

# Public Relations and the Traffic Engineer

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This 40th Annual Road School will present many of us with new ideas or with new information which we can effectively utilize. In fact, the means of dissemination of traffic information to the highway and traffic engineer is quite reliable. We are all aware of the volumes of information that a traffic engineer can collect and all the traffic and highway facts that he has at his fingertips that help him provide answers to traffic and highway problems. But how much of this traffic information is actually translated into action programs, into the construction of recommended facilities, or into the initiation of operational programs? I would venture to say that there is not nearly enough.

Without exception, all programs of improvement depend on the intelligent and continuing support of the people of the affected area. This support is not generated in a vacuum. It doesn't multiply of its own accord. No, it grows only from the firm roots of personal knowledge and is nurtured by the leadership of responsible citizens. In short, support for any program demands the widest possible dissemination of the facts concerning the highway and traffic program. Each citizen must be made to recognize that he has personal responsibilities in the program; he must be made to realize that his cooperation is desired and is essential.

## WHO SHOULD INFORM THE PUBLIC ABOUT THE TRAFFIC PROGRAM?

The public information job in traffic programs is the responsibility of several groups.

First, it is a major responsibility of the traffic engineer. No other person in the highway field is as close to the man in the street as the traffic engineer. The problems that he tackles are the everyday problems of the public and are problems about which they should be well informed. Included in this group are other public servants, engineers,

administrative officials, and enforcement officials. They can help, but they require someone who can lead them, who can answer the engineering questions which they have, who can give them the facts to sell the program.

The second group is composed of the normal media of public information—newspapers, magazines, radio stations, posters, car cards, window displays, and other displays. In almost every case this group is ready and willing to assist you in a presentation of the program you desire. They must, however, have some source of reliable information, and the best source of that information is the developer of the traffic program, the traffic engineer.

The third group is that core of civic-minded citizens which exists in every community. Civic organizations, professional groups, and business, industrial and religious groups offer fertile areas of cooperative leaders. Here again, however, the traffic engineer has a job. He must first of all inform this group and present them with the information that they must have in order to sell the traffic program.

Your task as a traffic or highway engineer, then, includes being a good public relations man. It includes the assembling of information and its distribution to the public. It includes the preparation and deliverance of speeches, the showing of films, and other information activities. It includes the preservation of good press, radio and television relations and the supply of the proper information to them.

#### WHAT SHOULD THE PUBLIC BE TOLD?

There is a tendency that those associated with any traffic program will both overestimate the knowledge that the public has about the problem and underestimate its capacity to absorb facts. We who are familiar with the common facts of traffic engineering may forget that the average citizen, even though he may think of himself as a traffic expert, actually knows very little about traffic engineering. First of all, then, we must supply them with the basic facts of our program and logically sell the program to them.

We also must not withhold portions of the program because the public would not understand it. How do we know they wouldn't? Actually, many of the citizens of a community will understand most of the material which you are able to give them, and that which they do not understand, they will appreciate. They cannot appreciate it if they do not know about it.

One of the areas where we do the poorest job of public relations is in telling what we have done and the results that have been accom-

plished. Too often the facts on why we should do something are obtained, the program eventually is placed in operation, and after a few months the new program is accepted as the way things always were. The public watches its servants closely, and unless they are continually informed of what they are getting from your department, they may get the impression that you are doing little. Maybe you are, but if you are doing a good job, tell them about it. That is the only way that you can place traffic engineering in its rightful place in your area. That is the only way you can hope to get a larger staff, a larger appropriation, a bigger voice in the solution of the traffic problems of your city.

As an example of the tendency of traffic engineers to neglect to inform the public on the results of their services, I would like to mention a few typical cases.

Many cities in Indiana have in recent years inaugurated one-way street systems. Prior to the initiation of the systems, most engineering departments discussed widely the advantages that the city could expect from one-way streets. They mentioned decreases in the number of accidents, increased capacity, and better travel times among other things. Public relations in most such instances tend to be fair, but after the one-way streets are placed in operation what happens? Usually very little. The engineering department might actually determine the amount of the decreases in accidents, the increased volumes that are being carried, and the decreases in travel times; but few of these departments give such material any publicity; practically none give it wide publicity. The motorist, especially if he opposed the program, may refuse to see even those benefits which are obvious because of his biased attitude, but a continual deluge of facts will in time convert many such opposers to supporters. Certainly you will never be able to convert everyone, but an enlightened group of supporters who know the facts about your program can usually handle any opposition based on nothing but prejudice.

