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VIA HAND DELIVERY

Ms. Victoria Rutson
Chief
Section of Environmental Analysis
Surface Transportation Board
1925 K Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20423

**Re: STB Finance Docket No. 34284, Southwest Gulf Railroad Company –
Construction and Operation Exemption – Medina County, TX**

Dear Ms. Rutson:

On November 4, 2005, the Medina County Environmental Action Association, Inc. (MCEAA) submitted a letter to your office accompanied by a DVD and a DVD-ROM concerning flash flooding in Central Texas. While the DVDs provide information about flash flooding in the Central Texas area, the MCEAA letter asserts that the construction of the Southwest Gulf Railroad (SGR) will somehow create or exacerbate such flooding. The MCEAA letter thus states repeatedly that, "Vulcan's quarry and rail line are the new developments that are failing to plan for flood impacts."

SGR has responded on numerous occasions to MCEAA's claims about flooding impacts. Suffice it to say that SGR is not unmindful of the concerns that have been raised or the discussion and analysis of flooding impacts set forth in the Draft EIS. Further, SGR has stated that it will accept the mitigation conditions proposed in the Draft EIS to address those concerns. That would of course include the voluntary mitigation incorporated into the Draft EIS which would obligate SGR to undertake extensive hydrological surveys prior to design and construction of its stream crossings.

At the risk of stating the obvious, SGR has no interest in building a rail line that will be susceptible to being destroyed or placed out of service by flooding. Dozens of rail lines currently traverse the same areas of Central Texas depicted in the video submitted by MCEAA. SGR is not aware of any claims made in the DVDs submitted by MCEAA, or elsewhere, that such rail lines contribute to flooding. This is the case even though virtually all of these existing rail lines were designed and

constructed prior to the enactment of NEPA and thus without any environmental reviews or mitigation conditions of any kind. The various alternative alignments being considered for the SGR line, by contrast, will have undergone careful study of flooding and other impacts by SEA and its contractor prior to construction, and that line will be designed to minimize the risk of any adverse groundwater impacts. Moreover, SGR would be required by mitigation conditions that have been proposed to consult with FEMA and the Medina County Flood Administrator, and to obtain Corps of Engineers permits to the extent required.

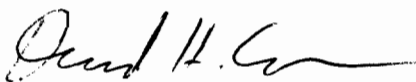
SGR's planned construction of a rail line stands in sharp contrast to the actions of some housing developers who are apparently building homes in floodplains along rivers and streams prone to flooding, as shown in the video submitted by MCEAA. Some of those developers may be ignoring historical flooding patterns when building and selling homes, and then moving on to another project. SGR, on the other hand, is not building its line entirely in a floodplain (under any of the alignments under consideration, most of the line would be outside the 100 year floodplain). Also, SGR will be constructing bridges across the few streams in the area after studying hydrological impacts and taking these into account. In addition, SGR will continue to operate its line once it is built; as noted above, the incentive to avoid flooding impacts in the area is obviously strong.

It also bears note that the video submitted by MCEAA does not suggest that structures located in or near floodplains are the cause of flooding problems. The video also notably does not even mention railroad lines or bridges as a contributing factor to the flash floods. Rather, the flooding described in the video is the result of natural forces. The video makes clear that the flooding dates back to the 1800's and earlier, before there were any significant structures in the floodplains. Structures in the floodplain can of course be damaged by floods if they are not properly designed; but such structures were not the cause of the floods shown in the video.

The video also makes clear that structures can be safely constructed in areas that might flood, such as the building in Austin shown in the video that was properly designed to meet certain standards. The SGR line also will be designed to minimize flooding risks, consistent with FEMA requirements.

SGR would be pleased to respond to any other issues raised in the MCEAA November 4 letter should SEA request a response.

Respectfully,



David H. Coburn
Attorney for Southwest Gulf Railroad Company

cc: Ms. Rini Ghosh
Ms. Jaya Zyman-Ponebshek