

APPENDIX I

IMPRESSIONS OF THE ALASKA HIGHWAY ^{1/}

Previous speakers have made frequent reference to the "Alaska Highway" and its possible influence on future development of the area it traverses. It has not yet been clearly brought out that the Alaska Highway in its present location was conceived and built as a military highway to serve a chain of airports and as an auxiliary supply route to Alaska.

A joint Canadian and United States Commission, appointed about 1935 for the special purpose, has studied the question of constructing a highway to connect the United States with Alaska. The southern portion of the routes discussed and advocated by this Commission lies to the west of the Rocky Mountains. This highway begins at the railhead at Dawson Creek and extends northward through Fort St. John, Fort Nelson and Watson Lake to Whitehorse from where it continues in a northwesterly direction to a junction with the Richardson Highway in Alaska at Big Delta. Except for some of the permanent bridges, construction of the highway is completed and carrying traffic throughout its length. Transportation difficulties, which delayed the delivery of steel fabricated in the United States, prevented completion of some of the permanent bridges this fall. Work will proceed on these bridges throughout the winter however and it is anticipated that they will be completed before the spring thaws take out any of the temporary bridges which are now serving the traffic.

The pioneer road which was built by the Army Engineers and civilian contractors under the Public Roads Administration during 1942 has been brought up to all-weather standard this year with a 26-foot roadbed and 20 to 22 feet of surfacing with local gravel or crushed stone. Grades in general were kept below ten per cent.

The building of the Alaska Highway was undoubtedly the greatest single highway construction project ever undertaken. The necessity for early completion gave all phases of the work an urgency such as is seldom associated with construction projects. Contractors' employees at one time exceeded 14,000, worked two shifts of 10 or 11 hours a day, 7 days a week, in all kinds of weather including 40 to 50 degrees below zero, to drive the project through. The hospital service organized by the U. S. Public Health Service which provided prompt and efficient care of the sick and injured workmen and inspection of water supplies and camp sanitation resulted in above average health conditions on the job and contributed materially to the results.

In August, this year, I made a trip over the highway, flying from Edmonton to Fairbanks and then coming down over the highway by automobile. I covered the full mileage, with the exception of that section between Northway Airport in Alaska and Slims River Crossing at Kluane Lake. The impressions gained on this trip may be summed up as follows:

^{1/} Gist of remarks of C. D. Curtiss, Deputy Commissioner, United States Public Roads Administration.

1. I was most impressed by the tremendous magnitude of the job. Through contact with the project in Washington I was familiar with the various features of the project that could be measured by figures, such as the 1500 miles from Dawson Creek to Big Delta, the thousands of trucks, tractors, shovels and other major items of road building equipment, the 100 odd bridges of sufficient size to constitute structural problems, the millions of dollars the project was costing, but it required the combined trip by air and ground over the highway to give these figures real meaning as to the unprecedented magnitude of the work. From the air I was impressed by the wilderness traversed by the highway after leaving Fort St. John. Outside of timber and gravel there was no local source of supplies required for the construction work. Practically everything from food for workmen to spare parts for equipment had to be imported, much of it more than 2,000 miles.

2. I was also very much impressed by the large volume of traffic using the road while it was still under construction. This traffic consisted of heavy loads of bridge material and equipment for the road itself, materials and equipment for military projects along the route of the highway, food and other supplies, and busses carrying soldiers and workmen. Before completion the Alaska Highway was already meeting the military needs.

3. Another thing which impressed me was the general excellence of the location. Much of the sharp curvature and excessive grades that were necessarily a part of the hurried trail construction has been eliminated through many minor and a few major relocations. Although the highway in general follows the trail road, with the exception of a very small percentage of the mileage, its location as built is quite satisfactory and will be retained in any future development.

4. The surfacing of the highway is of crushed rock and gravel and dust is a real nuisance. One cannot make a trip over the highway in dry weather without remembering the dust.

5. To insure uninterrupted service, constant, continuing maintenance will be necessary. Floods, frost, ice, snow and slides are some of the major items that the maintenance crews will have to contend with.

6. A previous speaker has referred to the tourist value of the highway in the post-war period. I was surprised and much impressed by the scenic beauty along the route of the highway which far exceeded my expectation. Throughout the area traversed by the highway there appeared to be excellent hunting and fishing opportunities. The scenic value alone, however, in my opinion would draw a great many. To be attractive to tourists, however, the highway would need to be made dustless and a suitable highway connection made with Edmonton to the east and through Prince George to the West Coast of the United States. Tourist accommodations and motor vehicle service would also have to be available at intervals along the highway.

7. Many features, some of which have already been discussed, will influence post-war development along the highway. To adequately serve commercial post-war traffic, the highway would need as for tourist traffic suitable highway connections with Edmonton and to the Pacific Coast. Also a dustless surface would be desirable and some alignment changes to reduce grades and curvature,