

Public Hearing: Economic Impact of Tourism and PA Heritage Area Program

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Grovedale Winery, Wyalusing

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Thank You, Chairman Adolph and distinguished members of the House Appropriations Committee for allowing us this opportunity to present the impact of the PA Heritage Areas Program and the PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor.

Where is PA Route 6?

PA Route 6 is the 400-plus miles of US Route 6 as it traverse across Pennsylvania from New York/New Jersey border to Ohio. It includes the 27-mile spur of Route 6N, which is the pre-1956 terminus of US Route 6 at Lake Erie. It links 11 northern tier counties: Pike, Wayne, Lackawanna, Wyoming, Bradford, Tioga, Potter, McKean, Warren, Erie and Crawford; 10 county seats; 3 major cities; and 43 communities with a population of over 500 with a vast amount of open space, farmlands and mountains in between. It also connects 19 state parks, several state forests, 5 PHMC sites, the Allegheny National Forest, 3 National Park Sites, US Forest sites, Army Corp of Engineers lakes – the list goes on...

Background - Story of Tourism Development and Tourism Promotion

Historically US Route 6 in Pennsylvania has been recognized by Harley Davidson, National Geographic Traveler, Travelocity and other leading travel sites as a scenic highway and great road trip. The highway has been marketed as a driving destination in Pennsylvania since the 1920's. There have been several attempts to organize a grassroots effort during the last century but none were successful until the 1990's. In 1996, a concerted effort of all the Convention and Visitor Bureaus across the highway was spurred on by the first offering of regional marketing initiative grants under the state tourism office. It is important to note that this regional joint CVB marketing effort for Route 6 started prior to designated PA Tourism regions. The nine CVB's continue to work together today to market PA Route 6.

In the early 2000's, the marketing effort led to increased interest in the economic, community and business development along the highway while maintaining its unique and special qualities. A grassroots effort was undertaken including regional meetings, development of a steering committee and completion of a feasibility study. It was recognized at that time that resource coordination, resource development, marketing and sustainability were areas that needed to be addressed for the highway to continue to provide economic impact to this rural part of Pennsylvania through tourism. The state heritage area model provided a sound way of structuring these areas.

In 2004, a management action plan for the PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor was completed and application was made to the Interagency Task Force for designation as a Pennsylvania Heritage Area. On January 15, 2005, Governor Rendell recognized PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor as the 12th state heritage area.

What is PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor?

The PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor is defined as all 11 counties that US Route 6 traverses in the Commonwealth, connected by a historical transportation corridor. The corridor's history is of moving resources and people; its culture reflects those struggles and successes that help build America.

Through the leadership of the PA Route 6 Alliance, citizens from 11 counties are joining together to preserve, enhance and promote the treasured resources that contribute to their shared sense of place. Using the corridor's strategic Management Action Plan as their guide, they are initiating heritage tourism development strategies that will build more sustainable local economies and enhance the quality of life in every community along Pennsylvania Route 6.

The National Picture

US Route 6 is a transcontinental highway, stretching through 14 states from the tip of Cape Cod in Massachusetts to Long Beach, California. There are active associations in at least 7 of those states. Thanks to the PA Heritage Area program, Pennsylvania is the only state with a structured program and staff.

Economic Impacts

In the 2008 Study of National and State Parks using the MGM2 Model, the PA Route 6 Alliance saw over 3.5 million visitors, spending \$91.1 million dollars. The direct, indirect and induced effects of visitor spending in the PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor was \$93.8 million. The PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor supports 2,172 jobs with a total payroll of \$31.9 million.

As Jane Sheffield from Heritage PA stated PA Route 6 is one of five heritage areas participating in the current economic impact study being conducted by University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown. This research will include both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Currently we have surveys out at 9 locations across Route 6 ranging from our 3 top state parks: Leonard Harrison, Pymatuning and Kinzua Bridge to 2 PHMC sites and a few visitor centers with plans to conduct one-on-one intercept surveys at three of those locations. Recently, during a 4 hour period where I personally participated in administering the survey at Kinzua Bridge State Park, we met 2 groups from Germany who were touring from New York to Cleveland and then onto Canada.

Our view of heritage tourism: development and promotion

PA Route 6 as well as many of our Heritage Area colleagues see ourselves in a supporting role of encouraging development and preservation of heritage assets. Many of the heritage areas are the organizers of trails efforts and provide technical assistance in community revitalizations efforts.

PA Route 6 has several programs designed to enhance community development and revitalizations while building the tourism assets and preserving the sense of place.

Through the PA Route 6 Heritage Communities program, 20 communities along the corridor developed grassroots Heritage Work plans. The Heritage Communities Program addresses the need to retain and enhance the small town experience by assisting communities in developing their own part of the Route 6 story. These communities benefit from heritage tourism that involves visiting important historical and architectural sites, enjoying the outdoors actively or

passively, rekindling the spirit of road touring, and providing opportunities to purchase goods and services along the highway.

