

Joint City-County-State Planning on Highway Projects

FRED B. FARRELL, Assistant Regional Engineer
Region 4, Bureau of Public Roads, Chicago, Illinois

Highway agencies are tackling the biggest construction job in history. Great mileages of interstate and primary highways, secondary and local roads, and city streets are being built. The overall job involves every level of government: the federal government, states, counties, cities, towns, and townships. They are all part of the picture. What one does affects the others.

Road systems under the administrative control of the state highway department typically extend to all counties and serve most, if not all, cities and towns in the state. Hence, decisions and actions of the state highway department with respect to road and street improvements, whether widening, reconstruction, by-passes, or new freeways, are of vital concern to the counties and cities involved.

For whenever major improvements are made on state highways, traffic patterns change. These take place not only on the state highway itself, but also on adjacent county roads and city streets. As a result, costly adjustments may be necessary. The cost of the adjustments is only one of the problems to which local communities are sensitive. Decisions as to location of major expressways can have profound effect upon their economy and future growth. So much so, that they have been called the makers and breakers of cities. They can do the same to rural areas.

Cities, counties, and states must, therefore, get together on their planning. There is simply too much at stake for any one of them to go it alone. The state cannot divorce itself from county road and city street affairs any more than the counties and cities can ignore what is happening with respect to state highways. Counties and cities in fact should take active part in the development of the state highway system. This does not weaken the state highway department; it actually strengthens it. Through joint planning the state will get a better job done; the cities and counties, for their part, will be able to plan ahead on their own road, street, and community development problems.

Cities and counties should see that the best possible land and property developments take place along highways, particularly new ones. Time is the one factor that is *not* on the side of the planners in this

stepped-up highway program. If they stand by hoping the problem will solve itself, it will not be long before substandard, unattractive, and low tax-producing developments will begin to take over the prime locations.

Once these eyesores get entrenched, they set the standard for hodge-podge community development for years to come. They become difficult and expensive to root out. Valuable land is spoiled.

The state can only go so far. It can control vehicular movements, for example, in interchange areas. But the control of traffic on local approach roads and of the adjacent land use is up to the counties and cities. It is their job to anticipate problem situations and take prompt action.

Joint planning is the way, the only way, that the interests of the traveling public and the interests of the local community can be taken into full account. This joint planning also includes participation by local civic and business groups. Above all others, they are quick to sense the enormous impact of highway improvements; they can bring out facts on the future economy of the area and other information which can help in determining the type of highway and where it should be located. Facts concerning the current and future economy of the area traversed become more sharply defined.

When these local groups are brought into the picture and understand the problem, they can be of tremendous help in resolving local differences of opinion on consequences of proposed improvements. The public can ordinarily be counted upon to support a worthwhile and needed program providing they have been kept abreast of developments, have enjoyed friendly and understanding contacts with highway agencies, and have assurance as to their competence and efficiency.

The public is not inclined to accept certain improvements as the best solution simply because a highway agency has so decided all by itself. If the public has been kept in the dark or is spoon-fed only selected bits of information, they may become apprehensive and perhaps antagonistic toward even the most worthwhile and needed improvements. And once a public judgment has been made against a proposal, it is difficult to change it. Both the agency and the public suffer.

Thus, to get the job done right requires joint planning; it requires cooperation, lots of it. What about this cooperation? Who takes the lead? What are the ground rules? These questions, and the answers, are of vital concern to every highway agency.

Joint planning cannot be effective under a pattern of cooperation that can be used or set aside according to the whims of any one agency

in its dealings with others. Cooperation must be deep seated; it must be continuous; it must be across-the-board. It must also be brought into play in the earliest stages when consideration is being given as to what roads are to be built, and where, and when. This is in the pre-planning stage. Further, it should extend through to the final decision-making stages.

