

GUEST COLUMN

North to south, east to west, interstate system is golden

This month is the golden anniversary of the interstate highway system. It was started by President Eisenhower who used the excuse that national defense would be enhanced by a better transportation network. That all made sense. We were still worried about a Russian attack, remember?

As with all such ventures, politics played a part. For example, how the highways would be numbered. Previously, U.S. highways were numbered starting from the north and east, and the numbers then rise to the west.

In order to get acceptance from congressional members in the rest of the country, they were told they would get the low (read more prestigious) numbers.

That is why the most southerly east-west route is our I-10. Then next higher up is I-20 serving Dallas on way up north to I-94.

The north-south roads start with number 5 on the West Coast over to 95 on the East Coast.

Highways that are mostly east and west have even numbers; north and south ones have odd numbers. That comes from the railroad tradition of numbering trains depending on the usual direction of their route.

As a further inducement to get support from congressional members outside of the Northeast, mileages also start from the west and south. Thus, if you see a mileage marker on I-10 that says 500, you know you are that many miles from El Paso.

Most of the interstate numbers end with either a 0 or 5. That allows for future highways so if a new east-west interstate were to go through Waco the numbers 14, 16 and 18 would be available.

If an interstate goes around a city, it is given a three-digit number with the first digit being even and the last two digits the same as the primary highway through the city. Thus in San Antonio we have 410. Houston has 610. The even number tells us the road is a circle and the next two numbers tell us what the base road is.

It is possible for there to be a duplicate of these numbers. New Orleans also has a 610. Jacksonville, Richmond and Washington each have a 295.

The nicknames of these routes that circle a city vary by geography. In the Northeast they are beltways. Here in God's country they are loops.

But wait, there is more. How about a tangent? That would be an interstate which starts from one of the highways and goes to a destination where it dead ends. It has

an odd number and then the originating route number. There are none in Texas, but look at a map of Pennsylvania. Interstate 380 leaves 80 and stops in Scranton. 180 departs 80 for Williamsport, and 176 serves Reading.

That should answer most of your questions except for one. Why is it that Hawaii has interstate highways? Isn't that a non sequitur?

In fact, they really do. For example they have interstates H1 and H3. Go figure.



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J. Ronald Carey writes how no matter which direction traveled, interstate system is golden. **Page 4A**