



# NJ 208 Freeway

*HISTORIC OVERVIEW*

**LENGTH:**

- 10.1 miles

**CONSTRUCTED:**

- 1952-1960

- [Current Conditions](#)
- [NJ Express](#)
- [njroads.com](#)
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This 2002 photo shows the northbound NJ 208 Freeway at the Russell Avenue exit in Wyckoff. (Photo by Douglas Kerr.)



### **LINKING NORTHWEST BERGEN COUNTY TO THE GEORGE**

**WASHINGTON BRIDGE:** Plans for a north-south divided highway from NJ 4 in Fair Lawn to US 202 in Franklin Lakes had been on state maps since the early 1930's. The highway, which was to be designated "Route S4B," was to provide an express link between rapidly growing areas in northwest Bergen County and the George Washington Bridge.

The highway was redesignated NJ 208 when work began in 1952 at the southern terminus with NJ 4. The route, which was completed northwest to US 202 in 1960, was originally constructed as a two-lane undivided highway (one lane in each direction). The state purchased additional right-of-way for a second carriageway, and bridges were built to accommodate additional lanes. The second two-lane carriageway was built during the late 1960's, bringing NJ 208 up to four-lane divided arterial standards.

In 1993, the NJDOT realigned the northern terminus of NJ 208 in Franklin Lakes to coincide with the completion of the long-delayed I-287. New exits also were built for High Mountain Road and the nearby Becton-Dickinson complex. Four years later, the last traffic light at McBride Avenue in Fair Lawn was removed, providing a 55 MPH, intersection-free route from NJ 4 northwest to I-287.

The existing 10.1-mile-long NJ 208 is among New Jersey's four-to-six lane divided highways that provide partial control of access, but still furnish driveway access to local business. The New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) classifies the entire length of NJ 208 as an "urban principal arterial." According to the NJDOT, NJ 208 carries approximately 70,000 vehicles per day (AADT).

**CHANGES FOR AN INTERCHANGE:** In late 2002, the NJDOT completed an \$32 million, 18-month-long reconstruction of the interchange between NJ 208 and NJ 4 in Fair Lawn. The project featured the construction of new local and express lanes on both NJ 4 and NJ 208, the construction of a new bridge to carry the eastbound express lanes of NJ 4 over eastbound NJ 208, and the rehabilitation of the existing bridge carrying NJ 208 over Saddle River Road. Improvements also were made to shoulders, acceleration and deceleration lanes, drainage, signing and lighting.

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This 2002 photo shows the rebuilt interchange between the NJ 208 Freeway and NJ 4 in Fair Lawn. (Photo by Christopher G. Mason.)



NJ 208 Freeway  
UNBUILT

**A PROPOSED FREEWAY THROUGH THE RAMAPO MOUNTAINS:** For many years, officials in Passaic County planned a realignment of Skyline Drive, a two-lane route between the Oakland-Franklin Lakes area of Bergen County and Ringwood, Passaic County. Steep grades, winding curves and heavy traffic volumes (particularly in the summer months) adversely affected traffic safety and capacity on the existing route.

In the early 1960's, officials from Passaic County recommended a 10.5-mile, four-lane highway to bypass the existing Skyline Drive through Oakland, Wanaque and Ringwood. Several years later, the engineering consulting firm Howard, Needles, Tammen and Bergendoff conducted studies on this corridor. Subsequently, in 1967, the NJDOT recommended the construction of NJ 208 as a freeway extension through Passaic and Sussex counties.

The recommended NJ 208 Freeway alignment from US 202 (and the then-proposed I-287) in Franklin Lakes north to the New Jersey-New York border at Greenwood Lake was significantly longer than the originally planned corridor. It was to circumvent the Ramapo Mountains with more desirable grade conditions, while providing improved local and inter-regional service.



The NJDOT recommendation for NJ 208 was outlined as follows:

The extension of NJ 208 north and west of US 202 in Oakland will furnish the resort traffic destined for the Greenwood Lake region with a much needed, free flowing facility. Present traffic must now travel on inadequate roads in this corridor. An adequate facility will develop the recreational areas in this region of the state, and provide a connection with major routes in Sussex County and Orange County, New York.



