

Vol. 2 | 2026

# Infrastructure

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE ASSOCIATED GENERAL CONTRACTORS OF TEXAS

**Management Conference Gives AGC Members Access to Industry, Political Leaders**

**Transportation Chair Craddick Discusses Funding, Local Priorities with AGC Members**

**Industry Leaders Surprise Jennifer Woodard, Showering Tributes for 40 Years with AGC of Texas**

**Industry Veteran Thomas Bohuslav Named Next AGC of Texas CEO**

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# REBUILDING THE LONE STAR LIFELINE

## EQUIPPING TEXAS FOR THE NEXT ERA OF INTERSTATE HIGHWAYS

Initiated by the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 under President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Interstate Highway System is widely considered one of the greatest transportation projects in the first 250 years of United States history. For the construction industry, it represented an unprecedented era of standardized road building, requiring all routes to be freeways with at least four lanes, controlled access, and no at-grade crossings. When signing the legislation in 1956, the President remarked, "Our highways badly need modernization and expansion to accommodate today's vastly increased motor traffic." Seventy years later, that statement still rings just as true today.

Authorized at an initial \$25 billion-equivalent to \$300 billion today-for the construction of 41,000 miles over a 10-year period, the Interstate Highway System stood as the largest public works project of its era. The very first project to break ground under this new legislation was the Mark Twain Expressway (Interstate 70) in St. Charles County, Missouri, which commenced the same year the act was signed.

Interestingly, the system's development in Texas, which currently contains 3,233 miles of the national network, began well before the routes received their official Interstate designations. One example is the 50-mile stretch of I-45 between Galveston and Houston. It opened in 1951 as the state's first urban expressway eight years prior to becoming I-45. Progress continued in 1962 when 43 miles of I-35 opened in Bexar County, marking the first time an Interstate Highway spanned from county line to county line within a large

metropolitan area. However, other regions presented unique challenges. Portions of I-10 west of San Antonio faced lengthy delays due to vast open spaces and a lack of nearby labor. Consequently, most of this section was constructed throughout the 1970s and 1980s and finally reached completion in the early 1990s. While the original estimate for the system was \$25 billion over 12 years, the massive construction undertaking ultimately spanned 35 years and cost approximately \$114 billion, or \$937 billion in 2026 dollars.

The Interstate Highway System remains the workhorse of the U.S. transportation system: heavily traveled and providing the most important link in the nation's supply chain, and the primary connection between and within urban communities. Today, the sprawling network spans 48,890 miles and serves as the main arteries for much of America. According to a report released in June by the non-profit TRIP ([www.tripnet.org](http://www.tripnet.org)), the economic benefit of the Interstate Highway System in Texas is over \$6 billion dollars annually, considering fuel savings, road safety improvements, and congestion reduction.

TRIP estimates that the annual economic benefit of improved safety on Texas's Interstate Highway System is \$2.25 billion because of fewer serious and fatal traffic crashes. The TRIP report also found that Texas's Interstate highways reduces traffic congestion by providing more efficient and reliable travel, which provides \$3.86 billion annually in benefits due to reduced delays and fuel consumption – resulting in a combined benefit to Texas residents of approximately \$6.1 billion

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annually due to improved traffic safety and reduced congestion—the second highest amount among states. However, Texas’s Interstate Highways are wearing out, showing signs of their advanced age, often heavily congested, and in need of significant reconstruction, modernization and expansion. At seventy years old, America’s Interstate Highway System is deteriorating, its traffic load of cars and trucks continues to increase, and the system lacks an adequate plan for its long-term health.

“Roads do more than just move people. They are the foundational lifelines that support our communities and keep America’s economy moving,” says Dean Word III, of Dean Word Company in New Braunfels, Texas, and TRIP Board President. “Rebuilding and expanding the 70-year-old frameworks that shaped modern transportation is our next great infrastructure challenge. Investing in the Interstate system’s future means preserving its legacy while increasing mobility and freight capacity for future generations.”

According to the non-profit organization TRIP’s 2026 American Highways report, the US Interstate Highways carry 24 percent of all vehicle travel despite making up only 2.6 percent of the nation’s roadway lane miles. The TRIP report found that from 2000 to 2024, travel on Texas’s Interstate System increased by 61 percent—the fifth highest rate in the U.S.—and that 64 percent of Texas’s urban Interstate highways are considered congested during peak hours—the ninth highest share among states. AGC of America’s 2020-2021 past President Bob Lanham, also President of Williams Brothers Construction, in Houston, Texas and past TRIP Board of Directors Chairman knows the importance of investing in our roads “Nearly 70 years after construction began, America’s Interstate System stands at a critical structural crossroads challenged by outdated foundations and traffic volumes that far exceed their original engineering. The next era of infrastructure development will not simply preserve these

historic roadways but require us to fundamentally reimagine and modernize them to meet the complex transportation and safety demands of the 21st century.”

