

The Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan



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With the support of local citizens and officials, BRPC and the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) have recently completed the *Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan* for the Mohawk Trail. Copies of the plan will soon be distributed to the public libraries and municipal offices of the communities through which the Byway travels. In Berkshire County these communities are Florida, Clarksburg, North Adams and Florida. The overall purpose of the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway corridor project was to recognize, interpret, preserve and promote the unique scenic, historic, cultural, natural and recreational resources of the Mohawk Trail in Franklin and Berkshire Counties through the development of this plan.

The Scenic Byway

The Mohawk Trail of western Massachusetts, also known as state highway Route 2, was one of the earliest Scenic Byways in New England, receiving its designation in 1953. The corridor is rich in natural, cultural and archeological resources, and historic villages and structures. It also includes some of the most beautiful scenic areas in Massachusetts. The Mohawk Trail is already an extremely popular auto-touring route during the Fall Foliage season.

The Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway corridor includes the communities of Greenfield, Shelburne, Buckland and Charlemont in Franklin County; and Savoy, Florida, Clarksburg, North Adams and Williamstown in Berkshire County. The Study area includes Route 2 and a one-half mile buffer strip along each side of the road. The total length of the Byway is approximately 41



miles, with 22 miles in Franklin county and 19 miles in Berkshire County.

What is a Scenic Byway?

A scenic byway is a route that people generally enjoy traveling and that reflects the intrinsic qualities of an area. The intrinsic qualities can be forests and mountains, communities, historic landmarks, or recreation resources for which the area is known. A byway can consist of one or more roads, and include rural or developed areas. Designating a route as a scenic byway can help residents plan how to preserve what they like best about it for the future and makes it eligible for additional grant funds. For more information on scenic byways, visit www.byways.org.

The Corridor Management Plan

A Corridor Management Plan is a tool that provides an inventory and assessment of important resources and articulates specific strategies and actions designed to achieve identified and measurable results. The Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan is similar to a



town's Master Plan in that it records current conditions and lays out strategies for future activities. The resources that were analyzed along the Mohawk Trail were Scenic, Natural, Recreational, Historic, Transportation, Tourism and Cultural. Also analyzed were current conditions such as Land Use and Zoning. Once these resources were assessed and current conditions were analyzed, a Plan of Action for future activities was developed.

In order to get to specific actions it is important that the common direction of the Byway be stated. This is done through the use of a Vision Statement, which is a broad statement that identifies an ideal that everyone can agree with. As a way to initiate discussion, the following is the Vision Statement developed for the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway:

“The Mohawk Trail is an historic and scenic travel corridor that provides travelers and local residents access to abundant natural, recreational and cultural opportunities as well as regional commerce. Promoted as a scenic automobile-touring route as far back as the early 1900’s, the road was one of the earliest in America to receive a scenic byway designation. Our vision is to expand economic opportunities along the Byway, particularly related to heritage and recreational tourism, while preserving the unique scenic qualities, natural resources and historic structures and communities that prompted its designation as a scenic byway in 1953.”

List of Goals

With the help of local individuals and public officials, the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway Advisory Committee has developed a List of Goals for the future of the Byway:

- Preserve the rural scenic character of the corridor and important viewsheds
- Protect the character of historic districts and village centers along the corridor
- Preserve and enhance the natural resources along the route
- Promote a low impact approach to tourism based on recreational, historic and cultural resources which minimizes traffic congestion
- Promote greater awareness of the Byway and its recreational, historic, and cultural resources
- Promote safety measures for roadway users including motorists, pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles
- Enhance transportation safety, efficiency and comfort, without compromising the rural qualities of the roadway.
- Maintain and enhance the quality of recreational experiences available to Byway users.
- Increase universal accessibility to recreation areas and associated facilities
- Explore appropriate design standards for commercial development along the Byway
 - Promote educational opportunities for students and the general public related to Byway resources



Public Participation

Throughout the development of the *Corridor Management Plan*, BRPC and FRCOG have been working with local citizens on the Mohawk Scenic Byway Advisory Committee to identify the most important aspects of the Scenic Byway and to develop a plan of action to protect and improve the experience of traveling the byway. This Committee is made up of private citizens and local officials who have an interest in the future management of the byway. We at BRPC and FRCOG gratefully acknowledge the guidance, insight and support of the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway Advisory Committee

members, who so generously volunteered their time to this project.

