

REMARKS BY
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I am pleased to have this opportunity to talk to so many people who are interested, as I am, in the rural road programs of the Commonwealth. My only regret is that more local officials are not with us today. There are 120 counties in Kentucky and everyone of them has a substantial stake in the success, or failure, of these programs.

While representatives of our District Offices are in almost continual contact with the county judges and fiscal courts of the Commonwealth, I think it is beneficial to all of us when we have a meeting-of-minds between local officials and the administrators of the Department of Highways that can be developed at a conference like this. But this is usually true, I suppose: "The people who need to hear the sermon most, don't come to church."

When I began to prepare these remarks, I set myself a time limit of twenty minutes, which translates into about 2,250 words. But if I had to, I could sum everything I have to say about rural roads with one word: "priorities." Since this leaves me 2,249 words to go, I will use them to explain exactly what I mean by "priorities."

Simply, it means: putting what you need most at the top of the list. And this is a responsibility all of us, local officials, highway executives and engineers, share, making the list.

As you know, the Deputy Commissioner for Rural Roads, and under his direction the Division of Rural Roads, is responsible for developing the annual County Road Aid Program and Rural Secondary Program and for recommending them to the Commissioner of Highways. The mission of the County Road Aid Program is to help county government meet its responsibilities for county roads. First of all, this has the effect of restricting the activity of the program to county roads. County Road Aid funds can be spent only on county roads, never on any part of the State-maintained system.

There are 39,993 miles of county roads in Kentucky. At the present time \$13 million is appropriated for the annual County Road Aid Program by the General Assembly. Now \$13 million is a lot of money. It's a lot of money if you are buying your wife a diamond necklace and a mink coat. It's a lot of money invested in Kentucky Fried Chicken stock. But it is not a lot of money when it is weighed against the needs of almost 40 thousand miles of county roads.

In fact, we don't even pretend it can be spread that far. The mileage covered by all 120 County Road Aid Maintenance Programs amounts to 17,723 miles, only about 45 percent of all county roads.

If the \$13 million County Road Aid Program were distributed evenly over the 17,723 miles assigned to the County Road Aid Maintenance Program, the average allotment per mile would be only \$750. If we attempted to cover all county roads, each mile would get only \$325 a year.

Obviously, either distribution would result in a very thin program. Charlie Weaver would tell you that Mrs. Butterworth's syrup is thicker than that.

Then, considering the limitations on our resources and the work that needs to be done, is it possible to have a good County Road Aid Program? My answer is "yes." And if you ask me how, then I answer with my one magic word "priorities."

The County Road Aid Program since its beginning has assigned the highest priority to maintenance. I agree with this policy completely. I think we should look at all our roads just the way a banker looks at the money entrusted to his bank. Our first responsibility, like his, is to preserve what we have. Only after we have met that obligation are we free to consider enlarging our activities and our commitments.

Following this approach, preserving what we have, I think we must give first attention to blacktopped county roads. Obviously, the public investment in one of these facilities is much greater than that in a traffic-bound road. For this reason, I think a good County Road Aid Program should begin by meeting the maintenance needs of blacktop county roads. After that is done, we can look to the maintenance needs of other roads.

In selecting the roads to be listed in an ideal County Road Aid Program, one of the most important and earliest tests to be applied would ask, "How much service does each county road provide?" "What traffic demands are made on every eligible road?"

A totally reliable answer to this question can be had from a traffic count. Roads entitled to priority are the ones that carry the most traffic each day.

We who live with the rural roads program day-in and day-out, believe that nothing is more important than the condition of bridges. If there is a dangerous condition on a highway the motorist can always minimize his risk by approaching the hazardous spot with a great deal of caution, but on a bridge he is, to some extent, the helpless creature of chance. There is very little he can do to reduce the risk of crossing an unsound bridge, other than staying off it. And sometimes the traveler has no choice. A review of bridge needs should be included in our preliminary studies every year.

And there are other questions we should ask about county roads, other tests we should apply. Connecting roads should have priority over dead-end roads, school bus and mail routes should out-rank roads that do not provide these services. I am convinced we owe it to the taxpayers of the Commonwealth to avoid wasting their money by listing in our maintenance program roads which simply cannot be maintained at a reasonable level of service. The bottomless road that swallows its annual ration of replacement stone is a good example of what I mean.

Only after priorities are established and maintenance needs met, only then, assuming any balance is left, should we consider improvement projects.

Now I am sure these obvious priorities have occurred to you long before this. In general, I believe they guide most of our Fiscal Courts when they are weighing their annual County Road Aid Program. My point in listing them now is to show you how seriously we take the advice given us by county officials, and to point out that the quality of these programs is a very real responsibility of the fiscal courts.

You who have served as county judges or magistrates for any length of time know that the attitude of different Commissioners of Highways toward the County Road Aid Program has varied substantially. The statutes require the Commissioner to solicit and pay attention to the advice of the fiscal courts. However, the Commissioner himself determines what weight he will give to the advice he receives.

