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[Transmittal of T&E Roads - Master Plan]

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STEPHEN EARLY  
Secretary to the President

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TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES:

I transmit herewith a letter from the Secretary of Agriculture, concurred in by the Secretary of War, enclosing a report of the Bureau of Public Roads, United States Department of Agriculture, on the Feasibility of a system of Transcontinental Toll Roads and a Master Plan for Free Highway Development.

The report, prepared at the request of the Congress, is the first complete assembly of data on the use being made of our national highway network. It points definitely to the corrective measures of greatest urgency and shows that existing improvements may be fully utilized in meeting ultimate highway needs.

It emphasizes the need of a special system of direct interregional highways, with all necessary connections through and around cities, designed to meet the requirements of the national defense and the needs of a growing peace-time traffic of longer range.

It shows that there is need for superhighways, but makes it clear that this need exists only where there is congestion on the existing roads, and mainly in metropolitan areas. Improved facilities, needed for the solution of city street congestion, are shown to occupy a fundamental place in the general replanning of the cities indicated as necessary in the report "Our Cities", issued in September 1937 by the National Resources Committee.

The report also points definitely to difficulties of right-of-way acquisition as obstacles to a proper development of both rural highways and city streets, and makes important and useful recommendations for dealing with these difficulties.

I call the special attention of the Congress to the discussion of the principle of "excess-taking" of land for highways. I lay great emphasis on this because by adopting the principle of "excess-taking" of land, the ultimate cost to the Government of a great national system of highways will be greatly reduced.

For instance, we all know that it is largely a matter of chance if a new highway is located through one man's land and misses another man's land a few miles away. Yet the man who, by good fortune, sells a narrow right of way for a new highway makes, in most cases, a handsome profit through the increase in value of all of the rest of his land. That represents an unearned increment of profit -- a profit which comes to a mere handful of lucky citizens and which is denied to the vast majority.

Under the exercise of the principle of "excess-taking" of land, the Government, which puts up the cost of the highway, buys a wide strip on each side of the highway itself, uses it for the rental of concessions and sells it off over a period of years to home builders and others who wish to live near a main artery of travel. Thus the Government gets the unearned increment and reimburses itself in large part for the building of the road.

In its full discussion of the whole highway problem and the wealth of exact data it supplies, the report indicates the broad outlines of what might be regarded as a master plan for the development of all of the highway and street facilities of the nation.

I recommend the report for the consideration of the Congress as a basis for needed action to solve our highway problems.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

THE WHITE HOUSE,

April 27, 1939.