

collection requirements in a "user friendly" format to improve the use of such information; and (iii) accurately assess the resources expended to retrieve and produce information requested. See 44 U.S.C. 3501.

Pursuant to 44 U.S.C. 3507(a) and 5 CFR 1320.5(b), 1320.8(b)(3)(vi), FRA informs all interested parties that it may not conduct or sponsor, and a respondent is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Authority: 44 U.S.C. 3501–3520.

Issued in Washington, D.C. on December 18, 1996.

Al Duncan,

Director, Office of Information Technology and Productivity Improvement, Federal Railroad Administration.

[FR Doc. 96–32666 Filed 12–23–96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4910–06–P

Research and Special Programs Administration

[Notice Number 96–1]

Announcement of Availability of the Surface Transportation Research and Development Plan, Third Edition; Request for Comments

AGENCY: Research and Special Programs Administration (RSPA), DOT.

ACTION: Notice of Report Availability; Request for Comments.

SUMMARY: The Department of Transportation (DOT) announces the publication of the third edition of the Surface Transportation Research and Development Plan (R&D Plan), copies of which are available from the contact listed below or on the World Wide Web at the INTERNET address listed below. In addition, the Department invites comments to assist it in the preparation of the fourth edition of this report.

Under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), DOT is required to prepare the R&D Plan for its near- and long-term surface transportation research and development (R&D) activities. The Department has begun preparation of the fourth edition, which will be the last required under ISTEA.

DATES: Comments on the report should be postmarked no later than January 23, 1997.

ADDRESSES: Comments on changes, suggestions for improvement, or specific issues to include in the fourth edition of the report should be sent to: Norm Paulhus, Senior Technical Advisor (DRT–1), Research and Special

Programs Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, 400 7th Street, SW Room 8417, Washington, DC 20590. Comments must be signed, and should include the name, address, and telephone number of the point of contact. One additional copy of the comments should be sent to Kevin Green at the address listed below.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Kevin Green, Volpe National Transportation Systems Center, Kendall Square, DTS–24, Cambridge, MA 02142. Telephone: (617)–494–2106. Internet: green@volpe1.dot.gov. Copies of the third edition may be obtained from Mr. Green. The complete text of the third edition of the R&D Plan is also available on the World Wide Web at <http://www.volpe.dot.gov/pblctns.htm>.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

This notice announces the publication of, and solicits comments on, the third edition of the R&D Plan. The report presents details of the Department's near-term surface transportation R&D programs, and presents a strategic long-term outlook for surface transportation R&D. The report is prepared under authority provided in Section 6009(b) of the ISTEA, which expires in 1997. In preparing the fourth edition of the R&D Plan, the Department will consider public comments and suggested changes raised during review of the third edition.

Purpose

DOT is committed to promoting a safe and efficient transportation system that enhances the U.S. economy and contributes to a secure and healthy environment. In January 1994, the Department issued its Strategic Plan, which established the Department's mission and core responsibilities, and identified several strategic goals for implementing that mission in an era of limited resources.

The R&D Plan is directed at the development of the technologies needed to produce convenient, safe, and affordable modes of transportation. Many of these technologies are also mentioned in the DOT Strategic Plan, and as such the document is a first step towards a science and technology strategy to support the transportation industry. The R&D Plan also establishes sixteen longer-term R&D emphasis areas to provide for the next generation of surface transportation systems.

The general requirement for the R&D Plan is set forth in ISTEA. It describes the time periods which must be addressed, the issues to be covered, and

the level of detail to be included, at a minimum, in the R&D Plan.

The Department has begun preparing the fourth edition of the R&D Plan, which will be the last called for by ISTEA. As such, the fourth edition could provide an important point of reference for decision making related to R&D provisions of any subsequent legislation. The Department, therefore, encourages public review and comment on the third edition of the R&D Plan, and will consider those comments in preparing the fourth edition.

The Department is particularly interested in receiving public comment on the following issues:

- The Department seeks comment on the strategic vision presented in the second section of the third edition of the R&D Plan. Does it ask the right questions about key trends and challenges for the future? Does it extend far enough into the future? Does it establish a reasonable set of expectations? Does it propose long-term R&D efforts that provide a strategic response to long-term challenges?

- The Department also seeks comment regarding potential measures of performance that could be used to assess the quality of surface transportation R&D programs, the extent to which they achieve their objectives, and the extent to which they ultimately shape the surface transportation system.

Issued this 18th day of December 1996, in Washington, D.C. by:

D.K. Sharma,

Administrator, Research and Special Programs Administration.

[FR Doc. 96–32701 Filed 12–23–96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4910–60–P

Surface Transportation Board

[STB Finance Docket No. 33314]

Nebraska, Kansas & Colorado Railnet, Inc.—Acquisition and Operation Exemption—Lines of the Burlington Northern Railroad Company

Nebraska, Kansas & Colorado Railnet, Inc. (NKCR), a noncarrier newly-created to become a Class III railroad, has filed a verified notice of exemption under 49 CFR 1150.31 to acquire and operate five rail lines which are currently owned and operated by the Burlington Northern Railroad Company (BN) as follows: (1) between Flynn, NE (milepost 3.3), and Almena Junction, KS (milepost 29.6), a distance of approximately 26.3 miles; (2) between Oronoque Junction, KS (milepost 47.3), and Oberlin, KS (milepost 78.0), a distance of approximately 30.7 miles; (3) between west of Orleans Junction,

NE (milepost 0.2), and St. Francis, KS (milepost 133.9); a distance of approximately 133.7 miles; (4) between Holdrege, NE (milepost 0.8), and east of Sterling, CO (milepost 225.9),¹ a distance of approximately 225.1 miles; and (5) Norton, KS area trackage between milepost 315.1 and milepost 319.2, a distance of approximately 4.1 miles.

