

Chapter 10

EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR HISTORIC HIGHWAYS

10.1 Recognition of Historical Significance

Highways are among the most difficult elements of the built environment to evaluate for historical significance. Highways are extremely common as a structure type, and with rare exception, highways are similar in materials, design, and general appearance. Highways are also exceptionally vulnerable to alteration over time as a result of maintenance and modernization, so that a highway cannot be expected to retain all of its original materials and design elements for more than a few years after initial construction. Highways are often defined more by their settings than by their physical nature, but the settings can also change dramatically over time, so that the original purpose and effect of a highway is no longer evident. Highways are also among the largest man-made structures, in some cases hundreds of miles long and with various materials, features, environmental and cultural settings, and integrity. The historical significance of a highway, like that of a railroad, trail, or river, may have no specific associated site.

Because of the ubiquity of highways, no single highway is likely to be considered historically significant simply because it exists. Rather, historic highways usually have significance because they allowed other human activities to occur that are considered to be important in our past. Some highways may have had particularly interesting construction histories or may include unusual materials or structures, but in general highways are historically important because of their role or effect in economic and social changes in our society. For example, Interstate 70 through the mountains of Colorado includes a number of outstanding engineering features, but those features are fundamentally important because they contributed to the opening of high-volume, high-speed transportation through the Central Rockies. I-70 has had tremendous effects on the tourism, skiing, and general commercial industries in Colorado, and the highway has substantially affected residential and related development in mountain areas along the route.

The historical context of a highway is therefore usually the key element in determining historical significance. The Criteria for Evaluation of properties for nomination to the National Register of

Historic Places (36CFR60) provide general guidance for determining whether a highway or other property has historical significance:

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

- (A) That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- (B) That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- (C) That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- (D) That have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criterion A addresses the importance of a property in broad patterns of history, and therefore highways are most likely to be eligible for nomination to the National Register under this Criterion. In rare occasions, a highway may have been the scene of a particular event important in history. In most such cases, only a small segment of the highway is a contributing element of a site or district; the highway as a whole usually does not attain historical significance from the event.

Highways are rarely eligible for nomination to the National Register under Criterion B, because this Criterion requires that a property must (1) be directly associated with a person important in history and (2) be directly associated with the events or work for which the person is important. Highways are usually corporate government projects, designed by teams of engineers according to established standards and constructed by government agencies or under government contracts. A possible exception would be a highway initially designed or constructed as a private road, and the road or highway was an element of the significance of the designer or builder.

A highway can be eligible for nomination to the National Register under Criterion C on the basis of engineering or construction features embodied in the highway. A highway can include distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, such as stone retaining

walls or drainage features built by the WPA or CCC during the Great Depression. A highway can (rarely) represent the work of a master or possess high artistic values, although those characteristics are usually confined to specific structures such as bridges. Most historic highways correspond to “a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.” Historic highways usually are eligible for nomination to the National Register under a combination of Criteria A and C, where physical features of the highway or the highway as a whole entity can be understood in terms of its relationship to important broad historical patterns.

Highways are extremely unlikely to be eligible for nomination to the National Register under Criterion D. Automobile highways are relatively recent phenomena, and the technology of highway construction is well understood and documented. Study of a physical highway is therefore unlikely to yield information important in expanding our understanding of history. Study and documentation of physical features of a highway are more likely to be applicable to Criterion C considerations.

10.2 Consideration of Integrity

The National Register Criteria for Evaluation require that, in order for a property to be eligible for nomination to the National Register, it must possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. As indicated above, highways are very susceptible to change over time, to the extent that a “pristine” historical highway is extremely unlikely to exist.

Location is the place where the historic highway was constructed. Highways are sometimes locally re-routed to lesser or greater extent, and the names or number designations for particular highways are sometimes changed so that a current route may bear little or no resemblance to an historic highway of the same designation. The principal consideration of integrity of location are (1) the extent to which a highway corresponds to the general route followed during the period in which the highway attained its historical significance, and (2) the relative importance of the route as an element of the significance of the historic highway. For example, a highway over a mountain pass would not be considered to have integrity of location if the original 1930s route

crossed a different pass to reach a mining camp. Similarly, a highway bypass would not have integrity of location if the original route passed through a town's main street. Relatively minor variations of route, such as relocation slightly higher on a slope or road straightening, are usually more appropriately addressed under consideration of integrity of design.

Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property. Elements of highway design include the height and width of the roadbed, surfacing methods, shoulder width and sloping, ditching and other drainage features, alignments, intersections, pullouts, retaining walls, guardrails and other safety features, bridges and culverts, and signs and signals. The principal consideration of integrity of design for a highway is the extent to which the highway retains the features that defined the physical nature of the highway during the period of its significance. All elements of original (or period of significance) design do not have to be present for a highway to retain its essential physical nature. For example, most signs and many culverts may have been replaced, but these are usually relatively minor elements of a highway as a whole. However, if a highway has been re-graded and substantially widened, the highway has lost important elements of design.

Setting is the physical surrounding of a highway, including the topographic, vegetative, and cultural character of the location of the highway. Cultural character primarily refers to the built environment, including buildings and other structures, but it can also refer to ethnic and other social factors. Every highway was designed to accommodate its setting, whether the highway is in a narrow mountain gorge, a city, or a wide open plains environment. The principal consideration of integrity of setting is the extent that the general environment and any particular elements of the environment that affected location, design, construction, and use of the highway remain intact from the highway's period of significance. Natural environments tend to remain basically unchanged unless disturbed by man, but cultural environments are much more prone to change. For example, a forest fire near a highway in a mountain canyon would not substantially alter the setting of a highway, but construction of a condominium complex in the same area might significantly degrade the setting in that locality. Redevelopment of a 1930s commercial area adjacent a highway would very likely adversely affect the historic setting of the highway.

The extent of the effective setting of a highway varies according to all of the elements that comprise the setting. The effective setting is usually the viewshed from a highway, meaning all natural and cultural features that can be clearly discerned with the naked eye. In many urban settings the viewshed extends only to the first or second tier of buildings from each side of a highway, but in some rural areas the viewshed may be many miles wide. Regardless of the extent of the viewshed/setting, the key integrity consideration is the retention of salient features from the period of significance of the highway.

Materials are the physical elements that were combined or deposited to form a highway and its associated structures and objects. Materials are the aspect of highways most likely to have been changed during and after the period of significance, particularly the materials comprising the driving surface. The principal integrity consideration for materials is the extent to which the highway retains the same general types of materials that were present during the highway's period of significance. For example, a highway that had a concrete driving surface has lost some integrity of materials if the driving surface is now asphalt. A highway that had an asphalt driving surface has lost little integrity of materials if the highway has been resurfaced with similar asphalt materials (assuming the resurfacing was similar in area and location).

Workmanship is the evidence of the particular skill of an artisan in building features or an entire highway, and it can include applications of technology as well as aesthetic principles. Examples might include ancillary statues or structures of concrete or stone or the dry-laid stone retaining walls built by the WPA. Again, the principal integrity consideration for workmanship is the extent of retention of distinctive artistry from the highway's period of significance.

Workmanship is rarely a primary integrity consideration in evaluation of highways, except for portions of highways built mostly by hand by WPA, PWA, and CCC program workers during the Great Depression.

Feeling is a highway's expression of a particular period of time. In essence, feeling is the quality of a highway that results from combination of location, design, setting, materials, and workmanship. This aspect of integrity is more subjective than other aspects, but clearly a solitary ribbon of highway through Monument Valley elicits a feeling that would be diminished if any of the component qualities were compromised. Although it has lost integrity of design and materials in some areas, Colorado State Highway 74 generally elicits the feeling of the period of initial automobile tourism into the Rocky Mountains.

Association is the direct link between an important historical event or person and a highway, usually meaning that distinctive physical features exist as part of the highway that clearly demonstrate the connection to the event or person. For example, remaining dry-laid retaining walls represent the WPA era/event in Colorado, particularly the reconstruction of State Highway

74 after a devastating flood. Association can also mean that individual elements of a highway remain visually and/or functionally connected, so that the historic highway can be easily recognized as a single entity. For example, a tunnel that is no longer part of a highway may still have essential association with the highway if the tunnel is visible from the highway and the former highway route to the tunnel is evident.

