

The increasingly interstate nature of economic life, the requirements of national defense, the dramatic growth of motor vehicle ownership, and the rise of tourism created a demand for a national highway network. The Office of Road Inquiry came into being in 1893 as part of the Department of Agriculture. It functioned as a fact-gathering and advisory agency until 1916, by which time it had become the Office of Public Roads and Rural Engineering.

A real highway program for Nevada had to await federal financial support. It came in the form of the Federal Aid Road Act of 1916. To be eligible to receive funding, a state had to have a highway department with adequate equipment and authority. In 1917, the Legislature, following Governor Emmet D. Boyle's recommendation, created a Department of Highways. The act doing so provided for three directors, to be appointed by the governor. A State Highway Engineer, appointive by the directors, was to attend their meeting and give "advice and counsel." The Attorney General was named as the Department's legal advisor.

The statute accepted the provisions of the Federal Aid Road Act and pledged the "good faith of the state . . . to make available funds sufficient to at least equal the sums apportioned to the state" by the federal legislation. Other parts of the Nevada act defined projected routes, and addressed such matters as bids and contracts, staffing, purchase of machinery, right of way, and the erection of guideposts and signboards. The statute created a State Highway Fund and a County-State Highway Fund.

Nevada and the other states had to bear all of the costs of maintaining the highways once built, as well as pay for surveying, planning, and rights of way. Supplementing monies from the general fund, an ad valorem tax, and racetrack revenues, were donations from the Lincoln Highway Association, sales of departmental property, and truck rentals to contractors. In 1919 the Legislature authorized the issuing of highway bonds.

In addition to the Board of Directors, the Department, in its early years, had a staff consisting of an Associate Highway Engineer, Office Engineer, Bridge Engineer, two Division Engineers, Chief Draftsman, Equipment Superintendent, and a Right-of-Way Agent. Because of the world war, little was done during the first biennium (1917-1919) of the Department's existence. The Department was able, however, to issue its first state highway map in 1919.

In its formative period the Department maintained, in addition to its Carson City office, an equipment plant in Reno and a sand and gravel plant at Lahontan. Later in the 1920s the Department established divisions with headquarters and equipment shops at Elko, East Ely, Las Vegas, and Tonopah. Heading each division was a resident engineer. The Department quickly became the largest unit of the state's government. It has also been the most affluent and independent department.



Figure 2: Snow plow clearing road at Donner Summit, 1952. Courtesy of Nevada State Archives. NHD-0004



Figure 1: Highway in Clark County leading to Las Vegas, n.d. Courtesy of Nevada State Archives. NHD-0010.

Of great benefit to Nevada and other sparsely-populated public land states was a 1921 amendment to the Federal Aid Road Act. It changed the formula from dollar-for-dollar matching to one taking into consideration the large amount of federally-owned lands that were not subject to state and local taxation. Under the new "Graduated Scale of Federal Aid," the federal share for Nevada changed from 50 percent to 87 percent. The act also expanded the program for building a system of forest roads. Each state was entitled to federal funding for 7 percent of its total road mileage. Less welcome were stronger requirements imposed on the states for road maintenance. Forest road funds were separate from the

federal aid 7 percent system and were administered jointly by the Bureau of Public Roads and the Forest Service.

An important state source of departmental revenue came in 1923 with the passage of an act imposing a tax on gasoline. At first, one half of the proceeds was for the State Highway Fund, and the other half went to the County-State highway fund of each county. In 1929, to meet federal funding requirements, the law was changed to have all of the proceeds go to the state fund. Also enacted in 1923 was a measure creating a state highway revolving fund, for meeting payrolls and other obligations of the Department requiring prompt payment.

By 1925 the Department's staff grew to include an Assistant Highway Engineer, Engineer of Surveys and Designs, Maintenance Engineer, Testing Engineer, Location Engineer, and Division Engineers for each of the system's three divisions. Later additions to the staff were a Secretary to the Board of Directors, Chief Accountant, and Inspector of the Nevada State Police.

There was also a Supervisor of Employment, Adjustments, and Public Relations. Even in its earliest biennial reports the Department of Highways was determined to gain the public's confidence and support. The reports were printed on good quality paper, with many illustrations and maps. The Department soon became responsible for circulating road and tourist information, which it did by issuing bulletins and maps.

