

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands

Testimony

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Testimony Presented by:
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To: The House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands
The Honorable James V. Hansen, Chairman
Hearing on H.R. 3910

A bill to authorize The Automobile National Heritage Area

Mr. Chairman, I wish to thank you and your fellow members of the committee for providing me the opportunity to appear here today. I come to speak in support of H.R. 3910 and the Automobile National Heritage Area. I do so on behalf of myself and more than 200 colleagues who live and work throughout southeastern Michigan, and have been generously and enthusiastically volunteering their ideas, professional expertise, personal effort, institutional resources, and in some cases financial support to advance this initiative. In dozens of cases, these colleagues, and the institutions they represent, have been working on this initiative for more than a decade.

We also wish to express our deep appreciation to Congressman Dingell and his colleagues: Congressmen Levin, Knollenberg and Upton who have lent their support to this legislation and spoken so eloquently on behalf of the Automobile National Heritage Area.

Finally I have been asked to convey the warm personal regards of Mr. William Clay Ford, Jr. Mr. Ford is grateful to the committee for its invitation and most appreciative of the leadership of this initiative which is being provided by Congressman Dingell and the members of the Michigan Congressional Delegation. He is Chairman of the Finance Committee and the Committee on the Environment and Public Policy of the Ford Motor Company Board of Directors. He is also Chairman of the Board of Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village and is in a unique position to support and advocate for the Automobile National Heritage Area. Although his prior obligations would not permit him to testify in person today, Mr. Ford will offer supportive comments for the record.

For my part, I am a senior officer at the University of Michigan- Dearborn. I also serve in a consulting capacity to Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village. U.M.-Dearborn Chancellor, James C. Renick and Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village President, Steven K. Hamp have provided leadership and support to the Automobile National Heritage Area initiative from its inception. The Automobile National Heritage Area is a concept that is consistent with each institution's mission, and values. Our goals are to forge partnerships and foster collaborative relationships within the community that contribute to education, sustainable economic development, a quality environment, and a shared sense of community pride.

Of course it's not surprising that there are a lot of other institutions in our community and state who also embrace missions and goals that in some way address these four quality of life issues. The very good news in "Detroit", and by that I mean all of Southeast Michigan, is that there are a lot of good things happening. The corporate and foundation communities, colleges, universities, museums and governmental agencies are finding new ways to work more closely together. There are a growing number of partnerships involving local units of government and institutions within the public and private sectors that are successfully working for improved education, sustainable development, and higher quality environmentally focused recreational programs. All of these contribute in tangible ways to community pride and give everyone optimism for the future of our region.

The Automobile National Heritage Area Partnership is one of these initiatives. Those of us who are involved in this project believe that official Federal Recognition of the Automobile National Heritage Area will be a potent force in helping us deliver on all of these counts. In fact, when one considers the aggregate impact of the institutions and programs currently in place, it is clear that we are already successful in many ways. You have contained within the background materials which were prepared for the committee, letters of support and a list of stakeholders who have already signed on to this partnership. It is an impressive group by virtue of the strength and breadth of the institutional leaders represented.

I would like to offer the committee a brief history of how this coalition of institutions and agencies joined together to pursue Federal designation of the Automobile National Heritage Area.

In the late 1980's a group of committed historical preservationists, staff working within the Wayne County Parks Department, and the Director of the Henry Ford Estate at the University of Michigan-Dearborn established a new initiative they named "The Ford Heritage Trails". Over one dozen cities up and down stream from the university, the Michigan Department of Transportation, various owners of historic mills in four different regions of the river and several dozen volunteers eventually agreed to be part of the effort. Their idea was to leverage public and private resources to restore, and interpret, a network of historic mills and related sites located along the Rouge River and its tributaries.

The outcome of this effort was to encourage public and private investment in restoring several historic sites and to stimulate significant increases in tourism traffic along four separate trails. This initiative helped establish new channels of communication between a large and diverse set of stakeholders in the region. It was the first time many of these groups recognized their shared interests and linkages to the heritage of the automobile.

Among this initial group was the National Park Service which provided valuable assistance in conceptualizing the project and in discovering connections to other complementary programs such as Rails to Trails and the Southeast Michigan Greenways Initiative. The Park Service recognized, early on, the importance and richness of the American manufacturing and labor history that exists within this region. The value of recognition and encouragement from the National Park Service can not be over emphasized. Aside from their considerable resources and expertise the NPS represents something akin to the "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval". Support from the NPS has had a catalytic effect on all of the partners in this initiative. Continuing and building on that relationship is a key reason we are seeking Federal designation as a National Heritage Area.

