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## Article Title: Constructing the Interstate Highway in Nebraska: Route and Funding Controversies

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Article Summary: Interstate Highway 80 made Nebraska political life more colorful for over thirty years. Regions lobbied to have the route run near their towns. Both governmental and private groups debated the project's funding.

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Photographs / Images: I-80 construction (2 views); State Engineer L N Ress; State Engineer John B Hossack; Nebraska map showing the eventual route of I-80 and two other proposed routes; Governor Victor E Anderson; Robert Mason and John Gottschalk lifting covering from "The Golden Link" that joined the completed sections of I-80 in Nebraska in October 1974; Governor Frank Morison and State Engineer John Hossack at the opening of I-80 near Kearney on August 20, 1963; Nebraska congressman Donald F McGinley

# CONSTRUCTING THE INTERSTATE HIGHWAY IN NEBRASKA: ROUTE AND FUNDING CONTROVERSIES

*By James C. Creigh*

Since its inception, the idea of a national system of interstate superhighways — in part across Nebraska — has received state-wide public support. The Lincoln Highway, the first interstate highway system connecting the East and West coasts, was laid out as early as 1913.<sup>1</sup> Stretching from New York to San Francisco, the route entered Nebraska at Omaha and roughly followed the Platte Valley. About the beginning of World War I local business and promotional groups began to designate other main arteries, including the Midland, Alfalfa, Cornhusker, Arrowhead, Rocky Mountain, Sunshine, and Red Ball routes. The earliest studies, which eventually led to the present superhighway system, were conducted by a favorite son of Nebraska, General-of-the-Armies John J. Pershing. However, while the general idea of interstate superhighways received little criticism, once the proposed system began to assume a more substantial form, controversy resulted.

The greatest disagreement involved

the exact route of the interstate. Most people early recognized the potential economic growth it would provide.<sup>2</sup> These route controversies did not limit themselves to rural or urban areas; both rural Nebraska and the cities of Lincoln and Omaha fought over the eventual route of the interstate in each particular area.<sup>3</sup> Nor were routing controversies limited to within Nebraska; the states of Iowa and Nebraska struggled for months over Missouri River crossings for the interstate highways.

Funding controversies also divided public opinion about the interstate highway system. Lack of agreement on the proper "mix" of state and federal monies plagued the earliest interstate highway proposals. Later as the need for these highways became more apparent, the choice between toll highways and tax supported highways became a matter of vigorous debate. Once federal matching money became available, the Nebraska legislature debated the problems of raising the state's share of construction money. Even when the federal government assumed nearly the entire cost of the interstate project, the state of Nebraska faced difficulties in raising its share.

In 1922 Congress instructed the army chief of staff, then General John J. Pershing, to study the need for and

possible routes of a nationwide system of express highways.<sup>4</sup> Pershing's 1923 report to Congress offered two possible routes. One north-south route was proposed running approximately parallel with the Mississippi River from the Canadian border to New Orleans; and one east-west route was proposed across the middle tier of states from coast to coast. This east-west route followed the approximate route of the current Interstate 80. While Congress did not appropriate funds for construction or further study, the Pershing study did evoke interest in such a system.

