

“The Interstate Highway System in Florida”

Summary

Though we all enjoy the advantages, and curse the disadvantages, of using an interstate highway system, most of us might not have the slightest clue as to why the national interstate system was created. This lesson addresses the origins behind the interstate system with the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act of 1956, and gives an opportunity to connect with the to the present-day conditions of these same highways.

Objectives

Students will:

- 1) understand the reasoning for the establishment of a national interstate system in the context of the Cold War;
- 2) discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using a national interstate highway system;
- 3) research the effects of rapid growth on an already overburdened highway system in Florida, and possible solutions.

U.S. History Event

This lesson can be used for any unit covering the Cold War or the 1950's.

Grade Level

Middle school or high school

Materials

Transparencies, Preview Activity, copies of “National Interstate and Defense Highways Act of 1956” overview (found online) and **Discussion Questions**.

Lesson Time

One class period (45 minutes)

Lesson

Procedures

- 1) As students enter the classroom, hand them a picture of the national interstate highway system (<http://wps.ablongman.com/wps/media/objects/31/32716/figures/DIV1626.jpg>) and have them answer the following questions (ask them all, or pick the ones that you think your students can successfully answer in a minimum amount of time):
 - a. What do you see in this picture?
 - b. Find Florida on the map. How many interstate highways are located in Florida?
 - c. Do you know the name of the interstate highway that passes through a portion of Polk County? What is it?
 - d. Have you ever traveled on an interstate highway? What was it like compared to traveling on other roads?
 - e. Charles Kuralt once wrote, *"Thanks to the Interstate Highway System, it is now possible to travel across the country from coast to coast without seeing anything. From the Interstate, America is all steel guardrails and plastic signs, and every place looks and feels and smells like every other place."* – What do you think he meant by this? Do you agree or disagree?
 - f. Why do you think that the national interstate system was constructed?

*On page 4 of this lesson is a ready-made worksheet with map and questions.

- 2) After allowing students 10-12 minutes answering these preview questions, allow a few minutes discussing their answers. Then, read for them Section 108(a) of the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways Act of 1956:

"It is hereby declared essential to the national interest to provide for the early completion of the 'National System of Interstate Highways,' as authorized and designated in accordance with section 7 of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944...It is the intent of the Congress that the Interstate System be completed as nearly as practical over a thirteen-year period and that the entire System in all the States be brought to simultaneous completion. Because of its primary importance to the national defense, the name of such system is hereby changed to the 'National System of Interstate and Defense Highways'."

*For a complete transcript of this act, go to

<http://www.ourdocuments.gov/content.php?page=transcript&doc=88>

- 3) Revisit with your students their answers to question "f" on the preview activity. Ask them again for what purpose the interstate highway system was built, in lieu of the Cold War of the 1950's.
- 4) Give each student a copy of the synopsis of the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act found at http://www.ourdocuments.gov/content.php?page=learn_more&doc=88, as well as a copy of the discussion questions.
- 5) After the students complete the discussion questions, allow them to partner with another student to brainstorm as many advantages and disadvantages for using a national interstate highway system.
- 6) Discuss answers with your students. Use a transparency to record a master T-chart showing several advantages and disadvantages to using the interstate system.

Activities



THE INTERSTATE HIGHWAY SYSTEM

1. What do you see in this picture?
2. Find Florida on the map. How many interstate highways are located in Florida?
3. Do you know the name of the interstate highway that passes through a portion of Polk County? What is it?
4. Have you ever traveled on an interstate highway? What was it like compared to traveling on other roads?
5. Charles Kuralt once wrote, *"Thanks to the Interstate Highway System, it is now possible to travel across the country from coast to coast without seeing anything. From the Interstate, America is all steel guardrails and plastic signs, and every place looks and feels and sounds and smells like every other place."* – What do you think he meant by this? Do you agree or disagree?
6. Why do you think that the national interstate system was constructed?
7. There are almost 43,000 miles of interstate highway inside the United States. The only state without the benefit of an interstate highway is Alaska. Currently, interstate highways represent 1% of the nation's total road mileage, but 20% of the nation's traffic. Do more interstate highways need to be built? Explain your answer.

