

**Frank Turner - Architect of the  
Interstate**

**Lead: Frank Turner shaped the largest public-works project in U.S. history.**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: Francis Turner grew up in Texas farm country during the Great Depression. At that time a person could work off their poll tax by doing a day's work building or repairing farm-to-market roads and he remembered helping his father on those roads. He studied soil science at Texas A & M**

**University and worked on military roads in Alaska during the war. After World War II he went to help reconstruct the highway system in the Philippines.**

**In 1954 when President Eisenhower appointed General Lucius Clay who had organized the Berlin Airlift, to head a commission that was to design a vast network of national highways, Frank Turner was made head of the Commission staff. He helped develop the plan, draft the legislation, and lobbied heavily to get it through Congress. Turner and the Commission did extensive national surveys seeking information on existing driving patterns and people's desires. They criss-crossed the map of the**

**continental United States with routes, which over two decades gradually became desires etched in asphalt.**

**Though most interstate highway mileage was in the country-side, most of the dollars were spent in and around cities. The interstate system helped shift the economic and political balance of power in the nation from the great northern and midwestern cities to the Sun Belt of the South and West. They also helped empty out old urban neighborhoods making it possible for people to work in the city and live in the suburbs.**

**Frank Turner became head of the Federal Highway Commission in 1969 just as a strong reaction set in to the**

**building of inter-urban highways. Soon in many cities it would be politically difficult to construct a downtown interstate. Congress became very stingy with funds for maintenance and the system fell for a time into disrepair. Funds intended for highways were used for mass transit, provoking Turner's disdain for what he called "rabbit" transit He said, "if you like waiting for elevators, you'll love rabbit transit."**

**Frank Turner may have been a man out of his time but his creation, nearly 50,000 miles of smooth, fast and with some notable exceptions uncrowded interstates is an engineering triumph and a feature of national life few Americans would even consider**

**living without.**

**At the University of Richmond, this  
is Dan Roberts.**

**Resources**

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