

**MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST  
DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY FORM**

NR Eligible: yes  no

Property Name: RAILROAD LINE  
B&O Baltimore Belt Bridge Over Jones Falls Valley Inventory Number: B-5288

Address: Bounded by W. 21st St., N. Howard St., N. Ave. Bridge (B-4521), & McMechen St. Historic district: yes  no

City: Baltimore Zip Code: 21217 County: Baltimore City

USGS Quadrangle(s): Baltimore East

Property Owner: CSX Transportation Company Tax Account ID Number: Not Available

Tax Map Parcel Number(s): n/a Tax Map Number: Unknown

Project: Baltimore and Potomac Tunnel Project Agency: Federal Railroad Administration

Agency Prepared By: Dovetail Cultural Resource Group

Preparer's Name: M. Chris Manning Date Prepared: 7/21/2015

Documentation is presented in: \_\_\_\_\_

Preparer's Eligibility Recommendation:  Eligibility recommended  Eligibility not recommended

Criteria:  A  B  C  D Considerations:  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

*Complete if the property is a contributing or non-contributing resource to a NR district/property:*

Name of the District/Property: \_\_\_\_\_

Inventory Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Eligible: yes Listed: yes

Site visit by MHT Staff yes  no  Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Description of Property and Justification: *(Please attach map and photo)*

**Opening Summary**

The Baltimore and Ohio (B&O) Railroad Baltimore Belt Line Bridge over Jones Falls Valley, located in the City of Baltimore, Maryland, is a six-span plate girder bridge constructed between 1896 and 1899. It is bounded on the northeast by West 21st Street, on the east by North Howard Street, on the south by the North Avenue Bridge (B-4521), and on the west by McMechen Street. Today the bridge is part of CSX Transportation Company's (CSXT) main freight line through Baltimore.

**Location/Setting**

The B&O Baltimore Belt Line Bridge over Jones Falls Valley is located in the City of Baltimore, Maryland in an area dominated by transportation infrastructure, including five current or former rail lines. It is bounded on the northeast by West 21st Street, on the east by North Howard Street, on the south by the North Avenue Bridge, and on the west by McMechen Street. From its northern approach, the bridge makes an S-curve, crossing over the former tracks of the M&P Railroad, Falls Road/Route 25, the

**MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST REVIEW**

Eligibility recommended  Eligibility not recommended

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MHT Comments: CONTRIBUTES TO B-5287

Jim Talamuso  
Reviewer, Office of Preservation Services

B Kentze  
Reviewer, National Register Program

8/28/2015  
Date

9/2/15  
Date

Jones Falls Trail/East Coast Greenway, Jones Falls, and the former tracks and rail yard of the PRR's Central Division before passing under the North Avenue Bridge while simultaneously bridging the east portal of the B&P Railroad Tunnel. The line then continues under Interstate 83/Jones Falls Expressway and through a short concrete tunnel under the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) Light Rail before entering a stone-arch tunnel leading to the Mount Royal Station (B-26).

Historic Context

In the eighteenth century, the land in and around present-day Baltimore was home to a thriving tobacco economy supplemented by commercial wheat and iron production that resulted in a diversified economy with a strong industrial base. By the late-eighteenth century, Baltimore had emerged as a major port with numerous wharves, warehouses, shipping offices, banks, and shops concentrated along the waterfront of the Inner Harbor (Shellenhamer 2015). During the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, commerce in Baltimore was intermittently disrupted by clashes with British forces and subsequent interruptions of trade networks. The city continued to grow and prosper, however, becoming the fourth largest and third richest city in the United States by the second decade of the nineteenth century (Shellenhamer 2015; Toll 2006:12). Unsurprisingly, Baltimore's ever increasing industrial presence and expanding trade network stimulated the development of a growing transportation industry and improved transportation routes that facilitated the movement of resources and finished products in and out of the city (Shellenhamer 2015; Ward et al. 2006).

