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SEA

SERVICE DATE – DECEMBER 27, 2005

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

STB DOCKET NO. AB-297 (Sub. No. 102X)

**Columbus & Greenville Railway Company -- Abandonment Exemption -- in Leflore
County, MS**

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, the Columbus and Greenville Railway Company (C&G) has filed a notice of exemption under 49 CFR 1152.50 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 for C&G to abandon an 1.18 mile rail line in the City of Greenwood, Leflore County, Mississippi. The rail line begins at milepost 112.67 and ends at milepost 113.86. A map depicting the entire rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to this Environmental Assessment (EA). If the notice becomes effective, C&G will be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances and to dispose of the right-of-way.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RAIL LINE

C&G states that it acquired the subject line from the Illinois Central Gulf Railroad Company in 1974 and began freight operations over the rail line on October 29, 1975. The rail line passes through an urban commercial area in the center of Greenville, MS. The right-of-way of the line is slightly less than 100 feet in width and includes no railroad owned structures although culverts and municipal water pipes are located under or near the line.

C&G reports that no traffic has originated, terminated, or moved overhead on the rail line for at least two years. Consequently, no rail traffic will be diverted to highway mode as a result of the abandonment.

According to C&G, a bypass track constructed and owned by the City of Greenwood has rerouted all of the traffic that once passed over the line proposed for abandonment. In a telephone contact, a spokesperson for C&G explained to the Surface Transportation Board's (Board) Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) that C&G is operating over the bypass track under an agreement with the City and intends to formally acquire the bypass track from the City in exchange for the subject line right-of-way.¹

¹ Approval for C&G to acquire and operate the bypass track from the City was decided by the Board on April 22, 2004. See Columbus and Greenville Railway Company –

C&G states that its acquisition of the bypass track will allow it to gain a more efficient and safer main line operation and further the City's aim of moving rail operations out of its commercial district. The City will benefit from the proposed abandonment and its planned acquisition of the rail line through improved public safety, the elimination of twelve at grade crossings, and better access to school properties and medical facilities paralleling the rail line. The City of Greenville filed a request with the Board for a public use condition in this proceeding on December 5, 2005. In its filing, the City indicated that it intends to convert the rail line into a parkway or road to provide a direct route to the downtown district and allow for better access to area schools and businesses.

C&G reports that it intends to salvage the track and rail following abandonment of the line. Materials that are removed would be recycled, as possible, or reused on other parts of the railroad's extant track system. Any refuse would be disposed of appropriately.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

C&G submitted an environmental report that concludes the quality of the human environment will not be affected significantly as a result of the abandonment or any post-abandonment activities, including salvage and disposition of the right-of-way. C&G served the environmental report on a number of appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Board's environmental rules [49 CFR 1105.7(b)]. We have reviewed and investigated the record in this proceeding.

C&G has reported that the National Geodetic Survey (NGS) stated in a telephone contact that there are no station markers that would be affected by the proposed abandonment.

C&G has received a response from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, indicating that there would be no effects from the proposed project to jurisdictional waters of the United States protected under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. Section 1344).

The Natural Resources Conservation Service has indicated to C&G that there are no prime farmlands along the right-of-way of the proposed abandonment and that no adverse effects on prime farmlands are anticipated.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, who has jurisdiction over Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, has reported to C&G that the project, as described, will have no significant impact on fish and wildlife resources.

The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources has indicated to C&G that the proposed abandonment would not affect land or water resources within the Mississippi coastal zone.

C&G reports that air pollutant emissions associated with planned salvage activities for the proposed abandonment are expected to be insignificant and that minor increases in noise levels during salvage activities would be short-term.

SEA will ensure that Federal, state, and local agencies that have not yet provided responses to the environmental report are added to the service list in this proceeding and receive a copy of this EA for their comment.

HISTORIC REVIEW

C&G submitted a historic report as required by the Board's environmental rules [49 CFR 1105.8(a)]. C&G served the report on the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (SHPO) pursuant to 49 CFR 1105.8(c). The SHPO has submitted comments stating that no historic properties listed in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (National Register) would be affected by the proposed abandonment. SEA has reviewed the report and the information provided by the SHPO and concurs with the SHPO comments.

Pursuant to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's regulations for implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act at 36 CFR 800.4(d)(1) and 36 CFR 800.8, we have determined that the proposed abandonment will not affect historic properties listed in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register. The documentation for this finding, as specified at 36 CFR 800.11(d), consists of the railroad's historic report, all relevant correspondence, and this EA, which have been provided to the SHPO and made available to the public.

SEA conducted a search of the Native American Consultation Database at <http://www.cast.uark.edu/other/nps/nacd/> and did not identify any Federally recognized tribes that may have an interest in the proposed abandonment.

CONDITIONS

We do not recommend any environmental conditions be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority for this proceeding.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, we conclude that, as currently proposed, abandonment of the rail line will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the environmental impact statement process is unnecessary.

Alternatives to the proposed abandonment would include denial (and therefore no change in operations), discontinuance of service without abandonment, and continued operation by another operator. In any of these cases, the existing quality of the human environment and energy consumption should not be affected.

PUBLIC USE

Following abandonment and salvage of the rail line, the right-of-way may be suitable for other public use. A request containing the requisite four-part showing for imposition of a public use condition (49 CFR 1152.28) must be filed with the Board and served on the railroad within the time specified in the Federal Register notice.

TRAILS USE

A request for a notice of interim trail use (NITU) is due to the Board, with a copy to the railroad, within 10 days of publication of the notice of the petition for exemption in the Federal Register. Nevertheless, the Board will accept late-filed requests as long as it retains jurisdiction to do so in a particular case. This request must comply with the Board's rules for use of rights-of-way as trails (49 CFR 1152.29).

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

The Board's Office of Public Services responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact the Office of Public Services directly at (202) 565-1592, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Services, Washington, DC 20423.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMENTS

If you wish to file comments regarding this environmental assessment, send an original and two copies to Surface Transportation Board, Case Control Unit, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Catherine Glidden, who prepared this environmental assessment. Environmental comments may also be filed electronically on the Board's web site, www.stb.dot.gov by clicking on the "E-FILING" link. Please refer to **Docket No. AB-297 (Sub. No. 102X)** in all correspondence, including e-filings, addressed to the Board.

If you have any questions regarding this environmental assessment, please contact Catherine Glidden, the environmental contact for this case, by phone at (202) 565-1542, fax at (202) 565-9000, or e-mail at gliddenc@stb.dot.gov.

Date made available to the public: December 27, 2005.

Comment due date: January 11, 2006 (15 days).

By the Board, Victoria Rutson, Chief, Section of Environmental Analysis.

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachment