

Municipal Column

Edited by the Village Manager

TRUCKS VERSUS HIGHWAYS

The competition between the inventors and makers of armor-piercing projectiles and those who in turn produce armor which they cannot pierce, but which in turn is pierced by projectiles of later development, seems to have its parallel in the manufacturers of trucks and roads respectively. When five-ton trucks were found to be too heavy for certain classes of highways, heavier highways were built to meet this increased demand; but before even a large percentage of them had been so reconstructed the truck manufactures were turning out ten-ton trucks and expecting the states and counties to provide highways that could carry them. There is no reason for thinking that trucks cannot be made to capacities of 20, 30 or even 50 tons if such capacities promise to be economical for transportation and the highway pavements can be made sufficiently strong to carry them.

The same thing but to a much less degree has been taking place in the railroad world, where locomotives have been increasing in weight and power and the rails to carry them have been necessarily made heavier and more strong and durable. In the latter case, however, the progression has been entirely in the control of one party and the increase in either locomotive or rail has been governed by careful calculation as to the ultimate economy, taking both into consideration. In the case of the truck and the highway, however, the cost of constructing and maintaining the highway is no concern of the truck manufacturer or user, since none of the cost comes out of his pocket, but all is paid either by the taxpayers directly or by traffic in general. There can be no question that the point will be reached, if it has not already been reached, when further increase in weight of truck and consequent cost of highways will cease to be economical, if all expenditures and profits are taken into consideration, and some authority should be given the power to limit the weight of truck, or else the truck users must be put in the position of paying such share of the cost of the highway as to cause them themselves to feel and heed the economical limit.

It has been said a number of times and by a number of those interested in the problem that highways should be made for the traffic and that, no matter what the traffic demands may

be, the highways must meet those demands if it would not halt the progress of civilization. We do not believe that the taxpayers of the country will accept this dictum if the facts and logic are placed fairly and squarely before them.

Most of the attempts at solving the problem so far have been in the form of state limitations to the weight of trucks that will be permitted to use the highways of the state in question. Maryland is an illustration, and her limitation of the weight of trucks is explained and defended in an article recently published by J. M. Mackall, chairman and chief engineer of the States Roads Commission.

One method of requiring trucks as well as other vehicles to pay in proportion to the use they make of the roads is by the gasoline tax, which has become quite popular within the past year or two, having been adopted in Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Montana, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota and Washington. The Chief of the Bureau of Public Roads, in urging that sources of revenue for highways be adopted that would be paid for by road users, stated that \$40,000,000 annually could be raised for road building and maintenance by a tax of one cent per gallon of gasoline.

Another method of bringing the economic limit home to the truck user is offered by Colorado. The Colorado Public Utilities Commission holds that truck owners have no right to make profit out of capital furnished by the taxpayers in the form of public highways. The Commission has recently handed down a decision denying motor trucks the right to use certain roads because they do not contribute their share towards the construction and maintenance of such highways, comparing them with the railroads, which pay much larger taxes and yet construct and maintain their roadbeds at no cost to the public.

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The growth of truck transportation has worked a particular hardship on suburban municipalities, through which through route trucks are operated to and from large centers of population. These municipalities receive no benefit from state vehicle taxes, and yet must maintain high-

ways to carry the heavy traffic imposed upon them. This means either excessively heavy special assessments against abutting property, which is depreciated rather than improved by the concentration of truck traffic, or large public benefits, payable out of general municipal funds, already in-

sufficient. Some plan must be worked out in the near future whereby municipalities such as Winnetka can receive liberal state aid for the construction of through truck traffic routes, the cost of which can be directly assessed against the transportation interests.

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