

Now, 30 years later, when some 50,000 people are being killed in traffic accidents, the factor of emotion and sensationalism has been injected and the lay public and officialdom are becoming aware of the seriousness of the problem.

We hope that the matter will be kept in perspective and that the wide interest will be turned into constructive channels and not result in a destructive or critical attitude.

We know that the work of your committee will be constructive and there will be no tendency to condemn the State highway departments or the highway program.

The expertise of professionals in the State highway departments constitutes one of this Nation's most valuable resources.

While we may be subject to some criticism for not anticipating or recognizing certain problems that have arisen on the Interstate System regarding roadside obstructions, we do not think that we should be severely criticized. Frankly, the limited amount of such roadside appurtenances involved on the interstate, as compared to the multiplicity of these things that are a part of the conventional rural highway or the city street, appeared to involve a rather negligible mathematical probability of being a causative factor of an accident.

The State highway departments first became safety-minded in the mid-1920's. In fact, an AASHO Committee on Standards was created in 1914 to "standardize construction and design to be used in the highway development program to accomplish efficiency, economy, and safety."

The association established a design committee in 1919, a bridge committee in 1921, a construction committee in 1922, a traffic committee in 1922, a roadside development committee in 1930, a maintenance and equipment committee in 1933, and authorized its planning and design policies committee in 1936. This latter committee is the one that develops most of our major design policies and standards and is composed entirely of chief engineering officers of member departments. The advancement of traffic safety was an important part of each of these committees' activities.

In 1925, when we first started computing fatality rates of highways and streets, there were only 21 million vehicles in the country. That year, the fatality rate was 17.5 per hundred million vehicle miles.

In 1926, the State highway departments developed the U.S. numbered system, roadmap symbols, the route marker, and started highway signing and road maps as we know them today, all for the convenience of the public and to promote safer travel.

In 1936, we started in earnest on improving geometric designs and layouts and on more effective highway signing to make our roads more functional. Reflectorized highway signs started about this time to make night travel safer.

Again, we found that the public was still apathetic to highway safety, mostly because of the fierce competition for the dollar to extend the pavement and not to spend the money on other things. In 1936, the fatality rate was 15.5, and there were 30 million motor vehicles.

Now, 30 years later, we find the fatality rate for the Nation to be 5.5, but for the Interstate it is 2.5, however, the roads it is replacing have a rate of 8 or 9 persons killed per 100 million vehicle miles.