

## Background

California's Scenic Highway Program began in 1963, to protect and enhance the natural scenic beauty of California Highways (Hwy) and adjacent corridors, through special conservation treatment. There are now 1,260.7 miles of Scenic Highways in California<sup>1</sup>. The most recent Hwy to be designated as scenic was Mono County's Hwy 395 (Owens Valley). A total of 101.2 miles of Hwy 395 (various segments) were designated scenic in June 2000. In addition, in August 1999 San Luis Obispo County designated 56.6 miles of Highway 1, from the SLO City limits to Monterey County Line, as a Scenic Highway. Approximately 99 percent of the land along this part of Hwy 1 Agricultural, with a minimum parcel size of 320 acres. Within Santa Barbara County, the officially designated "State Scenic Highways" are: the entire length of Highway 154, and Highway 1 from its intersection with Highway 101 at Las Cruces to the southerly city limits of Lompoc.



## County Scenic Highways Element<sup>2</sup>

The County's Scenic Highways Element is the component of the General Plan, related to the Open Space and Circulation Elements, which outlines the County's policies and procedures for obtaining official "Scenic Highway" designation. The Element's goals include: enhance and preserve valuable scenic resources; consider maintenance of scenic qualities when proposing new or realigned highways, and uphold economic contributions from tourism. The entire length of Highway 101 within Santa Barbara County is included on the State's Masterplan of highways eligible for the "Scenic Highway", as adopted by the legislature<sup>2,3</sup>. These eligible highways may become official State Scenic Highways when a plan of preservation is implemented by the County, as described below. In addition, the County's Coastal Land Use Plan **Policy 4-8**: states that the County shall request the State of California to designate that portion of Highway 101 between Winchester Canyon and Gaviota State Park as a "Scenic Highway."

## Official Scenic Highway Designation Application Process

The first step for nominating eligible scenic highways for official designation is an application from the County to Caltrans which includes a visual assessment and a resolution package.

The visual assessment is a written summary and must address the following concepts:

1. *Vividness – the extent to which the landscape is memorable.*
2. *Intactness – the integrity of visual order in the landscape and the extent to which the natural landscape is free from visual intrusions.*
3. *Unity – the extent to which intrusions are sensitive to and in visual harmony with the natural landscape.*

The resolution package consists of:

1. *A Board of Supervisors adopted Resolution of Intent.*
2. *A topographic map showing the suggesting scenic corridor boundaries and proposed scenic highway limits, a map overlay showing minor, moderate and major intrusions, and a zoning map delineating the scenic corridor and showing allowable land use.*
3. *A video (maximum of 15 minutes) showing both sides of the corridor, as viewed by the motorist.*
4. *A narrative description of the scenic elements in the corridor, including intrusions on scenic views.*

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<sup>1</sup> California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). 2010. *Officially Designated Routes*. Available at: <http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic/schwy.htm>

<sup>2</sup> County of Santa Barbara. Office of Long Range Planning. 1975. *Scenic Highways Element*. Available at: [http://longrange.sbcountyplanning.org/programs/scenichighways/scenic\\_element.php](http://longrange.sbcountyplanning.org/programs/scenichighways/scenic_element.php)

<sup>3</sup> California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). 2010. *Eligible and Officially Designated Routes*. Available at: <http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic/cahisys.htm>

After approval of the package, a Corridor Protection Program must be created that includes, at a minimum, the following:

1. *Regulation of land use and density of development*
2. *Detailed land and site planning (i.e. permit or design review authority)*
3. *Prohibition of off-site outdoor advertising and control of on-site outdoor advertising*
4. *Careful attention to and control of earthmoving and landscaping (i.e., grading ordinances, design review authority)*
5. *Design and appearance of structures and equipment (i.e. placement of utilities, microwave receptors, etc.)*

After adoption of the Corridor Protection Program, the County then submits a request for final scenic highway designation approval to Caltrans.

### **Scenic Highway Designation Benefits<sup>4</sup>**

A properly enforced Corridor Protection Program can:

1. Protect the scenic corridor from encroachment of incompatible land uses;
2. Mitigate activities within the corridor that detract from its scenic quality by proper siting, landscaping or screening;
3. Prohibit billboards and regulate on-site business signs so that they do not detract from scenic views;
4. Make development more compatible with the environment and in harmony with the surroundings;
5. Regulate grading to prevent erosion and cause minimal alteration of existing contours and to preserve important vegetative features along the highway;
6. Preserve views of hillsides by minimizing development on steep slopes and along ridgelines; and
7. Provide a vehicle for the community to promote local tourism that is consistent with the community's scenic values.

### **Things to Consider**

1. Almost all of Highway 101 on the Gaviota Coast is within the Coastal Zone; which already implies strict land use controls. In addition, the Gaviota Coast Plan could strive to incorporate elements that a Corridor Protection Plan would have, without going through the official Scenic Highway Designation process.
2. Per the Uniform Rules for Agricultural Preserves and Farmland Security Zones, the County allows Williamson Act contracts for Open Space if the land is located in a scenic highway corridor (Section 3-1, *Eligibility Requirements*)<sup>5</sup>.
3. Currently, the only section of Hwy 101 officially designated as scenic is 12.1 miles in Del Norte County (designated in 1970). Del Norte County is located in the most Northwestern portion of the State.

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<sup>4</sup> California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). 2010. *Benefits of Scenic Highway Designation*. Available: [http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic/can\\_do.htm](http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic/can_do.htm)

<sup>5</sup> County of Santa Barbara. 2007. *Uniform Rules for Agricultural Preserves and Farmland Security Zones*. September. Available at: <http://longrange.sbcountyplanning.org/programs/uniformrules/uniformrules.php>