

TEN-STATE GREAT RIVER ROAD CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT PLAN

PROJECT SUMMARY

This corridor management plan will describe actions, responsibilities, procedures and strategies to guide the ten states comprising the MRPC and their partners on how to continue providing and promoting a superior byway travel experience, improve quality of life locally, and maintain and enhance the archaeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational, and scenic intrinsic resources of the Great River Road.

The planning process will

- develop a 10 to 15 year management plan, and
- generate the national, ten-state and partner synergy required for plan implementation.

The ten-state Great River Road Corridor Management Plan will demonstrate that it addresses the Federal Highway Administration's National Scenic Byway corridor management plan components, adapted for this project as follows:

(1) A map identifying the Great River Road alignment, wayshowing and interpretive signage, Mississippi River Trail alignment, and the location of intrinsic resources within the corridor.

- The GRR alignment files were provided by the Transportation Committee working with state DOTs. These have been applied to the ten-state English and Japanese mobile apps. It is intended that these will be applied to a drivable print map so people can use the map for driving as well as general travel information.
- Map GRR wayshowing, interpretive kiosks, IC directional/on-site signage, and the location of intrinsic resources within the corridor using GIS technology to add to the app, hard copy and web map.
- Work with each state to receive the MRT alignment shape files to develop into a 10-state map. Verify MRT signage and shoulder/trail conditions in each state to assess if they are in accordance with bicycle design guidance. Consider updating the app and online map with the MRT alignment as a GRR recreation resource. Refer to Bob Robinson book as a condition reference.
- Use MRT route data to help market facility conditions to certain bicyclists, etc.
- Work with in-car navigation companies to indicate GRR (NavStar – Craig's daughter – technology may be outdated in coming 5 years) and Googlemaps. Provide them with the GRR shape files.
- Add signage for state and river crossings providing a welcome that you are on the GRR. Work with FHWA and 10-State DOTs to create an agreement that allows this signage.

(2) An assessment of Great River Road intrinsic resources, which Great River Road Interpretive Plan theme(s) the resource focuses on, their relationship to the road, visitor accessibility and comfort features, and their context as a part of the byway experience and Network of Interpretive Centers.

☐ While tourists and residents enjoying the act of traveling along the Great River Road is a measure of the corridor management success, providing access to, telling the stories of and encouraging visitation to the Mississippi River's intrinsic resources are also measures of byway management. Quantify these measures.

☐ Byway resources attract travelers to the Great River Road and vice versa. Instead of just driving through a community, the intrinsic resources encourage travelers to stop, spend more time in corridor communities, return again and again as they collect experiences in ten states along the Great River Road, thereby helping to sustain local intrinsic resources and as a result, grow local economies. Measuring these results is needed.

☐ Simplify field recording and ongoing inventory of Great River Road intrinsic resources by developing a comprehensive yet flexible and adaptable Geographic Information Systems (GIS)-enabled Collector application designed for field use. Data could be recorded with the Collector, a tablet-based software developed by Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) that uploads data wirelessly to a cloud server (ArcGISOnline).

☐ Assess the intrinsic qualities along the GRR and determine a method for accessing the significance within the overall plan. Concentrate on which ones are applicable to the 10-state plan. (For example, maybe we only feature the interpretive centers but then direct to each state's individual list.)

☐ Review how the 10 states present their information so there's some consistency.

The results can be added to the MRPC mobile app, website and print maps.

(3) Strategies for maintaining, enhancing and promoting Great River Road intrinsic resources.

☐ Expand use of Minnesota's Visual Resource Protection Process to all ten states to help preserve, enhance and capitalize on this crucial part of the Mississippi River experience – its scenery. (Example – Public call to nominate their favorite views, then assess these scenic assets with local CVB, engineers, elected officials so they can consider scenic resource management as a part of local permitting and marketing.)

☐ Work with state DOTs to enforce the Highway Beautification Act Outdoor Off-Premise Advertising Control regulations (billboards).

☐ Map Great River Road scenic easements and scenic areas, then work with local communities to apply them to local decision-making.

☐ Develop a 10-state vegetation and view assessment plan in order to maintain views from and to the river and unobstructed wayshowing signage.

☒ Encourage scenic conservation on a much larger scale throughout the byway corridor to maintain this core intrinsic resource. This may include partnering with organizations such as the Trust for Public Land, Minnesota Nature Conservancy, Sierra Club, Friends groups and Izaak Walton League to establish long-range strategies to protect open space and riparian zones along the Great River Road through conservation or scenic easements, transfers of development rights, or guidelines for development to ensure that future byway travelers experience the unique scenic qualities of the Mississippi River.

(4) A plan to interpret the Great River Road intrinsic resources and the story of the byway itself.

Continue to implement the Great River Road Interpretive Plan and Toolkit.

