



# DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

# NEWS

## OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20590

16-S-70

REMARKS BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE AT THE CONGRESSIONAL-CITY CONFERENCE OF THE NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES, WASHINGTON HILTON HOTEL, MONDAY, MARCH 9, 1970, 12:00 NOON.

I am delighted to be here. I have many good friends who are members of the League and I have been working with city officials ever since I first started my career -- for over thirty years when I was in private industry -- and during my 17-year career in public service. I know your problems. I know how hard you have to work. You have my great respect.

I've learned from practical experience never to try to tell a joke to an audience of public officials. One half already heard it before -- and the other half have their notebooks out ready to write down the punch line so they can use it themselves.

And these days it doesn't do any good to start a story by saying "A funny thing happened to me on the way to the hotel here today." You don't say it because the only thing that happened was that you got caught in a traffic jam -- and believe me -- that wasn't funny! And that, gentlemen, is what brings us here together . . . How are we going to eliminate those traffic jams?

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And I'm talking not just about traffic jams on city streets -- as Secretary of Transportation I have to worry about traffic tie-ups in our airways, in the railroad yards, in our harbors -- just about everywhere. But today -- let's talk about cities.

It is a curious fact that our cities -- now being strangled in varying degrees by transportation problems -- owe their very existence to transportation. Along our coastlines, virtually every city started as a port. Good cities grew where good harbors existed. Inland, we find river cities and canal cities. Our cities have identified with transportation -- Chicago as a rail center, Saint Louis as the "Gateway to the West", Kansas City as the "Crossroads of the Continent", and Salt Lake City as "The Crossroads of the West."

And now those cities -- in fact all cities, large and small -- find themselves blighted by a serious inability to get where you want, when you want, with the least possible delay.

The causes of downtown congestion are many. The cause that interests us is the great attractiveness of the private automobile -- combined with the success of the Federal Highway program which President Eisenhower launched in 1956. These two factors have given the average American family a degree of mobility that was undreamed of 50 years ago.

The unfortunate by-products of this success story, however, now demand our attention -- yours as mayors and mine as the one man who is singled out in the "letters to the Editor" column. The first by-product is the deterioration of public transportation systems in our Nation's cities and towns. The cause-effect connection is direct.

Since 1956, the Federal Government has spent some \$16-billion on highways in urban areas. In the same period, Federal spending for public transit amounted to peanuts. The actual statistics are even more revealing. In 1950, there were 40-million automobiles in the United States. Today, there are over 100-million.

In 1950, there were 1,400 urban transit companies carrying nearly 14-billion passengers. 17 years later 300 of those companies had gone out of business and the number of vehicles in their fleets had dropped from 87,000 to about 56,000. Total passengers dropped to under 7-billion for a 50 percent decrease.

Net operating income decreased over the same period from a plus \$66-million to a minus \$67-million. And all this was happening during a period when our urban areas were undergoing great expansion.

You officials here today know only too well how these national statistics translate into local problems: clogged downtown streets -- increased business costs -- decline of the central business district -- the ever-growing amount of pavement in your downtown areas -- and the continuing loss of tax property.

You know too from close experience that this deterioration of public transit has another disastrous effect. It imposes added burden and added hardship on the aged, the infirm, the young and the poor -- just about all of whom must rely on public transportation as their only means of mobility.

This is the situation today. Yet, as all of us here realize, the tremendous population expansions we anticipate in the next two decades will be taking place out in your urban areas. This was the background that prompted President Nixon to propose last year the first long range, full scale program to rejuvenate public transit with assistance from the Federal Government.

My friends, I want to make one comment right here -- at the outset. Our Public Transportation Act of 1970 is landmark legislation. It represents the first effort by the Federal Government to work with our cities on a continuing basis to resolve public transportation challenges. It represents a firm commitment to assist you officials in improving your cities and towns. It represents one heck of a lot more than the Federal Government has ever come up with before.

I am aware that some of you would like to see changes in the Bill. So would I. But all of us here today are practical, working public servants. You and I well know from everyday experience that few pieces of legislation do exactly as we want.

