

Project Category

NSBF Byway Organization Communications Award.

Project Name

The Florida Keys and Key West Driving App

Byway Name

Florida Keys Scenic Highway – Designation June 2001

All-American Road – Designation November 2009

Length of Byway – 110 miles

Overview

The Florida Keys Scenic Highway (FKSH) extends along US 1 through a 110-mile chain of small islands stretching from the southernmost tip of the Florida peninsula into the Gulf of Mexico. Approximately 60 miles south of Miami in Monroe County, Florida, the FKSH corridor begins north of Key Largo (Mile Marker 110) and extends to Key West (Mile Marker 0), which is the Southernmost City of the continental United States.

Designated an All-American Road, the stretch is surrounded on both sides by incredible natural beauty, including tropical scenery and seemingly endless turquoise waters. More than just an exceptional visual experience, the FKSH corridor is a passage rich in history and culture. The Keys' history spans from early Native Americans to the arrival of Western civilization through Spanish and British settlers. The islands were largely inaccessible until the arrival of Henry Flagler's Florida East Coast Railway in 1912, which was later destroyed by the Labor Day Hurricane of 1935. Stories of shipwrecks, sunken treasures and pirates weave together to create a lively, historical narrative.

Additionally, with a location just 90 miles from the coast of Cuba and with significant Bahamian roots, the Keys culture includes music, architecture, art and cuisine, which reflect a unique Caribbean blend not found anywhere else in the United States. This island paradise also offers a range of recreational activities, drawing millions of visitors to the region each year. Scuba diving, fishing, snorkeling and sailing are possible because of year-round moderate temperatures. An unparalleled location, the FKSH combines breathtaking natural allure, a temperate climate, outdoor recreation, history and a fusion of island flavors which attracts tourists from around the world.

The award category for this project is Marketing & Communication as the project nominated is a mobile driving app that visitors and residents travelling along the All-American Road can use to maximize their enjoyment and safety. It is an innovative app with features that include: narrated driving tours that give travellers advance notice of scenic, iconic, or historic points of interest as your drive along the Florida Keys Scenic Highway, giving two miles notice when travellers are near points of interest, playing narration to hear details about points of interest and amenities, fun facts about your route, and insider information on new spots to safely drive through the area. Based off of a traveller's location they can see what restaurants, attractions, and points of interest are nearby in real time. It allows app users to customize their own trip itinerary with the ability to add trip dates and "favorite" anything they find of interest in searching through the app tailored to the traveller. It also includes stunning 360-degree video views of major points of interest such as the Southernmost Point, Mallory Square, Seven-Mile Bridge, a Key West trolley, and views underwater, biking, kayaking, and in the backcountry. The app bridges the gap between the user and local business community, allowing users to search and directly book accommodations, attractions, restaurants, and more. Finally, the app links travellers to local webcams, weather conditions, introductions to each island community, events, maps, and social media. The travel app is truly all-inclusive app and maximizes visitor enjoyment while prioritizing the safety of all along the byway. The app determines if the traveler is seeking Northbound or Southbound travel information and only suggests stops that require a right hand turn off the highway, again stressing safety as the most important aspect.

Intrinsic Qualities

Visitors traveling to the Keys are faced with a three and a half hour journey from one end of the FKSH to the other. Long travel times, combined with visitor lack of familiarity with the highway and its resources have historically contributed to vehicle delays. While US 1 serves as the major artery to move travelers through the Florida Keys, it also serves as the main street for the communities located along the corridor. The Mobile App now enables travelers to efficiently identify and locate historical attractions along the way down the Florida Keys. Features such as interactive maps allow visitors to anticipate entrances to attractions, accommodations and historical sites. This significance aligns with and advances the byways' primary and secondary intrinsic qualities of recreational and scenic features. In featuring points of interest cherry-picked and vetted by organizations such as the local chambers of commerce and local tourism development council, the app reflects the intrinsic qualities of the byways as outlined by those who know it best.

Advanced planning and more accurate visualization of the visitor's trip has reduced the number of travelers getting lost, and has therefore minimized stop-and-go driving. This app has significantly improved the quality of life for those residents living in the FKSH byway community and increased safety for all travelers on the Florida Keys Scenic Highway, an All-American Road.

Partners

Partners and collaborators were paramount to the realization of The Florida Keys & Key West Travel App. Given the 110 mile stretch of the Florida Keys Scenic Highway, the Florida Keys Scenic Corridor Alliance served as the coordinator for the project and relied on the vast wisdom and expertise of partner organizations to develop the app. The Chambers of Commerce of Key Largo, Islamorada, Marathon, Lower Keys, and Key West provided their intimate knowledge of their respective communities to identify scenic, iconic, or historic points of interest and relevant information. As mentioned previously, the Monroe County Sheriff's Office provided valuable input in embedding safety measures in the design of the app and points of interest. Two Oceans Digital provided technical support and developed the app into a reality. The Monroe County Tourist Development Council funded the project and provided valuable input on the visitor experience. Bill Becker, the voice of US1 Radio, narrated the app and donated his time and voice to the project. Mandy Miles of The Weekly Newspaper compiled and edited the text, and Rob O'Neal was the photographer.

Byway Best Practice

The travel app provides a holistic and interactive visitor experience to make the stories of the Florida Keys Scenic Highway come alive. While enhancing the visitor experience is inherent to the best practices for byways, the primary objective of the development of the app is safety on the road for visitors and residents. The Florida Keys Scenic Corridor Alliance intentionally collaborated with the Monroe County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) to maximize visitor safety with measures such as directing travellers to only make right hand turns no matter which direction they are driving (North or South). MCSO was also a key collaborator in selecting the points of interest based on ease of entry and exit from FKSH. Finally, the app provides notification of points of interest two miles before a traveller needs to exit the highway, allowing a sufficient amount of notice to exit the highway in a safe manner. The Florida Keys & Key West Travel App serves as the example for best practices in byways for enhancing visitor safety.

Keys to Success

Our success is dependent on several factors, many listed above, and all are driven by the excitement of our team. We have a passion for this event as it touches so many key elements for our organization. It showcases the two counties spanning our byway, and some of the most unique historical locations in the nation. It directly correlates to our primary intrinsic quality of recreation and is set up to offer everyone a chance to participate – from youth/beginner to professional level athlete, we have a route distance to meet every need. Working closely with our area's tourism officials, business community and nonprofit partners, it's an event that welcomes visitors from start to finish with true show of hospitality and an unmatched enthusiasm for our region.

Why do they love it? You'd think after doing the event several years in a row, participants would get bored. Not here. We have so much fun designing custom medals and signature jerseys each year, creating a theme, and wowing our riders with celebrity entertainers and unique activities that it never seems like the same event twice!

Additional Information

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Project Year(s):

2019

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[Florida Keys Scenic Highway \(scenichighwayflkeys.com\)](http://scenichighwayflkeys.com)

Photograph

