

U.S. 29 Maryland to Florida

Series: FHWA Highway History Website Articles

June 30, 2023

The original format of this document was an active HTML page(s) located under <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/history.cfm>. The Federal Highway Administration converted the HTML page(s) into an Adobe® Acrobat® PDF file to preserve and support reuse of the information it contained.

The intellectual content of this PDF is an authentic capture of the original HTML file. Hyperlinks and other functions of the HTML webpage may have been lost, and this version of the content may not fully work with screen reading software.

U.S. 29 Maryland to Florida

When the Joint Board on Interstate Highways issued its proposal on the U.S. numbered highway system in October 1925, the report identified the main interstate highways that would be included. U.S. 29 was among them, with the route described as:

From Gastonia, North Carolina, to Spartanburg, South Carolina, Greenville, Anderson, Hartwell, Georgia, Athens, Atlanta, Lagrange, Opelika, Alabama, Tuskegee. [All spellings as in the original]

The Secretary of Agriculture submitted the Joint Board's proposal to the American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO) for consideration. Over the next year, AASHO acted on requests, many initiated by named trail associations, for changes in routings and numbers. Finally, by ballot of the State highway agencies on November 11, 1926, AASHO adopted the U.S. numbered plan.

The first official description of the approved U.S. 29 appeared in the initial U.S. numbered log, which AASHO printed in April 1927:

United States Highway No. 29.
Total Mileage, 393

North Carolina Beginning at Kings Mountain to the North Carolina-South Carolina State line north of Blacksburg.

South Carolina Beginning at the North Carolina-South Carolina State line north of Blacksburg via Gaffney, Spartanburg, Greenville, Anderson to the South Carolina-Georgia State line east of Hartwell.

Georgia Beginning at South Carolina-Georgia State line east of Hartwell via Athens, Lawrenceville, Atlanta, Newnan, LaGrange to the Georgia-Alabama State line at West Point.

Alabama Beginning at the Georgia-Alabama State line at West Point via Opelika to Tuskegee.

The route served as a connector between U.S. 70 and U.S. 80.

On June 8, 1931, AASHO's Executive Committee approved requests from the States involved to extend U.S. 29 to the north:

U.S. 29, North Carolina, Virginia. U.S. 29 is extended north from Kings Mountain, North Carolina, via Gastonia, Charlotte, Concord, Salisbury, High Point, Greensboro, Reidsville to the North Carolina State line north of Reidsville. VIRGINIA, beginning at the North Carolina-Virginia line, north of Reidsville, via Danville, Chatham, Altavista, Lynchburg, Amherst, Coveseville, Charlottesville, Madison, Culpeper. This route now absorbs all of U.S. 170 [the first branch route of U.S. 70 between Lynchburg and Charlotte].

The northern terminus, in Culpeper, was at the junction with U.S. 15.

In 1933, the District of Columbia and Maryland approached Virginia and AASHO about an extension of U.S. 29 north. In an undated letter (probably in May 1933), Commissioner Henry G. Shirley of the Virginia Department of Highways informed AASHO Executive Secretary W. C. Markham:

We will be very glad to join the District of Columbia, Maryland and the other states in the north with 29 at some feasible point. What we contemplate doing is to bring 29 in from Culpeper over U.S. 15 to Remington, then to Catlett, Bristow, Manassas and possibly by a new route into Fairfax Station, and then on in to Washington over one of the other routes or possibly take the detour around Washington over the proposed bridge near Freat [sic] Falls.

Portions of this route are not in the system and in a condition to take care of the traffic at the present time.

If the others want 29 brought on in to Washington it will be alright to bring it over this route as far as Manassas, then out to Centerville and then over 211 into Washington, it being temporarily located, with the understanding that when the by-pass and direct line around Washington has been constructed that this route will hook up and follow it, or some route passing around out of the thickly congested area in Washington.

If Maryland, the District of Columbia and others are ready for 29 now we will be glad to take 15 and 211 into Washington as a temporary route with the understanding that this more important route be worked out a little later on.

On May 23, Shirley wrote to inform Markham that, "We are thoroughly in accord with taking No. 29 on through north when the District of Columbia and Maryland, and the other states have worked out a route." He did not think the extension would have to follow U.S. 211 except for a short distance. "There are several routes being developed whereby we may be able to take this in without duplicating 211 or 50". Although he did not plan to take any action until "it has been worked out on either end", he assured Markham that Virginia would "try and work out some feasible plan" for the routing of U.S. 29.

