

## THE OPERATIONS OF THE HIGHWAY TRAFFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Thos. H. MacDonald  
Commissioner of Public Roads

Twelfth Annual Conference  
American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators  
Chicago, Illinois, June 20, 1944

This 1944 conference of the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators offers a very welcome opportunity to review the operations of the Highway Traffic Advisory Committee and to consider its future. The Central Committee and the individual State committees were brought into being in 1940 through action initiated by the Secretary of War. Basically, the membership of each State committee consists of the motor vehicle commissioner and the executive heads of the highway department and of the State highway patrol, and only in a few States have marked departures been made from this pattern. The membership has been expanded in some States by other officials who have legal duties or connections with highway transport. The central committee represents through its members these identical groups who are organized in national associations.

The concept behind the request for the establishment of these committees, national and state, was simple, direct and timely. New and untried officials and organizations were not required. No new appropriations of funds were demanded. No conflict between State and Federal laws and authority was involved. The whole idea was to provide a method for integrated action by the State officials having legal responsibility and authority over the whole field of highway transport - each one having jurisdiction over major elements but no one having overall control. This segmentation of authority was quickly highlighted, first by the demands of the defense program and a little later by war activities of which highway transport became an essential element. This division of authority over the many elements of highway transport developed gradually through the years, did not take vitally significant form as an obstruction to the most efficient performance of highway transport until suddenly the need broke for quick official decisions, for a step-up in the tempo of operations and for adjustments and changes in the established routine of highway transport administration. Certainly the time had come to push aside all other considerations in favor of integrated action by the officials who had, and who alone had, the legal authority to act in the component fields of

highway transport. This background is well understood generally by the public officials and by others engaged in the widely diverse activities which as a whole fit highway transport into our national economy. The absence of integrated administration was the inevitable consequence of too much fragmentary thinking, too much emphasis upon limited phases, and too little attention focused upon the nation-wide problems of a transportation system which had rapidly expanded to unforeseen, almost unbelievable dimensions.

Intimate contact through the past four years with the State committees in action, in cooperation with the Highway Division of the Transportation Corps of the Army and with the Central Committee, has fully established, first, that the services extending into many fields have made, and are continuing to make, highly important contributions to the war effort, and second, that the committees should continue to function indefinitely. The need for coordinated administrative action existed long before the war period; it is intensified during the war period, and will remain an indispensable element in the post war recovery effort. The field for such action has been partially defined by the operations themselves, as will become apparent from a critical analysis of the problems affecting highway transport which have necessitated many and widely varied committee operations, but the latent possibilities for public welfare are almost inexhaustible.

Without attempting to include all the important accomplishments which have been carried through by the organizations represented by the committee members, by subject matter these indicate some of the services from December, 1940, to June, 1943:

1. Completion of the original Truck and Bus Inventory.
2. Driver records furnished the Army.
3. War-time traffic controls.
4. The promotion of voluntary vehicle conservation.
5. The organization of 2400 local war transportation committees.
6. The organization of plant transportation committees.
7. Providing the Army with thousands of maps.
8. The selection of vital facilities to be protected.
9. The designation and marking of convoy routes and alternates.
10. Convoy escorts by state patrol officers.

About the beginning of the year 1943, transportation officers were established in each Service Command and Transportation Zones fixed coextensive with the Command areas. Transportation administrations of all kinds supervised by the Transportation Corps of the Army was highly decentralized. An Army officer to have direct charge of all highway transport matters arising within each particular zone was assigned to each Zone Transportation officer. This new plan of operation by the Army indicated a new and highly decentralized plan of operation by the Central and State Highway Traffic Advisory committees with each State committee acting autonomously.

Some of the general operations of the Committee since July, 1943, include the following:

1. The holding of highway transport conferences in all Service Command areas.
2. Liaison Service.
3. Maintained Truck and Bus Inventory - (38 States up to date).
4. Provided those directly and indirectly engaged in the war effort with over two thousand major services all of which are a matter of record.

These activities are those in which the Motor Vehicle Administrators have been more particularly engaged. The highway and patrol services are not included except to the extent they are joint undertakings.

Even with the impressive showings of accomplished tasks, there is a greater significance to place upon these and upon the additional operations of the highway departments and of the State and local highway patrols. It is impossible to measure the value of these services in terms of time saved, of important highway transportation successfully accomplished, of mutual good will and cooperation maintained between the military and civilian operations, or the extent of the prevention of conflicts, destructive in their effects, which have been definitely achieved. In this latter field the Motor Vehicle Administrators and the State and local traffic patrols have been of inestimable service to the Transportation Corps of the Army, the land operations of the Navy and other war agencies.

In these evaluations of the assistance rendered by the committees, there is generous and enthusiastic corroboration by highly responsible officers of the Army and of other war agencies.

Turning now more expressly to the future of the Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators, the correspondence and conferences with the officers and individual members since your last meeting have emphasized one major objective - that of a constructive program for the Association directed toward the solution of the problems confronting the individual Motor Vehicle Administrator and his organization. These problems have been well analyzed by the Association and its several committees. Progress in their solution involves, first, the study of methods and practices already developed and in successful operation in one or more States and, second, a research program directed toward the securing of fundamental information as a basis for administrative action in lieu of mere opinion or legislative compromise. The essential need for such a program and the appropriate approaches do not originate with me. They are the conclusions of the members to whom you have entrusted the important task of formulating the aims and the long-time policies of this organization. They are repeated here to express our concurrence in their authenticity, and to pledge our wholehearted cooperation, upon your request, in carrying forward the studies and research in the areas appropriate to the Public Roads Administration.

