

On a chilly day in December 1947, hundreds of men and women stood on an empty stretch of four-lane highway near Portland, Maine, and watched as Mrs. Joseph Sayward, wife of the Maine Turnpike's first chairman, cut the ribbon opening the Turnpike.

That first section of the Maine Turnpike stretched for 47 miles from Kittery to Portland. It was then, and remains today, a model of engineering and fiscal achievement. The toll road was conceived because of traffic congestion and safety on a heavily used portion of U.S. 1 between Kittery and Portland. By the mid-1940s, motorists could take the better part of a day to travel by car between the two communities.

So a bill was passed in the Maine legislature in 1941 to survey, design and finance the turnpike over a period of five years. The actual construction took less than two years.

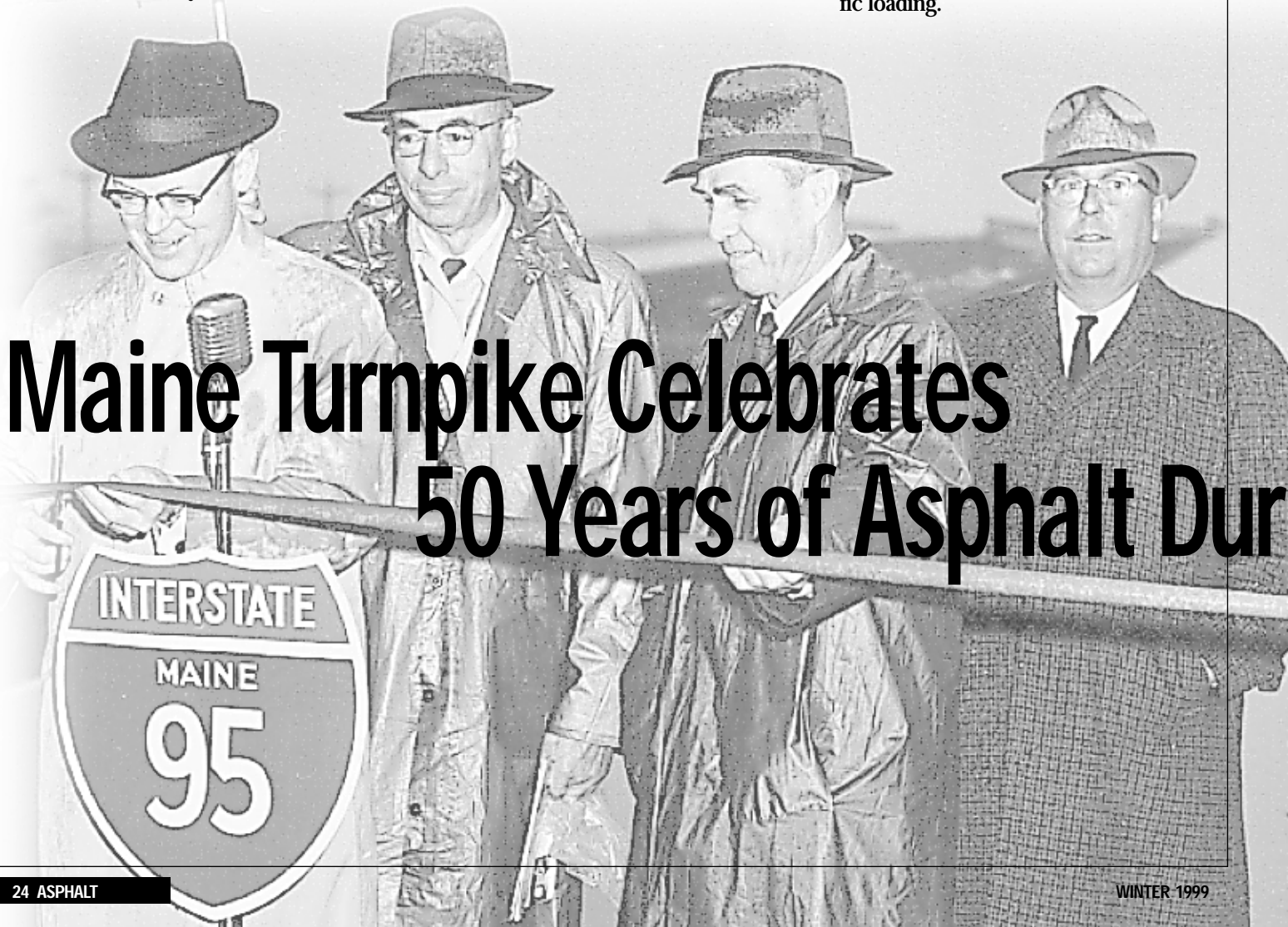


The Maine Turnpike Authority was a pioneer in the use of revenue bonds for highway construction, raising more than \$19 million through bonds sold to private and institutional investors. The revenue bonds enabled investors to build the road without any state or federal funds. The debt was repaid entirely from toll revenues.

The Maine Turnpike was the second toll highway built in the U.S. in this century. The Pennsylvania Turnpike was the first. The Maine Turnpike offered a

vision of the future. It was fast, straight, safe and efficient. During construction and for many years after, highway engineers from all over the world visited the Maine Turnpike.

The Maine Turnpike also reinforced the concept that a hot mix asphalt wearing surface served a more useful purpose than resurfacing a worn-out concrete road. Maine was the first to realize that, together with a flexible asphalt base, an asphalt wearing surface would stand up to any type of traffic loading.



# Maine Turnpike Celebrates 50 Years of Asphalt Dur

Two years after the first stretch was completed, the Turnpike began preparation for construction of a new stretch linking Augusta with the southern portion of the state. The 66-mile extension, including a four-mile spur to Falmouth, was at the time the largest highway construction project in Maine history. Two thousand construction workers were employed from the spring of 1954 to the winter of 1955. Twenty million cubic yards of earth, sand and gravel, 145,000 barrels of cement, 350,000 tons of hot mix asphalt, 47 million pounds of steel and 11.5 million gallons of asphalt went into construction of the extension.

