

ROADSIDES: THEIR USE AND PROTECTION

THE MOTORIST AND THE PUBLIC

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Far too little attention and emphasis have been given to the roadside and its importance in the overall highway program. Results of this relative neglect bedevil, irritate, and endanger highway users as well as frequently shocking their eyes and sensibilities. Moreover, results appear in very expensive wastes and inefficiencies in expenditures of highway funds. At a time when a huge and ever-widening gap exists between the roads we need and the roads we are able to build and maintain with resources presently devoted to road purposes, such wastefulness is intolerable.

It just doesn't make sense to expend large sums of highway-user tax funds in the construction of sorely needed major roads unless proper attention is given in advance to the roadside aspect of highway planning and design so that proper roadside decisions are made and put into effect which will prevent loss of major portions of the road's capacity, efficiency, safety, and convenience or enjoyability. Yet, failure to safeguard against such losses is an all-too-common occurrence.

Consider, for a moment, failure to acquire adequate width of right-of-way, which markedly affects roadside problems and measures for solution.

The statement on importance of adequate right-of-way width which has always most impressed me is that of H. S. Fairbank, Deputy Commissioner of Public Roads: "When shall we ever learn? Time after time, we find that 10 or 15 years after purchasing a right-of-way of inadequate width, we have to buy, at greatly increased cost, additional right-of-way or go to a new location.

"Failure to secure adequate right-of-way is perhaps the most serious basic fault in highway practice today."

Now, that statement was made several years ago — but I should be greatly surprised if it is not almost as true now as it was then.

Let us examine another startling example of failure to give proper emphasis to roadside fundamentals. It is crystal clear — or it should be — that the heavy-traffic main highways of America should be controlled-access expressways. Yet progress toward achieving that objective is maddeningly slow. Why — correct me if I'm wrong — some sixteen states still lack legal authority to control access, and the laws of some nine other states are deficient in some essential element. How strongly motorists want such highways now is clearly shown by toll-road developments.

A third and last example of failure to give proper emphasis to the roadside is in our lack of sensible, reasonable control over roadside structures, and ingress and egress points.

True, no controls of this sort can give us expressway results on the old-fashioned, horse-and-buggy, outmoded but ubiquitous type of main highway. Nevertheless, we have huge mileages of these roads, and it surely behooves us to take steps now — if we haven't taken them before — to assure maximum utility, capacity, safety, and pleasantness in their use.

Ride or drive on almost any main road, say from here to Baltimore, asking yourself all the way along if a great people, an intelligent civilization, a nation which prides itself on its progressiveness can possibly let such conditions continue on the heaviest traveled (or almost the heaviest traveled) major route in that nation. And, of course, that is but one example of what can be found, in varying degree, in so many places, along main routes. Yes, I'm talking about signs and billboards everywhere, entrances and exits seemingly continuously almost in places, and all the rest of the sorry picture.

Yes, the roadside is a vitally important integral part of the highway picture, and it must receive much, much, greater attention.

Fault -- blame — those are not where our interest should be directed. We're all to blame. Certainly outstanding highway officials have for years been outspoken about these matters, while bedeviled and pressured by the public and by groups for more miles of roads, as against more long-range-value road policies.

Motorists — informed — want the good roads, the high-quality roads, and proper roadside measures.

There is urgent need for education — and we must get beyond talking to ourselves. You must devise ways to popularize your fine case to laymen.

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Mr. Marsh then presented a summary of a recent survey made by the American Automobile Association. See Appendix C.