

**The D.C. Freeway Revolt and the Coming of Metro Sidebar  
U.S. 50: The Roads Between  
Annapolis, MD, and Washington, DC**

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## **U.S. 50: The Roads Between Annapolis, MD, and Washington, DC**

By  
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### **From the Early Days**

Even before the District of Columbia opened as the Nation's capital in June 1800, travel had begun between Annapolis, the capital of Maryland since 1694, and the area.

Alexandria, established in the 1690s, was an important tobacco warehouse area and landing along the Potomac River. Georgetown, also a tobacco landing, became an officially platted village in 1751. Bladensburg, Maryland, just outside the future District's line, was a commercial center for the area's farmers as well as the location where six roads converged, including the "Main Post Road" between Baltimore, Georgetown, and Alexandria.

As early as 1751, George Washington was an occasional visitor to Annapolis, crossing Maryland to watch the horse races there and for other more practical purposes. For example, after the Revolutionary War, he traveled from New York to Annapolis, the temporary seat of Congress, to resign as Commander in Chief of the Army on December 23, 1783. An account of the trip reports that he was eager to return to his wife Martha and his cherished life at Mount Vernon in time for Christmas. On one urgent occasion, he had covered the distance between Annapolis and Mount Vernon in a single day, but that was not possible on December 23 after the formalities ended around 1 p.m. As soon as they were over, he walked outside and began the ride home, racing across the State on horse and arriving at Mount Vernon on December 24. [Tebbel, John, *George Washington's America*, E. P. Dutton and Company, 1954, pages 32, 429-430]

The map of Maryland's roads before 1776, printed in the Maryland Geological Survey's 1899 report, showed a "Main Post Route Between North and South, 18<sup>th</sup> Century" running from Annapolis to Alexandria. [*Report on the Highways of Maryland*, Maryland Geological Survey, volume III, plate XIV, following page 156]

By 1796, a map of Maryland showed a road from Annapolis to Bladensburg, more or less on a straight line, just outside the outline of "Washington City." [*A History of Road Building in Maryland*, following page 16]

### **The Old Stage Road**

With the new capital city under construction, Maryland considered improved communication between Annapolis and the new capital to be important. In 1796, the Maryland General Assembly approved a resolution establishing a commission "to lay out a direct route between the two points." The commissioners selected what became known as the "Old Stage Road" from Annapolis to Washington via Camp Parole, Collington, and Bladensburg.

In a 1916 article, *The Evening Star* reported that having selected the route, the commissioners were authorized to “open, clear and grub” the road, with “grub” referring to clearing and removing tree stumps and other vegetation. From year to year, they failed to complete the work:

The fatality of incompleteness thus fixed upon it in the early days has followed this old road to the present time, so that it is among the last to feel the finishing touch of modern road improvement . . . .

The “Old Stage road” at the present time is in a deplorable condition, so much so that there is very little travel between the National Capital and Annapolis over it. As a result that section adjacent to it has not developed to the extent that it should have. There are several roads from the National Capital, but they are longer and over varied road conditions.

Meanwhile, the State had improved the road to Solomons Island south of Annapolis:

By connecting this road with the road from Washington via Upper Marlboro in Prince Georges County, it completed the link that joined the two capitals. As this answered the purpose of joining the two cities, no further improvements were considered. There is, however, at the present time about eight miles of roadway badly in need of improvement between Hill’s bridge across the Patuxent river, and Lothian, where the state road turns in the direction of Solomons island. The road at this time between the National Capital and Hill’s bridge, a distance of about twenty miles, is an excellent macadam and concrete highway, ideal in every respect. It is the only hard surfaced section between Washington and Edgewater. At Edgewater a concrete road extends the remainder of the distance into Annapolis. The distance over this route from Washington is 42.7 miles. [“‘Old Stage’ Road Is Favored Route,” *The Evening Star*, March 1, 1916]

Through much of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, mail would have been carried by horse and rider; no coaches ran south of Annapolis until after the Revolution. The first stagecoach line between the two capitals began in April 1800. Valentine Snyder, who operated the stage from Annapolis to Baltimore, and Henry Cook, were the lowest of four bidders for the Washington-Annapolis mail contract. The winning bid was \$350 a year.

Oliver W. Holmes described the operation of this initial stage line for the Columbia Historical Society. It ran on looping southern route:

The line ran through Upper Marlboro, and at first went but once a week, leaving Caton’s Tavern in Annapolis Tuesday mornings at 7:00 and McLaughlin’s City Tavern in Georgetown at the same hour Thursdays. The fare was \$3.00. In September, 1802, this line commenced running twice a week. This increase of service may have been hastened by the establishment in March, 1802, of a rival line by John Smith to run from Annapolis to Washington by the northern route, passing through Bladensburg. Smith’s line also left Caton’s Tavern in Annapolis. It went at first to the Union Tavern in Georgetown, but later advertisements showed that it had shifted to the Indian King, kept by Joseph Semmes, who had become a partner with Smith in the undertaking. This line began with

service only once a week also, but it, too, advertised that on the first of September, 1802, it would increase its trips to two a week. A month later an announcement was made of service three times a week. No notice, however, of this northern line is discovered after 1803. Henry Cook continued through the first decade of the century to hold the mail contract, and his stage continued to run through Upper Marlboro . . . . [Holmes, Oliver W., "Stagecoach Days in the District of Columbia," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society of Washington, D.C.*, 1948-1950, volume 50, Columbia Historical Society, 1952, pages 16-17]

The coming of the railroad to Maryland reduced the need for stagecoach service:

The stage line to Annapolis three times a week was continued to 1841, when, Annapolis being provided [sic] by railroad, the stages henceforth went only to Upper Marlboro. In 1853 the service to Upper Marlboro was increased to six times a week. This route was continued at that frequency until after the Civil War. [Holmes, page 31]

Traffic to or from Alexandria crossed the Potomac River on the ferry at Georgetown until 1809 when the toll Long Bridge opened in the vicinity of today's 14<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge complex. Stagecoaches immediately switched to the new bridge, bypassing Georgetown entirely and confirming the fears of Georgetown businessmen about the new structure:

The lines to Annapolis and Leonardtown continued for many years to start from Georgetown, it is true, but they picked up their main mails in Washington and also many of their passengers. [Holmes, pages 23-24]

Mary Bagot, wife of the first British diplomat posted to the United States after the War of 1812, traveled the road on March 18, 1816, between Annapolis and Washington via Bladensburg. Her day had begun before daybreak, although her party did not leave Annapolis until 9 a.m. in a variety of vehicles. She described the trip in her journal:

Each carriage was driven four in hand by a black driver & the horses were sent from Washington. The day was so intensely cold that I never in my life before had felt any at all to be compared with it. The roads were actually worse than ploughed fields & we went down such precipices & up others & into such holes that we expected every moment to be overturned. However, our drivers brought us safely to our journeys end without accident – stopping only once at a log house about half way between Anapolis & Washington for half an hour to bait the horses. The country struck me as wild, dismal & dreary & our road was thro' a sussion of never ending forests of pine, cedar, oak & c. –

the only cultivation we saw being occasional spots cleared for the sowing [of] maize . . . .

Aside from a few African-American field hands "crawling across a barren tract," she did not see any signs of population until her carriage reached Bladensburg. Along the way, however, she admired the scenery as her party crossed South River:

We crossed a ferry across the south river about five miles from Annapolis which struck me as very beautiful from the beautiful sweep of the river & the craggy cliffs that arise perpendicularly from its borders covered with cedars & pines.

They arrived at Crawfords hotel in Washington at about 6:30, having traveled a distance she estimated at 36 miles. [Hosford, David, "Exile in Yankeeland: The Journal of Mary Bagot, 1816-1819," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society of Washington, D.C.*, Volume 51, 1984, pages 33-34]

## **Central Avenue**

The two stagecoach routes – the northern route to Bladensburg and the southern route via Upper Marlboro – remained the two options for the trip between the cities. By 1900, the southern road to Annapolis followed East Capitol Street/Central Avenue (roughly MD 214 today). The Maryland Geological Survey's 1899 report commented on the road in Prince George's County:

One of the best improvements made by the county was the extension of Central Avenue, necessitating the building of 2 miles of new road, thereby forming a direct route from Halls' Station to Washington. This is also the direct road between Annapolis and Washington. A dirt road has been made in which a special feature is the extensive amount of grading on the westerly portion where embankments 10 to 12 feet high have been built.

The larger portion of the road, however, still requires much grading to put it in good shape. The heavy grading necessary on the western portion took most of the funds, leaving only enough to clear and shape the easterly portion. This piece of work cost in the neighborhood of \$5000.00, about one-half of which was paid for land damages. [Maryland Geological Surface, Volume 3, 1899, pages 244-245]

The county was still working on the road when the Maryland Geological Survey issued its report in 1902:

This is the direct road from Washington to Annapolis and is one of the most important roads leading from the District of Columbia into Prince George's county. Near the District it is hilly and the surface is in bad condition. In places on the hills the road has been washed [sic] and in the hollows it is sandy. The survey of the Highway Division extended a little more than two miles. The plans call for the reduction of the grades and surfacing with the best gravel obtainable in the vicinity. One hill to be graded crosses the District line, and it is hoped the District Commissioners will cooperate with the County Road Commissioners in doing this part of the work, which has therefore been postponed for the present. The Road Commissioners advertised for bids . . . but only one was received, namely 30 cents per cubic yard for excavation and 50 cents per cubic yard for gravel spread on the road. The Commissioners considered these prices too high and have undertaken the work by day-labor. [Maryland Geological Survey, Volume 4, 1902, page 158]

By the third report, the Maryland Geological Survey reported that the county's work resulted in a reduction of the grade from 7 and 8 percent to 4 percent at a cost of \$588.10, "which includes graveling about 1000 feet of road." This work to reduce the grade led the District of Columbia "to improve the continuation of the road within the District so that now there is a continuous stretch of good road from the county into the City of Washington." [Maryland Geological Survey, Volume 5, 1905, pages 183-184]

### **Maryland's Good Roads Movement**

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the country experienced the Good Roads Movement, spurred initially by the popularity of the bicycle and then the automobile. The growing interest in improving the Nation's rural roads prompted State and Federal officials to consider their role in the effort.

In 1896, Maryland created the Maryland Geological and Economy Survey Commission to investigate natural resources. It also was to furnish, when requested, free expert advice and technical assistance to the State's towns and counties on road matters. As noted earlier, the commission published periodic summaries of road conditions throughout the State.

Maryland's counties began seeking ways to improve their roads. Beginning in 1901, Baltimore County was the first county in the State to employ a trained road engineer.

On April 2, 1904, Maryland enacted the State Aid Road Law (chapter 225 of the Acts of 1904, approved April 2, 1904) to help the counties improve their roads. With an annual appropriation of \$200,000, the State provided 50 percent of eligible costs. The Maryland Geological Survey was the State's road builder, with Walter Wilson Crosby, former road engineer of Baltimore County, as chief engineer. This legislation was commonly referred to as the Shoemaker Law, after Samuel M. Shoemaker of Baltimore County – a prominent figure in dairying and agriculture who drafted and promoted the bill.

The State-aid program was to go into effect on January 1, 1905, but was delayed by a court challenge to the program's constitutionality under Maryland's constitution. A provision in Maryland's constitution of 1851 addressed internal improvements. Like many States, Maryland had borrowed funds during the prosperous 1830s to invest in internal improvements such as the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad that were expected to drive economic development by connecting the State to the west. However, after the onset of the devastating economic Panic of 1837, the State could not afford the interest on the debt despite raising taxes.

To address the issue, Section 22 of Article III ("Legislative Department") of the constitution of 1851 prohibited the legislature from approving any debt in the absence of approval of an annual tax or taxes sufficient to retire the interest and principal. It continued:

The credit of the State shall not, in any manner, be given or loaned to or in aid of any individual, association or corporation, nor shall the General Assembly have the power, in any mode, to involve the State in the construction of works of internal improvement, or in

any enterprize [sic] which shall involve the faith or credit of the State, or make any appropriations therefor. And they shall not use or appropriate the proceeds of the internal improvement companies, or of the State Tax now levied, or which may hereafter be levied, to pay off the public debt, to any other purpose, until the interest and debt are fully paid, or the sinking fund shall be equal to the amount of the outstanding debt . . . .

While the State Aid Road Law was under consideration in the General Assembly, legislators had drafted an amendment to the constitution to exempt the new program, but they had not pursued it. The question raised by a taxpayer in Baltimore County, Frank A. Bonsal, was whether a public road was an internal improvement within the meaning of the Maryland constitution.

The *Sun* reported:

The constitutionality of the Road Law was sustained by Judge N. Charles Burke, at Towson, Baltimore county, December 16, 1904. He decided that the ordinary public roads belong to the State, and it was its business to maintain them, that duty being delegated to the counties from motives of convenience in the administration of road affairs, and that the section of the Constitution relating to works of internal improvement was intended to apply solely to State appropriations for railroads, canals and similar undertakings of a quasi-public nature, which were conducted for profit.

