

**STATE LEVEL HISTORIC DOCUMENTATION REPORT
GRANT STREET BRIDGE
MERCER COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA
STATE PROJECT No. S328-GR/ANT-1.00
FEDERAL PROJECT No. STP-2020(222)DTC**



Prepared by:

Ahleah Boise, Environmental Resource Specialist, Senior
West Virginia Department of Transportation
Division of Highways
Technical Support Division
NEPA Compliance and Permitting Section
June 2022

STATE LEVEL HISTORIC DOCUMENTATION
GRANT STREET BRIDGE

Location: Grant Street over the Norfolk Southern Rail Yard in the City of Bluefield, Mercer County, West Virginia.
USGS Bluefield Quadrangle

Date of Construction: 1941

Builder: Virginia Bridge Company, Roanoke Va.

Present Owner: City of Bluefield
(Formerly joint ownership between City of Bluefield and Norfolk Southern Railway)
200 Rogers Street
Bluefield, WV 24701

Present Use: Bridge

Significance: The Grant Street Bridge is significant for its association with the Norfolk Southern Railroad and planning and development of Bluefield, the cultural and economic center of the southern West Virginia coal fields, and for its association with the Virginia Bridge Company, a nationally recognized steel bridge fabricator.

Project Information: The project has been undertaken due to the poor condition of the bridge. It has been closed to vehicle and pedestrian traffic since June of 2019, creating significant inconvenience to the travelling public and residents of the neighborhood accessed by the bridge. This documentation was undertaken in April 2021 in accordance with a Memorandum of Agreement among the West Virginia Department of Transportation and West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office. These measures are required prior to replacement of this National Register eligible structure. This bridge is scheduled for replacement in 2021-2022.

Ahleah Boise, Environmental Resource Specialist, Senior
West Virginia Division of Highways
Charleston, WV 25305
June 2022

The Grant Street Bridge is located in the town of Bluefield, West Virginia. It carries Grant Street over the Norfolk Southern railyard, connecting the residential neighborhood known as the East End to the north of the railyard to the downtown commercial center of the town located to the south of the railyard. The town is set in the valley between two ridges that run in a southwest to northeast pattern in the ruggedly mountainous region of southern West Virginia.

The Grant Street Bridge was built in 1941 by the Virginia Bridge Company of Roanoke Virginia. It is a two-span, riveted-plate Warren through truss bridge. The overall length of the structure is 320 feet, with an overall width of 20 feet, excluding the pedestrian walkway that runs along the northeast elevation. The structure consists of trusses that are connected by riveted floor beams, sway struts, and upper and lower laterals. It has a metal grid deck, and the pedestrian walkway has wooden floor beams. The bridge is supported at each end by stone and concrete abutments and intermittently by two reinforced concrete open-bent type piers.

Mercer County was established in 1837 from Giles and Tazewell Counties in what was then Virginia. The southern county line is also the state border with Virginia. The county is surrounded by West Virginia counties of McDowell, Summers, Raleigh, and Wyoming, and the Virginia counties of Giles, Bland, and Tazewell.¹ The county seat is Princeton, founded in 1837 and chartered in 1909. The county was named for Hugh Mercer, a General in the Revolutionary War, and the county seat of Princeton was named for Princeton, New Jersey, where General Mercer was killed. The town was burned by retreating Confederate troops during the Civil War, but later experienced major growth at the turn of the century when the Virginian Railroad established a shop and railyard in the town.²

From settlement until the 1880s, Mercer County had an economy primarily based on subsistence farming and ancillary businesses such as gristmills, tanneries, foundries, and saltworks.³ In the 1880s, the economy shifted from agrarian to industrial as intensive mining began of the Pocahontas coal field. The western section of the county lays over the Pocahontas No. 3 coal seam, a crescent of low sulfur "smokeless" coal ranging from one foot to nearly 13 feet thick.⁴ Large tracts of land in Mercer County were acquired by the Flat Top Coal Land Association (later the Pocahontas Land Corporation), a subsidiary of the Norfolk & Western Railway. The Pocahontas coal field was opened by the construction on the New River Extension of the Norfolk & Western railway beginning in 1881. The railroad followed a route from Radford, Virginia, through southern Mercer County along the banks of the East River, and was completed to Pocahontas, Virginia in 1883.⁵

The coal mining industry brought a massive influx of new inhabitants to Mercer County and the population grew 114 percent between 1880 and 1890, then in double digit percentages each year from 1910 to 1940. The influx of miners and their families contributed significant racial and ethnic diversity to Mercer County. The populous coal camps of Coopers, Freeman, McComas, Piedmont, and others dotted the western section of the county overlying the coal field, while the cities of Bluefield and Princeton are located in the south-central part of the county and served as commercial and business hubs for the outlying areas. Princeton, the county seat, was founded before the Civil War but experienced major growth when the headquarters of the New River

¹ C. Stuart McGehee, "Mercer County," e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia.

² Ibid.

³ McGehee, "Mercer County" e-WV.

⁴ C. Stuart McGehee, "Pocahontas No. 3 Coal Seam," e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia.

⁵ Robert L. Frey, "Norfolk & Western Railway," e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia.

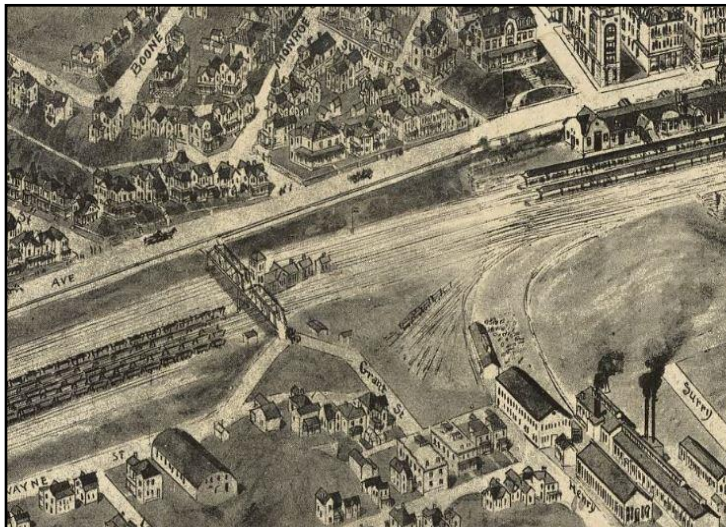
Division of the Virginian Railway was located there in 1907. Bluefield, the other major population center in Mercer County, was named the headquarters of the Pocahontas Division of the Norfolk & Western Railway Company in 1882.

The county reached its peak population in 1950, with 75,013 people, and declined in the second half of the 20th century as the coal mining industry became increasingly mechanized and rail transportation declined. Today the county has a population of approximately 60,000. Bluefield and Princeton remain population centers in southern West Virginia.

