

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands

Testimony

Testimony supporting HR 3910
A Bill to Authorize the Automobile National Heritage Area
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I am grateful for this opportunity to speak on behalf of HR 3910, A Bill to Authorize the Automotive National Heritage Area.

I come before you as a representative in several capacities:

As Director of the Detroit Historical Museums, I speak for the importance of urban history and for museums as cultural attractions.

As a former board member of the Michigan Association of Museums, and one of the founding board members of the Southeastern Michigan History Alliance, I speak for large and small museums, archives, historic houses, preservation organizations, historic commissions, oral historians, and other preservers of our heritage.

As a City department head appointed by Mayor Dennis Archer, I speak for the the importance of urban history and local pride as a vital part of community building; and for the economic benefits of tourism.

As one of the four trustees of the American Automobile Centennial Commission, which raised \$4.5 million and coordinated regional and national observances during the 1996 Centennial of the American Automotive industry, I speak for the importance of automotive history to the nation.

And finally,

As the Chair of Mayor Archer's Tercentenary Exploratory Committee, charged with planning the 300th anniversary of Detroit which will occur in 2001, I draw your attention to a unique opportunity to celebrate both the past and the future of southeastern Michigan, and our important contributions to the nation.

What makes the Automotive history of Southeastern Michigan a national story?

Nothing could be more American than the freedom of the open road. That freedom represents two kinds of mobility: the opportunity to succeed through sheer ability and hard work and the ability to move easily from place to place. The history of the American Automobile industry tells both stories. Southeastern Michigan is a premier American industrial success story that improved the lives of millions of people and their families. It is no exaggeration to say that Detroit's automotive industry fundamentally changed America.

The history of automobiles did not start in Michigan. Germany and France led the way in the 1890s. Springfield, Massachusetts was the home of the first American production run in 1896. Detroit and Michigan were not the first to enter the field, nor even in the beginning the best. But the vision of the founders in southeastern Michigan *was* different: it was uniquely American. Henry Ford, a farm boy himself, wanted to produce a simple, reliable, *affordable* car for the average family. Other manufacturers designed race cars and luxury cars for the wealthy. In Detroit, cars were made to haul goods to market, to transport salesmen on their routes, to take the family to church on Sunday.

So the first great innovation from Southeastern Michigan was to keep its eye on the market: the American idea that automobiles were for everyone.

The second great innovation, also from Ford, was to make more cars for less. The moving assembly line in 1914 reduced the time to make a Model T from 12.5 man hours to 93 minutes. In 1914 Ford announced his famous \$5 a day wage, more than doubling the existing rate, which accomplished two things. It stabilized the workforce and it gave factory workers enough money to become customers. By 1916, the price of a Model T had dropped from \$850 to \$360, costing less than half what it had only eight years earlier.

A third great innovation came from General Motors: Alfred Sloan and Harley Earl's introduction of automotive styling and the annual model change in 1927. Cars were no longer simply utilitarian; they became a statement of style, of status. Automobiles in every price range gave Americans a choice and a means of self expression. And, not incidentally, a reason to buy more cars more often.

A fourth great innovation came from the workers, the men and women on the line. The 1937 Flint sit-down strike set a new direction in national labor history: the Michigan National Guard protected the worker's right to strike, and in an historic change, General Motors agreed to collective bargaining. The United Auto Workers was born. Chrysler and Ford followed, establishing the UAW as the primary automotive union by 1941.

During World War II, Detroit's manufacturing know-how kept munitions, jeeps, tanks, and airplanes rolling out of factories to the front lines - all over the country, and especially in Detroit. William Knudsen left General Motors to lead the national war manufacturing effort. We supplied the Allies and our own soldiers. Not for nothing was Detroit known as the Arsenal of Democracy.

The free-wheeling fifties and sixties are captured in images of automobiles. Muscle cars, Cadillac fins, and the Mustang demonstrated our prosperity and our youth. In Detroit, the best place to see cars was cruising on Woodward Avenue. Today, every August over 10,000 historic cars repeat that cruise down Woodward in a truly grassroots event that attracts a million spectators.

Southeastern Michigan fell on hard times in the 1970s and 1980s - and this too, is a uniquely American story. Today, the automotive industry is again making the world's best cars, technologically advanced vehicles that offer a wide range of choice and are safe, clean, efficient, reliable, and fun to drive. The Big Three are a global industry. The urban centers of Detroit, Pontiac, Flint, and Lansing are experiencing growth and rebirth. Their image is changing for the better, and the quality of life is coming back.

Within these stories, throughout the twentieth century, the automotive industry has led the nation with thousands of innovations that have not only changed the way Americans drive, but changed the way we live. Automotive history is a national story, and the best place to tell it is in southeastern Michigan.

What will with Automobile National Heritage Area do?

I have participated in planning the Automobile National Heritage Area since 1995. Ed Bagale, whose testimony follows mine, will describe the depth and breadth of community participation. I want to give you an idea of what the Automobile National Heritage Area will do, and why federal recognition is so important to its success.

