

Van Vorst Park Association

Barrow Mansion

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July 7, 2017

Katherine Marcopul, Administrator and Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer:

New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office

Mail Code 501-04B

State of New Jersey

Department of Environmental Protection

PO Box 420

Trenton, NJ 08625-0420

Re: Comments on the Cultural Resources Identification Report
 Conrail Harsimus Branch Abandonment Exemption,
 STB Docket No. AB 167 (Sub-No. 1189X)

Dear Ms. Marcopul:

It is the understanding of the Van Vorst Park Association (VVPA), that the NJ State Historic Preservation Office is commenting on the Cultural Resources Identification Report for the Harsimus Branch. We request that you consider the comments below, and that you also submit this letter with your comments to the Office of Environmental Assessment at the Surface Transportation Board.

VVPA is a volunteer organization working toward promoting a better quality of life in the Van Vorst Park historic neighborhood and in the larger community. One of the ways in which we do that is by partnering with other neighborhood associations, civic entities, and various organizations to protect the historic legacy of Jersey City. With this letter, we add our voice to support the comments of the Embankment Preservation Coalition, in seeking to add the Harsimus Branch to the National Register of Historic Places.

1. The entire Harsimus Branch from Marin to approximately Chestnut Street near Journal Square should be recommended as eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.
 - a. The Harsimus Branch is a crucial component of the history of Jersey City, and in this regard, we agree with the Report, that it has great significance. According to historian Richard James, "The Pennsylvania Railroad Harsimus Branch Embankment is significant in American transportation history; it enabled a major trunk rail line to establish a large freight yard on the Hudson River, contributing greatly to the growth of the Port of New York and New Jersey. The embankment... facilitated the dedication of most of the Jersey City Hudson waterfront to rail and rail-related uses, significantly inflecting the social and political history of the City, as well as its physical outline." In this statement, Mr. James was nominating the Embankment, but the sentiment is applicable to the entire Harsimus Branch and its significance. (<http://www.jclandmarks.org/resources/national-registry-nominations/the-pennsylvania-railroad-harsimus-branch-embankment-jersey-city-nj-state-national-registers-of-historic-places-nomination/>)
 - b. The Harsimus Branch does retain enough integrity to convey its historic significance. See attached document "Harsimus Branch Integrity Pictures.pdf" for photographs taken by the Embankment Coalition, the City's Historic Preservation Officers, and Google Earth photos, all of which show the continuation of the railway along the Palisades to the point where it enters the CP Waldo area, which is where the PATH trains are. This is the old Bergen Cut.

2. The Embankment with the rest of the Harsimus Branch should be recommended as a “contiguous” part of the Pennsylvania Railroad New York to Philadelphia Historic District. We argue this given the continued integrity of the railway and its significant impact on the history of Jersey City.
3. Like the Harsimus Cove and Hamilton Park Historic Districts, the Van Vorst Park Historic District was also shaped by the Pennsylvania Railroad. While the Harsimus Branch formed the boundary between Harsimus Cove and Van Vorst Park, the passenger line of the Pennsylvania Railroad formed the northern boundary of the Van Vorst Park Historic District (see Map 1). These major demarcations, rather than being ancillary features, contributed to the evolution of a sense of place distinctive to each neighborhood. By preserving the Harsimus Branch, we acknowledge to future generations the interesting and complex factors that contribute to the identity of a neighborhood.

Thank you for considering the views of our community in your submission to the Surface Transportation Board.

Sincerely,

Oona Jackson Moore
President, Van Vorst Park Association &
Downtown Coalition of Neighborhood Associations

Copies: Victoria Rutson, STB OEA
Joshua Wayland, STB OEA
Andrea Tingey, NJ SHPO

Attachment: “Harsimus Branch Integrity Pictures.pdf”

