

# Interstate 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

## The Story of Oregon's Interstates

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*This material was compiled from a 2004 report entitled "The Interstate Highway System in Oregon, An Historic Overview" by George Kramer, prepared for the Oregon Department of Transportation.*



## **Introduction**

In the years following World War II, all across the United States, pressure increased for an improved highway system. More and more Americans were relying on private automobile transportation for both work and vacation travel. A widespread coalition of engineers, business, auto enthusiasts, state and local government leaders, and finally the federal government, all played a role in the development of what became the “Federal Interstate and Defense Highways” program, signed into law by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956.

The “interstate,” like no public works project before or since, was truly national in scope. It required billions of dollars and more than 30 years to complete. Today, a half-century after its inception, the interstate system remains the largest public works project in history.

Oregon’s interstate system consists of two major routes and approximately 11 miles of one of Washington’s major routes:

- Interstate 5, running north-south on the western side of the state;
- Interstate 84, running east-west along the Columbia River on the state’s northern border; and
- Interstate 82, running north-south in eastern Oregon for 11 miles to the Washington state border.

Oregon has several smaller connecting sections of the interstate:

- I-105, running east-west through Eugene-Springfield;
- I-205, south of the Portland metro area; and
- I-405, running north-south on the west side of downtown Portland.

In most ways, Oregon’s interstates are a microcosm of the entire national system, consisting largely of long stretches of uninterrupted pavement running through sparsely settled, rural landscapes. Both Interstate 5, tying the western portion of the state from north to south, and Interstate 84, tying the northern portion together east to west, change in character as they converge upon the Portland metropolitan area, where they become broad, multi-laned, multi-layered and many-bridged, urban routes. This mixture of long, rural freeways, coupled with densely developed and complex urban connections, typifies much of the interstate system.

In other ways, however, Oregon’s interstate is unique, the result of Oregon’s century-long commitment to good roads and nation-leading innovation in highway construction and design. Oregon’s 731-mile portion of the interstate, many parts of which were planned and even built before the federal program was enacted, reflects the highway tradition in our state and embodies its long recognition of the link between good roads, prosperity and access across its often difficult terrain.

## **Oregon’s road-building legacy**

Oregon’s innovative use of taxes upon gasoline, adopted in 1919, allowed the state to pursue road building that would be envied by other states. Assured of stable funding, the Oregon State Highway Department developed a master plan for Oregon’s highway system and was soon constructing a series of primary highways that would allow improved access. Two — the Columbia River Highway and the Pacific Highway — became central to Oregon’s development of the interstate.

Before there ever was an interstate, Oregon had the first border-to-border paved highway west of the Mississippi. By 1923, the entire road from the Columbia River in Portland to California was completed and paved. The “Pacific Highway,” as it was known, followed the western foothills of the Cascade Mountain range, and as a result, went through the center of almost every city or town along its 341-mile route in the state. As it passed through eight of Oregon’s counties, it in effect became the “Main Street” in seven county seats, and sparked roadside development such as gas stations, restaurants, hotels and tourist attractions.

Early in the century — in spite of gas rationing during two world wars — Oregon’s roadways saw increased traffic loads, for private vehicles as well as heavy freight trucks, accelerating damage to the system and pressing capacities. Despite the state’s increased reliance on its road system, a scarcity of materials and skilled workers limited the OSHD’s ability to improve the system. During the Depression, there was little money for road improvement. As WWII ramped up, the Highway Department was able to retain only a barebones level of capacity to maintain the roads already in use. Then during the war, Congress forbade road construction except what was necessary for the war effort.

By the war’s end, Oregon’s road system was in relatively sorry shape, but the economy and population were growing. The Department began to plan for prompt and comprehensive action.

Oregon is close to a complete breakdown of its highway system, State Highway Engineer R. H. Baldock said....The engineer blamed misguided administration of federal scarce materials controls for a situation that may bring all highway construction in the state to a halt. (*Medford Mail Tribune*, 9 September 1951, 14:1)

Robert H. “Sam” Baldock, the Oregon State Highway Engineer, played an integral role in the development of Oregon’s highway system prior to the war, helping to establish the state as a national leader. Baldock began to advocate for large-scale improvements in the primary road system, with the strong support of Thomas H. Banfield and the other members of the Oregon State Highway Commission. Beginning in 1949, because of OSHD efforts — aided in no small part by local political leaders who saw access to efficient highways a major component of their own community’s potential for post-war growth — the Oregon State Legislature undertook a series of actions to make a significant financial commitment to improving the state’s highways.

In addition to increasing funding, OSHD also sought new legislation that would give it the planning and legal tools to successfully develop modern “expressways,” such as the partially completed Pennsylvania Turnpike. The Highway Department wanted approval to use limited access and grade separations.

Limited, or “controlled,” access was a significant departure from early highways. Those portions of Oregon’s two primary highway routes, US 30 and especially US 99, that passed through cities and their outskirts, were lined with business and property owners who considered the location a primary advantage and a financial requirement for their success. The counties along the US 99 corridor contained more than 70 percent of Oregon’s

population in 1950. An almost uniformly commercialized corridor quickly developed in the communities along its route, separated by long, rural, or forested sections as it moved between communities. These commercial corridors, some incorporating downtown cores and others establishing entirely new strip developments, were a major component of almost every local economy along the roadway.

Business owners placed a high value upon an ability to easily and directly enter or leave the route. To Oregon's highway engineers, however, the constant flow of new, slower moving vehicles onto or off the road increased congestion, created dangerous situations, and increased the possibility of accidents. For the traffic engineer at the state level, the lack of access control severely reduced the effectiveness of the highway system for through-traffic. And in this period, through-traffic, as opposed to local traffic, increasingly became the primary focus in state highway design.

As with controlled access, "grade separations" also became a buzzword in post-war highway design that would separate the old type of highway from the new. Cross-streets created disruptions in traffic flow that decreased speed and safety as vehicles attempted to traverse the corridor. Railroad crossings required wigwags or crossing arms with worse effect, as long freight trains could create lengthy backups that compromised flow. Traffic signals and railroad crossings quickly became anathema on the modern post-war expressway.

Grade separations and controlled access along existing routes created both political and financial obstacles to the construction of new highways. Existing businesses would be affected through reduced access, numerous cross-streets and rail crossings through established communities would have to be addressed, and right-of-way acquisition, involving primary commercial frontages, would be significantly more expensive than that of more rural, open lands.

The Oregon Legislature responded to these various concerns by passing SB 121 in 1947, creating both the legal framework for the creation of controlled access highways and, in 1952, bond funding mechanisms to help pay for them. With these hurdles cleared, OSHD began the planning and development of what would essentially be an entire new highway system that would be superimposed over the earlier US 30 and US 99 corridors.

Among the most congested highway routes in Oregon, the access to downtown Portland from the east was high on the list. Sandy Boulevard, a densely developed commercial core, was typical of the type of problems created by unlimited access and so formed the perfect candidate for replacement with a new, controlled access corridor that would be free of distraction, grade crossings, and other potential traffic-snarling development.

The Banfield, named in honor of retired Oregon State Highway Commission Chair Thomas H. Banfield, was largely completed more than a year before the federal government would finalize the funding mechanisms for the interstate system as we know it today. The Banfield (the portion of I-84 from I-205 to I-5) established an increasingly typical standard for highway construction in Oregon. Largely a new route with both controlled access and full grade separations, the Banfield kicked off Oregon's foray into the interstate — before the interstate was even a system.

## **The interstate comes to Oregon**

As laid out in the “yellow book” that identified the basic route for each of the 41,000 miles of new interstate system, Oregon would have two major routes, plus several connecting spurs or loops, that were planned to serve the urban areas of Portland, Salem and Eugene. Of the 700+ interstate miles in Oregon included in the 1956 plan, some portions, most notably the Banfield Expressway and the so-called Portland-Salem Expressway, were either already complete or under construction.

In Oregon, where much of the interstate incorporated portions of the earlier, state-funded expressway system, the original two-lane highways were augmented with a parallel two lane route, each of which then became single-direction in an interstate standard four-lane highway. This process allowed Oregon to maintain efficient through-travel during construction, even in those places where the original US route was to be replaced rather than bypassed by the new interstate system. Today evidence of this two-part construction remains, particularly in sections of Interstate 5 between Salem and Portland.

Oregon didn't shy away from its road-building leadership role when the interstate system came along. Beginning in 1961, as most states were starting to open routes to the interstate standard, the percentage of miles completed was tallied nationally and Oregon appeared at the fore.

Mr. Cooper was true to his word and Oregon completed its portion of Interstate 5 in October 1966. This event marked the first border-to-border, paved, four-lane portion of that route, mirroring the state's leading the way in paving with the completion of the Pacific Highway more than four decades earlier. Its 308 miles comprised just 4 percent of the Oregon's highway system but carried over 18 percent of the total vehicle miles of travel, accounting for 1,163,200,000 vehicle miles in 1965 alone. Travel from Washington to California on the road took an estimated 2 hours less time than had been required on US 99, a savings the department estimated to be valued at \$12 million. (*ODOT GF, 6 October 1996*)

Oregon completed its 308-mile-long portion of Interstate 5 to full four-lane standards by October 1966, and as of March 1970 nearly 90 percent of the state's 730 miles of the route were finished. California did not achieve a completed interstate highway from border-to-border until six years after Oregon.

## **Segments of interest on I-5**

*Myrtle Creek-Canyonville.* The 10.2-mile portion of Interstate 5, initially known as the Fords Bridge Unit and later referred to as the Myrtle Creek-Canyonville segment, was the first section contract of interstate in Oregon to be awarded following the passage of the 1956 Federal Highway Act. The contract was finalized on September 27, 1956, and construction was completed in 1959 at a cost of \$5,500,000. The Myrtle Creek section, nestled between a large cut to the west and the Umpqua River to the east, follows a sharply curved route that still requires flashing lights and signed speed reductions. As the road straightens out south of Myrtle Creek toward Canyonville, it follows essentially flat bottomland before sweeping along a bend in the South Umpqua River that was documented as an early postcard view.

*Medford Viaduct.* Among the more unique elements of the interstate in Oregon is the Medford Viaduct, a 3,229-foot-long steel beam and girder bridge that carries the highway corridor through the middle of that city as an elevated freeway rather than one at grade. The construction of the viaduct was among the more controversial and protracted of the siting decisions outside the Portland area.

*Siskiyou Pass.* The southernmost sections of Interstate 5, beginning at Steinman, south of Ashland, and continuing to the California-Oregon border, include some of the steepest interstate grades in the nation. Construction of the interstate south of Ashland was entirely on a new roadbed cut through the mountains, making this among the most challenging and expensive portions of the Oregon interstate road outside the Portland metropolitan area. At its peak, the Siskiyou project had more than 600 workers on the job, moving 75,000 cubic feet of road-building-related material every day.

*Final segments.* The last links in the I-5 chain had come together in time to meet the 1966 deadline set by Governor Mark Hatfield. The Marquam Bridge, connecting the Baldock Expressway and East Bank Freeway across the Willamette in Portland, was opened to traffic on October 18, 1966. Four days later, on October 22, 1966, a dedication ceremony was held at the Cow Creek Safety Rest Area, south of Canyonville, in Douglas County, celebrating the completion of Interstate 5.

### **Focus moves north to I-80N (today's I-84)**

Improvements to the major east-west route (US 30) in northern Oregon — the Columbia River Highway and the Old Oregon Trail Highway — had been in the planning stages since the 1930s. Like most other projects, it was interrupted by WWII. With the passage of bond funding by the Oregon Legislature, OSHD had begun implementing those improvements on a segment-by-segment basis in the early 1950s. Most notable of these was the Banfield Expressway in the Portland area, but other portions of the route along the Columbia River also were improved.

With the passage of the Federal Interstate and Defense Highways Act in 1956, US 30 was scheduled to be superseded by Interstate 80 North, largely on a new and generally parallel routing, much of which was built closer to the river on flat terrain, avoiding the switchbacks of the older, higher route. This 375-mile-long route, now Interstate 84, is the longest numbered segment of the interstate system within Oregon. I-84 follows the Columbia River Gorge east of Portland before turning south and inland at Boardman, continuing through Pendleton, La Grande and Baker City before entering Idaho just east of Ontario.

### **Notable sections of I-80N/I-84**

The Banfield Expressway ends at Interstate 205, and as I-84 continues east, it becomes the start of the Columbia River Highway No. 2, also known as Oregon Highway 2. Historically OSHD referred to this section of the interstate as “Troutdale to The Dalles,” though it logically included the freeway beginning east of I-205. For much of its length outside the City of Portland, this portion of I-84 tightly hugs the banks of the Columbia River, providing numerous scenic views as well as access to several highly regarded natural features, such as Bridal Veil Falls and Multnomah Falls.

The section of Interstate 84 between Portland and The Dalles was largely completed by 1963. Complicated by the terrain, the need to maintain open traffic through the area, and the immediately adjacent rail line, the final elements of I-84 to The Dalles were not completed to interstate standard construction until 1969.

Between The Dalles and Boardman and heading southeast toward Pendleton, improved roads had been built throughout the 1950s. After the creation of the interstate system, the intent was for some portions of that 125-mile stretch to remain two lanes.

“During the next 13 years [Oregon’s interstates] will become four-lane freeways, with the exception of short stretches of US 30 in sparsely populated sections of eastern Oregon, which will remain two lanes...”  
(*ODOT GF, January 1958*)

These two-lane sections included Boardman to Stanfield Junction and the Pendleton By-pass section. Later, this option was removed from the federal standard, although that occurred after Oregon had itself decided to build all of I-84 to four lanes. After October 1966, when I-5 was finished, construction focus turned to the last area needing to be built to interstate standards (I-84 from Pendleton to Ontario), but it was not until July 3, 1980, that a full four-lane interstate highway ran continuously from Portland to the Idaho border east of Ontario.

### **Oregon’s minor major interstate: I-82**

Interstate 82 (McNary Highway No. 70) connects I-84, south of Hermiston, Ore. with I-90, in Ellensburg, Wash. Of the route’s 143.5 miles, only 11 (less than 10%) are within Oregon. Interstate 82 was placed on the System by the Secretary of Commerce in 1956, based on a recommendation by the Department of Defense. The states of Washington and Oregon did not concur on this route and consequently a number of alternatives were studied.

Many of public hearings held on route alternatives centered on the potential economic benefits that would accrue to communities either on, or left off, the route. After much heated discussion, in early 1964, both Oregon and Washington had reached consensus on a route that began at Stanfield, on I-84 and then headed northwest through Umatilla towards Prosser, Wash.

Once this decision became public, groups in the Tri-Cities area, as well as those Boardman, Ore., and Walla Walla, Wash., all sought political intervention to re-align the freeway to improve their access. A re-study of options for the freeway was formally requested in Aug. 1964. The new study recommended a routing of I-82 that would go from Prosser to Wallula, Wash., and enter Oregon at Pendleton, a significantly longer and more costly routing, but one that would meet certain political requirements. OSHD, on the other hand, remained steadfast in its desire for the Umatilla crossing, utilizing the existing bridge over the Columbia River.

Debate dragged on for nearly a decade without any conclusion and finally the Federal Highway Administration separately approved a spur route connecting the Tri-Cities with I-82 in Washington, largely dissipating that region’s interest in supporting the Wallula Route that would have benefited Walla Walla. In March 1973, both Oregon and Washington agreed upon Alternative “J,” which utilized the Umatilla Bridge and joined I-84 southwest of

Hermiston but did not go through that community. Various other local interests continued to agitate for re-evaluation and study of alternatives, and as late as September 1978, a hearing before the Oregon Transportation Commission was held to determine whether to re-open the siting discussions for I-82. In October 1978, the Commission reaffirmed its support of Alternative J. Construction bidding of the route was just beginning in early 1979 when progress was complicated by the on-going gasoline shortages of the energy crisis.

