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FROM: OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY, U. S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20590

REMARKS OF ALAN S. BOYD, SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION, PREPARED FOR DELIVERY AT 61ST ANNUAL DINNER MEETING, CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF ALLENTOWN/LEHIGH COUNTY, AT J. CONRAD SEEGER'S UNION, MUHLENBERG COLLEGE, ALLENTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA, 7:15 P.M., APRIL 11, 1967

I thank the Chamber of Commerce for this welcome opportunity to think out loud on a subject that very basically affects our social and economic life.

It is the question of improved transportation facilities for the Lehigh Valley, the State of Pennsylvania, and the nation as a whole.

As you would expect, the new Department of Transportation is deeply involved in the care and cultivation of this \$425 billion private-public investment. Wherever people travel and wherever goods are shipped -- by water, land or air -- our broad assignment from the Congress and President Johnson is to bring on transportation progress. And we hope to make an immediate contribution.

This summer, not too many miles east of here, the rapid-rail demonstration project, linking Boston, New York and Washington, should produce some history-making results. But since the Department was officially born only eleven days ago, our major contribution to

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transportation progress, thus far, has been in the form of shorter after-dinner speeches.

People and businesses located here in the Lehigh Valley are spending perhaps \$350 million a year on transportation service and equipment. So you have a very good reason for demanding the best transportation system obtainable -- one that is fast, safe, efficient, convenient, and economical. And also one that will preserve the natural beauty of the countryside.

I have been asked by the enterprising officers of your very civic-minded organization to comment on some of the local transportation problems of this community. I would be only too willing to do so. However, no one is really competent to advise you on these matters who has not spent considerable time on the scene, listening to the heartbeat of the community.

The engineering and economic arguments are always loud enough for an outsider to hear, but the social and cultural considerations speak in a very soft register, and these, in the end, often determine whether people will approve or be forever resentful of a transportation facility.

After the warmth of your reception, I certainly do not feel like an outsider to Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton. But fully aware that I could not, in these few hours, become much of an expert on local matters, I am going to have to discuss your community's transportation problems in rather general terms.

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Happily, I can be specific about one thing. And that is my admiration for this valley. This is a remarkably solid industrial area with a fascinating history and unique human resources. I know of no urban area comparable in size which has your locational advantages and your growth potential. I congratulate you on having such an able and respected man as Fred Rooney representing your interests in the Congress. And I congratulate you further on the rare sense of unity that your several cities and countries have achieved in their common identification as the Lehigh Valley.

Transportation is a force which, depending on your use of it, can either reinforce or erode that unity. It is essential that civic leaders bring a strong sense of community conservation to transportation decision-making.

In our Department, a few days ago, a dispute on the location of an urban highway was under review. A letter was brought to my attention from the head of a local group which said, in effect: "Our position is that we just want a direct route into the center of the city, and we're willing to let the engineers decide where it should be placed."

I was deeply disappointed by this all-too reasonable position, for it seemed to me that a civic responsibility was being evaded. It is wrong, in my opinion, to allow a decision of such cutting effect on the social fabric of that community to be made solely by one group. Here there simply must be a close and thoughtful collaboration between highway engineers and local leaders. I really think I would have been

less disturbed by that statement of position had it concluded, ". . . we're willing to let the theology students decide where the highway should be placed."

For a student of theology does not understand construction problems, but he must be concerned with ethical problems, and he should be quick to discern where human values were being penalized to abstractions such as efficiency or economy.

So the first generalization I want to make about improvements in the Lehigh Valley is simply this: The community must set the terms of existence for transportation, and not the other way around. A transportation route or facility may have momentous consequences for a city. It may undermine, or it may bring new vigor, or it may trigger some changes that make no fundamental difference at all. It is important for a community to choose the consequences, not just suffer the consequences.

In the Lehigh Valley, as in every live urban center, there is a continuing effort to balance the various social and economic interests. Usually, transportation is the fulcrum of that teeter-totter, as each element in the community tries to transfer the cost of movement away from itself.

Thus, the car owner wants someone else to provide the parking. The merchant wants someone else to absorb the delivery charges. The pedestrian wants someone else to subsidize urban transit. The

industrial plant wants someone else to underwrite the access road. The developer wants someone else to pay for the interchange. The owners of private planes want someone else to support the airport. And so on.

This is not anything to be cynical about. It is the nature of our society. It forces everyone to pay attention and results in a very healthy political life. Nevertheless, someone has to pay for transportation improvements.

