

My Six Years in Washington, D.C.

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INTRODUCTION

The suggested subject for the talk here tonight was to discuss the high points and perhaps the low points of my six years in Washington and, since I am only three months from the end of the six years, perhaps I can recall some of the events and experiences which stood out in my mind.

Perhaps I should say first that the shock of moving from Jefferson City, Missouri after living for 62 years in Missouri and working 40 years and 9 months for the Missouri State Highway Department to Washington, D. C. was very great. There was a feeling of loneliness that was very real.

I went to Washington, D. C. with the definite knowledge that the Bureau of Public Roads had done and was doing an outstanding job in supervising the highway program in partnership with the several state highway departments and with the determination to carry on that partnership at all costs. I had the further feeling that any organization can be improved and I thought, of course, that this was true of the Bureau of Public Roads. There was also at that time a rather wide spread feeling in the news media, and perhaps the public, that there was some misuse of funds in the road program. I did not share the feeling, but at the same time I felt that all effort possible should be expended to reduce scandal and misuse of the public funds to the lowest possible minimum.

So, with encouragement from the secretary of commerce, early attention was given to improvement in the bureau's headquarter's organization.

REORGANIZATION OF THE BUREAU

Two activities in the highway program which are subject to considerable controversy and difference of opinion in all the states is the location of the highway and the acquisition of right-of-way. So it seemed most logical that these two activities which are so closely re-

lated should be given the full attention of a top level supervisor. So the (1) Office of Right-of-Way and Location was formed by taking them out of the Office of Engineering.

The Office of Engineering's responsibility was restored to a great extent by transferring to it the Office of Operations, which had been responsible for supervision of all highway design and construction in national parks, forests and public lands and foreign government activity. The new combination was called the (2) Office of Engineering and Operations.

The work of research, highway planning, and highway safety had all been in the office of research. It seemed that all three of the activities were of sufficient importance to justify a separate office for each and to justify top level supervision. So an (3) Office of Highway Planning, an (4) Office of Highway Safety were formed, and the (5) Office of Highway Research was continued with research as its sole responsibility.

The size of the federal highway program, the opportunity for the misuse of funds, and the feeling that some wrongdoing was occurring seemed to justify the establishment of an (6) Office of Audits and Investigation. This was done by taking that responsibility from the (7) Office of Administration a top level supervisor who had had 15 years experience with the F.B.I. and 5 years experience in public roads on investigative work was placed as director of the office.

The foregoing seven offices with the (8) Office of General Counsel and Legal Affairs made up the reorganization of the Washington office of Public Roads. The actual day-to-day supervision of the field work by the states was carried on by ten regional offices and a division office in each one of the fifty states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. In addition to the above, there is a region 15 office in Arlington County, Virginia to do highway engineering for the national parks in the eastern part of the United States.

REORGANIZATION OF REGIONAL AND DIVISION OFFICES

It is tremendously important to have a top level engineer at the head of not only the engineering offices in Washington, but also at the head of the regions and the state division offices. The division engineer in each state is a most sensitive and important person. The success of the highway program in any state literally depends on the division engineer. He must see that the bureau's responsibility of ap-

proving or disapproving each step in the program is carried out efficiently and expeditiously. He must be able to work pleasantly and firmly with the state people and his own personnel and also be courteous and cooperative with the public.

During the six years that I was in Washington, shifts of division engineers were made in 40 of the 52 division offices in order to improve the partnership operation with the states.

ADVISORY RESEARCH COMMITTEE FORMED

The expenditure of something over three billion dollars of federal highway funds per year at the beginning of my six years caused me to wonder if the money was being spent to the best possible use for the public taking particular account of the future needs of transportation of people and goods. It appeared then and still does that the best way to be assured of the proper expenditure of the funds is through adequate research.

Public Roads had been active in highway research for many years, but it seemed desirable to have more guidance in this area. It was, therefore, decided to enlist the advisory services of a member of outstanding individuals who had distinguished themselves in the highway field with research experience and knowledge. This Advisory Research Committee formed by securing the services of Professor K. B. Woods of Purdue, who was named chairman of the committee, Professor Harmer Davis of the University of California at Berkeley, Professor Ralph Fadum, University of North Carolina, Professor William Garrison of Northwestern University in Chicago and Charles Zwick of the Rand Corporation. The foregoing were the original members of the committee but was later enlarged by adding Mr. Mike Ference, chief of research for the Ford Motor Company, Mr. Louis Lundstrom, director of automotive safety engineering, General Motors Technical Center, Mr. Robert Lundegard, Office of Navy Research, and Wilbur Steger, President, Consad Research Corporation of Pittsburgh. This advisory committee has been of the greatest value in suggesting, guiding and evaluating the research effort of Public Roads.

HIGHWAYS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

It is my feeling that much more recognition was developed in the past six years in the consideration of the best interests of the people for whom the highways are built. The building of a functional well-engineered highway falls short of its full purpose if it ignores the welfare of the public; if its impact on the public is harmful, if it fails

to preserve the aesthetic, cultured, natural, historical and social values so important to our way of life.

