



**MOTOR VEHICLE INSPECTION LEGISLATION**  
**A Survey of Patterns of Opposition**



**HIGHWAY SAFETY RESEARCH INSTITUTE**  
The University of Michigan

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# MOTOR VEHICLE INSPECTION LEGISLATION: A Survey of Patterns of Opposition

## SUMMARY

This report gives the results of a survey intended to determine the level of interest in and significant opposition to adopting motor vehicle inspection legislation in those states not presently having it.

The replies show that interest has been widespread: the legislatures in all reporting states have discussed such legislation, and in some of these states proposed bills have been defeated.

While no universally significant reasons for opposing motor vehicle inspection were discerned, we were able, by imposing arbitrary judgment criteria, to establish an overall rating of responses to statements offered in the survey form.

A. The following statement was rated significant:

"Abuses of the inspection system by the licensed inspectors require the public to make unnecessary repairs."

B. The following statements were rated not significant:

"There is no proof that motor vehicle inspection is effective in improving highway safety."

"Other state laws already require owners to maintain their vehicles in safe operating condition."

"The state is unable to provide the trained personnel needed to operate the program without further overworking the police."

These ratings must be viewed and evaluated cautiously, inasmuch as each statement in the survey was reported "significant" by at least one state, and "not significant" by at least one other state.

## INTRODUCTION

This is to report the findings of a Motor Vehicle Inspection Survey conducted by the Highway Safety Research Institute during November and December 1966.

Much has been said about the failure of a majority of states in the United States to adopt periodic motor vehicle inspection legislation. Many reasons have been suggested, but no supporting evidence adduced. As a starting point for our study of motor vehicle inspection, we determined to obtain some reliable qualitative information by communicating with responsible officials familiar with the situation in the various states.

## METHOD

The appended survey form (see attachment 3) was developed and mailed to the commissioners of the highway departments of thirty U.S. jurisdictions (see attachment 1) which do not presently have motor vehicle inspection legislation. (Eight Canadian jurisdictions were also surveyed; a summary of their returns is included as attachment 7.) A letter of introduction and request for assistance accompanied the survey form (see attachment 2).

The survey was designed to elicit information about the level of interest expressed with respect to motor vehicle inspection legislation in these jurisdictions, and to develop a list of significant reasons for opposition to such legislation by the state legislatures. For uniformity in the pattern of responses and to ensure some thoughtful reflection on the part of the respondents, a series of exploratory statements was developed and used. These statements represented a best effort based on our knowledge at that time. Since we anticipated that the statements offered might limit the responses unduly, the respondents were urged to add additional information wherever it seemed to them necessary.

## RESULTS

Cooperation was excellent; 29 of the 30 forms were completed and returned. The level of attention represented probably varied considerably; six forms were signed by a responsible official in the appropriate administrative department (two of these were stamped), fifteen were returned with covering letters signed by responsible officials, sixteen included remarks in the "comments" section, and three were returned with additional enclosures. Only five were returned without signature, covering letter, or enclosure.

The survey responses are summarized in attachment 3, which includes the list of comments. Patterns of the individual responses are charted in attachments 4 and 5, and graphs of the responses to the statements in part B are presented as attachment 6.

## INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

The implications of the responses to part A of the survey are clear. Most of the legislatures of the reporting states have discussed motor vehicle inspection and more than half have defeated legislative bills. All but two reported either discussing or defeating such legislation, and of those, one reported repealing existing legislation, and the other described an inspection law that had been enacted. In sum, motor vehicle inspection legislation has been considered by all 50 states.

The implications of part B are far less clear. Each statement could have been rated "significant," "not significant," or "no opinion." A total of 61 statements were marked "significant"; 110 "not significant"; and 61 "no opinion." (Unmarked statements were considered as "no opinion.")

Aside from survey statement 4,\* which we may say is regarded "not significant," no other statements seem to be universally judged

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\*"Other state laws already require owners to maintain their vehicles in safe operating condition."

either "significant" or "not significant." The graphs of attachment 6 best illustrate this. Moreover, no additional significant factor was developed from the comments supplied by the surveyees.

We devised an artificial standard for determining whether a statement is (generally) "significant," "not significant," or null (no opinion). To illustrate, since three responses to each question were possible, let us decide that:

- A. Any statement for which only one of the three responses was marked by one-third or more of the respondents may be generally categorized by that response.
- B. Any statement for which more than one of the three responses were marked by one-third or more of the respondents may not be generally categorized.

Measured by those criteria, the following statements must be considered significant (the numbers are the same as those in part B of the survey):

"(3) Abuses of the inspection system by the licensed inspectors require the public to make unnecessary repairs."

Judged by the same criteria, the following statements must be considered not significant:

"(1) There is no proof that motor vehicle inspection is effective in improving highway safety."

"(4) Other state laws already require owners to maintain their vehicles in safe operating conditions."

"(5) The state is unable to provide the trained personnel needed to operate the program without further overworking the police."

The following statements also may not be generally categorized (each of the responses enclosed in parentheses was marked by at least one third of the respondents):

"(2) The cost of a motor vehicle inspection program is prohibitive." ("significant"--"not significant")

"(6) The legislature has not been able to choose between a state-operated inspection system or a licensed garage inspection system." ("not significant"--"no opinion")

"(7) Other traffic safety or public work programs have priority for institution in this state." ("significant"--"not significant")

"(8) Such legislation has been opposed by special-interest groups within the state." ("significant"--"not significant")

Judgments of this type must be viewed circumspectly. More can probably be learned from studying the detailed individual responses. They show that each of the statements was considered to be significant in some jurisdictions; and each was considered to be not significant in others.

Nevertheless, the analysis does indicate that the question of implementation (e.g., problems of abuses and cost) may be more significant than any question of the ultimate value of motor vehicle inspection (e.g., proof of effectiveness vs. possible overlap or duplication of existing legislative programs). Perhaps, then, the burden of making motor vehicle inspection acceptable falls upon the program administrators rather than upon those who argue that such inspection programs improve traffic safety.

#### POSTSCRIPT

One purpose in conducting this survey was to obtain knowledge of fairly specific significant reasons for opposing motor vehicle inspection legislation. Such information could provide a directive either for improving motor vehicle inspection in the specified respects or for modifying the approaches to the legislatures so as to moderate their objections.

In some respects this information is no longer relevant to the adoption of motor vehicle legislation in the surveyed states. The Highway Safety Act of 1966 will require state highway safety programs conforming to federal standards by 1969; failure to comply will result in withholding the federal funds provided under that act as well as 10% of the federal aid highway funds. On December 5, 1966, the National Traffic Safety Agency promulgated a set of proposed state highway safety program standards, with motor vehicle inspection heading the list. Consequently, if the proposed standards become final, all the states will most likely adopt motor vehicle inspection under force of the federal pressure.

While the information elicited by this survey probably will not prove to be a decisive factor in persuading any state to adopt motor vehicle legislation, it may nevertheless prove useful in some limited way in shaping the programs.

ATTACHMENT 1

U. S. Jurisdictions Included in the Survey

Alabama	Iowa	Ohio
Alaska	Kansas	Oklahoma
Arizona	Maryland	Oregon
Arkansas	Michigan	South Carolina
California	Minnesota	South Dakota
Connecticut	Missouri	Tennessee
Florida	Montana	Washington
Idaho	Nebraska	Wisconsin
Illinois	Nevada	Wyoming
Indiana	North Dakota	Puerto Rico



ATTACHMENT 2  
Survey Form Cover Letter

The University of Michigan  
Highway Safety Research Institute  
Third Floor, City Center Building  
220 East Huron Street  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48108

(Address)

Re: Motor Vehicle Inspection

Dear (addressee):

This is a request for information concerning the regulation of motor vehicles in your state from the Highway Safety Research Institute of the University of Michigan. As the Institute is new in the field of highway safety, I have enclosed a reprint of an article to inform you of its creation and objectives.

The specific information requested is described in the enclosed form. I would appreciate your having the form filled in and returned.

I anticipate that we may in the future call on you for more specific information. It is an aim of the Institute, of course, to contribute to highway safety by making the results of our work available to organizations such as your own.

Sincerely yours,

Joseph W. Little

Enc. 2

JWL/jb

ATTACHMENT 3

Survey Form\*

MOTOR VEHICLE INSPECTION SURVEY

Motor vehicle inspection is one of the programs being promoted by some organizations as an aid to improved highway safety. Nevertheless, about 30 states do not presently have a compulsory motor vehicle inspection law. Our review of state laws indicates that your state is one of the thirty not having such a statute.

