



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

(6)

NEWS

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20590

33-S-70

REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE AT THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE LUNCHEON, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE, MAY 13, 1970, NOON C.D.T.

As a Past President of the Greater Boston Chamber I know the good works that members of a Chamber can and do bring about. In preparing for my remarks here today, I was especially impressed by the ambitious scope of work you have laid out for your city.

The Greater Memphis Program -- 4 years wide and \$4 million deep -- is one of the largest special-funding development efforts being undertaken by any Chamber in the country. And now, as you approach the halfway point of this landmark program, your position in the ranks of national leadership is a solid fact. Indeed, Memphis is the new hub of the mid-south.

Yes, in area development, in economic development, in central city development, in trade development and in human development Memphis is setting a pace in which you can all take great pride.

I've talked with Chamber people in Seattle, in Kansas City, in Atlanta, in Los Angeles and all across the Nation. And I'll tell you what I've been telling them: a city which is not upgrading or developing a means by which it can move large numbers of people effectively, efficiently, safely and smoothly from where those people are to where they want to go . . . is a city doomed to obsolescence.

I say "obsolescence" because as cities grow in population and in density -- as Memphis certainly is -- they redistribute population through urban renewal projects and through normal expansion. You know this. It's happened here. The changing face of urban America brings about radically changing property values.

The widespread sprawl of our expanding suburbs makes mobility a vital, basic necessity. And it is becoming more and more evident that the day has passed when urban America can rely on cars and trucks alone for all of its transportation needs.

We can never provide the mobility our citizens demand and deserve if we restrict ourselves to automobiles alone. Never mind the fact that the internal combustion engine generates from 50 to 80 percent of the air pollution we breathe every day. Never mind the fact that the automobile was responsible for over 56,000 deaths last year -- that's more than 150 funerals a day. Never mind the fact that the leading cause of death among our young people aged 16 to 25, is the highway crash.

Never mind the fact that in America today we have one linear mile of highway for every square mile of land, and with the automobile population growing by 10,000 vehicles every 24 hours the demand for additional pavement is enormous.

Over and above all these factors, we must accept the truth that there are those in our economy for whom the automobile is too expensive. We must accept the fact that all our proposed social remedies such as model cities, health centers, evening college classes, job training centers, suburban employment opportunities, and you-name-it, just aren't going to be fully utilized if we make automobile ownership an unwritten prerequisite for participation.

You could very well develop the greatest network of freeways and interchanges in the world; you could pour concrete from one end of Memphis to the other. You could condemn property, demolish neighborhoods, wipe out business blocks and build parking lots on every corner -- but, my friends, you would face the very real and very dangerous possibility that you might not have much of a city left in which to do business.

If Memphis is to continue as the vital hub of the mid-south, if people are going to be able to get downtown quickly and inexpensively, and if you -- the leadership of the city -- are to tie this region together the way you want it tied together -- then you must provide transportation service that the people will use.

This is the nub of the challenge here in Memphis. You have a bus system that -- in comparison to other cities -- is doing a good job. Why, then, did passenger revenues fall by 7 1/2 percent in the past year? This is something you'll have to find out. It is something you'll have to correct. Because

if the 22-million passengers who used that system last year all suddenly decided (or were able) to buy automobiles, you'd have traffic jams stretching for miles in every direction!

Whether the answer here in Memphis is rail rapid transit -- or whether the problem can be solved with an imaginatively upgraded bus system remains to be seen. I know that a number of studies are underway. But there are several points the business community must keep in mind as these decisions are being made.

First, remember always that a city is nothing more than a center of commerce where people come together to trade goods and ideas. Once that city begins to choke in congestion, the goods can't be traded and the ideas stop being exchanged.

Second, nothing worth obtaining is obtained easily. And I know it is all too easy for those of us who have carved a modicum of success out of life to say "let somebody else do it." Or "public transportation isn't that important -- we don't have to worry about that just yet." Well, my friends, I'm here today -- out of all the cities in America I could have gone to during National Transportation Week -- to tell you that you do have to worry about it. Now.

This city has an awful lot going for it. Memphis ranks among the Nation's biggest wholesale and distribution centers. Your geographic location and a transportation system consisting of all four modes (river, rail, truck and air) make this city tremendously attractive to business and industry. Any city served by 8 railroads, 66 common-carrier truck lines, 7 common-carrier barge lines, 10 major air lines and 2 air taxi services, 9 bus lines, 8 U. S. highways and 2 interstate systems sure as heck ought to be attractive to business and industry.

When the Memphis Expressway System is complete it will cover 67 miles and will have cost well over \$200 million. Aviation is big in Memphis too. Our air route Traffic Control Center here has averaged an annual 16 percent increase each year for the past 6 years. The Memphis Flight Service Station, during the same period, shows an annual increase of 30 percent, and the Memphis Airport Tower has averaged about a 15 percent increase each year since 1964.

But none of that growth is going to count for very much if the city itself -- its downtown, its people, its stores and service industries -- are obsolescent. Our Department hasn't pumped that \$3,120,000 into the Memphis Transit Authority just because we felt like passing out Federal funds. We felt it was needed. We felt it was vital. We feel that Memphis -- and every American city, large and small -- needs public transportation just as it needs public safety, public education, public works and so forth.

And we also feel that we should (if you don't mind a Republican expression), "put our money where our mouth is." Because we feel this way, President Nixon last year submitted to Congress a long-range Public Transportation Assistance Act that will provide \$10 billion in Federal funds -- on an assured basis -- for the construction, expansion and improvement of public transportation in a growing urban America. He did this because he knows -- as I know -- that we won't begin to solve any of our critical urban social and economic problems until we provide mobility to our people.

This Bill -- which passed the Senate 88 to 4, and will be debated on the Floor of the House in the days immediately ahead -- is, in a sense, the public transportation equivalent of the Federal Highway Act of 1956 which launched the interstate system. And that interstate system, by the way, has brought untold prosperity and mobility to this great Nation.

But now the time has come to bring the same mobility to the cities. And our Bill will do just that. There is no question that Memphis stands to benefit greatly from this landmark legislation. Whether you will be needing funds for express bus lanes, fringe area parking lots, more new and better low-emission buses -- or whether the city will grow to the extent that you will need some newer and more sophisticated facility such as the fabulous subway system that is being built in San Francisco -- that is a decision that will have to be made at the local level.

But the time to plan is now. The time to write your Congressman to urge support for our legislation is now. The time to help your city government, your planning agencies, your Chamber of Commerce and your Transit Authority is now.

With strong public support for that vital link that ties a community together -- public transportation -- Memphis can grow properly, and can become a showcase city not just for the south but for the Nation.

With the hard work, the dedication, the determination and the vision that is right here in this room -- I know you are equal to the challenge.

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