

# Suggested Applications by Seaway Trail, Inc., for a National Scenic Byway

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The potential for a comprehensive and well-organized national network of designated highways with scenic, historical, cultural, and natural resource values demands attention. Such an expansive character may also require a nomenclature other than "scenic" byways. The guidelines suggested here for creating, administering, and promoting a national byways system have been compiled from Seaway Trail, Inc.'s 13-year history and its ongoing study of byways on an international scale. Seaway Trail, Inc., promotes the longest national recreational trail in the United States, 454 miles of highway along New York State's freshwater shoreline. The key to a well-organized network of specifically approved highways may be found in a three-level organizational structure with unified standards. Because the highway is the common element linking all state-contained byways, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) would appear to be the logical federal agency to oversee a national network. At the state level, offices within the departments of transportation would coordinate consolidated efforts for their own byway systems. Local and regional agencies would have a greater diversity of character, mixing public and private resources for administration, funding, and promotion. A possible organizational structure with responsibilities including establishment of criteria for routes identified for nomination to join the national byways network is outlined in this report. Seaway Trail, Inc., offers its history as an encompassing example of the development and promotional opportunities available to byways everywhere. Signage, safety and environmental impact, and funding and economic impact are addressed, and nine suggestions are made for the creation, administration, and promotion of a national scenic byways system.

A three-level, cooperative organizational structure is suggested for the creation, administration, and promotion of a national scenic byways system. The FHWA appears to be the logical federal agency to head this structure and to establish the criteria by which state-nominated byways would be judged for inclusion in a national network. Standards might be set for safety, design, and highway maintenance, and guidelines suggested for funding, promotion, and ongoing monitoring procedures to assist evaluation and planning.

## RESPONSIBILITIES OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Offices within each state's department of transportation would supervise their own state's consolidated efforts, having established any state-specific criteria for their byway system. These

offices would offer technical assistance. Promotion of each state's particular and unique resources would serve to spur greater regional and national travel. Local and regional agencies could then combine this nationally established familiarity—particularly through consistent signage—with statewide diversity to maximize economic growth and community pride.

The outline that follows suggests the basic responsibilities of this three-level structuring.

### Federal Highway Administration

1. Establish criteria for member highways,
2. Review applications for state-nominated byways to join national network,
3. Administer federal funds for projects relating to byways,
4. Act as a clearinghouse for information, and
5. Provide technical assistance.

### State Department of Transportation Byways Offices

1. Establish any state-specific criteria for member highways,
2. Review applications for locally and regionally nominated byways to join a statewide byways system,
3. Prepare applications for state-nominated byways to join national network,
4. Administer state funds for projects relating to byways,
5. Act as overseer of statewide signage programs,
6. Act as a clearinghouse of information, and
7. Provide technical assistance.

### Local and Regional Agencies

1. Unite public and private resources along a byway,
2. Prepare resource inventory and mapping for byway route,
3. Prepare applications for byways to join statewide byway system,
4. Prepare site-specific signage and facilities,
5. Conduct planning and development studies,
6. Conduct marketing and promotion studies,
7. Conduct ongoing monitoring and evaluation studies, and
8. Develop and publish byways publications and guidebooks.

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## CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATED NATIONAL BYWAYS

The initial responsibility of the FHWA, with states' input, might be to create criteria by which state-nominated highway systems can be judged for inclusion in a national network of byways. These criteria, and applications by states, might address the following factors:

### Physical Design and Safety Standards

1. Logical terminuses (beginning and ending points),
2. Pavement and shoulder widths,
3. Guiderail (self-oxidizing),
4. Geometrics,
5. Landscaping,
6. Utility placement, and
7. Maintenance standards.

### Resource Theme Inventory (may include one or more of the following):

1. Outstanding or representative scenic quality;
2. Traversing or connecting historic points of interest;
3. Traversing significant architectural neighborhoods;
4. Traversing important areas of natural resource value;
5. Current or potential thematic development opportunities (e.g., Pennsylvania's Amish country, New York's War of 1812 route);
6. Outstanding or representative parkway (e.g., New York's Taconic Parkway); and
7. Significance as a recreational or tourist route.

### Organizational and Funding Resources

1. State level offices
  - a. Within departments of transportation and
  - b. Funding through grants.
2. Local and regional agencies
  - a. Mix of public and private resources and
  - b. Funding
    - Grants,
    - Membership, and
    - Advertising income of publications and guidebooks.

### Planning and Development

1. To include present and projected plans,
2. Detailing present and projected usage patterns and tourist travel trends,
3. Detailing data-collection procedures and ongoing monitoring systems,
4. Detailing attention to environmentally sensitive areas and fragile sites of historical and cultural significance needing protection, and
5. To include promotion and marketing short- and long-term planning with particular orientation to tourism.

### Signage Standards

1. Color coding,
2. Theme coding,
3. Placement, and
4. Maintenance.

### Ongoing Monitoring, Evaluation, and Review Standards

1. Nationally consistent procedures;
2. Information to be supplied to state and federal information clearinghouses; and
3. To include safety, tourism, and byway business statistics.

