

decontrol by the government takes place, services improve and diversify, prices drop, profits increase, and business grows. A good way to begin this process in the important transportation industry of roads would be to subcontract all road maintenance to private contractors. Later, auction off those roads which are the most overloaded and problematic. The owners, seeking to maximize income, would find ways to increase traffic volume while striving to compile a good safety record. The state, now relieved of the burden of the congested thoroughfares, could remove more taxes and sell more roads, at the same time returning its labor force to the productive private sector.

CONCLUSION

As with other aspects of our lives, we find that tax-supported substitutes for normal market functions are wasteful and destructive of the transportation industry and of society in general. Only angry public protest demanding that the officialdom relinquish power will work. It must be done on a constant and tireless basis, whether the regulation benefits us personally or not.

A Private Freeway In Houston, Texas

Those enterprising folks in Houston have done it again. Defying generations of economists who consider roads to be "public goods" that only government will supply, they've gone ahead and built a \$10 million, 10 mile, four-lane freeway, entirely in the private sector (no tax money, no use of eminent domain).

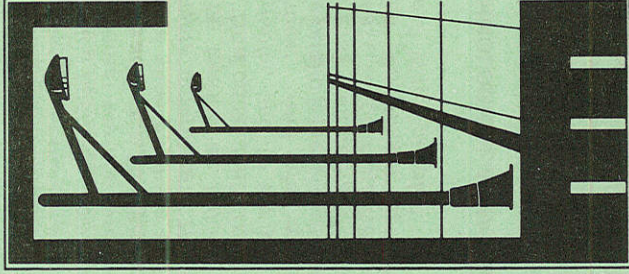
The "they" in question is the West Houston Association, a group of land developers, financial interests, and major corporations. The rapid growth of West Houston has left the area short of roads and mired in traffic. Rather than wait for government to get around to doing it, the association members decided to build the needed roads themselves. Their freeway runs parallel to Interstate 10, linking Texas 6 to the town of Katy. In addition to the freeway, they have built new roads within their industrial areas bordering the freeway.

Although land acquisition and construction are costing \$1 million per mile, the association will not be charging a toll. The way they see it, their businesses will benefit greatly from improved transportation, and the value of their land will increase accordingly. And that is apparently enough of an incentive for them to shoulder the full costs themselves.

"If we didn't have government, who would build the roads?" runs an old refrain. Well, from now on, don't you believe it.

Reason, And Now, a Private Freeway, July, 1980, pp. 16 and 18.

WHAT ABOUT THE ROADS?



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THE LIBERTAS STATEMENT

We, as libertarians, affirm:
That full individual liberty is impossible in any society other than a voluntary one that aggresses upon no one;
That men and women require the full and independent use of their own judgement in order to survive at an optimum level, and therefore have a natural right to do their own thing, providing that they do not physically harm or coercively restrict another individual's life, liberty or property;
That everyone is exclusively sovereign, and is a slave to no one;
That the individual is best served by society when he or she is free from the forcefully imposed controls of others, acting alone or in concert (as a government);
That all forms of coercion, aggression and fraud are always immoral;
That the only system consistent with personal freedoms in the economic arena is one that does not interfere with free trade between consenting individuals;
THEREFORE, we, as libertarians, resolve to oppose all forms of aggression by any State, Government, self-appointed savior, individual, or association of individuals. We further resolve to oppose taxation, conscription, eminent domain, laws which create victimless "crimes," and all programs forced onto individuals without their consent. It is time that the chains of authoritarianism in economics and morality be broken. Individual rights and coercion cannot co-exist. Liberty cannot be compromised, and we will settle for no less than freedom in our time.

(adopted on May 5, 1973)

By Jim Gallagher

Jim Gallagher, who ran for California State Assembly in 1978 on the Libertarian Party ticket, lived in Nicaragua for four years. A member of SLL's Executive Committee, Gallagher has lectured in college campuses on libertarianism and technology. Gallagher has been a computer programmer for more than 12 years.

WHAT ABOUT THE ROADS?

By Jim Gallagher

Frequently the newly initiated among those who find libertarianism interesting ask, "What about the roads?" Since libertarians question the need for provision of any service by government, this often seems of practical interest to those who view the roads as a natural collective activity and therefore should logically be left to government.

Prof. Murray Rothbard in his book, *For A New Liberty*, states the situation in this way:

if the government and only the government had had a monopoly of the shoe manufacturing and retailing business, how would most of the public treat the libertarian who now came along to advocate that the government get out of the shoe business and throw it open to private enterprise? He would undoubtedly be treated as follows: people would cry, "How could you? You are opposed to the public, and to the poor people, wearing shoes! And who would supply shoes to the public if the government got out of the business? Tell us that! Be constructive! It's easy to be negative and smart-alecky about government; but who would supply shoes? Which people?"

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES

It can be seen that these arguments in the light of what we know to be true are ridiculous. The point is that when the free market is offered as an alternative to a service presently monopolized by the government, the advocate cannot precisely predict how the market will provide the service. The beauty of the free market is that individual firms and businesses, in competition, provide a dynamic and progressive array of products and services, constantly improving through innovation and technological advance. However, since the particular question of the roads occurs to so many, I will risk the actual events proving me foolish and attempt to address it.

