

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION  
BUREAU OF PUBLIC ROADS  
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OUR SPECIAL GOALS IN THE FEDERAL-AID HIGHWAY PROGRAM

Remarks by Francis C. Turner, Director, Bureau of Public Roads, Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Highway Officials of the North Atlantic States, Baltimore, Maryland, April 14, 1967

It is a pleasure, as always, to meet with this Association. A great many things have happened since your last annual meeting and I want to review with you a few of the more significant developments in the Federal-aid highway program.

First, I want to remind you that we are now into the second 50 years of the program and it appears likely that the challenges ahead will be greater and more diverse than those we have faced up to now.

The development of overriding significance during the past year, I believe, was the creation of the new Department of Transportation and its official activation on April 1. The Department brings together under one head a number of the transportation agencies and programs in the Federal Government -- most of which have been more or less going on their individual tracks for many years. The cabinet level grouping of these is a recognition of the urgency of taking a careful and dispassionate look at the Nation's total transportation system and needs, rather than its bits and pieces, and improving the coordination between all elements of our transportation system.

The Department has more than 92,000 employees and a budget of \$6 billion, three-quarters of it devoted to the Federal-aid highway program of which you are a part. It includes the new Federal Highway Administration, which in turn includes the Bureau of Public Roads and the National Highway Safety Agency. Despite the reorganization involved in all of this, it is highly important that there be no substantive change in the traditional partnership relationship between the Bureau of Public Roads and the State highway departments. As to the Bureau's field organization, through which most of you have your contacts with the Bureau, the principal immediate change in setting up the new Department that you will see has been to designate Public Roads regional offices as Regional Federal Highway Administration offices with some added responsibilities in the Safety and ICC fields.

Most of you are familiar with, (and I'm sure, happy about) the release of frozen Federal-aid highway funds which was announced over last weekend. An additional \$350 million, supplementing the \$750 million previously scheduled for release for the fourth quarter of fiscal year 1967, was released as of April 1. This brought the total available for obligation during this fiscal year to \$3.825 billion. In addition, effective April 10, half of the unobligated balances of funds carried over on June 30, 1966 -- \$515 million nationally -- was released for reimbursable obligation during fiscal 1967 with another \$515 million to be released July 1. So the net result of these actions is to bring the program almost back to the level which had been contemplated before the cutback announcement of last November 23. Additionally, we are removing restrictions placed on ACI projects and the special 10 percent holdback accounting.

I want to cover several subjects this morning so I won't devote much time to the traditional measurements of progress in the highway program. But we certainly haven't been standing still. Our last report showed a total of 23,724 miles of the Interstate System in daily use by passenger and commercial traffic. Construction was under way on another 5,650 miles and only 3.7 percent of the 41,000 mile network now remains in preliminary status. Most of that mileage is not in controversy although there are still some location and design problems -- particularly in urban areas. These are being resolved as other equally difficult problems have been resolved one by one over the years.

With almost 58 percent of the Interstate System open to traffic, both passenger and commercial users are reaping the enormous benefits of greatly increased safety, savings in time and money, and the more rapid and efficient movement of people and goods. On the regular Federal-aid programs, progress also continues at a high level. Since the accelerated program began in 1956, more than 225,000 miles of construction contracts have been completed or are under way on the primary and secondary systems and their urban extensions.

As highway engineers and administrators, we can take justifiable pride in this visible progress but we must never forget for a minute the other challenges which are not measured by mileages and dollars. And probably the most serious of these is that we do everything possible to reduce the continuing toll of deaths and injuries in traffic accidents. Last year 52,000 of our fellow citizens died violently in motor vehicle accidents. Auto accidents are now the biggest cause of death and injury among Americans under 35. If the present rate continues, one out of every two of our people may expect to be injured by a motor vehicle accident at some time during his lifetime. Obviously, we have the grave responsibility of building safety into our new highways and to remove

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the accident hazards that exist on the older ones. And when I speak of highways, I'm talking not only about the riding surface, but also the shoulders, the right-of-way and the adjacent land to the extent that we have any control over it.

True, traffic accidents are due to any one of many factors and usually to a combination of several of these. But it is clearly the responsibility of the Bureau and the State highway departments to provide the safest and most foolproof roadway and roadside possible within the limits of available funds and to recommend an increase in these funds if needed to do the job. Our 50 years of Federal-aid highway experience can be put to no better use than in trying to minimize the senseless killing and maiming of our people on the highways.

