



**KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH**

AGENDA ITEM *L.2.C*  
*Lands*

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DALE BAGLEY  
MAYOR

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Pete Sprague, Assembly President  
Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly Members

THRU: *DLB* Dale L. Bagley, Borough Mayor

FROM: *P.O.* Paul Ostrander, Acting Planning Director

DATE: May 11, 2004

SUBJECT: Resolution 2004-051: Supporting the Designation of the Sterling Highway as a State Scenic Byway Between Skilak Road and Anchor Point by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

Nancy Casey, Casey Planning and Design, described the proposed designation of the Sterling Highway as a scenic byway to the Planning Commission during their regularly scheduled meeting of May 10, 2004.

The commission approved a motion to recommend providing a letter of support for the project by unanimous consent.

Draft, unapproved minutes for the subject portion May 10 meeting and a brochure of the proposed project are attached.

AGENDA ITEM D. PUBLIC COMMENT/PRESENTATIONS/COMMISSIONERS

1. Nancy Casey, Casey Planning and Design, Sterling Highway Scenic Byway

Ms. Casey thanked the commission for the opportunity to discuss the Sterling Highway State and National Scenic Byway Project. This project was sponsored by a grant secured by the City of Homer on behalf of the communities and organizations along the Sterling Highway. The consultant team's members are from Juneau and Colorado and have worked with byways for more than 10 years. The consultants worked on the Seward Highway National Byway Project as well as the Alaska's Marine Highway Project.

Ms. Casey wished to clarify the term *scenic*. When the program first began, Congress chose the word *scenic*, but over the years the program has evolved to recognize highways that have recreational, historical, cultural, natural, or archeological qualities. The terms *national byways* or *America's byways* are gradually replacing the term *scenic*.

Byway programs are about recognition or what is intrinsic about the entire corridor. Regulation is not involved with this kind of project. The only regulatory prerequisite is the billboard law, which Alaska already has. Once a highway is in the byway program, it becomes part of the national/international marketing program. Marketing includes maps, tour guides, magazines, etc. Many people plan their trips using the byway mapping system. Byway programs are significantly involved with economic development, e.g., tourism. Byway programs benefit tourists as well as those who live and have businesses along these corridors.

Federal grants with an 80/20 match are available. About \$25 million per year is allocated to byway programs. There is no federal oversight. All planning, design, decision making, and priorities are done at the local level. Communities can choose not to participate at this level. The free marketing and promotional opportunities are still available to the communities along the byway.

Each byway needs to have a local group to organize the various activities, make decisions, and obtain the grants. A corridor partnership plan is part of the process that Ms. Casey was hired to do. When paperwork is submitted to the National Byway Program, she will provide a partnership plan that analyzes the corridor and determines the areas in need, areas of opportunities, areas of constraints, etc.

The plan contains priorities based on what the byway group identifies. Membership of the byway group consists of local volunteers. This group helps organize and make decisions in conjunction with the corridor project. Volunteers can be residents or business owners. This is a means for the community to relate their story whether it involves history or recreation. For example, interpretive signs can be posted to help tell the story of the Sterling Highway. Grant funding could be obtained for interpretative signs describing the volcanoes along Cook Inlet, construction of fishing platforms, bank rehabilitation, restrooms, visitors center, rest stops, or trailheads.

The project's schedule requires first completing the State Scenic Byway Project. Two sections of the Sterling Highway (Anchor Point to Homer and Skilak Lake Road to the Seward Highway) are already designated as state scenic byways. Ms. Casey believed the remainder of the Sterling Highway was eligible for state scenic byway status, especially in terms of recreational opportunities.

The state nomination package will be submitted to the Commissioner Barton, State Department of Transportation (DOT), in June. The next step will be to proceed with the national nomination package, which involves the partnership program, community support letters, and a byway group. Recreation, such as the world-class salmon fishery, halibut, steelhead, and clamming, will be the primary focus of the package. Other recreational opportunities to be highlighted will be access to hiking, kayaking, bird watching, biking, canoeing, and winter sports. One of the byway consultants was very impressed with the recreational opportunities available along the Sterling Highway.

Ms. Casey encouraged the Planning Commission and members of the public to submit letters of support to the DOT commissioner. Brochures explaining the program, and a sign up sheet was on the table for those who wanted to be added to the mailing list. She encouraged anyone who would like to volunteer to help the program to sign the sheet. Ms. Casey offered to answer questions.

Commissioner Troeger asked Ms. Casey if she had spoken with the assembly. Ms. Casey replied yes. Commissioner Troeger noted that such items typically would be forwarded from the assembly to the commission

seeking recommendations. Ms. Casey explained the order of meeting with various groups depended on the meeting schedules of the groups and what dates the consultants were available. She heard the Assembly was going to prepare a letter of support. Anchor Point Advisory Planning Commission met last week. She understood the advisory commission was going to write a letter to the planning director. She planned to meet with the Cooper Landing Advisory Planning Commission next week.

Vice Chairman Clark thanked Ms. Casey for her presentation. In 2001 some Homer City Council members suggested the scenic byway program was needed so some control over the junk along the highway could be exerted. He inquired about the regulations associated with the scenic byway program. Ms. Casey had not heard of such controls.

Vice Chairman Clark commented that this designation was perceived as a means of exerting some control over the unincorporated areas of the borough. Ms. Casey commented that adding land use regulation to the highway corridor would have to go through the usual process required for such regulations.

Commissioner Hohl asked if the scenic byway designation went through city limits. Ms. Casey replied yes.

Commissioner Hohl inquired about the effectiveness of the partnership group once the designation is obtained. Ms. Casey replied it was as effective as the group desired. She understood the Seward group was mostly inactive at this time. The highway is still a byway and is still receiving the promotional opportunities.

Commissioner Isham said he attended one of the meetings. He was told there were "no strings" attached to the grant money or designation. He learned the moratorium on billboards stopped at city limits so it did not affect billboards already in place within the city limits.

Commissioner Hohl asked how far off the right-of-way the grant funds could be used. Ms. Casey understood the corridor partnership plan could include offshoots from the highway, such as the loop from Kenai Spur Highway/Bridge Access/Kalifornsky Beach Road or Skilak Lake Road. If these roads are discussed within the plan as secondary offshoots, she thought this would help justify projects within these areas. It would probably be easier to get grant funding along the main corridor, but it was not unheard of for tertiary areas to be included.

Commissioner Troeger inquired about the time line for a response from the borough. He understood Ms. Casey needed a letter soon. Ms. Casey wanted to get the submittal to the state commissioner the first part of June.

Commissioner Hohl inquired about the recommendation for how often the partnership plans were updated. Ms. Casey did not know.

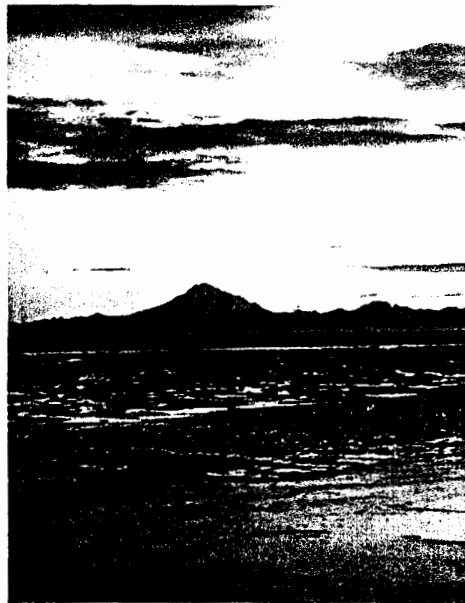
**MOTION:** Commissioner Isham moved, seconded by Commissioner Hohl, the planning commission recommend to the assembly a resolution in the form of a support letter naming the Sterling Highway a scenic byway.

Commissioner Troeger suggested the commission mention the short time frame so the submittal can be provided to the state in a timely manner. Chairman Bryson asked if a letter from the assembly had already been prepared and would be forwarded to the commission for comments. Mr. Ostrander did not think a letter had been written yet; however, it would need to be prepared soon since the next assembly meeting was May 18.

**VOTE:** The motion passed by unanimous consent.

BRYSON YES	CLARK YES	FOSTER YES	GROSS YES	HOHL YES	HUTCHINSON ABSENT	ISHAM YES
JOHNSON YES	MARTIN YES	MASSION YES	PETERSEN YES	TAURIAINEN ABSENT	TROEGER YES	11 YES 2 ABSENT

# Celebrating the Sterling Highway and its Communities



## Nominating the Sterling Highway as a State and National Scenic Byway

### Celebrating the Kenai Peninsula

The Kenai Peninsula is well known for its world class fishing, outstanding natural beauty, rich cultural history, and friendly residents. The Sterling Highway and the communities along this corridor are a vital part of a great story about Alaska and America. One way to tell the story of the Sterling and its communities is through the Scenic Byway program.

