

= Interstate 68 =

Interstate 68 (I @-@ 68) is a 112 @. @ 9 @-@ mile (181 @. @ 7 km) Interstate Highway in the U.S. states of West Virginia and Maryland , connecting I @-@ 79 in Morgantown , West Virginia , to I @-@ 70 in Hancock , Maryland . I @-@ 68 is also Corridor E of the Appalachian Development Highway System . From 1965 until the freeway 's construction was completed in 1991 , it was designated as U.S. Route 48 (US 48) . In Maryland , the highway is known as the National Freeway , an homage to the historic National Road , which I @-@ 68 parallels between Keyzers Ridge and Hancock . The freeway mainly spans rural areas and crosses numerous mountain ridges along its route . A road cut at Sideling Hill exposed geological features of the mountain and has become a tourist attraction .

The construction of I @-@ 68 began in 1965 and continued for over 25 years , with completion on August 2 , 1991 . While the road was under construction , it was predicted that economic conditions would improve along the corridor for the five counties connected by I @-@ 68 : Allegany , Garrett , and Washington in Maryland , and Preston and Monongalia in West Virginia . The two largest cities connected by the highway are Morgantown , West Virginia , and Cumberland , Maryland . Despite the fact that the freeway serves no major metropolitan areas , I @-@ 68 provides a major transportation route in western Maryland and northern West Virginia and also provides an alternative to the Pennsylvania Turnpike for westbound traffic from Washington , D.C. , and Baltimore .

US 219 and US 220 both overlap I @-@ 68 in Garrett County , and Cumberland , respectively , and US 40 overlaps with the freeway from Keyzers Ridge to the eastern end of the freeway at Hancock .

= = History = =

= = = Predecessors = = =

Prior to the construction of the freeway from Morgantown to Hancock , several different routes carried traffic across the region . West Virginia Route 73 (WV 43) extended from Bridgeport to Bruceton Mills , serving regions now served by I @-@ 79 (Bridgeport to Morgantown) and I @-@ 68 (Morgantown to Bruceton Mills) . After the I @-@ 68 freeway , then known as US 48 , was completed in West Virginia , the WV 73 designation was removed . Portions of the road still exist as County Route 73 (CR 73 , CR 73 / 73 , and CR 857 . Between I @-@ 68 's exit 10 at Cheat Lake and exit 15 at Coopers Rock , I @-@ 68 was largely built directly over old WV 73 's roadbed .

At Bruceton Mills , WV 73 ended at WV 26 , which from there runs northeast into Pennsylvania , becoming Pennsylvania Route 281 at the state line and meeting US 40 north of the border . From there eastbound traffic would follow US 40 into Maryland . I @-@ 68 now parallels US 40 through western Maryland .

US 40 followed the route of the National Road through Pennsylvania and Maryland . The National Road was the first federally funded road built in the United States , authorized by Congress in 1806 . Construction lasted from 1811 to 1837 , establishing a road that extended from Cumberland to Vandalia , Illinois . Upon the establishment of the U.S. Highway System in 1926 , the route of the National Road became part of US 40 .

= = = Cumberland Thruway = = =

In the early 1960s , as the Interstate Highway System was being built throughout the United States , east ? west travel through western Maryland was difficult , as US 40 , the predecessor to I @-@ 68 , was a two @-@ lane country road with steep grades and hairpin turns . In Cumberland , the traffic situation was particularly problematic , as the usage of US 40 exceeded the capacity of the city 's narrow streets . Traffic following US 40 through Cumberland entered through the Cumberland Narrows and followed Henderson Avenue to Baltimore Avenue . After the construction of I @-@ 68 , this route through Cumberland became US 40 Alternate (US 40 Alt .) .

