

Date of Hearing: June 21, 2021

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Laura Friedman, Chair

ACR 79 (Nazarian) – As Introduced April 28, 2021

SUBJECT: Amelia Earhart Memorial Highway

SUMMARY: Designates the portion of State Highway Route 101 and State Highway Route 134 between the Laurel Canyon Boulevard exit on State Highway Route 101 and the North Pass Avenue exit on State Highway Route 134 in the County of Los Angeles as the Amelia Earhart Memorial Highway.

EXISTING LAW: Assigns the Department of Transportation (Caltrans) the responsibility of operating and maintaining state highways. This includes the installation and maintenance of highway signs.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown, but the measure requests that Caltrans determine the cost of appropriate signage consistent with requirements for the state highway system, and only erect the appropriate signage upon receiving donations from non-state sources covering the cost.

COMMENTS: Amelia Earhart was born on July 24, 1897, in Atchison, Kansas. When 10-year-old Amelia Mary Earhart saw her first plane at a state fair, she was not impressed. “It was a thing of rusty wire and wood and looked not at all interesting,” she dismissively said. It wasn’t until she attended a stunt-flying exhibition, almost a decade later, that she became seriously interested in aviation.

Although Earhart’s convictions were strong, challenging, prejudicial, and financial obstacles awaited her, but the former tomboy was no stranger to disapproval or doubt. Defying conventional feminine behavior, a young Earhart climbed trees, “belly slammed” her sled to start it downhill, and hunted rats with a .22 rifle. She also kept a scrapbook of newspaper clippings about successful women in predominantly male-oriented fields, including film direction and production, law, advertising, management, and mechanical engineering.

After graduating from Hyde Park High School in 1915, Earhart attended Ogontz, a girl’s finishing school in the suburbs of Philadelphia. Earhart left Ogontz in the middle of her second year to work as a nurse’s aide in a military hospital in Canada during World War I, attended college, and later became a social worker at Denison House, a settlement house in Boston.

Earhart took her first flying lesson on January 3, 1921, and, in six months, managed to save enough money to buy her first plane, a second-hand Kinner Airster two-seater biplane painted bright yellow, which she named “The Canary,” and used to set her first women’s record by rising to an altitude of 14,000 feet.

In 1928, Earhart was asked to join pilot Wilmer “Bill” Stultz and copilot and mechanic Louis E. “Slim” Gordon as part of a project to be the first woman to fly across the Atlantic Ocean. On June 17, 1928, the team left Trepassy Harbor, Newfoundland, in a Fokker F7 named Friendship, and arrived at Burry Port, Wales approximately 21 hours later. Their landmark flight made headlines worldwide because three pilots had died within the year trying to be the first woman to fly across the Atlantic. When the crew returned to the United States, they were greeted with a

ticker-tape parade in New York and a reception held by President Calvin Coolidge at the White House.

Earhart and George Putnam, a book publisher and publicist, developed a friendship during preparation for the Atlantic crossing and were married on February 7, 1931. Intent on retaining her independence, she referred to the marriage as a “partnership” with “dual control”. Together, Earhart and Putnam worked on secret plans for Earhart to become the first woman and the second person to fly solo across the Atlantic and on May 20, 1932, five years to the day after the Lindbergh flight across the Atlantic, she took off from Harbor Grace, Newfoundland, to Paris. Strong north winds, icy conditions, and mechanical problems plagued the flight and forced her to land in a pasture near Londonderry, Ireland.

As word of her flight spread, the media surrounded her, both overseas and in the United States. President Herbert Hoover presented Earhart with a gold medal from the National Geographic Society and Congress awarded her the Distinguished Flying Cross-the first ever given to a woman. At the ceremony, Vice President Charles Curtis praised her courage, saying she displayed “heroic courage and skill as a navigator at the risk of her life”. Earhart felt the flight proved that men and women were equal in “jobs requiring intelligence, coordination, speed, coolness, and willpower”.

In the years that followed, Earhart continued to reach new heights, setting an altitude record for autogyros of 18,415 feet that stood for years and on January 11, 1935, she became the first person to fly solo across the Pacific Ocean from Honolulu to Oakland, California.

In 1937, as Earhart neared her 40th birthday, she was ready for a monumental, and final, challenge: she wanted to be the first woman to fly around the world. On June 1, 1937, Earhart and her navigator, Fred Noonan, departed from Miami and began the 29,000-mile journey around the world and by June 29, when they landed in Lae, New Guinea, all but 7,000 miles had been completed. On July 2, 1937, the pair embarked on a 2,556 flight from Lae, New Guinea to Howland Island. During this flight they encountered difficult conditions for navigation and Earhart lost radio contact the following morning with a nearby United States Coast Guard ship. Earhart’s plane disappeared and nothing further was heard from her.

The world will always remember Amelia Earhart for her courage, vision, and groundbreaking achievements, both in aviation and for women. In a letter to her husband, written in case a dangerous flight proved to be her last, her brave spirit was clear. “Please know I am quite aware of the hazards,” she said. “I want to do it because I want to do it. Women must try to do things as men have tried. When they fail, their failure must be but a challenge to others”.

This resolution is the second to designate a highway in memorial of a woman of importance in the Assembly’s 2021-2022 legislative session.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file

Opposition

None on file

Analysis Prepared by: Julia Kingsley / TRANS. / (916) 319-2093