

Altamaha Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan

Submitted to the
Georgia Department of Transportation
April 16, 2002
Revised per DOT Comments
June 12, 2002

Introduction

This document is a Corridor Management Plan (CMP) for the Altamaha Scenic Byway. Preparation and submittal of this plan for state agency review is the next step in having the proposed route officially designated as a state scenic byway by the Georgia Department of Transportation. The plan inventories and recognizes the six intrinsic qualities of the proposed byway and establishes an implementation strategy for achieving the locally determined vision for the corridor. Once the CMP is approved by DOT, local governments along the route will pass local resolutions approving the road's scenic byway designation.

Byway Vision Statement

To protect, enhance and share the cultural, natural, archeological, historic and recreational qualities of this unique region through the preservation, beautification, and interpretation of our coastal heritage for present and future generations.

State and National Scenic Byway Programs

The National Scenic Byway program offers communities an effective method to protect and promote their special scenic, historic, natural, cultural, recreational, and archaeological resources. Scenic byway designations are community-requested designations at the state or national level that recognize roads with these special features. This designation offers communities opportunities to highlight their most outstanding assets while attracting visitors to increase economic benefits from tourism and recreation. Scenic byway designations encourage local citizens, businesses, conservation organizations, and government agencies to work together to protect the state's best roadways. A strong scenic byway program gives communities a tool to plan for future growth along the designated scenic byway corridor, helping to safeguard against the loss of a road's beauty and intrinsic qualities to inappropriate development.

Local Background

In 1998, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs designated the City of Darien as a Better Hometown. In August 2000, the city hired a Better Hometown director and the Board of Directors held a Community Kick-Off event. At this town hall meeting, many citizens voiced concerns over growing development pressures in coastal Georgia. Rural charm, a European history dating back to England's King George, and the irreplaceable environment are elements unique to coastal Georgia, and their preservation is crucial to the present and future quality of life. Based on these concerns, our community set several local and regional goals to help guide development that will help preserve the most outstanding elements and enhance the beauty of the area. All three affected local governments, Glynn County, McIntosh County, and the City of Darien, voted unanimously to support a joint application to the Georgia Scenic Byways program.

The Georgia Scenic Byway program is an effective tool to promote thoughtful growth along with conservation. As such, it can provide the governments of Darien, McIntosh County and Glynn County with proven methods of guiding development carefully, always with an eye to protecting the beauty and history of our communities.

The proposed Altamaha Historic Byway spans southeastern McIntosh County, the City of Darien and northern Glynn County. The dominant feature of the area is the Altamaha River delta, with its distinctive ecological, historical, cultural, ethnic and archaeological qualities. Many small communities along the byway claim roots in the area dating back to the Scottish Highlanders and General James Oglethorpe who founded the town of Darien in 1736.

Much of the area comprising the proposed Altamaha Historic Byway route represents the last undeveloped land in coastal Georgia. While we welcome the progress that growth will bring, we are concerned about the potential compromise to our quality of life that unmanaged growth guarantees. Participation in the Scenic Byway program provides our communities with the necessary tools to protect and enhance the historic significance and natural beauty around us.

The following organizations and interested parties participated in the discussion that led to the application:

- McIntosh County Board of Commissioners
- Darien City Council
- Glynn County Board of Commissioners
- Darien Downtown Development Authority
- McIntosh County Development Authority
- Better Hometown Community Board of Directors
- Coastal Georgia Regional Development Center
- Department of Natural Resources- Coastal Management Program
- Department of Natural Resources – State Parks and Historic Sites
- The Nature Conservancy
- Brunswick/Golden Isles Chamber of Commerce
- McIntosh County Chamber of Commerce
- McIntosh County Rotary
- Brunswick Rotary
- Sapelo Island Cultural and Revitalization Society
- Sapelo Island DNR Education Office
- McIntosh SEED
(Sustainable Environment and Economic Development)
- Altamaha Riverkeeper

Public Participation Initiatives

Community Meetings

The Historic Planner from the Coastal Georgia Regional Development Center facilitated six public meetings during the Corridor Management Plan process. These meetings took place at historic buildings and churches along the proposed route. At each meeting new individuals from the community came out to learn about the byway and to support the process.

