

SCENIC CORRIDORS

A brief overview of the past, present, and future of Scenic Corridors, both locally in the Desert Foothills and nationwide.

> Jo Walker Cave Creek Arizona May 1990

SCENIC CORRIDORS

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SCENIC CORRIDORS

Acknowledging the dominant role that the automobile plays in shaping sprawling urban areas, communities are demonstrating a growing concern over urban aesthetics and community image by attempting to merge traffic engineering, urban design and landuse planning strategies into integrated corridor plans. Yet, thirty years ago, farsighted Foothills' residents concerned with the changes that the paving of Cave Creek Road and Scottsdale Road from the Valley would bring about in their remote area, had already began to plan the preservation of their outstanding vistas and natural habitats.

I. HISTORY

By 1950 the paving of Cave Creek Road was completed from Bell Road to Cave Creek. Within ten years, Scottsdale Road was extended north to Cave Creek Road. During the early 1960's, residents of the Foothills, represented by the Cave Creek Improvement Association (CCIA), set the following objectives for corridors in their area: to preserve the natural desert, to establish minimum setback lines, and to plan for future roads.

In 1963, at the request of the CCIA, the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors officially designated 17 miles along Cave Creek Road and Scottsdale Road as the Desert Foothills Scenic Drive. To preserve the scenic vistas, topographic features, and the natural desert vegetation found along this major corridor, the Maricopa County Zoning Ordinance was revised to include a 105 foot setback from the center line for Cave Creek Road and Scottsdale Road.

Citizens and government departments cooperated closely on the Drive for more than twenty-five years. Specimen plants were maintained and identified with small wooden signs, other signs were set back or removed, and trash was picked up regularly. Through the years several hundred . persons participated. The Scenic Drive was, and continues to be, included in many tourist publications, newspaper articles and periodicals. Visitors from many nations study and photograph the plants, and bus tours continue to stop along the Scenic Drive for "photo opportunities" of the cactus.

II. CURRENT STATUS

Since 1983 jurisdictional changes have occurred. Portions of the Scenic Drive have been annexed or incorporated into Scottsdale, Phoenix, Cave Creek, and Carefree, with only a tiny fraction remaining in the County. Consequently, future protection of Scenic Drives will depend upon action by these various municipalities.

Following are the current planning designations:

Cave Creek (see map)

Cave Creek's General Plan (adopted in 1988) designates Carefree Highway, Tatum Road, and Cave Creek Road north of New River Road as Parkways. Parkways as defined include a center median landscaped with native vegetation, with native shrubs on the outer limits of the right-of-way. Cave Creek Road south of New River Road, New River Road from Cave Creek Road west, a future 24th Street Loop from Carefree Highway north, and Schoolhouse Road including a future extension north are designated Scenic Corridors, which include standards developed with adjoining private properties for the preservation of native vegetation and the protection of views to background areas.

