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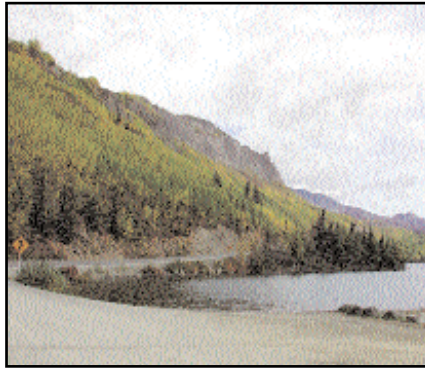
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C ommercial and Scenic Corridor

Figure 6-1, Besides providing a beautiful drive, Alaska's Glenn Highway is a key commercial resource. Upgrades to the road should make this important state resource safer and more enjoyable for all users.



6 Corridor PARTNERSHIP PLAN ESSENTIALS

Each Corridor Partnership Plan(CPP) is as unique as its Byway, yet each CPP must provide an analysis of several key factors to be eligible for designation as a National Scenic Byway or an All-American Road. This chapter and subsequent chapters provide information concerning the required elements not discussed so far in this CPP.

The Glenn Highway is a Commercial Corridor as Well as a Scenic Byway

The Glenn Highway is a key element in Alaska's National Highway System. It provides a direct connection to Anchorage's commercial center from Eagle River and the Mat-Su Borough. It connects Anchorage to Fairbanks and oil fields of the North Slope via the Parks and Dalton Highways. The Glenn connects Anchorage and South-central Alaska to Canada and the Lower 48 States. It provides these services while coursing through some of the most spectacular country in North America.

Though its importance has grown with Alaska's increasing population and resource development activities, the Glenn Highway has lagged behind in highway improvements to accommodate this growth in traffic and commerce. Much of Glenn Highway is a narrow two-lane highway that hugs tightly to canyon walls and along churning riverbanks. Traffic slows in the summer due to caravans of recreational vehicles and bicyclists, and in the winter due to ice, snow, and slow-moving trucks. Often, the driver remembers the white-knuckled driving experience, while the passenger remembers the scenic wonders.

In response to the needs for improved traffic flow, safety, and the elimination of near misses on sharp corners and steep grades covered in black ice-the cause of many "white knuckles"-the State of Alaska has embarked on an aggressive capital improvement program along the narrower stretches of the Glenn Highway between its intersection with the Parks Highway and its end in Glennallen. Specifically, where the highway narrows beyond Palmer, the State is reconstructing and, in places, realigning the highway to reduce grades, provide climbing lanes, widen shoulders, and to avoid areas of continual rock sloughing and avalanches.

Though an accident analysis based on the last three years of complete data (1997, 1998, and 1999) found three above-average accident locations in the corridor, and three areas of

Photo courtesy of Bill Evans





Photo courtesy of LDN

Matanuska Glacier State wayside interpretive signage



Photo courtesy of LDN

A recently upgraded section of the highway near Sutton.

The Glenn Highway will soon have the State's first full-service rest area facility. This is in recognition of the important role the highway plays as a commerce and recreational route.

concern, recent and planned improvements have already greatly improved the worst areas. Residents used to talk about taking your life into your hands when driving through the corridor, and the road would often discourage all but the most dauntless of visitors. The new highway improvements, where they have been completed and where they are proposed, will greatly enhance the driving experience and scenic quality of the highway. When drivers feel safer, they enjoy the drive more, and are more willing to venture a stop at a scenic viewpoint or local business.

The Glenn Highway will soon have the State's first full-service rest area facility. This is in recognition of the important role the highway plays as a commerce and recreational route. Three locations are presently under consideration for the facility; all of them are in the Byway corridor. The area that seems to be the local preference for the facility is at MP 131, approximately 4 miles inside the corridor's eastern boundary. This location is already in an exceptional winter recreation area, and offers good views of the Nelchina Glacier and the surrounding mountains and forest. Regardless of where the facility is built, it will greatly enhance the capacity of the corridor to serve Byway travelers, as lack of adequate restroom facilities along the corridor is a primary concern for the Partnership Board.

DOT&PFs experience with the Seward Highway All-American Road has indicated that highway improvements actually enhance the scenic qualities by opening up views, reducing driver anxiety, and providing more frequent pull-offs and rest areas. Similar improvements along the Glenn Highway have already improved the driving experience. Over the next six years, the remaining segments of the Glenn Highway will be improved to the benefit of commercial operators, residents, and tourists. The safety and drivability of the Glenn Highway will be greatly enhanced, making the Byway experience more enjoyable for all.



Bringing the Glenn Highway Up to Grade....

In 1993 the Federal Highway Administration approved an environmental assessment (EA) for corridor improvements to the Glenn Highway. These improvements began at the Parks Highway Intersection (MP 35) and continue to MP 118 (the boundary of Central Region DOT). Because traffic volumes drop quickly once the road leaves Palmer, a decision was made to deviate as little as possible from the existing alignment, and talk of a bypass four-lane divided access controlled highway facility was dropped in favor of upgrading the existing alignment.

Even though the decision was to follow the existing alignment as much as possible, several reroutes are discussed in the EA. These are typically in areas where there is some trouble with the existing alignment. One such area is by Long Lake. The road as presently aligned is narrow, steep, and cut into a hillside that continuously loses rock, causing rockfall on the highway. The realignment would move the highway to the other side of the lake and eliminate the maintenance problems and safety hazards to motorists created by the falling rocks. As mentioned in the previous section, it is also hoped that the grades along the Glenn Highway will be reduced in several more places.

While these projects are in the development stages, it is important to coordinate the Byway effort into the planning to ensure that opportunities for interpretation and improved views can be incorporated into the roadway design.

As the State moves forward with significant improvements on the Glenn Highway, there is a balance that must be attained between bringing the highway up to national design standards and the impacts that such improvements have on the character of the Byway. In almost all instances, the existing and proposed improvements will make the highway safer for vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians. The views will be enhanced and the white knuckled driving experience will be greatly reduced, except

Under Construction

GLENN HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

Recent road upgrades on the Glenn Highway between Palmer and Sutton have made this stretch of the drive safer and more enjoyable. Additional road improvements and a new full-service rest area are in the development stages.

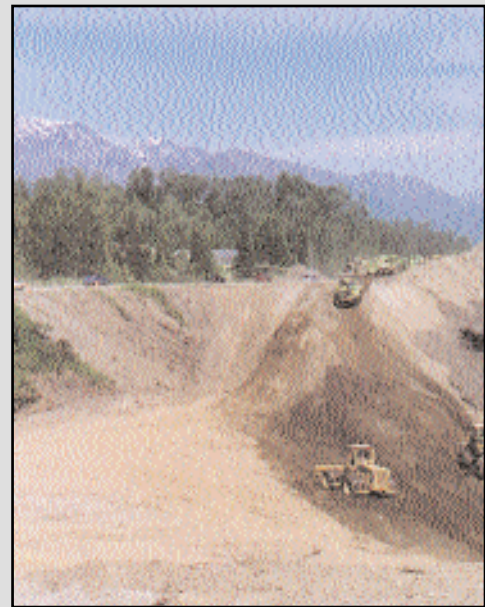


Photo courtesy of ADOT&PF



Photo courtesy of ADOT&PF



Bringing the Glenn Highway up to standard should greatly reduce the areas of known accidents and it should improve the visibility in areas of known vehicle/moose conflicts.



Photo courtesy of LDN

Striking mountain vistas from the Glenn Highway corridor



Photo courtesy of LDN

The Glenn Highway north of Anchorage

for times of extreme winter weather, but even then, the road will be much safer than before. The improvements will also provide opportunities for scenic alternates in the cases of where the old highway is still maintained to provide local access. In some places, the old highway will be closed. Bringing the Glenn Highway up to standard should greatly reduce the areas of known accidents and it should improve the visibility in areas of known vehicle/moose conflicts.

Perhaps the greatest potential impact of the highway improvements will be to businesses that are located where the highway may be realigned. Potentially, two existing roadhouses will be impacted. The State has pledged to be sensitive to these impacts and ensure that every allowable measure is taken help mitigate these impacts. The Scenic Byway program could help mitigate these impacts through the development of brochures and signage directing drivers to scenic alternates where these roadhouses are located. The brochures could go into detail to the history of these and other roadhouses along the Byway and what accommodations they have. The two roadhouses in question are known for their hospitality, activities, great food, and desserts. They will need to be marketed as destinations that are easy and convenient to get to from the main highway if they are, in fact, impacted by highway realignments. The changes to the highway must become opportunities—not liabilities—for those who live and work along the corridor.

Balancing Visitor Experiences with Intrusions to Residents

The land ownership along the Glenn Highway is different than along the Seward Highway All-American Road insofar that there is much more private property along the Glenn Highway. The private property is owned either by individuals or Native organizations. Both individual property owners and the Native organizations have expressed support for the designation of the Glenn as a National Scenic Byway or All-American Road, but they have also expressed concerns about what such a



designation may mean to their ability to develop their property or whether it may increase trespass. The Corridor Partnership Plan, the Partnership Board, and the State must be sensitive to these concerns.

