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Mr. Chairman, Senator Stennis, ladies and gentlemen:

I am glad to be here on the auspicious occasion of this first
of the John Stennis Symposia here at Mississippi State University.
I congratulate all of you who have had a hand in arranging the series,
for if this is a foretaste, the series will be fruitful indeed.

I am particularly delighted to see that the series has been
named in honor of my old friend, John Stennis, with whom I have
shared many tough battles to improve this country's transportation
system. He is a good man to have on your side and I want to take this
opportunity to thank him for the way he has pitched in for us when we
needed help.

I know the Senator and I agree that one of the more urgent
questions before this country is how to establish priorities for a cost-
effective highway safety program.

The automobile is one of the great liberators of the modern age, but like so many marvels we have not learned to treat it with the respect it deserves -- it is a potentially lethal weapon if mishandled, or if its intricate components fail, or if the roads are unsafe.

We certainly seem to have been awfully casual about this fact, perhaps because the automobile is such a familiar part of daily life.

I sense that the people want to hurry the day when they can drive off to work or begin a long road trip or send the kids across busy streets to school secure in the confidence that all will come back as full of life and joy as when they set out upon their journey.

Flying down here on the plane I reflected that the most dangerous part of my trip would be the passage from the landing field to the lecture hall. Today, many people set out in fear and a certain apprehension is justified.

Listen to the voice of one doctor writing to his colleagues in the medical profession: "As a surgeon I am weary of the urgent night calls, the usual milling cluster of police and scared relatives, the trail of blood down the corridor to the battered girl with the smashed face and the fractured pelvis. You are sick of it, too. I believe God himself is nauseated. "

Today, our 100 million vehicles are driven over a trillion miles each year by 100 million drivers -- most of them sober, almost all of them licensed. These cars and trucks and buses give us such personal and business freedom that it is impossible to imagine the shape of our society without them -- without the access they give us to distant vacation lands, to makers of goods, and to places of work, shopping, education and health care.

The unpleasant truth is, though, that these vehicles are entangled every year in some 10 million crashes, crashes that kill more than 50,000 citizens and injure another 4 million.

It is almost as if we are conducting some sort of military campaign against ourselves, for the pain, the human tragedy, and the destruction are warlike in their dimensions. In money terms alone, crashes cost us over \$13 billion per year in medical bills, lost wages, property damage, claims processing, police service, and operation of traffic courts.

Until recently, too many people were prepared to believe that these losses of human life and national wealth were just the price you had to pay for mobility.

Our projections show that there may be 300 million vehicles on the road within 30 years and twice as many drivers as today. If highway deaths were to rise proportionally, such losses would clearly be unacceptable by any criterion of economics on common sense.

What we needed to stop this increase was national leadership, a firm commitment to wrestle with the problem and unravel its complexities. And we got this leadership from President Johnson, from Senator Stennis, and from others in Congress.

In 1966, the Administration asked for and Congress passed two landmark acts within a few months of each other -- Highway Safety and National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety -- signifying that we would commit the resources of law and money and research necessary to bring highway crashes down to a level consistent with the state of our technology and our concern for human beings.

I think we have made some pretty remarkable progress, which could not have been anticipated as recently as 3 years ago. During the two years the National Highway Safety Bureau has been in operation we have significantly upgraded standards for new cars.

All cars manufactured for sale after December 31, 1967 must have the less flammable fuel tanks, stronger locks, crash padding, non-shattering windshields, safety belts, and shock-absorbent steering columns that experience has shown can prevent fatal injury, crippling, and disfigurement.

Cars sold after the first of the year must have the new head restraints.

In addition, we have issued new safety standards for used cars, tied to a sharp expansion of improved state auto inspection programs. Right now, 31 states inspect all cars periodically, an increase of 10 since the 1966 laws were passed.

But safe cars are only one part of our safety effort. New standards have been issued for driver education. More effective emergency medical service is being called for. Minimum requirements have been set for traffic controls and the design and construction of highways.

All along, of course, throughout the last 4 years, we have been pouring funds into the Federal Highway Administration's program of "spot improvements", designed to reconstruct some of the more dangerous portions of roadway. So far, we have budgeted \$1.2 billion in this cooperative effort with state highway departments.

All these steps should eventually slow down the number and severity of accidents on the streets and turnpikes of America. The big imponderable, of course, is the human element. People naturally prefer to be safe on the road; they rarely take deliberate risks. But they can be surprisingly indifferent to their own welfare.

It is one thing to pass a law requiring all new cars to have safety belts, and quite another to get people to wear them. Perhaps as designs improve and putting on the belt gets less cumbersome and the average motorist sees others properly packaged for travel, strapping up will be as natural as making sure the doors are closed.

For the present, however, it is much more common to hear about the proud owner of the new car with seat belts and shoulder straps who brings it back to the dealer as soon as he can and says: "Get this spaghetti out of here before somebody gets hurt". This is where the responsible individual -- the local leader -- can set a new fashion by always wearing his belt.

But do the belts really protect? Are they worth the trouble of establishing a new habit?

A study of 9,345 crashes in Sweden in which all occupants wore both lap and shoulder belts revealed that not a single person lost his life. But where the shoulder strap was unbuckled, people died from impacts as low as 12 miles per hour. Other research shows similar results -- a dramatic increase of survivals.

The average motorist has not yet acted upon his growing awareness of these life and death realities. We have to accept the fact that it is a lot easier to save lives indirectly when you don't have to motivate people to look out for themselves.

