



# NEWS

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## From the Director...

Scenic Ohio believes that a beautiful community brings economic prosperity to that community. In this issue of *Scenic News* we are presenting a few examples of this.

We have been meeting with the governor's office and with ODOT encouraging them to involve communities in highway planning and to include them in the early stages of project planning. Our action guide is Scenic America's *Getting it right in the right-of-way: citizen participation in context-sensitive highway design*. It explains the importance of community involvement; helps in planning strategy on how to proceed when a proposed plan adversely impacts a community; presents federal laws that support context-sensitive highway design; gives examples of how citizen participation affects project results; all with bibliography and references. Scenic Ohio has a limited supply, but Scenic America's website [www.scenic.org](http://www.scenic.org) has order forms.

We have also included a news release from Michigan. This is the result of really effective lobbying by Scenic Michigan and something that should happen here in Ohio.

On behalf of the Scenic Ohio board may I wish you all the very best and a "beautiful" New Year!

*Christine Freitag*

## Scenic Byway news from Columbus:

ODOT has designated two more byways. Jefferson Township Scenic Byway located five miles northeast of Columbus and the Drovers Trail Scenic Byway located in Belmont County. For more information about these new byways go to the state's website [www.ohiobyways.com](http://www.ohiobyways.com). Ohio now has a total of 16 byways located in 44 counties. More than 1,000 miles of roadways have been designated a byway in Ohio. For more information about the byway program, contact Paul Staley [pstaley@dot.state.oh.us](mailto:pstaley@dot.state.oh.us). The Ohio byway link can also be found at [www.scenicohio.org](http://www.scenicohio.org).

Paul F. Staley  
Ohio's Scenic Byway Program &  
Travel Information Centers

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## Greater Ohio campaign to kick-off January 20

A three-year statewide campaign for smarter growth policies in Ohio will commence Jan. 20 at an event at the Ohio Statehouse, beginning at 1 p.m. The Greater Ohio campaign is a project involving organizations (including Scenic Ohio) and people from around Ohio to encourage – through public education and grassroots advocacy – public policy in Ohio that is more supportive of the redevelopment of existing communities, strengthens regional cooperation, improves citizens' quality of life and is more protective of the countryside and Ohio's natural resources. For more information, Scenic Ohio Executive Director Christine Freitag can be contacted at [CDFreitag@aol.com](mailto:CDFreitag@aol.com).

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*Scenic Ohio believes that the Ohio Department of Transportation should incorporate context-sensitive highway design to all future planning. The following is our position paper on this issue:*

**Background:**

For decades, state DOTs and highway engineers have designed roads based on the three main criteria set out by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Green Book: (1) the proposed design speed, (2) the capacity, or more precisely, the level of service appropriate for the expected traffic at a future point in time, and (3) functional classification. These “design control” are referred to as the “tyranny of the triad” by advocates for context-sensitive highway design. Actually, there can be choices with flexibility within these parameters. A shift allowing citizens to have more of say in road and bridge design can be traced to 1991 when Congress pass ISTEA- The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991(ISTEA), renamed The Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA21). This transportation legislation dramatically changed the way transportation decisions are made by requiring state and regional transportation planners to involve the public in the planning process. This was reinforced in 1998 with TEA-21. The law recognizes the important of good design that is sensitive to its surrounding environment, especially in historic and scenic areas.

**Status in Ohio:**

ODOT, after much criticism over unattractive sound walls and highway design created *Aesthetic Design Guidelines*. The manual addresses many aspects of highway design that have been criticized but it does not address the issue of context-sensitive design. This can be seen in many current highway projects. The problem remains that many of ODOT’s 12 regional districts and the employees who oversee construction and maintenance projects need to be educated about context sensitive highway design. Projects often negatively impact community values such as the area’s built and natural environment, historic features as well as bicycle and pedestrian access to the road. One current example of ODOT’s insensitive planning is the upgrading of route 422 in Parkman Township, in Geauga County. Labeled the “monster” by Parkman residents, this community’s rural quality is threatened by the widening of 422.

