

ARTBA Resumes Fight For Interstate System As World War II Ends

By Tom Kuennen

The roadbuilding contractors and government agencies of the American Road & Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA)—then called the American Road Builders Association—suffered more during the catastrophe of World War II than they did from the Great Depression.

While during the Depression ARTBA had to struggle to defend road user taxes from being cannibalized for other public programs, road taxes continued to fund a steady flow of construction projects (see “As Depression Deepens, ARTBA Defends Road Program, User Taxes,” *Transportation Builder*, April 2001, pp. 19-23).

But roadbuilding in the United States came to a near halt as the life or death clash of the Second World War unfolded. Petroleum and its residual asphalt were consumed in vast quantities by the war effort, while auto users found their gasoline rationed and unnecessary trips voluntarily curtailed.

Naval station, port, airfield and Army fort construction had top priority for cement and aggregates. Steel that would have built bridges now was used to build warships and tanks.

Workers who would have driven trucks, operated steam shovels and rollers or placed asphalt or concrete now were volunteering to see the Big Show, or later drafted.

And while the national system of interstate and defense highways first spoken of during the Depression continued to

draw interest—especially for hauling war materiel—its adoption lay in the next decade, after years of intensive postwar politicking, research and lobbying.

ARTBA was there, too, ready in 1946 with a postwar plan for roadbuilding that addressed the need for capacity increases as well as economic security for returning vets and domestic war employees re-entering the civilian work force. In doing so, ARTBA addressed fears that the nation would slide back into Depression after the economic stimulus of the war was removed.

“[Highway construction] assumes increasing importance during the postwar period, with its uncertainty concerning economic conditions and the necessity for providing jobs for the returning military forces,” ARTBA said in a 1946 promotional flyer. “The association has dedicated its plan to the rehabilitation of the armed forces and the war workers and the construction of a modern highway system.”

For Some, Depression Beat War Years

The collapse of highway construction during the war years [1941-1945] is attested by statistics. “Fiscal year 1941 was the peak year for the Federal Aid program with 12,936 miles

“The interstate system came along in 1956, but prior to that, all the talk at ARTBA was to try to develop that system. We finally got it enacted into law under Eisenhower.”

-- ARTBA member and 1978 Chairman Dick Stander, interviewed in 2001

of roads of all classes completed,” wrote the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in its U.S. Bicentennial history, *America’s Highways, 1776-1976*.

After 1941’s peak, completed mileage fell to 10,178 in 1942 and only 8,445 in 1943. “After 1942 practically all new

work related directly to national defense,” FHWA said. “The diminishing Federal Aid funds were used to solve traffic problems in areas congested by war activities.”

There were no Federal Aid authorizations for FY 1944 and 1945.

“Our company was very fortunate during the 30s, in that we were able to find enough work to do, particularly local streets, to supplement the highway work in the area,” said Dick Stander, retired president of Mansfield Asphalt Paving Co., Mansfield, Ohio, and 1978 ARTBA chairman. “We made considerable progress during the Depression. We never had a losing year.”

But business declined very much in World War II, he said. “The war came on, and necessitated cuts in roadbuilding and personnel,” Stander said. “When the war came, I was working at the Ohio Department of Transportation’s highway testing laboratory. Of course, I went in the service and spent five years in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, working primarily on research and development.”

“Because state funds had dried up considerably, most state money was going for maintenance work,” Stander said. “So many of our employees went into the service that it was difficult to find help,” he said. “We found work wherever we could find it, such as around the defense plants. Our volume was very slim during the early 40s.”



“Roads for Defense” was ARTBA’s motto during World War II.

ARTBA TIMELINE

1940

Hal Sours, assistant director and chief engineer, City of Columbus, Ohio, elected ARTBA chairman at Chicago convention that attracts 47,500.

September: President Roosevelt signs Federal Aid Highway Act, authorizing Public Roads Administration to prioritize roads important to national defense.

1941

As war rages in Europe and the Far East, ARTBA sponsors a “Roads for Defense Forum,” which spotlights inadequacy of existing system for military and defensive purposes.

In Early 1940s, 'Toll Roads and Free Roads' Anticipates Interstates

A defining moment on the journey to 1956's interstate system was the 1939 report of the Bureau of Public Roads entitled, *Toll Roads and Free Roads*.

At the end of the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt proposed to Congress that the Bureau of Public Roads be renamed the Public Roads Administration and it be moved to a new Federal Works Agency, joining the Public Buildings Administration, the U.S. Housing Authority, the Public Works Administration and the Work Projects Administration. Congress approved this move, which was official July 1, 1939.

During the Depression, Roosevelt felt that a great interstate system of three east/west and three north/south toll roads from coast to coast would provide needed jobs then.

Roosevelt directed his Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) to conduct a study of the proposed system. The resulting study, *Toll Roads and Free Roads*, was delivered to Congress in April 1939 in two parts.

The first part stated that tolls would be insufficient to support a network as proposed, although individual highways might stand as tollways. It concluded that a 14,000-mile toll road network would not be self-supporting.

"Part II, A Master Plan for Free Highway Development," proposed a 26,700-mile system of interregional superhighways with connections through and around cities.

ARTBA had placed a national system linking state capitals on its first platform in 1902, and in 1939 went on record in favor of the plan outlined in *Toll Roads and Free Roads*.

"A network of limited access highways is highly desirable in any plan of national defense at a time when a new world conflict is threatened," ARTBA said in a resolution passed at its convention in San Francisco that year. ARTBA took it on itself to "urge the National Congress to give immediate consideration to a long-range nationwide program of superhighway development."

"To get around the steel shortage, the states changed their designs," FHWA reported. "Ohio began using wooden bridges on secondary highways. Arched culverts requiring no steel were substituted for reinforced concrete box culverts; steel reinforcing was omitted from concrete pavements."

As tire and gas rationing developed, highway use plummeted, and with it, state gas tax revenues. After gas rationing in 1942, highway traffic dropped as much as 40 percent of 1941 levels.

Long-time opponents of state gas tax diversion—like ARTBA—found some solace in the fact that states which had relied heavily on gas tax diversions now found their reliance on fuel taxes undermined general fund expenditures.

Roadbuilding Roars Back

After the war, roadbuilding roared back with a vengeance. From 1946 through 1950, state, local and federal road officials spent \$8.4 billion, more than in any previous five-year period in American history, reported Mark H. Rose in *Interstate: Express Highway Politics, 1941-1956*.

"Starting in 1946, we began to buy new equipment," Stander said. "Partly because we were anticipating a major highway program, but also because we sold a good bit of our equipment during World War II.

"The program can serve not only to help meet the nation's highway transportation needs, but also as a means of utilizing productively during the postwar readjustment period a substantial share of the manpower and industrial capacity then available. A program of highway construction will, in addition, encourage and support the many diverse economic activities dependent upon highway construction."

-- Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Interregional Highways, 1944



Futuristic elevated highway as imagined in "Interregional Highways." Courtesy of FHWA.

There was a demand for used equipment at that time because the manufacturers were all engaged in war production."

Then, state work started coming back, Stander said. "Maintenance was deferred during World War II and states needed to catch up on that sort of thing, mainly resurfacing work," he said.

But while maintenance drove work immediately after 1945, lobbyists and planners such as ARTBA never lost sight of an interstate-type system.

ARTBA Starts Postwar Plan Early

ARTBA started planning early for the postwar era. In 1943, ARTBA's President Charles H. Upham published *Sound Plan for Postwar Roads ... and Jobs*, which maintained that construction constituted 12 percent of the national income to maintain economic growth.

ARTBA's plan showed in understandable language that highway construction dollars were "high-powered dollars," that the postwar highway construction program would be an important economic stabilizer and that it would provide much-needed transportation facilities.

"The program has lagged since the industrial collapse of the early thirties, and the accumulative deficit has been aggravated by an almost complete collapse of new construction during the war," ARTBA said.

ARTBA's plan was universally accepted by legislators, industrialists, government agencies, economists and others involved in postwar problems. Over 50,000 copies

ARTBA TIMELINE

1942

C.J. Sherlock, director, Alabama State Highway Department, elected ARTBA chairman.

ARTBA members help form the Road Gang.

1943

Carl W. Brown, chief engineer, Missouri State Highway Department, elected ARTBA chairman.

1944

Interregional Highways published by the Public Roads Administration, predecessor of the Federal Highway Administration; outlines breadth and design life of future interstate system.

“The national role that highway transport has assumed, as the ‘assembly and delivery line’ for both war and peace products, is the clinching answer that can be made for the continuance of the wise policy of cooperation between the states and the federal government [since] 1916.”

