

27968

SERVICE DATE - AUGUST 8, 1997

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NO. AB-367 (SUB-NO. 2X)

Georgia Central Railway, L.P.
– Abandonment Exemption –
Rail Line in Chatham County, Georgia

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, the Georgia Central Railway (GCR) has filed a petition under 49 U.S.C. 10502 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. 10903 in connection with the abandonment of its railroad line located within the city limits of Savannah, in the northwest quadrant of the intersection between Interstate Highway 16 and Lynes Parkway, a distance of .071 miles in Chatham County, Georgia. A map depicting the rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to the report. If the exemption becomes effective, the railroad will be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances, and to dispose of the right-of-way.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE

GCR purchased the line proposed here for abandonment from CSX Transportation in November, 1990. CSXT also granted to GCR an easement over the underlying right-of-way. According to GCR, the line has since deteriorated (the line was embargoed and no traffic has moved over it since September 30, 1996). Rehabilitation would be costly and could not be justified by the amount of traffic shipped over the line.

Traffic levels prior to the line being embargoed and excluded traffic moved by Georgia Pacific, which has relocated, were roughly over 100 carloads per year. Commodities moved included lumber, building products, scrap paper, plywood, and cocoa beans. These 100 carloads would most likely be diverted to truck. Because of the extremely short length of the line proposed for abandonment, however, the Section of Environmental Analysis does not believe that impacts to air or energy resources would be significant.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The railroad has submitted an environmental report that concludes the quality of the human environment will not be affected significantly as a result of the abandonment or any post-abandonment activities, including salvage and disposition of the right-of-way. The railroad has served the environmental report on a number of appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Board's environmental rules at 49 CFR 1105.7(b). We have investigated the record in this proceeding. Also, we have consulted with appropriate agencies and individuals to verify the railroad's report and to obtain additional information and comments regarding the potential environmental effects of the proposed abandonment. Contacts have included the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; the Georgia State Clearinghouse; the Georgia Historic Preservation Division; and Mayor Floyd Adams, Jr. of Savannah, Georgia.

CONDITIONS

We recommend that no environmental conditions be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, we conclude that, as currently proposed, abandonment of the line will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the environmental impact statement process is unnecessary.

Alternatives to the proposed abandonment would include denial (and therefore no change in operations), discontinuance of service without abandonment, and continued operation by another operator. In any of these cases, the existing quality of the human environment and energy consumption should not be affected.

PUBLIC USE

GCR states that following abandonment and salvage of the rail line, the right-of-way may not be suitable for other public use. According to GCR, the line is surrounded by commercial property and will revert to CSX Transportation if abandonment is granted and consummated. A request containing the requisite four-part showing for imposition of a public use condition (49 CFR 1152.28) must be

filed with the Board and served on the railroad within the time specified in the Federal Register notice.

TRAILS USE

A request for a notice of interim trail use (NITU) is due to the Board, with a copy to the railroad, within 10 days of publication of the notice of the petition for exemption in the Federal Register. Nevertheless, the Board will accept late-filed requests as long as it retains jurisdiction to do so in a particular case. This request must comply with the Board's rules for use of rights-of-way as trails (49 CFR 1152.29).

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

The Board's Office of Public Services (OPS) responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact OPS directly at (202) 565-1592, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Services, Room 848, Washington, DC 20423.

COMMENTS

If you wish to file comments regarding this environmental assessment, you should send an **original and two copies** to Vernon A. Williams, Office of the Secretary, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Victoria Rutson, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-367 (Sub No. 2X) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Ms. Rutson at (202) 565-1545.

Date made available to the public: August 5, 1997.

Comment due date: September 5, 1997.

By the Board, Elaine K. Kaiser, Chief, Section of Environmental Analysis.

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary