

Grade Crossings

In other years Charleston has been notoriously dilatory in planning for its future growth. Dead-end, dog-leg streets have served to impede traffic and keep realty values at a minimum. Visitors have remarked at our failure to see ahead. Grade crossings have taken many lives.

Now perhaps we have entered upon a new era. We are planning for a city of a quarter of a million. Some things have to be undone and done over again. Our city planning commission is working on these.

Every city has its distinct individuality, just as people have. Some cities have vision, and in that class is our neighboring city of St. Albans. Its fine leading citizens have planned for the future and with the intent of preserving the city's charm. There are many wide streets in the residential section, there is a fine bridge over the Kanawha river and—St. Albans has two under-grade and one over-grade passes at railroad crossings. It has five other grade crossings which it plans to eliminate in the future.

The vision of the St. Albans planners was shown when they built their underpass in advance of the construction of the bridge they were certain would come. That takes brains.

Now take Charleston in comparison. It has one under-grade crossing at Florida street and one on the South Side at Ferry branch, the latter little more than a culvert. It also has a one-way culvert underpass at Porters hollow and one at Union Mission hollow—that is all.

But we have 15 grade crossings of primary importance and 10 of secondary importance. Besides, we have 32 other grade crossings, some industrial and others comparatively little used. But we have 57 grade crossings in all.

Down through the years we have been negligent in trying to eliminate these grade crossings. Many lives have been lost because of them, and there has been constant delay of traffic. Government funds have been available for grade crossing elimination but none of it has been utilized, unless we consider the South Side bridge that crosses the C. & O. tracks. But that was part of the bridge project and had to be provided as part of the bridge approach.

How St. Albans plans ahead is seen in the construction of its under-pass on Third street, that leads to the Kanawha river bridge. Those who were instrumental in getting the underpass constructed had a further and finer objective. That was the St. Albans-Sattes bridge. The underpass was started May 1, 1930 but it was planned long before that. The bridge came along nearly four years later, construction starting Feb. 16, 1934. The other St. Albans underpass is at Washington street, the over-grade pass on Route 60.

Think of it—St. Albans with a population of less than 4,000 and with two undergrade and one over-grade crossings, and Charleston, with a population of 70,000 or more with but two or three if you want to count the South Side bridge. That puts us even with St. Albans with our population 17 times as great.

But there is hope. The city planning commission is preparing tentative plans for crossing elimination—15 of primary and 10 of secondary importance. We are informed that recommendations, based upon months of study, will be ready within a few days.

Will this survey report and these recommendations be pigeon-holed?