

By the Board, Chairman Morgan and Vice
Chairman Owen.
Vernon A. Williams,
Secretary.

FINAL PROCEDURAL SCHEDULE

F-30	Preliminary Environmental Report, including supporting documents, due.
F	Primary application & related applications filed. [Environmental Report, including all supporting documents, due.]
F+30	Federal Register publication of: notice of acceptance of primary application and related applications, petitions and notices; and notice of any merger-related abandonment applications, petitions, and notices of exemption.
F+45	Notification of intent to participate in proceeding due.
F+60	Description of anticipated inconsistent and responsive applications due; petitions for waiver or clarification due with respect to such applications.
F+120	Inconsistent and responsive applications due. All comments, protests, requests for conditions, and any other opposition evidence and argument due. Comments by U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Transportation due. With respect to all merger-related abandonments: opposition submissions, requests for public use conditions, and Trails Act requests due.
F+150	Notice of acceptance (if required) of inconsistent and responsive applications published in the Federal Register .
F+180	Response to inconsistent and responsive applications due. Response to comments, protests, requested conditions, and other opposition arguments and evidence due. Rebuttal in support of primary application and related applications due. With respect to all merger-related abandonments: rebuttal due; and responses to requests for public use and Trails Act conditions due.
F+220	Rebuttal in support of inconsistent and responsive applications due.
F+260	Briefs due, all parties (not to exceed 50 pages).
F+300	Oral argument (close of record).
F+305	Voting conference (at Board's discretion).
F+365	Date of service of final decision. With respect to any approved or exempted abandonments: offers of financial assistance must be filed no later than 10 days after the date of service of the final decision.

Notes: Immediately upon each evidentiary filing, the filing party will place all documents relevant to the filing (other than documents that are privileged or otherwise protected from discovery) in a depository open to all parties, and will make its witnesses available for discovery depositions. Access to documents subject to protective order will be appropriately restricted. Parties seeking discovery depositions may proceed by agreement. Discovery on responsive and inconsistent applications will begin immediately upon their filing. The Administrative Law Judge assigned to this proceeding will have the authority initially to resolve any discovery disputes.

[FR Doc. 97-2857 Filed 2-4-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4915-00-P

[STB Finance Docket No. 33286]

Norfolk Southern Corporation and Norfolk Southern Railway Company— Control—Conrail Inc. and Consolidated Rail Corporation

AGENCY: Surface Transportation Board,
DOT.

ACTION: Decision No. 4; Notice of
Issuance of Procedural Schedule.

SUMMARY: The Board is issuing a
procedural schedule, following the
receipt of public comments on a
proposed procedural schedule and the
reply to those comments. This schedule
provides for issuance of a final decision
no later than 365 days after filing of the
primary application.

EFFECTIVE DATE: The effective date of
this decision is February 5, 1997.
Notices of intent to participate in this
proceeding will be due 45 days after the
primary application is filed. All
descriptions of inconsistent and
responsive applications, as well as any
petitions for waiver or clarification with
respect thereto, will be due 60 days after
the primary application is filed. All
comments, protests, requests for
conditions, inconsistent and responsive

applications, and any other opposition
evidence and argument will be due 120
days after the primary application is
filed. For further information, see the
procedural schedule set forth below.

ADDRESSES: An original plus 25 copies¹
of all documents, referring to STB
Finance Docket No. 33286, must be sent
to the Office of the Secretary, Case
Control Branch, ATTN: STB Finance
Docket No. 33286, Surface
Transportation Board, 1201 Constitution
Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20423.²
Parties are requested also to submit all
pleadings, and any attachments, on a
3.5-inch diskette in WordPerfect 5.1
format.

¹ In order for a document to be considered a
formal filing, the Board must receive an original
plus 25 copies of the document, which must show
that it has been properly served. Documents
transmitted by facsimile (FAX), as in the past, will
not be considered formal filings and thus are not
encouraged because they will result in
unnecessarily burdensome, duplicative processing
in what we expect to become a voluminous record.

Applicants may file in bound volumes an original
plus 25 copies of related applications, petitions,
and notices of exemption; however, to facilitate
processing of these related filings, we will require
that applicants also file two unbound copies of each
of these filings.

² It is anticipated that the Board will move to its
new offices in March 1997. The Board's address at
the new offices will be: Surface Transportation
Board, Mercury Building, 1925 K Street, N.W.,
Washington, DC 20423.

