

Read the passage. Then answer the question below.

The Interstate Highway System: A Revolution in Cross-Country Travel

Most people take for granted the interstate highway system that connects virtually every major city in the United States. Interstates play a critical role in our daily lives. Almost all of the goods and services we use each day arrive in our communities by truck via the interstate. Many families probably use the interstate to go to school, take a vacation, or commute to work.

The creation of the interstate highway system revolutionized transportation. President Dwight D. Eisenhower first envisioned the need for a system of highways connecting the East and West Coasts and the northern and southern borders of the United States. While traveling cross-country as a young soldier, his military convoy took over two months to cross the United States using the existing routes, often consisting of dirt roads and rickety bridges. As a result of this experience, Eisenhower realized that the poor conditions of the nation's roads would prevent the military from responding effectively in a time of crisis. He saw this as proof that an interstate highway system was needed. Eisenhower's idea further took shape when he was in Germany during World War II. While there, he saw the ease with which cars were able to travel via the autobahn—the world's first network of high-speed motorways.

Planning for a highway system began as early as the 1930s. However, it wasn't until Congress passed the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 that funding was made available for the largest public works program in U.S. history—the construction of a massive transcontinental road system. Already smaller highways—like the New York City parkway system—had been constructed as part of local and state highway projects. But as the number of cars on the road quickly increased, it soon became clear that an interconnecting national highway system was needed.

The legislation of 1956 called for an expanded network of over 41,000 miles of freeway, as well as national design standards for the interstate

system. The plan also determined that all highways designated as interstates must have at least two lanes in both directions with each lane being 12 feet wide. In addition, there must be a 10-foot paved shoulder, and the road must be designed for speeds of between 50 and 70 miles per hour. Legislation passed in later years continued to expand the network to over 46,380 miles. The interstate highway system was officially completed in 1991, although work still continues in some places. In 1990, President George Bush officially named it the Dwight D. Eisenhower System of Interstate and Defense Highways to honor the former president's role in building the system.

Eisenhower's great public works project has truly "united" our country, making it faster, safer, and easier than ever before to travel by road. However, there have been criticisms of the system—many of them revolving around the sacrifice of scenic travel to speed and efficiency. There are those who believe that the vast system of highways populated with fast food restaurants and chain hotels, takes away from the experience of the "road trip"—traveling the back roads through small towns of the "real" America. Well-known journalist Charles Kuralt summed it up when he said, "It is now possible to travel coast-to-coast without seeing anything."

Write an essay examining the pros and cons of interstate highways. Use evidence from the passage to support your response.