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Scenic Byways & Regional Tourism



2016 Regional Transportation Plan

11 Scenic Byways and Regional Tourism

The five scenic byways in Franklin County play an important role in regional tourism. The five byways are the Connecticut River Scenic Byway, the Route 112 Scenic Byway, the Route 116 Scenic Byway, the Route 122 Scenic Byway and the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway. Four of the byways are state designated and one of the byways, the Connecticut River Byway (Route 63 and 47), is nationally designated.

Both state and nationally designated scenic byways are part of the National Scenic Byways Program, a grass-roots collaborative effort established to recognize, preserve and enhance selected roads throughout the United States. The program was originally established as part of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991. It recognizes certain roads as scenic byways based on archeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational and/or scenic qualities. In Massachusetts, eligible roads are officially designated as scenic byways through an act of the Legislature.

The designation is primarily honorary and intended to recognize the special nature of these roads, using it to promote and protect the area as determined by local interests. Until 2011, funding was available through an annual discretionary grant program for projects that enhanced, protected and promoted the intrinsic qualities of the byway. In Franklin County, many projects have been funded through the scenic byway discretionary program ranging from the creation of corridor management plans, completion of land protection, the development of promotional materials, and the planning and construction of streetscape improvements. These funded projects have enhanced existing tourism activities, and laid the groundwork for continued tourism initiatives along the byways.

Scenic Byways

The following section describes the five scenic byways in Franklin County and describes recently completed or active projects on each byway.

Connecticut River Scenic Byway

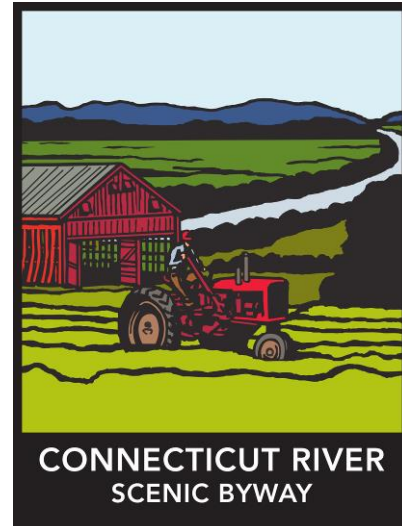
The Connecticut River Scenic Byway travels through the heart of the Connecticut River Valley and neighboring farmland, floodplains, and historic villages from northern New Hampshire and Vermont through Franklin County into Hampshire County in Massachusetts. Along the byway corridor, there are many sites and resources that highlight the rich history of the area dating back to the 1600s and the early inhabitation by Native Americans and Colonial settlers. The Connecticut River Valley's history and farming heritage is still reflected in the

many surviving architectural resources that can be seen along the byway. The Franklin County section of the byway, consisting of Route 63 in the towns of Northfield, Erving, and Montague and Route 47 in Montague and Sunderland, was designated as a state scenic byway by the Massachusetts Legislature in 2000, and the Hampshire County section of the byway (Route 47 in Hadley and South Hadley) was also designated in 2003. In 2009, the Connecticut River Scenic Byway was then designated as a National Scenic Byway. This remains the only nationally designated scenic byway in the Commonwealth.

Recently Completed Projects

Connecticut River Scenic Byway Tri-state Bike Map

In a project that included the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC), the Windham Regional Commission (Vermont), and the Southwest Regional Planning Commission (New Hampshire), the FRCOG coordinated the development and printing of an on-line map of the bicycle facilities connecting the three states. There are links on the frcog.org website to the pdf of the print map and to on-line versions of the maps that can be viewed in Google Earth.



The logo and way-finding sign for the Connecticut River Scenic Byway.

The project also included the installation of way-finding signs to aid in navigation along a recommended bicycle route that connects Greenfield, Brattleboro VT, and Keene NH. Additionally, the project included the purchase of bicycle parking racks for installation at key visitor oriented locations in the Hampshire County section of the Byway. The intention of the project was to enhance the bicycling resources in the tri-state area of the Connecticut River Scenic Byway and to build on the growing bicycle touring section of the regional economy.

Projects Underway

Connecticut River Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan Update

A Corridor Management Plan was originally completed for the Byway in 1998, and provided recommendations for promoting economic opportunities while protecting the natural, cultural, and historic resources of the Byway. With funding through the National Scenic Byway Program, work is currently underway to update the Corridor Management Plan. The updated plan will be completed in March 2016.

