Essex Coastal Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan

prepared for

Essex National Heritage Commission

by

Brown Walker Planners, Inc.
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Introduction

What is a Scenic Byway?
A scenic byway is a road recognized for having special qualities that its local communities wish to preserve and promote. Scenic byways are designated (at both the state and national level) for the defining qualities that make them distinctive and provide a unique (and appealing) travel experience.

Byways offer driving experiences “off the beaten path” where visitors can explore and experience the scenery, culture, history and special features of an area, that provide opportunities we might otherwise miss. You might think of byways as roads that tell a story—gateways to unique adventures and paths to better understand America’s history and cultures.

Byway Statement of Significance
The Essex Coastal Scenic Byway is a byway of regional (multi-state) and national significance. This is demonstrated by the collection of natural and historic resources that have received national or regional designations or protections, most notably the federal designation of the Essex National Heritage Area. The Byway connects these resources in a cohesive route that traces historic settlement patterns that began with the First Contact Period and provides access to the naturally defining features of the area. The Byway’s resources attract visitors from outside the region creating an opportunity to use the byway program to reinforce and grow the heritage tourism and recreation-based businesses.

This layered, authentic, and working landscape offers byway travelers a compelling experience of American home life, work, and recreation within the context of our country’s early history. From a wealth of First Period architecture, to salt marsh farms and stone walls and jetties, the byway landscape is rich in visual interest and has a diversity that reflects the character of the people of New England.

National and International Recognition
The Byway passes through and along resource areas that have been recognized for their regional and national significance. The entire Byway is located in the Essex National Heritage Area, which was designated by the U.S. Congress in 1996 to recognize the quantity and quality of the region's nationally significant historical, cultural, and natural resources. These resources are categorized according to three nationally significant historical themes – Early Settlement (17th century), the Maritime Era (18th century), and the Industrial Revolution (19th century). These themes were established by the National Park Service, described in the Essex National Heritage Area’s Heritage Plan, and approved by the Secretary of the Interior.

Each byway community contains historic resources listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the official list of the nation’s historic places worthy of preservation. Included are individual properties, entire neighborhoods, and several National Historic Landmarks. There are 25 National Register Historic Districts and 11 local historic districts located along the byway.

Estuaries along the Byway are part of the National Estuary Program, established by U.S. Congress in 1987 to recognize and protect estuaries of national importance. The Parker River National Wildlife Refuge lies adjacent to the Byway in Ipswich, Rowley, Newbury, and Newburyport, was designated as part of the national system in 1942, primarily to provide feeding, resting, and nesting habitat for migratory birds. Portions of four Massachusetts Important Birding Areas (IBAs) abut the Essex Coastal Scenic Byway: the Great Marsh, Rockport Headlands and Inshore Waters, Eastern Point/Gloucester Harbor, and Nahant Bay. IBAs are part of an international network of sites that have been recognized as providing critical habitat for endangered species and attracting large numbers of breeding, wintering or migratory species.

Byway Designation
A scenic byway is a road recognized for having special qualities which its local communities wish to preserve and promote. Scenic byway programs (which exist at both the state and national level) are about recognition, not necessarily regulation. Scenic byways are designated based on the defining qualities of the roadway corridor that make them distinctive and provide a unique (and appealing) travel experience. The Essex Coastal Scenic Byway links and interprets important natural, scenic, historic and recreational resources through the coastal communities of the Essex National Heritage Area, demonstrating the pattern of human settlement in this region, as it has been shaped by the natural environment.
The Essex Coastal Scenic Byway (the Byway) was designated as a state scenic byway as part of two separate processes. The first designation from Gloucester to Newburyport was enacted in November 2003 as part of Chapter 117 of the Massachusetts Acts of 2003. The second designation between Lynn and Gloucester was part of line item 6010-0001 of the FY 2006 state budget. In accordance with national trends and state guidance the two state designated byways have effectively been joined in order to better promote and coordinate byway planning and promotion.

