

Religious Freedom Byway

Introduction



St. Clements Island celebrates the birthplace of Maryland

This chapter of the Byway Management Plan summarizes the purpose of the plan and the process that was utilized to develop the plan.

1.1 The Religious Freedom Byway

The Religious Freedom Byway traces the story of Southern Maryland from its initial founding through the Revolutionary War. Through successive generations, what began as a struggle for the basics of survival, developed into a solid foundation of stable, rich American culture. Using the authentic places within this scenic and historic landscape, the Byway examines how these changes occurred, looking at the lives and fortunes of those who lived here.

1.2 Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of the Byway management plan is not regulatory. Instead, the planning effort is designed to help each County in its efforts to promote the rich historical and cultural legacy that emanated from the first effort to free religion from government in America. Much of this legacy still can be found throughout the corridor. The plan is designed to identify more compelling ways in which the story can be told in order to draw more visitors to the area. More than just drawing visitors, the plan also calls for new and innovative ways to preserve the

legacy, while at the same time developing sustainable tourism opportunities based on that heritage.

The plan is also designed to serve as the basis for submitting the route for nomination as a National Scenic Byway through the Federal Highway Administration's America's Byways Program. The plan meets the fourteen requirements of a corridor management plan as spelled out in the May 18, 1995 Interim Policy published in the Federal Register.

The plan is a statement about how the partnerships between local government, state agencies, civic organizations, residents and the owners and operators of historic sites and visitor attractions will work together to achieve the byway's goals. The implementation of the plan is dependent upon finding new sources of funding to support the management activities recommended in the plan.

What is a Byway Management Plan?

The plan is a written document in which the sponsor describes the goals, strategies and responsibilities for preserving, maintaining and enhancing a byway's most valuable qualities. It is developed cooperatively with all those who have an interest in the future of the Byway corridor, and includes both a long-term vision for what the Byway may become and a short-term action plan.

The preparation of the Byway Management Plan is the first step in coordinating Smart Growth Initiatives and creating a partnership with all federal, state and local agencies and programs to preserve, maintain and enhance the Byway's character-defining features.



Preservation of Southern Maryland's tobacco heritage is a strong priority in the region

Why a “National Scenic Byway”?

Under the National Scenic Byways Program, the U.S. Secretary of Transportation recognizes certain roads as National Scenic Byways or All-American Roads based on their intrinsic qualities. The Federal Highway Administration promotes the collection as America’s Byways®. The designation provides additional opportunities for heritage-based tourism development including funding opportunities for preservation and enhancement projects. Maryland has three byways currently designated under the program as National Scenic Byways: the Historic National Road, Frederick County’s Catoctin Mountain Byway and the Eastern Shore’s Chesapeake Country Byway.

