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REMARKS BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE TO THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED PERSONS NATIONAL CONVENTION, SHERATON PARK HOTEL, WASHINGTON, D. C., WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14, 1972

I am very privileged to bring you the greetings of President Nixon. When he heard I was going to meet with you, he asked me to extend his best wishes for a productive convention. He is well aware of the problems of our senior generations and he is determined to bring about effective solutions to those problems.

His statement to the White House Conference on Aging pretty well sums up the policy of this Administration. President Nixon said, "We will be guided by this conviction: any action which enhances the dignity of older Americans enhances the dignity of all Americans. For unless the American dream comes true for the older generation, it cannot be complete for any generation."

And the President has backed this commitment with action. There has been a 68 percent increase in total Federal spending for the elderly during the past four years -- from \$29-1/2 billion in 1968 to an estimated \$50 billion in the coming Fiscal Year.

Yet money isn't everything as you well know. Facilities are equally important -- and access to transportation is especially vital. The transportation needs of the elderly have three characteristics that need special attention. The first is economic.

The retired person has very little discretionary income. Yet transportation is not a discretionary matter. It is a vital necessity. We cannot allow retired persons to be priced out of the transportation marketplace.

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Second, we must consider the operational constraints that impede the mobility of older citizens.

Our transportation systems all too often are weighed against the elderly. Many cannot afford or cannot drive automobiles. And they also have the right to choose not to drive. Yet when this Administration took office, the public transit they needed had been deteriorating; routes were being cut and schedules were being reduced. At the same time, fares were increasing. Moreover, what service remained was too often geared to the commuting wage earner or the student. (Which is fine if your Doctor's appointment is for 7:30 in the morning, and you'll be there until 4:30.)

The third factor includes the physical and psychological barriers that obstruct the mobility of the aging. Bus steps are high; subway doors close fast; and the distance between the ticket office and the train seat stretches many yards.

We in the Department of Transportation were only too well aware of these problems.

We went to work to resolve them.

We have already taken actions to ameliorate them.

We shall be taking other actions in the future.

One of our major thrusts at softening the economic constraints is President Nixon's historic Public Transportation Assistance Act of 1970. This 12-year program -- which received overwhelming bi-partisan support from the Congress -- provides Federal assistance to our cities and towns to aid them in saving, expanding and modernizing public transportation. And we are achieving results. Since 1969, we have helped purchase more than 7,650 new buses; more than 650 commuter rail cars and over 230 rapid rail cars. In all we have helped 37 cities take over their ailing private transit companies and in 16 cities, where there has not been a municipal takeover, we have helped stabilize privately owned systems.

I want to point out in connection with this aid that Section 16 of the Act requires that localities give special attention to the needs of the elderly when planning and designing urban mass transportation facilities and equipment. This means what it says. I have personally insisted that no capital grant or technical study 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.

For many Americans public transit is a vital prerequisite for medical care, for companionship, for shopping -- indeed for just about any activity beyond mere subsistence.

It is this necessity of urban transit that lies behind a new proposal we have sent to the Congress -- a new bill which I consider to be the most important single piece of transportation legislation we have submitted to Congress. The legislation provides for an urban transportation category of funding which will be used by our State and city officials to finance the type of surface transportation improvements which, in their determination, their cities need most. The important words here are these three -- "in their determination." We are, further proposing in our Bill that this money -- about \$1 billion at the outset -- come from the Highway Trust Fund. Until last year the Highway Fund could only be used by State officials for highway design and construction.

In the 1970 Federal Highway Act Congress -- again on a solid bi-partisan basis -- approved the use of Highway Trust Fund money for the vital task of highway safety.

I know I don't have to tell this group what a serious matter safety is. With cars and highways designed for 60 mile-an-hour speeds, it is absolutely necessary that every effort be made to make motoring safe. What used to be a "fender bender" back in the days when you and I were learning to drive is now -- all too often -- the last mile of the last road.

So we're delighted that the Congress agreed to make that money available. But we believe there is a need for additional flexibility. We want to give our cities good alternatives to the private automobile.

We want to permit local authorities to provide special transportation for retired persons, which they most definitely could do under this new program.

Our Bill will also provide for a similar but smaller rural transportation fund which will give our county and State officials similar freedom in rural areas.

Looking ahead, I am very certain in my own mind that we shall be seeing in our cities a return of widespread use of public transportation. It won't happen overnight, but the trend has started already. The fact is that public transit is not only the best answer but it is the only answer to a number of major urban problems.

We've already proven it.

A good example is the exclusive busway. Two years ago, before we funded the construction of such lanes along 12 miles of the Shirley Highway into Washington, 12,000 Northern Virginia residents commuted over that busy highway by car, compared to only 4,300 who rode the buses.

A morning rush hour count last month with 80 new buses showed a dramatic reversal of that situation -- 9,100 bus passengers and 7,700 auto commuters; a 110 percent increase for mass transit a reduction of 2,800 cars, and a more efficient use of highways for those automobiles.

At certain points during rush hours bus patronage is up 300 percent. The new flock of delighted bus riders find that they are saving -- on the average -- at least 30 minutes each way. I am equally convinced that with this rebirth of public transit we shall be seeing -- more attention being paid to all of the special needs of the elderly. We are seeing to that. You'll be able to look for such things as special scheduling -- special routes and more equitable rates. I can assure you that whenever I can, I am putting in both good words and good deeds aimed at bringing about such changes.

We are aware that the aging also have special preferences in long distance travel and these preferences are often best met by train service. We are also convinced that other travelers like trains. That's why we went to work to rescue railroad passenger service. President Nixon proposed the National Rail Passenger Bill and Congress supported him enthusiastically. And Amtrak came into being. It will take time, determination, and hard work, but already -- as the Amtrak ads say -- "We're making the trains worth riding again."

There's been a sharp increase in ridership in the Metroliners between Washington and New York. Elsewhere, we're putting newly-refurbished trains on the track as fast as they come from the shops. Two hundred and fifty four upgraded cars are already out on the system, and the total will be 1,290 by mid-summer. The famous "Broadway Limited" between Chicago and New York went out with a totally-refurbished line-up of cars on May 2 (Amtrak's first anniversary) with a capacity crowd of passengers.

So yes, we're convinced that the trains can make a comeback. And we're delighted that Congress has given us additional funding -- as they did just yesterday -- to assure that Amtrak will be even better.

But our program for retired persons goes beyond legislation. We are also studying new techniques and new systems that will increase the mobility of our senior citizens. And we are putting these systems to work to demonstrate what can be done.

In Haddonfield, New Jersey, for example, we are conducting a Dial-A-Ride demonstration. Twelve vehicles are available to answer special calls -- right to the front door -- thereby giving the elderly special service. One vehicle is equipped with a special wheelchair ramp. This is taxi-cab service at bus company prices.

In the Naugatuck Valley of Connecticut, we are sponsoring a similar project which will provide special transportation to health and medical facilities. And in St. Petersburg, Florida, we are conducting a total

city-wide study to develop the best kind of transportation for retirement communities.

In Helena, Montana, another project -- specifically for senior citizens -- is also operating on a response-to-demand basis and consists of a fleet of mixed vehicles including taxis.

So let it be said we in transportation are happy to make house calls.

In summary, then, we are very much aware that the problem of mobility for the aging is a special problem requiring special attention.

The story is the same for all of President Nixon's programs to help the aging.

He has gone to work to upgrade the quality of nursing homes, with nearly 450 new State nursing homes inspectors who went through Federally sponsored training programs. We have a new Office of Nursing Home Affairs.

The President has also moved to help older Americans lead dignified independent lives of their own. He increased the budget of the administration on aging ten-fold since taking office, thereby significantly increasing homemaker, transportation, nutrition and community services for the aging. He has set up new systems to reach and inform the elderly to benefits available to them. He is launching a campaign to increase the participation by older persons in the Department of Agriculture's Food Assistance Programs.

The President has also acted to make housing money more readily available to the elderly.

In spite of all this, some people are trying to claim that the President is ignoring the interests of older voters. This simply isn't so. The facts say otherwise.

Three years ago, the President proposed extensive legislation to increase Social Security benefits for older persons.

Three years ago, President Nixon asked for a floor to incomes of the elderly.

Three years ago, the President called for liberalizing the earnings test by increasing the amount of exempt earnings from \$1,680 to \$2,000 -- this figure to be automatically increased as the general earning level rises in the future. In 1968 he stated that he favors the complete elimination of this test and he still believes this should be our long-term objective.

Three years ago, he asked for more money for widows by increasing their benefits to the same level the husband would have received.

Three years ago, the President asked for all these things. Yet -- until yesterday, finally -- the Bill never got out of the Senate Committee!

This delay has cost the elderly \$5-1/2 billion in increased benefits. This delay has cost you \$16 million a day lost.

But you here tonight know all this. This is history. But what you may not know is that these proposals do not represent the President's final position on Social Security benefits and other provisions.

The President has assured me he will consider any legislation which is passed by the Congress concerning this matter. He realizes time has passed and some of the provisions may have become outdated and may, therefore, have to be revised. He knows this and is working to achieve equitable revisions.

His only inflexible statement on this matter of Social Security is that whatever provisions are finally adopted must be fiscally responsible. I think all of us here tonight agree that in this matter of Fiscal responsibility he has an obligation that he must honor. However, he has said -- and he personally believes -- that "the entire Nation has a high stake in a better life for its older citizens because it needs them. It needs the resources which they alone can offer." He believes we should provide them the support they need so that their experience can be utilized.

In keeping with this philosophy, President Nixon believes not only that the straight Social Security rate be increased but that the inequities in the present Social Security law should be rectified.

It must be remembered that these provisions are all part of one very big inclusive Social Security benefit package which must be considered as a whole.

And so my friends, President Nixon has been working and pleading for the cause of the aging. He has not achieved his full program. But knowing him as I do, I can promise that he will continue the fight. He will secure the rightful benefits that are yours. He will continue to help you to keep your proper places in the affairs of mankind. He will work to see that you lead productive satisfying and peaceful years.

I salute the AARP for high goals; I assure you that I join you in your quest; I wish you nothing but success, happiness, and peace.

Thank you.

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