

Luncheon of American
Automobile Association,
Washington, D. C.,
November 17, 1939.

Hon. Thos. H. MacDONALD: President Henry and members and
guests of the American Automobile Association:

There are many things that I should like to say to you
today that would perhaps take a long time, longer than your
patience or the time interval assigned would permit.

I hope it will not be placing too great a strain upon
your imagination after this very bounteous luncheon that has
been served, to use this imagination in going with me for a
look into the tomorrow. May I quote?

"We now found ourselves in a colonnade, or rather arcade,
which I supposed to be on the level of the street. Its
width might be that of about our Broadway sidewalk. Here
I saw shops indeed and numbers of people passing in both
directions, but could not see the throng of vehicles
indicated by the sounds that reached my ears. I stepped
over to the balustrade that bounded the further side of
the arcade and found that I was by no means on the level
of the street but in a sort of balcony two stories
above it. The room I had left but a moment before was
fully sixty feet above the sidewalk. New York had truly
risen in the course of ages upon the ruins of its former
self.

"The architecture was of a style to me utterly unknown,
but combined in a remarkable degree the characteristics
of lightness and solidity. Above the lower arcade rose
others, one for each story, each one slightly receding
within the others. From this spot I could pursue with
my eyes the far-reaching ranges of buildings that were
in the distant perspective; what looked to me so huge
close by seemed reduced to comparative insignificance.
These long arcades, I was informed, as also the interior
corridors, extended the whole length of the avenue for
six miles without a break.

"As a natural consequence of this peculiar type of architecture, the respective location of shops and offices was exactly the reverse of that now seen. The lower story was assigned to offices and warehouses; the shops were in the upper stories. Each arcade in fact was equivalent to a whole store front.

"A short walk along the colonnade on which we had first emerged, brought us to a contrivance serving the same purpose as our elevators. This, like all the similar contrivances throughout the city, and they were found everywhere at short intervals, worked automatically by an ingenious application of force derived from the rise and fall of the tide in the harbor." *

This look into the future of our highway development was written before most of us here were born. It is now nearly sixty years old and has the conception of the piling up of our cities, one story on top of another. In the time that I shall occupy today, I can only briefly sketch an outline of the course that we feel should be pursued to make our future progress fit into a more desirable type of planning, a more desirable type of living for our people, than is pictured by a man who had never seen an automobile but who forecast fifty or sixty years ago what we would be doing not in 1939 but in the Ninety-sixth Century; that is, we have speeded up our progress considerably to arrive in the Twentieth Century at what he conceived might be the case in the Ninety-sixth Century.

It is important and timely to formulate a truly national highway program as the objective of the combined Federal, State and local efforts.

The constructive criticisms that may now well be made is that up to this time the programs of the various governmental agencies have been each too highly specialized; that is, the Federal and State agencies have concentrated on the development of major rural roads, the city and town governments upon their streets, counties and local bodies upon rural secondary and feeder roads.

As a result there has been created a strong partisan sponsorship in the struggle between agencies for an ever larger percentage of funds now largely derived from road user sources. The State-wide planning surveys offer for the first time a sound basis for national programs in which all evidence will be included.

As I stated, I am only trying to outline some of the principles that we think are important. One of the important things is that in the battle for division of funds, our major highways are and have been distinct losers.

I will give you these figures by the decades, - the last two decades, 1921 to 1930, 1931 to 1940.

Now, the highway user revenues increased in the second decade, that is from 1931 to 1940, increasing from an annual average of about \$600,000,000 for the period 1921 to 1930, to nearly a billion dollar yearly average in the period 1931 to 1938. When figures for the entire decade 1931-1940 are available the average will be still higher than from 1931 to 1938.

For State highway purposes, that is, the development of our major roads and those which are carrying the heavy traffic of the country, in the first decade we were using approximately three-fourths, 75% of that income, but in the second decade this struggle for larger division of funds on the part of the cities and on the part of the counties, had reduced that percentage used for our main roads and available to the State highway departments, to 60%. That is a loss of 15% between those two decades, and that is only a part of the loss.

