

---

*The Boone Tunnel was determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) by the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) in 1997. As part of Section 106 compliance requirements for the Howard Street Tunnel Project in Maryland, Delaware, and Pennsylvania, the historic property was documented on a Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey Form in 2020. It was determined the structure continues to be eligible for the NRHP under Criterion C. Mitigation under the project's Section 106 Memorandum of Agreement required updated evaluation-level documentation. This document provides that documentation, which includes additional historic context and photographic documentation, as well as historic photographs. The 2020 NRHP determination of eligibility for the property remains unchanged.*

### **History and Significance (Item 39)**

The Boone Tunnel was constructed as part of the Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) Railroad's Royal Blue Line, a new rail alignment between Bay View Junction in northeast Baltimore and Philadelphia that allowed the B&O to access the New York City harbor.

#### ***Railroad Competition Along the Northeast Corridor***

Railroads sought to dominate their competitors and secure access to the lucrative markets along the Northeast Corridor, including Wilmington, Philadelphia, and New York. The B&O was the first operational railroad in the United States and successfully constructed lines west from Baltimore to the Ohio River Valley and beyond; however, they struggled with access to the Northeast Corridor. The Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore (PW&B) Railroad and the Baltimore and Susquehanna Railroad (later known as the Northern Central Railway) established lines to Baltimore by 1840. The Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR) expanded its Baltimore presence through acquisitions of the Northern Central Railway in 1861 and the Baltimore and Potomac (B&P) Railroad in 1867. In 1873, the PRR constructed the 1.7-mile B&P Tunnel under the west side of Baltimore, providing a western connection to their newly constructed Union Station in the Jones Falls Valley. On the east side of the city, the PRR constructed a tunnel under Hoffman Street, which connected Union Station to the PW&B's line to Philadelphia, which was used by both the PRR and B&O under lease agreements (Manning 2015, 2).

With these improvements, the PRR gained a continuous north-south route through Baltimore connecting Washington, DC, to Philadelphia. Meanwhile, the B&O had no such connection through Baltimore, leaving the railroad at a distinct disadvantage. A partial solution to provide better access was the construction of a spur from Camden Station to Locust Point on the west side of the Baltimore Harbor. At Locust Point, a specially designed ferry transferred cars across the harbor to Canton on the east side. From Canton, a railroad line continued two miles northeast to Bay View Junction (Manning 2015, 2). Construction of the Baltimore Belt Line between 1890 and 1895 provided a continuous route through the city from Camden Station to Bay View Junction. North of Bay View Junction, both the PRR and B&O used tracks owned by the PW&B. Both railroads sought to acquire the PW&B, and, in 1881, the PRR, which was in a better financial position, secured a controlling interest in the PW&B (Manion 1990, 7).

#### ***The B&O's Royal Blue Line***

The PRR's ownership of the PW&B Railroad left its competitor, the B&O, without a route from Baltimore

through the Northeast Corridor. B&O president John W. Garrett, feeling the sting of the PRR's success in securing a direct line to Philadelphia, sought to expand the B&O's reach in the northeast (Wrabel 2014, 3). This led the B&O to construct its 90-mile Philadelphia Branch from Bay View Junction in Baltimore to the eastern side of the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia, northwest of, but generally parallel to, the PW&B tracks. Construction of the line began in 1883, but the first regular Baltimore–Philadelphia passenger trains did not begin operating until September 1886. The route served both passenger and freight service between Washington, DC, and New York City via Baltimore and Philadelphia. North of Philadelphia, the B&O relied on tracks owned by the Philadelphia and Reading (P&R) Railroad and the Central Railroad of New Jersey (CNJ) to reach New York's harbor (DVRPC 1997, 16; Harwood 1990, x).

To navigate the region, the B&O constructed three tunnels in the Philadelphia area: a 2,303-foot, cut-and-cover tunnel at Fairmount Park; a short tunnel beneath Grays Ferry Avenue in South Philadelphia; and the 626.5-foot-long, cut-and-cover Boone Tunnel under Chester Pike at the intersection with Cherry Street and Laurel Road at the nexus of the Collingdale, Darby, and Sharon Hill Boroughs. Boone Tunnel construction began in 1883 and was completed in 1885, dividing many of the large estates that were part of the Sharon Hill borough, located along Chester Pike (Clarke et al. 2009, 16; Harwood 2002, 45, 31).

