

Happy 30th Anniversary National System of Interstate and Defense Highways

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Happy 30th Anniversary National System of Interstate and Defense Highways

The 30th Anniversary of the Interstate System was honored in several ways. Here are a few examples.

America Celebrates 30th Anniversary of the Interstate System

The Fall 1986 issue of the FHWA's short-lived journal, U.S. Highways, contained the following article about events commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Interstate System.

Transportation and highway officials across the country recently celebrated the 30th anniversary of our nation's Interstate Highway System with proclamations, gatherings and ceremonies. In a formal proclamation, President Ronald Reagan designated June 26 as "National Interstate Highway Day," calling our system of highways "the world's largest and most successful transportation and public works project."

Federal Highway Administrator Ray A. Barnhart joined a host of congressional leaders and dignitaries at the Russell Senate Office Building for an anniversary ceremony. "There are few governmental projects that have played a more important or dramatic role in the development of this country," said Barnhart. "Today we have an unparalleled system that is 97 percent complete with 41,297 miles open to the public. America is, in fact, mobility, and the Interstate system is the backbone of that mobility," Barnhart added, citing the 325 billion miles traveled last year on the Interstate system.

Much of that Interstate travel will no doubt continue to occur on I-80 which recently celebrated an historic occasion of its own. In late August [August 22, 1986], another milestone in America's Interstate history was recorded as the final section of the East-West Interstate was completed near Salt Lake City, Utah. The completion of the final 4.5 miles of I-80 makes this the longest completed freeway in the world, running 2,908 miles from the George Washington Bridge in New York City to the Oakland Bay Bridge in San Francisco.

Back in Washington, D.C., among the attendees at the Interstate Day celebration on Capitol Hill was Susan Eisenhower, granddaughter of former President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who signed the legislation launching the highway system; co-hosts Senator Robert Stafford and Congressman Glenn Anderson; and other congressional and highway leaders. Anderson, a Democrat from California, is chairman of the Surface Transportation Committee. Stafford, a Republican from Vermont, is chairman of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works.

Eisenhower commented, "We are proud and happy for this national recognition of one of Grandfather's crowning achievements. He was committed to a strong Interstate transportation network and never doubted that it would happen, and I think this would have been one of his proudest moments," she said.

Representatives of the highway industry unveiled a commemorative sign that will be erected at rest stops and welcome centers along the coast-to-coast route of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Highway to honor the "Father of the Interstate System." [The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1973 designated the "Dwight D. Eisenhower Highway" along several Interstates that paralleled the route of the U.S. Army's 1919 convoy from Washington to San Francisco, on which the young Eisenhower gained an understanding of the value of good roads.]

Francis Turner, former FHWA Administrator during much of the system's development, also participated in the celebration. "We are paying honor today not only to the physical construction of the Interstate system, but to its

integral fiscal structure, which is its inseparable foundation," Turner said.

In an earlier celebration on May 20, nearly 500 transportation construction executives and members of the American Road and Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA) gathered to celebrate "Interstate Nite." More than two dozen members of Congress attended the dinner at the Washington Hilton Hotel, as well as Administrator Barnhart and five of his predecessors: John Volpe, Frank Turner, Norbert Tiemann, Karl Bowers and John Hassell, Jr.

Rep. James Wright (D-Texas), the House Majority Leader and a member of the Public Works Committee in 1956, delivered the main address. "The Interstate system has tied this nation together and enhanced its mobility," said Wright. "It has saved lives, time and money."

The system was launched in June 1956 with the passage of the Federal-aid Highway Act and the Highway Revenue Act, establishing the Highway Trust Fund as a pay-as-you-go system of user fees designed to let the beneficiaries of the Interstate System pay for the cost of construction and maintenance.

During the Interstate Day celebration, Barnhart pointed out that although the system comprises little more than one percent of the nation's total road mileage, it carries 20 percent of America's highway traffic. "The Interstate system links more than 90 percent of America's cities with populations of 50,000 or more, and many smaller towns as well," said Barnhart. "Its importance to industry, commerce, the economy and recreation and travel cannot be overstated."

The system is composed of more than 40,000 miles of four-lane divided highways, built by nearly 2.4 billion man-hours of time. Each year, approximately 352 billion miles are traveled on the system, yet its safety record of 1.06 fatal accidents per 100 million miles of travel is less than half that tallied on the nation's other highways.

"The system is a tremendous engineering achievement that maintains the economic growth of America," concluded Barnhart. "The 30th Anniversary of this peerless system is the time for all members of the highway community to be recognized for their contributions to the development and maintenance of our Interstate highways."

America's Interstate: A Monument to Freedom!

by **Ray A. Barnhart** Federal Highway Administrator

Federal Highway Administrator Ray Barnhart, who held that title longer than any of his peers (1981-1987) published the following article about the 30th anniversary of the Interstate System in the Fall 1986 issue of U.S. Highways:

As we celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the Statue of Liberty, we are mindful of our many American freedoms. The Statue is not only an inspiring monument, but a symbol embodying the hopes and dreams of generations of immigrants and citizens alike. As we look at this vast country of ours, we can see many monuments to that freedom. One of them, which we too often take for granted, is also celebrating its special birthday. This summer marked the 30th Anniversary of America's Interstate Highway System. In the entire history of our nation, not to mention the world, there have been few-if any-public enterprises which have brought about more positive changes and enhanced the lives of more people than these magnificent transportation routes.