In addition, one copy of all formal
filings in this proceeding must be sent
to Administrative Law Judge Jacob
Leventhal, Federal Energy Regulatory
Commission, 888 First Street, N.E.,
Suite 11F, Washington, DC 20426 [(202)
219-2538, FAX: (202) 219-3289], and to
the applicants' representative: Richard
A. Allen, Esq., Zuckert, Scoutt &
Rasenberger, L.L.P., 888 Seventeenth
Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20006-
3939.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Julia
M. Farr, (202) 927-5352. [TDD for the
hearing impaired: (202) 927-5721.]

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On
November 6, 1996, Norfolk Southern
Corporation (NSC) and Norfolk
Southern Railway Company (NSR)³
notified the Surface Transportation
Board (Board) of their intent to file an
application seeking Board authorization
under 49 U.S.C. 11323-25 for: (1) the
acquisition of control of Conrail Inc.
(CRI) and Consolidated Rail Corporation
(CRC)⁴ by NSC; and (2) the resulting
common control by NSC of Conrail and
its subsidiaries, on the one hand, and
NSR and its subsidiaries, on the other.
In the notice of intent, applicants state
that on October 23, 1996, NSC

³ NSC and NSR are referred to collectively as
applicants.

⁴ CRI and CRC are referred to collectively as
Conrail.

announced its intention to commence a public tender offer for equity securities of CRI. On October 24, 1996, NSC and its wholly owned subsidiary, Atlantic Acquisition Corporation (Acquisition), commenced the tender offer pursuant to an Offer to Purchase dated October 24, 1996. NSC and Acquisition have offered to purchase shares of common stock of CRI, subject to the conditions specified in the Offer to Purchase. Upon purchase of CRI shares by NSC, Acquisition, or their affiliates, such purchased shares will be deposited in an independent voting trust pending approval by the Board of the acquisition of control by NSC of Conrail.⁵ NSC is seeking to negotiate with CRI a definitive merger agreement pursuant to which CRI would, as soon as practicable following consummation of the Offer, consummate a merger or similar business combination with Acquisition or another direct or indirect subsidiary of NSC (the Merger). To avoid the acquisition of control by NSC of Conrail prior to our approval, NSC intends to deposit all issued and outstanding common stock of Acquisition (which may become stock of the surviving corporation on consummation of the Merger) owned by NSC into the voting trust at or immediately prior to the Merger. Upon our approval of the acquisition by NSC of control of Conrail, NSC will acquire control of Conrail through stock ownership of the voting trust. Applicants state that they anticipate filing their application on or before May 1, 1997.⁶

⁵ Applicants filed a copy of a proposed voting trust agreement (VTA) on October 25, 1996, to be entered into by and between NS, Acquisition, and a Bank (to be named as Trustee) for use in a possible future NS acquisition of Conrail. An informal staff opinion letter was issued on November 1, 1996. On November 6, 1996, applicants submitted an alternative VTA proposed to be entered into by and between NS, Acquisition, and a Bank (to be named as Trustee), which would revise ¶ 4 of the VTA to reflect that, if a merger between Acquisition and CRI takes place prior to our approval of the control application and the common stock of the merged entity is deposited into the voting trust in accordance with VTA ¶ 3, the Trustee will have the authority from the outset to vote all shares of the Trust Stock on all matters except the enumerated matters in ¶ 4 "in accordance with its best judgment concerning the interests of [CRI]." An informal opinion letter was issued on November 18, 1996.

⁶ The primary application, and each related application, petition, and notice, must be accompanied by the appropriate fee. *See, in general*, 49 CFR 1002.2(f), as recently amended in *Regulations Governing Fees for Services Performed in Connection with Licensing and Related Services—1997 Update*, STB Ex Parte No. 542 (Sub-No. 1) (STB served Jan. 23, 1997, 62 FR 3487 (Jan. 23, 1997), and effective February 24, 1997). The fees applicants will have to pay may include, among others, the fees codified at: 49 CFR 1002.2(f)(39)(i) (\$889,500 for the primary merger application); 49 CFR 1002.2(f)(12)(i) or (12)(iii) (\$44,500 for either an application or a petition involving the

In a decision served and published in the Federal Register on November 27, 1996 (61 FR 60317) (Decision No. 1), the Board gave notice of the prefiling notification, found that the transaction proposed by applicants is a "major" transaction as defined at 49 CFR 1180.2(a), and invited comments from interested persons on a proposed procedural schedule. Comments were due on December 13, 1996, and were received on or before that date. Applicants replied to the comments on December 23, 1996.