This planning effort includes not only elements of conventional community planning, such as visioning, the analysis of how land is used or planned to be used, community facilities, transportation, demographics, housing economy, but also transcends this level to include sustainable heritage tourism and sense of place issues localized to the community level. The program addresses the preservation and enhancement of the communities and resources making those communities a better place for residents to live and for tourists to visit.

The program was financed through a Heritage Grant from DCNR of \$100,000 and a match from Federal Highways of \$400,000. Each community was asked to support the effort with anywhere from \$667 to \$2000. So for a small local contribution, each community participated in the development of their own individualized work plan, which would have cost ten times that amount without PA Route 6 support.

The communities are now implementing their plan. The staff of PA Rt 6 provides technical support and often acts as a liaison between the communities and other agencies. Many of the communities have successfully completed recommendations from their Work plans and are seeing the benefits.

Smethport, our first PA Route 6 Heritage Community, has developed into a tourism destination based on the recommendations and projects outlined in their Heritage Work plan. Smethport's heritage as a home of lumber and oil barons is now interpreted through the Smethport Mansion Tour. Residents are taking pride in their architecture and historic resources and have invested thousands of dollars in renovating and improving their homes. Four homes have been reinvented as bed & breakfasts and executive suites. New stores and services are filling vacant storefronts.

Wyalusing, another PA Route 6 Heritage Community, has implemented recommendations in their Heritage Work plan for both infrastructure improvements and interpretive opportunities. The Bridge St. Project, which included lighting, sidewalks and landscaping, created a lovely entrance to the historic downtown. The borough matched this investment with a fencing project to protect children from the creek. Historic signage has been installed throughout the area. One idea that emerged from their work sessions and Work plan was a guided tour of buildings and barns using cell phone technology. Since January 2013, over 1,000 unique users have placed 1590 calls to hear about the history of a particular site.

During the planning for the Corry PA Route 6 Heritage Community, two issues were identified that residents believed hinder the town from being a tourist hub. Route 6 was actually bypassed around the town in the 1950 so travelers did not know to go downtown and there was a lack of accommodations for overnight stays. Through a Heritage grant, Corry developed a Heritage Center right on Route 6 where travelers can use a unique interactive kiosk to learn more about the town's history and places to visit. Corry is also anticipating the opening of a new hotel this fall - Cobblestone Inn and Suites with 37 rooms.

The Carbondale PA Route 6 Task Force has moved ahead on the recommendations in their WorkPlan, creating new events to draw visitors to the downtown. Last year, they introduced a self-guided tour of the downtown using QR codes to tell the city's story. This year, they are celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the "Alien" landing with events and have even adopted a mascot, "The Carbondalien". This was part of their history that they would often hide from but that they now embrace as making them unique.

In Conneaut Lake, the WorkPlan highlighted the lakefront as the biggest attraction in the area and provided suggestions for improvement. The community embraced those suggestions, had conceptual drawings completed, raised local dollars and have now been successful in raising more funds to complete their improvements. A few weeks ago, U.S. Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker announced that the Department's Economic Development Administration (EDA) is awarding a \$1 million grant to the Borough of Conneaut Lake. The funding will support critical infrastructure improvements in the town's central business district, which are to create 78 jobs and leverage \$950,000 from local tourism industries.

The PA Route 6 Heritage Communities have been able to use their Heritage Work plans to continue enhancements and community revitalizations efforts. Many of these projects would not have been possible without the help of my Heritage Area colleagues who support the PA Route 6 Heritage Communities in their regions. Lumber Heritage Region provided a grant to Smethport to install signage on the Mansion District Walking Tour. Endless Mountains Heritage Region provided funding to help Wyalusing with their historic signage and continues to help the community develop into a river town. Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority is working with Carbondale to bring the Lackawanna Heritage Trail into the city, connecting it to Scranton.

One of the goals of a Heritage Area is cultural conservation, for PA Route 6 this includes an element of community and business development as well. The PA Route 6 Artisan Trail has been active for almost 10 years, promoting the talent and artistry of the people of the Northern Tier with business development and promotional opportunities.

We have heard from artists and craftsmen, such as blacksmith Doug Firestone of Germania, that the Artisan Trail has allowed him to make a living doing what he loves to do, where he loves to do it. Over the years, we have seen empty storefronts converted into artisan co-operatives, such as the newly opened Potter County Artisan Center in Coudersport.

Part of the Artisan Trail is the promotion of events and festivals that bring people into our small communities. According to Marilyn Blackmore, the founder of the Arts in the Wilds, "The Route 6 Artisan Trail draws many visitors year around to ArtWorks at the Depot (a gallery in the restored train depot in Kane) and features Art in the Wilds as an event taking place the last weekend in June. We have partnered with PA Route 6 and PA Wilds since the first year of the show and proudly display their logos on our rack cards, posters and banners. This year's Eighth Annual Art in the Wilds, an outdoor, juried fine arts and fine crafts show, drew 5,817 patrons to Kane and completed another very successful year. Artist sales topped at over \$50,000. An economic impact of the area outside a 50 mi. radius of Kane was calculated at \$27,107. Zip codes collected by the artists showed that visitors came from the northeast US and farther."

