



# THE INTERSTATE HIGHWAY SYSTEM



- In 1956, I-85 would begin in Virginia and end at I-65 in Alabama. It would traverse North Carolina for some 233 miles and be the longest interstate route encompassing more than a third of the state's total interstate mileage.
- I-85 would enter North Carolina just north of Henderson and exit the state south of Kings Mountain, traveling through Durham, Burlington, Greensboro, High Point, Lexington and Charlotte.
- Interstate routes were designed to connect the larger cities, while at the same time serving the highly industrial and agricultural areas of the country. An example of this is I-85, a north-south route, which swerves westward towards Durham to line up with the industrial Piedmont. This area is often referred to today as the Piedmont Crescent.
- North Carolina had been building segments of its interstate system since 1949, before massive federal aid for interstate construction was available. The Lexington Bypass (US 29 and US 70) was one of the earliest segments and is now part of I-85.
- On Sept. 9, 1958, the first segment of I-85, an 11.3-mile section, opened in Mecklenburg County.
- In 1960, an 18-mile link of I-85 in Vance and Warren counties along with a 46-mile section between west Durham and Greensboro opened to traffic.
- A portion of US 29/70 between Greensboro and Salisbury was incorporated in the I-85 route in 1960 when additional grade separations and access control was secured.
- Also in 1960, a 4.5-mile section of the southern extension of the Charlotte Bypass was ready for traffic. This extended the route from Mecklenburg County into Gaston County in the direction of Gastonia.
- By the end of 1960, several sections of I-85 were completed and opened, including:
  - a 14-mile segment of the Charlotte Bypass;
  - a 15.4-mile segment of the Salisbury Bypass;
  - a 13.8-mile segment between Greensboro and Whitsett;
  - a 18.3-mile segment between Henderson and the Virginia line; and
  - a 22.2-mile segment between Whitsett and Efland.
- Contracts for three projects on I-85 were awarded during 1960. These projects included:
  - grading and structures for 10.9 miles of the Gastonia Bypass in Gaston County;
  - paving 5.4 miles of the Durham Bypass in Durham County; and
  - paving a 9.1-mile section of I-85 in Cleveland County from Kings Mountain to the South Carolina line.
- In June 1963, the N.C. State Highway Commission requested additional interstate mileage for the Greensboro and Raleigh-Durham metropolitan areas. The requests were for the I-85 spur from I-85 near Groometown to Lee Street via Freeman Mill Road and for the I-85 spur from I-85 at US 70 West of Durham and connecting back to I-85 via US 70 continuing south to Research Triangle Park and east to the Raleigh Beltline at Wade Avenue.



- As of Jan. 1, 1965, 133.6 miles of I-85 had been completed, more than any other interstate in North Carolina. This included 42.4 miles from the South Carolina line to and including the Charlotte Bypass; 20.8 miles from China Grove to Lexington; 51.7 miles from Greensboro to and including the Durham Bypass and 18.7 miles from Henderson to the Virginia state line.
- The N.C. General Assembly appropriated \$167,000 to build the first welcome centers in North Carolina on I-85 and I-95 near the Virginia border. North Carolina's first Welcome Center was located on I-85, two miles from the Virginia line. It was officially opened and dedicated on Aug. 1, 1968. The cost of the center was about \$85,000, exclusive of paving and grading, and contained about 2,800 square feet of floor space.
- By 1965, I-85 was complete from the South Carolina line to Charlotte and the entire stretch between northwest Charlotte and Durham was complete in the early 1970s. However, the "temporary I-85" between Greensboro and Lexington did not have full interstate status due to too many access roads. The six-lane, newly aligned section between Greensboro and Lexington opened in 1984 and the temporary I-85 status was no longer needed.
- There have been many widening projects on I-85, including an eight-lane widening through Charlotte between I-77 and US 29/49, six-to eight-lane widening through Gaston and western Mecklenburg counties, and widening of I-85 between Greensboro and Durham.
- The NC 109/I-85 interchange opened in October 2003 and marked the beginning of a much-anticipated route connecting I-85 Business and I-40, two of the largest and most important roads in our state.