

HISTORY OF TENNESSEE'S FIRST BICYCLE INTERSTATE ROUTE

In 1978 the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (**AASHTO**) established the concept of an Interstate bicycle routes similar to the nations motor routes. The idea didn't go very far until 2003 when **AASHTO** partnered with major bicycle advocacy groups, such as Adventure Cycling Association (**ACA**), Mississippi River Trail, and East Coast Greenways. Again the concept stalled. The idea had broad enthusiasm, but made little progress. The idea was also supported in Tennessee where in 2013, USBR-23 was officially registered as the State's first route. Nevertheless, at the peak of progress an unexpected and surprising turn of events halted this work.

Tennessee bicycle touring advocates backed **ACA's** desire to create routes across the State. **Bruce Day**, a co-founder of the FOGBEE Bicycle Club and the statewide advocacy organization Bike Walk Tennessee and a long time bicycle tourist, outlined routes across the State. In 2009 he presented his ideas to Tennessee Department of Transportation (**TDOT**). However, they along with **Day** recognized the magnitude of the job and were unable to provide the project with any resource priority. But, that was about to change.

In 2012, FOGBEE **Dave Shumaker**, a retired Sales and Marketing executive and entrepreneur, joined the project. He had the experience and energy to move the project forward and devised a plan to make USBR-23 a reality. As expected, it was going to be an enormous amount of work, but that didn't detoured **Shumaker**. Over the next year, he and **Day** met with mayors, city commissioners, and other promoters along the route. With great enthusiasm these city leaders wrote letters of endorsement to **TDOT** and **ACA**. In November 2013, **ACA** and **TDOT** registered USBR-23 as Tennessee's first bicycle Interstate route.

The work of **Day** and **Shumaker** received lots of publicity with local and national news coverage. Their methodology became the role model for how to make USBR routes happened. In 2014 bicyclists from across the State joined in an inaugural tour on USBR-23 with coverage in local television and newspapers. They were on "a roll," or at least that was what they thought.

A key part of the project was to get the route "signed" similar for what exists for other Interstates and tourist attractions. **Day** identified the location for four hundred signs from the border of Kentucky to Alabama. He personally provided geo-markers and photographs for every sign and gave that detail to **TDOT**. The initial cost estimate from **TDOT** was \$38,000. City leaders and the Nashville Regional Metropolitan Planning Organization agreed to contribute to this purchase. However, when the final project document was released by **TDOT**, the cost had ballooned to \$380,000 for just these four hundred signs. All parties agreed that this expenditure could not be justified.

This signage expense has damped the progress on other planned Tennessee USBRS projects supported by other advocacy organizations. Routes from Chattanooga to Nashville (USBR-121) and Kentucky through Knoxville and Chattanooga to Georgia (USBR-21) have halted prior to registration. FOGBEE tourists have mapped and bicycled from Abington Virginia to West Memphis Arkansas anticipating their tours would eventual become part of the US Bicycle Route System, but for now it will remain just a great idea until AASHTO and ACA can solve this signage issue.