On February 9, 1905, the Maryland Court of Appeals at Annapolis upheld Judge Burke's ruling, allowing the State Aid Road Law to begin operations. ["The Road Law And the Amendment," *The Baltimore Sun*, February 8, 1905; "State Aid To Roads," *The Baltimore Sun*, February 10, 1905; Rees, Charles A., "Remarkable Evolution: The Early Constitutional History of Maryland," *University of Baltimore Law Review*, Winter 2007, page 263]

An Act of 1906, known as the Hill Law (chapter 312, Acts of 1906), authorized the State to acquire the Baltimore-Washington Turnpike. The law authorized \$30,000 for each of fiscal years 1906 through 1908 to improve the road, while providing for the use of convict labor on the project. By 1908, about 12 miles out of 30 had been widened, straightened, and provided with a macadam surface, with additional funds needed – estimated at \$150,000 if the road, known as State Road No. 1, was to avoid grade crossings of the steam railroads in the corridor. The General Assembly authorized \$120,000 in 1910 and continued to fund the improvement.

The gradual progress was occasionally marred by incidents such as one described in the combined annual reports for 1908 through 1911. One serious problem was caused by "the entrance by various parties within the limits of your roads for physical work of their own." The report illustrated the problem with an incident disturbing the section between the District of Columbia line and Bladensburg that would eventually be shared with the roads to Annapolis and Baltimore:

For instance, a section of the Baltimore-Washington Road, between the District of Columbia line and Bladensburg, has been practically ruined in spite of all this Department could do, by the construction of a railway track along the section in defiance

of the plans, rulings and orders of your Commission, and with wanton disregard for the rights of the users of the public highway . . . .

The Washington Spa Spring and Greta Electric Railway Company desired to extend their tracks from the District of Columbia line northeasterly along the Baltimore-Washington Road to Bladensburg, a distance of a little over a mile. Their charter permitted such construction, but under the various acts your [Board's] prescription of certain details of construction was necessary. This section of the Baltimore-Washington Road had been improved under the State Aid Law in 1905-6, and was in good condition.

The application of the Railway Company was referred to your Chief Engineer for a report. He recommended that granting of the permit be based on certain conditions as to location, grades, etc. Your Board approved his recommendations and granted a permit with such conditions as a part of it.

The Railway Company thereupon performed their construction ignoring in almost every detail the conditions of the permit. Their action was reported to your Board by your Chief Engineer and your Board personally at different times has inspected the results. As yet, however, no action resulting in a remedying of the obnoxious conditions so caused has been taken by your Board. The existing condition of this section of an important road is a nuisance, if not a danger, to the traveling public and must occasion, if nothing worse, severe criticism of the road authorities responsible for this road. It is the judgment of your Chief Engineer that the existing condition should be remedied at once even if the expense now of so doing is large. [First, Second, Third, and Fourth Annual Reports of the State Roads Commission for the years 1908, 1909, 1910 and 1911 to the General Assembly of Maryland, May 1912, pages 75 and 104]

Governor Austin L. Crothers (January 8, 1908 – January 10, 1912) won election on a good roads platform. He introduced good roads legislation that passed the General Assembly after considerable debate and controversy. He signed the legislation on March 25. A contemporary summary described it:

In its general features this law provides for an issue of 3½ per cent. State bonds to the amount of \$5,000,000 for highway improvement; a State Highway Commission to consist of six members – the Governor, two members of the State Geological Survey, and three other members to be appointed by the Governor – together with a secretary and the necessary force of engineers and office contingent; all records are to be made public; the roads to be improved must be designated by May 1, 1909; and the work on them is to be completed by July 1, 1915; the work is to be prosecuted either under the direction of the Geological Survey or under competitive bidders; trees are to be planted and guide posts erected along the highways by the commission, and the roads improved are to be permanently maintained by the State. [“State Highway Legislation for 1908,” *Good Roads Magazine*, April 1908, page 140]

Governor Crothers announced his gratification at passage of the legislation:



I sincerely believe that it carries with it, if honestly and efficiently administered, more benefit to more people than any other legislation that could be passed. It will do more to advance the interests of the whole State than anything else; it will increase the value of property; it will attract the tide of immigration, a greater percentage of which has heretofore passed through Maryland; it carries lasting benefits to every taxpayer in the State, who for years have out of their hard earnings paid their tax bills, and have not been able to see in such a tangible way the benefits that flow to them . . . .

He was going to take his time to pick the best men for the new Maryland State Roads Commission (SRC):

This is a work that the public is interested in and wants to see carried out most efficiently and economically, and I think that the old rule of the place seeking the man, and not the man the place, should be applied rigidly in the selection of the commissioners for the administration of this act. [“Will Sign It Today,” *The Baltimore Sun*, March 25, 1908]

The SRC, based in Baltimore, began operations on April 30, 1908, with the swearing in of the members:

Chairman John M. Tucker of Cecil County, former State Fire Marshall;  
Samuel M. Shoemaker of Baltimore County, author of the 1904 good roads law;  
Francis C. Hutton of Montgomery County, a civil engineer;  
Dr. Ira Remsen, president of Johns Hopkins University;  
Dr. William Bullock Clark of the State Geological Survey.

Governor Crothers served ex officio on the commission.

The members elected W. W. Crosby, chief engineer of the Maryland Geological Survey, to be the SRC’s chief engineer, in a joint arrangement that avoided duplication of effort. The survey paid two-fifths of Crosby’s salary.

Much of the SRC’s early work involved designating a system of main, connected roads, as described in its annual report collection:

To aid the Commission in reaching its decision hearings were held in every county of the State and in Baltimore City at which the citizens were requested to appear and present to the Commission their views as to the best roads to be adopted for improvement. Large and enthusiastic gatherings were held and in this way the Commission obtained a good idea as to what the people desired. The Chief Engineer was instructed to locate on the detailed road maps of the Geological Survey the roads suggested for improvement at the hearings and when these were finally computed they were found to aggregate more than 2,500 miles, much more than the Commission was justified in selecting under the Act. The mileage of the roads was therefore cut down materially by the Commission until finally a total of about 1,200 miles was determined on. This represented a connected, main-artery system by means of which the county towns were connected as well as other leading shipping points. After the system had thus been tentatively selected, hearings

were held at the office of the Commission in Baltimore, at which many delegations appeared. A few changes were ordered but the system remained substantially the same as that already adopted. In this system were incorporated 38.19 miles of State Aid roads already built by the Geological Survey so that the main-artery system began with these roads to its credit. [First, Second, Third, and Fourth Annual Reports of the State Roads Commission for the years 1908, 1909, 1910 and 1911, page 12]

On July 23, 1908, the SRC tentatively approved State roads for Prince George's County:

Beginning at the Charles county line, near Mattawoman, and running to Clinton, to Camp Springs, to Silver Hill, to the District of Columbia.

Camp Springs to Upper Marlboro, to the Anne Arundel county line at Harden.

Beginning at the District of Columbia line, near Benning, and running to Brightseat, to Largo, to Hills, to Harden. ["Routes for State Roads," *The Baltimore Sun*, July 24, 1908]

The choices in Anne Arundel County were debated until November 30, when the SRC agreed on the county's State roads, as reported in the *Sun*:

Main road – Starting at the Calvert county line, near Owings, by way of Birdsville, South river bridge and Parole to Annapolis; from Annapolis and Parole, going west over the same route to a road three miles west of Parole and then northerly by way of Crownsville, Gate, Waterbury, Severn, Benfield, to Glenburnie, to Brooklyn, and entering the city [Baltimore] by the Light street route.

One of the cross-county routes decided upon is as follows: Annapolis to Parole, to Chesterfield, to Priest Bridge, at the Prince George's county line, there connecting with the Washington road.

Another cross-county route which will be built is as follows: From a point on the road to Annapolis two miles north of Birdsville, to Davidsonville, to Hardesty, which is on the Prince George's county line.

The SRC adopted the State road system on April 1, 1909, in Anne Arundel, Prince George's, and other smaller counties. Controversies continued in the larger counties – Baltimore, Carroll, Frederick, Harford, Washington, and Montgomery – where the selection task was made more difficult by the presence of turnpikes in main lines of travel and disputes among residents, businesses, and politicians over competing routes. ["State Roads Up Today," *The Baltimore Sun*, April 1, 1909]

Final actions took place on April 17, when the SRC made a few additions to the State road networks in Baltimore and Carroll Counties. Governor Crothers, who had been involved throughout the selection process, said:

Now that the roads in the counties are settled, it is extremely gratifying to the commission at the manner in which these selections have generally been received.

It is also gratifying that the real work is about to commence. I, as well as the other members of the commission, am anxious that the residents of the State should co-operate and help us in this work, and they can do it if they will.

It is really the people's work, and is not a matter of profit. Those who are fortunate enough to have the State roads come by or through their property can help if they will by not interfering with the proper drainage of the roads. They can aid by being willing to straighten their fences or change them without objection. The willing removal of a pile of stones and small things like this will help a great deal. It is in these and other little ways that the people can co-operate, and they owe it to themselves to do so. ["More To Be State Roads," *The Baltimore Sun*, April 18, 1909]

On June 1, 1910, the SRC took over constructing and maintaining State roads from the State Geological and Economic Survey.

### **Promoting the National Defense Highway**

In 1915 and 1916, the State legislature began considering construction of a National Defense Highway between Washington and Annapolis, home of the U.S. Naval Academy established in 1845. With Europe at war, road advocates around the country conceived many military or defense highways, on the theory that the national purpose of defense would encourage the Federal Government to pay for them – a view that Congress did not share.

In Maryland, bills were introduced in both houses of the General Assembly to advance a National Defense Highway. Senator Frank Duvall of Anne Arundel County introduced a joint resolution on January 25 directing the delegations of Anne Arundel and Prince George's Counties to draft a bill providing for improving the Old Stage Road. The resolution limited the cost to \$160,000. The *Post* reported that, "There is already a State road from Annapolis to Baltimore and one from Baltimore to the National Capital and this line, if built, would complete the triangle of the three cities." Quick action was asked because of the need for "a military road with a view to the defense of Baltimore, Annapolis and Washington." ["Federal Road to Annapolis," *The Washington Post*, January 25, 1916]

Representative Sydney E. Mudd (R-Md.) introduced a similar bill, H.R. 11959, in the U.S. House of Representatives on February 21, calling for the Federal and State governments to contribute \$250,000 each. The funds were "to be expended by and under the direction and supervision of the Secretary of Agriculture," home of the U.S. Office of Public Roads and Rural Engineering (OPRRE). Further, "no part of said sum shall be expended until the Secretary of Agriculture is satisfied that the State of Maryland has made provision and authority for the expenditure of an amount equal thereto toward the construction of said highway." The Federal Government would not be responsible for maintenance "except to the extent of a proportionate amount of any appropriation that may hereafter be made by Congress in aid of the States for a general system of highways." No toll would be charged for use of the road.

The SRC would be responsible for construction of the highway in Maryland, "but the Secretary of Agriculture may make or cause to be made, such inspection and examinations of said highway

as he shall deem necessary, and prescribe what reports shall be made to him in relation therefore, when they shall be made, and the subject matter thereof.”

The *Post* reported on Representative Mudd’s discussion of the bill:

I am introducing this bill because I am convinced that the time has come when the Federal government should take a definite step in the direction of anticipating the future by building strategic highways wherever necessary for use by the armed forces of the country in defending it against a foreign enemy in case of invasion or threatened invasion.

First of all, the National Capital, the heart of the nation, should be provided with every adequate means of proper defense, and to prevent a repetition of what occurred during the war of 1812, when British forces landed on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay and marched overland to Washington, where they burned the Capitol building and the White House.

State roads have been built from Baltimore to Annapolis and from Baltimore to Washington. There should be a road, equally as good, linking up Washington with Annapolis. In case of a threatened attack on Annapolis[,] troops could be rushed with heavy guns over the State road from Baltimore to Annapolis, and at the same time troops could be sent out from the National Capital to form a juncture with them in defending Annapolis, and at the same time protecting the National Capital.

The war in Europe has provided some most valuable object lessons. One of the most important of these is the value of strategic highways, which have been used in supplementing strategic railways, as facilities for the movement of troops, supplies and heavy guns.

Military experts have testified that in strengthening the army for the national defense we should have a mobile army. The strategic highway contemplated in the measure will contribute wonderfully to the mobility of the forces that may be called upon to defend Washington. [“For Defense Highway,” *The Washington Post*, February 21, 1916]

For several years, Congress had been considering Federal assistance for road building. In 1916, Congress was about to take up the legislation to create a national Federal-aid highway program involving a 50-50 financial partnership with State highway agencies; in February 1916, as before, Congress was not going to consider bills for individual roads. Like all such bills introduced in the House of Representatives, Representative Mudd’s bill was referred to the Committee on Roads where it died. President Woodrow Wilson approved the Federal Aid Road Act on July 11, 1916 (see *Creation of a Landmark: The Federal Aid Road Act of 1916* on this Web site at <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/highwayhistory/landmark.pdf>.)

In the General Assembly, the State bill came up for consideration in February. The *Star* described the bill:

The bill as drafted authorizes and directs the state roads commission to construct an improved modern road from the state road at Camp Parole, Anne Arundel county, Md., to

the state road at Bladensburg, Prince Georges county, Md., along the lines of the old stage road from Annapolis to Washington, which road was laid out in 1796, so as to connect the two capitals by a direct improved road, and provide for a bond issue to pay for the construction of the road by the state of Maryland, providing for the repair and upkeep of the road after its construction, and to be known as the National Defense highway.

