But, she said, doing the job in sections has also helped everyone involved to hone and perfect their work.

"Each time an issue would come up during one section, we learned from it and incorporated it into the planning and execution of future sections," Ms. Lewandowski said.

And building a 46-mile road with a 300-foot-wide right-of-way involves a lot more than clearing a path and laying down pavement.

Land has to be purchased, local zoning ordinances taken into consideration, soil tests, archeological exploration, planning, coordinating and more planning — all before the first piece of land can be cleared.

"There's a lot of geo-technical work in the early stages," said Tom Clements, DelDOT construction engineer, who's been overseeing work on the Del. 1 project for more than a decade.

In planning for the final section of Del. 1, for example, DelDOT archeologists discovered two sites — near Frederick Lodge and at Black Diamond — with thousands of artifacts dating back 8,000 years.

Those artifacts — spear points, arrowheads, knives, scrapers, etc. — are analyzed and then sent to the state museum.

Then there's the environmental impacts.

Michele Ackles, DelDOT manager of external affairs, said the primary reason Del. 1 crosses over U.S. 13, rather than running parallel to it, is to balance the impact between the wetlands to the east and the farmland to the west.

In order to lessen the environmental impact to the area, DelDOT has constructed a series of stormwater management ponds and wetland areas, including a 94-acre site south of Odessa.

Much of the 1.5 million cubic feet of fill material taken from that site has been used on other parts of the Del. 1 project.

Mr. Clements said there's definitely more of a challenge building in wetland areas.

But when working on farmland, he makes sure the rich topsoil is put to good use, covering the side slopes on other areas of the project rather than shipping new topsoil in from out of state.

Mr. Clements said building a major highway like Del. 1 is more about personal relationships than equipment and materials.

"It's a people business more than anything," he said.

"We try to establish a positive relationship with everyone involved early on and maintain that relationship throughout the process."

Ms. Lewandowski said the project has brought many people in DelDOT together like few other projects have.

"Everyone is saying this is the way we should always operate as a group," she said.

Mr. Clements said he feels a sense of pride working on Del. 1.

"You're building something that will last longer than your lifetime and will impact millions of people," he said.

"For anyone who does what I do to not feel pride in that, they're in the wrong business."

And what about Downstate businesses that have been built along U.S. 13 over the years?

How do they expect to be impacted when commuters and travelers have a choice between the road that runs past their parking lots and the one that bypasses them completely?

"I don't think it will hurt us," said Joan Thomas of Helen's Famous Sausage, a business north of Smyrna that's been serving customers for 17 years.

"We've got the fishers, hunters, truck drivers and all of our other regular customers."

Rusty Brackin is the manager of the Ocean Pro Shop, selling fishing equipment for more than 20 years on U.S. 13 south of Odessa.

He said they considered relocating before the last section of Del. 1 is complete, but it wasn't a cost-effective proposition.

Mr. Brackin said he expects his business to be impacted, but isn't sure how much.

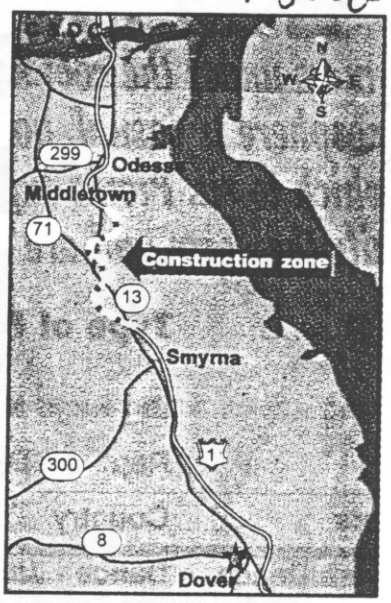
"It's tough to guess what's going to happen — we'll just have to wait and see," he said.

But some of the Downstate businesses that have been bypassed by Del. 1 since 1993 said their business has actually improved.

Ronny's Garden World has been in business north of Smyrna for about 30 years.

Manager Brenda Metts said there was some concern in the early '90s that the completion of the first section of Del. 1 would lead to a decrease in customers, but that was not the case.

"We've actually become more of a destination for people coming to the area," she said.



Staff graphic/**Paul Moore**

The final segment of Del. 1 is scheduled to open in May 2003. The 7.7-mile section between Smyrna and Odessa will cost more than $60.7 million and will feature five bridges. When finished, the stretch will include more than 142,000 tons of hot mix and more than 230,000 square yards of concrete. The section will complete a 46-mile, $1 billion project begun in 1989.

Lisa Morrison at the Smyrna Diner said the completion of Del. 1 between Dover and Smyrna helped their business as well.

She said prior to the opening, many local customers avoided U.S. 13 during summer weekends.

"The locals feel free to come out now," she said.

"They're here all the time."

Sarah Willey of Willey Farms south of Odessa said she's looking forward to the final section being opened in 2003.

She said when cars are backed up on U.S. 13 from beach and race traffic, nobody likes to leave their place in line to shop.

"There's also been a population explosion in the area," she said.

"We definitely have enough local business, and I think there's still going to be plenty of travelers who want to take (U.S.) 13 so they can stop and enjoy the trip along the way."

Ken Grant can be reached at 741-8226 or kgrant@newszap.com.

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