

THE WAHLUKE SLOPE HIGHWAY (11-A)

Reasons for its completion.

Its importance to agricultural development of the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project.

Its place in the highway program of the state.

Its relation to the Atomic Energy Commission.

The economic effect it will have on the State of Washington as an economic entity

Secondary State Highway 11-A was placed in the State Department of Highways program by action of the State Legislature in March, 1937. Secondary State Highway 11-A, according to the statute, "...begins at Connell on Primary State Highway 11, thence in a westerly direction by the most feasible route to Yakima on Primary State Highway 3; the director of highways of the State of Washington shall provide suitable facilities for vehicular and pedestrian crossing of the Columbia River at the point where SSH 11-A herein described crosses the river and shall maintain the means of crossing at the expense of the State of Washington without charge to the traveling public."

The director of highways did comply with the statute just referred to. Highway 11-A was in existence until the advent of the Atomic Energy Commission Hanford Works; at which time, 10 years ago, a portion of 11-A was removed from general public use. And that is the situation today. However, on January 8, 1953, just one month ago, the Atomic Energy Commission released certain areas in the vicinity of Highway 11-A thus making it possible for the construction of a given number of miles of road to connect the terminal points of Highway 11-A once more.

Permission has been granted for construction of a road through the Wahluke Slope which will permit the linking of the terminal points of Highway 11-A.

Here is some factual information pertinent to the construction of the Wahluke Slope road as given on Wednesday, February 4, by David Shaw, manager of the AEC Hanford Works at Richland:

First of all Mr. Shaw reaffirmed the fact that a highway can be constructed through the Control Zone of the Wahluke Slope.

No first-class road exists on the slope at the present time, yet there is a definite need for such a facility to provide for efficient movement of necessary protective military equipment throughout the major portion of the slope area.

It is common knowledge that the slope area as a portion of the entire perimeter surrounding the Hanford Works is dotted with necessary anti-aircraft gun emplacements.

It is known that the military is advanced in its planning for the construction of an 18-foot, hard-surfaced road extending along the present route of what is known as the County Line Road. This road traverses the slope from east to west along the lower reaches of the Wahluke Slope. We are advised by Mr. Shaw that the Corps of Engineers will regrade and resurface the existing County Line Road and will be calling for bids this spring to get that job done.

It was expressed by the manager of the Hanford Works that it would seem to be in the best interests of the military and the Washington State Highway Department to coordinate their planning to construct a highway which would serve the purposes of each and make a joint use of that portion of the highway extending through the Control Zone.

In the case of the military it would provide the access road they need to serve their installations. And in the case of the highway department it provides a route across the Wahluke Slope and through the Control Zone following a line where construction costs would be at a minimum; and yet complying with the necessary security measures which must be observed.

It would seem reasonable that the highway department would grasp the opportunity to accept the suggestion from the AEC that the shorter route be constructed across the lower level of the Wahluke Slope almost entirely within the Control Zone as against the alternate route for which the highway department made a survey years ago.

This would mean less miles of construction and a consequent lower investment on the part of the state.....which in these days of higher construction costs merits serious consideration.

Army specifications call for the road to be 18 feet wide with ballast meeting primary state highway specifications. Therefore, assuming that the state highway department and the military cooperate in this road project, it seems logical that the highway department would only have to provide funds for an additional four feet of roadway plus necessary shoulders. This would apply to 12 miles of construction through the Control Zone.

Mr. Shaw indicated that, in his opinion, it would be quite possible for the U.S. Army Engineers and the Highway Department to cooperate on this project with a saving to the highway department of about \$350,000.

From another side of the picture we have these observations concerning the AEC's interest in the Wahluke Slope Road: Charting a completely new road at a higher level on the slope would not be acceptable to the AEC because of security reasons. At the same time, from the state's standpoint, this would result in the ignoring of existing road beds and the savings which could be affected by building on an established route.

The Atomic Energy Commission has indicated that the construction of such a primary highway through the slope area under its control could be done without any expense to the state for rights-of-way. In other words, here is the opportunity for the state to pick up free of charge the minimum of 25 miles of rights-of-way for road construction.

