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OEA

SERVICE DATE – JUNE 12, 2026

**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423**

DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Docket No. AB 290 (Sub-No. 424X)

**Norfolk Southern Railway Company– Abandonment Exemption –
in Polk County, Iowa**

Docket No. AB 414 (Sub. No. 9X)

**Iowa Interstate Railroad, LLC – Discontinuance Lease and Operation Authority –
in Polk County, Iowa**

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, Norfolk Southern Railway Company (NSR) and Iowa Interstate Railroad, LLC (IAIS) jointly filed a petition under 49 U.S.C. § 10502 seeking exemption from the prior approval requirements of 49 U.S.C. § 10903 in connection with the abandonment and discontinuance, respectively, of a line of railroad in the Polk County, Iowa. The rail line proposed for abandonment extends approximately 12.2-miles from milepost DU 340.8 +/- to milepost DU 353.0 +/-, and together with the Clive Spur (no mileposts), are commonly referred to as the Grimes Line (the Line). A map depicting the Line in relationship to the area served is appended to this Draft Environmental Assessment (Draft EA). If the Board grants the exemption, NSR would be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances and dispose of the right-of-way.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE

The Line traverses the United States Postal Zip Code territories of 50111 (Grimes, IA); 50322 (Urbandale, IA); 50324 (Windsor Heights, IA); 50325 (Clive, IA); 50265 (West Des Moines, IA); and 50312 (Des Moines, IA). NSR owns the right-of-way underlying the Line in fee simple. The Line does not contain any federally granted rights-of-way.

The Line is a segment of a track that formed part of the St. Louis, Des Moines and Northern Railway that opened in 1882. Through foreclosure and bankruptcy actions, the Line was eventually purchased by Norfolk and Western Railway Company, a subsidiary of NSR in 1988. IAIS leased the Line in 1995 and is currently seeking an exemption in Docket No. AB 414 (Sub. No. 9X) to discontinue its lease and operating authority over the Line.

According to NSR, an average of 404 carloads were transported by IAIS per year between 2021 and 2025, with volume dropping each year. Currently there are three shippers that

transport dried lumber (Bessier Lumber Company and Frontier Forest Products), and steel plates (CB&I Storage Tank Solutions). NSR believes this freight could be diverted to truck and states that there are transloading facilities in both Des Moines, Iowa and Altoona, Iowa.

The Line traverses through six Iowa cities, and the right-of-way is 100 feet wide. NSR states that there are five bridge structures along the right-of-way that would be left in place and intact. NSR would work with each city and the Iowa Department of Transportation to leave in place or close existing public crossings if the abandonment and discontinuance requests are granted.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

NSR submitted a combined environmental and historic report (E&H Report) that concludes the quality of the human environment would not be affected significantly as a result of the proposed abandonment of the Line, including salvage. NSR served the E&H Report on a number of appropriate federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Surface Transportation Board's (Board) environmental rules [49 C.F.R. § 1105.7(b)]¹ implementing the National Environmental Policy Act. The Board's Office of Environmental Analysis (OEA) has reviewed and investigated the record in this proceeding.

Diversion of Traffic

As discussed above, NSR states that the local traffic has averaged 404 carloads over the last five years. Using a rail-to-truck conversion factor of 4 trucks per carload,² OEA calculates that on a per day basis, if all the rail traffic is diverted to truck traffic, the abandonment would generate an estimated 1,616 new trucks per year (3,232 truck trips assuming an empty backhaul). This equates to approximately 7 trucks per day being added to area roads during a 240-workday year.³ This increase would not exceed the Board's thresholds of an increase of more than 10 percent of the average daily traffic or 50 vehicles a day on any affected road segment [49 C.F.R. § 1105.7(e)]. Therefore, the proposed abandonment would not result in the diversion of rail traffic to truck traffic that could result in significant impacts to air quality or the local transportation network.

¹ The E&H Report is available for viewing on the Board's website at www.stb.gov clicking "Search STB Records;" selecting "Filings" in the "Search for" dropdown menu; entering "AB" "290" "424" "X" sequentially in the four boxes next to "Docket Number," then selecting "Search." The E&H Report was filed on January 20, 2026.

² The conversion factor is an estimate based on the types of commodities transported.

³ 240 workdays result when weekends and holidays are subtracted from a 365-day year.

Nor would the proposed abandonment adversely impact the development, use and transportation of energy resources or recyclable commodities or the transportation of ozone-depleting materials.

