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B-164497(3)
6-2-71



REPORT TO THE CONGRESS

Improvements Needed In Management Of Highway Safety Rest Area Program

B-164497(3)

Federal Highway Administration
Department of Transportation

BY THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL
OF THE UNITED STATES

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JUNE 2, 1971



COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
WASHINGTON D C 20548

B-164497(3)

To the President of the Senate and the
Speaker of the House of Representatives

This is our report on the improvements needed in the management of the highway safety rest area program. Federal participation in this program is administered by the Federal Highway Administration, Department of Transportation

Our review was made pursuant to the Budget and Accounting Act, 1921 (31 U.S.C. 53), and the Accounting and Auditing Act of 1950 (31 U.S.C. 67)

Copies of this report are being sent to the Director, Office of Management and Budget, the Secretary of Transportation, and the Administrator, Federal Highway Administration

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "James B. Aboody".

Comptroller General
of the United States

D I G E S T

WHY THE REVIEW WAS MADE

Safety rest areas are essentially rural facilities designed to provide motorists with adequate opportunities to stop safely and rest for short periods. They may include such comfort and convenience facilities as drinking water, picnic tables, and refuse containers.

Costs of constructing these areas are generally shared by the States and the Federal Highway Administration. Through 1970, about \$166 million of Federal funds had been authorized for the construction and improvement of 1,209 rest areas.

The General Accounting Office (GAO) conducted a review in eight States to determine whether the Highway Administration was providing States with the guidance and control necessary to ensure that

- rest areas were constructed first where most needed and
- Federal financial participation was limited to the cost of facilities and equipment reasonably necessary to meet motorists' needs.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Although the Highway Administration has issued guidelines for the States to use in selecting sites for safety rest areas, it has not required the States to establish and adhere to a system of priorities to ensure that rest areas are constructed first where most needed. (See p. 6.)

Studies conducted by the Highway Administration indicate that use of rest areas on interstate highways tends to increase as the distance from other rest areas and/or developed areas increases. The States included in GAO's review, however, had constructed rest areas close to developed areas even though comfort and convenience facilities generally were not available along stretches of highway without adequate stopping facilities. (See pp. 8 and 9.)

To increase the effectiveness of the safety rest area program, the Highway Administration should require that States build rest areas first where comfort and convenience facilities are not otherwise available.

The Highway Administration has issued guidelines to the States as to the size and type of facilities required for various traffic volumes; however, it has not required the States to adhere to these guidelines. As a result, rest areas included in GAO's review that had been designed to serve similar volumes of traffic

- had buildings which ranged in size from 320 to 1,400 square feet and which cost from \$10,650 to \$90,000,

- were located on from 3 to 44 acres of land, and

- provided from 14 to 102 parking spaces.

The cost and quality of equipment for these rest areas also varied widely. (See p. 18.)

GAO believes that, although regional differences in architectural styles and building materials and practices may have accounted for some of these variations, the wide variation of facilities and equipment resulted because the Highway Administration had not provided the States with specific guidelines for rest area facilities acceptable for Federal funding.

The Highway Administration needs to provide and enforce guidelines relating to the size, type, quality, and cost of safety rest areas that will be acceptable for Federal financial participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS OR SUGGESTIONS

The Secretary of Transportation should require the Federal Highway Administration to

- Require the States to establish priorities to ensure that safety rest areas will be constructed first where most needed (See p. 17.)

- Issue guidelines regarding safety rest areas setting forth limits on the amount of land and on the size, type, and cost of facilities and equipment that will be acceptable for Federal financial participation. (See p. 35)

- Establish review procedures at the national level to ensure that these priorities and guidelines are being followed. (See pp. 17 and 35)

AGENCY ACTIONS AND UNRESOLVED ISSUES

The Assistant Secretary for Administration, Department of Transportation, agreed that priority should be given to constructing rest areas along stretches of highway presently without adequate stopping facilities and said that the Department would continue to stress this priority.

The Assistant Secretary stated that the States had developed master plans for the location of safety rest areas which were being used in substantial conformity with existing guidelines. (See p. 15.)

The eight States included in GAO's review had developed State-wide master plans which showed existing and proposed locations for safety rest areas. The Highway Administration approved the plans even though

--most of the plans showed that the States intended to construct rest areas in or near urban areas, and

--most of the States had not established priorities to ensure that rest areas would be constructed first where most needed.

The Assistant Secretary stated also that the Department would continue surveillance of the design of safety rest area facilities, including the location and acquisition of land, to ensure that Federal funds were properly spent, but that he did not believe that it would be proper to establish specific cost limitations for equipment. (See p. 34.)

GAO believes that requiring the States to establish and adhere to a system of priorities for optimal locations of rest areas should help to ensure that the needs of motorists are met. For a program--such as the safety rest area program--for which the Government generally funds up to 100 percent of the cost, the Highway Administration should prescribe guidelines for acceptable facilities and equipment to ensure that the needed rest areas are being provided at a reasonable cost. (See pp. 17 and 34.)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE CONGRESS

This report is being issued to advise the Congress of the need for the Federal Highway Administration to improve its administrative guidance and control over the highway safety rest area program and thereby improve the program's effectiveness in meeting the needs of motorists.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AASHO	American Association of State Highway Officials
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
GAO	General Accounting Office

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Highway Beautification Act of 1965 (23 U.S.C. 131 note) provides for scenic development and beautification of roads in the Federal-aid highway program. The act established the following program areas. (1) outdoor-advertising control, (2) junkyard control, and (3) landscaping and scenic enhancement.

Our review was directed primarily toward examining into the manner in which the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Department of Transportation, the principal Federal agency responsible for highway matters, was carrying out its responsibilities with regard to landscaping and scenic enhancement, with particular emphasis on FHWA's administrative guidance and control over the location and construction of safety rest areas. Safety rest areas are off-roadway areas with provisions "for emergency stopping and for resting by motorists for short periods, with comfort and convenience facilities ***."

Prior to the 1965 act, the States were authorized by 23 U.S.C. 319 to include in the cost of Federal-aid highways subject to the normal cost-sharing ratios--90 percent Federal to 10 percent State for interstate highways, and 50 percent Federal to 50 percent State for primary and secondary highways--the cost of "such roadside and landscape development, including such sanitary and other facilities as may be deemed reasonably necessary to provide for the suitable accommodation of the public ***." FHWA generally limited Federal participation on the Interstate Highway System, however, to the costs of acquisition of land, and construction of turnouts and parking areas.

The 1965 act which, among other things, revised 23 U.S.C. 319, retained the provision for Federal participation in the cost of landscaping and scenic enhancement as a part of Federal-aid highway projects and authorized an additional allocation of appropriated funds to a State to be used for landscaping and scenic enhancement equivalent to 3 percent of the funds apportioned to the State for Federal-aid highways.

In accordance with the provisions of the 1965 act, FHWA revised its program to authorize Federal participation in the costs of such items as comfort stations, picnic tables, shelters, cooking facilities, and facilities to display traveler information. As of December 31, 1970, Federal funds of about \$166 million had been authorized for the construction and improvement of 1,209 safety rest areas. In the eight States included in our review, 236 rest areas had been constructed or authorized for construction as of December 31, 1970, at a cost to the Government of about \$32 million.

FHWA's administrative responsibilities are carried out principally by FHWA division offices in each State, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Each State has the primary responsibility for initiating proposals for safety rest areas, determining their location and size, and choosing the type of Federal participation. The States submit proposals to the responsible division office for approval. Normally the division offices approve safety rest areas on the basis of policy and procedural requirements promulgated by FHWA headquarters. In addition, division offices rely on informational guides developed by the American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO) and subscribed to by FHWA.

AASHO is a nationwide organization of representatives from each State's highway department and FHWA. The objective of the organization is to advise State and Federal highway officials in establishing a well-coordinated system of national highways. Through the years AASHO has issued policy statements and guides on a broad spectrum of highway-related matters, including safety rest areas.

CHAPTER 2

NEED TO IMPROVE ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL OVER

PLANNING AND LOCATION OF SAFETY REST AREAS

Although FHWA has established fairly definitive guidelines for the States to use in selecting sites along Federal-aid highways for safety rest areas, FHWA has not required States to establish and adhere to a system of priorities to ensure that safety rest areas are constructed at locations which would meet the motorists' greatest need. Generally, for the safety rest areas included in our review, the States had followed the practice of constructing safety rest areas on Federal-aid highways in close proximity to urbanized or commercialized areas even though comfort and convenience facilities were not available along stretches of highway without adequate stopping facilities.

The basic objective of the safety rest area program is to provide, for safety and convenience, adequate opportunities for the highway traveler to stop and rest for short periods. FHWA guidelines describe safety rest areas as essentially rural facilities which should be developed in a manner that the facilities, in combination with commercial facilities, would provide motorists with safe stopping places at reasonably spaced intervals. AASHO issued a policy statement on the location of safety rest areas in the Interstate Highway System in 1958. The guidelines contained in this policy statement, which were adopted by FHWA, state that

"Safety rest areas should be provided so that in combination with other stopping opportunities within or near cities and at service facilities on crossroads with interchange connections, there preferably will be facilities available for short stops about every one-half hour driving time."

Revised guidelines issued by AASHO in 1968 contain a similar statement. According to AASHO, the distances between available service facilities at crossroads and interchanges should be considered as one of the controlling factors in planning safety rest areas.

FHWA instructions issued in 1966 state that

"Safety rest areas should be located at practicable and suitable distances from the outer edges of suburban or urban development. Safety rest areas and similar facilities in connection with Federal-aid highways in the metropolitan areas are special cases and will require careful planning and justification of need."

The term "practicable and suitable distances from the outer edge of suburban or urban areas" was defined by FHWA in March 1965 as follows

*** [on the Interstate System] safety rest areas should be well removed, perhaps 10 miles or more, from the edges of suburban or urban development, ***."

*** [on the primary system] Safety rest areas are not to be approved within or near the developed areas, urban and suburban, of villages, towns, cities or rural industrial developments."

The instructions state also that rest areas "are not essential facilities in or near developed communities where local parks and roadside businesses furnish necessary motorist services and conveniences."

Locating highway safety rest areas away from commercialized or urbanized areas apparently was intended by FHWA, at the beginning of the program, as a means of ensuring that the traveler would be provided with some type of safe stopping place and comfort and convenience facilities at regularly spaced intervals and that, to achieve this objective, safety rest areas should be built first at those locations where such facilities were not otherwise available.

FHWA advised us that, although the guidelines requiring that rest areas be placed at practicable and suitable distances from the outer edges of suburban and urban development were appropriate during the initial stages of the program, the guidelines were under study for possible modification. FHWA stated that, with the complexity of urban highway systems,

it might be desirable, in some instances, to locate a rest area near an urban area and thereby provide an opportunity for a traveler to rest and read his map prior to entering the urban area. FHWA stated also that in some instances it might be desirable to include a visitor information center as part of the safety rest area development. FHWA stated further that the availability of a potable water supply or other utilities might dictate the location of a rest area in or near an urban area.

In addition, FHWA advised us that the policy which encouraged safety rest areas away from commercial facilities--which was suitable in 1966 when interstate highway rest areas were few and far between--also was under consideration for change. FHWA stated that it was neither proper nor safe to require a highway traveler to leave the interstate highway and find a roadside business to provide him with comfort facilities.

We recognize that certain changes and modifications of program policy are likely to occur as this program evolves, and we agree that changes should be made if they are in the best interests of the highway traveler. We believe, however, that there is some question as to the advisability of the changes contemplated if they are being considered on the basis of what will best serve the highway traveler.

FHWA has conducted national rest area usage studies within the past 3 years to determine the present demand for and characteristics of the use of existing rest areas. The studies were based on data collected on rest area usage, nationwide. The most recent study was conducted during the summer of 1970. The information in these studies indicates that use of rest areas on interstate highways tends to increase as the distance from other rest areas, cities, and developed areas increases. In addition, the most recent study indicates that, on the average, about 70 percent of highway travelers sampled stopped for the purpose of using the rest rooms or resting and that, on the average, less than 4 percent stopped for the purpose of using the telephone or getting travel information.

On the basis of these studies, it appears that the initial guidance to the States relative to the desirability of

locating safety rest areas away from urbanized or commercialized areas continues to have validity.

With regard to FHWA's belief that it is neither proper nor safe for a highway traveler to leave an interstate highway to find comfort facilities, the highway traveler must, of necessity, leave the interstate highway for any number of reasons, such as to obtain gas, food, and lodging. AASHO and FHWA criteria require that interstate highway interchanges be designed to provide for safe exit from and reentry onto the system.

Further, although FHWA stated that the available potable water and other utilities may dictate that rest areas be located near urban areas, we were advised by FHWA officials that the majority of these problems were encountered in the southwestern part of the United States. Also we found no evidence that the locations for the rest areas included in our review had been selected primarily on the basis of the availability of potable water and other utilities.

We selected 61 safety rest areas in eight States in five FHWA regions for review. Of these 61 rest areas, 24 were located within 2 miles and 10 additional were located either within 5 miles of towns or communities or within 5 miles of commercial or public facilities. FHWA considered two of these rest areas to be special cases and, in accordance with existing guidelines, required the States to justify their need. For most of the rest areas, however, we found no evidence that FHWA had questioned locating them near urbanized or commercialized areas. The following cases illustrate the types of site locations selected by the States and approved by FHWA that conflicted with the overall guidelines designed to provide safety rest areas along stretches of highway without adequate stopping facilities.

NEVADA

At the time of our fieldwork in Nevada, eight highway safety rest areas had been completed. Of the eight areas, four were located within the city limits of communities and two were located within 5 miles of communities. At the same time there were many remote and sparsely populated areas in the State where there were few, if any, comfort and convenience facilities along the highways. For example, there were no safety rest areas on the major highway between the Utah-Nevada border and the town of Winnemucca, Nevada, a distance of about 235 miles.

On the basis of our review of safety rest areas in both Nevada and other States, we concluded that extensive use of rest areas located in close proximity to communities by residents of the communities tended to restrict the availability of the facilities to travelers. For example, we noted that the parking lot of the safety rest area located in the town of Hawthorne, Nevada, was being used by customers of the grocery store and service station located directly across the street. In addition, the town restricted the hours during which the rest area was available and thereby further reduced its usefulness to motorists. (See photographs below.)



SAFETY REST AREA - HAWTHORNE, NEVADA

FLORIDA

FHWA approved Federal participation in the construction cost of two safety rest areas--Silver Beach and Gulf Breeze--in the State of Florida that are located on two-lane roads along which there are extensive commercial facilities, even though there were long stretches of highway in other parts of the State where few public comfort and convenience facilities were available. Gulf Breeze is located near Pensacola, Florida, and Silver Beach is located about 40 miles east of Gulf Breeze on the route which generally follows the Gulf Coast of Florida. Both safety rest areas are basically recreation oriented.

In June 1966, FHWA approved Federal participation in the acquisition costs of beach property at Silver Beach to preserve the natural scenic quality of the area. At that time it was not intended to develop the property for active recreation or associated uses. In December 1967, FHWA approved Federal participation in the costs of developing a rest area on the property, including construction of three comfort station buildings, six picnic pagodas, 12 picnic pavilions, and other associated facilities. The Federal cost amounted to about \$423,000, including about \$110,000 for the land.

The Silver Beach safety rest area (see photograph on p. 12) is located among a number of commercial facilities, including restaurants, motels, and service stations. About 5 miles west of Silver Beach there are numerous commercial facilities and about 10 miles west there is a State park, a wayside park, and a city park, all of which have comfort and convenience facilities.

During visits to the Silver Beach safety rest area, we noted that most of the visitors were swimmers. State officials advised us that the State had anticipated and designed Silver Beach to meet the recreational needs of visitors and that showers for the convenience of swimmers were going to be added at the State's expense.

FHWA also participated in the costs of developing a safety rest area at Gulf Breeze. The facilities include a comfort station, 20 picnic tables with shelters, and 32 auto-parking spaces. The comfort station also has showers, the

