

Essentials for Effective County Road Management

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I would like to preface these comments by saying that in my view, and in the view of a lot of people who have given this matter a great deal of consideration through the years, what happened yesterday morning in Washington, D. C., is one of the most significant things to happen in American government in several decades. The date, March 26, 1962, perhaps marks the turning point in American government in the sense that the Supreme Court yesterday handed down a decision that the federal courts will now have jurisdiction in cases involving the apportionment of the state legislatures. This country has been managed by-and-large for the last 175 years by people who are either from rural areas or have a rural approach to problems. I, for one, think that the government of the United States is in excellent condition, and I think that no one would have any real grounds to question but what the direction of the government in the past almost 200 years has been fine.

But now we have to live with a whole new set of rules, and the federal courts are now going to make absolutely certain that urban areas are adequately represented in the state legislatures. This is going to have some very profound impact upon road building in the United States. First of all, the Supreme Court decided this: that when a citizen is under-represented at the state legislature, he is denied his due process rights under the 14th amendment of the Constitution. He therefore has a legal grievance. They decided secondly that the facts presented in the Tennessee case, which was at issue, would indicate that they had a good case; and, third and finally, they decided that the federal courts would accept jurisdiction. In effect they handed the local courts a do-it-yourself kit on how to get these legislatures properly apportioned.

What does all this mean from the point of view of those who are interested in road management and road construction problems? I would like to make a guess. Remember this decision was handed down yesterday. None of us has had a real chance to study and consider the

tremendous impact that it might possibly have, but I would like to go on record as hazarding some guesses as to what it means. First of all, nationally, I think that this decision is going to have the result over a period of years of unseating a number of congressmen in the United States Congress who have, through long seniority and familiarity with the problems, been tremendous friends of the road program. As you know, the congressional districting in all the states is done by the state legislatures and there has been a tendency, of course, to over-represent the rural areas. Thus many of these rural seats have been very secure because of protection from the state legislature. Once the state legislatures are apportioned I think you are going to find that these districts are formed a lot more in keeping with the urban population trend. Many veteran congressmen who have been strong supporters of road programs are going to be unseated.

I think the second national impact will be that there is going to be a tremendous amount of pressure to divert federally collected highway funds into nonhighway uses, principally to subsidize mass transit. I think that we are all very strongly in favor of mass transit in urban areas, but there is serious question to whether or not we should take these funds from the highway purposes and divert them to subsidize mass transit.

The third tremendous impact that this decision will have at the national level is to increase pressure for revising the formulas for distributing federal aid. As you know, these formulas now are weighted to consider the area, the miles of certain routes, and population factors. I think with the urban areas getting increasing representation, there will very definitely be pressure to change these formulas and have the money distributed more into urban areas.

The fourth impact of this decision will be to bring tremendous pressure for creating a new system of federal-aid highways, a system comparable to our federal-aid secondary system in rural areas but operating wholly, completely, and totally within the urban areas. These are all guesses and your guesses on this matter are as good as mine, but I will pass them on for what they are worth.

What will this decision mean at the state level? In the first instance, it won't make any appreciable difference for a number of years because obviously there is going to be a certain amount of litigation. But in the next ten years this decision will, at the state level, have the effect of changing the balance of power from rural areas and big central cities to the suburban areas. I think you are going to find a very strange alliance in American politics, the alliance of the big

central core cities with rural areas. The big cities and the rural areas have been dropping very sharply in population. An alignment of those big cities with the rural areas would balance the increased influence of the suburbanite. I think that we can point out some specific states where this is already happening. In the state of Maryland, for example, the city of Baltimore is finding itself aligned with the rural legislature in fighting apportionment in the state of Maryland because the city is losing population to the suburban area.

