

**Interviewer:** You talk about turning points in one of your articles, *The Federal Highway Administration at 100*, and the National History Day theme this year is “Turning Points in History: People, Ideas, and Events.” Could you talk a little bit about how the 1956 Federal-Aid Highway Act was such an important turning point in American history?

**Weingroff:** Well, the interstate system was a major turning point in United States history. It’s different from some other turning points in this respect: for example, a major turning point was the end of the Civil War, or the stock market crash; as soon as these events happened, you immediately felt something had changed. In the case of interstate system, the day that President Eisenhower signed the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, everything was the same, nothing had changed. What did change was over time the impacts of the interstate system on our economy, on the shape of our urban areas, on how we go about our daily lives. So the turning point was one that was not immediate, but rather gradual.

**Interviewer:** In our project we talk about the (political)<sup>1</sup>, social and economic effects [of the Interstate Highway System]. Is there one that you would say is most important?

**Weingroff:** I think probably the most important impact of the interstate system was really on the way we live our lives on a daily basis. Of course, many of us have an interstate that we rely on, that we use fairly regularly to go to work, to go to school, to visit friends or family. And in that respect, the interstate system affects all of us; it also affects all of us because virtually everything you buy was in a truck on an interstate highway at some point. So, I think the most important thing was simply the impact of the interstate system on each individual in the country – that’s pretty major. Now, those kinds of impacts also affect other things, particularly the economy. The interstate system has transformed our freight shipments around the country; [it] has contributed to the distribution of population, not only within urban areas towards a suburban lifestyle, but also from the Northeast to the South and the Southwest. [It] transformed where our industry is located, again, near an interstate, maybe more in the South and the Southwest than in previous, pre-1956 period. And that’s a pretty major impact.

**Interviewer:** Were there other turning points in transportation that were as important?

**Weingroff:** We’ve had a number of turning points, I don’t want to try to say the date, but we’ve had a number of turning points in our transportation history. The decision to build the national road in 1908, I’m sorry 1808, (legislation signed by Thomas Jefferson) was a major turning point. It enabled us, what it’s primary purpose was, was to provide a portage between the Potomac River and Cumberland, Maryland, and the Ohio River, and Wheeling, which at that time was in Virginia (west Virginia didn’t become a state until some time later). And, it provided a means for settlers to get to the public lands that were being sold to new inhabitants, and opened up the Mid-West, what we call the “Mid-West” (it was known as the “North-East” at that time).

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<sup>1</sup> When this interview was conducted in November, we were thinking of including political aspects to our website, but now we just focus on social and economic effects.

So that would be an example. Another one would be, again, I'm not trying to give you dates, the first successful canal, the first railroad – that was major because it completely transformed how people got around the country, and the speed with which they got around the country. The telegram is actually a transportation device, even though it doesn't move people, it moves our ideas around the country – that's a turning point. You get into the twentieth century, and I would say the introduction of the Ford Model T in 1908 was a major turning point because it made the automobile available at a low price that everybody could afford. It was a vehicle built specifically for the bad roads of the day: it was high so it wouldn't get stuck in the ruts, it was mechanically fairly simple, but the main thing was it was very inexpensive, unlike most cars of that era. So that was a major turning point. In the history of highways (and by the way, obviously, the Wright Brothers with the airplane and so on were turning points as well, so it's not just highways as a means of transportation), for our program, the federal-aid highway program, we've had a couple of turning points. Of course, the major one is 1916, when Congress passed the Federal-Aid Road Act, and President Woodrow Wilson Signed it. That legislation established the basic format of the federal-aid highway program, and the key there is we take money that we make available, in that era, to the state highway agencies – they select the projects, they build them, we oversee it to be sure that the projects are done in accordance with federal requirements. Not too long thereafter we have a second turning point in our program: the federal-aid highway program, they made the federal-aid highway act of 1921 – it corrected a number of defects in that earlier program, but retained the same federal-state partnership that had already begun. The most important point, which you've emphasized on your website, is that it called for using the federal-aid highway funds, that we were making available to the states, on a specific system of highways, that had to be selected and approved. Only those highways were going to be improved, and a large percentage of them, a minimum of sixty percent, had to be interstate in character. With that approval, we began building the first real interstate network of improved, and eventually paved, highways. So, those are some examples of other turning points in the history of transportation, leading up to the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. In fact, the 1956 legislation was built on the foundation of the 1916, and especially the 1921, road legislation, retaining that same structure: we make money available, the states built the interstate system, with our oversight, following on the long-term pattern that we'd already established beginning in 1916.

