

CHAPTER 4



The Ordinary Roads Problem

From the 1923 Law to the “Road Agency”

While the motorway projects had their troubled lives, nothing was done to implement a road network renewal, and a great confusion ruled the enhancement of ordinary roads. We have seen how the democratic government left Mussolini’s cabinet a reform proposal to decentralize the roads sector, which it adopted in 1923. We have also seen how the reform was at first disregarded, and later suspended by the same government that had approved it.

We should also keep in mind that in 1923, “the Ministry of Public Works was reformed with the objective of stimulating cooperation between the State and private firms—particularly the large electricity companies—for the promotion of public works. This reform allowed the expansion of the concessions system and provided great legal flexibility, allowing public works such as the building of the motorways to be carried out either by the State or by means of concessions to private firms.”¹ This attitude, which was in line with the economic policies of the Mussolini government up to the end of 1925, gave political space for maneuvering to those economic actors and industrialists who were interested in public works. And while the railway industrial lobby was still strong throughout Europe,² the road-related interests were growing at a quick pace. The hope of achieving not just a motorway concession, but a contract regarding all of the Italian ordinary road networks, of about 20,000 kilometers, adding to that another 20,000–30,000 kilometers of concession regarding roads administratively in the charge of the provincial councils, was a breathtaking perspective. The contemporary example (also comparable to transport) of the telecommunications sector privatization (which between 1923 and 1925 led to a pure oligopoly of two big groups)³ was encouraging, offering hope that a similar outcome would be implemented for the ordinary roads. Puricelli, as we will see in later in this book, was fully committed to the challenge.

However, although it was committed to a (cautiously) favorable policy toward the road interests, Mussolini’s government faced strong rivalries, both among transport sector interests (e.g., the railway lobby against

roads) and within the same sector (different players within the road lobby). As for the road lobby, Puricelli was surely 10 miles ahead of his peers in terms of political influence and network, as well as critical mass and technical competences. However, the entire road reorganization was too big even for his voracious appetite.

Additionally, despite the fanfare, the political situation was actually very fluid and the budget constraints very high, and neither Mussolini nor his closest supporters had much ambition to lock the government into stringent and binding action, preferring, as a first step, to focus on the railway company's tight control and on the purge of "unfaithful" and highly unionized workers.⁴ The road lobby, with Puricelli leading the pack, was maneuvering backstage to achieve its targets: for a couple of years, the delay of any decision was seen as positive, offering them time to construct a favorable political landscape.

On the other hand, the car lobby was less satisfied with the delay in the action. In 1924 Gino Olivetti, member of parliament and secretary of *Confindustria*, the Italian industrial association, complained about this derailment. In an article in October of the same year, he expressed the need to begin a new season for the roads sector. Olivetti believed that state intervention was indispensable, because the roads were a theme with national relevance, but his article, disguised as an impersonal and detached consideration on the poor state of the roads, was a clear accusation against the choices of the government and the imprecision of the Ministry of Public Works. According to Olivetti, it was not prudent to "overturn an entire system of things if one does not have sufficient preparation for the new system. Now, in fact, planned preparation is missing, technical organization is not yet constituted, and there is not yet an adequate financing system. It is still not clear which of the old provincial roads belong to the third and the fourth classes. Not only that, but we do not know which methods the state will adopt for the maintenance of the roads it will take charge of, as the current roadbed system evidently cannot continue."⁵

Although there were no direct answers by the government to his statements, ten weeks later Italy was thrown into a new political regime. On 3 January 1925, Mussolini gave a speech that stamped a decidedly authoritarian change of direction on Italy, conditioning the national political orientation. Mussolini was moving to full dictatorship, which meant a change of pace for his policies, a shift of alliance, and new political compromises. This development transpired over a couple of years, and there were some winners and some losers. In this framework, there was an abundance of reasons preventing the government from resolving the roads debate immediately. In the first place, although the

