

FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS COOPERATE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

By E. C. Turner

Federal Highway Administrator

(The following article was written especially for the Cook County Highway News by Francis C. Turner, Federal Highway Administrator. We are most grateful to him for presenting his views to our readers).

I've been asked many times since taking over the post of Federal Highway Administrator what I consider to be the top priority of my assignment.

The answer to the question is easy: "Safety." The solution to the problem, however, is something else.

Safety is the goal of all modes of transport, of course, be it by rail, truck, bus, air or water.

But in highway transportation the task is monumental. How do we get a handle on a system that involves 100 million drivers operating nearly 100 million vehicles over one trillion miles a year?

We've been attacking it in a piecemeal fashion down through the years—individual States and cities and private and semi-private organizations doing what everyone generally agrees has been a commendable job. These efforts succeeded in bringing the death rate per 100 million miles down from a high of 16.7 in 1934 (when there were some 25 million vehicles on the roads) to a low of 5.16 in 1961 (when the vehicle population topped 76 million).

After that, however, the death rate started climbing again, traffic fatalities topped the 50,000-a-year mark, and the Congress recognized that this had become a paramount national problem calling for a comprehensive, nation-wide approach.

And Congress responded in 1966 by enacting the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Act and the Highway Safety Act, representing the most comprehensive traffic safety program ever attempted.

Under this legislation, the Federal Highway Administration's Na-



E. C. Turner

tional Highway Safety Bureau has issued more than two dozen vehicle standards setting performance specifications for such things as brakes, lights, windshields, seat belts, steering mechanisms, tires, etc. In all, the standards involve about 150 specific requirements and are helping to make the autos you and I drive safer and give us a better chance to survive a crash.

Besides the motor vehicle standards, the Secretary of Transportation also has promulgated 16 Highway Safety Standards. These are designed to help guide the States and local communities in expanding and improving their programs for achieving greater safety on the highways.

This is primarily a grant program, and the law requires that 10 per cent of the money expended in a State must go to local communities in that State.

This kind of program is usually kind of slow to get cranked up, but after two years of experience it is starting to move.

In Illinois, for example, more than \$5 million has been dedicated in joint efforts by the Federal

Emotional Stress, Alcohol Present In Most Accidents

A recent study of driver fatalities in the Houston area made by the Baylor University College of Medicine showed 80 per cent of the drivers were either alcoholics or had personality disorders, or both.

The conclusions of this study coincide with other studies which point out that alcohol and emotional personality factors are present in an exceptionally high percentage of fatal crashes.

In the Houston study, 72 per cent of the drivers had at least .15 per cent blood alcohol content. Evidence of psychiatric stress, growing out of marital, financial, occupational, or other factors within a 24-hour period prior to the crash was present in 80 per cent of the fatalities.

Government, the State and local communities in the past 10 months.

Under it, more than two dozen Illinois counties, cities and villages are receiving assistance in an effort to help them attack the No. 1 cause of death on our highways—alcohol, or the drunken driver. They are receiving financial assistance to purchase, or to train police officers in the use of breathalyzers and video tape equipment to gather and present evidence against this type of highway menace.

This kind of specific approach to the problem of highway safety will continue to grow and expand as we learn more about this complex task. By taking the same kind of Federal-State partnership approach to the subject, as we have developed down through the years in our road building efforts, I am sure we can do what the Congress charged us with doing: "Reduce the toll of deaths and injuries on our highways."