

How Can Counties Develop an Adequate Traffic Safety Program?

HALLIE L. MYERS, Executive Director

Indiana Traffic Safety Foundation, Inc.
Indianapolis, Indiana

Unfortunately there is no easy answer to this question. Perhaps the best quick answer is, "through the continuing skillful use of techniques already developed." The solution to the traffic accident problem involves many things and many persons but in the end and in all units of government it lies mainly in the hearts and minds of men.

This subject question has been asked by those on the program committee, presumably for the information of those charged with the responsibility of developing such programs. Whether or not these remarks do any good will depend largely on the amount of desire in the hearts of these responsible persons for an answer and on their willingness to do what is suggested.

There is, in the Bible, a story of the rich young ruler who came to ask "Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" The Master's reply was clear—"If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me." But, when the young man heard this he went away sorrowful—for he had great possessions.

Thus it is many times with those who ask what they can do to promote traffic safety. I am convinced that human nature has not changed very much in 2,000 years. I am convinced that few persons really want traffic safety enough to do what is required to get it. They want to keep what they have—they want no interference with their way of doing things—they want to do something spectacular or miraculous—they want to avoid the necessary day to day hard work—they want to discard what has been done and blaze new trails so they can reap the glory—SO—they go away sorrowful when they hear what is required.

In spite of much promising by many who advocate traffic safety, a considerable number of them go away sorrowful when they find that good traffic safety programs take work, sacrifice of some privileges, and an outlay of money. Desire fades when these things enter the picture.

The plain fact is that not many persons give more than lip service to traffic safety. If they did, there would be, already, a vocal organization in every community in the state demanding action and willing to work and pay for it. Such a desire needs to be generated.

One way to generate a desire for traffic safety is to present the facts to those most likely to be affected and those in a position to do something about it. That is the reason for this meeting today—to present the facts about, and suggested remedies for, Indiana's county road traffic accident problem.

We have all read and heard about the tremendous waste of lives, time, and money, caused by traffic accidents in both state and nation. When we stop to consider that, in Indiana, an average of over 1,100 per year have been killed and over 30,000 injured annually for the past 30 years; and that this annual toll—every year for 30 years, mind you—would require an unbroken line of hearses and ambulances 290 miles long to carry the victims, we begin to see something of the scope of this problem. Hardly a person in this room has not had at least one member of his family killed or crippled for life in a motor vehicle accident. Based on the record, one of every ten persons in this room will be in a serious accident this year.

COUNTIES NEED TRAFFIC SAFETY PROGRAM

Promotion of traffic safety on county roads is the last traffic safety frontier remaining in Indiana. This does not mean that efforts in cities and on state highways are finished or even nearing perfection, but rather that county roads are virgin territory for safety effort.

Thirty years ago the problem on county roads in Indiana was not alarming. As late as 20 years ago it constituted about 10 per cent of the total traffic deaths in the state—today it runs more than 20 per cent of the total. Property damage and personal injury ratios have increased in similar fashion.

This doubling of the county road's share is due to several causes, among which are these:

- . . . Doubling of the number of motor vehicles in the state,
- . . . Considerable increase in mileage driven per vehicle per year,
- . . . Spilling over of this traffic onto county roads from cities and state highways,
- . . . Migration of much of our population from city to suburbs and farms, thereby creating city traffic conditions on many county roads,
- . . . Improved county road surfaces without accompanying improvement in width, alinement, shoulders, marking, and signing,

. . . Reluctance of some county officials to attack the problem forcefully and a similar reluctance to seek or accept advice on how the problem might be met.

It should be said here that methods of traffic accident prevention are known to persons experienced in traffic work but failure to find out and apply what is already known is one of the biggest faults of those who are charged with responsibility to do something in this field.

Our effort to bring home to every citizen a realization of the extent of our traffic problem has rightfully emphasized the number killed and injured annually, but we have neglected to give equal emphasis to the progress being made. Through the years much work and study by many persons and a great deal of trial and error by those working for safer traffic movement have brought more success than most of us realize. A terrific job has been done in Indiana. In the last 20 years we have seen our state traffic death rate decrease from 17.1 per 100 million miles of travel to 5.9. What this cold statistical fact means is that without this reduction we would have killed 3,399 persons last year instead of 1,172.

One natural result of our failure to emphasize this success is that many incoming officials feel that no effective measures have been developed and each strikes out on his own to develop a new way to conquer the dragon singlehanded. While a certain amount of individual thought and experimentation may be beneficial, the general practice of each one going it alone results in confusion, loss of uniformity of control measures, duplication of effort, and trial and error methods which finally arrive at the same error after much trial that could have been avoided. Actually the rate on county roads in Indiana is more than twice as high as that for the state as a whole. This indicates a need for counties to study and adopt methods now in use in cities and on state highways.

