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WP 2/14
Front page

Highway Plan Shifts Costs to States

Bush's 5-Year Proposal Would Increase Spending, Cut Federal Share

By Stephen C. Fehr
Washington Post Staff Writer

Americans who want better highways, bridges and mass transit systems in the future could pay for them through higher state and local taxes under the federal transportation program proposed yesterday by President Bush.

The five-year, $105 billion administration proposal calls for the federal government to increase spending on highways and transit without raising taxes. But the federal share of the costs of projects would drop significantly in most programs, shifting more of the burden onto state and local governments, which, in turn, may ask taxpayers to make up the difference.

Kicking off what is expected to be a long and contentious effort in Congress this year to enact a new program, Bush and Transportation Secretary Samuel K. Skinner told transportation industry leaders yesterday that the president's plan was a good starting point.

"With this legislation, America is on the road to expanded productivity, more jobs and a strengthened infrastructure," Bush said.

Skinner sought a major push from the president, despite Bush's focus on the Persian Gulf War. The highway plan, which would largely replace 35-year-old legislation that built the 43,000-mile federal inter-

See TRANSPORTATION, A6, Col. 1

Highway Costs Shift to States In Bush Plan

BY LARRY MORRIS—THE WASHINGTON POST
Transportation Secretary Samuel K. Skinner explains proposal at White House.

TRANSPORTATION, From A1

state highway system, is one of the administration's major domestic initiatives. The program, like the current one, would be financed largely from a trust fund consisting of revenue from motor fuels taxes.

Drivers can expect no significant increase in the number of highways built, officials said, but would see more repairs and widening of existing roads that may decrease congestion. Urban areas such as Washington could expect to see more rush-hour carpool lanes, toll roads on federal highways and high-tech traffic control systems that warn drivers of problems.

Users of buses and trains could expect higher fares, industry officials said. Big-city transit systems such as Washington's Metro could no longer use federal money to subsidize their operating costs, and the percentage share of federal aid for capital costs would be reduced. Financially strapped transit systems may ask for more money from riders and the local governments that support them, officials said.

Congress probably will alter the proposal. Lawmakers and industry officials said yesterday they liked parts of the plan, such as ending most categorical grants to states and cities and allowing them to spend federal transportation money as they choose. But the officials

See TRANSPORTATION, A7, Col. 1

Proposal Could Yield Higher Local Taxes

TRANSPORTATION, From A6

complained that shifting the burden to the states is unfair because states already have been raising fuel taxes for transportation.

Skinner said, "We find that if the federal government has a somewhat smaller share, and state and local governments have a somewhat greater share than they have traditionally, you get better projects identified and built . . . on time and on budget because local officials are not looking for what I call free money" from Washington.

Shifting more of the costs of federal programs to the states is part of a pattern begun in the early years of the Reagan administration and now continued under Bush. The Reagan administration ended revenue sharing, for example, and consolidated social service block grants, leaving the states to take on more of the costs.

and industry officials said they want to increase the amount of federal spending, noting that some experts believe the nation will need between $1 trillion and $3 trillion to repair its crumbling roads and bridges. About $14 billion is spent annually on highways now; the proposal calls for an increase to $20 billion by 1996.

But Sen. Donald W. Riegle Jr. (D-Mich.), who attended the White House ceremony, said yesterday that it may be difficult for Congress to increase spending on highways and transit, in part because "no one understands what the war is going to cost us."

Under Bush's proposal, the federal government would spend $87.7 billion over five years on a restructured highway system that includes a new, 150,000-mile National Highway System consisting of the current interstate system and other

miles of urban and rural roads also would be created; states could decide within this program to spend federal money on roads or transit. A bridge program would provide money to fix existing spans. The national highway system would receive a higher share of federal money, but in nearly all cases, the federal contribution would drop.

Federal spending on transit would rise from $3.2 billion a year to $3.3 billion by 1996, but the federal share also would be slashed for most projects.

"This bill commits an enormous amount of money to building more highways that will carry more single-occupant vehicles," complained Alan Kiepper, president of the New York City transit authority.

Skinner said, "In these times of tough federal budgetary considerations, for mass transit to continue to rely on the federal government

LATIMES 2/14
FRONT PAGE

Bush Proposes $105-Billion Highway Plan

By ROBERT L. JACKSON
TIMES STAFF WRITER

WASHINGTON—The Bush Administration on Wednesday unveiled a five-year, $105-billion program to expand and improve the nation's deteriorating bridges and highways and to encourage construction of urban mass transit systems.

Billed as one of President Bush's major domestic initiatives, the proposed legislation would earmark $87 billion for highways and bridges, $16.3 billion for urban mass transit and $2.3 billion to promote safety programs, with a particular focus on combatting drunk driving.

A little more than $22 billion of the highway funds would be set aside in a special program that would allow states to spend their share of the money on transit systems, if they wish.

"The future of America's transportation rests on the new foundation that we're laying today," Bush said at a White House ceremony attended by Transportation Secretary Samuel K. Skinner. He called the proposed legislation, known as the Surface Transportation Assistance Act, the "first step on a long road that lies ahead."

Please see HIGHWAYS, A22

HIGHWAYS: Bush Plan Unveiled

Continued from A1

But the proposal came under immediate fire from environmental and transit organizations, who complained that the plan emphasizes cars at the expense of mass transit. State transportation officials and leaders of key congressional committees expressed concern that the proposed funding level would be insufficient and that states would have to bear too large a burden in matching federal funds.

The money represents a nearly 40% increase in highway funding. But while it calls for an increase of 25% in capital programs for mass transportation systems, it also reduces, by nearly the same percentage, federal operating subsidies for mass transit.

The largest share of the highway money—about $43.5 billion—would be used to create a 150,000-mile National Highway System. The system would include all 43,000 miles of existing interstates, and the remaining miles of major highways would be created primariy by expanding and improving existing state roads.

These roads would be selected in consultation with state and local officials, who would be required to come up with funds to augment Washington's contribution of 60% to 75% of the cost.

Rep. Robert A. Roe (D-N.J.), chairman of the House Public Works and Transportation Committee, said that the proposal "has some good ideas but I am concerned that, in some cases, they are masking reduced funding with philosophy and rhetoric."

Roe noted that the states would have to raise their share of funding for some road improvements from the existing 25% to as much as 40%.

"I don't know how the states, with all their financial problems, are going to come up with the money that's needed," he said.

Sen. Frank R. Lautenberg (D-N.J.), chairman of the transportation subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee, said that he fears the Administration is seeking to "transfer the burden for rebuilding our nation's infrastructure to the states."

Lautenberg said that "the job is too formidable and too closely linked to the performance of our national economy" to permit such burden shifting.

Rep. Norman Y. Mineta (D-San Jose), chairman of the surface transportation subcommittee of the House Public Works and Transportation Committee said through the bill in more detail. But he said: "I have been concerned that the Administration would shift a great deal of program responsibility to the states and require them to meet federal rules without shifting sufficient funds to go along with it."

In Sacramento, officials said it was not yet clear how California would fare financially under the proposed legislation. But they, too, expressed some reservations.

Carl Williams, assistant director of Caltrans, said that the bill "would give us a lot more flexibility in deciding what has to be done," although not as much as some officials had hoped. Williams said he likes the fact that the Bush proposal encourages private investment in the construction and management of toll roads.