Salvage Activities

Impacts from salvage and disposal of a rail line typically include removal of tracks and ties, removal of ballast, dismantling of any bridges or other structures that may be present on the rail right-of-way, and regrading of the right-of-way. Salvage may be performed within the right-of-way, or, if necessary, via the construction of new access points to the right-of-way. Should the Board grant NSR abandonment authority, NSR intends to salvage rail and track material, and smooth the roadbed to a level surface. NSR states that the existing roadbed and drainage systems would remain intact, ballast would not be removed, and no new soil disturbance would occur.

NSR requested comments from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) as well as the State Conservationist of Iowa. OEA has not heard from NRCS or the State Conservationist of Iowa. However, NSR states that it is not aware of any regional or local land use patterns with which the proposed abandonment would be inconsistent and does not believe that the proposed abandonment would have an adverse effect on any prime agricultural land. NSR also reached out to the appropriate local representatives of the Cities of Grimes, Urbandale, Windsor Heights, Clive, West Des Moines, Des Moines and Polk County, Iowa, for their feedback on land use. The cities of Urbandale and Windsor Heights responded that the abandonment would be consistent with their Comprehensive Plans. Because the Line is located along a mix of residential and commercial areas and due to the limited scope of salvage, OEA does not expect impacts to prime farmland or land use a result of the proposed abandonment. OEA is providing a copy of this Draft EA to NRCS, the State Conservationist of Iowa, the Cities of Grimes, Clive, West Des Moines and Polk County for their review.

Iowa does not border a defined coastal area pursuant to the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA). Accordingly, no further coordination is required.

NSR submitted the E&H Report to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island Regulatory District (USACE) and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Division of Water Quality (IDNR) and requested comments on water resources and potential permitting requirements under the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. § 1344). To date, no response from USACE has been received. IDNR submitted comments recommending that if any obstruction of the state designated paddling route along Walnut Creek occurs during salvage, NSR should contact IDNR regarding warning signage. NSR has stated that salvage activities would not require in-water work. Therefore, OEA does not anticipate that the proposed abandonment would require any

further consultation with IDNR or permitting by USACE. OEA is providing a copy of this Draft EA to IDNR and USACE for review.

NSR requested comments from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and IDNR, regarding potential impacts of the proposed abandonment to protected wildlife, including federally listed threatened and endangered species under the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. § 1531 *et seq.*). To date, USFWS has not provided comments. IDNR provided comments stating that consultation should occur with USFWS for any bridge removal activities that may impact protected bat species.

To identify protected species in the project area, OEA conducted a search of the USFWS Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) system.⁴ Species identified in the area of the proposed abandonment include: the Indiana Bat (*Myotis sodalist*, Endangered), the Northern Long-eared Bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*, Endangered), the Tricolored Bat (*Perimyotis subflavus*, Proposed Endangered), the Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*, Proposed Threatened), and the Western Regal Fritillary (*Argynnis idalia occidentalis*, Proposed Threatened). No designated critical habitats, refuge lands, or fish hatcheries are located within the project area for any species listed above. NSR has stated that salvage activities would not include any bridge removal. Therefore, OEA believes that it is unlikely that the listed bat species would be impacted by the loss of roosting habitat under bridge tresses. Similarly, salvage is not anticipated to involve the removal of nectar plant habitat needed by butterfly species. Based on known habitat information and the limited scope of salvage, OEA has determined that the proposed abandonment would have no impact on federally proposed or listed threatened and endangered species. OEA is providing USFWS – Illinois-Iowa Ecological Services Field Office a copy of this Draft EA for review.

Any air emissions associated with abandonment activities would be temporary and therefore would not have a significant impact on air quality. Similarly, any noise related to abandonment activities would also be temporary and should not have a significant impact on the area surrounding the proposed abandonment.

Based on all information available to date, OEA has determined that the proposed abandonment would not cause significant environmental impacts. In addition to the parties on the Board's service list for this proceeding, OEA is providing a copy of this Draft EA to USFWS, Illinois-Iowa Ecological Services Field Office; USACE, Rock Island District; NRCS; the State Conservationist of Iowa; the Cities of Grimes, Clive, West Des Moines; Polk County; and IDNR for review and comment.

⁴ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC), <https://ecos.fws.gov/ipac/location/index> (last accessed April 16, 2026).

