

MEETING THE PROGRAM MANAGEMENT PROBLEM

by

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Perhaps the gentlemen who arranged this program would have provoked a much shorter speech from the Commissioner of Highways if they had asked him to talk about the duties of a highway administrator instead of his problems.

His duties can be stated quickly enough. In fact, when examined, they resolve themselves into two specific assignments. The first is to determine what money is available and then to divide it among the various activities involved in the operation of a highway system. This is called making a budget.

The second duty of the administrator is to determine what work is to be done. He must first identify the needs of the roads under his jurisdiction and then he must assign priorities to their needs. Here in Kentucky -- and in most other states, I suspect -- there is never any shortage of needs nor any lack of potential projects. The available money will be exhausted long before the list runs out, thus, the necessity for determining which needs are most acute; that is, which go to the top of the list. This is called making a program.

Obviously there are many lesser decisions, about personnel, policies, and techniques, to be made. But essentially the responsibilities of the administrator can be summed up thus: to determine what needs can be met with the money on hand.

I realize I have made the highway administrator appear something like the wise owl in the forest. The owl perched in a tree and dispensed free advice to all the other birds and animals. He told the squirrels they should store food for the winter. He told the beavers they ought to build dams. He told the eagles to put their nests high in the trees and the rabbits to burrow in the ground. Then one day it finally dawned on them that the owl was telling them what to do but not how to do it. So the birds and animals of the forest appointed a committee that called on the owl and asked him, "How about this?" But the owl just blinked and said, "I only make policy." It would be a much more pleasant world for the highway administrator if he could just sit on his perch and imitate the wise owl. Unfortunately, it isn't that simple. The highway administrator has problems. Let me tell you something about them.

First of all they divide up in just about the same way as do his responsibilities. That is, some of the problems relate to money and some to programs. A major problem that has developed just recently and threatens to become more acute is the difficulty of determining just what money is going to be available to us in any particular time period.

During the past year, Federal authorities have been tinkering with the flow of Federal-Aid money on which most of our construction programs are based. You remember that the national administration decided to cut back Federal aid to highway programs at about this time last year. This was described as an attempt to combat inflation. Then, in March of this year, the cut back was ended and the restoration of funds previously withheld was begun. Recently, on October 1, the last share of our apportionment from the Highway Trust Fund for the year 1967-68 was finally released to us.

Then, on October 13, we were told Appalachian funds for construction projects were held up for an unstated period of time. We were threatened, too, with the possibility that other Federal-aid programs would be restricted to new and lower "ceilings." However, after the questionnaire sent to Governor Breathitt by Secretary Boyd of the Department of Transportation, we have no other later information. The only recent comment I have heard from Washington sources is entirely speculative. So far as I know, no decision has been reached. But the fact is that during the past year Federal authorities in Washington have turned on and off the spigot of Federal aid on two occasions, and they threaten to do it again.

I have no means of appraising the reasons for their doing so, the validity of their logic, or the effectiveness of their action. I can only say that it becomes extremely difficult for a highway administrator to establish an **orderly** and efficient program without the assurance that the money on which he has based his decisions will be available at the time he expects it.

We have no similar problem with state funds assigned to our programs. In Kentucky as you know, the revenues of a number of highway-user taxes are dedicated to the general road fund, by direction of a constitutional amendment. It is not statutory or a budget item. In consequence, neither the Governor nor the General Assembly can divert or hold up funds earmarked for road programs. During the last few years the general road fund has grown at a rate of about five percent annually as a result of greater use of our improved highway system. The estimates of revenues, on which our programs are based in part, come to us regularly and reliably. We have only one fault to find: we wish they were bigger.

Fresh problems face the highway administrator when Federal programs are changed. Obviously, when alterations are made by the Governor

or the General Assembly to the responsibilities assigned the Department of Highways by the Commonwealth, these changes are apt to be made with the full knowledge and consent, and perhaps even the sponsorship, of the Department of Highways. On the other hand, Federal programs may be created or concluded with only minimum advance information to and preparation by the Department of Highways. For example, I cite the Appalachian program.

The Appalachian program has meant a great deal to Kentucky in terms of progress toward development of an adequate highway system in our eastern mountains. It will mean even more as the program develops. We welcomed it when it was created and it continues to have our full and enthusiastic support. But it did come out of the blue or nearly so as far as the Department of Highways was concerned. By pure good luck, a few projects were under design that could be advanced to construction quickly. Most other states in Appalachia were not so fortunate. It was necessary for them to begin at the beginning.