The B&O marketed the Washington-New York route's passenger service as the Royal Blue Line. For nearly 70 years, it was the B&O's most prestigious rail system. From Washington, DC, B&O's passenger trains—painted in a distinctive royal blue color—traveled through Baltimore on the Belt Line, which opened to traffic in 1895, and then from Bay View to Philadelphia on the railroad's Philadelphia Branch before using the P&R Railroad and the CNJ's tracks and a ferry system from the CNJ's Jersey City Terminal to New York City (Harwood 2002, ix-x). Overall, the trip took five hours; however, the time still lagged behind the PRR, which could transport passengers between the two cities in just under four and a half hours (Wrabel 2014, 10). In 1910, the PRR opened New York City's Pennsylvania Station in Manhattan, and the Royal Blue Line began a slow but steady decline. The B&O discarded the Royal Blue Line imagery, seen as a tired relic of the past, and not long after converted to the more ubiquitous olive-green exterior paint color of Pullman Company rail cars (Wrabel 2014, 7).

In 1930, the PRR promised electrification of its line to Baltimore by 1935, which would require cables, substations, and expensive new locomotives. In response, the B&O began to switch its locomotive fleet to diesel fuel that did not require overhead transmission lines and a specialized motive power fleet. The B&O revived the nostalgic Royal Blue Line color scheme, hoping to entice customers. Though it garnered attention, the new Royal Blue trains did not attract as much success as the B&O desired (Wrabel 2014, 11-12).

### ***Development Near Boone Tunnel***

The land surrounding the Boone Tunnel remained largely undeveloped, with several residences and farms, until the Philadelphia, PW&B and B&O Railroads were constructed through the area in the late nineteenth century. The PW&B Railroad became operational in January 1838 but did not have an impact on the area as the original tracks ran along the Delaware River and no stations were in the vicinity (Black 1999, 2–3). The 1872 Gray Railway Map of the State of Pennsylvania shows minor development in the town of Darby and additional roads leading into the area. The main thoroughfare through the area was the "Queens Highway," which follows the path of present-day Chester Pike/US 13 (Clark et al. 2009, 7). By 1872, the PW&B had moved its tracks inland and constructed a station in Sharon Hill at the corner of Sharon Avenue. With the introduction of the railroad, Sharon Hill was platted out and many wealthy

Philadelphians began constructing homes in the area (Clarke et al. 2009, 9).

Prior to construction of the B&O Railroad, Maximillian LaRoche and Jacob Boon established the Collingdale Land Company and purchased land north of the proposed B&O tracks from Clifton Avenue to Springfield, extending as far north as Bartram Avenue. Once the route was completed, the area grew rapidly, as new residents could now take a train from the new station at Clifton Avenue (Collingdale 2020). By the early 1890s, development was occurring near the area's three railroad stations—the Sharon Hill Station, along the PW&B, and the Collingdale and "Boon" stations along the B&O (Delaware County History 1892). The Darby Station was northeast of the Boone Tunnel. This growth led the borough of Sharon Hill to officially withdraw from the Town of Darby in 1890. The following year, the Collingdale borough did the same. In 1892, trolley lines were constructed along Chester Pike, on top of the tunnel, by the Chester, Darby, and Philadelphia Railway Company, spurring additional growth in the east ends of Collingdale and Sharon Hill and the west end of Darby. The lines were double tracked in the early twentieth century and remained operational until 1934 (Clarke et al. 2009, 24). By 1929, the area was nearly completely developed with industrial buildings along the railroad tracks and residential duplexes between the tracks and MacDade Boulevard in Collingdale and a mix of single-family houses, duplexes, and rowhouses in Sharon Hill and Darby. Purpose-built commercial buildings or residential buildings converted to commercial use were along Chester Pike adjacent to the tunnel (Klinge 1929).

### ***Decline of the B&O Railroad***

The post-World War II years cemented the end of the Royal Blue Line. In 1944, the B&O was over \$112 million in debt and interest had come due. For two years the US Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) considered the B&O's deferment plan that set maturity dates between 1965 and 2010, which it eventually approved. Though this lightened the financial burden, the steady decline of B&O passenger service after the war exacerbated matters, as faster and more efficient means of transportation via automobiles and airplanes became more commonplace and affordable. In 1946, passenger service revenue fell by 25 percent as inflation rose. While railroads spent approximately \$1.7 billion in maintenance, the federal government spent over \$2.7 billion to build the nation's highways, which took passenger and freight traffic away from the railroads (Jacobs 1989, 115).

The situation worsened for the B&O in the 1950s. In 1952, the PRR unveiled its newest (and fastest) trains on the Washington-New York route, with which the B&O could not compete (Wrabel 2014, 13). Automation in the railroad industry led to an 81 percent decrease in the number of B&O employees (Jacobs 1989, 120). In 1957, passenger traffic decreased by 120,693 passengers from the year prior. Despite a five percent fare increase, passenger revenue declined by more than \$231,586. In November of 1957, the B&O filed petitions to discontinue service between Baltimore and New York, which included the Philadelphia Branch, to alleviate deficit issues. The discontinuing of eight passenger trains that year resulted in a net annual saving of approximately \$1.6 million (B&O 1957, 5).