In 1883, the Norfolk and Western Railroad completed its New River Division to Bluefield near the border of Virginia and West Virginia. United States Geological Survey maps produced in 1887 show one railroad running through the valley between Stoney Ridge to the north and East River Mountain to the south. The town was incorporated in 1889, seven years after the N & W had located its Pocahontas Division headquarters there. Bluefield is located in a wide valley on a gentle incline, which allowed the railroad to use an efficient gravity switching system for its trains. By 1895 the extensive railyard had been established as well as ancillary buildings including a passenger station, machine shops and a massive roundhouse.

As the gateway to the Pocahontas Coalfield, the town grew swiftly with wholesale and retail businesses, banks, theaters, and other commercial establishments that supported the coal industry. Supplies for the remote coal company towns established throughout southern West Virginia were supplied from Bluefield, as such, it was the nerve center of the coal fields. Residential neighborhoods were established both north and south of the railyard. The prosperous town boasted impressive Neoclassical Revival buildings, many designed by Bluefield-born architect Alex B. Mahood.

Reflecting the increasing diversity of West Virginia as African American residents of southern states moved north to pursue work on railroads and in the coal mines, a thriving Black community grew in Bluefield. The Bluefield Colored Institute was founded in 1895 centered in part around the Bluefield State College, a Historically Black College/University, is located at the southwestern edge of town.⁶



Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps from 1893 indicate that the earliest bridge built over the railyard was the Mercer Street iron bridge. In the next decade, the railroad would build several bridges linking downtown

Figure 1: Detail of T. M. Fowler map of Bluefield in 1911, showing the original Grant Street Bridge. Image: Library of Congress.

⁶ C. Stuart McGehee, "Bluefield," e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia.

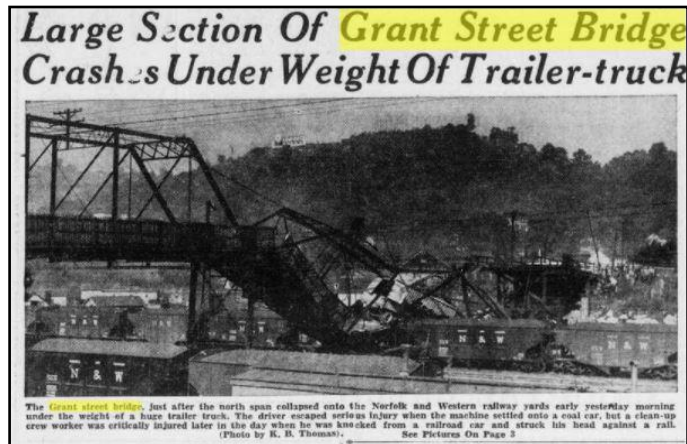


Figure 2: Image from Bluefield Daily Telegraph, September 1940.

Bluefield to the neighborhoods to the north of the railyard. The first Grant Street Bridge was built around 1903.

That bridge collapsed under the weight of an overloaded trailer truck in September of 1940, leading to a protracted negotiation between the City of Bluefield and the Norfolk & Western Railroad over the responsibility and expense of replacing and maintaining the bridge. It was eventually agreed that the N&W would fully fund the construction of the new bridge and that the railway would maintain the superstructure

and abutments while the city was responsible for maintaining the timber deck, roadway, sidewalk, handrails, and installing and maintaining load limit signs. Work got underway in March of 1941, and the piers and abutments were completed in May. The delivery of steel to complete the bridge was delayed over the summer as the Norfolk & Western and the Virginia Bridge Company prioritized defense contracts, but the bridge was opened to pedestrian traffic on October 5, and finally to vehicle traffic on October 20, 1941.⁷

The bridge was cleaned and painted in 1988. In 1992, Platnick Steel and Engineering Company completed a rehabilitation consisting of replacing timber stringers, the timber and asphalt deck, and four floor beams. In 2019, the bridge was closed to traffic after it was found to be structurally deficient and in danger of imminent collapse.

The Grant Street Bridge is a Warren through truss of steel fabrication with upper sway struts. It is among 120 steel through truss bridges constructed in West Virginia between 1882 and 1965.⁸ The Warren truss uses equilateral triangles to distribute loads. The type is seen throughout the state for long spans with struts and lateral braces as well as well as pony truss bridges. Steel truss bridges are a common type in West Virginia.

Following the collapse of the first bridge, the extant The Grant Street Bridge was built by the Virginia Bridge Company, based out of Roanoke Virginia. The company was organized as the Virginia Bridge and Iron Company in 1895 and was in the early 20th century the largest industry in Roanoke apart from the Norfolk & Western shops.⁹ The general offices of the company were located there, and they also operated large manufacturing plants in other cities such as Memphis, Birmingham, and Atlanta. In addition to fabricating steel railroad and highway bridges, the company produced structural steel for construction and steel railroad cars. The company was purchased in 1936 by the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company of Birmingham, Alabama, a subsidiary of U.S. Steel. The company continued its operations in Roanoke as the Virginia Bridge Company. The company prospered in the 1940s due to government contracts to fabricate steel for war materiel.¹⁰ The company declined and eventually closed in the 1950s after wage disputes.¹¹

⁷ Paige Wooldridge Is Named Police Judge...Bluefield Daily Telegraph, July 16, 1941, 1.

⁸ West Virginia Statewide Historic Bridge Survey, 2015.

⁹ George S. Jack and E.B. Jacobs, *History of Roanoke County*, 112-113.

¹⁰ Martha Carver, "Tennessee's Survey Report for Historic Highway Bridges-Bridge Companies", 215-217.

¹¹ Ibid.

The Grant Street Bridge is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with the Norfolk & Western Railroad and with planning and development in Bluefield. Bluefield was the social and commercial center of the southern West Virginia Coalfields from ca. 1889 to 1960. The bridge is not known to be associated with a person significant in history and is not eligible under Criterion B. The bridge is eligible under Criterion C for its association with the Virginia Bridge Company, a nationally recognized steel bridge fabricator. It is not eligible under Criterion D as it was built in the mid-20th century using commonplace techniques, materials, and tools. It is not likely to yield information important to the understanding of history or prehistory.

References

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- West Virginia Property Viewer Interactive Map*. WV GIS Technical Center: Map West Virginia. Accessed November 4, 2020. <https://www.mapwv.gov/parcel/>.
- West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office Interactive Map*. West Virginia Division of Culture and History. Accessed April November 4, 2020. <https://mapwv.gov/shpo/viewer/index.html>.

