



Zion Regional Collaborative

Summary

In 1990, the Utah State Legislature designated SR-9 between I-15 and Mt. Carmel a State Scenic Byway. About two decades later, a group of coordinated stakeholders, the Zion Canyon Corridor Council (ZC3), decided to pursue the federal equivalent of this designation: National Scenic Byway status. However, almost immediately following the ZC3's decision, the NSB program was defunded and deprioritized at the federal level. Earlier this fall, the President signed into law a bill revitalizing the program. The Zion Regional Collaborative, successor to the ZC3, will once again pursue this designation if local stakeholders support the effort.

Background

The National Scenic Byways Program (NSBP) was established in 1991 under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act. The Department of Transportation (DOT) recognizes roads throughout the US who possess one or more "intrinsic qualities." The qualities recognized are those which are archeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational, or scenic. Since its inception, the NSBP has designated over 150 roads across the country.

The intention of National Scenic Byway (NSB) designation is, "to help recognize, preserve and enhance selected roads throughout the United States." The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) administers the program. The primary role of the administrator has been to provide financial assistance to NSB's through the use of FHWA grants (intended to assist with interpretive planning, promotional efforts, etc). The administrator also facilitates national and international marketing efforts. However, since 2012, the NSB Program has been largely dormant. The newest NSB's were designated in 2009, about a decade ago.

Recently, federal legislators expressed an interest in rekindling the program. In September, the President signed the "Reviving America's Scenic Byways Act" into law. This law requires the Department of Transportation to request nominations and designate new byways within the year.

Timeline of Prior Efforts and Actions

1990: The Utah State Legislature designates State Route 9 (SR-9) between I-15 and US-89 as a State Scenic Byway.

2008: A group of local stakeholders meets to discuss the possibility of seeking NSB recognition. This group eventually becomes the Zion Canyon Corridor Council (the “ZC3”). The ZC3 narrows the scope of the NSB to a section of SR-9 between the intersection with Rt. 17 in La Verkin and the East Entrance to Zion National Park. This new, potential NSB is referred to as Zion Scenic Byway to differentiate it from the entirety of the State Scenic Byway.

2011: The ZC3 finishes development of a Corridor Management Plan for Zion Scenic Byway. The CMP is adopted by resolution of all communities along the Byway’s path, the County, and the Utah State Legislature.

2015: The ZC3 uses leftover grant funds from the CMP project to develop an Interpretive Plan. The Interpretive Plan “provides a vision for visitor experiences along the byway and defines the goals, objectives, primary theme, subthemes, and messages.”

2015/2016: A new organization, the Zion Regional Collaborative, forms in response to a desire for improved communication and increased collaboration amongst regional stakeholders. This group assumes all Zion Park Scenic Byway Committee duties from the discontinued ZC3.

Present: The ZRC manages all byway efforts through a designated subcommittee. The Zion Regional Collaborative is the current proponent of this nomination for National Scenic Byway designation.

Potential Benefits to National Scenic Byway Designation

Added Funding Resources: Historically, both the FHWA and State governments have provided grants exclusively available to National Scenic Byways. In 2012, the last year discretionary grant funding was available to National Scenic Byways through the FHWA, available funds topped \$20,000,000. As of 2012, Utah’s own Scenic Byway 12 (between Torrey and Panguitch) had received \$1.3 million in grant funds for project development and implementation on the byway. That includes funding every year between 2006 and 2012. Unlike many grants that require equal matching, the Federal grants for NSB’s have typically included an 80% Federal share. While the bill passed in September did not include a stipulation for grant funding, Scenic Byway contacts emphasize that this funding may still reappear in the future.

Increased Visitation and Visitor Spending: Multiple studies have illustrated increased visitation and associated visitor spending on scenic byways. In 2014, Zions Bank completed a study on the economic impact of National Scenic Byway Route 12 in Utah (between Panguitch and Torrey) on its surrounding communities. Zions Bank estimated the annual economic impact of the Byway at over \$12,000,000. They based this figure on an analysis of

daily visitor expenditures and a survey of the importance of the Scenic Byway as a factor in visitation. 47.2% of visitors who completed a survey distributed by Zions Bank ranked the byway designation of Route 12 as “Extremely Important” (5 out of 5) in their decision to drive the route.

Support for Marketing: In the past, the National Scenic Byways Program has independently marketed the byways to national and international travelers. The NSBP uses its own internal marketing resources to conduct this outreach, adding visibility to byways with no added cost to the byway communities themselves. The Program also possesses many marketing resources not readily available to individual communities, including increased capacity for language translations, access to partnerships, and name recognition. Generally, the NSBP provides expert assistance to local byway communities subsequent to designation.

Sense of Pride for Byway Communities: While difficult to quantify, the NSB Program also emphasizes the importance of community pride in a designation. National recognition confirms to communities the significance of their surroundings. It also provides a platform for collaboration and cooperation as communities come together to develop their byway.

Potential Concerns around National Scenic Byway Designation

Land Use Restrictions: The enacting legislation for National Scenic Byways prevents the erection of any outdoor advertising (billboards) adjacent to the route, with the intention of preserving viewsheds. While this added restriction is relevant to byways in other regions, in Utah, the law is redundant. Utah State Scenic Byway designation mandates the same outdoor advertising restrictions as federal designation. Thus, these outdoor advertising restrictions have already been in place on the Zion Scenic Byway for almost three decades. Other than this pre-existing restriction, there are no further federal land use laws associated with NSB designation. Local control still supersedes federal management, which is outlined clearly in the byway’s Corridor Management Plan.

Increased Traffic through Municipalities: National Scenic Byway designation typically increases visitation in the region around the Byway. A 2014 study by Zions Bank focused on the economic impacts of Route 12 between Torrey and Panguitch found a 25% increase in visitation on the Byway between 2001 and 2012. This translates into an average of 60,000 additional annual visits between 2001 and 2012. That being said, it’s important to note that visitation at all “Mighty Five” National Parks (two of which are located along Route 12) increased during this same time period. Increased traffic could have potentially adverse effects on local communities.