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Halvorson testimony concerning secondary highway system

Lloyd C. Halvorson

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United States Senate
WASHINGTON, D. C.

March 8, 1954

Honorable Boswell Stevens
President
Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation
Jackson, Mississippi

Dear Boswell:

For your information and for your files, I am enclosing you a copy of the statement of The National Grange representative before the Senate Public Works Committee, which had a real farmer's "trend," much more so than the gentleman who spoke for the American Farm Bureau Federation. I am sending this statement on to you for your use, as you may wish, in preparing something to say on the question of Secondary highways at the meeting of your Board of Directors. You know I try to look after the Secondary highway money here as it is the only money that directly touches the farmer as such. The Primary highway group and the interstate highway group are reaching with longer and longer hands for the Secondary money. They argue with great emphasis that it is statesmanship to support appropriations for the Primary highways, but socialism to let any Federal money get out on the county highways.

It is about time for another visit from you so let us hear from you.

I wish you would please give me a good strong statement in favor of funds for our Secondary highway system and speak of your interest in seeing that the Secondary system gets its fair share of the Federal funds.

With all good wishes, I am

Your friend,

John Stennis
John Stennis
United States Senator

Enc.

*Send to
Boswell*

TESTIMONY OF
LLOYD C. HALVORSON, ECONOMIST
THE NATIONAL GRANGE
on
S. 2859 and S. 2982
FEDERAL-AID TO ROADS
before
Senate Public Works Committee

March 3, 1954

Since early pioneer times, farmers have taken the lead in movements for better roads. In the early part of this century with the rapid advance of the motor vehicle this became especially pronounced. It was no accident that the Bureau of Public Roads was a part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture until recent years.

The main reason for the earlier movements for adequate roads was to get us out of the mud. I remember seeing many a tourist and many a salesman stuck in the mud on the old "Yellowstone Trail" which went through my home township. Most of our interstate and inter-city highways today are paved, but in many places we have a traffic muddle nearly as frustrating and vexing as the old muddy roads, however, not as defeating and uncomfortable.

In many farming areas we still have roads that become impassable at certain times of the year. In many places the roads are so "washboardy" you wonder if the cream will turn to butter before you get it to town. You either drive slowly or begin to think your car or truck may all of a sudden surely fly apart or bounce off the road. Many rural roads are dangerously narrow and have dangerous curves.

Today there is quite a movement for adequate roads underway throughout all sections of the country. After World War II people decided they wanted to do something about the mud and the muddle. Furthermore, with the increased performance of motor vehicles, we needed not only a passable highways but highways that can accommodate speed with reasonable safety.

Much has already been done to determine what road improvements are needed.

across the country. Estimates of the cost range from 50 to 100 billion dollars. We believe the American people are willing to pay the taxes needed to achieve adequate roads. One bit of evidence is the willingness of the people to pay the tolls on super-highway toll roads. At the same time most organizations (that I know of) are in principle opposed to toll roads, but highway users have been forced to accept this method of financing or go without the needed facility. It would be very unfortunate if through default the public is forced to turn more and more to the toll device which is an expensive way to get highways and entails unnecessary inconvenience. At its last Annual Session the National Grange favored more adequate roads and highways, but said "The toll method is not favored as a general method of highway financing"

The most difficult problems in developing a road program are:

1. How much can we afford to spend?
2. Where should the money come from?
3. How should Federal-aid be allocated?
4. How much Federal control should there be?

From what contact I have had with highway engineers and economists, I understand that we must greatly increase highway funds about the present level if we are to reach our goal of adequate roads in the next 10-15 years, and without widespread recourse to toll roads. Some estimates are that we must increase highway construction funds by 2 or 3 billion dollars a year to reach our goal.

As someone has said, good roads do not cost---they pay. This is very apparent to farmers. Poor roads wastes valuable time and are damaging to tires and equipment. Slow, rough roads can cause considerable shrinkage and damage to livestock in transit.

We are not only concerned with farm to market roads but with the whole highway system, including the speed and ease of traffic into the terminal market. It is far more than a Federal problem and farm people are becoming increasingly interested in the traffic engineering of our cities.

