

Senator Harry Hawes



Sketch by Wilbur Mayens
Missouri Department of Highways
Highway Planning Division

During his life he worked for his state many years - as a state representative, a member of Congress and as a United States senator. But his name lives on in Missouri history on a law which established the official beginning of federal aid in Missouri highway building.

On July 11, 1916 President Woodrow Wilson signed the Federal Aid Act. It opened up a source of revenue for all states by providing that the United States should aid the states in constructing rural post roads. Under Hawes' leadership, Missouri enacted a new road law in 1917. The law created a bi-partisan state highway board of four members and brought all road laws up to date.

But most important, the Hawes Law accepted federal aid and put Missouri in a partnership that has developed the country's highways to their modern level.

The Federal Aid Road Act signed by Wilson in 1916 provided a national impetus for road improvements. Meant to establish a national system of interstate highways, the act appropriated \$75 million in federal funds for rural post roads, with the states matching the federal funds on a fifty-fifty basis.

The act limited federal participation to \$10,000 per mile, excluding bridges longer than twenty feet. To receive funding, a state had to have an adequate and competent state highway department and follow the specifications of the Office of Public Roads and Rural Engineering, U.S. Department of Agriculture (renamed the Bureau of Public Roads in 1918). This was the first comprehensive federal legislation and appropriation for the improvement of state roads.

The Missouri General Assembly formally assented to the federal act with the passage in March 1917 of the Hawes Road Law, named for its chief author, State Representative Harry B. Hawes.

The Hawes Law strengthened the role of the Missouri State Highway Department, placing it under the authority of a four-member, bipartisan State Highway Board.

The members appointed under this law were E. L. Sanford, George. E. McIninch, S. S. Pingree and C. O. Raine. John M. Malang was appointed state highway superintendent and Alexander W. Graham was appointed highway engineer. The state was divided into six districts and a division engineer appointed for each district.

The Hawes Law also jump-started a surge in roadbuilding that culminated in approval of 122 projects, 61 of which were put under contract in 1917. By the end of that year, more than 11,000 miles were improved.