



# The Great River Road

## 2020-2021 Report to Stakeholders





**For the Great River Road, 2020-21 was an exciting year!**

**Your assistance and support were instrumental.  
We want to share some of the highlights and say, “Thank you!”**



## First-ever Virtual Annual Meeting - September 16, 2020

- 4 sessions, day-long, 152 registrants.
- Program participants included USFWS leaders, Interpretive Center leaders, transportation experts, a U.S. congressional representative, state tourism officials, and Scenic America.
- Participant evaluations “excellent”.



## December 2020

- National Scenic Byway Foundation helps to successfully obtain an initial \$16 million for the National Scenic Byway program, providing the first funding in nine years.
- Mississippi River Parkway Commission is a member.

## February 2021

- 8 Mississippi River states are named All-American Roads! This is the first Federal Highway Administration awarding of scenic byway status in 12 years.
- The Great River Road application effort was coordinated and led by the Mississippi River Parkway Commission’s Transportation Committee, co-chaired by Mississippi & Wisconsin Department of Transportation representatives, with participation and/or assistance from all 10 states.

## Semi-Annual Virtual Meeting - April 14, 2021

- 2 sessions, half-day, 207 registrants.
- Program participants included USFWS leaders, university scientists, and National Scenic Byway Foundation officials.
- Virtual celebration of All-American Road designation.
- Participant evaluations “very satisfied”.



## A Virtual Trip on the All-American Great River Road

Features Nationally Significant Destinations in All 10 States



## MRPC Marketing Efforts

### September 2020–September 2021

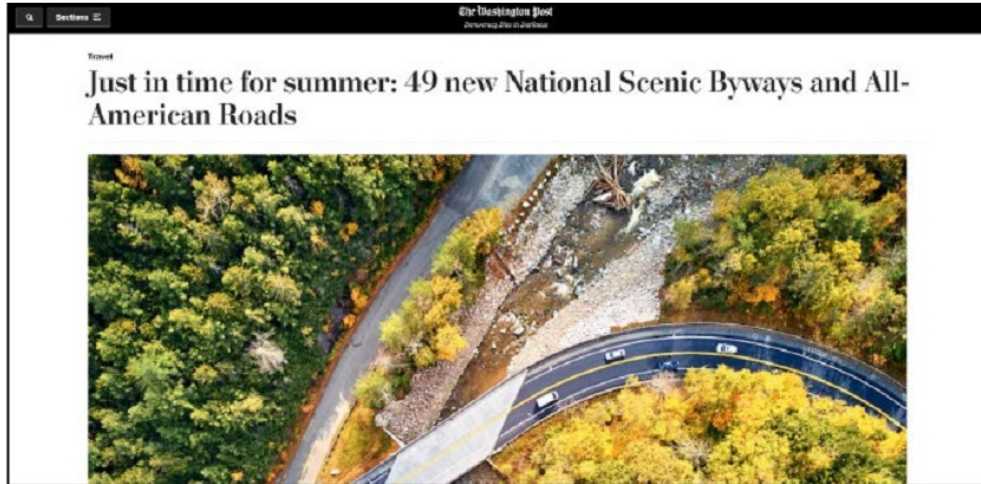
- Plan for All-American Road announcements.
  - New logos featuring All-American Road designation for all states.
  - Talking points & toolkit for state use.
  - National news release prepared.
- FHWA announcement (February 2021) – Plan implemented.
- Fall 2021 – All-American Road Marketing Plan features outdoor destinations and new, nationally significant itineraries for September (Drive the Great River Road Month).