national government did not want to concede power to local authorities, it could not burden itself with the minor roads. In addition, taking the roads problem in hand meant increasing the resources of the Ministry of Public Works or whichever entity was designated to manage the roads. A resource increase of the sort would open the delicate question of budget, and therefore the fascist government—like the democratic ones of the preceding decades—remained undecided on which option to choose. Finally, after the wave of privatization of the first three years, between 1925 and 1926 the government moved back to a traditional approach in public works, and the concessionaire system lost more appeal daily. However, this was not a matter of days, but of months and years: the hesitation regarding transport policies lasted for almost two years, from 1925 until November 1927. And while Mussolini was well known as a tactician, not all the actors necessarily had (or displayed) a clear strategy.⁶ After 1925, some protagonists were therefore out of synch—and not just due to incompetence or lack of knowledge—still believing that the (colossal) concession for the ordinary road was feasible and achievable.

That was the case of the new Minister of Public Works, Giovanni Giuriati, who was in office from 1925 to 1929. Giuriati was apparently eager to reproduce the British model of the Road Department in Italy. As mentioned, the British Road Department had been instituted in 1909 in England as the Road Board, with a scope that encompassed functions ranging from direct construction to technical support and financing the counties. A new law in 1919 incorporated the Road Board into the Ministry of Transport, with the new name of Road Department, and classified the roads into three categories according to the amount of central government subsidy received. After the reform, the Road Department had the function of financing, monitoring and, in exceptional cases, taking over for the local authorities. In parallel, it also carried out research and experimentation at three technical test laboratories.⁷ It should not be forgotten that England was seen as a European model for automobilism development, as unveiled in the past years by interbellum automobilism studies, emphasizing how much English road management was carefully followed by other European experts, and thus reframing the traditional approach that saw the United States as the only model.⁸

There is therefore little surprise in finding that the Italian road experts, in the mid 1920s, were also focusing their comparative studies on Europe. In the summer of 1925, just as the tireless Puricelli was promoting and financing highway engineering courses at the Polytechnic University of Milan, Minister Giuriati asked a professor at the same university, Albino Pasini, to study the roads problem. Pasini was charged

with "traveling personally to the major European countries, together with a top official from the Ministry for Public Works, Michele Carlo Isacco, in order to study in each individual country the organization and functioning of the roads services and to present concrete proposals for the solution of the roads problem in our country."⁹

On his return from his expedition abroad, Pasini submitted a heavy report, comprising a comprehensive compendium of the systems then in use in the various European nations. The greatest attention was paid to the English system, which, according to his research, even the French could have used as a model. The author's conclusions substantially recommended an adjustment of the 1923 road reform, modeled on the British example, but above all, an increase in spending. Essentially, Pasini recommended leaving all the extra-urban roads to the provincial administrations, while ensuring that they had a solid and flexible body of coordination and financing. Following the debate of the previous decades, and still under the conviction that the first fascist policies of privatization would continue, he felt there was a need for a "central roads agency, with full financial and administrative autonomy . . . This entity, to use a name that gives an idea of its independence, we will call the *Road Agency*. Talking of a central technical organization without adequate means will not resolve the problem."¹⁰

The theme of financing was fundamental to unraveling the knot and the comparison with the spending in the other countries—which Pasini could not sugarcoat—gave a sense of the gap between Italy and the other nations. "A comparison with the English network could be interesting, as it is the only one with large circulation in Europe that is modernized. The spending to maintain it, in 1924, was twenty-eight times greater than the amount spent on the same by Italy in the corresponding year."¹¹ In essence, Pasini proposed setting up the Road Agency as an agile and *decentralized* organization (the opposite of what fascism would later achieve with the National Road Agency, or AASS). It should be endowed with robust financing, which he imagined in variable growing figures, up to a grant of 380 million annually (about the same amount in today's USD), including bank loans.

