INTERVIEWEE: FRANCIS C. TURNER (Tape #1)

INTERVIEWER: DAVID G. MC COMB

November 12, 1968

M: First of all, Mr. Turner, I'd like to fill in your background. According to the information I have, you were born in Dallas, Texas, in 1908, educated at North Texas Agricultural College, got a degree there, an A.S. degree. Is that an Associate of Science?

T: That's right.

M: In 1927.

T: Right.

M: Where was that, incidentally? I'm not familiar with that school.

T: It's at Arlington. That's now part of the University.

M: That's now the University of Texas at Arlington.

T: At Arlington, yes.

M: I understand. Then you went to Texas A&M, got a B.S. degree there.

T: That's right. Arlington College at that time was part of the Texas A&M System. It was called North Texas Agricultural College.

M: And then you went to Texas A&M.

T: Right.

M: And you got a Bachelor of Science degree in chemical engineering.

T: Civil engineering.

M: Civil engineering, in 1929.

T: That's right.

M: So you are a Texas Aggie.

T: That's correct. And proud of it.

M: And proud of it. I've never met a Texas Aggie yet who wasn't proud of it.

Well, you've got a big game coming up.

T: That's right. Yeah, we'll see how well we get along with you fellows on that day.

M: Also, according to my information, you had various engineering past jobs, adviser to the War Department; you worked as an Assistant Commissioner of Public Roads, I guess, for a long time. I don't know whether you've held this position all this time or not, but you've been apparently in public roads work since 1929 to the present. Now, what was your position at first? Did you go to work in 1929 for the public roads?

T: Yes, I started with public roads in 1929 the next week after I graduated from Texas A&M and started as a junior highway engineer, which is the entry professional engineering grade in government and worked various places in the country. I had a few jobs in Texas, Kansas, Wisconsin, Colorado, and California, a number of places, and then was transferred into Little Rock, Arkansas. I worked there on federal aid to highway construction for seven years to 1940, working on all types of bridge and road-street construction involving federal funds.

I then was transferred into the Washington officer here to work on the development of maintenance practices and procedures in connection with federal aid to highways. I stayed here in what was called the Division of Construction, at that time. Then I was transferred out of the Washington headquarters--still in the Washington area, however--to a field office located here in Washington where I was a maintenance engineer and construction engineer covering the states of Ohio, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, and the District of Columbia until shortly after the war started when I was assigned to the work in connection with construction of the Alaska Highway.

I worked in this area picking up equipment, supplies, staff and so forth

to ship to the Alaska Highway after which I went up on the construction of the Alaska Highway and was one of the supervising construction engineers and later the adviser on maintenance of the highway, setting up the first maintenance organization for the highway upon its construction completion.

M: The urgency here was to supply Alaska during wartime, is that right?

T: The Alaska Highway was constructed as part of the war effort in support of a string of airports running through western Canada into Alaska by which materiel and aircraft were ferried to Alaska for transfer to the Russians at Fairbanks. They took over possession of the aircraft at that point and flew with their own crews across the Straits into Russia--part of the effort of supporting the extra front for the Russian war effort.

M: That Alaska Highway, was that a concrete paved highway?

T: No, the construction was to be the gravel surfaced road which would be adequate to carry supplies to the air bases--food and fuel, personnel, staff, things of that nature--in support of the aircraft ferrying operation, and other materiel that would go for support of our own ground troops within Alaska itself where we had a fairly sizeable contingent of military of all of the services. It was a wartime piece of construction for wartime purposes. It was not then intended to be for civilian use at all, so it was constructed as a gravel surfaced road entirely.

M: Was it a success?

T: Oh, yes. The bigger success, however, was in the war effort itself out in the Pacific where several successes of our naval forces in the Pacific in defeating large groups of the Jap fleet took a lot of the pressure off of the possibility of invasion of our West Coast and took off a lot of the pressure that previously existed with respect to defense of Alaska. So the need for large quantity movement of military supplies decreased very

substantially. With that, also, there was a decrease of the pressure for the construction of the route so that in the end that developed largely into a trail type of road--a pioneer type of road at minimum effort to get a road punched through that would connect the continental U.S. through western Canada to Alaska.

M: Was it, incidentally, on all-weather road? Could you keep it clear?

T: Oh, yes, it was all-weather. Obviously, there is considerable snow and ice and winter-time conditions up in that country, but we kept the road clear and were able to move freely throughout the year. During my time there we had the road closed for very short periods, a matter of a couple of days at the most, at any time during the several years that I was connected with the effort.

M: Then after the war, what did you do?

T: I stayed on that assignment, which was with the Corps of Engineers, until the highway and all of its equipment, camps and other facilities were transferred to Canada under the Surplus Property Act. Then I was returned to Washington and was here a few months and was assigned to the Philippines where I was in charge of reconstruction of war-damaged roads and streets and bridges from 1946 until 1950.

M: And then did you return to Washington?

T: In 1950 I returned to Washington. I was assigned in the Office of the Commissioner of Public Roads, which is the same position that I now occupy myself.

M: You came as an assistant commissioner?

T: I was an Assistant to the Commissioner of Public Roads, then Mr. Thomas H. McDonald. In that capacity I looked after the work on the Inter-American

Highway down through the Central American countries to the Panama Canal and looked after all the then new foreign aid work that was being established, first, under the Marshall Plan and, then, under the several predecessory agencies of what is now called A.I.D. [Agency for International Development] in the State department, the Foreign Aid Program. We handled the part of the program that involved highways in all the underdeveloped countries in the world. I worked in connection with that. Then subsequent to that I was assigned in connection with the development of the current program that we are now involved in, the enlargement of the regular Federal Aid to Highway Program and the beginnings of the Interstate Program.

M: Do I remember correctly that the Interstate Program began in the mid-1950's under Eisenhower?

T: It originally was authorized in 1944 as a result of studies that had been made in the late '30's and the early '40's during the war. The basic authorization for the program was contained in the 1944 act, but there was no financing to actually construct the system until the authorizations in the 1956 Federal Aid Act during the Eisenhower Administration.

In connection with that, I worked with the development of the legislative program in 1954, '55, and '56, the development of the controls of the program, the procedures, the general administrative devices that would be used, and in connection with hearings almost constantly for a year and a half in both the House and the Senate, Ways and Means Committee, Senate Finance Committee, and the Public Works Committees in both houses. During that time, President Johnson was the Majority Leader in the Senate and was the leader of the Senate at the time that that legislation was enacted. We had some contact with him at that time. This was my own first direct contact with him.

M: Did he support you in this work with this highway program?

T: Very definitely. He was one of the strong supporters of the program in the Senate. There was, of course, at that time a Democratic Congress but a Republican Executive. There was never any disagreement between the two opposing political parties with respect to support of the program. It went through with strong bipartisan support in both houses. In the Senate, of course, the President [Johnson] was the Majority Leader at that time that pushed the legislation through.

M: The problems that you ran into--were the main problems dealing with financing it, the placement of raods, or what?

T: The main problem in the 1956, and the 1955 legislation--the legislation, having been up during both years and did not get through in the '55 year, was then brought back and put through finally in 1956. The main legislation had to do with financing. The system had been authorized, as I say, by the Congress in 1944, and the roots of the system--different segments of highway that would comprise the system--had been largely selected by the individual state highway departments and the Bureau of Public Roads in the period from 1944 to 1947 so that the pieces of road to be included in the 40,000 miles of interstate system were largely selected at that time. But they were meaningless so far as getting actual construction improvement done in any reasonable period of time because there was no special financing provided for the program. This was added in 1956 with the creation of the Highway Trust Fund into which went the proceeds of federal gasoline tax, which, incidentally, was increased by that '56 act; part of the excise taxes on certain items such as tires, inner tubes, retread rubber, a tax on heavy trucks. All these revenues went into that highway trust fund and these revenues were earmarked specifically and only for highways under the 1956 program.

M: If the main problem was financing, was it this Highway Trust Fund that allowed for the passage of the act and provided the funds for it?

T: Yes, while the act was actually in two sections, two titles--because the authorizations were, of course, handled under the jurisdictional authority of different committees in the House, authorization being under the Public Works committees, and the financing part, Title II of the '56 act, came under the jurisdiction of the Ways and Means Committee in the House and the Finance Committee in the Senate. The bill was split into these two parts, Titles I and II, in order to permit the two committees to simultaneously consider their respective parts of the legislation and to handle it then jointly when it came to the floor so that it would be a coordinated piece of legislation. The '56 act, therefore, was primarily a financing device to carry out a program which to some extent had been outlined and authorized in prior years, but that authorization, as I say, was rather meaningless because of the large sums involved until the 1956 legislation was enacted.

M: Whose idea was it to have this Highway Trust Fund? How did this evolve?

T: Well, the trust fund itself, I think, was largely developed by the Treasury department representatives. The original proposal of a special committee--a citizen's committee appointed by President Eisenhower, headed by General Lucius Clay, the Berlin war airlift hero--was to set up a government coproration which would be authorized to issue bonds for the construction of the system and have pledged to the corporation the revenues from the federal gasoline tax, which was then 2¢ a gallon. This was opposed in the Democratic Congress because of the very lage interest payments that would be required over about a thirty year period and the fact that the revenues from gasoline and certain other excise taxes would be earmarked for such a long period of time.

The feeling on the part of the Democratic houses was that this was too high a price to pay and that we should go to a pay-as-you-go-type of program. As a result they voted down the bond proposal and suggested in lieu a scheme of setting up taxes which would finance the program pretty much on an annual pay-as-you-go-basis. Then the Executive Branch went further with that proposal and suggested that certain revenues be earmarked and put into a special account in the Treasury to be called a Highway Trust Fund usable only for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of the 1956 authorization which was for the interstate construction and the regular federal aid, the so-called ABC Program. This then was actually a joint effort, as I say, by both parties at that time.

M: Has the financing of this Highway Trust Fund done its job? Has it been a success?

T: It has been a tremendous success. The forecasts, for example, of projected revenue over the years that we made at that time have been found to be remarkably accurate. In fact, our error is in the order of 1 percent. Our forecasts of revenues made more than ten years ago have been accurate within that percentage here in these years since that time. Had we not had the trust fund with its revenues earmarked for this particular purpose, we would not have been able to manage the program and had the success with it that we feel that we had.

M: Were you equally successful in predicting the usage of the highways involved?

T: On a national basis, yes, very close. In fact, we make a forecast of usage in terms of vehicle miles, gasoline consumed, things of that nature, to convert into revenues. Gasoline tax is so much a gallon, of course, and hat naturally gets back to the number of gallons that would be used. This, in turn, is a function of the miles traveled by different classes of vehicles.

On a national basis our forecasts of vehicle miles of travel have had the same degree of accuracy as the financing forecast that I mentioned.

M: What about on a regional basis?

T: On a national basis we also are fairly accurate, but when you begin to tie them down to individual project, an individual segment of highway, one mile in length to five miles in length, while we are accurate within the degree of tolerance that is necessary for our purposes, we are not as accurate as the national figures that I mentioned. This is understandable. It is somewhat like handling life insurance actuarial experience. They can't predict an individual life, of course, very accurately, but on a collective base with a million or two million numbers of people to deal with, they can project them out fairly accurately, enough that they can set a premium rate, and they can hit it very accurately.

M: Is there any problem in the interstate system of obsolete design? Do you have to keep updating your designs as you go along?

T: Oh, yes, we are constantly updating our designs just as auto makers are updating their designs. A 1968 automobile is drastically different from a '58 or a '48 year model; the same way with our highways. A '68 model design of highway is vastly improved over a '58 model. You can't go back, however, in a highway and remold a 1958 design or put a modification kit of some kind on it very well and convert it to a '68 model, particularly when we still have many miles yet to build. We need all the finances we've got just to build the system and mileage the first time without being able to go back over it and update it, modernize it. So many designs that people see today are designs that were built, say, ten years ago, but were actually put on the drafting board fifteen or eighteen years ago. So there is considerable evolution in highway design just as there is in auto design.

