U. S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
Washington, D. C.

STATEMENT OF ALAN S. BOYD, SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION, AT JOINT HEARINGS BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE AND THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON AIR AND WATER POLLUTION OF THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS, UNITED STATES SENATE, ON S.451 AND S.453

March 14, 1967

Chairman Magnuson, Chairman Muskie and Members of the Committees:

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Committee this morning to discuss the Department's interest in the electric car in connection with S.451 and S.453, bills which would authorize Federal funds for research, development, and demonstration of electrically powered vehicles.

The current interest in the electric car centers primarily on its potential role in reducing air pollution.

There is no doubt that air pollution represents one of our most serious environmental problems. It degrades the quality of living for all Americans and particularly for the more than 70 percent of our population who live in urban areas. Nor is there any doubt that motor vehicles are the single largest contributor to air pollution today.

The Congress and the public have demonstrated a growing concern for the alarming increase of air pollution in the major cities of this Nation.

In 1965 the Congress passed and the President signed into law the Motor Vehicle Air Pollution Control Act which enables the Federal Government to establish meaningful standards for reducing the levels of harmful exhaust emissions on new motor vehicles.

The proposed amendments to the Clean Air Act (S. 780) now before the Congress contained the President's recommendations for the establishment of even more stringent controls on automobile emission and Federal assistance to State programs for the inspection of automobile exhaust systems to assure continued compliance of all vehicles with Federal standards.

Through the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966, automobile exhaust safety performance standards can be set to insure that carbon monoxide fumes do not endanger the occupants of the vehicle.

The Highway Safety Act of 1966 provides for the establishment of State safety programs which will include inspection of muffler and exhaust systems for their safe operation over the life of the vehicle.

The job of decontaminating the atmosphere has begun and I can assure the members of Congress that the problems of air pollution will receive high priority in the Department of Transportation.

But I feel that as an environmental problem, motor vehicle air pollution control must be viewed within a total systems context of present and future transportation service requirements.

Transportation systems must provide the public with satisfactory levels of service -- they must also be compatible with the environment within which they operate.

Today urban transportation is provided by two basic systems; one, the automobile, used primarily for individual transportation, and two, mass transportation in the form of buses, rapid transit, and commuter railroads.

The private automobile contributes significantly to air pollution in normal use, but the problem of air pollution is aggravated by the additional amounts of exhaust products created as a result of traffic congestion.

On the other hand, mass transportation systems contribute less to air pollution but may be unattractive to the individual because of delays at terminals or transfer stations and crowded conditions during rush hours.

Much can be done to make urban transportation more attractive. Both this Department and the Department of Housing and Urban Development are seeking ways to accomplish this.

The problem we are discussing here is primarily the reduction of air pollution created by the use of private vehicles.

It is reasonable to assume that in the future, just as at present, urban transportation will be provided by a multiplicity of vehicle systems. A personal electric vehicle may form the basis of such a system.

In one proposed system that employs the electric car, an individual would use such a vehicle for his personal suburban travel and would also be able to use the same vehicle on specially powered guideways for rapid transit into and out of the city or between cities.

Air pollution from these vehicles would be eliminated. The advantages of such a system are not, however, restricted to the reduction of air pollution. Traffic congestion would be reduced through electronic scheduling of vehicles moving on the total system. Vehicular movement would be much quieter, permitting greater compatibility of transportation routes with residential locations.

But these are ideas for the future. The technological problems involved are as enormous as the social, political, and economic changes they imply.

Within the Department of Transportation I plan to initiate a series of comprehensive system studies to evaluate the long-term impacts of alternative vehicle systems upon the Nation's transportation system. One system will incorporate the electric car. These broad studies will focus on the impact of new systems upon the environment, the society, and on major sectors of the economy.

Our immediate concern, however, is to insure that the air we breathe is as free as possible from harmful pollutants.

The best avenue for achievement of this goal in the near future appears to be through the reduction to non-critical levels of harmful emissions from internal combustion engines. This is being rapidly pursued by private industry through improvements in engine design, muffler technology, and petroleum fuels. The incentive for these improvements has largely been the establishment of strict Federal and State air pollution standards.

In like manner we believe that research on electric vehicles is first and foremost a responsibility of private industry, based upon the determination

that they offer a practical means of meeting standards of air pollution established by the Federal Government.

The Federal Government has a responsibility to assure that the products of industry meet standards of safety for public use, but not to determine what those products shall be.

-- Through the Federal Aviation Agency, it has the responsibility for the safe operations of our Nation's airways and certifies the safety of the pilots and aircraft of the Nation's aviation industry.

-- Through the National Highway Safety Agency, the National Traffic Safety Agency, and the Bureau of Public Roads, it has the responsibility for the safety of the traveling public on the highway transportation system.

-- Through the Coast Guard it has the responsibility for safety of life at sea.

-- In like manner, the Federal Government has the responsibility to clear the air we breathe of man-made pollution.

There are times when the Federal Government should participate with industry in the development of new transportation systems.

Such governmental-industry partnership is usually necessary when the development risk is high, capital requirements are very large, and the public welfare is involved.

Presently, there is considerable incentive for various elements of industry to pursue development of an electric car. Private industry stands to reap the substantial rewards of successful development of such a vehicle. And private industry has the necessary technical capability and risk capital.

In pursuing the developing of new products, industry will, and should, continue to be primarily profit oriented. However, industry must produce safe products which will not adversely affect public health and well being. Consideration of social and environmental effects must be given equal weight with other product design and marketing requirements.

I believe that a larger scale research and development effort to create pollution free motor vehicles is needed, but at this time I am not yet prepared to define the role of the Federal Government in the development of electric cars.

The Federal Government does have a role of developing and enforcing air pollution standards consistent with technological advances and of exploring and evaluating the full impact of new transportation technology on the quality of our environment, on the Nation's transportation system, and upon the growth of our urban communities.

In each of these areas the Department of Transportation can play a productive role that is consistent with our free enterprise system.

In summary, I would like to reiterate my belief that the Federal Government should not, at this time, assume the burden of financing the development of electric vehicles. Rather, we should expend our resources in a determination of appropriate standards for the protection of the public, and in establishing the means to enforce such standards. The automobile industry has the initial responsibility for the research and development necessary to achieve the technological breakthroughs essential to meet such standards. We have good evidence that various segments of industry are responding to the challenge.

I believe this should be our immediate approach. It is our intention to maintain close contact with private industry in order to keep abreast of developments to reduce air pollution from present vehicles, as well as research on alternative vehicle systems.

Should it appear that events are not proceeding rapidly enough, the Federal Government must be prepared to assume an expanded role in the development of anti-pollutant systems.

The Department thus is not in disagreement with the objectives and intent of the proposed legislation, but believes that we have not yet exhausted the means presently at hand to achieve its fulfillment.

As an example, the Department of Transportation is now working with the Department of Commerce in sponsoring a panel studying the feasibility of electric power vehicle. This panel is comprised of the most outstanding scientists and experts from our scientific and industrial community. The results of their study and analysis of this problem should be of great assistance in formalizing future planning for research and development of electrically powered systems for transportation.

Under Secretary Hollomon will discuss the work of the panel in detail in his testimony, so I will not pursue this point further except to indicate that the panel's report should be of substantial help to the Congress in its determination of a proper course of action.

I would like to conclude by saying that regardless of the action of Congress on these bills as well as on others designed to reduce or eliminate air pollution, you will have our wholehearted support in the effort to clean the air we breathe. We are in complete agreement with the importance and desirability of this ultimate goal.