"There is just not enough money at any level of government to provide for all of our transportation needs," Williams said. He said his main concern is that, by increasing the national highway system to as many as 150,000 miles, the federal government may not have enough money to help fund state and local projects.

Much of the funding for the bill would come from the federal Highway Trust Fund, which is supported by motor fuel taxes. Congress recently approved a 5-cent hike in the federal gasoline tax as part of its deficit-reduction agreement with the White House.

Of this increase, 2.5 cents has been earmarked for the general treasury to reduce the nation's budget deficit, another 2 cents for highway projects and half a cent for mass transit programs.

But the Environmental Defense Fund protested that, under the Bush proposal, each state's share of federal highway funds would be based largely on its fuel consumption, as reflected by fuel-tax figures. This factor could jeopardize air quality improvements in large urban areas like Los Angeles, the fund said.

"States that reduce gasoline consumption through ride pools, high occupancy vehicle lanes, transit and other creative measures would actually be penalized by receiving a reduced share of federal highway funds," remarked Bill Roberts, the fund's legislative director.

But Skinner told reporters that the bill encourages mass transit programs by proposing a shift in federal support from operating subsidies to more capital spending.

All mass transit programs will be funded through the trust fund more equitably distribute user fee revenues and will provide state and local decision-makers with a more predictable and stable federal funding source."

But Jack R. Gilstrap, executive vice president of the American Public Transit Assn., blasted the plan as "a recipe for more traffic jams, air pollution and wasted energy."

Gilstrap said that the bill, unless rewritten in Congress, "continues to emphasize the movement of cars and not people by proposing a no-growth policy for mass transit but a 40% increase in federal highway spending."

"Yes, there is a recognition of the federal role in transit," he acknowledged. "But where is the balance?"

Responding to criticism that mass transit would be shortchanged under the program, White House Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater said late Wednesday: "This is an age-old kind of concern and a trade-off that they have had to make since day one.

"I don't think there's much question about the need for a highway system and about the Americans' desire for the independence that that provides," he said.

"Similarly, we do have an urban mass transit fund that was set up by Congress some years ago that is providing billions of dollars to mass transit. And I think what you see here is a normal kind of special interest jockeying for funds . . . but I doubt very much that the balance is upset by this proposal," Fitzwater said.

The program calls for increasing funds for transportation each year, providing $18 billion in 1991 and nearly $24 billion by 1996.

Staff writer James Gerstenzang contributed to this story.

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION '91
To Jobs...To Homes...To Market

Thirty-five years ago, President Eisenhower and freshman Senator Prescott Bush defined the Interstate Highway vision. That vision has mapped the Nation's economic development and prosperity for the past generation -- politically, economically, and socially. Now through the President's National Transportation Policy, we've defined a new bipartisan vision for the coming generation of surface transportation -- one which meets the evolving mobility needs of the Next American Century, linking America and the world.

THEMES

1) **Investment for the Future**

President Bush's program proposes an increase of 25% in authorized funds distributed for highway investment in the next 5 years compared to the last 5 years. Funds distributed for mass transit would increase 6%; those specifically directed to capital investment would increase 33%. Given that transportation accounts for 17% of GNP and up to 25% of export dollars, the President's proposal will contribute to our international competitiveness.

Key Features:

o Designates a new National Highway System that reflects America's evolving demographics and marketplace dynamics.

o Increases motor carrier productivity by advancing an expanded national system, continuing deregulation and relief from burdensome paperwork.

o Increases long-term, stable investment for productivity and international competitiveness.

o Leverages investment from the private sector and promotes new public/private partnerships, including providing Federal assistance for toll roads, public and private.

o Provides ancillary short term benefit of job creation from construction (30,000 to 50,000 jobs per $1 billion).

2) Stewardship

President Bush's proposal protects the Nation's investment in highways and transit. The previous investment in construction of the Interstate System alone totals $116 billion. Our emphasis will be to protect and make better use of existing highways and transit systems.

Key Features:

o Provides flexibility of federal funding to empower state and local governments to make more efficient use of scarce resources.

o Requires modern management methods to protect the federal investment.

o Provides the highest Federal share for maintenance and operational improvements on the Interstate System.

o In transit, emphasizes capital investment and maintenance, not operating costs.

3) **Mobility**

President Bush's proposal will improve mobility of people and goods. Congestion costs interstate commerce over $35 billion per year.

Key Features:

o Supports a targeted national system to improve the links between workers and jobs, and goods and markets.

o Provides for operational improvements and innovative congestion management techniques to move traffic more efficiently in urban areas.

o Encourages advanced technologies -- IVHS (smart cars/highways) and High Speed Rail/Maglev to relieve congestion.

o Provides funds for selected new highways and highway lanes to serve growing regions.

o Keeps rural America connected.

o Provides for capital expenses to make transit accessible to disabled travellers.

4) **Environmental Sensitivity**

President Bush's surface transportation proposal strikes a balance between improving mobility and protecting the environment and scarce energy resources. Transportation is responsible for more than 50% of urban air pollution and consumes 62% of petroleum products.

Key Features:

- Improves local transit and highway operations to reduce fuel consumption and waste.

- Allows states, through flexibility of federal funding between highways and transit, to address clean air and make environmentally sound transportation decisions.

- Congestion management systems promote more efficient use of energy and less air pollution.

- Strong support for local planning to meet clean air goals.

5) **Safety**

President Bush's proposal advances safe highways and transit systems. It proposes a 43% increase in funding for highway safety activities for the next 5 years compared to the last 5 years. Each year, 45,000 lives are lost on highways, equivalent to one medium-jetliner crash each day.

Key Features:

- Supports the war on drunk driving and other safety problems.

- Assures that at least 10 percent of highway construction is safety-related.

- Increases funds for rail modernization to continue safety improvements to the Nation's rail transit systems.

- Supports new authority to assure drug testing in the transit industry.

U.S. Department of Transportation
February 7, 1991

COMPARISON OF PROPOSED STAA AUTHORIZATIONS
BUDGET AUTHORITY
(in millions of dollars)

MODE	ACCOUNT	'91 ENACT	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	'92-96TOT	
FHWA -	Federal Aid Highways	14,014	15,822	16,099	16,649	18,100	20,100	86,770	*
	Safety Programs	110	144	164	184	184	184	860	**
	University Trans. Centers	5	7	7	7	7	7	35	
	subtotal	14,129	15,973	16,270	16,840	18,291	20,291	87,665	
	Pct. Chg.		13.1%	1.9%	3.5%	8.6%	10.9%		
NHTSA -	Operations & Research	119	127	127	127	127	127	635	
	Highway Traffic Safety Grants	126	165	165	165	165	165	825	
	subtotal	245	292	292	292	292	292	1,460	**
	Pct. Chg.		19.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%		
UMTA -	All except WMATA	3,195	3,249	3,249	3,249	3,249	3,320	16,318	***
	Pct. Chg.		1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.2%		
	TOTAL	17,569	19,514	19,811	20,381	21,832	23,903	105,443	
	Pct. Chg.		11.1%	1.5%	2.9%	7.1%	9.5%		

* Compared to $69.2 billion for the period 1987-1991 -- a 25% increase.
** Total of $2.3 billion for highway safety, compared to $1.6 billion for the period 1987-1991 -- a 43% increase.
*** Compared to $15.4 billion in appropriations and obligation limitations for the period 1987-1991 -- a 6% increase.

US DOT
February 7, 1991

U.S. Department of Transportation
Office of the Secretary of Transportation

Assistant Secretary

400 Seventh St., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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Where Are Those New Roads?

By THEODORE H. WHITE

Here is a special report that's of vital and immediate concern to every motorist in the U.S.A.

ONE year ago—in January, 1955—the American people were invited by the President to embark on an adventure for which nothing in the history of man offered any precedent. It was, in name, a road-building program—but a road program of such stupendous engineering magnitude as to make the works of man in any other age seem almost aimless scratchings of the ground. It was a proposal to build such a system of roads in the United States as would make the Great Wall of China seem no more than a welt on the earth's surface and the Pyramids of Egypt no more than warts. Calling for combined state-and-federal road outlays of $101 billion over 10 years, President Eisenhower's highway program dwarfed any other enterprise ever undertaken or projected by our government, with the sole exception of World War II.

Whatever became of it?

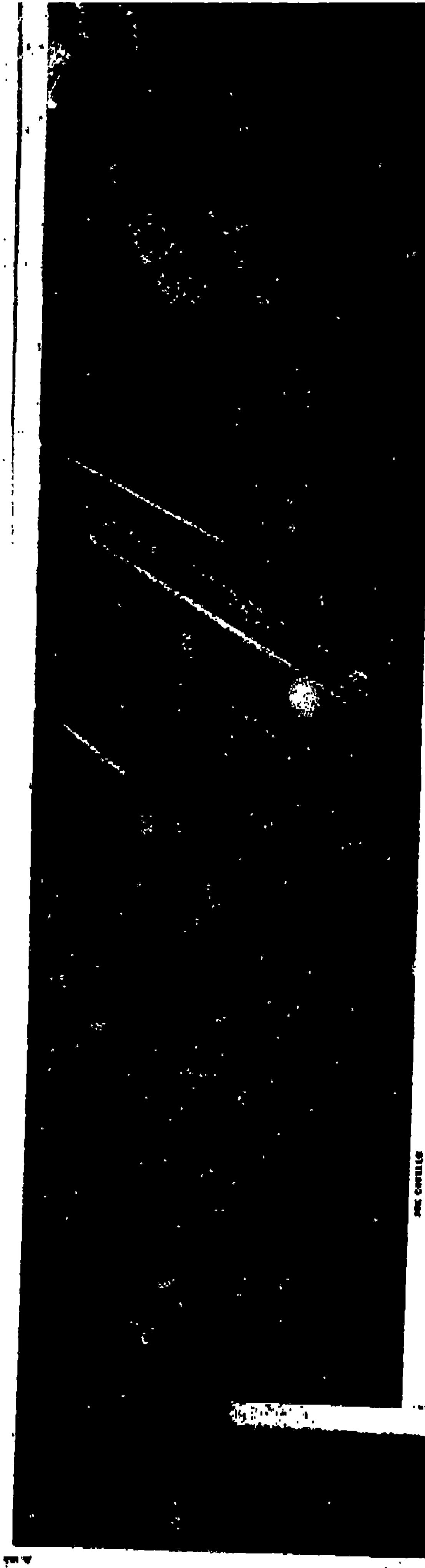
The great highway program of 1955 expired in the Congress of the United States. It died in an extraordinary convulsion of contending interests which paralyzed Congressional action. Hardly a murmur, however, was heard from the ordinary motorist behind the wheel, although his interests are just as intimately—and far more tragically—involved in the inadequacy of our present road net as the big battalions of open pressure.

In January, 1956, the second session of the 84th Congress must again begin grappling with the problem of the nation's highways—the slaughter and waste forced on us by a road system no longer able to match the needs of a growing country. Who will be heard from in 1956?

The highway battle will almost certainly explode in Congress in the same clash of interests (all, curiously enough, recorded *in favor of* better roads). Equally certain, it will end again in paralysis—unless the public bestirs itself as it did not during the Great Roadblock of 1955.

Deep somewhere in the origins of this new national highway program lurk the strains and nightmare fears of the average American motorist. Though historians of the future may someday write that the Americans were a race of killers who slaughtered one another in public places with the casual indifference of a tribe of rubber-wheeled Huns, the everyday carnage does not leave ordinary Americans unmoved. Daily, we mangle one another—ripping limb from limb, hurling two-ton missiles against the frail bodies of unprotected citizens, lacerating our nerves with instantaneous gambles on what may be approaching at the hidden corner or speeding down the other lane beyond the masking truck.

The current Christmas–New Year's holidays, for example, will suddenly terminate the lives of more than 1,000 Americans journeying hap-



Intersection of four major highways within New York City limits shows how traffic congestion can be relieved by sound planning

Collier's January 6, 1956

pily by car. Last year we killed 36,000 citizens on our public roads and wounded or crippled 1,000,000 more. Since 1945, we have killed off as many Americans on our streets and highways as did Nazis, Japs and Communists on every field of battle of World War II and Korea combined. All this, moreover, will go on and on until we get highways of modern design. These, say the experts, can reduce our annual death toll by 25 to 35 per cent, or save a staggering 10,000 American lives each year by engineering alone.

The great highway program of 1955, however, was proposed not so much out of pity and compassion as out of simple need.

We in America are strangling on our own prosperity. Our country is approaching an age and level of development where the problems that face us are of a kind no other civilization has ever known before. We confront an entirely new order of anxieties—and among the foremost of these is the problem of the automobile on our streets and highways.

For it is the automobile, as much as any other single phenomenon, that sets our way of life apart from the rest of the world. Everywhere else, common people have always been separated from their betters by the simple distinction of whether they walked or rode. In times past, people who rode were "cavaliers," hence aristocrats. In America today, every man is a cavalier.

Seventy million Americans—so says the American Automobile Association—take their annual vacation in the family car. Every year their appetite and their range of travel broadens so that, today, it is difficult to remember or recognize how fresh and novel even in our own country this revolutionary impulse is.

It was only yesterday—in 1911, the year that Dwight D. Eisenhower entered West Point—that a commercial automobile first managed the road trip from Coast to Coast. The expedition from Denver to Los Angeles alone took 66 days; tomorrow, if Dwight D. Eisenhower's road program becomes fact, that same trip will be little more than a weekend run.

TODAY, EVERY PERSPECTIVE of our country and times leads us to believe that we are only at the beginning of the automobile age, the era of complete mobility. Today, we have an automobile industry that turns out 8,000,000 new vehicles a year. This industry has already equipped our highways with 61,000,000 cars and trucks; in 10 years there will be some 81,000,000 in use, and in another decade the total will be almost 100,000,000.

What makes these figures ache is their relationship to our roads. At the outbreak of the second World War, we had about 3,300,000 miles of road in this country; since then we have added about 1 per cent in new road mileage. The present length of our roads is almost permanently frozen. As we add new automobiles, the existing lanes must, therefore, be broadened continuously. Since the war, we have worked energetically but sporadically on bits of superhighway; but in the same period the number of vehicle-miles driven in this country has doubled, and even with the new roads our traffic lanes are totally inadequate. If, at present, every registered automobile in the country took the road at the same time, we would have one car spotted every 700 feet on every street, every country road, every lane of every highway. And in 20 years their numbers may nearly double. Now, to any American who has let his throttle out as he turned off the cloverleaf onto one of our great new superhighways, denunciation of these great lanes must seem like nonsense. We Americans are people who thrill to road building and engineering; each new overpass, each great split-lane seems to have added dimension to our power and imagination as individuals.

Our newest state highways—the majestic Ohio Turnpike, the crowded New Jersey Turnpike, the imperial New York Thruway—are superb thoroughfares, the best of all time. But they are only stumps and pieces of a highway net. They are not a *system*. They are built only in and through limited areas where the engineers gamble that the toll fees of normal driving will repay in precisely calculated and collectible sums the enormous investment of private bondholders. They are not enough, and they dump the traffic they collect on the outskirts of our big cities in chaos and confusion.

The real problem of road building in America is new, and peculiar to our kind of democracy. In a country where every man is equally privileged and equally mobile, no citizen can be prevented from using the roads when and how he wants—even if everyone wants to use them at the same time. And, just as the arteries of our blood must be prepared to handle the emergencies of physical exertion or let us die, so the arteries of our public communication must be able to handle the convulsions of seasonal or weekly peaks in traffic or let anarchy prevail.

This is why our engineers figure that every highway must be designed to carry all normally predictable congestion (except for those 30 busiest hours of the year—the summer weekends and Labor Day and Fourth of July hegiras—whose peaks cannot be handled except by astronomic expenditures.) This is why, too, our highways must be designed to handle any legitimate truck load.

Our roads today, fine as they may feel under the tread of normal weekday traffic, no longer meet these standards. Certain sections of our nation's choking road net are already killer belts—the Boston Post Road between New England and New York, the old Suicide Alley out of Baltimore to Washington which engineers call "Bloody One," the southern leg of the same U.S. 1 as it stretches down Florida from Jacksonville to Miami, the "Grapevine" along U.S. 99 dropping into California's San Joaquin Valley . . . these are already notorious murder lanes.

As fast as we build, we create traffic jams. The New Jersey Turnpike, opened in 1952, is already carrying a traffic load not predicted until the early 1980s. Already, even with its new avenues of access, New York City's approaches are so congested that on a summer Monday morning when returning weekenders mingle with the truck peak, the traffic backs up so fast at the mouth of the Holland Tunnel that an athlete, running as fast as he can, could not keep up with the tail of the jam once it begins to clot backward.

All this is costing incalculable sums of money. It costs us, in addition to the cold valuation of $4.3 billion annually in accidents, another $5 billion in wastage of labor time, gasoline, rubber and equipment. It literally costs less to ship a crate of apples all the way from Oregon to the Hudson River than to get it across the Hudson to New York's East Side.

This road shortage may finally, if war comes, cost us our national life. For none of the great metropolitan areas possesses anywhere near adequate road facilities to evacuate swiftly the more than 70,000,000 people our Civil Defense authorities estimate will have to flee.

The crisis has been swelling for a long time. But up to now our highways and roads have been in the domain of state and local governments, with the federal government appropriating a modest annual sum to subsidize them in their work. Last year, finally, we arrived at a stage when it was obvious that the local resources and local programs could no longer meet what is now a national emergency. Which is why, one year and three months ago, Dwight D. Eisenhower asked a group of five distinguished citizens, headed by General Lucius D. Clay, retired, to devise a program for meeting the crisis head on.

The Clay report that issued from their labors was hailed editorially almost unanimously, and in a few weeks, now renamed the President's Highway Program, was delivered to Congress for action. Whereupon nothing further happened except debate. For suddenly our lawmakers found themselves engaged, at the supreme level of national politics, with those forces and groups which have always, in every Statehouse, made highway politics synonymous with bitterest controversy.

* * *

The Clay proposals were not, of course, born simply out of the amateur ruminations of a number of civic-minded gentlemen enthusiastically exploring our needs over a period of a few weeks. They were, as a matter of fact, only the polished form of a dream that had slowly been maturing in Washington for 20 years.

For Washington, among other things, is a city of dreamers. Among the boldest of these dreamers have always been the engineers of our Bureau of Public Roads. And the dreams that emerged in finished form in the Clay report were born at the bureau in the darkness of the depression. At that time, some now unremembered congressman pushed through Congress a resolution calling on the bureau to scheme up a major road-building program to soak up depression unemployment. What the congressman wanted, however, was a geometrical grid across the nation—three multilane highways running east to west, three more running north to south, all of them darting up hill and down dale, straight as an arrow, with little or no relationship to the needs of the country.

The engineers of the Bureau of Public Roads soon pointed out how phenomenally uneconomic and expensive such a grid would be. But they suggested an alternate plan, called the National System of Interstate Highways, which would be something entirely different. Through the years, the dream system gradually won official recognition. Franklin D. Roosevelt blessed it as a measure to pick up postwar economic slack; Congress, in 1947, formally made its map tracings official as the outline of our future in public communications.

The Interstate System will be based on existing roads. In its improved form, as it lies on the planning boards of the engineers, it is still a dream—a spectacular in concrete, asphalt and steel. Forty thousand miles of multiple-lane highway, running between major cities, will stretch across the nation in a road net distinguished from any previous conception of engineers in capacity, durability, grandeur and sweep.

Men will be able to drive from New York to San Francisco, scarcely, if ever, slowing at a traffic light. Truckmen will grind on hour after hour, without shifting gear or slowing to the agony crawl of the upgrade. Passenger cars will sweep by them in other lanes without ever once having to poke their noses out into the perilous stream of opposing traffic. Hills will melt away and distances will evaporate.

Not only that. The Interstate recognizes the tragic plight of our strangling big cities. It is the first serious plan to cleave through the tangled approaches of our great metropolitan areas and clear broad avenues of entrance and exit through the choking metropolitan jungle and its sprawling suburban fringes. Where our present new highways stop at city limits, the Interstate will slice directly through the urban jungle of streets in spectacular expressways that will take people through the heart of metropolis and out to the open road on the other side. It will be a *system*.

The Clay program—the President's Highway Program—made the Interstate System the crownpiece of a simple three-point program.

First, it proposed that the federal government raise some $25 billion to spend on the great Interstate to finish it in 10 years—this sum to represent 90 per cent of the total cost, the balance to be raised in the states. Thirteen billion of this would be spent on urban approaches alone. Where modern toll roads were up to the dream standards of the Interstate—some 2,500 miles of such roads exist, mainly in the North—the states which had built them would be reimbursed.

Second, it proposed that current routine federal appropriations for highway aid to secondary and feeder roads of the great Interstate be continued at $600,000,000 a year, or slightly less than their present total.

Third, it proposed a way for paying for the great new Interstate—that the federal government would set up a Federal Highway Corporation which would sell $20 billion worth of bonds, the bonds to be paid for out of current gasoline taxes, which would bring in ever more income as the new roads were built. The bonds, it was estimated, would take 30 years to pay off.

It was this third proposal that triggered off the fight. For the politics of American highways has always been dominated by one overwhelming truth: everyone loves roads, but no one wants to pay for them.