If you feel that a road located in the Control Zone would hamper the free flow of traffic, Mr. Shaw clearly states that the only so-called controls required by the AEC are as follows:

A-That the highway through the Control Zone be fenced on each side at the expense of the highway department; and that fencing needs to be nothing more than two or three strands of barbed wire to, as he put it, "deter the honest man." Any expensive form of fencing, according to him, is absolutely unnecessary.

B-The AEC would want some simple form of road block available at the eastern end of the highway just beyond the Control Zone to be put into use only in the case of emergency. Be assured that there is absolutely no need for individual inspection or issuance of passes or any other such procedures which are practical for security reasons within the project itself.

The AEC is quite willing to permit an improvement in the Cold Creek grade by relocating the necessary portion of the road through AEC properties. Again, this could be done without any cost to the state for rights-of-way, and only fencing would be needed.

Completion of SSH 11-A will provide a direct road entry to the Columbia Basin from Southwestern and Central Washington, insuring adequate facilities for shipment of goods, both agricultural and manufactured, from the fast-growing Columbia Basin area. Because of this factor and others there is a distinct state-wide interest in seeing completion of this highway link.

For instance, lumber and wood products from the west slope of the Cascades; food, machinery and equipment from the same area along with similar products from Central and Eastern Washington areas would find easy access to this part of the Basin.

From out of the Basin across this proposed highway would be moved quick-cash products such as fresh vegetables and grain which can be shipped into the state's largest market areas rapidly. Along with this movement of fresh produce will be the shipment of vegetables for processing, plus bringing contact with major ports for export. Warehouse and food-processing plants in the Yakima Valley would be immediately available for products being shipped from the Wahluke Slope area of the Columbia Basin.

Completion of Highway 11-A will provide a convenience for cross-state travel heretofore not available. There are three cross-state highways funneling into the Yakima Valley and from that point at the present time traffic must move in a circuitous route either north or south to reach a destination in the Columbia Basin. With the completion of Highway 11-A this flow of traffic feeding from three major highways across the state from west to east can move directly into the Basin proper with considerable savings in mileage. This fact is particularly attractive to the trucking industry and those who transport raw and finished products from the West slope of the Cascades to the Columbia Basin and the Inland Empire.

There's still further reason for this state-wide interest in completion of 11-A which comes under the heading of the "long-range" viewpoint. That is the possibility of an eventual hook-up with the west end of the Lolo Pass now under construction across the State of Idaho. It is due for completion within the next few years.

The Wahluke Slope road should be considered also from the standpoint of the number of farm units that it will serve in the future as the various areas within the Columbia Basin come into eventual production.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation reports that 1,625 farms lie within the area to be served directly or indirectly by the Wahluke Slope road. This represents a combined acreage of 133,900 acres of Class I, Class II and Class III land.

With the exception of approximately 50,000 acres of land just released by the AEC all the acreage referred to will come under irrigation by at least 1957 and will need this road facility before that time.

Populationwise, here are the areas to be served and receive direct benefit from the new road link: The Yakima Valley and its trade area embracing the counties of Yakima, Kittitas, Klickitat, Benton and Franklin with a population of 233,874 persons. The Greater Spokane area and the Inland Empire with its population of 230,800 persons will find benefit from the new roadway.

Apart from the immediate population of farm units lying directly to the east of the Yakima Valley, the Wahluke Slope road or the extension of Highway 11-A will serve additional persons residing along the proposed north-south Columbia Basin road, running on a line east of Moses Lake to Eltopia, thus bringing into this highway network greater numbers of farm units and populated areas.

Actually this roadway would be an important connection between the two major agricultural centers of our state--the Yakima Valley and the Columbia Basin--and most importantly relieves the heavy traffic flow on the highway now connecting Ritzville, Moses Lake and Snoqualmie Pass--Highway 10.

Advocates of the development of Highway 11-A across the Wahluke Slope are the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, Chehalis Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber of Commerce of Longview, the White Pass Highway Association, all communities of the Yakima Valley, the Connell Chamber of Commerce, Spokane Chamber and the Columbia Basin Commission.

