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A COMPILATION OF TRAFFIC REGULATIONS  
IN  
THIRTEEN IOWA CITIES



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COMMITTEE ON  
URBAN LAND USE AND TRAFFIC STUDIES

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The street traffic problem has developed in a relatively short period. We were not prepared to meet the problem with the tools of science, and as a result our traffic ordinances have grown like the traffic problem -- without design. They are not uniform within the city and they vary from city to city. It was to point out these faults and to urge some action for the unification of traffic regulations that this questionnaire was circulated.

Incidentally a review of these ordinances is profitable for they have a definite bearing upon the characteristics and volume of traffic flow which have been the object of considerable study.

A COMPILATION OF TRAFFIC REGULATIONS  
IN  
THIRTEEN IOWA CITIES

In an attempt to obtain concrete evidence of the great divergence of traffic ordinances in Iowa cities the Planning Board has solicited replies in 13 cities to a questionnaire prepared by the American Road Builders Association. The questionnaire was presented by a Planning Board representative to the officials in each city who were most familiar with local traffic regulations and problems. Questions of a technical nature were answered by the city engineer, traffic commissioner, or street commissioner; those concerning enforcement by the police chief or traffic sergeant; and those touching on the legal aspects were taken up with the city attorney.

Incident to drawing up uniform municipal traffic regulations these data are pertinent in the study of traffic flow, accidents, accumulation of vehicles and persons, parking, etc. They should prove valuable in showing just what has been accomplished and what foundations have been laid for future regulations and for the promotion of economical, efficient, and safe transportation.

The cities included in this study were: Burlington, Cedar Rapids, Clinton, Council Bluffs, Davenport, Des Moines, Dubuque, Fort Dodge, Keokuk, Marshalltown, Muscatine, Ottumwa, and Sioux City. Each city gave courteous cooperation and city officials expressed their interest in a survey of this kind.

The traffic regulations are set up by ordinance authority in nine cities, by the police department in one city, and by a City Safety Commission in two cities. The question of delegation of legislative authority has been raised in only two of these cities when regulations were established by others than the city council.

Pedestrians are required by law to obey traffic signals and move with the lights in nine cities out of the thirteen, but only one city has made any arrests and laid fines for violations. Twelve cities have limited-time parking; ten of them find it difficult to enforce. Of these ten, four feel that all efforts to regulate the parking of cars, except where they interfere with vision or are adjacent to bus stops, fire hydrants, and safety zones, should be abandoned because of the difficulty of enforcement, general lack of respect for regulations, and a more or less apathetic attitude toward the situation.

Regulation of trucks and mass carriers has received little attention as yet. Trucks engage in what is called store-door delivery at any time of day in twelve of the cities, and yet nine of them feel that long distance operators should be required to operate over certain well defined routes through the city, but only nine have any control over these routes.

The greatest variation of methods and procedure is shown by the returns on the sections on traffic control mechanisms and signs and signals. Cities use different colors to indicate identical signals and regulated areas. Only five cities have the progressive movement type signal systems, and one city has a few vehicle-actuated traffic controllers. One city still permits a right-turn on a red light. Two cities maintain their signals in operation 24 hours a day, and of the eleven others only three indicate that the signal is off and that a stop is required. In spite of the apparent need for uniformity in methods and systems, four cities still feel that a uniform nation-wide system of traffic control mechanisms and colors to indicate definite orders should not be adopted, but that it should be left to the discretion of the various local officials. It is interesting to note that of these four, two feel that the motor car driver is not thoroughly acquainted with all of the regulations.

The answers to questions on design and construction show that much may be done in the matter of safe and economical design. Ten cities feel that smooth street surfaces are contributing to traffic accidents and seven think it would be good public policy to make an expenditure for a non-skid surface over the existing one. Five of the cities are of the opinion that speed is a necessary quality and nine think that cars are being operated at speeds greater than those for which their streets were constructed. At certain times of day in three cities where pedestrians are required to move upon signals, the sidewalks are insufficient to accommodate the accumulation of persons. The design of safety zones in streets presents problems. Seven cities use street car safety zones and of this number five have trouble with drunken, sleeping, or inattentive drivers crashing into these obstructions.

Parking and garage facilities complicate problems dealing with construction. Parking in the concentrated commercial sections has its economic aspects and the regulation in these districts is mainly influenced by the attitude of the merchants. Ten cities state that their commercial institutions feel that the establishment of their own individual parking facilities for customers is a necessity. In the belief that it is more profitable than paying taxes on the original investment, property owners in three cities have wrecked buildings in order to establish parking lots.