M: Does the evolution of highway design take the form of better architecture or are there vast changes in material used?

T: Both. There are changes in the material. We are constantly researching and finding new material or finding ways to use old material in a different or better way. We are improving on steels. We improve on concretes, aggregates. We improve on the combinations of those materials, just as other professions are modernizing and improving their use. New metallurgy--for example, metallurgical discoveries have made possible the use of jet engines in airplanes because of the ability to forge a metal substance for engine parts, turbine parts, that was not possible fifteen years ago, or twenty years ago. We are doing exactly the same thing in the highway field.

Likewise, we are responsive to many of the pressures and interests of the times, one of which of course is the work that we have been doing in the emphasis on the beautification of highways, the emphasis being placed on making highways not only prettier in terms of their physical appearance, but also blending those appearance aspects into safety--rounding of slopes, flattening of slopes on fills and cuts, putting in features of design which are more aesthetically pleasing and at the same time are safer for the drivers using the road. These are things that are part of the evolutionary process.

M: Haven't highway engineers always had some interest in safety and beauty?

T: Oh, yes. Safety, of course, has been virtually the number one factor in considering the acceptability of a design from the very beginning. This is inherent not only in practice and in the engineering profession, but is written also into the basic law as one of the primary criteria in approving projects.

The same way with beauty. But the difficulty with beautification

efforts has been that there has never been sufficient funds to do all the things that we thought we would like to do and that the public wanted. So it was the question of arraying them in priorities. Frequently, with scarcity of funds, some of the things that we would have done to make the highway look nicer we had to forego in favor of things to make the highway safer--or just to keep ahead of the traffic growth. However, it's only been in the last few years, largely due to the impetus given to the beautification effort by Mrs. Johnson and supported, of course, by the President, that we have changed some of those priorities and have actually put more emphasis on the highway beautification along with safety than we had in prior years, but particularly on the beautification efforts and on things to make the highways fit into the adjacent countryside and city-scape a little more than in the past.

M: Considering the need for the highways, the growing use of vehicular traffic, is this emphasis on beauty, beautification of highways, really necessary? Wouldn't it be better to spend the money on safer highways?

T: Well, these are questions obviously of judgment and what you want to spend your money for. It's not unlike ordering yourself a meal in a restaurant or buying groceries for the week or buying yourself a suit of clothes or a car. There undoubtedly is a way in most cases to spend less money to get a meal, to buy a suit of clothes, a car, a house. You can do without some things, possibly, and probably get along all right. But we do have a certain amount of ability in our society, in this country at least, to be able to buy something a little bit more than the bare minimum in almost anything that we buy. We think we can do that same thing with respect to most of our highways. We can do a little bit more than buy just the bare minimum of pavement, and a bridge without any of the adornment of things to

make them look prettier, more attractive to users, as well as buy some additional safety. Many of these things can be bought with the same money in that many of the things that we would do for safety purposes also work toward a more aesthetically pleasing highway cross-section for the traveler to use.

M: Can you give me an example of that?

T: For example, one of the things that works in both directions is flattened slopes on a road fill or a slope--a back slope in a cut, for example. The flatter the slope, the safer is the road, and the flatter the slope, the more it is rounded easily and blended into what appears to be the natural terrain, the more aesthetically pleasing it is. At the same time, flatter slopes permit us to plant either native wildflowers or grasses which are pleasing and attractive, but they also hold the soil in place, decrease erosion, and thus stream pollution, also decrease maintenance costs because of reduced erosion and are easier to maintain when we have to use mowers and equipment to keep the roadside slicked up, to control rates of growth of grasses and weeds and things of that nature. So that things like this can be combined and we can get several benefits out of a single expenditure.

This is particularly true in some of the efforts that President and Mrs. Johnson have been promoting in terms of spreading all over the country the same kind of effort that the Texas Highway Department had done a great deal on most of their system, of flattening slopes and planting wildflowers and native grasses and to do these things that I just described in terms of increased safety and increased aesthetics and decreased maintenance costs.

M: Was there any disagreement on what makes a highway beautiful?

T: Oh, yes. There are almost as many different opinions as to what is beautiful on the highway as there are opinions as to what is beautiful in art or

any other characteristic that comes under the term of beauty. These opinions are hard to define and the differences of opinion are hard to define in words, but they exist and people can sense them but seldom can really express them in words or any kind of a method that can be measured so that you can say that this one is four on the scale of values and this one is five. Therefore this one is better than the other one by this degree.

M: Has the Highway Beautification Act promoted by the President and Mrs. Johnson, has it had any great effect, do you think?

T: Oh, very definitely. The Highway people generally have been dealing with this and have been quiet and effective supporters of this for years. We have been attempting to do this kind of a thing as long as I can remember, as long as I have been in the highway business, since 1929. But we've constantly had to fight this battle of inadequate funds and the assignment of available funds to what would appear to be real necessities in the highway construction programs and therefore had to forego some of these things, largely because of what we felt was public pressure in that the public was more interested in getting additional miles of improved highway, relocation of unsatisfactory alignments, repaving of inadequate surfaces, widening of narrow roads and bridges, and things of that nature--more and more miles of that to the exclusion of some of the things, such as emphasis on aesthetics and beauty. The President and Mrs. Johnson, however, enunciated those principles and said in effect that we can afford both and we should do both at the same time. And this support given to that effort was sufficient to convince the public and all the highway authorities to do just that.

M: Where did the President get the idea of beautification? Do you have any idea?

T: Of course, the generally accepted thought is that he got it from Mrs. Johnson. I don't know about this, but I presume that he probably did. She

certainly is bound to have been the foremost advocate of this program and I am sure that that has had a great deal to do with his own support of it. He rather freely admitted on numerous occasions that it was inspired by Mrs. Johnson's personal interest in it.

M: Did you have anything to do with the passage of that act?

T: Yes.

M: Were you consulted about it?

T: Yes, we helped to draft the details of the legislation and supported it in the Congress before the appropriate committees.

M: Well, in drafting that act, who decided what was beautiful and what you should do?

