



Illinois Route 66 Centennial Commission Meeting
October 30, 2025
Motorheads-Springfield, Illinois

Members Present: Cory Jobe, Casey Claypool, Scott Dahl, Bonnie McDonald, Robert Navarro, Liz Vincent, and Rep. Michael Coffey

Ex-Officio Members Present: Casey Sheehan (IOT)

Guests in Attendance: Melissa Chrisman (President and CEO of VisitBN, Bloomington Normal Area Convention and Visitors Bureau), Craig Peerbolte (Chief Executive Office of Joliet Area Historical Museum), Carol Sneed and Craig Holan (Litchfield Museum and Route 66 Welcome Center. Carol is the president of the museum and Craig is an intern), Rep. Michael Coffey's Chief of Staff, Madison Devlin.

Chairman Jobe called the meeting to order at 10:08 am.

Cory stated that the July minutes are in the packet at each desk and is requesting approval. Bob Navarro was the first motion to approve, and Bonnie McDonald seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Cory introduced Catie Sheehan, the Deputy Director of the Illinois Office of Tourism. She spoke about her trip to London. Just got back from London with Cory and Bob Navarro at an international tourism conference. Europeans and Brits are excited to come here. We were excited about telling them about all the great things going on including what we are discussing today.

Cory stated that Catie and he handled the tour operators and Bob took care of the media. Corey stated that they had 70 appointments with leading tour operators in four days. The week prior, three bureaus along the route (Visit Springfield, Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau, and Heritage Corridor Destinations) had a sales mission. Also did a sales mission into Frankfurt, Hamburg, Cologne and London. Great couple of weeks in the European market.

Over last 4 years, the Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity and the Illinois Office of Tourism has allocated nearly \$20 million to projects along Route 66 in partnership with the nine Convention and Visitor Bureaus that represent a piece of the route from Choose Chicago to the north all the way to Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau to the south.

Cory invited Melissa, Bob, Scott and Choose Chicago to do presentations with him for the meeting. Choose Chicago could not attend unfortunately.

Bob Navarro, the President and CEO at Heritage Corridor Destinations, gave a presentation starting from North on how the Route 66 grant money was spent for marketing and product development. Illinois has about 300 miles of route.

They helped establish new museums and exhibits and did some enhancements to some current exhibits along with lots of new photo opportunities and lots of new signage along the route. In addition, they also added ev's in an attempt to electrify the route. They also bought some ev equipment and ev chargers.

Year one and year 2, Bob managed the statewide marketing initiatives including domestic and international initiatives. In years 3 and 4 he all the funding went towards product development in his area for Route 66. Rivers and Routes managed the statewide marketing initiatives. Only one bureau can manage money.

The amount of the grants was approximately \$4 million per year. Some of the years it was a little less than that.

The first two years, most of the money went towards trade shows, some federal marketing and some ad insertions. They are most proud of the Travels with Darley, which was a 30-minute episode focusing on Illinois. They also did a 30-minute episode with Samantha Brown. They are both leading traveling influencers in the video digital space.

They translated maps of 66 sites in foreign languages (French, German, Spanish, Chinese) and supported the state's Byway travel guide. Bob showed shots of travels with Darley. She traveled the route and did videos and interviews. She started in Chicago and visited the old Joliet prison and went on down to Bloomington Normal.

The first couple of years they did some trade shows and sales missions along with supporting some different festivals and events along the route. They assisted in bringing Dan Aykroyd and Jim Belushi to the old Joliet Prison for a concert and red-carpet corridor at the advertising activation.

Bob went on to discuss how the money was used for festivals and special events then new museums and exhibits. They assisted the Joliet Area Historical Museum with their Joliet Railroad Museum. It is a new museum in the Joliet Gateway Transportation Center. It is an old switching station and visitors can come in and see what those old switches look like. They are near the railroad tracks. It has been a great new addition to the downtown Joliet City center area. They also supported two murals at the Rialto Square Theater in downtown Joliet. One mural tells the history of theatre while the other mural in the back is about the centennial anniversary for route 66 and the theater.

They also gave some money to Plainfield to help get a new museum started on Route 66. They also helped with some exterior signage to help them get set up in the building. They are hoping to be open by the spring of 2026. A new exhibit that is coming is the Joliet Drawbridge exhibit as Joliet is known for their bridges. This is an interactive exhibit for kids that includes a bridge to climb on and experience what one of those bridges looks like.

They worked with Oak Lawn Children's Museum on an interactive road trip exhibit that shows the whole route from Chicago to the Chain of Rocks Bridge. They also helped the Joliet Area Historical

Museum with the Gallery of Champions and the Joliet Prison exhibits by giving money to help with displays and signage.