Since I have served as Deputy Commissioner for Rural Roads, our highway Commissioners have assigned the highest value to advice about the County Road Aid Program they have received from the fiscal courts. With a very few exceptions, and then only when the programs recommended were seriously flawed, the Commissioner has taken the programs proposed to him by each Fiscal Court and based his County Road Aid Programs on them.

So in the long run, the effectiveness of each County Road Aid Program depends largely on the quality of the advice we are given by the Fiscal Court. And I say again, I believe that each Fiscal Court is obligated to the taxpayers of the Commonwealth and to the people it serves, to base its recommendations on a logical and clearly understood system of priorities.

The same thing applies to the Rural Secondary Program. Sound planning based on intelligently chosen priorities is perhaps even more important in this program. It is more important because rural secondary roads are usually built to higher standards and carry a heavier volume of traffic than a typical county road. It is more important because more money is involved.

While county officials do not bear the same burden of responsibility for the Rural Secondary Program that they do in connection with the County Road Aid Program, I assure you their suggestions are carefully considered and, in many instances, are included in the programs finally authorized.

The Rural Secondary Program offers more opportunities for highway improvement than we find in the County Road Aid Program. It has more money and more limited objectives. Our Rural Secondary Program for this year is based on anticipated revenue of \$31,020,000. The maintenance of 9,756 miles of rural secondary roads specifically assigned to this program will cost \$9,722,000. This leaves \$20.5 million for construction projects, after reserves for administration and emergencies are established.

While the Rural Secondary budget is not assigned exclusively to roads included in the Rural Secondary System, we in the Department of Highways believe they are entitled to priority in our programming. Only after we have met the needs of Rural Secondary roads should we consider other state-maintained roads or county roads. But whatever system is involved, our problem-solving should always be based on priorities.

Obviously, I have not tried to list every factor that should be weighed in arriving at priorities and developing programs. They are the same ones men of good will and common sense would be guided by under any circumstances.

Because the major responsibility for the Rural Secondary Program - and a substantial share of responsibility for the County Road Aid Program must be that of the Department of Highways, I would like to direct a few remarks to departmental people in the audience.

The most important contribution you can make to both these programs is accurate information. If you have worked for the Department any length of time, you know you can fill in every blank on any form and still omit facts that are needed for a sound decision. But when you have gathered needed information about any proposed project, you know what you would do about it if you were Commissioner. Your responsibility is to see that he and I have the background for a decision that you had.

No matter how much good-will or how many long hours are devoted to program development by the Commissioner and myself and all the people in the Division of Rural Roads, the projects we initiate will be no better than the reports, recommendations, and estimates you submit.

Next month I will celebrate my third anniversary in the Department of Highways. I have not spent this much time in the Department without learning how many demands are made on the time of District personnel. I know you are busy people. But, again speaking of priorities, I am convinced that nothing you do with your time deserves a higher priority than the planning phase of our operations. Time spent in project development can spare us all many hours of hard work later as projects move into the advanced phases of design, construction and operation. If our first decision is correct, it will influence the whole long life of the road.

I want you to think of programming as a year-round activity, not just something that happens once or twice a year, depending on whether we discuss the County Road Aid Program and the Rural Secondary Program at the same time or schedule them for separate court meetings. If all District personnel are constantly alert to the developing needs of their District, I believe they will find that programming can be made inseparable from the other operations they are responsible for. It will not require so much time if it is coupled with other activities.

Also I urge you to give local officials and political leaders credit for the same interest in, and dedication to, sound highway programs that you and I believe we have. I know we will be disappointed at times. The advice we

receive from them will not always be unselfish and disinterested, but I think we will be agreeably surprised to discover that much of the time it is.

The voters are sometimes deceived but they are not likely to trust their affairs very long to people who abuse their positions or use their authority and influence to serve their own purposes. If there are short-comings in the suggestions we receive from local officials and leaders, they may result from lack of information and understanding. It is our responsibility to correct these short-comings, if we can. We need never apologize to anyone for our efforts to up-grade the county roads of the Commonwealth.

In 1960 about half of all three-million Kentuckians lived in the rural areas and small towns that are served directly or indirectly by county roads. And, although they

are county responsibilities, about three times as many state dollars are spent on them.

In this biennium the Commonwealth has committed \$60 million in County Road Aid funds, Rural Secondary funds, money from other budgets of the General Road Fund, not to mention half of all truck licenses fees, to maintenance and improvement of county roads. In the same two fiscal years county funds spent on county roads amount to about \$18 million.

Regardless of the source of financing, rural Kentuckians deserve the best rural roads their tax dollars will provide. Our responsibility is to see that they do. And if you and I, local officials, concerned citizens, highway executives and engineers, come up with the right priorities, the taxpayers of the Commonwealth will get their money's worth in the rural road programs.