

Preserving the View



60th Anniversary of TRB's Landscape and Environmental Design Committee

CHARLES R. ANDERSON

One of the Transportation Research Board's earliest committees, Landscape and Environmental Design, celebrates its 60th anniversary this year. At first designated Roadside Development, over the years this committee has been a most productive and innovative TRB unit, from which a number of other committees have grown.

In the early 1930s highway officials were primarily interested in getting the highway user "out of the mud." It was almost unheard of to use highway funds for the purchase of grass seed or for the acquisition of more right-of-way than was needed to build and maintain the roadbed or other

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items now considered essential for transportation facilities. The Highway Research Board, the forerunner of TRB, was urged by the American Society of Landscape Architects to conduct a nationwide survey of all aspects of roadside development. This led to the appointment of a joint HRB-American Association of State Highway Officials committee, chaired by Luther Keith of the Connecticut State Highway Department.

Committee Objectives

At its first meeting, held in Milwaukee in 1932, the committee defined its purpose.

Roadside development must conserve, enhance, and effectively dis-

play 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 1933 the committee added to its objectives and recommendations: "Highway authorities should control the right-of-way and its appurtenances and have power to acquire adequate rights-of-way and other parcels of land for the public benefit."

The scope of today's committee differs only slightly from the original definition:

This committee is concerned with the design parameters that relate to the protection, conservation, restora-



Minnesota's TH 61, between Duluth and the Canadian border, provides motorists with miles of panoramic views of Lake Superior.

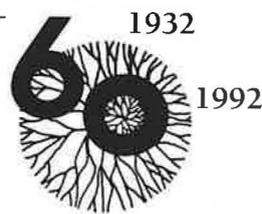
tion, and enhancement of the natural environment and man-made elements of transportation systems and their surroundings. The factors of interest include aesthetic and scenic quality and visual integration of facilities into their environment; conservation of natural elements; preservation of cultural and historic resources; identification and preservation of scenic opportunities; and quality development of roadside facilities to enhance travel experiences.

Early Activities

By 1939 the committee had expanded to include subcommittees on slope erosion, education and public relations, urban zon-

ing, highway types and roadside areas, plant ecology, and roadside economics. In that year a resolution was adopted to form separate HRB and AASHO Roadside Development committees. Harold J. Neale of the Virginia Department of Highways was appointed to chair the HRB committee. He had been chairman of the joint committee since 1936.

During World War II, HRB activity slackened, although the Roadside Development Committee continued to grow and publish reports on its areas of interest. By this time it had become the largest HRB committee, with a membership of 76. In 1943 the chairman suggested that postwar highways should be planned both for permanency



Landscape and Environmental Design Committee's logo.

and utility using a concept he termed "complete highways" based on four requirements: utility, safety, beauty, and economy. He envisioned the postwar highway as the product of a team with special training and experience in engineering, soil science, architecture, and landscape design techniques that had been developed in the design of parkway and urban freeways.

New Issues

During this period the committee explored topics that were ahead of their time. Issues

that concern today's highway departments, such as land use, environmental factors, joint use, economic benefits, zoning, and rest areas, were analyzed. One of the issues with which committee members were concerned was antiquated laws dealing with right-of-way acquisition. In a 1942 report the committee noted: "We are attempting to build a modern highway system for the stream-lined motor vehicle with land acquisition laws and devices of the horse and buggy period of our grandfathers." Committee members agreed that right-of-way should not be limited to traffic lanes. It should also include adequate shoulders, drainage ways, and flattened cuts and fills that were rounded to create a cross section that was safer, easier to maintain, and aesthetically pleasing. In 1952, after five years of work, the committee published *Special Report 7: Parking Turnouts and Rest Areas*, the only comprehensive report published on the subject. It also concluded its work on stabilized turf shoulders and published a circular on the subject in 1955.

After 17 years as chairman, Harold Neale was succeeded by Frank H. Brant of North Carolina, who reorganized the committee to a more manageable size of 28 members. At that time, the committee began to focus on the need for functionally designed plantings to assist in guiding traffic, reducing headlight glare, controlling drifting snow, and screening noise, dust, fumes, and visual pollution.

