



## From the Pedemontana Project to the Construction Suspension

### A “Formidable Powerful Unit”: The Pedemontana Motorway

The creation of AASS had important consequences for motorway policies: the interest that Puricelli and other companies had shown in motorways had been significantly watered down. With AASS on the stage, increased resources were available for the renewal of ordinary roads, and it was no longer possible to think of motorways as a future solution for the circulation problems.

Meanwhile, the slate could not be wiped clean after the enthusiasm of the 1923–1928 motorway proposals, which in many cases were still on the agenda. The legacy of the proposals, their inertia, and the strength of some of their sponsors made it difficult to get rid of them. However, their proponents faced serious challenges, and the collection of capital for new motorways proceeded with difficulty, to say the least. At the start of 1928, the Ministry of Public Works seemed concerned; the Milan–Lakes (around 85 kilometers) had been in operation for some years, but the results were not particularly brilliant, either in terms of traffic or financial results. The motorway only produced 4 million Italian lire in revenue against the 7 million predicted by the plan’s estimations, while the average use was limited to seven hundred cars a day instead of the thousand that had originally been thought certain. The annual increase in traffic was modest, along the lines of 6 percent, while the concessionaire society was saddled with a million and a half lire in payable interest per annum. Although demand forecasts in public works, and especially in transport-related initiatives, are typically inaccurate, with a strong bias toward overestimation of income and underestimation of costs,<sup>1</sup> Puricelli’s motorway financial plans were even weaker in their predictions.

The other two short motorways approved by the government (Naples–Pompeii and Bergamo–Milan) had their own issues. Even though the works for the two new tracts were underway (notably late, in the case of the first), this did not mean that the concessionaires’ hunt for capital was

finished. The financial plans proposed to the shareholders and the government were very superficial, as was the loose enthusiasm with which the local authorities had been encouraged to contribute to the works—or had been forced to by pressure from the prefect. This now emerged in all its gravity, alarming the ministry, which wanted to avoid repeating similar improvised initiatives. With this negative framework, particular concern was reserved for the Naples–Pompeii–Salerno motorway. The convention that had been approved in 1925 was nothing but dead words due to inadequate financing, and in 1927 the concession was rewritten, limiting the construction to the Naples–Pompeii trunk (21 kilometers). The new convention for the Neapolitan motorway reused the model of the Milan–Lakes, but—particularly important—the state accepted that reimbursement of its contribution would happen only after the share capital had been paid. In other words, considering the traffic forecast, the state guaranteed payment of dividends and would absorb the losses.<sup>2</sup>

The ministerial officials noted that “given the difficulties that the company has met and continues to meet now in arranging capital shares and bonds, in negotiating loans, and in collecting contributions from the local authorities, accurate investigations must be done during the preliminary investigations and questions of the concessions.”<sup>3</sup> Basically, the government officials felt it necessary to issue, as with the railways in the nineteenth century, uniform regulations for future concessions, legislative coordination, and a “master plan” for motorways that would lay out the priorities of the works as well as a calendar for construction.

The concerns of the Ministry of Public Works were particularly current because of the imminent signing of the convention for the Florence–Sea motorway. The history of the promotional committee of the motorway, the subject of a detailed work by Giuseppe De Luca, confirms that the idea was more a fleeting enthusiasm than a real requirement for the Tuscan region. The absolute absence of Tuscan industrialists and financiers in the project implementation demonstrates how uncertain the construction program was and how sketchy the design of much of the track was. It was only the involvement of Puricelli in 1927, called by the committee to conduct a general revision of the project, that led to a less hasty redesign.<sup>4</sup> The approval and decree for the motorway’s concession on 17 May 1928, the same day the AASS law was enacted, was therefore a surprise, considering that there were other motorway proposals that were more solid and mature, such as, for example, those for the Turin–Milan and the Bergamo–Brescia. De Luca’s research does not offer useful clarifications on this point, attributing it to the presence

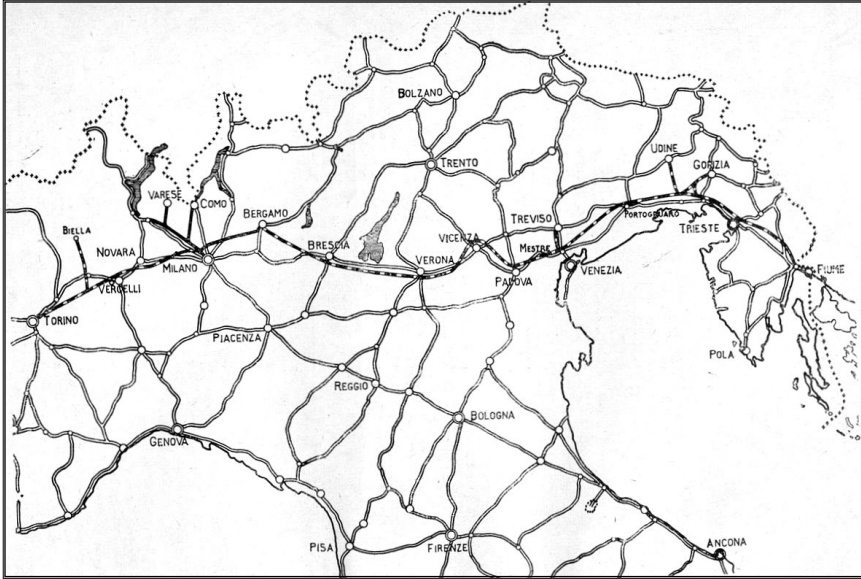
of Puricelli in the Florence–Sea affair, whereas we know that he was involved in other committees (including those of the two other motorways mentioned above) that had great difficulty in obtaining ministerial approval. Examining the dates, one suspects that the concession for the works on the Florence–Sea—of which Puricelli had the lion’s share—was perhaps a sort of compensation for the Milanese businessman for his previous surveys of the national roads network.

The convention for the Florence–Sea additionally confirms the episodic nature of Italian motorway development. However, those unconnected decisions had their rationales. First, no one was in charge of making a master plan. Second, any master plan would have annoyed important local fascist leaders, who would have been unable to present their plans directly to Mussolini. Third, as Mussolini and the Ministry of Public Works’ officers knew very well, a master plan for the country would have inevitably implicated public support if the private company could not provide the resources, meaning a significant burden on the state treasury. In addition, the definition of certain and predefined rules would have reduced the field of government choices, transforming motorway policy into a predestined act, reducing the power of Mussolini and his entourage to make the choices of the sector.

These elements were also behind the decision to construct the Turin–Venice route, an area with a more solid development of motorization and an *apparently* greater possibility of economic success for a motorway. Belloni’s 1921 Milan–Venice project was dug up, but with a new proposal that touched the intermediate cities and with two extensions: one toward Turin, where Senator Frola continued with his activities aimed at the construction of a motorway to Biella and Milan, and one toward Trieste and Fiume (in order to consolidate Italy’s eastern borders).

After Belloni’s idea came the proposal for a prealpine or foothill route, launched in 1925 once the works for the Bergamo–Milan were underway: the destination indicators placed on that occasion reported Milan in one direction, and wishfully indicated Brescia and Venice in the other. In the same year, a committee was established for motorway initiatives in Brescia,<sup>5</sup> and similar initiatives were reported by the specialized press.<sup>6</sup> They also reported the founding of new committees, in particular in Vicenza and Verona. In February 1928 the Pedemontana (foothills) proposal was “again in discussion at the convention held in Sirmione” at the initiative of the Verona committee. A little later, a convention was organized to reunite all the interested actors, to be held in Bergamo on 20 May 1928.<sup>7</sup>

The Bergamo convention was the effect of persistent efforts by Suardo (who had recently left his government position) and Giuriati



**Figure 5.1.** Draft of the Pedemontana motorway, 1928.

Italo Vandone, "L'autostrada Pedemontana Torino–Trieste," *Le Strade 5* (1928), 133–135. Courtesy of Touring Club Italiano.

(then minister of public works). The hope was to relaunch the motorway dream, using the goodwill toward the Pedemontana project as leverage, and demand that the government take action in the sector. While 1922 had been a euphoric year, 1928 saw more determined attendees, who also had a sense of the difficulties of proceeding with the plan. With the knowledge of the problems of raising resources and with an increasingly diffused hostility throughout the country, despite their propaganda, the promotional committees tempted fate, pleading for greater financial support from the state—which would nonetheless leave the limited companies as holders of the concessions.

The first step was to unite the different initiatives for the Turin–Trieste into one. The construction project for the Pedemontana had been developed by promotional committees and—despite the diffuse presence of Puricelli and his technical office—were "fragmented," making it necessary to reorganize the planning. The promotional committees and the limited companies, wherever they had been constituted, were united into a cohesive organism, although the interests in play and the mutual rivalry made it difficult. The organizing committee of the convention seemed to have clear ideas, expressing itself with wartime metaphors: "Let us say now that the idea of a real fusion of the various

companies is premature in the current state of affairs, if not downright impossible. Instead—as is the opinion of many—establishing the union of the companies of the Pedemontana as a simple committee will be a formidable powerful unit, against which nothing can combat.”<sup>8</sup>

