

# NATION WILL AGAIN LOOK AFTER HIGHWAYS

### IMPORTANCE OF MOTOR TRUCKS IN PRESENT DAY TRAFFIC BROUGHT TO ATTENTION OF UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT BY POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT.

Every true lover of an automobile is an exponent of good roads and is always ready to back with his labor and cash any movement toward good roads. The people of Glasgow and Valley county are a unit in favor of nicely surfaced highways.

The fact that Glasgow is on the Glacier Park highway, which is a connecting link between the Pacific coast and the Great Lakes, the subject of good roads is one of interest to every citizen in Glasgow and Valley county.

That is why the people turned out recently to help in building up and improving the roads of Valley county. To start big projects it always has been the cry to "ask the government to help."

There was a time in the days of the stage coach and the laboring ox train when the building and care of highways was one of the chief concerns of the federal government. Thus the twenties and thirties of the last century was a period of more and better roads constructed than any ensuing decades up to a very recent date.

This old period of national highway development witnessed uniform road construction through the several townships, counties and states along the route, without regard to local prejudice or local poverty. It saw roads chosen with regard to quick and direct transit between terminals. Why, the government engineers even refused to deviate a matter of two miles from a direct route in order to pass through the thriving settlement of Newark, Ohio. Local sentiment could go hang. They were building a road from Washington to Columbus, Indianapolis and Springfield, not furthering any private real estate booms, excepting incidentally.

Ancient history, you say. Yes, but here is the point. The national highway is coming back, not as the sentimental restoration of certain historic roads, but coming back as a national institution. Very recent war events inspire this prophecy, and these traditions of earlier government roads persuade us to hope that we shall again see—

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The government has been reluctant until very lately to see the potentialities of the highway. To men who were intimate with the development of the motor vehicle and full of the vision of paved roads everywhere, it has seemed that official Washington took a paltry, political not to say pork barrel view of a very vital topic. There have been sundry annual millions appropriated by way of federal aid to local paving projects—a sort of free seed distribution for the highway field—yet tending scarcely at all to-

ward the development of a true system of national highways.

But a year ago paving materials were placed on the prohibited list for freight shipments, subject to exception by special permit. What immediate need there was for the prompt linking of disjointed highways in order to accommodate the surplus tonnage of an overtaxed transportation system was not recognized until the railroad tangle had become most acute.

Less than two years ago, an officer high in the engineering branch of the United States army undertook to disabuse my mind of the idea that highways could have any more than local significance in time of war. The "military highway" he declared to be as dead as Caesar and Napoleon, since the development of railroads.

Yet for all this disparagement we have seen in the winter just past, the army driving truck trains from Detroit to the seaboard. We see private concerns shipping their wares on daily schedule distance of 500 miles or more. We see every passable road within fifty miles of commercial centers thronged with freight trucks, bent upon errands of auxiliary transportation service.

To get an idea of the extent of this traffic, take a glimpse at the thirty-five miles of bricked paved highway between Cleveland and Akron, Ohio. Students from Case school of applied science took a traffic census there for a week in March of the current spring, and compared the tonnage carried by truck with the tonnage carried by three railroad lines—the B. & O., Pennsylvania and Erie. Totals showed 5,014 tons of freight on trucks against 6,630 tons carried by three railroads, or approximately forty-six per cent. of the total traffic going over the highway.

This does not express the whole saving in railroad equipment that the highway effects. The enumerators counted 1,354 new cars being delivered from factories on their own power, and 471 new trucks. The estimated total saving in freight cars for the cars, amounted to 1,011 cars. When a single stretch of thirty-five miles can accomplish this saving, what must be the total for all the paved rural mileage in America? What might be the total, were every large city in America accessible to every other large city by a continuous paved road?

But something beside mere example has been at work on the government authorities. Following the convention of the American Highway association in Richmond last December, there was a committee meeting in Pittsburgh, followed by a conference in Chicago, each dealing with the war aspects of the road question. As a result was launched the Highway Industries association, consisting of representatives

of every industry that makes roads or vehicles or accessories. Call these men selfish if you will, bent upon maintaining the market for their own product. I prefer to believe in a certain degree of industrial idealism, and to respect their sense of their own national importance and their own capacity to serve. Unquestionably they knew the highway game, and their prompt measures of organization forced upon the government a realization of the great latent transportation force which they had lately proposed to ignore if not to stifle.

Assurance comes, as the result of the association's efforts, that every possible facility for the movement of highway material will be afforded this year, but that the government will expect to exercise a supervision over the choice of construction jobs with view to making every yard of paving count in the general object of getting from center to center, quickly, surely, and directly. Already government engineers are telling local road officials what unimproved sections of highway must be put in shape for heavy traffic before another winter comes. To be sure, the federal government has no authority to order a certain county in Pennsylvania or Indiana that a certain three miles of mud must be covered with substantial pavement as quickly as possible, but in this year of the world war many short cuts are taken through the customary angles of red tape. No community likes to feel that its roads are an obstruction to war traffic, and sentiment supports expenditures which in time of peace might be debated for half a decade without action.

The Highways transport bureau, headed by Roy D. Chapin is perhaps the most important manifestation of the government's awakened interest in roads, since it is authorized to handle the road question broadly, both with respect to highways and to vehicles. Under this bureau comes the development and production of Liberty truck which the government is specifying in its contracts for new army equipment.

