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**Gov. Blagojevich Applauds U.S. Recognition
For Historic Rt. 66 and Illinois River Road
*Scenic Byways Label Boosts Efforts To Attract Tourists
And Spur Economic Development Along Two Corridors***

SPRINGFIELD – Gov. Rod Blagojevich today applauded the “National Scenic Byways” designation by the U.S. Department of Transportation of two storied transportation routes in Illinois: Route 66 and the Illinois River Road. The designation means that the routes are added to the national list of Scenic Byways and are eligible to apply for grant funding that can be used for marketing, visitor centers, landscaping and other amenities.

“This is a big step forward in our efforts to make Illinois a premier tourism destination and highlight the natural and manmade heritage of our state,” said Gov. Blagojevich. “The Illinois River Road opens a window on our rich Native American cultural legacy and the natural splendors of Illinois. Route 66, which as everyone knows winds more than 2,000 miles from Chicago to L.A., is so much more than just a highway. It’s a symbol of our love for the open road and that can-do spirit of individualism and adventure that is such a vital part of the American way of life.”

The announcement of the designation of two new Scenic Byways in Illinois was made in Washington D.C. today by U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta, who was acting on applications submitted by two local groups – the Route 66 Heritage Project and the Peoria Area Convention and Visitors Bureau - through the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT).

"The designation of the Illinois River Road as a national scenic byway is a tremendous boost to nature-based tourism in Illinois River Country," said Lt. Gov. Patrick Quinn. "Our scenic byway provides the gateway for everyone across the country to enjoy the bird-watching, wildlife viewing, hiking, biking, fishing, boating, and camping that Illinois River Country offers."

“When you talk about the heritage of Illinois you are talking about the history of transportation in America,” said IDOT Secretary Tim Martin. “That’s why IDOT is proud to play a role in highlighting and bringing to life the stories of Route 66 and the Illinois River Road, two fabled routes that have played such an important role in the history of our state and nation.”

"Illinois has been an important part of the journey as so many people crisscrossed America for generations, and the Route 66 and Illinois River Road *Scenic Byway* designations support Gov. Blagojevich's efforts to build Illinois' tourism industry. Thanks to this national recognition, more visitors will see 'Mile After Magnificent Mile' of Illinois that will ultimately support even more businesses and jobs across our state," Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity Director Jack Lavin said.

The starting point of Route 66 – which was immortalized by the song “(Get Your Kicks On) Route 66,” performed by Nat King Cole, the Rolling Stones and many others – is at the corner of Lake Shore Drive and Jackson Blvd. in Chicago. The route winds through Chicago on various streets to southbound Interstate 55. It travels along much of I-55 and its frontage road, except for a loop from Plainfield to Braceville along Old US 66 and another loop along Route 4 from Springfield to south of Staunton, where it again meets the primary route along I-55. The Illinois portion of Route 66 covers 420 miles and ends in East St. Louis at the Martin Luther King Memorial Bridge.

The Illinois River Road, known as “the Route of the Voyageurs,” after the early French explorers, covers 271 miles through the heart of the state and runs from Ottawa to Havana. It includes much of Routes 26 and 29 on each side of the river.

IDOT worked with the two local groups in applying for the designation. IDOT installed directional signing for both Route 66 and the Illinois River Road in 1996.

In addition, DCEO has provided Route 66 Heritage Project more than \$500,000 in administrative and consultative funding for the development of this project.

Once a road is designated as a National Scenic Byway, they receive national recognition on the www.byways.org website and they are actively promoted as tourist destinations by the Federal Highway Administration.

Scenic Byways are eligible to apply for a \$25,000 annual seed grant for administration of the byway for the first 5 years. They are also eligible to apply for grant funds for marketing, landscaping and construction of visitor centers and other amenities. Since 1992, the National Scenic Byways Program has provided funding for almost 1,500 state and nationally designated byway projects in 48 states.

Illinois previously had five routes on the list of National Scenic Byways: The Great River Road along the Mississippi River; the Illinois portion of the Historic National Road, which cuts across the southern half of the state; Lincoln Highway, which starts south of Chicago and travels along US Rt. 30 and IL Rt. 38 to Fulton; the Meeting of the Great Rivers Scenic Route in the Metro East area, at the confluence of the Mississippi, Missouri and Illinois Rivers; and the Ohio River Scenic Byway, along the southern edge of the state.