Statement Regarding Fort to Fort Drive
Washington, D.C.

The earliest possible completion of the “Fort to Fort” Drive Parkway, directly related to the ultimate George Washington memorial Parkway up to Great Falls and down to Mt. Vernon and Ft. Washington, is one of the most important needs of the District. The conception of this drive – some 23 1/2 miles long making almost a complete circle from the Potomac Palisades on the west to Shepherd’s Parkway on the south was almost the first planning project adopted by our Commission soon after its formation.

One of the greatest traffic needs in Washington is the creation of a circumferential drive in the outlying areas of the District in order to relieve the rapidly growing central area traffic congestion. The District was and is, woefully lacking in short cut routes between the various residential sections and the sub-business centers.

The Commission, as soon after their appointment, as they had opportunity to make a careful survey of all planning and traffic problems, were unanimous in their conclusion that the District of Columbia stood almost alone among American cities in the lack of any well-connected boulevards or parkway drives. Study of park and boulevard systems of other cities of comparable size plainly revealed this very great lack of fore planning in the street layout of the capital.

The value of such parkways or Boulevards, welding and tying together residential areas and affording routes for pleasure drives as well as daily travel, was indisputably based upon the results achieved in other cities. Washington, with its beautiful drives through Rock Creek Park and the Potomac Park had apparently been lulled into a certain sense of satisfaction and had been blinded to the very sad neglect of providing some kind of a boulevard and parkway system.

The need for an outlying circulatory drive was further accentuated in Washington by the immense amount of traffic passing directly through the city which should have routed around the downtown business center.

Then too, it was perfectly apparent that there were large undeveloped areas that were not beginning to produce tax income in proportion to other areas, and the Commission was further convinced that the building of the “Fort to Fort” Drive would help develop these undeveloped areas into greater residential use and help bring about more balanced normal development of all the land within the boundaries of the District, which has been so lop-sided and uneconomic in its whole trend of growth. Greater and more intensive use of lands would naturally follow the building of a parkway giving easy accessibility and intimate relation between undeveloped areas and those sections already
more or less intensively occupied by residences and other structures. This would also help hold residential building in the city and greatly increase tax income of the District.

Further great importance and value of a “Fort to Fort” Drive would result from the preservation of the sixteen Civil War forts, both from the historical standpoint and the creation of open park or recreational areas in sections already congested, or other areas that are rapidly developing and will soon need the preservation of these open Fort sites.

It seems peculiarly fitting that the nation’s capital should preserve for all generations to come, the remains of these old forts which played such an important part in our history during the Civil War. Fortunately many of them are well covered with trees, making them well adapted as a part of the “Fort to Fort” Drive and recreation system.

As a matter of fact, the McMillen Commission in 1901 foresaw the city’s ultimate growth and the imperative need of some type of a circular roadway related to the preservation of these forts.

For some thirteen years the National Capital Park and Planning Commission has devoted more time to studying carefully the taking lines for this “Fort to Fort” Drive and its related Fort sites, and the acquirement of such lands, than it has to any other single or several projects. Something in excess of two and a quarter million dollars has already been spent for the acquirement of land for the Fort Drive proper, and some million dollars of the Fort Areas and necessary additional land.

The whole neighborhood park and recreational needs of the sections near these fort sites have been carefully studied in relation to the “Fort to Fort” Drive.

The change and adaptation of certain street plans and guides in areas affected by the “Fort to Fort” Drive have been carefully surveyed all through these years, and largely worked out, to fit properly into the ultimate establishment of the Fort Drive itself.

In other words, the whole conception of the “Fort to Fort” Drive and the preservation of the Forts themselves has been a vital influence in many of the planning matters enacted and carried through by the National Capital Park and Planning Commission and the Commissioners of the District of Columbia.

The greatest effort has been made to economize in the acquirement of land for purposes of this fort drive. All of these years we have endeavored to keep ahead of the building development, placing the order of our purchases where we could save future greater cost of land acquirement. In a few instances where the cost of land acquirement or removal of buildings would be too great, existing principal streets have been used with the hope that ultimately a greater set back of buildings may be obtained to give wide desirable open space on either side of the drive and afford a proper setting to this most important project of the city’s whole highway and street system.

It does not seem sound business that the present generation which has expanded nearly four million dollars in land acquirement, and which is today largely of no value to the community, should be denied its completion and enjoyment. Adjoining owners along this drive who have been withholding their plans for many years for development of their property are certainly entitled to the earliest possible building of the drive itself. The land acquirement for the drive itself is today some 90% complete, and within the next one or
two years at the present rate of acquirement of lands the District should have complete ownership of all the lands necessary for this great “Fort to Fort” Drive.

