

## Mindanao And Sulu Highways

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With the exception of a few short coastal roads in northern Mindanao which were built under the Spanish regime, road building in Mindanao and Sulu started only during the early days of the American Occupation by the U. S. Military authorities. Since the military roads were built primarily for the pacification of the Non-Christian inhabitants in that region, they were relatively few and were constructed solely for the purpose of connecting the seacoast to military posts in the interior, such as the Camp Romandier road in Jolo, the Fort Pikit road in Cotabato, and the Camp Keithley road in Lanao. Later on, when Military Government of that region was no longer necessary and civil government took its place, road and trail constructions were attempted as economic and social measures and although handicapped by lack of funds, the former Department of Mindanao and Sulu, under the supervision of the Bureau of Public Works, was able to construct coastal roads mostly along the northern coast of Mindanao and around the island of Jolo.

Immediately after the inauguration of the Commonwealth Government of the Philippines in 1935 steps were taken to accelerate the development of Mindanao. Legislative missions including His Excellency, the President of the Philippines, as well as Department Secretaries and their staffs have made repeated inspections and thru these visits the importance of properly developing Mindanao has been so impressed on the public as a matter of urgent concern to the country that it has become one of the most important national issues of the day.

Conscious of the importance of building systematically planned highways in Mindanao as the best and most logical way to open up the country, the National Assembly, on January 2, 1936, passed Commonwealth Act No. 18, reverting one million pesos from the establishment of agricultural colonies and making that sum available for the construction of roads in Mindanao. Such a decisive step on the part of the Legislature marked a "new deal" in road building activities in that part of the country, and as a direct result the opening to light traffic of the Iligan-Davao Interprovincial Road, 412.6 Kms. in length, was made possible early this year.

Ten months later, Commonwealth Act No. 75 was passed, on October 24, 1936, providing, among other things, the creation of the position of Commissioner for Mindanao and Sulu, under the Department of the Interior. According to this Act, the most important function of the Commissioner is to direct general development work in Mindanao and Sulu, and to so coordinate it as to prevent overlapping and duplication of similar activities by the various branches of the government. The timely appointment of no other than a veteran road builder as the first Commissioner by His Excellency, the President of the Philippines, is in itself a guarantee of the proper planning and the expeditious execution of road work in Mindanao.

The present policy of road building in Mindanao is based upon the sole desire of the Commonwealth to develop, as rapidly as funds permit, the economic resources of that vast and fertile country with the ultimate view of converting Mindanao into one of the main revenue sources of the government. In consonance with this policy, the roads are now being built in the order of their relative importance, i.e., those that contribute towards the preservation of peace and order, those that provide for interprovincial and intercoastal communication, and those that promote agriculture in general are given preferential attention. As examples of these routes, the present carefully selected National roads may be mentioned; the road around Lake Lanao, the central road in Jolo, the Iligan-Davao interprovincial and intercoastal road, the Davao-Agusan interprovincial and intercoastal road, the interprovincial and coastal road in northern Mindanao from Occidental Misamis to Surigao, the Bukidnon-Oriental Misamis Interprovincial road, the Davao-Cotabato Interprovincial road connecting Davao Gulf with Sarangani Bay,

the Cotabato-Makar road, the Butuan-Lianga road, the penal colony roads in Zamboanga and Davao, the Zamboanga-Naga Coastal road, the Isabela-Lamitan coast-to-coast road in Basilan, and the Tawi-Tawi coast-to-coast agricultural road.

The aforementioned National roads represent a total of 2,088.88 Kms. of which nearly 1,000 Kms. are first and second class roads and about the same length are either under construction or will be built in the near future. Pursuant to the provisions of Executive Order No. 71, promulgated December 3, 1936, the construction, maintenance and improvement of these National Roads in Mindanao and Sulu will be financed from such appropriations as may be authorized by the Commonwealth Government in annual or special appropriation acts and from the 80% of all collections under the Gasoline and Motor Vehicle Funds, which is subject to apportionment on a definite basis. It is, therefore, evident that these National roads will be adequately taken care of, and when completed will provide the immediate need for main traffic routes in that section of the Islands.

It has been proposed by the Honorable, the Commissioner for Mindanao and Sulu that a portion of the "Excise Tax", amounting, if practicable, to ₱23,658,000.00, be set aside to finance a road construction program on the islands of Mindanao and Sulu, including their maintenance, for a period of 5 years. It is expected that after the five-year period, the lands along which the roads built will be so populated and developed that sufficient revenue may be derived locally for their proper maintenance.

During the first two years it is proposed to construct some 1,238 Kms. of second-class main trunk roads, including the uncompleted sections of the existing national roads, at an estimated cost of approximately ₱10,000,000.00; the maintenance funds for 5 years included. During the third year, an additional 572 Kms. of second-class roads will be built, at a total cost of around ₱5,000,000.00 including maintenance needed for 5 years. By the end of the fourth year, it is estimated that an additional 593 Kms. of second-class roads can be added to the system, at a total cost of another ₱5,000,000.00 including provision for their maintenance for 5 years.

The proposed roads included in the aforesaid five-year program having a total length of 2,336 Kms. are mostly new projects, and together with the 1,800 Kms. of existing roads, they will provide a complete highway system of over 4,000 Kms. for Mindanao and Sulu which it is expected will be adequate for many years to come.