In a task of such magnitude as the present federal-aid highway program, there is a danger that the program will become impersonal. There is a danger that in their anxiety to attain their goal, highway builders may sometimes overlook the impact their efforts have on the American people for whom the highways are provided. There is a danger that they may even lose sight of the fact that a fine highway transportation system is not an end in itself, but instead, something that exists for the sole purpose of serving the needs of the people.

The welfare of the people must always be paramount. A utilitarian highway that ignores the environmental interests of the public can be a blight rather than a boon. It is important that special efforts be made to minimize disruption of church parishes, school districts, neighborhoods, parks and recreation areas, historic and scenic sites, and fish and wildlife habitats.

There was a time when the shortest distance between two points and the lowest construction cost were the deciding factors in a highway location. These criteria gave way to the cost-benefit ratio test whereby the cost of building and operating a route was matched against user benefits.

However, it was ultimately recognized that the cost-benefit ratio could not be the sole determinate because it failed to take in account the resources and human values in the areas traversed. The most economical route, or the best traffic service route, is not necessarily the best route in terms of its effect on people.

It is still necessary to give full consideration to the economy. It is mandatory that every dollar of the people's money be spent properly. But, at the same time, we should scrutinize each proposed route location from the point of view of social responsibility. Will it harm or benefit people, neighborhoods, communities, and institutions? The answers must be weighed carefully before a decision is made.

URBAN HIGHWAYS AND THE JOINT DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT

The foregoing comments about highways and human values applies both to rural and urban areas. But, with more and more people moving to the urban areas, year after year, as far ahead as we can see, it appears obvious that the main thrust of highway efforts in the years ahead should be directed to easing the plight of cities. This means not only easing traffic congestion, but using freeways and other highway and street improvements as tools to build better communi-

ties and to improve the human environment. This calls for the total cooperative efforts and skills of the city planner, the architect, the landscape architect, the traffic engineer, the highway engineer and the people.

Transportation in all its forms is an inseparable element of any city and cannot be considered apart from the city itself. All forms of transportation should be studied in order to determine what is best for any individual city. Just as we know how urban development will determine the demands on and the efficiency of highway facilities, the planning and location of highway facilities will shape urban development and affect the lives of generations of urban dwellers. The joint development of highways, housing, schools, playgrounds, parks, business and industrial areas, and parking is the efficient and effective procedure, and will be referred to hereafter as the joint development concept.

Another fact of life in urban areas is that there is very little usable space left in most of our cities and so we must make the best, the most efficient, and the most economical use of what there is. We must find a balance between intensity of land use and ability to provide supporting facilities—such as streets and utilities. We must realize that because of this the highway is in competition for land with a host of other needs of our cities.

We must realize that as freeways move close to or through the downtown areas of the larger cities, they take land which, till the day the demolition crews move in, has some other vital use as a part of the city's life. It does not matter that the pre-freeway use is a wrong one or an inefficient one, that the houses are small and mean, the people crowded, the industries unattractive. Neither does it matter really that the highway will bring stability and renaissance to a tired old area. Right then, as the right-of-way was cleared, the highway is a disruptive force on community life. And, ironically, the older and more crowded the neighborhood, the more it warranted demolition or renewal, the more disruptive is the new highway. The fact cannot be ignored. The joint development concept recognizes and responds to it.

This concept also reflects concern with making highway transportation compatible with the environment while serving many urban needs.

The economics of this approach are also basic to high hopes for its success. Studies show that in some urban situations the cost of acquiring whole blocks or squares of property would be about the same, or slightly higher, than acquiring just the normal freeway rights-of-way, including the payments which must be made for severance damages.

Thus, a city could acquire entire blocks or even wider areas on the route of a planned freeway, and, out of the whole block acquired for joint development, the highway department would need only a permanent three-dimensional easement—an air tunnel for the freeway—which it could buy for an amount equal to its appropriate share of the right-of-way costs, thus supporting the joint development concept without increase in its own planned highway expenditure. The community would then have available for other development a valuable assembly of land obtained for a fraction of acquiring it in separate steps, and avoid the all too well known problems of limited condemnation powers.

While the economics of land acquisition makes this concept feasible, it is the promise of more efficient land use that makes joint development so valuable for space-short cities. The considerable remaining space alongside, as well as over and under the freeway, could be used to meet an appropriate need of the city.

The land uses existing before the freeway could be re-established, if desirable, and often more efficiently than before. For example, the typical small home or tenement housing of blighted urban areas could be replaced, under a joint development program, with an equal number of comparable-cost housing units, on one-third the land area, with modern buildings.

This would mean that only the space of one block in three would be needed for replacement housing, while two out of the three blocks would be available for other development—such as parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, schools or public buildings, parking, additional housing or private buildings, or stores which could be located under an elevated expressway. It should be unnecessary to locate the housing itself over the freeway lanes.

The construction of the freeway could be coordinated with other development so that the replacement housing and buildings would be available as construction progresses for those who are displaced. Taking care of displaced people and displaced business is a vital social problem and must be adequately and fairly handled.

CONCLUSION

To me, the foregoing comments and problems cover some of the most important occurrences or developments during my six years as Federal Highway Administrator. While there were times of great frustration, it was a period of great challenge, great interest and great rewards, and it has been a great pleasure to talk to you about them.