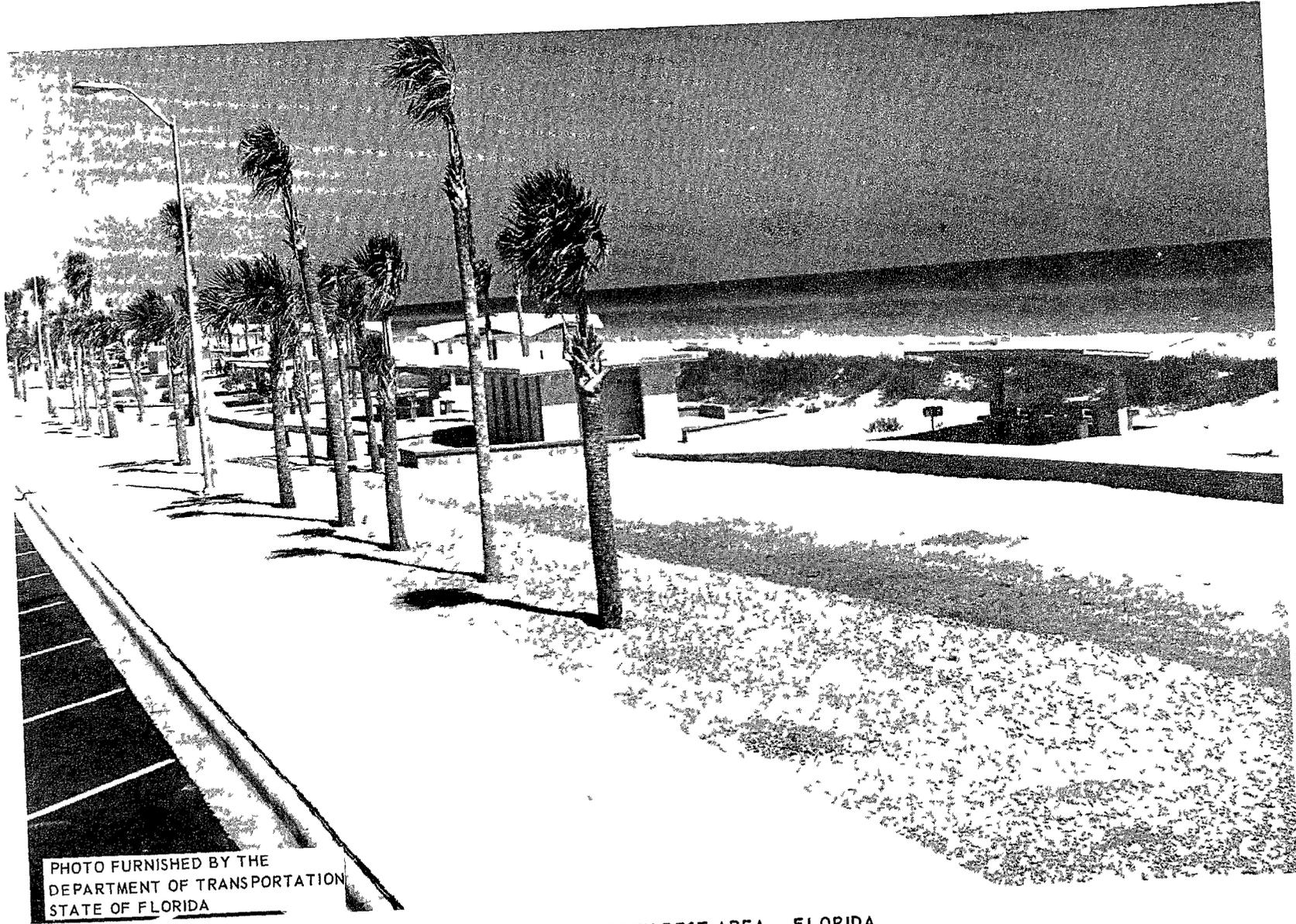


PHOTO FURNISHED BY THE
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
STATE OF FLORIDA

SILVER BEACH SAFETY REST AREA - FLORIDA

cost of which was borne by the State. Federal costs for this rest area amounted to about \$90,000.

The Gulf Breeze safety rest area is on the oceanfront and adjacent to the south end of the old Pensacola Bay Bridge which is advertised as the world's longest fishing pier. The driveway through the safety rest area leads to the old bridge. About 3 miles north, across the new bridge, is a State wayside park having complete comfort and convenience facilities similar to those provided at the safety rest area, including parking spaces for about 140 cars. (See photographs below) There is a public facility 3 miles southeast of the safety rest area that also has complete comfort and convenience facilities. Also there are numerous commercial facilities, such as service stations, restaurants and motels, within 2 miles east and 5 miles west of the safety rest area.



GULF BREEZE SAFETY
REST AREA



STATE WAYSIDE
PARK

Although neither the law nor FHWA regulations preclude States from constructing safety rest areas on Federal-aid highways at locations which naturally encourage recreation as a primary activity and only incidently provide highway

travelers with safety rest stops, it appears that these two safety rest areas should not have been given priority over other rest area locations because there are many other public and commercial facilities in these areas available to travelers for recreation and safety rest stops. There are, however, long stretches of highway in less developed areas of the State where no such facilities are available.

AGENCY COMMENTS AND OUR EVALUATION

In a draft report submitted to the Secretary of Transportation for comment, we proposed that FHWA require each State to establish and adhere to a system of priorities, to ensure that safety rest areas to be constructed on Federal-aid highways are provided first in those locations where most needed.

The Assistant Secretary for Administration, Department of Transportation, by letter dated December 23, 1970, commented on the matters discussed in our draft report. Certain of the Department's comments relative to our findings have been discussed on the preceding pages. In specifically commenting on our proposal, the Assistant Secretary stated that he agreed that priority should be given to rest area construction along stretches of highway without adequate stopping facilities and that the Department would continue to stress this in its administration of the program.

He stated also that the States had developed master plans which were being used substantially in conformity with FHWA and AASHO guidelines and that, of the 385 rest areas planned on controlled-access highways in Region 3, 62 have already been constructed. He stated further that the remaining 323 rest areas were on a priority schedule generally established by a combination of miles of highway and traffic needs, and that the master plans for this region showed an orderly system of development. In addition, he said that the necessity and justification for any significant variations would be given careful consideration by FHWA and the States on project-by-project basis.

With regard to the States' master plans, we found that the eight States included in our review had developed State-wide planning documents which showed existing and proposed locations for safety rest areas and that FHWA had approved the plans even though (1) most of the plans showed that the States intended to construct rest areas in or near urban areas, in direct conflict with the policy in effect at the time, and (2) most of the States had not established priorities to ensure that the rest areas would be constructed first where most needed.

We found that the master plan for the one State included in our review, which is within the jurisdiction of FHWA Region 3, showed only planned and existing rest area locations without indicating the priority for their construction. We noted that there were a significant number of safety rest areas yet to be constructed on controlled-access highways in the State. These areas apparently had priorities lower than those of other rest areas which had already been constructed on non-controlled-access, relatively low-traffic-volume roads, some of which were located near highly developed tourist areas.

In further commenting on our proposal regarding priorities, the Assistant Administrator pointed out that considerable savings in cost could be achieved by including site preparation work for a safety rest area as a part of a highway construction project and that in such cases priority determinations for the highway project, rather than the safety rest area, should dominate. In summary, he advised us that each safety rest area was considered in the light of its consonance with the State's overall need when the proposed area was submitted for approval and that its priority was evaluated at that time.

We agree that, where possible, States should include safety rest areas as part of highway construction projects. It should be noted, however, that 74 percent of the mileage of the Interstate Highway System was opened to traffic as of December 31, 1970, and that much of the remaining mileage was urban or suburban in character. In addition, in the States where we made our review, many of the rest areas in existence were constructed after the highways had been completed. Of the 181 rest areas planned for construction on the Interstate System in the eight States, 78 will be located on portions of the system which are currently open to traffic.

FHWA officials have pointed out that the overall cost of the safety rest area program is relatively small compared with the cost of the Federal-aid highway program and that it therefore receives proportionately less administrative attention.

Although the safety rest area program is small compared with the highway construction program, about \$166 million has

already been authorized for the safety rest area program. A program costing that amount appears to warrant prudent management. The size of the program should not be the only factor for determining the amount of control to be exercised by FHWA. FHWA should exercise the control necessary to ensure that the national objectives of the program are accomplished.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the safety rest area program is to provide a place for motorists to stop and rest for short periods. The safety rest areas we reviewed generally had been constructed near urban areas or commercial or public facilities which already had comfort and convenience facilities available. Although there may eventually be enough rest areas to adequately serve the safety rest needs of the motorists, we believe that FHWA needs to establish, and to require the States to adhere to, policies and procedures designed to ensure that safety rest areas are provided first in those areas where no such facilities are available. We believe also that, unless such action is taken, the States will continue to construct safety rest areas at locations which may not be of the most benefit to motorists in terms of providing such facilities along stretches of highway without adequate stopping places.

RECOMMENDATION TO SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION

We recommend that the Secretary of Transportation require that FHWA require the States to establish priorities to ensure that the safety rest areas will be constructed first at locations where most needed and to establish review procedures at the national level to ensure that such priorities are being followed.

CHAPTER 3

NEED TO PROVIDE GUIDELINES FOR

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION OF SAFETY REST AREAS

FHWA needs to provide, and to require the States to adhere to, definitive guidelines relative to the size, type, quality, and cost of safety rest areas acceptable for approval for Federal financial participation. Although FHWA has provided some guidance to the States, particularly with regard to such things as the amount of land to be developed and the number of parking spaces required for various traffic volumes, FHWA had not required the States to adhere to such guidelines.

Generally FHWA's practice seems to have been to approve and authorize Federal financial participation in the cost of acquiring, constructing, and equipping safety rest areas of virtually any size or quality proposed by the States. As a result, there is a striking variance in the type, size, quality, and cost of safety rest areas constructed by the various States to serve similar types and volumes of traffic. Some States usually provide large, elaborate facilities with customized equipment, while other States provide facilities and equipment which are comparatively small and austere.

Although regional differences in architectural style and generally accepted building materials and practices may have accounted for some of these variations, we believe that the extent of these variations resulted because FHWA had not provided and required the States to follow definitive guidelines as to the size, type, quality, and cost of safety rest areas acceptable for approval for Federal financial participation.

