

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

G. Sweitzer

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Commissioners and Members of Key Staff

Date March 1, 1990

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Bureau of Transportation Safety

Traffic Fatality and Fatality Rate Report



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GORDON A. SWEITZER

Since the Iowa rural Interstate highway speed limit was raised from 55 mph to 65 mph in May 1987, I have made reports to the Commission on a semi-annual basis. The last report in mid-1989 was a detailed workshop involving the Governor's Traffic Safety Bureau, the Iowa State Patrol, the Motor Vehicle Division, the Office of Transportation Inventory and the Bureau of Transportation Safety.

Each time we have discussed the subjects of the Interstate speed limit, traffic accidents and deaths, I have pointed out the fact that accidents involve numerous contributory elements including the driver (age, condition, training and capability), the vehicle (size, weight, safety features, handling capability, speed capability, etc.), and the highway (surface condition, weather condition, construction, maintenance, geometrics, etc.). The element of vehicle speed in relation to the posted speed is only one part of the total accident equation. In addition, we have pointed out that traffic accidents and deaths tend to fluctuate up and down over extended periods of time even though the level of travel has been steadily increasing since the oil embargo in 1974 (recently about 6% annually on the rural Interstate highways), and the fatality rate has been on a generally steady downward trend. Finally, we have regularly observed that the Interstate highways with their high level design features are the safest highways for people to use in their travels as evidenced by their low number of deaths and their low fatality rate.

The attached charts and graphs bear out what we have been saying. Rural Interstate deaths moved up in 1987 and 1988 causing concern on the part of opponents of the speed limit change. However, we pointed to the fact that rural Interstate and primary highway deaths in 1988 were basically identical to the same figures in 1981 when the speed limit was 55 mph. In 1989 the number of deaths dropped below the comparable figures in 1988, and appear to be within range of the 1983 figures.

Note from Graph No. 1 that the number of rural Interstate deaths is so low that it is difficult to derive any statistical significance from year to year changes. One accident one way or the other, or an accident with multiple deaths can greatly affect the annual totals and rates. The number of deaths shown in Graph No. 1 for both the Interstate and primary highways, and the comparable rates shown in Graph No. 2, clearly confirm which is the safest highway system to travel on.

Graph No. 3 indicates, with the exception of the years 1980, 1981 and 1988, the Iowa statewide fatality rate has been below the national rate. Even when above the national rate, we have been very close to it. We believe this demonstrates the fact that highway construction, safety and enforcement programs have been effective. These efforts must continue unabated and new initiatives must be undertaken if we hope to further reduce the fatality rates despite the rising population and travel trends.

Attachments

IOWA TRAFFIC FATALITIES REPORT

1980 THRU 1989

Bureau of Transportation Safety
February 12, 1990

ROAD SYSTEM	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
TRAFFIC FATALITIES								*		***
INTERSTATE - RURAL	30	35	22	21	15	18	14	23	35	26
INTERSTATE - MUNICIPAL	8	7	9	21	14	9	7	8	12	13
PRIMARY - RURAL	198	196	143	180	148	181	161	166	194	188
PRIMARY - MUNICIPAL	100	84	70	61	49	55	46	59	60	71
COUNTY - RURAL	212	201	176	172	146	157	145	163	173	150
CITY - MUNICIPAL	78	89	60	55	48	53	68	72	83	66
STATEWIDE TOTAL	626	612	480	510	420	473	441	491	557	514
FATAL TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS								**		
STATEWIDE TOTAL	541	529	431	434	376	415	388	443	494	451

* The speed limit on Rural Interstate highways was raised to 65 mph on May 12, 1987.