T: Well, the act does not describe those particular things in specific terms of what you would do under the act. It authorizes funds in three major elements of the program. One, of course, is the one that has gotten the most attention, far out of proportion actually to its real size, relative order of the fact on beautiful things, and that's the billboard part of the program. This has created more fire and more opposition, more strong support, and more polarizing, I guess of thought, on this than anything else. The beauty effort has been clouded to a very large extent by the overwhelming attention given to this one element of a rather large package. This is the reason I say that the billboard part of the program has had attention, debate, discussion, criticism, far out of proportion to its relative importance in the total package.

The second part of the program was to deal with junk yards, primarily automobile graveyards.

And the third part of the program had to do with such things as construction of roadside rest areas, the acquisition of strips of scenic beauty

alongside the highway, the acquisition of scenic easements, the planting of natural trees, flowers, grasses, and so forth--landscaping so to speak--and the kinds of efforts that I described, reshaping the roadway and the planting of natural wildflowers and things like that. These kinds of overall programs, activities, were authorized in the legislation along with a specific amount of money to be available for carrying out that particular part of the total package. None of the things, specifics, that you might call beautification as such, were actually spelled out in the legislation, so the question of who decides what is beautiful and what isn't actually does not come up in that context.

M: There must have been some discussion about the billboards then. They are the most publicized part.

T: Very definitely, there was discussion about the billboards. Most of the discussion concerning the so-called Beautification Act of '65 had to do with the billboard part of the bill. When the subject has been mentioned at any time since, most people have automatically jumped to the subject of billboards, forgetting all the rest of the parts of the program. The billboard part has been highly emotional and has been highly controversial. Different groups of interests in our country have created storms of protest and support pro and con on the subject.

M: There must have been some decision someplace along the line that billboards were not particularly beautiful--or junk yards for that matter.

T: Yes. This, of course, was the premise on which some of the early legislative efforts were based--was control of the billboards. This goes back some several years. There was considerable discussion of a billboard control act back in the late '50's. In 1958 there was actually a bill enacted which provided for control of billboards under certain regulations that would be

promulgated by the Secretary of Commerce, who was then the Cabinet official under whose charge the highway program was lodged. The legislation authorized us to pay to a state that was cooperating in the control of billboards a premium of one half of one percent of the construction cost of the highway, provided they would exercise the control of the billboards, such as removing them a certain distance away from the edges of the highway so that they may be supposedly less visible and less annoying in sight to travelers as they passed up and down the road. This was reasonably successful, but up until '65--between '58 and '65--only about half of the states--or less than half of the states I guess at that time--had availed themselves of that provision of the act. So it was a very slow process of getting control.

The '65 act put mandatory controls on billboards, and said that after a certain date if a state did not make provision for adequate control of billboards, then they would have to forfeit up to 10 percent of the Federal Aid to Highway monies that would otherwise have been made available to them. This created, of course, a great deal of opposition in itself simply because it was a compulsory device rather than a permissive approach. People sometimes react violently against something that they might even be for just simply because they don't like to be pushed into its acceptance, and so there has been some slowness on the part of many states in complying with that.

M: Has there been greater cooperation of the states on that more-or-less unknown or unpublicized aspect of the Beautification Bill, that dealing with the landscaping and natural grasses and roadside park building and that sort of thing? Has there been more state cooperation in that area?

T: Yes, far more. The cooperation in that aspect has been full-hearted, enthusiastic. As evidence of it, the authorized amount of money for that part of the program is several times the amount of money authorized for the billboard

and junk yard control sections. The states have regularly used all of the monies available at a faster rate for this so-called Title III, the landscape feature of the Beautification Bill, than they have the other two titles put together--and have actually cried for more money in that category. We, in fact, could get the states to use several times as much money each year for that part of the program as they are now using if we had the money available.

M: Would you say, then, that Title III is the most important aspect of that bill?

T: In my opinion it is, yes. That position I think is supported by the fact that larger amounts of money were authorized for that part of the program; also because it in effect does more in my opinion to achieve the beautification objective. This is the part that is more apparent to the user, perhaps, than either of the other two parts of the program. The billboard provision and the junk yard provision both have in them loopholes, if you want to call them that, but exceptions where provisions are not applicable. They necessarily have to have certain exceptions because the position was taken that under proper control, proper utilization, billboards are a legitimate business endeavor in this country and that, therefore, they should not be automatically and fully ruled off of the highway, but rather they should be put under some kinds of control so that their undesirable effects do not detract unnecessarily from the enjoyment of the roadside. But where they are necessary they can be allowed to exist under provisions that allow them to achieve their advertising purpose and, at the same time, can be administered.

Now the net effect of that is that there are large mileages of the systems of highways where these exceptions occur to the extent that if we took down all of the billboards that the law would permit to be taken down--or

would require to be taken down--there still would be a very large number of billboards remaining. So the net effect on the traveler is less obvious than are some of these other things that we can do in much larger extent over many more miles of highway.

M: In your highway programs, beautification as well as your other programs, have you run into any difficulty with the Park Service?

T: Yes and no. The Park Service, of course, is the agency of government that, by statute, is charged with the major responsibility for environment that is aesthetic in character. Actually, our national parks--they are to a large extent the representatives of that part of our society that is interested in the retention of national features, parks, the creation and enhancement of those features and the conversion into parks and preservation of natural beauty such as we find in the parks--both in the cities and in the rural areas. So they are naturally expected to assume a larger, s , more enthusiastic, interest in this particular direction than we would. We are charged with responsibility in a different direction, which is the creation of an adequate and safe highway transport system.

Now, sometimes those two objectives tend to run into conflict with each other. More times than not, however, they are entirely compatible, and they work hand in hand and there is no problem. But there are occasional instances, many of which have been highly publicized, and the impression given that they are representative of all of the program--and they are not--where there is conflict between the objectives of the conservationists, say--represented to a large extent by the Park Service--and the highway transportation needs--represented by the Bureau of Public Roads. But we generally work those things out. The highway people certainly have no intention nor desire to ruthlessly damage these important values just for

the sake of damaging them or simply because it may be inconvenient to do something else. We constantly are faced with a choice, a decision that we have to make with respect to relative values.

