Statement of Heritage Significance

SkyTrail (Canadian Pacific Railway) Bridge
Town of Outlook

Ross Herrington M.A., M. Sc., P. Eng.
Architectural Historian

March 1, 2008

Cover Photo: The former Canadian Pacific Railway Bridge at Outlook, looking northwest (R. Herrington; September 20, 2007).

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The Skytrail (Canadian Pacific Railway) Bridge crosses the South Saskatchewan River at the Town of Outlook. The structure, which was completed in October, 1912, consists of a series of multiple-intersection steel deck truss spans and plate girders on steel towers and concrete piers.

HERITAGE VALUE

The heritage value of the bridge lies in its status as a distinctive feature and an important community landmark in west-central Saskatchewan. With an approximate length of 3000 feet, the bridge was the second longest railway bridge in Canada and the piers the highest in the world when the structure was completed in 1912. Except for the removal of the railway tracks and conversion of the deck to a pedestrian surface, the superstructure and substructure remain largely unchanged since its erection in 1912.

The heritage value of the structure also resides in its association with the Canadian Pacific Railway. The CPR constructed a line from Moose Jaw to Outlook in 1909 to provide a more direct connection between St. Paul, Minnesota and Edmonton. The CPR re-machined eight of the 242-foot multiple intersection steel deck truss spans and two 80-foot plate girders from their 1886 bridge over the St. Lawrence River at Lachine, Quebec for use in the Outlook Bridge.

CHARACTER-DEFINING ELEMENTS

The heritage value of the SkyTrail Bridge resides in the following character-defining element:

- those elements which speak to its status as a landmark in the community, including the impressive concrete piers, steel towers, deck trusses and plate girders, and its location on its original site.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A. Historical Significance

The Canadian Pacific Railway constructed a line from Moose Jaw to Outlook in 1909 to provide a more direct connection between St. Paul, Minnesota and Edmonton, Alberta. Once the line reached Outlook, a large bridge was needed for the railway to cross the South Saskatchewan River and continue westward.

In late 1908, the Village of Outlook and area residents petitioned the government for the immediate building of a suitable traffic bridge across the South Saskatchewan River at Outlook. This was followed up in January 1909 by the Fertile Valley Liberal Association who wrote to Premier Walter Scott suggesting that "arrangements be made for a traffic attachment" to the proposed Canadian Pacific Railway bridge near Outlook.[1] The Association stressed the necessity of providing a means of crossing the river at Outlook.

Premier Scott's reply sympathized with the Outlook residents but made it clear that the government's experience with negotiating with the CPR and other railway companies "has been by no means satisfactory."[2] Scott was referring specifically to the Canadian Northern Railway and traffic bridge which had just been constructed over the North Saskatchewan River at Prince Albert. In the view of the government, the provincial government had been obliged to pay too much for the traffic attachments hoping that this would pressure the company to immediately build the railway line from Prince Albert to North Battleford. In hindsight, Prince Albert and area would have been better-served over a fifty-year period by separate railway and traffic bridges which would not have cost the government much more than the combination bridge.

Perhaps somewhat reluctantly, the government broached this subject with the CPR in early February, 1909. The immediate and enthusiastic response from the CPR was that the company could see "no reason why the traffic could not be accommodated on our bridge…carrying the roadways below the railway tracks and between the legs of the towers."[3]

By early November of that year the enthusiasm had waned. Throughout the summer of 1909, the Department of Highways had been considering a low level traffic crossing as an alternative to the CPR combination bridge and the CPR was anxious to reach a decision so that they could finalize the design. The CPR finally expressed its frustration with the Department of Public Works by writing to the Deputy Commissioner of Railways that "If the Minister could see his way to decide that a low level traffic bridge would be as suitable and as cheaply constructed as this traffic arrangement [the roadway under the CPT railway deck] it would suit our provisions better and facilitate the work."[4]

By January of 1910, the CPR was still waiting for the government to decide on the traffic attachments before they could complete their detailed plans.[5] At the same time, the government claimed it was unable to make a decision until it had access to the CPR plans! Further exchanges of correspondence through February and March added to the

apparent poor communication and underlined the frustration on both sides. The net result was the CPR wrote to the Deputy Minister of Public Works on April 18, 1910 and announced its decision, *viz*: "At one time the Company fully expected to provide a bridge with traffic attachment over the South Saskatchewan River at Outlook, provided the necessary aid could be secured from the Provincial and Dominion Governments, but after the matter has been gone into further by our Engineers, it was decided that, owing to the sandy bottom of the river, the bridge with short spans was not suitable, as, on account of the number of piers, the bed of the river would scour around the piers. To provide a bridge with long spans and traffic attachment would necessitate an expenditure of about $800,000.00 and as we have heard nothing from the Dominion Government, we have decided to utilize the spans of a bridge at present over the St. Laurence [sic] at Lachine [Quebec]. This will, of course, do away with the possibility of a traffic attachment."[6]