The ideal approach, of course, is providing the payment for all improvements out of the government general treasury. That system is great until you add up all the costs and discover you'd need a hundred times more money than there is in the treasury.

In general, our society seems to follow three principles of transportation finance. In one, the user bears the cost of the transportation system, as our fuel taxes pay for the highways.

Another is called that almost-swear-word, subsidy. This simply means that the user couldn't afford to pay what the service really would cost. Nevertheless it is very important to the community, for whatever reason, that this service be provided. So, as a matter of public policy, some part of the transportation costs are defrayed from the general treasury. This is customary, at the present time, for urban transit, local air service, and the merchant marine.

Arguments for and against a particular subsidy are, of course, necessary and desirable. This is the way we get at the truth. This is the way in which our society determines what is, and what is not, in the public interest.

The third principle is the conception that transportation is a cost of doing business. We usually see this applied to the large suburban shopping centers, where free parking and shuttle-bus service are provided. In other words, an enterprise which imposes the need for additional transportation facilities should bear those additional costs.

Now, I must say, metropolitan areas have been very reluctant to extend this principle to residential real estate development, where it logically belongs. All over America, new subdivisions and high-rise apartments are allowed to go up with little concern for the added burdens they impose on local transportation facilities. In plain language, more congestion. And a multitude of other side-effects. Usually, no calculation is ever made of these costs. No attempt is made by the community to obtain compensation from the developer, in advance. He takes his profits and the community takes the consequences.

I'm reminded of the tale told about a state legislature in the 1870's. Powerful interests were favoring a measure by personal incentive means that would be frowned upon today. On the floor of the assembly, member after member was getting to his feet and

lavishing praise on this particular bill. And its passage seemed assured. Until one old legislator who had somehow been overlooked stood up and began ferociously attacking the proposal. He lambasted it from every angle, for almost an hour, pointing to the evils in every paragraph. Meanwhile, news of this opposition reached the sponsors behind the scenes, and a messenger suddenly appeared on the floor with a bulky envelope which he casually dropped on the assemblyman's desk. The old politician, who was waving his arms in a peroration, scooped up the envelope and riffed through its contents. And as he put it in his coat pocket, he said, "Gentlemen, so much for the few bad parts of this bill. Now for the many good parts."

The evil is not real estate developers and urban growth, for we need the enlightened variety of both. The evil is not congestion, as such, for a certain amount of traffic delay in urban areas is just plain unavoidable. The abuse that we must seek to curb in the public interest is thoughtless or opportunistic use of land. Land-use which generates additional traffic where the facilities cannot be expanded except at prohibitive cost.

I know of no major city which possesses, or has the power to enforce, the kind of comprehensive zoning laws needed to defend the efficiency of its internal transport system.

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But congestion, in moderation, is not the villain. If the moderate traffic delays encountered in the business center of Allentown were thought to be unacceptable, you could very quickly alleviate the problem. You would only need to close down one of the nation's great department stores which lures so much of that traffic into town!

The value of such a proposed solution, which I assure you is offered in jest, is that lots of people suddenly realize how much they prefer to live with the problem itself.

It is safe to say that many of the area's transportation difficulties are local versions of a broadly national experience.

Railroad passenger service, for example. Back in the 1880's, I am told, the city of Easton by itself had no less than 64 passenger trains arriving and departing each day! How many are there now for all three cities combined? Ten. Today, as you know, most railroads are eager to get out of the long-haul passenger business. They can hardly be blamed for that. It's unprofitable. To try to force any private firm to remain in any business at a loss, beyond a brief period of time, would amount to nothing more than confiscation of property.

Nevertheless, the disappearance of rail passenger service for local and intermediate distances is a matter of serious concern. Among rail-commuter operations, there is now only one railroad in the

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entire country that is able to show even a modest profit on a suburban line. I believe we are going to have to take some new initiative to promote profitability in those operations.

On the other hand, I don't think your geographical area suffers from any deficiency in railroad freight service. Nationwide, the rail freight business has enjoyed a very substantial upswing in the past five years. The growth of piggybacking is one of the major reasons. But the railroads have been encouraged by other developments, as well, in the realm of public policy -- a very historic labor settlement, tax credits on investments, a more permissive ruling on mergers.

These and other decisions of the Johnson Administration have made the railroads more confident of their economic future, have inclined them to modernize and rationalize and economize. In so doing, they have become more competitive with other transportation modes. This, in turn, has made it easier for the railroads to attract fresh capital for further investment. And the upward spiral of progress yields benefits for the entire nation.