HISTORIC REVIEW

NSR served the E&H Report on the Iowa State Preservation Office (State Historic Preservation Office or SHPO), pursuant to 49 C.F.R. § 1105.8(c).⁵

OEA has not heard from the SHPO and therefore has not been able to consider the SHPO's opinion before determining what the effect of the proposed abandonment may be on historic properties eligible for or listed on the National Register of Historic Places (National Register). Accordingly, OEA is recommending a condition requiring NSR to retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of all historic properties including sites, buildings, and objects within the project right-of-way (the Area of Potential Effect) eligible for listing or listed in the National Register until completion of the Section 106 process. Guidance regarding the Board's historic preservation review process is available on the Board's website at <https://www.stb.gov/resources/environmental/historic-preservation-overview>.

Pursuant to 36 C.F.R. § 800.2, OEA conducted a search of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Tribal Directory Assessment Tool (TDAT) to identify federally recognized Tribes that may have ancestral connections to the project area.⁶ The database indicated that the following federally-recognized tribes may have knowledge regarding properties of traditional religious and cultural significance within the APE of the proposed abandonment: Apache Tribe of Oklahoma, Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma, Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, Sac & Fox Nation of Missouri in Kansas and Nebraska, Sac & Fox Nation of Oklahoma, and the Sac & Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa. Accordingly, OEA is sending a copy of this Draft EA to these Tribes for review and comment.

CONDITIONS

⁵ Applicants seeking authority from the Board to abandon railroad lines may act on behalf of the Board when complying with the Section 106 regulations of the National Historic Preservation Act. Applicants are authorized to initiate the Section 106 review process and carry out some of its steps, but the Board retains overall responsibility for the Section 106 review. See 36 C.F.R. § 800.2(c)(4); 49 C.F.R. Part 1105; Delegation Letter (Dec. 9, 2009). The Delegation Letter can be found at a link on the bottom of the Board's website overlooking historic preservation at <https://prod.stb.gov/resources/environmental/historic-preservation-overview>.

⁶ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Tribal Directory Assessment Tool, <https://egis.hud.gov/tdat> (last accessed April 16, 2026).

OEA recommends that the following condition be imposed on any decision granting abandonment authority:⁷

Norfolk Southern Railway Company (NSR) 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.

NSR shall report back to the Office of Environmental Analysis (OEA) regarding any consultations with the State Historic Preservation Office, Tribes, and the public. NSR 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.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided by all sources to date, OEA concludes that, as currently proposed, abandonment of the Line will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is unnecessary. See 42 U.S.C. § 4336(b).

Alternatives to the proposed abandonment would include denial (and therefore no change in operations), discontinuance of service without abandonment, and continued operation by another operator. In any of these cases, the existing quality of the human environment and energy consumption should not be affected.

PUBLIC USE

Following abandonment and salvage of the rail line, the right-of-way may be suitable for other public use. A request containing the requisite four-part showing for imposition of a public use condition (49 C.F.R. § 1152.28) must be filed with the Board and served on the railroad within the time specified in the Board's Federal Register notice of the proposed abandonment.

⁷ 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.

The Federal Register notice is also issued as a Board decision and is available on the Board's website.⁸

TRAIL USE

A request for a notice of interim trail use (NITU) is due to the Board, with a copy to the railroad, within 10 days of publication of notice of the petition for exemption in the Federal Register. Nevertheless, the Board will accept late-filed requests as long as it retains jurisdiction to do so in a particular case. This request must comply with the Board's rules for use of rights-of-way as trails (49 C.F.R. § 1152.29). The Federal Register notice is also issued as a Board decision and is available on the Board's website.⁹

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

The Board's Office of Public Assistance, Governmental Affairs, and Compliance responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact this office directly at (202) 245-0238, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Assistance, Governmental Affairs, and Compliance, Washington, DC 20423.

COMMENTS

OEA encourages interested parties to submit their comments on the Draft EA electronically through the Board's website at <https://www.stb.gov/>. From the Board's home page, scroll down to the blue "How to File" box. Select the "E-Filing (recommended)" button. From the E-Filing page, select "Environmental Comments" under "Select your E-Filing Type." Log-in accounts are not needed to file environmental comments electronically. Brief comments can be typed in the comment field, and lengthier comments can be attached as Word, Adobe Acrobat, or other file formats.

Alternatively, comments submitted by mail should be addressed to: Andrea Poole, Surface Transportation Board, 395 E Street SW, Washington, DC 20423-0001, Attention: Environment Filing, Docket Nos. AB 290 (Sub-No. 424X) and AB 414 (Sub-No. 9X). If you

⁸ Board decisions are available for viewing on the Board's website at <https://prod.stb.gov> by clicking "Search STB Records;" selecting "Decisions" in the "Search for" dropdown menu; entering "AB" "290" "424" "X" sequentially in the four boxes for "Docket Number," then selecting "Search."

