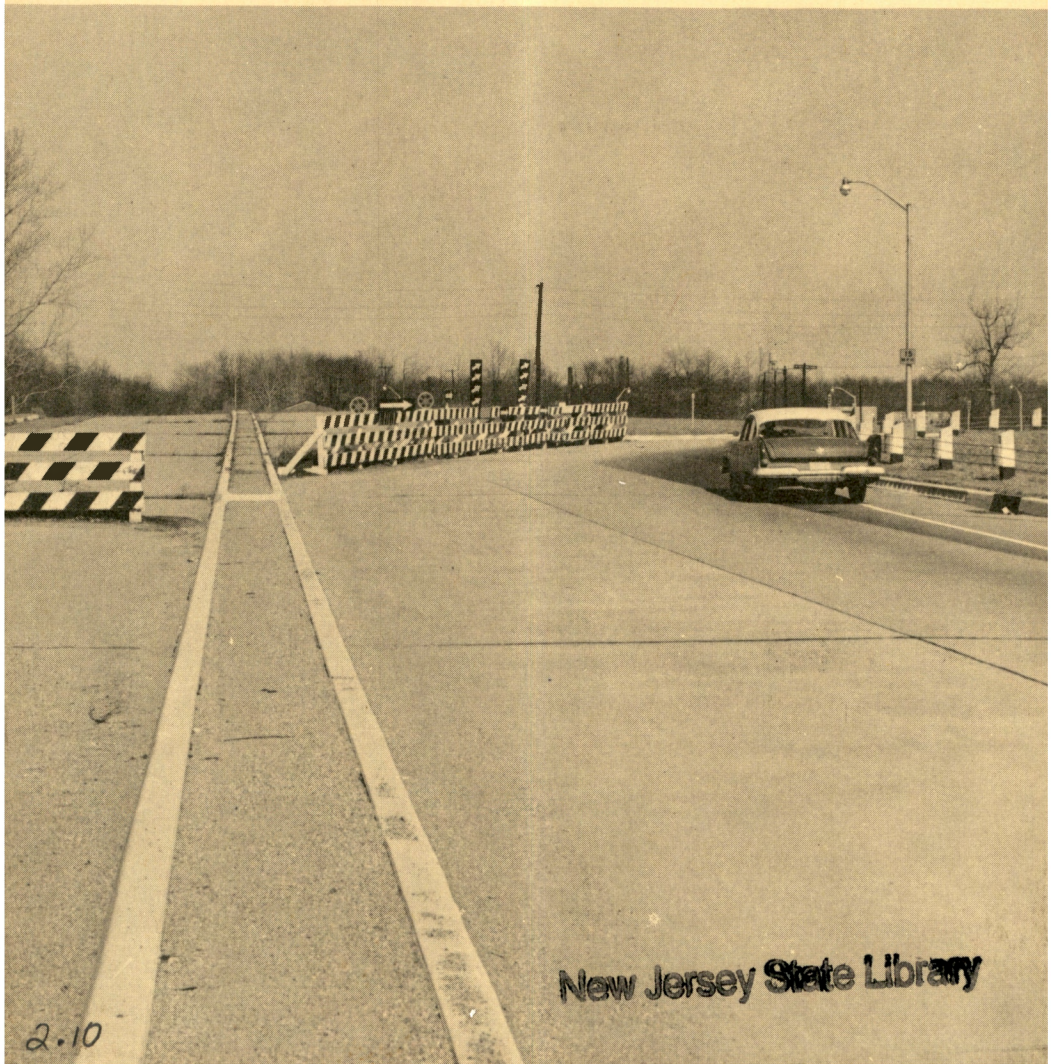


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WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE ?