Another source of good public relations that is only rarely used concerns money. Nothing is closer to the heart of the citizen than money, and he likes to know what he received for his money. We generally do a fair job telling the taxpayer what a program is going to cost or how much money we need to alleviate the traffic problems of the city, but only rarely do we tell him what he has received for his money in recent weeks, months, or years. How many citizens of your city do you think have a knowledge of the improvements that you have initiated in recent years, the benefits that they are receiving from them, or the cost of these improvements? Very few is right. How many motorists realize the small amount they pay for upkeep of their city streets and their rural

highways in comparison with what they spend on their automobile? Again, very few.

Of course, you cannot present the traffic statistics or the expenditures and receipts as just simple, cold figures. They must be dressed up, presented in simple, eye-appealing form, and made attractive to the public. Neither can you discuss your program or your accomplishments in an unenthusiastic manner. You must appeal to the emotions; you must present your material with enthusiasm; and you must present it as a challenge to each of your listeners.

Public relations is not a job that requires fluctuating attention, but rather one that requires constant attention. Just as an attack on traffic congestion, it requires a well-planned and balanced program. The most effective public relations job will not be a transient promotion nor a publicity campaign—it will be a continuous, long-range, and large-scale effort. It must continue as long as there is a traffic or highway program.

However you handle your public relations, you have a big job on your hands. In the end your purpose is to make each individual feel that he is responsible for part of the solution to the traffic problem and your traffic program, that he is capable of handling a part in it, and that he can begin at once. But you must go out and tell him. After that your job will be easier, more secure, and more rewarding.

As an example—undoubtedly not the best—of how we might begin to get the motorist to work with us and for us, the following article that is addressed to the motorist is presented. Such an article, if published as an illustrated pamphlet, would be one way of initiating a public relations program.

Again, note that this article is addressed to the average motorist. We are attempting to tell him how the traffic problems are being tackled, that he has a big part in helping solve the problem, what he can do, and how he can do it. The article is entitled:

### IT'S YOUR TRAFFIC PROBLEM

Did you find a good place to park today? Did you find cars and trucks impeding your freedom of movement, wasting your time and gasoline, and upsetting your nerves? What are you doing about this problem? What is anyone doing about it?

If things keep going as they are, there will likely be 40 to 60 per cent more traffic by 1960 than there is now—yes, by 1960, just six short years away. What do you think traffic jams will be like in 1960? Well, that depends on you. There is actually a lot that you can do to minimize the traffic problems of the present and the future. First, however, let's look at what others are doing in Indiana.

### *Traffic Experts Are at Work*

Here in Indiana, numerous studies have been and are being made of the traffic problem. A number of cities have traffic engineering departments that are staffed with trained engineering personnel; other cities, small in size, have cooperated with neighboring communities to jointly acquire the services of a traffic engineer. These cities have found that the application of engineering science to this problem is just as rewarding as it was to the construction of our highway system. The State Highway Department maintains a Traffic Engineering Department, a Metropolitan Area Traffic Survey Unit, and a state-wide Highway Planning Unit. All of these are engaged in the study and solution of traffic problems in all parts of the state. They have provided assistance to many of our cities and will, no doubt, continue to do so. The Metropolitan Area Survey Unit has performed Comprehensive Traffic Surveys in almost every one of the larger cities and in a few of the smaller ones. These surveys, as the name implies, are designed to collect all the facts on traffic movements—the origins, destinations, volumes, and purposes of trips; the locations and causes of delay; and the amount of parking spaces, demand, and use.

Purdue University has also contributed a great deal to the solution of the traffic problem through teaching, extension, and research. Courses in Traffic Engineering are available to undergraduate and graduate students in Civil Engineering, and several graduates manage the Traffic Engineering Departments in some of our Indiana cities. The Purdue Public Safety Institute conducts courses in driver training and motor vehicle safety and assists in the establishment of accident-record-analysis procedures and the evaluation of enforcement policies. A unit to provide extension service has also been organized in the Joint Highway Research Project of the University to offer advice and counsel in traffic engineering to the cities and counties of Indiana.

