

# HISTORY OF NOVA SCOTIA

==== begin quote:



1997 November 15  
Cobequid Pass Toll Road Opens  
First Pay-To-Drive Section of Trans-Canada Highway

On this day, the 45km four-lane Cobequid Pass highway opened for regular traffic. Electronic tracking at the toll booths at the Cobequid-Cumberland border counted 400 vehicles passing through the toll plaza before noon. The road was not scheduled to open until noon, but a local radio station mistakenly announced in the early morning that it was open for traffic, and many people simply drove around the barricades to see what the new highway looked like.

This road is a section of Nova Scotia Highway 104, also known as the Trans-Canada Highway, from Masstown, Colchester County, to Thomson Station, Cumberland County. It was built by a private company as a bypass for the old two-lane Highway 4 through Wentworth which was notorious for dangerous driving conditions and was the location of 52 traffic deaths in the last ten years. The main contractor was Atlantic Highways Corp.; major subcontractors were Nova Construction, Tidewater Construction and the Foundation Company of Canada. The \$113,000,000 Cobequid Pass highway was built by Atlantic Highways Corporation, with governments providing \$55,000,000 while the consortium put up the rest. Private financing was done by Newcourt Credit Group of Ontario. Newcourt sold three bond issues with terms of 15 to 30 years. Toll revenues will pay down the debts, and will provide \$96,000,000 in highway maintenance and \$34,000,000 worth of repaving over 30 years. The investors will be repaid from toll revenue collected for 30 years, according to a detailed schedule drawn up during the negotiations.

Reference: [Map showing Cobequid Pass Toll Highway location](#)

The Sydney Steel Corporation (Sysco) pension fund has invested \$5,500,000 in the highway, by buying a subordinated debenture in that amount issued by the Highway 104 Western Alignment Corporation. The Sysco pension fund expects to receive about 14% annual return on its investment. Tolls were expected to generate about \$250,000,000 profit for the private lenders over 30 years.

Government money wasn't used to build the highway but to fund the Highway 104 Western Alignment Corporation, the provincially owned business that administered

tolls. Nova Scotia Transportation Minister Don Downe said that, in the first twenty years, the province would make a \$151,000,000 profit beyond costs to build, manage and repair the new road.

Many local residents were furious the first tolled section of the Trans-Canada Highway was in their backyard. Anger over the toll contributed to a by-election loss in the area on 4 November for the governing party.

Reference: [Highway 104 Western Alignment Corporation](#)

The new Cobequid Pass Highway has no call boxes, no rest areas, and no service plazas. It has a posted speed limit of 110km/h for the entire length, except for the slowdown lanes approaching the toll gates, which have reduced speed limits and three rumble strips in each direction. In general, on the old highway 4 which parallels Cobequid Pass, posted speed limits have been reduced by 10 km/h from the previous limits, with the stretch between Mahoney's Corner and Wentworth remaining at its existing limit of 80 km/h.

Reference: [Map of Speed Limit Zones, Lower Debert to Thomson Station](#)

#### Saves Sixteen Minutes

A driver going at the speed limit will take around 40 minutes to travel the 54 kilometre stretch of the old highway. That's about four minutes longer than it takes driving the current speed limit. Drivers will be able to use the new highway and cover the 45 kilometres between Thomson Station and Masstown in about 24 minutes driving 110 km/h. That's 16 minutes quicker than the old route.

Among the features of the new highway are:

- five full interchanges with grade separations
- six major bridges
- 22.6-metre-wide median
- five large tunnels under the road for access to land parcels, snowmobile trails and wildlife passages; the wildlife tunnel has a skylight
- seven stream crossings with large concrete box culverts to allow fish to follow their natural flow
- 21 major structures

