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THE WPA AIRPORT PROGRAM

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I am going to try to confine my remarks strictly to the WPA program. First of all, I would like to give you the relationship between the WPA, the Bureau of Air Commerce, and the state aviation officials as we see it, and then will tell you a little about the WPA program so far as it applies to aviation.

The WPA program is strictly a relief program, and the first rule and order that we have to carry out is the relief angle, and that is putting men to work, and that one fact will answer a lot of questions as to why we can't get this or that done. So you have to keep that in mind because it is something we can't change. About a month ago, the Engineering Department of the Works Progress Administration, the Construction Department, was re-organized into five major divisions, more or less along the classes of construction that were included in the 1936 Appropriation Act. There is a director at the head of each division. Airways and Airports is a separate division, and everything pertaining to such projects comes under that division. Frankly, our job is to salvage from the depression as much useful work on airports as we possibly can, in the use of labor from relief rolls. As you probably know, the communities have to certify the people who are in need of relief. They certify them as employables and unemployables. The local community has to take care of the unemployables. A certain percentage of employables are offered jobs on the federal work program, by far the greater number being with the WPA. That doesn't mean that all the employables can be put to work. The 1936 appropriation is to cover all relief agencies. The WPA has in sight approximately enough money to run to about March the first, carrying approximately the same number of employables as are employed at the present time. Possibly you may have 15,000 employables certified in a certain community, but the funds allotted to that community are only sufficient to take care of 10,000, which fact will answer many questions as to why a man who is on relief cannot get a job on WPA projects.

There is another angle to the employment of men on airports. Our job, as we saw it in the Division of Airways, was to have some

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kind of a plan. We had to have some sort of an outline to be used in guiding the work on airports. You must, however, realize that communities themselves originate these projects. It is necessary for the local community or some political sub-division to initiate and prepare an application requesting the project. Many times there are so many projects applied for that they could not possibly be put into operation. Even those finally approved amount to five times as much as the available funds. So far as possible, we leave the selection of projects to the community. In fact it is necessary to do so in order to select a list of projects that will take care of the required number of men, allowing them their quota for the community. We have to mark these projects in order of priority. You can see quite often what happens. An airport may not be on the first list, depending entirely on the local efforts of the air-minded individuals, or the airport may be the top priority.

Another angle is the so-called man-year cost—just the amount of funds required to pay a worker for a year at the security wage, and also buy sufficient materials and rent sufficient equipment to keep him employed in a useful manner. That is arrived at quite simply—divide $1,425,000,000 by 2,000,000 men, and you have $700 available per man year.

I think everybody will agree that an airport is not worthy of the name without shelters and other facilities. These facilities require a large portion of skilled labor, and that will run the man-year cost up, and as you may have possibly experienced, some sponsors have had a hard time getting an airport project in operation. There are two ways you can get around that problem. The district WPA has a certain amount of money. The local community can contribute from its funds enough to bring the man-year cost within the allowable limit, or if the community cooperates with the WPA and submits a varied group of projects, so that the average can be brought down, the Administrator, if he considers the project desirable, can go ahead and build it, even though the costs are considerably more than the average man-year cost. In some instances it has been possible for cities which had a definite source of revenue, and wanted to make a lot of extensions to the water mains, or some other such project, to give a greater proportion of the cost, which made it possible for the airport project to be put into operation.

I would like to stress the point, and amplify it a bit, that this program is strictly, we hope, a temporary and emergency program, and we will work ourselves out of a job as soon as possible. The
Bureau of Air Commerce is a permanent federal institution charged by law with fostering and developing this business from a national viewpoint. To my mind the State Aviation Commissions hold exactly that same relative position in the state. One has state interests and the other national interest. We (the WPA) are simply filling in, and acting more or less as a banker in this particular case, and where a community can present the necessary collateral which is certain funds, suitable sites, and the need for employing employable relief workers on some construction program, we have also been the contractors. The Federal Bureau of Air Commerce and the State commissions are the consulting airport engineers.

There is a point here I would like to stress too. There have been cases where there has been conflict between the federal and state interests. I think you can appreciate the fact that the WPA is federal, and that it is necessary under the present set-up to have some sort of federal agency to look after the technical features of the program, and that is why possibly the Bureau of Air Commerce is given preference over the wishes of the State Commissions. Of course, it is our object not to have such things come up, but it is probably the same situation as would result if the State were carrying on these projects, in which case the State Aviation Commission would take preference over the local Aviation Committee. I stress this point because I want you to realize that we do not expect to be in business for any great length of time.

