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SERVICE DATE - JANUARY 10, 1997

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NO. AB-33 (SUB-NO. 101)

Union Pacific Railroad Company
-- Abandonment --
Plainville Branch (Plainville-Colby line)
in Rooks, Graham, Sheridan, and Thomas Counties, KS

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, the Union Pacific Railroad Company (UP) has filed an application seeking authority under 49 U.S.C. 10903 to abandon its railroad line located between MP 102.0 near Plainville and MP 201.0 near Colby, a distance of 99.0 miles in Rooks, Graham, Sheridan, and Thomas Counties, KS. A map depicting the rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to the report. If the exemption becomes effective, the railroad will be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances, and to dispose of the right-of-way.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE

UP has transported 658 carloads of rail traffic over the line during 1994; 338 carloads during 1995; and 323 carloads between January and October, 1996. The majority of carloads are farm products (primarily wheat). There are 32 bridges along the line that are 50 years old or older. The right-of-way consists of over 2500 acres, 99 percent of which are reversionary property.

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 investigated the record in this proceeding. Also, we have consulted with appropriate agencies and individuals

to verify the railroad's report and to obtain additional information and comments regarding the potential environmental effects of the proposed abandonment. Contacts have included the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, National Geodetic Survey, Kansas Department of Health and Environment, and Kansas State Historical Society (SHPO).

CONDITIONS

The Kansas State Historical Society (SHPO) states there are five bridges on the line which merit further examination for possible National Register eligibility.

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KSDHE) expressed concern about the potential water quality impacts of the abandonment and stated that UP may be required to obtain a water quality certification from KSDHE, and they recommend that UP prepare a Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Plan. KSDHE also expressed concern about properly removing storage batteries, and the potential for release of environmentally damaging materials during salvage and their proper clean up.

The National Geodetic Survey (NGS) has identified 42 geodetic station markers along the rail line and requests 90 days notice to plan relocation of any markers which may be disturbed or destroyed.

Therefore, we recommend that the following conditions be imposed on any decision granting abandonment authority:

- 1. Union Pacific shall retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of the five bridges located at mileposts 140.96, 141.56, 150.46, 151.49, and 154.40, until completion of the Section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 470f.**
- 2. Union Pacific shall consult with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KSDHE), and, if necessary, comply with KSDHE requirements regarding a water quality certification and a Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Plan, and the removal of storage batteries and potential release of environmentally damaging materials during salvage.**
- 3. Union Pacific shall consult with the National Geodetic Survey and provide NGS with 90 days notice prior to disturbing or destroying any geodetic markers.**

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, and subject to the recommended conditions, 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

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 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 certificate of interim trail use (CITU) is due to the Board, with a copy to the railroad, within 30 days of filing of the application. 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 Assistance (OPA) responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact OPA directly at (202) 927-6184, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Assistance, Room 4412, 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, Room 2215, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Mike Dalton, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-33 (Sub No. 101) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Mr. Dalton at (202) 927-6197.

Date made available to the public: January 8, 1997.

Comment due date: February 7, 1997.

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

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary