



**Minnesota Mississippi River Parkway Commission
4th Quarter Meeting – November 21, 2024
Centennial Office Building Room 101/Zoom Hybrid
MINUTES – Draft**

Commissioners Present

Sally Fineday – Lake Itasca to Grand Rapids
John Anfinson – Elk River to Hastings
Kate Carlson – Hastings to Iowa Border
Sen. Karin Housley
Paul Hugunin – Agriculture
Lisa Havelka – Explore Minnesota
David Kelliher – Historical Society
Marni Karnowski – Transportation
Anne Lewis – At Large

Technical Advisors/Staff Present

Peter MacDonagh - Transportation
Carol Zoff – Transportation
Michelle Yurich - LCC
Diane Henry-Wangenstein – LCC

Megan Voelke - LCC
Chris Miller – MN-MRPC Staff

Members & Technical Advisors Absent

Sen. John Hoffman
Rep. Sydney Jordan
Rep. Leigh Finke
Megan Christianson – Grand Rapids to Brainerd
Karl Samp – Brainerd to Elk River
Grant Wilson – Natural Resources Appointee
Kelli Bruns – Natural Resources
Tucker Blythe – National Park Service

Partners/Guests Present

Tim Wilcox, MnDOT

The meeting was called to order at 2:05 p.m. by MN-MRPC Chair, Sen. Karin Housley, followed by introductions. A quorum was present. The meeting packet and recording are available at <https://www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/mrpc/>.

Approve Agenda and Minutes from 8/15/24 Meeting: Motion by Sally Fineday and seconded by John Anfinson to approve the draft agenda and August 15, 2024 meeting minutes as presented. Motion carried.

Budget Report: Secretary-Treasurer Anne Lewis referenced the year-to-date budget report in the meeting packet and called attention to the notes including an update that print maps are now out of stock. Chris Miller provided information on line items where funding is likely to be available after actual costs have come in, providing the Commission with flexibility to consider maps or other needs.

MN-MRPC Classification in Transportation Funding Statute: 2023 Minnesota Statute 161.045 includes the MN-MRPC on a list of organizations that do not fulfill a transportation purpose. This has been reviewed in the past by the MN-MRPC with discussion on options to remove the MN-MRPC from the list. Michelle Weber reported that LCC will not have a housekeeping bill during the 2025 session. Therefore, there will not be an opportunity to consider including MN-MRPC items in such a bill. Marni Karnowski reported that MnDOT timelines for consideration of 2025 session language have passed, but that the Office of Environmental Stewardship has funding from another source to continue MN-MRPC participation for the remainder of the fiscal year.

Commission Needs and Priorities: Commission needs and priorities are up for review now that the 2024 MRPC Annual Meeting and Drive the Great River Road Month are completed. Print maps, website updates and Plan Your Trip/digital travel guides are being discussed at today's meeting and could be likely next priorities for the Commission. Members were asked to consider an ad hoc committee to be referred to the Executive Committee.

Proposed 2025 Meeting Dates: Proposed 2025 Quarterly Meeting dates were listed in the meeting packet – February 21, May 29, August 14, and November 20. Members were asked to respond with any known conflicts. Confirmation of the dates will be sent out via email.

2024 MRPC Annual Meeting, Winona – Review and Follow Up: Thank you to MN-MRPC members, our host community of Winona, Visit Winona, the Minnesota Marine Art Museum and Winona County Historical Society for a

great Annual Meeting! The efforts were above and beyond, on a short timeline. The National MRPC included evaluation results in their most recent e-newsletter and noted many positive comments.

MRPC Communications and Marketing Committee: Kate Carlson reported on the November 20 meeting of the committee. The committee is interested in gathering information from states to provide the best and most current content, events, and photos for use by the National Office. Kate Carlson and Megan Christianson, offered to help with this for Minnesota. The committee also discussed the National Scenic Byways grant application being prepared for the National Great River Road. The funding request will focus on a Great River Road app with up-to-date navigation and capacity for push notifications on any route changes, detours, etc.; and companion efforts including a new website. Efforts will focus primarily on the U.S. and Canadian travel markets. The FIFA World Cup will be held in the U.S. in the summer of 2026 providing an opportunity to promote Mississippi River travel to international visitors. The quarterly Great River Road marketing report is available at www.mrpcmembers.com.