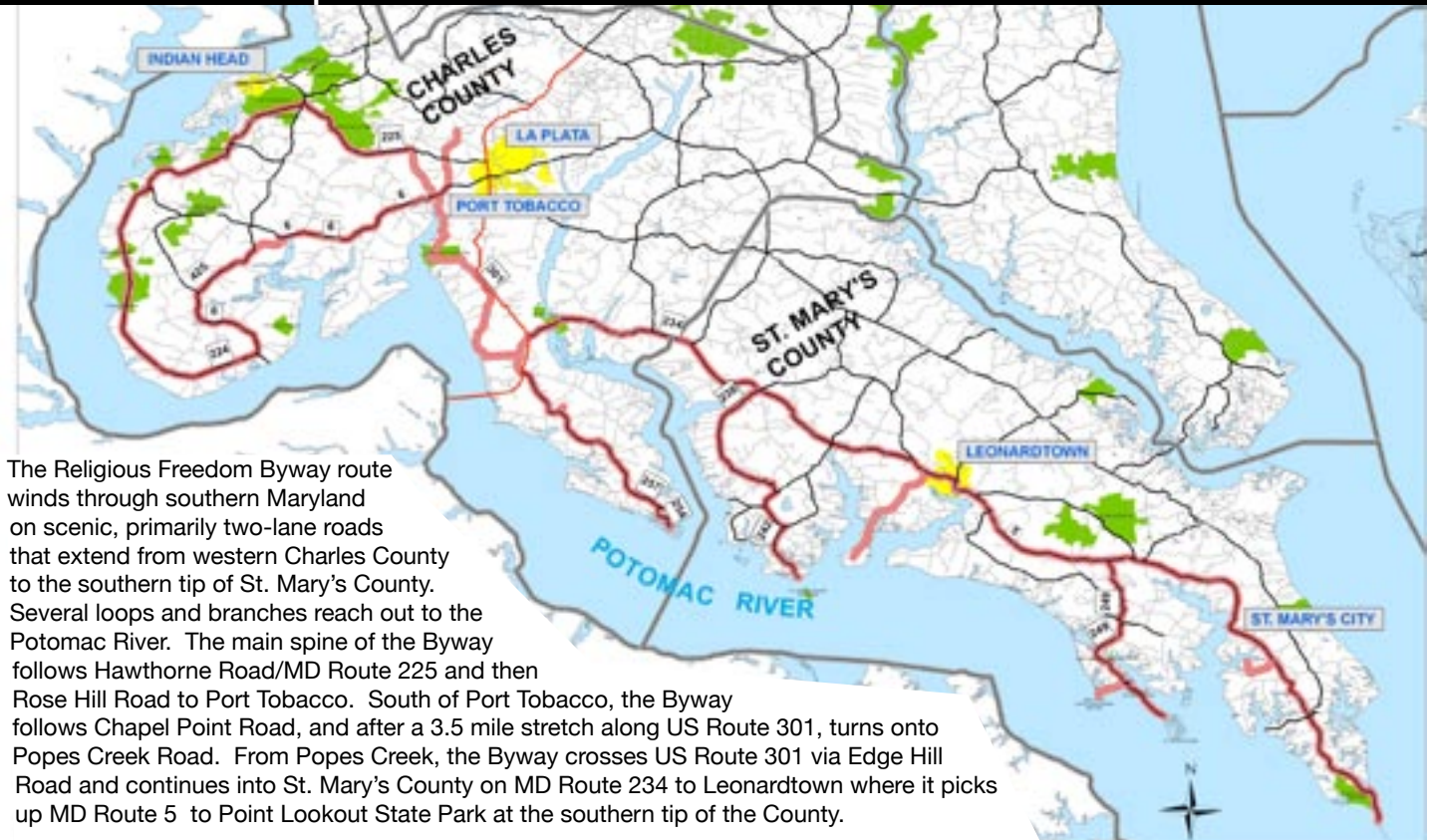
When determining if a state-designated byway meets the requirements for designation as a National Scenic Byway, the intrinsic qualities of that byway must be evaluated. The National Scenic Byways Program identifies six different categories of intrinsic qualities: scenic, cultural, historic, recreational, archaeological, and natural. In order for a byway to meet national designation criteria it must have at least one quality that is considered regionally significant. If two intrinsic qualities are deemed significant on a national level, the Byway qualifies for the All-American Road designation.

The Religious Freedom Byway has nationally significant historic qualities in that it presents the story of America’s founding as it unfolded on the shores of the Potomac River in Southern Maryland, one of the nation’s earliest colonial settlements. Southern Maryland’s unique colonial story began with the possibility that life in the New World presented significant opportunities for freedom and prosperity. In taking their chances on that possibility, thousands of individuals came to Maryland’s shores under varying circumstances. The realities they faced, the struggles they endured, and the lives they shaped are stories of our nation’s fragile and tenuous beginnings and help us understand who we are today.