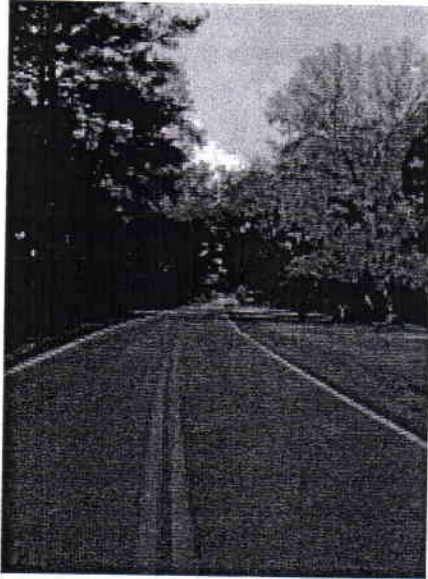
Public Hearings

Staff from the Department of Community Affairs facilitated four public hearings with support from the Coastal Georgia Regional Development Center. Two hearings were held at the Needwood Church in Glynn County, and two hearings were held at the Ida Hilton Public Library in Darien.

CMP Workshop

Following the first series of public hearings, Georgia Department of Community Affairs staff held a workshop for the members of the Corridor Management Committee.

Proposed Route



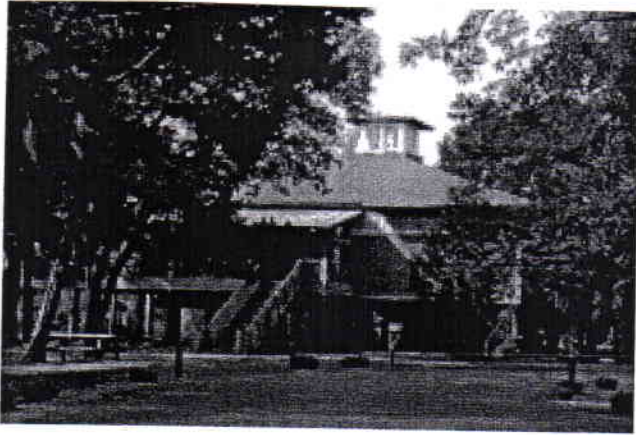
The Altamaha Historic Scenic Byway consists of two highways, SR 99 and US 17. Beginning at the Sapelo Island Visitors' Center off SR 99, the byway runs south past historic sites such as The Thicket, The Ridge, and Ashantilly Plantation on SR99 into Darien, Georgia. At the intersection of SR 99 and US 17, at the historic McIntosh County Courthouse, the route continues South on US 17 through Darien, across the Darien River, the Butler River, the Champney River, and finally, the Altamaha River into Glynn County. The route continues past Howfwyl-Broadfield Plantation State Historic Site and ends at the Historic Needwood Baptist Church and School. An alternate loop allows for a left turn on McIntosh Road in McIntosh County off SR99 to travel past Fort King George State Historic Site and continue down Fort King George Drive to US 17 one block south of the McIntosh County Courthouse. The length (in miles) of the entire proposed byway is 17.4 miles. (See map next page)

Our intention is not to halt development along the byway, but with continued public input and education, to assist landowners in making wise choices that will help preserve the intrinsic qualities of the corridor. We are building widespread support for and recognition of the benefits of the byway's potential as a regional tourist destination. Achieving wise land development choices will require combine continued public education targeted at elected officials and property owners. The byway commission will employ the assistance of existing federal and state government financial incentives designed to encourage sensitive growth and management of the natural, cultural, historic, and recreational resources along the route.

