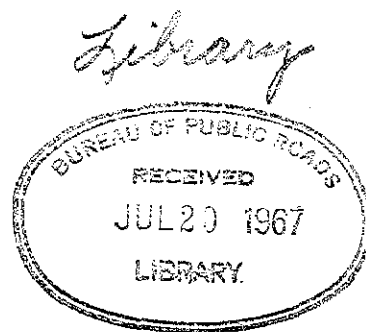


U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION
BUREAU OF PUBLIC ROADS
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OUR HIGHWAY GOALS FOR 1967-68

Remarks by Francis C. Turner, Director of Public Roads, Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, prepared for delivery at the 46th Annual Conference of the Western Association of State Highway Officials, Honolulu, Hawaii, July 11, 1967.

I want to congratulate the appropriate officials of WASHO on the choice of a site for your 46th Annual Conference. At the same time I want to convey my thanks because I have had a chance to take a good look at some of the highway work and the other transportation developments in these pleasant Islands. I especially appreciate the first-hand glance at what is going on here because -- even as the jet flies -- it is not possible to visit our 50th State very often. So I'm glad to be with the WASHO people again and particularly that your meeting is here.

When Dr. Matsuda asked me to provide a subject for these remarks, I almost automatically wrote down "Highway Goals for 1967-68." Then it occurred to me that in these days of changing meanings it might be a good idea to find out if the word "goal" still meant what I thought it did. Webster gives two principal meanings for the word. The first is "the terminal point of a race," which is not entirely applicable because there is no terminal point in the race we are in to keep up with the growth in population and the even greater growth of human needs related to or dependent upon transportation. The second meaning is "the end toward which effort is directed," and this is the sense in which I want to discuss our highway goals today.

If I were to set one all-encompassing goal for 1967-68, it would be this: to plan, locate, design, construct and maintain highways with an enlightened view toward their total impact on society. You have heard a lot about human and social values in the past few years, and it must be obvious

to everyone by now that it's not just talk. If there ever was a time when roads were built only to move people and goods, the time is long gone and there are many observers looking over our shoulders to make sure that it doesn't come back.

Certainly mobility is the basic purpose of highways, or of any other means of transportation, and this in itself is a human value of a high order. But one of the principal ends toward which our efforts must be more vigorously applied this year and every year is the preservation of human life and limb, which transcends all other human values. Those of you who were at the Sun Valley meeting last year will recall that I did a lot of talking about highway safety, especially as affected by roadside hazards. My comments at that time were based largely on an Instructional Memorandum issued by the Bureau on August 1, 1966 in anticipation of the report of the AASHO Special Traffic Safety Committee.

Now the AASHO "yellow book," embodying the Committee's findings and recommendations, is in your hands and the various matters it covers in the field of highway safety are also under scrutiny by the Blatnik Subcommittee on the Federal-aid highway program. Those of you who have followed the hearings must have been dismayed at the testimony. Quite naturally, the sessions have generated a great deal of publicity, and some of the news reports would indicate that highway designers and builders haven't learned a thing about safety in more than a half-century.

This, of course, is refuted by the generally downward trend of the traffic fatality toll in terms of miles of travel. In 1934, for example, the death rate was 16.7 per 100 million vehicle miles of travel. Last year the rate was 5.7. In other words, had the 1934 rate continued, we

probably would have counted some 150,000 traffic fatalities in 1966 instead of the 52,500 we actually had. And certainly this improvement has not all been due to refinements in the motor vehicle or in better driver performance.

On the other hand, one traffic death is too many. Also, while the general trend has been downward over the years, the fatality rate has edged up slightly every year since 1961. During about the same period there has been an alarming increase, especially on high-speed highways, in the number of vehicles running off the road and then hitting a roadside obstruction, frequently with fatal results.

It is toward the prevention of this type of lethal accident that the AASHO yellow book, the Bureau's wholesale adoption of it as policy, and the current Blatnik Committee hearings are mainly directed. In more ways than one, the Federal-State performance in this vital area of highway safety is on trial. The speed and efficiency with which we proceed to eliminate or minimize situations which we ourselves have found to be hazardous will not go unnoticed. Conversely, any foot-dragging or obstructionism in this effort will lead at the very least to further erosion of public and official confidence in the Federal-State partnership and in the engineering profession itself. At most, we may be forced by additional legislation or stronger controls to do what we should be doing voluntarily.

We have both a legal and a moral obligation to use all of the expertise we have gained and are gaining to protect the life, limb and property of the motoring public, which these days is synonymous with the American people. Our legal obligation goes back at least to 1921 when the Federal-aid legislation of that year declared under Section 18:

"That the Secretary (of Agriculture) shall prescribe and promulgate all needful rules and regulations for the carrying out of the provisions of this Act, including such recommendations to the Congress and to the State highway departments as he may deem necessary for preserving and protecting the highways and insuring the safety of traffic thereon."

This condition relating to safety has been carried through in all subsequent Federal-aid legislation, so that in adopting the recommendations in the AASHO yellow book, we are merely taking further steps to implement a legal directive that is just about as old as Federal-aid for highways itself. The moral obligation is implicit in the statistics which show that last year highway accidents injured 10,000 people every day, killed 1,000 every week and cost well over \$800 million every month in senseless economic waste.

We all know that there can be no such thing as a perfectly safe highway, any more than there can be a perfectly safe driver or a perfectly safe vehicle. Granting that, we have to assume there is going to be an irreducible minimum of traffic accidents, injuries and deaths, but we must proceed with all the means at our command to dip down to that bare, irreducible minimum. This is a goal, or as Webster says, "the end toward which effort is directed."

We took a long stride toward this goal in devising and continually updating the design standards for the Interstate System with the result that the traffic fatality rate on the open sections is about one-third of that on the older, conventional highways. We are incorporating into the ABC roads as many of these standards as are justified by traffic volumes and possible within the limitations of available funds. On the older highways the Spot Improvement Program has a very promising potential and the response of the States, while not uniform, has been encouraging. As of April 30, the State highway departments had programed a total of 2,651 highway safety improvement projects. Of

these, 118 have now been completed, some of them for enough time to pay substantial dividends in accident reduction with a relatively small investment of funds.

That leaves the matter of roadside hazards remaining as a principal problem to be dealt with aggressively and imaginatively -- beginning at once and continuing on a large scale for as long as necessary to provide the highest possible level of roadway and roadside safety on the Federal-aid highway system. To use the language of my letter of May 8 on the subject, we consider that available Federal-aid funds can be put to no better or more urgent use today than in the very prompt initiation of a broad program to increase the safety of public highways. For that reason, Public Roads Division Engineers have been instructed to take a broad and liberal viewpoint with regard to approving programs proposed by the State highway departments for work of the type described in the AASHO yellow book of February 1967. At the risk of oversimplification, this means that safety work other than maintenance proposed by a State after consideration of the deficiencies it finds in the highways under its jurisdiction may be approved for Federal-aid fund participation.

We are requiring that all aspects of location, design, traffic control, drainage features and roadside appurtenances be examined during all phases of the development of the plans, specifications, and estimates for highway projects beginning with the location survey, and to the maximum extent possible in the construction and post-construction stages, to insure that hazards arising from vehicles leaving the roadway out of control will receive primary consideration.

Some of the highway departments, as well as the highway construction

industry, have expressed concern that the Federal-aid highway program will grind to a virtual halt because of the new safety measures set forth in the AASHO yellow book and in the Bureau's adoption of its recommendations. This is not true. Actually the contract lettings need not be diminished, and where there is some necessary delay, it will be negligible and certainly it is for the best possible reason. Let us remember that these measures to increase traffic safety are not something imposed on us from outside; they are our own recommendations, arrived at by our own people on the basis of careful and extensive observation, and adopted voluntarily by both partners in the Federal-State roadbuilding program. So let's get on with the job.

The other end toward which major effort must be directed this year and for many years into the future is to accommodate the Federal-aid program to the problems of ever-increasing urbanization. This is not yet so great a challenge to the WASHO States as it is, for example, to the AHONAS group. But it is in some of your States and will be in all of them in the years ahead. By 1990, it is forecast that 219 million people will be living in urban areas -- more people in urban areas than we have now in all 50 States. Obviously, it is better to anticipate problems, or in this case, to prepare defenses against a time bomb rather than to just wait around for it to explode.

You have all heard much about the TOPICS program and the joint development concept. These are convenient terms referring to two current programs which the Bureau is pushing not only in the interests of efficient and safe traffic movement, but in the larger areas of human values. The TOPICS program, as you know, involves an 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 engineering

improvements. These do not involve major construction work but improvements of traffic operations which can step up speeds on urban traffic arteries as much as 25 percent as a result of a relatively modest investment.

We are going to continue to push this program hard. What we are striving for, of course, is greater utilization of existing highways, thus providing a great deal of additional traffic service at minimum cost. Obviously, it is no substitute for the needed new freeways and other urban arterials that must continue to be built to catch up with and then keep pace with the gravitation of people to our metropolitan areas.

But we must continue to take the fullest advantage of what we have. Low cost improvements to existing streets and the use of the latest traffic engineering techniques and traffic control devices can double traffic capacity. There is also a great possibility in legislation to make Federal-aid funds available for parking or terminal facilities on the outskirts of large cities. The study leading to this legislation was another part of the TOPICS program. Also we must give greater attention to measures which will increase our existing street capacity to move persons, rather than vehicles -- in other words, by the addition of more buses.

We are also pushing what we call the joint development concept, which is designed to make the maximum use of both space and funds in locating and building urban freeways. In simplest terms, it involves the use of the freeway to serve the social and economic ends of the community as well as its transportation needs. The key lies in the acquisition of entire blocks or squares of property rather than the minimum required for the freeway right-of-way. In many cases, we have found, this can be done at little or no extra cost and certainly is much cheaper than buying the same land piecemeal for housing,

recreation centers, parks and other community needs. Of the total property acquired by the local authority, the highway department would buy what amounts to an easement for the right-of-way or "air tunnel." The rest of the property over, under and adjacent to the freeway could be used for any of a number of community purposes.

This is an enlightened concept, permitting the construction of replacement housing while building the freeway, with a minimum of displacement of the dwellers in that area. It makes the most efficient use of both money and space to provide the needed freeway and the other facilities as a package development. It also makes possible a rebirth of the downtown area, with its consequent benefit to the city tax rolls.

This program is still mainly a concept, enthusiastically hailed by planners, but still too new to have demonstrated its full potential in actual practice. I personally believe that the potential is great and that the highway people must teach and encourage its development, demonstrating once more that we are capable of both imagination and a concern for values other than the shortest line from here to there. Today and as far ahead as we can look, the Federal-aid highway program must be concerned with the total impact of highways on people -- on their environment, housing, recreation, cultural interests, and all the other elements and amenities of modern living. It must be accommodated to the wider interests made possible and encouraged by increasing affluence and more leisure time. This is a goal -- or an end toward which effort must be increasingly directed.

The traveling public has indicated quite strongly, for example, that it is interested in esthetics -- as well as safety and a smooth, relaxed ride -- on the highways it is paying for. As you know, legislation is now pending in

Congress to finance both the beautification and the safety programs out of a new special trust fund, with revenues earmarked for these specific purposes. The proposal would authorize the 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 which form the true core of the beautification program, rather than the billboard and junkyard controls which get the publicity. The provision of safety rest areas is one feature of the Federal-aid highway program which is by no means new, but is still in the very elementary stages of development. It is one of the most popular features of the program, as well as one of the most important, since it serves safety, esthetics and recreation as well as utility.

If I seem to have soft-pedaled physical progress as a goal for 1967-68, it is largely because quality of construction rather than quantity is of overriding importance in the advancement of the Interstate and other Federal-aid highway systems. This is always true, but the truth is especially applicable during this fiscal year when our performance in enhancing highway safety is under scrutiny and when the future financing of the Federal-aid program will be up for consideration at the next session of Congress.

We faced and weathered some difficult financial situations during the fiscal year just passed. We entered the year with the expectation of about a \$4 billion program nationally, in terms of Federal funds. In November it became necessary to reduce this total program to a \$3.3 billion level, as an aid in curbing inflationary pressures. When the situation eased, the restriction was lifted to the extent that Federal-aid highway fund obligations for the fiscal year total about \$3.7 billion, or nearly up to the \$4 billion level originally

projected. The WASHO States' share of a \$4 billion total program would have been about \$1.127 billion. This was reduced to about \$927 million under the limitation prescribed in November 1966.

Additional funds were subsequently released to the States for obligation during the year as the result of a lessening of inflationary pressures nationwide. The final result of these actions was a total of \$1.184 billion made available to the WASHO States for obligations during the fiscal year which ended on June 30. Federal fund obligations totaling about \$890 million had been recorded for your States through May 31.

The outlook for the current fiscal year is very encouraging, barring a return of the same type pressures that were so prevalent during the early part of this past year. It is expected that Federal-aid highway funds totaling \$4.4 billion will be released for obligation during the year, together with the additional release of the remaining half of the frozen balances carried forward on June 30, 1966. The WASHO States' share of these releases would total about \$1.377 billion. Additional funds may be released for obligation during the year if the economic situation warrants.

Progress in advancing the Interstate and ABC programs is good. The latest status report, as of May 1, showed 23,839 miles or 58 percent of the Interstate System in use. In the WASHO States, 7,945 miles or 57 percent of the authorized total were open to traffic. Progress reports through May 31 showed U. S. averages of 34 percent of the 1968 apportionment of Interstate funds and 10 percent of the 1968 apportionment of ABC funds obligated to projects, plus prior year funds. For the WASHO States the corresponding figures were 36 percent of the 1968 Interstate funds and 20 percent of the 1968 ABC funds obligated to projects, plus prior year funds.

The program outlook for the current fiscal year is good. A word of precaution is in order, nevertheless. None of us likes to contemplate program cutbacks such as we had last year. But such future action cannot be ruled out if inflationary pressures due to war efforts again become acute. We all trust that it won't happen again.

As to the long range, the Bureau will be presenting to Congress next January a revised and more realistic estimate of the cost of completing the Interstate System. This will take into account not only increased costs, but changed conditions and revised concepts as to the functions of the System. It will then be a decision by Congress whether to provide additional financing to complete the System on time, to stretch out the program as long as is necessary to complete the 41,000 miles, to build as much as possible with available financing, or to adopt some combination of these alternatives.

Your guess as to the action of Congress is probably as good as mine at this point. The only thing I'm sure of is that we must design, locate and build the remainder of the System with intensified concentration on safety, esthetics and other human values, as well as utility and efficiency. If a choice had to be made, I believe it would be better to sacrifice some small amount of mileage than to build any remaining sections without the fullest consideration to these human values.

As to the longer range, we also will be submitting the initial report on the future highway needs of the Nation. Similar reports will be made every two years so that the needs may be regularly reassessed and updated in the light of changing demands and conditions. I might say here that some of the recommendations made by the WASHO States, both individually and as a group, in relation to a change in the distribution of funds, flexibility in the utilization of ABC moneys and related financial items are being carefully considered in the preparation of the first of these biennial reports. We always welcome any specific suggestions you have in matters affecting the Federal-State partnership or the machinery of the Federal-aid process.

Without predicting the findings of the highway needs study or studies, I believe it is safe to assume a continuing high level of highway construction activities as far ahead into the future as we can reasonably look. I believe it will include many thousands of miles of urban freeways, serving many purposes, and closely integrated with other transportation modes. I believe also that there will be many thousands of miles of scenic highways, complete with all the various types of recreational facilities that go with them.

There is no doubt in my mind that public demand will compel a continuing program on something like the scale of the present one. Certainly the motoring public has consistently shown its willingness to pay for safety, ease and convenience of travel. It spends more, for example, on parking and toll road fees than it presently does for the regular Federal, State and local taxes to provide highways. The public is no longer satisfied with just getting some-place. People want not only more highways, but safer, more pleasing, and more multi-purpose highways; and one of the most urgent highway goals of 1967-68 and of all the coming years is to accommodate our roadbuilding efforts to this desire.

That is the enlightened point of view, the public service point of view that we as public officials have a moral obligation to maintain. There is also a selfish point of view. Last year at Sun Valley I said:

"Today's highway engineer, in rebuilding the Nation's highway network, is facing his greatest challenge -- and his greatest opportunity. It is no exaggeration to say that he is building a monument both to his ingenuity and to his vision. If he builds it right, it will be a lasting tribute to his work. If he doesn't, if he perpetuates his errors of judgment -- or his indifference -- in steel and concrete, coming generations will blame his shortsightedness so that the reputation of all those in our profession will suffer accordingly."

That was last year. Today I would reemphasize that statement and add this:

If we don't build the highway systems right -- with meticulous attention to safety, esthetics and the enhancement of other human and social values, then we face the very real prospect of new legislation, new controls, which I know that none of you would welcome.

So in considering our highway goals for 1967-68, let us not forget to count among them the preservation of the Federal-State partnership as we have known it.