



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

NEWS

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20590

98-S-69

REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE OKLAHOMA GOOD ROADS ASSOCIATION, SHEPARD MALL, OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 30, 1969, 6:30 P.M. CST

I want to congratulate you members of the Oklahoma Good Roads and Streets Association for your excellent work. I know that your efforts have played a major part in giving Oklahoma its fine highway system, and I congratulate you for those efforts.

And I am proud and happy that the Federal government was working with you. We have provided Oklahoma with nearly \$260 million to help build your Interstate Highway System. And you have done well. Of the 800 or so miles designated for completion, more than 600 miles are already open to traffic. This is a good record and you can be proud.

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Oklahoma has also been moving ahead on its primary and secondary road systems. I find you have constructed or improved some 6,000 miles of these roads since 1956. Here again, I am proud of our Federal contribution of more than \$216 million.

And yet there is still a substantial amount of work to be done. I was studying a report by your state's highway department on Oklahoma's highway needs. In that report, 37 percent of your 12,000-mile state highway system is listed as inadequate. Of your 83,000 miles of county roads, 28 percent are described as substandard, and nearly 70 percent of your city streets are inadequate. This is a sizeable task ahead of you.

But I am going to ask still more of you. And my request may come as a bit of a surprise. Let me, consequently, go back a little.

When President Nixon appointed me to his Cabinet some nine months ago, one of his first requests was that I prepare a long range plan for the development of the Nation's overall transportation facilities. This is a most urgent matter and we are hard at work on it. I should like now to share with you some of the forecasts and projections we are faced with.

Our population is increasing by more than 180,000 souls every month -- that's net gain. That is an eye-opener, of course, yet the more astonishing fact is that the demand for transportation services is increasing faster than the population.

We are, for example, adding some 300,000 new vehicles to our highways every day. Our domestic airlines add 40,000 new passengers to their lists every day. And our railroads are increasing their freight operations by 15 million ton miles a day.

To meet this kind of demand means, in sum, that we must within the next 20 years double our transportation capacity.

We are not going to achieve this expansion by simply building more of everything. We are going to have to develop new techniques -- a new systems approach to the movement of people and goods. We must have better usage and greater efficiency from our existing system. We are going to need a balanced system of transportation.

We can begin our planning with one basic assumption. The automobile -- as America's favorite form of transportation -- is here to stay. There is nothing on the horizon to indicate the American people are ready to curtail their mobility by relinquishing the door-to-door convenience of the private automobile.

At the same time, it requires only elementary mathematics to realize that the staggering increase of about three-and one half million vehicles a year cannot continue indefinitely. If it does, we shall shortly reach a point in our cities when there is no more room to drive.

We shall, accordingly, need to improve our supplementary transportation systems. We must improve and expand our public transportation facilities. And we need your help.

Some may think it strange that I am appealing to roadbuilders for assistance in getting approval for our mass transit legislation. There should be nothing unusual about it at all. Future requirements will demand that we work together cooperatively -- for we are going to need all the transportation we can get. Public transportation, moreover, assists the roadbuilders in their ultimate objective of increased mobility. It does little good to build a four-lane superhighway designed for speeds of 60 miles an hour if traffic on that highway slows to a ten mile per hour crawl because of urban bottlenecks.

We must, consequently, look at the total system -- a true system in which each mode supports -- not obstructs or competes -- with other modes.

At present, the public transportation situation in our Nation is deplorable. In recent years, some 235 bus and rapid transit companies have gone out of business. Fares are increasing, services are diminishing and still the transit companies are sliding into the red.

Yet six or seven billion Americans every day depend on this form of transportation as their only way of travel.

To meet this challenge, President Nixon has proposed to the Congress a new bill that will enable the Federal government to assist these urban transit and bus systems.

This program if enacted will make available \$10 billion dollars in Federal funds and a minimum of five billion dollars from local sources for a total program of more than \$15 billion over the coming 12 years. This money will be used for the construction, expansion and improvement of public transportation in all our cities.