There are many stretches of the drive that could be immediately completed. For instance, for a length of 7.75 miles between Conduit Road and Ft. Totten, both acquisitions and development plans are entirely complete and ready for letting of contract for construction work.

It would seem that in relative importance to any other items of expenditure throughout the District, that few projects would be of more benefit to the people of Washington, and more inspiration to the nation as a whole as people visit their Capital City, than the building of this 23 1/2 mile parkway and boulevard drive which should immediately take its place as one of the most beautiful, interesting and useful drives to be found in any American city, and with dignity, scale and magnitude appropriate to the City which is rapidly becoming the World’s most beautiful Capital.

From the high points along this drive, distant views throughout the city will be possible – many visitors taking this drive will immediately get a comprehensive idea of the entire residential section of the district. It will enable those visitors and even Washingtonians themselves to see large areas now seldom enjoyed. It will add real character, charm, and value to the Community as a whole. It should help check the costly shifting and decline of neighborhoods. It would give us a sound basic framework to direct future growth. It will unite the District in a forceful, powerful manner, tending to bring about immediate and needed development in areas of the capital, now neglected. It will become a basic factor from which much neighborhood planning can be intelligently done.

It will provide for our capital city an outstanding parkway, not an extravagant one, but one with ample width for most of its distance, to have park-like character in striking contrast to the unfortunately closely built up sections of much of the city. There is serious need for a drive of such character in a city where so much of its area is given over to a rectangular street and block plan with unusually short lots and intensive occupancy of land by buildings.

The National Capital Park and Planning Commission believe that the increment of value resulting to nearby and adjacent areas and to the city as a whole justifies rapid completion of the “Fort to Fort” Drive. The Commission believes it will create much new value and also stabilize values throughout immense areas.

Where planting of trees is necessary, the very element of time for their growth makes it even more important to get started toward an ultimate plan of completion so that the present generation in Washington will get some benefit and enjoyment from the improvement within their lifetime.

Certainly much of the whole street plan outside of our important diagonal avenues in our capital city is sadly lacking today in character which would be so greatly augmented and improved by the building of the “Fort to Fort” Drive.

Inasmuch as it will take a number of years to complete the entire 23 1/2 miles it seems almost imperative that a program of not to exceed five years should be determined upon for the entire building of this parkway, and some five miles be completed yearly.
and brought into immediate use. This program of completion could be applied to the areas where benefits would be most immediate and where traffic relief is most necessary.

With the present rate of the growth of the capital city certainly by the end of five years the value will be fully demonstrated as to this most important project of the thirteen years work of the National Capital Park and Planning Commission.

During this entire time there has never been the slightest objection to this project. It has received the cooperation of congress, the local organizations of the city, the District commissioners, and all concerned. Schoolhouses, libraries, and other public improvements have been located with due regard to the ultimate building of this parkway drive.

In comparison with other needs, there is no more important project before all authorities in our capital today than the initiation at once of the building of some important link of this drive in order to make the first demonstration to the public of the serious need of the whole project.

The announcement of a five year program for its completion will immediately commend such wide approval, that every support will be forthcoming for its building as rapidly as may be consistent with the allotment of funds for this purpose within a five year period. It will be a real achievement of which the whole United States may well be proud. Its value to the District itself should be many times its total cost.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN058

Arguably Jesse Clyde Nichols (1880-1950) was the single most influential individual to the development of metropolitan Kansas City. Moreover his work, ideas, and philosophy of city planning and development had far-reaching impact nationally – so much so that the Urban Land Institute has established the J.C. Nichols Prize for Visionary Urban Development to recognize a person or a person representing an institution whose career demonstrates a commitment to the highest standards of responsible development.

Nichols’ objective was to “develop whole residential neighborhoods that would attract an element of people who desired a better way of life, a nicer place to live and would be willing to work in order to keep it better.” The Company under Nichols and his son, Miller Nichols (1911- ), undertook such ventures as rental housing, industrial parks, hotels, and shopping centers. Perhaps the most widely recognized Nichols Company developments are the Country Club District and the Country Club Plaza Shopping Center, reportedly the first shopping area in the United States planned to serve those arriving by automobile rather than trolley car.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) contains both personal and business files concerning J.C. Nichols’ private and business life. Included are personal correspondence, family related material, and speeches and articles written by him. Business and financial files pertain to actions of the Company, including information about different developments and the securing of art objects; and printed materials produced by and about the Company.