



Guidance for Historical Studies Desktop Survey

Introduction

TxDOT continues to look for ways to streamline the Section 106 project review process. One of these methods is to conduct a digital search of online resources to identify and document historic-age properties. This method is commonly called a desktop level survey and has the potential to reduce project development costs for TxDOT.

A desktop level survey may be used to update an existing Historic Resources Survey Report (HRSR), or to create a new HRSR report. In either case permission to conduct a desktop level survey must be received from TxDOT Environmental Affairs (ENV) division staff. The request to conduct a desktop level survey happens during the scoping phase of the Section 106 project review using the Project Coordination Request (PCR) form.

Do not automatically assume that the use of a desktop level survey will positively affect project development schedules. Any time saving from a desktop level survey should be viewed as a “bonus” rather than the default. If additional fieldwork is required, it should not be viewed as unnecessary or will necessarily “slow down” a project’s environmental review process.

Desktop Updates to Existing HRSR Reports

TxDOT Historical Studies branch (HIST) often needs to update Historic Resources Survey Reports (HRSR) during recoordination (pre-NEPA decision) or reevaluation (post-NEPA decision) due to passage of time since the original HRSR was finalized or design changes made to the proposed project.

If historic-age resources were not documented in a prior HRSR, TxDOT may require additional field survey. Conducting an additional field survey may be required if the desktop research reveals the presence of historic-age properties that met the historic-age cut-off date in the initial survey yet were not included in that initial survey.

Applicability

HRSRs may be updated using a desktop survey when all of the following conditions are met:

- Recent (within past 1-3 years) online street view data is available in the area that accurately captures previous and additional surveyed resources, and the historic-age resource is clearly visible.
- Online County Appraisal District (CAD) information is available to confirm presence of historic-age resources in the APE. CAD information must be considered a baseline for information as it is not always accurate. CAD information must be used with other sources such as online street view applications, historic aerials, and historic maps (such as those available in the Texas Historic Overlay) to refine estimated build dates for the resources.
- In addition to mapping and “photography” (using street view) of the resources in the APE, the historic context and periods of significance from the HRSR must also be updated appropriately. However, a new research design will not be required.

TxDOT or SHPO may still require a traditional survey depending on results of the desktop level survey and/or based on project public controversy, stakeholder input, the number of historic-age properties present, and/or the nature of potential effects to historic properties.



Hybrid Method

A desktop level survey may not be the only work that needs to be done, particularly if the online data is found insufficient or incomplete. Fieldwork may be required for any historic-age resources not visible from street view applications. In this case, a desktop level survey and resources documented in the field could be combined into one report. In addition, if while in the field consultants find they need to physically document resources that were previously only subject to a desktop level survey (for example, due to integrity changes from what is shown in the street view application) they should document those resources using traditional methods.

New Desktop Level Surveys (Limited traditional HRSR)

New historic resources surveys may be conducted from the desktop when all of the following conditions are met:

- The request to conduct a desktop level survey has been approved by TxDOT and SHPO. TxDOT will submit the PCR to the SHPO for review and request written confirmation (email is acceptable) that this method is appropriate for the particular survey area.
- Online street view data (recent within past 1-3 years) is available for the project area of potential effects (APE) to accurately document surveyed resources and historic-age resources are clearly visible.
- Online County Appraisal District (CAD) data is available to confirm the presence of historic-age resources in the APE. Note that CAD data must be considered a baseline for determining build dates it is not always accurate. CAD data must be used with other sources such as online street view data, historic aerials, and historic maps (such as those available in the Texas Historic Overlay) to refine estimated build dates for the resources.
- A limited number of historic-age resources exist in the APE (usually under 10 but exceptions may be granted)

TxDOT or SHPO may still require a traditional field survey depending on results of the research design (see below) and/or based on project controversy, stakeholder input, the number of historic-age properties present, and/or the nature of potential effects to historic properties or districts.

Research Designs

TxDOT requires research designs for surveys that will be limited to the use of a desktop level survey. In the research design, state the reasons why traditional survey methods are not necessary or recommended. For example: “Based on aerials, street view and other knowledge gleaned from desktop investigations, an on-the-ground survey is not recommended”. Or “Based on aerials, street view and other knowledge gleaned from desktop investigations, only one resource requires an on-the-ground survey, because the resource represents a high style ranch property. Or this resource cannot be viewed using desktop street view applications, etc.”.

Develop a period of significance (POS) appropriate to the survey area beforehand then set expectations for that POS. Develop a good context of the survey area using appropriate sources (note, the Handbook of Texas is not likely a good resource as the entries are not up to date or detailed enough if they are up to date.) Use primary sources such as:

- newspapers,



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- magazines,
- historic maps and
- aerial photos.

Refer to Section XIV of the *Documentation Standard for a Historical Studies Research Design* in TxDOT's toolkit for more information.

Historic context statements and periods of significance (POS) must be updated to reflect new data obtained as a result of additional desktop or field survey investigations:

TxDOT may still conduct a traditional field survey depending on results of the research design and/or based on project controversy, stakeholder input, the number of historic-age properties present, and/or the nature of potential effects to historic properties or districts.



Appendix A

The following table shows the revision history for this document.

Revision History	
Effective Date Month, Year	Reason for and Description of Change
May 2022	Version 1 was released.