In jet air travel, this valley holds some very definite advantages. Related to size of community, your A-B-E airport is the equal of any in the nation. It is only a few minutes away from

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your home or place of business; which is to say, it is not only physically close, but you have no problems of surface access. It is actively and intelligently used by private industry, and illustrates the value of general aviation, organizationally as well as competitively. Moreover, your scheduled airline service makes you a next-door neighbor to the great metropolis, with all its cultural and commercial resources. Yet your own airport suffers from none of the air traffic congestion that plagues the East Coast.

In that sense, perhaps, your airport is under-utilized, but by that same token, it has great growth potential. In the jet age, I would say that you folks have the best of both worlds!

I am left with the feeling that the Lehigh Valley has only one really fundamental transportation problem. And that, in all candor, is not a problem that transportation should be asked to solve. It is the question of your identity. This community has yet to determine what its economic relationship should be to the New York metropolitan area.

Is the Lehigh Valley eventually going to be an extension of the eastern megalopolis? Is that what you want to see happen? Or is the Lehigh Valley going to find its own future fulfillment as the . . . Lehigh Valley?

This choice, whichever choice you ultimately make, will have a

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very basic effect on your transportation needs. It will influence almost every transportation decision you face from tomorrow on.

Personally, I feel that we have more than enough New Yorks in our country and not nearly enough Lehigh Valleys.

One of the priority decisions, in that connection, would be the scenic and recreational development of the river. Another is the possibility of naturalized open space providing your community with a beltway and a green-forested buffer zone.

I place these both in the category of forestalling future transportation problems. It is far easier to shape the future than to revise the present day.

With bold strokes of a well-conceived, far-sighted policy, we can hand down to our great-grandchildren a marvelously improved environment. But dealing with current problems, the improvements usually come by small increments. Even the relatively minor changes for the better are hard to make.

The best illustration of that is perhaps the Department's High-Speed Ground Transportation project which I mentioned at the beginning of this talk. This experimental rapid-rail link-up of Boston-New York-Washington is the major activity in a \$26 million project. When the Boston-New York segment goes into operation, some time in July, the running time -- if our calculations are correct -- will be cut from

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the present four hours and ten minutes to about three hours and fifteen minutes. And when the New York-Washington segment starts up, at the end of October, the running time will be reduced from the current three hours and thirty-five minutes to a flat three hours.

Do you see the point I'm trying to make? All that money expended, and all that work by the best technical experts in the field, for a net savings of fifty-five minutes and thirty-five minutes, respectively. And when the project is completed, we will then first be in a position to find out whether the thing can be economically justified, whether the public will ride the rapid-rail in sufficient numbers.

In sufficient numbers for what? In sufficient numbers to justify a further investment in much faster equipment, so that the savings in time will begin to get really dramatic.

Please don't misunderstand me. I'm not criticizing one of my own projects. I know it is worth the effort. I believe it will succeed very dramatically. But it is an experiment. There's no other way of getting at the truth of certain transportation ideas.

It may, in fact, be justified on other than strictly economic grounds. Perhaps it is in the public interest -- hence worth a subsidy -- to have good surface transportation connecting the nation's commercial, intellectual and political capitals. That, however, would be a matter for the electorate to decide.

The nineteenth century historian, Macaulay, was once comparing two schools of philosophy. He noted that Plato's followers (the Stoics) aimed at producing men who were virtuous and wise and above the vulgar, material needs. Whereas the followers of Bacon (scientific experimenters) were only trying to satisfy those vulgar needs as best they could.

Then Macaulay observed with a sigh of regret: "The wise man of the Stoics would, no doubt, be a grander object than a steam engine. But there are steam engines. And the wise man of the Stoics is yet to be born."

I believe that life without idealism is a great waste. But I am inclined to agree with one of the historian's commonsense conclusions: the smallest actual good is better than the most magnificent promises of impossibilities.

The Department of Transportation has been given a mission that is both Platonic and Baconian.

We must try to conceive of an ideal transportation system, a system that will ideally serve your community and the rest of the nation.

We must, at the same time, take practical steps to do away with a railroad crossing having gates that come down on a main business street at rush hour.

Progress in transportation, like progress in community life, is a matter of seemingly minor adjustments. A dangerous knob removed

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from a dashboard. Agreement about the wording on an export form.  
Getting an aircraft to make less noise. Getting a railroad man to  
say hello to a barge man.

I hope that you, in your community work, and I, in my trans-  
portation work, are granted two essential qualities:

The wisdom to perceive the ideal, and the resoluteness to  
advance by small but useful steps in the ideal direction.