

## **CHAPTER 5: Recommendations and Improvement Strategies**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the recommendations and improvement strategies for the future of the I-75 corridor, based on the goals and objectives in Chapter 4. They were developed from the opinions and suggestions of members of the Scenic Corridor Study Committee, and were reviewed by general consensus. This plan covers a twenty year planning horizon and as a result, the recommendations and improvement strategies are intended to reach beyond current physical, political and financial constraints.

The chapter format will follow that of the previous chapter on goals and objectives, providing recommendations for: 1) Land Use Planning, Transportation & Development, 2) Scenic Values and Preservation, 3) The Environment & Natural Resources, 4) Zoning Considerations, 5) Roadside Maintenance, and 6) Community & Multi-Jurisdictional Involvement.

On December 6<sup>th</sup>, the Scenic Corridor Study Committee met at the Tuscarora Township Building to review the draft Chapter 4: Goals and Objectives. Participants were asked to convey their observations and ideas about the goals and objectives, and recommend changes, additions and/or deletions to them. On February 7<sup>th</sup>, the Scenic Corridor Study Committee met at the Tuscarora Township Building to review this chapter on recommendations and improvement strategies, and improve and clarify the final recommendations found herein.

Some of the recommendations strongly advocate the revision of local zoning ordinances to meet certain minimum standards for landscaping (& buffers), signage and billboards, blight, and outdoor lighting. Model ordinance language to address these needs may be found at the end of this Plan, in **Appendix A**. There is also a recommendation to substitute “tube-style” guardrails for concrete or corrugated metal guardrails. Engineering drawings for these are found in **Appendix C**.

Note: The specific tasks for each recommendation *are written in italics*.

### **Land Use Planning, Transportation, and Development**

#### **Improvement Strategy I: Establish Intergovernmental coordination to ensure continuity between jurisdictions.**

Recommendation 1) Present 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. *Prepare an inventory of Compact Disks (CD)'s that contain this plan, for distribution to the above decision-makers. Prepare a computer presentation describing the plan, and show this at meetings.*

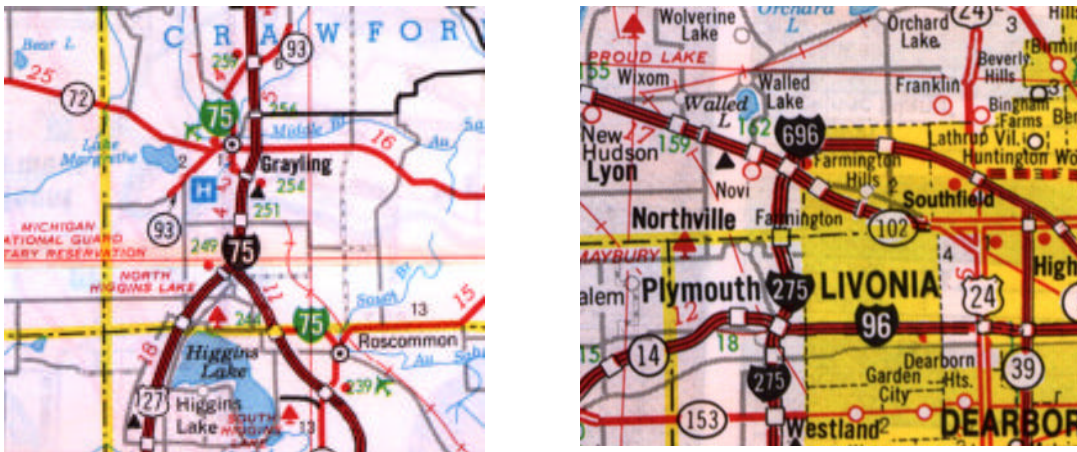
Recommendation 2) Develop ways that governments can establish a pattern of coordinating land use decisions. Local governments should have a policy to notify

adjacent jurisdictions of master plan updates. *Attend planning commission meetings and, as an agenda item, recommend the adoption of a policy to notify adjacent jurisdictions and MDOT of pending master plan changes or zoning updates. As a part of this policy, input should be solicited from these jurisdictions.*

