

Turquoise Trail Corridor Management Plan

Version 2.0

13.0 Signage Plan

13.1 CURRENT SIGN CONDITIONS

For the most part, the Turquoise Trail Scenic Byway signage is quite adequate from a visitor perspective. There is some confusion next to the Interstate 40 exit where NM 14, NM 333, NM 337 and Route 66 all intersect. One sign on the eastbound exit of Interstate 40 is dark and non-reflective. If a visitor becomes confused by the overlapping numbers, the entire area can be traveled in just a minute or two and immediately retraced. If the visitor uses a NM State map, it's easy to identify the differences, but most travelers don't have one and some don't have any maps at all. Once on NM 14, there are mile markers and they are in good repair, making it rather easy to drive the entire length of the byway without getting lost. NM 536 is also clearly marked each mile.

Signage has increased since 2000 and is expected to continue. Many safety signs were placed on the byway as part of a road improvement project between Madrid and Cerrillos. A soon to be completed road improvement project between Cerrillos and Lone Butte will have additional safety signs.

13.1.1 U.S. Forest Service Signs

Several years ago, the U. S. Forest Service implemented their Auto Tour Route signage; however copies of the guide are no longer available. On the other hand, the U. S. Forest Service has three visitor facilities all with off-roadway signing along the byway and provides interpretive materials including a clearly marked, detailed map. The U.S. Forest Service also has a brown sign on the eastbound exit of Interstate 40.

13.1.2 The Brown Signs and Historical Markers

Two Turquoise Trail NSB signs have been placed on Interstate 40 exits (eastbound and westbound) and two Turquoise Trail NSB signs have been placed on Interstate 25 exits (northbound and southbound). The signs were designed using brown signs and the NSB logo. The signs were funded by the Turquoise Trail Association with installation of the two I-25 signs provided by the NM DOT.

There are a few brown Turquoise Trail signs scattered on NM 14 and a couple more near the intersection with NM 536. Since these signs are few and far between, travelers easily miss them. A wood carved sign at the intersection of NM 14 and NM 536 indicating the spur going to Sandia Crest is missed by some tourists. Along the byway, only Cerrillos has a historical marker.

The Turquoise Trail Association is in ongoing talks with the NMDOT to replace the existing brown signs with signs indicating the Turquoise Trail is a National Scenic Byway.

13.1.3 Tourist Oriented Directional Signs (TOGS)

As do other states across the country, New Mexico has implemented Tourist Oriented Directional Signs. All installed signs follow local and state law. More about the TOGS laws below.

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13.1.4 Signs and scenic qualities

The negative effect of adequate signage is that signs ruin the scenic qualities if they are not properly designed and placed. As part of the work performed to develop this CMP, a survey was given to local area residents and that of nearby Albuquerque residents. Respondents were asked if there were too many signs on the byway. The choices were (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neutral, (4) disagree, and (5) strongly disagree. Overwhelmingly, the answers were neutral, with the urban Albuquerque respondents leaning more toward disagree (the signs are not a problem) and those living in more rural areas closer to the byway tending toward agree (signs are a problem). Clearly, the perspective was skewed by what people were used to as being normal. Either way, visitors do not consider the status quo as a bad situation.

Still, simplicity may be the best policy. Overlapping sign systems should be minimized keeping to one consistent theme. Three different route numbers in Tijeras don't help and a future objective should be to make that less confusing. The byway in the Tijeras area was reworked for signaling, but the signage is still confusing for tourists.

13.2 IT'S THE LAW

New Mexico does not have a signage plan for tourists, but they do have sign laws specifically designed to assist tourists in rural areas. Since most of the Turquoise Trail National Scenic Byway is rural, the laws apply.

NEW MEXICO STATUTES 1978 CHAPTER 66 MOTOR VEHICLES
ARTICLE 7 TRAFFIC LAWS; SIGNS, SIGNALS AND MARKINGS; ACCIDENTS;
WEIGHT AND SIZE; TRAFFIC SAFETY

Part 2 Signs, Signals and Markings.

