

M-119: Special Guardrail

Context

M-119 is located in Emmet County, north of Harbor Springs and adjacent to Lake Michigan. The road meanders along the shoreline offering the traveler spectacular views of the lake and the Beaver Island archipelago.

Purpose and Description

The purpose of the project, completed in 2003, was to improve safety of motorists in an aesthetically pleasing manner. Guardrail was upgraded along 19 miles of M-119, including the section frequently referred to as the “Tunnel of Trees.”

Public Engagement

In December of 2002, a 13-miles stretch of M-119 was officially designated as a Scenic Heritage Route. The route is considered by many to be one of the nation’s most scenic highways. The Heritage Route Program emphasizes cooperation among local residents, their government officials, landowners, and interested groups to preserve unique scenic, historic, or recreational highways. The M-119 Scenic Heritage Route management team was actively involved in planning the guardrail upgrade along this scenic segment of roadway. The team was responsible for reviewing samples of the new guardrail and selecting the color that was used.

Context Sensitive Solutions Approach

The newly designated Scenic Heritage Route was upgraded with a powder-coated product (flat brown) to blend into the natural environment and retain the highway’s aesthetic characteristics. MDOT purchased spare guardrail to facilitate any future repairs, which are the responsibility of the county. The use of an aesthetically pleasing guardrail did not add significant cost to the project.

Funding

The cost of the \$420,000 powder coated guardrail project was not significantly higher than installing standard guardrail.



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