Recommendation 3) 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, and distribute these to local government planners, MDOT policy-makers, road commissions, civic leaders, and business organizations. Ask planning commissions to adopt a policy to use these maps and illustrations, and input from MDOT, as a part of their site plan review process.*

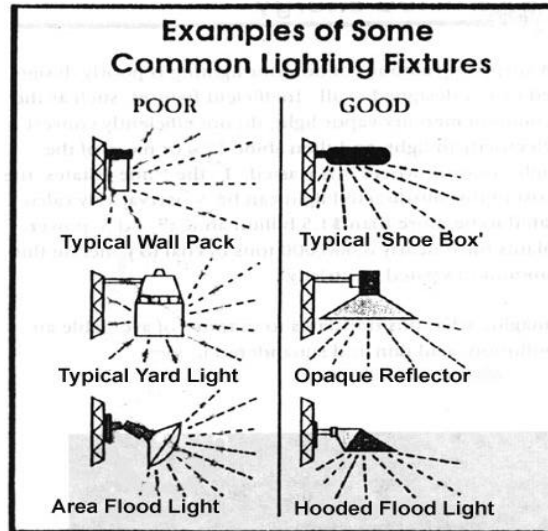
Recommendation 4) Identify areas within the I-75 ROW that can be used for future multi-modal transportation needs, such as connecting bicycle paths, hiking trails, and snowmobile trails. *Areas that are suitable for these uses can be cataloged on maps, so that both MDOT and communities adjacent to the highway can plan for such multi-modal facilities as the need arises. See **Figure 5.1**, below, and **Figure 5.10**, on page 5-11.*

**Figure 5.1**, Existing ROW snowmobile trails are found on I-75 south of Grayling, and near I-696 and I-275 in Farmington, Michigan



Recommendation 5) Establish outdoor lighting standards for development along the I-75 corridor. The aim of these standards will be to provide adequate lighting for safety and security, while at the same time eliminating glare for the motorist and enhancing the 'Northern Michigan' surroundings by keeping the night skies dark. *Planning commissions should require developers to use outdoor lighting fixtures which are shielded and that direct the light downward to where it is needed. MDOT should use top-shielded or flat-lens cobra head style fixtures for highway lighting and at rest areas. Fixtures should produce no skyward or horizontal light glare. Additionally, the Lighting Research Center in Troy NY recommends that lighting levels should be used which are no greater than 10 fc (foot-candles) for both*

safety (avoiding hazards) and security (protection from crime) lighting in parking areas and around commercial buildings. Examples of fixtures, modified from an illustration by the International Dark-Sky Association, Tucson AZ, are shown in **Figure 5.2**, below:



**Figure 5.2**, Lighting fixtures

Recommendation 6) “Visual Quality” planning & zoning workshops are needed for local communities. *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” (see **Figure 5.5**, on page 5-5).*

## Scenic Values and Preservation

### **Improvement Strategy II: Protect important scenic vistas that include the rural landscape and natural features**

Recommendation 1) Identify and preserve necessary highway ROW and buffer space adjacent to the ROW for landscaping and screening, where new development is likely to take place (see **Figure 5.3**, on page 5-5). *GIS should be used to produce maps showing future residential, commercial, and industrial development areas on either side of the I-75 corridor. Recommended buffers will be highlighted on the maps, and these maps should be distributed to each community planning commission and to MDOT planners.*

Recommendation 2) Preserve open and agricultural land where possible: *A) Zoning ordinance language can be changed to make it easier for developers to build “open space” developments than conventional ‘lot-grid’ type developments. B) Local communities can establish committees to explore programs such as “purchase of development rights” (PDR) or “transfer of development rights” (TDR). Support state legislation for the creation of a Michigan Agricultural*

*Preservation Fund. This would provide statewide funding for a locally driven PDR program. Funding for the program would come from public act funds and from the creation of a new "conversion tax" on farmland owners who sell for development purposes. C) Support state legislation for property tax "use value assessments" rather than "highest and best use" assessments for Michigan farm land. Lower property taxes for currently farmed land will make the preservation of farm land much easier. Michigan is one of only two states that currently requires the taxing of farmland at its highest and best use, and many farms are being taxed based on their development value rather than the current use as farms.*

