

"an estimated total of 200 manhours and \$15,000" on air bag compliance issues. Lacking the resources to independently develop an air bag system, it "has contacted airbag development companies in the US to assist with the project." Laforza concluded that it will take 2 years to develop and certify the system. If immediate compliance were required, the cost would be \$4,000,000. An exemption would permit Laforza to generate revenues "to meet the costs mandated by the airbag development program" and spread these costs over a period of time. Because the company is less than a year old, it could not submit corporate balance sheets and income statements for the three years immediately preceding the filing of its application, as specified by NHTSA's regulation. Its stockholder equity is \$900,000.

Laforza argued that "production of the Laforza Prima 4X4 is in the best interest of the public and the U.S. economy," pointing to the uniqueness of the vehicle, and the American components that it incorporates, the powertrain from Ford Motor Company and the purchase of "other parts * * * from approximately five different U.S. companies." The company currently employs 15 people full-time and three people part time, which will grow as production increases. Further, "in addition, * * * at least 50 employees from other companies are involved in the Laforza project." During the exemption period, the Prima will be "equipped with a conventional retractor type, three-point driver and passenger seatbelt system that meets all requirements of FMVSS No. 208." The vehicle otherwise complies with all Federal motor vehicle safety standards that apply to it.

No comments were received on the application.

Laforza began its efforts to comply with the automatic restraint requirements upon its agreement with Magnum Industriales to purchase chassis from it (the term seems to encompass a body without the engine, transmission, and emission control systems). Since taking this step towards becoming a vehicle manufacturer, Laforza spent the time between then and the filing of its application in beginning its efforts to comply with the standard. It believes that it can comply by the end of 2000. On the other hand, a crash program to comply would cost it \$4,000,000. The company has not generated any income to establish a retained earnings account. Any significant up-front expenses to comply with Standard No. 208 would likely

place it in a negative net worth position. Negative operating cash flows combined with the required debt load and resulting interest charges would probably be unsustainable, and the company would never become a going concern. The enterprise to produce the Laforza involves purchases from several different American companies. The company has requested exemption from only one Federal motor vehicle safety standard for a vehicle which will be equipped with a "conventional retractor type three-point driver and passenger seatbelt system that meets all requirements of FMVSS No. 208." It estimates that only 400 vehicles will be produced while the exemption is in effect.

These facts and arguments are similar to those offered in other instances in which NHTSA has granted temporary exemptions based upon a manufacturer's hardship. In consideration of the foregoing, it is hereby found that compliance with the automatic restraint requirements would cause substantial economic hardship to a manufacturer that has tried in good faith to comply with the standard. It is further found that a temporary exemption from these requirements would be in the public interest and consistent with the objectives of motor vehicle safety. Accordingly, Laforza Automobiles, Inc., is hereby granted NHTSA Temporary Exemption No. 98-6 from paragraphs S4.2.6.1.1 and S4.2.6.2 of 49 CFR 571.208 Standard No. 208, Occupant Crash Protection, expiring January 1, 2001.

(49 U.S.C. 30113; delegation of authority at 49 CFR 1.50)

Issued on: September 2, 1998.

Ricardo Martinez,

Administrator.

[FR Doc. 98-24593 Filed 9-11-98; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Surface Transportation Board

[Finance Docket No. 33556]

Canadian National Railway Company, Grand Trunk Corporation, and Grand Trunk Western Railroad Incorporated—Control—Illinois Central Corporation, Illinois Central Railroad Company, Chicago, Central and Pacific Railroad Company, and Cedar River Railroad Company

AGENCY: Surface Transportation Board.

ACTION: Notice of environmental review process schedule.

SUMMARY: On July 15, 1998, Canadian National Railway Company (CN) and Illinois Central Corporation (IC), along with their railroad affiliates, collectively referred to as CN/IC or Applicants, filed a joint application with the Surface Transportation Board (Board) seeking authority for CN to acquire control of IC. (This proposed transaction is subsequently referred to as the Acquisition or the CN/IC Acquisition.) The proposed CN/IC system would extend to both coasts of North America and the Gulf of Mexico. The Chicago area would serve as the hub of the combined system. This new system would cover approximately 18,670 miles of rail lines and related facilities, of which, approximately 4,520 miles would be in the United States. The Applicants state that integrating CN and IC operations would allow both rail systems to provide more reliable, efficient, and competitive service.

In Decision No. 6, served August 14, 1998, the Board accepted for consideration the proposed CN/IC Acquisition and issued a 300-day procedural schedule that will provide for the issuance of the Board's final written decision no later than May 11, 1999. The Board also announced that preparation of an Environmental Assessment is appropriate for this proceeding. The purpose of this notice is to advise that the Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) plans to issue a Draft Environmental Assessment (Draft EA) on the proposed CN/IC Acquisition for public review by November 1998. The public will then have 30 days to review and comment on the Draft EA. After reviewing all public comments on the Draft EA and conducting additional analyses, SEA will complete the Final Environmental Assessment (Final EA). SEA will issue the Final EA prior to the Board's Oral Argument which is currently scheduled for March 8, 1999. The Board will consider all public comments, the Draft EA and Final EA, and SEA's environmental mitigation recommendations in making its final decision on the proposed Acquisition. The Board plans to serve the final written decision on the proposed CN/IC Acquisition on May 11, 1999. Any party may file an administrative appeal within 20 days of the final written decision.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: A Fact Sheet on the proposed Acquisition, which includes a general discussion on the environmental review process and schedule, is available by calling SEA's toll-free environmental hotline at 1-888-869-1997. For additional

information regarding environmental issues, or the environmental review schedule, contact SEA's Project Manager for the proposed CN/IC Acquisition, Michael Dalton, at (202) 565-1530.

