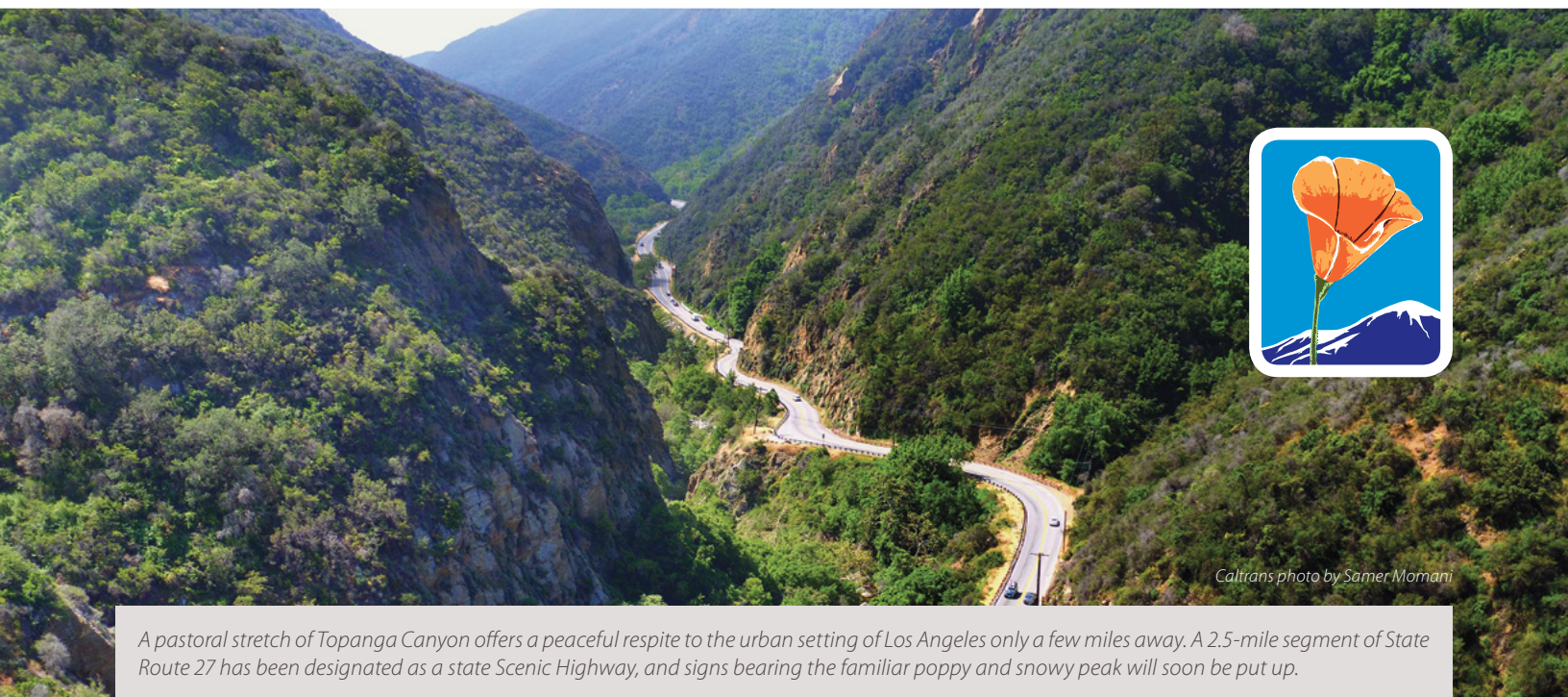


L.A. Canyon is New Scenic Highways Star

Topanga Corridor Now Part of Caltrans Program That Protects State's Unique Byways



Caltrans photo by Samer Momani

A pastoral stretch of Topanga Canyon offers a peaceful respite to the urban setting of Los Angeles only a few miles away. A 2.5-mile segment of State Route 27 has been designated as a state Scenic Highway, and signs bearing the familiar poppy and snowy peak will soon be put up.

California's newest officially designated State Scenic Highway winds through a rugged, steep-sided canyon past majestic oaks, only minutes away from one of the nation's largest urban population centers.

Topanga Canyon State Scenic Highway, a 2.5-mile segment of State Route 27, runs through the county and city of Los Angeles in the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area near the Pacific coast.

"L.A. is very urban but there are a lot of rural spots as well," said Glen Levstik, Caltrans District 7 coordinator of scenic highways. "Here it's obvious, with trees, mountains, hills and natural beauty."

