

Inside Seven

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CALTRANS DISTRICT 7 EMPLOYEE NEWSLETTER

PASADENA FREEWAY BECOMES NATIONAL LANDMARK

First Freeway in the West Launched the Freeway Age

By Patricia Reid

California's first freeway, the Arroyo Seco Parkway (Pasadena Freeway) was designated a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) on July 23 at a ceremony at Casa De Adobe in Highland Park.

During the ceremony, Dr. Delon Hampton of Washington, D.C., ASCE President, presented Caltrans Chief Deputy Director Tony V. Harris with a bronze plaque which designates the pioneering Arroyo Seco Parkway as a national landmark.

"We are deeply honored to have the historic Arroyo Seco Parkway designated as a National Civil Engineering Landmark by the History and Heritage Committee of the Los Angeles Section of the American Society of Civil Engineers," Harris said.

"This recognition from the civil engineering profession is a wonderful tribute to the men and women whose vision, talent and hard work turned an intermittent stream into an engineering marvel. The people of California have enjoyed the fruits of their labors for over half a century. Today, their families and thousands of motorists share in their triumph."

Referring to the West's first modern freeway as a "symbol of determination," Harris praised the spirit of cooperation

between the federal, state and city governments of Los Angeles, Pasadena and South Pasadena which made the project possible.

Bob Sassaman, Acting District Director served as master of ceremonies. Also on hand were Assemblyman Jack Scott, Pasadena Mayor Bill Bogaard and Los Angeles City Engineer Vitaly Troyan. Eddie Reyes, Chief of Staff to Los Angeles City

Councilman Mike Hernandez, presented a special commendation to Caltrans. Diane Kane, the district's architectural historian, worked closely with ASCE members to prepare the application to nominate the parkway for the landmark award.

Colorful dedication celebrations in 1940 marked the opening of this six-lane, landscaped and divided superhighway. With bridges eliminating cross traffic, the roadway reportedly cut motoring time between Los Angeles and Pasadena to 13 minutes.

Only nine other California Public Works projects have been awarded the "landmark" designation. The 8.2-mile parkway received this special designation because it was the first fully grade-separated, limited-access, landscaped freeway to be built

as a non-toll state highway within an urban area. Built at a cost of \$5.7 million, it paved the way for over 4,000 miles of California freeways that came after it and it became the prototype for subsequent urban freeways in the United States.

The parkway was constructed between January, 1938 and December, 1940. The Arroyo Seco, a dry wash lying just west of Pasadena and curving south and west toward downtown Los Angeles, was considered an ideal location for a road as

early as 1895. However, for various reasons, construction did not begin for another 45 years. A bicycle speedway that was constructed in the early 1900's preceded the parkway as the first transportation artery in the Arroyo Seco Channel.

The parkway proved to highway engineers nationwide that a



UNVEILING THE BRONZE PLAQUE - Tony V. Harris and Dr. Delon Hampton lift a cloth to unveil the landmark plaque. Left to right: Mark Acuna with the Southwest Museum; Tom La Bonge, Special Assistant to Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan; Dorothy Cohen, South Pasadena Mayor Pro-Tem; Dr. Delon Hampton; Tony V. Harris; Assemblyman Jack Scott; Robert W. Sassaman; and Eddie Reyes.



California Highway Patrol officers lead a convoy of vehicles from Pasadena through Highland Park during the grand opening of the Arroyo Seco Parkway on December 30, 1940.

Pasadena Freeway

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fully grade-separated highway in an urban area was feasible, that such a highway would be popular with motorists and that substantial user benefits could be realized.

Arroyo Seco Parkway was followed by Route 163 in San Diego (1942), the Terminal Island Freeway (1943), the downtown extension of the Hollywood Parkway (1946-48), the San Bernardino Freeway (1950) and the Santa Ana Parkway (1949-52). These wartime and early postwar projects were designed for general traffic use and were later renamed "freeways."

The Arroyo Seco Parkway was extended after World War II to connect (1953) with the Hollywood and Santa Ana Parkways at the Four-Level Interchange in downtown Los Angeles and in 1954 was redesignated the "Pasadena Freeway."

Last month an international team of college students came to Los Angeles to participate in a unique summer program to "document" the Arroyo Seco Parkway. Caltrans provided \$100,000 for the program that is sponsored by the National Park Service. When completed by the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) team, the report, drawings and

photographs of this renowned engineering landmark will be available to future generations at the U.S. Library of Congress and on their Internet site.

The team is led by supervising architect Andrew Johnston from the University of California, Berkeley and includes graduate and undergraduate students from all over the United States. There are four architects, two landscape architects, two historians and a photographer. An architect exchange student from Guadalajara, Mexico is also participating through the International Committee on Monuments and Sites.

The architects will produce a set of two dozen interpretive drawings which will depict significant features of the parkway including the pavement, landscaping, bridges and tunnels. The historians will use the drawings, in addition to public records, newspaper reports, special collections and secondary sources, to produce a report focusing on the history and engineering of the parkway.

The final product will be delivered to Caltrans within 12 – 18 months following the completion of fieldwork. The HAER student team and Eric Delong, HAER Chief, from Washington, D.C., will give a formal "close-out" presentation at the Executive Staff Meeting on August 12, 1999. The team will also give a slide show presentation for employees the same day at the State Office Building at 107 South Broadway.



This 45lb. beautiful bronze plaque will be placed in a public area for all to see in the vicinity of the Arroyo Seco Parkway.



Tony V. Harris, Chief Deputy Director, is interviewed by a KCAL Channel 9 reporter, just one of the many members of the media present for the special Arroyo Seco Parkway event.