There is in Washington today -- just as there is in your city halls -- an intense competition for resources. We have been busy working to overcome this competition and we have achieved results. We have lost a few battles -- but we have won many more. Suffice to say, the Bill now being considered is far better than anyone in transportation dared to hope a year ago.

And I want to thank the National League of Cities -- its officers and you members -- for the tremendous support you have given us on this legislation. This assistance of yours gave us power and momentum. I appreciate this dedicated work. I want to especially thank a number of mayors who took time off from their busy schedules last week to testify before the Congress. These mayors told the Congress that they needed public transit assistance. They proved to be the best witnesses we could have.

Our legislation is still being debated in committee, but I should like to report to you on its present status -- its present makeup. President Nixon originally proposed a \$3.1-billion program over the next five years -- \$300-million in fiscal 1971; \$400-million in 1972; \$600-million in 1973; \$800 million in 1974; and a full \$1-billion in fiscal year 1975.

The original Bill provided that these amounts would be appropriated each year. The Administration was persuaded, however, that cities need more assurance of continuity. Accordingly, an amendment was agreed to which would make the entire \$3.1-billion immediately available for obligation. To assure orderly programming and avoid inflationary effects, a schedule of limitations on appropriations was developed.

We support these changes. We believe a long term commitment is essential to your cities to enable them to plan and carry out large scale public investment. And the limitations give us an adequate pacing mechanism.

Other changes now being worked out cover environmental protection, direct aid to private transit companies and limitations on the amount of funds expendable in any one State. On the last subject let me say, we very much need flexibility. We are -- as you know -- working to convince the House that different States have different needs, and our program must reflect a recognition of these differences.

These funds will be dispersed generally on a matching basis -- 2/3 Federal funds matching 1/3 local. They will be available to cities, States, Interstate Agencies -- Port Authorities, for example, and public transit agencies. Most of the funds will be available for capital grants but we shall also finance technical studies, greatly-expanded research and development, demonstration projects and managerial training. This measure, when passed, will help reverse the ominous, ever downward trend of public transportation in our cities.

I am aware there are some among you here today who have suggested the proper way to finance aid to public transit is through the medium of a trust fund. Let me say, we considered the mechanism of a trust fund very carefully and we decided against it.

The essence of a trust fund is that those who use facilities provided by the government pay extra taxes to finance them. These taxes are revenues held in "trust" by the government on behalf of a special taxpayer. But public transportation -- as we all know -- is losing passengers. To increase fares to fill up a trust fund would merely drive more passengers away. In effect, it would be asking the patient who needs a blood transfusion to act as the donor.

Our decision to fund the public transportation program from general revenues follows logically from our premise that public transportation is a public responsibility and provides public benefit.

And here is where we come to the nub of the matter.

The revitalization of our public transportation systems in our cities and towns will require the passage of our Public Transportation Act. I have no doubt about that.

But more is needed, and the most important need is a new and widespread understanding that public transportation is a real and substantial benefit to everybody in the community.

There is, unfortunately, a prejudice -- a tendency by some people to regard public transportation as a poor relative.

But, my friends, it is a poor relative only because we have abandoned it. I am convinced that there are millions of drivers who right now would welcome the chance to leave their cars at home and ride to work on public facilities. But what are they offered! A square foot or so of crowded, noisy, dirty and uncomfortable standing space!

Our purpose must be to make public transportation so attractive -- so competitive -- that it will lure the driver from his car. Mayor Daley hit the nail right square on the head in his testimony. The Mayor told the Congress "To break the American habit of getting behind the wheel of the family car, we must give the motorist something that is attractive enough to compete with the convenience of his automobile. This is vital if we are to reverse the

trend of declining use of public transportation which in turn results in less income which further deteriorates the public transportation system."

Gentlemen, I believe we can and we must reverse this trend.

There is another matter which gives us urgency. And here again I will borrow from the testimony of one of your members. The speaker is Mayor Sam Massell and he was drawing from his own experiences in Atlanta. But I believe the picture he points is applicable to most of the Nation's cities. He told a House Subcommittee that "Unskilled workers are locked in central cities and that they need public transportation to get jobs." Atlanta, he said, has become a city in which "a white suburban noose encircles a black central core."

The residents of the central city, he said, "are locked into an environment which prevents them from sharing the social, economic and cultural assets of their own region."