**Interviewer** : Why did Congress agree to pass such a comprehensive highway-funding bill in 1956?

**Weingroff**: The thing that we sometimes forget, because we're living in the present, and we have today's attitudes, is that everybody supported development of the interstate system. Nobody objected to it, and that's a little bit hard to believe because people today have a lot of objections and problems and don't think some of the impacts were positive. But in 1955 and 1956, there was not opposition to it. So people might say, 'well surely the railroads were opposed to it' – well, they didn't like the idea because it was going to benefit their competitors in the trucking industry, but they didn't object to it. They just wanted the truckers to have to pay a fair tax. Well, how about transit? Surely the transit people saw it as a problem. No, not really. The transit was

buses and subways, in particular buses were provided by private companies, not by public agencies, and nobody in 1955, 1956, thought that the federal government ought to be subsidizing private companies. So there really was no opposition to the interstate program. The question was how to pay for it. That was the most controversial issue; it was not easily solved. In fact, Congress adjourned without solving it in 1955, and it looked like there was not going to be a solution. But they found it in 1956, and I think that one of the interesting aspects of that is, 1956 was an election year. President Eisenhower decided to run for reelection. Every member of the U.S. House of Representatives was up for reelection. One third of the senators were up for reelection. And sometimes it's hard to approve major legislation in an election year because the opposition party, in this case it would have been the democrats, who controlled the House and the Senate, wouldn't want to give a victory to president of the other party. We still see this pattern to this date. But in the case of the interstate program, they went ahead. It was just so popular; people wanted better roads, they couldn't wait to drive their big American automobiles all over the country on these superhighways that they'd been reading about, and that people, for the most part, had never seen. So it wasn't as complex as you might think. From a political standpoint, again, the difficulty was how to pay for it, and that was finally resolved in 1956, and from that point on it was just a matter of writing the language, getting it through committee, getting it through the House, the Senate, the conference committee, and then finally to the President.

**Interviewer:** Why did Congress choose to improve highways rather than railroads or subways during that time?

**Weingroff:** Well, in the case of the railroads we had a very extensive railroad network built, owned and operated by private railroad companies. That's how we built our network in the nineteenth century, and of course, it had been improved by the private companies in the twentieth century. As I mentioned earlier, nobody thought that the federal government ought to subsidize private companies. So that's the answer to question. It wasn't even an issue. The issue in that era was that the federal government, going back to nineteenth century, had been regulating operation of the railroads through the Interstate Commerce Commission, and a lot of the railroad companies felt that they were being treated unfairly, that the regulations of their schedules and their rates was unfair. So the issue was not whether the federal government would use its money to pay to improve railroads, the issue was whether the federal government regulation of the railroad operations (the fair structure, how things were carried, and the extent of each company's rail network), was fair. That was the only question. Now in the case of transit, you mentioned subways; there were very few subways in the United States in the mid 1950's. Of course, New York City had the most extensive one, and I believe there were rail operations in Chicago and maybe Boston, and a number of cities still had rail lines, they didn't have subways, but they had rail lines. And again, they were, not in New York, but in the other cases, they were generally privately owned – they were owned by a railroad company. And many of them had fallen in ridership since World War Two – they were declining; the lack of passengers meant they didn't have enough revenue to improve the cars that the people were riding in. Service began to decline and people kind of accepted that. 'We've got our automobiles, we'll drive our automobiles to

work!’ But again, nobody thought that the federal government ought to subsidize private companies, providing rail transit service. So those issues didn’t even come up. And again, one of the things that is surprising to people today is that the mayors of all our major cities couldn’t wait for the interstate program to get started because they were going to get all this money to build great highways that were going to serve their cities in a number of ways.

