



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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REMARKS BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE AT THE
GROUND BREAKING OF THE METRO SYSTEM IN WASHINGTON, D. C.
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 1969.

It is a privilege and an honor for me to be here representing President Nixon on this most auspicious occasion. I know he regrets not being able to be here himself. This is a project in which he has expressed a keen interest.

As the President said in September, when the funds for construction of the METRO were released, (and I quote him) "More than a subway will begin in December. A city will begin to renew itself; a metropolitan area to pull itself together. That the Nation's Capital is involved makes this an event of national significance."

The President and I both gained a new and dramatic understanding of the need for the METRO when we took a helicopter inspection tour of Washington-area rush hour traffic one morning several months ago. I remember his comment as we looked down on the long lines of slowly moving traffic. "Sure aren't many buses" was his first remarks, and at the end he observed wearily, "I'm sure glad I don't have to drive to work!"

But this new system that is getting its start today will do far more than relieve traffic jams. It will bring new life to Washington -- new growth -- new development -- new improvement -- and this progress will be far greater than most of us realize.

The development of this rapid transit system will give us a tool for shaping a better quality of life for all people in the District and in nearby Maryland and Virginia. And it shall set an example for the rest of the nation.

This transit system offers a proud and significant hope for altering the course of the forces of urban decay. This transit system can and must help set in motion the force and momentum of urban revitalization.

And at the same time, this transit system will enable us -- all of us -- to pay closer heed to the needs and requirements of the world we live in, the environment which gives us life.

I know all too well the insidious growth of air pollution in the cities of America. I see only too clearly the warning signs that our urban areas may choke on congestion while our urban citizens choke on poisonous fumes. This Administration -- as has been pointed out repeatedly -- is determined that our environment shall be protected, and that all public works projects we are involved in will give every consideration to the fragile balance between nature and man. We are not here to disrupt, we are here to balance the transportation needs of the community with the technical expertise and the human understanding that is the hallmark of our generation.

This METRO system can -- and will -- show the nation that there are infinite possibilities for upgrading the standard of living for the people of the community.

This METRO system opens new vistas of opportunity, and -- if the nation is equal to the challenge -- the nation will recognize those opportunities and capitalize on them. Surely what we accomplish here in Washington can provide the lead for other cities across the country.

And while every city may not need a 98-mile rapid transit system such as this one, virtually every city needs public transportation improvements. It is to the President's great credit that he has submitted to Congress the Public Transportation Bill of 1969, a bill that will provide long-range Federal aid to cities across the nation for upgrading of their public transportation capabilities.

We envision, for the smaller cities of America, fleets of new, low-pollution buses, making maximum usage of our highway systems with some 50-passengers per vehicle rather than the 1.6 passengers per vehicle that are carried by the private automobile.

We envision, too, a greater and more considerate development of our urban highway system. We recognize that rapid transit can never do the entire job all by itself. We recognize that highways and the private automobile can never do the job by themselves. And most important, we recognize that the highways we do build -- and the public transportation systems we build -- must be built to serve man, not to dominate him.

I would submit that the breakthroughs that brought about the release of subway money have significance for the entire nation. There are many who deserve praise for their efforts, and I think that the best way to pass on this praise is to once again quote President Nixon. He said "The people of the area, and indeed of the Nation, owe appreciation to many persons who have labored so many years to make this day possible; but, of course, special thanks are due to Members of Congress, to the Mayor and Council of the City of Washington, and to the Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority".

Let me add to this my special thanks to the Governors of Maryland and Virginia, to the county officials who have worked so hard and so long, and to the thousands of private citizens who have taken as their cause the cause of better, balanced transportation.

To make certain that what we do here profits other cities embarking on similar ventures, the President has directed me to take immediate steps to establish within the Department of Transportation a data collection center detailing all elements of METRO's development program for later retrieval and use by other cities. The President has asked that information be placed in this data center on such matters as private commercial tie-ins, early land acquisition, property assemblage and reuse and similar considerations where the judgments made here in the Nation's Capital can be viewed and analyzed later in the light of actual experience.

This then is a very happy occasion for me. My whole professional career has been spent in the building business and in public service. To participate in the beginning of this vast public works project is doubly satisfying.

As ground is broken here today, it signifies more than just the start of the Washington METRO. It signifies that this nation is determined -- and ready to go to work -- to unclog our cities, unclog our air, and greatly improve our urban environment.

Again, I am delighted to be here with you today.

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