



Module 1

Read Ahead

History of ALDOT

Module 1: History of ALDOT

Objectives

After attending the training in Module 1, participants will be able to:

- understand the history of ALDOT from birth out of corrections in 1911 until today.
- identify the many changes that have occurred throughout the history of ALDOT.
- understand the many reorganizations of areas, regions, divisions, and bureaus.

Early History of ALDOT

In 1911, the State Highway Commission was created under Governor Emmet O'Neal's Administration (1911-1915). The State Highway Commission consisted of five commissioners and three regular employees. The State Highway Commission was organized along with an Oyster Commission and was initially housed in the cloak room of the Senate Chamber in the Alabama State Capitol.

The first five Alabama State Highway Commission Members were Robert E. Spragins, Chairman, of Huntsville; John Craft of Mobile who later became Chairman of the 2nd Commission; V. B. Atkins of Selma; G.N. Mitcham, Professor of Civil Engineering at Auburn University; and Eugene A. Smith, State Geologist at the University of Alabama. Regular Members of the Commission were W.S. Keller, State Highway Engineer who had experience at the County Engineer level; Robert P. Boyd, Assistant State Highway Engineer who had experience at the County Engineer level; and C.L. Rabb, Clerk.

Earliest Years

Early highway executives in 1911 shared some of the same financial woes as their current counterparts. The Financial Act of 1911 appropriated \$154,000 from the State Convict Fund. The Act allowed the funds to be used for construction of roads and for the overhead expenses of the state executives. Each county received \$2,000 per year, which had to be matched by the county, and the county could accumulate the money for two years. If the money was not used after two years, it was then redistributed to all the other counties. In 1911, only Madison, Colbert, Macon, Lawrence, Blount, Bullock, Lauderdale, Dale, and Etowah received disbursements.

In 1912, engineering staff came from the counties. All previously ongoing work was suspended in their areas, and they surveyed within their respective areas. Each Engineer was paid \$5/day from the joint county and state funds, used his own survey equipment, and was paid \$5/day for per diem. The State provided notebooks, profile paper, and estimate blanks. All road construction was to be county-financed with bonds or warrants. The main role of the State Highway Commission was to educate the counties on the need for constructing roads along economical and engineering lines utilizing local materials.

Initially, many roads used chert (not crushed) as a stabilization medium. Montgomery County was the leader in the hard surface road movement in Alabama. The only power in the early years was gas steam rollers and rock crushers. All work was done by mules (\$300

for a good pair). A large contractor had ten to twenty teams of mules in order to perform necessary work.

AASHO (American Association of State Highway Officials) was formed in Atlanta, GA in 1914. The 3 regular Highway Commission employees attended. On July 11, 1916, federal legislation established "Federal-Aid" to states. Senator John Hollis Bankhead of Alabama was instrumental in getting the legislation passed. This created a \$200 million fund to provide states with matching funds for highway construction. In 1917, the first Federal Aid of \$10,000 was allotted to Alabama. The Highway Commission allowed the counties to match because there were no "state" funds as yet.

In 1919, the Alabama Highway Commission reorganized. The Legislature enacted changes that included the Commission moving to a new home in the Bell Building in Montgomery. Also, the Commission expanded to ten commissioners and two ex-officio members from Auburn University and the University of Alabama.

On October 31, 1921, Alabamians' first bond issue of \$25 million was passed by the legislature but failed to gain enough ballot votes to be ratified. In 1922, the bond issue was again submitted to the people for a vote and was ratified. This year also started the "State" system of roads. Military equipment from WW I was distributed for use.

Highways were first given names during this time, and Bankhead Highway, one of the most recognized at the time, extended across the country from Washington, D.C., through Bankhead's hometown of Jasper, AL and on to San Diego, CA. Bankhead was the Senator instrumental in the first Federal Aid bill and served as President of the United States Good Roads Association. Another highway worthy of mention is the Dixie Overland Highway, which extends from Columbus, GA to Meridian, MS and is now known as U.S. 80. Additionally, the Jackson Highway, which runs from Tennessee to Florence, AL to Russellville, AL and on to Mississippi as well as the Florida Short Route, which runs from Tennessee to Huntsville, AL to Gadsden, AL to Anniston, AL to Opelika, AL and on to Columbus, GA, were named.

Beginning in 1921, a fee was charged for inspection of gasoline sold. Chemists inspected 31 million gallons for highway departments, and these inspections yielded \$15,503.87.

Inadequate highway financing, increased road use, and unsympathetic public sentiment toward funding were issues at the time, and factors affecting roads included Alabama topography, maintenance problems, primitive equipment, serious flood damage (especially in Elba and Geneva), and the Great Depression. Despite these issues and factors, some progress was made to Alabama roads during this time.

In 1927, the Alabama State Highway Department was born, and the Alabama Highway Code restructured the department again. These changes included a three-man commission, a Bond Commission, public powers, provisions for expenditure of funds, creation of four Divisions, along with construction of a building for the Highway Department and Public Safety.

Becoming a State Department

On March 2, 1939, the Alabama Merit System law was created. It is the oldest such law now in effect in any of the southern states. The merit system owes its start in Alabama to a determined effort to generally improve administrative efficiency in state government. Enactment of a merit system law was one of a number of recommendations for organizational and administrative improvement that Governor Frank Dixon made to the 1939 State Legislature. While it did not overlook the problems of the spoils system, his message on the subject was essentially an eloquent argument for the merit system as a factor in governmental efficiency. Quoting from Governor Dixon's address, "Under our present system, the chief duty of the Governor of Alabama is running an employment agency. Many thousands of applications are on file for places; each applicant has a right to come and present his claim in person, and it is humanly impossible for the Governor to act for the best interest of the State in patronage matters, even assuming that he spends his entire time attending to that."

In this same message, delivered on the third day of the 1939 legislative session, the Governor called attention to the inefficiency resulting from numerous independent boards, bureaus, and governmental agencies and recommended "certain administrative changes." His recommendations spelled out plans for consolidating related functions into larger departments and placing these departments under single department directors, rather than commissions and boards. On this same day, bills were introduced to create six reorganized departments and to establish the merit system. All were enacted. The six departments were: Revenue, Highway (now known as Transportation), Finance, Corrections, Pardon and Parole, and Personnel.

In addition to the overall governmental overhaul, the Alabama State Highway Department was given the positions of Highway Director and Secretary to the Director. There were now six cabinet members who headed branches of operations called bureaus. Lastly, new positions of Construction Engineer, Survey and Plans, Auditor, Equipment Superintendent, and Maintenance Engineer were created. Divisions within the Department expanded from four to seven.

- Division 1 – Decatur
- Division 2 – Birmingham
- Division 3 – Tuscaloosa
- Division 4 – Alexander City
- Division 5 – Montgomery
- Division 6 – Grove Hill
- Division 7 – Montgomery

In 1943, Bureaus were added, including the Bureau of County Aid. In 1945, the Bureau of Materials and Tests was added. The Bureau of Bituminous Operations was added in 1947 but only lasted until 1951 when it was consolidated back into the Construction Bureau. The Bureau of Bridges was added in 1949 and was formed from part of the Construction Bureau.

World War II Era

World War II was a difficult time for the Department as it was for the entire United States. More than 600 employees were taken into service, and regular Federal Aid was suspended in December 1941. The Works Project Administration (WPA) came to a close in 1942. Access roads to military institutions became a priority, and all were paid for by the Federal Government. However, the Farm to Market Road Act was enacted locally in 1943 and, one year later, the Federal Aid Act of 1944 was created.

From 1949 to 1955 (post-World War II), business began booming. There was a new direction in construction, including improved road surfacing, ditches, rights-of-way, and a large number of bridges being built. In 1949, per a state legislative statute, the Department was required to assume the maintenance of state highways through municipalities. In 1951, the Captive County System was established by the Legislature, as defined in the AL Code. The Department is responsible for construction, repair, and maintenance of the roads and bridges of the respective county.

The Fifties Through the Seventies Saw Forward Thinking

In 1956, the Department was divided into seven divisions:

- First – Decatur
- Second – Birmingham
- Third – Tuscaloosa
- Fourth – Alexander City
- Fifth – Abolished
- Sixth – Grove Hill
- Seventh - Troy

In 1957, the Electronic Computer Section was organized. Alabama was one of the first state transportation departments to use computers. From 1951 to 1960, the Engineering Employee Training Program was started. In 1959, AHD “completed” the two-way radio system from vehicles to base stations.

In 1963, Governor George Wallace (first term) had a long distance approach to public services. He added the 8th Division in Birmingham and the 9th Division in Montgomery. He reestablished the 5th Division in Mobile. Additionally, six new Bureaus were added while Wallace was Governor. These included Right of Way, Planning and Programs, Materials and Tests, Research and Development, Urban Planning, and Federal Aid.

The interstate era in Alabama commenced in the mid-fifties. The basis of the Interstate System was the Federal Highway Act of 1956. Initially, a 60/40 match was provided in the 1954 act, but this was changed to a 90/10 match in 1956. The Highway Trust Fund (1956) called for the distribution of federal fuel taxes to highway construction and maintenance. The government could not allocate more to the states for any year than was already in the fund. The cost was more than originally estimated. The Highway Beautification Program, which included wildflowers for driving pleasure, was signed into law by Lyndon B. Johnson

in 1965. The first Interstate to go to construction in Alabama (1967) was I-65 from Kimberly to Cullman (28 miles).

In 1964, the Department moved from the shared building in front of the Capitol to the building behind the Capitol (current State House). In 1965, the Ninth Division (Montgomery) was dissolved, and the Eighth Division moved from Birmingham to Montgomery. By the mid- 1960s, the Department had eight Divisions, with the average number of employees at 7,000, and expenditures of \$192 million. Maintenance Management Systems were developed to help with budgeting.

In 1969, the Mobile River Tunnel was the most dramatic feature constructed. It was the largest contract to that date – a \$47.5M contract. It took 3.5 years to build and opened in 1973.

In the 1970s, the Alabama Highway Department changed again:

- 2nd Division moved from Birmingham to Sheffield
- 3rd Division moved from Tuscaloosa to Birmingham
- 5th Division moved from Mobile to Tuscaloosa
- 6th Division moved from Grove Hill to Montgomery
- 9th Division established in Mobile

Present Day

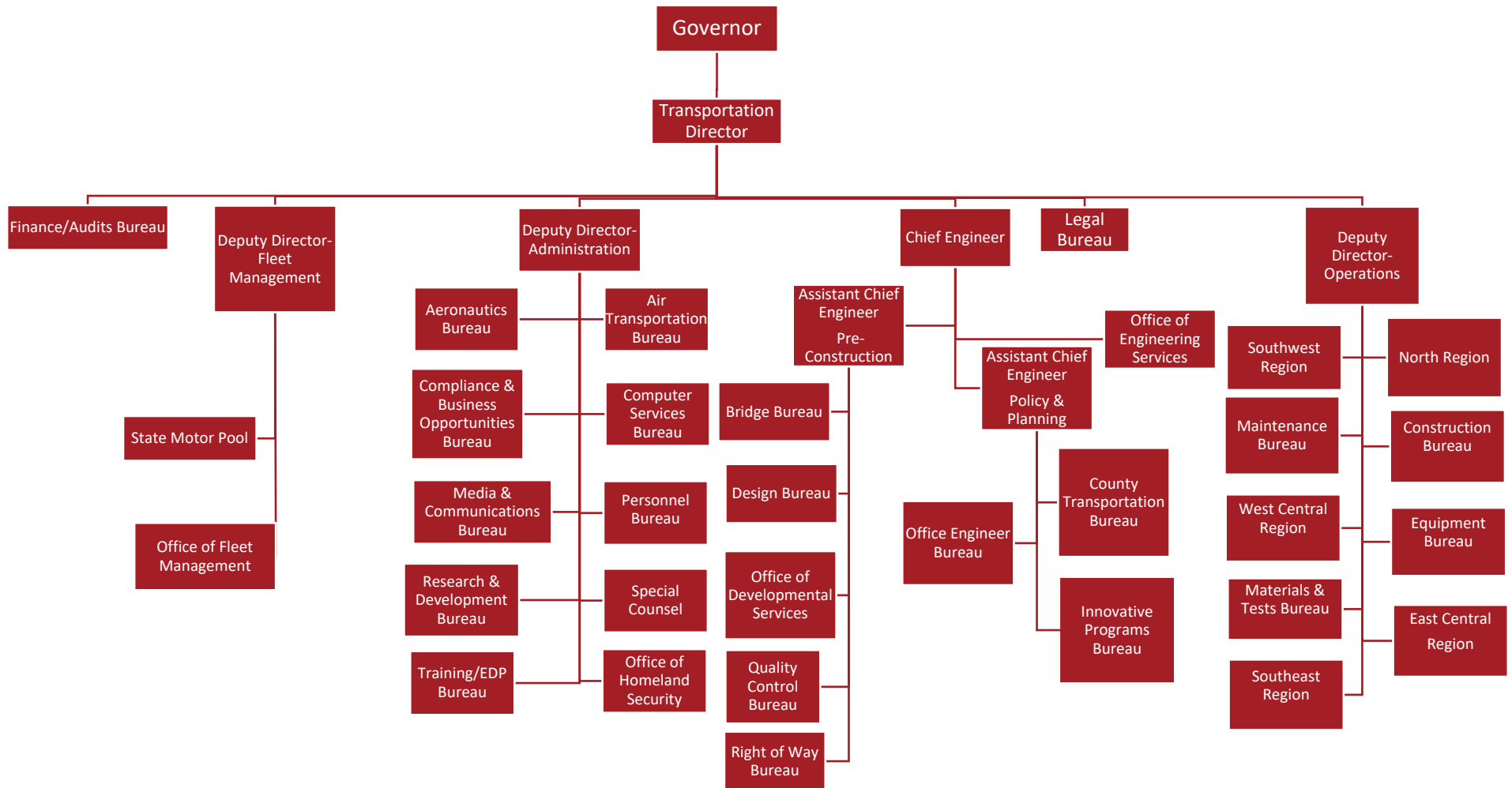
In 1993, the Alabama Highway Department was renamed the Alabama Department of Transportation to better represent the broadened focus of today's transportation network.