Phoenix

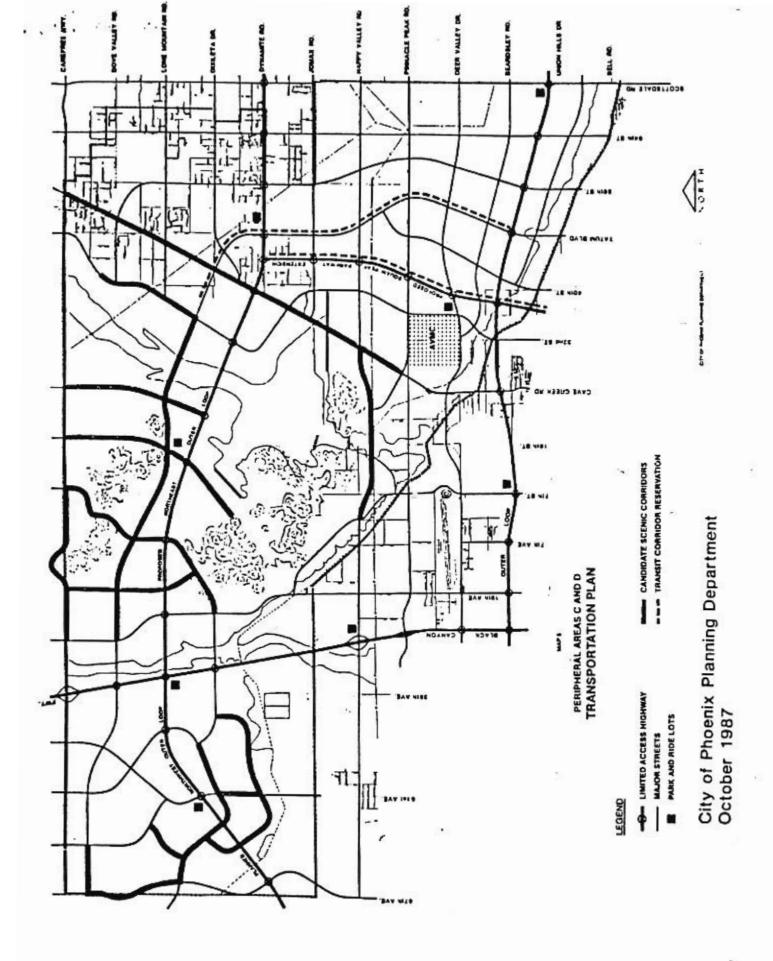
The Phoenix Council designated Cave Creek Road a Scenic Corridor in 1986. The General Plan Areas C & D adopted in 1987 (see map), also identifies other roadway segments including five north-south roads and Carefree Highway as candidates for Scenic Corridors. The Plan states that street "segments designated as Scenic Corridors should incorporate design standards and acquisition of appropriate right-of-way or easements to preserve the natural desert environment and / maintain a natural vista quality." Bids for the widening of Cave Creek Road to four lanes are being accepted

in Spring 1990, and design will soon be finalized.

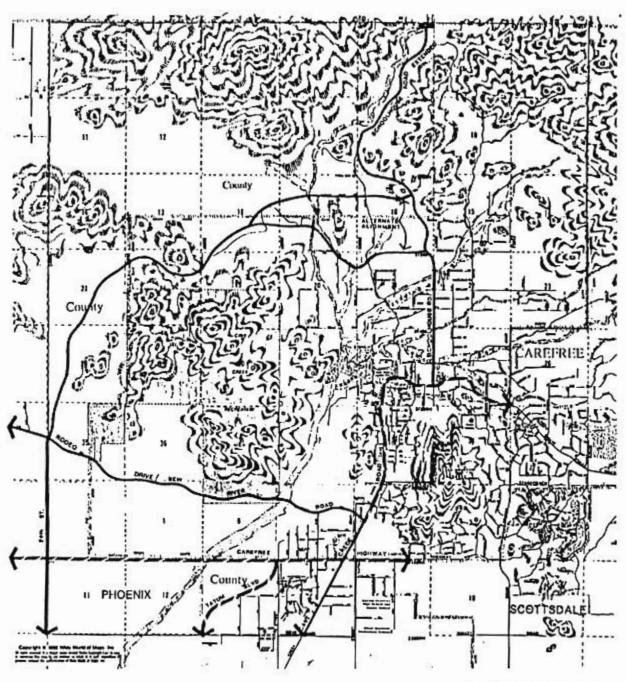
Scottsdale

Tonto Foothills General Plan 1986 and Black Mountain Area Plan 1989 both designate Carefree Highway, and Scottsdale Road north of Jomax as Scenic Corridors, as well as others. The Black Mountain Plan states "Scenic Corridors shall be maintained along Scottsdale Road, Dynamite Boulevard, and Carefree Highway to enhance the views from major streets, and to buffer traffic impacts by preserving native vegetation and by increasing building The width of the setbacks. Scenic Corridor shall be an average of 50 feet next to single family residential development and 100 feet next to all other types of develop-The native plant identification along Scottsdale Road should be maintained as part of The Desert Foothills Scenic Drive."

