

The Connecticut River Byway

A Community Guide

THE BYWAY is over 500 miles of state roads bordering the Connecticut River in both Vermont and New Hampshire. The Byway links the two states, focusing on the authentic New England experience - historic villages, mountain views, working farms, home grown crops and crafts, and outdoor pastimes like fishing, boating, wildlife observation, and hiking.

Byway routes in Vermont are Rte. 102 (Canaan–Lunenburg), Rte. 2 (Lunenburg–St. Johnsbury), I-93 (St. Johnsbury–Littleton), Rte. 18 (Waterford–Littleton), Rte. 5 (St. Johnsbury–Brattleboro), Rte. 142 (Vernon). Byway routes in New Hampshire are Rte. 3 (Pittsburg–Lancaster), Rte. 145 (Clarksville–Colebrook), Rte. 135 (Lancaster–Woodsville), Rte. 302 (Bath), Rte. 10 (Woodsville–Lebanon), Rte. 12A (Lebanon–Charlestown), Rte. 12 (Charlestown–Westmoreland), Rte. 63 (Westmoreland–Hinsdale).

What led to calling roads along the Connecticut River a “byway?”

Both New Hampshire and Vermont have scenic byway programs, and in 1997 both states encouraged the seven regional planning commissions in the Connecticut River Valley to study whether state roads near the river met the criteria for a scenic byway. The regional planning commissions evaluated the roads, and met with officials and the public in every town. The Connecticut River Joint Commissions (CRJC) convened bi-state regional workshops in the north country, upper valley, and southern valley to discuss the pros and cons of byway designation.

What did local people say?

- ◆ People wanted *local control*.
- ◆ The idea of *welcome centers* offering visitor services was popular.
- ◆ Towns would need *grant money* to build welcome centers.
- ◆ Welcome centers should be staffed with *trained volunteers*.
- ◆ The byway should have its own recognizable *logo*.
- ◆ The Byway needed an *organization to provide coordination* and network broadly among towns, chambers of commerce, conservation, historic preservation, and outdoor recreation groups, and encourage state agencies in Montpelier and Concord to cooperate across the river the way valley residents do.
- ◆ *The Byway should be marketed to diverse audiences:* tourists seeking both long and short visits... residents and their visitors... realtors and prospective residents... travel agents and tour operators... educators and students... people who boat, fish, snowmobile, ski and hike... history buffs and railroad enthusiasts...

What is the Connecticut River Byway?

Byway Background



CONNECTICUT
RIVER
BYWAY

- ◆ Many thought the Byway would *help valley residents better appreciate* places they may have taken for granted.
- ◆ People described *local economic benefits* from visitors who would bring outside dollars in to the region.
- ◆ Almost everyone said that inviting visitors to our scenic valley would require that we *also work to preserve* our villages, farms, forests, and shorelines, the assets at the core of the valley's appeal.

◆ *Based on superb scenic qualities and widespread public support, the states of Vermont and New Hampshire officially adopted the Connecticut River Byway roads into their state scenic byway systems in 1998.* ◆

Participants

Who's involved in the Connecticut River Byway?

- ◆ In 2000, people interested in developing the byway concept's potential began meeting and established a Connecticut River Byway Council that is open to all.
- ◆ The founders designed a Steering Committee with balanced representation from natural resource, recreation, cultural resource, and agricultural interests, business organizations, municipalities, regional planning agencies, state agencies, and business interests, including chambers of commerce. The Vermont Agency of Transportation, New Hampshire Office of Energy and Planning, and the Connecticut River Joint Commissions also participate on the Steering Committee.
- ◆ CRJC provides staff support for the Byway Council.

◆ *The mission of the Byway Council is to balance the promotion, preservation, enjoyment and stewardship of the Connecticut River Valley.* ◆

Accomplishments

What's been done so far?

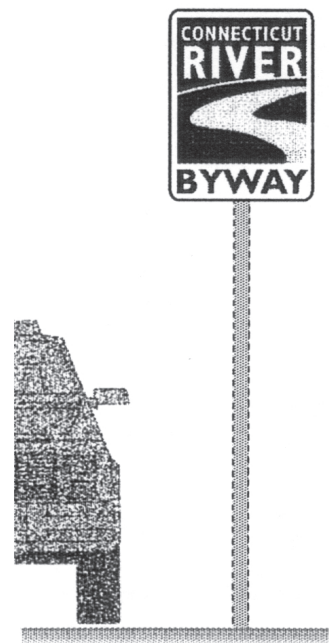
In its first four years, the Byway Council has concentrated on developing an interconnected infrastructure to support increased tourism along the Byway:

- ◆ **WAYPOINT INTERPRETIVE CENTERS:** Ten communities (*Brattleboro, Bellows Falls, Claremont, White River Junction, Windsor, Fairlee, Wells River/Woodsville, Lancaster, St. Johnsbury, and Colebrook*) volunteered to host welcome centers for Byway visitors. Most have now built or remodeled their centers, and are open to the public. Fairlee, Windsor, and Brattleboro have plans well underway.
- ◆ **EXHIBITS:** A four-panel exhibit featuring the Connecticut River and shared themes along its length has been developed by CRJC and provided at no cost to each of the ten waypoint centers.
- ◆ **TRAVEL MAP:** A full-color illustrated fold-out map features the ten Waypoint Communities and highlights things to see and do along the Byway.

- ◆ WEBSITE: Check in at www.ctrivertravel.net and find out what's so special about the Connecticut River Byway. The non-commercial site focuses on nature, recreation, culture, history, and rail, and features each of the ten Waypoint communities with scores of useful links.
- ◆ VIDEO: Veteran producer Caro Thompson has created a stunning fourteen minute film, "*Welcome to the Heart of New England*," now available in VHS, DVD, and CD from the waypoint centers, chambers of commerce, and CRJC.
- ◆ NEWSLETTERS: CRJC produces *River Byway News*, a biannual newsletter, for the Byway Council, distributing it to over a thousand readers. Subscriptions are complimentary.
- ◆ LOGO: The Byway Council has developed a blue stylized river design for its logo.
- ◆ SIGNAGE: Award-winning designer David Raphael has developed model signs using the Byway logo, and worked with local officials to create signage plans for each of the ten waypoint communities to guide visitors to their welcome centers. This project is awaiting federal funds for implementation.
- ◆ PRESERVATION OF NATURAL, SCENIC AND HISTORIC ATTRIBUTES: This is the current focus of the Byway Council! An inventory of these features provides the basis for future preservation work.

Where does the money come from?

- ◆ The Federal Highway Administration's scenic byway program provides grants to assist states with their byway projects. The grants are highly competitive, and several of the Connecticut River Byway's waypoint centers have been fortunate to receive this funding.
- ◆ A similar federal grant to the NH Office of Energy and Planning paid the cost of the travel map.
- ◆ The VT Agency of Transportation provided federal scenic byway funding to produce the Byway video. Additional money came from a partnership among several area chambers of commerce, regional planning agencies, communities, and local attractions.
- ◆ The Connecticut River Joint Commissions have used funds from their annual National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration grant to develop the byway logo, signage plan, and exhibits for each of the waypoint centers. CRJC's Partnership Program has also provided grants to local organizations for byway-related projects, such as the restoration of Alumni Hall in Haverhill, a heritage guide to Orford, NH, and a scenic resources inventory.
- ◆ A special one-time appropriation from the New Hampshire and Vermont legislatures paid for development of the website: www.ctrivertravel.net, and for initial marketing of the Connecticut River Byway.
- ◆ Staff support funds come from the Connecticut River Joint Commissions.



National Byway Recognition

What does it mean to be a “National” Byway?

- ◆ National designation is an honor, and the scenic, historic Connecticut River Valley is worthy of that honor.
- ◆ National designation will give the Connecticut River Byway a better chance in competition for scarce federal funds which can help preserve historic properties, scenic views, access to the river, and valuable farmland.
- ◆ Nationally designated byways are promoted on the Federal Highway Administration’s America’s Byways map and on its byways website (www.byways.org).
- ◆ National byways have access to technical assistance through the National Scenic Byways Resource Center, and to a network of communication with other national byways.
- ◆ National byways are marketed to the media, travel industry, and potential travelers, through, for example, the Mobil Travel Guide.
- ◆ Visitation may increase, bringing increased economic benefit to local communities and businesses.
- ◆ The process of working toward national designation will draw more people and communities into byway participation, and into shaping the byway’s benefits.
- ◆ There will be no oversight by the federal government.
- ◆ There are no regulations and no “takings” of private property that accompany national scenic byway recognition.
- ◆ Self marketing will be the decisive factor in determining how many tourists come. The Byway Council intends to continue marketing to a subset of the traveling public: those interested in American history, historic architecture, the machine tool industry, heritage tourism, agri-tourism, eco tourism, river recreation, locally-made products, and farmers markets.



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