Public Comments

Approximately 20 public comments were received in response to Decision No. 1. Comments were filed by shipper organizations, railroads, electric utilities, government entities, and rail labor unions and by United States Senators Byron L. Dorgan and John D. Rockefeller IV.

Some commenters suggested that we hold in abeyance any decision regarding the procedural schedule pending the outcome of the hostile takeover bid launched by NSC. Others suggested that the Board coordinate dates in both the present proceeding and the CSX/Conrail proceeding (STB Finance Docket No. 33220), and issue a single procedural schedule.

We find no reason to delay issuance of this procedural order, which only begins a procedural schedule when a NSC/Conrail application is filed. We realize circumstances are unusual here, but we believe that it would not be judicious for us to speculate about whether two merger applications will be filed, and we continue to have the power to revise our handling of this matter as necessitated by changes in these circumstances. Applicants in this proceeding already have filed their

construction of a rail line); 49 CFR 1002.2(f)(21)(i) (\$13,200 for an abandonment application, except an abandonment application filed by CRC under the Northeast Rail Service Act); 49 CFR 1002.2(f)(21)(ii) (\$2,200 for an abandonment notice of exemption); 49 CFR 1002.2(f)(21)(iii) (\$3,800 for an abandonment petition for exemption); 49 CFR 1002.2(f)(22) (\$250 for an abandonment application filed by CRC under the Northeast Rail Service Act); 49 CFR 1002.2(f)(36) (\$11,300 for an application for use of terminal facilities); 49 CFR 1002.2(f)(40)(iv) (\$750 for a trackage rights notice of exemption); and 49 CFR 1002.2(f)(40)(vi) (\$5,600 for a trackage rights petition for exemption). The Board is in the process of revising its rules and the way user fees are applied to reflect more accurately the resources expended on related filings in proceedings involving major transactions filed under fee items 38 through 41. We plan to issue interim rules shortly that also will implement a new three-tiered fee structure for inconsistent applications that includes a determination of whether the transaction being proposed is minor, significant, or major. In addition, we plan to clarify what a responsive application is and what fees should be assessed for the various types of responsive applications.

notice of intent, and pursuant to 49 CFR 1180.4(b) their application is anticipated within 3 to 6 months.⁷ In the interest of efficient government, we believe that we should establish a procedural schedule in a timely manner to give adequate notice to all interested persons prior to the anticipated filing date of the application.⁸

We find it unnecessary to consolidate this proceeding with STB Finance Docket No. 33220, in which no application has yet been filed, and thus will adopt separate, but identical, procedural schedules for these proceedings, which will not begin in either case until an application is filed.⁹ Rather, once an application seeking approval to control Conrail has been filed and the procedural schedule in that proceeding has begun, we will require that any subsequent application from any other party seeking approval to control Conrail, or any portion of Conrail, must be filed as an inconsistent or responsive application in accordance with the procedural schedule then underway. Thus, we will in effect have a single proceeding for determining the control or merger of Conrail.

After reviewing all of the comments we received on the proposed procedural schedule, we have determined, as discussed below, that a 365-day procedural schedule (which is 110 days more than applicants had proposed) will ensure that all parties are accorded due process and will allow us ample time to consider fully all of the issues in this proceeding. Within this procedural schedule, we will consider all issues affecting the public interest, and will also address cumulative

⁷ We note that, pursuant to 49 CFR 1180.4(b)(3), "[a] prefiling notice may be amended to indicate a change in the anticipated filing date."

⁸ We note that, at a shareholders' meeting on January 17, 1997, CSX failed to obtain Conrail shareholders' approval to opt out of Subchapter 25E of the Pennsylvania Business Corporation Act. *See* Pa. Stat. Ann., tit. 15, §§ 2541 through 2548 (West 1995). This has no effect on our decision to adopt a procedural schedule in this proceeding or in STB Finance Docket No. 33220, as the procedural schedule is only triggered by the filing of a formal merger application. Our issuance of such a decision neither requires action by any person or party nor prejudices any person or party.

