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[History Matters](#) focuses on people, places, and events of the past that make us who we are today. One such major happening was the construction of Interstate 75 (I-75) in the 1960s. Few events in the past 50 years have had such a dramatic and far reaching effect on our entire county. It was truly a game changer when I-75 opened in 1962.



I-75 is a four-lane, limited access highway that greatly reduced the drive time for passengers and products being transported through the center of our state. It replaced US 27 which was a two-lane road that

traversed through every town along its route. The new super highway brought about many changes such as new businesses locating near the flow of potential customers. Also, existing businesses such as the Underground Forest on US 27 near Frederic relocated to Gaylord and became Call of the Wild.

One change that might not be obvious to travelers on the new highway is how it split parcels of property in its pathway. Some farmers' homes and barns were now on one side of the highway and their crops and grazing livestock were on the other. This required going several miles to get to the back 40.

I-75 goes through 4 townships: Corwith, Livingston, Bagley, and Otsego Lake. A quick look at the 1965 plat book shows more than 30 farms were divided when I-75 was built.

The new freeway can only be entered and exited at four locations: Waters, Vanderbilt, Gaylord at M-32, and south of Gaylord near Otsego Lake.

Exit 270	Waters
Exit 279	Gaylord
Exit 282	Gaylord
Exit 290	Vanderbilt

A related infrastructure breakthrough occurred a few years prior to the completion of I-75. The Mackinac Bridge opened in 1957. It linked Michigan's Upper and Lower Peninsulas. Long lines of vehicles waiting for the car ferry were now a thing of the past.

It could be argued that these two major transportation improvements were in part responsible for the huge increase in our county's population during the 1960s through the 1980s. Here are the Census figures for those 3 decades:

1960	7,545 residents
1970	10,422 residents
1980	14,993 residents

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Joan Glasser wrote a college term paper titled "The Impact of Interstate Seventy-Five on Gaylord, Michigan, Otsego County" in 1970. She



recently shared her 25 page research report with us. You can find it on our web site, here's the [link](#). The report cites several primary sources such as interviews with community & business leaders Gordon Everett, Harry Collins, and Harold Elgas. She also spoke with the Gaylord City Manager and the Chairman of the Otsego County Board of Supervisors. Here are two samplings from Joan's document that summarizes the impact I-75 had on Otsego County.

"Economic factors looked bleak in 1958 and 1959, and a proposed new limited access highway would bypass Gaylord when completed. The businessmen were not willing to sit back and watch Gaylord become a ghost town."

"Thirty percent of the increase of business in town is attributed to the impact of interstate highway seventy-five. A traffic survey shows traffic is heavier on Old Twenty-seven since the opening of the new highway than before. This is based on two surveys taken in 1963 and 1969. Many communities would have been hurt by traffic by-passing the central business district: Gaylord has grown rather than decline."

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These observations were made in 1970 – less than 10 years after I-75 was built through Otsego County. What would we add to this narrative today – 48 year later? How has I-75 impacted you and your family?

Thinking Like A Historian

- **Cause & Effect** – Who or what made this change happen? What were the expected and unintended effects of I-75 on Otsego County?
- **Change & Continuity** – Who has benefited from I-75? Who didn't and why? What remained the same even with the construction of I-75 ?