HIGHWAY PLANNING AND FACT FINDING

In this respect, city and county participation in joint planning obviously involves more than merely finding out what is going on and passing judgment as to the merit of various proposals which the state highway department may have in mind. If they are to be effective as partners with the state in joint planning, counties and cities will have to contribute to basic problem solving. And nowhere is there greater need for contributions than in the area of fact gathering.

State highway departments are well fixed when it comes to marshaling facts on rural roads. This is because back in the 1930's the Bureau of Public Roads and the state highway departments set up the state planning survey programs. From these programs they have developed and now maintain an up-to-date supply of facts about the various road systems. A large backlog of useful information is on hand for rural state highways, and somewhat less for other rural roads. When it comes to highways and streets in cities and urban areas, there is a distressing lack of information. And what information is available is not on a uniform basis.

This lack of facts has seriously handicapped local units, particularly the cities. Recognizing this, a number of leading city officials got together about five years ago to form the National Committee on Urban Transportation. The Bureau of Public Roads and a number of other organizations became members of this Committee. Their objective was to prepare a general guide or blueprint as to how a continuing transportation fact finding and planning program could be set up in easy stages in cities, both large and small. Manuals of procedure for accomplishing this are now available. The procedures are so designed that they can be installed economically within the present framework of city administration to cover various operations: engineering, fiscal, legal, and administrative. These will produce the facts required for evaluating local transportation needs which will, in turn, facilitate joint planning efforts with other agencies.

The state highway department, however, is the king-pin in the highway planning field. It is its responsibility to assume the necessary leadership in bringing about a joint planning relationship with the

counties and cities and to encourage their taking part in such undertakings as that of the National Committee on Urban Transportation. Why is this so? For the answer, let us examine how highway agencies at the various levels of government fit into the picture.

Through various programs at the national level, interstate and federal aid primary, secondary, and urban, the federal interest in highway work has been extended deep into roads and streets not only under the control of the state but also under the jurisdiction of the counties and cities. However, when it comes to setting up federal aid money for a given highway, road, or street improvement, the request must be made through the state highway department.

The Bureau of Public Roads has a broad interest in the problems of counties and cities. This is evidenced by such activities as the Consultant Board of County Engineers and the previously mentioned participation in the National Committee on Urban Transportation. But when it comes to money matters, Public Roads does not deal directly with the counties and cities, only with the state highway department. This is a requirement in the law. Hence, as far as the Bureau of Public Roads is concerned, the state highway departments are the initiating and action agencies in the planning and programming of highway improvements.

At the other end of the line are the city and county highway agencies. They vary widely in competency and organizational structure, from one man part-time set ups to fully established administrative and technical organizations cover the full scope of highway endeavor. City and county highway agencies, be they large or small, are basic administrative road units. They are the level of government closest to the people. Because of their localized area of activity, cities and counties look to the state as the prime mover in the management of the overall highway program.

Thus, the state is accepted by other units of government, federal and local, as the leading partner in highway affairs. It is therefore incumbent upon the state to assume this leadership and to assert it vigorously. In so doing, they have responsibility and obligation to bring about an effective joint city-county-state planning relationship, a relationship characterized by coordinated and cooperative effort rather than unilateral or arbitrary action.

There is no ready means of gauging the effectiveness of joint city-county-state planning. It is a question of degree. Among other things, it involves attitudes, mutual respect, willingness to give and take, being informed of the other fellow's problems, and public knowledge and confidence in how highway affairs are handled.

Administrative and technical maturity on the part of all parties is called for. Breaking the matter down into its basic elements, it becomes largely a problem of lining up the facts, getting people together, talking things over, and reaching mutually arrived-at decisions. It's as simple as that.

LOCAL PRESSURES CREATE PROBLEMS

Simple as it is, it is surprising that joint city-county-state planning on highway projects should pose any particular problem. But it does, and there are reasons. In some cases, influence and pressures of special interest groups will start being exerted the minute that the state highway department gets together with the local highway agency. Sometimes these continue to plague and worry the planners throughout the course of their deliberations which may extend over a period of several months or even years. Local groups write letters of opposition; they solicit the support of elected officials; and they appear before the top echelon of the highway department to plead their cause or they make demands for personal appearances of highway officials before local meetings to discuss the problem.