The Chickaloon Native Village is embracing a "leave no trace" ethic when making long-term decisions about their land use, as well as for persons visiting or traveling in their land. They seem agreeable to people viewing the grandeur of their property but are not interested in opening their property up to uses that impact the sanctity or the resources of their land. Individual property owners take great pride in the beauty of the area, but they live in this remote part of Alaska to get away from the complexities of urban living, government control, and the pressures of people. Many stated that they fear that this designation was a backdoor attempt to introduce zoning to their area. Yet, at the same time, they recognize that the beauty of the corridor should be enjoyed by those who drive it and that there is benefit in telling the many stories and history of the Glenn Highway.

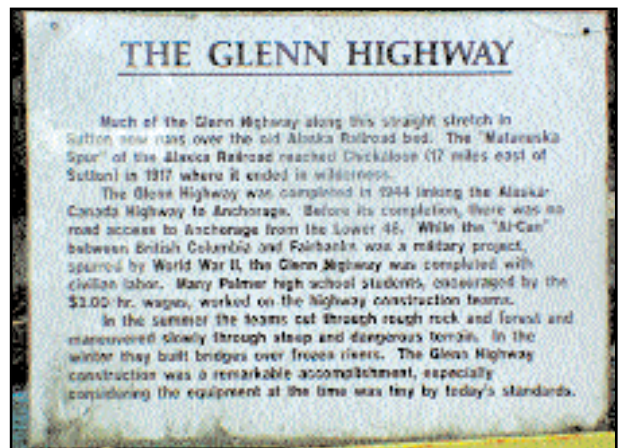
The designation process has been described to them as "recognition not regulation." The designation will provide opportunities to mitigate some of the impacts that are already occurring along the Byway because people traversing the corridor are not informed of the location of private or public property. The State pledges to be sensitive, for example, in locating pullouts and waysides to ensure that they access public property and public trails and not encourage trespass. Waysides should be located in places where their services do not compete with services provided by the private sector.

Specifically, the visitors' experience can be enhanced through information and education by providing good signage, traveler's guides, historical information, and maps showing public and private areas. These tools will also benefit the residents by clearly delineating where recreation activities are appropriate, where they are not, and what services are available, where they are available, and at what



Thunderbird Falls

Photo courtesy of LDN



A historic Glenn Highway marker

Photo courtesy of LDN

The visitors' experience can be enhanced through information and education by providing good signage, traveler's guides, historical information, and maps showing public and private areas. These tools will also benefit the residents by clearly delineating where recreation activities are appropriate, and what services are available, and at what time of year.



time of year. Ongoing communication among the property owners (many are Byway partners), the Partnership Board, the Mat-Su Borough, and the State is critical to the ongoing success of the Glenn Highway Byway program.

Recognition not Regulation

The Last Frontier is known for many things, including being the home of the rugged individualist. Unlike many locations in the Lower 48, where local government regulations abound, there are few land use regulations that affect the corridor outside the municipal boundaries of Anchorage and Palmer. The people of the State of Alaska are very progressive with respect to outdoor advertising. Alaskans have outlawed billboards by means of voter initiative not once but several times. Every time the legislature tries to modify the outdoor advertising laws, the voters turn back the changes through an initiative. The last initiative passed with over 70% voter support.

The success of preserving the corridor will be the responsibility of the people and property owners along the corridor. However, the true key to the success of preserving the corridor's values is the bottom-up approach that has been taken in organizing the Partnership Board and in developing the corridor Partnership Plan. The Partnership Board, in cooperation with the State and other local governments, is striving to involve and engage as many corridor communities and residents as possible in the process. This is an effort to educate the stakeholders along the corridor as to the benefits of the designation. No education is needed about why the Glenn Highway Corridor is special. Although the population is relatively sparse along the corridor, its residents have great ownership of the scenic and historic values of the corridor and the Glenn Highway.

The development that has occurred along the corridor blends well with the nature of the land. This exemplifies the care and concern that the residents have in developing their land. The Partnership Board

needs to understand this existing care and love for the land, and build on it by respecting residents concerns and helping to reduce existing and prevent future conflicts along the corridor. This process may truly be an example of where less regulation will provide the most benefits to the corridor.