## All-American Road Media Campaign

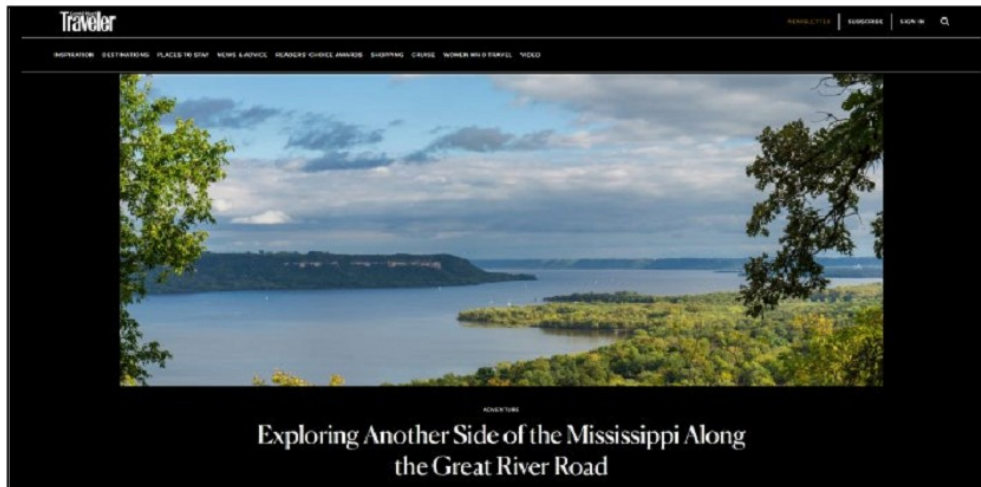
- National media announcements result in expanded national attention.
- All-American Road Tool kit provided by MRPC to all states with messages, visuals, and logos.
- New Pilot Wheel logos developed by MRPC for all states to underscore elevated status.
- Monthly e-newsletters maximize content from state applications and reinforce the intrinsic values.
- Multiple national and local media stories appear.



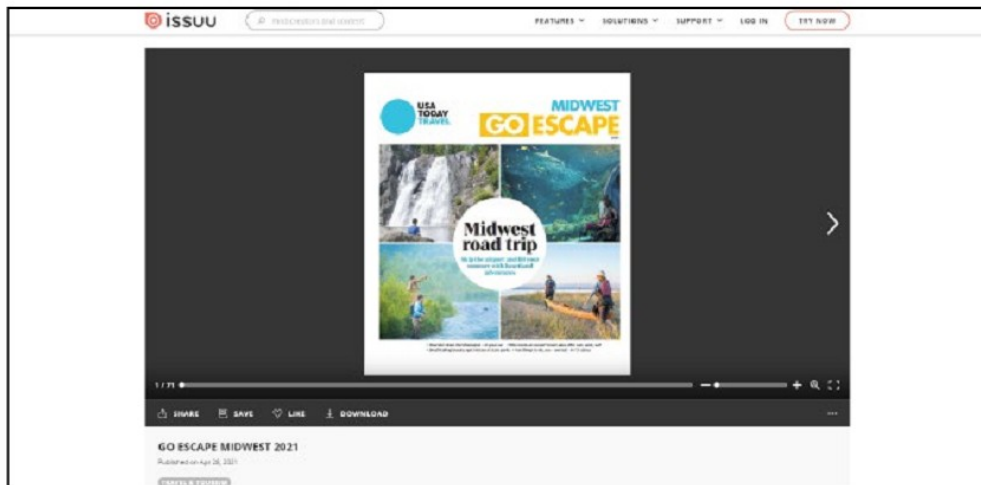
- Washington Post:



- Conde Nast Traveler:



- USA Today:



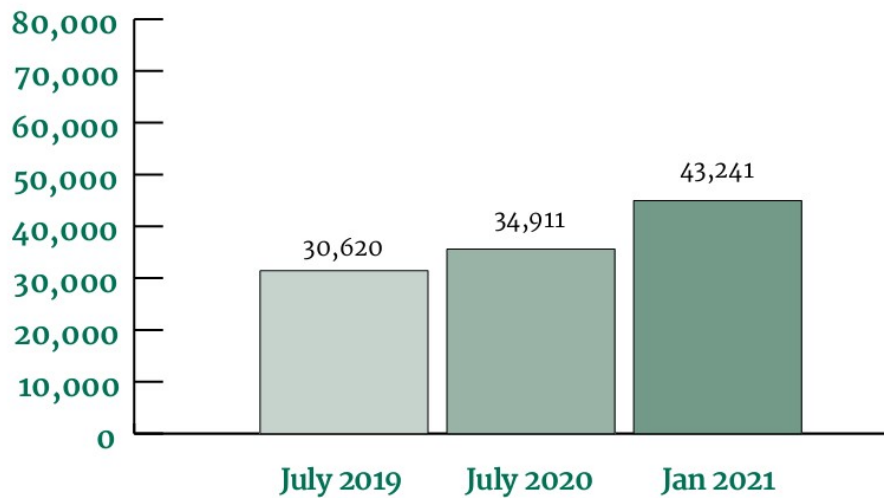
## Marketing the Great River Road in a Pandemic

