



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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REMARKS OF U.S. TRANSPORTATION SECRETARY JOHN A. VOLPE, THE INTERNATIONAL ROAD FEDERATION, MONTREAL, CANADA, MONDAY, OCTOBER 5, 1970, 9:30 A.M. E.D.T.

The significance of our conference here is immediately apparent. Progress for the peoples of the world depends on the fullest dissemination of information among the nations.

This is the promise of the sixth World Highway Conference -- a truly global exchange of information that will benefit transportation in all of our nations.

For this reason we are all indebted to the International Road Federation for its sponsorship of this meeting. I also want to commend the IRF for the valuable and continuing service it is performing in gathering and distributing information on road research throughout the world.

We in the United States are proud of the close working relationship between our Federal Highway Administration and the IRF and its members. We are especially pleased that the IRF last year selected our Federal Highway Administrator, Frank Turner, to receive its man of the year award.

As many of you know, we have a rather unique program for road building in the United States that grew out of our Federal system of government. Our major road systems are the responsibility of our 50 state governments, who build, maintain and operate them. Our Federal government provides leadership in setting national standards for highway improvement, and it helps finance engineering, right-of-way and construction costs, and also planning and research.

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The Federal-state road building partnership has been in business more than 50 years. It has been a very successful partnership. I can say that, because I have had the privilege of working on both sides of it -- as Commissioner of Public Works in Massachusetts, as Federal Highway Administrator, as Governor of Massachusetts and now as head of the Federal Department of Transportation.

It is a good thing this partnership has been able to provide the modern highways we enjoy today, because we wouldn't be the country we are without them. If you were to come to the United States and take a count, you would find we have over 200-million people and over 100-million motor vehicles. That's one highway-using vehicle for every two people. And the vehicles are multiplying at a faster rate than the people.

Now I'm not advocating that we regulate the number of motor vehicles being built in the U.S. and in other countries. But these statistics do point up the fact that we could -- theoretically at least -- put our entire population in motor vehicles at one time and not even use the back seats!

That gives you some idea of the personal, individual mobility available to most United States citizens. It also gives some idea of the demand for highway facilities.

We can't look at highway transportation in isolation, however. We have to view it as part of a total transportation system. The transportation system, in turn, is not an end in itself. It is a means to provide the movement of people, goods and services required by our society and our economy.

This is the concept underlying the establishment of the U.S. Department of Transportation in 1967. Before that time our governmental programs treated each transportation mode separately, and some were virtually ignored. But now when we look ahead to our projected population growth, and the foreseeable transportation needs of a growing economy, we realize we have to get the best from all available transportation modes and resources.

We have to develop a coherent national policy toward transportation and then fashion programs which aim at development of a balanced transportation system. In striving for the optimum system we recognize we shall have to consider ways of upgrading existing modes, such as our urban transit systems, which have been deteriorating. And we have to encourage development of promising new modes, such as the tracked air-cushion vehicle.

These are some of the problems which prompted the creation of our new Department. We are not expected to build and operate all facets of our transportation system, of course. That takes a blend of private investment and public investment at all levels of government, Federal, state and local. Now and in the future.

But it is our job to study and plan for transportation development in its entirety. It is our job to recommend national priorities and the programs to achieve them -- programs that can be acted upon by the President and the Congress. This is a big job.

We are dealing with an enormous economic force. Transportation in the United States today accounts for about 20 percent of our gross national product. It has held that relative position in our economy for several decades.

Looking to the future, we know we are going to have to double our transportation capacity in the next twenty years. (Or even less time)

In view of this, it would be hard to exaggerate the importance of long-range planning in our Department.

After extensive preparations, we have just recently embarked on our first National Transportation Planning Study, as the first step in establishing a continuing national transportation planning process.

We're innovating. This kind of comprehensive, national transportation planning has never been attempted before in the United States.

To help us develop a National Transportation Plan, we are gathering information from state and local governments, manufacturers and designers of transportation equipment, operators of transportation services, and major users of transportation.

With their help we hope to define the areas in which public and private funds are needed through 1990 to finance highways, public transit, airports and other terminals, railroads, waterways and pipelines.

The Department of Transportation will develop with other Federal agencies such information as future demographic patterns, national economic growth patterns, emergency transportation needs, freight and passenger flows and estimates of economic loss resulting from pollution caused by transportation.

We will summarize all of the information into a number of national transportation development alternatives and estimate the impact of each, taking into consideration such elements as economic efficiency in transportation, protection of the environment, and the improvement of safety.

These alternatives will give us a foundation for new programs, new legislation.

This kind of planning process is new to the total transportation system. But it is by no means new to our highway program. From the very beginning our Federal-state partnership stressed professionalism in carrying out its responsibilities. Professionalism required establishment of standards and criteria for highway improvements, and this alone probably would have prompted development of planning techniques.

But there was another compelling reason. In a word, necessity. Americans have cars; Americans need highways.

Since public resources for highway improvement are not unlimited, highway officials had to determine how to get the most results for the money available. This meant they had to predict and analyze the demand for highway services and devise long-range programs to serve this demand.

