

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
INTERSTATE 69
By Matt Dellinger
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INTERSTATE 69

The Unfinished History of the Last Great American Highway

by Matt Dellinger



“A great journey, with sharp reporting and fine writing and a genuine feel for an America we don’t often notice. With Dellinger at the wheel, the saga of the unfinished interstate becomes a wonderful tale.”

—Susan Orlean, author of *The Orchid Thief*

“*Interstate 69* is about a road that doesn’t exist, and probably never will, and we learn anew about small town America whose fortunes ebbed and flowed with the advent of the superhighway. **Dellinger has given us a new way to understand—and enjoy—our history.**”

—Seymour Hersh, author of *Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib*

For more than 20 years chambers of commerce and transportation departments have been planning a highway that would reach across the United States from Canada to Mexico, cutting through Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas. Much more than another line on a map, Interstate 69 has the potential to crucially shift the lives of those people living along its route – some for the better, and some for the worse. **INTERSTATE 69 (Scribner; 1416542493; \$24.00; August 24, 2010)**, Matt Dellinger’s ambitious debut book, takes a comprehensive look at the impact the highway would have on the local communities surrounding it and on the country as a whole.

Part history, part travelogue, **INTERSTATE 69** reveals the surprising story of how this extraordinary undertaking began, introduces us to the array of individuals who have worked tirelessly for years to build the road—or to stop it—and guides us through the many places the highway would change forever: from sprawling cities like Indianapolis, Houston, and Memphis to the small rural towns of the Midwestern rust belt, the Mississippi Delta, and south Texas.

The *idea* of I-69 has already had an impact. Many expect the interstate to be an economic boon for a suffering region of America, while others worry that another highway will only spoil what’s left of small-town life and rural beauty. Along the proposed route, Dellinger met retired

mayors and businessmen for whom I-69 is something of a last wish. And he met environmentalists, farmers, anarchists, and others who question its merits. Their stories, their fundamental reasons for supporting or protesting the highway, shed light on the true impact of this massive, unfinished project, which will undoubtedly continue to be an issue for years to come.

Along the way, Dellinger's **INTERSTATE 69** paints an insightful portrait of Middle America in all of its political, social, and economic complexity. His reporting and reflection shed new light on hot button issues like globalization and environmentalism, and his deep research provides much-needed context to the growing debate about our country's troubled infrastructure. In an era where bridges fall, levees fail, and states lease their toll roads to foreign-owned corporations, Americans are realizing how roads and bridges and rails affect our standard of living and quality of life and how it determines which places prosper and which places fade.

Dellinger connects these dots with an absorbingly human, on-the-ground examination of our country's struggle with development. **INTERSTATE 69** captures the hopes, dreams, and fears surrounding what we build and what we leave behind.

Among the revelations that Dellinger folds into **INTERSTATE 69**:

- This \$27 Billion dollar highway is the largest planned in the U.S. since the original Eisenhower Interstate System.
- Interstate 69 is the actual "NAFTA Highway," though the notion was twisted into a conspiracy theory by ultraconservatives and anarchist alike.
- I-69 was first championed by a landowner in southern Indiana whose family stands to gain from its construction. But the marriage of transportation improvements and land development for personal gain in America dates back to George Washington.
- Negotiations over the road's exact route pitted town against town, environmentalists against businessmen, and Trent Lott's Mississippi against Bill Clinton's Arkansas.
- Lobbyists and earmarks put I-69 on the map with more than \$2.5 Billion in federal and state money for feasibility studies, preliminary engineering, and construction.
- The Highway Trust Fund that has covered road construction since 1956 is insolvent, the Interstate Construction Program has ended, and each state must now find its own way to pay for Interstate 69. It's unclear whether the road will ever be built in its entirety.
- The story of I-69 became tangled in controversial highway privatization schemes in Texas and Indiana. Privatization is not new to the world, or to America, and the idea of the American "freeway," now precarious, was largely an accident of history.
- The road was opposed successfully in Texas but unsuccessfully in Indiana. Environmental laws governing infrastructure have proven largely ineffective. They slow down beneficial projects but are impotent in preventing objectionable construction.
- The ultimate fate of I-69 will be affected by the economy, gas prices, and a strong shift in national transportation priorities toward rail and biking and pedestrians.

About the Author:

Matt Dellinger has written for *The New Yorker*, the *Atlantic*, the *Oxford American*, *Smithsonian*, the *Wall Street Journal* magazine, and *The New York Times* and has reported on transportation and planning for the public radio show *The Takeaway*. He worked for ten years on staff at *The New Yorker* as an illustrations editor, multimedia editor, and the producer and host of *The New Yorker Out Loud*, the magazine's first weekly podcast. He also coached *The New Yorker's* softball team for eight seasons. Dellinger was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, and graduated from DePauw University. He lives in Brooklyn, New York, and blogs for public radio's TransportationNation.org.

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