The route from Annapolis is from the present state road at Camp Parole, in Anne Arundel county, thence following the line of the old stage road by the Annapolis water works to Chesterfield, to the Patuxent river, dividing the two counties, thence via Bel Air, Buena Vista, Lanhams station, to Bladensburg, the continued line of the old stage road where it meets the boulevard from Baltimore, the entire distance being about twenty miles. The estimated cost of the road was \$250,000. ["Legislature to Vote on Defense Highway," *The Evening Star*, February 14, 1916]

Senator Duvall introduced the bill on February 22 as a companion to the Mudd bill in the U.S. House of Representatives, as reported in the *Post*:

Senator Duvall has introduced a bill appropriating \$250,000 for the construction of a State road from Camp Parole along the line of the old stage road to Chesterfield, thence to the Patuxent River, dividing the two counties, and across the same and thence via the Belair, Buena Vista, Lanhams station in Prince Georges county to Bladensburg, where it meet the State road from Baltimore to Washington . . . .

The chief object of the road would be its military value for the defense of Annapolis, Baltimore and Washington in case of a naval attack from the Chesapeake Bay, which is practically without fortification.

The bill directed the SRC to complete the road by June 1, 1916, with the State's share of the work to be financed with revenue from a bond issue. ["Bill for Annapolis Road," *The Washington Post*, February 23, 1916]

On February 29, the Committees on Finance and Ways and Means held a joint hearing on the bill in the Senate chamber. The meeting had been scheduled to take place in the committee room, but so many people wanted to attend that, according to the *Star* account, "it was impossible for the members to get inside the door." The committee shifted the meeting to the Senate chamber.

The first speaker was Caleb C. Magruder, clerk of the Court of Appeals, in support of the Bladensburg route instead of the Central Avenue route via Upper Marlboro. He discussed the history of the route back to 1796 "and dwelt on the fact that it had not been improved." He said no bridges would have to be built and the route was shorter than the southern road. "The route which he urged, via Collington, and connecting with the boulevard at Bladensburg, he said, would bring Annapolis nearer to Washington, and he appealed to the committee as a taxpayer and in justice to the people of that section of the state."

He was interrupted several times by a resident along the central road "who evidently intended entering objections to the selection of the old stage route." Chairman Cooper insisted that he

remain quiet and show respect to the committees holding the hearing. The crowd greeting his remarks with shouts of "Put him out, put him out." Order was finally restored.

Other speakers were supportive of the project as well, favoring the Collington-Bladensburg route.

Thomas Fell, president St. John's College, spoke in support:

He said that the government was in favor of increasing the army and navy, and doubted if any one present would object to building the road . . . . Army and navy experts, he said, informed him that if these two branches of the service were increased good roads were necessary to move them about. He alluded to the lessons already taught by the European war.

We have high-powered automobiles, rapid motor cycles and motor trucks, and we should have some ready means of access between the two capitals. He told of the interest being taken by residents of the two counties and also spoke from an economic standpoint, notwithstanding the fact that taxes would have to be slightly increased if the roadway is built.

One speaker, City Councilman Ridgely P. Melvin of Annapolis, indicated that with the introduction of Representative Mudd's bill providing for an appropriation of \$250,000 and the appropriation of a similar amount by the General Assembly, the State would be getting the highway at half price. ["Defense Highway Topic At Hearing," *The Evening Star*, February 29, 1916]

The *Star* summarized the two alternatives:

One of the routes from the National Capital is via Benning, Central avenue, Capitol Heights, Largo, Halls, Davidsonville, crossing the South river at Edgewater; thence to Camp Parole, and terminating at the state capital. The other route, which is being favorably indorsed in various quarters, is via Bladensburg, Lanham, Buena Vista, Collington, Chesterfield, Camp Parole and Annapolis.

The latter route is urged because it is the old Washington-Annapolis stage road, and, besides being an all-dirt route, is the most direct from the National Capital. The route has been repeatedly recognized by the state and its legislature since 1796, and it is claimed it would be the most economic road to construct. This route, it is said, would serve at least ninety square miles, which are absolutely dependent upon it as the only means of travel.

The Benning-Capitol Heights route, it is said, is not quite so direct and, besides, would require the construction of a drawbridge across the South river at Edgewater, which would cost in the vicinity of \$220,000. The bridge would be constructed, with the consent and would be under the supervision of the War Department at Washington, and this one expense alone would be nearly enough to construct the entire road over the Collington route. The bridge across the Patuxent river, which is not more than forty feet in width at White Marsh, on the Collington route, would not cost more than \$12,000.

It is also claimed that it would be necessary to condemn about four miles before the road could be opened and that it would only serve less than thirty square miles and would parallel an existing state road about five miles distant. [“‘Old Stage’ Road Is Favored Road,” *The Evening Star*, March 1, 1916]

### **Battle of the Letters**

The Mudd bill did not specify the route of the National Defense Highway. The Duvall bill in the State Senate had specified the Old Stage Road.

On March 14, the *Sun* published a letter from “Taxpayer,” based in Baltimore, who wanted to let legislators considering the Duvall bill know that “a road has already been built by the State from Washington to Hill’s Bridge, on the Patuxent river, and all that is necessary is the building of about six miles of road from Hill’s Bridge to the Mount Zion Crossroads, which would connect at that point with the state road leading from Solomons Island to Annapolis, and on to Baltimore”:

Could there be anything more preposterous than the building of two State roads between two noncommercial cities, and could there be a more reckless waste of the taxpayers’ money, and would the Legislature consider for a minute a proposition to build another road between Baltimore and Washington?

He thought the answer was no. Taxpayers from the two counties “would protest against any such useless waste of the State’s money”:

The people who are asking for this appropriation are the same, I imagine, who were beaten by the Roads Commission, and later by the courts, in their efforts to build by a former appropriation this same old stage road. The road would be used entirely by pleasure seekers, and, is, therefore, not a necessity. The other road, nearly completed, is only a matter of a few minutes farther, and pleasure seekers have plenty of time. [“Says The Proposed Road Is In The Interest of Pleasure Seekers,” *The Baltimore Sun*, March 14, 1916]

Taxpayer’s comment about the courts referred to what was called the “Old Stage Road Case.” The case, initiated in 1914, turned on the fact that the SRC had identified several roads in Prince George’s County for inclusion in the State highway system: (1) from Charles County to Washington; (2) a road from Upper Marlboro to Washington, (3) the Central Avenue road from the District of Columbia to Queen Anne or Hardesty; and (4) the Old Stage Road from Bladensburg to Annapolis. After improving or letting contracts for the first three, SRC had let \$63,000 in contracts for a 3-mile road from Meadows to Camp Spring and the road from Upper Marlboro to Hills Bridge. The plaintiffs from Anne Arundel and Prince George’s Counties, including Judge Magruder, sought an injunction to require the SRC to improve the roads in the original order, with the Old Stage Road being next. Plaintiffs contended that the two roads the SRC was planning to improve were secondary in importance to the Old Stage Road.

Judge Joseph R. Brashears of the Anne Arundel Circuit Court denied the injunction on December 18, 1914, finding that the SRC had the discretion under State law to decide the order of road improvements. Plaintiffs appealed the ruling to the State Court of Appeals, which ruled on April 7, 1915, that Judge Brashears had ruled properly. ["Roads Commission Upheld," *The Baltimore Sun*, December 19, 1914; "Right To Make Decision," *The Evening Star*, December 18, 1914; "Wait on A Decision In Road Work Suit," *The Sunday Star*, December 7, 1915; "Road Commission Upheld," *The Baltimore Sun*, April 8, 1915]

In the Letters to the Editor column, the *Sun* carried a letter on March 18 from "Another Taxpayer," this one from Fort Howard in Baltimore County along the lower Patapsco River on Chesapeake Bay. In Another Taxpayer's view, the road Senator Duval proposed "is a most urgent necessity and those advocating it are not prompted by pleasure-seeking motives":

Pleasure seekers can more easily spare the "few minutes" required to travel the additional 11 miles via Hill's Bridge than the people along the Stage road, who need a highway that will serve their sections of the counties concerned, and need it badly.

As for the Old Stage Road Case, Another Taxpayer agreed that advocates for the road were "beaten" by the SRC and later in the courts:

In the first instance the term "beaten" may be construed literally, and in the second the court ruled adversely because the law gave such discretionary powers to the commission that it could and did ignore the natural route for a road connecting the cities of Annapolis and Washington, and constructed the one mentioned via Hill's Bridge, which increased the distance to be traveled by about 11 miles. ["Contends The Road From Bladensburg To Annapolis Is Badly Needed," *The Baltimore Sun*, March 18, 1916]

"G.S.M." of Lanham also objected to Taxpayer's views. If Taxpayer had been in Annapolis in late February, "he would have seen the greatest number of horny-handed, red-necked sons of the soil that ever came together in advocacy of a single agricultural question." Over 500 farmers from Anne Arundel and Prince George's Counties had come to the State capitol representing "a vast tract of Maryland's fertile soil, comprising more than 90 square miles, protesting that present conditions made their only road to their markets closed for four months of every year."

In G.S.M.'s view, Taxpayer had lost sight of a simple fact. Improving the route via Hill's Bridge would open it to so much traffic that the SRC would be compelled to reconstruct the South River bridge, "which alone the State Roads Commission has already estimated will cost the State more than the construction of the old stage road in its entirety." G.S.M. concluded:

I, too, am a taxpayer and have been one for nearly 40 years, and I live on the most damnable road in all Maryland, and I am also one of those horny-handed, red-necks who had outlived his patience and now demands justice: something for my taxes besides permission to exist. ["Not For Pleasure-Seekers, But For Horny-Handed Sons Of Toil," *The Baltimore Sun*, March 20, 1916]



The original Taxpayer from Baltimore replied by letter published on March 21. It began by noting that Another Taxpayer thought the improved Old Stage Road was “badly needed,” but gave no reasons why:

If it is so badly needed now as a State road, why was it abandoned years ago (as I have been informed it has been) as a county road. The first State road built in Prince George’s county was from the county seat, Marlboro, to Washington, and all that is needed now to complete the road to Annapolis is the link from Hills Bridge to the State road in Anne Arundel county, a distance of about six miles, and which has already been surveyed.

Why, then, go back to Bladensburg, a distance of 16 miles, to build a road across Prince George’s county almost parallel with the one already built, and only at an average distance of about eight miles apart.

Another Taxpayer misunderstood Taxpayer’s meaning in saying that those advocating the Old Stage Road were doing so for pleasure-seeking motives. As far as Taxpayer was concerned, “the road would be used almost exclusively by pleasure-seekers. The road could be of no public benefit.”

He added that “those behind the scheme are asking this enormous appropriation for no other purpose than to build a road that will enhance land values along the promised road.” He concluded, “If the Legislature is so unwise as to make the appropriation asked for, the Governor should promptly eliminate the item from the appropriation bill.” [“Says The Road Is Not Needed,” Letters to the Editor, *The Baltimore Sun*, March 21, 1916]

C. C. Magruder, who had spoken in support of the Old Stage Road before the Committees on Finance and Ways and Means, took exception to Taxpayer’s claim that the road had been abandoned as a county road. In a letter published on April 23, Magruder wrote, “It has never been abandoned as a county road” as reflected in a quote from the SRC’s answer when the Old Stage Road Case reached the State Court of Appeals:

In answer to the second paragraph of said bill of complaint, the defendants neither admit nor deny the allegation that the construction of the “Old Stage Road” will be a great public benefit to the taxpayers of Anne Arundel county, but put the complainants to the proof thereof. The defendants deny that it is their intention not to construct any part of the Old Stage road at any time and to abandon it altogether, but state that it is not their intention to construct it at the present time or out of the funds now applicable for road construction in Prince George’s county. [“Mr. Magruder Contradicts An Assertion by ‘Taxpayer,’” *The Baltimore Sun*, March 23, 1916]

On March 24, the *Sun* published a response to Taxpayer from Daniel B. Lloyd, who identified himself as a third generation reader of the *Sun* who lived in Glendale, Prince George’s County. Like Magruder, Lloyd contradicted the idea that the Old Stage Road had been abandoned as a county road. Instead, it “has been and is now being used both night and day for the purposes of a large traffic, and is, indeed, notwithstanding its chronically bad condition, one of the most largely traveled roads in our county.”

Lloyd also challenged Taxpayer's notion that those supporting the Old Stage Road were doing so to increase real estate values:

I beg indulgence to state but one of the main reasons why the road should now be constructed: It was selected as a part of the State roads system by the original Crothers Good Roads Commission of citizens of the two counties through which the road runs and a most careful consideration by them of the subject. Its construction would be but an act of tardy justice. ["Thinks The 'Old Stage Road' Should Be Converted Into 'The National Defense Highway,'" *The Baltimore Sun*, March 24, 1916]

In a letter published on March 27, Taxpayer admitted he had not anticipated that his original letter "would evoke so much adverse criticism." If the *Sun* would give him "space for a parting shot I will promise not to bother you again on this subject."

This time, he wanted to reply to G.S.M's letter citing agriculture as the reason for creating the National Defense Highway along the Old Stage Road. Taxpayer agreed that any section of Prince George's County is as entitled to a State road as any other. Those advocating the Old Stage Road "are those who are immediately adjacent to the road and a few politicians":

But if we undertake to build roads to Washington, or to any other city in the State for the agriculturists, we will have a network of roads and the State would become bankrupt. This road is solely advocated in the interest of Prince George's countians and they do not care a rap for Annapolis. All they want is a road to Washington. Annapolis had to be named, but Prince George's has no interest in Annapolis. If could not help them commercially or otherwise. If the matter could be submitted to the voters of Anne Arundel county and Prince George's county, or all of Southern Maryland for that matter, it would be overwhelmingly defeated.

