

Critical Issues in Strategic Planning for the Colorado Scenic and Historic Byways Commission

The following document lays out in simple terms the choices before the Colorado Scenic and Historic Byways Commission. In even simpler terms, here are the choices it describes:

Leadership

- 1 – Which of the five scenarios for reconfiguration of its leadership/structure should the Commission pursue?
- 2 – What refinements and details does the Commission wish to add to the chosen scenario?

Assuming Scenario #5 is not what the Commission wishes to pursue, then we have these questions:

Protocols

- 3 – Can we adopt the Ohio protocol?
- 4 – Whether yea or nay to #3, how should the Ohio protocol be refined?

Funding

- 5 – What should the strategic plan call for in the way of commitments from each member agency, and what should be the timing/process pursued by the Commission? (money, staff time, policy changes; much of this might be stopgap/"phase 1" prior to pursuit of state funding, if #6 is decided that way)
- 6 – Should the Commission pursue state funding?
- 7 – If yea to #6, what refinements and details does the Commission wish to add?

Companion documents to "Critical Issues" are the following:

- (A) Table for CO Byways Program Strategic Plan – "The Matrix" (Illustrating the Cross-disciplinary Nature of Byways and the Need for Collaboration among Agencies, 10/2/15)
- (B) Ohio's Scenic Byway Program Guidance Summary (referred to here as the "Ohio protocol")
- (C) Notes Toward a Fully Realized Set of Goals, Strategies, and Actions (a lightly altered version of the sketch presented to the Commission on September 2 for a three-phase implementation plan)

Critical Issues in Strategic Planning for the Colorado Scenic and Historic Byways Commission

The loss of dedicated federal funding for Colorado's scenic byways and state coordinating program represents a major shift in the way that this program has operated. For this strategic plan, we are taking this major shift as a "given." (Even though byway leaders nationwide are working tirelessly to address the need for more and dedicated resources and policy shifts to ameliorate the pressures caused by the reduction and change in funding, an effort supported by the Colorado byways program.)

This shift necessitates considering anew how to coordinate the program at the state level and support byway initiatives at the local level.

As we have considered the challenges represented by this shift, we have identified the following two critical issues:

- **A home for the program in this new phase must be determined.** CDOT has long been the natural location because of the flow of federal dollars, a portion of which supported the program. That is no longer the case. In recent years, CDOT has allocated planning funds to run the program, with FHWA's concurrence. No one state agency provides the ideal "home" for the byways program. Many states, like Colorado and CDOT, house their program in the state department of transportation. Others are found in tourism or parks and recreation departments.
- **A new strategy is needed to invigorate the program over the long term** so that it can fulfill its great promise to communities and the state as a whole. Colorado's program, like most across the nation, has historically been a grant program and not a strategic development program to encourage local byway organizations in their growth, sustainability, collaboration, and achievement. Without the energy provided by competition for federal grants, the program is already threatened with lost momentum in these early years of this new phase despite great effort on CDOT's part in continued coordination. In this new era, the program as a whole needs clear leadership, state protocols for continuation of local participation, and funding for both state and local operations.

The answer to both of these issues may well lie with the agencies represented on the Commission. Currently, their role individually and collectively has been to advise CDOT in awarding grants. They have provided advice and coordination in support of the program to much good effect. **Establishing an even more creative, more formal collaboration among these agencies** would probably provide the support CDOT seeks in making the transition to this new era of significantly reduced federal funding.

The Commission's structure is already recognized nationwide as one of the most effective ways to address a major challenge in fulfilling the long-term promise of byways. That is, byways link multiple communities, multiple special sites, and multiple agencies' programs in ways that provide greater synergy among all efforts, but this means that **the byways program and the state's 26 byways do not fit readily into one neat category.**

Scenarios for a Permanent Home for the Colorado Byways Program:

- 1) **Maintain the status quo**, with CDOT housing the program (including the Commission) and in the lead. In this strategic planning process, CDOT has let it be known that CDOT's exclusive leadership of the byways program cannot continue in the same way as in the past two-plus decades. While the byways program might be said to support the topic of one goal of the agency's strategic plan, economic vitality, a close inspection of the wording of the goal itself suggests that community economic development is not

contemplated by that goal.¹ Possibly CDOT's position could change if some level of dedicated funding were to be created to compensate CDOT for operation of this program (outside its regular state-federal budget), preferably with grant funding.

