

B. Key Issues

The following key issues have been identified through ongoing discussion by the Byway Council as well as public input received at the April 2013 public visioning session and March 2014 public hearing on Byway designation. These issues shape the goals and strategies identified in Section 5.

Public Appreciation for Historic Resources

A 2013 statewide survey by the UNH Survey Center for New Hampshire's nine regional planning commissions showed strong public interest in historic character. A full 90% of respondents indicated that their communities should be actively involved in protecting historic buildings and neighborhoods, second only to promoting local agriculture. Similarly, access to Cultural and Recreational Sites was identified as among the top five factors important to have in their community, with 82% of respondents identifying this as "important" or "very important". At the same time when it comes to development review, or management of publicly owned historic resources, the perception of participants in the Byway public input event was that historic resources are not as well understood or appreciated as they should be. The Recommendations section proposes a range of actions to improve public awareness of local history, from historic markers to audio tours to incorporating local historical resources into 4th grade New Hampshire history curriculum.

Traffic Safety

The April 2013 public input session identified concerns around excessive speed on byway roads, cut through traffic avoiding segments of I-93 and NH Route 101, and improvements to bicycle and pedestrian safety. Data from NHDOT show traffic volumes from permanent counting stations along the Byway route largely holding steady or in some cases declining in recent years, but this doesn't necessarily contradict the concerns noted above. Specific intersections identified as needing safety improvements include NH 121/NH 111 in Hampstead, Hampstead Four Corners, NH 121/NH 102 in Chester, and NH 102/ NH 28 Bypass in Derry. Portions of the Byway alignment are already designated State Bicycle Routes, including NH 121 from Drew Road in Hampstead north to Lake Massabesic, English Range Road and NH 102 into downtown Derry, and Island Pond/North Shore Road and Drew Road. The Recommendations section contains strategies intended to further increase the safety of all byway users.

Resource Protection

Protecting key buildings, sites and vistas that shape the history and character of the Byway corridor communities is a goal that has been identified throughout the planning process. This was a clear theme at the public visioning session, and a strong interest of members of the Byway Council. This desire to protect historic resources is countered by a sense that there is limited awareness of the value of historic resources by community residents, and inadequate attention paid to their protection as part of development review. At the same time there is a desire to accomplish this as much as possible through private sector volunteer activity rather than through regulatory means.

Strategies discussed have included updating local inventories of historic properties and working to list additional properties on the National Register of Historic Places; communities adopting advisory design guidelines for new construction in historic districts or rehabilitation or adaptive reuse of historic properties; outreach to owners of historic properties regarding their importance to the community; and recognition programs including landmark signs on historic properties and interpretive signage in other locations.

Economic Development

The visioning session and deliberations by the Byway Council have also identified a strong interest in using the Byway and its assets as a tool to strengthen local economies in corridor communities through increased visitation. Scenic Byways have been used effectively by rural communities elsewhere in the country to spur

visitation to a region and encourage longer stays by visitors that do come. The visioning session identified opportunities to use the Byway to market local agriculture as well as historic resources, outdoor recreation centered around the Southern NH Rail Trail and Lake Massabesic, and cultural attractions like Chester's annual town-wide display of scarecrows, which draws significant crowds of visitors around Halloween and fall harvest time. Going forward there is a desire to work with the Greater Derry Chamber of Commerce and the NH Division of Travel and Tourism to promote the Byway and the region.

Funding for Byway Improvements

With the 2012 passage of MAP-21, the current federal transportation funding legislation, there is no longer a stand-alone pool of federal funding for marketing, safety or amenity improvements along designated Scenic Byways. The federal Scenic Byways program was one of four separate funding programs consolidated into the new federal Transportation Alternatives (TA) program, along with Transportation Enhancements, Recreational Trails and Safe Routes to School programs. With this consolidation came an overall funding cut of approximately 30%. In New Hampshire these Transportation Alternatives (TA) program funds amount to approximately \$2.25 million per year statewide, and are very competitive. TA is a reimbursement program providing an up to 80% federal funding share for selected projects. As with all transportation funding in New Hampshire, this funding is highly competitive. In the most recent funding round for the TA program, 34 projects were submitted statewide, requesting over \$7.3 million, as compared to available funding of \$5.5 million. Twelve projects were selected statewide.