**Interviewer:** Why did other countries choose similar paths or different paths such as public transportation? And by similar paths we mean roads and highways.

**Weingroff:** It’s very difficult to compare the United States with any other country. Obviously other countries have their own form of government with a different economy, with a few obvious exceptions: they’re much smaller than the United States; Europe in particular, which collectively might be... (more or less the same size)... is filled with individual countries that have their own patterns of development. The United States, because of tremendous increase in the number of automobiles, was a world leader in highway development. People looked to this country for ideas on how to improve road networks. In fact, we had an extensive international outreach program to developing countries and we would send experts to help them plan their highway networks to improve their economic options. So in a way you’d have to say, ‘well, why didn’t Holland build freeways?’ Well, it’s a very small country and it had a different perspective. It had a rail network already that was serving its needs. So it’s hard to say why other countries didn’t immediately follow our lead. One country that was ahead of us was Germany. In the 1930’s, Adolf Hitler had taken up an earlier idea that resulted in the construction of the autobahn. The autobahn was comparable to the interstate system, although it didn’t go into cities, and was an inspiration, really, for American engineers who went over to see it – everybody went over. We didn’t have anything comparable, so they would all go to Germany whenever they had the opportunity and take a look at the autobahn network. As you may know, President Eisenhower, when he was the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe, saw it in operation. After the war, he was the president of NATO and he saw it in peacetime. So at least one country, and I could name a couple others, were either ahead of us, or working along similar lines. But our development was entirely our initiative – we weren’t imitating somebody else (with the possible exception of the autobahn as an example.)

**Interviewer:** Why would you say that Germany, as an example, chose to subsidize roads specifically?

**Weingroff:** In the case of Germany, the original idea of the autobahn network of highways was probably peacetime, but when Adolf Hitler took it up, it almost certainly was primarily defense, primarily military in nature. Initially, people didn’t know of his intentions, they didn’t know they were going to be launching into World War Two, and so it wasn’t completely clear why he was doing this. But the reality is that unlike the United States in 1930’s, Germany did not have a whole lot of privately owned automobiles. He was building this network of freeways, of expressways, before there was traffic to use them. Obviously there were cars, obviously there were trucks, obviously there were military vehicles (government vehicles), but the large number

of German citizens didn't have cars. And so he also had the idea of why don't we also provide a people's car – a low-priced car that people could afford, so that they could drive on this great network of highways. And that car became, today we know it as the Volkswagen – it was invented by Ferdinand Porsche at Hitler's request, but before manufacturing it, the war broke out in 1939 in Europe and the plant where they were going to build it wasn't converted to military use. But the point is that Germany had a military reason for building its network that we didn't have. They built the network with combat in mind, so they had a different incentive than we had.

**Interviewer:** Earlier you talked about how Americans were looking forward to driving on these superhighways in their big automobiles. Would you say that car culture primarily caused the highway act or vice versa?

