

SERVICE DATE—SEPTEMBER 29, 2025

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

DECISION

Docket No. AB 1346X

WEST BELT RAILWAY, LLC—DISCONTINUANCE OF SERVICE EXEMPTION—IN THE
CITY OF ST. LOUIS AND ST. LOUIS COUNTY, MO.

Digest:¹ This decision allows West Belt Railway, LLC, to discontinue service over approximately 9.66 miles of rail line in St. Louis, Mo.

Decided: September 29, 2025

On June 30, 2025, West Belt Railway, LLC (WBRY), a Class III rail carrier, filed a petition under 49 U.S.C. § 10502 for exemption from the prior approval requirements of 49 U.S.C. § 10903 to discontinue service over: (1) the West Belt Industry Lead (the WBIL) from approximately milepost 1.07 at Adelaide Avenue to the end of track at approximately milepost 9.54; and (2) the Central Belt Industrial Lead from its point of connection to the WBIL at approximately milepost 9.54 to the end of track, all located in the City of St. Louis, and St. Louis County, Mo. (the Lines). Notice of the petition was served and published in the Federal Register on July 18, 2025 (90 Fed. Reg. 34,068). No comments opposing the proposed discontinuance were filed. The Board will grant the petition for exemption.

BACKGROUND

WBRY has operated over the Lines under the terms of a lease with the Lines' owner, Terminal Railroad Association of St. Louis (TRRA). (Pet. 2); see W. Belt Ry.—Lease & Operation Exemption Including Interchange Commitment—Terminal R.R. Ass'n of St. Louis, FD 35972 (STB served Dec. 1, 2015). WBRY and TRRA have recently agreed to terminate the lease and arrange for TRRA to resume service over the Lines in place of WBRY. (Pet. 2.)² In accordance with its obligations under the lease agreement, WBRY seeks authorization through its petition to discontinue its common carrier status and attendant obligations on the Lines. (Id.) WBRY asserts that no customer on the Lines will be deprived of common carrier service as a consequence of WBRY's proposed discontinuance. (Id.)

¹ The digest constitutes no part of the decision of the Board but has been prepared for the convenience of the reader. It may not be cited to or relied upon as precedent. See Pol'y Statement on Plain Language Digs. in Decisions, EP 696 (STB served Sept. 2, 2010).

² The railroads anticipate this transition in operations to occur on or before December 1, 2025. (Id. at 8.)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Exemption from 49 U.S.C. § 10903. Under 49 U.S.C. § 10903, a rail carrier may not discontinue operations without the prior approval of the Board. Under 49 U.S.C. § 10502, however, the Board shall, to the maximum extent consistent with U.S. Code Title 49, subtitle IV, part A, exempt a transaction or service from regulation when it finds that (1) continued regulation is not necessary to carry out the rail transportation policy (RTP) of 49 U.S.C. § 10101, and (2) either (a) the transaction or service is of limited scope, or (b) regulation is not needed to protect shippers from the abuse of market power.

In this case, detailed scrutiny of the proposed discontinuance under 49 U.S.C. § 10903 is not necessary to carry out the RTP. An exemption would expedite regulatory decisions by minimizing the need for regulatory control over operation of the Lines, reduce regulatory barriers to exit for WBRY, and expedite the process of allowing WBRY to be relieved of its common carrier obligations over the Lines. See 49 U.S.C. § 10101(2), (7), (15). Other aspects of the RTP would not be adversely affected by the use of the exemption process.

Regulation of the proposed transaction under 49 U.S.C. § 10903 also is not needed to protect shippers from the abuse of market power.³ TRRA, the Lines' owner, retains a common carrier obligation to provide service over the Lines, and TRRA will soon assume operation of the Lines. Moreover, no shippers have expressed concern about TRRA assuming the operations provided by WBRY.

Labor Protection. Where a rail carrier is abandoning, or, as here, discontinuing service over, its entire system, the Board generally does not impose labor protection under 49 U.S.C. § 10502(g), unless the evidence indicates the existence of (1) a corporate affiliate that will continue substantially similar rail operations, or (2) a corporate parent that will realize substantial financial benefits over and above relief from the burden of deficit operations by its subsidiary railroad. See Midcoast Railservice, Inc.—Discontinuance of Serv. Exemption—in Cumberland, Knox, Lincoln, & Sagadahoc Cntys., Me., AB 1341X, slip op. at 4 (STB served Dec. 3, 2024); Cent. Tex. & Colo. River Ry.—Discontinuance Exemption—in McCulloch, San Saba, Mills, & Lampasas Cntys., Tex., AB 1272X, slip op. at 9 (STB served Apr. 27, 2022); Northampton & Bath R.R.—Aban. near Northampton & Bath Junction in Northampton Cnty., Pa., 354 I.C.C. 784, 785-86 (1978); Wellsville, Addison & Galetton R.R.—Aban. of Entire Line in Potter & Tioga Cntys., Pa., 354 I.C.C. 744 (1978).

WBRY notes that it is a subsidiary of Patriot Rail Company LLC. (Pet. 3.) WBRY asserts, however, that because it would have no residual interest in railroad assets or any other regulated operations as a result of the proposed discontinuance, it is entitled to relief from otherwise-applicable labor protection conditions. (*Id.* at 6.) As the record contains no indication that a corporate affiliate will continue substantially similar rail operations on the Lines, or that WBRY's parent company would realize substantial financial benefits over and above relief from

³ Because regulation is not needed to protect shippers from the abuse of market power, the Board need not determine whether the transaction is limited in scope. See 49 U.S.C. § 10502(a)(2).

the burden of any deficit operations by WBRY, the Board will not impose employee protective conditions here.

Offers of Financial Assistance, Interim Trail Use/Rail Banking, Public Use, and Environmental Review. Because no formal expressions of intent to file an offer of financial assistance (OFA) to subsidize continued rail service were filed by the July 28, 2025 deadline, the Board will not consider subsidy OFAs in this case. See 49 C.F.R. § 1152.27(c)(1)(i). And, because this is a discontinuance and not an abandonment, the Board need not consider OFAs to acquire the Lines, interim trail use/rail banking requests under 16 U.S.C. § 1247(d), or requests to negotiate for public use of the Lines under 49 U.S.C. § 10905. Lastly, because there will be an environmental review if abandonment is sought in the future, environmental review is unnecessary here.

It is ordered:

1. Under 49 U.S.C. § 10502, the Board exempts from the prior approval requirements of 49 U.S.C. § 10903 the discontinuance of service on the Lines by WBRY, as described above.
2. This exemption will be effective October 29, 2025.
3. Petitions to reopen and petitions to stay the effectiveness of the exemption must be filed by October 20, 2025.

By the Board, Board Members Fuchs, Hedlund, and Schultz.