



SCENIC ACTION NETWORK

update

August 11, 1997

LETTER FROM **WASHINGTON**

Dear Scenic Advocate,

It's been a busy couple of months since you last heard from us -- months in which the shape of ISTEA continues to be debated, the need to reform the Highway Beautification Act becomes ever clearer, and highway and other lobbyists fight to eliminate key scenic conservation programs from ISTEA.

And months in which we have boosted our staff. The Scenic Action Network will benefit from this boost with the addition of Anna El-Eini, our new Policy Associate.

Anna, a native of Great Britain, will work with all of you to ensure that the Scenic Action Network operates as effectively and efficiently as possible. We want this network to provide you the information you need on key scenic conservation issues, and we want to ensure that the voices of scenic conservationists are heard on the Hill.

We're excited to have Anna on board. I hope that you will call either her or me with any questions or comments you may have about the Network.

With your help, we will preserve America the Beautiful.

Sincerely,

Frank Vespe
Vice President
Policy and Communications

ISTEA HEATS UP OVER THE SUMMER

ISTEA (Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act) reauthorization and transportation funding will be at the top of the agenda for Congress when it resumes on September 2.

Congress fought hard for a balanced budget, and some transportation advocates fear that transportation was shortchanged. The Senate will pursue a six year renewal of ISTEA, while the House may go for a three year renewal. Either way, programs like *Enhancements* and *Scenic Byways*, which are both popular and effective, are nonetheless under threat.

Meanwhile, Representatives and Senators have gone home for August recess, and it's time for them to hear from their constituents. We need you to get the message to them over the next few weeks that ISTEA should be strengthened.

What Do We Want to Protect in ISTEA?

The *Enhancements* program, introduced as part of ISTEA in 1991, was a six year \$2.5 billion program that has allowed states to spend money on improving the livability of their communities. Money has been used for bike and pedestrian paths and for landscaping and scenic byways, among other things. Some money has also been used for billboard removal. Typically the result has been exactly what the program called for: improved livability and a positive boost for local economies. *Enhancements should continue to receive a designated share of transportation funds.*

The *National Scenic Byways* program, also part of ISTEA in 1991, was a landmark program making a small but significant amount of money (\$80 million) available for the identification, protection and promotion of America's most scenic roads. *The Byways program must continue to balance economic development with conservation, including a ban on new billboard construction.*

In addition, the *Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality* program (CMAQ), which funds projects that improve air quality through better transportation solutions, *should also be re-funded.*

The word is that ISTEA will be considered in committee in September.

SUMMER VACATION: NO TIME TO REST ON BILLBOARD REFORM

At least 5,000 new billboards go up every year on US highways supposedly protected from billboards by the Highway Beautification Act.

Thousands of trees on public property are felled each year to improve billboard visibility.

The Highway Beautification Act actually prevents communities from removing billboards.

As a result, if you vacation in the US this summer and drive along federally funded highways, you will see an average of 47 billboards an hour. In South Carolina you might see as many as 125 an hour.

Clearly the Highway Beautification Act has failed and is in need of reform.

Proposed Reform:

As proposed by HR.1448/1449, Rep John Lewis (D-GA), and S.401, Sen. Jim Jeffords (R-VT), the reform packages would:

- 1) Cap the number of billboards on federal-aid highways;
- 2) Prohibit billboards in unzoned, rural areas;
- 3) Allow communities to remove billboards by any constitutional means;
- 4) Prohibit tree cutting for billboard visibility;
- 5) Impose a 15% gross revenue tax on billboards with funds dedicated to billboard control;
- 6) Require FHWA to compile an annual, comprehensive billboard inventory.

THE ANTIQUITIES ACT UNDER THREAT

Last year President Clinton used his authority under the 1906 Antiquities Act to declare the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in

Utah. The Antiquities Act allows the president to take rapid action to protect federal lands from imminent threats. Emergency declarations by past Presidents protected treasures like the Grand Canyon and Statue of Liberty, and led to their Congressional approval as National Parks.

But now, Rep Jim Hansen (R-UT) is proposing an arbitrary limit -- 50,000 acres -- on the size of national monuments. He also would force the President to go through Congress before declaring a National Monument, undermining the intent of the Act. This proposal is unnecessary, however, because Congress already has full authority to override such presidential actions (or to build on them). The Act is a critical tool in efforts to protect federal lands from inappropriate development -- one that should not be weakened.

Let your Representatives and Senators know that you support the Antiquities Act and you oppose Rep Jim Hansen's bill HR.1127.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

We need you to tell members of Congress that a reauthorized ISTEA must do even more to protect America's scenic beauty. Members of Congress really do listen to their constituents, especially when they are home for recess. Call, write or fax your Representative and your Senators. Try to get a meeting to see them or their aides.

Your message: You are a constituent and voter. Tell them you support ISTEA's Enhancements and Scenic Byways program. Ask them to support reform of the Highway Beautification Act and to protect the Antiquities Act.

ADDRESSES AND PHONE NUMBERS

Members of Congress can be reached at:

Members of the House of Representatives:

The Honorable _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Members of the Senate:

The Honorable _____
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The phone number of the Capitol switchboard, which can connect you to any member's office: (202) 224-3121