The Pasini proposal, although it remained dead words, was acknowledged outside of the ministry, demonstrating a new interest in the roads. While the traditional road contracts of the provincial administrations were routine for contractors, the bigger industrial players understood that "the renewal of the entire state road network constituted a still broader problem, both because of the resources required and because until then it had not actually been confronted. Private business understood it as a potentially enormous affair, for which it was

necessary to be equipped with adequate organizational and financial structures."¹²

However, Pasini's proposal said very little about how to acquire the finances needed, and was rather ambiguous about the legal form of the agency, leaving it unclear whether it should be a state-owned company, as was the case for the railways, or a concessionaire. Although the proposal was written by an external expert, having the fingerprints of the client—e.g., the public works ministry—on the document was reassuring to those players most interested in the roads questions. The report did not stand alone, but was actually followed by an official declaration, by Giuseppe Volpi, just named Minister of Finance, to the Roman correspondent of the *Daily Express*, in which he stated that the use of British capital was possible.¹³

The background of those attempts to drive the discussion was, as we have seen, based on the concession of public works to third parties "with annual installments including capital and interest" from the state. This was a model already present in Italian legislation and starting in 1919 could potentially have been extended to *all* public works,¹⁴ a trend confirmed by the public works ministry reform in 1923. The activity of renewing and coordinating the ordinary roads could in fact be transferred in concession to a private company, with the capacity to advance the necessary finances to conduct the work, naturally with the annual state reimbursement. Obviously, such massive work could only be entrusted to a company, or a pool of companies, with adequate capacity for works on thousands of kilometers of road, that enjoyed a consolidated relationship with the provincial and national technical offices, and that could count on consultancy from the several faculties of engineering. And that, finally, had robust contacts with the banking world, in order to acquire financial capital. Puricelli's holding company met all these requirements and he had already drafted some in-depth documents in 1924 and 1925 (files today unfortunately no longer available in the state archives).

In autumn 1925, the prime minister, Mussolini, seemed inclined toward the Road Agency solution, but refrained from saying whether this would be public or in concession. He referred to it both in a speech in October 1925 to the representatives of the Touring Club in Rome,¹⁵ and in a telegram to the Minister of Public Works a few days later.

Dear Giuriati,

I forward you these notes. We must follow these ideas:

- (a) nationalize the roads (except for the private roads);
- (b) create a Road Agency under your control, regarding which Puricelli has sent me a specific project.¹⁶

The government showed a desire to resolve the roads problem; however, they once again failed to carry out concrete acts, due in part to the great resistance and doubts surrounding the issue. Certainly, the prospect that Puricelli would become the only manager of roads in Italy was unpopular with the other contractors. The bureaucracy of the Ministry of Public Works showed strong resistance against all of the proposals advanced. In winter 1925, Mister Isacco, the ministry's top manager encountered earlier in this book, sent two reports to the minister of public works, in which he substantially criticized the plan for a Road Agency and, aware that Mussolini had declared himself in favor of the option, selected Pasini's report as the target of his unfavorable opinion.

Initially, Isacco observed that the data reported by Pasini on the extension of the Italian roads network and his estimated costs for the renewal were incorrect. Then he noted that it was the government itself in the preceding years that had abolished many independent government agencies, while the Road Agency plan proposed to institute one *ex novo*. It would be a countertrend act, out of sync with the politics currently being practiced: it would be better to follow the indications of the 1923 law, that is, the creation "within the Directorate General of Roads [at the Ministry of Public Works], of a Technical Inspectorate for the maintenance and improvement of the roads."¹⁷ Additionally, pouring salt into the wound, not many provinces would be able to meet the demands of decentralization. Finally, to create an organization like the Road Department in Italy, massive financing was required: to meet the expenses, such funds would need to be independent of the state balance. According to Isacco, meeting these conditions was currently impossible, and so the only achievable solution was to increase the powers of the Ministry of Public Works. Immediately, Minister Giuriati sent Isacco's report to Mussolini, declaring the need to locate sufficient resources and confirming, as a subordinate alternative to the creation of a Road Agency, the second choice of "separating the General Directorate of roads and ports in two, creating a single administrative organ for the roads."¹⁸