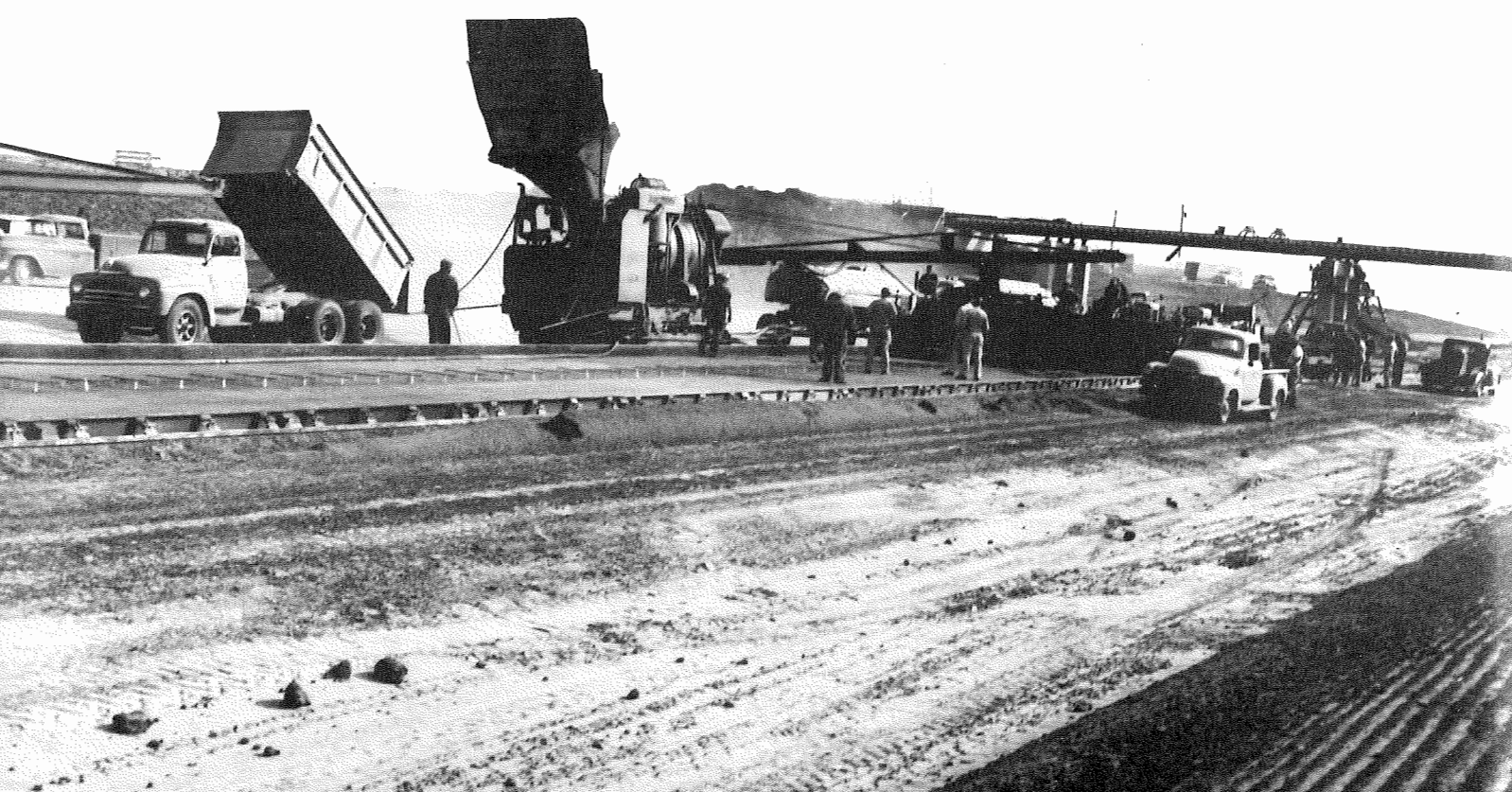
This interest reemerged in 1938, when Congress directed the Federal Bureau of Public Roads to perform a feasibility study of a national superhighway network. The report, which the bureau presented to Congress in 1939, advocated the construction of a special, tentatively defined system of direct interregional highways, with all necessary connections through and around cities, designed to meet the requirements of the national defense in time of war and the needs of growing peacetime traffic.<sup>5</sup> However, with the approach of World War II and the diversion of tax money to American military rearmament, this plan for a national superhighway network remained unrealized.

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*I-80 construction. Courtesy of Nebraska Department of Roads.*



Interest in the 1938 report prompted Congress to commission another study of national superhighway needs. The report, submitted to Congress by the Commissioner of Public Roads during January 1944, was entitled "Inter-regional Highways" and led Congress to authorize the "National System of Interstate Highways" in the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1944. The 1944 act called on the states and the Federal Bureau of Public Roads to designate routes for this national system of superhighways, limited by Congress to 40,000 miles, which would connect all state capitals, major industrial areas, and other important cities. Selection of these routes was completed and reported to Congress in 1947.

Provisions for funding the superhighway system were finally established in the 1952 Federal Highway Act, which authorized a fifty/fifty matching scheme between the federal and state governments. The act authorized \$25,000,000 of federal funds for two-year periods beginning July 1, 1955, and July 1, 1956.

Progress lagged under the fifty/fifty funding provisions so Congress authorized in the 1954 Federal Aid Highway Act, an increase in the federal share of construction costs to sixty percent of the total. However, this formula would not take effect until all funds authorized under the fifty/fifty matching scheme had been expended.

In 1954 Congress also called for a reassessment of national highway needs, a dominant issue before the National Governors Conference held with President Eisenhower in June. Eisenhower, through a national appeal made at this conference, initiated a movement in Congress that resulted in specific action to address the highway needs of the country.

This led directly to passage of legislation in 1956 establishing the Federal Highway Trust Fund under the 1954 Federal Aid Highway Act. Taxes were raised on gasoline, tires, and other motoring items, with the revenue flowing directly into the trust fund. Trust



*State engineers L. N. Ress (above) and John B. Hossack were necessarily involved in the I-80 routing controversies. Courtesy of Nebraska Department of Roads.*



funds could be used only for construction of highways, including but not limited to the interstate system. The legislation also increased the federal share of interstate system construction costs to ninety percent. Under this legislation the name of the superhighway system was changed to "The National System of Interstate and Defense Highways."

The 1956 legislation provided increased federal aid and called for the 40,000-mile system to be completed simultaneously in all areas.<sup>6</sup> It also established locations that the system had to serve. These locations, already stated under the 1947 plan, became known as "control points." Control points in Nebraska included Omaha, Lincoln, and North Platte.