A grassroots effort led by the City of Homer and numerous community and local organizations along the Sterling is exploring the potential for nominating the entire highway as a State Scenic Byway. Currently, only a portion of the Sterling Highway is designated as a State Scenic Byway including the 38-mile stretch from the Wye to Skilak Road and the 23-mile stretch from Anchor Point to Land's End in Homer. The middle portion of the highway is not currently state designated but is certainly worthy. If successful, the entire Sterling (State Highway 1) would be designated as a State Scenic Byway in the summer of 2004. Once a State Byway, the grassroots effort will explore whether there is support for further recognition and obtaining the highest designation, National Scenic Byway in the summer of 2005.

The Sterling Highway would then complete America's first National Scenic Byway loop linking the Seward All American Road to Alaska's Marine Highway National Scenic Byway and create a unique marketing and travel opportunity for the Kenai Peninsula.

### What is a State Scenic Byway?

A state scenic byway is a *non-regulatory* designation given to Alaska's most beautiful and culturally or historically important roadways in order to encourage more tourism-related economic development along the road (i.e., more travelers and more business investment) and to encourage local communities to think about how to manage the qualities of those roadways in a non-regulatory manner (e.g., How do we protect our historic structures? How do we make more people aware of our cultural heritage?)

Research has repeatedly shown that driving scenic and culturally important roads is a favorite traveler activity. Byways tend to be written about in travel guides, are shown on highway and AAA maps, and are promoted by the State in its tourism marketing.

Today there are eleven state scenic byways in Alaska. In fact the northern and southern ends of the Sterling are already state scenic byways. Therefore our first objective is to attain state designation for the central portion by summer of 2004.

Occasionally residents are concerned with the phrase 'Scenic Byway'. The program is based on recognition of outstanding places, rather than management. It is not the intent of the program to place development restrictions on those who live or do business along the byway.

### What is a National Scenic Byway?

Once a highway obtains state designation, those that live along the highway may nominate the corridor as a National Scenic Byway. A National Scenic Byway is part of a select group of approximately 100 roads in the United States that offer significant experiences related to their history, scenery, culture, natural resources or recreational opportunities. The Federal Highway Administration created the national program in 1991 with an act of Congress. This was a first of its kind program in that there were ***no strings and no regulations associated with byway designation*** aside from a prohibition on new billboards...and this is already a state law here in Alaska.

### “It is about recognition...not regulation”

The National Scenic Byways program – or America's Byways, as it is increasingly being called – is designed to find and designate America's most beautiful and interesting roadways. Once designated, the byway becomes eligible for Federal grant funding to help local people provide interpretation and capital improvements along the corridor and to provide national and international marketing of this roadway system. For more information on the America's Byways program, go to [www.byways.org](http://www.byways.org)

The neighboring Seward Highway is already a national scenic byway – and has achieved the highest designation of an All American Road. There are only 19 All American Roads in the entire country. Other Alaskan National Byways are the Alaska's Marine Highway and the Glenn Highway.

### Why Consider Byway Designation?

Scenic Byway designation has many benefits:

- State, and even more so, National designation puts you in a league with the best of the best of the highways in our nation. This will bring more economic opportunities to the Sterling and will bring more travelers to the Kenai.
- State and National designation allows the Sterling to obtain funding for marketing, interpretation, visitors centers and other activities. In Fiscal Year 2003, \$26 million was granted for 209 different byway projects around the country. Nationally designated byways get a higher priority.
- Once the Sterling is nationally designated, it is included in national and international travel marketing by the America's Byway program. This program also promotes individual byways where possible.
- Finally, a byway is a great way to get the communities along that road to cooperate not only on byway-related projects, but on other issues as well. While some may see increased visitors to the Sterling as a benefit, others may not; this cooperation can help obtain a balance. Once the commonality and cooperation is established, it spreads to other regional challenges and opportunities.



### What does this mean for the Sterling Highway?

As a first step, we will be exploring the level of support for State byway designation for the middle portion of the Sterling Highway. Once obtained, we will determine the level of support for nominating the entire highway for National designation. As part of the byway work, we will be conducting a series of public information meetings starting in April 2004 to inform you about the program and answer your questions. We will be putting byway experts on the radio, sponsoring our newspapers to look at the issue, speaking before your elected officials and holding informal meetings, public workshops and conversations along the Sterling during 2004.

### We invite you to participate!

Stay tuned for notices on meetings and presentations. Please contact us at:

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