In 1827, the Maryland Legislature granted a charter to the B&O Railroad to establish a connection between Baltimore and the lucrative markets of the Ohio River Valley (Lee 2005:163-164). The railroad opened three years later to become the first operational railroad in the United States, although it did not complete its line to Wheeling, West Virginia until 1852 (Shellenhamer 2015; Wolmar 2012:19-20). In 1835, the B&O opened a southern branch to Washington, D.C., originally known as the Washington Branch and later as the Capital Subdivision. Initially, the B&O's eastern terminus was located at Mount Clare Station on the southwest side of Baltimore at Pratt and Poppleton Streets. In 1857, the B&O constructed the much larger Camden Station, situated closer to the center of Baltimore, which was substantially expanded in 1865 (Lee 2005:164).

The B&O did not remain the only railroad in Baltimore for long, however. Within a decade of the opening of the B&O, both the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore (PW&B) and the Baltimore and Susquehanna (later the Northern Central) had established lines to the city (Lee 2005:164). In 1863, the PRR gained control of the Northern Central Railway, followed in 1881 by the acquisition of the PW&B (Lee 2005:164). In 1873, the PRR constructed a 1.7-mile tunnel under Baltimore (actually a series of three tunnels with two short breaks for ventilation) to connect their newly constructed Union Station in the Jones Falls Valley to the B&P Railroad (a subsidy of the PRR) on the west side of town (Lee 2005:164). The PRR also constructed a second tunnel under Hoffman Street to connect Union Station to the PW&B's line to Philadelphia, thereby establishing a continuous north-south route through Baltimore to connect Washington, D.C. to Philadelphia.

Faced with stiff competition from the PRR's B&P, it soon became clear that the B&O needed a north-south connection of their own through Baltimore (Lee 2005:164). However, the B&O was at a distinct disadvantage, having no direct access to the north side of Baltimore from either Mount Clare or Camden (Lee 2005:164). As a partial solution, a line was constructed from Canton on the east side of the harbor north to Philadelphia. To connect Canton to Camden, a short spur was constructed from Camden to Locust Point on the east side of the harbor, where a specially designed ferry then transferred up to 10 passenger cars or 27 freight cars to Canton (Lee 2005:165). At Canton, the line continued two miles north to Bay View Junction before heading northeast to Philadelphia (Lee 2005:165). Although it was the most viable option at the time, the B&O knew that this elaborate and time-consuming route was not a permanent solution.

Several options for an alternate connection through Baltimore were explored by the B&O, including a proposed elevated line that

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was unpopular with civic leaders (Lee 2005:165). The final plan called for the construction of a 1.4-mile (2.2-km) tunnel under Howard Street that would connect Camden Station to Baltimore's less populated north side, from which a connecting line to Bay View and the B&O's Royal Blue Line to Philadelphia could be established. To accomplish this task, in 1888 the B&O joined with the Maryland Central Railroad (MCRR), a small, narrow-gauge line that had initiated the idea for the tunnel, to form the Baltimore Belt Railroad (Lee 2005:167). The MCRR soon failed, however, and the B&O took full control of the operation.

The plan was not without opposition, most prominently from the Baltimore city council, which was concerned about possible surface disruptions during construction of the tunnel. In addition, city officials wished to avoid the ventilation issues that plagued the B&P Tunnel and posed a serious health hazard to Baltimore residents (Lee 2005:167). Several additional challenges complicated construction of the Belt Line, including crossing the Jones Falls Valley and the tracks and rail yard of the PRR while avoiding major roadways, the North Avenue Bridge (under construction at the time), and the east portal of the B&P Tunnel. According to one historian, "The topography, tracks, and city streets presented a maze of obstacles at varying elevations, and Rea [the chief engineer] had to find a way to thread the new line," all four tracks of it at this point, "through it all" (Lee 2005:167-168). The final design "literally wove the Belt Line through these existing structures" (Lee 2005:168) (Figure 1).

