

# National Scenic Byways Overview

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## Background

The National Scenic Byway Program elevates routes of regional and national significance, whose scenic value is determined through a series of features and federally defined intrinsic qualities. The program is administered by the Federal Highway Administration, and is a grass-roots collaborative effort established to help recognize, preserve and enhance selected roads throughout the United States. The NSBP was first established under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 and was continued and strengthened under subsequent transportation bills passed by the U.S. Congress.

The Reviving America's Scenic Byways Act of 2019 required the Secretary of Transportation to solicit nominations for designation of National Scenic Byways and All-American Roads, collectively known as America's Byways®. Routes designated as America's Byways are roads that merit recognition at the national level for one or more outstanding scenic, historical, recreational, cultural, natural, and archaeological intrinsic qualities. The America's Byways collection currently includes 150 distinct routes across the country, and 10 here in Tennessee.



## Which Routes Are Eligible?

Designated National Scenic Byways, All American Roads, and routes actively working towards a national designation are all underpinned by either a state-level Scenic Highway or Tennessee Parkway designation. Each route must have a byway organizations, who are often non-profits or local governments, and are responsible for creating and updating professional planning documents and that form the basis for managing and interpreting the byway

corridor. Such planning documents include Corridor Management Plans (CMPs), interpretive plans, environmental plans, way-showing and wayfinding guides, and design and landscaping guidelines.

### **How is a Route Designated as a National Scenic Byway?**

Tennessee does not designate National Scenic Byways. Scenic Byway designations occur at the federal level, and at the discretion of the Federal Highway Administration. This usually occurs after the passing of legislation from Congress calling for applications for new the designation of new routes.

The formation of a Scenic Byway organization is a planning-focused process that can have significant benefits for a community. When considering becoming a byway, it's important to pursue the designation for reasons that support community goals, needs, and the desire for economic development. Often, a community will choose to pursue byway status because they intend to preserve their rural character or historic features. A community could also leverage byway designation for economic development, increasing revenues from tourism and maintaining lower property taxes. A summary of the byway organization process is outlined below:

**State Designation:** Receive either a Scenic Highway or Tennessee Parkway designation from the State of Tennessee. This designation is the first step in preserving intrinsic qualities of a byway and is a requirement of all routes admitted into the America's Byways Program.

**Managing Organization:** Local stakeholders should assemble a scenic committee or a non-profit to serve as a Byway Organization. This organization can be affiliated with a local government or regional planning entity and should be capable of meeting regularly and acting on behalf of the byway. This Byway Organization should also be representative of the various interests along a byway route and able to raise funds in support of byway projects because most byway grants require a local match.

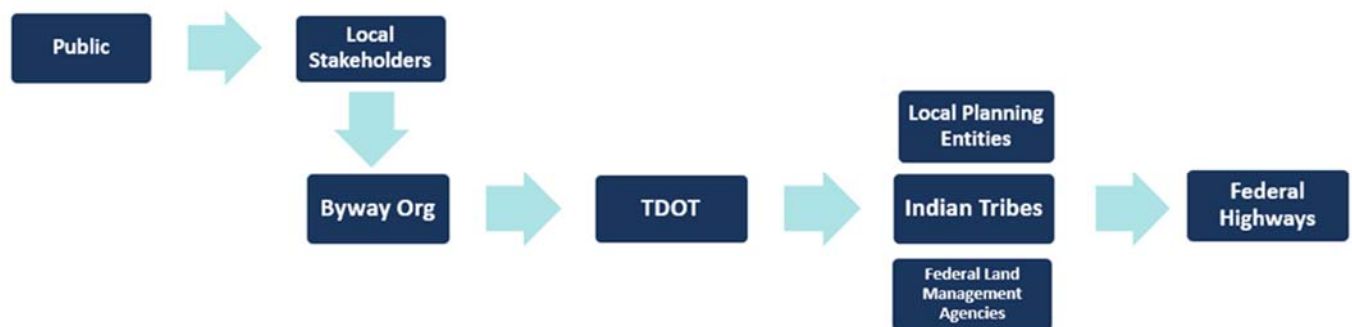
**Planning Document:** The Byway Organization will need to establish an initial list of byway priorities, maintenance activities and potential projects. The organization should work towards completing a Corridor Management Plan that both engages the public and encompasses formatting required by the America's Byways Program. TDOT should be a contributing resource in the development of a byway's Corridor Management Plan.

As the route's Corridor Management Plan is being developed, the Byway Organization should engage any local planning entities, Indian tribes, and Federal land management agencies for input on the intrinsic qualities and potential

projects. These entities will need to support local byway efforts and endorse future Federal designations.

**Ready for Designation:** Once a scenic byway organization is formed and a CMP has local entity support, the organization is eligible to apply for a national designation from the U.S. Secretary of Transportation. Federal designations come as either a National Scenic Byway or an All-American Road, and more information about both designations are found in the next Chapter.

While more information on National Scenic Byway designations can be found in the Tennessee Scenic Handbook, the process generally follows the flow chart below.



### What are the Benefits to National Scenic Byway Designation?

National Scenic Byways receive the following benefits, which are outlined in more detail depth in the Tennessee Scenic Handbook:

**Federal Grant Funding:** National Scenic Byways receive greater access to federal grant funding, when it is made available by the Federal Highway Administration and appropriated by Congress.

**Expanded Marketing:** Routes will receive international marketing, under the America's Byways marketing campaign, and be included in efforts involving BrandUSA.

**State Support:** Tennessee's collection of Scenic Byways receive robust technical and other support through connections to TDOT's Highway Beautification Office. This support includes: funding for "Love TN Byways" beautification projects, partnerships like "Market TN Byways" to build public messaging capacity for byways, annual membership to the National Scenic Byway Foundation and access to training sessions, collection-wide marketing, interpretive support through the publishing of guides, and more.

## Where Can I Learn More About National Scenic Byway Routes in Tennessee?

On the Official Tennessee Transportation Map, National Scenic Byways are highlighted in dark green. Information about routes adopted into the America's Byways system, can be found by visiting the Tennessee Scenic Byways website, <https://tnscenicbyways.com/>, or the Federal Highway Administration's Scenic Byways website, [https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/hep/scenic\\_byways/](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/hep/scenic_byways/). Below is a statewide map of routes included as part of the America's Byways program in Tennessee.

