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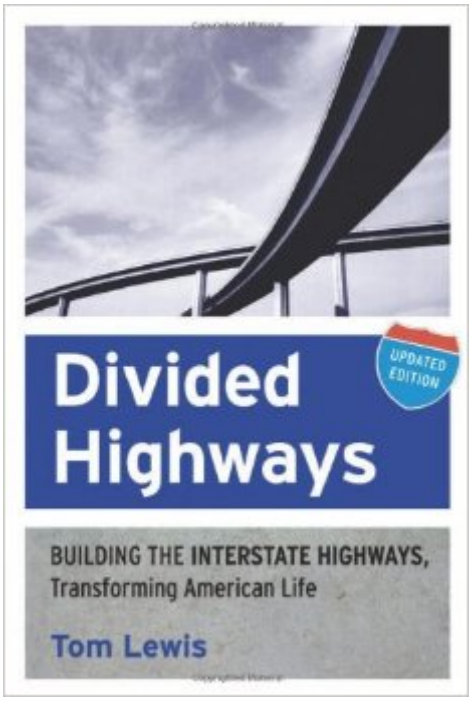
Divided Highways: Building The Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life



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Synopsis

In Divided Highways, Tom Lewis offers an encompassing account of highway development in the United States. In the early twentieth century Congress created the Bureau of Public Roads to improve roads and the lives of rural Americans. The Bureau was the forerunner of the Interstate Highway System of 1956, which promoted a technocratic approach to modern road building sometimes at the expense of individual lives, regional characteristics, and the landscape. With thoughtful analysis and engaging prose Lewis charts the development of the Interstate system, including the demographic and economic pressures that influenced its planning and construction and the disputes that pitted individuals and local communities against engineers and federal administrators.This is a story of America’s hopes for its future life and the realities of its present condition. It is an engaging history of the people and policies that profoundly transformed the American landscapeâ •and the daily lives of Americans. In this updated edition of Divided Highways, Lewis brings his story of the Interstate system up to date, concluding with Boston’s troubled and yet triumphant Big Dig project, the growing antipathy for big federal infrastructure projects, and the uncertain economics of highway projects both present and future.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The title itself can be interpreted as "the nation’s opinion is divided over these highways". That tells a lot about the socio/political stance of the book.There are tens thousands of miles of highways in the U.S. that are ’divided’ with 4 or more lanes, like the Interstates, but are nonaccess-controlled

highways that do not meet superhighway standards. There were many such highways built both before and after the Interstate system, so "divided highways" is not a technically proper and specific way to refer to Interstate highways.I don’t know if I would call it "anti-road" so much as to say that anti-road themes heavily predominated over pro-road themes. He also made a number of basic factual errors over items where I have local knowledge (see below).His recital of the Eisenhower urban Interstate legend is a whopper all by itself, and he doesn’t point to any primary source that would back it up. It’s presented as a conversation that took place in a car and remembered by one person. You would think that something of that importance would have been in a presidential news release or some other official presidential publication if it in fact happened. The "Divided Highways" cite says that he was traveling from the White House to Camp David, and they encountered Interstate construction near the edge of D.C. There is no Interstate highway, period, in that part of the city that would have been on the conceivable route northwestward across the western or northern D.C. boundary. That, and the purely anecdotal nature of the alleged incident, shows that this smacks of historical revisionism.

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