The plate girder bridge crossing the Jones Falls Valley has been aptly described as a "complicated arrangement" (Lee 2005:173). The topography and existing infrastructure required that the bridge be constructed on a 10-degree curve, spanning the tracks of both the M&P and the PRR as well as Jones Falls and Falls Road (Lee 2005:168). At the southwestern end of the bridge, the adjacent tracks had to pass under the North Avenue Bridge through two stone-arch tunnels while simultaneously bridging the east portal of the B&P Tunnel. However, the roof of the tunnel could not support the weight of the trains that would pass overhead on the Belt Line. Rea's ingenious solution was to construct two additional plate girder bridge sections inside the North Avenue Bridge tunnels that would carry the Belt Line over the B&P Tunnel, creating "a unique, three-level street and rail crossing" (Lee 2005:168).

The most prominent engineering accomplishment of the Belt Line was the 7,341-foot Howard Street Tunnel (B-79), constructed between 1891 and 1895 (Stover 1987:175). Having experienced firsthand the problems caused by the soot, fumes, and smoke emitted by the steam engines passing through the B&P Tunnel, city officials were adamant that the B&O avoid similar problems with the Howard Street Tunnel. The B&O needed a source of clean power. Steam was not an option; the relatively steep grade inside the tunnel meant that northbound trains had to work exceptionally hard, producing large quantities of smoke and gas (Lee 2005:178). In 1892, the B&O "took a substantial leap of technological faith," signing a contract with fledgling company General Electric (GE) for electric locomotives and an innovative electrified system in which direct-current power was provided via an overhead rail to power the Belt Line (Lee 2005:178-179).

Survey for the new line was completed by the end of 1889 and construction began in 1891 (Stover 1987:174-175). When completed in 1895, the 7.2-mile, double-tracked Belt Line ran north from Camden Station via the Howard Street Tunnel, past Mount Royal Station (B-26), through the shorter Mount Royal Tunnel, through the North Avenue Bridge Tunnels (passing over the B&P Tunnel portal), then across the Jones Falls Valley, winding north up the east side of the valley. After reaching a high point near Huntington Avenue and 26th Street, the line turned sharply east, passing through a long cut interspersed with several stone-arch tunnels and over several smaller plate girder bridges, connecting with the line to Philadelphia at Bay View (Stover 1987:174). In total, the Belt Line included, within its 7.2 miles of track, ten tunnels totaling 9,605 feet (2,927.6 m) in length (Lee 2005:173).

The B&O Belt Line operated on the overhead electric rail system for several years. In 1902, it was replaced with a third electrified rail at ground level, which remained in use for several decades (Lee 2005:182). In the mid-1930s, the B&O began to convert from steam to diesel engines, with complete replacement of all steam locomotives after World War II, making the electrified rail system on the Belt Line unnecessary (Lee 2005:186). Sections of electrified rail remained in place for several more years, but in 1952 all

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remaining electrified engines were replaced with diesel and the third electrified rail was removed from the track shortly after (Lee 2005:186). In 1987, the B&O Railroad merged with and became CSX Transportation, which now operates a freight line along the former alignment of the B&O Baltimore Belt Line, including the evaluated bridge (Styron 2001:4).

Architectural Description

The B&O Baltimore Belt Line Bridge over Jones Falls Valley is a 503-foot (153.3-meter), six-span bridge that carries the tracks of the former B&O Baltimore Belt Line over the Jones Falls Valley. The bridge, which is constructed on a 10-degree curve with a grade of 1.07 percent, is comprised of two parallel sets of six spans--three through-plate girders and three deck-plate girders--constructed of steel and reinforced with steel cross-bracing. The deck consists of wood railroad ties. The plate girders are supported by a pair of stone abutments and five stone piers of varying sizes, all constructed of coursed, rough-faced limestone. The abutments have a coping of limestone, while the piers have a replacement coping of poured concrete. Additional poured concrete replacement material can be seen near the top of the northern abutment. The west end of the northern abutment wing wall tapers until it merges with the circa-1883-1886 Jones Falls Retaining Walls (B-1313), an early effort at channelizing the Jones Falls that predates the Belt Line by more than a decade (Culhane 1999). The west end of the southern abutment wing wall also intersects a pre-existing stone retaining wall, likely part of the same channelization effort, which runs northwest for approximately 400 feet (121.9 m) before it is truncated by a modern, poured concrete retaining wall. The east end of the southern abutment is incorporated into the structure of the adjacent North Avenue Bridge, which is located 35--50 feet (10.7--15.2 m) from the southern end of the B&O Baltimore Belt Line Bridge over Jones Falls Valley.