The traffic volume has increased to such an extent in four cities that it has become necessary to consider the construction of an elevated highway. They also feel that a system of public garages in connection with these highways would stabilize property values in the commercial districts. It was indicated that in only two cities would the voters look with favor on such a project, and all of them feel that there would be objections to such a highway over already established streets.

An educational program is being, or has been, conducted in nine cities which has proved effective in improving the public's attitude toward the enforcement of traffic regulations. This program has been applied in twelve cities in the public schools and from what statistics

are available the school child accident situation has shown improvement. In connection with the educational program two cities have traffic schools which offenders are required to attend in lieu of fines.

All thirteen municipalities have a system of traffic accident reporting and ten have traffic accident investigation systems. These systems are rather new in some cities and the accident reports are analyzed in only eight of the cities. From these analyses periodic reports are issued in six cities which show the trend of the traffic accident situation. From the accident reports an accident spot-map has already been prepared in eight cities and one has a vehicular traffic flow map made up from intersectional counts.

This summary of the questionnaire is presented by the Iowa State Planning Board in order to make available to those persons interested in traffic problems a comparison of the traffic regulations in the larger cities of the State.

SUMMARY OF REPLIES  
TO  
QUESTIONNAIRE ON TRAFFIC REGULATIONS  
IN 13 IOWA CITIES

CITY ORDINANCES	Cities replying		
	Yes	No	No reply
1. Are the Traffic Regulations set up by:			1
(a) Ordinance?	9		
(b) Police Department?	1		
(c) Commission of authority?	2		
2. Has the question of delegation of legislative authority been raised in cases where regulations were established by others than the law-making body of the municipality?	2	8	3
3. Is there a traffic division of the municipal police?	5	8	
4. Is there a traffic engineer provided by Ordinance or otherwise?	2	11	
5. Are police vehicles radio equipped?		7	
(a) One-way communication	4		
(b) Two-way communication	2		
COURTS			
1. Are the Courts sufficient in number to devote sufficient time to give thorough attention to each individual case?	13		
2. Should one Court be devoted exclusively to traffic cases?	3	9	1
3. Is a bureau maintained where offenders may pay fines and avoid appearing in court for traffic violations?	5	8	
4. Has it been demonstrated that payment of damages has a tendency toward the dismissal of charges for want of prosecution?	11	2	
5. Are all fines collected that are imposed?	10	3	
6. Is there a deferred payment plan of fine payment?	10	3	
7. Have fines been established which make for a minimum of appeals to higher courts?	7	4	2
8. Has the practice of requesting repeated continuances resulted in ultimate evasion of fines or punishment?	4	8	1

	Yes	No	No reply
9. Is there a traffic school which some offenders are required to attend in lieu of fines?	2	11	

REGULATION OF PEDESTRIAN TRAFFIC

1. Is the pedestrian required to obey traffic signals of police officers the same as the car driver?	8	5	
2. Is this regulation required by:			(In one city ordinance not enforced)
(a) City Ordinance	7		
(b) Police Order	2	4	
3. Is the pedestrian prohibited from crossing streets except at intersections?	7	5	1
4. Does the pedestrian have right-of-way:			1
(a) At all times	3		
(b) At intersection on proper light	8		
(c) At no time	1		
5. If pedestrians are required to move upon signals, are the sidewalk areas insufficient to accommodate the accumulation of pedestrians awaiting such signals?	3	9	1
6. Have pedestrians been arrested for violation of regulations?	1	12	

SAFETY EDUCATION

1. Is there being conducted in your city an educational program which has proved to be effective in improving the public's attitude toward traffic accident reduction?	9	4	
2. Has such a plan been applied to the school children with any marked improvement in the school child accident situation?	12		1
3. Has there been a recent official publication of your Traffic Regulation Code and has it been distributed among the citizens?	9	4	
4. Do you believe that the motor car driver is thoroughly acquainted with all the regulations?	3	10	

BUILDING SAFETY AND FACILITY INTO THE HIGHWAY

1. Do you believe that your City streets have been constructed in such manner and of such material as to be conducive to the safe public use thereof?	7	6	
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	Yes	No	No reply
2. Is speed, in your opinion, a necessary quality?	5	7	1
3. Do you believe that cars are being operated at speeds greater than those for which the highways were constructed?	9	4	
4. Do you believe that the wearing surface of existing highways in your community has been constructed sufficiently non-skid for reasonable safety at high speeds?	6	7	
5. Do you believe that slippery, smooth street surfaces are contributing to traffic accidents in your city?	10	3	
6. If so, do you believe it would be good public policy to make an expenditure for a non-skid treatment over existing smooth-wearing surfaces?	7	4	2

