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STATE AID FOR MAIN HIGHWAYS

A Plan of State Aid for the Purpose of Constructing a Comprehensive System of Main or State Highways, and to Enable Iowa to Obtain Her Share of the Federal Appropriation of \$85,000,000.00 in Aid of Good Roads, Without Increasing the Levy of Taxes upon Property or the Issuance of Bonds.



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STATE AID FOR MAIN HIGHWAYS.

A PLAN OF STATE AID FOR THE PURPOSE OF CONSTRUCTING A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF MAIN OR STATE HIGHWAYS, AND TO ENABLE IOWA TO OBTAIN HER SHARE OF THE FEDERAL APPROPRIATION OF \$85,000,000.00 IN AID OF GOOD ROADS, WITHOUT INCREASING THE LEVY OF TAXES UPON PROPERTY OR THE ISSUANCE OF BONDS.

The most pressing need of the State of Iowa at this time is some comprehensive plan whereby the energies and available resources of a great and wealthy state may be so concentrated and intelligently and energetically directed that the present generation may enjoy the privileges and advantages of a reasonably improved system of state or main highways. Under existing conditions, Iowa is neglecting her opportunities and dissipating her resources. Wasted opportunity is like unused water over the dam, lost and gone forever.

What Iowa needs, to bring order out of chaos, is a systematic plan capable of early consummation. Iowa can have a reasonably well improved system of state highways built from present resources, without any additional taxes, and without a bond issue of any sort or character.

MAIN TRAVELED ROADS.

Main traveled roads,—roads connecting county seats and population centers,—are subject to much more dense, constant, and wearing travel than are branch or mere connecting highways. The main traveled roads are used not only by the people residing in their locality,

but by the people of the state at large, and such outside travelers as, for business or pleasure, may come to Iowa. The cost of construction and maintenance of the main highways is substantially more than similar expenses connected with branch roads. There is, therefore, every reason why the State, and her people generally, should contribute liberally to the construction of a state system of highways, rather than have such roads built and maintained locally.

In most communities where state roads have been successfully constructed, for instance, in states like California and Massachusetts, the State has either made liberal contribution to the construction of main roads, or assumed all of the expense of building same, and in the neighboring states of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Michigan, and Ohio, a system of state aid, or "state reward", as it is sometimes called, is in successful operation.

The situation of Iowa, in the matter of road improvement, is embarrassing, because of the unusual number of miles of public highway that is entitled to public supervision, and that demands some sort of governmental improvement. The total number of laid out public highways in Iowa, outside of cities and towns, is 104,082 miles,—more miles of highway than is found in any other state in the Union, except Missouri and Texas, and, if you consider highways that have actual public supervision, more miles of that character of road than any State in the Union.

The soil of Iowa, so fruitful for agricultural purposes, is not adapted to road building. Our extremes of heat and cold during each recurring year, and the scarcity of

good road material, add to the difficulties of the situation.

NUMBER OF MILES OF MAIN ROAD.

The State Highway Commission, with the assistance of the Boards of Supervisors and the County Engineers of each county, has laid out and adopted what is known as a system of county roads. This county road system comprises 15,767 miles. It connects each county seat with every other county seat, and each principal trading point with the county seat of the county in which it is located. No serious objection or criticism has appeared to the designation of this county road system, and it could advantageously be considered as the basis of a state system of main roads.

It is perfectly natural, from the human and selfish standpoint, that those who reside or own land upon the 90,000 miles of highway outside of this county system should show reluctance or opposition to spending large sums on main roads to the exclusion of the branches. Each resident and property owner ordinarily wants the road abutting his premises improved first.

To insure the construction of a state system of highways, so that citizens of Iowa now living may to some extent enjoy same, a plan of substantial state aid is imperative, and, in view of the multiplied uses of main as compared with branch roads, it is only fair and just that some plan should be devised whereby the State at large can contribute substantially to the carrying out of such a plan.

