

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

48)  
f 10

REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION,  
ALAN S. BOYD, BEFORE THE AMERICAN ROADBUILDERS' ASSOCIATION  
1968, ANNUAL MEETING IN LAS VEGAS, NEVADA, FLAMINGO HOTEL, ON  
FEBRUARY 12, 1968, 10 A.M.

I don't know what the prophet Isaiah might say if he were standing here today in Las Vegas.

I do know that as I stand here I can't help recalling his ancient exhortation to "make straight in the desert a highway. . . ."

Rumor has it that there are some present-day saints who think we ought to have left it at that.

Actually, I don't think they're saints at all - judging by the language they use when they storm into work every morning after fighting the rush-hour traffic.

And there are those who think we've interpreted the rest of Isaiah's exhortation a little too literally, especially in some of our urban areas - I mean the verses that read: "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain. . . ."

While we're on Isaiah, I think an even more appropriate text of his for this occasion is the one that goes: "Come, let us reason together."

That is, as you know, one of President Johnson's favorite Biblical passages - and after some ten months at the helm of the Transportation Department I have come to fully share his fondness for it.

More than that, I am convinced that our success in developing the transportation system that the nation needs in the years immediately ahead must come - not from the sudden appearance of some new technology, or from a massive outpouring of money that simply gives us more of the same - but from the willingness of everyone involved in using and improving that system to reason and work together.

I am also convinced that any effort by any segment of that system to seek its own advancement at the expense of other segments, or of the system as a whole, will be ultimately and utterly self-defeating.

Take, for example, our highway system. I don't think there is any question but that the Federal Highway Program as it has developed over the years since 1916, and particularly over the last ten years, must rank as the great public works project of this nation.

Without the highways that Program helped build the unparalleled prosperity we enjoy today would surely be beyond our reach. And millions of Americans would not yet know the immeasurable opportunities those highways have opened up - in all spheres of human experience and endeavor, personal, social, economic, cultural, recreational.

Who could harbor anything but the utmost affection for highways?

Well, some are less affectionate than others. And these are, by and large, the people who have been entrusted with the management of major cities.

Some two-thirds of the Federal Interstate System is completed. About one-half of the scheduled 6,000 miles of that system in our urban areas remains unbuilt. And in city after city, progress toward building the remaining miles has either slowed to a rush hour crawl, or come to a complete stall.

The last miles are indeed proving to be the longest.

(more)

Let's examine the reasons.

Senator Jennings Randolph, Chairman of the Senate Public Works Committee, put it this way in a speech last October to the American Association of State Highway Officials:

"The highway is a catalyst, changing all it touches. This is true in rural America as well as in urban America, but the urban highway, by reason of the density of the population and the concentration of economic and social values, has a far greater effect on the environment of the city."

A freeway rolling through vast rural countrysides - where the per acre population of cows or corn often far exceeds that of people - that is one thing. But a freeway roaring through thickly populated urban neighborhoods and communities, straining their physical, social and economic fabric - that is another.

San Francisco, Seattle, San Antonio, New Orleans, Atlanta, St. Paul, Milwaukee, Chicago, Indianapolis, Cleveland, the District of Columbia, Philadelphia, New York City, Boston - this is but a selective roll call of major cities across the country in which bruises and bitterness from fierce freeway fights still show.

San Francisco, I fear, has shown us how deep resentment can run when a city and its citizens believe a freeway has been forced on them without taking into account the views and values and needs of the city itself. In the words of former Mayor John Shelley, "San Francisco's famous, or as it has often been called, infamous, Embarcadero Freeway. . .without doubt served as the trigger mechanism for our 'Freeway Revolt.'" "We have," the Mayor continued, "the visible evidence of the Embarcadero Freeway and the people are saying, 'Cut it out; no more.'"

Last year San Francisco turned down two major freeways - and a quarter of a billion dollars or more of Federal matching money that would have come along with them.

A month or two ago I ran across this view of urban highways: "Take the Federal highway program. No one seriously questions the nation's need for good roads, but a lot of people are beginning to wonder whether that need always has to override everything else.

(more)

"The doubters have become more numerous as freeways multiply in metropolitan areas, displacing families, schools and businesses, destroying scenic areas and drawing an ever-increasing flow of cars into already over-crowded city centers. Yet the planners by and large push full-speed ahead, insisting on the route that's best - for the road, if not for the community."

These are not the comments of the American Institute of Architects, or of the National League of Cities, or of some mass transit lobby - or even of an official of the Department of Transportation.

These are the concerns of the Wall Street Journal.

I think the moral to all this is clear. If we don't include the total needs and desires of our cities in our urban highway planning - and not just the needs of the auto user in the narrow sense of the word - then let there be no mistake: major cities will continue to drag their feet on highway construction.

I am convinced that, in the long run, the highway industry and the highway program, will flourish to the extent to which it meets the total needs of our society - not as narrowly conceived by any particular special interest, whether it be public or private, but as broadly conceived by our citizenry as a whole.

In our urban areas - where most Americans live, and where our transportation problems most demand and defy solution - that means several things:

First, that each urban area itself must decide what kind of transportation system best serves and suits its particular needs. Obviously, the system that works best in Las Vegas or Los Angeles is not likely to be the system that works best in Philadelphia or San Francisco.

Second, any assessment of the role of any segment of our urban systems must be made in the context of the system as a whole. We can't build airports without adequate access roads or rails - or undertake extensive road building to accommodate private automobiles without taking into account the feasibility of rail or other mass transit.