The purpose of this survey is neither to promote nor to criticize compulsory motor vehicle inspection but is an attempt to determine the reasons why a majority of the states don't have such programs. The responses will be considered opinion only and not in any sense statements of official position.

A. STATUS OF MOTOR VEHICLE INSPECTION LEGISLATION IN THIS STATE

Please mark those statements that represent the level of interest in motor vehicle inspection legislation that has been evident in your state.

- |  |             |
|--|-------------|
| (1) Motor vehicle inspection legislation has not been seriously considered or advocated in this state. | <u>[2]</u>  |
| (2) Newspapers and/or public interest groups have promoted motor vehicle inspection legislation.       | <u>[17]</u> |
| (3) The legislature has discussed motor vehicle inspection legislation.                                | <u>[22]</u> |
| (4) The legislature has defeated motor vehicle inspection legislation bills.                           | <u>[16]</u> |
| (5) The legislature has repealed motor vehicle statutes or allowed them to lapse.                      | <u>[3]</u>  |

B. FACTORS AFFECTING COMPULSORY MOTOR VEHICLE INSPECTION LEGISLATION

The following statements are frequently made in discussion of compulsory vehicle inspection statutes. Would you please read through them and indicate your opinion of their significance for not having such a statute in your state? We would also appreciate your remarks expanding on any of the listed comments and additional remarks describing other factors active in your state. If compulsory motor vehicle inspection legislation is presently being considered in your state, would you please note that in your comment.

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\*Bracketed numbers in the response column represent the total number of survey respondents who chose each response.

Attachment 3 (contd.)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| (1) There is no proof that motor vehicle inspection is effective in improving highway safety.                                      | Significant [8]<br>Not significant [14]<br>No opinion [7]  |
| (2) The cost of a motor vehicle inspection program is prohibitive.   | Significant [10]<br>Not significant [14]<br>No opinion [5] |
| (3) Abuses of the inspection system by licensed inspectors require the public to make unnecessary repairs.                         | Significant [12]<br>Not significant [8]<br>No opinion [9]  |
| (4) Other state laws already require owners to maintain their vehicles in safe operating condition.                                | Significant [3]<br>Not significant [22]<br>No opinion [4]  |
| (5) The state is unable to provide the trained personnel needed to operate the program without further overworking the police.     | Significant [4]<br>Not significant [16]<br>No opinion [9]  |
| (6) The legislature has not been able to choose between a state-operated inspection system or a licensed garage inspection system. | Significant [3]<br>Not significant [14]<br>No opinion [12] |
| (7) Other traffic safety or public work programs have priority for institution in this state.                                      | Significant [11]<br>Not significant [11]<br>No opinion [8] |
| (8) Such legislation has been opposed by special interest groups within the state.   | Significant [10]<br>Not significant [11]<br>No opinion [7] |
| (9) Comments   |  |

Factors Affecting Compulsory Motor Vehicle Inspection Legislation  
(Comments of Highway Officials)

The following is a full list of the comments appended to the completed survey forms. Comments are listed in the order received. In several instances additional valuable materials were appended to the response, but they are too long to be included here.

1. You refer to the program as compulsory motor vehicle inspection. The program is more favorably known as periodic motor vehicle inspection (P.M.V.I.). This term is much more acceptable than compulsory.

2. (Referring to statement 3 dealing with the abuses of the inspection system). Abuses of the inspection system where fees are assessed but no inspection is made. These so-called programs

Attachment 3 (contd.)

have done a disservice to good programs for years.

3. The best program would probably ideally be administered by an agency other than police.

4. Such legislation has all too often been fostered by selfish interests to have much to gain personally by the passage of the law, such as parts wholesalers, dealers, service stations, etc.

5. New legislation has been prepared for introduction in 1967.

6. A bill will be drafted and submitted to the legislature in January, 1967, for a motor vehicle inspection law.

7. We forecast passage of P.M.V.I. legislation in the Spring Session of the legislature.

8. The bugaboo of "graft" has been significant. We believe we have layed this specter. During the past session the bill died primarily because of political concern over more emotional issues.

9. In the 1965 Session of the General Assembly periodic motor vehicle inspection bills failed to come out of committee. No doubt compulsory inspection bills will be introduced in the forthcoming session which convenes in January of 1967.

