Toll roads in the United States

See List of toll roads in the United States

A toll road in the United States, especially near the east coast, is often called a turnpike. The term turnpike originated from pikes, which were long sticks that blocked passage until the fare was paid and the pike turned at a toll house (or toll booth in current terminology).

Some states have an RF tag that automatically bills the commuters account electronically for tolls. Examples of this are the E-ZPass electronic toll collection system used on most toll bridges, toll tunnels, and toll roads in the eastern U.S. from Virginia to the south, to Maine to the north, to Illinois to the west; California's FasTrak; Florida's SunPass; Kansas's K-Tag; Oklahoma's Pikepass; Houston's EZ Tag; Texas's TxDOT; Dallas's TollTag; Louisiana's GeauxPass; and Georgia's Peach Pass and Cruise Card.

A high-speed toll booth on SR 417 near Orlando, Florida

Traffic in these special lanes can move near the speed limit with minimal slowing.

Toll roads are in 26 states as of 2006. The majority of states without any turnpikes are in the West and South. In 2015, there were 5,000 miles (8,000 km) of toll roads in the country.\[1\]

1 History, funding through toll

In early US history, many individual citizens would travel nearby stretches of road and collect a fee from people who used that specific stretch. Eventually, companies were formed to build, improve, and maintain a particular section of roadway, and tolls were collected from users to finance the enterprise. The enterprise was usually named to indicate the location of its roadway, often including the name of one or both of the termini. The word turnpike came into common use in the names of these roadways and companies, and is essentially used interchangeably with toll road in current terminology.

The first major toll road in the United States was the Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike, built in the 1790s, within Pennsylvania, connecting Philadelphia and Lancaster. In New York State, the Great Western Turnpike was started in Albany in 1799 and eventually extended, by several alternate routes, to the Finger Lakes region.

Prior to the American Revolution, some smaller toll roads organized by local governments existed, such as the Little River Turnpike which connected Alexandria, Virginia with the farmland of Western Virginia.

In the mid to late nineteenth century, private toll road building was particularly active in the West including California and Nevada. In Nevada, over 100 private toll roads were laid out between the 1850s and 1880s, some of them nearly 200 miles (320 km) long. The owners included stage companies, miners, and ranchers who built the roads, at least in part, to attract business for their primary investments.\[2\]

By the turn of the twentieth century most toll roads were taken over by state highway departments. In some instances, a quasi-governmental authority was formed, and toll revenue bonds were issued to raise funds for construction and/or operation of the facility.

With the development, mass production, and popular embrace of the automobile, faster and higher capacity roads were needed. In the 1920s limited access highways appeared. Their main characteristics were dual roadways with access points limited to (but not always) grade-separated interchanges. Their dual roadways allowed high volumes of traffic, the need for no or few traffic lights along with relatively gentle grades and curves allowed higher speeds.

The first limited access highways were Parkways, so called because of their often park-like landscaping and, in the metropolitan New York City area, they connected the region's system of parks. Most of the parkways in the New York metropolitan area were not fully access-controlled. While access to most portions of New York's parkway system was through interchanges, there were still numerous segments with at-grade intersections. The nation's first fully controlled-access expressway, the Merritt Parkway in Connecticut opened in stages between 1938 and 1940. The Merritt Parkway, along with the adjoin-
ing Hutchinson River Parkway to the west and Wilbur Cross Parkway to the east, provided an uninterrupted expressway link between New York City and Hartford. The Merritt Parkway used a barrier system: one toll plaza was located at the New York/Connecticut state line and the other was located at the Merritt’s east end, just east of the Igor I. Sikorsky Memorial Bridge in Milford, Connecticut, where the Wilbur Cross Parkway continues north-east to Hartford. Tolls were removed from the parkway in 1989. When the German Autobahns built in the 1930s introduced higher design standards and speeds, road planners and road-builders in the United States started developing and building toll roads to similar high standards. The Pennsylvania Turnpike, which largely followed the path of a partially built railroad, was the first of these, opening in 1940 and starting a resurgence of toll collection, this time to fund limited access highways.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, after an interruption by World War II, the US resumed building toll roads, but to even higher standards. One of these roads, the New York State Thruway, had standards that became the prototype for the U.S. Interstate Highway System. Several other major toll-roads and toll-road systems, based on the model of the Pennsylvania Turnpike, were established before the creation of the Interstate Highway System. These were the Illinois State Toll Highway Commission (now the Illinois State Toll Highway Authority), Indiana Toll Road, Massachusetts Turnpike, Ohio Turnpike, Connecticut Turnpike (whose tolls were stopped in 1985), Florida’s Turnpike and New Jersey Turnpike. In Illinois, three such roads, which had all been constructed simultaneously, were opened in 1958: the present-day Tri-State Tollway, Northwest Tollway and the Ronald Reagan Memorial Tollway (originally named the east–west Tollway). Kentucky has an extensive system of parkways, built in the 1960s and 1970s, which began as toll roads. However, Kentucky state law requires toll collection to cease once the road’s construction bonds are paid off. As a result, the last two Kentucky parkways to charge tolls were de-tolled in November 2006. Oklahoma also has an extensive system of turnpikes, built about the same time as Kentucky’s parkways.