Construction began on one of the first sections of what would become I @-@ 68 , the Cumberland Thruway , on June 10 , 1965 . This portion of the highway , which consists of a mile @-@ long elevated bridge , was completed and opened to the public on December 5 , 1966 . The elevated highway connected Lee Street in west Cumberland to Maryland Avenue in east Cumberland , providing a quicker path for motorists traveling through the town on US 40 and US 220 . The Cumberland Thruway was extended to US 220 and then to Vocke Road (Maryland Route 658 , MD 658) by 1970 . Problems quickly emerged with the highway , especially near an area called " Moose Curve " . At Moose Curve , the road curves sharply at the bottom of Haystack Mountain , and traffic accidents are common .

= = = Corridor E = = =

In 1965 , the Appalachian Development Act was passed , authorizing the establishment of the Appalachian Development Highway System , which was meant to provide access to areas throughout the Appalachian Mountains that were not previously served by the Interstate Highway System . A set of corridors was defined , comprising 3 @,@ 090 miles (4 @,@ 970 km) of highways from New York to Mississippi . Corridor E in this system was defined to have endpoints at I @-@ 79 in Morgantown , West Virginia , and I @-@ 70 in Hancock , Maryland . At the time , there were no freeways along the corridor , though construction on the Cumberland Thruway began that year . It was this corridor that would eventually become I @-@ 68 .

The construction of Corridor E , which was also designated as US 48 , took over 20 years and hundreds of millions of dollars to complete . The cost of completing the freeway in West Virginia has been estimated at \$ 113 million (equivalent to \$ 732 million in 2015) The cost of building I @-@ 68 from Cumberland to the West Virginia state line came to \$ 126 million (\$ 816 million in 2015) ; the portion between Cumberland and Sideling Hill cost \$ 182 million (\$ 417 million in 2015) ; and the section at Sideling Hill cost \$ 44 million (\$ 101 million in 2015) .

Much of the work in building the freeway was completed during the 1970s , with US 48 opened from Vocke Road in LaVale to MD 36 in Frostburg on October 12 , 1973 , and to MD 546 on November 1 , 1974 . On November 15 , 1975 , the West Virginia portion and a 14 @-@ mile (23 km) portion from the West Virginia state line to Keyzers Ridge in Maryland opened , followed by the remainder of the freeway in Garrett County on August 13 , 1976 .

In the 1980s , the focus of construction shifted to the east of Cumberland , where a 19 @-@ mile (31 km) section of the road still had not been completed . The first corridor for the construction to be approved by the Maryland State Highway Administration (MDSHA) ran south of US 40 . This corridor would have bypassed towns in eastern Allegany County such as Flintstone , leaving them without access to the freeway , and would have passed directly through Green Ridge State Forest , the largest state forest in Maryland . This proposed corridor provoked strong opposition , largely due to the environmental damage that would be caused by the road construction in Green Ridge State Forest . Environmental groups sued MDSHA in order to halt the planned construction , but the court ruled in favor of the State Highway Administration . In 1984 , however , MDSHA reversed its earlier decision and chose an alignment that closely paralleled US 40 , passing through Flintstone and to the north of Green Ridge State Forest . Construction on the final section of I @-@ 68 began May 25 , 1987 , and was completed on August 2 , 1991 .

= = = Designation as I @-@ 68 = = =

Though the National Freeway was designated as US 48 , as the completion of the freeway neared , the possibility of the freeway being designated as an Interstate Highway came up . In the 1980s , the project to improve US 50 between Washington , D.C. , and Annapolis to Interstate Highway standards had been assigned the designation of I @-@ 68 . MDSHA , however , later concluded that adding additional route shields to the US 50 freeway would not be helpful to drivers , since about half the freeway already had two route designations (US 50 and US 301) and drivers on the freeway were already familiar with the US 50 designation . This made the designation to be applied

to that freeway more flexible , and so in 1989 , the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) , the organization composed of the various state departments of transportation that decides route numbering in the United States , approved MDSHA 's request to renumber the US 50 freeway from I @-@ 68 to I @-@ 595 . That same year , AASHTO approved changing US 48 's designation to I @-@ 68 . This change took effect upon the completion of the last section of the National Freeway , on August 2 , 1991 .

