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SERVICE DATE - FEBRUARY 20, 2004

**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423**

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

STB DOCKET NO. AB-55 (Sub-No. 625X)

**CSX Transportation, Inc. – Abandonment Exemption –
in Preston County, WV**

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, CSX Transportation, Inc. (CSX) has filed a petition for exemption under 49 CFR 1152 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 for CSX to abandon approximately 14.3 miles of rail line extending from Milepost BAJ 0.0 at Rowlesburg to Milepost BAJ 14.3 near Albright, in Preston County, West Virginia. A map depicting the rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to the report. If the notice becomes effective, CSX will be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances and to dispose of the right-of-way.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE

According to CSX, the rail line proposed for abandonment was previously used to ship coal and lumber products. There has been no coal service over the line in many years. The line closely parallels the Cheat River in a mountainous, forested area. The right-of-way varies between 25 and 75 feet from the centerline of track, and does not contain federally granted right-of-way. Abandonment of the line will allow for the elimination of 14 road crossings.

Abandonment of this line will result in the removal of the rail, crossties, and possibly the upper layer of ballast. Operations and maintenance of the line will then cease. Removal of material will be accomplished by use of the right-of-way for access, along with existing public and private crossings, and no new access roads are contemplated. CSX does not intend to disturb any of the underlying roadbed or perform any activities that would cause sedimentation or erosion of the soil, and does not anticipate any dredging or use of fill in the removal of the track material. The crossties and/or other debris will be transported away from the rail line and will not be discarded along the right-of-way nor be placed or left in streams or wetlands, or along the banks of such waterways. During track removal, appropriate measures will be implemented to prevent or control spills from fuels, lubricants, or any other pollutant materials from entering any waterways.

CSX states that, based upon their review of the area, the line is not within any wildlife sanctuaries or refuges, National or State parks, or forests. The line was disturbed during construction

by cuts and fill, and any archeological resources that may have been located in the proposed project area would have been affected at that time. CSX records do not indicate that any swampy conditions exist, or that any hazardous material spills have occurred within the project area.

There are ten CSX-owned bridges which are over 50 years old on the line segment that are part of the proposed abandonment and which may be eligible for listing in the National Register. Nine deck plate girder bridges varying in length from 25 to 59 feet were built between 1801 and 1916. In addition, one 89 foot I-beam span was built in 1945.

CSX states that this line segment has generated minimal originating and terminating traffic during the past two years and no new rail-oriented business is expected to develop adjacent to the line. There is only one rail patron located on the line and that patron's use of the line has recently declined. Allegheny Wood Products (AWP), whose principal commodity is lumber and wood products, operates a facility at Caddell. AWP shipped 60 carloads in 2001; 53 carloads in 2002; and only 18 carloads in 2003. AWP operates another facility at Petersburg, West Virginia that will continue to have rail access even if this petition is granted. The primary source of alternative transportation available to AWP is motor carrier transportation. CSX is discussing the potential for a post-abandonment property sale to AWP that should improve truck access to the facility at Caddell. The proposed abandonment will relieve CSX from the costs of owning and maintaining an under-utilized line of railroad.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

CSX 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. The applicants served the environmental and historical reports on a number of appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Surface Transportation Board's environmental rules [49 CFR 1105.7(b)]. We have reviewed and investigated the record in this proceeding.

The National Geodetic Survey has advised us that 18 geodetic station markers have been identified that may be affected by the proposed abandonment.

The U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service in Elkins, West Virginia, has indicated that no federally listed endangered and threatened species are expected to be impacted by the proposed abandonment. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service in Philippi, West Virginia, has indicated that the Farmland Protection Policy Act will not apply to this abandonment because no prime farmland is involved. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Huntington, West Virginia, has stated that their office has no objection to the proposed abandonment and that a Department of the Army Permit is not required. In addition, the West Virginia Division of Environmental Protection, Office of Water Resources has indicated that no permits will be required from their office.

The Monongahela River Trails Conservancy is interested in an approximately seventeen mile rail corridor paralleling the Cheat River in Preston County, extending from a bridge on U.S. Route 7 to Rowlesburg, indicating that the corridor would make an excellent recreational trail and conversion of the property to trail use is in accordance with local plans and endorsed by local and state government. The Preston County Commission has indicated that the Preston Rail Trails Committee is interested in developing the right-of-way into a portion of the Monongahela River Trails Conservancy. The Town of Rowlesburg and the Town of Albright also support plans to convert the corridor into a rail-trail system.

The application states that a total of 53 carloads were moved on the line during the base year (calendar year 2002). Using a rail-to-truck conversion factor of 4 trucks per carload¹, SEA calculates that on a per day basis, if all the rail traffic is diverted to truck traffic, the abandonment would generate an estimated 212 new trucks per year (424 truck trips assuming an empty backhaul). This equates to approximately 2 trucks per day being added to area roads during a 240 workday year². This increase will not exceed the Board's thresholds of an increase of more than 10 percent of the average daily traffic or 50 vehicles a day on any affected road segment [49 C.F.R. 1105.7(e)].

HISTORIC REVIEW

CSX submitted an historic report as required by the Surface Transportation Board's environmental rules [49 CFR 1105.8(a)]. CSX served the report on the West Virginia Division of Culture and History (SHPO) pursuant to 49 CFR 1105.8(c). The SHPO has determined that the rail line be considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, and that the removal of track materials will constitute an adverse effect to this historic resource. We will notify the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and determine their participation pursuant to 36 CFR part 800.6. We will begin consultation with the SHPO to determine ways of resolving any adverse effect.

CONDITIONS

We recommend that the following two environmental conditions be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority:

1. The National Geodetic Survey (NGS) has identified 18 geodetic station markers that may be affected by the proposed abandonment. Therefore, CSX shall notify NGS 90 days prior to salvage activities in order to plan their relocation.

¹ The conversion factor is an estimate based on the nature of the commodities transported on the line.

² 240 workdays result when weekends and holidays are subtracted from a 365 day year.

2. CSX shall retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of all sites and structures on the right-of-way that are 50 years old or older until completion of the Section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 470f.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, we conclude that, as currently proposed, and if the recommended conditions are imposed, abandonment of the 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.

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 Kenneth Blodgett, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-55 (Sub No. 625X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have any questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Kenneth Blodgett, the environmental contact for this case by phone at (202) 565-1554, fax at (202) 565-9000, or e-mail at blodgettk@stb.dot.gov.

Date made available to the public: February 20, 2004.

Comment due date: **March 22, 2004 (30 days).**

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachment

