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FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION  
BUREAU OF PUBLIC ROADS  
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Remarks by Francis C. Turner, Director of Public Roads, at the  
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Alf has told you that this is a year of decision and action. I fully agree. I want to talk about some of these needed decisions and actions as I see them from the Bureau of Public Roads' side. In doing so, I'm not going into a detailed catalogue of all the separate problems such as money that have been more or less with us since the beginning of Federal aid, nor am I going to discuss the After '75 Program important as it is. Rather I want to discuss a few of the relatively new concepts and developments which are having profound effects on the Federal-State highway program, and which I feel must be given attention in our preparation for the After '75 Program.

In many respects our entire relationship is on trial. If anyone doubts this, I refer him to the transcript of hearings held by the Blatnik Committee this summer on the matter of highway safety. Some of the testimony put the State highway departments and the Bureau of Public Roads in a very bad light and even with due allowance for exaggeration we have had to admit to several shortcomings, some of which will be shown to you at Tuesday evening's session. There is nothing disastrous about this admission in and of itself. To err is only human. If there be a man who never makes a mistake, you can be pretty sure that he isn't doing anything either positively or negatively. But to err twice in the same way can be deadly in more ways than one.

We are in a kind of transitional period in the history of the Federal-State partnership and one of its most serious current and future tests is its ability to make needed adjustments to rapidly-changing conditions; to adapt to new realities; and to lead public opinion rather than to follow it.

You seldom win anything by being always on the defensive, and this is as true of public opinion as it is of war or a football game. These are generalities, to be sure, but I'll try to connect them up with some solid realities of our times. I believe strongly that we must take a more aggressive approach to giving the public what it wants, and what it has shown a willingness to pay for.

One of the most frequent criticisms of our work is that we are both unable and unwilling to develop any new ideas; that we are hide-bound in our own narrow self-interest of building simply more roads in a straight line - - at the lowest cost; thus to produce more traffic by more cars creating more pollution and more congestion.

We know that these characterizations are no longer true, if they ever were, but nonetheless these are the accepted images which the highway program and its managers conjure up in the minds of our critics at civic association meetings, the public hearing, the popular magazine article of the sensational piece writer, and the person whose house has to be taken for right-of-way. If these were the only persons to be thinking so, it would be the expected norm for a huge public works program which necessarily has to disturb some for the benefit of the majority, but the damage and real concern come from the fact that this kind of thinking is being accepted as the norm by too many persons in places of responsibility in connection with the program. The reason for this is perhaps due to the fact that these persons hear only from the dissenter; the person with an appeal request; or the professional "aginner".

This is so, because this is the way we have organized our society and its various political structures; it is up to the aggrieved party to initiate his protest; those in agreement need to take no action at all. Thus it is hardly surprising that people in places of responsibility see only the one side -- only the negative side, since this is all that reaches them -- and thus they are unwittingly but seriously misinformed about the rest of the larger picture.

But because they see only this one side, they logically assume that there are many more difficulties with the program than actually exist. To listen to this side is to believe that every mile of the program in rural areas is beset with a problem involving a proposal to ravage a park; or to cut through a college campus; or deliberately to destroy a wilderness area and a fine trout stream; likewise that every mile in the urban areas is purposely so located as to bulldoze the city and to destroy tens of thousands of helpless homeowners and businessmen whose homes and businesses will be wiped out without recognition of their rights and with no engineering yardstick of measure except dollars. But the number of projects in both urban and rural areas that are currently in dispute or on which there has been any strong cry of dissent can be numbered at a few dozen, involving only about half a percentage point of the Interstate mileage.

This is certainly a small percentage out of the 41,000-mile extent of the system. But the other 99-1/2 percent that goes smoothly, in which is included the normal or routine project, is overlooked because it is only the out of ordinary ones which ever surface to the top for administrative consideration. But these few have had a profound and far-reaching effect and it is these kinds of problems to which we must give more attention.

You have stated in strong terms that you do not like compulsory legislation, nor rules, nor control, nor penalty-type legislation such as we now have in the fields of planning, safety, beautification, and the like. Neither do I. Let me suggest to us all that the best way to avoid these shackles is to be out in front, keeping pace with the public demand and need, and demonstrating that we are carrying out a program essential to the economic and social development of the Nation and sensitive to the values of its citizens.

There is a feeling that highways are too complex and far-reaching in their implications to be left exclusively to the State highway departments and the Bureau of Public Roads. Powerful interests are proposing to give control of the decision making parts of the program to local government representatives and citizens' groups.

Along with this there is a growing feeling that highway programs must be subordinated to serve a wide variety of non-highway purposes and to fulfill desires not in the least related to highways as transportation systems.

Some proposals include such suggestions as:

Abolition of the Federal-aid systems concept.

Abolition of the Highway Trust Fund, at least insofar as its dedication for highways is concerned with substitution of the block grant. Under this concept, present Trust Fund revenues could then be used for either maintenance or construction on any highway or street, for mass transit, freight handling devices, airport access, parking, other modes of transportation, or even for general government or any other purpose.

Development of short-term impact-type highway programs instead of the present long-range Interstate-type of program to prevent inflexibility as the present program is alleged to have done.

I must emphasize that these are merely a listing of some of the thoughts which we are hearing today which you should be aware of in order to help you in thinking out your AASHO positions on policy.

If there ever was a time for the State highway departments and the Bureau to pull together and to avoid family squabbling, this is it. There are enough people shooting at both of us without our taking any pot shots at ourselves.

Also we need to unite on our joint problems to create a solid front even on individual items which may not be of major significance to some of the group -- such for example as the urban problems -- a united front in solution of this is essential to the overall program and thus even the rural state has an important stake in the result.

Most of our problems in my opinion stem from only a few highly-publicized special cases or situations, which are not representative but which are powerfully persuasive in producing anti-highway feeling when presented out of context or in less than their totality.

In some respects our highway problems probably tie in with the much larger problems of our times. We are in a period of change, of seething transition, when old values are under searching question everywhere. It is an age of hippies, of pot, of LSD, of dropouts, of teachers' strikes, of race riots, of looting. It is a period of frequent breakup of the home, the abandonment or slackening of morals, or at least the wide acceptance of a different moral code than the one which most people knew and respected for centuries. Yet it is a period in which wisely directed change can bring us an immensely better future.

In such a time then, it is understandable that the values of the highway program should be questioned too. Not only the values of the program, but the quality of our stewardship over it. While I would like to think that this is merely a passing phase I'm afraid it is not so; nor necessarily that it should be otherwise. We should be constantly probing and questioning ourselves.

In a period of questioning and general distrust, we have to justify everything that we do both to ourselves and others -- to prove not only that we're doing it right, but also that we're contributing something to

society beyond simply improved mobility. It therefore behooves highway people, meaning us, to do our own questioning rather than have someone else do it. Therefore, I pose this broad question: Are we really directing the highway program toward the broader goals of a better society? How do we answer that? I think that we have the best highway minds in the country assembled here in Salt Lake City right now (even though some would dispute that). I think this group must get cracking on some positive programs, movements, undertakings, or what you will. I have five specific ideas which you might kick around as starters.

First would be the establishment of a Standing Committee on Community Environmental Factors. I'm not sure that's the right title but it relates to the need for adjustment, for compatibility of our program with the complex environmental impact of highways, particularly in urban areas. I believe that there is a real need for such a Committee and identifiable under a name like this. The mere creation of such a Committee would help meet the criticism that highway people are still living in the twenties, isolated from the larger community effects of their programs.

Second, as another, and bolder approach, I think that AASHO might consider developing a program to use those unemployed but able people for the advancement of some additive kinds of highway work. These presently non-productive people -- or many of them -- could augment State highway department maintenance forces and do other useful work connected with the road program. The idea would be to use relief and other non-highway funded programs to accomplish several purposes in one program -- to do needed and constructive highway work, otherwise not attainable, to take idle people off the streets with their potential for trouble through their idleness, and to give the taxpayers something for their relief money. My proposition would envisage only the technical supervision, materials, and equipment to be furnished by the Highway Department. We could build a number of rest areas, recreational areas, picnic areas which we need near cities, and beautification and scenic enhancement projects by this method with little cost.

The third point is related to another source of constant criticism having to do with our alleged indifference to the wonderful world of nature; the open spaces, the parks, the trout streams, the wilderness, the historic sites from which our forefathers raised our national heritage.

There is need for a properly appropriate consideration of each of these and to the extent that we have felt that physical and economic conditions warranted, I know that we have been giving these full consideration when they could be identified. And while they are important, they can never be allowed to become the controlling and sole consideration in location and design of a highway as some people are insisting upon regardless of costs or any other factors.