10. A legislative research committee will recommend a bill to the next legislature.

11. (A legislative bill modeled after the Pennsylvania system) will be introduced again in January 1967 General Assembly.

12. In 1963 and 1964 the legislative research council seriously considered a motor vehicle inspection law. It failed to receive favorable recommendation due to the possible increased cost. At approximately the same time, the state was considering other areas of increased taxes, and we do not believe they wish to become involve in motor vehicle inspection at the same time. We feel that the 1967 session will give it serious consideration, and most likely adopt a system of licensing private inspection stations franchised by the state along with state enforcement.

13. (State name) 1967 session of legislature will be presented a bill enacting "compulsory motor vehicle inspection." We do not anticipate any problems in passing this bill.

14. The subject will again be before the legislature in January and modifications may be enacted and properly funded.

Attachment 3 (contd.)

15. This will be considered again by the legislature in January 1967.

16. We expect compulsory motor vehicle inspection legislation will be given serious consideration in the 1967 session of the state legislature which meets in January. Since it will probably be required by the standards promulgated under the Highway Safety Act of 1966, we believe that legislation will be adopted. It is believed that a licensed garage inspection system will be adopted, although it is possible that state-operated inspection stations may be used in the (city name) metropolitan area.

17. (State name) does have an inspection law which became effective January 1, 1966, which requires inspection of all used cars sold in (state name), also all used cars coming into (state name), and applying for (state name) registration.

18. This system of inspection is under the jurisdiction of the (state name) state police, and inspection is done by private garages licensed and supervised by the (state name) state police.

19. Such legislation has been thoroughly discussed by the legislature and rejected in favor of our present program which tends to develop an individual sense of responsibility for proper vehicle maintenance oriented towards full time safety rather than aiming for a safe vehicle at any given fixed period.

20. M.V. legislation is presently being seriously considered for the state of (state name). The Department of Public Safety, Division of State Police, is actively engaged in feasibility studies to determine ways and means for adoption of a system, the results of which will be presented to the legislature for consideration.

21. A bill establishing compulsory vehicle inspection is before the consideration of the state's legislature. Our position is to wait until it is approved or rejected to make further remarks.

22. It is difficult to answer each of these questions without a qualification. The question of "proof" of inspection effectiveness, for example, really becomes significant because there is lack of conclusive proof of its value because...so many other factors may affect a program's effect on a state's highway safety record.

23. We do not believe the cost to be really significant,

Attachment 3 (contd.)

although it is frequently cited. It more often is a convenient scapegoat for the underlying reason for rejection of the program, that is, dislike of still more government regulation and so-called reported abuses by inspecting stations in other states.

24. Officials did not actively seek an inspection program in this state until 1965. Prior to that time it was believed that other needs had priority over inspection.

25. A measure has been prepared for presentation to the 1967 (state name) legislature.

26. Some of the determining factors which have contributed to the defeat of proposed motor vehicle legislation are:

a. An acute lack of awareness on the part of car owners of the necessity for proper maintenance and periodic inspection.

b. Failure on the part of the public to realize that new automobiles are not necessarily in safe mechanical condition...For example, maladjusted headlights, wheel alignment, errors or omissions on the assembly line, failure of the dealer to put a new car in proper condition before delivery.

c. Complete ignorance of these various mechanical aspects and components of the motor vehicle insofar as most drivers and car owners are concerned.

d. Factory advertised 50,000 mile guarantee which gives the public the false impression that nothing can go wrong until then.

e. Almost complete lack of valid data on the true cause of accidents. Until such time as we begin to investigate and analyze motor vehicle mishaps in the same manner as airplane crashes, we are not going to really know anything about causes. I think the public realizes this but drivers are not impressed by the pious pronouncements of the professional traffic safety people. If we had some facts, car owners might be willing to cooperate.

27. Vehicle inspection legislation will be introduced in the 1967 session of the (state name) legislature. Federal activity makes its passage very likely. I doubt that it would pass if Congress had not acted.