The idea that this was a fight was evident in everyone’s words. The first battle, the most difficult, was to gather the resources. However, the convention attendees showed great optimism. They recalled how the establishment of the AASS “has and does greatly favor the proposal of an intervention by AASS with as yet imprecisely defined support, an intervention greatly justified by the fact that this new state agency has, as part of its mandate, the duty to supervise the management of the motorway.” The next step was to convince the (tepid, if not hostile) automobile lobby itself of the validity of the motorway project, citing, if necessary, the example of Henry Ford. “Last year Ford proposed that Argentina construct, at his entire cost, a network of very modern roads. That Republic of South America, once out of the circle of several perfectly organized cities, has countryside that can be briefly characterized by the absolute primitive nature of its roads. . . . What one, in every way, wants to make clear is the advantage, the profit for many of our business class, for one reason or another, from subscribing to capital for these motorway companies destined directly or indirectly to increase the value of land, industry, and work.”<sup>9</sup>

They felt there could not be any doubts, in other words, because “in addition to everything, today there is the clear intention from the government to support the achievement of this work.” It was again Minister Giuriati who speculated, stating that “for more than two years, Engineer Puricelli has presented the government with a master plan for motorways. It has not been forgotten. The first essential piece of this master plan is the Turin–Trieste. I cannot forget that since that moment, the prime minister has said to me that when we are able to start working toward the motorway master plan, we should commence with the Pedemontana Turin–Trieste.”<sup>10</sup>

The promoters of the motorway asked for double assistance from the government. The first was to obtain the same subsidies that had been given to the Naples–Pompeii for future concessionaire conventions, that is, “to pay the dividends of the capital shares before repaying the government subsidy.” But the other request was to use the general funds of AASS. “Finally, others observe that on the ground covered by the Turin–Trieste there is a first-class roads network almost parallel to the Pedemontana; and for this network AASS has a sum for the renewal and a sum for the maintenance. But creating a new motorway parallel to that one, which is bound to absorb a major part of the traffic . . . will

consequently free the AASS from a significant financial weight, which the AASS should transfer to those who procure it, *to those who, therefore, do work of high national interest on its behalf.*"<sup>11</sup>

In other aspects, the debate was a cultural battle. It was not enough to launch the idea of the motorway, it had to be accepted by public opinion and become sufficiently strong as a concept in itself for the success of the project to be guaranteed. Additionally, the writers of the report on the convention made explicit criticisms of Puricelli, contesting, ungenerously and unjustifiably, that he was unable to understand the full potential of the motorway. Extending the services offered in the motorway to their maximum became the catchcry.

Let us say here that it is necessary to popularize the motorway with intelligence and considered speed. This objective of a well-intended popularization of the motorway was not valued as it should have been in the estimates for the first motorways. . . . And if we think of all possible ways to increase the income—advertising, refueling, auxiliary services, those public services for passengers and goods referred to above—we clearly see that the motorway in general, and the Pedemontana in particular, could represent something like a perfected and corrected railway. That is, it would have unlimited tracks, switches, platforms, etc., all much simpler to use, insofar as there is no need for warehouses, and for low and high speeds, which will allow a surprising autonomy. The motorway will in this way, in itself, find broad possibilities to produce and earn. We believe that the assets arising from this form of popularization will equal those earned from the simple traffic of private automobiles, which until now has served as the sole cornerstone to demonstrate the economic basis of the motorway.<sup>12</sup>

The idea of the social role of the motorway and the means of financing it therefore seemed clarified, but the question remained of how to unite the many existing projects into one. In essence, far from being a "formidable powerful unit," the representatives of the various committees seemed to be a disordered army. The proposal to create a federation of the committees and societies pertaining to the Pedemontana was approved without discussion, but an entire afternoon was dedicated to the wearying debate to establish who would take part. Who had the right to be part of the new institution? The representatives of the promotional committees, or only those of the limited companies that had already been formed? Within the Pedemontana united committee, who would make the selection? The prefect or the committee itself? And in those places where no committees, let alone companies, had been formed, like the area between Venice and Trieste, who would take part?

Suardo, who was presiding over the meeting, worked hard to convince the assembly to approve a final deliberation agreeing on the formation of "a general steering committee to promote the Turin–Fiume motorway construction, comprising two representatives from each province, a representative of each company, where established, and a representative selected under the presidency of the prefect of all the entities to be convened."<sup>13</sup>

### **"The Motorway is a Luxury"**

The 1928 convention in Bergamo had demonstrated that individual projects could go beyond localism and emerge on the interregional scene, like the Pedemontana. It is not surprising that after the pioneering beginning, from 1928 to 1929 a new motorway fever relaunched the discussion and led to the effective construction of several routes. It became evident that there was a contradiction between the intention to construct a motorway with private resources and the lack of willing investors in an economic affair with very high risks. For its part, the public sector experienced difficulties gathering resources for the simple renewal of the ordinary roads, let alone for a massive motorway program. At the bottom of it was the evident lack of interest of the automobile lobby. Even Puricelli seemed inattentive to the creation he had spent so much energy on—he had seen it as a tool to gain contracts, but this was now obsolete due to the constitution of AASS.

