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SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

Washington, DC 20423

Office of Economics, Environmental Analysis, and Administration

December 27, 2002

Ms. Kathryn A. Kusske
Mayer Brown Rowe & Maw
1909 K Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006-1101

Re: STB Finance Docket 34305, The Burlington Northern And Santa Fe Railway Company - Construction and Operation Exemption - In Merced County, California

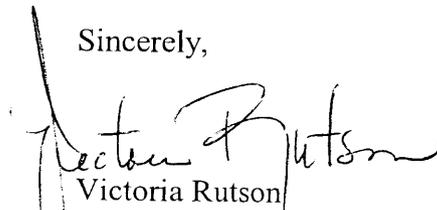
Dear Ms. Kusske:

Pursuant to 49 CFR 1105.10(c), we are granting your request of December 23, 2002 for a waiver of the six-month prefiling notice generally required for construction projects under 49 CFR 1105.10(a)(1).

The Surface Transportation Board's (Board) Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) met with Sarah Bailiff and Larry Ruple of The Burlington Northern And Santa Fe Railway Company (BNSF or applicant), Eric Steinbach of Quebecor World (Quebecor), and John Morton of HDR Engineering on December 17, 2002. At the meeting, Ms. Bailiff and Mr. Ruple explained that BNSF would seek authority from the Board to construct and operate an approximately 850-foot rail line to connect the Quebecor printing and distribution facility with BNSF's existing Stockton Subdivision main line. The proposed rail line would provide the Quebecor facility with competitive rail service. Mr. Morton also discussed information that had already been gathered for BNSF indicating that it is unlikely that the proposed construction project would result in significant environmental impacts. At the December 17, 2002 meeting, SEA also provided a general overview of the Board's environmental review process, SEA's role in the process, and the use of third-party consultants.

Based on the information from this initial meeting, SEA believes that it has adequate information and the applicant is sufficiently aware of the environmental process to grant this request. If we can be of further assistance, please contact Dave Navecky of my staff at 202-565-1593.

Sincerely,


Victoria Rutson
Chief

Section of Environmental Analysis