I-291

Editor's Note:

The information to follow was compiled by Donald Perkins from articles in the West Hartford News.

Now that pollution and ecology have become the big issues of the American people, it is important that they realize that the conservation of nature and natural resources is equally important. As the wheels of progress turn faster and faster, and ribbons of concrete lay waste to our forests and rolling meadows we fight the preliminary and immediate battle of pollution. But this is pollution, pollution of the worst kind. To destroy nature's beauty for the sake of the convenience of a corrupt highway department is the largest of all crimes. This is something that affects the local citizenry. Do something.

When a highway passes a body of water there are four basic types of pollution that occur. They are auto exhaust emissions, other substances from motor vehicles, accidental spillage of hazardous materials and the use of de-icing chemicals on the roadways. (1) Auto exhaust emissions include unburned hydrocarbons, carbon monoxide, aldehydes, oxides of sulfur and nitrogen, and the heavier weight hydrocarbons often called benzpyrene. Additions to the gasoline to increase anti-knock ratings also may produce lead, nickel, and phosphorus compounds. The full range of contaminants is not known.

Lead is added to gasoline in the form of lead tetraethyl which when decomposed in air becomes triethyl lead. These are both highly toxic materials.

The nickel compound used in gasoline is the nickel carbonyl. This compound is even more toxic than the lead compounds.

Phosphorus produces many compounds including oxides, oxychlorides and others, all of which are toxic.

It is interesting to compare the lead and nickel compounds with a known poison such as hydrogen cyanide. If this is done, one notes that lead tetraethyl is 133 times as toxic as the cyanide, and nickel carbonyl is 1,430 times as toxic as hydrogen cyanide, both on a weight basis.

Of the gaseous products, probably the most dangerous is benzpyrene, which is a proven cancer producing agent.

(2) The wearing down of brake and clutch linings and the loss of auto undercoating give rise to asbestos fibers in the air near highways.

(3) The spillage of hazardous materials on our highways has shown a substantial increase in recent years and problems of control are described by our Secretary of Transportation as follows:

"We are confronted with a situation where our regulations and procedures built up over the last 60 years may no longer be adequate to deal with the massive movements of hazardous materials now needed by our advanced technology." Six examples of chemical spills involving reservoirs follow.

1965 — Highly toxic diethylphthalate dumped by an overturned truck into the Hackensack (New Jersey) Water Company watershed.

1957 — Kerosene from an overturned tank truck permeated the entire Lebanon, New Hampshire water system.

1961 — Bunker oil and 100 octane gasoline dumped by a train wreck into the same system.

1964 — Asphalt and fuel oil got into the same system from overturned trucks.

1969 — Home heating oil dumped into a tributary of the Stamford Laurel Reservoir.

(4) De-icing salts and assorted other chemicals are spread on the roadway each winter and are converted to aerosols by the action of vehicle tires thereby permitting the spread of these materials away from the highway.

These four types of contaminants have shown up in measurable amounts in bodies of water that are passed closely by well-travelled highways. The Department of Transportation would like to locate I-291 within 100 feet of the main distributing reservoir (No. 6) on the Metropolitan District Commission's property on Talcott Mountain.

Interstate Route 291 is a highway in the federal interstate highway system. It is planned as a bypass of metropolitan Hartford so as to route traffic around the city instead of through it.

The Connecticut Department of Transportation's most recent plan is to run I-291 directly up the middle of the Metropolitan District Commission reservoir land in West Hartford. It involves draining and filling of Reservoir No. 3 and Dike Pond, fills a corner of Reservoir No. 2, and passes within 100 feet of the main distributing reservoir (No. 6) in such a manner that the planned Rt. 44 interchange would have to pass on a viaduct directly over Reservoir 6. The highway would also pass over all major filter beds of the M.D.C. and run the entire length of its West Hartford watershed.

It would, however, be a "scenic drive" and would fill projected traffic needs.

Transportation Commissioner George Conkling explained his route choice in a letter to West Hartford Mayor Ellsworth Grant. Some of the points made in that letter:

— post-hearing Dept. of Transportation studies were confined to the area between the I-291 - I-84 interchange, being built, and Reservoir 6. At this, the northen end, the Transportation Commissioner said his department hadn't considered moving the reservoir bed because of the location of the Brainard Estate and the Renbrook School.

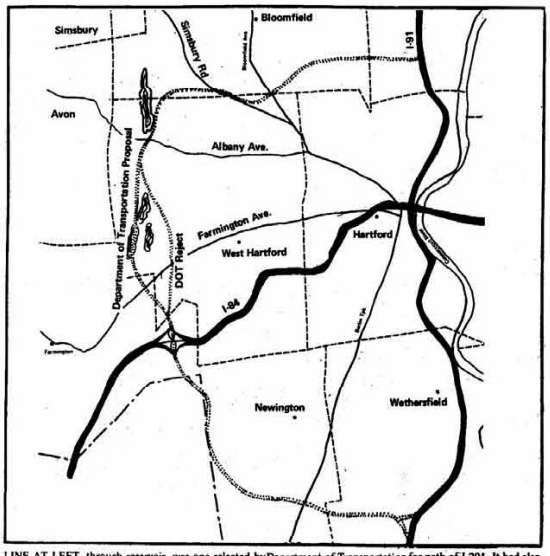
— a more westerly route (still through the MDC property) would have created "unreasonable scars" on the mountainside.