** The speed limit on other rural freeway sections was raised to 65 mph on December 23 and 29, 1987.

*** Preliminary data.

IOWA TRAFFIC FATALITY RATE REPORT

1980 THRU 1989

Bureau of Transportation Safety
February 12, 1990

ROAD SYSTEM	FATALITY RATES									
	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
INTERSTATE - RURAL	1.34	1.48	0.94	0.87	0.57	0.68	0.50	0.78	1.07	0.75
INTERSTATE - MUNICIPAL	1.22	1.02	1.28	2.98	1.61	1.02	0.75	0.81	1.08	1.14
PRIMARY - RURAL	3.51	3.49	2.57	3.17	2.51	3.22	2.79	2.84	3.20	3.00
PRIMARY - MUNICIPAL	4.17	3.54	2.96	2.57	1.95	2.25	1.89	2.45	2.38	2.73
COUNTY - RURAL	6.45	5.85	4.68	4.51	3.81	4.26	4.01	4.49	4.65	3.99
CITY - MUNICIPAL	1.92	2.09	1.28	1.16	1.01	1.10	1.38	1.44	1.60	1.24
STATEWIDE RATE	3.42	3.27	2.48	2.59	2.05	2.35	2.15	2.36	2.55	2.28
NATIONAL RATE	3.3	3.2	2.8	2.6	2.6	2.5	2.5	2.4	2.3	NA

