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Final Case Study for the National Scenic Byways Study

Utah Scenic Byways and Backways
A Case Study of the History of Development
and Two-Tiered Integration Systems

Scenic **BYWAYS**



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DEVELOPMENT AND TWO TIERED
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**UTAH SCENIC BYWAYS AND BACKWAY
A CASE STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT AND TWO TIERED
INTEGRATION OF SYSTEMS**

The initiative to develop a scenic road system was inspired by a study which was completed in late 1985 by a local government group known as the Five County Association of Governments. This local initiative was to become the prototype of a statewide program that would involve the participation of several state and federal agencies and many local government groups, and would become a major marketing action for Utah's tourism and recreation industry. This Case Study will present the history and process that followed from the initial local "grass roots" initiative through to the statewide program known as Utah Scenic Byways and Backways.

The initial study done by the Five County Association of Governments suggested that rural communities would benefit economically by a concentrated effort to direct travelers from traditional routes which kept them on the freeway. Additionally, it suggested that our National Parks were experiencing overuse while nearby scenic areas were underutilized. Several suggestions were made to address this situation. The accepted proposal was made by the Utah Travel Council and involved designating scenic roads throughout seven counties in Southern Utah. The meeting to determine direction for the program took place in February of 1986.

The plan to designate roads as scenic had possibilities to expand statewide. The initial plan, however, involved only seven of Utah's twenty-nine counties. The limited geographical area and partners in this endeavor was based on interest. The Utah Travel Council contacted the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) for interest and involvement. Past attempts by the Utah Department of Transportation to join in a nationwide scenic highway program had been too controversial both politically and environmentally. UDOT was not willing to take part in designating scenic roads because of this controversy but was willing to allow the travel industry to make the selections. UDOT did indicate that they might provide scenic route signs for the selected roads.

Several areas of concern were discussed and addressed by the Utah Travel Council, the Five County Association of Governments, Canyonlands travel region (a two county area), and Color Country travel region (a five county area) prior to establishing criteria and actual selection of roads. These issues involved problems of environmental restrictions, restrictions on

development, diversity of terrain, safety of the motorist, number of scenic roads to be designated, name of the program, installation of signs, and the fact that many of the state's scenic roads are not paved. The final criteria developed by this group centered around safety, scenic beauty, and travel by motorcoach. From discussions with UDOT and community residents it was immediately clear that the term scenic highway implied environmental constraints and would be rejected by rural communities. The committee decided on the name "Scenic Route" to avoid past confusion and bias. Each county within the two travel regions (seven counties) was then directed by the Utah Travel Council to submit nominations for the Scenic Routes to their region. The regions prioritized the nominations and negotiations with the Utah Travel Council over actual selection took place. The major problem in selection was the fact that nominating committees within each county were proud of their roads and surrounding scenery. Too many roads were nominated to be credible to the traveling public unfamiliar with Utah's great diversity and scenic beauty. The Utah Travel Council became the final arbiter in selection.

Recognizing that many roads in Utah are not paved and did not fit the basic criteria but were none the less scenic, the Utah Travel Council, Canyonlands and Color Country agreed to a second classification which was called "Secondary Routes". These were roads off the beat an path, unpaved, but high in scenic value.

Each region then gathered descriptive copy, traveling times, mileage, directions to the roads, and photos for the roads selected (both Scenic Routes and Secondary Routes). A designer was retained and a layout for the brochures was approved which included a general map indicating the location of these roads. After several attempts by the designer to write the copy, the Utah Travel Council assumed the responsibility. A mock-up brochure was developed to present to UDOT at a joint UDOT/Utah Travel Council Board meeting in October, 1986. Both boards endorsed the program and direction was given to expand the program statewide. UDOT agreed to indicate Scenic Routes on the state highway map and sign for the program.

The process for selecting routes was then repeated statewide by using the Utah Travel Region organization for local input. Roads in Southern Utah were also reevaluated with the objective of reducing the numbers of selected routes to those that would be the most marketable to the rest of the nation. In the early fall of 1987, the state highway map was redesigned to include Scenic Routes using dots along the roads as indicators. In the summer of 1988, copy was in the process of being generated, a Scenic Route logo was designed for highway signing, and discussion regarding a brochure was

underway. Simultaneously, the U. S. Forest Service became actively involved in promoting their National Forest Scenic Byways.

