

Monticello Crossroads Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan

A. INTRODUCTION

Background and Public Input Process

Jasper County is a scenic and historic gem located in the heartland of middle Georgia. This area of gently rolling hills, sweeping valleys and broad summits provides a cherished quality of life for its residents and a growing economic resource as more and more visitors make the countryside and historic towns their destination.

Growth and land use have long been areas of concern in Jasper County, Georgia. While the progress growth brings is desirable, many citizens realized that the quality of life enjoyed by this community might be compromised if not protected and enhanced. Also, the quality of life and rural character of the region have started to provide economic development through tourism. In 1996, the Monticello City Council contacted the Georgia DOT concerning protection for the scenic highways leading to the historically important city. Subsequently, the Scenic Byway Program was initiated and assisted the local committee and community in preparing the nominations for State Highways 11 and 83. This nomination, along with local zoning and land use plans, will help preserve the scenic and historic nature of these highways and help Jasper County in promoting tourism.

In this same time frame, the community has also been involved in the application process for the Georgia Better Hometown Program and a ten year land use map was being prepared. The committee was able to incorporate the Scenic Byway nomination into the work of both of these committees and received tremendous community involvement and support. Indeed, about 2% of Jasper County's total population has had direct involvement in this project with many more being informed through coverage in the local newspaper and newsletters.

An application for consideration of a Scenic Byway designation was prepared and approved by the three local governments with jurisdiction; Jasper County, the City of Shady Dale and the City of Monticello. A Georgia DOT team visited the proposed byways and, following their recommendations, a revised application was approved by the DOT on October 9, 1998.

The following organizations and interested parties participated in the discussions that led to the application:

Jasper County Board of Commissioners

City of Monticello
City of Shady Dale
Jasper County Scenic Byway Committee
Georgia Scenic Byway Project
Development Authority of Jasper County
Monticello-Jasper County Chamber of Commerce
Monticello Better Hometown Program
Monticello Downtown Development Authority
Monticello Garden Club
Monticello Kiwanis Club
U. S. Forest Service
Georgia Department of Community Affairs
Georgia Department of Industry Trade and Tourism
Jasper County Future Land Use Committee
Jasper County Zoning Office
City of Monticello Zoning Office

In addition, many interested individuals participated in discussions at the three public meetings held to prepare the Corridor Management Plan. The meetings were advertised in the local paper and through Chamber of Commerce flyers. The local paper also ran several articles on the Scenic Byway Program. (See articles in Appendix). As mentioned, the proposal was also extensively discussed in conjunction with the Jasper County Future Land Use Plan Committee and the Scenic Byway route was adopted as part of the Jasper County Land Use Plan and presented to the Jasper County Board of Commissioners in December 1998. A final public meeting was held on January 7, 1999 to present the completed Corridor Management Plan.

Routes

The Monticello Crossroads Scenic Byway consists of two highways, Georgia 11 and Georgia 83 starting at the northern borders of Jasper County, crossing at the City of Monticello Square, and continuing to the southern city limits of Monticello. Highway 83 also goes through the historic town of Shady Dale. The “U” shaped 40 mile route is mostly rural and zoned agricultural. The community has determined its greatest asset is this rural character and plans to exploit its tourism potential.

Vision

The community's vision for the Byway is to preserve the rural character of these roads while opening the tourism potential of this serene area so close to three major Georgia urban areas; Atlanta, Macon and Athens.

A list of vision statements gathered from the public meetings include:

Protect the natural beauty

Maintain rural character

Plan gateways for Monticello

Educate the community to promote the Byway

Provide for buffers along the Byway

Complete the Perimeter Truck Route

Have protection for Byway like historic districts

Form a Byway Commission

Complete a driving brochure

Build a Welcome Center

Have a web of county roads connected to the Byway

B. EXISTING CONDITIONS

Condition of roads

State Highway 11 and State Highway 83 are under the jurisdiction of the Georgia Department of Transportation. Maintenance issues on the road, such as trash pick-up, grass cutting, etc. have been discussed at county meetings. Highway 11 is built on a 60 foot right-of-way that allows tree-shaded tunnels at several locations. Both roads are in good condition.