The second impact at the state level is going to be pressure for changes in the present formula for distributing state collected, locally shared revenue, and I think this very definitely does apply to state collected highway user fees distributed to the locality through the state. I don't profess to be any great expert on what's happening here in your state of Indiana. I'm drawing some national conclusions and it is up to you to evaluate what I'm saying in terms of the impact here in your own state of Indiana. It is almost certain that in at least 20 or 30 states there will be tremendous pressure at the state level to change these formulas for distributing aid to give more money to the urban area.

Finally, the third major impact of this decision at the state level is going to be a great deal more emphasis upon programs that are considered more or less urban in nature. I refer to such things as increases in the welfare programs. State legislatures are going to hear much more about public housing, urban renewal, and other programs that are designed primarily for people in the urban area. I think, too, that with respect to transportation there is going to be at the state level, at the federal level, and at all levels a greater emphasis placed upon mass transit, air travel, and other forms of transportation.

Now what does this all mean to we who are tremendously interested in road transportation? First of all, for you who live in and work in urban areas, the impact of this decision ultimately is going to make you pay a lot more attention to the design of your urban roads and to take into consideration other factors besides the roads themselves. I refer here to planning the relationship of roads with urban renewal projects, planning road construction in urban areas to meet the needs of air transportation, and designing the highway system for better truck terminals and transportation of goods. Highway programs will be planned to make more allowances for mass transit. I think, too, that there is going to be much more emphasis in urban areas on the aesthetics of the highway program and on subjects that have not directly been concerned with highways until recent years. I'm referring now to planning for open spaces, planning for parks and recreational areas. In

other words, as difficult as it is now to plan roads and transportation systems in urban areas, it is going to be a lot more difficult when the people who live in urban areas demand a much higher level of service and much better performance from their urban roads.

What are these decisions, this reapportionment, this new urban emphasis likely to mean to rural areas? I think in the first instance it is going to bring pressure for we who work in the rural areas to organize better the operation of our highway function at the county level. Obviously, there is going to be a battle. People who live in the rural areas are not going to placidly surrender any preference that they have in the allocation of road funds and other operations of the highway program which they have enjoyed for so many decades. There is going to be tremendous pressure for us at the local level to make absolutely positive that we're spending rural road dollars in the most efficient, economical way possible. My personal opinion is that in many cases we are doing exactly that, but it is also my personal opinion that we are doing about the world's worst job of explaining how we are spending money in these rural areas. I don't think that there is much understanding on the part of the public of what is involved in constructing these roads, and I think that leads to the third point. We are going to have to do a whale of a lot better job of explaining what the road program means in the rural area.

This is a pretty long introduction to what we are doing, but I think that this case is so important and the potential impact is so important that it is worth discussing in the framework of this kind of a question. If these are going to be the problems in the urban and the rural areas, where we in county government operate, what are we doing in the National Association of County Officials to help bring organization and direction to the road program?

The National Association of County Officials is an organization essentially of county commissioners, the county governing body. This is the parent organization. Within the National Association of County Officials, we have the professionally trained county engineers, the National Association of County Engineers. These two groups, working together within our National Association of County Officials and with the aid of a grant from the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads and the Automotive Safety Foundation, have for some five years been trying to improve county road management, both in urban areas and in rural areas. They have *not* taken the position that they know everything about roads, that this is how you should do it, and if you don't do it you are pretty dumb. Rather they have taken the position that certain procedures,

techniques, and methods are followed in counties having generally recognized excellent road programs and that others can study what is done in these very well administered places and evaluate it in terms of their own local needs. A research program has been involved. We have divided this research project into office management, personnel, information, relations, programs, plans, instruction, maintenance, and research. In other words, all of the functions of road management are being systemically studied.

What are some of the conclusions that have been reached by this group? What are the principles that are being evolved here? What are guide posts that have been developed that will be of help to you in your county, whether rural or urban? One of the first weaknesses in our road programming has been that we have had county-elected policy-making bodies that have not always acted as policy-making bodies. They have been getting too much involved in the details of road administration. As a matter of fact, you may be quite amused to discover that in Pennsylvania, for example, some of the county commissioners, by the terms of their election as county road superintendents, are required by law to actually go out and work on the roads, to dig with shovels, and operate equipment. They actually, by terms of their election, work on the roads physically. And I think in many other counties in the United States there is a great misunderstanding about the role of the county governing body.