Granted that this is all part of the job, it nevertheless takes time, much valuable time, because it requires the attention of the top men of the department. In many respects it is a thankless job inasmuch as all that is involved in many cases is the opposition of special interest and minority groups. Highway officials who appear before such groups are frequently subjected to hostile attitudes. Acceding to certain demands may quiet down one group, but will usually stir up others. By and large it is a time-consuming job which often shows no measurable accomplishment. Then, too, when planning proposals are divulged too far ahead highway officials understandably fear possible exploitation of property values along the projected new highway routes.

It is small wonder, then, that the state highway department may sometimes shy away from what promises to be a troublesome and frequently unproductive undertaking. Even though they recognize the need to seek audiences to explain their overall program or proposed plans for particular projects in order to gain public understanding and support, they may be inclined to postpone the day of reckoning by keeping their planning under wraps until the latest possible moment. They then face up to the situation and push it through as rapidly as they can.

LEGISLATION CAN HELP

This practice has serious drawbacks. When it becomes a habit, the situation can get out of hand. Highway agencies do not work together

harmoniously and public dissatisfaction becomes widespread. Under such circumstances, legislative action can accomplish much good in setting up a framework under which effective joint planning and cooperative relationships can be carried out.

Such legislation can provide the needed guideposts. These, when supplemented by administrative actions, will foster harmonious relationships. They could, for example, clearly set forth the authority and responsibility of various governmental units for carrying out their highway functions. In so doing all highways, roads, and streets would be classified into clear-cut categories as a cooperative effort by all agencies involved. The law might well spell out who is responsible for providing financial support and how and where joint financing arrangements can be undertaken.

Legislation could also require the preparation of long range highway development plans by each highway agency. It would provide for complete cooperative action between the state and the counties and cities in all phases of preparing such plans. The mere making of a one-time needs study has only limited benefit. Legislation might likewise direct that each agency reappraise its plan from time to time. This will insure continuance of joint effort.

Additionally the law could require the state, the counties and the cities to maintain short term improvement programs, including financial plans, based on their long range program. In this respect each agency would report annually upon work completed during the past year and programed for the coming year.

In order to work up these long and short range programs, standards for the construction and maintenance for local roads and streets might be established cooperatively between the state highway department and the counties and cities. This could be accomplished by means of separate state-wide committees for local roads and city streets with state highway department representation on each such committee.

On the matter of organization and management of highway agencies, highway legislation could establish effective administrative machinery and provide means whereby interagency cooperation shall be effected. It could, as well, provide for periodic review as to how well this machinery is working.

Existing laws, in many cases, already permit such joint efforts between the state highway department and the counties and cities. But by being specifically spelled out in the law, the process can be greatly speeded up.

Legislation can help immeasurably, but it cannot insure ultimate accomplishment of effective joint city-county-state planning. Broad gauge

attitudes on the part of those who administer highway affairs cannot be brought into being by merely passing a law. In this respect, highway agencies, in order to get along with each other, are dependent upon the quality, capabilities, and understanding of the men themselves who head up the highway agencies. If these men are of a mind to get along together, if they are open and above board, if they inspire confidence, their staffs and employees up and down the line will tend to follow suit. But it takes more than a desire to bring it about; it takes a plan of action. People have to be encouraged. They have to be motivated. The task of doing these things is a big one, but it pays tremendous dividends.

One of the first steps in the right direction concerns what each agency can do on its own, and that is to see that each of its employees knows his organization and how it works. In other words, the problem starts at home. The larger the agency, the more important it is for them to see to it that their people up and down the line know their own duties and responsibilities, know how their work fits in with other work of their associates and colleagues, and appreciate how the operations of their own particular agency relate to the work of other agencies at the same and different levels. In so doing, they will have overcome one of their own internal obstacles and cleared the way for more effective cooperation in the joint planning of highway work.