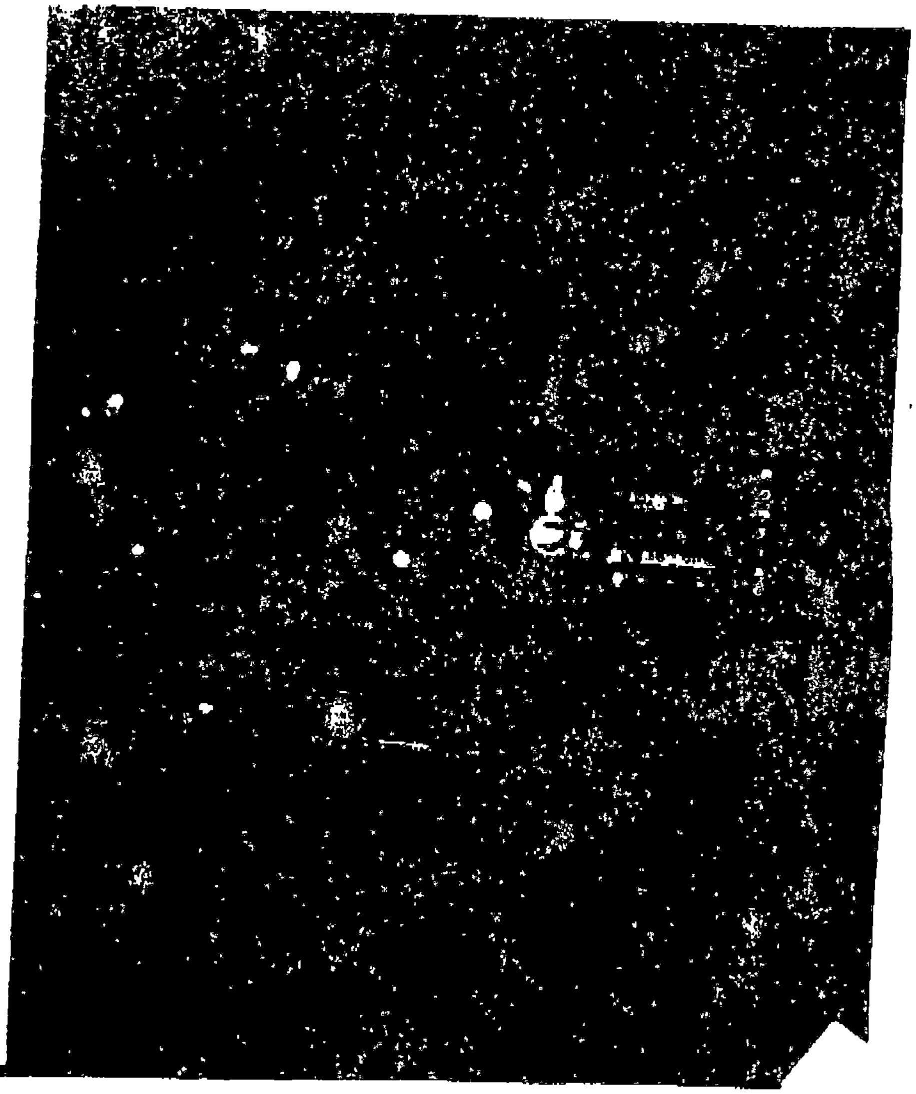
* * *

Once the great highway program reached Congress last February, all the complications of this truth began to unfold. The 1955 Battle of the Highways, as fought in Congress, proceeded in three main stages, each illuminating a separate area of uncompromising conflict.

Both of the first two stages of battle unrolled in the Senate—and each had a partisan champion. One was the freshman senator from Connecticut, Prescott Bush, an able and distinguished man making his mark

Along "Suicide Alley"—Baltimore to Washington. Roads like this would be modernized if Congress could agree on a highway program

ROBERT PHILLIPS



Everybody's in favor of better highways, but nobody can agree how they should be paid for

The result: We're still stuck with an inadequate, dangerous system nobody wants

for the first time upon the Senate and nation in an issue of national significance. In the absence of senior Republican leadership, he emerged as the captain of the administration's road program to raise 20 billion federal dollars immediately by bond issue, as proposed in the Clay program. The other was the freshman senator from Tennessee, the shrewd and eloquent Albert Gore, who questioned not only the wisdom of so huge and inflexible a national commitment to roads, but, even more, the sweeping powers the federal government would arrogate under the Clay proposals over a domain that had always hitherto been under the states.

The first of the two Senate struggles raged over the bond-financing provisions of the administration's highway bill.

FOR TWENTY YEARS, the Senate had listened to Republicans denouncing Democrats as borrowers and spenders, recklessly saddling the nation with debt and burden down through all the unborn generations of time. And the Democrats had always replied that this was a healthy, growing country whose children could well afford to pay for the benefits we, their fathers, were so wisely preparing for them.

Now the sides switched. The Republican bond corporation proposal, said the Democrats, was trickery, fraudulent evasion of the legal debt limit of the nation. The bonds would eat up $11 billion of interest in addition to their principal; only bankers would profit.

It was as if, they implied, the huge $280 billion official national debt were about to spin off a satellite "corporate" debt into space, perhaps followed by others, until we had a whole constellation of satellite debts whirling about the economy, all exerting an irresistible inflationary pull.

"I for one," summed up Senator Gore, "think that the need for highways must be considered along with, and balanced with, the need for other programs, such as schools and hospitals. It doesn't make sense to me to segregate the highway problem by excluding highway expenditures from the budget and from the public debt. It doesn't make it any easier to pay for them. In my opinion, no financial legerdemain can isolate the highway expenditures or eliminate their impact upon our economy and upon the Treasury of the United States."

To all of which arguments, the Republicans replied as if the mantle of Franklin D. Roosevelt and all the ghosts of the New Deal had descended on them. Nothing great or creative is ever done, they said, unless one reasonably finances the present out of the future. This is what a homeowner does when he raises a mortgage on a new home, what a corporation does when it issues debentures for a new plant, what the nation must do to finance expansion in time of need.

They argued that if money were available immediately, through the bonds, to build the system now, highway use would increase so rapidly that gasoline taxes would rise enough to pay off the entire debt burden within 30 years without a single extra tax. Roads would be built, said the Republicans—and it would be painless.

"The importance of the Interstate Highway System is so great that it has to be provided for now," said Senator Bush, who led the Republican defense. "It must be completed within 10 years and must be put in effect as a whole, and not piecemeal. . . . The plan contained in . . . the Clay bill . . . is a pay-as-you-use plan. Nobody who has been in business would say that it is not good business to borrow money to build productive assets. That is the only purpose of borrowing money in the field of commerce and industry. It should be likewise in government."

The Senate gravely listened to both sides, then by a resounding two-to-one vote rejected the President's bond plan. It then turned to phase two of the fight—the argument over the alternative plan (see box) brought in by Senator Gore for the Democrats. The Gore bill was quite different from the President's original proposal. It carefully omitted any financing provision at all, thus dodging that fight; the money for the highways it proposed would be found, said its proponents, by the House—where, constitutionally, all bills taxing American citizens must arise.

Deep and basic to the thinking of the Gore bill were several convictions—that the secondary and country roads would be shortchanged if the Clay proposals for pouring money into the Interstate went through; that the nation had too many other needs to commit itself irrevocably to so large a program at once; that control of the money it appropriated must rest with Congress, not with any centralized federal agency.