**Weingroff:** Prior to 1956 when we began building the interstate system, the American people had embraced the automobile. Millions and millions had been sold after World War Two. The millions of returning soldiers, as soon as they could, they bought an automobile, they bought a home, often the home was out in the suburbs with help from the GI bill. They had read about superhighways; for example, before the war, in 1939, the New York's World Fair was held and the most popular exhibit was an exhibit put on by General Motors called "Futurama." At Futurama, people would come in, they'd get into a chair, which would lift up and carry them over the highway network of the future – multi-lane highways with towers, and the people in the towers would tell you when you should turn and how you should go, with each lane separated from the other for safety. When you finished the exhibit, when your chair had finished going across the United States with a narrative telling you what you were seeing, as you left the Futurama exhibit, you were given a little lapel pin. The lapel pin said, "I have seen the future." But very few people had actually seen that kind of road. In October 1940, the first section of Pennsylvania turnpike opened, and in fact, it had no speed limits. People [would] get on, pay the toll, they'd go whatever speed they wanted to on this highway and it came to be a cliché to call it a magic carpet ride. Cities had built expressways, and people basically wanted better highways – that's why the idea of the interstate system proved to be so popular in the 1950's. If you look at the automobiles of the 1950's they were getting bigger, they were getting more powerful. Gasoline was very inexpensive, promotion of automobiles was extensive – I remember stages of models – all the major companies would change models in the fall, and I, like many Americans, eagerly waited to see what the new Buick was going to look, how was Ford going to change its vehicles. But the explanation was bigger, more powerful, better, faster. So the automobile culture grew along side our road network. It's the chicken and egg situation, but obviously we would not have needed an interstate system, we would not have needed the federal-aid highway program, I'm sorry, the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, if there was not a demand in the form of millions and millions of automobile and millions of millions of American motorists wanting something along those lines.

**Interview:** That [World] Fair in New York sounds pretty interesting. Do you know anywhere we could look to get sources about that?

**Weingroff:** About what?

**Interviewer:** About the World Fair [in New York] that you were talking about.

**Weingroff:** Oh yah; when we're done I'll send you – probably on Monday – I'll send you some background information.<sup>2</sup>

**Interviewer:** Ok, that sounds great!

**Weingroff:** The Futurama is really an interesting thing and you can even... I know I've seen videotape of it...so one thing you might consider is go online and search for Futurama, 1939. It may be that somewhere on YouTube you'll be able to see tape of it – I know I've seen it, although I've seen it in documentaries. But I suspect there could very well be footage, so you can see what I'm talking about on YouTube.<sup>3</sup>

**Interviewer:** Ok, we'll look into that.

**Weingroff:** I'll send you something on Monday.

**Interviewer:** Alright, so how did the interstates effect the economy – shipping and businesses?

**Weingroff:** When the interstate system was in its earliest stages it was expected to be a conveyer belt for the economy, carrying the goods back in forth, material to the factory, goods out of the factory to the market. And it did have that effect – it still serves that purpose. But as our economy has evolved, the uses of the interstate system have changed. In the 1950's, our industry was concentrated in the Northeast and the Midwest, but for a variety of reasons, and transportation is certainly one of them; the ease of transportation in the South, and the Southwest, resulted in changes of our manufacturing base, so that a lot of it moves south and to the Southwest. That was made possible essentially by having interstate highways that could get products from the factory to a port or to an airport, without too much difficulty. Our economy continued to evolve – the ease of transportation, particularly by truck, made it feasible to start outsourcing our manufacturing jobs to other countries. So I'm not saying that as a good thing, I'm saying that's what happened. And so other countries with lower paid labor put a lot of our jobs away. One of the things about the interstate system is that it just sits there – the roads don't move, sometimes we relocate them a little bit, but basically they just sit there, and they sit in more or less the same place, decade after decade. The interstate system has been very flexible in adapting to the changes in our economy and the world economy, and it's very important to understand that as time has moved on, our economy has become linked to the world economy in ways that could not have been conceived in the 1950's. The computer, multinational corporations, transportation

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<sup>2</sup> A Futurama brochure, sent to us by Mr. Weingroff, can be seen on our “U.S. Highway Developments Prior to 1956” page on our website.

<sup>3</sup> As referred to us by Mr. Weingroff, video footage of Futurama can be found on the same page.

via containers (that's another part of the revolution that took place in transportation in the era of the interstate highways), made possible a global economy that the interstate system, designed for a different purpose, nevertheless, proved adaptable to serve.

**Interviewer:** So you sent [us] that email about Richard Nixon, Vice President Richard Nixon's Grand Plan Speech, and I looked through the U.S. Department of Transportation's article on that, *Ike's Grand Plan*. We were wondering if the original intentions that he was talking about in the speech were different from the actual effects of the system – the interstate system.

