

09-S-70

EXCERPTS OF REMARKS BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE, AT LUNCHEON OF THE NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTE, 12:00 NOON, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 23, 1970, WALDORF-ASTORIA, NEW YORK, NEW YORK

More than a year ago -- before I actually took office -- I sat in on a series of briefings on the state of America's transportation. There were many eye-openers, but I was perhaps most impressed by the fact that the transportation challenges I had faced as Governor of Massachusetts were universal and common to almost every state and major city.

Every one of these problems can be described as urgent. In aviation, the number of aircraft -- and their usage and capability -- has increased faster than the facilities needed to support them. At a time when our nation was, without question, becoming more and more an urban civilization, public transit serving our urban areas was deteriorating. The nation's railroads were in difficulty. Many were losing money, most were abandoning their passenger service. Some were bankrupt!

Our highways were magnificent -- on the interstate system -- but we had reached the point where we had one linear mile of pavement for every square mile of land in this country, and a final goal had to be found and identified.

The motor carrier industry had its problems, the intercity bus companies needed better interfaces with other modes, and our maritime industry was hard on the financial shoals of foreign competition.

And the biggest problem of all was that there was pitifully little coordination between the modes of transportation providing essential services.

More than anything else we needed a plan that would restore balance to this transportation picture -- a long-range plan that would both remedy the ills and prevent them from recurring.

Certain actions, however, could not wait. Aviation, for example, required immediate attention. Over the past five years, the airline industry has been increasing its capacity by an average of 66-million seat-miles per day -- per day. General aviation has been increasing its flying hours by 4,000 per day. Yet today, right now we need 900 new airports and we need improvements at more than 2,700 airports. That isn't all. We shall need to spend on the operation, maintenance and expansion of the airport/airways system \$12 billion over the next ten years. That averages out to more than \$3 million per day.

This money will be spent for radars and towers -- for automated equipment -- for research and development and for personnel.

The expansion of our payroll is perhaps the best indication of our growing costs. Ten years ago, we had a total of 12,000 controllers in our centers, towers and flight service stations. Today we have 24,000. Ten years from now we shall need 43,000.

To meet these needs, we sent to the Congress our Airport/Airways legislation which proposes new user charges on those who benefit from aviation. The funds from these charges will be used to help pay the tremendous costs of operating, maintaining and expanding the supporting facilities needed by our flying public. The Bill passed the House by the astonishing vote of 337 to 6. I am optimistic it will also be successful in the Senate and that we shall soon have funds to go to work.

I do not have to remind this group of transportation experts about our population explosion -- the 6,000 new Americans added to our census rolls every day. But where these Americans are living is of special import. Five years from now 75 percent of our people will live in urban areas, in other words, on 2 percent of the land. About half of America will be living in three highly concentrated and continuous urban zones -- one along the northeast Atlantic coast, the second in the Cleveland-Detroit-Chicago zone, and the third in California.

Yet in the face of these facts, public transportation -- the very life blood of our urban areas -- is deteriorating. In the past several years, 235 public transit companies have gone out of business and the majority of those remaining are having financial problems.

The availability of good public transit is necessary to all our urban renewal programs. It does little good to set up job training centers if the employee has no way to get to the job in the suburbs. For the disadvantaged in our cities, public transit is the only means of transportation. Restrict or limit that transportation and you have restricted their opportunities. But public transportation goes beyond this. It offers the only promise of relieving the terrible and continuous traffic congestion that is gradually strangling our cities. Downtown congestion is weakening property values. It is adding to the cost of doing business. And it is one of the major contributors to urban air pollution.

Public transit must be strengthened and restored. Accordingly, we sent to the Congress new legislation -- the Public Transportation Act of 1969 (now 1970) which calls for a \$10 billion investment in public transit over a long-range period.

I urge you to do what you can to support this legislation. It is important to our people -- it is important to business -- it is important to almost all modes of transportation. The Bill has the endorsement, for example, of the Automobile Manufacturers Association. Aviation is also taking a new look at transit after the success of the new Cleveland transit line to the city's airport. This is a matter of urgent importance.

Our new approaches to transportation problems go beyond legislation. We have an active research and development program designed both to make more efficient use of existing facilities and uncover new systems of mobility. We are, for example, assisting cities to increase the capacities of their streets through the use of special express lanes, better regulated lights, and special turn lanes. We are studying the success of the Metroliner for its adaptability to other urban corridors. We are keenly interested in the tracked air cushioned vehicle. A prototype, called AeroTRAIN, is already in operation in France. The AeroTRAIN reaches speeds of 165 miles per hour.

These programs -- and the hundreds of others we sponsor -- are sound answers to immediate and particular problems. They do not, however, meet the one over-riding transportation challenge.