The next significant milestone in the development of the Automobile National Heritage Area occurred with the awarding of a planning grant from the State Bureau of History to Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village. The grant allowed the museum to retain the services of two planning firms who were nationally

recognized as leaders in the development of heritage areas. With the guidance of David Dixon/Goody Clancy and Lane Frenchman & Associates Inc. and the participation of a broad-based coalition of community leaders we were able to produce "A Shared Vision for Metropolitan Detroit". This document which has been provided to the committee, illustrates the broad range of resources within metropolitan Detroit which help tell the stories of the automobile and its impact on America in the 20th century. My colleagues who are testifying today and those who are supporting this effort back home can illuminate this history far better than I. But suffice it to say, this is one big and compelling saga. It is one that captures the hearts and imaginations of millions of people around the world. It contains stories of immigration and migration, of science and technological achievement, of social change and the empowerment of working people. These are stories that bring excitement to educational curricula and inspire life long learning. They are also stories which if told correctly and packaged in ways that make them accessible to the public, can be a tremendous factor in bringing tourists and providing quality recreational programming for citizens.

In 1995 we envisioned three corridors within the Automobile National Heritage Area.

The Rouge River corridor contains The Automotive Hall of Fame. This facility which opened in 1997, focuses on the people who made the automobile industry great. Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village, a national historic landmark, annually draws more than one million visitors to Dearborn and generates hundreds of millions of dollars of economic impact to the area. In addition, a newly constructed corporate sponsored automotive attraction, The Spirit of Ford will feature a virtual plant tour. The Rouge corridor includes The University Of Michigan -Dearborn, with the Henry Ford Estate Fair Lane, also a national historic landmark; the headquarters of the Ford Motor Company and the national historic landmark Ford Rouge Plant. The Rouge River corridor also supports the Ford Heritage Trails system, an innovative system of county parks with high quality recreational facilities, and is the site of the National Wet Weather Demonstration Project, the centerpiece of a national model for sustainable development.

The Detroit River Corridor stretches from Lake St. Clare to Lake Erie and unites the world's two greatest automotive trading partners, the US and Canada. This corridor contains the world headquarters of General Motors where plans for a new automotive museum are currently being developed, the beautiful Belle Isle park, which annually plays host the Detroit, ITT Grand Prix, and Cobo Hall which annually hosts the North American International Auto Show. The auto show alone brought over 1,000,000 visitors and generated an estimated \$277 million of economic impact in to the Detroit region in 1998.

Woodward Avenue is the third corridor. As one of our state's most celebrated roads, an association of Woodward merchants, residents and governmental officials from several communities and counties has recently applied to the Michigan Department of Transportation for designation as a Michigan historic roadway. The Woodward corridor is anchored by the General Motors World Headquarters at one end and Chrysler Corporation world headquarters at the other. It is home to dozens of historic neighborhoods; world class art and cultural institutions such as the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Detroit Historical Museum; Wayne State University, one of the nation's premier urban research universities; the Center for Creative Studies, with an outstanding program in automotive design; University of Detroit-Mercy; the Michigan State Fair; and the birthplace of Motown Music. Each year the Woodward Avenue Dream Cruise attracts hundreds of thousands of car enthusiasts who line up along the road to watch thousands of "cool cars" parade along the boulevard.

These are just a few highlights of a region that is rich in automotive history and alive with contemporary automotive culture. All of these institutions, corporations and programs and many more not mentioned in

this testimony are part of the alliance that supports the Automobile National Heritage Area.

The development of this alliance and the formation of the Auto Heritage Area is a dynamic process. It is most definitely a work in progress. Since issuing the 1995 draft report "A Shared Vision for Metropolitan Detroit" the coalition forming the auto heritage area has expanded to include the Sauk trail/ Chicago Road Corridor which includes sites in Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, and Kalamazoo; and the cities of Lansing and Flint. Within these three corridors are the University of Michigan - Ann Arbor, U of M-Flint, Oakland, Michigan State and Eastern Michigan universities. There are major automotive research facilities, automotive history museums and some of the nation's most important and hallowed labor history sites.

The six "Corridors" identified in H.R.3910 are not neat and easily ordered or cataloged. The sites and institutions within them are free to interact with each other, develop collaborations and independent strategies as they see fit. Once established and authorized by Congress the Automobile National Heritage Area Partnership will develop a management plan with assistance from the NPS and support from member institutions. The plan will be dynamic and inclusive. It will not be overly prescriptive or directive. It will capitalize on existing resources to create synergistic programs and attractions that promote tourism, create a "sense of place" and make our collective automotive heritage accessible, educational, and inspirational.

I would be pleased to answer any questions from the Committee.

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