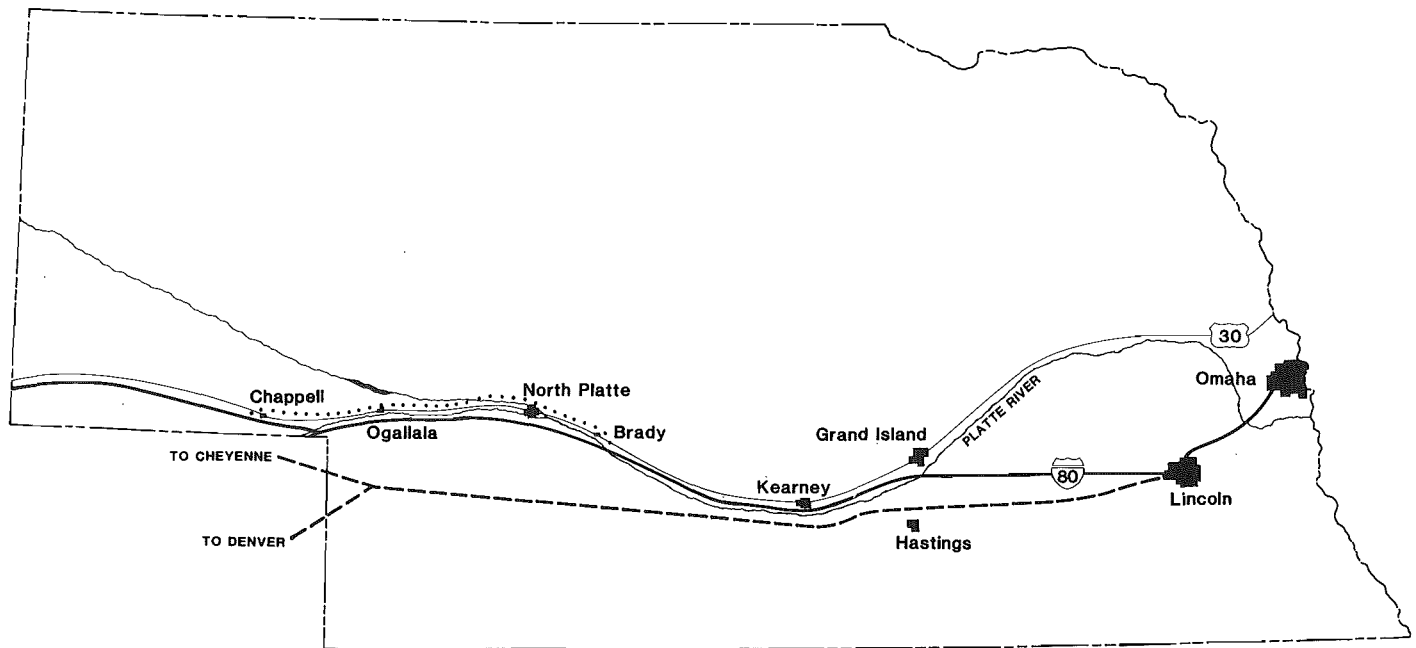
Federal legislation provided the framework around which later state controversies would revolve. The control points established by federal legislation provided a corridor across the state where the interstate had to be built. Local officials then had to select the final route from within the guidelines established by federal law. All the Nebraska interstate highway struggles were fought within this framework of federal legislation.

The most bitter struggle involving Nebraska's interstate highway system concerned its route. Federal legislation established generally the route the new highway was to take and the cities which the system must serve. The state Department of Roads (and the governor of Nebraska) received the dubious job of final route selection. Sectional interests throughout the state lobbied for locating the interstate in their particular areas. The federal government maintained a policy of minimizing costs except in extraordinary circumstances.

In April 1954, a group of federal highway officials visited the state to establish likely routes for the interstate. The group made inspection tours between Lincoln and Omaha and between Lincoln and North Platte to study "possible locations [and] the problems of going through some of



## Interstate Highway System



*The solid line represents existing route of I-80. Dashes indicate the approximate route favored by the South Platte United Chambers of Commerce and other south bank supporters. Dots indicate the approximate route favored by western Nebraska chambers of commerce. Map by Dell Darling.*

these towns and what might be done about relocations in some spots.”<sup>7</sup> Officials in towns along the proposed route, however, became concerned that the new highway would bypass them.

In May State Engineer L. N. Ress announced that bypass decisions depended solely upon construction costs. For instance, if right-of-way through a town cost more than land for a bypass, then a bypass route would probably be built. Ress also pointed out that running the interstate through some towns along the proposed route would probably destroy their business districts.

County roads also posed a problem for Nebraska’s highway designers. Under federal guidelines, each county road which the interstate crossed had either to be closed or diverted under or over the interstate. However, officials in the Department of Roads felt existing state laws might prevent the closing of any county roads; and would require many more expensive overpass structures than previously estimated — perhaps as many as one per mile in

some areas. County and state officials managed to compromise on the problem through a loose interpretation of state law (forbidding the closing of county roads) and through individual accommodation with residents affected by such closings.

