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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20590

TESTIMONY BY ALAN S. BOYD, SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION,
PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON ROADS
OF THE HOUSE PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE, DECEMBER 5, 1967,
10:00 A.M.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to review with this Committee
the problems of the District Highway program.

It is my understanding that your scheduled hearings for this
week will include area Congressmen and representatives
of the highway departments of the District and the
neighboring States of Virginia and Maryland.

The issues involved in building highways to serve the District
and the surrounding metropolitan region are also of sub-
stantial concern to local governmental officials.

If time permits, you may wish to hear from officials of these
political jurisdictions who are entrusted with highway
and street programs as part of their responsibility for
the general welfare of the citizens of the region.

During the past few months the Department of Transportation
has had under way a review of several Interstate highway
location problems in the Washington metropolitan area
which grew out of a request made to the Department by
the National Capital Planning Commission.

As a result of this review, certain issues have been raised
and preliminary conclusions reached internally on how to
treat these locational problems.

The Department is consulting and intends to continue consulting
with the States and local governmental officials to
resolve these issues so that highway transportation
development in the region can proceed at a rapid pace.

Thus the opportunity to share with your committee these views
prior to further consultations within the region is
welcomed.

My advice was solicited in large measure because of the Congressional directive contained in the recently enacted Department of Transportation Act. Specifically, Section 4(f) of that Act provides, and I quote:

"After the effective date of this Act, the Secretary shall not approve any program or project which requires the use of any land from a public park, recreation area, wildlife and waterfowl refuge or historic site unless (1) there is no feasible and prudent alternative to the use of such land, and (2) such program includes all possible planning to minimize harm to such park, recreation area, wildlife and waterfowl refuge or historic site resulting from such use. "

A similar provision of law was enacted in the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1966 which when taken in conjunction with the above citation is a clear indication of public concern as reflected in actions taken by our duly elected officials.

As you can see, this section places a number of projects, both urban and rural, in a category requiring added review. It was for this reason that the National Capital Planning Commission last May requested that I review the need for the Three Sisters Bridge.

Although planning had been underway for some years on the facility, the Commission realized that on a question over which many citizens and experts disagreed, I, as Secretary of Transportation, would ultimately have to consider very carefully whether the need for a Potomac bridge at the Three Sisters Island site was so compelling and the alternatives so impractical as to require that it be built at this time.

Requests for Departmental advice on projects prior to receipt of a request for formal approval are not common.

I agreed to the review requested by the Planning Commission only because of (1) the substantial Federal interest in the Potomac River and its shoreline, (2) the uncertainty which has existed over the implementation of Section 4(f) provisions, and (3) the opportunity to expedite review of the project and avoid further delay at such times as a request for approval of the bridge might be made by the District.

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The proposed plan for Federal Interstate Route 266 is to construct it along a corridor which runs through parklands in Arlington County, across the Potomac River at the Three Sisters Island site into the District, and along the Georgetown waterfront to the West Leg of the proposed inner loop in the vicinity of 26th and K Streets, N. W. This proposal will involve substantial encroachment upon parklands, recreational areas and historic sites on both the Virginia and District shoreline of the Potomac. Thus if Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act has meaning at all, it must have particular applicability to projects which are planned through an area where protection of scenic, historic and recreational values have in the past received a high priority.

The impact of a major freeway facility on the environment of the Potomac River must receive careful consideration in the light of President Johnson's March 1965 directive to the Secretary of the Interior requesting that he review the multiplicity of proposals for the Potomac River Basin and devise a program for a deliberate land use pattern to preserve its natural setting and beauty and provide adequate recreational facilities.

A task force report to the Secretary of the Interior, made pursuant to this directive, expresses serious concern over further encroachment of freeways and bridge approach ramps upon the River in the Washington urban area and referred specifically to the Three Sisters Island bridge crossing as a major threat.

It categorically stated that construction of the proposed bridge would be completely incompatible with the type of development recommended for this sector of the urban Potomac.

In this instance, the Secretary of Interior has jurisdiction over land on both sides of the Potomac River at the points that would be needed for the Three Sisters bridge heads.

I should like to make it clear that even without Section 4(f) I would, of necessity, have to seek the concurrence of the Secretary of the Interior on any final proposal involving construction of the Three Sisters Bridge.

