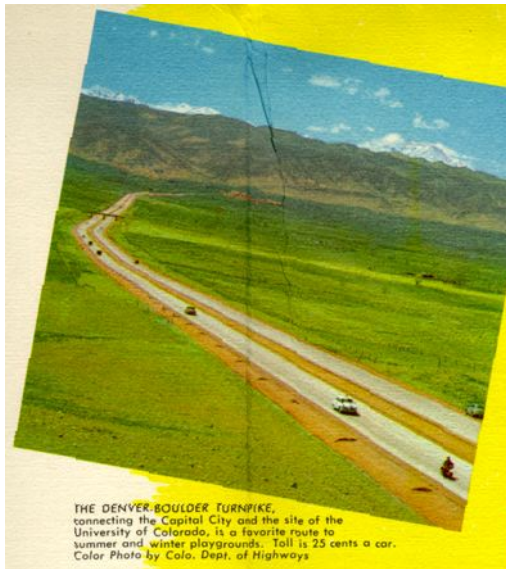




Help us fix U.S. 36

## Commuting Solutions

### Boulder Turnpike History



The Denver metro area's highway system had a big problem up through the 1940s: There was no direct route between Denver and Boulder. The only way to get from Denver to Boulder was via U.S. 287 north to Lafayette and then either South Boulder Rd. or Arapahoe Ave. (SH 7) west to Boulder.

The original proponent of the Boulder Turnpike was Prof. Roderick L. Downing of the University of Colorado at Boulder's School of Engineering. In fact, he would often take his students out to the route he proposed to practice surveying.

Eventually, most Boulder civic organizations, the University and prominent citizens signed on to the project, expressing their interest in direct regional connection. The Legislature finally passed a bill

authorizing the Colorado Department of Highways (CDH) to build a road and mandated that it operate as a toll road to recoup the cost of construction. The state hired Kansas-based consulting firm Howard, Needles, Tammen, and Bergendoff (HNTB) to conduct a feasibility study. Unfortunately, the results said that the road would not pay for its cost and upkeep over a 30-year period.

Despite the report, support reached a fever pitch. Bonds totaling \$6.3M were sold, to be repaid over 30 years. The roadway officially opened on January 19, 1952. The Boulder Turnpike went from Federal Blvd. north of Denver to 28th St. in Boulder. It was built to freeway standards with fully controlled access. Each direction boasted two 12-foot wide lanes, a 10-foot shoulder, plus a 20-foot depressed median. There were 12 major structures, including toll booths, built on the spot. This was the first project awarded by CDH of this magnitude.



The tollbooths were located under the Wadsworth overpass at the Broomfield interchange. It cost 25¢ to travel from Federal Blvd. all the way to Boulder, 10¢ from Federal Blvd. to Broomfield and 15¢ from Broomfield to Boulder. Other than access points in Denver and Boulder, the Broomfield interchange was the only way to get on and off the Turnpike. Toll booth operators befriended a stray dog they called Shep. The pooch lived at the tollbooth near the Broomfield exit for years. After he died, a tombstone was donated for his grave in a fenced area near his old tollbooth. The tombstone remains to this day.

The original Boulder Turnpike faced a serious disadvantage because it was not directly connected to the Denver highway system. Its end at Federal Blvd. and the north end of Denver's new Valley Highway were not directly connected by the SH 382 highway until 1956.

Despite such an obstacle, traffic counts along the Boulder Turnpike far exceeded expectations. The HNTB consulting report was ultraconservative. It predicted 3,170 vehicles per day for 1960-1980, but actual counts skyrocketed to 13,774 vehicles per day in 1966. The toll revenue was so high that on September 14, 1967, the Boulder Turnpike became free and was renamed U.S. 36. The toll booths were removed immediately thereafter. The tolls had successfully paid for \$6.3M in bonds, \$2.36M in interest, roadway resurfacing and realignment at Federal Blvd. in just over 15 years, 15 years ahead of schedule. It is believed at time that the Boulder Turnpike was the only public toll road to ever become free.

Today, the Boulder Turnpike is one of Colorado's most heavily traveled highways, carrying 90,000 vehicles each day. It is the lifeline of the Northwest Region, carrying goods, people and ideas throughout the area and beyond. Just as it took the pioneering spirit of U.S. 36 residents, businesses and communities to build U.S. 36 in the first place, it will require the same level of visionary leadership and effort to improve U.S. 36 for today and the future.