In the safety rest areas included in our review, we noted that comfort station buildings designed to serve similar volumes of traffic ranged in size from 320 to 1,400 square feet and in cost from \$10,650 to \$90,000. The number of automobile-parking spaces provided ranged from 14 to 102, and the area of land acquired ranged from 3 to 44 acres. The cost and quality of the equipment acquired for the rest areas also varied widely.

As early as July 1965, an FHWA headquarters official advised FHWA field personnel that some States, in anticipation of the Highway Beautification Act, were planning rather extensive and costly rest areas on the Interstate System and that there might be a need to establish uniform cost-control limits. In January 1967, another FHWA headquarters official advised FHWA field personnel that he had noted "wide variations in the scale of provisions for parking, picnic and comfort facilities" provided by the States and asked the States for a report on "rest area design guides and operational experience of the States ***."

Replies received from the States indicated that as of March 1967 there was a significant lack of uniformity on the location and cost of rest area facilities among the States. In a memorandum to the regions and States dated October 3, 1968, FHWA noted that the number and, in some instances, the quality of rest areas on the Interstate Highway System varied greatly from State to State.

Even though FHWA has long been aware of these significant variances in the safety rest areas provided by the various States on the Interstate System and the other Federal-aid highways, FHWA has not provided the States with definitive guidance as to the type and quality of facilities and equipment to be provided in safety rest areas.

FHWA guidelines issued in 1966 for all Federal-aid highways point out that rest and recreation areas "are to be provided with comfort and convenience facilities *** reasonably necessary to accommodate the traveling public" and that safety rest areas are for emergency stopping and for resting by motorists for short periods and could include such comfort and convenience facilities as drinking water, toilets, tables for meals, walkways, open shelters, bulletin boards, refuse containers, lighting installations, and signs. The guidelines state also that simple types of design of suitable appearance for each installation that will be durable and maintainable at low cost should be adopted for all facilities

FHWA has suggested that, for design concepts, the States consider the AASHO guidelines issued in 1958 and 1968 on safety rest areas. These guidelines contain little guidance, however, on the type and quality of facilities and equipment

to be provided, other than to point out that the objective of such facilities should be to provide reasonable convenience and comfort to motorists.

The AASHO guidelines state that the decision as to the extent of such facilities depends on the policies and practices of the various State highway departments that are based on their experiences. As early as 1958, however, the AASHO guidelines recognized that each item added to comfort and convenience facilities entailed not only additional costs for installation but also additional continuing costs for maintenance in a pleasing condition.

FHWA advised us that, contrary to our opinion as to the lack of definitive guidelines for comfort station buildings, there had been maximum size limits set and that the lobby size had been based on the number of comfort facilities within a building. We found that early in 1966 one FHWA region had provided the States under its jurisdiction with "some ideas" with respect to the size of buildings which might be provided on the basis of various traffic volumes. Overall lobby size in these buildings was generally related to the number of comfort facilities within the buildings.

In 1968, this same region definitized these ideas by setting maximum size limits for Federal-aid participation in the cost of comfort station buildings. The limits were based on the total number of comfort facilities within the building and were related to traffic volume factors. We found no evidence, however, that the other regions included in our review had adopted these maximum limits. In fact, one FHWA official from another region stated that within his own region there was no need for imposing maximum limits on the costs for rest area facilities and that, on a nationwide basis, if it were apparent that things were getting out of hand there might be a need in the future for definitive criteria relative to the extent of Federal participation in the costs of rest area projects.

FHWA also advised us that a number of safety rest areas built early in the program had proved to be inadequate and undersized and that it was costly to redevelop them to meet the new levels of traffic and use. FHWA stated that safety rest areas recently or currently being built were more closely meeting existing and projected needs and requirements.

FHWA indicated that it had encouraged rest area upgrading where it felt that a State's design was too frugal and austere and that it had asked for restraint where it felt that a design was too elaborate and costly.

On the basis of our review, we tend to agree with FHWA that some of the rest areas built early in the program are inadequate and undersized and that it probably would be costly to redevelop them. Some of the safety rest areas being constructed at the time of our review, however, were of the same size and design as those which had been built at the inception of the States' programs. For example, in two of the States included in our review, a one-size, one-design comfort station building was used for all safety rest areas, regardless of the traffic volume of the highways to be served.

If FHWA is concerned about the cost of redeveloping comfort station buildings, we find it difficult to understand why FHWA permitted these States to continue to construct such buildings. The fact that one State builds extremely modest 320-square-foot buildings to serve relatively large volumes of traffic while another State builds an extremely lavish 1,323-square-foot building to serve an relatively small volume of traffic indicates that FHWA's control over the States' programs is inadequate.

Some examples of the variances in the size of the safety rest area facilities and type of equipment provided are presented below

FACILITIES

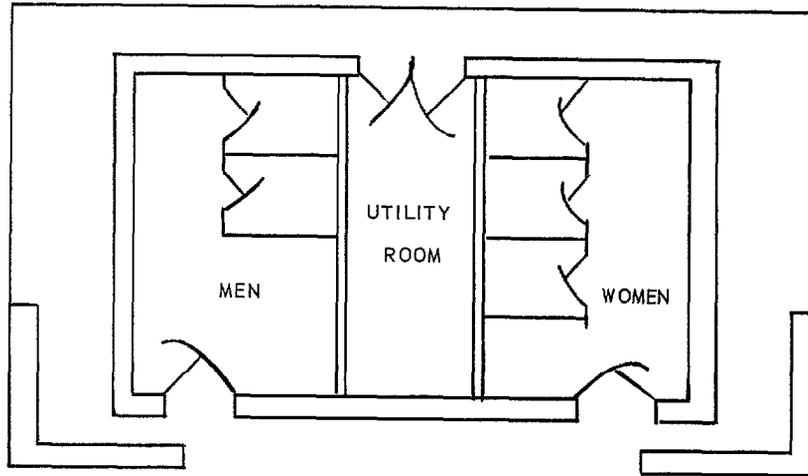
Comfort station buildings

Some States provide buildings which are simply designed and functional while other States "express their historical heritage by way of the visual impact of their buildings ***." Among the States where we made our reviews, Missouri provided the smallest comfort station buildings. Each of the buildings was about 320 square feet in size and was designed to serve traffic volumes ranging from 5,500 to 19,300 cars daily. The costs of the buildings ranged from \$10,500 to \$16,320, depending on location and the cost of labor. They were generally constructed of cinder block and included toilet facilities and small utility rooms. (See photograph and floor plan on p. 23.)

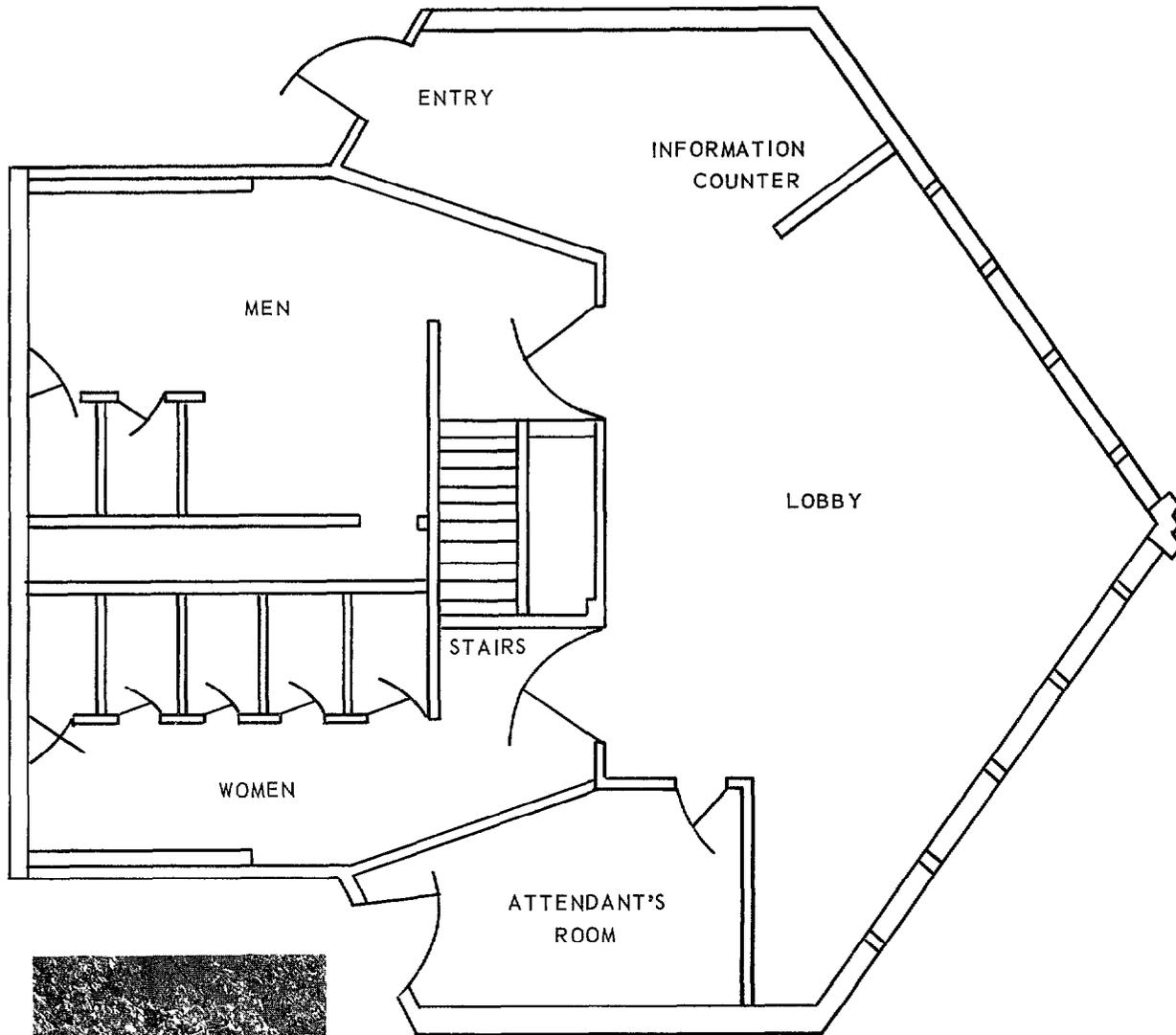
The comfort station buildings constructed in New Hampshire were a striking contrast to the buildings constructed in Missouri. Most of the buildings in New Hampshire were large--ranging from 700 square feet to 1,475 square feet in size--and usually contained lobbies, utility rooms, basements, caretakers' rooms, information booths, and fire-places.

