



DEPARTMENT OF  
TRANSPORTATION

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NEWS

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20590

18-S-70

EXCERPTS OF REMARKS BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE  
BEFORE THE FLINT INDUSTRIAL EXECUTIVES CLUB, WEDNESDAY,  
MARCH 18, 1970, 6:00 P.M., FLINT, MICHIGAN

It is a distinct pleasure to be back in Flint. This is my second visit to your city. The first was just about two years ago -- when as Governor of Massachusetts -- I had the opportunity to talk with Harding Mott and Frank Manley about a special community school program we were starting in Massachusetts.

I spent the day here, and as well as convincing them that support of our project was worthwhile, I had the opportunity to visit the various foundation-financed projects throughout the city, and to meet with a great many of the people who are working with your young people to make this city the great place that it is.

Let me begin with a few facts.

Half of all the energy consumed by man in the past 2000 years has been consumed in the last century. Fully half of all the natural resources taken from the earth since the dawn of civilization have been taken since the year 1910. Twenty-five percent of all the people who ever lived -- are alive today. Ninety percent of all the scientists who ever lived are living now.

The population of the United States is just over 200 million now; it will be well over 300 million thirty years from now, in the year 2000.

The challenges will be massive.

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In my own field of transportation we are faced with equally astounding challenges.

My researchers pointed out to me last year that in the next two decades, we in America will be called upon to double our transportation capability in all modes.

Let's put that another way. In the next twenty years, we will have to provide as much transportation capacity as has been gradually built up since the days of the founding fathers some two centuries ago!

Here's how it breaks down.

Right now there are about 100 million motor vehicles on our highways. By 1985 -- just fifteen years from now, we will have some 170 million. We are adding (and this is a net increase) approximately 10,000 vehicles to our highways every day!

Highway tonnage will double in the next ten years, and rail freight will increase by 25%. And amazing as it may seem, air passenger miles will triple in the coming decade.

You have proof of this right here in Flint. During 1969, Bishop Airport experienced the highest percentage increase in air traffic of any Michigan air traffic facility. There was a 12% increase with a total of close to 200,000 operations.

This means the minor traffic jams we put up with now -- getting into and out of the parking lots where we work -- will expand until we are faced with bumper-to-bumper traffic every hour of every day.

These facts mean that we could -- within a generation or two -- run out of natural resources. We could face the day when petroleum products are a thing of the past, when mineral resources are nearly gone, when electricity is a precious commodity that has to be rationed.

It means the minor delays we put up with at major airports will inflate to the point where air transportation reaches a plateau -- has to level off -- and cannot cope with the demands from the public.

It means the food you -- or your wife -- buy in the supermarket will be stale, because it's been delayed en route.

Now I understand full well the normal reaction to remarks such as this. The temptation to say "It'll never happen while I'm alive" is great. And yet, my friends, the threat is all too real. The possibilities are all too imminent, for us to say that.

Now this is not to say that nothing is being done.

In fact, much is being done. The protection and preservation of the world we live in has become a rallying point for hundreds of thousands of concerned Americans -- and believe me, I'm with them all the way! But there is a tremendous job still ahead.

If you will allow, let me take a look at what can be done in our own field -- the business of transportation.

Now I am well aware that Flint is the "vehicle city" -- that your municipal traditions are based upon the great American precept of mobility for all. And this is good. America's automobiles, America's highways, have opened up this country as nothing before or since. The automotive age is what made America great -- bringing people together, bringing down travel barriers, and bringing great strength to our national economy.

Five weeks ago I spent two days in Detroit -- visiting with the Big Three automakers. They showed me that the battle against air pollution can be won. The battle for highway safety can be fought well. Lives can be saved, and our world can be a better place in which to live.

But I also know that this will never happen if we wear blinders -- if we take the narrow view -- if we think only of ourselves.

We have a crisis in transportation in this country. It will take the best efforts of every American to solve that crisis.

We needed, for example, to sharply upgrade safety and efficiency in the airlines. As a result, we proposed to Congress a \$15 billion program -- with funds derived from those who use the air system -- that will provide for 900 new airports, will pay for improvements at some 2700 existing airports, and will allow us to add equipment and manpower to the Nation's air navigation system. That legislation passed the House 337 - 6, went through the Senate 77 - 0, and was taken up by the Conference Committee just today. We expect it to be on the President's desk for signature by the end of the month.

We are attempting the same sort of success in public transportation. We recognized at the outset of this Administration that public transportation -- buses, subways, and rapid transit facilities for our Nation's beleaguered cities -- large and small -- was absolutely necessary if we were to take a crack at the severe social ills that plague our metropolitan areas. After all, what good are job training centers, employment opportunities, evening college classes, health clinics, and even zoos and playgrounds -- if people can't get to them?

We have proposed to the Congress the first sizeable, long-term financing program for public transportation in our cities in the history of the Nation.

And public transportation needs help -- no question. Right here in Flint your local bus company carried nine million passengers in 1956. Yet now, with the population just about the same, there were only 2.2 million passengers in 1969.