Another important consideration---and that is the so-called parallel construction of highways. Parallel construction is something to be avoided in development of sound, long-range planning for highways.

The Wahluke Slope proposal could not be classified as parallel construction for there is no direct connection to Eastern Washington below Highway 10 which connects Seattle and Spokane. A long, circuitous route through Walla Walla is on the State Highway system but provides no outlet for the Columbia Basin nor does it conveniently connect the two heaviest population areas of Eastern Washington. The construction of the Wahluke Slope road would bring these population centers in more direct contact with each other and still avoid parallel construction.

Construction of this road is the most logical step to be taken in that the Frenchman Hills and the Saddle Mountains form two natural barriers to the north and any consideration for a route further south would traverse the Hanford Works project area--which cannot be done--or would be too close to Highway 410, and thus present the impractical situation of parallel construction.

We have already demonstrated the need for another cross state highway between west, central and eastern Washington. The Wahluke Slope is the logical location for such a cross-state highway.

What about Highway Planning?

Referring to a report on Highway Classification prepared for the Joint Fact-finding Committee on Highways, Streets and Bridges by the Washington State Council for Highway Research, 1952:

"State highways besides being important to the people of the state must satisfy the following requirements:

- 1-It shall begin and end at important terminals or junctions.
- 2-It shall carry enough through traffic to make state administration a substantial advantage. Where state is aroused only by economic benefits from local industry it may be that the general welfare will be better served by local road administration.
- 3-It shall be the most feasible route for the traffic it is intended to serve.
- 4-It shall be economically justified by the traffic it serves."

It is our sincere belief, based on the factual material at hand, that the completion of Highway 11-A will meet all the requirements outlined above to the finest detail.

Now, you must logically be asking yourselves this question: What do you want?

What we want is this--legislative action that would give recognition to the project, action that will see it takes its place with other projects on the basis of merit. We are asking you to provide the funds to get started on preliminary surveys and studies, now, while we have the chance to deal with the Atomic Energy Commission and the Army Engineers.

Let us, the people of Washington, keep faith with the AEC which has worked unceasingly for the past five years to release land on the Wahluke Slope for settlement and a roadway.

The AEC has done its part--it's up to us to do ours now.

The Wahluke Slope road should be completed--it's the wish of the 1937 legislature...it will meet the needs of the AEC...it will provide access to the fabulous Columbia Basin...it will forge another link in our expanding highway system...it can be financed economically at this time with a savings of \$350,000 to the taxpayers of the State of Washington.

Let's build the Wahluke Slope highway...let's complete Highway 11-A.

Presented before the joint hearing of the
Senate-House Roads and Bridges Committee
February 9, 1953 -- Olympia, Washington

By: Lew Garbutt, Manager,
Yakima Chamber of Commerce

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1. The first thing I noticed when I stepped out of the car was the cold air.

It was a sharp contrast to the warm car. I shivered slightly as I walked towards the building.

The building was a large, old structure with many windows. Some of the windows were broken.

I walked up the steps and entered the building. The interior was dark and smelled of old wood.

I looked around and saw several people sitting at tables. They were all looking at me.

I felt a bit uncomfortable. I didn't know why they were all looking at me.

I walked over to a table and sat down. A woman next to me looked at me and smiled.

I felt a bit better. I started to talk to the woman. She told me that she was a teacher.

I told her that I was a student. She asked me what school I was at.

I told her that I was at the local high school. She said that was a good school.

We talked for a while. She told me about her own school days.

I felt like I was finally someone who understood me. I was glad to meet her.

The day was over. I had to go home. I felt a bit sad to leave.

I walked home. I thought about the woman and how nice she was.

I decided to write her a letter. I would tell her how much I enjoyed talking to her.

I wrote the letter. I put it in an envelope. I was ready to mail it.

I went to the post office. I put the letter in the mailbox. I felt happy.

I went home. I felt like I had made a friend. I was glad to have met her.

The end of the world was not what I needed. I needed a friend.

I was glad to have found her. I was glad to have someone who understood me.