



# SCENIC HIGHWAYS ELEMENT



SANTA BARBARA COUNTY  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ADOPTED 1975  
REPUBLICATED MAY 2009



County of Santa Barbara  
Planning and Development  
123 E. Anapamu Street  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

The electronic version of the Santa Barbara County Comprehensive Plan can be found at: <http://longrange.sbcountyplanning.org>



Former Scenic Highways Element Cover – Replaced March 2009

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## **I. PREAMBLE**

The scenic vistas along Santa Barbara County's highways are a valuable resource. Preservation of this resource is important to both present and future County residents. The policies and program outlined in this Scenic Highway Element may form a significant part of this County's endeavor to preserve its renowned scenic resources.

## II. INTRODUCTION <sup>1</sup>

The Scenic Highway Element of the County General Plan presents the County's policies and procedures for scenic highways and their designation. Scenic Highway Elements are a required part of County General Plans under the State's Government Code section 65302(h). (See Appendix A) This requirement is intended to assist in preserving and enhancing the most scenic areas along the State's highways.

This element specifically will present the County's scenic highway goals, evaluation standards, preservation measures and procedures for obtaining official "Scenic Highway" designation for State and County roads in Santa Barbara County. The adoption of a Scenic Highway Element is the first step in establishing a preservation program for scenic highways. Individual routes may then be nominated and evaluated for potential designation. The emphasis of the State guidelines is on designating State highways as "scenic highways." Local agencies at their option may adopt other designation programs for local scenic routes.

At this point it may be helpful to define the term "scenic highway." The guide to scenic highway implementation prepared by the State Department of Transportation gives these definitions:

- a) "The Rural Designated Scenic Highway is a route that traverses a defined visual corridor within which all natural scenic resources and aesthetic value are protected and enhanced."
- b) "The Urban Designated Scenic Highway is a route that traverses a defined visual corridor which offers an unhindered view of attractive and exciting urban scenes."

At present there are two State highways in Santa Barbara County which have been officially designated "State Scenic Highways." They are: State Highway 1 from its intersection with State Highway 101 at Las Cruces north to the southerly city limits of Lompoc; and the entire length of State Highway 154.

Portions of other State highways traversing the County are in the State's masterplan of highways eligible for "Scenic Highway" designation. The masterplan was adopted by the Legislature with the specific legislation. These eligible highways may become official State Scenic Highways when a plan of preservation is implemented by the County for these routes. The procedure for this implementation is explained in the "Procedures" section.

The eligible highways are:

- a) State Highway 33 from the junction of State Highway 166 south into Ventura County,

- b) State Highway 166 from the junction of State Highway 33 west thru Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties to its junction with State Highway 101,
- c) State Highway 101, its entire length in Santa Barbara County,
- d) State Highway 150 from its junction with State Highway 101 east into Ventura County.

This element of the General Plan is related to the circulation and open space elements. A well-rounded circulation network provides, in addition to access and interchange to all functional areas of the region, scenic corridors to and through areas of aesthetic, historical, and recreational interests. In conjunction with the open space element, scenic corridors may form part of the areas set aside for preservation.

The existing County General Plan has circulation designations of “scenic road” and “scenic corridor.” The “scenic road” designation was mapped for various County roads both existing and proposed when the County’s General Plan was adopted in 1965. No preservation measures were applied to the “scenic roads.” Later when the official State Scenic Highways in this County were adopted, they were given the designation “scenic corridor” on the General Plan. The two designations “scenic road” and “scenic corridor” have no relationship except that they both indicate routes having scenic qualities. The “scenic road” designation may be eliminated to avoid confusion with officially adopted Scenic Highways.

### **III. GOALS**

The County seeks to attain the following goals through the adoption and implementation of this Scenic Highway Element:

- a) To enhance and preserve the valuable scenic resources located along roadways within the County,
- b) To consider every proposed new highway or major realignment as an opportunity to maintain the scenic quality of the County by evaluating them for scenic highway eligibility,
- c) To help maintain the economic contribution of tourism to the County,
- d) To accommodate State planning law.

### **IV. PROCEDURES**

The local agency first adopts a Scenic Highway Element for its General Plan. When this has been accomplished, the County may then consider individual routes for designation as “Scenic Highways.”

## **FOR STATE HIGHWAYS**

The next step toward designating State highways already eligible through the State's masterplan for Scenic Highways will be the passage of a resolution by the Board of Supervisors. This resolution will be addressed to the State District Director of Transportation requesting him to conduct a corridor survey and highway facility study for the nominated route. The corridor survey will analyze the area adjacent to the route; the highway facility study will analyze the area within the right-of-way. These two studies will be combined by the District Director into a "Scenic Highway Report." This report will be transmitted to the County to assist in the next step -- the formulation of the "local plan and program of protection" for the eligible route.