Take one example, in San Antonio, that involved a corner of Brackenridge Park--an example that got a great deal of national publicity, most of which was uninformed, I'm afraid. There the choice was between no highway improvement, which would have meant complete breakdown of transportation on the existing streets to the north of the central business district of San Antonio--which was an unthinkable and certainly an undesirable choice--or a choice of building a highway to carry that traffic load, and the location of which would have gone outside the park and in so doing would have taken out many hundreds of homes, many of which would have been in the poorer neighborhoods, among the poor groups in the community. It would have taken out a large number of stores, industrial activities, and therefore jobs of people. It would have taken down schools and created problems of education, and things of that nature. In other words, a real disruption to the established fabric of the community. Or a location could be chosen which would go across a corner of the established Brackenridge Park and then would skirt through open land--which was open but not a park, but sometimes used for recreation purposes, a water flood control and conservation area, for example--and thus make unnecessary the dislocation of large numbers of people and businesses.

Faced with that decision, the Highway people, backed by the representatives of the people through the City Council, the Mayor's office of the City of San Antonio, chose the location through the corner of the park with the requirement, however, that the Highway department design it in such a way that it would minimize the impact on the park. In so doing the Highway

Department chose--had to choose--an alignment which was less than the optimum. In other words, there was a considerable curvature, indirectness, introduced into the location finally chosen in order to stay out of the park as much as possible, but still out of the houses and the community development.

As a result, the Highway Department, we thought, developed a fairly satisfactory answer to a difficult problem, recognizing that it would not suit entirely the wishes of conservationist enthusiasts. But just the same, on the other hand, there would have been violent objection from those that would not like to be displaced from their homes, or their businesses--displaced and, thus, their jobs taken away from them.

So we felt that the less undesirable of the alternates was the location through the corner of the park. It really did not go through the park. All the noise and charges that have been made that this is absolute destruction to the Brackenridge Park in San Antonio are just not based on fact at all. It is a very small corner of the park area, but which part is not really developed and used as a park in the sense that so many people are thinking of it.

M: This must be the area that is north of the park that is used for flood control.

T: Yes, north of the park. The location would then go into an area that is where there are no residences, and there are no developments except picnic grounds, ball diamonds, and things of that nature which can be sacrificed in time of flood, of course, and which can largely be moved and adjusted to fit the location of the highway. The golf course, for example, can be laid out in a different configuration.

This is what the highway would do. It would modify and adjust the

facilities so that they would continue to be available, but in a slightly different location or configuration without real damage to the ability to utilize the facilities. And those rearrangements would be done with highway money, so that whatever damage the highway did it, it would then replace it and pay for the damage that it wrought.

M: What has been the outcome of this program?

T: The argument has moved back and forth clear up to the Secretary's office here in Washington. It was finally decided to support the decision originally made and proposed by the Texas State Highway Department which was to utilize the routing through the corner of the park and eliminate the large relocation of families and businesses problem that would have otherwise been required.

So all that kind of a situation is illustrative of the conflicts that we sometimes get into between highways and so-called conservation interests. We frequently have to compromise the needs and the positions of both groups in order to arrive at a solution that is necessary in the larger over-all public interest. And that, I think, is what we have done in this case. That's typical of the way that we handle all of these conflicts. As they arise, they create tremendous fire and heat and smoke and correspondence and emotion on both sides. In most cases the devils in the plot are the highway people who are charged with indiscriminate and cynical attitudes toward the conservation groups and the conservation interests. This just isn't true at all. It's just a difficult problem of making choices between two undesirable choices that are available to us.

M: I see. Did you have anything to do with the formation of the Department of Transportation?

T: Yes, I was in several task forces that were put together prior to the creation of the department, prior to the passage of the legislation that set

up the department. Those task forces largely established the framework of the organization that the department now has.

M: Was there any objection from your point of view to the formation of the Department of Transportation?

T: No, the Bureau of Public Roads as an organization and the groups that counseled with us all supported the creation of the department, as did most of us that were in the Bureau of Public Roads at that time.

M: Did you work with the trucking industry and the people that used highways primarily, or what?

T: Well, we largely worked with the groups such as the representatives of the state highway departments, the American Association of State Highway Officials, the National League of Cities, and the National Association of Counties, simply because in our program the dealings that we have are largely with those bodies rather than with such industry groups as the American Trucking Association, the American Automobile Association, and things like that. We did talk to those groups and they talked to us, obviously. In most cases--I think in virtually all cases those industry interest groups supported the creation of the department.

M: Did you have anything to do with problems in the maritime industry or anything outside of the area of the roads?

T: No, none whatsoever in that.

M: From your present point of view, does a Department of Transportation make sense to you? Is it logical? Has it worked?

T: It's logical, but at the moment I don't think it's working as well as was intended or as well as it can and undoubtedly will in the future. This is part of the shakedown experience, I suppose, of any new program, any new endeavor--and new people, new teams of groups of people working together.

As a result it takes a certain amount of time to smooth off the rough edges and get things meshed together and create a working team.

There has been, in my opinion, a considerable feeling in the new department, in many of the places where decisions are made that the highway program is responsible for many of the evils of the world, not only in the transportation field but elsewhere as well. This obviously is not a correct picture, but as a result of some of that fairly extremist feeling I believe that there is some antipathy toward the highway program and the highway agencies involved--a desire to take some of the Highway Trust Fund monies, for example, and take them from highway program and put them into mass transportation program in your urban areas, meaning in most cases divert them to such things as the Metro proposal here in Washington, D.C. area, a subway; same in Newark, New Jersey, and Philadelphia, and Chicago, and San Francisco, and Los Angeles, New York, places like that.

But the Highway Trust Fund was a solemn covenant, in my opinion. It was made between the people of this country where they agreed to accept a certain tax, providing that tax was devoted to a prescribed purpose. Now, that's pretty much the convenant that we made with them at the time that the Highway Trust Fund was created and to break that, I think, is just like breaking faith on any other contract or agreement--except that I think it's worse where the public officials break a convenant that way with the people than it is between two private individuals who may be contracting with each other.

M: It would certainly curtail your programs, too, would it not?

