

Maryland's Chesapeake Country All American Road - Tourist Information Project Table of Contents

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I. Basic Project Information – Project Description, Location, and Parties

1. **Name/title of proposed project:** Maryland’s Chesapeake Country All American Road - Tourist Information Project
2. **State DOT Applying for Funds:** Maryland
3. **Name and contact information for the State DOT or Tribal applicant point of contact:** Maryland Department of Transportation, Christy D. Bernal, CBernal@mdot.maryland.gov, (410) 545-5659
4. **Name of the byway(s) impacted by the proposed project: and whether the project is a statewide or multi-State project:** The byway impacted by the proposed project is the Chesapeake Country All-American Road (CCAAR), a federally designated All-American Road. This project will impact the nine counties composing Maryland’s Eastern Shore, which are Cecil, Kent, Queen Anne’s, Talbot, Caroline, Dorchester, Wicomico, Somerset, and Worcester.
5. **Designation type of the byway(s) impacted by the proposed project:** Federally designated All-American Road
6. **The primary project type under which the proposed project aligns:** The proposed project aligns with Section C.3.iv (7) the development and provision of tourism information to the public, including interpretive information about a scenic byway.
7. **If applicable, the additional project types identified:**
8. **Project Abstract (Max 5 sentences):** Work completed under this project will follow guidelines and recommendations set forth in the existing CMP and interpretive plan to develop tourist information to the public, including interpretive information along the Chesapeake Country All-American Road (CCAAR) in the form of signage. Specific locations will be finalized after completing a NEPA analysis for the design, fabrication, and delivery of 25-30 informational byway hubs for key locations and 50-70 interpretive wayside panels. This project benefits the traveler by enhancing safety, providing interpretation, and linking points of interest together that are focused on the byway’s intrinsic qualities. The project’s goal is to instill a greater appreciation of the byway in the visitor, along with a desire to protect the intrinsic qualities the byway has to offer.

a) Project Description -

Background

What is now the Chesapeake Country All-American Road (CCAAR) began as the Chesapeake Country Scenic Byway, which was designated a state byway in 1999. In June 2002 it became a designated National Scenic Byway. The byway was expanded, extended south, and elevated to All-American Road status in February 2021 for its cultural and recreational intrinsic qualities. Since then, the nine Maryland counties of Cecil, Kent, Queen Anne’s, Talbot, Caroline, Dorchester, Wicomico, Somerset and Worcester have worked cooperatively with three of Maryland’s certified heritage areas and the Maryland Office of Tourism Development to manage the byway. This group is referred to as the CCAAR Alliance.

The byway’s [corridor management plan](#) (approved June 2020) has guided management efforts. Alliance members secured grant funding through the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA) to develop an [interpretive plan](#), which was approved in September 2023. Additional MHAA funding has supported the development of a website, which will launch in Spring 2025 and provide the byway with a robust online presence.

Challenges

The CCAAR Alliance has classified physical signage as a high-priority so that it may address certain challenges.

Safety Challenges: Since the byway has evolved over time, an existing challenge is that cohesive and uniform signage is lacking. This project will provide travelers along the CCAAR with consistent signage, including a map, that orients and connects individual byway locations. As a multimodal byway, hubs and interpretive wayside signs will consider all travelers - whether they be in a vehicle, on a bike, or walking/jogging and provide a safer passage for the travel.

Climate and Sustainability: As laid out in its interpretive plan, the CCAAR's central interpretive theme is, "Life on the Eastern Shore is inseparable from the presence and influence of the Chesapeake Bay – the largest estuary in the United States."

The Chesapeake Bay is the beating heart of the CCAAR, but rising sea levels and temperatures are making it [particularly vulnerable](#) according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). This was recently highlighted during a 60-Minutes segment on CBS, ["Maryland island struggles to survive impact of rising sea level, erosion."](#)

According to a recent report by NOAA, "The Chesapeake Bay's coastal communities are a major economic engine for the region. They support commercial and recreational fishing, desirable living areas, and major recreational opportunities. Immediate and potentially life-threatening events...pose real challenges to both safety and the economy." This project will highlight climate change and sustainability challenges and also educate visitors on associated opportunities.