Provisions in the Omnibus Agreement call for the province to restrict express-truck traffic greater than five tonnes from using the old highway. Beginning when Cobequid Pass was opened, express trucks using the old 104 were to be fined \$250. "The Province of Nova Scotia has every intention of enforcing its trucking laws on this route just as it does throughout the province," said Mr. Downe. "Vehicle compliance officers operate across the province to ensure trucks follow weight and road restrictions while making sure vehicles conform to National Safety Code standards. Enforcement measures covered in the 104 contract deal only with ensuring that express-truck

traffic uses the new route. We'll use automatic traffic counters, and if there's a problem, our officers will monitor the road more closely." The government's contract with Atlantic Highways allows the company to take over policing of the old highway if at least 92% of truck traffic does not travel on the new road. The notion of private enforcement is not unique, said Mr. Downe. He pointed to the Halifax Bridge Commission, which employs its own security staff who can issue citations for speeding or driving through the toll-gate without paying.

Under the Omnibus Agreement, the province agreed not to build a road competing with the Cobequid Pass for 30 years or twin the existing road through the Wentworth Valley. Twinning the existing road and creating a controlled-access highway was ruled out long ago because it would have split Wentworth Valley communities down the middle. New service roads would then have been needed for area residents.

The highway was free of charge for the first two weeks of operation. At 12:01 am on 1 December, toll charges came into effect. The toll collection plaza was located about halfway along the highway, at the border between Cumberland and Colchester Counties. In all of Canada, this was the first section of the Trans-Canada Highway on which drivers had to pay a fee. One local person commented: "You can get in your car in Vancouver and never pay a toll until you get to the Wentworth Valley." The one-way cash charge for cars was \$3.00, for recreational vehicles \$4.00, and for trucks \$2.00 per axle.

Reference: [Questions and answers about tolls and profits](#)

Electronic transmitters (the technically correct term is "transponder," not "transmitter"), about the size of a playing card and known as E-Passes, were available to be bought by frequent users - that is, by anyone who was willing to pay the \$16.00 to buy one of the electronic transponders. These transponders were mounted inside the windshields of the vehicles. Electronic equipment at the toll plaza scanned each approaching vehicle. Those with E-Passes returned a radio signal to the toll collecting equipment, containing vehicle identification information which the highway's computer used to file a record of the vehicle identification, the time and direction of the trip, and to make a deduction from that vehicle's prepaid E-Pass account. E-Passes for cars cost \$15 (actually, the buyer's out-of-pocket cost was \$15.00 + \$1.00 + \$2.40) with a deposit of \$30 in the toll account; each car with an E-Pass paid a toll of \$1.50, half of the \$3.00 charge when paid by cash. E-Passes for trucks cost \$40 with a deposit of \$54 in the toll account; each truck with an E-Pass paid a toll of \$1.50 per axle, a reduction from the \$2.00 per axle charge when paid by cash. On Cobequid Pass, drivers who don't pay tolls will be videotaped and reported to the RCMP.

The above was excerpted from  
The Halifax Chronicle-Herald of 8, 15 and 17 November 1997,  
The Halifax Daily News of 15 November and 1 December,

The Globe & Mail of 15 November, and  
Transportation Department press releases dated 27 Mar., 8 Sep. and 14 Nov. 1997.  
<http://www.gov.ns.ca/cmns/msrv/nr-1997/nr97-03/97032705.htm>  
<http://www.gov.ns.ca/cmns/msrv/nr-1997/nr97-09/97090804.htm>  
<http://www.gov.ns.ca/cmns/msrv/nr-1997/nr97-11/97111401.htm>  
<http://www.gov.ns.ca/cmns/msrv/nr-1997/nr97-11/97111402.htm>  
<http://www.gov.ns.ca/cmns/msrv/nr-1997/nr97-11/97111403.htm>

Reference: [Cobequid Pass Toll Highway website](#)

Note: On 5 September 2001, the hit counter in this webpage showed 00214.

## Cobequid E-Pass Electronic and Easy

[The following was excerpted from the information leaflet, prepared by AHMC (Atlantic Highways Management Corporation), and given to each motorist passing through the Cobequid Pass toll lanes, after the highway opened.]

### What is an E-Pass?

An E-Pass is the fast, easy, least expensive way to travel on Cobequid Pass. It's an electronic transmitter that attaches to the inside of your windshield and allows you to pay for your trip easily and electronically - no card to swipe, no attendant to pay.

