



# DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

# NEWS <sup>(99)</sup>

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REMARKS BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE TO THE WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF STATE HIGHWAY OFFICIALS, SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH, TUESDAY, JUNE 6, 1972

It is a real delight to be here in Salt Lake City today -- and it's always a pleasure to be with men who have established their reputations as builders -- people who leave the land a little better than it was when they found it. As a former contractor and Commissioner of Public Works -- as the first Highway Administrator and as an AASHO Officer -- I know the challenge of highway building in tough, rugged country.

As you probably know, we just closed the gates on the Nation's first International Transportation Exposition -- TRANSCO 72 -- day before yesterday in Washington. It was a tremendous show -- more successful than we anticipated in almost every respect. But it was also a hectic nine days -- filled with conferences and meetings with ambassadors, business and world transportation leaders, Congressmen and hundreds of exhibitors. So this trip West is almost a vacation -- a chance to get out to the open spaces and away from the crowds.

You know, of course, of my allegiance to highway transportation and my deep respect for State highway officials. And before going further, I want to bring you greetings from President Nixon and to assure you that he shares my admiration for America's highway builders.

As the President said in his State of the Union Message, highways are our greatest transportation success story. You have done a superb job. You have helped put America "on the road" to economic prosperity. And I have unshakable faith in this industry's ability to be just as competent, just as responsive, and just as devoted, in meeting the future transportation needs of this Nation.

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Unquestionably, however, those needs are changing.

And I submit that as we live in times of change, we must be the architects of that change or we will most certainly be its victims.

Now I'll admit that in recent months I've had highway contractors, and even a State highway director or two, come up to me and say "Are you the same John Volpe who used to be President of the AGC?" or "Are you the same fellow who was in on the start of the Interstate System back in '56?"

The answer, of course, has to be a double one. I'm the same guy insofar as I know that America needs mobility -- the best brand of mobility it can imagine and afford.

But on the other hand, having sat where I've been sitting for the past three years -- getting the overview -- I've changed in that I know that no one mode of transportation alone will ever solve all our transportation problems. Urbanization, environmental protection, safety, and other social concerns have introduced a new era -- a new set of challenges -- for the highway builder. And I know that you are up to meeting those challenges.

The highway, by and large, has been an efficient user of the land. The Interstate network occupies less than one-tenth of one percent of the land, accounts for about one-fourth of the road system aided by Federal funds, and carries three-fourths of the traffic.

The Interstate System has reduced travel time, on the average, by 10 percent. And it is estimated to have saved 30,000 lives and averted hundreds of thousands of injuries.

Where, then, has the highway program fallen short? What remains to be done to make our highway system an even greater national asset?

First, there is no doubt that the Interstate Program must be completed. Traffic is moving on 77 percent -- 32,988 miles -- of the total system. With construction under way on another 4,100 miles, only four percent of the system is not yet started.

Then, secondly, we see the wisdom of upgrading selected non-interstate roads -- both urban and rural -- to accommodate the constantly changing growth patterns in and around urban areas.

Thirdly, the urban system authorized under the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1970 must be pursued urgently, and in the most imaginative way possible.

This does not mean giving free rein to the commuter, or Carte Blanche to the contractor. The highway must be viewed for what it is -- one part of a multi-modal solution to the problems of mobility.

It means that where highway construction (or re-construction) offers the best means for dislodging bottlenecks, those highways can and should be built.

It means that where alternative routing will prevent intercity traffic from conflicting with commuter traffic, such paths should be carefully explored.

But however it may be funded in the future, the Highway System should not subvert our larger purpose, which is to promote a balanced transportation system that serves all Americans. We simply can no longer accept the spectre of increased air pollution, highway congestion, and urban strangulation. We have tried to make the motor vehicle the answer to all our surface transportation needs, and we have learned that the transportation problem is too big to be solved by a single mode -- especially in urban areas.

I am occasionally asked just what our national highway policy is. And my answer is brief: we don't have one. What we have is a National Transportation Policy.

That policy recognizes that the historical function of transportation -- to tie this vast country together -- is essentially fulfilled. From this time forward, we must give more of our energy to the task of providing service to the 200 million members of our society who want to use the transportation system we have.

