

Kansas Historic Route 66 Byway receives state designation

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News contact: Scott Shields, (785) 296-4149; scottsh@ksdot.org or Sue Stringer, (785) 296-8669; stringer@ksdot.org

The Kansas portion of the original Route 66, located in Cherokee County, has been designated as a Kansas Historic Byway. With this addition, Route 66 becomes the eleventh Kansas byway to receive official designation from the Kansas Department of Transportation.

“The designation of Kansas Historic Route 66 will emphasize the important significance of the route in this area for visitors and local residents, encouraging them to drive the route and explore the communities along it,” said Scott Shields, Kansas State Byways Coordinator.

An historic byway must have resources that are historically significant, be numerous, visible and have a setting or character that is complementary to the resources. “We are excited to add Historic Route 66 to the Kansas Byway collection. The route designation provides travelers a chance to view the relationship between the history of the original highway and the landscape and structures that define the area, in a combined effort to promote tourism and economic development, while exploring the natural and cultural importance of the byway communities,” Shields said.

The 13.2 miles of Kansas Historic Route 66 includes paved state, city and county roads, beginning at the Kansas-Missouri state line and following the original Route 66 route through Galena, Riverton and Baxter Springs to the Kansas-Oklahoma state line.

The byway offers opportunities for visitors to enjoy a variety of experiences to “get their own kicks” while driving the original Kansas portion of Route 66, found in the “Ozark Plateau” or Southeast corner of the state. There are museums, collections, murals and ghost writing that tell the local history of life along the route. A traveler can drive over many of the original structures of “The Mother Road,” including the only remaining Marsh Arch Bridge on Route 66, or explore the mining and railroad history of the area. Visitors can have a picture taken with the tow truck that was the inspiration for the character “Mater” from the “Cars” movie or discover Schermerhorn Park and the Southeast Kansas Nature Center south of Galena. They can learn of the importance of hydroelectricity in Riverton or enjoy a stop at the Eisler’s Brother Store, the location of a 1920’s Route 66 gas station. The stories of Baxter Springs include Native American history, early battles of the Civil War, a frontier cattle town and baseball. There are tours offered throughout the year and many dining and lodging facilities available for travelers as well as locations that offer Route 66 memorabilia for sale.

The state designation will result in the placement of Kansas Byway route markers along the byway, the creation of a promotional brochure and inclusion on the Kansas Scenic Byway Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/KSByways>. The byway will have a page on the www.ksbyways.org website, a place on the National Scenic Byways website, www.byways.org and the byway will be eligible to apply for National Scenic Byway grants to enhance the route for visitors. With this state designation, Kansas Historic Route 66 will join several other states who's portion of Route 66 carries the designation of an All American Road, a National Scenic Byway or a state byway including Arizona, Illinois, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Missouri.

Renee Charles of Galena and Marla Larison of Baxter Springs are Co-Chairs of the Kansas Historic Route 66 Byway Planning Committee. They submitted the byway application and developed the Corridor Management Plan along with numerous others from the area that are also members of the planning committee.

The Kansas Byways program identifies scenic and historic routes in the state and preserves, enhances and promotes the routes through a cooperative grassroots partnership. For additional information, contact Shields at (785) 296-4149, scottsh@ksdot.org or Sue Stringer, Kansas Byways Public Involvement Liaison at (785) 296-8669 or stringer@ksdot.org.

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Sue Stringer
Public Involvement Liaison
Kansas Department of Transportation
700 SW Harrison, 2nd Fl. West
Topeka, KS 66603-3754
785-296-8669
Kansas Byways 1-800-684-6966
On the web: ksbyways.org
stringer@ksdot.org