MRPC Culture & Heritage Committee: David Kelliher reported that the November 19 meeting focused on discussion around Great River Road Interpretive Centers, especially those that have not confirmed their data or responded to requests for information. States were encouraged to step up their outreach to the Interpretive Centers. The committee discussed the America 250 initiative coming up in 2026 and ways to connect with the celebration. The Great River Road's All-American Road designation is a great hook. Each state has an America 250 Commission and other organizations are partnering at the national level. David Kelliher will be gathering additional information for the committee to consider.

MRPC Environment, Recreation & Agriculture: The most recent meeting was cancelled, and the committee will meet again in early 2025.

MRPC Transportation: Peter MacDonagh reported on two main committee priorities – inventorying and mapping wayfinding signage to Great River Road Interpretive Centers, and the process to obtain and utilize the Mississippi River Trail (MRT) logo and trademark. More details will be coming on information/participation needed from states.

Plan Your Trip and Digital Travel Guides – Status and Needs: Marni Karnowski provided an update on status of the Great River Road Plan Your Trip and online digital travel guide applications. They will need to be moved from Arc Map to Arc Pro by December 2025, as Arc Map is being phased out and will no longer be supported. This will require a complete rebuild which is a significant commitment in time and expertise. Preliminary estimates are that the most basic rebuild would take approximately 30 – 40 hours, and digital travel guides would take an additional 60 – 70 hours. Staffing for this will not be available prior to December of 2025 with the possible exception of the most basic rebuild. Ongoing hosting and updating/maintenance of the information are additional considerations. Assistance from the MN-MRPC is likely needed for this rebuild. Commission discussion followed with comments summarized below.

- Plan Your Trip and the digital travel guides currently provide much of the content for the MN Great River Road website, which along with the print maps provides the MN Great River Road's visual presence.
- It would be helpful to have a cost estimate.
- The print map and online presence are two parts of the same puzzle and need to be coordinated. An ad hoc committee was suggested to review and make recommendations.
- The original data sets (700+ things to see and do) came from Kimley-Horn as part of the Corridor Management Plan project, and then MnDOT SEEDs/student workers developed the current Plan Your Trip online mapping and digital travel guides.
- Safety is a consideration. The print map helps travelers stay on the route regardless of cell signals or missing signage.
- Route details on Plan Your Trip are used to determine proximity to local projects, transmission lines that the Commission sometimes comments on, etc.

Motion by Anne Lewis and seconded by Sen. Housley to designate an ad hoc committee to discuss the print map and online needs and develop recommendations. Motion carried. A committee will be convened including transportation, tourism, and agriculture representatives from the MN-MRPC, and led by Anne Lewis.

Itasca State Park GRR Interpretive Panel Review Results: Carol Zoff provided information on a recent review of Great River Road Interpretive Panels at the Mary Gibbs Visitor Center in Itasca State Park. DNR partners

have notified us that all interpretation within Itasca State Park was recently reviewed and evaluated for appropriate and up-to-date content, including content related to Native American history and storytelling. Some signage has been recommended for removal, there will be a project phase for development of new interpretation as needed and then a final phase to invest in new signage. This review included Great River Road signage outside the Mary Gibbs Visitor Center. The review allows the Ten-State "Treasures"/GRR Interpretive Center sign to stay in place, along with the MN Great River Road "Headwaters" regional content sign. The other five regional panels will be removed for now since three of them require updated content. The two signs not needing updates will be placed in storage for reinstallation when the others are complete.