Intersection improvement or other safety projects not defined as bicycle or pedestrian projects can also be put forward by Towns for general highway funding through the biennial solicitation of projects for the State Ten Year Transportation Plan and the four-year State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). As with the TA program this is a highly competitive process, and with an even longer timeline, as new projects are typically added to the back end of the state Ten Year Transportation.

Given the downward trend in Federal and State funding, combined with increasing administrative requirements associated with federal funds, communities should give strong consideration to local funding of transportation improvement needs associated with the Byway.

One means of generating local funding is local vehicle registration fees. Beginning on July 1, 1997, in addition to the motor vehicle registration fee collected, the legislative body of a municipality may vote to collect an additional fee for the purpose of supporting a municipal and transportation improvement fund. The additional fee collected can be up to \$5.00. Of the amount collected, up to 10 percent, but not more than \$0.50 of each fee paid, may be retained for administrative costs. The remaining amount will be deposited into the Municipal Transportation Improvement fund to support improvements in the local or regional transportation system including roads, bridges, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, parking and intermodal facilities and public transportation.

Use of the local option fee has several advantages as a local funding source for transportation improvement. First, surveys by Rockingham Planning Commission have found this to be a relatively palatable approach to revenue generation for local transportation needs as compared to gas taxes, as people tend to see it as a nominal cost paired with local control over use of the revenue. The fee is dedicated by statute to transportation use and is stable from year to year and not subject to an annual appropriations process.

C. Road & Traffic Assessment

Safety and Traffic

The primary roads along the byway are NH 121, NH 28 Bypass, and NH 28. These roads are classified as state maintained primary roads. All of these are heavily traveled and are the primary routes from Manchester to points southeast. There are several safety hazards that have been identified in each of the community's Master Plans. The NHDOT has formally adopted the context sensitive solutions process in defining problems and their solutions on the state's transportation system. The following are problem areas that have been identified for each community.

Auburn:

While none of the highest accident locations on the byway are in Auburn, there are still areas of concern. Several locations along NH 28 Bypass, as well as the intersection of NH 121, Hooksett Road, and Raymond Road all experienced a moderate number of accidents from 2002 to 2010. Traffic volumes generally range from 3,000-4,000 AADT on NH 121 to just over 7,000 on NH 28 Bypass just south of the Massabesic traffic circle (2009-11 data)

Chester:

Chester is home to the 10th-most dangerous intersection along the byway, that of NH 102 and NH 121. This intersection experienced 21 accidents between 2002 and 2010, and 9 people were injured. A road safety audit completed in February 2012 found safety issues including:

- Vegetation
- Visibility & location of signs
- Vertical alignment/slope creating line of sight issue
- Turning traffic double stacks and bypasses on all approaches
- Vehicles from NH 121 are not yielding to oncoming NH 102 traffic
- Flashing beacon is not visible/effective

No other intersections in Chester typically experience a high number of accidents. Potential solutions to these and other issues include evaluating sign locations, the effectiveness of the flashing beacon, formalizing turn lanes, and the potential for creating a roundabout or vertically realigning the roadway in the long term. Traffic volumes along NH 121 in Chester are generally in the 3,000-4,000 AADT range.

Derry:

Six of the top 10 accident locations along the byway can be found in Derry. NH 28 and Lawrence Road experienced the greatest number of accidents between 2002 and 2010 (52), but the roundabout at NH 28 Bypass, NH 102, and East Derry Road had almost twice the injuries (35) during the same span. Other high accident locations in Derry include:

- NH 28/Island Pond Road
- NH 102/Tsienneto Road
- NH 28/NH 102
- NH 28 Bypass/English Range Road

Traffic volumes vary greatly in Derry, but it is generally the most well-traveled section of the byway. NH 28 near the Robert Frost Homestead saw an average of 12,000 vehicles a day in 2010. Secondary roads like Island Pond Road see roughly 3,000-4,000 vehicles per day, and English Range Road AADTs are closer to 1,500 vehicles per day (2009).

