

# You Can't Get There From Here: the coming of the Interstates to Vermont



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Interstate 89 between Williston and South Burlington in 1962 and then two years later in 1964. These photos illustrate the transition from small roads to major highways. **By Nancy Columb**

The first idea for a set of superhighways came from President Eisenhower when he traveled across the US as a lieutenant colonel in the army (right)<sup>1</sup> and when he was in Germany and witnessed the Autobahn<sup>2</sup>.



The Autobahn increased vehicular safety and could be used for military purposes; this is what President Eisenhower envisioned for the United States.

In 1956 President Eisenhower received support from the Federal-Aid Highway Act to begin constructing what he called the "National System of Interstate and Defense Highways." <sup>3</sup>

H. R. 10660

[PUBLIC LAW 627]

[CHAPTER 462]

## Eighty-fourth Congress of the United States of America

AT THE SECOND SESSION

Began and held at the City of Washington on Tuesday, the third day of January,  
one thousand nine hundred and fifty-six

### An Act

To amend and supplement the Federal-Aid Road Act approved July 11, 1916, to authorize appropriations for continuing the construction of highways; to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 to provide additional revenue from the taxes on motor fuel, tires, and trucks and buses; and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

### TITLE I—FEDERAL-AID HIGHWAY ACT OF 1956

#### SEC. 101. SHORT TITLE FOR TITLE I.

This title may be cited as the "Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956".

#### SEC. 102. FEDERAL-AID HIGHWAYS.

(a) [1] AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—For the purpose of carrying out the provisions of the Federal-Aid Road Act approved July 11, 1916 (39 Stat. 555), and all Acts amendatory thereof and supplementary thereto, there is hereby authorized to be appropriated for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1957, \$125,000,000 in addition to any sums heretofore authorized for each fiscal year; the sum of \$850,000,000 for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1958; and the sum of \$875,000,000 for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1959. The sums herein authorized for each fiscal year shall be available for expenditure as follows:

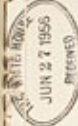
(A) 45 per centum for projects on the Federal-aid primary highway system.

(B) 30 per centum for projects on the Federal-aid secondary highway system.

(C) 25 per centum for projects on extensions of these systems within urban areas.

(2) APPROPRIATIONS.—The sums authorized by this section shall be apportioned among the several States in the manner now provided by law and in accordance with the formulas set forth in section 4 of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944, approved December 20, 1944 (58 Stat. 828); *Provided*, That the additional amount herein authorized for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1957, shall be apportioned immediately upon enactment of this Act.

(b) AVAILABILITY FOR EXPENDITURE.—Any sums apportioned to any State under this section shall be available for expenditure in that State for two years after the close of the fiscal year for which such sums are authorized, and any amounts so apportioned remaining unexpended at the end of such period shall lapse: *Provided*, That such funds shall be deemed to have been expended if a sum equal to the total of the sums herein and heretofore apportioned to the State is covered by formal agreements with the Secretary of Commerce for construction, reconstruction, or improvement of specific projects as provided in this title and prior Acts: *Provided further*, That in the case of those sums heretofore, herein, or hereafter apportioned to any State for projects on the Federal-aid secondary highway system, the Secretary of Commerce may, upon the request of any State, discharge his responsibility relative to the plans, specifications, estimates, surveys, contract awards, design, inspection, and construction of such secondary road projects by his receiving and approving a certified statement by the State highway department setting forth that the plans, design, and construction for such projects are in accord with the standards and procedures of such State applicable



LS08768



It didn't take long for construction to start in Vermont. This is the beginning of some construction on Interstate-91 in Brattleboro in 1958.



There was more than just road to be built when it came to Vermont's hilly and uneven areas. This is construction of bridges on Interstate-91 in Rockingham.

LS05905



Signs had to be posted as well so that drivers would know how far to the next destination they were, and where to expect an exit ramp; another example of safety features



The terrain around Vermont was not always conducive to straight-up paving of roads. Here outside of Montpelier a crane removes steep rock outcroppings along where the road will go.

LS06519

Before the Interstate Highway System, many places in Vermont were farmland with a few scattered houses and one or two main roads. This aerial photo from 1927 of some land along the Winooski River between Williston and Richmond depicts that scenario.



(OH-872 M-B) 11-12-27-115A (12-30-27) CH. AIRHOUSE BRIDGE BETWEEN WILLISTON AND RICHMOND, VT.

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Here is the same area along the Winooski River in 2004, now with many more houses and Interstate 89 running through the middle. Even the covered bridge was replaced with a metal one.

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But as a result of skyrocketing farming prices and the increasing ease of importing goods due to railways and the Interstate, much of the previous farmland has been reforested. That is evident here in Royalton, Vermont in 1927, where much farmland is visible.



1028-8786-8411-8-27-1927-1/2 5000' R. 4010 Bridge Series Royalton, VT 410

LS01444\_000

**In the same area, 77 years later, some of the area is still open but there is much more forest than before. Interstate 89 is also a major change to the area.**



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LS07035\_000



Here is the very beginning of road layout and an exit ramp for Interstate-89 in Williston, Vermont around 1961.

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Three years later, in 1964, the road is finished and complete with road signs. It is now available for cars to travel on.

LS09336



Here men from the Vermont Highway Department dump roadside litter into the truck. Aside from the accumulation of litter, many other large trucks could travel the interstate allowing for growth of business by speeding up the delivery process and driving down warehouse storage costs.



From all the construction and planning by the state and federal governments came the Interstates of today that we all know and love: I-89 and I-91 here in Vermont, such as this stretch outside of Middlesex.

LS01432\_001



(026-877C-8)(11-12-27-11A)(12-3000) EAST of RICHMOND, VT

## From dirt roads and covered bridges... To asphalt, cement, and metal.

1. Weingroff, Richard F. "Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956: Creating the Interstate System". Public Roads. 1996.  
<http://www.fhrc.gov/pubrds/summer96/p96su10.htm>

2. GE 342 - Military Geology PowerPoint Presentations. University of Missouri -Rolla.  
<http://web.umr.edu/~rogersda/umrcourses/ge342/>
3. "National Interstate and Defense Highways Act".  
1956. U.S. National Archives & Records Administration. <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=88>

