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EXCERPTS OF REMARKS BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE TO THE ROTARY CLUB OF HOUSTON AND THE HOUSTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, GRAND BALLROOM, RICE HOTEL, HOUSTON, TEXAS, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22, 1970, 1:00 P.M.

Last Thursday morning at the White House -- just a week ago today -- President Nixon signed into law the Urban Mass Transportation Assistance Act of 1970. This far-reaching landmark legislation, which had swept through both the House and the Senate by near-unanimous votes, gives the citizens and the cities of America the opportunity to pull downtown transportation up by its bootstraps. As the President noted when he signed the Bill, this legislation will do for the urban frontier what the railroads did for the western frontier a century ago. The new Bill commits \$10-billion for new and improved bus and rapid transit systems in urban areas over the next ten years. This Administration submitted such legislation because we believe -- firmly and strongly -- that while public transportation will not solve all our urban ills and growing pains, those ailments simply will never be solved without good, clean, fast efficient public transportation.

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Virtually every city of substance in America -- and I'm talking about even those cities in the 50,000 population range -- needs mobility that will enable the unskilled to get to job training centers, will provide the means for those without automobiles to get to clinics and health centers, will allow that youngster who wants to improve himself the chance to get to evening college classes, and will allow all of our citizens the mobility they must have if we are to make adequate housing, recreation, employment and education readily accessible to everyone.

Virtually every city official knows this; the urbanologists know this; and -- to their great credit -- the Congress of the United States recognized this and passed our Bill with flying colors.

As a result of passage of this legislation, we announced today that our Urban Mass Transportation Administration (which, incidentally is headed up by a Texan: Carlos Villarreal from Brownsville) has approved a grant of over half a million dollars to the city of Houston.

These funds will be used by the city to develop a total public transportation plan and program for the Houston metropolitan area.

The study will be divided into two phases:

First, a short-range study of bus transit improvements, including such subjects as the adequacy of existing service, projections of operating changes, and preparation of a schedule of capital and service improvements. The role of the private operator will be evaluated. And I might note at this point that we are well aware that Rapid Transit Lines, Inc. has accomplished considerable in the way of system improvements and innovations since it acquired the system four years ago. All this has been done without public assistance, and Houston is the largest city, and one of the very few cities in the United States, that still has a privately-owned transit system.

The second phase of the project will be a longer-range study. It will consider ~~from~~ all viewpoints -- the feasibility of modern, clean, efficient, pace-setting rapid transit here in Houston. Initial plans call for a study of six possible transit corridors, with the ultimate goal of recommending construction in at least one of these corridors. If -- and I emphasize that word "if", -- the studies tell us that such a wide-ranging project is feasible, we stand ready to undertake our share of the costs of preliminary engineering and design for an exclusive right-of-way rapid transit system for the city of Houston. And we have the funds -- thanks to the legislation signed by the President last week -- to pay up to two-thirds of the entire cost of the project.

Now let me emphasize that this half-million dollar grant, and this study, represent the first initial step. While reality and optimism give me every reason to state that Houston can have a transit system to rival the new one being built in San Francisco, and surpassing the older ones in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York, I want you to realize that a decision to build a system here will have to be a local decision. You will have to raise one-third



of the cost locally, which will most likely mean a bond issue which will undoubtedly mean a city-wide referendum. And in all candor, I point out that similar referenda have failed in recent years in Seattle, in Los Angeles, in Kansas City, and in Atlanta. They failed, primarily, because there just weren't any matching Federal funds available. But also in all candor, I think that the Houston spirit is such ... that the "can do" attitude reflected by community leaders such as yourselves is real enough .. so that your city can and will -- once the feasibility studies are complete -- get behind this project all the way. And of course, Federal funding is now a reality.

There is full agreement that Houston is the kind of city that is determined not to be left in the backwash of progress. No, this city has come too far already to allow itself to slip a notch backward toward obsolescence.

That's a strong word "obsolescence" and yet it is a word I have selected with care, because I am convinced that a city that gives little or no long-range consideration to urban transportation is headed for obsolescence. Even a city like Houston, where bold headlines talk about the "city of tomorrow". Even a city like Houston -- a city known to the world as the symbol of man's greatest transportation ventures, the journey's to outer space. Yes even in Houston -- which prides itself in being the "city of knowledge".

My friends, this city is too close to pace-setting greatness to falter at this stage of the game. You are proving, with concrete and steel and with vision, that private capital can develop one of the most progressive cities in the world.

