



Merritt Parkway
Conservancy



Conservancy Notes

Fall 2010

Merritt Parkway Named As One of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places

The National Trust for Historic Preservation named the Merritt Parkway to its 2010 list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places. Ever-increasing traffic volumes and budgetary constraints threaten the preservation of many of the Parkway's original features and designs, including the landscape and bridges.

"The Merritt Parkway is one of America's most important roads, a great landscape enjoyed by millions of travelers each year," said Richard Moe, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. "There are so few roads where a motorist can enjoy the natural beauty of their surroundings, and standing by and watching this extraordinary place be stripped of its irreplaceable character is simply not an option."

The Conservancy nominated the Merritt Parkway as the challenges

Deterioration of the North Avenue Bridge in Westport.



of balancing the demands of functionality and preservation of the aesthetic qualities are becoming increasingly difficult. The nomination also reaffirms the historical importance of the Parkway and DOT's commitment for future stewardship.

"We know the Merritt Parkway needs a lot of tender loving care and we plan to keep it that way," CTDOT Commissioner Marie stated at the press conference announcing the nomination.

This nomination, as well as the Merritt's inclusion on the World Monuments Fund 2010 Watch List, highlights the importance of making the Parkway's preservation a shared goal among national, state, and neighboring communities.

"I want to commend the Merritt Parkway Conservancy for keeping alive the vision of the Parkway's original proponents, designers and architects. The Conservancy has helped us ensure that the historic and aesthetic characteristics of the Parkway are protected and preserved. This beautiful ribbon of roadway has served us now for more than 70 years and remains a uniquely Connecticut gem. Our partnership with organizations like the Conservancy is critical to our commitment to keeping the Merritt safe and scenic."

Governor M. Jodi Rell

Tributes To Spring Along The Parkway

We all have a favorite tree, a bridge or stretch of road on the Parkway. Even a favorite season that paints our travels - the welcoming green in the spring, vivid colors of the fall contrasting with the starkness of winter. Unfortunately, stresses on the environment are changing the landscape of the Parkway and threatening the environment we treasure. Disease, pollution, invasive

plants and maintenance issues have taken a toll on many of the flowering trees once found in abundance along the Merritt.

Most notable is the loss of the spectacular spring blossoming trees. The Merritt was originally planted with thousands of mountain laurels with the intent to rival the cherry blossoms in Washing-

ton D.C. Eleanor Roosevelt would drive the Parkway in the spring to enjoy the flowering dogwoods and mountain laurel.

As a *tribute to spring* on the Parkway, the Conservancy has established a program to plant dogwoods, mountain laurel, rhododendron and azalea along the right-of-way. This is a unique opportunity

to enhance the natural beauty along the Parkway.

The Merritt Parkway Landscape Master Plan allows for the planting of *Cornus kousa* (Kousa Dogwood), *Cornus alternifolia* (Pagoda Dogwood), *Kalmia latifolia* (Mountain Laurel), *Rhododendron catawbiense* (Catawba Rhododendron), *Rhododendron 'Wilsoni'* (Wilson Rhododendron), *Rhododendron maximum*

Merritt Parkway Trail

The Connecticut Department of Transportation has applied for a \$1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Scenic Byways Program to conduct a feasibility study on developing a 37.5 mile multi-use path from Greenwich to Stratford. The trail would provide an east-west route and provide linkage to adjacent north-south trails. The path would become part of the 2,750 mile East Coast Greenway stretching from Maine to Florida.

The idea of building a trail along the right-of-way is not new. Prior to the Parkway's construction, numerous existing equestrian paths already existed in Fairfield County on privately owned land. Through the purchase of land for the Parkway, the highway department became the owner of much of the land through which the existing trails passed.

In 1936, there was a proposal for a system of bridle trails to parallel the Merritt. At the time, the feeling was this would contribute to the "charm of the area" and attract the "right type of citizen." The Merritt Parkway Bridle Association was formed to lobby for the bridle trails.

In 1938, there was general consensus to build the bridle trails. However, Attorney General Charles McLaughlin ruled Highway Commissioner Cox did not have the authority under existing law to build the trails. A year later, the General Assembly passed a bill allowing the highway department to construct bridle trails and allowing the connection of existing trails with new ones. It is not clear if any new trails were built, and the idea of a network of horse trails was later abandoned.

In 1994, a Merritt Parkway Trail Study

was completed by the Regional Plan Association. The study acknowledged the challenges of completing a continuous trail and suggested the trail be completed in segments. Demonstration sections would be built, and as support grew other towns would add to the trail. The first one mile segment was planned from Newfield Avenue to High Ridge Road in Stamford. However, the project was not approved by CTDOT.

