



VALLEY HIGHWAYS—Two highways—one a scenic route along the Rogue river, the other an interstate freeway—are available to southern Oregon tourists. Will travelers leave the wide ribbons of divided pavement for a scenic slower route if they know it exists? Motel and other business owners along Highway 99 between Rock Point and Grants Pass think so and have formed an association to let the out-of-state traveler know that tourist facilities are available across the river.

Features

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'Scenic Route' Businesses Try To Attract Tourists Off Freeway

By JIM FRAKE
Mail Tribune Staff Writer

Tourism is important to the economy of southern Oregon and, in particular, to the motels that line the highways. To what extent tourist facilities—including motels, restaurants, service stations and scenic attractions—are exploited depends largely on two things: that tourists know such facilities exist and that they have a desire to find them.

There are many reasons why tourists would want to spend the night in the Rogue valley. Medford is about half way between Portland and San Francisco, the primary interstate freeway sweeps through the area, Medford is recognized as an important shopping center, there are 44 consecutive performances at the Oregon Shakespearean festival in Ashland, there is easy access to Crater lake and the Oregon caves and, of course, the Rogue valley is on the route to the Seattle World's Fair.

Whatever the reason, tourists are flocking to motels,

hotels, trailer parks and campgrounds daily, looking for a place to spend the night.

Until about a year ago, a motorist could drive from Ashland to Grants Pass and never be too far from motels. Since portions of the new Interstate 5 freeway have been opened a tourist, who finds lodging accommodations in the cities filled, may unknowingly return to the freeway and continue to Roseburg or into California.

Motels on what is termed the "Rogue River highway," Highway 99 from Rock Point (near Gold Hill) to Grants Pass, no longer are on the main route between Medford and Grants Pass. What effect will this have on their business?

The freeway, by-passing business on Highway 99 from Rock Point to the city of Rogue River, opened late last summer. Another freeway link from Rogue River to beyond Grants Pass opened about June 1 of this year.

Along with restaurants, service stations and other businesses, there are more than

50 motels along the "old" highway.

A check of motels in this area showed that most motel owners believe the new freeway has "hurt" their business. Many have taken steps to retain their tourist trade. Others said it was "too soon to tell," and it was pointed out that this is an "abnormal year" for comparison because of the World's Fair.

Jack Shoemaker of the Fly-caster motel said their business had been hurt, but "not as bad as we thought it would." Much of his business, he noted, included customers who had stayed there before, and those stopping because of his American Automobile association (AAA) affiliation.

Another motel owner had mixed emotions about the new freeway. He said he was glad that the freeway had taken most of the traffic away from his door because of the noise, but at the same time his business had dropped considerably. Although he had but six units, he said they have remained empty many nights this summer.

Mrs. Lee Shrode, manager of the Rio Linda court, admitted the new freeway may have done "a little damage," but said she has had a "pretty good summer this year." She and her husband manage five units.

The owners of the Star motel, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Weed, said their four rentals are filled "most of the time," but that "this is not unusual for August." They also reported "occasional winter business" until the freeway opened last year.

A delivery man, who collects laundry from motels along the Rogue river for a Grants Pass firm, claims that motel business has dropped two-thirds "for the most part." He contends that business was "good" north of Rogue River along the old highway because of the "overflow" from Grants Pass when the downtown motels are filled.

Ed Schreengost, owner of the Laurels motel, upheld that the freeway had "cut out the transient business." Nevertheless, he said that "within five years there'll be more business than ever before." The owner warned that motels, especially the small ones, would have to keep up with the times.

Those motels that don't attract new business will "really suffer," he concluded.

Tourists Are "Confused"
The majority of the small motel owners in the affected area had one thought in common—tourists are "confused." As Marvin LeMaster, who operates the Foots Creek Country store and trailer park put it: "They're not sure what's off the freeway, and many don't even realize they're near a river."

"They're lost," is the way one motel owner described it. Mack Lillard, who owns the Welcome motel located between Rogue River and Grants Pass, says many of his regular customers go by without realizing they've missed the motels along the river.

Of major concern to the people in this area is having adequate signs on the freeway to tell motorists where tourist facilities are and that they can reach Grants Pass via the route along the Rogue river.

Lack of Signs
LeMaster insists there is a lack of signs. Another said there were "no signs to show that there was anything here (along the river). I've never seen such a bunch of crazy signing in my life," he commented.

Shoemaker agreed that the freeway "isn't signed right." He felt that there were no signs saying where the old highway goes. Motorists don't realize that it's "the scenic route," one businessman noted.

In an effort to obtain better signs on the freeway, several

motel owners have written to the state highway commission seeking assistance. The commission, in turn, has met with area residents to discuss the situation.

Al Head, who supervises installation of signs for the highway commission, has helped the motel owners "considerably" according to some, but others claim there isn't adequate signing. One motel owner said the "gas-food-lodging" markers are "very effective," while others say they are too small and fail to point out the scenic attraction of the Rogue river.

Shortly after the freeway opened, the commission posted a sign near the Foots Creek exit indicating the turn-off for the Redwood highway (Highway 199). Under this arrangement, motorists would travel along the river on the old highway until they reached the U.S. 199 junction in Grants Pass. Earlier this summer the sign was removed and U.S. 199 traffic now turns off the Interstate 5 freeway at the Grants Pass Sixth st. exit. It was reported the sign was moved for "the convenience of the traveling public." It was felt that routing motorists who are traveling to the coast off the freeway at Grants Pass would be more "direct."