In the 1950s, modifications were made to the bridge to strengthen it, which is likely when concrete components were added to the structure (Lee 2005:186). The bridge's capacity was also reduced from four tracks to two, possibly around the same time.

Summary and Statement of Significance

The B&O Baltimore Belt Line Bridge over Jones Falls Valley is a six-span, steel through-plate and deck-plate girder bridge constructed between 1896 and 1899 as part of the B&O's pioneer electrified rail, the Baltimore Belt Line. It is one of approximately 10 bridges constructed as part of the Belt Line and is the longest and most complex of those bridges. Other bridges located along the Belt Line include single-span, through-plate girder bridges over Kirk Avenue, Garrett Avenue, and Saint Lo Drive and a three-span, through-plate girder bridge at Belair Road/Route 1. Other plate girder bridges along the Belt Line that have since been replaced with more modern materials include bridges over Loch Raven Road, Aisquith Street, North Rose Street, Federal Street, and Pulaski Highway/Route 40. None of these bridges have been evaluated for eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

For listing in the NRHP, a property must be demonstrated as significant under one or more criteria and must also possess most, if not all, of the seven aspects of integrity set forth by the NRHP: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Overall, the B&O Baltimore Belt Line Bridge over Jones Falls Valley retains some degree of integrity of all seven aspects, although integrity of design, materials, and workmanship have all been negatively affected by alterations, including the replacement of stone with poured concrete in some areas (pier copings and portions of the abutments), as well as a reduction in capacity from the original four tracks to two.

The B&O Baltimore Belt Line Bridge over Jones Falls Valley is eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion A for its association with the transportation industry. Specifically, it is a contributing resource to the B&O Railroad Baltimore Belt Line (B-5287), which is nationally significant as the first electric railway in the United States and for its role in providing the B&O with an all-rail route from Washington, D.C. to Philadelphia, thereby allowing it to more effectively compete with the PRR.

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The B&O Baltimore Belt Line Bridge over Jones Falls Valley is not eligible for NRHP listing under Criterion B because it is not associated with a person of importance at the local, state, or national level.

The B&O Baltimore Belt Line Bridge over Jones Falls Valley is eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion C because it embodies distinctive characteristics of a late-nineteenth-century, steel plate girder railroad bridge. Furthermore, it is the longest and most complex plate girder bridge on the B&O Railroad Baltimore Belt Line and is a contributing resource to the Belt Line, which is nationally significant for its many engineering accomplishments and pioneer use of an electrified rail.

Investigations were not conducted to determine whether the property has the potential to yield information important in history or prehistory; therefore, NRHP Criterion D was not assessed.

In conclusion, it is recommended that the B&O Railroad Baltimore Belt Line Bridge over Jones Falls Valley is eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criteria A and C.

References:

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Reviewer, National Register Program	Date

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**B&O Railroad Baltimore Belt Line Bridge Over Jones Falls Valley (B-5288)**  
Baltimore, Maryland



Figure 1. Circa-1977 Aerial View of the B&O Baltimore Belt Line Bridge over Jones Falls Valley and Surrounding Transportation Infrastructure, Looking Northwest (Boucher 1977).

B&O Railroad Baltimore Belt Line Bridge Over Jones Falls Valley (B-5288)  
Baltimore, Maryland



