



The Foothills Parkway: Completing the “Missing Link”



Above: Bridge 2 after completion.

The Foothills Parkway. Congress authorized the Foothills Parkway as a scenic parkway on February 22, 1944. Of the seven Congressionally Mandated Parkways, the Foothills Parkway is the only remaining parkway yet to be completed. The entire 72-mile corridor is administered by Great Smoky Mountains National Park, however, only three segments totaling 22.5 miles are completed and open to the public.

Background. Between 1966 and 1970, a 6.4-mile section of road between U.S. Highway 321 in Walland and Carr Creek was constructed (Section F). In the 1980s, two contracts were awarded for construction of approximately 10 miles of road between Carr Creek and Wears Valley (Section E). Both projects experienced structural fill failures and erosion problems that caused the projects to be suspended in 1989, thus leaving a 1.65-mile segment uncompleted. The uncompleted section is referred to as the “missing link.”

In the 1990s, a new design was developed by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to complete the “missing link” by using bridges, walls, and fills to minimize surface disturbance and reduce environmental impacts.

Less than one mile of the original 1.65 miles of the “missing link” remains unfinished.

Current Status. Since early 2000, the National Park Service (NPS) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) have worked together to develop a plan to complete the “missing link.” Four bridges and two road segments have been completed for \$46.2 million.

Bridge 2 has been completed at a cost of \$25.7 million, funded by Title 23, American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The remaining sections of the “missing link” were combined under one contract in an attempt to complete construction by 2016. Funding for this project came from Title 23, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the Federal Lands Transportation Program, and multiple Federal Highways Appropriations. Total construction awarded to date is \$48,438,000.

Future Funding. The funding required for full completion of Sections E and F (including the “missing link”) is estimated at an additional \$29 million. This will complete the paving and miscellaneous work to open the entire 16 miles (Sections E and F) from Wears Valley to Walland, TN.



Above: Construction of the Caylor Gap road segment, looking to the west.

Completion of the “missing link” and the final paving project is possible by the Centennial of the National Park Service in 2016.



Foothills Parkway History:

- 1944 - Foothills Parkway authorized by Congress.
- Property acquired by State of Tennessee and donated to the NPS. Acquisition began in 1947 and by 1979, all property was transferred to the NPS.
- Total Length: 72.1 miles, divided into 8 sections.
- Late 1960's – Sections A, G and H under construction. All 3 sections open to public by 1968.
- 1966-1970 – Section F constructed (minus final surfacing and barriers), closed to public.
- 1982-1989 – TDOT assumes construction of Section E. By 1989, construction stopped due to wall failures and environmental issues.
- 1996 – NPS completes Environmental Assessment to identify options to continue construction of Section E. The EA identifies a series of bridges with cuts/fills and walls as preferred alternative.
- 1999-2001 – Construction of Bridges 9 and 10 completed at a cost of \$12.4 million.
- 2006-2008 – Construction of Bridge 8 completed at a cost of \$4.5 million.
- 2008-2009 – Construction of Site 1 completed at a cost of \$4.4 million.
- 2010 – Multiple Bridges Project, including Bridges 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, awarded. Total award to date of \$48,438,000. Contract completion date estimated as October 2015.
- 2013 – Bridge 2 Complete at a final cost of \$25.7 million.
- 2013 – Final pavement & safety feature design in progress.



October 26, 2011



December 28, 2011



May 30, 2012



December 27, 2012

Section A – 5.6 miles (I-40 to Cosby), completed in 1968 at a cost of \$1.9 million.

Section B – 14.1 miles (Cosby to Pitman Center), incomplete.

Section C – 9.6 miles (Pitman Center to Gatlinburg), incomplete.

Section D – 9.8 miles (Gatlinburg to Wears Valley), incomplete.

Section E – 9.7 miles (Wears Valley to Carr Creek), constructed from 1982-89.

Interrupted, resulting in “Missing Link”. Record not clear on costs.

Section F – 6.4 miles (Carr Creek to Walland), completed in 1970 at a cost of \$2.9 million.

Section G – 10 miles (Walland to Murray Gap), completed in 1968 at a cost of \$3.4 million.

Section H – 6.9 miles (Murray Gap to Chilhowee), completed in 1968, cost of \$2.4 million.