Aside from building safety into the new Interstate and other highways, we need a far stronger effort to remove boobytraps from the older ones. This is being done on an encouraging scale through the spot improvement program, which was inaugurated in March 1964 with a goal to rid the Federal-aid systems of these accident-inducing features by September 1, 1969. Nearly all States have now completed their inventories of hazardous locations and developed plans to correct them. More than 2,200 spot improvement projects have been programed by the States and the results of some of the completed projects are heartening. In Iowa, for example, four bridges were widened and improved under this program. In the three years prior to the improvements, the bridges had been the scene of 17 accidents in which seven persons were injured. In the first full year following the reconstruction, no accidents of any kind were reported.

This program has great potential but I'm not convinced that the potential is being fully exploited at the rate necessary to meet the 1969 deadline. We must step up our efforts beyond the mere making of inventories and plans, if we are to reach that goal. There is a tremendous amount of beneficial work to be done under this program -- not only in widening bridges and shoulders and traffic lanes -- but in realignment of curves and improving sight distances, reconstruction of intersections, provision of protected left-turn lanes, protection of railroad grade crossings, and the installation of proper guardrails, lighting, and uniform signs, signals, and markings.

Likewise, we need to move faster and more intelligently in removing some of the worst accident hazards -- those lethal objects which now exist too close to the roadway. Accidents involving cars running off the road and striking such things as trees, lighting poles, sign supports, bridge abutments and other appurtenances are all too frequent and all too often tragic. Even

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guardrail, which is supposed to save life, sometimes destroys it when an automobile leaves the pavement and crashes into the end of it. These are all things which we can and must do in the area of responsibility which you and I have and which is ours alone. We must not fail to perform to the utmost of our ability.

In regard to roadside obstructions, the Bureau has issued several memoranda on the subject, the latest and most comprehensive of which was an Instructional Memorandum dated August 1, 1966. Of greater importance is the Report of the Special AASHO Safety Committee, covering a study of the problem in depth and presenting enlightened recommendations to cope with it. The Report is the product of some of the best minds in the highway and traffic safety field and is an AASHO operation. It will be off the press within a few days and will be the authoritative guide for us to follow in the area of assuring safer roadsides. With that in hand, let's push hard on this program, which must be assigned the top priority on our work lists.

Before leaving the subject of highway safety, I should mention the new TOPICS program (Traffic Operations Program to Increase Capacity and Safety). This has the twin purpose of relieving traffic congestion and enhancing traffic safety in cities. The relatively new policy involves expansion of the Federal-aid primary system to permit the selection of principal streets and downtown grids, in areas of 5,000 or more population, to receive Federal-aid for certain kinds of improvement. This program, I believe, has great potential for the years ahead, especially in view of the constantly increasing urbanization of our country, and the pressing need for some kind of relief to traffic congestion.

I have devoted a lot of time to highway safety because, as I indicated earlier, it is the biggest problem and the greatest challenge in our area of responsibility for as far ahead as we can see. In the next 50 years, if the present annual toll of 52,000 traffic fatalities is maintained, we will be killing off 2,600,000 people -- not to mention the injuries and economic waste involved. In recent years we have devoted increasing attention to the human and social values of highways but certainly the preservation of life and limb transcends all the others.

Another social value certain to increase in importance in the years ahead is highway beautification. The traveling public has indicated quite strongly that it is interested in esthetics, as well as safety and a smooth ride, on the highways it is paying for. Congressional hearings have begun on legislation to finance both the beautification and safety programs out of a new special highway safety and beauty trust fund, with revenues earmarked for these specific

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purposes. The proposed legislation (H. R. 7797 by Representative Fallon) would authorize appropriation of \$160 million for fiscal year 1968 and \$220 million for fiscal 1969. By far the bulk of both years' appropriations would be for landscaping and scenic enhancement. This is the heart of the beautification program although the control of billboards and junkyards probably receives more publicity.

Since passage of the Highway Beautification Act of 1965 -- signed on October 22 of that year -- the States have made commendable progress. This includes the landscaping of 644 highway projects, acquisition of 3,162 scenic strips, and construction of 285 safety rest areas. Of particular importance is the provision of rest areas which serve both esthetics and safety. Progress toward the effective control of outdoor advertising and junkyards is more preliminary in nature but a great deal has been accomplished.

I want to refer briefly to another important area of social and human values. Both the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1966 and the Transportation Act contain requirements for special consideration of parklands, conservation areas, historical sites and similar facilities. The Bureau shortly will be issuing more detailed instructions for cooperation in this matter with the appropriate agencies, including the President's new Advisory Council on Historical Conservation.