Equity: By focusing on the theme listed above, as well as sub-themes which include: Living, Natural Bay; People and Settlement; Abundant Harvest; Travel and Transportation; Recreation, Inspiration, and Renewal, strides will be made to overcome challenges regarding equity due to inadequate storytelling. The CCAAR interpretive plan addresses concerns of unserved and underserved byway community populations, as its development relied upon grassroots and collaborative public engagement. Moving forward, unserved and underserved groups will continue to be included in the interpretive process, ensuring that text is written with and about these groups, including the indigenous populations.

Workforce Development, Job Quality, and Wealth Creation: Byway hubs and interpretive wayside panels will create a broader context for the traveler. Coordinated interpretation will serve as an economic driver for the region, as it connects people with places, encouraging them to linger and learn in small attractions, businesses, and Main Streets, allowing for a more equitable distribution of visitation and visitor spending to more rural and far-flung communities.

Deliverables

Funding will be utilized to:

1. Draft, design, fabricate, and ship 25-30 byway hubs. Each hub will include a map of the byway, provide general byway information, and interpretive text specific to the location.

2. Draft, design, fabricate, and ship 50-70 interpretive wayside panels.

The exact quantity of signs, final locations, interpretation, and design aesthetics will follow guidance set forth in the CCAAR's interpretive plan, which outlines where travelers most need information. It will also be dependent upon NEPA analysis and the securing of necessary permits and approvals. Approvals and permits will be requested as needed, and alternate locations will be selected should approvals not be granted for any single location.

A contractor will be selected to work with local stakeholder groups to research and develop interpretive text. A graphic designer will create a user-friendly byway map and design the byway hub and interpretive wayside panels. Fabrication of the byway hubs and interpretive wayside panels will be contracted, including shipping and/or delivery.

The CCAAR Alliance will oversee the project and work within Federal and State guidelines as well as with local county, city, and towns as needed to secure any required permissions or approvals and coordinate installation. The CCAAR Alliance will be responsible for installation of signage as well as its future maintenance.

Lead Applicant

Queen Anne's County Economic and Tourism Development (QACETD) is the lead applicant and will act as the project's fiscal agent. QACETD is a department within the Queen Anne's County Government with a mission to elevate Queen Anne's County as an economically vibrant, welcoming and diverse place for business and recreation by: Delivering exceptional customer services and timely, relevant resources; proactively cultivating business attraction, retention and expansion; developing and strengthening destination amenities; promoting visitor opportunities and experiences; forging intern and apprentice partnerships; and skillfully managing County resources to fuel economic growth.

QACETD's office is located at 425 Piney Narrow Road, Chester, MD 21619. April Plummer, Marketing Administrator and County DMO, will act as the lead grant fiscal manager and will be supported by the Queen Anne's County Finance office.

Queen Anne's County has successfully completed numerous projects funded with federal grants and QACETD, specifically, was a subrecipient of a FY24 \$250,000 EDA grant supporting the Chesapeake Bay Ferry Feasibility Study, two USDA grants totaling a \$100,000 in FY21 and FY24 and \$4 Million in ARPA funds through Queen Anne's County supporting local businesses and nonprofits during the pandemic.

Other Parties to the Project

In addition to Queen Anne's County, Maryland, the other parties for this project is the CCAAR Alliance, which is composed of the Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) for Cecil, Kent, Queen Anne's, Talbot, Caroline, Dorchester, Wicomico, Somerset, and Worcester Counties as well as the Beach to Bay Heritage Area, Heart of the Chesapeake Heritage, and Stories of the Chesapeake, and the Maryland Office of Tourism Development. The CCAAR alliance and the Maryland Office of Tourism Development will contribute to the financial match. Its members will be on the core project management team and bring other technical resources to the project. Upon award, each party to the project will enter into a written agreement detailing duties, roles, and responsibilities specific to project execution and delivery.

b) Project Location -

The Chesapeake Country All-American Road (CCAAR) is located entirely within Maryland and situated on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay in the Mid-Atlantic Region. The byway is approximately 90 miles east of Washington, DC; 75 miles southeast of Baltimore; 110 miles south of Philadelphia; and 200 miles south of New York City.