An act of 1927 made the Governor, Attorney General, and State Controller the new Board of Directors of the Highway Department. The position of Maintenance Engineer was eliminated and his duties were assigned to the Division Engineers, of which there were five by 1931. New responsibilities for the Department in the 1920s included an annual traffic count (since 1922) and the erection of road markers and signs along the U. S. roads. The next major federal legislation affecting the Nevada program was the Oddie-Colton Act of 1930 under which the federal government assumed the entire cost of surveying, building, and maintaining roads through its unappropriated public lands and Indian reservations.

The New Deal programs of the 1930s brought additional federal money and involvement into the highway system. The National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 authorized the president to grant money to state highway departments for "emergency" road construction. Nevada was quick to accept its share, and to award contracts and hire workers. The Department became a major work-relief agency for the state during the depression era. The Hayden-Cartwright Road Act of 1934 brought still more funds to the Department and allowed them to be used also for federal-aid roads running through urban areas. The act also converted loans from the Emergency Advance Fund (created by Congress in 1932) into grants.

As the Department of Highways experienced rapid growth and expansion, so too did the power and influence of the State Highway Engineer grow. In this period Robert A. Allen held the position. Allen became the superintendent ex officio of the state park system, chairman of the State Planning Board, and a member ex officio of the State Board of Publicity. He also served as State Engineer for the federal Public Works Administration.

Increased funding allowed the Department, beginning in 1935, to add other units: Planning, Architectural, Publicity, Personnel, Roadside Improvement, Statistical, and Safety and Accident Study. The State Highway Patrol slowly evolved throughout the 1920s and 1930s. By the mid-1930s it had only handful of officers, whose main duties were to promote highway safety and supervise traffic.

In 1921 the Department of Highways began issuing an in-house biweekly newsletter, *The Nevada Highway News*. The Department launched a more ambitious publishing venture in 1936: *Nevada Highways and Parks*, a bimonthly periodical. In addition, the Department has published materials of a more technical nature, such as area transportation studies, standard specifications, and traffic reports.

In the later 1930s the Department began conducting "special studies." The investigations included speed studies, and reports on truck weights, car occupancy, accidents, origin-and-destination, turning movements, parking areas for military convoys, and out-of-state visitor statistics.

In 1937 an act of the Nevada Legislature authorized the Department of Highways to enter into contracts with the

federal government for the building of secondary roads, for which the federal government began providing more funds. Federal aid was also extended to help finance the elimination of grade crossings. By this time there were eight categories of federal-state road building funds: the federal aid (7 percent) system, secondary roads, grade crossings, federal land roads, forest highways, National Park roads, parkways, and Indian roads. Only the first two categories called for state matching funds, and for these the federal government paid more than 86 percent of the total.

An amendment to the state constitution, adopted in 1940, specified that all revenue from taxes on gasoline and other motor fuels "be used exclusively for the construction and repair of the public highways of this state." The object of the amendment was to protect the Highway Department's state financial base and to ensure continuing ability to meet federal requirements.

An Attorney General's ruling construed the amendment narrowly. As a result, the Department suspended publication of *Nevada Highways and Parks* and curtailed the work of the Safety and Landscape divisions because these projects did not conform to the Attorney General's interpretation of construction, maintenance, and repair. The Legislature responded quickly, passing an act declaring that it was public policy to include these operations within the meaning of the amendment of 1940. Over the next few years the suspended activities became operational again. In 1991 the lawmakers prohibited the use of motor fuel tax revenues for the purchase of equipment.

Despite the Legislature's apparent willingness to give the Highway Department what it wanted, there was growing concern about the Department's spiraling costs and what was seen as lavish spending. An Assembly concurrent resolution of 1939 established a joint committee to conduct a thorough investigation, including audits of the Department's books. A special committee was appointed to determine if such an investigation should be made. State Highway Engineer Robert A. Allen convinced a majority of the members that the supposed extravagance of the Department was the result of compliance with federal requirements, and the matter was dropped for the time being.

