



Office of Environmental Analysis

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
Washington, DC 20423

August 6, 2021

Re: Docket No. FD 36284, Seven County Infrastructure Coalition—Rail Construction and Operation Exemption—in Carbon, Duchesne, Uintah, and Utah Counties, Utah: **Issuance of Final Environmental Impact Statement**

Dear Reader:

I am pleased to announce that the Surface Transportation Board's (Board) Office of Environmental Analysis (OEA) has issued the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed Uinta Basin Railway. The Final EIS analyzes the potential environmental impacts of the Seven County Infrastructure Coalition's (Coalition) proposal to construct and operate an approximately 85-mile rail line connecting the Uinta Basin (Basin) to the national rail network. The Final EIS also includes comments received on the Draft EIS and responses to those comments. The Basin is an isolated geographical region, extending from northeastern Utah into northwestern Colorado, that is surrounded by high mountains and plateaus with limited access to transportation infrastructure. According to the Coalition, the proposed rail line would provide shippers in the Basin with a viable alternative to trucking, which is currently the only available transportation option.

The Coalition's proposed rail line would extend from two terminus points in the Basin near Myton and Leland Bench to a connection with an existing Union Pacific Railroad Company rail line near Kyune, Utah. Depending on future market conditions, between approximately 3.68 and 10.52 trains could move on the proposed rail line per day, on average, including both loaded and unloaded trains. The Coalition expects that these trains would primarily transport crude oil produced in the Basin, but could also carry frac sand, other proppant material, steel, machinery, or mineral and agricultural products and commodities into and out of the Basin. The Final EIS analyzes three alternatives for the proposed rail line, as well as the No-Action Alternative. The alternatives are the Indian Canyon Alternative, Wells Draw Alternative, and Whitmore Park Alternative. In its request for Board authority, the Coalition identified the Whitmore Park Alternative as its preferred route for the proposed rail line.

OEA issued the Draft EIS on October 30, 2020. The comment period lasted from the issuance of the Draft EIS on October 30, 2020, to the close of the twice-extended comment period on February 12, 2021. During that time, OEA received 1,934 comment submissions on the Draft EIS. In preparing the Final EIS, OEA considered all comments whether received orally or in writing. The Final EIS includes all of the comments received on the Draft EIS and OEA's responses to substantive comments, as well as any changes to the analysis that resulted from comments. Changes made to the Draft EIS appear in blue in the Final EIS.

Based on the analysis in the Final EIS, OEA concludes that construction and operation of any of the alternatives would result in significant environmental impacts. Major impacts would include temporary and permanent impacts on surface waters and wetlands; impacts on biological resources,

including federally listed threatened and endangered species and other protected species; permanent changes to land uses on public and private lands; and noise impacts on residences near the proposed rail line during rail operations. In the Final EIS, OEA identifies the Whitmore Park Alternative as the environmentally preferred alternative because it would avoid or minimize major environmental impacts compared to the Indian Canyon Alternative and the Wells Draw Alternative. The Final EIS also sets forth OEA's final recommended environmental mitigation, as well as the Coalition's voluntary mitigation measures.

Five cooperating agencies assisted OEA in preparing the EIS: the U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service; the U.S. Department of the Army, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs; the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management; and the Utah Public Lands Policy Coordinating Office, representing all Utah State agencies. OEA also consulted with tribes; other federal, state, and local agencies; and other stakeholders during the preparation of the EIS. Throughout the EIS process, OEA consulted extensively with the Ute Indian Tribe. The Ute Indian Tribe is the only federally recognized tribe that accepted OEA's invitation to engage in government-to-government consultation.

In addition, OEA, in consultation with consulting parties, has executed a Programmatic Agreement to satisfy obligations under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The Programmatic Agreement details the procedures and responsible parties for identification and evaluation of historic properties, assessment of potential effects on historic properties, and the resolution of adverse effects on historic properties. To satisfy obligations under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, OEA included a Draft Biological Assessment in the Draft EIS and initiated formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on March 18, 2021.

WHERE TO FIND THE EIS

The Draft EIS and Final EIS are available for viewing and downloading on the Board's website (www.stb.gov) and on the Board-sponsored project website (www.uintabasinrailwayeis.com). OEA is also making the Final EIS available at the following libraries.

- Duchesne Library, Duchesne, Utah
- Price City Library, Price, Utah
- Roosevelt Library, Roosevelt, Utah
- Uintah Library, Vernal, Utah

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

The Final EIS sets forth OEA's conclusions regarding the potential environmental impacts of the proposed Uinta Basin Railway and OEA's final recommendations to the Board, including recommended environmental mitigation measures. The Board will then issue a final decision that will take into consideration the transportation merits of the proposed project and the entire environmental record, including the Draft EIS, Final EIS, and all public and agency comments received. In this final decision, the Board will decide whether to approve the proposed rail line, deny it, or approve it with mitigating conditions, including environmental conditions.

OEA appreciates the efforts and interest of all who have participated in this environmental review and worked to make the Final EIS as informative a document as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Danielle Gosselin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D' and 'G'.

Danielle Gosselin
Acting Director
Office of Environmental Analysis