Interest was expressed by the Forest Service to receive endorsement for their National Forest Scenic Byways. They regretted that they were not involved in the selection of the above mentioned Scenic Route designation. A meeting was called by UDOT and U. S. F. S. following commitment from UDOT to endorse three Utah National Forest Scenic Byways. The purpose of the meeting was to begin the process of creating a statewide scenic byway program. The meeting was held in August of 1988.

Among those represented at the meeting were representatives from the Bureau of Land Management, Federal Highway Administration, county commissioners, Association of Governments, travel regions, the Utah Travel Council, National Park Service, and League of Cities and Towns. An overview of the National Forest Scenic Byways was presented from which the audience engaged in a general discussion of past actions. Items discussed included environmental issues and concerns, funding, limitation on construction, reconstruction, and maintenance as a result of designations, design standards, signs and sign coordination, marketing and promotion potentials, and coordination with other resource users and uses. The audience voiced concern that any program should not prohibit development that had already been approved by federal, state or local planning documents for areas within and/or adjacent to road rights-of-way. The audience was also confused over the roles and responsibilities of the state and federal agencies and local government groups in developing a scenic road program. It was suggested by UDOT that the Utah Travel Council be the lead agency to appoint a committee of those parties interested in designating scenic roads and to discover whether it was possible to resolve any of the problems and conflicts. The main issue to be resolved centered around coordination and correlation of existing and proposed scenic road programs. At the time, the Utah Travel Council and Utah Travel Regions, and the U. S. Forest Service had existing programs and others wanted to be involved.

A steering committee was formed by notifying the president, director, or supervisor of each agency and organization in attendance. Each group appointed a representative to negotiate and take any future action. The committee was made up of Carvel Magleby, Six County Association of Governments; Reed Stalder, Bureau of Land Management; Michael Hill, National Park Service; Jan T. Furner, Utah League of Cities & Towns; Larry Simer, Federal Highway Administration; Jim Naegle, Utah Department of Transportation; Darrell Cook, Utah Travel Regions; Clair Lee, Color Country; Garth Heaton, Wasatch-Cache National Forest; Ann King, Utah Travel Council.

and; Jimmy Walker, Grand County Commissioner. Each person was asked to network all correspondence, nominations, and information through their organization or agency. The committee agreed to meet once a month until the process of selection was completed. After the second meeting the representative from the county commissioners and Utah League of Cities were not in further attendance. Notices and correspondence, however, continued to be sent until the selection of Scenic Byways was complete.

The first meeting resulted in the Utah Travel Council agreeing to change the name of their program, reevaluate criteria, and work with the other mentioned agencies in redefining criteria and route selection. A letter was sent by the Governor to all parties asking for full participation in the selection of criteria and roads along with a letter from the Utah Travel Council reviewing the history, past criteria, selected routes, and difficulty in selecting the "best" routes. The broad base of support for the program represented in the steering committee added credibility to the task of creating a national program which would, if we could work together, be the first of its kind in the nation.

Each entity was asked to select no more than five roads per land management unit, i.e., 5 per National Forest, 5 per BLM District, etc., or three roads per county. All agencies and organizations involved were asked to review the existing criteria and make comments, review the scenic routes as they appeared on the highway map and test whether they fit the criteria, make suggestions, prioritize selections and limit suggestions to a reasonable number. Review of all input began September 30, 1988.