With the completion of I @-@ 68 and the change in its route number , the US 48 designation was removed . In 2002 , AASHTO approved the establishment of a new US 48 , this time for the Corridor H highway from Weston , West Virginia , to Strasburg , Virginia . This marks the third time that the US 48 number has been assigned to a highway , the first use being for a highway in California that existed in the 1920s .

= = = Incidents = = =

Numerous accidents and incidents have occurred on I @-@ 68 . On June 1 , 1991 , a gasoline tanker descending into downtown Cumberland from the east attempted to exit the freeway at exit 43D , Maryland Avenue . The tanker went out of control and overturned as the driver tried to go around the sharp turn at the exit . Gasoline began to leak from the damaged tanker , forcing the evacuation of a three @-@ block area of Cumberland . Approximately 30 minutes later , the tanker exploded , setting eight houses on fire . The fire caused an estimated \$ 250 @,@ 000 in damages (equivalent to \$ 570 @,@ 000 in 2015) , and prompted MDSHA to place signs prohibiting hazardous materials trucks from exiting at the Maryland Avenue exit .

On May 23 , 2003 , poor visibility due to fog was a major contributing factor to an 85 @-@ vehicle pileup on I @-@ 68 on Savage Mountain west of Frostburg . Two people were killed and nearly 100 people were injured . Because of the extent of the wreckage on the road , I @-@ 68 remained blocked for 24 hours while the wreckage was cleared . In the aftermath of the pileup , the question of how to deal with fog in the future was discussed . Though the cost of a fog warning system can be considerable , MDSHA installed such a system in 2005 at a cost of \$ 230 @,@ 000 (\$ 290 @,@ 000 in 2015) . The system alerts drivers when visibility drops below 1 @,@ 000 feet (300 m) .

= = = Effect on surrounding region = = =

One of the arguments in favor of the construction of I @-@ 68 was that the freeway would improve the poor economic conditions in western Maryland . The economy of the surrounding area has improved since the construction of the freeway , especially in Garrett County , where the freeway opened up the county to tourism from Washington , D.C. , and Baltimore . Correspondingly , Garrett County saw a sharp increase in population and employment during and after the construction of the road , with full- and part @-@ time employment increasing from 8 @,@ 868 in 1976 to 15 @,@ 334 in 1991 . However , economic difficulties remain in Allegany and Garrett counties . There were concerns over loss of customers to businesses that have been cut off from the main highway due to the construction of the new alignment in the 1980s , leading to protests when then @-@ Governor Harry Hughes visited the Sideling Hill road cut when it was opened .

= = = Proposed extension = = =

In the 1990s , there was discussion about a future westward extension to I @-@ 68 . Such an extension would connect the western terminus of I @-@ 68 in Morgantown to WV 2 in Moundsville . A 1989 proposal had suggested a toll road be built along this corridor . In 2003 , the Federal Highway Administration approved the extension , paving the way for federal funding and for the road to become part of the National Highway System on completion . However , the project ran into problems due to lack of funds , and in 2008 , West Virginia Governor Joe Manchin suggested dropping the project altogether , making construction of a westward extension of I @-@ 68 unlikely in the near future .

On September 15 , 2014 , Marshall County officials brought the extension of I @-@ 68 up again as a way for oil companies to have easier access to drill into the area , likely by fracking . Much like the second leg of the Southern Beltway in the Pittsburgh area , an extension of I @-@ 68 is being spurred in response to the Marcellus natural gas trend . If the extension were to be built , it would also include a widening of WV 2 to four lanes and would cost an estimated \$ 5 million per mile . It is expected that the project would be divided into two legs , first from Morgantown to Cameron , then Cameron to Moundsville .

In May 2015 , Maryland passed a law to increase the state 's maximum speed limit . The speed limit was changed from 65 to 70 miles per hour (105 to 113 km / h) . October 1 of the same year , this law was put into effect , making I @-@ 68 's speed limit 70 mph except for the Cumberland area . Other Interstates in Maryland could also have their speed limit raised . West Virginia 's speed limit is already 70 mph .