— a more easterly route would have filled Reservoir 1. The MDC doesn't use it, but the Dept. of Transportation felt the reservoir was useful for flood retention. This route would also pass through expensive homes in Sunset Farms, Hunter Drive, and other neighborhoods, thus ruining 29 homes. (Approximately the same number of families are presently scheduled to be dislocated in a less expensive area, Farmington's Oakland Gardens.)

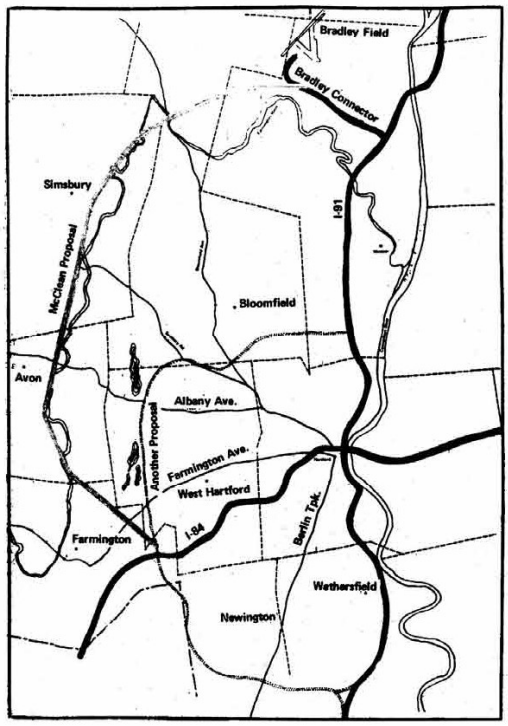
— the possibilities of lead pollution by exhaust and a crash involving a filter bed were "discounted" by the Commissioner.

— the chances of a runaway vehicle entering a reservoir would be eliminated at Reservoir 3 by draining it and reduced at Reservoir 2 by construction of a "mound" 25 feet high and half a mile long between the highway and the reservoir.

State Health Commissioner Franklin M. Foote sent the accompanying letter to Transportation Commissioner Conkling in which Dr. Foote expresses his reaction to certain of these points.



LINE AT LEFT, through reservoir, was one selected by Department of Transportation for path of I-291. It had also studied, but rejected because of community impact, line to right (east) or reservoirs. State health department, whose opinion had been sought by CONNDOT, rejects both because of their proximity to reservoirs, especially large distribution reservoir (Reservoir 6) at top.



BROAD STRIP shows I-291 alternative advanced by several parties, among them former Councilman Laughlin McLean, Charlotte Kitowski, and Mayor Ellsworth Grant. It would utilize I-84 interchange under construction and all the existing planning south and east of it, as well as portions of the planned new Route 10, and has the additional appeal of providing another approach to Bradley Airport. Path shown to right of reservoirs was also to be proposed by a high state official. It would take some 40 high-priced homes, a dozen or more located recently to be out of the way of I-291.

Health Of 386,000 Involved

Mr. George J. Conkling,
Commissioner
Department of Transportation
60 Washington Street
Hartford, Connecticut

Dear Commissioner Conkling:

The decision to go ahead with the highway in close proximity to the distribution reservoir of the Metropolitan District and also fairly close to Reservoir No. 2, is most disturbing.

Our studies have shown that motor vehicles account for approximately 70% of the total tonnage of the air pollutants over Connecticut. This motor vehicle waste is estimated to consist of more than 198,000 tons of hydrocarbons and more than 75,000 tons of other toxic airborne contaminants.

Of all the places to construct a multi-lane interstate highway, I strongly urge that you reconsider the decision and carefully avoid reservoirs for drinking water. This particular reservoir serves about 386,000 persons

Full Text of Foote Letter

at the present time and the number served in the 7 municipalities in this area undoubtedly will rise considerably by the time thousands of trucks, busses and other motor vehicles begin using the highway.

Both of the proposed routes are aimed like rifles at Reservoir No. 6, the distribution reservoir. From the point of view of health the eastern route would seem to give somewhat better protection to Reservoir No. 2 but both routes present a serious hazard to Reservoir No. 6 in terms of potentially toxic airborne pollutants.

I would strongly feel that a greater distance between reservoirs and the highway would give far better protection against the possibility both of surface water run-off and of a vehicular accident. My recommendation has been for a distance of ¼ mile, the minimum with which I would feel comfortable.

I do not agree that the danger of noxious airborne pollutants should be considered highly improbable. There is no reason for taking any risk at all of this sort where the health of so large a number of persons is involved.

Your advisors undoubtedly

(continued on page 16)