



Janet Napolitano
Governor

Victor M. Mendez
Director

Arizona Department of Transportation

Utility & Railroad Engineering Section
205 S. 17th Ave. Mall Drop 618E Phoenix, Arizona 85007
Phone 602.712.6193 Fax 602.712.3229

5-1-2008

Richard Travis
Deputy Director

E1-7215
Dfw
FD-34836

Victoria Rutson, Chief
Section of Environmental Analysis
Surface Transportation Board
% Diana Wood
Case Control Unit
395 E Street, SW
Washington, DC 20423

Re: STB Docket No. 34836 – Draft Environmental Assessment – Arizona Eastern Railway – Construction and Operation – In Graham County, Arizona

Dear Mrs. Rutson,

On behalf of the ADOT Utility & Railroad Engineering Section and Environmental Planning Sections, I would like to offer the following comments on the Draft Environmental Assessment. ADOT appreciates being able to discuss this application with Mrs. Diana Wood on April 10th, 2008 and for the 30 day extension to the comment period.

The February 25, 2008 draft Environmental Assessment (EA) analyzed an at-grade signalized crossing of a two-lane rural highway for an area of modest population growth. Other foreseeable alternatives suggested by the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) were not discussed or analyzed. This is contrary to the June 13, 2006 Scoping Letter sent by the Surface Transportation Board (STB) to interested parties.

A two-page transmittal letter to the readers of the draft EA speaks to a scoping process and analysis to date by the Surface Transportation Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA). This resulted in a SEA conclusion that "did not appear to warrant grade-separation." We could not find this SEA analysis in the documents provided to ADOT.

The Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) has been actively engaged for several years with various alternatives to accommodate the proposed crossing of US Highway 70 near milepost 343, west of the San Simon River by the Arizona Eastern Rail Road (AERR), a privately operated railroad company.

In August of 2006 three basic alternatives discussed with the railroad were:

- 1) Allow AERR to construct an at-grade crossing on US 70.
- 2) Have ADOT construct a grade-separated structure over the new spur (and perhaps the San Simon River) as part of our future five-lane widening project. AERR would pay all costs for this overpass.
- 3) Allow AERR to construct a grade-separated structure over US 70 with sufficient clearance to allow the highway to be widened in the future.

A December 15, 2006 email from Michael Daehler of the ADOT Environmental Planning Group asked John Cook, the preparer of the environmental document for SEA, for Mr. Daehler to be specifically included on the distribution list for the EA for the Arizona Eastern Railroad, and inquired about public meetings held or being planned.

"Have you have (sic) any public meetings and/or when is the next one planned? ADOT Environmental Planning Group would like to be invited to all meeting and have the opportunity to comment on all documents."

There is currently an active ADOT project for a proposed grade separated railroad spur crossing of the US 70 west of San Simon River Bridge at Milepost 343.4 (ADOT Project Number 70 GH 343 H7305 S1D, AERR Spur Crossing). An *Initial Feasibility Study Report* for this project was issued in September 2007. The feasibility study addresses design alternatives for a project approximately one mile in length. At this point, a design option has yet to be determined, or a construction footprint finalized.

There is also an active ADOT project for shoulder widening, re-striping for turn lanes and pavement preservation of US Highway 70 from Milepost 341.37 to 343.40 . This project, (ADOT Project Number 70 GH 341.4 H7094 01C Lone Star Road to San Simon River Bridge) is going to advertise for bid in June 2008 and will end just before the proposed crossing. The project to widen a portion of US 70 has been actively discussed and planned since June 2006 to help accommodate the growth in traffic and population east of Safford, Arizona. Finally, ADOT is in the process of planning to widen the US 70 to 5 lanes (ADOT Project Number 70 GH 340 H5109 01C Safford to Solomon). This project will be directly impacted by the proposed AZER crossing.

The area surrounding the proposed project is experiencing population growth in excess of the data shown in Tables 3.3-1 and 3.3-3. Due to the growth in the Safford area and changes programmed for US 70, ADOT would like to see information and safety analysis included in the EA about train-vehicle collisions at: five-lane, three-lane and two-lane highways with at-grade crossings.

Revised traffic counts were provided to the STB by Mr. Paul David, ADOT Safford District Development Engineer on April 24, 2008. This updated traffic data shows a 245 percent increase in AADT on the US 70 from 2000 AADT in 2003 to 6900 AADT in 2007.

The February 25, 2008 draft Environmental Assessment includes some discussion of the benefits of the proposed railroad hauling hazardous materials to the mine and reducing the total number of trucks hauling hazardous cargos. The draft EA should also discuss the number and types of hazardous materials haulers in the region and the number and types of special vehicles that would still be travelling on US 70 through the proposed at-grade crossing.

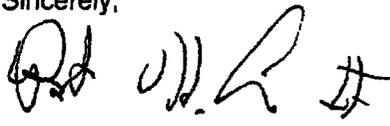
The February 25, 2008 draft Environmental Assessment did not discussed the total loss of time and delays caused by vehicles that are required by law, regulation and policy to stop at railroad crossings such as school buses and trucks carrying gasoline, acid and other hazardous materials and the slower speeds for all other vehicles as they travel through an at-grade crossing.

The risks of rear-end (and other) accidents that occur while school buses and other vehicles are stopped at or moving slowly through an empty at-grade crossing was also not included within the impact analysis of the draft EA.

ADOT would like to see information included in the EA about traffic delays to emergency responders, especially since this is the only road between Safford and Solomon, Arizona.

We look forward to commenting on the revised draft Environmental Assessment and working with the STB on proposing the appropriate mitigation measures necessitated by the Arizona Eastern Railway crossing US Highway 70 near the San Simon River.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Travis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a distinct flourish at the end.

Robert H. Travis, P.E.
State Railroad Liaison
Arizona Department of Transportation
rtravis@azdot.gov