

Bypass Was Long Time Coming

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News Editor

A U.S. 74 By-Pass of Kings Mountain has been a conversation piece among local area citizens for some 30 years and a highway department dream for at least 20.

In 1984 the By-Pass became a reality after years of discussing, planning and surveying.

King Street-U.S. 74, called a "bottleneck" by every motorist who traveled it, is relatively quiet now that the \$47 million super, 9.6 mile highway opened to traffic.

Governor Jim B. Hunt led a delegation of state, federal and local officials here on Tuesday to formally dedicate the new four-lane freeway.

Right-of-way acquisition for the By Pass started here in January 1975 and after three and one half years in June 1978 property was acquired for two separate projects, the interchange next to I-85 under federal aid and the remainder portion coming from state funding.

Vernon Stocks, who with George Shull, both of the Shelby, N.C. Transportation office, who were right-of-way agents for the projects, said that a total of 44 claims were filed under federal aid and a total of 272 claims were filed under state funding projects or a total of 316. Ninety-seven percent of the claims were settled by agreement of the State Highway Department and individuals, with just three percent having to be settled by the courts, an almost phenomenal record when you remember the controversy attending the project.

Right-of-way acquisition amounted to \$4,184,986.55, said Stocks, Assistant Division Right-of-Way Agent in the 12th Division Office in Shelby.

Mr. Stocks, who came to work in the Shelby office in April 1965, recalled his first day on the job in Cleveland County. His "boss" told him his duties would be to work on right-of-way acquisition for the new Kings Mountain ByPass. But, it was 10 years later, in 1975, when that work actually began. Prior to that several public hearings were held, and according to files of the Herald, local citizens submitted more than one petition: some citizens were for the U.S. 74 By Pass of Kings Mountain and some opposed it. Some were for the widening of King Street and others opposed that. There were several suggested routes.

Stocks said the Kings Mountain By Pass is probably the biggest project ever undertaken in the Shelby division office of the State Department of Transportation.

George Ware, Kings Mountain native, now of Charlotte, was area relocation agent in the early days of the By-Pass planning. He agrees with Stocks that the Kings Mountain project was top priority. Mr. Ware, son of the late Mr. and Mrs. John Fletcher Ware of Kings Mountain and brother-in-law of Doris (Mrs. Paul) Ware of Kings Mountain, retired in June 1977 after 25 years with the State Department of Transportation. He was Area Relocation Agent in 11 counties, including the Kings Mountain project. And, he opened the first area relocation office in Charlotte, recalling that for about 10 years he spent hours on the Kings Mountain Project.

Ware recalls that the rumor mill started grinding out stories about the By Pass shortly after World War II ended. Surveyors came to town several times and several times the survey lines were changed. He recalls, as pages of The Herald will attest, the early controversy. But, he like Mr. Stotts, said that positive reaction from local people who relocated homes and businesses because of the new road, was "super". With a percentage record of 97 percent of claims settled, it was the finest record ever established for a project of this magnitude.

Ware said that when the

relocation task was over that approximately 134 residences were moved, along with eight businesses and 27 signs.

Ware said that the current trend was to by pass communities and while there is usually great argument locally over the relative merits of accommodating through traffic versus the economic dislocation brought by the re-routing of main highways, the Bypass has become an accepted principle of highway engineering.

Files of the Kings Mountain Herald in 1959 revealed that some citizens were unhappy with the prospects of either a By Pass of the city or the widening of King Street, the latter which had been proposed by some

highway officials as the answer to the Kings Mountain bottleneck.

"U.S. 74 Project Remains Static" was the headline in the June 19, 1959 edition. In the July 2, 1959 Herald was the report that the state highway commission had ordered a survey for the U.S. 74 By-Pass and agreed in late June 1959 to commit funds for 1960-61 for bypassing Kings Mountain with U.S. 74. The commission, said The Herald, by its action, apparently declined to accept the recommendation of Division Engineer E.L. Kemper of Shelby who favors the widening of King Street which bisects the city and which has been labeled a bottleneck by Highway

Director Engineer W.F. Babcock.

Mr. Babcock had previously told the Herald via telephone that the commission anticipated a bypass to link with I-85, the four lane north-south limited access boulevard and now under construction.

Mr. Kemper, according to The Herald, suggested that widening of King Street would be cheaper and that King is the shortest distance to connect with the four lane boulevard to Shelby and points west.

Babcock said he doubted the federal roads bureau would share in the costs of widening King Street. Business interests on King Street, pointing to the results of the U.S. 29 bypassing,

are anxious for U.S. 74 to be retained on King. Conversely, some have businesses along the route and are averse to providing the highway department with additionally required right of way."

The July 9, 1959 Herald reported that "Highway Projects Produces Upsets; US 74 Project No Exception." The July 23, 1959 headlines were "Babcock Sees 74 By Pass To South."

And another smaller headline: "Highway Thinking In Million Class."

By August 6, 1959 petitions were being circularized by citizens asking the widening of King and on August 13, 1959, according to The Herald, petitions were being circulated asking

for a U.S. 74 By Pass.

The Herald editor wrote on July 9, 1959:

"Highway changes have long caused property owner upsets, both pro and con, and the proposal concerning the U.S. Highway 74 through Kings Mountain, better known as King Street, is no exception.

"Some citizens along the present route were overjoyed by the action of the State Highway and Public Works Commission in committing funds for a U.S. 74 bypass of Kings Mountain.

"These same citizens were less happy when W.F. Babcock, director of the commission, said no plans are finalized and that

Turn To Page 4-B



Aerial View Of Highway 74 Bypass