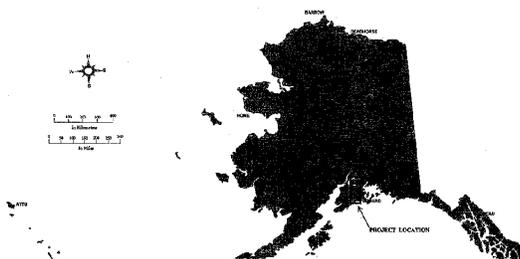
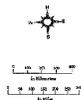


Seward Highway Corridor Partnership Plan



A STRATEGY FOR MANAGEMENT, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND CONSERVATION

Prepared for

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities as part of the submission materials required for designation under the National Scenic Byways Program of the Federal Highway Administration

Prepared by

The National Trust for Historic Preservation
Rural Heritage and Heritage Tourism Programs

With

Whiteman and Taintor, Planning Consultants

1998

Photo © Dan Marriott

cover photograph:
The Seward Highway along Turnagain Arm.



STATE OF ALASKA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
JUNEAU

April 22, 1998

Dear Reader,

It is my pleasure to endorse this Corridor Partnership Plan for the Seward Highway. Alaska is a state rich in natural and scenic beauty along our highways. With so much to offer, we take special pride in the Seward Highway. This highway is so distinctive because of the concentration of different Alaska experiences in an area so easily accessible to the majority of our population.

The world's second most extreme tidal range, a retreating glacier, earthquake subsidence, alpine valleys, and fjords greet the Seward Highway visitor in a remarkable 127 miles. Along the way, travelers often observe Dall sheep, Beluga whales, moose, bald eagles and water fowl. The U.S. Forest Service and the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities have already recognized these special qualities through scenic byway designations.

Alaska now seeks national recognition to promote the route and to ensure Alaskans and visitors better understand how to conserve this unique highway.

Residents and visitors will soon be able to enjoy the scenic Seward Highway by foot, bicycle, ski or in-line skate. The Tony Knowles Coastal Trail, a designated National Recreational Trail, will be extended from its present terminus at Kincaid Park in Anchorage, along Turnagain Arm and the Seward Highway to the community of Girdwood, a distance of 40 miles. Construction of some segments of the trail is underway, and planning for the remainder is in progress.

We are particularly pleased by the new partnerships the corridor planning process has created. Representatives from federal, state and local governments have combined with the private sector, nonprofit corporations, and local citizens to develop a plan for the Seward Highway. The Corridor Partnership Plan before you is a collaborative effort representing a cross section of Alaskans and their collective vision for the Seward Highway.

I believe there is nowhere else in America where one can travel from sea to sea through spectacular knife-edged mountain peaks and peaceful valleys in a mere three hour drive. Nowhere else can one experience whales, glaciers, and gold rush history in an afternoon drive. And nowhere else can the hospitality of Alaskans and the commitment of a state dedicated to a safe and enjoyable traveler experience be matched.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tony Knowles".

Tony Knowles
Governor

A Note of Thanks

This Corridor Partnership Plan (CPP) was prepared with the assistance of numerous agencies, offices, local governments and private individuals. Their commitment to assisting with this project and sincere interest in the cre-



herein, in particular the critical actions and partnership strategy, reflect the ideas and recommendations of Alaskans who respect the Seward Highway as a unique natural and recreational resource in the state. They see it as a valuable economic asset that, given proper stewardship, can provide great employment and financial benefits to the people of the Kenai Peninsula and the region.



Byway advocates and resource managers spend a spring afternoon at the Campbell Creek Nature Center in Anchorage discussing the future of the Seward Highway.

Executive Summary

The Seward Highway and the Corridor Partnership Planning Process

This Corridor Partnership Plan (CPP), the result of intensive site studies, interviews and meetings, was prepared as a requirement for nomination to the National Scenic Byways Program (NSBP) of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The NSBP was established to recognize unique and special roadways in the United States without interference in local management and decision-making. Thus, this CPP provides a valuable starting point for a dialogue about the future of the Seward Highway corridor.

The National Scenic Byways Program was established under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA). The Scenic Byways Advisory Committee, working with the Federal Highway Administration, recommended that the program designate a system of National Scenic Byways and All-American Roads. For a route to be eligible for designation as a National Scenic Byway, it must possess one or more of the six intrinsic qualities identified by the Scenic Byways Advisory Committee (scenic, historic, cultural, natural, recreational, and archaeological), have a community committed to its designation and management,

and have developed a corridor management plan—in Alaska, this will be referred to as a Corridor Partnership Plan. For designation as an All-American Road, the route must possess two of the intrinsic qualities and demonstrate existing programs supporting byway goals are in place (the 1989 US Forest Service scenic byway plan, for example).

The requirement for a Corridor Partnership Plan is simply to ensure that communities seeking national recognition for a particular route have taken the time to assess the intrinsic qualities that make their route unique and have taken a careful look into the future to question if today's special qualities will be enjoyed by future generations. National designation is only awarded to communities and states committed to the scenic qualities—such as those that make the Seward Highway one of the finest highways in the world. This plan, therefore, identifies many issues and opportunities as well as concerns and possible threats. It makes recommendations, not policies, and suggests solutions, not mandates. It provides the “leg-work” for those willing to champion its advice and work toward the implementation of its ideas.

The Seward Highway

The Seward Highway corridor extends approximately 127 miles between its two termini points: downtown Anchorage and mile zero in Seward. The road is predominately a two-lane highway except for a 10-mile divided highway segment in Anchorage. The Seward Highway was designated as an Alaska Scenic Highway in 1993, and most of the route has also been designated as a National Forest Scenic Byway. The highway itself has been largely rebuilt in recent years and current construction in the Girdwood area and Hope Highway Junction, and planned reconstruction in the Seward area, will sig-

nificantly improve the safety and efficiency of the route. Highway ownership and management is under the jurisdiction of the Central Region of the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF). A Memorandum of Understanding between the United States Forest Service (USFS) and ADOT&PF provides for consultation regarding road management on USFS lands.

Lands adjacent to the Seward Highway are largely held by public agencies and development is relatively limited. Alaska DNR-Parks and the USFS are the single largest land owners along the route. Significant land areas immediately adjacent to the highway have been identified for conveyances in the coming years. This potential change in ownership and land use could significantly alter the highway corridor.

Due to its great scenic appeal, the Seward Highway serves as a local and national tourism and recreation attraction. Everyone from outdoor enthusiasts seeking a backcountry experience to cruise ship visitors are accommodated along the Seward Highway corridor. ADOT&PF, DNR-Parks, the USFS, and the Alaska Office of History and Archaeology have already responded to many visitor needs through highway and safety improvements, pullouts, and interpretation at selected sites.

The Last Frontier at a Crossroads

Alaska is growing. The “last frontier” is being discovered by thousands of outsiders who are coming in increasing numbers to visit and to live. In fact, since the summer of 1989, the total number of visitors coming to Alaska annually has increased by over 350,000. Overall, visitation to Alaska has seen an annual average growth rate of 8% since 1989. This has certainly been felt on the Seward

Highway as Anchorage recreationists, Borough residents, and outside visitors have generated bumper to bumper traffic on the Seward Highway during peak seasons.

You can still drive south from Anchorage, or north from Seward, and in a relatively short period, be surrounded by the rugged natural scenery for which Alaska

for them, our future generations, to witness first hand the beauty and majesty of an environmentally sound and economically vibrant Alaska is, in many ways, the impetus behind this study and corridor partnership plan for the Seward Highway.

One need only drive the Parks Highway near Denali National Park to see how the Seward Highway could benefit from a Corridor Partnership Plan. The aggregation of gift shops, strip centers and other icons of American commercialism found adjacent to the entry of the national park could be anywhere in the Lower 48. It is not hard to imagine such a scenario for the Seward Highway in the not-too-distant future, especially with the pending land conveyances that will move land adjacent to the road from public to private ownership. Through this CPP the Seward Highway can secure valued growth and development without compromising its beauty.

Alaska is no longer the isolated, inaccessible outpost of even a few years ago. Population changes, business associations and global communication have linked the state with the rest of the world. Alaska still lives up to its reputation as the last frontier. Breathtaking views, dense forests, and sparkling waterways still dominate the landscape. However, these resources are the most vulnerable to change, and can be easily bruised by reckless development and use.

The Four Theses

This Corridor Partnership Plan was developed under four "givens" regarding the existing nature of the corridor and likely trends for the future that emerged during the preparation of this document. This Corridor Partnership Plan was prepared with these four Theses:

1. **Tourism to Alaska will continue to increase, as will Alaska's resident population.**
2. **Tourism to Alaska will continue to increase, as will Alaska's resident population.**
3. **The Seward Highway is a multi-purpose corridor serving both residents and visitors for numerous recreational and commercial purposes.**
4. **The successful management of the Seward Highway is dependent on the cooperation of existing institutions, resource managers and committed individuals.**

The Three Keystone Strategies

From these four Theses emerged three Keystone Strategies for the successful management of the Seward Highway for future generations. Keystone Strategies, unlike the four Theses, suggest areas in which the future of the Seward Highway can be influenced through action, policy and commitment. The three Keystone Strategies are:

1. **The Seward Highway should provide a safe, aesthetic and world-class driving experience.**
2. **Effective visitor management is necessary to ensure long term economic development through tourism.**
3. **Haphazard development poses the greatest threat to the highway's ability to attract visitors and quality development.**

For each of the three Keystone Strategies, specific critical actions have been identified to maintain and enhance the quality of the Seward Highway. These *critical actions* are recommendations that will require the cooperation, endorsement, and enthusiasm of residents, resource managers and political leaders for their successful implementation.

Keystone Strategy 1

The Seward Highway should provide a safe, aesthetic and world-class driving experience.

- K.1-A Design Theme
- K.1-B Design Integration
- K.1-C Roadway Details
- K.1-D Urban Landscape
- K.1-E Guardrails
- K.1-F Clear Zones
- K.1-G Roadside buffers
- K.1-H View management
- K.1-I Pullouts
- K.1-J Bike Paths
- K.1-K Scenic Highway Identification Signage
- K.1-L Highway Signage
- K.1-M Grooved Centerline and Edge Warnings
- K.1-N Restricted turning movements
- K.1-O Left turning lanes
- K.1-P Right turning lanes
- K.1-Q Center turning lanes
- K.1-R Shoulders
- K.1-S Traffic Calming or Speed Management
- K.1-T Management of Curb Cuts

Keystone Strategy 2

Effective visitor management is necessary to ensure long term economic development through tourism.

- K.2-A Rest Area Strategy
- K.2-B Forest Service Recreation Management
- K.2-C State Parks Recreation Management
- K.2-D Carpooling and Ridesharing Facilities
- K.2-E RV Dump Site Facilities
- K.2-F Seward Highway Scenic Byway Road Guide
- K.2-G Historic Sites Inventory
- K.2-H Visitor Newspaper
- K.2-I Seward Highway Audio Tape
- K.2-J Staffed Interpretive Van
- K.2-K Seward Highway 20-minute Video
- K.2-L Seward Highway Awareness Campaign

Keystone Strategy 3

Haphazard development poses the greatest threat to the highway's ability to attract visitors and quality development.

- K.3-A Conveyance Planning
- K.3-B Nodal Development Areas
- K.3 C Corridor Development Areas
- K.3-D Corridor Preservation Areas
- K.3-E Gateways

Partnership

The Corridor Partnership Plan concludes with a section on partnership and proposes a method by which agency representatives, government and interested citizens can work toward implementing the goals and critical actions outlined in this plan. The partnership strategy calls for the creation of the **Seward Highway Partnership Board** consisting of a Core Working Group representing the principal agencies and players along the corridor, a Partnership Associates group representing smaller communities, business, and individual interests to serve in an advisory capacity to the Core Working Group, and an ADOT&PF Advisor (the Alaska Scenic Byways Coordinator).

What A Corridor Partnership Plan Can and Cannot Do

It is the purpose of this Corridor Partnership Plan to identify ways for growth and economic development to enhance and sustain the physical, recreational and visual enjoyment the Seward Highway corridor provides to resident and visitor alike.

The Corridor Partnership Plan for the Seward Highway is Designed to:

- Develop a stronger sense of the Seward Highway as a community of linked resources.
- Assist local communities with participating in corridor-wide issues and plans.
- Provide a uniform voice endorsing corridor-wide projects benefiting multiple organizations, agencies, and individuals.
- Facilitate the implementation of the critical actions listed under the three keystone strategies.

- Increase communication among Seward Highway communities regarding tourism and economic development initiatives.
- Provide a framework by which economic development may be encouraged without compromising the quality of life enjoyed by the residents of the region.
- Invite an ongoing commitment by resource management agencies.
- Provide a stronger lobbying block to solicit funding for corridor-wide projects.
- Fulfill the Corridor Management Plan requirement for designation under the National Scenic Byways Program.
- Be a flexible plan that can be modified over time as necessary.

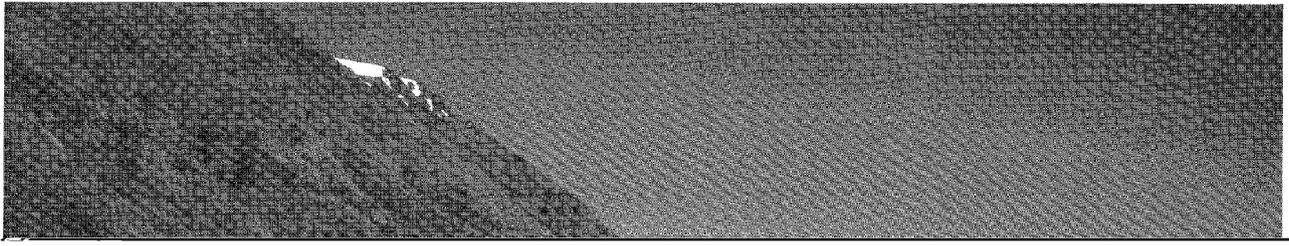
The Corridor Partnership Plan for the Seward Highway is Not Designed to:

- Prohibit new construction or development.
- Impose any regulation on any borough, land agency, city, town, or Native Corporation along the route.
- Require the adoption of any new local ordinances or special districts.
- Deny any community its right to pursue funding for local projects.
- Require participation in corridor-wide projects or programs.

