



**DATE:** April 16, 2015  
**TO:** Transportation Commission  
**FROM:** Debra Perkins-Smith, Director, Division of Transportation Development  
**SUBJECT:** Colorado Scenic and Historic Byways

**Purpose**

This memo provides information regarding a proposed new Colorado Scenic and Historic Byway.

**Action**

Approval and designation of the proposed “Tracks Across Borders” Byway.

**Background**

Despite the elimination of the Byways grant program and the limited funding for current Byways support activities, a new Byway has been proposed by stakeholders in Colorado and New Mexico. The last time Colorado added a Byway to its program was in 2005. The proposed “Tracks Across Borders” Byway travels more than 125 miles between Durango, CO, and Chama, NM, following the route of the nation’s largest narrow gauge railroad system - the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad (D&RG), often on top of the original road grade, near many railroad remnants and through numerous ghost towns.

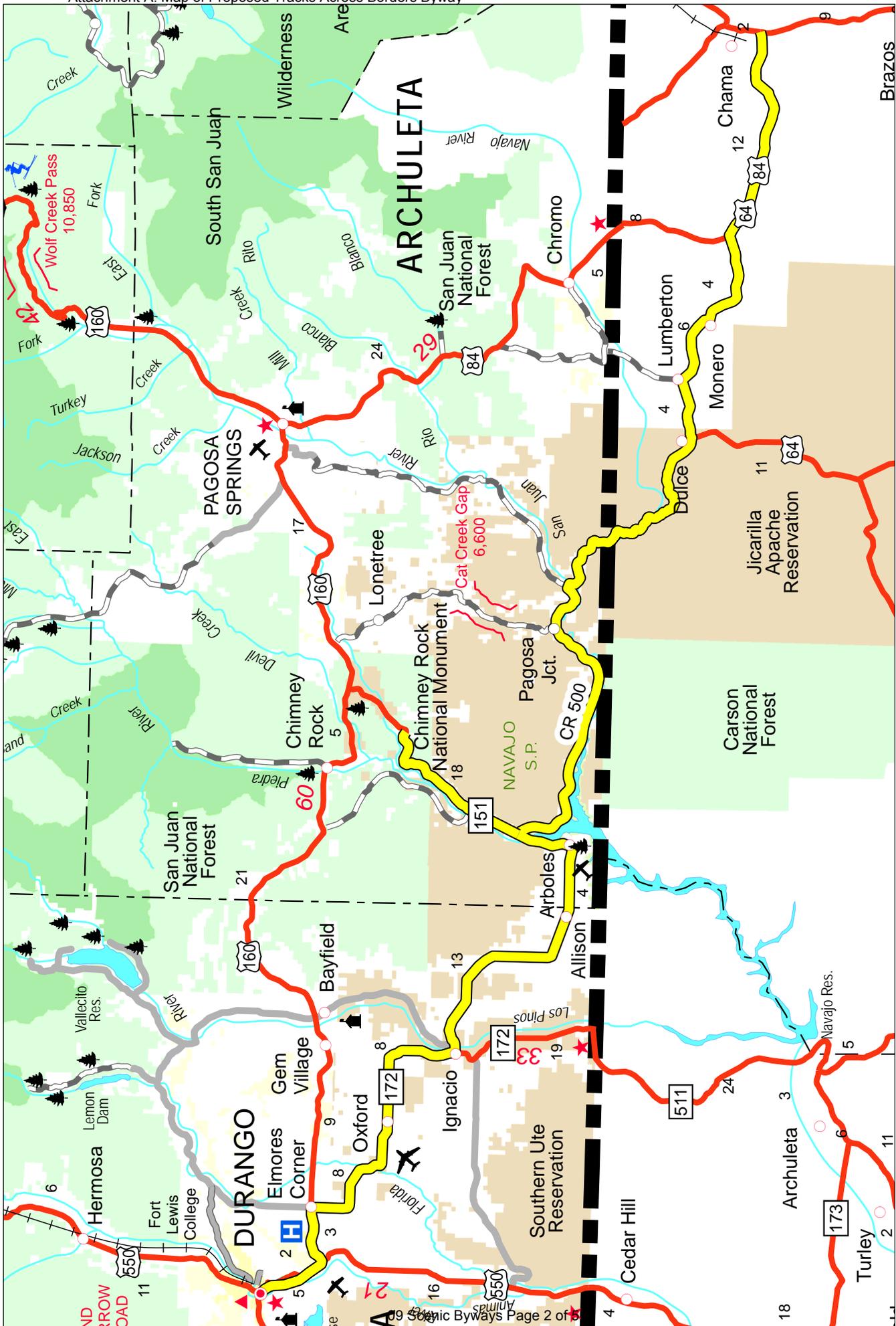
This route offers many unique Colorado stories related to the railroad, Native American and Hispanic culture and prehistory that are not offered by the other Byways in the state. In addition to traveling along two states, this route provides insight into Native American cultures, breathtaking countryside, treaties and technology. It crosses ancient and historic time, as well as varied communities of the present day.

