

Planning the Use of Trucks to Meet Emergency Transport Needs

By Theo. H. MacDonald, Commissioner of Public Roads
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Someone said earlier this year, and quite correctly:

"This country is now teetering on the edge of a transportation shortage."

It is not just a coincidence that we approached a transportation shortage in the second year of the national defense program. It is the direct result of the employment of four million additional workers in the past two years. Our industrial production this year will probably establish a new record. We will have a national income of perhaps \$4 billion dollars, compared with the previous high of \$1 billion in 1929.

But the real test of our transportation facilities lies ahead. The National Resources Planning Board has estimated that by 1943 we will have more than 56 million men at work. That compares with 47½ million in 1939 and about 52 million this year. It means that whereas we put **FOUR** million additional men to work in the **PAST** two years, in the **NEXT** two years we may employ **SIX** million additional workers.

The Planning Board estimates that our industrial production will reach still greater highs in the next two years, and that our national income will amount to 100 billion dollars in 1943, or nearly 25 percent more than in 1929.

You can see that this great industrial expansion will place an unprecedented burden on transportation. If the country is teetering on the edge of a transportation shortage THIS year, where will it be NEXT year and the year after? In the midst of a transportation crisis?

That is not necessarily the answer. The trucking industry has a great opportunity to do its part in proving that is not the answer, and to establish itself in a position of undisputable indispensability in the Nation's transportation system.

You are in a relatively good position to make an excellent showing, too. At a time when increased capacity has become so vital, the trucking industry has about 42 percent more trucks registered than in 1932! No other type of freight transport has had anywhere near so large an increase.

The trucking industry is already responding to the increased demand for transportation. The load trucks carry this year probably will be about 28 percent greater than it was in 1939. In 1939, trucks carried approximately a 58-billion ton-mile load on rural roads. In 1941, the total carried load on rural highways will approach 72 billion ton-miles, according to preliminary estimates.

The 1939 truck movement, incidentally, equaled about a sixth of the total haul the same year by railroads. This indicates the remarkable growth in truck transportation since the first world war.

The 1941 truck load will be heavily weighted with defense goods. It is estimated that about 25 percent of the 44 million motor trucks now in service are engaged in hauling the raw materials and products of defense industries.

Certainly you are doing a fine job. But can you keep up the pace? For instance, if industrial activity, as measured by national income, actually does increase 20 percent in the next two years, will highway transport be able to keep up with the demand for its services? Some of you have already had to refuse some of the new business that has come your way.

At a time like this, a time of rapid expansion in industry, the trucking industry operates at a definite disadvantage compared with the railroads. The trucking industry is old, and unwieldy and, with all due respect to American Trucking Association, lacking in central organization. It employs probably more than FIVE million people, compared with the ONE million total of all employees of the railroads. That one million in railroading includes everyone from engine wipers to presidents.

If a crisis in transportation were to develop suddenly, the Interstate Commerce Commission could ask for maximum service from the railroads simply by making one telephone call to the Association of American Railroads.

The trucking industry could not be so easily mobilized. One telephone call to American Trucking Associations would be very effective in reaching several thousand for-hire truck operators, but several million other truck owners would be missed.

The Interstate Commerce Commission could also call the principal railroad companies. Telephone calls to about 30 companies would reach the major part of the railroad industry, representing about 90 percent of the total investments of class 1 railroads.

It is impossible even with several hundred telephone calls to reach a appreciable part of the trucking industry on the basis of invested capital or any other basis.

By these comments I do not mean to suggest that the trucking industry should be organized like the railroads into a relatively few big concerns. I am only emphasizing that lack of organization is a handicap in coordinating the industry for greatest service in the event of a transportation shortage. And it is the main reason we are now conducting the national defense truck and bus inventory. It is also the main reason truck owners should respond to the inventory.

The inventory is a means of organizing the trucking industry -- on paper -- so that its services can be utilized with greater efficiency in meeting the transportation requirements of the national defense program.

I am sure that by this time, all of you are very familiar with the way the inventory is being conducted. It was requested by the War Department and is being sponsored by the Highway Traffic Advisory Committee to the War Department.

It was organized by the Public Roads Administration, and is being handled through the motor-vehicle registration agencies in the various States. From the records of these agencies questionnaire cards are addressed to truck and bus owners -- a white card to truck owners and a blue card to bus owners. The white card calls for such information as the make of the truck, year of manufacture, type of body, capacity, and so on.

One of the key questions reads this way: "In case of an emergency would you voluntarily hire or lease vehicle to a Federal agency?" That question has bothered a good many truck owners. Some have indicated they were afraid to answer it, or, even afraid to answer the entire questionnaire, for fear the Government would come around the next day and take their trucks. Others, already engaged in hauling defense goods thought this work eliminated the necessity for filling out the questionnaire card.

We have emphasized again and again that we want every truck owner to fill out a questionnaire card, no matter what use he may be making of his truck and no matter how he may choose to answer the question about leasing the truck to a Government agency. We do not expect every truck owner to answer "yes" to the question. But we must have information on every truck, and every bus, in order to plan the production of trucks and busses and replacement parts under the Government's priority system. On the basis of the best information now available, the Office of Production Management has already established a priority rating to step up the production of heavy motor trucks and to maintain the present rate of production of medium trucks. The returns from the inventory will be highly valuable in checking the adequacy of this priority rating.

So far as more efficient transportation is concerned, perhaps the most important outcome of the inventory will be the creation of truck pools or truck clearing houses to facilitate the leasing of trucks, by owners willing to lease, for use by other operators or in other areas in need of additional facilities to serve defense industry. The inventory facts would be invaluable in the operation of such clearing houses. The hiring and leasing of trucks on a commercial basis under some such set-up as this undoubtedly will far surpass any Government hiring or leasing.

The records obtained in the inventory are specifically intended for War Department use. In fact the War Department supplied the questionnaire cards that you are filling out. You will get some idea of the way the War Department may use the inventory records if you will recall some of the Army movements involving commercial vehicles.

The latest illustration to come to my attention is the shift of 16 thousand men of the 25th Division from Pennsylvania to maneuvers in North Carolina last month. The Army supplemented its own vehicles with about 75 tractor-semitrailer units and about 65 busses of commercial motor carriers. I understand this was the first time a full Army division has moved completely by motor vehicle.

With records of trucks available for hire or lease, classified according to body type, size, and other characteristics, the Army can quickly select the number and class of trucks it may happen to need in a particular area and make immediate arrangements with the owners. So far as the Government is concerned, the War Department will undoubtedly have greater use for the records from the inventory than any other agency.

The truck and bus inventory has been very well received by vehicle owners. You have been even more responsive than we anticipated. You have shown a sincere interest in giving the Government a complete set of facts about your vehicles.

In most of the States that had begun the inventory by October 1, percentage returns at the end of the first two weeks were already considerably in excess of the final total expected from the usual mail questionnaire. At the end of last week, we had returns as high as 58 percent. Twelve States had returns of more than 50 percent, and about 25 had returns of more than 40 percent. The inventory is in all stages of completion. Some States mailed the questionnaire cards September 25, and one State will not mail until November 4.

I have no doubts about the willingness of you who are here today to cooperate in this inventory to the fullest extent. I am sure that if you have received your questionnaire cards, they are already filled out and returned or are now being filled out. But back home, there will be some truck operators who are not so responsive, who do not understand that it is their patriotic duty to fill out their cards. I hope you will do all you can to influence these individuals to do their part in this national defense inventory of trucks and busses. We want to complete it to the full satisfaction of the War Department. This means we must have close to 100 percent cooperation from all truck and bus owners.