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On behalf of the  
National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers**

**Testimony on Historic Preservation of Railroad Property and Facilities  
For the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials  
House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
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I would like to thank Chairwoman Brown, Ranking Member Shuster, and the members of the House Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials Subcommittee for the opportunity to appear before you. I am Rodney Little, the State Historic Preservation Officer for the State of Maryland and former President of the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers. On behalf of the 57 Historic Preservation Officers we appreciate the opportunity to present our thoughts on the preservation of historic railroad property and facilities.

The National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers (NCSHPO) is the professional association of the State government officials who carry out the national historic preservation program as delegates of the Secretary of Interior pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The NCSHPO acts as a communications vehicle among the SHPOs and their staffs and represents the SHPOs with Congress, federal agencies and national preservation organizations

For the past forty-two years, State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOS) and State Departments of Transportation have worked cooperatively to advance transportation improvement activities that meet today's transportation needs, while simultaneously preserving our Nation's historic heritage. In 1966, Congress enacted the National Historic Preservation Act in order to preserve the many historic properties being harmed by federal activities. The key process identified in the legislation is commonly known as Section 106. When done correctly, the Section 106 process identifies potential conflicts and resolves them before the project begins so that activities can proceed in timely and cost-effective manner. The administrative tools needed to work effectively through potential issues exist today and are being used successfully across the country.

We are aware of discussions surrounding legislatively exempting railroads from historic preservation reviews in certain states or possibly the nation. Since Section 106 is an effective and efficient process, and our nation's railroads are significant in American history, potentially

exempting the properties and rights-of-way of this important mode of transportation seems inappropriate. The Section 106 process is designed to solve problems and most often results with a win-win resolution.

My testimony focuses on the following: 1. our Nation's Historic Preservation Program 2. the Administration's support of historic preservation 3. Federal resources for preserving historic sites related to transportation 4. the importance of railroads in American History, and 5. the railroad's role in energy conservation and other opportunities.

### **National Historic Preservation Program**

In 1966 Congress recognized the importance of preserving our past by passing the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 16 USC 470), which established today's Historic Preservation Program and without which, the historic railroad resources described above would likely not exist today.

The NHPA directs State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) to carry out the federal preservation program: 1) Locate and record historic resources; 2) Nominate significant historic resources to the National Register of Historic Places; 3) Foster historic preservation programs and the creation of preservation ordinances at the local government level; 4) Provide funds for preservation activities; 5) Comment on federal preservation tax projects; 6) Create and update State Historic Preservation plans 7) Review all federal projects for their impact on historic properties; and 8) Provide technical assistance to federal agencies, state and local governments and the private sector. Though often unglamorous, SHPOs' work is the foundation of the preservation of our Nation's heritage.<sup>1</sup>

Congress enacted the NHPA in response to public concern that many of our Nation's historic resources, including historic railroad properties and facilities, were being demolished without receiving any consideration in the Federal construction projects. Congress recognized that new legislation was needed to protect the many historic properties being harmed by federal activities and established what is known as the Section 106 review program in the NHPA.

Section 106 balances historic preservation concerns with the needs of Federal undertakings. It is designed to identify potential conflicts and resolve them in the public interest. The review process is administered at the Federal level, by the President's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), and at the state level by the State Historic Preservation Office. It requires that every federal agency "take into account" how each of its undertakings could affect historic properties.

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<sup>1</sup> National Park Service, "40 Years The Historic Preservation Fund Annual Report 2007," Washington, 2008.

For example, the Dakota, Minnesota and Eastern (DM&E) Railroad is working on a major upgrade and expansion of their lines through Minnesota, South Dakota, and Wyoming. After first resistance to the historical significance of the railroad in the Section 106 process, through productive discussions they have now embraced the railroads' importance in American and South Dakota history. In addition, the DM&E Railroad supported the listing of the Chicago & North Western Railroad Bridge at Pierre/Fort Pierre on the Missouri River in the National Register of Historic Places in 1998, and as part of a Preserve America project this year, the DM&E Railroad helped fund an interpretive sign on the multi-span, swing-span bridge.

