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Clyde Tingley and the Rerouting of Route 66

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The U.S. Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) authorized the establishment of US 66 (Route 66) in August of 1926 as a federal route between Chicago and Los Angeles.¹ The route was to go through New Mexico. The first route was to come through Tucumcari to Santa Rosa and go west through the state. Two existing road systems, both leaving from Santa Rosa, could be used for this new federal highway: the northern route and the southern route. The northern option went north to Romeroville, near Las Vegas, New Mexico, and then on to Santa Fe, down through Albuquerque to Los Lunas, and west towards Laguna, Grants, and Gallup. The southern option went to Vaughn, Willard, Mountainair, and to Socorro before going west to Arizona.² The BPR selected the northern route for US 66 in 1926. In this alignment, US 66 and US 85 shared the roadway from Romeroville to Los Lunas.

Arthur T. Hannett, former mayor of Gallup, was governor when the northern route was selected. A. T. Hannett joined the New Mexico Highway Commission in 1923 and became governor in 1925. A major function of the state highway commission was to help the federal government in deciding which routes should be selected for US 66. They elected Clyde Tingley³ to the Albuquerque City Commission in 1916 and served until becoming Governor of New Mexico in 1935. They elected him chairperson of the city commission in 1922 and served in that capacity, being considered the unpaid ex-official mayor, until 1935. He joined the New Mexico Highway Department as Maintenance Supervisor of District 3 in 1923 and had that responsibility until 1927. One could rationalize that he wanted to be in on the ground floor of the implementations of the new federal highways that were coming into New Mexico.

It is apparent that Hannett and Tingley had novel ideas as to the development of the federal highway system in New Mexico in the 1920s. There were two short-

cuts that would make the route over a one hundred miles shorter.⁴ One, the Santa Rosa cut-off, would go from Santa Rosa west towards Moriarty and intersect a state road and then go west to Albuquerque. This would require opening twenty-seven miles of new roadway. The other short-cut, the Laguna cut-off, which was proposed by Clyde Tingley, would be from Albuquerque going west towards Laguna. These shortcuts became part of US 66 in 1937. While A. T. Hannett was the governor who constructed the Santa Rosa cut-off, Clyde Tingley was the governor when the two cut-offs were integrated into the Route 66 system in 1937. This article will highlight Clyde Tingley's contributions to this monumental transformation in the nation's new highway system.

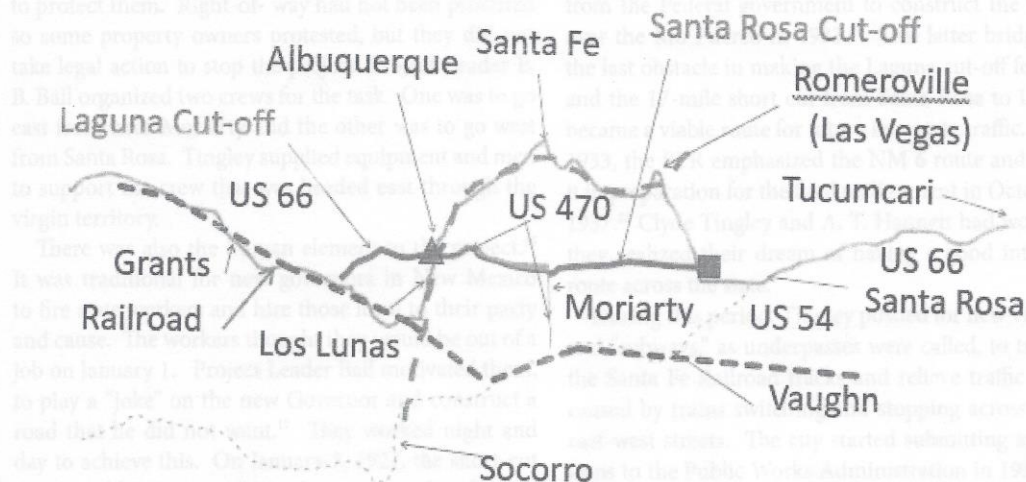
It is useful to have timelines in defining the roles of Tingley and Hannett in this major transformation of US 66 between 1926 and 1937.

