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WASHINGTON, D. C. 20590

STATEMENT OF JOHN A. VOLPE, SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION, BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ROADS, HOUSE PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE, REGARDING FEDERAL  
HIGHWAY LEGISLATION, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10, 1970.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

I appreciate this opportunity to appear before you to discuss our  
highway programs and the legislation for extending and strengthening them.  
I would also like to express my appreciation to the Committee for being so  
accommodating in scheduling the Department's presentation.

We have all heard much about a "balanced transportation system" although  
at times advocates for one mode or another tend to argue that the system  
should be balanced in their favor. Before going into a discussion of specific  
programs, I would first like to inject a little "balance" and perspective  
into the discussion.

This country's Interstate highway system has often been referred to as  
the greatest public works project in the history of man. By itself, that  
fact, though impressive, indicates nothing about whether the program has been  
"good" or "bad". I firmly believe, from the perspective of years of experience  
as a Public Works Commissioner, Federal Highway Administrator, Governor, and  
now Secretary of Transportation, that this Nation's highway program has been  
highly beneficial and a very good thing for the American people.

The Interstate System has linked together the widely separated regions  
of this vast continent -- making these truly the united states. It has  
brought tremendous economic growth to under-developed areas, and industry  
and millions of jobs to our people. Serving both as a connection for commerce  
and as a means of cultural exchange, it will continue to exert a strong  
cohesive force in the years ahead.

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One interesting issue in the recent debate over the highway program is whether more cars have required better highways or whether better highways have stimulated the desire for more cars. While both propositions are probably true, it is pertinent to note that in 1920 there were 9.2 million motor vehicles in the United States. By 1955, this number had grown to 62.7 million -- almost a six-fold growth before the Interstate System was even started. Assuming a continuation of that growth rate, it can be seen that without improved highway systems traffic congestion would be incredibly worse than it is today. To cite but one example, I well recall conditions on the Newburyport Turnpike in Massachusetts in the 1930's and 1940's. It used to be a virtual parking lot ten to twenty miles long on holidays and weekends. Today it moves a heavy flow of traffic efficiently and rapidly, with a higher degree of safety.

Improved safety has been a very important contribution of the Interstate System. It has been clearly demonstrated that, on the average, for every five miles of Interstate which is opened to traffic one fatality is avoided each year. This means that when the Interstate is completed it will account for saving as many as 8,000 lives per year.

All of this is on the credit side of the picture. I realize there is a debit side as well. Certainly, the automobile has created serious air pollution problems in many localities. The construction of urban freeways has been a disruptive force in some of our urban areas and perhaps accelerated the process of central city decay. Nor have we always been as mindful as we should have been of the natural beauty of the countryside in laying out and constructing our highway system.



I would not defend these consequences as being the necessary price of progress. I would point out, however, that we are talking about a very small percentage of the Interstate System and an extremely small percentage of the Federal-aid highway system.

Furthermore, much of the current concern with environmental programs -- which I wholeheartedly share as evidenced by the fact that I established the Office of Environment and Urban Systems as my first official act even before environmental protection became a popular issue -- is a very recent development and much of the scientific knowledge on which it is based is relatively new. For example, science has only very recently made us aware of the extent of the environmental hazard created by auto exhaust fumes. In fact, all of the effects of such pollution is still not clear, although we do know that it is harmful in one way or another. The realization of the harmful effects of exhaust pollution lies behind the Department's efforts to reduce smoke emission from jet aircraft, to encourage the development of low-emission vehicles, to conduct demonstrations as to the feasibility of gas turbine buses, and so on. As our knowledge advances, we should deal resolutely with these and all other aspects of environmental pollution -- but we should not rush to condemn those who preceded us who did not have the benefit of our current knowledge.

What then is my conclusion on the question of balanced transportation in this country? It is simply this: the problem is not how much we have spent on highways in the past, but how very little we have spent on public transportation! For the future, there should be a better balance of effort. Federal investment in subways, bus systems, rail passenger lines, have been almost entirely neglected. The American people have expressed

their strong desire for reliable private transportation through the automobile or reliable, fast, long-distance transportation via the airplane. It is only recently, when these two modes have begun to show the strains of this heavy reliance, that much of the public has come to realize that very good transportation could exist in other modes if it were available and supported.

