

The Present Status of Legislation on County Road Management

REPRESENTATIVE WALTER H. BARBOUR

and

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Legislative Advisory Commission

REPRESENTATIVE WALTER H. BARBOUR

I talked to a county commissioner out in the hall a little while ago and after I introduced myself he asked me what I was doing. I said, "Well, we're supposed to be studying what the county commissioners are doing." "That's a pretty difficult job," he said, "at this time of year even we don't know what we're doing." I can see his point. But in view of the fact that he didn't know there was a study commission in session since the last legislature, I thought I would review the Act that was set up in the last session.

The 1961 legislature established a commission for the purpose of studying the county road system of our state, conducting research, and otherwise making a complete survey of the organizational procedure and related aspects of the county highway administration. We are to report the findings and recommendations for the maximum efficiency and the management of the county highway systems before September 15 of this year. Now, this was no small task. There are 92 counties in Indiana, all doing business. Many of them are doing business in their own individual fashion.

Our commission had its first meeting on July 10, 1961. We invited twelve people to be advisers to the commission, most of whom were at the first meeting and have attended all of the meetings since. The advisers were three commissioners, Glen Ashby of Vanderburgh County, Byron Pike of Wayne County, and French Elrod of Marion County; an engineer supervisor, Joseph Harrison from Howard County; Professors John McLaughlin and Jean Hittle from the School of Civil Engineering, Purdue University; Professor John Stoner, Department of Government, Indiana University; Col. H. E. Fillinger, engineer of county and federal aid of the State Highway Commission, who is now deceased and replaced by Don O. Eusey; Howard B. Swaine, State Board of Accounts; James Proctor, State Chamber of Commerce; and

Claude Hodson, executive secretary of the County Commissioners Association. I believe in this group we have the best talent and experience that could be assembled. All are most helpful.

It was the consensus of this group that a questionnaire should be formulated and sent to each county, thus giving each county a common ground upon which at least a partial judgment could be made. The final count, on which the tabulation was made, was from all but four counties contributing. We want to thank all of you for your contribution.

Many suggestions were made. Some thought that more money would be the best way to cure all evils and problems. Money is difficult to get, but we see no need at the present time to change the formula. We are in agreement that more uniformity in the management of all county highway departments is a must. We, the committee, strongly support the new bookkeeping system which is now the law, and I feel that each of you will follow your oath of office in so complying. At the present time there is little or no uniformity in the operation among the counties across the state.

The commissioners of today are too busy to administer the detailed solution of each little problem. They should decide *policy only* and should surround themselves with professional and experienced people upon whom they can rely. We believe the commissioners should be well informed of the laws under which they perform their everyday task and for this reason we think it important to have all county highway laws codified. We also think that the term of office should be lengthened to a four-year term and that the county commissioners should have full control of the current highway funds. This has been one of the controversies among the counties, according to those whom we have questioned.

We feel that these measures will help the counties toward solutions to their problems, so we will present bills to the legislature in 1963 in an attempt to accomplish these things. We hope we will be able to have your full support in trying to pass this legislation. It isn't up to us entirely, it usually takes everyone's help to get a bill through the legislature. I hope that this program meets your approval.

Speaking of programs, according to the questionnaire many counties, even today, do not have a highway program, and only 12½ per cent published, to the tax payers, their program for the year. This is important. Have a program. Tell your people that you have a program, that you are living by it, and that you are going to do things on a businesslike basis, which includes, of course, the classification of the

road system and other things. This will eliminate those who come to you for special favors. I think this is a help. This doesn't mean you can't lay a dust in a particular area if an unforeseen traffic problem arises, but, by and large, stick to your program and I'm sure that over a period of time you will develop a good road system of which all the people can well be proud.

