

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

DECISION

STB Docket No. AB-303 (Sub-No. 25X)

WISCONSIN CENTRAL LTD.—ABANDONMENT EXEMPTION—
IN LANGLADE, MENOMINEE AND SHAWANO COUNTIES, WI

Decided: April 29, 2008

By decision and notice of interim trail use or abandonment (NITU) served on January 5, 2001, the Board granted the petition for exemption filed by Wisconsin Central Ltd. (WCL) for abandonment of a 34.3-mile line of railroad, known as the White Lake-Shawano Line, between milepost 280 north of White Lake and milepost 314.3 north of Shawano, in Langlade, Menominee, and Shawano Counties, WI. The exemption was subject to environmental, historic preservation, and standard employee protective conditions, as well as a trail use condition authorizing a 180-day period, until July 4, 2001, for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WisDNR) to negotiate an interim trail use/rail banking agreement with WCL. The decision was scheduled to become effective on February 4, 2001. Subsequently, by decision served on February 2, 2001, the January 5 decision was stayed until further order with respect to trail use/rail banking negotiations over the portion of the line in Menominee County that were authorized. In all other respects, the January 5 decision took effect as scheduled on February 4, 2001. In a decision served on July 3, 2001, as corrected on July 10, 2001, the negotiating period under the NITU was extended until December 31, 2001, with the stay remaining in effect for the portion of the line in Menominee County. By decisions served on December 28, 2001, and February 27, 2002, the NITU negotiating period and the deadline to exercise abandonment authority were extended to May 31, 2002.¹ By decisions served June 7, 2002, November 27, 2002, May 23, 2003, November 21, 2003, May 19, 2004, November 19, 2004, May 13, 2005, November 10, 2005, May 9, 2006, November 6, 2006, May 16, 2007, and November 1, 2007, the NITU negotiating period except for that portion of the line in Menominee County (between mileposts 287 and 299.5) was extended until April 29, 2008.² By letter filed on April 25, 2008,

¹ A petition for judicial review of the Board's decision allowing interim trail use/rail banking in Menominee County was filed in the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit in Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin et al. v. STB et al., No. 01-1100 (D.C. Cir. filed Mar. 2, 2001). On May 24, 2002, that Court granted the parties' joint unopposed motion to dismiss the petition. The Board's stay is now moot.

² By letter filed on June 5, 2002, WCL informed the Board that it had consummated the abandonment of the line between milepost 287 and milepost 299.5. In a subsequent pleading, the parties reported that WCL had reached an agreement with WisDNR for WisDNR to purchase the right-of-way from milepost 280 to milepost 287.

WisDNR seeks an extension of the NITU for that portion of the right-of-way from milepost 299.5 to milepost 314.3 for 180 days. WisDNR states that negotiations are continuing. WCL concurs with the extension request.

By decision and notice of interim trail use or abandonment served on December 30, 2002, a NITU request was granted for the Stockbridge-Munsee Community (the Tribe) to negotiate an interim trail use/rail banking agreement with WCL for a portion of the right-of-way approximately from milepost 303 to milepost 306.4 in Shawano County until June 28, 2003. By decisions served on June 26, 2003, December 24, 2003, May 19, 2004, November 19, 2004, May 13, 2005, November 10, 2005, May 9, 2006, November 6, 2006, May 16, 2007, and November 1, 2007, the negotiating period was extended until April 29, 2008. On April 16, 2008, the Tribe filed a request for extension of the NITU for 180 days. The Tribe states that negotiations are still continuing. WCL concurs in the request to extend the NITU.

Where, as here, the carrier is willing to continue trail use negotiations, the negotiating period may be extended.³ An extension of time will promote the establishment of trails and rail banking consistent with the National Trails System Act, 16 U.S.C. 1247(d). Accordingly, both NITU negotiating periods will be extended for an additional 180 days, until October 26, 2008. Given the length of time the parties have had to negotiate a trail use agreement, however, the negotiation parties are again urged to conclude their negotiations so that further extensions are not necessary.

This decision will not significantly affect either the quality of the human environment or the conservation of energy resources.

It is ordered:

1. The requests to extend the NITU negotiating period are granted.
2. The NITU negotiating periods are extended until October 26, 2008.
3. This decision is effective on the date of service.

By the Board, David M. Konschnik, Director, Office of Proceedings.

Anne K. Quinlan
Acting Secretary

³ See Rail Abandonments—Supplemental Trails Act Procedures, 4 I.C.C.2d 152, 157-58 (1987).