



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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NEWS

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20590

55-S-69

EXCERPTS OF REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE BEFORE THE GOVERNOR'S CONFERENCE ON URBAN AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 1969, 10:45 A.M., UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS, AUSTIN, TEXAS

I am delighted and honored to be here with you for the Governor's Conference on Urban Affairs and Design.

A year or so ago -- when I was Governor of Massachusetts -- we held a special governor's conference on community development up in Boston, bringing in experts and community leaders just as Governor Smith has done here today. We found that conference to be extremely useful in formulating plans and programs for our State. I am confident that this meeting in Austin will do the same for Texas, and I congratulate you on getting together here to draft blueprints for a better future.

And as we flew over Texas this morning, I must confess to feeling a twinge of official pride. Since 1956, some 1.3 billion dollars in Federal funds have been spent on the Interstate Highway System in Texas.

The Coast Guard spends money here to the tune of 12 million dollars a year. The Southwest Region of the Federal Aviation Administration -- of which Texas is the major part -- had a budget of 88 million dollars for fiscal year 1969, and at the present time has committed almost 7 million dollars for airport development and grants in aid for your State. And even our

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youngest operating administration, the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, has already allocated some \$10,422,000 within Texas over the past two years. And to round things out, our Federal Railroad Administration recently contracted for a \$150,000 project here in Texas in connection with railroad safety.

In terms of fiscal year 1969, the Department's total funding in Texas went over 273 million dollars, the fourth highest amount going to any single State from our Department. The meaning is clear. The people of Texas have been doing a good job of going after the Federal dollar -- we, on our part, are doing as much as we can to invest those dollars where they will be used wisely -- and your State will certainly stay in the forefront of progress in modern transportation facilities.

This conference is devoted to urban affairs and design, and I would submit to you as my text for the day, that unless we start now to utilize transportation as an instrument of urban design, we are headed for deep trouble.

Let's take a look at some of the basic problems facing our cities in America today.

We are adding some 10,000 automobiles to our roads every day. Not every year, every day. And at the same time, automobile usage is up. It is increasing about 40 percent every eight years.

Because everyone is in the habit of piling into their automobile every time they want to go somewhere, we are finding fewer and fewer people riding public transportation facilities.

Because they are all on the highways, we are faced with traffic jam after traffic jam in virtually every urban area in the Nation.

We have coped with the problem to a degree by injecting tremendous amounts of money into our highway system -- a system that is excellent -- a system that is one of the most extensive public works projects in history.

But we are caught up in a cycle, as highways contribute to urban sprawl -- putting people further away from where they want to be -- resulting in even greater automobile usage. Our highway system -- extensive and effective as it is -- needs company. It needs efficient public transportation.

Public transportation has gone downhill -- fast -- over the past quarter century. While automobile registrations have nearly tripled since 1945, transit fares (and I'm talking about buses, as well as subways and rapid transit systems, of course) have also multiplied by nearly three. While all this has been going on, however, the number of transit passengers has fallen from almost 24 billion per year to about 8 billion, and operating income has plummeted from 149 million dollars down to an 11 million dollar deficit.

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The situation has deteriorated to the extent that cities and States simply cannot be expected to underwrite the cost of a massive upgrading of our public transportation facilities. Already State and local indebtedness in this country is well over 100 billion dollars, and the economists predict that over the next ten years the States and the cities are going to run short by possibly another 250 billion dollars.

So you can't really blame the governors and mayors for building highways -- which are Federally financed to the tune of 90 percent in the Interstate System -- when the alternative is public transportation for which Federal financing has always been extremely meager. In fact, the Federal Government has spent more money on highways in the past six weeks than it has spent on public transportation in the last six years!

What we need -- and what President Nixon and I have proposed in the Public Transportation Act of 1969, now before the Congress -- is a 12 year, 10 billion dollar program to provide Federal funds on an assured basis for the construction, expansion and improvement of public transportation in growing urban America.

