



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION

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TO EDITORS:

The enclosed remarks prepared by Secretary of Transportation Claude S. Brinegar for delivery to the August 14 meeting of the Society of Automotive Engineers at Anaheim, California, provide a sharp delineation of the Secretary's position on urban mass transit. There are within the speech a number of points I think will be of interest to you, but I call your particular attention to the four key elements that the Secretary sees as composing the proper future role of the Federal Government in mass transit planning and funding.

First, Secretary Brinegar recommends financial assistance through 1980 in the range of \$1.5 to \$2 billion annually in general funds to help urban areas -- especially the larger ones -- improve the quality and quantity of public transit.

"This federal assistance should be directed towards cost-efficient solutions of existing urban transportation problems," the Secretary says. "It should only secondarily be directed to the broader objectives of stimulating urban area economic growth and increasing central city density."

The Secretary takes the position that too many fixed rail proposals are largely based on what should be the secondary objectives. "Totally apart from the pros and cons of the merits of such proposals, I do not believe that in today's inflationary environment the nation's taxpayers should be called upon to shoulder the enormous financial burdens of building all of them," the Secretary says.

Second, the Secretary encourages local urban planners to assume a greater responsibility in choosing between the urban transportation alternatives.

"More responsible local decision-making should improve the quality of planning and increase the productivity of the resulting investments," Secretary Brinegar says. "To this end we favor providing federal funds that are both dependable over time and flexible in use." He reiterates the Department's long-range objective of bringing into a single fund the bulk of the Urban Mass Transportation Administration's capital grant program and the urban highway programs of the Federal-Aid Highway Act.

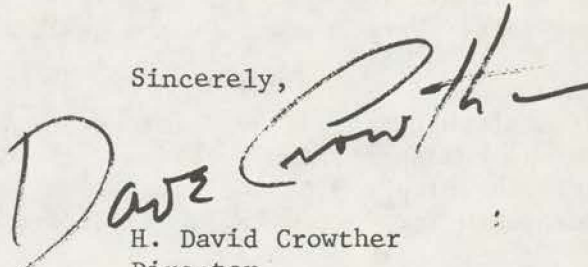
Third, Secretary Brinegar announces the Department's intention to develop for local implementation incentive systems to force more efficient vehicular use of existing streets and highways. "A necessary part of such an approach," he says, "is to see that the automobile does in fact pay its share of all the costs it imposes on the cities." As possible examples he cites stiff parking taxes, some form of special rush hour licensing, and for some cities, banning or limiting automobile access to the central core.

"We must bring the automobile into the mass transit solution, rather than try to work around it," Secretary Brinegar says. "Without question our automobiles can be better managed by such approaches as work-hour staggering, carpooling and by sophisticated traffic flow controls."

"Further," he says, "by creating special bus lanes and 'minibus' home pickup and delivery service, we should be able to entice reasonably large numbers of people to switch from their cars, especially as gasoline prices, downtown parking rates and other costs of automobile ownership and useage rise."

Fourth, the Secretary dedicates the Department to continuing the search for better mass transit technology. "We very much need new ideas -- especially ones that have favorable cost/benefit relationships and that, from the users' standpoint, offer attractive alternatives to the private automobile," the Secretary says. He places the highest value on the invention of a "lovable" bus.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dave Crowther", written in a cursive style.

H. David Crowther
Director
Office of Public Affairs

Enclosure



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

NEWS

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY WASHINGTON, D. C. 20590

05-S-74

REMARKS BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION CLAUDE S. BRINEGAR AT MEETING OF SOCIETY OF AUTOMOTIVE ENGINEERS, ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA, AUGUST 14, 1974.

MASS TRANSIT: PROGRESS AND PROBLEMS

It's a great personal pleasure to have this opportunity to speak to the Society of Automotive Engineers.

Tonight I'd like to focus on the very large and complex issue of urban mass transit--its present problems and likely future directions. It's not totally unfair to say at the start that I'll be talking about a king-sized problem that your own past successes have helped create. Perhaps if I can thus burden you with a little guilt, maybe I can enlist your talents in helping me find some much-needed solutions.