The ANHA will establish six historic corridors:

Rouge River - the site Ford's mighty Rouge plant, and home to the Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village

Detroit River - along its banks where the first Detroit automobile factory stood from 1899 to 1901, new urban recreational areas are being planned

Woodward Avenue - reaching from Detroit to Pontiac, it includes the first mile of U. S. concrete highway, and a plethora of museums and annual special events like the Woodward Dream Cruise

U.S. 12, also known as Michigan Avenue - it traverses the state from Detroit moving west to Chicago and is a classic American road

Lansing - home of the Oldsmobile

Flint - Site of the 1937 Sitdown Strike that won recognition for the UAW, this classic factory town experiencing rebirth

The purpose of the Heritage Area is to empower communities to conserve their automobile-related heritage through cooperative relationships among governments and the private sector, while strengthening future economic opportunity.

ANHA has three goals:

1. Increase tourism
2. Build community
3. Educate youth

Let me describe each in turn.

Tourism will focus upon marketing over 16 existing attractions and will facilitate the development of at least 6 additional attractions to extend the visitor experience.

Existing attractions will be packaged and marketed as group, linked together through:

Directional and identification signs to make sites easier to find

Interpretive road signs to mark historic areas

Brochures that consolidate information into visitor-friendly formats

Advertising

Billboards on major highways to set the tone and create interest

Joint scheduling and booking for tour groups

Entry point kiosks to welcome visitors at airports, hotels, convention and travel centers

The collaboration to market these attractions will include:

Detroit, Lansing, and Flint Convention and Visitor Bureaus

Travel Michigan - state travel agency

Cities,villages, and townships in the region

Automotive public relations and marketing firms

Individual attractions

ANHA will link large and small attractions together. For example, a visitor to the nationally known Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village, or a business traveler in Flint, will easily find information about other places to see, tours to take, and recreational areas to enjoy. These visitors will be encouraged to stay longer and to plan return visits with family or friends.

Existing attractions to be marketed immediately include:

Detroit/Dearborn: 5 museums and 4 historic houses

Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village

Automotive Hall of Fame

Yankee Air Force Museum

Detroit Historical Museum's Motor City exhibition

Detroit Institute of Art's Diego Rivera Murals

Henry Ford Estate/Fairlane

Edsel & Eleanor Ford Home, Henry Ford's only son

Fisher Mansion, of Fisher Body fame

Meadowbrook Hall, built by Matilda Dodge Wilson

Lansing: 2 museums and 1 historic house

Michigan Historical Museum's 20th century exhibition

R.E. Olds Museum

Whaley Historical House Museum

Flint: 3 museums and a GM factory tour

Labor Museum & Learning Center

Alfred P. Sloan Museum

Buick City

GM Truck and Bus Plant

Major new attractions that are already underway include:

The Spirit of Ford, a high-tech visitor experience in Dearborn

Chrysler Museum in Auburn Hills near Pontiac

General Motors Heritage Center in downtown Detroit

The ANHA will also organize step-on bus tour guides for historic districts and industrial centers, working with the convention and tourism industry.

Currently 3.5 million tourists visit Michigan each year, making it the sixth-most-visited state. Promotion of the ANHA could easily attract another 500,000 to 1 million tourists a year. Millions of Americans are auto enthusiasts. Each year, on a national basis:

44 million people read Auto magazines

30 million people visit an auto show

15 million people attend professional auto races

Combining all of these interests, between 10 and 25 million people can be considered "autocentric" - people who are likely to spend time and money on automotive related leisure time activities. In the region that includes Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio, 1.7 to 4.25 million "autocentric" people reside.

Recent research by *Autoweek Magazine*, a Crain Communications publication which reaches 300,000 auto enthusiasts each week, showed that 60% of their subscribers are highly interested in visiting automotive related attractions, if a critical mass of such attractions could be created. The ANHA will be able to capture this interest.

The second goal of the ANHA is to create **strong communities with a unique sense of place**. Automotive heritage binds southeastern Michigan together. Strong, local self-identification with a common heritage is

essential to link urban and suburban areas and help to build our region's future.

Last year, the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce established a nine-county zone to attract new business development in southeastern Michigan. There is widespread recognition that our economic future is regional: not a series of competing urban enclaves, but a single, interconnected, interdependent region. Regional automotive businesses include the offices, technology centers, and factories of the Big Three and hundreds of suppliers companies. Quality of life is a vital component to attract the best people to work in these industries. The ANHA will improve quality of life through its work in recreational areas, cultural attractions, and by strengthening awareness of our important automotive heritage.

The City of Detroit is experiencing an unprecedented comeback. Visitors who last saw Detroit just a few years ago are amazed: new construction is underway downtown and in many neighborhoods; the Empowerment Zone and state Renaissance Zone are attracting business investment; streets are freshly paved and the city looks cleaner; neighborhood housing stock is being improved and the value of homes are rising dramatically.