Those of you who are involved with municipal finances know only too well how difficult it is to sell bonds when there is no assurance of matching Federal funds a few years down the road. It was essential that this legislation contain some provision that would let our State and local partners know that this would not be an "on-again, off-again" program. The preamble to the President's legislation calls for the Congress to firmly indicate its intent to fund an on-going program, and is further bolstered by a budgetary mechanism known as "contract authority" which will enable cities to undertake long-range projects; such as subways in the larger cities, exclusive busways and other facilities in medium-sized cities, and perhaps fleet modernization activities in smaller cities. These are just examples.

Our legislation seeks the authority to commit funds starting at 300 million dollars and rising to one billion dollars during the first five years, then holding level with an additional one billion dollars each year for the balance of the program.

The key concept to the program is the "contract authority" which is, simply, the granting of Federal authority to the cities to enter into binding commitments to the full extent of the fund authorization -- not just to annual periods.

I'll concede that this is not the trust fund I was plugging for. But as I stated publicly on many occasions, I favored a trust fund unless somebody could come up with something else that would work as well. And this approach will work. It obligates the Federal Government to support programs once the contracts have been signed . . . period. We will be legally obligated to follow through on approved plans, and that will give the cities the assurance of continuity they have always demanded.

Let's take an example: Suppose City "X" needed a 10 million dollar transit grant from the Federal Government. We at the Department of Transportation could

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approve that request, and the city would be assured that the 10 million dollars would be forthcoming over the time period required for design and construction. Even though Congress had not actually appropriated the money, that city would know -- as well as could be known under the Highway Trust Fund, for instance -- that the funds needed would be appropriated by the Congress. Bear in mind the fact that the Highway Trust Fund has never been an automatic source of money for the building of our great Interstate System. Our highway program has always relied on the biennial action of the Congress to appropriate money out of the Fund for design and construction, and it was all the assurance of fund availability this Nation needed.

Where will the money go? This is not just a "big city bill." Our bill pumps needed cash into cities of every size, and this legislation surely ought to have the support of conscientious leaders from all over the country -- from rural areas as well as urban areas.

In summary, we feel that we have a bill here that will get us underway on a task that certainly needs doing. There is no question in my mind that job training centers, employment opportunities, health facilities, educational institutions, recreational areas -- all of the things that are needed in all of our cities are not going to be fully utilized if people cannot get to and from them. We need new systems, and we need to improve existing systems, in order to give every American the opportunity to share in the good life and keep this Nation strong. We need mobility in this Nation if we are to fulfill our pledges to the disadvantaged, the young, the poor, the elderly and the physically handicapped.

We need to do this now, throughout the country, and we need to come up with the money at the Federal level.

It is to the President's great and enduring credit that he recognizes the dangers of relying solely upon one mode of transportation to give Americans the mobility they require and demand. He knows -- and he and I have discussed this often -- that if we expect to make any headway with our urban problems of congestion, pollution, poverty and unemployment, we are going to have to try something new in the way of urban transportation.

You are here at this conference these two days to consider urban affairs and design. It is Governor Smith's hope . . . and your hope and my hope . . . that this conference will accelerate movement toward the initiation and adoption of desirable legislation affecting the quality of life in urban areas and throughout the State. You are emphasizing good planning and proper implementation.

I firmly believe that in my Department we can do much to help you accomplish these great goals.

I firmly believe that the legislation we have proposed, that I described to you this morning, is long overdue.

I solicit your support. I encourage your enthusiasm.

I applaud your awareness of urban problems, and am highly hopeful that you ladies and gentlemen will see fit to pass the word to the Lone Star

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State's two distinguished U.S. Senators and 23 dedicated members of the House. Uncorking the lid on congestion, pollution, and wasted resources in America's cities transcends party lines. It is a program basic to the survival of our cities, and I appreciate having had the opportunity to discuss it with you this morning.

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