Next steps.....

(5) A general review of the road's infrastructure, its intended parkway visual integrity and attractiveness, its safety and accident record (including bicycle and pedestrian), tourist-oriented facilities, and planned transportation investments.

Transportation to confirm the strategies with the state DOTs and implement strategies through incorporation into highway planning, design and maintenance.

Maintain state-wide Great River Road wayshowing signage and amenity wayshowing to allow for ease of travel for travelers.

Provide drivable maps online, app and in print.

Provide pedestrian access and crossing of the Great River Road near local attractions, ICs and multimodal facilities.

Provide bicycle accommodation (shoulder, shared lane or separate path) along the entire length of the corridor, but, particularly in areas that share the Mississippi River Trail designation.

Incorporate traffic calming near amenity access points, pedestrian and bicycle crossings, overlooks and waysides.

Integrate and promote multimodal options and connection points by partnering with different entities that operate Amtrak, transit, excursion ports, marinas and airports.

Provide and maintain safe pull-offs and parking areas for motorists to observe the Mississippi River from the roadside. Tell the river's stories at these locations.

Pave any unpaved Great River Road segments remaining (in Aitkin County, MN) to allow greater use by bicyclists, motorcyclists, RVs, coach buses, collector cars, etc. Investigate potential unpaved segments in AR and IA.

Adjust the route as needed to best showcase Mississippi River by getting people closer to the river, intrinsic resources and multimodal travel options.

(6) Review Great River Road guide (wayshowing), interpretive, and intrinsic resource signage and develop a plan that demonstrates how the States will insure the number and placement of signs supports the visitor experience and maintains the parkway as place.

□ See #2

(7) A discussion of parkway design standards including evaluation tools to assess how proposed road design and maintenance may affect the intrinsic qualities of the byway corridor.

□ Restore and maintain Great River Road wayshowing as a continuous and consistent system. Wayshowing is a critical need of those traveling the byway. Without it travelers get lost and are unlikely to return.

□ Coordinate Great River Road wayshowing with Mississippi River Trail wayshowing to help partners manage the signs over time, especially where the routes are colocated, to simplify traveler wayfinding, reinforce cross promotion and branding, avoid sign and post proliferation, and reduce maintenance costs.

□ Identify places within the right of way to tell the river's stories and to offer visual and physical access to the Mississippi River, particularly where there are none.

□ Incorporate Great River Road interpretation in the right of way, where possible, so it is seen and accessed from the road as an intended part of the parkway experience. Map them for use on the website. Assess condition and maintain existing Great River Road interpretive panels. Develop a typology pallet of existing interpretation.

□ Reflect and honor the scenic and natural intrinsic qualities of the Mississippi River by using native stone materials. Use no artificial stone on Great River Road, river bridge, rest areas, walls and other transportation infrastructure. The Great River Road markets intrinsic resources include highly valued natural bluffs, granite outcrops, sand plains, and other geological features. Artificial stone imitates, rather than displays, natural attributes that Mississippi River tourists and residents are attracted to.

□ Road designs should not replicate natural features in order to preserve, enhance and promote what is authentic in its authentic setting. Develop a pallet of best and not best practices.

□ Manage vegetation to protect water quality, stabilize slopes, steward native plants in new designs and maintenance operations, increase habitat for pollinators and native and migratory species, disperse precipitation impacts, act as living snow fences, calm traffic, preserve or enhance views to and from the river and enhance byway curb appeal.

□ Maintain scenic easements/scenic areas and incorporate them in Great River Road mapping so they are known to transportation project managers and local decision makers.

□ Map/restore/maintain historic roadside properties (ie New Deal) along the Great River Road according to the Secretary of Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

□ Expand and connect modal options along the length of the byway.

□ Incorporate ADA-compliant accessibility in scoping, design, construction and maintenance.

☑ Safeguard the scenic easements by mapping and communicating with DOTs about the need to maintain them..

Track use of the GRR and MRT and develop a feedback tool to determine traveler recommendations for improvement and to know what is working well.

☑ Develop a palette of GRR interpretive panel designs use in each each state

☑ Develop a GIS data base of wayshowing in each state DOT, then a protocol for maintenance and replacement.

☑ Manage roadside ditches to restore suitable habitat to maintain or reestablish native flora and fauna.

☑ Assess shoulders of the GRR for bicycle design guidance compliance and work with DOTs and County/local road managers to program needed improvements.

☑ Screen from view adjacent developments and unpleasant existing conditions that are not aesthetically compatible with the character of a parkway.

☑ Encourage MRPC BOD and state Commissions to lobby Congressional members to work to reestablish the National Scenic Byway grant program.

☑ Work with adjacent states to enhance opportunities to cross the river safely.

