

WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED PLANNING?

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Let's call a spade, a spade. That is a customary preface to plain speaking. This is going to be a plain speech.

There is no better place for plain speech than in the bosom of the family. I presume to membership in this family, and I speak plainly as a member of it.

If a refusal to blink the unpleasant is a fault of plain speaking, the merit of it usually is that it aims hopefully to remove the causes of the unpleasantness. For my plain speaking to you today, here in the bosom of this family, I claim this merit, if I must acknowledge in some measure the fault.

The subject upon which I have chosen to speak is a question. It is a question couched in the provocative mood of the disbeliever. What is this thing called planning?

Planning! There are some among us to whom the very word is anathema. I comprehend; and I deplore some of the causes of this intense dislike. They are causes which have no relation to, and should not be permitted to defeat the purposes of, sound planning.

For what is it to plan? It is to form a scheme or a method for doing. It is to entertain as a project with the prospect of effecting or performing. It is to devise ways and means of accomplishing; to contrive. Planning, as defined broadly in these terms, is the first discipline and purpose of the engineer and the administrator. Why is it, then, that among engineers and administrators there are so many to whom the word "planning" bears a connotation to be looked upon with mild amusement; to be frowned upon; to be passionately opposed?

That question addressed to any group of engineers and administrators would elicit, no doubt, a various response.

To one man the word "planning" has come to be associated with an actuality better described as visionary and impractical dreaming. Day dreaming! "Let the dreamer indulge his dreams; let the planner play with his plans. There's work to do; let's get on with it." This is the amused response.

To another man the word "planning" implies an extension of the effort to arrange and contrive beyond the boundaries of practicable control and dependable foresight. "You can plan a house or a road. You can plan a day's work or a year's budget. You can't plan a city or even a road system. No man alive can plan ten years ahead." This is the frowning response.

To a third man the word suggests a distasteful infringement of a prided intuitive judgment, a judgment cultivated by long, and perhaps successful experience. "I don't need any of these planners to tell me what to do. Keep 'em out of my way and I'll do it." This is the response of passionate opposition.

Such responses are, I believe, actually no more than automatic reflexes to an exciting word; shall we say, an irritating word. They have little relation to the actuality of sound and needed planning.

We are a highway family here. Naturally, the planning of which we are thinking is highway planning. So the question brought closer home is: What is this thing called highway planning?

At meetings such as this it has become the usual thing for speakers to refer in terms of approval to the Statewide highway planning surveys. You will not expect me to say an unkind word of the planning surveys, and you will know that it is not my intention to do so when I say that the highway planning surveys are not highway planning. The surveys are an indispensable instrumentality of highway planning. They are not highway planning. They are related to highway planning in just about the same way as the survey with transit and level is related to the engineering location of a road. That is, they are the means by which the data essential to highway planning are gathered. The data essential include, at the least, all of the kinds of facts suggested by the original outline of the surveys: the facts of the road inventory, including the cultural items; the facts of traffic volume and of the origins and destinations of traffic; the facts of vehicular weight; the facts of vehicle registration; the facts of road use; the facts of the so-called road-life studies; and last, but by no means least, the financial facts. A planning survey that does not regularly gather all of these kinds of facts is an inadequate instrumentality of highway planning. A planning survey whittled down to little more than a traffic count may be useful as a tool of highway design. It is little more. It is not an effective instrument of highway planning.

I have just referred to highway design as a thing distinct from highway planning. The distinction is drawn deliberately. Highway design is not highway planning. If the planning surveys are an instrumentality of highway planning in the formative stage, highway design is important among the means of effectuating the formed plan. By analogy with the art of war, highway planning is strategic; highway design is tactical. As strategy and tactics, in the broad sense, comprise the art of war, so do highway planning and highway design complement each other in the art of highway administration.

I do not seem to be answering the question. The question is: What is this thing called highway planning? I seem to be speaking of things that are not highway planning. Well, bear with me, I'll come to the question later. I want just to mention a few more things that are not highway planning.

The shuffling of roads among road systems by casual legislative action is not highway planning. The establishment of highway tax rates and the appropriation of highway funds upon no definite consideration of highway needs is not highway planning.

It is not real highway planning, but something else, that results in the distribution of the tax payer's dollar between the State, the counties, and the cities, responsive to the relative intensity of pressures that can be brought to bear upon a State legislature.

Highway planning does not automatically apportion highway expenditure and improvement evenly between highway commissioner's districts. Highway planning does not make a mockery of the sober purpose to recognize and provide accordingly for the improvement of preeminently important backbone elements of the highway structure, as a national system of interstate highways.

The attitude of the highway planner is not that of him who says: "Why should I spend a hunk of money getting together a lot of facts that will only bother me in doing what I want to do?" Nor does a highway engineer, possessed of a reasonable respect for the complexities of an adequate and balanced provision of the roadway means of efficient highway transportation, presume to know, without objective measurement and the careful and systematic balancing of determined needs and resources, how best to plan for that provision.

The offhand remarks of able and experienced highway engineers on the subject of highway planning sometimes remind me of views I heard expressed a generation ago by practical road builders of that time about highway engineering. In the generation that has elapsed we have moved on from problems of how best to build roads to

problems of how best to support, manage, and perpetuate efficiently, serviceable highway systems. But resistance to the application of scientific method is with us yet; exerted at a higher level.

Well, what is this newer application of scientific method? It is highway planning. And what is highway planning?