In fact, that is the essence of the public health approach to highway safety. For example, the new energy-absorbent steering assemblies, which work regardless of whether the driver cooperates, appear to be reducing fatalities in certain crashes by up to 70 percent. If all cars had them, we might save 12,000 lives every year.

Likewise, prevention seems to be working beautifully to reduce the high rate of motorcycle casualties. In one state enforcing our new rules on wearing of helmets and licensing, only 52 cyclists were killed last year, compared with 90 in the year before. In another state, which has no helmet law, fatal crashes rose 9 percent. Overall, though motorcycle registrations mushroomed during the last year, the death rate is down 22 percent nationally, and as much as 59 percent in some areas.

Some of you may already be thinking, this is all very well but what about the occasional driver who is constitutionally unfit to pilot two tons of steel down the pike? We all think we're pretty good drivers, but what about the guy whose record shows that he is a menace to every family on the road?

We have a National Driver Register that lists names and data on 1,600,000 persons whose licenses have been revoked or suspended. We are adding about 2,000 names of outstanding malefactors to this dossier every 24 hours.

By checking with the Register, a state will not inadvertently give a license to someone with a bad record in another state. The service seems to be popular because we are getting about 65,000 inquiries per day from all over the country.

This, I think, gives a clue to much that we are doing in the Department of Transportation. We are trying everything we can to help the states and localities make their streets and roads safer for their citizens.

We plan soon to assist the states in improving pedestrian safety. We will encourage training of police in procedures to investigate accidents and to anticipate hazardous driving and vehicle conditions. States accepting our standards will receive grants to implement them.

What direction will safety take in the future?

One of the most productive roads to follow is to relieve congestion because crowding always raises the accident rate. In our TOPICS program we have been working closely with a number of cities to break up the patterns of congestion without having to build costly new expressways.

We are putting our emphasis upon low-cost street improvements that promise a big payoff. We are trying to improve traffic signals, adding left turn lanes, and investigating the use of more overpasses and turn-out zones where trucks can load and unload. We believe that special lanes for buses could stop the constant blocking of cars and dramatically speed up city transit lines.

Tests show that street capacity can be upgraded by 15 to 25 percent without spending millions of scarce highway dollars. Senator Stennis was sufficiently impressed with the evidence to give us some matching funds to aid cities in expediting these improvements.

I think the biggest job we have to do in transportation over the next decade -- and this applies to our transportation network overall, not just to safety -- is that we must begin to think in terms of systems.

The day of building highways at random without thinking of their impact on nature and on city dwellers is done. Equally obsolete is the idea of making vehicles without thinking of the conditions under which they will be used, and without foreseeing judgmental failure on the part of drivers. We have long since gone beyond the time when we could plan one kind of transportation in ignorance of how to mesh it with other kinds.

Take freeways as an example. Until this year, the Federal Government would subsidize the construction of more expressways, but contributed nothing to the cost of parking facilities to handle the extra cars the expressways could bring into the city.

This destructive circle has been broken, or at least cracked.

This year, Senator Stennis agreed with us that money should be made available to help build fringe parking lots, tied -- and this is the vital part -- tied to mass transit services that will deposit people conveniently at office or factory.

Mass transit systems today are in deep trouble.

They are losing passengers. They carry 700 million fewer people now (1966) than they did in 1940.

They are slowly going broke. Transit net revenues plummeted 50 percent between 1940 and 1966.

The transit lines -- bus and rail -- are a national asset and must be helped. They impinge upon all other social systems. As President Johnson said, not a single one of our national needs in health, education, housing and job opportunity can be fully met without rebuilding our long neglected systems of mass transportation.

This latest labor of Hercules falls mainly to the newest member of the Department of Transportation team -- the Urban Mass Transportation Administration. The Urban Mass Transportation Administration is starting out by making grants and loans to cities of all sizes -- small and medium as well as large -- that are willing to sponsor advanced studies of their transport problems. We will also help train transit officials and technicians.

We are doing this none too soon, for the nation desperately needs a balanced system of transportation. By that I mean not just a batch of ill coordinated, fancy technologies shooting off like fireworks in various directions, but a genuine system that is rational, efficient, and modally integrated.

Such a system would find each part of the network doing its own thing, as the young people say, and not overlapping or competing needlessly with other parts.

To those who know the present state of American transportation, this may seem like an idle dream. But it must become a reality if we are to meet the needs of the era of total mobility that beckons in the near future.

You should take a look at our projections. They are very conservative, but spectacular nonetheless. For example, between 1966 and 1975 a mere 13 percent increase in population will produce at least a 26 percent increase in cars, a 57 percent rise in intercity passenger miles, and a 53 percent surge in intercity ton miles.

To make this mass of movement possible, let alone acceptable, we will have to apply social and economic penalty-benefit ratios rigorously to each of the options technology affords us. We will have to ask ourselves well in advance what our goals are, how we will achieve them, and what kind of life for the next generation we want to make possible.

Having made these tough decisions, with all their compromises and value trade-offs, we must have the courage to implement them as fully as possible. I think we can do better than we have up to now, letting technology decide everything for us by default.

We have made a beginning, at least, by criticizing some of our most hallowed practices and testing a number of theories in action. Thanks to the leadership of the Johnson Administration and the responsiveness of Congress, there is purpose and direction, instead of sheer momentum, in American transportation today.