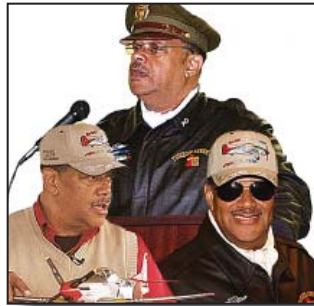


# The Genesis -&- Time line of the Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Trail

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by R.L. Ron Spriggs, Executive Director RSETA  
Lexington, KY September 1, 2014



I was recently asked by a colleague, Burton Lowe of Detroit, about the specifics of the Interstate (I-75) designation of the Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Trail, herein alternately referred to as T.A.M.T. or TAMT. Burt encouraged me to create a time line of events on TAMT as a way to document the process of this historically significant event and to help others who might have an interest in replicating this endeavor in their state.

Currently, it seems as though there is a movement to encourage the Michigan Legislature to pass a Bill to designate the Michigan portion of the I-75 corridor as a tribute to the many cadets, pilots and ground support personnel from that state who are Tuskegee Airmen.

Our idea to designate a portion of the I-75 corridor in Kentucky as a memorial to the Tuskegee Airmen began with an email from The Honorable Representative Reginald Meeks (D) from Louisville during the Kentucky Legislative session of 2006. Representative Meeks informed me that legislation had been passed by the Colorado Legislature to name a portion of the I-80 highway in the Denver area after the Tuskegee Airmen.

As the Executive Director the Ron Spriggs Exhibit of Tuskegee Airmen, (RSETA), I received this notice with enthusiasm and replied that this was something that we should try to implement for the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Representative Meeks, with the support of a variety of interested citizens and lawmakers, was able to sponsor a bill that would result in the designation of the I-75 corridor around Lexington, KY (Fayette County) as the Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Trail. This bill was successfully processed during the 2007 Kentucky General Assembly, and it was ultimately signed into law by the governor.

As an added bonus, the designation was completed prior to the opening of the World Equestrian Games in Lexington, KY, the

Horse Capitol of the World. Visitors from all over the world who attended the Games were able to view the highway signs as they travelled throughout the Lexington KY area.

There was a major difference between the Bill approved by the Colorado legislature and the one passed by the Kentucky legislature. Colorado only approved the Bill without providing funds to install their Highway designations. On the other hand, Kentucky's legislature did approve funding and authorized the Kentucky Department of Transportation to post signage on the I-75 portion around Lexington. As a result, Colorado passed their Law first, but Kentucky "**put their stick in the ground first.**"



KY. Gov. Steve Beshear and other officials unveiling the new Kentucky I-75 signs on July 17, 2010 at Georgetown University, Kentucky.

Our initial design for the I-75 sign designating the TAMT was created by KY-DOT, but the RSETA organization facilitated the approval for the use of the Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. (TAI) National logo for the sign. Once approved, we developed a standard that would be available for use by other states in order **to be consistent across all Interstate corridors.** The above photo is the recommended full size TAMT sign.

In 2007, an unveiling ceremony was hosted by the Aviation Museum of Kentucky, located at the Bluegrass airport. There were three Documented Original Tuskegee Airmen (DOTAs) in attendance: Frank Weaver of Louisville Kentucky, Frank Doug Walker of Richmond Kentucky, and Dr. John Lehr of Cincinnati Ohio. Unveiling and publicizing this designation made Kentucky the first state in the nation to recognize the Tuskegee Airmen on an Interstate highway.

During the 2007 Tuskegee Airmen National convention in Dallas, Ron Spriggs, president of RSETA, was able to show a replica of the sign to demonstrate the progress we had made



United States Air Force Lt. Col. (Ret.) James C. Warren (right) sings along with the USAF song at the conclusion of a dedication ceremony for the Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Highway at the Veterans Memorial Hall in Dixon.

to honor the Tuskegee airmen. This convention was focused on approving the new bylaw for the national organization, and there was not much time in which to publicize what we had achieved.

As a result, I sat with the sign, approximately 36 inchewide by 12 inches high, outside the convention door and as Tuskegee Airmen exited the meeting rooms, they were asked to autograph the highway marker. There are approximately 75 to 80 Tuskegee Airmen signatures. This sign was framed and sealed and is in the care of the RSETA organization. Because of the uniqueness and rarity of this sign, the value placed on it has a \$20,000 price tag.

During the rest of 2007, 2008 and even into 2009, I personally sent letters on how to do what Kentucky did to all of the state legislative bodies along the I-75 corridor. I had the notion of wanting to make the entire I-75 corridor of 1,785 miles a designated Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Highway, beginning at Sault Ste. Marie Michigan all the way down to Hialeah Florida. Along that path, are six states beginning with Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia and finally Florida.



