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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

AUG 9 1974

Mr. Norbert T. Tiemann  
Administrator, Federal Highway Administration  
Department of Transportation

Dear Mr. Tiemann:

During a survey of the status of the Interstate Highway System in California, we examined into the extent to which the State was modifying existing highways to specifications below standards in order to facilitate the movement of traffic.

As of April 1974, the State, with FHWA approval, had completed 40 projects under which the State had temporarily increased the number of traffic lanes on sections of the highways by reducing the widths of the existing lanes below design standards and by using a portion of the safety shoulders. The State later compared the accident experience on certain of these projects for test periods before and after the change in lane widths.

We examined nine of these comparisons and noted that for two of the projects, both on Interstate 280, traffic accidents had increased substantially after the lane widths were reduced. For highway segment numbered 04-SCL-280-9.58/10.2, accidents had increased about 40 percent from 35 accidents during the test period before the modification to 49 accidents during the test period after the modification. State highway officials stated that there were no plans to restore the lanes on this project to standard width before 1980.

For highway segment numbered 04-SF-280-0.85/2.6, accidents had increased about 30 percent from 66 accidents during the test period before the modification to 86 accidents during the test period after the modification. The safety shoulder has been restored but all lanes remain at substandard width.

FHWA approval did not require that the State evaluate the safety effect of the modifications; however, the two cases cited indicate to us that such modifications can have an adverse effect on the safety

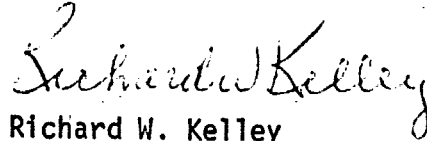
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of the motoring public. Therefore, it appears that FHWA approval of highway modifications not meeting current design and safety standards should be conditioned on a State's evaluation of the effects of such modifications and prompt restoration of the highway when warranted. We would appreciate your views on this matter.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard W. Kelley". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Richard W. Kelley  
Associate Director

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