To see more of the broad picture it is necessary to review quickly a few more facts. The more than 76,000 miles of county highways are divided into 92 county road units varying from 180 miles in Ohio County to 1,542 miles in Allen County. Most counties have more miles of roads than any state highway sub-district. Money for these roads comes from motor vehicle license and fuel taxes and distributions ranging, in 1957, from \$80,649 for Ohio County to \$1,892,593 for Marion County. The average county has 833 miles of roads and received last year about \$446 per mile. This will be increased in the calendar year 1958 by about 15 per cent to approximately \$522 per mile. If we use the 1956 count of vehicle miles on county roads we arrive at an average of about 50 vehicles per day per mile. Only a very small percentage carries more than 400 vehicles per day. About 17,000 miles or about 22 per cent of this system is surfaced with either brick, concrete, or bituminous ma-

terial. An unknown number of miles in each county is made up of streets in unincorporated towns. The Indiana State Road Map lists 1,675 named, unincorporated places. Those ranging in size from 100 to 3,000 population number about 500 or about five per county. While this mileage is not a large part of the total it must be taken into account as part of the county road problem. It is the county responsibility to control speed, erect stop and warning signs, and, if necessary, regulate parking on those streets which are not in the state system.

It is folly to think that this \$446 per mile or the \$522 expected in 1958 will enable even the most efficient county highway administration to provide state highway type surfaces and maintenance on any large mileage of these roads.

It is *not* folly, however, to think and demand that the most efficient use possible be made of this money and that a share of it be spent in each county for the protection of life on county highways.

Bear in mind that the National Safety Council has evaluated Indiana's traffic safety organization structure as "a model for the rest of the country" and that this organization and its methods have resulted in a traffic death rate in the rest of the state that is much less than half that of county roads. It seems, then, that counties must keep their methods within the framework of this statewide program, which is built on Engineering, Education and Enforcement. We must have them all. All are important, but due to the nature of this group we must confine our thoughts here to what can be done by those who are responsible for the engineering and care of roads. And make no mistake about it, that is a very large slice of the problem. Engineering is the most positive and the most lasting of the three methods of approach.

I realize that it is common practice to blame all accidents on wild, drunk, or irresponsible drivers. That, of course, is the easy way. However, when we stop to think that the fatality rate on state highways and city streets is less than half that of county roads and that the rate on the Indiana Toll Road is less than half that of state highways, we begin to see that good roads have their effect. We use the same drivers, same vehicles, same weather, same laws, and same educational measures in each case. The difference lies in the roads.

HOW ARE WE TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT?

1. Plagued as we are with too little money we may not completely work over the entire system but that cannot be accepted as an excuse for doing nothing. Roads must be classified according to traffic use and needs, and top priority given to those showing greatest needs. Perhaps

the greatest need on county roads today is for road classification. No county can afford not to have a road classification, for without it you have a haphazard arrangement of snap judgment and individual opinion.

2. The practice of splitting county road funds between the three commissioner's districts, as is done in some counties, without regard to road needs should be changed to a more realistic apportionment. Traffic streams, like streams of water, do not tend to follow evenly the boundaries of Commissioner's Districts. In bygone days when road funds came from abutting property owners there was some excuse for such division. Such conditions no longer exist. Funds contributed by highway users should be spent in their best interest and without attempt to balance distribution between districts.

3. Commissioners must hire competent men for county highway supervisors; pay enough salary to keep a good man; give him sound policies to work by; give him enough authority to do the job; leave him alone and let him do it; and retain him in office longer than our present average of 3.5 years. County road business has become big business and requires business methods, high type administration, and the use of recognized traffic safety measures rather than the pet ideas of individuals. The Commissioners must seek help on traffic matters from persons and agencies qualified to give it and then follow it. Before some one questions what business efficiency has to do with traffic safety let me add that traffic safety and efficiency are practically synonymous terms. You don't usually get one without the other.

4. A start should be made at complying with the law. Since 1939 it has been the law in Indiana that signs and markings on county roads must conform to the standards of size, color and shape and other particulars set out in the *Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices* prepared by the State Highway Commission of Indiana. To the best of my knowledge no county has fully complied in the intervening 19 years and less than 10 per cent have even started. It is time to realize that laws apply to officials as well as to individuals. It is begging the point to say that there is no penalty in the law. None should be needed for men sworn to uphold the law. The fact remains that it was and is the will of the legislature. A program of providing adequate signs should be started using the roads highest on the classification list first and working down. A new Manual has just been distributed by the State Highway Commission. It is the legal standard. There is no excuse for deviation from the accepted standards. My home county, Marion, is one of the worst in the state for this lack of uniformity.

5. Many roads have been given improved surfaces in recent years without any change in road width, bridge width, or cutting out sharp turns or bad curves. View obstructions have been left in place and skew intersections remain as before. There is no doubt that the increase in rate and number of county road accidents is due in part to driving smooth running new cars over smooth road surfaces and being trapped into too much speed for a right angle turn or curve. These things must be considered if we are to have adequate traffic safety on county roads.

