The County's Stake in the Federal-Aid Secondary Program

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The 1944 Federal-aid Highway Act appropriated $150 million "for projects on the principal secondary and feeder roads including farm-to-market roads, rural free delivery mail and public school bus routes." This appropriation was made for each of three years. A somewhat similar act passed in 1948 appropriated $135 million for secondary roads for each of two additional years. The unspent portions of these appropriations are still available. The final expiration date is June 30, 1953.

These funds were distributed to the 48 states. Indiana's share of the secondary funds from the 1948 Act is a little over $3 1/2 million a year. Because these funds have not been spent as fast as they were appropriated, there is now a total of about $8 1/2 million for Indiana which has not yet been placed under contract. However, a portion of this $8 1/2 million has been tentatively set aside for projects which have been programmed for construction.

The law specifies that this money is to be spent for construction on principal secondary feeder roads including farm-to-market roads and mail and school bus routes. The law does not state exactly which roads or how many miles of road may qualify for these funds. It has been interpreted to mean that certain roads on the state highway system, which are not of sufficient importance to qualify as primary highways, are eligible. In more than half the states, however, a majority of the mileage is on county systems of roads. Since the law stipulates that the aid shall be for principal secondary and feeder roads, it is clear that the objective was to give assistance to counties in constructing main county roads.

In order to use these funds for the construction of county roads, it is necessary that a system of Federal-aid Secondary roads be established in each county. The money may be spent only on those roads included in this system. In Indiana, the system as now designated is
relatively quite small. The Federal law, however, places no limit on
the size of the Secondary system. It is to be expected that the Federal-
aid Secondary system in Indiana will ultimately include a much larger
mileage than the system now designated.

There is no reason why more roads cannot be added to the system,
so long as they are important roads. If any of the counties have roads
which they consider as justifiable additions to the federal system, Mr.
George Goodwin, should be consulted. He will be glad to discuss your
problems with you and attempt to work out a solution satisfactory to all
parties.

There are a number of other steps which must be taken by the
county officials in order to secure federal money. Mr. Goodwin is
thoroughly familiar with these steps and is always willing to help with
the details. I won’t attempt to describe these details at this time but
will merely mention the reasons why some of these steps are required.

Assuming that the project which you desire to construct is on the
Federal-aid Secondary system, the next step is to ask the state to place
this project on a construction program. We like to plan our work in
advance so that we will have sufficient time to investigate the need for
the project and to get an idea of what type of improvement can be
justified. Certain minimum plans must be prepared. We have found
from experience that it pays to have plans and specifications for all work
in order that both the contractor and the contracting authorities have
a definite idea of the kind and amount of work to be done. The cost
of preparing plans generally amounts to only 3 or 4 per cent of the
cost of constructing the project and we believe that the use of plans
is likely to result in savings during construction of more than their cost.

After plans have been approved, the state will advertise for bids
and let a contract for doing the work. During construction there must
be adequate engineering supervision on the job to see that the work
is properly done. If the project is on a county road, the county must
agree to maintain it in a satisfactory manner after completion.

Federal money up to one-half of the cost of the project may be
used. The other half is supplied by the county for county roads and
by the state if it is a state highway.

I am aware that some county officials believe that they can do their
own construction in their own way at considerably less cost than is
the case where federal money and the accompanying federal and state
rules and regulations are used. The fact that only about 20 out of
the 92 counties in Indiana have used the federal money indicates that
it has not been popular in this state. However, in Michigan where
quite similar conditions exist, every county has constructed one or more federal projects.

We believe that there are a number of counties in Indiana that would receive worthwhile benefits by participating in this program. Many of these counties, so far, have not used any federal money.

In driving over Indiana county roads, I have observed a large number of old bridges which are in poor condition and which may fall down any day when a heavy load passes over them. Professor Petty has called attention to the large number of weak bridges on county roads in his *Highway Extension News*. To those of us who have given some thought to the problem of Federal-aid for counties, the reconstruction of these old weak bridges, before they fall down, seems to be a very desirable way to use the money. This is a type of work for which a contract must be let whether or not federal money is used. As you all know, county bonds may be issued to pay the county share of the cost of bridges. At this meeting last year, Mr. Coffin of Wayne County, described how he had laid out a 20-year program of bridge construction financed by a special property tax. It is his plan to use federal funds to pay half of the cost of these bridges. To those of you who may be interested, I am sure that you will find Mr. Coffin’s discussion, which is printed in the Proceedings of last year’s Road School, quite helpful.

I was particularly impressed by some figures Professor Petty published in a recent issue of his *Highway Extension News*. He showed that the total amount of money spent on county and township roads in Indiana in 1927 was nearly $27 million or $383 per mile of road. Twenty years later, only $12½ million or $170 per mile was spent on all the roads under county jurisdiction. Of course, in 1927, almost all of the $27 million came from property taxes. Twenty years later, property taxes for road use have almost entirely disappeared and the counties depend almost solely on motor vehicle revenues for their income. Obviously, $12½ million in 1947 was entirely inadequate as compared with $27 million in 1927. How and from what source the counties should obtain additional funds is not up to me to advise. However, it does seem that the federal funds available for new construction could be used to advantage by many counties that have not done so.