

March 27, 1978, the Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998 (112 Stat. 2681, *et seq.*; 22 U.S.C. 6501 note, *et seq.*), Delegation of Authority No. 234 of October 1, 1999, Delegation of Authority No. 236–3 of August 28, 2000 (and, as appropriate, Delegation of Authority No. 257–1 of December 11, 2015). I have ordered that Public Notice of these determinations be published in the **Federal Register**.

Alyson Grunder,

Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Department of State.

[FR Doc. 2017–27921 Filed 12–26–17; 8:45 am]

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SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

[Docket No. FD 36149]

New Orleans Public Belt Railroad Corporation—Acquisition and Operation Exemption—Public Belt Railroad Commission of the City of New Orleans

On November 22, 2017, New Orleans Public Belt Railroad Corporation (NOPB Corp.),¹ a noncarrier, filed a verified notice of exemption under 49 CFR 1150.31 to acquire from the Public Belt Railroad Commission of the City of New Orleans (Public Belt), and operate approximately 26.7 miles of rail line and approximately 10.25 miles of assigned trackage rights pursuant to a Cooperative Endeavor Agreement (Agreement) to be entered into by NOPB Corp., Public Belt, the City of New Orleans (the City), and the Port. On December 11, 2017, the Board issued a decision holding this proceeding in abeyance and requesting supplemental information from NOPB Corp. NOPB Corp. provided that information on December 18, 2017.

NOPB Corp. describes the lines and trackage rights it seeks to acquire as follows:

1. The Public Belt main line from the connection with BNSF Railway Company (BNSF) and Union Pacific Railroad Company (UP) at milepost J8.3 at West Bridge Junction in Avondale, La. to milepost J1.1 at Southport Junction in Jefferson, La. and from milepost J0.3 at Lampert Junction in Jefferson to milepost J0.0 at the Jefferson/Orleans Parish, La. border, a total distance of approximately 7.5 miles in two sections connected by the overhead trackage rights described in

Segment #6 below. The West Belt Junction-Southport Junction section of this Segment #1 includes the Huey P. Long Bridge.

2. The Public Belt main line from a milepost equation at the Jefferson/Orleans Parish border where milepost J0.0 = milepost 0.26 to the connection with CSX Transportation, Inc. (CSXT) at milepost 14.2 at Almonaster in New Orleans, a distance of approximately 13.94 miles.

3. The Burma West Lead in New Orleans from milepost 14.2 at Almonaster to the end of track at milepost 15.3, a distance of approximately 1.1 miles.

4. The Burma East Lead in New Orleans from the connection with CSXT at milepost 14.4 east of the Industrial Canal to the end of track at milepost 16.3, a distance of approximately 1.9 miles.

5. The Bulk Terminal Lead in New Orleans from the connection with CSXT at milepost G0.0 east of the Industrial Canal to milepost G1.5, a distance of approximately 1.5 miles.

6. Overhead trackage rights on Illinois Central Railroad Company (IC) from IC milepost 449.9 at East Bridge Junction in Shreveport, La. through Southport Junction (Public Belt milepost J1.1) to IC milepost 921.14 at Lampert Junction (Public Belt milepost J0.3), a distance of approximately 2.6 miles.² There is a milepost equation a Southport Junction, where IC milepost 451.7=IC milepost 921.9.

7. Overhead trackage rights on IC from IC Station 120+0.00 (Public Belt milepost 3.4) at Nashville Avenue to IC Station 175+68.09 (Public Belt milepost 4.4) at Valence Street in New Orleans, including the connection to the NOPB locomotive maintenance facility lead track at IC Station 163+80.0 (Public Belt milepost 4.2) near Upperline Street, a distance of approximately 1.05 miles.³

8. Overhead trackage rights on CSXT from the connection with Segment #2 at CSXT milepost 801.5 at Almonaster in New Orleans across the Port-owned

² See *New Orleans Pub. Belt R.R.—Trackage Rights Exemption—Ill. Cent. R.R.*, FD 33182 (STB served Oct. 30, 1996). The eastern segment of these trackage rights, from Southport Junction to Lampert Junction, connects the two sections of Public Belt's main line described in Segment #1 above. The western segment of the trackage rights, from East Bridge Junction to Southport Junction, is adjacent to and north of Public Belt's main line between those points.

