

APPENDIX B

Current Strengths and Weaknesses, Future Opportunities and Threats

The following is a summary of individual comments compiled from the corridor visioning session on August 22nd and from notes submitted by some members of the Scenic Corridor Committee who could not attend. Note that the items are not necessarily presented in order of importance.

Strengths

There is good I-75 freeway access for industrial developments in communities along the corridor
 There are exceptional views (including some very long views) of natural features such as forests, fields, and water resources
 There is a diversity of forest and wildlife species along the corridor
 MDOT logo signage helps to identify businesses available at interchanges, without large billboards being necessary
 There are less restrictions for motor freight on I-75 than on County roads (i.e., frost weight restrictions in the spring)
 The freeway enables a strong tourism economy for communities along the corridor
 There is a “dark sky” resource (very little light pollution from the Straits to Gaylord)
 The highway is well designed, with many scenic curves and hilltop views
 There are very good rest areas
 There is minimal commercialization of rest areas (rest areas in some states have excess signage and too many commercial establishments at rest areas)
 Most communities along the corridor have the ability to guide development through local zoning
 There is relatively light traffic on I-75, compared to freeways located downstate
 Communities along I-75 get extensive public exposure (millions of vehicles per year)
 The I-75 corridor shares a general “Northern Michigan” image of a very scenic environment
 Development has occurred primarily at highway interchanges, and has not spread out along the corridor
 Billboards have not yet become excessive in number

Opportunities

There is still an opportunity for intergovernmental coordination along the corridor
 It is possible to institute more planning for communities along the corridor
 There is a chance for proactive economic development
 There is an opportunity for proactive resource management
 Communities can decide to take a balanced approach to development (protection of natural resources vs private property rights)
 When development occurs, it can be placed away from the I-75 view, or it can be properly screened by vegetative plantings or by forest buffers
 MDOT logo signs could be expanded to include attractions at each community
 Presentations on planning topics could be given to communities to encourage planning
 Model zoning ordinance language could be adopted by communities to guide development and provide regulatory continuity between jurisdictions
 Incentives for positive development can be instituted (such as tax breaks for businesses)
 Northern Michigan’s natural resources (such as forests, lakes, and streams) can be preserved for future generations of residents and tourists
 The views along the corridor can be preserved for future generations to enjoy
 Timber management along the corridor is possible. This would be a proactive approach to over-mature or diseased timber stands, which can cause downed timber problems
 It is possible to plant wildflowers in the median areas, to enhance the views for tourists

Communities can coordinate signage and landscaping projects along the corridor
An organization could be established to purchase development rights within the most scenic viewshed areas along the corridor
Purchase of development rights (PDR), transfer of development rights (TDR), scenic easements, and open space plans could be used to preserve the viewshed
It is possible to institute a policy to protect natural forest areas along the corridor from clear-cut
Subdivision and other development plans can be required to have landscaping and screening

Weaknesses

There is no funding for proactive roadside timber management
There is no funding for resurfacing the highway until 2005 (i.e., if the ride is not enjoyable, then the views will not be enjoyed); 1968 concrete sections are degrading, and the “superpave” sections (near Riggsville Rd) are breaking up
There is gravel needed on the shoulders, but no funding is available for this
Snowfence is not working; permanent tree plantings for drifting snow areas are needed
Many billboards are unsightly and too numerous
Ordinances from different communities are not consistent with each other
There are visual distractions while driving, such as: billboards which hide natural views, inconsistent on-premises signs (different sizes, types, and spacing in different communities), “junky” development sites, and light glare at night
Some signage affects remote communities (some communities have billboards which advertise businesses 10’s or 100’s of miles away)
A visual “Gateway” appearance to Gaylord is lacking; a ‘sense of community’ is lost in strip development areas
Communication between the road commissions and the Michigan State Police is needed about the use of the median area for training purposes
Vanderbilt lacks a “Gateway” appearance to promote the Pigeon River Forest area
Development is occurring faster than are efforts to preserve the views and natural resources
There are commercial failures at certain interchanges which are dilapidated “eyesores”
It is difficult to get communities to agree on what steps to take to protect visual resources, and what ordinance language to use when dealing with issues such as signage and landscaping along the corridor
The rural environment appears “unprotected” from development
The very nature of the aesthetic and visual qualities of I-75 causes development pressures
Industry and subdivision developments are oriented toward “passer-by” traffic rather than toward the residents of the local communities
The I-75 traffic is a source of carbon monoxide pollution (residential areas should not be too close to the freeway)
Industrial and commercial development close to the freeway can negatively impact views from the highway