T: Yes, it would do that, but I believe that the public support for the highway program is so great that the public, of course, would demand a continuation of the program. This is really why we have a program with such

support. This is the reason we have such a large program--is because this is what the public and the people are demanding. This is the reason we have a highway program rather than a subway, because they would rather have an opportunity to drive their automobile even though they get caught in a traffic jam. It still apparently is more acceptable to them than would be a subway, because the places where there are subways available and mass transportation, buses or anything else, the people are not using them. They are transferring from those mediums of transportation to driving their own cars simply because, with any of the shortcoming, they would still rather apparently have the freedom of movement that the individual automobile permits them than to be constrained by any kind of mass transit facility.

So, as highway people and as industry that support the program through its taxes or participation in it--that is frequently referred to as the all-powerful highway lobby and therefore it is interested in keeping the program going just in order to keep its own work operation going, but actually it's the other way around. The lobby in favor of highways is the people that are using those highways, and by their use are signalling that this is what they want to do. Until and unless we change our system of government in this country and we decide to tell people how they are going to be allowed to move around, then I think we have to respond to what it is that they say that they want and are willing to pay for--and can pay for. That's the reason we have a large highway program with lots of support behind it, I believe, because this is what the people want.

M: In this thought to use your Highway Trust Fund for urban purposes, does this tie in in any way with the transfer of the urban mass transit program from Housing and Urban Development to the Department of Transportation? Is there any connection with that?

T: Yes, in that the planning of a transportation network in a large urban area, of course, is done on the basis of looking at all of the transportation needs, then an assignment of those needs to different modes of transportation. How can you accommodate that need by different modes or a combination of different modes? You make a study then of what would those cost, how they could be done, what benefits they would produce, whether or not they would do the job, and you come up with a system of transportation that provides for all of the needs with either one or several combined modes of movement. This is what we have been doing in the highway field for a long time;in order to plan our highway system we had to take the total transportation needs and then distill out of that the part of the total needs that involves highways and then make our highway plan to fit those on the assumption that some other agency responsible for another program would come in and meet the needs that were found necessary to be in some other mode of transportation. That is why the urban mass transportation activity was moved from HUD over into the Department of Transportation, so that we could combine the ability to meet the mass transportation, by the mass transportation methods, along with the highway method to meet the total needs of the community. We already had the rail group in the department so that putting all of these together in one place then supposedly would permit us to do the joint planning. Now, having done the joint planning the next step probably is to do joint funding. This is a possibility that has been suggested and, I think, is possibly an objective of the Department of Transportation--to convert the Highway Trust Fund into a General Transportation Trust Fund with its resources usable at the will of the local community for any of the modes that it chooses.

M: Are there limits to how far highways can solve a traffic congestion problem--such as in Washington, D.C.?

T: Definitely, there are. We have participated in the planning studies for transportation needs in the Washington metropolitan area for more than twenty years, and those studies have shown conclusively that we could not meet all the needs with any practicable number of highway projects--streets and freeways. We, therefore, supported the findings of all of those reports which have been that, in addition to the highway program, there must be a supplement by mass transportation--either by bus or by rail or by both, even supplemented by a certain number of people who walk, others who ride bicycles, and any other mode of transportation. We have supported that proposition right along. The highway people have been some of the strongest supporters of an additional transportation medium that would augment the Highway Program because I think we know better than anybody else that we can't build enough highways either physically or financially to be able to meet what we are certain are going to be the needs for transportation--not only now but twenty, twenty-five, thirty, forty years into the future. So we have consistently supported those things.

We have a strong feeling, however, that many of those mass transportations needs of that kind, the supplementing of the present personal passenger car movement by buses, might be over those same highways, might be a more efficient and less costly way of moving those additional people than by the proposed subway system simply because the bus system is cheaper, to start with, to build and to operate. It's much more flexible. It can go places and change its routes where fixed rail facilities can't move. If you project the growth of the city in a certain direction twenty years hence and you build a subway fixed rail system in that direction and then it doesn't materialize, or it goes in the other direction instead, you have a great big hole in the ground on which you owe a whole lot of money and on which you

can't get a service out of it. You can't pick up a hole in the ground and move it to the other side of town very well, whereas if you are using buses on the existing street system or on the freeway system--the highway system that is laid out, the highway network--those buses can be moved by somebody's command. You can reroute those buses to take them out of this area where you thought the growth was going to occur and transfer them over here to the place where it did actually occur.

M: Would you be in favor of setting up special bus lanes or streets where there would be no other vehicular traffic?

T: Yes, we have promoted that proposition. The trouble with it is that in most cases there are not sufficient numbers of buses traveling down a particular street to justify the complete removal of all automobiles along with those buses. The general populace would not support you in an effort that would block off a street here, or a lane, to keep it open for a bus every five minutes to run down there when people are crowded up over here in the adjacent lanes and are not permitted to use that lane. You've got to have public support for that kind of an action. So far we don't have sufficient bus usage to fill up that lane that way.

M: But you do see the necessity in the future for some kind of mass transit system?

T: Very definitely. We support that, and we have authorized exclusive bus lanes, even promoted such things as exclusive bus streets and things of that nature to make this bus usage easier and more acceptable. But, as I say, there isn't as yet the volume of demand that will fill up that available street or lane.

M: Do you see as necessary from the financial point of view for the buses to become sort of a public utility?

T: I think that's the trend that will develop. One of the reasons that the buses are not successful is that in most cases they are a private enterprise and the owner of that, whether a corporation or an individual, must of course make a profit in order to stay in business. With decreased patronage, which is the experience of most bus lines, he finds himself caught in a bind of decreasing revenues and increasing costs because wages go up, materials go up, and buses cost more, and all these things so that the individual operator is caught in a squeeze. As a result he has to raise the fare, and when he does he loses a certain number of customers that were with him before simply because they decide, "well, that's too high; I'm not going to ride any more." So he finds himself in a difficult position. As a result, I think that we may have to move toward public ownership and operation of bus systems in the country--at least the granting of substantial public subsidies to bus operators to supplement the highway movement.

M: Did you have anything to do with the passage of the Highway Safety Acts in 1966?

