

## CHAPTER 4: Goals and Objectives

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### Introduction

This chapter presents the goals, and objectives to reach those goals, that serve as the purpose and intent of the Corridor Plan as developed from opinions and suggestions of members of the Scenic Corridor Study Committee. This plan covers a twenty year planning horizon and as a result, the goals are intended to reach beyond current physical, political and financial constraints. The process of developing goals commenced with examining existing conditions including visual assets, natural resources, goals of communities located along I-75, existing land use, land ownership, outdoor advertising, roadside maintenance, and the status of community planning and zoning. Existing conditions were examined at a meeting of the Scenic Corridor Study Committee on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

To aid in the development of goals and objectives, corridor assets as well as problem areas had to be identified from the existing conditions. On August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2001, the Scenic Corridor Study Committee met at the Tuscarora Township Building to hold a visioning exercise that identified “Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats”. Strengths and weaknesses pertain to those ‘good and bad’ conditions which presently exist, while opportunities and threats relate to conditions which may occur in the future (1-20 years from now), and are dependent on our actions today. Participants were asked to convey their observations and ideas about these conditions, and to consider topic areas such as the residential developments along the highway; commercial and industrial activities; community “Gateway” entrances; signage & billboards; intergovernmental relationships; forestry; aesthetic characteristics and preservation of scenic views; zoning ordinances; natural resources and wildlife habitats. They were also free to explore any topics that were not listed above, but that they felt were relative. A complete list of these observations from the visioning exercise are found in **Appendix B** of this document.

In addition to the current Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats exercise, there was an activity designed to reveal a “Vision for the corridor in the year 2021”. Participants were asked to imagine that they were driving the I-75 corridor in the year 2021. The corridor has developed in the way that they wanted to see it, and they are describing the development and natural features to their visiting relatives as they move from one community to another on I-75. The descriptions include the views along the corridor as well as the entrances, or “gateways” to the communities. A list of these descriptions are found in **Appendix B** of this document.

On December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2001, the Scenic Corridor Study Committee met at the Tuscarora Township Building to review and finalize this chapter on Goals & Objectives. A summary of the goals are listed as follows, with categories and detailed objectives found in the “**Goals**” segment beginning on page 4-5:

#### Summary of Goals

- 1) Ensure continuity between jurisdictions through Intergovernmental coordination .
- 2) Protect important scenic vistas that include the rural landscape and natural features.
- 3) Protect and enhance high quality wildlife habitat and natural resource areas.
- 4) Reduce the necessity for the construction of more billboards.
- 5) Identify snowdrift problem areas, and plant drift-barrier trees in these locations.
- 6) Preserve the enjoyment of the I-75 driving experience with additional road and shoulder maintenance.

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This Chapter is presented in two segments: “**Key Issues Identified**” and “**Goals**” Sub-categories in each segment include: 1) Land Use Planning, Transportation, and Development, 2) Scenic Values and Preservation, 3) The Environment and Natural Resources, 4) Zoning Considerations, 5) Roadside Maintenance, and 6) Community and Multi-Jurisdictional Involvement.

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## **Key Issues Identified:**

### Land Use Planning, Transportation, and Development (*Key Issues*)

- The I-75 highway provides excellent year-round access to communities for commerce, tourism, and local travel between communities. This can be an opportunity for communities located along I-75 to establish attractive ‘gateways’ that enhance or preserve their uniqueness.
- Planning for the future is necessary while the traffic is still relatively light (compared to other areas), before night-sky light pollution has started, and before near-by development and over-abundant signage has further degraded scenic views. Without planning, communities may be in danger of losing their ‘uniqueness’ to strip-type development.
- A consistent plan for development across jurisdictions is needed, so that the communities’ needs are addressed while the preservation of scenic views and proactive roadside maintenance activities are taking place.
- Industrial, commercial, and residential development which is close to the freeway, and which lacks screening or landscaping buffers, can negatively impact views from the highway.
- A “Gateway” appearance is needed for communities near I-75, such as Gaylord, Vanderbilt, Wolverine, Indian River, Mackinaw City, and Cheboygan. Styled and landscaped community entrance signs provide a visual sense of arriving at a unique destination. Such signs can be placed just outside of the highway right-of-way, and in a location visible to motorists from the highway. The Gateway appearance may also be enhanced by the moderate use of Tourist-Oriented Directional Signs (TODS), which are small directional signs used by businesses or by a community to inform motorists of some special attraction to be found in that community.
- Business development is oriented more toward “passer-by” traffic rather than toward the residents of the local communities. Planning is necessary to provide development for local residents.

### Scenic Values and Preservation (*Key Issues*)

- There needs to be a policy to protect the “long” views of natural features along the corridor from development or signage which may obstruct such views.