Throughout the past forty-two years, the ACHP and SHPOs have efficiently and effectively carried out our country's historic preservation program. Under the Administration's Program Assessment Rating Tool, management of Historic Preservation Programs received a score of 89% indicating exemplary performance of mandated activities. Reinforcing this finding is the December 2007 National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) report "BACK TO THE FUTURE: A Review of the National Historic Preservation Program." NAPA, a non-profit, independent coalition of top management and organizational leaders, found that the National Historic Preservation Program "stands as a successful example of effective federal-state partnership and is working to realize Congress' original vision to a great extent."<sup>2</sup>

### **Administration Support of Historic Preservation**

Executive Order 13287, "Preserve America," was signed by President Bush on March 3, 2003. The order establishes federal policy to provide leadership in preserving America's heritage by actively advancing the protection, enhancement and contemporary use of the historic properties owned by the federal government, and by promoting intergovernmental cooperating and partnerships for the preservation and use of historic properties.

The Executive Order directs federal agencies to improve their knowledge about, and management of, historic resources in their care. It also encourages agencies to seek partnerships with State, tribal and local governments and the private sector to make more efficient and informed use of these resources for economic development and other recognized public benefits.

### **Federal Resources for Preserving Historic Railroad Sites**

Congress has established several programs to aid and assist the preservation of our Nation's historic assets. In order to receive funds through these programs the historic site must be classified as eligible for the National Register. Without National Register eligibility, thousands

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<sup>2</sup> Office of Management and Budget, DETAILED INFORMATION ON THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE - NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT, 2003, [expectmore.gov](http://expectmore.gov) and NAPA, "BACK TO THE FUTURE: A Review of the National Historic Preservation Programs" December 2007, p. 29

of historic railroad properties and facilities would be unable to receive Federal Highway Administration Transportation Enhancement grants, National Park Service Save Americas Treasures grants, as well as Historic Preservation Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits.

#### *Transportation Enhancement Grants*

Transportation Enhancement (TE) grants offer funding opportunities to help expand transportation choices and enhance the transportation experience. Eligible activities for funding include the acquisition of scenic or historic easements and sites, historic preservation, rehabilitation and operation of historic transportation buildings, structures, or facilities, conversion of abandoned railway corridors to trails, archaeological planning and research and establishment of transportation museums.

#### *Save America's Treasures*

The Save America's Treasures program provides competitive and Congressionally earmarked grants are for restoration, and/or conservation work on nationally significant historic structures and sites, including historic districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects.

#### *Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits*

The Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program offers tax credits for the rehabilitation of income-producing historic structures. Since 1976, the National Park Service has administered the program in partnership with the Internal Revenue Service and State Historic Preservation Offices. Tax incentives are one of the nations most successful and cost-effective community revitalization programs having leveraged more than \$30 billion in private investment to rehabilitate historic building that give cities, towns and rural areas their special character. The tax incentives also generate jobs, enhance property values, and augment revenues for State and local governments through increased property, business and income taxes. The transformations of Washington DC's Union Station and Grand Central Station in New York City were made possible by using historic rehabilitation tax credits.

## **Importance of Railroads in American History**

#### *Colonization and Community*

The first regular carrier of passengers and freight was the Baltimore and Ohio railroad, founded on July 4, 1824. Charles Carroll of Carrollton the last surviving signer of the Declaration of Independence laid the corner stone. Other American innovations included the 1826 three-mile Granite Railway in Massachusetts and the South Carolina Canal and Railroad Company, begun in 1830, that completed the first mechanical passenger train.

Railroad systems stretching across the Great Plains encouraged emigration and picked the town sites. The fortunes of many cities were made or broken by the passing of railroads through their limits. The railroad provided a market for goods, grain and cattle and it brought the mail and other news of the outside world. The development of the refrigerator car brought tropical and out

of season foods to American homes. Railroads were the primary mode of transportation in pre-automobile days.

