

Building a 4-lane highway across the Sierra



A 1938 postcard of the two-lane U.S. 40 over Donner Summit. Photo/Nevada Photo Service/James R. Herz Collection/UNR Library

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Anyone who frequently drives along Interstate 80 across the Sierra has probably experienced travel delays due to heavy traffic or snow.

Before the construction of the modern interstate, driving over the Sierra between Reno and Sacramento meant dealing with U.S. 40, a winding highway with just one lane heading in each direction. Even modest amounts of snow could make the narrow roadway impassable for days, and one record-breaking storm in 1952 closed the highway for an entire month.

Every winter, Reno's casinos went through a seasonal slump as nervous drivers kept their distance.

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