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EXCERPTS OF REMARKS BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE  
FOR THE WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON AGING, SHOREHAM HOTEL, WASHINGTON,  
D. C., TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 1971

I am delighted to be here -- to participate and to pledge the  
continuing support and commitment of my Department to the goals of  
this Conference.

Travel today is often a trying experience for the young and able;  
as you are well aware, it can be an ordeal for the aged or infirm. The  
aged must be afforded the same opportunities as other persons to use  
public facilities and services, and to take part in the affairs of  
community life.

The Department of Transportation has been given the responsibility  
for improving transportation methodology through research and demonstrations  
to improve mobility for all Americans and specifically the elderly of  
this country. We gladly accept this as our role.

Yet the challenge is intensified by a number of factors -- not the  
least of which is the fact that one-half of the 20 million Americans  
over 65 live at the near-poverty level. They have little discretionary  
income. In most cases the incomes of the elderly have not kept pace with  
the rising costs of goods and services. What may have appeared 10 or 20  
or 30 years ago to be a comfortable retirement income could be hopelessly  
inadequate today.

And I would be negligent if I did not note that President Nixon's  
anti-inflation program is working to relieve that situation. By exercising  
restraint over wages and prices, the President's program is especially  
helpful to those on fixed incomes, those who are frequently caught on the  
short end of the wage-price cycle. At the same time, we are working with  
all diligence to provide an alternative to the expensive proposition of  
owning and operating a car. We want to make public transportation  
economically accessible to all. President Nixon, when he took office,

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directed that transportation be improved for all the people of our land. Unprecedented legislation, providing for progressive long-range developments in air, highway, railroad, and urban mass transportation, has been enacted. We are on our way to a better brand, a better blend, and a better balance of transportation services for all who travel.

Every plank in our broad platform of transportation reforms has provisions for the elderly and the handicapped. We intend to overlook nothing that might make transportation more respectful of our elders.

There are two approaches we are taking. On the one hand, we are conducting demonstration programs designed specifically with the transportation needs of the elderly in view. At the same time, we make certain that every transportation program we sponsor or support involves due consideration for the circumstances of the senior traveler.

Section 16 of the Urban Mass Transportation Act, for example, requires that localities give special attention to the needs of the elderly and the handicapped when planning and designing urban mass transportation facilities and equipment. This means what it says. I have personally insisted that no grant be approved until the applicant shows that this stipulation has been met. There simply is no longer any place in this country for transportation initiatives that fail to consider 20 million of our citizens.

A case in point is the new subway -- or "Metro" -- system now under construction here in the Washington area. We insist that it be accessible to all -- and that is why we worked with the metro planners to provide for the installation of elevators to the train platforms, recognizing that escalators alone would not suffice.

But let's look at the larger picture, of interest to all Americans.

I should like first to tell you what we have done and then I shall discuss our program for the future.

We have a number of demonstration projects underway or on tap that put the transportation needs of the elderly and the handicapped foremost.

For example, in the lower Naugatuck Valley in Connecticut, where 10 percent of the population is of retirement age, our Urban Mass Transportation Administration (we call it "UMTA") is funding a unique transportation demonstration. Bus service to and from the community's health and medical facilities will be furnished, on a fixed-route basis, and -- experimentally -- on a demand-responsive basis as well. That means the bus will make house calls even when the doctor can't.

In Helena, Montana, where there is no public bus system, UMTA has made a grant to the local taxi company to provide reduced-rate service to senior citizens on a "will call" basis.



One innovative program we have particularly high hopes for is the "dial-a-ride" demonstration project to be tried in Haddonfield, New Jersey. The intent here is to operate a flexible, semi-automated system, enabling residents to dial for a bus when they need one. The buses have been purchased, the equipment is being installed, and we hope to be underway in February.

Any or all of these demonstration projects could become the model for better door-to-door municipal transit systems to come.

As another example of transit developments with built-in "people saver" provisions, the new Bay Area Rapid Transit System in San Francisco -- which opens this Spring -- will feature elevators to transport passengers from street level to the train. The system will make extensive use of loudspeakers and super-visible signs, and will have special gates and fare-collection procedures to ease the way for older passengers.

The "people-mover" demonstration project in Morgantown, West Virginia, is designed to meet the needs of its passengers more than half way. There will be no more "waiting for the bus" -- another "people-mover" will be along in a matter of minutes. Aisles will be spacious, doors wide, the cars clean and comfortable, and no tricky steps or high curbs to contend with.

While other new rail and subway systems are beginning to sprout in cities across the country, buses still promise to be the mainstay of public transportation for some time to come.