They also gave some money to help enhance some existing exhibits. Some of those exhibits include helping repaint and get new windows for the the Ambler/Becker Texaco Visitor Center in Dwight. There is also a wall which is a map inside where people can put a little pin on the map as to where they are from. They start with a fresh new map each year. It's a famous spot on our first hundred miles.

The Broadway Greenway along Joliet which was rebranded with new neon signs and some park improvements were made. Bob believes an ev stations was put there as well. Some other things that were done include display cases for the Rock and Roll Museum, landscaping around Route 66 sign in Lockport, Jacob Henry Mansion with new stage/sound equipment on site. Bob showed pictures of some of the enhancements discussed.

Bob also discussed some new kiosks and murals in Pontiac and the Wilmington area. Route 66 is depicted on murals near the Gemini Giant.

Bob also stated that the first year of the grant, they gave some money to the Joliet Area Film Museum to rebrand their gift shop. There's a new neon sign and some new product displays in that location.

He also showed photo ops and signage. He showed a picture Gigantar, located at the Rock and Roll Museum on Route 66. The is 24 feet tall. There are also new community electric sign boards in 20 locations for route 66 shield community monuments. In Romeoville, they have one at White Fence Farm but also near their athletic center. There is one downtown by the Gateway transportation center and another one over by the Broadway Street park.

The last thing Bob talked about was the ev equipment and charging stations. They were able to add some ev charging stations in various locations such as cities like Joliet, Dwight, Blackport, Bolingbrook, Wilmington, Pontiac along Route 66.

Melissa from Visit BN was next to make a presentation.

Melissa is nine months into job at Visit Bloomington Normal. They received around \$263,000 for various signage and ev chargers. They also did some advertising, brochures, and placements in American Bus magazine and various on-campus sponsored content. In 2024, they received just over \$180,000 which was used for murals, chargers, and also some advertising placements and Destination magazines.

She showed a presentation of four murals in McLean County. These include murals in downtown Bloomington, Route 66 Visitor Center, Lexington (walking trail southbound side of Route 66), and a mural heading out of McLean County (on a massive grain silo). They are trying to restore their historic water tower for an additional mural.

Next Melissa talked about the signage. The first one she talked about was the in Chenoa. The mayor of Chenoa likes it so much that he will go down and sit near it to say hi to visitors. The next signage Melissa talked about is the Lexington sign. There is also signage in the very far north of Normal. This is a very historical site. There was a phono contest for this signage and the one shown

was the one that won the contest. There is also one in Mclean near the train depot and one in Bloomington near the park. Bloomington is largest sign and is very unique.

She also discussed two ev chargers. One is located at the Miller Park south of Miller Park Zoo.

Melissa showed photos of Sprague's Super Service. Photos included work done on backside of building. With an amount of \$100,000, they were able to replace hundreds of bricks and to do work on the building. Backside is now beautiful and completely restored.

Next to present was Scott Dahl, the Director at Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau. He welcomed everyone to Springfield and Motorheads. He talked about the Motorheads facility including how they tear down outside area for winter every year.

He then went on to discuss the Springfield route 66 grant projects.

One of the exhibits is the Route History virtual reality experience at the Route History Museum located at Cook and 8th street. The museum includes information regarding black travelers and has ties to Green Book. It is a great and unique experience.

Next Scott discussed the Route 66 experience at Illinois State Fairgrounds. This location used to include a shed that had light animals in it. They decided to use this location for the Route 66 experience. It is near Gate 2 and was approximately a \$2M project. It is a Jurassic Park of neon signs. He also talked about how the Abe Lincoln neon sign is the original sign. He also stated that the Casey sign is the original Casey sign as well. The Route 66 is the original size. The new giant is a tribute to all the giants in Illinois.

Scott then talked about the oral history project that was completed with 15 different stories.

Motorheads is the home to Big Ron. He is almost three stories tall. Another sign Scott highlighted is the new Maid-Rite sign.

Next on Scott's presentation was the reopening of Shea's gas station. Most of the items were auctioned off but they wanted to open the station. It was replicated exactly as it was 30 years ago.

Scott went on to discuss the mural trail. The murals include Lon's gas station, Williamsville. Also, there is a 50-60 feet wide mural in downtown Springfield on Madison Street.

He also talked about the Slide of 66 which is open on Saturdays during summer. It needs new paint job which they are hoping to do. It is four stories.

Next Scott talked about the wayside exhibits. There are about 12 of them. He then went on to talk about the Carpenter Park concrete. The contract was from 1922 when putting up bridge they walked over. At the bottom is an old iron bridge. It is a quarter mile stretch.