We also note that CSX, Conrail and NSC have indicated an agreement to meet to discuss matters pertaining to a merger involving Conrail. Given the intent of CSX and Conrail currently on the record to file their application in STB Finance Docket No. 33220 by March 1, the Board believes that it must address the pending petitions to set a procedural schedule for both proceedings at this time. As with any action that the Board takes, if circumstances change that warrant modification of a Board decision, the Board will take whatever action is appropriate.

⁹ By separate decision served concurrently in STB Finance Docket No. 33220, we are adopting the same procedural schedule for the CSX proceeding.

impacts and crossover effects of prior mergers as appropriate. Further, we will consider the transaction in light of any settlement agreements that the applicants may reach with any parties, regardless of the complexity of the agreements.

We have carefully considered the parties' concerns regarding the amount of time necessary to prepare their cases, and have crafted the attached procedural schedule with fairness to all parties in mind. Accordingly, we have adjusted the proposed procedural schedule to give more time for the submission of filings. We also believe that we have established a schedule that will provide adequate time for the processing of any inconsistent applications that may be filed in this proceeding.

Environmental Reporting

Applicants filed comments requesting that we modify the requirement that applicants file an environmental report (ER) on F¹⁰ – 30 days and instead require that only a preliminary environmental report (PER) be filed on F – 30 days, and a full ER when the application is filed. We will grant applicants' request. We note, however, that, while applicants' two-step procedure would provide early notice of specific locations that will be the subject of the detailed analysis of localized environmental effects, the PER would not be sufficient to allow the Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) to commence an adequate review process during the 30 days prior to the filing of the application. Accordingly, SEA will require additional time to complete its environment review as a result of the delayed filing of applicants' ER. We have considered this delay in adopting the extended procedural schedule.

In order for us to fulfill our responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act and other environmental laws, inconsistent applications and responsive applications must contain certain environmental information. As we have stated in past merger proceedings, anyone intending to file an inconsistent or a responsive application involving significant operational changes or an action such as a rail line abandonment or construction under 49 CFR 1105.6(b)(4) of our environmental rules must include, with its application, a preliminary draft environmental assessment (PDEA) or a preliminary draft environmental impact statement

(PDEIS), as determined by SEA. Generally, these types of actions require an environmental report under 49 CFR 1105.6(b)(4) that would form the basis of a subsequent environmental assessment (or environmental impact statement, if warranted). Here, because of the time frames that we are adopting, a PDEA or PDEIS is necessary at the time that an inconsistent or responsive application is filed. We, however, will not require an inconsistent or responsive applicant to file an ER in advance of the filing of the inconsistent or responsive application.

Although the information would be presented in a somewhat different format, the PDEA or PDEIS should address essentially the same environmental issues that would have been covered by an ER. The PDEA or PDEIS, like the ER, should be based on consultations with SEA and the various agencies set forth at 49 CFR 1105.7(b). In order to ensure timely, consistent, and appropriate environmental documentation, inconsistent and responsive applicants shall consult with SEA as early as possible. If a PDEA or PDEIS is not submitted or is insufficient, we will not process the inconsistent or responsive application.

If an inconsistent or responsive application does not involve significant operational changes or an action such as an abandonment or construction, it generally is exempt from environmental review. The applicant must certify, however, that the proposal meets the exemption criteria under 49 CFR 1105.6(c)(2). Again, anyone intending to file an inconsistent application or responsive application shall consult with SEA as early as possible regarding the appropriate environmental documentation. Due to the uncertainties associated with this proposed transaction, we reserve the right to adjust the environmental review process, as appropriate.

Notice of Intent To Participate

All documents received by the Board concerning this proceeding will become part of the record and will be placed in the public docket for inspection and copying. Only those documents considered formal filings (i.e., those meeting the filing specifications discussed above in the **ADDRESSES** section) will be downloaded to the so-called pleading list. Moreover, persons who submit documents that are not considered formal filings will not be placed on the service list in this proceeding.