NUMBER AND AMOUNT OF AUTOMOBILE LICENSES.

The increased and multiplied use of motor vehicles is said to be the principal cause of the demand for improved highways,—highways that can be used 365 days in the year. Why not let the automobile owner's make the main contribution toward the construction of these highways?

According to the records in the Secretary of State's office, there were issued in Iowa, during the eleven months of 1916 ending December 1st, motor licenses on 197,038 automobiles and 6890 motorcycles, making 203,928 vehicles licensed. This does not include the machines represented by 2774 dealers' licenses. The total receipts at the Secretary of State's office, for license fees and transfers of various kinds, aggregate, for the eleven months, \$1,793,237.16. The average annual license fee paid was \$9.25, ranging from \$3.00 for motorcycles and \$9.25 for Fords to \$17.28 for a Packard Twin Six.

It is fair to say that the number of automobile licenses which will be issued in 1917 will very considerably exceed 200,000 and the general revenue derived from this source will undoubtedly exceed \$2,000,000.00. This fund could easily be raised to \$3,000,000.00 by making some reasonable increases in the amount of the license fee. When it is considered that the payment of this license fee exempts the machine from all local and general taxes, an increase, especially if used for road improvement purposes, would be justified, and this increase should be largely laid upon the more expensive and higher power machines, for the dual reason that they are harder upon the roads and the exemption from taxes

on the high priced machines is of more value to the owners.

FEDERAL AID—TERMS UPON WHICH IT CAN BE OBTAINED.

In addition to this source of revenue, the State of Iowa, if it complies with the provisions of the Act of Congress, will receive from the Federal Government an annual and increasing contribution to the good roads fund. Beginning with an appropriation of \$146,200.00 for the year 1917, this fund will increase during a period of five years, until the annual contribution from the Government for the year 1921 will be \$731,000.00, or a total amount due Iowa, under this Act of Congress, for good road purposes, of \$2,193,000.00. The State, however, to avail itself of the provisions of this Act of Congress, must:

1st. Accept the provisions of the act by legislative enactment.

2nd. Have a State Highway Commission or State Highway Department.

3rd. Have a definite, comprehensive, and practicable plan of road improvement covering a five year period.

4th. Such plan as the State may adopt must be submitted for the approval of the Secretary of Agriculture.

5th. There must be an agreement between the Secretary of Agriculture and the State Highway Commission as to the character of the proposed road construction.

6th. The work must be done, as provided by the state laws, under the supervision of the State Highway Commission.

7th. The State must adopt a reasonable plan for the maintenance of roads receiving Federal aid.

To entitle Iowa to her share of the \$85,000,000.00 recently appropriated by the Federal Government, which will aggregate over \$2,000,000.00, some definite plan of road improvement, covering a period of five years, must be adopted by the next Legislature.

In addition to the sources of revenue above suggested, a discriminating and practical use of the prison labor of Iowa, in either actual work upon the highways or employment in producing surfacing material, could be made an essential element in this great public enterprise. The average daily population of the penal institutions at Anamosa and Fort Madison is about 1200. There are great possibilities for this labor, if it was intelligently and systematically directed, in the way of good roads construction.

These combined sources will furnish the State of Iowa, for an indefinite number of years, with a fund running from in excess of \$2,000,000.00, under the present license assessment, to in excess of \$3,000,000.00, if a reasonable readjustment of this license charge is made, and the increase in the number of automobiles licensed will annually materially add to this fund.

PRESENT DISTRIBUTION OF AUTOMOBILE LICENSE FUND.

From an intelligent business point of view, the present distribution of the automobile license fees is wholly indefensible, and results in the expenditure and dissipation of this large fund each year without showing any definite or tangible results. No one can point to any

particular road, or section of road, and say this is the result of the expenditure of the \$2,000,000.00 automobile fund raised and expended in the year 1916.

