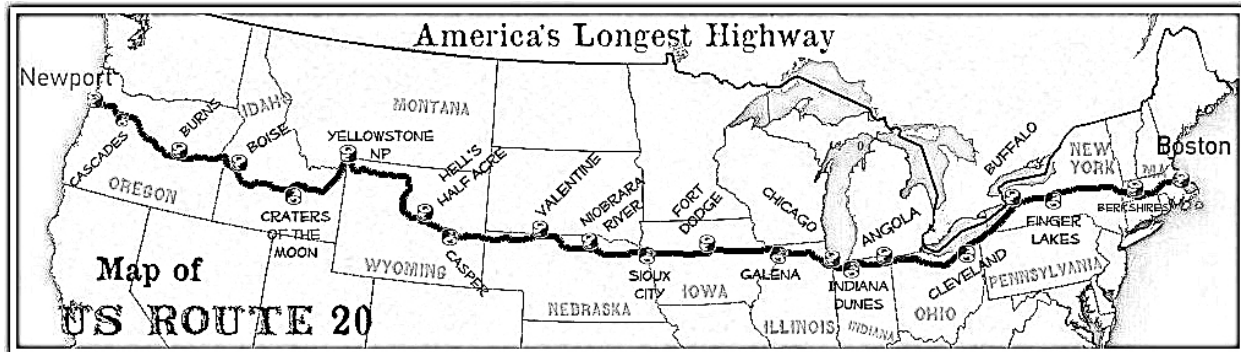


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A Brief History of US Route 20

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There are many pre-histories to the formation of US Route 20 and we hope to cover many of them over time. In this article we will focus on the official Federal Highway known as US 20.

The Federal Highway Acts of 1917 and 1921 allowed for federal monies to go directly to the States for the improvement and building of highways. As most roads at this time were dirt, these acts were greatly welcomed.

The 1921 Act required the identification of important road ways that could be used in the event of war. With this, various states began different methods of marking their highways. Some with painted colors on telephone poles, others with elaborate signs while in New England, important routes were assigned numbers.

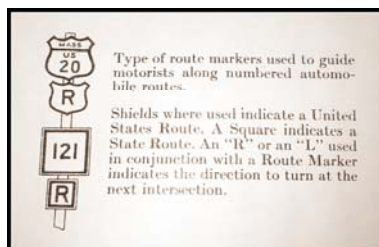
It was the New England System that inspired The Joint Board on State Highway officials to develop a uniform nationwide highway numbering system

The Board first met on April 20-21, 1925 and agreed to create a group of highways, that would be known as United States Highways. The board designated that series of regional public works

and highway officials would meet in May and June to designate which roads, already in existence should become US Highways.

The roads that would become US Route 20 in Massachusetts were officially identified at the Boston meeting on June 15, 1925. Other regions met as follows; Western - May 15, Great Lakes - June 3, Mid Atlantic—May 15.

The Joint Board on Interstate Highways convened again after each region had selected their roads to adopt, connect, number and map out the routes for which had been chosen. The first day of meetings on August 3, 1925 was a preliminary review session. The second day saw the adoption of the US Route Shield. This shield was modeled after the shield of the United States.



On August 5, 50,000 miles of highway were selected to become US Highways and be numbered and signed with the uniform markers picked the previous day.

It was decided that the final numbering system would be delegated to sub-committees and voted upon at a later date

On November 18, 1925, the Joint Board issued its approval of the complete preliminary United States Highway System. The states could still make suggestions or ask for any changes until a final approval would be ready the following year.

Most of what designated as Route 20 did not face any issues. The only area of concern was voiced by Oregon. As Route 20 was to run to Astoria via Yellowstone National Park, Oregon felt that since these roads were in poor condition and closed during the winter months, direct travel could not occur and Oregon would be left without a direct cross country route. Therefore, Route 20 was truncated to the eastern entrance to Yellowstone NP and US 30 was moved to connect to Astoria.

On November 11, 1926, the American Association of State Highway Officials approved the final map drawn of the US Highway system—its official birth.

Route 20 would begin at the State House in Boston, MA and continue to Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming.

In 1926, one could now travel on US Route 20 from Boston, MA to Yellowstone National Park.

As the number implies, all US highways ending in zero, were to be transcontinental routes, but with Oregon's objection, 20's transcontinental status was cut short.

The first major route change of US 20 came in 1932, as a 48 mile section from Northborough to Palmer, MA was relocated to the newly constructed Southwest Cutoff and to previously designated state highways.

As various projects through the WPA were assigned, roads in Montana, Idaho and Oregon were improved greatly. The state of Oregon, now asked the AASHO in 1937 to consider extending US Route 20 along the improved roads. AASHO did not approve this first request, stating that roads in Idaho were still not up to highway grade and it would take an additional two years to improve these sections. It was on June 3, 1940 that they agreed to extend Route 20 from West Yellowstone, MT to Albany, OR. It had been the policy of the AASHO to not assign route numbers in National Parks, therefore, Route 20 officially was divided into an eastern and western section.

Later in 1940, US Route 20 was extended further to the Pacific Ocean at Newport, OR.

In 1940 as well, Route 20 was discontinued from the Massachusetts State House in Boston to Arlington St.

Also during this time, one route that began on Cape Cod and initially went to the Hudson River was gradually expanded westward. US 6 starting in Provincetown, was extended to Erie, PA, then Greeley, CO and finally to

Long Beach, CA. This final extension in 1937 made US Route 6 the longest highway in the United States with a total length of 3,653 miles.

Meanwhile other routes, were gaining notoriety in books, song or just by name. Route 66 was coined the "Mother Road" by John Steinbeck in *The Grapes of Wrath*, and the Lincoln Highway harkened back to a trail name, took travelers on a more southern route across the US.



Route 20 remained the second longest highway in the country behind Route 6 until June 18, 1963, when the State of California asked the AASHO to approve its highway renumbering system. AASHO agreed and Route 6 was truncated to Bishop, CA and thus was reduced to 3,227 miles.

Route 20 was bumped to the rank of the longest highway in the United States and had retained this status since 1963.

Road purists may insist that since Route 20 is divided into two sections at Yellowstone NP, that the designation of America's Longest Continuous Highway should remain with Route 6. The Historic US Route 20 Association follows the Federal Highway Administration's total calculation of

US Route 20 and therefore retains the claim of "America's Longest Highway".

Several changes occurred after this 1963 designation. One mile of highway in Boston was discontinued to its current terminus at Kenmore Square. Various road projects allowed for straightening or alignments onto safer highways later constructed. This was most apparent in some urban areas and most notably in the state of Iowa where an interstate grade highway has been slowly reassigned as US Route 20.

However, much of the original 1926 route can still be driven in its entirety. This cannot be said of the most famous highway in the United States, Route 66. That road has been cut up, abandoned or moved entirely that in 1985, the AASHO decommissioned the route entirely. Today, it exists as a historic highway with various organizations promoting the old "mother road".

Route 20 still remains a sleeping giant, but the Historic US Route 20 Association plans to bring its amazing history to life by working with the many towns and organizations along its path to promote the highway and bring tourists and travelers back to the road less traveled.

