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| **Transportation Infrastructure Videos** |  |
| Curated by: **AOTM Team** |

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| Transportation infrastructures—the road and rail networks we depend on—are easily taken for granted. After all, they are “infra”—below—the structures. They remain hidden, out of sight, out of mind—until the break. They are also hard to display in museums. They’re big, heavy, and only make sense when connected. So in *America on the Move* we display infrastructures on video, letting the camera track the networks. Click on the icon to see the videos, or read the scripts.  |

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|  |  | [**Transportation Infrastructure, 1800-1900**](http://amhistory.si.edu/onthemove/themes/vid_menu_6.html)A short video overview of the history of America's transportation infrastructure. Produced by the History Channel in collaboration with the National Museum of American History.  |

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|  | **The Fairview Inn near Baltimore, a stopping place on the National Road, 1827** |

 |  | It’s hard to imagine America in 1800. The young country consisted of 16 states and just over 5 million citizens. The vast and impenetrable landscape made travel difficult and as a result people tended to live very local lives. But over the next hundred years, roads were built, canals dug, rivers improved, and rails laid, which allowed Americans to spread out and conquer the continent.Road construction was one of the first improvements in American infrastructure. Major cities in the northeast were often connected by post roads, which at first were little more than dirt trails but later were improved with gravel or wooden planks. Travel on these roads was slow going - the trip from Boston to New York, for example, could take up to 3 days by stage coach. In 1806, Congress allotted funds for the national road, the first federally funded road. It stretched from Cumberland, Maryland to, eventually, southern Illinois. To reach points further west, hundreds of thousands of intrepid souls embarked on journeys from the banks of the Missouri. They headed out on horseback and in wagon trains, over routes like the Santa Fe and Oregon trails. The grueling trip all the way to the pacific coast could take up to 8 long months.Canals also helped link up the interior of the country. In 1825, the Erie canal - the nation’s most famous - opened for business. With it, food, goods and people could flow between New York City and the burgeoning west. Its success sparked a canal building boom throughout the eastern United States and elevated New York city to the nation’s commercial center.Engineering projects made navigation in coastal waters and along rivers safer and easier. Steamboat companies took advantage of these changes to move increasing numbers of passengers and cargo.And although people and goods crossed the oceans at the beginning of the century, by its end, harbor improvements allowed more and larger ships laden with immigrants and goods from Europe and Asia, to dock at U.S. ports.But nothing affected America’s westward expansion like the growth of the railroad. It was fast and stupendous in scope: in 1840, there were 3000 miles of track in the country; twenty years later, there were more than 30,000.By 1869, enormous investment and spectacular engineering feats allowed the railroad to reach from coast to coast. After that first transcontinental link was made, hundreds of thousands of miles of rail were laid, consolidating the railroad’s grip on the nation’s long distance travel and trade.By the turn of the century, the nation’s growing network of canals, roads, waterways, and railroads had forged new links between people and places, and helped create the spectacular growth of 19th century America. |

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|  |  | [**Transportation Infrastructure, 1900-1950**](http://amhistory.si.edu/onthemove/themes/vid_menu_7.html)A short video overview of the history of America's transportation infrastructure. Produced by the History Channel in collaboration with the National Museum of American History. |

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|  | **Cover of *Concrete Highways Magazine*, showing Highway 10 near Asheville, North Carolina, 1928** |

 |  | Between 1900 and 1950, the United States paved the way to its future. Local, state and federal dollars built millions of miles of roads, opening up new worlds to those who traveled along them.You might think car and truck owners were the force behind good roads. But the first paved roads were a result of a very different lobby. Bicyclists wanted smooth streets for an easier ride. And health reformers fought for them because they were easier to clean than dirt or cobblestone—an important consideration when horses produced over one million pounds of manure a day in some cities. Later, farmers pushed for roads to get their goods to market and truckers lobbied for them between cities. Cities took responsibility for their own roads, taxing adjacent property owners to fund improvements. States and the federal government took the lead in outlying areas where some roads made travel nearly impossible. In 1916, Congress realized the importance of good roads to the nation’s economy and allocated millions to improve them. States matched the funds with money raised from gas taxes, setting off a highway building boom across the country. The nation’s first superhighway-the Pennsylvania turnpike-opened in 1940. The four-lane toll highway set the standard for the future. There were no traffic lights, no intersections, no steep hills, no sharp curves and no speed limit. The federal government also invested in air transport and waterways. Starting in 1904, the Army Corps of Engineers dug, blasted, and tore out jungles to build the Panama Canal. When it was completed ten years later, the canal knocked 8000 miles off the trip from New York to San Francisco making trade and travel between the east coast and the west faster, easier, and cheaper. The government also spent billions of dollars dredging rivers and harbors and building levees throughout the nation to improve shipping. The U.S. Post Office and military built airports across the country and lucrative government mail contracts gave airlines the business they needed to become established.By the end of World War II, the U.S. had a well-developed network of routes—air, rail and road—that linked every state and connected the country as never before.  |

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|  |  | [**Transportation Infrastructure, 1950-2000**](http://amhistory.si.edu/onthemove/themes/vid_menu_8.html)A short video overview of the history of America's transportation infrastructure. Produced by the History Channel in collaboration with the National Museum of American History.  |

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|  | **United Airlines advertisement, October 1960** |

 |  | From the air, America’s transportation system looks like a massive and intricate spider’s web. Roadways reach up and around, railroad tracks sweep across the plains, large and small airports dot the land, rivers and canals snake across the country, and ports spread for miles along the coast. Fifty years ago, however, the transportation landscape was very different. The modern era of roads didn’t begin until 1956 when President Eisenhower signed into law the federal aid highway act. With it, he authorized the construction of 40,000 miles of limited access roads creating the interstate highway system. It was the biggest public works project this country has ever seen, and was lauded as one of the most important, as well. But the interstate system also generated controversy. In cities, poor neighborhoods were often targeted for destruction, leading to protests. Still, most interstates were built as planned - and they saw use beyond their designers’ wildest dreams. As more people traveled by car and plane, railroad companies gave up their passenger service. They concentrated, instead, on hauling freight. Throughout the 20th century, more tonnage went by rail than any other way. In the 1960s, railroads began to haul goods in standardized steel containers that could easily be moved from train to truck to ship. These containers made transport easier and cheaper. But they demanded a whole new kind of port. They needed large areas of flat land - and good connections to road and rail, to keep the cargo moving. Airports also expanded. Cities invested billions in acres of hangars and terminals and miles of runways..they hired thousands of workers. All to get us where we wanted to go, when we wanted to get there. |