

**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD ISSUES DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FOR DAKOTA, MINNESOTA & EASTERN RAILROAD'S PROPOSED POWDER RIVER BASIN EXPANSION PROJECT**

Surface Transportation Board (Board) Chairman Linda J. Morgan announced today that a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) has been issued for the Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern Railroad Corporation's (DM&E) Powder River Basin Expansion Project (PRB Expansion Project), in the case entitled *Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern Railroad Corporation Construction in the Powder River Basin*, STB Finance Docket No. 33407. The Board welcomes public review and comment on the over 2000-page Draft EIS, with written comments due **January 5, 2001**.

**The DM&E Project:** DM&E filed an application with the Board for authority to construct and operate a new rail line and associated facilities in east-central Wyoming, southwest South Dakota, and south-central Minnesota. The line would enable a third railroad to serve Wyoming's Powder River Basin coal mines to transport coal eastward and is designed to increase the operational efficiency of DM&E's existing rail line in Minnesota and eastern South Dakota.

The PRB Expansion Project is the largest and most challenging construction proposal ever before the Board. It comprises nearly 1,000 miles of rail line (approximately 280 miles of new rail construction and 600 miles of rail-line rehabilitation); traverses three states; involves the participation of five cooperating Federal agencies (the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, and Coast Guard); entails numerous and diverse environmental issues; and involves new rail yards and various alternatives, as well as bypass proposals, the majority of which have their own potentially significant environmental impacts.

**The Draft EIS:** The Draft EIS addresses various environmental impacts identified by the Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) regarding this project, as well as alternatives SEA has considered. It also addresses measures SEA currently recommends that the Board impose on DM&E's proposal to mitigate or alleviate potentially significant environmental impacts.

In particular, the Draft EIS discusses several issues, alternatives and potential modifications related to DM&E's proposal, including:

- The No-Action Alternative, under which D&ME would not receive final Board approval, or authority from the appropriate cooperating agencies, to construct or operate a rail-line extension into the Powder River Basin.
- Three major alternative routes for extending DM&E's existing system westward to access mines in the Powder River Basin.
- A connector rail line that would link two sections of DM&E's existing main line at Mankato, MN, and a new connection with another railroad (I&M Rail Link) in Owatonna, MN.
- Construction and operation of four proposed bypasses (for the communities of Rochester and Owatonna, MN and Brookings and Pierre, SD), two of which (Rochester and Brookings) SEA determined to be reasonable and feasible.
- Construction and operation of six major new rail yards.

A one-page "Project at a Glance" and charts providing more information on the major alternatives SEA analyzed and on SEA's preliminary recommendations are available at [http://www.stb.dot.gov/eis/dme/dme\\_deis.htm](http://www.stb.dot.gov/eis/dme/dme_deis.htm). A complete overview of the project and SEA's analysis is set forth in the Executive Summary to the Draft EIS.

SEA and the five cooperating agencies will consider all public and agency comments on the Draft EIS in preparing a Final EIS. SEA will then make its final recommendations to the Board. The Board and the cooperating agencies will then consider the entire environmental record developed in this case--including all public and agency comments, the Draft EIS, and the Final EIS--in making their respective decisions on the proposed project.

Comments on the Draft EIS must be postmarked by **January 5, 2001**. For comment letters over five pages in length, commenters must submit a signed original plus 10 copies. A signed original is sufficient for comment letters of five pages or fewer. All comments must be mailed to:

**Office of the Secretary  
Case Control Unit  
STB Finance Docket No. 33407  
Surface Transportation Board  
1925 K Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20423-0001**

with the following designation written in the lower left-hand corner of the envelope:

**Attention: Victoria Rutson  
Environmental Project Manager  
Environmental Filing**

**Public Meetings:** In addition to receiving written comments on the Draft EIS, SEA will host 12 public meetings at the following locations, dates, and times:

**Douglas, WY**

Best Western Douglas Inn  
1450 Riverbend Drive  
Douglas, WY 82633  
Monday, October 30, 2000  
6:00-10:00 p.m.

**Newcastle, WY**

The Fountain Inn  
2 Fountain Plaza  
Newcastle, WY 82701  
Wednesday, November 1, 2000  
1:00-4:00 p.m. and  
6:00-10:00 p.m.

**Rapid City, SD**

Rushmore Plaza Civic Center  
444 Mount Rushmore Road North  
Rapid City, SD 57701  
Thursday, November 2, 2000  
6:00-10:00 p.m.

**Pierre, SD**

Best Western Kings Inn  
200 South Pierre  
Pierre, SD 57501  
Monday, November 13, 2000  
1:00-4:00 p.m. and  
6:00-10:00 p.m.

**Brookings, SD**

Brookings Inn  
2500 East 5th Street  
Brookings, SD 57006  
Tuesday, November 14, 2000  
1:00-4:00 p.m. and  
6:00-10:00 p.m.

**Mankato, MN**

Best Western Hotel and Restaurant  
1111 Range Street  
North Mankato, MN 56003  
Wednesday, November 15, 2000  
1:00-4:00 p.m. and  
6:00-10:00 p.m.

**Rochester, MN**

Mayo Civic Center  
30 Civic Center Drive South East  
Rochester, MN 55904  
Thursday, November 16, 2000  
1:00-4:00 p.m. and  
6:00-10:00 p.m.

SEA also will conduct a meeting specifically for interested Tribes and Tribal organizations as part of the formal government-to-government consultation process on the Draft EIS.

**Pre-Registration for Public Meetings:** Persons wanting to speak at a public meeting are urged to pre-register by telephoning the toll-free Environmental Hotline at **1-877-404-3044** and providing their names, telephone numbers, the name of their group, business, or agency affiliation, if any, and the date and time of the meeting during which they wish to speak. The deadline for pre-registration for all meetings is **October 20, 2000**.

**Availability of Draft EIS:** Because the Draft EIS is quite large--over 2,000 pages within several bound, paperback volumes--SEA has made the entire document available to key governmental agencies and other appropriate entities, parties of record (official participants in the case), and those who specifically requested the entire document in response to SEA's postcard-notification mailing this past June. SEA also has distributed the entire Draft EIS to over 80 public libraries and has asked that the Draft EIS be made available in their reference sections. To obtain the name of the library nearest you that has received the Draft EIS, telephone the Environmental Hotline at **1-877-404-3044**, and leave your name, address and telephone number. You will be contacted promptly.

The entire Draft EIS in Finance Docket No. 33047 is available for viewing and downloading via the Board's website at <http://www.stb.dot.gov>. **Copies of the printed Draft EIS are available for a fee by contacting D~To-D~ Office Solutions, Room 405, 1925 K Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20006, telephone (202) 466-5530.**

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