



WHITE PASS SCENIC BYWAY
CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE 2014

UPDATING THE WHITE PASS SCENIC BYWAY CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT PLAN

The original White Pass Scenic Byway Corridor Management was developed as a resource for visitor-oriented management and improvements to the byway. Since the completion of the original plan many of the initial goals and projects have been successfully implemented, including National Scenic Byway designation, capital projects, visitor information and marketing, and stakeholder outreach.

This plan update focuses on project opportunities that have developed since the original planning process, and which can be considered for the next phase of the byway's management and development.

SETTING AND CONDITIONS

Since the completion of the original Corridor Management Plan for the White Pass Scenic Byway, the funding and partnership landscape has seen considerable change. At that time there was robust state and federal support for scenic byways, including a dedicated scenic byway grant program, active National Scenic Byways program at the FHWA, and several state agencies (primarily WSDOT, Tourism and Fish and Wildlife) actively promoted scenic byways as a tool for rural economic development and resource conservation. Since that time, the Scenic Byways discretionary grant has been discontinued, the federal scenic byways program has been drastically reduced, and state government has also reduced its focus and resources for supporting byways and tourism in general.

Some functions that were previously supported by federal and state agencies have been replaced by NGO's that provide resources for byways. At the national level, the National Scenic Byway Foundation has replaced some of the coordination and technical support function previously supported by FHWA. At the state level, the Washington Tourism Alliance, and ScenicWA (an offshoot of Visitor Guide Publications) are supporting the state's scenic byways as tourism activities.

Some federal funding is potentially still available for byway-related capital projects. The federal enhancements program had two components that previously provided funding for byways projects. Federal land management agencies (from WPSB perspective including Gifford Pinchot NE, the Okanogan-Wenatchee NE, and Mount Rainier National Park) were eligible for a federal lands-only enhancement funding.

This funding source was used by the Gifford Pinchot to improve the Palisades Viewpoint and Mount Rainier Viewpoint on the west side of the pass, and by the Okanogan-Wenatchee to improve several of the campgrounds on the

east side of the pass. Federal enhancement funds administered through WSDOT were used to construct the WPSB gateways project. In the latest (as of 2014) federal transportation funding bill, the enhancements program was replaced with the Transportation Alternatives funding program. Some of the byway-specific project types remain eligible for funding under this program. Federal lands management agencies continue to have access to a dedicated funding source under Transportation Alternatives. At the state level, the Transportation Alternatives program is administered similar to the Enhancements program, however competition for funding has become more intense.

PARTNERS

Tacoma Power is one of the key recreation partners on the west side of the byway. Their participation in the Mossyrock Dam viewpoint project made one of the most visible improvement projects along the byway possible.

The Lewis County PUD plays an active role in the highway corridor, managing one of the nearby recreation sites, and with several locations where power lines are part of the byway landscape.

VisitRainier has become a more mature and established marketing presence for the Mount Rainier region, including continued support from Lewis County lodging tax funds (although Pierce County continues to be the major funder.) In addition to the main VisitRainier website, the organization is active in social media.

The WPSB website continues to draw more and more followers, accelerated by the partnership with White Pass Ski Area that allowed WPSB to manage bookings for lodging at the pass.

Not specific to byways, the federal and state partners participating in the WPSB have also faced increasing budget challenges. The USFS has seen a continued drop in funding support for recreation, and future reductions in access to recreation via forest roads is a concern. Mount Rainier National Park has seen a slow erosion in the spending power of their annual budget, as operations funding has generally lagged behind rising costs.

Washington State Parks, while not a major participant in the byway, has also seen a significant drop in state funding support, with the legislature focusing on user fees as their primary funding source. And, as mentioned above, the Washington State Tourism office was entirely written out of the budget during the most recent economic downturn. Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife has de-emphasized their wildlife tourism program.

The cities of Mossyrock, Morton, and Naches are all key long-term partners for the success of the byway. Each of these communities has seen byway projects developed in their jurisdictions, and play an important role in providing visitor services. These communities are also the beneficiaries of much of the economic contribution from visitors along the byway, both in terms of supporting local businesses and in the form of tax revenues generated from travel-related spending.

The Chinook Scenic Byway is a connecting route and part of the Mount Rainier loop tour. In the future, there may be opportunities to collaborate with that group on shared projects.

The Fire and Ice Scenic Loop is a new loop route focused on Mount St. Helens which includes the segment of the WPSB between I-5 and Randle as part of the loop. As of 2014 they have not finalized any plans or projects, however there may be opportunities for shared project work once their plan is complete.

