



# DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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# NEWS

## OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20590

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REMARKS BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE BEFORE WASHINGTON CONCRETE PAVING ASSOCIATION AND AFFILIATED GROUPS, OLYMPIC HOTEL, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 1972, 9:00 P.M. PDT

Because you are primarily construction people here tonight -- highway builders and members of the Associated General Contractors -- and because this just happens to be National Highway Week -- let me begin by re-inforcing a point or two.

As I told the American Transit Association this morning -- here in this same ballroom -- our Nation's highways are essential to our commerce and indispensable to the movement of people and products. Our highway system is the envy of the world. It is the threat that ties our cities and states together, the network that gives Americans mobility never dreamed of in previous generations.

Our highway system makes it possible for people who cherish the outdoor life to live as much as 50 miles away from their jobs. It enables youngsters to appreciate the scope and the breadth of this great land. It allows produce from Washington state to appear in Chicago supermarkets. It has tied our Nation together -- not just our cities and states. It has given us a cohesiveness that helps keep us a strong and determined people.

Yet as we enjoy the benefits of this program -- we must also keep an eye to the future. We must make ready now for the events that lie ahead -- just as an Olympic competitor spends weeks and months in a rigorous training for that one excruciating moment of truth in the spotlight of the arena.

The one brief transportation message I bring to you tonight is that we cannot -- we must not -- stand still in our tracks, running in place, and say, "Don't rock the boat; don't change". Because, my friends, we live in times of change. We live in an era where complacency is the sure road to disaster. Satchel Paige said it best: "Never look back -- someone may be catching up on you".

In President Nixon's words, "If we are to keep our country from falling behind the times, we must keep well ahead of events in our transportation planning."

Let me assure you that in this Administration, transportation means "mobility" and mobility requires that we develop and improve all modes so each will be able to serve the purpose for which it was designed and is best suited. And when it comes to traffic in congested areas, let's face it -- bumper to bumper cars just aren't the answer!

There is much work to be done and the challenge of urban transportation takes high priority.

At present, more than 70 percent of our population live on only 2 percent of the land. Or, phrased in another way, nearly 80 percent of our people live in metropolitan areas. This means concentration and too often -- congestion.

I remember one particularly strong and succinct statement of this urban problem. It went as follows: "The single greatest problem facing the city today is transportation in all its aspects. This includes roadspace, traffic flow, intersection congestion, pedestrian movement, parking and pollution ..."

That quote comes from a report entitled "The Emerging Downtown". It was based on a study done right here in Seattle, so you see I'm not talking in broad generalities.

I'm talking about your city -- about King County --- about this whole Pacific Northwest megalopolis.

I was tremendously pleased by the outcome of the referendum here in King County last week. That 3/10 of a cent sales tax -- which will provide the \$96 million needed to set up a county-wide bus mass transit system -- will probably be the best 3/10 of a cent the people of this area have ever invested in anything! I'm serious! Without it, you would see your city slowly strangle and die. You are limited here by your geography -- yet the very assets of that geography (the harbor, the Sound, the clean air, the compactness of the center city core) would be worth far less if you were forced to devote inordinate amounts of space to transportation facilities.

By providing a county-wide system that will include express buses, exclusive bus lanes, extensive fringe parking areas -- along with new vehicles that have carpeted floors, pastel colors, low-emission engines, comfortable seats, air conditioning, and so forth -- you will be providing Seattle's commuters with an attractive alternative.

And when commuters -- who use those cars only twice a day -- avoid the congestion and use public transportation, you'll find that those freeways are going to be free indeed. Free and open for the 60 mile-an-hour traffic for which they were designed!

That's what I'd call a logical approach to good urban transportation, and I am delighted that the voters of King County agree!

Now there may be those of you who don't think bus rapid transit will ever work -- no matter what improvements are made. Well, I beg to differ. In 1969, bus commuters from suburban Virginia came into Washington, D.C. on the same congested freeway that the automobiles used. And the bus company carried about 4,000 passengers a day. My Department financed an experimental exclusive bus lane down the median strip of that highway. Traveling time for bus riders was cut -- in some cases -- from as much as an hour down to as little as 15 minutes! And as of last month there are now 151 buses using that exclusive lane every rush hour -- and they carry 17,000 passengers a day, which is more than the number of commuters who use that highway in their automobiles!

These are new buses -- comfortable and convenient -- and commuters from Northern Virginia have never had it so good. So we know it will work, and we look forward to working with the Municipality of Metropolitan Seattle as this project gets underway.

My friends -- there is one other point I would like to make here tonight. There has been considerable interest, nationwide, in this Administration's support of proposals to make money from the Highway Trust Fund available for uses other than the design and construction of highways.

Let me lay out the facts, so you'll have the story straight. The measure we support -- which has already passed the Senate by a substantial margin and is due for consideration in the House -- sets aside a portion of highway revenues. That portion amounts to \$800 million. It is earmarked for urban areas -- and it is earmarked for transportation. It is not earmarked for buses, or for rapid rail transit or for people movers, monorails, busways or highways. That decision, my friends, will be up to you.

This Administration wants local decisions made by local people. You know what your needs are -- and you know what the answers to those needs should be. And if the people of this area want to use their share of that fund entirely for highways -- that legislation says "OK" -- it's your decision." It you want to use it all for transit, that's OK too. Or a 50-50 mix, or a 70-30 mix. It's your business -- because, after all, it's your money.

That's what this Legislation calls for -- and I hope that you agree that such an approach is fair, is appropriate and is in the spirit of a free society. To my way of thinking this isn't a "raid" on the highway fund -- rather it's a ray of hope for improved mobility for all Americans!

\* \* \* \*

All in all, I am convinced that we have made sound progress.

I am convinced we shall be even more effective in the future. We have, under President Nixon, picked up momentum these past four years. There are some who are urging that we stand still -- or even go backwards -- return to old ways. I for my part want none of it. I believe in progress. I believe we have an obligation. I believe we also have an obligation to make this world ready for the young people who will inherit this Nation. And I accept that obligation.

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