

## Chapter 1

# Origins of the Orlando-Orange County Expressway Authority

Orlando and Orange County experienced rapid growth during the decade and a half following World War II. Some of the population increase resulted from the post-war influx of servicemen returning to the salubrious Florida climate which they had discovered during the war.

Others came because of military preparedness relating to the Cold War. Both the Orlando and Pine Castle air bases remained open, bringing payrolls, new businesses, and housing construction. Residential areas spread around the outskirts of the city, and people relied more and more on automobile transportation.

Growth accelerated even further when the United States Missile Test Center opened at Cape Canaveral in 1955. Some of its employees chose to live in Orlando and commute to the coast. Orlando businesses performed services for the new agency. The Martin Company (later Martin-Marietta and then Lockheed-Martin) purchased 7,300 acres in southwest Orange County, spurring more new businesses and residential developments. Martin's 8,000 or so employees commuted from Pine Hills (west), Rio Pinar (east), and Maitland (north). During its first two years, Martin spawned 72 other new businesses. Encouraged by the Orlando Industrial Board, five industrial parks opened in



*Looking north on Orange Avenue as it appeared in 1958 during construction of the SunBank Building.*



*Looking south across Lake Lucerne in 1955 during construction of the Orange Avenue causeway.*

the city along with others in surrounding towns. These developments placed commuter traffic on local streets and roads as well as S.R. 50 between Orlando and Cape Canaveral.

By the early 1960s, more than 300,000 people lived in metropolitan Orlando, the economy was still expanding rapidly, and new residents were flooding in. The area's infrastructure, constantly strained, was reaching critical proportions in many areas. Transportation needs were especially serious.

Orlando had been a transportation hub of Central Florida since the opening of the Dixie Highway (U.S. 441) and the Cheney Highway (SR 50) in the 1920s. Progressive business leaders such as Martin Andersen, the influential owner of the Orlando Sentinel, William H. (Billy) Dial, prominent attorney and banker, and others had relished that distinction and were anxious to retain it. With Dial representing Central Florida on the State Road Board, they were able to have the Sunshine Parkway (Florida's Turnpike) routed through southwest

Orange County. Interstate-4, connecting Tampa and Daytona Beach, was designed to pass through Orlando and intersect with the Turnpike southwest of town. These roads opened for traffic in 1963 and 1965 respectively. At the same time, area leaders recognized that their Municipal Airport had inadequate runways for jet passenger planes. Pressed for both time and money to construct a new facility, they resorted to extraordinary methods. With Mayor Carl Langford playing a prominent role, they made an arrangement with the U.S. Air Force whereby civilian passenger planes could land at McCoy Air Force Base (formerly Pine Castle) and the city could build a terminal on military land. In 1968, Mayor Langford signed a long-term lease, by which the city paid one dollar to acquire full control of civilian air traffic at McCoy.

With modern airline services after October 1961, and limited access highways to the south, west, and north under construction, Orlando lacked only

a similar road to the east. That road became more crucial when President Kennedy announced in 1961 that the United States would put a man on the moon within ten years, leading Brevard County to proclaim itself the “Gateway to the Moon.” Wishing to retain its Central Florida leadership position, Orlando changed its own slogan from the “City Beautiful” to “Action Center of Florida,” and then took measures to give the new name substance.

A Texan who had kept close contact with his native state, Martin Andersen had long been impressed with what the Dallas Citizen’s Council, organized in 1935, had done for the infrastructure of its city. Hoping to provide similar long-range leadership for Orlando, Andersen and others formed the Central Florida Development Commission (CFDC). Its three announced goals were: to promote an area university, to create an East Central Florida Regional Planning Council (ECFRPC), and to complete an adequate road system for the metropolitan area. The ECFRPC was in place by 1962 and Florida Technological University was authorized in 1965. Plans for the road system were more complex.

Lack of funds made traditional road construction methods inadequate. Demands for local roads already far exceeded the resources of local governments. The State Road Department (SRD), grappling with the growing needs of the entire state, was falling behind in its road-building program. The plans for an interstate system of highways, begun in 1956, were already completed, and there were no federal funds for additional limited access highways in the Orlando area.

Faced with these limitations and especially desirous of a limited access road connecting the McCoy Jetport with Cape Canaveral, Andersen and the CFDC explored other alternatives. After a large group of civic leaders visited Jacksonville in 1961 to view that city’s expressways, talk in Orlando turned to a toll road system. Drafted by Joel Wells and perfected by Representative John Brombeck who guided it through the legislature, a bill creating an Orlando-Orange County Expressway Authority (OOCEA) became law in 1963.<sup>1</sup>

Although in 1963 the CFDC was immediately interested in building a road

between the McCoy Jetport and Cape Canaveral, the law creating the OOCEA authorized an Orlando-Orange County expressway system. Signed into law by Governor Farris Bryant, the statute created an Authority of five members, three of whom were to be Orange County citizens appointed by the governor. The two other members were the incumbent Orange County Commission chairman and the Central Florida member of the State Road Board, serving ex officio. The OOCEA board was to elect one member as chairman. It could elect a secretary and a treasurer who did not have to be OOCEA board members. It was also empowered to employ an executive director, legal counsel, technical experts, engineers, and other necessary employees, and to fix their compensation. It could employ a fiscal agent, but that person or firm was to be chosen from at least three sealed bids. Members were to serve without compensation except for travel expenses incurred in conducting OOCEA business.

The OOCEA was empowered to build expressways and all necessary appurtenances including approaches, roads, and bridges. It could acquire rights-of-way by donation, purchase, or by eminent domain. It also had authority to enter into lease-purchase agreements, to establish and collect tolls, and to borrow money by pledging anticipated revenues. With approval of the County Commission, Orange County tax funds could also be used to back the bonds, but any such funds which were disbursed had to be repaid to the county “when the authority deems it practicable.” The OOCEA was also authorized to accept grants from, and to enter into contracts with, any federal agency, the state, the county of Orange, or the city of Orlando.<sup>2</sup> This was a broad grant of authority to carry out a large responsibility. When need for roads were great and no tax dollars were available, the OOCEA would become the builder of last resort.

Although it received scant notice at the time, a proviso that the OOCEA could not build a road within the boundaries of any municipality without the municipality’s approval was to have broad repercussions many years later.<sup>3</sup> Another limitation was that the OOCEA lacked power to build outside Orange County, and the need for metropolitan roads often extended beyond the county boundary.

In the meantime, the OOCEA was first concerned with constructing the road which became known as the Bee Line.