

Using a Programmatic Agreement as a Bridge to the Future: Streamlining Historic Clearance for Hundreds of Wooden Trestle Bridges

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CSX Transportation, Inc. (CSXT), along with the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the Georgia State Historic Preservation Office (GA SHPO), developed a programmatic agreement (PA) for addressing historic reviews of wooden trestle bridges in Georgia. As part of the permitting process under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act, the USACE is responsible for considering the effects of its permit actions on historic resources.

Currently, wooden trestle bridges are evaluated individually as part of the permitting process. On several projects, the GA SHPO determined that wooden trestle bridges were contributing elements of historic railroad corridors/districts. As a result, replacing these bridges was considered an adverse effect and archival and photographic documentation of the bridges was required prior to replacement. Completion of these tasks frequently contribute to delays in project schedule. For instance, obtaining a nationwide permit for the replacement of two wooden bridges in 2014-2015 took almost 13 months.

CSXT plans for the repair or replacement of several hundred wooden trestle bridges over the next 5 years and wanted to consider alternatives to the standard review process to reduce scheduling uncertainty. Accordingly, CSXT and Amec Foster Wheeler Environment and Infrastructure, Inc. initiated discussions with USACE and GA SHPO to evaluate options to streamline the historic review process. The USACE and the GA SHPO had also been considering methods to improve the review process to more efficiently use their resources and provide timely reviews and agreed to partner with CSXT and develop a potential solution. The team agreed that a PA would provide a method which would streamline the review process and serve to consider historic implications. Usually, developing and implementing a PA is a lengthy process that often takes multiple years. However, due to the collaborative effort and support of all parties, the PA development timeframe was significantly shortened and took only a few months from draft to signature.

The final PA applies to CSXT wooden trestle bridges in GA, which are more than 50 years old, or whose main structural members have not been altered or repaired with modern construction materials in the last 50 years. As part of its responsibilities under the PA, CSXT will provide information to help update the statewide railroad industry history, prepare a wooden trestle bridge inventory on their lines in Georgia, recommend a representative sample of its wooden trestle bridges for archival and photographic documentation, and once an appropriate sample is approved, prepare the bridge documentation. Once the documentation is reviewed and accepted by USACE and GA SHPO, documentation of individual wooden trestle bridges will no longer be required for CSXT projects in Georgia.

With the PA signed CSXT has begun implementation and by the time of the Railroad Environmental Conference, CSXT hopes to have completed the archival documentation and the survey of a representative sample of its wooden trestle bridges. With the excellent help of the USACE and GA SHPO, CSXT developed a tool which minimizes uncertainty in the process used to maintain its inventory of

wooden trestle bridges. If the PA is successful, CSXT plans to open discussions with other SHPOs to promote the use of similar PAs throughout its system.