- 66-7-101. State highway commission to adopt sign manual.
- 66-7-102. State highway commission to sign all state highways.
- 66-7-102.1. State highway commission; speed limit signs.
- 66-7-103. Local traffic-control devices.
- 66-7-104. Obedience to any required traffic-control devices.
- 66-7-105. Traffic-control signal legend.
- 66-7-106. Pedestrian-control signals.
- 66-7-107. Flashing signals.
- 66-7-108. Display of unauthorized signs, signals or markings.
- 66-7-109. Interference with official traffic-control devices or railroad signs or signals.

Two laws are of note: 66-7-101 defines the signs and 66-7-102 gives authority to NM DOT to install them. Other laws were passed such as NMSA 1978 Section 67-12-1 Highway Beautification Act followed by SHTD Rule 92-1 Tourist Oriented Directional signs in 1992. SHTD Rule 88-2(L) implemented LOGO signs for specific services. The latest revision which occurred in December, 1998 is 18 NMAC 21.4 TOURIST ORIENTED DIRECTIONAL SIGNS (TODS). The entire text of the TODS law is located in the Appendix D, but some of the important highlights follow.

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- The signs are designed specifically for out-of-area visitors and “point out cultural, historical, recreational, educational, or entertainment activities”, as well as, other commercial activities that visitors use such as gas, lodging, food, and motor vehicle repairs.
- The signs are designed to assist economic development
- Businesses have to conform to very specific rules to obtain signage, the most important of which is the major portion of a business’s income must be derived from motorists not living in the area. Typical examples would be a bed and breakfast, inn, campground, or a museum.
- The signs may only be used in rural areas
- The signs are officially sanctioned by New Mexico and can be placed in the highway right of way
- To obtain a sign, a business must not be visible from the road.
- A business must be open most of the time, have rest rooms, drinking water, and a public phone
- Businesses must pay an application and rental fee, and for the sign itself
- Trailblazer signs or route markers to a TODS business are defined
- LOGO signs are incorporated into the TODS system where appropriate

13.3 NEW MEXICO SCENIC BYWAY SIGNS

In 1998, New Mexico had a team of tourism and highway experts from across the state design a scenic byway sign that would be consistent and assist visitors on their journey. New Mexico wanted to create a common theme, and to that end, signs were installed in all the existing state byways. Approximately twenty signs were placed on the Turquoise Trail.

13.4 VIRTUAL SIGNS

Physically placed road signs are by no means the only way to assist visitors. Several CMPs across the country suggest the use of these new technologies. The technology currently exists to give visitors information through noninvasive means such as:

- Global positioning systems. GPS mapping is now a common option in vehicles.
- Low power radio signals that give highway advisories
- Cellular phones that can key off of numbers making signs fewer and smaller
- Notebook computer maps including audio cues for tourist amenities such as gas, food, lodging, and activities. Mapping programs available from Google Earth, Mapquest, and Yahoo are commonplace on the internet.
- Vehicle windshield head up displays with road information

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13.5 GOALS TO ASSIST VISITORS

- Provide visitors with the information necessary to make their journey safe
- Provide visitors with the information to make their trip a positive experience
- Minimize the size and number of physical signs and strategically place them to maintain the scenic and natural beauty of the byway

13.6 OBJECTIVES TO ASSIST VISITORS

- Put safety first
- Implement a virtual sign system emphasizing the use of GPS systems in vehicles
- Substitute other informational techniques, rather than physical signs
- Design signs to reduce their number and size
- Design signs to blend in with the natural surrounding, yet still provide information. For example, hide the back side of the signs, so drivers going in the opposite direction don't see them.
- Design signs to assist both domestic and international visitors
- Integrate the various methods to minimize overlap yet still provide excellent service to the visitor

13.7 STRATEGIES AND PROJECTS TO ASSIST VISITORS

- Determine the adequacy of signs for emergency situations
- Determine the location to place safety signs in hazardous road areas, such as curves
- Determine the adequacy of signs for essential services such as gas stations
- Determine the location and number of scenic byway signs to place
- Install the scenic byway signs
- Build visitor centers to provide mile marker based information
- Create mile marker based maps and brochures to lessen the need for directional signs
- Work with the appropriate industries to use the global positioning system technology to provide location based information.
- Provide consistent cellular phone service
- Provide audio tapes, CD's, and DVDs to assist visitors in their vehicles
- Provide low power radio and proximity signals to standard AM and FM radios to give visitors information about nearby facilities, as well as, emergency information
- Provide hospitality training to the local population, especially those in storefronts that directly interface with the traveling public.