

2-S-69

REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY JOHN A. VOLPE,  
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION, AT THE GOLDEN SPIKE  
CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION DEDICATION PROGRAM,  
PROMONTORY POINT, UTAH, SATURDAY, MAY 10, 1969,  
1:00 P. M.

We gather at mid-continent today to commemorate one of the earliest triumphs of what the twentieth century calls "American know-how." And we are here today to acknowledge a great epic of human will and determination as well.

The events of a century ago, here in the vast wilderness far removed from the centers and terminals of trade and commerce, have had a tremendous and far-reaching effect upon the growth of this nation and the progress and prosperity of the world.

It was here, at this site, that men of all nations -- who immigrated to the new world -- joined the rails to span a continent, and thus earned their place in the history of man's accomplishments.

Like all our great enterprises, this effort was sustained by men of all nations, races and social origins -- the Irish, the Germans, Italians, Chinese, Blacks -- by veterans of both the Union and Confederate armies, by Mormon settlers -- by card sharks, fortune hunters and straw bosses who swore mightily, as well as by Puritans who swore only by hard work.

The task that was accomplished here in 1869 was indeed, the culmination of years of hard work . . . in the finest American tradition.

Who else but these Americans could have bored eleven tunnels in a 20 mile stretch while the mountains were under 30 feet of snow? Who else could have pierced more than a mile of solid granite? Who else could have laid 10 miles of track in 12 hours and 1,776 miles in 6 years?

No history of the transcontinental railroad would be complete without acknowledging the special contribution of the Mormons. Their diligence, their steadfastness, their high moral standards made for high production and peaceful labor camps. They were highly cherished by both railroad companies.

Brigham Young particularly, his sons, and other Mormon leaders quickly grasped the economics of railroad construction. One historian reported that the Mormons met the shrewdest financial tactics of the railroad timekeepers with "home-grown financial maneuvers that brought applause from the sophisticates of the financial East."

In this connection, let me say that it takes equally shrewd and persistent tactics to protect the great landmarks of American history. The Golden Spike National Historic Site probably would not have been restored had it not been for the persistence -- over some 43 years -- of Bernice Gibbs Anderson, for many years a distinguished correspondent with the Salt Lake Tribune.

At first Mrs. Anderson's plans for preserving the area failed to arouse great interest. Later, the people of Box Elder County began staging an annual commemorative ceremony. Eventually, 11 years ago, Congressman Henry A. Dixon interested the National Park Service in the project. A study was made and Congress authorized acquisition of this land in the Golden Spike National Historic Site Act of 1965.

That bill would not have become law without the leadership and support of the distinguished Senators from the State of Utah -- the Honorable Frank E. Moss and the Honorable Wallace F. Bennett -- both with us today, as well as Representative Lawrence J. Burton, Congressman from Utah's First District.

Since enactment of the bill the National Park Service has done a superb job of restoration, aided and inspired by Mrs. Anderson's knowledgeable enthusiasm. Such dedication should be a model for all Americans, and we thank her for her tenacity, perserverance, and respect for our proud national heritage. I am delighted and honored to accept this historic site today on behalf of the United States Government and the people of this country.

While we are here this afternoon to commemorate an historic event, let me be quick to point out that we are dealing with an industry -- a mode of transportation -- that is not hidebound to the past.

I am afraid that too many Americans look upon our railroad industry as merely a piece of Americana - - picturesque and nostalgic, but that's about all. All too often the sight of burnished rails receding to the horizon summons up not images of technical virtuosity and unparalleled efficiency, but of Hopalong Cassidy leaping from his horse to the baggage car!

Well, I for one have learned that things are a little different now. Witness the two railroads represented here today - - the Southern Pacific and the Union Pacific. Some 10 days ago I was privileged to be conducted on a 2-hour tour of Ben Biaggini's Southern Pacific operations in San Francisco, where the use of computers, video tape, microwave links and other sophisticated devices is resulting in genuine twenty-first century railroading. In fact, Ben is bringing on a whole new generation of railroaders -- only this time they wear miniskirts rather than overalls, and work in air conditioned control centers instead of switch-yards!

And let me pay tribute too, to the great Union Pacific Railroad -- whose pioneering spirit continues with giant diesel locomotives such as the 6600 horsepower Centennials, certainly marvels of our times.

Edd Bailey, too, is one of the leaders of this resurgent industry -- a man who is setting the pace for the rest of the nation's railroads at a time when their great carrying capacity and efficiency is so definitely needed.

The golden spike that will be driven here in a few short moments then, symbolizes more than a link with our historic past. That spike points the way to the great strides in technology, as well as management and financial expertise, that are fast becoming hallmarks of the railroad industry.

Just as the spike of one hundred years ago made it clear to the world that we are a nation of builders, so today's spike makes it clear that the first one hundred years were just a start.

I personally view the railroad not as an anachronism, but as a growth industry. I am convinced that it will give birth to even more new ideas, and will transform itself steadily and progressively in response to new technology and new opportunity. So in honoring the pioneers of the past, we also acknowledge the promise of tomorrow. My friends, the railroads are just beginning to roll.

Let me recount just a few of the advances that have been made in recent years:

Piggyback service now accounts for a hard-won four percent of total carloadings and could very well double in the next 6 years.

Seven years ago, the railroads carried less than ten percent of new automobiles to market. Now, with double and triple deck cars, rails carry more than half of such automobiles.

Five years after its appearance, the unit train carried one-third of all rail-borne coal. Containers, used in conjunction with the widely touted land bridge, will carry this line of advance still further.

My Departmental experts now forecast that by 1975 a trillion ton-miles of freight will be transported by rail in this country -- up twenty-five percent in nine years in spite of extremely vigorous competition. With system-wide innovation, consolidation, and integration, this figure could prove conservative.

Even in the passenger business the outlook is more favorable than many people imagine.

Our initial experiences with high-speed demonstration trains -- the Metroliner and the Turboliner -- in the Northeast Corridor show that rails can be competitive with the other modes along runs of intermediate distance between urban centers of high population density. Soon, the autotrain may start carrying people in their automobiles from Washington to Florida, thus saving them the trouble of driving. In the near future new forms of guided transportation will emerge whose debt to the rails is clear -- the tracked air cushion vehicle is one example. The gravitrain is another.

The railroads can play a major part in the modernized and completely balanced transportation system that we must build if this country is not to be gripped in complete paralysis. The railroads also have an unrecognized potential as instruments of long-range environmental planning. They can help us to relieve congestion, reduce pollution, and exercise a more responsible stewardship for our dwindling natural resources. Railroads can help to restore the good life for millions of our citizens.

Indeed, as we pay homage today to the past, we must ask ourselves: if we do not purge this land of pollution, ugliness, congestion and decay, and preserve its beauty, what kind of nation will Americans look out upon as they gather here one hundred years hence for the Golden Spike Bicentennial?

That ceremony a century ago marked the beginning of the end of the Western frontier. Let's resolve that this ceremony shall mark another beginning. Let's pledge ourselves to an all-out effort to cleanse and enhance our environment, to evaluate progress in terms of the good of society. Let's strive to create a harmony between nature, technology and our fellow men. Again, it is a pleasure to be here and to participate in this most significant event.

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