

Turner, Frank

Job Acceptance Delays

—Blame State, Not Bureau: *editorial*

Once the state highway department has found the contractor's work satisfactory on a Federal-aid project, he needn't delay going ahead with his topping on account of the Bureau of Public Roads. He doesn't have to wait for BPR concurrence, if the state engineer says "go."

This was one of the clarifying points which Frank Turner, the Bureau's chief engineer, emphasized in a talk at AGC's midyear board meeting at Portland, Oregon. As discussed on this page in September Roads and Streets. Turner was invited to address the contractor's Highway Directors session on the Bureau's role in the highway program.

Turner's talk did much to cut through the widespread confusion over issues involved in the Bureau's double-inspection and the delays that have hampered jobs in many states. Turner's talk, published in this issue, should be read carefully by every state road contractor.

What this talk did was to throw the ball squarely

back to the state highway departments. There is nothing in the Federal-state contractual relationship that prevents a state's field force from exercising judgment and making decisions promptly on the contractor's work.

Turner also emphasized some other points. One: better specifications that make each party's role clearer will ease contractor headaches. Recent months have brought much progress here, spearheaded by the publishing of the AASHO Guide Specifications and their progressive adoption in the states.

Another: continued upgrading of state inspectors and other field personnel. Better selected and better trained field men are the hope in restoring the vital role of professional decision making at the project level.

As Turner reminded the AGC members at Portland, the road contractor's dealings are or should be strictly with his state highway department.

It is the *department's* role, as much as the Bureau's, that often needs clarification.

More On Out-of-State Contractors

To continue with observations on the invasion by road contractors into states away from home (see last month on this page), a Pennsylvania contractor asked us: "Why does that fellow have to come into our territory and spoil it for our state's firms that need the work?"

This kind of complaint isn't restricted to "furriners." This leader went on to tell of another road builder right in his own state who had bid off a whole string of freeway contracts. As the sections came up for letting, he bid each successive section a little lower than the last. "Obviously he was sacrificing his profits when prices are already low enough, so as to

hog it all."

If the big firms are getting bigger by low-bidding more of the available jobs, this would be a trend that needs watching by the policy makers. But we didn't know how to answer these comments, except to say something about free enterprise and open competition still being the basis of running the highway program.

Roads and Streets expects to survey and report of latest trends in state highway award patterns, including the job load carried by the largest firms, and percentage of work done by out-of-state contractors.

Harold J. McKeever

BPR's Role

p. 156

"The Bureau's role is large and admittedly one of influence. But the right to initiate, the responsibility to actually construct and maintain, and the final ownership of the roads rest with the state. Ours is a role of approval or concurrence as each step is taken by the state, including the right and responsibility to disagree and disapprove when in our judgment that is necessary to meet the principles and objectives stated in the enabling legislation.

"The Bureau's role in the program is as stated repeatedly in the enabling legislation — namely, to approve (or disapprove) each action proposed by the sovereign state's

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highway department when that action proposes the use of funds made available through the Federal government — or to require revision or modification of these proposals to make them acceptable to a Federal highway administrator who carries the responsibility of representing all of the people in all of the states. With the exclusive privilege which the state has to initiate every project proposal and to own the project on its completion goes a responsibility to see that it is built in accordance with the proposal as agreed upon; and with the responsibility which the law imposes on the Bureau to review and approve or disapprove such proposals necessarily goes the right to independently inquire into these proposals and to be satisfied therewith before giving approval to them." — F. C. Turner, chief engineer, BPR, at the highway directors session, AGC board meeting, Portland, Oregon

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