Proposals from Puricelli and the Automobile Club

Although all the actors were rather ambiguous and careful, so to speak, to keep a foot in both camps, Isacco's report certainly did not help provide a rapid solution for the problem, and it did not exactly reflect an approach that Puricelli favored. The opposing views and the bureaucratic inertia added up to a lack of political initiative, heightened

by the status of the economic resources. The government was also musing on the autonomy of local authorities, moving toward a proposal of abolition *tout court* of the provincial administrations. Obviously, if the provinces were abolished, all the extra-urban roads, about 100,000 kilometers, would pass into the competence of the state, as Mussolini emphatically suggested. This would have enormous costs for the treasury and would prevent the establishment of the Road Agency, which was based, as noted in the memo, on the existence of local authorities delegated to and financed by the state (including via private concessionaires). There was enough to call for a new delay: the minister of public works in April 1926 prepared a decree that put off any decisions until 1927. This choice was "made indispensable by the fact that the studies for the reform of the current situation were still underway, and required regulations that couldn't be quickly achieved once they were issued."¹⁹

So while in October 1925 the Road Agency seemed a step closer to being created, over the course of 1926 the situation was once again up in the air, although with the possibility that the private sector would take care of the modernization of the roads on behalf of the state. Puricelli, after the first advances of 1925, found himself first in line the following year to offer his companies as candidates to manage the public roads. A few days after the closure of the PIARC congress in Milan, in November 1926, at the zenith of his success, the Milanese entrepreneur began a new, deeper colossal survey on the renewal of Italian roads, with the aim of defining the necessary work to optimize and maintain the 20,000 kilometers of road. The work was begun by Puricelli's technical office with "the approval of the Ministry of Public Works, which, to facilitate the task, agreed to involve the Civil Engineering office, while, at the same time, the individual provinces supported the company, placing the respective technical offices at its disposition."²⁰ Additionally, in 1927, Puricelli also reorganized many of his business ventures into a holding company, in order to be ready for greater financial ventures.²¹ Meanwhile, the outcome of the work by Puricelli's engineers was systematic, with the preparation of seventy-six dossiers—one for each Italian province—prefaced with a general report, estimations of cost, and the detailed plan of each road on a 1:25,000 scale map. The aim was not just the renewal of the road surface, but also the improvement of the routes, the elimination of dangerous curves, the enlargement of the lanes, and the modification of the crossing of inhabited areas, etc. The study, today lost, "was conducted and completed in three successive moments. The work regarding the 'first-class' northern Italian roads network, of 7,440 km, was completed on 31 March 1927, precisely six months from the start of the study. The work on the central Italian network, of 4,494.131 km, was

ready 1 July. And today—15 September 1927—we present the southern Italian and islands network, with a complex of 8,707.048 km.”²²

The 1927 estimated costs for the northern Italian intervention were almost a billion and half lire (1.4 billion in today's USD), equal to around 200,000 lire per kilometer (USD 170,000). This sizable financing would then need an additional 2 billion for the renewal of the central-south, coming to a total of 3.5 billion. But considering the very high costs, Puricelli suggested reducing the work to just 13,000 km of network, covering those with the most traffic, with a complete cost of a little more than 2 billion lire (e.g., the same worth in today's USD). The realization of the works would be entrusted to a limited company established specially and named “United Industries of the Road, entity for participation and financing,” with an initial capital of 50 million, which could be increased to 100 million (more or less the equivalent of today's USD).

The proposal went beyond the ordinary relationship of public-private concession, suggesting a symbiotic relationship. To use the words of Annabella Galleni, it was not a simple integration “on an operative level, in which the most competitive and trustworthy company was chosen to enact decisions of public relevance, according to centrally defined times and priorities. Rather it was a self-attribution of duties, which was only fully understandable in the framework of ‘privatization’ of the state. This constituted one of the legacies of the most representative personalities of Italian industry in wartime production during the First World War (the so-called wartime mobilization).”²³

In other words, in autumn 1927, Puricelli proposed relaunching the concessionaire policy, creating a public-private authority that would carry out the activity of road renewal. The Milanese entrepreneur wanted this authority recognized by private law, in its executive as well as financial nature, with a part of the shares “having preferred voting, with a shareholders’ agreement to ensure absolute control of management.”²⁴ The effective control of the realization of public works worth over 2 billion lire (worth about the same in today's USD) would in this way be guaranteed to the possessors of a share portfolio equal to a few tens of millions, ensuring a restricted business group would receive state, province, and municipal contracts of enormous value never before seen in Italy. The “United Industries of Roads, entity for participation and financing” would in fact have carried out the works with their own financing, and would naturally be repaid 2 billion by the state over the course of twenty years. That meant “this new and specially formed entity must provide for the financing of the entire project, which must be executed in the most rapid manner possible through subconcessions: the state will pay for the work of renewal over twenty years with

guaranteed resources from the treasury, which represent the capital invested plus the amortization interest."²⁵