Ideally, the county governing body should set broad policies to guide the road building and transportation policies of the county. It should leave to the professionally trained county engineer the business of carrying out the details, deciding the use of equipment, training men, and the other aspects of road management. That, then, is the second principle that is evolved from this research project. The principle that road building is a highly technical and specialized business and that you should have the services of a trained engineer or at least someone who is thoroughly familiar with the operations of the engineering techniques involved.

I am told that this is a subject that is very controversial here in your state of Indiana. I am told that of approximately 90 counties, only a few have professionally trained engineers. But I'm passing on to you what these professionals have discovered in their research. Those counties that are best administered and doing the best job of county road administration have the advice of a professionally trained engineer. The county board of commissioners makes the policy decisions, and the

engineer hired by the county board and accountable to the county board carries out the details of their policy.

The third principle that has been uncovered is that highway construction is getting to be so complicated and it has such a vast impact on everything that we do that there is an absolute urgency about making long-range plans for our highway promotion. For example, up until recent times nobody has felt that there is much of any relationship between county planning, county zoning, and highway and road building. Actually the reverse is true. The proper use of planning and zoning techniques can locate industrial development sites that will facilitate the construction of your road. It can locate where you are going to have residential areas. It can synthesize the whole transportation system of an area, bringing together all of the many relationships that go into road building.

The fourth principle that has been uncovered in this research concerns this question of cost records. Most of our counties are actually being governed by intuition because there is very little of the business of collecting facts and cost data so that the policy makers can review alternative approaches to road building. They find it hard to collect data for use in choosing the least costly approach to building a road or the most efficient way of doing things. We don't have cost estimates that we can rely on. We collect a lot of records, but we do not use them for management purposes. By-and-large our records are kept at the county level for purposes of seeing that there is no skulduggery, that nobody stole any money. But record-keeping at the county level can be a tremendous management tool. As a county commissioner, you can say we decided this route because it costs less and here are the facts to prove it. You can answer an irate citizen who wants to know why such and such a road hasn't been built by saying "look, we made a long-range plan; that road is going to be considered, but it has a lower priority than this road going to the airport or this road going to the county industrial development area that's going to bring new tax resources to our community." You can actually document your case. You don't have to be governed now by intuition.

The fifth thing that we're learning in this research project is the point that we keep coming back to time and time again. *We are not telling our story.* We're not telling the county story to the press, to other levels of government, to federal officials, or to the state officials. More importantly, we're not telling our story to the average citizen. There are relatively few people engaged in road building in municipalities, states, or at the federal level who understand, for example, that

we in county government have $2\frac{1}{2}$ million miles of roads to build and maintain. I don't think they understand how deeply our 3,000 counties are involved in road building. We have a quarter of a million employees doing nothing but building roads, improving roads, and otherwise working in the road building program. I think very few Americans understand that we as a nation are spending 12 billion dollars every year for road building and maintenance.

We have to get this story to the public particularly in view of the fact that there will be this new urban emphasis. We have to get across the story that the roads we have jurisdiction for at the county level are perhaps the most expensive roads in the world in terms of the only yardstick that is meaningful, the cost per miles of vehicle travel. We can document the case that the most expensive road is the road that goes into a farm that's used exactly six times a day. The milk truck goes in and out, the mail man goes in and out, and the school bus goes in and out. Six trips on that road a day, and yet that road has to be maintained in all-weather conditions. There are very few people who understand that the urban expressways costing 1 million, 2 million, 5 million dollars a mile are perhaps the least expensive roads in terms of vehicle miles, because we collect our revenues in terms of highway user fees that go up with the number of miles traveled. We have to do a lot better job of telling the county story at the local level.