

GEORGIA SCENIC BYWAYS PROGRAM DESIGNATION GUIDE



This guide is intended to introduce the Georgia Scenic Byways Program and to assist potential Scenic Byway sponsors through the Scenic Byway designation process.

The Georgia Scenic Byways Program is a grassroots effort, undertaken by local governments, individuals, or community organizations, to identify, preserve, promote, and protect treasured corridors throughout the state. A Georgia Scenic Byway is defined as any designated highway, street, road, or route, which features certain intrinsic qualities that local sponsors want to protect or enhance. It is these qualities, which may include scenic, historic, natural, archeological, cultural, or recreational resources that give the byway its character and appeal.

INITIAL STEP

The Department encourages all prospective sponsors and local governments to utilize the process outlined in this guide to minimize the designation timeline while maximizing the benefits of the corridor and the Scenic Byways Program.

The first step for anyone who has a route in mind is to contact the State Scenic Byways Coordinator (SSBC), (404) 631-1987, or scenicbyways@dot.ga.gov and request additional information about the program. Copies of the Designation Handbook, the Application, and other byways-related fact sheets shall then be furnished as available. These materials will give local sponsors an idea of both the qualities a potential byway should possess and the work involved with pursuing its designation.

After reviewing this information, and if the local sponsor thinks their proposed route would qualify as a byway, the next step is to contact the SSBC to schedule a site visit. The SSBC will meet with you to discuss the program, discuss the application, and tour the potential route. Other groups are involved in the Georgia Scenic Byways Program and will serve as valuable resources to make the potential byway a success. Therefore, local sponsors should also invite representatives such as a planner from their local Regional Commission or Metropolitan Planning Organization, a local Department of Community Affairs representative, the local Department of Economic Development (Industry, Trade, and Tourism) representative and other interested parties to assist in the assessment of the proposed corridor. If needed, the SSBC can provide contact information to the local sponsor.

CONDITIONS FOR A SCENIC BYWAY

The initial site visit will be a significant step for the potential byway sponsor, other representatives, and GDOT. It provides sponsors the chance to ask any specific questions they might have about the program or the designation process. It allows participants the chance to drive the route and evaluate the intrinsic qualities and resources such as scenic views, historic sites, natural areas, and recreation opportunities. Any information the local sponsor can provide about history and culture will also be helpful. Any potential issues or negative aspects of the route, such as billboards, commercial and industrial development, or visually unappealing locations can be documented and discussed. After this initial visit, and review of the input from the representatives, within two weeks the SSBC will discuss with the local sponsor the Department's findings of the initial site visit you have a potential Georgia Scenic Byway and the steps to be taken from there.

DEVELOPING LOCAL SUPPORT

Part of the Designation Application asks about support from, and notification of, governmental jurisdictions and community organizations. After the initial site visit, the local sponsor should consider bringing some of the potentially affected parties together. One opportunity to get leaders together is for the local sponsor to conduct a tour of the potential route. This will provide a chance for the local sponsor to talk about the Byways Program, what it can do for the community, and the sponsor's vision of designating a byway.

It is often easier to gather support of a Scenic Byway at these early stages of designation. Local citizens might be familiar with the route, but may not have a great appreciation for its qualities, so it may be prudent to invite some local citizens on the tour as appropriate. This will be a perfect opportunity for long-time residents to share information that will add to the story of the byway. Also, you may educate some of the locals who might not know the history or unique qualities of the area.

In addition, if the proposed byway follows a route under the jurisdiction of a local government (a county road or city street) a resolution from the local authority must be submitted approving the application. A sample resolution is included in this document as Appendix A. Program Policy presently does not *require* a resolution of support if the route is on the state system. However, GDOT does request resolutions to ensure the involvement of the local governments and the protection of the route based on local land use planning policies.