Before August 1926

New Governor Hannett got the state legislature involved in a creation of the Santa Rosa cut-off. On March 19, 1925, the legislature created NM 6 as an alternative route that went west from Santa Rosa to intersect the north-south road going through Moriarty.⁵ The new route was in Guadalupe and Torrance counties. Guadalupe County began raising funds for advancing the route. Torrance County did not raise any money for the new road from Santa Rosa. In the 1927-1929 period, it did raise some money to establish US 470 which went from Willard to Albuquerque, but the county did not contribute to the Santa Rosa cut-off.⁶

Clyde Tingley, as Maintenance Supervisor of District 3, sent a letter to Governor Hannett on June 8, 1925, establishing a proposal for the Laguna Cut-off.⁷ Tingley, as a city commissioner, knew that Central Avenue had an 80 ft right-of-way while 4th Street, which contained

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US 66 and US 85, only had a 60 ft right of way.⁸ Central Avenue would be better prepared to manage the increased traffic expected with US 66 travel.

After November 2, 1926

Governor Hannett was not re-elected on November 2. This was a highly contested political election, and it disappointed Hannett that Richard C. Dillon, a Republican, who ran against the Santa Rosa cut-off, would replace his Democratic party. Governor Hannett decided that something had to be done. He and Clyde Tingley had traveled over the proposed route.⁹ Hannett decided that the short-cut needed to be completed before he left office on January 1, 1927. If this did not happen, new Governor Dillon could postpone the construction and eventual implementation of the cut-off for an indefinite time.

Governor Hannett authorized construction of the cut-off in November with instructions that the work should start before December 1st and be fully constructed by January 1st.¹⁰ Sixty-nine miles of road were to be completed with twenty-seven of the miles being through virgin territory. No right-of-way had been acquired. The legislature had authorized NM 6, but there were no state budgeted monies to construct it. Governor Hannett had the monies charged to the District 3

Maintenance Department of which Clyde Tingley was the head. In 1927, the chair of the State Highway Commission reported that the maintenance department had a \$200,000 deficit the past year.¹¹

There are several articles that discuss this decision as "Hannett's Joke."¹² This article will not dwell on the details of why and how the Santa Rosa cut-off was established, but on Clyde Tingley's role in helping make it and the overall shortening of US 66 happen. His contributions were significant.

Before January 1, 1927

Sixty-nine of the seventy-six miles had to be cut through ranch roads and undeveloped landscape. The actual termination point of the sixty-nine miles was at an intersection ½ mile north of the town limits of Moriarty, where there was a primitive road leading west to Tijeras.¹³

The goal was to clear and grade this sixty-nine miles in the 31 days of December of 1926. Workers were to work through Christmas season holidays. There were numerous problems including weather, sabotage, lack of good equipment, and lack of right-of-way.¹⁴ Weather records show that the maximum temperatures were sometimes below 20° F, and there was ten inches of snow on December 10th. Some people, who did not want the

project to be completed, tried to sabotage the efforts by putting sugar and sand in equipment gas tanks.¹⁵ Operators had to sleep with their World War I road graders to protect them. Right-of-way had not been procured so some property owners protested, but they did not take legal action to stop the project. Project Leader E. B. Bail organized two crews for the task. One was to go east from near Moriarty and the other was to go west from Santa Rosa. Tingley supplied equipment and men to support the crew that was headed east through the virgin territory.

There was also the human element to the project.¹⁶ It was traditional for new governors in New Mexico to fire state workers and hire those loyal to their party and cause. The workers thought they would be out of a job on January 1. Project Leader Bail motivated them, to play a "joke" on the new Governor and construct a road that he did not want.¹⁷ They worked night and day to achieve this. On January 3, 1927, the short-cut was passable. January 3 was the first time that the new Governor could get someone to the project to shut it down. They authorized the designated project stopper to shut it down if they did not complete it. By then, cars were passing over the Santa Rosa Cut-off from Santa Rosa to Moriarty and then to Albuquerque.¹⁸ He called the new governor, and Governor Dillon decided not to shut the new roadway down.