Instead of biting off a 10-year chunk of the future, therefore, it limited its commitments to $7.7 billion over a five-year period, after which Congress could take another look at the problem. Another $4.5 billion would go to the lesser local roads that would feed the Interstate.

The Gore bill represented the best thinking of Senate Democratic leadership. And the Republicans, led by Bush again, denounced this thinking as pitifully inadequate. It was a horse-and-buggy bill, they said, as they went on to open up another continuous area of American highway debate—the everlasting struggle between metropolitan and rural Americans about where and how roads should be built.

What the Republicans objected to most was the way the Gore bill shared the enormous funds for the Interstate among the individual states. The Clay proposal had advocated that $25 billion be spent by the Highway Corporation where needed—largely in the congested population centers of the North and East. But the Gore bill instead insisted that at least half the money be divided among the states by the traditional formula of highway aid.

THIS CONGRESSIONAL FORMULA, first invented in the Road Act of 1916, still quaintly reflects the era of the Model T Ford and the Stanley Steamer. By this old formula, all federal highway aid is divided in thirds. One third is shared by states according to their population; another third is divided among states according to area; the final third is distributed in proportion to their mileage of Rural Free Delivery routes. This, of course, penalizes the heavily congested states of the Midwest and the Northeast and favors the wide-open range and farming states.

Senator Gore said he did not want money appropriated by Congress to be cut up by anybody except Congress. "I just do not believe," he said later, "it would be consistent with the public interest to place this much authority in the hands of any one person . . . As Governor Hugh White of Mississippi has said, 'Those people in Washington might wake up with indigestion some morning and decide not to give my state any money.' I am confident that Congress . . . will never agree to make a permanent appropriation of such huge sums, with the money to go into a 'kitty' to be doled out on the basis of what the Secretary of Commerce considers to be the needs of the various states."

The Republicans called the Gore bill a "blunderbuss bill." Said Bush, "After he has read the analysis of the distribution of the fund, I will leave it to every senator to say whether he does not agree that that is a good term to apply to the proposed legislation. The fact is that 30 states are given less than they say they need to complete the Interstate System and 18 states are given far more than they need and more than they can use. I say [it] . . . scatters dollars and does not build roads where the roads are needed."

Once again, as debate rolled on, the Senate sat in witness of a switch. The Democrats, normally as sensitive as sandpapered skin to big-city votes, voted solidly for the bill. Republicans, normally suspicious of big-city needs, voted solidly against it. But the Democrats had the votes and the Gore bill passed. It passed, to be shelved almost immediately. For while the long hearings and debates had dragged on in the Senate through March, April and May, the members of the House had begun to draw up their own plan—the so-called Fallon bill (see box).

* * *

Now the Fallon bill—named for Democratic Representative George H. Fallon of Baltimore, a long-time road enthusiast—was offered as a work of courage and forethought. Long before the Senate had finished consideration of the bills before it, House Democrats had decided that their road bill would be one of "real statesmanship"—which is to say that since roads have to be paid for, they would undertake to find the money. The Democrats of the Public Works' subcommittee drawing up the road bill conferred with Sam Rayburn, the Speaker, who praised their inclination and then, in a total breach with House tradition, told them to go ahead and write the taxes themselves.

The Fallon bill accepted the dream plan of the Interstate System, and the continuing federal support of lesser roads as embodied in the President's program, altering them chiefly by spreading out the expenditures over 13 years instead of ten. But it flatly rejected setting up any federal corporation to borrow the money by bonds. Instead, it bracketed the appropriations it demanded with precise tax measures to meet them.

It insisted that the burden of paying for roads must fall most heavily on those who profit most by them. It called for raising the tax on every

The Interstate highway system—repaired and modernized, this 40,000-mile net could solve our road headaches

THE ROADS above are the vital arteries of the nation—40,000 miles of them. Together, they comprise the National System of Interstate Highways that has been the basis for every major U.S. highway improvement program proposed since the late 1930s—the roads we need for a healthy economy, the roads we must modernize in order to survive in an emergency. Some portions of the Interstate are already among the best roadways in the world. But most are badly in need of modernization—and everybody agrees the need is urgent. Here's why:

The Interstate network, even today, carries more than one seventh of all traffic in the U.S. It joins 42 state capitals and 90 per cent of all American cities of more than 50,000. Although it embraces only 1.2 per cent of our total road mileage it serves 65 per cent of the U.S. city dwellers and 45 per cent of the rural population. It also ties into major arterial routes in Canada and Mexico.

At best, the Interstate will have many miles of two-lane highway—narrow but straight and smooth and altogether adequate. But more than 28,000 miles will be four-lane, and 2,300 hard-traveled miles will be six-lane.

How much has been built to date? At present, 28 states have built or are building modern toll roads—like the superb Pennsylvania and New Jersey turnpikes—along 2,500 miles of Interstate routes. It is already possible to travel almost all the way from New York to Chicago by superhighway, with only a few breaks. Yet much remains to be done. A survey some months ago showed that only 15 per cent of the Interstate was up to the standards set for it. Bypasses and cut-throughs must be constructed for scores of congested cities on the net.

A broad-scale program will be required to complete the project—but so far Congress has been unable to agree on one. In the next column are listed the three plans Congress considered in its last session, and their present status.

PRESIDENT'S PROGRAM (DEFEATED):

1. The Interstate system to be built within ten years.
2. Price tag: $27 billion; $20 billion to be raised immediately by bonds of the Federal Highway Corporation. Money to be spent as needed to complete the system, the federal government paying 90 per cent of the costs, or a total of $25 billion.
3. Routine federal aid to the states for other lesser roads to be continued at something less than the present level, or approximately $600,000,000 a year.

GORE BILL (PASSED IN SENATE ONLY):

1. The Interstate program to begin with only a five-year authorization; Congress to take another look in five years.
2. Price tag over the five years: $7.7 billion. Financing of this sum to be left to the decision of the House.
3. Routine federal aid to other lesser roads to continue, but at a higher figure than at present, or approximately $800,000,000 a year.
4. Half of all the money appropriated for the Interstate to be shared by the traditional formula of state distribution, the other half to be distributed according to engineering costs.

FALLON BILL (DEFEATED):

1. The Interstate System to be built within 13 years.
2. Price tag: $27 billion to be raised by immediate taxation. All motorists to pay one cent more a gallon on gasoline, heavy truckers to pay an additional 2 cents on a gallon of diesel fuel and an additional 10-cent tax per pound of rubber in tires, besides additional federal excises on new trucks.
3. Routine federal aid to lesser roads across the country, to start at the present level (approximately $725,000,000 a year) and rise by $25 million each year.

Highways was one of the first business matters Ike took up after his heart attack

gallon of gasoline burned in our automobiles by an additional cent (at a cost to the average motorist of about $5.56 a year). Not only that. The architects of the Fallon bill were convinced that the ponderous, pounding heavy rigs of the trucking industry are the villains that beat our roads to bits. Consequently, they proposed that heavy trucks should pay a sort of supertax—a 50-cents-a-pound tax on every truck tire over 8.5 by 18, a special four-cent tax on each gallon of fuel for the extremely heavy diesel trucks, a new and heavier excise tax on a new truck when purchased. Such taxes meant that the normal five-axle heavy rig would be hit by what the truckmen claimed would be an additional tax bill of some $1,031 in the first year.

