

History and Safety

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In this oral history interview excerpt, Stan Hyatt describes the history of the I-26 corridor and explains the challenges and dangers associated with this road.

Audio
File:

Duration: 2:38
Transcript:

Audio Transcript

Stan Hyatt

But it's a natural north-south corridor that's moved commerce and people. I suspect if you went back to the history, it was an old drover's route a hundred years ago, where people drove cattle and pigs and turkeys and things like they did down along the Buncombe turnpike, down the French Broad River. I think they probably did the same thing across Sam's Gap, and so commerce has moved. It's been a natural corridor for over a hundred years. It became apparent, as these other sections were being completed on either end of Madison County back in the 70s, that this was or would be a missing link through Madison County that needed a more modern road than the old US-23 highway up Murray Mountain to Sam's Gap. That road was built in the mid-30s. I'm sure when they opened it up and had a ribbon-cutting back in the 30s you could just see the exubalation [slang for exuberance and exhilaration] on the faces of the people coming over the mountain from Erwin, Tennessee and going back and forth what a fantastic road they had at that time. But if you stop and look, they didn't have tractor-trailers then. The traffic count would have probably been a few hundred people a day, and today of course we have nearly 10,000 people a day and six to seven hundred tractor-trailer rigs per day.

Rob Amberg

I didn't realize it was that high.

Stan Hyatt

Yes, and even the bigger tractor-trailer rigs have been banned from using the road. That ban went into effect about five years ago because of the concern of the families living on Murray Mountain that were putting their school kids out there. The mothers were just terrified that a runaway truck - these big rigs - would come off the mountain and run over a loaded school bus. So, even with the ban we're still having 500 to 700 rigs per twenty-four-hour period come off of the mountain. That road has just outlived its usefulness. Unfortunately, because of the grade of it, the terrain of it, the horizontal alignment of it, it is not possible to go in and put an easy remedy on fixing the existing road.

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