Byway Oversight

To realize the community's vision for the Altamaha Historic Scenic Byway the three governments will create a local entity to provide the necessary focus for the preservation and enhancement of the byway. While elected official involvement is paramount to our success, a Byway Commission will give the byway a more distinct community identity. The organizational structure for byway oversight is described further in the Implementation Strategy section of this CMP.

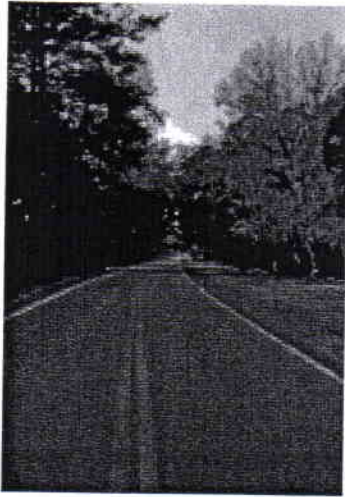
(Attached Route Map should be inserted here)



Existing Conditions

While McIntosh Road and Fort King George Drive are county/city roads, SR 99 and US 17 are under the jurisdiction of the Georgia Department of Transportation. However, Georgia DOT assumes no financial or legal responsibilities as a result of these roads being designated a scenic byway.

SR 99 is a two lane undivided roadway with 6 foot grass shoulders and an estimated right of way of 80 to 100 feet, until the intersection of SR 99 and US17/SR 25. The average annual traffic count for this section is 1900 cars per day.



SR/US 17/SR 25 is a divided four lane roadway, with curb and gutter, and an estimated 85 foot right of way. At the intersection of SR 99/US17/SR 25 and SR 25 Spur, the roadway goes to two lanes, undivided with 8 foot grass shoulders and an estimated 100 foot right of way continuing to the Glynn County line. The average annual traffic count for this section is 6600 cars per day.

SR 99/US 17/SR 25 Spur is an undivided two lane roadway with 5 foot grass shoulders and an estimated 60 foot right of way. There are no traffic counts available for this road.



McIntosh Road is a two-lane roadway with 5-foot grass shoulders and an estimated right of way of 60 feet. Fort King George Road is a two-lane roadway with 5 foot grass shoulders and an estimated right of way of 60 feet. There are no traffic counts available for McIntosh Road or Fort King George Road. Both roads have newly completed pedestrian corridor/bicycle routes funded through TEA.

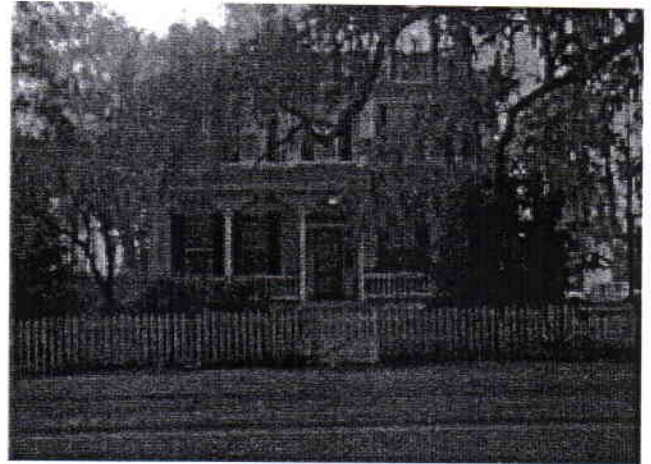


DOT project (PI# 0000422, STP-0000-00 (422), Glynn County, 1.03 miles of widening on SR 99 beginning east of I-95 and extending to US 17/SR 25 has the potential to impact the byway either positively or negatively depending on design factors. Construction funding for this project is in "long range;" meaning it will not be funded for six years. Although it is acknowledged this and all DOT project schedules are subject to change, this time frame would be appropriate since it would allow ample time to coordinate this project with the goals and objectives of the Corridor Management Plan for the byway.