During this period, representatives of areas not adjacent to the proposed interstate route lobbied to have the route changed. In July 1955, the Highway 92 Association presented arguments to the State Highway Advisory Commission for designating Highway 92 as the interstate route. However, the state Department of Roads cited federal legislation which mandated service to both Lincoln and Omaha as reason for rejecting the association’s proposal. The first construction on the interstate was a 6.4 mile section near Gretna let to five contractors for \$2,019,160.<sup>8</sup>

The 1947 federal route designations presented a general corridor for the system across Nebraska. According to this proposal the highway would enter Nebraska at Omaha; follow U.S. 6 to

Lincoln; follow U.S. 34 to Grand Island; and then U.S. 30 across the rest of the state. State highway departments were to establish the specific interstate routes within the corridor established by the 1947 route designations.

The East Platte route controversy concerning the Platte River interstate section between the Hastings-Grand Island area and the town of North Platte, began even before passage of the Federal Aid Highway Act in 1954. Early that year, *Lincoln Star* writer Clarke Thomas proposed building the interstate south of the Platte River. Thomas argued that the area south of the Platte had fewer towns and that construction difficulties would be no worse on the south side than on the north side of the river.<sup>9</sup>

In June 1955 Nebraska Governor Victor Anderson predicted the interstate route would run “somewhere between Grand Island and Hastings,”<sup>10</sup> which he thought was the logical location, since it was between the two largest cities in central Nebraska.<sup>11</sup> Anderson’s statement raised hopes



Governor Victor E. Anderson (NSHS-A551-86)

among southern route supporters that a southern route was planned.

In 1956 the state Department of Roads announced tentative plans for the East Platte interstate route. While the interstate would pass between Grand Island and Hastings, it would follow the north bank of the Platte River. In response to the announcement, forty-two towns south of the Platte, through their chambers of commerce, formed a lobbying group, the South Platte United Chambers of Commerce (SPUCC).

The SPUCC proposed its own interstate route, which would run south of the Platte. The route the SPUCC proposed in August 1956 ran between Hastings and Grand Island and then to Grant in western Nebraska, where the interstate split, one branch running toward Denver and the other toward Wyoming. State Senators Kathleen Foote of Axtell and Eldon Thompson of McCook proposed the SPUCC

southern route in letters to the Department of Roads and state newspapers.<sup>12</sup>

The Department of Roads rejected the SPUCC's route proposal almost immediately, because North Platte, one of the federally mandated "control points," would not be served under the SPUCC proposal. The SPUCC argued that the southern route would be shorter and less expensive than the route proposed by the Roads Department. Dropping North Platte's status as "control point" was implied in the SPUCC's rebuttal.

As a compromise, the Hastings Chamber of Commerce in January 1957 proposed an interstate route which ran between the routes sought by the Roads Department and the SPUCC but which also bypassed North Platte. Proponents of the Hastings plan argued that this route would cost nearly \$100 million less than the Roads Department's route. The Hastings

route was shorter; required fewer bridges to cross rivers, roads, and railways; and could be built on less costly land. The group also argued this route would be less subject to interruption or damage in wartime; and if the interstate was closed, traffic could be more easily diverted to U.S. 6 and U.S. 30 under the Hastings plan than under the Roads Department's plan.<sup>13</sup> The Hastings group concluded by claiming that the interstate would have "no direct benefit or advantage to our community. The interest is solely one of wanting to see Nebraska construct and maintain a well-built road at the least cost to our tax-payers."<sup>14</sup>

Supporters of a route north of the Platte River first acted during the 1959 state legislative session. Five state senators introduced a legislative bill mandating the Department of Roads to build the interstate on land adjacent to existing highway U.S. 30.<sup>15</sup> Under this plan the two lanes of U.S. 30 would be incorporated into the interstate and two additional lanes constructed alongside. Senators Lewis Webb of Ogallala, A. A. Fenske of Sunol, George Gerdes of Alliance, Dale Erlewine of Grant, and Marvin Lautenschlager of Grand Island introduced the bill in January 1959. After strong criticism by the Roads Department and the American Association of State Highway Officials, the legislature's Public Works Committee, voting 5-1, killed the bill February 16.

In early 1959 the Roads Department began estimating costs for routes hugging both the north bank and the south bank of the Platte. The State Highway Advisory Commission, an appointed board which advised the Department of Roads, announced the cost estimates on February 8, 1959.<sup>16</sup> The estimated north bank cost was \$46,911,000. The estimated south bank cost was \$55,761,000. When these estimates were announced, the SPUCC called a special meeting to formulate a unified argument for the south bank route.<sup>17</sup> The highway advisory commission scheduled two public

hearings for March 17 and 18, 1959, to consider the routing controversy.