Sileno Fabbri, a cohort of Puricelli's and national president of the Union of Provinces, hurried to clarify for the state that to settle the expenses, only half "the annual revenue that the state earned (directly or indirectly) from the taxes on customs, fuel sales, and circulation of motor vehicles" would be required.²⁶ The Union of Provinces was one of the many pillars of support for Puricelli's project. The TCI was going through a definite period of crisis, linked to the death—in January 1926—of its highly active president Luigi Vittorio Bertarelli, but its support for Puricelli's initiative could be taken for granted. The Italian Automobile Club (ACI, itself involved in changing its status to a semi-governmental organization, with the grand appellation of "Reale") would, as we shall see, help the project of the Milanese entrepreneur (mainly due to the fact that its president Silvio Crespi was a member along with Puricelli of the administrative board of Comit and—as we have noted—president of Puricelli's limited company, Autostrade).

In October 1927, Puricelli's activities became frantic. As established above, his technical office had just completed the study on the 20,000 kilometers of national road, and Mussolini received the Milanese entrepreneur himself at the end of October. Two days earlier, for the same purpose, Mussolini had met with Silvio Crespi in his role of president of the Italian Automobile Club, an appointment that the Milan press had emphasized strongly, taking it for granted that government interest was certain. Crespi had submitted a copy of Puricelli's project to the prime minister, championing the government approval.²⁷

Additionally, in the winter of 1927–1928 a solution to the controversy surrounding provincial authorities was found: their ongoing existence was confirmed but they would have reduced autonomy. Finally, in the late months of 1927, Mussolini had completed his move toward a complete dictatorship, and a new political landscape was settled. The solution to the road problem was within reach, with the establishment in 1928 of the National Road Agency, in Italian the *Azienda autonoma statale della strada*, or AASS. But before the formation of AASS however, there was no lack of faux pas, twists, and vendettas.

The Creation of the National Road Agency (AASS)

Puricelli's true ambition—supported by the new political and economic landscape created by World War I—was to be the only manager of the Italian road network modernization process, but after the enthusiasm

of the first half of the 1920s, both his peers and the government were unhappy at how much power this would give him. It was Mussolini who, in expectation of a confidential government meeting on the roads theme to be held in November 1927, *did not want to have Puricelli among the attendees*. "Engineer Puricelli, whom Commendatore Chiavolini has invited in the name of the Hon. head of the government, has communicated that he can participate in the meeting that will take place on the 14th of this month for the problem of the roads. The Hon. Suardo believes that this invitation was a misunderstanding, insofar as he did not hear the Hon. head of government express his wish in words."²⁸

Although convoluted, this note from Mussolini's secretary was unequivocal: Puricelli, the Duce wrote, "must not participate," and the "not" was underlined three times by the head of government. The choice to exclude the Milanese businessman from the meeting that should have decided the fate of the roads was the effect of both the personal and political evaluation of Mussolini, and of the debate within the rooms of power triggered by the imminent reform. While the Ministry of Public Works and the office of the prime minister were rediscovering Pasini's 1925 study, accepting its ideas and information (but avoiding any role for the provincial councils and even less prone to a concessionaire system),²⁹ elsewhere an argument on the blatant support of the ACI (Italian Automobile Club) for Puricelli's project had broken out, as it had infuriated the other companies in the sector. Such backing by the ACI was seen in many circles as excessive and inappropriate. In January 1928, Puricelli himself responded to the criticism of the mixed interests between his companies and the ACI, in a confidential meeting with Arnaldo Mussolini, the prime minister's brother, where he restated his defense in writing. What emerged, on the contrary, was a more sinister picture, in which the links between the public association (which was the ACI at that point) and the private interests of the Milanese businessman were confirmed.

