

Transportation: Building Bridges to America's Past

Did you know?

Transportation is considered the largest financier of historic preservation and archaeology.

While most citizens think of transportation in terms of hard-working road crews, few people know that thousands of transportation employees and millions of transportation dollars are working hard behind the scenes to preserve historic resources, undertake archaeological investigations, and document and preserve the nation's heritage.

Without a doubt, transportation is considered one of the largest financiers of historic preservation and archaeological studies—and state historic preservation officials increasingly consider their state highway department as a partner in preserving history. Transportation agencies are responsible for identifying, assessing, and protecting historic properties as well as archaeological exploration, documentation, and recovery that would never have occurred otherwise.

Kentucky Transportation Cabinet officials report spending at least \$1 million per year contracting for archaeological work alone. Texas DOT's environmental office contracts for archeology amount to at least \$2 million per year—not counting millions of dollars in funding for cultural resource staff at the agency, field office expenditures, or millions of cultural resource dollars spent by the Texas Turnpike Commission. Pennsylvania DOT estimates spending between \$5 million and \$15 million per year on its archaeological work. And in Michigan, officials say that spending on archeology accounts for at least \$1.2 million per year.

Assuming state transportation agencies average spending at least \$1 million per year on archaeological inventory, investigation, documentation, and mitigation—transportation is providing upwards of \$50 million annually to document and preserve our nation's archaeological resources.

On a national level, the Federal Highway Administration reports that:

- ▶ FHWA has obligated over \$1.3 billion in funding from the federal highway program since 1991 to support preservation projects under the Transportation Enhancements Program, plus close to \$20 million for the Historic Covered Bridge Program.



Opposite and above – Few historic preservation efforts anywhere in the United States rival that of the relocation of the 18th-century, 580-ton, two-and-a-half-story, stone King of Prussia Inn from its original location in the median of Pennsylvania Route 202, to a new and safe location just east of its original site (overlay).

The project combined historical and archaeological research with a stupendous feat of engineering to permanently relocate and protect this important colonial building, and created the opportunity to make much-needed improvements in traffic flow on the roadway.

- ▶ FHWA supports the hiring of thousands of cultural resource specialists at the state transportation agencies as well as consultants, who are directly involved in identifying and assessing historic sites, buildings, objects, districts, and structures.
- ▶ Highway agencies spend millions of dollars from project funds to rehabilitate historic bridges and mitigate impacts to historic resources.

This infusion of financial support and technical resources is preserving America's history through:

- ▶ Identification of historic structures, such as buildings and bridges, and evaluation for eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places.
- ▶ Avoidance, protection, and mitigation of historic resources.
- ▶ Development of cultural resource databases.
- ▶ Historic bridge surveys and preservation.
- ▶ Archaeological field surveys and data collection.
- ▶ Recovery and preservation of historic and archaeological resources.
- ▶ Public education.



Photo courtesy of the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet



Photo courtesy of the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet

Opposite and above – The Renaissance Kentucky initiative is designed to bring together communities and the resources necessary to revitalize and restore Kentucky’s downtowns in a focused approach.

“The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet is the single largest funder of historic preservation projects in the state.”

— *David Morgan, Kentucky State Historic Preservation Officer*

Kentucky: A Renaissance in Preservation

The Kentucky State Historic Preservation Officer touts the fact that the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet has provided more funds for historic preservation than any other source in the state. Over the past 10 years, it has provided \$70 million for historic preservation efforts, according to David Morgan, the state’s top-ranking historic preservation official. “No one else could even come near that.”

Morgan estimates that at least 70 percent of historic preservation efforts in Kentucky are directly or indirectly funded by transportation dollars.

Kentucky leads the nation in the percentage of transportation enhancement funds obligated to historic preservation projects. These funds have played a key role in Governor Paul Patton’s program to revitalize Kentucky’s downtowns.

The Renaissance Kentucky Program is an alliance of seven state agencies working together to help communities preserve, restore, and revitalize their city’s core. To date, \$15 million of Transportation Enhancements Program funds have been designated for these communities, providing a funding source for restoring façades of public buildings, creating pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly streetscapes, preserving historic sites, protecting scenic byways, converting abandoned railroad corridors for trails, and rehabilitating historic transportation buildings into museums, visitor centers, or for modern transportation facilities.³

Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT): Improving the Field of Preservation

In Texas, transportation efforts have brought the field of historic preservation to a new level.

“Over the past 30 years, the communication, coordination, and preservation efforts of TxDOT and the Texas Historical Commission have grown, evolved, and improved in ways that have benefited not only those highway projects for which we have both been directly involved, but have also greatly benefited the entire discipline of historic preservation,” according to the state historic preservation agency.

TxDOT’s cultural resource management office conducts archaeological and historic property surveys, identifying significant archaeological and historic sites, structures, and districts located in the path of proposed transportation projects. Officials work with other agencies, such as the Texas Historical Commission, to avoid or minimize impacts to these resources. Where necessary, the staff conducts excavations, providing a new understanding of Texas history and prehistory. Local museums often use the information from TxDOT’s archaeological digs for educational purposes and exhibits.