Construction on I-82 continued through the 1980s, including improvements at the Columbia River. The last contract for the route, and the final element of Oregon's entire interstate system, was awarded in late 1985. Just under three years later, Interstate 82 was complete. The dedication ceremony, on I-82 near Hermiston, was held on Tuesday, Sept. 20, 1988.

### **Oregon's other interstates**

Included in the initial planning of Oregon's interstate system, in addition to the two major routes of I-5 and I-84, was a series of connecting routes and urban loops, all intended to improve access to the main roads from bypassed cities or, in the case of Portland, to improve the flow of through traffic in the densely developed city center.

*I-105.* A short, 4.5-mile-long route that connects Interstate 5 with the Delta Highway and downtown Eugene, I-105 ties the Interstate with the older route of US 99, as it heads west toward Junction City. The major aspect of its construction concerned the bridge across the Willamette River, as the route turns sharply south. There was very little controversy associated with I-105, so there is not much historical information about this segment of interstate. Construction began sometime in the early 1960s and was completed in 1970.

*I-205.* This 26.6-mile-long route, which meets I-5 at Tualatin south of Portland, and then continues east through West Linn and Oregon City before heading north, was one of the most delayed and controversial of Oregon's interstate segments. It was, perhaps not coincidentally, one of the first of Oregon's highways to follow successfully the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). NEPA required that "...road projects using federal funds must have an Environmental Impact Statement [EIS] detailing the effects of the proposed work," a requirement that would have major impacts on Oregon's interstate program. I-205 was the last of the proposed I-5 connecting loops actually to be constructed, although its final form was not as originally planned.

The first contract for construction of any portion of Oregon Highway No. 64, the East Portland Freeway, as I-205 was called, was awarded on Jan. 11, 1968, for the Willamette River Bridge at West Linn. It opened to traffic on May 28, 1970.

While some controversy arose during the construction of the road from I-5 east to West Linn and Oregon City, much of the 17.9 miles of this portion, perhaps among the most scenic segments of the interstate in any of Oregon's urban areas, was completed by mid-1974. As I-205 pushed north to Multnomah County, however, the project ran into new and considerably more virulent controversy than had previously been the case. In 1973, groups opposed to the project filed petitions with Environmental Quality Commission. These environmental concerns, along with new doubts about the social value of freeways in general, put I-205 in the spotlight.

In July 1974, despite the fact that construction was already underway, the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners formally retracted its earlier approval of the I-205 route and requested that the Oregon Department of Transportation redesign a nine-mile section of the freeway. ODOT wanted to stay with the proposed eight-lane design; Multnomah County wanted no more than four lanes. The Clackamas County Board of Commissioners, who now enjoyed a virtually completed I-205 throughout the county, supported ODOT, as did the West Linn City Council.

By the end of 1974, Glenn Jackson, Oregon Transportation Commission Chair, and the Multnomah County Commissioners were working on a compromise plan. Finally, in July 1975, ODOT and the local governments reached a tentative consensus that would keep the right-of-way but allow some dedication for bus only lanes while removing or redesigning several of the originally planned interchanges. But that did not end the controversy. In November 1975, the Federal Highway Administration notified the State that it objected to portions of the compromise plan related to types of interchanges and the bus-way design. By December 1975, following changes to the interchanges and redesign of portions of the bus corridor, FHWA withdrew its opposition to a six-lane I-205 freeway with exclusive bus lanes, and so removed the major obstacle to construction of the route between Foster Road and the Columbia River. By 1978-1979, construction on the remaining 9.2-mile section of I-205 was underway, with the agreement that the bus transit portion would be designed but not constructed concurrently with the route. The Glenn L. Jackson Bridge, which spans the Columbia River and connects I-205 between Oregon and Washington, was formally opened in December 1982. Interstate 205, as a complete interstate link between Tualatin and Vancouver, Wash., was completed in 1983.

The controversy surrounding I-205, which questioned the focus on auto transit as opposed to bus systems or other forms of mass transit, represented a turning of the tide for freeway construction in Oregon. It was the last spur or connecting loop of I-5 to be constructed in the state.

*I-405.* Formally known as the Stadium Freeway and sometimes referred to as the West Portland Freeway, the route generally now called I-405 is the second part of the inner loop system that rims the downtown Portland area. The freeway runs between Interstate 5 (across the Fremont Bridge) in the north, connects via the Vista Ridge Tunnel with US 26 (Sunset Highway) to the west, and then rejoins I-5 near the western end of the Marquam Bridge, for a total length of just 4.2 miles. Requiring the clearing of densely developed commercial structures near the heart of the downtown, land acquisition, multiple grade crossings, and the depressed construction of this comparatively short route combined to make it, per mile, the single most expensive interstate project in Oregon's history — with a cost of \$121 million.