⁹ Id.

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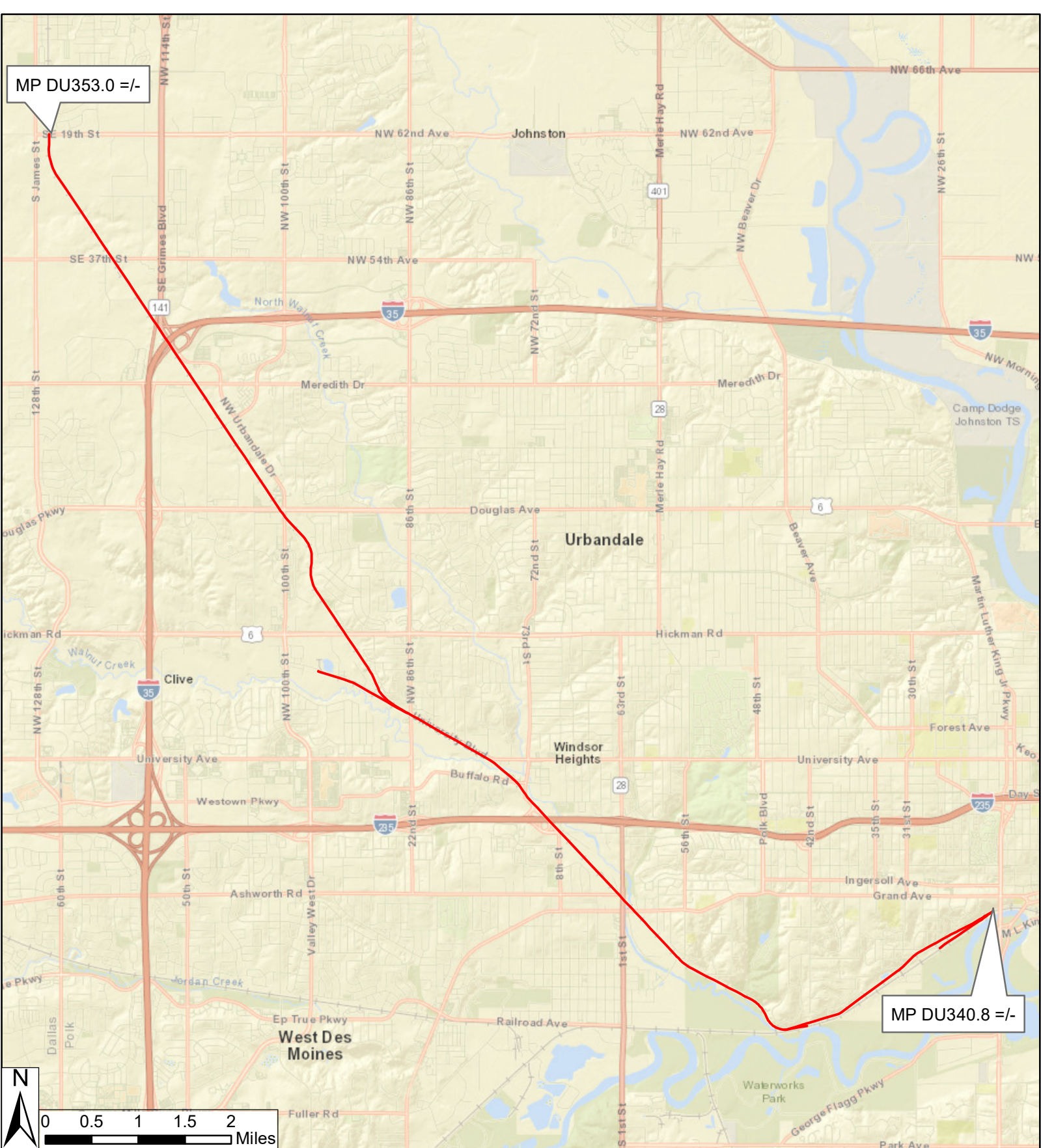

have any questions, please contact Andrea Poole by email at Andrea.Poole@stb.gov or by phone at 202-245-0305.

Date made available to the public: June 12, 2026

Comment due date: July 13, 2026

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

Attachment

STB Docket No. AB 290 (Sub-No. 424X)
 Norfolk Southern Railway Company
 Abandonment Exemption
 In Polk County, Iowa

Legend
 — The Line

Note: Maps produced by the STB's Office of Environmental Analysis are based on information provided by the applicant and are for reference purposes only.