Also, "Designs for streetscapes and medians shall include low maintenance, low water consumption, traffic safety, strong relationships to adjoining natural features, and the protection of existing vegetation and natural features....Landscape materials along street rightsof-way and medians shall be characterized by a varied plant cover consistent in intensity with the surrounding natural coverage, and shall use native plants."



CAVE CREEK GENERAL PLAN MAP - 2010 CIRCULATION PLAN



MAJOR STREET DESIGN CRITERIA

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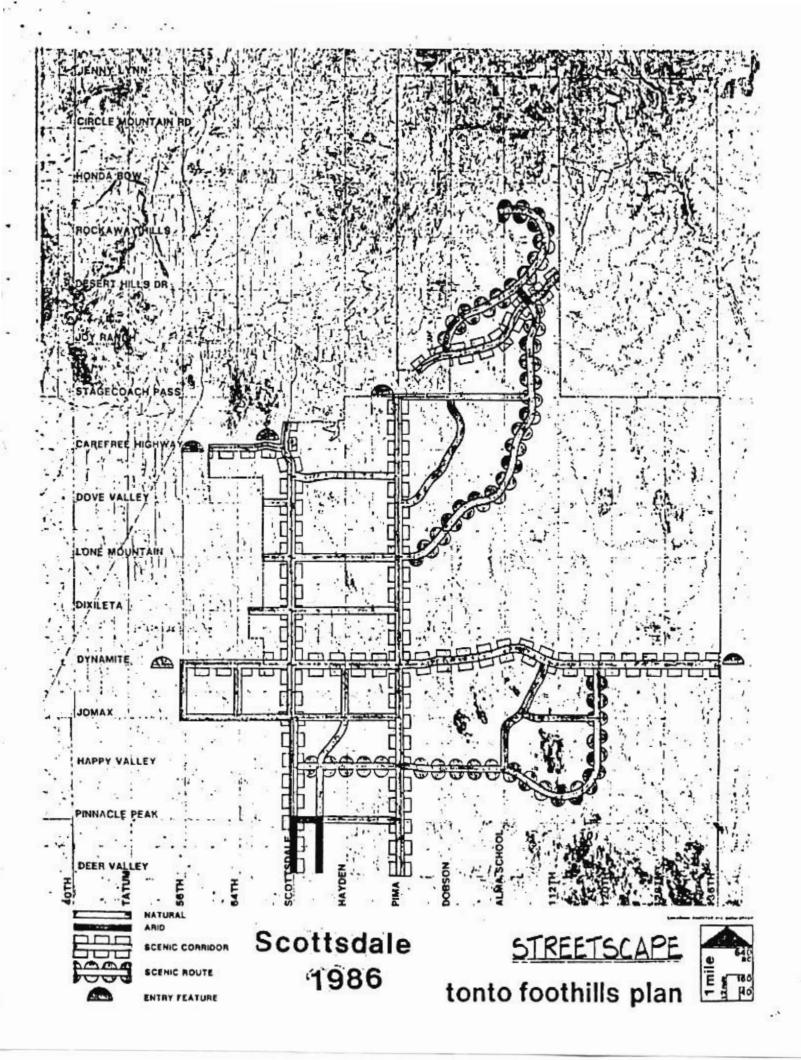
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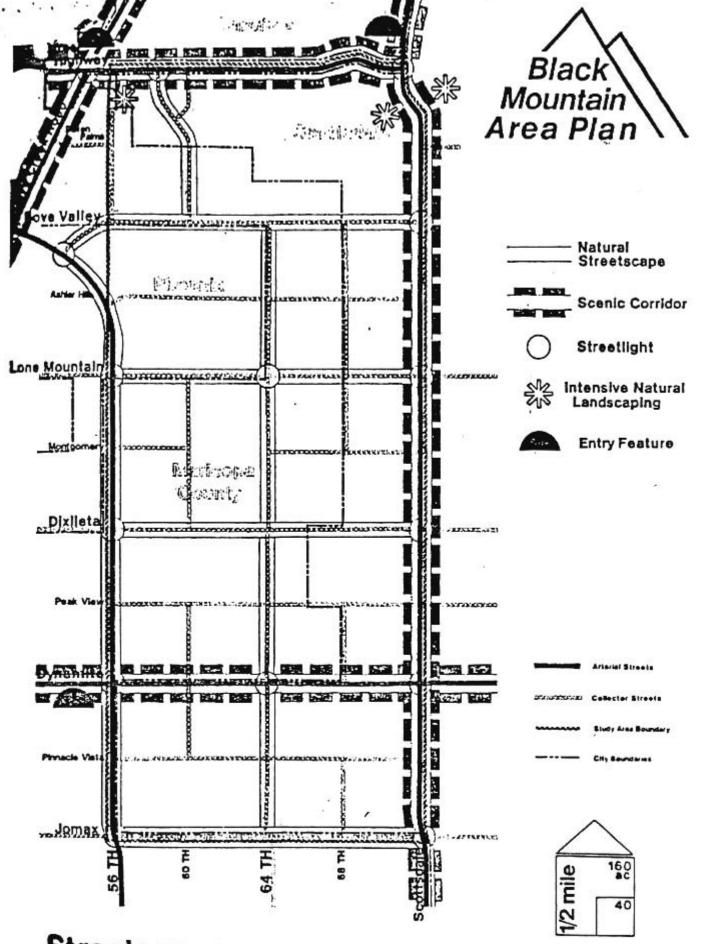












