

# FRIENDS OF AMERICA'S BYWAYS

October 18, 2011

The Honorable Ray H. LaHood, Secretary  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood:

We are writing to ask your personal attention to an issue of high importance to the thousands of communities across the nation which have a vital interest in the National Scenic Byways Program (NSBP). We recognize your strong personal interest in and support of this program. The NSBP has been a tremendous success, now including 150 routes that share the nation's scenic, recreational, cultural and historic best with domestic and international travelers alike. These are both "the roads Americans love," the description applied at the program's creation by then-President George H.W. Bush, and vital economic engines for communities seeking to share their stories with those who seek an understanding of our nation's remarkable features and stories.

The NSBP has three key elements. You are empowered to designate routes that qualify as National Scenic Byways and All American Roads. NSBP also includes a small grant program that supports nationally-significant projects with real potential to be replicated, and especially aimed at non-pavement projects which protect and explain the byway and the corridor through which it passes. A third key element is technical assistance provided to communities about byways management and marketing.

Earlier this year, we learned that funds provided by Congress - specifically for the technical assistance functions of the NSBP - would not be provided to the America's Byways Resource Center because they were withheld from distribution. We were told, when the decision to withhold these funds was announced, that your department had elected to use powers provided by the Surface Transportation Extension Act of 2011 (signed into law in March 2011) allowing the Secretary of Transportation discretion to redistribute funds allocated to specified projects and programs that were designated in SAFETEA-LU, if the Secretary determines that these programs have received "sufficient funds in fiscal year 2010, or a previous fiscal year, to carry out the purpose for which the project or activity was authorized." (Surface Transportation Extension Act of 2011 [Public Law 112-5, Title 1, Section 101(d) as it amends Public Law 111-147, Title IV, Section 411(d)]).

We want to express our concerns both regarding this decision on byways funding and our disappointment that the organizations signing this letter, many of whom have played an active role in the NSBP since its inception, were not invited to comment on use of the discretionary authority. We strongly disagree with the decision that the technical assistance needs of the byways program have been met with pre-FY2011 funding.

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The latest extension of SAFETEA-LU once again provides funding for byways technical assistance efforts through the America's Byways Resource Center. This affords your department an opportunity to avoid the now-planned shut-down of the Center.

Once again, your department is authorized by the latest extension to redirect Congressionally-provided funding for the America's Byways Resource Center operations. We ask you, instead, to implement the actions of the Congress and provide the authorized funding to support byways technical assistance activities across the nation. This assistance is not possible from the current FHWA staff resources at the national level and, by its nature, requires a perspective beyond the capabilities of individual states.

We would be delighted to meet with you or a designated official within your department to explain our views in more depth. We urge you to continue your long and strong leadership of byways efforts through continuation of the technical assistance efforts. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

**AAA**

**American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials**

**American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association**

**American Motorcyclist Association**

**American Recreation Coalition**

**American Society of Landscape Architects**

**Arrowhead (MN) Regional Development Commission**

**ARVC - National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds**

**Good Sam Club**

**Great Lakes Seaway Trail**

**Illinois River Road National Scenic Byway**

**Keep America Beautiful**

**Motorcycle Industry Council**

**National Association of Development Organizations**

**National Association of Gateway Communities**

**National Association of State Park Directors**

**National Forest Recreation Association**

**National Park Hospitality Association**

**National Parks Promotion Council**

**National Recreation and Park Association**

**National Scenic Byways Foundation**

**National Ski Areas Association**

**National Trust for Historic Preservation**

**Recreation Vehicle Dealers Association**

**Scenic America**

**Southeast Tourism Society**

**U.S. Travel Association**

**Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission (MN)**

**Western States Tourism Policy Council**