The CCAAR stretches 419 land miles from Chesapeake City, Maryland to Crisfield, Maryland (plus 12 nautical miles to Smith Island) and east to Snow Hill, Maryland. The byway connects three State of Maryland certified heritage areas along with all nine counties located on Maryland's Eastern Shore and includes eight Main Streets.

It includes the following zip codes: **Caroline**: 21629, 21632; **Cecil**: 21913, 21915, 21919; **Dorchester**: 21613, 21622, 21631, 21634, 21643, 21664, 21869; **Kent**: 21610, 21620, 21635, 21645, 21661; **Queen Annes**: 21617, 21619, 21690, 21623, 21638, 21658, 21666; **Somerset**: 21817, 21821, 21824, 21838, 21853, 21871, 21890; **Talbot**: 21601, 21606, 21654, 21662, 21663, 21671, 21673, 21679; **Wicomico**: 21814, 21830, 21837, 21856, 21801, 21802, 21803, 21861; **Worcester**: 21851, 21863.

The beginning address/intersection and GPS coordinates: Route 213, North of the C&D Canal Bridge 39.53, -75.80. The ending address/intersection and GPS coordinates: 114 Ocean Gateway, Pocomoke City MD 21851 38.00,-75.54. ([Appendix CCAAR Map](#))

The CCAAR is located in a rural area, with one exception. ([Appendix UrbanAreasMap](#)) Salisbury, Maryland, with a population of 32,638, is considered an Urbanized Area according to the 2020 Census urban areas depicted on FHWA HEPGIS maps and the December 29, 2022 Federal Register Notice. ([Appendix 2022FederalRegisterNotice SalisburyMD](#)) The CCAAR includes several federally designated community development zones, specifically Opportunity Zones located within Cecil County, Kent County, Queen Anne's County, Caroline County, Talbot County, Dorchester County, Wicomico County, Worcester County, and Somerset County. ([Appendix CCAAROpportunityZones](#))

II. Grant Funds, Sources and Uses of All Project Funding

The project's budget consists of Non-Federal Funds from five sources including the Chesapeake Country All-American Road (CCAAR) Alliance, Maryland Office of Tourism Development, Maryland Heritage Areas Authority, local heritage area contributions, and the requested NSBP funds. ([Appendix CommitmentLetters](#))

Type	Total	Source	Amount
Non-Federal Funds	125000	CCAAR Alliance Contribution	30000
		Maryland Office of Tourism Development	30000
		Maryland Heritage Areas Authority	50000
		Local Heritage Area Contribution	15000
		Non-Federal Total	125000
NSBP Fund Request	500000	NSBP Fund Request	500000
Other Federal Funds	0		0
Total Funds	625000	Total Project	625000

The project will be broken down into phases to complete. The first phase will be the map development and byway hub signage design development. The design concepts are completed and need to be finalized. ([Appendix: Design Guidelines](#)) This will allow the selected byway hub sites to have their signage first, which will serve the highest concentration of visitors. The map will be displayed on each byway hub and a description of the entire byway will be accompanied by site specific information. The hub signs will be developed and ordered using the guidance of the interpretive plan. We've established a cost that is current with a range to allow us to cover some anticipated rise in costs. If the rise in costs is much higher than anticipated the adjustment will come from the wayside line items and those signs will be reduced. This will allow all main hubs to have signage, independent of unexpected cost fluctuations.

As the hub signage is being fabricated and then installed, the next phase of wayside signage will begin. These signs will be developed and ordered in the same process as the hub signage.

Phases	Component	Federal Share (80)%	Non-Federal Share (20)%	Grant Funded	Overmatch & Contingency
Phase 1					
	Research & Design & Map Development	199040	49760	248800	
	Subtotals - Phase 1	199040	49760	248800	
Phase 2					
	Sign Fabrication	250960	62740	313700	
	Installation Overmatch				26250
	Subtotals - Phase 2	250960	62740	313700	26250
	SHA Admin Fee	50000	12500	62500	
	Project Totals	500000	125000	625000	
	10% Contingency Funds				62500
		500000	125000	625000	0

III. Merit Criteria -

This project will advance all four NSBP goals as follows:

Safety

This project will advance the NSBP goal of safety. The fabrication and installation of byway hubs at key locations, as they are recommended in the interpretive plan, will assist in making this multi-modal transportation system safer for all. Each byway hub will include a full map of the CCAAR with an orientation marker so that travelers understand where they are currently and have the tools needed to safely navigate to their next location via multi-modal means.

