

# Travel Industry Association of Kansas

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## Governor's Challenge:



**Enhance tourism product  
development within  
Kansas**



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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Kansas tourism industry is a vital part of the Kansas economy, generating over \$7.2 billion into the economy. Not only does it put money back into our economy, but it also generates jobs. Every 203 visitors into Kansas create a new job. That's nearly 150,000 tourism jobs in the state.

Visitors spend on average \$238 during their visits to Kansas. That helps to maintain Kansas' tax rates. If tourism didn't exist in the state, each household would have to pay about \$876 more in taxes in order to maintain the current level of state and local tax receipts. The transient guest tax collections increased by 49% between 2001 and 2009, reaching a high of \$32 million in 2008 before dropping during the economic recession in 2009. The majority of tourism dollars is spent on lodging, food and shopping.

Kansas offers a variety of experiences—from festivals to destinations, from wineries to the great outdoors. Yet, to stay competitive and attractive to eager tourists, Kansas must continue to look for new tourism opportunities. A competitive and successful tourism development program requires a well-conceived strategic marketing effort, and also an investment in product offerings.

The following are a few specific product development opportunities upon which Kansas tourism professionals believe Kansas should focus. We believe these projects will set Kansas apart by being unique and differentiated as well as representing one or more of the tourism categories (Nature Based, Art/Culture, Heritage, or Discovery), which have been identified as the best destination driver opportunities for Kansas.

## **MISSION**

To present a coordinated and purposeful set of solutions that will enhance the national image of Kansas as a healthy, historic, educational travel destination promoting traditional Midwestern family values.

## **PURPOSE**

Travel and tourism consistently ranks in the top five revenue generators for the state of Kansas. It truly is a significant and vital component of the Kansas economy. While we can appreciate and applaud the numerous visitor experiences available to both in-state and out-of-state travelers, we have a very rich foundation upon which to build.

The art of becoming something we are yet to be requires courage, hope, willingness and a well conceived plan. The project solutions hereby presented will be beneficial to the entire state of Kansas. They will catapult Kansas into the National destination arena. They will be beneficial



to no less than eleven critical life-style habits:

- Accelerate economic recovery for the state
- Job creation
- Healthy outdoor human activity promoting physical fitness
- Aligned with environmental best practices
- Encourages local community vitality and product development
- Educational awareness-promotes the unique Kansas historical contributions
- Enhances image awareness of state and national parks and heritage areas
- A natural Kansas connector to the best destination driver opportunities
- Unifies diverse state relationships
- Foundational plan upon which to build private/public partnerships
- Preserves and sustains rural Kansas culture



**PROJECT SOLUTION #1: OBTAIN DEDICATED RIGHT OF WAY AND CONSTRUCT HIKING/BIKING TRAILS ADJACENT TO EACH KANSAS BYWAY.**

**Background:** The Kansas Byways are home to some of the great natural landscapes in the United States. They were formed to identify and designate scenic roadways for the enjoyment of the traveling public to Kansas. Currently, 10 byways serve to educate travelers about our nation's environment and our state's history and culture. They are aligned with the National Scenic Byways Program, a project of the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA). Some of the nation's most scenic experiences include: the largest interior marsh in the United States, significant wetlands for migrating birds, 100 foot bluffs, sandstone canyons, limestone quarries, diverse landscapes, glacial deposits, Native American and Western history, and natural beauty unique to Kansas. The byways are hereby listed; including mileage, state and national parks within the byway area.

Flint Hills	47.2 miles	Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve Flint Hills National Wildlife Preserve
Frontier Military	168 miles	Crawford State Park Hillsdale State Park Fort Scott National Historic Site Marais des Cygnes Wildlife Area
Glacial Hills	63 miles	
Gypsum Hills	42 miles	
Native Stone	48 miles	
Post Rock	18 miles	Wilson Lake State Park
Prairie Trail	56 miles	Kanopolis State Park Mushroom Rock State Park
Smoky Valley	60 miles	Cedar Bluff State Park & Reservoir
Western Vistas	102 miles	Lake Scott State Park
Wetlands & Wildlife	77 miles	Quivira National Wildlife Refuge
Future Development: Route 66	13 miles	

**Goal:** Create a five-year plan to obtain right-of-way trails adjacent to each byway. Install the appropriate environmentally aligned surface to accommodate safe hiking/biking experiences. Obtain state support (legislative & departmental staff) to create the framework which will solidify public/private/federal partnerships ensuring all byways will be completed by the end of the five-year period (2012-2017).

