

## Outlook for Highway Building in 1934

By Thos. H. MacDonald, Chief,

U. S. Bureau of Public Roads

Events of importance to highway transportation and to the roads that make it possible have followed so fast one after another during the past year that it is difficult to forecast what new turn of events will change completely the order of things. But certain facts about highway work as now organized stand out clearly.

Of first importance, it is now evident that the State highway departments, considered as highway planning units, have almost completed their task of putting men to work under the special \$400,000,000 highway appropriation provided in the National Industrial Recovery Act. The greater part of the planning of work assigned to the State highway departments is now finished and actual construction work is well advanced. The State highway departments now stand ready to undertake new projects.

Many of the projects made possible by the emergency highway employment appropriation already have been completed, and each week from now on will bring additional projects to an end. As the work on these projects comes to an end it will be necessary to have new projects planned and ready to begin if the desired level of employment is to be maintained.

There is little doubt that highway building will continue to occupy a prominent place in the recovery program. It is now well understood that highway work is especially valuable in relief of unemployment

because the highway dollar is so widely diffused among many different industries in all parts of the country. Studies made by the Bureau of Public Roads establish the fact that nearly 90 percent of the taxpayers' road dollar eventually is paid to workers in wages and salaries and, in addition, many widespread industries received a financial stimulus. The money appropriated for emergency road building has put men to work in at least three-fourths of the counties of the United States, a diffusion of employment of a single type that undoubtedly cannot be approximated in any other kind of public works. It is becoming increasingly clear that the State highway departments are disciplined organizations and closely-knit agencies of Government that are sufficiently well dispersed to insure reasonable success of emergency employment effort. And so, it is inevitable that State and Federal highway organizations should be called upon to take a prominent part in unemployment relief projects through public works.

Better to understand the highway requirements and prospects of the coming year, a brief review of the events of the past few months is desirable. For the first time in 17 years, Congress failed at the last session to make definite provision for the continuance of Federal-aid road construction. In place of the usual authorization of Federal-aid road funds, it provided in the National Recovery Act for the construction of highways as a means of furnishing employment during 1934. It appropriated \$400,000,000 to be expended on Federal-aid roads, on extensions of such roads into and through municipalities, and on secondary or feeder roads in all States; and an additional

\$50,000,000 for National forest, park, Indian reservation, and public lands roads. Regulations governing the expenditure of the \$400,000,000 appropriation were promptly issued on June 23, 1933, by the Secretary of Agriculture and the Special Board for Public Works, of which Secretary Ickes, as administrator of the Federal Emergency Administration of Public works, is chairman.

The regulations set up new procedure that required the submission of a preliminary statement showing the assignment of funds to different types of work. Upon approval of this statement showing the scope of the work contemplated, each State was directed to submit a detailed program of proposed construction. This new machinery, necessitating maturity of planning by the States, led to some little unavoidable delay in getting the programs under way. The initial delay, however, has been overcome rapidly by the speed with which projects have been placed under construction by the States.

Some States have already put practically all of their allotment of highway funds to work. On November 25, New York had under way 93.2 percent of its allotment; New Jersey, 52.3 percent; and Pennsylvania, 67.2 percent. In the whole country, there were 4,239 projects advertised for construction, representing 50.1 percent of the \$400,000,000 appropriation. A few States have lagged somewhat in their progress but the program as a whole is advancing definitely toward completion; and the planning work of the State and Federal road-building agencies is virtually done. Once construction work is in progress, the planning and administrative agencies stand ready for new tasks.

Looking to the coming year's activities with a view to keeping the highway departments actively engaged as well-organized and smoothly-functioning agencies for public works in the relief of unemployment, the possibility of enlisting the services of the far-flung maintenance organizations of the States becomes apparent. Highway maintenance under Federal-aid laws has always been obligatory. For the protection of the large investment in improved roadways, needed repairs must be promptly made. Highway maintenance is therefore a highly essential work and one that must go on constantly, winter and summer. It offers an excellent opportunity for organized work to benefit unemployed men in all walks of life. In addition to the repair of road surfaces, there is a great need on all highways for betterment work, such as the widening of shoulders and the inside of curves, laying tile underdrains and cobble gutters, fencing right of way, building guard walls, and tree planting and other such landscape work. The maintenance supervisors of the various State highway departments are in intimate contact with the work that must be done on the State highways and the needs of the county roads can be determined quickly by these supervisors through county officials.

Because of their wide diffusion and the ease with which unemployed men can be absorbed into their working organizations, the highway construction and maintenance forces must continue to be the "shock troops" of the "war against unemployment" army which the Public Works Administration has marshalled into form and driven into action. The responsibility imposed upon the State and Federal highway departments has tested to the utmost their individual and

organization competency. How well they have met the test is told by the record of unemployed men promptly put to work on public works of lasting value.

In the face of an unprecedented breakdown in the construction industry, State and Federal employment in June of the past year reached 360,000 under the stimulus of the emergency highway appropriation made by Congress in 1930. Last September, employment had dropped considerably due to the exhaustion of State and Federal funds. The Public Works appropriation came at a most opportune time. Its expenditure, promptly planned and quickly begun, soon restored the falling level of highway employment; and no effort will be spared to keep the work going and every possible man employed throughout the winter.

A significant departure from Federal highway policies established in past years is the launching of the Government into new fields of city street construction and improvement of secondary or feeder roads. Highway functions of the Bureau of Public Roads are thereby extended at both ends of its work to cover a much larger part of the highway program of the country. Undertaking work both in the cities and on the secondary or feeder roads is, however, a logical development and in keeping with the trend of public thought for some time. Many objectionable conditions on the main routes within cities are being corrected and, at the same time, employment is being furnished in population centers. Likewise, secondary road construction in the rural areas is furnishing employment in many agricultural communities during this period of distress.

New emphasis has been placed on the elimination of traffic hazards on highways and this humane trend is coupled with increased attention to the landscaping and widening of highway right of way. When it is recognized that a very large part of the total use of highways is for recreational and social pursuits, it is clear that protection of the traveling public from traffic hazards and a reasonable expenditure for making roadsides beautiful and pleasant are wholly consistent with public policy. Scars of construction operations will be healed and travel made more comfortable while, at the same time, security and pleasure of the traveler by highway will be enhanced. Wider right of way and adequate provision for footpaths are new developments that the coming year will see grow into accomplished facts.