By the Board, Elaine K. Kaiser, Chief of the Section of Environmental Analysis.

Vernon A. Williams,

Secretary.

[FR Doc. 98-24572 Filed 9-11-98; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Surface Transportation Board

[STB Docket No. AB-317 (Sub-No. 5X)]

Indiana Harbor Belt Railroad Company—Abandonment and Discontinuance of Trackage Rights Exemption—in Cook County, IL and Lake County, IN

On August 25, 1998, Indiana Harbor Belt Railroad Company (IHB) filed with the Surface Transportation Board (Board) a petition under 49 U.S.C. 10502 for exemption from the provisions of 49 U.S.C. 10903 to abandon a line of railroad known as the East Chicago Belt Branch, extending from railroad Valuation Station (-0+17) beginning at a point 168 feet west of the Illinois/Indiana State line in Burnham, IL, near Brainard Avenue, extending generally eastward through Hammond, IN, to and including a point 100 feet east of the east edge of Indianapolis Boulevard in East Chicago, IN, at railroad Valuation Station (140 + 00), a distance of 2.3 miles in Cook County, IL, and Lake County, IN. The line includes approximately 0.4 mile of track in Hammond, in the vicinity of Sohl Avenue and Hohman Avenue, owned by the Elgin, Joliet and Eastern Railway Company, over which IHB seeks to discontinue trackage rights. The line traverses U.S. Postal Service Zip Codes 60603, 46320, and 46312. There are no stations on the line.

The line does not contain federally granted rights-of-way. Any documentation in the railroad's possession will be made available promptly to those requesting it. The interest of railroad employees will be protected by the conditions set forth in *Oregon Short Line R. Co.—Abandonment—Goshen*, 360 I.C.C. 91 (1979).

By issuance of this notice, the Board is instituting an exemption proceeding pursuant to 49 U.S.C. 10502(b). A final decision will be issued by December 11, 1998.

Any offer of financial assistance (OFA) under 49 CFR 1152.27(b)(2) will

be due no later than 10 days after service of a decision granting the petition for exemption. Each OFA must be accompanied by a \$1,000 filing fee. See 49 CFR 1002.2(f)(25).

All interested persons should be aware that, following abandonment of rail service and salvage of the line, the line may be suitable for other public use, including interim trail use. Any request for a public use condition under 49 CFR 1152.28 or for trail use/rail banking under 49 CFR 1152.29 will be due no later than October 5, 1998. Each trail use request must be accompanied by a \$150 filing fee. See 49 CFR 1002.2(f)(27).

All filings in response to this notice must refer to STB Docket No. AB-317 (Sub-No. 5X) and must be sent to: (1) Surface Transportation Board, Office of the Secretary, Case Control Unit, 1925 K Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20423-0001, and (2) Roger A. Serpe, 175 West Jackson Boulevard, Suite 1460, Chicago, IL 60604-2704. Replies to the IHB petition are due on or before October 5, 1998.

Persons seeking further information concerning abandonment procedures may contact the Board's Office of Public Services at (202) 565-1592 or refer to the full abandonment or discontinuance regulations at 49 CFR part 1152. Questions concerning environmental issues may be directed to the Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) at (202) 565-1545. [TDD for the hearing impaired is available at (202) 565-1695.]

An environmental assessment (EA) (or environmental impact statement (EIS), if necessary) prepared by SEA will be served upon all parties of record and upon any agencies or other persons who commented during its preparation. Other interested persons may contact SEA to obtain a copy of the EA (or EIS). EAs in these abandonment proceedings normally will be available within 60 days of the filing of the petition. The deadline for submission of comments on the EA will generally be within 30 days of its service.

Board decisions and notices are available on our website at "WWW.STB.DOT.GOV."

Decided: September 8, 1998.

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

Vernon A. Williams,

Secretary.

[FR Doc. 98-24573 Filed 9-11-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4915-00-P

UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY

Notice of Receipt of Cultural Property Request From the Government of the Republic of Cyprus

AGENCY: United States Information Agency.

ACTION: Notice of receipt of cultural property request from the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

The Government of the Republic of Cyprus made a cultural property request to the Government of the United States under Article 9 of the 1970 UNESCO Convention. The request was received on September 4, 1998, by the United States Information Agency. It seeks U.S. protection of certain categories of archaeological and/or ethnological material the pillage of which, it is alleged, jeopardizes the national cultural patrimony of Cyprus. In accordance with the provisions of the Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act (19 U.S.C. 2603 *et seq.*) the request will be reviewed by the Cultural Property Advisory Committee which will develop recommendations before a determination is made.

Dated: September 8, 1998.

Penn Kemble,

Deputy Director, United States Information Agency.

[FR Doc. 98-24590 Filed 9-11-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 8230-01-M

UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY

Notice of Meeting of the Cultural Property Advisory Committee

AGENCY: United States Information Agency.

ACTION: Notice of meeting of the Cultural Property Advisory Committee.

The Cultural Property Advisory Committee will meet on Monday, September 28, 1998, from approximately 9:30 a.m. to approximately 5:00 p.m., at the U.S. Information Agency, Room 840, 301 4th St., S.W., Washington, D.C. to review a cultural property request from the Government of the Republic of Cyprus to the Government of the United States seeking protection of certain archaeological and/or ethnological materials. A portion of the meeting, from approximately 9:30 a.m. to approximately 10:30 a.m., will be open to interested parties wishing to provide comment to the Committee that may bear on this request. The Cyprus request, submitted under Article 9 of the