A ghetto resident I once talked to summed up this situation most eloquently, "If you don't have a car in this town, you are dead."

My friends, this is the challenge. This is the larger issue with which we must deal. Any further deterioration in public transportation means an eventual worsening of many of the problems besetting your cities.

An expanding and successful system -- providing comfortable, dependable, safe and speedy service -- can begin to help unravel many of the troubles and difficulties that lately seem to be so much a part of urban living. As you mayors know only too well, we have here in our dilemma no choice. The fact is the demise of public transportation could only bring disaster. And I'm not talking about disaster in only a handful of our largest cities.

Let me make it very clear that this is not just a big city Bill. It will help the smaller cities. And they need help. The smaller cities are also finding difficult going in public transportation.

Two meetings -- one with Mayor Stanley Cmich of Canton, Ohio and Mayor Ben Boo of Duluth -- brought this home to me. They told me of workmen living three miles outside of their cities who couldn't get to work on time because they had no car. They told me of their struggle to keep small-city bus companies rolling in the face of mounting deficits. Yes, this public transportation is national and widespread and affects just about everyone of our urban areas.

We are also helping your cities in other ways. We are providing substantial public transportation support through our Federal-aid Highway Program. For instance, we have an experiment going on right now with an exclusive bus lane for peak hour travel on Shirley Highway in Northern Virginia coming into the District. We are planning to provide an exclusive busway in Los Angeles. We hope to do more in other cities.

You will also find our Urban Transportation Planning Process invaluable too. This planning process, now operative in all 233 urbanized areas of 50,000 or more population, provides the information needed for decisions on public transportation investment as well as Federal-Aid Highway project planning.

We have already suggested the establishment of a Federal-aid metropolitan highway system in each urbanized area, to be based on the on-going transportation planning process. The functional classification study of all roads and streets in the Nation will provide important documentation for establishment of such a system. I want to express my appreciation to the National League of Cities for its cooperation and assistance in the preparation of this study. Your help was invaluable.

And let me assure you we in the Department of Transportation are doing everything we can to minimize any disruptions resulting from either our public transportation or highway construction programs. I have insisted and I shall continue to insist that we take into consideration all environmental and human values. It was just such an analysis as this that prompted me last month to issue an order that expands upon the relocation provisions of the 1968 Federal Highway Act.

We now insist that all transportation projects utilizing Federal funds from our Department be undertaken only with the understanding that replacement housing will be provided for -- and, if necessary -- be built before condemnation and demolition take place.

If a family is going to be evicted to make way for a new Federal-aid project, there must be available comparable housing to accommodate that family. This is fair, it is honest. It is decent. It is right.

This new housing directive will require the assistance of you local officials for its enforcement. I ask that cooperation of you now.

Our transportation aid to your cities goes beyond public transportation and highways. Our airport/airways legislation which is now in Conference Committee after passage by both the Senate and the House will assist you in expanding and improving your airports. Our Federal Railroad Administration is conducting the Metroliner and TurboTrain experiments that we hope will lead to an efficient restructuring of railroad passenger service. And you Mayors from the Great Lakes Cities know of the activities of our St. Lawrence Seaway Administration. I could not end this roll call without a salute to our great United States Coast Guard which administers our Department of Transportation responsibilities along the Coast, on our rivers, and at sea.

As you can appreciate, we have a big job. And everyday it gets bigger. Our projects indicate a continuous tremendous increase in the demand for all kinds of transportation services. The size of the future transportation market can be summarized with one dramatic fact. To meet this demand, we shall have to double the capacity of our transportation system within the next twenty years. This is a big job -- and it will require work by all parties concerned -- private industry, the Federal government and State and municipal governments.

I hope that I am establishing by my remarks here today a new basis for Federal-City cooperation in the transportation field. That is my intention. Let me assure you that we on our side will go more than half way -- far more -- every time if we are convinced of the worth of your project. I know from my many experiences in working with Mayors that we can expect the same of you. I have no doubt, consequently, we are on our way -- that we can help you resolve your problems.

And now let me thank you for our invitation to this luncheon. I have enjoyed it. I have made new friends and I hope I shall meet more of you in the months to come.

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