MOVING FORWARD

In the past, the National Scenic Byways Discretionary Grant program was a reliable source of funding for the byway. At different times National Scenic Byways grants supported organizational, marketing and planning activities, while more recently the grants had been focused on capital projects. With the retirement of that funding source, byway capital projects will be more challenging to fund. Potential funding sources to consider for future projects include:

STATE RECREATION AND CONSERVATION OFFICE (RCO)

The RCO manages several grant programs that could be appropriate for capital projects to enhance recreational facilities.

LODGING TAX

Lodging Tax from Lewis County and potentially the City of Morton are appropriate funding sources for tourism-related projects. Lodging Tax funds are more appropriately focused on marketing and hospitality-training than capital improvements. A core component of byway projects is tourism economic development. Many of the new and ongoing byway projects are effective tourism marketing, and are a strong fit for lodging tax funding.

WA STATE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE DIRECT GRANTS

This state program through the Department of Commerce Community Capital Facilities program funds a variety of capital projects, either through competitive grants or direct appropriations guided by the legislature.

FHWA TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES GRANT PROGRAM-STATE ADMINISTERED

This program replaces enhancements grants as a source of funding for projects that are often not directly related to highway capacity and safety. For projects on the west side of the pass, Transportation Alternatives funding would be coordinated through the Southwest Washington RTPO, which is administered by the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments. On the east side of the pass, projects for this grant source would be prioritized by the Yakima Valley Conference of Governments, which serves as the RTPO for local jurisdictions within Yakima County.

FHWA TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES GRANT PROGRAM-FEDERAL LANDS

Byway-related projects sponsored by Mount Rainier National Park, the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, or the Okanogan Wenatchee National Forest may be eligible for the portion of FHWA Transportation Alternatives funds available to federal agencies. The agencies collaborate to develop prioritized project lists for the region.

PROJECTS



TRAVELER INFORMATION SITES/KIOSKS

These locations are intended to provide en-route travel information to visitors already in the corridor. Information describing scenic tour routes, short hikes, nearby communities, and other byway destinations would encourage additional time in the corridor, enhance the visitor experience, and improve the economic impact from byway travelers. These types of installations are most effective when located at major decision points, especially in locations travelers are already stopping. Each of the locations proposed for an information kiosk would require working with a landowner/operator partner for implementation.

I-5 INTERSECTION

An information site near the west end of the byway would provide an opportunity to reach a large number of visitors and provide travel information at a point in their trip when they may have flexibility to modify their itinerary. The most likely location for a kiosk near the I-5 interchange is the existing information area associated with the Shell Station/campground just to the east of Spiffy's. Although not easily visible from the highway, this location is prominent for patrons of the gas station, and may be eligible for wayfinding signage from the byway.

The project would include aesthetic upgrades to the existing kiosk, and development of site-specific displays for traveler information.

Implementation notes

This site is privately-owned, and would require an appropriate agreement with the landowner prior to any significant investment on the project. In the preferred scenario, the byway would reach an agreement to improve the kiosk and have control over the information display. If the preferred option is not feasible, a low-cost partnership may also be possible, with the byway providing displays to the landowner to display.

Partnership opportunities:

- City of Mossyrock
- Tacoma Power

Anticipated cost for preferred option: \$8,000 - \$12,000

RANDLE

This information kiosk would be located in Randle at the intersection with Forest Road 25 to Mount St. Helens. This is an important crossroads for the byway, both as a connection to Mount St. Helens and as an access to several of the short tour routes included on the tear-off wayfinding map/web site and developed with previous RAC funding. This information site could feature the byway tour loops, provide information for Mount St. Helens trips, and provide information for visitor services in Randle, Morton, and Packwood.

Implementation notes

The most prominent part of the site was a gas station for many years, and currently is the location for a drive-through coffee stand. The preferred scenario for this location would probably include an agreement with the underlying landowner to locate a kiosk on the upper portion of the property in coordination with the coffee stand. There would likely be some benefit to the coffee stand operator as the information site may attract travelers who otherwise would not have stopped. A second option would be to locate the kiosk on the site's lower terrace, which was the location of a log scale for many years. This part of the site is less constrained by other uses, but isn't as prominent from the byway, and would not benefit from colocation with coffee stand. The previous use at both of these locations was likely to have released hazardous substances into the soil to some extent. Any use agreement should include legal review to ensure that the byway is protected from potential liability for past contamination.

Partnership opportunities:

- Gifford Pinchot NF
- Fire and Ice Scenic Loop

Anticipated cost for preferred option: \$8,000 - \$12,000

WHITE PASS

Travelers love to stop at the pass in the summertime, just to look around and enjoy being at the high point of the road. While there is currently a byway interpretive panel displayed at the store, there is an opportunity for a more prominent display including more site-specific information for the pass and surrounding recreation sites.