In addition, to the above-described line acquisitions, NKCR will also acquire, by assignment from BN, certain overhead trackage rights currently exercised by BN between Almena Junction, KS (milepost 29.6), and Oronoque Junction, KS (milepost 47.3), a distance of approximately 17.7 miles. The overhead trackage rights run over a line of railroad owned by the Kyle Railroad and currently dispatched by BN. The trackage rights effectively link the lines to be acquired by NKCR between Flynn, NE, and Almena Junction, KS, and between Oronoque Junction, KS, and Oberlin, KS. The trackage rights will also enable NKCR to access and serve customers located on the Norton, KS area trackage.

The subject trackage, including the overhead trackage rights, is approximately 437.6 route miles in length.²

The transaction was expected to be consummated on or about December 16, 1996.

If the verified notice contains false or misleading information, the exemption is void *ab initio*. Petitions to reopen the proceeding 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. 33314, 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 Robert A. Wimbish, Esq., Rea, Cross & Auchincloss, Suite 420, 1920 N Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036.

Decided: December 17, 1996.

¹ BN will retain overhead trackage rights to provide rail freight service between milepost 225.9, east of Sterling, CO, and a connection with the current or any future industry track at or near Wallace, NE, at or about milepost 114.0, for the sole purpose of serving the Gentleman Power Plant, or any successor.

² NKCR will serve as the operator of the lines, except that BN shall have the right to operate over the retained BN overhead trackage rights.

By the Board, David M. Konschnik,
Director, Office of Proceedings.

Vernon A. Williams,

Secretary.

[FR Doc. 96-32657 Filed 12-23-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4915-00-P

[STB Finance Docket No. 33306]

Wabash & Western Railway Co.; Lease and Operation Exemption; Morris Leasing Co., Ltd., and Michigan Southern Railroad, Inc.

Wabash & Western Railway Co., Ltd. (WAB), a Class III shortline rail carrier, has filed a notice of exemption under 49 CFR 1150.41 to lease and operate approximately 49.6 route miles of rail lines (the Lines) owned and/or operated by Morris Leasing Co., Ltd. (MLSC) and Michigan Southern Railroad, Inc. (MSR), Class III rail carriers, as follows: (1) Between milepost 119.0 and milepost 120.1, at or near Kendallville, Noble County, IN, (a portion of the GR&I Industrial Track); (2) between milepost 0.0 and milepost 9.8, at or near Elkhart, Elkhart and St. Joseph Counties, IN, (a portion of the E&W Secondary Track); and (3) between milepost 382.5, at or near Coldwater, MI, and milepost 421.2, at or near White Pigeon, MI, (the Quincy Secondary Track). Michigan Southern will be the operator of the lines.¹

The transaction was expected to be consummated on or after December 4, 1996.

If the notice 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 does not automatically stay the transaction.

An original and 10 copies of all pleadings, referring to STB Finance Docket No. 33306, 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 Robert A. Wimbish, Esq., Rea, Cross & Auchincloss, Suite 420, 1920 N Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036.

Decided: December 17, 1996.

By the Board, David M. Konschnik,
Director, Office of Proceedings.

Vernon A. Williams,

Secretary.

[FR Doc. 96-32658 Filed 12-23-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4915-00-P

¹ For purposes of this lease transaction, WAB will enter into an agreement with MLSC and MSR whereby WAB will be permitted to do business under the trade name "Michigan Southern Railroad."

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Customs Service

Public Meeting on the Meaning of "Customs Business"

AGENCY: U.S. Customs Service,
Department of the Treasury.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: This notice announces that a public meeting will be held in Hearing Room B of the Interstate Commerce Commission Building in Washington, D.C., commencing at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday, January 28, 1997. The purpose of this meeting is to (1) provide the public with a briefing on Customs interpretation of the meaning of "customs business" as provided in section 641(a)(2) of the Tariff Act of 1930 (19 U.S.C. 1641 (a)(2)), as amended by Title VI of the North American Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act (Pub. L. 103-182); (2) surface and discuss differing public interpretations of this definition and related issues; and, (3) explore options for clarifying the differing interpretations. Due to limitations on available seating, those planning to attend are requested to notify Customs in advance.

DATES: January 28, 1997, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

ADDRESSES: Interstate Commerce Commission Building, Hearing Room B, 12th Street & Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dale Snell, "Mod Act" Task Force, U.S. Customs Service, Franklin Court, 1301 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20229. Phone: (202) 482-6987; FAX: (202) 482-6994.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On December 8, 1993, the President signed the "North American Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act." The Customs modernization portion of this Act (Title VI of Public Law 103-182), popularly known as the Customs Modernization Act or "Mod Act," amended the definition of "customs business" as contained in 19 U.S.C. 1641(a)(2) to provide, among other things, that such business includes the preparation of documents but does not include the mere transmission of data received for transmission to Customs. The amended definition in 19 U.S.C. 1641 (a)(2) now reads:

The term "customs business" means those activities involving transactions with the Customs Service concerning the entry and admissibility of merchandise, its classification and valuation, the payment of duties, taxes, or other charges, assessed or collected by the Customs Service upon