### ***Absorption of the B&O Railroad into CSX Transportation***

In the 1960s, revenue continued to sink as operating expenses remained largely the same (Jacobs 1989, 120). Across the country, railroads were suffering. In 1960, the Chesapeake and Ohio (C&O) Railroad sought to purchase a majority share in B&O common stock, which was achieved the following year and approved by the ICC on December 31, 1962 (Jacobs 1989, 122). The new combined C&O/B&O totaled 11,000 miles of tracks. The C&O embarked on a number of improvements to the B&O's infrastructure. In

1971, Hay Watkins, an employee of the C&O since 1949, became president of the C&O/B&O and renamed the railroad company, mostly for marketing purposes, the "Chessie System." The logo—a cat with a blanket tucked beneath its chin—dated to the 1930s, in which a C&O advertisement in *Fortune* magazine ran with the tag line "Sleep Like a Kitten," referring to the C&O's smooth ride (Jacobs 1989, 124-125).

The 1970s proved fruitful for the Chessie System, with total operating revenues rising over \$800 million and net earnings of more than \$85 million (Jacobs 1989, 125). In 1980, the ICC approved a merger of the Chessie System with the Seaboard Coast Line, which had formed in 1967 from a merger between the Atlantic Coast Line and the Seaboard Air Line. The 1980 merger produced a holding company known as CSX Transportation; rumor had it that the "C" stood for Chessie, the "S" for Seaboard, and the "X" was due to the fact that the result of the merger was greater than simply adding the two systems together. In 1986, the B&O, C&O, and CSX Transportation consolidated into CSX Transportation Incorporated (Jacobs 1989, 127). As of 2022, CSX continues to operate a freight line along the former alignment of the Philadelphia Branch and the Royal Blue Line and is planning track lowering for additional height clearance. Work at the Boone Tunnel will include underpinning the foundations to allow for track lowering.

