

The National Road



The Braddock Road had been opened by the Ohio Company in 1751 between Cumberland, Maryland, the limit of navigation on the Potomac River, and the forks of the Ohio River (a site that would later become Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania). It received its name during the French and Indian War when it was used in the Braddock expedition, an attempt to assault the French Fort Duquesne by General Braddock and George Washington.

Construction of the Cumberland Road (National Road) was authorized on March 29, 1806 by President Thomas Jefferson. The Cumberland Road would replace the Braddock Road for travel between the Potomac and Ohio Rivers, following roughly the same alignment until east of Uniontown, Pennsylvania. From there, where the Braddock Road turned north to Pittsburgh, the Cumberland Road would continue west to Wheeling, West Virginia (then part of Virginia), also on the Ohio River.

The **National Road** or **Cumberland Road** was one of the first major improved highways in the United States, built by the federal government. Construction began in 1811 at Cumberland, Maryland, on the Potomac River.

Construction of the new Macadam road began on November 20, 1815 at Cumberland, and the road reached Wheeling on August 1, 1818. On May 15, 1820 Congress authorized an extension to St. Louis, Missouri, connecting it directly to the Mississippi River, and on March 3, 1825 to Jefferson City, Missouri.



Workers laying a section of the new Macadam road

A chain of turnpikes [Toll Roads] connecting Baltimore, Maryland, to the National Road at Cumberland was completed in 1824, forming what is referred to as an eastern extension of the National Road. In 1835 the road east of Wheeling was turned over to the states for operation as a turnpike. It came to be known as the **National Pike**, a name also applied to the Baltimore extension.

The National Road then crossed the Allegheny Mountains and southwestern Pennsylvania, reaching Wheeling, Virginia (now West Virginia) on the Ohio River in 1818. Work on the extension utilized the pre-existing Zane's Trace between Wheeling and Zanesville, Ohio, and was completed to Columbus, Ohio, in 1838 and Springfield, Ohio, in 1838.



A remaining section of the original road in Guernsey County in Ohio

Plans were made to continue through St. Louis, Missouri, on the Mississippi River to Jefferson City, Missouri, but funding ran out and construction stopped at Vandalia, Illinois in 1839. The last Congressional appropriation was made May 25, 1838, and in 1840 Congress voted against completing the road, with the deciding vote cast by Henry Clay. By that time railroads were proving a better method of transportation; the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was being built for the same purpose - connecting Baltimore via Cumberland to Wheeling. Construction stopped in 1839, and much of the road through Indiana and Illinois remained unfinished, later transferred to the states.



The Old and new Blaine Bridge in Ohio

The approximately 620-mile (1000 km) road provided a connection between the Potomac and Ohio Rivers and a gateway to the West for thousands of settlers. It was the first road in the U.S. to use the new macadam road surfacing. Today the alignment is mostly followed by U.S. Highway 40. The full road, including extensions east to Baltimore and west to St. Louis, was designated "**The Historic National Road**", an All-American Road, by U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Y. Mineta in 2002.



A Mile marker from the National Road



The first monument in honor of George Washington was built along the National Road