In my humble opinion, no more iniquitous appropriation bill was ever introduced in the Legislature of Maryland and, if passed, no more iniquitous law could be placed upon the statute books of the State. If by any chance it should be passed we will submit to the Governor a map to show the utter uselessness of the road. ["The State And The Old Stage Road," *The Baltimore Sun*, March 27, 1916]

Taxpayer's "parting shot" prompted a "parting shot" from Daniel Lloyd. He challenged the assertion that support for the Old Stage Road comes only a few politicians and those living along the road:

Though I have some familiarity with road building both in this country and in Europe, I have heard of no country ever having been bankrupted by that means. I have sufficient confidence in the sense of fairness and justice of our fellow-Southern Marylanders to believe that the great majority of them favor our proposition. We in Prince George's county are honestly and enthusiastically in favor of a good road to the capital of our State as well as out of our county to the capital of the nation.

Lloyd, in considering the likelihood that the Governor would sign the bill, invoked Mark Twain's comment about the funeral of a man he disliked. If Twain wrote in *Roughin' It* (1872) that if he were in the territory when the funeral took place, he would "postpone all other recreations and attend." In the same sense, Lloyd wanted to be present when Taxpayer submitted his map to the Governor. ["Still Fighting For A Good Road," *The Baltimore Sun*, March 29, 1916]

Although Taxpayer and G.S.M had taken their parting shots, a new correspondent, E.M.K of Mitchellville in Prince George's County wanted to reply to G.S.M. E.M.K. doubted that G.S.M had ever worked a farm:

There are no farms around Lanham, and I don't think he can find over one or two from Buena Vista to Collington. All you will find after leaving one farm the other side of Collington is a barren section from there to Chesterfield.

If "G.S.M." will take a trip over Central avenue from Capitol Heights to Annapolis via Largo, Hall, Hardesty and Davidson, he could go home and tell friends he had been through a farming district – a road where 50 times as much produce is hauled to market as over the old stage road.

He wondered if G.S.M. could name a dozen farmers using the Old Stage Road. "How many of you tillers of the soil around Lanham own a horse?" The people living in Hyattsville, Bladensburg, all the way to Buena Vista were not tillers of the soil. Instead, "all the people in this section are office-holders":

And if it is not for pleasure seekers and to enhance the value of their land, what is it for? And in regard to the State construction of a bridge across South river, saying it will cost as much as the old stage road, the State will have to build this bridge, anyway, as the State road from Annapolis to Solomons Island crosses this bridge. ["No Farms There, He Says," *The Baltimore Sun*, April 3, 1916]

### **The Legislature Moves On**

The General Assembly approved the highway bill on April 4, 1916, as the session was coming to a close. Governor Emerson C. Harrington (January 12, 1916 – January 14, 1920), who had promised in his 1915 election campaign to construct the highway, approved the bill. It designated the "Old Stage Road" as the route and provided an appropriation of \$125,000, to be raised by a bond sale, contingent on Congress passing a companion bill providing a similar matching amount. ["Legislature Passes Defense Highway Bill," *The Evening Star*, April 4, 1916]

On April 6, Senator John Walter Smith (D-Md.) introduced S. 5401 in the United States Senate to fund the National Defense Highway. The bill authorized \$250,000 for the project, with the funds to be made available through the Department of Agriculture. As in Representative Mudd's bill, the State highway commission would be in charge of construction, but the work would be subject to inspection by the Agriculture Department. The bill was referred to the Committee on

Post Offices and Post Roads, which did not act on it. ["Bill Provides \$250,000 Toward Maryland Road," *The Evening Star*, April 6, 1916]

The *Post's* short article on the bill stated:

All members of the Maryland delegation in both houses of Congress are in favor of the plan, and it is exceedingly popular among residents of Maryland and the District. It also has the approval of officials of the War and Navy departments because of its value in time of stress for use as a military highway. The construction of an exceptionally good highway connecting the national capital and Annapolis was actually first favored by Federal leaders in 1796, but the plan has never been carried out. ["Annapolis Road in Favor," *The Washington Post*, April 7, 1916]

A few weeks later, Representative David J. Lewis (D-Md.) extolled the benefits of the Smith bill:

I am strongly in favor of Senator Smith's bill to have the government share with the state the cost of building the Washington-Annapolis highway. I voted for the Shackleford [Federal-aid] bill, giving government aid to the building and improvement of post roads on the line of the Shoemaker road law in Maryland. But the Smith bill particularly appeals to Marylanders, and ought to appeal to people generally on account of both its historical and direct military importance to the seat of government. The national wealth now is \$2,000 per capita and exceeds that of any other country by about 60 per cent. I do not know of any better use we can make of our surplus wealth than to put a part of it into the roads of the country, which, like Aaron's rod, striking the rock of our potential resources will respond with even greater wealth for our people.

Reporting on this statement, the *Star* observed:

Representative David J. Lewis of Maryland is proving to be as alert to the advantages of good roads, say motorists, as he is to the benefits of good telephonic, telegraphic, parcel post and express service for the country at large. ["Advocate of Good Roads," *The Sunday Star*, April 30, 1916]

Representative Mudd had put his bill aside while work on the Federal Aid Road Act was clearly moving toward a successful end. He realized that the dozens of bills for specific roads around the country would never emerge from committee. Instead, he expected that the general funds the new program would make available to Maryland provided the best opportunity to pay – at the Federal share of 50 percent of eligible costs – for the proposed road between Washington and Annapolis.

On July 20, Representative Mudd headed a delegation that met with the SRC to promote the combination of Federal-aid and State bond funds for the National Defense Highway. He had also visited Logan W. Page, director of the OPRRE, to promote the project. Mudd suggested that Page launch an experimental project – a common OPRRE activity – to improve the road. ["Mr. Mudd Is Working For Maryland Roads," *The Evening Star*, July 21, 1916; "Will Study Fast Ferry," *The Baltimore Sun*, July 21, 1916]

Maryland, according to the *Sun*, expected to receive \$44,000 in 1917 from the Federal Aid Road Act of 1916. Supporters urged the State to use this amount along with funds from the State's \$125,000 bond issue to build about 8 miles of the National Defense Highway. Future Federal-aid funds could be used in a similar way. The Reverend Michael Hogan of the Church of the Ascension in Bowie urged the SRC to use the funds for this purpose:

If the work is undertaken, Father Hogan has agreed to furnish free of cost all the gravel that will be needed to build 10 miles of the road, and to furnish gravel for the remainder at a nominal figure, say 10 cents a yard . . . . This offer would cut down the cost of building the road materially. An abundance of excellent sand, he says, can be had along the line of the proposed road for practically nothing; so that for 10 miles of the road, at least, the material cost would be only for cement. ["To Promote Highway," *The Baltimore Sun*, July 28, 1916]

### **Lost in the Lowlands**

On July 25, 1916, the *Star* dispatched its automobile editor, Howard S. Fisk, on a ride "to secure accurate information as to the mileage, condition, etc., of the roads between the National Capital and Annapolis, Md." Although Fisk knew that "conditions were far from being ideal," he thought the information might be helpful to motorists interested in touring. However, the main purpose was "securing information that might later aid in the improvement of the roads in this section of Maryland." Fisk's companions were D. Brailey Gish, who was the primary driver, and Louis Ledyard Kaess, in a Haynes "Light Six" automobile.

Fisk summarized the journey in his opening paragraph:

"Lost in the lowlands of Prince Georges County in a cloudburst" would be an excellent title for a story of a trailblazing trip made a few days ago under conditions that would tear the heart strings of the most hardened motorist. It is hard to find words that would tend to describe the real road conditions encountered and the experience which the members of the pathfinding party went through. While the condition of the road was partially to blame for some of the strenuous experience, the heavy downpour put the finishing touches to the trip and came near causing a sad ending. Much delay was caused by being imbedded in an embankment, and, after being extricated, progress was extremely slow over the water-covered roads.

When the trio began their trip, "the weather was bright and clear." Beginning in northeast Washington, they drove to 15<sup>th</sup> and H Streets, NE., where they turned onto the Baltimore-Washington boulevard and headed toward Maryland. At the District line, they took "a good concrete road" to Bladensburg, 6.5 miles from their starting point.

Their plan was to follow the Old Stage Road, the long-established, direct route between the two capitals. Turning off the boulevard "at the blacksmith shop," they found "a good gravel highway, but this later turned into a red clay road." In several places, the road was "filled with water from the recent heavy rains," but they were not deterred. Taking the left fork at 9.5 miles, they followed the telegraph wires along "a typical country road" paralleling the Pennsylvania Railroad

tracks. At the Lanham post office, they turned to the right, crossing a bridge over the railroad tracks, then turned sharply to the right “with another set of telegraph wires,” and took the road that they “were informed leads to Bowie.”

Their first taste of the troubles to come came at 12.3 miles where “we saw two wooden rails about three inches above a broad expanse of muddy water which was rushing in torrents down stream.” They could tell that a bridge was between the rails, but were not certain of how high the water was above the bridge deck; they could not even be sure the deck was still there. Fearing the worst, they nevertheless “picked our way through the swift-moving torrents in the center of the two rails and when we felt the machine rolling over the wooden floor of the bridge the water came up to the floor boards.” They feared “a ducking,” but “came through safely on the other side.”

They found a “fairly good gravel road,” but as they continued they encountered a red clay surface. At 13.8 miles, the trio crossing the bridge over the tracks of the Baltimore, Washington, and Annapolis electric line near a station known as Buena Vista. They came to a fork in the road, with the right leading to Bright Seat and the left to Glendale.

At this point, the downpour began:

Side curtains were broken out and, with the rain beating in torrents against the windshield, we proceeded cautiously through the thickly wooded road ahead. It was almost impossible to see three feet ahead of the car on account of the rain. At 14 miles we crossed a wooden bridge, and at 14.5 miles kept straight ahead at the crossroads. We had proceeded just one mile, or 15.5 miles, to be exact by the odometer, when we were groping our way along the road, which had become darkened by the heavy clouds, that we cut off part of an embankment, hidden with underbrush, and landed in a ditch. And there we remained just exactly one hour and a half.

They saw no point in trying to extract their car from the ditch while the pouring rain continued to shift the mud around them.

The article was accompanied by a photograph of their plight. The caption read: “It was owing to the almost completely hidden road due to heavy shrubbery and underbrush that the Haynes chopped off the side of a hill and was ditched just beyond Glen Dale, Md.”

When the rain finally let up, the trio had a stroke of luck. While Gish and Fisk tried to dig the wheels out of the mud, Kaess went looking for help – preferably help with horses:

Luckily, the mishap occurred a short distance from the home of Judge Caleb C. Magruder, clerk of the court of appeals of Maryland.

Judge Magruder, with his son, came to our rescue and sent a farm hand along to assist the digging-out process. Armed with spade and hoe and two horses, block and tackle, all hands set to work, and within a short time the machine was back in the center of the road and preparations made for resuming our journey. Judge Magruder is one of the foremost

advocates for the national defense highway, which when completed will pass over the very road we had traveled, if it is constructed.

After their long delay, they made good progress following the telegraph wires, reaching Collington at 18.6 miles from their starting point:

Inquiry elicited the information that the road straight ahead led to Priests Bridge and Annapolis; to the right to Mitchellville and to the left to Bowie. Collington is about midway between Washington and Annapolis.

After a few forks in the road, they reached Priest Bridge at 22.1 miles, where the Patuxent River is the dividing line between Anne Arundel and Prince George's Counties. "We could hear the waters rushing beneath the bridge, showing that the heavy rains had caused the stream to swell considerably, as could be seen by the flooded lands on all sides."

They proceeded "through a thickly settled stretch of woods, and as the glaring electric headlights cast their shadow through the darkness all we could see everywhere was water, water, water." They would have turned back but a reversal was out of the question because "the road was scarcely wide enough for our machine to pass through beneath the overhanging trees, which surrounded us on all sides."

They had no way to know what problems they might encounter, but "there was nothing else for us to do but to risk it and shove on":

Dropping into low speed, we moved along cautiously, following the slight traces of the roadway, which we could see on the far shore from us and following an imaginary road line through the water.

In a few minutes, they reached "terra firma" and breathed a sigh of relief.

They crossed several bridges "and proceeded [sic] up a stiff gravel hill, taking the right fork at 21.8 miles. It was just beyond this last fork that we wandered through a water-bound section of the country and lost our way." They drove around trying to find the right road or the railroad tracks or the telegraph wires. "It is useless to specify the various forks and turns and crossroads from this time on, because we felt that we were retracing some of the road we had already gone over. In fact all roads looked alike to us that night."

They finally found telegraph wires that led to a railroad that led them into Millersville at 34.8 miles from their starting point:

We had been looking for the two hours previous for the town of Chesterfield. We are still looking for it but up to the present time it hasn't put in its appearance.

Giving up on their trip to Annapolis, the trio headed to Baltimore via the Baltimore-Annapolis boulevard. After enjoying a much-needed midnight supper in Baltimore, they returned home on the Baltimore-Washington boulevard. They had experienced several hours of rain-free travel, but rain returned, slowing their return trip.