The ferry service at the bridge site continued to operate during construction in 1911 although poor service impacted activities on both sides of the river. The bridge was completed by October, 1912 and the first train, consisting of twenty-nine cars of wheat, crossed the bridge from the west on October 23, 1912.[7]

Interest by local residents in traffic attachments for the bridge continued even after the bridge was completed. The CPR officials who visited Outlook in January 1913 indicated their willingness to discuss this matter although they had not had any formal request from the government.[8] By April 1913 the Outlook Board of Trade had received many petitions, particularly from areas west and southwest of Outlook. The provincial government continued to be disinterested in pursuing this until receiving a local delegation in late November, 1913. It is not known how the discussions progressed between the government and the CPR but the result was that the bridge continued as a dedicated railway bridge until the last train passed over the structure on March 16, 1987.[9]

On December 31, 1998 the Canadian Pacific officially donated the bridge to the Trans Canada Trail (TCT) to become part of the Trans Canada Trail system. The TCT in turn gifted the bridge to the Town of Outlook in November, 2005.[10] The Town of Outlook and the RM of Rudy provided funding support for materials to convert the structure into a pedestrian bridge while fund-raising was being undertaken. Under the Canadian Military Engineers 2003 "Bridges for Canada"[11] centennial program, Military Engineers decked the bridge and installed safety railings in 2005. The structure is now known as the "SkyTrail Bridge" and is Canada's longest pedestrian bridge.

B. Engineering Significance

The substructure of the bridge consists of nine concrete piers and nine steel towers. The contract for the concrete substructure was initially awarded to the J.D. McArthur and Company of Winnipeg on January 24, 1910, but for unknown reasons, the contract was taken over by S.C. Hill and Son of Winnipeg.[12] Work on the substructure commenced in mid-February, 1910 and was completed on September 3, 1911.[13]

Since their 1886 continuous bridge near Lachine, Quebec was being replaced at the time, the CPR decided to re-machine eight of the 242-foot multiple intersection steel deck truss spans and two 80-foot plate girders, and install them in their Outlook bridge.[14] The towers, rocker bents and other steelwork were newly fabricated.

The superstructure consists of eight sections of deck trusses, each 242 ft long, three sections of deck plate girders, each 80 ft long, seven sections of deck plate girders, each 60 ft, and nine sections of deck plate girders, each 45 ft long.

The first consignment of steel from the Lachine Bridge arrived in early August, 1911[15] with more steel arriving by the end of the month. It was estimated at the time that several hundred carloads would be required to transport all the steel. By early December, 1911, seven girders had been erected on the eastern approach with five spans still to be added to reach the first river pier. The entire eastern approach was completed by Christmas. The first steel span was completed by mid-March, 1912 and all steel work was laid by October 19.

With an approximate length of 3000 feet, the bridge was the second longest railway bridge in Canada and the piers the highest in the world when the structure was completed in 1912.[16]

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[1] Letter dated January 20, 1909, in Saskatchewan Sessional Paper, No. 36, Saskatchewan Archives Board, Regina.
[2] Letter dated January 29, 1909, in Saskatchewan Sessional Paper, No. 36, Saskatchewan Archives Board, Regina.
[3] Letter from the Assistant Chief Engineer of the CPR to the Department of Public Works, dated February 19, 1909, in Saskatchewan Sessional Paper, No. 36, Saskatchewan Archives Board, Regina.
[4] Letter dated November 2, 1909, in Saskatchewan Sessional Paper, No. 36, Saskatchewan Archives Board, Regina.
[5] Letter from the CPR to DPW, dated January 12, 1910, in Saskatchewan Sessional Paper, No. 36, Saskatchewan Archives Board, Regina.
[6] Letter from Wm. Whyte, Second Vice President of the CPR to the Deputy Minister of Public Works, dated April 18, 1910, in Saskatchewan Sessional Paper, No. 36, Saskatchewan Archives Board, Regina.
[7] *The Outlook*, October 25, 1912, p.1.
[8] *The Outlook*, January 24, 1913, p.10.
[9] http://www.town.outlook.sk.ca/skytrail/skytrail-2.html
[10] Personal Communication on January 7, 2008 with Mr. David Wood, Manager, Rail Rights of Way, Trans Canada Trail.
[11] A three year cooperative project between the Trans Canada Trail Foundation and the Canadian Military Forces.
[12] *The Outlook*, February 11, 1910, p.1.
[13] Kozma, L.S., A Survey of Railway Bridges in Saskatchewan: 1882 to 1996, Phase II, 1996, unpublished report prepared for the Saskatchewan Heritage Foundation, Regina, Section 7.0 B.3.
[14] Young, C.R., "Bridge Building", *The Engineering Journal*, Vol. 20, June 1937, p.483.
[15] *The Outlook*, August 11, 1910, p.1.
[16] http://www.town.outlook.sk.ca/skytrail/skytrail-2.html