

Introduction

Background

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), under the direction of Michigan's Governor John Engler, began to take action to improve the appearance and aesthetics of major transportation gateways into Michigan. It had been determined that the I-75 corridor from Gaylord to the Straits of Mackinac, including the Mackinaw Bridge, was a major 'internal gateway'. In this context, MDOT applied for and received Transportation Enhancement Funding to conduct a study that would result in a "corridor management plan" developed by a multi-disciplinary committee consisting of individuals, local planners, government officials, property owners, regional planning representatives, transportation officials, economic development professionals, environmental advocates, business representatives, and Michigan Department of Transportation representatives.

The corridor management plan will provide a common vision and direction for the long range protection, management, and enhancement of visual and natural resources. It will address environmental, social, and economic issues. And, it will provide MDOT with a positive, comprehensive public relations tool to build a partnership with individuals, organizations, and local governmental units.

The Northeast Michigan Council of Governments (NEMCOG), with its technical planning staff, was awarded the grant contract to develop and publish the Plan. The Plan development tasks involved organizing and facilitating the committee meetings, developing the Plan structure, gathering and analyzing information pertinent to the Study, producing the Plan maps, presenting the existing corridor conditions to the committee, conducting the goals & objectives visioning sessions, processing changes to the draft Plan, and finally publishing the Plan.

A series of I-75 Corridor Study Committee meetings were held to gather input on the overall development of the Plan, to develop goals, objectives, and recommendations, and to make necessary changes to the Plan before publication. A total of five meetings were held on March 7th, 2001, June 28th, 2001, August 22nd, 2001, December 6th, 2001, and February 7th, 2002. The publishing date for the complete Plan is March 31, 2002.

Study Area

The boundaries of the corridor study were based on 2 important factors:

- 1) An extended distance of 3,000 feet parallel to the right-of-way lines on each side of the highway. Under the Highway Advertising Act of 1972, Act 106 as amended, activities shall not be considered to be in a “business area” more than 660 feet from the main traveled [high]way. Nevertheless, the authority granted to MDOT under the Act provides for the regulation of advertising activity within an “adjacent area”, defined as “The area measured from the nearest edge of the right-of-way of an interstate highway, freeway, or primary highway and extending 3,000 feet perpendicularly and then along a line parallel to the right-of-way line”.
- 2) On a clear day, the distance from the highway that a motorist can see from inside a vehicle - that distance, in this report, being called the “viewshed”.

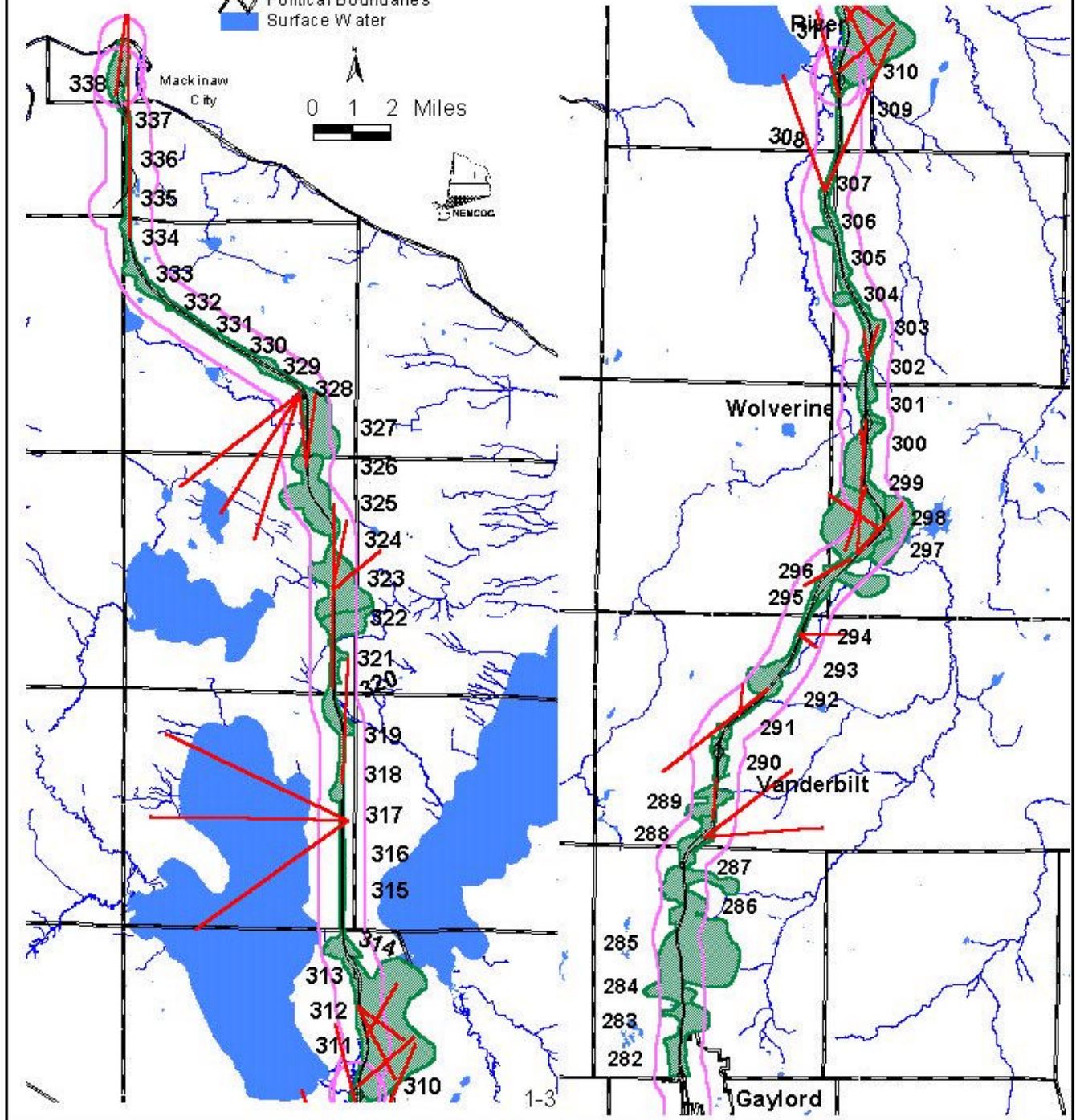
Therefore, the study area includes a distance of 3,000 feet from the right-of-way on each side of the highway, until that distance is extended by the viewshed. NOTE: if the motorist’s view extends more than approximately two miles, the viewshed is shown only by extended lines, and not by a definitive boundary line (see **Figure 1.1** on the following page).

