

AFTER SIX YEARS

A Discussion by Thos. H. MacDonald, Chief, U.S.
Bureau of Public Roads, before the Sixth Annual
Meeting of the American Association of Motor
Vehicle Administrators, Detroit, Michigan,
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Six years ago it was my privilege to extend congratulations to this Association upon its birth, - to touch briefly upon problems needing attention, - to suggest some elements in the broad field of useful service possible, - and to extend the cooperation of the Bureau of Public Roads. This promise we have endeavored faithfully to carry into effect.

The new order brought together into a national entity sectional organizations which had already pioneered in the field of cooperative effort between State motor vehicle commissioners. Once organized on a national scale, and destined to long life and notable development, it has been necessary for the new Association first to sink its roots deeply into the confidence of the officials eligible for membership, and to secure the loyal adherence of the motor vehicle administrations of the States.

The review of the accomplishments of this Association and its development through this 6-year period are fully recorded in the reports of the officials and in the intimate knowledge of you who have participated. The Association may now take considerable satisfaction in the fact that the progress already made has attracted

such substantial support and cooperation of other organizations as to make possible an expanded program of research and other activities.

There is no thought that the officials in charge of motor vehicle operations in the individual States, or this Association, should be called upon to take full responsibility for the development of all phases of a national program designed to effect an efficient and safe use of our streets and highways for the multitudinous purposes to which they are dedicated. The intense interest and activities of other organizations in the field of traffic safety, many of which have been made possible by the support of the Automotive Safety Foundation, have produced invaluable allies in helping to accomplish one of the most important of all objectives of this Association. The future program must recognize, however, that by reason of the legal authority which rests only in the membership as State officials, there devolve certain inescapable responsibilities which cannot be assumed by other organizations or individuals, and which may be only indirectly shared. This Association, through its program, must, first, provide the necessary leadership in bringing about needed legislation, and, second, reach out strong support to its individual members in carrying the responsibilities of their State offices, through concerted agreement upon the major principles of modern and efficient

motor vehicle administration.

It will be understood if, in this discussion, conclusions are expressed that are drawn from the experience over a long period of a very similar organization. Next year the American Association of State Highway Officials will celebrate its twenty-fifth anniversary. From a modest beginning in 1914 that Association through cooperative effort and the devoted support of the State and Federal highway officials composing its membership has now to its credit a long series of accomplishment in many fields. Because the problems which have been faced by that Association are so similar in their general characteristics to those before this Association, its experience may be drawn upon to justify every confidence in the possibilities for accomplishment that lie in this organization if vigorously and unselfishly supported by its individual members.

Some examples will illustrate this generalization. There are many here who will remember the long years of unorganized effort to secure Federal legislation and Federal financial support for the improvement of public highways. While these efforts had continued over many years and had taken many forms no material results had been achieved. The Association of State Highway Officials immediately upon its organization in 1914 adopted as its first major activity the drafting and advancement of Federal

highway legislation. There is no question that all of the previous efforts had a strong contributory effect, but it was not until the highway officials of all of the States organized and agreed upon a single plan that the first important Federal highway legislation came into being, and this resulted within a period of two years. Since then every important piece of legislation dealing with the cooperative relationships between the States and the Federal Government in highway improvement has been first passed upon in principle by the Executive Committee of the Association. This should not be construed to mean that the legislation advocated by the Association has been enacted in every case, or that the Congress has accepted the exact recommendations of the Association, but it does mean that in no important principle have the committees of Congress and the Association been in disagreement.

From legislation to the field of operation is the logical step, and here also the Association has performed an invaluable function. As the Chief of the Federal Bureau having the administration of the Federal highway legislation, it is my judgment that it would have been impossible to establish and maintain the generally cordial and effective relations that have existed between the State Highway Departments and the Bureau of Public Roads, without this common organization. In the field of operations there is a

highly illuminating example of effective organizational technical activity in the development of standard bridge specifications. Through the work of the Bridge Committee of the Association, specifications for highway bridges have been developed to such a state of perfected standardization that it is no longer necessary to repeat the specification in contracts for individual structures. The construction is covered completely except for special or individual features by a simple reference to the standard bridge specification of the American Association of State Highway Officials. Perhaps no technical situation could be found with wider variation than existed in the field of highway bridge specifications when this activity was started, and the successful outcome has placed at the disposal of all of the States the most valuable training and experience of both State and Federal bridge engineers, in which personal viewpoints and experiences have been tempered by the viewpoints and experiences of the whole committee. The work of this committee is extensive and continuous.

One other example of organizational activity which has proved helpful and acceptable to the public is the establishment and marking of the system of United States highways. It may come as a surprise to some that there are no national and few State laws behind this achievement. Most State Highway Departments have legal authority to mark the highways, but the establishment of an interstate numbering system and the continuous revision of national

routes to make the system more efficient is an activity carried on cooperatively by the States through the Executive Committee of the Association.