= = Route description = =

I @-@ 68 spans 112 @.@ 6 miles (181 @.@ 2 km) ? 81 @.@ 1 miles (130 @.@ 5 km) in Maryland and 31 @.@ 5 miles (50 @.@ 7 km) in West Virginia ? connecting I @-@ 79 in Morgantown , West Virginia to I @-@ 70 in Hancock , Maryland , across the Appalachian Mountains . The control cities ? the cities officially chosen to be the destinations shown on guide signs ? for I @-@ 68 are Morgantown , Cumberland , and Hancock . I @-@ 68 is the main route connecting western Maryland to the rest of Maryland . I @-@ 68 is also advertised to drivers on I @-@ 70 as an " alternate route to Ohio and points west " by the MDSHA .

= = = West Virginia = = =

I @-@ 68 begins at exit 148 on I @-@ 79 near Morgantown and runs eastward , meeting with US 119 one mile (1 @.@ 6 km) east of its terminus at I @-@ 79 . I @-@ 68 turns northeastward , curving around Morgantown , with four interchanges in the Morgantown area ? I @-@ 79 , US 119 , WV 7 , and WV 705 . Leaving the Morgantown area , I @-@ 68 again runs eastward , interchanging with WV 43 , which provides access to Cheat Lake and Uniontown , Pennsylvania . Near this interchange , I @-@ 68 passes over Cheat Lake and climbs a steep ascent out of Cheat Canyon .

Entering Preston County , the route interchanges with CR 73 / 12 , which provides access to Coopers Rock State Forest . In contrast to the Morgantown area , the portion of Preston County that I @-@ 68 crosses is more rural , with the only town along the route being Bruceton Mills . In Bruceton Mills , I @-@ 68 meets WV 26 . I @-@ 68 meets CR 5 (Hazleton Road) at its last exit before entering Garrett County , Maryland .

The region of West Virginia through which the freeway passes is rural and mountainous . There are several sections that have steep grades , especially near the Cheat River Canyon , where there is a truck escape ramp in case trucks lose their brakes descending the steep grade .

The peak traffic density in terms of average annual daily traffic on I @-@ 68 in West Virginia is 32 @,@ 900 vehicles per day at the interchange with I @-@ 79 in Morgantown . The traffic gradually decreases further eastward , reaching a low point at 14 @,@ 600 vehicles per day at the Hazleton exit .

= = = Maryland = = =

After entering Garrett County , I @-@ 68 continues its run through rural areas , crossing the northern part of the county . The terrain through this area consists of ridges that extend from southwest to northeast , with I @-@ 68 crossing the ridges through its east ? west run . The first exit in Maryland is at MD 42 in Friendsville . I @-@ 68 ascends Keyzers Ridge , where it meets US 40 and US 219 , both of which join the highway at Keyzers Ridge . The roadway that used to be the surface alignment of US 40 parallels I @-@ 68 to Cumberland , and is now designated as US 40 Alt . I @-@ 68 crosses Negro Mountain , which was the highest point along the historic National Road

that the freeway parallels east of Keyzers Ridge . This is the source of the name of the freeway in Maryland : the National Freeway . Three miles (4 @. @ 8 km) east of Grantsville , US 219 leaves the National Freeway to run northward towards Meyersdale , Pennsylvania , while I @-@ 68 continues eastward , crossing Savage Mountain before entering Allegany County .

The section of I @-@ 68 west of Dans Mountain in Allegany County is located in the Allegheny Mountains , characterized in Garrett County by a series of uphill and downhill stretches along the freeway , each corresponding to a ridge that the freeway crosses . In Allegany County , the freeway crosses the Allegheny Front , where , from Savage Mountain to LaVale , the highway drops in elevation by 1 @, @ 800 feet (550 m) in a distance of nine miles (14 km) .