Nevertheless, they finally reached Washington. “But as all had gone well, no accidents had occurred and no one felt any the worse for their experience, congratulations were in order”:

The Haynes stood the trip remarkably well, notwithstanding the fact that for miles and miles it was necessary to use low speed in order to get through the deep mud, which frequently covered the axles. The car was spattered with mud from stem to stern, and there was hardly an inch that was not hidden beneath the mud and clay from Prince Georges and Anne Arundel counties.

Fisk’s conclusion was:

As stated before, this trip is not intended for a pleasure trip for motorists, and anyone who takes it might meet with the same fate and not come through as lucky as did our run. There are lots of people who think that trailblazing is a “joy ride,” but this trip will soon convince them that it is far from being one. The writer has covered many thousands of miles of roads, but the Fredericksburg road through Chopawamsic swamp, below Dumfries, is a boulevard compared with the roads which we encountered on the trip just described. We hope that some day we will be able to ride over a fine state highway through this section, and then we will advise the motoring public of that fact. [Fisk, Howard S., “Blaze the Trail for Military Road,” *The Sunday Star*, July 30, 1916]

(The Fredericksburg road through Chopawamsic swamp was notorious during this era for impassability on the main East Coast road that would be combined into U.S. 1 in 1926.)

### **Getting to Construction**

On August 19, 1916, the SRC held a hearing for a large delegation from Prince George’s and Anne Arundel Counties in Maryland and the District of Columbia regarding improvement of the road between Washington and Annapolis. Speakers included members of the State legislature, Judge Magruder, representatives of the Automobile Club, prominent Washington attorney Thomas P. Littlepage, and Father Hogan, who repeated his offer of free gravel for 15 miles of road.

All stressed the need for a better, shorter road between the cities, particularly as part of the war preparedness program. During the presidential election, President Wilson campaigned on keeping the United States out of the European war, but the need for preparedness had prompted Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels to write to the commission in support of the proposed project.

Although the new State law was contingent on securing an equal amount of funds from the Federal Government, the speakers understood that the bills introduced in the House and Senate would not be considered in view of enactment of the Federal Aid Road Act of 1916 a month earlier. Maryland’s total funding over the course of the multi-year bill was estimated at \$650,000. The focus, therefore, was on securing as much of this Federal-aid highway funding as possible for the National Defense Highway. The *Sun* summarized the speakers’ views:



The delegation which appeared before the Roads Commission asked that part of Maryland's share of the Federal funds be applied to the road. The State will receive \$44,000 in 1917 and \$88,000 in 1918 and larger installments each year thereafter until the total apportionment to the State is exhausted. The application of those sums to the road, plus such sums as the State could apply, would complete the roads within a couple of years.

The *Star* published excerpts from Littlepage's speech:

No single road is of more importance to the state of Maryland, the government of the United States or the city of Washington than the old National stage road. It connects the capital of the United States with the capital of Maryland, where is located the United States Naval Academy, which has in charge the training of all of the United States naval officers. In case of a European war the defense of the army of the United States is of no more importance than the defense of the United States Naval Academy, where the United States sailors are trained.

If the European war has demonstrated one thing over another it has shown that next to preparedness of its citizens is the preparedness of the means of quick transportation, both from the standpoint of public roads and railroads. If one thing more than another can be pointed out for the success of the Germans, so far, in the present war it is their modes of transportation and the movement of armies and artillery from one place to another.

Aside from all the questions of national importance, however, is the importance of this road to the state of Maryland. No nation or state can excel whose rural population does not succeed, and while it is boasted throughout the country today of the back-to-the-farm movement, the fact remains, nevertheless, that for every individual who goes back to the farm there are ten that leave the farms for the cities.

The high cost of living will be an ever-increasing problem until the suburban and rural sections are better developed. The standard of American citizenship depends not so much upon the cities as upon the rural sections which furnish the food supply to those cities, and the time has come when the American citizen will not live in the country unless he has at his command the average means of transportation.

For this reason no state can hope to stay long at the top of the list of progressive states, with high citizenship, that does not realize the supreme importance of the improvement of public roads.

The *Sun* summarized the commission's response:

The Roads Commission promised to give the matter careful thought. Chairman [Frank H.] Zouch pointed out that there would be demands from all sections of the State for part of the Federal funds, and that there are other demands for the shares of Anne Arundel and Prince George's county in the State funds – from which shares any State aid to the road would have to come. But, notwithstanding these facts, the commission

seemed impressed deeply with the arguments made for the road. [“Defense Highway Urged,” *The Baltimore Sun*, August 20, 1916; “Highway For Defense to Annapolis Urged,” *The Evening Star*, August 19, 1916]

The *Sun* supported the National Defense Highway in an editorial on September 2. The idea “has much to commend it”:

The road is sorely needed, and its condition is now such that it is almost impassable; and there is no question but there should be a good road, available not only for military use in time of stress between the capital of the nation and the great school of the navy at Annapolis, but also for ordinary traffic in times of peace.

The editors commended Representative Mudd and Senator Smith for introducing bills in Congress to fund the road. “These bills have little or no chance of passage in view of the action of Congress in passing the Shackleford Good Roads bill.” They agreed that Maryland’s share of the funds should be used for the road “unless some legal technicalities should be set up to prevent [it]”:

If it should be done, it would provide a highway much needed in the territory between Washington and Annapolis and a valuable addition to the State’s system of roads. The State Roads Commission should give this matter careful consideration. [“The National Defense Highway,” *The Baltimore Sun*, September 2, 1916]

On September 6, Representative Mudd gave a short speech indicating he would renew his efforts to secure passage of his National Defense Highway bill, as well as a bill he would introduce when Congress returned in December linking Washington with the big smokeless powder manufacturing plant at Indian Head, Maryland, via the Indianhead Military Road (H.R. 17768). The *Sun* summarized:

Mr. Mudd declared that there were abundant precedents for Federal aid in the building of the highway. He cited cases of the Federal Government constructing military roads from large centres [sic] to national cemeteries. He also pointed out that the proposed Washington-Annapolis military highway would not only connect Washington with the Chesapeake Bay but would give the Government a splendid boulevard from Washington to Indian Head, where the Government has spent millions.

“The State of Maryland has certainly done its part in road work,” said Mr. Mudd, “having spent upward of \$20,000,000 in build a system of magnificent turnpike roads throughout the State, covering the main arteries of its territories.” [“To Renew Fight For Roads,” *The Baltimore Sun*, September 7, 1916]

Neither bill was considered in Congress and they died when the 64<sup>th</sup> Congress ended on March 4, 1917.

The OPPRE released regulations for administering the new Federal-aid highway program on September 1, 1916. Given the failure of the National Defense Highway bills in Congress, advocates could only speculate on whether the wording of the State law enacted earlier in the

year would allow the State funds from the bond sale to be matched by Federal-aid highway funds authorized for general highway improvements by the 1916 Federal-Aid law, but not specifically for the National Defense Highway.

Leon E. Greenbaum, the SRC's counsel, offered an opinion that use of the Federal-aid funds with the State match would be warranted by the State law. However, Chairman Zouch did not think the matching of the Federal-aid funds with the bond issue funds would be necessary. Sufficient State funds were available under the State's general road law:

He says that there is no question but that the Government would approve of the spending of the \$44,000 on the National Defense Highway and that there is now available \$109,000 of the allotment of State road funds to Prince George's county for the construction of that part of the highway that lies in the county. He has ordered immediate surveys made of the road and it is the plan, unless something unforeseen happens to prevent [it], to begin the construction of the road next spring. The road, it is expected, will be well under way by the time the next Legislature meets, and at that time, it is believed, the Legislature will be willing to remove the conditions from its appropriation of \$125,000 for the highway and allow it to be used for the completion of the road. ["Backing New Road Plan," *The Baltimore Sun*, September 16, 1916]

On September 27, the SRC agreed to use half of the State's Federal-aid highway funds on the National Defense Highway. Governor Harrington, who was present, endorsed the plan, calling the highway a necessary link in the State's arterial system of highways. Although supporters had brought pressure on the SRC to use all the Federal-aid funds on the highway, the commission concluded that dividing the funds would be best. The members were satisfied that sufficient funds would be available as needed for the multi-year construction project.

The SRC, which had not yet completed the survey, expected to build the highway with a concrete pavement. It would be wider than the average State road, with a thicker pavement to accommodate the passage of heavy military traffic if the country went to war. The project was expected to cost \$15,000 a mile. ["For Defense Highway," *The Baltimore Sun*, September 28, 1916]

Chief Engineer Henry G. Shirley – formerly chief engineer in Baltimore County, he was a national figure who had served as president of the American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHTO) during the first 2 years after its formation in 1914 – stated:

Under the recently enacted federal aid road law, the state of Maryland will receive about \$600,000 of federal funds in the next five years. The principal road upon which it is expected that these funds will be expended is one leading from Washington to Annapolis. It is known as the Old Stage Road, or the National Defense Highway, and is about 25 miles long. The estimated cost is \$375,000. [Shirley, Henry G., "A Resume of Maryland Highway Work," *Good Roads*, November 4, 1916, pages 184-185]

Reflecting the importance of the National Defense Highway, Governor Harrington and two State road commissioners, Chairman Zouch and John E. George, drove an automobile over the route

on Friday, December 8, 1916, a day free of the rain storms that had disrupted the *Star's* trip in July. *The Sunday Star* described the trip:

The journey was one of inspection, and the governor expressed pleasure not only at the practicability of the route as a defense measure, but also at its possibilities for development of the remoter sections [sic] of Anne Arundel and Prince Georges counties.

The State now estimated the road, to be paved with concrete, would cost \$500,000, to be split 50-50 with the Federal Government under the new road program. The 30-mile road was equally split between the two counties. However, the cost of construction was expected to be higher in Anne Arundel County than in Prince George's County because, as the *Sun* put it, "Anne Arundel is honeycombed with hills, which will require much grading." The cost will be reduced because "there is already a Government road from Annapolis to Camp Parole, a distance of about 4½ miles," thus leaving only 10½ miles to be built:

Rights of way will have to be secured in many places, particularly in Anne Arundel, because to follow the old stage coach road, which has many curves and grades, would be more costly than to obtain new rights of way. It is presumed that exorbitant prices will not be asked, for a highway of this kind would be of great advantage to the farmers. There are thousands of acres of arable land which are now going practically undeveloped, owing, it is said, to the lack of transportation facilities.

The lack of railroad facilities is one of the reasons why the highway will prove an expensive proposition. There is no railroad which touches the proposed highway in Anne Arundel. Material will have to be hauled from Camp Parole to points of distribution. Prince George's is better off. There are three lines – the Rogers Creek branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad, at Collington, the main line of the Pennsylvania at Lanham and the Baltimore and Ohio, at Hyattsville – which can transport materials.

Governor Harrington stopped to see Judge Magruder, who offered refreshments for the group. "Mr. Magruder rode with the Governor to Hyattsville and introduced him to various citizens there, all of whom expressed approval of the new road plan." ["Governor Studies Road," *The Baltimore Sun*, December 9, 1916; "Defense Highway Route Is Given an Inspection," *The Sunday Star*, December 10, 1916]

In view of these comments, "A Taxpayer" from Mitchellville questioned the decision to upgrade the Old Stage Road. (Whether this Taxpayer was E.M.K. from the earlier letter exchanges is unknown.) In a letter to the editor of the *Sun* dated December 11, he wrote:

In the spring of 1916 I was a member of a delegation of 100 men which went before the Governor in behalf of Central avenue [as the] State road between Washington and Annapolis. I heard Governor Harrington promise that all roads which had been begun would be completed before any State money was put in new ones. Central avenue, the shortest route between Washington and Annapolis, passes through the most fertile farming districts of Southern Maryland. The old State [Stage] road passes through one of the poorest sections, and many of the people are office holders, traveling on electric cars,

and are not farmers. Central avenue is completed from Washington to Largo with fine concrete, and with only 14 more miles would link with concrete road at South River, completing the highway to Annapolis.

Hundreds of thousands of dollars could thus have been saved. Excellent gravel beds are along this road, which crosses the Pennsylvania railroad at Hall's Station, providing facility for transportation. If Central avenue is the shortest and most practical road, why was the old stage road selected? The only conclusion the taxpayers of Southern Maryland can come to is that the Governor and the State Roads Commission are ruled by a few politicians and have selected the old stage road to please these politicians. ["Did Governor Harrison And State Roads Commission Show Good Judgment In Selecting The Old Stage Road?" *The Baltimore Sun*, December 15, 1916]

In early February, the SRC met in Baltimore, with Governor Harrington in attendance, to formally select the projects to be advanced under the Federal-aid program. The *Star* described the National Defense Highway as the "most important road" between the "splendid concrete road" from Annapolis to Camp Parole and the "macadamized roadway from Bladensburg to this city." ["Governor of Maryland Is Interested in Roads," *The Sunday Star*, February 18, 1917]

Two months later, on April 2, 1917, President Wilson appeared before a joint session of Congress to announce his decision that the United States must join Great Britain and France in the war against Germany and its allies. "It is a fearful thing to lead this great peaceful people into war, into the most terrible and disastrous of all wars, civilization itself seeming to be in the balance. But the right is more precious than peace."