Now new developments in technology offer means of keeping the convenience of public roads while achieving the fairness and efficiency of private roads, thus avoiding the coerciveness of taxation and eminent domain.

One device that might be useful in eliminating the inconvenience of toll booths would be the bar code reader. The vehicle owner might register with a road billing company, as opposed to a non-voluntary State licensing at the Department of Motor Vehicles, and acquire a sticker for the side of the vehicle. This sticker would have a billing number in bar code and the customer would be instructed to mount it at a certain place on the vehicle. The bar code reader, just now being seen in grocery stores for automatic cashiering, could sense your car entering a right-of-way and log you off or on miles later, creating a record of your trip. This record could appear on your itemized statement at the end of the month. Another innovation that would reduce our dependence on petroleum products and still give us the freedom we desire might be MASER [Microwave Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation] transmitters. These arrays of needlelike coherent microwave beams could respond to your vehicle's request for power, while you are moving, to drive your car's electric motors and simultaneously recharge its small 250 lb. battery pack. Presently, the biggest objection to electric cars is the huge weight they must carry around in batteries to get a minimum range of 100 miles or so. Standardized 250 lb. packs could give a light car 30 to 40 miles of range without recharging, setting you to a MASER array or a pack-swap station.

FREE CHOICE

A return to a system of private roads will achieve another important objective: free choice. In the bureaucracy's usual predilection for putting people in homogeneous boxes, it has declared 55 mph. a speed over which no one may venture. It has simultaneously cut the number of miles a trucker may drive from 700 or more to 550 a day [truckers are paid well regardless of the miles they drive]. The consumer, as usual, pays the bill and makes the senile, unskilled or otherwise impaired a dangerous impediment to traffic because he or she is not allowed to choose a more leisurely thoroughway. In a free market, vendors would seek to serve differing markets. There would be those who would supply electric cart roads limited to 25 mph. traffic, and those who have 100 mph. unlimited roads for Porsches, Z-28 Camaros and Jaguars. And there

POLITICS AND ROADS

With the advent of the automobile, financing the roads equitably through taxes on fuel was considered the best method, and the superiority of a public system of roads has never been questioned by the majority of the public. However, it has become apparent that, as is normally the case with state functions, politics and the omnipresent inefficiencies associated with government enterprises has begun to offset the apparent advantages of public rights-of-ways. As an example, in 1977 Orange County, California, received only 10 cents in appropriations for roads for each dollar sent to the State Capitol in fuel taxes. With the advent of revenue sharing on the part of the federal government, there is even more heavy-handedness evident. For instance, 55 mph. might be appropriate for Maryland, Virginia and New Jersey, but is it for Nevada, South Dakota and Montana? Yet if the more sensitive state-level agencies do not enforce this speed limit, then the Feds won't hand over the tax money. Now Americans are gathering eight million speeding tickets a year and there is general lawbreaking occurring on the nation's highways.

It has been found that private road maintenance contractors can maintain a given stretch of road for about half the cost of the state crews while keeping a more rigorous schedule of repairs. These facts have caused many people to consider the alternatives to publicly financed roads.

AN EXAMPLE: SUNSHINE STATE PARKWAY

The Sunshine State Parkway in Florida carries the majority of the North-South vehicular traffic between Miami, Orlando and Tallahassee; in spite of the fact that these cities are also served by the tax-funded Interstate Highway System, users prefer to use the privately-owned Sunshine State Parkway, even to the point of paying both the tolls and taxes.

would be a larger number of limited access highways for the everyday, 65-75 mph. traffic that the larger number of us seek for normal driving.

It is much easier to monitor the performance of a road company with respect to environmental impact than it is to monitor each individual vehicle. The road company could then take steps to punish dirty vehicles with higher rates in order to prove it wants clean air and deserve the support of the community. A major consideration should be the fact that on state-run roads, there is a great deal of fuel waste, because trucking regulations and licensing will give a trucker permission to haul freight in one direction but not on the return trip. "Deadheading" is a major cause of high freight rates and greater truck traffic. This has economic consequences of great concern. First, it keeps marginal shippers from entering into larger markets. This results in lower productivity on the part of the marginal producer, since he is denied the economy of scale. Further, when the empty truck runs down our roads, it is causing unproductive wear and it is paid for by other users rather than the truckers. Thus we see that the larger businesses are indirectly benefitting from the Interstate Commerce Commission and other state agencies meddling in the market, on the excuse that the roads are publicly owned and must be regulated to fit some anonymous bureaucrat's idea of "social good."

MARKET ALTERNATIVES

For example, there are a variety of state weight limits. There is also a multitude of "public servants" who enforce these limits. In a free market the natural occurrence of an Association of Road Owners is probably inevitable. There would also be smaller and more specialized cooperatives, such as those owners of roads who would band together to provide road services to those who carry high density freight from New York to Los Angeles and back. The same market process that brought about the Universal Product Code for grocers, the most competitive of businesses, will bring about the same organized means of providing a wide variety of road services to the public now so well "protected." The trucking industry is dying of the same malady the railroads expired from; government regulation. Privatizing the roads would make the existence and cost of those regulating agencies unacceptable by the public at large.

DECONTROL AND PRIVATIZED ROADS

As has been seen in the airline industry, when