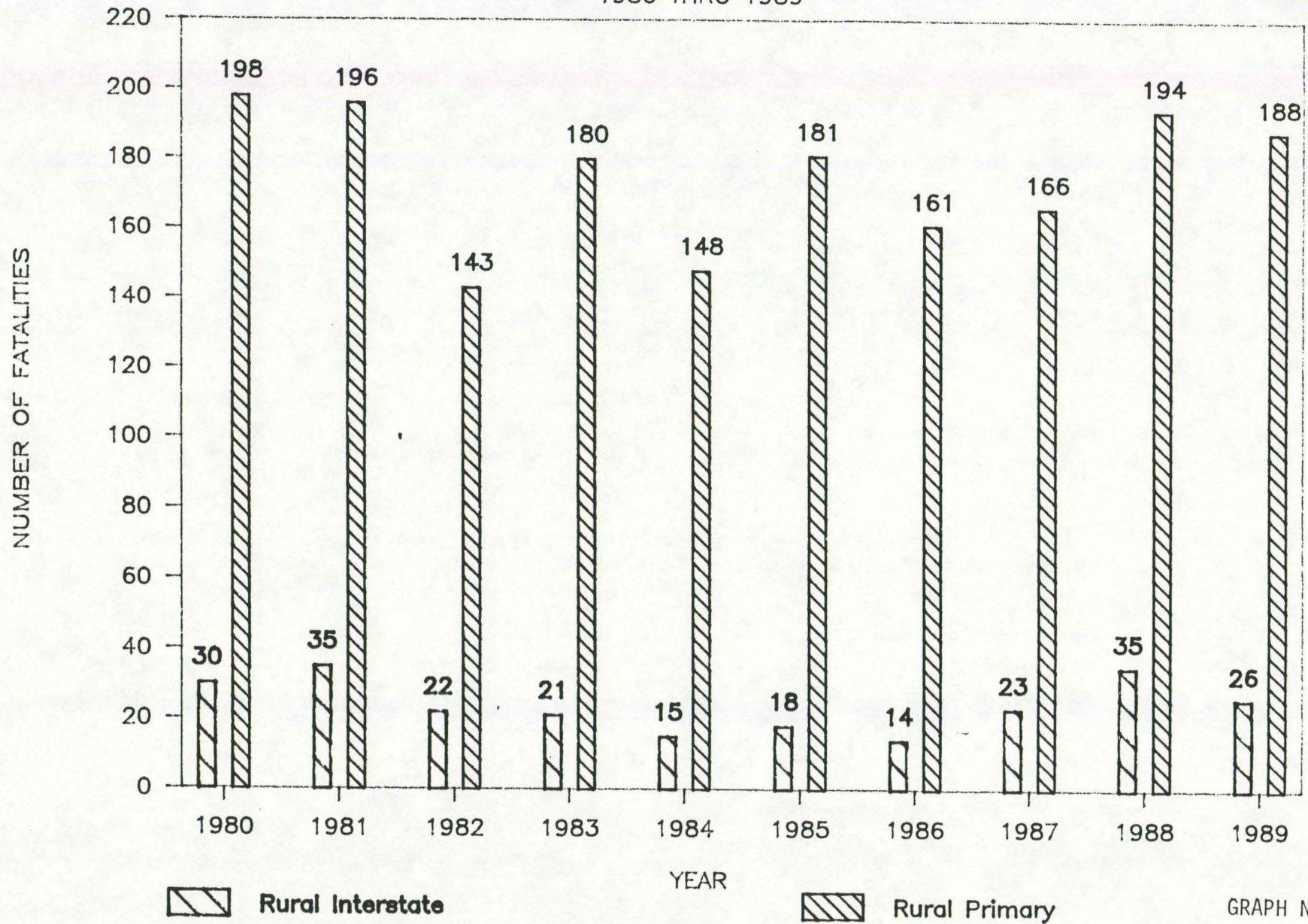
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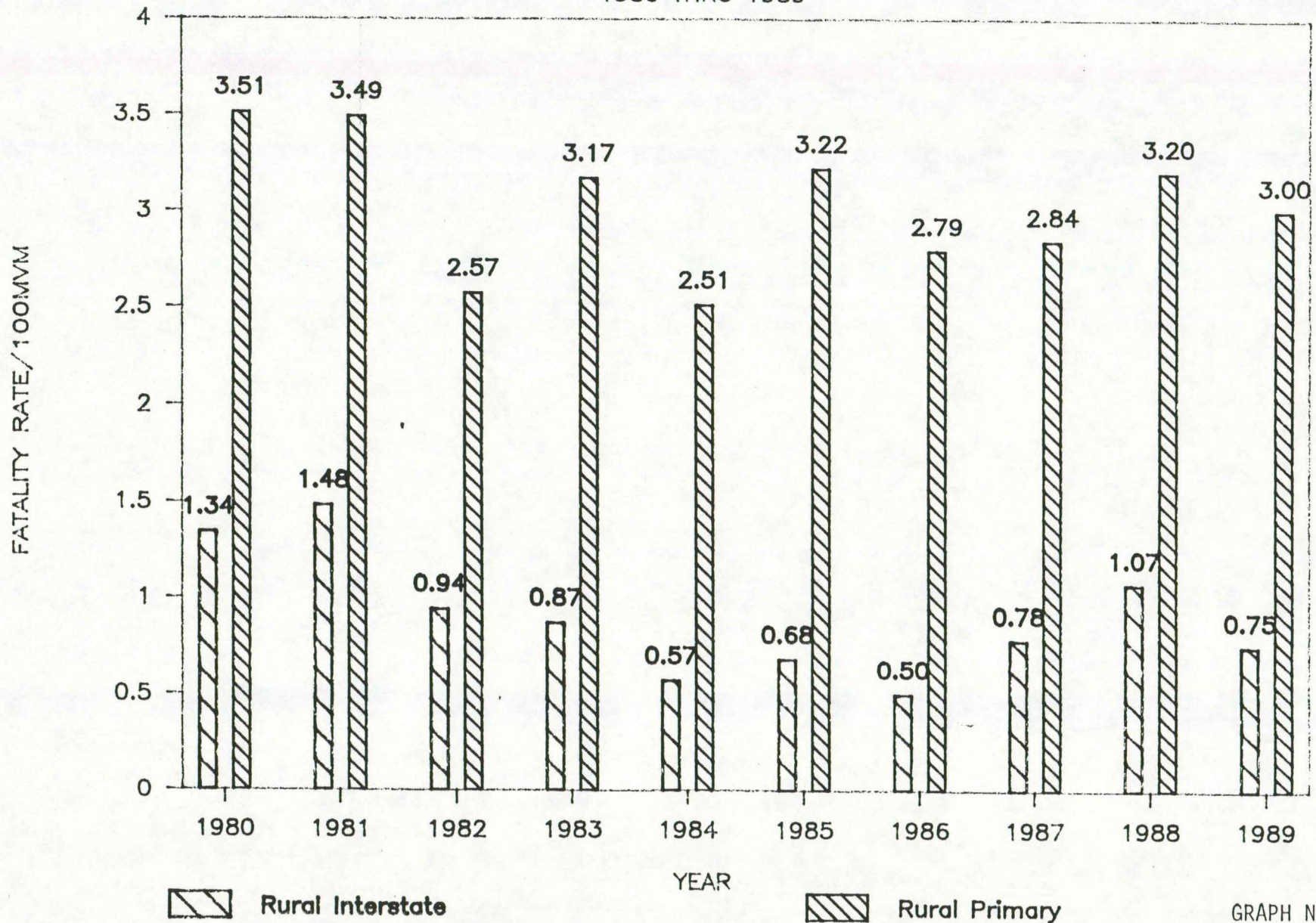
RURAL INTERSTATE AND PRIMARY FATALITIES