Given the major number of condemnations and dislocations associated with the central, urban freeway such as the Stadium, not surprisingly, there was considerable debate about the route and its effects upon neighboring properties. Despite some controversy, however, I-405 was a critical component of the Oregon construction program and was started early in the interstate program, at a time when freeway construction still generally enjoyed widespread public support. Perhaps more importantly, the review policies and environmental impact process was not as powerful a legal tool as it would become in the ensuing years.

Condemnations proceeded, and ground clearing began for the construction of I-405 by late 1964. Excavation for portions of the depressed route began in 1967. By early 1968, the right-of-way had been largely cleared.

“...The excavation of an estimated 1,000,000 cubic yards of dirt for Portland’s six-lane Stadium Freeway extending from S.W. Montgomery to N.W. Johnson, is a big job. However, it is dwarfed by the huge amount of structural work required on the \$12,000,000 contract.” (*Western Construction*, December 1967:45-46)

Most of the Stadium Freeway was completed and opened to traffic on February 25, 1969. Its final link, the Fremont Bridge, was opened on November 11, 1973, completing Portland’s “Inner Loop.”

### **Oregon’s interstate segments...that weren’t**

*I-80N, western end (Mt. Hood Freeway)*. This route was intended to replace the earlier Banfield Freeway as the western end of Interstate 80N (now I-84) running from I-205 on the east to the East Bank Freeway section of I-5. Various routes were considered for the freeway, which was approximately five miles in length and would have run concurrently with about 2.5 miles of I-205 before heading east along the present route of I-84. The route roughly parallels US 26 on Powell Boulevard, but would have been a full access-controlled and grade separated freeway built to interstate standards. The Banfield Freeway, Oregon’s first modern expressway, was built before the adoption of the interstate and its standardized designs.

OSHD, in coordination with the City of Portland, largely accepted the new I-80N route known as Division-Powell and moved forward to seek approval for the Mt. Hood Freeway project in 1968. As a part of the proposal to the federal government, Oregon requested that the Banfield be withdrawn and replaced with the new route.

As might be expected, opposition to the re-routing of I-80N developed in the affected neighborhoods. In 1972, a complaint was filed in U.S. District Court seeking to halt the project pending additional corridor studies and filing of an Environmental Impact Statement. Following a similar pattern to that of the other proposed interstate projects during this period, opposition to the Mt. Hood Freeway continued on a variety of fronts, complicated by the then severe energy crisis that created acute gasoline shortages nationwide and pointed out the reliance of the U.S. transportation system on foreign oil supplies. On July 25, 1974, the Portland City Council withdrew its prior approval of the project by a vote of 4 to 1. A year later, in July 1975, the Mt. Hood Freeway was formally withdrawn and the funds reallocated.

*I-305*. This roughly four-mile spur was to join I-5 and connect to Salem. As originally proposed, the route was to begin at Keizer on I-5 (at the time, I-5 was still referred to as the R. H. Baldock Freeway) and follow Chemawa Road, continuing into the existing Salem street grid. Later, the project was modified and extended approximately 2.34 miles to include a new bridge across the Willamette River and to meet Oregon 22 (Willamina-Salem Highway No. 30), providing increased access within Polk County. In Nov. 1968, the top choice for a design, estimated to cost \$14.5 million, was submitted to the federal government. Before it

was reviewed, a request for the extension was submitted, increasing the cost by \$35.5 million. Despite the local and state support, the cost of the third bridge and extension was not reviewed favorably by the Federal Highway Administration, and the project apparently stalled. Because of the delay, and because of changes in Federal law adopted subsequent to the original submittals, the re-designed project was required to file an Environmental Impact Statement. That requirement opened up the public discussion in the early 1970s — the same period in which the I-205 controversy was raging in the Portland area.

Public meetings turned up both support and objections to the proposed I-305. There was growing opposition to the planned route going through neighborhoods in northern Salem. Complicating the construction of I-305 were new federal rules that allowed monies allocated for interstate construction to be re-allocated for other transportation projects in the area. In Dec. 1976, ODOT Director Robert A. Burco informed the Oregon Transportation Commission,

“Today I was informally notified....that Marion County, the City of Salem, and the local Council of Governments have all passed resolutions endorsing withdrawal of I-305 as an interstate segment and transferring those funds to other projects in the Salem metropolitan area...” (*ODOT GF, Burco, 16 December 1976*)

Some of the funds that had been set aside for I-305 went toward widening a bridge across the Willamette River and toward the completion of the Salem Parkway, which joins I-5 at Keizer and connects to downtown Salem, following much of the route originally identified for I-305. The Salem Parkway was completed in 1986.

*I-505.* This proposed freeway spur was to establish an access-controlled connection between I-405 in downtown Portland and the northwest industrial area along Yeon Avenue, to St. Helens Road, a bypass from US 30. Numerous options of varying mileage lengths and estimated costs were considered for this route. Although some public hearings were held about improving access to this area as early as 1959, the original plans to improve street access in Portland’s northeast Industrial Section were first announced by the OSHD in 1963. After public hearings and multi-government involvement, the original 1.3-mile-long route of the freeway was agreed upon in early 1971.