Third, because the transportation system itself has so powerful and pervasive an impact upon the total environment in which it operates, that impact must be of prior and prime concern in any decision to alter or expand that system.

(more)

What I'm saying is really very simple: cities are for people, and so are transportation systems.

The problems that freeways are running into in our cities are not entirely of their own making.

They do not, for example, arise from any deep-seated American resentment of the highway or the automobile. That combination has given the people of this country unparalleled freedom, comfort and convenience of travel and, with proper planning, will continue to do so.

They arise, in part, from a changing set of values. When President Johnson called for legislation to make administration of Federal highway activities a part of the Department of Transportation, he emphasized that future highway planning should reach beyond the economics of road building to encompass not only all transportation needs but the very environment in which those needs exist.

We are now an urban society. Seventy percent of our people live in or around cities. And there is a growing realization that these are the only cities we have and we should be handling them with care. So we are becoming more protective of them - of the air around them, of the water supply, of the parks and of the neighborhoods, because they are the heart of American life.

What this means, in short, is that we can no longer afford to build transportation systems or segments of systems if they serve only a transportation need and do it at the expense of other considerations.

The answer, then, to the problems of highways in urban areas - and the problems of urban areas with highways - is not to continue on a collision course, but to make common cause - the kind of common cause that may well be underway in the city of Baltimore, to cite one example.

Many of you, I imagine, are aware of how for years Baltimore has been embroiled in a bitter struggle over the city's 21-mile share of the Federal Interstate Highway System. The issues were the usual ones: some of the city's most historic sections were threatened as well as at least one viable, stable neighborhood.

(more)

Last year, the State of Maryland and the City of Baltimore came to the Department of Transportation and asked us to finance a new approach to breaking the impasse. It was a so-called design concept team that would bring together the social as well as the highway engineers, the urban as well as the highway designers, the urban as well as the highway interests.

It is far too early to speculate about what the final results of this effort will be. But thus far I think the indications are extremely encouraging.

When the team was first formed, for example, one planned section of the freeway - that would have run right through a neighborhood, cutting it in two and eliminating a substantial number of homes and jobs - was regarded as unchangeable.

But as the team looked more closely at the situation, as the architects began to talk to the engineers, and the sociologists to the leaders of the community - as everybody began to talk to everybody else - they began to be aware that there were indeed alternative routes and alternative designs. They began to be aware that by talking with each other and with the leaders of the community they could discover possibilities - and problems - they had not seen before. And in the process they could see the freeway becoming, more and more, not simply a means of moving automobiles and trucks and buses, but as an occasion and an instrument of improving and enhancing the life of the entire neighborhood.

I do not - as I have said - know what the results of this effort will be. But I am convinced that it is only from efforts such as this, in cities across the country, that we can arrive at acceptable solutions to our urban transportation problems.

Let me be absolutely clear on one point. The approach I suggest will cost more money. The planning and analysis being done by the concept team in Baltimore will add between one and one-and-a-half percent to the total cost of the segment of freeway that is under review.

Let me also suggest that, in the long run, the roadblocks which major American cities seem increasingly determined to place in the path of freeways they do not want will be far more costly.

I do not know how the trade-off between the brief pause for more intensive planning and the long delay caused by bitter argument over route and design would work out in every case.

(more)

I do know that the cost of freeway construction has been going up under the pressure of rising prices of materials at a steady rate of 3 percent a year. It requires no more than grade school arithmetic to see that a brief delay for planning review would cost less than a long delay for quarreling over route and design - in our out of court.

I do know that nobody is going to gain by thinking in terms of pro-highway or anti-highway - of either rail or road. It is not a question of either-or - it is a question of both-and as well as a question of what proportion.

Let me repeat here what I have said many times before: It is quite clear that Americans will continue to add at least 2.5 million automobiles to our supply every year and it is quite clear that we are going to build highways to accommodate them. Yet it is also clear that we are dangerously close to the point of diminishing returns in our use of the automobile - that now that almost ever body has his own auto, and many of us more than one, none of us can use it with the unlimited pleasure and freedom we bought it for.

The sheer growth of numbers of the automobile will eventually begin to limit the very freedom of movement, which led us to buy so many in the first place. For another, we are going to have to provide efficient, effective and attractive mass transit facilities as a serious transportation alternative. I am not - let me emphasize - talking about mass transit instead of autos and highways: I am talking about mass transit as well as autos and highways, mass transit of a kind and quality that will offer people what they do not now have - a real choice.

In general, I think it is time for all of us - in the public and private sectors of the Nation's transportation system, and particularly of our highway system - to re-examine our role in terms of the Nation's total needs in the years ahead.

As you know, Senator Jennings Randolph is holding intensive and exhaustive hearings on our whole Federal approach to urban highways. I am informed that Chairman Fallon intends to discuss the same subject when his House Committee opens hearings on this year's highway legislation.

Within the terms of existing legislation, the Department of Transportation is reviewing and revising our highway and other standards to make them far more responsive to the total needs of the society.

You - the builders - have given us the greatest system of roads in the world. It is now time for us to take the next step - to build the greatest transportation system in the world.

It will not be an easy job. The blueprint is still in the developing tank and the lines are still too faint to read.

(more)

But we do know this: It can be done. You do have an enormous opportunity, never before granted to builders. You have a chance to build a system that will give us a better way of life than man has ever known. That's a job worth bidding on. That's a dream worth doing something about.

Thank you.

# # # #