1.3 Planning Context and Process

In 1999, the Maryland State Highway Administration designated 139 miles of roadway in Southern Maryland as a State Scenic Byway. The byway follows scenic corridors bordering the Potomac River and its tributaries from northern Charles County to southern St. Mary’s County. Named the Religious Freedom Byway, it was designated for its scenic, cultural, historic, recreational, and natural qualities. In 2006, St. Mary’s & Charles Counties received

Corridor Location Map





The Religious Freedom Byway Management Team toured the corridor to identify issues and opportunities for management

a grant from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in the amount of \$150,400 to develop a Byway Management Plan (BMP) for the Religious Freedom Byway.

Over the past year, a team of landscape architects, planners, engineers, and preservation consultants have been working with an Advisory Committee representing various state and local governments and civic groups to develop the Byway Management Plan. The goal of the effort is to nominate the Religious Freedom Byway for designation as a National Scenic Byway through the Federal Highway Administration's America's Byways Program. A Byway Management Plan along with the demonstration of public support for the scenic byway is required for nomination. In addition, the Byway must be ready for visitors.

An Advisory Committee was formed to assist in the development of the management plan. The Religious Freedom Byway Advisory Committee represents a cross-section of those people that live or work along the Byway, those that are responsible for its management, and those with extensive knowledge of the history of the area. The Byway Advisory Committee has

- assisted in the formulation of a vision, goals and objectives for the plan;
- provided information to the planning team about important features and points of interest along the Byway;
- assisted in the development of strategies to preserve, maintain, and enhance important features and to help determine how best to take advantage of the opportunities;

- made recommendations regarding how the plan will be implemented; and
- made a recommendation to pursue designation as a National Byway.

The Religious Freedom Byway Advisory Committee met seven times over a one-year period at different locations throughout the corridor. These Advisory Committee meetings were open to the public. In addition, two public meetings were held: the first to provide more information to the public about the planning effort, and to review the plan's vision, goals and objectives; and a second meeting to review the plan's recommended strategies for preserving, maintaining and enhancing the travel route as an important gateway to Southern Maryland's heritage and ecotourism opportunities.

The following Advisory Committee meetings took place to assist in the development of the plan:

- #1 What are the Vision and Goals for the Byway? JUNE 26, 2007
Public Meeting - Are we headed in the right direction? JULY 31, 2007
- #2 Where are the special places along the Byway and how can they best be preserved? AUG. 28, 2007
- #3 How can we enhance the Byway and make it more attractive? SEPT. 25, 2007
- #4 What is the best way to tell the Byway's stories of Religious Tolerance and Freedom? OCT. 23, 2007
- #5 How do we encourage visitors to stop in the towns and businesses along the Byway? NOV. 27, 2007
- #6 How can we make sure the Byway is both safe and attractive for travelers? JAN. 29, 2008
Public Meeting - Did we get the plan right? FEB. 27-28, 2008
- #7 Who will be responsible for implementing the plan? MAR. 27, 2008

The result of this extensive outreach is a true grass-roots planning effort that reflects the sense of the communities along the Byway about how best to preserve, maintain, and enhance the route as it gains designation as a National Scenic Byway.

1.4 Ongoing Public Involvement

The Byway Management Plan is intended to be more than just a snapshot of the planning process to date and the results of the planning effort. Instead, it is intended to be a working document that provides step-by-step recommendations for how to transform a little-used state scenic byway into one of the primary spines for heritage tourism in Southern Maryland.

The work of the Advisory Committee will continue as the plan unfolds. Advisory Committee members will provide input on the more detailed planning efforts needed for wayfinding and interpretation and provide a distinct voice for the Byway on matters relating to its future preservation and enhancement. The Plan and the Advisory Committee have become the voice for the Byway, speaking out on its behalf.

Chapter 6, Plan Implementation, addresses the ongoing management of the Byway including the steps necessary to create a permanent management entity. In the short-term, Charles and St. Mary's Counties, along with their agency partners will continue to work together to implement the plan and utilize the existing Advisory Committee to continue their role in representing the public interests in the development and implementation of the Plan.