- Recommendation 3) Develop consistent design guidelines that provide direction for new development. *Zoning ordinance language should be provided to local officials which addresses requirements for setbacks, landscaping, and aesthetic screening of new development sites. Local communities should establish volunteer committees to recommend landscape screening for existing visual detractors and for future development (see **Figure 5.3** on page 5-5). Ordinances should include lighting requirements to reduce glare and keep night skies dark.*
- Recommendation 4) Provide limits that are more stringent than P.A. 106 for off-premises signage and billboards: There are dilapidated and unsightly billboards at some locations along the corridor that, by law, are difficult to remove. Some industrial-looking billboards detract from an otherwise natural-appearing setting (see **Figure 5.4** on page 5-5). There are also nineteen billboards in good condition that are available for advertising, but are not presently being used, which may indicate that there is slight need for new billboard construction. *Through local zoning controls and state legislation, limit the construction of large billboards and other off-premises signs. Support changes to Act 106 that will allow the expeditious removal of abandoned (abandoned for 1 year or more) signs and billboards. Use a Geographic Information System (GIS) to keep track of billboards which do not conform to current regulations, including the displaying of permit numbers, and require compliance to the regulations with on-going enforcement efforts.*
- Recommendation 5) Use other outdoor advertising methods besides billboards. *Local communities should encourage the use of smaller Tourist-Oriented Directional Signs (TODS) to advertise community attractions and business locations. Local food, fuel, and accommodations businesses should be encouraged to use MDOT logo signs near interchanges instead of promoting the construction of new billboards.*
- Recommendation 6) Reduce visually detracting on-premises signage: *Through local signage ordinances, limit the size, number, style, and placement of on-premises signs (see **Figure 5.11**, on page 5-11). Local zoning ordinances should also address signs painted on vehicles that are parked next to the highway ROW.*
- Recommendation 7) "Visual Quality" planning & zoning workshops are needed for local communities. These should 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" (see **Figure 5.5**, on page 5-5).

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Figure 5.3  
Figure 5.4  
Figure 5.5



Figure 5.3, Examples of Landscaping Alternatives:  
A building with no landscaping (l)  
A building with plantings (r)



Figure 5.4, This is an old extraction area which is now reverting to natural-looking wetlands. These billboards greet visitors to Michigan's Lower Peninsula after crossing the bridge.



Figure 5.5, Examples of Community Gateways.

## The Environment and Natural Resources

### **Improvement Strategy III: Protect and manage high quality wildlife habitat and natural resource areas**

- Recommendation 1) 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 natural growth with diverse species, and remove falling/fallen timber. Continue to coordinate activities that complement MDNR forestry management programs adjacent to the highway.*
- Recommendation 2) Identify and preserve ecological corridors which cross the highway (see **Figure 2.8**, in **Chapter 2**). *Using GIS and wildlife management strategies, identify possible ways to enable the movement of wildlife through the corridors, from one side of I-75 to the other (i.e., plantings may be used to help guide wildlife to areas where there are opportunities to cross; I-75 bridges over water courses should be of a sufficient length to allow a land connection for animal travel under the bridges. Or, a small 'land corridor' could be constructed under one side of those bridges that do not have such a continuous land connection, and stout fencing could be installed so as to keep animals from crossing over the top of I-75 at those points).*
- Recommendation 3) Coordinate natural resource preservation efforts, including water quality efforts, between jurisdictions and among natural resource organizations. *Local planning commissions should consult with neighboring jurisdictions and MDOT during on-going community master plan updates or zoning changes. Natural resource protection organizations and watershed protection organizations should also be consulted, especially when those organizations have active projects in the same locations. Planning commissions should solicit input from all of the above jurisdictions and organizations.*
- Recommendation 4) Planning & zoning workshops are needed for local communities. *Develop and conduct planning & zoning workshops for local communities that focus on natural resource and scenic enhancement. The workshops will address natural resource management strategies, and provide development guidelines that highlight visual aesthetics .*

## Zoning Considerations

### **Improvement Strategy IV: Establish Intergovernmental coordination to ensure that there is continuity between jurisdictions, and that all issues are addressed comprehensively. (For zoning language relating to the following recommendations, refer to Appendix A)**