SENATOR PAUL J. BITZ

When the Friendship Seven went up in space with Col. John Glenn, they were equipped to handle all circumstances that might happen when he was rocketed up through the air around the world. But, are we equipped today? Is your legislature, not mine, but your legislature, equipped to understand your problems of road building? Are you equipped, on the local level, to understand the problems of road building? Let me tell you this, politicians all—the public are not as dumb as they used to be. They are a lot smarter today than we politicians of old give them the credit for being, and if we do not awaken soon to the new challenge we have to meet, then I am sure they are going to surround themselves with people that are going to meet those challenges.

We on the County Highway Study Committee have tried to study programs of county road building on the state level, as far as we humanly possibly could. We are not experts. We had to get the information on the local level with assistance from Indiana University, Purdue, and from people with the know-how and ability to give us the facts. After all, that is the job of the legislature. We are up there for only 61 days. We have to take the pros and the cons on legislation and come up with the best possible answer. We know you need help back home and you know that on committees, there is a different political climate. There is a difference of opinion. I am happy to say that our committee pretty well agrees to the extent of how far we should go, or should not go, on county road building legislation.

There are a few things that have not been mentioned thus far that I call, or maybe people have a tendency to call, the more liberal viewpoint of what should be done. I would like to touch briefly on those.

We think, or I think personally, that there should be a matching fund for your Accumulative Bridge Fund on the state level. Now remember this, if you can't get more money from the cities, under the formula, then you must find another means or another method of getting it to get the job done on the local level. As I said, when the Friendship Seven Space Ship went up they were equipped, but we are still in the horse and buggy days with respect to road building. If we

don't catch up in the next ten years on the county level, with all the industrialization, the farm-to-market roads, then we are never going to be able to catch up. We are moving at too slow a pace and the state is responsible as much as the county for moving at that slow a pace because you haven't had a legislature that has been well informed and knows your problems. We can't understand the problems in 61 days if you don't help us to understand the whole year long. That is your responsibility while we are back home, to gather with us and to help bring those problems to our attention so we can understand them when we get back to the legislature, if we do. I would like to say that I personally think that we need to match your Cumulative Bridge Fund. That would give additional money to the bridge building program, which is so far behind that we are never going to be able to catch up unless we give you additional money.

Now where should that money come from? You are going to hear 150 different opinions on that when the legislature convenes. I say it should come before any money is distributed back home so that nobody suffers under the formula plan. In other words, take it before it gets to where it is broken down.

There is another thing I think we should have. I think that in the highway districts in the state of Indiana we should have a state-aid county man. If there is anything that makes me mad, it is the fact that we have stood still in the State Highway Department with three or four people administering, and helping you to administer, a \$50,000,000 highway program. I know there has been a big improvement in the last five or six years over what you had, but it hasn't been fast enough and it hasn't kept pace with the times. There are a number of states that are enjoying the fact that they have a state engineer in each highway district, who is a county engineer or state-county engineer, in the aid section of the highway department. This man doesn't come in and do all your planning, he doesn't take away your supervision or your management of your own problems on a local level as people would have you believe, but rather he assists you with engineering ability and know-how, planning, and urban renewal programs. He helps get this job done the best way possible. Also, we think that if we are spending \$50,000,000 a year on county roads, we can spend \$500,000 for engineers. I believe that we are going to try to come up with some kind of permissive legislation, not mandatory, but some kind of permissive legislation that will enable you, in 42 or 45 of the counties, or in all of the counties if the legislature so sees fit, to have the opportunity to hire a professional engineer in your locality to assist you to do this job.

We have made a survey and found that in Marion, Lake, Allen, and Vanderburgh counties there is more money spent to hire someone to come in and assist with this than you could spend in the 92 counties, having a fulltime engineer at a salary of \$10,000 a year. We want to try to give you the tools that are needed. We are going to try and I think you are going to find the legislature receptive when the commission reports back. We are going to give you these tools and these instruments to help yourself, but remember, before we can help you, you have to help yourself. We appreciate the cooperation you have given us this year on the questionnaires you have returned, but we say we need still more cooperation in the future.