



SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
Washington, DC 20423

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Office of Environmental Analysis

November 7, 2012

Mr. Clint McRae
Rocker Six Cattle Company
3633 Rosebud Creek Road
Forsyth, MT 59327

Re: Docket No. FD 30186, Tongue River Railroad Company, Inc.—Rail
Construction and Operation—in Custer, Powder River and Rosebud Counties,
MT, Request for Maps Dated October 29, 2012

Dear Mr. McRae:

I am responding to your email to Mr. Ken Blodgett of my staff, asking for maps of a proposed rail alignment near Colstrip, MT. Your email explains that you are concerned that this proposed alignment could bisect your summer pasture, and that, without a detailed map, you cannot determine the potential impact that this proposed alignment could have on your property. I will respond to your concerns as well as I can at this point.

The Surface Transportation Board's Office of Environmental Analysis (OEA) has just begun the environmental review process for this proceeding based on a revised application filed on October 16, 2012 by the Tongue River Railroad (TRRC). OEA issued a Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and a Draft Scope of Study for the EIS on October 22, 2012, three weeks ago. There, we explained that in the EIS, the agency will be looking at the potential environmental impacts of the railroad's proposed alignment and the reasonable and feasible alternatives. The Notice of Intent specifically requested comments on potential alternatives to TRRC's proposed alignment, including, at a minimum, those analyzed in the EIS prepared in the 1980s in Tongue River I. As pertinent here, those alternatives included:

[A]n alternative known as the Colstrip Alternative, which would leave the existing Cow Creek branch of BNSF at Colstrip, crossing Cow Creek and Rosebud Creek as it heads south and east, following the Greenleaf Creek Valley to the Rosebud Creek/Tongue River divide. From there it descends into the Tongue River Valley and joins the proposed route at the Tongue River crossing north of Ashland.

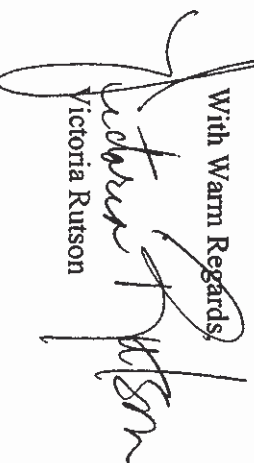
The full Notice of Intent is available on the Board's website at www.stb.dot.gov, under E-library, and search for decisions using the docket number FD 30186. The Notice of Intent is also available on the EIS Project website at www.tonguerivereis.com under documents.

To my knowledge, no in-depth engineering has been done on any of the potential alignments for the rail line that is now being proposed; therefore, detailed mapping simply is not

available at this time. TRRC has hired an engineering firm to develop some alternatives, and that firm, TransSystems, has produced a few maps, which they gave to us in late October. These maps are preliminary and represent only the railroad's point of view. To disclose as much information about this project as possible to the public, we have made these maps available on the EIS Project website (www.tonguerivereis.com under documents). However, as the EIS Project website explains, the maps are TRRC's, not the agency's.

Further, because we are just beginning the environmental review process, have not yet met with the public at our upcoming scoping meetings, and the time for filing written comments on the Notice of Intent and Draft Scope of Study has not yet run, these roughly sketched alignments are very likely to change. Commenters may suggest new potential alternatives that minimize potential environmental impacts and enhance environmental quality. Similarly, old proposed alternatives could be tweaked or even changed altogether before issuance of a Final Scope of Study for the EIS or the Draft and Final EIS.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact me at (202) 245-0295. I hope you are able to attend our upcoming scoping meetings and we look forward to hearing your views on alignments and potential environmental impacts.

With Warm Regards,

Victoria Rutson