- 2) **Retain CDOT as home to the program, but define a collaborative leadership system among agencies** participating in the Commission (and perhaps others over time as appropriate, perhaps also including appropriate statewide nonprofit institutions). *How this collaboration should be structured over time is in need of discussion if it is, as we believe it is, to be the preferred option and detailed to a greater degree in the strategic plan.* Already, early in the strategic planning process, the Commission defined a new, more dynamic problem-solving role for its members, which should be fleshed out further for the final strategic plan and/or in practice. Options include agencies' contributions of funding and staff to the byways program, as well as that mentioned with Option 1, of creating special funding.
- 3) **Move the program to another agency.** During the second strategic planning session, the Commission identified OEDIT and the Governor's Office as most likely homes, although neither choice was discussed at length. It is likely that the discussion to refine Option 2 would contribute to this thinking, for even by moving the program, a challenge that would remain is that other agencies will always need to participate to ensure that the program takes maximum advantage of the others' missions, and vice versa. Some level of funding would have to be created to compensate the chosen agency for operation of this program, preferably with grant funding.
- 4) **Create an extra-governmental organization.** The strategic planning process has touched on this in terms of addressing one element of the critical issue of the need to reinvigorate the program for the long term, the idea of creating a "friends" group to raise funds (especially since the Commission is not allowed to accept donations in its own right). In this option, we go further in removing the program from state agencies' oversight (their involvement could perhaps be retained in some voluntary fashion through participation in the board of directors) and creating an organization (an authority, foundation, or 501(c)(3) nonprofit) that would maintain a statewide presence through staffing and grants. Designation of new byways (if any) and de-designation would still be the ultimate responsibility of the Transportation Commission, although this new organization could provide at least a portion of the staffing and process for these decisions under a memorandum of agreement. Utah is currently considering a nonprofit organization as its preferred option, with multiple state agencies promising contributions of funds. (A public draft of their strategic plan, more than a year in the making with many meetings throughout the state, will be available shortly.)
- 5) **"Declare victory" – wind the program down to the bare minimum by devising a largely self-executing program maintenance strategy with supervision by CDOT.** CDOT would continue to maintain directional signage, publish a byways map and/or mark byways on the primary state map, and keep up the website (or OEDIT could be prevailed upon to do this), all according to protocols set by the Commission. The Commission would also establish standards for maintaining local recognition. The

¹ That goal states, "Improve the competitiveness of the state economy through strategic transportation investments." Objectives address freight and economic growth ("support strategies and operational improvements that facilitate multi-modal freight movement and promote state, regional, and local economic goals") and job access ("ensure transportation system provides access to jobs within reasonable commute times"). CDOT's three other goals are: SAFETY (Move Colorado toward zero deaths by reducing traffic-related deaths and serious injuries); MOBILITY (Improve mobility and connectivity with a focus on operations and transportation choice); and MAINTAINING THE SYSTEM (Preserve and maintain the existing transportation system – which means maintaining assets like bridges and culverts, annual maintenance including snow and ice removal, and rural transit).

Commission would either disband or continue its advisory role to CDOT in de-listing byways that fail to live up to the standards. If it disbands, the Transportation Commission could assume the role of de-listing. No further byways would be added to the system and no additional state support would be sought under this option. Local byways could create an organization of their own to provide mutual support.

