

# Maryland residents resist highway construction (Intercounty Connector/MD 200), 1980-2011

## Timing

### Time period notes:

Some people may consider the start of the anti-ICC campaign to be earlier (the highway proposal has been in planning records since 1950), but this case file treats 1980 as the starting point, when opposition efforts began to intensify.

1980

to:

2011

## Location and Goals

### Country:

United States

### Location City/State/Province:

Montgomery & Prince George's Counties, Maryland

[View Location on Map](#)

### Goals:

The goal was to prevent the State of Maryland from constructing a proposed six-lane highway, thereby avoiding the environmental degradation that would immediately result from the construction (loss of forests, wetlands, and animal habitat), as well as the long-term consequences (air pollution and carbon emissions from additional driving, more sprawl development, less money to fund mass transit projects, etc.).

## Methods

### Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support

### Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions

### Methods in 3rd segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support

### Methods in 4th segment:

- 001. Public speeches by political elites

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 010. Newspapers and journals>Organizational newsletters (Sierra Club, civic associations/neighborhood groups)
- 015. Group lobbying
- 016. Picketing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 5th segment:

- 001. Public speeches>by political elites
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 010. Newspapers and journals>Organizational newsletters (Sierra Club, civic associations/neighborhood groups)
- 015. Group lobbying
- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches>by political elites
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols>"ICC is a lemon"
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 010. Newspapers and journals>Organizational newsletters (Sierra Club, civic associations/neighborhood groups)
- 015. Group lobbying
- 016. Picketing>at governor's press conference
- 035. Humorous skits and pranks>Musical skit at public hearing
- 038. Marches
- 044. Mock funerals>Mourned loss of trees; Irish wake with bagpipe
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 037. Singing
- 177. Speak-in
- 178. Guerrilla theatre

Segment Length:

Approximately 5 years 3 months

## **Classifications**

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Environment

Group characterization:

- Environmentalists
- local residents
- members of civic associations
- mostly highly educated upper middle-class homeowners

## **Leaders, partners, allies, elites**

Leaders:

There were no clear individual leaders, but the Audubon Naturalist Society and the Sierra Club's Maryland chapter were particularly important in marshaling resources for the political lobbying and lawsuits in the later stages of the campaign.

Seeing as this was a campaign largely driven by numerous, independent civic/homeowners' associations and environmental groups (as well as myriad unaffiliated individuals, collectively forming the general public), the following groups - along with many others - could be classified as leaders: Shady Grove Woods Homeowners Association, Stonegate Citizens Association, Eyes of Paint Branch, Sierra Club Maryland, Audubon Naturalist Society, Maryland Native Plant Society, Environmental Defense, Coalition for Smarter Growth, Save Our Communities Coalition.

Partners:

Progressive Neighbors MD, 1000 Friends of Maryland, and other organizations.

External allies:

Various politicians at various times

Involvement of social elites:

At various points between 1980 and 2011, opposition to the highway came from a number of politicians, with official policy positions changing as new people were elected to office. Political opponents of the highway included the governor, the Montgomery and Prince George's County Councils (as a collective body and individual council members), county executives of the two counties, and state lawmakers representing the two counties. Aside from issuing official proclamations and press releases, elected officials expressed their opposition through writing op-eds and letters to the editor in popular newspapers, speaking at protest rallies, and participating in other protest events.

## **Joining/exiting order of social groups**

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Civic/Homeowners' associations
- environmental organizations
- political elites (entering and exiting throughout all six segments)

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

- Various local political action committees (PACs)

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

ICC-opposition was a central policy issue for many local political action committees by at least the 4th segment, but likely even earlier.

Segment Length:

Approximately 5 years 3 months

## **Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence**

Opponents:

Pro-highway politicians; business lobby, including Greater Washington Board of Trade; road construction industry; state and federal agencies, including Maryland State Highway Administration, U.S. Dept of Transportation (under G.W. Bush administration)

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

None known

Repressive Violence:

None known

## **Success Outcome**

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

3 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Total points:

7 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

Construction began in November 2007 and the full 18.8 mile highway was completed in November 2011. The campaign attained an initial victory when Gov. Parris Glendening canceled the project in September 1999, but his successor, Gov. Robert Ehrlich, revived it in 2003. However, the opposition campaign secured significant concessions related to mitigating or compensating for the environmental impact of the highway, including construction redesigns, additional restoration work, reductions in exhaust pollution from school buses, airborne soot monitors, and other items.