The local plan will adopt the corridor boundaries and present the protection measures for the proposed highway. The plan for the corridor must include:

- a) regulation of land use,
- b) detailed site planning,
- c) control of outdoor advertising,
- d) regulation of grading and landscaping,
- e) design of structures and equipment.

These items are explained in the section called "Preservation Measures" later in this document.

When the preservation plan for the corridor is completed, it shall be forwarded to the District Director of Transportation for his recommendations. From these recommendations the plan will be modified if necessary to assure compliance with State requirements.

When the local plan is finalized, the County will implement the preservation measures presented in the plan for the specific corridor. The last step is a written request to the State Director of Transportation for official designation of the route as a "State Scenic Highway." This designation would be given upon the approval of the State Director.

For a list of the procedural steps leading to official scenic highway designation, see figure 1 below.



Figure 1

Procedures for obtaining “Scenic Highway” designation for State highways in the masterplan:

The County:

- 1) Requests studies from the State District Director of Transportation,
- 2) Reviews the studies,
- 3) Completes protection plan,
- 4) Submits plan to District Director of Transportation for review,
- 5) Enacts preservation measures of plan,
- 6) Applies to State Director of Transportation for designation.

If program is approved, official designation will be granted.

If the County wishes to designate a State highway which is not in the masterplan for scenic highways, it must nominate that route to the State legislature. Upon adoption by the legislature of that nominated route into the masterplan, the same procedure as above would be used to obtain official designation of the new route.

**FOR COUNTY HIGHWAYS**

The procedure for designating a County road as a “County Scenic Highway” is similar to that for State Scenic Highways. In this case when the County decides to evaluate a route for scenic highway status, it shall prepare its own corridor survey and highway facility study. The State District Scenic Highway Coordinator will assist the County as requested. The plan for preservation of the corridor will be prepared and the protective measures of the plan adopted. When this has been done, the County may apply in writing to the State Director of Transportation for official designation of the route as a “County Scenic Highway.” The criteria for official State Scenic Highway designation shall be equally applied to a proposed County Scenic Highway. If the County route and program meet these standards, the route will be approved.

Throughout this evaluation and designation procedure responses from citizens, landowners, General Plan Advisory Committees, and others should be encouraged to make the resulting scenic highway program representative.

## **V. PRESERVATION MEASURES**

The local plan of preservation for an eligible scenic route must contain certain measures for the protection and enhancement of the corridor. These measures are described below.

### **REGULATION OF LAND USE**

Appropriate zoning to insure that development in the corridor will not conflict with the scenic objectives of this element will fulfill this requirement. For scenic corridors in Rural Areas this will be accomplished by adding the ‘D Design Control Overlay District’ to the base zone district.” Zoning restrictions on design control or agricultural improvements required pursuant to California Streets and Highways Code Sections, 261 & 262 shall be minimized. Lot size will be determined based upon the General Plan designation and the specific route analysis. Urban portions of the scenic corridor will be zoned to commercial, industrial, or residential districts which provide for development plan and/or architectural review. The General Plan overlay for either rural or urban portions will be “scenic corridor.” Lands in Agricultural Preserve meet this requirement.<sup>2</sup>

### **DETAILED SITE PLANNING**

The urban portion of an eligible scenic corridor should be zoned to various districts which provide for approval of a development plan for future development. For rural portions of eligible highways, this site planning may be achieved by an overlay zone on the underlying agricultural zoning district which requires Planning Commission approval of plans for further development. This site planning requirement can be provided with appropriate zoning as listed above.

### **CONTROL OF OUTDOOR ADVERTISING**

The County has adopted a sign ordinance (Chapter 25 of the Santa Barbara County Code), which meets this requirement for all zoning districts except “C-3”, General Commercial District, “M-1”, Light Industrial District, “M-I-X”, Exclusive Light Industrial District, and “M-2”, Heavy Industrial District. Any legal non-conforming billboards in eligible corridors would have to be removed before official adoption of the route. If desired, special regulation of signs in scenic highway corridors may be added to the present sign ordinance.

### **REGULATION OF GRADING AND LANDSCAPING**

The prevention of earthwork detrimental to the scenic quality of eligible corridors will be implemented by the existing County grading ordinance (Chapter 14 of the Santa Barbara County Code) and the proposed agricultural grading ordinance amendment. If the agricultural grading ordinance is not enacted, a special grading ordinance covering only those areas within the designated scenic corridor would suffice for the rural portions of eligible highways.

