

U. S. Highways: Roads in Ruin

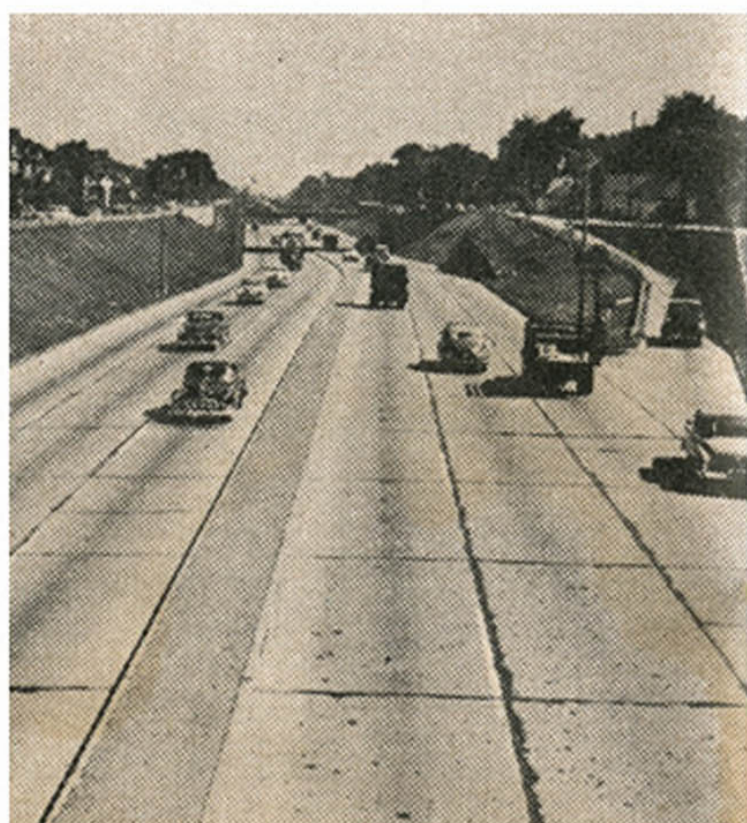
The most highly motorized nation on earth faced the danger of finding itself all gassed up with no place to go. As the budget-harried Administration pressed for a 20% cut in highway aid to states, legislators and private groups warned that U. S. roads were fast crumbling. They sought to boost annual Federal aid from today's \$500 million to \$800 million. Meanwhile, with steel controls being eased, 36 states hoped to get enough steel to resume over 500 needed highway projects.

The Vanishing Highway

The U. S. has 350,000 miles of surfaced primary roads, but about 20,000 miles become unusable or too dangerous every year. One warning sign: U. S. auto deaths, now over 1 million, equals the American dead in all wars since the Revolution.

Even the good roads are not equal to the demand. About 85% of today's city-to-city travelers go by road. Yet most highways—built during the 1920's—are narrow, with poor visibility, weak bridges, and congested intersections. Vehicle registrations have soared — 52 million today, a whopping 68% over 1945. (The Pennsylvania Turnpike, planned for daily traffic of 715 cars in 1940, now carries 10,000 cars a day.) And 75% of all freight is trucked at least part of its journey today. The U. S. spends over \$4 billion a year on





Outdated roads are crumbling;
not enough superhighways replace them.

highways. But the Bureau of Roads says the figure should be closer to \$7 billion for the next 15 years.

Out of every dollar the average motorist spends for transportation, only 10¢ goes for roads. Attempts to cut a bigger slice run into opposition ranging from oil interests, which fight new gas taxes, to rurally-ruled state legislatures which care little about city-serving superhighways.

Solution—At a Price

Toll roads, offering more speed at a price, provide one approach to highway financing and traffic snarls. Five states have revived them; four others will soon follow. Plans call for a web of non-stop turnpikes (toll and free) from Maine to Washington, D. C., and west to Chicago, and another network on the West Coast. New York City, Los Angeles and Dallas have built them through and around their city limits—with more to come.

In 1917, U. S. railroads sagged under the war-freight load. In World War II, the highways shared the beating. The nation's outdated road system could collapse in another war.