

United States Planning Huge Road Improvements

By GEORGE KITCHEN
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WASHINGTON (CP) — The United States, with an estimated 61,000,000 motor vehicles pounding its highways every day, is thinking of launching a \$51,500,000,000 road-improvement program. The road-users would pay most of the cost.

Congress, alarmed at the deterioration of national roadways and their inability to cope with present-day traffic, has before it several plans, introduced by both Republicans and Democrats, to finance a 15-year program of highway modernization on a pay-as-you-go basis.

The scheme basically is aimed at modernizing, rebuilding and expanding the country's interstate highway system, a 37,800-mile network which now links 42 state capitals and 90 per cent of all cities with a population of 50,000 or more. The program includes 2,200 miles of roads needed but not yet built.

USERS FOOT BILL

The proposals now before Congress for pay-as-you-go financing, with much of the money to be raised through higher taxes on gasoline, diesel fuel, tires, trucks, trailers and buses. Thus those who use the highways, whether truckers, bus lines or private motorists, would help foot the bill.

These proposals are designed to raise \$12,000,000,000 over a period of several years. This would be added to the \$22,000,000,000 now produced through existing federal taxes on gasoline and tires to make up the \$35,000,000,000 federal share of the program. The states, which would handle the construction work, would raise the rest.

Pay-as-you-go financing is favored by most congressmen over a proposal made last year by President Eisenhower that the federal share be paid through a special bond issue. The original Eisenhower plan ran into strong opposition and Eisenhower now says he will go along with the tax-increase proposal, though it admittedly

faces an uncertain reception in this election-year Congress. Highway experts say that two-thirds of the country's roads, a key factor in national defence planning, are below minimum safe driving standards, with worn-out pavement, poorly engineered curves, narrow rights-of-way, jammed intersections and narrow bridges.

NEEDLESS COSTS

They estimate that inadequate primary highways, which provide the country's most vital transportation links, cost annually \$1,000,000,000 in traffic accidents, \$900,000,000 in lost time for commercial vehicles and \$70,000,000 unnecessarily spent on fuel, brakes and tires.

The interstate highway system, prime target of the program, services 65 per cent of all urban dwellers and 45 per cent of the rural population. But, the experts say, only one mile in every six is considered adequate for today's needs. The other five miles are old and in bad need of repair.

The modernization program involves abandoning some roads altogether and relocating them. On many stretches now existing, another two lanes would be laid, providing a divided four-lane highway. Rights-of-way would be expanded and bridges built. Many of the 22,000 curves in excess of three degrees would be straightened. Others would be graded. Steep grades would be reduced or eliminated.

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