

PHIA says road network is 'taken for granted'

HARRISBURG—Very few other states in the Union have a road system as large or as diverse as does Pennsylvania. Building a highway in the Keystone State is expensive, largely because the terrain is a combination of trails through the Rockies, and the ups-and-downs of a rolling countryside. Pennsylvania is too wide a State to be ignored or bypassed in traveling from the Atlantic seaboard to the Middle West and beyond. But as one truck industry leader said recently, "we can't afford to take our rigs over the nearly worn-out Pennsylvania roads and we can't nearly afford to go around the State either. It's just too big."

This sense of frustration is being echoed by highway users who see a road system growing old and decaying before their eyes. These motorists simply can't understand why they are not getting a usable and safe highway system in return for their tax dollar.

Pennsylvania's highway users last year paid nearly \$1 billion into the State's Motor License Fund, but as has been the case for many years, more than 48 per cent of the Fund's monies are earmarked for uses that have nothing to do with the construction or care of our highways (State Police funds, aid to municipalities,

many free license plates, driver education, etc.). Although inflation has increased the cost of building highways more than 100 percent, no additional funding has been provided by the State Legislature to alleviate this condition.

Neglect seems to be the hallmark of our highway concern. We have invested billions in the state's 45,000 mile road system and allowed that investment to erode and wear out, says the Pennsylvania Highway Information Association.

Everyone knows how bad the roads are, and too often the statewide reaction is to place blame wherever most convenient. The most visible target is PennDOT, since remarks about PennDOT corruption, mismanagement

and the stumblings of bureaucracy are quite common. But, in reality, those same comments could be made about any other State agency. Those who don't blame PennDOT cast their grievance on the legislature for inaction, or a "too little, too late" attitude. But it is rather common knowledge that government does react to public opinion, if it is audible enough. Maybe the public outcry has been more muffled than apparent, PHIA suggests.

It might make more sense to place blame where it is most deserved - on every one of us who took the road system for granted and didn't insist on its being taken care of and properly funded.

This placing of blame doesn't solve Pennsylvania's most severe highway crisis

in history. It doesn't repair or replace those dangerous bridges, many of which are being closed in all parts of the state. It doesn't repave roads that wreck our car's alignment, rip the tires and cause serious accidents.

The fact that Pennsylvania ranks first, among all of the states, in highway indebtedness (a total of \$2.3 billion, at an annual cost of \$200 million) only adds further anguish to this critical condition. There are not many months left until the advent of yet another

Winter. Even if the months from November - April were only average, they would only wreak further erosion on a road system that is being neglected.

Only an aroused citizenry can turn things around. Only a citizenry that cares can end this slip-down to a highway system that will only aggravate an economy already in trouble. Surely it is evident that, like the bridges, many of our worn-out roads will also be closed in the months and years to come, PHIA concludes.

Grange supports 6-day rural mail service

HARRISBURG - George W. Rodgers, assistant to the Master, of the Pennsylvania State Grange, stated recently that the Grange supports keeping a six-day mail service in Rural Free Delivery.

In an address to the Pennsylvania Rural Letter Carriers Association in Danville, Rodgers said, "The Grange will fight to a bitter end to retain this service."

A move has been made recently within the postal system to curtail the amount of mail service-days in an effort to cut costs.

The Grange believes that such a service curtailment would hurt the rural population of this state.

Another area that Rodgers commented on was PennDOT's request for a 2½ cent gas tax increase. He questioned the need for it. He went on to ask if a

departmental overhaul for PennDOT might not be more in order.


He did say, however, that if it is determined an increase in funding is necessary, the increase in the gas tax would be the most equitable way.

Rodgers also commented on the proposed "sunset" legislation to reduce the amount of state agencies and departments.

He stated that the Grange urges caution in this legislation. Care should be used so that the good agencies are not the ones that are eliminated.

"Take a stand," Rodgers said, "Meet the challenge and the voice of rural Pennsylvania will be heard."



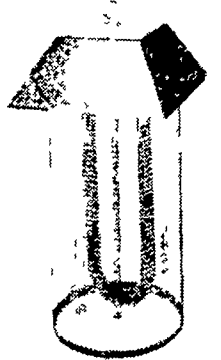


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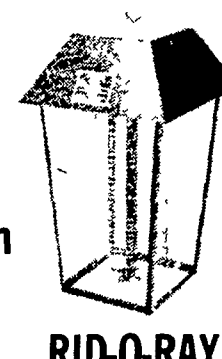
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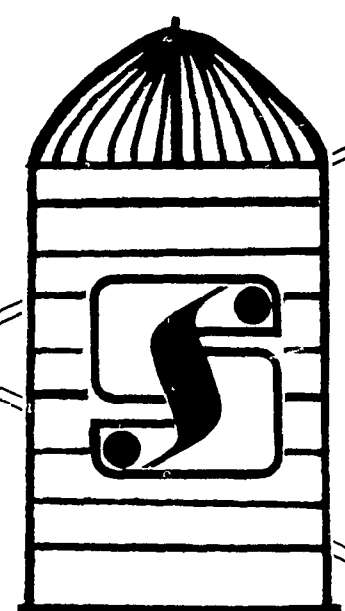
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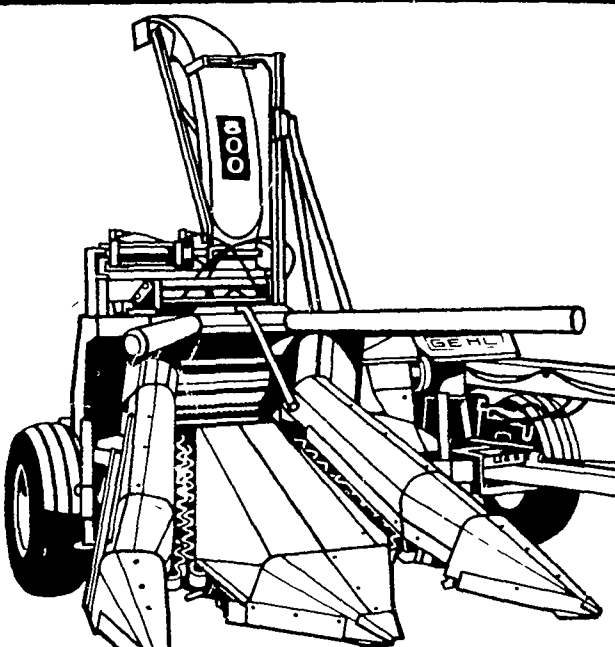
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