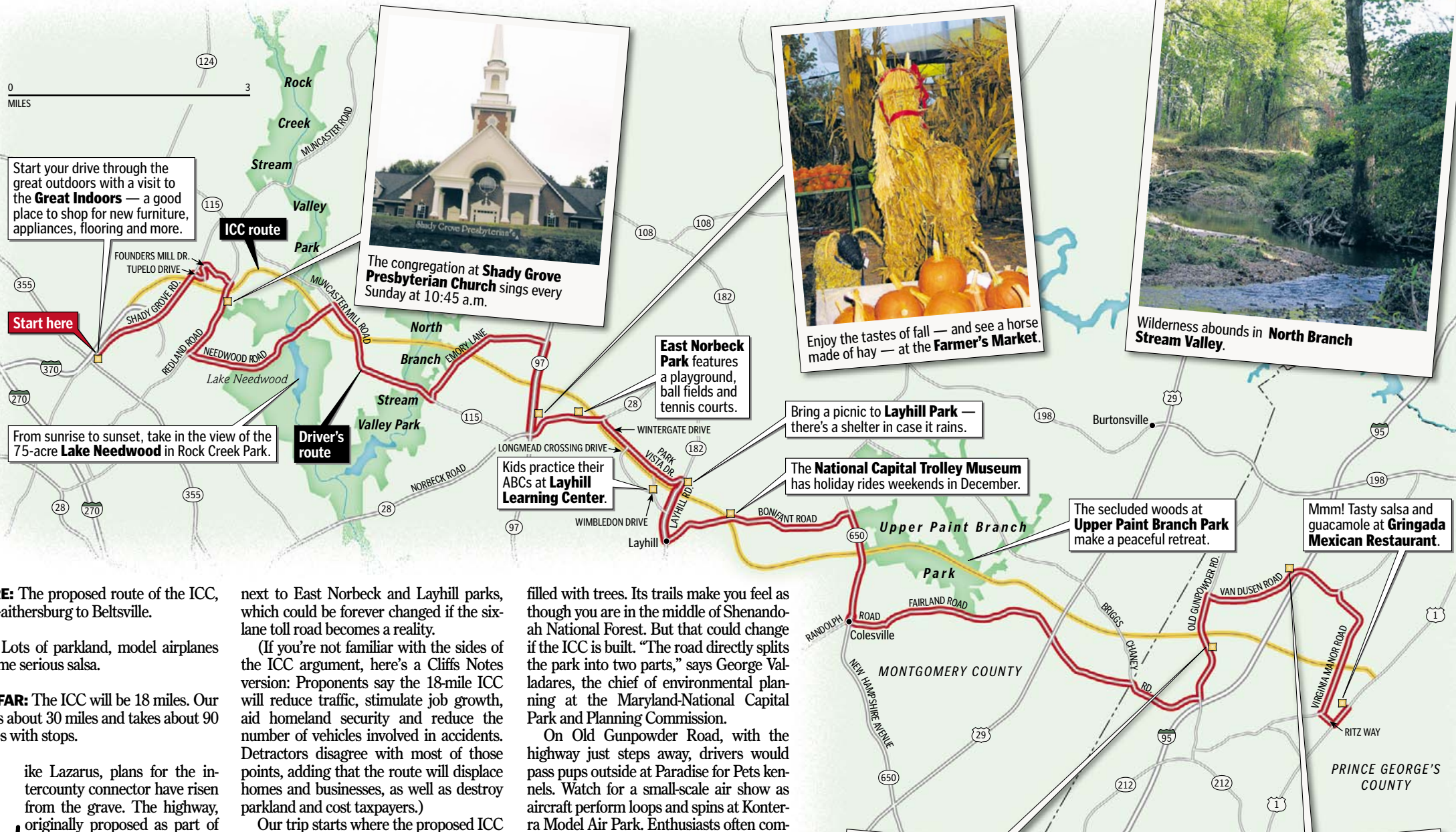
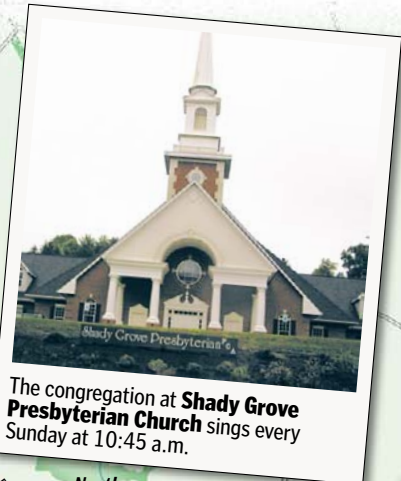


# ROADTRIP

Investigate the Proposed Intercounty Connector



Start your drive through the great outdoors with a visit to the **Great Indoors** — a good place to shop for new furniture, appliances, flooring and more.