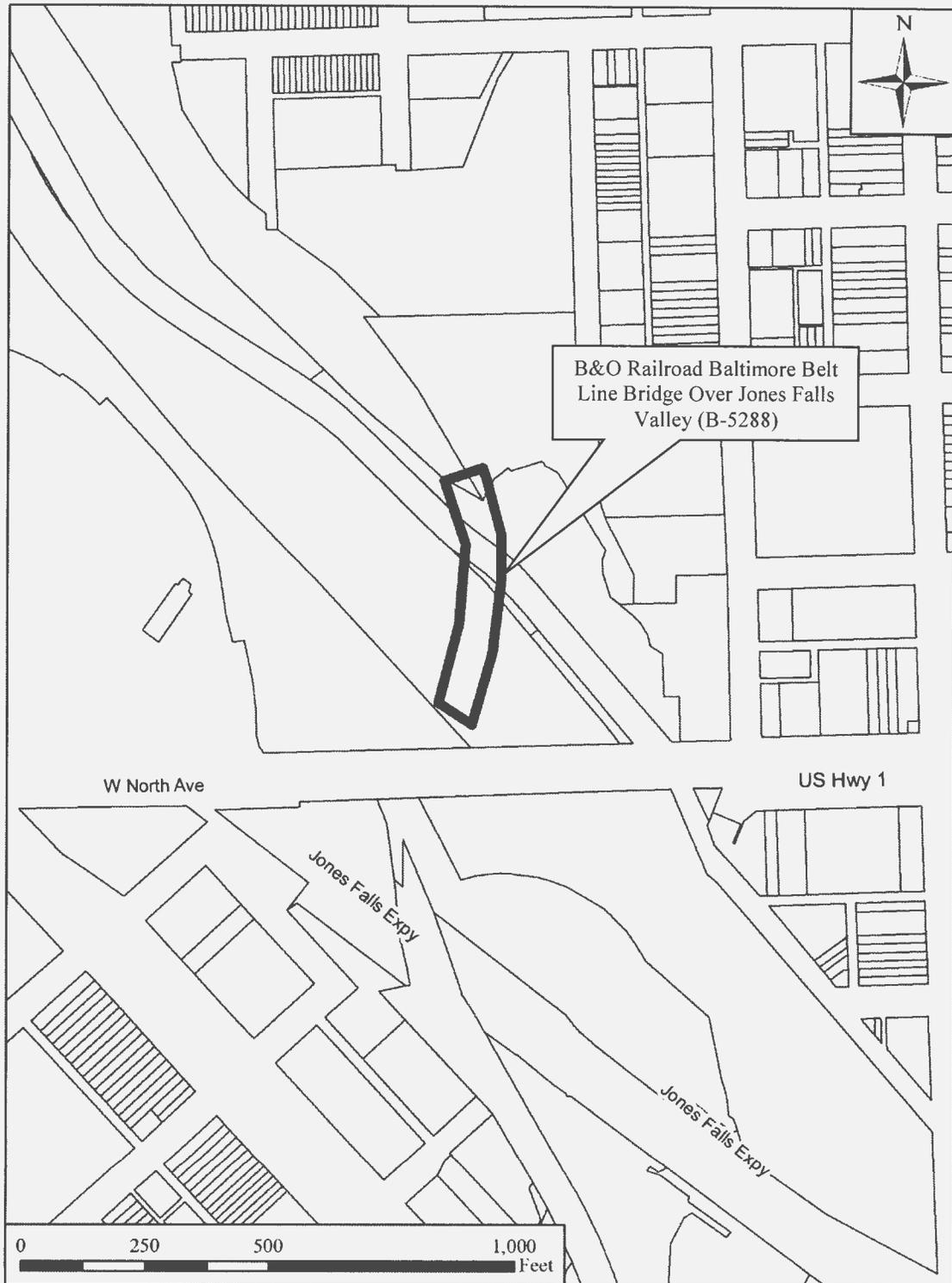
USGS Baltimore East, Maryland and Baltimore West, Maryland Quads (United States Department of Agriculture [USDA] 2001).

**B&O Railroad Baltimore Belt Line Bridge Over Jones Falls Valley (B-5288)**  
Baltimore, Maryland



Baltimore City, Aerial Imagery (Esri 2015).

B&O Railroad Baltimore Belt Line Bridge Over Jones Falls Valley (B-5288)  
Baltimore, Maryland



Baltimore City Parcel Map (City of Baltimore 2010).

