

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD  
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

STB Docket No. AB-490 (Sub-No. 1X)

**Greenville County Economic Development Corporation – Abandonment and  
Discontinuance Exemption – in Greenville County, SC**

**BACKGROUND**

In this proceeding, the Greenville County Economic Development Corporation (GCEDC) 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 approximately 11.8 miles of line between milepost 0.0 in Greenville, South Carolina, and milepost 11.8 in Travelers Rest, South Carolina (“the Northern Segment”), and discontinuance of service over 3.29 miles of line, between milepost AJK 585.34 in East Greenville, South Carolina and milepost AJK 588.63 in Greenville, South Carolina (“the Southern Segment”). Both segments lie within Greenville County, South Carolina, and together, comprise all of the rail line owned by GCEDC. GCEDC indicates that the Northern and Southern Segments were formerly owned by the Carolina Piedmont Division of the South Carolina Central Railroad (SCCR). In May 1999, GCEDC filed a notice of exemption with the Surface Transportation Board (the Board) to acquire the Northern and Southern Segments.

The Northern Segment has been under an embargo since 1997 due to poor track and bridge conditions, and no service has occurred since February 1998. GCEDC states that the Southern Segment provided service to only one shipper who used motor carriers for 95 percent of its service needs. This Segment is now used for rail car storage, and no rail traffic exists on either the Northern or Southern Segments. A map depicting the rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to the report. If the exemption becomes effective, GCEDC will be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances from the Northern Segment, while retaining the Southern Segment in place. Upstate Forever, a non-profit, tax exempt organization, chartered to “protect special places and promote sensible growth” in the Upstate region of South Carolina, commented that since their formation in 1998, they have been advocating public acquisition of the Northern Segment for interim trail use. They have requested that all bridges, culverts, trestles, and other trail-related structures be kept in place. GCEDC has indicated that they anticipate entering into an agreement with a willing trail user to preserve the rail corridor of the Northern Segment for possible future reactivation as a rail freight and commuter or high speed passenger line.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE**

According to the information available to GCEDC, the Carolina, Knoxville, & Western Railway was built from Greenville, South Carolina to Marietta, South Carolina in 1888, and was subsequently extended to River Falls, South Carolina but the operation was abandoned in 1899. The Greenville & Knoxville Railroad was formed to revive the line in 1907, and operated it until 1914. The Company was reorganized as the Greenville & Western, and then renamed the Greenville & Northern in 1920. The rail operation was scaled back to Travelers Rest in the mid-1950s, but was not officially abandoned until 1970. The Carolina Piedmont Division of the South Carolina Railroad bought the Greenville & Northern line from Pinsky Railroad in April 1997, and the last train ran on the Northern Segment in February 1998. GCEDC acquired the line in June 1999.

The right-of-way of both segments varies in width from 15 to 200 feet. Both segments lie in the uplands of South Carolina, with a slight decline in elevation moving southeast from the Travelers Rest end of the Northern Segment to the southeast side of Greenville where the Southern Segment lies. The Southern Segment traverses an urban/suburban area. The Northern Segment extends from downtown Greenville through suburban and rural areas to the small community of Travelers Rest, a town of approximately 4,000 to 4,500 people.

There are four railroad trestles located on the segments that span creeks, culverts, and drainage ditches. These trestles are significantly deteriorated and would need to be replaced, should the abandonment not be authorized. A steel truss bridge exists in the in the Southern Segment along Woodruff Road. GCEDC indicates that it will be removed by the South Carolina Department of Transportation as part of a road improvement project. Both segments do not cross any significant water bodies. GCEDC is not certain of the exact ages of the four railroad trestles and the bridge, or when major alterations (if any) occurred, but believes that all five structures are over fifty years old.

## **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 and historical reports 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 and reviewed the record in this proceeding.

GCEDC is a corporation created by the government of Greenville County to acquire and preserve the rights-of-way of land, and if feasible, provide for operation of the Northern and Southern Segments. Thus, preservation of the rights-of-ways through trail use and retention of the Southern Segment intact, after GCEDC has determined that no financial feasible alternative exists for operating these segments, is consistent with local land use plans.