Occasionally it is mooted that some of the Interstate highways, for example, those in the sparsely populated states just east of the Rocky Mountains, should have been turnpikes. The reason is to have those cross-country trucking firms that use them pay for them. But there is no movement to do this, especially since trucking companies already pay a fuel tax in each state they drive through.

In 2005, Indiana’s Governor Mitch Daniels sought to lease the Indiana Toll Road to a private company. His initiative, referred to as “Major Moves” was passed the Indiana General Assembly in March 2006. Following a legal challenge that upheld the deal, the Indiana Finance Authority received the $3.8 billion payment in a series of wire transfers on June 29, 2006, from the Indiana Toll Road Concession Company, the joint-venture between Cintra and Macquarie Infrastructure Group. At noon local time on June 29, the toll road lease deal was signed and went into effect.

2 Interstate Highway System

By 1956, most limited-access highways in the eastern United States were toll roads. In that year, the federal Interstate Highway program was established, funding non-toll roads with 90% federal dollars and 10% state match, giving little incentive for states to expand their turnpike systems. Funding rules initially restricted collections of tolls on newly funded roadways, bridges, and tunnels. In some situations, expansion or rebuilding of a toll facility using Interstate Highway Program funding resulted in the removal of existing tolls. This occurred in Virginia on Interstate 64 at the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel when a second parallel roadway to the regional 1958 bridge-tunnel was completed in 1976.

Since the completion of the initial portion of the interstate highway system, regulations were changed, and portions of toll facilities have been added to the system. Some states are again looking at toll financing for new roads and maintenance, to supplement limited federal funding. In some areas, new road projects have been completed and later maintained with public-private partnerships funded by tolls, also known as build-operate-transfer systems. One such public-private partnership was the constructions of the Pocahontas Parkway near Richmond, Virginia, which features a costly high level bridge over the shipping channel of the James River and connects Interstate 95 with Interstate 295 to the south of the city.

3 Toll avoidance: shunpiking

A practice known as shunpiking (not to be confused with toll evasion, which is the non-payment of tolls at a toll booth or concealing of toll RFID tag at a toll reader, both violations) evolved which entails finding another route for the specific purpose of avoiding payment of tolls.

In some situations where the tolls were increased or felt to be unreasonably high, informal shunpiking by individuals escalated into a form of boycott by regular users, with the goal of applying the financial stress of lost toll revenue to the authority determining the levy.

One such example of shunpiking as a form of boycott occurred at the James River Bridge in eastern Virginia. After years of lower than anticipated revenues on the narrow privately funded structure built in 1928, the Commonwealth of Virginia finally purchased the facility in 1949. However, rather than announcing a long-expected decrease in tolls, the state officials increased the rates in 1955 without visibly improving the roadway, with the no-
The increased toll rates incensed the public and business users alike. In a well-publicized example of shunpiking, Joseph W. Luter Jr., head of Smithfield Packing Company, the producer of world-famous Smithfield Hams, ordered his truck drivers to take a different route and cross a smaller and cheaper bridge. Despite the boycott by Luter and others, tolls continued for 20 more years. They were finally removed from the old bridge in 1975 when construction began on a toll-free replacement structure.

4 References


5 External links

- International Bridge, Tunnel and Turnpike Association (Association of User Financed Transportation Organizations)

- Turnpikes and Toll Roads in Nineteenth-Century America (EH.Net Economic History encyclopedia)

- National Alliance Against Tolls (British anti toll group, but “News” pages includes USA and other countries.)
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