Timeline of the first roads and their use

The earliest roads can be traced back to horses, oxen and people transporting goods in the Stone Age

The first goods transport was on human backs and heads, but the use of pack animals, including donkeys and horses, was developed during the Stone Age.

By about 5000 BC tracks developed along ridges in England to avoid crossing rivers and bogs.

Street paving has been found from the first human settlements around 4000 BC

Bronze and Iron Ages – freight transport started to take place often by water

Wheeled transport created the need for better roads. Generally, natural materials cannot be both soft enough to form well-graded surfaces and strong enough to bear wheeled vehicles, especially when wet, and still stay intact.

In urban areas it began to be worthwhile to build stone-paved streets and, in fact, the first paved streets appear to have been built in 4000 BC. "Corduroy roads" were built in Glastonbury , England in 3300 BC and later in the Fens.

1st Century AD: Roman Military Roads were constructed

With the advent of the Roman Empire, there was a need for armies to be able to travel quickly from one area to another, and the roads or tracks that existed were often muddy, which greatly delayed the movement of large masses of troops. To solve this problem, the Romans built great roads.

Milestones started to be laid at every 1000 (mille) double-steps.

Waymarkers were also used to define Packhorse Tracks, causeys & holloways, manorial and monastic ways, pilgrims routes, coffin routes, salt ways…

1555 Statute labour was introduced for highway repairs by townships (north) and parishes

The Act said that each year, in the Easter week, every parish was to elect "two honest persons" of the parish to serve as the Surveyor of Highways, who would be responsible for the upkeep of those highways within the parish boundaries which ran to market towns. Local men had to do unpaid work mending the highways.

1600 Statute Miles were introduced – 1760 yards, although ' long' or 'country' miles lasted till 1800s (7/5 stat mile)

1675+ Ogilby's "Britannia, Book of the Roads" – the first English road atlas was created

Responsibility for the state of the roads lay with the local parish since Tudor times. In 1656 the parish of Radwell , Hertfordshire petitioned Parliament for help to maintain their section of the Great North Road.[1] Parliament passed an act that gave the local justices powers to erect toll-gates on a section of the Great North Road, between Wadesmill, Hertfordshire and Caxton.

1697 Guide stones/stoops Act, JPs must erect markers on open land and where routes crossed

1704 First Turnpike Trust act, tolls charged for wheeled vehicles and animals

1767 Milestones compulsory on turnpike roads, giving direction & distances, for charging for horse hire at coaching inns and for delivery charges on mail before 1840.

First Mail Coach Services

The first trial mail coach run from Bristol to London took only 16 hours, a remarkable speed for the time. The first regular mail coach route was therefore established from Bristol to London, via Bath, on 2 August 1784.

In the early 1800s, steam coaches were beginning to replace horse drawn coaches – did not need to stop frequently.

1840s Railway era

1880s Turnpikes wound up because they were bankrupt for lack of use

1880s Local Authorities took over responsibility for roads

1896 the first cars in England

1910 Car use spread more widely, to the middle / professional classes

Even in modern day, we pay taxes to help maintain our roads.