



**DEPARTMENT OF  
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REMARKS OF U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE TO THE AMERICAN TRANSIT ASSOCIATION, GRAND BALLROOM, STATLER HILTON HOTEL, DALLAS, TEXAS, MONDAY, OCTOBER 4, 1971, 1:15 P.M.

Thank you Mr. Haugh and Mr. Cochran for this great honor -- this very esteemed award. I can assure you that I intend to continue to work for public transportation in the tradition exemplified by the Haugh Award.

I'm going to show this to all my critics -- the ones who said my clothes were made of concrete! Well, I do know how to build highways. But I also know how to put commuter buses on them. And I thank you very much for this award.

And I want to thank you for all your efforts at focusing public attention on the urban transportation needs facing this nation. It seems almost impossible that your first annual meeting could have been held 90 years ago -- seven years before America's first commercial trolley line, and 16 years before the first subway.

That fact that you are 90 years old should establish the pre-eminence of ATA in the mass transit field.

With so many new mass transit opportunities on the horizon, it's easy to forget that transportation problems have been with us since antiquity. Ever since the Sumarians invented the wheel, people have been trying to provide for the easy movement of people and goods to, from and within the cities of the world.

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And we have made progress. Our interstate highway system can shuttle families from Maine to California without ever hitting a stop light. Airplanes circle the globe in hours. And general mobility is greater than ever before.

But there are problems. Most are due to congestion. Most are in our cities. And most have to do with the daily ritual of going to and from work. To these problems, we must find immediate solutions.

Wishing away the automobile or turning back the clock will not resolve urban transportation dilemmas. Neither can we spend all of our time looking wistfully to dream-machines that are still a few years away. Nor can we rely -- just yet -- on the technical promises implicit in the turbine engine, the tracked air cushion vehicle, or the linear induction motor.

These and other promising approaches to the people-moving problem may ultimately result in some new mecca of mobility. In fact they probably will. I have great faith in technology. But we cannot await final or perfect answers. Transportation is a daily -- even an hourly -- need for hundreds of millions of city and suburban dwellers around the world.

Just the other day I was handed a magazine article written by a local transit official. The headline read: "The transit problem must be solved correctly if cities are to prosper." I thought that headline indicated great foresight. Then I noticed the date -- October 1920. The author was Edward Dana, General Manager of the Boston elevated railway company. And he did show great foresight. Unfortunately, not everyone was listening back in 1920. If they had been, we wouldn't be faced with the catch up job that confronts us now.

Of course not all cities are that far back. Perhaps because Dallas is a young city or perhaps because of its history of dynamic and progressive leadership -- but whatever the reason -- Dallas is one of the cities that has shown great foresight.

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The ultra-modern bus system here is a model for judging others. The shining fleet of 440 air-conditioned buses roll over one of the best route patterns I've seen. And at least 360 of those buses are almost brand new. I know because we helped pay for them through legislative authority enacted since the Nixon Administration came into office. Even more significant is the fact that here in Dallas the fare boxes are paying the bills -- and with a basic adult fare of only 35 cents. That fact alone makes this bus system and its management among the giants in the mass transit field.

It might have been this historic western city that President Nixon was thinking of when he signed the Urban Mass Transportation Assistance Act of 1970. He said this new legislation would help meet the "challenges of our urban frontier."

We must face those frontiers as boldly and as resolutely as our predecessors faced the frontiers of wilderness America. We seem to have forgotten that the pathways that led outward from our trading posts and settlements -- from Arlington, Dallas, Houston, and Amarillo -- knitted a Nation together. And today those trading posts are busy centers of commerce and transportation. The frontiers have come home to our doorsteps.

From New York to Hawaii -- from Brownsville to Duluth -- the mobility problem is the same: getting from the front doorstep to work, or church or play. And too many of our citizens today are denied access to adequate transportation.

It is surely no revelation to this audience that 94 percent of all travel in urbanized areas is by automobile. Yet for a variety of reasons, not everyone can own or drive a car. Not everyone wants to own or drive a car. Most important, not everyone wants to drive a car all the time. And for these people we must provide an alternative.

So obviously, public transit must be strengthened. That's a very basic goal at the Department of Transportation. And that's why you will see Federal Highway Administrator Frank Turner and Urban Mass Transportation Administrator Carlos Villarreal both at this meeting. We are all working together to solve this problem.

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Now, I am not here to prescribe the perfect transit tonic or to recommend a transportation transplant guaranteed to save the circulation system of our cities. In traveling abroad, however, I have noted what governments and city fathers the world around are doing to improve urban mobility.

