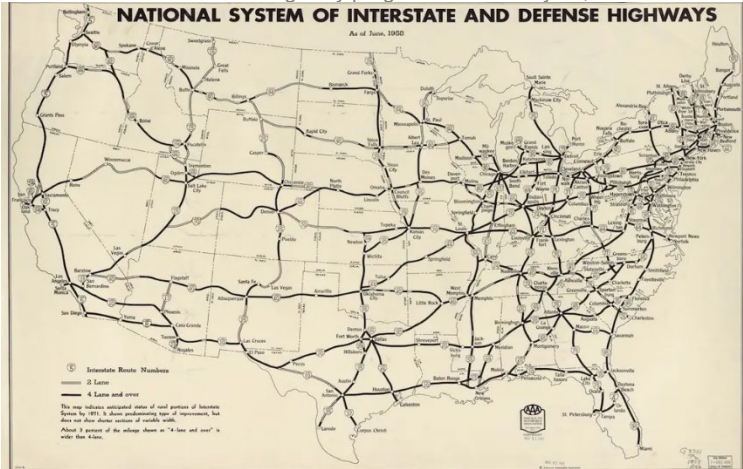


## Aging Interstate Highway System Creates a Growing Pipeline of Work in South Atlantic

by: Lisa Mead, TRIP



Dwight D. Eisenhower meets with the President's Advisory Committee to discuss federal and state highway programs on January 11, 1955.



Map courtesy of Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

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 public works projects in the first 250 years of United States history. For the heavy civil 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. “Our highways badly need modernization and expansion to accommodate today’s vastly increased motor traffic,” Eisenhower said when signing the legislation. Seventy years later, that statement rings just as true. Authorized at an initial \$25 billion — equivalent to \$300 billion today — for the construction of 41,000 miles over a 10-year period, the massive construction undertaking ultimately spanned 35 years and cost approximately \$114 billion, or \$937 billion in 2026 dollars. Today, the sprawling network spans 48,890 miles and serves as the main arteries for much of the U.S., generating an estimated economic benefit of \$65 billion annually considering fuel savings, road safety improvements, and congestion reduction, according to research by the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit TRIP.

### Cracks in the Concrete

Celebrating its 70th birthday this year, the Interstate Highway System’s infrastructure is showing severe signs of its advanced age. A critical issue for modern roadbuilders is that most interstate segments still retain their original underlying foundations, meaning repeated pavement resurfacing yields diminishing returns and increasingly shorter periods of pavement smoothness.

“Rebuilding and modernizing the Interstate Highway System is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve safety, strengthen mobility, and

prepare our transportation network for the future,” said **Cathy Underwood**, Corporate Business Development Officer of **Branch** and TRIP Board Member. “To make the most of these investments across the South, we must prioritize thoughtful planning, efficient project delivery, and strong partnerships that maximize the value of every transportation dollar.”

In the South Atlantic, intense utilization and rapid population growth have heavily strained this aging network:

In Maryland, 51 percent of all major locally and state-maintained roads and highways are currently in poor or mediocre condition. Driving on these rough roads costs the average Maryland driver \$856 annually in additional vehicle operating costs. Furthermore, 4 percent of the state’s bridges are rated in poor or structurally deficient condition, and 43 percent were built in 1969 or earlier.

In North Carolina, 37 percent of all major locally and state-maintained roads and highways are currently in poor or mediocre condition.

Driving on these rough roads costs the average North Carolina driver \$633 annually in additional vehicle operating costs. Furthermore, 7 percent of the state’s bridges are rated in poor or structurally deficient condition, and 32 percent were built in 1969 or earlier.

In South Carolina, 45 percent of all major roads are in poor or mediocre condition. The state’s bridges also face significant aging issues, with 6 percent rated in poor or structurally deficient condition and 43 percent constructed in 1969 or earlier. Additionally, traffic congestion currently costs South Carolina drivers \$2.8 billion each year in the form of lost time and wasted fuel.

In West Virginia, 54 percent of major roads are rated in poor or mediocre condition. Driving on these rough roads costs West Virginia motorists \$960 million annually — an average of \$848 per driver. Furthermore, 18 percent of West Virginia’s bridges are rated in poor or structurally deficient condition — the highest share in the nation. To make matters more urgent, 29 percent of West Virginia’s bridges were built prior to 1970.

For contractors, modernizing the network will require a massive pipeline of upcoming work. Beyond simply replacing aging pavements, roadbuilders will be tasked with completely upgrading outdated interchanges, “right-sizing” lane capacity, and fundamentally overhauling safety features to handle the influx of both passenger and commercial freight.

Freight moved by trucks is expected to increase substantially by 2050 — growing 60 percent by weight in South Carolina and 64 percent by weight in North Carolina. By 2050 in Maryland, freight moved by trucks is expected to increase 55 percent by weight and 101 percent by value, while in West Virginia, freight moved by trucks is expected to increase 35 percent by weight and 89 percent by value.

“The Interstate Highway System is one of the greatest infrastructure achievements in American history, but it wasn’t built to handle today’s traffic volumes or tomorrow’s transportation demands,” said Ken Lanford, President of Lanford Brothers Company Inc. and TRIP Board Member. “Modernizing these corridors is about preserving a legacy while ensuring they continue to serve the people, businesses, and industries that rely on them every day.”

“The Interstate Highway System is more than concrete and steel; it is a living symbol of American ambition, ingenuity, and unity,” TRIP Executive Director Dave Kearby said. “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 reflect on 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.”

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[www.tripnet.org](http://www.tripnet.org). About the Author

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