

Development of a City Street Improvement Program

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When recently asked to speak on the development of a city street improvement program, I remarked that I was probably best qualified to speak on how not to develop a city street program. I say this not because we do not develop a yearly street program in the city of Hammond. We do. A haphazard manner of arriving at a yearly street improvement program has been followed for over a hundred years and the fruit born of such a method is now evident in the traffic strangulation found on our thoroughfares.

Both city and state have in the past been negligent in developing city streets and state routes through the city in an orderly manner to provide maximum use of the traffic lanes. The sins of our fathers are now coming to rest on our heads. The lack of planning in the past years has finally brought home to our city fathers that planning obviously pays dividends. We are now believers that it does not cost to plan, it pays! It required a population growth explosion to make us aware of it. This is probably true in most of the cities and towns throughout our land.

To properly acquaint you with some of the problems found in Hammond today, it would help to recall some of the history of our city. Hammond lies at the south end of Lake Michigan and adjoins Chicago on the west and the heavily industrialized Calumet region on the east. The north half of the city is a conglomerate of heavy industry and good residential districts; the south half is almost strictly residential with a sprinkling of shopping centers and business districts. Still farther south of the city limits are mushrooming bedroom-type towns which provide housing for the workers in the heavy industries located along Lake Michigan. Traffic problems are thus compounded by the movement to and from work of thousands of workers who live outside the city limits. Of course there is never any objection to these same employees spending their money in city shopping districts. On shopping days and nights they do not necessarily ease the traffic woes.

The location of Hammond means that all of the interstate traffic generated in Chicago headed east must necessarily pass through the city.

The traffic from Chicago to the south also travels through. Hammond is surrounded by other cities and lies in the path of the most direct route to and from Chicago in all directions.

In the last ten years some traffic relief has been achieved by the construction of the Indiana East-West Toll Road through the northern half and by the Tri-State Highway through the southern half of Hammond. These expressways have taken most of the interstate traffic off congested east-west city streets. Thus far nothing has been done to aid the north-south traffic movement of the workers and interstate travelers.

Just as the highways converge on Hammond, so do all the major railroads from the east and south converge on Hammond in going to and from Chicago. They pose no small problem for street and highway users. The Calumet Region Traffic Study and Report of 1953 by the Indiana State Highway Commission stated that there are 37 major railroad crossings at grade in Hammond which cause great economic loss. Twenty-one of these crossings are on state highways and 16 on city thoroughfares.

There is only one overpass on a state highway in the city and at the south end of this grade separation is another major railroad crossing at grade. During change-of-shift hours it is not unusual to find traffic stopped on this overpass and for miles beyond it into the neighboring city because a freight train is passing at this grade crossing. With similar conditions existing throughout the city, how does one develop a city street or highway program?

If you like a challenge, here is one that can hardly be matched anywhere. Not only is the traffic problem aggravated by railroads in abundance, but two rivers cross the city from east to west. There are insufficient river crossings over the Grand Calumet River and the Little Calumet River, Hammond's southern boundary. Lack of traffic lanes to handle the volume of north-south traffic across these rivers adds to the problem.

After several years of having funds cut from our budget for a master thoroughfare study and plan we are finally assured of such a plan. Urban renewal has been initiated in Hammond. The thoroughfare plan will be integrated with the up-dating of the Master Zoning Plan by request of the Urban Renewal Agency. To have waited a hundred years for a master thoroughfare plan is *not* the proper way to develop a city street program.

Hammond has had a traffic engineering department for many years under the city engineer. This office is staffed with a capable police

traffic captain. He has for years collected traffic counts, supervised traffic control devices, parking, and street lighting. Today the captain is at Northwestern University for a year's study at their Traffic Institute. For the past several years the budget cutters have removed from our budget an amount for a trained traffic engineer. *This is not* conducive to developing a street improvement program in a city the size of Hammond.

For a number of years \$200,000 of gas-tax money has been used to pay Police Department salaries. This practice finally stopped this year and the entire gas-tax monies are available for street repairs and an increased Barrett Bond street improvement program. Using gas-tax money for police salaries is *not* a proper aid in developing a city street program.

In spite of all the handicaps previously mentioned, yearly street programs have been developed. The street department has developed maintenance programs by making visual inspections every spring. All streets are inspected and the condition reported on cards kept in the Street Department office. Every patch or repair made during the year is recorded on the card for the street and thus a good history of the street is on hand. From the inspections and the cards a street program is developed for seal coating or laying hot mix asphalt. In recent years, the lack of gas-tax money has curtailed the maintenance program and it has been necessary to tailor the program to the amount of money on hand. The street commissioner prepares the program for the year and then presents it to the administration for approval.

A Barrett Bond program is carried out each year based on the amount of money allocated in the budget for street improvements. This program is developed by the city engineer's office from numerous petitions on file and is based on need and importance of streets. Principal thoroughfares are widened under this program and are given priority, with the city paying approximately 50 percent of the cost. Other residential streets are programmed for improvement as needs dictate. This program is also presented to the administration for approval. Lack of money from gas tax prevents planning for more than one year's program. If all of the tools were available for properly developing a city street program, programs would be developed for one year, two years, five years, and long range. It certainly would save money to be able to plan properly.

Finally, the street improvement program this year will be enhanced by the first city-financed railroad overpass. This was accomplished with the cooperation obtained in the forming of a City Council Traffic-Railroad Committee. For several years this committee met, discussed, and

solved traffic problems caused by the various railroads. The end result from these meetings was an agreement that grade separations were badly needed in the Hammond area. This cooperation has led to the financing of this first overpass by the railroad, the city, and the county. A city bond issue for this overpass will also pay for about one half mile of street extension.

Essential to the development of city street programs is proper long range planning for the orderly growth of a city, with the cooperation of the various branches of city government working with responsible committees and civic groups. Engineers working with planners make a good team for planning any program, but the cooperation of interested parties is vital.