One motel owner suggested that the old highway be called the "business route," or some other designation that would identify it as having river-side businesses as well as being another route between Medford and Grants Pass.

Erect Billboard
One attempt to solve the "sign problem" and end the "confusion" was the erection of a 12 by 60 foot billboard adjacent to the freeway. It was paid for by more than 100 owners of motels, restaurants, service stations, sporting goods stores, grocery stores, building suppliers and other businessmen who have formed the "Rogue River Businessmen's Association."

The sign, which cost about \$3,000, was erected in early April about a mile east of the Foots Creek exit. Located at the left of the roadway, the sign encourages tourists to travel the "famous" Rogue river route.

The project was spearheaded by Mr. and Mrs. Jim Oliver, owners of Rogue Valley motel located between Rogue River and Grants Pass. Scores of people were contacted in the last few months to seek support for the sign.

Not Necessary
Although the sign has been met enthusiastically by most people, some feel it is "on the wrong side of the highway" while others don't think it's necessary.

In their attempt to let tourists know about the Rogue river and the businesses along it, the RRBA members are thinking of other ways to promote their area. A pamphlet featuring this area is now being printed. Bumper strips telling of the Rogue River highway may also be distributed, according to the Oliver's.

One motel owner summarized the situation by saying that the "freeway won't damage anyone if the area is properly promoted." Another agreed that "those making an effort" will do okay, regardless of the freeway.

"Those who aren't keeping up with the times and are 'out of style' are the ones who will be hurt," one stated.

Worried About 'Small Guy'
Jack B. Kaufman, who owns the Motel Del Rogue near Grants Pass, is one who is concerned about what the freeway is doing to motel business along the old highway. Although it's not hurting his business, he admits, "I'm worried about the small guy."

Kaufman charges that there is little cooperation from the



ADEQUATE?—Some business owners along Highway 99 between Gold Hill and Grants Pass feel that the Oregon Highway department signs do not tell the motorist enough so they will leave the freeway and seek accommodations along the "scenic river route."

downtown motels in Grants Pass. He said that when tourists find the downtown motels filled they follow the "northbound" and "southbound" signs and end up back on the freeway without knowing that there are scores of motels along the old highway.

After a letter he wrote on the situation appeared in the Grants Pass newspaper, Kaufman said he received at least 50 telephone calls. Forty-five per cent of the motel owners supported the charges, he said. Owners of some of the downtown motels "apologized" for any misunderstanding and insisted that they didn't discourage tourists from taking the old highway if the Grants Pass motels are filled.

Jack McMahan, manager of the Grants Pass Chamber of Commerce, rebuked the cries of "less business" and the charge that downtown motels are "unfair." He said he understood that the motels on the old highway were "doing quite well" this summer. If they want any signs or special promotion, he continued, they should "do it themselves."

Responsible to Members
McMahan emphasized that there were only one or two motels outside of the downtown area that belonged to the chamber of commerce and that "we are responsible to our members."

After the Kaufman letter was printed the manager reportedly received four or five calls from motel owners denying the charges that they were trying "to get all the gravy" and not trying to help the "little man."

"Whenever possible," McMahan continued, "we have made referrals to them (motels on the old highway), but the chamber is primarily responsible to its members."

In Jackson county, Max Weston, president of the Jackson County Motor Court association, said definitely that "cooperation between motels in the valley is needed." Regarding the freeway, Weston said the motels were going through a "transitional period," but would be able to adjust.

Another point of view on motel economics was taken by an area real estate man. The salesman, who asked his name not be mentioned, said some of the motels who are concerned about a loss of business

have "never been highly profitable."

"It takes about 20 units to make it (owning a motel) profitable," he stated. Several of the motels from Rock Point to Rogue River are four to eight units in size. More than one of the motel owners tried to sell before the freeway was opened, he noted.

For Sale Signs
The Mail Tribune reporter found at least three small motels deserted in the area with a "for sale" sign posted. Others don't enter to overnight travelers but rent by the week or month to people working in the area.

On the other hand, and flavored with a touch of irony, is the fact that two major developments are planned for the area—a 100-space mobile home park and a motor court resembling the famed Village Green enterprise near Cottage Grove.

Although little information is available on the two proposals, it was learned that the trailer park will be known as Rock Point village. It is to feature a recreation hall, swimming pool, putting green and hobby shop. A billboard, located on a site facing the Rogue River highway near Rock Point, promises "a complete community for adults."

Hold Option
The motor court is expected to be located at the Foots Creek exit adjacent to the Interstate 5 freeway. The developers reportedly have an option to purchase additional land across the old highway on the Rogue river. At least one nation-wide oil company is also expected to join the project.

The consensus seemed to be that the freeway itself won't be detrimental to the economy of this particular area, if businessmen are able to adjust. The immediate effect of taking a main highway away from one's door (if he is a motel owner who depends on tourist trade) certainly can, and has been in some cases, disastrous. But with long-range planning and proper promotion, the tourists will gladly leave the freeway to spend their money here.

As one person put it, the opening of a freeway has always affected someone's home or business, and Rogue River highway is no exception.



ASSOCIATION'S SIGN—The Rogue River Businessmen's association spent more than \$3,000 for this 60 foot long billboard near the Foots Creek exit of Interstate 5. (Knackstedt photos)