

Submitter's Comments:

I sent this over on Dec. 2,2004 but I can't see where to look at this & other comments regarding STB & Vulcan/SGR. Where do I have to go online to read other comments about this???I am sending a certified copy out tomorrow so that this is part of the official record before Jan 10, 2005.
Thank you
Chris Mitchell

Attached file on following pages:

December 2, 2004

Public Meeting

Hondo TX.

For the Record, my name is Chris Mitchell. I am Commissioner Elect for Medina County Pct. 1. Since I do not officially take office until Jan. 1st please let the record reflect these are my personal comments about the SGR proposed rail construction.

After reading an executive summary of the EIS draft & other excerpts from the 3 volume set, my # 1 concern remains safety & flooding issues. This executive summary is undoubtedly what the STB Board will read in lieu of the voluminous EIS itself. Having lived just outside Washington D.C. for over 20 years, I am well versed in the bureaucratic methods of "summarizing." Developing an EIS of this magnitude (3 volume set), virtually guarantees the decision makers will be influenced by whomever presents this summary for their review.

It's interesting to note that the "proposed route" language refers to "six drainage features with intermittent seasonal flow", while the alternating routes 1, 2, 3 (which of course are not the preferred routes) refer to the same named creeks as "streams". The reality is whether SGR, SEA or anyone else chooses to minimize the description; they are streams that flood, not "six drainage features..." So far in 2004 our "seasonal flow" has probably totaled over 50 inches. These are flood prone lands.

In addition you don't use the term "at grade crossings" anywhere in the proposed route language, yet the wording in each alternative route mentions "at grade crossings" for each county road named. What exactly does SGR plan to do for crossings?

SGR states it might enter into an agreement as a "common carrier" with Union Pacific. This does not provide any of us with a sense of safety or security based on UP's record of accidents just this past 6 months! Once this is accomplished then Medina County is stuck dealing with UP.

TxDot lists a traffic count from 2000 for FM 2676. This does not accurately reflect today's traffic. FM 2676 is heavily traveled each & every day by San Antonio commuters, school buses and lake traffic in addition to our regular farmers & ranchers. The current Commissioner states anywhere from 40-200 vehicles on the county roads??? That's a big spread! There needs to be more current data obtained since Medina County's population is already where it was projected to be in 2010...and this is 2004. Imagine what the next 6 years will bring.

SGR states "approximately 4 trains per day." How will the increase in demand for product be handled? Will train traffic increase to 6, 8? Is this a 24/7, 365 day operation? How will all this impact Hondo City crossings ...will they be backed up?...what about emergency vehicles, school buses trying to maintain a schedule?

On page 4-16 of the EIS draft paragraph V: “SGR shall develop a plan with TxDot & Medina County that specifies the responsibility of each party concerning maintenance & repair of grade crossing warning devices and grade crossings.” The preceding paragraph U states “SGR shall maintain appropriate grade warning devices at all grade crossings.” Which is it & what does it mean to Medina County?

It will be my recommendation to Commissioners Court that Medina County taxpayers not be subjected to any financial burden as a result of SGR’s rail operations if granted by the STB Board. As taxpayers we already subsidize enough federal & state rail activities. If SGR is successful in their request then SGR & Vulcan can absorb the costs of maintenance & repair of the devices and grade crossings.

Again, I reiterate, safety of our citizens, flooding concerns are my priority. I would encourage the STB to take another look at this and to do what’s in the best interest of Medina County.

Thank you,
Chris Mitchell