The invention of the telegraph, linked to railroad rights of way in the late 1840s and 50s, created a communication revolution creating instant communication across continents.

The railroad depot became the new center of each community. The depot agent was often a well-respected member of the community--and the depot was the place to congregate to hear news about the rest of the world. Today, railroad depots are once again emerging as community centerpieces.

Depots nationwide have architectural styles all to themselves. According to the Railroad Station Historical Society, at one time there were upwards of 40,000 depots; today that figure is halved. They come in different shapes and sizes, but basically all once served to expeditiously move passengers and freight. Many existing depots continue to serve their original function; others have been adapted to useable community space. After years of neglect the buildings are being reclaimed, preserved, and now serve as community or retail centers, museums and even transportation centers.

#### *American Railroad Engineers*

In 1826, Colonel John Steven, considered to be the father of American railroads, demonstrated the feasibility of steam locomotion on a circular experimental track constructed on his estate in Hoboken, New Jersey, three years before George Stephenson perfected a practical steam locomotive in England. The first railroad charter in North America was granted to John Stevens in 1815.<sup>3</sup> Grants to others followed, and work soon began on the first operational railroads.

In 1830 Peter Cooper designed and built the Tom Thumb, the first American-built steam locomotive to be operated on a common-carrier railroad, for the B & O. The Pullman Sleeping Car was invented by George Pullman in 1857. Pullman's railroad coach or sleeper was designed for comfortable overnight passenger travel. Pullman's planned community in Chicago due to historic preservation efforts has been preserved as a residential community.

#### *American Bridge Engineers*

America has also fathered some of the world's foremost celebrated transportation engineers. Octave Chanute, chief engineer for the Erie Railroad, whose study of wind tolerances in the Pennsylvania Kinzua Valley would later influence his glider designs and the future of aviation; Thomas Curtis Clarke, senior partner with Clarke, Reeves and Company, whose vision and creativity led to the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy (IL) Railroad Bridge over the Mississippi River, the Poughkeepsie (NY) Bridge over Hudson, the New York Elevated Railway and the Hawkesbury Bridge in Australia; and Adolphus Bonzano, a mechanical genius and inventor who was the idea man behind the locking devices for draw bridges. Bonzano would later play a role

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<sup>3</sup> Thurman W. Van Metre, *Transportation in the United States* (Brooklyn: Foundation Press, 1950), p. 31.

in hundreds of bridges, including the Red Rock (AZ) Cantilever Bridge over the Colorado River Canyon, completed in 1890.<sup>4</sup>

### *Today's Historic Railroad Facilities*

Historic railroad depots, tracks, bridges and trains continue to fulfill today's community and transportation needs. Just North of Washington D.C. is the Thomas Viaduct which opened on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1835 and longest stone arched railroad viaduct when constructed and in use today. It was the bridge ever to be built on a curve. During its construction it was widely believed that the bridge would not hold under the weight of a loaded train. However, it soon proved to be one of the sturdiest structures in the nation and today carries CSX and Maryland MARC commuter trains throughout the day. In 1964 the Thomas Viaduct was named a National Historic Landmark.

The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (B&O) was one of the oldest railroads in the United States and the first common carrier railroad, with an original line from the port of Baltimore, Maryland, west to the Ohio River at Wheeling. It is now part of the CSX network.

The Altoona Pennsylvania Railroad's contribution to the nation's transportation infrastructure, marks it as one of the most important contributors to America's industrial revolution. By the 1920s, the Altoona railroad works employed 15,000 workers, and by 1945 the Pennsylvania Railroad's facilities at Altoona had become the world's largest rail shop complex. Today the Horseshoe Curve in Altoona stands as a National Engineering Landmark and the rail lines are still used by Norfolk Southern. The Rockville Railroad Bridge, slightly north of Harrisburg is the longest stone arch bridge in the U.S. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1976, its four tracks have been in continuous use since 1906.