Puricelli believed that the criticism of the ACI's support for his project was manufactured. He confessed with (suspect) candor that the ACI roads commission had repeatedly held their meetings at the offices of Puricelli's company, to the extent that the paternity of the roads renewal project had become confused. The links were such that, *naturally*, "the president of ACI was asked last October by the head of the government to present a report on the development of the association [ACI]. He decided autonomously to include both my project and my study."³⁰ Puricelli, who with good reason considered himself one of the greatest operators in the Italian and European roads sector, noted in

the letter that he did not feel troubled by such small-minded criticisms. But, evidently, this time the businessman and his allies had crossed the line. Romolo Vaselli, an important Roman contractor and a competitor of Puricelli's, did not stop at discrediting his competition, but also, in record time by the end of November 1927, submitted his own proposal of renewal for the national ordinary roads.

In his memoirs, written after the Second World War, Vaselli describes his own proposal as "a tribute" by his company to the destiny of motor-ing: it aimed at the "rational renewal of the first-class roads conceived and founded on solid technical and economic premises."³¹ In fact, it was a blow at the heart of competing projects: in few words, Vaselli underlined that he had been compelled to "study a solution to compare with that championed by the ACI" due to his "astonishment upon reading the heavy burden that would be put on the state treasury."³² Vaselli's project would have avoided "exceptional financial requirements, as the sum currently supplied for the roads would be sufficient if integrated with the greater income suggested by the ACI. In fact, the economy would come from the savings on interest that the advance of the billions necessary for the ACI [that is, Puricelli] project would entail, and by the execution of the works gradually." In other words, with the same costs, instead of renewing just 13,000 kilometers of roads as in the ACI/Puricelli project, Vaselli would renew *all* the first-class roads, all 20,000 kilometers. The savings were the effect of the simplicity of the offer, which consisted of the obligation "of the contractor to assume the maintenance, in this way ensuring its interest in doing and maintaining the works better . . . all done with an annual lump sum per kilometer, avoiding the need for the current technical and administrative offices for measurement, accounting, surveillance of execution etc. etc."³³

Perhaps Vaselli was not the only one to make a move in those frenetic days. According to testimony by socialist MP Lionello Matteucci released after World War II, in the 1920s Giovanni Agnelli, Fiat president, wished to establish a sort of road management company and "presented a project. Mussolini had it examined and then called Agnelli and said: 'I thank you, but with these conditions, the state will do the roads.'"³⁴ Research done in the Fiat Historical Archives and the State Central Archives has not confirmed the reported testimony, but it seems valid to assume that the Puricelli and ACI initiative was also noted by Fiat top management.

In sum, the criticisms raised, the strong opposition to alternative projects, and the great confusion that resulted allowed Mussolini to make a decision in full autonomy, and to appropriate Puricelli's project without entrusting him with the roads management. On 1 December 1927, the

major Italian papers reported verbatim from a press release from the prime minister, that

the head of the government has convened a meeting in Viminale [the Italian prime minister's office] with the ministries of Public Works, Finance, Communication, the undersecretary of the interior, the president of the national federation of the provinces, Grand Official Fabbri, the president of the Italian Automobile Club, and Senator Crespi, to discuss and resolve the motoring problem as was projected in the report of the Automobile Club presented last 22 October. For the minor points of this complex problem that form the first eleven requests of the Automobile Club, the agreement has practically already been achieved in discussions between the individual ministers and Sen. Crespi: now the same agreement has been sanctioned by the head of the government. For the big problem of the roads, the Ministry of Public Works has proposed the institution of a National Road Agency [AASS] under its direct government, which will assume the work of renewal and maintenance of all of the roads that service the most intense national traffic.³⁵

The National Road Agency was instituted by law on 17 May 1928, reporting to the Ministry of Public Works and assuming the duty of managing a state network of 20,000 kilometers, much more extensive than the prewar network that the state had managed. The list of state roads determined in 1928 substantially retraced the first-class roads defined in 1923, enumerating the roads starting from Rome and where possible using the names of the consular roads of Roman times, in deference to the fascist imperial mythology.³⁶ Although subject to the control of the Ministry of Public Works, AASS was nonetheless an autonomous organism, with a separate balance and managed by a board of administration appointed by the government. The authority received an annual endowment of 180 million lire (about the same in today's USD), plus a share in other fiscal revenue, mostly linked to motor traffic.