To bring this about, the top executives of each agency must be keenly sensitive to this situation. Their leadership is essential. Larger agencies can employ staff conferences and instruction courses as means of filtering their ideas and objectives through their organization. These will set the stage in broadening an understanding of what goes on within and outside of the agency. Many executives may feel that this is all well and good for other agencies, but that they don't need it as badly as the other fellow does.

This requires some serious soul-searching. For it is quite doubtful that even the best organized and indoctrinated agency cannot stand some improvement. The task is always with us. New employees are constantly coming into the larger organizations and occasional failures and misjudgments can be expected even under the best of conditions. Personalities differ. Some individuals play their cards close, some are aggressive, some are hasty, some are inconsistent, others procrastinate and fail to act. All of these characteristics must be recognized, taken into account, tempered, and moulded along the most productive lines. This requires tact and understanding of how people work and react to a variety of situations.

KNOWING THE OTHER MAN'S PROBLEMS

Then there is the problem of breadth of knowledge. For the smaller highway agencies one or two top men might well handle all of its affairs personally. But the matter becomes more complex as the size of the agency increases. They must resort to delegation. Those to whom various tasks are delegated are, therefore, acting for their superior. They should have sufficient understanding and breadth of knowledge to represent him effectively not only within the agency but outside as well. They should also have the authority to make commitments. This is not always the case. Sometimes the authority has strings attached. Those who represent their superiors are permitted to go only so far. Such commitments as they might make are tentative, subject to later qualification and even discouraging reversal. Then, too, it is all too common for agency representatives to be little more than observers or listening posts. They are in position to contribute little or nothing to solving the problem at hand. They simply report back to their superiors who have reserved unto themselves the right to make whatever decisions are called for, usually at some later date. True, there are certain situations where such practices are appropriate. These cannot, however, be permitted to become the accepted pattern of operation, otherwise effective cooperation, particularly in dealings with outside agencies, tends to break down.

What are the ground rules for indoctrinating an agency with an understanding and appreciation of not only its internal functions but its outside relationships? There are no specific rules. For the larger agencies, the problem presents a real challenge. Top administrators and those who act for them must base their decisions and courses of action on this matter on their own appraisal of what needs to be done. The mechanics of doing the job are important, but even more important is the desire to get the job done and the follow through in seeing that it is done. Even a poor set-up, from the standpoint of mechanics, can be made to work well if the right people are running the job.

All of us, from time to time, participate in meetings and discussions as representatives of our agency. We may be expected, for example, to make a contribution to the solution of a vexing problem, the resolving of a troublesome situation, or it may be simply one of explaining our agency's position on certain matters. Too often the knowledge we bring to bear is limited to what we have absorbed or come in direct contact within our own particular area of operation. And quite often, this may be only crudely oriented into the overall objectives of the agency we represent. Then, too, we may have even less knowledge, bordering

on ignorance, of the part being played by the other fellow. This narrows our approach and tends to make us conservative. We stay well within bounds. We follow lines of least resistance and traditional patterns instead of opening up new and more productive avenues of approach.

I have been in on many meetings myself where I have had only a vague awareness of what part the other fellows were playing or what their specific objectives were in the same boat with respect to my activities. As far as I could see they had only the foggiest notion of the Bureau of Public Roads, the nature of the federal aid program or how we work with the states. Obviously, there is considerable question whether decisions reached under such conditions, if reached at all, were the best decisions.