³ See *Ill. Cent. R.R.—Joint Relocation Project Exemption—in New Orleans, La.*, FD 33533 (STB served January 16, 1998); *Ill. Cent. R.R.—Joint Relocation Project Exemption—in New Orleans, La.*, FD 32598 (ICC served Nov. 16, 1994). These trackage rights are parallel to Public Belt's main line described in Segment #2 above and serve as a bypass around Cotton Warehouse Yard.

Industrial Canal bridge to the connections with Segments #4 and #5 at CSXT milepost 801.2 in New Orleans, a distance of approximately 0.3 miles.

9. Temporary overhead trackage rights on IC from IC milepost 906.4 at East Bridge Junction in Shreveport to IC Milepost 900.8 at Orleans Junction in New Orleans and from IC milepost 444.2 at Orleans Junction to IC milepost 443.5 at Frelsen Junction in New Orleans, a distance of approximately 6.3 miles.⁴

NOPB Corp. will also acquire Public Belt's ownership or operating interests in all yard, industry, wharf, and lead tracks associated with the above line segments, including the Southern Recycling Lead, East Bridge Yard, Pacific Fruit Express Yard, Cotton Warehouse Yard, Race Yard, French Market Station, Pauline Yard, Claiborne Yard, France Yard, North Bulk Terminal Yard, and South Bulk Terminal Yard. Upon completion of the transaction, NOPB Corp. will be a Class III switching and terminal railroad and will continue to provide local and intermediate switching service in place of Public Belt.

NOPB Corp. certifies that its projected annual revenues as a result of this transaction will not exceed those that would qualify it as a Class III rail carrier.⁵ Because NOPB Corp.'s annual revenues will exceed \$5 million, on October 13, 2017, NOPB Corp. certified to the Board that it had complied with the requirements of 49 CFR 1150.32(e) by posting notice on October 13, 2017, at workplaces of Public Belt employees and by serving notice on the national offices of the labor unions representing Public Belt employees on the same date. NOPB Corp. further certifies that the Agreement does not include any provision limiting NOPB Corp.'s future interchange of traffic with any connecting carrier.

The transaction may be consummated on or after January 17, 2018, the effective date of the exemption (30 days after the verified notice of exemption was filed).⁶ If the verified notice

⁴ See *New Orleans Pub. Belt R.R.—Temp. Trackage Rights Exemption—Ill. Cent. R.R.*, FD 36067 (STB served Oct. 14, 2016 and Jan. 30, 2017). NOPB Corp. acknowledges that it will be subject to employee protective conditions imposed in *New Orleans Public Belt Railroad—Temporary Trackage Rights Exemption—Illinois Central Railroad*, FD 36067 (STB served Oct. 14, 2016).

⁵ NOPB Corp. notes that, because it will operate as a switching and terminal railroad, it presumably would be classified as a Class III carrier in any event. 49 CFR 1201(1–1)(d).

⁶ Because NOPB Corp.'s supplement was filed on December 18, that is considered the filing date of the verified notice for purposes of calculating the effective date of the exemption. In its supplement, NOPB Corp. requests that the effective date of the

¹ NOPB Corp. is a newly-formed public non-profit corporation and subsidiary of the Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans (the Port).

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 effectiveness of the exemption. Petitions to stay must be filed no later than January 4, 2018.

An original and 10 copies of all pleadings, referring to Docket No. FD 36149, must be filed with the Surface Transportation Board, 395 E Street SW, Washington, DC 20423-0001. In addition, a copy of each pleading must be served on Thomas J. Litwiler, Fletcher & Sippel LLC, 29 North Wacker Dr., Suite 920, Chicago, IL 60606-2832.

According to NOPB Corp., this action is excluded from environmental review under 49 CFR 1105.6(c) and from historic preservation reporting requirements under 49 CFR 1105.8(b)(1).

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

Decided: December 21, 2017.

By the Board, Scott M. Zimmerman, Acting Director, Office of Proceedings.

Jeffrey Herzig,
Clearance Clerk.

[FR Doc. 2017-27931 Filed 12-26-17; 8:45 am]

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OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES TRADE REPRESENTATIVE

[Docket No. USTR-2017-0024]

Request for Comments and Notice of a Public Hearing Regarding the 2018 Special 301 Review

AGENCY: Office of the United States Trade Representative.

