

## Epilogue

The story of transportation in Iowa has not ended. What has been written here covers only a relatively short interval in the passage of time—a pause that reflects the indispensability of effective transportation upon economic and social progress. The physical conquest of the state was underscored in terms of successive improvements in the means of transportation: flatboats, steamboats, stagecoaches, railroads, highways and motor vehicles; pipelines, airplanes and public transit. Each, in its unique way, contributed to the well-being of the people; each brought individual challenges and problems to be met, studied and integrated into state and local planning.

But technological advancements are but one phase in the development of a state or nation. Equally or more important is the genius, initiative, maturity and wisdom of those responsible for the legislation, administration and implementation of the transportation programs designed to accommodate the economic needs, social concerns and protection of the safety of the public. In this respect, Iowa has been historically and is presently in good hands.

The federal government has played the major role in transportation development in the United States. To a lesser degree was the role of the states as they shared financial support and political leadership in the improvement of waterways, the building of railroads, highways and aviation facilities to serve a growing and mobile population. Regulation became the primary policy instrument after 1877, promoted to a considerable extent by the local demand to curb railroad abuses. Iowa, among other Midwestern states, was a leader in this movement. Federal-state cooperation benefited the states, especially through the technological revolution during the 1920-1950 period. But as other modes were developed, new policies proliferated and often the states found themselves in adversarial relationships with the federal government as they tried to implement the new rules and regulations.

Intervention by government into the operation of transportation services, usually rendered by private enterprise, raised serious questions concerning the continuation of this practice when the service was no longer profitable, for what length of time and to what end. Demands for a national consensus of goals for transportation services was subordinated to the day-

by-day implementation of individual modal development, and despite the formation of the U.S. Department of Transportation, the nation still lacks a single national transportation policy and a uniform plan for implementation. The absence of such a policy makes planning, funding and programming difficult on state and local levels.

The post-World War II period brought substantial changes in economic and social circumstances and conditions, in turn reflecting upon transportation developments. The relative roles of the modes were altered as public choices in one sense became limited; in another where services became more competitive and accessible. To attempt to bring some order out of economic regulatory chaos in the transportation sector, carriers were freed from some of the burdensome bureaucratic rules and regulations that had hampered their activities for years. Competition was to rule but the nature of "competition" was not addressed. Currently, the nation and the states are at a crossroad during this transition period, uncertain as to the direction of "market place" policies—whether or not they can or will provide the necessary incentives for improvement in services to the public.

Relaxation of the policy of economic regulation may result in other types of regulation. Limiting or eliminating past modal political protection may require an increase in other standards or regulations. Coordinated service may be required to facilitate intermodal arrangements. Mergers, some of which have already occurred, together with joint use of physical facilities should be monitored closely. Abandonments will probably accelerate as carriers seek to eliminate unprofitable business, in some instances to be succeeded by new entrepreneurs. Safety has become a high priority policy in highway and airline travel. Environmental programs will be under constant scrutiny by federal and state agencies. Individually and collectively, these forms of regulation may be more important than freedom of the carriers from rate control, entry, exit or collective rate-making. And as they multiply, it is essential that each be evaluated on the basis of net benefits to society relative to the costs to commerce and mobility.

The transportation drama will continue. It will involve conflicting interests and struggles for power, security and survival among promoters, owners, investors and users—between federal and state administrations and cities, towns and industries. The cast will include merchants, farmers, consumers,

managers and employees, investors and financiers, commissioners and defendants, politicians and lobbyists. And as the various interests debate the impact of changing goals, policies and programs, the central question as evident from the beginning, should be: "Where does the public interest lie?" It seems evident that transportation services in the future will be rendered in a different and more difficult

environment than in the past. This will require political decisions and public choices to determine where the transportation function is going to avoid being carried to unknown destinations. For as the Cheshire Cat said to Alice, "If you don't know where you are going, it makes no difference what route you take."

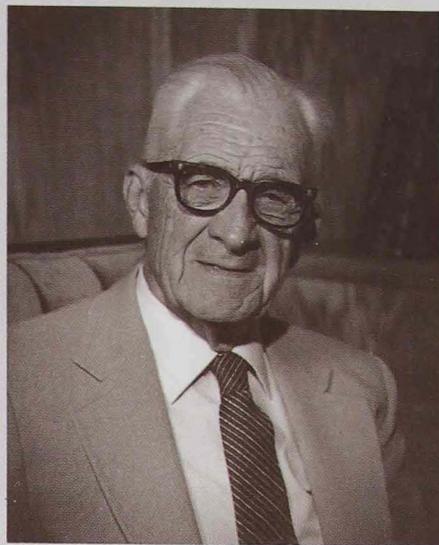
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After retirement from the Iowa State University in 1980, he was commissioned by the Iowa Department of Transportation to conduct the research and write a history of transportation in Iowa.