STATE LEVEL HISTORIC DOCUMENTATION
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Grant Street Bridge
Grant Street
City of Bluefield
Mercer County, West Virginia

Photographer: Ahleah Boise

November 2020

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GRANT STREET BRIDGE-3	East elevation of Grant Street Bridge
GRANT STREET BRIDGE-4	Bridge builder plaque and rehabilitation plaque
GRANT STREET BRIDGE-5	View of struts and laterals
GRANT STREET BRIDGE-6	West elevation vertical and diagonal members
GRANT STREET BRIDGE-7	East elevation vertical and diagonal members
GRANT STREET BRIDGE-8	Pier and abutments in Norfolk Southern railyard
GRANT STREET BRIDGE-9	Wood plank sidewalk on east elevation



Photo 1
Grant Street Bridge
City of Bluefield, Mercer County
Grant Street over Norfolk Southern Railyard
View northwest toward Grant Street Bridge



Photo 2
Grant Street Bridge
City of Bluefield, Mercer County
Grant Street over Norfolk Southern Railyard
View southeast toward Grant Street Bridge



Photo 3
Grant Street Bridge
City of Bluefield, Mercer County
Grant Street over Norfolk Southern Railyard
East elevation of Grant Street Bridge



Photo 4
Grant Street Bridge
City of Bluefield, Mercer County
Grant Street over Norfolk Southern Railyard
Bridge builder plaque and rehabilitation plaque



Photo 5
Grant Street Bridge
City of Bluefield, Mercer County
Grant Street over Norfolk Southern Railyard
View of struts and laterals



Photo 6
Grant Street Bridge
City of Bluefield, Mercer County
Grant Street over Norfolk Southern Railyard
West elevation vertical and diagonal members



Photo 7
Grant Street Bridge
City of Bluefield, Mercer County
Grant Street over Norfolk Southern Railyard
East elevation vertical and diagonal members



Photo 8
Grant Street Bridge
City of Bluefield, Mercer County
Grant Street over Norfolk Southern Railyard
Pier and abutments in Norfolk Southern railyard



Photo 9
Grant Street Bridge
City of Bluefield, Mercer County
Grant Street over Norfolk Southern Railyard
Wood plank sidewalk on east elevation

Photographs
Grant Street Bridge
Mercer County
State Project No. S328-GRANT-1.00



1. South approach. Photo: WVDOH November 2020.



2. North approach. Photo: WVDOH November 2020.

Photographs
Grant Street Bridge
Mercer County
State Project No. S328-GRANT-1.00



3. West elevation. Photo: WVDOH November 2020.



4. East elevation. Photo: WVDOH November 2020.

Photographs
Grant Street Bridge
Mercer County
State Project No. S328-GRANT-1.00



5. Detail of plaques. Photo: WVDOH November 2020.

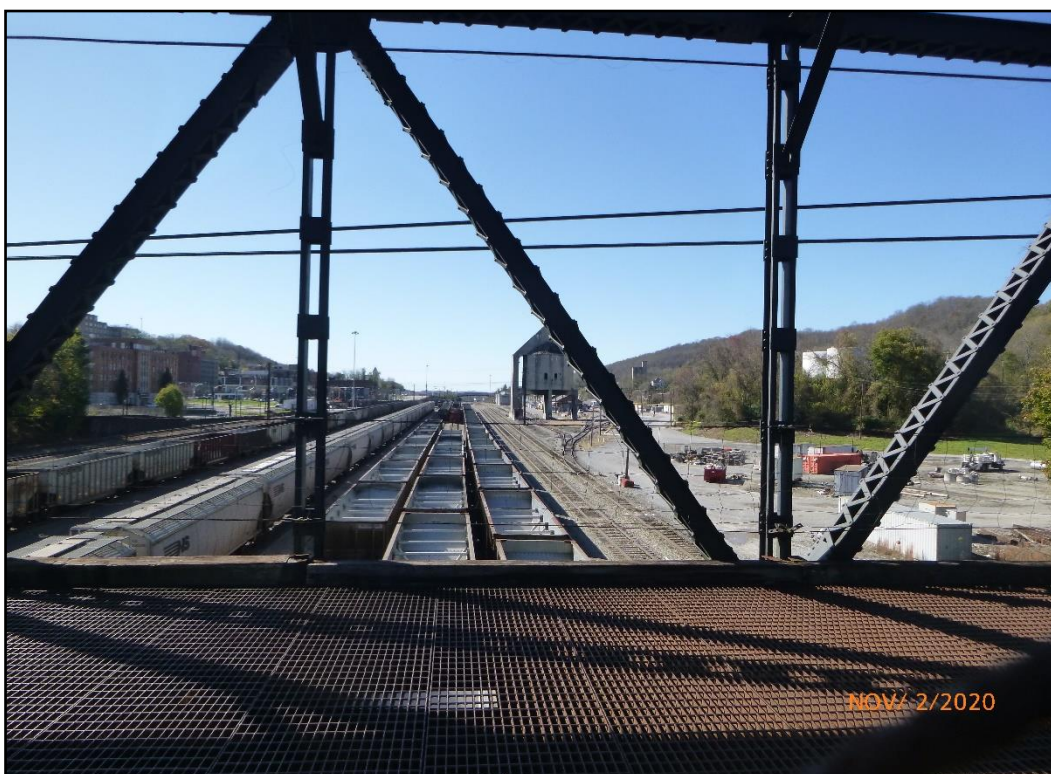


6. Bridge sign and upper laterals. Photo: WVDOH November 2020.

Photographs
Grant Street Bridge
Mercer County
State Project No. S328-GRANT-1.00



7. Norfolk Southern Railyard looking northeast from Grant Street Bridge. Photo: WVDOH November 2020.



8. Norfolk Southern Railyard looking southwest from Grant Street Bridge. Photo: WVDOH November 2020.

**MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT
BY AND AMONG
THE FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION,
THE WEST VIRGINIA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER
AND THE WEST VIRGINIA DIVISION OF HIGHWAYS
REGARDING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GRANT STREET BRIDGE
REPLACEMENT PROJECT
STATE PROJECT #S328-GR/ANT-1.00
MERCER COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA
DECEMBER 2020**

WHEREAS, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), in cooperation with the West Virginia Division of Highways (WVDOH), proposes to replace the Grant Street Bridge, spanning the Norfolk Southern Railyard in the City of Bluefield, West Virginia hereinafter referred to as the Project. The project will remove the existing bridge and replace it in the existing location; and

WHEREAS, the FHWA has determined that the Project will have an adverse effect upon the Grant Street Bridge, a property eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP); and

WHEREAS, the FHWA has consulted with the West Virginia State Historic Preservation Officer (WVSHPO) pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800 Implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act; (16 U.S.C., 470f); and

WHEREAS, the FHWA has determined that the Project will not affect archaeological properties; and

WHEREAS, The WVDOH has contacted the Preservation Alliance of West Virginia, Bluefield Historic Landmarks Commission, Mercer County Historical Society, Eastern Regional Coal Archives, the National Coal Heritage Area; and members of the East End community in Bluefield. Ms. Vonnia Davis, representing the East End Community, wishes to be consulting party; and

WHEREAS, in accordance with 36 CFR 800.6 (a) (1), the FHWA has notified the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) of its adverse effect determination providing the specified documentation, and the ACHP has chosen not to participate in the consultation pursuant to 36 CFR 800.6 (a) (1) (iii);

NOW, THEREFORE, the FHWA, the WVSHPO, and the WVDOH agree that the undertaking will be implemented in accordance with the following stipulations in order to take into account the effects of the undertaking on historic properties.

