

the Federal aid primary and secondary systems and their urban extensions—ABC systems. Due to increasing construction costs and higher design standards, far fewer miles are being built today with the same amount of money. Since 1966 ABC authorizations have been pegged at \$1 billion a year. According to the composite price index for bids on Federal-aid highway projects, unit prices have increased from 106.7 to 119.2 between the start of fiscal year 1966 and the second quarter of fiscal 1968. This is an average annual increase of 5 percent. If this is projected through the start of fiscal year 1970, it will mean an overall increase of approximately 20 percent in bid prices since 1966.

In addition to the inflationary factor there has been the imposition of higher design standards on all federally assisted highway projects. There is no way of measuring the effect on the actual miles of improvements accomplished as a result of these higher design standards. We can furnish examples to the committee of greatly increased costs on comparable projects. The point we are trying to make is that the \$1 billion authorized for fiscal 1970 will build less than 80 percent of what could be accomplished in 1966.

We believe there is a strong case for increasing ABC authorizations just to keep abreast of inflation.

NACO also is concerned about the effect of the stretchout of the Interstate System timetable on the growing backlog of needs on the ABC systems. The optimists now are estimating that the Interstate System will be completed in 1976. Others say 1978. It could be 1980 or even later if cost and design standards continue to go up. No one can predict with any certainty just when the system will be completed.

We want to make it clear to this committee that NACO was in the forefront in 1955 and 1956 in advocating the urgency and priority for accelerating the completion of the Interstate System. When previous increased cost estimates were submitted in 1958 and 1961, we supported higher taxes to maintain the construction schedule. Our commitment to the Interstate System still is as firm as ever. Our county officials fully recognize its economic benefits to our Nation and especially the benefits to those communities located close to its designated routes.

The desire to complete the system as soon as possible, however, has to be balanced with the needs of the several hundred thousand miles of other major highways in the Nation.

TOPICS PROGRAM

We are very pleased therefore with the proposed Federal Aid Highway Act of 1968 which recommends the establishment of a TOPICS program for urban areas consisting of \$250 million a year for fiscal 1970 through 1974. This is particularly important for counties since the backlog of needs is greatest in the suburban portions of our metropolitan areas. It is here that there has been the largest increases in traffic. This has been borne out by every recent traffic study done in metropolitan areas.

We believe however, that using these funds only for improving traffic operations is too restrictive. These funds should also be able to be used for major reconstruction and improvements when it is decided