

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## Study Background and Purpose

The Massachusetts Legislature designated Route 112 as a state scenic byway in the Acts of 2004, Chapter 291, Section 65. This designation laid the path for federal funding of this Corridor Management Plan and the accompanying public participation process, which has involved the eight communities along the Route 112 Scenic Byway: Colrain, Shelburne, Buckland, and Ashfield in Franklin County; and Goshen, Cummington, Worthington, and Huntington in Hampshire County.

The Route 112 Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan is a cooperative project of the eight Byway communities, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, and MassHighway to recognize, interpret, preserve, and promote the unique scenic, natural, recreational, historic, and cultural resources of Route 112 in Franklin and Hampshire counties, and to identify threats to the character and viability of the Byway. Development of the Plan has been guided by two advisory committees, one in each region of the Byway, and incorporated an extensive public participation process. The plan provides a framework for guiding future Byway projects, while also remaining flexible and dynamic so that communities can respond to opportunities and needs as they may arise and change.

Development of the plan has entailed meeting five major objectives:

- Identifying the unique scenic, natural, recreational, historic, and cultural resources of the Route 112 Scenic Byway corridor;
- Developing recommendations and strategies to preserve and enhance these resources;
- Identifying opportunities to expand economic activities related to agricultural heritage and recreational tourism along the Byway;
- Developing an assessment that identifies potential recreational linkages to other scenic byways, and to hiking trails, state forests, river access points, and other cultural and recreational features along the Route 112 corridor;
- Collaborating in the early stages of development of a regional scenic byway website that will highlight the attractions of all of the five scenic byways located in Western Massachusetts.

With the completion of this plan, Byway communities are now eligible for federal scenic byway grant funds. According to the Federal Highway Administration, these funds can be used for planning and implementing byway projects that involve: safety improvements, byway facilities, access to recreation, protecting historical, archaeological, and cultural resources, and interpretive information and marketing.

## Document Format

In order to conduct an in-depth review and planning process for the resources of the Route 112 Scenic Byway in each region, the two advisory committees and the respective regional planning agencies worked on parallel, but somewhat separate tracks. The Corridor Management Plan reflects this in-depth effort with chapters that describe the resources of the Byway in two parts. Each resource chapter has a section on Franklin County and then on Hampshire County. The Action Plan brings together the recommendations from the two regions into one place, charting a course of action for preserving and enhancing the resources of the Route 112 Scenic Byway.

## Corridor Description

The Route 112 Scenic Byway corridor—defined to include the area within a 1/2 mile from each side of the roadway—runs 53.4 miles north to south through a landscape of historic village centers, working farms, rolling hills, deep forests, and rushing waters. The Byway spans the length of two counties, Franklin and Hampshire. It extends south from the Vermont state line, where it begins at 738 feet above sea level, and then dips down to 400 feet where it crosses the Deerfield River Valley. Route 112 then rises to cross the western New England peneplain with highpoints of more than 1,500 feet above sea level in Ashfield, at the intersection with Route 116, and more than 1,400 feet at Five Corners in Cummington. From Worthington Center, the Byway begins its descent to the confluence of the Middle and West Branches of the Westfield River, ending at an elevation of 369 feet in Huntington. The Byway includes eight towns that have varying lengths of the Byway within them: Colrain (9.1 miles), Shelburne (1.9 miles), Buckland (6 miles), Ashfield (6.5 miles), Goshen (4.6 miles), Cummington (7.8 miles), Worthington (9 miles) and Huntington (8.5 miles). The Byway also intersects three other scenic byways: the Mohawk Trail (Route 2) to the north, Route 116, and the Jacob’s Ladder Trail (Route 20) to the south.

### *Franklin County Area*

The Franklin County section of the Route 112 Scenic Byway is approximately 24 miles long. For the most part, the corridor consists of a two-lane (one travel lane in each direction) rural type roadway. The character of the Route 112 Scenic Byway in Franklin County reflects its function as an important and primary regional travel route within a scenic rural area. The following description is intended to provide a sense of the character and layout of the road traveling from north to south.

### Colrain

From the Vermont State Line south to the intersection with Greenfield Road in Colrain, the roadway is generally characterized by long, sweeping curves and gentle inclines and declines. The edge of the roadway changes a number of times along this section from thickly wooded to wide open hay fields providing dramatic views down the valley. Guardrails, in some instances overgrown with vines, also periodically line the edge of the roadway. A number of farm barns and structures, along with the



*Route 112 in Colrain North of the Village Center*

occasional house, are located close to the edge of roadway. Between Jesse Wood Road and Thompson Road, the bridge crossing the North River has been narrowed to a single lane due to structural issues and the traffic flow is controlled by a traffic signal.