The University, also through the Joint Highway Research Project, has cooperated with the Metropolitan Area Survey Unit of the State Highway Department in performing comprehensive surveys in several cities. Faster and more economical methods of collecting data have been developed and the importance of the city and its individual citizens in solving its own traffic problem has been noted.

### *One Big Problem*

The complete traffic problem includes many smaller problems—movement, parking, pedestrians, violations, accidents, etc. The solution of any one or two of these factors, however, will actually do very little to solve the complete problem. In fact, such a solution may cause it to

become worse. For example, a solution to the traffic movement problem into and out of a business district would bring more people downtown faster, but would not provide them a place to park. The same is true of any part of each problem. The construction of a modern, multilane bridge across a river and terminating on each side at an inadequate two-lane street would certainly present no movement solution. In this latter case, adequate approaches to the bridge and approach streets with proper capacity must be provided at the same time as the bridge. This means that a thorough study of the patterns of traffic movement in the entire city is necessary.

### *Traffic and Parking Plan Required*

Actually, the only good method of approaching the traffic problems of the city is through a complete study of the traffic conditions of the city. The traffic patterns—where people desire to travel and where they actually do travel—must be known if any permanent solution is to be found. The collection and analyzation of these basic traffic facts in your city should be the first step. This is obviously not a job for just anyone. Trained personnel are necessary to plan and administer such a study and to make recommendations to the city from the facts. Your city's Traffic Engineering Department, the State Highway Department, and consulting engineers are capable of performing such a survey.

From such a collection of facts, a Traffic and Parking Plan should be established. The magnitude of the problem requires that progress be orderly, efficient, thorough, and economical; a Plan is the only way to assure such progress. The facts will clearly point to the most important problems, the methods of solving these problems, and the effects of each solution. Solutions can then be programmed in a wise and economical manner.

Your part in the preparation of this Plan is seeing that it is developed. Few cities have a comprehensive Traffic and Parking Plan, and too many of those that have one are not following the Plan to reality. It requires that you, your neighbor, and his neighbor demand the development of a Plan; the adherence to that Plan; and the constant review necessary to meet changing conditions. Your interest expressed directly to your governmental officials or to them through a Citizens' Traffic Committee will produce results.

### *Other Work to Be Done*

While this plan is being developed—and it may require a year or so—there are several traffic factors that should be given attention. At least six items require improvement in almost every city and, if accomplished, promote the safe and efficient movement and parking of traffic.

*Keep Thoroughfares Open*

(1) Keep your main thoroughfares open to maximum traffic movement.

Highways were built for the movement of traffic and not for the storage of vehicles. It has been found, moreover, that the flat parking on one side of a street decreases the effective width of that street for moving traffic by as much as 14 feet. Consequently, a trend to prohibit parking on our main thoroughfares is natural, sensible, and an actuality. Curb parking space has been necessarily decreasing for years and will in the next few years be prohibited on our most important city streets. Each motorist must understand that parking on-street is a privilege and should encourage the elimination of that privilege wherever the streets are congested. No other single method will do as much to increase the ability of a street to carry moving traffic.

Double parking and other parking violations should, of course, not be tolerated. Penalties must be of such a nature that these violations become unpopular. They are not so now, however, for they number in the hundreds in almost every city in Indiana on every day.

Most of the decrease in the ability of a street or highway to carry moving traffic is due to an increase in the number of traffic conflicts on that thoroughfare. A new facility usually carries large volumes of traffic without congestion because it was constructed to minimize traffic conflicts. Congestion with little or no increase in volume will result, however, if traffic conflicts are permitted to multiply at numerous exits and entrances. A sensible solution is to limit the number and location of exit and entrance points on such a thoroughfare to a few major locations and provide local, parallel access roads for the development along the thoroughfare. Experience has proven that development is not retarded and that traffic movement is thus maintained.

*More Parking Space Is Required*

(2) Provide additional parking space off-street near the center of your commercial district.

There are four types of parkers which must be supplied. They are the loader, short-term parker, shopper, and long-term parker. All are best accommodated in off-street space because of their conflict with moving traffic while parked at the curb and during the parking and unparking operations.

If the recurrence of loading demands results in necessary double-parking, a loading zone must be provided, but on-street only as a last resort.