Well before news of these tax provisions had leaked, however, and as soon as the House Democratic leadership had made known that its Roads subcommittee was writing a pay-as-you-go tax bill, every economic interest in our country with any direct or remote connection with highways girded its loins for battle in a lobbying fray rarely matched in recent history. All of them wanted highways, but all believed their very survival hung on the way Congress chose to pay for them.

Under our system of government, lobbying is a clearly legitimate and constitutional right of every citizen and group. But it is up to Congress to weigh the legitimate pleas of every group against the common good, balance off their contentions and come up with a judgment. And rarely, if ever, has Congress been under greater pressure in making a judgment between the broad but diffuse needs of a common citizenry and the sharpened needs of men whose livelihood hung on their decisions.

TWO GIANT CAMPS soon developed in the struggle over the bill. One was led by the railways, supported by the American Automobile Association and backed by most of the state highway officials of the country. They supported the Fallon bill. In the other were the truckmen, the tire dealers, the independent oil dealers, the diesel manufacturers—led in the grand strategy of opposition by the truckmen.

It is easiest to begin the story of the fight over the Fallon bill with the story of the railway men. Now, the railways have an acute and continuing interest in highways. In modern America, truckmen and railway men have been as bitter and unforgiving enemies as sheepmen and cattlemen on the open range of Wyoming, 80 years ago. In the past 30 years the trucking industry has grown to be a giant that grosses over $5 billion a year for freight haulage (against the railways' $8 billion).

If the great Interstate System goes through, with its near-level grades, its limited accesses, its numerous and heavy-paved lanes, the truckers—now engaged principally in short-run transport—will have a chance to gnaw away as successfully at the railways' long-haul freight business as the airlines have at the railways' long-haul passenger business, and the commuters' automobiles at their suburban passenger business.

Any kind of legislation on the Interstate System thus placed the railways in a delicate position. They could not, in a nation that loves highways, simply come out and flatly denounce better roads. Yet they could scarcely watch with blithe unconcern as the nation proposed to build this spectacular roadbed for their competitive rivals. They had to present their views skillfully—by supporting the highways the nation wanted, yet making sure their competitive rivals, the truckers, gained no advantage out of them. Which, in essence, is why the railways threw all the influence they could behind the Fallon bill.

Robert S. Henry, who is a vice-president of the Association of Amerihis eye, explained the railways' position to me thus:

"Highways? Why, of course we're in favor of good highways. But we want a *sound* highway program and any sound highway program has to include user charges—people who benefit from it should pay, and that's particularly true of people who use these facilities to carry on commercial business. We railways pay in taxes 11.9 cents of every dollar we take in; we pay 19.7 cents more of every dollar to maintain our roadbeds and tracks. The truckers pay only seven cents of their dollar for taxes and they get their roadbeds free. That makes 31 cents out of our dollar against their seven cents. That's just not fair—and that's why we think the Fallon bill is such a good bill."

Exactly how much influence the railways brought to bear in the drafting of the tax features of the Fallon bill no one knows. The American Trucking Associations, of course, holds the railways directly responsible for the taxing of big trucks. According to John Lawrence, ATA managing director, "They have intervened in the highway program, attempting to promote punitive taxes on big trucks which will cripple truck competition with their own freight operations. . . . Congressmen have evidence of that on their desks in the form of a barrage of letters, wires and calls inspired by railroad interests, and often indeed sent to their offices in railroad envelopes. No such railroad lobby has descended on Washington in the history of the Republic as that which is now operating in support of the soak-the-truck proposals. It is this wrecking crew which is mainly responsible for throwing the highway situation out of perspective."

THIS BITTER STATEMENT must be balanced by other facts, for the truckmen, when they finally mobilized, easily matched the railway men in power and skill of influence. Their open bitterness reflects, mostly, the fact that the railways were informed of the tax measures on trucks weeks before the truckmen realized what was happening in committee. And by the time the truckmen had become aware of what was happening they found themselves trapped as if by political jujitsu.

The railways had already taken up the position of virtue; they were supporting the Fallon bill, the boldest highway program ever proposed. But the truckmen were faced with Hobson's choice. They could accept the Fallon bill, giving them the great Interstate System they so desperately wanted—yet if they did so they would have to accept a tax burden on their industry which they claimed added another $375,000,000 a year. Or they could elect to torpedo the Fallon bill and accept the blame for sabotaging the highway program.

The truckmen elected to mobilize against the bill. And their emergency mobilization dramatically outweighed anything the railways had previously been able to muster.

"Yes," says Walter Belson of the American Trucking Associations, "we had considerable influence in killing the Fallon bill. But don't confuse the Fallon bill with the highway program. We're not such stupid idiots as to be opposed to a road program we need as much as anyone else. We were about the first group to support the highway program from the beginning. We supported it before both Senate and House, we agreed to accept increased taxes to pay for it—we'll pay our fair share, the same tax rate on fuel, tires and equipment everyone else pays. Don't misunderstand what this means in dollars. The same rate of tax will make the big truck pay five times as much as the average passenger car in gas tax every mile it runs, 18 times as much in tire tax and 13 times as much in equipment. This is not per company, but on every individual five-axle truck owned as against a passenger vehicle. And our state taxes run up to 40 times as much per truck as per the average passenger car."

Desperately and doggedly, all through the months of June and July, the truckmen and their allies fought to pull the tax teeth from the Fallon bill. The committee members compromised with the truckmen by moderating their original bill until the additional diesel tax was lowered by two cents a gallon and the tax on large truck tires reduced from 50 cents a pound to 15 cents a pound. But the lawmakers could not be moved from their conviction that it was heavy trucks that profited most from the new roads, that heavy trucks required most of the extra-cost features of the roads—the wider lanes, the sturdier bridges, the pavings of 12 inches rather than the six or eight that might handle normal passenger traffic. A principle was involved, they said—a user charge was being imposed for the first time on a federal level and special users had to pay special taxes. The truckmen could not accept this principle.

By the time Congress got around to voting on the revised version of the Fallon bill at the end of July, the final push against the bill was operating in high. An array of eloquent interests had all convened on Capitol Hill to protest its tax features.

The diesel manufacturers implied their industry would be so hobbled that it might die, thereby jeopardizing the entire national-defense program, which requires diesel engines.

The big oil companies and big tire companies protested, in the orthodox tradition, that they could not see why their products should be made into particular and peculiar tax-collecting agencies of governments—as Robert H. Scholl of Esso, speaking for the American Petroleum Institute, pointed out, state and federal governments were already collecting in taxes some 35 per cent of what filling stations received for each gallon of gasoline.

Independent oil companies and independent tire jobbers protested at the taxes because, they said, it would manacle them in competition with the giants of the industry, whose capital structure could more easily afford to bear the amount of additional capital frozen into the inventory of every tire or oil outlet by the new taxes. Their lobbyists painted a somber picture before the Fallon committee of thousands and thousands of little businessmen squeezed out of business because they could not carry the taxes for their customers.

"I feel," said one of their spokesmen, "like I am representing a plucked chicken with two feathers left in his tail, and there is a hand reaching out for the last feathers."

