

Interstate 70, Colorado

Eisenhower/Johnson Memorial Tunnels and Glenwood Canyon

1973, 1979, 1992



Colorado Department of Transportation

The Eisenhower/Johnson Memorial Tunnels and the Glenwood Canyon Project represent successful partnerships between the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the state of Colorado to complete the U.S. Interstate System and spur economic growth in the region. The projects were largely funded with federal dollars and have become a major contributor to the safe movement of people and goods across the Continental Divide and to the Colorado tourism industry.

Bird's-eye view of Interstate 70 through Glenwood Canyon.

Mountain tunnels provide freer movement of people and goods through otherwise difficult terrain.

The Eisenhower/Johnson Memorial Tunnels, the highest vehicular tunnels in the world, are key features of Interstate 70 in Colorado. They improve connectivity, travel safety, and reliability between east and west by uniting the state through the Rocky Mountains and the Continental Divide.

I-70 has had tremendous impact on tourism in Colorado and improved the efficiency and safety of movement of people and goods through the Rocky Mountains. It has also enabled both residential and commercial development in mountain areas along the route.

“This project proves that desirable environmental goals and great engineering feats can be mutually compatible.”

—Thomas D. Larson,
former FHWA Administrator,
at the opening ceremonies for the Glenwood Canyon portion of I-70.



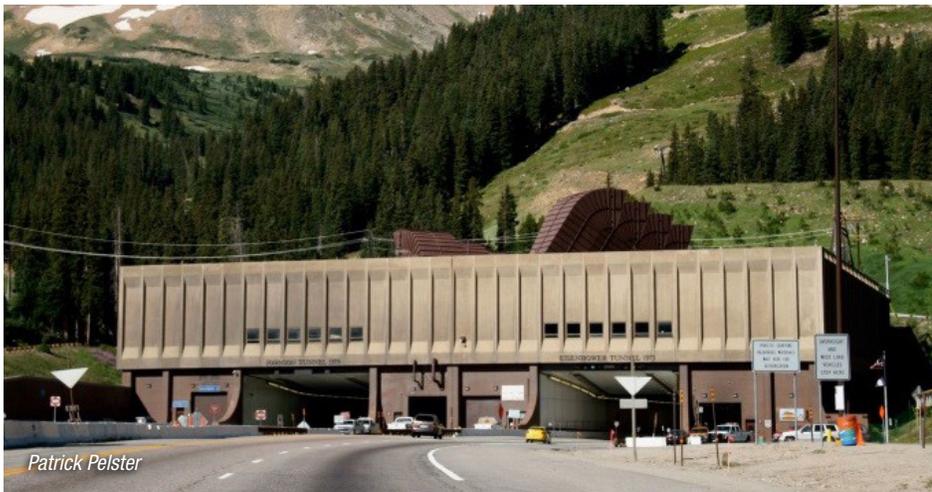
U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration

Contributions & Crossroads
Our National Road System's Impact on the U.S. Economy and Way of Life

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2008 photo (left) of eastern portal of Eisenhower Tunnel.

Pilot bore of the Eisenhower Memorial Tunnel (above).

Quick Facts

- The 1.7 mile-long Eisenhower/Johnson tunnels are located approximately 60 miles west of Denver. They are the highest vehicular tunnels in the world, with an average elevation of 11,112 feet, also making them the highest point in the Interstate Highway System.
- The west bore of the tunnel was completed in 1973 and named after President Dwight Eisenhower. The east bore was finished in 1979 and named for Edwin C. Johnson, a past governor and U.S. senator from Colorado.
- Federal aid administered through the FHWA accounted for more than 90 percent of the \$117 million cost for the Eisenhower bore, which at the time was a record for a single Federal-aid project.
- Nearly 6,000 people were employed on the tunnel project at various times over the five years of construction of the Eisenhower bore. The excavation for the tunnel itself was 524,000 cubic yards, with a total excavation of more than 1 million cubic yards. The Johnson bore, essentially a twin of the Eisenhower bore, was constructed at a total cost of \$145 million, mostly through Federal-aid funding.
- The tunnels represent an important event in the fight for workplace equality. Although qualified to perform her duties, Janet P. Bonnema, an engineer, was not allowed by the construction contractor to set foot in the tunnel. On Nov. 9, 1972, after Colorado's voters agreed to amend the state constitution to guarantee equal rights for women, Bonnema, accompanied by several reporters, entered the tunnel for the first time.
- The Glenwood Canyon Project, a 12.5-mile portion of I-70 through an extraordinarily narrow, environmentally sensitive gorge in western Colorado, was completed in 1992.
- It was one of the most challenging settings for an interstate highway, and one that caused a 30-year controversy due to potential impacts on the environment. Forty-plus bridges and viaducts—including precast box girders; precast I-beams; cast-in place, post-tensioned box girders; and welded steel box girders—as well as a tunnel were used to minimize damage to the setting.
- Though traffic through the canyon substantially increased, with the improvements, crash rates dropped 40 percent in the years following construction.
- I-70 was a major contributor to the growth of Colorado's ski industry. New ski towns such as Vail began to develop and grow significantly, and by 1984, the corridor between Denver and Grand Junction contained the largest concentration of ski resorts in the United States.

Reference and Additional Information

<https://www.codot.gov/travel/eisenhower-tunnel>

<https://www.codot.gov/about/CDOTHistory/50th-anniversary/interstate-70/glenwood-canyon>

<https://www.codot.gov/about/CDOTHistory/50th-anniversary/interstate-70/eisenhower-johnson-memorial-tunnels.html>

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