



DEPARTMENT OF
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NEWS

FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION

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Remarks by F. C. Turner, Federal Highway Administrator, U.S. Department of Transportation, at the 22nd Annual Virginia Highway Conference in Lexington, Virginia, October 9, 1969

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you at your annual highway conference. I consider it a privilege to be here with you to discuss the highway program in which we are all so interested.

Here in Virginia, you can be proud of the progress of your program. Of the 1,068 miles of Interstate Highway System in Virginia, 691 miles are open to traffic, and work is underway on 386 miles. Only on 10 miles is there no work in progress.

Interstate projects completed since July 1, 1956 total \$806 million, of which \$716 million was Federal funds. Projects underway or authorized total \$355 million, with \$329 million as the Federal share. While this was going on, your State completed improvements on its Federal-aid primary and secondary systems and their urban extensions to the tune of \$476 million. Of that amount, \$231 million was Federal aid. Projects now underway or authorized total \$91 million, with \$46 million in Federal funds.

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For the nation as a whole Interstate projects completed total \$26.5 billion, with \$23.4 billion as the Federal share. Projects underway or authorized total \$10.6 billion. The Federal share is \$9.4 billion.

For the primary and secondary systems and their urban extensions, \$21.6 billion worth of projects have been finished, with the Federal share fixed at \$11.2 billion. Projects costing \$4.6 billion are underway or authorized, with the Federal share set at \$2.4 billion.

These are substantial sums of money but they are expenditures that must be made if motorists traveling in Virginia and the rest of the nation are to be furnished with the safe and efficient highways they want and are entitled to have. All indications are the highway user, who pays for road improvements, does not object to expenditures that provide him with a better highway transportation system.

Virginia has a fine system but your State cannot become complacent. Your 1968 motor vehicle registration of 2,047,000 is expected to rise to 2,121,000 at the end of this year an increase of 3.6 percent.

The position Virginia is in is duplicated throughout the United States. The nationwide motor vehicle population is expected to climb from 101 million last year to almost 105 million this year. By 1985, the number of vehicles in the country will probably reach 144 million. During this same period, travel is expected to climb from 1.016 trillion vehicle miles to 1.5 trillion.

Obviously, additional highway capacity will be needed to accommodate the increasing number of vehicles, and I am convinced the American people who constitute the only real highway lobby in existence want those of us in positions of responsibility to furnish the capacity necessary to sustain the mobility which has become an integral aspect of American life.

Of course we hear some criticism of the highway program but it comes from a small albeit vocal segment of the public. Unfortunately, these critics give the impression there is an anti-highway revolt sweeping the country. The truth is the American people have given no indication that their long-time romance with the automobile is on the rocks.

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Two surveys conducted independently by two research firms demonstrated clearly that despite what some critics may say, the overwhelming majority of Americans like highway transportation. A majority of those polled said they consider the automobile to be much closer to the ideal mode of transportation than other modes for all trips except business trips over 500 miles. Public transportation of all types was considered closer to the ideal mode by only 12 percent of those who responded.

And I might state here that our present expanded highway program -- the one which has brought our great interstate network into being -- was launched under impressive auspices. It was President Richard Nixon, then Vice President, who recommended the expansion and enlargement of highway building efforts in a speech before the Governor's Conference at Bolton Landing in New York in 1954. That speech launched the cooperative city-county-State-Federal-industry studies which culminated action by Congress in 1956 which authorized the present program. Therefore, we consider that we have in the White House now a man who not only realizes the value to the nation of Interstate Highways, but who was an early champion of the program.

In a program as vast and far-reaching as the highway program, it is inevitable that there will be some opposition. Most of it has centered in a few more than a dozen urban areas where the construction of much-needed Interstate Highway System freeways has met resistance. But even here, only 2% of the proposed 7,200 miles of Interstate urban freeways are being opposed. All of the balance, 98%, is completed, under actual construction, or under design, approved in advance by the local community through its duly constituted officials. That record is a far cry from a stopped or stalled activity.

To some persons there has to be an "either-or" choice. They over-simplify a complex problem, which has no clearly definable sides to it.

Please permit me to state as emphatically as I can that we in the Federal Highway Administration welcome the contribution which any other mode of transportation can efficiently and economically and acceptably make toward aiding the transportation requirements of our nation. We are fully aware that in some areas of high population density, rail transit can perhaps do an excellent job, and we enthusiastically support its existence as a part of the whole transportation capability.

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But we also recognize that in a majority of urban areas, rail transit simply is impractical because of its high cost and service features. We must not lose sight of the fact that buses today are carrying 70 percent of all transit passengers in over 233 urban areas, and probably will continue to be the only form of mass transit in at least 95 percent of our urban areas of 50,000 or more population, and in all smaller communities.

We also know that in some cities, urban freeways alone will not furnish the total traffic relief that is needed, and that is why we urge the enactment of authority to create additional facilities such as under the Public Transportation Assistance Bill of 1969, which would provide \$10 billion over the next 12 years to give cities additional mass transit facilities. Many, or most of them, by buses operating on the street and highway network. The measure could help us attain the balanced transportation system we have long advocated for some of our cities.

It would be foolhardy to ignore any assistance that might play a part in the fight to improve urban transportation. If rail transit can help, let's have it. If freeways can help, let's build them. If we can make better use of our existing street facilities, let's do so.

We would make a grievous mistake if we failed to take advantage of every kind of help that might be available. Even if new freeways alone may not be sufficient to furnish all the additional road capacity some cities need, this doesn't mean they shouldn't be built.

The benefits they offer are many and as a general rule cannot be provided by other means. In terms of fatalities, they are several times as safe as other city streets, and four times safer as far as non-fatal injuries are concerned. At speeds of 35-40 miles an hour, freeways carry twice the number of vehicles per lane as the average city streets. In contrast to street capacity of about 600 vehicles per lane per hour, freeways carry about 1,500. During short periods of highway demand, freeways carry 1,800 or 2,000 vehicles per lane per hour.

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One freeway lane capacity roughly is equal to two and a half surface street lanes, and it would require 20 new lanes of surface street to carry as much traffic as an 8-lane freeway. But the 20 lanes would have neither the speed nor safety of the freeway and their construction would displace far more families and businesses and disrupt the community far worse than the single freeway will do in most cases.

Freeways by passing the center core area take traffic that doesn't want to be there off of the downtown streets. They attract vehicles that previously had been forced to use local streets. The shift from surface streets to urban freeways enables the former to perform their primary function - the movement of purely local traffic.

Despite the accusation leveled by those opposed to freeways, traffic congestion in urban areas is not caused solely by suburbanites who commute to work by car. About two-thirds of the traffic found on downtown streets is there not because it wants to be there but because it is forced by lack of any other facilities such as a new freeway to use downtown streets to reach other destinations beyond the center area.

The urban freeway offers those living in core cities an efficient facility for getting to the suburbs where more and more job opportunities are becoming available. It enables the use of bus rapid transit to transport core residents who do not have cars to the suburban sites of employment.

An expansion of bus transit facilities coupled with the construction of urban freeways can provide unprecedented mobility to many city residents who now lack easy public transportation. At the same time, buses traveling on freeways between core cities and the suburbs offer a feasible substitute for many of the private cars now contributing to street congestion.

We are watching with keen interest an experiment recently inaugurated on Interstate 95 in northern Virginia where two lanes have been reserved for exclusive bus traffic inbound for Washington in the morning rush hours. We know already that travel time is reduced by restricting the use of lanes to buses, and we are hopeful that more people will leave their cars in the suburbs and use bus rapid transit.

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A switch of 50 persons from their own cars to bus transit can bring a reduction of 30 cars on city streets. But how can motorists be induced to switch? One way to assist is to provide fringe parking facilities adjacent to or within the right-of-way of freeways. The Federal-aid Highway Act of 1968 made provision for the use of Federal-aid funds to provide parking facilities outside a central business district to serve an urban area of more than 50,000 population, and be located so they can be used in conjunction with existing or planned mass transportation systems.

However, commuters will not use fringe parking unless they are assured of adequate transit service to take them from the parking stations to the vicinity of their places of employment. It is unlikely they will switch unless they are convinced it is advantageous to them to park their cars outside the core cities and take other transportation to their jobs.

A contract has been approved by the U.S. Department of Transportation for a fringe parking project to be built at Woodbridge, New Jersey, to link the highway system with Penn Central's rail passenger service between Washington and New York.

It is contemplated that when the parking lot is finished, about 750 cars will be parked there daily instead of crowding highways and city streets. The project is a first in the nation. For the first time, Highway Trust Fund money will be used to acquire land adjacent to a Federal-aid highway to build parking facilities for the use of commuters.

The use of fringe parking to keep cars off city streets is but one phase of the major effort we have launched to increase street capacity by making better use of existing streets. Another phase is our Traffic Operations Program to Increase Capacity and Safety (TOPICS) which relies on traffic engineering techniques to relieve congestion and step up the flow of traffic so the street system will be operated safely and efficiently.

These techniques include improved signal systems; channelization; pavement marking; signing; turning lanes at intersections; installation of reversible lanes and control systems; upgrading of highway lighting; provision of bus turn-outs; and construction of pedestrian or highway grade separations at complex intersections.

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TOPICS offers urban areas a way to obtain much-needed additional street capacity without resorting to expensive, disruptive highway construction projects. We are hopeful that TOPICS will step up the flow of traffic in some areas by as much as 25 percent through traffic engineering, without having to construct new streets.

We try earnestly to avoid dislocation of people, and consequently, are always seeking ways to make better use of existing facilities. We are aware that major reconstruction projects may place an unequal burden on some people whose homes and businesses may be in the path. This explains in large part the emphasis we are placing on TOPICS as a means of accelerating traffic flow without forcing people to move. More and more cities are participating in the TOPICS program, and we are happy about it. Our latest report shows 85 areas taking part, and preliminary negotiations are underway in an additional 85.

We have long been troubled by the sometimes unavoidable necessity of uprooting people to make way for highway construction. Despite what some critics may say, you and I know from experience that highway people get no sadistic satisfaction from displacing people and businesses. As a matter of fact, no group was more elated than highway builders last year when Congress accepted our recommendations in solving this problem when they liberalized relocation payments. In addition to payments for moving costs, provision was made for payments up to \$5,000 above the fair market value for home owners whose properties are taken, and up to \$1,500 for tenants to rent suitable new quarters.

I would like to devote a few moments to discussing with you the highway program's image in the United States. I am convinced it is a good one because the American people are aware of the link between highways and their social, economic and cultural well-being. Although he may fail to articulate his feelings, and may need an occasional reminder, the average American knows to what extent he depends on highway transportation for his job, shopping, recreation, vacation, cultural activities, for the mail he receives, the clothes he wears, the food he eats, the newspapers he reads, for health services, for

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transporting children to school, for having his television set repaired and for all the rest of his other day-to-day activities.

It is hard to imagine any facet of American life that is not tied to highway transportation. We have a top-notch system, unquestionably the finest in the world, but by the same token we have some complex problems that do not lend themselves to easy solution.

Much of the transportation difficulty we are encountering stems from the growing urbanization of the United States. It is no consolation, of course to us as citizens, that highway transportation and its problems are not the sole problems. Urban areas are having troubles with housing, education, crime, noise, garbage collection, air pollution, and many other factors that determine the quality of life in our more heavily populated cities.

But we who are responsible for furnishing the facilities needed to sustain the country's mobility are utilizing every available resource to move people and goods more expeditiously and more acceptably throughout our urban areas, as our professions contribution to solving this part of this collection of vexing problems.

I know that to some persons, it is "in" to talk in such cliches as coast-to-coast and bumper-to-bumper traffic jam; traffic paralysis; turning the country into a giant parking lot, etc. One might get the impression that all motor vehicles have become immobilized on our highways. How, then, did the driving public rack up 1.016 trillion vehicle miles of travel last year? There must surely have been more than a few gaps in the coast-to-coast traffic jam.

Everyone deplors the traffic congestion some sections of many of our urban areas are experiencing. No one denies that these exist. But that does not mean the whole country is bogged down in traffic strangulation. An enormous lot of people, merchandise and farm products are being moved on our nation's streets and highways, at every moment of time, day and night, every day of each year.

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There is nothing in the foreseeable future that portends the disappearance of the motor vehicle and its replacement by some still non-existent, esoteric form of transportation. The car, truck and bus are going to be with us for a long time, and as long as they are, we have an obligation to provide the highway facilities they need. If we were to pursue any other course, we would be inviting transportation chaos. Let's keep on doing our assigned tasks, with confidence that the big majority of our customers are being benefitted and that in so doing we are making our contribution to improving the world order of which we are a part.

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