I-75 Scenic Corridor Plan

Figure 1.1

-  Long Views
-  I-75 Highway
-  3000 Feet Adjacent
-  ViewShed
-  Political Boundaries
-  Surface Water

Boundaries of the Viewshed
and 3,000 Feet Adjacent



Purpose of the Planning Process

The purpose of the I-75 Scenic Corridor planning process is threefold: 1) to record existing conditions and roadside maintenance activities that are occurring within the corridor which will provide a basis for planning future activities, 2) to facilitate a coordinated, across jurisdictional boundaries, approach to land use planning and scenic enhancement planning for the I-75 corridor, and 3) to develop written recommendations and guidelines for preserving and enhancing the corridor's visual qualities, which will help to maintain and improve the economic vitality of the I-75 communities through the protection of visual and environmental resources.

First, the study required the formation of an I-75 Scenic Corridor Study Committee composed of members that could provide input to guide the Study process. This involved bringing together those who provide daily roadside maintenance, those who are responsible for policies and supervision, those who have an interest in visual qualities, economics and tourism, those businesses whose livelihood depends on maintenance of the corridor, and those government entities and agencies that have regulatory authority over corridor-related activities

Next, the study identified and analyzed existing conditions such as land use, land ownership, demographics, environmental conditions, outdoor advertising, local planning and zoning activities, visual resources and visual detractors, roadside maintenance activities, and adjacent communities' festivals and events. With the exception of planning and zoning activities, the above information is recorded and analyzed in Chapter 2, Existing Conditions. Community planning and zoning activities are found in Chapter 3, Status of Planning and Zoning.

The study guided participants of the I-75 Scenic Corridor Study Committee through the process of identifying goals and objectives for the future of the corridor. To do this, participants were asked to list their observations and ideas about current or future corridor 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 is found in **Appendix B** of this document). The results of this phase in the Study is found in Chapter 4, Corridor Goals and Objectives.

Finally, the study developed recommendations that can be used by MDOT and local jurisdictions to cooperatively and pro-actively address all of the major issues raised in the course of this Study. These recommendations are organized under the recurring six categories of: 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 and Multi-Jurisdictional Involvement. The written recommendations are found in Chapter 5, Recommendations and Improvement Strategies.

It is important to mention here that the achievement of the goals and objectives in this Plan will require a continued effort to provide this information to communities. It will also require the adoption of suggested policies by those who are responsible for policies and supervision, and the adoption of recommended ordinance language by the government entities and agencies that have regulatory authority over corridor-related activities. Adoption of the Scenic Corridor Plan

as a master plan amendment will enable communities to use the suggested policies and guidelines contained herein in their day to day planning activities. The adoption process should follow the procedures defined in the township, village, city and county planning statutes respectively. Adoption of the Plan will serve as the legal foundation for regulating land use activity along the corridor through zoning.