PREPARING THE APPLICATION

Once a route is chosen, government and community support is secured, and resources and corridor issues along the route are assessed, the local sponsor can prepare the application. The Department looks favorably on applications that have supporting materials such as resolutions by local government entities or letters of support from community organizations. If after the initial site visit GDOT determines that the Byway meets the criteria to continue the designation process, the Department will notify the local sponsor and the appropriate Board Member. The Board Member may decide to endorse the potential Scenic Byway in the form of a letter.

The following summarizes information needed for the application:

Applicant Information

This will serve as the Department's point of contact information for the scenic byway sponsor.

Proposed Scenic Byway Information

This section lists the requested scenic byway name and describes the route that the scenic byway could follow. The application and the local sponsor(s) can finalize the proposed byway name during the Corridor Management Plan development process.

Intrinsic Qualities

What qualities does this byway possess? Check only the boxes that apply. The byway may include any or all of these qualities.

Scenic Quality is the heightened visual experience derived from the view of natural and manmade elements of the visual environment of the scenic byway corridor. The characteristics of the landscape are strikingly distinct and offer a pleasing and most memorable visual experience. All elements of the landscape – landform, water, vegetation, and manmade development- contribute to the quality of the corridor's visual environment. Everything present is in harmony and shares in the intrinsic qualities.

Natural Quality applies to those features in the visual environment that are in a relatively undisturbed state. These features predate the arrival of human populations and may include geological formations, fossils, landform, water bodies, vegetation, and wildlife. There may be evidence of human activity, but the natural features reveal minimal disturbances.

Historic Quality encompasses legacies of the past that are distinctly associated with physical elements of the landscape, whether natural or manmade, that are of such historic significance that they educate the viewer and stir an appreciation for the past. The historic elements reflect the actions of people and may include buildings, settlement patterns, and other examples of human activity. Historic features can be inventoried, mapped, and interpreted. They possess integrity of location, design, setting, material, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Cultural Quality is evidence and expressions of the customs or traditions of a distinct group of people. Cultural features including, but not limited to, crafts, music, dance, rituals, festivals, speech, food, special events, vernacular architecture, etc., are currently practiced. The cultural qualities of the corridor could highlight one or more significant communities and/or ethnic traditions.

Archeological Quality involves those characteristics of the scenic byways corridor that are physical evidence of historic or prehistoric human life or activity that are visible and capable of being inventoried and interpreted. The scenic byway corridor's archeological interest, as identified through ruins, artifacts, structural remains, and other physical evidence have scientific significance that educate the viewer and stir an appreciation for the past.

Recreational Quality involves outdoor recreational activities directly associated with and dependent upon the natural and cultural elements of the corridor's landscape. The recreational activities provide recreational experiences. They include, but are not limited to, downhill skiing, rafting boating, fishing, and hiking. Driving the road itself may qualify as a pleasurable recreational experience. The recreational activities may be seasonal, but the quality and importance of the recreational activities as seasonal operations must be well recognized. [Inserted from Board Resolution January 1998]

Statement of Significance

Local sponsors present their byway vision to GDOT. In this section local sponsors should identify that the byway contains certain intrinsic qualities; and should detail those qualities and define why this route deserves designation. The local sponsor may want to go through the qualities individually.

Jurisdiction

Local scenic byway sponsors must have the support of the local governments that have jurisdiction over the byway. At this point, the local sponsor should have already talked with the local officials and received their support for this byway effort. This includes attempting to obtain support from the local GDOT Board Member(s). Provide a list of names, how they were contacted, and any initial comments or concerns they may have.

Community Participation

It is very helpful to have the support of important local community organizations involved in the designation process. List the name of the organizations contacted and how they were contacted. This is very similar to the information collected in the jurisdiction section noted directly above.

Corridor Management Issues

This section documents potential problems or opportunities for the proposed route. The section also develops goals and objectives for the route. The local sponsors should note what they hope to achieve and what issues they may face in meeting those goals. This will define the responsibilities, from both the local sponsor and supporting groups, which byway designation entails. [Note: Page 7 of this guide notes GDOT's Corridor Management Plan (CMP) requirements. The CMP is completed after the local sponsor receives GDOT's approval of the application.]

