

STATUS REPORT**FEDERAL ROLE
IN
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SAFETY INCREASES SOUGHT IN BUDGET

The budget submitted to Congress just before President Johnson left office, and which is subject to reworking by the Nixon Administration, contains spending increases over current levels for highway safety.

In addition, the budget proposes a change in the manner of financing the federal safety program, with expenditures coming out of the Highway Trust Fund. There was an abortive attempt last year to switch financing of the safety program from general revenue to the almost-sacrosanct Trust Fund, and it remains to be seen how far the proposal will get in the current session of Congress. Traditionally, use of the fund for anything but highway construction has met stiff opposition.

While Mr. Johnson's budget views for the 1969-1970 fiscal year are not binding upon Mr. Nixon, historically the proposals of an outgoing administration weigh heavily in the early months of a new administration. This could be particularly true this year, with the Democrats retaining control of Congress.

As proposed by the former President, expenditures for the total safety program, but not including the federal grant-in-aid program, would be increased from an estimated \$26,457,000 during the current fiscal year to \$36,100,000 during fiscal 1970.

A breakdown of the overall figure shows some emerging new emphasis in the 2 1/2-year-old safety program.

For example, \$8,884,000 is earmarked for the investigation of accidents and the analysis of relevant information. This compares with \$4,275,000 currently for this purpose, and only \$1,259,000 in 1968. The budget narrative says "these funds will be required for collecting data from all sources for the purpose of determining the relationship between motor vehicles or motor vehicle equipment performance characteristics and (1) crashes involving motor vehicles and (2) the occurrence of death or personal injury as a result of such occurrences."

Funding for research, demonstration projects, and training related to the development and improvement of highway safety standards and other aspects of state safety programs would total \$8,640,000, compared with \$7,695,000 in the current fiscal year and \$5,035,000 in 1968.

For the used car safety program, which is expected to gather momentum in the months ahead, the budget requests \$2,478,000. This compares with \$2,350,000 for the current fiscal year and \$1,416,000 spent last year. A large share of the money spent to date has gone into the preparation of a Department of Transportation report to Congress and on background work preparatory to the issuance of standards for the 95,000,000 vehicles currently in use.

The \$36.1 million figure also includes \$13,510,000 for the continued development of motor vehicle and tire standards for new vehicles and for procedures to evaluate their effectiveness and to determine compliance. This program is currently receiving \$9,905,000; in 1968 it received \$5,507,000.

For the highway safety grant program created under the Highway Safety Act of 1966, under which federal funds are made available to the states and their local communities to meet highway safety standards, the budget includes the use of \$100 million in obligating authority in 1970. This compares with \$63.8 million currently available.

Administration of the safety grant program is a complicated numbers game and the \$100 million figure alone is misleading. For one thing, \$2.1 million would be deducted for administrative expenses. Additionally, the National Highway Safety Bureau will actually enter 1970 with substantial unused obligating authority left over from the first three years of the program. If all ceilings and restrictions were removed, there could be close to \$350 million available for state programs in 1970. But due to persistent inflationary pressures and the announced intention of the new Administration to hold down government spending, it is unlikely that any deluge of new funding will be forthcoming.

The budget, in fact, includes an appropriation of \$90 million in "liquidating cash," which would be consistent with an obligating rate of only a few millions more. For 1969, \$50 million was set aside as liquidating cash.

Personnel limitations remain in effect for most federal agencies under a law passed by the 1968 Congress, but the new budget contains some reason for optimism regarding the highway safety program. Authorization for permanent employees would increase from a current 560 to 760 in 1970.

The Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety would be forced to live within its current personnel ceiling, but would receive \$2,720,000 in 1970, compared with \$2,012,000 in 1969. The Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety issues and enforces federal regulations that apply to interstate truck and bus operators.

FIRST OF 17 'MANUALS' PUBLISHED

The National Highway Safety Bureau has published the first 12 of a projected 17-volume series of highway safety program manuals which are designed to get down to the nitty gritty of state and local safety programing.

The manuals will coincide with the 16 highway safety "standards" issued to date, with the 17th addressing itself to planning and administration. For the complexity of the subjects covered, a casual examination of the initial manuals shows them to be reasonably concise and readable. They draw upon the best knowledge and research currently available.

In announcing the issuance of the first 12 manuals, Dr. William Haddon, Jr., head of the NHSB, noted that inputs from the states, other governmental units, and private resources had been utilized in drafting them.

"We have prepared these volumes to make the most up-to-date advice available to the states and their communities to help them in their efforts to make America's highways safer for everyone. We have also already provided more than 1,500 grants-in-aid to get the ball rolling," he said.

The latter was a reference to the federal safety grant program to help the states comply with the 16 standards issued to date.

The first 12 manuals relate to the standard areas of periodic motor vehicle inspection, motor vehicle registration, motorcycle safety, driver education, driver licensing, codes and laws, traffic courts, alcohol in relation to highway safety, identification and surveillance of accident locations, traffic records, and emergency medical services, as well as planning and administration. The other five manuals are expected in about 30 days.

Copies of all manuals will be made available to interested parties and to the general public in about a month, according to the NHSB.

PUBLICATION 'DOCUMENTS' SAFETY DEFICIENCIES

At least one Capitol Hill source takes umbrage with the critical attitude of the mass communications media toward highway safety information, as reported in the last issue of the Status Report.

He points out hundreds of man-hours have gone into the collection of information about safety deficiencies in the nation's federally-aided highway system -- all fully documented in hearings and reports published by the House Committee on Public Works -- and the media have paid scarce attention.

In this context it is worth calling attention to the latest publication issued by the Committee -- 661 pages of testimony and photographs dealing with deficiencies in freeway signing and road geometrics as examined in hearings by a House Special Committee on the Federal-Aid Highway Program last spring and summer.

The publication is replete with examples of how not to do it gathered primarily in a few eastern states but typical of road systems all over the United States.

In summing up the hearings, the subcommittee chairman, Rep. John A. Blatnik (D-Minn.) declared they had exposed a "tragic weakness" in the federal-aid highway program -- the "failure to apply knowledge gained through research and experience."

Copies of the report are available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402 for \$3. Ask for Document Y4.P96/11: 90-39 entitled "Highway Safety, Design and Operations -- Freeway Signing and Related Geometrics."

FHWA ISSUES SEVERAL VEHICLE SAFETY MEASURES

Federal Highway Administrator Lowell Bridwell issued or proposed several vehicle safety regulations before relinquishing his post January 20. Several other modifications or new proposals have been published since that date by officials running the FHWA on a caretaker status until President Nixon nominates a new administrator.

-- One regulation, published in the January 24 Federal Register, specifies the conditions under which regrooved tires can be sold or used in interstate commerce. After February 28, only tires specifically designed for the regrooving process and labeled as regrooved can be used under regulated conditions on trucks and buses.

-- An amendment to an existing motor vehicle safety standard on door locks and other "retention components" extends its coverage to multi-purpose passenger vehicles and trucks effective January 1, 1970, and January 1, 1972, respectively.

-- Comment has been asked from the public or interested parties by May 15 on proposals to issue a federal standard that would specify speed and acceleration capabilities for fully loaded cars, trucks, buses and other vehicles while traveling uphill. Purpose of the proposal outlined in the January 23 Federal Register is to prevent rear-end collisions with slow-moving vehicles.

-- Another proposal published in the same Register is aimed at the eventual issuance of a standard to correct the problem of "jack-knifing" of such coupled vehicles as semi-trailers, truck tractor units, and so forth.

-- The FHWA has proposed modifications in existing requirements for fuel tanks and fuel lines. The standard would be tightened up so there could be no spillage from a fuel tank 90 per cent full if the vehicle had to make a panic stop at a speed of 80 miles an hour. The amendments were published January 24.

-- It is planned to tighten up braking requirements as set forth in Motor Carrier Safety Regulations that relate to interstate trucks and buses. "Accident data continues to show brake failures and braking system inadequacies to be the largest single cause of vehicle-defect related accidents," the FHWA said in a regulation signed January 17 by Mr. Bridwell.

-- At the same time, the FHWA has adopted another regulation that will require the auto manufacturers, after September 30, to tell consumers how long it takes a vehicle traveling at 60 miles per hour to come to a full stop. This and other required braking information will permit car buyers to compare the braking capability of various models.

-- Another consumer-related action requires the manufacturers to put a lifetime label on every vehicle manufactured after August 31 that tells the original or any subsequent buyer exactly when the vehicle was manufactured. That way the consumer can determine which vehicle safety standards have been complied with.

- -- The FHWA has asked for comments by February 21 on a proposal for a new vehicle safety standard aimed at providing more protection for small children in crashes. A NHTSB official said most auto seats for small children "have not been providing the protection that present safety engineering knowledge makes possible." It has been pointed out that some safety seats only succeed in raising a child to a height where a crash or a sudden stop cause him to hurtle forward into the windshield.

* * *

HADDON STATUS -- There was no announcement about the status of Dr. William Haddon, Jr., Director of the NHTSB, following a meeting with Transportation Secretary John Volpe January 29. There were reports that Dr. Haddon would be leaving the NHTSB by February 10 to make room for a new appointee of President Nixon, but there was also speculation that Dr. Haddon might remain in place on a substantially longer "interim" basis

PRIORITY OBFUSCATION -- Dr. Haddon attempted to dispel some of the confusion that exists about priorities in the highway safety program in a recent appearance before a presidential advisory committee. Dr. Haddon explained that the Bureau prefers to talk about two "priority groupings" rather than assigning a numerical order to the 16 standards issued to date. He noted that the states are expected to spend 65 to 75 per cent of federal allocations in the first priority grouping, which contains seven standards, but even then there is "reasonable flexibility." Theoretically, he added, a state could spend 35 per cent of its money in a single standard area in the second priority category. Dr. Haddon warned, however, that the Bureau initially would not condone any wide variations from the basic theme of dealing with a broad system of remedial measures, particularly those covered in category one. The whole priority question has become somewhat clouded. In the interpretation of some observers, much of the sense of "priority" is destroyed by lumping the standards into groups of seven and nine. Two memorandums on the general subject issued by the Bureau have been regarded as somewhat contradictory, and FHWA field personnel and state officials are uncertain as to which one to follow.

