

THE NATIONAL DEFENSE TRUCK AND BUS INVENTORY

Radio interview by Thomas H. MacDonald, Commissioner, Public Roads Administration, Federal Works Agency; Ted V. Rodgers, President, American Trucking Associations; and Announcer, broadcast Thursday, September 25, 1941, by WJSV, Washington, D. C., and the Columbia Broadcasting System.

ANNOUNCER:

Back in the early days of the first World War when the enemy was within about 20 miles of Paris, the defenders saved the city by a blitz maneuver in TAXICABS, and turned the whole tide of the war.

Here in the United States we hope we will never see the day when private motor vehicles will be needed in so acute a crisis, but already there is a need for making a more efficient use of highway transportation. In the present national emergency, the War Department and the National Defense Advisory Commission have called for a nation-wide inventory of all trucks, freight trailers, and busses. This inventory began in most of the States today,

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Now in the company of the Federal Government's principal highway official, Mr. Thomas H. MacDonald, and a representative of the trucking business, Mr. Ted V. Rodgers, let's get behind the scenes of the nation's first inventory of its great new industry, highway transport.

Mr. MacDonald, you are Commissioner of Public Roads and Chairman of the Highway Traffic Advisory Committee to the War Department. So I'd like to have you give us a little background on this inventory of trucks and busses.

MACDONALD:

All right, Mr. _____ . In requesting the inventory, the War Department and the National Defense Advisory Commission were influenced by England's experience with highway transport. They recognized that we cannot organize our transportation facilities for greater efficiency in the defense program unless we first have detailed knowledge of them. Such information is already assembled for railroads, water shipping, aviation - - - for ALL facilities EXCEPT those employed in HIGHWAY transport.

We have now begun the nation-wide inventory to collect these essential facts on highway transport. We are calling on all owners of motor trucks and motor busses, as a patriotic duty, to supply the information requested of them. This is a necessary step in marshaling the Nation's full resources for defense.

ANNOUNCER:

You said the request for the inventory was influenced by England's experience, Mr. MacDonald you mean England's experience with truck transportation?

MACDONALD:

Yes. Before the war, England by legislation discouraged and prevented the natural expansion of the use of motor trucks. Consequently when war came, highway transportation failed woefully to measure up to war-time needs.

The British Government could not use the existing motor-transport facilities to the fullest advantage. In the midst of war, it had to reorganize its records of truck transportation so that it could make greater military and industrial use of trucks, yet not interfere with essential civilian services.

ANNOUNCER:

So a bad situation has finally been corrected.

MACDONALD:

Yes; the British Government now is apparently able to make reasonably effective use of highway transportation facilities.

ANNOUNCER:

So we got our idea for a truck-and-bus survey from England!

MACDONALD:

No, we didn't get the IDEA from England. I recall attending a highway meeting in Ohio 4 years ago and hearing at that time the suggestion of just such an inventory of trucks and busses as we're now making.

We're indebted to England NOT for the IDEA -- but for the lesson that we must make the inventory now, BEFORE we're in the midst of a crisis.

ANNOUNCER:

Well, that helps us to understand the official beginnings of the inventory, Mr. MacDonald.

Now, Mr. Rodgers, as President of American Trucking Associations, will you give us a business man's view of the inventory?

RODGERS:

I'll be glad to. As I see it, the war has developed into a battle of production. In this country, the "wheels of industry" are turning as never before in our history. However, to make this enormous production effective, we must be able to transport it to the places where it is needed. Our transportation system is giving good service so far, but it is operating under difficulties.

For example, many of our ships have been diverted to overseas work. This has added to the burden of our land-transportation facilities.

ANNOUNCER:

Gasoline is an illustration of that added burden, isn't it, Mr. Rodgers? Some of our gasoline supplies here in the East will have to come in by rail instead of by water.

RODGERS:

That's the way it looks, Mr. _____. Now another example of transportation difficulties. Our railroad car-building program is lagging. Due to scarcity of material, we'll probably have about 20 thousand fewer new cars in service on October 1 than the railroads anticipated.

Under these circumstances -- increased industrial production, diversion of ships, and the lag in supplies of rail equipment - - - under these circumstances, we must guard against a transportation shortage. We must develop all our transportation resources to their fullest extent, or the defense program will be slowed down by a freight jam worse than that of 1917.

That's why the inventory of trucks and busses is now under way -- to lay the foundation for greater service from highway transportation.

ANNOUNCER:

You think, then, that our highway-transport system is not yet doing all it can?