**Benefit:** This project solution could place Kansas in the top five states in the nation for outdoor educational recreation. Such advancement would increase tourism, resulting in economic recovery to local communities along the byways as well as the entire state. Nationally, Kansas could become recognized as the healthy state, counter to obesity that is growing throughout the nation. Local communities would experience a renewed vitality as they each improve their product development along the byway. Such would enhance the current healthy partnership message the state is promoting with Blue Cross/Blue Shield. It would also strengthen the positioning of the state and national parks located within the designated byway area.



## **PROJECT SOLUTION #2: ENHANCE NINE HERITAGE SITES WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF FREEDOM'S FRONTIER NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA.**

**Background:** We believe our history is an asset unique to Kansas and differentiates our destination from others. There are nine heritage sites in eastern Kansas that are parts of the Freedom's Frontier National Heritage and are designated as historic sites by the Kansas Historical Society.

These sites reside in both urban and rural areas.

- Mine Creek Battlefield, near Pleasanton
- Kansas Museum of History, Topeka
- Grinter Place, Kansas City
- Shawnee Indian Mission, Fairway
- John Brown Museum , Osawatomie
- Goodnow House, Manhattan
- First Territorial Capitol, Ft. Riley
- Constitution Hall, Lecompton
- Marais Des Cygnes Massacre, northeast of Trading Post

**Goal:** Strong support for these sites is key for them to realize their visitor potential and to become integral assets in Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area, which in turn helps market our entire region as a heritage destination, leveraging private and federal funding.

The needed support from the state includes dedicated funding for these nine sites via the Kansas State Historical Society and improved resources including consistent staffing and hours. Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area has the ability to help these sites gain prominence nationally, but it is imperative they be supported by the state to make that happen.

**Benefit:** These historic sites represent and interpret the history that is ours and ours alone and, with the support provided by Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area and strong support from the state can be destination drivers within the heritage area. Heritage travelers have a proven propensity to spend more on dining, hotels and retail purchases than the national average.

Building these sites into strong, sustainable destinations is good for all of our communities – both urban and rural - and the state's tax income.



### **PROJECT SOLUTION #3: ENHANCE THE EISENHOWER CAMPUS.**

**Background:** Located in America's heartland you will find the perfect spot to learn about the 5-star General and 34th President of the United States – Dwight David Eisenhower. More than 40 years after his death, Dwight D. Eisenhower is still an international icon and continues to impact our lives today. He affected more lives world-wide before, during, and after his presidency than any other U. S. President – and he was from Kansas!

Five distinct buildings make up the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum housed on 22 acres. Included are the Boyhood Home, Museum, Research Library, Visitors Center and the Place of Meditation – the President's final resting place. The Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum is the ONLY presidential library to operate a boyhood home.

The Museum is long since past due for a **major** renovation. The Federal government does not provide dollars for exhibits, programs or marketing. The primary support comes from the Eisenhower Foundation (501 c-3).

#### ***Introductory Gallery***

**Goal:** Create a **modern** introductory gallery that would examine Eisenhower's early life against a backdrop of the significant historical events that defined his times. The essence of approaching the introductory gallery under the following principle will also define the tone of the entire museum: *Prior to 1942, Eisenhower's life was shaped by external events, individuals, and circumstances, but after that year, he would personally influence world events for the rest of his life.* Guiding museum visitors to appreciate the magnitude of this juncture will be one of the primary goals of the new introductory gallery.

**Benefit:** Developing a modern introductory gallery encompassing not only Eisenhower as an individual, but also the events of his time is a top priority for the museum. As the events of the first half of his life are less celebrated and understood than those of his Generalship and Presidency, this institution should strive to highlight this formative era and illustrate how the historical context influenced both the man and the world events he would later oversee. Additionally, implementation of this proposal will allow Mamie's historical involvement to be addressed throughout the narrative in each applicable gallery. Incorporating Mamie (and the rest of Eisenhower's family) into the new introductory gallery will facilitate a more natural and nuanced exploration of their life and times.

#### ***Traveling Exhibit***

**Goal:** Create a traveling exhibit for schools and libraries. The travel distance to Abilene makes it difficult for many schools to make field trips to visit the Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum and Boyhood Home to learn about this important era of American history. With proper funding, the exhibits could be made available to the rural areas at no cost.

**Benefit:** These traveling exhibits will provide new and innovative ways to bring the history of Dwight D. Eisenhower to Kansans. Libraries and schools in underserved areas will benefit from learning about Dwight D. Eisenhower and the history of his era.



### ***Entrance Signs***

**Goal:** The Kansas Department of Transportation is currently working on upgrading the entrance signs into Kansas on the interstate system to read “Home of Dwight D. Eisenhower-34<sup>th</sup> President of the United States.” *Every* road leading into Kansas should be marked with an entrance sign announcing that one of the most notable U.S. presidents came from Kansas.

