



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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EXCERPTS OF REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE AT THE DIAMOND JUBILEE BANQUET OF AMERICAN PUBLIC WORKS ASSOCIATION, CLEVELAND, OHIO, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 1969

Let me extend the official congratulations of my Department and the Administration to the American Public Works Association on the occasion of this most auspicious 75th anniversary.

I remember well the last time I met with this group. That was on the occasion of your congress and equipment show two years ago. One of your speakers at that show pointed out -- and I'll quote him -- that "the tremendous productivity we have achieved here in the United States stems directly from our freedom to build and create." He went on to say that "it is our challenge in the last third of the 20th Century to make this productivity beneficial -- to ourselves and to the rest of the world."

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Well, a lot has changed during those two years. Your speaker at that meeting -- in Boston -- has since gone on to become the Secretary of Transportation -- and he's standing here in front of you this evening.

We have a new Administration in Washington -- an Administration that is eager to re-establish Federal-State cooperation to the high degree we enjoyed in the recent past -- an Administration that sincerely and earnestly wants to work hand-in-glove with the states and municipalities to best serve the larger good.

I think that this most notable seventy-fifth anniversary, marking three quarters of a century of progress in the public interest, is a most appropriate time for us to re-commit ourselves to the proposition that the effective construction of public works in the United States must involve full cooperation and understanding between the Federal government, the states and the municipalities. Together we can build properly and constructively. If we work at cross-purposes, however, our labors will have been largely in vain.

As I said two years ago, our progress stems from our freedom to build and create. And I would expand that to say that the best kind of freedom is the freedom to work cooperatively together.

We are faced with massive challenges. I know that in my particular field of responsibility -- transportation -- our biggest tasks are still ahead of us.

It is in my office that everything comes together. It is in my office that we have to face the fact that the Nation's population is increasing by about 6,000 a day; that the number of automobiles is increasing at the rate of about 10,000 a day; that automobile usage is increasing by about 40 percent every eight years. It is at the Department of Transportation where we look at the "whole picture"; that we must cope with the fact that every day there are some 14,000 airplanes using the increasingly-congested air space over America. The airlines have doubled their domestic passenger-miles in the last four years, and expect to triple them in the next ten. Moreover, we are faced with the fact that 70 percent of the people in the United States live on 2 percent of the land -- in the cities -- and that the massive problems of urban transportation will get bigger no matter what we do.

We have 100-million drivers and 100-million vehicles, traveling a total of one-trillion, 10-billion miles each year on our 3.7 million miles of roads, streets and highways. We have one linear mile of highway for every square mile of land here in this country.

We know that poor people are dependent on public transportation. We know that 76 percent of households with annual incomes of less than one thousand dollars do not own an automobile; 69 percent of households with incomes of less than two thousand dollars have no car. Fully half of all minority-group households own no automobile.

At the same time, we recognize the economic importance of highway transportation in America. Automobile expenditures accounted for some 9.3 percent of the gross national product in 1967 (most recent year available).

In our other areas of responsibility -- the railroads carry about 750-billion ton-miles of freight at the present time. We know full well that that figure will be somewhere in the neighborhood of one-trillion ton-miles by 1975.

We foresee increases of similar magnitude everywhere we look -- in pipelines, barges, air cargo, motor freight -- and in international commerce, too, where the volume of trade will shoot up at least 100 percent before 1979. Transportation is the largest service function in our economy. All told, it accounts for almost 20 percent of the G.N.P.

Transportation generates some 18 percent of all taxes collected by the Federal government. It provides 13 percent of the Nation's civilian employment -- well over 9 million jobs.

It demands public works of the highest order.

We have much in place, no question. And I am referring, of course, to our magnificent interstate highway system; now 67 percent complete with 28,219 miles open to traffic; 5,259 miles under construction, 6,897 miles on the drawing boards, and 5 percent still in preliminary stages.

Just to refresh your memory, construction contracts involving 231,731 miles of primary and secondary highways and their urban extensions have been completed since July 1, 1956, at a cost of just over \$20 billion.

The interstate highway system is one of the best examples of Federal-State cooperation in the history of this Nation.

The kind of cooperation we enjoyed back in the late fifties and early sixties was, I am sure, one of the major reasons we were able to build the interstate system to the extent that it exists today. The relationship between Washington and the outlying regions was a good one, and when good men work together for a good cause, good works are the result.

I know full well how important it is to have a genuine, sound and respected relationship between the Department of Transportation and Public Works Officials throughout the Country.

At the same time, it is vitally necessary that the States maintain good relations with the cities if the program is to operate with full efficiency and maximum benefit.

And let me point out another reason for the success of a solid partnership between the States and Washington. Such a partnership is responsive to new conditions and the changing nature of our society.

The ever-increasing emphasis on human, environmental, and aesthetic values poses difficult and time-consuming problems for builders -- for public works decision makers -- especially in urban areas. The enlightened goal is to provide facilities that will not only accomplish the principal function of moving people and goods, but will also be beneficial parts of the total urban environment, preserving the best of community values, and integrating the various modes of transportation.