Contents

iv	Executive Summary	iv
1	Introduction	3
2	An Introduction to Scenic Byways: Some Background and A Few Questions	7
3	The Four Theses: An Introduction to the Seward Highway	13
	Thesis 1	17
	Thesis 2	23
	Thesis 3	32
	Thesis 4	34
4	Keystone Strategies and Critical Actions for the Future of the Seward Highway	37
	Keystone Strategy 1	38
	Keystone Strategy 2	44
	Keystone Strategy 3	49
5	Partnership	55
6	Conclusion	63
7	Appendix	65
8	Resources	71

Contents



Introduction ©



The Seward Highway at Tern Lake.

Photo © Helen Rhode

1

Introduction

The Seward Highway is, without question, one of the most spectacular driving experiences in the United States. From jagged peaks and alpine meadows to breath-taking fiords and crystal lakes, the Seward Highway offers a concentrated series of diverse landscapes and experiences found nowhere else in the nation. Visitors may experience Beluga whales in Turnagain Arm, Dall sheep at Windy Corner, or even a dog team in winter months along the route. Along the highway visitors will find interpretation explaining natural features, wildlife and the Alaska Gold Rush; and within a few miles the experienced outdoors enthusiast can find unparalleled recreation options. In this corridor, opportunities to witness a retreating glacier, experience a scenic and historic railroad, or visit a state-of-the-art aquarium exist side-by-side with the first spring blooms, sleepy summer afternoons along Turnagain Arm and crisp star filled winter nights.

"It's the Most Beautiful Highway in the Country"

In the course of developing this corridor partnership plan, the consultant team met with numerous individuals, agencies and organizations along the Seward Highway who manage or have an interest in the Seward Highway—THE STAKEHOLDERS. Regarding the team's initial inquiries as to the value Alaskans place on the route, the response was overwhelmingly positive. "It is the most beautiful highway in the country." "What can I say, just drive it." Virtually everyone contacted from state government officials as far away as Juneau, to a restaurant owner flipping pancakes in a log structure along the route, valued the Seward Highway for its aesthetic qualities and saw the route as the lifeblood of the Kenai Peninsula. It is at this point that the initial breathless reality of "It's the most beautiful highway in the country" diverges into several different realities of the role the route plays in the lives and livelihood of the different stakeholders.

While all agree the Seward Highway possesses exceptional scenic resources, some also see it as an ideal development corridor bringing wealth and prosperity to the residents of the peninsula, and others see it as an area seriously threatened by development, degraded by outsiders, and vulnerable to unchecked growth. Addressing a uniform appreciation for the route's scenic quality based on different views and realities is the great challenge faced by the Seward Highway.

These different realities can be a source of conflict or creative thought. After all, how can a scenic travel route also serve as the only highway artery for a population of 46,807? How can a wilderness experience compare to a bus load of tourists snapping photos of whales and moose as they speed toward their cruise ship? How can the daily responsibility to manage a forest be reconciled with accommodating visitors (and an unwanted visitor, the spruce bark beetle)? How can new facilities provide opportunities without sacrificing the landscape? How can the safety of the route be improved while enhancing the scenic qualities of the landscape? And most fundamentally, how can all Alaskans best benefit from the resources of the Seward Highway corridor?

Addressing these issues objectively, honestly, and head-on is the purpose of this plan. The Seward Highway has a significant advantage over most other routes in the nation; everyone who drives it values its beauty. It is from this common ground that this Corridor Partnership Plan will strive to address the many issues raised and present a logical framework for responsible management that can be shared by all the stakeholders.

¹ Source: Kenai Peninsula Borough Planning Office. Population figures as of January 1997. Population of the Borough in 1980 was 25,282 (US Census Bureau).

What is a Corridor Partnership Plan?

Quite simply, a Corridor Partnership Plan (CPP) is a written document that outlines a specific plan of action to bring about the VISION defined when the byway planning process first began. The complexity of the CPP and the topics it addresses in detail vary from route to route. A Corridor Partnership Plan, as a document, carries with it NO regulation. It may contain recommendations, or a range of management options for considera-

The Corridor Partnership Plan presents options and strategies for consideration. It addresses specific issues and suggests methods by which goals may be achieved. For example, if a community has identified increased tourism revenues as a goal, the CPP suggests ways in which it might be accomplished—developing a tourism board, preparing a marketing program, the development of needed tourism facilities such as rest rooms or restaurant facilities. The CPP cannot assign responsibilities or mandate funding—it simply identifies the *need* and may