We will compile and issue an official service list at an early stage of this proceeding to help facilitate the participation of persons who will be

actively participating as "parties of record" (POR). We are requiring these persons to notify the Board, in writing, within 45 days after the primary application is filed, of their intent to participate actively in this proceeding. In order to be designated a POR, a person must submit an original plus 25 copies of the notice, along with a certificate of service to the Secretary of the Board, indicating that the notice has been properly served on applicants' representatives and Judge Leventhal.¹¹ Every future filing must have its own certificate of service indicating that all PORs on the service list and Judge Leventhal have been served with a copy of the filing. Members of the United States Congress will be designated as MOC and Governors will be designated as GOV on the service list. They are *not* parties of record and need *not* be served with copies of filings, unless designated as a POR.

We will continue to follow the practice established in *Union Pacific Corporation, Union Pacific Railroad Company, and Missouri Pacific Railroad Company—Control and Merger—Southern Pacific Rail Corporation, Southern Pacific Transportation Company, St. Louis Southwestern Railway Company, SPCSL Corp., and The Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad Company*, Finance Docket No. 32760 (UP/SP). See UP/SP, Decision No. 15 (STB served Feb. 16, 1996), at 2–3. Copies of decisions, orders, and notices will be served only on those persons who are designated as POR or MOC or GOV on the official service list. All other interested persons are encouraged to make advance arrangements with the Board's copy contractor, DC News & Data, Inc. (DC News), to receive copies of Board decisions, orders, and notices served in this proceeding. DC News will handle the collection of charges and the mailing and/or faxing of decisions to persons who request this service. The telephone number for DC News is: (202) 289–4357.

Comments, Protests, Requests for Conditions, and Other Opposition Evidence and Argument

Most commenters expressed a need for more time to prepare protests, requests for conditions, and other opposition evidence and argument, and ask that these submissions be due on F+120 days or later, instead of due on F+75 days. In their response to those comments, applicants support giving

¹⁰ F is the date of filing of the primary application.

¹¹ The Office of the Secretary will compile the official service list for this proceeding after service of this decision adopting a procedural schedule. Persons named on the earlier service list will not automatically be placed on the official service list.

persons at least 120 days to make such submissions.

We will extend the time for filing comments, protests, requests for conditions, and other opposition evidence and argument to F+120 days as requested by applicants and most of the commenters. All inconsistent and responsive applications, and comments, including comments from the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) and the United States Department of Transportation (DOT), are also due on F+120 days. Every party intending to file an inconsistent or responsive application must contact the Office of the Secretary at (202) 927-5686 or 927-8910 to reserve an STB Finance Docket No. 33286 Sub-number to use in filing the *description* of anticipated inconsistent or responsive application due on F+60 days. [After the Board relocates to its new offices, the new number will be (202) 565-1681.]

Responses and Rebuttals

Applicants support a schedule that would permit them to file at F + 150 days a single pleading (Consolidated Filing) containing responses to comments, protests, and requested conditions filed by all participating parties (including all government parties) and their rebuttal in support of the primary application, as well as their responses to inconsistent or responsive applications. Our schedule will provide for applicants' filing a Consolidated Filing containing responses to comments, protests, and requested conditions filed by all participating parties (including all government parties) and their rebuttal in support of the primary application, as well as their responses to inconsistent or responsive applications. A Consolidated Filing by applicants would result in a more orderly record and would allow them to address the issues coherently in one submission, without needless fragmentation or repetition.¹²

Numerous commenters (including DOT), however, have urged that we allow them additional time to digest and respond to comments, protests, requested conditions, and, in particular, any inconsistent and responsive applications. Given the complexity and

magnitude of issues that potentially may arise in an inconsistent or responsive application, we will add time in the schedule for responses to these filings. Responses to inconsistent and responsive applications, comments, protests, requested conditions, and opposition evidence and argument, as well as rebuttal in support of the primary application, will be due on F + 180 days. We note that, because inconsistent and responsive applicants must submit descriptions of their intended applications on F + 60 days, parties will have in effect 120 days to prepare their responses due on F + 180 days to any inconsistent and responsive applications. This schedule will allow adequate time for the processing of inconsistent and responsive applications filed in this proceeding, and we do not anticipate that further extensions to this schedule will be necessary.