- 4 -

Out of the cruel and costly experiences of this war there emerge inescapable facts - facts that cannot be pushed aside or forgotten now or in the future pattern of administration of all the elements of highway transport. Even though the whole nation is presently engaged in the war effort, highway transport is, and will continue, almost completely a civilian operation. Available supplies have limited the use of motor vehicles, particularly passenger cars, to the more essential purposes. Over many routes, around numerous camps and in rather extensive maneuver areas, organic military motor vehicles and other mechanized units of warfare use the public roads in long convoys and in large numbers, but in the aggregate the total is relatively small when compared to the total of civilian vehicle passenger-miles and civilian vehicle ton-miles.

Other facts are self evident. The United States as a nation, with its normal economy so completely geared to peaceful pursuits, must defend itself, must also take its place in mutual self-preservation with other like-minded nations by the means of conversion - conversion of every facility and every resource to this one essential objective. Highway transport to make possible the conversion of the peacetime worker, and the conversion of all industrial and agricultural facilities and organizations to war production, is indispensable. Highway transport operating in the relatively short-haul field has become an essential part of the production assembly line. This result has been accomplished to a major extent with the motor vehicles and the highways that were in service when the war began. The number of new vehicles and the mileage of new highways added in the war period are relatively small compared to the total number and total mileage in every minute service. The handicaps of highly limited supplies, equipment and skilled labor needed to obtain the maximum possible service from these vehicles, and the previously improved highways, accent the management accomplishments and point even more insistently to the need for continuing the efforts which become more difficult the longer the war continues, because of depreciation through use and the scarcity of the means of repair replacements. The earlier war directives to stop new construction, to cease the manufacture of civilian vehicles and to divert so many of the available civilian facilities to war purposes, were a harsh but realistic awakening to the fact that the nation must carry through a war effort beyond any previously conceived magnitude, without any considerable additions to the civilian highway transport facilities and brought us face to face with highway transport problems that had not been generally recognized as acute with the possible exception of that of highway accidents. These problems involve the three major elements of highway transport - the operator, the vehicle and the roadway. Thus it was, and is, apparent that the State officials who are charged with the responsibilities of control, and who have the legal authority, can best meet the problems. They constitute together the only authority that under the existing and desirable principle of State control of highway transport, can engage in all phases of its problems.

- 5 -

But successful attack is only possible through coordinated effort. As we eagerly read the news of the operations of our armed forces on the battle fronts of the world, perhaps the most impressive single thought is that the greatest victories are won through the split-second integrated action of air, sea and land forces. As never before the lesson of planned working together and coordinated operations as the most effective tool of democracy, has been deeply implanted in our most serious conscience.

On the less spectacular but nevertheless essential home front, and in the important segment of that field, highway transport, there can be no let-up in perfecting coordinated effort among the motor vehicle commissioners, the highway patrol and the highway departments. Each administration has its particular duties, and each one is dependent to a degree not yet fully recognized, upon the efficiency of the operations of the others.

This inter-dependency of the State agencies who have the legal authority over the elements of highway transport, is very importantly real. It is far deeper than has been generally accepted, and many of the relationships of most consequence are not superficially apparent. It is doubtful if the average citizen directly connects driver training and driver control with the design of highways, but the highway engineer cannot - and this is an accurate and proven statement - cannot design and build safe highways for unsafe drivers. The highway engineer cannot within the funds available build highways that will carry loads far beyond the design load limits without damage. The highway patrol cannot keep unsafe vehicles off the highways without the aid of adequate and regular motor vehicle inspection. These only illustrate a long series of inter-relations in the highly divided scheme for the administration by the State governments of the many elements that compose the entity of highway transport, and contain within themselves the most acute and most difficult problems. This is the internal situation.

The external relation of highway transport to other types of transportation is rich with opportunities for coordination with the promise of improved overall service. No type of transportation is sufficient unto itself. Generally, highway transport must be used with rail, water, and certainly with air facilities, to render a complete service either for freight or passengers. While it is true there exist zones of competition between types of transport, these zones can be narrowed by planned articulation between the types, and proper regulations to secure as the end product the most efficient service to the public.

This may seem a far cry from the problems that have perplexed the committees during the war period, yet what problems have been more difficult than the questions of sizes and weights of motor vehicles, of speed on the streets and highways, of essential uses, of State barriers, of reciprocity between States, and of adequate highway facilities? Nearly all major airports are on the periphery

- 6 -

of large urban centers, the time required to reach the terminal or from the terminal to ultimate destination, plus the expense on both ends, are frequently considerable items in the over-all time and the cost of the trip. Yet there is at present no indication that planned provision for efficient highway facilities is recognized as an important requirement of airport installations.

The exigencies of war-time conditions intensify all these problems, perhaps, but they have certainly demonstrated the essentiality of integrated administration by many agencies in many fields - not only to serve the war emergency but the post-war civilian economy.