The new Federal-aid highway program ground to a near halt. Engineers and construction workers enlisted in the war effort, while the railroads were needed to ship war materials rather than road materials. Funds and official attention were diverted to the war. According to *America's Highways 1776-1976*:

By July 1918, the OPRRE had approved 572 projects, totaling 6,249 miles in length, estimated to cost \$42.28 million, of which \$16.05 million was Federal aid. However, only five projects, totally 17.6 miles, had actually been completed. [*America's Highways 1776-1976*, Federal Highway Administration, page 100]

Although Maryland had to put off construction of the National Defense Highway, State Senator Oliver Metzertott of Prince George's County introduced a bill in early March 1918 urging immediate construction of the road. The *Star* reported:

It provides that the work of construction be commenced at Bladensburg, where the road will connect with the Washington-Baltimore boulevard, and Camp Parole, where it will connect with the Annapolis-Southern Maryland pike. ["Metzertott Bill Calls For Annapolis Highway," *The Sunday Star*, March 24, 1918]

In May 1919, citizens and officials in Prince George's County decided that the planned National Defense Highway should be dedicated as a memorial to the war dead from the county. "A

calvary cross, 20 feet high, will be erected at Bladensburg and the names of the county heroes will be inscribed on a bronze tablet.” John H. Riggles, head of the National Defense Highway and Memorial Cross Association, and Mrs. Edgar Brown, head of the women’s committee for the memorial, expected a dedication ceremony in July 1919. They were inviting Governor Harrington, Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, Secretary of the Navy Daniels, and other dignitaries. [“Highway To Be Memorial,” *The Washington Post*, May 26, 1919; “Prince Georges Plans War Memorial Cross,” *The Evening Star*, June 2, 1919]

(Riggles, a first class at Washington’s Navy Yard, was president of the Prince George’s County Good Road Association. In the years ahead, he would regularly urge the SRC to advance the National Defense Highway – often announcing SRC’s plans to reporters.)

Although the bill was not approved, the State had awarded one contract for the highway by the war’s end with an armistice approved on November 11, 1919. The SRC advertised a contract in April 1919 for the 1.63-mile section between Bladensburg and Bailey’s House. In early May, the State awarded the contract to Pier Construction Company of Baltimore. The new section near Bladensburg would be 16 feet wide, straight, with grades no higher than 4 percent. The project, to be completed in 90 days, also would eliminate Simon’s Hill, which the *Star* called “the terror of automobilists.”

The article added that:

Two years ago, \$125,000 was appropriated for the beginning of the highway from Bladensburg to Annapolis, but that sum was diverted to road work on the eastern shore.

The *Post* began its article about the contract optimistically:

After a twelve-years fight for the “Defense Highway,” from Bladensburg to Annapolis, by the American Automobile Association and others, the project is now at the eve of fulfilment. [“Defense Highway’ Soon,” *The Washington Post*, May 1, 1919]

However, the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) delayed installation of sewer and water pipes needed prior to the start of construction. By the time the highway work could resume in the fall, the State had added nine-tenths of a mile to the contract. In addition, the SRC advertised a contract for construction of the section from Camp Parole in the direction of Chesterfield.

The *Star* added, “Gov. Harrington has given assurances that this highway will be constructed without delay and its friends are hoping . . . the highway [is] completed before cold weather sets in.” [“Road Bids To Be Opened,” *The Sunday Star*, August 24, 1919]

## **Moving Forward**

By January 1920, the State had made little progress on the National Defense Highway. As the *Star* put it, despite designation of the road as part of the State road system in 1909, work had not begun on the project until the spring of 1919 “for one reason and another.” Even then, the initial Pier contract had been delayed by a “scarcity of labor and one or two other unforeseen

conditions.” In the fall, Pier was able to undertake only the most preliminary work on the initial contract. The second contract, for construction of a 1-mile section west of Camp Parole, also had been delayed into the new year.

Work resumed in earnest on March 10, 1920, with the hope that construction would reach Lanham, Maryland (just beyond the modern day Capital Beltway) by year’s end.

Governor Harrington’s term ended in January 1920, with his successor, Governor Albert C. Ritchie, taking office. He would remain in office for 15 years, leaving on January 9, 1935, after losing his 1934 reelection bid. According to the SRC’s official history:

For his chairman of the Roads Commission the Governor selected John N. Mackall, the career-man who had been made chief engineer just two years before . . . . The nine years of the Mackall administration were the boom years for Maryland and America – the Boom that preceded the Bust. [*A History of Road Building in Maryland*, page 69]

Early in the year, Governor Ritchie received a letter from Navy Secretary Daniels urging construction of the National Defense Highway. Secretary Daniels wrote that expansion of the Naval Academy necessitated “much more travel and the carrying of greater quantities of supplies, [making] the construction of this road one of interest to the Naval Academy as well as to the people of your state.” He hoped that “construction of this road may be undertaken and speedily carried on under your administration.” [“Bladensburg-Annapolis ‘Defense’ Road May Reach Lanham in 1920,” *The Evening Star*, March 11, 1920; “Road Bids To Be Opened,” *The Sunday Star*, 1919; “Mr. Daniels Urges Early Finishing of Defense Road,” *The Sunday Star*, March 21, 1920]

John Riggles also pressured Governor Ritchie to complete the highway. Riggles wrote, “As you know, the National Defense Highway from Bladensburg to Annapolis has been dedicated to the heroes of our world war.” He urged Governor Ritchie to use his influence to complete the highway as far as Seabrook. Riggles also planned a formal protest to the governor for failure to award a contract for another 2 miles of the highway that could be completed before winter. He also invited the WSSC to explain its delay in laying water mains along the route of the highway. [“Asks Road Be Extended,” *The Evening Star*, June 1, 1920; “Plans Road Protest,” *The Evening Star*, August 30, 1920]

With the war over and the Federal-aid highway program beginning to function normally again, Maryland was able to increase the pace of construction on the National Defense Highway.

In April 1921, the SRC awarded a contract to Horace A. Brown and Company of Baltimore for improving a little over a mile of the National Defense Highway from Bladensburg toward Lanham. At the same time, the SRC awarded a contract to continue improvement of Central Avenue for over a mile toward Halls Station. [“Begins Defense Highway,” *The Evening Star*, April 30, 1921]

After continuation of this incremental approach, the *Star* reported in April 1924:

At present about nine miles of the road have been paved with concrete, leaving a dirt span of seventeen miles . . . . The Defense highway begins at Bladensburg and if paved would cut the distance from Washington to Annapolis by automobile almost in half. At present motorists are obliged to travel forty-two miles via Upper Marlboro to reach the Maryland capital as the unfinished span of the Defense highway is impassable in winter.

The occasion for this summary was a statement by Riggles indicating that the SRC planned to award contracts in early spring to pave 2 miles on the Washington end and 4 miles on the Annapolis end of the National Defense Highway. [“Defense Highway Link To Be Paved,” *The Evening Star*, April 13, 1924]

## **Completed**

In February 1925, the Anne Arundel County commissioners “voted to divert the county’s entire proportion of the lateral road funds for this year toward completion of the National Defense Highway.” As the *Post* reported, county officials hoped this action would advance the project to completion 2 years earlier than the SRC planned.

The SRC accepted the county’s decision and decided to devote its Federal-aid highway funds to completing the road in the two counties. [“Will Hurry Building Of Road To Capital,” *The Washington Post*, February 18, 1925; “Defense Highway Work Speeded Up,” *The Evening Star*, Marcy 12, 1925]

In July 1925, the road took an important step forward with completion of the Priest Bridge structure over the Patuxent River. The new bridge was a 216-foot reinforced concrete girder bridge, consisting of six spans. It would carry the National Defense Highway and Robert Crain Highway (Baltimore to Bowie) over the river. A mile of concrete roadway also opened on the Annapolis end of the National Defense Highway. [“Patuxent River Bridge Is Opened,” *The Evening Star*, July 26, 1925]

(The 32-mile Robert Crain Highway, named for an attorney from Charles County who was its chief advocate, “set out boldly on a direct route to connect Baltimore with deep Southern Maryland.” Construction of the highway between Benfield in Anne Arundel County and Mattawoman in Charles County began on September 30, 1922, “with ground-breaking ceremonies at Upper Marlboro, where a monument was erected by private interests to commemorate the event.” Designed by Baltimore architect Howard Sill, the Crain Highway Monument was erected by the Southern Maryland Society and the Merchants and Manufacturers Association of Baltimore. Standing about 30 feet high, the monument is located in an oval median at the intersection of Marlboro Pike, Old Crain Highway, and Main Street.)

(The SRC completed the project in 5 years at a cost of \$1,250,000. On October 22, 1927, the Robert Crain Highway “was opened with pomp and ceremony befitting the occasion – said to have been the most elaborate road opening conducted by the Commission before or since.” Governor Ritchie clipped a ribbon at Priest Bridge and led a caravan of automobiles to the dedication ceremony held at the Marlboro Fair Grounds where an estimated 18,000 people listened to speeches by Governor Ritchie, Chairman Mackall, and Robert Crain. At Benfield, the



new highway connected with the General's Highway to Baltimore, creating a 75-mile link. The Crain Highway was included in U.S. 301. [*A History of Road Building in Maryland*, page 72-73; "18,000 Marylanders Join In Dedication Of New Crain Road," *The Washington Post*, October 23, 1929)]

In February 1926, SRC Chairman Mackall responded to a petition from local officials who were concerned that no funds were available to complete the road. The SRC, he explained, could not proceed until the 1927 State legislature appropriated road funds. On May 18, Anne Arundel County commissioners adopted a resolution loaning \$100,000 to the SRC to build 2.41 miles of the National Defense Highway in the county. The SRC agreed to the loan with the understanding that it would return the county's funds as soon as funds became available. Ultimately, James A. Walton, president of the Annapolis Bank and Trust Company, and other leading citizens took out a personal loan of \$100,000 to complete the highway. ["Road Fund Exhausted," *The Evening Star*, February 28, 1926; "County Provides Fund For Defense Highway," *The Washington Post*, May 19, 1926]

This help spurred leading citizens of Prince George's County to borrow \$80,000 on personal notes and transferred the funds to the SRC to complete the National Defense Highway later that year. In all the county's contributed \$180,000 to complete the road.

The SRC completed the roadbed on November 26, 1926, but it would remain closed until December 22, 1926, to allow the concrete to settle. The final 5.47-mile section in Anne Arundel County intersected the Robert Crain Highway near the new Priest Bridge structure. The entire 24.08-mile project cost \$840,000 or \$35,000 a mile. Because of the time of year, the SRC opened the route near Christmas without ceremony.

Actually, the new road included a detour at Collington where construction of a grade-separation bridge had not been completed over the Pope's Creek branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad. The detour was over "a cinder road in good condition."

The *Star* recalled the contribution of Judge C. C. Magruder, who had died at the age of 84 on June 2, 1923:

The late C. C. Magruder, clerk of the Court of Appeals at Annapolis for many years, was the first to advocate the building of a direct road connecting the National Capital with the seat of the United States Naval Academy.

Mr. Magruder first sought to have the State Legislature pass a bill appropriating the money to build the road, and, failing, he later tried to get the Congress of the United States to grant the necessary funds.

When this gesture also proved unsuccessful, he took the matter before the State Roads Commission and finally succeeded in having that body agree to apportion a certain amount of the annual allotment of State roads funds to Prince Georges and Anne Arundel Counties for the construction of the road.

The *Star* also noted the county contributions:

Had not the counties advanced the money necessary for the work this Fall, the opening of the road would have been delayed for more than a year. No appropriation from the State Treasury could have been made until next June. ["Work is Completed on Defense Highway," *The Washington Post*, November 27, 1926; "Defense Highway Completed Will Be Opened December 23," *The Sunday Star*, December 12, 1926; "12 Miles Saved By New Highway," *The Evening Star*, December 19, 1926]

With the opening of Defense Highway, the route along Central Avenue to Upper Marlboro ceased to be the main road between Annapolis and the District of Columbia. This change in status was reflected in the decision to designate the National Defense Highway as part of the U.S. numbered highway system. When AASHO approved the original routes and numbers in November 1926, the Defense Highway became part of U.S. 50, a road from Annapolis to a junction with U.S. 40 in Wadsworth, Nevada (the original termini). Defense Highway/U.S. 50 met the Baltimore Pike/U.S. 1 at Bladensburg, with the combined routes following Bladensburg Road into the city.

AAA's District edition of *American Motorist* called the opening of Defense Highway "an epochal event to the Washington motorist" because "it cut the distance in this favorite playground nearly in half and has reduced the driving time to three-quarters of an hour." Construction had its share of challenges:

The swamps presented the gravest problem and are the reason for the apparently slow construction of the highway. These places had to be filled in with logs and ground; and then the engineers had to wait patiently for the settling of the fill-in material. Several bridges and the elimination of grade crossings boosted the cost of the project.

In addition, the article cited the funding crisis that would have delayed construction by another year if the two counties had not loaned the needed funds to the State in 1926, without interest, to keep construction going.

The magazine described the drive:

At places the road runs through almost virgin forest and what seem to be impenetrable swamps. But this ribbon of concrete rises and falls, twists and turns and virtually pushes its way through forest and swamp until it emerges upon the slope leading toward the Severn River and the Chesapeake Bay.

Somewhat bare in winter but by no means colorless because of its scattered evergreens and holly, the Defense Highway will be one of the most beautiful drives out of Washington during the spring, summer and fall.