Puricelli's and Vaselli's proposals were, overall, not acceptable to the government because they implied a company taking on an excessive role, overshadowing other actors in the sector. In other words, if they had to speak of a government agency for roads, it could not be directly controlled by just one of the many players on the scene. While Puricelli was in line with the *Zeitgeist* of fascism's wishes and policies up to 1926, he was no longer able to stand close to Mussolini's new direction, let alone anticipate the government's actions. This did not change the fact that, partly due to political pressure,³⁷ AASS turned for the most part to the two major entrepreneurs of Italian roads, Puricelli and Vaselli, who obtained large contracts.³⁸

However, establishing a state authority for roads meant finding and directing resources for the works of maintenance and intervention for the roads. On the one hand, this would cut the already undernourished municipal and provincial balances, which during the dictatorial regime saw their percentage of spending on public works drastically cut. The provinces, at the beginning, were even obliged to contribute to the partial financing of AASS. On the other hand, it once again changed the sphere of the interventions: in 1928 for the first time, the spending on works in the roads sector carried out with partial or total financing by the state was more than that of the railways, reaching 425 million, and climbing to 868 million in 1930³⁹ (again, more or less equivalent to today's USD).

Part of the income came from the taxation linked to motoring (taxes on purchase and circulation, imposed on fuel), despite the complaints of the car lobby, which nonetheless in 1927 saw the favorable institution of a public motoring register. Thanks to the register, mortgages on motor vehicles began to be legally recorded, making purchase by installment safer for the seller and cheaper for the buyer, and increasing motor vehicle sales. The constitution of AASS occurred therefore in a context that was much vaster than the pure and simple administrative management of the roads, inevitably assuming implications for economic policies and industry support.

Notes

1. Bel, "The First Privatization," 944. See also Buccella, "Le autovie nel sistema dei trasporti," 726–748.
2. Robert Millward, *Private and Public Enterprise in Europe: Energy, Telecommunications and Transport, 1830–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 154 et seq.
3. De Felice, *Mussolini il Fascista*; Bel, "The First Privatization," 947.
4. See Maggi, *Le ferrovie*, esp. chapter 4.
5. Gino Olivetti, "Il problema della strada," *Gazzetta del Popolo*, 19 October 1924.
6. See De Felice, *Mussolini il Fascista*.
7. Mick Hamer, *Wheels within Wheels: A Study of the Road Lobby* (London: Friends of the Earth, 1987).
8. Catherine Bertho Lavenir, speaking about the French debate on tourism infrastructure of that period, with an emphasis on the transport implications, noted how the U.K. was considered the model to be copied: see *La roue et le stylo*, 337. See also Mom, *Atlantic Automobility*, and Moraglio, "European Models, Domestic Hesitance."
9. Letter from Giovanni Giuriati to the Pcm dated 10 November 1925, in Acs, Pcm, 1928–30, 7/1-2/2532, *Problema stradale in Italia. (Studi, proposte, richieste per concessioni lavori ecc.)*.

