

The History of the Numbered Routes That Pass or Have Passed Through Superior Township.

Before the route numbering system was developed there were a number of marked "Auto Trails" throughout the United States. These routes were usually promoted by business interests who had in mind their own interest rather than that of the motoring public. They passed commercial establishments who paid for the "privilege" of being on the route. Michigan had a number of such trails and eventually it became necessary that they be regulated. Thus the state became involved in designating highway routes. The creation of Michigan Trunk Line routes began in 1913.¹ In 1918 Michigan began to designate trunk line routes using a numbering system, the second state in the nation to do so, Wisconsin being the first in 1917. By 1925 Michigan had a fairly comprehensive route numbering system in place.

With the adoption of federal route numbering system in 1926 the Michigan system had to make adjustments in that some of Michigan's numbered routes became federal routes. There was no point in having two different numbers for the same route, although in some cases where two or more routes use the same short stretch of roadway, this does occur.

The Federal Route Numbering System was created by the Joint Board on Interstate Highways, consisting of Federal and State highway officials, and released for public comment in November 1925. It called for east-west routes to have even numbers with the major route numbers ending in "0". North-south routes had odd numbers with major routes ending in "1" or "5". Branches off the main roads were assigned three digit numbers and there were other criteria for creating numbered routes. A tentative plan designating routes was submitted and after considerable changes the numbering system was adopted in November 1926. All the routes were to use existing roads but how specific routes were selected involved practicality, location, road conditions, amount of use; and a whole lot of politics. We won't get into that here.

Plymouth-Ann Arbor Road US-12, M-14

US-12. When the federal route numbering system was instituted in 1926, the Plymouth-Ann Arbor Road became US-12. Starting in downtown Detroit, it followed Grand River Avenue (US 16) to Plymouth Road, northwest of the downtown area. US-12 then followed Plymouth Road to the City of Plymouth. From Plymouth it followed the Ann Arbor Trail, which at the Washtenaw County line became known as Plymouth Road. After passing through Ann Arbor it crossed the state by way of Jackson, Battle Creek, Kalamazoo, and St. Joseph, then turned south into Indiana. West of Ann Arbor it used a good deal of the route of the territorial road through the second tier of counties authorized by the Territorial Legislative Council in 1829.

In the 1930's a bypass south of Plymouth was built on Golden road and the route changed to that location. In Plymouth the new bypass came to be known as Ann Arbor Road to differentiate it from Ann Arbor Trail and this name was then applied to the remaining route to Ann Arbor, although the section of the Ann Arbor Trail west of

¹ Public Act 334 of 1913

Plymouth may have already been called Ann Arbor Road rather than Ann Arbor Trail prior to the building of the bypass.

The very early records of settlement east of Plymouth invariably refer to the Ann Arbor Trail as the "Ann Arbor road" or "the road to Ann Arbor."² It would be interesting to know when the term Ann Arbor Trail came into common usage.

Political pressure caused the designation of a second route, US-112 running in the same general direction on Michigan Avenue and the Chicago Road. It passed through Dearborn, Ypsilanti, Saline, Clinton, Somerset, Jonesville, Coldwater, Sturgis, White Pigeon, and New Buffalo before crossing into Indiana.

M-14. In mid-1956 after the Detroit Industrial Expressway was extended to west of Ann Arbor, the US-12 designation was shifted to that road and the old US-12 route, the Plymouth and Ann Arbor roads, became M-14 from Detroit to Ann Arbor.

In 1964 a two mile stretch of freeway was built from US-23 east of Ann Arbor to Ann Arbor Road and connected with Ford Road, M-153. This new stretch of freeway was then designated as M-14 and bypassed Dixboro.

In 1965 the Ann Arbor north belt freeway opened connecting I-94 with U.S. 23 over which the M-14 route was directed, it no longer having to go through a western portion of the City of Ann Arbor.

