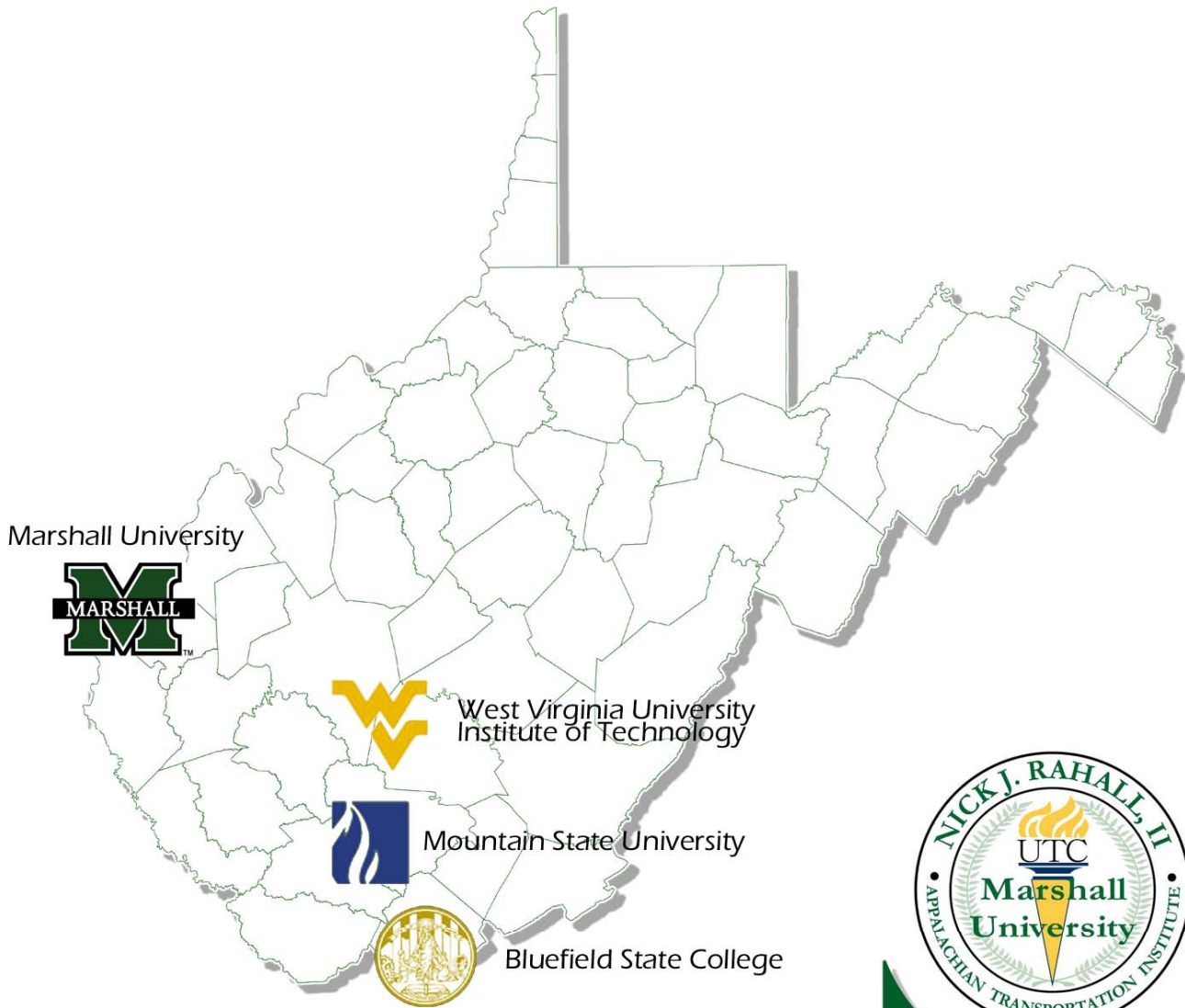


# TRP 99-02 Preserving Branch-Line Railroad Capacity in Southern West Virginia



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16. Abstract West Virginia's coal heritage once yielded an extensive network of railroad branch-line trackage. While a significant number of these branch-lines have been abandoned and the tracks removed, dozens more remain in place. The current study is designed to produce a systematic method of evaluating the economic benefits of specific branch-line properties and assessing the cost of maintenance options. Specifically, the study considers the alternative costs of continued Class I ownership, private short-line ownership and operation, the State's Rail Bank program, and other maintenance options.					
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Capacity in Southern West Virginia  
TRP 99-02

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Marshall University

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*Prepared for the West Virginia Department of Transportation, Division of Highways, in cooperation with the US Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration.*

# Preserving Branch-Line Railroad Capacity in Southern West Virginia

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**MAP 1: “Active” Class I Branch-Lines in WV**

**MAP 2: “At-Risk” Class I Branch-Lines in WV**

**MAP 3: “Abandoned” Class I Branch-Lines in WV**

## Summary of Findings

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Even before the implementation of the Staggers Rail Act of 1980, Class I rail carriers began a program of route “rationalization” in which branch-line trackage was either abandoned or sold to smaller carriers for short-line operations.<sup>1</sup> Deregulation accelerated this pattern of rationalization by easing the processes through which unwanted branch-lines can be abandoned. Consequently, Class I track miles fell from 164,822 in 1980 to 100,125 in 2002.<sup>2</sup>

In instances when trackage was abandoned, affected communities encountered the considerable challenge of spurring future economic development without the availability of one of the principal surface freight transport modes. As a result, cities, counties, and states have developed various means of preserving the railroad capacity no longer deemed necessary by the nation’s large freight carriers. These methods include, but are not limited to:

- Public ownership and operation of branch-lines;
- Public purchase and “banking” of branch-line properties;
- Retention of railroad right-of-ways, with conversion to interim recreational use;
- Public support for private purchases of branch-lines for freight operations; and
- Public support for private purchase of branch-lines for tourist excursion operations.

Within southern West Virginia, the issue of branch-line capacity preservation has taken on additional importance because of the predicted declines in the quantity of coal mined with the region. Historically, Class I carriers have often abandoned branch-lines connecting mining properties to their mainline trackage as mine production ceased. Now, in an era in which measurable reductions in annual coal production are possible, this pattern of branch-line abandonment may well accelerate.

Given the level of competition in surface freight transportation, compelling the State’s Class I carriers to retain branch-line properties that are unprofitable would be impossible. At the same time, the availability of future railroad transportation may be essential to the development opportunities of the communities currently faced with the potential of

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<sup>1</sup> A Class I railroad is defined as a rail carrier with more than \$272 in annual operating revenues. Branch-lines are shorter lines that “branch” off from a main line.

<sup>2</sup> Association of American Railroads, *Analysis of Class I Railroads*.

reduced coal mining activity. Thus, the State of West Virginia must seriously consider extending current programs for railroad capacity preservation.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, these programs are not without their costs. The strategies enumerated above often entail significant public expenditures for the purchase, rehabilitation, and subsidization of branch-line rail properties. Even when rights-of-way are simply “banked”, potential private land owners are compelled to forego the use of the property so that there may be a non-trivial opportunity cost.

The current analysis attempts to (1) catalogue the extent and level of activity of branch-line trackage within West Virginia and (2) assess both the cost and effectiveness of the various means of capacity preservation.

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<sup>3</sup> West Virginia’s position in this regard is not unique. The majority of states have rail preservation programs and most are under continuing pressure to accommodate larger and larger amounts of abandoned trackage.

## Section 1 – The Transportation Context

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### INTRODUCTION

Railroads are comprised of various network components. Each plays a distinct role within the transportation process. A summary of these components and a brief description of their associated transportation functions are provided in Table 1.1.

<i>General Network Role</i>	<i>Network Components</i>	<i>Transportation Role</i>
Nodes	Classification Yards	Locations where inbound line-haul traffic is either resorted and assembled along with local traffic into new trains for further dispatch or distributed to local customers.
	Intermodal Terminals	Terminal locations where traffic is received from or transferred to another surface mode (truck barge).
	Industrial Trackage	Shipper-owned facilities for handling inbound and outbound traffic.
	Other Terminal Tracks	Belt-lines, interchange tracks, mechanical service facilities, and other trackage used to connect the components of more complex terminal facilities.
Links	Mainline Trackage	Primary facility for moving traffic between nodes, may have a limited amount of local shipping, but is mostly characterized by high line-haul tonnages and through train activity.
	Secondary Mainlines	Still dominated by line-haul activity, but have lower tonnages and a larger proportion of local traffic than primary mainline routes.
	Branch Lines	Trackage that exists primarily to connect one or more remote customer to the greater rail network, these may connect to either a terminal location or mainline trackage

Changes in transportation facilities and practices evidenced over the past several decades have increasingly diminished the importance of reaching small, relatively remote shippers by rail. In case after case, the ever-improving economics of highway transportation lead to the diversion branch-line freight from rail to highway. As branch-line tonnages declined,



the cost of serving remaining shippers increased. As branch-line operations became less profitable, both the investment in and maintenance of branch-line facilities declined rapidly. Thus, the quality of service also declined. Ultimately, Class I carriers began programs of system "rationalizations" under which they sought to discontinue service over and ultimately abandon thousands of miles of branch-lines.

However, in the three decades between World War II and the middle 1970's, service discontinuance and abandonments were closely regulated by the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC). Often, it took Class I carriers years to abandon trackage that was clearly unprofitable. During these protracted abandonment proceedings, the carriers rarely, if ever, expended funds on the maintenance of the subject properties.

By the mid-1970's, the nation's rail carriers were suffering financially due to increased competition from other modes of transportation (particularly trucking), rising labor, fuel and maintenance expenses, and regulation that made divestiture of unprofitable lines extremely difficult. In response, Congress enacted a series of laws culminating in the Staggers Rail Act of 1980 (Staggers Act).

