

progress in the research. Only the IRT and RSPA staff involved with the contract will be invited to the quarterly performance review meetings held between the public semiannual meetings.

Another objective is to conduct each semiannual meeting at the same location and either before or after a meeting of GRI's Nondestructive Evaluation Technical Advisory Group to enable participation by pipeline technical personnel involved with nondestructive evaluation. This meeting is being held in Salt Lake City to dovetail with a meeting of the GRI Nondestructive Technical Advisory Group. Each of the future semiannual meetings will be announced in the **Federal Register** at least two weeks prior to the meeting.

II. The Contract

The Battelle contract is a research and development contract to evaluate and develop in-line inspection technologies for detecting mechanical damage and cracking, such as stress-corrosion cracking (SCC), in natural gas transmission and hazardous liquid pipelines. Third-party mechanical damage is one of the largest causes of pipeline failure, but existing in-line inspection tools cannot always detect or accurately characterize the severity of some types of third-party damage that can threaten pipeline integrity. Although SCC is not very common on pipelines, it usually appears in high stressed pipe, low population density areas under a limited set of environmental conditions. Several attempts have been made to develop an in-line inspection tool for SCC, but there is no commercially successful tool on the market.

Under the contract, Battelle will evaluate and advance magnetic flux leakage (MFL) inspection technology for detecting mechanical damage and two electromagnetic technologies for detecting SCC. The focus is on MFL for mechanical damage because experience shows MFL can characterize some types of mechanical damage and can be successfully used to detect metal-loss corrosion under a wide variety of conditions. The focus for SCC is on electromagnetic technologies that can be used in conjunction with, or as a modification to, MFL tools. The technologies to be evaluated take advantage of the MFL magnetizer either by enhancing signals or by using electrical currents that are generated by the passage of an inspection tool through a pipeline.

The contract includes two major tasks during the base two years of the

contract. Task 1 is to evaluate existing MFL signal generation and analysis methods to establish a baseline from which today's tools can be evaluated and tomorrow's advances measured. Then, it will develop improvements to signal analysis methods and verify them through testing under realistic pipeline conditions. Finally, it will build an experience base and defect sets to generalize the results from individual tools and analysis methods to the full range of practical applications.

Task 2 is to evaluate two inspection technologies for detecting stress corrosion cracks. The focus in Task 2 is on electromagnetic techniques that have been developed in recent years and that could be used on or as a modification to existing MFL tools. Three subtasks will evaluate velocity-induced remote-field techniques, remote-field eddy-current techniques, and external techniques for sizing stress corrosion cracks.

A Task 3 is being considered for an option year to the contract. Task 3, if done, will verify the results from Tasks 1 and 2 by tests under realistic pipeline conditions. Task 3 will (1) extend the mechanical damage detection, signal decoupling, and sizing algorithms developed in the basic program to include the effects of pressure, (2) verify the algorithms under pressurized conditions in GRI's 4,700 foot, 24-inch diameter Pipeline Simulation Facility (PSF) flow loop, and (3) evaluate the use of eddy-current techniques for characterizing cold working within mechanical damage.

A drawback of present pig technology is the lack of a reliable pig performance verification procedure that is generally accepted by the pipeline industry and RSPA. The experience gained by the pipeline industry and RSPA with the use of the PSF flow loop in this project will provide a framework to develop procedures for evaluating pig performance. Defect detection reliability is critical if instrumented pigging is to be used as an in-line inspection tool in pipeline industry risk management programs.

The ultimate benefits of the project could be more efficient and cost-effective operations and maintenance programs to monitor and enhance the safety of gas transmission and hazardous liquid pipelines. Pipeline companies will benefit from having access to inspection technologies for detecting critical mechanical damage and stress-corrosion cracks. Inspection tool vendors will benefit by understanding where improvements are beneficial and needed. These benefits will support RSPA's long-range

objective of ensuring the safety and reliability of the gas transmission and hazardous liquid pipeline infrastructure.

Issued in Washington, D.C., on February 18, 1998.

Richard B. Felder,

Associate Administrator for Pipeline Safety.

[FR Doc. 98-4580 Filed 2-23-98; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Surface Transportation Board

[STB Ex Parte No. 575]

Review of Rail Access and Competition Issues

AGENCY: Surface Transportation Board.

ACTION: Request for comments.

SUMMARY: At the request of Congress, the Surface Transportation Board (Board) is commencing a review of access and competition issues in the rail industry. The Board is requesting comments on these matters. One or more oral hearings will also be held.

DATES: An oral hearing will be held beginning on April 2, 1998. Written notices of intent to participate as parties of record *and* requests to speak at the oral hearing are due by March 3, 1998. Shortly thereafter, we will issue a preliminary service list and will request written corrections to the list by letter or FAX. We will issue a corrected service list if necessary. Written comments are due by March 26, 1998. By March 27, 1998, a scheduling order for the hearing will be served and published on our web page (www.stb.dot.gov). To facilitate our communication with the parties, we encourage everyone to submit FAX and E-mail addresses in their notices of intent to participate.

