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REMARKS BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE BEFORE THE
GALVESTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 1970
GALVESTON, TEXAS

I am delighted to be here this evening to meet and speak with the members of this influential organization. As members of the oldest Chamber of Commerce in the State of Texas -- now starting your 126th year -- you have a great deal to be proud of.

You have built a splendid city here on the beautiful Gulf Coast and with such a location your potential for growth is among the best in the nation.

The direction and quality of that growth, however, will be determined by your transportation strategy. It's a proven historical fact that from the time of Texas independence right down to the present, the cities of this State have developed along a backbone of roads, trails, and rails.

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In the old days you could rely upon the stagecoach, railroad, or steamboat entrepreneur, the hardy pioneer who was willing to gamble his personal fortunes on future prosperity. Today, however, because of the size and complexity and mutual interests of urban regions, transportation requires long-range community planning, a real passion for environmental excellence, and a solid willingness to commit great civic energies.

Of course, we still need and will always need that pioneer spirit if we are going to successfully mobilize all these resources. Galveston obviously has that kind of spirit and self-discipline, because just last December your citizens voted overwhelmingly to tax themselves for their share of a \$93 million road and bridge bond issue.

I can tell you I keep a pretty close watch on these referendum issues around the country and Galveston was one of the few places such issues passed during 1969. We are well aware that a large part of the success here was due to the leadership of this Chamber.

This is a good sign. It shows you are oriented toward the future and you want to be ready for it. That future will certainly be vastly different from the past. Galveston will no longer be merely a prosperous, innovating city of medium size -- it will be the nucleus of a rapidly growing coastal complex with a population of almost 400,000 by 1985. And that's just the beginning. Within the lifetimes of many of us here, the Galveston metropolitan area will embrace over a million people.

This is an exciting prospect and one that makes you take a step back and think a minute. What does it imply for the transportation system in this area? How will Galveston ensure efficient, safe mobility within the downtown commercial center which is the necessary core of any vital city? How will it provide access to advanced educational institutions like Galveston College, which are sure to grow rapidly? How will it get low-income people to jobs within a scattered metropolitan complex? How will you encourage the flow of tourists? Will citizens still have easy access to your parks and beaches? And what about getting passengers to and from Galveston Airport in an age of mass air travel?

These questions cannot be answered wisely without a good deal of serious thought -- original thought. I am delighted that the Galveston County Transportation Study will include an overall plan for highway development in this area because efficient use of your road system is a must. This might be an ideal time, in fact, to include all forms of transportation in an overall master plan to assure the quality of life in Galveston for decades to come.

The Interstate Highway System -- as I am sure you know -- has been one of the most significant economic development sparkplugs in the history of this nation.

It has brought together various regions of the country, it has opened up vast expanses of land that previously were accessible only with difficulty. It has made jobs available, it has widened the horizons of all Americans -- and it has saved lives.

The safety design engineering factors that are part of our Interstate standards have given us the safest highways in the world. We have figures that prove that for every five miles of Interstate highway we build, we save one life per year -- on a continuing basis. If there were no other reason for the construction of the Interstate system, that would be sufficient.

And yet while our magnificent network of highways is most certainly an asset, it has created some liabilities at the same time.

With the increase in basic mobility available to virtually all Americans, we have entered an era of great "transportation expectations". More and more, our citizens are looking at transportation capability as an inalienable right.

More and more, Americans are thinking in terms of vacations a thousand miles away, are thinking of new jobs in any corner of the nation, have come to expect nearly overnight shipment of products manufactured just about anywhere. The question no longer is "whether you can get there from here", or "how do we get there", but rather "when do we leave?"

And because the Interstate system -- and our rapidly expanding aviation industry -- have given Americans this sense of mobility, we face massive transportation challenges.

What if every single resident of Galveston decided on a Sunday that it would be a good idea to drive up to the Astrodome for a football game? I suspect the causeway would be something of a bottleneck!