ATTACHMENT 4

"Status of Motor Vehicle Inspection in this State"

(The pattern of responses from 30 states)<sup>1</sup>

Response Number	Statement Number				
	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
1				x	
2			x		
3		x	x		
4	x		x	x	
5		x		x	
6		x	x	x	
7	x		*	*	
8		x	x	x	
9		x	x		
10		x	x	x	
11		x	x	x	
12		x	x	x	
13		x	x		
14		x	x	x	
15		x	x		x
16		x	x	x	
17			x	x	
18		x	x	x	
19					
20				x	
21			x		
22			x		
23		x	x		
24					x
25		x	x		
26			x	x	
27		x	x	x	
28		x		x	x
29			x		
30**					

<sup>1</sup>Note: x's indicate statements marked by the respondents (see Survey Form, p. 8).

\*Many years ago.

\*\*Survey Form 30 not returned.

ATTACHMENT 5

"Factors Affecting Compulsory Motor Vehicle Legislation"

(The Pattern of Responses to Eight Statements from 30 States)<sup>1</sup>

Response Number	Statement Number							
	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>
1	N	S		N	N	N	S	N
2	N	S	N	S	S		S	
3	S	S	S	N			S	N
4		S	N	N	N		N	S
5	N	N	S	N		N	N	
6	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	S
7	S			S	N		N	N
8	N	N	S	N	N	N	S	S
9			N	N				
10	N	S	N	N	N	N	S	N
11	S	N		N	S		N	N
12	N	N	N	N	N	N	S	S
13	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
14	N	N		N	N	N	N	N
15	N	S			N			S
16		N	S	N	N	S	N	N
17	N	N	N	N	N		N	S
18	S	N	S	N	N	S	N	S
19								
20	S		S	S		N		
21	N	S	S	N	S	S	S	N
22	N	S	S	N	N	N	S	S
23	N	N		N				
24								
25	S	N	S	N	N	N	S	S
26	S	N	S	N	N	N	N	S
27		S	S	N	S	N	S	N
28	S	S	S	N	N	N	S	N
29								
30*								

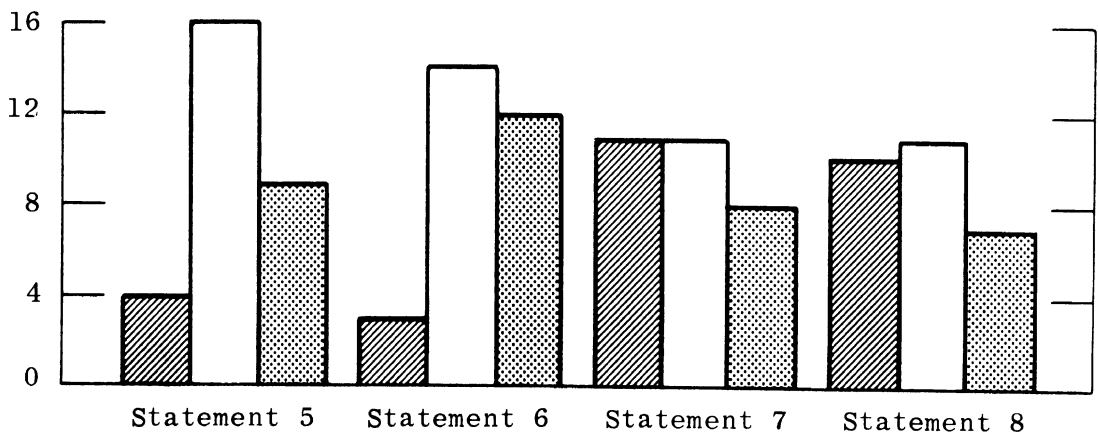
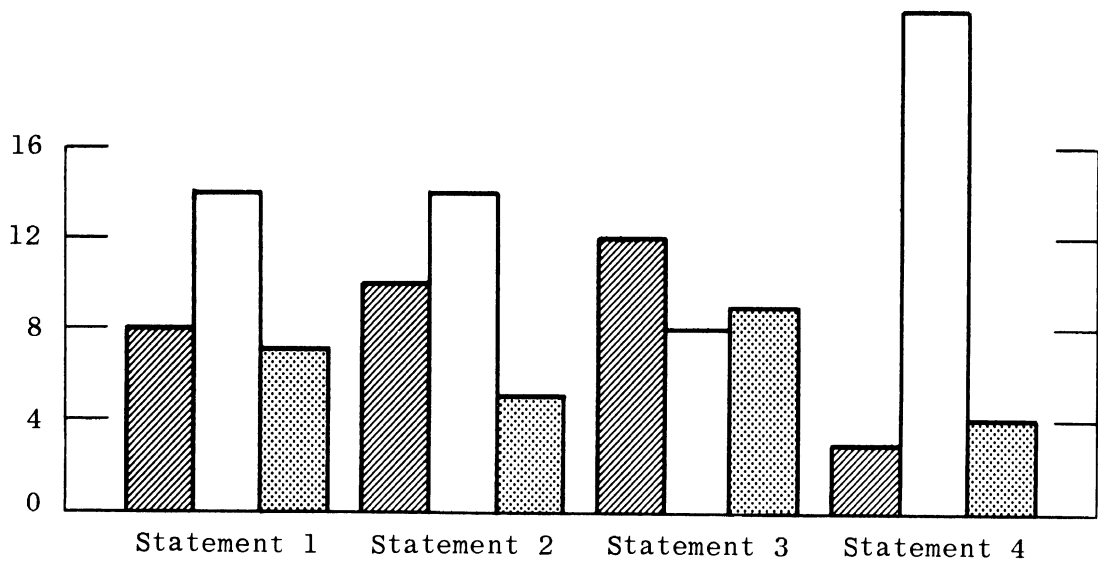
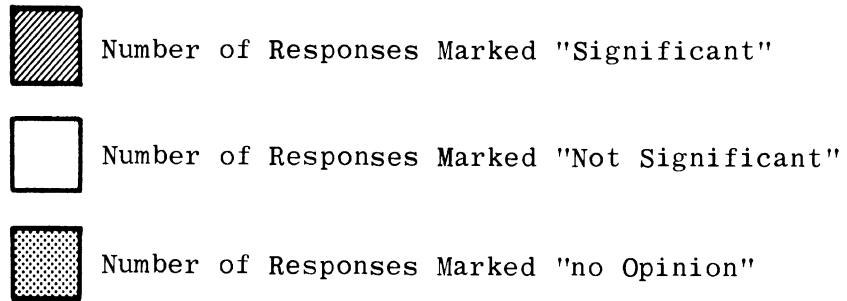
<sup>1</sup>Note: S and N indicate responses of "significant" and "not significant" (respectively) to the statements in this part of the Survey Form (see p. 8); no entry indicates a response of "no opinion."