Local opposition began to grow, however, as details of the project became widely known. In late 1971, several groups filed suit in U.S. District Court asking that all work be halted until a draft Environmental Impact Statement was prepared and filed under NEPA requirements. Several studies were performed over the next couple of years and ODOT felt it was close to a decision in late 1973, but others came forward with more opposition. Finally, in early 1979, Governor Atiyeh petitioned the Federal Highway Administration for withdrawal of the I-505 Industrial Freeway from the system and the allocation of those funds for other transportation related projects in the area. In addition to funding traffic improvements in Northwest Portland, the Industrial Freeway withdrawal provided \$15 million in funding for the Banfield Transitway Project, \$7.4 million for the ODOT fund, and \$21 million for improvements on SE 19th Avenue, SE Powell Boulevard, Oregon 217, the Sunset Highway, and Oregon 212. Other projects benefiting from this withdrawal included the Hollywood Business District, Holgate Bridge, the Willamette Greenway, and streetlight and

transportation improvements for Swan Island and Columbia Boulevard (*Oregon Journal*, 15 December 1979).

### Oregon Interstate Finalization Dates

Name(s)	No. Miles	Date Completed
I-5 Pacific Highway	308	Oct. 22, 1966, near Canyonville
I-105 Eugene Spur	4.5	Oct. 25, 1967, at Eugene
I-405 Stadium Freeway	4.2	Feb. 25, 1969
I-84 Columbia River, Old Oregon Trail	375	July 3, 1980, near Baker City
I-205 East Portland Freeway	26.6	Dec. 1982
I-82 McNary Highway	11 (in Oregon)	Sept. 20, 1988, near Hermiston
<b>Not Finalized</b>		
I-80N Mt. Hood Freeway	5	Withdrawn, July 1975
I-305 Salem Spur	3.3	Withdrawn, Sept. 1977
I-505 Industrial Freeway	3.17	Withdrawn, Dec. 1979

### Interstate-Related Issues

*Interchanges.* In earlier highways, the traveling public had full access along the entire highway corridor. The interstate, as access-controlled routes, restricted points of entry and exit and shunted an ever-increasing volume of travelers into selected locations.

Requiring engineering that accommodated not only standard road building but an understanding of velocity, deceleration and acceleration, the power capability of a wide variety of vehicle types, safe turning radii, and aerodynamics, among other things, interchanges became an important and integral element of the interstate system.

Interchange design included so-called “basic” patterns that were often defined by their shape — the diamond, cloverleaf, trumpet, rotaries, and directionals. Basic pattern interchanges, the design of which largely became standardized through repetition, were usually favored by engineers as lower-cost than special situation interchanges that required individual design. Many local business owners and community leaders looked at the matter differently, believing that having an interstate run near their town without having any access to or from it provided little benefit. Interchange placement then, soon became a politically and economically charged issue.

Responding to the new opportunities created by interchange construction in the 1950s and 1960s, gasoline stations and, soon, national franchise restaurants, became the most common types of interchange business. It became predictable to find McDonalds, Wendy's, Bob's Big Boy and others, along with Shell, Texaco, Standard and other gasoline refiners. Motels, a word coined in an earlier generation by combining "motor" and "hotel" to reflect the auto-centric focus of their service and design, also became increasingly chain-oriented and accessible from interchanges. Howard Johnson's, Holiday Inn, Motel 6 and others became household names.

In the past 30 years, "Interchange Commercial" has become a common zoning classification in many Oregon communities, reflecting the types and character of development that seek these areas. Cities often allow larger signage, require additional parking, or prefer other design standards that differ from what is allowed within the traditional downtown core, further amplifying the difference between the interchange and the community center.

*Business Loops, Malls, Frontage Roads and Downtown Impacts.* As the interstate system matured and became more and more integral to the commercial life of the community, new business forms were developed dependent upon the interstate connectivity but often restricted by the compact geography of the interchange.

Many cities, in an attempt to maintain the economic viability of the traditional downtown core, had their earlier U.S. highway "couplets" re-designated as business loops, with signage to that effect installed at the appropriate interchange connections on either side of the community to inform the traveler of the route. At other interchanges, though, as well as elsewhere within the view of the interstate route, new forms of retail developed to take advantage of the focused stream of consumers made possible by controlled access points. The prototype of this new retail form was the Southdale Mall in Edina, Minnesota, opened in 1952. The first mall in Oregon, patterned after Southdale, was to be the largest such development in the world at that time — Lloyd Center in Portland. Privately financed at a cost of more than \$100 million when it first opened, Lloyd Center covered some 56 acres (to grow to more than 100). With a payroll of more than 4,000 full-time and 2,000 part-time employees, it was considered one of the largest employers in Oregon.

Full credit is given to the Banfield Freeway by the owners of the privately financed \$100 million Lloyd Shopping Center....It may surprise opponents of urban freeways that the decision to acquire the property, raze the existing buildings and create the Center was not made until construction and location of the Banfield Freeway was assured. (*Venable 1962:35*)

Another form of commercial development that resulted from the development of the mature interstate system is the frontage road. Distinct from the business loop, which connected new interstate travelers with earlier, established, commercial cores, the frontage road was an entirely new form of linear development that directly paralleled the freeway in proximity and, in the best scenario, was almost entirely visible from it. In some situations, these businesses face the frontage road, with their rear, service areas visible to the highway but newer developments are lined up like prospective partners at a dance, best face forward to the freeway, with large signs and interesting designs in the hopes of catching the eye of the interstate driver. This is particularly true of so-called "Outlet Malls," which often blend

creative architecture with the perception of low-priced, name-brand wares and tend to locate in visible, interstate-close locations.