Markham, who was finalizing proposals for the Executive Committee to act on during its mid-year meeting, informed Shirley on May 26 that "we were trying to work out something that would be satisfactory for 29 and yet not duplicate U.S. 211 and 15." Markham asked:

Would you prefer that we should report this request to the Executive Committee for the extension of U.S. 29 from Culpepper [sic] to Washington, using U.S. 211 and U.S. 15 temporarily with an explanation of your final plans?

Based on Markham's contacts with the three jurisdictions, he included the U.S. 29 extension in a June 14 letter to all members of the Executive Committee for consideration and voting by ballot:

U.S. 29 extends from Culpepper, Virginia to Tuskegee, Alabama. The State Highway Departments of Virginia and Maryland have asked for the extension of U.S. 29 to the north east to make it a road of more importance and accommodate southwestern travel which might not wish to use U.S. 1. Virginia is building a new road towards Washington and Maryland proposes that we utilize their State Route 27 from the northeast corner of the District of Columbia to Baltimore via Ellicott City. The State Highway Department of North Carolina also joins in this request for the extension of U.S. 29 northward.

Mr. Shirley proposes to use temporarily U.S. 15 from Culpepper to Warrenton and U.S. 211 into Washington, as a temporary location, with the request that ultimately this route be designated to bypass both Washington and Baltimore. I have indicated on the Maryland map enclosed in green the proposed temporary route and in red the proposed final routing. That part of the road in Virginia indicated in red is more than half completed at the present time.

The Executive Committee approved the change, as Markham informed Shirley, Chairman G. Clinton Uhl of the Maryland State Roads Commission, and Director of Traffic W. A. Van Duzer of the District of Columbia by letter on June 22:

I am instructed by the Executive Committee to notify you that they have approved the extension of U.S. 29 from its present northern terminus at Culpepper, Virginia, to Washington and Baltimore, temporarily using U.S. 15 to Warrenton and U.S. 211 to Washington and State Route 29 in Maryland from Silver Springs [sic] to Ellicott City and U.S. 40 to Baltimore. It being understood that ultimately this route will take a new road now in process of construction from Culpepper via Mannassas [sic] to the District of Columbia line and such other changes near and around Ellicott City and Baltimore as may develop in due time.

The change was recorded in AASHTO's 1933 Annual Report as:

Virginia, U.S. 29 now begins at Culpeper, Va., is extended north and east temporarily over U.S. 15 to Warrenton then over U.S. 211 to Fairfax, to the District of Columbia line, opposite the Francis Scott Key Bridge.

District of Columbia, U.S. 29 is extended through the District of Columbia to Silver Spring, Md.

Maryland, from Silver Spring via State Route 27 to Ellicott City and Baltimore. It is understood that this is a temporary extension, as a new route is now being constructed by the State of Virginia that will make a direct route from Culpeper to Manassas on to the District of Columbia Line to connect ultimately with a by-pass around Washington, permitting also a further development for by-passing Baltimore and probably Philadelphia and New York City.

During AASHO's annual meeting, October 9-11, 1933, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the Executive Committee agreed to investigate consolidation of U.S. numbered routes, the discontinuance of alternate routes and the disapproval of requests for recognition of named routes. The Executive Committee considered these issues during its midyear meeting on June 22-23, 1934, in Chicago, Illinois. The route log that emerged from this review reflected the temporary extension of U.S. 29 to Baltimore, Maryland, and a southern extension to Pensacola, Florida:

Maryland Beginning at Baltimore (City Hall) 11, Ellicott City 16, Ashton 13, Silver Spring 7.

District of Columbia Washington (Zero Milestone) 17.

Virginia Fairfax 29, Warrenton 26, Culpeper 18 (the above description of this numbered route in Maryland and Virginia is temporary only as permanent location will require several changes), Madison 28, Charlottesville 17, Coveseville 36, Amhurst 17, Lynchburg 25, Alta Vista 22, Chatham 19, Danville 26.

North Carolina Reidsville 24, Greensboro 17, High Point 36, Salisbury 20, Concord 21, Charlotte 22, Gastonia 13, Kings Mountain 13.

South Carolina Blacksburg 9, Gaffney 20, Spartanburg 32, Greenville 11, Piedmont 21, Anderson 22.

Georgia Hartwell 47, Athens 42, Lawrenceville 32, Atlanta 41, Newman 36, LaGrange 28, West Point 17.

Alabama Opelika 26, Tuskegee 20, Union Springs 37, Troy 19, Luverne 42, Andalusia 46, Brewton 16, Flomaton 29.

Florida Cottagehill 16, Pensacola.

(The figures following the name of the city (e.g., Cottagehill 16) indicate the mileage between that city and the next one given.)

