

# Future Problems of Highway Construction

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I recognize the fact that in my audience tonight there are those who are primarily interested in the highway problems of Indiana. I am pleased that these road schools are attended by so many representatives of local government—men who have firsthand knowledge of the problems in our townships, towns, and cities. It is particularly gratifying that so many engineers, constructors, and public officials have been attending these schools.

Purdue University is to be congratulated upon the public service it is rendering in conducting this, the Thirty-Second Annual Road School. Much of the progress we have made through the years in road construction has been due to the assistance, research, and scientific advice given us by Purdue University.

In approaching the future problems of highway construction, I feel that we are entering a new era in this important development. In 1942, when the highway program was more or less abandoned, we were ringing down the curtain on the first era of road building in our state and nation, an era which started at the close of World War I and closed at the beginning of World War II. This new era should out-dimension anything that has taken place previously in the history of this state and this nation. I recall vividly the road building immediately following the close of World War I. It is my recollection that at that time we had a three-mile road law, a township-line road law, and many other legislative monstrosities. Every neighborhood was promoting a petition for road construction, and every citizen of each county signed the road petition of each person when it was presented to him for signature. These road petitions were filed with the county auditor, and the group that was best acquainted with the board of commissioners got priority on its highway. You all recall that there were many highways known as the "Township Trustee's Highway" or the "County Commissioner's Highway". Many of these roads started nowhere and ended nowhere. There had been no planning for the great task of road building that was undertaken in the counties throughout the state. There was great waste of materials and money because of this lack of

planning by the people of the respective counties. Regardless of the tremendous extravagance of road building at that time, however, this first era served well in getting the country out of the mud—and in some manner connected the centers of population.

#### TODAY—PLANNING AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

The new era will deal with supplying the highway facilities to meet, adequately, the demands of traffic—to relieve the points of congestion—to reduce the cost of transportation and communication, and thus reduce the cost of production. It will be one of the basic factors in improving our standard of living.

The scope of the new highway program will exceed by far that of any previous period of road building in this country. The ten or fifteen million new cars that will be placed on the highways in the next few years will require an expanded program of modern and adequate highways. In addition, the only practical solution to our problem of traffic fatalities is through a proper highway construction program.

I have been particularly concerned recently with the increase in traffic accidents on our highways. The year 1945 set an all-time high in reportable traffic accidents. In 1945, 51,000 reports were processed by the Accident Prevention Bureau of the Indiana State Police Department. This number represents an increase of 6,000 accidents over 1944. Eight hundred and forty-five lives were snuffed out during 1945—sixteen more than the 1944 toll. This is the present record in Indiana.

Throughout the period of the war, there was restricted driving due to gasoline rationing. People who were accustomed to drive 20,000 miles in a year were able to drive only 5,000 or 6,000 miles. When V-J day came, restrictions on driving were lifted, and motorists who had patriotically taken gasoline rationing as one of the necessities of the war period now took to the highways. Being accustomed to speeds of thirty to forty miles per hour during the war, and to gauging distances at those speeds, when the driving public immediately stepped up car velocities, at once the accident situation changed.

Since V-J day, 375 persons have died in Indiana because of motor vehicle crashes. Accident cases have mounted since that time; and on November 23, for a single day, 520 accidents were reported in this state.

The national picture is equally alarming. From Pearl Harbor to V-J day, 261,000 soldiers were killed; the home-front statistics show that there was a traffic toll of 94,000 persons killed during that same period.

The peak year for vehicular traffic was 1941, but it is pointed out that the volume of traffic is increasing so rapidly, according to surveys being conducted, that we are rapidly approaching pre-war figures.

The economic loss to the state is a factor with which we must reckon. It is estimated that the waste resulting from preventable accidents amounts to \$50,000,000 annually. But this, of course, is secondary to the loss of life and the injuries inflicted.

I have been in constant contact with my State Highway Commission in regard to our highway problems, and I desire to commend the personnel of that Commission. They are devoted to their duties, and are doing everything possible to solve the perplexing problems with which they are confronted. A great deal of the construction of the future will be four-lane highways, in order to relieve the congestion which now exists in our metropolitan areas.

The Commission has advised me that plans and specifications are prepared so that we can utilize all of the federal aid that has been allocated to Indiana. It has been a difficult task, during the war period, to keep abreast of the highway problem. One of the chief obstacles has been in keeping the Highway Department adequately staffed with experienced engineers. Many engineers who were taken into the armed forces of the United States have now returned, but, because of the salary scale of our state, have taken private employment rather than return to the Highway Department. However, the Department has been able to increase the number on its staff, and to increase the salaries somewhat.

The magnitude of the program before us will demand a much larger staff than we now have, and the Highway Commission is doing its utmost to meet this challenge.

Throughout this Road School you have undoubtedly treated many of the specific problems which confront us. I know that you have considered the matter of secondary roads for which federal funds can now be obtained. You have also discussed the problem of maintenance of your county highways as well as the state highways.

We in Indiana have been fortunate indeed. Our state highways have been built on a pay-as-you-go basis, and we do not have any state debt due to the construction of highways. It is my belief that we can keep abreast of the times and keep up the fine record we have enjoyed in Indiana for many years. The co-operation of all of us will be required to attain this high goal. This is especially true during a period when materials are not available. Therefore, as a public official, I am asking my fellow public officials throughout the state to be diligent

in their work and to do their utmost to see that our high standard of highways is maintained.

We may expect an increase in the amount of traffic on our highways in the years ahead. The number of vehicles on the highways in the United States reached the peak in 1941, with more than thirty-four million vehicles. In 1944 this number was reduced to approximately thirty million vehicles. There is no question that there are more cars on the road today than was estimated at the start of the war. The greatest number of cars ever scrapped in one year was 2,351,000, in 1939. The smallest number scrapped in recent years was in 1943—411,000. This means that, even with a generous number being scrapped in the next five years, with the demand for motor vehicles there will be close to forty million cars by 1950. This increase is going to be a serious factor to deal with, unless we immediately get the highway program started and continue it in the speediest way possible.