

July 2, 1959 letter to General Bragdon on the Federal-aid Highway Act of 1956

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U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration
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July 2, 1959 letter to General Bragdon on the Federal-aid Highway Act of 1956

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON
July 2, 1959

Dear General Bragdon:

The Federal-aid Highway Act of 1956 provided for a sharply accelerated roads program, established a time limit for completing the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways, committed the Federal Government to the completion of a 40,000-mile system irrespective of cost, increased the Federal share for Interstate projects to 90% and established a "pay-as-you-go" system for funding Federal-aid payments. Questions have arisen as to (1) whether present policies of routing will achieve most economically the purposes sought; (2) whether design standards are greater than needed; and (3) whether needs justify a system of the magnitude currently planned. The cost of the system has increased from the \$25 billion anticipated when the legislation was under consideration to a 1958 estimate of \$36 billion, and is almost certain to increase substantially above this under present highway policies.

A broad review of the Federal highway program should be initiated to:

1. Reexamine policies, methods, and standards now in effect in order to ascertain their effectiveness in achieving basic national objectives. This reexamination should cover, but not be limited to, intra-metropolitan area routing including ingress and egress, interchanges, grade separations, frontage roads, traffic lanes, utility relocations, and engineering design.
2. Delineate Federal responsibility as distinguished from State and local responsibility in financing, planning, and supervising the highway program.
3. Determine the means for improving coordination between planning for Federal-aid highways and State-Local planning, especially urban planning.
4. Developing recommendations covering the legislative and administrative action required to redirect the program as indicated in 1, 2, and 3, in a manner that will (a) minimize the Federal cost of the highway program, and (b) assure financing these cost from the Trust Fund on a self-sustaining basis.

In this study priority should be give to those aspects of the problem where maximum savings can be effected. As specific conclusions and recommendations are developed, I expect them to be implemented, after appropriate clearances, without waiting for the final report to be completed.

The scope and method for carrying on this study should be developed jointly by you, the Director of the Bureau of the Budget and the Department of Commerce. However, in view of your assigned duties in the area of public works planning, I want you to assume responsibility for carrying out this broad study of the highway program. It will, of course, be necessary to consult on a continuing basis with the Bureau of the Budget in order that the study and the final recommendation are consistent with overall budgetary, legislative, and management policies of the Federal Government.

In view of the importance of this study it is my wish that you give this project highest priority in your work program.

You should also coordinate this work with the Secretary of Commerce who will furnish you such assistance and data as may be necessary.

I am addressing letters to the Secretary of Commerce and the Director of the Bureau of the Budget regarding this study as well as a separate study to be undertaken under the direction of the Budget Bureau on the immediate problem of avoiding appropriations from the general fund to meet impending deficits in 1960 and 1961 in the Highway Trust Fund.

Sincerely,

The Honorable John S. Bragdon
Special Assistant to the President
The White House
Washington 25, D.C.
