



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

NEWS

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STATEMENT BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE AT A
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I have invited you here today for a discussion of progress and accomplishment -- that which has been achieved in the Department of Transportation during the two years of the Nixon Administration.

To you who have not met them, I want to introduce our Under Secretary, Jim Beggs; and Assistant Secretary for Policy and International Affairs, Charlie Baker.

They have been powerful contributors to our progress. Their participation here today is most fitting.

Accomplishment is not achieved in a vacuum and requires, especially in Washington, the support of many forces. Ranking high among the supports we value has been that of the members of the news media whose thorough coverage and interpretation of our actions, proposals and ideas have generated the public support so essential to the success of our legislative and other action programs.

I am aware that what I have referred to as support is what you consider responsibility. But I do want to express my appreciation for the fair and courteous treatment you have given me in my two years here. I look forward to continuing this valued working relationship.

I think even our most severe critics will concede there has been considerable accomplishment in the Department during the past two years. Indeed, if that were not the case, John Volpe would not expect to be here -- either by personal choice or that of the President. While I might find enjoyable a complete recitation of two years of accomplishment and progress, I place too high a value on your time to expose you to such ritualistic torture --- for the catalog to me is pleasingly thick. I will confine my remarks to some of the highlights.

To accurately gauge how far one has traveled, it is necessary to pinpoint the beginning. When I took office in January 1969, the Department was less than two years old. The more than 30 agencies that had been assembled in its formation -- were miles apart in philosophy, purposes, and courses of action. There was negligible thinking within modal administrative leadership relating to the concept of a total transportation system, balanced to obtain optimum efficiency from each mode.

We were almost as fragmented physically as we were philosophically, with our headquarters offices scattered throughout Southwest and Northwest Washington.

Transportation was in trouble in every mode. Air traffic growth had far outpaced airport and airways development. The air traveler was a principal victim.

Death, disability and economic loss from highway accidents had reached alarming levels and held little promise of declining.

At a time when the Nation was becoming acutely aware of the air and noise pollution from highway and air traffic economic and social conditions were threatening to force the less polluting rail passenger and urban transit systems out of existence. to leave many persons without an alternate means of travel.

The highway program was stymied in many areas where an irate public protested the intrusion of freeways into residential neighborhoods, parks and historic shrines.

Derailments of shipments of hazardous materials, with their potential for disaster, were increasing at an alarming rate.

It was with these and more challenges that we began. At the outset, President Nixon advised me that we must arrive at our solutions through long-range planning while at the same time responding to the crisis of the moment.

By following the president's advice we are now in the position of moving ahead aggressively to provide Americans with better and safer transportation. We have the enabling legislation, we have the funding -- and most important -- we have put together the team to work cooperatively and creatively toward the goal of a total and balanced national transportation system.

Three pieces of legislation signed into law in 1970 are prime examples of the wisdom of the long-range and forward-looking approach to problem solving.

The Airport/Airways Act permits the Department to commit approximately \$600 million annually for the next five years to improve and modernize our airports and air traffic control systems and at the same time support on going programs. There is now assurance of funding for long-range plans beyond the usual annual appropriations.

Similarly, the Urban Mass Transportation legislation authorizes \$10 billion in Federal funds over a 12-year period to effectively strengthen public transit. Of this amount, the Department now is able to commit \$3.1 billion for grants to be extended over the next five years. This funding arrangement permits cities planning such long-range projects as subways or rail commuter lines to know what Federal funds they can count on. It gives them a sound foundation for their local funding appeals. The Act also permits help to rescue foundering bus lines and extending, modernizing and improving others.

The creation of the national Rail Passenger Corporation, charged with providing optimum service over a national system, will give America a chance -- perhaps her last -- to demonstrate whether or not her people will support rail passenger service. Restricted by limited funding and the charge to produce a profit, the Corporation initially would not be able to serve as extensive a system as many people -- including myself, would like to see.

But editorial prophecies of doom notwithstanding, I look upon the National Railroad Passenger System as a base for solid growth and improvement -- as the mechanism for the "reinvention" -- if you will -- of the passenger train as a popular and viable mode of transportation.

The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1970, over and above assuring the resources to complete the national system of interstate and Defense Highways, provides us with the tools to meet social challenges related to highway construction.

For the first time, dollars from the Highway Trust Fund will be spent for purposes other than the direct design and construction of roads.

The Act furnishes new support to highway safety by assuring financing for campaigns against such menaces as the drunk driver.

It authorizes me to conduct a program to train the disadvantaged and bring them into the job market as skilled highway construction employees.

It enables us to bring the highway beautification program back on track and places new emphasis on billboard and junkyard control.

It permits an extended use of the idea of exclusive bus lanes, thus challenging highway planners to think in terms of moving numbers of people rather than number of vehicles and fostering an intermodal partnership between highway and mass transit planners.