By bringing the automobile to its present level of technological excellence and relative low cost you have, in fact, given us an extraordinarily attractive means of personal transportation for our home-to-work and related family mobility needs. Today's automobile is convenient, reliable, comfortable, and private--all qualities that Americans place very high in their living standards. Just how high can be judged from the 100+ million automobiles now on our nearly 4 million miles of streets and highways, and from our willingness to sit patiently, or even impatiently, in these automobiles in traffic jams or, as we did last winter, in gasoline lines.

As automobile usage has grown, mass transit usage has fallen. In 1954, when there were half as many automobiles in use, nearly 10 billion public transit fares were paid; this year, by contrast, the total number of paid fares will barely exceed 5 billion. An interesting 20-year relationship: twice as many autos; half as many mass transit users.

The automobile, of course, is not without its drawbacks--both technical and social. While I don't plan to dwell on them tonight, I must note in passing that, taken as a class and relative to the alternatives, automobiles are responsible for excessive numbers of deaths and injuries; they are polluters of our air; and they are inefficient users of scarce liquid fuels. Progress is being made in each of these areas, and I'm optimistic that, with time, a great deal more will be accomplished. I would observe that this progress must be prompt and major. Clearly established national priorities will tolerate nothing less.

The automobile has also created a terrible dilemma for America's cities. Its positive qualities have made it possible for millions and millions to adopt a suburban lifestyle based on low-density use of relatively open spaces. During the decade between 1960 and 1970, for example, the population of America's suburbs grew by one-third, while the population of our central cities was, in total, unchanged. This growth has had a major impact on driving patterns. So many millions now drive to work at the same morning hours and to home at the same evening hours that our urban highway system's peak-hour capacities are, by and large, strained beyond reason.

Thus the dilemma: Shall we now add to our urban highway capacity because of today's peak-load demands? But if we do what assurances do we have that the cycle won't repeat--that a perverse version of one of Parkinson's Laws (a version that says that "demand rises to meet capacity") won't prevail? And, of course, we have the related questions of whose land do we take for the new highways and parking spaces? Unpleasant questions, to say the least.

Instead, let's look at the other side of the coin. Let's assume that we do not add materially to highway peak-hour capacity, but rather decide to entice or shift people from their automobiles by offering mass transit alternatives. Deciding upon the nature of this "enticement," upon the extent to which the shift will be voluntary or involuntary, and upon the proper methods for making it all fit smoothly within each community's own long-term plans--these are, to me, the essence of the mass transit problem.

Before exploring the issues raised by this approach, I think it would be worthwhile to pause for some perspective on our Nation's urban structure.

America's urban population can be largely found in the 33 areas of one million or more.* The largest, by far, is the New York City area with 11-1/2 million; the second largest is the Los Angeles area with 7 million; the third is Chicago, also with 7 million; the fourth is Philadelphia with 5 million, and the fifth is Detroit with 4 million. From there on down the numbers drop rapidly. At the lower end, we find such areas as San Jose, New Orleans, Tampa-St. Petersburg, and Portland, Oregon, each with almost exactly one million. Clearly, these 33 areas offer the bulk of the Nation's mass transit opportunities, as well as bracketing the full range of problems.

* These and the following numbers are based on 1970 data for the standard metropolitan statistical areas (SMSA's) for the designated urban regions.

Six of these areas--New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Boston, and Cleveland--have fixed rail transit systems in operation, and one, Washington, D.C., is well along in the building of a major new system. Two others, Baltimore and Atlanta, are in the final planning stages prior to field construction of a fixed rail system.

An examination of the home-to-work patterns in these 33 areas is both revealing and discouraging. The New York City area is head and shoulders above all other areas with nearly 50% of the work-trips by public transit--mostly on New York's long-established and extensive subway system. But for the other 32 urban areas the numbers are profoundly different: the average percentage using public transit for the home-to-work trip is in the order of 12%--only one in eight! And of the trips by public transit, at least 90% are by city bus.

The principal cause of this wide disparity in mass transit usage is to be found, I believe, in the central city population densities of these 33 urban areas. New York City, with 24 thousand per square mile is in a class by itself--ranking with Paris and London in terms of concentrations of people in the central city areas. Second in density is Philadelphia with 15 thousand per square mile, and in the third rank is Boston with 14 thousand. From there on down the central city densities fall rapidly. There are only 7 cities between 14 and 10 thousand per square mile. Los Angeles, for example, has 6 thousand; Seattle has 5 thousand; Houston and Dallas each have 3 thousand; and Kansas City has a central city density of only 2 thousand. The role of the automobile in shaping this last group of urban areas is unmistakably clear. Equally clear, at least to those of us who are struggling with it, is the enormous difficulty--a difficulty now imbedded in each city's structural pattern--in shifting any significant number of these people from the automobile to mass transit.

The perspective provided by this analysis, as well as other studies that time prevents me from going into, suggests four overriding points that must be recognized as we attempt to solve the mass transit problem:

Point one: Although we can make--and, in fact, as I will discuss shortly, are making--improvements in existing transit systems, we must not expect too much too fast from mass transit. As anyone who has tried to move about in New York or London or Paris at rush hours knows, a good mass transit system and enormous traffic problems can easily co-exist. The New York City area, with its heavy population density, is probably unique among American cities in its ability to collect and then move as much as half of the people to work and back by mass transit. For a handful of the other very large urban areas--such as Philadelphia, Chicago, and Boston--numbers as high as 25-30% using mass transit may be attainable, but for virtually all the rest, unless there are fundamental changes in the ways in which we treat our automobiles, 15 to 20% is more likely a realistic upper limit.

Point two: Available mass transit technology is largely limited to fixed guideway (mostly rail) systems and to buses. Unfortunately, fixed guideway rail systems cost a very great deal (over \$40 million a mile for subways, generally), take a decade or so to plan and put into place, and are able to attract significant ridership only when serving densely populated corridors. Viewed strictly from a technical standpoint, in all but a very few situations buses are cheaper, more quickly available, and can be more flexibly adapted to changing commuting patterns. Unfortunately, too many automobile commuters do not yet view buses as a very appealing alternative.

Point three: Many relatively lightly populated urban areas are seriously considering installing fixed guideway transit systems, not primarily as solutions to today's transit problems, but more as a deliberate means to shape future economic growth and to increase central city urban density. These may be desirable local objectives, bringing new jobs, increased land values, and higher tax bases, but I think it is important to recognize that are not direct, near-term transportation objectives. This essential distinction must be kept clearly in mind, especially when we come to the tough question of how to allocate limited funds to competing projects.

Point four: Since the automobile will almost certainly be our principal form of urban transportation for a long time, we must aggressively seek ways to avoid traffic congestion through better urban planning and better traffic management. Just as the automobile is being made environmentally clean and energy efficient, we must also turn our talents to making it more compatible with the urban physical setting.

So much for diagnosis. What are we, at the Federal level, now doing to help solve these problems?

By comparison with other Federal urban efforts--such as those on highways and housing--the Federal interest in helping public transit is a fairly recent one. The big step forward came in 1970 when the Urban Mass Transportation Assistance Act of 1964, which contained only modest funding levels, was amended to authorize direct Federal grants to urban areas of at least \$3 billion. This increase put the program in the "big leagues." In 1973 the Act was again amended to add an additional \$3 billion. This program, as is the highway program, is administered by the Department of Transportation.

Unlike the highway program, which is funded by special taxes held in a Trust Fund and allocated to the states by formula, the UMTA program is based on direct grants in response to specific applications, and is paid from general fund monies.

The thrust of UMTA's grant program since 1970 has been directed toward stopping the long-term decline in the quantity and quality of the Nation's urban mass transportation systems. In my judgment, substantial progress toward this objective has been made through the \$3.1 billion that has been committed in 750 separate capital grants.

About one-third of UMTA's funds have been used in connection with bus programs, with grants being made to 230 cities to help buy 20,000 new buses. In 90 of these cities the funds have been used to help purchase, for the municipal government, private bus systems that were on the verge of going out of business. In the Los Angeles area, UMTA has made several grants -- including one of \$28 million made in June -- to assist in the purchase of 1,100 new buses.

Virtually all the remainder -- and by far the largest share -- of UMTA's capital grants has been used to upgrade or complete the six urban fixed rail transit systems now in service. UMTA's grants have helped buy 2,000 new rapid transit cars, more than 1,000 commuter rail cars, and to help build nearly 200 miles of rail rapid transit track. It's perhaps worth adding, to illustrate how flexible we can be, that we have even helped finance the purchase of 14 ferry boats that provide connecting service to other transit systems.

The contrast between the two main types of programs is worth stressing: 33% of UMTA's funds has been used to help 230 cities upgrade bus systems; 60% has been used to help just six cities upgrade fixed rail systems.

The second step in the Federal effort to help urban transit is more recent and, though important, more modest. In 1973 the Federal Aid Highway Act was amended to permit a part -- about one-fifth -- of the regularly allocated highway trust fund monies to be used for either urban highways or urban mass transit capital projects, depending upon local choice. Cities were also given one-time options to "trade-in" certain unbuilt urban interstate segments in return for an equivalent amount of mass transit dollars. These two types of flexibility were permitted in order to encourage the cities to approach urban planning with a more open mind -- not simply to plan for more and more federal highways because of the narrowness of the funding method. Within the past three months four cities (Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and St. Louis) have elected to convert \$785 million from highway projects to mass transit projects. As the cities get better acquainted with the implementation procedures, I would expect increasing use of these flexibility provisions.

Let me next shift to a consideration of the proper future Federal role in mass transit. This is a particularly appropriate time to do this because we now are, in my judgment, at something of a cross-roads: UMTA's 1970 program of providing specific "quick-fix" grants to help reverse the transit decline has, in the main, been successful, and the inflexibility of the urban highway funding process has been overcome.

I would summarize the key elements of the proper future Federal role as follows:

1. At least until 1980 we should provide general fund financial assistance in the \$1-1/2 to \$2 billion a year range to help urban areas, especially the larger ones, improve the quantity and quality of public transit. This Federal assistance should be directed mainly towards cost-efficient solutions of existing urban transportation problems. It should only secondarily be directed to the broader objectives of stimulating urban-area economic growth and increasing central city density. In this connection I must note that I am concerned that too many big fixed-rail projects are being proposed based largely on these latter objectives. Totally apart from the pros and cons of the merits of such proposals, I do not believe that, in today's inflationary environment, the Nation's taxpayers should be called upon to shoulder the enormous financial burdens of building all of them. The billions of dollars that such systems cost are simply too high; the National benefits, in a public transit sense, are simply too low. Of course, if local communities elect to raise most of the needed money directly, as in the main, San Francisco did, we would have no objections.

2. We will encourage local urban planners to bear more of the burden of deciding which of the many competing programs they wish to push, given the limits on financial resources, and which they will defer. These are decisions that we are not well equipped to make at the Federal level, although we should -- and will -- do a better job than we have thusfar in providing the data, guidelines, and criteria needed to make prudent decisions. More responsible local decision making should improve the quality of planning and increase the productivity of the resulting investments. To this end we favor providing Federal funds that are both dependable over time and flexible in use. As part of this move we would like to see the bulk of the UMTA and urban highway programs brought under a single, long-term funding process.

3. We will develop -- and encourage local areas to implement -- various incentive systems to force more efficient vehicular usage of our existing streets and highways. A necessary part of such an approach is to see that the automobile does, in fact, pay its share of all the costs that it imposes on the cities. This could mean stiff parking taxes and possibly even some form of special "rush hour" license plates. For some cities it might even mean banning or severely limiting automobile access to the central core. The essence of what all this amounts to can be stated quite simply: we must bring the automobile into the mass transit "solution," rather than trying to work around it. Without question our automobiles can be better "manage" -- that is, can be better fitted into peak-hour capacity -- by such approaches as work-hour staggering, car pooling, and by sophisticated traffic flow controls. Further, by creating special bus lanes and "minibus" home pick-up and delivery service, we should be able to entice reasonably large numbers of people to switch from their cars, especially as gasoline prices, downtown parking rates,

and other costs of automobile ownership and usage rise. Bus system managers can also learn how to be better salesmen and better operators. By encouraging "jitney-type" limousine service and more flexible taxi service, we can discourage central city automobile use. To the engineer this "systems" approach to a solution may be obvious. Regrettably, it has not been obvious to enough urban planners -- or at least to those that possess the needed combination of effective power and the political courage to use it.

4. We must continue to seek better mass transit technology. Elsewhere in this Conference you will hear about our sponsored research into some of the newer ideas -- especially those that involve the "personal rapid transit" concept. I would only say here that we very much need new ideas -- especially ones that have favorable cost/benefit relationships and that, from the users' standpoint, offer attractive alternatives to the private automobile. To cite a specific need, if any of you could come up with what amounts to a "lovable bus," I would willingly award you the Department's equivalent of the Nobel Prize.

Finally, let me offer a few brief remarks on the principal mass transit legislative proposals now before Congress. I believe it is fair to group them broadly into three types: bad near-term; bad long-term; and reasonable long-term.

Senate Bill 386, or what is generally called the Minish-Williams Bill, after the New Jersey Congressman and Senator that introduced it, is "bad near-term." S.386 would supplement the existing FY 1975 \$1.3 billion mass transit capital program with a single one-year \$800 million fund. These special monies would be allocated by formula and could be used by transit operators to pay for either operations or capital projects. Since the formula in the Bill has been juggled so that over 20% of the \$800 million would go to the New York area, I interpret it as mainly an effort to keep fares on the New York subway at 35¢. The reasons for keeping this fare at 35¢ are, to me, largely local, including strong overtones of local politics. Certainly, the reasons are not strong enough to merit National taxpayer support of this magnitude. This Bill is clearly inflationary and, as well, has several objectionable technical features that I won't go into here. Fortunately, the House voted on July 30 to recommit it to Conference, thus practically insuring that it will die the quiet death it deserves.

Late in July the House Public Works Committee reported out a huge mass transit Bill (H.R. 12859) that is at the other extreme -- bad long-term. It proposes \$20 billion of general fund taxpayer money over the next 6 years, mostly for transit capital projects. In addition to its obvious inflationary aspects, it has a program structure that might serve to stimulate excessive fixed rail construction in cities that should be seeking less costly transit solutions. If it is passed in its present form, I would recommend a veto.

Between these two approaches is a reasonable middle ground. Last February the President sent to Congress the "Unified Transportation Assistance Program" (UTAP), a proposal that we believe fairly and adequately meets

the cities' needs for Federal transportation assistance. Between 1975 and 1980 UTAP would provide some \$10 billion either for urban transit capital or, within limits and based on local choice, for use in operations; it would also provide \$6 billion for urban highways; it would allocate most of the money by formula, thus making it dependable; and it would slowly blend the UMTA and urban highway programs so that local urban planners could flexibly choose between alternatives.

On other occasions I have indicated the Administration's willingness to consider reasonable modifications in UTAP's program structure and even funding levels. I remain hopeful that Congress will, in time, turn to this general approach.

I would conclude with this observation.

Quite clearly, what we casually call the mass transit problem is, in reality, a bundle of problems. Some are technical, some are sociological, some are legislative, some are human. Almost all of them touch, in varying ways, upon the automobile and its urban role. As we all seek rational long-term solutions to these problems we must recognize these interrelationships and we must deal with them with interrelated programs. I am working to see that these principles guide future Federal programs. I urge State and local governments to do likewise.

Thank you.

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