- Considerations – Collectively pivot to outdoor, scenery promotions in April/May 2020 for safe tourism, monitor all 10 states.
- Coordinate 10-state information.
- Disadvantages – Indoor and facility-driven tourism reduced.
- Advantages – Outdoor, scenic tourism and virtual tourism increased dramatically, with map requests, web site visits and social media interaction at record levels.

- **Map Fulfillment Grows**

- 8/1/20-8/31/21: **15,120**
- 8/1/19-8/31/20: **9,066**
- 8/1/18-8/31/19: **6,756**

- **E-newsletters Subscribers Grow**

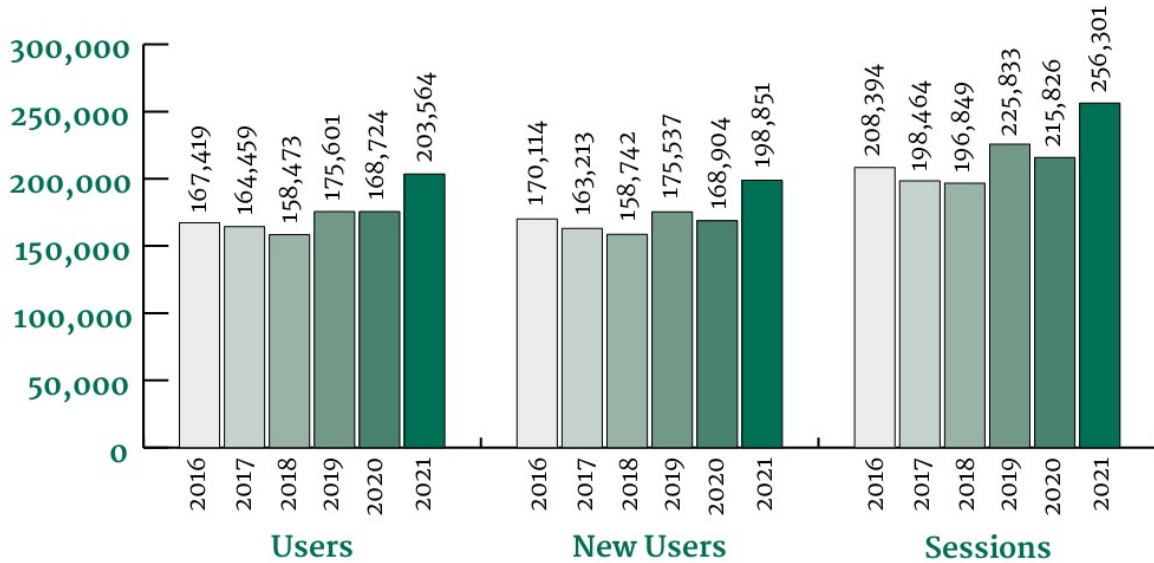


- 10 e-newsletters sent between August 2020 and August 2021.
- Average open rate: **27.8%** (industry average: 17%).
- Average click rate: **6.4%** (industry average: 2.2%).