1980 THRU 1989



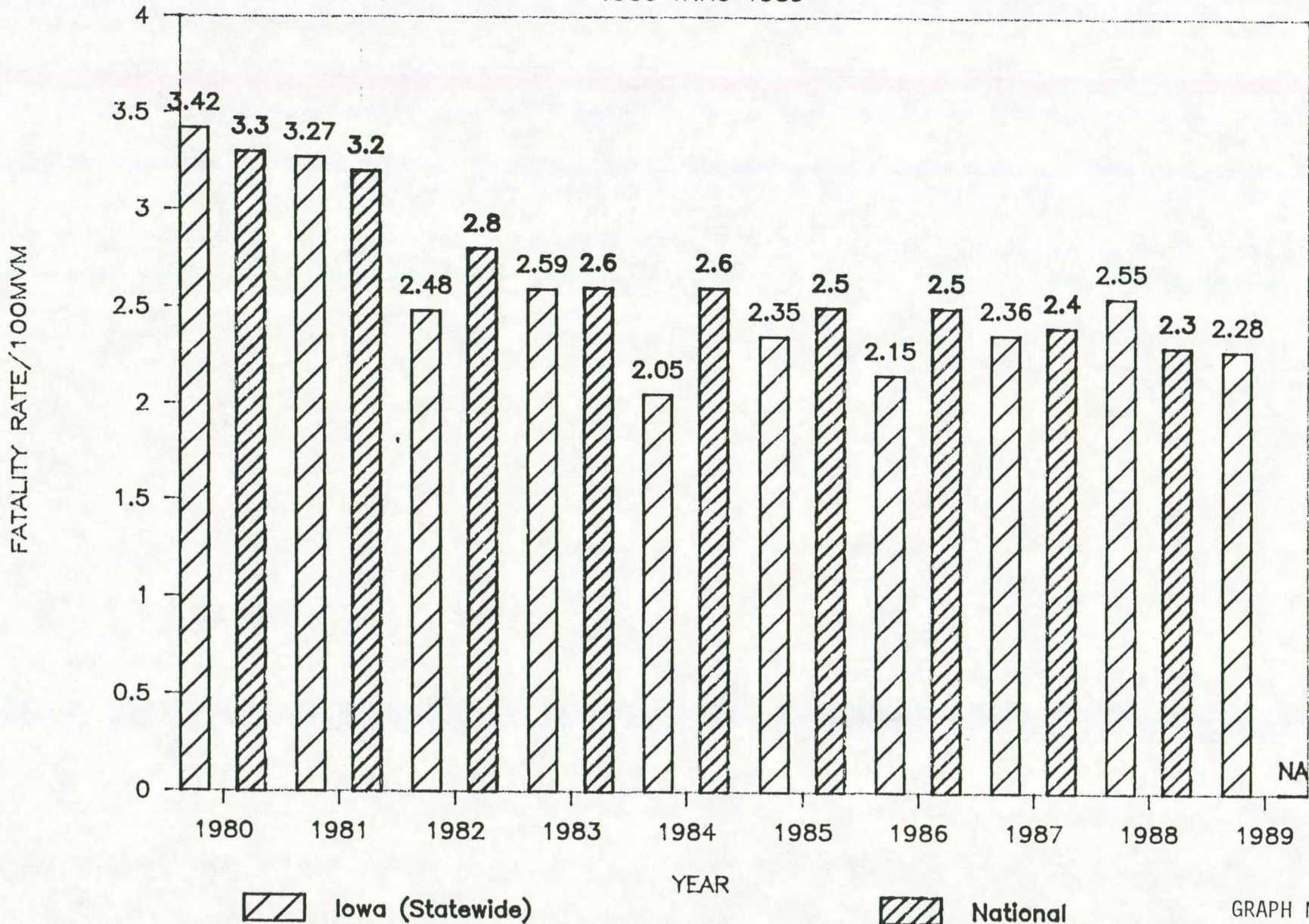
RURAL INTERSTATE/PRIMARY FATALITY RATES

1980 THRU 1989



IOWA STATEWIDE/NATIONAL FATALITY RATES

1980 THRU 1989



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