Scott discussed the Bob Waldmire exhibit in Springfield. They are working with Pontiac to prosper both exhibits. The Springfield location is currently open on Fridays and Saturdays from noon to 6:00 pm. They are hoping to expand the days and hours of the exhibit.

The next item is the Route 66 exhibit at the Kidzeum. It is a fun way for kids to get involved and they are looking to expand.

Cory Jobe, President/CEO of Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau, was next to present. Their claim to fame where the mother road of Route 66 meets the great river road. They are excited to merge these two scenic byways together. It is the last hundred miles. Bob Navarro has first 100 miles. It includes regional six counties up to Sangamon County.

They hosted a postcard mural trail launched in 16 cities. Each includes community facts with different images. He showed the Farmersville mural; however, there are many throughout region. The goal was to get people to slow down and appreciate the art.

He also discussed the Route 66 monument trail, showing the one in Girard. They have eight of them in the region. These are used for photo ops.

Next Cory talked about community projects. This was the biggest undertaking. Cory showcased Carlinville. They helped restore and open to the public the historic Cannonball Jail. They will be starting guided tour of the million-dollar courthouse and jail.

Supported the city of Litchfield by helping with the Litchfield Museum and drive-in movie theatre signage. They also helped restore and provide funding for food and concession area of the drive-in. The Ariston celebrated it's 100 year. They provided grants for restoration.

Next Cory talked about the West End Service Station in Edwardsville. It was a service station during the 40's, 50's and 60's, then was turned into a dentist office in the late 70's and early 80's. Two years ago, the State of Illinois bought it and was going to tear it down. it went to auction, and they bought it from the State of Illinois. They gave the city of Edwardsville \$560,000 to restore it as visitor center and museum. It has been visited by people in 30 countries and all 50 states. They are seeing international travel in Edwardsville also. Great place for a classic car photo shoot.

They have also done some signage in Edwardsville. One of them was done in their public park that includes information about Edwardsville.

The next item was the Edwardsville Children's Museum. They opened Route 66 roadway experience and garage. They have small antique cars for kids. It's been a big hit for the museum.

They have done a lot of murals. They funded 3 different murals in Collinsville. One is in the downtown district and two are in the uptown district.

They also completed a neon sign path in Granite City. They brought 3 out of the 7 of them back to life. They turned a dilapidated lot into the neon sign lot.

A lot of murals were painted in Granite City. They also created some larger-than-life items. Some of these include a large fork (14 feet tall), Graniteware tea pot, and Makit toy which was first made in Granite City.

They also welcomed three new giants. Rusty, the 20 ft tall giant, pays homage to mine workers and was done by the same guy that did Big Ron. Earl, an auto giant, is located at the oldest tire center on Route 66 in America. Earl was the first owner at O'Brien Tire and Auto. There is also a 20-foot-tall train conductor that is yet to be named and will be located in downtown Granite City due to all the trains going through the town. If funding is available, they have two more giants for Granite City.

Cory also talked about some items at the seats. These were done as a partnership with a statewide marketing grant last year. It was done with Midwest Living (owned by People inc.) magazine. These were polybagged to over 200,000 households in key states. It covers everything from Chicago to the Chain of Rocks Bridge.

Cory Jobe then introduced Casey Claypool, Executive Director of the Illinois Route 66 Scenic Byway, who was next to make a presentation.

The federal commission is putting their stamp of approval on projects from Chicago to Santa Monica. There are several events taking place on April 30. The main one will be in Springfield, Missouri but there will be 5 others that will coincide with that event.

Casey then stated that they are a 501C3 and get their money from license plates that you see on the road. It's about \$220,000 per year. They write grants for the rest of the money and cannot do my job without the tourism bureaus that are here. They have really good to the byway by providing funding for our mobile app, maps that we have done and our visitor guide.

Casey next stated that they are currently working on 13-coin collectors set. It is in production now. They are double-sided and have 12 locations on them. The Board of Directors chose the locations. These will be individually laser numbered and available for purchase after the first 300 are sold. Each location will have opportunity to sell at their locations. They will come with letter of authenticity. This is one of their main revenue streams for the centennial at the Byway. If you are interested in purchasing and want a special number, she will hold that number for you. These are high quality coins. A sign company is creating a stand for the coins so you can display them in your office or wherever you choose.

