

CITIES MAY GET U.S. PARKING AID

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Roads Chief Hints Proposal to Divert Highway Funds

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The Administration is expected to ask Congress next year to clear the way for the use of highway funds to help cities finance off-street parking.

Strongly backed by Federal highway officials, the proposal is known to be under serious consideration at high levels.

A strong indication that the Administration has virtually decided to push for such an amendment to the Federal Highway Act in the next Congress came today in a speech by Rex M. Whitton, the Federal Highway Administrator.

In a speech to the American Association of State Highway Officials in Wichita, Kan., and released by his office here, Mr. Whitton said:

"It is my belief that we will have to do something to provide financial assistance to cities for off-street parking."

Mr. Whitton did not set a target date. Nor did he propose any specific amount of money. However, sources close to the Administration say that the proposal is almost certain to be presented to the Congress convening in January.

Under the present Federal highway law, funds cannot be used for parking facilities. The bulk of the money is used to help states acquire rights-of-way and construct highways.

Many members of Congress would almost certainly oppose diversion of funds from roadbuilding into construction of parking facilities.

This opposition would likely be particularly strong at this time, for President Johnson last week ordered a sharp cutback in the Federal highway program in an effort to quell inflationary pressure in the economy.

The Federal Government had originally planned to commit \$4-billion to \$4.4-billion in highway funds in the present fiscal year ending next June 30. This has been cut back to \$3.3-billion.

This will make an interesting test on the use of highway trust funds for broad urban transportation purposes.

This will slow roadbuilding in every state. The greatest impact will be on the interstate superhighway system, a 41,000-mile system that is now slightly more than half completed.

Under the cutback, New York State's Federal-aid limitation bill will be \$171,445,000, of which just \$183,000 has been placed under contract since last June 30. New York's share last fiscal year was \$210,587,664.

In pushing for authority to divert funds into off-street parking, Federal highway officials argue that it would less costly in most cases to erect parking facilities than to construct new streets.

By removing existing street parking, they point out, one or two additional traffic lanes can be opened to vehicles.

Federal highway officials are also seeking other solutions to urban traffic problems. One proposal is for what they call "street stretching."

In his speech today, Mr. Whitton described "street stretching" as converting existing sidewalks into vehicle traffic lanes. Pedestrian walks would be provided in arcades built into the first floor of buildings.

"This obviously is not a cheap solution to increasing the traffic capacity and safety of streets," Mr. Whitton said. "But it certainly is less expensive and disruptive than removing entire buildings for new street or freeway constructions."