The Staggers Act was enacted with the aim of largely replacing railroad regulation with market-based decision-making. The act significantly deregulated the railroad industry and replaced the regulatory structure that had existed since the 1887 Interstate Commerce Act. It permitted railroads greater flexibility in pricing, service adjustments, and route determination.

Among its provisions, the Staggers Act markedly reduced the regulatory burden associated with abandonment proceedings. Further, strict statutory guidelines now limit the amount of time that can be taken in the evaluation of any proposed abandonment. As a result, the railroad industry sold or abandoned tens of thousands of miles of both mainline and branch line trackage in the two decades follow the passage of Staggers.

The impact of the Staggers Act on the railroad industry was pronounced. Real rail rates fell as carriers reduced costs. The quality of service in terms of freight loss and damage and transit times improved. Railroad employment fell markedly even as annual ton-miles of service increased. By nearly every measure, the Staggers Act achieved its principal aim of revitalizing freight rail service in the United States.

Unfortunately, the resulting pattern of accelerated abandonments left many communities in the unenviable position of relying entirely on trucking as their lone form of transportation. While the loss of rail service need not affect commerce that relies on low-volume movements of highly valued

commodities, commerce that depends on the high-volume movement of low-valued commodities is difficult to support in a truck-only environment.

As a consequence, most states have developed programs aimed at preserving branch-line railroad service where possible. These programs embrace a number of preservation methods including, but not limited to:

- Public ownership and operation of branch-lines;
- Public purchase and “banking” of branch-line properties;
- Retention of railroad right-of-ways, with conversion to interim recreational use;
- Public funding for the rehabilitation of privately owned branch-lines;
- Public support for private purchases of branch-lines for freight operations; and
- Public support for private purchase of branch-lines for tourist excursion operations.

In aggregate, states spend approximately \$500 annually to preserve branch-line capacity. In some instances, these efforts are financed through general revenues. More commonly, however, the funding for branch-line preservation and / or operations is derived through a fuel tax on other transportation providers or through a source of federal funds.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research comprising the remainder of the current document contains two components - an inventory of branch-lines in West Virginia and an evaluation of the preservation methods available to the State. During the initial research, the Center for Business and Economic Research (CBER) catalogued the branch-line operations within West Virginia of the two Class I carriers, CSX Transportation and Norfolk Southern Corporation. The purpose of this evaluation was to identify those branch-line segments that are most likely to be abandoned. Each branch-line is classified as “active,” “at-risk,” or “abandoned.”

The second component of the research involves the evaluation of the methods of preserving the various “at-risk” branch-line properties, the cost of preservation under each method, and the potential economic importance of continued access to the national rail network. This research phase necessarily includes a careful evaluation of West Virginia’s current program of railbanking in order to determine whether it provides the best means of preserving branch-line service to communities. The ultimate goal of the research is to provide State and regional policymakers with the information necessary to make efficient transportation decisions.

## Section 2 - Overview of Branch-Lines, Abandonments, and Short-Line Formations

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### NATIONAL TRENDS

Under the Interstate Commerce Commission Termination Act of 1995, a railroad may only abandon a line with permission of the U.S. Department of Transportation's Surface Transportation Board (STB). The STB must consider two opposing factors when deciding whether, "present or future convenience and necessity require or permit" the abandonment. The STB must weigh the need for continued service by local communities and shippers against relieving the railroad's financial burden caused by continuing the unprofitable lines instead of reallocating those resources to more economical operations.

In general terms, the abandonment process continues as the railroad must demonstrate a financial burden either through an actual operating loss or opportunity costs. The STB then examines the public's need for continued service and hears public comments and evidence to demonstrate opposition to the application before deciding on an abandonment.

Most of the applications for abandonment received by the STB are submitted by the railroads. These requests are typically either "Notice of Exemptions" or "Petitions for Exemptions." In the first case, the railroad states that the track has not been used for two years or more ("Notice of Exemption"). In the second case, the railroad states that the track has so little traffic that the carrier can not profit by its continued operation ("Petition for Exemption").

In general, nationwide data on railroad abandonments is often inaccurate or differs among sources. Railroads often do not maintain a single database that catalogues abandoned and railbanked branch-lines and sometimes the railroads do not even differentiate abandoned lines from railbanked lines. Based on applications and exemptions filed with the STB and granted, there have been 16,661 miles of track abandoned in the U.S. during the 10-year period from 1992-2001. Annual volumes are summarized in Table 2.1.

Routinely, Class I carriers will attempt to sell unprofitable branch-lines as an alternative to outright abandonment. This leads to an observable increase in short-line formation in the decades immediately following

**Table 2.1**  
**Abandonment Requests**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Cases Filed</i>	<i>Granted</i>	<i>Miles</i>
1992	117	104	1,725
1993	147	138	1,896
1994	161	139	2,138
1995	154	141	1,994
1996	142	135	2,245
1997	106	91	1,253
1998	96	106	1,080
1999	72	66	1,243
2000	58	51	892
2001	90	75	2,195
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,143</b>	<b>1,046</b>	<b>16,661</b>

Note: Cases Filed includes applications, exemption petitions, and exemption notices.

Source: STB Activity Report 1996/1997; STB Activity Report 1998-2001; and U.S. General Accounting Office, *Surface Transportation: Issues Related to Preserving Inactive Rail Lines as Trails*, October 1999.

Staggers.<sup>4</sup> The railroads are often only a few miles in length, but can extend to a length of several hundred miles.

Because of continual entry and exit, the total number of short-line railroads changes frequently. However, the American Short-Line and Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRRA) claims that there are approximately 550 short-lines that operate nearly 30 percent of total US trackage.

## WEST VIRGINIA'S EXPERIENCE

As noted above, many of West Virginia's branch-lines were constructed to move coal from mine sites to mainline trackage. Accordingly, as mining activity declines, the branch-lines often become unnecessary. In some cases, Class I owners will simply remove a branch from service when coal traffic ceases, particularly if there is reason to expect that it may resume. In other cases, the owning railroad will immediately seek to sell or abandon the branch-line.

Although abandonment data is difficult to obtain, reliable data was collected for West Virginia's two Class I carriers (CSX and NS) branch-lines directly from the carriers for this study. Based on the most recently available data, CSX has 262.85 miles of abandoned branch-lines representing 21.3 percent of all CSX branch-lines in the state. NS has 52.59

<sup>4</sup> In 1980, there were approximately 180 short-line railroads operating over roughly 8,000 miles of track. In 2004, there are approximately 550 short-lines operating over 50,000 miles of track.

miles of abandoned branch-line trackage, representing 11.3 percent of all NS branch-lines in the state. Additional information is included in *Section 5 - West Virginia's Branch-Lines, Branch-Lines Inventory*.

Table 2.2 provides a brief description of the short-line railroads that provide freight service in West Virginia. As this table indicates, at least, three of the state's short-lines were the direct result of planned or actual Class I abandonments.

**Table 2.2**  
**West Virginia Short-Line Freight Railroads**

<i>Railroad</i>	<i>Miles in West Virginia</i>	<i>Form of Ownership</i>	<i>Subject of Recent or Planned Abandonment</i>
Kanawha Rail Corp.	3	Corporate	No
South Branch Valley Railroad	52	State	Yes
Vaughan Railroad	NA	Corporate	No
West Virginia Central Railroad	110	State	Yes
West Virginia Southern Railroad	18	Private	No
Winchester and Western Railroad	24	Private	N/A
Elk River Railroad	80	Private	Yes
Wheeling and Lake Erie Railroad	10	Corporate	No

## **ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES**

For West Virginia policy-makers, there are at least two additional factors that further complicate the challenge of preserving branch-line railroad capacity. The first of these is the increased weights of loaded equipment being used on Class I railroads, the second challenge relates to CXST's obvious desire to eliminate hundreds of miles of West Virginia trackage.

**Heavier Equipment** The railroad industry has moved rapidly toward the adoption of railcars having a gross loaded weight of 286,000 pounds (286K). The ability to handle 286K cars, which are also termed heavy axle load (HAL) cars, is important if branch-lines are to remain viable carriers of many commodities, especially those of high bulk such as coal, mineral products, grain, agricultural chemicals, wood products, and metal products. The use of HAL cars reduces railroad costs for car ownership, labor, fuel, car and maintenance. These cars allow shippers to move more product per carload, with a resulting savings in rates. The need to use fewer cars

reduces demands on railroad system capacity, an important consideration given the capacity constraints now being experienced in many portions of the network. Industry sources indicate that the majority of new hopper, covered hopper, and gondola cars now being ordered by Class I railroads and private railcar owners are 286K compatible. To remain a viable portion of the railroad transportation system, branch-lines must be able to handle these cars.

The movement to heavier equipment may diminish the role of short-line railroads as a means of capacity preservation. The 286K cars accelerate the deterioration of track and bridges. Most short-lines, created from light density branch lines sold or abandoned by Class I railroads, rarely have the capacity to make the investments necessary to accommodate the 286K cars. Many of these properties had been unprofitable or barely profitable for many years before being converted to short-line operation. Thus, there had been little investment either in capital or maintenance to track and bridges. Rail, ties, and other track components do not meet modern standards, and often are in worn condition. Some track may be incapable of supporting 286K cars. In other cases, operation of these cars will overstress and rapidly degrade track, resulting in high maintenance costs.

The short line industry is extremely concerned about impacts of 286K cars on track and bridges, and the costs of upgrading to safely and economically handle this traffic. The approximately nine percent increase in axle loading for a 286K car may, at first seem modest, but it can have dramatic effects on the typically light track construction found on many short lines. Much short line track is already highly stressed by 263,000 pound cars, especially given the unfortunate tendency of small railroads to maintain track to the minimal standards established by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). Tests performed by the Association of American Railroads on the effects of HAL cars have shown that freight cars exert dynamic loads in excess of 1.8 times the static load because of track irregularities. Cars harmonically excited by periodic low rail joints can impose peak vertical wheel loads as high as 3 to 5 times the static wheel load. Since most short lines have 39-foot jointed rail, this is especially relevant.