Following comment by field representatives, the steering committee focused on the criteria used for selection (see criteria for Scenic Byways). Discussions on criteria included application and use of the new National Forest Scenic Byways criteria. Lengthy discussion was held over all points made for suggested criteria. For the most part, however, clear and unanimous direction was given by our constituency regarding the desire for specific criteria. Since the primary purpose for traveling these roads was determined to be sightseeing, safety was felt to be of primary importance. Grade, slope, curve, and road conditions were discussed as they related to safety. A clear consensus of what "safe" meant could not be made by determining specific values for each of these elements. The Federal Highway Administration suggested that the committee might consider AASHTO standards for safety in eliminating questionable roads. The decision was made to consider a road safe if it conformed to AASHTO standards for either a primary or secondary road. A final list of thirteen criteria was developed which included such items as scenic values, safety, responsibilities of

agencies in implementing the program, road conditions, and limiting the number of designations.

After establishing criteria which were later modified by the public review process, all nominated roads were marked on a state highway map and given to each committee member. A process of judging each road against the criteria then took place. The entire network of roads was then reviewed for overall value and geographic representation. Comments were made by committee members representing views of their constituency as to the suitability of each road nominated and the priority in which they placed that particular road. After discussion and careful review of written comments an oral vote was taken. If any two committee members voted against the road it was removed from the system without further comment. Each road receiving two negative votes was noted and the reason for elimination was indicated. This process was repeated until twenty-seven road designations considered marketable and reasonable was reached. After each meeting, committee members reported back to their field representatives as to the progress of selection and encouraged their input.

Several roads previously designated under the Scenic Route system were removed because they weren't paved or did not conform to AASHTO standards. In only one case was an effort made to reclassify a road under AASHTO standards. However, because of the expense and interagency difficulties in working out a manageable solution, this road too, was left off the system.

A public appeals meeting was held in February 1989, to discuss any deletions or addition felt to be inappropriate. A notice was sent to all agencies and organizations of the time and place for this review along with a list of criteria and roads the committee had recommended. It was noted that this meeting would determine the final criteria and list of roads to be designated. Four appeals to add to the system and one change in criterion (#13) were made. One additional route was accepted and the change in wording to criterion #13 accepted.

Immediately following the review, a list of selected Scenic Byways was sent to the various agencies and organizations for descriptive copy, mileage, traveling time, location directions, names, and photos. A designer was hired. The original intent was to create a brochure similar in layout to that of the Scenic Routes brochure.

At this point in time the steering committee discussed the interest of communities and agencies in including roads which were not paved or did

not meet AASHTO standards into the system (similar to the Secondary Routes indicated in the Southern Utah Scenic Route brochure). As the committee was gathering information to include in the copy of the Scenic Byway brochure, the Bureau of Land Management brought to the steering committee's attention their initiative to create a National Back Country Byway program. The idea was intriguing because it would allow many roads deleted from the Scenic Byway program which possessed high scenic value but did not meet AASHTO standards or were not paved to be incorporated into the system. The committee agreed to undertake the project of designating a supplementary system which would satisfy concerns from all agencies and organizations and develop a truly comprehensive program crossing agency boundaries as our Scenic Byway system did. Production of the Scenic Byway brochure was delayed until the supplementary system was designated and could be incorporated.

Since Utah has such a high percentage of federal and state land (land administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and various state agencies), and since the majority of this land is suitable for consideration to a supplementary program, it was desirable that the name National Back Country Byway be modified. A version of the name National Back Country Byway was selected which was easier to pronounce and could be more easily read on road signs. The name selected was Scenic Backways. It was felt that roads designated under the Scenic Backway system and the Scenic Byway system should be clearly differentiated in the minds of the traveling public as to their level of expectations and experiences. It was agreed that signing and brochure copy reflect those differences. (Scenic Byways are paved and designated for the purpose of sight-seeing in a passenger car, motorcoach or RV while Scenic Backways are generally not paved, open subject to weather conditions, involve adventure, and most often require a high clearance vehicle). A special effort was made to make signs distinct enough so that the traveling public would not confuse the two systems.

