



Contact: Sandy Bynum, Tourism Division  
[sbynum@mississippi.org](mailto:sbynum@mississippi.org)

601.359.3297

## **MISSISSIPPI BLUES TRAIL HONORS HIGHWAY 61 SOUTH**

Jackson, Mississippi (March 10, 2009) – Gov. Haley Barbour today announced the second Mississippi Blues Trail Marker to commemorate U. S. Highway 61, the Blues Highway.

The Mississippi Development Authority’s Tourism Division Heritage Trails Program, the Mississippi Blues Commission and the Vicksburg Convention and Visitors Bureau will celebrate the historic significance of U. S. Highway 61 South on Thursday, March 12, 2009, at 11:00 a.m. at the corner of Washington and Jackson Streets in Vicksburg.

“I am proud to recognize a landmark that has been so important economically and culturally to Mississippi,” Gov. Barbour said. “The route was an important north-south connection in the days before the interstate highway system. U.S. Highway 61 inspired countless artists from blues legend B.B. King to rock icon Bob Dylan.”

Like Route 66 in the Western United States, the iconic U.S. Highway 61 is so strongly identified with blues music that it is also known as the Blues Highway. Many Southerners traveled north along the highway to promote their music. The rise of the automobile and the development of a national highway system in the 1920s and ‘30s coincided with the initial boom of blues, jazz and spiritual recordings. The most prominent highway in blues lore was “61 Highway.”

The original route of U. S. Highway 61 ran from downtown New Orleans to Grand Portage, Minnesota on the Canadian border and connected cities including Memphis, St. Louis and St. Paul. Within Mississippi, the highway was initially mostly gravel and ran approximately four hundred miles through the downtown areas of many communities. Today’s route, which largely bypasses city centers, is considerably straighter and about eighty miles shorter.

In 1921, the Federal Highway Act mandated a national highway system. By 1926, U.S. Highway 61 was one of nine numbered highways that ran through Mississippi. Construction on the initial Highway 61 continued until the early ‘40s, by which time at least seven blues singers had recorded songs about Highway 61. Today the Mississippi Department of Transportation is upgrading the highway between Vicksburg and Leland to four lanes.

(more)

This is one of two Mississippi Blues Trail markers dedicated to U. S. Highway 61. The first marker, in Tunica, gives a more detailed history of the various song recordings. The new marker will commemorate the southern portion of the highway.

Mississippi is a destination for music lovers. Gov. Barbour created the Mississippi Blues Trail to recognize the talents of the state's countless musicians in the Birthplace of America's Music. When completed more than 100 sites will offer an unforgettable journey into Blues history.

The Mississippi Blues Trail markers are funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and by support from the Vicksburg Convention and Visitors Bureau and Center for the Study of Southern Culture, the Mississippi Department of Transportation, Delta State University and the Mississippi Development Authority. To submit information on the musicians, sites, and promoters honored by the Mississippi Blues Trail, contact: Jim O'Neal, Mississippi Blues Trail Research Director (816-931-0383, [bluesoterica@aol.com](mailto:bluesoterica@aol.com)).

For more information, visit the Mississippi Blues Trail on the web at [msbluestrail.org](http://msbluestrail.org) or the official MDA Tourism site [visitmississippi.org](http://visitmississippi.org). To contact the Mississippi Blues Trail office in Jackson, contact Alex Thomas (601-359-3297, [athomas@mississippi.org](mailto:athomas@mississippi.org)) or Leigh Portwood (601-359-3061, [lportwood@mississippi.org](mailto:lportwood@mississippi.org)).

#### **About Mississippi Development Authority**

Mississippi Development Authority is the State of Mississippi's lead economic and community development agency. Nearly 300 employees are engaged in providing services to businesses, communities and workers in the state. While the agency is best known for its efforts to recruit new businesses to Mississippi, the Authority provides services to promote tourism, help communities improve their quality of place, help existing employers identify and meet opportunities and challenges and help workers improve their skills – all with the goal of improving the quality of life and economic well-being of Mississippians. For more information, visit MDA's website at [www.mississippi.org](http://www.mississippi.org).

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