

Paying the price for highway repairs

Have you ever noticed how highway maintenance takes place at the most convenient times, like during rush hour at the height of the tourist season? A recent trip to Florida revealed some interesting facts about this topical subject that I feel is my duty to share with our alert readers.

The first day of spring just passed, and those living in Jamestown and other New England cities and towns can soon look forward to an influx of tourists whose numbers will increase as we progress into summer. At that time, Jamestown's population will grow by approximately 20 percent. In some beach towns, populations will double and triple. As expected, more people will translate into more traffic. So, instead of fighting gnarly traffic jams impeded by snow and ice in sub-freezing temperatures, we can fight gnarly traffic jams impeded by tourists. . . oh, and one other thing — road maintenance crews.



You can't beat a system you can't understand

By Sam Bari

However, before being hasty to condemn the road workers for making life inconvenient, I suppose we must consider the weather. Cement doesn't harden well in winter, and asphalt is difficult to apply in the snow. So, we generally reserve roadwork for the warmer months. Keeping that in mind, the extremely intelligent and considerate management of our department of transportation limits the number of hours that crews can impede traffic. For our convenience, they work two shifts, both at night, and only during the week. They begin shutting down traffic lanes at 4 p.m. in the afternoon and open them again no later than 9 a.m. the following morning. This ingenious policy keeps the roads clear for traffic during daylight hours, you know — when everybody is at work and doesn't need to travel. In other words, they start at the beginning of evening rush hour and finish at the end of morning rush hour. How convenient. What are they thinking?

So, I go to Florida in the dead of winter for a little relief — not so. Traffic is no less horrendous in paradise. Guess why — Bingo! Tourists, and oddly — road repair crews. Hmm . . . something seems wrong with this picture. Why doesn't the state of Florida repair its roads during the summer when the tourists are up north? They don't have real winter. Their answer is simple. In place of snow, Florida is blessed with hurricanes in the summer. And the roads need to be open for evacuation during the stormy season. Consequently, major repairs do not take place in the summer months on the roads of Florida.

Okay, I'll concede. Road maintenance is one of life's inconveniences that will not be eliminated any time soon. Nonetheless, I have never understood why the same areas of highway are always under construction. In Florida, crews continually

seem to repair a 30-mile stretch of I-95 just north of Ft. Lauderdale. Every year, I see them at work somewhere on that road. And they never finish the job. I've watched them fixing that road so much that I recognize the crew members as I creep by at 5 miles an hour. They've made careers out of maintaining that section of the interstate highway. They start at one end of their designated portion and work until they reach the other end. Then they go back to the beginning and start over, like a modern version of the ancient Greek "Myth of Sisyphus." I am sure this scenario occurs in many places, but Ft. Lauderdale is one area with which I am intimately familiar.

In another area in Rhode Island, the same scenario occurs every summer. It starts on I-95 at Providence and continues south about 30 miles. Every summer, some part of that highway is under construction, and traffic slows down for miles every morning and afternoon.

In an odd way, it brings to mind an old saying that my grandmother used to tell me: "No matter where you go, you take your troubles with you." I'm sure you've all heard a version of that chestnut at one time or another. Now I'm not so neurotic that I think road maintenance is part of the baggage I carry wherever I go.

However, I swear that in both Rhode Island and Florida, it's the same crew working on those roads. If this is indeed the case, they must summer in the Ocean State and winter in the Sunshine State. Maybe this is a common occurrence all over the country. I don't know.

But you gotta admit, it's kinda creepy, and definitely part of that system we can't understand.

A Jamestown's Prayer

*Oh Lord please help me over this bridge
I get so nervous approaching the ridge.
The mesh at the top makes me so queasy
I forget the salt air is so cool and breezy.
Lord Jesus, I need you, please give me your hand
To get me back safely rolling on land!*

anonymous

March 31st deadline for old bridge memories

Time is running out for the old Jamestown Bridge and for your chance to share your memories of the old structure. The Jamestown Historical Society is seeking anecdotes or family stories about the old Jamestown bridge.

Those who would like to share their reminiscences should send them to the Jamestown Historical Society, PO Box 156, Jamestown, RI 02835. The deadline is Friday, March 31.

You may also e-mail Sue Maden at SDMaden@aol.com. The first prize for the most special bridge memory submission will be a copy of the 1990 book, "The Jamestown Bridge, 1940-1990: From 'The Bridge to Nowhere' to Obsolescence." This book is out of print.

Plant a Seed

By Robert G. Goode, Jr.

Spring is here, time to clean our home head to toe. Brush off old address books all the ones that mean the most to us even if we see them everyday or once a year. Renew old friendships. Create new bonds, for you don't know If you will be here Next year to do so. Spring is here. Time to plant a seed and watch everything grow

— In fondest memory of Nancy Baker

Photo reprints are now available at The Jamestown Press.

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