For all of us, most projects had to start with location and design, then advance to right-of-way acquisition, and finally, after a lapse of possibly two years, reached the stage where we were ready and able to build roads. I am afraid our publicity sometimes contributes to the impression that the decision to build a particular road means construction starts next week. Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. A construction project of any consequence involves at least one and often two seasons of preparation, that is, location, design, and right-of-way acquisition must be accomplished, before construction can actually begin.

So we have our problems with new Federal programs. I must say that, while it is embarrassing to have projects ready and no money on hand, it is downright frustrating to have money to spend and nowhere to spend it.

Let me explain another problem arising from our limited budgets; that is, the difficulty of making large-scale plans with small-scale money. For example, I cite the Federal-aid primary program. Combining the states share of one-half with the Federal share, we have about \$15 million to spend on the Federal-Aid primary program each year.

I could give you other examples but let me mention the Jefferson Freeway in Louisville, a project to be financed through this program. The best, most efficient, and easiest way to build this freeway would be to construct the whole project in one continuous operation. But, if we did that, it would take all the money available to the Federal-Aid primary program for three years. There would be nothing left for any other projects in any other city, county, or section of the state. As you see, this is

simply impractical. We must distribute this money in such a fashion that various parts of the Commonwealth receive some benefit. We cannot allow any particular project or section to monopolize it. Thus, the Jefferson Freeway must be built, when it is undertaken, a section at a time. And this, as we know, is not the best, most efficient, or easiest way to do it.

Most of all, the highway administrator needs long range information, information that will enable him to predict with some hope of certainty the amount of money to be available five or ten years in the future and the limitations that will restrict its use. Right now a great deal of speculation goes on about the use to which the Highway Trust Fund will be put after the Interstate System is complete. At present, about three-quarters of all the revenues of the Trust Fund, which total 4.8 billion dollars, are devoted to the Interstate System. The last mile of these great highways will be completed sometime between the first target date, 1972, and the more realistic goal, 1975. When the Interstate System is finished, the money now assigned to it can be dedicated to other highway activities.

What will they be? I can assure you the administrator's job would be enormously simpler if he knew. It is not likely Congress will make a decision any time soon.

Perhaps from the emphasis I have given to the difficulty of forecasting budgets, you may assume that priorities remain relatively constant. You may have concluded that, once a determination is made that road "A" is in more urgent need of reconstruction than road "B", the only thing then to do is await the availability of money. This isn't necessarily true.

Changes in land use result in changes in traffic needs and traffic patterns. The rural farmland of today may very well be the factory site or subdivision of tomorrow. The road that has a traffic count of 50 today may have 500 next week and 5,000 next year. In consequence, the Department of Highways must constantly restudy its priorities and re-evaluate its needs.

For example, utterly unpredictable elements in our programs are industrial access roads. The capacity to anticipate them is almost non-existent. Yet the contribution of new industry is so significant in the development of the economy of the Commonwealth that we feel real responsibility to insert these roads in our programs at whatever date the need develops. (If I had time, I would like to review with you the amount of work and the number of decisions involved in providing service to the new Ford factory in Louisville.)

The planner does not operate in a private world. Other agencies, both state and national, are busily developing their own programs, sometimes coinciding and sometimes conflicting with those of the Department of Highways.

Particularly, I mention the activities of the U.S. Corps of Engineers in constructing flood control facilities. Again, these programs are welcome to the Kentucky Department of Highways, as they are to all Kentuckians. We are delighted to accept and acknowledge the worth of the contribution they are making to life in the Commonwealth. At the same time, we note that the lake behind a flood control dam often interrupts and dislocates local roads and traditional traffic patterns. Our problem with these projects is not apt to be lack of information. They are a long time developing and we are usually familiar with their development, step by step. The conflict is more likely to result from the different **goals** of the agencies involved. The Corps of Engineers has, in constructing a dam, the primary responsibility to control floods. The relocation of displaced roads is necessarily a secondary aspect of their activities. With the Department of Highways, road considerations must be primary. The difference in emphasis, as you can imagine, leads to difficulties. So, finally, I come to the point where I will try to tell you what can be done to resolve these problems.

The answer is: through sound planning which limits as far as humanly possible the unpredictable elements that affect highway programs. For example, after careful study we have developed our own ideas about the responsibilities that could and should be assigned to the Highway Trust Fund after the Interstate program is completed. We have placed this information before the Congress and before the Administration. We hope that, along with other state highway departments, we will be able to influence their thinking and persuade them to come to a proper decision at a reasonable time.

