ROAD SIDE IMPROVEMENT

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The subject assigned to me today is somewhat limited, and I am going to take the liberty of speaking about one or two things that would rightly not be associated with this subject. I feel that these things are of such vital importance that they are worthy of consideration at this time in order that specific roadside improvement that may come later will form a basis for these one or two things that I want to suggest. In the first place, the topography of Kentucky offers a splendid opportunity for the location of roads that will have beautiful views or vistas out across the countryside. In some instances these views may extend for miles when the air is clear so that the traveler may see one ridge of hills after another fading away until they meet the sky. We already have highways in this state where it is possible to see four, five, or six miles across ridges of hills. To attain this result means that the road was located either by accident or on purpose in such a way that this view or vista was made possible.

Another thing in this connection, there are many places in the state of Kentucky where it is possible for the highways to present attractive views of curves or bends of rivers. We have two or three of these on U. S. 60. Lookouts have been built so that it is possible for the traveler to stop, get out of his car and enjoy the view across the Ohio River to the hills of Southern Indiana. On U. S. 25, from Lexington to Richmond, was one of the finest views of a river and hills to be found anywhere in Eastern U. S. However, when the new bridge was built at Clay's Ferry, this lookout was lost.

Now I am fully aware of the many problems that are presented to the locating engineers when they are selecting a location for a new road. I know that their work is circumscribed by the possibility of securing right-of-way. The cost of construction and maintenance must all be taken into consideration. Nevertheless, I want to urge upon those who have the responsibility of locating roads that they will preserve beautiful views that already exist and develop new ones. This means that the locating engineer will take on an additional duty; namely, that of looking for attractive scenes and interesting views. I believe that it is possible to coordinate this with the other requirements as laid down by cost of right-of-way, construction, and maintenance.

With your permission, I would like to mention three or four places
in this state where I think there are wonderful possibilities for just such a development as I am talking about. On Highway 62, between Boston and Elizabethtown, there is quite a hill. At the top of that hill is one of the most interesting views I know of anywhere. On a clear day it is possible to see two or three miles, and in passing that way last fall early in the morning when the fog was rising, it presented an appearance similar to what one would see in a mountainous country. The view was so interesting that I stopped, got out of my car, and looked at it for several minutes. Another as we go South on 27 beyond Stanford, we come to Halls Gap. There is a lookout built at the top of the hill just off of the traveled road. I have never passed that way that I have not seen one or more cars in the parked area and the occupants out enjoying the marvelous view across the valley to the distant hills. Another is on the new Highway 27 from Cynthiana to Covington. About ten miles north of Cynthiana the road comes out on top of a ridge. The view both to the right and to the left is very, very beautiful. I want to congratulate the locating engineers who located that road. On a clear day it is possible to see some five or six miles.

One more example, several years ago when 31 E was being reconstructed just south of Bardstown, I suggested to Mr. Ben Johnson, who was then State Highway Commissioner, that the road be relocated so that people coming North as they came up out of the valley of the Beech Fork Creek would see the Cathedral at Bardstown just as they topped the hill. The first conversation I had with Mr. Johnson regarding this met with a stern rebuff. He informed me that the plans for the road had already been made; that it was going to follow the old right-of-way, which meant losing a very historic point of interest. After one or two conversations with Mr. Johnson regarding this and some pressure from the outside, he finally acquiesced; and the road was built on its present location. I believe each one of you will agree with me that the change in the location in order to take advantage of the view of the cathedral as one tops the hill coming North was well worth some additional cost. I hope that I am not asking too much when I ask that the locating engineers of the Highway Department will give consideration to this fact when they are locating future roadways in this state.

The second thing that I want to mention deals with the highway as a part of the local community. I do not look upon a highway as just a means of conducting traffic. I feel that the highway should become a definite part of the community. This means that the grades and curves, the back slopes and shoulders will all blend together in such a way as to form a definite pattern; that there will not be any projecting
objects that will catch your eye so that you see these rather than the highway or the gentle slopes and curves.

What I am trying to say is this—that a community is made up of individuals, and that each individual usually has his own definite ideas as to what he wants of the highway when a new road is built past his place. Now these individual ideas are often not the best for the community, because one property owner wants a six or eight foot concrete retaining wall in the front of his property. The next one prefers to have his lawn or property slope to the ditch line. This variance of ideas of the individual property owner does not go together to make a good community setting for a highway. If you want to see a good example of this, take the new section on 27 South from Camp Nelson toward Lancaster. As you top the hill beyond Camp Nelson and drive to Camp Dick Robinson, you will see some five or six retaining walls made of concrete. These are on either side of this road. In between are slopes leading from the ditch line back to the individual’s property line. The effect produced is not pleasing or restful. In fact, if you want to think of it, it looks like the boy or girl losing their first set of teeth. Those concrete retaining walls stand up as a tooth and the slopes where the teeth are missing.