South of Colrain Village Center, wooded embankments line at least one side of the roadway for much of its length to Hope Street in Shelburne. The curves are sharper and more numerous in this section. Occasionally, the road comes close to the edge of the North River or open hay fields, providing views down and across the valley, and guardrails along much of this section are partially overgrown with vines. This section is more developed than the previous one, with clusters of houses and businesses located close to the roadway edge at a number of locations.

### Shelburne

Leading to Route 2 on Hope and Mechanic Streets, the roadway runs through the northern section of the Village of Shelburne Falls. Houses are located on both sides of the streets. The road widens out as it approaches the intersection with Route 2. Almost immediately after turning onto Route 2, you cross the approximately 600-foot span of a bridge that first crosses the section of Route 112 just traversed and then the Deerfield River as you pass into Buckland.



*Intersection of Hope and Main Streets, Shelburne*

## Buckland



*View of farms and hills on Route 112 in Buckland*

The next section south of Route 2 from Buckland to the Ashfield Town Line is characterized by long sweeping curves and gentle inclines and declines. Vegetation and trees are cleared further from the edge of the roadway than seen in the northern portion of the Byway, providing a more open and faster roadway. Corn and hay fields are more prolific along this section of the Byway and the wide valley provides excellent views of the hills lining either side.

## Ashfield

Soon after crossing the Buckland/Ashfield town line the climb up Ashfield Mountain begins. This climb lasts for about a mile and a half, resulting in a change of elevation from bottom to top of approximately 550 feet. The road gently snakes its way up the mountain with a straight section about half way up. The climb is lined by a thickly wooded embankment on the east side and a thickly wooded drop off on the west side protected by guardrail, providing no view as you climb. Again, vegetation and trees have been cleared back about 20 feet from the edge of the roadway. At the top of the mountain the roadway straightens and flattens out for a short distance between Buckland Road and Main Street (Route 116) before climbing once again. This time, views are afforded down the valley for some distance to the east.



*Route 112 snaking up Ashfield Mountain*

South of Spruce Corner Road in Ashfield to the Goshen Town Line, the road widens and is primarily lined by thick woods. Trees have been cleared to as much as 30 or 40 feet from the edge of the roadway, although occasional sections of guardrail are located adjacent to the road's edge. The long sweeping curves, gentle inclines and declines and wide cross section make this section of the Byway more conducive to higher travelling speeds.

## *Hampshire County Area*

### Goshen

Upon entering Goshen, Route 112 passes D.A.R. State Forest, which provides opportunities for swimming, boating, fishing, hiking, camping, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling. This portion of the Byway consists of mixed coniferous/deciduous forest on both sides of the road with wetland areas interspersed throughout. Route 112 then intersects with Route 9 for



*Route 112 bends into Goshen*

several miles traveling along the scenic Swift and Westfield rivers with low density residential development on both sides of the road. Throughout Goshen, the roadway is wide, modern and less context sensitive than other stretches of the Byway.

### Cummington

Route 112 turns south in Cummington at the Old Creamery grocery store. It passes through Bryant Four Corners, adjacent to the historic William Cullen Bryant Homestead, with Bryant Mountain providing a dramatic background. This portion of the road is more rural in nature as opposed to the wider, straighter sections leading to this point. Some stretches here (and in Worthington as well) are bounded by sugar maple allees, that heighten the experience of being in this quintessential New England landscape. Route 112 passes through scenic farmland and forested areas before entering Worthington.



*Route 112 as it stretches southward in Cummington*

Worthington

As it enters Worthington, Route 112 passes the Worthington Rod and Gun Club in a forested area with low density residential development. This section of the road has a rural feel to it with many winding and curving sections. As Route 112 merges into Route 112/143, the area opens up to farm fields on both sides of the road with scenic views of the surrounding hills. Route 112 then passes through the historic town center of Worthington and travels along the Little River before entering Huntington.



*Route 112 as it enters Worthington from Cummington*

Huntington

In Huntington, Route 112 continues along the Little River and enters the Hiram H. Fox Wildlife Management Area before passing the Knightville Dam on the East Branch of the Westfield River. Continuing south, the road follows the scenic Westfield River past C. M. Gardner State Park and finally ends in the town center of Huntington where it intersects with Route 20 (Jacob’s Ladder Trail Scenic Byway). The town center of Huntington is a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places with restaurants and services.