**Weingroff:** Well, in a way, no. The Grand Plan Speech, which President Eisenhower had intended to deliver to the nation's governors at their annual conference, spelled out a plan that he had for what he called an articulated highway system. What he meant by that was that he was proposing that each level of government, the federal, the state, the county and the municipal, improve the roads it was responsible for. Now, you don't actually see the words "interstate system" in those remarks, but that's what it applied to. The major roads of the nation would be improved as a responsibility of the federal government. In that speech, the remarks that he ultimately had to give to Vice President Nixon because of a death in the family (he was unable to attend the conference), but the remarks that he gave to Vice President Nixon listed the reasons for the interstate system – for that part of it. The first one, well I won't say the first – one of them was the economy, and certainly has been born out, has been supporting our economy as it has grown and grown and grown to levels that, really, they couldn't have conceived in the 1950's. Safety – that's been achieved. The interstate system is the safest road network in the United States by far, and probably the safest in the world (maybe the safest.) Arguably, the autobahn today is safer – it's difficult to compare. Next was relieve congestion in our cities – I don't think I can say that. I think the interstate system has been very successful as a conveyer of traffic within our cities. It didn't relieve congestion, but maybe that's an unrealistic expectation. Population has increased as we have moved from rural to urban. I don't know what would relieve congestion, so I give it a mixed result on that expected result. Others might say that it just failed, but I don't like to say that because I work for the Federal Highway Administration. He also thought that it would reduce the time that courts had to spend dealing with traffic accidents, traffic crashes. I don't know if it did or it didn't have that effect – obviously there's fewer fatalities, fewer injuries because of safety of the interstate probe system and lessons that we learn on the interstates that we can apply to other highways, as well improvements in the safety of our vehicles, that's a major factor. On the other hand, our population has increased so I don't know how effective it was in clearing the, what we call, the logjam of traffic cases in our courts. I think the last item he mentioned was evacuating our cities in the event of an atomic bomb attack. Now, that sounds a little funny today because we don't have an expectation of an atomic bomb attack or a nuclear attack of any sort, and so it seems like that was kind of silly. Actually, that was a real concern in the 1950's during the height of the Cold War. We were definitely afraid that the Soviet Union was getting ahead of us in nuclear weapon technology as well as intercontinental ballistic missiles – we could be attacked. It was a civil defense; it was a major concern in every city. Every government agency here in Washington had to go through drills in what would happen in the event of an evacuation. But as far as evacuating our cities, we had very little experience with

it because we never had to do it. Would the interstate system have served that purpose? Well, it's questionable because as we see when we have a case of, say, a hurricane approaching, and a city such as New Orleans or Charleston, South Carolina has to be evacuated, it really does serve the purpose. You're not going to be leaving the city at seventy miles an hour, because of the traffic volume, but it actually has served the purpose. And I'll give you another example: 9/11. When the airplanes flew into the World Trade Center and into the Pentagon, the entire air network was shut down – no planes allowed other than military. The interstate system, while it wasn't needed to evacuate, was proved to be a primary way for recovery efforts to get to their destination. So I think that when President Eisenhower was saying [to] evacuate cities in the event of an atomic war, that didn't happen anyway; we didn't have an atomic attack and we didn't have to evacuate cities because of it. On the other hand, I think that the interstate system has proven very effective in serving our military for goods and personal shipments, serving our population when evacuations, mainly because of anticipated natural disasters, occurred, and, as I mentioned, in the case of 9/11. So overall, I would say the interstate system has achieved what he anticipated – it's done a lot more, but it did achieve what he anticipated for the most part.

