

President-Elect Dwight D. Eisenhower on Good Roads

Series: FHWA Highway History Website Articles

June 2023

The original format of this document was an active HTML page(s) located under <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/history.cfm>. The Federal Highway Administration converted the HTML page(s) into an Adobe® Acrobat® PDF file to preserve and support reuse of the information it contained.

The intellectual content of this PDF is an authentic capture of the original HTML file. Hyperlinks and other functions of the HTML webpage may have been lost, and this version of the content may not fully work with screen reading software.

President-Elect Dwight D. Eisenhower on Good Roads

The President-elect issued the following statement to the Hearst Newspapers, then in the midst of an extensive highway improvement campaign:

The obsolescence of the nation's highways presents an appalling problem of waste, death and danger.

Next to the manufacture of the most modern implements of war as a guarantee of peace through strength, a network of modern roads is as necessary to defense as it is to our national economy and personal safety. We have fallen far behind in this task-until today there is hardly a city of any size without almost hopeless congestion within its boundaries, and stalled traffic blocking roads leading beyond those boundaries.

A solution can and will be found through the joint planning of the Federal, state and local governments. In this, the national government can supply leadership of the kind that is lacking today. It must provide an intelligent leadership to band all units of government in an efficient and honest attempt to build America into the great and prosperous nation it can become.

New roads to meet the requirements of today and the foreseeable future, instead of the era when automobiles were a luxury and roads were minor shipping lanes, will be a foundation for the progress ahead. But, the Federal Government must not tackle this problem in the position of a boss, directing the local governments how and when tax dollars can be spent. We have had too much of a Government manned by power-hungry people attempting to tell each community what is good for it and how it should be controlled.

An aim of the crusade in which I am engaged is to give to the people themselves the right to develop their nation without dictation by bureaucrats.

There were 37,500 men, woman and children killed in traffic accidents last year, and those injured totaled another 1,300,000. This awful total presents a real crisis to America. As a humane nation, we must end this unnecessary toll. Property losses have reached a staggering total, and insurance costs have become a real burden.

Added to that is the terrific waste resulting from unnecessary wear and loss of time due to congestion. As has been pointed out by the Hearst Newspapers in tackling the alarming problem, there are now 53,000,000 passenger cars, trucks and buses on our streets and highways. This is an increase of about 23,000,000 vehicles since the end of World War II.

We had a traffic jam back in those days. It is not surprising, then, that congestion today is no longer a jam. In and near most industrial areas, traffic amounts practically to a blockade.

Throughout the nation, we have state highway departments, county road commissions and municipal street and traffic departments. We have in Washington the Federal Bureau of Roads. By intelligent leadership and wise planning, an integrated program can be devised within the ability of the people to pay the cost.

More than at any time in history, modern roads are necessary to defense, and traffic is an interstate problem of concern to the Federal Government. Once a determined and honest effort is made, this crisis, too, will be solved by the ingenuity of America.

Any newspaper which undertakes to aid and encourage the progress, prosperity and safety of the future is to be commended for its vision and its public spirit.