During the two hearings, held in Kearney and Cozad, north bank route supporters argued that the higher population within five miles north of the river versus that within five miles south of the river justified building the interstate on the north bank of the Platte. Northerners also argued that a south bank route would be inconvenient for industrial development, which was concentrated north of the Platte. Officials of the state Roads Department also spoke in favor of the north bank route, citing the shorter distance and the need for fewer bridges and county road crossings.<sup>18</sup>

South bank supporters argued that a north bank route would "squeeze" industrial development between the interstate, the Union Pacific Railroad, and U.S. 30. This squeeze, southerners argued, would limit industrial development. Also should the Kingsley Dam, which holds back Lake McConaughy, be destroyed in wartime, the resulting flood would destroy the north bank interstate route. Finally, southerners argued that the south bank route best fulfilled the goals of the interstate highway system — facilitating interstate travel. The northern route, likely clogged by local traffic, would decrease interstate travel efficiency.<sup>19</sup>

The temper of the hearings can be reflected in the arguments which each side presented. North side supporters claimed that prevailing northwesterly winds would cause larger snowdrifts on a south bank route. South bank supporters argued, to the contrary, that the Platte River provides a natural snow fence, protecting the south route from drifts. North bank supporters argued that a south bank route would create many satellite communities south of existing cities such as Kearney and Gothenburg, which would be outside the reach of police and fire services. South bank supporters believed these communities, if they developed at all, would prosper.<sup>20</sup>

The Department of Roads announced



Robert Mason (left) and John Gottschalk lift covering from "The Golden Link" symbolizing the completion of I-80 in Nebraska in October 1974. Courtesy of Omaha World-Herald.





*Governor Frank Morrison (right of saw) and State Engineer John Hossack (left of saw) participating in the opening of I-80 near Kearney on August 20, 1963. Courtesy of Nebraska Department of Roads.*

during the summer of 1959, its approval of the north bank route. The department cited the arguments which it presented during the March hearings, as well as the existing support of the north bank route by the Federal Bureau of Public Roads, the agency responsible for funding and approving the interstate highway program.

However, the SPUCC commissioned its own feasibility study and lobbied Governor Ralph G. Brooks (who had to make the final decision) to choose the southern route. The SPUCC study indicated cheaper construction costs for the southern route. Communities north of the Platte River organized a lobbying group, the North-of-the-Platte Interstate Highway Association, to oppose any attempt at moving the interstate south of the river. Despite SPUCC efforts, the decision to build north of the Platte prevailed when Brooks affirmed the north bank route on January 28, 1960.<sup>21</sup>

While construction was underway on the east-of-North Platte segment of the interstate, controversy again arose over the route the proposed interstate

would follow west of North Platte.

In late 1957 State Engineer L. N. Ress announced that the North Platte exit would be located on U.S. 83 south of the city. At the time no one grasped the significance of this announcement. Hearings for public comment on the highway's location began in early November 1961 in Ogallala and North Platte. Nearly 250 attended the Ogallala hearing, with only four people speaking in favor of a south route.

Gene Kemper, president of the lobbying organization Greater Nebraska Interstate, stated that population in western Nebraska was concentrated north of the South Platte River. The interstate should therefore be built on a north-of-the-river route to best serve this population. Kemper further argued a northern route would provide the best access to recreation areas of northwest Nebraska. Kemper received backing from C. C. Worden, president of the Western Nebraska United Chambers of Commerce; and Don McGinley, U.S. Congressman from Ogallala.<sup>22</sup>

The North Platte hearings focused

on the potential economic impact which a north route would provide. State Senator Cecil Craft of North Platte argued a north route should be avoided because this route would "divide large ranches and disrupt economically significant hay and cattle feeding operations."<sup>23</sup> Craft further argued that ground pressure generated by the interstate might adversely affect underground water flows. A representative of the Platte Valley Irrigation District, George B. Dent, Jr., also noted that this route would have to cross a main channel and various lateral channels, and would force removal of the main structures of the district.

The North Platte Motel Association, however, spoke in favor of a north route. The association spokesman said a north route would benefit local tourism and lodging facilities more than a southern route.

Later in November chambers of commerce in Oshkosh, Gering, Scottsbluff, and Ogallala passed resolutions favoring a north route for the interstate. C. C. Worden, speaking for the WNUCC, provided results of a



poll which showed members of the North Platte Chamber of Commerce also favored a north route.

The *Keith County News*, an Ogallala newspaper, editorially backed the proposed north route.<sup>24</sup> The paper cited statistics estimating the population of western Nebraska as 149,137 north of the South Platte River, and 47,729 south of the river. The editorial claimed that on a per capita basis the higher estimated cost of the north route, about \$60 million, offset the lower estimated cost of the southern route. The editorial also claimed that the state of Colorado would be the primary beneficiary of a southern route.