The Strauss Bascule Bridge Company of Chicago constructed a double-track bridge for the Florida East Coast Railway (FEC) in 1925 to span the St. Johns River in Jacksonville. This moveable bridge was the heaviest yet built for its time and utilized an unusual truss configuration. It was constructed on the old foundation of the original railroad bridge, which dates to 1889. The FEC line and the railroad bridge continue to operate today and provide an important link between Jacksonville and the rest of the state.

## **The Future of the Historic American Railroad**

### *Going "Green"*

With the worldwide concern over climate change, greenhouse gas emissions and oil prices, public transportation, including commuter, passenger and freight trains are becoming

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<sup>4</sup> *Society for Industrial Archeology Newsletter, Fall 2005*

increasingly popular and seen as “environmental friendly” options. According to the American Association of Railroads, freight trains are now two to four times more fuel efficient and cleaner burning than over-the-road trucks on a ton mile basis and rail companies are continually improving their fuel efficiency through better locomotive technology, engineer training and employee involvement.

#### *Industry Expansion*

Due to substantial and sustained traffic increases and increasing energy costs, U.S. freight railroads are moving more freight than ever before and demand for freight rail service is projected to grow sharply. Passenger rail growth is also expected to expand. The American Association of Railroads predicts that “capacity will likely be the single most important factor determining our ability to provide the high quality rail services that will be essential for both freight and passengers.”

#### *Tourism and History*

Historic railroads and facilities will continue to play major roles in tourism and economic development. The Ohio Rail Tourism Association estimates that railroad visitors generate \$200 million for Ohio’s economy. Highlighted below are successful examples from Colorado and Alaska:

- Colorado Historical Society

The Colorado Historical Society owns and operates the Georgetown Loop. The engineering marvel originally built in 1884, fulfilled the hopes of Georgetown citizens to become a prosperous settlement and connected Georgetown to Denver and points east. In connecting Silver Plume and Georgetown, towns over 2 miles apart, the tracks scaled an elevation of 640 feet over mountainous terrain, requiring trestles, cuts, fills, loops, and curves totaling 4.5 miles.

Today the Loop is a popular tourist attraction and an uncommon way to see the Clear Creek Valley. Along the route visitors may also stop for guided tours of a historic silver mine. The park is located on 978 acres and includes an 1884 depot, the Morrison Interpretive Center, two 1860s mines, an 1871 mill building, four reconstructed mine buildings, a locomotive maintenance building, the 1874 Pohle House, and a new rolling stock shelter.

- The Alaskan Railroad

The Alaskan Railroad has played a central role in Alaska's growth -- providing a means for communities to settle and flourish along the railway, supplying the Fairbanks gold fields, helping to build the Alaska Highway, supporting the war effort and hauling pipe and supplies for construction efforts.

Today, the Alaska Railroad continues its tradition of support for the Alaska community by carrying more than 500,000 passengers annually, providing access for Alaskans and visitors from tidewater in Seward and Whittier to the interior of Alaska. In addition, the railroad operation

creates over 700 jobs for Alaskans. The railroad also plays a powerful role in the States economic development, hauling nearly 8 million tons of freight per year and transporting building products to construct Alaskan homes and businesses.

The Railroad also works to improve the quality of life for residents along the railway by leasing land to communities for parks, bike trails and other public interest uses.

### **Conclusion**

The importance of the American Railroad not only reaches back in time but also embraces the present and future. NCSHPO supports partnerships and agreements between the railroads and communities that simultaneously advance the expansion and repair of U.S. railways and preserve railway historic resources. Through Section 106 Reviews, federal agencies and the public decide the most effective ways to move projects forward while protecting our nation's heritage. National Register designations afford historic railroad resources eligibility for preservation incentives. NCSHPO believes that the railroads central role in our Nation's history should continue to be honored by affording it the protections and resources available for National Register eligible properties and sees no need for exemptions or additional legislation. The administrative tools needed to work successfully through potential issues exist and are being used effectively across the country. The federal government plays an invaluable role in preserving our nation's history and through our partnership, State Historic Preservation Officers stand committed to identify, protect, maintain, and continue to use our Nation's historic railway heritage.

Thank You.