

The Federal Road Program - Outlook

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1967

I want to use this brief article for the HIGHWAY BUILDER first as a vehicle to convey my best wishes to the Associated Pennsylvania Constructors on the occasion of your 45th Annual Convention and Highway Conference.

The highway industry has done an outstanding job for the Nation, particularly in the years since 1956, in providing our people with the better road network they need for better living. As an organization representing a substantial segment of the industry, you have reason to be proud.

Before getting into the outlook for the Federal-aid highway program, it may be well as a matter of perspective to consider where we stand now -- to the extent at least that progress can be measured in terms of dollars and mileages. This is a good time to take a look because we are in a period of transition when there is constantly increasing emphasis on safety, esthetics and the general relationship between highways and human values.

Since the creation of the Highway Trust Fund in 1956, revenues accruing to it have totaled \$30,981 billion and expenditures have totaled \$30,913 billion, leaving a balance of \$68 million on January 31, 1967. In terms of progress on the Interstate System, about 23,500 miles were in use and another 5,600 miles under construction. Some degree of work was underway or had been completed on 39,400 miles or 96 percent of the 41,000-mile System.

On the less glamorous but equally important ABC programs, projects

have been completed since July 1, 1956, at a total cost of \$17.7 billion. The completed projects involve construction contracts on 208,000 miles of primary, secondary and urban highways. ABC projects underway or authorized at the beginning of this calendar year totaled \$3.7 billion and included more than 16,000 miles of construction contracts.

Statistics are boring and sometimes confusing but they serve the necessary purpose of showing how far we have come in terms of fiscal and physical progress since the landmark Federal-aid highway legislation of 1956. By "we," I mean the State highway departments, the highway industry and the Bureau of Public Roads.

In considering the outlook for the program several questions are involved and I will try to answer them to the best of my ability. First, what will be the effect of the creation of the Department of Transportation? I don't foresee any basic change in the historic relationship between the Bureau of Public Roads and the State highway departments, nor their relationships with the roadbuilding industry. On the other hand we must all become a little more "transportation conscious" rather than just "highway conscious." This is not because of the new Department but because it's the only attitude that makes sense in this complex latter half of the Twentieth Century.

Second, what is the prospect for another big road program similar to the one authorized in 1956? And if so, will it be financed through a Highway Trust Fund as at present? I wish I could answer these with some degree of assurance but it is always hazardous to try to forecast what future Administrations and future Congresses will do. The Bureau of Public

Roads and the State highway departments have been making an exhaustive study of highway needs as far ahead as 1985. The report of this study will go to Congress in January, 1968, and will include recommendations as to the type of program to succeed the present one, as well as financing recommendations.

It should be noted, though, that this study is part of a larger and broader study which will consider the Nation's total transportation needs because highways can no longer be divorced or considered separate from other means of moving people and goods. We must plan and build transportation systems.

One thing I can predict with reasonable confidence -- that any future highway program will be heavily oriented to the urban areas, and quite properly so. We are going to have more people in the metropolitan areas, year after year, for as far ahead as we can see. Even today, two-thirds of our population is in urban areas. And even today, half of all motor vehicle travel occurs on city streets, which account for only 13 percent of total mileage.

In fact, under the present program we have had to take into account this increased urbanization in many ways, including various expedients to get more capacity out of existing city streets. Just recently the Bureau has undertaken a new program to help cities reduce traffic congestion through traffic engineering improvements.

In a departure from tradition, presently available highway funds may be used for specific purposes on certain city streets not previously considered eligible for Federal-aid. It involves expanding the Federal-

aid primary system to permit the selection of additional principal streets in areas of 5,000 or more population to receive Federal aid for the improvement of traffic operation only, but not for major construction or reconstruction projects.

The cost of the improvements -- such things as channalization of intersections, for example -- will be shared by the Bureau on a 50-50 basis out of regular Federal aid highway apportionments. The selection of the streets will be made by State highway departments, in cooperation with local officials, and will be subject to approval by the Bureau.

I mention this not because it has any great significance for the construction industry but because you are citizens first, roadbuilders second, and the mounting problem of urban traffic congestion is one that affects all of us. Without trying to predict the outcome of the highway needs study, it seems obvious that many more miles of urban freeways will be needed in the future, as well as other transportation modes in some of the larger cities.

Venturing a little further out on the limb, I foresee a continuing high level of highway construction activity as far ahead in the future as we can reasonably look. With the usual hedges about the possibility of a major war or depression, I believe public demand will compel a continuing program on something like the scale of the present one. But the public has indicated quite strongly that it is no longer satisfied with merely getting from here to there. People want not only more highways, but safer, more useful and more beautiful highways, and one of the great challenges of the future is to accommodate our roadbuilding efforts to this desire.