

# It's Been Fun

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It was my honor to have known Frank Turner, to have observed him, and to have sought and received his counsel on many occasions during my 18½ years as Executive Director of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. Thus I am pleased to have the opportunity to provide some personal perspectives on a man I regard as a mentor and as a truly historic person.

I did not meet Frank face to face until 1980, after I became Executive Director of AASHTO and some 8 years after he had retired from federal service. But our paths crossed in the years between 1966 and 1980, when I served as a member of the governing body of Prince George's County, Maryland, and on the boards of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (WASHCOG) and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). This was an intense period in the transportation history of metropolitan Washington. During those 14 years, WASHCOG, WMATA, and our local governments had strong views on a number of critical issues, views that were sometimes at odds with those of the Maryland and Virginia highway and transportation agencies. The Federal Highway Administration also had strong views, and until he retired in 1972, Frank had the primary responsibility for advancing them. As a result, we had many opportunities to watch him in action.

We saw a quiet, strong, fair man of great integrity, a highly competent engineer, and a person dedicated to providing the best possible highway capacity for the region. But we also saw a man who knew compromises were needed and who worked with the states, WASHCOG, and our local governments to achieve them. Frank Turner was a bold man who thought beyond traditional highways.

When I came to AASHTO, Frank offered his counsel to me, and I gladly accepted. Indeed, to a great extent, whatever I did to further America's highways while I was Executive Director of AASHTO can be traced at least in part to Frank Turner's counsel and advice.

Throughout my years with AASHTO we talked many times, on many issues. We examined the role of highways in America, and the need to plan for their renewal and changes to accommodate growing traffic. We discussed the need for transit in urban areas and the importance of finding ways to improve highway design to accommodate transit vehicles. We discussed what had been learned from the AASHO road test and the impact of increasingly heavier trucks on the system.

Frank was a strong supporter of the federal-state partnership in the federal-aid highway program, and he urged me to work to strengthen the state highway agencies and AASHTO to further that partnership. He talked with me about the need for a strong, ongoing highway research program and the importance of providing both technical training and program management skills to FHWA, state highway agency, and private-sector personnel. His dedication to quality highways led him to help found the AASHTO Materials Reference Laboratory as a partnership between FHWA and AASHTO. The laboratory continues to play an important role in ensuring good-quality asphalt highways across the nation.

Frank also talked about the need for all agencies to plan ahead and to develop the new leaders that will be required in the coming years. He practiced this concept himself. Over the years he reviewed every new class of Bureau of Public Roads/FHWA professionals and identified those

he believed might become leaders. He then quietly followed their careers, and when a vacancy opened, would reach into his pool for a candidate.

Frank understood his role and his federal authority and responsibility, but to the fullest extent possible wanted to work in partnership with the states. The esteem in which he was held by AASHTO is demonstrated by his receipt in 1962 of the organization's highest award—the Thomas H. MacDonald Memorial Award. In 1964 he was honored again, this time jointly by AASHO, the Highway Research Board, and the American Road and Transportation Builders Association, with the George S. Bartlett Award.

Frank has received important recognition for the changes he brought to 20th-century America, and to the world. In 1994, *American Heritage* magazine cited him as 1 of 10 unsung persons who brought great change to the nation during the 20th century. In 1999, *U.S. News and World Report* wrote about Frank Turner under the headline "The Superhighway Superman."

I have two favorite quotations of Frank's. The first is just one word long. He was often asked, "When will America's highways be finished?" His invariable reply was, "Never."

The second quotation is a little longer, and demonstrates that Frank knew himself well. At TRB's 1999 Annual Meeting, he was asked to comment after he had received the first-ever Frank Turner Medal. He stood at his table, and with that special smile we so often saw simply said, "It's been fun."

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Dedication of the Francis C. Turner Building on May 5, 1983, at the Turner-Fairbank Highway Research Center. From left: FHWA Deputy Administrator Lester P. Lamm, former FHWA Administrator Frank Turner, Secretary of Transportation Elizabeth Dole, and FHWA Administrator Ray A. Barnhart.



words carried weight when the time came to make changes. His vision, in the end, required that road builders pay attention to the relationship of highways to the entire transportation picture. For Turner, this meant accepting that roads were the most important transportation system, even in the multimodal transport world that was unfolding in the last years of his service to FHWA. Only roads, he argued, allowed for connections between the various modes.

Intriguingly, this conception summarizes the situation of American transportation as we enter a new century. It also defines the work of transportation professionals at the state and federal levels. Frank Turner deserves a significant share of the credit for demonstrating how this realization could be incorporated within the long-standing traditions of BPR leadership and within the structure of the federal-aid partnership

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