

Let's Get **Out of
the Muddle**



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Let's Get...

OUT OF THE MUDDLE

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS
GENERAL MOTORS
DETROIT, MICHIGAN

FOREWORD

THIS BOOKLET is based on information in a new General Motors 16 mm. sound motion picture called, "Let's Get Out of the Muddle." The film was produced as a report to the General Motors field organization and GM dealers on the critically serious condition of the nation's highway system and the need for concerted community action to solve the problem. It includes the introductory and concluding remarks by Mr. Bradley and Mr. Hufstader as printed in this booklet.

If you would like to borrow a print of this film for showing to any civic, fraternal, government, church or other interested group, consult your local Chevrolet, Pontiac, Oldsmobile, Buick, Cadillac or GMC Truck dealer, and he will arrange to obtain a print for you without charge.

INTRODUCTION

by

Albert Bradley
EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT,
GENERAL MOTORS
CHAIRMAN, NATIONAL HIGHWAY
USERS CONFERENCE



This subject of highway modernization is vitally important to every one of us.

The story is simple and to the point. To a very important degree, the American economy rolls on gravel, black top and concrete roads. Every day more and more people are on the road, more and

more goods are moved from place to place.

Yet day by day our highways are becoming less and less adequate to handle this ever-increasing load. We are not even standing still. Actually, we are slipping backward. Our highways are not only becoming more and more obsolete—they are also wearing out faster than they are being repaired. Highway congestion and highway accidents are steadily increasing.

The deplorable state of our highways naturally concerns all of us as Americans; we want our country to be prosperous and strong. It concerns you and me more directly. Highway transportation is our bread and butter.

We may think we sell cars and trucks—what we are really selling is mobility. Our cars and trucks must be well designed and well built, but if they cannot be used efficiently and enjoyably, they will be of no more value than a canoe in the desert.

The film you are about to see will review more fully the increasingly

critical nature of the highway problem. Many agencies are working hard to speed up remedial action.

General Motors—along with other automobile manufacturers, the petroleum and tire industries and other groups—is strongly supporting this work through the National Highway Users Conference and the Automotive Safety Foundation.

GM's active role in this work goes back many years. For example, Mr. Sloan was the chairman and guiding spirit of the National Highway Users Conference from its organization in 1932 until 1948. As his successor in this position, I have been increasingly impressed with how much constructive work we can and should do in this field.

I can assure you that other General Motors executives are equally concerned. We all realize that action is needed.

Too many people take our highways for granted—almost as if they were provided by nature!—the sea lanes for our ships, the air lanes for our planes, the highways for our motor cars and trucks.

However, unlike the sea lanes and the air lanes, our highways are man-made. It is up to us to see to it that they are not neglected but are made adequate—and kept adequate—to meet the ever increasing demands upon them.



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One of the things we Americans like to talk about, when we're in the mood, is the fact that we have more automobiles and trucks than all of the rest of the world combined.

"We're a nation on wheels," we like to say. And someone is almost certain to add, "You can say *that* again."

Well, we *ought* to say it again . . . and we ought to do some serious thinking about it. We *are* a nation on wheels. At the rate we're going, we'll soon have more than 50 million motor vehicles.

Millions of cars and busses get millions of us to and from work every day.

And on Sunday they get millions of us to and from church.

Millions of trucks deliver our goods . . . tons and tons of it, day and night.

We rely on many other types of vehicles:

Police cars and ambulances to protect our lives.

Fire engines to protect our property.

Public utility vehicles to help keep vital public services operating.

And when our cars are not working for us, they're trying their best to give us a lot of pleasure.

So let's "say it again." We are a nation on wheels . . . wheels made to roll.

But *do* they?

Millions of times a day the wheels of our vehicles are stopped dead by traffic congestion that makes us late for work and delays the delivery of goods.

In all the cars and busses and trucks in traffic jams all over the country are countless people . . . people and goods urgently needed at their destinations . . . in offices, factories, stores and markets the nation over.

And at their destinations, there is almost sure to be still more time wasted trying to find a place to park . . . whether it be in a big city or any one of the thousands of smaller communities from coast to coast. Every snarl of traffic that slows our wheels, slows the work of the nation just that much.

Well, let's get out of this jam—it's Sunday now . . . why not pack a lunch and take mom and the kids. Let's head for the *open road*.

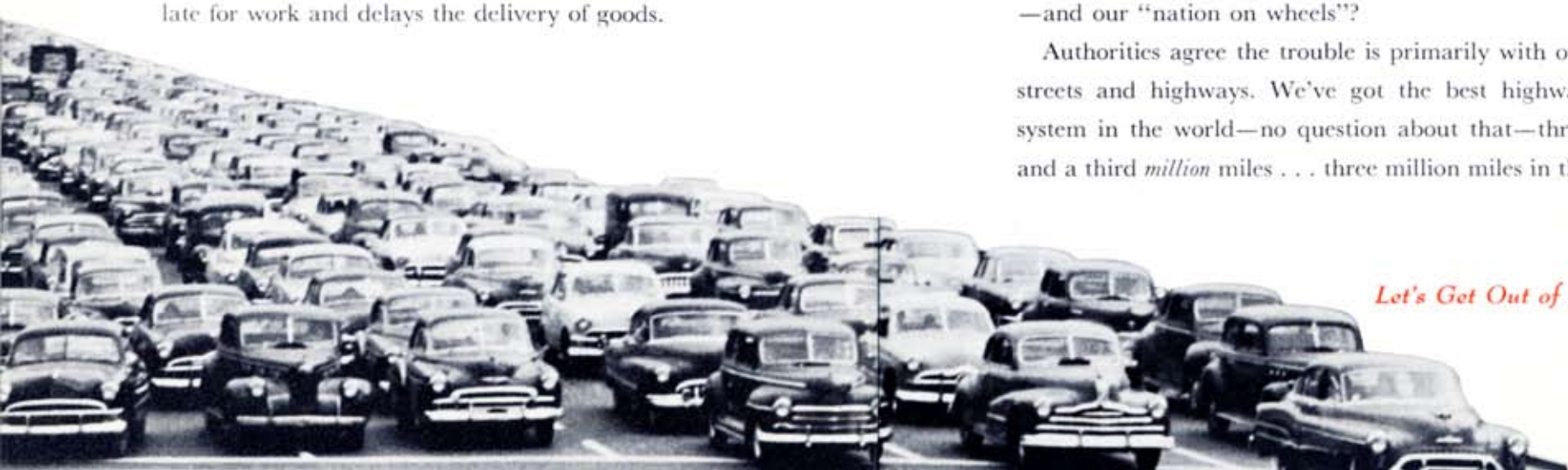
What "open road"? . . . Try to find one!

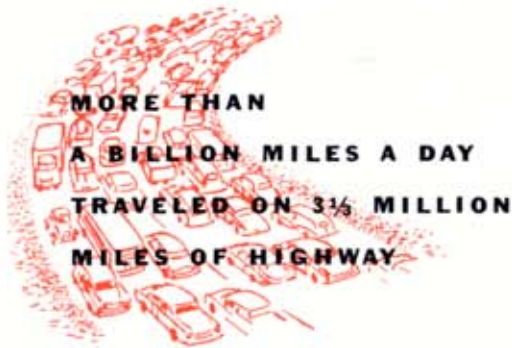
Besides congestion, the toll of deaths, injuries, and property damage due to accidents has reached shocking proportions.

What's the matter, anyway? What's *happening* to us—and our "nation on wheels"?

Authorities agree the trouble is primarily with our streets and highways. We've got the best highway system in the world—no question about that—three and a third *million* miles . . . three million miles in the

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country, three hundred thousand miles in cities and towns. We have spent billions of dollars to make our highways a major nerve system of transportation.

Our automobiles, trucks and busses travel a total distance that's getting pretty close to five hundred *billion* miles every year, or well over one billion miles a day.

More than twenty-five thousand towns in the United States without rail service depend entirely on highway transportation. Eighty-five per cent of the people who travel from city to city travel by highway. School busses carry one out of four children to and from school.

Eighty-nine per cent of all our food and other farm products reach their first markets by truck. This includes 71 per cent of all livestock, 83 per cent of all fruits, 91 per cent of all grains and 97 per cent of all milk.

Industry would be crippled without truck transportation. In fact, trucks are a vital link in moving seventy-five per cent of all the tonnage transported in this country.

In times of national emergency, our reliance on

highway transportation is critically important. Up to seventy-five per cent of the materials and supplies shipped to and from defense plants is handled by trucks. Three out of four defense workers use motor vehicles to get to work. Motor transport is a key factor in the strength and mobility of our armed forces.

There's no question about the tremendous importance of highway transportation in this country—an importance that is a real tribute to the American energy and ingenuity that developed our economic system and made possible the mass production of highly-efficient, reasonably-priced motor vehicles.

The importance of our highway transportation also is a tribute to the highway pioneers who launched the



“good roads” movement. They got us out of the mud and started the tremendous boom of road building in the twenties.

