

Appendix: Comments on the City's response

We are hoping to have the Willow Glen Trestle listed on the California Register of Historical Resources as a resource with a “Local Level of Significance”.

We do not fault Steve Mikesell for omitting the Willow Glen Trestle from his book, “*Historic Highway Bridges of California*” because (1) it’s not a highway bridge, and (2) the bridge is not of statewide significance. As Mr. Mikesell points out, there is a taller trestle near San Diego, a longer trestle near Ft. Bragg, and older trestles elsewhere. But the Willow Glen Trestle is our bridge: it helped shape the very character of our Town of Willow Glen during its formative years in the 1920s and ’30s.

Mr. Mikesell’s resume lists the evaluation of the Willow Glen Trestle as one of his major accomplishments. We do not mean to challenge his credentials or reputation with our efforts to preserve the Willow Glen Trestle: all we are trying to do is to save a piece of our local history.

Specific points in the City’s letter:

We never claimed that the Western Pacific Railroad (WPRR) was the “dominant player” in the field: it arrived on the San José scene years after Southern Pacific was well established. Our mentioning of the 1953 Ford Plant in Milpitas was to indicate that Western Pacific became and remained a respectable player in the market. As Mr. Mikesell points out, WPRR had maybe a 10% market share during the 1920s. But, just as Apple Computers had at best a 10% market share compared to the dominant IBM in the early PC market, both Apple and WPRR influenced their respective markets with their innovations: in the latter case by bringing “same day delivery” and “Less Than Carload” (LCL) service which allowed farmers to get their produce to market in a timely manner.

We stand by our statement that there are only three timber trestles left in Santa Clara County, whereas the City claims eight (see the “Citation Location” map and the accompanying charts).

- #1, over the Los Gatos Creek, is the Willow Glen Trestle, subject of this nomination.
- #2 over the Coyote Creek near Story Road is nearly a twin of the Willow Glen Trestle: a little taller, a little longer (but narrower), built at the same time, but less historically intact and also somehow not as historic: it was built out in the countryside and never really shaped the development of the town. (It is a nice bridge, and we hope that it too can be saved: it and the Willow Glen Trestle would make great “bookends” to the trail, iconic trestles at either end of the planned Three Creeks Trail.)
- #3 was a short little trestle over Silver Creek by the Eggo waffle factory. It too was part of the Western Pacific expansion to San José, also from about 1922, but a “poor cousin” to the other two trestles. Last year it caught fire, allegedly due to the homeless. Even though the trestle appeared to have survived the fire with only superficial charring of the timbers, it was quickly demolished and removed “for safety”.
- #4 is also part of the Western Pacific track, this one crossing the Guadalupe River. The river is narrow (in what was once called the Lewis Canal), and the bridge is comprised of a pair of riveted steel walls that support the ties and rails – not a trestle at all.
- #5 is the CalTrain bridge over the Los Gatos, built around 1936 by Southern Pacific. I understand that there remains a small portion of wooden structure by the southern abutment, but most of the bridge is steel girders atop concrete piers. CalTrain plans to replace this bridge very soon, with clearing of the site already in progress.

- We're not quite sure which bridge the City is referring to when calling out a trestle through the Don Edwards Wildlife Reserve. There are two bridges in the Reserve, one on either side of the ghost town of Drawbridge: Google Earth shows #6 to be a long, low, concrete causeway across the mouth of the Coyote Creek as it flows into the San Francisco Bay; #6a is the nearby concrete bridge over Mud Slough in Alameda County. In nearby Alviso at the edge of the Reserve, the tracks cross the Guadalupe River at #6b: this bridge has steel-cased piles and concrete caps. All three bridges serve the main West Coast passenger and freight line.
- #7 is the trestle we discussed in our nomination. It crosses the Pajaro River near Hwy. 25 at the San Benito County line. It is a nice bridge, but it is still in use and is remotely situated 30-some miles from San José.
- The City refers to a #8 at the San Benito County line. If this isn't a repeat of the above, then perhaps they're referring to the Amtrak line south and then west of Gilroy. There does appear to be a trestle over Pescadero Creek, at the San Benito / Santa Cruz County line, but that is outside of Santa Clara County. As it serves the main passenger and freight route to Southern California, presumably the structure receives regular maintenance and repairs.

To address the other comments regarding the importance and the impact of the Willow Glen Trestle, we would like to quote some of the testimony and comments from the April 18, 2016 Quarterly Meeting of the State Historical Resources Commission:

Seth Bergstein:

[Before Western Pacific,] local farmers – farmers and growers in a very fruit rich region of San Jose – had only one option: Southern Pacific Railroad for competition. And they also could not access Southern Pacific's cars unless they had a large enough volume of product.

What the Western Pacific did was essentially serve the little guy.

They came in with something called the “Less-than Car Load” or an LCL which would enable a farmer or a small grower to be able to take advantage of actually getting their fruit shipped and not have to go through the Southern Pacific. This is one way that that Western Pacific was able to break into a market that was, remember, very monopolized at the time. ...

[San José] granted [a franchise] to the Western Pacific for the sole purpose of getting competition into the region. ...

[T]his brings in a lot of competition for the city of San José; it fosters development ... all the industry is to the right of [the trestle], which is actually northeast on the map, which was essentially constructed as spur tracks to serve industry, and by 1958, although the packing district is changing in San Jose at the time from all the suburbanization, there is still essentially a lot of traffic going on here, and what's interesting is every single train has to cross that trestle to get there – there is no other way to do it. So essentially this is the gateway to a rapidly expanded amount of industry.