The McIntosh County current and future land use maps show that all property along the byway is primarily residential. The Glynn County land use element of the comprehensive plan states "Glynn County will maintain and enforce development regulations which meet legal standards, encourage high quality development, allow a reasonable use of property and protect the interests of citizens." Darien's business district allows a variety of uses that will suit the tourism needs of byway travelers. Each local government has expressed support for enforcing current regulations and encouraging appropriate business, residential and recreational development on the corridor.



Along the seventeen mile route, much of the housing is rural in nature. That is, mostly on large lots, although there are several clusters of mobile homes and one mobile home park. While The Ridge offers the traveler a glimpse of a well-preserved Victorian neighborhood, other communities are much more utilitarian in appearance. Several specimens of southern vernacular architecture along the route are dilapidated and uninhabited. These houses, barns and garages should be rescued and returned to housing, or converted to small businesses that may capture the tourism potential of the byway. The historic character of the architecture is worth the effort of preservation.



DOT rules specify that "the CMP shall provide for segmentation (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). However, the Altamaha Historic Scenic Byway route (shown on the map on page 5) is rich in the five intrinsic qualities, and no segmentation of this byway appears to be appropriate.



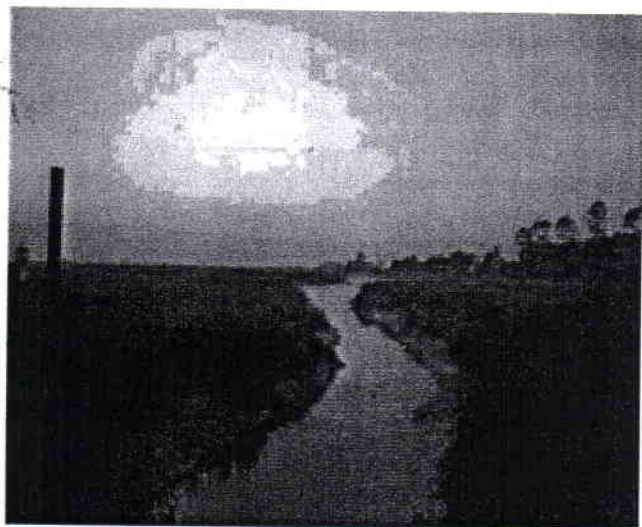
There are no existing Billboards along the route and the participating local governments will work to see that the scenic route remains billboard-free.





Scenic Qualities

The intrinsic scenery of the Altamaha Historic Scenic Byway is outlined in detail in the Natural, Historic and Archaeological Qualities sections that follow. The interwoven characteristics of each intrinsic quality provide for a unique opportunity to experience the best of Coastal Georgia. It should be noted that at this time, some of the privately held property along the corridor might not be considered "scenic" in nature.



Several of the most scenic resources are located a few hundred feet off the main byway on side roads. Currently, these resources are noted by historic markers. The scenic vistas are noteworthy on their own for anyone with an appreciation for natural beauty, but discreet interpretative signage will provide information for those wishing to learn more about the unique environment through which the byway travels.

The vistas from Highway 17 through Darien and into Glynn County are incomparable in the United States. Coastal Georgia is home to one third of all marshland on the east coast of North America, much of which is visible from the scenic byway. From the Highway 17 bridge out of Darien onto General's Island (a relative high point in Coastal Georgia) is an expansive view of the famous Darien shrimp fleet, the northernmost branch of the Altamaha River Delta, and hundreds of acres of marshland. Continuing south along the route from Darien, the traveler will cross through the marsh itself on a series of bridges and causeways (man-made "dry land" created for the purpose of a road). On any given day, one may see osprey, bald eagles, great blue herons, red tailed hawks and owls, in addition to whatever migratory birds may be passing through at the time. After crossing the bridge over the South Altamaha River into Glynn County, the byway seems to close in on itself. This perceived narrowing is due to the road leaving the Delta and returning to mainland on which grows the remains of a once towering maritime forest. (See the Natural Qualities section for a complete overview.) The terminus of the byway is the Needwood Baptist church and school, a classic example of late 19th century southern religious architecture.