Although the size and cost of New Hampshire's comfort station buildings generally seemed to be somewhat related to the volume of traffic to be served by the buildings, we noted that a large, elaborate safety rest area had recently been constructed on a section of the interstate highway near the town of Springfield which has a relatively low traffic volume. This comfort station building is 1,323 square feet in size--one of the largest in the State--and cost about \$90,000, a higher cost than that of any of the other buildings in our review.

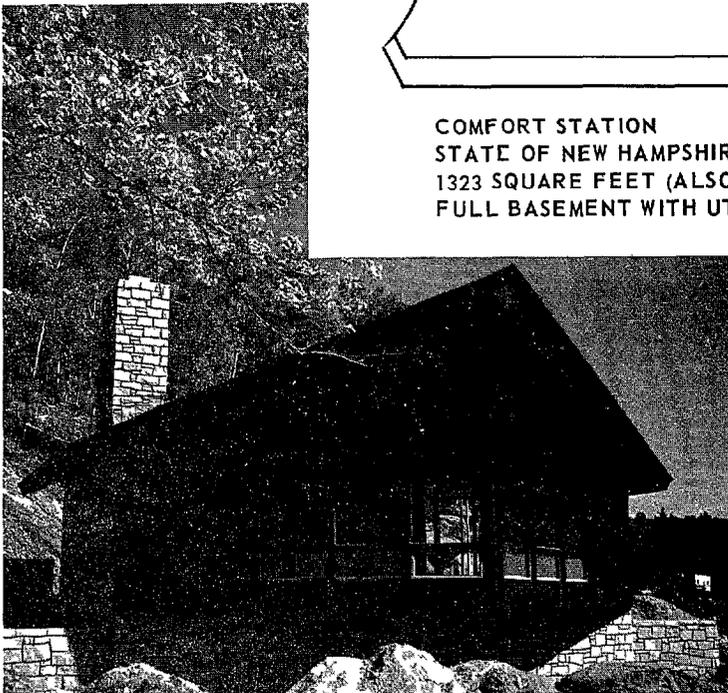
The building contains such amenities as a spacious lobby, a large stone fireplace, a caretaker's room with stove and refrigerator, and an information booth. The floor-to-ceiling picture windows overlook a scenic view of the surrounding mountains. In contrast to the size of the building, the parking area had spaces for only 15 automobiles. (See photograph and floor plan on p. 24.)



**COMFORT STATION
STATE OF MISSOURI
320 SQUARE FEET**



COMFORT STATION
STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
1323 SQUARE FEET (ALSO HAS A
FULL BASEMENT WITH UTILITY ROOM)



Land

Although FHWA has provided the States with fairly definitive guidelines as to the practical maximum limits for the number of acres of land required to develop a rest area with full comfort and convenience facilities, FHWA has not required the States to adhere to such guidelines. It has long been recognized that the amount of land required for rest area facilities is related to, among other things, the volume of traffic to be served by the facilities. The guidelines suggest from 5 to 8 acres for rest areas to serve a relatively small traffic volume--under 10,000 vehicles daily--from 6 to 10 acres for a medium traffic volume--10,000 to 25,000 vehicles daily--and from 8 to 12 acres for a large traffic volume--more than 25,000 vehicles daily.

The amount of land on which rest areas were constructed in the eight States included in our review ranged from

--2 to 42 acres for rest areas serving small traffic volumes,

--5 to 38 acres for rest areas serving medium traffic volumes, and

--3 to 44 acres for rest areas serving large traffic volumes.

FHWA stated that the amount of land needed for rest areas varied because the land need for parking areas might vary with the design year and forecast of traffic, the type of vehicles, the type of traffic, the availability of land because of terrain, the State's prerogative to build a full facility initially or in stages, and the economies associated with the purchase of full parcels rather than several remnants.

We recognize that the amount of land acquired for safety rest areas will vary, depending upon the type and amount of traffic eventually to be served by the facilities and the availability of land. We also agree that, in some cases, more land than is actually needed must be acquired for such reasons as the owner's being unwilling to sell only part of a parcel or the acquisition of one parcel's eliminating access to other parcels.

As previously indicated FHWA has issued guidelines to the States relative to the minimum and maximum number of acres of land required for development of rest areas to serve various volumes of traffic. In establishing these guidelines, FHWA took into consideration such things as the types and projected volumes of traffic and the ultimate development of full rest area facilities. Thus we believe that the minimum and maximum number of acres specified in the guidelines, revised when necessary, should be used as a basis for establishing the amount of land eligible for Federal financial participation.

We believe also that FHWA should require a State to justify any purchase of land which significantly exceeds the number of acres suggested in the guidelines and that, if the State cannot justify the purchase of the additional land, FHWA should limit Federal participation to the cost of acquiring the number of acres required to provide a facility adequate to serve the expected volume of traffic.

Parking spaces

FHWA and AASHO have long recognized that the need for parking spaces at rest areas is directly related to the volume of highway traffic to be served. FHWA guidelines suggest that up to 30 parking spaces be provided for a small traffic volume, up to 40 for a medium traffic volume, and up to 60 for a high traffic volume.

Parking spaces provided at the rest areas included in our review ranged from

- 11 to 93 for small-volume facilities,
- 13 to 82 for medium-volume facilities, and
- 14 to 102 for high-volume facilities.

As previously indicated, we recognize that various factors, such as the type of traffic and the amount of land available for use, have a bearing on the number of parking spaces to be provided. In view of the suggested relationship between traffic volume and parking spaces needed, however, it is difficult to understand FHWA's basis for approving Federal participation in financing the construction of a safety rest area in California which provides only 14

parking spaces to serve an interstate highway having a high potential traffic volume and of a safety rest area in Florida which provides 93 parking spaces to serve a two-lane road having a very low potential traffic volume. Both of these rest areas are located in heavily tourist-oriented areas and are in close proximity to commercial and public facilities.

EQUIPMENT

The cost of certain basic items of equipment generally found in the safety rest areas included in our review varied significantly from State to State. Although FHWA and AASHTO have suggested that picnic tables, refuse containers, bulletin boards, and sun shelters be provided whenever possible, FHWA has not provided the States with maximum limits on the amount of Federal participation in the cost of such items of equipment. As a result, some States provide functional, relatively inexpensive equipment, while other States provide custom-designed equipment apparently chosen more for its esthetic value than for its functional value.

We found that the cost of

- picnic tables varied from \$75 to \$628,
- refuse containers varied from no cost to \$200, and
- bulletin boards varied from \$250, to \$3,500.

In addition, we found that certain States and Federal agencies within those States often had purchased similar items of equipment at considerably lower costs.

Although the variation in the cost of each item of equipment may not be substantial when considered separately, the acquisition of more costly equipment than necessary could have a significant overall effect on the Federal participation in the cost of the program, especially when considered in light of the fact that the States are planning to construct about 1,000 additional safety rest areas on the Interstate Highway System.

