

REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION BROCK ADAMS,
BEFORE THE AMERICAN PUBLIC TRANSIT ASSOCIATION'S ANNUAL MEETING, TORONTO,
CANADA, SEPTEMBER 27, 1978

I am pleased to see that the American Public Transit Association has become a vocal and effective organization in just four years. We need to get together at meetings like this -- to consult, to argue, to learn from each other. As Secretary of Transportation, I have not always agreed completely with your policy positions. Nor have you with mine. But we have shared a dedication to broader goals: the need for better public transportation, for more efficient use of energy, for a cleaner environment and the revitalization of the cities of America.

It is appropriate that we are meeting in Toronto. This metropolitan area of nearly 3 million people is served by an integrated network of rail, trolley and bus service that is widely recognized as a model.

I am particularly impressed by the success of the transit commission in providing fast and easy connections between different modes and by the overall coordination of transportation and development policies. We can all learn from Toronto's experience.

But we're not doing so badly on our side of the border.

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Since we last met in March, transit ridership -- an economic indicator that many of us watch closely -- has shown consistent and highly encouraging strength. For twelve consecutive months, the number of people riding on transit has risen. This is the longest steady period of growth since the gasoline shortage of 1973 and the second longest since World War II. We can take joint satisfaction from these figures: we must be doing something right.

The New York City transit system has received \$583 million in grants for improvements since this Administration took office.

And to your incoming chairman, Harold Fisher, let me say the department has just approved a \$69 million capital grant for the New York City Transit Authority.

Of course, New York has lots of company. Just last week, Chicago got a \$137 million package that will extend service out to O'Hare Airport and provide new rapid transit and bi-level commuter cars.

Miami has been authorized to increase its planned rapid rail project from 16 to 20 miles, with a current federal funding commitment of \$632 million. We've given Buffalo the first construction grant for its new light-rail system, \$50 million toward our ultimate commitment of \$359. We've authorized the first eight-mile section of Baltimore's new rapid rail system and a \$669 million package of public transportation improvements for Boston.

It's been a busy year. All of you are familiar by now with the revised performance specifications for transbus that the department issued two weeks ago. Although we have had our differences over this program, the specification provides flexibility for both manufacturers and operators.

In May of 1977 I decided that all transit buses purchased with federal funds after September 30, 1979, would have to meet transbus performance specifications for low floors, wide doors and easy access. Under the revised specifications, this date will be reviewed and reassessed within the next few months when we learn from manufacturers how soon they expect to be able to deliver the first transbus.

As you know, the revised specifications answer the objections raised by some operators. The new bus will have the option of a ramp or a front door lift.

I'd like to commend the APTA members of the first transbus consortium -- Los Angeles, Miami and Philadelphia -- for ordering 530 buses. I'm pleased that other cities are preparing for bids.

There is almost no question that transbus will cost more. Any new piece of hardware is more expensive until the assembly line gets the bugs out.

But I'll make a prediction that is about as safe as the one Wernher Von Braun made for the space program. He said, "I'll guarantee you your tax dollar will go farther."

Well, I will simply say that the transbus program is the right thing to do for all of our citizens, and one day we'll all be glad that we had a part in it.

The faster manufacturers can produce transbus, the smaller the effect of inflation on its price. To encourage early delivery, the department has established incentive payments for those who speed up production. And we are prepared to consider sole source procurement if one manufacturer is ready to deliver substantially before others are.

With an assured order of 530 transbuses from the first consortium and more under consideration, this program is finally rolling. We look forward to the time when APTA gives its endorsement.

I know of your concern about proposed regulations to assure that transportation facilities are accessible to the elderly and handicapped. Resistance to this proposal, based mainly on the cost of compliance, has been presented at hearings we held in New York City, Chicago and Washington earlier this month. Your publication has called this "the most controversial issue in the history of the Federal government's program to aid mass transportation."

We recognize the financial burden that Section 504 requirements may impose on rail, bus, and transit systems. Their quarrel, however, is really not with us but with Congress. Since the Congressional mandate gives us little choice in the matter Congress and HEW as the lead agency have ordered us to provide access by the handicapped to public transportation, we are trying to comply with those orders.

As Dick Page has already told you, I have initiated development of a process where we might be able to combine the Urban Mass Transportation Administration and the Federal Highway Administration into an integrated Surface Transportation Administration.

Many of us believe the time has come to forge a day-to-day partnership between these two equally important components of our national transportation system. Formation of the Department of Transportation a decade ago constituted the first major step toward such a natural consolidation.

We recognize that highway and transit interests have historically regarded each other as rivals. But from the nation's point of view, the two are and must be allies.

So we think we may have a marriage here. But as we all know, that's the easy part. It's the living together that takes a lot of work. And, understandably, some of you in the transit community may be worried that your interests would receive less attention in such an agency.

That is not going to happen.

For transportation, the pioneering is over. The focus is shifting. The Interstate highway program was a marvel for the world to admire, but it is virtually complete. The restoration of public transportation systems is now an accepted national policy.

The Department of Transportation must be concerned about how, as well as where, our national systems will move the people. Urban mass transit is moving into an era of revival; highway and transit people are learning much from each other.

If any of you are suspicious of the consequences of merging the federal highway and transit programs, you may feel better for knowing that some highway people are a little uneasy, too. They seem to think, without any reasons I know about, that a surface transportation administration might devote a larger share of its financial resources to transit than the present allocation. I don't find many APTA members are worried about that.

The driving force here is the desire of state and local governments, the manufacturers -- the riders -- and the taxpayers -- that we have coordination between highway and transit facilities. That is essential to progress.

It is also an exciting and challenging goal, both for us in Washington and for state and local transportation officials. A unified, fully-staffed surface transportation administration could eliminate duplication, speed up program delivery and respond more rapidly to city, county and state needs. It could provide one-stop service for transportation officials throughout the country.

I invite comments from APTA and its members on this proposal as it begins to develop.

One note for your future file: I am determined that the department improve existing interchange systems between rail, bus and subway lines. We need to simplify ticketing to make it easier for commuters to use combined systems smoothly.

You can also look forward to some special assistance in the future in developing imaginative new features for your transit systems. President Carter has proposed that \$200 million in special aid be made available for urban initiatives. This will enable you to design and build special subway stations that connect directly with shopping facilities or housing projects or, perhaps, to improve connections between bus and subway lines.

During 1979, the department plans to hold a series of productivity conferences, regional meetings designed to help transit managers measure their system's performance and then improve that performance. APTA is one of the sponsors of this promising effort.

As we meet here, Congress is deciding how much of our limited federal resources will go into transportation in the years ahead, how much money for highways and how much for public transportation. Frankly, I'm very concerned about what has been happening on Capitol Hill, and I want to share my concern with you.

The department has asked for \$14.4 billion for urban transit over the next four years. The Senate Committee added to this, and the House Committee has added even more.

Now I know it is traditional for operators of transit systems and their suppliers to rejoice when Congress authorizes more spending. After all, that raises pleasing prospects: higher operating budgets for one, and more profits for the other. But I ask you this morning to take another look at that notion.

I'm here to ask the leaders and members of APTA to exercise vision and wisdom to support a federal spending level that is fair, that is progressive, but that fits into our national goal of a balanced budget.

The country is one year out of phase between revenues and expenses. If we can eliminate the bugaboo of the chronic deficit, we can really deal with the root causes of inflation. And we can still all fight for our share of federal revenues.

I can assure you that the department is dedicated to using a major share of its resources, now and more generously in the future, to insure the role of transit in the revitalization of our cities. Transportation is not a stepchild of urban planning nor strictly the province of the engineer. We have learned painful lessons together.

Together, we can work to liberate the modern American city from twice-daily strangulation by the automobile commuter. This is going to require time, money, effort, some very hard-nosed politics and all the wisdom we can collectively summon. With your help, I believe we can meet the challenge.

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