As you know, we have been promoting the so-called joint use concept in urban areas. I believe that a similar concept can and must now be developed by us for the planning of our projects in the rural areas. And so this is my third point: Where we are developing routes through recreational or scenic areas, we should organize informal Highway Joint Development Councils with membership consisting of representatives of the official agencies responsible for such things as the trout stream, the park, the wilderness, the historic site. This Council should operate during the initial planning stages before we go to the public hearing so that our plans can be developed to give fullest possible consideration to the needs and plans of these other groups consistent with our fiscal and statutory limitations. If done in this manner, we should thus head off one of the principal sources of the present criticisms. I know we already do this after a fashion, but let's take more initiative and leadership in this regard and make friends instead of critics and antagonists. We need the friends, and our public needs and wants the facilities which such an arrangement would provide for them.

A fourth point concerns an effort to assist in solving the so-called Urban Transportation Problem. We must develop aggressive leadership in the direction of using buses not only on our freeways but also as connecting feeder and distributor systems on city streets by which to increase the "persons" capacity of our existing and future highway and street network for we cannot continue to merely add lanes of pavement to our highway routes. One of the constant cliches we hear is the one which predicts that in a few years we will have succeeded in paving over with concrete (either asphalt or portland cement) all of the downtowns of our cities, to create a paved desert devoid of either business or residence establishments. And so, one of the answers proposed by others is to exclude the motorist from the central city and force him to use a mass transit rail facility which his highway user taxes have been diverted to

pay for. Most of the need for rapid mass transportation can be provided by rapid busways but we cannot do this alone. The transit operators must cooperate. We can and should develop leadership in this method of transportation as a part of our total planning effort in each urban area of more than 50,000 population.

And my fifth point is that of Safety -- to continue the execution of programs already developed and underway to clean up and minimize the roadside hazard introduced in connection with our highway design and construction and operation.

Of course, there are a lot of other things -- all important -- but many of them are includable under the five subjects I have selected -- which five I feel will ward off many of our problems.

I suppose it's another cliché to say that we're facing a critical year. Every year has been critical in the highway program in one way or another. But I believe that in this coming year we will be heading into a storm. We need not be afraid of it because our experience has taught us how to navigate -- but prudence also demands that we take inventory of our situation and properly prepare for the blow. It is a time when divisive forces will be at work both outside and within. The highway transportation component is the largest component and most ubiquitous of all the interests in the total transportation picture and is the most essential to a healthy Nation and its future. We who are its principal managers and developers should and must therefore take leadership positions in the total, overall transportation process. If we do not, there are others straining to gain the control positions. I suggest therefore that this Association awaken itself to the current trend of happenings and take strong and positive aggressive steps toward reaching and maintaining an assertive leadership position with respect to the highway portion of the transportation network.

But before asserting claim to this leadership position, I believe the Association must make doubly sure that it is fully demonstrating its right and qualifications to leadership by being not just current or closely following the times, but leading in all elements of the highway programs; with special emphasis on those elements recently being brought into the picture by giving to them, a great deal more consideration than has been given in the past. This is not too large an order, for there is clearly enormous capability already demonstrated in the works which we have produced. But there have been too many instances when we have been forced to do that which we should have done as a matter of leadership in

this, our chosen field of work. Let's continue all those good practices which exemplify the vast majority of our product, while improving the remainder so as to make ours the most respected and followed program in the whole transportation field.

There are some people who don't like AASHO -- so let's not kid ourselves. Some people don't like a Federal-State partnership. Others just like to criticize. Some people think AASHO should do some things that it hasn't done -- or at least hasn't been credited with doing.

But I believe that the welfare of this country requires a mature, strong, knowledgeable, capable, and experienced group to guide the Nation's highways and its highway policy. I am one of those persons who feel strongly that AASHO is the organization to do this best, as it has done for more than a half-century. But these are new and changing times, and we must continue to make some changes and adjustments which update the successful policies of the first 50 years, if we are to retain our leadership during this second 50 years.

Highway people have been notably successful in building for the people of this country the finest highway system in the world and contributing immeasurably to the whole national prosperity and general well being. We've done so by capability; tough decisions made with courage and fairness; and far-sighted planning ahead. The present times demand a continuation of this demonstrated formula for successful leadership. Some of the ideas I've here expressed in my opinion are needed for this goal.

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