Those are examples of national accomplishments through State and Federal cooperation. They have required a large amount of time and effort on the part of the chief executives and most important technical personnel of the State Highway Departments, and of the Bureau of Public Roads. While the theory of the Association of State Highway Officials has been to establish a common supply of technical information and administrative support from which the individual State and Federal organizations could take freely, it was very early established that in order to have this common supply it must be laid up by the earnest and devoted effort of the individual members.

There is no uncertainty of a reward in full measure for all the time, effort and other support put into the work of this Association by the officials of the individual States. On the other hand, there is no possibility except through Association activities of obtaining the concerted action that is necessary for the uniform determination and enforcement of many public policies with which the individual States must deal. Among the most important of these are the broad questions of a uniform motor

vehicle code, including a uniform code for sizes, weights and other characteristics of motor vehicles, and Federal legislation in the field of motor vehicle operation with its wide implications of State and Federal relations. There are many other important subjects, but these are sufficient to illustrate the necessity for intensive and intelligent organizational activities. In dealing with these two problems alone, the only possibility of resolving the many potential conflicts and of evolving policies and practices of maximum advantage to the public is through research to disclose the facts and the gathering and analysis of basic data that can best be done by the important executives and technical staffs of the Association and of the individual State motor vehicle administrations. The analysis of State motor vehicle laws recently published by the Bureau of Public Roads, when compared with the proposed uniform motor vehicle code, indicates the inexcusably individualistic tendencies inherent in the existing State codes. It might be argued that the basis of uniformity is indefinite and that mere uniformity of ineffectual provisions would be powerless of itself to produce greater safety or greater efficiency in the utilization of our highways. Perhaps this term uniformity has been over-emphasized. Properly interpreted it means that State legislation shall in every State contain all those elements which are believed necessary to protect and to assist in the

highest degree possible, all those who use our streets and highways. To illustrate in part this point, the following is repeated from a recent traffic safety broadcast in the Farm and Home Hour of the Department of Agriculture -

"In some States, drivers are not required to be licensed. Some States have no minimum age limit for drivers, no prohibition against the licensing of habitual drunkards, narcotic addicts, or those afflicted with mental disability. Some States do not require tests to determine physical fitness to drive. Some State laws do not set forth complete rules of the road."

These particulars indicate some of the important elements in which State legislation is deficient and which generate the demand for uniformity. No-one is especially interested in advocating uniformity in petty detail, but of the need for uniformity of principle there can be no question. In the field of a size and weight code for motor vehicles, which has been highly controversial, there is the opportunity to clarify our thinking and to obtain a decent organized consideration of a major subject in which many others besides this Association are interested, by separating the engineering factors and the economic factors. All of the considerations which govern the engineering design of highways are related to the amount and kinds of traffic to be moved. These elements determine necessary traffic volume capacities and the structural strengths of the highway and bridge

designs. That there should not be adequate engineering standards upon which to base the design of our national highway system is unthinkable. While this discussion was being written, the world was standing upon the precipice of war. It is a terrifying thought. And when we contemplate at such close range the actual realities of a world at war, the importance of the structural integrity of our highways becomes more than a theory. It is hardly conceivable that there will be opposition to the fundamental necessity of such design and construction of our highways that will permit all movements of traffic necessary for the public defense.

The engineering factors of the design and development of our highways incontestably occupy one field. The questions of the public policy and economic utilization of our transportation systems as a whole occupy an entirely different field. These remarks are prompted by the implications embodied in the Federal motor carrier act, and the necessary Federal activities that now are developing under that act. These to be successful must rest upon close cooperation between the Federal authorities and this Association in order best to serve the interests of the public.

Many other important matters of interstate complexion requiring the most thoughtful consideration by responsible public agencies are matters of proper concern for this Association. There surely will be general agreement with the statement that

there has been a too rapid drift toward unsound insulating restrictions in the legislation of individual States. Many of these have to do with the motor vehicle and its use although by no means wholly confined to it. Nationally it is an alarming trend. The greatness of this country and, in a high degree, our standards of living and opportunities are primarily due to the free flow of people and commodities across State lines. Let anyone who questions this statement spend sufficient time in Europe to get the full impact of the universal border restrictions and impositions. Even the food that comes to the table reflects these limitations. Hate across the border is one of the most frightful enemies of national and international peace and prosperity.

It is in an Association such as this, conceived as it is on a broad national basis to serve the public interest, and possessed as it is of the capacity to bring about reforms, that there lies the highest hope of effecting more satisfactory conditions in one of our greatest of national problems, - the efficient and safe utilization of our streets and highways. The fullness of the accomplishment by the Association will be determined by the contributions made by the individual State members.