



New Mexico Route 66 Association

Dedicated to education, promotion, and preservation of New Mexico's Historic Route 66 Scenic Byway and economic revitalization along its 604 mile stretch throughout the state since 1989. Est. 1989. A 501-(c)3 Non-Profit.

- 2004 New Mexico Heritage Preservation Award Winner
- National Scenic Byways Best Practices Recognition
- 2003 Preservation Project of the Year: New Mexico Route 66 Magazine
- Regional Emmy Award Winner: Best Cultural Documentary "Rt 66 The Neon Road"

President: Melissa Lea Beasley Treasurer: Jennifer Lazarz Secretary: Connie Loveland

November 1, 2023

An open letter from the New Mexico Route 66 Association regarding New Mexico Governors recent executive order to create state Route 66 Centennial Coordination Group.

Recently I awoke to this headline in the Santa Fe New Mexican: "New Mexico prepares for Route 66 centennial — but which route will be celebrated?" It was at this point my heart sunk, because I knew the State had completely ignored the New Mexico Route 66 Association in preparations for the centennial celebrations.

From the onset of discussions, we were to play a role in the state's celebration, a public/private partnership of individuals and organizations. Alas, as I read the article, nowhere was the Association even mentioned. The State was forging ahead without us.

All along the plan was for the Association to be part of New Mexico's organizing committee, just like in the other states through which 66 traverses. Bill Thomas, Chair of the Route 66 Road Ahead Partnership, has done a wonderful job organizing and preparing all of us on the board for this prestigious point in history for Route 66. Now that it is time for me to assist our State, the Association is being cut off, and I would like to know why.

I have been involved with the Route 66 Road Ahead Partnership from the beginning as the New Mexico State representation board member. In 2017 we held our first meeting to prepare for the Mother Road's 100th Birthday Celebrations. The plan was to have each state representative from Road Ahead on their collective state committee. It makes sense to have us help the commission fully understand and achieve its goals.

It is beyond reproach that we are being pushed out. It is disheartening to have to fight the Tourism Department and the Governor to represent our Association, of which I have served as President for eight years, to prepare for the centennial. We have been ignored repeatedly by the State, and now the Governor has assembled this group without informing the public of it, as well as us.

The State has a growing history of such actions and omissions. I have reached out to the tourism department various times as President to discuss ways to promote Route 66. They weren't interested. They pulled our funding to help produce our quarterly publication, New Mexico Route 66 Magazine, and refuse to let us receive our portion of the Route 66 license plate sales. Even after providing documentation showing this money does not go against their state anti-donation clause because the money is coming from the individual purchasing the plate, who are entrusting the state to pass on their donation to us - not the state, we were denied.

The frustration we have felt—and kept from the public—has been building over the years, and it continues to get worse. The New Mexico Department of Tourism has been completely out of touch with Route 66 tourism. I have attempted to work with them toward promoting Route 66 for years and received no cooperation. Their marketing materials throughout the years have little, if any mention of Route 66.

We were the first Route 66 state association to produce a magazine and a license plate, something our state should be proud of. Instead, we receive no recognition for it, nor any assistance from them. Other Route 66 states have followed in our footsteps and created a license plate to recognize their stretch of Route 66, while raising needed funds for their association. Their state officials have gladly partnered and helped them by providing them their portion of license plate sales, as well as partnering on numerous other Route 66 related activities.

It has left the New Mexico Route 66 Association to be the sole promoters of the Mother Road throughout New Mexico.

Beyond the insufferable omission of the Association, the State is losing sight of the broader goal, which is to celebrate Route 66! Their concern of which alignment to feature is little different from rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. It doesn't matter. In fact, none of the other seven states along Route 66 are worried about this in the slightest.

Yes, purists know which alignment was the original. They know which alignments came later, and they know where original alignments are no longer accessible, either by virtue of tribal lands, private property, or having been destroyed in the name of Progress. But no one is concerned about this, because it is the Mother Road we are celebrating, all of it, every inch of it, whether it was there in 1926, or down to the bitter end in 1985.

Dismissing the contributions of the Association is also little different from ignoring medical advice when they are the experts in their field. No one knows Route 66 in New Mexico better than we do, but they are effectively saying, "Stand back and let us run this show." They may know event management and tourism, but we know the Mother Road, not just where the pavement lay, but also its people, its cultures, its history, and its traditions. That's something you can't just cobble together with people living and working in ivory towers.

The New Mexico Route 66 Association has been here for 35 years, promoting our 604 miles of Mother Road to people all over the world. We have also been helping communities preserve as much as possible so communities can thrive, and tourists have something to experience and see when they visit. In addition, we have been assisting businesses with their physical and economic growth.

And we've continued to do these things with little to no help from our State. Why do we do these things? Because we care about our communities and take pride in the importance Route 66 has played in our State's and American History.

I want to see centennial funds distributed fairly, especially when it comes to the smaller Route 66 communities through New Mexico, where Route 66 is a vital economic engine for them. To be excluded from the New Mexico State group implies the State has other plans for the funds that should be going into communities toward restoration, revitalization, and promotional opportunities they have needed desperately for so long.

On behalf of the New Mexico Route 66 Association, I hereby file my displeasure, disappointment, and disgust with how things have turned out. This could have been a mutually beneficial arrangement for all...the State and its constituent cities and towns, the Association, and, more importantly, the people of Route 66.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melissa Lea Beasley-Lee". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Melissa Lea Beasley-Lee | President
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