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RJ

The Medina County Environmental Action Association, Inc.

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December 10, 2004

Victoria Rutson, Chief,
Section on Environmental Analysis
Surface Transportation Board
1925 K Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20423-0001
Fax 202-565-9000

received
12/10/04

Re: Finance Docket 34284

Dear Ms. Rutson:

The purpose of this letter is to inform the Surface Transportation Board of an upcoming rail study on the San Antonio area railroads.

An article in the December 8, 2004 San Antonio Express-News, stated the study will look at recent collisions, how railroads intersect with streets and how much and what kind of freight goes through the San Antonio area.

MCEAA, Inc. would like to know if the STB will participate in this study. If so, it must take into account the impact of the proposed SGR shipment of at least 1000 cars per week (5 million tons per annum) going through San Antonio as well as the upcoming freight from the new Toyota plant in southwest Bexar County that will also use this line.

If STB is not involved in this study, MCEAA, Inc. requests the name of any known Federal agency that would either conduct or be involved with the study.

We would like a prompt reply to these questions in view of the very limited amount of time we have to comment on the DEIS.

Sincerely,

Robert T. Fitzgerald

Dr. Robert T. Fitzgerald, President

Encl. Article - San Antonio Express News 12-8-04

Cc: Senator John Cornyn
Representative Henry Bonilla
State Senator Frank Madla
State Representative Tracy King

County kicks in \$25,000 for rail

M 3B

safety study

Several agencies are partnering in response to string of crashes.

BY ELIZABETH ALLEN
EXPRESS-NEWS STAFF WRITER

Continuing to grapple with an issue over which they have no authority, Bexar County commissioners voted Tuesday to spend \$25,000 partnering on a half-million-dollar study of area railroads.

The study will look at recent

collisions, how railroads intersect with streets, and how much and what kind of freight goes through the San Antonio area.

Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff has called for rail operator Union Pacific to step up its safety programs after several train accidents, including two that claimed five lives. He's also pushing a regional rail relocation plan.

The Metropolitan Planning Organization will put up \$50,000, the city is considering another \$25,000, and Texas Department of Transportation also will help on the 18-month study that

should kick off in the spring, said Seth Mitchell, the county's chief of staff. UP will cooperate in the study.

Wolff said TxDOT is paying more attention to rail service and how it can take pressure off highways, "where before they never really even mentioned the word 'rail.'"

He also said state leaders are talking about a rail relocation bond of \$200 million that could be used to leverage \$2 billion, of which Central Texas entities could snag a percentage to put toward their proposed projects.

In another issue where the

county has little power but can make a lot of noise, commissioners accepted a petition of nearly 3,000 signatures from Helotes resident John Eakin protesting a Wal-Mart proposed at the edge of the Northwest Bexar County town.

Eakin, who said more than 800 signatures came from Helotes citizens angry with the proposed site on Scenic Loop Road, found some support for his cause among the commissioners.

"I can't imagine a worse site," said Commissioner Lyle Larson. Wolff told Eakin that state

Sen. Frank Madla of San Antonio has offered to introduce a bill in the Legislature's upcoming regular session dealing with the issue. Madla, who has family land nearby, has sent a letter to Wal-Mart opposing a store at the Helotes site.

Commissioner Paul Elizondo said Sheriff Ralph Lopez has some authority to enforce development standards on the project — such as traffic and drainage — and that Lopez has offered "to make sure that's given extreme due diligence, if you know what I mean."

In her regular report to com-

missioners on the current county jail population, detention population monitor Kristie Blust said the number of inmates was down to 3,755, or 90.4 percent of capacity. That's a hair off the sheriff's stated ideal of 90 percent. The population is down in part due to seasonal patterns, Blust said.

And commissioners voted to give the new children's court five deputies instead of four after Chief Deputy Dennis McKnight asked for six, citing the facility's security needs.

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