It permits Federal participation in improving city streets and it sets up environmental protection guidelines which will supplement ongoing programs.

As we strive to improve transportation in all modes, no single aspect receives more attention than that of safety. These unrelenting efforts produced significant results in 1970.

In the year just ended, we have succeeded in reversing for the first time the shocking trend of an annually increasing highway death rate.

Preliminary figures indicate a total of 55,300 deaths on our highways in 1970 -- a reduction of 1,100 from 1969. And this in the face of a 5 percent increase in motor vehicle travel. I submit that our intensification of effort to produce safer vehicles, highways, and drivers is paying off.

In aviation, the scheduled domestic airlines have just gone through a year in which there were no passenger deaths within the continental limits of the United States.

For all scheduled flights, the airlines compiled a record of .001 deaths per 100 million passenger miles -- by far the lowest rate in airline history.

Contributing to the record performance in significant measure was improvement and modernization of air navigation and traffic control systems manned by an expanded and strengthened force of air traffic controllers whose working conditions and professional opportunities have been greatly improved.

In the second major area of air travel safety -- our anti-hijacking effort -- the record for 1970 was 13 air carriers diverted to Cuba as compared with 31 in 1969.

Much credit for this reduction must be given to the initiation this year of our sky marshal security program and the increased use of the pre-boarding screening measures created by the FAA.

At sea, the Coast Guard responded to more than 50,000 calls for aid and gave assistance to 125,000 persons and saved 3,764 lives. The value of vessels, aircraft and their cargoes which received assistance from the Coast Guard last year was \$2.1 billion -- nearly four times the Coast Guard's budget for the year.

In the Railroad Safety Act of 1970 we have been given the instrument to stem the rising rate of rail accidents. The Act establishes broad, clear-cut authority for the Secretary of Transportation to set up and enforce safety standards for the railroads and to control shipments of hazardous materials. It gives new impetus to improving protection at grade crossings, where the accident victim's odds of surviving are 1 in 2.

Progress is what we've been talking about. It is a sad commentary of our time that too many people for good reason have come to regard progress as a threat to their personal comfort, well-being and environment.

It has been and will continue to be the policy of this Department that no project sponsored by any of its Administrations will displace a family from its home until it is assured that adequate replacement housing is provided -- even should that mean building it.

I have halted or diverted numerous projects in the past two years which I judged posed a threat to the environment or which would have damaged parks or historic shrines.

We will be no less vigilant in the years ahead. Such decisions, which originally were more or less personal judgments, are now supported by environmental control standards in much of our major enabling legislation in addition to the acts and executive orders initiated by the President.

An area of departmental administration to which I have devoted considerable time with gratifying results has been that of civil rights and minority employment.

When I took office in 1969 there were no members of minority groups holding supergrade positions in this Department. Today there are 19 minority group supergrades and two at the executive level as well as a greatly improved total minority employment picture.

The Director of Civil Rights now reports directly to me and speaks for me in all matters pertaining to civil rights.

A recognition I gained shortly after taking office is that the solution to many transportation problems transcend the Nation's borders. We have greatly increased the Department's international activity -- especially in the area of cooperation.

An excellent example of our international cooperative effort is the Meeting on International Air Transportation Security now taking place at the State Department. I delivered the keynote address to the plenary session Monday and FAA Administrator John Shaffer is presiding over the sessions at which delegates from 81 nations are attacking the problems of hijacking and airport security.

Working through the International Civil Aviation Organization, we were an important force in obtaining the drafting of an international treaty which will result in stiff penalties being imposed on hijackers by ratifying nations. This international cooperation presents a formidable barrier to air piracy. We hope that eventually there will be no safe haven for a hijacker anywhere in the world.

In the interests of promoting international air security, I have within the past year inspected facilities at 17 international airports throughout Europe and Asia and conferred with at least as many foreign ministers on that and other transportation related subjects.

We have established a close working relationship in transportation problems with Nato nations through that organization's Committee on Challenges to a Modern Society.

It was through the Committee that we were last summer able to sponsor an International Conference on Automotive Passive Restraints. In October, we provided leadership to the Committee's International Conference on Oil Spills.

We also participated in the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and in June, were co-sponsors of that organization's International Conference on Tunnelling.

We have negotiated bilateral agreements with Japan and West Germany for the development of experimental safety vehicles and I am confident similar agreements will soon be consummated with other nations.

Through memorandums of understanding and cultural exchange agreements, we are constantly exchanging information on transportation technology throughout the world including nations behind the so-called Iron Curtain. Practical time limitations preclude my taking longer about our accomplishments. Otherwise, I could easily do so. There is much to tell and it is an activity I enjoy.

I know that for most of you, the major mission is to develop a hard news story. Possibly we can do that through your questions which I am ready to receive.

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