T: We worked on some of them, but we worked on them primarily from the standpoint of the highway part of that package. The main thrust of the Safety Act of '66 had to do with vehicles--vehicle design, production--and drivers--driver training, driver education, driver licensing, and things of that nature, driver behavior. While we have done some work on that in the past--done considerable work in fact in order to develop criteria with respect to highway design features--how wide should a lane be? How far do people drive from the edge of a lane characteristically, what are the performance characteristics of vehicles so that we can gauge their acceleration and braking capabilities, their steering capability--things of this nature. We've done a great deal of research on them, but the part that we

were involved in had primarily to do with setting of standards on the highway itself as distinguished from the vehicle and the operator.

M: What is the relationship of your Bureau of Public Roads to the National Transportation Safety Board?

T: The National Transportation Safety Board is an accident investigating agency which is quasi-independent. It is to some extent like the regulatory agencies, ICC and groups like that.

M: Does it oversee your program?

T: No, it does not. It has nothing to do with our program in terms of authority or oversight. In fact, they have no oversight over any of the operational aspects of the Department of Transportation. They are somewhat independent, even, of the Secretary. They are housed within the Department of Transportation for administrative services, for their budget, their housekeeping the payment of their salaries, and as a place to be lodged and handled within the government structure. But in terms of the Secretary being able to control their decisions as his decision, this he cannot do under the terms of the basic legislation. So they are set up so that they would be independent. They, then, can exercise freedom of action and decision with respect to factors that affect safety in transportation and cannot be overruled or influenced in their decision by any one of the modes or by the Secretary, who is the spokesman for all the modes. NTSB can make a decision independent of him and have no fear then of getting that decision overruled or vetoed by the Secretary before it is proclaimed.

M: Have your road programs been tied in with the so-called War on Poverty to any extent?

T: Oh, to some extent, in that we participate in all of the elements of that thing outside of the act itself--the general War on Poverty, which involves

equal employment opportunity efforts, training of minority groups, the question of improving housing where we dislocate people, the provision of summer jobs, youth opportunity things and that kind of effort, yes. We are very heavily involved in all of those aspects. We do not have a part of the program that says that we will take this many dollars or this percentage of our available programs and say that this is earmarked for a project in a particular ghetto area or anything like that.

M: But where possible you follow the guidelines of that program?

T: We follow those and we have made major adjustments in the conduct of the program and its administration to attempt to meet those objectives, those program efforts simultaneously with our major effort of trying to provide an adequate highway transportation system.

M: Does this hinder your programs at all?

T: In some cases it has slowed down the work, it has made considerable increase in administrative actions in connection with the program. It takes more manpower. It creates a large amount of paperwork, quite a bit of tension, quite a bit of discussion and review of programs in order to be responsive to many of the suggestions of the poverty-war people and their administrators. So it has definitely had an effect which is largely to increase the cost of the program, to slow it down, and to increase the administrative burden of the program.

M: Well, this must be, just assuming--I would think this would be somewhat irritating to a trained engineer who tries to get a job done as efficiently as possible--to have to bring in another program like this which is going to slow you down and make you more inefficient, perhaps.

T: In that sense, yes, but these are also national objectives. They are part of the total program of the Executive Branch of the government, part of the

President's program, part of the law of the land that has been enacted by Congress and is applicable to our program. So, whether they are irritating or not, they must be complied with regardless of how you may feel about them personally. They are the law of the land and we are accustomed to following the law of the land and the administrative direction of the President, regardless of who he is, in getting the job done the best way we know how. This is the way that the Civil Service in this government performs and always has. I think that most people that are acquainted with it would agree that this is the way it does its job.

M: I suppose this same sort of attitude would apply to the building of roads for the Appalachian area, roads back into the mountains and what not. Even though you might not get great use out of these roads, they would fit into the war on poverty.

T: Well, that's right. They fit into it even more than the regular program, because the Appalachian program was conceived as a program whose primary purpose was to open up, to assist in the development of a part of our country where incomes were low. Opportunities for jobs and a better life were less than they were in many other areas of the country. This is the reason why there was an Appalachian program.

The Appalachian program is considerably larger than just a highway program alone. The highway program is just a part of a larger package. It is the largest part, incidentally, in terms of dollars of the total program, and it does involve the creation of roads and the improvement of roads in very much the same way as the rest of the program, but it is primarily directed toward a social benefit type program as part of the larger war on poverty.

M: One last question: has the Cost Analysis Program put in by the Defense

department, by McNamara, has this affected your program at all?

T: Yes, we and all other government agencies, of course, are required by the Budget Bureau to follow the PPBS. [See tape #2.]

INTERVIEWEE: FRANCIS C. TURNER (Tape #2--continuation)

INTERVIEWER: DAVID G. MC COMB

November 12, 1968

T: Our program, like all the other programs in the government, has been required by the Bureau of the Budget to utilize the Planning, Programming, Budgeting System that was initiated in the Defense department under Secretary [Robert] McNamara. This has meant considerable adjustment in our budgeting procedures. Actually this year is the first year where we have operated fully under the system and it is probably a little early to try to draw any conclusion as to its values or its demerits. It has created a lot of extra work, some confusion. At the moment I'm not sure in my own mind whether it has created any advantages over the prior system in our part of the program or not.

M: Can you explain to me how this is applied? Is it the use of computers in, say, road design, or choice of location, or what? How does it apply?

T: No, it has nothing to do with that. It's much broader in scope. It approaches a problem on the basis of the establishment of a set of goals, then a way, a device, some sort of a scale, let's say, for measuring the performance against those goals. Then the budget is prepared on the basis of classifying each activity, each budget item, under one or another of those goals or objectives, with some way of trying to convert that budget item into a scale value so that you can see how "X" dollars under a certain budget item tend to meet that objective. This is very hard to do in our program because so many of the objectives are intangibles in terms of being able to measure them.

