

# Commission Faces Giant Task

By MELVIN PAUL  
The Frontier's Statehouse Correspondent

LINCOLN—As the new state highway advisory commission held its first meeting here this week, members found out that their job of "planning the state highway system" covered a lot of ground.

For one thing, there are already 9,660 miles on the state highway system. And the catch is that with the new revenues provided by the 1953 legislature, it will take nine years before all the roads that the state highway department considered "dangerously" sub-par can be improved.

Then legislatures through the years have passed bills establishing statutory routes which never got built. There are 1,865 miles of these routes scattered in 72 places, all over the state.

A good reason for not building these is that the department has been saddled with other types of roads through the years.

For example, the legislature once passed a law authorizing the department to build a connecting state highway to the following kinds of cities and villages:

Any village within two miles of a state highway.

Any village with a population of at least 50 and a postoffice if within three miles of a state highway.

Any incorporated village not served by a railroad if within six miles of a state highway.

**Additions Galore—**

Another "gimmick" which added roads to the department's responsibility—and seldom with any increase in revenue—was a law which said the state should maintain any roads built in part by federal funds. So counties matched federal funds for the improvement of their roads which were most expensive to maintain. That didn't stop until the 1949 legislature changed the law to provide that the state doesn't have to maintain federal aid secondary routes unless state funds are put into their construction.

The department also had to take over access roads to military installations and plants which it had built for the government in World War I.

In 1926 the department was told to maintain all state highways within corporate limits of villages of less than 1,400. A year later it became responsible for maintaining these highways in towns of less than 2,500 population. In 1935 the department was made responsible for paying half the cost of maintenance for wear and tear on these highways down the streets of towns with populations between 2,500 and 25,000.

So the new highway commission has plenty of places it can add to the state highway system if it chooses. The state can take over any federal-aid secondary route on which it spends money. Several hundred miles of state highway could be built in connecting villages to the state highway system. And there are those 1,865 miles of statutory road never built.

The catch, of course, is that the commission will have the same trouble finding the money for these projects that the department has. Especially when the existing system is getting no younger month by month.

**Explosives Hauling—**

A neat bit of "toss the hot potato" was exhibited at the state house when Gov. Robert Crosby called a meeting to discuss the problem of hauling explosives. The truckers were there to prove they were victims of "hysteria" arising from the fire-caused explosion of an ammunition truck west of Omaha. The representatives of the army and the department of defense were there to see that the hauling of these essential materials wasn't unduly hampered. Omaha safety officials were there trying to get action on all dangerous types of hauling. City officials were there to get backing for proposed ordinances to either ban or slow down the trucks.

Conspicuously absent were the railroads, who would stand to gain the most if ammunition trucks were banned from the highways.

Nothing much happened in the way of constructive conclusions. Everybody agreed that explosives are dangerous. Most agreed that a country engaged in pre-

paring for defense against war has to have these dangerous things around. The truckers worked hard to get government witnesses to endorse a recent statement by James K. Knudsen, administrator of the defense transportation administration, that "the truck record is as safe as any other." And it was obvious that Governor Crosby wasn't going to get himself involved in the

bitter dispute any more than necessary.

For observers it was an interesting reversal of a scene several weeks before when operators of motels, restaurants, and service stations had come in to plead with Crosby and State Engineer L. N. Resch that there be no planning of bypasses which would take highways out of their towns. But at the ammunition hearing the cry from the cities was to bar the trucks—which have the same legal rights to the highways as any other motor vehicle—from

traveling through the centers of the towns and possibly blowing them to kingdom come with explosives.

A neat example of the "eat your cake and have it too" theory in the opinion of some observers.

**Acid Test—**

Governor Crosby went before his "home town folks" at North Platte to explain why he had to order a statewide tax equalization adjustment which hit that Lincoln county town the hardest—a 207 percent real estate assessment

boost. As if that wasn't enough, one of his severest critics, Sen. Terry Carpenter of Scottsbluff, was on the platform. Both Carpenter and North Platte's Sen. Harry Pizer asked Crosby to call a special session.

But the governor told the audience he wouldn't succumb to such false promises of an easy solution.

**Joseph Ridgeway**

**Weds Today—**

V. Joseph Ridgeway, son of Mr. and Mrs. Ross Ridgeway,

will wed Miss Patricia Denvir of Connellsville, Pa., in nuptial rites today (Thursday) in immaculate Conception church at Connellsville. The bride-elect is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. J. I. Denvir of Connellsville.

The couple will reside in Denver, Colo., after their wedding trip. Mr. Ridgeway is an electrician employed in Denver.

Sunday and Monday on business. Their boys, Billy and Richard, stayed with their grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. George Beatty of Madison.

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