

**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423**

FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Docket No. AB 1332X

**Athens Transportation Partners, LLC – Abandonment Exemption –
In Clarke County, Ga.**

ABANDONMENT TYPE

The time for comments on the Draft Environmental Assessment (Draft EA) has expired in this:
(X) Notice of Exemption () Petition for Exemption () Regulated Abandonment

() **NO NEW COMMENTS WERE RECEIVED**

(X) **NEW COMMENTS WERE RECEIVED**

In this proceeding, Athens Transportation Partners, LLC (ATP)¹ filed a notice with the Surface Transportation Board (Board) under 49 C.F.R. § 1152.50 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. § 10903 in connection with the abandonment of a line of railroad located in Clarke County, Georgia. The rail line proposed for abandonment is approximately 6.5 miles in length and extends from milepost F-MP 98.8 on the north side of the Oconee River trestle bridge in Athens-Clarke County north to milepost F-MP 105.3 near East Broad Street in the city of Athens (the Line). The Office of Environmental Analysis (OEA) served a Draft EA for this proceeding on May 17, 2024 for public review and comment. In the Draft EA, OEA recommended one environmental condition and concluded that the proposed action would not significantly impact the quality of the human environment.

Comments on the Draft EA

OEA received one comment after issuance of the Draft EA. By letter dated May 24, 2024, the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC) commented that the Line, along with the adjacent Oconee Hill cemetery, is recognized as a Regionally Important Resource (RIR) in the *Northeast Georgia Resource Management Plan for Regionally Important Resources* (2018) for being regionally significant to the natural environment or as a cultural resource that is worthy of preservation. NEGRC adds that the Line is also identified in the Northeast Georgia Green Infrastructure Network for its potential to contribute to part of a strategically planned and managed network of parks, greenways, and conservation easements for its potential to improve the health and quality of life for the communities sharing the network. NEGRC agrees that the

¹ ATP is a limited liability affiliate of UGA Real Estate Foundation, which is a supporting organization of the University of Georgia.

University of Georgia's plans to develop the Line as a multi-modal connectivity corridor following abandonment is consistent with its assessment of potential future uses and concludes that the proposed abandonment would not adversely affect identified resources.

Conclusion

The Draft EA comment period has ended. Accordingly, OEA recommends that the following condition previously recommended in the Draft EA should be imposed upon any decision granting abandonment authority:²

Athens Transportation Partners, LLC (ATP) shall retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of all historic properties including sites, buildings, structures, and objects within the project right-of-way (the Area of Potential Effect) that are eligible for listing or listed in the National Register of Historic Places until the Section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act, 54 U.S.C. § 306108, has been completed. ATP shall report back to the Office of Environmental Analysis (OEA) regarding any consultations with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Historic Preservation Division (State Historic Preservation Office or SHPO) and the public. ATP may not file its consummation notice or initiate any salvage activities related to abandonment (including removal of tracks and ties) until the Section 106 process has been completed and the Board has removed this condition.

If the above condition is imposed, OEA believes that the proposed action will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment.

By the Board, Danielle Gosselin, Director, Office of Environmental Analysis.

² If an interim trail use agreement under 16 U.S.C. § 1247(d) and 49 C.F.R. § 1152.29 is reached for the Line (or a portion thereof), compliance with this condition is not required with respect to any portion of the Line covered by the interim trail use agreement for the duration of the agreement.