



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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EXCERPTS OF REMARKS BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE AT THE GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY CONVENTION OF THE NATIONAL EASTER SEAL SOCIETY FOR CRIPPLED CHILDREN AND ADULTS, SHERATON-COLUMBUS HOTEL, COLUMBUS, OHIO, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 1969, 12:00 NOON

I have been long looking forward to this luncheon. To meet with many old friends, to join in this anniversary observance, to take part in this most worthy charity. This is a wonderful occasion.

We in the Department of Transportation take a keen interest in the problems of the handicapped. In fact, we are releasing today a lengthy study on the transportation needs of the handicapped. It's a pretty good sized book and it's called "Travel Barriers." The study describes the transportation demands of the handicapped and the physical, social, and economic obstacles that must be overcome in satisfying those demands, with recommendations for eliminating these barriers.

The study estimates that at any point in time there are about 30 million Americans who are handicapped.

But I can illustrate this demand far better than reciting the tables of statistics in this study if I tell you a little story.

We had in our office last week two young midwestern business men. One of them, Len Lovdahl, operates a unique taxi service for the handicapped of Milwaukee. His business -- called Handicab -- doubles in volume every two years. That's sensational growth.

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But the other businessman had an even more exciting story. He's Ken Lovdahl, the brother of the first and he manufactures special ramps that can be attached to small vans and buses -- ramps to load and unload wheel chaired passengers. Ken operates his business out in Illinois, and his only problem is finding capital for rapid expansion. His business doubles every year!

Far better than any of our statistics on the importance of this transportation, however, is Len Lovdahl's own story. He is himself handicapped -- confined to a wheel chair since youth by Muscular Dystrophy. But Len is a doer. He was, in fact, awarded with your Society's Gallantry Award in 1962. And this handicapped man is independent. He is providing a valuable service. (Many of his customers are handicapped school children.) He is providing employment and he is paying taxes. He is contributing much to society.

This is the significance of transportation for the handicapped.

I do not want to leave the impression that we in Government are interested in the handicapped for economic reasons purely. The matter goes far beyond that. President Nixon is personally committed to this program. He has endorsed it on many occasions.

There is, indeed, an almost universal awareness in our society -- an awareness backed by resources and funds -- that transportation for the handicapped is good business, good government and good human decency.

Yet there are barriers which keep handicapped people from participating fully in our society.

First are the physical barriers which they encounter everywhere -- in their own home, in factories and office buildings, in stores and places of entertainment, and in public transportation.

Second are the psychological barriers which stand between disabled people and their personal independence.

Not only are handicapped people burdened with their own feelings of frustration and inadequacy in this highly competitive society, but those of us who are not handicapped add greatly to this burden by regarding our disabled fellow citizens as incompetent and permanently dependent. Or, what is worse, by not thinking about them at all!

One of the most prevalent causes of architectural barriers is that builders and architects simply failed to think about the special problems of disabled people.

We have made some progress in the matter of architectural barriers. After years of study and countless hearings on the subject, a major breakthrough has been achieved in this long-neglected problem.

Recently, Public Law 90-480 began to require that architectural barriers be removed in Federal buildings and in facilities built in whole or in part with Federal funds.

The next breakthrough must come in the area of better transportation services for the handicapped. They must be made available, affordable, and free from the common types of barriers which would prevent their use by people who cannot walk or see normally.

The major requirement here is that those concerned with transportation be aware of the needs of the handicapped -- that they think about their problems. I am happy to note that some work in this effort has already begun.

General Motors has developed a special "kneeling" bus, which can lower itself to curb level to facilitate wheel chair boarding. Minibus of California has also designed a special bus for the handicapped, and we in the Department of Transportation are working toward the development of a "Dial-A-Bus" system which will bring public transportation to the passenger's doorstep.

I want to see more of this imaginative thinking and I shall be pushing it.

The imperative for me, personally, in moving into this new field is a fact that is very heavily emphasized in our study. Travel in itself has a therapeutic value. It is sheer fun for the handicapped or the crippled just to get out of the house. But more, the ability to travel permits the crippled and the handicapped to engage in work, school, social and family activities -- activities which help the disabled feel normal and useful. And how important this is!

As all of you here well know -- and as our study so well documents -- for so many of these people, the misshapen or shattered limb brings the shattered heart. We can help cure that sickness of the heart. There is no reason for delay!

I do not suggest this will be an easy task. The sheer size -- and the importance -- of the problem is enormous. As the opening statement of our study notes, "every person in the United States, at some point in his lifetime, will be handicapped." And we know that the number of handicapped will increase. Looking ahead 15 years, our study estimates that we shall have 8 million persons who will be limited in mobility as a result of long term medical condition or impairment.

But look what we can do!

If 4 million disabled Americans can be enabled to travel to and from their jobs, then their lives will be better for it, and our nation will be stronger;

If 2 million handicapped children are enabled to attend school with their non-disabled friends, then America will be enriched not only by their contributions to our future society, but by the increment of compassion and thoughtfulness that we have expended upon them;

If 18 million men and women over age 65 are enabled to participate more freely in the activities of their community, then their lives will have been made more rewarding, and the prospect of life in retirement made more inviting for all of us.

This job, however, cannot be done by our Department of Transportation and your National Society alone. There's enough work for everybody. We are going to need help. We are going to need volunteers -- volunteers from every element of society -- we are going to need concerned individuals and organizations working at the local level. There is a tremendous wellspring of power and energy in our towns and cities. Once this power is tapped and directed, it can achieve incredible results. Your own Society is a testimony to this power. And what tremendous results you have achieved!

Certainly, if we as a nation are going to achieve the goals President Nixon has set for us, we are going to need legions of volunteers. The President recognizes this. I recognize it.

My friends, meetings such as this one are inspirational, and they are enlightening. However, there is a distinct danger that once we break up here and go back to our cities and towns, there comes a "let down." The problems seem bigger and we are alone. But knowing you, I know this will pass. Those who are devoted to helping their fellow man find special strength. There is for them a second wind of the spirit that keeps them driving. I can sense that drive here in this gathering. I know nothing will stop you.

And so, my friends, you and I have a job to do. I look forward to it. I look forward to working with you. And I look forward to meeting with you again in the future. And now let me thank you for inviting me here. I have enjoyed every minute of it. And may God be with you and your work.

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