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THE ADMINISTRATIVE ROLE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IN THE INTERSTATE SYSTEM[a]

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ABSTRACT

Because our 67 million motor vehicles cannot recognize the artificial political jurisdictional boundaries we have set up to subdivide 100,000,000 residents in urban areas, the author states that we must develop more effective cooperation across these boundaries if the vast highway program provided by the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 is to bring needed traffic relief.

From time immemorial transportation, the movement of people and goods, has been one of the great driving forces in human progress. And nowhere on earth has transportation been more essential to the growth and unity of a nation than here in the United States.

Our Nation's Founding Fathers were well aware of this basic truth. It is implicit in the preamble to the Constitution which proclaims the intent to form a more perfect union, provide for the common defense, and promote the general welfare. To achieve these things Article II which deals with the general powers of Congress is specific in reference to transportation, for in section 7 is included the power "To establish . . . . . post roads." Thus the legal responsibility for Federal participation in a highway program is very firmly rooted, and the guiding principles for its administration are clearly stated.

Today highway transport plays such a fundamental role in our daily lives and is such a basic factor in our economic growth that the enlarged

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road building program which we have undertaken may well mark the beginning of a new age for 170 million people—an age in which the motor vehicle really comes into its own as an integral factor in our American way of life. I want to point out that the Federal role in the 1956 Act Interstate System program is in no sense a new one. The 1956 Act is a direct by-product of the close and long-maintained relation between the Federal Government and our State highway departments. The bill is a fitting tribute to more than 40 years of hard work, good will, and sound experience in cooperation.

The original Federal-Aid Road Act of 1916 has left a deep and lasting imprint upon highway practices in this country. Under this early Federal law the States selected the roads to be improved, and the type of their improvement; were to be responsible for surveys, for the plans and specifications; and the making of contracts and supervision of construction. Of course, while these various steps are all subject to cooperative review by the Bureau of Public Roads the initiative still rests with the States.

Parenthetically I might say that apart from this well-defined and very effective working partnership, the Federal Government through its Bureau of Public Roads has for many years directly supervised highway improvements in our National forests and parks, Alaska, and foreign countries while also performing a large amount of highway engineering and construction for other Federal agencies.

Public Roads has long assisted a number of foreign countries in carrying out programs of highway improvement. Some of this work was undertaken through the cooperation of the International Cooperation Administration and the Export-Import Bank. Since 1930 the Bureau has assisted numerous Central American republics in the construction of the Inter-American Highway—a 3,200-mile highway link between the United States and the Panama Canal. So you see we also are an operating highway department with a program considerably larger than a majority of the individual States.

It is against this background that we must measure the enlarged role of the Federal Government under the 1956 Act. Just as a construction job this bill launched the greatest peacetime program ever undertaken. By about 1972 we expect to complete the 40,000-mile National System of Interstate and Defense Highways, linking every one of the 48 States and 90 percent of all cities with populations of 50,000 or more. For the first time Congress has authorized a long-range program designed to complete an entire highway system—the system of routes most important to the Nation.

In recent years especially the growth patterns of our society have lent new urgency to the problem. I refer, of course, to the steady trend toward regional urbanization which has become so marked in the last decade or two. Whatever name you give it, this new development is directly related to and largely dependent upon the almost universal use of motor vehicles. And because these motor vehicles recognize no artificial political jurisdictional boundaries, we must of necessity find effective ways of cooperating with each other if our transportation is to be of any real value.

That is why public officials and civil engineers alike must reckon as never before with the all-pervasive role of highway transportation. Consider the fact that today more than 100 million people are living in our central cities and metropolitan areas. The location, design, and construction of expressways and other streets and highways to serve the people living in these centers is a major civic undertaking. It calls for the cooperative efforts of civil

engineers, public officials, and business, industrial, and community leaders in every walk of life.

Consider the fact that the Interstate System alone will pass through 37 percent of all the counties in the Nation; that these counties hold over half of the rural population and market nearly half of all farm products sold; add the further fact that the Interstate System is the backbone of a Federal-aid primary network totaling 249,000 miles—not to mention a secondary system of some 521,000 miles—and you can see the absolute necessity for coordinated and careful planning which must precede the actual work of highway construction in both urban and rural areas. The location and design of paralled and intersecting routes under the administrative jurisdiction of cities, counties, and States which lead to interchanges with the great Interstate System trunks is vitally important.