The southern extension followed a combination of State routes from Tuskegee to Flomaton, Alabama. From the intersection with U.S. 31 in Flomaton, the extended U.S. 29 followed existing U.S. 331. The extended route, from Baltimore to Pensacola, was 1,102 miles long.

Through the 1955 edition, AASHO's U.S. numbered highway logs retained the language about the temporary routing in Virginia, the District of Columbia, and Maryland.

During the annual meeting in Seattle, Washington, on November 9-11, 1954, the Executive Committee approved a change in the routing of U.S. 29 and created U.S. 29 Alternate in Maryland:

Relocation of U.S. 29 on the Baltimore-Washington highway, more particularly that portion between Columbia and White Oak. The new location is essentially direct, going through Scaggsville and Burtonsville to a junction with the present route at White Oak. The old route from Columbia through Ashton to White Oak is to be designated U.S. 29 Alternate, the change to be effective upon completion of the construction work, which is indicated as being in the latter part of 1955.

This routing is shown in the 1955 log, as is a new northern terminus at the junction of U.S. 29 and U.S. 40 about 12 miles west of Baltimore. AASHO modified the terminus on June 18, 1968:

From the present end of U.S. Route 29 at its intersection with U.S. Route 40 running in a northerly direction approximately 1 1/2 miles to the intersection with Interstate 70N.

The northern terminus of U.S. 29 in Ellicott City remains the same today (I-70N became I-70 in 1975). The route ends 1,153 miles away at its junction with Cervantes Street (U.S. 90 and U.S. 98) in Pensacola. In between, the route has shifted over the years to place it on improved alignments and bypasses.

Origins of the Route

When the original U.S. numbered highway system was selected and numbered, several parts had been included in named trails. The original route, the one selected by the Joint Board in 1925, was almost entirely part of the Bankhead Highway, a transcontinental route, 3,640 miles from Washington, D.C., to San Diego, California. It had been conceived during a good roads meeting in Birmingham, Alabama, on October 6, 1916, and was named after Senator John H. Bankhead of Alabama, whose advocacy for Federal-aid and role in passage of the landmark Federal Aid Road Act of 1916 had earned him the honorary title of "The Father of Good Roads in the United States Senate."

From Spartanburg to Tuskegee, U.S. 29 was also identical with the Gulf-Atlantic Division of the Southern National Highway. This transcontinental route (Washington, D.C., to San Diego) was one of the earliest in the country. It had been formed in 1912 by promoters from the Southwest, but never achieved the prominence of some of the other early routes. The Gulf-Atlantic Division was a branch off the main route.

In Virginia, U.S. 29 also included segments of the Lee Highway (also Washington, D.C., to San Diego), and the National Roosevelt Midland Highway (Washington, D.C., and Newport News, Virginia, to Los Angeles, California).

The segments that became U.S. 29, however, can be traced well beyond the early days of the automobile. The Maryland section is known as the Columbia Pike, reflecting its days as a toll road (in some areas, a nearby road is marked "Old Columbia Pike," showing an earlier location of the route). A report of the Maryland Geological Survey in 1899 mentioned two turnpikes still in operation on the route (the Ellicott City and Clarksville Turnpike, 10 miles, Howard County, and the Washington, Colesville, and Ashton Turnpike, 12.5 miles in Montgomery County).

In Virginia, the section from Warrenton to Washington was known as the Warrenton Turnpike, dating to 1808. It played an important part in the first and second Battles of Bull Run (Manassas). Following the initial battle, the route was the scene of a hasty, disorganized retreat when Confederate forces gained a victory, sending northern soldiers running for Washington. The soldiers vied for room on the road with escaping citizens who had traveled to Manassas with picnic lunches to observe the battle.

When a Jubilee of national reconciliation was held in Manassas in July 1911, President William H. Taft (the first Chief Executive to purchase automobiles for the White House) decided to drive to the festivities on the same route taken by Federal troops and Washington revelers in 1861. As described in *The Washington Post* (July 21, 1991):

A caravan of four cars bearing reporters, congressmen, secret servicemen, presidential aides and the 300-pound president left the White House a little after noon on July 21 for the 4 p.m. ceremony. The corpulent Taft and his party dined sumptuously in both Falls Church and Fairfax City, with the promise of

a third dinner in Manassas. Between meals, the motorists were plagued by heat, dust clouds, a rainstorm, mud and swollen streams. A Virginia law also required drivers to stop and calm horses frightened by their vehicles; the president, who later become [sic] chief justice of the Supreme Court, dutifully complied.

