

The **National Highway System (NHS)** is a network of strategic highways within the United States, including the Interstate Highway System and other roads serving major airports, ports, rail or truck terminals, railway stations, pipeline terminals and other strategic transport facilities, providing access to 207 airports, 198 ports, 190 rail or truck terminals, 67 Amtrak railway stations, 58 pipeline terminals as well as 82 intercity bus terminals, 307 public transit stations, 37 ferry terminals and 20 multi-purpose passenger terminals. The NHS system includes 4% of the nation's roads, but carries more than 40% of all highway traffic, 75% of heavy truck traffic, and 90% of tourist traffic. All urban areas with a population of over 50,000 and about 90% of America's population live within 5 miles of the network.

The National Highway System Designation Act of Congress was signed into law by President Bill Clinton on November 28, 1995. The legislation designated about 160,955 miles (259,032 km) of roads, including the Interstate Highway System, as the NHS. Since there was a cap on total mileage, the FHWA in coordination and cooperation with the states, local officials, and metropolitan planning organizations (MPO's) made a decision on what routes will be included in NHS and what routes will not be included based on the following 5 sub-system criteria:

Five sub-systems of NHS

- Interstate : The Eisenhower Interstate System of highways retains its separate identity within the NHS.
- Other Principal Arterials: These are highways in rural and urban areas which provide access between an arterial and a major port, airport, public transportation facility, or other intermodal transportation facility.
- Strategic Highway Network (STRAHNET): This is a network of highways which are important to the United States' strategic defense policy and which provide defense access, continuity and emergency capabilities for defense purposes.
- Major Strategic Highway Network Connectors: These are highways which provide access between major military installations and highways which are part of the Strategic Highway Network.
- Intermodal Connectors: These highways provide access between major intermodal facilities and the other four subsystems making up the National Highway System.

The NHS benefits our transportation system by:

- Encouraging states to focus on a limited number of high-priority routes and to concentrate on improving them with federal-aid funds.
- Helping meet the challenges of global economic competition by enhancing our different modes of transportation, increasing Americas productivity, and bolstering its economy.
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- Improving multi-modal connectivity by serving ports, airports, Amtrak stations, rail/truck terminals, intercity bus terminals, public transit stations, ferry terminals pipeline terminals and multipurpose passenger terminals.
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- Providing virtually every American with improved access to work and to market. This enhances the ability of our transportation system to sustain economic growth and help our nation thrive in the increasingly competitive international marketplace.