In 1941 a Senate concurrent resolution, reflecting continuing apprehension about what was viewed as the freewheeling conduct of departmental business, set up a committee consisting of members of the Assembly and Senate highway committees. The resolution directed the joint committee to investigate the expenditures of highway funds and "the nature, purpose and legality" of such disbursements. The joint committee in turn established a fact-finding subcommittee. An Assembly concurrent resolution stated that the subcommittee did not have sufficient time to complete its task during the 1941 session; both houses agreed to a resolution postponing the report until the next session. When the Legislature met in 1943 each house had only one holdover member of the joint committee, and no report was forthcoming.

Whatever the legislators' uneasiness regarding the Department, in 1941 they also passed the Uniform Motor Vehicle Operators' and Chauffeurs' License Act, which created the Drivers License Division and made the Highway Engineer--Allen--its Administrator. A statute of 1931 had named the Secretary of State the ex officio vehicle commissioner and the county assessors were made responsible for issuing licenses. The new arrangement provided for centralized registration and for examinations of those applying for licenses. The Administrator of the Drivers License Division was to appoint the examiners. The Secretary of State continued to function as vehicle commissioner until 1949.

During World War II road construction came to a virtual halt. The Highway Department, however, kept busy building flight strips requested by the Army Air Forces, and with other projects in cooperation with the military services. As the conflict drew to a close, Congress passed the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1944. The measure provided, on a matching fund basis, for the expansion of the system of interstate highways, aid to urban areas for reducing traffic congestion and accidents, improvement of farm-to market roads, and funds for rebuilding roads worn down by wartime traffic.

After the war there was the resumption of serious questioning of the Department of Highways and its head. A bulletin of the Legislative Counsel Bureau, issued in 1948 criticized the Legislature for setting up the Highway Department as "a sort of super-government that dwarfs the State itself" and for granting too much power to the

State Highway Engineer. The bulletin emphasized that, contrary to a widely held notion, most of the Department's funding came from state revenues, not from the federal government.

By the time the bulletin was published, Allen had been dismissed. Whatever the criticisms of him, he was unquestionably an able, energetic administrator, whose efforts had benefited the state. During Allen's tenure he also contributed to the historical record of Nevada and the West by having departmental employees transcribe diaries and other manuscripts with research value.

In 1949, apparently in response to the Legislative Counsel Bureau's concerns, the Legislature consolidated all of the vehicle licensing and state highway revenue-collecting responsibilities and transferred them, along with the Highway Patrol, to the Public Service Commission. The legislative intent was to confine the duties of the Highway Department to the building and upkeep of highways.

The Communications Division came into being in 1954. The 1957 Legislature created a Legal Division, whose primary responsibility was the acquisition of property through condemnation proceedings. The Department's Safety Section was established in 1958. During the biennium of 1961-1962 the Department entered the computer age; the new technology was first used for accounting, planning, design, and field surveying projects. In 1966, a Systems Analysis Section was added. The Urban Transportation Section was created as part of the Planning Division the following year.

The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1954 added significantly to the federal government's contribution to Nevada. The augmented funding allowed the Department to increase its personnel by about 20 percent. A huge influx of federal money came in 1956 with the enactment of legislation that authorized the building of a national interstate highway network. In Nevada, the federal funding amounted to 95 percent of the construction costs. The state continued to bear all of the costs of maintenance of the roads.

Since its creation of the four original state routes in 1917, the Legislature designated many more until 1957. That year it delegated to the Highway Engineer the responsibility of selecting and designating new routes and of assigning them numbers.

By 1955 the Department consisted of the following divisions: Planning Survey, Design, Survey and Location, Testing, Traffic, Equipment, Construction and Maintenance, Office Engineering, Federal Aid, Personnel and Administrative, Auditing, Mail and Files, and Building. By 1960 there were six maintenance divisions. In 1957 the Legislature established an Advisory Board for Department. It was abolished in 1975.

Another important piece of federal legislation was the Highway Beautification Act of 1965. It provided matching funds for the control of billboards and junkyards along interstate and primary routes; the federal government bore the entire cost of landscaping and scenic enhancement. After the passage of the federal Highway Safety Act of 1966, the Legislature provided for its implementation in Nevada.