No one knows better than the membership of this Association that if our highways are to remain avenues of true mobility the transportation load must be distributed more evenly. The roads we have today must be made more efficient; those we build tomorrow must satisfy social as well as engineering specifications.

One example is the exclusive bus lane.

Two years ago, before we funded the construction of exclusive busways along 12 miles of the Shirley Highway into Washington, 12,000 Northern Virginia residents commuted over that busy highway by car, compared to only 4,300 who rode the buses.

A morning rush hour count last month showed a dramatic reversal of that situation -- 9,100 bus passengers and 7,700 auto commuters; a 54 percent increase for mass transit, and a more efficient use of highways for automobiles. The new flock of delighted bus riders find that they are saving -- on the average -- about 30 minutes each way. And those who are still using their cars are finding a heck of a lot less congestion.

This is just one of a variety of urban mass transportation alternatives now available. Unfortunately, the Federal financing structures in transportation have not always been responsive to that variety of opportunities. And we are working to alter that situation.

We have presented to the Congress, as I am sure you are very well aware, a new urban surface transportation program that would alter the existing highway financing mechanism to a degree.

This program would establish a Single Urban Fund, financed with the money from the Highway Trust Fund, that would provide capital investment funds for any type of surface transportation improvement -- highways, rapid rail systems, exclusive bus lanes, personal rapid transit systems, or any other transport innovation.

I believe that this program, especially the Single Urban Fund, gives us the tools to be creative, innovative, and responsive to the changing transportation demands in America.

It would mean also that the initiative for solving transportation problems peculiar to specific areas would be placed where it belongs -- with the leaders of those areas most familiar with the problems.

Of the \$5.6 billion anticipated to be in the Highway Trust Fund in Fiscal 1974, \$1 billion would go into the Single Urban Fund for surface transportation improvements. That figure would rise to \$1.8 billion in Fiscal 1975, and \$2.2 billion in Fiscal 1976.

The Surface Transportation Program and the Single Urban Fund hold the promise of long-term solutions. They offer the assurance of continued Federal financing that is so much a part of the Trust Fund concept. As road builders, you must appreciate the soul searching in America today about the future of highway building. The new Surface Transportation Program sets a new course -- a course that guarantees a continued high level of highway construction.

And I want to point out that this is not just a big city program, or a mass transit program, or a highway program. It is a transportation program.

It does not alter in any way our commitment to finishing the Interstate Highway System. And in fact, it strengthens our commitment to build and improve highways not on the Interstate System. A new rural Federal-aid system and a rural general transportation fund would be established.

The funding levels of these new proposals would insure a higher quality rural road system than presently exists. And for the first time, Federal funds could be used to build county roads and bridges -- so vital to rural mobility.

The primary goal of this legislation is flexibility -- the ability to have money follow the priorities rather than vice versa. We've drawn up this program fully realizing that transportation needs here in the Western States differ greatly from needs in New York, New Jersey or Massachusetts.

Let me emphasize this point as heavily as I can: If a State -- or urban area -- wants to spend every last nickle of its money from the Urban Fund for highways -- well, you go right ahead and do it! If you want to set aside five percent, or 10 percent to solve a particular congestion problem in a metropolitan area -- go right ahead and do that! The decision won't be made for you in Washington!

This is not a program to promote mass transit, or railroads, or Tracked Air Cushion Vehicles, or highways. It is a program to promote the very best transportation possible. And if your states and cities decide highways will do the job -- then you go right ahead and build highways. You make the decisions -- we'll come up with the money. And more importantly, this program assures you that you'll keep on getting it -- that highways will continue as the major element in your transportation formula, that highway building will be sustained just as long as it is needed.

The Surface Transportation Program is a commitment to excellence in transportation -- and that includes an excellent national highway system.

The history of highways entered a new phase with the establishment of State Highway Departments. Since that time, your efficiency and talent has elevated highway building to its present state. Your leadership has given a new measure of mobility to all Americans.

Today I ask your help in a larger effort. I solicit your leadership in applying the lessons of highway building to all forms of transportation. We are aiming at the best transport system in the world. And by working together, we can build it.

Thank you.

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