

Dwight R. G. Palmer

Statement Before Assembly Committee on
Highways, Transportation and Public Utilities -
at Hearing on AB no. 557.

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Statement
of
Dwight R. G. Palmer.
New Jersey State Highway Commissioner

Before

Assembly Committee on Highways, Transportation
and Public Utilities - Assemblyman Wm. T. Hiering, Chairman

at

Hearing on Assembly No. 557

March 31, 1964 - 3 p.m.
Mountain High School - West Orange N.J.

I am Dwight R. G. Palmer, Commissioner of Highways, State of New Jersey
and I assure you it is a privilege, Mr. Chairman and your associate
Assemblymen, to present the following facts regarding Interstate Route
280 in the West Orange area.

Five years ago today the New Jersey State Highway Department conducted
a public hearing on the alignment of this highway through Newark and the
Oranges. At this hearing, the Department presented the alignment which
exhaustive studies had indicated would be the best, also certain
localized alternatives. One of these would have provided for a
tunnel in the vicinity of First Mountain, West Orange, which is the
subject of today's hearing.

As was announced well in advance, the hearing was open to all and a
special effort was made to see that everyone had an opportunity to speak.
The record shows that the various representatives of West Orange occupied
2½ hours of a 13-hour hearing. To be exact they covered some 54 pages of
a total of 77 pages of the evening session recording.

Since then, five years have been used up in developing the financial wherewithal to depress the major portion of the Essex East-West Freeway, in its design, its acquisition of right-of-way and numerous time-consuming studies devoted to the continued requests of officials of West Orange for the tunnel alternate.

No one denies that Essex County has long since badly needed the Essex East-West Freeway. When this 30-years hoped for dream becomes a reality it will only be on the basis that this highway has had to "fight for its life" every foot of the way. It took years to persuade the Federal Bureau of Roads that it should be classified as an Interstate Route eligible for 90-10 aid. It took years to develop the alignment and still more years to find a way of paying for the additional cost of a depressed freeway. Inquiry has been made as to how much longer the citizens of all Essex County and the State must wait for this modern transportation facility.

It is interesting to note that in late December, 1957 - 15 months before the public hearing - the Department described the preliminary alignment of the route as "curving southeasterly along the most southerly portion of Llewellyn Park crossing Mount Pleasant west of its intersection with Main Street."

This afforded early notice to West Orange of the line the Highway Department was considering. During all of these years, West Orange has made studies of its own in an effort to substantiate the virtues of a tunnel and also obtained studies by Federal agencies. All of these

have been reviewed by our engineers. Even after the Highway Department and the Bureau of Public Roads were satisfied that a tunnel was not feasible, the Department at the request of the Chief Executive of our State, agreed to one more final review by an independent firm of Consulting Engineers of international repute. This final review confirmed the Highway Department's own findings, previously confirmed by the Federal Bureau of Roads, and, with respect to the question of safety among other aspects, pointed out that the economic impossibility of providing shoulders in a tunnel might well result in increased hazard for lack of room to sidetrack disabled vehicles. All of these studies have consumed substantial sums of the taxpayers money, as well as incurring increasing delays in getting this much needed project under way.

Careful and time-consuming consideration has been given to the views expressed by the Mayor of West Orange and his advisors. It is imperative to give consideration to the pressing needs of Essex County and the entire State for the relief from congestion and hazard on existing roads which the East-West Freeway will provide.

Also, the Highway Department presently estimates an expenditure far greater than any foreseeable available funds will be required during the next decade for the New Jersey State Highway System to accommodate 1975 traffic demands. The projects included in the Highway Department's Master Plan include many for which there is a crying need today in every County of our State, but for which sufficient funds have not been available.

In the light of these facts, under no circumstances could the New Jersey State Highway Department recommend to the Federal Bureau of Roads an expenditure of \$13 million or more for the tunnel proposed by West Orange even if there were a source for such funds, which there is not. Plain common sense tells us that the money could be used to greater advantage elsewhere.

In proceeding with the design and construction of Interstate Route 280 on the basis of an open cut, the Highway Department plans to maintain its policy of doing everything possible within the limits of sound engineering to preserve and enhance the aesthetic values of the locality. Bridged connections will be provided for those portions of the residential area which might otherwise be separated.

In conclusion I wish to point out that this project is long over-due. Every facet has been analyzed and we are unqualifiedly satisfied that the conclusions of our Department's engineers and those of the Federal Bureau of Roads selecting an open cut are the best for all parties at interest with due weight given to all the evidence.

In making my determination I used my independent judgment in deciding whether or not the tunnel or open cut method of construction should be used. I was guided, but not controlled, by the reports of the technical advisors which I have mentioned above.