

Introduction

CHAPTER 1

Connecticut River Scenic Byway

Study Background and Purpose

The Connecticut River Scenic Byway is a state designated Scenic Byway, and also part of the three-state (New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Vermont) nationally designated Scenic Byway. This Corridor Management Plan is for the 38-mile Massachusetts section of the Byway that spans North-South from the New Hampshire/Massachusetts line in the town of Northfield to South Hadley Center near Mount Holyoke College. In Franklin County, the Byway is Route 63 in the towns of Northfield, Erving, and Montague, and Route 47 in southern Montague and Sunderland. In Hampshire County, the Byway is Route 47 in the towns of Hadley and South Hadley.

The Massachusetts Legislature designated the Franklin County section of the Byway in the towns of Northfield, Erving, Montague and Sunderland as a Scenic Byway in 2000, and the Hampshire County section of the Byway in Hadley and South Hadley as a scenic byway in 2003. In 2009, the Massachusetts section of the Connecticut River Byway was designated as a National Scenic Byway by extending the New Hampshire and Vermont sections of the Byway that had been previously designated as a National Scenic Byway in 2005. Funding was received to complete the Corridor Management Plan through the Federal Scenic Byway Program.



The Dickinson Memorial Library in Northfield.

The Connecticut River Scenic Byway corridor is rich in scenic, natural, cultural, archeological, architectural, and recreational resources. It celebrates the traditions, the history, the agricultural heritage, and the cultural vigor of the area as it travels through the heart of the Connecticut River Valley. It is a landscape of distinct natural beauty with classic New England farm village patterns. There are many sites and resources that highlight the rich history of the area dating back to the 1600s and the early settlement by Native Americans and Colonial settlers. The Byway is the main street of the towns and villages along the way.

The Corridor Management Plan is an update of a previous plan completed for the Byway in November 1998. It is a collaborative effort of the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC). The project area includes a ½ mile buffer on each side of the Byway. The purpose of the development of a corridor

management plan is to recognize, interpret, preserve, and promote the unique archeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational and scenic resources of the Connecticut River Byway. The Plan documents and analyzes these six intrinsic qualities. It includes updated inventories of the Byway's resources, issues of concern and recommended future actions.

The Corridor Management Plan update also includes an evaluation of a possible extension of the Byway to the west side of the Connecticut River in the towns of Hatfield, Whately, Deerfield and Greenfield. This evaluation included a review of possible routes and also an evaluation of the resources along these proposed routes. The information for Hatfield which is in Hampshire County is included in each of the chapters and the information for the towns of Whately, Deerfield and Greenfield is in a separate chapter which considers different proposed byway routes. The expansion to the west side of the Connecticut River would potentially include either River Road and/or Route 5/10.

The project was also intended to actively involve the public in the shaping of a Corridor Management Plan for the Byway through regional advisory committees and a participatory planning process.

Corridor Description

The Connecticut River Byway currently includes Route 63 in the towns of Northfield, Erving, and Montague and Route 47 in the towns of Montague, Sunderland, Hadley and South Hadley. The total mileage of the Byway is 38 miles with the mileage for each town as follows: Northfield (8.15 miles), Erving (2.16 miles), Montague (6.78 miles), Sunderland (7.03 miles), Hadley (11.20 miles), and South Hadley (2.86 miles).

In Franklin County, the Byway passes through historic Northfield center on Route 63. It is a scenic center with a historic streetscape, sidewalks and historic structures. The Byway route travels south through the farmland and scenic views of the Connecticut River in Northfield and Erving. The Byway route crosses the Millers River in the historic industrial village of Millers Falls. From Millers Falls the road passes through forested areas that abut the Byway. The historic village of Montague Center is near the Byway as it passes from Route 63 onto Route 47. South of Montague Center the Byway travels on Route 47 through rolling farmland on Montague and Sunderland. In Sunderland center the Byway travel through the historic village.

The Hampshire County section of the Byway travels through the farmland of Hadley. This section of the Byway is close to the Connecticut River and there are glimpses of the river along the way. The Byway travels through the historic tree-lined town common area of Hadley. The route winds into South Hadley through the farms that are at the base of Mount Skinner. It winds through South Hadley to the village center near Mount Holyoke College.

The Planning and Public Participation Process

Throughout the planning process, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) worked with their

regional Connecticut River Scenic Byway Advisory Committees. The regional planning agencies and the Advisory Committees worked to recognize, interpret, preserve and promote the unique archeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational and scenic resources in the byway study area.

FRCOG and PVPC's role in the development of the Corridor Management Plan was to gather pertinent information about the byway by working with local residents, officials, and other interested stakeholders. The FRCOG worked closely with the Connecticut River Scenic Byway Advisory Committee throughout the process. The plan reflects the common goals of the communities along the Byway. It details the information gathered, conclusions that were reached, and recommendations that were identified during the process.

A successful scenic byway program depends on the commitment, enthusiasm and support of community members and municipal officials. A Corridor Management Plan is intended to reflect the vision for the Byway and the surrounding area that the communities along the Byway worked to develop together.

The Connecticut River Scenic Byway Advisory Committees were comprised of municipal officials, landowners, business owners and interested citizens. The role of the regional committees, one in Franklin County and one in Hampshire County, was to develop the Corridor Management Plan and prioritize recommendations for implementation. The Byway Advisory Committee met quarterly throughout the two-year period in which the plan was crafted. The draft chapters were reviewed by the Advisory Committee. In addition, the final draft chapters were posted for public review on the FRCOG and PVPC's websites. The complete draft report was presented at two public review forums held on March 23rd, 2016 in Hampshire County and March 29th, 2016 in Franklin County. Two joint Byway Committee meetings were also held during the development of the plan. One of the joint meetings was held on June 18th, 2014 and the other on March 2, 2016.

Byway Vision Statement and Goals

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. 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 and goals.

Vision Statement

The Connecticut River Scenic Byway is recognized as a scenic resource by both the Massachusetts State Legislature and the National Scenic Byway Program. The Connecticut River Scenic Byway travels through the towns of Northfield, Erving,

Montague, Sunderland, Hadley and South Hadley. The corridor is rich in history and heritage, and natural, cultural, architectural, and recreational resources.

The vision for the Connecticut River Scenic Byway and the Corridor Management Plan is to preserve and protect the scenic qualities, natural resources, historic structures/places, cultural resources and community character while educating people about the tourism, recreational, and economic opportunities along the Byway.

Broad Goals for the Plan

- Promote and enhance roadway safety while taking into consideration the rural and historic qualities of the Byway.
- Preserve and enhance the character by working with willing land owners to protect important viewsheds and natural resources.
- Maintain, protect, and enhance the historic resources, villages and districts within the project area.
- Promote a low impact approach to tourism that highlights the natural, agricultural, recreational, historical and cultural resources but minimizes potential negative impacts to these resources such as traffic congestion.
- Support the local agricultural resources and economic viability of farming activities.
- Enhance and develop information and educational resources available to tourists for sites located in the greater Byway area.
- Support, maintain and enhance the quality of outdoor recreational experiences (such as hiking, picnicking, kayaking or canoeing) available to Byway users.
- Increase universal access to recreation areas and associated facilities.
- Promote educational opportunities for students and the general public related to Byway resources.
- Support projects to improve the safety of Byway for motorists, pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles as appropriate to the roadway conditions such as scenic pull-off areas.