

Governor Marion Hay signs Permanent Highway Act on March 8, 1911.

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On March 8, 1911, Governor Marion E. Hay signs the Permanent Highway Act. The law transfers more control of road construction from counties to the state. It creates a Permanent Highway Fund for construction of "permanent" (hard-surfaced) roads between trade centers.

The Permanent Highway Act repealed the 1907 State Aid Law which had left much of the responsibility for road building with individual counties. The Act established a Permanent Highway Fund, which received \$1,000,000 per year from a one mill general levy. The money was to be used to construct "permanent highways" -- roads "surfaced with macadam, stone, gravel, or some other durable material" (Forty Years) that would not give way under the increasing numbers of automobiles using the state's highways.

Other standards were also established. The roads, intended to aid commerce, had to start from trade centers. They had to be at least 16 feet wide, of which at least 12 feet were to be hard surfaced. Grades were to be less than 5 percent where feasible and never more than 10 percent.

Counties retained the authority to propose and design roads, but both the proposed route and the engineering plans had to be submitted to the Highway Department for approval. The ceding of control was sweetened by the fact that the Permanent Highway Fund paid the full cost of construction.

According to Highway Commissioner William J. Roberts' 1912 report to the Legislature, the Act was a success:

"Counties, where nothing more durable than wooden culverts and earth roads were [formerly] built, now find that concrete culverts and hard surfaced roads are more economical in the long run, and give greater satisfaction

"Many counties constructing roads under this law are for the first time in their history securing hard surfaced roads dustless in summer and mudless in winter" (*Fourth Biennial Report*).

Roberts reported that 34 of 39 counties were active in building Permanent Highways, and that in the 18 months after the law took effect, 169 miles were constructed at a total cost of \$1,039,217, an average cost of \$6,149 per mile.

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Bothell Road along the Sammamish River, Woodinville, 1910s

Postcard



Bothell Road, King County, 1912

Courtesy UW Special Collections, Webster & Stevens Collection



Concrete base for paving of Pacific Highway, near Kent, 1910

Courtesy WSDOT