Take the one we were talking about awhile ago, beauty. How do you set

up a scale of values of beauty? Everybody will have a different scale, and individuals will have a different set of values and scales from one day to the next depending upon how they happen to feel that day, what their backgrounds are, what the circumstances are at any given time and place. Many of our program elements are intangibles that are very difficult to measure and put numbers onto. This system presupposes that you can convert everything into a scale of values, a set of numbers--that this particular item has a value of four on the scale, this one has a value of six, therefore it's one and a half times as good as the other one over here because its numerical value is six instead of four, one and a half times the value. The objective is to assign these numbers in a mathematical way so that then you can array them in ascending or descending order of values. Therefore you supposedly always then pick out the highest priority items with respect to each other to constitute your program in any given year.

If you had a way of accurately measuring all of the elements of the program, if it were as simple as saying we are going to produce this many apples and this many oranges and we like oranges twice as much as you do apples, then you could work out that kind of a system and it would be an effective way of doing it. But I am not sure that our program--and I think this is probably true of many programs--I am not sure that you can devise a workable scale of values that will permit you to do that on a very precise scheme. I don't believe that there is any substitute for a large amount of just plain horse sense, common sense, judgment, and experience. These are the kinds of things by which an administrator of a program decides what he wants to do at any given point in time--the things that he wants to emphasize, the ones he wants emphasized more than others. I don't know that there is any substitute for that. The PPBS scheme is intended to be either

a device to aid that gumption or judgment process or, as it is so often being done I'm afraid, it's a substitute for that judgment. In that respect I'm not sure it's really a workable or a desirable change in the budgeting process.

M: I see. I wish to thank you for the interview and for taking your time to talk to me.

T: It's my pleasure. I have enjoyed the years I have spent in the government service. I felt that I was working on something that was of benefit to the country, that it was a program that I thought people were behind, that I believed in, that I felt we were doing a good job on. I believe the public thinks so. There are problems involved in it, but there are in everything else. We are solving them. That's part of the fun of the job. But the feeling that you are doing something that's worthwhile and, in the last two years since I have been in this particular position as an appointee of the President, I have felt that he was in support of the program. He has indicated to me in conversations that he was a good roads enthusiast. He thought we had the finest highway system, the finest highway program there was in the world and that he was behind it 100 percent.

M: Has his support been consistent?

T: It has been. That's a real strong payoff for anybody trying to get a job done--is to feel that it's appreciated and that you have the support of the boss man himself. So that helps to make some of these problems like San Antonio and the others sort of disappear and makes them a little easier to do.

M: Good. Thank you very much.

M: I just asked Mr. Turner about his appointment and he was telling me about

this, so go ahead.

T: The appointment was a total surprise to me. I have been a career Civil Service employe since 1929 and had seen many appointees of various administrations come and go and had worked with them--incidentally found most of them to be very fine people, very well-qualified individuals for the jobs in the highway program. But a couple of days after Mr. Whitton, who was my immediate predecessor, had retired, I received a telephone call out of the blue from Marvin Watson who almost apologetically asked if it would be convenient if I could come over and visit with him for a few minutes.

Well, obviously, it was convenient for me to respond to the call from the White House, so I did. Being familiar with the clearance procedure, and so forth, having been in the White House on many other occasions, I immediately asked him which gate I should come in at and would he clear me with the guards for passage into the offices. He said of course he would and directed me which gate to come in at. He set a time about an hour later, and I was there and visited with him, very informally, very interestingly. He asked me if I would be willing to consider the place, that they had been given my name and would like to know if I would be willing to consider it--described certain things that the President was interested in, whether or not I would be sympathetic to those. They being in the nature of a good sound highway program--emphasis on the beautification program, emphasis on fair strong dealings with contractors, calling the shots as I saw them, and the continuation of an already good well-managed highway program. I told him that if that was the President's desire, that of course I would be willing to respond if that's what he wanted me to do and I could meet his specifications. He asked me for certain references, which I gave. I found that he did check on those references.

A few days later I had a call back from his secretary, again asking almost apologetically would it be convenient for me to come over and visit, asking me to keep the appointment confidential, that I would be expected to meet with both Mr. Watson and the President. Of course, I said that would be convenient, and the appointment was set up for six-thirty in the evening.

I went over and was cleared through as planned, waited for some little time while I didn't know whether they had forgotten me or whether I was out of place or what, till after some little time Marvin did appear and ushered me in to see the President who told me that he was sorry to have kept me waiting and apologized, I thought, very humanly. I didn't think it was necessary for him to apologize to me, but it certainly was indicative of the man and his consideration of people as individuals. He told me however that he had been struggling with an important military problem which turned out later to be nothing less important than the development of an anti-ballastic missile system. I, of course, felt that my appointment with him could certainly take a lower order of priority on his time than what he had been discussing.

He invited me to sit down in his office and in a very casual, relaxed manner spent a good part of an hour with me just discussing the highway program. I found to my delight and surprise that he knew a great deal about the program, its operation, the individuals involved in it, its mechanics, its objectives, some of its problems--all of which was very interesting and illuminating to me, that with as many problems as he had before him that he had that much knowledge of the highway program. But in the course of the conversation he outlined to me the kinds of things that he thought were important, what he would like to do, thus setting up the instructions, in

effect, that I have been trying to follow--and again asked me certain individuals that I knew and some of my background, but very little, which he apparently had been filled in on because he did know something about my background. With certain references he asked about, which I gave to him, he then said, "Well, we'll check these out, and if they check out satisfactorily, it will be my intention to send your name up for nomination."

I found that when I left his office about eight-thirty in the evening that immediately after I left he apparently went to work in following up on the references that I gave him because my references reported to me that the White House endeavored to reach them and did eventually succeed in reaching them before midnight that night and checked me out. A few days later I was given a call, again notifying me that my name would be sent up. Through the regular nomination and approval hearing appointive process I was confirmed and sworn in on the twenty-seventh of March, I think it was, into the job I now hold--a very interesting and thrilling experience and a climax to a Civil Service career.

M: Has your relationship with President Johnson always been a cordial one?

T: I do not have a great deal of contact with him, but the times that I have been with him have always been cordial. He has been extremely interested in the program, knowledgeable about it, and extremely understanding and cordial with me both individually, personally, and officially.

M: Thank you.

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By Francis C. Turner

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