TERMINAL FACILITIES

1. Does your city maintain a municipally owned and operated bus or motor truck terminal?	12	12	1
2. Have you any control over the routes these vehicles use over your City streets?	9	4	
3. Is it your opinion that the operation of trucks over your streets has contributed to:			1
(a) traffic congestion	12	1	
(a) traffic accidents	7	5	
4. Should these vehicles be required to operate only over certain well defined and designed City streets?	13		
5. Do these vehicles remain on the designated routes?	4	8	1
6. Do these trucks engage in what is called store-door delivery service, that is, delivery to stores without handling through terminals?	12	1	
7. Is it your opinion that long-distance operators should be required to use truck terminals in every case?	9	3	1

PARKING AND HOUSING

1. Are you in favor of time-limited parking rather than prohibition entirely in concentrated commercial sections?	13		
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	Yes	No	No reply
2. Has the regulation of traffic in these districts been influenced by:			
(a) attitude of the merchants?	10		
(b) attitude of mass transportation operators?	1		
(c) thought of benefit for masses?	4		
3. In districts other than concentrated commercial do you permit unlimited parking, twenty-four hours a day?	10	3	
4. Do you believe that, from the sanitary standpoint of street cleaning, there should be a period when all cars should be required to be off the streets?	11	2	
5. Do you believe it to be sound public policy to attempt to require that all cars be placed in garages, rather than be permitted to stand on the streets?	8	5	
6. Do you permit parking in public alleys?	2	9	2
7. Do you permit angle parking?	12	1	
8. Do you have limited time parking?	12	1	
9. If so, is it difficult to enforce?	10	1	2
10. Is there a tendency for property owners to wreck buildings and establish parking lots as more profitable than paying taxes on the original investment?	3	8	2
11. Do you believe that all efforts to regulate parking of cars, except where they interfere with vision and adjacent to bus stops, fire hydrants, and safety zones, should be abandoned because of difficulty of enforcement, general lack of respect for regulations and the misuse sometimes made of parking tickets, together with a more or less apathetic attitude toward the situation?	4	9	

TRAFFIC SIGNS AND SIGNALS

1. Do you permit a right-turn on a red light?	1	12	
2. Do you use a flashing red light to indicate some subsequent signal?	2	11	
3. Do you use flashing red lights as warning of some permanent highway obstruction?	3	8	2
4. Do you permit left-turns on all intersections?	11	2	
5. Do you use an amber signal to indicate change of signal?	10	2	1

	Yes	No	No reply
6. Do you use any other colored lens to indicate pedestrian control?	1	12	
7. Do you use audible signals in addition to lights?	6	7	
8. Has there been public reaction against audible signals?	2	4	7
9. Do you believe that they are an aid?	7	3	3
10. Have you any vehicle-operated traffic controllers?	1	12	
11. Have you the so-called progressive movement type signal system?	5	6	2
12. Have you a controller which is set on a predetermined schedule to operate in a particular manner at different times of day and different days of the week, all automatic?	2	9	2
13. Do you use interconnected signals on your progressive system?	5		
14. Do you use for the same purpose a synchronous motor?	3		
15. Have you experienced difficulty in connection with Neon advertising signs, where these are in direct line of vision with traffic signals?	2	11	
16. Do you permit these signs to be flashed or to indicate motion?	9	2	2
17. Do you prohibit such signs where they interfere with proper vision of traffic control signals?	5	7	1
18. Do you maintain all your signals in operation 24 hours a day?	2	11	
19. If not, do you provide an indication to motorists that the signal is off and that a "Stop" is required?	3	8	2
20. Do you turn off your signals as an economic measure?	3	10	
21. Do you turn off your signals to reduce unnecessary regulation?	8	5	
22. Do you turn out your signals to reduce the likelihood of highway robbery during the night hours?	1	11	1
23. Do you flash any light of your signals when they are out of operation?	1	12	
24. Do you make use of the reflector button Stop sign for night vision on any of your intersections?	9	4	

