



DRAFT Great River Road Strategy Development

February 2015

OVERVIEW

This document provides a consultant team-recommended starting point for the 2015 Great River Road CMP strategy development and prioritization process. The consultant team held an internal workshop on Thursday, January 29, 2015 to develop a baseline structure and strategies for the 2015 CMP. Inputs were considered from wide variety of project resources, including:

- ▶ Stakeholder meetings
 - ◆ Arrowhead RDC
 - ◆ Headwaters RDC
 - ◆ St. Cloud APO
 - ◆ Explore Minnesota Tourism
 - ◆ Minnesota Department of Agriculture
 - ◆ Minnesota Historical Society
 - ◆ Minnesota Department of Transportation
 - ◆ Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
 - ◆ White Earth Nation
 - ◆ Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe
 - ◆ Prairie Island Indian Community
 - ◆ MnDOT Planning Management Group
 - ◆ MnDOT All Planners Workshop
 - ◆ MnDOT GIS Coordination Meeting
- ▶ 2000 CMP
- ▶ National Scenic Byway Intrinsic Qualities
- ▶ Visitor impression surveys
- ▶ Field Team observations and recommendations
- ▶ National Scenic Byway Foundation and other emails
- ▶ PMT meeting notes
- ▶ MN-MRPC meeting notes
- ▶ Project Advisory Team meeting notes
- ▶ Public open house feedback
- ▶ MetroQuest online survey responses
- ▶ MNRRA Visual Resource Protection Plan
- ▶ MNRRA Alternative Transportation Plan
- ▶ 2014 CMP Request for Proposals
- ▶ Other Scenic Byway CMPs
- ▶ MN-MRPC Mission
- ▶ Statutes

Structure

The team recommends the 2015 CMP be branded with the tagline, “Follow the Water.” Overarching Guiding Principles for the plan should be based on the mission of the MN-MRPC and the 2015 CMP— to promote, preserve and enhance the resources of the Mississippi River Valley and to develop the highways and amenities of the GRR—with the acknowledgement that this is to be achieved through partnerships. Goals should be organized into key themes and assigned associated strategies. The Communications Plan and Business Plan provide key actions for achieving the thematic goals of the CMP. This structure is shown on the following page.



Follow the Great River

Preserve | Promote | Enhance

Through Partnerships

Wayfinding & Placemaking	Education & Outreach	Technology & Social Media	Health & Active Living
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Improve the route •Increase the signage •Offer better mapping •Provide multimodal travel options •Connect visitors to places and communities •Preserve and enhance the unique sense of place along the Mississippi River 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Train Great River Road Ambassadors •Partner with schools •Tell stories •Engage diverse populations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Create web-based mapping tools •Update the Great River Road website •Integrate social media •Enhance mobile and cellular connections along the route •Develop tools to enhance travel experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Partner with health and active living groups •Leverage existing state and local health initiatives •Highlight healthy and active living resources

Communication Plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Improve branding •Emphasize cross-promotion •Identify and target key audiences

Business Plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Update corridor management techniques •Identify funding sources •Develop mutually-beneficial funding partnerships •Focus on economic development and tourism

Timeline

This figure summarizes the work flow for strategy refinement and prioritization.





▲ THEME: WAYFINDING & PLACEMAKING

Goal: Improve the route

- ▶ Re-designate stretches of the Great River Road to better highlight the river, historic river towns, and tribal culture (where appropriate)
- ▶ Maintain the existing gravel portion of the corridor to provide a rustic traveler experience

Goal: Improve and maintain signage

- ▶ Develop a consistent sign policy with guidance on symbology, colors, and spacing
- ▶ Install missing confirmation signs after turns along the route
- ▶ Install signs where the route crosses the Mississippi
- ▶ Develop and implement a plan and schedule for ongoing review and maintenance