Like the original 47-mile stretch, the design of the Turnpike extension set a national standard for safety, economy and efficiency. The lanes were wide and paved with asphalt, a surface well suited to the Maine climate. A new, depressed median strip increased safety, provided better drainage and facili-

tated snowplowing. Ninety-one bridges were built, including an 846-foot span over the Androscroggin River at Lewiston.

On December 13, 1955, in Augusta, Governor Edmund Muskie cut the ribbon opening the 66-mile Turnpike extension, eight years to the day after the original 47-mile toll highway opened. Visitors on the new extension ate at a state-of-the-art Howard Johnson's restaurant, complete with Formica lunch counters. This single restaurant served travelers in both directions. Northbound travelers parked and walked through a tunnel under the highway to grab a bite to eat before continuing on their way. The restaurant was so popular that local residents paid 10 cents to enter the Turnpike and eat there.

In the 15 years since the Maine legislature's decision to build, the Turnpike has remained a self-supporting facility that in turn has contributed more than \$100 million to the Maine DOT money that helps maintain state roads and bridges and reduces the burden on taxpayers.

The majority of Maine residents view the quality transportation provided by the Turnpike as essential to Maine's economic growth. Today, most of the freight in Maine goes by truck via the Turnpike, because it is the most efficient form of freight transportation. More than 12,000 trucks enter the Turnpike daily carrying Maine goods to the other states and Canada.

During the Turnpike's first decade, the average daily traffic volume was 2,500 vehicles. In the early 1970s that number had grown to 31,000. Today, the Turnpike accommodates an average of more than 122,000 vehicles per day.

*This article was taken from excerpts from the Maine Turnpike 50th Anniversary Commemorative Book printed in Maine Trails Magazine. Photos provided by the Asphalt Institute photo archives.▲*

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