Signature(s) of Sponsor(s)

This signature represents support for the proposal.

Maps

Sponsors will need to provide two copies of a map indicating the route of the proposed byway. These can range from GDOT county maps to locally produced GIS maps. To help GDOT's evaluation, please mark any points of interest along the route.

Supporting Materials

Additional materials may be submitted by the local sponsor that could further help judge the qualities of the route or the level of community support. Examples of such materials may include brochures from points of interest along the route, letters of support from the community,

and pictures of the potential byway. These materials should include local government resolution(s), demonstrating additional support for the proposed byway.

Before sending the final application to GDOT, the local sponsor can elect to send a draft version to the appropriate Regional Commission (RC). The RC has to option to review the application and provide feedback.

SUBMITTING THE FINAL APPLICATION

When the SSBC receives the application it will be reviewed by the GDOT Office of Planning, the SSBC, the GDOT planner assigned to your area. Notification will also be sent to various GDOT offices and the applicable GDOT District office by the Office of Planning, informing them of a possible Scenic Byway. During this review process, a field check will be conducted to visually evaluate the route and its resources. As soon as this review is complete, GDOT's Office of Planning will send a letter either approving the application or requesting further refinement to the application. On occasion, when sufficient resources or intrinsic qualities are not present along a route, the application will be rejected. If the application is approved, the sponsor will receive notification to begin the Corridor Management Plan development phase, which includes the local sponsor notifying property owners and owners of outdoor advertising signs. At this point the Office of Planning will again notify other GDOT offices to inform them of the approved application.

THE CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Corridor Management Plan (CMP), requires significant public involvement, documents the vision for the byway and the steps to be taken to achieve the goals of promotion, preservation, and enhancement.

Developing the Corridor Management Plan

The local sponsor will determine how to proceed with the development of the CMP. Items to be addressed are: Who will be involved in preparing the plan? Will a local entity be able to produce the document with their available staff or will the sponsor need to hire a consultant? When should a public meeting be held? A steering committee, established by the local sponsor can be a valuable resource in the development of the Corridor Management Plan.

The steering committee should be comprised of local stakeholders that are interested in or affected by the byway and might contain representatives from the local governments and community groups. Before hosting the first public meetings, the local sponsor should have a meeting with this group and develop the initial vision for the byway and develop a potential framework for the CMP with some broad goals and actions for the byway.

Documenting Public Involvement

The public involvement process is vital to designating a Scenic Byway. Public meetings inform residents and property owners about the potential byway and collect their feedback on the

proposed plan. GDOT requires the byway sponsor hold at least two public meetings during the development of the CMP. Once the sponsor has developed a draft outline of their vision for the scenic byway, they may decide to hold an initial public meeting at which the local sponsor discusses the broad goals they hope to achieve. This will be a good time to educate local residents about the Georgia Scenic Byways Program and the designation process. An important item to be stressed at this meeting is the only restriction imposed by GDOT after designation, the prohibition of new billboards. Any additional regulations would be at the discretion of the local jurisdiction. The sponsor should be prepared to address any questions, issues, or concerns about the Byways Program. After presenting this information sponsors should be able to assess the public support for the route and should invite public comment on their goals. From this input, the byway group may proceed with the development of the CMP.

It is important to notify residents about the plans for a Scenic Byway and invite them to at least two public meetings. Sponsors should attempt to notify, by letter, every property owner along the potential byway, explaining their efforts and inviting them to a public meeting. Sponsors can obtain a list of these property owners from their local tax assessor's office. It is especially important that owners of commercial properties be notified as they are directly affected by the billboard restriction. Appendix B provides a Receipt of Notification form which will allow the sponsor to keep a record of and verify all notified property owners. An electronic copy of each form should be provided to the Department's SSBC. In addition, an announcement of each public meeting should be placed in the appropriate local newspaper or other appropriate media. Documentation of the public involvement must be included in the CMP.