The postoffice department has designs of its own with respect to the development of paved roads. James L. Blakeslee, fourth assistant postmaster general, is a vigorous advocate of government trunk lines to carry parcel freight to the farmer and to bring food stuff back for direct delivery to the consignee. Some seven routes, approximately one hundred miles in length apiece, have been operated experimentally, and Mr. Blakeslee is seeking the authority of congress to extend the service wherever a commercial center is connected by substantial highways with productive rural territory. Farm produce reaching cities at the present time, he says, must be handled at least seven times, and in many cases it is handled twenty times. His proposal would call for but two handlings, one from the producer's gateway and one at the consumer's doorstep.

And so we have the federal government engaged in actual war transportation by through routes of travel. We have it planning nationalized space functions of great importance. We have the office of public roads acting as a tribunal in deciding what highways may and what may not be paved. We have government pressure upon local authorities, directing them to fill in the broken links of the highway chain. Actual government construction of highways near the national cantonnments has also been witnessed within the last year. These, with a federal aid appropriation of \$75,000,000 for highways seem to in-

volve the general government so thoroughly in the work of highway construction that never hereafter will this feature of national transport be considered as anything but of highest importance.

This does not mean that local road improvement should be or will be subject to national administration, but the need of supervision for interstate routes has been so acute that highway users can hope for the development of something analogous to the supervision which the government exercises of interstate railroad traffic. It may be expected to designate certain roads as interstate routes, to prescribe the character of improvement, and to expend the federal aid appropriation solely in the development of such routes. More substantial and wider roads may be expected as the result of the war experiences. America is not yet fairly out of the makeshift period in road construction. The need for mileage has been so pressing that permanence has been sacrificed. It is a grave question whether we are making roads much faster than the increasingly numerous and heavy vehicles are "un-making" them. With the motive of applying this lesson, General Leonard wrote to State Highway Commissioner William D. Schier of Massachusetts:

"The requirements for the wearing surface for military purposes may be stated as (1) absolute dependence in all kinds of weather, in all seasons of the year under the most severe usage; (2) wear resistant so that extensive or frequent repairs and maintenance will not be necessary; (3) easy and quick to repair without interrupting traffic and with simple tools and materials; (4) low in tractive resistance, and (5) offering a good foothold for horses and a good grip for rubber tires, and at the same time to allow a good rate of speed for motor trucks.

Only the highest types of standard pavement surfaces answer these requirements completely. Wearing surfaces which are not suitable for use in our cities will not stand up under concentrated highway traffic. The block pavements, such as stone block or vitrified brick, are probably the best types, but in localities where these materials are not available, carefully prepared sheet pavements of proved worth may be used satisfactorily. Methods of construction and types of surfacing, which are used to cheapen the first cost at the expense of the requirements stated above, should not be used."

Wider and better pavements are sure to come under government direction. In France, many of the highways are wide enough to permit the army trucks being driven four abreast. The medieval nuisance, the side ditch, will have to go, primarily because the room is needed for paving surface, but also largely because it holds the continuous menace of accident to the driver, because it breeds mosquitos and malaria and because its tendency to stoppage makes it of double value from a drainage point of view. On two sections on the Cleveland-Buffalo highway the side ditch has already been eliminated in favor of vitrified pipe underdrainage.

Routes for national highways will be determined naturally by the exigencies of traffic this year and next. In general, these routes have been well identified for many decades, but only on a few of them has it been possible to travel for more than a few hours at the most without encountering all possible kinds and degrees of improvement, or lack of improvement. When the new national highway policy bears fruit, it will be possible to travel from

the plains to the Atlantic, the gulf or the Pacific, with a certainty of finding an adequate road surface over the entire route. Truck freight may not compete with rail freight for economy over long routes, but it saves hours and dollars in the fact that it

avoids terminal delays and does not require special breaking of bulk for delivery. The simplicity of the highway traffic makes it especially valuable in emergencies. Roads are the primary means of transport. All you have to

do is to load your vehicle and keep going until you get there. Fluctuations in volume of traffic put no special strain on dispatchers, crews or switchmen. You can start any time and go at any speed.



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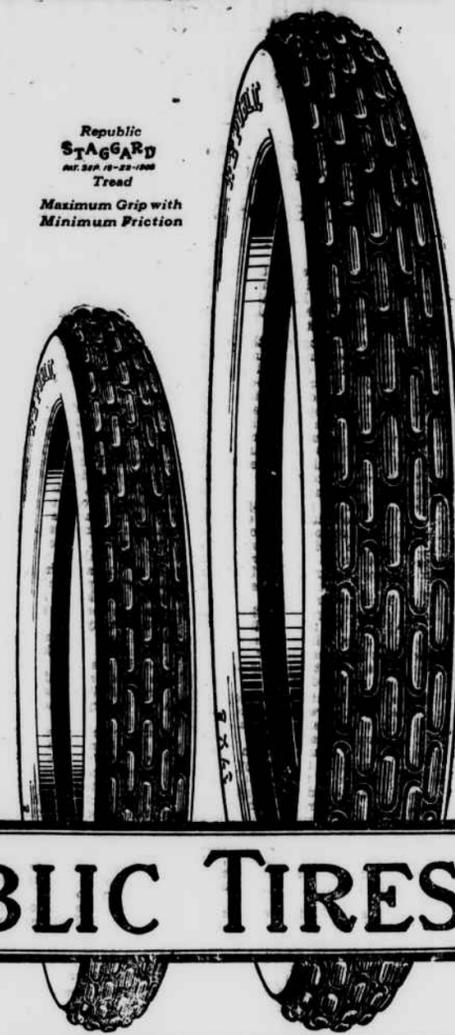
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