6. Counties must work for a rational speed policy. There can be no question that speeds of 65 mph, the state limit, are too high for county roads. The present law provides that the county commissioners can establish lower limits after an engineering and traffic survey. Few have done anything. Some that have tried, have erected signs without any survey, based entirely on someone's hunch as to what the limit should be. In some cases no official action was taken by the commissioners to make the limit official. Such methods breed disrespect for all traffic regulation. We think a new law setting the top speed on county roads at 45 mph and then giving the commissioners authority to zone either up or down from that would be beneficial. Even now, however, there is authority under the law to remedy this condition. The State Highway Department has a traffic engineer available on request to help counties in speed zoning and other traffic surveys. With the need that is apparent on every hand he should be the busiest man in Indiana.

7. County commissioners and county attorneys could benefit from sitting down with state highway traffic engineers and learning how they prepare traffic regulations that will stand up in court when violators are arrested. In days immediately ahead there will be more and more instances where it will be necessary to adopt traffic regulations for small towns, in built-up suburban areas, etc. They must be properly drawn before they can be enforced.

8. During most of last year there was, and now again this year there is, a state traffic safety survey team in the field making surveys of Indiana cities at the request of their mayors. These surveys are made without charge by personnel of four state departments. I have been and am now active in these surveys as a consultant, in assisting as advance man, and in the presentation of the reports. These reports have been universally well received and have already produced some very worthwhile results. Eleven cities were completed last year and 12 more are already scheduled for this year.

A COUNTY TRAFFIC SAFETY SURVEY

There has been much discussion about the possibility of organizing a similar team for county surveys. Aside from the fact that trained manpower is not available at the moment and we have no questionnaire form prepared for use by such a team, the chief reason nothing has been done is the difficulty of getting all the necessary county officials together to request a survey and to agree to make an honest effort to carry out its recommendations. In many counties it would be difficult to get even the three commissioners in agreement but a complete survey would also involve the sheriff, superintendent of schools, the circuit judge, and the prosecutor.

I feel that when some county gets interested enough to get these people to request a traffic safety survey of their county we will find the necessary manpower and ways to get it done. The highway section would be only a part of the broad survey. As I have said, no questionnaire has been developed, but when it is, it will beyond any doubt, contain most or all of the following questions. Suppose you think of the answers for your county as I read them.

1. How many persons were killed and injured on your county roads last year? What type of accidents caused these casualties?
2. How does your population rate and registration rate compare with the other counties of the state?
3. How many miles of county roads do you have?
4. How many miles of your roads have paved surfaces?
5. How many miles of these have a center line?
6. How many intersections do you have which are controlled by STOP or YIELD signs?
7. How many of the above have been placed following adoption of formal resolution by the commissioners?
8. How many miles of your roads are in unincorporated towns and how many in built-up areas adjacent to cities?
9. What traffic control measures have been taken in these areas?
10. How many miles of sidewalks have been provided in such areas to keep pedestrians off the road?
11. Have you painted any cross walks in small towns for school crossings?
12. How many traffic signals do you operate? How do you determine where they are needed?
13. How many railroad grade crossings on your roads?

14. How many of these are equipped with gates, watchmen, or flashers?
15. How many have difficult approach grades? What have you done to correct these grades?
16. At how many of these crossings have you placed STOP signs?
17. How many miles of your roads have been properly zoned for speed?
18. Are these areas properly signed?
19. What attention have you given to traffic control near schools?
20. What means are used to keep weeds down around traffic signs and at corners?
21. How much of your annual budget is earmarked for traffic safety and control?
22. If none, how do you provide traffic control devices when funds are all used up for construction or maintenance?
23. Where do you purchase your road signs?
24. How many did you place last year?
25. Do you read and follow the standards set out in the *Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices*?
26. How many bridges do you have on paved roads that are no wider than the road? How many of these are less than 30 feet in length?
27. How many bridges have you widened in the last year?
28. Have you considered the possibility, for instance, that instead of replacing one bridge at a cost of \$50,000 you might be able to widen 25 others for the same amount and produce more safety?
29. Have you placed any "no passing" zones on any hills or curves? Are they needed?
30. Do you know that Purdue University has short courses in fundamentals of traffic engineering control which would be very valuable to your highway supervisor?

Practically all of these questions suggest what the correct answer should be. How did your county rate? This list alone shows how Indiana counties can improve the highway part of their traffic safety program. Your answers have no doubt proven to you that you have a long way to go. Until a special survey reveals a more specific one, here is a program for you. I am sure that, like the rich young ruler, many of you will go away sorrowful because I have not shown you an easy royal road to traffic safety, but for those with the proper desire and determination to do something about it,

HERE IS YOUR PROGRAM!