Under the provisions of Section 1571-m32 of the Supplement Code of Iowa, this fund is first distributed among the 99 counties of the state, in proportion to the number of townships in each county, and then a further distribution is made by the counties among their cities and towns, so that, when the fund finally reaches the officials who have the authority to expend same, the amounts are so small that no one can find the result of same.

It required some special skill to devise a plan that could so effectually destroy the power of the automobile license fund to bring about practical results as the one now in force in Iowa.

PROPOSED SUBDIVISION OF PRESENT COUNTY ROAD SYSTEM.

If the county road system of Iowa was divided into three sections of 5000 miles each, putting the most important and most traveled roads in Section A, the next most important in Section B, and the balance of the state system in Section C, such sections to be improved in the order of their importance, the State by using the present motor vehicle tax, together with such funds as it would receive from the Federal Government, could pay state aid to each county building a mile of state road in the sum of \$2500.00. If this fund was increased, by a moderate raising of the license tax, to \$3,000,000.00 a year, the state aid could be raised to \$3000.00 per mile. Thus there could be built by state aid, out of this fund,

1000 miles of state highway each year,—practically three main roads across the entire state. A state system of graveled and permanently bridged roads could thus be constructed, and this without the issuance of a single bond, or an increase of taxes upon real or personal property.

NO ADDITIONAL OFFICERS OR COMMISSIONS REQUIRED.

No additional public officers, commissions, or expense would be necessary for the proper distribution of this fund. The Executive Council, upon certificate from the Highway Commission that the road had been constructed according to specifications, could make the distribution contemplated.

Again, this plan would require no general revision of present laws. The same official machinery in the counties that now builds the roads and distributes the funds will continue to do so. Very slight amendments to present laws would put this plan into successful operation.

Where the cost of any five mile section of road would not equal the amount of the state aid, then the county so constructing this section of road should receive only the actual cost of the road. Where the cost exceeded the amount per mile of the state aid, the county, out of its general road fund, should pay the additional cost, or, if it was preferred, each county might receive a definite sum for each mile of state highway constructed, the excess, if any, over actual cost going to the general road fund of the county.

CONDITIONS UPON WHICH STATE AID SHOULD BE EXTENDED.

The aid of the State should be extended upon two conditions:

1st. The county, before it would be entitled to state aid, must permanently bridge, grade, drain, and surface with gravel, broken stone, or other similar material that may be approved by the Highway Commission, each mile of road upon which it would expect to receive this aid, the construction of the entire improvement to be in compliance with such general standard specifications as may be approved by the State Highway Commission.

2nd. The counties so receiving state aid must make reasonable provision, and this provision should be general and uniform throughout the state, for patrol and maintenance, agreeing to expend not less than \$150.00 per mile per annum upon the state roads upon which such aid has been paid, and, as part of this plan of maintenance, establish small depots at convenient intervals, which shall contain a supply of material with which slight repairs on the road could be speedily made.

Does not the conservation of this automobile and Federal aid fund, and its systematic expenditure, stand not only for effectiveness but the accomplishment of practical and definite results? Does not this plan present a reasonable solution of "lifting Iowa out of the mud?"

The people of Iowa can well afford to lay aside local and factional jealousy; can afford to make a strong, united, and patriotic effort to accomplish this result, and, by the adoption of this or some other equally efficient plan, which would mean actual and progressive road building, place Iowa on the road question where her

wealth, intelligence, and common sense entitle her to be,—a leader and not a laggard.

This plan should not in any wise interfere with the improvement of branch roads by the people of each locality, under some liberal plan of local option, the two propositions working together, the state aid lifting from the shoulders of each locality much of the responsibility of the main road construction, and permitting each locality, in its own way, and at such time and in such manner as it may desire, to improve its local surroundings, free from outside interference or control.

The importance of a state wide system of highways calls for broad and unselfish co-operation. Will not Iowa and her people respond?

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