**Benefit:** Currently, the museum is welcoming nearly 170,000 visitors annually. The Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum has a total economic impact on Abilene of \$12.7 million using conservative estimates. Many who travel to Abilene to conduct research in the presidential archives come from all corners of the world. In FY2011, 800 researchers visited the library, spending several days in Abilene and Kansas.



**PROJECT SOLUTION #4: OBTAIN DEDICATED RIGHT OF WAY AND CONSTRUCT HIKING/BIKING/ RIDING TRAILS ADJACENT TO EACH OF THE FIVE MAJOR TRAILS IN KANSAS AND DEVELOP A PLAN TO INTERPRET THE HISTORY OF THE TRAILS.**

**Background:** Several Native American Tribes ruled the western prairies and eastern woodlands that would later become the Sunflower State. As settlers moved westward, significant historical trails emerged that were instrumental in shaping the future of Kansas as well as for the entire nation. Whether by river, or by horseback, or by foot, or by rail, the westward movement of the nation's settlers was significantly influenced by the land that would become Kansas. The state is fortunate to have had such a historical influence portrayed by the following trails:

- Lewis and Clark Trail
- Santa Fe Trail
- Oregon Trail
- Chisholm Trail
- Western Cattle Trail

Many of America's most significant events and historical movements were impacted by Kansas and continue to be so today.

**Goal:** Create a ten-year plan to obtain right-of-way trails adjacent to each trail. Install the appropriate environmentally aligned surface to accommodate safe hiking/biking/horseback riding experiences. Obtain state support (legislative & departmental staff) to create the framework which will solidify public/private/federal partnerships ensuring all trails will be completed by the end of the ten-year period (2012-2022). In addition, work with appropriate historians to develop a plan to interpret the history and significance of the trails.

**Benefit:** Kansas could become a national leader in providing hiking/biking/horseback riding experiences adjacent to five major historical national trails. This development could provide stimulus to communities to improve travel/tourism product in their local communities for local, national and international travel. Such would provide the potential for economic recovery.

In addition an interpretative plan, which highlights the historical and significance importance of the trails, will enhance the trail experience and bring an educational component for the user.





## **PROJECT SOLUTION #5: ENHANCE THE WELCOME MESSAGE TO TRAVELERS.**

### ***Statehouse Visitors Center***

**Background:** As the preservation and renovation of our Capitol comes to an end, Kansans are left without a vital component of this national historic site. The proposed Kansas Capitol Visitor Center would be a key attraction to all Kansans young and old as well as a destination attraction for visitors from around the world. We are one of 50 that exist in the United States and one of the most beautiful.

**Goal:** The addition of a Kansas Capitol Visitor Center would encourage additional visitation, provide an educational experience that would showcase our geological, environmental and historic information in a setting that will enhance the overall experience and encourage visitors to stay longer in order to explore our beautiful state.

**Benefit:** The Kansas Capitol is an important asset to our state and the City of Topeka. The building has a huge impact on tourism in the downtown capital district. In 2007, Topeka hosted 57,804 visitors at the Capitol. In 2008, 61,112 and in 2009 the total was 66,049. In 2010, the numbers fell to 43,442 due to the renovations. These numbers show the significance the Capitol plays in driving visitors to Topeka. The estimated total sales tax paid upon completion of the Capitol renovations, including the Visitor Center, was \$16,747,236. Of this, \$2.7 million would be paid to our local government. Tourism is an economic driver.

### ***Signage at State Line***

**Background:** First impressions are very important and Kansas needs to greet its visitors in a way that makes them feel welcome and encourages them to return time and time again. The signs on many of the highways coming in to our state do not provide that warm welcome and are very small compared to our neighboring states.

**Goal:** Add larger signage on all incoming highways to welcome visitors. These signs could be customized to include nearby towns and attractions so visitors are encouraged to stop and stay awhile.

**Benefit:** Anyone driving into Kansas from any direction knows they are arriving in a friendly state that wants them to stop and enjoy what Kansas has to offer. Such a welcome will leave a very good first impression with people who may just be passing through on the way to somewhere else. Kansas only has one chance to make a first impression and it should be a good one.

### ***Flint Hills Regional Welcome Center***

#### **Background:**

The Flint Hills, 11,000 square miles of tall grass prairie in east-central Kansas, embody awe-inspiring natural features and vibrant communities. This unique region offers visitors an enjoyable collection of attractions and experiences, which provide its communities with both economic opportunities and the chance to share the beautiful landscape with the culture born



from it. However, many travelers who pass through the region are unaware of the regions rich offerings. A Flint Hills Welcome Center would provide the opportunity to capture and educate the thousands of potential visitors who traverse the region daily. Five counties working together; Pottawatomie, Riley, Geary, Wabaunsee, and Morris, as well as a representative of Ft. Riley have served as the Core Committee on this project. Consultants Verner Johnson and Economic Stewardship were hired to determine the site, desirability, develop architectural concepts and demonstrate the economic feasibility. The recommended location for this Welcome Center is I70/177, Exit 303 which is centrally located in the five partner county area, and well position in the Flint Hills to capture the targeted profile visitor.