Each of the trade associations joined in battle against the bill had roots in a thousand small towns and neighborhoods of America. Now these too began to be heard from in a lobbying campaign unmatched, say many congressmen, since the days of the Taft-Hartley bill. Telegrams began to snow on Congress—an estimated 100,000 in all, 10,000 on Congressman Fallon's desk alone.

The telegrams were accompanied by letters. They came not only on stiff white paper under the letterheads of great firms or associations but in the grease-stained handwritten letters that worry congressmen much more—under letterheads of "Art's Filling Station," of "Alf's Friendly Service," of "Lone Star Sales and Service."

In the final days of the fray, the AFL Teamsters Union, perhaps the most powerful influence of all, got to work, as Dave Beck decided that his truckers should back up the truckmen who employed them. Dave Beck made a personal call on Sam Rayburn to press the truckmen's point of view as that of the Teamsters Union, whose resources are so important to Democrats in doubtful Congressional districts.

Some congressmen claim they could even trace a trucker's day at the wheel by following the date lines of telegrams that would arrive. A driver might send his first wire from, say, Philadelphia at eight in the morning, his second from Harrisburg two hours later, his third from Pittsburgh that afternoon, his fourth from Toledo in the early morning.

BY THE TIME, on the afternoon of July 27th, that the final roll call on the Fallon bill took place, the House and its members were adrift under impulses and pressures they could not fathom. The drive against the bill was sharp, pointed and overwhelming; but the support for the bill, which should have come from the average motorist, was conspicuously absent.

Even though experts say that modern highways would save him $100 a year in car expenses, the average motorist was silent. Though Andrew Sordoni, the president of the American Automobile Association (himself a commercial truckman), told the House that his members supported the bill and would accept it, he could deliver *few* votes.

Some congressmen were deeply upset by the breach of tradition which had let a new committee write the taxes that had always previously been the sole prerogative of the august Ways and Means Committee. Even more important, many of them dimly sensed (and some were sharply informed) that the new bill, by increasing gasoline and tire taxes, was extending the taxing power of the federal government into the domain which the individual states had always considered as one of the reserved areas of their authority. Old-line State righters bridled.

And, finally, party discipline and control on both sides collapsed. The Fallon bill was a Democratic bill. Sam Rayburn, the Speaker, convinced of his authority and prestige, felt certain down to the last minute that party discipline would rouse the necessary votes; when, at last, he realized it could not, it was too late to improvise the tactics or counter-pressures to whip his errant Democrats into line.

The Republicans erred as badly. The White House, which had always wanted to pay for the roads by bond borrowing, came at the last minute to the conclusion that the Fallon pay-as-you-go measure was better than none. But by the time Sherman Adams had phoned this eleventh-hour decision to Republican Congressman De Witt Hyde of Maryland, voting had begun. By the time Hyde got the message to Republican floor leaders, a House colleague later recounted, the Republicans were voting almost solidly against the bill and it was too late to switch. By the resounding margin of 292 (mostly Republican) to 123 (mostly Democratic), the House had rejected the Fallon bill, and with it any hope of a start on the new highways in 1955.

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What of the new session of Congress that opens in January? Will it give America any start on a modern highway system?

At this writing, it is certain that every congressman will vie with his neighbor in his love, devotion and dedication to better highways. After all, 1956 is a Presidential year and neither major party wishes to be stuck, in the voter's mind, as the mossback outfit that was blind to this growing country's needs for better roads.

What kind of legislation we will get is, however, an open question—and one dependent more than anything else on the politicians' assessment of the public temper. It was the conspicuous silence of the average motorist in last year's Donnybrook that left Congress without that directional magnetic field by which it normally guides its actions among contending interests.

IT WOULD BE NAÏVE to hold the big lobbies of Washington either solely or chiefly responsible for destroying a program the nation needs by pursuing their legitimate, if individual, interests. True responsibility rests with Congress. This changing and dynamic country, in this age of vast physical and social transformation, needs an enormous range of expensive facilities without which it cannot thrive and for which everyone will have to pay.

The price tag on our growth will, when it is presented, be as high as anything else in this age of prosperity and somehow Congress must see to it that it is paid properly and justly.

It is this fundamental obligation of Congressional judgment that—at present writing—the administration hopes to pinpoint in the coming months. A new highway program stands high on the list of administration priorities for 1956; indeed, in the first business visit permitted Sherman Adams at President Eisenhower's bedside in Denver, the highway program was one of the chief concerns of the ailing chief executive. Since then, the Cabinet has passed responsibility for a new approach on to the Department of Commerce. There, administration leaders have been trying to define their attitude toward all the complex problems involved, yet leave it to Congress to come up with a hard bill in terms of specifics.

On phase one of last year's battle (financing), the administration has decided to yield to the Democratic point of view in an effort to get a program passed—it will now accept a pay-as-you-go measure in place of its original bond-financing proposal. But phase one was a partisan struggle that could be compromised, as it appears to have been now, by responsible party leaders. On phase two (the conflict of urban and rural needs) and phase three (the clash of rival transportation lobbies) unbridgeable differences of opinion seem to promise a new Highway Battle of 1956. In these phases, the differences cut through and across both major parties, for here Congress is struggling to decide on the shape of a new America which neither party sees clearly. In this struggle, the decisive voices will be those who understand the complicated issues best. But 1956 is an election year and the voices Congress aches most to hear are those of the voters. Do they understand? Will they make themselves heard? The kind of highways we get in 1956 and the years to follow depends on the answers.

THE END

Wash. Post P.A10 2/4

M.K.

Mr. Bush on the Roads and Rails

IT WAS well disguised in President Bush's domestic checklist for the State of the Union address, but the administration is proposing a significant reorganization of federal financing for highways and mass transit in the years ahead. Mr. Bush proposes to keep the government in the highway building business after the completion of the Interstate system, but to pay a lower share of the costs. There are bound to be differences in Congress over formulas for federal-state financing, for allocations to the various states and for the total amount of federal money that should be committed to the policy. But the president's new Surface Transportation Act would at least mesh mass transit and highway financing in a better fashion by providing new ways for shifting funds from roads to transit or the other away around.

The proposal, which will be outlined in the fiscal 1992 budget today, would boost federal highway and mass-transit financing to nearly $90 billion over the next five years. States, however, would have to come up with bigger shares of their own money. A large portion of highway funds could be used for transit, and all transit money could be shifted to highways. Congressional Democrats already are talking about a push for a larger bill altogether or at least for more mass transit money. Other members in both parties may seek changes in proposed allocation formulas to protect the interests of states with lots of land but not lots of people.

The administration proposal would establish a 150,000-mile system of "highways of national significance" that would include the Interstate highway system. The few remaining segments of the Interstate system would, like the rest of the system built over the last three decades, be done with 90 percent federal funds. The rest of those "national significance" highways would for the most part be financed through a 75-to-25 federal-to-state matching ratio for improvements or construction. Yet another category—an "urban-rural" system—would be designated for 60 percent federal financing, the same formula applying to mass transit construction funding. This way, any switching of road money for transit money wouldn't result in federal dollars lost because of differing federal-state formulas.

Given the shortages of state money these days, the pressures for greater continuing federal participation are likely to be intense. But the administration has done some sensible thinking about its approach to a transportation policy—and about the necessity of setting highway and transit priorities as America's great age of the Interstate highway system winds down.

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