DOTAs from the Chicago DoDo Chapter eagerly autographing the Tuskegee Airmen Trail sign commemorating the installation on I-57



Other Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Trail activities:  
 During this time other chapters of TAI were showing interest in this project. I am citing those areas although my time line may be a little bit askew, they are as follows:

1. 2013, The **Chicago DoDo Chapter** led by Ken Rapier, Chapter President dedicated a 20 mile portion of I-57 up to a junction call Sauk trail was developed.
2. 2010 A segment of I-85, around Tuskegee was dedicated at the dedication of Moton Field, **Alabama** where the Tuskegee Airmen pilots received their basic cadet training at Tuskegee.
3. In 2008, thru the **Atlanta Chapter** and historian Zellie Orr installed a 12 mile branch off I-75 which would connect air travelers to the Atlanta Hartsfield Airport. This branch is called the Tuskegee Airmen Parkway.
4. 2011, In **South Carolina** a segment branch of I-95 around Walterboro was also established.
5. 2012, A 5-mile stretch near **San Diego, CA.**, was dedicated the Tuskegee Airmen highway on I-5.
6. 2010, State Representative Reginald Meeks (D) of Louisville, sponsored another bill to extend the previously installed Interstate 75 in both directions leading from Lexington **Kentucky** to both state borders beginning at the Ohio River and ending at the Tennessee border near Jellico. On April 12, Gov. Steve Beshear signed a bill that extended the trail from border to border on I-75. It is now 191 miles long. It has been estimated that some 92,000 vehicles travel each day on this road.
7. 2012 State Senator Thelma Harper (D), sponsored a Bill in the **Tennessee** Legislature to dedicate I-75 a Tuskegee Airman Trail; but only at the borders since the entire corridor had already been designated the Al Gore, Sr. Highway.
8. 2013 After nearly 2 years in both Houses, the **Ohio** Legislature approved a Bill Sponsored by State Rep. Denise Driehaus (D), the Tuskegee Airmen Trail for its I-75 corridor. Highway markers were grouped with the American Legion and another organization on a single post and installed in both directions at their rest stops.
9. 2012, **Colorado** passed legislation to install signage around Denver, around the time of the Republican National Convention. Later, the Colorado Legislation approved the designation of the Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Trail along the entire width of its 451 miles of Interstate 70 making it the first East/West designated TAMT. There are 10 states making up the 2,173 miles of I-70.



## T.A.M.T. - CHECK LIST

Getting a Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Trail (TAMT) installed and dedicated is not a complicated process, although it can be a political football. States General Assemblies could perform the required tasks in one session; however it can more, using the following check-list:

- Recommend that Joint-Bills be sponsored in both Houses. It saves time and money. The final step is to have the Governors to sign approved Bills into Law.
- Recommend two sponsors in each House to sponsor a Bill. One is primary sponsor, the other a co-sponsor.
- Recommend representation from both parties in this nonpartisan program.
- Start early weeks or even months before the start of a legislative session. Try to avoid election years; elected Officials might be a little bit distracted.
- State the history, purpose and the length of the Interstate (e.g. WIKIPEDIA). Determine the sinage interval, using a factor of 15 or 20 miles. Then add two signs for each border. Complete the rest of the math using Kentucky costs to develop a rough estimate; add 20% variation misc. factor.
- Kentucky signs cost about \$200 each to make in-house. Request the State's Dept. of Transportation to make and install all signs. DOT personnel should be able to install signs at the designated intervals.
- Signs should be spaced on both sides of the road at regular intervals (e.g. 15, 20 miles; rest areas or county lines) and always at the states border.
- Signs may be stacked with other designated purposes. Limit to three.
- TAMT signs can be installed over a period of time to make it more cost effective.
- Publicizing is a must. Prepare a public service announcement (PSA) for local newspaper, radio and TV stations to refer to the new signs. Monitor on a periodic basis.
- Ensure consistency in naming "**Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Trail** or **Highway**". Always include the TAI logo in he same position (the lower left corner). Use only Interstate Green reflective decals.
- The Kentucky D.O.T. or the Ron Spriggs Exhibit of Tuskegee Airmen (RSETA) will assist in the layout and technical issues of creating the TAMT signs.

Feel free to contact Ron Spriggs at: (859)576-3636 or ronspriggs@aol.com if you need assistance. Also visit our website: www.rseta.org

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From February 2006 to Present Day



## Operation-75

**Mission:** To work through state's legislation, the entire I-75 corridor that runs 1,787 miles through six states designated as the **Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Trail**. To encourage states west of I-75 to replicate this honor especially on I-80 as the east/west passage.

|                 |                    |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| FL.....         | 471mi              |
| GA.....         | 355 (12)           |
| TN.....         | 162mi              |
| KY.....         | 192mi              |
| OH.....         | 211mi              |
| MI.....         | 396 mi             |
| <b>Total ..</b> | <b>1,787 miles</b> |