Within these federally established criteria, each state can develop its own resources to encourage travel. Although the greatest percentage of highway travel in the United States is done by families traveling by automobile, attention might also be directed to resources relating to travel by other socioeconomic groups and by other means of transportation (e.g., bicycle, foot, recreation vehicle, and motorcoach). In addition to the enjoyment of travel, its educational value might also be promoted by highlighting historical sites along a byway.

## STATE LEVEL RESPONSIBILITIES

A byways office within each state's department of transportation could serve to establish and oversee compliance with any state-specific criteria for highways included in its state-wide byways system. This office could review applications submitted by local and regional agencies for routes to join the statewide system and submit them to the FHWA in application to join the national network. The state offices could check locally and regionally prepared resource inventories and mapping for cohesiveness with state and federal byways criteria, provide technical assistance, and act as a clearinghouse of information valuable to both federal and local levels.

## LOCAL AND REGIONAL AGENCIES

Local and regional agencies interested in promoting byways will be diverse in their character and resources. Seaway Trail, Inc., offers its format and programs with its 13-year record for consideration.

Seaway Trail, Inc., formed in 1978, is an agency for the development of a national recreational byway. Its 454-mi stretch from Rooseveltown to Ripley in New York State forms the longest National Recreational Trail in the United States.

Organizationally, Seaway Trail, Inc., is a private sector, not-for-profit, 501-c-6 with bylaws, authorizing officers, and a board of directors. The board, composed of one representative from each of the 10 counties traversed by the trail, meets quarterly. A staff of seven administers programs.

Seaway Trail, Inc., has received an annual New York State appropriation since 1986. These funds are administered and reviewed by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation. The private sector contributes ad-

vertising and membership funds. The highest annual budget figure on record is \$700,000.

Physically, the Seaway Trail is a mix of state and county two-lane highways and is recognized for mixed usage by automobile, bicycle, recreational vehicle, motor coach, and vehicles towing boats and snowmobile trailers. It is a greenway offering public access to 38 state parks, 13 wildlife management areas, 37 fishing access sites, and 21 public beaches.

Eight resource themes have been developed to date for the Seaway Trail. These are coastal recreation, history of the coast, people of the coast, natural resources, coastal agriculture, commercial fishing, water-related industry, and international coastline.

A resource inventory conducted by Seaway Trail, Inc., in 1987 collected data for determining possible resource themes for development and helped identify sensitive resources, both natural and manmade, in need of protection. Potential tourism and recreational development opportunities were thus identified and base maps were created for each of the 10 counties traversed by the trail.

Scenically, the Seaway Trail is unique in that for its full length it parallels four waterway systems along New York state's freshwater shoreline: Lake Erie, the Niagara River, Lake Ontario, and the St. Lawrence River.

Historically, Seaway Trail, Inc., has developed a strong War of 1812 theme with 42 well-placed signs along the trail and with site-specific interpretive signage at tourist stops along corridors of travel just off the trail. A War of 1812 guidebook was published, sectioned to correlate with these 42 stops. The Village of Sackets Harbor, found in a corridor just off the trail, celebrates an annual War of 1812 re-enactment weekend festival.

Other guidebooks, published with Seaway Trail, Inc.'s assistance, feature architectural, geological, bicycling, and lighthouse resources. The Lighthouse Assessment and Tourism Feasibility Study that prompted the Seaway Trail lighthouses guidebook was timed to capitalize on the potential tie-in with the bicentennial celebration of the American Lighthouse Act of 1789.

Seaway Trail, Inc., has developed an ongoing merchandising program that includes paid advertising in regional, state, and national publications and in its own consumer magazine, *Journey*, targeted to a North American audience. A hospitality awareness campaign for image-building has been created using "Ask Me About the Seaway Trail" buttons distributed to private businesses and through Seaway Trail members along the trail.

Cost-effective image building for each scenic byway in the national system could serve to promote travel across the nation. A mix of paid advertising, public relations campaign promotions, and publications can be important vehicles to increase public awareness of resources. Coordination with existing promotion agents might also be helpful. Target market studies can be useful in determining potential markets by geographical, life stage, socioeconomic, purpose of trip, and recreational activity factors. Conversion studies and evaluations might also serve as useful tools.

Seaway Trail, Inc., conducts a continual Tourism Monitoring Study, collecting short- and long-term data. These data include international bridge crossings, boat registrations, fishing licenses recorded, attendance figures for coastal parks, travel and tourism employment statistics, and lodging taxes.

This type of study helps identify development opportunities in addition to assessing organizational progress relating to economic improvement.