In 2001, Detroit will celebrate its 300th birthday with a year-long festival. Legacy projects include new riverfront parks, monuments and public art, and the restoration of historic Campus Martius, a large urban green space to be set amidst new class A offices and retail. Museums and performing arts organizations are preparing over 25 special exhibitions, concert series, plays, and other cultural attractions. Automotive history is one of the most important themes of the Tricentennial. The ANHA will coordinate the development of automotive history tours, exhibitions, and educational materials. The Tricentennial - only three short years away - is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to launch the Automotive National Heritage Area in coordination with a major celebration that brings together special events, cultural attractions, the business community, and schools. It is the perfect time to enhance community identity, increase regional pride, and to show off southeastern Michigan - its past accomplishments and future opportunities - to the world.

Let me give you an example of how automotive themes can support urban redevelopment and build community. The famous Highland Park Ford plant, home of the Model T, long ago succumbed to industrial obsolescence and has stood unused. Like many factories, it was too big to save, and too important to completely lose. Many of the buildings in the complex were torn down years ago, and the site stood empty until the new Model T Shopping Plaza was built there last year. Both the Henry Ford Museum and the Michigan History Center assisted developers by providing historical photographs that were enlarged into giant wall murals in the Farmer Jack's grocery store. Every shopper is reminded of the site's automotive heritage on every visit, in a positive and festive way.

A similar automotive theme can be found in a particularly popular MacDonalds in Lansing. The ANHA will seek to increase this kind of tangible link between business and historical attractions. Automotive-themed restaurants, shopping mall decorations, and even movie theaters will carry the visitor's automotive experience into evening hours. The ANHA will create opportunities for business development in the tourism service industry.

Cultural tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors of the tourism industry. Cultural tourists tend to be well educated and affluent. They spend their dollars in hotels and restaurants, they patronize area shopping malls, and they are looking for a unique experience: something they can find no where else. The ANHA will provide that unique focus to attract these tourists to southeastern Michigan and to extend their stay.

The ANHA will help to create attractive urban and regional infrastructure, for the benefit of area residents and tourists alike. Anticipated improvements include:

Bike paths

Walkways

River tours by boat

Environmental and natural recreation areas

Public art and monuments

ANHA can also encourage the preservation and adaptive re-use of key historic sites. It will:

Identify important historic sites

Provide planning and technical support to aid preservation or restoration

Promote adaptive reuse of historically significant auto industrial buildings

Promote efforts to preserve history and sense of place in sites where the historic structures cannot be saved

The third goal of the ANHA is **Education, to serve the**

local audience. Historic sites, cultural attractions, and recreational areas become more powerful when area residents carry with them personal knowledge of automotive history. ANHA educational efforts will serve children through:

School tours of museums and historic homes

Classroom materials, such as the Motor City Curriculum Guide and videos already being provided by the Detroit Historical Museum

Teacher training in automotive and labor history

Corridor theme tours to create integrated curriculum

Charter schools, such as the Henry Ford Academy of Manufacturing Arts and Sciences, which is establishing new relationships between the Henry Ford Museum, corporate leaders, and the community to prepare high school students for their future

Education is not only for children. In today's world, adults continuously learn new skills and new knowledge. New UAW training centers are being built in Detroit. Automotive history is being used in corporate diversity training and team-building exercises. New regional residents - from Arab immigrants to international corporate executives - want to learn about their new home.

The ANHA will promote educational opportunities for adults, including:

Tours for corporate orientation, through the Wayne State University Orientation Institute, Leadership Detroit, and similar programs

The Center for Creative Studies leads the nation in training for automotive and other industrial design.

The Walter Reuther Archives for Labor and Urban Affairs at Wayne State University provides courses for future MBA's.

The Reuther Archives and the Public Library's National Automotive History Collection are premiere archives for research, used extensively by historians.

Why is federal designation necessary?

National recognition of the ANHA will establish a mechanism for the Secretary of the Interior to recognize the ANHA Partnership, Inc. The Partnership represents the diverse interests within the Area and will create the Area Management Plan for Secretary of the Interior approval. Federal recognition will give our regional effort a new validity, and will give us access to National Park Service expertise that is essential to the success of our efforts.

Let me close with some tangible examples fo the benefits of federal designation:

Rand McNally will put the ANHA on maps. It will be in the AAA travel guides and other standard publications that tourists rely upon.

Hometown pride will be boosted, giving new life to efforts to transform blighted rivers and underused cultural and community attractions.

Regional investment in automotive-related projects will increase. Over \$100 million is already being invested in improvements to automotive history attractions or the construction of new automotive attractions.

The Automobile National Heritage Area has strong, widespread community and regional support. It builds upon strength, and will bring tourism, community building, and educational programs to higher levels. It is a highly collaborative effort that will coordinate diverse projects. ANHA projects are publicly and privately funded. ANHA projects are being created by non-profits, educational insitutions, the business community, and local governments. The synergy of the whole is far greater than the sum of the parts. Federal recognition is a major step to firmly establishing the ANHA and realizing its important goals.

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