ACTION: Request for comments and notice of public hearing.

SUMMARY: Each year, the Office of the United States Trade Representative conducts a Special 301 review to identify countries that deny adequate and effective protection of intellectual property rights (IPR) or deny fair and equitable market access to U.S. persons who rely on intellectual property protection. Based on this review, the United States Trade Representative (Trade Representative) determines which, if any, of these countries to identify as Priority Foreign Countries. USTR requests written comments that identify acts, policies, or practices that may form the basis of a country's

exemption be advanced to January 11, 2018. This request will be addressed in a separate decision.

identification as a Priority Foreign Country or placement on the Priority Watch List or Watch List. USTR also requests notices of intent to appear at the public hearing.

DATES: *February 8, 2018 at midnight EST:* Deadline for submission of written comments, hearing statements, and notices of intent to appear at the hearing from the public.

February 22, 2018 at midnight EST: Deadline for submission of written comments, hearing statements, and notices of intent to appear at the hearing from foreign governments.

February 27, 2018: The Special 301 Subcommittee will hold a public hearing at the Office of the United States Trade Representative, 1724 F Street NW, Rooms 1 & 2, Washington, DC. If necessary, the hearing may continue on the next business day. Please consult the USTR website for confirmation of the date and location and the schedule of witnesses.

March 2, 2018 at midnight EST: Deadline for submission of post-hearing written comments from persons who testified at the public hearing.

On or about April 30, 2018: USTR will publish the 2018 Special 301 Report within 30 days of the publication of the National Trade Estimate (NTE) Report.

ADDRESSES: USTR strongly encourages electronic submissions made through the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the submission instructions in section IV below. The docket number is USTR-2017-0024. For alternatives to on-line submissions, please contact USTR at Special301@ustr.eop.gov before transmitting a comment and in advance of the relevant deadline.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Sung Chang, Director for Innovation and Intellectual Property, at 202-395-7548 or special301@ustr.eop.gov. You can find information about the Special 301 Review at www.ustr.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Background

Section 182 of the Trade Act of 1974 (Trade Act) (19 U.S.C. 2242), commonly known as the "Special 301" provisions, requires the Trade Representative to identify countries that deny adequate and effective IPR protections or fair and equitable market access to U.S. persons who rely on intellectual property protection. The Trade Act requires the Trade Representative to determine which, if any, of these countries to identify as Priority Foreign Countries. Acts, policies or practices that are the basis of a country's identification as a

Priority Foreign Country can be subject to the procedures set out in sections 301-305 of the Trade Act (19 U.S.C. 2411-2415),

In addition, USTR has created a "Priority Watch List" and "Watch List" to assist the Administration in pursuing the goals of the Special 301 provisions. Placement of a trading partner on the Priority Watch List or Watch List indicates that particular problems exist in that country with respect to IPR protection, enforcement or market access for persons that rely on intellectual property protection. Trading partners placed on the Priority Watch List are the focus of increased bilateral attention concerning the problem areas.

USTR chairs the Special 301 Subcommittee (Subcommittee) of the Trade Policy Staff Committee. The Subcommittee reviews information from many sources, and consults with and makes recommendations to the Trade Representative on issues arising under Special 301. Written submissions from the public are a key source of information for the Special 301 review process. In 2018, USTR will conduct a public hearing as part of the review process and will allow hearing participants to provide additional information relevant to the review. At the conclusion of the process, USTR will publish the results of the review in a Special 301 Report.

USTR requests that interested persons identify through the process outlined in this notice those countries whose acts, policies, or practices deny adequate and effective protection for intellectual property rights or deny fair and equitable market access to U.S. persons who rely on intellectual property protection.

Section 182 also requires the Trade Representative to identify any act, policy or practice of Canada that affects cultural industries, was adopted or expanded after December 17, 1992, and is actionable under Article 2106 of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). USTR invites the public to submit views relevant to this aspect of the review.

Section 182 requires the Trade Representative to identify all such acts, policies, or practices within 30 days of the publication of the NTE Report. In accordance with this statutory requirement, USTR will publish the annual Special 301 Report on or about April 30, 2018.

II. Public Comments

To facilitate the review, written comments should be as detailed as possible and provide all necessary information to identify and assess the