10.3 Consideration of Age and Period of Significance

The National Register Criteria for Evaluation requires that a highway must be ordinarily be 50 years old or older to qualify for eligibility for nomination to the National Register, in addition to qualifying under at least one of the primary significance criteria and having sufficient integrity to convey its significance. The Criteria for Evaluation contains three possible exceptions to the 50 year age rule:

1. The highway is an integral part of an historic district that otherwise qualifies for nomination. Many historic districts, particularly in central business districts, were built along highways or major roads that became highways. Rural historic districts and other cultural landscapes are also often anchored by a road or highway.
2. The highway has been reconstructed, and the reconstruction has been accurately executed in a suitable environment and presented in a dignified manner as part of a restoration master plan, and when no other building or structure with the same association has survived. This situation is extremely rare, but theoretically a faithful restoration of any highway could qualify under this consideration.
3. The highway is of exceptional historical importance. For example, the highway/causeway built to carry the space shuttle from the assembly building to the launch site is of exceptional historical importance. In Colorado, the Glenwood Canyon segment of Interstate 70 might qualify under this consideration.

Most highways in Colorado originated in some form more than 50 years ago, and therefore most of the state's highways technically meet the ordinary age requirement. A more useful application of age in the evaluation of significance involves assignment of a highway to one or more of the four principal historic periods of automobile highway construction in the state, and then assessment of the integrity of the highway to that period. As discussed elsewhere in this document, the principal historic periods of highway construction in Colorado are:

1890-1930, The Pioneer Automobile Era
1930-1945, Depression and World War II

1945-1973, Postwar Boom and the Interstate Era
1973-2000, Completion and Expansion of the Highway System

Nearly all highways in Colorado have been in use during more than one of these periods; the earliest highways have been in continuous use through all of the periods. The focal period for historical significance of most highways is the period in which they were constructed and first used. In that initial period, the highway met the need for which it was built, and in that period the highway probably had its most definable effects on the economy and culture of the highway's service area. Use of the initial construction period as the beginning point of a highway's period of significance also establishes a basis for identifying change and assessing integrity of the physical characteristics of the highway. For highways that are significant primarily for their engineering and construction features, the period of significance may appropriately end with the completion of the highway or a particular segment of the highway.

The ending point of a period of significance is more problematic for most highways, because most highways continue to be vital to the transportation, commerce, and general culture of their service areas. The period of significance is the time in which the highway performed the special function or role that distinguishes it from other highways. The initial construction of a highway will correspond to one of the four principal historic periods listed above, but the period of significance for a particular highway may be only a few short years or may span more than one of the principal historic periods, depending on the particular historical context of that highway. For example, State Highway 141 550 in western Colorado began as a community funded road in 1921, was improved as an automobile highway from the 1920s to mid-1950s, and served a vital role during World War II as a supply and haul road for uranium processing for the Manhattan Project. State Highway 141 continues to serve as a vital transportation route in that part of Colorado, but its role after the mid-1950s was similar to that of most highways in the state. The period of significance for State Highway 141 as an automobile highway therefore extends from 1921 to the mid-1950s. It is worth noting that this route also has significance in historic contexts other than automobile highways.

10.4 Other Considerations in Evaluation of Historic Highways

There has been a nationwide campaign to preserve historic highways over the past decade. This

movement first gathered national attention in 1995, when the National Trust for Historic Preservation placed the Bronx River Parkway – the first modern motor parkway – on its list of “America’s Eleven Most Endangered Historic Places.” The subsequent struggle to maintain the historic integrity of the Bronx River Parkway (constructed 1907-1924) inspired other local preservationists to fight to maintain the integrity of the Lincoln Highway in Nebraska, the Arroyo Seco Parkway in California, and the Merritt Parkway in Connecticut.