The roads did not gain especially. They remained about constant so far as percentage was concerned, between the two. City streets did gain somewhat on the face; that is 1.36% of highway user revenues were allocated to cities in the first decade, and 2.82% in the second decade. However, in order to put more of the burden on the highway user, the great section of our public represented by you men in this

audience, the States assumed local indebtedness necessitating debt service payments equal to 3.5% of their total income during this past decade; that is, the average per year of debt service on State-assumed debts between 1921 and 1930 was less than seven million dollars - - debt transferred from the counties or other local subdivisions to the States, which means an additional burden on the road user revenues available to the States.

The average per year for the second decade was thirty-four million dollars, an increase, you see, between the two decades per year of nearly thirty millions of dollars; and the total loss of highway user revenue for road purposes, of course, has been greatest in the diversion which in the first decade averaged less than 2%, and in the second was about 12%.

You see that the State highway departments who are responsible for the care and improvement and extension of your major highway facilities are steadily losing in this battle for highway funds.

Under the master highway plan, it is necessary that a program, a truly national program, to avoid this struggle for funds, shall be agreed upon with a reasonable division,

and we think that that division may be somewhat along the line of the total use by the traffic of the three types of roads. That would give the city streets a larger division of the funds, than they now receive. It would not increase - it would decrease - the amounts given to the local roads and there would be a serious battle because of the interest of those who use the rural roads. Thus we have the two opposite ends of that program failing to agree upon a balanced use of the funds.

It is necessary that such a program be accepted by the public and that is where an organization such as the American Automobile Association comes in. It is also necessary, before we can have such a program, to bring into cooperation and to the same line of thinking, nearly fifty thousand officials and legislators, so that this problem of education is a tremendous one.

In the master highway plan which we propose, I am going to touch upon only one of the three major elements; that is, the construction of a special, tentatively defined system of direct, inter-regional highways, with the necessary connections through and around cities, designed to meet the requirements of the national defense in time of war, and the needs of a growing peacetime traffic of longer range.

That goes directly to the city problem, because we propose to start these highways, the inter-regional highways, not out in the country where it would be easy to build them, but in the hearts of the metropolitan areas.

This program which it is proposed to motivate through our democratic processes, contrasts violently with the program that Germany reached through totalitarian governmental processes. The program of new developments in France is much more nearly akin to that which we think is desirable in this country; that is, there they are building from the center of Paris, out into the rural districts, and connecting with the existing national roads. In Germany in order to reach the place nearest Berlin, it is necessary to go south as far as Potsdam, which is twenty miles out of the city. In the United States when we are twenty miles out of the city, we can go pretty nearly anywhere we desire to go; and we think with all their totalitarian boasted efficiency, maybe they are not building their roads where the people most need them. Here we have sound, factual bases for the recommendations which we are making.

To perform and put into effect a coordinated program providing for these major elements would require a higher

degree of centralized direction than now exists. The State highway departments are the key to such an organization, and that is the message that I wish to bring to you representatives of the American Automobile Association as you go back to your homes and represent the using public in your districts, that we have to get behind the State highway departments in each State, help them to develop this program along the line of the highway traffic surveys, and with the factual data available, and then push that program through the legislature. But we must introduce a degree of coordination and cooperation that has never as yet existed, if we are going anywhere in this country with such a program.

Assuming the establishment of a balanced program under adequate central control, the most important elements to make possible or to frustrate operations are the methods of securing and of financing lands.

The conception of urban facilities can be best illustrated by taking specific examples. For example, in the District of Columbia, which for the first time is participating in Federal aid, we now have a cooperative highway survey. That doesn't mean much, expressed in general terms, but here are some of the things that we are doing, and this is given as illustrative of what we are

doing elsewhere in the metropolitan areas.

The District survey consists of studying the existing facilities, first spotting the breaks in the continuity of arterial highways; second, studying existing major bridges and approaches; third, locating undesirable conditions of alignment and pavement; fourth, locating points of maximum congestion; fifth, studying parking facilities both off and on the street; and, sixth (and this is important), studying the present distribution of business, industry, and residences within the city, and the trend of movement of each of these classes of land occupancy.