Streetscape

City of Scottsdale

"Character Features" states
the corridors "should be
designed as a unified whole,
with emphasis on the
preservation of views, natural
desert landscape
character, and the casual
life-style of the areas."

Carefree

Carefree's Master Plan 1987
says Carefree should designate
Cave Creek Road from Carefree
Highway to Stagecoach Pass as
a "Scenic Corridor." And
"Further study should be given
to determine the proper width
and means of implementation."

III. OPTIONS

Many options exist for roadways that are candidates for special treatment.

- A. Do nothing
- B. Guidelines
- C. Design standards
- D. Overlay zoning
- E. Ordinance regulation
- F. Conservation easements
- G. Mini-parks
- H. Designation as Scenic Road
- I. Special plan

IV. DISCUSSION

(Section IV consists primarily of excerpts from the 1990 APA "Designing Urban Corridors").

A. Improving the appearance of commercial corridors

Unplanned commercial corridors contain the following characteristics:

- Numerous large freestanding and portable signs
- Large expanses of unscreened surface parking
- Little or no landscaping
- Few or no pedestrian improvements
- Above-ground utilities and overhead lights.
- Poorly delineated and closely spaced driveway access points
- Uncoordinated design, location and planning of public and private improvements

Unplanned commercial corridors can pose both visual and functional problems. Visually, they often lack a sense of organizational structure, and this confusion reflects poorly on the community. The development often bears no relationship to a community's natural setting or the architectural styles present in the rest of the community. Franchises and chains make one community's commercial corridor(s) indistinguishable from the next, leaving visitors with the impression that the community does not care about its appearance.

On the other hand, guidelines and regulations provided by corridor zoning districts, overlay controls, site planning requirements and special plans are being used to create more attractive, cohesive, and safe roadways with greater continuity in design. In addition, planning guidelines serve to provide a clear message to developers about the city's expectations for thoughtful and attractive

site planning along important corridor routes.

A.1 Sign control measures

Competing for the attention of the motoring public, merchants continually push the roadside visual envelope to its breaking point by erecting bigger, taller, and brighter signs. Design review committees evaluate the appropriateness of proposed sign design by considering material, color, shape, and proportion to the building and nearby signs. Lighting standards are clearly spelled Sign size can be related to building size or lot frontage.

A.2 Screening and landscape standards

Well-planned screening and buffering techniques can be very effective methods of improving the overall aesthetic quality of a road corridor, since surface parking often consumes from 50 to 75 percent of a site. delineating the edge of a project and its critically important element, the entrance, landscaping actually serves to increase a project's visibility and enhance its viability in the competitive Landscape buffers setting. can include trees, shrubs, berms, and other landscape features.