## Section 3 – Branch-Line Preservation

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### METHODS OF PRESERVATION

The Surface Transportation Board (STB) identified two primary alternatives to abandonment and two alternative uses for rail rights-of-way.<sup>5</sup> The alternatives to abandonment continue rail operations (although changes may occur) but replace the Class I carrier with another service provider (the branch-lines are then referred to as short lines). The alternative uses of rights-of-way eliminate rail operations but retain the rail corridors and rights-of-way should rail service be needed in the future. Rail carriers scrutinize the branch-line operations before deciding on the fate of the line but most either chose the voluntary sale of the line (preserving both the track and right-of-way) or railbanking (removing the track but preserving the right-of-way) methods of preservation.<sup>6</sup>

### Alternatives to Abandonment (Short Line Purchases)

Although a Class I carrier may consider a branch-line unprofitable, other parties may want to continue operating the line under other arrangements. Rather than abandoning the line, the carriers may consider alternatives such as forced sales/subsidies and voluntary sales/operations.

#### *FORCED SALES AND SUBSIDIES*

When parties cannot agree on the price or terms of a sale or subsidy, Congress and the STB can force the sale or subsidy of the lines proposed for abandonment. Forced sales and subsidies can occur when lines are already approved for abandonment or when lines are subject to abandonment but the abandonment process has not started.

If a line has been approved for abandonment, any financially responsible party may compel the railroad to sell or conduct subsidized operations over the line to continue service under the offer of financial assistance (OFA) procedures.<sup>7</sup> After cost, traffic, and physical condition reports have been shared and OFAs have been filed, the offeror provides a detailed offer and the carrier provides an estimate to keep the line (or portion of line) in operation. If the STB finds that the offeror is financially responsible and the offer reasonable, the abandonment will be postponed and the parties can negotiate. If the negotiations are successful, then the parties enter

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<sup>5</sup> Surface Transportation Board. *Overview: Abandonments & Alternatives to Abandonments*. April 1997.

<sup>6</sup> The WV State Rail Authority (the state's railroad planning agency) and the Public Service Commission continue to have input into the discontinuance of service process.

<sup>7</sup> 49 U.S.C. 10904 and 49 CFR 1152.27.

into a purchase or subsidy agreement to continue rail service and the abandonment application is dismissed. If the negotiations are unsuccessful, then either party may ask the STB to establish terms and conditions. If the terms and conditions are accepted by the offeror, then the railroad is forced to comply with them. Under the forced sales and subsidies of lines approved for abandonment, minimum service requirements are established for the offeror.<sup>8</sup> These include:

- The purchaser may not transfer or discontinue service on the line for at least two years after assuming responsibility.
- After two years, the purchaser may transfer the line to the seller but it must wait at least five years before the line can be sold to other carriers.

When a line is subject to abandonment, interested parties (such as shippers and communities) may compel the STB to require the railroad to sell the line before the abandonment application is filed under the feeder railroad development program. The price for the sale is either negotiated and agreed upon by the parties or is set by the STB. The STB requires the purchaser to demonstrate several requirements including:

- The purchaser can pay the net liquidation value of the line or the going concern value, whichever is higher.
- The purchaser must provide adequate service for at least three years.

The feeder railroad development program has both advantages and disadvantages. The benefits of the program include eliminating the time and expense involved in the abandonment process and preventing the physical condition of the line from worsening before the purchaser assumes responsibility. However, the program can force a carrier to sell at a price that it may not have agreed upon (set by the STB) and then subject the purchaser (operator of the new short line) to an immediate adversarial relationship with the carrier (operator of the main line).

#### *VOLUNTARY SALES AND OPERATIONS*

Before the abandonment process occurs, interested parties may negotiate the voluntary purchase of a line. Exemptions from regulations and special provisions favor the voluntary purchase of lines to continue service on lines that would have otherwise been abandoned. There are two types of voluntary sales - class exemptions and individual exemptions.

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<sup>8</sup> 49 U.S.C. 10904(f)(4)(A).



Voluntary purchases of lines subject to abandonment almost always fall under one of three class exemptions (Sections 10901, 10902, and 11323). After the deregulation triggered by the Staggers Act, Class I railroads sold or abandoned many of their unprofitable or marginally profitable lines. As a result of the number of approved requests to acquire and maintain service on these lines and the significant level of public interest, the Interstate Commerce Commission developed broad class exemption procedures to the formal acquisition procedures in 1986.

When no class exemption applies, interested parties may seek an individual exemption for almost any small rail acquisition or operation. Additionally, some types of rail operations and transactions (such as the ownership or use of a spur, industrial, team, switching, or side tracks) are exempt from STB regulations.<sup>9</sup>

### Alternative Uses of Rights-of Way (Railbanking)<sup>10</sup>

When rail carriers have no immediate use of tracks but do not want to lose the rail corridor to future development, the carriers may railbank the corridor. Railbanking generally involves removing the rails and ties, maintaining a clear right-of-way, and keeping the ballast in place throughout its public or trail use life.

The regulatory benefits of railbanking can be extremely important to railroads because many railroads have easements over the land of adjoining landowners rather than having ownership of the land beneath their tracks. Should a rail carrier simply abandon the tracks, the right-of-way reverts to the original landowner, which may not be the carrier. But if the rail carrier railbanks the tracks, the right-of-way remains with the rail carrier and can be reactivated should the rail carrier or a short line operator choose to resume operations.

Although railbanking preserves the right-of-way, railbanked lines are seldom returned to service.<sup>11</sup> As of October 1999, only three rights-of-way were returned to service after being railbanked. In Iowa, a small part (350 feet out of 64.5 miles) was returned to service after a year of being railbanked (filed in 1990). In Ohio, 9.1 miles of a right-of-way that had been railbanked three years earlier was returned to service (filed in 1993; the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy reported that this area was never developed as a

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<sup>9</sup> 49 U.S.C. 10906.

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that railroads are granted the right to build and operate tracks by the different states in which they operate. Rules vary by state if operations as a railroad cease. It remains to be seen what legal challenges may arise from railbanking.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office. *Surface Transportation: Issues Related to Preserving Inactive Rail Lines as Trails*. October 1999.

trail). In Missouri, a short section (1,100 feet out 6.2 miles) was returned to service after five years of being railbanked (filed in 1997).

The U.S. General Accounting Office reported to the Honorable Sam Brownback, U.S. Senate, that the likelihood of additional railbanked lines returning to service in the near future is low after speaking with the four major Class I carriers. A Union Pacific (UP) official stated that it would only resume service on a railbanked line if a major change occurs, such as a large shipper locating along a banked line. Additionally, UP does not even maintain information on how many rights-of-way it has banked or where they are located. CSX officials reported that their banked lines are probably not located in areas that would need freight service. An NS official stated that its banked rights-of-way were banked under the assumption that the conversion to trails would be permanent.

The process for railbanking relies on adherence to strict timeframes that begin once the lines are approved for abandonment or exempted from abandonment. At this point, interested parties may negotiate voluntary agreements to use a railroad right-of-way for either public use or trail use. Additionally, two rail carriers - CSX and NS - use discontinuance authorities to manage rail lines that may be removed from service but are not going to be railbanked.

#### *PUBLIC USE CONDITIONS*

One form of railbanking is applying for a public use condition so that the rail corridor may be used for an alternative public use, such as highways, other forms of mass transit, conservation, energy production, or energy transmission. The STB may prohibit the railroad from selling or disposing of the rail corridor for a statutorily imposed 180-day period. During this time, interested parties may negotiate with the railroad but if the parties fail to reach an agreement then the STB must allow the railroad to fully abandon and dispose of the line. The STB cannot require the rail carrier to sell the line (including the rail corridor and right-of-way) for public use. Public use railbanking is not used as much as trail use railbanking.

#### *REQUESTS FOR TRAIL USE CONDITIONS*

The most common form of railbanking is the Rails-to-Trails program, which is generally involves the combined efforts of the rail carriers, states, U.S. Department of Transportation, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, local communities, and other partners to develop the areas into recreational paths for public use.

The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy maintains the most accurate information on the number of *developed* trails and trail mileage in every state. However, this information may differ from the information maintained by other entities (such as states and the STB) because the trails are *developed* rather than *proposed*, the trails may not precisely follow the rail lines, the trail use requests may not have been granted, the rail carrier and trail sponsor did not come to terms on an agreement, or the trail sponsor did not notify the STB that it canceled the trail use agreements. Both West Virginia and Ohio have used the Rails-to-Trails program to railbank comparable track mileages while Pennsylvania has railbanked nearly twice as many miles. Other neighboring states do not aggressively use the Rails-to-Trails program. *Please see Table 3.1.*

Table 3.1  
Neighboring State Rails-to-Trails Count and Mileage

<i>State</i>	<i>Number of Trails</i>	<i>Trail Mileage</i>
West Virginia	54	442
Ohio	51	536
Pennsylvania	114	1,185
Virginia	27	208
Maryland	20	96
Tennessee	17	45
North Carolina	14	32
Kentucky	6	13

Source: Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, July 2004.

#### *CARRIER'S DISCONTINUANCE AUTHORITY*

Two of the four largest rail carriers have developed policies not to abandon or bank additional rights-of-way when *any* potential for future rail service exists. Both CSX and NS have discontinuance authorities that oversee and preserve lines and allow the carriers to retain right-of-way without obligating them to provide service. These carriers maintain the rights-of-way and avoid the problems of returning track to service under the railbanking program. Both CSX and NS may be able to avoid public challenges to resumption of service and avoid litigation from landowners with underlying rights to properties.