Recommended Steps for Invigorating the Colorado Byways Program:

“The program as a whole needs clear leadership, state protocols for continuation of local participation, and funding for both state and local operations.” (from the description of this critical issue, page one of this document)

- 1) **Clear leadership** is addressed in the prior section. However, as mentioned in Option 5, local byways could also be encouraged to create an organization of their own to provide mutual support and a formal voice for the process of invigoration.
- 2) **State protocols:** Ohio offers a one-page summary of protocols that admirably illustrates many of the points made during the Commission’s strategic planning. It will be provided separately to Commissioners.
- 3) **Funding:** It is clear that some level of statewide, competitive, dedicated funding would motivate local byways. *What amount that should be and what source it should have could be delineated in terms of ranges and possibilities; the Commission needs to think about this and provide guidance for the final strategic plan, if it agrees to provide a recommendation for more funding.* It is assumed that the precise dimensions and timing of seeking a funding source will need time to unfold after publication of the strategic plan. The plan should therefore lay out a “groundwork phase” for implementation prior to initiating a campaign for additional funding. (Phases can be delineated in the final strategic plan as suggested in the documentation provided for the second strategic planning retreat.)

Two first steps are possible before state funding is sought or achieved: (1) grant-making agencies participating in the Commission could offer “points” or other advantages to local byways seeking funds directly from those agencies; and (2) CDOT can revamp the TAP guidelines, which we understand is a process already underway. Along with that second step, CDOT could establish a training program for the byways to seek TAP funding, and also establish guidance for each of its districts that they are expected to award at least one grant to a byway in each round (this may be overstepping, but it gets across the idea and perhaps CDOT can suggest the best policy approach). Neither will be sufficient for the significant grantmaking envisioned here, but both could most certainly make a difference.

Moreover, in the new era upon us, we have an opportunity to re-think how and why we provide funds to local byways. Byways that meet or exceed certain standards could be offered grants for operations – the toughest money to raise there is. Standards for grants for marketing could be revised to conform to the state’s marketing initiatives. Grants could be dedicated to maintenance of existing, highly leveraged facility investments that should not be allowed to fall by the wayside simply because they are “not new.” Grants could be designed to encourage greater interpretation (including through the arts and events), also some of the most difficult money to find. Grants could be awarded in preference to projects that are undertaken by multiple byways. And so on. *This, too, requires some brainstorming by the Commission to make sure that the complete range of needs and possibilities is addressed in the strategic plan.* The possibilities are endless; if possible, the Commission needs to offer ideas with greatest potential impact in the strategic plan. This will help in building the case for the campaign to establish the funding and help others imagine what kinds of projects and needs the new funds would address.



Ohio's Scenic Byway

Program Guidance Summary

Ohio's Scenic Byway Program Guidance was approved by the Scenic Byway Advisory Committee on May 17, 2012. The guidance was designed to provide the criteria necessary to establish byways that promote, preserve and enhance the significant intrinsic resources of the State of Ohio. The Ohio Department of Transportation strives to maintain a quality byway program that reflects the importance of enhancing the byway's visitor experience.

How does this program guidance affect the existing byways? The existing byways will be expected to maintain a sustainable byway by completing the following:

- Maintaining a byway committee
- Maintaining a member/stakeholder list
- Maintaining a regular meeting schedule
- Review action plan – so it is clear that goals are achieved
- Public workshops and other community events
- Participation in ODOT's meetings, trainings, and conference calls
- Completion of Annual Surveys
- Completion of Corridor Management Plan Updates
- Participation in Byway trainings, workshops and webinars.

As of March 2013, byways will be required to complete annual online survey. The annual survey will be used as a tool to track the accomplishments of the program goals and the byway goals. Importantly, this survey assures that the reasons for the corridor designation are still relevant and that progress is being made towards preservation of the corridor.

All byways with a CMP older than five years will be required to update current CMP. Byways will have until June 2015 to complete update.

Any byways not completing requirements as directed will be subject to review for de-designation by ODOT. De-designation may occur with the following instances.

- The intrinsic values originally identified along the corridor have been degraded
- The minimum criteria for designation are no longer applicable
- The byway committee deteriorates and/or there is no cohesive group of citizens or local government to implement the CMP
- The land uses along the corridor change the overall character of the byway
- The committee fails to complete annual reporting and/or 5 year CMP update
- Other reasons as may be deemed appropriate by ODOT or the SBAC

The Scenic Byway Program Guidance will be reviewed as needed by the Scenic Byway Advisory Committee and ODOT.

