

# Planning for Safety

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Planning for safety is very much like the weather, everybody talks about it. Notably, as we meet here, the third of a series of planning conferences is under way in San Francisco, and a fourth will be held in May in Miami. The other two were in Atlantic City in early March, and quite recently in Chicago, which many of you no doubt attended. They are being held under the auspices of the President's Committee for Highway Safety, and the biggest names of government and industry are linked with them.

Two years ago similar conferences were held in these same cities, similar to, but different from, the current meetings. The meetings two years ago were for government officials, federal, state, and municipal. The prime purpose of these meetings was to create state and local safety organizations, affiliated or not with existing national bodies. The first purpose of the current sessions is to indoctrinate citizens with a burning fervor for safety. But enough of the plain citizens weren't there. Again those in attendance were often officials whose task it will be to carry back to the citizenry the eloquent messages they received at these meetings. I think these meetings have been successful but not always for the purposes for which they were organized. However, the attendance of 4,000 persons, the discussions, the enthusiasm engendered, the sense of personal responsibility developed, make them notable occasions.

That is the first point I want to develop with you today . . . the high sense of personal responsibility of each of us for the safe and efficient use of our transportation facilities. Largely we are, for instance, a God-fearing and church-going people. We attend services on Sunday and we leave a donation for the priest or the pastor, feel warm and comfortable about it, and hope that we have bought our way into Heaven for a week at least. In the same way we join a safety council or a traffic club, and sometimes we take part in its discussions. Usually as individuals we have our pet nostrums to offer, we talk with our elected officials, and then we go away with a glow that we have transferred

our responsibility for the intolerable loss of life and injuries to the manager of the club, or to the chief of police, to the school superintendent, or to the highway department. They are to be the keepers of our conscience. I don't believe we can transfer our hopes of Heaven to the pastor, nor our hope of freedom from traffic disaster to the club or the elected official. We must share in them.

Highway safety is a highly personal matter; but safety also is a negative thing. We must not do something; we must avoid this; we must not drive too fast, nor fly too low. We must look within ourselves for those traits, those attitudes that make us good citizens in a car.

Perhaps now I have delayed long enough a recitation of the horrible facts, already known to you, that in part at least bring us together today. And then we can examine the future and see what it is we must plan against, or for.

Twenty years ago traffic deaths were 39,600. In 1957 there were 38,600 fatalities; the in-between years, grossing 800,000 lives, ran 38, 39, 40, and up to 42 thousand fatalities with injuries running to a million and a quarter a year.

The fatalities seem to run fairly constant, but there is a hopeful and encouraging note to these statistics. Twenty years ago the fatality *rate* per 100 million vehicle miles of travel was close to sixteen; today that rate is down to six, actually 5.9 the statisticians tell us, per 100 million vehicle miles of travel. It is a remarkable and heartening decrease. Twenty years ago the miles traveled were approximately 200 billion. Last year, 1957, the American public traveled 650 billion miles, and we had a vastly increased population and number of cars on the road. The 1937 motor vehicle registration was 30,000,000; today it is 67,000,000.

What must we plan for in 1975? The Bureau of the Census gives us a variable figure, generally accepted as about 220 million people. This will mean, in all probability, 86 million people employed and requiring transit, and 43 million school children, half of them going to school by bus. Barring war and depression, we shall have 100 million cars in 1975. The exposure factor is fantastic and astronomical. And it means, too, everlasting and increasing vigilance in planning for their safe future, and probably, too, drastic and arbitrary and expensive changes in our way of life.

One such drastic change already is under way. I refer of course to the interregional or interstate modernization of our principal highways connecting our urban centers. This will affect 41,000 miles out of a total of over 3,000,000 miles of highway. The cost will be, by present estimates, \$1 million per mile. At least one-sixth of this sum will go for

right-of-way. Because the estimates of cost have risen in two years from 29 billions of dollars to 40 or 41 billions, we may expect, if inflation continues, to see that figure raised appreciably.

Before we proceed to other drastic and formidable considerations, let me pause long enough to pay my tribute to the traditional three E's, enforcement, engineering, and education. If our fatality rate has come down from 16 to six, is this not then sufficient to continue as we have been doing, only more so and with more sincere application of the principles we know?

I believe it is not. I think the most dangerous doctrine in safety ever promulgated is that we know how to reduce accidents, that we know the principles to be followed. Of course we do, but not profoundly enough. Certainly our enforcement must be stepped up. Poorly conceived traffic laws must be reviewed, and casual enforcement improved. But neither our ego nor our pocketbooks can afford a police state, and it would be impossible to put a patrolman on the tail light of every car.

