

Wet weather equals pothole problems

By PAUL C. BARTON
Special to the Battalion

America's road system is becoming badly blemished. Cracks and potholes are multiplying rapidly, causing once-smooth streets and highways to resemble obstacle courses for motorists who swerve and sway in order to keep from knocking the front end of their cars

out of alignment.

All across the country, bad winter weather has combined with a shortage of funds to restrict road maintenance efforts. The result is a growing backlog of repair work that is causing headaches for transportation officials.

"It's a situation everybody is facing — state and local governments all

over the country," says John Berard of the federal Road Information Program.

Figures released by the Department of Transportation show that it would take \$21.8 billion a year through 1990 to keep American highways at the same level of quality that existed in 1975. That's twice the amount spent in 1978.

Further, Berard says that between November and April the number of potholes in roads nationwide increased by an estimated 93 million. Approximately 354 are forming every minute.

Opinions differ on the quality of the roads in this area. Bob Galloway, head of the highway materials division at the Texas Transportation Institute, calls them "not very good."

Gerald Lambert, head of transportation for the Bryan School District, says the roads "shake our buses to pieces." He mentions that window units, starter, motors and battery boxes have been known to fall out of buses at times.

On the other hand, John Hudson, president of Traffic Engineers, Inc., a Houston consulting firm, says the roads in this area are better than the ones in most Texas counties.

Brazos County road authorities, along with those in Bryan and College Station admit they are falling behind in the race to keep things in good shape.

"Weather is hurting us badly," says Jack Cornish, director of public works in Bryan.

Bryan City Engineer Holland Winder says the roads the last three winters have been unusually moist. Consequently, repair crews have been unable to fill potholes as soon as they appear. That delay adds to the problem.

"A pothole is like a cancer," says George Ford, director of public works for College Station. "If you don't treat it it's going to keep growing."

Not only does the weather inhibit repair work, moisture itself is the major cause of potholes. When water enters a crack in the road it soon drips down into the subbase. Once there, it doesn't dry — even when the sun comes out. Instead, it causes deterioration that combines with the bouncing of traffic on the pavement

to create a pothole. Winder says, however, "We don't have potholes at all compared to what they have in the northern part of the country."

Traffic volume is another major cause of road decay. In 1978 Americans drove more than 1.5 trillion miles. The total has been increasing at an estimated rate of 4.5 percent a year.

Berard says, "Nine times out of 10 you'll find local or county roads built for traffic conditions that existed before World War II."

Because of that, communities enjoying rapid population growth often have maintenance problems.

"That will hurt you worse than anything," Cornish says of Brazos County's rapid growth. The population grew 60 percent between 1970-1976.

Adds Galloway, "I doubt if anybody anticipated the growth in traffic we've had in the last 25 years."

Something else hurting local governments is a shortage of road construction and maintenance funds.

"The funds that you have for operation today are being eaten by inflationary rises that are far greater than taxation has risen," says County Commissioner Walter Wilcox. "You can't help but agree that the state of the roads is getting worse and worse."

He adds: "The general public has probably seen the best era of roads in this country. Unless something drastic happens, there is not going to be enough money in the future to expand and maintain roads as we have in the past."

Just how expensive has road maintenance become? Berard says the cost of building and maintaining roads has more than doubled in the

last 10 years.

Although he says funding is not a problem for College Station right now, Ford, too, is apprehensive about the future. "I don't think the era of good roads is gone, but the thing that is going to affect us in the future is the energy crunch," he says.

In addition to road deterioration, the county government is also facing problems with several bridges in the area.

There have been a number of bridge failures in the last year caused by oil trucks going over weak bridges near Kurten, an oil drilling area.

Moreover, Hudson's firm did a study of county roads and features related to traffic safety and found several bridges with structural deficiencies.

In its report to the county presented in September, the firm recommended that a bridge replacement program be started. It also warned that recent bridge failures would only be the beginning if there was not continuous inspection for bridge damage done by trucks with large loads.

Wilcox says each commissioner is keeping watch on the bridges in his precinct and that money for a large scale bridge replacement program is not available now.

It soon might be, however. Under a new program, the Texas State Department of Highways and Public Transportation will inventory, inspect and appraise bridges on all public roads, not just state highways. In addition, a certain percentage of federal highway funds regularly earmarked for bridge replacement or repair will now be available for fixing local bridges.



Politics, ping pong, protests predominate in Pyongyang

United Press International

Table tennis, the game that spawned "Ping-Pong diplomacy" between China and the West eight years ago, has become a political battleground.

The 35th World Table Tennis championships opened in this North Korean capital April 25. But when the 71 banners were paraded around the impressive 20,000 capacity stadium, four had no players behind them, and South Korean and Israel did not even rate a showing.

The host country refused South Korea's entry, claiming the International Table Tennis Federation had agreed to a unified Korean team. Israel was rejected on security grounds.

Vietnam also failed to show, having sent word from Hanoi that it would not take part in these biennial championships because of "Chinese aggression."

The ITTF upheld North Korea's decision to exclude South Korea and Israel although the federation president Roy Evans in his opening address termed it "regrettable."

Seven European countries together with the United States signed a letter of protest Wednesday night, but none threatened to withdraw.

Taiwan's exclusion from the 1978 Montreal Olympics highlighted the way sport has succumbed to politics, and table tennis is no exception.

"We try to keep politics out, but

there is nothing we can do when the decision is made one week before the championships begin," Evans commented: "We believe it is in the best interest of the sport to hold the championships, although it is hard on those countries which are excluded."

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