Both the Administration and the Congress have recognized the need to very substantially increase our investment in the other modes of ground transportation. The Administration has proposed a \$10 billion mass transportation improvement program to meet the deficiencies of the past and the challenges of the next decade. This measure was passed by the Senate by an overwhelming vote, and I am hopeful of early House action. The Senate has also passed, with strong Administration support, a bill designed to stop the decline and imminent disappearance of railroad passenger service. This bill would establish a National Railroad Passenger Corporation which, with a substantial capital contribution from the Federal Government and the railroads, would assume responsibility for providing modern, fast, clean, and timely rail passenger service in every market where such service would have a fair chance of success. Here, too, I am hopeful that the House will act promptly and favorably.

Even with these new, imaginative, and well-financed programs designed to cope with the public transportation problem, we will not have removed the need to improve our urban highway systems. Most public transportation is now, and will continue to be, provided by buses running on rubber tires over city streets. Much can be done to improve that service by improving the streets, by new traffic control techniques, and numerous other design changes. The



automobile is here to stay and we will have to continue to improve the present Federal-aid highway system quite apart from the Interstate program.

In short, the bill which the Administration has submitted to the Congress is not intended to foreshadow the withering away of the Federal highway program. The Administration is firmly committed to finishing the Interstate System. I should add the qualification "virtually" because it may well be that some small segments of the presently designated 42,500 miles will not be completed. With the possible exception of such segments, we look to completion of the Interstate System within the next seven or eight years. Some scaling down in the authorization level is being recommended in fiscal years 1975 and 1976 to enable us to maintain more flexibility in dealing with our total transportation needs. We have attempted, however, to maintain the program at a sufficiently high level so as not to disrupt sound planning by the states for completion of the system. The scaling down does reflect the realization that we have to establish priorities, both in the context of our total transportation needs and in the context of our total national budgetary requirements. The authorization levels proposed reflect the Administration's determination to maintain steady progress in meeting our transportation needs within the framework of a sound national budget.

While there are many issues involving the highway program before the Committee, certainly the most important are the level of the highway authorizations, the level and direction of the highway safety programs, and the future of the highway beautification program. I would like to turn now to the Administration's bill and discuss in general terms our approach to each of these issues.

With respect to the Interstate authorizations, we are proposing an increase of slightly over \$9,000,000,000 through fiscal year 1976, consisting of a \$1,775,000,000 increase in the existing fiscal year 1974 authorization, \$3,750,000,000 in fiscal year 1975, and \$3,500,000,000 in fiscal year 1976. Based on the 1970 cost estimate, this will leave an unauthorized balance of \$2,875,000,000. Further authorizations looking toward completion of the Interstate can be submitted to Congress when the final cost figure will be known with more accuracy.

The authorizations for the ABC system would be continued at their present level through fiscal years 1972 and 1973. We realize that there are many unfilled needs on the primary and secondary road system, including constructing new roads, up-grading existing roads, and repairing and replacing bridges. Many of the State Highway Departments feel that their non-Interstate needs are greater than the level we have proposed and have so testified before this Committee. The Administration feels, however, that priority should be given to the Interstate and that to increase the present level of effort on primary and secondary roads without substantially paring back the Interstate System would not be sound from a fiscal standpoint nor from a national priority standpoint.

The authorizations for the TOPICS program and the rural primary and secondary road program would be continued at their present level through fiscal year 1973. The TOPICS program, which was initiated with the 1968 Act, was designed to make better and safer use of existing urban highway facilities through the application of traffic engineering techniques. As of



March 1, 1970, approximately 300 urban jurisdictions were formally engaged in TOPICS activity. This has proved to be a very popular program and, in the long run, should show some real positive results. While no special program requirements have been developed for the expenditure of the rural primary and secondary funds, the money authorized has made possible much needed improvements in rural areas that otherwise could not have been financed.

The forest highways and public lands highways programs would also be continued through 1973 at their existing levels. These programs provide support for full utilization of our forests and public lands. Also, they increase the recreational opportunities for all Americans and facilitate the marketing of timber and other resources needed by our economy.