### Why should I but an E-Pass?

Using an E-Pass saves you half the toll rate - that's \$1.50 every time you drive on Cobequid Pass - and it allows you to use the E-Pass express lane.

### How does an E-Pass work?

When approaching the toll plaza, E-Pass users go through a specially marked express lane. As you approach the toll gate, your E-Pass number is read by a computer system that checks your account to make sure there are enough funds to pay the toll. If your account has sufficient funds, you get a green traffic light and the toll gate rises automatically. When your account balance falls to one-third of your original balance, you get a yellow light and the toll gate rises. That means you need to make a deposit to your account. If there is not enough in your account to pay the toll, you get a red light and the gate does not rise. A toll attendant will explain how to pay the toll and replenish your account.

### How much does an E-Pass cost and where do I get one?

An E-Pass costs \$16.00 (\$15.00 plus \$1.00 for the mounting kit) plus HST (harmonised sales tax, 15% in 1997). This is a one-time charge. You can open an E-Pass account in person at the Toll Plaza on Cobequid Pass near Sullivan's Lake, mail your application to P.O. Box 920, Eastern Passage, Nova Scotia B3G 1M4, or fax it to 902-465-4986. When you open an E-Pass account, you will need to make a minimum deposit of

\$30.00 which will be used to pay your toll charges. You can pick up an E-Pass at the Toll Plaza on Cobequid Pass near Sullivan's Lake, Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 4:30pm.

How do I keep my account up to date?

There are two options:

Pre-authorized credit card charge

Pay in person with cash, credit card, debit card, or money order

Each time you use your E-Pass, the toll charge is deducted from your account. For pre-authorized credit card accounts, your credit card is automatically debited to replenish the E-Pass account to the amount of the original deposit. This occurs when your account has one-third of the deposit remaining. If you do not have a pre-authorized account, you can top up your account at the toll plaza with cash, money order, or by using your credit card or debit card.

What if I don't have an E-Pass?

Everyone is welcome to drive on Cobequid Pass. If you don't have an E-Pass, you simply pay the \$3.00 cash rate to a toll booth attendant.

Other things you need to know:

Your E-Pass will work in any weather, including temperatures as low as -40°C. It is not affected by vibration, noise, magnetic fields, rain, ice, snow, dirt, or mud.

If you buy a new car, no problem - just remove your E-Pass from your old car and put it on the windshield of your new car.

If you close your E-Pass account, all money left in the account is refunded.

If you decide to change your method of payment, call us at 902-668-2211 or drop by the toll plaza.

In future, E-Pass tags may also be registered for use on other toll roads or bridges (Halifax-Dartmouth Bridge Commission, Saint John Harbour Bridge). If you wish, AHMC can send you information on how to set up an account for these locations when such services become available.

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A telephone call to the toll plaza, 902-668-2211, elicited the information that a monthly statement will be mailed to each holder of an E-Pass, with details of each trip through the toll gate - date, time of day, and direction of the trip. This means that a computer record is kept of this information, for each and every E-Pass account.  
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Why tolls? ... Are tolls being introduced for other reasons? Warnings have already been sounded by Ontario's privacy commissioner that that the real money in tolling comes from the sale of information gathered by electronic toll systems. The record of your travel habits is marketable, and toll collectors in the U.S. are already selling this

information to credit agencies ... Is Nova Scotia ready for this threat to privacy?  
[Excerpted from "Highway Robbery on the 104", by Janet Maybee, in The Chronicle-Herald, 3 May 1995.]

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ICS comment:

The system of electronic monitoring and computer recording of vehicle movements on the Cobequid Pass highway was installed with minimal public debate about, and no known government supervision of, design features affecting the potential problems inherent in such systems, which will have the effect of significantly increasing government intrusion into the private lives of citizens. For more information, see Background Notes on Electronic Toll Collection Systems and the unintended and unexpected effects they have had on privacy of ordinary citizens.

<http://alts.net/ns1625/electrictoll.html>

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For More Information Contact:



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