

HIGHWAY HISTORY

Previous to 1892 very little organized attention was paid to highways. Each town had a supervisor of highways who was elected by the town. The people usually "worked out" their town highway tax which at that time was assessed by separate highway districts within the town.

The General Assembly of 1892 provided for the election of Town Road Commissioners and for the assessment of a tax of not less than 20 cents on the dollar of the grand list which should be collected and paid to the town treasurer and should be used for keeping in repair the highways in the town. Provision was also made for the assessment and collection of a State Tax of five cents on the dollar of the grand list to be paid by each town and city to the State Treasurer who, in turn, reapportioned this money to the several municipalities on the basis of their total road mileage. This money could be used only for the "support of highways" and this was the first legislation providing for state aid to towns in the construction and maintenance of highways.

The General Assembly of 1892 also authorized the Governor to appoint a suitable commission to make an examination of the highway system of the State and report to the next General Assembly. This commission was composed of O. L. Hines, J. W. Boldy and Marcus Peck.

The General Assembly of 1898 created the office of State Highway Commissioner whose duty it was to supervise the expenditures of all State funds used in highway improvement. This office was first held by William B. Vaile of Randolph who served until 1900.

The powers and duties of the State Highway Commissioner were increased by the General Assembly of 1906 at which time it was provided that the Selectmen of the towns, subject to the approval of the State Highway Commissioner, should make a selection of trunk lines of improved highways, from town to town, to be known as "selected highways," upon which should be expended the five percent State Highway tax and money used for improvement of highways under the supervision of the State Highway Commissioner. A system of State Aid to towns was established whereby if for the improvement of selected roads a town voted a sum of money not less than \$100.00 the State would match it with an equal amount with a further provision that the State Aid to any one town for this purpose should not exceed \$500.00. The same session of the General Assembly provided for the appointment of County Highway Commissioners, under the control of the State Highway Commissioner. The Act requiring that automobiles should be registered was also passed by the General Assembly of 1906.

In 1908 a law was enacted requiring the annual registration of automobiles and providing that the monies received therefrom, after paying the expense of administering the Act, should be set aside in the State Treasury and used for the purpose of assisting towns in the maintenance of their most important highways under the direction of the State Highway Commissioner.

In 1912 a law was enacted providing for the Patrol Maintenance System which is still in effect.

In 1915 State Aid was granted to towns for the construction of bridges on the State Aid Highways. This enabled the State on the approval of the State Highway Commissioner to reimburse the town for a part of the expense incurred in building or rebuilding of a bridge. The State's share of the cost was limited to twenty-five percent of the total with a further limitation of \$300.00 on any one bridge. Subsequent amendments in 1919, 1921, 1927, 1933 and 1935 gradually increased the State's share until at the present time the State may pay at least two-thirds the cost and in cases where the town indebtedness is three times its grand list and the town tax rate amounts to \$3.00 on the grand list, the State may reimburse the town for the entire amount expended.

In 1917 the law providing for County Highway Commissioners was amended, providing that the State be divided into highway districts. These should not exceed twelve in number. Eleven highway districts were established at that time with a County Commissioner in charge of each. Two years later this was changed to twelve districts, and while the number of districts has not been altered since then there has been some rearrangement of towns in the separate districts. In 1917 the General Assembly also enacted legislation enabling the State to meet the terms of the Federal Aid Road Act and secure financial aid from the Federal Government in the construction of certain specified highways, particularly rural post roads.

In the early part of the winter of 1919-1920 the State Garage was built for the purpose of housing and maintaining the miscellaneous Surplus War Material, tools and equipment, allotted to the State by the Federal Government.

Important legislation affecting the State Highway Department was enacted in 1921. A bill was passed creating a State Highway Board of three members, one to be appointed for two years, one for four years with the Governor acting as a member ex-officio. This bill also provided for the appointment of a Commissioner of Highways and the employment of a Chief Engineer. This Act was amended in 1923 with the result that the State Highway Board should consist of three members to be appointed by the Governor with the approval of the Senate, one member to be appointed for two years, one for four years and one for six years, and biennially thereafter the appointment of one for six years. Under this amendment the State Highway Board, subject

to the approval of the Governor, appoints a Commissioner of Highways who is the Executive Officer of the Board. The appointment, subject to the approval of the Governor, of a Chief Engineer and other expert assistants was provided for by this amendment of 1923.

In 1923 a gasoline tax of one cent a gallon was imposed. During its first year of operation this yielded a revenue slightly in excess of \$175,000.00. This has been amended from time to time until at present the law provides for a State tax of four cents a gallon and in addition to that there is a Federal tax of one cent a gallon. This State tax of four cents a gallon yields approximately \$2,000,000.00 at this time.

Following is a list of those who have served as Commissioner of Highways since the creation of the office in 1898:

William B. Vaile	1898-1900
J. O. Sanford	1900-1904
Chas. W. Gates	1904-1915
Stoddard B. Bates	1915-1921
Thurman W. Dix	1921-1923
Stoddard B. Bates	1923-1929
Hubert E. Sargent	1929-present time.

In 1915 Charles W. Gates was elected Governor and upon his taking over the duties of this office he appointed Mr. Bates to the position of Commissioner of Highways. In 1921 Mr. Bates was appointed to membership on the State Highway Board and Mr. Dix took his place as Commissioner. Two years later Mr. Bates was again appointed Commissioner of Highways which position he held until his death in 1929. Mr. Sargent, who was then Chief Engineer, was appointed to fill the vacancy.

HIGHWAY PLANNING SURVEY

The law granting Federal Aid to the states provides that one and one-half (1½) per cent of the amount apportioned for any year to any state may be used in making studies and plans for future highway work; and, on account of the growing demand for the rapid improvement of the three classes of road in the State, the Highway Board decided to cooperate with the Bureau of Public Roads in such a project of study for future work.

At the present time forty (40) of the states are carrying on a Highway Planning Survey project. This project was started in Vermont in the summer of 1936 and we expect will be completed sometime in 1937.

These studies are being undertaken to supply the necessary information regarding the amount, type and distribution of traffic, so as to place future highway work on a sound and business-like basis.

The survey consists of three parts: namely, a highway traffic survey, a highway condition survey and a highway financial survey.

The traffic survey shows the character and extent of traffic on the various roads of the State, accumulated through various types of counts and checks, also, the volume of industrial and agricultural productions moved on the highways. The information obtained from these counts together with that obtained through the highway condition survey will indicate the road improvements needed.

The highway condition survey consists of a complete road inventory of all roads in the State, showing the mileage, types, widths, character of grades, sight distances, curvatures, grade crossings, and bridges. It also includes the plotting of regular bus and truck routes, postal routes and general highway transportation routes.

The financial and road use surveys cover the costs, expenditures and revenues of the highways of the State. This includes a study of gasoline taxes, registration fees, special taxes and diversions, the yield of the various taxes, who pays them, and the share paid by rural and urban residents.

It will also include all other state and local revenues available for road purposes.

The objective of the several classes of study included in this survey is to accomplish the following ends:

1. Select an integrated highway system to include all roads to be improved in the next twenty (20) years.
2. Record the present state of highways in respect to traffic serviceability, and indicate the amount, kind, and cost of further improvement required to reach fully satisfactory serviceability.
3. Budget highway operations over a considerable future period, and indicate sources from which the necessary funds should be, and can be obtained, properly related to benefits conferred.