The byway hubs will prioritize safety and public health, so that travelers have the tools needed to make informed decisions based on their method and means of travel in order to avoid transportation-related injuries. As noted in the CCAAR interpretive plan, when planning and designing visitor experiences, it's important to remember that visitors need to know where they are and what's expected of them. Visitors need to have their basic needs met—food, water, safety, and security—before they can attend to personal growth or take in new information. Restrooms, wayfinding and orientation, and etiquette all play into creating environments where visitors are relaxed and able to receive information. Visitors need to feel welcome, comfortable,

and clear about how they should interact with all of the CCAAR sites through a cohesive experience.

Climate and Sustainability

This project will advance the NSBP goal of climate and sustainability. As a multi-modal byway, the CCAAR lends itself well to encouraging alternative means of transportation - the largest contributor to climate change. Additionally, the CCAAR's interpretive themes will further advance this goal. Interpretation will center around a central theme, which is laid out in the CCAAR interpretive plan, and is, "Life on the Eastern Shore is inseparable from the presence and influence of the Chesapeake Bay – the largest estuary in the United States." A sub-theme includes "Living, Natural Bay."

Due to the CCAAR's proximity to the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, a natural point of discussion includes climate and sustainability. Many of the CCAAR's waterfront sites struggle with sea level rise and flooding, which threatens to drown coastal tourist destinations. Many places will experience more frequent and widespread flooding from high tides and storms as sea levels rise over the next 30 years and beyond. Additional impacts, including erosion, property damage, and habitat loss will reshape coastal landscapes creating structural, environmental, and economic challenges for many communities. Interpretive panels will plan to address this in key waterfront locations.

It is imperative that interpretation focuses on these topics, as educating travelers is a key component in tackling the climate crisis so that a more resilient infrastructure can be built. Through a better understanding of the landscape, past and present, this effort will lead to better sustainability and appreciation of the region's resources, creating a better quality of life for both residents and visitors.

Equity

This project will address equity. The outdoor, free, and public interpretive signage will be available for all, hence creating an affordable and accessible option. All signage created through this project will follow guidelines outlined in the interpretive plan, be 508 compliant, and follow National Park Service signage standards.

Past inequities in interpretation will be addressed and overcome through inclusive stakeholder engagement and inclusive storytelling, through the CCAAR's interpretive sub-theme, "People and Settlement." The land east of the Chesapeake Bay which now comprises the CCAAR was first inhabited by indigenous tribes prior to the exploration and future settlement by Europeans. Later, this same land would be the birthplace of Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and Henry Highland Garnet. More recently, large-scale events within the Civil Rights Movement, with the most notable taking place in Cambridge, Maryland with Gloria Richardson took place here.

As members of the CCAAR Alliance, the three certified Maryland Heritage Areas included in this project work in concert to tell the stories of the region, including those above, specifically focusing on the underrepresented communities and people, as well as the more rarely told stories. Progress has been made in this effort, and this project will further mitigate past inequities.

Workforce Development, Job Quality and Wealth Creation

Heritage Tourism and visitor spending is a major economic driver for Maryland's Eastern Shore, including the businesses and destinations along the CCAAR. Tourism and visitor spending is the second largest industry on the shore, surpassed only by agriculture. Based on a report by Tourism Economics, visitor spending within the nine counties touching the CCAAR totaled \$4 billion dollars in 2023, creating over 21,000 direct jobs and generating \$435.3 million in taxes.

[\(Appendix_TourismEconomics\)](#)

By creating a more immersive experience with the introduction of byway hubs and interpretive wayside panels, this project will encourage visitors to stay longer and spend more, thereby strengthening small businesses, creating opportunities for new business development, and growing tourism's economic impact.