FHWA stated that it had been aware of variations in the cost of certain equipment found in safety rest areas and indicated that these variations, across the country, were not unexpected and not necessarily unreasonable. FHWA stated that the variations had been brought about, in part, by such economic and marketing factors as supply and demand, labor and materials, transportation, and the controls sometimes placed by Government and labor organizations on materials, labor, and products and that, because these factors varied so much and changed so often with the local or national economy, placing any dollar cost limit on items of

basic equipment would be arbitrary and difficult to administer. Likewise, purpose and design will vary between items ostensibly having similar functions.

We recognize that all of these factors would have some effect on the cost of various items of equipment furnished in safety rest areas. We believe, however, that the wide variations in type and cost of equipment encountered in our review were not the sole result of such factors, particularly since we found wide variances in both type and cost of items in adjacent States. The variances in these adjacent States were caused primarily by the fact that one State chose to use custom-designed equipment while the other State used "off the shelf" items.

Presented below are examples which, in our opinion, illustrate the need for FHWA to provide to the States guidelines setting forth the type and cost of equipment eligible for Federal participation. FHWA should approve any significant deviations from such guidelines only if a State shows that the high costs for certain items of equipment are caused by economic factors of the types mentioned by FHWA.

Picnic tables

Most of the States included in our review provided simple all-wood or wood-and-pipe frame picnic tables in their highway safety rest areas. In some States the tables were attached to concrete slabs, and in other States the tables could be moved from place to place. (See photographs on p. 30.) The cost for these types of tables ranged from \$75 to \$210.

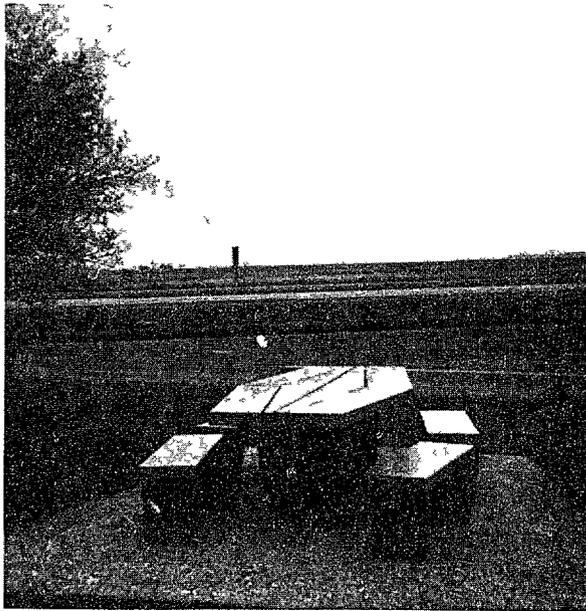


STATIONARY PICNIC TABLE



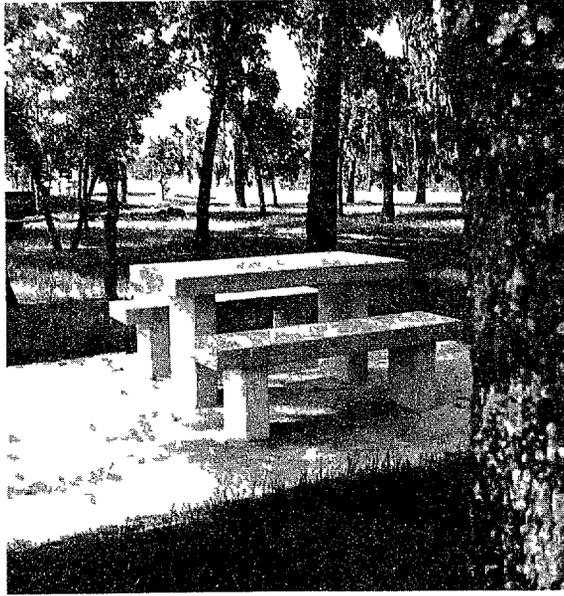
MOVEABLE PICNIC TABLE

In their safety rest areas, however, Florida and California provided picnic tables which were elaborate in design and which cost considerably more than those the two States and certain Federal agencies provided for use in State and national parks. Also, the tables Florida and California provided in their rest areas cost considerably more than did the tables provided by the other States included in our review.



CALIFORNIA PICNIC TABLE

The picnic tables California provided in some of its highway safety rest areas have truncated, diamond-shaped tops made of clear redwood supported by concrete pedestals. (See photograph above.) The cost of these tables ranged from \$175 to \$500. In contrast, in its parks and recreational areas California provided standard redwood picnic tables which cost about \$85 each. We also noted that in its recreational facilities the Western Region of the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, which serves California, generally provided a wood table with metal supports and two benches that cost about \$80, in some cases it provided concrete and redwood tables or all-concrete tables.



FLORIDA PICNIC TABLE

The picnic tables Florida provided in some safety rest areas had concrete-slab tops and seats, both covered with ceramic tile, and were supported by prestressed-concrete columns which were cemented to a concrete-slab foundation. (See photograph above.) The cost of these tables ranged from \$480 to \$1,100. State officials advised us that, although ceramic tile shattered easily and was expensive to repair or replace, this type of table was easy to maintain, and that concrete, instead of wood, had to be used because of the termite problem in the State.

Florida apparently is the only State which provides ceramic tile-covered tables. State officials advised us that they were considering other types of tables.

We noted that in its State parks Florida provided treated-pine picnic tables which cost about \$30 each. In its recreational areas the National Park Service, Southeast Region, provided wood-and-pipe frame tables which cost about \$46 each.

Also in a national forest in Florida the Department of Agriculture provides concrete-slab picnic tables which cost about \$158 in 1966. On the basis of information supplied by Department of Agriculture officials, we estimated that these tables would cost about \$210 at the time of our review.

Refuse containers

In their safety rest areas, two of the States included in our review provided reconditioned oil drums and paint barrels and furnished them at no cost to the Federal Government, while other States provided metal trash cans which were anchored to the ground and which cost about \$40 each. California, however, provided both reconditioned oil drums and precast-concrete trash cans. The precast-concrete trash cans cost up to \$200 each. (See photograph below.)



CALIFORNIA REFUSE CONTAINERS

AGENCY COMMENTS AND OUR EVALUATION

In commenting on our proposal that FHWA develop, and require the States to adhere to, specific guidelines regarding safety rest areas setting forth limits on the amount of land and on the size and type of facilities and equipment that would be acceptable for Federal participation, the Assistant Secretary for Administration, Department of Transportation, stated that FHWA would continue surveillance of the design of these facilities, including location and land acquisition, to be certain that Federal funds were properly and wisely spent and that, in revising the current guidelines, FHWA would consider the advisability of specific guidelines along the line recommended by us.

He stated also that FHWA would continue to furnish information and guidance to the States on the design and purchase of rest area equipment to be certain that the Federal funds were properly spent but that he did not believe that it would be proper to establish specific cost limitations for equipment.

We believe that, in the absence of such guidelines regarding the type and cost of equipment acceptable for Federal financial participation, there will continue to be a lack of assurance that needed facilities are being provided at reasonable costs. We believe further that in a program such as this, in which the Federal Government generally contributes up to 100 percent of the funding, it is incumbent upon the administering agency to prescribe definitive guidelines.

CONCLUSION

The States included in our review generally acquired land and provided facilities and equipment which varied widely in terms of size, quality, type, and cost. In view of the nationwide character and scope of this program, and since the Federal Government generally contributes up to 100 percent of the funding, we believe that it is reasonable to expect that FHWA would provide more definitive guidelines to the States as a means of controlling the costs of this program.

RECOMMENDATION TO SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION

We recommend that the Secretary of Transportation require FHWA to issue specific guidelines regarding safety rest areas setting forth limits on the amount of land and on the size, type, and cost of facilities and equipment that will be acceptable for Federal financial participation, and to establish review procedures at the national level to ensure that such guidelines are being followed.

CHAPTER 4

SCOPE OF REVIEW

Our review was conducted at the Washington, D.C., office of FHWA; the FHWA regional and division offices; and the offices of the State agencies responsible for implementation of the safety rest area program, under the Highway Beautification Act of 1965, in the States of California, Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, and Vermont.

We reviewed pertinent legislation, FHWA policies and procedures, and FHWA and State records pertaining to the safety rest area program. We also discussed the program with officials of FHWA and the States that we visited.

Our review included examination into the planning for and construction of 61 of the approximately 236 safety rest area projects constructed or authorized for construction in the eight States. We selected the 61 safety rest areas to provide samples of projects constructed to serve projected average daily traffic volumes of (1) under 10,000 vehicles, (2) between 10,000 and 25,000 vehicles, and (3) over 25,000 vehicles, because these projected average traffic volumes were the bases for certain construction criteria contained in FHWA's instructions. We selected the most recent projects constructed or under construction on interstate, primary, and secondary highways within these volumes.

