ADDRESS

HON. W. P. CURLIN, Commissioner of Highways,
Commonwealth of Kentucky

It is gracious of the University to collaborate with the Department in holding these annual conferences. It is a fine thing to have these get-togethers in the interest of better roads. The general sessions will reflect many worth while ideas and the technical group meetings will uncover many fundamentals which will mean better roads at less cost.

Probably the least understood department in our state government is the Department of Highways. Few Kentuckians realize that more than 1100 of our people have been with us more than ten years — and that fully half of them have been with us as much as twenty years.

My pride in my own connection with the department is concerned with the attitude of my associates. These old-timers — and many of the so-called new-timers, too — who are really responsible for the planning, construction, and maintenance of our highways, have a direct personal interest in this work.

Indeed it is this interest which has resulted in an expanded and broadened road program without too much cost to the highway user.

Twelve thousand five hundred miles of primary highways in Kentucky have been constructed and are being maintained through the direct taxing of motor vehicles and the fuels they use. The industries and individuals who use the highways are paying for this use.

There are nearly 25,000 miles of feeder roads, county roads, short-route connections, which need attention. Since the new rural secondary program was inaugurated 2 years ago, 2,500 miles — or about ten percent of these roads — have been constructed at a cost of $25,000,000.

The primary system and its important bridges — 3,100 of them — are debt-free. Kentuckians are not passing on to future generations a huge debt and worn out roads.

Twenty-four of our bridges were partially paid for by tolls. All but one of these are paid out, debt free, and a future economic treasure to those who use our highways.

There is food for thought in these statements. To me, they constitute a saga of cooperation — a story of fine understanding on the part of everyone concerned.

I like to think — and I am sure it is true — that selfishness had little part in this great achievement. For many years, from 1900 on, good roads enthusiasts, automobile clubs, chambers of commerce, farm organizations and others clamored for roads — and offered the gasoline
tax as a solution. They all wanted roads — and were willing to pay for them.

The prosperity of Kentucky, we all agree, is very tightly tied into its transportation systems. The waterways, the trails, the turnpikes, the toll roads, the railroads and their feeder lines — all have played a part in the development of Kentucky industry and agriculture. Today, highways play a more important role than ever before. Highways are being fashioned to carry traffic volumes not dreamed of in the wildest type of forecasts a short time ago.

Proportionately, we are administering our maintenance and construction programs more efficiently and economically than ever before. By proportionately I mean that we are giving greater value per dollar of cost. We are maintaining many more miles infinitely better today than ever before — giving the highway user access to more areas, more outlets, more markets — and we are rendering more service in maintenance per mile. Center line striping, adequate guard rails, wider and better shoulders, traffic control devices, are expanded services which were not necessary a few years ago.

Construction and design have experienced the same sort of change in requirements. We are concerned with heavier traffic — both by volume and by weight. A road or bridge built in 1920 is inadequate and unsafe for the speed and volume of today. It must be rebuilt or realigned for proper service — and at a cost which would have been a scandal ten short years ago.

No administrative officer with the Highway Department will hesitate to point out the fact that, in the past few years, highway costs have increased more than in any like period in the nation's history. A mile of road today costs twice what it did in 1940, five times as much as it did in 1910.

A high gasoline tax? Compared with old standards of highway construction and maintenance, the seven cents in Kentucky sounds high. Reasonable people will see, however, that the tax has not kept pace with rising costs — and that ingenious mechanical devices and careful planning are responsible for holding the tax down.

That is where you men in this room and the organizations you represent come into the picture. Credit for holding costs within the bounds of the present tax rate is shared by engineers, contractors, equipment and materials suppliers — all for you.

'Dozers which move tons of materials, power shovels and huge dump trucks are a far-cry from our earlier mule-scraper-and-wheel-barrow methods of dirt moving. These machines and the men who
have the know-how to run them have decreased costs to such an extent that heavier roads and more of them are possible.

New and improved methods of producing materials needed for surfacing our roads have made other reductions.

Engineers in the department have been quick to capitalize on all these opportunities and turn them to advantage in planning and carrying out a road program. They have put much study and careful consideration of details into long range planning. They have brought together all the threads of the program, weighed all the problems — and I don't have to tell this crowd the problems are many and tough.

The keynote of this conference this year is hinged on maintenance. I am sincerely interested in the studies you will make in this connection. In my opinion, this is the most important phase of highway administration and one which is clouded with many issues.

Along with the heavy road building equipment mentioned, manufacturers have been producing heavy trucks — equipment capable of loads beyond even the wildest dreams a few years ago. Roads built for maximum weights of 30,000 pounds are being forced to carry twice and three times that weight.

Enforcement of the weight limits is not always possible. Cheating on the part of a few truckers is rapidly bringing about conditions which will affect them all. "Slipping through" with an illegal over-weight may be "profit-in-the-hand" for that particular trip but the results are going to be drastic.

"Cheating truckers" are willing to pay penalties — even our present drastic fines — if they get caught. Many trips are possible without molestation and the cost of one penalty against one truck is divided among them all.

This "cheating" is sly and, in many cases, carefully planned. Every road would have to be almost lined with police if we are to effectively prevent it. In the meantime, the trucks which do "get by" the law leave indelible marks on our highways — breaks, ragged shoulders, permanent damages. Many times the damage to the road is in excess of the value of the merchandise transported.

With heavy legal weights and the constant pounding of the illegal trucks; the truck volume and the steady increase in passenger car traffic, roads everywhere, not only in Kentucky, face an extended maintenance problem.

I am talking to people who understand what the administration of a highway department entails — who understand the importance of the broad view of the entire program, while keeping an eye on the immediate, often urgent, needs.
You agree with me, I am sure, on the importance of proper allocation of the funds we have in order to make the entire system of highways as serviceable as possible.

Kentucky cannot afford to indulge in super deluxe highways until every community is served by a travelable road. It is elemental that a pay-as-you-go state must spread its road revenue as thin as good engineering practices will permit in order to facilitate traffic.

You know, too, that improved roads bring increased revenue—traffic counts made before and after construction or reconstruction on specific roads give ample proof of that. As our miles of smooth surfaces have been extended, we who watch the tide of revenue have seen spectacular increases. We know that our hope of meeting increased demands on the highway fund lies in augmenting that fund in proportion to the demands. We know that wise expenditure of the funds we have will best insure increased revenue.

We are going to give our very best to this effort. In doing this, there is more than a moderate comfort in the knowledge that we have the cooperation and the sympathetic understanding of fellows like you.