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EXCERPTS OF REMARKS BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE
BEFORE THE 41st ANNUAL MEETING OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
MOTOR BUS OWNERS, DRAKE HOTEL, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, THURSDAY,
SEPTEMBER 17, 1970, 12:00 NOON

This morning we came in from the airport on Greyhound's new experimental turbine bus, which I might note is a tremendous step in the right direction. Anything we can do to cut the pollution of our atmosphere simply must be looked into, and in addition to the turbine's extremely clean operation, I was also impressed with the economic efficiencies involved.

I am delighted that Bob Kaye is participating in your meetings, and I certainly hope you will all have an opportunity to chat with him and get to know him better. Bob -- who, of course, is our new Director of the Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety -- is a real transportation expert. He's fair and objective and gets things done. I know you'll like working with him.

I would like -- right here at the beginning -- to congratulate Chuck Webb and the entire NAMBO membership. Your 1,000 companies are providing transportation for 400,000,000 passengers every year -- fast, convenient and safe transportation for the public and you are providing this service (I am told) at a profit. I congratulate you. I wish all forms of transportation were doing as well. (And believe me, I am dedicated to prosperity for all modes.)

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I hope this success doesn't come between us. I have learned from my experience in public service that nothing brings industry and government closer together than adversity. I hope prosperity is not going to ruin a beautiful friendship!

There are several matters of concern to both your industry and our Department of Transportation. Some of them need clarification, and I'll get right to the point.

We are now conducting an expanded program of road checks for safety on intercity buses. I want to emphasize that the business of our Department of Transportation is -- first and foremost -- safety. At any given time, we are sponsoring hundreds of safety projects -- new rules and proposed rules, studies, or research projects. These safety efforts encompass automotive vehicles, aircraft, railroads, ships, pipelines and all other elements -- involved in moving people and goods. Our road check is, thus, but one of many, many safety efforts.

At this time it is still far too early to analyze to any great degree the specific results of our interstate bus survey. The checks are still going on and the data from those checks already made are not yet tabulated. It would be unfair to all of us to try and interpret these data at this early date. We expect, however, to have a pretty good fix on what safety problems exist, and we shall make the results of our study available to you. I am confident we will be able to work together on whatever remedies might be called for. I hope, furthermore, that this and all other safety programs are undertaken in the spirit of industry-government cooperation. There can be and there will be between us no disagreement on where we are going. Maximum safety is our goal and we both shall be working to reach that goal.

An explanation is needed, too, on a word definition. I have been touring this land of ours preaching that solution of our major urban problems will come only with the development and expansion of public transportation. Reports on my talks tell me that in the popular mind -- public transit means rapid rail transit. But the fact is, the most popular public transit vehicle is the bus. In some of our towns and smaller cities, the only public transportation is the service provided by your buses as they pass through town.

I mention this as an introduction to a major new policy directive we issued earlier this month. We are encouraging cities throughout the Nation to experiment with new procedures that will speed up bus traffic. It is our intention that the advantages will accrue to both the intercity buses you gentlemen own and operate as well as commuter and core city bus service.

Our plan is to encourage on our urban freeways and streets the greatest use of buses in preference to individual automobiles. We must unsnarl city and freeway traffic -- and we must do it promptly.

The potential of the bus in easing congestion is fantastic. We recently made a study of peak-hour traffic in a typical locality and found that of all the vehicles counted, 67 percent were private automobiles and less than 15 percent were buses. But translating these figures into people -- in line with our vehicle-occupancy figures -- we find that 82 percent of the of the people passing that check point were in buses while only 15 percent were in automobiles.

The volume of these single passenger cars traveling at peak hours represents a very inefficient use of our highways. We are, therefore, determined to promote bus travel. Our Federal highway engineers, accordingly, are exploring a number of means to give buses special treatment.

We are looking into the establishment of exclusive bus highways. (An exclusive bus "highway" is one which is reserved at all times solely for the use of buses.) These may at some time be opened to automobiles carrying volume car pool passengers.

And at the same time, we are working to set up exclusive bus "lanes" -- one or more lanes reserved solely for the use of buses during peak periods.

We shall also examine ways to give buses preferential treatment -- for expediting bus movements within the stream of mixed highway traffic. Some examples of the way we are thinking include bus-actuated traffic signals, and also the metering of vehicle access to freeways with special by-passes for buses.

These measures and others to come should do much to speed up operations for you who are responsible for highway movement into and out of our metropolitan areas.