The congregation at **Shady Grove Presbyterian Church** sings every Sunday at 10:45 a.m.



Enjoy the tastes of fall — and see a horse made of hay — at the **Farmer's Market**.



Wilderness abounds in **North Branch Stream Valley**.

From sunrise to sunset, take in the view of the 75-acre **Lake Needwood** in Rock Creek Park.

**East Norbeck Park** features a playground, ball fields and tennis courts.

Bring a picnic to **Layhill Park** — there's a shelter in case it rains.

Kids practice their ABCs at **Layhill Learning Center**.

The **National Capital Trolley Museum** has holiday rides weekends in December.

The secluded woods at **Upper Paint Branch Park** make a peaceful retreat.

Mmm! Tasty salsa and guacamole at **Gringada Mexican Restaurant**.

**WHERE:** The proposed route of the ICC, from Gaithersburg to Beltsville.

**WHY:** Lots of parkland, model airplanes and some serious salsa.

**HOW FAR:** The ICC will be 18 miles. Our route is about 30 miles and takes about 90 minutes with stops.

Like Lazarus, plans for the intercounty connector have risen from the grave. The highway, originally proposed as part of an outer beltway, has been on and off the drawing boards for 50 years. This summer, Maryland Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. announced a new route to connect Montgomery and Prince George's counties, putting the controversial ICC back in the limelight once again.

The ICC needs to be approved by the Federal Highway Administration before construction can begin — which could be as early as next year or may never happen at all. But if you're curious to see what the area looks like for now, take our drive. Along the way, you'll see places that are here to stay — from the Great Indoors to the Shady Grove Presbyterian Church to Gringada Mexican Restaurant. You'll also find scenic green spaces, such as those

next to East Norbeck and Layhill parks, which could be forever changed if the six-lane toll road becomes a reality.

(If you're not familiar with the sides of the ICC argument, here's a Cliffs Notes version: Proponents say the 18-mile ICC will reduce traffic, stimulate job growth, aid homeland security and reduce the number of vehicles involved in accidents. Detractors disagree with most of those points, adding that the route will displace homes and businesses, as well as destroy parkland and cost taxpayers.)

Our trip starts where the proposed ICC would pick up at the end of I-370. The route then would run east, slicing through narrow sections of Rock Creek Park and North Branch Stream Valley before its first interchange at Georgia Avenue. For now, fresh fruit, flowers and seasonal goodies abound at the Farmer's Market, which would be in the way of an on-ramp.

The National Capital Trolley Museum would be in the way, but plans are already in the works to move up the street (construction is happening, but no move date has been set). Just a stone's throw away, the Layhill Learning Center isn't as lucky — its preschoolers may get their first lessons in eminent domain.

Upper Paint Branch Park, near the New Hampshire Avenue junction, is a valley

filled with trees. Its trails make you feel as though you are in the middle of Shenandoah National Forest. But that could change if the ICC is built. "The road directly splits the park into two parts," says George Valadares, the chief of environmental planning at the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.

On Old Gunpowder Road, with the highway just steps away, drivers would pass pups outside at Paradise for Pets kennels. Watch for a small-scale air show as aircraft perform loops and spins at Konterra Model Air Park. Enthusiasts often compete in mid-air combat with remotely operated flying machines.

The ICC doesn't stop, as one might suspect, at I-95. It continues to a quiet section of Route 1, where you'll find Gringada. The Mexican eatery, which has been a fixture for more than 20 years, will prepare any dish on the menu sans meat. A tiny spot, it may have to add a few more tables and a larger parking lot if the ICC brings traffic its way.

— **Matthew Graham**

**Road Trip maps** are available online at [www.washingtonpost.com/roadtrip](http://www.washingtonpost.com/roadtrip), as are addresses and hours of operation (be sure to check before you go). Have an idea for a trip? E-mail [roadtrip@washpost.com](mailto:roadtrip@washpost.com).



**Paradise for Pets** — which, with 53 outdoor yards, claims to be the largest outdoor kennel in the world — has been family owned and operated since 1975.



The radio-controlled planes at the **Konterra Model Aircraft Park** have a bird's-eye view of I-95.