



Brief Summary of the History of the Interstate

- The story of the Interstate begins with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1937. FDR summoned the Chief of the Bureau of Public Roads, Thomas MacDonald, to the White House and drew on a map his vision for a cross-country high level road system and asked for an evaluation. The result was the 1939 report, *Toll Roads and Free Roads*, which can be said to have initiated the drive for an Interstate System. This report presented a 26,700 mile system connecting principal cities and regions of the country.¹
- A second report in 1943, *Interregional Highways*, is credited by many as the most important document in the history of America's highways. It took the original Roosevelt map, the network set forth in the *Toll Roads and Free Roads* report, and recommended a network of about 38,900 miles. During the late 1940s the network was mapped, but it took until the Eisenhower years to get serious about the system.¹
- Although the *Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944* authorized designation of a "National System of Interstate Highways" 40,000 miles long, the legislation did not authorize a separate funding program for the highway agency (now called the Public Roads Administration) to build it.¹
- In the early 1900s, Dwight D. Eisenhower participated in a very difficult and lengthy cross-country military convoy as a young Army officer, and later marveled at the efficiency of the German Autobahn system following World War II. After taking office in January 1953, President Dwight D. Eisenhower made revitalizing the Nation's highways one of the goals of his first term. President Eisenhower signed the *Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956* on June 29, 1956 which set the Interstate systems length at 41,000 miles.^{1,2}
- Following enactment of the *Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956*, the American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO) asked State highway officials to suggest designs for an Interstate marker. Dozens of proposals were submitted. AASHO chose the design submitted by Texas, with the addition of the word "Interstate" as proposed by the Missouri design for the top portion of the shield. It was approved on August 14, 1957.⁴
- The 50th anniversary (1956-2006) is an opportunity for us to review the past and focus on the future of the Interstate system.



The Interstate System in Texas

- When the 1956 legislation was passed, Texas had many miles of roadway under construction that would eventually be designated as interstates. There were some 2,500 miles of roads already on the state highway system, many of which would be upgraded to meet interstate standards.³
- The first Texas interstate contract began in 1956 for a segment of I-45 in Navarro County near Corsicana, and the last segment of I-27 between Lubbock and Amarillo was completed in 1992.³
- Currently, the Interstate System is 46,876 miles long.⁴ Texas has 3,233 miles of interstate highways – more than any other state.³
- I-10 is the southernmost coast-to-coast interstate in the United States. It is also the longest interstate in Texas, traveling from the deserts of El Paso to the bayous of the Louisiana border.³
- Beginning in the desert of West Texas, I-20 serves mid-sized communities such as Midland, Odessa, and Abilene, and is also the primary route between the West Coast and the Dallas–Fort Worth Metroplex.³
- The next-to-last interstate approved in Texas was I-27 connecting Amarillo and Lubbock.³
- I-30 begins in Fort Worth at the junction with I-20 and heads to Texarkana and on into Arkansas.³
- Beginning at the international border in Laredo, I-35 provides a direct freeway connection between Mexico and Canada. The interstate's starting point in Laredo is one of the oldest border crossing points in the United States, and the nation's busiest inland port.³
- I-37 runs from San Antonio to Corpus Christi, and is the main freeway connection from I-35 to the Gulf of Mexico and the coastal zones.³
- One of the major east-west interstate routes, I-40 goes across the Texas Panhandle and through the city of Amarillo, much of its route following the famous Route 66.³
- I-44 was one of the later interstates designated in Texas, approved in 1982. It is a diagonal east–west route and links Texas and Missouri via Oklahoma.³
- I-45 serves eastern Texas and is one of the busiest freeways in the state, carrying traffic between Houston and Dallas.³



References

1. *Technical Memorandum Task 1: The Interstate and National Highway System – A Brief History and Lessons Learned*. Online Posting: <http://interstate50th.org/docs/techmemo1.pdf>. Accessed August 2006.
2. Peters, M. The Now and Future Interstate System. *Better Roads Magazine*, May 2006. <http://www.betterroads.com/articles/may06d.htm>. Accessed August 2006.
3. Beaumont, P., R. Brinkman, D. Ellis, C. Pourteau, and B. Webb. *The Development of the Interstate Highway System in Texas*. White Paper. http://tti.tamu.edu/interstate_anniversary/white_paper/white_paper.pdf. Accessed August 2006.
4. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Interstate 50th Anniversary website. <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/interstate/homepage.cfm>. Accessed August 2006.

Websites Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Interstate Highway System

- American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials: <http://interstate50th.org/>.
- Federal Highway Administration: www.fhwa.dot.gov/interstate/50_splash.htm and www.fhwa.dot.gov/interstate/homepage.cfm.
- Texas Departments of Transportation: http://tti.tamu.edu/interstate_anniversary/.