

**Alexander W. Graham**  
Missouri State Highway Engineer  
March 1917 to Jun 1922



Sketch by Wilbur Mayens  
Missouri Department of Highways  
Highway Planning Division

In March 1917, upon passage of the Hawes Law, Alexander W. “Boss” Graham was appointed State Highway Engineer. Graham promptly began outlining the state road system with the assistance of the county courts and the State Highway Board. Graham’s proposed a system of 5,000 miles (1,500 miles above the legislated minimum) connecting all of the counties and the larger population centers. Graham’s plan would remain the foundation of Missouri’s road system. The State Highway Board approved the tentative system in June 1917.

For both 1917 and 1918, the legislature appropriated \$200,000 which was apportioned to the counties according to their assessed valuations, with no county receiving more than \$6,000. Through December 1, 1918, the board approved 122 projects covering 1,590 miles in sixty-one counties.

Of these projects, sixty-one were placed under contract in forty-three counties, while over 11,400 miles of the inter-county seat highways were dragged and otherwise improved. Most counties requisitioned their full allotments of Federal Aid funds in both years. Missouri State Highway Department engineers assisted the counties in developing their projects and made periodic inspections of the ongoing construction. This local, state and federally-funded highway system marked the beginning of Missouri’s modern highway development.

Graham traveled to Washington, D.C., in May 1917 and received some standard bridge designs from the Office of Public Roads and Rural Engineering. There Graham also secured Chester D. Mann as the department’s first Bridge Engineer.

The Centennial Road Law of 1921 marked the final step in the transition from local to state control over road construction. Designed to implement the 1920 bond issue, the Centennial Road Law passed in special session after long, heated debate and compromise between urban and rural legislators. It created a four-member Missouri State Highway Commission with broadened powers to locate, design, construct, and maintain the state highway system, let contracts, and purchase rights of way.

The commission was authorized to appoint a Secretary to the Commission, a Chief Counsel, and the Chief Engineer. The legislation detailed a 1,500-mile system of primary routes to be comprised of “high type” or hard surfaced roads to connect the principal cities. It also explicitly defined a secondary system of 6,100 miles, chiefly of graded earth and gravel, which interconnected all of the county seats. The law mandated that construction be carried on simultaneously as far as possible in all the counties; each county received an apportionment of \$6,000 per mile.

Governor Arthur Hyde appointed the first commission members on December 1, 1921: Theodore Gary, chairman; S. S. Connett, vice chairman; Murray Carleton; C. D. Matthews; and state geologist H. A. Buehler as an ex officio member. The board selected John M. Malang, of Jasper County; as state superintendent of highways and ex-officio secretary of the board, and reappointed Alexander Graham as Chief Engineer.