

Travel and Transportation



Early 19th-century Americans were a people on the move. Many were heading west. The small roads and trails could not hold the heavy traffic. Travel was slow and hard, so America started making improvements in transportation.

Transportation growth happened for 4 main reasons:

1. *The Louisiana Purchase* doubled the size of the country in 1803.
2. *The War of 1812* showed the need for better communication and defense.
3. *The cost of shipping goods* over land was too expensive. In 1816, one ton of goods from Europe could be shipped for \$9. For the same price, it could be shipped only 30 miles on land in the United States. Transportation improvements were needed to make it cheaper to ship goods over land. (Transportation Revolution, p. 132-152)
4. *Settlers wanted to move west.* With roads described as unfit for travel this was a difficult task. Sometimes they were spotted with fifteen-inch tree stumps throughout the dense forest. At first, the Wilderness Road in Kentucky was the main way that settlers traveled west. In the early 1800s, the Ohio River was used to travel west and in 1825, the Erie Canal connected the Hudson River to Lake Erie, improving water travel. However, even with the improved water routes, many settlers still chose to move westward by land.

Travel Times by Horseback: 1820 - 1843

City	Time	Year
Noblesville to Indianapolis	4 to 6 Hours	1835-1843
Indianapolis to Lawrenceburg	About 3 Days	1843
Indianapolis to Cincinnati	2 Days	1834
Cincinnati to Indianapolis	2 ½ to 3 Days	1834
Richmond to Indianapolis	2 ½ Days	1840
Indianapolis to Fort Wayne	5 Days	1824
Fort Wayne to Indianapolis	5 Days	1835
Indianapolis to Westfield	54 Hours	1843
Philadelphia to Indianapolis	About 3 Weeks	1841
Indianapolis to Cincinnati	15-20 Days (Driving Hogs)	
Noblesville to Indianapolis	3 to 4 Days (Driving Hogs)	



1835 Map of Indiana and Ohio

Transportation in Indiana

By the mid 1820s, there were many ways to travel in Indiana, but they were not easy. Most roads or trails were in poor shape. The best ways to travel included:

1) *River travel* - Rivers were important to transportation and communication. Many towns grew up along rivers. Roads often followed rivers. The Ohio and Mississippi rivers were very important for transportation.

- People used canoes, flatboats and keel boats for transportation. Steamboats were used for moving goods because they were fast and cheap. They also connected major ports.

2) *Roads* - The early roads in Indiana were very poor in quality. Most personal travel was either on foot or horse. Sturdy wagons were used to transport goods and immigrants. The Michigan Road was the first major road in the state. It was used by passengers and for hog drives. Some people traveled by stagecoach.

- Plank roads were used, which were wooden roads. Travelers also used turnpikes, which were roads where people had to pay a fee or toll. Not many turnpikes were built because they were expensive.

3) *Canals* – Canals are man-made waterways that connect bodies of water like rivers and lakes. Major canals of the time included the Erie Canal, the Ohio-Erie Canal, and the Miami-Erie Canal. Ohio built the most canals.

- Indiana began planning to build canals in 1816, but most Indiana canals were never built because there wasn't enough money.

4) *Railroads* - Railroads did not play an important role in transportation until after the 1830s. The first "railroad" in the state was built in Shelbyville in 1834. The "train" consisted of carriages on rail that were pulled by horses. The first true railroad, which ran from Madison to Indianapolis, started running in 1847. Railroads gradually spread across the country to help with the move West.

Transportation Difficulties

Why did canals fail as a good system of transportation?

- ◆ They were expensive to build and repair.
- ◆ Railroads were cheaper, faster and more direct. (Transportation Revolution, p.32-55)

Failure of Indiana Transportation

Most of the other states created transportation networks. Why did Indiana fail?

- 1) Indiana lacked organization.
- 2) It did not have enough money for all of its projects.
- 3) Indiana's waterways were not as important as those in Ohio and Pennsylvania.
- 4) Indiana was slow to make improvements.

The National Road



Since the late 1700s, and with the support of President Washington, many Americans called for a road system that could get people and goods to the West. They wanted the road to span the entire East and West. This would allow for the exchange of goods and improve the entire country's economy.

In 1811, construction of the road began in Cumberland, Maryland, and created many new jobs for Americans. Trees were cut and hills were flattened to prepare for the massive road system. Some of the first bridges were constructed to allow for travel over rivers. These bridges were made of stone, wood, and eventually steel.

Construction of the road stopped in 1852 in Vandalia, Illinois, before it reached its original goal. Still the road was a major accomplishment. It was a main route for settlers moving west and made it easier to ship goods.

Suggested Readings on Transportation and Internal Improvements
Esarey, Logan; *History of Indiana*.

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Hulbert, Archer B.; *The Cumberland Road*, Arthur H Clark Co., 1904.

Hunter, Louis B.; *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, Harvard, 1949.

Indiana Historical Society; *Transportation and the Early Nation*, Indianapolis, 1982.

Meyer, Balthasar; *History of Transportation in the United States before 1860*, reprint by Peter Smith, 1948.

Searight, Thomas B.; *The Old Pike: A History of the National Road*, Uniontown, Pa., 1894.

Taylor, George Rogers; *The Transportation Revolution 1815-1860*, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1951; Harper Torchbooks, 1968.