Cleaning Up an Historic Road

Restoring the former glory of Route 66.

Back in 1920s America, automobiles were being mass-produced for the first time and becoming exponentially more popular. The country's road system at the time needed major upgrades to meet ever-increasing vehicle demands. One of those upgrades would be the first highway connecting Chicago and Los Angeles—a fully paved (rare for the time), two-lane road stretching nearly 2,500 miles across eight states: Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. Officially commissioned in 1926, this highway was designated as U.S. Route 66. The route became an important pathway for migration to the west, particularly in the 1930s, and gave new life to the towns and cities through which it passed.

In the decades that followed, four-lane highways gradually became the standard for interstate travel, and two-lane roads such as Route 66 became less widely used. By the 1970s, almost all of Route 66 had been bypassed by modern highway systems, turning the route into a nostalgic alternate roadway. When Route 66 was officially removed from the U.S. highway system in 1985, its nostalgic allure only increased. Portions of the road were designated National Scenic Byways and remain on maps as "Historic Route 66." Some other sections were turned into state or private roads, or abandoned completely. While the road no longer runs uninterrupted from Chicago to Los Angeles, more than 80 percent of the original Route 66 still exists and has a loyal fan base, with several groups dedicated to its preservation and in some instances, restoration.

In many cases, the need for restoration is not on the roadway itself, but on the properties that line it. Route 66's heyday and subsequent decline left hundreds of gas and auto service stations, hotels, and restaurants closed and abandoned along the historic path. The dormant gas stations had underground storage tanks (USTs) containing residual petroleum, and over the years, many of the tanks deteriorated to the point where their contents leaked and contaminated the surrounding property.

Recognizing that cleaning up these properties to remove contamination or the threat of future leaks would reduce human health risks, increase property values, and clear the way for revitalization of affected cities and towns, a number of federal, state, and local partnerships formed to take the necessary actions. For example, in the small town of Sayre, OK, a community-led initiative used state funding to assess and, when necessary, clean up 19 former gas stations along Historic Route 66. Doubling as Sayre's Main Street, Route 66 is considered one of Sayre's most important landmarks and attractions, and cleaning these dormant sites was essential to the town's well-being.

Federal Activities

On the federal level—particularly since several sections of the Route have been designated a National Scenic Byway—the National Park Service established a "Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program" dedicated to preserving selected roadside properties. The program provides technical assistance and cost-share grants, and works closely with partners including local governments and associations, nonprofits, and

individuals such as property and business owners to restore and preserve these roadside properties.

In Arizona, the state's Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) created the Route 66 Initiative in June 2004. Arizona currently has about 70 open sites (i.e., with corrective actions incomplete) along the route on which leaking underground storage tanks (LUST) or pipes have been reported and further investigation (and potentially, cleanup) is necessary. Overseen by ADEQ and the EPA, the initiative was created to identify and clean up releases, remove orphaned USTs, and assist UST owners with addressing releases. The initiative has already proven effective at addressing LUST sites. From June 2004 to June 2008, 27 LUST sites along Route 66 were removed from Arizona's list of problem sites.

In early 2006, the EPA and ADEQ partnered with local communities in the Winslow-Holbrook area to explore UST site redevelopment opportunities. ADEQ and EPA hope that remediating and restoring these properties will revitalize affected cities and towns, increase property values, and protect human health and the environment. Meetings held in Winslow and Holbrook drew representatives from 20 different agencies and organizations, as well as from the local press, banks and other private industry, community members, and property owners.

Complementing the efforts of the Route 66 Initiative is EPA's Brownfields Program, which in the last decade has helped to address hundreds of UST sites through assessment and cleanup grants. Dormant, former gas station properties have always been a common type of brownfield, and the brownfields program is targeting them in locations across America, as well as on historic Route 66.

Flagstaff, AZ, is home to a section of Route 66 with several former gas station properties. Though most of these properties are being reused for gift shops and other light commerce, uncertainties about leaking USTs and other contamination remain. A $200,000 Brownfields Assessment grant from EPA, awarded in May 2006, is being used to create a detailed inventory of sites in Flagstaff's Route 66 Central Corridor, conduct community outreach, perform environmental site assessments, and develop a comprehensive redevelopment plan for targeted properties. Long-range, potential plans for these properties include historic restoration of some of the original gas station properties, an open marketplace, and a mixed-use complex featuring residential and retail space.

Albuquerque, NM, received an EPA Brownfields Assessment grant in 1999 that was used to address brownfields along historic Route 66, as well as other properties. One of these roadside properties was an active trading post operating on a former industrial and office site. EPA-funded assessments conducted on this property in May 2000 revealed lead and asbestos contaminants that were removed four years later (after the trading post's closure) using $265,000 in EPA Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Loan funds. Assessments and cleanup of this property led to its purchase by a private developer that built a $4.9-million housing development on the land.

The preceding is excerpted from Brownfields Success Story, Brownfields Along Historic Route 66, *Solid Waste and Emergency Response (5105T), EPA-560-F-09-018, February 2009, www.epa.gov/ brownfields.*

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Posts Let Cyclists Ride "America's Main Street"

Many people think of Pennsylvania Avenue as the street in Washington, DC, where the president lives, but it is also a heavily traveled central artery in the nation's capital—and one favored by thousands of bicyclists. Now, thanks in part to channelizer posts, a stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue has dedicated lanes for cycling commuters.

Inaugurated this summer, the new bike lanes run down the center of Pennsylvania Avenue from Third Street to 15th Street NW. Each lane is clearly defined by FG 300 Channelizer Posts from Pexco (www.pexco.com). The white posts, which also have reflective striping, form a high-visibility barrier between the cycling lanes and the adjacent roadway.

The clover-leaf design of the FG 300 Channelizer Post provides durability and consistent rebound when the posts are hit by vehicles. This geometry combined with polyurethane, the toughest flexible engineering polymer, mean the channelizer posts offer long service life—a critical concern for municipal officials.

"There is no better place for the District of Columbia to demonstrate its commitment to traffic safety than right here on America's Main Street," said DC Mayor Adrian M. Fenty.