



# DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

# NEWS

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REMARKS BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE TO THE AMERICAN TRANSIT ASSOCIATION, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 1972, 10:00 A.M.

I am delighted indeed to join the American Transit Association for another annual meeting. This is the third time in the past four years that I have had this pleasure -- and I would be batting four-for-four had I not been sent on a special European mission by President Nixon back in October of 1969 when you met in Montreal.

Under Secretary Jim Beggs stood in for me on that occasion, and told me afterwards that your Association -- whose members carry 85 percent of the Nation's transit riders -- was eager to work with the new Administration in every way to do the job that needed to be done.

Well, standing here this morning -- in front of an audience that has been on the front lines of the urban transportation crisis -- let me begin my remarks by thanking each and every one of you for the great job that has been done.

Prior to 1969 mass transit was strictly a back burner program in Washington. UMTA had a spartan staff, a shoestring budget, and no continuity of funding.

Today public transportation is a billion dollar item in the Federal budget.

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We would be nowhere near this figure if we had not had such support and hard work from all of you. The Urban Mass Transportation Assistance Act of 1970 laid the fiscal foundations for a 12-year program. And for more than a year now we have been trying to broaden the base for public transportation financing.

Ask yourselves, in all honesty, when in memory have you encountered an administration -- when can you recall Federal policies -- as aggressively PRO public transportation as the Administration, and the programs, of these past three-and-a-half years? When has the cause of better transportation in all its forms -- air, water and surface -- experienced so much attention or garnered more support, than in these years of the Nixon Administration?

I am delighted to stand at this podium today -- as his representative -- and bring his most sincere greetings and best wishes. President Nixon is vitally concerned with the future of America's cities -- and he knows, as you do, that "step one" in the quest for cities that work is the creation of cities in which people, goods and ideas move freely and efficiently. Under the President's leadership, and with hearty bi-partisan support in the Congress, we have seen eight major transportation bills -- landmark legislation -- become law...and Congress is not yet done with transportation legislation submitted by this Administration.

President Nixon has been working devotedly to revitalize public transportation and restore it to a place of true utility in our society. In his State of the Union Message last January, he clearly re-affirmed the importance of bringing public transportation back to life. "In the past two decades," he said, "highway building was our first priority, and our greatest success story. Now we must write a similar success story for mass transportation in the 1970's."

The first chapters in that success story are being written. Since passage of the UMTA Act, Federal dollars have helped buy 7,823 buses, 552 rapid transit cars, and 656 rail commuter cars. Federal assistance has saved or stabilized public transit systems in 60 cities. Capital, technical study, and planning grants have exceeded \$1 billion, more than previous administrations spent in five years.

And let me stress that point: These are just the FIRST CHAPTERS. I think this Administration has made quite clear its conviction that all the power -- all the brains -- all the know-how and the expertise -- are not the private preserve of the Washington Establishment.

As succeeding chapters of the urban transportation story unfold, the most vital fact will be the conviction of the American PEOPLE -- NOT the conviction of the government -- that public transportation is a vital necessity in every city in this Nation!

We have seen that conviction right here in Seattle -- in King County -- within the past week.



It was Federal seed-money -- \$447,000 in UMTA funds -- that financed the Puget Sound Governmental Conference's study of a county wide bus mass transit system. But it was the people themselves -- turning out at the polls to express their wishes -- who approved the proposal by a nearly 60-to-40 margin.

Perhaps -- with our "Blue Streak" Demonstration Project here -- we played a role in showing these voters what well-planned mass transit can do. But the decision to accept a 3/10 of a cent sales tax for transit purposes was a decision made by the people, for the people.

In the same way, the people of metropolitan Atlanta put their money on the line a year ago when they voted approval for a one-cent sales tax to underwrite not only a takeover of the bus system but also the design and construction of a multi-modal areawide transit system that will be the envy of everyone. I was in Atlanta just 12 days ago, and the enthusiasm in that community for the MARTA System is truly exhilarating. One of the great satisfactions of public service -- at any level, whether you're a bus driver or the Secretary of Transportation -- is to know that you are involved in a project that has wide popular support.

Look at San Francisco. It was a long hard pull to bring the BART System from a dream to reality -- but that dream is paying off with a system that works, that is being patronized, that was designed to do the job -- and most of all, a system in which the people of the Bay Area are taking tremendous pride.

And it isn't just the big metropolitan areas; when there is thorough community involvement in public transportation -- such as you have in Erie, Pennsylvania, or in Salt Lake City, Utah, -- you CAN have a system that is an asset to the city and not a burden on the taxpayer.

We -- and by this I mean not just the government, but you people and your communities as well -- must do much more than just salvage systems or replenish hardware.

We want to see people better served; our urban centers saved from strangulation and suffocation. I heard it said a few years ago that public transit in America was too far gone...the outlook for any real recovery a bleak and dismal one. You and I know better. Together we have helped get the adrenalin flowing. And we have seen enough color come back into the complexion of public transportation to be convinced that our goals are realistic and reachable.

I mentioned Seattle's "Blue Streak" express bus project a moment ago. We're proud of that project; we're glad we participated. But sprinkling the country with Demonstration Grants does not solve our long-term problems. "CARE Packages" alone will not cure public transportation's ills. But together we are proving a point -- that public transportation CAN be revived, and revitalized, to the betterment of the community. And it is also becoming increasingly obvious that urban planners and transportation planners must work together as a team to combine housing, shopping, schools, jobs and all the rest into total communities that WORK.



So urban transportation, in the long run, involves more than just moving people, it relates directly to the FORWARD MOVEMENT of any community.

If I thought for one minute that in any given Capital Grant application we were merely prolonging the life of a transit system and not enriching the life of the community, I would consider denying that grant, no matter how large the city or desperate the situation. The whole purpose in correcting transportation insufficiencies, imbalances or inequities is to help meet social and human needs -- to enable people to get to schools, to jobs, and to markets.

It has consistently been our view that keeping transit wheels turning is NOT ENOUGH.

We must move in new directions, turn to new ideas, and devote more resources and resourcefulness to improving the FUNCTION of public transportation as well as its facilities.

It also remains our steadfast position that first priority must go to our cities, and that Federal-aid programs must be made more flexible to permit more say on the part of cities and States on how urban transportation funds are spent.

Accordingly, last March -- at the President's request -- I submitted legislation calling for a broadening (to some extent) of the utilization of revenues that pour into the Highway Trust Fund.

And just 6 days ago the United States Senate took historic action.

For the first time in the history of our Nation, the Senate approved the use of those funds for purposes other than just the design and construction of highways. As the American Transit Association is well aware, the Senate voted an amendment to the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1972 which provides \$800 million that may be used, on an optional basis, for either highways, the purchase of buses, or rail rapid transit systems.

I would remind you that the 1972 Federal-Aid Highway Act not only provides flexibility to local and State officials to select that mode -- or mix of modes -- that will help solve their total transportation problem; it does it in such a way that it does not interfere with or lessen the amounts currently available for the Interstate, primary, secondary, or rural roads.

Here again, the President has indicated his complete belief in local officials and their ability to solve their own problems.

While most cities would undoubtedly use public transportation money for the improvement of bus service, there are cities where support for rail transit is urgently needed. We believe every community should have that choice, and the flexibility to program funds to meet its identified transportation priorities. The challenge is a local one, and the option should rest in local hands.



We also believe that to attain parity and avoid bias in urban transportation choices, the Federal share in transit projects funded under the UMTA program should be raised to 70 percent, which is the Federal share for non-Interstate highway projects.

Seventy years ago -- or even 90 years ago, when this Association was in its infancy -- we needed public transit in America because not everyone could afford a car. Today we need it because nearly everyone CAN afford a car. So now it is our challenge to make transit competitive WITH the car.

Yet you know and I know that where people shun bus travel today it is because the bus is inconvenient. Many transit systems today are unavoidably commuter-oriented, the last choice or the only choice available to the commuter.

How many transit systems serve the suburbs in any realistic way? How many are suited to the "shop and go" needs of the housewife, or to the door-to-door needs of the very young, the elderly, or the infirm?

The private automobile is the servant of its owner. The transit passenger, on the other hand, must await the pleasure of the bus or the subway car. He is at the mercy of its schedule, its route structure, and its space limitations.

So let's admit that we will never be very successful in attracting people back to public transit so long as public transit is clothed in the lifestyle of another era. We will be successful -- and we are being successful -- in winning converts when we demonstrate that public transportation systems can compete with the private automobile in quality and speed of service, in comfort and convenience, and in cost.

Bringing that to pass is your goal as it is mine. Our Shirley Highway exclusive bus lane experiment in Virginia, the Blue Streak service here in Seattle, the Cleveland Airporter, the growing popularity of Philadelphia's Lindenwold Line, the public responsiveness in Atlanta and wherever fares have been reduced and service enhanced, the investments in new transit facilities in Washington, Baltimore, Boston, San Francisco, Houston, and elsewhere: these are more than token expressions of a revival in public transportation that can usher in a new golden age of urban mobility.

In closing, let me make a rather unusual point.

This is National Highway Week. There may be those who will interpret what I have said here today as being disloyal to our highway system -- a system I helped build -- or critical of its contributions to our society, our mobility, and our prosperity.

Certainly that is not the case. Our highways are essential to our commerce...indispensable to the movement of people and products. Without our highways, public transportation by bus could not exist or grow. Without President Eisenhower's foresight in launching the Interstate program and President Nixon's commitment to its completion, our roadway system would be hopelessly constricted, dangerously out-of-date, and totally inadequate to our growing needs.



The debate today must not revolve around the relative merits of roads or rails, steel wheels or rubber tires, personal rapid transit or public mass transit. Our concern must be centered on the basic problem, which is supplying the people-moving capacity our cities must have to survive the seventies and remain mobile in the eighties.

That's why President Nixon believes the House should concur in the action of the Senate in voting to support urban public transportation needs through highway user revenues.

That's why he believes cities should have the choice in determining how transportation funds are expended.

Our Transportation Needs Study clearly showed the tremendous gap that must be closed between the capacity of urban transportation systems today and the needs of tomorrow. It also revealed the diversity of need, both in capacity and mode, that exists from State-to-State, locality-to-locality. I know of no city in America that pretends the job can be done by the automobile alone.

Even leaders in the auto-related industries -- the manufacturers, the oil companies, the tire and accessory suppliers -- recognize and support the necessity for better public transit. It's becoming increasingly apparent that the investment of highway-generated funds in projects designed to relieve the congestion on our roads is a proper and fruitful expenditure of user taxes.

So in my judgment there is no better message I could bring during National Highway Week -- no better news for highway user and transit rider alike -- than our pledge of continued commitment to the cause of better public transportation throughout America.

Thank you for inviting me to your 91st Annual Meeting. I hope that the events of these three days prove to be pleasant, productive and profitable for all the people and the purposes of the transit industry.

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