

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

Washington, DC 20423

Office of Economics, Environmental Analysis, and Administration

November 17, 2004

The Honorable Henry Bonilla
U.S. House of Representatives
1120 Wurzbach, Suite 300
San Antonio, TX 78230

Re: STB Finance Docket No. 34284, Southwest Gulf Railroad Company –
Construction and Operation Exemption – Medina County, TX

Dear Congressman Bonilla:

Thank you for your October 22, 2004 letter to Surface Transportation Board Secretary Vernon Williams regarding Southwest Gulf Railroad Company's (SGR) proposed rail line construction and operation in Medina County, Texas. In your letter you request that we address three specific concerns that have been submitted to you by the Medina County Environmental Action Association (MCEAA): (1) condemnation of land for railroad use; (2) the scope of the environmental analysis for this proceeding; and (3) information to be considered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) in its review of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for this proceeding.

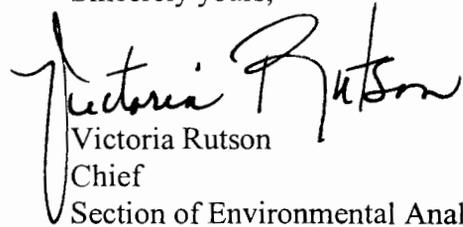
The Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) recently issued the Draft EIS for public review and comment, which we have sent to you under separate cover. The Draft EIS sets forth SEA's preliminary environmental analysis and conclusions regarding the potential environmental impacts of SGR's proposed new rail line and alternatives to that proposal, including the no-build alternative. The issues of land use, condemnation, and the appropriate scope of analysis are set forth in detail in the Draft EIS. Because it is important that the document "speak for itself," I encourage members of the public to review the Draft EIS to find information of particular interest and concern to them.

The comment due date for the Draft EIS is January 10, 2005 and we look forward to receiving the public's comments. SEA will be holding public meetings in Hondo, Texas on December 2, 2004, as detailed in the Draft EIS, to provide the public with the opportunity to submit oral (as well as written comments).

After the close of the comment period, SEA will review all comments received, conduct additional studies and analyses, if necessary, and then issue a Final EIS, setting forth final environmental recommendations to the Board. The Board cannot issue a final decision regarding SGR's proposed rail construction and operation until completion of the environmental review process. In addition, the U.S. EPA will review both the Draft and Final EISs, pursuant to its responsibilities under Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

We appreciate your interest and participation in the environmental review process for this proceeding. If we can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me or Rini Ghosh of my staff at (202) 565-1539.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Victoria Rutson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "V".

Victoria Rutson
Chief
Section of Environmental Analysis

cc: Dr. Robert Fitzgerald, MCEAA