### **COSTS OF PRESERVING CURRENT / FUTURE SERVICE**

When there is a forced sale or subsidy, the State will often assist the railroad by providing substantial money for rehabilitation of the branch-line.<sup>12</sup> When rail lines are being preserved under the Rails-to-Trails

<sup>12</sup> Surface Transportation Board. *Overview: Abandonments & Alternatives to Abandonments*. April 1997.

program, federal Transportation Enhancement grants from the U.S. Department of Transportation are available to cover about half of the costs, with the other half being matched by federal, non-DOT funds; match donations; Federal Highway Administration; and state and local governments.

Under most circumstances, the annual cost of preserving current service or of maintaining a right-of-way for future service on a rail route that can not be profitably operated by a Class I carrier is substantial, often amounting to several thousand dollars per track mile per year. Again, through the use of local, state and federal funds, various jurisdictions spend approximately \$500 million annually to preserve branch-line capacity. In West Virginia, during the 2003 fiscal year, the State Rail Authority spent more than \$6 million for this purpose, primarily in support of the two state-owned short-line railroads.

## **THE ECONOMICS OF CONTINUED ACCESS TO THE NATIONAL RAIL NETWORK**

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At the most basic level, governments intervene in commerce when freely operating markets fail to produce socially optimal outcomes (efficiency concerns. Governments also routinely take actions aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of local jurisdictions relative to other regions (economic development). In the case of branch rail line preservation, the governmental decision to intervene probably reflects both motivations. Two factors lie at the heart of the issue.

- Certain lines of commerce involving the movement of high volumes of lower-valued commodities are impossible without access to either rail or barge transportation.
- In most cases, property acquisition costs and the cost of environmental compliance make the cost of new rail line construction prohibitive.

Given these conditions, communities must preserve current rail access or face the very real possibility that this access will not be available within the foreseeable future. The latter outcome very necessarily implies that the community will not be able to participate in economic activities for which it might, otherwise, be well suited. In an optimal setting, private market

interactions will preserve rail access. However, when private markets fail to sustain railroad access, many jurisdictions have opted to intervene.<sup>13</sup>

## Section 4 - State Rail Plans

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Under 49 U.S. Code 221 Local Rail Freight Assistance, states must maintain a state rail plan to be eligible for federal assistance.<sup>14</sup> This regulation requires states to maintain an adequate plan for rail transportation in the state and a suitable process for updating, revising, and modifying the plan. The state plans are to be administered or coordinated by a designated state authority and are to provide for a fair distribution of resources. Additionally, states must ensure that they will maintain adequate procedures for financial control, accounting, and performance evaluation for the proper use of assistance provided by the federal government.

### STATE RAIL AUTHORITIES AND STATE RAIL PLANS

As part of this study, the current rail preservation practices of several neighboring and nearby states were examined. Because of differences in the amount of track located in each state, the active carriers, the geography, and the reasons for operating, states vary on the amount of information included in state rail plans. This study examined the abandonment/railbanking sections of four nearby states that have developed detailed state rail plans - Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina.

#### Kentucky State Rail Plan

Kentucky's 2002 State Wide Rail Plan is one of the more recent rail plans of WV's neighboring states. Although Kentucky is working to improve its rail preservation program, its present system is very weak. Kentucky has only 11.5 miles of rails to trails, ranking it the 47<sup>th</sup> state in rails to trails mileage.<sup>15</sup> Only Delaware, Hawaii and Alaska are worse, with Hawaii and Alaska having almost no rail mileage at all. To improve this situation, Kentucky is trying to change past practices with several goals being devoted to rail line preservation. If rail service preservation is not an option, the

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<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, while the popular press routinely touts the linkage between continued rail service and economic development, a thorough review of the economics literature reveals no empirical evidence supporting this contention.

<sup>14</sup> 49 U.S. Code 22102 Eligibility.

<sup>15</sup> Kentucky Rails-to-Trails Council. These numbers differ slightly from the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy figure of 6 trails and 13 miles. The difference is likely due to the release date of information or the development and length of trails.

State is implementing new procedures and policies to preserve rights-of-way for future use or recreational use.

### **Ohio State Rail Plan**

In May 2004, Ohio completed the comprehensive transportation study, Access Ohio 2004-2030. Chapter 6: Ohio's Rail System outlines Ohio's plan for short- and long-term recommendations for the state's passenger and freight rail system. The Ohio Rail Development Commission, an independent commission within the State Department of Transportation, actively seeks rail lines that are pending abandonment. They consider whether the rail line can be saved by preventing the loss of service. If the rail line is bound for abandonment, they will take steps to preserve the right-of-way through railbanking and possibly rails-to-trails. Currently Ohio has 536 miles of rails-to-trails along 51 trails. Ohio is one of three states that to have experienced banked rail return to service.<sup>16</sup>

### **Pennsylvania State Rail Plan**

Pennsylvania's current rail study is the 2003 Comprehensive Rail Freight Study and State Rail Plan. Pennsylvania leads the nation in the number of rails-to-trails that have been developed and is fourth in the nation in the number of trail miles developed.<sup>17</sup> Included in the State Rail Plan, the Rail Freight Preservation and Improvement Program helps create or expand new rail lines and helps protect low service lines when economically feasible by creating assistantships such as grants and loans. This program was developed due to the passing of the Rail Freight Preservation & Improvement Act of 1984 by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. When there are no other options other than abandonment, Pennsylvania takes the steps necessary to preserve the rights-of-way through railbanking and rails-to-trails.

### **North Carolina State Rail Plan**

Since the 1920s, North Carolina has lost several miles of railroad right-of-way due to abandonment regulations. This has caused the state to take a strong stand on rail corridor preservation in North Carolina's State Rail Plan 2000. North Carolina strongly believes that preservation through state acquisition is vital for the transportation system and in the public's best

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<sup>16</sup> See previous section, "Alternative Uses of Rights-of-Way (Railbanking)."

<sup>17</sup> Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. State Trails and Trail Mileage Counts.

interest.<sup>18</sup> Unlike some other states that favor railbanking, North Carolina has purchased almost as many short lines as carriers have railbanked in the state. In 2000, North Carolina had 139.5 miles of railbanked lines and is actively looking at over 40 more miles that may be acquired.<sup>19</sup> Only 32 miles of the railbanked lines have been developed into trails. Between 1988 and 1998, the state had purchased 93.26 miles of short lines among 10 lines.<sup>20</sup>

## **WV STATE RAIL AUTHORITY**

The West Virginia State Rail Authority (WVSRA) was originally established as the West Virginia Railroad Maintenance Authority and later re-designated as the WVSRA. It promotes the beneficial use of rail transportation and works to protect essential rail service across the state. The WVSRA consists of seven members including the chairman (secretary of the State Department of Transportation) and six Governor-appointed and WV Senate-approved members who serve staggered six-year terms.<sup>21</sup>

Among its many functions are the acts of purchasing short lines and railbanking. The WVSRA has purchased two short lines, the South Branch Valley Railroad (52.4-miles) and the West Virginia Central Railroad (132.1-miles), totaling 184.5-miles. The WVSRA has railbanked 10 lines for temporary public recreation use or future rail service should the market warrant this service. Currently, the WV State Rail Authority has railbanked 266.28 miles of track. These properties are described in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1**  
**WVSRA Railbanked Properties**

<i>Name</i>	<i>End Points</i>	<i>Mileage</i>
Greenbrier River Rail Trail	North Caldwell - Cass	74.93
Greenbrier River Rail Trail	Cass - Durbin	17.11
North Bend Rail Trail	Wilsonburg - Walker	60.57
North Bend Rail Trail	Walker - Parkersburg	11.04
Harrison County Rail Trail	Clarksburg - Spelter	6.93
Harrison County Rail Trail	West Clarksburg - Hackers Creek	14.13
Marion County Rail Trail	Shinnston - Fairmont	12.27
Tri-Rivers Trail	Richwood - Camden on Gauley	14.50

<sup>18</sup> Rail Corridor Preservation Policy, October 1998.

<sup>19</sup> North Carolina State Rail Plan 2000.

<sup>20</sup> North Carolina Department of Transportation, Rail Division.

<sup>21</sup> WV State Code Chapter 29 Article 18.

Caperton Trail	Reedsville - PA State Line	50.23
Panhandle Trail	Weirton - PA State Line	4.57
<b>TOTAL MILES</b>		<b>266.28</b>

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Source: WVSRA

## WV STATE RAIL PLAN AND UPDATE

On February 23, 1994, R.L. Banks & Associates, Inc. of Washington, D.C. completed an update to the *State Rail Plan*, which was dated September 28, 1977. The *State Rail Plan* was prepared in accordance with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) requirements included in the *Local Rail Freight Assistance to States*. The purpose of the *State Rail Plan Update* was to provide a rational basis for planning State actions and expenditures and submitting requests for federal assistance. With regard to branch-line preservation, the State Rail Plan Update addresses actions that may be taken to anticipate and react to rail abandonments including state short-line purchases, railbanking, and assistance to short line and tourist line operations.



## Section 5 – West Virginia’s Branch-Lines

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West Virginia’s economy has heavily relied upon coal mining since the early 1900s. Although this area was fortunate to have mountains with large reserves of coal, it was satiated with accessibility problems. To help address these problems, railroads were constructed to serve as the primary method of transporting large freight out of the areas. As the economies of some communities changed, the need for large freight transportation was reduced or eliminated. As a result, several branch-lines became inactive or abandoned. This section identifies the “active,” “at-risk,” and “abandoned” branch-lines of the Class I carriers within West Virginia.<sup>22, 23</sup> Branch-lines that were sold or leased from a Class I carrier to another party (i.e., local operators and tourist trains) have been excluded from this study.

### IDENTIFICATION OF BRANCH-LINES

#### Total Branch-Lines

Including “active,” “at-risk,” and “abandoned,” there are 146 Class I branch-lines totaling 1,697.66 miles in West Virginia. The majority of these lines are owned by CSX (72.6%) and the remaining lines are owned by NS (27.4%). CSX owns 1,231.91 miles over 98 lines, while NS owns 465.75 miles over 48 lines.