I would like to turn now to a discussion of the highway beautification program. During the past year, we have carefully reviewed this program and given a great deal of thought to its future direction. We feel strongly that the program has made, and will continue to make, a significant contribution toward enhancing the visual quality of the Nation's highways. The erection of new uncontrolled billboards has been stopped in the 32 states which have passed outdoor advertising control legislation; 10 percent of the junkyards visible from Interstate and Federal-aid primary highways have been screened or removed; approximately 500 rest areas have been constructed or programmed; over 5,000 scenic easements have been purchased or programmed; and considerable work has been done on landscaping existing highway rights-of-way.

However, as you know, there have also been serious problems with the program. The 1965 Act purported to guarantee just compensation to property owners but too often it has had the opposite effect. The low levels of

appropriations during the entire life of the statute coupled with the Federal inducement to the states to enforce compliance laws and enter into agreements has been the direct cause in this loss of value. The burdens of this program have fallen most heavily on the small sign companies.

Nonetheless, in my view, the objective of the beautification program is sound and the Federal Government has gone too far down the road and made too many promises to turn back. I think we can, and should, take a positive approach to the billboard problem and get on with the job.

While numerous implementing problems arose in the first two years of the program, it is clear that inadequate funding has been the primary problem. Because of the severe budgetary constraints under which we must continue to operate, the Administration proposal includes measures to reduce the total cost of the program and to reallocate some resources to the billboard control program so that adequate funding can be achieved without an unreasonable additional budgetary impact. And this will not be done by ignoring the property rights of sign owners. "Just compensation" will be paid for every sign removed under this program.

Our basic approach would be to phase the program over a five- to six-year period. The total cost to the Federal Government of taking down all non-conforming signs would be about \$300 million. We would propose establishing a funding level of about \$50 million per year and maintaining that level until the job is done. The billboard program would be financed in part by shifting funds from the landscaping and scenic enhancement program. Given the state of the billboard program, I believe we have to give it higher priority than the landscaping program, at least for the immediate future.



In each of the first two years of the program, we would use up to \$15 million of the amount authorized to undertake demonstration projects to determine the best means of accomplishing billboard removal. In particular, we would explore the feasibility of acquiring non-conforming signs on a company-by-company basis rather than on a sign-by-sign basis.

We would also make two other significant changes in the beautification legislation. We would remove the present 660-foot limit on billboard and junkyard control and extend the limit to include all signs or junkyards visible from the controlled highway. This is essential if we are to stop the erection of huge billboards 661 feet from the highway, which was one direct consequence of the existing 660-foot limit.

We would also change the present penalty provision for non-complying states. I do not believe it is reasonable to penalize states for failing to take down billboards when the Federal Government has failed to provide its matching share of the cost. However, I believe we should penalize states which take no action before the end of their next legislative session to prohibit the erection of new non-conforming signs. The penalty provision would be further modified to start at 1 percent of the state apportionment and increase by 1 percent for each year of non-compliance up to a total of 10 percent of the apportionment. The existing flat 10 percent penalty has proved to be too drastic in practice and I think we ought to recognize that fact.

There are many advantages to this new approach to highway beautification. First, it is a positive approach to environmental improvement. Second,

through the phasing concept, we could lower total program costs to a fundable level. Third, demonstration programs, such as the company-by-company approach, may show the way to reducing some of the adverse effects of billboard control on the outdoor advertising industry, particularly for the smaller companies. Finally, we would have a realistic program which would provide the states the assurance necessary to elicit their full cooperation. Where such cooperation was not forthcoming, we would have an enforceable penalty.