In early December, however, the Nebraska Department of Roads announced its backing of a southern route. State Engineer John Hossack said: "[The Department of Roads] has taken into account all angles of the various routes. . . . We have come to the conclusion that the south route will best serve traffic, the communities involved and the entire state."<sup>25</sup>

Naturally, proponents of the north route strongly opposed the Department of Roads decision. C. C. Worden, of the WNUCC, said the department was "making a big mistake and turning its back on all of northwestern Nebraska."<sup>26</sup> Worden further stated that a south route would "make it hard for northwest Nebraskans to go east and [would] divert trade which should go into Lincoln and Omaha [into] Denver instead."<sup>27</sup> North route supporters voted to continue their fight for a northern route.

The controversy next moved to the Nebraska Highway Advisory Commission. While the final decision regarding the route rested with the governor's office, Governor Frank B. Morrison had said he would support any decision the commission reached.

Proponents of both north and south routes lobbied highway commissioners vigorously. North route supporters commissioned a hydrologist, who testified that new embankments along the Platte River, which the southern route

required, would likely increase flooding north of the river. North bank supporters further argued that a north route would be more accessible to feeder roads, which would require fewer railroad crossings than comparable roads along a south route. Meanwhile south bank supporters, like the SPUCC earlier, argued their route had a natural barrier of trees provided by the Platte River which would reduce future snow removal costs.

In late January 1962, the highway commission voted against the southern route which the Department of Roads had proposed. It also recommended that Governor Morrison select a north bank route west of North Platte. The majority of the commissioners felt a northern route would provide economic benefit to more people than a southern route.<sup>28</sup> The commissioners also felt a north bank route would be safer, requiring fewer railroad cross-

ings by the interstate access roads. Finally, the commissioners noted, "A road north of the river would destroy or damage less amounts of valuable land. A road south of the river would cut off ranching lands from access to water and destroy use of the brush and trees on the south side, all of which are highly valuable to stock raising. Access to the river on the north side is already largely cut off by the railroad."<sup>29</sup> Morrison accepted the commission's recommendation and ordered new studies for a north route.

Late in February 1962, the Federal Bureau of Public Roads, the agency responsible for allocating the ninety percent federal share of interstate construction money, decided it would not support the north route for the interstate.<sup>30</sup> While the federal bureau had no authority to determine routes, it did have the power to withhold the federal share of construction money. This threat effectively forced the state to comply with the wishes of the federal government. The federal highway administrator saw no justification for the higher construction costs which the north route would incur. State Engineer Hossack then announced the interstate would follow the south route originally recommended by the Department of Roads; this route had already been approved by the Bureau of Public Roads in 1957.

Supporters of the north route were incensed at the federal decision. State Senator Lewis Webb said he would write to the Nebraska congressional delegation in Washington and added, "The people of Omaha got what they wanted at any price." The bitter reaction among north route supporters is best exemplified by a member of the Ogallala Chamber of Commerce who claimed the federal decision was "no better than actions Khrushchev makes because it ignores the people's request."<sup>31</sup>

Governor Morrison and members of the highway commission traveled to Washington in early March to appeal the federal decision. While in

*Nebraska congressman Donald F. McGinley. (NSHS-L514)*



Washington the delegation met with Commerce Secretary Luther Hodges to present the case for a north route.

However, in March the Bureau of Public Roads reaffirmed its support for a southern route. Morrison then said, "I feel that [this] decision by the Bureau of Public Roads rejecting the north route is final."<sup>32</sup> Morrison with the support of the Highway Commission then ordered the Department of Roads to begin work on the southern route.

The earliest funding controversy facing the Nebraska interstate system concerned the type of system it would be. Nebraska had in the 1940s formed a turnpike authority to study the feasibility of building a state toll road network. Supporters of the Turnpike Authority feared a federally funded interstate highway would kill any possibility of building a turnpike. State Engineer L. N. Ress in 1954 confirmed these concerns by saying that Nebraska would support whichever group built first but not both. Turnpike Authority President Raymond McGrath prompted Ress's comments by asking if any opportunity existed for building both an interstate and a toll road. Ress replied with a blunt "no."<sup>33</sup> The idea of building a toll road faded as construction of the federally funded interstate system began in earnest in 1957.

The interstate proposal also prompted concern among other groups. The State Highway Advisory Commission initially was skeptical of the proposed system. The commission felt the state should use all the federal funds already available to it before embarking upon any massive new highway projects. In a 1954 hearing, Commissioner C. E. Metzger asked Ress if the interstate would be built at the expense of existing state highways. Ress responded by asking Metzger if the commission was going to "let \$2,400,000 fly out the window."<sup>34</sup> Ress later admitted the state could not then generate enough state funding to receive all federal highway matching funds available to it. However, Ress

said the state could afford the interstate if counties would relieve the state of some rural highway responsibility. As late as 1956, state officials had to respond to local concerns that the interstate would drain funds from rural primary and secondary highways.