**Goal:**

Raise awareness of the Flint Hills and the tourism offerings in the region. This welcome center would intercept thousands of visitors traveling through the Flint Hills daily along I-70. The Welcome Center must be visible along I70, provide a quality view of the Flint Hills, have infrastructure availability, proximity to destinations in the Flint Hills, and secure access and capacity. By capturing 10% of the visitors traveling along the Interstate and changing their behavior, this would bring an additional 212,000 visitors' days into the region annually.

**Benefit:**

Visitors to the Flint Hills Welcome Center will learn more about the opportunities to experience in the Flint Hills. The more time they spend in the region, the more opportunities visitors have to generate economic impact through their purchases. Additional spending and distribution among the five counties would further improve their economic share and the overall benefit received from the Flint Hills Welcome Center by improving the caliber of the visitors experience and marketing offerings to travelers.

The Welcome Center is envisioned to enhance travel on along Scenic By-ways which would increase tourism to attractions in the region.

***Kansas City Travel Information Center***

**Background:**

Prior to 2001, Kansas T&T operated a Travel Information Center (TIC) on I-70, located westbound at approximately 78<sup>th</sup> street exit. This center, although only accessible to west bound traffic, received high visitation numbers. An additional TIC was opened in the late 1990's in Johnson County, off I-35. Street. In 2001, when Kansas Speedway opened, an agreement was made between Kansas Speedway Corp. and the Department of Commerce to move the two KC area TIC's to one central location at Kansas Speedway, 110<sup>th</sup> street exit off I-70. Kansas Speedway owned and operated the building. Commerce paid a management fee of approximately \$97,000 to support TIC staff and operations. Located with the TIC was a NASCAR gift shop, of which Commerce received 10% of the net revenue. Per contract, the gift shop was also required to carry a number of Kansas products.



In 2005, Commerce closed the Kansas City TIC citing the following reasons: Budget shortfall and low visitation numbers. Commerce provided the following factors that impacted visitation:

- Distance of the actual TIC from and location relative to the heart of the retail and other attractions at Village West.
- Access is not direct from the interstate, as with the other two TICs.
- Available signage may not provide clear way-finding or ample decision-making time.
- The TIC is not readily visible from the points of exit, and so does not function as a visual landmark.
- The TIC may not be identifiable or distinguishable from the adjacent structures.
- The 435/70 interchange, while one of the busiest in the state, is a high-speed, high-volume, intimidating interchange.

Since 2005, there has not been a state operated TIC in the Kansas City area or on the Eastern side of the State of Kansas.

#### **Benefit:**

Kansas City, KS is a gateway community into Kansas. Home to Kansas Speedway, Village West, Sporting KC Park, Legends Outlets Shopping, and the KC T-bones, KCK boasts over 10 million visitors annually. Opening in February 2012, the Hollywood Casino at Kansas Speedway anticipates adding another 4 million visitors to that number.

Highways I-70, I-35, and I-435 all lead into KCK. Being so centrally located, visitors to many parts of the state will be traveling through this city. These same visitors are looking for additional information on where to stay and what to do while in the Kansas City metro and in the state of Kansas.

Travel Information Centers establish the first impression of Kansas, providing attraction and lodging information to enhance the visitor's experience. There is significant research that shows that Travel Information Centers increase average visitor spending.

#### **Goals**

The goals of a Kansas City area Travel Information Center are to:

- Increase length of stay for visitors while in Kansas
- Increase amount of visitor spending
- Provide accurate information to visitors
- Provide a sense of Welcome to visitors to our state
- Provide a location for visitors and residents to purchase Kansas products
- Provide a central location for Kansas City metropolitan area communities and Kansas communities to display and distribute visitor information
- Increase repeat visitation by providing ideas for future visits to Kansas



## **CONCLUSION**

Many times people have creative ideas that become diminished by real and imaginary roadblocks. As time passes without product enhancements, hope dwindles and passion cools. “Ad astra per aspera” is our shining light! For it is to the stars through difficulty that the people of this state have prospered. We expect that such an attitude will guide us long into the future. We sincerely believe these projects will provide the stimulus to enhance our local tourism products while attracting larger numbers of visitors to our state.

The Travel Industry Association of Kansas (TIAK) stands ready to assist and support these projects in any way that we can. Whether the need is grant writing, creating public/private partnerships or seeking foundation assistance, TIAK seeks to be an engaged resource. And, we sincerely believe these projects will place Kansas on the national stage for promoting a healthy lifestyle of living based upon its natural resources and historical prominence.