Discussion Questions-
National Interstate and Defense Highways Act of 1956

1) What did the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act of 1956 establish?

2) Why did President Franklin D. Roosevelt express interest in a network of superhighways during the 1930's?

3) This overview mentions President Eisenhower's experiences with highways and how they shaped his thinking about an interstate system for the United States. What were these experiences?

4) In this 1956 act, how many miles of highway were to be constructed, and at what cost?

5) The last sentence of this synopsis makes the statement, "Because of the 1956 law, and the subsequent Highway Act of 1958, the pattern of community development in America was fundamentally altered and was henceforth based on the automobile." What do you think this statement means?

6) On the back of this questionnaire, design a T-chart showing advantages and disadvantages of a national interstate highway system. For example.

Advantages	Disadvantages
* Traveling long distances is a lot faster.	*When road repairs need to be completed, who pays: the individual state or the federal government?

Activity (optional)

As a closing activity to be used as a project, read the following information to your students:

“One of the difficulties encountered in the construction and upkeep of the interstate highway system is that with Florida’s explosion in population growth, some of these highways are becoming obsolete. Take, for example, Interstate 4, the major diagonal route from Tampa to Daytona Beach via Orlando. (picture: <http://www.roadguides.com/graphics/I-4Floridamap.gif>). When I-4 was constructed decades ago, it easily handled the daily traffic demands of Central Florida. But with the opening of the Walt Disney World Resort complex in the 1970’s and the subsequent growth around Orlando and Tampa, Central Florida quickly outgrew its interstate system.

Now, traveling I-4 is an exercise in patience. Traffic often slows to a crawl during peak hours in the morning and at night. Accidents often occur, some fatal, due to the combination of high speeds, heavy traffic, and tourists unaccustomed to the flow of traffic they encounter in Central Florida.

Construction is currently under way to expand I-4 from a four-lane to a six-lane highway, but many people feel that this will not adequately offset the amount of growth that is expected to continue in the next several decades. Some people feel that expanding I-4 into anything less than a ten-lane “superhighway” is a waste of time, effort, and taxpayer expense. Toll roads and smaller highways have been built around I-4 to help lessen the traffic, but to no avail.

A few years ago, Floridians voted for a state law requiring the development of a high-speed rail system (HSRS) to help alleviate the amount of traffic on Florida’s roads. This is currently a hotly-debated issue among state leaders. Your assignment: take a side in the bullet-train debate. Research your argument, and write a paper (2-3 pages) explaining your stance and why your side is the better option for Central Floridians. If you choose the ‘Pro’ side, be prepared to give examples of how people will benefit from HSRS, and how it will be paid for; if you choose the “Con” side, be prepared to offer alternatives to the HSRS. Include pictures, if you wish, to help persuade others.”

For more information, go to the following web site:

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/custom/growth/orl-asec-roads13101302oct13,0,6335222.story?coll=orl-news-growth-headlines>

Assessment

- 1) President Franklin D. Roosevelt had originally wanted to construct a transcontinental superhighway in the 1930s in order to:
 - a. send war materials to both coasts in case of an invasion
 - b. create a new source of revenue by making it a long toll road
 - c. provide more jobs for people in need of work during the Great Depression
 - d. move consumer goods around the country at a quicker pace

- 2) President Dwight D. Eisenhower saw the advantages of a national highway system when he:
 - a. participated in the first U.S. Army transcontinental motor convoy from Washington, DC, to San Francisco
 - b. saw the German advantage that resulted from their autobahn highway network during WWII
 - c. noted the enhanced mobility of the Allies that used the German autobahn network when they fought their way into Germany towards the end of WWII
 - d. all of the above

- 3) The unique purpose of the interstate highway system as spelled out in the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act of 1956 was:
 - a. improved transportation for families on vacation
 - b. quicker mode of travel for frozen goods and perishable food items
 - c. rapid movement of defense materials in case of war or attack
 - d. increased fuel efficiency of vehicles

Resources

<http://www.eisenhower.utexas.edu/highway.htm> -The Eisenhower Library

http://www.ourdocuments.gov/content.php?page=milestone_documents