

# ARTBA Battles Highway Funding Decline As Environmental Movement Emerges

By Tom Kuennen

After 15 years of expansion, spending on highways from both federal and state agencies plummeted in the decade of the 1970s.

During the 1970s, the fledgling environmental movement set its sights on highway and airport construction.

But through the 1970s, the American Road & Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA) vigorously supported higher spending levels and defended transportation infrastructure improvements against the overreaches of the nascent environmental movement.

ARTBA participated in developing surface transportation legislation of 1970, 1973 and 1976, even as persistent inflation, nagging energy and material shortages, and executive branch “impoundments” of federal highway funds unnerved the highway construction industry throughout the 1970s.

During the decade, ARTBA proposed the original legislative concepts for two federal programs that today represent the industry’s fastest growing segments: the 3R program of highway resurfacing, rehabilitation and restoration; and the federal bridge repair and replacement program. To further influence legislation, by the end of the 1970s ARTBA had established a Political Action Committee.



Aerial photo showing part of the 3.3 miles of construction of new U.S. Route 50 as part of the Appalachian Corridor “D” in Harrison County, W.Va. (1971). Photo courtesy of Appalachian Regional Commission.

In this decade, ARTBA also helped launch the Airport and Airway Trust Fund, established by the Airport and Airway Revenue Act of 1970, which has boosted state and local airport capital investment for over three decades.

All of this took place as world events shook surface transportation financing, such as the Arab oil embargo which caused gas shortages nationwide and eroded national confidence.

## Interstate Enhanced Prosperity

But, even as popular support for highways wavered, the country benefited from the enhanced prosperity improved roadways and the Interstate system were providing.

This was recognized by lawmakers. For example, the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1970 explicitly provided for Economic Development Highways to revitalize rural economies and reverse rural-to-urban migration.

The spreading Interstate system opened up rural areas for light manufacturing, bringing new jobs and wealth; underpinned the new growth of the Southeast and Southwestern states; and provided new access to urban cores from booming suburban areas on the edges of our metropolitan areas.

Perhaps nowhere in the 1970s was the impact of improved roads so great than in Appalachia, where transportation investments under the Appalachian Regional Development Program were being used to change the economic and social structure of rural areas.

## Clean Air Act Energizes “Greens”

The new national environmental acts of the period challenged the highway construction community and empowered the growing professional

“By the early 1970s, unquestioned support for large-scale highway construction had dissipated... [s]tate highway engineers could count on neither broad public support for new projects nor the finances necessary to complete many projects.”

-- American Association of State Highway & Transportation Officials, “The States and the Interstates” (1991)

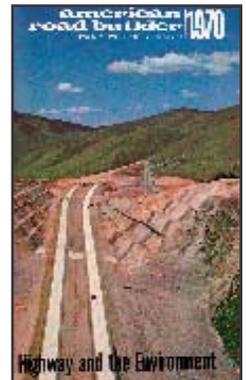
environmental, or “Green Movement.”

“The Interstate system was conceived as a long-distance travel network,” said John W. Yago, former staff director, Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, and ARTBA congressional relations director and publications editor in the 1980s and 1990s. “It was only when the politics shifted to local travel, and the Interstate started penetrating the cities, that we began to get trouble.”

The “Green Movement” got its first national legislative impetus during the Nixon administration (1969-1974), when Congress passed and the President signed the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and the Clean Air Act (CAA) in 1970.

As author of the History of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, ARTBA’s Yago said the act intended that strict limits on mobile emissions would stimulate development of pollution control technology. Stationary industrial sources also were targeted.

It wasn’t until much later—with the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 and ISTEA of 1991—that the act was modified to provide more



A 1970 cover of “American Road Builder” magazine, focusing on highways and the environment.

### ARTBA TIMELINE

1970

Ralph Heffner, Heffner Construction Co., is elected ARTBA chairman at New York City convention.

ARTBA-pushed federal Airport Trust Fund established.

1971

Barber-Greene Co., Vice President Edward H. Holt is elected ARTBA chairman at Los Angeles convention.

President Nixon unsuccessfully attempts to abolish new U.S. Department of Transportation.

1972

October: Congress adjourns without passing the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1972.

serious linkage between transportation and air quality planning. This change would allow the professional environmental community to use provisions of the CAA to halt or slow down road projects in the 1990s.

## ARTBA Tackles "Green Movement"

ARTBA quickly sought to understand the "Green" movement and the effects of the mobile emissions requirements on the industry. In October 1971, ARTBA held a timely conference, which focused on highways and the environment. The conference, "Environmental Awareness Relating to Tomorrow's Highways,"

was an "eye-opener" for the industry, ARTBA said.

"Environmentalists, ecologists and concerned citizens are not merely protesters engaged in a popular cause," ARTBA learned at the conference. "These people are doing their homework. They appear with well-researched material regarding the harm they feel is being inflicted on the environment."

While understanding the environmental complaints against roadbuilding, ARTBA articulated a fair and balanced policy that resisted the attacks that the environmental lobby brought against highway construction "inside the Beltway."

For example, in March 1973 testimony, ARTBA's Contractors Division President J.L. Cone, Jr., told a House subcommittee: "We do not see a need for additional federal requirements in the social and environmental areas... the highway program should not be singled out for special requirements which are not applied elsewhere to other national programs."

By the end of the decade, ARTBA became more aggressive in advocating for the highway construction industry, including the underwriting and release of *Getting There from Here*, a 25-minute film on road and bridge needs, narrated by Lowell Thomas and punctuated with commentary by actors such as Lloyd Bridges. It was distributed nationally and provided a pro-industry message for the industry.

## ARTBA Boosts Transportation Safety

Traffic and work zone safety—and the products that enhance it—was a major theme of ARTBA's outreach in the 1970s.

In the 1950s, ARTBA's Committee on Traffic Control Devices, as it was known, worked with FHWA's predecessor—the Bureau of Public Roads—to develop traffic control manuals, including the first *Manual*

**"The preservationists [have] decided that highways have replaced money as the root of all evil, and the social scientists that highway taxes are the bottomless pitcher from which can pour forth an endless stream of dollars to solve the nation's manifold problems."**

*-- Rep. John Kluczynski (D-Ill.), chairman of House Subcommittee on Roads, to ARTBA members in 1970*

on *Uniform Traffic Control Devices*. The committee later became ATSSA's Traffic Sign, Signal and Pavement Marking Group.

Separately, the American Traffic Safety Association (ATSA) was founded in 1965, according to a 1973 essay by its president, Bob Dunbar.

In 1972, ATSA affiliated with ARTBA's Materials & Services Division. "The membership felt that it needed a pipeline to the U.S.

Department of Transportation and other federal agencies which the highly prestigious ARBA could provide," Dunbar said.

During its association with ARTBA, ATSA and ARTBA worked to establish clear and concise specifications for traffic control devices, and conducted product testing. ARTBA M&S Division Managing Director Bob Garrett served as ATSA executive secretary.

In 1977, ARTBA founded its Transportation Safety Advisory Council, composed of representatives of all ARTBA divisions, charged with developing traffic safety policy and programs.

And in 1979, ARTBA's Traffic Safety Industry Division (TSID) was created to give safety professionals and firms a "home" within the association.

ATSA separated from ARTBA in 1980, and in 1984, was renamed the American Traffic Safety Services Association (ATSSA). Garrett served ATSSA as executive director until 1997.

## ARTBA Helps Dedicated Bridge Funding Become Law

In the 1970s, both industry and legislators became painfully aware that the existing federal funding formulas—that encouraged spending on new construction—were shortchanging bridges.

A series of massive bridge failures focused more attention on bridge needs. "The Silver Bridge collapse in 1968 between Ohio and West Virginia was a calamity and brought attention to the problem," said then-ARTBA President Dan Hanson.

Relief came in the 1970s via legislation initiated by ARTBA. Utilizing a Special Bridge Replacement Program, some \$835 million was appropriated by Congress over the seven years from 1972-1978. But the backlog of deficient bridges grew worse. ARTBA devoted an entire issue of its monthly journal to bridges and testified in Congress to the problem shortly thereafter.

ARTBA and its allies lobbied for even higher funding of bridges and were rewarded when \$4.2 billion for bridges alone over a four-year period was authorized in the Surface Transportation Assistance Act of 1978. The act required an inventory of all off-federal-aid-system bridges and an inspection training program was prepared by FHWA.



ARTBA boosted its commitment to work zone safety during the 1970s.

### ARTBA TIMELINE

E.J. Peltier, Sverdrup & Parcel, is elected ARTBA chairman at New Orleans convention.

1973

On Jan. 1, Daniel J. Hanson, Sr., becomes ARTBA president.

At Houston convention, Ray Burgess, director, public works, Baton Rouge, is elected ARTBA chairman.

1974

J.L. Cone, Jr., Cone Bros. Contracting Co., is elected ARTBA chairman at Las Vegas meeting.