Maryland Route 200, also called the Intercounty Connector or simply the ICC by locals, is an 18.8-mile six-lane toll highway meant to provide an express road connection between the neighboring Maryland counties of Montgomery and Prince George's, both of which are suburbs of Washington, DC. Initially conceived as a

section of the proposed Outer Beltway that would fully encircle Washington, the ICC appeared on the master plans of both counties starting in 1950, at that time proposed as 32 miles. Although the local governments eventually dropped the Outer Beltway project, the ICC remained on the counties' infrastructure agenda. Widely considered to be one of the most controversial Maryland road projects in living memory, opposition to the highway stalled the project for decades, with construction getting underway sixty years after the highway's initial approval.

The opposition to the ICC historically has not been coordinated through a single entity or campaign leader, but rather has been taken as the collective protests of many small, autonomous organizations such as homeowners' associations and civic associations, as well as numerous private citizens individually and independently voicing their disapproval to their politicians. The region's residents have a history of being highly preoccupied with issues of town planning and development policy, with the local general public taking a great interest in what is elsewhere dismissed as the most mundane aspect of governance. As neighbors spoke with one another about the potential impact on their communities and the highway developed into a popular topic of everyday conversation, the issue became highly politicized (what the Washington Post named the single most divisive political issue in the state) and public opposition grew. In Montgomery County, where elections frequently revolved around candidates' development platforms, the county's entire delegation of state legislators (the state's largest bloc) declared its opposition to the ICC project in 1980. The declining political support, coupled with the difficulties state highway administrators faced during the 1980's in writing an environmental impact statement satisfactory to federal regulators, caused the first ICC study to be formally abandoned in 1989.

Public resistance to the project largely consisted of individuals choosing to express their opposition through traditional systems of communication established by the government and the media: residents wrote letters to newspapers, testified at public hearings, called their legislators, signed petitions, etc. In an unconventional twist on a traditional method, anti-highway campaigners attended a public hearing at a Greenbelt, MD, high school in June 1997, but instead of following the usual format of individually speaking at a microphone, the group performed a musical skit at the hearing, titled "Development Sucks." According to the ensemble's four-page script, the first act consisted of cast members dramatizing the history of suburbanization and urban decline in the Washington region since World War II, utilizing props that included a shopping cart, vacuum cleaner, and cardboard facades of Washington landmarks and suburbs. The second act focused on the collusion between the characters Developer and Board of Trade, who together rolled a black mat (a road) out through the audience, causing environmental and community destruction as they go. The governor was represented by a Ken doll, which Developer carried in his pocket. At the end, the Developer or Board of Trade sang a parody of Frank Sinatra's "My Way" replacing the lyrics "I did it my way" with "I built a highway."

Aside from private citizens working individually or forming ad-hoc opposition groups, it is also important to acknowledge the role of civic and homeowners associations in spreading the sense of discontent among the public. Many residents learned of the details of the highway proposal through attending neighborhood association meetings and reading the association newsletters. Through these highly localized communication forums, people were made aware of how the highway would impact their immediate communities and also of the environmental impacts in their area, which intensified their opposition. Furthermore, people's negative attitudes toward the project were reinforced upon seeing the shared sentiment of their neighbors in these neighborhood meetings and newsletters, and they were reminded of the issue on a monthly basis.

In addition to their role in stoking anti-highway sentiment among their own members, homeowners and civic associations also were important in generating media attention through protest events. One particularly creative event occurred in April 2008, when the Shady Grove Woods Homeowners Association organized a mock Irish wake to "mourn" the loss of forest cut down as part of the highway construction. Nearly 100 people attended the

event in Derwood, MD, where a Scottish bagpiper played and attendees wore green t-shirts (in solidarity with the trees) reading “A Wake for MoCo” (MoCo being a nickname for Montgomery County). Aimed to influence Governor Martin O’Malley to cancel the project, the event was titled “O’Malley’s March” to use the name of the governor’s former rock band.

The Audubon Naturalist Society and the Sierra Club’s Maryland chapter were also important participants in the opposition camp, as these larger organizations had certain resources, such as money, reputation, expertise, political clout, and large membership, that enabled them to be particularly effective challengers to the project. The Audubon Naturalist Society coordinated a loose coalition of over fifty civic and environmental organizations, dubbing it the Save Our Communities coalition and setting up a special website for the group. Around June 2007, the Save Our Communities coalition debuted a new campaign image, the “ICC is a lemon” logo, overlaying the highway sign on the citrus fruit, with the term “lemon” being a colloquialism for a defective car; the logo served as visual branding for the campaign after that. Similarly, an unnamed coalition of environmental groups utilized their collective expertise by submitting extensive comments on the state’s draft environmental impact statement.