Let us, at the outset, understand the magnitude of our problem. Transportation expenditures amount to about 20 percent of the gross national product. In 1967, for example, this meant a total of \$151 billion. This industry is of such proportions that one out of every eight persons in the United States is employed in transportation or services to transportation.

Yet this whole industry is in the process of tremendous expansion. In the next ten years, air passenger miles will triple. Automobile traffic volume will increase by 50 percent; railroad ton-miles will be up by 25 percent; and trucks will be carrying half again as much as they do today. Furthermore, we expect these trends to continue with the result that our long-range planning begins with the assumption that we shall have to double the capacity of our transportation system within the next two decades.

Consider, finally, that we begin with an imperfect system; that, in essence, the system is badly out of balance.

This, then, is our major challenge -- to restore order and efficiency to this transportation system and assist it in meeting the unprecedented demands of the future.

I remind you, also, that we must accomplish these objectives in conformity with two major and all-important responsibilities; that we protect and preserve the quality of our environment and that we must at all times pay first attention to the demands of safety.

I hope there is no complacency among transportation authorities on this subject of environmental protection. We are no longer dealing with possibilities.

President Nixon was speaking for all Americans when he said last week in his State of the Union message, "clean air, clean water, open spaces -- these should once again be the birthright of every American."

And for my part, I am ready to back the President's program to the hilt.

But even before the President spoke, environmental concern was affecting transportation. It is a factor in the difficulty of building a much-needed fourth jetport here in the New York metropolitan area. The potential destruction of a great natural resource has stopped construction on the Miami Jetport in the Everglades, and citizen groups are -- in several locations -- delaying the construction of highways and the danger of air pollution is bringing critical attention to the internal combustion engine.

The overall concern for safety is equally demanding and severe. The tragic story of death and destruction on our highways needs no explanation. But we are looking with new apprehension at the railroads and the highly dangerous cargoes they often carry. And the ever increasing number of pipelines and the potentially destructive materials they carry are also a matter of concern. Let me emphasize, in sum, safety is foremost and cannot be compromised.

These, then, are the dimensions of our problem.

As an answer to this challenge, we in the Department of Transportation are looking to a new national transportation planning process. This process would include all modes of transportation which come under Federal regulatory or financial responsibility -- or those which are heavily dependent on Federal programs.

The first stage of our process would be an information gathering stage. We would want to know what resources are available and at what cost. We would also want to have estimates of what transportation services are needed. Our aggregate statistics would enable us to compare the effectiveness and responsiveness of transportation alternatives on a National basis.

The programming and budgeting phase -- the second phase -- would match available resources to the needs and set priorities. The new and the key element here is that the decisions would be made by local, elected officials. The focal point of the decision-making would be the office of each State Governor. In addition to making state decisions, the Governors would serve as channels for the decisions of mayors and other local officials.

This new national transportation planning process is based on the realization that our existing transportation future is going to demand a large number of decisions. These decisions will be of tremendous magnitude. They will involve the expenditures of vast amounts of money. Their effect will be long-term. They will determine where our people will live, where they will work and how they will spend their leisure time. These decisions must be made, consequently, by informed and expert opinion at the local levels where the needs exist.

There is, thus, a need for a penetrating examination of our existing transportation system. We must analyze, again, the basic purpose of transportation. We must estimate demand. We must weigh the various methods by which these purposes can be met -- the cost/benefit ratio of each option. Having determined this, it is then necessary that we have the adaptability and courage to put these findings to work.

In sum, we are moving -- for the first time -- to a systems approach to transportation.

The role of the Department of Transportation will be that of a catalytic agent. We shall be the center, and we shall give transportation planning a sense of unity. We in the Department are assembling the pieces of the national transportation puzzle together in one place where we can look at them and fit them together. Our role, as I see it, is that of a forum where both local elected officials and the leaders and spokesmen of the transportation industry can make their needs and views known. We have confidence, consequently, that for the first time, at the Federal level, transportation planning will have direction, purpose and momentum.

And this is the precise purpose for which our Department was created.

And so, my friends, I look forward to working with you. Ours is a most urgent task. In twentieth century America, most human activity depends on mechanical transportation. Restrict or limit that transportation and you restrict and limit opportunity. Expand and improve transportation and you expand opportunities.

I would hope -- and I would urge -- that you transportation executives might occasionally pause for a moment and look beyond the day-to-day activities of transportation -- beyond schedules and equipment and payrolls -- load factors -- shipments and baggage. I would hope that you would look at the service you are providing. And I would hope you would find satisfaction. You are contributing much. There is a passage written by the nineteenth century British author and statesman, Thomas B. Macaulay, that best sums up the importance of your work. These words, by the way, are inscribed over the entrance to Union Station in Washington. They read: "Of all inventions -- the alphabet and the printing press alone excepted -- those inventions which have bridged distance have done the most for the civilization of our species."

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