RURAL HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES BY DEPARTMENT MAINTENANCE FORCE

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Rural highway maintenance is quite a challenge. In no undertaking have I been called upon to do so much with so little; however, in spite of all the work and frustrations involved I have always enjoyed trying to see how much could be accomplished through the Rural Highway Program. Much has already been accomplished, but much more remains to be done, and this can be done with full co-operation between the county officials and the men who represent the Department of Highways.

I am going to outline the procedure that we of the Department Maintenance force try to follow in order to set up a practical and workable Rural Highway Program in each county.

1. The assistant district engineer for maintenance will discuss the program for the coming fiscal year with the county judge and members of the Fiscal Court in the early spring (about March), and ask them to decide on the type of program they want and the roads they want included in the program. It is the responsibility of the Fiscal Court to decide on which roads will be included in the program. I might add here that the Fiscal Court should give special thought to school bus routes and mail routes as the general public is going to demand that these roads be kept passable. Also, all bridges that might need repairs during the coming year should be included. One big problem the department has is the request for immediate repairs to bridges which are not included in the program. As soon as a program is decided on, a date is set when the assistant district engineer can meet with the Fiscal Court.

2. On the appointed date, the assistant district engineer meets with the Fiscal Court at which time the court approves a resolution which authorizes the county judge to sign all rural highway contracts and supplemental agreements. A list of the roads to be included in the program are attached to the resolution, and after approved by the court it is recorded and signed by the clerk of the county court.

3. After the resolution is recorded by the clerk of the county court, the District Office forwards it to the Commissioner of Rural Highways for his approval.

4. As soon as the Commissioner of Rural Highways approves the resolution, and program, the rural highway contract for the ensuing fiscal year is written by the District Office, signed by the county judge, and forwarded to the central office, in Frankfort, for approval by the Commissioner of Highways. When the commissioner signs the rural highway contract (and not until then), the Maintenance Division has the authority to requisition such materials as required to carry out the program for the new year.

5. The next step in this plan of operations is for the District Office to requisition the materials needed: such as replacement stone, pipe, and lumber for bridge repair.
Maybe at this point I should explain why I stressed the point of an early beginning toward setting up a program. As you can see, the procedure I have outlined will consume considerable time. It will also take from six to eight weeks, from the time materials are requisitioned by the district office until materials can be delivered; therefore, if any work, that requires materials, is to be accomplished in the summer and early fall it is necessary that these materials be ordered as early as possible.

We now move on to the actual physical maintenance of the rural highways. We have four items which must be performed each year for the proper maintenance of a traffic bound road.

1. Blading—It usually will require between two and six bladings a year to keep the ordinary rural road in a satisfactory condition (depending on the condition of the road and the amount of traffic).

2. Ditching—This is a major problem in most counties, and since there is not sufficient funds for an overall ditching program of all roads, our method of handling this, usually takes the form of “spot ditching.” By this, I mean pulling the ditches where necessary to provide adequate drainage and skipping the spots where ditches are still functioning. Ditches can be kept in fair shape by an alert grader operator who will notice trouble spots and correct them in connection with his regular blading operation.

3. Repair of drainage structures—Drainage structures must be kept functioning if roads are to be kept in an acceptable condition. Too often a county road is made impassable by heavy rains due to clogged or inadequate structures or by small wooden structures which, due to age, collapse under heavy loads. The department's maintenance superintendents and foremen check these roads and let the district office know what repairs will be needed in the coming year. Each district office should try to keep an adequate reserve fund from each county's allotment to take care of unforeseen emergency repairs on bridges and culverts. Regardless of how careful you inspect and plan you are always faced with one or more structures failing, and this, it seems, is usually after the funds are depleted.

4. Replacement stone—The amount of replacement stone placed on the roads in the program is determined by the condition of the roads and the money available to purchase and spread stone. Seldom is there enough stone to spread from beginning to end of a road, but only enough to spread on the weakest spots. This of course, every year, leads to numerous complaints, from the people living on these roads wanting to know where all their rock went.

Another item, which is on the increase each year, is bituminous surfaces which must be maintained under the Rural Highway Program. We try to patch and maintain these in the same manner as our state highways, but since most of these are lightly constructed roads, we are hard put to properly maintain the heavier traveled roads with our limited budget.

In the counties that have a qualified county road engineer, we may leave the maintenance of the rural roads to the county, with the department contacting for the materials. I would like to elaborate on that statement, “so far as the funds will permit”, which appears in the rural highway contract. There seems to be quite a lot of misunderstanding about the extent of the “Rural Highway Program.”

This program is for aid to county roads. The roads listed in the contract are county roads and placing them in the Rural Highway Program does not mean that the Highway Department assumes the full responsibility for maintenance of these roads. There is a definite allotment of funds for each county, and the department only agrees to use that allotment on the various roads in the program. When a county insists on getting too much road mileage, or roads impossible to maintain, into the program, this allotment is inadequate for proper maintenance. When this happens, any additional work required is the obligation of the county. In view of these facts, I would suggest that each Fiscal Court make a careful
study of the roads and total road mileage in their proposed program, and see if it is possible to properly maintain them with the available funds.

Well so much for procedure. As to policy; it is the Maintenance Division's policy to get the best results possible for each dollar spent, and this can be done if the county officials and the department's engineers work together towards a single goal of better roads.