Major Findings

BRPC presented its Findings and suggested Ideas for Implementation to the public in a Public Forum held on Thursday, June 13th at the First Baptist Church on Main Street in North Adams.

In summary, the major findings are these:

- 1) The historic vistas remain spectacular, however:



- a) Scenic vistas are vulnerable to development.
 - b) Trees have grown in and impede scenic views in some areas.
 - c) Scenery is difficult to enjoy at the busy eastern and western ends of the Byway.
 - d) Historic motel cabins are unfortunately deteriorating.
- 2) The Scenic Byway is rich in natural resources and efforts to protect them should be maintained or increased:
- a) Prime farmlands along the Deerfield River are valuable economic and scenic resources.
 - b) Areas of rare and endangered species habitat are found all along the Byway corridor.
 - c) Cold water fisheries in the Deerfield, Cold and Hoosic Rivers face threats from Stormwater runoff and increased pressure from recreationists.
- 3) Recreational opportunities are abundant along the Byway, but:
- a) The DEM Forests and Parks system is deteriorating from lack of funding, staff, and improper trash disposal.
 - b) There is a need for additional access and parking to the Deerfield River and the Mahican-Mohawk Trail.
 - c) Trails for family bicycling are limited to state parks, which have rugged terrain.
 - d) Most Byway communities would welcome a modest increase in recreational tourism, but:
 - Impacts of increased recreation on resources is unknown at this time; and
 - Local rescue teams are already struggling to maintain the equipment, adequate coverage (number of volunteers) and training needed to answer the increasing number of emergency calls for outdoor recreation accidents
- 4) The Byway has a rich heritage that should be actively promoted, but:
- a) Many of local the historic information centers are not always accessible due to limited resources.
 - b) Historically significant structures and sites are not marked for recognition.
 - c) Many historic buildings of the Auto Touring Era (c. 1920-1950) have deteriorated, perhaps beyond repair.
- 5) The level of service for the transportation system is good, but:
- a) Speeding vehicles and pedestrian/bicyclist safety is a main concern (notably in Charlemonst and Florida).
 - b) Traffic and congestion is a concern in some areas (notably Shelburne Falls and the North Adams/Williamstown strip).
- 6) Highway improvements can be conducted to respect the scenery and heritage of the Byway.



- 7) Communities along the Byway wish to maintain the rural character of the corridor, but:
 - a) “Approval Not Required” development is the single greatest threat to this wish.
 - b) The Byway serves as the main street for some communities, so it is a natural place for economic development.

- 8) Tourism in rural communities along the Byway has declined from the hay-day of the 1940-50s.
 - a) Most communities along the Byway would welcome a modest increase in tourism, but:
 - Tourist information about the Scenic Byway is scattered along the Byway,
 - The Mohawk Trail Association, a private association of tourist businesses, survives on a limited budget, and its state funding sources is threatened, and
 - Many small historical/cultural attractions that lend character to the Byway have limited hours of operation.
 - b) Many tourist-oriented businesses suffer seasonal “feast or famine” cycles.

The Action Plan

The Action Plan outlines the Ideas for Implementation that developed during the creation of the *Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan*. The Major Findings and Action Plan described here are only a summary of what can be found in the *Corridor Management Plan*.

Next Steps

BRPC and FRCOG have submitted four grant applications to the National Scenic Byway Grant Program to conduct a number of activities, including:

- 1) Conducting a Facilities Improvement Project to create a bicycle/pedestrian trail, to improve hiking/canoeing access, to install informational kiosks, and to create a system of historic markers for significant structures and sites;
- 2) Conducting an Access Management Study for the increasingly commercial North Adams to Williamstown strip;
- 3) Developing a Strategic Marketing Plan for the Scenic Byway (including development of a distinctive logo); and
- 4) Creation of a Visitor Center in a historic building in Charlemont.

These activities are directly out of the Action Plan that was created from Ideas that were generated during the development of the *Corridor Management Plan*. For more information about the Corridor Management Plan or future activities along the Scenic Byway, contact Lauren Gaherty at BRPC at 413-442-1521 or lgaherty@berkshireplanning.org