Important archaeological sites that have been excavated by TxDOT include:

- ▶ 800-year-old semi-underground structures, in El Paso;
- ▶ 18th-century Mission Dolores in San Augustine; and
- ▶ 11,000-year-old Wilson Leonard site just north of Austin.

TxDOT also has coordinated the rehabilitation of many historic bridges, either for continued roadway service or to accommodate hike-and-bike trail uses. A statewide inventory of these historic bridges has been completed and includes historical information on more than 8,000 bridges in the state.



Above – Excavation of the 1795 Mission Refugio, US 77 in Texas.

Below – Recent excavation of graves in the right-of-way of SH 288, Brazoria County, Texas. Graves from this late 19th or early 20th-century African American cemetery were moved back into the cemetery proper in anticipation of highway construction.



Pennsylvania: Transportation “Lies Gently on the Land”

Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) officials explain that it—like other state DOTs—is bound by federal and state laws and regulations to consider the effects of its actions on all aspects of the environment—including impacts on archaeological and historic properties. Transportation officials in the state have taken it a step further, demonstrating a commitment to the design, construction, and maintenance of a transportation network that “lies gently on the land.” As a result, PennDOT is the single largest source of public sector archaeological and historic resources investigations in the state. Thanks to a commitment to excellence, PennDOT’s archaeology program is not just Pennsylvania’s largest, it’s also the best.

In Pennsylvania, the Department of Transportation hosts the state’s largest public sector archaeology program. Annually between \$5 million and \$15 million are expended to identify, evaluate, protect, and learn from the buried evidence of Pennsylvania’s past along its highways. While this work is mandated by federal and state laws and regulations, the program is driven by more than legal requirements. When transportation projects produce unavoidable effects to important sites, PennDOT is committed to state-of-the-art approaches to archaeological excavation and analysis and to disseminating the results of that work to the professional community and to the public.

The New Hampshire Department of Transportation’s Partnership with Preservation

New Hampshire officials tout an excellent partnership between transportation and historic preservation in the state.

New Hampshire Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Linda Ray Wilson reports that “New Hampshire DOT’s cultural resources survey, inventory, mitigation, historic preservation initiatives, and direct financial support are at the core of much of the current historic preservation work in New Hampshire.” Wilson describes the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NH DOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) as “the strongest historic preservation partners for New Hampshire’s State Historic Preservation Office program.”

For instance, the survey methodology developed jointly by the NH DOT, FHWA, and the Division of Historical Resources for transportation projects “has evolved into the foundation of our statewide cultural resources survey program, and the standard for cultural resources survey and historic preservation work conducted by other federal and state agencies,” Wilson says.

State preservation officials in New Hampshire credit their transportation agency with a litany of contributions. For example, Wilson says the DOT is providing citizens access to a consistent level of professional



Photos courtesy of NHDOT



historic preservation services whether or not a transportation project is directly involved. In cases where historic properties could not be preserved intact, the NHDOT provides extensive documentation, and high-quality research files are available to the general public, the community, citizens, and local officials.

Citizens seek access to the NHDOT survey data for National Register of Historic Places nominations, or to document requests for rehabilitation tax incentives. Other federally assisted rehabilitation projects—particularly those for affordable housing and downtown revitalization—are being expedited because the identification of historic properties has already been done for a NHDOT project.

New Hampshire DOT has moved decisively to protect the state's historic timber covered bridges from threats of human and natural destruction and is assisting in an increasing number of municipal projects for preservation of historic bridges. An unexpected result of the NHDOT crews rebuilding historic stonework on bridges has been the development of a new set of stonemasonry skills that will be available for other NHDOT projects.

The state's program also has worked hard to advance public information and education efforts. New Hampshire DOT and the state historic preservation program have been partners conducting the state historical markers program since 1961, and the department is now adding historical and archaeological interpretive panels and features as integral parts of other projects.

TAKING THE HIGH ROAD



Above left – New Hampshire's historic Oxford Bridge.

Right –The historic Cornish-Windsor Bridge in New Hampshire is the longest wooden bridge in the United States, and the longest two-span covered bridge in the world. Maintained by the NHDOT, the bridge spans the Connecticut River, connecting the towns of Cornish, New Hampshire, and Windsor, Vermont.

Preservation in Vermont: Transportation Taking the Lead

Vermont's Agency of Transportation (VTrans) has proven so effective at preserving and protecting historic resources that it has become the first in the nation to be delegated complete authority from the state historic preservation office for ensuring that road projects comply with federal historic preservation requirements.

As a result of this award-winning programmatic agreement, Vermont's State Historic Preservation office reports that transportation projects are moving more quickly and with better protection of historic resources.

"Everybody is a winner," according to Vermont Division of Historic Preservation official Nancy Boone.

Vermont preservation officials consider VTrans "a great partner" in preserving historic resources, Boone says.