

30186

SERVICE DATE - JUNE 11, 1999

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NO. AB-561X

RIO VALLEY RAILROAD, INC.
--ABANDONMENT EXEMPTION--
IN CAMERON COUNTY, TEXAS

AND

NO. AB-562X

RIO VALLEY SWITCHING COMPANY
--DISCONTINUANCE OF SERVICE EXEMPTION--
IN CAMERON COUNTY, TEXAS

BACKGROUND

In the Docket No. AB-561X proceeding, the Rio Valley Railroad, Inc. (RVRI) has filed a petition under 49 U.S.C. 10502 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 in connection with abandonment of its railroad line located between milepost 0.316, near San Benito and milepost 9.19, at Rio Hondo, a distance of approximately 8.808 miles in Cameron. A map depicting the Line in relationship to the area served is appended to the report. If the exemption becomes effective, the RVRI will be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances, and to dispose of the right-of-way.

In the Docket No. AB-562X proceeding, the Rio Valley Switching Company (RVSC) has also filed a petition under 49 U.S.C. 10502 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 in connection with discontinuance of its service over the same line RVRI seeks to abandon.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE

The line extends through a rural area. No traffic has moved over the Line since October, 1998, when the only shipper on the line informed the railroad that its shipments (fertilizer materials) would no longer move by rail.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The railroad has submitted an environmental report that concludes the quality of the human environment will not be affected significantly as a result of the abandonment or any post-abandonment activities, including salvage and disposition of the right-of-way. The railroad has served the environmental report on a number of appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Board's environmental rules at 49 CFR 1105.7(b). We have verified the record in this proceeding. Responses to the railroad's request for comments thus far have not indicated a need for environmental mitigation conditions.

CONDITIONS

We recommend that no environmental conditions be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, we conclude that, as currently proposed, abandonment of the line will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the environmental impact statement process is unnecessary.

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

If abandonment and salvage of the rail line take place, 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 CFR 1152.28) must be filed with the Board and served on the railroad within the time specified in the Federal Register notice.

TRAILS 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 the 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 CFR 1152.29).

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

The Board's Office of Public Services (OPS) responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact OPS directly at (202) 565-1592, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Services, Room 848, Washington, DC 20423.

COMMENTS

If you wish to file comments regarding this environmental assessment, you should send an **original and two copies** to Vernon A. Williams, Office of the Secretary, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Harold McNulty, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket Nos. AB-561X and AB-562X in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Mr. McNulty at (202) 565-1539.

Date made available to the public: June 11, 1999.

Comment due date: July 12, 1999.

By the Board, Elaine K. Kaiser, Chief, Section of Environmental Analysis.

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

PLEASE SCAN THE MAP