The traffic density on I @-@ 68 in Garrett County is rather sparse compared to that of Allegany County . At the Maryland ? West Virginia state line , there is an annual average daily traffic of 11 @, @ 581 vehicles per day . This density increases to its highest point in Garrett County at exit 22 , where US 219 leaves I @-@ 68 ; 19 @, @ 551 vehicles per day drive through this section . At the Allegany County line , the traffic density decreases slightly to 18 @, @ 408 . In Allegany County , the vehicle count increases to 28 @, @ 861 in LaVale , and to the freeway 's peak of 46 @, @ 191 at the first US 220 interchange (exit 42) in Cumberland . East of Cumberland , the vehicle count decreases to 16 @, @ 551 at Martins Mountain and stays nearly constant to the eastern terminus of I @-@ 68 in Hancock .

After entering Allegany County , I @-@ 68 bypasses Frostburg to the south , with two exits , one to Midlothian Road (unsigned MD 736) and one to MD 36 . Near the MD 36 exit is God 's Ark of Safety church , which is known for its attempt to build a replica of Noah 's Ark . This replica , which currently consists of a steel frame , can be seen from I @-@ 68 .

East of Frostburg , I @-@ 68 crosses a bridge above Spruce Hollow near Clarysville , passing over MD & nbdp ; 55 , which runs along the bottom of the valley . The freeway runs along the hillside above US 40 Alt. in the valley formed by Braddock Run . Entering LaVale , I @-@ 68 has exits to US 40 Alt. and MD 658 (signed southbound as US 220 Truck) . I @-@ 68 ascends Haystack Mountain , entering the city of Cumberland . This is the most congested section of the highway in Maryland . The speed limit on the highway drops from 70 miles per hour (110 km / h) in LaVale to 55 miles per hour (89 km / h) until the US 220 exit , and to 40 miles per hour (64 km / h) in downtown Cumberland . This drop in the speed limit is due to several factors , including heavy congestion , closely spaced interchanges , and a sharp curve in the road , known locally as " Moose Curve " , located at the bottom of Haystack Mountain . This section of the highway was originally built in the 1960s as the Cumberland Thruway , a bypass to the original path of US 40 through Cumberland .

Until 2008 , signs at exit 43A in downtown Cumberland labeled the exit as providing access to WV 28 Alt . Because of this , many truckers used this exit to get to WV 28 . This created problems on { WV 28 Alt . } in Ridgeley , West Virginia , as trucks became stuck under a low railroad overpass , blocking traffic through Ridgeley . To reduce this problem , the Maryland State Highway Administration removed references to WV 28 Alt. from guide signs for exit 43A and placed warning signs in Cumberland and on I @-@ 68 approaching Cumberland advising truckers to instead use exit 43B to MD & nbdp ; 51 , which allows them to connect to WV 28 via Virginia Avenue , bypassing the low overpass in Ridgeley .

At exit 44 in east Cumberland , US 40 Alt. meets the freeway and ends , and at exit 46 , US 220 leaves I @-@ 68 and runs northward toward Bedford , Pennsylvania . I @-@ 68 continues across northeastern Allegany County , passing Rocky Gap State Park near exit 50 . In northeastern Allegany County , the former US 40 bypassed by I @-@ 68 is designated as MD 144 , with several exits from I @-@ 68 along the route . I @-@ 68 crosses several mountain ridges along this section of the highway , including Martins Mountain , Town Hill , and Green Ridge , and the highway passes through Green Ridge State Forest . East of Green Ridge State Forest , MD 144 ends at US 40 Scenic , another former section of US 40 .

I @-@ 68 crosses into Washington County at Sideling Hill Creek and ascends Sideling Hill . The road cut that was built into Sideling Hill for I @-@ 68 can be seen for several miles in each direction , and has become a tourist attraction as a result of the geologic structure exposed by the road cut .

On the east side of Sideling Hill , I @-@ 68 again interchanges with US 40 Scenic , at its eastern terminus at Woodmont Road . Here US 40 Scenic ends at a section of MD 144 separate from the section further west . Four miles (6 @. @ 4 km) east of this interchange , I @-@ 68 ends at I @-@ 70 and US 522 in the town of Hancock .

= = Exit list = =