In floor debate on this provision it was brought out that the legislative intent was much broader than would appear to be indicated by the appropriate section of the Transportation Act. Chairman Kluczynski of the House Public Roads Subcommittee in particular interpreted the provision to apply to preserving the integrity of neighborhoods, people, businesses, schools and churches among the other social and human values which are to be given full consideration. He also cautioned that this requirement was to be sanely administered and that highways were also an important value objective in themselves and might even have a higher claim on land use than parks and historic sites.

This has particular significance, of course, to the urban areas and I don't want to go into strictly city problems in any great depth today for two reasons. First, there are so many of them that it would take an hour to scratch the surface. Second, Rex Whitton covered the problems and some of the proposed solutions at the last AASHO meeting in Wichita. However, since this Association represents what is probably the most urbanized area of America, I want to touch briefly on a few matters of urban interest.

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In 1940, 57 percent of our population lived in urban areas; by 1950, 60 percent; and by 1960, 63 percent. And by 1990 it is forecast that 73 percent of the Nation's population, or 219 million people, will be living in metropolitan areas which is more people than our total population at the present time. The problem is brought into sharper focus by the fact that even now, nearly half of all motor vehicle travel occurs on city streets which account for only 13 percent of the total mileage.

This is part of the reason for the TOPICS program I mentioned earlier; for the "street-stretching" plan to provide more traffic lanes on existing urban streets by using the sidewalk space and making the first floors of buildings pedestrian arcades; and for other schemes somewhat unusual or even radical in terms of our past thinking. But the problems are so pressing and so huge, that innovative, imaginative, and radically new, but workable, solutions must be found by us.

It is the reason for trying to make urban freeways serve multiple purposes, including the use of the air space over, under and alongside them for replacement housing, businesses or any other appropriate needs of the city. This is what we call the joint development concept and is designed to make the maximum use of both space and funds in cities short of one or the other or both.

We also have research evidence that low-cost improvement to existing streets and the use of the latest traffic engineering techniques and traffic control devices can double traffic capacity and increase average speeds by 25 percent. There is also a great possibility in legislation being proposed by the Administration to make Federal-aid funds available for parking or terminal facilities on the outskirts of large cities. The study leading to the President's proposal was another part of the Bureau's TOPICS program. Also we must give increasing attention to measures which will increase our existing street capacity to move persons rather than vehicles - - obviously by the addition of more busses.

Of the several other studies under way, either entirely at the Federal level or in cooperation with the State highway departments, I will mention only the revised estimate of the cost of completing the Interstate System. Work is progressing at a good rate but January isn't far off now and we urge your continued support and assistance to complete these during the summer months so the finished report can be sent to Congress on schedule.

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Just recently, we set up the machinery for reporting costs for additional work on previously constructed parts of the Interstate System which do not comply with the recommendations being made in the previously mentioned AASHO report to provide an acceptable level of safety. This is vital life-saving information and we urge that you supply it as early as possible in accordance with the instructions contained in the Bureau's Circular Memorandum dated March 31. We intend to add these costs to the previous costs for the Interstate System in our report to the Congress.

The changing and growing costs of construction and right-of-way, plus new design concepts, require a new look by Congress at the time schedule for completing the System as well as means of providing the necessary financing.

This present report is of tremendous significance, not only in connection with completing the Interstate System but as part of a report on the future highway needs of the Nation, including recommendations regarding the Federal interest in meeting these. Moreover, for the first time it is part of a larger study of the Nation's total transportation requirements extending far into the future. It will be a companion to the all-important report which AASHO is also making to the Congress. So that when I speak about the next 50 years, it's not just idle talk; for we are indeed shaping the future of our land and our people.

Even though most of us won't be around that long, we have an important part in the kind of transportation system which this country will be using for at least 50 years into the future. This is an even larger challenge for highway engineers and highway administrators than we have faced heretofore. We are intimately and consciously involved -- and properly so -- in a much broader role than the highway program alone. There is no doubt that the highway role is the dominant part of our transportation system now and will continue in this position for as long as you and I can see into the years ahead. We, therefore, have a corresponding dominant responsibility to insure that our efforts be sufficient in both amount and quality. I urge you to accept and step up to this leadership requirement with promptness and firmness. The largest measure of proven experience available in the transportation field is within our profession. We have a responsibility to see that it is used fully and wisely for the benefit of our employers -- the millions of those whom we refer to as Mr. and Mrs. America.

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