Through a variety of partnerships with citizens, organizations, and public agencies, the region works to blend economic development at the local level with the preservation of the region's natural, cultural and historic resources in a regional approach that better serves all the counties, municipalities and villages on the eastern shore. The byway, with all of its interpretive elements will more effectively and efficiently move people from place to place with a better understanding of the geography and history here on the shore.

IV. Project Readiness -

a) Technical Feasibility

The Chesapeake Country All-American Road (CCAAR) will create and install 25-30 byway hubs and 50 -70 interpretive wayside panels using the recommendations for location, theme, and design outlined in the interpretive plan. This project will help orient visitors to the Eastern Shore of Maryland and to provide opportunities for discovery in which the visitor can connect with the deeper meaning of the place. The project's overall technical feasibility is best addressed through examination of each of its components.

Map Creation: This component focuses on the development and design of a byway map that both orients visitors to place and outlines a safe way to navigate the CCAAR. Building upon the map created for All-American Road designation, the contractor will create a map file for use on the byway hubs, which will be in a downloadable format usable in a variety of media. The \$3200 cost for map creation is based on a 2024 estimate from a certified interpretive planner. Map creation will occur immediately after contractor selection in Year 1 and will take 3 to 6 months.

Byway Hubs: CCAAR will install 25 to 30 byway hubs orientation kiosks, termed Byway Orientation Hubs, in popular places where visitors and tourists intersect with the CCAAR. These hubs provide orientation information, such as maps and overarching introductory thematic content about interpretive opportunities in the area. Located at gateway sites, visitor centers, waterfront access points, and historic towns, interpretive content will be intriguing so as to cause the visitor to want to learn more by visiting byway partner sites. The CCAAR interpretive plan includes design concepts and recommended locations for the byway hubs. The two sided byway hubs will feature the same byway map created in year 1 with site specific customization. Work specifications include interpretive content development (customization of primary panel for each

location), development of location-specific secondary panel, and graphic design in a format ready for fabrication. Because the installation of the byway hubs will cause ground disturbance, the alliance will collaborate with its contractors, local governments, and MD SHA, on NEPA, permitting, and other required compliance including ADA. The \$7200 cost estimate for byway hubs (\$3600 for research, copyediting, and design; \$3600 fabrication and shipping) is based on estimates provided by a certified interpretive planner. Byway hub research and design will start in year 1 and continue through year 3. Fabrication of signs will commence as designs and copy are finalized. The completion time frame is estimated at 12 – 24 months. Once installed, maintenance costs will be paid for by the alliance and its partners.

Interpretive Wayside Panels: CCAAR will install 50 to 70 interpretive wayside panels at featured locations identified in the CCAAR interpretive plan. The Interpretive Wayside Panels will follow the design and story theme of the CCAAR while delivering local themed information and thematic site installations. The content of the wayside panels will be developed in collaboration with local advisory teams. Work specifications include interpretive content development, graphic and sign base design for each panel delivered in a format ready for fabrication. Because the installation of the interpretive wayside panels will cause ground disturbance, the alliance will collaborate with its contractors, local governments, and MD SHA, on NEPA, permitting, and other required compliance including ADA. The \$5000 cost estimate for the panels (\$2000 research, copyediting, and design; \$3000 fabrication and shipping) is based on estimates provided by a certified interpretive planner. Interpretive wayside panel research and design will start in year 2 and continue through year 4. Fabrication of signs will commence as designs and copy are finalized. Once installed, maintenance costs will be covered by the Alliance and its byway partners. The completion time frame is estimated at 12 – 36 months.

CCAAR will hire an outside contractor to work with local advisory teams to research and design the hub and wayside panels. The contractor will be responsible for panel designs based on the concepts in the interpretive plan, byway map creation, interpretive content, and provide the files, and specifications necessary for panel fabrication. This project will follow local, state, and federal procurement policies for contractor selection to insure compliance with all requirements, including Title VI/Civil Rights. The advisory teams, with a diverse membership of citizens, business owners, nonprofits, and historians will guide the interpretive content development.