Transportation costs have always been an important economic concern to

farmers. The transportation cost on agricultural and related products is between 3.5 and 4.0 billion a year, about half of which is for truck transportatio. This is for hired transportation and in addition farmers have a private transportation bill of a substantial amount. Poor roads can mean costly delays, damage to commodity, and increased charges.

In addition to the dollar and cents gain from adequate highways, there are also many intangible and in some cases invaluable benefits. An adequate and passable road is essential to prompt medical care at times; and adequate roads make it possible for farmers to participate in more educational, cultural, and recreational activities of our society.

In regard to where the money should come from, the National Grange has a long record of favoring Federal-aid. Federal aid is necessary for a number of reasons among them being the need to work out an integrated highway system from state to state, from East to West and North to South. Another reason is that some states are so sparsely populated that they do not have enough highway funds to build highways to accommodate modern civilization. Per capita income among the states varies considerably, being nearly 3 times as high in some states as in others. The flow of commerce is a national concern because people in our heavily populated states are interested in getting beef from Wyoming and are also interested in selling them cars, shoes, clothing and so on. As a nation we are interested in knowing that all of our citizens, no matter what state they live in, have good enough roads to have access to emergency medical care, education, cultural activities, and mail.

I find no guide in our Grange policies as to how much of our highway costs should come from the Federal government. I have heard people in some of our State Granges say their state would be hard put to raise enough state money to match the present Federal highway aid. However, the Grange has adopted resolutions saying, "The 50-50 matching basis should be continued." The Grange has gone along with the past level of Federal-aid, but in our tax policies the

National Grange has strongly urged curtailment of Federal expenditures. In the event of a recession or even unsettled economic conditions we would favor increased Federal-aid for highways as a highly desirable form of public works. Compared with the billions we spend for defense, 300 or 400 million extra dollars for roads is a small amount but might help ease the transition as defense expenditures taper off.

At our last Annual Session the National Grange in its tax policy reaffirmed its long established opposition to the levying of Federal automotive excise taxes as a means of securing funds for general revenue purposes. In addition our transportation policy calls for the repeal of the automotive excise taxes. In view of the budgetary deficit, this policy may have to wait for fulfillment. It is my opinion that the Delegate Body of the National Grange would oppose a substantial increase in Federal highway funds as provided in S. 2982 and S. 2859 in view of the present budgetary deficit, unless it became economical wise to increase public works to firm up the economy.

The National Grange has favored Federal aid for roads even though it has opposed the Federal automotive excise taxes. We have always felt that because all citizens have a stake in highways from the standpoint of national defense, interstate flow of commerce, mail, education, national culture, and citizenship, that Federal aid for highways should come from general budgetary receipts and not from highway user taxes. The benefits from Federal aid to highways are general and widespread and bear no direct relationship to automotive use. Furthermore, the states are hard pressed for highway funds, and the Federal automotive excise tax is really an infringement upon a tax that properly belongs to the states. Already gasoline and oil prices are very high and for the Federal government to maintain its gasoline and oil tax is nearly to preclude ^{the} / states from raising the highway money they need to do their part in achieving adequate roads.

I am confident that our Grange Delegate Body would oppose that language in

Section 2 (a) of S. 2982 which links any part of the Federal aid funds to the Federal automotive excise taxes. Even if we should resign ourselves to a continuation of the Federal automotive excise taxes until the budget permits further tax cuts, linkage now would probably weld the automotive excise taxes to our Federal tax structure permanently.

Some might argue that we would have to abolish or greatly curtail Federal aid to roads if we abolished the Federal automotive excise taxes; and that if this happened the states would not raise gasoline and oil taxes to make up for the abolition of the Federal tax. If this happened we would have less money for roads than ever. We challenge this line of reasoning. In the first place, we believe there is ample justification for having the present level of Federal aid without a Federal automotive excise tax (as indicated above). In the second place highway user groups are determined to bring about more adequate roads and are organized in most every state to see to it that as much money as is economically feasible is raised from state automotive excise taxes. For these reasons withdrawal of the Federal government from the automotive excise tax field would increase funds available for highway construction.

I should also point out how unfairly the Federal automotive excise taxes fall upon farmers. In 1952 the cost to farmers of operating motor equipment came to 2.1 billion dollars. Many farmers use gasoline in their tractors and stationary engines, and a long list of automotive parts and accessories used in farm equipment are subjected to the tax. Net farm income is down so low that this Federal automotive tax as it hits farmers is appalling.