“Big Box Retail,” a term that has come to describe large-volume retail stores such as Wal-Mart or Fred Meyer, along with specialty shops such as Home Depot, Office Max and Circuit City, also often develop along frontage roads either singly or in groups dubbed “power centers” by real estate development interests.

Today, despite the changes fostered by the interstate system, many Oregon downtowns are successful, vibrant and economically vital elements of their communities. Many retain strong integrity, through both luck and, more frequently, dedicated restoration to their physical character during an earlier period. Few, however, bear any strong resemblance to the function or services that were provided prior to the construction of the interstate highway system. Local specialty shops, antique stores, art galleries and fine, locally-owned restaurants have largely replaced the work-a-day pharmacies, furniture stores, hotels, hardware stores and mom-n-pop operations that characterized many of Oregon’s smaller communities fifty years ago. Those uses, now dominated by national or regional chains, are more likely found on frontage roads or malls — all nearer the highway.

*Safety Rest Areas.* As the quality of cars and roads improved, the necessity of repair or fuel lessened and the distances between stops grew. In the early 1920s, roadside rest areas began to appear along the state’s highways and drinking fountains were located in areas possessing a source of pure water. With the interstate, and the controlled access and bypass routing that removed much of the road from existing facilities, the federal standards allowed for the construction of “Safety Rest Areas” at recommended 35-mile intervals along the interstate routes. Like the entire interstate program, the cost of construction for safety rest areas connected with interstate development was shared on a 90/10 percent ratio, with the federal government paying the majority of costs.

The first rest area along I-5 was constructed at Oak Grove between Albany and Eugene in 1962. It was immediately apparent that popularity of a place to stop, stretch and relax in a quiet atmosphere far exceeded the wildest estimate of usage, especially by truckers. Now, Oregon has 22 strategically located rest areas along the I-5 and I -84 corridors (plus another 45 along other Oregon highways).

### **Highway Beautification**

*Signage.* The presence of commercial billboard advertising on entirely new, access controlled, interstate highways was viewed by many as an unfortunate continuation of the crass roadside development of the early highway era. In Oregon, as was so often the case, interest in this area of highway development pre-dated and influenced later national legislation. The Federal Highway Beautification Act of 1965, generally associated with President Johnson’s wife, Ladybird, provided additional authority to remove roadside billboards along the interstate corridor and, by 1983, Oregon removed more than 2,000 such advertisements from all its highways.

In 1971, partially in response to concerns from the business community over the impacts of the billboard removal programs, Oregon’s Legislature passed the Oregon Motorist

Information Act, establishing policies for alternative private business signing on the interstate, subject to restrictions and following uniform design guidelines. This program, with small, size-restricted advertisements mounted upon state-owned blue interstate standard information signs, is called the Logo Program.

In addition to business signage, Oregon had used rustic wooden signs for various purposes along its state highways, such as historic or scenic information panels. With the construction of the interstate, variations of that design were used to welcome tourists to the state, along with the statement “we hope you will enjoy your visit.” This phrase was adopted early in the interstate period and initially caused little concern.

Following the administration of Governor Tom McCall (January 1967 - January 1975), however, the phrase took on new meaning, as McCall’s oft-repeated statement regarding Oregon’s growth came to be personified by what some interpreted as the closed-door “welcome” interstate signs. After Victor Atiyeh was elected Governor (January 1979 - January 1987), the phrase became more of a political issue. After much wrangling and discussion, ODOT decided to simply blank out the slogan portion of the sign, so that it would read “Welcome to Oregon.”

*Landscaping.* The construction of entirely new roadbeds left much of Oregon’s highway system with disturbed earthen embankments, denuded slopes and generally unattractive roadside character. To improve the appearance of the highways and to control erosion, dust and other negative impacts, Oregon undertook a massive landscaping project as a part of interstate construction. For example, in 1961, in concert with the Oregon Federation of Garden Clubs, Oregon established a pilot wildflower seeding program, resulting in wildflowers beautifying many areas near the interstate. The Federal Highway Administration adopted a program in December 1973 called “Operation Wildflower” that was largely modeled after Oregon’s success in this area.

Within the constraints of construction, efforts were made to retain original materials during construction and, where original plants and trees were removed, to replant using native species to the degree possible.

“Whenever practical and depending upon the availability of plant materials, native trees and shrubs are specified in rural highway plantings. In these areas, trees such as Douglas fir, shore and lodgepole pines, incense cedar, oaks and maples have been used extensively.” (*ODOT GF, Cooper, letter to Betty Philpot, 24 June 1969*)

In 1965, in the Portland Metropolitan area, Oregon participated in the Green Thumb Program, a pilot project tapping into the skills of retired farmers and gardeners, with funding through the U.S. Department of Labor’s Manpower Administration. Oregon was one of four states in the nation selected to participate and by 1971, the program had expanded to seventeen states.

While much of Oregon’s highway landscaping occurred in the median strips of the rural right-of-way or along the embankments of the depressed sections of the urban routes, the large expanses of interchanges also required landscaping from both a maintenance and

practical standpoint. Here, unlike most of the median areas, the Department installed sprinkler systems and, in many cases, lawns.

By the late 1970s, the use of grass for medians and interchange area was largely replaced by lower maintenance designs. Taking care of such landscaping had become an increasing burden on regional maintenance staff, who additionally sought more drought tolerant designs as Oregon experienced water shortages in much of the state.