A short-term parker will walk about 300 feet and no farther. He is running an errand for a particular purpose and will drive to the store that provides him nearby parking space. These parkers wish to park one-half hour or less, but constitute over one-half of all parkers. A great amount of the retail trade comes from these motorists and they must be accommodated if business is to flourish. Customer lots are answers to this problem that should be encouraged, and short-time limits on central area parking may be another. More off-street space in the central area is certainly the best solution.

The shopper wishes to park an average of one and one-half to two hours and will walk several hundred feet farther than the short-term parker. Space within 500 to 700 feet of a downtown district is seldom sufficient to accommodate these parkers, however, and more must be found. The long-term parker is usually an owner or employee and must not be allowed to compete with customers for parking space. If he must drive, he must be forced to park, either on or off-street, several blocks outside the downtown district. He harms his own and his neighbor's business if he is allowed to have a private space near his place of business or to become a nickel-stuffer.

Additional spaces then can only and must be provided off-street. This will require, in most cases, the destruction of some developed property and its redevelopment as parking lots or garages. The businessmen have a heavy stake in this problem and should give it their wholehearted, including financial, support.

Your city should also have zoning ordinances which make the provision for sufficient off-street parking space a requirement for the issuance of a building permit. This is one method that will prevent a constant recurrence of this parking problem.

#### *Uniform Signs and Signals Needed*

(3) Standardize your traffic signs, signals, and markings as to location, type, and shape according to the adopted national standards.

The warrants and standards as published in the "Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices" by the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads should be followed. They have been developed from years of experience and research and are the conditions which best promote the movement of traffic. Uniformity promotes recognition and increases obedience, especially by the out-of-town driver, and installation according to engineering warrants insures against installation according to political or opinion warrants. Many signs and signals in our cities were installed without proper warrants and are not promoting safe and efficient movement of



traffic. A traffic light, for example, will probably result in restricted traffic movement and more accidents if traffic does not require the signal.

#### *Ride the Buses*

(4) Encourage the use of your mass transit system, especially for downtown trips.

One bus can haul 30 or more people; each car carries about two persons. Obviously, the more people who leave their cars at home and ride the bus, the fewer will be the number of automobiles moving on the streets and seeking a place to park. There undoubtedly is no other more efficient, economical, and effective method of minimizing the downtown congestion problem than that possible through mass transit.

#### *Courtesy Makes Careful Drivers*

(5) Be a courteous and careful driver.

Driving a motor vehicle is a full-time job. When at the wheel of a motor vehicle, no other duty, entertainment, or preoccupation is possible. All of your energies and thoughts must be used to safely operate your motor vehicle. Treat your fellow-driver and your vehicle with respect, give them the courtesy that such respect demands, and you will promote the movement of traffic and increase your chances of not becoming a casualty statistic. You may even lower the insurance rate on your car.

#### *Don't Oppose for Personal Reasons*

(6) Don't oppose a traffic plan or a recommendation made after thorough study by traffic engineering specialists because it affects your job, your business, your property, your taxes.

Study the facts and you will probably understand the soundness of the improvement. Any improvement that is going to be valuable is also going to inconvenience some individuals temporarily. Remember two things, however: (1) the improvement is recommended as a benefit for the entire city and not for individuals, and (2) whatever benefits the entire city will improve the economic conditions of the city and ultimately every individual in it. Opposition for personal reasons is often short-sighted and against the best interests of the city. If you oppose because of cost, remember that the money to develop a sound traffic program is now being spent for lost time and increased cost of vehicle operation. That money only needs to be directed to the traffic program. The greatest cost, in fact, will occur if a program of traffic relief is not developed. Actually, you pay at least eight times more to own and operate your car than you pay for the road on which it must travel.

And, lastly, do not inflate the value of your property if it is required for traffic improvements. Your city cannot thus benefit and you have obtained only selfish gain at the expense of your neighbors.

*You Can Help*

The traffic problem is the number one problem of almost every city in America. Your city has that problem and needs help. Won't you see that the problem is solved? Express your interest; enlist your neighbor; approach the problem with the facts; study the facts; secure competent specialist personnel; develop a Traffic and Parking Plan; carry out that Plan; solve your problem. It is possible, but it's up to you. Cease to be just a part of the traffic problem and become a part of its solution.