-- H. E. Hiltz, deputy commissioner, Public Roads Administration, before the Highway Engineers Association of Missouri in St. Louis, April 1944, as reported by the Federal Highway Administration

of the plan were distributed, necessitating five reprintings.

Like Roosevelt, ARTBA promoted postwar highway spending as a guarantee that the economy would not slide backwards.

“Construction will play a tremendous part in stabilizing America’s national economy after the war, and road building will furnish a material part of the required construction volume,” said Harvard’s Dr. Alvin H. Hansen at an ARTBA-sponsored dinner in Washington, D.C., in June 1945.

That year, ARTBA urged that funds be increased to accommodate pent-up needs. “The future of American highways and the solution of our unemployment problem squarely rests upon the amount of road projects we have ready to put into operation when the war ends,” ARTBA’s Upham said in June.

“During the first postwar year, we propose to build more than a billion dollars worth of roads,” Upham said. “[But] authorities agree that if one billion dollars in construction work is proposed, there should be at least twice that amount in plans in order to give



First designation of routes on the “National System of Interstate Highways.” (1947) Courtesy of FHWA.



The Gulf Freeway through Houston, Texas. (1949) Photo courtesy of the National Archives.

flexibility to the program.”

By November 1945, in an article written for ARTBA’s *Road Builders’ News*, U.S. Commissioner of Public Roads Thomas MacDonald was able to write: “The much-talked-of post-war highway program, calling for an outlay of \$1,500,000,000 [\$14.9 billion in 2000] in federal funds on a matching basis over a three-year period ... has advanced beyond the discussion stage and soon many projects will be in process of construction.”

Early Interstate System Plans

In hindsight, it can appear that the 1956 legislation which established the interstate program—the Federal Aid Highway Act and Highway Revenue Act of 1956—just suddenly appeared through the intervention of President Eisenhower, launching road projects that would benefit future generations.

It actually was the result of decades of sparring and lobbying and planning from many different sectors and ARTBA was a leader and coordinator throughout.

“The interstate system came along in 1956, but prior to that, all the talk at ARTBA was to try to develop that system,” said 1978 Chairman Stander.

While it’s patently clear now what a positive program the system has been for the United States, not everyone wanted the system, nor did policy makers first know whether it could be afforded.

ARTBA had urged such a system in its founding platform (1902). Another such system was recommended in the 1939 Bureau of Public Roads report, *Toll Roads and Free Roads*, which

Recollections of 1978 ARTBA Chairman Dick Stander

Richard R. [Dick] Stander has been a leader in the U.S. transportation construction industry for many years.

Long-time ARTBA member, director and former chairman (1978), he also was an early member, and the fourth president, of the National Asphalt Pavement Association. He’s been a director of The Road Information Program (TRIP), since 1976, serving as chairman for three years (1984-86).

He’s served as co-chairman of the AASHTO-ARTBA-AGC joint committee. He also has attended every annual meeting of the Transportation Research Board since 1950, save one, when he was nobly called to see Ohio State play in the Rose Bowl.

“My first recollection of ARTBA was when my father, Carl Stander, went up to the Road Show in Cleveland [1927 or 1928] and bought a concrete mixer,” said Stander, retired president of Mansfield Asphalt Paving Co., Mansfield, Ohio. “That was used to pour a substantial amount of Ohio concrete pavement during the 30s. In fact, at one time our company did a great deal of the concrete paving in Ohio.”

At the time, Mansfield Asphalt was a member of the Ohio Contractors Association, an affiliate of ARBA, Stander said. During World War II, Mansfield Paving got out of concrete paving altogether and concentrated on asphalt.

Stander’s first personal involvement with ARTBA was at the 1948 Road Show in Chicago at Soldier Field. “I took a train up there and met a number of people,” he said. “I followed up by going to an ARTBA annual meeting a few years after that,” he said.

“Gen. [Eugene] Reybold was the president at the time [1950-1955, replacing Charles M. Upham], and after he left it was Gen. [Louis W.] Prentiss [1956-1967],” he said. “I became acquainted with Gen. Prentiss quite a bit and became active then. ARTBA enabled me—as a young person getting involved in the business—to become acquainted with other contractors, equipment manufacturers and material suppliers—and get more than a local point of view,” Stander said. “I was able to listen

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ARTBA TIMELINE

1945

James L. Skelly, president of James L. Skelly Co., elected ARTBA chairman.