### **What's next?**

*Oregon Transportation Investment Act.* OTIA I, II and III, approved by legislators, is allowing unprecedented investment in Oregon's infrastructure. OTIA I and II provided \$500 million for statewide projects; OTIA III allocates \$1.34 billion to repair or replace hundreds of aging highway bridges, and an additional \$1.2 billion to maintain and modernize local and state roads. Federal funds are also involved, mainly because most of the bridges needing work are on Interstates 5 and 84. OTIA III projects will keep the state's highway construction crews busy to 2015 and beyond.

*2005 – 2030 Oregon Transportation Plan.* The Draft Oregon Transportation Plan, a long-range investment and policy document set to cover 2005 – 2030, is being reviewed and finalized in 2006. While the plan doesn't detail specific projects, it does provide guidance to transportation agencies and organizations for future projects and approaches to transportation challenges.

Most notably, the OTP reveals that thinking about transportation in Oregon is going to have to change, because the population growth and increase in freight volume cannot be accommodated with projected revenues. Based on 2004 dollars, about \$2.15 billion is spent annually to maintain, operate and expand the statewide transportation system. An additional \$533 million per year is needed to address the 40 percent loss in purchasing power by 2030 because of inflation. To keep pace with population and expand the system at a level slightly above current service levels will take an additional \$733 million per year over the 25-year plan period.

Based on these research findings, the plan makes several recommendations:

- Hold down spending by maintaining and optimizing what we have.
- Use technology to create efficiencies.
- Work together in new ways across jurisdictions and in public/private partnerships to make the best decisions about transportation projects.
- Prioritize transportation projects that contribute to Oregon's economic vitality and standard of living.
- Develop new funding to meet new demands and keep up with inflation.
- Invest strategically in capacity enhancements.

In addition, the plan says Oregon must optimize the transportation system currently in place by better integrating the modes and better managing system operations. The interstates in Oregon play a key role in the future of the state's growth and prosperity.

*Individual projects.* In the near future, there are several major projects planned involving Oregon's interstates:

- In January 2006, a ground-breaking ceremony kicked off extensive work on I-5 between Kuebler Road and Mission Street in the Salem area.
- The I-205 Preservation project began in April 2005 and is repairing and paving the section between the Willamette River and the Columbia River.
- Planning is underway for the I-5 Delta Park project, which will widen I-5 in north Portland between Victory Blvd. and N. Lombard Ave.
- The Columbia River Crossing project on the I-5 corridor from State Route 500 in Vancouver, Wash. to approximately Columbia Blvd. in Portland is a multimodal, bi-state effort to enhance this transportation lifeline. In the early planning stages, the project is aimed at improving the mobility, reliability and accessibility for automobile, freight, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian users of that busy stretch of I-5.
- Eugene/Springfield's Beltline interchange at I-5 will be a major upgrade for these communities. Construction is scheduled to begin in 2007.
- Projected to be complete in 2006, the \$5.8 million Canyonville to Azalea project at mile point 86-87 replaces two I-5 bridges.
- Two more I-5 bridges in southern Oregon are being replaced for \$33 million. The I-5 South Umpqua River, Shady Bridge replacement project is scheduled for completion in 2008.
- The \$40 million Sutherlin to Roseburg project on I-5 is reconstructing eight bridges, and repairing two others. It also includes paving, median barrier and guardrail work in several sections of the project.
- Construction is expected to begin in 2006 for the new South Medford Interchange at exit 27 on I-5. Estimated project cost \$70 million, making it the single most expensive transportation project in Southern Oregon.
- Five new and/or repaired bridges on I-84 between mileposts 64 – 159 will improve the safety and mobility of that major route. In this same area in the next few years, there will be two interstate maintenance projects and a rockfall development at milepost 75.
- Started in 2005 and projected for completion in 2008, more than 20 interstate bridges will be repaired or replaced along I-84 in eastern Oregon. Mostly funded by OTIA, the projects will result in the removal of freight restrictions on the freeway throughout eastern Oregon.
- In 2006, construction on the two-year, North Ontario Interchange Project near mile point 274 will begin.
- OTIA-funded safety improvements are planned for the Burnt River Canyon section of I-84 between mile points 230 and 242 in 2008. Over a half dozen sharp curves have contributed to numerous crashes in the area. This is the first major project for this particular area, with more planned to address this interstate section's varied issues.

- A third lane (truck passing) for eastbound I-84 traffic headed up Three-Mile Hill between mile points 356 and 359, west of Ontario is planned for 2009. The OTIA-funded project will reduce wintertime road closures due to spun-out trucks blocking the freeway on this steep grade.

### **Conclusion**

Oregon has several billion in assets within its interstate and road systems, and maximizing that asset is a top priority for the state and its citizens. The future may hold a wider variety of options for traveling and moving freight but one thing is certain: the Oregon Department of Transportation has a history of moving people and goods safely and efficiently, and the plan is to continue — and build upon — that tradition.

*See full bibliography at <ftp://ftp.odot.state.or.us/techserv/Geo-Environmental/Environmental/OTLA%20III%20Environmental%20Program/Historic%20Context%20Studies/Oregon%20Interstate%20Highway%20Overview%202004.pdf>*