Threats

Roadside timber management may continue to be ‘reactive’ and more costly than ‘proactive’
Highway resurfacing in 2005 may come too late, and the entire road, including the sub-base, may need reconstruction
If shoulder gravel is not replaced, the edge-drop may deepen and may further exacerbate pavement deterioration, as well as possibly causing a driving hazard
Roadside tree plantings for drifting snow areas are under fire from business owners who have signs that may be blocked from the view of motorists by growing trees

- The addition of more billboards are possible; they may block scenic views or be of a visually detracting character themselves, or may cause the removal of tree plantings that block snowdrift from the highway
- Inconsistent ordinances from different communities create confusion for both developers and community residents; development may occur that is not in tune with each community's values
- Visual distractions can detract from the driving experience; There may be more "junky-looking" development sites, and light glare at night may become prevalent
- If planning for the future is neglected, communities along I-75 may lose their unique identity to strip development
- New commercial, industrial, and residential development may be too close to the freeway which can negatively impact enjoyable views from the highway

Results from Envisioning an Ideal I-75 Corridor for the Future

This next section deals with what committee participants felt were desired future conditions along the I-75 corridor. **Visioning by Scenario** was the process used to help committee members imagine, describe and attain a preferred future for their highway corridor. From this desired vision will come the goals and actions that are necessary to achieve those goals.

Vision → Goal Formulation → Action Plans → Action

Participants were asked to respond to the following Visioning exercise. To encourage a free flow of ideas, answers were not restricted by current physical, political and institutional constraints. All participants had opportunities to present their ideas in an open, informal setting.

The scenario is as follows:

Imagine you have friends or relatives visiting in the year 2021. You decide to take them for a tour to show off the wonderful community near I-75 in which you live. You take a drive through the community's 'Gateway' from I-75, admire the beauty of the landscape, marvel at the development, drive back to the interchange and enter the highway bound for the next community. Much of what you see pleases you, and some activities surprise you. Describe the 2021 future that you envision. Consider the physical environment (residential, commercial and industrial development); the natural resources (forestlands, water, open space and farmlands); community facilities and services; and the activities (and/or the interaction) of communities located along the I-75 corridor.

The list of ideal future conditions is as follows:

Vanderbilt is a destination sought by tourists; there is a pleasant 'gateway' to the community consisting of natural-looking recreational style signage, landscaping at the interchange, and an inviting welcome center; there is an RV park and a small business district with a few light industries; the community is considered to be

‘walkable’ (a family can park the car and walk or bicycle to most every shop and other attraction located in the village, through a series of sidewalks and trails).

Northern Michigan’s destination **attractions** (sought by visitors) **are added to MDOT’s logo signs**, so that large unattractive signage is not necessary to lure those interested in these attractions.

Natural-looking recreational style signs are used in all communities along I-75 to identify community attractions, businesses, and public facilities alike, in keeping with a **Northern Michigan “Up-North” atmosphere**.

There is **“Quality Development” in communities** along I-75; the business and residential structures are setback from the right-of-way to allow for screening, landscaping, and natural resource protection. There is a clustering of commercial and residential development to allow for open spaces.

The communities along I-75 have allowed **mixed commercial & residential development to provide a ‘village’ atmosphere**. It is easy and pleasant for pedestrians and bicyclists to travel within the communities through a **series of sidewalks, trails, and safe road crossing facilities**.

All of the **“Junk” billboards have been removed**.

Other visual distractions are absent; **the corridor still looks “natural”**, with views of the forests, fields, lakes, and rivers. The night sky is visible because of controlled lighting.

The highway through urban and open areas **has a “parkway” appearance**; there is landscaping with natural materials, there are wildflower plantings, and the interchanges to communities have been beautified to present the appearance of a **gateway to each community**.

The **governmental jurisdictions are cooperating** and collaborating to produce consistent ordinances that reflect a common vision. There are **consistent development guidelines** that are being used by Northern Michigan’s communities.

The **highway pavement is in good shape**, making it possible to enjoy the ride and the views of the corridor.

The **communities along I-75 are ‘vibrant’ economically and socially**. Financial institutions are finding good returns on investing in the small communities.