But the plain truth is that our present highway system is not equal to the job we’re asking it to do.

In the first place, most of our highways were not designed for today’s volume and kind of traffic.

In the second place, many of them are worn out.



We have modern rolling stock and obsolete highways—highways that slow down and endanger traffic because of

restricted visibility

narrow lanes

sharp curves

steep grades

soft or narrow shoulders

dangerous and congested intersections

cramped underpasses

narrow and low capacity bridges

no separation between opposing traffic

lack of necessary railroad

grade separations

and too many entrances to main highways from roadside establishments.

In cities, out-of-date street systems are threatening to cause complete stagnation of traffic. This congestion is irritating and costly to operators of cars, trucks and busses. Particularly serious is the enormous cost of time lost in traffic jams.

One major problem is the lack of well-located and well-designed express routes for heavy traffic movements within and through cities.

Another is the shortage of parking and loading space, which not only inconveniences those who require it but also adds to general congestion.

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Traffic is further handicapped by badly-designed intersections which contribute to confusion, delay and accidents.

And as traffic continues to increase, our highway problems multiply. It is perfectly clear that we have got to provide more *space* for the movement and parking of motor vehicles, and more *freedom* from driving hazards caused by highway deficiencies.

It's a real job.

It *can* be done, of course. But to do it, we've got to look deeply into the reasons why our highway system has gotten us into such a muddle.

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1. **HIGHWAYS ARE DYING . . .** Much of our existing mileage is dying—dying of old age. Highways constructed during the road-building boom of the twenties were planned for life-expectancies ranging from fifteen to thirty years. Their number is up.
2. **WARTIME NEGLECT . . .** Our maintenance job is swamping us . . . because we unwisely considered highways “expendable” during World War II, and let too many of them go to pot. Last year we spent more than a billion dollars on maintenance alone, in a desperate effort to keep existing roads in service. Much of this sum could have been used for necessary new construction if we had not let our roads deteriorate so badly.
3. **INFLATION . . .** Inflation has nicked about fifty cents out of the 1941 highway construction dollar. Because appropriations have nowhere near offset this, we are actually spending less today than prewar . . . in terms of construction purchased.
4. **INCREASED TRAFFIC . . .** We're suffering from growing pains. In the past ten years, population in the United States has increased more

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than 19 million. During this same period, annual personal income after taxes—or “spendable income”—increased about 130 billion dollars. Even allowing for the rise in the cost of living, there has been an increase of 40 billion dollars. These increases . . . the greatest of any comparable period in our history . . . were responsible for a tremendous rise in traffic. Vehicle registrations increased from 33 million to 48½ million cars and trucks, and the mileage traveled by these vehicles has increased from 300 billion to 450 billion miles a year.

This greatly increased traffic is wearing out and obsoleting our highways at a faster rate than ever before.

5. WE BUILT FOR YESTERDAY . . . The big highway construction program of the twenties . . . which gave us most of the roads we are now using . . . was aimed at the requirements of that time, not of today. The obvious, urgent need then was for improved surfaces on existing roads. The idea of re-designing highways to make them adequate for much greater traffic demands did not occur to most people, simply because few foresaw the tremendous growth of automotive transportation which was just ahead.

6. CITY BOTTLENECKS . . . We have let our city streets become bottlenecks. We have done little to develop them into systems designed to meet the requirements of today’s motor vehicle traffic.

7. UNWISE SPENDING . . . We have not always used our highway tax funds wisely. We have spent highway tax money for other purposes, thus reducing the funds available for road building. We have spent money for roads that were not justified by traffic needs, thereby cutting the returns on our total investment in highways.

So how we got from the highway mud of the past to the highway muddle of the present is pretty clear. As for how we get out of the muddle, there are . . . as usual in this land of ours . . . some differences of opinion. But two things are absolutely certain:

First, we must spend more money to get the roads we need.

Second, we must see to it that this money is spent wisely.

Investing more money in highways may require more revenue in some states. Authorities estimate that it would cost 5.7 billion dollars a year for 15 years to meet our minimum road needs. This is a lot of money,

but it's a sound investment in our future. Today, we are spending only about ten cents out of our automotive transportation dollar for highway facilities. If we increase this to the amount required to get the roads we need, the dollar value of time saved, plus the operating savings in lower gas consumption and less wear and tear on engines, brakes, tires and other parts of the car, will more than offset the added investment in roads. If we don't . . . it will certainly prove a false economy, for congestion and accidents will drive our total highway transportation cost still higher. In other words, we are going to pay for good roads whether we have them or not.

But more money alone won't get these better roads. It must be spent wisely.

