

MID-YEAR CONFERENCE

HOT SPRINGS, ARKANSAS, 1928

What a Commercial Organization Can Do to Relieve Street Congestion

By

WILLIAM R. DAWES

Address

Discussion

Resolutions



CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF THE UNITED STATES

WASHINGTON, D. C.

Address of William R. Dawes before Conference of National Councillors, Presidents and Secretaries of Member Organizations, Members of Committees and Officers and Members of the Board of Directors, at Hot Springs, Arkansas, October 5 to 9, 1928.

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RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED AT MID-YEAR CONFERENCE, HOT SPRINGS, ARKANSAS, OCTOBER 5-9, 1928

The Uniform Vehicle Code

The record of motor accidents and the conditions surrounding motor traffic in the various states show clearly the necessity of uniform laws. The National Chamber has already approved uniform state motor-vehicle legislation. Substantial progress toward coordination has been made in the past two years through the enactment of legislation by a number of states based on the Uniform Code, prepared by the National Conference on Street and Highway Safety, which the Chamber has actively supported.

With forty-four legislatures meeting in 1929 there will be an opportunity for additional states to bring their laws into harmony with the Uniform Code. This meeting of National Councillors strongly urges all member organizations to lend their influence to secure the adoption of such legislation in their several states.

Municipal Traffic Ordinances and Regulations

The National Council notes with satisfaction the completion by the National Conference on Street and Highway Safety of a Model Municipal Traffic Ordinance based on the best experience of cities and towns throughout the country. This makes available a municipal code in harmony with the uniform code of state motor vehicle laws.

We urge upon member organizations consideration of the Model Municipal Traffic Ordinance and request the Board of Directors to take such action as will assist member organizations to this end.

We also draw attention to the recent report of a committee of the American Engineering Council recommend-

WHAT A COMMERCIAL ORGANIZATION CAN DO TO RELIEVE STREET CONGESTION

By WILLIAM R. DAWES

President and National Councillor, Chicago Association of Commerce

THERE is an interesting experiment going on in Chicago. The topic has to do with street and highway traffic. In our work in Chicago we are undertaking also to improve highway traffic conditions out over the highways leading into and out of the business district of Chicago, for, say 50 miles; that is a little apart from the experiment that is going on within the business district of Chicago. It is being worked out by two or three organizations within the county of Cook, in which our own Chicago Association of Commerce has a very active part, but with your permission I want to tell you a little bit about what we are doing with the traffic conditions as we find them in Chicago, and particularly in the downtown district.

I am assuming that you know a good deal about the situation that we have in Chicago, our loop district, as we call it, and the congestion which is so very evident there. In 1926, at the request of Mayor Dever, the Chicago Association undertook to make a survey of the traffic conditions and facilities in our downtown district. Prior to that time we had at his request also inaugurated and installed a system of coordinated signal lights, under the direction, of course, of the Chief of Police of the city and the Traffic Bureau, and that was so successful that when this other question came up relating to the correction of the congestion of the city streets again they came to the Association.

Upon undertaking this, we did it as an Association matter, paying the cost of the survey out of our own funds, appropriating the sum of \$50,000, which has been spent, and some in addition, in order to make the survey. We made the survey and developed the facts, presenting these facts as we found them to the City Council for whatever action they might desire to take.

The first thing we did was to enlarge our own street traffic committee by bringing into that committee certain members of the City Council and members representing all of the public utilities. We had a large number of the engineers of the city, and it finally resulted in a committee with a membership of upwards of sixty, which sounds like a pretty large committee. By subdividing the work, however, they were able to carry on the survey without trouble.

First, we undertook to determine the parking capacity of the streets of Chicago. Of course, you understand that one of the big problems in any municipal traffic ordinance is what to do with your cars while they are on the streets; that is the problem in every city, and the first thing we wanted to try to do was to find out the parking capacity of the city. We found that without restrictions the loop district was capable of accommodating at any one time during the day for parking purposes a total of 3,863 vehicles, but that certain legal restrictions, such as those relating to entrances to buildings, prohibition of parking in front of fire hydrants, and other restrictions of that kind, cut down the legal capacity for parking purposes to 1,159 vehicles, a small number. Then we found that there were garages existing and other off-the-street parking places in or immediately adjacent to the loop district capable of accommodating 8,732 vehicles in addition to the downtown district.

In order to arrive at the real facts in the case we enlisted the cooperation of a large number of the principal business establishments in the city, and they made a detailed sur-

vey of the questions involved, involving the interviewing of 96,082 separate and distinct individual patrons and customers of these business establishments on a typical business day. The result of this investigation indicated that an average of no more than 1.57 per cent of the total number of patrons or customers of these business establishments were users of the curb parking facilities; that is, people who drove up to a store, did their business and drove away. Then as a fair test of the "No Parking" order, which was a police regulation at that time, we requested that the City Council experiment with the ordinance which was finally passed as a result of this survey, and that regulation should be given a trial application for a period of ninety days. As a matter of fact, it went along for four months.

In 1926, we made an actual count of the vehicles and the number of passengers entering the loop by all forms of transportation: railroads, street cars, elevated lines, buses, taxis and privately owned cars, including commercial trucks. Again, on a corresponding date in this year we made another count under exactly the same conditions, and with the same purpose in view. I am not at liberty to give to you the results of the comparison between the two surveys, for the reason that a good many of our business men feel now that four months was not a sufficient time to test out properly this question of "No Parking" within the limits of the loop district. They have asked us to withhold the figures until after they have been able to observe the operation of the "No Parking" ordinance during the holiday season, and that we have agreed to do; in fact, we believe that the longer the people operate under a "No Parking" ordinance in a city like Chicago, the more willing they will be to accept the findings which these various surveys and investigations have disclosed.