	Yes	No	No reply
25. Do you depend on roadway markings lettered "stop" just ahead of the intersection?	9	3	1
26. Do you find it necessary to use a heavier standard for signs in the city than is used on state roads, due to people damaging them in town?	3	10	
27. Are stop signs erected at intersections as a result of demands from residents who complain of frequent accidents?	7	4	2
28. Before installing stop signs do you refer to a spot-accident map?	8	4	1
29. Do the systems of "through" or major streets expedite the movement of traffic?	2	11	
30. Would you place a limit on the number of intersections equipped with stop signs?	6	7	
31. Has the "saturation point", in terms of the public's attitude and reaction to stop signs, been reached in your city?	3	9	1
32. Has it been your experience that on the one hand there is a demand for more stop signs and on the other a demand that many of the existing stop signs be removed?	7	4	2
33. Are your stop signs established by:			
(a) ordinance authority?	12		
(b) police regulation?	1		
34. Do you have swivel type stop signs?	2	11	
35. Do you believe that banked curves should have signs placed ahead to indicate maximum permissible speed?	11	1	1
36. Do you believe that a uniform nation-wide system of traffic control mechanisms and colors to indicate definite orders should be adopted instead of leaving it to the various local officials?	7	4	2

#### TRAFFIC LANE PAINTING

1. Do you establish traffic lanes by dividing them with painted lines?	10	3	
2. Have you found that this makes for better and safer traffic flow?	10		
3. Has the progress of your work of traffic regulation, including signals, signs, and painting, been hampered by insufficient appropriations for that purpose?	10	3	

	Yes	No	No reply
4. Is it your opinion that running through stops signs should be looked upon as a major offense?	10	3	

DESIGN AND USE OF SAFETY ZONES

1. Do you use the following type of street-car safety zone:			
(a) Painted outline	4		
(b) Same as (a) with raised mushroom buttons	3		
2. Do you believe that street-car passengers should be protected by a safety zone of a substantial type?	7		
3. Has it been your experience that these obstructions in the streets have been targets for drunken, inattentive, or sleeping drivers or skidding cars?	5		2
4. Do you use parkway dividers along the centerline of your wide streets?	4	4	5
5. Do you maintain the illumination of safety zones 24 hours a day?	1	6	
6. Do you illuminate center-dividing devices 24 hours a day?	2	2	
7. Have traffic dividers been an aid to pedestrians crossing streets?	4		

TRAFFIC ACCIDENT STATISTICS

1. Do you have a system of traffic accident:			
(a) investigation?	10	3	
(b) reporting?	13		
2. Are traffic accident reports analyzed?	8	5	
3. From these analyses are periodical reports made, showing the trend of the traffic accident situation?	6	2	
4. As a result of these reports do the Police drive against the offenders who are shown to be causing the accidents?	10	3	
5. Do you maintain a spot-accident map showing the number of accidents which occur at various places?	8	4	1
6. Do you have a traffic flow map made up from inter-sectional counts?	1	12	

	Yes	No	No reply
MASS TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS			
1. Do you have a municipally owned:			
(a) street car system		13	
(b) bus system	1	12	
2. Has the operation of these mass transportation vehicles shown improvement with regard to traffic accidents?	8	5	
3. Are your taxi-cabs operated under the control of city officials?	9	3	1
4. Is there a tendency to hinder the enforcement of taxi-cab regulations by litigation instituted by the operators?	1	10	2
5. Are taxi-cab operators required by your city to maintain public liability insurance?	10	2	1

ELEVATED HIGHWAYS

1. Has vehicular traffic increased on your streets to such an extent that it has become necessary to consider the construction of an elevated highway?	4	8	1
2. Do you believe that a system of converging elevated structures, with a system of public garages, would aid in handling the traffic in congested commercial districts?	3	1	
3. Would such a system of public garages have a tendency to stabilize property values in these districts?	4		
4. Would your city look with favor upon construction of elevated highways?	2	2	
5. Do you believe that such a system could be made self liquidating by charging the user a small fee?	2	2	
6. Would there be objection to such a highway system through already established streets?	3	1	
7. Would consequential damage claims make such a system prohibitive?	1	2	1
8. Would such a system offer accommodation to inter-city truck traffic?	3	1	
9. Do you think the elevated highway would accelerate mass transportation vehicles on public highways?	4		

- |  | Yes | No | No reply |
|--|-----|----|----------|
| 10. In view of the popularity of elimination of railroad grade crossings, do you believe it reasonable to build elevated motor car highways to eliminate the street intersection accidents, since they show such a preponderance over railroad grade crossing accidents? |     |    | 4        |
| 11. Do you believe it a reasonable proposal to associate garage facilities with these elevated highways, conveniently located to shopping districts, so that parking facilities will encourage business from tourists and out of town customers?                         |     |    | 4        |

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