Phase 1: Research & Design & Map Development

Phase 2: Sign Fabrication & Installation

For detailed scope please see project schedule below.

b) Project Schedule

Phase	Year	Timeframe	Component
1	Years 1-3	Months 1-4	Award Notification
			Contractor RFP development and distribution designed to meet local, state, federal, and Title VI/Civil Rights procurement requirements
			Interpretive signage advisory panels finalized involving local citizens, businesses, nonprofits, and historians
			Planning for local and state approvals, environmental review and permitting begins
			Contractor interviews and selection
		Months 5-16	Byway Map – Design and development of overall map for use with byway
			Interpretive themes selected for each site based on those included in the interpretive plan
			Research into each interpretive theme and sub-theme
			Sign locations finalized, approval and permitting process underway
		Months 16-36	Sign storylines created
			Sign content review, editing, and final approval by advisory
			Sign type and graphic designs approved
			Permitting requirements in final stages
Signs approved for fabrication			
2	Year 4	Months 36-42	Sign fabrication
		Months 42-48	Sign installation
3	Year 5	Contingency	Sign reveal ceremonies

c) Required Approvals

i) Environmental Permits and Reviews

The planning for environmental permits and review will be implemented as soon as possible in conjunction with the award notification. It is anticipated that most signage will be located on county, municipal, or private land that has had significant past ground disturbance and not on land within state rights-of-way. The CCAAR Alliance will work with MD SHA to determine the NEPA approach.

State and Local Approvals

CCAAR has broad support at the local and state level ([Appendix: Letters of Support](#)). The project is aligned with the missions of multiple state programs including Maryland Main Streets. Approval of permits will be requested as needed and alternate locations identified should approval not be granted for a specific location. CCAAR Alliance members have extensive experience in successfully obtaining approvals for installation of similar interpretive signage.

Federal Transportation Requirements Affecting State and Local Planning

The project will comply with all planning requirements for inclusion in documents. Interpretive signage projects are identified in the CCAAR corridor management plan, CCAAR interpretive plan, and the three heritage areas' 5 year strategic and management plans. The CCAAR corridor management plan was approved and incorporated into local plans at the time of All-American

Road designation. The three heritage area plans have likewise been incorporated into planning documents.

ii) Assessment of project Risks and Mitigation Strategies

Overall project risk is low because there are no real estate acquisition costs and no uncommitted match funds. Environmental uncertainties and procurement issues are minimal.

V. Statutorily Required Project Selection Priorities and FHWA Priority Selection Considerations

Maryland's Chesapeake Country All-American Road - Tourist Information Project is highly qualified as it advances all four of the merit criteria, meets the *project selection priorities* per 23 U.S.C. 162(b)(2) i., and implements the Corridor Management Plan and Interpretive Plan of an All-American Road.

This project meets all of the *priority selection considerations* as they are laid out in the NOFO. As illustrated in section III Merit of this narrative, it will advance two or more of the NSBP goals, as laid out in E.1.I Merit Criteria, including Safety, Climate and Sustainability, Equity, and Workforce Development, Job Quality, and Wealth Creation.

The majority of the project's costs will be spent within the boundaries of a Census-designated rural area as described earlier in the application, Section 1.b.Location. At least part of the project falls within an economically distressed community per the U.S. Economic Development Administration. The project spans across two federally designated Economic Development Districts and is included in their Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies. The Mid-Shore Regional Council (<https://www.midshore.org/about>), created in 2001, serves Caroline, Dorchester, and Talbot Counties while the Tri-County Council (serves <https://tcclesmd.org/about-us/>) Worcester, Wicomico, and Somerset Counties and was established in 2001.

If awarded, non-Federal funds will be leveraged to share the costs of this project. The value of in-kind signage installation is offered as an overmatch, providing additional support beyond the required 20 percent non-Federal match and 10% contingency fee.

VI. Appendix

1. [CCAAR Corridor Management Plan](#)
2. [CCAAR Interpretive Plan](#)
3. [CCAAR Map](#)
4. [FHWA HEPGIS Maps: Urban Areas Map](#)
5. [Federal Register Notice 2022 Salisbury, MD](#)
6. [Maryland Opportunity Zones, Census Tracts](#)
7. [Budget: Funding Commitment Letters for Non-Federal Funds](#)
8. [CCAAR Interpretive Plan Design Guidelines](#)
9. [Economic Impact of Tourism in Maryland 2023](#)
10. [Letters of Support](#)