Interpretation was discussed as a possible legacy project related to the America 250 celebration. Past reviews of other MN Great River Road Interpretive Panels indicated many need replacement due to regular wear and tear. David Kelliher offered assistance from MNHS and noted that other state agencies have tribal liaisons as well. Sally Fineday asked to be kept in the loop and Carol Zoff will connect her with the project contact at DNR. A question was raised about content of other Great River Road Interpretive Panels, both on existing signage and in the Roadside Storybook plan awaiting installation. A full review of content is needed before any of the panels are replaced or new installations are made. This is currently on a list of MN-MRPC priorities for consideration when resources and leadership are available. Discussion on the Itasca State Park panels continued, with a question on whether all the previous panels will be re-installed and stressing the importance of maintaining the Great River Road logo, branding, and content. The current plan is to re-install all six regional panels in the future with maintenance of the Great River Road information.

Drive the Great River Road Month: A report on the 2024 "GO with the Flow on the Great River Road" campaign was included in the meeting packet. Thank you to the DNR for sponsoring Drive the Great River Road Month this year! The itineraries developed remain available for download at <https://www.mnmississippiriver.com/order-maps/> and members were encouraged to use and promote them. Chris Miller noted that suggestions are now needed for the 2025 theme and that after reviewing past themes and sponsors, history might be one to consider. David Kelliher said that MNHS is game to help coordinate a history theme, working with local partners and the MNHS communications team, and requested ideas from all members – including local and county historic sites along with MNHS sites. A suggestion was made to use this content to move forward into America 250 in 2026, i.e. The Power of Place.

Transportation Alternatives Funding Applications: Carol Zoff provided an overview of the funding source and process and directed attention to the details and project summaries in the meeting packet. MnDOT received 45 letters of intent to submit applications, six projects are in Great River Road communities and two were determined to benefit the Great River Road. Summaries of the projects, located in the City of Brainerd and City of St. Cloud, were included in the meeting packet.

National Scenic Byways Grant Applications: Tim Wilcox, MN Scenic Byways Coordinator from MnDOT, provided an overview of the program and interest that has been noted in Minnesota. States and tribal governments are the eligible applicants and are able to partner with other entities on projects. Final details for partners working with MnDOT are due December 2, including letters of support. Projects seeking letters from the MN-MRPC include the Point Douglas Park Trailhead Project in Washington County, Lum Park Trailway Access Project in Brainerd, and Downtown Riverwalk in St. Paul. Project summaries were included in the meeting packet. In addition, the National MRPC will be asking for letters of support from all state commissions, and other partners, for their application that will focus on a navigation app and website. The Tennessee Department of Transportation will be submitting the application on behalf of the ten-state MRPC.

Action on Requested Letters: Motion by Anne Lewis and seconded by David Kelliher to authorize letters of support for the City of Brainerd and City of St. Cloud Transportation Alternatives projects if the applicants decide to move forward with the full applications. Motion carried.

Motion by Anne Lewis and seconded by Kate Carlson to authorize a letter of support for the National Scenic Byways Grant application to be submitted by the National MRPC and Tennessee Department of Transportation, with final review and approval to be provided by the MN-MRPC Chair when details are available. Motion carried.

Motion by John Anfinson and seconded by Anne Lewis to authorize letters of support for the City of Brainerd, Washington County and City of Saint Paul National Scenic Byways Grant applications. Motion carried. A second motion was made by John Anfinson and seconded by Anne Lewis, authorizing the Chair to review information if any new requests are received. Motion carried.

Member and Partner Recognitions: Carol Zoff shared a tribute to Holly Slagle, recently retired MN Scenic Byways Coordinator, and her 30-year career at MnDOT. Motion by Anne Lewis and seconded by John Anfinson, to acknowledge Holly Slagle's service to all Minnesota byways including the Great River Road. Motion carried. Chris Miller noted that Kelli Bruns, DNR's technical advisor to the MN-MRPC, has moved on to another position. Thank you to Kelli for her service to the Commission.

Commission Member Updates: John Anfinson reported on an upcoming interview with a German travel podcast and invited ideas and possible content from members about life on the Mississippi River in Minnesota. Thank you to Explore Minnesota for making this connection.

Next Meeting: 2025 schedule will be confirmed soon via email.

Adjournment: There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:05 p.m.