

THE FUTURE IS TODAY'S CHALLENGE

By Wayne F. Kennedy

Most of us think of the future as some mysterious unknown. It is true that we cannot see clearly what is going to happen a year, a month, a week, or even a day ahead. However, I submit that we can, in a manner of speaking, see more of the future than we are aware that we can see. In other words, it is no longer a question of whether we change the world. Rather, it is a matter of what kind of world do we want.

Just for the record, the dictionary's definition of future is, "What is to come," or "What is to be." Challenge is defined as "A call to fight or a contest." My own definition of challenge is more like, "A difficult undertaking or task."

For a moment, let me digress. Let us forget about making comparisons between challenges and the relationships with the future.

Let me just mention the future of right-of-way from a highways perspective. What is our future? There is one point to keep in mind and that is no highway can be built without rights-of-way being acquired first. That being the case, I would say that there is a lot of work ahead for us. The nation's population continues to grow and that means more and larger cities and towns. More cities and towns means more roads. Perhaps there will not be another Interstate System, but that is only one type of road. Even though the Interstate Road System created a lot of right-of-way work, it is only 42,500 miles in length. There are 3,875,319 miles of other roads in the United States.

Do not forget that even road widenings often involve the need to acquire more right-of-way. Road widenings can result in some very complicated right-of-way takings. Also, more air rights appraisals will be required as land becomes more scarce and expensive.

By saying that the future is today's challenge I do not mean to infer in any way that we can predict the future by knowing or looking at what our challenges are. My objective is not to convince you that we all can become seers. What I do mean is that we can help determine the future by meeting head on and solving each day's challenges. It is very important that each of us does our part to push back our own professional frontiers as far as we can.

Routine day-to-day work can become dull and boring at times, no matter what one's profession may be, so we should look forward to each and every challenge for that change of pace we all need. Now, there are many kinds of challenges. Some challenges come in the form of needs to discover new and better or more efficient and effective ways of accomplishing our jobs. Some may be nothing more than "biting the bullet" and making those tough decisions which have significant political impacts and ramifications. Although the latter challenge is extremely important, I want to pay particular attention to the former.

It is most important now, for right-of-way people to become more effective and efficient than ever before. This is so because for many of us manpower and budgets are down and our workload is up or holding steady. To some extent, this challenge has always existed for most right-of-way people, but there is little doubt that we have an even bigger problem now, at least in the various levels of government. President Reagan has pledged to reduce the size of government's budget and its personnel. Many State, county, and city governments are also cutting back in the same manner.

Right-of-way people are used to difficult

tasks. No one ever claimed it was easy to take someone's home against his or her will. But right-of-way people must accomplish such tasks each day. What is more, right-of-way people must face a multitude of new and uniquely challenging tasks nearly everyday. That is because each property owner dealt with is different and has different personal problems, needs, and demands.

It is my considered opinion that we help make the future each day of our lives by facing and overcoming the many challenges of life and our work. It is only in retrospect that we come to realize how much we have affected the future.

Take the International Right of Way Association for example. Our founder, Frank C. Balfour, faced the challenge of organizing right-of-way people into a viable group of professionals that is presently recognized throughout this country, Canada, and even other parts of the world. To some extent the Frank Balfours of our world are visionaries who do, in a manner of speaking, look into the future and envision what can be. In the case of Frank C. Balfour, it took great organizational ability, persuasiveness, confidence, dedication, and a strong determination to do what needed to be done.

As another example, the large number of IR/WA training courses and the high caliber of content and high proficiency of instruction did not come about overnight. Not long ago, the IR/WA had only two courses. They were called Negotiations I and II. These became the Communications Course I and the Interpersonal Relations Course that Chuck Pyron organized with considerable help from members of this organization. It was fitting that the first courses taught through the auspices of

the IR/WA organization had to do with communications, because of the paramount role communications plays in everything a right-of-way person does.

We subsequently developed a right-of-way management course, a principals of right-of-way course, advanced communications skills, group communication, managing the right-of-way and real property organization, the appraisal of partial acquisitions, relocation assistance, environmental consideration, and property management leasing. This is truly a significant accomplishment over a relatively short period of time. It happened because certain individuals in this organization individually and collectively faced the challenge of training for right-of-way people.

During the development of the Interstate road system in this country, there were many occasions encountered where publicly-owned property was in selected right-of-way corridors. Publicly-owned properties usually prove to be very difficult to handle in the acquisition process. Long delays were encountered in overcoming or developing solutions to problems of this sort. Then, the Federal Highway Administration developed what is called a functional replacement program, which is designed to overcome the problems of acquiring publicly-owned properties. By use of the functional replacement approach, we have avoided long delays or possibly even stalled freeways. Although the cost of some of these individual functional replacement projects may seem high, there have been overall savings because the project has been advanced in a more timely manner and this proves to be a great savings in cost of construction and labor in the long run.

