

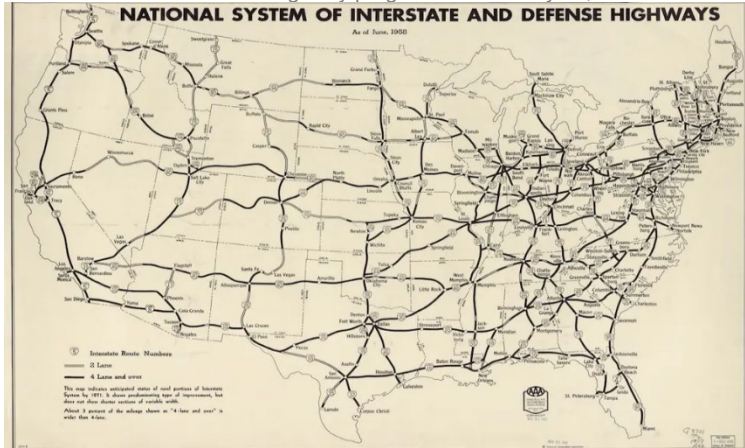
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Aging Interstate Highway System Creates a Growing Pipeline of Work in the Ohio Valley and Appalachia

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**.

“Every day, millions of Americans depend on the Interstate Highway System without giving it a second thought,” said **Bryce Burgett**, CEO of **Kokosing** and TRIP Board Member. “It keeps

businesses operating, families connected, emergency services moving, and freight on schedule. As this network approaches its eighth decade, we have an opportunity to invest in improvements that will strengthen mobility, enhance safety, and support the nation’s economy for many years to come.”

Cracks in the Concrete

Celebrating its 70th birthday this year, the Interstate Highway System is showing severe signs of aging, presenting an immense challenge for heavy civil contractors, engineers, and roadbuilders. The **U.S. Department of Transportation** estimates a staggering \$196 billion backlog in necessary improvements nationwide, which includes \$58 billion needed for pavements, \$65 billion for bridges, and \$73 billion for system expansion and enhancements.

Throughout the Ohio Valley and Appalachia, these physical and operational infrastructure deficits are highly apparent, presenting distinct opportunities and challenges for regional contractors:

Ohio: Currently, 33 percent of major roads in Ohio are in poor or mediocre condition. These deteriorated roads cost Ohio motorists \$5.3 billion each year — or \$628 per driver — in the form of additional repair costs, accelerated vehicle depreciation, and increased fuel consumption and tire wear. Additionally, 5 percent of the state’s bridges are rated in poor or structurally deficient condition, and 38 percent were constructed prior to 1970.

Kentucky: 29 percent of major roads are rated in poor or mediocre condition, costing Kentucky drivers \$1.7 billion annually (\$558 per driver) in extra vehicle operating costs. The state’s bridge network is also heavily aged: 7 percent of Kentucky’s bridges are rated in poor or structurally deficient condition, and 38 percent were built prior to 1970.

Indiana: Indiana boasts the strongest pavement conditions in this group, though 17 percent of its major roads are still in poor or mediocre condition, costing motorists \$1.6 billion annually (\$336 per driver) in extra operating costs. However, structural overhauls remain a priority, as 5 percent of Indiana’s bridges are rated poor or structurally deficient, and 35 percent were built prior to 1970.

Illinois: 39 percent of Illinois’ major roads are in poor or mediocre condition. Driving on deteriorated roads costs Illinois motorists \$6.5 billion a year — \$751 per driver — in the form of additional repairs, accelerated vehicle depreciation, and increased fuel consumption and tire wear.

A Pipeline of Opportunity

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.

“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.”

For more information and access to all TRIP reports, go to www.tripnet.org.

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