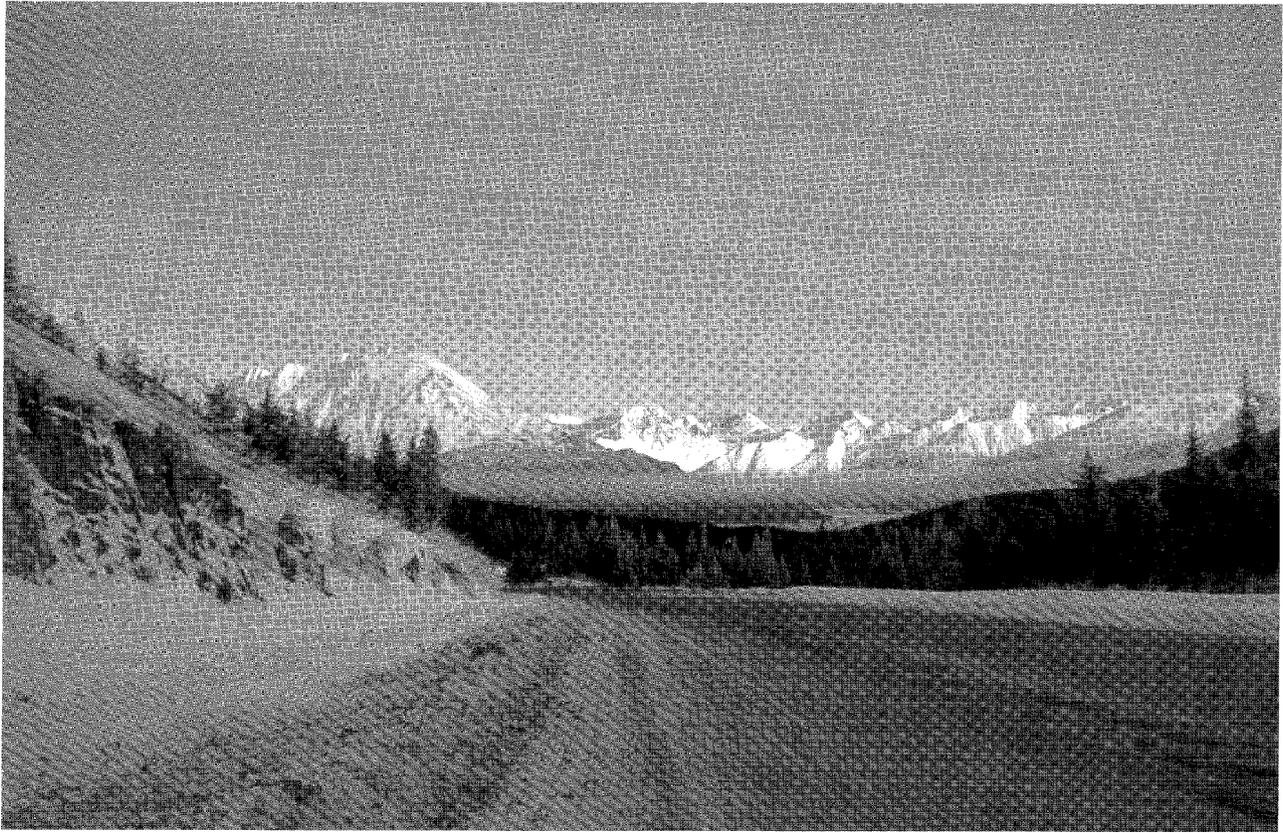
of agencies or individual citizens. A Corridor Partnership Plan represents a beginning. Bringing about the VISION established to guide the future of a route requires an outline of steps, an approach, a plan of action. The CPP assembles all the concerns, thoughts, and ideas expressed regarding the byway in a single document. Thus, issues and objectives as diverse as increased tourism development, roadway safety, citizen benefits, and even an archaeological museum can be studied and planned for from a single community-based document. This helps all community members to work together, join forces on related projects, and avoid the conflicts that occur when different organizations, groups or governments are planning without consulting one another.

started, or identify an ideal manager or funding source. The key to the success of the CPP will be in the follow-through of an energetic byway leadership that gets together and works to implement identified goals and programs. If such a program involves the assistance or approval of the state or local government, the CPP identifies the appropriate governmental agency to contact.

How Will a Corridor Partnership Plan for the Seward Highway be Structured?

This Corridor Partnership Plan for the Seward Highway will establish a framework and structure by which the FUTURE of the corridor can be effectively managed. As such, the CPP strives to pull together the many distinct resources, realities, fears and aspirations of the route's managers and communities, both individually and as a collective whole, and assemble them into a feasible and practical program that can be implemented over time.

To accomplish this, the Corridor Partnership Plan identifies a series of actions to be undertaken for the benefit of the Seward Highway corridor. Based on extensive research with and input from land managers and local communities along the route, these actions are intended to direct and identify specific projects. Such actions will increase the opportunities for the corridor stakeholders to preserve the quality of life and stunning natural character that distinguish the route and enhance opportunities for economic development and tourism.