Questions for Reviewers

- 1) Is the name of the agency correct?
- 2) Is the description of the agency’s mission in terms of the CO Byways Program correct?
- 3) Is the list of Benefits of the CO Byways Program complete and accurately named?
- 4) Is the agency’s ability to each benefit correctly identified?

**DRAFT Table for CO Byways Program Strategic Plan – “The Matrix”
Illustrating the Cross-disciplinary Nature of Byways and the Need for Collaboration among Agencies (10/2/15)**

State Agency ¹	How the CO Byways Program Supports the Agency’s Mission	How the Agency Can Contribute to the CO Byways Program															
		Arts	Bicycling	Community Economic Development	Community Planning	Education	Environmental Quality (Roadway Area)	Grant-making to Local Byways	Historic Preservation	Interpretation	Land Conservation	Marketing	Safety	Trails & Access	Visitor Facilities	Wayfinding & Information	Wildlife habitat
CDOT (Dept of Transportation)	Supports CDOT’s strategic plan’s economic goal; showcases and protects CDOT’s most attractive two-lane roads; provides a mechanism for community input into safety and wayfinding and other road planning along CO’s most popular touring routes; enables CO residents to visitors to have an enjoyable and safe driving experience on less-traveled roads		x		x	x	x	x					x	x	x	x	
Governor’s Bicycling Initiative [ck name]	Provides ready-made community groups ripe for planning greater access for bicycling, along Colorado’s most popular touring routes and to mountain-biking trailheads		x			x						x	x	x		x	
OEDIT - CO Creative Industries (previously State Council of the Arts)	Links communities that have Creative Districts; provides a mechanism for community involvement in the arts; supports the arts when used for community interpretation and placemaking/enhancement	x		x	x	x		x		x		x					
OEDIT – CO Office of Outdoor Industry [ck name]	Provides part of the magnificent landscape experience that drives the outdoor industry in Colorado – scenic byways are the premier means of accessing ski areas, rivers, and trailheads to Colorado trails and backcountry			x								x					

¹ Represented on the Commission

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OEDIT - CO Office of Tourism	“Touring” is the second most popular tourism activity in Colorado; scenic byways are the premier means of accessing Colorado’s recreational opportunities and link small communities where many tourist dollars are generated; local byways organizations create events and undertake promotion to build Colorado’s tourism economy and seek to protect the scenic qualities touring routes and to build local businesses and unique local experiences (the most basic elements of the visitor experience related to touring)						x				x			x	x	
CO Dept of Natural Resources (incl CO Parks and Wildlife - CPW)	Provides a mechanism for community involvement in state park management; Provides part of the magnificent landscape experience that is part of accessing Colorado’s public lands; scenic byways link many Colorado state parks and state-maintained trails			?	x	x	?		x	x	x		x	x	x	x
DOLA (Dept of Local Affairs; incl CO Main Street)	Links communities that have Main Streets; provides a mechanism for community involvement in local economic development	x	x	x			?	x								
GOCO (Great Outdoors CO)	Provides a mechanism for community involvement in local land conservation; provides a major way of focusing land conservation dollars in Colorado’s most visible landscapes		x	x			x		x				?	?	?	x
History Colorado	Provides a mechanism for community involvement in historic preservation; provides a mechanism for telling stories related to preserved properties and Colorado’s history in general			?	?	x		x	x		x					

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Federal Agency	For all four agencies below, the CO Byways Program provides ready-made community groups that serve as mechanisms for community involvement in the management of federal public lands, particularly in enhancing the visitor experience with amenities and facilities on public lands and in nearby communities; scenic byways provide (and protect) the magnificent landscape experience that is part of accessing Colorado’s public lands; scenic byways link many Federal public lands and federally maintained trails and other recreation areas																
BLM (Bureau of Land Management)	See above				X				X	X			X	X	X	X	
NPS (National Park Service)	See above				X				X	X			X	X	X	X	
USFS (US Forest Service)	See above				X				X	X			X	X	X	X	
USFWS (US Fish & Wildlife Service)	See above				X				X	X			X	X	X	X	

V. Goals & Strategies for the Colorado Byways Strategic Plan

A. The Byways System

GOAL: Maintain a state byways system that is second to none.

