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TO: Members of the Surface Transportation Board
of the U. S. Department of Transportation
Section of Environmental Analysis

Finance Docket No. 34284
Southwest Gulf Railroad Company
Construction and Operation Exemption
Medina County, Texas

December 15, 2005

Members of the Surface Transportation Board:

We wish to reaffirm that we support Vulcan Mining and Materials Company and their plans to develop an aggregate quarry in the northeast section of Medina County, Texas. To move their product seven miles from the proposed mining site to an established rail line, they need the Southwest Gulf Railroad (SGR) to build a new line through a rural area. We ask that you approve the construction of this railroad for the reasons cited below.

1. Transportation and Traffic Safety

Railroads have become a necessity to transport goods of every origin throughout our country. When compared to hauling aggregate by truck, the railroad will minimize the inconvenience to persons who live and travel in this area. Public safety is a legitimate issue of railroad crossings, but we trust the SGR will be required to install all appropriate and necessary warning signals. The Texas Department of Transportation (TexDOT) will offer expert planning for these crossings to ensure safety for those who travel the roadways nearby. Medina County citizens have experienced railroad crossings since 1861 and travel through them frequently. SGR crossings shouldn't cause any greater problems here than others throughout America.

2. Water Resources

Flooding and erosion can be concerns when a railroad is built, but the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers will address these issues and design construction plans and policies to prevent significant problems. Historical flooding in flood plains may continue regardless of whether there is a rail line or not. Protecting water resources is of great importance, so SGR will be made to comply with all local and federal guidelines to prevent negative impacts on groundwaters and the Edwards aquifer.

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3. Air Quality

We know the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality will demand that SGR comply with its requirements, causing less air contamination than the option of trucking these materials.

4. Land Use

Your board members can impose conditions to ensure landowners access to their land and enforce regulations which allow land bordering the rail line to continue to appear in its natural state.

5. Noise

Increased noise does result near railroads, but people continue to build homes, establish businesses, construct schools, etc. quite close to railroads across our country without severe negative noise impact on citizens. In our community many people live comfortably, and many retail owners manage profitable operations within one block of the Southern Pacific Railroad. We can hear train whistles throughout the day and night in Hondo, but they do not cause great anxiety nor awaken us repeatedly.

7. Vibration

It has been said railroad noises and vibrations will damage or destroy historical sites and water wells along the proposed route. Nowhere in Medina County have century-old structures near railroads suffered more severe damages than those buildings which exist many miles from a rail line. No one has proven that wells were harmed by vibrations in the area where a rail line was used long ago on land east of the proposed SGR rail route.

6. Cultural Resources

Homes and business operations within one to two blocks of Hondo's railroad tracks have existed for over a hundred years. None of them have been abandoned because of damage caused by vibrations from the railway. Architects who specialize in renovation of historical structures are presently assisting with plans to restore homes on either side of the proposed rail line with little concern that passing trains will damage or destroy them.

3.

The Vulcan Company has spent nearly five years conducting environmental studies and has proven its dedication and ability to work with the Surface Transportation Board while complying with the National Environmental Protection Act. They seek to address the mitigations listed in the Draft EIS. This company has remained a good neighbor to housing developments and their schools which were constructed in San Antonio and Helotes long after their mining sites were in full production. O'Connor High School and Clark High School chose locations on property which adjoins Vulcan industries, and a large youth baseball complex exists across the fence from one of its quarries. Realtors state that rural land in the Quihi and SGR area has increased in value despite negative predictions by those who oppose the quarry and the railroad.

For all the reasons stated above, we feel that no significant cumulative impacts would result from a seven mile rail line operating from a Vulcan quarry going south to the Union Pacific railway already in place. We also believe that the proposed quarry and the SGR project should not be united as a singular endeavor. It is unfair to predict that sufficient progress in the Quihi area will never occur and that other entities will never benefit from using the proposed rail line.

We commend you for your dedication and efforts during these many months of studying and assessing the environmental impact of the proposed SGR rail line and encourage this board to approve the Southwest Gulf Railroad project in Medina County. You proved at the public meeting in Hondo during December, 2004, that you were very thorough in addressing the many concerns of the community members. We believe that Vulcan Mining and Materials and the Southwest Gulf Railroad has spent the past year working diligently to overcome all mitigations stated in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. We look forward to your next meeting in Hondo and appreciate the opportunity to express our points of view.

FROM: Glenn R. Schweers Mary Jo Schweers
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