America's Interstate highways make up a 42,500-mile network of the safest and most technologically advanced roadways in the world. Comprising only one percent of our total road mileage, they carry almost 20 percent of all traffic. They link together America's major population centers, providing untold benefits for commerce and industry, for recreation, and-should the need arise-for defense mobilization in times of national emergency. Interstate design standards mean the highest standards of transportation safety and efficiency with unimpeded travel, wide lanes, gentle curves, as well as high quality directional signs and roadside safety equipment. Last year, the Interstate accounted for only slightly more than one fatal accident for every 100 million miles of travel-a truly remarkable record.

But the Interstates are much more than just ribbons of concrete and asphalt. By forming the backbone and lifeline of our economy, they have changed the face of America, affecting the way we live, where we work and play, the goods and services we provide and receive, and our ability to freely move about our nation whenever we choose, unrestricted.

The Interstate highway system has had a dramatic impact on our nation's economy, stimulating commercial development, and creating jobs all across this land in every state in the union. When President Eisenhower signed the Federal-aid Highway Act establishing the Interstate system in 1956, America's Gross National Product (GNP) was \$421 billion. Today, our GNP approaches \$4.5 trillion, more than a ten-fold increase. This economic explosion and the corresponding quantum leap in our national quality of life has been made possible in large measure by the efficiency of this Interstate highway system.

Last year, more than 357 billion miles were driven on the Interstates. And we should not lose sight of the fact that a large portion of those miles was logged by trucks, carrying every kind of commodity to markets across the nation. In fact, virtually everything we eat, wear, use and produce at some point on its way to the consumer moves by truck along our nation's highways. And it moves with a safety and efficiency unparalleled in the entire world, thanks not only to the Interstates themselves, but to the hard work and skill of the people who comprise America's trucking industry, another one of our nation's vital, yet under-appreciated assets.

It is also significant that the Interstate system, which is recognized as the world's largest and most extensive public works project, has been financed on a pay-as-you-go basis, incurring for the federal government not one dime of fiscal indebtedness. The system is totally financed by the Highway Trust Fund, an innovative mechanism conceived by the Congress in the same legislation which established the routing of the Interstates. Very simply, it provides that those who use the system pay for it. Gasoline and other highway related taxes are dedicated solely to transportation purposes. Through the Trust Fund, the American people have invested more than \$108 billion in the Interstate system during these last 30 years. Strict provisions prevent Trust Fund expenditures from exceeding Trust Fund revenues over a given period of time, thereby insuring the fiscal soundness of the program. Don't we wish we could say the same for our other government programs?

Finally, consistent with the balance of powers inherent in our Constitution and with the wisdom of our Founding Fathers, the Interstate system has been a true model of the federal/state partnership at work. Ten percent of all costs related to the Interstates have been borne by the states, which are also responsible for awarding the construction contracts and managing day-to-day maintenance operations and law enforcement. It is a relationship between the federal and state governments which has worked exceedingly well in the past and should continue to serve us well in the future.

Like the other freedoms we celebrate as Americans, the freedom of mobility is exercised daily and regarded as our national birthright. We often forget that it is not so in other lands. In most countries throughout the world today, we know that freedom of movement of people is severely restricted by a variety of "roadblocks," both literal and figurative. In the Soviet Union, for example, a citizen must apply for a visa to get permission to travel between certain cities and areas within that country. But in the United States, it is a significant measure of the "liberty" we celebrated this Fourth of July that a citizen can drive to Boston or Houston or Los Angeles at any time he chooses without encountering so much as a traffic light or stop sign. Our Constitution and laws have made it legal-for which we will forever count our blessing; but it is our Interstate highways that have made it possible.

President Ronald Reagan Declares National Interstate highway Day, 1986

National Interstate Highway Day, 1986

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

In June 1956, the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 and the Highway revenue Act of 1956 were enacted to provide for the construction and financing of the National Interstate and Defense Highway System. Nineteen hundred and eighty-six marks the 30th anniversary of the passage of this legislation.

During the last 30 years, the construction of the Interstate System has brought about tremendous change and progress in our society. As the world's largest and most successful transportation and public works project, it has enhanced travel and has helped join the Nation together to supply raw material, finished goods, food, and other essential products and services, and contributed to the national defense.

The Interstate System accounts for just over one percent of the total road mileage in the United States, yet it carries approximately 20 percent of the Nation's total traffic volume. Employing the most advanced highway safety designs ever devised, the Interstate System is one of the Nation's safest modes of transportation.

The Congress, by House Joint Resolution 638, has designated June 26, 1986, as "National Interstate Highway Day" and has authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation in observance of this day.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim June 26, 1986, as National Interstate Highway Day, and I call upon the people of the United States to observe that day with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this nineteenth day of June, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and tenth.

Ronald Reagan

National Interstate Highway DAY

H.J. Res. 636

Whereas the 42,500-mile National System of Interstate and Defense Highways is the world's largest transportation and public project and connects the various regions of the Nation;

Whereas June 1956 is the 30th anniversary of the enactment of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 under which construction of the Interstate System commenced and which established the Highway Trust Fund; and

Whereas the design and construction of the Interstate System has provided substantial employment and economic growth for all segments of our society; Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, The June 26, 1986, is designated as "National Interstate Highway Day". The President is authorized and requested to issue a proclamation calling upon the people of the United States to observe that day with appropriate ceremonies and activities to recognize the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways and the Highway Trust Fund.