Travelers on Topanga Canyon State Scenic Highway enjoy views of massive ancient rock formations and coastal valleys with a diversity of plants and wildlife, including bobcats and mountain lions.

State Route 27 cuts through lower Topanga Canyon parallel to Topanga Creek, the last free-running stream from the crest of the Santa Monica Mountains to the sea.

To protect and enhance the natural beauty of California highway corridors, the state Legislature created the State Scenic Highway Program in 1963. The first Scenic Highway designation was awarded in 1965 for a 72.3-mile segment of State Route 1 in Monterey County.

Many highway corridors are eligible for Scenic Highway status, but receiving an official designation requires the local government to apply to Caltrans for approval and adopt a Corridor Protection Program. The local governing body must develop and implement measures that strictly limit development and control outdoor advertising along the scenic corridor.



At top, the conclusion of a major reconstruction project along a section of Topanga Canyon brought together officials and members of the community in 1956. Above left, an earlier construction project took place in the 1920s to make the passage between the San Fernando Valley and ocean a safer one. Today, above right, State Route 27 retains its bucolic charm for travelers and residents of the canyon.

In California, 70 segments of 42 state highways have official recognition as a State Scenic Highway. In addition, following the same program requirements that apply to state routes, eight segments of seven county roads in California have obtained state recognition as an officially designated County Scenic Highway. Two of those county roads are located near the new Topanga Canyon State Scenic Highway in Los Angeles County.

Other recent California recipients of official recognition as a State Scenic Highway are:

- The Gaviota Coast State Scenic Highway, a 21-mile section of U.S. Highway 101 in Santa Barbara County featuring spectacular views of the Pacific Ocean, grassy rolling hills and the Santa Ynez Mountains.
- A 3.5-mile segment of State Route 52 in San Diego adjacent to Mission Trails Regional Park, crossing an impressive open-space system that preserves San Diego's diverse natural history.

Approval for Topanga Canyon State Scenic Highway was granted March 22, 2017. It was the first in Los Angeles County since 1971, when a 55-mile segment of State Route 2 from La Cañada Flintridge to San Bernardino County received official scenic status.

Topanga Canyon State Scenic Highway falls within two municipal jurisdictions — the county and the city of Los Angeles. Both local governments requested the scenic designation to work in concert with their goals of conserving the unique natural setting.

The city segment is in Topanga State Park, one of the world's largest wildlands in the boundaries of a major city.

Formerly a county road, Topanga Canyon Boulevard became part of the state highway system in 1933. Efforts were made over many years to draw attention to its scenic importance, with renewed emphasis after the state significantly improved the route through lower Topanga Canyon in the 1950s.

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The Scenic Highway designation reflects strong support by area residents and local government, including a written proposal and a detailed visual assessment of the route. The city and the county formally endorsed the application to Caltrans.

State Route 27 spans 20 miles from its southern end at State Route 1 (Pacific Coast Highway) to its northern limit at State Route 118 in Chatsworth near the northwest corner of the San Fernando Valley. The section approved for scenic status lies approximately a mile from the coast.

Nearby residents in the unincorporated community of Topanga applauded the new state recognition, which will be marked with distinctive highway signs.

“We have always seen Topanga Canyon Boulevard as our Main Street that just happens to run through some of the most spectacular scenery in the Santa

Monica Mountains,” said Roger Pugliese, chairman of the Topanga Association for A Scenic Community.

“The Topanga community is honored and delighted that California’s Department of Transportation has recognized the largely unspoiled beauty of lower Topanga Canyon Boulevard and has designated most of it as a Scenic Highway,” said John J. Waller, a board member of the Topanga Town Council.

The scenic designation is “the greatest of gifts,” said Joseph Rosendo, past president of the Topanga Chamber of Commerce. “As an organization, a community and individuals we are prepared to do all that is necessary to maintain our Scenic Highway distinction and to work with Caltrans to continue to protect, preserve and improve one of California’s natural resources.”

A dedication ceremony for inclusion of the Topanga Canyon section in the State Scenic Highways program is set for June 16 at the Theatricum Botanicum in the community of Topanga. **MM**

Source: Michael Comeaux, Public Information Officer, District 7



Topanga Canyon, traversing the Santa Monica Mountains, is home to a diverse range of trees, plants and wildlife.



State Route 27 in the 1950s looked much like the route today, other than the vehicles on it. It spans 20 miles in total.