Interstate Construction

From the mid-1950s to the early 1960s, planning, design, and construction of the Interstate highway program became the prime topic of discussion. Two years after the Interstate program was enacted, Wilbur J. Garmhausen of Ohio took over as chairman, appointing the first secretary, Earl A. Disque of the National Park Service. The National Park Service has been represented on the committee since that time, and on occasion the U.S. Forest Service has also been represented. During this period, Bradford Sears, of Syracuse University, cataloged the best of the existing literature on roadside development.

The committee published numerous reports on noise abatement and maintained a subcommittee on this subject until 1964. Another active subcommittee covered roadside maintenance, publishing many papers on practices, equipment, materials, economics, public relations, control of litter, and outdoor advertising. It became a separate TRB committee in 1969.

Scenic Beauty

In 1964 Charles R. Anderson of Maryland was appointed committee chairman. His term included the years in which President Lyndon B. Johnson and his wife were advocating activity in roadside beauty, rest areas, and scenic lands. During the 1966 HRB Annual Meeting, Anderson was summoned to the White House for a conference with Lady Bird Johnson on visual im-

bers serving on both committees. General Howard A. Ives, Administrator of the Connecticut State Highway Department, chaired the AASHO committee.

The need for safety rest areas with adequate comfort facilities was noted in a paper presented by General Ives at the 1965 HRB Annual Meeting. At that time, the federal government did not participate in the cost of comfort facilities in rest areas. Both committees promoted the idea and lobbied for change, particularly along the new Interstate Highway System, and federal funding was finally approved. By 1976 nine percent of the average daily traffic nationwide stopped at Interstate rest areas.

In 1965 D. Grant Mickle, HRB Executive Director, asked the committee to prepare a report on the state of the art in roadside development, believing it would make a worthwhile contribution to President Johnson's highway beautification program. Pub-



I-64 east of Charlottesville, Virginia.

provement of the highway approaches to Washington, D.C., and on other occasions was invited to the White House to attend meetings on roadside development. President Johnson convened a conference on natural beauty during his time in office. His wife was later honored for her work on the beautification of the country's roadsides at the committee's midyear meeting in Texas in 1980.

Starting in 1964, joint midyear meetings with the AASHO Committee on Roadside Development were held, with some mem-

bers serving on both committees. General Howard A. Ives, Administrator of the Connecticut State Highway Department, chaired the AASHO committee.

lished as HRB *Special Report 88: The Art and Science of Roadside Development*, this report was later used as a textbook at Syracuse University. The Highway Beautification Act was passed by Congress in November 1965.

Committee Concerns

Through the years, erosion control, which forms the very foundation of roadside beauty, has been a key element of roadside



Scenic overlook of St. Croix River, Minnesota (1930 photograph).

development. Changing highway design standards and construction methods required continuing research on more effective and economical erosion control techniques. Before the 1970s, erosion control was primarily aimed at stabilizing highway roadsides and medians after grading was complete. The committee took the initiative in controlling sediment during construction. It staffed a panel to oversee the National Cooperative Highway Research Program project, Erosion Control During Construction.

John J. McRyan of New York was appointed chairman of the committee in 1970. The committee assisted AASHTO in preparing the *Guide for Highway Landscape*

and *Environmental Design*, which was published in 1970. It became involved in improving aesthetic elements; applying landscape architectural and ecological principles and practices to highway location, design, construction, and maintenance; and collaborating with other organizations and HRB committees concerned with multiple use and joint development projects.

With the signing of the National Environmental Policy Act, the committee became increasingly concerned with natural environmental features such as wetlands, wildlife, and water quality. The theme of the 1972 HRB Summer Meeting in Madison, Wisconsin, was highways and the environment. To reflect the broad environ-

mental activities of the committee, in 1973 its name was changed to Roadside Environment. Soon the word "roadside" was thought to be too limiting because the committee's interests covered the entire transportation corridor. In 1978 the committee's name was changed to the current title, Landscape and Environmental Design.