### **DESIGN OF STRUCTURES AND EQUIPMENT**

This requirement is applicable to public as well as private projects in the scenic corridor. For private development the “D”, design supervision combining regulation, will be

adequate. This combining regulation requires architectural review of future development plans. For County projects the Board of Supervisors, as the final approval and funding body, can require conditions suitable for maintenance or enhancement of the scenic qualities of the corridor. The Board of Supervisors should make recommendations for State and federal projects which may affect scenic corridors. A specific part of this State requirement is the underground installation of utility lines within the corridor.

The County may institute additional measures or regulations it determines necessary for the preservation of scenic highways. Following are some suggested optional measures:

- a) Public purchase of development rights in scenic corridors;
- b) Establishment of a citizens' committee for scenic highway matters;
- c) Implementation of Williamson Act "Open Space Preserves" for areas along scenic routes;
- d) Enactment of a development prohibition in scenic corridors.

## **VI. DESIGNATION PRIORITIES**

The application of the scenic highway program may be approached in the following phases:

- 1) Implement the scenic highway designation for the State routes in the County which are in the master plan for scenic highways.
- 2) Evaluate and nominate County roads for the "County Scenic Highway" designation.
- 3) Evaluate proposed and future routes for Scenic Highway designation.
- 4) Evaluate and nominate other existing State routes for inclusion into the State masterplan for eventual adoption or implementation.
- 5) Establish and implement a local scenic route designation system separate from the State program.

Phases two, three, four and five are optional and do not necessarily have to be accomplished in the order listed above. This phasing of the County program for scenic highways allows flexibility in its implementation. Specific route nominations and recommendations may be received from County agencies including the Board of Supervisors, the Planning Commission, the General Plan Advisory Committees, County departments, and interested groups and individuals. Each nomination will be given a Planning Commission case number and then reviewed by the Planning Commission for

recommendations to the Board of Supervisors. The Board of Supervisors may take the appropriate procedural action to pursue adoption of the nominated route or routes. The County will confine its activities to the routes within its jurisdiction, but should be ready to co-ordinate with other agencies and jurisdictions when requested.

Official scenic highway designation should be considered only for those routes and their respective corridors which are found to exhibit extraordinary or unique scenic qualities. Because of the generous natural endowment of Santa Barbara County, the evaluation to determine the most scenic routes for designation may prove difficult. Additional qualifications may be allowed for routes which give access to historical sites, recreation areas, parks, connect to other designated scenic highways, or have a great variety of scenery. A road with high quality scenery need not be rejected because it has unscenic “blemishes”, if those unscenic areas are amenable to renovation. Such blemishes as billboards, unscreened industrial activities, or poorly-executed grading may be corrected to appreciate the qualification of a road for the “Scenic Highway” designation.

## **VII. MAP OF THE COUNTY**

(See GP-23, the map portion of this element.)

Scenic Highways are also designated on the following maps:

GP-1	County-wide Area,
GP-2B	Montecito-Summerland Carpinteria Area,
GP-3C	Goleta Valley Area,
GP-4A	Santa Ynez Valley Area,
GP 5	Los Alamos Area,
GP-6B	Lompoc Valley Area,
GP-7A	Santa Maria-Orcutt Area,
GP-8	Guadalupe Area,
GP-8A	Casmalia Area,
GP-9	Cuyama Valley Area.

## APPENDIX A

The following excerpts form the basis of authority and scope for Scenic Highway Elements.

From the State of California Government Code Section 65302(h):

[The General Plan shall include] “A scenic highway element for the development, establishment, and protection of scenic highways pursuant to the provisions of Article 2.5 (commencing with Section 260) of Chapter 2 of Division I of the Streets and Highways Code.”

From the Streets and Highways Code, Section 260:

“It is the intent of the Legislature in designating certain portions of the state highway system as state scenic highways to establish the State’s responsibility for the protection and enhancement of California’s natural scenic beauty by identifying those portions of the state highway system which, together with the adjacent scenic corridors, require special scenic conservation treatment. It is further declared to be the intent of the Legislature in designating such scenic highways to assign responsibility for the development of such scenic highways and for the establishment and application of specific planning and design standards and procedures appropriate thereto and to indicate, in broad statement terms, the location and extent of routes and areas requiring continuing and careful coordination of planning, design, construction, and regulation of land use and development, by state and local agencies as appropriate, to protect the social and economic values provided by the State’s scenic resources.”

Further information is contained in other sections of the Streets and Highways Code, and also in “The Scenic Route: A Guide for the Official Designation of Scenic Highways” and “Guidelines for Local General Plans (State of California).”

## CITATIONS

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<sup>1</sup> [Resolution No. 75-848](#) (Case No. 75-GP-7) Adopted November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1975 (Adopt the Scenic Highways Element as an Element of the General Plan of the County of Santa Barbara)

<sup>2</sup> [Resolution No. 91-541](#) (Case No. 81-GP-3) Adopted September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1991 (Amended Preservation Measures, Regulation of Land Use paragraph)