Goal: Offer better mapping

- ▶ Improve drivable and printable mapping on the Great River Road website

Goal: Provide multimodal travel options

- ▶ Brand the Great River as more than a road. Promote multimodal travel through modal catch phrases: "Drive the Great River," "Bike the Great River," "Paddle the Great River," "Hike the Great River" "Transit the Great River"
- ▶ Include bicycle lanes in road improvement plans
- ▶ Appeal to three types of bicyclists: long distance MRT riders, "Bikes on Cars" recreation, local bicyclists
- ▶ Develop bicycle tours that vary in theme, duration, and difficulty
- ▶ Develop mapping capabilities that integrate multimodal travel options: transit, bicycle, pedestrian
- ▶ Work with Tribal Nations to develop trail connections along the Great River Road for transportation purposes
- ▶ Promote Northstar as a multimodal travel option to bring a bicycle on the train/bus in conjunction with bicycling on the MRT
- ▶ Work with Amtrak to see if it is possible to revise their bicycle policy (bicycles are currently allowed only in bike boxes—they cannot be carried on board)

Goal: Connect visitors to places and communities

- ▶ Create thematic travel itineraries (biking, fishing, hiking, history, art, food etc.)
- ▶ Showcase connections to the river, parks, trails, and recreational areas
- ▶ Create storybook panels for each Tribal Nation
- ▶ Identify, repair, and replace damaged and worn kiosks and interpretive panels
- ▶ Relocate kiosks and interpretive panels that are clustered or not along the route
- ▶ Partner with local businesses and attractions to display Great River Road logos or signs
- ▶ Enhance the identification of and signage for Great River Road Interpretive Centers
- ▶ Provide information on how and where to access the river

Goal: Preserve and enhance the unique sense of place along the Mississippi River

- ▶ Complete a Visual Resource Protection Plan for the full Great River Road, utilizing recommended process from pilot completed during the CMP development.
- ▶ Participate in rulemaking as it concerns protecting the intrinsic qualities of the Great River Road
- ▶ Work with Tribal Nations to safeguard place and protect cultural and spiritual resources along the Great River Road while also promoting those resources that are available to the general public.
- ▶ Manage public properties adjacent to the Great River Road to sustain healthy, diverse, and native pollinator populations



▲ THEME: EDUCATION & OUTREACH

Goal: Train Great River Road Ambassadors

- ▶ Conduct Great River Road Hospitality Training with resource site managers at the DNR and MHS, as well as with Chambers of Commerce and Convention & Visitors Bureaus, GRR Interpretive Centers, local businesses (see Connect Visitors to Places and Communities), Federal agencies managing intrinsic resources, travel information centers, and County Historical Societies
- ▶ Develop online Great River Road Ambassador Training for private business owners
- ▶ Educate river communities on how to maximize the effectiveness of the Great River Road
- ▶ Educate local residents who live along the Great River Road of the route's significance
- ▶ Partner with Amtrak to embed Great River Road content in the Empire Builder

Goal: Partner with schools

- ▶ Engage the University of Minnesota and other college and universities in river communities in river corridor studies, research and activities
- ▶ Develop or identify lesson plans for educators on the Great River Road and its resources
- ▶ Develop field trip itineraries for classrooms to experience resources along the Great River Road
- ▶ Create a Great River Road "Passport Club" for students to earn rewards for visiting resources

Goal: Tell stories

- ▶ Partner with Tribal Nations to promote the sharing of culture through oral history and story telling
- ▶ Create historic walking tours within cities along the river and hikes in rural areas/parks.
- ▶ Generate awareness on upper Minnesota's Mississippi wildlife refuges and threatened and endangered species

Goal: Engage diverse populations

- ▶ Broaden the interpretation of stories that are told along the river to be more diverse
- ▶ Develop strategies for engaging youth, young adults, families
- ▶ Reintroduce the river to all generations
- ▶ Conduct outreach to legislative representatives
- ▶ Partner with agencies on initiatives, such as the National Park Service on the "Find Your Park" campaign