In 1956 a committee was formed in Lincoln to promote legislation which would increase state highway revenue. The Better Roads Through Fair Taxation Committee circulated initiative petitions which sought to establish a state ton-mile tax, which the committee felt was a fair method of generating revenue to cover the state's share of interstate construction costs. A similar legislative bill had earlier been defeated after strong trucking and oil industry lobbying. The committee gained enough support to place the initiative on the general election ballot in 1956. However, voters rejected it in the general election by a 3-2 margin.

As an alternative to existing federal highway funding schemes, Governor Victor Anderson proposed in 1957 a fundamental shift in federal and state highway responsibilities. Anderson proposed that states assume complete responsibility for all non-interstate highways in the country. This would leave responsibility for the interstate system solely to the federal government. Anderson presented his proposal at a conference of state governors and federal officials on August 8, but failed to receive any significant support.

Perhaps the greatest funding controversy erupted in 1960. Early that year representatives of several Panhandle communities met to discuss their opposition to the construction priorities established for the new interstate. Out of a series of meetings early in the year, these Panhandle representatives, along with representatives of other state groups, such as the South Platte United Chambers of Commerce and the Western Nebraska United Chambers of Commerce, formed an organization called Greater

Nebraska Interstate (GNI).<sup>35</sup> GNI argued that construction of rural, trunk line interstate routes should receive higher priority, in terms of dollars spent, than urban spur routes. The state Department of Roads planned to build first in Omaha and then proceed west in order to lower the total cost of the system through the state.

GNI, however, felt state funds shouldn't be used on a route through Omaha (I-480), which served primarily local traffic. The interstate's purpose was to move long-haul traffic, so GNI representatives felt any routes in downtown Omaha should be constructed after the main trunk line was completed. GNI also felt Omaha projects would expend all state interstate funds, leaving rural Nebraskans permanently without an interstate highway.

In a January 15, 1960, editorial the *Lincoln Star* criticized the plans for building a downtown Omaha route. The *Star* took the position that a route serving primarily local needs contradicted the system's stated goal of moving long-haul traffic. The *Star* predicted that the decision giving priority to Omaha routes would have dire political consequences for the Democratic party, which then controlled both the legislature and the governor's mansion.

Following the *Star* editorial, U.S. Representative Don McGinley asked Governor Ralph Brooks to convene a public hearing on the interstate priority controversy. McGinley told Brooks the Omaha route had to receive lower priority than rural routes "in order to maintain a healthy attitude of public support for the entire program."<sup>36</sup> McGinley further said that only by holding public hearings could the state properly present the details of the interstate program to the public.

The state convened hearings during the spring of 1960. At these hearings the state and representatives of GNI compromised by adopting a ratio whereby funding was split twenty-three percent for urban construction and seventy-seven percent for rural construction.<sup>37</sup>

## Interstate Highway System

Interstate construction progressed smoothly under this plan until 1970, when state officials, with public support, readjusted the ratio slightly in favor of urban construction.<sup>38</sup> The readjustment was prompted by a federal threat to penalize the state for not meeting construction deadlines on the Omaha route.

The interstate highway has made Nebraska political life more colorful for more than thirty years. From the earliest disputes over route selection through funding controversies, to controversies involving roadside signs and sculptures following completion of the system in 1974, perhaps no other public works project has prompted so much dispute.<sup>39</sup>

Initially, controversies focused on how to fund the state's contribution to the system. Then controversies moved to general locational disputes involving route proposals affecting a relatively large area. These wide area rifts narrowed to become small area quarrels, such as the West Platte location dispute, in which competing route proposals were often no more than five miles apart. Controversies reemerged as competing groups fought for funding priority of their particular plan. All participants in these conflicts realized the potential economic and population growth the interstate would bestow upon communities along its route.<sup>40</sup>

Not even completion of the interstate system in 1974 brought an end to disputes. In 1974 the state and federal governments engaged in a heated struggle over the presence of state tourist information signs along the newly completed interstate. The federal government, through Federal Highway Administrator Norbert Tiemann (formerly Nebraska governor), ordered the state to remove forty-two tourist information signs which the FHWA felt presented a safety hazard. Governor J. J. Exon refused. Tiemann then threatened to withhold all federal highway money until the state com-

plied with the federal order. In response, the state sued the federal government for violation of states' rights and lost. The state subsequently removed the signs.

In 1988 the state legislature passed LB 632, which called on the Department of Roads to undertake a comprehensive examination of the state's expressway system. The debate, which preceded passage of LB 632, focused primarily upon the need for a north-south expressway through the state. The legislators identified four likely routes which generally followed U.S. 83, 281, 81, and 77. The interstate controversy seems ready to begin another cycle although under a different name and to continue influencing Nebraska political life.<sup>41</sup>

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Drake Hokanson, *The Lincoln Highway, Main Street Across America* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1988.)

