

State-County Cooperative Agreements on Highway Problems: Background and Approach

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Men who build highways are among the most practical, realistic men in industry. County commissioners, highway engineers, and surveyors are by the nature of their offices and the nature of their responsibilities among the most practical politicians in Indiana. It is interesting to note that one of the most important experiments in the field of political science is being undertaken by these hard-headed men. The success of this experiment will determine in a great measure whether or not the freedom that we know in this country will continue to survive.

At the time of the American Revolution, visionary writers and militant revolutionists were attacking both the principle of the "divine right of kings" and the complete reliance by individuals upon strong central governments. Our revolutionary fathers established for the first time a government dedicated to the principle that all men are created equal. The most fundamental document in American history, the Declaration of Independence, says in part:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Even before our Constitution was finally adopted, our founding fathers discovered that it was relatively easy to establish the principle of equality in government, but it was extremely difficult to practically provide each person an equal voice in his government and an equal opportunity in our society.

Alexander Hamilton and the Federalists took the position that equality of opportunity could not be achieved in a society in which

the people were provided an equal voice in making the policies of government. These men reasoned that a strong federal government with its policies made by the "most qualified and intelligent men" in the country would provide greater opportunity to all people.

Thomas Jefferson and the Republican-Democratic school of political thought believed that the only guarantee of the equality of opportunity in a society rested upon the equality of the voice each of us possess in our government. From the time of the presidency of Thomas Jefferson, this principle has been the established practice in government in the United States.

Thomas Jefferson recognized that the smaller the number of persons who elect a public official the greater is the voice of each individual in the control of the functions of government performed. Jeffersonians insisted upon the recognition of a state of the Union as the basic unit of government, with the federal government as a government of delegated authority. Further, Jeffersonians believed that the functions of government which could be performed best and supported most adequately at the local level should be placed under the control of elected local city, county, town, and township officials. Without entering into the controversy over the increase in the authority of the federal government, it has been demonstrated without question that the greater a government is in size and the number of people controlled, the less each individual participates in making the policies of government and in determining the quality of its leadership.

A nation cannot choose whether or not it will join in the industrial revolution. The tide of scientific advancement rolls inexorably over all communities. Improvements in communication and transportation have made all of the communities of the United States interdependent. Responsibility for many of the problems facing any of our communities must rest in part upon all of the other communities of this great nation. The great question facing the American people today is whether or not the price of economic and scientific progress is the loss of our social and political freedom.

Jefferson, one of the greatest American scientists that ever lived, in his wildest imagination did not comprehend the tremendous changes that would take place in the United States during the last almost two hundred years. His most comprehensive writings upon the nature of our political system do not provide us with a complete answer to our problems. The number of people who have accepted the Hamiltonian philosophy of a strong central government in public life have increased.

Many of those people who are Jeffersonian in their preferences believe that economic progress requires a strong federal government.

There are a few political scientists who believe that the American people must control the industrial revolution in this country and that the maintenance of our precious freedom is the only means by which we can bridle an economic system which threatens to cease being a domesticated animal of a great value and to become a monster capable of destroying us.

The federal and state governments have exercised increased control of local government in a number of areas. This increase in the role played by federal and state governments was the result in the beginning of the crises of the 1930 depression which led to a complete failure of the property tax as a means of financing local government.

New sources of tax income were provided at the state and federal levels of government to avoid chaos and to provide substantial assistance to our local communities. This assistance was provided the local communities principally in the areas of welfare, schools, and highways. The availability of state and federal funds carried with this assistance certain controls to insure taxpayers of the state and of the United States that the funds would be expended wisely.

The necessity of establishing a completely adequate highway system as a necessary part of our national defense required the federal and state governments to take an increasing interest in all highways. The control of the highways in the entire highway system of the United States provided an admirable opportunity to establish that cooperation between various units of government as the most effective answer to the problem of accepting the benefits of tremendous improvement in communication and transportation techniques while at the same time maintaining for each of us an effective voice in the control and operation of our highway system.

Intercontinental highways are used primarily by persons from all of the states of the United States, and they should support and maintain these highways. Intrastate highways have become primarily the responsibility of all of the citizens of a state. Neither of these systems can serve the people of Indiana or any other state effectively unless the feeder and secondary roads in our cities and counties are adequate to serve not only the people of the communities in which these roads are found but also those people who visit our local communities through the facilities of our intercontinental and intrastate highways.

Divided responsibility usually results in poor operations for the reason that it permits the persons charged with the responsibility to

disclaim the record of their failure. Divided responsibility often means excessive costs by reason of the increased need for overhead expenditures. None of these weaknesses in a highway system are the result of misconduct or inefficiency by public officials. They are inherent in the system. There has been a tendency by political scientists, highway constructors, and other persons interested in efficient highway construction and operation to shift the control of our highways to either the state or federal governments. Most of the highway users who for the most part use local highways have opposed this program, realizing that their control over mayors, county commissioners, city councils, and county councils is more likely to provide them adequate local highways.

Several years ago, the Association of Indiana Counties and the Indiana State Highway Commission began exploring the possibility of interchanging ideas and of jointly issuing regulations and instructions permitting the effective delegation of responsibilities and permitting an efficient economic operation of both state and local highway systems. This program culminated in the appointment of a committee by the Association of Indiana Counties to work closely with the Indiana State Highway Commission.

The State Highway Commission governs its operations through regulations adopted by the commission. The Association of Indiana Counties, which is an organization made up of counties of the state, makes available to persons interested in county highways a manual which provides instructions for the operation of a county highway system. It is the hope of the Indiana State Highway Commission and the county officials of the state that the close cooperation between the Association of Indiana Counties and the State Highway Department in the preparation of regulations and instructions will lead to a program which permits local taxpayers to elect and control those persons who construct, maintain, and operate local highway systems, and that those highways which are the responsibility of the State Highway Commission can be used more effectively through the integration of local highways with the state highway system. This program of cooperation has developed to the point that at least two serious problems have been resolved by the counties and the State Highway Department: One, the problem of a limited access highway program cutting and dead-ending county highways, and two, the problem of returning to a county state highways which have lost their usefulness to the state system.

It is important to notice that the following principals are necessary to obtain effective cooperation:

(1) There must be a complete and timely exchange of information between the counties and the State Highway Department.

(2) Both the counties and the State Highway Department must have effective and adequate plans for the future construction and maintenance of their highway systems.

(3) There must be a clear delegation of responsibility.

(4) There must be ample notice of any action to be taken by the agency possessing responsibility and an opportunity to be heard by the other agencies involved.

These requirements are important for two reasons: One, they provide for more adequate operation of any program of cooperation, and two, in a democracy where the officials rely upon the vote of the electorate to remain in office, the steps are essential to properly inform the public immediately affected by any ruling or any program in relation to highways.

The eyes of political scientists and politicians throughout the United States who are interested in maintaining strong local government should be focused upon Indiana during this experimental period of cooperation.