Because of the urgency of this question presented to me by the National Capital Planning Commission, I asked for a complete staff review of the Three Sisters project and its relationship to the freeway program in the District of Columbia.

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It is my considered judgment that, even if we resolve the questions related to Section 4(f), the present design of the District freeway system, as it relates to the Three Sisters Bridge, is inadequate.

I could not, therefore, approve the Three Sisters Bridge, until several basic questions have been answered.

At this point, Mr. Chairman, I would like to move to the exhibits and explain to you why I believe that I cannot approve this project at the present time.

First, I should like briefly to review with you the history of freeway design and location in the District of Columbia.

We have here a series of maps which portray the routes that have been proposed for the northwest extension of I-70S, intended to provide a freeway from downtown to the beltway and subsequently connect with I-70S where it now joins the beltway approximately at Wisconsin Avenue.

As you can see, this freeway has gradually been moved from close to the Potomac River to a point now north of the Capitol.

It has been successively relocated in an effort to overcome the opposition which characterized each proposed location.

The freeway as it is now designed is a tremendously expensive and inadequate artery.

Since it is planned to traverse part of the right-of-way of the existing Baltimore and Ohio trackage, it will require extremely costly retaining walls.

It is designed for six lanes, as is the incoming section of I-95.

These twelve lanes of traffic are designed to funnel in at this point to eight lanes on the so-called "North Central Expressway."

I don't need to point out to you the congestion, delay and safety hazard that would be created by this design.

Finally, it traverses that portion of I-495 which is considered the least adequate portion, the section also with the highest accident rate.

Second, I call your attention to the present design for the so-called "south leg" of the inner loop.

The most viable plan for this section of the inner loop is this tunnel carrying three lanes in each direction.

At this point, the tunnel is designed to join the Southwest Expressway.

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Here again we have the prospect of six lanes of traffic, three on the Southwest Expressway and three on the so-called "south leg" tunnel, funneling into 4 lanes of traffic on the remainder of the Expressway eastward to the junction of I-95.

In support of this, I should like to point out that the Southwest Expressway was originally designed without taking into account the traffic that would be generated by the south leg tunnel and the third 14th Street bridge, which is now under way.

Neither of these facilities was even contemplated when the Southwest Expressway was planned.

Mr. Frank Turner, Director of the Bureau of Public Roads, has characterized this tunnel expressway as a "cannon" which will literally fire three lanes of traffic at three lanes which are already on the expressway.

The cost of this proposed tunnel is in excess of \$100,000,000 for a distance of one mile.

At best this massive expenditure would obtain only a marginal improvement over the surface streets we already have.

At worst it would severely overload the Southwest Expressway.

Third, I should like to point out to you that the major justification for the Three Sisters Bridge involved its tying into two major corridors of traffic, one an intermediate loop and the other a radial flow.

There was to be the Glover-Archbold Parkway which would have traversed this route.

For the same reason that we have progressively located I-70S to the east, the Glover-Archbold Parkway has been abandoned.

There was enormous opposition from the citizens in the Glover-Archbold vicinity.

Second, the Bridge was intended to channel traffic into the northwest quadrant of the core city by the north leg, at this point.

There is at this moment no acceptable agreement for the construction of that freeway.

I believe we must find a route for the north leg across the inner city.

I do not believe that the route proposed at present, over K Street provides an acceptable solution.

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The expressway will severely disrupt commercial activity around this area for at least three years; and it will not provide a distribution of cars into the inner city since it is designed at present as a through connection from the interchange of 26th and K to the center of the inner loop.

I have informed all interested parties in the District of Columbia of the commitments of the Department of Transportation to find acceptable solutions and have pledged the full resources of the Department in an intensive effort to find the new location.

The net effect of these two factors makes it unwise at this time to construct the Three Sisters Bridge at its planned location.

It is my judgment that its construction at this time simply would transfer a growing traffic jam from the Virginia side of the Potomac to the interchange at 26th and K Streets.

It is my conclusion, therefore, that we should await answers to the following questions prior to a final decision on the construction of another Potomac River crossing and its location.

1 - Is it not appropriate that we delay any final decision until we have a final design and approval of the location and design of the inner loop?

As I have said before, I have pledged the full resources of the Department to help find agreement on a new route.