Other Seaway Trail, Inc., studies include a shoreline analysis, a two-year, trail-wide action plan, and tourism development plans for two cities and one trail sector. The 14-person planning committee for the Tourism Development Plan for the Oswego-Eastern Shore Communities study is an example of the kind of cooperative representation needed at the local and regional level. This committee included members of the governments of two counties, a city's tourism and waterfront departments, two chambers of commerce, a county legislature, mayor's office, state college, foundation, festivals organization, and the New York State Department of Transportation. This committee exemplifies the diversity of individuals and organizations that can work together to promote travel along a byway.

Corridors of travel moving away from the main byway route might be researched for possible development in conjunction with byway theme opportunities. One Seaway Trail corridor augments the coastal recreation theme by encouraging travel to sites of inland fishing, cross-country skiing, and snowmobiling opportunities. The War of 1812 theme draws visitors to more than 40 sites of historical interest off the trail.

## SIGNAGE

The single most important factor contributing to a byways system's success might be signage to establish consistent, easily recognized, and high-quality directional information to reassure travelers. Supplementing these guideposts might be well-placed informational kiosks offering travelers sites of specific interest. Color coding might be a means of designating areas as historically, culturally, scenically, or environmentally significant.

The Seaway Trail has more than 1,500 green-and-white trailblazer signs along its 454-mi route. There are also 56 informational and display kiosks as well as 42 War of 1812 theme signs. Interpretive signage at specific sites provides travelers with a contact point in areas where staffing may not be affordable. Installation of rest areas providing a variety of facilities such as restrooms, restaurants, information booths, and gift shops might be considered. These could be maintained by the states' departments of transportation, an Adopt-a-Highway sponsor, area chambers of commerce, or local garden clubs.

## SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

A top priority as FHWA determines the criteria for highways to join a national byways system will likely be safety concerns. These often go hand-in-hand with addressing environmental impact. Governmental officials could work closely with engineers, landscape architects, and utility companies to balance driver safety issues with environmental impact.

Criteria may address the intrusive location of utilities and excessive signage, which can block driver vision or create distraction. Latitude might also be provided to accommodate pedestrian and bicycle travel. A system for monitoring safety

via police accident reports and routine maintenance checks is recommended with a nationally consistent procedure.

In all likelihood, highways that currently meet the criteria for consideration as a scenic byway will be environmentally friendly. These highways blend with topography, vegetation, landscaping, and architecture. Sightlines are not compromised and nor is scenic value.

These safety and environmental concerns indicate that the FHWA and state departments of transportation may be the best agencies to oversee a byways system. Their access to and expertise with safety studies can correlate several factors and the impact on environment. These studies consider population areas, types of highways, pavement and shoulder widths, signage and other visual distractions, intersections, travel patterns, accident records, and traffic control methods (e.g., lights, signs, and speed limits). This information can also assist with placement of scenic overlooks, rest areas, and possibly even new businesses. Careful and appropriate highway design minimizes the need for guide rail and other barriers and warning or cautionary signage.

### FUNDING AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

A carefully balanced mix of public and private funding is suggested to support local and regional byway agency administration. Incentive or local and regional matching fund sources are suggested for new model programs and to spur economic development in recognized economically depressed areas. This would ensure local interest in and commitment to the success of the project. Outright grants of government funds might be directed to proven successful organizations providing user services to the public. Membership dues and advertising income generated by agency publications may be available to provide financial resources as well.

The organizational and informational resources of local and regional agencies can greatly enhance the economic opportunities of businesses located along a byway. Statistical and monitoring studies may provide valuable information on travelers' wants and needs, indicating past patterns and potential opportunities. Access to these studies, correlating economic growth and potential, could directly affect efforts to obtain support from loan institutions traditionally reluctant to support small byway businesses. Local and regional promotion

agencies along the byway can also help with cooperative advertising and promotion efforts. Development of off-byway corridors of travel may offer additional funding resources.

### CREATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF A NATIONAL SCENIC BYWAYS SYSTEM

The following suggestions are offered:

1. A national byways system might be administered through a three-level organizational structure composed of the FHWA, byways offices within each state's department of transportation, and local and regional agencies.
2. A more appropriate and encompassing nomenclature for a national byways system with scenic, historical, cultural, and natural resource values might be considered to replace "scenic" byways. An active awareness campaign for any system name might serve as a promotional tool.
3. Criteria for judging byways for inclusion in a national system might be established by the FHWA with states' input. Comprehensive resource inventory and mapping could be helpful application requirements.
4. Nationally consistent guidelines for signage programs could be especially important to ensure travelers' directional familiarity and security.
5. An ongoing and nationally consistent procedure for data collection could be established to assist planning and evaluation at all levels of organization.
6. Special attention might be given to developing resources for all socio-economic groups, various modes of transportation in addition to automobiles, and to resources of tourist, recreational, cultural, and historical value in addition to scenic quality.
7. Installation of rest areas of various facilities such as restrooms, restaurants, information booths, and gift shops might be considered.
8. Off-byway corridors of travel might be developed relating to byway themes with an appropriate plan of management.
9. A unity of vision and a spirit of cooperation among private and public individuals and organizations can be encouraged for the purpose of promoting byway travel locally, regionally, statewide, and nationally.