**Enhancing the Byway Experience—
Scenic Loops and Other Attractions**

Over the years, the alignment of the Glenn Highway has been improved and segments of the old highway still exist. While not formally being included in the designation for the Byway, these loops should be noted for the traveler to give them the opportunity to see portions of the old road, as well as attractions that exist off the immediate Byway. One such route is the Old Glenn Highway through Eagle River, Chugiak, and Peter's Creek. Once outside Eagle River, this route is a winding, two-lane road that has beautiful scenery with local gardens and wildflowers. Local glass and antique shops are well worth the stop for local hospitality and a glimpse of an older way of life. Further on is the trailhead for a hike to beautiful Thunderbird Falls. The stretch of the Old Glenn Highway north of Eklutna is an 18-mile loop into Palmer along the base of Pioneer Peak that has beautiful views of Knik River. The Reindeer Farm petting zoo for domesticated caribou, elk, moose, and Sitka deer provides wonderful photo opportunities in a safe environment.

Although not scenic loops, there are a few other important attractions along the corridor that should be signed for visitor information. These include the Eagle River Nature Center, the Iditarod Dog Mushing Museum, and recreational gold panning at Hatcher's Pass.

National and International Marketing Plans

The core of the marketing strategy for the Glenn Byway will be interpretive and travel publications. The National Scenic Byway Program requires that adequate material is available for marketing the Byway and for visitors. National Byways will be marketed both nationally and internationally by

Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway Corridor Partnership Plan



Byway organizations, but the following speaks to some other marketing opportunities the Glenn Highway plans to make use of in its efforts to attract more visitors.

Anchorage, Chugiak and Eagle River, Palmer, and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough each have a Chamber of Commerce, Convention and Visitor Bureaus and/or visitor centers. The resources of these local organizations will be used to ensure the Byway is promoted and publicized locally and on the world-wide web. The Partnership Board is still deliberating about the possibility of the Byway having its own website. This may occur in tandem with the Seward Byway to promote and advertise Alaska's All American Roads. In addition, the Automobile Association of America has long been an important source of promotion for America's premiere driving roads. It is the intention of the Byway to take full advantage of their built-in marketing and promotions resources.

Once designated, many travel and tour companies seek out Byway information and resources for their own promotion efforts. To that end, development of marketing materials (interpretive pamphlets, brochures, and other marketing materials) is of primary importance once the Byway is designated. The Partnership Board and DOT intend to make full use of reputable travel and touring companies for their marketing efforts both in the United States and abroad.

There is an existing care and love for the land. The Partnership Board can build on this by respecting concerns and helping to reduce present conflicts as well as preventing future conflicts along the corridor. This process may truly be an example of where less regulation will provide the most benefits to the corridor.



Photo courtesy of LDN

Just off the Glenn Highway, a road leading down to the Matanuska Glacier Park

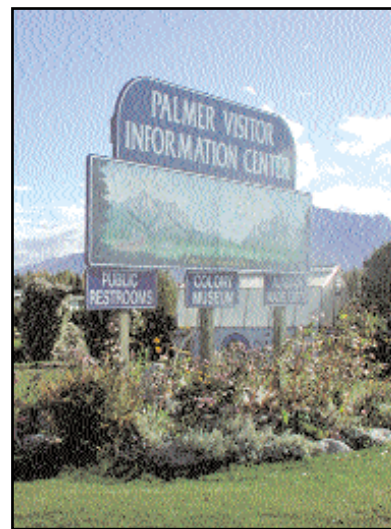
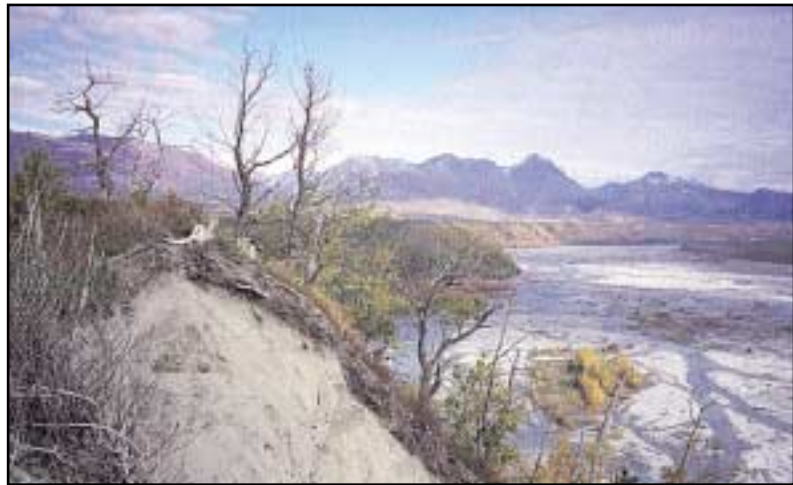


Photo courtesy of LDN

The Palmer Visitor Center





The Mighty Matanuska River

Figure 6-1. Erosion, flooding and topography along the mighty Matanuska River can challenge drivers and also Alaska's DOT as it works to improve traffic flow and safety on the Glenn Highway.

Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway Corridor Partnership Plan