The committee kept abreast of all aspects of the Highway Beautification Act, making recommendations on rest areas, acquisition of scenic lands, and control of outdoor advertising and junkyards. The Federal Highway Act of 1973 authorized the states to use highway funds for bicycle paths, and during the next several years the committee sponsored papers on bikeways and explored bikeway design.

For a number of years, a major interest of the committee had been scenic highways and the acquisition of scenic lands. In 1974, the year HRB became the Transportation Research Board, it participated in a session on current practice and problems in acquiring less-than-fee interest on land for scenic enhancement.

In 1976 Lawrence E. Foote of Minnesota became chairman of the committee. He stressed the need for professionals—not "pseudo-environmentalists"—to perform environmental work. Papers began to be published on all modes of transportation. For example, at the summer meeting held in 1978, the committee heard its first presentation on solar energy.



HRB Committee on Roadside Development in session at 1967 Annual Meeting.

Subcommittees and Publications

In 1979 the committee reorganized into its current structure with four standing subcommittees: Steering, Research Needs, Formal Papers, and Mid-Year Meeting, along with ad hoc committees as needed. Robert L. Jacobsen of the Federal Highway Administration in Denver, Colorado, was appointed chairman in 1982, a year that marked the committee's 50th anniversary.

AASHTO requested its Task Force on Environmental Design to update its 1970 *Guide for Highway Landscape and Environmental Design*. The task force welcomed assistance from the committee in authoring the new guide. Several new subjects were

added, including wetlands, water quality, erosion control during construction, park and rides, and other modes of transportation. The new guide was published in June 1991.

The committee's Research Needs Subcommittee has always been active in identifying needed research. It has produced and established priorities for research problem statements, distributing the information to all states. The focus on one high-priority area resulted in the 1986 NCHRP project on Identifying, Measuring, and Evaluating the Benefits of Safety Roadside Rest Areas.

Recent Activities

In the early years of the committee's history, most members were from east of the Mississippi River and attended HRB Annual Meetings in Washington, D.C. As the membership became more evenly distributed throughout the country, midyear meetings were held in various states. The committee has tried to maintain a balance in membership. About half of its members come from state transportation agencies. One-sixth each come from federal agencies, research and education areas, or are consultants. This has provided expertise from a variety of groups, strengthening the committee. The Steering Subcommittee helps the chairman fill vacancies by recruiting new members.

David H. Fasser of the New York State Department of Transportation became chairman in 1988. Scenic highways had always been one of the committee's interests, but now greater emphasis was placed on the subject. A task force on scenic byways was set up within the committee. In anticipation of upcoming legislation establishing a National Scenic Byways Program, the committee solicited papers through 1991 and sponsored a session on scenic byways at the TRB 1992 Annual Meeting. The scenic byway legislation was signed into law in December 1991. The committee was once again well prepared to address the next generation of transportation needs in support of new public policy.

Recently committee members have focused on two areas: wetlands and wildflowers. Papers have been sponsored on



Safety rest area on I-75 near Topinabee, Michigan, retains natural character of site.

wetland creation and restoration, ecological functions, and factors affecting plant survival. Considerable research has been performed on wildflower ecology and planting methods, and thriving wildflowers now enhance the nation's highways.

Through the years the committee has benefited from the work of TRB staff representatives such as Frank Wray, Larry Spaine, W. George (Pat) Ring, and currently Frank McCullagh.

In its 60th year, the committee's enthusiasm is as high as when the first group gathered in 1932. An anniversary celebration is planned for the midyear meeting in College Station, Texas, in August 1992. The committee can be proud of its 60 years of dedication to producing transportation facilities that emphasize safety, utility, economy, environmental compatibility, and beauty for all to enjoy.

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Subject: TRB Committee A2A05, Landscape and Environmental Design

Dear Mr. Fasser:

It is with great pleasure that I express my appreciation and congratulations to you and the members of your committee, Landscape and Environmental Design, for the 60 years of continuous service that the committee has provided to the transportation community. The members of the committee deserve high praise from the entire transportation community for their efforts. Their contribution will enable us to build not only technically sound transportation facilities but also aesthetically pleasing ones. Congratulations and keep up the excellent work.

Sincerely yours,

William W. Millar
Chairman, TRB Executive Committee