#### “Active” Branch-Lines

As implied by the name, “active” branch-lines are active tracks that are currently being used and maintained. Out of the total Class I branch-line mileage, 56.2% of the lines are considered “active” and are not likely at risk for abandonment. There are 26 “active” Class I branch-lines totaling 953.76 miles in West Virginia. CSX operates 704.57 miles over 14 lines, while NS operates 249.19 miles over 12 lines.

#### “At-Risk” Branch-Lines

“At-risk” branch-lines have either low tonnage levels or completely eliminated operations. Out of the total Class I branch-line mileage, 25.2% of the lines are considered “at-risk” and are candidates for preservation. There are 59 “at-risk” Class I branch-lines totaling 428.46 miles in West

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<sup>22</sup> All branch-line data was collected from 2000-2003 CSX and NS track charts and timetables; interviews with CSX and NS personnel; 2003 North American Railroad Map developed by Railway Station Productions, LLC; and CBER estimates.

<sup>23</sup> In an effort to be as complete as possible, all potential identified branch-lines are provided here. These branch-lines were not further stratified due to a lack of complete data for all lines.

Virginia. CSX maintains 264.49 miles over 38 lines, while NS maintains 163.97 miles over 21 lines.

State rail authorities have different methods of identifying “at-risk” trackage, most of which is subjective and treated on a case-by-case basis. However, identifying these lines at the state-level is necessary but can become cumbersome to manage. Pennsylvania’s Department of Transportation categorizes its “at-risk” branch-lines as those with annual tonnage under 5 million gross tons (mgt) and “significantly at-risk” as those with annual tonnage under 1 mgt.<sup>24</sup> For this study, the CBER assumed any active line with capacity less than 3 mgt was considered “at-risk.” This level was chosen after examining many of West Virginia’s short but necessary lines that serve many of the coalfield areas, timbering operations, and manufacturing operations. These lines serve areas that can become exhausted of resources, cease operations, and consequently eliminate the need for rail service. These “at-risk” tracks should be reviewed individually to determine how long service may continue, which could vary considerably based on the need for service.

Many of the branch-lines with eliminated operations are either (1) lines that are being reserved for future use or (2) routes that are likely to be abandoned. Since these lines have no current capacity, they are included in the “at-risk” category.

### “Abandoned” Branch-Lines

Branch-lines that have been converted to recreational uses or have had the rights-of-way restored to the original owners are considered “abandoned” branch-lines. Out of the total Class I branch-line mileage, 18.6 percent of the lines are considered “abandoned.” There are 61 segments of “abandoned” Class I branch-lines totaling 315.44 miles in West Virginia. CSX abandoned 262.85 miles over 46 segments, while NS abandoned 52.59 miles over 15 segments.

## BRANCH-LINES INVENTORY

The following tables identify “active,” “at-risk,” and “abandoned” branch-lines in West Virginia. The data is organized by Class I carrier and by county. If a rail line crosses county lines, the CBER estimated the mileage of the segment within each county and included the number of county segments that complete the entire line in the parentheses after the branch name. If tonnage is marked with an (S), then that rail line crosses county lines and the tonnage level represents the entire volume for that line. The

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<sup>24</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Transportation; Bureau of Rail Freight, Ports and Waterways. *2003 Comprehensive Rail Freight Study and State Rail Plan.*

tonnage level is based on categories defined by the 2003 North American Railroad Map developed by Railway Station Productions, LLC. Tonnage and tonnage level may differ due to the release dates and availability of data. Tonnage levels are defined in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1**

**Tonnage Levels**

<i>Tonnage Level</i>	<i>Tonnage (million gross tons)</i>
1	0.1 - 4.9 mgt
2	5.0 - 9.9 mgt
3	10.0 - 19.9 mgt
4	20.0 - 39.9 mgt
5	40.0 - 59.9 mgt
6	60.0 - 99.9 mgt
7	Over 100 mgt

Source: 2003 North American Railroad Map, Railway Station Productions, LLC.

**“Active” Branch-Lines**

The greatest amount of “active” tracks is located in Fayette, Boone, Mingo, and Wyoming counties. CSX owns all of the trackage in Boone while NS owns all of the trackage in Wyoming and most of the trackage in Fayette and Mingo. *See Tables 5.2-A, 5.2-B, and 5.3.*

***“ACTIVE” BRANCH-LINES, BY GEOGRAPHY***

By examining Map 1, several characteristics are very clear about “active” Class I branch-line mileage in West Virginia. There are no “active” lines in the eastern panhandle, the highlands area, or the north central parts of the state. The majority of “active” branch-line mileage is located in the following four areas:

- Ohio River counties
- Limited northern coal/manufacturing counties
- Southern coal/timbering counties
- North-south corridor of central counties, west of the highlands

***“ACTIVE” BRANCH-LINES, BY CARRIER***

The Ohio River Branch (CSX), which runs for 211.30 miles from Wheeling to Huntington, is a very active route with an annual tonnage of 14.45 mgt. Two CSX lines, the Ohio River Branch and the Short-Line Branch, add activity to the northern counties. The only “active” NS line in northern

West Virginia is the 1.5 mile Wana Spur in Monongalia County. Only CSX has "active" lines in the central counties of Barbour, Lewis, Upshur, Braxton,

**Table 5.2-A**  
**2000-2003 "Active" Branch-Lines, by Class I Carrier**

<i>Carrier Code</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>Length (miles)</i>	<i>Tonnage (millions)</i>	<i>Tonnage Level</i>
<i>CSX "Active" Branch-Lines</i>					
BUC	Cowen (2 of 6)	Barbour	21.00	(S) 18.41	-
CLL	Big Coal (2 of 2)	Boone	30.00	(S) 33.20	-
CLF	Coal River (3 of 4)	Boone	23.00	(S) 28.65	5
CLN	Seth	Boone	10.50	4.15	1
CLN	Seth	Boone	10.50	4.15	1
CLJ	West Fork	Boone	9.06	6.59	1
BUC	Cowen (2 of 6)	Braxton	28.00	(S) 18.41	-
BN	Ohio River Branch (1 of 9)	Cabell	17.60	(S) 14.45	-
CLS	Logan (1 of 4)	Cabell	15.50	(S) 11.44	3
CAY	Gauley	Clay	6.03	(S) 5.67	-
CAY	Gauley	Fayette	8.00	(S) 5.67	-
BNA	Short Line	Harrison	35.00	(S) 11.21	-
BN	Ohio River Branch (3 of 9)	Jackson	28.70	(S) 14.45	-
CLI	Pond Fork	Kanawha	28.67	26.05	4
CLF	Coal River (1 of 4)	Kanawha	16.00	(S) 28.65	5
CLL	Big Coal (1 of 2)	Kanawha	5.60	(S) 33.20	-
BUC	Cowen (2 of 6)	Lewis	14.00	(S) 18.41	-
CLS	Logan (2 of 4)	Lincoln	32.00	(S) 11.44	3
CLF	Coal River (2 of 4)	Lincoln	10.50	(S) 28.65	5
CLS	Logan (3 of 4)	Logan	36.80	(S) 11.44	3
CLU	Buffalo	Logan	16.32	5.44	1
CLF	Coal River (4 of 4)	Logan	3.00	(S) 28.65	5
BS	Fairmont (2 of 2)	Marion	20.20	(S) 8.11	-
BN	Ohio River Branch (8 of 9)	Marshall	28.00	(S) 14.45	-
BN	Ohio River Branch (2 of 9)	Mason	51.00	(S) 14.45	-
CLS	Logan (4 of 4)	Mingo	6.50	(S) 11.44	3
CAY	Gauley	Nicholas	7.50	(S) 5.67	-
BN	Ohio River Branch (9 of 9)	Ohio	4.00	(S) 14.45	-
BN	Ohio River Branch (5 of 9)	Pleasants	16.00	(S) 14.45	-
CLP	Jarrolds Valley	Raleigh	15.12	13.88	-
CLQ	Big Marsh Fork	Raleigh	7.40	11.93	1
BS	Fairmont (1 of 2)	Taylor	6.00	(S) 8.11	-
BUC	Cowen (1 of 6)	Taylor	6.00	(S) 18.41	-
BN	Ohio River Branch (6 of 9)	Tyler	14.00	(S) 14.45	-
BUC	Cowen (2 of 6)	Upshur	26.00	(S) 18.41	-
BUC	Cowen (2 of 6)	Webster	16.00	(S) 18.41	-
BNA	Short Line	Wetzel	23.07	(S) 11.21	-
BN	Ohio River Branch (7 of 9)	Wetzel	12.00	(S) 14.45	-
BN	Ohio River Branch (4 of 9)	Wood	40.00	(S) 14.45	-
<b>TOTAL MILEAGE</b>			<b>704.57</b>		

*Continued to Table 5.2-B*

**Table 5.2-B**  
**2000-2003 "Active" Branch-Lines, by Class I Carrier**

<i>Carrier Code</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>Length (miles)</i>	<i>Tonnage (millions)</i>	<i>Tonnage Level</i>
<i>NS "Active" Branch-Lines</i>					
-	Loveridge Sec.	Fayette	79.60	21.90	1
-	Dry Fork Branch	McDowell	44.87	31.00	4
-	Lenore Branch	Mingo	22.26	5.80	1
-	Gilbert Branch	Mingo	12.95	24.40	3
-	Delorme Branch	Mingo	9.60	9.40	2
-	Guyandot River Branch (2 of 2)	Mingo	5.00	(S) 12.6	2
-	Alma Branch	Mingo	3.55	4.90	2
-	Ben Creek Spur	Mingo	2.80	11.90	2
-	Marrowbone Spur	Mingo	2.45	5.40	0
-	Wana Spur	Monongalia	1.50	5.50	1
-	Guyandot River Branch (1 of 2)	Wyoming	40.00	(S) 12.6	2
-	Morri Branch	Wyoming	19.40	7.50	2
-	Pinnacle Creek Spur	Wyoming	5.21	6.10	2
<b>TOTAL MILEAGE</b>			<b>249.19</b>		

Webster, Clay, and Nicholas. Both CSX and NS have "active" tracks in the southern coalfield counties. CSX is located primarily in Boone, Fayette, Kanawha, Lincoln, and Logan with limited "active" tracks in Mingo, Nicholas, and Raleigh. Over 99 percent of NS's "active" tracks are concentrated in the four southern counties of Fayette, McDowell, Mingo, and Wyoming.