The Seward Highway at Turnagain Pass.

Photo © Ian Marriott

2

An Introduction to Scenic Byways: *Some Background and A Few Questions*

What is a Scenic Byway?

Scenic byways are special routes offering travelers access to the beautiful scenery and the cultural and natural riches of our country. They may be spectacular destinations sought after by travelers, and they may be local routes long admired by a community for a Sunday drive. They may be rural, suburban, and urban. They come with different names—rustic roads, scenic highways, historic roadways, or backways. As long as the community regards a roadway as a special resource to be promoted and protected, it can be a scenic byway.

What Types of Scenic Byways Programs are There?

Many programs exist to identify scenic byways at the local, state, and federal level. Such programs typically establish basic criteria for eligibility and have a system for nomination and designation. The commitment required of the community and the regulation administered by the governmental entity are as varied as the routes. For some byways, officially adopted plans, land use regulations, and inventories are required. In other communities, requests approved by the state department of transportation will suffice for designation and the erection of special signs to identify the route. In other communities, a good faith commitment by the citizens and the thoughtful stewardship of landowners may be sufficient to recognize a scenic byway.

In general, scenic byways may be recognized through one of the following programs:

Local Programs

Administered at the city, town, and county/borough/parish/tribal level, these programs exist to maintain the special qualities of routes of local importance and use.

Private Sector Programs

Maintained and administered as private entities, some scenic byways exist entirely within the private sector. These byways may be part of private corporate properties, or may be open (sometimes with a fee) to the public. Examples include: the Seventeen-Mile-Drive in California and the scenic roads of Calloway Gardens in Georgia.

State Programs

Administered by state departments of transportation, byway commissions, and economic and tourism development offices, these programs identify routes of significance at the local and state level. Frequently, state programs seek to represent various categories of resources—scenic, historic, natural—or to recognize the different geographic regions of the state. In some states, byways are nominated by local organizations for designation; in others, byways are designated by an administrative body; in others, byways are designated by individual acts of the legislature. Some state scenic byway programs require or encourage some form of land-use planning within the byway corridor; in other states, scenic byway designation implies no particular level of management or enhancement. A vast majority of states have, or are developing, scenic byway programs, but they vary widely in their criteria and implementation. A description of the Alaska Scenic Highways Program, administered by the ADOT&PF, is included later in this section.

Federal Programs

Programs to designate and manage scenic byways have been developed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the US Forest Service. BLM's program of Back Country Byways includes different types of roads—some accessible only by four-wheel drive vehicles—which lead the traveler to some of the unexplored areas of the West. The USES has designated over 7,000 miles of scenic byways in national forests throughout the country. While not specifically designated as scenic byways, nine parkways and numerous park roads through scenic areas are managed by the National Park Service (NPS). The Seward Highway was designated a National Forest Scenic Byway in 1989.

The National Scenic Byways Program

The National Scenic Byways Program was established under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA). The Scenic Byways Advisory Committee, working with the Federal Highway Administration, recommended that the program designate a system of National Scenic Byways and All-American Roads. For a route to be eligible for designation as a National Scenic Byway, it must possess one or more of the six intrinsic qualities identified by the Scenic Byways Advisory Committee (scenic, historic, cultural, natural, recreational, and archaeological), have a community committed to its designation and management, and have developed a **corridor management plan**—in Alaska this will be referred to as a Corridor Partnership Plan.

In addition to National Scenic Byways, the program also designates All-American Roads (AAR). These roadways represent the finest examples of scenic byway corridors in the country and are marketed to both domestic and international travelers. All-American Roads must possess a minimum of two of the six intrinsic resources. In addition to qualities making them "destinations unto themselves," (the road corridor should be of a caliber that travelers are willing to visit simply to experience driving the road) All-American Road designation will require that the programs and actions identified in the Corridor Partnership Plan are being implemented (in other words, programs and actions need not be in completed form, but should, at minimum, be in progress). Designation as an All-American Road will be rare. As of 1997 there were six All-American Roads designated in the United States.

Nominations for National Scenic Byway designation will come from the local level through the states, and most nominations will be existing state scenic byways. For example, for the Seward Highway to become an All-American Road, demonstrated interest at the local level (and a demonstration that programs supportive and appropriate for an AAR are already in place), designation as an Alaska Scenic Highway, and preparation of a Corridor Partnership Plan (this document) must be completed. Federal agencies may also nominate byways with the concurrence of the state.

The Alaska State Scenic Highways Program

The State Scenic Byways Program was created in 1993 (as a result of ISTEA policy encouraging all states to develop scenic byways programs) as a cooperative, interagency program to promote economic development, and improve access to and appreciation of the state's unique features. Established by ADOT&PF policy (DPOL

01.03.020), the program gives the department authority to designate as scenic those segments of the state highway system which have outstanding scenic, historic, recreational, cultural, natural, or archaeological qualities. The program is nonrestrictive in nature and does not impede future construction or maintenance which may be required, nor does it restrict land use along the corridor. The program requires long range, multi-modal planning, and program promotion.