Not bus systems as we have known them, but bus systems as they should be.

Buses themselves can stand improvement. UMTA's Office of Research, Development and Demonstrations is putting the finishing touches on a new set of bus specifications that include lower bus floors, special doors, lower steps; in fact, an experimental bus has been designed that actually kneels down to the curb after it pulls up to the bus stop!

I might also mention that we are experimenting with new low-emission engines, and even with steam-powered and natural gas-powered buses, prototypes of which are now in operation, as a means of cutting down on air pollution. And that's good news for everybody, young and old alike.

While urban transit is often the most immediate of the elderly's transportation needs, it is not the only one. The aged have "long distance" travel problems, too.

The National Rail Passenger Act (Amtrak) was proposed by President Nixon and passed by Congress as a means of rescuing and revitalizing passenger rail service in the U.S. I know that many older people prefer



to travel by train. Amtrak is trying to enlarge that frame of preference by making rail travel more attractive to more people. It is a difficult job, but I am confident the train -- especially on routes up to 400 miles -- can be restored as a popular and viable form of intercity transportation.

For those able and willing to travel by air, the most difficult obstacles are the terminals and the trip to and from them. But help is on the way. Air terminals today are being designed to minimize walking, baggage handling, and passenger processing -- and airport access plays a vital part in all airport planning.

On the highways, we have launched a nationwide program of driver control which, among other things, is intended to help our elder citizens cultivate better driving and pedestrian habits. We are deeply concerned that while the elderly comprise about 10 percent of the population, they account for 28 percent of pedestrian fatalities.

I think it's important to point out that while we hope to make elderly pedestrians more safety conscious, we are working equally hard to make all drivers more aware of their responsibilities behind the wheel.

Also regarding highway transportation we are well aware that our highway responsibilities include housing relocation. While some forms of relocation assistance have long been available, they -- on occasion -- have been impersonal and inconsiderate. It has long been my policy -- and the Congress has now approved it as a national policy -- that suitable replacement housing must be provided before any resident's life is disrupted by a highway project.

It doesn't make any sense to kick someone out in the street just to build another street! And in far too many cases the people being displaced were elderly people -- for whom the disruption was particularly harsh. The way the policy reads now, no Federally-financed construction project gets our approval unless and until adequate replacement housing is found, or if need be, built. Period.

There is another area of vital concern to the elderly. I touched upon it a moment ago while mentioning fixed incomes and the like. We recognize full well that the cost of public transportation is crucial, and we are inspecting very carefully the possibility of government-supported reduced fares for the elderly. Already, in a number of cities, experimental programs are underway for off-peak hours on bus and subway lines. But how about reduced fares on trains? And on planes and on other modes? We are watching all the experiments closely, and if such an approach is found to be sensible and produces measurable results, Government at all levels should be ready to tackle the problem on a nationwide basis. This is certainly an area worthy of full attention; it not only answers a need, it also gives local communities and the states an opportunity to help the Federal government provide answers to that need.



Our sensitivities to the needs of the elderly are by no means confined to the few programs I have mentioned here today. We are exploring a great host of possibilities, including such things as the use of school buses during off-hours, in an effort to bring the means of mobility to more of the elderly.

We don't question the suitability of school buses for trips to concerts, parks, ball games, medical facilities, shopping excursions, sightseeing trips, or what-have-you. Indeed, a preliminary study being funded by our Federal Highway Administration is even looking toward the possible use of off-duty mail trucks!

I will be realistic, however, and point out at least one problem communities are having with the use of such vehicles. The matter of liability coverage for public as well as privately-owned school buses used to transport the elderly seems, to many communities, to be an insurmountable problem. In this regard, we are now working on a program that will provide liability coverage for those school districts and private companies that want to participate. We feel that this is certainly a worthwhile function of a government that cares about its senior citizens. Nothing is insurmountable when you really want to do it. We are committed to all the research it takes and to whatever programs will do the job best. I assure you we welcome and solicit your suggestions and recommendations.

Our motives are not entirely free of self-interest. Old age is not something that happens only to the few or the unfortunate. The good Lord willing, we shall all come to know the rewards as well as the trials of old age.

By 1985, the over-65 population in our country will number 25 million; 30 million before the year 2000. We would be foolish to deprive our Nation of the great contributions which our elder citizens, by virtue of their maturity and experience, can make to our society and to the world. Yet, without adequate transportation, those contributions could be severely curtailed.

We cannot arrest the flight of time. But we can make the journey as comfortable and as fulfilling and as fruitful as possible. For transportation to be a good and faithful servant, it must be the servant to all.

Thank you for inviting me to be with you today.

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