The National Grange is very active in establishing the 1944 allocation formula which gave 45 percent of the aid to the primary system, 35 percent to the secondary system and 20 percent to urban streets and roads. Our members were disappointed when the 1948 act reduced the rural road share to 30 percent.

Out of the 3.3 million miles of roads, alleys, and streets in our nation, 2.8 million are secondary and local roads. From this we see the terrific road

burden that falls upon a minority of the people. Farmers do not ask that all these roads be eligible for Federal aid, but they do believe that the main connecting links between the primary system and the main feeder roads to the primary system should be eligible for Federal aid, as they are. There are at present about 460,000 miles of these connecting links and feeder roads which are designated as secondary roads in the Federal aid program. However, only about 100,000 miles of these roads have received Federal aid to date, and already 20,000 of these 100,000 have had to be further improved with Federal aid.

From my own experience and from talking to farm people, it is evident that the secondary roads are so inadequate as to be costing us considerable time, inconvenience, and damage to equipment and commodity. We have heard complaints that the Federal specifications for secondary roads are too high. Maybe the specifications aren't too high, but it is easy to understand why farm people want to spread the money so thin as to at least get out of the mud and to have passable roads. Because of the great mileage of rural roads and the decreasing percentage of people that now live in rural areas, farmers may never obtain secondary roads that provide safe, expeditious and economical travel and hauling unless they get their fair share of Federal highway funds, and unless the Federal automotive taxes are abolished and reserved to the states. If local tax funds must be used to build as well as maintain secondary roads, there will simply not be enough money to build and maintain the 2.2 million miles of local roads that we consider a state and local responsibility.

There are still some roads that are impassable in certain weather. Is it not too much to expect that Federal aid be used to help bring the secondary roads up to a level of adequacy as well as to build super-highways. This is especially so in view of the importance of roads to the efficient marketing of farm products, ready access to emergency, medical care, mail, and essential living supplies. Furthermore, about 4,000,000 children ride to school daily

over the secondary roads of our nation.

For these reasons we are strongly opposed to Section 2(a) of S. 2982 for authorizing \$200,000,000 outside the 45-30-25 formula and giving it all to the interstate system. If any increase in Federal aid is to be made for regular highway purposes, it should fall within the present formula as provided in S.2859 by Senator Case. Our people would prefer to see Federal aid stay at the present \$550 million level in view of the present budgetary situation, unless a program of public works is needed to bolster the economy. As soon as the budgetary situation permits, we would like to have the Federal automotive excise taxes repealed.

Sitting up a separate appropriation of \$200,000,000 million for the interstate system is doubly unacceptable when it is combined with linkage to the Federal automotive excise taxes. It nearly looks like an attempt to make collection of highway user taxes a Federal function, and then pre-empting a large part of the money for only a small class of users. The states are best equipped to decide the proper sharing of highway user taxes.

It may appear to some that the present formula of 45 percent for the primary system, 30 percent for the secondary system and 25 percent for the urban primary system is very unfair. Some seem to have the idea that all of the 45 percent for the primary roads is spent in rural areas. This is not true. So we see that in addition to the 25 percent for urban areas they get part of the 45 percent, and it may be quite substantial for all I know. The secondary and local roads are the principal roads that farmers use, and of course unless they are useable the primary highways are limited ^{of} value.

We recognize that we must view our highway problem as a whole. We want to see adequate highways in urban as well as rural areas. After all farm products must move to the cities and farmers also go on interstate trips. In view of the fact that the 45 percent for primary roads can be used in the cities as well as between the cities, we would think that setting aside of 30 percent for

secondary connecting and feeder links is quite a sound formula to apply to all Federal highway aid.

We must all recognize that the traffic muddle in our Cities is not entirely a street or highway problem. It is often a public transit problem and it would be foolish and costly to try to solve it by building super freeways and expressways. After all we don't have enough parking facilities now, and they are costly now.

When super freeways and express ways are built in cities there should be ample provisions for public transit facilities. The average number of passengers per car in the rush hours is about 1.3, I am told. A modern bus or street car can carry 50 to 60 people and commuter trains many more. If we can get our public transit systems straightened out to provide good expeditious service, many people would prefer public transit and it would cost less. The transit companies and the public would gain and our city traffic muddle would be considerably eased. We must remember our main problem is transportation and not simply motor vehicles.