Highway planning is an organized, deliberate, and rationally directed process, aiming to bring about, and maintain an optimum balanced adjustment of the condition of all roads and streets to their proper and necessary uses in the service and promotion of safe and efficient, reasonably regulated highway access and highway transportation by vehicles of appropriate design, through the application of constructive effort in proportion to scientifically determined needs, and the collection of financial means for the support of that effort from all beneficiaries, and from each in proportion to the benefits conferred.

The process so broadly defined, you will say, is not highway planning. It is highway transportation planning. Well, let it be so. It is of highway transportation planning that I am plainly speaking, and of the need for it in all this country of ours, in its national entity, in its States, its counties and in its cities. The question I am really trying to answer is: What is this thing called highway transportation planning?

Now, certainly, by no stretch of accuracy, can highway transportation as it now exists be described as planned. Like Topsy, it has "grewed." It has the vitality for further prodigious and useful growth. But if, with the voice of its singing wheels it should sing of itself as it now is, it could find, I believe, no words more appropriate than those of the immortal Gilbert -

A wandering minstrel, I -

A thing of shreds and patches.

In one part it is a large patch of roads and streets; in another it is a patch of millions of vehicles. The two are but loosely sewn together; and overlapping them, and intended somehow, but with astonishing ineptitude, to piece them together are patches of public vehicular and traffic regulation, and of road user taxation.

The patch of vehicles is made up of shreds produced by numerous manufacturers for various intended uses, and used by millions of owners, often in ways for which they were not designed. It is made up of a number of classes of vehicles of a wide range of

size and weight and operating standard, productive of some incompatibility of the several kinds when they are combined together in traffic, and some of a size and weight and operating standard inconsistent with the character and design of roads over which they are operated.

The patch of roads and streets is made up of almost unnumbered shreds of various ages, designed and fabricated by thousands of more or less independent highway authorities, each functioning within fixed and often narrow geographical boundaries unrelated to transportation necessities, with less than a sufficient regard for the desirable balance and harmony of their several productions; often without knowledge of the number and kind of vehicles that may and do use the roads built; and too often in ignorance of the road and street qualities and characteristics essential to efficient usage either by vehicles and traffic as they are, or as they may or should be.

The patch of vehicular and traffic regulation is composed of shreds of a wide variety of form and intention, formulated often without intelligent understanding of the capacities of roads and streets or the essentials of economical vehicle operation, and generally without conscious thought of their place and effect in promoting and preserving a desirable coordination of vehicles and roads.

And, finally, the patch of road user taxation, like all the others a poorly knit fabric of many dissimilar shreds, not only fails signally in its primary purpose as a measure of highway finance, but in doing so imposes an inequitable relativity of demand upon the various classes of users in such degree as to hamper, if not to prevent the evolution of sound road-traffic-vehicle relationships.

These are the conditions in which highway transportation now exists. They are clearly undesirable conditions. They are the result of many piecemeal decisions and actions, taken at many times, by many individuals and corporate bodies and many governments, without clear recognition of the interrelationship of the matters decided and acted upon.

There is growing recognition of the need to alter and correct these conditions. How can it be done? The answer, the only answer of which I can conceive, is organized, deliberate highway transportation planning. And highway transportation planning is the thing that I have defined. Let me repeat the definition.

Highway transportation planning is an organized, deliberate, and rationally directed process, aiming to bring about, and maintain an optimum balanced adjustment of the condition of all roads and streets to their proper and necessary uses in the service and promotion of safe and efficient, reasonably regulated highway access and highway transportation by vehicles of appropriate design, through the application of constructive effort in proportion to scientifically determined needs, and the collection of financial means for the support of that effort from all beneficiaries, and from each in proportion to the benefits conferred.

Highway transportation planning of such definition and scope is certainly not the sole concern or responsibility of State highway departments. It calls for actions and decisions far beyond the capacity of a Federal Public Roads Administration. It calls for the unified co-working of many agencies and groups: The cooperation of highway officials of the nation, State, city and county; of motor vehicle administrators; of police officials; of the legislative branches of the State and Federal Governments; of road users; and of vehicle manufacturers.

It is a remarkable fact that motor vehicle manufacturers, by a concerted action to improve, and more exactly define the designed capacity of, their vehicles, and through the recent invaluable assistance of the Automotive Safety Foundation, of which they are the principal support, should be taking, as they are, a leading part in bringing about the needed multilateral cooperation toward many of the objectives of highway transportation planning as here defined.

Such cooperation and broad planning is being achieved State by State, one after another. The results that have issued from it in California, the even more gratifying results soon to appear in Michigan are certain to inspire similar effort in many States.

The Public Roads Administration is willing and anxious to take its part. It was for this use, exactly, that the highway planning surveys were conceived: to these ends every item of the recommended outline of needed fact gathering was directed. A recent General Administrative Memorandum (No. 319, issued September 24, 1947) renews our promise of cooperation, and repeats an earlier suggestion of the manner in which information, that can be well assembled only by the highway planning surveys, can be addressed to the ends of highway transportation planning.

The State highway departments cannot, if they would, avoid the responsibility of major contribution to such planning effort when it is undertaken, as surely, soon or late it will be, in every State. The State highway planning surveys will be the expected source of most of the facts required in that planning.

May I, in closing, suggest to the head of each State highway department here attending, that he take a fresh look at his highway planning survey after the approaching holidays; that, patiently, for it will require patience, he read the full text of General Administrative Memorandum No. 319; and, facing toward the west from whence a new wind is blowing, decide for himself, whether he is going to be ready, as the inevitable occasion will require, to fulfill the requirements of this thing called highway transportation planning.