10. Pasini, *Relazione a S.E. il Ministro dei Lavori pubblici on. avv. Giovanni Giuriati sul problema della strada moderna*, 65.
11. *Ibid.*
12. De Ianni, "Vecchi e nuovi documenti," 295.
13. See also the *Report for the Prime Minister* dated 9 October 1925, in Acs, Pcm, 1928–30 7/1-2/ 3516, *Costruzione di strade in Italia. Proposta del Generale Giampietro per impiego di capitali inglesi*. Mussolini's reply at the bottom of the page is negative, with a note that Emilio Giampietro was a "ferocious antifascist."
14. See Bortolotti, *Storia della politica edilizia in Italia*, 109, 110.
15. See "La giornata del presidente," *Il popolo d'Italia*, 15 October 1925.
16. Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia, volume 21* (Firenze: La Fenice, 1972), 468.
17. See the account of attorney Michele Carlo Isacco dated 17 December 1925, in Acs, Pcm, 1928–30 7/1-2/3516, *Costruzione di strade in Italia. Proposta del Generale Giampietro per impiego di capitali inglesi*.
18. Letter from the Minister for Public Works to the Pcm dated 20 December 1925, in Acs, Pcm, 1928–30, 7/1-2/2532, *Problema stradale in Italia*.
19. Letter from the Minister for Public Works to the Pcm dated 16 April 1926, in Acs, Pcm, 1926, 10/3/1455, *Strade pubbliche, manutenzione. Schema di D.L. per proroga norme*. See also decree 943 of 20 May 1926.
20. "Sistemazione della rete stradale di prima classe. Proposta di piano d'esecuzione, Ufficio Tecnico Puricelli, anno VI," flier dated 28 October 1927, in Acs, Iri, numerazione rossa, busta 527.
21. See De Ianni, "Vecchi e nuovi documenti," 295.
22. See "Sistemazione della rete stradale di prima classe. Riassunto Generale. Relazione, Ufficio Tecnico Puricelli, anno VI" pamphlet dated 15 September 1927, in Acs, Iri, numerazione rossa, busta 527, page 1. Unfortunately, the complete documents of Puricelli's study are not traceable in the Archivio di Stato di Roma, nor, according to accounts, in the Spea-Italstrade, previously Puricelli's company.
23. Annabella Galleni, "Strade, autostrade e fascismo," 48.
24. Fabbri, *Il problema delle strade in Italia*, 33.
25. "Sistemazione della rete stradale di prima classe. Piano d'esecuzione, Ufficio Tecnico Puricelli, anno V," pamphlet dated 28 October 1927, in Acs, Iri, numerazione rossa, busta 527.
26. Fabbri, *Il problema delle strade in Italia*, 33.
27. See Bortolotti and De Luca, *Fascismo e autostrade*, 35 et seq.; see also "Perché l'Italia automobilistica sia alla pari delle grandi Nazioni," *Corriere della sera*, 29 October 1927 and "La rete stradale di prima classe e il piano tecnico e finanziario per sistemarle," *Corriere della sera*, 30 October 1927.
28. Note from the Secretariat of the Pcm dated 28 October 1927, in Acs, Spd, Cr, busta 60, Piero Puricelli.
29. See Acs, Pcm, 1928–30, 7/1-2/2532, *Problema stradale in Italia*.
30. Letter from Piero Puricelli to Arnaldo Mussolini dated 13 January 1928, in Acs, Sps, Cr, busta 60, Piero Puricelli.
31. Romolo Vaselli, *Mezzo secolo di lavoro* (Rome: Sansaini, 1955), reported in Bortolotti and De Luca, *Fascismo e autostrade*, 39.
32. Letter from Romolo Vaselli to the Pcm dated 28 November 1927, in Acs, Pcm, 1928–30, 7/1-2/2532, *Problema stradale in Italia*.
33. *Ibid.*

34. Speech to the Chamber of Deputies by Lionello Matteucci on 26 April 1955, reported in Bortolotti and De Luca, *Fascismo e autostrade*, 38.
35. "Un Ente statale della strada per l'incremento dell'automobilismo," *Corriere della Sera*, 2 December 1927. See also Acs, Spd, Co, 509.837, *Azienda Autonoma Statale della Strada*.
36. See Aass, *Specchio comparativo fra l'elenco delle strade statali e quello delle ex strade di prima classe* (Roma, s.e., 1929).
37. See the documents preserved in Acs, Pcm, 1928–30, 7/1-2/2532, *Problema stradale in Italia*.
38. Puricelli, according to an anonymous note in the Archivio centrale dello Stato, intended to carry out "a ferocious campaign" against his competitor, menacing that "before long, Vaselli will have no more work in Rome": Acs, Spd, Cr, busta 97, *Vaselli Giovanni*.
39. Istat, *Sommario di statistiche storiche dell'Italia* (Roma: Istat, 1968), 87. In effect, considering the autonomous expenses of the provinces and municipalities, this "excess" can be traced to the start of the 1920s, if not actually to the Giolitti period. See also Carlo Mochi, "I Trasporti."