



THE INTERSTATE HIGHWAY SYSTEM



- The Interstate System approved for North Carolina in September 1946 included Route 296 (U.S. 25, Asheville to South Carolina via Hendersonville) which was later to be designated I-26.
- In 1966, two segments of I-26 were completed. These segments were from East Flat Rock to near Fletcher and from near Fletcher to N.C. 180, west of Skyland.
- On Aug. 2, 1966, construction started on the dual bridges over the Green River on I-26.
 - This \$2.3 million contract was awarded to Wannamaker and Wells Co. of Orangeburg, S.C.
 - In December 1967, the contractor began pouring the Green River bridge decks.
 - By 1968, the Green River Bridge was believed to be the highest in eastern United States at, 225-feet tall.
 - Because of maintenance problems in painting a structure of this height, unpainted corrosion-resistant steel was used in the superstructure, as well as for encasement of the piers.
 - The Green River Bridge opened to traffic in 1972.
- In 1969, I-26 was open from I-40 south to today's NC 225 near Hendersonville, and from about NC 108 south to the South Carolina line.
- In 1973, a short stretch of I-26 from the I-26/US 25 connector to exit 28 was finished.
- By late 1975, I-26 was completed from I-40 in Asheville to the South Carolina line, except for a short stretch near Tryon, which opened in 1976.
- By 1979, the I-26/US 74 freeway interchange (exit 36) was finished.
- In 1980, I-26 is complete, except for a rest area-welcome center planned north of the South Carolina line.
- Construction begins on I-26 from Mars Hill to the Tennessee line in 1996.
 - Construction costs were \$224 million for the highway and \$6 million for the Welcome Center.
 - A total of 84 contractors and subcontractors were used to plan, design and build the nine-mile segment.
 - On Aug. 5, 2003, the I-26 project between Mars Hill and US 19 was complete. It provides a four-lane highway from Columbus, Ohio to Charleston, S.C., promoting economic growth throughout western North Carolina and the entire Appalachian region of the United States.
 - Two wildlife underpasses were built under this section of interstate to provide a safe crossing for wildlife.
 - The 220-foot high Laurel Creek Bridge is specially equipped with an anti-icing system to prevent ice from forming on the bridge.
 - The \$105.6 million contract for rough grading and drainage from US 19 to Laurel Creek Road was the single largest contract ever awarded by NCDOT.
 - The highest elevation, 3,875 feet, on North Carolina's interstate system is on I-26 in Madison County.
- To protect the natural beauty and character of Madison County, the N.C. Board of Transportation designated I-26 from US 19 to the Tennessee line as a scenic highway, the state's first interstate to be designated as such.