The article explained that festivities at Manassas continued while "the jovial Taft ate and motored his way through Northern Virginia, unruffled by such impediments or the illness of one senator in his car." Taft and his party arrived 2 hours late, and "with only one vehicle, the other cars having been abandoned in rain-gorged streams, their passengers left to scavenge for carts and buggies." Although "dusty and bespattered," Taft addressed the crowd of Union and Confederate veterans, saying of Virginia hospitality that "its soil and its streams gather about you and cling to you." He then, as the article note, "returned to Washington by train." (For a detailed account of the trip, see Michael L. Bromley's *William Howard Taft and the First Motoring Presidency, 1909-1913*, McFarland and Company, Inc., 2003, pages 285-291.)

The original road between Greensboro, North Carolina, and Georgia was part of the Upper Road, and played a part in the Revolutionary War. According to Douglas Waitley in *Roads of Destiny* (Robert B. Luce, Inc., 1970):

The Upper Road . . . followed the edge of the Appalachian highlands to Fredericksburg, Virginia, and was already [in 1779] supplanting the swampy, mosquito-infested King's Highway [the Lower Road] as the South's main immigration trail.

In North Carolina, the section through Salisbury and Charlotte had been part of the Great Trading Path of the Catawba and Cherokee Indians. In 1791, President George Washington used part of the Upper Road/U.S. 29 between Charlotte and Salisbury on the return leg of his southern tour of the Nation. The tour was part of his effort to hold the country together in very tough times by going to see the people in remote places--and letting them see the country's greatest hero. (He had conducted a similar tour of New England in 1789). The trip moved south through Richmond to Wilmington, North Carolina; Charleston, South Carolina; and Savannah, Georgia; before turning north and passing through Charlotte, Salisbury, and Winston-Salem, North Carolina; and finally returning to Virginia on a more or less direct line to Fredericksburg.

The trip got off to an unpromising start, especially in view of the South's reputation for "notoriously bad, sandy roads," as biographer Douglas Southall Freeman put it:

Had he been superstitious he would have doubted at the very outset the wisdom of his venture, because in crossing the Occoquan, on April 7, the day of his start south, one of the animals harnessed to his new, light chariot fell into the stream, fully harnessed, and so excited the others that all went overboard. Quick work prevented loss.

As for his venture on future U.S. 29, the President found Charlotte "disappointing but the approaches to it were through better farm lands than Washington had seen in days, and the district between Charlotte and Salisbury seemed to him "very fine."

Another section, in Florida, follows the route of an old trail used by General Andrew Jackson on the way from Pensacola to Fort Montgomery in the spring of 1818 during the First Seminole War. His successful efforts help the United States acquire Florida from Spain in 1819. The road had been part of the Great Pensacola Trading Path, known in pioneer days as the Wolf Trail, between the Creek Indian settlements at present-day Montgomery, Alabama, and Pensacola.

Another President On The Road

When President-elect Thomas Jefferson left his home at Monticello near Charlottesville, Virginia, on November 24, 1800, he was headed to the new city of Washington, D.C., to take the oath of office as President. According to research by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Jefferson traveled the Three-Notched Road (Route 250) to

Fredericksburg Road (Routes 22 and 231). From Gordonsville, he took Chicken Mountain Road (Route 639) or a plantation trail to Montpelier. Jefferson followed the Carolina Road (also known as Rogue's Road) to Brandy Station, a route that eventually became U.S. 29. From Centreville, where he had breakfast on November 27, he reached Washington later that day via Falls Church. Thus, for at least part of his trip, Thomas Jefferson followed the predecessor roads of future U.S. 29.

Inspired by this trip, President-elect Bill Clinton and Vice President-elect Al Gore followed a parallel route on the way to Washington for his inauguration on January 20, 1993. Clinton, who had often campaigned by bus during the period leading up to his election, wanted to begin his journey at Monticello, home of someone he considered a spiritual mentor.

The trip took place on January 17, 1993. Gabriel Escobar of *The Washington Post* described the tour of Monticello (the President-elect especially liked Jefferson's library), and a meeting with school children who had won the newspaper's contest. "Dear Mr. President", One student addressed the future President as "Governor Clinton", Or President-elect, whatever . . . " Clinton grinned, "Whatever."

People lined the 121-mile route, waving flags and holding signs. Some offered advice ("Small Business and Agriculture need help"), while others simply offered food and hot coffee to the President-elect and his party. Many of those along the way had voted for President George H. W. Bush; one held a sign predicting bad economic times under the new President.

For the last leg of the trip via I-66, President-elect Clinton could see a sign posted by the Virginia Department of Transportation in the spirit of the old Burma Shave signs:

Thanks Mr. President
For Taking the Bus
Fewer Cars on the Road
Helps All of Us
White House 23 Miles.