*Erving*side Streetscape Improvements

The Connecticut River Scenic Byway passes through the Town of Erving along Route 63. A one-mile section of this route has been awarded funding to complete the design and construction of sidewalk and streetscape improvements. The project is intended to improve pedestrian access and safety. The project area includes the Erving section of Millers Falls and the adjacent residential neighborhood known as Erving

side. Comprehensive plans for sidewalk and streetscape elements will be developed as part of the project. The improvements will link residential neighborhoods, the Erving Library, Veterans Memorial Park, the Erving Elementary School, the Senior Center and the business that are located along Route 63 in Erving.

Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway

The Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway is one of the earliest scenic byways in New England, receiving its designation in 1953. The byway travels on Route 2 and 2A through Berkshire, Franklin and Worcester counties. In Franklin County, the byway travels through the towns of Charlemont, Buckland, Shelburne, Greenfield, Gill, Erving and Orange.

The western section of the byway (Williamstown to Greenfield) follows the east-west route first used by Native Americans between the Hudson River and the Connecticut River Valleys. The route continued to be used for travel by colonists and eventually was upgraded to support subsequent forms of transportation. The western section of the byway was the first state road to be designated and constructed as a scenic tourist route, opening amid much fanfare in 1914.

The eastern section (Greenfield to Athol) also first developed as a foot path of the Native Americans. The Europeans from the Connecticut River Valley later used this trail to settle the northern interior of Massachusetts and for commerce by horse and cart. Later, entrepreneurs from the cities in eastern New England built the Fifth Massachusetts Turnpike along much of the original pathway. During this development, the road was changed and improved to accommodate new modes of transportation and infrastructure.

Recently Completed Projects

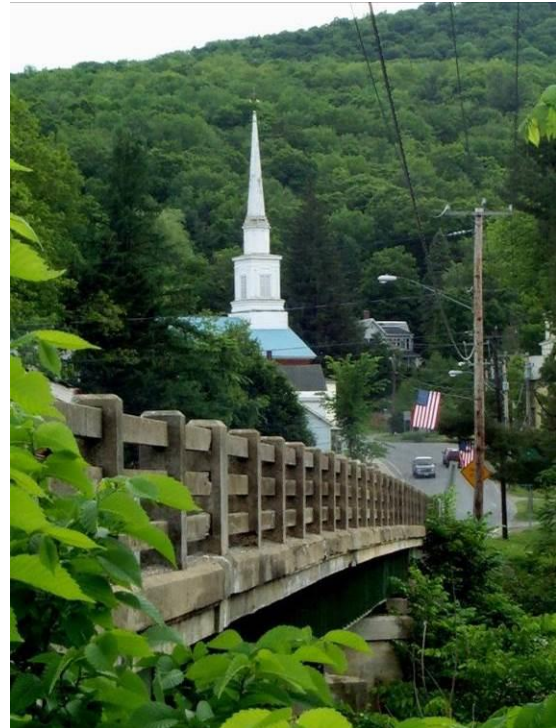
Mohawk Trail Historic Preservation Project

The FRCOG is working with the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) to complete the Mohawk Trail Historic Preservation Project. The goal of the project is to preserve historic properties located on the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway. The project has two components: 1) to prepare Massachusetts Historic Commission Survey Forms and/or National Register of Historic Places nomination forms for several properties along the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway,

and 2) to conduct a study to determine the feasibility of developing and administering a revolving loan fund to assist landowners in preserving historically significant properties on the Mohawk Trail. The FRCOG worked with the local Historical Commissions to identify properties that are of historic significance along the Mohawk Trail corridor. The national Register of Historic Places nominations have been prepared for the Riverside District in Gill, the Shelburne Free Library and the Little Red Schoolhouse in East Charlemont. The feasibility study is underway.

Route 112 Scenic Byway

The Route 112 Scenic Byway was officially designated as a scenic byway by the Massachusetts Legislature in 2004. The Route 112 Scenic Byway travels through the Towns of Colrain, Buckland, Shelburne, and Ashfield in Franklin County and the Towns of Goshen, Cummington, Worthington, and Huntington in Hampshire County. It travels through historic town centers, working farms, scenic rivers, and majestic forests with beautiful mountains providing a backdrop. The corridor is rich in natural, cultural, and historic resources. In addition, the byway intersects with the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway to the north and the Jacob’s Ladder Trail Scenic Byway to the south. A Corridor Management Plan for the Route 112 Scenic Byway was completed in 2009.



Route 112 bridge in Colrain Center over the North River.