Implementation Notes

Any projects at the pass are made more difficult by the need to survive heavy winter snowfall and to avoid interfering with winter operations. An information installation would be best if it could be designed to be removable for winter storage.

Partnership opportunities:

- White Pass Ski Area
- Okanogan Wenatchee NF
- Gifford Pinchot NF

Anticipated cost for preferred option: \$12,000 - \$15,000

PACKWOOD DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

This project would reconstruct US 12 through downtown Packwood to improve pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and to enhance the character of downtown Packwood as a visitor destination. US 12 (the White Pass Scenic Byway) is Packwood's main street, and most of Packwood's retail and services businesses are located along the highway. Major community facilities, including the Packwood Library, fire station, community hall, and visitor center, are also located along the highway. Packwood is a four-season recreation destination, and is also an important provider of traveler services for personal and commercial travel along the highway. US 12 is a highway of statewide significance, as one of the few cascade passes open year-round.

Currently the Packwood downtown area, which includes the majority of businesses and community facilities, has no developed pedestrian or bicycle facilities. Wide shoulders are used for unmarked head-in angle parking on both sides of the highway. Parked cars generally need to back into highway travel lanes to re-enter traffic. Although the community is compact, with major community destinations, restaurants, retail and services buildings located within a few blocks, the community does not feel walkable or bike-able. Both local residents and visitors typically move their cars from one destination to another rather than walking in the community or using bicycles for short trips.

Project elements would likely include sidewalk, re-designed parking, bicycle facilities (likely striped bike lanes), and full ADA-standard crossings. The project may also consider traffic calming elements if there is demonstrated need and support from the public outreach process. Additionally, streetscape elements such as decorative light fixtures, banners, benches, decorative paving, and pedestrian plazas would enhance the downtown's character and walkability.

Implementation Notes

This is a multi-million dollar project that would likely be completed in phases. The most likely approach to completing this project is to seek an initial planning/conceptual design seed grant that would include community outreach and define the overall goals, character, and cost of the project. With a design concept in place, stakeholders would then have the necessary information to seek funding for final design and construction.

Partnership opportunities:

- Lewis County
- Washington Department of Transportation
- Destination Packwood

Anticipated cost for planning/conceptual design: \$100,000-150,000



MORTON VISITOR COMPLEX COMPLETION

The Morton Visitor Center and Depot complex is an exciting and important visitor resource for the byway. This project would complete the elements needed for the complex to serve visitors, including interior displays, final site work, and other needs to be open and functional as a visitor facility.

IMPLEMENTATION NOTES

This project will require additional refinement to identify the complete scope of project elements and scope.

PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES:

- Cowlitz River Valley Historical Society
- City of Morton

RIFFE LAKE VIEWPOINT VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

This viewpoint provides a panoramic overview of Riffe Lake and its surrounding forested hillsides. The pullout includes a generous parking area and an interpretive panel. Site distance for entering/exiting the pullout is very good. When this viewpoint was established, the forested hillside adjacent to the highway had been recently harvested, and allowed an open view to the lake. Over time, trees on the hillside have regrown until the view to the lake is almost completely blocked.

This project would implement a sustainable strategy to reestablish and maintain open views from the viewpoint to the lake.

IMPLEMENTATION NOTES

The majority of the trees that are currently blocking the view are on private property. There are a variety of options for implementing selected clearing in this location—ranging from a one-time agreement to harvest trees that would be revisited when the trees regrow, to a long-term agreement/easement that would allow entry and harvest in the view corridor as necessary over the long term.

PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES:

- Washington State Department of Transportation
- Lewis County PUD (possible assistance for tree clearing)
- Lewis County
- Tacoma Power (possible interaction between this location and Tacoma Power's ownership at lower elevations around Riffe Lake.)

Anticipated cost: Unknown

COMMUNITY GATEWAY/WAYFINDING SIGNS PH III

This project would continue implementation of a corridor-wide wayfinding and gateway sign program. The next likely phases of the program would include gateway signs for some of the communities along the byway (possibly Glenoma and Salkum on the west side, and Rimrock and Naches on the east), and off-highway wayfinding signs with communities for some of the larger byway communities.

The smaller community gateway signs would be less complex than the community gateways developed in the first phase—with bases anticipated to be framed from wood and smaller sign panels. The signs, however, would continue to be more substantial than would be allowed in the clear zone, so locating signs would require care and sufficient WSDOT right-of-way.

Off-highway wayfinding signs would focus on trailblazer signing to byway-related visitor destinations, for example the Salkum hatchery and similar locations that provide wayfinding challenges for inexperienced byway travelers.

IMPLEMENTATION NOTES

Development of community gateway signs generally includes extensive coordination with local stakeholders for selecting locations. Off-highway wayfinding signs will require coordination with the appropriate jurisdiction for each location.

PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES:

- Washington State Department of Transportation
- Lewis County
- Yakima County
- City of Morton
- City of Mossyrock
- City of Naches

Anticipated cost: depending on the scope of signs anticipated, \$60,000- \$150,000

OAK CREEK WILDLIFE AREA VISITOR EXPERIENCE PLAN

The Oak Creek Wildlife Area is one of the byway's most compelling resources. The land base for the wildlife area is a spectacular mix of shrub steppe, grassland, and east side forest, along with rocky cliffs and riverside riparian areas. Currently, the wildlife area is underdeveloped as a destination for inexperienced visitors. Interpretive and orientation information at the main parking area is outdated, and it is unlikely that the visitor center can maintain sustainable volunteer staffing outside of the peak wildlife feeding season. On-site staffing at the wildlife area is low, and (appropriately) focused on habitat and wildlife management, rather than visitor services.

There are a wide variety of opportunities to enhance the wildlife area as a "visitor friendly" destination for general byway travelers, however they all hinge on whether here is a way to improve access and facilities without overburdening staff. Potential improvement projects include:

- Refresh and enhance interpretive and wayfinding at the wildlife area headquarters—the main parking area and wildlife viewing area should be developed as the primary visitor welcome and orientation area. Project elements here would likely include new signage and a potential kiosk structure to draw visitor attention.
- Improve Bighorn Sheep feeding area—provide wayfinding signage to reach the bighorn sheep feeding area, an identifying entry sign, interpretive signage at the site, and minor parking lot improvements.
- Trailhead improvements along SR 410—there are several trails that can be accessed from SR 410 that are currently unmarked with unimproved trailheads. Depending on highway safety/operations review, improve visitor information for trails and provide improved trailheads.
- Trailhead improvements along US 12—the wildlife viewing and rock climbing access trails across from the wildlife area headquarters are increasingly popular. Improve visitor information and trailhead signs.
- Interior roads—for experienced backroads travelers, some of the roads inside the wildlife area offer exceptional opportunities for sightseeing and wildlife watching. Provide improved visitor information for access to these roads and itinerary opportunities.

Implementation Notes

One or more of the opportunities described above may be possible, however they need to be evaluated in a planning process before their ultimate scope

and feasibility can be assessed. The first step in this process should likely be the development of a visitor access and education plan for the wildlife area.

Partnership opportunities:

- Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Washington State Department of Transportation
- City of Naches
- Chinook Scenic Byway

Anticipated cost (plan): \$40,000

COMMUNITY HISTORY INTERPRETATION

Each of the byway's communities has a fascinating story to tell. This project would develop an interpretive presentation for each of the byway communities describing their history and key personalities in their development. These stories could be displayed on interpretive signs, however they would likely reach a broader audience as paper brochures, which could also be made available on the byway website.

IMPLEMENTATION NOTES

This project could be packaged as a set for grant applications, or done individually for different communities depending on interest and resources.

PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES:

- Local historical societies
- Individual jurisdictions

Anticipated cost: \$5,000-\$20,000 for each community depending on need for professional support and printing costs.

MORTON TO DAVIS LAKE RAIL CORRIDOR RAIL TO TRAIL

This project would develop a recreational connecting Morton to Davis Lake along a portion of unused rail spur.

MOSSYROCK TO MOSSYROCK PARK BIKE TRAIL

This trail would provide a safe and enjoyable walking and bicycle connection between Mossyrock Park and downtown Mossyrock, a distance of a little over three miles.

IMPLEMENTATION NOTES

Depending on right-of-way ownership, this project could either seek funding for design and construction or begin with a concept plan. If there is adequate space in the existing public right-of-way the implementation of a trail can be relatively straightforward, although any planning/design process should include extensive outreach to adjacent landowners. If the project would require acquisition of right-of-way it would likely be much more complex to complete.

PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES:

- City of Mossyrock
- Tacoma Power

Anticipated cost:

- Approximately \$120,000 for design-only if project is phased/right-of-way needed.
- A concept plan could be developed for \$30,000-\$40,000 to support grant funding for full design and construction.
- If right-of-way is in public ownership, full design and construction cost is likely to be in the range of \$850,000 to \$1,400,000.

ENHANCE WEBSITE/SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

Continue to build on the successful website and social media program for the byway. Potential opportunities for new functionality could include traveler reviews/recommendations, and look/feel upgrades to maintain a sense of freshness for the site.

IMPLEMENTATION NOTES

This activity could be funded as a packaged grant activity or an ongoing program cost.

PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES:

- Byway community chambers
- White Pass Ski Area (ongoing)

Anticipated cost: varies, depending on scope and packaging strategy.