STIPULATIONS

The FHWA shall ensure that the following stipulations are carried out:

I. Grant Street Bridge Stipulations

- a. The Grant Street Bridge will be documented in its present historic setting. The documentation package will include 5"x7" black and white digital prints in accordance with the National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmarks Survey Photo Policy Expansion of January 2009. The documentation package will include hard copies in the form of PDFs for reports and documents, and TIFF files for photographs. The WVSHPO will be given the opportunity to review the documents before submission of final versions.
- b. A brief history of the structure will be included along with fully completed West Virginia Historic Property Inventory forms and copies of any available plan sheets and drawings of the bridge from WVDOH and City of Bluefield bridge files.
- c. West Virginia Division of Highways staff will provide the Mercer County Historical Society, the Bluefield Historic Landmarks Commission, and the Eastern Regional Coal Archives with a hard copy of the Grant Street Bridge State Level Historic Documentation for references and educational purposes. A digital copy in PDF form of the Grant Street Bridge State Level Historic Documentation will be provided to Vonnia Davis, East End community representative.
- d. The new Grant Street Bridge design will incorporate a sidewalk on the north side of the bridge, railings with "Bluefield" signage, and lighting similar to that found in the nearby Bluefield Downtown Commercial Historic District.
- e. Color brochures of the Grant Street Bridge will be developed by the WVDOH and distributed to the Craft Memorial Library in Bluefield. The WVSHPO will be given the opportunity to review all educational materials developed for this stipulation. A CD containing the brochure will also be provided to print brochures when the original total has been exhausted.
- f. The Grant Street Bridge will be documented on Highways Through History, the West Virginia historic bridge website.
- g. A walking tour and accompanying ArcGIS Story Map of African American historical sites located in the East End neighborhood will be developed in cooperation with the East End community. A QR code to access the East End African American History Walking Tour will be included on the Grant Street Bridge brochure and a link will be included on the Highways Through History website.

II. Duration

This MOA will expire if its stipulations are not carried out within five (5) years from the date of its execution. At such time, and prior to work continuing on the undertaking, the FHWA shall either (a) execute an MOA pursuant to 36 CFR 800.6, or (b) request, take into account, and respond to the comments of the ACHP under 36 CFR 800.7. Prior to such time, FHWA may consult with other signatories to reconsider the terms of the MOA and amend it in accordance with Stipulation VI below. FHWA shall notify the signatories as to the course of action it will pursue.

III. Post-Review Discoveries

If any unanticipated effects to or discoveries of historic properties or archaeological sites, including human burial sites and/or skeletal remains, are encountered during the implementation of this undertaking, work shall be suspended in the area of the discovery until the WVDOH has developed and implemented an appropriate treatment plan in consultation with the WVSHPO pursuant to 36 CFR 800.13 (b).

IV. Monitoring and Reporting

Each year following the execution of this MOA until it expires or is terminated, FHWA shall provide all parties to this MOA a summary report detailing work carried out pursuant to its terms. Such report shall include any scheduling changes proposed, any problems encountered, and any disputes and objections received in FHWA's efforts to carry out the terms of this MOA.

V. Dispute Resolution

Should any signatory or concurring party to this MOA object at any time to any actions proposed or the manner in which the terms of this MOA are implemented, FHWA shall consult with such party to resolve the objection. If FHWA determines that such objection cannot be resolved, FHWA will:

- a. Forward all documentation relevant to the dispute, including the FHWA's proposed resolution, to the ACHP. The ACHP shall provide FHWA with its advice on the resolution of the objection within thirty (30) days of receiving adequate documentation. Prior to reaching a final decision on the dispute, FHWA shall prepare a written response that takes into account any timely advice or comments regarding the dispute from the ACHP, signatories and concurring parties, and provide them with a copy of this written response. FHWA will then proceed according to its final decision.
- b. If the ACHP does not provide its advice regarding the dispute within the thirty (30) day time period, FHWA may make a final decision on the dispute and proceed accordingly. Prior to reaching such a final decision, FHWA shall prepare a written response that takes into account any timely comments regarding the dispute from

the signatories and concurring parties to the MOA, and provide them and the ACHP with a copy of such written response.

- c. FHWA's responsibility to carry out all other actions subject to the terms of this MOA that are not the subject of the dispute remain unchanged,

VI. Amendments

This MOA may be amended when such an amendment is agreed to in writing by all signatories. The amendment will be effective on the date a copy signed by all of the signatories is filed with the ACHP.

VII. Termination

If any signatory to this MOA determines that its terms will not or cannot be carried out, that party shall immediately consult with the other parties to attempt to develop an amendment per Stipulation XI, above. If within thirty (30) days (or another time period agreed to by all signatories) an amendment cannot be reached, any signatory may terminate the MOA upon written notification to the other signatories.

Once the MOA is terminated, and prior to work continuing on the undertaking, FHWA must either (a) execute a MOA pursuant to 36 CFR 800.6, or (b) request, take into account, and respond to the comments of the ACHP under 36 CFR 800.7. FHWA shall notify the signatories as to the course of action it will pursue.

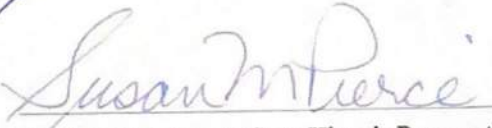
EXECUTION of the Memorandum of Agreement by the FHWA, WVSHPO, the WVDOH and the Council, and implementation of its terms evidence that the FHWA has afforded the Council an opportunity to comment on the Grant Street Bridge Project and its effects on historic properties, and that the FHWA has taken into account the effects of the undertaking on the historic properties.

Signatories Page



Federal Highway Administration

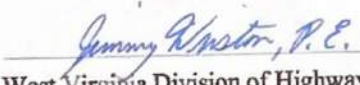
12/29/2020
Date



West Virginia Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

12/8/2020
Date

INVITED SIGNATORY:



West Virginia Division of Highways

12/9/2020
Date

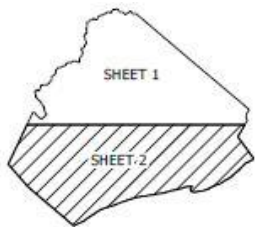
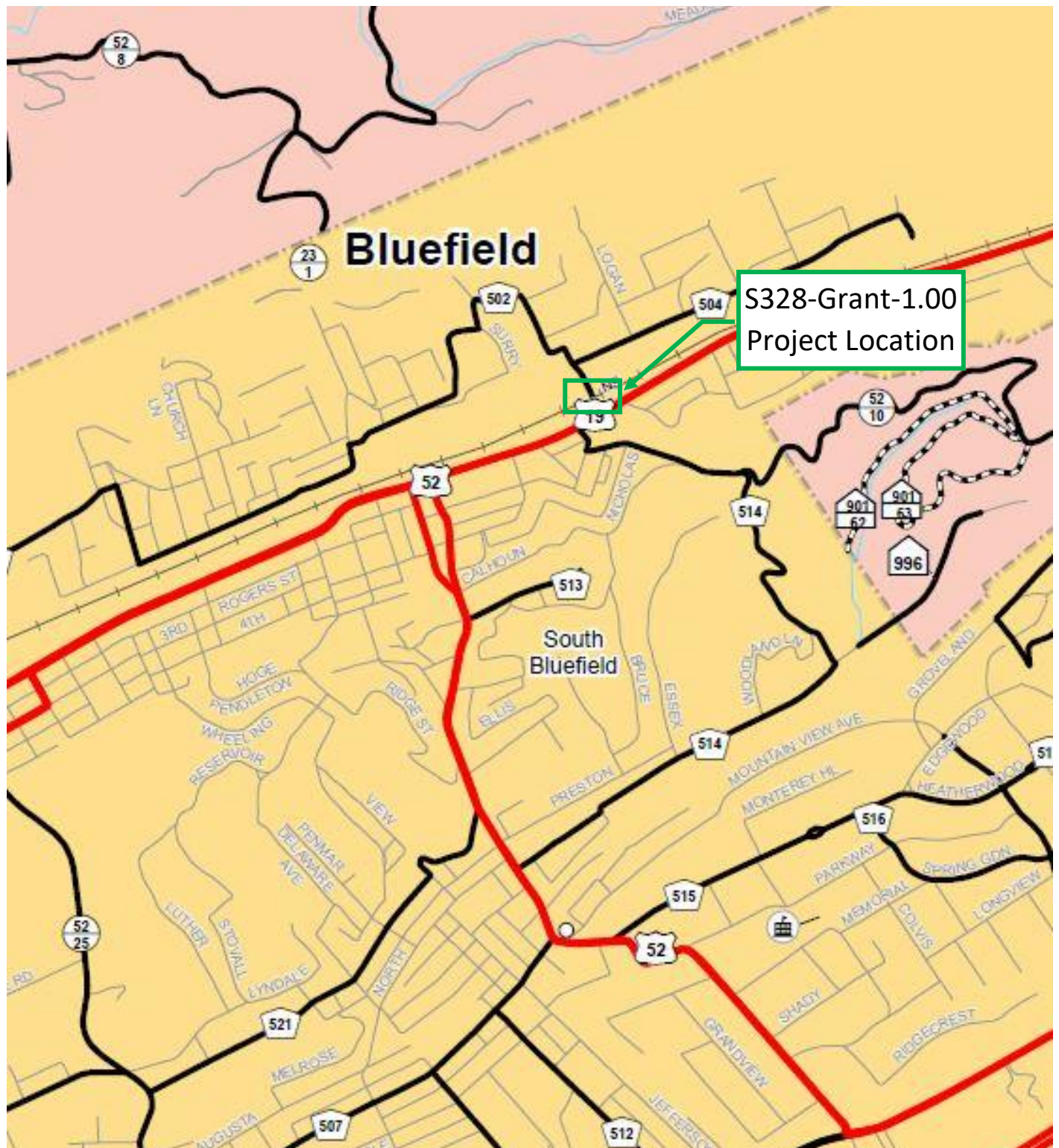
Consulting Parties

Vonnia Harris Davis

Vonnia Davis, East End Neighborhood Representative

12/09/2020

Date



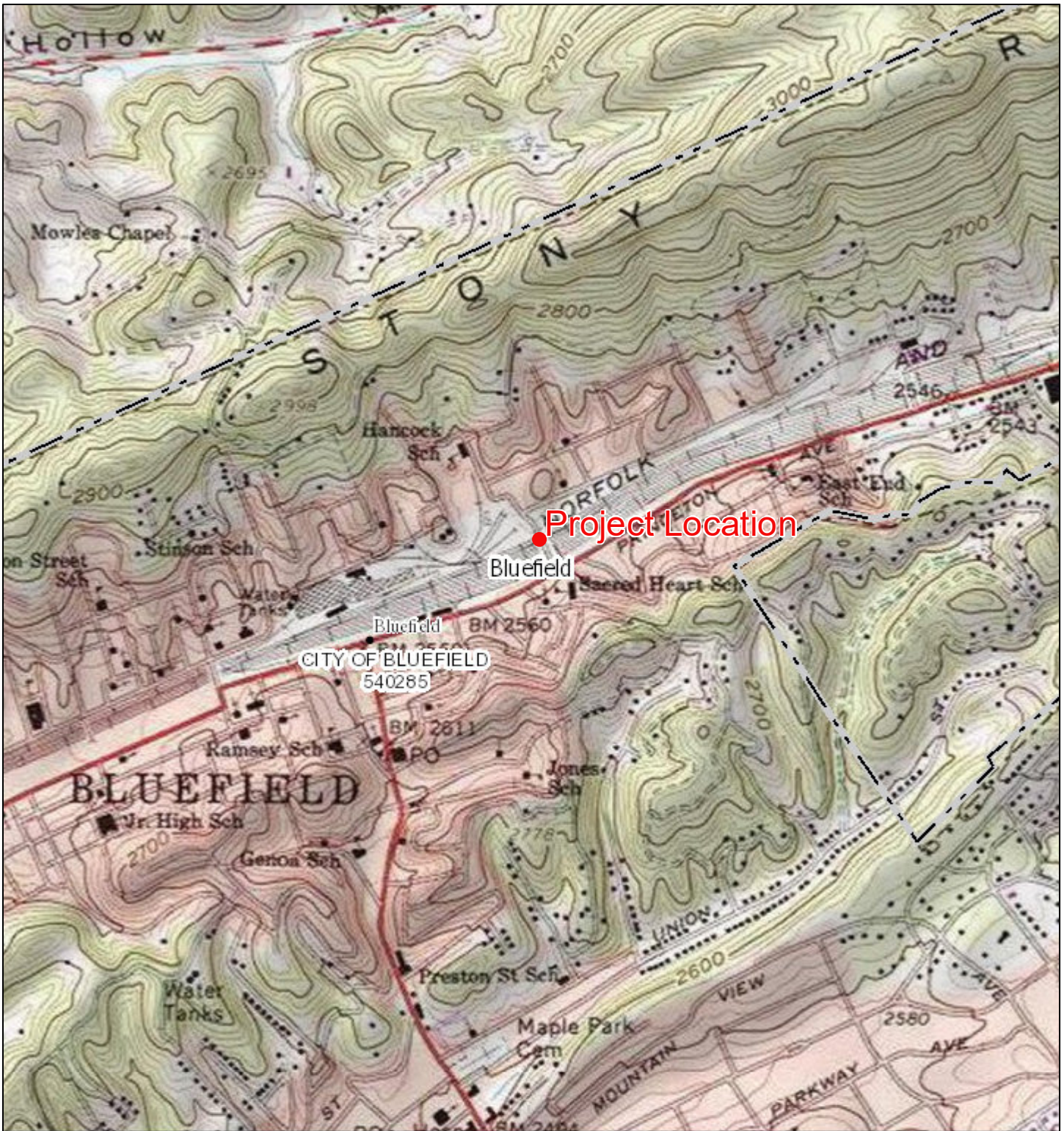
KEY MAP OF SHEETS



KEY MAP OF COUNTIES

Location Map:
 Grant Street Bridge Replacement
 State Project No. S328-Grant-1.00
 Mercer County
 Map: West Virginia Division of Highways 2020