Casey has been working with IDOT the last couple of year and really come full circle for the byway in the last 6-7 months. The map was produced in 1998, and people are looking for it. There are only 30 copies left in the whole state and she has them all. This is an old paper map, and they worked to recreate it. It will be twice as big but will look relatively the same as the actual map. A timeline and story about Route 66 is added. They will produce 100,000 of them and will be pushing them out for free. The byway members will get right off the bat. Non-members will need to wait a little bit. It was just finalized yesterday. It will go to print in the next couple of weeks. Casey will reach out regarding the shipping.

Another project they are working with IDOT on is to put new signs on road. They got approval from the Federal Highway Administration. These will be brown historic signs. They have been out on the road the last year and a half taking inventory. They want the communities to have a say where they go. IDOT will produce the signs for free. IDOT will also install them. Casey will provide the signs for areas that are not on an IDOT jurisdiction road. You will need to have your road commissioners or someone to install them for you. They are hoping that they are going to start producing these signs in January.

They also got approval for the centennial road signs. Every community will get at least two. The larger communities will probably get four. These will be delivered by Casey. Illinois is the only state of the eight getting the centennial signs.

Casey stated that they are working with the other seven states on a Caravan in 2026. The caravan will start in Santa Monica and go to Chicago. It is a 20-day stop, and Casey will do two overnights in Illinois. They don't have approval on it yet, but the first overnight would be in Springfield, and the second overnight would be in Joliet. This is going to be a 12-car caravan. Each state will have at least one car. The gentleman that owns the big Texan Steakhouse will be towing his steer. It is massive like the pink elephant. He will be doing a steak challenge every night at the hotel. He will be providing a 72-ounce steak to anyone that would like to try and eat it. We will have video the entire time. Best Western will be the host hotel. They will be providing hotels for every traveler for each of the 19 overnights. The caravan will start June 5 approximately. They are currently waiting on California to get dates. Currently the dates are the 5th through the 22nd or 23rd. However, they are awaiting on California. This will intersect with the great race.

Another project Casey is working with the other seven states on is the trading card program. The Byway is sponsoring this program. There are a total of 26 trading cards. Each state has anywhere from two to four trading cards. They will be given to several locations in each state. They are 50 cents a card and can be sold for one dollar. In Illinois, the cards will include the prison and the Chain of Rocks bridge. The bonus sponsorship card will be the experience at the fairground.

The next item Casey discussed was the coloring book for kids. This area has not been tapped. Casey hired a Milliken University young lady to design the pages. Casey had mentioned to her that they need a character that would be attractive for kids. The character to be used throughout the state is Simon the Spudnick. It was shown to Casey when she was at the A sign company. He was originally at the Bel Air Motel on 6th Street in Springfield. They created Simon but didn't know what to do with him. Casey stated that she was going to put him in their coloring book. Simon will belong to the Scenic Byway. Casey would like him to be kind of hidden at all the locations that are highlighted in the coloring book. The coloring book will go out free of charge with their visitors' guides. Simon will be in the coloring book, the pen, and magnets. There is also going to be a plushie which will be hidden throughout the state. He will also be part of the mobile app for kids. Kids can look for Simon when traveling with their parents. They can use their phones and QR codes to find all 20 Simons. They will receive a Route 66 license plate for bicycles for free.

Casey then stated that they are finishing up their Centennial website. They have one page right now on the Byway that is for Illinois. They just finished up with events. Each bureau has their own pages for the centennial. Byways going to cover everything throughout state. This will be a kind of clearinghouse for all of Illinois where all the events can be found. Let her know of anything you want added. They have merchandise available to purchase on the website. They will have caravan information on the website along with the trading cards and things like that.

November 2026 is the statewide celebration. A celebration will be held on November 11 (Route 66 actual birthday) at Motorheads. There will be a conference during the day and a concert at night. On November 10, there will be a gala at the sign company. There will be state-wide awards throughout the byway.

Casey also stated that they are the organization that provides the statewide visitors guide, the centennial edition. It will be a collector's edition. They are shooting for a January date for those to

be available. They are printing 100,000 of these as well. It will be the later part of January. If you don't want to pay for shipping on these, get ahold of Casey and she can get them to you.

Bonnie McDonald, President of Landmarks Illinois, thanked everyone for their hard work in promoting. She also stated that the activities are remarkable. She stated that if there is somewhere she can be of help, to let her know.

Official announcement of celebration. Working on some things now with Governor to kick off the year next year. They are currently working on these things right now. One thing will be a press conference probably sometime in December. They are currently trying to nail down a couple of dates and asking the Governor to participate.

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Cory then stated the next thing to discuss was the statewide celebration grant program. There was not only 4 million dollars approved, but there was an additional \$1 million dollars for centennial celebration events across the state. There are a couple of items in the packet Cory supplied of things that need to be acted on today.

