

Two Expressways Need to Get Going

TRAFFIC on overloaded city streets is a major cause of wasted fuel. Automobile manufacturers regularly list differences in gasoline mileage for highway and city driving. These differences are substantial in EPA tests and may be even greater in actuality.

Expressways tend to improve fuel efficiency but there seems to be no way to build them as fast as traffic is increasing.

Rising costs and the inefficiency of our protracted system of building highways obviously are major parts of the problem. By the time a highway is designed, funds accumulated, contracts are let and the road is built years have gone by and it might be inadequate.

A couple of prime examples are the Central Expressway and the West Bypass in Oklahoma City. Both have long histories and neither has gotten beyond preliminary stages.

The Central Expressway was conceived long before World War II and when the Broadway Extension to Edmond was completed it became urgent. Construction costs at that time were estimated to range from

\$35 million to \$50 million. They have been rising steadily since.

Enter the federal government from two directions. One was to pay for 90 percent of the cost as a federal highway route. This was welcomed by Oklahomans who could visualize huge tax savings.

Another direction involved regulations from Washington that resulted in a long hassle over resettlement of families living in the expressway's path. Objectionable planning now has generated a lawsuit filed by adjacent property owners to protect a nearby park.

It still might be possible that the expressway will be put into use in this century, but delays could run costs past \$200 million.

The West Bypass roughly follows the route of Grand Boulevard part of the way. In 1909 Oklahoma City voted \$400,000 in bonds to pay for right-of-way for Grand Boulevard, conceived as a scenic route encircling the city. This 26-mile project still is not completed.

The ecology of Lake Hefner has been used as an excuse for delay of bypass construction north of Grand

Boulevard. This man-made lake is filled by siphoning water from the North Canadian river in another watershed. Hefner's almost treeless ecology is not natural.

Yet nearby residents, who may be in position to benefit more than others from completion of the bypass, raised ecological questions that stalled the project for years. In 1978 a Memphis firm was hired to make an environmental impact study. It cost \$145,000 for some 300 copies of a study almost the size of a telephone directory.

Eventually, this obstacle was resolved and officials moved forward, somewhat timorously, to blacktop a piecemeal 4-lane road up to the lake but not far enough. This probably will have to be rebuilt.

It is evident that everybody wants and needs improved streets and highways. The blame for high costs and slow results must be shared by a number of agencies and groups, and by the public.

Isn't it time we get into high gear on road building? It's the only way we can go places.