

Date of Hearing: April 17, 2017

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Jim Frazier, Chair

AB 542 (Holden) – As Amended March 20, 2017

SUBJECT: Route 66 Centennial Commission

SUMMARY: Directs the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), on or before January 1, 2021, to establish a Route 66 Centennial Commission to work with local and federal agencies in a commemoration of the 100th anniversary of California Historic State Route 66 and to foster preservation projects; makes this provision inoperative on July 1, 2027, and repeals the provision on January 1, 2028.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Statutorily describes Route 66 to be from:
 - a) Route 210 near San Dimas to the eastern city limit of the City of Pomona.
 - b) The eastern city limit of the City of Rialto to Route 215 in San Bernardino.
- 2) Provides that the relinquished former portions of Route 66 within the city limits of the Cities of Claremont, Fontana, Rancho Cucamonga, Rialto, and Upland are not state highways.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: Route 66 was the nation's first all-paved highway under the U.S. Highway System connecting the Midwest to California and has played a major role in the history of the United States. For example, it was the symbol of opportunity to hundreds of thousands of people seeking escape from the Dust Bowl in the 1930s, serving as a "road to opportunity" in the West. It provided employment during the Great Depression by putting road crews to work to pave the road. Furthermore, Route 66 was invaluable in transporting troops, equipment, and supplies across the country to the West, where the government established multiple industries and armed force bases during World War II.

Many believe Route 66 symbolized the nation's positive outlook during the postwar economic recovery in the 1950s and 1960s, serving as an icon of free-spirited independence and linking people across the United States. During this period, the tourist industry along Route 66 grew tremendously, giving rise to countless tourist attractions, motels, service stations, garages, and diners. Known by other monikers, such as "The Mother Road," "The Will Rogers Highway," and "Main Street of America," Route 66 originally started from Chicago, Illinois, and ran through Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, before ending at Los Angeles. In 1926, the highway encompassed a total of roughly 2,448 miles. (This is an approximation. The road had many different alignments through the years.) The 320-mile stretch of Route 66 that passes through California extends from the Colorado River near Needles, to the Pacific Ocean at Santa Monica.

The 100th year anniversary of the commissioning of Route 66 will be in 2026. The bill would direct Caltrans to establish a commission to work with other agencies to commemorate the event and to foster preservation projects.

Similar efforts to prepare for a Route 66 centennial celebration are underway in other states and at the federal level. In fact, the National Park System already administers the Route 66 Corridor Preservation program to provide funding assistance in the form of cost-share grants, to support the preservation of the most significant and representative historic Route 66 buildings, structures, road segments, and cultural landscapes in the eight states through which the route passes. Assistance is also provided to support research, planning, oral history, and education outreach projects related to the preservation of Route 66.

Committee comments and suggested amendment: Caltrans is probably not the most appropriate agency to assign the task of establishing a Route 66 Centennial Commission. Although the agency played an integral role in the route's history, Caltrans' expertise is primarily in engineering and not, for instance, tourism, or cultural history.

The author may wish to consider amending the bill to assign the task of creating the Route 66 Centennial Commission to another agency, such as the Office of Historic Preservation, within the California Department of Parks and Recreation, rather than Caltrans.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file

Opposition

None on file

Analysis Prepared by: Janet Dawson / TRANS. /