



SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
Washington, DC 20423

EI-21110

AUG 07 2015

Office of Environmental Analysis

August 5, 2015

Marc Wolfe
State Historic Preservation Officer
Texas Historical Commission
108 W. 16th Street
Austin, TX 78701

Attn: Tiffany Osburn

Re: Project review under the National Historic Preservation Act:
STB Docket No. FD 35874, Lone Star Railroad, Inc. and Southwestern Switching
Company, Proposed Operation and Construction, Howard County (Surface
Transportation Board; Track #201504494)

Dear Mr. Wolfe:

Thank you for your letter dated January 30, 2015, regarding the above referenced proposed rail line construction near Big Spring in Howard County, Texas. The Surface Transportation Board is the federal agency that will decide whether to approve, approve with conditions, or deny Lone Star Railroad, Inc.'s and Southern Switching Company's (the Applicants) request for a license to construct and operate the proposed rail line, which makes it an undertaking subject to review under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. In your letter, you recommended that a professional archaeologist survey the proposed project area and that a report of those investigations be submitted to your office for review. The Board's Office of Environmental Analysis (OEA) conducted a professional archeological survey and is attaching the report to this letter. The results of the investigation are summarized below.

In May of 2015, Moore Archeological Consulting, Inc. of Houston, Texas conducted the archaeological investigation under Texas Antiquities Permit Number 7258. The pedestrian cultural resources survey covered 100% of the proposed right-of-way (ROW), which is also the area of potential effects (APE) of the undertaking. The proposed ROW width is roughly 15.25 meters (50 feet) for the bulk of the alignment, and in no place will be wider than 30 meters (100 feet). The precise depth of impact is not known, however, the rail line construction is likely to result in significantly deep (as far as archeology is concerned) excavations.

A total of 96 shovel tests were excavated for the archaeological investigation, and these revealed three historic/prehistoric sites and one isolated object. The sites were delineated by a combination of shovel testing and examination of surface expression. These sites were initially designated Temporary Sites 1-4 (Temporary 2 being the isolate), but the sites have since been given the state of Texas issued trinomials 41HW134, 41HW135, and 41HW136.

Based on the shovel tests excavated and the surface examinations of the sites, the archaeological investigation recommended that, should the Board grant authority for Applicants to construct and operate the proposed line, construction of the rail line should be allowed to proceed

without further archeological investigations. This is based on the accessible portions of the sites (i.e., within the project APE) being determined to have no potential for the National Register of Historic Places and having no further research value. However, because the sites extend beyond the boundaries of the current proposed construction, the investigation also recommended that should any future work that is subject to state, federal, or local governmental jurisdiction or oversight be proposed adjacent to, but outside the rail line ROW within the vicinity of the newly recorded sites, additional archeological investigations should be conducted prior to any ground disturbance to determine the extent, integrity, and potential significance of the sites.

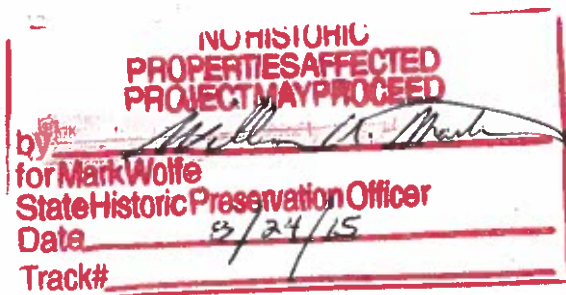
Based on the results of the archaeological investigation, the Board's OEA is requesting your concurrence at this time with a Section 106 finding of "no historic properties affected." In the unlikely event that future rail line construction activities would take place outside the proposed ROW close to these sites, OEA will recommend a mitigation measure on any decision granting the construction and operation authority requiring that the Applicants shall, prior to construction, consult with OEA and the SHPO about the scope of additional archaeological investigations that may be necessary. In addition, OEA will also recommend a mitigation measure requiring that in the event that any unanticipated archaeological sites, human remains, funerary items or associated artifacts are discovered during rail line construction activities, Applicants shall immediately cease all work and notify OEA and the SHPO.

If you have any questions concerning agency coordination and responses, the Board's environmental review process, or need specific information about the proposed project, please feel free to contact Kenneth Blodgett, OEA's Environmental Project Manager, by phone at (202) 245-0305 or by email at Kenneth.Blodgett@stb.dot.gov. We look forward to your comments and appreciate your assistance.

Very truly yours,



Victoria Rutson
Director
Office of Environmental Analysis



Enclosure:

- An Archeological Investigation of the Proposed Lone Star Railroad Project in Howard County, Texas