ADDRESSES: Send an original and 10 copies of notices of intent to participate and comments, referring to "STB Ex Parte No. 575," to: Surface Transportation Board, Office of the Secretary, Case Control Unit, 1925 K Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20423. The comments must be served on the persons identified as "parties of record" on the service list.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Joseph H. Dettmar, (202) 565-1600. [TDD for the hearing impaired: (202) 565-1695.]

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Chairman of the Senate Committee on Commerce and the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine

have requested that the Board hold hearings and develop a record on access and competition issues in the rail industry, stating in their request that, "[t]he information obtained through a Board inquiry on rail access and competition could be very useful as Congress conducts proper oversight of the rail industry and works to address rail service issues." See the attached copy of their February 12, 1998 letter to Board Chairman Linda Morgan. Accordingly, we are commencing this examination of rail access and competition and other proposals related to those issues.

We will hold a public hearing beginning at 10:00 A.M. on April 2,

1998, at the Board's offices at 1925 K Street N.W., Washington, D.C., to provide interested persons an opportunity to testify on these issues. The hearings may be continued on April 3, 1998, if necessary. We encourage parties with similar interests or positions to file joint statements and to designate a single spokesperson to provide oral testimony. The Board will group speakers and allocate times as necessary to expedite the hearing. To meet the responsibility entrusted to us by Congress, we invite comments, data, studies, and proposals for legislative action.¹ Following the initial hearing,

¹ As noted in the letter from Senators McCain and Hutchison, the Board has ongoing proceedings

and any subsequent hearings we may decide to hold, we will take further action based upon the record made in the comments and at the hearing(s).

Decided: February 20, 1998.

By the Board, Chairman Morgan and Vice Chairman Owen.

Vernon A. Williams,

Secretary.

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_____ specifically addressing the rail service problems in the western United States. Thus, parties are urged to focus their submissions in the proceeding we are initiating here on the broader issues of rail access and competition generally, rather than on the specific existing service problems in the West.

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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,
 AND TRANSPORTATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125

February 12, 1998

The Honorable Linda Morgan
 Chairman
 Surface Transportation Board
 1925 K Street, N.W.
 Washington, D.C. 20423-0001

Dear Chairman Morgan:

As Chairman of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation and Chairman of the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine, we consider reauthorization of the Surface Transportation Board (STB) to be a very important Committee priority for this session of Congress, and one that the Committee must proceed with expeditiously.

In this effort, the Committee will be carefully reviewing the Board's staffing and authorization levels. During reauthorization hearings, we will be seeking your views, as appropriate, on these and other matters.

In addition, you can expect that we will consider a number of other rail service and rail shipper concerns. In particular, service problems throughout the West and pending consolidation proposals in the East will likely be raised. These are serious matters, but specific issues and cases we believe are best resolved by the Board. The Congress established the STB as an independent non-political authority and we believe the Board must continue to fulfill its statutory responsibilities independently.

We fully support the deregulatory approach provided by the Staggers Rail Act of 1980 and recognize its critical importance to the economic viability of the rail industry. However, we are facing serious issues which must be reviewed, including, complaints by some smaller shippers who believe their rail service needs are not adequately fulfilled. Others are not satisfied with the federal process available to seek relief from unreasonable rates and practices.

While we would not support efforts to "re-regulate" the rail industry, Congress has the responsibility to examine proposals that would appropriately and effectively remedy legitimate

CHAIRMAN MORGAN

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Supervisor

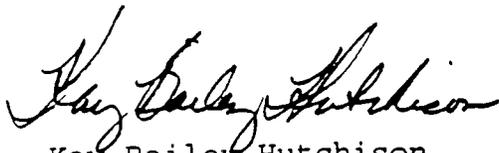
The Honorable Linda Morgan
February 12, 1997
Page 2

transportation problems. Some believe that providing open access, forced access, or competitive access in the rail industry would stimulate competition and help to address the concerns of shippers in general, and small shippers in particular. Since competition generally serves the public interest, we believe we should have a thorough review of the relevant views and issues on pro-competitive proposals and their impact on the rail industry.

It is our understanding that the Board would be agreeable to conducting hearings on rail access and competition issues. We urge you to hold these hearings. The information obtained through a Board inquiry on rail access and competition could be very useful as Congress conducts proper oversight of the rail industry and works to address rail service issues.

Thank you for your time and attention to these matters. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or if we can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,



Kay Bailey Hutchison
Chairman
Surface Transportation &
Merchant Marine Subcommittee



John McCain
Chairman