The program is intentionally uncomplicated. Nominations for highway designation can come from any public or private entity or individual. The ADOT&PF evaluates the route, determines which intrinsic qualities exist within the corridor, and holds public meetings to ensure local support. The ADOT&PF Commissioner then designates the route as an official State Scenic Byway. Although the commissioner has the authority to designate any route as a scenic byway, designations are not made without documented public support. Resolutions from cities or boroughs, letters of support from land owners or managers, or other written support are encouraged to demonstrate local commitment to the byway.

Thus far, only the Seward Highway has been designated as an Alaska Scenic Highway. The Seward Highway was designated by the state in 1993. Other highways interested in applying for the program should contact the state scenic byways coordinator at the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities in Juneau.

What Does Designation as a Scenic Byway Mean?

Scenic byway designation at any level (local, state, or federal) provides recognition of the special qualities and resources of a particular byway and corridor. This official acknowledgment carries with it a heightened awareness of the route and recognition of the community that sought the designation. It also carries with it special federal funding for scenic byways. Alaska has already received **\$2,442,302¹** (FY93-FY96) in National Scenic Byways Discretionary Grant Funding. This money has been used to help establish the state scenic byways program and has been used for the development of three

For many routes, scenic byway designation will provide new tourism opportunities, increased visitation, and economic development. It should always be a source of pride. Scenic byway designation can, in some states and jurisdictions, provide:

- additional funding,
- identification on state highway maps and other regional and promotion maps,
- increased maintenance and highway construction by some state DOTs,
- technical assistance for management, and
- promotion and development assistance from tourism and economic development offices.

Designation as a National Scenic Byway by the U.S. Secretary of Transportation will acknowledge the national significance of a byway corridor.

¹ Alaska was the twelfth highest recipient of National Scenic Byways Discretionary Funds in the Nation. The other high ranking states FY92 - FY 96: Arizona (\$3,419,186), Colorado (\$3,908,938), Louisiana (\$2,775,269), Minnesota (\$3,044,611), New York (\$5,130,021), Pennsylvania (\$3,235,200), South Dakota (\$3,965,670), Utah (\$2,722,342), Vermont (\$2,898,808), Virginia (\$2,482,508), and Washington (\$6,530,630).

How do Scenic Byways Relate to TRAAK?

The Alaska Scenic Byways Program was incorporated as a part of Trails and Recreational Access for Alaska (TRAAK), and brings with it the opportunity for additional funding for planning and projects from the National Scenic Byways Program grants. Additionally, scenic byway issues are incorporated into TRAAK corridor assessments.

In 1995, the State of Alaska established the TRAAK program with two main goals:

1. To improve access to trails and recreation for Alaskans and

TRAAK is a cooperative program which brings together four state agencies, the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, the Department of Fish & Game, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Department of Commerce and Economic Development, as partners to get the job done. Each of the agencies works closely with federal agencies to improve existing and develop new recreational opportunities on public land.

Corridor assessments for the ten major National Highway System routes in Alaska are being developed. The assessments focus on the highway corridors only, identifying existing facilities and noting opportunities for future (near term and long term) improvement. They may be expanded to include land ownership and management responsibilities, off-road trail opportunities, and concerns and issues of state and federal agency partners. These reports will be used as a long range planning tool for project development.

The TRAAK Citizens Advisory Board is appointed by the Governor to advise the State of Alaska on the imple-

ment of the program. The Board includes members of the public as well as non-voting members from the Departments of Transportation & Public Facilities and Natural Resources. The Board can review and recommend priorities for all TRAAK funding programs, and has specific authority to approve grant awards under the Symms and Land and Water Conservation Fund programs.

The TRAAK program receives funding from several sources. The agencies involved with TRAAK dedicate staff time and expenses to the administration of TRAAK. Projects that are designed and built under the TRAAK program are funded by legislative appropriation through one or more of the following federal programs:

Transportation Enhancement program of ISTEA. Under Transportation Enhancements (TE), up to \$20 million per year are made available for TRAAK projects in Alaska. Projects funded under TE include bicycle and pedestrian facilities, scenic waysides, trail heads, rest areas and sanitation facilities, and interpretive sites and landscape development along roadways. The mitigation of water pollution due to highway runoff is eligible for TE funds independent of TRAAK. TRAAK represents, in large part, the primary long-range planning efforts occurring for Transportation Enhancements in Alaska.

