

From the moment of its conception, this bridge crossing the Potomac became a tangible symbol of progress and faith in a better, brighter future.

This bridge — now over twenty-seven years old — represents Maryland's confidence in the future and our leadership's vision of what the future would hold.

We need only recall the *time of its conception* — the 1930's, the bleak decade of depression — to appreciate the extraordinary vision of Maryland's leaders.

In the year 1937 a feeling of economic apathy prevailed throughout the nation. Few could afford the luxury of cars or trips or travel. The State's total population was estimated to be little more than 1.5 million, while all the residents of Southern Maryland's counties combined numbered just over 40,000 people.

There was little indication for optimism and less incentive for ambitious investment schemes. There was little impetus to lift the economic lethargy. "Happy days" did not seem on the horizon. Yet in Maryland a handful of leaders knew what was to be and, even more important, what could be if proper plans and programs brought the necessary facilities to stimulate growth.

Their vision was nonetheless tempered with realism and with responsibility. They saw what needed to be done — and could only be done through State initiative, State planning and State funds. They recognized that there was risk, but without risk progress is rare.

This was the vision of experienced businessmen — the pragmatic view that economic growth could be positively developed — and a network of highways, bridges and tunnels was essential to generate economic growth.

Thus, in 1937 legislation was enacted authorizing the State Roads Commission to develop a comprehensive bridge and tunnel construction program financed wholly by the tolls. That legislation was signed into law by Governor Harry W. Nice.

A plan of awesome ambition emerged including spans crossing four of Maryland's waterways — the Potomac, the Susquehanna, the Patapsco and finally the ultimate — a dream of two centuries — a bridge linking the shores of the Chesapeake Bay.

The first priority was to create a national "north-south" highway — avoiding Baltimore and Washington traffic, cutting travel time and distance between Philadelphia and Richmond.