2 - Will it be possible to design a comprehensive freeway system in the District of Columbia until we have reached a final decision on the location and design of a northwest arterial route.

I propose we finish the construction of the District of Columbia side of the George Washington Parkway - known also as the Palisades Parkway.

I would further propose that this new route be designated as I-70S and be made part of the Interstate System.

This project would be 90% federally funded and would insure a swift completion of the project.

That route is now complete from the beltway to the D. C. line. We have several alternative design plans before us to finish construction from the D. C. line to the interchange at 26th and K.

I believe we can move quickly to begin construction of the final segment of this parkway and I have been assured the full support and cooperation of the Secretary of the Interior in that undertaking.

A substantial number of motorists in the northwest section of Washington and the northwest suburbs of Montgomery County would be able to use the artery for faster trips into the downtown area.

This, in turn, would lessen the demand for a quick, and perhaps ill-advised, decision on the precise location of another radial to the northwest.

It is my intention to place these questions before the three highway commissioners.

When I have their comments on these questions, I will then proceed to further discussion with them and with other interested government officials.

I do not believe that this process should take very long and I believe we can move quickly to implement whatever decisions are reached.

In the meantime I should like to make it clear that the interstate system in the Washington metropolitan area has not, as some have claimed, been hopelessly bogged down in controversy between local and Federal officials.

For example, the Capital Beltway, one of the first completed in the Nation, provides a basic traffic artery, which has already begun to influence substantially the economic development of the region.

Its completion has provided a highway facility that has significantly improved the efficiency and effectiveness of transportation service for movement of people and goods in this region.

Completion of this circumferential belt also provides a continuous and connecting link in the Interstate System.

Progress also has been made in bringing to early completion certain radial corridors into the District itself and construction continues on these and other components which are critical to the District of Columbia's traffic needs.

This is the question that I propose to put before responsible officials in the Washington metropolitan area and those in the state capitols who must join in this determination: I offer these proposals as a means to put an end to the present stalemate on major arterial construction in this area.

I offer it as a means for swift action that will solve some of our most pressing problems.

But there is much work ahead before we can say that metropolitan Washington has a balanced transportation network.

Some of it involved major construction and expense, and the subway system which is now in the design stage is in that category.

Some of it can produce significant benefits at relatively low costs.

For example:

-- In any area as vital and dynamic as the Washington metropolitan region, bus travel represents a most efficient and flexible transportation service.

We must, however, make bus travel more attractive.

To this end, we plan to discuss with HUD, WMATA, and local bus lines the possibility of a HUD grant to WMATA for the purchase of new bus equipment.

The equipment, in turn, could be leased by WMATA to local bus companies.

-- The Department is considering draft legislation in January which would provide Federal funds for the construction of fringe area parking lots.

In this way, commuters from distant points in the suburbs could drive to these fringe area lots where they would switch to bus for the trip downtown.

Experiments in other cities have shown that with adequate scheduling and pricing, the provisions of these fringe area lots makes bus travel quite attractive.

-- Also being considered in the Department is legislation to provide Federal funds for traffic operation improvements.

Much can be done to improve the efficiency of existing streets and highways through better traffic control, grade separated intersections, channelized turn lanes, etc.

I can think of no more appropriate place to use these funds than in the Washington metropolitan area.

-- The Bureau of Public Roads has recently announced that Federal funds are available in the construction of new highways for the development of reserved lanes for bus usage.

The plans of the Virginia State Highway Department for the reconstruction of the Shirley Highway now make provision for such lanes.

Similar action might well be taken on other major highways coming into the city.

-- Studies by the D. C. Highway Department in support of the Three Sisters Bridge indicated that much of the traffic using the Three Sisters Bridge would wish to move not along the Potomac River Freeway to the downtown area, but rather laterally through local streets to the North Central and Northeast portion of the District.

Currently there are few efficient arterials for doing this.

We propose that the District Highway Department explore with the Bureau of Public Roads the possibility of substantial upgrading of local East/West arterials to improve the flow of that traffic which is to move laterally through the District.

(more)

There is no doubt in my mind that even with the subway, improved bus service and expanded capacity of existing streets, the Washington area will need new and better highways in the years ahead.

Our concern is simply that the highways we build be as carefully designed and as relevant to need as possible so that they provide a foundation for growth in future decades, not an obstacle to that growth.

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