Federal Aid Sportfish Restoration Act (also known as the Wallop-Breaux fund). This program represents a portion of the money received from the sale of sport fishing gear and licences. For Alaska this program nets approximately 10 million dollars annually for fishery

National Recreational Trails Fund (Symms) Act. Under this grant program, \$150,000 per year is available for building and improving hiking, skiing, snowmobile, and off-road-vehicle trails in Alaska. This is a competitive grant program where grants are awarded to organizations and agencies. The funds are based on the percentage of the tax on fuel that comes from off-road recreational vehicle use.

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). This program provided up to 50% matching funds (less state administrative fee) to state agencies and local communities for the acquisition and/or development of outdoor recreation facilities. Congress has not appropriated money for the LWCF since 1995. During the period 6/1/90 through 9/1/95 the program annually awarded \$300,000 to state and local community outdoor recreation

Questions Specific to Alaska

What's the Value of a Scenic Byway Label?

Aren't All the Roads in Alaska Scenic Anyway?

Most of the roads in Alaska offer a beauty so striking and so unspoiled it is hard to imagine the benefit a scenic byway designation might bring. But try not to think of this as a program simply erecting signs and seeking designations. Think of this as a program to better manage the Seward Highway for the economic and aesthetic benefit of future generations of Alaskans. It is a program to motivate and empower agencies, local governments, and citizens to have a say in their future. The Scenic Byway process is a way in which to study changes and resolve conflicts before the great scenic quality of the route is

ing access, Alaska has devoted between \$400,000 and \$1 million a year to fishing access under this program. Funds can be used for easement or land acquisition, and for building and improving fishing access trails and boat launches.

rather than short term benefits based on expediency and wasteful land use practices.

Alaska is so Big, Why Should We Plan for Scenic Roads?

We could never see the congestion of the Outside. Alaska may be vast in acreage, but the linear corridors served by the state's road network represent access to a tiny percentage of Alaska's land mass. In fact, tiny Vermont, with a population almost equal to Alaska's, has over 1,000 miles more of total roadway (paved interstate to dirt road) than Alaska. Alaskans and visitors to the state use a surprisingly small percentage of the vast lands of the state. This intensity of use has led to the congestion already evident along the Seward Highway and in a worst case scenario has led to the commercial strip development along the Parks Highway. Such development is changing the face of Alaska, and has already transformed some areas of the "Last Frontier" into "Anyplace USA". And while it is true such negative changes are relatively few, they are nonetheless significant impacts on an area frequented by most of the state's residents and visitors.

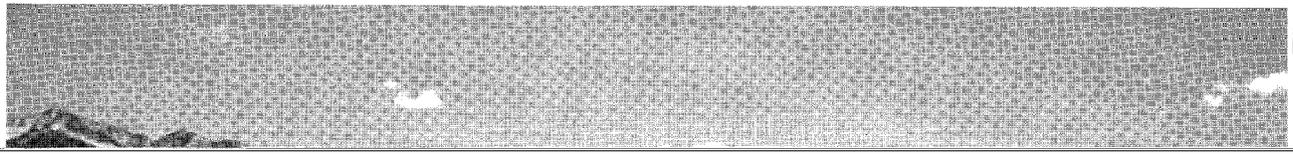
Is Scenic Byways Designation Going to Prevent New Development?

We need new services and opportunities for our people, not another land-lock. Absolutely not! A Corridor Partnership Plan for a scenic byway recognizes that visitor use and some resident desires are demanding new development. A scenic byways program seeks to accommodate responsible development in a sensitive manner. After all, Alaska is a special place; why should it look like the lower 48? Corporate America today is distinguished by look-alike facilities with little variation between Florida and Alaska. Yet Corporate American can, and has, demonstrated a willingness to work with communities desiring thoughtful development—communities that have a plan. Alaskans have a choice regarding new development. It can be accommodated in a manner that is appropriate for Alaska, or it can imported with the same generic thoughtlessness already so prevalent throughout so much of the nation. This plan provides a strategy by which Seward Highway can acquire the employment and tax benefits of new development while respecting the unique resources of the Seward Highway corridor.

What about existing plans already addressing lands along the Seward Highway?

Have these efforts been considered in this process? How does this plan fit in?

The Corridor Partnership Plan provides a forum to coordinate existing plans and ideas that cover limited segments or management responsibilities along the highway. To date, there has been no Corridor Partnership Plan coordination to address all opportunities and challenges, and to pool available management and financial resources along the full length of the corridor. This CPP represents a nonbinding strategy seeking to respect the qualities that distinguish the route, and recognizing that many existing programs and managers already have the best interests of the route at heart. Thus, the CPP process provides an effective vehicle for efficient cooperation among existing entities. It is not intended to create a new level of bureaucracy. It is, most simply, a streamlining process by which Seward Highway byway initiatives can either be effectively coordinated under existing programs, or where appropriate provide methods for addressing new initiatives.



The Four Theses



A delicate thread through a vast landscape: The Seward Highway at Turnagain Pass.

Photo courtesy Chugach National Forest/US Forest Service