

## Teacher Notes



# You Can Get There From Here: The Interstate Highway System and Its Impact on America

## Activity 1 The History of the Interstate Highway System

### *Activity Overview*

The objective of this lesson is to provide students with basic background information on the following:

- ◆ The need for a system of interstate highways.
- ◆ The benefits of the system to Americans.
- ◆ The problems generated due to the building and operation of the highway.

### *Directions*

#### *Before the Activity Begins*

Display a map of Florida, and point out where the major interstate highways are located. They are I-10, I-75, I-95, and I-4. (A complete set of Florida roadmaps is available at no charge from the Florida Department of Transportation website:

## Activity at a Glance

- ◆ **Subject:** Social Studies
- ◆ **Subject Area:** U. S. History
- ◆ **Category:** Postwar America
- ◆ **Topic:** The Rise of Suburbia
- ◆ **Grade Level:** 9 - 11
- ◆ **Prerequisites:** None
- ◆ **Total Teaching Time:** 50 minutes

## Materials

- ◆ TI-83 Plus
- ◆ LearningCheck™ App
- ◆ **Activity1-1** edc resource file:  
**Post Test**
- ◆ **Activity1-2** edc resource file:  
**Debriefing Questions**
- ◆ Student Data Sheet: **The History of the Interstate Highway System**
- ◆ Student Data Sheet: **Pre-test**
- ◆ TI External Keyboard
- ◆ Teacher's Answer Key

www.dot.state.fl.us. Your media center should have a map or atlas with this information available.)

Point out that interstate highways that end in even numbers (like I-4) run east-to-west. Those that end in odd numbers (like I-75) run north-to-south. Ask students to indicate where your school is in relation to the nearest interstate(s).

Point out major cities that are connected by the interstates in Florida. Point out that this system of highways connects states together. Engage students in a discussion of why they think these highways were built and how old they are. Ask students to describe their experiences traveling along the interstate.

After the discussion about Interstate Highways, administer the pre-test. You can send the **Activity1-1** edc resource file that contains the Pre-/Post test if you want to administer the test electronically, or you can use the paper-based version of the test included at the end of this activity. Do not correct this test at present. This same test will be administered at the end of the activity, and the students will correct their tests and compare their answers at the end. Note that a teacher's answer key is included at the end of this activity.

Distribute the Student Data Sheet, **The History of Interstate Highway System**, and send the **Activity1-2** edc resource file to the students. Divide the class into small workgroups. Each group will read and discuss the exercise, then answer the questions as a group, using the **Activity1-2** edc resource file to record the answers.

### ***During the Activity***

Monitor the student groups' discussions and answer any questions that may arise as they answer the questions. When the students are ready to record their answers to the questions, have them open the **Activity1-2** file on their devices. They should use the TI External Keyboards to type their responses.

### ***After the Activity***

Once the groups have finished their discussions and have answered the questions, lead a class discussion to review their answers. The students should use the information stored in their devices to contribute to this class discussion.

At the end of the class discussion and review, administer the post test. The students should compare their pre- and post test results.

## ***Student Data Sheet***

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## ***The History of the Interstate Highway System***

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### ***Background***

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the country had some 2 million miles of roads, of which only 140 miles were paved. These were primarily thoroughfares that linked farms to city markets and often dead-ended at the county line. The first national highway, The Lincoln Highway, was begun in 1912. It linked New York and San Francisco and could charitably be described as difficult to drive.

As affordable automobiles began to democratize American mobility in the 1920s, it became clear that greatly improved highways would be needed. Interest in a national system of highways was spurred in the 1930s by hype over Germany's fast, efficient *Autobahns*. At the 1939 World's Fair, General Motors "Futurama" exhibit invited Americans to "*Imagine the possibilities*" of an America linked by streamlined superhighways. By the early 1940s, the success of early superhighways, especially the Pennsylvania Turnpike, sparked interest in developing a national toll-road system. American automobile and road-building industries were already dreaming of the profits to be had from creating a national expressway. However, World War II interrupted development of such a system. Ironically, the war and the need to move men and equipment rapidly across the country heightened the need for adequate roads. At the same time, the nation's roads were deteriorating under the heavy pounding of war time traffic.

Stop here and discuss the following questions with your group.

1. Describe road conditions in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century.
2. What sparked interest in building a national system of superhighways?
3. What postponed plans to build the interstate?

Record your group's answers to these questions in the first section of the **Activity1-2** edc resource file. If one person is recording the group's responses, the recorder should send the completed file to each member of the group at the end of this exercise. (Use the unit-to-unit cable to share the file.)

In 1919, a young Army officer, Dwight David Eisenhower, had the opportunity to ride on the first transcontinental motor convoy from Washington, D.C., to San Francisco. He described the 62-day journey as a trip "through darkest America with truck and tank" on roads varying from "average to nonexistent." His average speed was 5 miles per hour.

A quarter of a century later, as the military head of occupied Germany, Eisenhower saw first-hand the civil and military advantages of Hitler's *Autobahns*. Characterized by high speeds and wide pairs of lanes separated by grassy medians, they stretched to the horizon unimpeded by stoplights or

intersections. As president, Eisenhower recognized that America needed these “broader ribbons across the land” and that they would bring “greater convenience, greater happiness, and greater standards of living” to the American people. Eisenhower proposed the Interstate Highway System in 1956 with the federal government picking up 90 percent of the tab (funded by taxes on gasoline). He tapped engineer Francis Turner to oversee the project.

Today, the Dwight D. Eisenhower System of Interstate and Defense Highways (a nod to Cold War fears) is a 42,742-mile network of roads. At a cost of 129 billion dollars, the Interstate Highway System is the most expensive and largest public works project ever undertaken in the United States. The first major interstate route to be completed – Interstate 495, a beltway around Washington, DC, - was opened in 1964. By the 1970s, 75 percent of the system was completed. While the Interstate makes up less than 2 percent of the nation’s roads, it carries over 21 percent of the traffic. At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Interstate Highway System has been described as “America’s circulatory system” and “the modern Main Street.”

Stop here and discuss the following questions with your group:

1. What influenced Eisenhower to push for the building of an interstate highway system?
2. How was the construction financed?
3. According to the reading, how many miles of interstate highway are currently in place? At what cost?

Record your group’s answers to these questions in the second section of the **Activity1-2** edc resource file. At this point, the recorder should send the completed file to all members of the group.

## ***Student Data Sheet***

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### ***Pre-Test***

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### ***Directions***

Mark true or false (T – F) next to each statement.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were 2 million miles of *paved* roads in the United States.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The first interstate highway, built in 1912, linked New York and San Francisco.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. The 1939 World's Fair and the success of the New Jersey Turnpike helped generate interest in a system of interstate highways.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The Interstate Highway System was patterned after the Autobahn in Germany.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The Interstate Highway System is the largest public works project in American history.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. The cost to build the Interstate Highway System has exceeded its value to the public.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The Interstate Highway System has allowed people to move out of the suburbs and into the cities.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. The Interstate Highway System, built during the Cold War, continues to benefit the United States militarily.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. The interstate Highway System has been at least partially responsible for America's tremendous economic growth.

***Teacher's Answer Key***

***Pre-Test***

- 1 - False
- 2 - False
- 3 - True
- 4 - True
- 5 - True
- 6 - False
- 7 - False
- 8 - True
- 9 - True