



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

NEWS

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20590

6-S-71

REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY U.S. SECRETARY OF
TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE BEFORE THE CONFERENCE
ON AIRCRAFT AND ENVIRONMENT, SHERATON PARK HOTEL,
WASHINGTON, D. C., MONDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 1971, 9:00 a.m.

Welcome to this first Conference on Aircraft and the
Environment. It will not be the last.

We are hopeful that your wise deliberations during
these three days will show us how air transportation can
be a good neighbor to our social and natural surroundings.
That is the goal of this Conference and I know it can be
reached.

One thing for sure, those pioneer days when a new
airport was automatically greeted by community exaltation
are gone forever. The public is no longer fascinated with
mobility per se. It wants mobility combined with clean air
and peace of mind.

Now there are some members of my generation who think
this new public sophistication is a mindless revolt against
the machine. I say no. What the people want now is that
technology be used to make the earth a better place to live.
All of us want to liberate man from noise, filth, ugliness
and inconvenience. That is what the environmental revolution
is all about.

The President is well aware of this and he gave me
explicit instructions -- the first day I came to Washington
two years ago last month -- to make transportation into a
servant of the people instead of their master. I said that's
exactly what I would do, and anybody who doubts me or the
President in this matter is in for a pretty stiff argument.

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We must come up with solutions to aircraft noise. We must find better ways to fit these giant airports into their surroundings. We must set up fast access via rapid rail and tracked air cushion vehicles or the congestion of today is going to seem like a joyride by 1980.

The fact is that the business of moving people and goods through the air is going to increase -- that much is inevitable. The airlines may be feeling the pinch right now, but by the end of the seventies they will be carrying three times as many passengers as they are now. And by 1985, embarkations will be up 400 percent.

Anybody who thinks we can meet that kind of demand with today's organization of resources, with today's pollution and congestion, with today's intolerable noise levels -- just doesn't know how mad people can get.

The people want results and they are going to get them. Thanks to President Nixon's timely leadership, this Administration already has the basic tools to do the job.

First of all, the Airport and Airways Development Act of 1970 plainly states that no airport from now on can get any Federal aid unless the planners protect and enhance both its human and natural surroundings. No project with an adverse effect of any kind on the environment can be authorized by the Secretary of Transportation unless a complete review of feasible and prudent alternatives has been made. The Bill requires open public hearings on all such questions and emphasizes consideration for air and water quality around the proposed airport.

Then, backing up the Airways Act, the historic National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 requires all Federal agencies to initiate detailed studies of possible environmental effects as early as possible in project planning. We are required to foresee the irreversible commitment of resources and to anticipate all direct, secondary and cumulative effects of our operations on the physical environment of the world we live in.

And third, our founding legislation, the Department of Transportation Act of 1966, says flatly that no transportation facility can be built with Federal funds if it takes land from a park, wildlife refuge, or historic site, unless there is no feasible and prudent alternative. Any harm must be minimized.

I cannot emphasize too strongly that we have the authority to block or modify any project which increases public exposure to noise and pollution, dislocates homes and small business, or isolates one part of a community from another. And we will do so where necessary.

All this may sound rather harsh, but there is no question in my mind that it is what the times require. Moreover, I am convinced that in a majority of cases -- if we use our imagination, our social inventiveness, and our aerospace technology to the fullest extent -- we can have our cake and eat it too. We can have the speed and efficiency of modern machines, and at the same time really enjoy the fruits of our labor.

We have already made a beginning in this complex task. The new aircraft coming on-line are quieter than their predecessors due to the noise certification rules promulgated by the FAA. The Boeing 747, the DC-10, the Lockheed 10-11 --- all represent a new generation of aircraft with engines that are quieter and have a lower pollutant level, while they also carry more people and thus reduce the number of flights.

However, the best noise suppressors in the world won't save the airlines if cities and states allow private homes to be built where aircraft noise will make them uninhabitable. Changing operational procedures, and limitations on use of facilities are then just bandaids to make up for a failure of elementary foresight.

