

Pritzker Administration Awards \$4 Million In Grant Funding For Projects Along Route 66

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SPRINGFIELD - Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) today announced \$4 million in grant awards for various projects across the state designed to spur tourism, bolster educational opportunities, and support an increase of Electric Vehicle (EV) travel – which will create and modernize attractions along the Mother Road leading up to the 100th Anniversary of Route 66.

This grant – which was open to Illinois' Certified Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVBs) – was awarded to Great Rivers and Routes CVB, Heritage Corridor CVB, Visit Oak Park CVB, and Springfield CVB for innovative projects that span Route 66 throughout the state.

“Route 66 in Illinois is a driver for both national and international travelers and these state grant funds will go a long way towards reinvigorating our Mother Road tourism products in southwest Illinois. We applaud the forward-thinking of Governor Pritzker and state legislators who recognized the need to invest in this national road. Our region includes the Last 100 Miles of Route 66 in Illinois, and we plan to use the grant funds for a variety of innovative projects that benefit our communities. It’s key we do all of this now so we can take part in state and national celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the Mother Road in 2026.” - said Cory Jobe, Chair of the Illinois Route 66 Centennial Commission and President/CEO of the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau.

Great Rivers and Routes will receive \$919,000 to retrofit the West End Service Station in Edwardsville to serve as a Route 66 visitor’s center, complete with museum-quality exhibits, memorabilia, and local products. They will also develop murals and monuments throughout the region along the Route.

“These projects honor the history of Route 66 while also building for the future with new attractions and upgrades that benefit communities across Illinois,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “I can’t think of a better way to prepare for Route 66’s centennial celebration than revitalizing and creating attractions along the Mother Road.”

Projects include: the installation of EV charging stations along Route 66 in Berwyn, Pontiac, and Wilmington; an interactive Virtual Reality exhibit designed to highlight the experience of Black Americans living or traveling along Route 66 in Springfield; transforming a service station into a Route 66 Visitors Center in Edwardsville; and a statewide Route 66 marketing campaign.

“From forward-looking projects like new electric vehicle charging stations, to projects that recognize Illinois’ rich history, these Route 66 projects truly bridge the past and present of one of America’s greatest road trips,” said DCEO Director, Sylvia I. Garcia. “Under Governor Pritzker’s leadership, Illinois has prioritized investments in the unique locations and attractions that make Illinois a great place to live, work and visit.”

With more than 300 miles of Route 66 in Illinois from its starting point in Chicago to the Chain of Rocks Bridge, Route 66's economic and historical impact is woven into the fabric of communities across the state. Route 66 is one of the most famous roads in America, and it serves as an important historical and cultural symbol. Route 66 was designated in 1926 as part of the new numbered highway network and grew to be one of

the most well-known and traveled highways. The construction of Route 66 helped make the Western part of the United States accessible to anyone with a car, while generating economic benefits for many communities along the Route.

“I’m absolutely thrilled about being awarded a Route 66 Grant from DCEO. As we prepare for the centennial anniversary of Route 66 in 2026, I’m excited this grant program will allow for domestic and international marketing, new exhibits and roadside attractions along The First Hundred Miles, creation of a new Route 66 Welcome Center in Joliet, and EV stations in two both Wilmington and Pontiac. Both cities are popular stops along Illinois Route 66 and these new EV charging stations will allow visitors to linger longer by shopping, dining, and exploring while charging their EV on their iconic road trip experience.”- Robert Navarro, President & CEO, Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitors Bureau

“People come to Illinois from far and wide to travel Route 66, and the first leg of this famous roadway is right here in the western suburbs,” said Senate President Don Harmon. “The additional attractions and EV infrastructure will make this journey even more accessible and exciting.”

“Sharing our history with tourists is common for the Springfield community, but I am so proud that we will have a special emphasis on Black History when we talk about Route 66,” said Sen. Doris Turner, (D-Springfield). “The City of Springfield and partnering communities along Route 66 will be using the latest technology to not just tell these stories but educate a new generation and lift up voices that were previously ignored.”