Route 116 Scenic Byway

The Route 116 Scenic Byway is the most recently designated Scenic Byway in Franklin County. In 2008, the Massachusetts Legislature designated Route 116 in the towns of Deerfield, Conway, Ashfield, Plainfield, Savoy, and Adams as a scenic byway. The byway travels 39 miles from the Deerfield/Sunderland town line (at the Connecticut River) to downtown Adams (in Berkshire County) at the intersection of Route 116 and Route 8. In Franklin County, the Byway travels through the towns of Deerfield, Conway, and Ashfield. In Deerfield, the byway route follows the historic route of Route 116 (the current Route 116 bypass was constructed in the 1960s) onto Sugarloaf Street through historic South Deerfield center onto Elm Street and north onto Routes 5/10/116. The byway rejoins Route 116 to the west of South Deerfield center and travels west to historic Conway center, which travels

past the Burkeville Covered Bridge which is on the National Register of Historic Places and has recently been restored. Route 116 continues west through historic Ashfield center, where it intersects with Route 112, which is also a designated scenic byway.

Recently Completed Projects

Corridor Management Plan

A Corridor Management Plan for the Route 116 Scenic Byway was completed in 2013. The plan was developed in coordination with BRPC and PVPC. The plan details the many scenic, cultural, historic, natural, and recreational resources along the byway. It provides recommendations for protecting and enhancing these resources.



Farmland along Route 116 in Franklin County.

Route 122 Scenic Byway

In 2005, the Massachusetts Legislature designated Route 122 in the Towns of Paxton, Rutland, Oakham, Barre, Petersham, Orange, and New Salem as a scenic byway. The Route 122 Scenic Byway travels from the Paxton/Worcester town line to downtown Orange. Paxton, Rutland, Oakham, Barre, and Petersham are in Worcester County, and New Salem and Orange are in Franklin County. The Franklin County section of the byway travels along the northern end of the Quabbin Reservoir. In Orange, the byway terminates at the intersection of Route 122 and Route 2A, part of the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway.

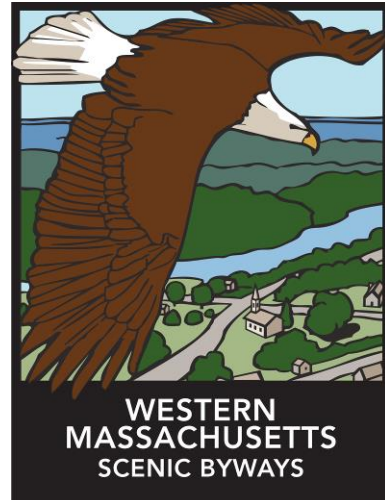
Recently Completed Projects

Corridor Management Plan

The FRCOG completed a corridor management plan for the Franklin County section of the Route 122 Scenic Byway in New Salem and Orange. The eastern end of the project area is at the town border of New Salem and Petersham. The corridor management plan was completed in June 2011. The plan includes: inventories of the historic, cultural, and natural resources; a scenic landscape inventory and assessment; and the identification of heritage and recreational tourism-related attractions and support services. The plan also includes recommendations to help guide future byway-related activities and projects.

Western Massachusetts Byways Promotional Campaign

The Western Massachusetts Scenic Byway Marketing Project is a collaborative effort of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC), the FRCOG, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC), and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) to create unified promotional materials for the seven scenic byways in western Massachusetts. The project has included the development of individual byway logos, advertising materials, a website, and way-finding signs. Each of the byways has its own unique character and story, and the project developed materials to highlight these qualities while also presenting the information as part of a network. The byway's website, <http://www.bywayswestmass.com>, was launched in June 2013. The way-finding sign installation will be completed by June 2015.



Western Massachusetts Scenic Byways Logo.

Scenic Byway Land Protection Project

The FRCOG is working cooperatively with the Franklin Land Trust, MassDOT, Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), and the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture (DAR) to permanently protect land along the Mohawk Trail, Connecticut River and Route 112 Scenic Byways. To date, approximately 1,000 acres of landscapes critical to the Mohawk Trail, Connecticut River and Route 112 Scenic Byways have been permanently protected.

