

Why San Diego and Southern California Claim Recognition in their National Highway Aspirations

By Colonel Ed Fletcher

The only national highway route east to west connecting the Atlantic and the Pacific, free from snow and open every day of the year for travel, is along the Mexican border through southeastern Arizona, New Mexico and the South. The nearest point to the Pacific from Arizona is San Diego, approximately 180 miles from Yuma, Arizona. But until 1912 San Diego was surrounded by a mountain range of granite and a sea of sand and silt—the great Imperial Valley.

In 1910 Governor Hunt pledged the good word of Arizona that the first paved highway from Phoenix to the California line would be built to Yuma providing California did its part. With approximately 65,000 population at that time, San Diego County voted bonds and spent a million dollars in blasting a road to the Imperial County line through the mountains from San Diego. The business men of San Diego by private subscription raised \$60,000 and built the Mountain Springs Grade into Imperial Valley. They donated the lumber, Imperial Valley citizens did the work, and we demonstrated the feasibility of a plank road through the famous sand hills of the Colorado Desert to Yuma, shortening the distance across the continent by 45 miles. Today a magnificent paved highway has replaced the plank road, making those self-same sand hills one of the most interesting attractions of a transcontinental trip.

San Diego and Imperial Valley citizens raised \$25,000 to assist in the building of the Yuma bridge, and nearly as much more to enable Yuma County, Arizona, to sell its million and a quarter of highway bonds, assuring the grading of our national highway from Yuma to Phoenix in conjunction with the Maricopa County highway construction.

The history of our national highway aspirations is a record of sacrifice and hard work. Today every mile of the three national highways—Dixie Overland, Old Spanish Trail, and Lee, are federal aid projects. It is

only a question of time when they will be completely paved.

With these highways practically all graded today, and from forty to fifty percent paved or under contract, the increasing auto travel is a revelation. Five years ago the government inspection of travel into California at Yuma did not exceed five machines a day. During the last six months it has averaged over two hundred cars a day, with six or seven hundred people, and increasing at the rate of twenty-five percent a year. The estimate of the Eastern travel is slightly less, but likewise increasing in volume.

Our aim should be to work until we have secured a permanent highway across the continent, for it means lower costs of transporting products to market, increased values of real estate effected, and a tendency to assist in an immediate development of the country through which it runs. Increased state and national highways mean increased travel. It is estimated that twenty million people during the summer of 1926 were out in automobiles travelling from one state to the other, thereby keeping money in circulation, and more important still, securing a better understanding of each other's problems and mode of living. The West desires to go East just as much as the East desires to go West, and national highways will make for better citizenship and strengthen the bonds between the North and South, East and West.

National highways mean everything in the progress of this nation in time of peace, but become invaluable when war threatens. Have you ever stopped to think that it would be possible to transport a million men in two weeks across the continent by auto in time of emergency?

Let every chamber of commerce and every organization interested in highways, working together, bring pressure to bear on all federal, state and county officials, urging the completion of the missing links in permanent highways across the continent, and at as early a date as possible.



San Diego "Air Capital of the West," along the waterfront.

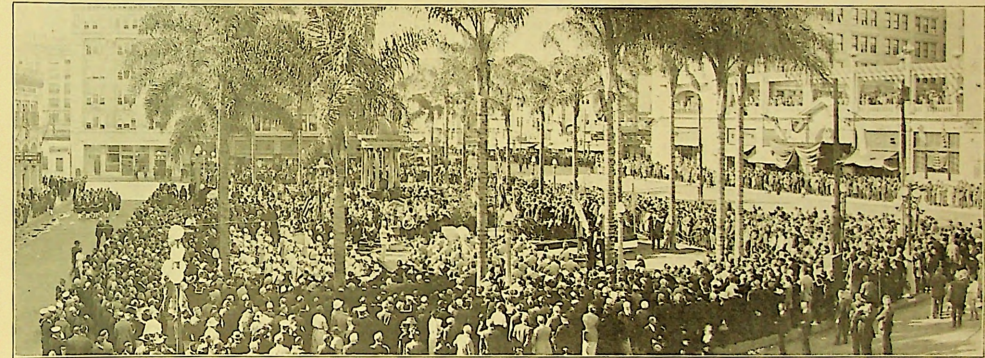
An Account of Colonel Fletcher's Record-Breaking Transcontinental Trip

San Diego, California, to Savannah, Georgia

Auspices, San Diego Chamber of Commerce

October 10-13, 1926

71 hours, 15 minutes, Western Union Time



Dedicating Plaza Milestone November 17, 1923, at San Diego. Colonel Fletcher reading President Coolidge's Address

Log of Trip and All-Year National Highways Map-- Atlantic to Pacific

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