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By DWIGHT R. G. PALMER

State Highway Commissioner

MISSING MONEY

- MISSING MILES

**Why do many people succeed in agreeing
that we need better highways, while failing
to see that it takes money to build
bridges, tunnels and roads?**

By DWIGHT R. G. PALMER

State Highway Commissioner

IS IT POSSIBLE that New Jersey will fail to provide funds necessary to its highway requirements until there is a catastrophic traffic jam extending from the Atlantic to the Delaware and from New York State to Cape May — by which time it would be much too late?

The State Highway Department has been pointing to the urgent need for increased construction funds for lo these many years. It is interesting to note moreover that during this period traffic jams steadily have grown worse and motorists' patience has been exhausted because few would heed our warnings.

Although relatively recent increases in Federal allocations for Interstate highways have accelerated road building in New Jersey, nowhere near enough is being done. Conservative estimates indicate that if we are to provide for traffic of the predictable future — and many of today's urgent needs — highway expenditures must be increased an additional 60 to 70 million dollars a year for the next 12 years. Boiled down we must be prepared to spend a billion dollars more than present estimates of combined State and Federal appropriations. If we fail to provide these funds on a continuing basis, we shall most certainly find that the cost

of not building the required highways will be greater than the cost of building them.

Too much "me!" One obstacle to be overcome in convincing the people of New Jersey of these "facts of life" is the common failure to understand, or even care about, the other fellow's plight. The driver who uses Route 22 each morning and evening is oblivious to the trials and tribulations of other drivers who are similarly stalled in scores of traffic jams on other roads. Even at the official level concern for highway improvements is strictly local in nature. We have yet to hear of a clamor for South Jersey highway improvements originating in Northern New Jersey or vice versa. In fact, one section of the State frequently will criticize the Department for its expenditures in other sections. While this may be natural, it is indicative of a complete lack of understanding of Statewide highway needs. All over the State local talent labels their strangulated highway as "suicide highway." There are dozens so named. Until we learn that highway insufficiency is not a local phenomenon little headway can be made in attacking the broader aspects of the problem. One look at the Department's Master Plan will show that needed highway improvements are called for in each of our 21 counties and that these improvements form an integrated network serving the entire State and are capable of bringing benefits to all.

But how can this story of inadequacy and the need for additional funds be brought to the attention of our citizens and the Legislature? Surely the Highway Department is neither equipped nor permitted to devote the necessary manpower or dollars to the promotion of such a broad-scale program. Our energies must be dedicated to the task of constructing and maintaining highways. While we can point to the needs, the job of acquainting the public and devising means of raising the necessary dollars must be left to others.

Without success. There have been some attempts along this line in the past, but they have failed to produce the desired results. Perhaps their ineffectiveness could be attributed to a number of reasons. It might be that they failed to reach people at the grassroots level whose voice will be the deciding factor in influencing legislative action. It might be that past and present efforts are too sporadic rather than continuous throughout the year. It might also be that such efforts suffer when they are launched by those who benefit directly from construction contracts rather than from completed highways. It could be lack of adequate financing or a combination of all of these many factors.

New Jersey needs a dynamic highway movement to impress our citizens and their legislative representatives with the need for prompt action. To be successful such a program should be under

the direction of leaders in the fields of business, industry, labor and other important segments of our complex society. Those who would benefit directly would at best remain in the wings and not occupy center stage. A successful highway movement must have the active participation of all groups, not for selfish reasons, but because the continuing economic prosperity of New Jersey depends upon uninterrupted and safe travel on our highways.

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If we fail to provide for tomorrow's highways with the same wisdom that we are providing for our children's education, water supply for our industries, open space for generations yet unborn and institutions for our less fortunate, it is possible that the final traffic jam may be just around the next curve in the road. What we need is a "merger" of all interested organizations and the selection of a few capable citizens to assume the job of promoting the State's needs.



TRAFFIC-LOCKED Route 22 during mid-morning rush hours. A provincial attitude toward regional traffic and a close concern with their own problems makes motorists fail to realize that traffic congestion is a state-wide and not a local phenomena.

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