

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD ISSUES TONGUE RIVER RAILROAD DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

The Surface Transportation Board announced today that its Office of Environmental Analysis (OEA) has issued the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) for public review and comment of the Tongue River Railroad Company's (TRRC) proposed construction and operation of approximately 42 miles of new rail line between Colstrip, Montana, and the Ashland/Otter Creek areas of Montana. The Draft EIS analyzes the potential environmental impacts that might occur if TRRC were to construct and operate the proposed rail line, and alternatives to TRRC's proposal, including a "no-action" alternative.

OEA issued the Draft EIS as part of the environmental review process under the National Environmental Policy Act, working with the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management; the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service; and Montana state agencies (collectively, "cooperating agencies"). In addition to analyzing the proposed action and alternatives, the Draft EIS sets forth OEA's preliminary recommended mitigation and TRRC's voluntary mitigation measures, and encourages mutually acceptable negotiated agreements to mitigate adverse environmental impacts, should the Board approve the proposal.

OEA and the cooperating agencies invite public comment on all aspects of the Draft EIS and are providing a 60-day public comment period, which begins upon the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's issuance of a notice of availability in the *Federal Register* on **April 24, 2015**. Comments on the Draft EIS must be e-filed or postmarked by **June 23, 2015**. Instructions on how to submit comments to the Draft EIS, and a list of the dates, times, and locations of forthcoming public meetings are attached in a separate Fact Sheet.

After the close of the public comment period on the Draft EIS, OEA and the cooperating agencies will prepare a Final EIS in response to comments received on the Draft EIS. The Board will then issue a final decision based on the entire public record, including the record on the transportation merits of the proposal, the Draft EIS, the Final EIS, and all public and agency comments received. The Board will decide whether to approve the proposal, deny it, or approve it with mitigating conditions, including environmental conditions. The cooperating agencies also may issue separate decisions related to the proposal.

OEA has distributed the Draft EIS widely for public review and comment. Notices of the availability of the Draft EIS have been distributed to all parties on OEA's environmental distribution list, which includes interested federally recognized tribes, key governmental agencies, and persons expressing an interest in the Draft EIS or participating in the environmental review process for this proceeding. OEA also has distributed the Draft EIS to all parties of record (official participants), and has made additional print copies of the Draft EIS available for review in seven public libraries in the proposed project area.

The Draft EIS was issued today in the case entitled [Tongue River Railroad Company, Inc. – Rail Construction and Operation – in Custer, Powder River and Rosebud Counties, Docket No. FD 30186](#). The entire Draft EIS is available for viewing and downloading on the Board's website at www.stb.dot.gov, or the Board-sponsored project website, www.tonguerivereis.com.

A Fact Sheet is attached.

FACT SHEET

To encourage full and active public participation in its environmental review of the Tongue River Railroad's proposed rail line construction and operation project in Montana, the Surface Transportation Board's (Board) Office of Environmental Analysis (OEA) has scheduled 10 public meetings in the project area and two online public meetings for parties outside the project area. The purpose of these meetings is to ensure that the public, tribes, agencies, communities, and all stakeholders have the opportunity to participate and comment on the Draft EIS. Comments on the Draft EIS must be e-filed or postmarked by June 23, 2015.

Beginning on June 8, 2015, OEA and the cooperating agencies will host public meetings in the Montana communities of Ashland, Miles City, Colstrip, Lame Deer, and Forsyth to receive public comments on the Draft EIS during which interested parties may make oral comments in a formal setting and/or submit written comments. OEA will begin each meeting with a 30-minute open house followed by a brief overview of the proposed project and environmental review process. The overview will be followed by a formal comment period during which each interested individual will be given several minutes to provide oral comments. The dates, specific locations, and times of the public meetings are listed below:

--June 8, 2015, 2:00–4:00 pm and 6:00--8:00 pm at St. Labre Indian School, 1000 Tongue River Road, Ashland, MT

--June 9, 2015, 2:00–4:00 pm and 6:00-8:00 pm at Miles Community College, Room 316, 2715 Dickinson Street, Miles City, MT

--June 10, 2015, 2:00–4:00 pm and 6:00-8:00 pm at Colstrip High School, 5000 Pinebutte Drive, Colstrip, MT

--June 11, 2015, 2:00–4:00 pm and 6:00-8:00 pm at the Northern Cheyenne Tribal Building, Council Chambers, 600 South Cheyenne Ave, Lame Deer, MT

--June 12, 2015, 2:00–4:00 pm and 6:00-8:00 pm at Forsyth High School, 917 Park Street, Forsyth, MT

Additionally, OEA will hold two online public meetings intended for people who cannot attend the public meetings in the project area. All interested individuals must register to attend the online public meeting and preregister to provide formal comments. OEA will begin both online public meetings with a brief overview of the proposed project and environmental review process. The overview will be followed by a facilitated formal comment session during which individuals that have preregistered will be given several minutes to provide oral comments. If time permits, the facilitator will allow other interested individuals who did not preregister to provide oral comments. Interested individuals can participate in the meetings via phone, computer, or both. The online public meetings will be held at the following date and times:

--June 17, 2015, 12:00–3:00 pm and 6:00–9:00 pm (Eastern Time).

--To register for the online public meeting, visit www.tonguerivereis.com. Additional meeting information and dial-in instructions will be provided at registration.

Recorded Comments: A court reporter will be present to record oral comments during the public meetings. Time permitting, the court reporter will be available at the conclusion of the formal segment of the meeting to record oral comments from individuals not interested in addressing the meeting as a whole. All meeting transcripts will be available on the Board-sponsored project website, at www.tonguerivereis.com, at the conclusion of the meetings.

Electronic Comments: Comments may be submitted electronically on the Board-sponsored project website, www.tonguerivereis.com. OEA strongly encourages commenters to submit their comments electronically—as it often takes more than a week for OEA to receive written comments. It is not necessary to mail written comments that have been submitted electronically. Please refer to “**Docket No. 30186**” when submitting comments.

Written Comments: Comment forms will be provided at the public meetings. Completed forms will be accepted at the meetings or the forms can be submitted later by mail. Any interested party may submit written comments on the Draft EIS regardless of whether they participate in any of the 10 public meetings and provide oral comments. Comment forms or written letters may be mailed to:

Ken Blodgett
Attention: Environmental filing, Docket No. 30186
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Streets SW
Washington, DC 20423-0001

Library Distribution: OEA has distributed the Draft EIS to the libraries listed below and requested that the entire Draft EIS be made publicly available in their reference sections.

Bicentennial Library of Colstrip
417 Willow Ave
Colstrip, MT 59323

Big Horn County Public Library
419 North Custer Avenue
Hardin, MT 59034

Dr. John Woodenlegs Memorial Library
1 College Drive
Lame Deer, MT 59043

Henry Malley Memorial Library
102 South Lincoln
Broadus, MT 59317

Miles City Public Library
1 South 10th Street
Miles City, MT 59301

Judson H. Flower Jr. Library (Miles Community College)
2715 Dickinson Street

Miles City, MT 59301

Rosebud County Library
201 North 9th Avenue
Forsyth, MT 59327

Deadline: Written comments on the Draft EIS must be postmarked by **June 23, 2015**.
Electronically filed comments must be received by **June 23, 2015**.

All comments received—written, submitted electronically, or transcribed—will carry equal weight in helping to complete the EIS process and guide the Board in making a decision on this matter.

For further information about the Draft EIS, please call 1-866-622-4355.