At a minimum, a second public meeting should be held once the Draft CMP is ready for public review, but before it is finalized. Here, byway sponsors shall confirm how they captured and addressed local concerns and suggestions. Of course, sponsors may have as many meetings as they feel necessary to ensure maximum community participation and to develop the best possible plan. If the route crosses into multiple government jurisdictions sponsors may need more localized meetings. The SSBC as able, will attend public meetings, upon request by the local sponsor.

In addition to the public, another key stakeholder in the Byways Program is the outdoor advertising industry. Because of the restriction on billboards, they will be particularly concerned with the rights of commercial property owners along a potential byway and whether or not they have been informed about the proposed byway and accompanying land use restrictions. The byway sponsor shall provide notification for the Executive Director of the Outdoor Advertising Association of Georgia, via GDOT (submit the notification to the SSBC directly, for forwarding to the OAAG), to solicit their input about the proposed route and to offer the opportunity to tour the potential byway with the sponsor. The Department recommends completion of this step immediately after the application is approved to identify any potential signing issues.

In addition, the sponsors should remain in contact with their GDOT Board Member(s), informing them about the designation efforts. This is best accomplished by working through the Office of Communications in the appropriate GDOT District Office. Sponsors should also extend an invitation to the Board Member(s) to tour the proposed scenic byway. Support of the Board Member(s) is critical because ultimately they are the one(s) that introduce a resolution to the

State Transportation Board for designation of the byway. An official letter of support from the Board Member(s) is required for the CMP.

The CMP will also focus on the byway's right of way. Utility companies are involved in how this property is managed. Try and include a representative from the local utilities in the early public meetings to discuss the CMP. Utility companies conduct maintenance and construct new utilities along that right of way and may proceed with actions that are not conducive with the plan. Understanding a sponsor's intentions should lead to cooperation with their plans. GDOT District offices, including the utilities offices, are notified of your proposal and will also try to accommodate as best they can. The SSBC can provide contact information as needed.

Defining Corridor Management Plan Components

There are three main components to a Corridor Management Plan. These include the development of a byway organization, an inventory of intrinsic qualities, and the local goals and objectives for the route.

The byways organization, whose mission is to implement the plan, will often develop from the original application sponsor or the group developing the plan. The structure for this organization and a list of responsibilities should be detailed and ready for implementation once the byway is designated.

The byway's benefits should be clearly defined. In the application, the sponsor was asked to check certain intrinsic qualities present along the route. These qualities were also detailed in the Statement of Significance. The CMP, should expand on the idea, travel along the route, and document all issues of significance. Sponsors might want to assign groups of people from the byway committee to travel the route to define all of the qualities of the route or of a particular category. For example, the sponsor could request members of the local historical society or preservation group to document all of the historic and archeological sites. The sponsor should clearly record this information on maps, photographs, or in written form.

The third component establishes a set of goals and objectives for the byway. This section details what the sponsors hope to achieve with each of the intrinsic qualities and resources they identified. These goals can be grand ideas, but make sure they are attainable. Either develop these objectives based on the categories of intrinsic qualities, or match certain resources or qualities to larger goals. Try to get as detailed as possible with the objectives and proposed actions. In the future, if/when a sponsor is applying for grant funds, reviewers will want to know they have thought ahead and this proposed project is part of a master plan.

The Elements of a Good Corridor Management Plan

The Federal Highway Administration looks for the following qualities when considering the Designation of a National Scenic Byway:

1. Maps identifying the corridor boundaries, location of resources, and land uses within the corridor.

2. An assessment of the intrinsic qualities and their “context” (the areas surrounding them).
3. A strategy for maintaining and enhancing each of those intrinsic qualities.
4. The agencies, groups, and individuals who are part of the team that will carry out the plan, including a list of their specific, individual responsibilities. Also, a schedule of when and how the sponsor will review the degree to which those responsibilities are being met.
5. A strategy of how existing development might be enhanced and new development accommodated to preserve the intrinsic qualities of your byway.
6. A plan for on-going public participation.
7. A general review of the road’s safety record to locate probable hazards and design issues, and to identify possible corrections.
8. A plan to accommodate commercial traffic while ensuring the safety of sightseers in smaller vehicles, as well as bicyclists, joggers, and pedestrians.
9. A listing and discussion of efforts to minimize uncharacteristic intrusions on the visitor’s experience of the byway.
10. Documentation of compliance with all existing local, state, and federal laws about the control of outdoor advertising.
11. A plan to make sure the number and placement of highway signs will not detract from the scenery, but will be sufficient to help tourists find their way. This includes, where appropriate, signs for international tourists who may not speak English fluently.
12. Plans of how the byway will be marketed and publicized.
13. Any proposals for modifying the roadway, including an evaluation about design standards and how proposed changes may affect the byway’s intrinsic qualities.
14. A description of what you plan to do to explain and interpret your byway’s significant resources to visitors.

GDOT’s CMP Requirements

- Information on local land use or zoning plans for the corridor.
- An acknowledgement of federal requirements regarding existing outdoor advertising in the corridor and the prohibition on new billboards along those routes designated as National Highway System, Interstate, or former Federal Aid Primary. (Upon request, the State Scenic Byways Coordinator can provide the proper citations of these requirements.)
- Copies of the Certified Letter and return receipt sent to the Outdoor Advertising Association of Georgia.
- A statement providing for segmentation, which is the exclusion of corridor sections with industrial or commercial use that include little or none of the intrinsic qualities for which Scenic Byway designation is desired. Sections of highway to be excluded should be identified and a reasonable basis for the exclusion must be established.
- The CMP must be approved by the local jurisdiction having responsibility for its implementation prior to endorsement by the Office of Planning, and GDOT approval. This is often covered with a resolution of support from the local government(s). See Appendix A.
- A summary and documentation of the public involvement process followed by the sponsor. GDOT requires at least two public information meetings on the proposed scenic byway and CMP.

- A provision for the placement of Scenic Byway designation signs on the local roadway. An agreement will be entered into between GDOT (the appropriate District Office) and the local government at a later date for the installation of these signs.
- A provision that GDOT does not assume any financial or other legal responsibilities by designation of the local roadways as a Scenic Byway.
- A letter of support from the sponsor's DOT Board Member(s). The Board Member(s) will be introducing a resolution for designation to the State Transportation Board. This is to ensure that he or she is fully aware of the sponsor's efforts and supports designation.

Once finalized, the sponsor will submit three hard copies and an electronic copy of the CMP to GDOT SSBC for review. Upon approval by GDOT, the SSBC will forward copies of the CMP to the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Community Affairs for their review and comments. Once the sponsor has addressed the three agencies' assessments, and the plan meets everyone's requirements, the Office of Planning will send a recommendation for designation to the GDOT Commissioner for concurrence. If the Commissioner concurs, approval by the State Transportation Board will be requested. The sponsor's GDOT Board Member(s), who at this point should be familiar with the sponsor's efforts, would introduce a resolution to officially designate the route as an official Georgia Scenic Byway. Once again, we will notify appropriate GDOT divisions informing them of the official designation both prior to and after Board action.

DESIGNATED SCENIC BYWAY (NEXT STEPS)

Upon successful approval, one of the local sponsor's first actions will be working with GDOT to provide signs for the byway. GDOT will develop a signing plan, supply the signs and posts, and will also install and maintain the signs along state highways. If the byway travels off the state highway system, the local government must install and maintain the signs. The GDOT District Office will formalize this responsibility through an agreement with each jurisdiction.

Part of GDOT's involvement is the designation of your new byway on the State Transportation Map and Scenic Byway websites. The map, distributed at rest areas, welcome centers, and other public areas can serve as the first step in marketing the byway. The Department's website can provide information about byway facilities and points of interest to potential visitors. Please provide any information to the SSBC, including photographs, which you would like to be considered for posting to this website.

