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ORIGINAL

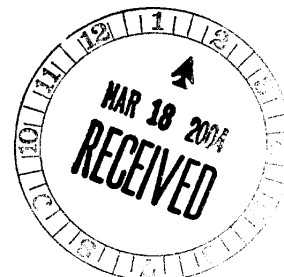
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March 18, 2004



VIA HAND DELIVERY - RETURN COPY

Hon. Vernon A. Williams
Secretary
Surface Transportation Board
1925 K Street, NW (7th fl.)
Washington, DC 20423-0001

Dear Secretary Williams:

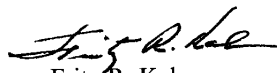
This refers to STB Finance Docket No. 34483, SMS Rail Service, Inc.-Petition for Declaratory Order-Status of Rail Carrier, and to the Petition for Declaratory Order of SMS Rail Service, Inc., filed March 5, 2004.

Representatives of SMS Rail Service, Inc., and Norfolk Southern Railway Company have begun exploratory discussions and informal discovery investigation to determine whether their disagreements can be resolved amicably. They, accordingly, jointly ask that the proceeding be held in abeyance for a period of thirty days. The responsive pleading of Norfolk Southern Railway Company, if the request were granted, would not be due until April 26, 2004, and its production of documents would not be due until April 30, 2004.

Ten copies of this letter are enclosed to permit your circulation of it. An additional copy is enclosed for you to stamp to acknowledge your receipt of it and to return to me via the messenger.

If you have any question concerning the foregoing which you believe I may be able to answer or if I otherwise can be of assistance, please let me know.

Sincerely yours,


Fritz R. Kahn

enc.

cc: Maquiling B. Parkerson, Esq.
Mr. Jeffrey L. Sutch