RODGERS:

That's right. I think the Government sees in highway transportation a young giant that can be coordinated to do a great deal more work in this emergency.

This young giant, Highway Transportation, is only about 25 years old, you know. But it has grown enormously in that short time. On the basis of total tonnage of freight and the distances it is moved, trucks now haul about a sixth as much freight as the railroads. And, taking into account distances traveled, passenger travel by bus and by train is about equal. The truck completely dominates the short-haul field. Highway transportation has become big-time stuff!

MACDONALD:

Highway transportation is big business, you see, Mr. _____. Yet we know very little about it. For instance, we don't even know exactly how many 2-, 3-, and 5-ton trucks and how many large busses we have in this country -- we know only that the total number is somewhere around 5 million.

ANNOUNCER:

All right, you make the inventory of trucks and busses, Mr. MacDonald. Then what?

MACDONALD:

Then the Work Projects Administration will prepare national and regional lists of trucks by type, capacity, location, and so on. They'll also prepare similar lists of busses.

RODGERS:

Then when the Army wants to hire or lease some trucks, it will be able to find them.

ANNOUNCER:

Do you know of some instances, Mr. Rodgers, where the Army has hired trucks?

RODGERS:

Oh, yes. Last spring, the Army moved 14 thousand soldiers in a series of short marches from Fort Custer, Michigan, to a maneuver area 650 miles away in Tennessee. The Army hired a Michigan trucking concern to distribute food supplies along the line of march. The trucking outfit used as many as 22 trucks a day for 10 days. It hauled nearly 400 tons of food in numerous separate trips totaling more than 40 thousand miles.

Just recently, the Army moved 10 thousand men from Fort Custer to the Louisiana war games. And a commercial trucking concern again delivered food supplies along the route -- a total of more than 200 tons of food.

And here's another example. In mobilizing the 153rd infantry of the Arkansas National Guard, the Army hired about 50 trucks and 30 busses and concentrated 1,500 men and 150 tons of baggage in less than 12 hours.

MACDONALD:

The Army is only one of many Government agencies that are likely to find the central and regional registers of trucks and busses helpful in speeding up the defense program.

ANNOUNCER:

Do you have something specific in mind, Mr. MacDonald?

MACDONALD:

Well, for example, the records would be extremely useful in organizing truck pools in order to get more efficient service from each truck. Such pools have been successfully organized in England.

RODGERS:

Yes, and in this country, in New York and some of our other large cities. In New York City, one truck pool now provides complete trucking service for most of the large stores.

ANNOUNCER:

Have either of you got another idea on the use of the records that are to be made up from the inventory?

MACDONALD:

Well, yes, Mr. _____. The Central Motor Truck Transportation Committee will make considerable use of them.

ANNOUNCER:

That's a committee in the Office for Emergency Management, isn't it, and you're a member of it, aren't you, Mr. MacDonald?

MACDONALD:

The answer is "yes" to both questions. Mr. Rodgers here also is a member of this central committee.

ANNOUNCER:

Just how will the central motor-truck committee use the truck and bus records that will be made up from the inventory?

MACDONALD:

For one thing, in organizing more efficient and economical use of the highways and more efficient and economical use of motor vehicles in the transportation of property.

The committee will also do all it can to assure sufficient motor-truck equipment to meet the needs of national security.

ANNOUNCER:

Can you give us a little more light on that last point, Mr. MacDonald -- about providing sufficient motor-truck equipment to meet the needs of national security?

MACDONALD:

You know the Government has already placed limitations on the production of automobiles, in order to conserve steel and other materials for defense production. With the detailed information from the inventory ---- information on sizes of trucks and busses, body types, and usage ---- a truly fair and intelligent approach to the whole problem of priority of truck and bus use can be made. This will also enable manufacturers to concentrate on production of the sizes and types of trucks that are needed.

ANNOUNCER:

That sounds like a practical use for the records, Mr. MacDonald. And I suppose these records will also be helpful in developing plans for more effective use of highway transportation in the assembly of defense-industry materials.

MACDONALD:

Of course, and in the delivery of military and civilian supplies.

RODGERS:

And in the movement of people -- soldiers and civilians -- in emergencies.

MACDONALD:

To put the whole matter in one brief statement: The information that will be provided by the inventory is absolutely essential as a basis for many of the plans that are being made to meet a serious national emergency.

ANNOUNCER:

Great possibilities for these records, I'm sure.

Let me see ---- I think one of you gentlemen said we have about 5 million trucks and busses in this country. It will take quite an army of census-takers to inventory them all. How many?