B-5288, B&O Railroad Baltimore Belt Line Bridge Over Jones Falls Valley, B&P Tunnel Project

TIFF Image File Name	Description	Date Taken	Ink	Paper	Brand, Make & Dye Type of CD
B-5288_2015-05-14_01.tif	B&O Railroad Baltimore Belt Line Bridge Over Jones Falls Valley (B-5288), Overview from South Approach, Looking North	5/14/2015	Dye-based HP Vivera Ink	HP Premium Photo Paper, Gloss	Memorex 80 min./700MB 52x Pro Gold Archival CDR
B-5288_2015-05-14_02.tif	B&O Railroad Baltimore Belt Line Bridge Over Jones Falls Valley (B-5288), East Elevation of North End, Looking West	5/14/2015	Dye-based HP Vivera Ink	HP Premium Photo Paper, Gloss	Memorex 80 min./700MB 52x Pro Gold Archival CDR
B-5288_2015-05-14_03.tif	B&O Railroad Baltimore Belt Line Bridge Over Jones Falls Valley (B-5288), West Elevation of North End, Looking East	5/14/2015	Dye-based HP Vivera Ink	HP Premium Photo Paper, Gloss	Memorex 80 min./700MB 52x Pro Gold Archival CDR
B-5288_2015-05-14_04.tif	B&O Railroad Baltimore Belt Line Bridge Over Jones Falls Valley (B-5288), Northwest Bridge Abutment and Wing Wall, Looking North	5/14/2015	Dye-based HP Vivera Ink	HP Premium Photo Paper, Gloss	Memorex 80 min./700MB 52x Pro Gold Archival CDR
B-5288_2015-05-14_05.tif	B&O Railroad Baltimore Belt Line Bridge Over Jones Falls Valley (B-5288), Juncture between Wing Wall and Jones Falls Retaining Walls, Looking North	5/14/2015	Dye-based HP Vivera Ink	HP Premium Photo Paper, Gloss	Memorex 80 min./700MB 52x Pro Gold Archival CDR
B-5288_2015-05-14_06.tif	B&O Railroad Baltimore Belt Line Bridge Over Jones Falls Valley (B-5288), Limestone Pier and North Abutment, Looking North	5/14/2015	Dye-based HP Vivera Ink	HP Premium Photo Paper, Gloss	Memorex 80 min./700MB 52x Pro Gold Archival CDR



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B+O RAILROAD BALTIMORE BELT LINE BRIDGE  
OVER JONES FALLS VALLEY

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

C. MANNING

5/14/2015

DETAIL CULTURAL RESOURCE GROUP

OVERVIEW FROM SOUTH APPROACH, LOOKING  
NORTH



STREETCAR

MUSEUM

B-5288

B+O RAILROAD BALTIMORE BELT LINE BRIDGE  
OVER JONES FALLS VALLEY.

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

C. MANNING

5/14/2015

DOUETAIL CULTURAL RESOURCE GROUP

EAST ELEVATION OF NORTH END, LOOKING WEST



BALTIMORE & OHIO  
AMERICAN

Central

GRAFFITI

GRAFFITI

GRAFFITI

B-5288

B + O RAILROAD BALTIMORE BELT LINE BRIDGE  
OVER JONES FALLS VALLEY  
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

C. MANNING

5/14/2015

POUETAIL CULTURAL RESOURCE GROUP

WEST ELEVATION OF NORTH END, LOOKING  
EAST



4 of 6

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B+O RAILROAD BALTIMORE BELT LINE BRIDGE  
OVER JONES FALLS VALLEY

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

C. MANNING

5/14/2015

DODETAIL CULTURAL RESOURCE GROUP

NORTHWEST BRIDGE ABUTMENT AND WING WALL,  
LOOKING NORTH



B-5288

B+O RAILROAD BALTIMORE BELT LINE BRIDGE  
OVER JONES FALLS VALLEY

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND  
C. MANNING

5/14/2015

DOVETAIL CULTURAL RESOURCE GROUP

JUNCTURE BETWEEN WING WALL AND JONES FALLS  
RETAINING WALLS, LOOKING NORTH



B-5288

B&O RAILROAD BALTIMORE BELT LINE BRIDGE  
OVER JONES FALLS VALLEY  
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

C. MANNING

5/14/2015

DETAIL CULTURAL RESOURCE GROUP

LIMESTONE PIER AND NORTH ABUTMENT, LOOKING  
NORTH