A marvelous example of challenges and the future is the following. Back in about 1966, the then Federal Highway Administrator, Rex M. Whitton, invited an independent group of professionals to prepare a set of guidelines for the planning and design of urban expressways. This group's report resulted in a book entitled "Freeway in the City," and it was published in 1968. Chapter 6, entitled "Multiple Use of the Corridor," stated that the Federal government had greeted the concept of multiple use with enthusiasm and that the Bureau of Public Roads (now the Federal Highway Administration) had declared itself "ready to work with the nation's cities to seek new and bold uses of

the joint development concept to achieve maximum use of that part of our scarce urban land which must be devoted to highway transportation." In making its offer, the Bureau of Public Roads took care to address itself to the sensitive political and social problems of the displacement of people and removal of scarce innercity land areas from tax roles. It pointed out that in heavily built-up residential areas, apartments could replace row housing in about one-third of the space formerly used. When this happens, the Bureau stated, the other two-thirds can be devoted to other kinds of development, and careful coordination can assure that "new replacement housing would be available for those displaced, as construction progresses."

The report goes on to state that such a program could be financed in a variety of ways, but all of its supporters see economics as the key to its success. One attractive feature is that in areas of greatest need, the land required for block-wide multiple use can be acquired for little more than the cost of land for freeway use alone. A city could acquire entire blocks on the route of the planned freeway, which it could buy for not much more than the highway department would have to spend (considering severance damages as well as right-of-way cost) for just a portion of the block needed. The city would then sell to the highway department the space needed for the freeway, at the same right-of-way plus severance damage price which the department would have to pay. The cost of the highway, thus, would be no less and no more, but the city would acquire the adjoining land very cheaply for its other facilities.

Some experts would go further and give the highway department itself the authority to condemn and purchase the area immediately adjoining a proposed freeway or interchange. It would sell the unused "improved land" (for the presence of the highway would greatly enhance its value) for public development projects.

Either method would work to the advantage of the community: For the cost factor of highway construction becomes less critical when revenue is produced by subsidiary uses of the corridor. This is the strength of the concept—its benefit to the highway department in terms of more peaceable land acquisition and its benefit to the city in terms of better traffic access,

possibilities of renewal on a more significant and creative scale, the removal of less land from the tax roles, and for all concerned the reduced long-range cost of freeway construction. The highway would no longer be the intruder, it would be a welcome component of the new city structure—as much a part of its architecture as a fine building.

All who work or have worked with highway departments recognize this and are well aware of how much has been accomplished in the years since. We have examples of multiple use of air space that range from parking areas underneath structures to parks over depressed freeway sections, apartment houses over Interstate highways and even a gambling casino, the famous Nugget in Sparks, Nevada, which has been constructed beneath an elevated portion of the Interstate highway there.

In no little way, the future, in the form of multiple use of air space, was made a reality by those innovators and imaginative people who were gathered together by Mr. Whitton back in 1966 to meet head on the challenge of constructing freeways in the city.

I realize that what I am saying is rather simplistic. But isn't it a wonderful feeling to think that you and I, individually and collectively, do have an impact on the future. The very point I am trying to make is that each of us is responsible for what the future may be. We should not be fearful of the future. We should not be reluctant to grab hold and help shape the future. Rather, we should face each day with excitement over the opportunity to confront each day's problems, study them, fully analyze what is involved and work out solutions to those problems. These problems, or challenges, are our opportunities.

Have you ever noticed how much more productive and innovative people are when they look upon problems as opportunities. Take the inventor or the research scientist, for example. His whole life is spent enthusiastically looking for the solutions to doing things better or easier or more productively and efficiently. Outstanding appraisers look forward to complicated appraisal problems, like complex or one-of-a-kind operations. An outstanding negotiator looks forward to opportunities to convince the most stubborn and resistant of owners that it is in their best interest to accept the fair market value being offered.

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CHAPTER # _____

My point is not to educate you in any way, shape, or form about right-of-way work. My only purpose is to encourage everyone to face all of the challenges they find in their work with enthusiasm and the happy expectation that by solving the problems and facing the challenges they will be helping to create the future. The true right-of-way professional does not wait for problems or challenges to come to him or her. The true right-of-way professional eagerly seeks out problems and challenges that he or she can meet head on and overcome. In that way we can shape the future of this great profession of right-of-way and, in no small way, play a part in the future of this country.

Although the work of right-of-way professionals is not as visible as that of engineers who actually build structures, roads, etc., it is, nevertheless, of great importance and each and every right-of-way person should take great pride in what they do and in their accomplishments that are made visible by the architects and the engineers who do the building.

Just 2 months ago, this country met the challenge and brought the future to us when two Americans, with much support from others on the ground, successfully flew the world's first space shuttle. An earlier giant step forward was taken when our Apollo Mission people succeeded in landing the first man on the moon.

You and I may not be faced with challenges of this magnitude. Nevertheless, that fact does not make our future any less important to us, our colleagues, our employers or, in fact, this country.

There have always been great challenges for right-of-way practitioners. One of these is gaining universal recognition and acceptance of right-of-way as a profession among all other professions and by the universities. That is the challenge I hold out for you. I hope you will accept it and make it our future.