The system is showing severe signs of aging, presenting an immense challenge for heavy civil contractors, the construction industry, and those who support roadbuilding. The Interstate Highway System saved 600 Texan lives in 2024 according to the TRIP report, but this continued impact is in jeopardy from crumbling and aging infrastructure. A critical issue for modern roadbuilders is that most Interstate segments still retain their original underlying foundations. Consequently, repeated pavement resurfacing yields diminishing returns, resulting in higher lifecycle costs and increasingly shorter periods of pavement smoothness. According to the TRIP report, pavements on 13 percent of Texas’s Interstate highways are in poor or mediocre condition. One percent of Texas’s Interstate bridges are rated in poor or structurally deficient condition and 54 percent are rated in fair condition.

The U.S. Department of Transportation estimates a staggering \$196 billion backlog in necessary improvements, which includes \$58 billion needed for pavements, \$65 billion for bridges, and \$73 billion for system expansion and enhancements. The Transportation Research Board (TRB) has indicated that addressing these massive physical and operational deficiencies will require annual investments to more than double, increasing from \$23 billion in 2018 to \$57 billion annually over the next 20 years. For contractors, this mandates a massive upcoming pipeline of work dedicated to rebuilding aging foundations, upgrading outdated interchanges, and adding capacity to meet 21st-century demands.

Looking ahead, the modernization of the Interstate Highway System presents a multifaceted pipeline of specialized work for the heavy civil construction sector. Beyond simply replacing aging pavements, contractors will be tasked with completely

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upgrading most of the system's roughly 15,000 interchanges, which are currently a primary source of traffic bottlenecks and whose immense reconstruction costs are not even fully captured in current federal funding estimates. Modernizing the network will also require "right-sizing" the system, which includes adding necessary lane capacity to existing corridors and comprehensively overhauling safety features. Thirty-eight million gallons of fuel are saved annually by the Interstate Highway System in Texas according to the TRIP analysis, and this will only continue to be a benefit as capacity is adjusted to meet the growing populations that live near and use the system.

In addition to rebuilding the existing network, the future of the highway system includes significant geographic expansion through Congressionally designated high-priority corridors, ensuring long-term project opportunities for the construction industry. Forward thinking expansion is critical for accommodating long-term demographic and economic shifts. By the year 2060, counties located within 20 miles of an Interstate are projected to grow in population at a rate roughly seven times faster than those located further away. To finance these massive future undertakings, the construction industry will likely see an increased reliance on innovative funding mechanisms, including public-private partnerships, the construction of new toll facilities, and the addition of high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes to highly congested freeways. As these creatively-funded projects break ground to right-size the network and add necessary lane capacity, heavy civil contractors will be pushed to rapidly scale up their equipment fleets. This unprecedented surge in active job sites creates a massive, long-term opportunity for the reputable independent dealers of the IEDA, who are uniquely positioned to buy and sell the essential heavy machinery needed to execute these historic upgrades worldwide. Ultimately, equipping builders to aggressively tackle these comprehensive overhauls will not only modernize the nation's infrastructure, but it will also deliver continued savings to road users by

further reducing the 138 million hours currently lost to traffic delays in Texas.

Upon releasing the report, TRIP Executive Director Dave Kearby said, "The Interstate Highway System is more than concrete and steel. It is a living symbol of American ambition, ingenuity, and unity. Built by a generation that believed in creating something bigger than themselves, these roads connected families, fueled commerce, strengthened national defense, and opened the country to endless opportunities. As we approach its 70th anniversary and America's 250th, rebuilding this system is not just an investment in infrastructure, it is a chance to honor that legacy and ensure future generations inherit an America that still believes in building boldly for tomorrow." Founded in 1971, TRIP is a private, nonprofit organization that conducts research, evaluates, and distributes economic and technical data on surface transportation issues. The organization works with industry partners such as AGC America to release reports at the state and national level.

Reflecting on his two terms in office, former President Dwight D. Eisenhower once said of the Interstate Highway System, "More than any single action by the government since the end of the war, this one would change the face of America." Seven decades later, that prediction still resonates. The Interstate System impact is undeniable. Beyond reshaping the physical landscape, the vast network of highways accelerated social, economic, and cultural changes that transformed American life throughout the second half of the 20th century.

Founded in 1971, TRIP is a private, nonprofit organization that researches, evaluates, and distributes economic and technical data on surface transportation issues. By generating traditional and social media news coverage, TRIP informs and promotes policies that improve the movement of goods and people, make surface travel safer, and enhance economic development and productivity.  
Learn more: [www.tripnet.org](http://www.tripnet.org)