

STATEMENT OF ANDREA BALHIS
Staff Paralegal, STB Office of Proceedings

STB Finance Docket No. 34395

CITY OF PEORIA, IL, D/B/A PEORIA, PEORIA HEIGHTS & WESTERN RAILROAD–
CONSTRUCTION OF CONNECTING TRACK EXEMPTION–IN PEORIA COUNTY, IL

Good morning Chairman Nober, Vice Chairman Mulvey, and Commissioner Buttrey.

The City of Peoria, IL, d/b/a Peoria, Peoria Heights & Western Railroad, to which I will refer as PPHW, filed a notice of exemption under 49 CFR 1150.36 to construct approximately 1,800 feet of connecting track in Peoria, Peoria County, IL, over land that it owns or over which it has an easement for railroad purposes. The track to be constructed would connect a 1.9-mile segment of track that the City of Peoria, to which I will refer as the City, purchased from Union Pacific Railroad Company with an 8.29-mile segment of track known as the Keller Branch that the City acquired from the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad Company.

An environmental assessment was prepared by the Section of Environmental Analysis. SEA concluded that based on the information provided from all sources as well as its independent analysis, that the construction and operation of PPHW's proposed connecting track would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment if the mitigation measures recommended in the EA were imposed.

After considering the comments filed to the EA, SEA prepared a Post EA in which it recommended 12 environmental mitigation measures, and 6 additional voluntary mitigation measures related to a proposed new highway/rail at-grade crossing at University Street that PPHW has agreed to implement.

As explained in the Post EA, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Rock Island District, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District, and the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission concurred with SEA's conclusions in the EA. However, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 5 and Illinois Department of Transportation raised certain environmental concerns.

Based on additional review and analysis, SEA concluded that the environmental analysis in the EA and the Post EA is adequate, that, with the recommended mitigation, the construction and operation of the proposed connecting track would have no potentially significant environmental effects, and that preparation of a full environmental impact statement is not required. The draft decision would adopt SEA's final recommended environmental mitigation measures with some minor editorial changes, as set forth in the Appendix to the decision, and impose them as a condition to this exemption.

We would be happy to address any questions you might have. Thank you.