Two statistics will emphasize the importance of mass transit. In the New York metropolitan area, 86 percent of the impoverished live in the downtown city. In Chicago, the figure is 75 percent.

Yet the National Committee on Urban Growth Policy has found 75 to 80 percent of new industrial and trade jobs are being developed in the suburban fringes of our cities.

The success of our many efforts at relieving the plight of unemployed will depend ultimately on his ability to get to the job.

Though I have used figures from two of our larger cities, I want to emphasize that this deterioration of mass transit is common to all our cities -- large and small.

The best proof that this program will work for the eventual improvement of auto traffic is found in the support of one important organization.

The Automobile Manufacturers Association has endorsed this public transit proposal. Some people thought I was sticking my neck out, but I told the AMA in Detroit last Spring that if they didn't help relieve street congestion, people wouldn't even be able to get to the showrooms to buy new cars!

Let me move now to another topic -- one of great importance to all Americans. And I refer to safety on our streets and highways,

The Oklahoma Good Roads and Streets Association can be proud of its highway safety efforts.

The general public often forgets that the premise of the highway builder is improving safety for the motorist who uses them. Because of your work, lives have been saved. We know, for example, that in the interstate system, the safety features incorporated in these highways are saving more than 8,000 lives a year.

But I ask that your concern for highway safety go beyond your professional interest in highways. I ask you -- as I ask everybody to whom I speak -- to become an apostle of highway safety.

We in the Department of Transportation have put a top priority to this challenge of preventing accidents and reducing fatalities and injuries. And we have discovered our first obstacle is an unnecessary fatalism -- the feeling that somehow fatalities are a price that must be paid for our auto mobility.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this belief is without any foundation whatsoever, in fact, the opposite is true. Our safety record is improving. And let me assure you it will continue to improve.

Our studies indicate that if the auto fatality rate that prevailed in the 1930's had continued through today, our auto fatalities would be three times what they are today.

But I am not satisfied with rates, I want to see an actual reduction in numbers. I believe we can reduce automobile casualties. I know we can do it. I believe we can reduce our fatalities by at least 10,000 per year.

Our Department of Transportation has set up a number of standards -- and they are minimal standards -- that we are requesting the states to adopt. We are reasonable on this matter but we want to know that individual states are working toward their adoption. On this point, I want one thing thoroughly understood.

If I become convinced that any individual state is deliberately dragging its feet -- or that it has determined it will not work with us on highway safety, I shall have no hesitancy whatsoever in invoking the penalties provided by the Congress.

There is another element of transportation that I would raise. And this is close to the heart of all roadbuilders.

Here I speak from personal experience. I spent most of my professional life as a contractor. It was a good life and I enjoyed it. Most of you know the excitement of building. The satisfaction -- after many months of bargaining, driving and haggling -- when you're topping off. Or the pride when the last scaffolding comes down and the sweepers and cleaners come in and gradually the building begins to grow and look good. But these are as nothing compared to the sudden realization a few months later when you unexpectedly come across your building and realize it has contributed to the neighborhood. This is the final best thing about building -- the thought that you have left the land better than you found it.

And this is what I ask of you tonight -- that in building your highways, you proceed in such a manner that you can come back to your project and say, "I have left the land better than I found it."

This matter of preserving and improving our environment is a top priority requirement of the present administration. President Nixon, soon after he took office, sent out a stiff directive that protection of our environment would be of major importance during his tenure of office. He followed this by setting up an environmental quality council.

In keeping with his directive, I established in my own Department a new Assistant Secretary of Environment and Urban Systems and charged him with the same task. It is my principle -- and I hope it will be the principle of all construction people -- that transportation and its development are important, but when transportation facilities conflict, social, human and environmental considerations come first.

I have worked with the President on many occasions and I know from first hand experience the quality of his leadership. He is deliberate, certain and determined. Under this leadership, we are, as he predicted, moving forward together.

I thank you for your invitation to meet with you. I have enjoyed my visit to Oklahoma City. I have renewed old friendships, made new friends, and I have learned much. And I leave tonight with only the desire of coming back soon.

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