The Federal Aid Road Act of 1916 is amended to provide for payment of half the cost of acquiring and freeing toll bridges.

1947

February: James T. Callaway, assistant to the president, Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co., elected ARTBA chairman.

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to convention speakers and form some opinions I used later in the business.”

During the postwar interstate lobbying days, Stander enjoyed hearing the national perspective through his Ohio association activities. “I recall having several meetings with our Ohio representatives,” he said. “I recall Sen. Jennings Randolph speaking, and became acquainted with some of those folks as a result.”

This interface led to increased equipment sales. “It demonstrated to me that there was a good future in the highway construction business,” Stander said. “It reinforced some of my ideas about the purchase of new equipment, that we knew we would be able to use it long enough to justify its cost. It was always an upward curve, and it didn’t really take off until 1956.”

In those lobbying days, Stander used needs data developed by ARTBA to reach out to his state congressmen. “I used the information to talk with them about road needs,” he said.

In 1986, Stander received the *Rebuilding America Award* from the CIT Group/Equipment Financing. He sold his firm in 1988. When not volunteering his time these days, he enjoys life in Ohio and Florida.

recommended a 26,700-mile interstate-type system that would not require tolls.

This was further refined in the report *Interregional Highways*, released in 1943 and distributed generally in 1944. *Interregional Highways* called for a 39,147-mile interstate-type system, with a 20-year life expectancy.

Urban Sprawl Becomes Issue

By the end of the decade, urban sprawl was becoming an issue, with concomitant traffic congestion exacerbated by the lack of expressways.

“[O]ur down town city areas are still moving to the suburbs at a rapid rate, just as they have been for the past 20-odd years,” ARTBA’s Upham wrote in March 1949.

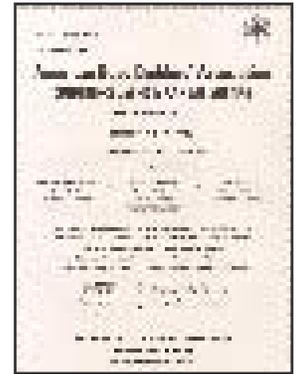
“City highway engineers are vitally interested, in light of the new traffic problems presented, particularly during the peak commuting periods,” he said. “Commuting has become a regular part of living, making the population more than ever dependent on automobiles, good roads and city stores.”



A 1949 photo of the Whitehurst Freeway in Washington, D.C. The memorial structure was dedicated to H.C. Whitehurst, director of highways for the District of Columbia and a past ARTBA chairman. Courtesy of the National Archives.

At ARTBA’s 1949 annual meeting in Washington, D.C., ARTBA’s Chairman Enoch R. Needles, principal, Howard Needles Tammen & Bergendorf (HNTB), challenged his fellow members to look ahead to the next era and serve the nation well.

“We have been living in a golden age which is a privilege almost beyond price,” Needles said in his address to ARTBA. “Our association has always been alive and influential in bringing about better and better and more and more highways, to assist our nation and our civilization to grow.” He urged the members to continue to grow and serve the public. TB



An advertisement for ARTBA’s 1949 annual meeting in Washington, D.C.

100th Anniversary Trivia..

(Answers might not be included in the 100th Anniversary article)

1. How many people attended ARBA’s “Road Show” held in Chicago in 1948?

- A) 50,000
- B) 100,000
- C) 200,000
- D) 300,000

2. Who is the longest serving ARTBA President?

- A) Dan Hanson
- B) Pete Ruane
- C) Charles Upham
- D) Gen. Louis Prentiss

3. What organization did the Highway Industries Association later come to be known as?

- A) Associated Equipment Distributors
- B) National Asphalt Pavement Assn.
- C) Construction Industry Manufacturers Assn.
- D) Equipment Manufacturers Institute

4. How many students were enrolled as ARBA members in 1940?

- A) 200
- B) 400
- C) 600
- D) 800



Answers: D, C, B, D

ARTBA TIMELINE

1948

Record 300,000 attend ARTBA “Road Show” in Chicago.

1949

Enoch R. Needles, one of the founding members of Howard Needles Tammen & Bergendorf (HNTB), elected ARTBA chairman.

Gen. Eugene Reybold appointed ARTBA president (1949-56).