We will not allow parties filing comments, protests, and requests for conditions to file rebuttal in support of those pleadings. Parties filing inconsistent and/or responsive applications have a right to file rebuttal evidence, while parties simply commenting, protesting, or requesting conditions do not. *UP/SP*, Decision No. 6 (ICC served Oct. 19, 1995, at 7-8, 60 FR 54384 (Oct. 23, 1995)); *Burlington Northern Inc. and Burlington Northern Railroad Company—Control and Merger—Santa Fe Pacific Corporation and The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Company*, Finance Docket No. 32549, Decision No. 16 (ICC served Apr. 20, 1995), at 11. Rebuttal in support of inconsistent and responsive applications will be due on F + 220 days, which will allow inconsistent and responsive applicants 40 days instead of 15 days to prepare their rebuttals.

Other Dates

We also will expand the schedule to allow parties 5 additional days to prepare briefs (not to exceed 50 pages), which will be due on F + 260 days, as well as 5 additional days to prepare for oral argument (close of record), which is scheduled on F + 300 days. As for the remainder of the schedule, we will adopt the timetable as had been proposed. The voting conference (at Board's discretion) is scheduled on F + 305 days; and the date of service of the final decision is scheduled on F + 365 days.

In summary, the procedural schedule we adopt here consisting of a 365-day time period both is fair to all of the parties and allows us sufficient time to resolve the unique issues that we anticipate will arise in connection with

any merger proposal involving Conrail. Our schedule is consistent with the thrust and weight of the comments and accommodates the processing of major inconsistent or responsive applications.

Discovery

In accordance with our decision in *Expedited Procedures For Processing Rail Rate Reasonableness, Exemption and Revocation Proceedings*, STB Ex Parte No. 527 (STB served Oct. 1, 1996, 61 FR 52710 (Oct. 8, 1996)), parties should not file any discovery requests or materials with the Board unless they are attached as part of an evidentiary submission, or motions to compel or responses thereto. The Secretary's Office will otherwise reject them.

If parties wish to engage in discovery or establish discovery guidelines, they are directed to consult with Administrative Law Judge Leventhal. Judge Leventhal is authorized to convene a discovery conference, if necessary and as appropriate, in Washington, DC, and to establish such discovery guidelines, if any, as he deems appropriate. However, Judge Leventhal is not authorized to make adjustments to, or to modify, the dates in the procedural schedule. We believe the schedule as adopted allows sufficient time for meaningful discovery. Any interlocutory appeal to a decision issued by Judge Leventhal will be governed by the stringent standard of 49 CFR 1115.1(c): "Such appeals are not favored; they will be granted only in exceptional circumstances to correct a clear error of judgment or to prevent manifest injustice." See *Union Pacific Corporation, Union Pacific Railroad Company and Missouri Pacific Railroad Company—Control—Chicago and North Western Transportation Company and Chicago and North Western Railway Company*, Finance Docket No. 32133, Decision No. 17 (ICC served July 11, 1994), at 9 (applying the "stringent standard" of 49 CFR 1115.1(c) to an appeal of an interlocutory decision issued by the ICC's former Chief Administrative Law Judge Paul S. Cross).

Merger-Related Abandonments

The procedural schedule applicable to merger-related abandonments will be as follows: (1) all merger-related abandonment proposals (which may be filed as applications, petitions, and/or notices) are to be filed, with any and all supporting documentation, simultaneously with the primary application; and (2) if the primary application is complete, we shall publish in the Federal Register, by day F + 30, notice of the acceptance of the

¹² As in prior merger proceedings, we think it appropriate to tighten the deadlines provided by 49 CFR 1115.1(c). Accordingly, the provisions of the second sentence of 49 CFR 1115.1(c) to the contrary notwithstanding, an appeal to a decision issued by Judge Leventhal must be filed within 3 working days of the date of his decision, and any response to any such appeal must be filed within 3 working days thereafter. Likewise, any reply to any procedural motion filed with the Board itself in the first instance must also be filed within 3 working days of the date the motion is filed.

primary application as well as notice of any merger-related abandonment proposal. Thereafter, with respect to each merger-related abandonment proposal: (3) interested parties must file notifications of intent to participate in the specific abandonment proceedings by day F + 45; (4) interested parties must file opposition submissions, requests for public use conditions, and/or Trails Act requests by day F + 120; (5) applicants may file rebuttal in support of their abandonment proposals, and/or responses to any requests for public use conditions and

Trails Act requests, by day F + 180; (6) as with the primary application and all related matters, briefs shall be due by day F + 260, oral argument will be held on day F + 300, and a voting conference will be held, at the Board's discretion, on day F + 305; and (7) if, in the final decision served on day F + 365, we approve the primary application, we also will address, in that final decision, each of the abandonment proposals, and all matters (including requests for public use conditions and Trails Act requests) relative thereto; and if we either approve or exempt any of the

abandonment proposals, we shall require interested parties to file, no later than 10 days after the date of service of the final decision, offers of financial assistance with respect to any approved or exempted abandonments.

