

**MRPC Marketing Committee Conference Agenda
September 15, 2016
Annual Meeting, Natchez, MS**

Attendees: KY, IA, MN, LA, AR, WI, MS, National Office (NO)

Meeting began at 2:17pm.

- **Updating the app for navigation (with Transportation):** NO provided an update on the current navigation component for the app using a manually plotted route on Google Maps as the source material. The navigation provides a representation of the route but is not particularly effective for navigation. To create an accurate mapping platform, Carol Zoff, Transportation Chair, has been collecting GIS files from each state Department of Transportation. Currently, all but IL has provided their GIS files to be used in mapping the Great River Road. NO has shared these files with a mapping firm they have worked with on a past mapping project and who uses the same mapping software as the DOTs. A quote was requested to create a singular map from the 10 state files that is navigable online and if the user loses a cell signal. Based on the desire to have a offline navigate, the app will need to be redesigned. To create a new app with the GIS navigation, the NO shared a quote of \$35,000 with a delivery date before Memorial Day weekend, or the start of the summer travel season.

On behalf of the Transportation Committee, KY motioned to recommend the board approve funding not to exceed \$35,000 contingent on a delivery date of May 29th for the app project with firm selected by NO. Second by LA. Motion carried.

On behalf of the Marketing Committee, WI motioned to recommend the board approve funding not to exceed \$35,000 contingent on delivery date of May 29th for the app project with firm selected by NO. Second by AR. Motion carried.

Request was made to ask Pilot Pro Tem to convene a Board Meeting prior to the end of the Annual meeting to approve the funding request. NO agreed to make the request. Request was made to give IL a deadline of November 1st to provide the file to expedite the project. Recommendation was made to discuss the project with local senator or other contacts to obtain the GIS file. NO will make these requests.

Joint meeting between the two committees concluded with each committee thanking the other for the discussion. Committees shared they felt meeting together was beneficial and was a format that could be used for future meetings.

In the Marketing Committee meeting, a recommendation was made to contact Google to see if they can add the GRR to their mapping platform. NO will inquire.

- National Geographic Geotourism update: Committee members gave an overview of the program and the status of the website launch. Over 1,500 businesses are on the website but an additional 2,500 are awaiting approval. KY gave an overview of the launch presentation and said it was primarily about the Mississippi River basin and Delta Regional Authority. KY shared that they did present the Mississippi River as an economic driver to the mayors to push for clean water and tourism/transportation initiatives, which is positive for the GRR mission. More roll out of the new website will be made on October 12 in Moline at the Upper Mississippi River Conference and on October 27 in Minnesota. There is also discussion about creating a better sorting system on the website as it is currently only sorted alphabetically and not by state or interest. Committee members shared that the National Geographic project is doing some similar marketing as MRPC by distributing window clings and selling merchandise with the National Geographic logo on it. MN shared there is a widget that can be used to link to the website.
- Discuss reprinting the GRR map vs. creating a GRR Travel Guide: NO presented the number of map requests and the donations submitted once the map is received. The map appears to be very popular. NO expressed concern that selling advertising in a Travel Guide could compete for sales with states that produce their own guide. Several states that produce a guide shared their concerns. Committee decided to focus on finding a sponsor to reprint the map instead of looking at advertising sales to prepare a new Travel Guide piece. Committee wants to make reprinting the map a priority as some states already need additional maps for distribution.
- 2016 marketing/advertising plan options: NO presented and reviewed the second quarter 2016 marketing update. Committee requested an electronic copy to share with their states.

NO reviewed the three themes for 2016: birding, biking and driving. The birding promotion proved to be very successful and is clearly an activity people who are interested in the GRR are engaged in. Committee members agreed that the activity is strong in our target markets. Biking appeared to have a similar interest. NO updated the committee on the status of the Drive the GRR promotion which will be included in the third quarter wrap-up. Committee inquired on keychains for the promotion. NO explained the cost of keychains was too expensive to fit in the budget. Committee requested the keychains be revisited based on their popularity. NO will provide pricing for reprinting keychains to be considered at the next meeting.

- 2017 Marketing Plan: Committee decided that even though the MRCC is promoting hiking as its featured activity in 2017, the focus should remain on birding, biking and driving. NO recommended that hiking be included in the editorial calendar, if not the promotions. Committee agreed. Committee requested that RVing and motorcycling be

included in the drive promotion in 2017. NO agreed. Committee requested that \$15,000 again be allocated towards three promotions in the 2017 budget. NO will schedule a meeting in October prior to the Board meeting so the committee can approve a final budget line item. NO will use a Doodle poll to select the date and encouraged everyone to respond. Committee agreed.

Committee discussed creating a promotion to encourage app downloads once the new app is completed. A budget should be considered to market the app. NO agreed to include a roll out plan on the agenda for the next meeting.

NO shared idea to create Snapchat filters that could be available at Interpretive Centers branding the GRR in lieu of creating selfie spots. NO reviewed how the Snapchat social media platform works and showed the filter available in Natchez as an example. Committee agreed that the filter was an easy way to brand the GRR especially to younger travelers. Committee requested NO create a plan for consideration at the next meeting. NO agreed.

- Sponsorship ideas for 2016: Based on the donations that come in from the map mailings, the Committee requested NO add a donations tab to the website. NO said they will move ahead on this request.

Committee discussed the importance of finding a signature sponsor especially based on the numerous requests on the budget for marketing. Committee recommended a sponsor with international ties might be interested in MRC's efforts. NO discussed potential sponsorship plans related to the map, app, and website. Committee decided to discuss sponsorship options at the next meeting.

- 10-state bike race: NO alerted the committee to an all-commissioner meeting the following morning to discuss the bike race options. NO reminded states that haven't submitted their bike race inventory to do so on mrpcmembers.com.
- MRC updates: NO shared JATA begins on September 22-25. NO leaves on the 20th for Tokyo. MRC is also hosting a media dinner with two chefs from New Orleans who will be creating a menu inspired by the ingredients of the Mississippi River. There will also be a travel trade seminar on the 27th. MN, IL, MS, Memphis and LA will be attending on behalf of the organizations.
- State Reports: WI reported they are working on a new website that will feature agritourism and the intrinsic qualities of the GRR. WI also created a visitor guide and sold the ads as a way to increase revenue to the organization. 50,000 visitor guides were printed.

MN shared copies of their maps and gave an update of the organization's marketing efforts. MN Tourism also promoted "10 Glimpses of America via the Great River Road" in conjunction with the MN State Historical Society.

<http://www.exploreminnesota.com/travel-ideas/10-glimpses-of-america-via-the-great-river-road/>

KY reported they did a new print piece with the four counties' participation.

AR announced the Harahan Bridge is opening on October 22, which will have a positive impacts on the region's tourism product.

- Other business: NO thanked Ron Maxwell, retiring from AR Tourism for his years of service to the MRPC. Maxwell shared that working with the MRPC/MRC was a highlight of his time in the position. Committee shared their appreciate for his service.

Committee requested the NO send out the quarterly reports as an annual report that can be shared with stakeholders. Many states reported meetings with the Tourism Departments in November and asked that the report be available for those meetings. NO agreed although will only be a three quarter report based on the time of the meetings. Committee agreed.

Meeting adjourned at 5:04pm.