

The Post-Interstate System

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PLAN NOW FOR AFTER 1972

What to do after 1972? It is important to begin by saying that there are no pat answers. It would be presumptuous to outline the highway program which we should undertake during the 1970's and 1980's.

It is tremendously important that we talk about this subject seriously and frequently. It is important to plan well in advance in order that the highway program may have the continuity which is so important both to the highway administrators and to the industry. Lapses in the highway program will result in extra costs, serious unemployment, and intolerable confusion.

Congressman John C. Kluczynski of Chicago, Illinois, chairman of the House Subcommittee on Roads said that this is the year of decision for writing major highway legislation for the follow-up program of the present 41,000-mile interstate system construction program.

The completion of the system is now expected to cost \$56.5 billion, plus additional expected cost increases of another \$5 billion before it is finished. The Department of Transportation estimates that the work will run into 1975, with some problem sections taking longer.

Because planning for a future follow-up program must begin well in advance (from three to five years), DOT believes that the available leadtime is barely adequate even now.

THE ABC SYSTEM

In addition to this normal leadtime for planning, one must consider the unexpected higher traffic volumes which are rapidly increasing the deterioration of the regular primary, secondary and urban systems (ABC systems) which have had less than adequate attention because of the special interstate construction program.

So great is the necessity of attention to the ABC highways, the American Road Builders Association has proposed to the House Subcommittee on Roads that the 1968 apportionment of ABC highway

funds (for fiscal 1970) be increased from the \$1 billion annual level to \$1.5 billion.

The \$1 billion apportionment level was reached in 1964 and has remained at that level although traffic volume has increased about five percent annually and is not expected to drop below an annual increase of 2.7 percent during the foreseeable future. This increase, termed by DOT as a "modest" estimate for the next 20 years is not expected to drop much below the annual five percent increase for the next few years while Americans continue to "wheel-up" to the rate of a motor vehicle for every two persons, with increased travel of each vehicle averaging around an additional 50 miles each year.

Massive and multi-studies by federal, state and local governments along with private research projects by various industries and associations is causing a rapidly changing highway planning concept which has apparently triggered the developing urgent need to re-orient the highway program in a "pre-post-interstate program" to begin on or before the original interstate completion date.

The ARBA's proposed increase of ABC apportionments (under the present federal-state matching program) is newer than the mid-February annual meeting of the association in Las Vegas, and apparently was a surprise to congressmen and the sister state highway officials who testified before the subcommittee on the same day. The American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO) also came up with several innovations, chiefly the reversal of earlier statements, by asking for a halt to additional interstate mileage and a return to a modernized ABC program which would include interstate-type development of regular major primary highways and necessary urban expressways and thoroughfares.

The AASHO statement was backed by a December 12 meeting of all chief state highway executives—who are still "running" the actual highway program—and are apparently now desiring to return their attention to the "regular" highway program, with a uniform return of federal highway taxes collected from the state highway users to be added to normal state-collected revenue to upgrade their highway system as needed by the individual states.

THE BUREAU AND STATES START NEED STUDIES

It is encouraging that the Bureau of Public Roads and the state highway departments have, on their own initiative, started the highway needs study. It is apparent that our federal and state highway officials recognize the importance of getting this job done. The

American Road Builder's Association and the highway industry are solidly behind us in this effort.

In general terms, the task consists of:

- (1) Determining what highway improvements will be necessary to take care of the traffic of the future and what priority should be given to the several categories of highway needs.
- (2) Estimating the total cost of these improvements.
- (3) Determining what share of the responsibility should fall on the federal government, what share on the state governments, and what share on the local governments.

When these responsibilities are determined, the highway departments and the industry will be in position to get to work and determine how their respective responsibilities can be carried out in an efficient and economical manner.

HIGHWAYS NOW HAVE PERSONNEL FOR POST-1972

The object of this paper is not to forecast the findings of the highway needs study or to tell what the findings should be. Instead, it is suggested that there are things involved in the process of getting ready for 1972 which are not a part of the subject matter of the needs study and which can be considered independently of that study.

We know, for example, that the effectiveness of a highway department depends on the calibre of the people who work for that highway department, not only the top management echelon but the people all the way down the line. You can have the best design engineers in the world and still build poor highways if the inspectors on the job are incompetent.

The task of building a good highway department is a never-ending one. As older employees move up the career ladder or retire, their places must be filled by well-trained new employees who are suitably motivated to consider their jobs with the highway department as career positions offering opportunities for advancement and professional satisfaction. A gap in our federal-aid program would almost certainly cause a sizeable reduction in the need for skilled personnel in our highway commission and result in a breakdown of the efficiently functioning team built up since 1919. The need to rebuild the team would delay the full-scale resumption of the program after the gap.

I'd guess that most people are in favor of preserving the federal-state partnership in highway construction, with the Bureau of Public Roads handling the federal responsibility. We had better be aware

that other arrangements are likely to be proposed. In the long run, the best way to preserve the present arrangement is to prove that it can continue to get the job done in the best possible way.

So one way to get ready for the post-1972 period is to make sure that we are well organized to administer the highway program of the future.