☑ Use a minimum 50' vegetative buffer to screen utility corridors seen from the GRR. Work with utility corridors and PUC to require this by the utility companies installing and maintaining these corridors.

☑ Use dark sky principles to safeguard the night views along the river in transportation infrastructure design.

☑ MRPC members to participate in DOT engagement efforts for project and modal plan development along the GRR and MRT.

☑ Control timber harvesting to avoid impacts to the visual quality of the GRR, MRT and water quality.

☑ Work with DOTs to develop strategies to manage removal of trees affected by Emerald Ash Borers (ash, walnut, and pecan) and reestablish native vegetation.

☑ Restoration of native plants should focus first on indigenous plants.

☑ Champion development of an IA home of one of the original IA proponents of the GRR as an interpretive center to tell the story of the GRR.

☑ Separate commercial traffic from car traffic when feasible. Protect the byway experience by considering adding weigh stations.

Access accident types and hotspots to determine potential improvements.

Encourage local festival and event planning coordinators to consider congestion and public communication about access and egress.

(8) A demonstration of compliance with all existing local, State, and Federal laws on the control of outdoor advertising.

Work with state DOTs to enforce the Highway Beautification Act Outdoor Off-Premise Advertising Control regulations (billboards).

(9) A plan to increase tourism travel while maintaining a safe and efficient level of highway service and multi-modal connectivity for all users.

Work with state DOTs to assess safety and efficiency issues

Add Amtrak stations, excursion ports (Delta Queen, etc), commercial airports and transit to mapping.

(10) A strategy for assuring intrusions on the Mississippi River Valley visitor experience will be minimized.

See #3

(11) A Great River Road marketing plan to attract travelers domestically and from abroad.

Do What Roger Carmack says.

Work with MRC to coordinate itinerary development and hospitality training for the network of interpretive centers staff.

Integrate multiple languages, where applicable and feasible.

Research Chinese market interest in agritourism and hands on experiences, and by developing interpretation options in Chinese language.

(12) A plan to provide education to members, partners, stakeholders, funders and traveling public on the value of actively managing the Great River Road and its intrinsic qualities.

Tailor messages to the subject matter expertise of the audience so they can assist or benefit from specific MRPC efforts without being overwhelmed by the breadth of Commission work.

Report back to funding and resource partners on progress made and positive benefits of projects they have supported.

Build corridor management synergy and competence amongst MRPC and member agencies with a monthly newsletter that may include:

A "Did You Know..." section on Great River Road

A "How To" section with agency corridor management tips and resources, projects, best practices, etc.

- A rotating spotlight featuring a different member agency each month and a current corridor management success
 - A frequently asked corridor management question/answer
 - A CMP question or poll (What is your favorite thing about corridor management?)
 - Updates from member agencies and MRPC
 - A suggestion box to collect (and respond to) feedback
- Incorporate economic impact information on the current website
- Work with cities, organizations, and businesses to use Great River Road and Mississippi River Trail as amenities to attract and retain young professionals in rural areas
- Conduct geotourism-themed photo submission events featuring Great River Road eco-friendly places or activities.
- While today's economics and industry trends require use of technology to reach many with less, CMP engagement is most effective for both the Commission and local partners when on-site meetings are included. (Encourage on site meetings)

Work with tourism councils, convention and visitors bureaus, chambers of commerce and visitor centers to:

- Identify local restaurants, groceries, and locally grown food to promote healthy food options or specialties
 - Leverage local events
 - Promote Great River Road as a local national treasure
- Increase brand awareness using the Pilot's wheel.

(13) An organizational plan to sustain the MRPC and the ten state MRPCs, and to help assure partner and public participation essential to implementation of the corridor management plan.

- Use the benefits of MRPC membership to express gratitude for support and accomplishment, then to engage state transportation, natural resources, agriculture, historical society, commerce and tourism in CMP implementation of specific strategies.
- BOD and Technical Committees to review member agency and legislative priorities to align with and leverage value from Great River Road corridor management plan implementation.
- Invite Federal agencies from the Mississippi River Connections Collaborative, plus FHWA, Commerce and US Forest Service to partner in CMP implementation by providing technical and fiscal project support for specific strategies.
- Lobby Congress to reinstate the National Scenic Byway grants for eligible activities described in Transportation Alternatives Program and interpretation, planning, and marketing.
- Develop corporate partnerships to offer byway travelers discounts or coupons, to distribute Great River Road brochures at corporate locations, and to sponsor active living strategy implementation
 - Sporting goods

- Healthcare providers
- Bicycle companies

(14) An initial schedule, assigned primary responsibilities and potential resources for implementing the corridor management plan.

- TBD once the CMP is final through the next Strategic Plan, tentatively scheduled for initial discussion after the 2018 Annual Meeting