

## **Orange County Freeways**

Transportation has always played a key role in the history of Orange County. Whether it's been stage routes, railroads, or paved highways. But since the 1950s, it's been the freeways that have led the way.

The term "freeway" dates back to about 1930. It was coined to suggest a *free* flow of traffic – a highway *free* from cross streets, *free* from traffic lights, *free* from homes and businesses, and *free* from pedestrians.

Yet the development of our freeway system certainly goes back even further than that. At least back to the 1920s, when things like the Manchester Boulevard and Imperial Highway projects were getting underway. Manchester Boulevard was completed down to Santa Ana in 1935, and it wasn't long before they were talking about transforming it into a "freeway."

In 1939, the State of California authorized the route of the Santa Ana Freeway, and the Orange County Board of Supervisors began changing the zoning along the way to allow for its eventual construction.

By the 1950s, the Federal, state, and county governments had mapped out an extensive freeway system for all of Southern California. Here's the Orange County grid as it was laid out back then. If you look close, you'll notice a few freeways that never got built, including the Pacific Coast Freeway paralleling Coast Highway, the Huntington Beach Freeway along Beach Boulevard, and a freeway through La Habra and Brea.

Work on the Santa Ana Freeway began on the Los Angeles end in 1944, but they didn't even get to Orange County until 1950, when construction began in Buena Park.

By 1953, they had finished the stretch through Santa Ana, and the Chamber of Commerce held a big ribbon-cutting ceremony. There's First District Supervisor Cye Featherly on the left in the white hat. On his right is Sheriff Jim Musick. I expect he was there because they started the celebration with a motorcade, led by some of his motorcycle officers.

Construction on the I-5 continued on through the 1950s, and by 1960 it was complete all the way through Orange County, from Buena Park to San Clemente.

During the 1960s, we had five different freeways under construction in Orange County. Construction started on the 55 (I still can't quite get used to calling it the Costa Mesa Freeway) started in 1961, and the first segment opened a year later. Here they are at work on the Chapman Avenue interchange in Orange.

By 1973, the 55 had been extended south of 405, but the final segment wasn't completed until 1990. By the way, this was also the first freeway in Orange County to have "carpool" lanes, back in 1985.

Work on the 405 started on the Los Angeles end in 1957, and the final segment through South Orange County was completed in 1969, creating the El Toro Y at its junction with the I-5.

The first segment of the Garden Grove Freeway opened in 1964, and the final stretch east to the 55 was completed in 1967.

The first segment of the Riverside Freeway opened in 1958, but it wasn't completed all the way out the Santa Ana Canyon until 1971. Then as you know, in 1996, the toll lanes were added down the center. They were operated by a private company until they were purchased by the Orange County Transportation Authority in 2002.

The fifth freeway to start construction in the 1960s was the Orange Freeway, and the first segment opened in 1969. It was completed in 1976.

We had just one freeway built in the 1970s – the first stretch of the Corona del Mar Freeway, which opened in 1979.

In the 1980s we made the switch from traditional freeways to toll roads. The Transportation Corridor Authority was formed in 1986 to build several new toll roads in Orange County, starting with the Foothill Transportation Corridor, which opened in stages between 1995 and 1998. This is the toll plaza at Windy Ridge.

The TCA also built the Eastern Transportation Corridor – the 261 – to connect up with the 241, and extended the 73 south to become the San Joaquin Hills Transportation Corridor. And they extended the 133 north to meet up with the 241.

And the story doesn't end there. In the 1990s we began expanding our existing freeways – first the 5, and now the 22. And as you know far better than I – plans are being considered for the Foothill South extension.

It's hard to under estimate the impact that the freeways have had on our development. Freeways – along with imported water – certainly have done more than any other factor to fuel the growth of South County.

And for better or for worse, they allow people to commute all over the Southland. In the 1950s and '60s, it was people driving north to their jobs in Los Angeles. Now Orange County has its own bedroom communities throughout the Inland Empire

Freeways have helped to make us what we are today. What we do about them now is going to help shape Orange County's future.