

HIGHWAYS in OREGON

By John H. Lewis, State Engineer

The current Oregon Voter contains a Road Synopsis consisting of articles discussing the subject from various points of view. The first, a summary of recommendations by State Engineer Lewis, is reprinted as follows:

If we are to get anywhere in the matter of road construction in Oregon, we must have a plan of definite road policy. Also an organization to execute such a plan and policy.

At the present time, we have no plan and no policy. Responsibility is not definitely fixed in any particular officers or boards for the maintenance of any particular roads.

At the present time the state is working on one project where state, county, district, city and private funds are being expended in the same work. Much effort is wasted in getting all these agencies to work in harmony at the right time to the same end. When the work is completed, who will be responsible for the maintenance of this work?

In two other cases, the state in cooperation with counties expended large sums in the construction of new grades. The work was abandoned during the winter time and a number of hills were washed out and many unnecessary slides came in for lack of proper attention at the right time. In the spring, disputes were had between the county and state officials as to who was responsible for removing these slides and raking new fills so that the roads constructed at great public expense could be used during the summer months.

In one of our counties where the state is constructing a trunk line on 5 per cent grade, the county or the district this summer expended a considerable sum in constructing a 10 per cent grade, ignoring the state survey, and where the entire investment will prove a total loss and the work done over in a year or so.

Under the law, the county courts must allot 70 per cent of all road levies to the districts for expenditure by the road supervisors, the balance of such road funds to be expended by and under the direction of the county courts. There are no particular roads set apart for the county court to build or maintain.

The result is the intermingling of work in such a way that the people cannot tell whether the county court or supervisors are to blame. Credit for good work cannot, therefore, be given and the responsibility for bad work cannot be definitely fixed.

There is but little improvement in the matter of state highway expenditures. The legislature in 1913 attempted to definitely adopt a state highway system on which all state funds were to be expended until such time as the system was complete, but the Attorney General has recently held that the Highway Commission can expend state money on any road which it may adopt as a state road.

This is wrong. The legislature alone should have the power in this very important matter of selecting trunk lines of the state and authorizing the expenditure of state funds thereon.

We have approximately 37,000 miles of road in Oregon to be maintained at the present time. In addition, many more miles of new roads must be built to open up the shortest and most desirable through routes. Besides, millions of dollars must be invested in the near future in pavements. With the most rigid economy, the problem confronting Oregon is enormous, when we take into consideration its great area and limited taxable wealth.

We must, therefore, systematize and organize this work in the interest of the taxpayer and the traveling public and see that no unwise expenditure is made and that all work is done in accordance with some definite plan so that eventually when our system is complete there will be no duplication of effort or waste.

This can be accomplished by classifying our roads in accordance with their relative importance and definitely fixing responsibility upon specific officers for the construction and maintenance of each particular class of roads.

Three classes appear sufficient—state, county and district roads.

The state roads should include the principal inter-county and interstate routes. Some of these have not as yet been opened up. For this reason, they should be spoken of in the law as routes.

Whenever any portion of a state route has been constructed by the state, the state and no other subdivision of the government should be thereafter responsible for the maintenance of this road.

These routes should be briefly defined in the law, such as the Pacific Highway, beginning at the inter-state bridge near Portland, running thence southerly through Portland, Eugene and Medford to the California line.

In a like manner all other im-

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Important routes should be defined. The John Day route, extending from Portland across the Cascade Range south of Mt. Hood, up the John Day river to the Idaho line near Ontario, will shorten the distance for through travel from Idaho, Utah and eastern points more than one hundred miles. In a like manner, the Eugene-Klamath Falls line when completed will shorten the distance to Portland from Klamath and Lake Counties and other points to the southeast by about one hundred miles.

The state roads should be under the jurisdiction of the State Highway Department and no state funds should be expended on any other road until such time as the program laid out by the legislature has been completed.

The county roads should include the most important roads in the county and operate as feeders for the state trunk line system. They should be selected by the County Court with the approval of the State Highway Department and their total length limited to some reasonable per cent of the total mileage of roads in the county, and all county funds should be expended upon these roads by the county courts. Prior to the taking over of the inter-state roads in the county by the state, the county should be responsible for the construction and maintenance of such state routes.