Table 5.3  
2000-2003 "Active" Mileage, by County

<i>County</i>	<i>Mileage</i>
Barbour	21.00
Boone	83.06
Braxton	28.00
Cabell	33.10
Clay	6.03
Fayette	87.60
Harrison	23.07
Jackson	28.70
Kanawha	50.27
Lewis	14.00
Lincoln	42.50
Logan	56.12
Marion	20.20
Marshall	28.00
Mason	51.00
McDowell	44.87
Mingo	65.11
Monongalia	1.50
Nicholas	7.50
Ohio	4.00
Pleasants	16.00
Raleigh	22.52
Taylor	12.00
Tyler	14.00
Upshur	26.00
Webster	16.00
Wetzel	47.00
Wood	40.00
Wyoming	64.61
<b>TOTAL MILEAGE</b>	<b>953.76</b>

## "At-Risk" Branch-Lines

The greatest amount of "at-risk" branch-lines is located in Greenbrier, Logan, McDowell, Raleigh, Summers, Wayne, and Wyoming. CSX owns all of the "at-risk" tracks in Greenbrier, Logan, and Summers, while NS owns all of the "at-risk" tracks in McDowell, Wayne, and Wyoming. Both Class I carriers own "at-risk" tracks in Raleigh County. *See Tables 5.4-A, 5.4-B, and 5.5.*

### *"AT-RISK" BRANCH-LINES, BY GEOGRAPHY*

The most noticeable difference in Map 2 when compared to Map 1 is that the activity along the Ohio River Branch (which is the only branch-line in these counties) is great enough that there are no "at-risk" tracks in Wetzel, Tyler, Pleasants, Wood, Jackson, Mason, and Cabell counties. In addition to the Ohio River counties, there are no "at-risk" lines in the eastern panhandle or in a few dotted areas of the state. The majority of "at-risk" branch-line mileage is located in the following two areas:

- Southern coal/timbering counties
- Northeast coal/manufacturing counties

Each of the southern coal/timbering counties mentioned earlier has over 25 miles of "at-risk" tracks per county. Most of the northeast coal and manufacturing counties have less than 10 miles of "at-risk" tracks per county (Barbour, Harrison, Marion, Randolph, and Taylor). There are a few other counties with "at-risk" trackage that appear on Map 2 but most of these counties have less than 10 miles of "at-risk" trackage. These counties include Marshall, Gilmer, Braxton, Randolph, and Putnam.

### *"AT-RISK" BRANCH-LINES, BY CARRIER*

CSX has "at-risk" trackage across the state, appearing in most of the shaded counties on Map 2 except in McDowell, Mercer, Wayne, and Wyoming counties. The greatest amount of CSX "at-risk" trackage is located in Greenbrier, Logan, Raleigh, Summers, and Upshur. NS only has "at-risk" trackage in the southern counties of Fayette, McDowell, Mercer, Mingo, Raleigh, Wayne, and Wyoming.





Table 5.4-A

## 2000-2003 "At-Risk" Branch-Lines, by Class I Carrier

<i>Carrier Code</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>Length (miles)</i>	<i>Tonnage (millions)</i>	<i>Tonnage Level</i>
<i>CSX "At-Risk" Branch-Lines</i>					
BUO	Century	Barbour	5.05	-	-
BUN	Berryburg	Barbour	4.00	-	1
CLK	Robinson Creek	Boone	2.92	-	-
CQJ	White Oak Mine Ext.	Boone	2.44	-	-
CQI	Indian Creek Mine Ext.	Boone	2.01	-	-
BUF	Elk	Braxton	6.20	-	-
CQL	Glade Creek Spur	Fayette	2.97	-	-
CBM	Hawley Spur	Fayette	1.45	-	-
CAN	Piney Creek (1 of 2)	Fayette	1.00	(S) 2.68	-
BWY	Little Kanawha	Gilmer	1.51	-	-
CAH	Rupert	Greenbrier	20.80	0.48	-
CAJ	G&E (2 of 2)	Greenbrier	13.00	(S) 1.65	-
BWH	Grasselli	Harrison	2.15	-	-
BSF	Lumberport Cut-Off	Harrison	0.31	-	-
CLD	Cabin Creek	Kanawha	12.35	-	-
CME	Logan & Southern	Logan	11.40	1.33	-
CLH	Laurel Fork	Logan	9.00	0.47	1
CMC	Island Creek (1 of 2)	Logan	7.00	(S) 0.98	-
CMF	Pine Creek	Logan	5.95	1.00	-
CLZ	Rum Creek	Logan	3.58	0.84	1
CLV	Snap Creek	Logan	3.16	-	-
CLX	Rockhouse Creek	Logan	3.01	-	-
CLG	Beech Creek	Logan	2.11	-	-
CMK	Little Creek	Logan	1.24	-	-
BTC	Paw Paw	Marion	2.85	-	-
BNB	Moundsville Belt	Marshall	0.85	-	-
CMC	Island Creek (2 of 2)	Mingo	3.60	(S) 0.98	-
CAK	Hominy Creek	Nicholas	5.74	0.60	-
BUP	Mcmillion Spur	Nicholas	1.96	-	-
CAJ	G&E (1 of 2)	Nicholas	1.43	(S) 1.65	-
BAJ	Kingwood	Preston	14.30	-	-
CQA	Scary Spur	Putnam	2.50	-	-
CAN	Piney Creek (2 of 2)	Raleigh	25.61	(S) 2.68	-
CAQ	RS&WG	Raleigh	5.45	0.30	-
CAV	Maple Meadow Mine Ext.	Raleigh	4.50	-	-
CQB	Roland Mine Ext.	Raleigh	2.18	-	-
BUH	Pickens (2 of 2)	Randolph	6.00	(S) 1.99	-
CAF	Sewell Valley	Summers	43.70	2.45	-
BAP	Sand Lick	Taylor	2.24	-	-
BUH	Pickens (1 of 2)	Upshur	11.00	(S) 1.99	-
BTF	Ten Mile	Upshur	4.32	-	-
BUJ	Christopher	Upshur	1.65	-	-
<b>TOTAL MILEAGE</b>			<b>264.49</b>		

Continued to Table 5.4-B

**Table 5.4-B  
2000-2003 "At-Risk" Branch-Lines, by Class I Carrier**

<i>Carrier Name Code</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>Length (miles)</i>	<i>Tonnage (millions)</i>	<i>Tonnage Level</i>
<i>NS "At-Risk" Branch-Lines</i>				
- Vaco Branch	Fayette	0.84	-	1
- Tug Fork Branch	McDowell	16.00	1.30	1
- Jacobs Fork Branch	McDowell	10.35	0.90	1
- South Fork Spur	McDowell	5.64	1.00	1
- Spice Creek Branch	McDowell	4.58	-	1
- Sand Lick Branch	McDowell	4.33	0.30	1
- Four Pole Spur	McDowell	3.71	-	0
- Caretta Branch	McDowell	3.00	-	1
- Right Fork Widemouth Branch	Mercer	5.54	-	0
- Big Branch	Mercer	2.07	-	0
- Wenonah Spur	Mercer	2.00	-	0
- Mate Creek Branch	Mingo	6.26	2.80	1
- Briar Mtn. Branch	Mingo	3.96	-	1
- Lick Fork Spur	Mingo	3.09	-	1
- Sycamore Branch	Mingo	2.53	-	1
- Winding Gulf Branch	Raleigh	29.00	0.30	0
- Bolt Branch	Raleigh	2.30	-	0
- Wayne Branch	Wayne	32.84	3.00	1
- Glen Rogers Branch	Wyoming	12.00	-	1
- Cub Creek Branch	Wyoming	9.43	-	1
- Stone Coal Branch	Wyoming	4.50	0.90	1
<b>TOTAL MILEAGE</b>		<b>163.97</b>		

Table 5.5  
2000-2003 "At-Risk" Mileage, by County

<i>County</i>	<i>Mileage</i>
Barbour	9.05
Boone	7.37
Braxton	6.20
Fayette	6.26
Gilmer	1.51
Greenbrier	33.80
Harrison	2.46
Kanawha	12.35
Logan	46.45
Marion	2.85
Marshall	0.85
McDowell	47.61
Mercer	9.61
Mingo	19.44
Nicholas	9.13
Preston	14.30
Putnam	2.50
Raleigh	69.04
Randolph	6.00
Summers	43.70
Taylor	2.24
Upshur	16.97
Wayne	32.84
Wyoming	25.93
<b>TOTAL MILEAGE</b>	<b>428.46</b>

## "Abandoned" Branch-Lines

The greatest amount of "abandoned" branch-lines is located in Fayette, Greenbrier, Harrison, Kanawha, Logan, Mercer, and Webster. CSX owns all of the "abandoned" tracks in Greenbrier, Harrison, Kanawha, Logan, and Webster, while NS owns all of the "abandoned" tracks in Mercer. Both Class I carriers have "abandoned" tracks in Fayette County - 88.8% is owned by CSX and 11.2% is owned by NS. *See Tables 5.6-A, 5.6-B, and 5.7.*

### *"ABANDONED" BRANCH-LINES, BY GEOGRAPHY*

Upon comparison of Map 3 with Maps 1 and 2, one can notice that there are no Class I branch-line tracks in the eastern panhandle, indicating that the Class I carriers either sold lines that were once owned there or never constructed railroads in that area. Additionally, with the exception of 3.73 miles in Wood County, the area from the northernmost county of Hancock down the Ohio River to Wayne County does not have "abandoned" branch-lines. The majority of "abandoned" branch-line mileage is located in the following area:

- North-south corridor of central counties, west of the highlands

Only seven counties have more than 20 miles of "abandoned" tracks, located in large and/or southern counties. The remaining 16 counties with "abandoned" branch-lines have less than 20 miles of track, most have less than 10 miles of track. However, several of the counties with less than 10 miles of "abandoned" track have a considerable amount of "at-risk" track (McDowell, Summers, Wayne, and Wyoming).

