

# SUSQUEHANNA RIVER RAIL BRIDGE PROJECT



## Recent Progress


Amtrak's Environmental team has been coordinating multiple agency meetings as part of the permitting process to discuss bridge replacement and the protection of natural resources. Recent meetings have included agencies such as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Maryland Department of the Environment, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Maryland Historical Trust, among others. Recently, Amtrak's Environmental team hosted agency field meetings to discuss potential tidal impacts to the Susquehanna River and potential non-tidal impacts to nearby streams including, Lilly Run and Gashey's Creek.

## What's Happening Here?

The existing Susquehanna River Rail Bridge was built in 1906 and consists of a movable swing span thru-truss over the navigation channel at River Mile 1.0. The existing bridge provides 52-foot vertical clearance above mean high water (MHW) in the closed position and 127 feet in the open position. Due to the bridge's vertical clearance over the waterway, occasional openings of the swing span are required to accommodate maritime traffic, which significantly impacts rail operations and requires considerable Amtrak resources, with at least 30 Amtrak staff to properly open the bridge. Although the bridge only opens about 10 times a year, it requires a great deal of coordination and now that the bridge is coming to the end of its useful life, it requires a significant amount of maintenance and upkeep. The new Susquehanna River Rail Bridge will have a higher fixed span that will not require openings for marine traffic.



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## In the Weeds

Amtrak's Environmental team is currently conducting stream assessments within the Amtrak project corridor as part of the USACE's Maryland Stream Mitigation Framework (MSMF) Calculator to determine the functions, quality, and conditions of those streams impacted by the project. The team is performing longitudinal profiles and cross sections of each impacted stream, along with documenting existing fish and macroinvertebrate habitat. This assessment will also help Amtrak determine the compensatory stream mitigation requirements for the project and help offset impacts to streams as a result of the project.

In addition to stream assessments, Amtrak has coordinated with Towson University on the presence of the Northern map turtle within or adjacent to the project corridor. The Northern map turtle (*Graptemys geographica*), is classified in Maryland as a state endangered species in Maryland. They are currently found only on the Lower Susquehanna River and its tributaries, between the Maryland State line and the mouth of Chesapeake Bay. Amtrak has commissioned Towson University to conduct Northern map turtle basking surveys this spring to determine where the turtles are basking within or near the project corridor. Basking in the sun is important to female turtles as it facilitates egg production and is essential for egg shelling. Disturbance to females during basking can negatively impact reproduction. The results of the basking surveys will assist Amtrak in evaluating avoidance and minimization scenarios to mitigate impacts to basking turtles during construction. Amtrak will continue to work closely with Towson University to understand the nature of these impacts.




## Up Next

Over the next few months, Amtrak's Environmental team will continue to assess potential environmental impacts and mitigation measures. In August 2023, the team will be conducting submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) surveys along the shorelines of the Susquehanna River at the Amtrak bridge crossing as well as upstream and downstream of the bridge. SAV are plants that grow completely below or at the water's surface. They provide habitat, food, and shelter for many aquatic species. The SAV surveys are to determine the extent of the SAV beds within the project's limits of disturbance in order to understand the potential impacts to these areas. All SAV impacts will be offset through compensatory mitigation which will consist of the creation of SAV beds adjacent to or within the same watershed where these impacts may occur.



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