

EO-418

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
Washington, DC 20423

Office of Economics, Environmental Analysis, and Administration

December 7, 2006

Don L. Klima, Director
Office of Planning and Review
Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Suite 809
Washington, DC 20004

Re: STB Docket No. AB 497 (Sub-No. 3X), Minnesota Northern Railroad,
Inc. – Abandonment Exemption in Polk and Norman Counties, Minnesota;
Notification of Adverse Affect

Dear Mr. Klima:

By this letter, I am notifying you that the abandonment, set forth above, may adversely affect a historic rail corridor located within the project right-of-way (the Area of Potential Effect or APE). I am sending this notice of adverse effect in compliance with 36 CFR 800.6(a)(1) and 36 CFR 800.11(e) of the regulations implementing Section 106 of National Historic Preservation Act.

Project Background

On September 5, 2006, the Surface Transportation Board (Board) issued a Notice that Minnesota Northern Railroad, Inc. (MNR), filed a notice of exemption under 49 U.S.C. 10502(a) for an exemption from 49 U.S.C. 10903 to abandon approximately 17 miles of its stub-ended Ada Subdivision located between milepost 64.0, south of Beltrami, MN, and the end of the track at milepost 47.0, just south of Ada, MN, in Polk and Norman Counties, MN.¹

In its Environmental Assessment (EA), the Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) recommended and the Board imposed an environmental condition requiring MNR to retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of the rail right-of-way itself (excluding the tracks and ties) until the Section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 470f, has been completed.

To assess the potential National Register of Historic Places (National Register) eligibility of the rail corridor, SEA served the EA on 22 Federally recognized tribes that may have ancestral connections to the project area. SEA also interviewed, via telephone, several members of the Polk and Norman County Historical Societies. Last, SEA conducted an internet review of

¹ On November 8, 2006, the Board received a notice that MNR was willing to negotiate railbanking and interim recreational trail use of the rail line right-of-way with Agassiz Recreational Trail Joint Powers Board. In addition, on October 20, 2006, MNR was approached by V & S Railway, Inc. (VSR), with a Notice of Intent to File an Offer of Financial Assistance (OFA) to purchase the line.

historical information regarding the line which revealed that it was originally part of the Great Northern Railway (GNR), whose history is summarized below:

The Great Northern Railway was the only privately funded transcontinental railroad in the U.S. refusing federal subsidies for its construction. GNR was financed by Mr. James J. Hill and developed from the existing St. Paul and Pacific Railroad. GNR was also the only transcontinental railroad to avoid receivership during the depression of 1893 to 1897. During the early years, GNR was built slowly. Mr. Hill used early promotional incentives like feed and seed donations to farmers settling along the rail line.

At its height, GNR had a constructed rail system reaching from the Canadian border to the north, to Chicago, IL to the south, and from Superior, WI, in the east to Puget Sound at Everett, WA, to the west. By 1970, at the time of its merger with BNSF, GNR had a rail system extending over 8,000 miles in length. In 1997, the Line was then acquired by MNR from Rail America Transportation Corporation

To date, SEA has not received any correspondence from the tribes or historical societies contacted regarding the rail line's potential historical importance. However, based on input from the SHPO and SEA's historical research, we have determined that the rail line is eligible for inclusion in the National Register under Criteria A and B. The rail line proposed for abandonment is an original segment of GNR which was important to the history and development of Minnesota, and is associated with financier Mr. James J. Hill who was responsible for both funding and constructing the rail line.

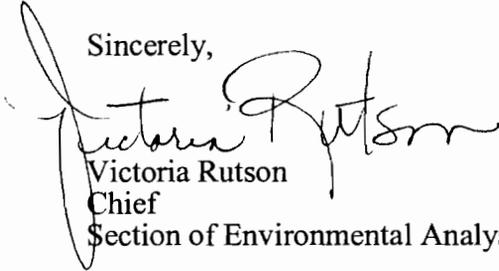
The following documents are enclosed for your review:

- a letter dated September 6, 2006, from Ms. Britta L. Bloomberg, Minnesota Deputy Historic Preservation Officer, stating that the rail line's right-of-way may meet the criteria for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places;
- a copy of the petition for exemption filed with the Board by MNR, describing the proposed action and containing information about the rail line; and
- a copy of the Environmental Assessment prepared for this abandonment proceeding by SEA.

SEA will work with the SHPO, interested tribes, and other identified consulting parties to resolve adverse effects to historic properties through the development of a Memorandum of Agreement. Please notify us within 15 days of receipt of this notice, if you would like to participate in the resolution of adverse effects for this project. We do not seek your participation at this time.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this notification, please feel free to contact Mr. Troy Brady of my staff at (610) 793-4301 or via e-mail at Troy.Brady@stb.dot.gov. Thank you for your assistance in this process.

Sincerely,



Victoria Rutson
Chief
Section of Environmental Analysis

Enclosures

cc: Ms. Britta Bloomberg, MN – Deputy SHPO
Mr. Thomas F. McFarland, MNR