The National Task Force for Historic Roads (NTFHR) was formed in the mid-1990s as an ad hoc organization seeking the participation of anyone interested in historic roads. The NTFHR is part of the Rural Heritage Program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in Washington, D.C. The NTFHR’s mission is to maintain the integrity, design, purpose, and use of historic highways in ways appropriate and responsive to modern safety needs. The primary purpose of the NTFHR is to promote the recognition of historic roads. To better identify the historical use of the nation’s roads, the NTFHR established three classifications of historic roads: aesthetic routes, engineered routes, and cultural routes:

Aesthetic routes are roads designed for a specific interaction with the natural or built environment. Colorado boasts a number of highways where views and natural detail were central to their design. Some aesthetic routes include US 550 from the Colorado-New Mexico line to Ouray, State Highway 141 from Whitewater to Dove Creek, and the auto highway up Pike’s Peak (Marriott, 1998: 11-14)

Engineered routes are roads designed for a specific transportation goal. The movement of drivers and their vehicles is the principal underlying force behind the design of an engineered route. Engineered routes, like aesthetic routes, have a documented origin or authorization and construction date. In Colorado, Interstates 25, 70 and 76 and US Highway 160 meet these criteria (Marriott, 1998: 222).

Cultural routes are legacies handed down from the first people to venture through a mountain pass or who trekked over the prairie. Cultural routes represent routes adapted over time by that evolved through necessity or tradition. Some examples of roads used by the first indigenous

peoples to Colorado to the present day include US 24 and US 40. State Highway 13 in the northwest portion of the state is a latter-day example. It began as a route built by the military to protect settlers and remains the primary north-south thoroughfare in that corner of Colorado (Marriott, 1998: 221).

In Colorado, the national and local movements for recognition and preservation of historic highways have resulted in nomination of five of Colorado's historical roads to the National Register of Historic Places. These nominations reflect both the importance of highways in the rise of the state's tourism industry and the legacy owed to the designers and builders of routes like the Trail Ridge Road and the Denver Mountain Parks system. The five Colorado highways that have been entered in the National Register by the spring of 2002 are listed below.

TRAIL RIDGE ROAD

Larimer County

Listed: November 14, 1984

Period of Significance: c. 1926-1941

- Built by S.A. Wallace, Roger Toll, et al.
- Engineering feat, the highest continuous highway in the United States
- Spectacular scenery
- 37.9 miles through Rocky Mountain National Park

RIM ROCK DRIVE HISTORIC DISTRICT

Mesa County

- Rim Rock Road Historic District includes the road, three tunnels, and numerous associated roadway features which were a part of the road design including scenic overlooks, guard walls, retaining walls, culverts, ditchers, drop inlets, and drainage tunnels.
- One of the major purposes of the road was to allow travelers' scenic vistas and views of the magnificent geological formation of the monument

DENVER PARK AND PARKWAY SYSTEM THEMATIC RESOURCE

Colorado

Listed: September 17, 1986

Period of significance: 1907-1914

12 road-related listings are included in the Denver Park and Parkway System TR:

- East Seventeenth Avenue Parkway
- Richtofen Place Parkway
- West Forty-sixth Avenue Parkway
- Monaco Street Parkway
- South Marion Street Parkway
- Williams Street Parkway
- Clermont Street Parkway
- Downing Street Parkway
- East Fourth Street Parkway
- East Seventh Street Parkway
- Forest Street Parkway
- East Sixth Street Parkway

DENVER MOUNTAIN PARKS MULTIPLE PROPERTIES SURVEY

Colorado

Listed: November 15, 1990

Period of significance: 1912-1941

Two road-related listings are in the Denver Mountain Parks MPS:

- Bear Creek Canyon Scenic Mountain Drive (listed November 15, 1990)
- Lariat Trail Scenic Mountain Drive (listed September 26, 1990)

CORLEY MOUNTAIN HIGHWAY (AKA GOLD CAMP ROAD)

Colorado Springs and Goldfield

Listed: March 25, 1999

Period of significance: 1900-1939

- Originally cleared for the Colorado Springs & Cripple Creek District Railway; the 31.8-mile

Gold Camp Road is one of the few intact mountain highways from the early days of high country auto tourism (listed March 25, 1999)

(Source: Marriott, Saving Historic Roads, 1998: 182-3; United States Department of the Interior, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: 1998).