The district roads will comprise all other roads. These are the local roads and of little importance to inter-state or inter-county traffic. These should be under local control.

Sufficient power must be lodged. However, in the State Highway Department to correlate the work of all three of these highway departments. The state should prescribe definite standards for curvature, width, grade and alignment for each of these classes of roads, also standard loadings to be used in the design of all bridges, culverts, pavements, etc.

In order to enforce such standards, all plans and specifications for construction work by the county or district in excess of a fixed amount should be submitted to the State Highway Department for its approval prior to the letting of contracts. In this way the best practice of all the counties can be made available to each and the state standards adopted can be conveniently enforced. The roads between districts and counties, when they connect at the border, will then all be found to follow the same standards and ultimately form units in a complete state system.

One of the most important functions of the State Highway Department should be to prescribe and enforce a uniform system of cost keeping and publish annually total and unit costs of all construction or maintenance work at the close of each year. The people in this way can be conveniently informed as to how and where their funds are being invested.

This is the plan followed in New York and many other states at the present time.

It is absolutely impossible to pave all roads in Oregon at the present time. Neither will it be possible to pave all state roads in the near future. We must, therefore, ascertain what are the most important projects to be taken up first and proceed in an orderly manner for the completion of the whole plan.

It is my belief that the state should not take up an extensive paving program at the present time. We should at the outset confine ourselves very largely to the improvement of alignment and grade and in opening up the uncompleted links of short through routes, so that within the near future all of our roads may be made uniformly passable, and that we may get the maximum use out of these roads while we are developing our more expensive highway system.

With thorough maintenance of existing roads, a considerable development will take place and the increased taxable wealth assist in building a more ideal system.

We should, therefore, confine ourselves for the next few years to the cutting down of steep and dangerous grades, such as on the Pacific Highway in Josephine and Douglas Counties, and on the Columbia River Highway in Hood River and Wasco Counties. There are a few

important links which should be built to connect up present roads such as from Prairie City to Unity on the John Day route and a limited amount of construction to open up a present road from Eugene to Klamath Falls.

There are also many dangerous railroad grade crossings which should be eliminated, such as the one between Eugene and Roseburg, and no pavement should be permitted on the present location until these crossings are removed.

By the time this work is well under way and the fills thoroughly settled, the State Highway organization will have been sufficiently tried out and enough foundation prepared so that extensive paving operations can be commenced and carried out with economy and efficiency. Until such time, expensive wearing surfaces, if provided, should be largely, if not entirely paid for by the community benefited.

If our limited state highway funds are opened up for paving projects, they can all be used

in the Willamette Valley without making any material showing. This would not be fair to the other sections of the state which contributed to this fund.

The most important road for early paving, however, is undoubtedly in the Willamette Valley.

In the vicinity of the Pacific Highway from Eugene through Salem to Portland, more than 50 per cent of the entire population of Oregon resides and a paved auto truck highway through this section with necessary feeders would do more to stimulate development than any other program which can be suggested.

However, it is useless to stick to our present state standard of 5 per cent grades unless we can get adequate entrance to the various cities such as Portland. At the present time, it is absolutely impossible to get into Portland from the southwest on anything like a 5 per cent grade. The Terwilliger Boulevard was built with park money and auto trucks will not be permitted to use this road. Even this, it is said, has a short stretch in excess of 5 per cent.

Where the heavy traffic which will ultimately develop between Portland and Tillamook and between Portland, Salem and Eugene,

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as well as the west side road from Portland through Oswego to Oregon City, is concentrated for entrance to the city streets of Portland, we should have a specially constructed trunk line of not to exceed a 4 per cent grade, eliminating as far as possible the numerous grade crossings through the suburbs. This we must do, if we are to encourage auto truck traffic between the producer in the country and merchants in the city.

It is generally admitted that with paved trunk lines, auto trucks can compete with railroads in handling freight up to a limited distance of approximately 50 miles, on account of the greater convenience in receiving and delivering. This is due to the fact that the cost of handling freight in cities, together with terminal charges on railroads, is so great compared with the cost of hauling short distances that the cost of haul can practically be ignored.

I have endeavored to point out the present chaotic condition of highway development in Oregon and show the necessity for the adoption of some plan and definite road policy. There is ample precedent to be had in creating an organization to execute such plan and policy.

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