WV Topographic Map-Grant St. Bridge

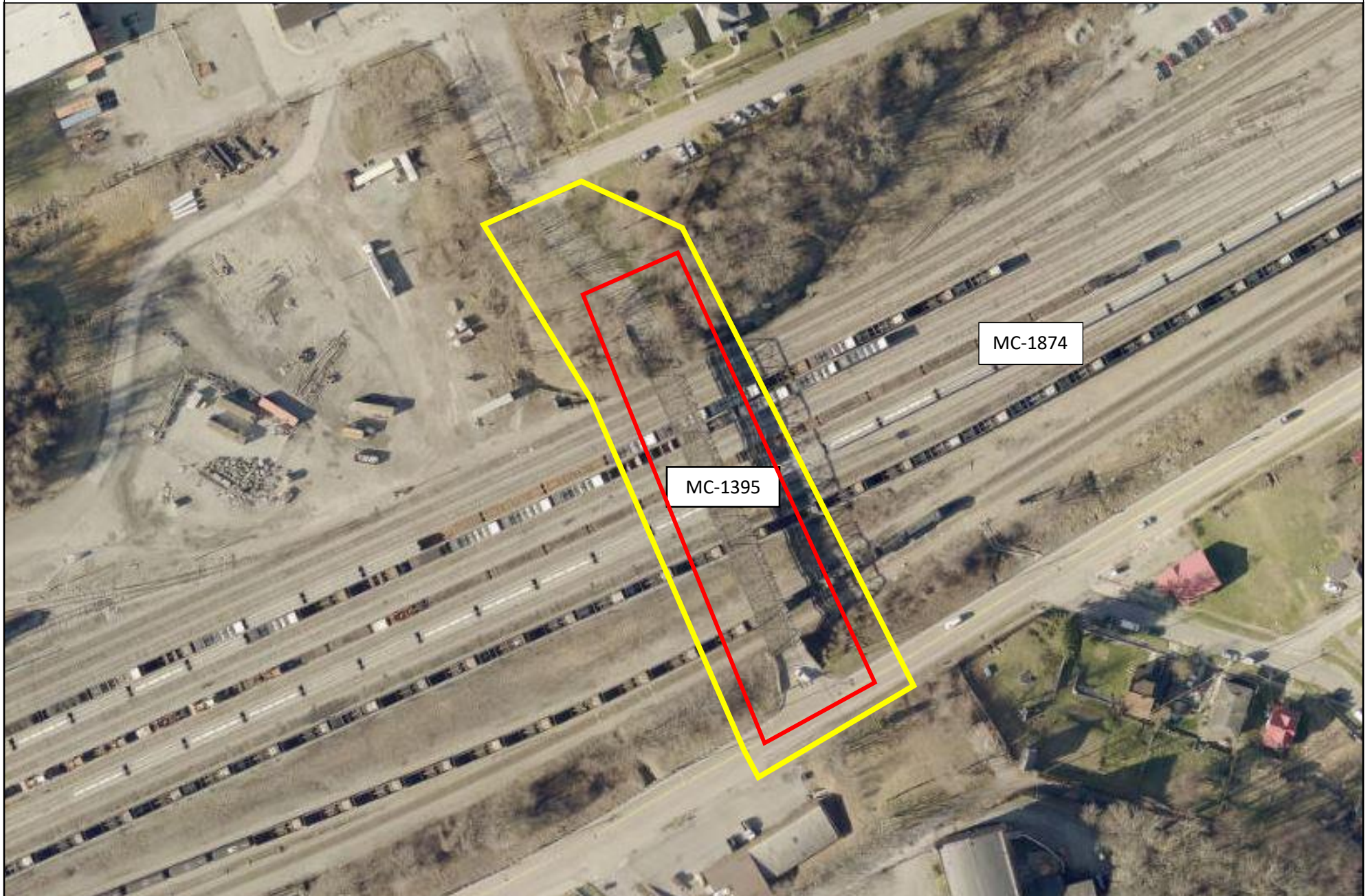


November 3, 2020

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Notes:

Historic Resources Area of Potential Effect
Grant Street Bridge, Bluefield, Mercer County
State Project S328-GRANT-1.00



Project Area is outlined in Red. Historic Resources Area of Potential Effect is outlined in Yellow.

NATIONAL REGISTER EVALUATION INFORMATION

National Register Determination Eligible Reason Not Evaluated

National Register Determination Date 2013

This bridge has a significant association with a historic transportation system, program, event, trend, or policy identified through contextual research and survey activities. Although this bridge has undergone alterations, it still retains the historic integrity necessary to convey its historic significance and, therefore, is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A.

This bridge exhibits continuous span design, demonstrating important engineering design or technology as a variation within its class.

This bridge was designed or constructed by an engineer or firm whose work is distinguishable on the national level.

Although this bridge has undergone alterations, it still retains the historic integrity necessary to convey its engineering significance and, therefore, is eligible for the National Register under Criterion C.



West Virginia Historic Bridge Inventory Form
Form Prepared By Mead & Hunt and KCI
Form Preparation Date 2013

WEST VIRGINIA HISTORIC PROPERTY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

NAME: Grant Street Bridge
SURVEY NUMBER: MC-1395
PROJECT/FR NUMBER: S328-GRANT-1.00

Continuation Sheet Date: 11/4/2020

Continuation Sheet Prepared By:

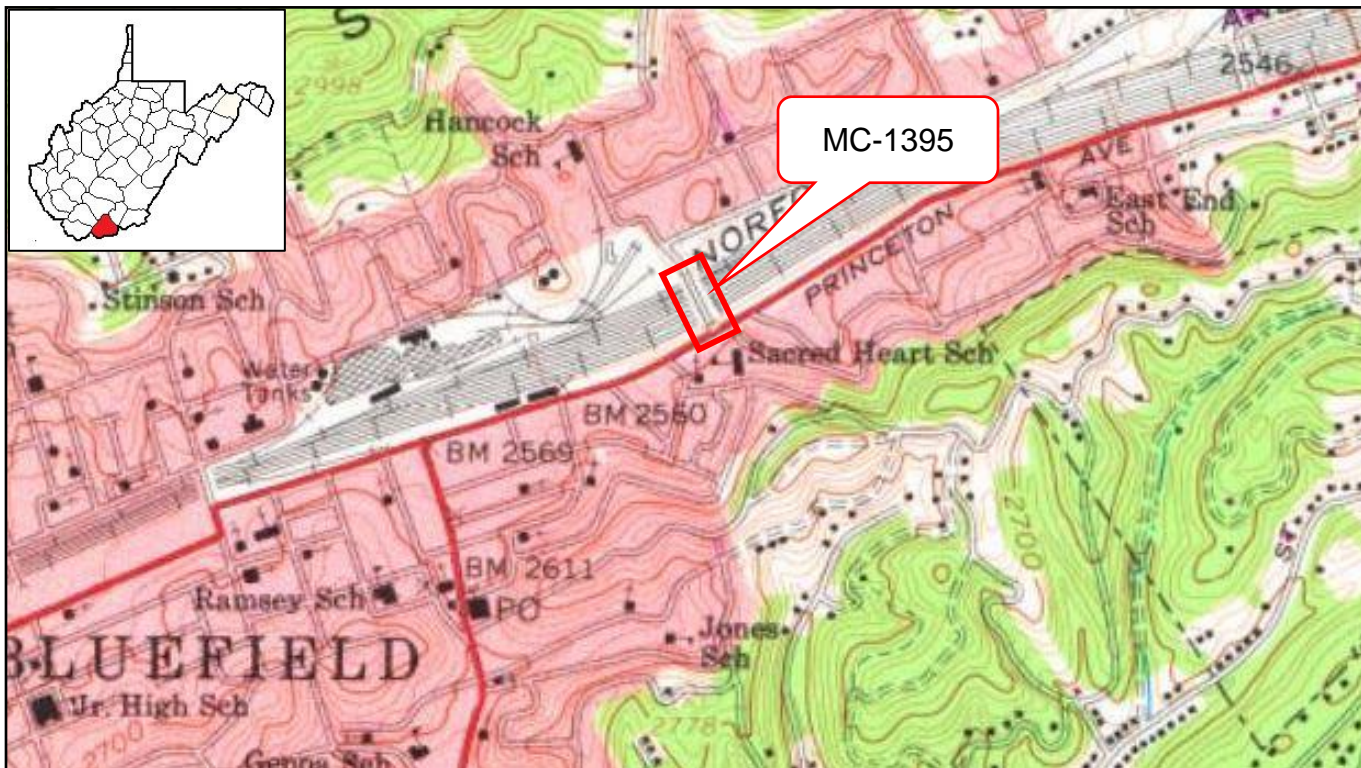
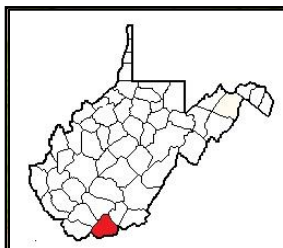
Ahleah Boise
Environmental Resource Special-Senior
WV Division of Highways
Engineering Division-Environmental Section
1334 Smith Street
Charleston, WV 25301
304-630-0248

Survey Report Prepared For:

Grant Street Bridge Replacement
State Project Number S328-GRANT-1.00
Mercer County

Site No. in 2020 Survey: APE #1

Address: Grant Street over
Norfolk Southern Corp Railyard
Bluefield, Mercer County
Parcel ID: N/A



WEST VIRGINIA HISTORIC PROPERTY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

NAME: Grant Street Bridge
SURVEY NUMBER: MC-1395
PROJECT/FR NUMBER: S328-GRANT-1.00

Setting: The Grant Street Bridge is located in the town of Bluefield, West Virginia. It carries Grant Street over the Norfolk Southern railyard, connecting the residential neighborhood known as the East End to the north of the railyard to the downtown commercial and administrative center of the town located to the south of the railyard. The town is set in the valley between two ridges that run in a southwest to northeast pattern in the ruggedly mountainous region of southern West Virginia.

Description: The Grant Street Bridge was built in 1941 by the Virginia Bridge Company of Roanoke Virginia. It is a two-span, riveted-plate Warren through truss bridge. The overall length of the structure is 320 feet, with an overall width of 20 feet, excluding the pedestrian walkway that runs along the northeast elevation. The structure consists of trusses that are connected by riveted floor beams, sway struts, and upper and lower laterals. It has a metal grid deck and the pedestrian walkway has wooden floor beams. The bridge is supported at each end by stone and concrete abutments and intermittently by two reinforced concrete open-bent type piers.

Statement of Significance: Mercer County was established in 1837 from Giles and Tazewell Counties in what was then Virginia. The southern county line is also the state border with Virginia. The county is surrounded by West Virginia counties of McDowell, Summers, Raleigh, and Wyoming, and the Virginia counties of Giles, Bland and Tazewell.¹ The county seat is Princeton, founded in 1837 and chartered in 1909. The county was named for Hugh Mercer, a General in the Revolutionary War, and the county seat of Princeton was named for Princeton, New Jersey, where General Mercer was killed. The town was burned by retreating Confederate troops during the Civil War, but later experienced major growth at the turn of the century when the Virginian Railroad established a shop and railyard in the town.²

From settlement until the 1880s, Mercer County had an economy primarily based on subsistence farming and ancillary businesses such as gristmills, tanneries, foundries, and saltworks.³ In the 1880s, the economy shifted from agrarian to industrial as intensive mining began of the Pocahontas coal field. The western section of the county lay over the Pocahontas No. 3 coal seam, a crescent of low-sulfur "smokeless" coal ranging from one foot to nearly 13 feet thick.⁴ Large tracts of land in Mercer County were acquired by the Flat Top Coal Land Association (later the Pocahontas Land Corporation), a subsidiary of the Norfolk & Western Railway. The Pocahontas coal field was opened by the construction on the New River Extension of the Norfolk & Western railway beginning in 1881. The railroad followed a route from Radford, Virginia, through southern Mercer County along the banks of the East River, and was completed to Pocahontas, Virginia in 1883.⁵

The coal mining industry brought a massive influx of new inhabitants to Mercer County and the population grew 114 percent between 1880 and 1890, then in double digit percentages each year from 1910 to 1940. The influx of miners and their families contributed significant racial and ethnic diversity to Mercer County. The populous coal camps of Coopers, Freeman, McComas, Piedmont, and others dotted the western section of the county overlying the coal field, while the cities of Bluefield and Princeton are located in the south-central part of the county and served as commercial and business hubs for the outlying areas. Princeton, the county seat, was founded before the Civil War but experienced major growth when the headquarters of the New River Division of the Virginian Railway was located there in 1907. Bluefield, the other major population center in Mercer County, was named the headquarters of the Pocahontas Division of the Norfolk & Western Railway Company in 1882.

The county reached its peak population in 1950, with 75,013 people, and declined in the second half of the 20th century as the coal mining industry became increasingly mechanized and rail transportation declined. Today the county has a population of approximately 60,000. Bluefield and Princeton remain population centers in southern West Virginia.

