

Seminar on Sociological Effects of Highway Transportation

Introductory Remarks

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•SOME OF the sociological effects of highway transportation have been discussed in previous Highway Research Board meetings. Recently, for example, a sociologist has stated that there are in the United States more automobiles than bathtubs and more drivers' licenses than library cards. The sociological effects of highways are everywhere apparent.

The following papers call attention to some of the different sociological effects of highways and to some of the different ways in which highways affect people. For many people, the opening of a new freeway means gaining precious minutes driving downtown or perhaps a more convenient trip to a major city. It may mean a few more shows in town or a few more days at the shore each year. Each mile seems to bring us a little closer to the safe, efficient road network that today's automobiles demand. But to the people in residential areas adjacent to a highway or to the people displaced when right-of-way is acquired, a proposed highway may not seem to be such a blessing. These people may wonder whether the advantages from the easier mobility provided by the highway are sufficient to outweigh the disadvantages, particularly when the disadvantages may not be known for sure.

Some of these problems and the seriousness of such problems are the bases for these discussions. Are apprehensions about traffic noise and exhaust fumes justified? In areas that might be called "socially stable" should right-of-way payments reflect such intangible factors as friendships and social relationships? For displaced people who are unable to find comparable housing, is it enough to compensate for fair market value (or fair market value plus a nominal allowance for moving)? What comfort can we take from the fact that residents relocated from highway right-of-way typically improve their living conditions if this upgrading results because the relocated resident cannot find housing in the price range of his former home?

On the other hand, how serious is the change in residence associated with right-of-way acquisition in a dynamic society where so many people move so often? Should highway people be held responsible for such social problems as finding relocation areas for low income and minority groups when these problems were serious even before land was taken for highway use? Are some of these problems like some of the benefits associated with highways—dependent on a number of ingredients and perhaps only set off or catalyzed by the presence of a highway?

Perhaps our thinking will also be directed to some of the purposes which may be served by knowing more about the social effects of highways. Whereas it is interesting and, no doubt, desirable simply to know more about these effects, of what practical use is such information? Can it be used for highway planning or for public hearings? If we are to make use of information about sociological effects of highways, do we need to be able to measure or quantify these effects? If we cannot measure or count such effects, can we ignore them or do we, as Hennes has said (1), need to exercise intuitive judgment in determining social effects in the absence of precise instruments for measuring changes?

Included also are comments on such matters as the traffic generation characteristics of different types of households, the effects highways typically have on the supply of

community leaders and on the attitudes of these leaders, and highway effects on recreation or other nonwork associations.

These are some of the matters which are considered in this seminar. The authors have training in traffic engineering, economics, law, city planning, political science, and sociology and should be able to bring some of the sociological effects of highways into sharp focus.

REFERENCE

1. Hennes, R. G. Highways as an Instrument of Economic and Social Change. Highway Research Board Spec. Rept. 56, pp. 131-135, 1960.

Five Years of Highway Research: A Sociological Perspective

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•RESEARCH into the economic and social impact of highway improvement is now in its sixth year at the Pennsylvania State University. This paper reviews in brief the researchers' efforts with emphasis on those facets of study which are of special interest to the sociologist. Indeed, the sociologist's proclaimed interests at times seem extremely widespread. With regard to highway impact, his concern may focus on the broader aspects of technological development through time and the concomitant increase in the complexity of a given society. At a lower theoretical level, as is the case here, he may emphasize various highway-community relationships. Even within this narrower framework, however, all relationships cannot be reasonably considered; i. e., they cannot be given the equal treatment they merit. Thus, the researcher must decide which factors he deems most worthy of consideration.

In this study, the sociological interest has been directed specifically toward changes in population, changes in level of living as measured by a social class rating, community values as evidenced to an extent by attitudes expressed, and degree of community organization as ascertained through use of an Index of Community Complexity. Sociologists themselves have been known to confess that their discipline is, at times, merely accumulative rather than being in a more preferred state of being "systematically cumulative." The sociological perspective presented here is posited on the assumption that systematic cumulation offers the best avenue to the understanding of highway-community interrelationships. Further, it is felt that this understanding is essential to the acceptance and success of the action programs affecting these interrelationships.

STUDY SITES

Three research sites in Pennsylvania have been studied intensively by the Pennsylvania State University research staff. These are Monroeville near Pittsburgh, Blairsville in Indiana County, and four interchanges in the vicinity of York. Because these locations and their respective highway changes have been described and presented graphically elsewhere, there is little need for reiteration here (1, 2, 3). It is sufficient to say that Monroeville had three major highway changes: the opening of a turnpike interchange, the opening of a new thoroughway to downtown Pittsburgh, and a widening of the major highway through the community. Many of the changes in Monroeville were compared with changes occurring in 38 other communities located on a ring equidistant from downtown Pittsburgh. Blairsville experienced the bypassing of its business district, and the York County communities were traversed north-south by an interstate highway and witnessed local construction of interchanges. Most of the findings set forth in the following relate to these three sites.