We found as soon as we got into the traffic study that the District of Columbia, a little less than ten miles square, was only the center of a metropolitan area, and in place of reaching out ten miles, we must reach out in both Maryland and Virginia, on a radius of perhaps twenty to twenty-five miles, if we are to determine the type of improvement that will give a plan for the District that will extend into the future and will spread and serve our population in the manner to be desired.

One of the most pathetic things we have in the city today is the effort that people are making - and it is

illustrated elsewhere in the country - to get into the country and to occupy a place in the sun, literally in the sun, where there are some grass and trees, and it has resulted in such low-cost housing development as we have out at the end of Sixteenth Street, here in the District, just over the line in Maryland, out of the zoning control of the District, to be sure, but there is our "Street of Presidents" with the other end going into a district where just as many families have been concentrated into as little area as is humanly possible, it seems to me, to concentrate them.

Now, that does give them, it is true, some trees and grass and some sunlight around them for a few minutes, but soon the roads will press on behind and then they will become a little isolated tenement district upon one of the best streets in the District.

Now let's look at Chicago as an example of the development of highways in metropolitan areas. As you know, Chicago extends along Lake Michigan, so, in place of a wheel with its hub at the center of the city and radial spokes reaching out into surrounding districts, we have as a major highway plan conceived for the metropolitan area of Cook County and Chicago, about half a wheel, or a little more than half a wheel, the rest of it being in Lake Michigan. That means

main road extension of Lake Shore Drive North, Lake Shore Drive South, northwest artery, a west artery, and southwest artery, - five main arteries. Each one would reach into the metropolitan area, and each would serve approximately at the present time a million people.

Now, in studying this northwest artery, the number of vehicles that it is expected it would serve within the city limits would be 78,000, average daily movement, and the whole improvement within Cook County can be obtained for around twenty to twenty-five millions of dollars. We have to stop talking in terms of total programs, however. It isn't very important what the total cost is for construction because if we have this program under central jurisdiction and allocate the income to building a pre-conceived program, we will have the income coming in each year about as rapidly as we can actually do the construction work; so it is entirely possible that this kind of plan in the Cook County area could be put through without the increase of a single cent from the road user, if the revenues are properly used.

One other big "if" at the bottom of anything we do of an adequate character lies in ^{the} taking of land. We have conceived that the taking of land should be upon a long-term basis and should be supported by the credit of the community or of the

State or of the United States. We have favored extending that facility or that help to the local communities in order to get the land necessary for the development of these arteries. If we don't buy wide enough, long enough rights of way, we have entirely blocked ourselves from extending the population out into the country district and making use of the greatest utility, the motor vehicle has brought to us; that is, the ability of people to live at some distance away from where they are employed in surroundings that are better than the tenement districts, or districts that are fast becoming tenement districts, in which so many of our people live at the present time.

In this Chicago area this means probably a total of \$120,000,000 to \$125,000,000 involved in extending all of these arteries to the limits of Cook County. That wouldn't cover the whole program, but the estimated cost of such a program at the present time is between \$100,000,000 and \$125,000,000, of which about 40% would be land costs. If you take 40% away, i.e. around \$50,000,000 away from \$125,000,000, and leave \$75,000,000 or \$70,000,000 on a five-year program, you will have about \$15,000,000 per year, which can be financed from current income from the city, the State, the Federal, and the county sources. That is, the program, on the basis of present revenues, once the land problem is solved on a long term basis through the use of credit for the purchase of that land -

the construction program can be carried out without increasing the revenues. This is a better conception of how our people ought to live than the conception the gentleman had fifty-five years ago, of how we were going to pile people up on top of each other, and I think we have done that to too great an extent already. There must be this centralized program, and it seems to me that the one policy that could be adopted by this Association to carry out to your States as a policy of your clubs for the forthcoming year, would be to get behind the State highway departments in formulating the program for the State on the basis of these surveys which are available and upon which you can rely without having to stamp an opinion on the word of somebody else, simply to follow the lead of the facts as they are developed.