And I can tell you that in many ways the cities of Europe and Asia are stealing a march on the United States in public transportation planning and execution.

We can surely learn a thing or two about public transportation from our neighbor Nations as well. Subway facilities in Mexico City and in Toronto and Montreal are far advanced.

But this Administration and the Department of Transportation are not locked into position that the only kind of transit is rail -- or exclusive, fixed right-of-way -- transit systems.

Our policy is that the decision as to what type of public transportation to utilize is a local decision. As President Nixon recently said, "the hard fact is that the best mixture of transportation modes is not something that remote officials in Washington can determine in advance for all cities, of all sizes and descriptions, in all parts of the country."

We make available technical study money. We seek a close planning relationship. But in the final analysis it is up to the local community to decide what sort of public transportation will work best.

And I want to emphasize that should the local decision be for fixed-right-of-way transit, and if it is economically and technically feasible, we are quite ready to entertain grant applications.

But I don't need to tell this group that in the vast majority of cases, the best solution -- based on local decisions -- has been to optimize existing bus systems all over the country. We are tremendously delighted with the phenomenal success (and "phenomenal" is a conservative word) of exclusive bus lanes in Washington on Shirley Highway, in Boston on the Southwest Expressway, in New Jersey on the Lincoln Tunnel approaches, and in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

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These innovations save time for commuters, save money for taxpayers, and save trouble for the cities. Utilizing the newest generation of buses available, such projects provide the commuter with air-conditioning, comfortable seats, carpeting, low-pollution engines, flexible routings and courteous service.

Not only do fleets of buses in exclusive lanes cut trip times by as much as one-half, they cut sharply into the total number of vehicles on the highway thereby lessening congestion on overcrowded freeways and in center city areas.

Even in smaller cities -- where exclusive busways are not yet needed or practical -- a simple upgrading of rolling stock has made urban bus travel more attractive and better utilized. We are especially proud of the 7,100 new buses we have helped purchase in recent years and the 52 bus systems that have been revitalized with federal funds.

But sooner or later, the one nut every transportation planner has to crack is cost. Urban transit in recent years has not been a popular venture or a profitable investment. The pattern of increasing costs followed by rising fares and declining ridership must be broken. Transit economics will have to be recycled if public transportation is to be restored to the ranks of true public utility. But first it must survive.

Recognizing this, the Department of Transportation already has made nearly 200 capital improvement grants for mass transit, totalling more than a billion dollars. But even this figure dims in comparison to the national need -- which some authorities put as high as \$33 billion in the next 10 to 20 years. We don't know the exact need. But we're going to find out.

We are now in the process of assimilating data for our 1972 National Transportation Needs Study. This study is of special significance to those of you in the transit field. It will be the first time the Federal government has worked to gauge transportation needs across the board -- in every mode -- in order to determine investment priorities. The data collection and staff analysis for this study are now well underway. And the final report should be ready for Congress early in the 1972 legislative session.

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Gentlemen, our Department is only four years old. But we spend much of our time coping with transportation myths that are 100 years old. We hear of people who won't ride buses, of the automobile romance, of the subway stigma, of the death-defying pedestrian. We need to destroy all of these old wives' tales and begin anew. And one way to start is by finding out just what our transportation system consists of. The needs study is a solid beginning.

Prior to this Administration, Federal funding for public transit never exceeded \$200 million a year. Under the higher priority President Nixon has accorded it, and through the impetus supplied by the Urban Transportation Assistance Act, \$435 million of the first \$3.1 billion authorized by that Act was made available last year. And we will have obligated more money in the 18 months beginning January 1, 1971, that was obligated in the previous 10 years.

It is the President's purpose to supply financial aid for urban transportation projects just as fully and as freely as it can be effectively applied. And that leads to the question: What about operating subsidies, or "fare stabilization", or whatever you want to call it?

As you know, the legislative history of this question is long and detailed. The Federal government has continually maintained that operating subsidies constitute an unwarranted intervention into the affairs of local governments and private operators. Federal encroachment in local affairs has mushroomed in recent years. And one of the primary tenets of the Nixon Administration is to reverse this trend.

However, we realize the very special needs and characteristics of Urban Mass Transit Systems. And we are reviewing the entire question of operating subsidies. Within the next two weeks -- by October 15 -- I will report to Congress the findings of an intensive study now underway in the Department on this very question. And I assure you that the actions and words of this conference will be considered in that report.

We now have a new interest -- a new demand -- in this country for better urban mass transportation. We must not drop the gauntlet. We must pick it up and seize the initiative.

As leaders of the American transit industry, your leadership is essential to this task.

The march is on for better mass transit in America. And it is time to pick up the step.

Thank you.

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