

## REPORT OF DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAY FINANCE

THOS H MACDONALD, *Chairman*  
*Chief, U S Bureau of Public Roads*

The business of research is very similar to the condition which we now find prevailing in Europe. Italy began finding some fault with Ethiopia and we looked on at some distance away thinking we were not concerned, then pretty soon we found that England was concerned, then France, the League of Nations, and the headlines of our daily papers now are showing the interest that the United States holds over what first looked to us like a quarrel with border bandits. In the research on highway finance we have arrived over a considerable period of time at a somewhat similar situation.

We have only been treading around the outskirts of the question although each time we undertook the previous studies and projects we thought we were going into the heart of the question. You will recall that the first transport survey in which the Bureau was interested was undertaken cooperatively with Connecticut in 1922. Every year since then,—a period of 13 years now,—there have been one or more of these transport studies running in cooperation with the State highway departments of the various States.

We come now to a period almost a decade and a half later and find that our information is still too fragmentary,—not sufficiently conclusive to cover the subject of highway finance and its various implications. So this year we are attempting to develop the basic data that will not only give us a background for our future

financial policies but, we hope, for other broad policies in this field of highway finance, administration and even engineering. Therefore, my report today is like many others, a report of that which is to be done and not of that which has been accomplished. However, this time the attempt has been made, all in cooperation with the State highway departments, to outline the project on a sufficiently broad basis and with sufficient financial support to do the job. I am not going into great detail in outlining this work which is now under way, but I should like to have the understanding and support of the research workers of the country—some of you will be engaged in this work, and all of you have allied interest in it—of the general purpose of the survey and certainly of parts of it.

The proposed rural highway survey starts with, first—a road and bridge inventory. It is proposed to develop from the existing maps and from field studies a complete inventory of our system of public roads, not confined to the State roads or the Federal aid roads, but to include all of the roads. One of the principal purposes of the study is not to add new roads but to do away with as large a percentage of so-called public roads, as we possibly can. A study in one county gave the very illuminating information that it is possible in that particular county to close 17 per cent of the mileage of listed public roads, that is, take off that mileage as a public liability without harm. We

must reduce our mileage of public roads so far as is possible and this is one of the purposes of this study

The second general heading is the place of ownership of motor vehicles. From the registration and other data that are on file, supplemented again by field inquiry, we intend to place the location now of motor vehicles. It is not with the thought that there will not be changes in ownership and a constantly increasing number of families possessing cars, but when we consider the tremendous registration of motor vehicles we believe that by obtaining the location of their ownership we can predict the existing use more closely than the road must serve with reference to these vehicles, that being in our judgment a more determining method than taking the traffic counts on these roads.

The third classification is the distribution of the rural population, churches, schools, etc. A large percentage of traffic on our highways is made up of recreational and social comings and goings, which require no further justification of the increased interest and support that exists behind the development of the so-called rural roads. Farm to market roads, and roads that are not now on either Federal or State systems, have prompted a part of this inquiry. We have been a long time on this job of improving State and Federal aid systems consisting of 300,000 to 350,000 miles and when we think of adding an additional 2,000,000 miles of roads it makes us pause and wonder just who is going to pay the bill and how.

The fourth is a classification of agricultural lands. That, of course, is for the purpose of determining the future need for roads in particular areas and we hope in that manner to exclude a considerable

mileage of roads that should pass out of the public responsibility category.

For the fifth we have a short traffic count for national purposes particularly.

Item No 6 is Detailed Traffic Surveys

Item No 7 is Volume of Agricultural and Industrial Production moved by Highways

Item No 8 is Determination of Past Incidence and Amount of highway taxation and necessary and proper changes in existing tax policies. That, of course, is a very broad subject in the particular field of this committee, but we believe that this other information is fundamental and necessary before we can arrive at conclusions in this particular field.

We then sum up the objectives of this survey in these terms—

- 1 To select an integrated highway way system to include all roads to be improved in the next twenty years and indicate priority of improvement,
- 2 To record the present state of all parts of the selected mileage in respect to traffic serviceability, and indicate the amount, kind, and cost of further improvement required to reach full satisfactory serviceability, and
- 3 To budget highway operations of a considerable future period, and indicate sources from which the necessary funds should be and can be obtained, properly related to benefits conferred.

Just this one observation with reference to the last point. There has been a decided tendency, as you know, to take funds arising from our ordinary sources of revenue and use them for other purposes than highway improvement and development. This tendency has been particularly marked during the

depression period when the States have been called upon to supply or to give employment to the utmost. They have found it easier, particularly some States, to take funds from highway improvement to devote them to other purposes. The process of their reasoning is a little difficult to follow when these funds used on highway construction and maintenance do give employment. It is a little difficult to follow the reasons for diverting funds when the principal objective for which we have been working, State and nation alike, has been to give additional employment.

I am certain that that movement has gone far enough so that if we are to continue to preserve a sufficient income for the adequate improvement and the proper maintenance of our highways, it is necessary to get before the public this broad picture of the amount of work that

must be done and the cost of doing it. I know of no way that will better bring that forcibly to the attention of the public than through these surveys which will show,—notwithstanding the considerable progress that has been made over a long period in the building of roads,—if we consider the situation State by State, community by community, that we have only begun this job. It is important to go into the perfecting of details of construction but unless we have and are able to secure in the future the support of the public, and that means the proper financing, then this work of perfecting our construction details and our design of highways and allied improvements is all in vain. So that the economic aspect after all must be carried along and forced into public attention by the research workers who may be interested in quite a different field.