It is my policy and the policy of the Administration I represent, that we shall do everything we can, in each individual case, to guarantee that the building of highways, airports, transit systems and so forth will cause the least disruption of human and natural resources and of traditional neighborhood patterns.

President Nixon has established the Council on Environmental Quality Control and the Urban Affairs Council -- both of which are involved in the protection and improvement of our city neighborhoods. I have also established in our Department of Transportation an Office of Environment and Urban Systems.

Congress and the general public have become increasingly concerned with environmental and human values, and anyone who considers this concern to be a passing fancy is living in a dream world. Let's take a look, for a moment, at a few statistics relative to just relocation in connection with highway construction.

The Federal-aid Highway Program will cause some 50,000 displacements annually for the next several years. Approximately one-fourth of these will be in rural areas and the other three-quarters in urban areas. About 87 percent of the annual total will involve residences, 10 percent will involve business and non-profit organizations, and the remaining 3 percent will involve farms. Over half of all displacements will be on interstate projects. The greater number of projected residential displacements will involve middle range or lower cost housing. And, as I stated in Washington last Friday, we have reached the point in awareness of human values where as long as I have anything to say about it, highway projects will not be approved unless and until adequate replacement housing has already been provided for and built.

The stakes are high. Yet you know and I know, that unless we can somehow equate relocation housing supply and demand, we run the risk of having our highway program grind to a halt. This is a problem that should be high on your priority lists. It is a step that must be taken. And that brings me to another topic.

There is something else that could bring our highway program grinding to a halt. In fact, even today in many locations, it brings traffic almost to a halt twice a day. I'm talking, of course, about urban highway congestion ... and the whole range of problems that result from too many people in too many vehicles trying to get to too many places all at the same time.

The President understands the dimensions of the problem. And he recognizes also that before the end of this century we should have one thousand new cities averaging 100,000 in population, and ten new cities averaging one-million each ... just to accommodate 20 percent of the added population we expect by the year 2000.

Our first requirement in reaching balanced urban transportation is a revitalizing of our public transit.

The present status of urban public transit is deplorable. In recent years, 235 bus and transit companies have gone out of business. In the past 25 years, transit fares have tripled, and during the same period, passenger totals fell off by two-thirds.

This has occurred in small and medium-sized cities as well as in the larger urban and suburban areas.

Rising costs have been met with increases in fares and cutbacks in service. Then you get a loss of passengers and an eventual reduction of revenues.

It's a vicious cycle that requires modern thinking, planning and solutions, with the Federal government taking a leadership position and providing substantial funds.

As a result, President Nixon has recommended to Congress that we provide Federal assistance to develop and improve public transportation in local communities.

We are asking for "contract authority" to obligate funds over the full five years so as to assure cities of the support they need to undertake long-range projects.

Let's take an example, suppose City "X" needed a ten-million dollar transit grant from the Federal government.

We at the Department of Transportation could approve the request, and that city would be assured that the ten million 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.

Let me emphasize that this is not just a "Big City" Bill.

Not just subways for cities like Dallas, Atlanta, Seattle, and Pittsburgh, but improved bus (and other) systems for cities as small as 25,000 population.

This is legislation that deserves the support of leaders in all of the states -- rural as well as urban.

In addition to our all-important public transportation bill, our Department is also working very hard on another key piece of legislation, an Airport/Airways Bill. This legislation, based on a trust fund paid for out of user charges, is designed to raise a total of \$5 billion over the next decade, half of which is to be matched by state and local units of Government for a total of 7.5 billion dollars.

My friends, this is must legislation. Just yesterday morning, I spent some three hours on Capitol Hill with the House Ways and Means Committee on this all-important Bill. And several of those Congressmen -- and this was on a bi-partisan basis -- agree that this legislation is long overdue; that we are approaching an emergency situation in airports and airways. We are optimistic about chances for passage of this Bill, but our optimism is based on hard cold fact -- and the sheer necessity of making sizeable investments to cope with the rapidly expanding use of our limited air space.

I think the best way to sum up our transportation challenge is to say that we shall be required -- in the next 20 years -- to double the capacity of our existing transportation system. We must -- in transportation -- accomplish as much in 20 years as we did in the previous 300 years. And that's a lot of construction!

I have thrown at you some pretty sizeable challenges. But I know the good stuff you public works people are made of and I know you're ready to help. The knowledge that there are -- in all our states and communities -- strong workers like you, is a source of confidence for me.

And I understand your problems. I know them personally. I've been in this business for more years than I care to admit. I know that the public works of this Nation can demonstrate the breadth and depth of our American spirit -- its hope, its confidence and its courage.

Let your work be strong and of great proportions -- for that is the nature of the future that awaits us. I ask you then to build for a very great and a very exciting tomorrow. In this way, you will reflect the basic spirit of our people today.