1975

E.D. Etyrne's James A. Nelson is elected ARTBA chairman at Chicago convention.

**“In 1973, Congress did enact legislation of major significance to highway, airport and urban public transport construction. ARBA was in there for the united highway industry, testifying, position papering, and getting facts before senators and representatives at every step of the way.”**

*-- ARTBA Director Don Buttenheim to the Construction Industry Manufacturers Association, 1973*

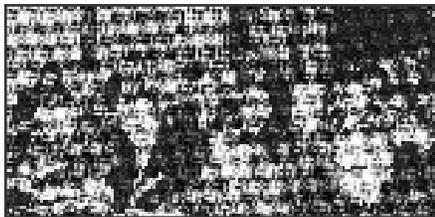
## Turmoil in Funding

Environment and traffic safety were new battle cries for ARTBA in the 1970s, but its fight for funding was a much older theme.

After years of steady increases since 1956, capital outlays for highways stalled as the 1970s began. Despite the 1970 act—which extended the Highway Trust Fund an additional five years—the federal gas tax remained flat, at four cents-per-gallon. Only the additional vehicle miles traveled by newly mobile America allowed receipts to increase at a constant rate.

“In addition to the rising cost of labor, other pressures are pushing highway costs up,” noted ARTBA President Burton F. Miller in September 1971. “The highway dollar nowadays must be stretched to cover the cost of protecting the environment and guarding against any adverse impact on the communities through which the roads pass.”

One of the battles fought by ARTBA through the Nixon, Ford and Carter administrations in the 1970s was the unilateral “impoundment” of highway funds by the Executive Branch of government. Three



ARTBA members testifying during a Senate Subcommittee on Roads hearing in 1973. From left to right: J.L. Cone, Eugene Johnson, Daniel Hanson and Ray Burgess.

administrations said that increased spending on highways would inflate labor wages, raise raw material prices and encourage more driving in a time of oil shortages.

“The practice of executive impoundment is well known to this committee,” said ARTBA Senior Vice President Ray Burgess before the House Committee on Public Works in March 1973. “We feel very strongly that the practice of impounding Highway Trust Fund monies must be abandoned.”

In April 1973, a U.S. Court of Appeals ruled against impoundment. And the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974, signed by Nixon that year, was a victory by ARTBA and its allies. But the battle continued. The oil crisis gave new justification for impoundment of highway funds, and by May 1974, the total highway funds impounded were about \$8 billion, ARTBA reported.

Year-in-and-out, administrations would continue to support spending levels below ceilings authorized by Congress.



A map showing the progress of the Interstate system as of June 1973.

## ARTBA Fights for Interstate and Airports

As the nation entered the 1970s, the Interstate system was far from being completed. Originally the final apportionment for the Interstate system was to have been for FY 1969. But by September 1972, of 42,500 miles of designated Interstate system at that time, just 33,736 had been completed.

That was a driving theme as ARTBA

## ARBA Gets Its ‘T’

In the 1970s, ARTBA formally became multi-modal, with the “T” for transportation added in 1977. A new logo incorporating a red “T” was developed by 3M.

ARTBA’s shift to aggressively support construction of multiple modes of transportation followed the creation of the multi-modal U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) in 1966, and paralleled the transformation of state highway departments into state DOTs.

The name change in 1977 was a symbolic occasion because it marked ARTBA’s 75th anniversary. ARTBA celebrated its Diamond Anniversary at its annual convention at Bal Harbour, Fla.

“The ARBA position that modal transportation development programs are not competitive but complementary enhances ARBA’s credibility,” said ARTBA Chairman Ralph E. Heffner at the association’s annual meeting in January 1971. “We speak as an organization favoring total transportation development rather than the narrower position of only representing the highway industry.”



actively influenced the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1973. “During the 1970s, the push was on to complete the Interstate system, but we kept falling back,” said then-ARTBA President Daniel J. Hanson, Sr. “We needed to complete the system.”

Yet another ARTBA effort was the birth of the Airport and Airway Trust Fund in 1970, which provided stable federal investment in airport construction and safety improvements.

Prior to 1970, federal aviation spending fluctuated from year to year. ARTBA and its allies felt a dedicated trust fund would lock-in increased capital investment in airport infrastructure. Nixon argued that aviation tax revenues also should contribute to the day-to-day costs of operating the air traffic control

### ARTBA TIMELINE

1976

J.C. Landen, 3M, is elected ARTBA chairman in San Francisco.