- Drive the Great River Road app downloads

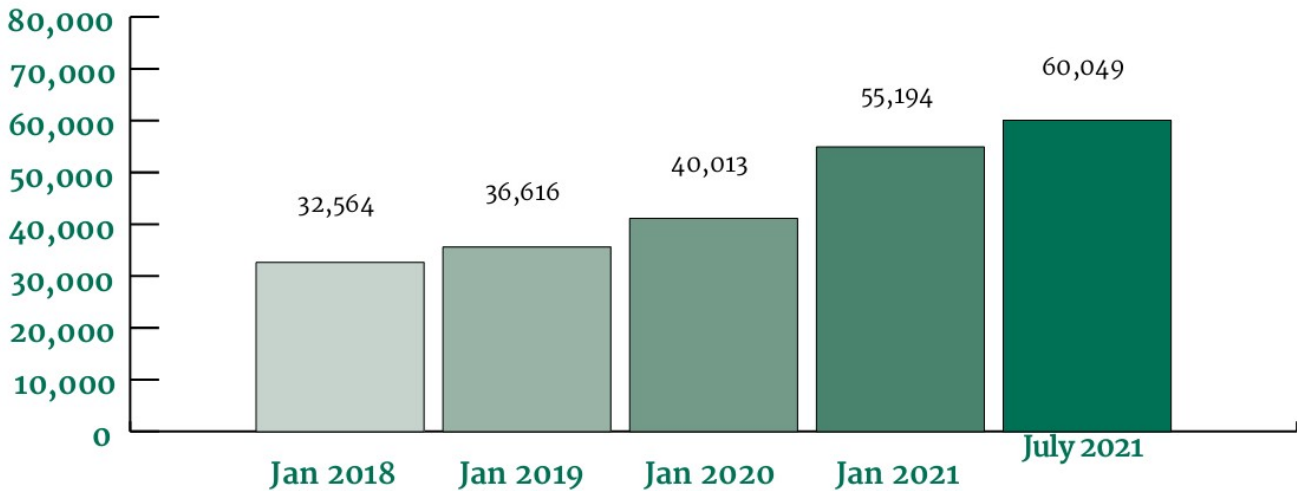
2019 - **24,226**      2020 - **26,571**      2021 - **28,838**

- Traveler Web Site Visits Grow - [experiencemississippiriver.com](http://experiencemississippiriver.com)



Compared to the average of the previous five years, 2021 saw 19.8% more users, of which 97.7% were new users. 2021 also had 20.3% more sessions than the average over the previous five years.

- Facebook Fan Numbers Grow - [facebook.com/GreatRiverRoad/](https://facebook.com/GreatRiverRoad/)



- Facebook updates from July 2020 to June 2021: **170**



## Environment, Recreation and Agriculture

September 2020–September 2021

- MRPC Sept. Virtual National Meeting – “Clean Water Connection to the Great River Road” featuring national wildlife refuge role in river communities’ economies and Representative Betty McCollum on Mississippi River Resilience and Restoration.
- MRPC April Virtual National Meeting – “The Mississippi Flyway and its All-American Significance” featuring Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge personnel and University of Illinois Stephen Forbes Center research director.

## Culture and Heritage

- “Getting off the Road to the River” presentation at MRPC virtual meeting in September features National Mississippi River Aquarium and Museum, Arkansas Heritage Sites and Delta Blues Museum to share ideas for connecting during Covid.
- “Uncovering the All-American Advantages of the Great River Road” presentation at MRPC April meeting features Lakes to Locks Passage All-American Road and National Scenic Byways Foundation executive directors on marketing cultural and scenic attributes of byways.
- New Interpretive Center approved in Minnesota.

## Transportation

- Coordinate final applications for All-American Road with monthly meetings, collection of state-DOT current Shape files, and shared tips for web site application process.
- Reorganize Great River Road Transportation website to ensure accurate archiving of up-to-date Great River Road state route records.

## MRPC Links and Resources for All 10 Great River Road States

- New Mississippi River Parkway Member website invites more state interaction and resource sharing.
  - [mrpcmembers.com](http://mrpcmembers.com)
- National Scenic Byway Foundation membership and services for all member byways.
- U.S. Travel membership ensures up-to-date tourism research and developments.
- Active 10-state map fulfillment and tourism call-line.
  - 866-763-8310
- National traveler website provides 10-state Great River Road itineraries and their websites.
  - [experiencemississippiriver.com](http://experiencemississippiriver.com)



## Special Thanks

MN, WI, IA, IL, KY, MO, AR, TN, MS, LA Departments of Transportation

Mississippi River city & town Visitor & Convention Bureaus

Mississippi River Mayors

Great River Road Interpretive Centers

MN, WI, IA, IL, KY, AR, TN, LA State Office of Tourism

National Scenic Byway Foundation