### *"ABANDONED" BRANCH-LINES, BY CARRIER*

CSX has "abandoned" trackage throughout the north-south corridor of central counties with the greatest concentration of "abandoned" trackage in Fayette (35.38), Harrison (32.67), Kanawha (35.43), and Greenbrier (23.45). NS has 6 miles of "abandoned" trackage in Marion County and the remaining 46.59 miles in the seven southern counties of Fayette, McDowell, Mercer, Mingo, Raleigh, Wayne, and Wyoming.

**Table 5.6-A**  
**2000-2003 "Abandoned" Branch-Lines, by Class I Carrier**

<i>Carrier Code</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>Length (miles)</i>	<i>Year Abandoned</i>
<i>CSX "Abandoned" Branch-Lines</i>				
BWW	Bear Mountain	Barbour	2.59	1987
BMV	Astor (Section 2 of 2)	Barbour	0.83	1987
CLO	Elk Run	Boone	3.90	1991
CLM	Seng Creek	Boone	3.63	1990
CLR	Brush Creek	Boone	0.36	1986
BWZ	Sutton	Braxton	6.72	1986
CAG	Landisburg	Fayette	13.44	1990
COF	Powellton/Elkridge	Fayette	6.95	1989
BUX	Gauley River	Fayette	6.12	1989
CAO	Laurel Creek	Fayette	5.51	1992
CAU	White Oak	Fayette	3.36	1993
CAI	Big Clear Creek	Greenbrier	13.50	2001
CAM	Brushy	Greenbrier	5.70	1991
CAL	Peaser	Greenbrier	4.25	1991
BVF	WV&P (1 of 2)	Harrison	24.20	1998
BWS	Annabelle	Harrison	3.62	1983
BWG	Clarksburg	Harrison	2.66	1987
BSC	Willard	Harrison	2.19	1992
CLB	Paint Creek	Kanawha	22.10	1991
CLE	Leewood	Kanawha	7.15	1991
CMR	Republic	Kanawha	2.65	1991
CLC (COG)	Imperial	Kanawha	2.07	1991
CQH	Paint Branch	Kanawha	1.46	1981
BVF	WV&P (2 of 2)	Lewis	2.00	1998
CMQ	Trace Fork	Logan	7.82	1995
CMU	Mud Fork	Logan	4.30	1989
CMA	Dingess Run	Logan	3.72	2001
CLW	Right Fork	Logan	3.06	1991
CMD	Whitman Creek	Logan	2.48	1990
CLY	Huff Creek	Logan	2.24	1991
CMB	Band Mill	Logan	1.05	1998
CLT	Elk Creek (1 of 3)	Logan	0.50	-
BSE	Kilarm	Marion	3.26	1989
BXD	Palatine Branch	Marion	2.57	1987
BXE	Hickman Run	Marion	1.50	1987
BSG	Fairmont Belt Line	Marion	1.13	1996
CLT	Elk Creek (2 of 3)	Mingo	2.00	-
	Greer Siding	Monongalia	-	1991
BTB	Morgantown (1 of 2)	Monongalia	12.00	1991
BUG	CRB&L Co. RR (2 of 2)	Nicholas	11.54	2002
BUD	Saxman	Nicholas	5.18	1989
BUU	Panther Creek	Nicholas	1.93	1989

*Continued to Table 5.6-B*

Table 5.6-B

2000-2003 "Abandoned" Branch-Lines, by Class I Carrier

<i>Carrier Code</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>Length (miles)</i>	<i>Year Abandoned</i>
<i>CSX "Abandoned" Branch-Lines, continued</i>				
BTB	Morgantown (2 of 2)	Preston	4.00	1991
CAR	PR&PC	Raleigh	6.69	1998
CAS	Beckley Mine Ext.	Raleigh	4.25	2001
CAP	Glade Creek	Raleigh	1.27	1985
BUL	Coalton	Randolph	4.58	1997
BMV	Astor (Section 1 of 2)	Taylor	2.00	1987
BUR	Williams River	Webster	11.29	2002
BUG	CRB&L Co. RR (1 of 2)	Webster	9.00	2002
BWX	Little Kanawha IT	Wood	3.73	1987
CLT	Elk Creek (3 of 3)	Wyoming	2.80	-
<b>TOTAL MILEAGE</b>			<b>262.85</b>	
<i>NS "Abandoned" Branch-Lines</i>				
-	Beards Fork Branch	Fayette	2.70	-
-	White Oak Branch	Fayette	1.75	1999
-	Federal R.T.	Marion	6.00	-
-	Northfork Branch	McDowell	7.30	-
-	Bluestone Branch	Mercer	17.58	-
-	Crane Creek Branch	Mercer	2.00	-
-	Pocahontas Branch	Mercer	1.50	-
-	Thacker Branch	Mingo	2.30	1991
-	Mitchell Branch	Mingo	1.50	-
-	McCarr Branch	Mingo	0.95	1999
-	Bowyer Creek Branch	Raleigh	3.00	-
-	Cedar Branch	Summers	2.28	-
-	Huff Creek Branch	Wyoming	1.58	-
-	Devils Fork Branch	Wyoming	1.15	-
-	Allen Branch	Wyoming	1.00	-
<b>TOTAL MILEAGE</b>			<b>52.59</b>	

Table 5.7  
2000-2003 "Abandoned" Mileage, by County

<i>County</i>	<i>Mileage</i>
Barbour	3.42
Boone	7.89
Braxton	6.72
Fayette	39.83
Greenbrier	23.45
Harrison	32.67
Kanawha	35.43
Lewis	2.00
Logan	25.17
Marion	14.46
McDowell	7.30
Mercer	21.08
Mingo	6.75
Monongalia	12.00
Nicholas	18.65
Preston	4.00
Raleigh	15.21
Randolph	4.58
Summers	2.28
Taylor	2.00
Webster	20.29
Wood	3.73
Wyoming	6.53
<b>TOTAL MILEAGE</b>	<b>315.44</b>

## Section 6 - Conclusions

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The analysis presented thus far leads to a number of conclusions. These may be summarized as:

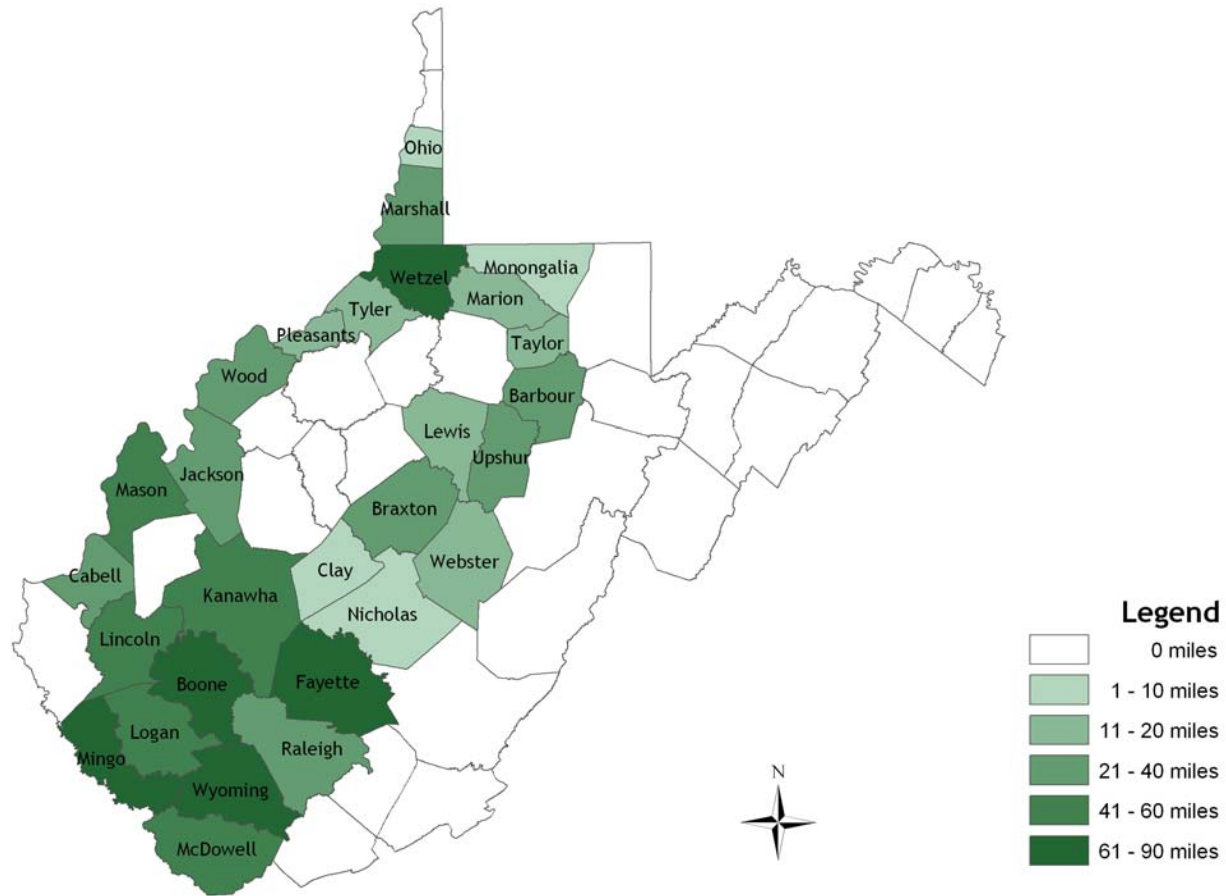
- Continuing competitive pressures on Class I carriers will likely lead to the continued abandonment of unprofitable branch-lines and secondary mainlines trackage
- Once lost, branch-line capacity is rarely restored.
- Railbanked routes are very rarely put back into service.
- Sale of candidate routes to short-lines is the most viable course. This may, however, require subsidies for rehabilitation or even ongoing operational subsidies.
- Operational / marketing advantages often can make a short-line profitable where Class I operations are not. However, this outcome depends on several factors and is, by no means, guaranteed.
- The movement to heavier railroad equipment exacerbates the problem of branch-line capacity preservation.
- The economic benefits associated with branch-line capacity preservation are case-specific and not easily quantified in any sort of generalized setting.

