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August 4, 2003

The Honorable Don Young, Chairman
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

We are writing to express our strong opposition to action by the House Committee on Appropriations on the FY 2004 budget for the U.S. Department of Transportation which would earmark all funding available for scenic byways projects, completely eliminating the **merit-based** grant selection process established by statute. We further urge your action – and offer our support for that action – to block this rewrite of TEA 21 through the appropriations process.

The National Scenic Byways Program was created in 1991 and has produced significant benefits for the nation's transportation, tourism, recreation and environmental programs. There are now 75 National Scenic Byways and 20 All American Roads in 39 states, including nine with portions in more than one state. Hundreds of competitive grants have been awarded under criteria established by the Congress under ISTEA. Grant applications have historically exceeded funding by more than 2:1. Successful grant applications have been projects of outstanding merit and national significance. Most of the grants are relatively small in amount and are leveraged with local and private funds to boost economic development through tourism. In FY 2001, 142 grants were awarded for projects in 41 states and Puerto Rico. In FY 2002, 286 applications were received, representing a total of \$65 million in requests. In FY 2003, 310 applications were received from 42 states, representing a total of \$81.9 million in requests.

The Committee on Appropriations is now proposing to completely transform the scenic byways grant program in FY 2004 by earmarking projects to receive every dollar of the available funding. There were no hearings on this major change, nor any review of the eligibility of the identified projects. The result will be that many worthy projects with true merit and wide local community support will be denied the opportunity to receive grants.

We strongly oppose earmarking of National Scenic Byways Program funds, and ask for your help in maintaining the integrity of this unique and successful program.

Thank you for your consideration of these views.

Sincerely,

Meg Maguire, President
Scenic America

Susan Pikrallidas, Vice President
AAA

Derrick Crandall, President
American Recreation Coalition

Kathryn Higgins, Vice President, Public Policy
National Trust for Historic Preservation