Parking areas can be further enhanced by the addition of "islands" with trees and shrubs. Preservation of existing trees and other native vegetation is a common

requirement of many corridor ordinances, and additional plantings may be required to ensure adequate screening. More than any other single roadside feature, trees can define the character of a roadway corridor. By providing scale, texture, and color to the entire length of the corridor, trees can unify the diverse elements that make up the corridor visual experience. The planting of native trees is used as a means of enhancing the visual rhythm of corridor areas.

Flexible buffer strip requirements and the use of alternative compliance standards help to ensure fairness.

A.3 Pedestrian amenities and streetscape improvements

The need for pedestrian improvements and street furnishings differs among corridors according to adjacent land uses and roadway speeds. Improvement techniques can be tailored to individual stretches of roadways, with recommended design solutions and regulatory strategies creating a coordinated yet dynamic corridor image. The location of sidewalks, the use of paving materials, the designated use of walkways and other design variables can be spelled out on a district-by-district basis yet use a common design theme. Location and arrange-ment of items such as benches, trash receptacles, newsracks, pedestrian lighting, planters, bike racks, and hitching rails can vary by district.

A.4 Architectural standards

Buildings themselves constitute a major component of the corridor, although they are sometimes lost in the visual chaos of the roadside. Some communities regulate building design elements within the corridor in an attempt to showcase local architectural and cultural Varied building traditions. and land-use themes for individual stretches of the corridor can range from "Old West" to rural to suburban. Flat roofs or pitched roofs, shingles or tiles; stucco, brick or natural wood siding; amounts of glass and reflective material used on building facades; and the use of no more than three exterior colors per building are some of the standards communities use to define their "character."

A.5 Community entryways

Roadways serve as primary entrance routes to a community, or as gateways to an entire region. These streets and roads have a special place due to their important role in both conveying first impressions to visitors and shaping community identity for local residents. They help to mark boundaries between communities whose differences might otherwise go unnoticed. Entryways also provide information to motorists by providing insight into the historical, cultural and economic foundations of the area.

Installing attractive welcome signs at community entrances

is a simple and relatively inexpensive way to improve the appearance of local entry corridors. Both public and private activities can enhance the overall visual quality of highways that bisect a town. Improvement strategies can be developed to encourage travelers to stop and enjoy the unique character of the community. Improving roadway area visual quality is viewed as an important step in prompting local economic development and business recruitment efforts.

A.6 Unifying elements

Other unifying elements include public art and sculpture to signal the location of important public open spaces; the installation of landscape features and artwork; pedestrian-oriented streetscape designs in the downtown area; and a unified design for public street and information signs. Roadways can be divided into districts based on their natural and built features, with district specific design guidelines intended to highlight the character of individual stretches along the corridor.

A.7 Financing

A number of financing methods can be considered as means of implementing the public improvement program costs: general revenues, percent-forart funds, park and recreation funds, special improvement districts, private donations, and capital improvement program funds.

B. Land-use and site planning standards for urban corridors

The roadway corridor, more than any other feature of the urban environment, shapes our perceptions of a community. Functional problems posed by urban corridors relate primarily to traffic safety and congestion brought about by long stretches of intensive development, poorly marked and inadequately spaced driveways, inadequate turning lanes, and haphazard on-site circulation facilities. The number, size, and location of signs within corridor areas may also affect the functional operation of corridor roadways by contributing to the confusion of motorists in an environment that is already difficult to negotiate.

Sound subdivision and site plan standards can help ensure corridors that are efficient and safe, as well as attractive. Important considerations include the use of bus turn-out lanes, perimeter walkways, landscaped median strips to prevent left turn movements, and the clustering of commercial uses.

B.1 Land use regulations

Most corridor zoning regulations function as overlay districts that impose additional site development standards on projects located adjacent to major roadways. Some restrict certain uses such as drive-in windows, gas pumps, and other intensive retail commercial uses, with preference given to

alternatives to direct driveway access to adjacent thoroughfares. Unregulated development of drive-in banks, fast-food restaurants, quickservice food stores, and service stations would have an adverse impact on traffic service levels, public safety, and community appearance.