It meant they had to plan for long-range capital development of the nation's highway plant. It meant they had to look to the interests of the nation as a whole and draw up programs for national acceptance.

I have already noted that we have one vehicle for every two people in the United States. Last year these vehicles traveled one trillion, sixty billion miles. The Federal-aid Highway System accommodated over two-thirds of this travel. Since it accounts for only about one-fourth of our total road and street mileage it is obvious that the Federal-aid program has concentrated on our most important highways.

The importance of this program is further emphasized by the role of highway transportation in the United States.

In intercity travel last year about 88 percent of the person miles were by highway. In larger urban areas, highways accounted for 97 percent of the travel; in the smaller towns, practically 100 percent.

In addition, virtually all of the movement of goods in urban areas is by truck. In intercity movement, trucks account for about 23 percent of the ton miles. But the value of truck transportation is much greater -- about 73 percent of our total freight bill.

Economically, we spend more than four times as much for highway transportation as we do for all other transportation combined. Highways are the backbone of our entire transportation network.

With such national dependence on highways it is absolutely essential that the public investment in highways be planned as well as we know how.

Highway planning is national development planning. It cannot help but be.

The outstanding example of the value of sound highway planning is our interstate highway system. This 42-thousand, 5-hundred mile nationwide network of controlled-access freeways is a monument to the pioneering efforts of our highway planners. By almost any measure, it is the largest public works project in history.

Almost 20 years of planning had been devoted to this system before we launched construction in 1956, when I was Federal Highway Administrator.

Today, over 70 percent of it is in use. Eventually, it will carry more than 20 percent of all highway traffic in the country, while consisting of only one percent of our total street and highway mileage.

The interstate system is a great national asset. The public investment in this facility -- which may reach \$70-billion or more -- is more than paying for itself in benefits to the users. These savings result from reductions in operating costs, accident costs, and the travel time of commercial vehicles.

Because of its safety design, it is saving lives -- about one life a year for every five miles opened to traffic, year after year.

It is producing enormous social and economic benefits. To name a few:

It has increased land values because of better accessibility; increased job opportunities; allowed dispersion of industrial and commercial activities and new economic development; increased the choice of residence; afforded easier and quicker access to parks and recreational and cultural centers; increased the effectiveness of such services and facilities as schools, hospitals and churches.

All this adds up to a better life for our citizens.

So far, I have been talking about planning on the grand scale -- planning from a national viewpoint. A very large part of our transportation demand, however, is essentially local in character. And because it is local, it is very much involved with people.

We are well aware of the great economic and social impact transportation improvements can have on a community. We recognize the role such improvements can play in achieving desired community development, and we provide for participation by local government in the planning process.

Specifically, transportation planning is tied firmly to urban land use planning. We require communities to consider their future land use in terms of their requirements for transportation and whether such requirements would lead to the desired social, environmental and economic improvement of the community.

The planning process must take in all modes of urban transport, and highway development must be coordinated for other modes.

Our planning also includes studies in multiple use of highways -- a matter which I commend to you officials who are bothered by congestion.

We are experimenting with several plans to give buses precedence over private automobiles during commuter rush hours. One of these experiments -- which we are conducting on a busy highway leading into Washington -- consists of a single lane devoted exclusively to buses. Our results to date have been most heartening. Bus trip time is now much less than the private automobile with the result that bus patronage on that route has increased 19 percent. Bus travel represents a considerable improvement in the efficiency and utilization of our highways. We get more "bang" for our highway buck; we can and do move more people with more speed in less time and with greater safety.

I have been talking about planning for total transportation needs and the important contributions that our highway program has made to this effort.

I cannot leave this audience, however, without saying a word about two subjects that are of great concern to the United States. These are the problems of highway safety and of air pollution.

These problems seem particularly serious to us because they are an unhappy byproduct of a massive highway transportation system.

But they really don't respect any boundaries. They are problems in every automotive society.

For this very reason, they deserve to be attacked on an international scale. All of our nations can work together to reduce the tragic slaughter of our highways and the hazardous pollution of our highway vehicles.

The United States is anxious to cooperate in such efforts, and we are now participating in the work of several international organizations. I co-hosted a conference on automotive passive restraints under the auspices of the NATO Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society earlier this year. And we have also had our National Highway Safety Bureau officials visit many other nations to find how you -- in so many progressive countries -- are working to cut highway death rates.

I shall also head the American delegation to the NATO-sponsored oil spills conference in Brussels next month. This is a maritime problem, rather than a highway problem, but it underscores our determination to attack environmental problems on an international basis.

It is in this spirit of international cooperation that I invite any of you who may have the opportunity to visit the United States after this conference to stop by and see us in Washington. I assure you the people in our Federal Highway Administration and at the state highway departments around the nation will be happy to see you and show you around.

And now thank you for your invitation to be with you at this important conference. I have enjoyed meeting you and I hope we shall meet again. And I hope, too, that our conference will bring us all a little closer together -- give us a little better appreciation and understanding of each other. If it does nothing else, it will have been worthwhile -- for the road to international peace begins with internationally shared expertise and knowledge. Thank you again.

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