GCDEC contacted the Columbia, South Carolina office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, who determined that additional information would be needed with regard to impacts on prime agricultural land. To date, the

U.S. Department of Agriculture has not advised SEA of any adverse impacts to prime agricultural land.

Greenville County does not lie within a designated coastal zone, therefore coastal zone consistency is not required.

GCEDC contacted the National Geodetic Survey regarding impacts to geodetic station markers. To date, the National Geodetic Survey has not responded. However, to prevent the destruction of any markers, SEA is recommending a condition requiring GCEDC to contact the National Geodetic Survey 90 days prior to the onset of salvage activities in order to plan for possible relocation.

Traffic has not moved on either segment for five or more years. Accordingly, the proposed abandonment and discontinuance of service will not adversely impact the development, use and transportation of energy resources or recyclable commodities; transportation of ozone-depleting materials; or result in the diversion of rail traffic to truck traffic that could cause significant impacts to air quality.

The proposed action would improve public safety by allowing existing grade crossings on the Northern Segment to be permanently repaired for motor vehicle traffic. There will be no change in vehicle delay time at railroad grade crossings because no traffic has moved on either segment for several years. There are no known hazardous waste sites or known hazardous material spills on either segment, and hazardous materials are not currently transported. Short-term impacts on noise levels associated with any salvaging activities would not be significant.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service confirmed the presence of two federally-listed plant species, the Dwarf-flowered Heartleaf (*Hexastylis naniflora*) and Bunched Arrowhead (*Sagittaria fasciculata*), in wetland and spring habitats near the railroad right-of-way in Travelers Rest. They subsequently instructed GCEDC to conduct a field survey along the rail right-of-way in Travelers Rest. On July 20, 2005, a team of biologists, consisting of Dr. Gill Newberry, Dr. Joe Pollard, and Carlton Owen and working on behalf of GCEDC, conducted a field review of the species and habitats in question. The biologists found no evidence of Dwarf-flowered Heartleaf, or its habitat, but did locate healthy populations of Bunched Arrowhead in two areas along the west side of the railroad right-of-way, just south of Watkins Bridge Road. The first population was observed approximately 850 feet south of Watkins Bridge Road where the width of the railroad right-of-way spans approximately 100 feet across (50 feet on either side).

Based on the field survey, most of the population likely exists on adjacent private land within a sewer right-of-way. The second population was found 1000 feet south of Watkins Bridge Road, along the western side of the corridor. Accordingly, this population likely exists within the rail right-of-way and on adjacent private property, within a sewer right-of-way. The biologists believe that the areas in question can be managed safely through a series of vegetation control strategies, which have been included in a July 25, 2005 letter to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. In an August 11, 2005 response, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service commented that the proposed action will have no significant effect on resources under their jurisdiction. Providing no additional information is revealed that could affect the listed species in a manner, or to an extent not previously considered, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service believes that the requirements of Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act have been fulfilled relative to the proposed action,

and that no further consultation is necessary at this time. They further recommended that all rail line improvements be contained to the current railroad bed; that herbicide use be restricted within 50 feet of all bunched arrowhead populations; and that herbicide application instructions be followed and retained onsite. GDEDC may be required to conduct additional coordination with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for any post-abandonment activities.

The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control commented on impacts to waters of the State in accordance with Sections 401, 402, and 404 of the Clean Water Act. Any non-point discharges into a stream or river for construction areas of two (2) acres or more will require a Stormwater Management and Sediment Control Permit. Construction areas of one (1) acre or more are subject to NPDES regulations. They further recommend that any debris should be transported away from the rail line and not be discarded within the right-of-way. Based on preliminary discussions with the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, GCEDC believes the proposed action will be consistent with water quality standards, but is unclear as to whether the proposed action will require a Section 402 permit.

GCDEC contacted the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and based on preliminary discussion, believes that a permit for Section 404 of the Clean Water Act will not be required as the proposed action will not result in filling, dredging, or disturbing any floodplain, wetlands or waterways.