<sup>2</sup>The effect of the interstate on Nebraska counties is analyzed in David M. Ambrose's and Louis G. Pol's "The Importance of Interstate Highways to Economic Development in Nebraska," in *1988 Nebraska Highway Needs Study* (Nebraska Department of Roads, 1988), Vol. 1, 12-14.

<sup>3</sup>*Questions About Nebraska's Interstate Highway* (Nebraska Department of Roads, Mar. 1958).

<sup>4</sup>The term "express highways," used with the Pershing study, refers generally to two-lane roads with intersections, rather than the four-lane divided roads with exit ramps which comprise the modern interstate system. The current usage of "expressway" refers to four-lane divided roads with intersections. "Superhighway" refers to the four-lane style road which comprises the current interstate system.

<sup>5</sup>State Engineer's Report, Nebraska Department of Roads, 1966.

<sup>6</sup>*First Biennial Report of the Department of Roads, 1957-1958* (Lincoln, 1958), 7. A. T. Lobdell, *Nebraska Department of Roads, A History* (Lincoln, 1965), 37.

<sup>7</sup>*Lincoln Star*, Apr. 18, 1954.

<sup>8</sup>A. T. Lobdell, *Nebraska Department of Roads, A History* (Lincoln, 1965), 39.

<sup>9</sup>*Lincoln Star*, Febr. 10, 1954.

<sup>10</sup>*Lincoln Sunday Journal and Star*, June 5, 1955.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>*Lincoln Star*, Aug. 25, 1956.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, Jan. 30, 1957. See also *Hastings Daily Tribune*, Jan. 11, 1957; Jan. 22, 1957.

<sup>14</sup>Fred R. Irons, Hastings Chamber of Commerce, to Governor Victor E. Anderson, Jan. 26, 1957, in "Interstate Highway Correspondence" file, RG1, SG35, Box 73, Victor E. Anderson

Gubernatorial Papers, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>15</sup>The proposed bill was the 1959 legislature's LB171.

<sup>16</sup>*First Biennial Report of the Department of Roads, 1957-1958* (Lincoln, 1958), 3.

<sup>17</sup>*Lincoln Star*, Febr. 8, 1959.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, Mar. 19, 1959. *Kearney Daily Hub*, Mar. 19, 1959. *The Cozad Local*, Mar. 20, 1959.

<sup>19</sup>*Lincoln Star*, Mar. 18, 1959.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, Mar. 19, 1959.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, Nov. 22, 1959, Jan. 29, 1960. Correspondence, petitions, and resolutions from various individuals and groups, including the SPUCC, can be found in "Outstate-Interstate" file, RG1, SG 36, Box 38, Ralph G. Brooks Gubernatorial Papers, Nebraska State Historical Society. The State Highway Advisory Commission reaffirmed its earlier choice of the north route on a 5-2 vote Jan. 25, 1960, and its action is recorded in "Highway Commission (State): Action taken at meetings" file, also in Box 38, Brooks Papers.

<sup>22</sup>*Lincoln Star*, Nov. 21, 1961.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>*The Keith County News* (Ogallala), Nov. 27, 1961.

<sup>25</sup>*Lincoln Star*, Dec. 6, 1961.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, Jan. 23, 1962.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, Febr. 24, 1962.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, Apr. 3, 1962. Rex M. Whitlow, Federal Highway Administrator to Governor Frank B. Morrison, Mar. 29, 1962. Frank B. Morrison to John B. Hossack, State Engineer, Apr. 9, 1962. These letters and other correspondence regarding the West Platte route controversy are in "Interstate Routing" file, RG1, SG 38, Box 44, Frank B. Morrison Gubernatorial Papers, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>33</sup>*Lincoln Star*, May 13, 1954.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, Oct. 12, 1954.

<sup>35</sup>*The Alliance Daily Times-Herald*, Jan. 12, 14, 15, 18, 1960.

<sup>36</sup>*Lincoln Star*, Jan. 17, 1960.

<sup>37</sup>*Second Biennial Report of the Department of Roads, 1959-1960* (Lincoln, 1960), 17. Nebraska Highway Advisory Commission statement regarding the allocation of funds, Febr. 8, 1960, in "Interstate Feb. 2, 1960 Hearing" file; and *State Engineer's Report on Nebraska's Interstate Highway*, Febr. 2, 1960, in "Highway Commission (State): Action taken at meetings" file, both in RG1, SG36, Box 38. Brooks Papers.

<sup>38</sup>Omaha's I-480 westbound lanes were finally finished and dedicated in late 1970. *1969-1970 Biennial Report, Nebraska Department of Roads* (Lincoln, 1970), 4.

<sup>39</sup>For information on the Bicentennial sculpture project, see *A Final Report of Activities* (Lincoln, 1977), 65-68.

<sup>40</sup>Frederick C. Luebke, "Time, Place, and Culture in Nebraska History," *Nebraska History* 569 (Winter 1988):167.

<sup>41</sup>In its report mandated by LB 632, the Department of Roads designated U.S. Highway 81 as the north-south expressway through the state.