What if -- on a given day with a given set of atmospheric conditions -- every automobile owner in Galveston started up his or her car at the same time and let the engine run while noxious, poisonous fumes wrapped Galveston Island up in a blanket? After all, the automobile is the source of from 50 to 75% of all the air pollution in America.

What if demands are such that when the Galveston area does have a population of a million people -- each of those people wants a private automobile all to himself. On an island 32 miles long and about two miles wide, you just won't have room to park them or to drive them!

Highways can be liabilities to our environment also. The beaches that you prize -- would they be better if they were covered with pavement? Where would your tourist industry be then?

You have critical housing problems here. Are you going to solve those problems by pre-empting wide expanses of acreage for highways, interchanges and parking lots?

So you see -- despite the tremendous benefits of our nation's highway system, benefits that are indisputable and are envied the world over -- we must always remember that we could be afflicted with too much of a good thing.

We must -- now, while there is still time left to plan -- think in terms of alternate modes. If you think our streets and highways are congested now, just wait until the turn of the century when America's population is half again as large -- when there are 300 million of us, not 200 million!

The Interstate Highway System, when completed to its full 42,500-mile length, will constitute only 1% of the pavement in America. Yet it will carry some 20% of the traffic.

For intercity and interstate driving, this is efficiency of the highest order.

But in urban areas -- and particularly those urban areas such as Galveston where the available amount of real estate is so definitely limited by the fact that you are an island -- we must provide alternate modes of transportation.

Now is the time for every growing city in America to recognize the transportation crisis. Now is the time for every growing city in this nation to look upon public transportation -- the efficient, clean safe movement of large numbers of people while taking up a minimum amount of space -- as a public responsibility, just like public safety, public health, public welfare, and so forth.

While we must complete the Interstate system, while we must build highways where necessary -- where they have been started but not yet completed, we must also step up the Federal program of assisting public transportation systems. We have had Federal aid to highways for the past 50 years, yet it is only recently that the Federal Government has begun to play a role in public ground transportation.

President Nixon has recognized this imbalance -- this truly dangerous threat to American health, happiness and mobility -- and has proposed to the Congress, on my recommendation, a wide-sweeping, long-range program of Federal assistance for public transportation.

We know that in recent years local governments have been reluctant to obligate their taxpayers to large expenditures for public transportation.

They just haven't had assurance of Federal aid.

Our proposed program, however, provides just the assurance that local taxpayers require and need.

Our bill doesn't "force" you to do anything -- rather, it is designed to "help" America's cities help themselves. It will provide \$10 billion over a long-term period to expand and improve public transportation in cities, large and small -- because whatever their size, all cities have problems. Under the bill, we will be able to obligate over \$3 billion during the first 5 years and \$1 billion in each of the succeeding years.

The bill has been favorably reported by the Senate Banking and Currency Committee and the House is holding hearings right now. We hope for passage in both Houses, but we need the help of influential people such as yourselves. Contact your Senators and Representatives to tell them you support this legislation. You will be glad you did, because the cities of America need help to preserve a decent way of life for their citizens and to offer new opportunity for work, and enjoyment in a wholesome environment.

Transportation planning today is a far cry from what it was when this Chamber began in the year 1845. In those days you just saddled your horse and that was it. Today transportation planning takes place in a complex world of simulation, computers, research and development, intermodality, ambient design, social psychology, systems and subsystems. It requires social thinking as advanced as technology itself.

So when you plan, plan for the future, not the past. See the picture whole. Coordinate your airports, your roads, your ships, your buses, your pedestrian movement -- and do it with an eye to beauty and serenity as well as sheer convenience. Do so, and the future of this city is assured. Fail to do so, and it will become intolerable to human life and decent living within one generation.

I applaud your accomplishments thus far. You still have the pioneer attitude that nothing is impossible -- it is a spirit that infuses the great State of Texas. There could be no better example for this nation. As we cross the doorstep into the Seventies let us resolve to keep America free -- and inhabitable.

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