

First Impressions

Enhancing your Byway Corridor



First Impressions Introduction

"You only get one chance to make a first impression"
- Will Rogers

Evaluating the first impression of a byway corridor requires an outside perspective since familiarity of our own Byway keeps us from sensing reality.

Sensing the Byway Corridor

Life is about perceptions. Early perceptions can become self-fulfilling prophecies.

The five human senses help us to understand and perceive the world around us. Touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste all play a role in creating a first impression of a byway corridor.

Let me share an example: When you live close to a factory and it has some unpleasant odors on a daily basis, you may not smell the odors anymore at all. A visitor might detect these odors and ask you about them right away. When giving a tour of a cheese plant in the mid-afternoon, someone asked about the 'foul odors,' the response with a grin - "Ah, that is the smell of money." The same might be said of a dairy farm along many of our rural byways.

Intrinsic Quality - Primary

Your byway's 'sight' first impression may be the sign that someone sees along the road or the images they see on your website. Projecting the primary intrinsic quality of your byway is essential. Taking time to create first and lasting images of your byway on any and all marketing materials is important and takes careful planning. In this image, the byway logo and sign for Lake Mille Lacs in Minnesota, you know right away that this scenic byway's primary intrinsic quality is about this natural lake.



Identifying what to Enhance

There are many methods to gather feedback from visitors. Enhancing a first impression starts with identifying what visitors perceive as favorable or unfavorable features along your byway corridor. To gather visitor feedback, with little or no money, here are a few ideas:

- 1) Talk to visitors.
- 2) Survey visitors.
- 3) Ask business owners, hotel managers, restaurant servers and others what visitors tell them about the byway or their visitor experience.
- 4) Listen to feedback at local tourism meetings.
- 5) Quiz tour operators about the comments they hear.
- 6) Put a 'suggestion box' on your website for both visitors and locals to give feedback. You could get a little fancy with "question of the month?"
- 7) Ask friends and family what they think when they visit you and your byway for the first time.

This list of ways to gather information may be endless, so be creative. There are more formal ways to gather information from visitors; just know that it may cost a little money, but it also may be well worth it. Local DMO organizations and university researchers interested in community development may be good partners for survey efforts.

Where to start?

There are a few givens to discuss during your byway planning stages, including when you are updating your byway corridor management plan.

- 1) The Byway Entrance - entering or leaving the Byway.
- 2) Confidence Markers - Road signs and markers affirming to the traveler that they are traveling on their chosen path. Refer to the 'Wayshowing Guide' publication or fact sheet in the NSBF Byway Resource Library.
- 3) Physical Appearance - Elimination of litter, providing clean restrooms and safe scenic pull-offs for memory making photos are all important.
- 4) Hospitality - Front-line staff at hotels, museums, restaurants and shops must be user-friendly, tourist-centered and willing to serve the traveler.
- 5) Cross-promotion - Marketing concept that you promote other available options to the consumer that also benefit you. Example: Retail staff promoting eating in town, so the visitor stays in town longer and might even stop back in to buy something at a local shop.

Assets and Features

As we said in the introduction, it is extremely hard to be unbiased about evaluating one's own byway corridor.

Here are some of the things that others will be observing when they come to your byway.

Signage - use of byway logo, route markings, directional signs, TODS, parking, handicapped parking, wayshowing signs; over-abundance or too few, legibility and usefulness

Landscaping - control of vegetation for exposure to viewsheds; trees, plantings, flowers, year-round décor, mowing and hanging planters

Architecture - downtown building cohesiveness, maintenance of homes, public parks and open spaces

Cleanliness - Adopt-a-Highway program, highway trash, overflowing trash containers, sidewalk and street cleaning, shop windows, curbside trash pick-up, unsightly dump sites, and the ever dreaded abundance of road kill

Condition of Road Surface and Berms - room for bikes, occasional pull-offs spots, missing or dented guard rails, and condition of sidewalks

Utility Services - availability of electric and cell service or pay phones; overhead transmission lines, rainwater runoff control, cell-phone towers, elevated water storage tanks and electric sub-stations

Public Parking - signage, access, availability, handicapped spaces; accessible parking for RV's, motorcycles and bicycles

Tourism/Welcome Center - traveler information center, parking and easy access

Bike paths and hiking trails - clearly marked signage, access, parking and safety

Information about the First Impressions Byway Research Program

A First Impressions byway research program is designed to provide insight of a first time visitor's experience along a byway corridor. The fact sheet about this program can be found in the NSBF Byway Resource Library. Additional information is available by contacting the NSBF at info@nsbfoundation.com.

REFERENCES

First Impressions Byway Research Program Fact Sheet. National Scenic Byway Foundation. April 2021. nsbfoundation.com.

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