West Virginia, like most states, is almost certain to see a continued increase the number of rail miles subject to potential abandonment. Thus, any preferred method of branch-line capacity preservation must not only be suitable within the current context, but must also be applicable to a much more extensive trackage network.

Railbanking is easily the most affordable course. However, the cost of restoring track that has been removed appears to be prohibitive in most cases, so that one must question the efficacy of this policy course. Alternatively, converting candidate branch-lines into short-line properties is a much more effective means of capacity preservation. However, this policy approach requires significantly greater resources.

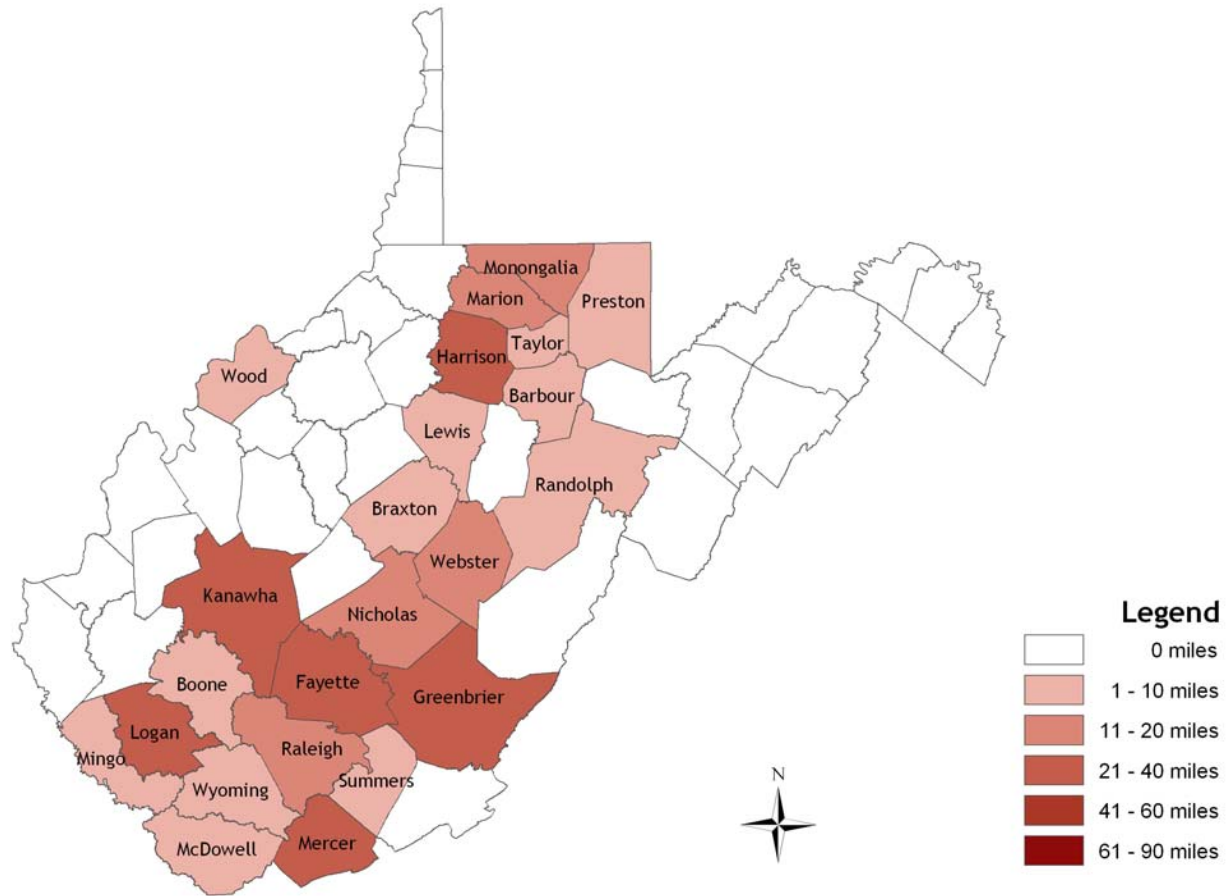


**Map 1:  
"Active" Class I Branch-Lines in WV  
953.86 Total Miles**



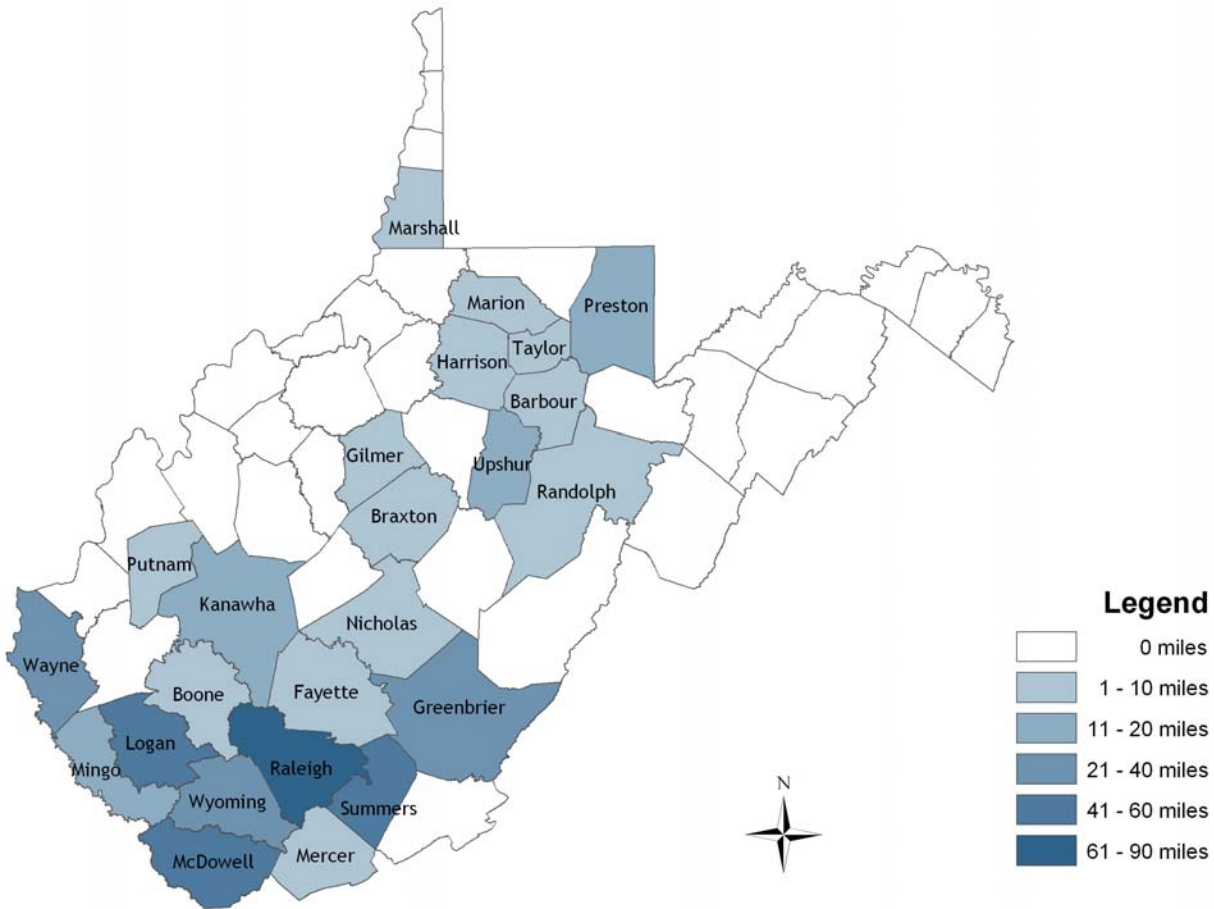
Note: Map includes only Class I carriers. Branch-lines that were sold or leased from a Class I carrier to another party have been excluded.  
Source: 2000-2003 CSX and NS track charts and timetables; interviews with CSX and NS personnel; 2003 North American Railroad Map developed by Railway Station Productions, LLC; and CBER estimates.

**Map 1:**  
**"Abandoned" Class I Branch-Lines in WV**  
**315.44 Total Miles**



Note: Map includes only Class I carriers. Branch-lines that were sold or leased from a Class I carrier to another party have been excluded.  
 Source: 2000-2003 CSX and NS track charts and timetables; interviews with CSX and NS personnel; 2003 North American Railroad Map developed by Railway Station Productions, LLC; and CBER estimates.

**Map 1:  
"At-Risk" Class I Branch-Lines in WV  
428.46 Total Miles**



Note: Map includes only Class I carriers. Branch-lines that were sold or leased from a Class I carrier to another party have been excluded.  
Source: 2000-2003 CSX and NS track charts and timetables; interviews with CSX and NS personnel; 2003 North American Railroad Map developed by Railway Station Productions, LLC; and CBER estimates.