



The Foothills Parkway: 100 Years of Challenges

The Foothills Parkway, originally conceived in the late 1920s, and authorized by Congress in February 1944, was initially planned as a 72-mile scenic road traversing the northern and western perimeters of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, providing views of the Smoky Mountains from outside of the Park. Of the seven congressionally mandated parkways, the Foothills Parkway is the only one not yet completed. The National Park Service (NPS) and Federal Highway Administration continue to deal with funding and design challenges to complete this Parkway.

Construction Begins

Construction on the Foothills Parkway began in the 1960s and was managed by the US Bureau of Public Roads, which was soon to become the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). In the early planning stages, the project was divided into eight sections, identified by the letters “A” through “H,” each preceded by an “8.” To date only three segments of the Parkway have been completed and opened to the public: from Chilhowie to Murray Gap (Section 8H), from Murray Gap to Walland (Section 8G), and from Cosby to I-40 (Section 8A). These three segments total 22.5 miles of the 72-mile Parkway.

Between 1966 and 1989 the Bureau of Public Roads/FHWA and the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) constructed approximately 15 miles of roadway between Walland (Section 8F) and Wears Valley (Section 8E) at a cost

of approximately \$51.4 million. Also between 1966 and 1970, a 6.4-mile segment between Walland and Carr Creek (Section 8F) was constructed.

Two Steps Forward, One Step Back

Beginning in the 1980s, construction of approximately 10 miles of road between Carr Creek and Wears Valley (Section 8E) was started under two contracts. In 1989 work was



suspended on these two contracts due to retaining wall failures. There were inadequate erosion and sedimentation control measures, resulting in acidification sedimentation in downstream watersheds from the previously encapsulated pyritic rock fill.

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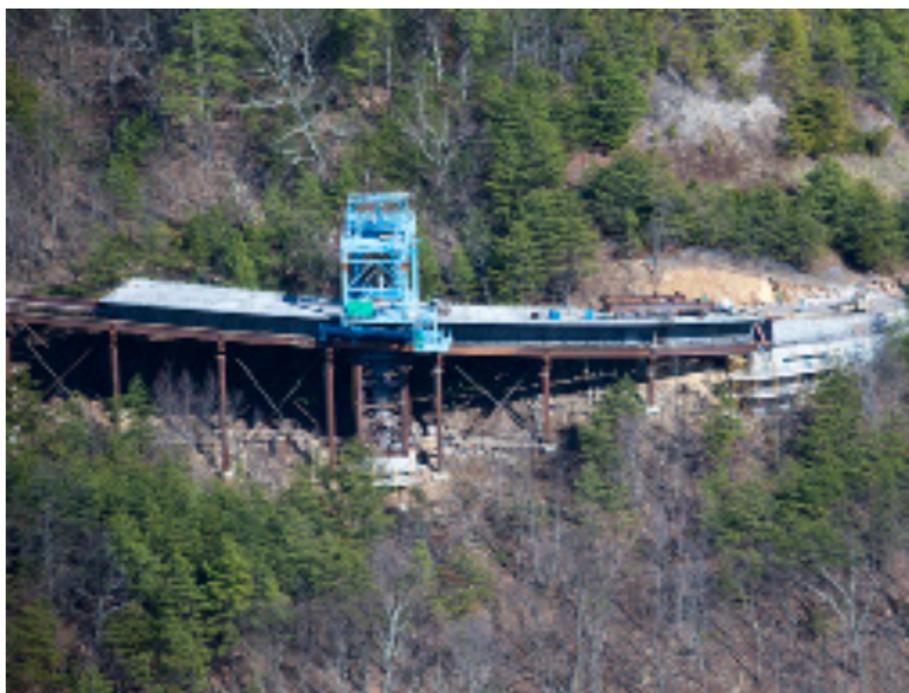
Today, a 1.65-mile segment in Section 8E remains uncompleted. This has become known as “The Missing Link.” In 1990 the National Park Service (NPS) working with partners at the Federal Highway Administration, Eastern Federal Lands Highway Division (EFLHD), began developing a new design for the 1.65-mile “Missing Link” section, using a series of bridges instead of the initially designed cut and fill sites. The goal was

to minimize surface disturbance and environmental impacts, while mitigating the previously experienced erosion problems and retaining wall failures.

Bridging The Gap

A series of 10 bridges—totaling 6,200 linear feet—and a few short wall sections were designed to complete The Missing Link. Since early 2000, the NPS and FHWA have worked together to complete three of the bridges (#10, #9, and #8) and two road segments, at an investment of approximately \$21 million. Contracts for bridges #2, #3, #4, #5, #6, and #7 and the Caylor Gap walls projects were awarded and were under construction from 2009 to present (an approximately \$73 million investment).

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When completed, the Foothills Parkway will serve as an important link for visitors and tourists to East Tennessee looking to connect to the area from Atlanta, Nashville, Cincinnati and beyond by way of Interstates 40 and 75. Great Smoky Mountains National Park's economic benefit to the communities surrounding the Park is well known, ranking first in the

nation by generating more than \$850 million in revenue, and 14,000 jobs.

An NPS Centennial Goal

The current objective is to complete the 16-mile section of the Foothills Parkway between Wears Valley and Walland, Tennessee (Sections 8E and 8F) by the Centennial of the NPS in August 2016. Completion of this section of the only unfinished Congressionally-mandated Parkway in the National Park System in time to celebrate the NPS Centennial would be a significant milestone in the history of Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the NPS.

An NPS Transportation Program fact sheet for the Foothills Parkway, with more details on the sections remaining to be completed and their costs, is available as a .pdf for downloading at: http://www.nps.gov/transportation/fact_sheet_foothills_parkway.html.