I am not prepared to say just how this plan can be worked out. However, I do want to leave the thought with you, because I am sure that it is worthy of your consideration, and I know that every man connected with the Highway Department in any capacity whatsoever wants highways that are pleasing to look at, interesting to drive over as well as being serviceable.

The third point that I want to bring to your attention is the need for research that will develop a program whereby the shoulders of the highways of Kentucky may be covered with some form of grass or grasses that will control erosion, thereby making the highway safer and at the same time provide a safe place for cars to drive off the main traveled section in case of emergency without sinking into the mud so that it will be impossible for them to get back on the hard surface. I think this is one of the big problems confronting us, especially on the highways that are already built.

If we think of the shoulders of the road as being a usable part of the road yet at the same time they should be good looking, I am sure that you will agree with me when I suggest some form of cover for these shoulders. I am well aware that the engineers and the maintenance men are chiefly concerned in shoulders that will drain the water from the edge of the highway quickly, and I see evidences of where
shoulder drains are placed at regular intervals. I am thinking now of the new section of Highway 27 from Lexington to Nicholasville, and there are many other examples that could be given. Drains were cut at regular intervals to lead the water from the edge of the surfaced highway to the ditch. The materials used in filling these drains are often used without consideration of the fact that at some future time it will be necessary to cover these drains with soil in order to have some kind of grass grow over them. I feel that this is a problem calling for research. I believe that the drain can be installed in the highway shoulders in such a way that they will serve their purpose of conducting water and at the same time have it possible to have grass growing right over these drains.

On account of the different types of soil in the different sections of Kentucky it is necessary to have different kinds of grasses growing on the shoulders of our highways. For example, in Eastern Kentucky where the soil is mostly of sandstone origin certain types of grasses may be used. In Central Kentucky our soils are of limestone origin, and in all probability bluegrass is the best type of grass to use. In the Penny­rile and the Purchase other types of soil prevail so that other grasses will be needed. This should be determined by research; and after the research has proven the point, it would be safe to adapt the results to that section.

The back slopes of the highways both new and old present another problem. Back slopes that are bare and gullied from erosion are certainly not good to look at. The soil that has washed down these back slopes causes a maintenance problem, because it fills ditches and culverts that were designed for drainage. Again, it becomes a question of selecting cover crops for these areas according to the different sections of the state, keeping in mind the question of maintenance. For example, if the slope is sufficient to permit the growth of bluegrass, Bermuda or some other form of low-growing grass that does not need mowing very often, this undoubtedly is an economy. The materials to use to cover these back slopes need to be worked out by research and accurate records kept on the cost of maintenance on the different kinds of materials used.

There is one thing that we would like to call attention to, and that is it appears to us that the Highway Department in drawing specifications for grade and drain for any highways is realizing the value of having sufficient right-of-way to enable them to specify slopes that are gentle and will tolerate the growing of some kind of a vegetative covering. A few years ago cuts were made, highways constructed, and very little thought was given to the back slope. I congratulate the Highway
Department on securing a right-of-way that is wide enough to have back slopes that can be covered with some form of grass.

Time does not permit us to discuss plantings. However, we would like to say just this one thing in that connection. Kentucky has always been noted for its beautiful trees of various kinds, and I am of the opinion that a very careful selection of trees correctly located will for the most part represent the major plantings along our highways. To my way of thinking we should adapt our plantings to fit the different sections of the state. I believe the most pleasing highways in Central Kentucky are those that are lined with bluegrass and perhaps a large tree here or there with occasional clumps of the smaller trees. Since Kentucky has such a varied soil and topography, I feel reasonably sure that what other states may be doing does not necessarily apply to Kentucky. We have a system of highways that is more or less our own. Therefore, the plantings that we have should be our own, and they should represent the individuality of our state.

In conclusion, let me say that I have presented four or five things for your consideration. These are things that I, as an interested person, feel are worthy of some consideration on your part. I am thoroughly convinced that all of you are interested in having highways that will be more inviting and attractive and that those who travel these roads will be impressed by the fact that the highway is not only good to travel over, but it is a means of conducting you through an area that is quiet, restful, and good looking.