

Frequently Asked Questions



Route 101 - Mendocino County



Route 395 - Mono County



Route 14 - Kern County

WHAT IS THE CALIFORNIA SCENIC HIGHWAY PROGRAM AND WHEN DID IT START?

Many state highways are located in areas of outstanding natural beauty. California's Scenic Highway Program was created by the Legislature in 1963. Its purpose is to protect and enhance the natural scenic beauty of California highways and adjacent corridors, through special conservation treatment. The state laws governing the Scenic Highway Program are found in the Streets and Highways Code, Sections 260 through 263.

WHAT ELEMENTS MAKE A HIGHWAY "SCENIC"?

A highway may be designated scenic depending upon how much of the natural landscape can be seen by travelers, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes upon the traveler's enjoyment of the view.

WHAT DOES THE "STATE SCENIC HIGHWAY SYSTEM" INCLUDE?

The State Scenic Highway System includes a list of highways that are either eligible for designation as scenic highways or have been officially designated. These highways are identified in Section 263 of the Streets and Highways Code and can be found on the Landscape Architecture Program webpage at:

<http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic/cahisys.htm>. In addition, a list and map of California's officially designated scenic highways can be found on this website at: <http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic/schwy.htm>, and at: http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic_highways/index.htm respectively.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN "ELIGIBLE" AND AN "OFFICIALLY DESIGNATED" SCENIC HIGHWAY?

The status of a proposed state scenic highway changes from eligible to officially designated when the local governing body applies to Caltrans for scenic highway approval, adopts a Corridor Protection Program, and receives notification that the highway has been officially designated a Scenic Highway.

WHAT IS A CORRIDOR PROTECTION PROGRAM?

When a city or county nominates an eligible scenic highway for official designation, it must identify and define the scenic corridor of the highway. Scenic corridors consist of land that is visible from the highway right of way, and is comprised primarily of scenic and natural features. Topography, vegetation, viewing distance, and/or jurisdictional lines determine the corridor boundaries. The city or county must also adopt ordinances, zoning and/or planning policies to preserve the scenic quality of the corridor or document such regulations that already exist in various portions of local codes. They should be written in sufficient detail to avoid broad discretionary interpretation and demonstrate a concise strategy to effectively maintain the scenic character of the corridor. These ordinances and/or policies make up the Corridor Protection Program.

WHAT IS INCLUDED IN A CORRIDOR PROTECTION PROGRAM?

There are five legislatively required elements for scenic corridor protection:

1. Regulation of land use and density of development;
2. Detailed land and site planning;
3. Control of outdoor advertising;
4. Careful attention to and control of earthmoving and landscaping; and
5. The design and appearance of structures and equipment.

Public participation in developing these elements is very important if the program is to have popular support.

WHAT STEPS ARE NECESSARY TO RECEIVE OFFICIAL DESIGNATION?

If a route is included on the list of scenic highways eligible for official designation, contact the Caltrans District Scenic Highway Coordinator. For the coordinator near you go to the Landscape Architecture Program webpage at: http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic_highways/scenic.hwy.coordinators.htm. The city or county with jurisdiction over lands adjacent to the highway must take the following steps:

1. Conduct a visual assessment of the route to determine if it meets the current scenic highway criteria and to what extent, if any, development has intruded on the scenic views.
2. Submit a Scenic Highway Proposal to the District Scenic Highway Coordinator. The package should include a letter of intent by the local governing body, maps showing the scenic corridor and existing zoning, a map overlay of development in the corridor, and a narrative description of the scenic elements. The District and State Scenic Highway Coordinators review the proposal and if it is determined that the corridor meets the scenic criteria, the applicant proceeds to the next step. If the route fails this review, it is not advisable to continue seeking official designation.
3. Prepare and adopt a Corridor Protection Program. The District and State Scenic Highway Coordinators review the protection program. If it is determined that the program meets the legislative standards, a recommendation to designate the highway as scenic is forwarded to the Caltrans Director.

CAN HIGHWAYS BE ADDED TO THE SCENIC HIGHWAY SYSTEM?

Yes. A city or county may propose adding routes with outstanding scenic elements to the list of eligible state highways. However, additions can only be made through legislative action. Consult with the District Scenic Highway Coordinator before initiating action, to ensure that the route qualifies.

CAN COUNTY ROADS BECOME PART OF THE SCENIC HIGHWAY SYSTEM?

Yes. Although there is no official list of county highways eligible for scenic designation, county highways that have outstanding scenic qualities are considered eligible and do not require legislation. To receive official designation, the county must follow the same process required for official designation of state scenic highways.

HOW ARE OFFICIALLY DESIGNATED SCENIC HIGHWAYS IDENTIFIED?

The California poppy serves as the logo for the scenic highway program. Caltrans places signs with this logo along officially designated routes. Also, the poppy logo identifies scenic highways on travel maps, and maps produced by the State Division of Tourism.

IS THERE SPECIAL FUNDING FOR THE SCENIC HIGHWAY PROGRAM?

There is no special State funding sources for preparation of scenic highway nominations. However, interested cities and counties can apply for Community Based Planning Grants for this purpose. More information is available on the Caltrans Division of Transportation Planning webpage at: <http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/offices/ocp/cbtpg>. In addition, some types of enhancement projects on scenic highways may qualify for funding under the [Transportation Enhancements \(TE\) Program](#), and the [National Scenic Byways Grant Program](#).

CAN SCENIC HIGHWAYS BE WIDENED OR OTHERWISE CHANGED?

Yes. However, Caltrans works with appropriate agencies to ensure the protection of scenic corridors to the maximum extent feasible. It identifies impacts to scenic corridors (i.e., degradation and obstruction of scenic views) as an integral part of its project planning, project development and maintenance operations.

DOES OFFICIAL DESIGNATION PRECLUDE DEVELOPMENT?

No, but an effective Corridor Protection Program will ensure activities within the scenic corridor are compatible with scenic resource protection and consistent with community values while still allowing appropriate development.

CAN SCENIC HIGHWAY DESIGNATIONS BE REVOKED?

The most critical element of the scenic highway program is implementation and enforcement of the Corridor Protection Program. Caltrans performs a compliance review of scenic highways every five years, or more often if appropriate. Revocation of a scenic highway designation can occur if Caltrans determines that the Corridor Protection Program or the scenic quality of the corridor is no longer in compliance. A city or county may request revocation if it no longer wishes to be part of the program.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BENEFITS OF SCENIC HIGHWAY DESIGNATION?

Official designation requires a local governing body to enact a Corridor Protection Program that protects and enhances scenic resources along the highway. A properly enforced program can:

- Protect the scenic corridor from encroachment of incompatible land uses such as junkyards, dumps, concrete plants, and gravel pits, etc.
- Mitigate activities within the corridor that detract from its scenic quality by proper siting, landscaping or screening.
- Prohibit billboards and regulate on-site signs so that they do not detract from scenic views.
- Make development more compatible with the environment and in harmony with the surroundings.
- Regulate grading to prevent erosion and cause minimal alteration of existing contours and to preserve important vegetative features along the highway.
- Preserves views of hillsides by minimizing development on steep slopes and along ridgelines.
- Prevent the need for noise barriers (sound walls) by requiring a minimum setback for residential development adjacent to a scenic highway.

IN ADDITION, SCENIC HIGHWAY DESIGNATION WILL:

- Enhance community identity and pride, encouraging citizen commitment to preserve community values.
- Enhance land values by maintaining the scenic character of the corridor.
- Provide a vehicle for the community to promote local tourism that is consistent with the community's scenic values.

If you have any problems or suggestions, please e-mail dennis.cadd@dot.ca.gov