As many know, in 2014, Divisions united to become Regions.

- Parts of the 1st and 2nd Division became the North Region.
- Parts of the 5th, 2nd, and 8th Divisions became the West Central Region.
- The 3rd and 4th Divisions became the East Central Region.
- The 6th and 7th Divisions and part of the 4th Division became the Southeast Region.
- The 8th and 9th Divisions became the Southwest Region.

Per ASCE's 2015 Alabama Report Card, Alabama has 15,986 bridges, of which ALDOT maintains 5,758 and 102,200 miles of public roads, of which ALDOT maintains approximately 11,000 miles of federal and state highways.

The current organization chart for the Department is below.



Below is a chart identifying the Directors of ALDOT since the beginning.

Term	Highway Commission Chairman	Governor
1911-1915	Robert E. Spragins	Emmet O'Neal
1915-1919	Robert E. Spragins	Charles Henderson
1919-1923	John Craft (1919)	Thomas E. Kilby
1923-1927	John Rogers	Thomas E. Kilby
	Highway Director	
1927-1931	Woolsey Fennell	Bibb Graves
1931-1935	Langdon G. Smith	Benjamin M. Miller
1935-1939	Gaston Scott	Bibb Graves
1939-1943	Chris J. Sherlock (1939-1942)	Frank M. Dixon
	W. Guerry Pruett (1942-1943)	
1943-1947	G.R. Swift (1943-1945)	Chauncey M. Sparks
	E.N. Rodgers (1945-1947)	
1947-1951	Ward W. McFarland	James E. Folsom
1951-1955	W. Guerry Pruett	Gordon Persons
1955-1959	Herman L. Nelson	James E. Folsom
1959-1963	Sam Engelhardt	John Patterson
1963-1967	E.N. Rodgers (1963-1964)	George C. Wallace
	Herman L. Nelson (1964-1967)	
1967-1968	Herman L. Nelson	Lurleen B. Wallace
1968-1971	Robert G. Kendall (1968-1969)	Albert P. Brewer
	Marion H. Wilkins (1969-1971)	
1971-1975	W. Guerry Pruett (1971-1972)	George C. Wallace
	Ray D. Bass (1972-1975)	
1975-1979	Ray D. Bass (1975-1978)	George C. Wallace
	Dan H. Turner (1978-1979)	
1979-1983	Rex K. Rainer (1979-1980)	Forrest "Fob" James, Jr.
	Bobby J. Kemp (1980-1983)	
1983-1987	Ray D. Bass	George C. Wallace
1987-1991	Royce G. King	Guy Hunt
1991-1993	Perry A. Hand (1991-1993)	Guy Hunt
	G.M. Roberts (1993)	
	Transportation Director	
1993-1995	G.M. Roberts	James E. Folsom, Jr.
1995-1999	Jimmy Butts	Forrest "Fob" James, Jr.

1999-2001	G.M. Roberts	Don Siegelman
2001-2003	Paul E. Bowlin	Don Siegelman
2003-2011	Joe McInnes	Bob Riley
2011-present	John R. Cooper	Robert Bentley

Summary

ALDOT has been through many changes through the years. As technology advances, more changes will come. The basic needs to fulfill the mission of the Department will not change. The citizens of Alabama will continue to need a safe, viable transportation network. And you, as a leader, will make this happen.