- There are opportunities to place developments at a certain distance from the highway, thereby allowing for the protection of natural scenic settings, or for the placement of landscaping for screening around new developments.
- Landscaping, with native shrubs and wildflowers in open median areas can enhance views along the highway.
- “Junky-looking” or dilapidated sites, such as cluttered or abandoned commercial sites, are visual detractors. Light glare can also be a visual distraction at night.
- The addition of more billboards or large on-site signs may (1) block scenic views or be of a visually detracting character themselves. (2) If the sign(s) cannot be seen because of tree plantings that block snowdrift from the highway, the removal of the trees may result. (3) Many signs are located in communities which are 10’s or 100’s of miles from the actual advertised attraction. This has a visual impact on these communities, without apparent benefits to the communities.

## The Environment and Natural Resources *(Key Issues)*

- There is a desirable diversity of forests, other vegetation, and wildlife along the corridor. There are opportunities for proactive resource management programs.
- Communities can take a balanced approach to development, such as the protection of natural resources vs private property rights.
- Timber management is possible. This would be a proactive approach to managing over-mature or diseased timber stands in the ROW.
- Protection of natural forest areas along the corridor from ‘clear-cutting’ is possible by policy.
- Since I-75 traffic is a source of carbon monoxide pollution, residential areas should not be built too close to the freeway.
- Wetlands, wildlife corridors, farmland, and other scenic view areas could be protected from being developed. Purchase of development rights (PDR) or transfer of development rights (TDR) might be used to preserve the wetlands, wildlife corridors, and scenic view areas. PDR, TDR, or lower property taxes for active farmland may help to preserve farmland.

## Zoning Considerations *(Key issues)*

- Regulatory consistency is needed between jurisdictions to guide development and protect natural resources.
- New development, including residential, commercial, extractive use, and industrial can be required to include landscaping and screening. Regulations can also address lighting issues.
- On-site signage regulations can include considerations for aesthetics and scenic views.

- Local signage regulations can be more restrictive than Public Act 106.

## Roadside Maintenance *(Key Issues)*

- MDOT logo signs in the ROW identify businesses (food, hotel, fuel) available at interchanges, and reduce the need for large billboards to advertise businesses at those interchanges. TODS signs, outside of the ROW, can provide other information such as other types of businesses or unique attractions to be found at each community.
- There are very good rest areas along I-75, and there is minimal commercialization at these sites (rest areas in some states have excess signage and too many commercial establishments at rest areas).
- Permanent tree plantings in the ROW are needed in snow drift areas- snow fencing does not work. Existing trees that block snowdrift may be removed because they block commercial signs.
- Currently, roadside timber management activities are reactive to problems after they have occurred. If funding were available, the timber could be thinned and harvested as necessary to keep forest stands young and healthy. Trees that are in danger of falling in the roadway or on ROW fence could be removed before these problems occur.
- Gravel work is needed along the shoulder in many areas, however funding for this is limited. Also, in certain areas, concrete pavement is degrading which can affect the quality of the ride and, consequently, the enjoyment of the views that are available.

## Community and Multi-Jurisdictional Involvement *(Key Issues)*

- There is an opportunity for intergovernmental cooperation in planning, along the corridor.
- Model ordinance language on signage and landscaping is needed for agreed upon steps to take in protecting visual resources. All jurisdictions could adopt such language into their ordinances.
- Signage and landscaping projects for designing “Gateways” could be coordinated between communities.
- Consistent ordinances between communities are needed to eliminate confusion for developers and community residents. Development consistent with the communities’ common values can also occur.

## Goals:

### Land Use Planning, Transportation, and Development (Goals)

#### **Goal 1: Ensure continuity between jurisdictions through Intergovernmental coordination.**

- Objective a) Through presentations, show the findings in this plan to local government planners, MDOT policy-makers, road commissions, civic leaders, and business organizations to show the need for cooperation across jurisdictional boundaries.
- Objective b) Develop intergovernmental agreements for coordinating land use decisions. Notice to adjacent jurisdictions of master plan updates, zoning changes, and ordinance changes are to be part of these agreements.
- Objective c) Define primary shared goals between jurisdictions, and establish a mechanism for all jurisdictions to work toward these goals on a regular basis. Produce maps and illustrations for the desired outcomes of future development along the corridor.
- Objective d) Identify areas within the ROW that can be used for future multi-modal transportation needs, such as connecting bicycle paths, hiking trails, and snowmobile trails. The areas that are suitable for these uses can be cataloged on maps, so that communities adjacent to the highway can plan for such multi-modal facilities as the need arises.
- Objective e) Establish outdoor lighting standards for development along the I-75 corridor. The aim of these standards would be to reduce or eliminate glare for the motorist, and to enhance the 'Northern Michigan' atmosphere by keeping the night skies dark.
- Objective f) Develop and conduct planning & zoning workshops for local communities that focus on scenic enhancement. The workshops would address natural resource management and development guidelines that highlight visual aesthetics, including ways that communities can design their own unique "Gateways".

