

## ROADSIDES: THEIR USE AND PROTECTION

## THE TRAFFIC ENGINEER'S POINT OF VIEW

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Like all persons concerned with the operations of the nation's highway transportation system, the traffic engineer has a deep concern in roadside development. His concern is perhaps most intimately related to the features of roadside development which affect the basic character of traffic performance. The traffic engineer recognizes the aesthetic values which are involved and he favors the full preservation of roadside beauty. However, it is not felt that the aesthetic qualities should be considered to the exclusion of business, economic, and traffic-performance qualities. Several observations and changes seem pertinent.

Over the years the concept of the average motorist has changed considerably insofar as automobile use is concerned. More than ever before, people think of automobile usage as a necessary activity; there is little driving for pleasure. This factor should of course be taken into account in designing, constructing, and maintaining routes of travel. The average motorist is primarily concerned in getting from a given origin to a given destination in as short a time as is compatible with safety. Speed studies made over long periods of time show little, if any, change in speed characteristics of a route when the flowers are in full bloom, when the fall leaves are in their height of beauty, or when the countryside is barren. Certainly this does not mean that motorists have become completely unaware of roadside culture and attractiveness. They like pleasant surroundings, but functional qualities of the roadway itself unquestionably supersede the aesthetic quality. If both qualities can be combined it is obviously very good, but if one has to be sacrificed then it should be the aesthetic. Questions of what can be afforded might become the determining factor.

The traffic engineer recognizes many potentials in roadside improvements. The screening of vehicles from view has many possibilities. Some very favorable results are being reported in reducing highway noises by roadside plantings. It is even being suggested that research is needed to determine whether or not the proper type of plantings on a median island can bring about a reduction in accidents—screening headlight glare, cushioning impacts, and delineation are some of the factors to be considered. It can probably be stated, then, that the traffic engineer is very keenly interested in all phases of highway beautification and highway plantings that have a clearly defined relationship to traffic operations.

Another area of roadside development which enters the discussion is that of roadside business. While not qualified to speak for the traffic-engineering profession, it is my feeling that there should be control over this business activity, but by "control" elimination of this method of marketing is not intended. Here again there seems to be a fundamental concept of road use. A traffic stream is an artery of great business potentials. In considering the extent to which enterprises should be prohibited, one must raise the question as to the

extent to which the traffic market can be tapped. In evaluations, the rights of individuals, the rights of business interests, and the rights of property owners present difficult issues. The general conclusion seems obvious: the proper control of roadside business to insure safety is needed, but such control does not imply prohibition of such business.

Actually, the traffic engineer and others need the results of much additional research before these questions can be conclusively answered. One study made might show that certain types of roadside development create great traffic hazards; another will suggest that certain development is essential to prevention of driving monotony and, therefore, acts as a safety influence. Actually, the proper mixture of the two approaches has not been suggested, much less proven.

In conclusion, it is my belief that the traffic engineer is properly concerned with roadside control and development but that he recognizes the need for much more extensive studies of the problems and factors involved before any conclusion can be reached. He wants to provide both safe and efficient traffic performance but he wants also to avoid undue expenses and improper infringement of individual rights.