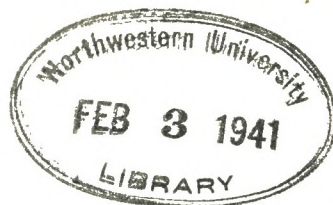


FEDERAL WORKS AGENCY  
WORK PROJECTS ADMINISTRATION

For Release on Delivery,  
Tuesday Afternoon, January 28, 1941.

"LOCAL ROADS IN THE DEFENSE PROGRAM"

The following address was delivered by Perry A. Fellows, Chief Engineer, Work Projects Administration, before the County Highway Officials' Division at the 38th annual convention of the American Road Builders' Association, at the Pennsylvania Hotel, New York City, at 2 p.m. Tuesday, January 28, 1941:

In this period of national emergency every organization and every individual seeks to do his part for national defense. Sometimes this means doing the customary job, but doing it with an increased urgency and dispatch. Sometimes it means reorienting the customary work so as to serve the new national needs. We on the WPA have a directive from the Congress to devote a large part of our activities to projects that are important for national defense. Among these projects an important group is represented by the development of access roads to provide entrance and egress for army camps, military or naval reservations, arsenals, munitions factories and similar strategic points.

This is the subject I would like to discuss with you, since you will be the partners in this enterprise, as you have been in the road projects of the past. With your cooperation and assistance, WPA workers have constructed or improved more than 500,000 miles of highways, roads and streets in the past five years. It is a compliment to all of us that the demonstrated effectiveness of WPA road work, in every state of the Union, has led to the utilization of WPA labor in expanding and improving the

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nation's road system for purposes of military defense.

The impression has gone abroad that the WPA proposes to expand its operations enormously into new sections of the field of major highways. This is an erroneous impression and I would like to correct it right at the outset of my talk. I know of no plan to turn over all work on primary strategic highways to the WPA, nor reason to believe that such work will not be done under arrangements as followed in the past, by State highway departments and the Public Roads Administration under the contract system. The Work Projects Administration, while it has been authorized to give priority to defense projects, still remains an agency whose primary function is to provide useful work for the unemployed. It must continue to utilize the maximum labor that can be efficiently used in the operation of projects. WPA funds for equipment and materials still remain severely restricted.

The manner in which the WPA plans to fit its operations into defense road construction is similar to the manner in which it has fitted its operations into the general road programs of the past. As you know, we have had few conflicts in the allotment of tasks, and I expect we will have even less in the case of defense projects. There is plenty of urgent work for everybody to-do.

The establishment of new camps, posts, and aviation fields, the extension of military and naval facilities, and the expansion of the industrial plant for defense needs -- all this makes necessary a tremendous construction program for access roads. A preliminary survey by defense authorities and highway engineers indicates that more than \$200,000,000 will be required to construct these access roads alone. Follow-up surveys have shown that in many specific cases two or three times the amount originally calculated may be needed.

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In addition to access roads, the WPA has a big field of activity in the construction or improvement of alternate or supplementary roads, for use in emergencies when sections of military highways may not be open, or when the main highways are reserved for military traffic and other routes should be available for civilian traffic. In extreme emergencies practically all roads assume great importance. If there is anything that recent military experience abroad has demonstrated it is that there can not be too many roads.

Some \$550,000,000 was expended by the WPA on road and street projects during the fiscal year 1940. No substantial departure from this rate is foreseen in the immediate future. This year, however, it is expected that about half of the WPA road construction will consist of roads which have military importance as distinct from roadways of purely local interest.

WPA work on access roads and on alternate routes is to be carried on under much the same partnership with local communities as has obtained in the past. A major portion of WPA road work in the past has been carried under the sponsorship of local units of government, as distinct from the state highway bodies which build the larger traffic arteries with their own funds and allocations from the Public Roads Administration, and which utilize WPA assistance on a smaller proportion of their work. As nearly as can be foreseen a large part of the WPA defense road work will be sponsored by local government units as in the past, with the State Highway Departments also sponsoring their usual quota of projects. Roads on military properties of the Government, will be sponsored, of course, directly by the Federal departments concerned.

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I would like to urge upon you local officials that you have an important task to fulfill in planning and sponsoring defense road projects. It is your task to prepare the proper engineering data, and to carry your share of the work, as all of the project requirements cannot be met with Federal funds. Some of the regular WPA limitations may be modified on projects which merit full certification by the Army or Navy authorities as of first importance to national defense, but you must always remember that in practically every instance local road needs will be met at the same time that military purposes are being served. If in some instances the circumstances make it possible to finance these roads almost entirely out of Federal funds, so that the local communities get their local needs served gratis, in other instances it is right and proper that the local communities bear the usual sponsors' costs and let the Army and Navy reap the benefit.

In order to assure the smooth functioning of the road program, the WPA has instructed its state administrators and its field forces to confer with local and county officials, with the local Army and Navy officers, with State Highway officials, and with the local officials of the Public Roads Administration in outlining suitable projects, these conferences will be held jointly where desirable.

At these conferences the decisions as to which projects are to be undertaken by the WPA, and which by State highway bodies and the Public Roads Administration, may be governed, as in the past, by the established character of the WPA as a quick-moving flexible organization which can make available local unemployed labor for needed public improvements. This character of the WPA has been built up through cooperative relations with local officials, and we all expect these relations to continue in so directing the program

as to meet defense needs.

There is one more subject on which I would like to touch -- although it is not directly in the technical engineering field -- and that is the trend of unemployment and its bearing on the continuance of programs of the WPA. The increase in private employment resulting from the defense program is of course welcome news to all of us. We all hope that private employment will increase to such a point as to provide jobs for all the unemployed and that the increase in the tempo of business recovery will make the local communities so prosperous that they will be able to carry on their public work without the type of help represented by the WPA.

But this goal is far from having been attained. Most of you local officials know only too well that the full effect of defense industry employment has not seeped through to your communities, and that you still have a relief problem as well as a stringency in local financial resources. The explanation is not far to seek. It is apparent that orders to produce the things needed for defense purposes cannot be distributed evenly over all communities. Furthermore, even the expected requirements of defense industries are still far from equalling unemployment where it exists.

As long as a big unemployment problem remains, and it is the policy of the government to assist in meeting the problem, an agency such as the WPA will continue to operate. So don't be led astray by exaggerated good news consisting of reports that the unemployment problem has become a thing of the past. When that situation becomes true, the absence of need for public assistance to the unemployed will be readily apparent to all concerned.

The President and the Bureau of the Budget have recommended to the Congress an appropriation for the WPA during the fiscal year 1941-42

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which will enable it to employ an average of 1,500,000 persons. This represents a reduction of about a third from the present program. Conditions might so improve during the next year that it would not be necessary to spend all of such an appropriation; but I doubt it, and I believe you doubt it too. With such an appropriation, however, we shall be able to do quite a lot of defense road work -- not as much as we should like to do, and not as much as there is to be done, but still quite a lot. More than 40 percent of our WPA labor has been devoted to roads and streets, and, as I have already indicated, it may be expected that about half of our road work will be devoted to projects of defense importance.

We on the WPA, and I believe you local officials as well, can derive a great moral satisfaction from carrying on useful public work with labor that would otherwise have gone to waste -- from the employment of men and women whose skills and morale would otherwise have been corroded by idleness. I think this year our satisfaction can be all the greater in that we are using this labor to promote the defense of the nation. We are helping the unemployed to defend the nation which defends them.

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