**Position statement:**

Transportation is big business in Ohio. This may be bad news for communities and the countryside if hundreds of miles of scenic, historic and environmentally sensitive roads are widened, straightened and flattened beyond recognition or if opportunities are lost to promote pedestrian and bike friendly communities. In 1997 the FHWA published *Flexibility in Highway Design* a publication recommended for its case studies that respect the natural and constructed environments. The examples are out there and are proof that context sensitive designs standards can and should be adopted by Ohio. ODOT’s *Aesthetic Design Guidelines* is a start but our legislators should require that every road project fully involve citizens who are affected by the design or redesign of a road and reflect sensitivity to the environment, to aesthetics and to the character of place. Scenic Ohio proposes that Ohio adopt model language to foster context-sensitive highway design on state and local roads and streets

Scenic Ohio met recently with Governor Taft’s office to discuss our concern about road building that ignores scenic, aesthetic, and historical features. Context-sensitive highway design will have to be either legislated or mandated by the Governor. The other issue that concerns us is sprawl. We believe ODOT planners should listen to those communities who are concerned about transportation plans that will have a negative impact on the character of their communities. We are pleased to be serving on the new committee, Greater Ohio, which will be addressing these concerns.



## “BEEP” USED CAR LOT

In 1977, on a busy commercial strip, the owners of an abandoned gas station decided to get into the used car business and asked if our firm would like to help design it. My reply that I never had a burning desire to design a car lot, but if they wanted to do something better, I would be pleased to help. I recommended that we turn the lot into a park and they agreed.

The client projected that they would be extremely happy if they could sell about fifteen cars per month out of their small lot. A year after the facility opened they had sold an average of eighteen cars a month because of the trees, planting, lighting and other details made the facility so appealing. The average sale was \$300 more per car than the typical competition would charge. This brought \$65,000 additional profit for the year which was three times the cost of entire front-end “park”.

Women started buying their cars. The design firm developed the name, “BEEP”, graphics and even re-wrote their sales agreement in plain English which was approved by their attorney. As the trees and landscaping grew each year, the park became even more appealing.

This is another case that has dramatically proven that an appealing, beautiful facility *is* good for business and the inner pleasure of people.

F. Eugene Smith,  
Design Management and board member, Scenic Ohio



## *The following letter was published in the Akron Beacon Journal December 8, 2003.*

Bob Dyer’s Nov. 21 column, headlined “Sound walls prettier, but still absurd” expressed Scenic Ohio’s frustration with the Ohio Department of Transportation. Years ago when sound-wall construction was begun, we contacted the Federal Highway Administration asking for its criteria for these walls. We learned they’re all funded by the FHA, but regulations for them are established by each state.

ODOT makes the decisions whether to incorporate sound-walls in Type 1 conditions, which are associated with major highway construction such as adding a third lane or relocating a highway. Type 2 sound-walls relate to noise problems on existing highways; They are voluntary.

The efficiency of noise abatement using a sound-wall is debatable because sound can bounce, increasing the traffic noise to areas previously impervious to it. Decibel testing has proven that earth berms absorb sound and are the most efficient sound barrier. The downside is the space they require. Combined earth berms and concrete are more effective than just using concrete.

According to sound-wall design expert Dave Beyers, of the New Jersey Transportation Department, the best walls are not seen. The second-best are aesthetically attractive, with mounding where space permits, accents of trees like red bud and cherry. and plantings of shrubs, ground covers and perennials.

Faced with growing criticism about Ohio’s ugly sound walls, ODOT, prepared *Aesthetic Design guidelines* as the document they would use for future sound wall design. Since that time, sound walls have been built in various colors and designs, but without landscaping to soften the texture. If there is an exception to this sterile design, and trees are planted, credit goes to the ODOT district’s deputy directors.

