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SERVICE DATE - JULY 16, 1997

**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423**

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NO. AB-55 (SUB-NO. 535X)

**CSX TRANSPORTATION, INC. -- ABANDONMENT EXEMPTION --
IN CLARKE COUNTY, GEORGIA**

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, CSX Transportation, Inc. (CSXT) has filed a petition under 49 U.S.C. 10502 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 in connection with the abandonment of its railroad line located between Milepost YYA-37.44 and Milepost YYA-37.00, a distance of 0.44 miles at the end of track at East Athens, Clarke County, Georgia. The line is part of a 2.34 mile branch main line between Athens and East Athens, GA, which is a portion of the Atlanta Service Lane, Abbeville Subdivision. A map depicting the rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to the report. If the notice becomes effective, CSXT will be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances and to dispose of the right-of-way. CSXT had originally considered abandoning the entire 2.34 mile branch, but decided to limit the abandonment to the 0.44 mile end segment for which authority is sought here.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE

There is one rail service customer, IMC Vigoro, on the line proposed for abandonment. CSXT has agreed to sell the subject line to IMC Vigoro following abandonment. IMC Vigoro hopes to significantly increase its rail usage at its facility and to expand its industrial trackage on the site. The line, once abandoned by CSXT, would thus continue to be used for rail service as a privately owned industrial track.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The railroads have 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 railroads have 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 railroads' request for comments thus far have not indicated a need for 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 and discontinuance of service 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 does take place, the right-of-way may be appropriate 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. However, the Board will accept late-filed

requests as long as it retains jurisdiction to do so. 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.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMENTS

If you wish to file comments regarding this environmental assessment, send an **original and one copy** to the Board's Section of Environmental Analysis, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Harold McNulty, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-55 (Sub-No. 545X) 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: July 11, 1997.

Comment due date: August 11, 1997.

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary