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REMARKS BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE BEFORE THE BUILDING TRADES EMPLOYERS ASSOCIATION, WALDORF ASTORIA, NEW YORK CITY, THURSDAY, APRIL 20, 1972, 8:00 P.M.

I am delighted to have this opportunity to be with the Building Trades Employers Association of New York. Here in this room tonight for this great annual dinner you have the leading men in the construction industry; and that takes in not only management and labor, but the investment community and state and local officials as well. Without the leadership present here virtually nothing would happen -- and the New York metropolitan area would quickly fall to second-rate status. I am well aware that better than 85 percent of the new buildings in the city are accounted for directly by this audience, and I am honored to have been asked to be with you.

It is a similar honor for me to perform the very pleasant task of bringing you the greetings of President Nixon. I mentioned to him that I would be with you this evening, and he asked me to be certain to extend his best wishes for a most pleasant and successful evening. As you are well aware, he is keenly interested in the continued growth and prosperity of the entire nation, and knows full well that the future of the Nation relies in large measure on our determination to continue to be builders -- in every sense of the word.

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Just as you won't settle for a second-rate city, he has no intention of presiding over a second-rate nation. And challenging though it may be, I am tremendously grateful for the opportunity to work with and for a man who has such a solid understanding of what made this nation great --- such a solid understanding of the bedrock principles of building on firm foundations.

Let me now place before you a list of four general objectives at the Department of Transportation -- four areas of concern in which we are centering our efforts and our energies.

Number one -- we are intensifying our research and development activities. The experts tell us that we will have to double transportation capacity by 1990. (Eighteen years from now). This can't possibly mean twice as much of everything we have in place, so it means we have to get a "bigger bang for our buck" from facilities already laid out. This means new vehicles, new thinking -- radically new technology. The tracked air cushion vehicle is a good example. We're working along those lines.

Second, we are greatly intensifying our overall effort in transportation safety. I created the post of an Assistant Secretary for Safety and Consumer Affairs -- and he worries about nothing but. This may be a carry-over from my days at the Volpe Construction Company when I maintained that if the top level of management doesn't care about industrial safety, no one will. It paid off for me in industry. We're going to make that policy pay in transportation.

A third area of concern is the environment. We are dedicated to preserving the environment. And this too, may be a carryover from the construction days. We were determined then that the hallmark of a good builder was to leave the land a little better than it was when we found it -- and that philosophy must be applied in Federally-financed transportation projects as well. That's the main reason we also created the post of the Assistant Secretary for Environment and Urban Systems. He is, in a sense, the "watchdog" of the Department -- making sure that what we do for man's short-range benefit isn't actually operating against man's long-range interests.

Fourth -- and I've saved this one for last -- we recognize an increasing need to be concerned about urban transportation.

The cities are the life-cells of the Nation. The cities, like New York, are the hubs of commerce, of transportation, of the interchange of ideas. If we cannot tame the transportation problems of the cities, then there isn't much point in working on the long-haul challenges. Transportation between cities becomes somewhat extraneous when the cities have choked to death -- either from congestion or from air pollution. By the same token, inner-city social programs aren't worth a hill of beans if there's no way to get to them. Job training, employment opportunities, health care, recreation -- none of these mean much at all if the user has to transfer three times (and wait in the rain) for a bus that only runs every hour and a half.

And it is totally fallacious to believe that the private automobile alone will even begin to solve our mobility problems in the great cities of America.

You well know the difficulties of commuting, the rising costs of the subway; the increasing costly congestion on urban streets and on through the whole list of city frustration and defeat.

Fortunately, two years ago, President Nixon foresaw this situation and sent to the Congress a bill to relieve the crisis. This landmark legislation -- the Urban Transit Assistance Act -- passed with overwhelming bi-partisan support. It provides federal funds to assist cities with their transit needs.

We are now proposing a complementary piece of legislation. And I consider this the single most important piece of legislation I have ever suggested. And here I will need your help. We are proposing the creation of an urban transportation fund which will be allotted to cities to be spent at their discretion in the solution of their surface transportation problems. We are further proposing that this fund start off at \$1 billion a year and that these monies be derived from our Federal Highway Trust Fund.

We need to enable construction of transportation facilities where people need them -- where they live and work and shop and do business. And we feel that the decision as to how to allocate these funds can best be made by those closest to the problem -- the local and state officials.

Our reasoning is that if we utilize some of the highway fund monies for public transportation we will win on two counts. First, we will get the facilities needed to unclog our urban areas -- subways, exclusive bus lanes, the new "people movers", and so forth. Second, by providing alternative ways to get around, we will have de-congested existing urban highways, and make highway travel that much easier.

From your own standpoint -- when your trucks are hauling gravel, or cement, or steel, or whatever you need at a construction site -- you don't want those trucks tied up in city traffic!

So our thinking---both are the Department of Transportation and the White House -- is to unclog those urban streets and keep traffic moving.

We're going to fight for this program as hard as we know how -- and I submit that anyone who has a stake in urban America (and that certainly means each of you) will help us in every way possible.

Whether the challenge lies in transportation, in housing, in the overall range of huge urban problems -- or in the very real problems that confront rural America -- this Nation is on the right track.

I solicit your help in keeping this Nation on track; I solicit your well-known ability to reason sharply, to estimate accurately, to construct boldly.

As this nation moves ahead into times that are filled with change, we must dedicate ourselves to being architects of proper change -- rather than victims of disastrous change.

Knowing this industry -- knowing you men -- knowing the traditions that reach down to bedrock -- I am confident that we can count on you in these times of stress, change, and opportunity.

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