## **Traffic**

Traffic has not moved on either segment during GCEDC's ownership. Prior to February 1998, some carloads of waste paper and scrap metal were transported on the Northern Segment. Since that time, no traffic has moved. Using the truck traffic figure from 1998, and the conversion factor of four trucks per railcar,<sup>1</sup> SEA calculated that the proposed abandonment will not result in the diversions of traffic from rail to truck. Therefore, this action will not add any truck traffic to area roadways per year.

## **HISTORIC REVIEW**

GCEDC submitted an historic report as required by the Board's environmental rules [49 CFR 1105.8(a)] and served the report on the South Carolina Department of Archives and History (SHPO) pursuant to 49 CFR 1105.8(c). The SHPO submitted comments stating that there are no properties included in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places along the Northern Segment. However, two properties listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places are adjacent to the Southern Segment, the Monaghan Mill and the Woodside Mill Village. The SHPO states that railroad lines provided transportation of goods and services to the mills and this railroad could be a contributing factor to the historic integrity of the mills. As the Southern Segment is proposed for discontinuance of service only, the SHPO believes that the proposed undertaking will have no adverse effect on the Monaghan Mill and the Woodside Village. We have reviewed the report and the information provided by the SHPO and concur with the SHPO's comments.

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<sup>1</sup> The conversion factor is an estimate used to calculate the rail to truck conversion of varied commodities.

Pursuant to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's regulations for implementing the section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act at 36 CFR 800.4(d)(1) and 36 CFR 800.8, we have determined that the proposed abandonment will not affect historic properties listed in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register. The documentation for this finding, as specified at 36 CFR 800.11(d), consists of the railroad's historic report, all relevant correspondence, and this EA, which have been provided to the SHPO and made available to the public.

## **CONDITIONS**

We recommend that the following environmental conditions be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority:

1. The Greenville County Economic Development Corporation (GCEDC) shall provide the Geodetic Survey (NGS) at least 90 days notice prior to disturbing or destroying any geodetic markers. GCEDC shall report the results of this notice in writing to the Board's Section of Environmental Analysis prior to the onset of salvage operations.
2. During salvage operations, GCEDC shall ensure that any herbicide use is restricted within 50 feet of the federally-listed and field surveyed Bunched Arrowhead (*Sagittaria fasciculata*) in accordance with the findings and recommendations of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Any herbicide application shall be in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
3. Prior to commencement of any salvage activities, GCEDC shall consult with the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control to ensure that any concerns regarding potential contamination of the right-of-way and the need for a Section 402 stormwater construction permit are addressed. GCEDC shall report the results of these consultations in writing to the Board's Section of Environmental Analysis prior to the onset of salvage operations.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, we conclude that, as currently proposed, and if the recommended conditions are imposed, 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**

Following abandonment and salvage of the rail line, the right-of-way may be suitable for other public use. 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 the time specified in the Federal Register notice. 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 responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact the Office of Public Services directly at (202) 565-1592, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Services, Washington, DC 20423.

## **COMMENTS**

If you wish to file comments regarding this environmental assessment, send an **original and two copies** to Surface Transportation Board, Case Control Unit, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Diana Wood, who prepared this environmental assessment. Environmental comments may also be filed electronically on the Board's web site, [www.stb.dot.gov](http://www.stb.dot.gov) by clicking on the "E-FILING" link. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-490 (Sub No. 1X) in all correspondence, including e-filings, addressed to the Board.** If you have any questions regarding this environmental assessment, please contact Diana Wood, the environmental contact for this case, by phone at (202) 565-1552, fax at (202) 565-9000, or e-mail at [woodd@stb.dot.gov](mailto:woodd@stb.dot.gov).

Date made available to the public: August 23, 2005.

Comment due date: **September 22, 2005 (30 days).**

By the Board, Victoria Rutson, Chief, Section of Environmental Analysis.

Vernon A. Williams  
Secretary

Attachment