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SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
Washington, DC 20423

Section of Environmental Analysis



April 1, 2003

Wayne Norwall, Regional Director
Bureau of Indian Affairs
P.O. Box 10
Phoenix, AZ 85001

Re: Finance Docket No. 34075, Six County Association of Governments – Construction and Operation – Rail Line between Levan and Salina, Utah

Mr. Norwall:

I am writing to let you know that the Surface Transportation Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) is initiating an environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of the project described below. I am also writing to ask your assistance in providing any information on potential environmental impacts, resources, or issues over which your agency has special expertise or jurisdiction concerning this proposal. SEA has not yet determined what level of environmental analysis is appropriate for this proposal. Before making that decision, we would like to have feedback from you and other Federal, state, and local agencies concerning any potential environmental impacts, both beneficial and adverse, that this proposal may generate. Please review the information below. I have also provided contact information below if you have questions or comments.

Description of the Project

On July 30, 2001, the Six County Association of Governments (SCAOG) comprising the Utah counties of Sevier, Juab, Sanpete, Millard, Piute, and Wayne applied to the Surface Transportation Board (Board) for authority to construct and operate a 43-mile line of new single-track rail line in Sanpete, Sevier, and Juab Counties, Utah.

The proposed rail line would begin at the connection with Union Pacific Railroad's (UP) mainline near Levan, Utah (see attached Figure 1). The connection at UP would be a wye between the Juab and Sharp Sidings. The alignment would go southward and east of Chicken Creek Reservoir, a man-made irrigation reservoir. The alignment would generally follow a path near an existing power transmission line that goes through the center of the Juab Plain, which consists of the valley between the South Hills to the west and the Skinner Peaks area to the east.

The proposed alignment then begins to run parallel with the eastern boundary of Yuba Reservoir (Sevier Bridge Reservoir), another man-made irrigation facility. The line continues east of the reservoir until it reaches the point at which reservoir narrows (Yuba Hills). At this point, the line continues south, west of Yuba Reservoir.

The alignment continues southward along the western side of the Sevier Valley near areas where the foothills intersect with irrigated farmlands. The alignment continues southward on the valley's western side, passing on the west side of the town of Redmond. South of Redmond, the alignment bears east toward the center of the valley.

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The proposed alignment crosses State Highway 50 west of Salina and continues south, crossing State Highway 118 (Old Highway 89) and the Sevier River. The alignment continues west of the hills south of the Salina industrial park and terminates in the Lost Creek area before Interstate 70.

According to SCAOG, the purpose of this project is to serve a number of industries, primarily the coal industry. Coal mines owned by the Southern Utah Fuel Company (SUFCO) are located 30 miles east of Salina. Due to an absence of rail access, these industries (including SUFCO) currently move all goods by truck. SCAOG believes that the proposed project would reduce the number of coal trucks using portions of five highways: I-70, SR 50, I-15, SR 28, and SR 10. Most segments of these roads currently carry 750 trucks per day, with 1,500 trucks passing through downtown Salina each day at a rate of about one truck per minute. SCAOG states that reducing the number of trucks on these roads would decrease roadway congestion; increase the quality of life through towns such as Salina, Centerfield, Gunnison, and Fayette; and reduce wear and tear on state roads and interstates.

SEA will evaluate the potential impacts of:

- The proposed rail line
- The no-build alternative
- Other reasonable and feasible alternatives that may be identified

The proposed right-of-way would have a width of approximately 100 feet. SCAOG anticipates operating an average of one to two trains per day. Most shipments would consist of coal from the SUFCO coal mines. In addition to coal shipments, SCAOG anticipates shipping smaller quantities of petroleum products, lumber products, nonmetallic minerals, wallboard, and plaster.

Preliminary Consultation Process

To assist us in conducting the environmental review required by NEPA, we are consulting with, and soliciting comments from, agencies and organizations that may have specific knowledge of potential environmental issues and impacts that may be associated with the proposed project.

Your comments would be most helpful to us if they focused on specific environmental issues or concerns pertaining to your jurisdiction. Issues and resource areas that may be important to this project include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Local, regional, and national transportation systems, including safety of freight operations, potential traffic delay, and highway/rail crossings
2. Local land use plans, including parks and refuges
3. Land ownership, including farmland segmentation
4. Air emissions and air quality impacts
5. Noise impacts, including impacts to wildlife resources
6. Historic, cultural, and archaeological resources
7. Native American populations, land, and cultures
8. Impacts to prime, unique, and important farmland
9. Biological resources, including threatened or endangered species and wildlife migration routes
10. Water resources, including water quality and wetlands
11. Impacts to "environmental justice communities" (low-income or minority populations)

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Submitting Your Comments

Information on any additional issues or concerns that you consider appropriate would also be appreciated. We are seeking your assistance as expeditiously as possible. Therefore, we are requesting your comments by May 2, 2003. Please send your comments to:

Rick Black
HDR Engineering, Inc.
3995 South 700 East, Suite 100
Salt Lake City, UT 84107-2594
Attention: Finance Docket No. 34075 – Environmental Comments

SEA has retained HDR Engineering, Inc. (HDR) to assist SEA in preparing the environmental document for this proposal. We have assigned an environmental team member from HDR to provide any assistance you may need. The team member will contact you shortly to ensure your receipt of this letter and answer any questions you may have.

If you have any questions about the Board's environmental review process, please contact Phillis Johnson-Ball, SEA's Environmental Project Manager, at (202) 565-1530 (e-mail address: johnson-ballp@stb.dot.gov). If you have questions concerning agency coordination and responses, or need specific information about the proposed project, please contact Rick Black at (801) 281-8892.

We appreciate your assistance and look forward to working with you during the environmental review process for the proposed project.

Sincerely,



Victoria Rutson
Chief
Section of Environmental Analysis

Enclosure