

B. D. Tallamy Reports on Highway Program During First Year

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On August 5, 1957, the U.S. Department of Commerce issued the following news release:

B. D. Tallamy Reports on Highway Program During First Year

August 5, 1957

In a review of accomplishments during the first year of the long-range highway program set in motion by President Eisenhower and the 84th Congress in June 1956, Federal Highway Administrator Bertram D. Tallamy reported to Secretary of Commerce Sinclair Weeks:

"We have progressed at a gratifying rate and we are on schedule. Of course, in a year's time the advancement of such a tremendous program cannot be validly assessed in terms of earth moved, bridges built or pavement laid. In the very early stages of a long-range program-lasting some 16 years-the best yardstick for measuring progress is the dollar yardstick.

"Nevertheless we can point to some very tangible results. On the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways, contracts were awarded for 561 projects involving construction on 1,532 miles of the most modern type highways. At the same time contracts have been awarded for work on 24,000 miles of the primary and secondary (farm-to-market) systems and their extensions into cities, all of which are essential to an expanding economy."

Tallamy said the Bureau of Public Roads, which he heads, had set a fiscal 1957 goal of \$2.225 billion in Federal obligations for surveys and plans, acquisition of right-of-way, and construction. At year's end, actual obligations totaled \$2.223 billion, he reported. Of this amount, \$1.383 billion was committed to the Interstate system and \$840 million to primary, urban, and secondary road improvements.

"Measuring progress in terms of obligations is a nebulous thing but the year's balance sheet shows that we have made a fine beginning and are right on schedule," the Administrator said. "These statistics are now being translated into physical accomplishment as miles of fine new highways."

The multibillion dollar road program is being financed on a pay-as-you-go basis from excise taxes on gasoline, tires, trucks, and other highway user levies which go into a Highway Trust Fund.

"We are specifically directed by the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 to gear our program to Trust Fund receipts as estimated by the Secretary of the Treasury and this we are doing," he said.

"It should be borne in mind that there is an average interval of several years between the time of authorizing a program and the time of making payments for work actually accomplished.

"Our authorized schedule for the first three fiscal years of the program is now apportioned and available to the States.

"Based on present Trust Fund estimates, it would appear that it will require 16 years to complete the program. The Act, however, makes provision for greater authorizations each year if the Trust Fund will support them, so the program could be completed within a 13-year period. For the year 1957 Trust Fund receipts were within \$60 million of reaching the estimate of \$1.542 billion."

Tallamy noted that the program is a balanced one, not weighted toward the interstate system nor toward the primary, secondary, and urban roads.

"Over the 16-year construction period, almost as much money is expected to be committed to the primary and secondary systems as to the wholly new interstate network," he added.

He said the many problems encountered during the first year of the program are being met and overcome and "I see nothing in the foreseeable future that poses a real threat to the program."

"The engineering shortage is critical but we are alleviating it through the use of electronic digital computers, aerial photography and other methods which have multiplied the amount of engineering we can get per engineer," Tallamy continued. "For example, about a year ago, it took a college-trained engineer about 30 weeks to compute earth removal for 100 miles of highway. Today he can do the job in a week using the electronic computer.

"Steel continues in short supply in some areas but we have found that prestressed concrete is a good substitute in many types of bridge construction. We need 50 million barrels of cement a year but the leaders of the industry have assured us, barring prolonged work stoppages, that they can supply it."

The Administrator said one of the "real trouble spots" which developed during the first year of the program was "the potential misuse of Federal funds, especially in the acquisition of right of way."

"This erupted in the news in Indiana, but we were well aware of the possibility prior to that and had begun a series of steps to safeguard the public interest. We authorized the appointment of one or more appraisers in each State to act for the Federal Government in looking into property acquisition. We directed that no reimbursement be made to States for right of way until complete information on each parcel of property is submitted by the State and a final audit made by the Bureau.

"Most important, we recently set up a Project Examination Division to audit and spot check both Bureau and State operations in construction, engineering, right-of-way acquisition and all other aspects of the Federal-aid program. It is our hope that these new procedures, coupled with long-standing Bureau precautions, will protect the public interest and funds. Needless to say, any evidence of wrong-doing will be turned over to the Department of Justice for prosecution."

"The motorist will gain in countless ways from the planned access highways in the system. Last year, 40,000 Americans lost their lives and 1,400,000 were injured in traffic. Yet where modern, planned access highways have been built the death rate has been cut in half and the accident rate by two-thirds. Last year the national traffic fatality rate was 6.4 per 100 million miles of travel. On planned access highways in rural areas the fatality rate was only 3.4, compared with 10.3 for the older roads with no access control. In the cities the death rate was 4.1 on streets with no access control, but it was cut to 2.7 on the new freeways.

"On the modern turnpikes, the record is frequently better. On the New York Thruway the death rate was 2.68, the New Jersey Turnpike, 2.34, the Ohio Turnpike, 1.91, and on the Garden State Parkway, 1.3."

Tallamy predicted that the average motorist will save a cent a mile on an adequate highway system and that he can average 55 miles an hour on expressways compared with 35 miles an hour on older roads. Many recreational and resort areas, previously too far away now are within easy reach for some motorists.

He reported that a large trucking company in New York State achieved such a good safety record by using the Thruway, that its insurance bill was cut \$50,000 a year. The firm now recaps 75 percent of its tires, but using the old roads, it could recap only 30 percent. Flat grades and easy curves on the Thruway permit the trucker to use lighter tractors and carry up to 1,500 pounds more per trip.

Construction of the new superhighways offers cities splendid opportunity to combine traffic relief with slum clearance, and halting blight and declining land values, Tallamy believes. The freeways will aid national defense by allowing industry to decentralize, help speed evacuation of cities in time of peril, and speed movement of military equipment and personnel.