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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
WASHINGTON, D C 20590

ASSISTANT SECRETARY
FOR ADMINISTRATION

December 23, 1970

Mr. Richard W. Kelley
Assistant Director, Civil Division
United States General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Kelley

Mr. Bernard Sacks' letter of July 22 requested comments on the GAO Draft Report entitled "Improvements Needed in the Management of the Safety Rest Area Program."

The report contends that there is (1) need to improve administrative control over the planning and location of safety rest areas, (2) need to improve guidelines for constructing safety rest areas, and (3) need to control costs on items of equipment provided in safety rest areas.

A number of guidelines have been prepared by FHWA and AASHO on the subject. Primarily among these are the Instructions for Highway Beautification Cost Estimate, the 1958 AASHO Policy for Safety Rest Areas, the 1968 AASHO Guide for Safety Rest Areas, and FHWA PPM's 21-4.6, 21-17, and 80-1. This material has a scope and flexibility that recognizes the States' prerogative for initiative, a degree of tolerance for individual State policy decisions, and some latitude for individual engineering judgment in each specific project situation. The principal guide has been PPM 21-17, which was developed shortly after passage of the Highway Beautification Act of 1965. FHWA and AASHO policy on safety rest areas has been further developed and refined in recognition of changing traffic and traveler requirements, and the need to broaden and reissue PPM 21-17 has been recognized.

The safety rest area program is relatively new, particularly on Interstate highways where there has been a generally short-time progressive development of a series of safety rest areas along any one route. Developing experience has shown that it is economically advantageous to include a safety rest area as a part of a highway construction project, that there is a need for larger safety rest areas than were first thought to be necessary, and that visitation and usage have been greater than was anticipated. Some rest areas built early in the program at a relatively moderate cost are now recognized to be inadequate in size, quality, and service, and need to be updated at costs reflecting present high cost levels for labor and materials. High operating and maintenance costs have led the States to conclude that it is preferable to have a smaller number of large safety

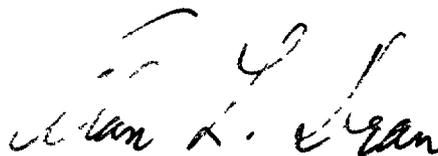
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rest areas along a route than a greater number of small ones. The priority for construction of safety rest areas primarily is governed by a State's schedule for the orderly progression of construction of sections of highway routes.

We appreciate the concern and interest you have shown in the safety rest area program and can assure you that the GAO report will be carefully considered in further consideration of the long-range criteria for this program. While we have recognized the need to broaden and reissue PFM 21-17, the report has given us a greater awareness of this need and for placing greater stress on completing this revision.

For your further information, we are enclosing detailed comments relative to the primary findings as set forth in the report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Alan L. Dean".

Enclosure

Alan L Dean

BEST DOCUMENT AVAILABLE

GAO DRAFT REPORT

"IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED IN THE MANAGEMENT OF THE
SAFETY REST AREA PROGRAM"

NEED TO IMPROVE ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL OVER THE PLANNING
AND LOCATION OF SAFETY REST AREAS

The report indicates that " . . . it is reasonable to expect that FHWA would establish a system of priorities and control the construction of rest areas so that each State has sufficient facilities to provide the highway traveler with regularly spaced areas where he can stop and rest for short periods of time" The report recognizes that "master plans" have been developed in eight of the nine States reviewed, but that in some instances site locations were not in consonance with the general principles of locating safety rest areas away from urban areas and public or commercial establishments which could provide the traveler with safe stopping and comfort facilities, also that most of the master plans did not show a priority in which the State's safety rest areas would be built.

The GAO report recommends that FHWA.

1. Reevaluate the States' master plans for safety rest area locations
2. Require the States to establish a priority for construction.
3. Establish a review procedure to assure that the priorities are followed.

Guidelines prepared by FHWA and AASHO call for safety rest areas on freeways to be located approximately 30 to 40 minutes driving time apart and to have facilities deemed necessary for the comfort and convenience of the traveling public. For this purpose, master plans showing proposed locations were prepared by the States.

Generally, safety rest areas on one system in a State should be developed on a priority basis. However, this may conflict with the significant economy that could be affected by including the safety rest area as a part of a highway construction project. In many cases, the several work items of a safety rest area project, i.e., the right-of-way acquisition, ramps, parking, grading, paving, buildings, utilities, and landscaping can be included in a total highway project with considerable savings in costs. Accordingly, the Statewide priority determinations for the highway project, not the safety rest area, should dominate. Traffic considerations may

APPENDIX I

influence priorities. In some instances, spacing may be affected because the rest area facilities have been added to an area primarily selected for its scenic quality. In other instances, spacing may be affected by having to shift proposed sites because of topography, lack of adequate and suitable land, and improper conditions for water, sewage disposal and other utilities.

Generally, the States' master plans are being used in substantial conformity with FHWA and AASHO guidelines. In Region 3, for example, there are 385 rest areas planned on controlled-access highways. Of these, 62 have been constructed. The remaining 323 have a priority schedule generally established by a combination of miles of highway and traffic needs. A look at the master plans for this Region will show an orderly system of development. The necessity and justification for any significant variations are given careful consideration by FHWA and a State on project-by-project basis.

SAFETY REST AREAS LOCATED NEAR OR WITHIN URBAN OR SUBURBAN AREAS OR COMMUNITIES

The GAO report points out that rest areas in four States had been located in or near urban areas, contrary to FHWA guidelines. These guidelines, instructing that rest areas be placed "at practicable and suitable distances from the outer edge of suburban and urban development," were appropriate during the initial stages of the highway beautification program, but are under study for possible modification at the present time.

There are instances where it is desirable to provide a rest area when approaching an urban area, usually for rest and orientation, prior to entering the city. In some cases, a visitor information center is made a part of the rest area development. Here, brochures, maps, and other material, and sometimes trained personnel, may help a traveler. With the complexity of some urban highway systems and the confusion of several systems converging on a large city, a traveler needs and appreciates the chance to rest, read his map, and decide upon his actions before entering the busy city traffic.

In other situations, the appropriate desirable site or the availability of a potable water or other utilities supply may dictate the location of the rest area near or in an urban area. Further, in some States, FHWA has concurred in a program of roadside parks which generally are small areas along primary or secondary routes. Some States develop these roadside parks in small towns. This practice is considered to be acceptable and consistent with the legislative intent of the highway beautification program.

SAFETY REST AREAS CONSTRUCTED NEAR PUBLIC OR COMMERCIAL FACILITIES MADE AVAILABLE BY OTHER THAN THE STATE HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

The report implies that whenever there are developments along a highway or at an interchange, such as public parks, gasoline stations, restaurants, motels, and so forth, safety rest areas are to be located elsewhere. The

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FHWA policy which encouraged this position, although suitable in 1966 when Interstate rest areas were few and far between, is under consideration for change.

We believe that it is neither intended proper nor safe to require a highway traveler to leave the Interstate, for example, and find a roadside business to provide him with comfort facilities. It is not fair to the operator of the business. Seldom does a driver's or a family's need for a comfort stop coincide with a vehicle's need for fuel. An out-of-the-way corner of a gasoline station or the parking area of a motel is not a proper or desirable place for a driver to park and stay for rest, relaxation, or picnicking. Many businesses would not have the facilities for parking and comfort to accommodate more than just a few of the great mass of Interstate users at any given time. Public park areas may have facilities adequate for a sizable number of highway travelers, but may not permit trucks or tractor-trailers to enter the area. A number of public parks charge a fee to enter the area.

Finally, if safety rest areas were not allowed where comfort and convenience facilities were to be found near cities or at service facilities on cross-roads with interchange connections, many routes in the Nation never would be eligible for a rest area, particularly on the Interstate System. In the East particularly, interchanges are located at fairly frequent intervals, even in rural areas, and there are business establishments at practically every interchange

SAFETY REST AREAS CONSTRUCTED AT LOCATIONS WHICH ENCOURAGE LONG-TERM STOPPING FOR RECREATIONAL PURPOSES

The GAO report points out that rest areas have been constructed at locations which encourage long-term stopping for recreational purposes. The report quotes PPM 21-17, which states, "Safety rest areas are not provided for overnight camping or active recreation"

Again, the report cites an FHWA guide which has been in the process of change. Section 319(b) of Title 23, USC, enacted as part of the Highway Beautification Act of 1965, provides that highway beautification funds may be used for the ". . . acquisition and development of publicly owned and controlled rest and recreation areas" This provision of the law relating to recreation is reflected in a Circular Memorandum forwarded to the field and the States on February 1, 1968. This said in part

"At some locations the rest area might include adjacent lands for recreational purposes. In this manner the facilities . . . would serve both the motorist that would make a short stop and also those that wished to stop for several hours and enjoy some active recreation."

This policy, which has been followed for the past several years, is consistent with the provisions of Federal law as set out in Section 319(b).

