

Harry S. Truman on Good Roads

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May 1955

On March 18, 1955, Senator Stuart Symington of Missouri submitted comments that appeared in the *Congressional Record*:

Mr. SYMINGTON. I should like to make a few comments on another subject.

Mr. President, knowing of the great interest in the various highway building programs now being studied by the appropriate committees in the House and the Senate, I wish to read to the Senate a letter just received from a man whose support and leadership for better roads is of long standing, Missouri's No. 1 citizen, a former Member of this body and one of our greatest Presidents, Hon. Harry S. Truman:

My Dear Senator Symington: In that you are on the Public Works Subcommittee, I am writing you my views on the improvement and modernization of the highways of the United States.

My interest in transportation and communication is as lively as it ever was, so that I have noted with approval the consideration being given the bills pending in the Congress to modernize our major highways within 10 years. I repeat, I have a very great interest in transportation and communication.

Every citizen agrees with me that the need to bring our roads and streets up-to-date is urgent. The longer we wait, the greater the cost will be.

Every year our outdated and wornout roads cost us time and money; and, much more important, they cost us lives. Traffic accidents and road congestion together cost us billions of dollars and thousands of lives every year.

I have always been interested in traffic safety. In 1946 I called a National Safety Conference to try to find a way to stop death and destruction by highway accidents. Safety conferences were held yearly on the call of the President after the first one.

Since returning to Missouri, I have been saddened by the number of people who die, every year, on the highways of this great State.

We all know that roads properly built to meet modern highway traffic conditions can help materially to reduce accidents. The saving of life and limb alone would justify the cost of modernizing our road system as quickly as possible.

Of course, it will take a big capital outlay to build a modern highway system. Solutions to fiscal problems are never easy, but I am sure we can all see the wisdom of this investment in the future of this great country. It is one that will bring immediate dividends in the convenience, efficiency and, above all, safety to highway travel and transportation.

Our improved standard of living and vast economic expansion, which accompanied the tremendous growth of highway transportation over the past 40 years are due in large part to the Federal-aid program

first enacted in 1916, under a Democratic administration and subsequently extended and enlarged, always on a public service and not on a partisan basis.

The 84th Congress will have few better opportunities to advance the welfare of the American people than by making possible the large scale and rapid development of our highway system. I hope the Congress will take advantage of this opportunity.

With kindest personal regards,

Sincerely yours,

Harry S. Truman.

Because he made so many other contributions to our Nation and to the free world, history probably will not list Harry S. Truman as a great road builder, but that is the field of public service in which he first earned State, national, and international recognition.

For reasons so adequately stated in his letter, Mr. Truman knows from first hand experience that money spent wisely for roads and highways is not an expense, but one of the best investments that can be made.

In the years from 1927 to 1934, as presiding judge of the county court, the chief administrative office of Jackson County, Mo., Mr. Truman initiated and carried through to successful completion a road system equaled by not more than 1 or 2 counties in the United States.

Under Judge Truman's leadership, Jackson County was literally taken out of the mud.

An all-weather road served every farm, and no farm was more than 2 miles from a concrete highway-an almost unbelievable achievement 25 years ago.

Building highways was not a matter of partisan politics to Mr. Truman. He retained the best professional staff available under a bipartisan board of engineers. Contracts were let through true competitive bidding to the lowest and best bidders.

Mr. Truman's vision and leadership of 25 years ago resulted in much more rapid development of the rural areas of this county than would otherwise have been possible.

As our former President drives, each day, over these roads from his home in Independence, to his office in Kansas City, to the family farm near Grandview, I am sure he takes justifiable pride in the fact that these roads were the best investment, dollar for dollar, ever made by the county, and that the roads have long since paid for themselves in increased wealth in the area they serve.

Mr. Truman's interest in good roads extended far beyond his home county. Even before he became a United States Senator, while still a county judge, he was elected president of a national road association. As shown by his letter read here this afternoon, his support for good roads and highways is unabated. He still believes in building not only for the present but for the future. Would that we had more leaders with such vision and courage.