- Advocate for and achieve public recognition and support for an excellent system, well-maintained and understood by travelers to be a lifetime experience and by residents as an opportunity for community economic development through heritage tourism, historic preservation, and land conservation.
- Develop and protect a well-recognized “Colorado Byways” brand.
- Protect and extend existing public investment in Colorado’s scenic and historic byways through varied public, private, state, and federal sources and, as appropriate, local matches.
- Advocate for Colorado’s continued investment in byways to protect intrinsic qualities:
 - ✓ Capital projects (safety, overlooks, visitor comfort, recreational access, directional signage)
 - ✓ Historic preservation
 - ✓ Viewshed protection (land conservation; design/development planning/guidelines)
 - ✓ Interpretation & celebration relating to byways’ intrinsic qualities (kiosks/outdoor interpretive signs; apps; events)

✦ (Supports Executive Director Shailen Bhatt’s Best DOT motto.)

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B. Commission Sustainability (operations and funding)

GOAL: Build the Commission’s capacity to support the state system and local byways through a multi-agency partnership.

- Grow the commitment of all state agencies represented on the Commission to collaborate in meeting the needs of the statewide system, including their dedication of staffing, grant funding, and policy/problem-solving decisions in support of byways.
- Provide a continuing forum for state and federal agencies to collaborate on fund-raising and problem-solving.

C. Byways’ Sustainability (operations and funding)

GOAL: Ensure that each local byway is a fully functioning part of an excellent statewide system

- Support local byways in ways that help them to ensure their sustainability, civic engagement, and capacity to undertake projects that implement their corridor management plans and address the needs of byways’ intrinsic qualities.
- Establish greater accountability for byways in planning their work, tracking their progress, and measuring benefits and results.
- Establish rigorous standards for local byways to remain in the system. If new byways seek to be added, set a rigorous standard for business planning.
- Explore greater regional collaboration on marketing and administration. (Brand USA)

D. Community-based Economic Development & Livability

GOAL: Make the Colorado Byways system a recognized state asset for economic development.

- Recognize community-based economic vitality and livability as a guiding principle for setting priorities and gauging results in all other goals.
- Stimulate local byway development of enhanced visitor experiences and local quality of life, so that local byways have the capacity to:
 - Engage local businesses in building successful local byways.
 - Periodically measure key indicators for community-based economic vitality and livability.
 - Bike the Byways. Healthy Highways. Tagwhat

LENORE – I SUGGEST A MODEST REFINEMENT OF THIS DOCUMENT TO REFLECT THE CHOICES LAID OUT IN THE “CRITICAL ISSUES” DOCUMENT

Notes Toward a Fully Realized Set of Goals, Strategies, and Actions

Phase 1 (year one): “Byways for Colorado’s 21st Century”

Conditions: little grant funding, little funding for program support (and threat of loss of existing CDOT support), strong Commission (could be stronger), uneven local byway leadership, highly popular tourism resource for critical state industry.

Approach: *Status quo* but re-position, re-message, re-energize in order to overcome current limitations by Phase 3; play to strengths besides funding – latent knowledge/experience to be shared, strength in collaboration/sharing; build case for byways’ effectiveness and impact; explore options for Phase 3; explore and emphasize other agencies’ responsibilities.

Questions/Options/Ideas: just as CDOT has been able to justify the wayfinding assessments (5 per year), could CDOT devote some of its planning budget to a project to undertake rapid-fire, “innovation” updates to corridor management plans; seek non-CDOT funding for a grant to support local byways’ business (sustainability) planning at the same time.