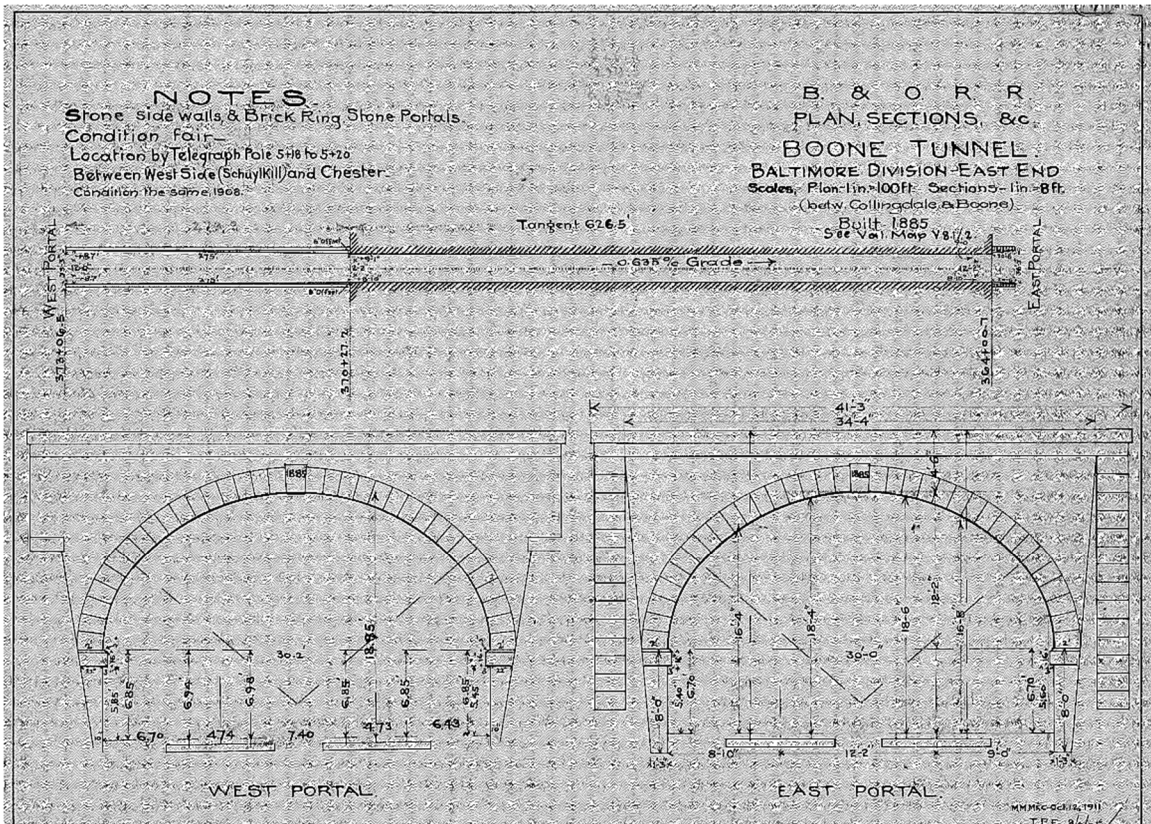
## References

- Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company (B&O). "B&O RR Plan, Sections, &c. Boone Tunnel." CSX Transportation collection, Jacksonville, Florida. 1905.
- . 1957. "131<sup>st</sup> Annual Report." Courtesy of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Museum.
- Black, Laura S. 1999. "Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad." Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey Form, Key # 111801. Harrisburg, PA: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.
- Clarke, Kathleen, Jean Shiber, and the Sharon Hill Historical Society. 2009. *Sharon Hill*. Mount Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Publishing.
- Collingdale Borough. 2020. "About Collingdale." Accessed June 30, 2020.  
<http://www.collingdaleborough.com/about.shtml>.
- Delaware County (PA) History. 1892. "Borough of Darby." Accessed June 30, 2020.  
<https://www.delawarecountyhistory.com/darbyborough/images/DarbyBoro1892.jpg>.
- Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC). 1997. "Abandoned Railroad Inventory and Policy Plan." Accessed November 3, 2021. <https://www.dvrpc.org/reports/97006.pdf>.
- Gray, Frank A. 1872. "Railway Map of the State of Pennsylvania" in *New Topographic Atlas of the State of Pennsylvania*, Henry F. Walling and O. W. Gray, editors. Philadelphia, PA: Stedman, Brown, Lyon.
- Harwood, Herbert H. Jr. 1990, 2002. *Royal Blue Line*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, reprinted in 2002.
- Jacobs, Timothy, ed. 1989. *The History of the Baltimore & Ohio*. New York City: Crescent Books, 1989.
- Klinge, Frank H. M. 1929. *Atlas of Delaware County*. "Parts of Boroughs of Darby, Collingdale & Sharon Hill." Lansdale, PA: Frank H. M. Klinge.
- Library Company of Philadelphia. 1891. "Collingdale Station." Item number P.9945.106.  
<https://digital.librarycompany.org/islandora/object/digitool%3A36711>.
- . 1891. "Darby Station." Item number P.9945.110.  
<https://digital.librarycompany.org/islandora/object/digitool%3A36719>.
- . 1891. "Darby Tunnel." Item number P.9945.107.  
<https://digital.librarycompany.org/islandora/object/digitool%3A36713>.
- Manion, Paul. 1990. "Howard Street Tunnel." *The Sentinel* 12, no. 4 (July-August 1990): 6-21. Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Historical Society (B&ORRHS). Courtesy of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Museum.

Manning, M. Chris. 2015. "B&O Railroad Baltimore Belt Line." Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form B-5287. Crownsville, MD: Maryland Historical Trust.

Wrabel, Frank A. 2014. "The Royal Blue Line." *The Sentinel* 36, no. 3: 3-19. Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Historical Society (B&ORRHS).





"B&O RR Plan, Sections, &c. Boone Tunnel," 1905, annotated in 1911 (Photo courtesy of CSX Transportation)



Boone Tunnel, southwest portal, looking northeast, March 1891 (Photo courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia)





Boone Tunnel, southwest portal, looking northeast, June 1965 (Photo courtesy of the B&O Railroad Historical Society)



Boone Tunnel, northeast portal, looking southwest, June 1965 (Photo courtesy of the B&O Railroad Historical Society)





Boone Tunnel, northeast portal, looking southwest, June 1965 (Photo courtesy of the B&O Railroad Historical Society)



Collingdale Station, March 1891 (Photo courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia)



Darby Station, March 1891 (Photo courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia)





Photograph #1: Boone Tunnel northeast portal, tracks, and setting, looking southwest. October 15, 2021.



Photograph #2: Boone Tunnel northeast portal looking southwest. October 15, 2021.





Photograph #3: Boone Tunnel northeast portal and north retaining wall, looking north. May 20, 2020.



Photograph #4: Boone Tunnel northeast portal and retaining walls, looking southwest. October 15, 2021.





Photograph #5: Boone Tunnel interior view from northeast portal, looking southwest. October 15, 2021.



Photograph #6: Boone Tunnel northeast portal arch interior, looking southwest. October 15, 2021.





Photograph #7: Boone Tunnel southwest portal and retaining walls, looking northeast. October 15, 2021.



Photograph #8: Boone Tunnel southwest portal and interior north wall, looking north. October 15, 2021.



Photograph #9: Boone Tunnel southwest portal and interior, looking northeast along south wall.  
October 15, 2021.





Photograph #10: Boone Tunnel interior, north wall, looking north. October 15, 2021.



Photograph #11: Boone Tunnel northwest retaining wall, looking west. October 15, 2021.