So far as airports are concerned, under present conditions we are right now at a critical period of the program. The present appropriation is limited to July 1st of next year. That gives us nine months in which to work, but our funds under present conditions will only last until about March 1st. We don't know what the political situation is going to be after November 3rd. Everybody has his own idea. We don't know what Congress is going to do about carrying on this program. Therefore, we are bending every effort in the remaining nine months to complete all the projects that have been started. We want to complete them in full if possible. The program is not perfect, and you will have a lot of loose ends. We will make an honest effort, and we need the help of both the Bureau of Air Commerce and the State Commissions to give us every possible assistance to clean up these jobs, and put the airports in useful condition just as quickly as we can. That does not necessarily mean no additional projects, but it does mean that state administrators have orders not to start any unit of any project unless they have funds in sight to complete the program. If Con-
gress should decide to extend this program, that is something else, and will give us time to plan in the future. That is mainly the reason we have asked for a program, and perhaps to some of you sitting here this afternoon, it perhaps seems rather ridiculous to ask for a plan. We have asked the Bureau of Air Commerce to give their recommendations. We want both so that we can concentrate during the remainder of this program on the projects you think most important. You can appreciate that there were a number of projects which should never have been built in the way applied for. There were over 1800 airport projects approved. Of that 1800 we have actually released for operation a little over 600. They are being operated on some 450 locations. You will be interested in knowing that out of 450 locations, 65 are new locations, 75 are airports that were started during the CWA and the FERA, but were not included in the Bureau of Air Commerce list of airports for 1936. The bulk of airport work is being used to extend the existing facilities. The question comes up of constructing aids to navigation, beacons, radio stations, etc. If you will just remember that this is strictly a relief program, you will understand why we cannot undertake a lot of such projects even though, as everyone knows, they are absolutely necessary to the safety of flying. If the sponsors are willing to transport the labor, and if they can find through other federal sources or local sources, sufficient funds to bring the man-year cost down, something can be done about it.

Mr. Wynne mentioned the fact of procurement. That is one of those situations that comes up in this type of program. Those of you who have been following this work for some time, know that during the CWA and FERA there were different methods used. During the WPA Congress decided to use the Treasury Department and have local Purchasing Agents and Disbursing Officers. That means such an officer in each state and district of the state. Their jobs are to take requisitions for materials and advertise for bids and buy the material. I will grant you it is not the best working type of arrangement, but it is necessary to have every possible safeguard on the expenditure of federal funds. If you wish to complain about a particular job, get in touch with the local WPA representative or get in touch with us. We have a special section set up in this reorganization with a man who works with the procurement section in expediting these particular questions, and of course he only works on those he knows about.

I have touched on the relation of the three organizations, and I would like to add this further thought that we are working to this
end—that if we fold up the WPA next spring or summer, we expect to have this time a complete record and file of work that has been done—cost figures, and other pertinent data, and all the recommendations and data we have accumulated, which we intend to turn over to the Bureau of Air Commerce. Any state aviation commission that wants a copy of that data will be entirely welcome to it.

There is one plea I want to make to everybody. I think it would mean more to aviation as a whole, and give us more of a chance to expand, at least the ground facilities, if we make a success of this present program, and the only way we can make a success of that is to complete usable units of airport projects under construction. That means the necessary plans, specifications, and working drawings must be provided to the WPA supervisor in order to carry on the work. That is the greatest help you can give during the remaining part of this program.

There is another point I might mention. It is unfortunate that we haven’t been able to complete some of the jobs started under the FERA and the CWA; some because they could not qualify, but mainly because the sponsors did not have the funds with which to acquire the land. I appreciate that you may think it unfair to leave the jobs in that condition, and may consider it a breach of faith in some respects, and while it is particularly hard on certain communities, it is another case where you have to consider the welfare of the whole, and as a matter of policy it was determined that we could not work on anything other than public property in this program.

I want to pay a tribute at this time to the work that has been done in the field by state aviation officials. While you may not have felt an official connection with the program, we have relied on you as much as we possibly could and you have played a vital part.

I want to close with this one thought—that the ideal situation so far as ground facilities are concerned—would be to have a map of this country showing the civil airways following the density of traffic, showing where aids to navigation are needed, together with preliminary plans and specifications from which a future program could be adopted, maybe not to complete the whole system, but at least to fill in facilities at the points most needed. Thus, whatever work would be done would fit in with the prearranged plan and be of the greatest benefit to the country as a whole.