DCEO and IOT, where the funds are coming from, needs a fiscal agent to administer the grant. The finance person with Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau has agreed to be the fiscal agent. This would be reporting all financial reporting for the state, advancing dollars to events and festivals, all fiscal duties. The fiscal sponsorship agreement is in the packet. They are proposing a \$30,000 financial management fee. The state has not agreed upon that yet. Bob Navarro moves to adopt the fiscal sponsorship agreement. It was seconded by Casey Claypool. Motion passed.

Cory walked through the budgeted items/events in 2026. Events will run through next November. The first item to be discussed is the Route 66 throwback uniforms to be worn at the home games including the Big Men's Classic coming into SIU Edwardsville.

The Joliet Area Historical Society won the right to be a satellite kickoff event. There are five of them across the states. They would provide funding to produce that event.

On June 6 and 7, there will be a Progressive Decades Party. This is a celebration throughout the decades.

From September 10 – 26, The Mainstreet of America World Premier will be in Illinois with John Paget. This will go to help support each location. This will be a film debut in Chicago then it will go to Joliet, Pontiac, Bloomington Normal, Springfield, Litchfield, Edwardsville. They will start on the third in Chicago and they will be in Litchfield and Edwardsville on the tenth.

On October, there will be a two-day festival with the Rivers and Routes along with the scenic byway in 14 communities along the last one hundred miles.

In November, there will be a statewide conference that Casey talked about earlier.

Cory and Bob both talked about the drone shows. In partnership with the Heritage Corridor, there will be drone shows on Route 66. The locations are still to be determined. They will not be back-to-back dates but two weekends in row. There will be a total of four shows for whole state. This will help to enhance events. Some communities may not have compacity to do drone show where can benefit all communities. These would be in the last 100 miles in smaller communities. Fourteen towns will participate. The maximum number of shows would be 400.

There will be a Route 66 mother road festival in partnership with Visit Springfield.

Cory also discussed the Route 66 founders club.

This is the nineteenth Red Carpet Corridor. It runs from Joliet to Bloomington. There are 15 communities. The money given is huge for some of them.

Cory went through the budget. This totals roughly a million dollars.

Bonnie McDonald motioned to approve the budget. It was seconded by Madison Devlin as a proxy for Representative Mike Coffey. Motion passed.

Cory then asked if there were any commissioners comment or update.

Bonnie McDonald talked about some of Landmark's projects. They are working with Casey to put map in the spring mailing. They will also honor history at their spring event to get to a wider audience. If there is any site on the route that need grant funds, they have capitol grant funds for repair work, etc. Let them know if you are interested or if there are other ways Landmarks can be of assistance.

Casey stated she and Quinn are working on the caravan making stops. Quinn and Casey can bring into caravan.

Bonnie talked about Landmarks' preservation of organizations. They helped with the Green Book and the World History sites with the Landmark grants. They are now giving awards next Friday. They are trying to give awareness to things going on with Route 66 and the investments people are making.

Scott also stated that they went outside of Springfield and included Williamsville and Thayer. This is the first time Thayer will be included. They are trying to embrace all communities. Mick and Mary's have been in Thayer for many years, since 1926.

Liz Vincent talked about working with preservation efforts. From a Pontiac perspective, they are excited about the automobile museum. It is also the 100th year anniversary of the museum. They will be celebrating a dual event. They will be opening centennial plaza located at the beautiful mural.

Liz also discussed that they will also be having a Skoolie Swarm. This is people that redo old school buses and travel.

Cory updated on the centennial passport. It will be delivered the first week of November. Springfield, Great Rivers and Routes, and Heritage Corridor will be sending out. Cory also mentioned that it is also a great opportunity to promote America's 250. It would have been Miles

Davis's 100th birthday also. They are working on doing something around the Alton area to celebrate Miles' legendary career.

Cory also thanked everyone for their support and cooperation.

Craig Peerbolte talked about having a sign regarding the Joliet Dairy Queen being the first Dairy Queen.

He also talked about the correlation between baseball and the Joliet prison in 1914. Baseball helped to improve morale and dignity to prisoners. They have talked Joliet Slammers to into doing game. Bill Beck and Bill Murray both have ownership of the Joliet Slammers team. They are also hoping to have a game with the Grizzlies and Slammers. They are happy to do something at beginning of year, possibly a 3-day event and the same weekend as the red-carpet event.

Melissa also wanted to thank everyone for their support.

Cory requested a motion to adjourn. Scott Dahl motioned to adjourn the meeting, and Bonnie McDonald seconded the motion.

Chairman Jobe adjourned the meeting at 11:43 am.