Interchanges were to be built at the following locations:

- EXIT 1: I-287 and US 202 in Franklin Lakes; cloverleaf interchange
- EXIT 2: Skyline Drive and West Oakland Avenue in Oakland; trumpet interchange
- EXIT 3: Muller Road (West Oakland Industrial Park) in Oakland; diamond interchange
- EXIT 4: Wanaque Connector in Ringwood; trumpet interchange
- EXIT 5: Ringwood Avenue in Ringwood; partial diamond
- EXIT 6: Greenwood Lake Turnpike in Ringwood; "scissors" interchange
- EXIT 7: Margaret King Avenue in Ringwood; trumpet interchange
- EXIT 8: Marshall Hill Road in West Milford; partial cloverleaf interchange
- EXIT 9: Union Valley Road in West Milford; partial cloverleaf interchange
- EXIT 10: Lake Shore Drive in West Milford; partial trumpet interchange
- EXIT 11: Wawayanda Park Entrance Road in Vernon; partial cloverleaf interchange

The NJ 208 Freeway was to include an extension into New York State as the proposed Orange Expressway (NY 208) north to I-84 near Maybrook, Orange County. It was also to provide future connection to either the proposed NJ 178 Freeway south to Morris County, or the proposed NJ 94 Freeway southwest to Warren County.

Design standards for the NJ 208 Freeway were to be Interstate-standard, albeit with some modifications. The 21.4-mile, four-lane freeway was to feature a 60 MPH design speed, a 300-foot-wide right-of-way, split-level roadways and maximum grades of five percent (with one exception along the route of a six-percent grade). Climbing lanes would have been added where appropriate. The freeway was designed for a capacity of 30,000 vehicles per day (AADT).

The proposed NJ 208 Freeway, which would have taken 101 homes and five businesses, was estimated in 1970 to cost \$66.3 million, including construction and right-of-way acquisition costs. Costs were to be minimized by constructing the route along utility rights-of-way. However, nearly all of the alternatives proposed by the NJDOT went through the Wanaque Reservoir watershed, as well as through state and county parkland.

The Tri-State Transportation Commission recommended the upgrading of the existing Fair Lawn-to-Franklin Lakes section to full freeway standards, and the construction of the NJ 208 Freeway from Franklin Lakes northwest to Ringwood, as "priority projects" for completion by 1975. The freeway extension from Ringwood northwest to Vernon was recommended as a

"long-range project" for completion by 1985.

In 1975, the Tri-State Regional Planning Commission (the successor to the Tri-State Transportation Commission) recommended further studies to improve access in the proposed NJ 208 Freeway corridor. The proposal in the report Maintaining Mobility recommended construction of the freeway for completion by 2000. However, by the late 1970's, high construction costs and potential environmental damage deterred the NJDOT from pursuing the NJ 208 Freeway project.

**THE WANAQUE-RINGWOOD BYPASS:** During the mid-1990's, officials in Passaic County presented a scaled-down highway proposal that would have paralleled Ringwood Avenue (Passaic CR 511) north from I-287 to the New Jersey-New York border. The four-lane Wanaque-Ringwood Bypass, a four-lane arterial highway that would have utilized an abandoned railroad right-of-way, would have served the same environmentally sensitive region as the canceled NJ 208 Freeway.

Fearing intense development and pollution of the nearby Wanaque Reservoir, local community groups pressured officials to re-evaluate the route. These forces received a victory in 1996, when the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) rejected the environmental impact statement presented by Passaic County. According to the NJDEP, the EIS failed to project how much traffic would use the bypass, and how the additional traffic capacity would affect adjacent roadways. By 1998, Passaic County officials abandoned support for the Wanaque-Ringwood Bypass.







**SOURCES:** Transportation 1985: A Regional Plan, Tri-State Transportation Commission (1966); New Jersey Highway Facts, New Jersey Department of Transportation (1967); "Route 208 Freeway Location Report," New Jersey Department of Transportation (1970); Master Plan for Transportation, New Jersey Department of Transportation (1972); Maintaining Mobility, Tri-State Regional Planning Commission (1975); Tri-State Transportation Campaign; Paul Bryan; Rich Dean; Raymond C. Martin; Dan Moraseski; William F. Yurasko.