When traffic congestion and compatibility with nearby land uses are primary concerns, corridor ordinances may also attempt to mitigate the overall effects of corridor-wide development activity by placing limits on building intensity. Overlay regulations significantly reduce permitted development intensities by imposing additional floor area ratio (FAR) limitations on corridor land uses, as well as height limitations.

B.2 Site planning

Site plan review requirements are a common feature of almost all corridor zoning regulations. Site plans provide an invaluable means of evaluating on and off site transportation impacts of corridor development activity. Site plan approval should be required as a precondition of all development and redevelopment activity within a scenic corridor.

B.3 Traffic impact analysis

A traffic impact analysis is often necessary to gauge a project's full range of transportation impacts, since urban corridors are very sensitive to increases in traffic volumes. Traffic impact analyses should be required for nonresidential corridor projects with an aggregate size of 40,000 square feet or more, and for residential projects with more than 50 units. If a traffic study shows an adverse impact, a mitigation plan that includes necessary improvements, cost estimates, and proposed costparticipation ratios should be developed.

B.4 Access controls

Access control measures offer great potential for slowing the cycle of functional obsolescence and for maintaining safe traffic operation conditions along corridors. Inadequate controls may render a highway functionally obsolete well in advance of its design life and contribute to potential safety problems. Location and design of access points also have a significant impact on the safety and efficiency of pedestrian movements. planning can create areas of pedestrian and vehicular conflict where driveways meet sidewalks.

Roadways establish two sets of "rights," the right of the general public to travel, and the right of access for those whose land abuts the roadway. Such issues should be addressed within a corridor-wide access management plan that integrates land-use and transportation planning objectives along the entire route.

A number of variables,

including roadway design speeds, sight distances, grades, service levels, and the operational and traffic generating characteristics of adjacent land uses come into play when evaluating appropriate access control and design issues.

Some communities establish minimum 150 foot spacing requirements between private drives and major intersections, and 100 foot minimum spacing between private drives. Others establish a limit of one driveway or street intersection for every 660 linear feet of road frontage along a major through traffic route, with submission and approval of a site specific access plan for each new driveway connecting along the roadway.

Corridor protection strategies can require or at least strongly encourage the use of shared driveways by adjacent parcels in the case of a large number of narrow lots. Ordinances may give preference to shared entrances, access to other streets, and internal service drives, while strongly discouraging access drives to individual sites within the corridor. Access standards can also establish minimum sight distance criteria for driveway placement and driveway profile design guidelines.

The absence of landscape features and curbs makes it extremely difficult to identify where the public roadway ends and the private parking lot begins. Such

situations are not only ugly, they are also unsafe.

B.5 Traffic Controls

Transportation management programs can be an effective means of alleviating traffic congestion along intensively developed corridors and other areas with a large concentration of office developments or major employment facilities. Trip reduction plans, preferential parking spaces for carpool and vanpool vehicles, park and ride lots, and other strategies are useful.

C. The preservation and protection of Scenic Corridors

California, Vermont,
Tennessee, Connecticut, and
Oregon have protected scenic
roadways through the use of
designation programs,
billboard controls, and
conservation easements. The
work of private land trusts
and the National Environmental
Policy Act of 1969 provide
further evidence of longstanding emphasis on scenic
roadway planning in the USA.

Scenic Roadways are important. They provide an escape route for city dwellers in search of unspoiled environments and rural traditions. They provide important links with communities whose economic fortunes are closely tied to tourism revenue. Most of all, they provide "pleasure driving." Preserving and promoting the scenic qualities of area roads can make a

significant contribution to local tourism and economic development programs. Longterm protection of scenic corridors requires thoughtful planning strategies and sensitive land-use controls.

C.1 Scenic Corridor selection and designation

Identification of scenic roadway areas in need of protection is the most fundamental and important task. Some visual resource management systems rely heavily on elements of artistic composition (form, line, color and texture), and relational aesthetics (intactness, unity and vividness). Other systems place a much greater emphasis on local community values and measure community opinion about which scenic resources are important and should be protected.

