

REPORT of COMMITTEE on ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT

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THE past year has been one of transition for the Committee on Roadside Development, resulting in some organizational changes and a slightly different work procedure, but retaining basically unchanged the Committee's aim and scope of work.

The aim of the Committee is to search for, assemble, and evaluate roadside development methods and practices throughout the country; to initiate and supervise research studies on various phases of roadside development in cooperation with state highway departments and other state and federal agencies and commercial organizations; and to distribute resulting information to highway officials and engineering personnel and to other organizations and individuals interested in roadside development and allied fields of work.

The scope of work of the Committee covers all phases of the broad field of roadside development: not only the technical landscape phases of erosion control, conservation and protection of roadside vegetation and scenic roadside features, planting design, and development of roadside parks and other roadside areas; but also the application of sound landscape principles to highway location, design, construction, and maintenance -- all aimed toward the goal of The Complete Highway wherein are combined safety, beauty, utility, and economy.

The present Committee faces the challenge of continuing the good work and valuable service of the previous years of operation of the Committee on Roadside Development under the leadership of the late Luther M. Keith and his successor, the immediate past Chairman, Harold J. Neale. Over a period of 20 years, beginning in 1932, the Committee has concerned itself with defining roadside development; pointing out the reasons and the way for roadside development to become an integral part of highway operations; and assembling and disseminating each year new or additional information on techniques of all phases of roadside development work.

During a period of five years ending at the 1953 Annual Meeting, the Committee reviewed, brought up to date, and summarized its findings of the preceding years and initiated a series of circulars and special reports on the various phases of roadside development.

While it is the intention of the Committee to continue, in its future meetings and reports, to cover new developments in all phases, more emphasis will be placed on concentrated study of specific technical problems by task committees, usually on a short-term basis rather than acting as standing subcommittees. The program for the past year has been a combination of instituting several special studies, continuing unfinished business from the preceding year, and preparing material for publications. The Task Committee on Publications met with members of the Highway Research Board staff in September to make final arrangements for the publishing of a circular on Tree Pruning and a Special Report on Mechanization of Roadside Operations, as well as to handle matters pertaining to the annual report and future publications.

At this Annual Meeting the study of stabilized turf shoulders is being concluded. It has reached the point where close collaboration with other shoulder studies of the Board is necessary if full value of the turf-shoulder study is to be realized. It can be more than a technical achievement of growing turf under adverse conditions; it can be part of a practical contribution of several committees to a highway safety and maintenance problem that is deeper than just surface-soil erosion control.

Mowing practices and the use of herbicides for roadside weed and brush control form one of the new studies undertaken during the past year. With mowing an expensive maintenance operation and contradictory reports being received on much publicized herbicides, this study is considered to be quite timely.

There are still varying opinions as to where roadside trees should be placed on the roadside. A paper on this year's program reviews the subject of roadside trees and summarizes the manner in which they are assets or liabilities in highway operations.

Erosion control might well be considered as the backbone of roadside development, making a tangible dollars-and-cents contribution to highway safety, utility, and economy, as well as forming the very foundation of highway beauty. Changing highway-design standards and construction methods require a continuing search for and reporting of more effective and more economical techniques of erosion control, and this year's program includes a summarization of the latest developments - - and the newest problems - - in highway-erosion prevention and control.

One session of this year's meeting is devoted largely to design of tree and shrub plantings for (a) highway grade separations, intersections and interchange areas, and (b) reduction of traffic noise. Some engineers whose highway service dates back to the time when modern roadside development began to evolve from the pioneer attempts at roadside "beautification" still question the value of roadside tree and shrub plantings. The Committee feels that there is a definite and growing need for well designed and conservatively designed functional planting to improve highway appearance and at the same time assist in guiding traffic; reducing headlight glare; screening adjacent properties against noise, dust, and fumes; and helping with snow-drift control, to name a few possibilities. It is true that careful planting design is necessary, but it is confidently expected that a median can be attained wherein tree and shrub plantings will be functional and attractive without interference with highway safety, utility, or economy of maintenance.

The Committee's program for 1954 has not been determined definitely, since it is hoped that ideas and opinions expressed at this Annual Meeting will indicate the most urgent needs for research. Suggestions for research topics will be appreciated by the Committee. Only by knowing the problems in the field throughout the country can the Committee function to provide the service it desires to give to all interested in roadside development.