

Boston Post Road

1600s and 1700s



The Boston Post Road was the first postal route between Boston and New York. The three different routes or alignments were: Upper Post Road, Lower Post Road, and Middle Post Road. Portions of these postal roads were eventually incorporated into more substantial trails and pathways, leading to portions of several U.S. and interstate routes.

Before European settlers colonized North America, Native Americans had established trails that were used frequently. These paths eventually became portions of post roads, which were used by post riders to deliver mail to the early colonists. The first portions of the Boston Post Road were laid out in 1673, becoming America's first mail route. In the 1700s, riders carried the Boston News-Letter, widely considered America's first regular newspaper, along the Boston Post Road with regular mail, sharing information with settlers and connecting towns along the route.

In 1753, then-Deputy Postmaster Benjamin Franklin traveled the Boston Post Road to standardize postal rates based on distance. Stone markers were placed at mile points along the route. In 1783, the Boston Post Road carried America's first long-distance stagecoach service from New York to Boston, corresponding with improvements in the road's surface that resulted in a faster, safer, and more efficient transportation system. The success of the stagecoach service along this route convinced Congress to send mail by stagecoach instead of lone rider.

In 1925, when the federal government asked each state to designate its principal routes, the Massachusetts public works chief picked two branches of the Boston Post Road as U.S. Route 1 and U.S. Route 20.

A painting by artist Carl Rakeman depicts Benjamin Franklin on the Boston Post Road in 1763.



U.S. Department of Transportation
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Contributions & Crossroads
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Boston Post Road marker (mile 62) at East Brookfield, Massachusetts (left).

Boston Post Road marker (mile 65) at Brookfield, Massachusetts (above).

Quick Facts

- North America's first post rider carried mail that consisted of "two port-mantles crammed with letters, sundry goods and bags" from New York to Boston in 1673. The two-week, 250-mile trip was through New Haven and Hartford in Connecticut, and then on to Springfield, Worcester, and finally Boston in Massachusetts.
- Mail service left New York once each week in the summer (and once every two weeks in the winter) and followed the Lower Post Road, where the New York rider exchanged mail bags with the rider who had come down from Boston. By late 1600s, the Boston Post Road included a total of three routes due to new settlements between New York and Boston.
- The Boston Post Road became a portion of The King's Highway, a 1,300-mile road laid out from 1650 to 1735 in the American colonies to link Charleston, South Carolina, to Boston, on the order of Charles II of England.
- Population growth in the various colonies resulted in growth in travel and commerce among the colonies. Soon after Benjamin Franklin and his assistants placed stone mile markers along the Boston Post Road, the General Assembly of Connecticut ordered all towns located on any post route to erect stone markers, at least 2 feet high, by the side of the road to indicate the distance to the nearest county seat. Signposts were also erected wherever roads diverged to guide travelers.
- In 1789, newly elected President George Washington made a tour along the Boston Post Road from New York to Boston. Several old New England buildings still display the sign "George Washington Slept Here" along this route.
- The oldest Boston Post Road was the Upper Post Road, which was the most traveled of the three routes. Portions of this road loosely correspond to today's U.S. Route 5 and U.S. Route 20. The Lower Post Road goes along the shoreline from New York before turning north through Providence, Rhode Island, to Boston. Portions of the Lower Post Road loosely correspond to the original alignment of U.S. Route 1 in eastern Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts. The youngest portion of the Boston Post Road was the Middle Post Road: the shortest, fastest, and most straightforward route from New York to Boston. Portions of the Middle Post Road loosely correspond to today's U.S. Route 44 and U.S. Route 16.

Reference and Additional Information

<https://connecticuthistory.org/boston-post-road-carved-out-three-early-travel-routes-through-state/>
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