Business development extends to our heritage or traditional business like the Maple Producers. Each year, the maple producers in Potter and Tioga County take home a large amount of the awards from the Farm Show. In a joint project with the Lumber Heritage Region and the local CVB's, PA Route 6 helped the Potter-Tioga Maple Association develop a marketing strategy. The efforts has resulted in increased sales at their businesses, increased attendance during their Maple Open Weekend in March and some new product lines. This effort will be expanded across the Northern Tier this year.

When tourism as a whole across the northern tier of Pennsylvania is considered, the 2012 Tourism Economic report (released in December 2013) reports that the impact of tourism for all 11 Route 6 counties includes \$3.6 billion in visitor spending, supporting 28,000 jobs with a payroll of \$717 million. PA Route 6, for many of the counties, is another asset to their destination and for some of the counties it is a leading economic driver. As in the case of McKean County, the Allegheny National Forest Vacation Bureau wrote:

Successful new business ventures that have opened since the PA Route 6 heritage and marketing efforts began include; Flickerwood Wine Cellars & Lounge, Lantz Corners Getaway, Barrel House Restaurant, The Sweet Shoppe, CJ Spirits, The Inn on Maple Street, Barnhaven, Corner Pizza, Jewett's Kaffe Sol, Village Brew Coffee House, McKean County E-Sales, Lightwaves Engraving & Gift Shoppe, Roseart Company, Rose Boutique, The Option House, Main Street Antiques, Main Street Mercantile and Zanadu. These new businesses are made possible because of the number of tourists traveling PA Route 6 and the new net income they are bringing into the region. Local historic attractions such as the Eldred WW II Museum, Old Jail House, and the Penn Brad Oil Museum have increased visitation numbers as a result of travelers enjoying PA Route 6.

As Route 6 coordinates it resources by linking them as a road trip through Americana, businesses are benefitting. This is one of many visitors' perceptions from Flickerwood Winery in Kane: "You folks have a hidden treasure business that we would have never found if we had not traveled across PA on Rt. 6. This trip has been so relaxing and unbelievably beautiful."

Marketing Efforts

One of PA Route 6's greatest successes is the ability to maintain an active coalition of convention and visitor bureaus. Through the marketing and promotion efforts, PA Route 6 has developed a successful brand and recognition of the "Do 6" logo. An annual guide and map, website, national advertising and press stories are elements of this effort. Recently PA Route 6 has been featured in a Lonely Planet Guide, Washington Post and Motorcycle MoJo magazines.

Our nine CVB members participate in co-operative advertising targeted at attracting visitors to PA Route 6. Recently, PA Route 6 leveraged its CVB marketing dollars against the national Brand USA campaign to make a major advertising buy on the number one travel search site, TripAdvisor. Targeting the Ontario Canada market, the campaign has seen significant results, way above the national average, in people clicking through to the PA Route 6 and partner websites. We have also seen an increase in Canadian request for our brochure

The measure of impacts is not always in dollars, sometimes it can be in health and wellness. This year, PA Route 6 decided to highlight the assets that could be used to create a healthy lifestyle: trails, race events, farmers markets, etc. Penn State Co-operative Extension, who had similar goals, approached us to partner for a health program called "Walk Across PA". The program would encourage teams of participants to walk 50 miles a week for 8 weeks – or 400 miles. Each week the participants would receive updates on just how far they would have walked across Route 6 including sites and attractions as well as healthy eating tips based on products from the northern tier. Our interest was to build awareness of the attractions and resources across the corridor. We anticipated 200-300 people to register for the virtual walk; instead 2,000 participants signed up. In the end 250 teams walked over a 100,000 miles total. Over 30% indicated that they planned to visit an area of Route 6 they learned about through the program.

The PA Route 6 Alliance has continued its effort to preserve, enhance and promote the transportation heritage of one of the nation's first transcontinental highways; to sustain and nurture, scenic beauty of one of America's favorite "road trips". Our projects are as much about preservation as they are about economic and community development. That is why one of our main goals is to achieve Pennsylvania Byways designation and ultimately National Scenic Byway designation.

We believe that the success of PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor has a great impact on the northern tier of Pennsylvania. We also believe that as we move towards becoming a National Scenic Byway, the impact will only increase in many areas including look and feel of the highway, preservation of our historic assets, the strengthening of our communities, and prosperity for our small businesses.

I leave you with last quote from Marsha Chesko, owner of the Sherwood Motel in Wellsboro:
"Route 6 is very important for all of Wellsboro businesses. If they would do a bypass or stop promoting how beautiful and historical Rt 6 is it would affect the whole downtown of Wellsboro. Rt 6 is very important to the livelihood of this downtown. There are so many small Americana downtowns that are closed or almost closed because of Wal-Mart Superstores and such coming in. We need to stand firm and promote how important and wonderful small town areas like this is to our Heritage, to wonderful places for big city people to run away to for a getaway and just quality of life for the people that live here. Allot of us came here for that quality of life, we left our corporate lifestyles to enjoy the area, the people and the business life that Wellsboro has to offer. These businesses downtown employee allot of people and if it goes away so do the people."

Thank you.