As another idea or perhaps in some kind of combination, per Jeff Sudmeier, CDOT is considering how to plan for Main Street/state highway interface at the local level – could we create a couple of pilot/demo programs where the byway is added to that mix, so that CDOT and the community are doing a “Byway Community Area Action Plan” that accounts for byway needs along with the needs of the community’s Main Street program and state highway route?

Ideas for Goals/Strategies/Actions

1. Engaged state agencies and state partners (MOU between Commission and individual agencies/organizations, tailored to each agency’s role? Clarify what each does well, where it will lead, and how it can undertake specific initiatives/activities/policies for the byways program, including funding from each agency.)
2. Engaged legislature (charm campaign)
3. Engaged governor’s office (charm campaign)
4. Engaged local byways and community partners
5. Address funding issue
 - ✓ Re-configure existing funding sources (e.g., work to refine CDOT TAP program)
 - ✓ Teach local byways about CDOT and other grants (e.g., GOCO planning grants)
 - ✓ Explore potential funding sources (preparatory to applying for funds for implementation in Phase 2 (would have to contract with a nonprofit partner to obtain grants; e.g., for the nonprofit business planning idea, seek a foundation grant to contract with the Colorado Resource Center?))

6. Brand development: Study the Byways Brand – with OEDIT, begin market studies and marketing plan
7. Build commitment to “Byways for the 21st Century”
 - ✓ Internal messaging (state leaders, byway stakeholders, residents) – “Go Colorado, Grow Colorado” (? or something like this); anticipate findings from economic impact study; how do byways support existing state plans and initiatives, how do they contribute economically, how do they help Colorado innovate?
 - ✓ Bring byways together for training, forums (they have much to share)
 - ✓ Build local byways’ partnerships: Encourage byways to form collaborations for marketing, admin, other initiatives
 - ✓ Set standards for byway administration and accountability for progress
 - ✓ Clearinghouse/best practices
 - ✓ Establish curatorial standards for an excellent system (see the “Ohio protocol” accompanying the “critical issues”/choices piece)
 - ✓ “Access Colorado’s Great Outdoors” (?) (what is CO doing for trail planning and how does it interface with byways’ provision of linkages and trailheads?)

Phase 2 (years two-three): “Innovation Byways”

Approach: leverage existing staff, seek grants to build up funding and momentum, move local byways into high gear toward recognition and further achievement; establish game-changing, momentum-building projects at local and state levels.

Ideas for Goals/Strategies/Actions

1. Compile detailed results - go beyond the economic impact study to build an even deeper case for public support
2. “Innovation Byways” – get a grant
 - Youth involvement/leadership
 - Smart needs assessment (includes assessment of progress on CMPs)
 - Two-year action list (include business planning)
3. Project planning – be shovel-ready (could be preparing for a bond issue?)
4. Brand development: Address limitations uncovered by market studies/planning

Phase 3: “Investment Byways”

Approach: Phases 1 and 2 have laid groundwork: under the Commission’s leadership and advocacy, together all stakeholders will have created stronger collaborations, identified needs, and built momentum and constituencies. Now is the time to close the deal and gain large and permanent funding sources to sustain system excellence and brand development.

Option 1: Public funding

Option 2: Private funding – Friends of Colorado Byways? (or just consortium of local byways with local byways taking charge of admin)

Option 3: Combination of public/private funding

Ideas for goals/strategies/actions:

Fully execute the strategy to be developed by the Commission on October 21 in response to the “Critical Issues” paper, refined in the strategic plan, and detailed over the preceding two-three years as the Commission builds experience, ideas, and groundwork for a fully developed campaign.

One possibility would be a bond issue based on the intensive needs assessment and specific project planning at the local level. Consider partners in such a bond issue (libraries would be a good example). Spread across the state broadly enough and well-argued with a strong case, you’ll have a shot. This would be grant funding – go after administrative funding in some other way.

Instead of using general funds to repay the bonds, they could be paid back with a small share of statewide lodging tax (go after a larger increase and promise the rest to the businesses for marketing; be sure to devote a portion of this increase to provide matching funds for BrandUSA initiatives to seek international visitors).

Find administrative funding separate from these initiatives.