- Recommendation 1) Community governmental units should be informed about their ability to guide development so that it is consistent with the communities' values,

through local zoning ordinances. *Informational presentations to planning commissions, about zoning issues, should be an on-going program.*

- Recommendation 2) Discussions should be held between planners from different jurisdictions concerning the use of zoning language to protect visual resources. *Consistent zoning language, addressing landscaping (see **Figure 5.3**, on page 5-5), visual & natural resources, and signage (see **Figure 5.11**, on page 5-11) should be adopted by adjacent communities to provide regulatory continuity between jurisdictions.*
- Recommendation 3) Eliminate night-time lighting glare for the motorist, and preserve Northern Michigan's dark night-sky environment. *Each community should share consistent outdoor lighting standards for residential, commercial, and industrial development along the I-75 corridor. These standards should be put into the form of regulatory language, and adopted as part of a zoning ordinance by all adjacent communities.*
- Recommendation 4) Since zoning is quite often county-wide, Michigan's counties need to have the legal authority to regulate billboards as do townships and municipalities. *All communities should support changes to Act 106 which will allow counties the authority to regulate billboards along State highways.*
- Recommendation 5) Planning & zoning workshops are needed for local communities. *Develop and conduct planning & zoning workshops for local communities that focus on scenic enhancement. The workshops will address natural resource management, and provide examples of development guidelines and regulations that highlight visual aesthetics.*

## Roadside Maintenance

### **Improvement Strategy V: Protect and manage high quality wildlife habitat and natural resource areas**

- Recommendation 1) Institute a forestry management program within the ROW that will improve the health of timber stands and the quality of natural habitat. *As much as possible, MDOT should harvest over-mature timber stands, replant or allow to repopulate with diverse species, and remove falling/fallen timber that may land on the roadway or ROW fence. There should be a continuation of the policy to coordinate activities that complement MDNR forestry management programs adjacent to the highway.*
- Recommendation 2) Community planning departments and county road commissions need to continually work with MDOT TSC's and the North Region Office to make sure their local plans and projects coordinate with MDOT corridor plans and projects. *Local communities should provide land use, future land use, and zoning maps, as well as a list of proposed local development projects and natural resource plans to MDOT for reference. MDOT should provide the 5-Year Road and Bridge Program, its natural resource management plans, and an up-to-date booklet of roadside maintenance policies to local planners. There should be at least one annual meeting between MDOT planners and local decision-makers for this purpose.*

Recommendation 3) Many communities have natural resource attractions that should be conveyed to potential tourists, however more off-premises multi-color signage can contribute to visual clutter. *Landscaped TODS constructed of natural-looking materials can be used to advertise natural attractions or recreation areas to tourists. These aesthetically-designed TODS can also be used as “community awareness” signs that notify motorists that they are entering a unique place.*

### **Improvement Strategy VI: Identify snowdrift problem areas, and plant trees in these locations to control snow drift.**

Recommendation 1) Continue the program of planting trees in snowdrift problem locations, and pursue more funding for this purpose. *Maps should be produced showing snowdrift problem segments of I-75. Planting trees in the ROW along these segments should be programmed into the normal I-75 maintenance activities (see **Figure 5.6**, on page 5-9).*

Recommendation 2) A road commission has reported at least one instance of business owners requesting that trees in the ROW be cut down because the trees will soon obstruct their commercial signage. This was in a known snowdrift problem area, and the trees were left standing. *Existing policies to prioritize the preservation of trees should remain in place, especially in snowdrift problem areas. Trees should not be cut simply because they may obstruct views of commercial signage.*

### **Improvement Strategy VII: Preserve the enjoyment of the I-75 driving experience**

Recommendation 1) Gravel is needed to correct pavement ‘edge-drop’ along certain segments of I-75, however funding is limited for this maintenance activity. *Local communities should work with MDOT each year to prioritize future highway maintenance activities. Together, they should explore sources of funding for additional road & shoulder maintenance along the roadside.*

Recommendation 2) Cast iron reflector mounts have a tendency to crack and release fragments into the roadway, which can present a potential hazard to vehicles and motorists. *The cast iron reflector mounts should be removed from the pavement. The mounts should be replaced with a safe durable material, or the reflectors should be eliminated from the roadway altogether. See **Figure 5.7**, on page 5-9.*