The current proposed feasibility study could take up to two years to complete after funding has been approved. Design considerations include bridge and intersection crossings, steep slopes, river and wetland crossings, ensuring privacy of abutting landowners, safe separation from automobile traffic, and limited impact on the beauty of the Merritt.

Service Area Design

CTDOT entered into an agreement with Project Service LLC (joint venture between Doctor's Associates, parent company of Subway, Subcon, Inc. and The Carlyle Group) to operate all of the service area facilities in the state. Six of the service area facilities on the Merritt will be updated within the next two years. Renovations include interior improvements and expansion at the rear of the

buildings to accommodate Dunkin Donut and Subway offerings. Planned exterior improvements include landscaping and fuel pump relocation at four of the areas for safer access and service.

The Conservancy has met with Project Service LLC on the design of the new fuel canopy and to insure the exterior of the buildings are minimally impacted.

The North Haven service area on the Wilbur Cross is the first renovation on Route 15 and is anticipated to be completed in February 2011. This will serve as the model for the planned updates on the Merritt. Greenwich service areas are expected to be closed for renovations in September 2011 and re-opened in February 2012.

Tributes to Spring (Continued from page 1)

(Rosebay Rhododendron), Rhododendron periclymenoides (Pinxterbloom Azalea), Thododendron vaseyi (Pinkshell Azalea), Rhododendron viscosum (Swamp Azalea). A landscape architect will select the trees and locations along the Merritt. Trees will be planted by a licensed landscape profes-



Photo courtesy of Huntersville.org

sional, mulched and watered during the establishment period - all included in the purchase of a tree. Dogwoods may be purchased for \$500, Rhododendron \$300, Mountain Laurel \$300, and an Azalea for \$200.

Trees may be purchased to commemorate special

milestones, joyous occasions, holidays or as a living memory. Or purchase a tree to greet you on your daily commute! A tree certificate acknowledging your gift will be provided. Also, you may designate the town along the Parkway for planting your tree.

To order a tree please visit our website www.merrittparkway.org.

Bridge Cleaning and Restoration

Twelve bridges are being cleaned and repaired as part of the federally funded Resurfacing, Safety and Bridge Improvements Project in Fairfield and Trumbull. In addition, the Mill River Bridge, carrying traffic over the Mill River (near the Fairfield Service Area) is being replaced. As part of our partnership with CTDOT, the Conservancy received a grant from Newman's Own Foundation to review and comment on restoring the architectural features including color matching of the concrete.

The bridges are being cleaned using low pressure liquid power washing,

soft-bristled brushes or using sponge blasting. Sponge blasting is similar to power washing but instead of water, small granules of sponge with an abrasive coating are blasted onto the surface. The sponge material is then collected and placed into an onsite recycling machine which separates the reusable material from debris. The majority of the material is recycled for use again.

An unfortunate consequence of cleaning the bridges, and clearing the bridge abutments for planting, has been the introduction of graffiti on the bridges. CTDOT has removed

the graffiti, but it continues to reappear. The Conservancy has been in contact with the Connecticut State Police and is working with CTDOT on a graffiti removal program.

Concrete repairs are anticipated to begin in October. The Conservancy will be working with CTDOT on color matching of new and old patches.

The Park Avenue Bridge was completed in 1940. The bridge decoration was created using reverse molds in concrete formwork. At the higher ends of the bridge pylons is a cartouche featuring the seal for the Town of Trumbull.

Photo Below - Area of the bridge which will be stained to match the current color of the bridge.



Park Avenue Bridge located on the Fairfield/Trumbull line - Exit 47. The bridge is currently in the process of being cleaned.



The Magic Motorway

Two C-SPAN award winning student film makers, Greenwich High School '09 graduates, were hired by the Conservancy as summer interns. Their task was to create a You-Tube length film that would somehow connect the next generation of people to the Merritt Parkway. To interest youth in preservation of a road they take for granted, and who have no direct connection to its historic beginnings, is a challenge.

Charlie Greene (Brown 2013) and Eliza McNitt (NYU Tisch School 2013) didn't

hesitate at the challenge and given artistic freedom, they created a 'treatment' quickly and set to the many logistics of filming current and historic segments on the Merritt. The theme is a 'parkway ride' from the 1938 World's Fair with some flash-forwards, all narrated by the acclaimed actor James Naughton.

The October release of this short film is greatly anticipated. In October, see our web-site, You-Tube, and standby for a special invitation to its debut party!



Shooting a scene for a leisurely drive to be included in one of the historic segments.



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Wings of Victory

This is the third poster in a series celebrating the 70th Anniversary of the Parkway. *Wings of Victory - The James Farm Road Bridge* commemorates the opening of the Stratford portion of the Parkway in September 1940.

Posters may be purchased from
our website
www.merrittparkway.org.

Poster designed by
automotive artist JoePeP