However, the magazine noted some safety problems:

Because of the nature of the country through which the road runs the highway is not by any means devoid of curves. This factor, however, helps to make the drive exceedingly interesting . . . . Motorists who go over the road at the present time should be careful of the shoulders and the curves. The sandy soil of this particular territory is extremely

heavy, so that it is the part of wisdom to keep one's wheels on the concrete. Guard rails have not yet been constructed on the curves, so that it is also wise to approach these cautiously. ["A Capital at Each End" and "Where the Defense Highway Ends," *American Motorist*, District of Columbia Edition, January 1927, pages 8F, 8G]

Maryland and District of Columbia officials staged the formal dedication of the National Defense Highway on July 16, 1927. The event took place on the portico of the Pigeon House Tavern near the new Priest Bridge. Former Governor Harrington, who had signed the legislation authorizing the road, explained that the World War had delayed construction:

This highway is dedicated to public service and not only is it a direct road to Washington and Annapolis, but it brings the tidewater counties of the Maryland Eastern Shore closer, with its many advantages of seashore and agriculture. The road will stimulate increasing trade with the National Capital. The farmers of the Eastern Shore already have a healthy market in the District.

Rear Admiral John Halligan, representing the Navy Secretary, said the road not only brought the Naval Academy in Annapolis and the Navy Department in Washington closer, but would make Annapolis and the academy closer for tourists.

District Commissioner Proctor L. Dougherty described the history of Annapolis dating to 1650 and the Battle of Bladensburg in 1812. The Defense Highway was well "named, running through country replete with historical interests":

The new road connects two of the most important capitals, and will bring the people of Maryland and the District of Columbia in closer harmony with each other and to their mutual advantage as years go on.

Several participants paid tribute to C. C. Magruder; his son Hampton was the master of ceremonies. The *Post* summarized his speech:

Hampton Magruder declared that the occasion was eminently fitting, as it was on March 21, 1791, that George Washington left Philadelphia for a tour of the Southern States, and followed from Annapolis to Washington the old stage road, which is practically the same route followed today by the Defense Highway, with the exception of a few cuts.

He described how the bill creating the artery was introduced in the Maryland Legislature by Senator Frank Duvall, of Anne Arundel County, and the signing of the measure by Gov. Harrington . . . .

Magruder expressed deep regret that his father, who worked so zealously for the highway, passed away before he was to realize his life's ambition.

(President Washington's southern tour – from the capital at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to Augusta, Georgia – brought him to Annapolis on March 25-26, 1791, after a harrowing trip across Chesapeake Bay and along the Severn River during a storm. Leaving Annapolis, he traveled to Bladensburg accompanied by Governor John Eager Howard and others, with a rest

break about 13 miles from Maryland's capital. He spent the night at the Indian Queen Tavern in Bladensburg, before traveling to Georgetown for meetings about the country's new capital. The tavern, located at Baltimore Avenue and Upshur Street, is now known as the George Washington House.)

After these and other speeches, a caravan of vehicles carried participants to a dinner at Carvel Hall in Annapolis, led by an escort of Maryland and District motorcycle police. Three buses carried guests, such as the Women's City Club, the Washington Board of Trade, and the Washington Chamber of Commerce. The *Star* described the entrance into the city:

The streets of the old town were decked in flags, in honor of the visitors and the occasion, and the United States Naval Academy Band, seated under the maples in the academy grounds, gave a special concert.

About 300 people enjoyed dinner. Representative Stephen W. Gambrill (D-Md.), one of the post-dinner speakers, discussed his efforts in the House of Representatives to secure a \$1 million appropriation to widen the new highway; he would introduce the bill again in the next Congress.

E. C. Graham, president of the Washington Board of Trade, said the new road made the two cities neighbors but visualized that eventually the road would be transformed into a 50-foot wide boulevard lined with houses.

After the dinner, many participants strolled to the harbor for a fireworks display. The day's events ended with a dance in the St. John's College Gymnasium. ["Defense Highway Formally Opened," *The Sunday Sun*, July 17, 1927; "Annapolis and Capital Join To Open New Defense Road," *The Washington Post*, July 17, 1927]

### **The Peace Cross**

In Bladensburg, as mentioned earlier, the cross road of Defense Highway and the highway to Baltimore, Prince George's County residents wanted to erect a war memorial in the form of a Calvary cross in memory of county residents who died in the war.

A few weeks before the armistice, they held dedication exercises on September 28, 1919, presided over by John Riggles of the good roads and memorial committee, consisted of speeches and breaking ground for the highway and the cross. According to the *Star*:

Secretary of the Navy Daniels paid high tribute to the people of Prince Georges county at the dedication exercises held at Bladensburg, Md., yesterday afternoon as being the first to actually erect a memorial in honor of those who fell in the war . . . .

Mrs. William Farmer, mother of George Farmer of Company F. 115<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 29<sup>th</sup> Division, the first soldier of the county to fall in France, broke the ground for the monument. Ground for the highway was broken by Mrs. Martin Redman, mother of William Redman, the first county boy serving in the Navy to give up his life for his country.

Two thousand people attended the ceremony. [“Prince Georges Praised,” *The Evening Star*, September 29, 1919; “Begin Work on Memorial,” *The Washington Post*, September 29, 1919]

By 1920, the private committee raising funds for the cross had been forced to halt work on the unfinished memorial. Over the next few years, the partially built memorial was widely considered “an eyesore to every ex-service man and to the public generally” at the junction of the roads to Annapolis and Baltimore. [“Incomplete Condition of Memorial Criticised [sic],” *The Sunday Star*, January 8, 1922]

Through the fund-raising efforts of the Snyder-Farmer Post of the American Legion, based in Hyattsville, the war memorial was completed in July 1925 and dedicated on July 12.

Representative Gambrill delivered the dedication address:

Where we of the past generation have failed to prevent war, perhaps you young men of the American Legion or the mothers who gave their sons to the conflict may succeed. You men of Prince Georges county fought for the sacred right of all to live in peace and security and by the token of this cross, symbolic of Calvary, let us keep fresh the memory of our boys who died for a righteous cause.

Mrs. Bradley A. Snyder of Bladensburg, assisted by John H. Hiser of the legion post, unveiled the 40-foot tall cross. An American flag at the base was removed, revealing a bronze tablet

inscribed with the names of 49 county residents who had lost their lives during the war. The bottom of the tablet contained the words of President Wilson on April 2, 1917, before a joint session of Congress urging approval to enter the war in Europe:

The right is more precious than peace: we shall fight for the things we have always carried nearest our hearts – to such a task we dedicate our lives.

The *Post* added:

On the four sides of the base of the monument are the words “Valor,” “Endurance,” “Courage,” “Devotion.” Each arm of the cross measures 5 feet and the base is 12 feet square. It was constructed at a cost of \$10,000 by John D. Early, of this city, sculptor and architect. The material is a mix of concrete and marble. At a distance it resembles sandstone, having about the same color, light brown with a reddish brown border. It faces down the Baltimore pike toward Washington and an American flag flies from a staff to one side. [“Legion Dedicates Bladensburg War Memorial Cross,” *The Washington Post*, July 13, 1925]

In the late 1930s, when the Writers’ Program of the Works Progress Administration was preparing its American Guide Series volume on Maryland, the writers said of the Peace Cross that, “It is surrounded by filling stations, billboards, and hot dog stands.” [*Maryland: A Guide to the Old Line State*, American Guide Series, Oxford University Press, 1940, page 472]

In March 1961, the Snyder-Farmer-Butler American Legion Post transferred the Peace Cross to the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. The cost of maintaining the symbol had become too costly for a private organization. The SRC gave the commission the deed to the property holding the Peace Cross. [“Planning Group Gets Peace Cross,” *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, March 12, 1961]

In 1985, the planning commission completed a \$100,000 renovation of the Peace Cross, which had deteriorated due to weather. [“Peace Cross Memorial Rededication Plans Set,” *Washington Informer*, October 30, 1985]

On September 8, 2015, the National Park Service included the Peace Cross in the National Register of Historic Places.

Over the years, the Peace Cross has been the subject of court challenges based on the First Amendment’s establishment clause (“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion”). In March 2018, the full U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4<sup>th</sup> Circuit upheld the finding of a three-judge panel of the court that the use of taxpayer funds to maintain the cross “excessively entangles the government in religion.” The majority found that, “Nothing in the First Amendment empowers the judiciary to conclude that the freestanding Latin cross has been divested of this predominantly sectarian meaning.” The Appeals Court suggested that the issue could be resolved if the cross were shifted from public land or its arms were removed.

This finding returned the case to the District Court that had found the monument served a “secular purpose.” Defenders of the Peace Cross appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. [Marimow, Ann E., “Court Upholds Ruling Against Cross Memorial,” *The Washington Post*, March 4, 2018; Barnes, Robert, and Marimow, Ann E., “Supreme Court Will Take Case on Constitutional Challenge to Maryland’s Peace Cross,” *The Washington Post*, November 3, 2018]

On June 20, 2019, the Supreme Court found, 7 to 2, that the cross may remain in place. In an opinion by Justice Samuel A. Alito, Jr., the court cited several factors weighing against a violation of the establishment clause of the First Amendment. Citing “the simple wooden crosses that originally marked the graves of American soldiers killed in the [first world] war,” Justice Alito wrote that the cross had taken on “an added secular meaning” when used in memorials:

Not only did the Bladensburg Cross begin with this meaning, but with the passage of time, it has acquired historical importance. It reminds the people of Bladensburg and surrounding areas of the deeds of their predecessors and of the sacrifices they made in a war fought in the name of democracy. As long as it is retained in its original place and form, it speaks as well of the community that erected the monument nearly a century ago and has maintained it ever since. The memorial represents what the relatives, friends, and neighbors of the fallen soldiers felt at the time and how they chose to express their sentiments. And the monument has acquired additional layers of historical meaning in subsequent years. The Cross now stands among memorials to veterans of later wars. It has become part of the community.

The opinion dismissed arguments that the memorial, erected by a group that includes a Jewish veteran, left off the names of Jewish and black soldiers killed in the war or reflected the heightened racial and religious animosity of the period when it was erected. “We can never know for certain what was in the minds of those responsible for the memorial, but in light of what we know about this [dedication] ceremony, we can perhaps make out a picture of a community that, at least for the moment, was united by grief and patriotism and rose above the divisions of the day.”

Moreover, “it is surely relevant that the monument commemorates the death of particular individuals. It is natural and appropriate for those seeking to honor the deceased to invoke the symbols that signify what death meant for those who are memorialized.”

Justice Alito concluded his opinion:

The cross is undoubtedly a Christian symbol, but that fact should not blind us to everything else that the Bladensburg Cross has come to represent. For some, that monument is a symbolic resting place for ancestors who never returned home. For others, it is a place for the community to gather and honor all veterans and their sacrifices for our Nation. For others still, it is a historical landmark. For many of these people, destroying or defacing the Cross that has stood undisturbed for nearly a century would not be neutral and would not further the ideals of respect and tolerance embodied in the First Amendment. For all these reasons, the Cross does not offend the Constitution.

We reverse the judgment of the Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit and remand the cases for further proceedings.

Following the ruling, Maryland Governor Larry Hogan said:

Today’s ruling ensures that this memorial – a dignified tribute to those who came before us and made the ultimate sacrifice – will stand tall and proud for the ages.

[*American Legion et al v. American Humanist Assn. et al*; Barnes, Robert, “Supreme Court Rules That Maryland ‘Peace Cross’ Honoring Military Dead May Remain on Public Land,” *The Washington Post*, June 21, 2019; Gresko, Jessica, “Court Upholds Cross on Md. Land,” *The Baltimore Sun*, June 21, 2019]

### **The Future of the Defense Highway**

The Defense Highway had been obsolete almost from the beginning, as reflected in the *American Motorist* article cited earlier.

Safety was a major problem, as reflected in a letter to the *Post*’s editor on August 25, 1927, from “T.P.M.” It began:

In the interest of humanity, it occurs to me that you might be interested in giving further publicity to the “Suicide Lane,” Defense Highway.

On Sunday, August 14, he had driven from Annapolis to Washington in a heavy rainstorm. He saw five wrecked cars:

I don't believe that in any instance it was due to careless driving, but due 100 per cent to the narrowness of the road and to improper sidings. As a matter of fact, the sidings are causing all of the accidents. It is almost impossible not to go off the siding an inch or two in allowing other cars to pass and when this is done it makes a drop of an inch or two and throws the front end of the car diagonally cross the road. If the rear end drops, or if the front end drops, then its natural course is to go to the right into the ditch.

He had made 18 trips on the road in August. "I have seen one complete wreck every day, due solely to the improper sidings." The road was, in short, "a distinct blot on the good, clean reputation of the State of Maryland, and with full knowledge of that, the State officials are daily sending to destruction visitors from other parts of the country as well as the residents, causing untold loss in property damage, with many serious injuries as well as fatalities." ["A Suicide Highway," *The Washington Post*, August 25, 1927]

On February 16, 1928, the House Committee on Roads received testimony from Representative Gambrill on his bill to authorize \$1 million to widen the highway. SRC Chairman Mackall testified along with the Congressman in support of the bill. Mackall said the road left the District by Maryland Avenue. "It turns off the Washington-Baltimore Highway at Bladensburg, which is the first turn [at the Peace Cross war memorial] after you leave the District line." He described the area the road passed through:

The road runs through for the most part a very sparsely settled territory. In Anne Arundel County there are 10 miles which run through an almost undeveloped section of the country. Except for the demand of the road to connect the Capital and the Naval Academy, I don't believe that the Maryland program would have built a road through that sparsely settled country.

