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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

NEWS

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20590

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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
JOHN A. VOLPE BEFORE THE RAILWAY PROGRESS INSTITUTE, THURSDAY,
NOVEMBER 20, 1969, CONRAD HILTON HOTEL, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

I am delighted to be here to share this Metroliner Award with my good friend Stu Saunders. Needless to say, we are both extremely proud of these trains.

The Metroliner is proving that in certain corridor-type areas, the potential for public service and respectable return on investment is somewhat larger than even the enthusiasts expected.

I believe with every ounce of my conviction that the cities cannot be saved as decent and productive places to live unless we reform our transportation system from top to bottom. The passenger train can play a vital -- not an important, but a vital -- role in this process -- especially along these densely packed urban corridors.

Look at the figures. Close to half-a-million people have taken this train since the first runs were inaugurated last January 16. Even after the number of Metroliners was doubled, the seat-mile utilization rate has been 69 percent.

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The airlines do well to get 40 percent between Washington and New York. Patronage keeps climbing, and on-time performance has been over 90 percent. So we have a success on our hands.

This does not mean, however, that we have responded to all the challenges. I know the Penn Central is concerned about getting a return on it's money. I know equipment manufacturers wonder if a substantial market will evolve from this demonstration.

I know everyone in the industry would be delighted to know how much the Federal Government will commit to passenger train services. We cannot answer all these questions as yet. But I think they will be answered very shortly -- within the next year or so.

Congressman Sam Freidel of Maryland who is Chairman of the Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee, said something last week that bears repeating.

The Congressman said: "Those of us who are charged with guiding the development of a sound national transportation system recognize that the serious financial burden which maintaining rail passenger service places on our railroads must be dealt with."

My friends, when you have a Congressman who recognizes that the rail passenger problem is not going to solve itself -- when you have a congressman who recognizes a burden when he sees one -- you have a friend in court. We recognize the burden. We also feel that it is a burden worth carrying. And that we should carry our share.

Having said that, I think I should add that the possible resurgence of rail passenger service is only one of our great challenges. I welcome the opportunity to be here not just to receive your award, but it also gives me a chance to discuss - briefly - the all-important topic of rail safety.

These are times of acute social awareness and consumer protection movements. Safety is a big issue in the United States today; it is a top priority issue at the Department of Transportation.

Our railway Safety Act, now before the Congress, will help to guarantee progress in reducing the steeply rising curve of rail accidents. We are asking for the authorization to set reasonable standards for rolling stock, track, roadbed, signal systems and employee qualifications.

The bill is the result, largely, of work done by the Task Force on Rail Safety -- composed of representatives from management, labor, and state regulatory agencies and chaired by our Railroad Administrator, Reg Whitman.

As with almost every piece of legislation anytime, anywhere, we don't have a full agreement on all the details of the bill. But we have a foothold on the problem, and I am confident that reasonable men working together will accomplish the goal we are all seeking.

But we know that the simple application of safety standards is not the only thing the railroad industry needs. If we are to maintain our worldwide economic pre-eminence, then we shall have to see new ideas, new legislation, and new equipment in railroading. Never before have your plans and programs for the future been of such importance.

Not since the days of the westward expansion has the railroad industry been as needful of friends in Washington.

And along these lines let me say just a word about our hosts -- the Railway Progress Institute. I know personally that it is a very effective organization on the Washington scene. R-P-1 has taken the "Railroad Story" to cabinet officers and other key administration people in Washington. It is a very effective presentation of the railroads' financial straits.

I am certain that the tax relief in the form of five year amortization and other relief provisions which were recommended by the Treasury and passed by the Senate Finance Committee can be traced in large part to the briefings which the R-P-1 organized along with the Association of American Railroads and individual railroads during September and October.

I congratulate this national association of the railway supply industry for such an effective demonstration of assistance to the railroads of our nation which are plagued with serious financial problems.

Again, gentlemen, it is a pleasure to be here with you this evening.

Working together, Government, the railroads, the railway suppliers, and the public -- must see to it that the United States of the future has all the benefits and possibilities that a modern, growing, efficient railroad system can provide. I am confident that each of you can and will respond to the challenge admirably.

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