By 1970 the eight classes of federal aid funds were: Interstate, Primary, Rural Primary, Secondary, Rural Secondary, Urban, Traffic Operation Program to Increase Capacity and Safety (TOPICS), and Highway Planning and Research. In fiscal year 1986 the U. S. Department of Transportation awarded the contracts to complete Nevada's portions of the Interstate system. After that time the Nevada department concentrated its efforts on preservation and reconstruction.

The Department of Highways became the Nevada Department of Transportation in 1979. The title of the head of the new department changed from State Highway Engineer to Director, and under him was a Deputy Director and four Assistant Directors for the divisions of Administration, Operations, Engineering, and Planning and Program Development. The position of Assistant Director for Engineering was eliminated in 1983, and its duties assumed by the Deputy Director. Soon thereafter the Department's six field districts were reduced to three. The position of Business Manager had been added to the departmental staff in 1969.

In 1979 the Legislature enabled the Department to prepare a state rail plan. The act also allowed the state to "contract for the acquisition of rail lines by lease or purchase."

The lawmakers eliminated the three-member Board of Directors in 1987, but left the power to appoint and remove the Director with the Governor. In the next its session, the Legislature created a seven-member Board consisting of the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, State Controller, and three members to be appointed for four-year terms by the Governor.

Legislation of 1991 obliged the Highway Department to prepare reports of its construction and maintenance projects. That year the position of Motor Vehicle Recovery and Transportation Planner was added to the departmental staff.

For the past several years, the Department's mission has been "to provide the driving public with a transportation system consistent with the state's social, economic and environmental objectives. The mission is supported by a general transportation plan that provided statistics and maps related to the mileage, traffic and condition of all transportation systems. The plan is used to establish management practices for the construction, operation and maintenance of roads and highways."

General Files 1917-1986 179 cu. ft.

The Transportation Department records were divided into four subsections. 1NDOT is generally arranged in chronological order; 2NDOT is arranged chronologically by year and thereunder alphabetically by subject; 3NDOT is arranged by subject; and NDOT is arranged numerically. The finding aid consists of an in house box list.

Department's Highway Planning Survey Division, 1917-50 (1NDOT and 2NDOT) Among the files in 1NDOT are: general correspondence; photographs to accompany reconnaissance reports on Federal Aid projects; expense accounts; receiving records (Form 5320); correspondence about maps and mapping; automobile mileage reports; payrolls; information on federal aid for eliminating railroad grade crossings; notices to contractors; reports on airfields and other aviation data; maps and profiles; traffic data for rural highways and Las Vegas; memorandums from the Bureau of Public Roads, Public Roads Administration, and the Works Progress Administration.

General Files of the Highway Planning Survey Division make up most of 2NDOT. In addition to planning surveys, found here are: maps; general correspondence; correspondence of individual DOH staff; traffic studies; fiscal information; equipment inventories; personnel information; aerial photographs; forest highway files; automatic traffic recorder data; loadometer studies; triangulation data; statistical reports from other states. The reconnaissance reports are arranged by route numbers. There are "Special Studies" of, for example, intersections, speed, and turning movements. The records in 2NDOT cover the period from 1929 to 1972. There is a run of *Public Roads* magazine for these years.

Statewide Photologging System of Nevada: The fourth collection of records, designated only as NDOT, consists of rolls of 35mm. color film ("Statewide Photologging System of Nevada"), both positive and negative. The pictures are of Nevada highways, shot from a camera mounted on a truck, taken every 100th of a mile. This project was intended to document the conditions of Nevada highways. The films date from 1974 to 1986. NDOT-0075 contains indexes.

Among the state agencies represented in the Department of Transportation files are the State Planning Board and the Nevada Industrial Commission.

The federal agencies with which the Department has had close ties include the Bureau of Public Roads and its successors, the Public Works Administration, Civil Aeronautics Authority, and Works Progress Administration. Among the private organizations significantly represented in the files are: the American Association of State Highway Officials; American Road Builders Association; International 4-States Highway Association; Western Association of State Highway Officials; American Automobile Association; Transportation Association of America; National Highway Users Association; American Trucking Associations, Inc.; Council of State Governments; Highway Research Board of the National Academy of Sciences; Western Council for Travel Research.