Nothing had happened on the proposed Laguna cut-off until December 29, 1926, when the State Highway Commission approved the cut-off in its last meeting before the change in the administrations.¹⁹

After January 3, 1927

The workers had accomplished a near miracle. This accomplishment established a fair-weather short cut from Santa Rosa to Albuquerque that saved ninety miles of travel. In all fairness, the construction workers impressed Governor Dillon with the hard work that went into creating the short-cut, and he accepted the fait-accompli. He did not fire the workers!²⁰

As ex-officio mayor, Tingley needed to construct some improvements in Albuquerque. He worked hard to get state monies for construction of a bridge across the Rio Grande on west Central, which was completed in 1931.²¹ The bridge would service the west side airport and could connect to the developing Laguna cut-off, which would also become part of NM 6. The federal government was trying to help economic recovery and created the Emergency Construction Act of 1931 and

National Recovery Act of 1933. The construction of Tingley's Rio Grande Bridge paved the way for the BPR to work towards realigning Route 66. The state got help from the Federal government to construct the bridge over the Rio Puerco in 1933.²² This latter bridge was the last obstacle in making the Laguna cut-off feasible, and the 17-mile short cut from Santa Rosa to Laguna became a viable route for future interstate traffic. After 1933, the BPR emphasized the NM 6 route and paved it in preparation for the final realignment in October of 1937.²³ Clyde Tingley and A. T. Hannett had won, and they realized their dream of having a good interstate route across the state.

During this period, Tingley pushed for new viaducts and "subways," as underpasses were called, to traverse the Santa Fe Railroad tracks and relieve traffic delays caused by trains switching and stopping across major east-west streets. The city started submitting applications to the Public Works Administration in 1933 and, by 1937, they had accomplished the construction of the Central and Tijeras Avenue underpasses and a viaduct at Coal.²⁴ These new structures, promoted by Tingley, relieved congestion downtown and provided a grade separation for the future route of Route 66.

After October 1937

Clyde Tingley was the governor in 1937 when Route 66 was realigned and paving across the state had been they completed.²⁵ He played a prominent role in the National Highway 66 Association, which he pushed to be named the Will Rogers Highway 66 Association.²⁶ He attended a meeting in Amarillo in November of 1937, where he was the keynote speaker. A newspaper article from Amarillo cited: "Highway 66 was the first border-to-border highway completed in the Sunshine State in a highway project which ranked New Mexico fifth in the United States in the construction of roads."²⁷ Governor Tingley advocated acceptance of the "Will Rogers Highway" as a permanent name for Route 66 in 1937, and this action was finalized in 1952.

In summary, Clyde Tingley contributed significantly to the improvement of the addition of Route 66 in New Mexico. He had a vision of what could be, and he helped achieve that reality by providing men, equipment, and funds for the addition of the Santa Rosa cut-off. He used his leadership and political skills to help create several important infrastructure projects that led to the construction of the Laguna cut-off.

Endnotes

1. Kammer, David, "Route 66 through New Mexico: Re-survey Report;" Santa Fe New Mexico Historic Preservation Division, Office of Cultural Affairs, March 2003.
2. Kammer, David, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Route 66 Through New Mexico;" National Register of Historic Places, US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, August 1993.
3. Tingley was ex-officio mayor and the best I can tell it was a volunteer position. He was an attorney by profession and his wife had a good deal of money so he had time to be active in politics. He did take a salaried position with the state of New Mexico in 1923 and served through 1926 under two Democratic governors.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. New Mexico's US Highway network approved November 11, 1926. State of New Mexico.
7. Letter from Clyde Tingley to Governor A. T. Hannett; Commission of Public Records, State Records Center and Archives; June 9, 1925.
8. 1891 Sanborn Map of Albuquerque; City of Albuquerque Landmarks Commission.
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11. "5-Cent Gas Tax Passes, Hannett Administration Left Construction account \$200,000 Over-drawn, Springer Says;" Santa Fe New Mexican; Feb. 9, 1927.
12. "Rerouting Route 66 Through Tijeras Canyon." Memoirs of Roger Max Zimmerman, Volume 5 Volunteer Activities, Library of Congress No. 2020922418; 2021.
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18. Ibid.
19. State Highway Commission Minutes -1925-1932; NM Department of Transportation.
20. Bail, E. B., "New Mexico-U. S 66 Albuquerque's Golden Road;" NM Professional Engineer, July-August 1952.
21. Kammer, David.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Two Organizations, National Convention of '66' Association and Regional Parley of Shriners Opens; Amarillo Daily News; Nov. 22, 1937.
25. Kammer, David.
26. Two Organizations, National Convention of '66' Association and Regional Parley of Shriners Opens; Amarillo Daily News; Nov. 22, 1937.
27. Ibid.