

**ASPHALT INSTITUTE**  
**Executive Offices and Research Center**  
Research Park Drive  
P.O. Box 14052  
Lexington, KY 40512-4052  
USA  
Telephone 859-288-4960  
FAX No. 859-288-4999

---

## **Asphalt Design Resolves Environmental Concerns Through Scenic Franconia Notch**

***By Bob Joubert, Senior District Engineer, Asphalt Institute***

---

Although few environmentalists may describe any highway as beautiful, most of those involved in the two decades of debate about the Franconia Notch Parkway agree that it is a spectacular civil and environmental engineering achievement.

The parkway's completion in June 1988 marked the culmination of more than 25 years of negotiation, cooperation and planning by environmental groups and government agencies. Involved were the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT), the New Hampshire Department of Natural Resources and Economic Development, several environmental groups and the White Mountain Environmental Committee.

### **Controversy**

Controversy over the parkway went as far back as 1947, when planning began for the Interstate system. Planners proposed Franconia Notch as the corridor for a north-south link through the White Mountains. The parkway replaced Route 3, the original two-lane road on which motorists simply pulled over to view the many scenic vistas. Route 3 was the scene of constant traffic jams and safety hazards during the summer and fall.

The primary concern of the environmentalists, however, was not traffic conditions, but the color of the parkway's proposed asphalt pavement. They were most concerned that the pavement, and the adjacent 9-mile paved bicycle path, would age to a light color and look like two white scars through the Notch.

State and federal officials and the White Mountain Environmental Committee finally reached an acceptable compromise and highway construction began in 1982. To assure that the pavement would retain a dark or deep grey color, the Materials and Research Division of the NHDOT specified the use of a "dark vein" granite aggregate that environmentalists had already approved.

### **Dark Aggregate**

NHDOT called for specific percentages of large-size dark aggregate to ensure the lasting color in the pavement surface. NHDOT also assured environmentalists that they will use dark aggregates for future overlays and rehabilitation.

The choice of other materials, such as naturally stained wood on structures, stonework on bridges and painted weathered steel blended with the natural beauty of the Notch. Since the

parkway's opening, NHDOT has found that the dark grey color serves to enhance traffic lane and safety island delineations. The contrast of the dark pavement also facilitates snow and ice removal.

### **More Opportunities**

Is the parkway a success and does it satisfy the environmental needs of the Notch? Visitors to Franconia Notch would answer "yes" to both questions. Dick Hamilton, president of the White Mountain Association-the largest touring agency in New England-promotes the parkway as a major tourist attraction. He says that the new parkway, with its designated parking areas and scenic overlooks, has provided "more opportunities for sight-seeing than did old Route 3." Hamilton adds, "there also are more opportunities for organized sight-seeing because groups can gather in the parking lots and overlooks to enjoy planned trail hikes, bicycling and scenic adventures."

As for the environmentalists, Hamilton believes that most of them are satisfied with the new parkway, although some of them feel there are not quite enough trees. NRDOT's tree policy was "no net loss", but due to the severity of the winters in the Notch, the agency may have to replant trees two or three times. The color and appearance of the asphalt pavement seem to satisfy everyone.

After four years of living with the new parkway, local residents of the Notch area agree that the road is well maintained and a pleasure to drive during each season of the year. They also concur that the dark gray asphalt pavement blends respectfully into the natural beauty of Franconia Notch.

**This article appeared in the Summer 1992, Volume 6, No. 1, ASPHALT magazine.**