

Kansas Department of Transportation

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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Merrill Eisenhower Atwater to join in celebrating 50th anniversary of Interstate

He will retrace a legendary journey made 87 years ago, but the trip for Merrill Eisenhower Atwater will be a smooth ride thanks to the vision of his great-grandfather.

Atwater, the great-grandson of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, will be part of an upcoming national convoy of vehicles crossing the country to recreate one of the influential events in American transportation history. The event is being planned to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the national Interstate highway system, for which the former President from Kansas was the leading proponent.

Kansas will join the national celebration June 21-23 as it host events at the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum in Abilene and at Kansas Speedway in Kansas City, Kan. Banners will also be placed on overpasses along I-70 at various locations welcoming the national convoy during its trip across Kansas.

Atwater will be one of the featured dignitaries making remarks from the front porch of Eisenhower's boyhood home in Abilene around 7:45 p.m. on June 21.

Atwater will keep a journal of his convoy trip to be placed in the Eisenhower Library alongside the journal his great-grandfather kept in 1919 during an epic transcontinental military convoy. He will also be filing a daily Internet blog of his observations.

Eisenhower personally witnessed the need for a national highway system in 1919 when as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army he led a Transcontinental Motor Convoy

across the United States that took a grueling 62 days to complete. The former Kansan also learned the value of a strong, national highway system during World War II by observing the efficiency of moving armies on the German autobahn.

Eisenhower realized from those experiences the potential value of an interconnected, quality road system across the country. As President of the United States, he championed the creation of a national Interstate system and on June 29, 1956, he signed legislation authorizing the system and making his vision a reality.

The national convoy of historic and modern-day vehicles will begin their reenactment of Eisenhower's trip in San Francisco on June 16. They will travel nearly 3,000 miles along the Interstate system on a route parallel to that taken by the military convoy. The trip will conclude June 29 in Washington, D.C., which was the starting point of the original convoy. Although the convoy route to Washington, D.C., is along Interstate 80, a swing group will detour on Interstate 70 for events in Kansas.

A complete schedule of events in Kansas are listed below. The schedule, convoy route, Interstate history, photos, a link to the national 50th Anniversary web site and more can be viewed at the KDOT web site, www.ksdot.org.

Kansas Events

Abilene - June 21

6-9 p.m. – Evening Social at the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum (Eisenhower Center)

“Celebrate Ike and the Interstates” with an ice cream social, a performance by the Abilene City Band, an antique car show, and Interstate exhibits outdoors and in the Library building.

Welcome convoy about 7:45 p.m., followed by remarks from the front porch of Eisenhower's boyhood home. Atwater, Eisenhower Center Director Dan Holt, KDOT Secretary Deb Miller and Interstate Author Dan McNichol will speak.

Rain contingency –Visitor's Center

Abilene - June 22

6 p.m. – Vehicle parade around Abilene

Vehicle parade with convoy and other participants starts/ends at the Eisenhower Center.

7 p.m. – Interstate Panel discussion

Panel discussion will highlight Eisenhower's impact on the nation's Interstate system.

Welcome remarks by Secretary Deb Miller and President of the Kansas Turnpike Authority Michael Johnston. Panelists include: **Moderator Dan Holt**, Director of the Eisenhower Center; **Mary Turkington**, chair of the Kansas Turnpike Authority; **Jim Brewer**, KDOT Engineering Manager; **Constance**

Achterburg, attorney who handled land condemnation for the original interstate construction; **Mike Lackey**, former Assistant Secretary/State Transportation Engineer; and **Dan McNichol**, author of “The Roads that Built America: The Incredible Story of the U.S. Interstate System.”

7:30 a.m. – Farewell parade

Citizens and visitors in Abilene bid farewell to the convoy as it heads to I-70 and travels to Kansas Speedway.

Kansas Speedway– June 23

10:45 a.m. - Kansas Speedway

The convoy arrives at Kansas Speedway for a Kansas/Missouri bi-state event and will make a “victory” lap around the track. Mary Peters, former Federal Highway Administrator, will be the keynote speaker. Other speakers will also participate. The convoy will then leave Kansas and travel through Missouri to Iowa.