We support efforts to make the federal infrastructure project review process more efficient. We share the broad goals outlined in the One Federal Decision policy established in Executive Order 13807 to promote the timely processing of reviews for major infrastructure projects, as well as related efforts of the Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council. The most effective way to save time and money in the historic preservation review process for infrastructure projects is to develop better 21st century digital maps that allow project planners and agency reviewers to know where cultural resources have already been located and where they are likely to be identified.

Gathering information about existing and predicted historic resources takes significantly longer without these digital tools, yet many State and Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs and THPOs) lack the funding to develop such tools. As a result, historic preservation reviews typically occur late in the project development process, often during a Section 106 review of the impacts of the preferred alternative, with the potential for delays and constrained options that make preservation of important historic places less feasible. Conversely, developing more robust GIS-based maps enable infrastructure project planners and decision makers to incorporate and avoid historic resources early in the planning process, resulting in shorter project review timelines.

Instead of waiting until the final stages, consideration of historic resources should happen early in the project planning process, when most project elements—purpose, location, alignment, and scale—are still fluid. Early participation in project planning enables preservation planners to work with project sponsors to plan, design, and develop projects that avoid harm to historic resources, lessen conflict, and expedite project delivery.

Federal investment in our country’s aging infrastructure is overdue and is critical to the communities where we work and live. Efficient delivery of infrastructure projects and the preservation of our nation’s cultural resources can and should be complimentary goals, as intended by Congress when it passed the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966.

**FY 2020 Appropriations Request**

Please support $5 million to create a new competitive grants program to fund GIS-based historic resource databases for SHPOs and THPOs in the FY 2020 Interior Appropriations bill.

**APPROPRIATIONS BILL:** Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
**AGENCY:** National Park Service  
**ACCOUNT:** Historic Preservation Fund

**JUSTIFICATION:** Congress should establish a pool of competitive grants to enable SHPOs and THPOs to create and enhance GIS-based maps of historic and cultural resources and develop predictive models. Such an investment would advance the faster, less expensive, and more efficient delivery of infrastructure projects while ensuring the protection of our nation’s most cherished historic resources.
This map demonstrates a cultural resources dataset layer in the state of Virginia. The map includes national historic landmarks, sites that are “listed on, contributing to, or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places / Virginia Landmarks Register,” as well as “surveyed sites/properties without formal recommendations of eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places but have potential for eligibility.”

DATA COURTESY OF THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HISTORIC RESOURCES

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