Highway user taxes should be dedicated solely to highway work, and apportioned in accordance with traffic requirements. The diverting of highway user tax funds to non-highway uses must be eliminated.

And the spending of highway user tax funds on unwarranted road projects is a waste the nation cannot afford, simply because we cannot afford to have the main arteries of our highway transportation system choked and clogged.

Of course, an adequate road system must include more than principal highways. A good system of secondary roads is equally important. Local rural roads,

too, generally render essential service. All three types contribute to a network which binds the nation together and meets every need from farm to market to transcontinental travel.

But we must concentrate on the most urgently needed improvements first . . . on projects aimed at clearing critical bottlenecks. And it is only logical to concentrate highway user tax funds on such projects, for they promise the greatest benefits to the greatest number of those who pay such taxes.

Highway officials know what these projects are. The most critical ones exist on the recently designated National System of Interstate Highways. This is a 40,000-mile network of our most important inter-



city highways and their urban links. Although it includes only about one per cent of our entire highway system, it carries twenty per cent of the rural traffic and ten per cent of city traffic.

Highway planning, construction and finance are big, complex operations. But the basic course of action we must pursue is quite clear.

The need for action is urgent . . . action by each of us in support of an intelligent program of highway rehabilitation and expansion in our own communities and states.

Action dictated by political expediency will not work.

The problem will not be solved by wishful thinking or bickering over details.

Individuals and organized groups cannot avoid responsibility by passing the buck to others.

And modernizing our highways will cost money—lots of it.

We must familiarize ourselves with what is needed locally . . . and then make our influence as citizens felt aggressively. For in a very real way, further deterioration of our highway system will be a withering curb on the social and economic development of our country. But, with teamwork we can have a modern street and highway system. We can have freedom from traffic congestion and accidents.

Some states and cities have made a start . . . Studies

of highway needs and finance are underway. Off-street parking facilities are being developed. New highways and bridges are eliminating bottlenecks. Action is being taken on expressway projects.

These and other projects need support from a public that is willing to pay for the modern street and highway system that will get us out of our highway muddle and keep us out.



Recommended Action for General Motors Dealers

by

W. F. Hufstader
VICE-PRESIDENT IN CHARGE
OF DISTRIBUTION STAFF



It's time for interested groups to start a concerted campaign to get public opinion behind an intelligent highway program.

It's time for action! Action up and down our main streets and in our rural areas.

I can't think of a more effective group to grab this ball and start running with it than you men who are General Motors dealers.

Individually and collectively, you can strike a spark that can be fanned into a prairie fire of public interest and action.

You and I have a responsibility, as citizens interested in good government, to work for the improvement of our highway system.

And you and I, as automobile men, have a vital business interest in highway improvement. Economic studies indicate that our market for the sale of cars and trucks is far from saturated—but highway saturation might very well become a serious sales obstacle.

What can you do about it?

May I recommend that you consider seriously the following steps in your personal plan of action:

FIRST, you do not have to be a highway expert to make an effective contribution. There are some things you can do immediately.

SECOND, find out whether your dealer organizations, either local or state, have active highway committees. They should have! Is their work given major prominence? It should be!

Similarly, does your local Chamber of Commerce have an active

highway committee? I believe it should have—and the same applies to local civic organizations to which you may belong.

THIRD, find out whether these local highway committees are in touch with the best sources of information about local highway needs. Official highway agencies are obvious sources. They will welcome constructive interest.

Such organizations as your state Highway Users Conference are other sources. And many states and cities have published highway survey reports which should have far wider public distribution and understanding.

FOURTH, once organized and informed, dealer organizations and civic groups should directly encourage acceleration of official action on highway needs. It is our right and our duty to express our views on public policy to legislators and governmental agencies. The most important thing is to do this constructively and to coordinate your efforts with other interested groups.

FIFTH, help develop broader public support of a program for highway improvement. This can be done best by telling the highway story to the public.

Prints of the film "Let's Get Out of the Muddle" are available to you for showings to civic, fraternal, church and official groups throughout your community. I hope you will use this film extensively, as I believe it is an effective tool for public education. Booklet reproductions of the film also are available to you for distribution.

Local press and radio support also should be sought. Your own advertising can be used effectively on this highway subject, in much the same way that many of you have supported traffic safety campaigns.

I hope each of you shares our deep concern about the highway problem and the urgency of getting something done about it.

The job of straightening out this highway muddle is huge. It will take a lot of doing!

Your interest and your continuing participation will be a real public service and will help to assure the further growth and development of your business and ours—the automobile business.