Once designated as a Georgia Scenic Byway, local sponsors often decide to inform the public with an event along the newly "created" scenic byway. This is an opportunity to educate the public about the scenic byway with a designation event. It might involve a tour of the byway and its resources including stops at locations that exhibit the various qualities that make the byway special. Also, at this event sponsors may want to have an official unveiling of the new signs or a ribbon cutting ceremony. Coordination with the Department, specifically the SSBC and the Office of Communications is requested.

It is also time to begin implementing the CMP. The route has been designated a Scenic Byway, so what does that really mean? In essence, it means the sponsors have agreed to work toward

enhancement of the designated corridor. To do this, it is time to put the Corridor Management Plan into use. The CMP should have detailed a future byway organization and its responsibilities, including steps to get that local group up and running.

Consult the timeline established in the CMP to outline a plan of action. Identify objectives that are to be met first and who is responsible for them. Completing many of the actions put forward in the CMP may call for construction or planning projects. Funding for these projects is always an issue and may prove challenging. The State Scenic Byways Coordinator can provide a list of possible funding sources for potential byway projects.

CONTINUING BYWAY REVIEW AND EVALUATION

The SSBC and/or the staff representing the local sponsor shall conduct a field check of the byway every four years or as needed to review the intrinsic qualities of the route and evaluate both their condition and the implementation of the Corridor Management Plan. The Department will review the proposed actions and the implementation timeline to make sure sponsors are continuing their support and maintenance of the Scenic Byway. An update of actions and a revised timeline may need to be developed at this time. As with the original CMP, this updated version will be reviewed by GDOT, the Department of Natural Resources, and the Department of Community Affairs.

If a byway is not meeting Georgia's Scenic Byways Program requirements, the Department will coordinate with the sponsor to address deficiencies and improve conditions. However, a significant degradation of the original qualifying conditions may result in the revocation of a portion or the entire corridor from Scenic Byway status.

APPENDIX A

Sample Resolution

A RESOLUTION OF SUPPORT FOR THE (NAME OF BYWAY)

WHEREAS, the (byway sponsor) has identified a route that follows (description of route), which contains significant scenic, natural, historic, cultural, archeological, or recreational qualities;

WHEREAS, the (byway sponsor) is seeking to gain “Georgia Scenic Byway” designation for the route from the Georgia Department of Transportation;

WHEREAS, the (local government or business entity) has been advised on details of the Georgia Scenic Byways Program, the proposed byway, and the benefits of designation;

WHEREAS, designation of this route will support the objectives of this body to protect, promote, enhance, and interpret the outstanding intrinsic qualities of (city or county or region); and

WHEREAS, the Georgia Scenic Byways Program is a tool to encourage tourism and responsible development, bringing positive economic benefits and opportunities to this community;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the (local entity) having met and considered the matter in open session on (date), hereby fully endorses the Designation Application, for the proposed (name of byway).

FURTHER, the (local entity), in its endorsement of this application, acknowledges the efforts of the (byway sponsor) in undertaking this project and will support the completion of the designation process.

Dated this ____ day of _____, 20____.

Signatures

Seal

It also helps if you can add that seeking byway designation fits with the goals or actions of the group supplying the resolution. (Example: specific land use, preservation, or economic plans)

APPENDIX B

RECEIPT FOR SCENIC BYWAYS INFORMATION

DATE _____

INDIVIDUAL _____ FAMILY _____ MOBILE HOME _____ BUSINESS _____

FARM _____ NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION _____ NON-RESIDENT OWNER _____

BYWAY NAME OR ROUTE _____

COUNTY _____

NAME _____
(PRINT)

PRESENT ADDRESS

I, the above named, do hereby certify that I have on this date been made aware of the proposed scenic byway and the restrictions it will place on additional outdoor advertising. In order to preserve the integrity of the corridor, no new billboards will be allowed. I am aware that onsite signs are permissible in accordance with local sign ordinances.

(SIGNATURE)

(DATE)

WITNESS