They can't prevent confusion, bitterness, litigation, last minute appeals to Washington and ulcers for everyone. Not to speak of unnecessary constraints on the healthy growth of aviation. Land use planning is a must in the overall solution to the airport noise problem. Nevertheless -- notwithstanding the need for land use planning -- we still have the problem of how to control the effects of jets already in service.

We are working diligently to determine the facts related to possible retrofitting of earlier model jet engines to control noise. We are already doing this for exhaust emissions (specifically with the JT-8D engine) and recognize that we must exert "noise control" efforts as well if airports are to be accepted by the community. Perhaps this will, indeed, require a slight sacrifice of fuel economy, but we must give priority to the public good.

Moreover, a good clear look down the runway shows substantial future changes coming in the nature of air services. V-STOLS must be made quieter than existing jets and their sharp angle of ascent and descent will minimize noise under the flight path. By 1980 a large part of the shuttle traffic could go by STOL planes operating from urban fringe locations. Naturally that is going to require a sales job in downtown districts where any kind of noise is met with furious opposition. But reasonable men can always find ways to agree when their common interests are at stake.

I think too that a lot of the demand that in the 50's and 60's had to be picked up by the airlines will gradually flow into improved, high speed ground transport. We have already seen a 14 percent increase in train travel between Washington and New York in a recent 12-month period thanks to our successful Metroliner demonstration. Convenient new suburban stations augment this trend.

The introduction of tracked air cushion vehicles on such runs -- and they are technically feasible -- could eventually produce revolutionary new patterns of travel in the major urban corridors. Again, that would relieve pressure on the airports, and would add new flexibility to the use of airports.

It is obvious that we can't solve our aircraft environmental problems without recourse to systems planning. It is common sense to ensure airport access by mass transit in an age of mass air travel. It is common sense to install drainage, adequate utilities and other adjuncts before the airport is completed. It is also common sense to control the ultimate use of the real estate within the entire airport community.

The conflicts recently associated with airport development in Los Angeles, New York, Boston, and elsewhere dramatically underscore the importance of this sophisticated, long-range, interdisciplinary and intermodal kind of social planning.

Now let me say a word or two about supersonic transportation. Not one thing I've said today contradicts the building of two experimental SST's. I can't give you the whole SST story right now -- if I did we'd have to send out for a midnight snack. But I do want to mention a few facts -- not opinions, but cold, hard facts -- that were not given sufficient consideration when the Senate voted on this issue back in December.

First of all, the Government proposes to build two prototype aircraft and to test the concept -- no more. These two planes will not be a menace to the environment. They will not destroy the world or any part thereof. But they will provide some answers not only about the aircraft and its performance, but answers about possible adverse environmental effects.

The President and I, as well as the Congress, have on many occasions addressed the issue of SST sonic booms. Our policy is explicit, and I would like to reiterate it as plainly as I can -- commercial SST's will not be permitted to fly at speeds causing sonic booms to reach the ground in the U.S. The Department of Transportation is in the process of issuing a regulation to support this policy; hence, I do not think that SST sonic boom is a real environmental issue any longer.

In addition, many questions have been raised concerning possible adverse effects of large numbers of SST's upon the world's climate. I would like to make it clear that we will have the necessary facts in this area before we proceed with a full-scale production program.

Finally, in the matter of airport community noise, there has also been much mis-information. The SST does not have the approach and takeoff noise problems associated with subsonic aircraft. We do have a sideline noise problem, but recent progress toward reducing this noise has been most encouraging. I would also like to emphasize that before we make a production commitment we will demonstrate that the capacity exists ... for the commercial SST to achieve noise levels consistent with those required for certification of new four-engine, inter-continental, subsonic transport aircraft. I am sure it can be done. I, for one, have faith in American technology and ingenuity.

Let me make it absolutely clear that I will see to it that the production program will not proceed -- period -- if tests of the prototypes indicate serious damage to the fabric of the natural world, or social problems that we can't treat and assimilate.

I know I have covered the ball park today, but I have endeavored to clarify our policy relative to aircraft environmental issues. I am delighted that we have this opportunity to jointly sponsor a meeting to face up to the environmental problems of our Air Transportation System. I look forward to your positive recommendations that will enable us to ensure a system that is both practical and environmentally responsible.