Education was slow to swing in behind the traffic program as we know it today, but we can not gainsay the enthusiasm nor the good effect of its participation now. Driver education is the most promising hope for the future in accident reduction. Every test has proved its efficacy, but still not 50 per cent of our young people learn to drive in school. And such training as they get probably is inadequate for lack of funds. State aid for driver education must burgeon and grow, but it must be paid for, too, out of the pockets of the taxpayer. And if we are to progress much beyond the manipulative skills, teaching attitudes while youth is receptive and pliable, we must begin our driver training programs in the elementary schools.

As I have said, we have begun a modernization program on one-eighth or a little more of our antiquated road system. But our most optimistic plans reserve not more than \$2 billion annually for the remaining seven-eighths (2,600,000 miles) of our road system. We must wonder if this is a fair allocation when it is remembered that even today the average trip by car is probably no more than 20 miles. We know the new system will have built-in safety factors, but are we beginning the dangerous practice of assigning percentages of savings on lives to a facility that does not yet exist? It is part of our tendency as a people to transfer responsibility to any person or thing but ourselves. A form of wishful thinking is dangerous.

Because of its expense I would say that we can build this type of convenience only once. And we can not afford many mistakes. If many of you have had, as I have had in a small way, a part in thinking about the elite system, then you sometimes may be tortured, as I am, that some

new technological development, such as helicopters, for instance, will make the system obsolete before it is completed. These nightmares, I hasten to add, are no excuse for delay in pushing the construction program to its utmost.

Generally accepted programs for traffic improvement include:

Improved driver training and better licensing procedures;

Improvement of poorly engineered streets and highways;

Better maintenance of streets and roads;

Rewriting of ill-conceived traffic laws and more alert enforcement of them;

Discovery of physical handicaps and emotional eccentricities of the licensed driver.

But in seeking basic cures for our traffic malady we have too long, I fear, identified safety with traffic alone, and traffic with safety organizations. There are more fundamental approaches. One of them is the consideration for misplaced populations. I mean, of course, urban and suburban planning, always taking into account the political and geographic lines that plague our planners today. If we are as clever as we ought to be we will find ways to solve what seems on the surface to be an unsolvable problem.

We have all heard of exploding populations, and we have all seen, and likely we have become a part of one of the satellite and perimeter communities that fringe our cities today.

And we have seen, too, the duplication and perpetuation of the evils of poor planning for an automotive age, repeated over and over again in our suburban development, with the suggestion that new slums are being built in our lush meadowlands. We can forgive the sins of our fathers, when they planned our cities. They neither saw nor dreamed of an America on wheels. But to make the same mistakes and to intensify them is inexcusable today.

I wish we could have a study telling us who owns our cities, whose mortgages and whose the dead hands that strangle our civic spirit. It would be revealing, maybe profitable. Perhaps the first thing needed to halt the headlong rush to the suburbs is a rebirth of civic pride, which at least should be compared to the razing and rebuilding that is beginning in driblets today.

Along our east coast, and to a degree on the west coast as well, one sprawling development touches another. From Norfolk to Boston, for example, we have one continuous urban community, with many designs. High-powered cars crawl at snail's pace in traffic jammed streets too crowded to be of value as arteries of commerce. When the driver gets to his destination he can't stop because he has no place to put his car.

Planless suburban development and planless urban evacuation are the basic causes of our traffic problems and many of our safety difficulties as well.

Traffic congestion is the symptom and not the basic cause of our national distress. All our other actions are good enough in themselves, but they are palliatives designed to reduce the fever, not to cure the patient.

I think I know where to go for the fundamental planning that we must have, and I think I stand in the presence of those who are competent to make a beginning.

At its November meeting in Denver last year the Land Grant Colleges voted to establish on their own account a series of studies looking toward the establishment of safety centers, transportation centers, seeking discovery of new and constructive ways that these major institutions of learning can serve the constituency that supports them. It is a cautious and careful statement, but I read it to mean that they are concerned with human beings as well as livestock; I read it to mean that they are concerned with the distribution of food and fiber as well as the productivity and largess of the good earth. I understand them to say that they are prepared to take a total look at all of their responsibilities as colleges of agriculture and the mechanic arts.

Too long our technicians have worked in isolation and apart from each other. Too long the architect has been concerned only with the parcel on which he builds his structure; too often the highway engineer has built his roads without land-use studies; and too often the landscape architect has placed his parks and breathing spaces where the people can not go.

And too often the traffic engineer has had to unscramble the errors of those who built his roads too narrow and put them in the wrong place in the first place.

In the public interest I propose a pooling of these talents. I suggest that this pooling begin on the campuses and in the study halls of our institutions of higher learning, even at the wrench of curriculum revision. If we are to train others for great tasks, we first must provide intellectual leadership.