C.2 Scenic Corridor elements

A scenic corridor includes much more than just the roadway pavement, right-of-way area, and adjacent roadside. Its boundaries include outstanding scenic vistas as well as the facilities for enjoying them. The corridor may extend for miles in horizon to horizon vistas. The aesthetic values inherent in such natural areas are readily appreciated by a broad cross-section of the community.

C.3 Regulatory strategies

In the early 1980's, Austin, Texas adopted "principal roadway area" and "scenic arterial" zoning controls for land along major transportation routes. These corridor regulations function as overlay zones and impose special site development, design, access, and sign controls on property located within 1,000 feet of the right-of-way. A number of standards are included "to maintain the natural beauty of the country" and "to allow people to live, work, and enjoy recreation within the area without reducing its natural beauty." Additional site plan requirements include

- a. A detailed survey of all trees inside construction areas
- Location and screening methods of all mechanical equipment, loading and parking areas, and lighting
- c. Cross-section drawings demonstrating compliance with special height controls
- d. Location and extent of existing or potential scenic vistas

Intensity zones, together with the slope, determine the maximum development intensity permitted for the site. Intensity bonuses are granted for innovative site planning or architectural design features and compliance with at least six of twelve specific "performance incentive criteria." These include voluntary preservation of scenic vistas, limitations of driveway access points, installation or preservation of increased landscape areas, limiting of construction to relatively flat areas, and

consolidation of small lots to create large parcels (thus encouraging unified development and site planning).

Upland, California's Scenic Overlay Ordinance prohibits a number of uses, including auto repair shops, freestanding drive-in restaurants, adult-oriented businesses, and many types of outdoor display and sales enterprises. Site development standards prohibit direct access from the roadway to off-street parking areas, and to commercial, industrial, and multifamily developments along the corridor.

Los Angeles' Scenic Parkway Ordinance regulations govern roadway geometry, landscaping, utilities, roadway access control, public information sign placement, permitted uses, and site development practices. The ordinance is comprehensive in its treatment of visual and natural resources. It restricts grading and cut-and-fill practices, regulates tree protection, and has landscape requirements. "slope/density" formula establishes fairly low maximum permitted densities. Views from the parkway and surrounding areas are protected by prohibiting most structures from exceeding 25 to 35 feet in height throughout the corridor. Major public viewpoints are identified and buildings or structures are prohibited from penetrating protected viewsheds.

C.4 Land trusts and easements

Private land trusts are among the most active organizations in scenic corridor and rural area protection. These groups have an impressive track record in scenic resource protection.

It takes an organized and concerted effort to protect the scenic qualities of a roadway. Local land trusts, organized to preserve local scenic roadway corridors, open space areas and environmental resources, can pursue an ambitious conservation agenda. They can promote public awareness of the unique qualities of a roadway corridor, devise gateway protection strategies, and acquire important parcels along the roadway to ensure they are left in their natural state. Acquisition efforts can be supported by fund-raising activities and gifts of land from private landowners along the route.

Many organizations are attempting to enhance and expand the long-term viability of their efforts by implementing an active easement program. The move toward greater reliance on easements stems from both a desire to appease local concerns about the amount of land being removed from tax rolls, and an acknowledgment of the impressive track record of privately managed easement programs that exist around the / country.

Once obtained, easements should be recorded and clearly

indicated on all plans and plats. Access across easements should be limited to streets of collector level or greater.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CORRIDOR PLANNING AND DESIGN

Establishing higher standards for site planning and design within corridor areas is important because these areas have a profound impact on our perceptions of community character. Planning strategies that seek to capture and enhance those features that make communities special should not be dismissed as mere window dressing. Improving the appearance of corridor areas can have positive effects that transcend the superficial facelift.