The difficulty of assigning permanent priorities to projects should not deter us from a continual study of the extent and urgency of the needs of highways all over Kentucky. I can assure you that we are doing just this. The Department is now organized to devote substantial attention to planning operations.

Many of you are familiar with our arrangements but I will briefly detail them: immediately below the level of the Commissioner's office, a deputy commissioner is assigned to full-time responsibility for programming. This is Mr. J. C. Moore's job.

At the next level is the Office of Planning and Program Management. It is headed by Mr. J. R. Harbison and its functions are adequately described by its title, Planning and Program Management.

Next, and subordinate to this office, are the Divisions of Planning and Rural Roads. Mr. Jim Fehr is Director of the Division of Planning. The task of this division is to make studies on which sound plans can be based, to maintain continuing records, and finally to evaluate particular projects and, make recommendations to higher levels of management.

Mr. H. H. Sandusky is Director of Rural Roads and his office has responsibility for preparing, with the advice of county officials and local citizens, the annual programs financed by rural secondary funds and county road aid funds for the Commissioner's eventual decision.

I believe we plan soundly within the limitations I have mentioned. Our great need is to extend the range and enhance the accuracy of our planning.

What can an administrator do to meet these problems? He can aid the development of sound planning techniques largely through the encouragement and support he offers the technical staff of the Department. Almost as important is his sensitiveness to the appraisal of needs made by private citizens and highway users all over the Commonwealth.

We recognize that planning is not an exact science. It is not a matter of simply counting traffic and then applying a formula to determine the width and quality of the road needed to serve the traffic counted. Many other factors are involved, and they usually are based on judgement rather than mathematical study. For example, the probable development of a community, its size and character 20 years from now, can only be a matter of judgement.

We can insure that the planner has the training to establish a degree of competence in making expert judgements. At the same time, the opinions and conclusions of local citizens can be very helpful to the highway administrator. Information from this source may provide substantial aid to the technical judgements used in planning, but it should never be considered as a substitute for professional judgement.

What can technicians do to meet these problems? Most of all, the technician can improve his techniques. He needs to train himself to the point where his judgements, and the plans based on them, can be more precise than they are at present. Too much of the technical advice we receive simply spells out alternatives. The administrator needs firm recommendations amply supported by evidence presented in a form he can understand. I have a horror of "gobbledygook", from whatever source.

Did you ever hear the story about a city that advertised for a one-armed planner? When asked why they wanted a one-armed planner, they

explained, "If he has only one arm . . . he surely won't give us that business about . . . on the one hand . . . and on the other hand . . ."

What can the private citizen, the voter and the highway user, do to meet these problems? He can support the administrators and technicians in their assignment. He can recognize that many of the evils of our highway systems today developed in the past, when roads were built exclusively as a result of political pressures. No attempt was made to appraise the present or future need for a particular facility. The sole determinant was the degree of support a particular candidate had received from a city, a county, or an area. The citizen can insist we never go back to that time and that way of operating.

Above all, a system of highways must be a system. The value of any road is limited if it has no worth beyond its terminals. Its potential can only be realized if it ties into a whole network of roads and offers its users more than just a way to get to the county seat. The roads Kentuckians need are the roads that will take them to San Francisco, New York, or Miami, beginning at their own front doors.

The citizens, the voters of Kentucky, can have any quality of highway system they require. They will get no better than they demand and no better than they are willing to pay for.

I will not have another opportunity to address you as Commissioner of Highways. There are many people in this audience to whom I am obligated, as is the Commonwealth, for sincere dedication to the programs of the Kentucky Department of Highways. Many of them are employees of the Department, many of them are officials of our counties and cities, and many of them are contractors and consultants in the highway industry. Whoever they are, I thank them with all my heart for the help they have given, not to Mitchell Tinder, but to Kentucky.

On this public occasion I would like to pay tribute to Arno Neiser and Johnnie Moore, the senior career officials of the Department. Each of these gentlemen typifies in his own way the best qualities of character and ability I have seen in so many employees of the Department. I am grateful to them and to many others for professional guidance and loyal support. No administrator could operate without that kind of help. I have no better wish for my successor, whoever he may be, than that he may have the same support I have enjoyed. I ask you to give it to him.

I am proud to have had a part with you in the great work that has been done. Although my share of the job is nearing an end, I trust that yours is not. I hope you will be allowed to go on contributing to the attainment of our common goal.

Though we have done a great deal, much remains to be done. I think we are justified in looking backward with pride. I hope that days ahead will see our programs continue to move forward. In the long run, the safety, security and prosperity of 3 million Kentuckians are more important than any Governor, any Commissioner, any Party.

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