



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### From byway to highway

*Alexandria Times, January 24, 2013*

*Image: Shirley Highway traffic jam, ca. 1960. Photo, George Mason University..*

After nearly eight years of construction, the Henry G. Shirley Memorial Highway was finally completed in September 1949. But by the time this milestone was achieved, development along the highway corridor through Arlington and Alexandria caused traffic to explode, as seen in this photo taken about 1960.

New homes, suburban shopping centers and office parks quickly replaced the forested countryside, vastly overburdening the four-lane highway. By 1956, with the approval by Congress of the Interstate Highway System, plans were already in the works to rebuild the 17-mile Shirley Highway as part of the new Interstate 95, a 1,920-mile limited-access expressway designed to parallel the Eastern Seaboard of the United States.

After a series of delays lasting nearly a decade, work on improving the Shirley Highway finally began in 1965. As I-95 construction moved northward from downtown Richmond, a massive effort to rebuild the Shirley to Interstate highway standards was undertaken, with many trend-setting traffic innovations. The north and southbound travel lanes were widened, and they were to be separated by two additional travel lanes in the highway median, which could be redirected in either direction depending on traffic conditions.

Although these additional lanes were conceived to accommodate all traffic, by the time just one lane was complete in 1969, they were redesignated as commuter “busways,” becoming the first restricted interstate highway lanes in the country. Ultimately, as an additional lane was added, they were changed to HOV lanes, allowing personal cars with higher-than-normal occupancy access to the express lanes.

The complete rebuilding of the Shirley Highway as part of I-95 was finished in 1975, but the designation was short lived. Just two years later, the to-be-built segment of the roadway between College Park, Md., and New York Avenue in Washington was canceled because of community opposition in the nation’s capital.

The Shirley was then renumbered as I-395, with I-95 rerouted along the eastern side of the Capital Beltway.



*“Out of the Attic” is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as “Marking Time” and explored Alexandria’s history through collection items, historical*



**Office of Historic Alexandria  
City of Alexandria, Virginia**

---

*images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into “Out of the Attic” and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.*

*These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by Amy Bertsch, former Public Information Officer, and Lance Mallamo, Director, on behalf of the Office of Historic Alexandria.*