



AN ONLINE DATABASE OF INFORMATION

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**HIGHWAYS.** Domestic transport was primarily by coastal shipping until the 19th century. Humboldt described Cuban roads as fair in the west, poor in central Cuban and impracticable for wheeled vehicles in the east. The Junta de Fomento had constructed a few turnpike (toll) roads around Havana, stretching 12 leagues west to Guanajay, 5 leagues south to Santiago de las Vegas 5 leagues to the east and 7½ leagues to the southwest. But most roads were merely unimproved rights-of-way. Even the east-west camino real was little more than a trail for mule trains and only became suitable for carretas (oxcarts) in the 1840s, when railroads had started to replace highway transport at least in western Cuba.

By 1862 there were 161 kms of major highways, centered on Havana; this had increased to 256 km of calzadas (macadamized roads) by 1898.. The first United States intervention added another 96 kms, and the Estrada Palma administration, 382 kms. During the second intervention, Col. Black built 570 kms of 16 ft (4.9 m) wide, tree-lined highways, and planned the further 1,332 kms built by 1924. The Carretera central was begun in 1927. By 1956 Cuba had a total of 7,169 kms, of which 1,144 were first class, and by 1959, 10,104 kms of which 5,896 were paved. By the Revolution of 1959 Cuba had one of the most extensive road networks in Latin America. Since then further expansion has been undertaken, although road maintenance has decreased significantly. In the 1990s Cuba had about 12,420 miles (20,000 km) of highways, including over 9,000 miles (14,500 km) of major roads, most of them all-weather although only 5,280 were metaled. The vast number of (mostly unpaved) rural access roads, add another 87,600. These minor roads have traditionally comprised the most neglected part of the nation's road system, especially in Oriente province.

An early act of the Revolutionary government had been the ripping up of the then newly installed parking meters. Thirty seven years later the revolutionary government was introducing highway tolls to provide badly needed funds for maintenance, beginning in January 1996 with tolls on the roads to Varadero and Cayo Coco beaches.

See also: OCHO VIAS; ROAD ACCIDENTS.