*Route 112 crosses the East Branch of the Westfield River in Huntington*

## Planning Process

This Corridor Management Plan reflects the collective thinking of many people in the eight Byway communities. In developing the plan, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission worked on an ongoing basis with two advisory committees. One committee has representatives from the Franklin County area of the Byway to the north and the other has representatives from the Hampshire County area of the Byway to the south. Advisory committee members have brought to the planning process a passion for the place where they live and the promise they see in the byway process for Route 112 to help shape a healthy and vibrant future for their towns. Representatives from MassHighway have also been integral to this planning process. The 21 advisory committee members from Franklin County and the 12 advisory committee members from Hampshire County include representatives from the eight town's select boards, conservation commissions, agricultural commissions, planning boards, and historical commissions, as well as other interested community members, businesses, and business associations. The Franklin County Route 112 Scenic Byway Advisory Committee met 11 times between 2006 and the completion of the project in 2009. The Hampshire County Route 112 Scenic Byway Advisory Committee met 14 times during this same period.

Regional planning staff conferred regularly to coordinate the progress and planning products of both the Franklin and Hampshire County Advisory Committees. The two advisory groups came together for one joint meeting in October 2007 to develop a common vision and goals for the Byway.

In addition to the work of the two advisory committees, there were three larger public meetings. The regional planning agencies and advisory committees held regional public forums in each of their respective counties. The regional public forums, one of which was held in Hampshire County and the other in Franklin County, provided an opportunity for the public to learn about and discuss the draft chapters and accompanying maps for the Corridor Management Plan. FRCOG, PVPC, and the advisory committees also organized an interregional public forum to present and obtain public input on the merged Corridor Management Plan, maps, and some content developed for Route 112 to be included in a regional Scenic Byway website for Western Massachusetts.

## Vision and Goals

While the plan chapters describe the region's many resources, the vision and goals developed by the advisory committees, together with the Action Plan, serve as the heart of this document. The vision and goals express the desire among advisory committee members to find a healthy balance between enhancing Byway resources and preserving the region's quality of life. The goals also make explicit the intent to ensure a process for the Route 112 Scenic Byway that both engages and respects all stakeholders throughout the region.

### *Vision*

The working farms, historic villages, fields, hills, forests, and rivers along the length of Massachusetts Route 112 embody a rural landscape that is fast disappearing in much of Southern New England. Establishing the Route 112 Scenic Byway serves to increase the viability of the region through appropriate tourism and support for forestry and agricultural businesses, while protecting and enhancing the scenic, natural, historic, recreational, and cultural assets treasured by the people who live in and visit the communities along the Byway.

### *Goals\**

1. Encourage economic development that is appropriate to the rural nature of the Byway by supporting working forests and farms, farm-related businesses, and cottage industries such as artisans and crafters.
2. Encourage consideration of design standards and guidelines for commercial development that will be compatible with the Byway's historic and rural scenic character.
3. Support willing landowners in their efforts to preserve open space, scenic views, and culturally and historically significant landscapes.
4. Promote and sustain important wildlife areas and travel corridors, including providing passage under the roadway where necessary.
5. Support the protection of the historic character of village centers and other historical resources along the Byway corridor.
6. Explore ways to increase recreational opportunities for Byway residents and visitors that respect private landowners' interests.
7. Promote the Byway region through a comprehensive and unified marketing and education campaign, drawing on the region's scenic, natural, historic, recreational, and agricultural resources while reflecting and enhancing the unique character of each individual town.
8. Cooperate in the development of limited signage that unifies the Byway through the use of an easily recognizable symbol.
9. Ensure that roadway safety improvements, signs, and maintenance activities are compatible with the Byway's historic and rural scenic character, by using context sensitive design and low-impact, environmentally sensitive practices. Where warranted,

this shall include the careful analysis and remediation of past projects that detract from scenic value.

10. Identify, inform, and involve all stakeholders in public discussions of Byway plans in order to promote inclusiveness and collaboration.
11. Recognize and respect the rights of private property owners along the Byway for all activities related to the Route 112 Scenic Byway corridor.

*\*The goals of this Corridor Management Plan are recommendations that do not supersede existing relevant Town and Commonwealth of Massachusetts regulations.*

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