**Interviewer:** What was Eisenhower's involvement and attitude towards the plan to construct the interstate system?

**Weingroff:** The interstate system?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Weingroff:** Oh, I thought you were going to say in the cities. President Eisenhower had a very strongly supported and improved highway network, and this was based on his experience and his observations. In 1919, he participated in the U.S. Army's first transcontinental convoy of military vehicles – this was quite an affair. Our roads really weren't very good, they were primarily dirt roads outside of our cities and nobody knew what they had done! But in addition to that, this was an era before the computer obviously, before television, before extensive radio network, and people were eager to see the military vehicles that had won World War One, The Great War. So as the convoy crossed the country and crashed through weak bridges, got stuck in the mud, was blown off course, had trouble even finding the road in some cases, people were coming from miles around, every city along the way, to see these vehicles passing by, and often to greet them with speeches, with a luncheon or dinner, [or] with a dance in the evening. So it was quite, what we would call today, a media event, but it was quite an exciting trip. It took two months; it probably would have taken less if they didn't have to stop in every city and listen to speeches and go to dinners and dances (and they also had a military recruiter there signing up people), but in any event, it did take two months. Now, President Eisenhower remembered this from a different perspective – he had tried all through World War One to be assigned to a fighting unit in Europe, and he had never achieved that. In fact, his commanding officer told him to stop submitting these requests because you're not going to Europe. He was assigned to a unit in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania for training on the new tanks that were just then becoming used in the military operations. So after The War he was thinking he has no future in the military – the future



is for all the generals, or not generals, rather the officers who had been to Europe, who had fought in the war, who had helped to win it. And he was just, you know, maybe he shouldn't even stay in the military. He thought go out in the private sector and earn a living, and so it was in this mood that he heard about this convoy that was going across the country and he decided, and along with a friend of his, Major Sereno, to go along, supposedly to observe tanks that were part of the convoy (although they were carried on trucks.) In fact, he decided at the last minute – he wasn't even at the ceremony south of the White House in Washington that kicked off the convoy. He joined the convoy in Frederick Maryland and then continued with the convoy to Gettysburg, turned west on the Lincoln Highway and followed the Lincoln Highway all the way to San Francisco. But he saw from this experience, as did everybody on the convoy, how the nation's roads really needed to be improved, and it was a lesson he remembered. Over the years he had different, as he was moved around the country, to Europe, he studied road networks as part of his work, and of course when he became the commanding general of the Allied Forces in Europe, he saw the autobahn at work; he saw after the war, the autobahn, and as a result serving peacetime needs. And as a result, when he became president, this was something that was very important to him; he wanted to improve the nation's roads. He aimed to do a few other things first, such as end the Korean War, stabilize the economy after the war (when a war comes to an end there's always economic disruption – he aimed to deal with that.) In 1954, he signed the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1954, and he was glad to sign it, but he knew it wasn't sufficient. The interstate network that we needed wasn't going to get built with the money that was in that bill and so he almost immediately, on his own initiative, launched efforts to begin development of the highway plan that became the interstate system. So President Eisenhower wasn't just... you know, sometimes presidents get credit or blame for things that happened when they're president – they didn't have anything to do with the bill, they didn't want it, or they just sign it, and it turns out to be a good thing or a bad thing. But in the case of the interstate program, this was something he initiated, he wanted it. When Vice President Nixon delivered the President's Grand Plan Speech to the nation's governors, they were shocked – they had no idea this was coming. They thought he was just going to come and talk about how wonderful the governors are and that [the] states are great and they love working with the governors and so on (just a boring kind of a speech.) Instead, and in fact, [the governors] wanted the government to get out of the federal highway business; they thought that should be a job the states handled. So they were shocked when [Vice] President Nixon delivered this amazing speech with a grand plan the president had for developing the nation's highway networks. But that was something that was so important to him that he launched it immediately after signing the 1954 Federal-Aid Highway Act and he pursued it behind the scenes with members of Congress – it was something he was personally interested in.

**Interviewer:** One of our sources says that the federal government paid for about ninety percent of the construction of the interstate highway system and state government paid for about ten percent. Now, since the [interstate] highway[s] didn't immediately effect all states, what was the reaction of the states that had to pay for a project that didn't really concern them?