In 1979 the final leg of the new freeway was completed connecting the existing western section with I-275 and the entire route designated M-14, the termini being where it intersected the I-275 free on the east, and where it connected to the I-94 freeway west of Ann Arbor. When the freeway north of Plymouth-Ann Arbor road was completed and designated as M-14, Plymouth-Ann Arbor road for the first time in 53 years was no longer a numbered highway. Shortly thereafter it was turned over to the County of Washtenaw.

In June 1961 the US-12 designation was taken from what had also been designated as I-94 and assigned to US-112, the US-112 designation then being eliminated. Thus did the Chicago Road receive its current designation as US-12.

For a short period the freeway bypass on the south side of Ypsilanti carried both the designation US-112 (the Michigan Avenue bypass) and US-12 (the freeway) until the US-112 number was eliminated.³

The M-14 designation has been used previously on two other Michigan routes prior to it identifying a route from Detroit to Ann Arbor by way of Plymouth.

Ford Road M-153

Ford Road was designated a trunk line route, M-153, from western Detroit to west of Ann Arbor in December 1930 although at that time the road did not extend all the way through the township of Canton or around the north side of Ann Arbor. The proposed road around the north side of Ann Arbor was intended to also carry US-12 traffic thus

² Minutes of the Meetings of the Township of Bucklin, 1827-1857.

³ Internet information authored by Richard F. Weingroff.

bypassing the congested business district of the city. This bypass around Ann Arbor was cancelled in 1935.⁴

In 1933 Ford road was completed west through Canton Township to Napier Road at the Wayne County line and connected with the existing rural road in Superior Township which ran from the county line to US-12 (Plymouth-Ann Arbor Road) just east of Dixboro. The stretch of road in Superior Township was improved in 1932 and 1933 in preparation for paving in 1934. The road in Wayne County between Canton Center Road and Napier Road having been paved the previous year.

In 1964 a portion of the M-14 freeway was completed east from US-23 in Ann Arbor Township and connected with the Ann Arbor-Plymouth Road, by then designated M-14. Ford Road was extended to the northwest at Frains Lake Road to connect with the completed leg of the freeway at Ann Arbor-Plymouth Road. The portion of Ford road west of where it turned to meet the freeway was then turned over to county control.

The intersection of Plymouth-Ann Arbor Road and M-153 was originally constructed as two boulevards, Plymouth-Ann Arbor Road being widened in that area to accommodate such an arrangement. It was known locally as "Sixteen Corners". This configuration proved confusing and prone to accidents. Plymouth-Ann Arbor Road was rebuilt as it originally was, a two lane road with appropriate turning lanes, intersecting with the dual lane M-153.

M-14 Freeway

The M-14 freeway was built in three phases. The first phases built in 1964 was a two mile portion easterly from US-23 at Ann Arbor to a connection with Plymouth-Ann Arbor Road, M-14, just west of the settlement of Frains Lake. At that time Ford Road, M-153, was extended to the northwest to connect with the new freeway segment. A year later a freeway was opened around the north side of Ann Arbor connecting the US-23 and M-14 freeways with the I-94 freeway west of Ann Arbor. In 1979 the freeway was completed between the Ann Arbor/Plymouth road segment and the Jeffries freeway (I-96) east of Plymouth, the entire length then receiving the designation as route M-14.

What Might Have Been

Some of the things that had been planned for Superior Township but never happened.

At one time in the 1930's Ford Road was being considered as the location of a high speed highway to carry traffic west of Ann Arbor. These plans were cancelled in 1935.

More recently when the western end of M-14 freeway was built from US-23 east to Ann Arbor Road, the dual lanes were carried past Ann Arbor road and connected with Ford road. State highway plans projected a freeway paralleling Ford Road located between Ford Road and Warren road but these plans were dropped in favor of a road further north, the present M-14 freeway.⁵

⁴ Washtenaw County Road Commission minutes, March 8, 1935.

⁵ Interview with Lionel Guregian, member of citizen route planning committee