▲ THEME: TECHNOLOGY & SOCIAL MEDIA

Goal: Build upon the CMP web-based mapping tools

- ▶ Develop a GPS-enabled live routing tool
- ▶ Implement MnIT project to continue coordination of online mapping tools and agency and partner databases
- ▶ Create a “Google River View” like Street View
- ▶ Use ESRI’s story map—an online, interactive application—to share photos on maps
- ▶ Develop a tool based on the existing MNRRA River Trip Planner to apply to the full corridor

Goal: Update the Great River Road website

- ▶ Develop a modernized, fully-responsive website that works for computers, tablets, and mobile devices
- ▶ Add focus to information that is presented online
- ▶ Integrate the Great River Road 10-state mobile application
- ▶ Partner with the 10-state mobile application to develop a feature whereby visitors unlock badges by visiting corridor destinations
- ▶ Develop visitor technology that interfaces with other traveler information sites (e.g., Cyclopath)
- ▶ Use search engine optimization to ensure the Great River Road is appearing to those seeking

Goal: Integrate social media

- ▶ Use social media to connect with travelers and share stories
- ▶ Promote private resources on Pinterest and other social media sites
- ▶ Use drone technology to produce aerial photography/video to capture views of the river to share online
- ▶ Upload and share videos of user experiences and consider a potential partnership with GoPro

Goal: Enhance mobile and cellular connections along the route

- ▶ Partner with cellular providers for increased 3G, 4G, and LTE coverage
- ▶ Install Wi-Fi hotspots in strategic kiosks, destination centers, or local attractions
- ▶ Communicate where hotspots are and where there are gaps in coverage

Goal: Develop tools to enhance travel experience

- ▶ Add an oratory element to kiosks to share spoken word histories and experiences
- ▶ Develop a podcast for travelers
- ▶ Use URLs and QR codes on signage to link visitors to more information online



▲ THEME: HEALTH & ACTIVE LIVING

Goal: Partner with healthy and active living groups

- ▶ Implement and share Pedal MN bicycle safety guidance
- ▶ Encourage businesses to be more bicycle-friendly
- ▶ Develop and publish bicycle tours of the MRT and along the Great River Road
- ▶ Connect with local health care providers to encourage Mississippi River-focused physical activities as a treatment option and a healthy lifestyle.
- ▶ Partner with Nice Ride Minnesota to increase the potential pick-up and drop-off locations adjacent to the GRR or the MRT host communities
- ▶ Connect with Bike Walk Twin Cities to reach more nonprofit organizations

Goal: Leverage existing state and local health initiatives

- ▶ Utilize the Hennepin County Active Living Toolkit as a reference when implementing route improvements
- ▶ Partner with Blue Cross Blue Shield's Active Living Initiative to make infrastructure improvements and to educate visitors on active living.
- ▶ Support health, livability, and active living policies and resolutions
- ▶ Leverage Minnesota Department of Health's Healthy Places and Physical Activity Initiatives to increase the amount of bicycle and pedestrian friendly stretches along the GRR
- ▶ Partner with the Statewide Health Improvement Program (Department of Health)

Goal: Highlight healthy and active living resources

- ▶ Highlight the connection between the health of the river and the health of people
- ▶ Promote the healthy recreation and travel amenities, such as the Cuyuna Recreation Area
- ▶ Promote opportunities for people to incorporate physical activities in their daily routines
- ▶ Promote dog parks as visitor and local resources along the Great River Road
- ▶ Promote healthy foods – farmers markets, Minnesota Grown locations, etc.



▲ COMMUNICATIONS PLAN: PROMOTIONS & PARTNERSHIPS

Identify and target key audiences

- ▶ Create thematic travel itineraries (biking, fishing, hiking, camping, eating, drinking, agritourism etc.)
- ▶ Broaden the interpretation of stories that are told along the river to be more diverse
- ▶ Develop strategies for engaging youth, young adults, families