At first there was a great deal of apprehension, as you know. I might say right here that the first two weeks in January of this year, the "No Parking" ordinance having

gone into effect on January 1st, I was called up very often, every day, by exasperated, angry, disgusted business men, members of our Association. We were charged with interfering with business; we had all kinds of data presented to us showing what the "No Parking" was doing in the way of harming business in the city. I simply asked them to wait and give the thing a chance to be tried.

The manager of one very large store called me up every day during that two weeks, giving me the exact figures as to the number of customers that he had lost due to the "No Parking" ordinance. But a curious thing happened in connection with this man. In his report to his stockholders last March he stated that the business of his establishment in February, 1928, showed an increase of 15 per cent over his business for February in 1927, and he was the most persistent man in calling me up of anybody in Chicago.

It is not very easy to sit in your office and have these complaints come in from business men who are supporting your organization, who are your personal friends and business associates, but if the thing is right in principle we must simply sit there and take it, trusting to the final results.

One thing that we have found in Chicago is that one of our great troubles—and it is the trouble in almost any undertaking of this kind—is the trouble arising out of the designation of the ordinance itself. In spite of everything that we could do that street traffic ordinance in Chicago is labeled a "No Parking" ordinance, and that very fact is what causes a lot of the difficulty. People do not like to be told what they cannot do; if there can be some way of labeling an ordinance of that kind in a different way, giving it more of a constructive name, you will not have nearly so much difficulty, I am sure. If it could be known as an ordinance which would conserve and facilitate the use of the streets, you would have much less difficulty, and if any of you are thinking of adopting the Model Ordinance

which has been put out by the National Conference on Street and Highway Safety, and in which the United States Chamber of Commerce has had a most important part, if you can get that thing into the minds of your own people you can save yourselves much difficulty.

In our survey we have run up against certain major problems. I am quoting here from the unpublished report which we are withholding. It doesn't give any facts or figures, but it does state in very brief form some of the problems which will result from an official action of this kind. Here are the things that you have to find out, and that is what we are doing in Chicago now. It is an experiment. We do not know whether this ordinance will remain exactly as it stands upon the books today, but we hope it will remain in its essential provisions.

The first thing we have to find out is, has prohibited parking affected merchandising in the central business district? I have told you some of the difficulties and complaints which we had. Second, what effect has the parking prohibition had upon the facility and safety of traffic movement in the district? That is a matter for engineers and trained experts in transportation to decide. Third, has the regulation necessitated administrative methods which are costly or oppressive? That means, are people arrested and fined and called into Court and made a lot of trouble, or are the regulations enforced in a severe and unduly restrictive manner. That is a thing you can find out only by trying out some scheme. The final question is, what is the ultimate solution of the central district parking problem, and that is what we are in process of finding out.

In general, the purpose transportation and traffic facilities serve in central districts is to provide a maximum ease of access to the area for the population of the community. You must keep in mind the needs of your own community. Transportation has no direct ability to affect the amount of money individuals will spend, or in general to modify

the economic facts of supply and demand. Transportation simply brings the customer in, but does not determine how much money he is going to spend. The utility of transportation and traffic being to provide accessibility, the value of the current service rendered is to be measured by the volume of persons carried and not by the amount of sales or business transactions resulting from this volume. In other words, granting that accessibility to the business district is the prime object of an ordinance of this kind, and the safety with which pedestrians and vehicles can move upon the streets being the thing that we are concerned with, it is not the amount of business which is being done in the stores, but the number of people who are brought into the business district and who are able to go about their business easily and safely. So that is really the prime purpose of any ordinance of this kind.

Our first survey was published, and since I left home I have just received a clipping from an article which appeared in our little organ, the Chicago Commerce, under date of September 22, 1928, which says that the report and recommendations of the Metropolitan Street Traffic Survey have been sent very broadly over the entire world. There are thirty-seven cities in foreign countries that have asked for copies of this report. I simply mention that so that you can understand that this is not a problem that is peculiar to the United States; all the large cities in the world are having their own troubles in this respect, and my only thought in telling you of it today was simply to apprise you of some of the things which are being done there, and why we are trying to do them.

DISCUSSION

F. B. CASWELL: Mr. Chairman, I am sure we have all been looking for uniform traffic laws. We have all been sufferers in going from one city to another city and being condemned for doing the very thing we were supposed to

do in our own home town. It means more to municipalities than just the tourist coming in; a lot of those who used to come to town, and perhaps there to purchase commodities, are not doing that now; that complaint has been made frequently. Parking enters into it largely, but uniform traffic laws will do away with a great many of those ills, and I think every member of the Chamber should get behind the adoption of those state laws and city laws. Our own Association is doing that, and we pledged every member to take up the uniform traffic laws in his community and see if he could not get them passed.

H. H. RICE: Knowing that the National Automobile Chamber of Commerce is strongly behind this movement, I will just urge you all to go back home and try to get this Uniform Code adopted in your home towns. It is probably not 100 per cent perfect, but the thing to do is to adopt it and use it, and let time show if any changes are necessary.

GEORGE W. ELLIOTT: Mr. Chairman, I want to read two resolutions. We went through this same problem in Philadelphia. Pennsylvania has adopted the Uniform Vehicle Code, and Philadelphia is now trying to solve its problem after having experimented. A very careful study of this problem of parking should be made in all our large cities to determine whether or not decentralization is not taking place in our large cities to a point not desirable.

I would like to present these two resolutions, relating respectively to the Uniform Vehicle Code and Municipal Traffic Ordinances and Regulations, as approved and adopted at the meeting: (The two resolutions are printed on the inside front cover of this pamphlet.)