Highway safety is another area in which the Department is attempting to develop some new initiatives. In 1969, more than 56 thousand people lost their lives on the highway. In this connection, I should point out that we have developed data in the course of our automobile insurance study which indicates that about 7 thousand more persons will die this year from injuries incurred in 1969 or previous years. Therefore, the actual number of deaths attributable to accidents in 1969 would be on the order of 62 thousand. As a further result of highway accidents in 1969, 2 million people suffered disabling injuries, and almost \$12 billion were lost in property damage. In the last ten years, over one-half million people have died on the highway and in the last 20 years, in excess of 900 thousand! We simply must stop this carnage. Through our motor vehicle safety standards, we are making the automobile safer. Through improved highway construction and design standards, we are making the highway itself safer. Increasingly, the problem is one of saving the driver from himself and from other drivers. It is clear beyond any doubt that the drinking driver is the foremost contributor to the maiming and killing which takes place annually on our highway system. We must launch a full-scale attack on the problem drinker who drives. From experience in other countries, notably Britain and Sweden, it is clear that with a concerted effort we can reduce the alcohol related accidents.



The Department is proposing a broad-scale demonstration program effort designed to develop and test means of coping with the problem drinker who drives. We are planning to conduct action programs in cities throughout the United States. These would be local action programs aimed at identifying the problem drinker, deciding on the extent of his drinking problem, and taking action to minimize the likelihood of his driving after drinking.

Concurrently with this attack on the alcohol problem, we plan to establish demonstration programs covering one or more highway safety standards, providing sufficient funding over a sufficient length of time to measure the results. The knowledge learned from these demonstrations will permit us to develop future state and community grant programs which concentrate the greatest amounts of money in the highest payoff areas.

To carry out the increased highway safety research program, we are recommending authorizations of \$70 million in fiscal year 1972 and \$115 million in fiscal year 1973. Because of the large balance of unappropriated authorizations for the state and community grant program of about \$180 million, no new authorizations are proposed for that program in fiscal years 1972 and 1973. Each state has now submitted and received the Department's provisional approval of a comprehensive state program to remedy deficiencies in the areas covered by the highway safety standards. We hope to see steady progress in implementing state and local programs, particularly as we learn from the demonstration programs being proposed. The existing authorizations will be adequate to carry out the state programs during the next two years.

In recognition of the importance we attach to the implementation of the highway safety programs, the Administration bill would establish a Federal

Highway Safety Administration within the Department of Transportation. The Administration would be headed by an Administrator at Executive Level III who would be appointed by the President, with the advice and consent of the Senate. It is contemplated that the Secretary would delegate to the new Administrator the traffic safety functions vested in the Secretary by the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966 and the Highway Safety Act of 1966. Some of the functions presently delegated to the Federal Highway Administrator under the latter Act would continue to be delegated to him. I believe the reorganization we are proposing is essential given the increased emphasis we intend to place on this program.

The Administration is also proposing that all highway and highway-related programs be funded from the highway trust fund. The bill which we have submitted would, therefore, provide that all funds for forest highways, public lands, state and community highway safety grant programs, highway safety research, and highway beautification come from the highway trust fund. Each of these programs is for the direct benefit of the highway user and, therefore, properly fundable from the trust fund. In this connection, I would like to note that the Administration has submitted a bill to the Congress which would extend the highway trust fund through February 28, 1977, and authorize expenditures from the trust fund for the above-mentioned programs.

One final provision of the Administration bill which I would like to mention concerns the Darien Gap Highway. The Administration recommends that the proposal contained in Congressman Clausen's bill (H.R. 12014) be incorporated in the 1970 Highway Act. It would, as you will recall, authorize the United States to cooperate with the Republic of Panama in completing approximately



250 miles of highway, in the area known as the Darien Gap, in order to connect the Inter-American Highway with the Pan American Highway System of South America. \$100 million would be authorized for this purpose.

In summary, the Administration's highway bill represents a careful attempt to improve the administration of certain existing programs and to maintain an adequate level of funding for all programs consistent with orderly planning and construction, total transportation needs, and national budgetary priorities. We are now hard at work within the Department on the development of the 1972 Highway Needs Study. This will in effect be a "transportation" needs study because we must consider highway needs within this broader framework. Concurrently, the Department is in the process of developing a statement of national transportation policy. Our transportation needs will be determined within the framework of this policy statement. I believe that, with the approach we are taking, we can present to the Congress and this Committee in 1972 a comprehensive program for the development of a truly intermodal transportation program.

This concludes my prepared statement. I shall be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.