Then there was even a party overtly opposed to motorways, whose uncertainty in the early 1920s had transformed into outright hostility. Ugo Ancona, senator and academic at the Milan Polytechnic, was an exponent of this group and in autumn 1928 in the journal *Nuova antologia* (New Anthology) he criticized the motorway model and, in an easy prediction, forecast a greater cost to the state than that which had been estimated up until then. "What I cannot endorse is the excessive push for motorways. It is useless to say that they should be constructed privately, because the state always ends up contributing too, either directly or indirectly, especially in the south. . . . Now I say that the motorway is a luxury that can only be afforded by rich countries, when they have already put the ordinary roads in order (for automobile traffic). The motorway presupposes intense, rich traffic, without which it cannot help but be unprofitable, and must knock—sooner or later—on the state treasury doors."<sup>14</sup>

The committee for the Pedemontana, formed with such difficulty and among such diffidence, had a brief life. Its composition was much

more complex than the May 1928 decision had made it seem. In theory, it required the prefect of each province along the Pedemontana to choose two representatives to be on the coordinating committee. This soon became a headache for the government representatives: although they were alert to the risk of creating useless hostility, they were constrained by the abundant lobbyists, and were sometimes obliged to choose between different committees active in their territory. For example, between June and July 1928, the Milan prefect telegraphed the prime minister repeatedly asking for advice, in the fear that his choice might officially commit the government to a certain direction.<sup>15</sup>

The situation, already critical because of the difficulties of raising funds and the growth of hostilities, was getting out of Suardo's hands. And so it happened that in September 1928, a prime ministerial decree nominated Suardo as the "Commissioner for the Pedemontana motorway." The commissioner's work was explained in the same decree, vague enough to go beyond the Turin–Trieste tract and cover a generic mandate of coordination on a national scale. According to the decree, Suardo's nomination was "an opportunity for the important initiatives to construct and manage motorways in the diverse regions of Italy, especially the Turin–Trieste motorway, to be coordinated and integrated with a unity of intent, with the scope of achieving improved results in the general interest [and] considering moreover the need to issue uniform regulations to discipline, from a legal-economic perspective, the relative substance of the motorway concessionaires."<sup>16</sup>

The appointment of the commissioner of the Pedemontana had a double intention. With it, Mussolini endorsed the political role given from then on to Suardo, including his constant presence in the sector, offering a great deal of hope to the supporters of the motorway program. As we shall see in more detail in the next chapters, Mussolini's choice encouraged Fiat to intervene directly in the sector, now that clear government involvement had emerged. The appointment of a commissioner also gave Suardo greater discretion, making the coordinating committee proposed at the May Bergamo convention obsolete, getting rid of the many headaches it was giving the prefects and the prime minister.

The institution of the commissioner of the Pedemontana also meant one more entity entrusted with the work of supervising and planning the motorway field. In fact, the motorway projects had to be approved by the High Council of the Minister of Public Works, subordinate to the eponymous ministry, while concessions were approved by prime ministerial decree. Meanwhile, the duties of AASS explicitly included



the function of "controlling the operation of definitively completed and inspected motorways."<sup>17</sup> This was a typical case of fascist polyarchy, that is, a "disorganized overlapping of institutions, bureaucracies, and lobbies," in which "the governmental actions were aiming mainly to avoid 'collisions'" among those groups, and, naturally, to rule them.<sup>18</sup>

The situation meant that the role of the commissioner was much more confused than might have been expected from reading the decree of the appointment, making its effective capacity to coordinate rather vague. While Suardo did his utmost to control the situation, those who were unsatisfied and disappointed were not slow to understand the multitude of actors involved and the overlap of powers that arose, and made sure to plead their causes at every opportunity, even directly with Mussolini himself.

From the moment of his appointment, Suardo understood the delicate nature of the problem, and hoped that the commissioner would be "the only organ of coordination" of a project that promised to be anything but easy. In a letter to the prime minister, he felt it was necessary to "pray that no initiative on the matter of motorways be accepted and no lobbyists be admitted to Your Excellency's presence, to ministries, or parties, without the commissioner being alerted."<sup>19</sup> It goes without saying that this superimposition of roles and competences, with the inevitable clashes between public structures, made it necessary to have someone to make compromises and final decisions. Mussolini was only too happy to play this role, which was inherent to the political system, as it exalted the role of the dictator.

As had happened for the railway routes in the last half of the 1800s, the planning of the Pedemontana saw the presentation of different and alternative motorway designs. For example, an early plan for the Pedemontana discarded the city of Vicenza. This was answered with an alternative proposal from the local Chamber of Commerce "in which the people of Vicenza could be validly defended and protected." The studies for the tract between Venice and Trieste were even more confused: two generic plans existed, "one completely toward the sea, and one moved toward the mountains and longer than the other by several kilometers." The first had the characteristics of a "direct" route, while the second was more attentive to the interests of the centers that lay between the two Adriatic ports.<sup>20</sup>

It is not surprising that in December 1928 the Venice–Trieste situation found itself "in unsettled management because of the different views of the interested provinces regarding the route, and because of financing difficulties, due to which there was an intention to ask the government for the same treatment as the secondary railways, with the

highest subsidies, both for construction and for operation.”<sup>21</sup> In January 1930 the anemic financial means of most committees and companies involved in the construction of the Pedemontana became embarrassing. The committees not only lacked the resources to realize the works, but had to ask for public financing just to carry out the master plan. Suardo proposed constructing the Trieste–Fiume motorway as a priority, in order to complete the terminal tract. This living proof of future realization would guarantee Trieste that, sooner or later, the trunk toward Venice would also be done. “[I]t is absolutely necessary, if the initiative is to live and continue to have the consensus it currently enjoys, that the government offers the interested provinces and companies established for the study and implementation of the motorway a guarantee of immediate commencement of a new trunk (Trieste–Fiume) or the assurance of support for even a part of the necessary cost to compile a master plan.”<sup>22</sup>

And Puricelli? What was his role in these events? He seemed to have taken a backseat position, and was not the same man who in 1922 had launched the motorway project with enthusiasm and conviction. The materials gathered in the archives portray him as skeptical: some days before the convention for the Pedemontana, he sent Suardo a long report that was as meticulous as it was detached and, in several aspects, even defeatist (not surprising, considering that in those months he had just lost his lifelong target of the ordinary road management). In the first lines, the Milanese entrepreneur confirmed without hesitation that motorways should be constructed only where there was adequate existing traffic for their self-financing, without state subsidies.

I start from the conviction that motorways should be made where there is a combination of necessary elements sufficient to keep them alive with the proper means; where the saturation of traffic is such as to require the creation of a new road in addition to the preexisting ones; and, in every case, they should be provided for by private initiative or entities directly interested, without the possibility of asking for any real contribution from the state. In contrary cases, where these conditions are not met or these requirements would be difficult [to achieve], it is better to limit [the network] to already existing ordinary roads and to renew these in a manner more consonant with the needs of the traffic, maintaining them in an efficient state.<sup>23</sup>

Puricelli felt that several tracts of the Turin–Trieste perhaps merited interest, but in its entirety the motorway was entirely premature due to the insufficient traffic. Its realization would signify an inevitable financial burden on the state, because the local committees would not be able to

reach a sufficient critical mass to complete the works. Given the varied traffic conditions of the provinces, they would need to apply specifically tailored public subsidies, with the consequent recriminations and risk of more than one injustice. In regard to the criteria used in the past, it was necessary to

objectively recognize that in the specific case of the "Turin–Trieste," whatever the desire to construct it, something needs to be modified. We find ourselves facing conditions that are different from those that were assumed to be necessary to evaluate the opportunity to construct a motorway. These necessary conditions have been superseded by needs of a general character [e.g., AASS's foundation] and by national defense requirements.

Moving on to examine the various trunks that the "Turin–Trieste" is divided into, the efficiency of the committees that have proposed the construction, and the local possibilities for financing, we must conclude that, with the current legislative and financial regime, on the basis of which the "Milan–Lakes" and "Bergamo–Milan" have already been constructed, we could additionally construct the "Bergamo–Brescia," the "Turin–Milan," and the "Verona–Brescia." Except for some optimistic forecasts for the "Padua–Mestre," it would be difficult for the remaining trunks to achieve the same results and if we wish to proceed in parallel and avoid that the entire work remains incomplete; it is necessary to modify the regime mentioned and do it so that, where a private involvement is neither sufficient or possible, it is supported by alternative sources. It is also necessary, however, for this new regime to create a single criterion and have a single application as regards all the interested committees, because inequalities won't be tolerated and it does not seem fair that the many competitors with one aim should experience different treatment.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, the realization of the works would need a single program of execution, with uniform regulations and subsidies for all the trunks. It was the only way that the work could be achieved completely. Implicitly, Puricelli was proposing his business for the execution of the work, which on balance would cost around 450 million lire (more or less equivalent to today's USD, as are all the following amounts in this chapter). To reach the amount needed, a contribution from the state of 150 million would be needed, as well as 50 million from local authorities, and 125 million in bonds to put on the market, guaranteed by the state.

Puricelli's calculations, as the Ministry of Public works and Mussolini knew well, had always proved to be inaccurate and come to less than the actual costs; therefore, such sums were to be considered broad estimates. Considering the reluctance of private capital to invest, this meant

enlarging the public financing by quite a lot. The money—in the best of hypotheses around 200 million lire coming from the state—would go to a public work of dubious benefit, particularly given the work on the ordinary roads that AASS was already doing in northern Italy. Moreover, proposals to construct motorways in Italy continued to lose ground, partly due to the fact that the two trunks opened to traffic in spring 1928 (Milan–Lakes and Bergamo–Milan) were showing modest daily results, far from expectations.

The idea of entrusting the construction of the entire tract to Puricelli—supposing that this was the true desire of the Milanese entrepreneur—was not even considered. Instead, those portions of the Pedemontana that could count on powerful local protectors and had some hope of adequate traffic were approved, as had happened in the past. The Bergamo–Brescia (45 kilometers), under the watchful gaze of Augusto Turati (*ras* of Brescia and secretary of the national Fascist Party) and Suardo, obtained a construction concession first, in February 1929. In October of the same year, the Turin–Milan (126 kilometers, and strongly backed by Fiat) followed. Finally, in 1930, the works for the short Padua–Mestre (25 kilometers) were approved. The construction of the latter happened together with the bridge—or “autobridge”—between Venice and the mainland, works that were connected.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Indefinite Postponement of Construction Programs (1930)**

The outlook for other trunks of the Pedemontana was grim. We have seen in the preceding section how Suardo, in the first months of 1930, wrote to Mussolini indicating the need for state financing not just for the construction, but even for the preparatory surveys and projects. On the same day, the prime minister wrote to the Ministry for Public Works communicating his decision to release the concessions just for the tracts already agreed on, postponing the realization of the entire tract to a later time.

Dear Di Crollalanza,

I am sending you the enclosed, sent to me from the Hon. Suardo, Commissioner of the Pedemontana. It comes to [an additional cost of] 204 million [about 180 million in today's USD]. This is not the moment to launch the initiative. Let us limit ourselves to completing the Turin–Milan, Bergamo–Brescia, and Padua–Mestre trunks. In 1932–33–34–35 we will do the rest, until Fiume. Mussolini.<sup>26</sup>

In fact, Mussolini's choice reflected the indications in Puricelli's 1928 memo to authorize only those trunks that seemed to have a more solid traffic base. The Milanese entrepreneur was not an impartial witness, nor had his past traffic predictions for the motorway been very trustworthy. Once again, his expectations were inaccurate: with the exception of the Turin–Milan, the concessionaires saw limp traffic and inevitably presented insolvent balances.

Mussolini's decision to postpone the entire Pedemontana gave the critics of the motorway projects a chance to air their views that they did not pass up. In the spring of 1930 they made themselves heard in the parliamentary discussion of the state budget. The accusations aimed at the motorway program were the same as those that engineer Cantamessa had expressed in 1925 and Senator Ancona in 1928: the motorways were a luxury, and their cost was ultimately borne by the state. The constitution of AASS and its roads modernization program made motorway projects completely useless: why would a motorcar driver pay a toll to use a motorway if he could count on good state roads? Why should the state subsidize the motorways if it was working to renew the ordinary roads?

In the discussion in both houses of parliament, by now completely fascist, of the budget of the Ministry of Public Works, dissatisfaction and direct accusations against the motorway system emerged. In the Senate, it was Silvio Crespi—president of the ACI and a recent supporter of Puricelli—who signaled the change in the motorway sector. At the approval of the Turin–Milan, the senator declared “now we have enough motorways,” outlining the future need for a Genoa–Ventimiglia, but highlighting the interventions of the ordinary arteries as a priority.<sup>27</sup> In the Chamber of Deputies, the first to cast a stone at the motorways was Francesco Caccese, who moved a circumstantial *j'accuse*. Caccese demonstrated—according to the facts and with the fervent approval, if not open applause, of his colleagues—how the concessionaires had insolvent balances and how only the annual state contribution allowed the motorways to survive. According to the MP, the Milan–Lakes concessionaire offered an annual share dividend of 0.2 percent; the Bergamo–Milan did not even offer one; in fact, without the state contribution the company would have been insolvent. The Naples–Pompeii furnished the richest return at 3 percent, but only because the convention allowed for a particularly favorable reimbursement of the state contribution. The conclusion was that “the motorways were not absolutely necessary”; it would be better if “the state devolved that money to the improvement of the already existing road networks.”<sup>28</sup>

When responding to the observations, the minister of public works, Arnaldo Di Crollanza, had no trouble admitting that the government had applied the brakes to motorway programs and possible requests from other committees. "I can at any rate declare that the government, upon the completion of the Pedemontana Turin–Trieste and the Florence–Sea, considers the construction of motorways sufficient for now, and so has decided to reject eventual requests for further subsidies and contributions from concessionaires for the works underway."<sup>29</sup>

Suardo continued to defend "his" Pedemontana, giving a long speech to the Senate in May 1930, which he managed to have published as a brochure. In effect, the Bergamo senator found himself in a "slightly embarrassing situation,"<sup>30</sup> because "the suspension of the initiative for reasons of balance had produced some turmoil, particularly for those who invested money, because they see their legitimately conceived hopes growing distant."<sup>31</sup> Suardo proposed to relaunch the Pedemontana project, not as a response to the needs of national automobile traffic, but as a strategic instrument of military defense and a weapon for Italian expansionism toward the Balkans. According to Suardo's (biased and probably servile) testimony, Mussolini had known about the Milan–Venice motorway project by Belloni since 1916,<sup>32</sup> and it had been Mussolini himself who had enlarged the "limits of the grandiose initiative [Pedemontana] to the extent of thinking that the much opposed work, which we continue to believe in, must be . . . the initial tract of a vaster work for the future, destined to help Italian influence penetrate deeper into Eastern Europe."<sup>33</sup>

But with the backing of Mussolini's decision, neither Senator Rolandi Ricci, who supervised the balance of the Ministry of Public Works, nor Di Crollanza retreated from their positions. The former rhetorically illustrated the reasons for the widespread caution toward new construction projects: "Why is there a diffuse sense of diffidence toward the multiplication of motorways? Because private capital has run where there was traffic, but has also believed that it is enough to create a motorway to create traffic. They begged for motorways that were not necessary and not useful, founded on hopes that it did not seem wise to nurture. There are three motorways in operation and three in construction: today these need contributions. When the conditions of the balances are improved, when there are the means to satisfy less urgent needs as well, we will create those motorways that require financial help."<sup>34</sup>

The ministry, for its part, was curt. Italian motorways were the effect of a particularly happy phase for public financing, but that period had passed; in the meantime, the constitution of AASS had changed the terms of the question.

Public opinion in these times has not demonstrated a complete understanding of the motorway problem, which represents a brilliant Italian initiative for rapid communication by car. The problem must be viewed in relation to the needs of the moment, which was a setting that coincided with a period of vast financial possibility in terms of public works. Certainly, even if state means had been more modest, some motorways would still have been curated by the government; but that period has passed . . . because the AASS has rapidly filled the gap and in several cases has left the Italian roads in conditions of absolute superiority.<sup>35</sup>

The words of the ministry, which followed Mussolini's more authoritative decision, closed the brief and limited season of Italian motorways in May 1930. By that date, the Milan–Lakes, Bergamo–Milan, and Naples–Pompeii had been completed (as well as the Rome–Ostia, which was not truly a motorway); the Florence–Sea, Bergamo–Brescia, and Turin–Milan were still underway, while the Padua–Mestre was to soon open its construction site.

The postponement of works along the other tracts of the Turin–Trieste, which Mussolini foresaw as temporary, lasting just a few years, became an indefinite delay.<sup>36</sup> With the exception of the brief Genoa–Serravalle (50 kilometers), realized a few years later, motorways in Italy were much *spoken* of but *nothing more was done*. In addition, the economic crisis of 1929 came on top of Mussolini's decision, making any other motorway initiative in the country practically impossible. The decrease of traffic also made the imbalance between costs and benefits clearer; there was no possible justification for new motorway projects under that lens. Instead, the open works were barely able to stay alive, while the concessionaires were overwhelmed by their negative balances.

The case of the Turin–Milan, analyzed in detail in the next chapter, perfectly illustrates the difficulties the concessionaires found themselves in related to the construction and management of the various motorway trunks. These difficulties were typical of all the Italian motorway companies, and were only magnified by the 1929 crisis.

## Notes

1. Bent Flyvbjerg, Mette K. Skamris Holm, and Søren L. Buhl, "How (In)accurate Are Demand Forecasts in Public Works Projects? The Case of Transportation," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 71, no. 2 (2005), 131–146.
2. See Giovanni Da Rios and Savino Rinelli, "Autostrada Napoli–Pompei," in *Le autostrade della prima generazione* (Milano: Spa per l'Autostrada Serravalle–Milano–Ponte Chiasso, 1984), 66–73.

3. Letter from the Minister of Public Works to the Pcm, dated February 1928, in Acs, Pcm, 1931–33, 7/1-2/5043, *Autostrade—Commissariato governativo per le Autostrade*.
4. The first plans for the Florence–Sea had the final trunk of the artery passing through a swamp. See Bortolotti and De Luca, *Fascismo e autostrade*, 141.
5. See the brochure “Autostrada Bergamo–Brescia” dated 28 June 1925, in Acs, Pcm, 1926, 7/1-2/1846, *Autostrada Bergamo–Brescia*.
6. See Carlo Cesareni, “L’autostrada Bergamo–Milano e l’autostrada pedemontana Torino–Milano–Venezia.”
7. See *L’autostrada Pedemontana e i suoi problemi. Primo convegno per la ‘Pedemontana’, Bergamo, 20 maggio 1928–VI* (Bergamo: Officine dell’Istituto italiano d’arti grafiche, s.d. [1928]). See also IV [Italo Vandone], “L’autostrada Pedemontana Torino–Trieste,” *Le Strade* 5 (1928), 133–135.
8. *L’autostrada Pedemontana e i suoi problemi*, 10.
9. *Ibid.*, 13.
10. Vandone, “L’autostrada Pedemontana Torino–Trieste,” 135. It should be mentioned that the version of Giuriati’s intervention reported in the minutes of the meeting does not contain any mention of Mussolini’s ideas regarding the Pedemontana.
11. *L’autostrada Pedemontana e i suoi problemi*, 15, italics added.
12. *Ibid.*, 11–12.
13. *Ibid.*, 29.
14. Ugo Ancona, “I problemi dell’automobilismo al Congresso mondiale di Roma,” *Nuova Antologia* (1 November 1928), 103–119, here 108. Ancona’s article came after the world congress of automobiles, at which Puricelli had repropoed the motorway projects; see “Il congresso mondiale dell’automobile. La viabilità e il problema finanziario,” *Corriere della sera*, 29 September 1928.
15. See Acs, Pcm, 1928–30, 7/1-2/6001, *Autostrada Torino–Trieste*.
16. Prime minister’s decree of 29 September 1928.
17. Law of 17 May 1928 n. 1994, in G.U. 31 May 1928, articolo 1.
18. Salvatore Lupo, *Il Fascismo. La politica di un regime totalitario* (Roma: Donzelli, 2005), 448.
19. Typed notes from Giacomo Suardo to the Pcm dated 27 January 1930, in Acs, Pcm, 1928–30, 7/1-2/6001, *Autostrada Torino–Trieste*.
20. See *L’autostrada Pedemontana e i suoi problemi*, 8.
21. “Promemoria riservatissimo” (confidential communication) from Giacomo Suardo dated December 1928, in Acs, Pcm, 1928–30, 7/1-2/6001, *Autostrada Torino–Trieste*.
22. “Promemoria riservatissimo” (confidential communication) from Giacomo Suardo dated 21 February 1930, in Acs, Pcm, 1928–30, 7/1-2/6001, *Autostrada Torino–Trieste*.
23. Letter from Piero Puricelli to Giacomo Suardo dated 5 May 1928, in Acs, Spd, Cr, busta 60, *Piero Puricelli*.
24. *Ibid.*
25. See Elio Zorzi, “Il nuovo ponte autostradale tra Venezia e la terraferma,” *Le vie d’Italia* 4 (1933), 262–275, and G. Milani, “L’autostrada Padova–Venezia,” *Le vie d’Italia* 10 (1933), 262–275.
26. Letter from the Prime Minister to Arnaldo Di Crollanza dated 21 February VIII [1930], in Acs, Pcm, 1928–30, 7/1-2/2340, *Autovia Bergamo–Brescia*.



27. See *Atti del Parlamento italiano, Camera dei Senatori, Discussioni, volume 2* (Roma: Tipografia del Senato, 1930), session of 8 March 1930, 1810.
28. *Atti del Parlamento italiano, Camera dei deputati, Discussioni, volume 3* (Roma: Tipografia della Camera dei deputati, [s.d.]), session of 3 May 1930, 2446, 2447.
29. *Atti del Parlamento italiano, Camera dei deputati*, session of 6 May 1930, 2490.
30. Giacomo Suardo, *Sulle autostrade. Discorso del senatore Giacomo Suardo pronunciato nella tornata del 28 maggio 1930* (Roma: Tipografia del Senato, 1930), 28. Two other versions of the Senate discussion of 28 May exist, which only partly match the brochure printed in Suardo's name, that is, the *Atti del Parlamento italiano* and "Senato del Regno, Legislatura 28, sessione 1°, 73° Resoconto sommario, mercoledì 28 maggio 1930."
31. "Senato del Regno, Resoconto sommario, mercoledì 28 maggio 1930," 4.
32. See Suardo, *Sulle autostrade*, 24.
33. *Ibid.*
34. "Senato del Regno, Resoconto sommario, mercoledì 28 maggio 1930," 7.
35. *Ibid.*, 10–11.
36. The films of the Istituto Luce include a film from November 1933 (Giornale Luce B0361) entitled *Trieste. L'inaugurazione dell'autostrada Trieste–Fiume alla presenza del sottosegretario Leoni*. Given the lack of other documents on the work and considering other requested inaugurations for motorways that never actually existed (see Acs, Pcm, 1927, 7/1-2/395, Autostrada San Remo-confine francese—Inaugurazione lavori), it is easy to suppose that it dealt with the renewal of ordinary roads.