In June 2004, the Save Our Communities coalition held a press conference and rally at a Silver Spring, MD high school, where the State Highway Administration was simultaneously conducting a public ICC workshop onsite. According to the organizers, over two hundred people came to this alternative event, where attendees picketed and listened to speeches from fellow highway opponents, including political elites such as Montgomery County Councilmember Phil Andrews.

Due to the highly educated backgrounds that characterized most of the opposition campaigners, the campaign had numerous experts in a variety of fields at its disposal. The campaign drew heavily on these human resources, utilizing sympathizers’ technical expertise to more competently challenge the government’s assertions about the economic, environmental, and community impact of the highway, to more effectively negotiate changes to routes and engineering features, to carry more clout when lobbying politicians, and to gain more credibility when trying to turn public opinion against the highway project. In an example of the last use, highway opponents held a rally in June 2008 where a doctor – a pediatrician who specialized in environmental health – spoke about the impact of increased air pollution on people near the proposed highway route, particularly students at a local elementary school. The organizers hoped that the speaker’s medical credentials would attach authority to his statement that “the vulnerability of children to air pollution cannot be overstated.” At the protest, the doctor was flanked by children as he spoke at the podium, at least one of whom visibly suffered from a respiratory ailment.

The opposition campaign achieved an initial victory in September 1999, when formerly pro-ICC Governor Parris N. Glendening announced he was withdrawing his support for the highway on environmental grounds, declaring it did not comport with the Smart Growth development policy that he championed. Subsequent elections brought a number of pro-growth politicians to local and state offices, shifting the political balance in favor of ICC construction, and Governor Glendening’s successor, Governor Robert Ehrlich, revived the project in 2003.

In the view of the Washington Post, the loss of political allies hampered highway opponents’ ability to effectively communicate their message, with the newspaper citing the events of a July 2005 press conference as an example. At the outdoor press conference in Rockville, MD, where the governor would announce the planned route for the ICC, approximately 30 protestors from the Sierra Club, the Audubon Naturalist Society, and neighborhood associations hoped to use the state’s media event as an opportunity to counter the governor’s advocacy of the project. After the state police cordoned off the boundaries of the designated protest zone, which the demonstrators had negotiated to be located directly behind the governor, the governor’s staff rotated his

podium and platform 90 degrees, thereby adding twenty feet of separation from the assembled picketers and excluding them from the view of the television news cameras. Lacking the political clout to renegotiate with state police, the protestors were not permitted to adjust their location (though a few seemed to defy the restrictions and get within camera shot nonetheless, as two placards are partially visible behind the governor in the photo on the state's official press release). Despite their disadvantageous siting, which prevented them from achieving the visual impact they had planned, the picketers managed to disrupt the press conference with their loud booing and chanting, forcing the governor to pause his remarks to acknowledge them. "We'll listen to the voices of the past here for a minute," he said. After a brief silence, he continued, "The vocal minority has won for too long. Today, the view of the vast majority finally wins."

The federal government also expressed support for the highway, approving the project in 2006 after an expedited environmental review, made possible by President George W. Bush's 2002 executive order that authorized fast-track approval of select transportation projects. In response, a number of homeowners and environmental groups sued in a last-ditch effort to cancel or delay construction. In 2006, Sierra Club and Environmental Defense filed a federal lawsuit challenging the highway on air pollution and public health grounds. Calling upon its vast membership in the local area, Sierra Club solicited donations toward legal fees, providing the general public with a way to support the opposition campaign despite the inherently technocratic nature of lawsuits. Also in 2006, the Audubon Naturalist Society and the Maryland Native Plant Society joined local residents in seeking a federal injunction against highway construction due to its environmental impact. The next year, in March 2007, the Shady Grove Woods Homeowners Association filed a lawsuit in state court asserting the highway project was not economically feasible.

The two federal lawsuits were consolidated, then dismissed, and ultimately settled on appeal in 2008. The state lawsuit was also settled in 2008. The opposition campaign secured significant concessions related to mitigating or compensating for the environmental impact of the highway, including construction redesigns, additional restoration work, reductions in exhaust pollution from school buses, airborne soot monitors, and other items. However, the ICC opposition proved unsuccessful in their ultimate goal of canceling the project. Construction began in November 2007, and the complete 18.8-mile road opened for public use on 22 November 2011.

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Additional Notes:

Wikipedia has an incredibly comprehensive (and well-sourced) article on the Intercounty Connector, providing both an excellent overview of the history of the project as well as detailing the political wrangling, legal actions, and protests that occurred. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maryland\\_Route\\_200](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maryland_Route_200)>

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