If a district has an interest in landscaping, the project stands a better chance of being attractive. Ultimately, aesthetic design rests at the top with the ODOT Director, Gordon Proctor.

Currently, decisions are made without the guidance of a landscape architect. Tree planting requires a professional to select the appropriate material and required maintenance. That talent exists but is not used at ODOT.

Christine Freitag, Scenic Ohio

## London, England... ...It Finally Happened

A London ad agency is selling ads on people's foreheads. The small shop, Cunning Stunts Communications Ltd., is recruiting university students to wear brand logos on their foreheads for GBP 4.20 (\$6.83) an hour. While on duty, the human billboards are permitted to shower, but not to rub their foreheads vigorously (the tattoos are temporary). They also must agree to be out and about with other people for three or four hours a day. If not, they might be nabbed by the agency's "mystery shoppers," who monitor places the students should be.

The idea is the brainchild of John Carver, 45 years old, the co-founder of Cunning Stunts, an independent 25-person ad and marketing agency in London's trendy Clerkenwell neighborhood. Mr. Carver dreamed it up while talking with other ad people about how to market a cigarette. He was thinking of ways a cigarette brand could communicate with people, now that there are so many restrictions on tobacco marketing in Britain. His fascination with tattoos -- though he has none himself -- sparked the idea: Why not advertise on a human head? A living cigarette ad, of course, might irk the health authorities. "But [a forehead ad] would look great with the right kind of brands -- music, fashion, drinks," Mr. Carver says.



## From Scenic America:

### *Sign Control is Good for Business:*

- The National Academy of Sciences Urban Policy Committee reports that "improving the appearance and attractiveness of buildings and open spaces in a community increases its desirability as a place to live, work, visit, and invest."
- When a community passes regulations that effectively limit the size and number of signs, the viewer actually sees more. As a result, businesses do a more effective selling job at a lower cost. Elimination of clutter also increases motorist safety, and reduces the visual assault on our senses.
- The President's Commission on Americans Outdoors reports that "natural beauty" is the single most important factor for adults when they choose a site for outdoor recreation.
- The Texas Industrial Commission recommends "visual enhancement" is one of the five major steps for a city that is seeking industrial development.
- The more a community does to enhance its unique natural, historic, and architectural assets, the more tourists it will attract. On the other hand, the more one place comes to look like everywhere, the less reason there is to visit.
- Almost all of America's premier vacation resorts ban billboards and control signs. For example, Palm Springs, Lake Tahoe, Carmel, and Big Sur, California; Santa Fe, New Mexico; Scottsdale, Arizona; Hilton Head, South Carolina, Williamsburg, Virginia; Boca Raton, Florida; and Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts have all recognized that sign control helps attract tourists' dollars and aids the local economy.

## Update of Scenic Ohio's education project for middle school students "How to see"

Scenic Ohio will collaborate with the Dunn Foundation of Warwick, Rhode Island. Using the educational materials that they have developed, we will work with middle school teachers of ten Akron Public Schools. Our mission is to educate the children and their parents by promoting an understanding and appreciation of the appearance of our community. Scenic Ohio will create a booklet to explain the project and the reasons for it. A 25 minute CD will illustrate the man-made ugliness problem. Next, we propose a photo contest. We will provide disposable cameras for the students to photograph the best and the worst they see around them. Prizes will be awarded. The Akron Public schools will be our initial target for "How to see" and if it proves to be successful, it will be offered across the state. Scenic Ohio is applying to two local foundations to support this project.

**SCENIC OHIO THANKS YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT.  
THE FOLLOWING IS A LIST OF SUPPORTERS AS OF DECEMBER 14, 2003**

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**Scenic Ohio**

*...our mission is to  
preserve and enhance  
the scenic character of  
Ohio's communities and countryside.*

- Promote Scenic Byways
  - Protect open space
  - Support highway beautification
  - Encourage billboard control
- Join us and help us protect your scenery*

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