



Decline and Rebirth of the National Road — 1852–Present

In 1852 the Pennsylvania Railroad reached Pittsburgh and in 1853 the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad reached Wheeling, Virginia (now Wheeling, West Virginia). Taking the train was faster, less expensive, and more comfortable than traveling on the National Road, so use of the National Road declined. Taverns were converted to private homes, stores and stagecoach lines disappeared. People who had worked on the National Road went to work for the railroads or found other work. The busy National Road of the 1840s vanished. Over time the Road became part of a network of local roads. By the 1870s states no longer wanted to pay for the road. Counties took over maintenance. The National Road was neglected.

The invention and popularity of the “safety” bicycle in the 1880s led to a demand for good roads. The “safety” bicycle was very similar to today’s one-speed bicycles. Bicyclists organized the Good Roads Movement and the League of America Wheelmen. The movement gained the support of farmers and the railroads. They needed good roads to transport cargo to and from railroad stations.

In the early 1900s as use of the automobile increased, there was an even greater demand for good roads. Americans were on the move in their cars; they needed places to go and gas to get there. Hotels and gas stations took the place of taverns and stables. In 1912 federal funds for rebuilding the National Road were authorized. More and more motorists took to the roads after World War I.

In 1926 the American Association of State Highway Officials adopted a new road numbering system. U.S. route numbers were applied to many existing roads. U.S. Route 40 was created and in most places it went right on top of the old National Road.

U.S. Route 40 was as busy in the 1940s as the National Road had been in the 1840s. The traffic was different—tractor-trailer trucks instead of Conestoga wagons, buses instead of stagecoaches, gas stations and motels instead of stables and taverns.

In the 1950s and 1960s new Interstate Highway 70 took the place of U.S. Route 40 as the primary east-west route in the region. But people still travel on U.S. Route 40. When they do, they can see many of the sights people saw when they traveled the National Road in the 1800s.



Decline and Rebirth of the National Road — 1852–Present

Supplemental Activities

1. Write a song about that road's history. Sing it to the tune of Yankee Doodle, Hot Cross Buns, or some other favorite song.
2. Have your students see if anyone they know has some old photographs of cars and transportation from the early 1900s.



Student Reading: Traffic Leaves the National Road and Comes Back

Materials

- Copies of the reproducible pages **Traffic Leaves the National Road and Comes Back**.

Objectives

After reading the student reading and answering the thought question, students will be able to

- List three changes to the National Road after 1853.

Standards

Pennsylvania Standards for History

- 8.1.3 A
- 8.2.3 C

Pennsylvania Standards for Economics

- 6.1.3 D
- 6.3.3 B
- 6.4.3 G



Procedures

1. Make a copy of the reproducible pages for each student.
2. Have the students read and answer the thought questions.
3. Discuss the thought questions.

Thought Question Answers

- People have to stop to eat, sleep, and go the bathroom. People like to get places quickly.
- People don't use horses to travel, they go much quicker, there are lots more comforts for traveler.



Traffic Leaves the National Road and Comes Back

After 1853, railroads put an end to traffic on the National Road. It was cheaper and faster to use the railroad for travel and shipping. Instead of stagecoaches and wagons pulled by horses, people used railroad cars pulled by steam engines. People who had worked on the National Road went to work for the railroads or found other work. The busy National Road of the 1840s was gone. By the 1870s states no longer wanted to pay to maintain the National Road. The road was neglected.





Traffic Leaves the National Road and Comes Back

The invention of the “safety” bicycle in the 1880s again made people want good roads. The “safety” bicycle was very similar to today’s one-speed bicycles. Bicyclists organized the Good Roads Movement. Farmers and the railroads also needed good roads to transport goods to and from railroad stations.

In the early 1900s more and more cars were on the road. Americans were on the move in their cars. They needed places to go and gas to get there. Drivers wanted smooth roads and the government started to pave them.

In 1926 officials created a numbering system for roads. U.S. Route 40 was created. In most places it covered the

old National Road. The road was paved. In the 1940s U.S. Route 40 was as busy as the National Road had been in the 1840s. The traffic was different. There were tractor-trailer trucks instead of Conestoga wagons. There were buses instead of stagecoaches. There were gas stations and hotels instead of stables and taverns.

In the 1950s and 1960s new Interstate Highway 70 was developed. It took the place of U.S. Route 40 as the primary route in the region. However, people still travel on U.S. Route 40. When they do, they can see many of the sights people saw when they traveled the National Road in the 1800s.



Thought Question:

How would travel on the National Road today be like travel in the 1800s? How would it be different?



Student Activity: A Poem and a Riddle About the National Road

Materials

- Copies of the reproducible pages **A Poem and a Riddle About the National Road**.

Objectives

After completing the student activity, the students will be able to

- List two ways travel on the National Road changed.

Standards

Pennsylvania Standards for History

- 8.1.3 A
- 8.2.3 C
- 8.3.3 C

Pennsylvania Standards for Economics

- 6.5.3 D



Procedures

1. Copy reproducible pages for each student.
2. Have the students complete.

Activity Answers

- **#1. Poem:** a horse and horseshoes — clanging hoof; a railroad engine — steam king; the National Road — old pike.
- **#2. Poem:** The last two lines of the poem mean that railroads put an end to most of the traffic on the National Road.
- **Riddle:** A car.



A Poem and a Riddle about the National Road

Directions: Read the poem below. It was written after 1850 (author unknown). Then answer the questions below.

We hear no more of the clanging hoof
And the stagecoach rattling by;
For the steam king rules the traveled world,
And the old pike's left to die.

1. Which words in the poem refer to

a horse and horseshoes _____

a railroad engine _____

the National Road _____

2. Explain what the last two lines of the poem mean.



A Poem and a Riddle about the National Road

Directions: Solve the riddle below. Then try making up your own riddle about a feature of the National Road.

What is it?

It runs but has no legs.

It has a body but is not alive.

It has a horn but no tail.

It travels on the National Road.

It is a _____.





Student Activity: Picture Matching on the National Road

Materials

- Copies of the reproducible pages **Picture Matching on the National Road**.

Objectives

After completing the student activity, the students will be able to

- List three common sites associated with travel and transportation in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Standards

Pennsylvania Standards for History

- 8.1.3 A
- 8.2.3 C
- 8.3.3 C

Pennsylvania Standards for Economics

- 6.3.3 B



Procedures

1. Copy reproducible pages for each student.
2. Have the students complete.

Activity Answers

- Cyclists and their bicycles — 2
- Car stuck in the mud — 1
- U.S. Route 40 sign — 5
- Gas Station — 4
- Auto-era hotel — 3



Picture Matching on the National Road





Picture Matching on the National Road

Directions: Write the statement number under the picture that it matches.

1. People with cars wanted the old National Road to be fixed.
2. The Good Roads Movement was started by people who wanted better roads for their sport.
3. More cars meant new places to visit and stay overnight.
4. Instead of stables with grain for horses, the new National Road had these.
5. The National Road was fixed up and became this highway.