

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: February 7, 2007

SUBJECT: San Luis Obispo North Coast Scenic Byway Update

SUMMARY

SLOCOG staff is bringing two items relating to the SLO North Coast Scenic Byway Program for board review and comment. The Byway Program relates to activities in the Highway 1 corridor between Highland Drive in San Luis Obispo and the northern county line with Monterey County.

- A. Staff is seeking board authorization to release the Public Review Draft of the SLO North Coast Scenic Byway Corridor Plan (BCP). This BCP update has focused primarily on improving:
- User-friendliness
 - Plan graphics
 - The focus of priorities
 - Comprehensiveness

The Administrative Draft SLO North Coast Scenic Byway Corridor Plan (BCP) has undergone review by the Scenic Byway Advisory Committee (SBAC) and other key stakeholder in the byway corridor. Staff intends to release the plan for a 30-day public review period beginning February 8th. Staff is seeking immediate approval of one recommendation within the plan. The SBAC reached a consensus that a complete signage plan should be completed which would address all signs and signage policies within the corridor. The plan would address:

- Existing signs to be removed or consolidated.
- Placement of signs being requested by SLOCOG and other jurisdictions including Scenic Byway Logo signs and other tourist-serving signs.
- Policies to avoid clutter and impacts to viewsheds.

- B. A draft SLO North Coast Scenic Byway Logo has been prepared and has undergone review by the SBAC and other key stakeholders in the byway corridor. Staff is seeking tentative board approval of the design and authorization to begin the process for formal Caltrans approval of the design for placement within State right-of-way. It is hoped that this design, or a very similar version, will receive Caltrans approval so it can be placed in within Caltrans right-of-way to serve as the National scenic designation equivalent to the "Poppy" signs that are used to illustrate State Scenic Highway designation.

RECOMMENDATION

- Staff:**
- A. Direct staff to release Public Review Draft of SLO North Coast Scenic Byway Corridor Plan and schedule for April adoption.
 - B. Initiate a corridor signage plan
 - C. Tentatively approve Draft SLO North Coast Scenic Byway Logo

TTAC/ CTAC: Concur with Staff recommendations

DISCUSSION

The byway corridor has seen significant activity in the past four years, which is one of the reasons that the BCP is being updated. As progress continues to be made toward implementing important byway goals, collaboration of the byway's key stakeholders will be critical. SLOCOG has made every effort to prepare a plan that incorporates the goals of the stakeholders in the corridor and prioritizes programs and projects to achieve them. To do that, staff has assembled recent accomplishments in advancing byway goals, and presented recommendations on what should be the thrust of our efforts in the short to mid term.

As the SLOCOG Byways program has matured since its inception in 2002, staff has desired to refine the way the BCP is structured and used. There have been a number of successes over the past 3 and half years with a large emphasis on preserving the pristine nature of the corridor through the purchase of property and/or development rights. The two most publicized were the purchase of nearly 18 miles of coastline west of Highway 1 and the acquisition of the vast majority of development rights on approximately 81,000 acres of Hearst Ranch. These two acquisitions by the American Land Conservancy and State of California have provided the insurance that the northern reaches of the byway remain in their existing state. Other smaller acquisitions have continued to put into place a very successful mosaic of preservations/viewshed protections.

The acquisitions, primarily the purchase of the Hearst Ranch Property west of Highway 1 and the Piedras Blancas Hotel site have opened up extraordinary opportunities at improving coastal access and the California Coastal Trail. The improvement of the access for non-motorized transportation users has been at the top of the priorities list from a SLOCOG staff perspective, which has been strongly supported by the SBAC.

The Byway Corridor Plan is a required document for highways within the National Scenic Byways Program. Highway 1 between Highland Dr. in San Luis Obispo and the Northern County Line is included in the program as an "All-American Road", the higher of the two-tiered federal program. The SLOCOG Board first approved the BCP in February 2002. Since that time, the plan has been used primarily to define priorities for improvements in the corridor. Projects that have been completed, or partially or fully funded since the adoption of the plan include:

1. Cambria Cross Town Trail (SLOCOG, CCSD)
2. Hearst Ranch Scenic Viewshed Easement/Acquisition (American Land Conservancy, Caltrans)
3. Morro Bay-Cayucos Multi-use Path (NSB, SLOCOG)
4. Morro Bay Harborwalk (SLOCOG, Costal Conservancy)
5. Estero Bluffs Pullouts (Caltrans)
6. Highway 1 (Morro Bay) Highway Aesthetics (Caltrans)
7. Byway Interpretation and Signage (NSB, SLOCOG)
8. Byway Community Gateways (NSB, SLOCOG)
9. Cayucos Viewshed Conservation Easement (NSB, SLOCOG)
10. Piedras Blancas Scenic Viewshed Acquisition (Land Conservancy, NSB)
11. Byway Corridor Plan Implementation (NSB, SLOCOG)

Note: NSB=National Scenic Byways funds, SLOCOG=COG discretionary Sources.

Next Steps

The draft BCP plan will be circulated for public review and scheduled for adoption in April. Project development team meetings will commence to implement the Byway Interpretation and Signage grant as well as the Byway Community Gateways grant. Upon adoption of the byway logo, integration of the design will commence on marketing materials, non profit, local and state agency interpretive facilities (where applicable), and formalized with Caltrans for installation on the state highway (upon adoption of a signage placement plan with Advisory Committee input).

Staff report prepared by Darren Brown