\*Survey Form 30 not returned.



ATTACHMENT 6

Graphs of Responses to Statements in Part B



ATTACHMENT 7

Summary of Canadian Replies

The following Canadian jurisdictions were mailed survey forms:

Alberta	Ontario
British Columbia	Prince Edward Island
Manitoba	Quebec
New Brunswick	Saskatchewan
Nova Scotia	

Eight replies were received; four stated that motor vehicle inspection legislation of some type was in effect; three survey forms were returned. A summary of those responses follows. The letters and numbers refer to those on the survey form.

Part A

<u>Statement Number</u>	<u>Affirmative Responses</u>
(1)	2
(2)	2
(3)	0
(4)	0
(5)	0

Part B

<u>Statement Number</u>	<u>Significant</u>	<u>Not Significant</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>
(1)	1	2	0
(2)	1	1	1
(3)	0	3	0
(4)	2	1	0
(5)	0	3	0
(6)	0	2	1
(7)	1	1	1
(8)	0	2	1

Comments:

(1) In the Province of (name) we have Motor Vehicle Inspection on a voluntary basis. This system has only been in effect for one year. The program has been well received by the public.

(2) Answer to 5 is influenced by the fact that the Province of (name) is considering partial compulsory examinations, that is vehicles which appear to a peace officer to be in a faulty state or whose age leads a police officer to believe it is not in good shape...No legislation will be required to enforce this program since it is already in the books.

(3) (Legislation) will be presented at next session early in 1967.

(4) We are presently contemplating a co-operative program involving both Government and licensed inspection stations. Full-time Government-operated stations to be located at centres where inspection volume will justify erection of buildings and equipment. In other centres garages will be licensed and personnel can turn to other tasks on days that inspection is not operating.

a. It is anticipated that a large number of vehicles in poor operating condition because of age and wear, will be removed from the road.

b. Our knowledge of costs indicate that the motorist will receive a thorough inspection at a very minimum cost. System should easily be self liquidating.

c. The opportunity to choose any repair agency should offset the intention of any unscrupulous inspector. Adequate Government supervision through analyses of inspection record cards should disclose such practices.