### Scenic Values and Preservation(Goals)

#### **Goal 2: Protect important scenic vistas that include the rural landscape and natural features**

- Objective a) Identify and preserve necessary ROW and buffer space for landscaping and screening, where new development is likely to take place.
- Objective b) Preserve open and agricultural land where possible, through conservation easements, "purchase of development rights" (PDR) or "transfer of development rights" (TDR) programs or other means as appropriate.

- Objective c) Develop design guidelines that provide direction for new development. Draft zoning ordinance language which addresses requirements for setbacks, landscaping, and screening of new development sites. Screen existing visual detractors. Address lighting requirements to reduce glare and keep night skies dark.
- Objective d) Enact local controls that limit the construction of large billboards and other off-premises signs. Support changes in Act 106 to allow the expeditious removal of abandoned (1 year or more) signs and billboards. Billboard design guidelines should be developed and adopted by I-75 communities. Use a Geographic Information System (GIS) to keep track of billboards which do not conform to current regulations, and require compliance to the regulations.
- Objective e) Enact local signage ordinances to limit the size, number, and placement of on-premises signs. Local zoning ordinances should also address signs painted on vehicles that are parked next to the highway ROW.

## The Environment and Natural Resources *(Goals)*

### **Goal 3: Protect and enhance high quality wildlife habitat and natural resource areas**

- Objective a) Institute a forestry management program within the ROW that will improve the health of timber stands and the quality of natural habitat. Harvest over-mature stands, replant with diverse species, and remove falling/fallen timber. Continue to coordinate activities that complement MDNR forestry management programs adjacent to the highway.
- Objective b) Identify and preserve ecological corridors which cross the highway. Identify possible strategies to enable the movement of wildlife through the corridors, from one side of I-75 to the other (i.e., I-75 bridges over water courses should be long enough to allow a sufficient land connection for animal travel under the bridge).
- Objective c) Coordinate natural resource preservation efforts, including water quality efforts, between jurisdictions and among natural resource organizations. Consult with neighboring jurisdictions during periods of community master plan updates, and also with natural resource protection organizations and watershed protection organizations during their active projects.
- Objective d) Develop and conduct planning & zoning workshops for local communities that focus on scenic enhancement. The workshops would address natural resource management and development guidelines that highlight visual aesthetics.

## Zoning Considerations *(Goals)*

### **Goal 1: Ensure continuity between jurisdictions through Intergovernmental coordination.**

- Objective g) Conduct presentations to governmental units. Inform them of their ability to guide development so that it is consistent with the communities' values, through local zoning ordinances. Presentations on zoning issues can be a recurring event for planning commissions.
- Objective h) Organize and hold annual meetings between planners from different jurisdictions. Model zoning language can be discussed and brought back to their respective communities with a recommendation for adoption. This will provide regulatory continuity between jurisdictions for the protection of visual and natural resources.
- Objective j) Establish outdoor lighting standards for development along the I-75 corridor. The aim of these standards would be to reduce or eliminate glare for the motorist, and to enhance the 'Northern Michigan' atmosphere by keeping the night skies dark.
- Objective k) Support changes to Act 106 which would allow counties the authority to regulate billboards along State highways.
- Objective l) Develop and conduct planning & zoning workshops for local communities that focus on scenic enhancement. The workshops would address natural resource management and development guidelines & regulations that highlight visual aesthetics.

## Roadside Maintenance (Goals)

### **Goal 4: Reduce the necessity for the construction of more billboards**

- Objective a) Encourage the use of TODS and MDOT logo signs instead of new billboards.

### **Goal 3: Protect and enhance high quality wildlife habitat and natural resource areas**

- Objective e) Institute a forestry management program within the ROW that will improve the health of timber stands and the quality of natural habitat. Harvest over-mature stands, replant or allow to populate with diverse species, and remove falling/fallen timber that may land on the roadway or fence. Continue to coordinate activities that complement MDNR forestry management programs adjacent to the highway.

### **Goal 5: Identify snowdrift problem areas, and plant drift-barrier trees in these locations**

- Objective a) Continue the program of planting trees in snowdrift problem locations, and pursue more funding for this purpose.
- Objective b) Support existing policies to prioritize the preservation of trees. Trees should not be cut simply because they may obstruct views of commercial signage.

### **Goal 6: Preserve the enjoyment of the I-75 driving experience with additional road and shoulder maintenance**

- Objective a) Explore sources of funding for additional road & shoulder maintenance along the roadside.
- Objective b) Hold annual meetings between local communities and MDOT to prioritize future highway maintenance activities.

## Community and Multi-Jurisdictional Involvement(Goals)

### **Goal 1: Ensure continuity between jurisdictions through Intergovernmental coordination.**

- Objective m) Institute a policy to notify adjacent jurisdictions of pending master plan changes.
- Objective n) Share and adopt consistent regulatory language to protect visual and natural resources among adjacent communities.
- Objective o) Develop and conduct planning & zoning workshops for local communities that focus on scenic enhancement. The workshops would address natural resource management and development guidelines & regulations that highlight visual aesthetics, including ways that communities can design their own unique “Gateways”.