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## THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY EVOLUTION OF LOCAL-SCALE ROADS IN KENTUCKY'S BLUEGRASS

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**ABSTRACT.** In the nineteenth century, local-scale roads in central Kentucky were built subject to local knowledge and cultural tradition but within the context of legal authority and folk- or science-based engineering precepts. This study demonstrates how legal and engineering standards—though conceived as transcendent and objective—were in fact contingent on the region's physical attributes as well as its cultural traditions and character. Thus local road alignment and construction have been influenced by and contingent on local knowledge, dialogue, and debate since frontier times. *Keywords:* *Kentucky, local roads, road engineering, road history, road law.*

On 3 December 2003, state transportation officials gathered beside U.S. Highway 27–68 in Lexington, Kentucky, the county seat of Fayette County, to dedicate the newly reconstructed federal road that links Lexington to Paris, the county seat of adjoining Bourbon County. The highway is 12.5 miles long and is locally known as the “Paris Pike.” The ceremony marked the culmination of a complex, thirty-seven-year-long vetting process that included engineering plans and proposals, protests and lawsuits by abutting landowners, public hearings and debates, and finally intensive consultation between engineers and landowners before and during road reconstruction. The remarkably altered roadway cost more than \$93 million, or about \$7.5 million per mile, nearly double the cost of any comparable road in the state. What had been a narrow, shoulderless, two-lane asphalt track laid atop a nineteenth-century turnpike had been transformed into a four-lane parkway built to interstate-highway specifications and carefully engineered to preserve historic landscapes (Figures 1 and 2). Horse farms line long sections of the route, their road frontage demarcated by rock fences that required removal and reconstruction by expert masons (Schneider 2003, 9–13).

The Paris Pike reconstruction process illustrates vividly that legal statutes and engineering standards are not universally applicable—though conceived as objective and transcendent—but are subject to local conditions and concerns; as David Livingstone affirms, the authority of legal and “scientific knowledge is produced

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