Recently, I was in casual discussion with some highway people at a regional meeting who were well up the organizational echelon of their particular agencies. One of those present opened up a discussion of the condition of the Highway Trust Fund. I am not going to elaborate on this subject. I merely mention it because it concerns a matter that is of top importance on the national highway scene. Yet it soon became obvious that he was talking above the heads of many of his listeners. No doubt they had heard of the Trust Fund and had a smattering of knowledge about the subject, but certainly they were in no position to contribute to the discussion. When we consider that these were men who frequently represented their particular agency at various meetings, even those at the national level, it is cause for concern. We stand to lose the constructive ideas and suggestions these individuals would otherwise contribute.

The foregoing situations are not unusual; they exist at all levels of government. We have all been in similar predicaments at one time or another. Obviously we cannot be all-seeing and all-knowing. That is not the point. The point is that we need to be constantly on the alert as to ways and means of doing the best job we can do, both as individuals and as agencies, in keeping abreast of what is going on in our own and the other fellow's shop. This will narrow the no-man's land of understanding and bring about more effective cooperation in city-county-state planning.

Certain individuals have the capability and initiative to acquire a depth and breadth of knowledge well beyond the normal expectations of their position. Others do not. This is a matter which highway agencies, particularly the larger ones, must recognize. It is to their advantage to bring their employees along through articles, talks, con-

ferences, instruction courses, and the like. They should inform them of the background of certain administrative decisions, and what is going on elsewhere. Above all, the top level people in each agency should set an example to their own employees.

We all recognize the tremendous value of road schools and similar meetings conducted on regional and state-wide bases. Representatives of various agencies get together in an informal way to discuss technical and administrative problems of common concern. Here they have opportunity to find out what is going on elsewhere, who the other fellow is, and how he thinks. It is an effective means of breaking the ice and toning up administrative and technical competency. It provides an environment in which cooperative effort in furtherance of joint city-county-state planning can be fostered.

It is well to mention, too, the part that can be played by state-wide organizations. Some of these may be associations whose membership consists solely of county or city representation; others may have wider representation including business interests and the like. Under competent management and direction such groups can provide effective day-to-day representation of county and city interests on a state-wide basis. Their office can, in fact, become a clearing house for the dissemination of information as well as providing an effective means of communication among the counties, the cities, and the state.

Thus far, we have touched upon the need to broaden our knowledge of what goes on in our own agency and in others. This knowledge, by itself, is not the cure-all for bringing about more effective city-county-state planning. All the knowledge in the world will not help one iota unless those who come in contact with others have some appreciation and understanding of how to meet and deal with people. The attitudes and principles that make for friendly, congenial, relations between friends and neighbors are identical to those that facilitate dealings among business associates, among highway agencies, and with the public.

An individual who is inconsiderate, non-communicative, and domineering will win few friends. People may have to work with him, but they won't like it. It is the same way with the highway agencies. It seems almost childish to dwell upon this matter. Yet it is serious. Occasionally, highway agencies become frustrated in their dealings with each other. There is simply no give or take. Where does the trouble lie? Well, if it lasts for long, the finger of suspicion tends to point to the state highway department. This is not because they are in the wrong, but because they fail to exploit their position of recognized leadership to resolve the situation. Quite commonly, the test of this leadership is not what the state highway department does with respect to their own

course of action but what they can get others to do in cooperating with them.

City and county highway agencies frequently do not have a clear notion of the various regulations and requirements relating to federal and state highway improvement programs. They need help on this and other matters to become full partners on the highway team. It is up to state highway departments to provide this help through leadership that is mature, understanding, and sympathetic.

This relationship is not one-sided. The cities and counties, for their part, should recognize the amenities in carrying out their obligation in this relationship. They, too, must be governed by the same principles that apply to the state highway department. They must be willing to get their own houses in order and develop an environment that enables cooperation with the state to be carried out under circumstances of mutual respect and consideration.

All highway agencies have the same objectives, to serve the best interest of that segment of the public they represent, to use highway funds efficiently, and to get the job done. Joint city-county-state planning is needed in bringing this about. Legislation can set the stage. But in the end, success can be gauged by how well the state highway department functions as the king-pin in the highway planning field.