1977

*March:* ARBA marks 75th anniversary in Bal Harbour, Fla., changes name to ARTBA.

Wilbur Smith, Wilbur Smith Associates, is elected ARTBA chairman.

*May:* The first 40-page ATAC report is released.

ARTBA’s Transportation Officials Division is established.

system. Ultimately the fund paid for Federal Aviation Administration operating expenses as well as capital improvements.

## ATAC Identifies, Publicizes Needs

During the 1970s, and under the weight of tremendous increase in usage, highway conditions continued to decline. To demonstrate surface transportation needs, ARTBA launched the pioneering American Transportation Advisory Council (ATAC).

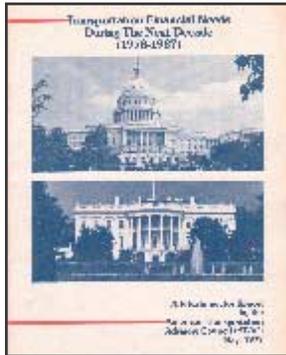
“This loosely knit coalition was formed for one purpose only, the preparation of a private sector report on total United States transportation needs for the decade ahead,” said 1978 ARTBA Chairman Dick Stander, president of Mansfield Asphalt Paving Co., Mansfield, Ohio.

Beginning in April 1976, under the direction of ARTBA President Hanson, the association coordinated the coalition of the 40-plus transportation-oriented associations which comprised ATAC.

Released in May 1977, the first ATAC report suggested a federal share of \$153 billion of \$250 billion in total highway capital needs for the decade 1978-1987. ATAC called for total annual capital needs of \$37.3 billion in 1975 dollars for each year of the decade 1978-1987.



President Jimmy Carter



Cover of the 1977 ATAC report

To facilitate work, the Surface Transportation Assistance Act of 1978 supported lower state matches for non-interstate, bridge, and Interstate 3R work. But significantly—in view of the aging infrastructure—the act required states use at least 20 percent of apportioned primary and secondary funds for 3R projects.

ARTBA supported this law. “This provision does not appear particularly onerous,” ARTBA said, “in view of the current inclination of states to emphasize this type of work.” ARTBA objected to the additional record keeping that this element would require.

ATAC represented a powerful tactic—an avalanche of facts—that would serve ARTBA and its members well as the next decade approached.

But ARTBA used other ways of influencing policy. In November 1979, the ARTBA board directed Hanson to proceed with creating a limited purpose Political Action Committee (PAC). The ARTBA-PAC allowed the association’s members to support the election of federal candidates—through ARTBA—who believed in strong transportation investment.

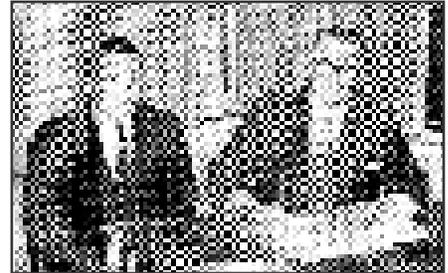
As the decade ended, ARTBA and the nation watched closely as President Jimmy Carter took on California Governor Ronald Reagan in what turned out to be a landslide victory. Reagan’s election would provide many opportunities—and challenges—for the transportation construction industry in the 1980s.

### NEXT MONTH:

#### ARTBA & the Nation Plan for the Post-Interstate Era (1980-1989)

### About the Author

Tom Kuennen is principal, The Expressways Publishing Project (EPP), located in Wheeling, Illinois. He has more than 20 years writing experience on transportation construction issues. You can learn more at EPP’s website, [www.expresswayonline.com](http://www.expresswayonline.com).



Burton F. Miller (right) retired as ARTBA president in 1973 and Daniel J. Hanson took his place as head of the association.

## 100th Anniversary Trivia..

1. What year did ARBA become the “American Road & Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA)?”

- A) 1975
- B) 1977
- C) 1979
- D) 1981

2. What year was the Transportation Officials Division established?

- A) 1977
- B) 1979
- C) 1981
- D) 1983

3. What year was the Traffic Safety Industry Division established?

- A) 1969
- B) 1974
- C) 1979
- D) 1984



Answers: B, A, C

### ARTBA TIMELINE

#### 1978

Dick Stander, Mansfield Asphalt Paving Co., is elected ARTBA chairman at Washington, D.C., convention.

#### 1979

In New Orleans, A.B. Long, chairman of A.B. Long, Inc., is elected ARTBA chairman.

ARTBA-Political Action Committee (ARTBA-PAC) is established.

ARTBA Traffic Safety Industry Division is established.