Roads, Roman and post-Roman Late Antiquity inherited an extensive network of public roads designed and maintained, largely at local expense, in the interests not of private or commercial travellers but of the state. The public roads, punctuated by milestones, underpinned the state transport and communication system, the Cursus Publicus. Although compilations of routes rather than catalogues of public roads, the Antonine Itinerary, from the Tetrarchic Period, and the diagram on the later Peutinger Map give an impression of the comprehensiveness of the network.

The last major new projects were the militarily significant Strata Diocletiana on the desert fringe in Syria and the Via Herculia in central southern Italy, both undertaken by the Tetrarchy. The foundation of Constantinople took advantage of a key nodal point where European and Asian routes converged. The Bordeaux Pilgrim provides a detailed itinerary across the Alps and northern Italy along the Via Militaris in the north Balkans to the new capital, on to the Holy Land by the Pilgrims’ Road, and back by way of the Via Egnatia and up Italy through Rome to Milan. Inscriptions record repair and upgrading at state expense in Baetica and Germania Secunda under Valentinian I (CIL II, 4733; XVII/2, 565), with the last such investment known from the Western Empire being replacement of the milestones along the Via Aurelia in Gallia Vienensis in 435 (ILS 806).

Roman law codes give an insight into the mechanisms for the maintenance of the transport system (CTh VIII, 5 = CJ XII, 50) and its physical infrastructure (CTh XV, 3), and reiteration of some regulations by the Burgundians (Lex Romana Burgundionum, 17, 1) and Visigoths (Breviarium of Alaric, 8, 2) shows that the system did not entirely vanish with the Roman state. In Ostrogothic Italy, a nineteen-mile stretch of the Via Appia through the Pontine marshes was renovated by Theoderic c. 510 (ILS 827; Cassiodorus. Variae, 2, 32–3). In the East, repairs to the coast road in Cilicia Prima by a Roman military commander are recorded in 519 (AE 1973, 542) and, after the Byzantine invasion of Italy, inscribed verses
celebrated bridge repair on the Via Salaria north of Rome by the general Narses in 565 (ILS 832).