Attractive and well-planned corridors can prompt visitors to extend their stay or make a return trip, encourage appropriate development or redevelopment, and attract people for the first time. A number of general and specific techniques can be used effectively to improve or preserve the character of corridors:

- Keep provisions and the process simple.
- Remove regulatory barriers that impede innovative site design and land-use planning.
- Be firm about goals and be flexible about how to attain them.
- Don't ignore the relationship between traffic circulation and land use.

When possible, include specific alternative provisions, and leave some leeway for approval of new practices. Performance based screening and buffering requirements, which base the width of landscape buffers and the density of planting within buffer areas on the nature of land use, are an excellent response to concerns about inflexibility and the potential for onerous treatment of small projects.

Tree planting and preservation requirements, as well as a local tree planting program, should be part of every corridor improvement and protection strategy. Healthy attractive trees located along the roadway can do more to enhance the appearance of corridor areas than any other single roadside feature.

Access control measures should be a part of all roadway area plans and ordinances. Allowing reasonable access opportunity need not necessarily entail direct access for each use abutting the roadway. Private service drives and shared access driveways are appropriate and reasonable alternatives. Uses such as fast-food restaurants, convenience stores, and service stations should be targeted for special treatment. These uses, as well as high-intensity commercial developments, need a means of mitigating the effects of their tremendous transportation demands.

An integrated and comprehensive approach offers

great promise of improving the function, safety, and appearance of corridors.

VI. SUGGESTIONS FOR LOCAL CORRIDORS

A. Mini-parks

Mini-parks could be developed along a Scenic Corridor. Small areas to pull-out and park would provide the opportunity to safely examine and photograph desert plants at close range. Areas bordering washes are ideal as plants grow more profusely near the washes. Wildlife clusters near washes and their bordering vegetation, dependent upon that dense growth for food and cover. Additional native plants could be brought in if needed for variety. Plants should be identified with signs, and additional informational material could also be available.

B. State/local Scenic Road designation (see A.R.S.)

Local authorities may acquire any land for the establishment or improvement of highways, roads, or city streets designated as parkways or historic or scenic roads by expenditures of local highway user revenues or other funding sources.

To ensure the protection and enhancement of the special features for scenic roads, parkways and historic roads, revised construction and maintenance procedures may be developed, allowing an

exemption from the standards normally applied.

C. Encourage private developer controls

The best developers realize that the more natural desert they keep, the more valuable their land is. The less soil disturbed, the less problem with undesirable plant invasion. Transplanted cactus in densities not found naturally make aesthetically unattractive arrangements and shorten the plant's life. Desert plants placed near standing water or sprinklers slowly die. The desert is a complex habitat with all the plants and animals codependent. Leaving an occasional saguaro or drastically pruned tree does not preserve the desert.

Tatum Ranch, Sincuidados,
Troon, Desert Mountain,
Boulders, etc., have design
standards to control signs,
lighting, walls, building
envelopes, etc. Approved and
prohibited plant lists help
maintain a unified natural
desert appearance.

Design standards for roadway design, grading, drainage handling, general construction guidelines, signage, lighting, native plant retention, landscaping/revegetation, walls, paths for pedestrians, bikes and horses, utilities and site layout can enhance the scenic corridors, while allowing reasonable density development.

VII. BENEFITS OF SCENIC CORRIDORS

- A. Improved community image
- B. Economic benefit to the community
- C. Increased valuation of real property
- D. Sign and sound buffers between roadways and adjacent land uses
- E. Open space linkages through and between communities
- F. Scenic opportunities unique to the region
- G. Insured continuance of an exhaustible resource—the Sonoran Desert Foothills

VIII. CONCLUSION

With the Scenic Drive already in place and additional Scenic Corridors designated on their General Plan maps, local communities have an excellent beginning. Cooperative planning could ensure continuous loops of Scenic Corridors in the Foothills.

Rapid development in the area argues for the adoption of specific scenic corridor design standards in the near future. With action now, development along Scenic Corridors can continue to provide an opportunity for pleasure travel, convenient and attractive access through the natural desert, and environmental protection of the immediate desert while enhancing the value of the land, community image, and pride. Without protection soon, the uniqueness of the Desert Foothills area will be lost forever.

BCENIC CORRIDORS

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