I think it must be obvious to anyone in transportation that we must find alternatives to the private automobile. And it is equally obvious we must find ways to provide more Federal assistance to these alternative modes. This is one of the premises behind some highly significant studies now being undertaken by our Department. We are, first of all, developing a comprehensive national transportation policy statement. This policy will enable us to chart the future course of transportation in the country on the basis of firm priorities. Such a policy seems most elemental. But the fact is there has never been such a policy statement in the history of the country. Well, we need it, and we expect to have it ready by the end of the year.

We are also working on a national transportation plan that will list the requirements of each mode of transportation. In the past we have had regular highway needs studies. We are expanding this to cover all modes. We shall be working with industry on this and we shall be meeting with your association.

Others who will help include all State governors and the mayors of key cities. This plan will provide us with a complete inventory of the Nation's transportation needs.

We are in an era of change and we must change with conditions. The first reports of this year's census are a case in point. In the past ten years, our population has increased by about 21,000,000 persons. Yet three-fourths of this growth occurred in metropolitan areas. At the same time the rural areas did not just stand still. Rather, they lost people. In the same ten-year period, our farm population -- in just ten years mind you -- decreased by 33-1/3 percent -- from 15,000,000 to 10,000,000. We must, consequently, provide transportation where people are. We must change with the shifting population patterns of this great Nation. These are the facts behind our decision to review our entire urban transportation planning process.

The need for a restudy is evident. We are now adding to our highways an average of 10,000 vehicles a day and the greatest impact of this growth is felt primarily in our metropolitan areas. The result is apparent to you gentlemen who have buses operating in and out of any metropolitan areas: Long lines of bumper-to-bumper traffic; stand-still traffic jams at inter-sections. This means delay and frustration, economic loss, a great increase in air pollution and eventual economic disaster to our downtown business areas. For you bus owners, the penalties are more direct. There is little profit to be earned by a bus that crawls into and out of city terminal areas at only 8 to 10 miles per hour.

And the situation is worsening. We simply can't add nearly 4,000,000 vehicles to our highways every year and avoid traffic disasters. Look ahead five years and think what this congestion will do to your business.

The only answer for all of us is improved public transportation, and more efficient use of the facilities already in place. I outlined earlier some of the steps we are taking to speed up bus public transit. But this is not enough. At this particular time when we most need public transportation, the fact is public transportation is deteriorating.

Here are the facts:

In 1950, there were 1,400 transit companies operating in the cities and towns of this Nation. In 1967, only 1,100 were left. 300 had gone broke.

In 1950, transit companies operated 87,000 vehicles. By 1967, that number had dropped to about 58,000.

In the same period, the number of passengers dropped 50 percent and operating income fell from a plus \$66 million to a minus of \$67 million.

As you are well aware, President Nixon last year submitted legislation to Congress calling for \$10 billion in Federal funds for public transportation assistance. I am asking for your firm support. Over the years this legislation -- by reducing traffic jams -- will have a direct and profitable relationship to your intercity operations. Our bill is good for everybody who must travel into, out of, and around metropolitan areas -- both large and small. The bill will soon be coming up for debate on the floor of the House. It has already passed the Senate by a vote of 84-4. I urge you to support it.

I also want to congratulate you members of this association who are working with the manufacturers to reduce pollutants from your bus engines. I understand all new coaches purchased by NAMBO member companies incorporate new features which promise lower pollutant emissions. And -- of course -- we are all aware of the current road testing of lower pollutant turbine engines. And there are other efforts. This is to be commended. The threats to our environment are many and pervasive.

Final resolution of this problem will require voluntary, self-started work by all of us. Acts of law and public funds are, of course, necessary and President Nixon is moving forward with a vigorous program of environmental protection. But success in the end will result only if each of us seeks to discover what he can do and resolves to do it. I commend you member companies who have undertaken these programs.

Our resources are great -- and the greatest of these resources -- over and above our fantastic technological capability -- is the basic decency and honest patriotism of our American people. While some news reports center around the efforts of the Congress and the President to meet the great challenges of our times, millions of ordinary Americans are quietly meeting conflict and dissension and resolving them with patience and forbearance. And the millions upon millions of these minor victories total -- in the aggregate -- tremendous progress.

I've enjoyed meeting with you and I've enjoyed talking about our common problems. But I hope this is just the beginning and that you and I will work closely together.

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