Zoning

The majority of the non-urban areas adjacent to and surrounding the Scenic Byway are zoned for Agricultural uses. Minimum lot size in this zoning is five acres per house. Much of the land is also in the agricultural conservation program. *Jasper County Zoning Resolution specifically prohibits commercial billboards from all areas designated for residential and/or agricultural uses. Zoning resolutions will be proposed to prohibit commercial billboards anywhere that has scenic byway designation. Since the Monticello Crossroads Scenic Byway does pass through the cities of Shady Dale and Monticello with existing commercial zoning containing important historic qualities, the community does not want to segment out these areas. The community acknowledges that designation of the route as a scenic byway will subject the route to certain federal restrictions on outdoor advertising.*

Land Use

The Monticello Crossroads Scenic Byway has been adopted into Jasper County's Comprehensive Plan. Throughout the many public meetings, residents expressed a desire for assurances that the area remains rural in nature. The lack of infrastructure, notably sewer and water service, will assure that the area will remain one of low density in population. The Cities of Shady Dale and Monticello have listed the Scenic Byway in their land use updates.

The community will work with the Georgia DOT to place scenic byway signs along the route. The community requested that byway signs be placed on Interstate 20 at exits 47 and 50 to direct tourists to the byway.

C. ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE ROADS

Georgia State Highway 11 connects the City of Monticello with Social Circle to the North and Gray to the south. The Monticello Crossroads Scenic Byway on Highway 11 follows a route used by Native Americans, Methodist Circuit Riders, and stagecoaches. The road was paved in the 1930's.

Georgia State Highway 83 connects the City of Monticello with Madison to the north and Forsyth to the south. The road also goes through the historic town of Shady Dale in northern Jasper County. The Monticello Crossroads Scenic Byway on Highway 83 follows a portion of the Seven Island Road first mentioned on maps in 1690. The subsequent stagecoach road through the territory was the result of a treaty signed by George Washington with Indian Tribes East of the Mississippi. Paving on Highway 83 was not completed until the 1950's.

D. INVENTORY OF INTRINSIC QUALITIES

Scenic Qualities

North Jasper County, where both scenic byways originate, is an area of rural beauty with woodlands, pasture lands and historic farmhouses around every curve. Entering Jasper County on Ga. Highway 11 S. the driver is surrounded by rolling grasslands, reminiscent of Ireland, that is part of the 2200 acre Charlie Elliot Wildlife Center. The roadway passes through tree-shaded tunnels, pasture land, tree farms, stately houses, historic churches, pecan groves and abandoned country stores. Highway 83 S. contains scenes of unsurpassed pastoral beauty with high and low lakes nestled in the rolling pasture land framed by forests along the edges. Both roads crest several hills with vistas of the countryside stretching out to the horizon.

Natural Qualities

Jasper County is located in the central part of Georgia and the Piedmont region. The rolling land has low ridges and moderate slopes. All waterways that flow through the county originate in the county which is a pure and valuable resource that must be protected.

Oak and pine forests originally covered most of the county. Small parts of the original forest are still seen around the oldest homesteads and a large tract is in the Murder Creek wetlands area along Highway 83. The diverse natural qualities of the land support a huge number of wildlife including, deer, wild turkey, geese, raccoon, skunk, bobcat, and a large number of predator fowl.

Historic Qualities

Georgia Highways 11 and 83 loosely follow the paths of old Native American, pioneer and Methodist Circuit Rider routes. Indeed, on Highway 11 N. there is a large boulder named Dow's Pulpit for the famous Methodist evangelist that used the rock for a worship platform. Highway 83 crosses and follows the Seven Island Stage Coach Road which connected Augusta to Mobile, New Orleans and the Natchez Trace. Highway 83 also bisects the historic town of Shady Dale and the small community of Machen. Jasper County is currently pursuing National Register listing for the Seven Island Road.

Both Highways eventually climb the "little hill" where Monticello is located and make up half of the four highways that come together at the historic Square. This important central Georgia crossroads is dedicated to the historic preservation of its residential and downtown areas. The City of Monticello was recognized for its beauty and efforts in historic preservation by being listed on the National Register of Historic places in 1997. Four individual structures listed on the register are visible from the Scenic Byway; the Monticello Civic Center, the Jasper County Courthouse, the Monticello Presbyterian Church and the Jordan Bellew House.

