

# A State Government Views a National Problem

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Maintenance of a completely integrated mass transportation system includes work on highways, railroads, parking facilities, terminals, stations, and park-and-ride facilities. People, industries, and commercial establishments are moving from highly urbanized areas to suburbia and usually relocate along existing transportation corridors. Use of mass transportation facilities is encouraged to minimize the tremendous congestion on highways. Maintenance of related facilities to meet this requirement must be accomplished by using public funds in the form of federal financial aid. Without this assistance, high fares will force people to use the already overcrowded highways.

The federal government, state governments, local governments, public authorities, and other jurisdictions have spent large sums of money constructing a major highway network and providing large improved mass transit systems. The Interstate Highway Program alone was responsible for thousands of kilometers of major highways, and, while this was being accomplished, other agencies were building toll roads, freeways, and local feeder roads and were upgrading the existing highway network (by dualization, widening, and the like). This generally resulted in a large disbursement of people from the inner city to sprawling suburbs. At the same time, major commercial establishments and employers remained in the city or went to suburban areas along established transportation corridors. For instance, a business in the city that is not thriving or finds that the majority of its potential workers or customers or both are located in suburbia will most likely relocate to some place that is convenient for its workers and customers. This relocation then will be close to existing transportation facilities. Department stores have either moved or established branches in scattered geographical areas of suburbia, which has created a heavier dependence on the automobile. The result is the need for people movers from home to work that are both economical and efficient.

Privately owned bus and rail facilities are now becoming the mainstay of transportation in metropolitan areas because the public has been encouraged by all levels of government and the communication media to use mass transit. Railroads were not making money on the passenger business but rather were dependent on freight tariffs. The need for passenger service actually placed a burden on the railroads, and government subsidies were necessary to keep the service available at an economical rate. The railroads and bus companies were caught in the nation's economic spiral of rising costs and the need for increased and extended service while keeping the fare down. Subsidies were needed to keep the mass transit system alive; otherwise, the highways would become overburdened to the point where they might become one big parking lot.

Mass transit can work only if people have access to the facilities, which requires adequate parking facilities strategically located and necessary feeder roads to them. There are many ways to provide this system, one of which is to use the existing roadway network and build parking areas convenient to both the neighborhood and the mass transit facility. Another method is to use existing (or about to be constructed) parking lots at commercial sites to serve the commuter. These spaces could be used during the normal workday when they are not really needed and can provide a side benefit to the commercial establishment—visibility to customers.

What does all of this have to do with transportation maintenance? This complete network now functioning to move people and products either through the individual vehicle or the mass transit unit needs to be kept operational 24 h/day, 365 days/year. Operations of all modes must be maintained. Operation and maintenance of the vehicles have been the responsibility of the operator even though some units are publicly owned and privately operated. Physical plant structures and vehicles can be maintained by the operator. Maintenance of parking lot, highway, and rail facilities can be accomplished by either the operator or a public agency.

Railroads already have the maintenance of rail facilities and component systems established and functioning. Training new personnel to perform this service would be both time consuming and costly; therefore, this mainte-

nance is most likely to remain with the rail operators. Parking lot and highway maintenance are not familiar to the bus company or not a part of rail maintenance and therefore would be in another maintenance system. All states have the highway maintenance expertise and management systems to maintain highway and parking lot facilities. A situation arises when assigning priorities of maintenance, and generally parking lots would receive low priorities in both labor and fiscal matters. Many states are now experiencing financial problems and cannot afford to maintain their highways to normal standards and will probably be forced to reduce maintenance on parking lots to a bare minimum or to zero maintenance. A partial solution is to have the park-and-ride facilities in commercial lots that are maintained by merchants if possible. The rest can be maintained by a local municipality, authority, or rail owner through revenues collected from parking fees. It should be possible to accomplish this total maintenance activity by using the procedure just mentioned.

One ingredient is still missing—the financing to accomplish this maintenance activity and provide the necessary economical service. Federal funding was necessary to construct our current total transportation system, and, if the investment is to be preserved, federal assistance is essential.

Highway maintenance is a growing industry because of the last 2 decades of intense highway construction. Many states have explored, with very poor results, several avenues of funding for the continued construction of the Interstate and freeway systems. Voters have rejected bond issues consistently, and legislators have failed in their efforts to raise revenue through increased or new taxes. The result is a trend away from building highways on new alignments to upgrading existing highways through general improvements and widening. There is a dependence on high levels of highway maintenance service to maximize the effective flow of traffic on existing highways. This is becoming an impossibility as most states are forced to reduce their budget dollar per lane kilometer each year as a result of inadequate funding, and they are now accepting a lower level of maintenance service. Lower levels of highway maintenance service generally result in higher decay rates for bridge and pavement structures, which, in turn, because of premature failure, places these structures in the priority need category for reconstruction at an early date. An adequately funded preventive maintenance program could postpone the reconstruction for many years and result in a net savings to the government and ultimately the taxpayer. A total program based on a priority repair and reconstruction engineering analysis could maximize the life span of a highway while minimizing overall cost. This program can only be effective if funds are made available immediately. New Jersey has a good maintenance management system, as do most states, and the hope is that federal funding will be coming for highway maintenance operations that use reporting data accumulated from these maintenance management systems. Reimbursement for maintenance operations would be most effective if the federal government would accept the management system of the state involved for the program and reporting tool.

Mass transit facilities should be maintained by money (federal money, one hopes) directed to a particular activity, such as parking lot maintenance or rail maintenance. This funding could then be used to reduce or eliminate the parking fare, or the portion of the riding fare related to maintenance. An example would be a parking lot that costs approximately \$100,000/year to maintain and charges 50 cents/car/day for its use. If this lot were to receive \$50,000 in federal maintenance

funds, it would allow the fare to be reduced to 25 cents/car/day. This reduction would then probably make the mass transit facility more attractive and remove some of the vehicles from the highway, indirectly saving maintenance dollars and some critical energy dollars.

Basically, the problem is viewed as being one of financial responsibility to maintain a complex network of transportation modes that was built or upgraded with federal assistance to meet a people and cargo movement demand. I feel that the federal government must provide this financial assistance now.