Bluefield was incorporated in 1889, seven years after the Norfolk & Western Railway had located its Pocahontas Division headquarters there. The town was located in a wide valley on a gentle incline, allowing the railroad to use an efficient gravity switching system. As the gateway to the Pocahontas Coalfield, the town grew swiftly with wholesale and retail businesses, banks, theaters, other commercial establishments, as well as residential neighborhoods located both north and south of the

¹ C. Stuart McGehee, "Mercer County," e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia.

² Ibid.

³ McGehee, "Mercer County" e-WV.

⁴ C. Stuart McGehee, "Pocahontas No. 3 Coal Seam," e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia.

⁵ Robert L. Frey, "Norfolk & Western Railway," e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia.

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massive railyard. Bluefield State College, a Historically Black College/University, is located at the southwestern edge of town.⁶

Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps from 1893 indicate that the earliest bridge built over the railyard was the Mercer Street iron bridge. In the next decade, the railroad would build several bridges linking downtown Bluefield to the neighborhoods to the north of the railyard. The first Grant Street Bridge was built around 1903. That bridge collapsed under the weight of an overloaded trailer truck in September of 1940, leading to a protracted negotiation between the City of Bluefield and the Norfolk & Western Railroad over the responsibility and expense of replacing and maintaining the bridge. It was eventually agreed that the N&W would fully fund the construction of the new bridge and that the railway would maintain the superstructure and abutments while the city was responsible for maintaining the timber deck, roadway, sidewalk, handrails, and installing and maintaining load limit signs. Work got underway in March of 1941, and the piers and abutments were completed in May. The delivery of steel to complete the bridge was delayed over the summer as the Norfolk & Western and the Virginia Bridge Company prioritized defense contracts, but the bridge was opened to pedestrian traffic on October 5, and finally to vehicle traffic on October 20, 1941.⁷

The new bridge was built by the Virginia Bridge Company, based out of Roanoke Virginia. The company was organized as the Virginia Bridge and Iron Company in 1895 and was in the early 20th century the largest industry in Roanoke apart from the Norfolk & Western shops.⁸ The general offices of the company were located there and they also operated large manufacturing plants in other cities such as Memphis, Birmingham, and Atlanta. In addition to fabricating steel railroad and highway bridges, the company produced structural steel for construction and steel railroad cars. The company was purchased in 1936 by the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company of Birmingham, Alabama, a subsidiary of U.S. Steel. The company continued its operations in Roanoke as the Virginia Bridge Company. The company prospered in the 1940s due to government contracts to fabricate steel for war materiel.⁹ The company declined and eventually closed in the 1950s after wage disputes.¹⁰

⁶ C. Stuart McGehee, "Bluefield," e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia.

⁷ Paige Wooldridge Is Named Police Judge...Bluefield Daily Telegraph, July 16, 1941, 1.

⁸ George S. Jack and E.B. Jacobs, *History of Roanoke County*, 112-113.

⁹ Martha Carver, "Tennessee's Survey Report for Historic Highway Bridges-Bridge Companies", 215-217.

¹⁰ Ibid.

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NRHP Criteria Evaluation: The Grant Street Bridge was previously evaluated as eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C. It remains eligible. The Grant Street Bridge is eligible under Criterion A for its association with the Norfolk & Western Railroad and with planning and development in Bluefield, the social and commercial center of the southern West Virginia Coalfields from ca. 1889 to 1960. The bridge is not known to be associated with a person significant in history and is not eligible under Criterion B. The bridge is eligible under Criterion C for its association with the Virginia Bridge Company, a nationally recognized steel bridge fabricator. It is not eligible under Criterion D as it was built in the mid-20th century using commonplace techniques, materials, and tools. It is not likely to yield information important to the understanding of history or prehistory.

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South approach.
(Photo: WVDOH
November 2020).



North approach.
(Photo: WVDOH
November 2020).

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East elevation.
(Photo: WVDOH
November 2020).



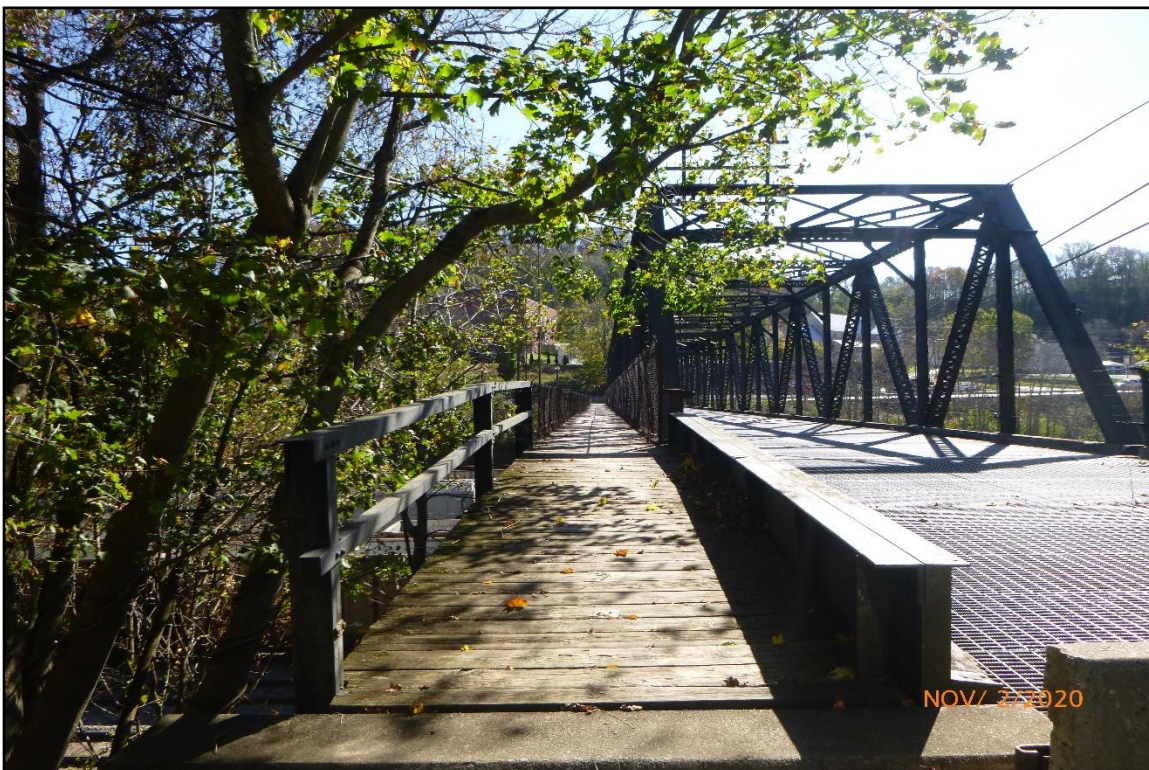
West elevation,
obscured by
vegetation.
(Photo: WVDOH
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Detail of bridge plaques. (Photo: WVDOH November 2020).



Detail of pedestrian walkway. (Photo: WVDOH November 2020).