WISCONSIN, DELAWARE FIRST -- Wisconsin and Delaware are the first two states to have their highway safety programs "approved" by the Secretary of Transportation as meeting the intent of the Highway Safety Act of 1966. Official notification was made in letters to governors of the two states by Dr. William Haddon, Jr., Director of the NHTSB, acting in behalf of Secretary Alan Boyd during the last few days of Mr. Boyd's administration.

NEW 'TOPICS' GUIDELINES -- The Bureau of Public Roads has issued new guidelines for the 'TOPICS' program. TOPICS is an acronym for the Traffic Operations Program for Increasing Capacity and Safety, a federal program aimed at reducing congestion, speeding up the flow of traffic, and improving safety in urban areas. Cities of 5,000 or more population are eligible for a share of \$200 million expected to be available in both 1970 and 1971, but the new guidelines state that priority will be given to large urban areas where traffic congestion is most critical. TOPICS assistance will only be given where there is area-wide traffic improvement planning, according to Director F. C. Turner of the BPR. TOPICS exists as a viable program now, and federal assistance can be obtained where state highway departments are willing to participate, but there is no specific federal sum allocated.

VOLUNTEERS FOR SAFETY? -- Citizen and volunteer highway safety efforts should receive if nothing more a moral boost from one approach to social problem solving enunciated by President Richard Nixon. Mr. Nixon said in his inaugural speech that "we are approaching the limits of what government can do alone." He added that "our greatest need now is to reach beyond government to enlist the legions of the concerned and the committed." Historically, much of the impetus for highway safety has come from private, voluntary sources and some of them have felt by-passed -- for various reasons -- in the past two years. With vision, imagination, and leadership, private safety efforts could be strongly reasserted in the new Administration as an important corollary to federal-state official action.

NEW INSPECTION MEMO -- The Federal Highway Administration on January 17 transmitted a memorandum to its regional offices and to all 50 of the states which takes a tougher stance regarding so-called "spot" motor vehicle inspection programs. Several states have sought to comply with the motor vehicle inspection standard through spot or random inspection of vehicles, and this apparently is in the thinking of others considering inspection programs. The January 17 memo stresses that any such program must be viewed as a "trial substitute program" intended to "improve the safety quality of the total vehicle population during the trial period." It is the intention of the FHWA that all states bring their programs up to the level defined in the new manual on motor vehicle inspection "as rapidly as possible." The intent of the program outlined in the manual is to have all vehicles inspected periodically.

NELSON CONTINUES PRESSURE -- Sen. Gaylord Nelson (D-Wis.) has carried his crusade for safer tires to the new Administration. In a January 26 letter to Transportation Secretary John Volpe, Senator Nelson said "millions" of defective tires produced by nine major manufacturers were in use on the roads today and a substantial number were still being offered for sale, in violation of the Vehicle Safety Act of 1966. "I urge you to take steps immediately to institute legal action against those who are violating the law, to inform the public in as comprehensive manner as possible about the suspect tires, and to work with the tire companies to recall all the faulty tires and replace them," he wrote. DOT officials were consulting with representatives of the tire companies about the charges. Meanwhile, in separate action, the FHWA ruled that as of next September 30 the manufacturers would have to give consumers standardized information about tire reserve load, information as to potential overloading, and tire pressures for safe operation.

NEW HAMPSHIRE CASE -- A U.S. District Court judge in Concord, New Hampshire, has ruled that the State of New Hampshire has the right to enforce a state law related to the inspection of automobile headlamps. Chrysler Corp. challenged a portion of the state law as it applied to an auxiliary high-powered headlamp on its vehicles on grounds that federal law preempted this area.

REGULATION REVOKED -- The Federal Highway Administration has announced the revocation of a Motor Carrier Safety Regulation which has prevented the release to the public of accident reports filed by motor carriers. As a result of the action, motor carrier accident reports filed with the FHWA's Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety after March 31 will be open to public inspection. The reports will not be admissible as evidence in court cases.

NEW SAFETY RESEARCH SERIES -- The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety has inaugurated a new "safety research information" series which will attempt to summarize significant research findings in a concise, readable format for safety practitioners at all levels. The first report in the series is a summary of the "Economics of Highway Emergency Ambulance Services," a \$175,000 project done by Dunlap and Associates, Inc., Darien, Conn., for the NHTSB. One of the general conclusions of the researchers is that: "Surprisingly, the general public, their elected representatives and government officials, and even members of the medical profession are frequently ignorant of how emergency ambulance services are currently provided." The summary is available free of charge from the IIHS.

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