MACDONALD:

Oh, the whole job will be done by mail. Each State motor-vehicle agency is mailing questionnaire cards to truck and bus owners. We're asking each individual truck and bus owner to fill out one of these cards and return it to the State office.

---- Here's one of the bus inventory cards.

ANNOUNCER:

A blue card. About 5 inches wide and 8 inches long, I'd say.

MACDONALD:

Yes, and here's a truck card.

ANNOUNCER:

A white one -- same size.

MACDONALD:

That's right -- both are small cards ----- and very simple to fill out too. I think either card can be filled out in less than 10 minutes.

ANNOUNCER:

Yes ----- Let's see. You fill out here the kind of truck you own. And here your name and address capacity of truck kind of body. And you check the months you have the greatest use for the truck in your own business.

MACDONALD:

That's so the Government won't interfere with the owner's business in case it should hire or lease his truck. ----- But notice that next question -- right there.

ANNOUNCER:

(Reading) "In case of emergency, would you voluntarily hire or lease the vehicle to a Federal agency?"

MACDONALD:

That's a key question. The Government wants to know where it can hire or lease trucks, if that should ever be necessary in an emergency.

ANNOUNCER:

What a pile of cards you're going to have on your hands one of these days! Five million.

MACDONALD:

They won't give us much trouble. The Government is going to use automatic tabulating equipment to make various lists of the trucks and busses -- a central list and regional lists, lists according to type of truck body, lists according to capacity, and so on. Then if the day ever comes when the Government wants, say a hundred tank trucks in some part of the country, it will know immediately where to get them.

ANNOUNCER:

I must say you're certainly going to have highway transportation organized for national defense.

We've had a hint here and there in this program that many Government agencies are cooperating in the nation-wide inventory from which these central and regional records of trucks and busses will be produced. Will you list these agencies, Mr. MacDonald?

MACDONALD:

This is the line-up:

The inventory was requested by the War Department and the National Defense Advisory Commission.

The Public Roads Administration of the Federal Works Agency worked out the details -- planned -- the inventory.

The Highway Traffic Advisory Committee to the War Department made arrangements with the State motor-vehicle registration departments to conduct the inventory in their respective States.

The Work Projects Administration of the Federal Works Agency has agreed to provide clerical assistance in many of the States, to analyze returns from all States, and to list the vehicles in various classifications, by regions and on a national basis. These classified lists will then be made available to the War Department, the Office of Production Management, and other Government agencies.

ANNOUNCER:

Now we know who's doing each phase of the inventory. And we've already discussed how the results of the inventory may be used. But will the truck owners respond to this call for information?

Mr. Rodgers, you're President of American Trucking Associations. Can you promise a full response from your members or will they regard the questionnaire as another nuisance and not answer it?

RODGERS:

The truckers will respond - not only from patriotic motives but also to serve our own interests.

ANNOUNCER:

The Government pays well for what it hires, Mr. Rodgers, but truckers are already getting all the business they can handle. You must have something more than rental payments in mind.

RODGERS:

Yes, I am thinking of the prestige of the trucking industry. We have a hard-won position to maintain. Truckmen have fought their way to dominance of the short-haul field against many obstacles. The worst of these has been unduly restrictive legislation setting up unnecessary barriers at State lines. If I may digress from the subject for a moment, I want to say that removal of these barriers in a number of States is essential to movement of army supplies and defense materials. I could cite numerous instances -

ANNOUNCER:

To bring you back to the subject, Mr. Rodgers - you were speaking of maintaining the prestige of the trucking industry.

RODGERS:

We must maintain that prestige. Much of the public is ignorant of the service we now render in meeting the daily needs of the nation. We must meet every demand made on us for national defense. We want to show what trucks can do. A better understanding by the public is bound to result in benefits to the truckmen.

ANNOUNCER:

And so your Association asks its members to fill out this questionnaire.

RODGERS:

Yes; it only takes about five minutes, and we will be prepared to use our trucks in meeting any national emergency.

ANNOUNCER:

That's good. It's reassuring to know that if we get into trouble, four or five million trucks are ready to dash to the rescue. It's still more reassuring to know that steps are being taken to send only the kind and number of vehicles that will be needed.

And now I must thank you and Mr. MacDonald for your statements regarding the nation-wide inventory of 5 million trucks, freight trailers, and busses, now under way.

Ladies and gentlemen, you have heard in this interview from Mr. Thomas H. MacDonald, Commissioner, Public Roads Administration, and Mr. Ted V. Rodgers, President, American Trucking Associations.