We are well aware of the great growth and expansion here. We know of Texas Eastern's plans for a \$1.5 billion Houston Center on the east side. We know of Shell Oil Company's plans to develop those 525 acres near the Astrodome into a billion-dollar complex. We know of Metropolitan Life's half-billion dollar proposed project. Indeed, we know full well that major office and commercial building construction started or announced this year exceeds \$5 billion. Why even in Washington a figure like \$5 billion makes people sit up and pay attention!

You, the members of Houston Rotary and the Houston Chamber, however, are challenged to do much more than sit up and pay attention. This is your city. Your future is involved. Your civic pride is involved. Your families are involved. Your livelihood is involved. You stand on the threshold of real progress, with opportunities unavailable to many millions of Americans in hundreds of other urban areas. And you, as civic leaders, must accept the mantle of opportunity offered to you, and must insist that public growth here unfold with the same good sense and planning that private growth has unfolded.

I was most gratified to learn that in blueprinting Texas Eastern's Houston Center, architect and planner William Periera paid full attention not only to mobility within the center, with "people movers", moving sidewalks, and so forth -- but has also given full consideration to external feeder systems. Working closely with Wilbur Smith Associates, consulting traffic engineers, Texas Eastern is assuring that movement of traffic into and out of Houston Center will be handled swiftly and well, and that there will be adequate parking spaces.



And I might mention at this point that Houston's very wise and judicious use of federal highway funds has given you handy and immediate access to our great interstate system through your I-610 freeway loop -- allowing the free flow of commerce that sparks the life of any city. I join with you in appreciating Houston's 390-mile web of limited access, high speed highways. It is the envy of many other cities in the Nation.

But at the same time I want to emphasize -- in no uncertain terms -- that automobiles alone will never do the entire transportation job. Here in Houston or anywhere else.

Never mind the fact that an automobile is some 20 feet long, weighs two tons, and carries (on the average) one and one-half people on each trip. Never mind the fact that the internal combustion engine (depending on whether you listen to its fans or its critics) generates from 50 to 80 percent of all the air pollution we breathe every day. Never mind the fact that the automobile kills 56,000 people a year -- that's over 150 lives lost every day of the year. 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 already have one linear mile of street 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 tremendous. Over and above all these items, we must accept the fact that there are those in our economy for whom the automobile is far too expensive a purchase.

If you are to grow properly you must provide -- for all people -- fast and efficient public transportation in addition to your network of streets, highways and freeways.

Here in Houston ... if the business community is to prosper and thrive the way I know you want it to, there must be a thread of unity running throughout your widely-diversified, outwardly-growing city.

And this thread, my friends, can and should be upgraded, imaginative, efficient public transportation.

Houston needs public transportation just as it needs -- and has -- public safety, public health, public welfare and public works.

You could very well develop the greatest network of freeways and interchanges in the world -- you could pour concrete from one end of the metropolitan area to the other -- you could condemn property, demolish neighborhoods, wipe out business blocks, and build parking lots on every corner -- but 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 Houston is to continue as the vital hub of the entire southwest; if you are to tie all of Houston together the way you want it tied together -- then you must have clean, courteous service, you must have transportation facilities that do not take inordinate amounts of space, do not pollute the air, and do not wipe huge chunks of revenue-producing property off the tax rolls.



A city, really, is nothing more than a center of commerce where people come together to trade goods and ideas. When that city begins to choke in its own congestion -- if there is no trend of communication and transportation for the exchange of goods and ideas -- then that city is not only becoming obsolescent, that city is dying.

Your presence here today indicates to me that you are concerned ... that you are not interested in being eyewitnesses to the death of a great city.

And it doesn't have to happen here in Houston. It shouldn't happen.

It will not happen if you continue to look ahead.

My friends, there is no way of turning the clock back when you are dealing with the growth of a city -- especially an area, a region, such as greater Houston.

You cannot stop the growth, but you certainly can direct it.

The Department of Transportation is interested. Vitally interested. Your city could well become a showplace for the Nation.

The entire Administration is interested. The President and I have discussed, on many occasions, the fact that transportation can well be the one key factor in freeing the bonds that make city living so difficult for so many.

I challenge you to come up with new urban transportation ideas, new thinking, new daring, and new, bold determination if you are to fulfill the bright promise that belongs to Houston.

To fulfill the promise, we shall all have to work together: private enterprise, along with your local, state and Federal government.

If we can couple the individual determination of private enterprise with the resources and dedication of government at all levels, you can have the greatest city in the country. We look forward to continuing to work closely with all of you.

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