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SEA

SERVICE DATE – FEBRUARY 23, 2009

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

STB DOCKET NO. AB-43 (Sub-No. 182X)

**Illinois Central Railroad Company - Abandonment Exemption –
In Grenada County, MS**

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, the Illinois Central Railroad Company (IC) filed a notice of exemption under 49 CFR 1152.50 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 in connection with the abandonment of an approximately 1.2-mile rail line in Grenada, Grenada County, Mississippi. The line extends between milepost 311.90 and milepost 313.10. If the notice becomes effective, IC will be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances and dispose of the right-of-way. A map depicting the rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to this Environmental Assessment (EA).

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

IC submitted an Environmental Report that concludes the quality of the human environment would not be affected significantly as a result of the abandonment or any post-abandonment activities, including salvage and disposition of the right-of-way. IC served the Environmental Report on a number of appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Surface Transportation Board's (Board) environmental rules [49 CFR 1105.7(b)].¹ The Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) has reviewed and investigated the record in this proceeding.

Diversion of Traffic

The line has not generated any traffic for at least two years and any overhead traffic on the line can be rerouted over other lines. Accordingly, the proposed abandonment would not adversely impact the development, use, and transportation of energy resources or recyclable commodities; transportation of ozone-depleting materials; or result in the diversion of rail traffic to truck traffic that could result in significant impacts to air quality or the local transportation network.

¹ The Environmental and Historic Reports are available for viewing on the Board's website at www.stb.dot.gov by going to "E-Library," selecting "Filings," and then conducting a search for AB-43 (Sub-No. 182X).

Salvage Activities

According to IC, the line was built in approximately 1856, and was used primarily to transport cotton to Memphis from the Mississippi Delta. More recently, Memphis Hardwood was a customer on the line, but that company is no longer in business.

Impacts from salvage and disposal of a rail line typically include removal of tracks and ties, removal of ballast, dismantling of any bridges or structures that may be present on the rail right-of-way, and regrading of the right-of-way. Salvage may be performed within the right-of-way, or, if necessary, via the construction of new access points to the right-of-way. IC intends to salvage rail, ties, and track materials from the line.

The National Geodetic Survey (NGS) did not identify any geodetic station markers in the area of the proposed abandonment. Accordingly, no geodetic station markers would be affected by the proposed abandonment.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Mississippi Field Office submitted comments stating that there are no Federally-listed threatened or endangered species or candidate species in the area of the proposed abandonment. Accordingly, no further consultation pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act is required and no mitigation is necessary.

The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP) reviewed the proposed project and expressed concerns regarding impacts to water quality and the Chestnut Lamprey (*Ichthyomyzon castaneus*), a species of special concern. However, MDWFP determined that, if best management practices are implemented, the proposed abandonment likely poses no threat to listed species or their habitats. Accordingly, we recommend that the railroad follow best management practices during salvage activities to minimize impacts to water quality and wildlife habitat.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) has not submitted any comments regarding the proposed abandonment. However, the line does not cross any bodies of water, and the proposed rail line abandonment would not involve any in-stream salvage work or discharge of dredged or fill material into Federal, jurisdictional wetlands or waters. Accordingly, no mitigation is recommended.

The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR) reviewed the proposed project and submitted comments stating that the abandonment would have no direct or indirect impacts to coastal wetlands. Accordingly, DMR has no objections to the proposed abandonment, and state coastal management consistency certification is not required.

Based on all information available to date, SEA does not believe that salvage activities would cause significant environmental impacts.

Additional Comments

The Grenada County Board of Supervisors submitted comments stating that it objects to the proposed abandonment because “the location of the railroad tracks on the south side of the Yalobusha River constitute[s] protection from flooding at high water levels and abandonment would endanger their integrity for the residents inside the levee created by the railroad.” Accordingly, we recommend that IC consult with the Grenada County Board of Supervisors prior to commencement of salvage activities, in order to discuss the Grenada County Board of Supervisors’ concerns regarding the proposed abandonment and the potential flood risk.

HISTORIC REVIEW

IC states that there are approximately three bridges on the line and estimates that those bridges were built between 1921 and 1925. The Mississippi Department of Archives and History (State Historic Preservation Office or SHPO) reviewed the Historic Report prepared by IC, and in a letter dated September 25, 2008, the SHPO submitted comments stating that the rail line, including three bridges, is ineligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (National Register). Accordingly, pursuant to the Section 106 regulations of the NHPA at 36 CFR 800.5(b), and following consultation with the SHPO and the public, we have determined that the proposed abandonment would not affect historic properties listed in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register.

Pursuant to 36 CFR 800.2, SEA conducted a search of the Native American Consultation Database at <http://home.nps.gov/nacd/> to identify Federally-recognized tribes that may have ancestral connections to the project area. The database identified no Federally-recognized tribes in Grenada County.

CONDITIONS

SEA recommends that the following environmental conditions be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority:

1. Based on the comments of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks, the Illinois Central Railroad Company shall follow best management practices during salvage activities to minimize impacts to water quality and wildlife habitat.
2. To address the concerns raised by the Grenada County Board of Supervisors regarding the proposed abandonment, the Illinois Central Railroad Company (IC) shall consult with the Grenada County Board of Supervisors prior to commencement of salvage activities. IC shall report the results of these consultations to the Board’s Section of Environmental Analysis prior to commencement of salvage activities.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, SEA concludes that, as currently proposed, and if the recommended conditions are imposed, abandonment of the line

would 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 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 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 Assistance, Governmental Affairs, and Compliance responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact this office directly at (202) 245-0238, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Assistance, Governmental Affairs, and Compliance, Washington, DC 20423.

COMMENTS

If you wish to file comments regarding this EA, send an **original and two copies** to Surface Transportation Board, Case Control Unit, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Christa Dean who prepared this EA. Environmental comments may also be filed electronically on the Board's website, www.stb.dot.gov, by clicking on the "E-FILING" link. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-43 (Sub-No. 182X) in all correspondence, including e-filings, addressed to the Board.** If you have any questions regarding this EA, please contact Christa Dean the environmental contact for this case, by phone at (202) 245-0299, fax at (202) 245-0454, or e-mail at christa.dean@stb.dot.gov.

Date made available to the public: February 23, 2009.

Comment due date: March 10, 2009.

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

Anne K. Quinlan
Acting Secretary

Attachment