Improve branding

- ▶ Promote the Great River Road as a better, scenic way to get from point A to point B
- ▶ Market lakes as part of the river
- ▶ Dedicate or hire staff to manage Great River Road social media, website and mapping/data management with member agencies.
- ▶ Boost the Great River Road brand through in-state and out-state publicity
- ▶ Develop marketing strategies to strengthen branding
- ▶ Promote “sense of one” with the river
- ▶ Complete a comprehensive public relations campaign
- ▶ Reinforce value of the river and its national/international significance, but also local access and appreciation
- ▶ Promote microbreweries, wineries, and distilleries along the GRR

Emphasize cross-promotion

- ▶ Partner with EMT to promote the Mississippi River as one of Minnesota’s top tourist attractions
- ▶ Promote ecotourism destinations along the route
- ▶ Research EMT priorities and highlight areas of overlap—use to form funding partnerships
- ▶ Partner with DNR to develop a guide of public lands along the river
- ▶ Formalize strategic partnerships with MPOs, Chambers of Commerce, RDCs, MnDNR, PedalMN, economic development agencies, and Conventions and Visitors Bureaus
- ▶ Encourage and support local community efforts to plan for the River in their communities
- ▶ Partner with river communities completing riverfront planning efforts
- ▶ Create models for how organizations partner (e.g. MN Power)
- ▶ Cross-promote with Heart of the Continent and other stewardship coalitions
- ▶ Coordinate with and promote annual Mississippi headwaters canoe trip as an alternative to the Boundary Waters (potential to brand as “Explore the Headwaters”)
- ▶ Coordinate with and support effort to designate the Mississippi River as a national water trail



▲ BUSINESS PLAN: FUNDING & PARTNERSHIPS

Update corridor management techniques and review Commission structure and operations

- ▶ Develop Destination Area Councils
- ▶ Coordinate with other byways in Minnesota
- ▶ Maintain agency buy-in at highest levels
- ▶ Develop a long-term strategy for maintaining social media beyond the life of the CMP
- ▶ Seek more capacity and staffing to implement
- ▶ Develop the MN-MRPC as a technical and policy resource and known entity
- ▶ Establish task for each member agency to implement each strategy, including funding, staff, schedule, and phasing
- ▶ Add tribal representation to the MN-MRPC
- ▶ Establish an annual report process used for promotion and fundraising
- ▶ Work with MnDOT leadership and modal offices, such as MnDNR, to document and consider the byway when scoping and implementing other projects (including modal plans)

Identify funding sources

- ▶ Eastern Federal Lands Program grants (FHWA)
- ▶ Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) grants (FHWA)
- ▶ League of Minnesota Cities grants (e.g., Natural Disaster Protection Grant 2015)
- ▶ Explore Minnesota Tourism grants
- ▶ Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funds
- ▶ National Highway Performance Program
- ▶ Surface Transportation Program
- ▶ Metropolitan & Statewide Planning and Nonmetropolitan Transportation Planning
- ▶ Research, Development, Demonstration, and Deployment Projects
- ▶ Community Development Foundations (Blandin, McKnight, etc.)
- ▶ Affordable Health Care Act (policy that non-profit health care providers and institutions can make active living investments that are 100 percent tax deductible)
- ▶ Minnesota Legacy Funds (Parks and Trails Commission)
- ▶ MN State Legislature

Develop mutually-beneficial funding partnerships

- ▶ Sporting goods companies: Gander Mountain, REI, TrekUSA, etc.
- ▶ Bicycle companies: Quality Bike Parts, DERO, Erik's Bike Shop, Park Tool, Surly Bikes, Penn Cycle, etc.
- ▶ Health care providers and companies: United Health Group, Health Partners, Fairview, etc.
- ▶ Tribal nations: partner on capital projects to benefit tribes and visitors

Focus on economic development and tourism

- ▶ Leverage research on scenic byways and economic development and tourism
- ▶ Partner with Tribal Nations to enhance and promote their tourism opportunities along the Great River Road
- ▶ Work with cities, organizations, and businesses to attract and retain young professionals in rural areas
- ▶ Work with local businesses (by city, by destination area) to create a supportive network (i.e. Great Allegheny Passage – Trail Town Certified Business Network – <http://www.trailtowns.org/sbn/>)