Transportation Related Regional Tourism

Regional tourism is an important consideration for transportation and travel in Franklin County. The region is rich in scenic, natural, cultural, and historic features that are appealing to travelers. Tourism also plays an increasingly important role in the region's economy. The Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT) estimated that in 2013 domestic travelers in Franklin County spent over \$58 million (source: *MOTT's Economic Impact of Travel on Massachusetts Counties, CY2013*). This was a 25% increase from traveler expenditures in 2009. Consequently, visitors to the area are a significant contributor to the local economy and essential to the economic viability of the region. Additionally, recent economic data quantifies the significance of the creative economy of the region. These resources are important to consider as part of any transportation planning activities.

Scenic Byway Related Tourism

The scenic, natural, recreational, historic, and cultural resources along the byways appeal to a wide range of interests. As previously noted, byway travelers experience a diverse landscape that includes the classic mill towns of New England, rolling hills, rural farmland, historic architecture, mountains, river valleys, and spectacular vistas. The byways cater to a variety of outdoor activities ranging from hiking, picnicking, kayaking, canoeing, fishing, to skiing. Each byway has a unique history that is representative of different periods of time. In addition, there are many artisans who currently live and work in the area and provide opportunities to experience their crafts. The byways of Franklin County are a region-wide network for travelers to explore these diverse and rich resources.

It is important that tourist information and services be available to travelers. Information including publications, brochures, maps, websites, and telephone numbers are crucial to encouraging tourism along the scenic byways. The corridor management plans for the scenic byways contain an inventory of the cultural, historical, natural, scenic, recreational, and commercial resources within each byway area. Through the Scenic Byway Marketing Project enhanced informational resources and the byway website were developed to assist visitors to the area and byway travelers.

Bicycle Tourism

Bicycle tourism has increasingly been recognized as an important component of the Franklin County tourism industry. The region has many low volume, scenic roads that provide excellent bicycle touring routes. The significance of bicycle tourism and the increasing number of people who are traveling to Franklin County to bicycle was emphasized during the public input sessions held during the development of the *2009 Franklin County Bikeway Plan Update*. This updated plan included the following two goals related to bicycle tourism: 1) encourage bicycling as a regional tourism activity and complete measures which will identify Franklin County as a great place to come and bicycle, and 2) identify bicycle routes that could encourage tourism throughout Franklin County. The Plan further recommended the creation of promotional materials for the Visitors Centers, Chambers of Commerce, and the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT) to promote bicycling in the region. It also recommended the creation of advertisements to be used in bicycling magazines and websites promoting bicycling in Franklin County. The goal of promoting bicycle tourism was also included in the *2008 Massachusetts Bicycle Transportation Plan* to “develop bicycle tourist publications through the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT).”

The FRCOG has already created four bicycling maps for the region. The maps highlight the Franklin County Bikeway routes (both off-road bike paths and shared roadway sections),

elevation change, water stops, the services along the way, and other information that may be helpful to cyclists. Travel to Franklin County via the Amtrak rail service does not currently allow passengers to carry bicycles onto the train as luggage. It is important to the regional tourism economy that bikes and skis are allowed on this Amtrak passenger service.

Promotion of Regional Tourism

The regional tourism and hospitality industry are important considerations as the future of the regional transportation system is planned. Currently, local business representatives and economic development practitioners are focusing efforts on particular niches of the tourism industry, such as agri-tourism, eco-tourism, heritage tourism, and cultural tourism related to artists and craftspeople. Farm stands, maple sugar houses serving pancakes, and other forms of interactive experiences are growing in the agricultural industry of Franklin County. Eco-tourism activities include outdoor recreation such as rafting and skiing as well as education-related opportunities, like guided nature hikes. Future transportation planning should reinforce and build on this momentum in the region to promote all of the region's many tourism opportunities.

Recommendations for Scenic Byways

- Continue work to permanently protect scenic and agricultural lands along the scenic byways by purchasing conservation restrictions and/or agricultural preservation restrictions from willing landowners.
- Continue work to develop initiatives to market the byways of Western Massachusetts as travel destinations.
- Implement the recommendations of the corridor management plans for each of the scenic byways.

Recommendations for Tourism

- Develop marketing and informational resources to promote Franklin County as a travel destination.
- Provide information and resources to encourage tourism opportunities related to bicycling throughout the county.
- Create promotional materials for the Visitors Centers, Chambers of Commerce, and the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT) to use in their promotional campaigns.

- Encourage the Visitors Centers, Chambers of Commerce, and the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT) organizations to include information on bicycling in Franklin County in their tourism materials.
- Create advertisements to be used in bicycling magazines and websites promoting bicycling in Franklin County.
- Advocate for bikes and skis to be allowed on Amtrak regional rail service.



Rafters on the Deerfield River in Franklin County.