

There seems to be a current tendency to downgrade experienced highway professionals in favor of people in other fields that are relatively inexperienced in highways, thus failing to utilize fully the vast resource and background already available to solving essential highway transportation problems.

This is causing severe morale problems in the highway departments and even in the engineering schools. It seems to be the "in" thing to criticize the highway program and the highway engineer, even though both are an essential part of the future of this country.

We are still looking at the "design concept team" approach, and will be interested in the results that it might produce, and as to the time and money that might be involved.

We are also concerned about the tendency to deal directly with dissident groups by going around State highway departments instead of going through channels. The Federal role should be one of approving or denying a States' proposal in whole or in part and not making agreements directly with local people or officials.

We are also concerned over the philosophy that local lay people have a more prominent role in highway location and design. Some of these particular problems are in declining corridors where the new highway improvement will surely reconstruct the entire corridor because a new highway is a very real catalyst. We should not attempt to conform too greatly to the existing community that is almost certain to change.

We are firm believers that local people should have a role through the public hearing and have recourse through their appropriate elected officials who, in turn, should and must participate fully in the planning process at the project development stage. To allow local people to have a greater voice in the highway location and design for which they are not trained, would negate the expertise of trained highway professionals.

Highway officials are unlikely to insist on a project that does not have the approval of appropriate elected local officials. Highway officials certainly will insist that their project not only serve the primary purpose of the facility, but that it will be an attractive and good neighbor to the community traversed.

We would suggest that Congress also give consideration to strengthening the role of the Bureau of Public Roads by putting the highway and traffic engineering portion of the safety program into that agency, and lodging the remainder of the safety program dealing with vehicles and other items in the relatively new National Highway Safety Bureau.

We believe that the public works committees should give attention to amending Title 23, U.S. Code, Highways, to require all levels of government, including the Federal, to hold public hearings before reserving lands for any purpose where such a reservation might create physical barriers to future transportation needs, and that such a proposal would have to receive the approval of the State highway department involved, and the Secretary of Transportation.

At the present time, highway departments must hold hearings regarding their programs and we believe that the same should hold true for other agencies when their programs might affect present or future highway transportation needs.