We believe a full recognition of this should largely stop the clamor for more and more Federal aid for the urban areas, and the idea of using public funds for parking facilities.

In the second paragraph in the appendix giving the Grange Highway Policy, our Delegate Body gave recognition^{to} the problem of the cities.

As to the amount of Federal control over the use of Federal aid funds, it is of course, essential that there be enough Federal control to insure an integrated national highway system.

Three years ago the National Grange adopted a statement as follows:
"therefore, in the interest of uniformity, road standards recommended by the American Association of State Highway Officials should be considered minimum for receiving Federal aid for road building below which no state should go, but above which they might go if they so desired. Standards of road construction

especially on the 40,000 interstate highway system and the remaining Federal primary and secondary system should be high enough to handle trucks designed and loaded in conformity with A.A.S.H.O. recommendations. Until present road studies on sizes and weights are completed, we recommend that no changes be made in size and weight laws for heavy trucks beyond the recommendations of A.A.S.H.O. in the interest of protecting our highways from undue deterioration from excessive axle loadings."

There has been no Grange declaration on the matter of road standards since 1951, but I am confident that our people today feel that as far as the secondary road system is concerned it is desirable to give the states full say so to what standards of construction should be maintained. We have heard complaints from some states that the present Federal requirements for secondary roads are so severe that there would never be enough money to get the farmers out of the mud.

We endorse the idea of giving the states 25 percent flexibility in the use of the funds authorized for the (1) primary, (2) secondary, and (3) urban road system. It is quite true that the sufficiency rating of the various types of roads may be so unequal in a state as to justify channelling more money into one category of roads than the strict 45-30-25 division would allow.

The Grange has generally favored adequate roads in public forests and public parks. After all many people travel many miles to get to them for their vacation and it would be irony to find the roads inadequate for full enjoyment of our scenic resources. Forest roads usually pay for themselves and enable small sawmill operators to compete for the saw timber. We are in no position to judge the amount.

We have no position on the inter-America highway.

I am attaching an appendix which gives the highway policies adopted by the National Grange last November.

A P P E N D I X

Highway Planning

The National, State, Pomona, and Subordinate Granges should work closely with all movements having for their purpose the improvement of highways in their jurisdiction. As far as possible they should seek to guide the direction which these movements take and thus assure favorable consideration of farm-to-market or rural roads so necessary in getting the products of the farm to the consumer with the least possible delay or deterioration.

In planning future highway developments, care should ever be exercised that in attempting to relieve one bottleneck we do not create a worse situation. A typical case is the construction of boulevards of thru-ways to expedite traffic into our large cities. These improved highways bring more and more cars into the heart of the city only to find no available parking thus intensifying the traffic problem. Suburban parking lots with rapid transit facilities into the business section, night loading or unloading of trucks, underground parking areas, and the building of shopping centers outside the city limits are being tried. They but emphasize the danger of short-sighted, hastily promoted plans which instead of relieving a critical situation intensify it.

Highway Construction and Financing

In new construction or rebuilding of heavily traveled highways, we recommend the construction of a special truck lane on ascending grades, not only as a measure to expedite traffic, but as a major safety precaution.

It is a recognized fact that in order to handle the heavier commercially operated trucks and trailers, more expensive construction and maintenance must be provided. To meet these increased costs some form of a highway use tax should be devised to assure that these heavier vehicles pay a just and equitable share of the heavier construction and maintenance which they necessitate.

In order to protect the highways and bridges we now have until stronger roads, more adequate to meet the demands of heavier traffic and increased weight limits are constructed, state laws regulating size, weights and speeds should be strictly enforced. Since a small minority of truck owners overload because they find it more profitable to break the law and pay fines, we believe a system of fines graded according to the amount of overload and number of repeated offenses should be adopted. Suspension or revocation of license should be the penalty for flagrant and continued disregard of the law.

All state imposed highway user taxes should be devoted to highway construction and maintenance purposes. We oppose any diversion of highway taxes for non-highway uses.

Highway-user taxes should be levied by states only. The present Federal gasoline tax should be relinquished to the states and devoted strictly to highway construction and maintenance.

The toll method of financing roads is not favored as a general method of highway financing.