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In summary, we see no need for a specific reevaluation of the States' master plans. Each safety rest area is considered in the light of its consonance with the State's overall needs when it is submitted for project approval. Its priority is evaluated at that time. Likewise, FHWA's regular review procedures, which are well known to GAO, appear adequate to assure compliance with established policies. We do agree with GAO that, wherever possible, consistent with other constraints mentioned above, priority should be given to rest area construction along stretches of highway presently without adequate stopping facilities, and we will continue to stress this in our administration of the program

NEED TO PROVIDE GUIDELINES FOR CONSTRUCTING SAFETY REST AREAS

The report suggests that there is a ". . . need for increased administrative guidance and control by FHWA to provide more assurance that the limited amount of funds available in this program are used more efficiently and that the facilities constructed serve the needs of the highway traveler in a uniform and consistent manner", that this need is brought on ". . . because FHWA has not provided the States with adequate guidelines as to acceptable sizes and costs for safety rest area development and has not exercised sufficient control over the States' plans for constructing these facilities."

The GAO report recommends that FHWA

1. Develop more specific limits on the type, amount, and cost of rest area facilities and the amount of land to be acquired.
2. Develop appropriate controls at the national level to assure that the guidelines are being followed.

During the short time that the Interstate safety rest area program has been in progress, much knowledge has been gained by FHWA and the States regarding highway traffic and traffic volumes, travelers' needs and inclinations, and the effect these have on safety rest area sizes and costs. FHWA has been aware of the variations in range of sizes and costs during this early "growing" period. Guidelines first promulgated by FHWA and the States, anticipating a growing and changing program, were written with considerable flexibility and latitude.

On any given route within a State or between States, safety rest areas, of necessity, will vary in acreage. For instance, land needed for parking areas may vary with the design year and forecast ADT, the class of vehicle (truck and passenger car), the type of traffic (business and recreational), a State's prerogative to build a full facility initially or by stages, and the availability of land because of terrain (mountainous, rolling, and flat). Land needed and suitable for buildings and utilities

may vary because of topography and geology (for siting, potable water supply and sewage disposal). Land in excess of actual physical needs may be acquired because of the benefits, economically and from maintenance and operations viewpoints, of having full parcels rather than several remnants. Land may be acquired to serve as a screen or insulation for safety rest areas or to preserve, protect or display some outstanding scenic resource.

A number of safety rest areas built early in the program, in accordance with FHWA and AASHO guidelines promulgated at that time, have proven to be inadequate and undersized in land and facilities. It is costly to redevelop them to meet the new levels of traffic and use. Rest areas recently or currently being built are more closely meeting existing and projected needs and requirements. Guidelines currently in use were written to permit greater flexibility, latitude and judgment by FHWA and the States.

Generally, within any given State, safety rest area buildings may vary in size because of design year, ADT and other factors, but will be compatible in architectural style, materials, and quality

Since 1966, there have been FHWA guidelines relative to the maximum limitations of comfort station facilities. Lobby size has been based on the number of sanitary facilities within the building. In keeping with the guidelines, some States prefer a minimum approach to building design and do not include a lobby, while others provide a lobby.

A number of States are providing welcome centers at State entrances. Some are being built on the primary approaches to large metropolitan areas or areas having significant historic, scenic, or other values. These welcome centers may be separate developments or may be combined with comfort stations in safety rest areas. A number of them have large lobbies and trained personnel to dispense information. Limits of Federal-aid participation in welcome centers are determined by existing guidelines and generally go only to the limits permitted for a normal safety rest area. The additional costs are financed by funds from other sources.

The Federal-aid program is a partnership between the Federal and State Governments. The State has the right of initiative on a project. For this reason, we believe that the States have the right, within reason, to determine the character and quality of the buildings they propose to construct. Some States express their historical heritage by way of the visual impact of their buildings, others provide the simplest of comfort facilities. We have encouraged upgrading where we have felt that a State's design was too frugal and austere, and we have asked for restraint where we have felt that a design was too elaborate and costly, but, within a reasonably wide range, we have respected the State's right of initiative. We shall continue to inform and advise the States of up-to-date construction techniques and materials which would have an effect on the design and cost of structures.

APPENDIX I

In summary, we will continue surveillance of the design of these facilities, including location and land acquisition, in order to be certain that Federal funds are properly and wisely spent. Likewise, in revising PPM 21-17, we will consider the advisability of specific guidelines along the lines recommended by GAO.

NEED TO CONTROL COSTS ON ITEMS OF EQUIPMENT PROVIDED IN SAFETY REST AREAS

The report states that ". . . costs for certain basic items of equipment generally found in safety rest areas--picnic tables, refuse containers and bulletin boards--vary widely from State to State." It admits that variations are to be expected in a program that spans the continent, but that ". . . the extent of the variations, with regard to the quality and type of equipment, indicates a need for FHWA to establish upper limits on the cost of these items. . . ." Further, the report judges that some States ". . . provide custom designed equipment apparently chosen more for its aesthetic value than its functional value."

The GAO report recommends that FHWA

1. Provide the States with more specific guidelines as to the types and quality of rest area equipment.
2. Establish cost limitations for items of equipment.

We are very much aware of variations in the cost of certain equipment found in safety rest areas. These variations, across the country, are not unexpected and not necessarily unreasonable. They are brought about, in part, by such economic and marketing factors as supply and demand, labor and materials, transportation, and the controls sometimes placed by Government and labor organizations on materials, labor and products. Because these factors vary so much and change so often with the local or national economy, we believe that placing any dollar cost limit on items of basic equipment would be arbitrary and difficult to administer. Likewise, purpose and design will vary between items ostensibly having a similar function.

We know of no single instance where basic equipment is not serving the function for which it was procured and provided. Form follows function. The shape, size, materials and appearance of such items as picnic tables, refuse containers, bulletin boards, and shelters are basic factors in a fully design-integrated system of consistently high quality, considered desirable by most States. A few States prefer to design for each location. Early rest areas could and did contain minimum gravel parking, pit toilets, pump-handle water supplies, oil drum trash cans and the simplest of picnic tables and benches. Today, the traveling public demands better than these. In our present society, environmental conditions are becoming increasingly important and the States generally wish to provide the very best for "State advertising." Furthermore, the great volume and high intensity of

use in most rest areas requires the provision of great capacity and high-quality facilities if they are to serve adequately over a reasonable span of time.

In support of those States that are providing more customized rest area equipment, a distinction should be recognized between the cheap-dollar, lowest first-cost, high maintenance picnic table, trash can, bulletin board or other installation and those that cost more initially but are much more resistant to wear, defacement or other vandalism, or outright theft, and are less costly to maintain.

The environment of a safety rest area differs from that of most public outdoor recreational areas. Generally, a rest area is relatively small, compact and highly developed, serving many travelers for a relatively short span of time per person. Public parks generally are large and are used less intensively for longer periods of time for a different purpose. Park facilities and equipment, if appropriate, reflect the character and purposes of the park. They would most likely be unsuited in character and quality for safety rest area purposes.

In summary, we will continue to furnish information and guidance to the States on the design and purchase of rest area equipment in order to be certain that Federal funds are properly spent. We do not believe it proper to establish specific cost limitations for equipment.

APPENDIX II

OFFICIALS OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT
RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF
ACTIVITIES DISCUSSED IN THIS REPORT

	<u>Tenure of office</u>	
	<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION		
(note a):		
John A. Volpe	Jan. 1969	Present
Alan S. Boyd	Jan. 1967	Jan. 1969
SECRETARY OF COMMERCE (note b):		
Alexander B. Trowbridge (acting)	Jan. 1967	Mar. 1967
John T. Connor	Jan. 1965	Jan. 1967
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATOR		
(note a):		
Francis C. Turner	Mar. 1969	Present
Lowell K. Bridwell	Apr. 1967	Jan. 1969
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC ROADS (note c):		
Ralph R. Bartelsmeyer	May 1969	Present
Francis C. Turner	Jan., 1967	Mar. 1969
Rex M. Whitton	Feb. 1961	Dec. 1966
HIGHWAY BEAUTIFICATION COORDINATOR		
(note d):		
George F. McInturff (acting)	June 1969	Aug. 1970
Fred S. Farr	Feb. 1967	May 1969

^aPosition created by the Department of Transportation Act (Pub. L. 89-670).

^bAll functions, powers, and duties of the Secretary of Commerce under certain laws and provisions of law related generally to highways were transferred to and vested in the Secretary of Transportation by the Department of Transportation Act.

^cTitle changed in April 1967 from Federal Highway Administrator, Department of Commerce; position abolished by reorganization of FHWA effective August 6, 1970. Duties transferred to four associate administrators.

^dPosition abolished by reorganization of FHWA effective August 6, 1970; duties transferred to the Scenic Enhancement Division, Office of Environmental Policy, FHWA.