Using Bureau of Land Management guidelines for criteria established for National Back Country Byways, a letter was sent to the organizations and agencies advising them of the Scenic Backway program, describing its relationship to the Scenic Byways program and requesting participants from each area or region make limited and prioritized nominations with descriptive copy. Since the number of possible backways were more numerous, and previous statewide selection had not been made, the total number nominated was approximately six times those of the Scenic Byways. Using a BLM map and the state regional maps all nominated roads were charted. (It should be noted that about this time, regional and area

organizations and agencies found that if they worked together in nominating, chances for successful designation were higher.) The committee then began the process of examining each road against the established criteria. The committee immediately found that the class types used by BLM were of no value because of the subjective nature of the class type. Public awareness of road conditions was of primary importance. Therefore, it was necessary to return to the field for a clear written description of the road condition. Written descriptions were felt to be more understandable to the traveling public than class types which required referral to an original definition and were subjective.

In order to complete the program by spring of 1990, the committee met every two weeks, often for six hours at a time. During this period, all committee members participated, with the exception of the county commissioners and Utah League of Cities and Towns who were not included on the committee because of lack of participation in the Scenic Byways selection. Several times local representatives were asked to attend our meetings to further describe roads and justify their inclusion. Originally the intent was to designate the same number of Scenic Byways and Backways. However, due to the variety of land forms and the outstanding scenic and historic nature of many of these unpaved and rough roads, it was necessary to expand our original limit. A complete review of nominated roads was made several times. After each review additional information was requested from field participants. As a road was closely examined, more investigation and cooperation occurred between organizations and agencies in the field which gave the committee a clear indication of acceptable roads to be designated. A final list was compiled and input was sought in a public review in October 1989. No changes were made. A letter was then sent to all parties requesting descriptive copy, traveling time, mileage, road conditions and photos.

At the public review, a proposal was made by the Canyonlands Travel Region and the Canyonlands Natural History Association to produce a brochure which could be sold rather than given away as was the traditional practice for all participating agencies and organizations. The proposal was accepted and the designer was instructed to redesign the brochure so that the quality was consistent with other brochures or booklets sold in retail outlets. By combining Scenic Byways and Backways in one brochure the relationship of the systems was noted and differences in the system were designated. It also provided a complete source of travel information in one package, and gave greater meaning to the cooperative nature of the work that had been done. This work was a complete integration of the travel industry, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park

Service, local governments, UDOT and Federal Highway Administration interests.

Dedication of the Scenic Byways and Backways program was held April 9, 1990, at the Calf Creek Campground next to one of the designated Scenic Byways (State Highway 12). In attendance were the Governor, and representatives from the counties, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, U. S. Forest Service, Utah State Parks and Recreation, Utah Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Utah Travel Council and Utah Travel Regions. (Over 200 people were in attendance.) The actual location for the dedication was significant in that Highway SR-12 passes by or through all lands managed by the agencies involved. Twenty-seven Scenic Byways and fifty-eight Scenic Backways were dedicated.

The Utah Scenic Byway and Backway program now consists of a brochure describing and locating all roads; a state highway map which locates the Scenic Byways and highlights them on the back, and; signing along the designated routes. Press kits were developed by the committee and distributed to local and national press and media which announced the program and answered the most frequently asked questions. Every major newspaper and television station, many radio stations, and a local magazine have featured Utah Scenic Byways and Backways. A great deal of attention has been generated as result of this coverage and has stimulated the sale of the brochure. All Scenic Byways signs should be in place by May 28, 1990. Signs are being produced, paid for, and installed by the Utah Department of Transportation. State highways designated Scenic Backway will be paid for and signed by the Utah Department of Transportation. Signing for Scenic Backways crossing federal or county owned lands are the responsibility of that agency. UDOT will fabricate the signs and each agency or local government will purchase and install them. The U. S. Forest Service has already made arrangements to purchase the number of signs needed to cover National Forest land and letters have been sent and plans are being made to meet with land agencies and county road officials to install the remainder of the Backways signs.

The unified effort of the Scenic Byways and Backways program has prompted the U. S. Forest Service in Utah to nominate all roads approved as Utah Scenic Byways as National Forest Scenic Byways. It is also the intent of the Bureau of Land Management to nominate to the National Back Country Byway System all Scenic Backway roads where over 50% of the length of the route passes through lands administered by BLM. Of the 58 Backways in the State system, 26 would fit this criteria. Three are already accepted into the

national system. Each District has been requested to start nominating the remaining one as quickly as possible.