Pursuant to the Executive Order, Byways nominations shall be evaluated and recommended for designation by the Byways Commission, and then forwarded to the Transportation Commission for approval. The Tracks Across Borders nomination has been reviewed and approved by the Byways Commission. The Byways Commission and those behind the nomination are aware of the limited funding available for the Byways program in Colorado and recognize that support and development of the Byway will be a local responsibility with limited promotional support available through the existing Byways Program. New Mexico’s Transportation Commission is expected to review and approve their portion of the Byway on May 21<sup>st</sup>.

**Attachments**

- Attachment A: Map of Proposed Tracks Across Borders Byway
- Attachment B: Tracks Across Borders Byway Fact Sheet
- Attachment C: Transportation Commission Resolution





Proposed Tracks Across Borders Byway



## ***Please support the Tracks Across Borders Byway Designation***

### **What is the Tracks Across Borders Byway?**

The *Tracks Across Borders Byway* is along the Colorado and New Mexico border between Durango, Colorado and Chama, New Mexico. The Byway travels along two states, Native American cultures, breathtaking countryside, treaties and technology, across ancient and historic time, and varied communities of the present day.

- The Byway's primary feature is one of Colorado's greatest stories - the creation and development of the state's first, and ultimately the nation's largest, narrow gauge railroad system - the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad (D&RG).
- The Byway passes through the Southern Ute Indian Tribe reservation land, whose headquarters and superlative Southern Ute Cultural Center and Museum are located in Ignacio, Colorado.
- The Byway skirts the north end of Navajo Lake, a little-known environmental and recreational gem in the Colorado and New Mexico State Parks systems.
- Chimney Rock National Monument is an essential thematic feature of national significance on the Byway. The round-trip spur provides access and increased exposure to the unparalleled natural beauty to one of America's newest National Monuments.



Chimney Rock National Monument



Juanita Townsite

### **What is the Value in Scenic Byway Designation?**

- A byway designation would help with the identification and protection of significant - and irreplaceable - resources along the route.
- Information about the Byway will serve to inform and educate the traveler on the need to respect and protect sovereign tribal lands.
- Byway designation will assist in promoting economic development by providing common goals for collaboration among the communities and major land owners.
- Byway designation is expected to have direct beneficial economic impacts on visitor traffic, visitor expenditures, and total retail sales - all important in rural communities.

### **Why Should Tracks Across Borders Byway be Designated a Historic Byway?**

The Byway follows a corridor that covers a span with over 800 years of Colorado history.

- It opens to discovery a part of Colorado little known to most residents and visitors.
- The tourism potential encompasses numerous groups including history buffs, rail enthusiasts, recreation and adventure seekers, along with those who want to know more about the diverse nature of our state.
- It offers abundant camping, fishing, rafting, sailing, hiking, biking, and photography opportunities, along with its over-riding value as first-hand history experience.
- It links two of the State's most important historic narrow gauge railroads - the Durango & Silverton RR and the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic RR - both remaining parts of the San Juan Extension built in the early 1880's.
- Byway designation is expected to have direct beneficial economic impacts on visitor traffic, visitor expenditures, and total retail sales – all important in rural communities.

### **How is the Tracks Across Borders Byway Designation Different?**

This route offers many unique Colorado stories related to the railroad, Native American and Hispanic culture and prehistory that are not offered by the other byways in the state.

- It traverses Colorado and New Mexico, as well as the continental divide.
- It crosses two Native American sovereign nations (Utes and Jicarillas), each with interpretive centers, accommodations and casinos.
- Accesses Colorado's Navajo Lake State Park at Arboles, CO, a major recreation resource.
- Tours through Chaco ruins and the Chimney Rock National Monument.
- It travels over 125 miles between Durango, CO, and Chama, NM, following the route of the D&RG narrow gauge expansion, often on top of the original road grade and near many railroad remnants and through ghost towns.
- It traverses important parts of Colorado's early logging, ranching and farming areas.
- The railroad showcases Chaco, Native American, Hispanic and Anglo cultures.
- It represents an under represented area of Colorado.



Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad



Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad

***We submit that the Tracks Across Borders Byway Designation is worthy of joining its predecessors and will expand their collective importance to Colorado.***

**Resolution Number TC-XXXX**

Resolution for Approval of Tracks Across Borders Scenic and Historic Byway

**WHEREAS**, in 1989 the Colorado Department of Transportation established the Colorado Scenic and Historic Byways Program under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA); and

**WHEREAS**, since that time, Colorado has designated 25 Scenic and Historic Byways throughout the state, eleven of which are nationally recognized as part of America’s Byways; and

**WHEREAS**, Colorado offers abundant and easily accessible opportunities for viewing and visiting scenic, recreational, historical, educational, scientific, geological, natural, cultural and ethnic resources; and

**WHEREAS**, a new byway has been proposed that travels along the Colorado and New Mexico border between Durango, Colorado and Chama, New Mexico; and

**WHEREAS**, this route offers many unique Colorado stories related to the railroad, Native American and Hispanic culture and prehistory that are not offered by other Colorado Byways; and

**WHEREAS**, this proposed Byway’s primary feature is one of Colorado’s greatest stories – the creation and development of the state’s first and largest narrow gauge railroad system – the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad; and

**WHEREAS**, the Scenic and Historic Byways Commission has reviewed, approved and recommends the nomination for designation;

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, the Transportation Commission approves the nomination and designation of the proposed Tracks Across Borders Byway.

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Herman Stockinger, Secretary  
Transportation Commission of Colorado

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Date