Mackall said the State had spent approximately \$900,000 on the project, of which "perhaps \$300,000 or maybe \$350,000" had been State funds:

The Federal-aid participation was limited to a maximum cost first of \$20,000 and then of \$25,000 a mile. The cost of this road ran very considerably over that. In some sections it was as much as \$50,000 to \$55,000 a mile. So, by and large, Maryland's allotment of its own funds has been about two-thirds and the Federal-aid allotment to Maryland has been about one-third.

He added that of the Federal-aid highway funds apportioned to Maryland, all of the funds for the two counties were used on the Defense Highway. Even so, the road was completed only because "the people of Prince Georges and Anne Arundel Counties advanced to the State the money to construct it in 1926." The counties provided the loans in a public-spirited way, "and they have donated their interest as their contribution to having the road completed four years earlier than it would normally have been completed."



Mackall said the road consisted of a 15-foot, two-way paved area on a 25-foot graded area. The State's goal was to pave an additional 15 feet:

It we had constructed it twice as wide, it would certainly have taken us 16 years. I think that for normal purposes a road constructed right away [sic] 15 feet wide is a lot more to be desired than one 30 feet wide to be completed eight years later . . . . I would like to have built it wider. But I believe that a minimum width of road over the whole distance is much more desirable than a road twice as wide for half the distance.

Representative John M. Nelson (R-Wi.) asked Mackall what emergency existed or what benefit to the United States justified the expenditure of \$1 million to widen the highway. Mackall replied:

I don't know that there is any immediate necessity for it. I believe, however, that we ought to use as much foresight as we can. The expression is, "Prepare for war in time of peace." It is certain that a road of greater width than it is now is highly desirable even at the present time for the large numbers of people who go from Washington to Annapolis, especially for week ends, at the present time. [Roads, Hearings before the Committee on Roads, U.S. House of Representatives, 70<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, part 2, 1928, pages 474-479]

The efforts of Representative Gambrell and Chairman Mackall proved in vain. Congress did not provide a special \$1 million authorization to widen the road.

In 1935, the Maryland State Planning Commission cited the Defense Highway as an example of bad planning: "It was adequate only for the traffic at the time it was built; almost at once it was found exceedingly unsafe." To overcome this deficiency and other "examples of waste," the commission called on the State to completely rebuild the primary highway system, often on new location. [*A History of Road Building in Maryland*, page 116]

As the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) began planning the Interstate System based on traffic surveys in the 1930s, its landmark report, *Toll Roads and Free Roads* (1939), and its successor, *Interregional Highways* (1944), included maps of the projected network, but they did not include a road between Annapolis and Washington. (For many years, Annapolis would be one of the few State capitals not linked to the Interstate System.)

In the late 1940s, the State began planning an aggressive program of freeway construction, including a limited-access expressway on new alignment to carry U.S. 50. Officials considered some of the freeways for development as turnpikes (Annapolis-Washington, Baltimore-Frederick, and Frederick-Washington). During this pre-Interstate period, the success of the Pennsylvania Turnpike, the first section of which had opened in October 1940, inspired many States to consider turnpike financing in the period before funding for the Interstate System was assured in 1956. Initially, Maryland avoided using Federal-aid highway funds on these routes because Federal-aid law prohibited the use of funds on toll roads. Eventually, Maryland decided to build the new Annapolis-Bladensburg expressway without tolls. [Federal-Aid Highway Act of

1950, Hearings before the Committee on Public Works, U.S. House of Representatives, 81<sup>st</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, No. 81-12, 1950, page 430]

The *Star*, in an editorial, supported the project, describing Defense Highway as “dangerously inadequate now in serving a rapidly expanding residential area in Prince Georges County as well as the heavy traffic between Washington and the Maryland shore.” Speaking about the planned Annapolis road and the proposed Baltimore-Washington Parkway, an editorial said the “two fine high-speed automobile roads . . . will do so much to relieve dangerous congestion now on the Baltimore pike and the Defense highway.” [“Two Needed Highways,” *The Evening Star*, July 15, 1948]

(In November 1948, AASHO approved Maryland’s request to extend U.S. 50 from Annapolis to Ocean City on the State’s Eastern Shore. At the time, U.S. 50 became a transcontinental route from Ocean City to San Francisco, California.)

In September 1949, the SRC awarded a contract to C. J. Langenfelder and Son of Baltimore for construction of a 6-mile segment of dual highway from near Annapolis to U.S. 301 (Robert Crain Highway). The State also was advertising a contract for a new bridge across the Severn River for a northern bypass of Annapolis as part of the expressway that would provide a good road from Washington to the Eastern Shore via the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. (Construction of the bridge began in January 1949; the bridge would open on July 30, 1952.)

By 1953, a 10-mile section of dual highway connecting Collington near U.S. 301 with Defense Highway at Parole was open for traffic, although without exits except at either end. The missing link between U.S. 301 and the District line at Kenilworth was scheduled for completion by 1958. [McAler, Charles A., “Annapolis Freeway Expected to Be Finished by ’58,” *The Evening Star*, November 27, 1953]

On August 12, 1954, SRC Chairman Russell H. McCain announced that the Washington-Annapolis Freeway would be called the John Hanson Freeway. Hanson, on November 5, 1781, became the first “President of the United States in Congress Assembled,” following ratification of the Articles of Confederation in March 1781. Maryland had been the last State, on March 1, 1781, to ratify the Articles to begin the “perpetual Union of the thirteen states of America.” Hanson’s selection as the country’s first President, as he is sometimes inaccurately referred to, may have been a reward for his efforts to secure Maryland’s approval of the governing document.

The position was mainly a ceremonial post that he held for 1 year, the term the Articles had set. An article about his service stated:

In his capacity as first president of Congress of the Confederation, Hanson established the first cabinet, consisting of secretaries of war, finance, foreign affairs, and state.

Ironically, Hanson’s first use of the “Great Seal of the United States” was on a 1782 commission authorizing George Washington to exchange war prisoners. Just days before he was to relinquish office, he issued a proclamation authorizing America’s first national Thanksgiving Day to be celebrated the last Thursday of every November.

Hanson had been in poor health during his 1-year term. He retired after leaving office and died on November 15, 1783, in Prince George's County at Oxon Hill Manor, site of his nephew's plantation. He was 62 years old. [Gay, James Thomas, "Americans: 'first president of the united states,'" *American History*, June 1999, pages 12-14]

(Today, Hanson is largely forgotten outside the Washington area. Even within the area, his historical significance is little known. However, Hanson's name survives on a school, a savings bank, other facilities and, of course, the Washington-to-Annapolis Freeway. [Associated Press, "Annapolis Highway Called John Hanson After 1776 Leader," *The Evening Star*, August 12, 1954])

By then, Maryland had begun construction of the freeway from U.S. 301 to MD 704 (George Palmer Highway, named after a banker and community leader from Seat Pleasant) and was planning to let a contract in 1955 for the stretch from MD 704 to the District line at the planned Kenilworth interchange. This major interchange would link the new Annapolis freeway, the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, Kenilworth Avenue, and River Road in Prince George's County, with a link to the East Capitol Street Bridge (which would open August 30, 1956), New York Avenue, and South Dakota Avenue. The interchange project, once awarded, would take 2 years to complete. [Beveridge, George, "Maryland Plans \$59.1 Million For Area Roads," *The Sunday Star*, January 2, 1955]

On October 25, 1957, Governor Theodore R. McKeldin participated in the opening of the Kenilworth Avenue interchange. Commissioner Charles D. Curtiss of BPR and District Highway Director John N. Robertson joined Governor McKeldin in the ribbon cutting. ["First Section Dedicated Of Circumference Road," *The Evening Star*, October 25, 1957]

On October 7, 1961 AASHO approved Maryland's request to transfer the U.S. 50 designation to the new expressway:

This routing will be over new high-type facility, beginning at the junction of present U.S. 50 and U.S. 301 west of Annapolis thence westerly and southwesterly to the Maryland-District of Columbia line at the end of the ramp connections of the Kenilworth Interchange joining with the Washington-Baltimore Parkway.

AASHO also approved the U.S. 50 routing in the District of Columbia:

This routing will be over New York Avenue extended from the District of Columbia-Maryland State line west of the Kenilworth Interchange and will run thence westerly along New York Avenue to junction with present U.S. 50 at Bladensburg Road.

Defense Highway became MD 450.

By that point, the final gap in the John Hanson Freeway, between the George Palmer Highway and the Kenilworth interchange, had remained in place since 1957. After winning election in November 1958, Governor J. Millard Tawes appointed new members of the SRC who made completion of the 4-mile gap a priority.

In October 1961, with completion of the highway just a few months off, the *Post* referred to the “last agonizing four miles of bottlenecks and bumper-to-bumper traffic.” Completion was important “for the hundreds of motorists who have zipped along the Freeway almost to within sight of Washington only to be dumped at the end of it onto two-lane secondary roads.” Particularly in the summer, those last 4 miles could take an hour or two on a Sunday evening when Washingtonians return from the beaches on Maryland’s eastern shore. [“Annapolis-D. C. Freeway To Be Completed Soon,” *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, October 20, 1961]

Finally, Maryland opened what was known as the Ardmores-Kenilworth section on November 21, 1961. Calling the last 4 miles “an annoying gap,” Governor Tawes told the crowd that, “Today, we forge the final link in Maryland’s ‘Golden Triangle,’” referring to the roads connecting Annapolis, Baltimore, and Washington:

It has been predicted that by the year 2000 a total of 10 million people will live in this triangle or regions surrounding. By proper land use, wise location of industry and commerce, by sensible development of water and sewerage systems, by sound and adequate school construction, by well-planned establishment of a transportation network, by intelligent reservation of land for recreation and park facilities – things which this administration has actively supported and will continue to support – this area will realize its full potential as a golden triangle.

He added that his limousine ride from Annapolis on the new 33-mile, \$26.4 million highway was a “wonderful experience.”

Governor Tawes also joined with leaders of the John Hanson Society of Oxon Hill to unveil a plaque honoring the highway’s namesake. [Hope, Paul, “D.C.-Annapolis Freeway Opened As Final Leg of ‘Golden Triangle,’” *The Evening Star*, November 21, 1961; Velsey, Victoria, “Last 4 Miles Of Maryland Road Opened,” *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, November 22, 1961]

On July 28, 1975, as part of a series of Interstate System actions in Maryland and the District of Columbia, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) approved designation of a portion of Maryland’s U.S. 50 as part of the Interstate System:

U.S. Route 50 between the Capital Beltway and Annapolis is approved subject to your furnishing, with respect to the portion of this route within the District of Columbia urbanized area, documentation of consultation with the responsible local officials (WASHCOG/TPB) and with local governments concerned (Prince Georges County) as required by paragraph 476.206 of the regulations. It is understood that the specific Annapolis terminus of the route will be determined after the specific location of the Baltimore-Annapolis route is established.

On November 11, 1975, FHWA approved numbers for the series of Interstate shifts, including U.S. 50 as I-68. FHWA and the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO, as AASHO was now called) had some doubts about the use of “68” for the route, as expressed in FHWA Administrator Norbert T. Tiemann’s approval letter:

We concur with your position that proposed I-68 be considered a spur route to be numbered 595, 795, or 995. It would not seem desirable to number it I-595 because of the close proximity of the National Airport access road in nearby Virginia which is already numbered I-595. Thus, I-795 would be an acceptable alternative.

It was to remain signed as U.S. 50 until reconstructed to Interstate standards, work that was completed in 1995.

On August 27, 1982, FHWA Administrator Ray A. Barnhart and Administrator Arthur E. Teele of the Urban Mass Transportation Administration approved withdrawal of the remaining section of I-595 in Virginia from the Interstate System. FHWA approved the use of I-795 for a route in the Baltimore area on October 20, 1978 (from a junction with the Baltimore Beltway, I-695, northwest of Baltimore northwesterly to a point new Dolfield Road in Owings Mills). These actions made I-595 available in the Washington area while eliminating I-795 as an option for U.S. 50.

In western Maryland, the State was building an 80.3-mile freeway, known as the National Freeway, from Hancock to the State line, where the road would continue to Morgantown, West Virginia, as a replacement for U.S. 40 through the area. With West Virginia's concurrence, Maryland agreed to shift the I-68 designation to the new freeway while renumbering the Washington-Annapolis as I-595.

On June 7, 1989, AASHTO agreed to designation of U.S. 50 between the Capital Beltway and the terminus in Annapolis as I-595. At the same time, AASHTO approved I-68:

Redesignate as I-68 presently designated U.S. Route 48 from the intersection with I-79 southwest of Morgantown, West Virginia to the intersection with I-70 at Hancock, Maryland.

Although AASHTO was intermediary between the State departments of transportation and FHWA, final designations for the Interstate System required FHWA approval. This approval of I-68 and I-595 came on June 3, 1991. In the approval letter, FHWA Administrator Thomas D. Larson noted:

On November 14, 1975, AASHTO assigned the number I-68 to U.S. 50 between the Capital Beltway and Annapolis, Maryland. While approving the shift of I-68 to U.S. 48 in 1989, AASHTO assigned the number I-595 to former I-68. This action has never been officially reflected in our Interstate records. We are, therefore, advising you that we are today also approving the following route description for I-595:

FAI 595 – From I-95 near Washington, D.C., to east of MD 70 near Annapolis, Maryland.

Despite the redesignation, Maryland chose not to install I-595 signs along the freeway. In the Washington area, the freeway is sometimes referred to as the John Hanson Highway or Hanson Highway, but mostly as U.S. 50 or Route 50.