The steering committee continues to meet to discuss brochure distribution, signing and continued self sustaining financial commitment to the program. The major objective from this point forward is to continue a meaningful and lasting program. In an effort to expand the program and because of interest expressed by historical groups, a subcommittee was formed in May of 1990. The subcommittee was given the charge to develop themes, prioritize roads for interpretation and develop interpretive information for the Scenic Byways and Backways. At the very least, interpretive information will be gathered, mimeographed and distributed to enhance the traveler's experience while traveling the Byways and Backways. Depending on funding, a more elaborate system of roadside interpretive signing will be initiated.

The designation of Scenic Byways and Backways in Utah is a U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Association of Governments, Utah Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Utah Travel Region, and Utah Travel Council joint program. All share funding, program implementation and direction responsibilities. The partnership has allowed us to establish a meaningful system with the public's interest in mind and avoid the constraints of working strictly within agency boundary lines.

CRITERIA FOR SCENIC BYWAYS

1. No actual or inferred restrictions on commerce or future highway rehabilitation or development shall be assumed by such designation.
2. Responsibility for byway designation shall be that of the interagency steering committee consisting of the Utah Travel Council, Utah Department of Transportation, Association of Governments, Utah Travel Regions, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, and the Federal Highway Administration. A representative from the Utah Travel Council will chair the committee.
3. Designated routes are to be shown on the official highway map as published by the Utah Department of Transportation. Other promotion will be the responsibility of the Utah Travel Council and other interested parties.
4. Highway signing to designate preferred travel routes will be developed by the Utah Department of Transportation over time and maintained as part of the department's regular signing program. Interpretive signing will be coordinated through the Utah Department of Transportation.
5. Selected byways should conform to AASHTO standards for primary or secondary roads.
6. Byways should be paved.
7. Roadside attractions should possess outstanding scenic, recreational, historical, educational, scientific or cultural values or features.
8. Byways should be wide enough for recreational vehicles or provisions should be made for travel by recreational vehicles.
9. Byways should be off the interstate program.
10. Regional travel boards will coordinate with relevant regional public agencies and will review, prioritize and submit all proposals for scenic byway nominations.
11. Byways may not necessarily lead to or join other road networks.

12. As long as the byway is deemed scenic it need not be open during the winter months.
13. To maintain the quality and integrity of the Scenic Byway system, it is the intent of the criteria to be restrictive in nature so as to limit the number of designated byways. The committee (designated in #2) will meet at least biannually to consider deletions and additions, and will give prime consideration to this concern.

CRITERIA FOR SCENIC BACKWAYS

1. The proposed backway must have high scenic values and may include recreational, historical, wildlife, educational, geological, scientific, or cultural features. These values and features must be of more than local significance. High scenic values usually refers to corridors where the majority of landscapes are classified as Scenic Quality Class A or B in the BLM Visual Resource Management (VRM) inventory.
2. The road must be an existing route and have legal public access.
3. The road must be reasonably safe for the prescribed type of vehicle use. Travel on all roads involve a certain amount of risk, therefore a reasonable level of risk is part of the recreation experience. Scenic backways may have the following characteristics:

Roads may have parts paved or have all weather surface and have grades that are negotiable by a normal touring car. These are usually narrow, slow speed, secondary roads.

Roads which require high clearance type vehicle such as trucks or 4-wheel drive. These roads are usually not paved but may have some surfacing. Grades, curves, and road surfaces are such that they can be negotiated with a two wheel drive high clearance vehicle without undue difficulty.

Roads which require 4-wheel drive vehicles or other specialized vehicles such as dirt bikes, all-terrain vehicles (ATV), etc. These roads are usually not surfaced but are managed to provide for safety considerations and resources protection needs. They have grades, tread surface, and other characteristics that will require specialized vehicles to negotiate.

4. The proposal to manage the corridor and the road to maintain the visual features and scenic values must be consistent with the affected agencies' land use plan.
5. Roads that form a loop or are a part of a network of scenic roads or trails are preferred. Dead end roads may be included in the system if they have strong attractions at their terminus.

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