Now when you look at the stats, you can look at shipping totals, [WP does well.] And, what was more important, was that in local newspapers, we're reading editorials at this time that say that the small shipper is being served – there is greater competition.

Okay, now that there's the other association for development here is the fact that Willow Glen remains residential, and there's reasons why this happened.

Willow Glen was going over issues about incorporation over fears of the Western Pacific alignment coming into town and this is going on in editorials in the newspapers at this time if one reads them.

That first incorporation vote in 1917 did not happen, and largely because [T.S.] Montgomery was quoted in the paper saying he will absolutely make certain that no industrial construction will occur in Willow Glen. And what then happens beyond this is that, when we get into the 1920s, the Southern Pacific is still trying to figure out how they're going to fit in and how they're going to grant a franchise.

San Jose continues their negotiations [playing WP off against SP], and they finally get, at the end of the story, Southern Pacific to move their alignment off of 4th Street, relieve this traffic congestion, and essentially doing this by inviting the Western Pacific into the town. And then the sort of the other development, and this is evident throughout Willow Glen today, ... you will see Montgomery Standard Realty Company flanking all this alignment. And then when you drive these neighborhoods you see wonderful existent 1920s - 1930s residential neighborhood that remain exactly as they were constructed. So this evidence of residence is quite there in Willow Glen; and for folks that live there, Willow Glen still retains this kind of leafy collective residential character. ... [Other than] a lumber yard, there was no other industry in Willow Glen. So despite Willow Glen's fears – and to close the story – at the very end Willow Glen does incorporate for a very brief time, and why do they do this? – because now they can keep the Southern Pacific out later when they try to get their franchise.

Milford Wayne Donaldson:

[W]hat I want to address today: community.

The 1966 National Historic Preservation Act, which created your commission, is celebrating its 50th year. The purpose of the act says “the historical and cultural foundation of the Nation should be preserved as a living part of our community, life, and development, in order to give us a sense of orientation to the American People.” – that is the purpose of the act.

But I'd also like to remind you all that this is under Criteria “A”, which is associated with industrial and economic development of the San Jose community, not “C”.

And as all of you know, these linear resources, whether they be bridges or railroads or old highways or airports or transmission lines or water resources or trails, are always difficult because they change over time. We know they change over time.

But more importantly, the San Jose Preservation Commission voted unanimously – there was one person that was absent – and I listened to the audio tape of the Commission. In Commission there, Marilyn Messina, “said I think it's wonderful, to see a group of people, and so passionate and dedicated about preserving something. Something unique and special in your area and the history, and it's very gratifying to see that.”

But more important, the chair, Ramiro Torres, said, “even if it only lasts 50 years” – he's referring to a report in the EIR – “I should think that should not be up to us at this point, our generation, to make that determination that it should be torn down. I have a 2 1/2 year old, and maybe then 50 years now, his generation can say “yes” to rebuilding the structure, or if it's too old, may be replaced. But at this point, if we're going to last another 50 years, let's keep it.”

So I think it's important, when we're looking at these, is that there's a need for every generation and every community to discover these “pieces of lost gold”, as William has always said, is that in the beginning of the National Historic Preservation Act, we had a lot of Placer gold, where you

could just pick up gold off the ground, but now we have to look for these special things, like these mid-Century Modern and how we keep these going.

So, when we're looking at Willow Glen, I think it will give us again another sense of this orientation to community to establish not just what was at that time western San José, but to all of the members of San José.

Commissioner Elizabeth Edwards Harris:

[F]actors that really stood out for me was the ... connection between the bridge and the residential [community], which is important factor under criterion "A". ... I think there was a lot of credible evidence here to show that this is, in fact, a piece of history.

Commissioner Alberto Bertoli:

... I keep reading the title of our work, our commission, Office of Historic Preservation for the state of California.

So now as I think about the bridge, the object, and I start to see all sorts of connections.

Timber construction was very important at the turn of the century. When you happen to be in a state where timber is plentiful, in particular at the beginning of the 20th century.

And from that point of you have a significant in a very very very low means, if you compared to the other parts of the world and moment everybody else was doing concrete bridges, right? But here, in a very small modest community they decided to use the materials that is local. Timber is here in California. And timber construction that we can throughout, everywhere.

So, from that point of view, sitting on this commission, I feel that it is extremely important that we can protect those few pieces that are hidden here and there.

They are hidden everywhere, and we should try to keep him up in the eyes of everyone and in the future for admiration and observation, the status of the names of the next generation of the children in the school and in the schools of architecture so I could take sure the students.

To find structural systems in architecture is always a struggle. It is a marriage between the two within the architecture expiration of the building and the structure that allows us to do all remote in this nature? When we look at this object, the subject of discussion, the connection between the structural system, which is really fascinating, and the final product, it has a visual enhancement, a visual presence, that they become, to certain degree, very unique.

And, from that point of view, I think it wholly qualifies what I would effort to try to preserve it as much as we can. ...

I would like to make a motion to accept and approve the nomination as it has been written.

Last year, the State Historic Resources Commission heard and considered the City's thoughts and recommendations and then unanimously decided to recommend that the Willow Glen Trestle be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. We hope that the Commission will once again consider our application, this time for the State Registry, and will grant it the recognition that will help it be preserved for generations to come.

The full transcript of the SHRC hearing, along with other supporting documents, are online at www.WGTrestle.org