Recommendation 3) Scenic views are often hidden from the motorist by guardrails or concrete barriers at bridges and scenic locations, such as the Inland Waterway view, Indian River. Typically, it is not possible to see through existing guardrails or barriers, which are constructed of concrete or corrugated steel. The views could be greatly improved through the use of “tube-style” guardrails. *As existing guardrails and bridge barriers become in need of repair or replacement, MDOT should program their replacement with see-through “tube” style guardrails. Refer to tube-style guardrail engineering drawings, provided by MDOT, in **Appendix C**; see also **Figure 5.8**, on page 5-9.*



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Figure 5.6  
Figure 5.7  
Figure 5.8



Figure 5.6. Trees can be planted for noise absorption, screening visual distractions, or for snow drift barriers.



Figure 5.7. Fragments of cast iron reflector mounts are sometimes found in the roadway.

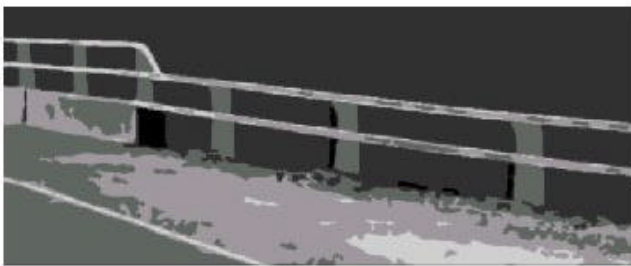


Figure 5.8. Illustration of a tube-style see-through guardrail (l), and a photo of a concrete bridge barrier in need of replacement near the Topinabee exit (r).

Recommendation 4) A motorist's visual enjoyment of the I-75 corridor can be greatly improved by having native flowers, grasses, shrubs, and trees in certain corridor views. Sweet pea ornamentals add color, and grow well in Michigan's northern environment. *A program of planting native flowers, grasses, shrubs, and trees in the median or along the ROW at intervals should be added to normal roadside maintenance activities. See Figure 5.9, on page 5-11.*

## Community and Multi-Jurisdictional Involvement

### **Improvement Strategy VIII: Establish Intergovernmental coordination to ensure continuity between jurisdictions.**

Recommendation 1) Develop ways that local governments can establish a pattern of coordinating land use decisions, such as having a policy to notify adjacent jurisdictions of master plan updates. *Attend planning commission meetings and, as an agenda item, recommend the adoption of a policy to notify adjacent jurisdictions and MDOT of pending master plan changes or zoning updates. As a part of this policy, input should be solicited from these jurisdictions.*

Recommendation 2) Community planning departments and county road commissions need to continually work with MDOT TSC's and the North Region Office to make sure their local plans and projects coordinate with MDOT corridor plans and projects. *Local communities should provide land use, future land use, and zoning maps, as well as a list of proposed local development projects and natural resource plans to MDOT for reference. MDOT should provide the 5-Year Road and Bridge Program, its natural resource management plans, and an up-to-date booklet of roadside maintenance policies to local planners. There should be at least one annual discussion between MDOT planners and local decision-makers.*

Recommendation 3) Discussions about using zoning language to protect visual resources should be held between planners from adjacent local governmental jurisdictions. *Consistent landscaping, visual & natural resource, and signage zoning language should be adopted by adjacent communities to provide regulatory continuity between jurisdictions.*

Recommendation 4) NEMCOG should be contacted for information about current planning officials at the State and local level.

Recommendation 4) Planning & zoning workshops are needed for local communities. Develop and conduct planning & zoning workshops for local communities that focus on scenic enhancement. The workshops will address natural resource management, and provide examples of development guidelines and regulations that highlight visual aesthetics, including ways that communities can design their own unique "Gateway" appearance. See **Figure 5.5**, on page 5-5.

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Figure 5.9  
Figure 5.10  
Figure 5.11



Figure 5.9, Wildflowers planted in the median (Virginia DOT)



Figure 5.10, Culvert for a multi-use ROW bicycle trail (l), and winding trail for pedestrians and bicyclists (r).  
Source of photos: FHWA



Figure 5.11, Examples of on-premise signage where there may be little local regulation of unconventional signage.