The Central Business District enjoys local designation as well as the Forsyth Street District on Highway 83 S and the Eatonton Street Area District on Highway 11 S. (See Appendix for additional information on the county's historic resources.)

Recreational Qualities

Highways 11 and 83 pass through areas of great recreational possibilities including state and federal park and forest land that is open for fishing, hunting and special activities for children and the disabled. Bicycling is a growing sport on these roads and just driving the road is a pleasurable recreational experience. A trailhead-Welcome Center is presently being planned in the City of Monticello Government Building that would serve as a museum, planning and rest stop for the Scenic Byways. This government building/welcome center will be located in the center of downtown Monticello.

CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT ISSUES

The Monticello Crossroads Scenic Byway has been created following the desire of the people in Jasper county to maintain the rural atmosphere and quality of life that may be endangered by unplanned growth and development. Our vision is that public transport and natural, scenic and historic beauty have coexisted on these roads for hundreds of years and can continue to do so with the proper planning and protection.

Rural Appearance

The citizen's committees working on the Monticello Crossroads Scenic Byway have already accomplished one important goal for maintaining the rural nature of the byway by incorporating the route into the Jasper County Future Land Use plan. This designation will also be shown on the City of Shady Dale and the City of Monticello's Future Land Use Plans. The "Land Use Needs Assessment-Policies and Goals" states, "To protect Scenic Byways, development should be designed and properly sited to complement the Scenic Byways. Preserving the rural character of Jasper county is paramount to county residents. While growth is needed and anticipated, it should not be at the expense of the quality of life. Strip commercial development should be avoided. Use of access roads should be encouraged and development should be adequately buffered from the road so not to negatively impact Jasper County's rural character. Commercial development should be clustered." Specific implementation steps are listed in the next section of the CMP.

Tourism and Economic Development

Tourism is the second largest industry in Georgia and is a great part of the future economic development of historic and scenic Jasper County. The City of Monticello is already on the National Register of Historic Places and the Monticello Historic Preservation Commission monitors the local districts in place along the routes. Jasper County is beginning the process of having county historic districts and a Jasper County Historic Commission. This will add to the protection and promotion of historic and tourist sites along the routes including the Charlie Elliot Wildlife Center and Dow's Pulpit.

A Welcome Center and Scenic Byway Trailhead Center has been renovated in the former Benton Supply Building on the Square in Monticello. Conservative estimates are that 200 visitors from out of town per month come inside the Welcome Center for historic information, directions, tourism information and to view the displays. The Welcome Center is presently only open during business hours only on weekdays. Specific implementation steps are listed in the next section of the CMP.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS AND CONCLUSION

Below are the short and long term action steps as proposed at the public meetings :

Short Term actions

Create Scenic Byway Commission to monitor route.

Work with Zoning Administrators to create policy for notification of proposed zoning exceptions.

Finalize Jasper County Scenic Byway System and have tourist brochures and maps available at Chamber of Commerce and Charlie Elliot Wildlife Center.

Encourage use of route by bicycle groups.

Work with Historic Heartland and other state and regional groups to highlight designation.

Work with Jasper County Public Works to monitor trash pick-up and mowing along routes.

Work with local governments to remove two existing ,non-conforming billboards on route.

Long Term Actions

Adopt county-wide historic preservation plan and ordinance.

Develop master plan for landscape, turn-around and trail systems.

Acquire and develop land for Seven Island Road Park at Smith's Mill crossing on the Ocmulgee River.

The citizens of Jasper County have united over the proposed Monticello Crossroads Scenic Byway and have already taken steps to protect this valuable resource. The local of governments have strongly supported the routes through zoning and the Future Land Use Plans. The designation of the route and the yearly DOT review will act as a catalyst to gauge the direction and purpose behind the local covenants.

The Monticello Crossroads Scenic Byway will be a shining example of cooperation on a local, regional and state level working to fulfill the wishes of the people of Jasper County and the State of Georgia through this important project. Hopefully, this will inspire other counties and cities to work together to protect and promote their scenic roads and other areas that add to their community's special quality of life.