Particularly in large urban areas, the location and design of these traffic arteries touch almost every phase of urban and suburban life—the location of schools, facilities for recreation, slum clearance, and the growth and development of outlying communities.

Clearly one major role of the Federal Government lies in furnishing a means for unifying and coordinating the efforts of all the many jurisdictions which have a stake in a program aimed at providing a safer, more efficient highway transport and service. Frequently the Bureau of Public Roads will function as one member of a four-way partnership—Federal, State, county, and city, but generally only with the State.

Although the vast scope of the Interstate program will greatly increase the importance of this comparatively new four-way relationship, we are not strangers in this field. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944 authorized the first specific funds for highway improvement in urban areas. Since that time the Bureau has appeared in a number of Federal-State-County-City quartets, if I may put it that way. And we have achieved, I think, some excellent harmonies.

These past performances take on added significance for the future when we remember that perhaps half of the $25 billion authorized for the Interstate System will be spent in and around our cities to provide about 6,000 miles of arterial highways. This presents an opportunity, a challenge, and a heavy responsibility to make these highways powerful tools for city improvement.

With about half of the Interstate System program costs, as now estimated, going to urban areas it is interesting to note that anticipated Federal revenues derived from highway-user taxes will be spent in about the same proportion. This has significance for the highway user, the engineer-administrator, and all of us, for it indicates that we have set the stage for a reasonable and equitable balance in the overall construction and financial aspects of the Interstate program.

Obviously this calls for stronger working alliances and cooperative joint relations between the representatives of our Federal, State, county, and city governments than ever before. In the nature of things there are some overlapping jurisdictions and responsibilities between these representatives. But these overlaps need not lead to inefficiency and increased costs. Nor should they give rise to friction. With proper coordination; by assigning to each representative that part which he is best able to perform; there will be a complementing action which cannot fail to improve the final result.

There are some things which the Federal members of the team can do

better than the others and some which none of the others can do by themselves. Always the Federal Government has given to the States the right to initiate, reserving to itself only the right to approve the States' proposals when Federal funds are requested. Over the years differences of opinion and approach have arisen, as rightly they should in a full partnership, but it is highly significant and a tribute to both parties that these differences have always been resolved in the best professional traditions—and with a final resultant that has generally stood the test of critical analysis by both parties.

This is one important role of the Bureau. In the professional give and take of these exchanges we also develop a well-documented public record. This kind of procedure certainly does not imply any monopoly of knowledge or ability. To the contrary, it is simply a built-in device which we have developed for putting our product—a better highway—through its own proving-ground trials before it is sold on the public market. The many problems, new and old, arising out of the Interstate program in all areas will demand even more extensive use of this checking procedure in the future.

You may not know it but the definition of an urban area in the Federal-Aid Highway Act does not mention the usual city limits term. This is quite intentional because the highway program is related to land use and development patterns and not to artificial political jurisdictional boundaries. Indeed, the automobile and its driver seldom know or care about such boundaries—except as they may interfere with the availability of a continuous highway roadbed and the easy flow of traffic which it provides. This means then that for efficient use of our motor transportation we must find means of being able to build uninterruptedly across these political boundaries, whether they be State, city, county, town, or township lines. When our country was young and transportation slower with range of movement small, these boundary lines had little effect because the normal movement of individuals was generally confined wholly within some one such unit. But in a few minutes today millions of our daily trips cross several such boundary lines, mostly city limits boundaries, but often State lines as well. Take the daily commuting pattern of New York, Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City, Philadelphia, Washington, or many others as examples. Any single day's trip from home to business place and return will probably cross half a dozen such lines each way. It is unthinkable that there should be anything but coordinated planning and cooperative effort in solving our urban highway problems under such conditions.

We have done reasonably well, but I do not think we have yet done as well as ultimately—and quickly—we must do if we are efficiently and economically to provide the public with facilities which they have been told to expect and for which they have given us in the highway field the go-ahead signal; complete with funds, incidentally. We therefore have a compelling directive to find an answer to this problem. It is a problem, however, only if we do nothing about it—there is an answer and a solution.