The maxi-cab project has been slow in starting. Perhaps we need to better educate the public. Perhaps we need to make refinements in routing and scheduling. Perhaps it will catch on. At any rate we know public transportation needs help if it is to survive -- and we also know that it must survive if our cities are to keep from being choked to death.

What we are seeking is a package that will allow us to obligate more than \$3 billion over the first five years of the program, in order to give our cities the start they need at pulling themselves up by their bootstraps.

We have received approval from the Senate by an 84 to 4 vote, and we are -- right now -- in the midst of hearings over on the House side.

We simply have to do something in the face of the tremendous population expansion that faces us and public transportation is the answer. I have touched upon only several of our responsibilities -- pollution, expansion, aviation, and public transportation. Although time will not permit a full discussion, let me also mention that our Federal Railroad Administration is working on matters of rail safety, as well as on the rail passenger question.

Our United States Coast Guard -- the only branch of the Military that is not in the Department of Defense -- does a magnificent job protecting shipping and boating on our coastline as well as here in the Great Lakes region.

Our St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation is working to develop America's heartland (your land) as a major force in world trade, and our Federal Highway Administration, of course, can take credit for the development of this Nation's magnificent Interstate Highway System, the envy of the world.

We are working to meet the challenges of American transportation -- the massive challenges that I outlined to you earlier. At the same time, we are working together -- because we know that airports need highways for swift and efficient access -- we know that docks and shipping terminals need rail service -- we know that there's no point in going to the end of the line on the bus unless there is an "interface" with other modes of transportation.

We are working to develop a national transportation policy. And I might mention that development of such a policy is being carried out at the express request of the President. Last year, as the Administration was just getting under way, he told me that it would not be good enough to cope with present problems. He wants us, also, to prepare for the problems of the future. Because he knows, as he has said so often, that the future demands sensible planning and preparedness.

Gentlemen, there is one other topic I would like to mention here this evening. It has nothing to do with transportation. It has no direct connection with the City of Flint. It concerns a grave and serious development in the field of international affairs. Ordinarily I do not get publicly involved in foreign affairs -- although at Cabinet meetings all of us participate in discussions, and add whatever we can.

I would -- for just a moment -- like to discuss with you the matter of America's involvement in the Far East. I don't mean Viet Nam. I am certain you all have made yourselves fully aware of our responsibilities and commitments there. I speak tonight of the rapidly developing matter of our involvement in Laos.

My friends, President Nixon has told the American people the truth about our involvement in Laos. He leveled with the American people.

But still we hear the question -- why are we in Laos?

Let me lay that question to rest once and for all. We are there because: we have been asked to be there, and we have a duty to be there.

We have been asked by the Royal Laotian Government to help because, in President Nixon's phrase, "Before the ink was dry on the 1962 Geneva accords," the North Vietnamese Communist Government began to violate them. The Laotian Government that asked our help is the same government that the Communist side approved in the Geneva agreements.

Under those agreements, by the way, the Royal Laotian Government has the right to seek help in its self-defense.

We have the duty to be there not only because of our part in the Geneva agreements but also because Communists are using the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which runs through Laos, to send supplies to kill American fighting men in South Vietnam.

The United States, at the request of the Royal Laotian Government, responded to this infiltration through Laos with bombing missions along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. It is important to remember that when the United States did that, it was responding to the escalation of infiltration by the North Vietnamese. We did not provoke that escalation.

Some who criticize the American bombings in Laos tend to look on them as an isolated military venture far removed from South Vietnam.

This is a totally invalid assumption. The bombings along the Laotian section of the Ho Chi Minh Trail are an integral part of the war in Vietnam.

Were the bombings to cease, the flow of men and supplies into South Vietnam would increase measurably.

The results would be an increase in American dead and wounded and a slowing of the Vietnamization program that is meant to take Americans out of that war.

Unfortunately, many who are asking the question I referred to at the beginning -- Why are we in Laos? -- are deliberately ignoring these facts. In their zeal to criticize their own country and defend the Communists they have ignored the real question reasonable men should be asking. And that question is, "What are the North Vietnamese doing in Laos?"

So far, we have heard no answer to that question.

In discussing the issue of Laos, we should remember one thing. If there were no war in Vietnam, there would be no need to bomb the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. President Nixon has made it plain to North Vietnam and the world that he is willing to end the war. It is time the North Vietnamese made that same decision.

Gentlemen, I have brought this matter to your attention for one reason. You invited me here because I am Secretary of Transportation and Flint is a transportation city. It is a good place to talk about highways, cars, trains, buses and trucks.

Yet as a member of the President's Cabinet I know that in this shrinking world events in Southeast Asia do have a direct effect on events here at home, and I felt that I should discuss the matter with you.

And by doing so, I hope I have made two points with you here this evening.

The first is the crisis in our environment as it relates to the crisis in transportation. I have outlined the challenge, I have touched upon possible solutions.

The second point is that all our efforts here at home will be of little or no avail if we cannot live in a world that is at peace.

We live in the greatest nation in the world. It is great not because of its Presidents, its industrialists, its teachers, financiers, or politicians. It is great because of common ordinary free people.

We must become involved, we must love our neighbors, we must raise our children with devotion, we must guard our heritage with a fierce jealousy. And we must honor the God - Who made us all.