**Weingroff:** The way the interstate program was set up was that funds would be made available to every state so that, in theory, all of the states would complete their programs of interstate construction more or less at the same time. We kept very close track of the mileage in each state and every couple of years we would adjust the formula for distributing the interstate construction funds to try to achieve that goal of equal completion. And the answer wasn't as if we gave all the money to New York and New York got building and meanwhile Alabama didn't get anything – everybody got the share they needed to try to achieve this completion at more or less the same time, which would have been in the early 1970's (that was the original goal.) The fact that the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 gave the federal share at ninety percent gave the states great incentive to do their share. Although they had had some doubts about the need for a federal program, it didn't take them very long to come on board and to understand the benefits that each state was going to receive. Before '56, before 1956, many states felt 'why should we use our money to benefit drivers from other states? They don't vote in Alabama, they don't vote in New York' (well, New York was actually on board, so I shouldn't use that as an example.) But many states didn't see the need for an interstate program or they didn't see why they should be spending their money on it. But when it became a ninety-ten program, they had some incentive and they very quickly saw that each state was going to benefit from the program. So although there had been some doubts – some governors didn't like the idea initially – they basically came around and saw that it was going to happen whether they liked it or not and they began to embrace it. And not very long after the program got under way, it really had full support all over the country.

**Interviewer:** I think you answered this question, but one of our questions was: was the debate over the 1956 Federal-Aid Highway Act more of a constitutional question or more of a funding question? It was more funding, right?

**Weingroff:** For almost from the start of this nation under the constitution, the role of the federal government in what was called "internal improvements," which would have been roads and canals and so on, was debatable. It essentially is a question that we still address today: what is the proper role of the federal government under the constitution, compared with the states? For example, it wasn't clear in 1908, I'm sorry, in 1808, that the federal government had the authority to build roads in the states. After all, the ground on which you build the road was owned by the states. What right did the federal government have to go do it? The solution was a compromise: that the federal government would build a national road from Maryland to Ohio if the states involved would give permission to the federal government to do so. So they found a solution to this constitutional question of what role did the federal government have in road construction under the constitution. And all along, this issue kept coming up, and early in the twentieth century as we began talking about a federal road program. The issue was who is going to build the roads, the federal government or the states? In 1916, we basically answered the question and that answer has remained the same ever since. We were going to have a federal-aid program where we would provide the funds to the states, the states would build, own and operate, as well as maintain, the roads resulting from the new program. So by the time of the interstate program, it wasn't so much the constitutional issue that Congress had to wrestle with.

It is true that going back the 1940's, the nation's governors overall wished the federal-aid highway program would go out of business and that they would be completely responsible for building their roads, but they really didn't raise that objection to Congress. In fact, the Governor's Conference, which was the predecessor to the National Governor's Association, testified. At one point in 1955, one of the member's of the public works committee said to him that you're testifying in favor of this legislation [and] just not that long ago the governor's conference was opposed to it. Are you flip-flopping? And the witness said, yes! That's exactly what we're doing! We had some doubts about it, but we know it's going to happen anyway. And so we're going to get on board and go along and try to make suggestions to improve what's going to happen inevitably. So the constitutional issue really was not a major issue in 1956 as it had been in 1916.

**Interviewer:** Ok, so in 1916 for example, there was a lot of resistance to internal improvements?

**Weingroff:** Well in 1916, the question was what kind of assistance do you provide? The Supreme Court had rolled in a couple of cases that the federal government did have authority under the Constitution to build roads or canals or anything else. And so again, by 1916 it wasn't so much...the constitutional issue was in the background and the more important was who's going to do what? Many advocates, many people who supported good roads, thought the federal government ought to build good interstate roads with its own resources. Ultimately, that wasn't the direction we went – we went with the federal-aid program and that was a twentieth century solution to the nineteenth century problem of what role does the federal government have in internal improvements among the states. So, by 1956 it is in the background but it certainly wasn't something that had to be overcome – it wasn't a major concern of debate within the House or the Senate.

...Is that everything?

**Interviewer:** Yup, I guess that's everything.

**Weingroff:** Ok, great! Then you guys have a good weekend and we'll be communicating next week!

**Interviewer:** Thanks a lot!

**Weingroff:** Bye.