

ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS

By

Roy W. Crum, Director,
Highway Research Board

I should like to talk informally for a few minutes about the place of the Highway Research Board in the roadside development program, and our experience in helping coordinate the efforts being devoted to it. It was about 1930 when Professor Aust and Professor Elwood first suggested that the Highway Research Board should take an interest in this work. We spent considerable time wondering just what could be done; what the objectives from a research standpoint might be. As you know, it was then spoken of as Roadside Beautification and the small amount of work being done was largely artistic rather than engineering in nature.

After a while, however, we realized that much more was involved in this problem than making the roadside look better. Roadside development, which I think is a good name for what we are trying to do, covers the whole right of way of the road and it is bound to go beyond and include a part of the adjacent property. In fact, we will not have the job finished until we get the unsightly blots upon the landscape under control.

Our first thought was that we could at least provide a clearing house for information, and we started to set up an organization for that purpose, and the American Association of State Highway Officials was invited to join with us. The first meeting of the Joint Committee was held in Milwaukee, in 1932. There the Committee wrote a definition of roadside development, which, I think is a masterpiece. "Roadside development must conserve, enhance and effectively display the natural beauty of the landscape through which the highway passes, as well as provide safety, utility, economy, and recreation facilities by means of proper location, construction, and maintenance of the highways".

In general, the Association of State Highway Officials is concerned primarily with the setting up of standards, and the Highway Research Board with research work aimed toward that end. Through the facilities of the Board we have been able to bring many interests into cooperation. In the membership of the Joint Committee and Project Committees there are in addition to the highway officials, representatives of universities, colleges, and practicing landscape architects. Our Committee work has few limitations except that we do not attempt standardization work. Commercial as well as technical and official interests are recognized in the deliberations of the Committees. We seldom undertake specific research work ourselves, but through our Committees get other people to do it. An important Committee function is to digest available information and make findings and recommendations upon which other people can base their activities.

As far as Committee work is concerned, perhaps the biggest thing is the coordination of effort it affords to the interested people throughout the nation. Another duty of this Committee is the formulation of research projects. A number of Project Committees have been appointed and are going ahead rapidly. There has been a big demand for everything we have put out on roadside development. The copies of the very fine report made in 1933 are exhausted and I should like to see that material revised and brought up to date in a new report.

Another thing which I hope will be done before long is the preparation of a manual of good practice, and I think this Joint Committee would be the proper agency for the purpose. I think the engineers and landscape architects in charge of this work in the various States and their assistants would find it very helpful.