This action will not significantly affect either the quality of the human environment or the conservation of energy resources.

Decided: January 30, 1997.

By the Board, Chairman Morgan and Vice Chairman Owen.

Vernon A. Williams,
Secretary.

FINAL PROCEDURAL SCHEDULE

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F	Primary application & related applications filed. [Environmental Report, including all supporting documents, due.]
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F+120	Inconsistent and responsive applications due. All comments, protests, requests for conditions, and any other opposition evidence and argument due. Comments by U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Transportation due. With respect to all merger-related abandonments: opposition submissions, requests for public use conditions, and Trails Act requests due.
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F+220	Rebuttal in support of inconsistent and responsive applications due.
F+260	Briefs due, all parties (not to exceed 50 pages).
F+300	Oral argument (close of record).
F+305	Voting conference (at Board's discretion).
F+365	Date of service of final decision. With respect to any approved or exempted abandonments: offers of financial assistance must be filed no later than 10 days after the date of service of the final decision.

Notes: Immediately upon each evidentiary filing, the filing party will place all documents relevant to the filing (other than documents that are privileged or otherwise protected from discovery) in a depository open to all parties, and will make its witnesses available for discovery depositions. Access to documents subject to protective order will be appropriately restricted. Parties seeking discovery depositions may proceed by agreement. Discovery on responsive and inconsistent applications will begin immediately upon their filing. The Administrative Law Judge assigned to this proceeding will have the authority initially to resolve any discovery disputes.

[FR Doc. 97-2858 Filed 2-4-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4915-00-P

[STB Finance Docket No. 33348]

Sault Ste. Marie Bridge Company— Trackage Rights Exemption— Wisconsin Central Ltd.

Wisconsin Central Ltd. (WCL) has agreed to grant non-exclusive overhead trackage rights to Sault Ste. Marie Bridge Company (SSMB) over WCL's line of railroad between milepost 310.7 at Hermansville, MI, and milepost 342.7 at Gladstone, MI, a distance of approximately 32.0.

The transaction is scheduled to be consummated on January 29, 1997, or upon SSMB's consummation of the transaction in STB Finance Docket No. 33290, *Sault St. Marie Bridge Company—Acquisition and Operation*

Exemption—Lines of Union Pacific Railroad Company, whichever is later.¹

WCL has concurrently filed a Notice of Exemption in STB Finance Docket No. 33349, *Wisconsin Central Ltd.—Trackage Rights Exemption—Sault Ste. Marie Bridge Company*. In conjunction with that filing, the proposed trackage rights will allow SSMB and WCL to jointly utilize their parallel lines between Hermansville, MI, and Larch/Gladstone, MI, for the purpose of improving the flexibility and efficiency of operations in that corridor.

As a condition to this exemption, any employees affected by the trackage rights will be protected by the

¹ The exemption in STB Finance Docket No. 33290 became effective on January 20, 1997. SSMB agreed to refrain from consummating the acquisition until January 24, 1997. A petition to stay the effective date, that had been filed on January 6, 1997, was denied by a decision served on January 24, 1997.

conditions imposed in *Norfolk and Western Ry. Co.—Trackage Rights—BN*, 354 I.C.C. 605 (1978), as modified in *Mendocino Coast Ry., Inc.—Lease and Operate*, 360 I.C.C. 653 (1980).

This notice is filed under 49 CFR 1180.2(d)(7). If it contains false or misleading information, the exemption is void *ab initio*. Petitions to revoke the exemption under 49 U.S.C. 10502(d) may be filed at any time. The filing of a petition to revoke will not automatically stay the transaction.

An original and 10 copies of all pleadings, referring to STB Finance Docket No. 33348, must be filed with the Surface Transportation Board, Office of the Secretary, Case Control Branch, 1201 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20423. In addition, a copy of each pleading must be served on Thomas J. Litwiler, Esq., Oppenheimer Wolff & Donnell, Two Prudential