

## Looking Forward in Highway Work

By Thos. H. MacDonald  
Chief, U. S. Bureau of Public Roads

Looking to the future of highway building in the United States in the coming year certain tendencies appear most of which have been given direction and impetus by the National Industrial Recovery Act. While much has been accomplished in highway development in past years, many things remain yet to be done. Included among the developments that will be in progress during the coming year are projects such as the elimination of traffic hazards, the filling in of gaps in the highway system, the improvement of through roads in cities and of feeder roads that provide access both to rural and urban industries, the coordination of all forms of transportation, and many other new projects that are a natural development.

Changes in vehicles affect the roads over which the vehicles operate both as to the efficiency of the highways as traffic arteries, and also as to safety for vehicles and pedestrians. Chief among the developments in vehicles is the increase in speed. Higher vehicle speeds have made it necessary to redesign many features of our highways to eliminate traffic hazards and to meet other requirements of increased speed. The elimination of traffic hazards was directed in the National Industrial Recovery Act on projects such as the widening of narrow roadways and bridges, the separation of grades at crossings, the reconstruction of existing railroad grade crossings, the building of footpaths, the replacement of unsafe bridges, the construction of routes to avoid congested areas, or any other construction that will provide safer traffic facilities or definitely eliminate existing hazards to pedestrian or vehicle traffic.

Realized needs are met through the National Industrial Recovery Act provisions that immediate attention be given to gaps in the highway system where Federal-aid roads pass through municipalities and where added highway facilities are needed on secondary roads to provide feeder connections to the main highways. The filling in of all gaps in the Federal-aid highway system without delay was given the impetus of first priority under the regulations adopted for the construction of public works highways.

In line with this tendency, money for public works highways has been apportioned so that not more than 50 percent of a State's share is to be expended on the Federal-aid system outside of municipalities, not less than 25 percent on extensions of Federal-aid roads into and through municipalities, and not more than 25 percent on secondary or feeder roads.

The launching of the Government into new fields of highway improvement in city street construction and the building of secondary roads is a significant departure from Federal highway policies established in past years. It accents the necessity of state-wide planning of highway facilities. The high percentage of traffic that is of municipal origin and also the traffic on city streets contribute in a large measure to the annual highway income. It is just that the major routes within cities should be brought to adequate standards for traffic. In the planning of secondary roads, a proper relation must be maintained between such roads and the major highway system, and an annual income for their further improvement must be assured.

There is a distinct trend toward the control of secondary or feeder roads by the State highway departments. This simplification of highway administration has been stimulated by the requirements of the National Industrial Recovery Act.

A new and far-reaching development of the coming year will be the connection of highways with railroads as supplementary services. Railroads were built upon the presumption that highways would deliver freight to stations established along the route, an essential service in railroad operation. Changes in vehicles on the highways made possible a wider field of service and placed motor vehicles in competition with railroads in some cases. It seems probable that some unprofitable railroad mileage could be abandoned with profit, and also some little-used highways. Coordination of highways not only with railroads but also with air and water facilities is contemplated in studies now in progress by Federal agencies.

A large part of the funds made available under the \$400,000,000 appropriation for public works highways will be used during the coming year. Predicted increases in motor vehicles indicate a return to more ample funds for road building from motor vehicle and motor fuel taxes. However, new and pressing needs to meet changing traffic conditions indicate that a very large amount of work in road building must be accomplished to keep abreast of actual traffic requirements.

The present status of public works highway projects as reflected by progress reports of December 16 shows that in the whole country projects advertised for contract represented 57 percent of the \$400,000,000

appropriation made under Section 204 of the National Industrial Recovery Act. The speed with which projects have been placed under construction since last August indicates that the funds available will all be under contract within a few months. In fact, some states already have put to work practically all of their allotment of highway funds. New York State, on the same date, had under way 94 percent of its allotment; Ohio 73 percent; and Pennsylvania 74 percent. At that time, 130,500 men were employed on 2,636 projects under construction. Projects already completed under the public works highway program totaled 365 involving an expenditure of \$9,552,000.

While a few states lag somewhat in their progress, the program as a whole is advancing definitely toward completion, and the planning work of the State and Federal road building agencies is largely done. Once construction work is in progress, the planning and administrative agencies stand ready for new tasks. As construction work is completed, it is necessary to have new projects planned and ready to begin if the desired level of employment is to be maintained. The peak of construction activities will come early this summer and by fall the entire program should be well advanced toward completion.

Highway maintenance under Federal-aid laws always has been obligatory as necessary for the protection of the large investment in improved highways. As a means of keeping the highway departments actively engaged as well-organized and smoothly-functioning agencies for public works in the relief of unemployment, highway maintenance can readily be

expanded, especially on works that are in the nature of betterments. In addition to the repair of road surfaces, there is a great need on all highways for betterment work such as widening shoulders and the inside of curves, laying tile drains and cobble gutters, building guard walls and right of way fences, and tree planting and other such landscape work. New emphasis has been placed on the landscaping of a reasonable mileage of wide right of way for we are no longer content to build roads and to neglect their appearance.

The marked changes inaugurated in connection with the employment of labor under the National Industrial Recovery Act will continue in the work of the coming year. Most of the Federal-aid work under construction is being accomplished by contract as in past years. Under the regulations adopted to control the work, the use of day labor hired directly by the highway authorities is permitted. Existing county or municipal organizations may be utilized but the responsibility for such day labor work rests with the State highway departments. Labor used on all classes of public works highways is obtained through local employment agencies designated by the United States Employment Service to prepare employment lists for both skilled and unskilled labor. Minimum wage rates are prescribed in all contracts for road construction and similar wage rates are used for day labor employed directly by the highway authorities. A 30-hour week is provided for in construction agreements or contracts with the use of the 130-hour month in special cases.

All possible speed consistent with safety of public funds has been encouraged by the Bureau of Public Roads in the beginning and prosecution of construction work. Procedure has been reduced to a minimum by provisions such as the reduction of required time of advertisement for bids to two weeks, advertising work for bids immediately upon the approval of the project by the district engineers, abbreviated plans on secondary road projects following closely the existing highway, and the completion of plans for day labor work within a reasonable time after the beginning of construction.

The coming year will see a larger measure of effort to meet both municipal and rural highway needs, to accomplish roadside beautification on wider rights of way, to eliminate traffic hazards, to coordinate transportation facilities, and to develop other new and needed highway proposals to the end that unemployment will be relieved and the highway system of the country will be consolidated and improved. The National Industrial Recovery Act has established new criteria for highway work that have opened new fields for service.

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