**Byway Vision Statement**

The Essex Coastal Scenic Byway will present the coastal part of the Essex National Heritage Area story and resources in a coherent manner, so that people visiting one part of the Byway will quickly gain an appreciation for the full range of resources offered by the region. People from around the nation and world will be able to learn about and appreciate what makes this place special. The Byway will attract visitors who share an appreciation of the natural environment and will be interested in the region’s history, culture and nature-based recreational opportunities.

**Plan Purpose**

This Corridor Management Plan describes and inventories the Byway and the resources along the route and develops goals and management strategies to protect and promote the byway corridor’s significant qualities. Developed with substantial community input, this plan provides a connection between regional planning and local plans and initiatives. In addition to being a useful tool for the communities, this Plan is a prerequisite for attaining designation as a National Scenic Byway, which can bring added recognition and possibly additional federal funding to the route and the region.

**National Scenic Byway Programs 14-Points**

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) lists 14 components that must be in any Corridor Management Plan (CMP) and would also be included in a byway’s application for national recognition.

The FHWA requirements for a CMP are:

1. A map identifying the corridor boundaries, locations of intrinsic qualities, and land uses in the corridor (see Chapter 2);
2. An assessment of the byway’s intrinsic qualities and their context (the area surrounding them). The end product is typically a catalogue of the byway’s scenic, historic, natural, archeological, cultural, and recreational qualities (see Chapter 2);
3. A strategy for maintaining and enhancing each of the byway’s intrinsic qualities (see Chapter 9);
4. A list of the agencies, groups, and individuals who are part of the team that will carry out the plan (see Chapter 10);
5. A strategy for how existing development along the corridor might be enhanced and how to accommodate new development while preserving the byway’s intrinsic qualities (see Chapter 9).
6. A plan for ongoing public participation (see Chapter 10);
7. A general review of the road’s safety record to locate hazards and poor design and identify possible corrections. Identify ways to balance safety with context-sensitive highway design practices that accommodate safety needs while preserving the road’s character (see Chapters 3 and 9);
8. A plan to accommodate commercial traffic while ensuring the safety of sightseers in smaller vehicles as well as bicyclists and pedestrians (see Chapters 8 and 9);
9. A listing and discussion of efforts to minimize anomalous intrusions on the visitor’s experience of the byway (Chapter 4);
10. Documentation of compliance with all existing local, state, and federal laws about the control of outdoor advertising. Federal regulations prohibit all new billboards along designated scenic byways that are classified as federal-aid primary, national highway system, or interstate roads. States are free to impose stricter controls on billboards along scenic byways (see Chapter 6);
11. A plan to make sure that the number and placement of highway signs will not get in the way of scenery, but still be sufficient to help tourists find their way (see Chapter 6);
12. Plans for how to market and publicize the byway (see Chapter 5);
13. Any proposals for modifying the roadway, including an evaluation of design standards and how proposed changes may affect the byway’s intrinsic qualities (see Chapter 9);
14. A description of what you plan to do to explain and interpret your byway’s significant resources to visitors (see Chapter 7).²

**Plan Organization**

This Corridor Management Plan is actually a series of individual reports -- a compilation of research, inventories, plans and recommendations for each of the elements that will be a part of a successful and sustainable scenic byway program. This Plan provides a vision for the Byway’s future and outlines strategies for achieving that vision. Each chapter of the CMP contains detailed information about specific aspects of the Byway and the Implementation Plan in Chapter 11 pulls all the recommendations together.

The Plan is intended to be used as a planning tool and policy guide by the byway organization and regional partners. The Plan also includes a more concise Report Summary companion document that presents the highlights of the different components. It is anticipated that communities and regional partners will use the full CMP as a reference document which provides more detail on specific components referenced in the Report Summary. The information contained in this comprehensive planning document should be useful for grant applications, identifying project resources, and formulating work plans.