While I personally feel sure that that answer is ultimately in the political field and therefore outside our engineering formulas, there are some things we can do short of that step and while waiting for it to occur. We hear much of such plans as "metros", and consolidation of city and county governments, and other devices, all of which I predict will gradually become widespread and accepted everywhere. These involve a change in our political philosophies, however, and such a change is necessarily—and properly—a slow one. In other words, the evolution of new concepts for our forms of local

governments where counties and cities or a cluster of numerous small cities abut on each other to form a metropolitan or urban area. You can see therefore that our Federal-aid highway Acts—going back to 1944—already contain the concept of urban areas—related to metropolitan land uses—rather than those artificial boundary lines called city limits.

But we have a problem to resolve now—in 1957 and 1958—not in the sometimes of the future. The solution lies in voluntary joint cooperation of our several political jurisdictions—county, city, State, and Federal. We are already doing this in many cases—in most, I would say—closer coordination is needed even yet. The day when Federal-aid funds could be expended only in rural areas is long since past—more than 20 years to be exact—since the law was amended to provide funds which could be used to ease the urban area traffic problem. Likewise, the day is long past when a State highway department could drop its load of State highway traffic at the city limit sign without a care as to what would happen on the other side. In similar fashion, the city and the county can no longer think and build in their own separated and individual little compartments without knowledge of or consideration for what the traffic picture is around about them. Cooperation, coordination, and also consolidation in many instances is the obvious need.

What are we doing toward this end? Discussions and studies like this very panel which will stimulate creative thinking on the matter are a part. The Bureau has just recently initiated with county officials and some other interested agencies, such as the Automotive Safety Foundation, a research project on county highway management, looking toward how this unit of local government can most efficiently discharge its highway responsibilities in the fast-moving, complex, and expensive highway transport system picture of today and tomorrow. The Bureau, the American Municipal Association, and the American Association of State Highway Officials have recently joined in the formation of a new AMA-AASHO joint committee to assist in providing a coordinating mechanism in the urban area-State highway department field. So you can see that we are taking some concrete steps toward reaching answers to these questions while the slow processes of political change are awakening.

I have stressed the unifying, coordinating role of the Federal Government in highway improvement because I believe it to be the Bureau's most significant and long-lasting contribution to our growth and unity as a free Nation.

Since the Interstate System serves more than 90 percent of all our cities of more than 50,000 population, and all of our industrial cities of more than 100,000 population, it becomes self-evident that when talking about the Interstate System in urban areas, it becomes a matter of interest to every city which is of such a size as to begin to have an urban problem of the kind we are discussing here.

The Interstate System particularly in the urban areas will weave the pattern and build the framework on which virtually every future element of growth and development in our urban areas will be dependent, both private and public, and with such staggering impact, felt over a long period of time, it is imperative that we as engineers who plan and approve the plans exercise the utmost of good judgment and the maximum of ability if the public is to be insured of the best final result.

In this our Federal role is one of coordination of State with State, planner with builder, Congressman and the citizen—to the end that we shall be able to translate the pennies paid by the individual road user into an Interstate

System which is truly national in scope, yet characterized by an ability to serve a majority of the individual motorists' personalized travel needs. The Federal Government must do this while at no time usurping the basic principle of initiative by the States and local self-government. This is a large order, but there is no reason to fear that we shall fail to achieve it, because we are in fact already doing it in a well-formed routine and accepted manner. We must merely enlarge and strengthen. The Bureau's position therein must be essentially that of coordinator of the four-part partnership, leader of those States in the forefront, pusher for the various partners that are lagging, an enforcer of standards, an arbiter of national interest questions, a collector of the pennies, and disburser of the billions. We must serve as a clearing house for new ideas, and improved versions of the old; the principal exponent, leader, and collector of vital research in the highway field; the buffer with Congress; and the executive custodian of a Constitutionally declared national interest in highways.

In this respect, I believe the Bureau role is clear and the responsibility rather staggering. The one single national characteristic of our country is our national unity. We wander as tourists or businessmen over our entire country as easily as going across our home towns, with never a fear nor a thought but that we still are "at home." It is the unity of our media of transportation and communications which makes this possible in such a "take-it-for-granted" manner. In this our highways play perhaps the major role. To do so, however, they must of necessity be one fully integrated, coordinated, and unified network rather than a series of separate systems lacking a national oneness. The welding flux in this instance is the Bureau—to see that from the highway standpoint our country is truly and in fact a United States. This is, I believe, the Bureau's part in the common effort and goal.