

Urban Planning and the Federal Highway Act

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The Federal Highway Act of 1962, particularly the transportation portion, can be fully described in very few words. However, the events leading up to the passing of the act cover many years.

Transportation is as old as man. This might have been a different world if Adam had not transported the apple from the tree to Eve's hand. Simply, transportation is the act of moving persons and goods from one area to another.

Every conceivable form of transportation has been used by man throughout the ages. The invention of the wheel, the use of beasts of burden, the development of the steam engine, all had a great influence on the advancement of man.

Despite the development of each succeeding transportation system, problems have always arisen faster than they could be solved.

With the advent of the automobile in the early part of this century all past transportation problems seemed trivial. The early cars, as crude as they seemed, were much better than the roads which they had to travel on. From that day forward the automobile manufacturers have designed and produced cars of a type, and at a rate, that put a severe strain on the nation's network of roads.

In 1916 the Federal government recognized the need for a system of roads that would "get the farmer out of the mud." The 1916 Act made available federal highway funds to the states, providing adequate highway commissions were established to construct and maintain a federal highway system of roads. This system of roads was to ignore state lines and was to be truly the first attempt of establishing a system of interstate highways.

In 1917, the Indiana General Assembly passed an act establishing the Indiana State Highway Commission. Such a commission was established and operated for a few months before the Attorney General ruled the act unconstitutional. The General Assembly of 1919 modified the act and the Indiana State Highway Commission became a reality on March 10, 1919. It has been in continued operation since that time.

For many years the primary purpose of the Indiana State Highway Commission was to develop a *State highway system* that would provide the following services:

1. Improve the "farm to market" roads.
2. Connect all county seat towns.
3. Connect all major urban areas.
4. Establish a numbering system for State highway routes that would be reasonable and flexible.
5. Establish a maintenance section responsible for the maintenance of all State and Federal highways.

Roads in this era were mainly a low type surface. Dirt, gravel and stone were the principal types of surface. Rigid types of surface were practically unknown in the rural areas. The first Portland cement concrete road was constructed in Indiana in 1918. Some brick and block roads were in existence but these were mostly in urban areas.

Although one of the purposes of the newly created Highway Commission was to develop routes between major areas, no provision was made for the development of such routes within the urban areas. For several years the State Highway Commission was unable to either construct or maintain State highways in urban areas. County roads were improved according to funds available, local political pressures and the whims of individuals in offices. City street development was done in much the same manner. In addition the city fathers gave little or no thought to future expansion.

Until recently representatives of all governmental agencies responsible for the construction of roads and streets were so tied up with their individual problems that the thought of cooperation with other like agencies was not considered. In many cases the State Highway Commission was locating routes in both rural and urban areas without consultation with county and city authorities. Cities were developing streets without regard for the county system of highway, and likewise the counties were developing a program all their own without cooperative efforts with either the cities or the State.

When the first highway improvement programs were inaugurated most of the State's population was in rural areas. This is no longer the case. For example, over 63 percent of Indiana's population lived in urban areas in 1960. Much of this population shift was due to modern equipment, new farming techniques and better transportation facilities which enabled the farmer to farm much larger acreages with less help to provide the nation's food supply.

With the thought in mind, that one of the most pressing highway problems was the need for an extensive urban improvement program, coordinated between *all agencies* of government, a conference of enlightened and far seeing engineers and planners met in 1957 to plan such a program. This meeting has become known as the Sagamore Conference and can be called the "Grandfather" of the 1962 Federal Highway Planning Act.

The late President Kennedy was most interested in urban transportation of all kinds. At one time he seriously considered the establishment of a post of Secretary of Urban Transportation in the Cabinet. It was through President Kennedy's insistence that the 1962 Federal Highway Act was passed.

The planning portion of the act is not long. It reads as follows:

"It is declared to be in the national interest to encourage and promote the development of transportation systems, embracing various modes of transport in a manner that will serve the states and local communities efficiently and effectively. To accomplish this objective the Secretary [of Commerce] shall cooperate with the states. . . . in the development of long-range highway plans and programs which are properly coordinated with plans for improvements in other affected forms of transportation and which are formulated with due consideration to their probable effect on the future development of urban areas of more than fifty thousand population. After July 1, 1965, the Secretary shall not approve . . . any program for projects in any urban area of more than fifty thousand population unless he finds that such projects are based on a continuing comprehensive transportation planning process carried on cooperatively by states and local communities in conformance with the objectives stated in this section."

The intent of the act is clear.

First, it indicates that the transportation planning process shall be done in a cooperative manner between all agencies of government. Secondly, the transportation planning process shall be comprehensive in every respect. Thirdly, the transportation planning process shall be kept current by a continuing program.

At the time the 1962 Federal-Aid Act became a law, Indiana had eight areas of over 50,000 population in which studies were required. They were as follows: Indianapolis, Evansville, Terre Haute, Ft. Wayne, Chicago (Northwestern Indiana Area), Louisville (Southern Indiana Area), Muncie, South Bend (Niles Michigan Area).

In addition the State is cooperating with Ohio and Kentucky in the Cincinnati study. Since the 1960 census Anderson has passed the 50,000 population mark because of the annexation of additional area.

The state decided that in order to properly organize and conduct such transportation planning process as required, it would be proper and necessary to organize cooperative committees, composed of federal, state and local agency officials. This decision was based on the success of such committees in operation in Indianapolis and Marion County at that time.

The Indianapolis-Marion County Committees were organized primarily to deal with the various problems that developed due to location and design of the interstate system. The two committees were called: the Administrative Committee and the Technical or Working Committee. The Administrative Committee was composed of elected and appointed officials of local government who had the power by law to allocate funds and implement programs. The Technical or Working Committee was generally composed of engineers, planners and other local officials whose agencies were represented on the Administrative Committee.

Such committees have been organized in all of the ten areas coming under the 1962 Act. In addition committees have been organized in other areas which had less than 50,000 population in 1960.

Included are areas such as: Kokomo—Howard County; Lafayette, West Lafayette — Tippecanoe County; and Bloomington — Monroe County.

The Indiana State Highway Commission believes so thoroughly in the transportation planning process that they are willing, subject to the availability of staff time, to aid in the establishment of such a process in any urban area of the State.

In the development of a transportation planning process it became vital that engineers and planners establish a much closer union than had existed in the past.

Planners felt that engineers lacked vision and long range ideals. Engineers reluctantly accepted many phases of planning but felt that no transportation process could be developed without a thorough study of traffic generation, assignment and forecasting.

Another difference of opinion between engineers and planners was in the field of implementation of recommended programs. Many planners felt little or no responsibility for the financing or implementation of their programs. On the other hand the engineer because of his training and experience always wanted to know, "What can we accomplish with the funds available?"

When high speed electronic computers became available it was possible for the first time to coordinate the work of all the planning, engineering and related activities of transportation planning into a single operation. This operation permitted an enormous saving in time, manpower and money.

One of the best by-products of the transportation planning process is the better understanding between all the agencies and division of government as to "other fellows" problems. This provides for cooperation at a level never before attained. It should provide "our boss—the taxpayer" with the assurance that he is getting the best return possible for his tax dollar.