

Testimony for House Bill 159

My name is William Flood. I serve as the secretary of the Ohio National Road Association, an Ohio Scenic Byway; I am also president of the Whitehall, Ohio Historical Society which is a community on the National Road east of Columbus. I would like to testify to the value of scenic byways from the vantage of their economic benefit - specifically how heritage tourism benefits the communities on/near these routes.

Heritage tourism has become one of the largest segments of the travel industry. Today, more than ever, people are seeking unique, authentic travel experiences. These travelers are drawn to scenic roads; historic buildings and the communities in which they sit; and, most importantly, local businesses with a compelling story. It's a need to recapture the past that's important to these travelers, and scenic byways route not only route travelers to destinations with a past, the routes themselves are part of the experience.

Scenic byways provide a spillover effect from the people who travel them not only in the form of attention to obvious tourist locations, but indirectly through patronizing local businesses. It's a solid investment for communities to promote their heritage. Heritage travelers stay longer, spend more, and travel more frequently than their leisure traveling counterparts. They tend to be older, better educated, and typically more affluent than other tourists. Add in international tourists who tend to stay even longer and visit more destinations than domestic travelers, and it becomes unmistakable that opportunities resulting from heritage travel industry are enormous. Scenic byways are particularly impactful in this regard because of the geography they span, simultaneously benefitting many communities. I am in support of HB 159, designating the month of May as "Drive Ohio Byways Month."

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