

U. S. Department of Transportation



news:

Office of Public Affairs

Washington, D.C. 20590

REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
BROCK ADAMS, TO THE LOS ANGELES CHAMBER OF COMMERCE,
LOS ANGELES CALIFORNIA, MAY 17, 1978.

I want to thank Mayor Bradley, and President Allen of the Chamber of Commerce for arranging this luncheon. It has become a custom for the Secretary of Transportation to speak in Los Angeles during National Transportation Week, and I am pleased to continue that tradition.

Any national "week" is an occasion for reflection and prediction. We don't have to add figures, or search history, to prove that transportation has been good to us in America. Nor do we have to look very far, especially here in Southern California, for evidence of the transportation abundance we all enjoy.

Looking to the future, however, is another matter. We find ourselves today on uncertain ground. In the past we built transportation facilities as we needed them -- highways and airports, and -- before that -- railroads, transit systems, waterways. Our resources of land and petroleum seemed limitless, and our skills and technologies infinite. Transportation became our 'fifth freedom' and a major force in our economy.

Now we have come to a time of transition in transportation progress. We have built the great and wonderful American transportation machine, a system of tremendous capacity and great versatility -- but one that is not as efficient as it could or should be. Before we expand it further, we must work to improve it.

I want to talk today about the changes in view for our transportation system over the next 10 to 15 years. I have chosen to do so for three reasons:

1. The warning signs are unmistakable. We cannot continue, indefinitely, the way we are going. The changes required must be started now. The decisions we make and the programs we set in motion during this Administration will be felt throughout the 1980's.

2. In the next decade we will be spending \$150 to \$200 billion of the taxpayers' money. The people have a right to know what is the reasoning behind our budget proposals and what our priorities are.
3. Transportation Week is an appropriate time for a status report on national transportation policy and Los Angeles is an appropriate place. Southern Californians have been leaders in many transportation developments -- you pioneered the freeways, two of the busiest airports in the country are located here, and a great aerospace industry is centered here. Los Angeles represents many of the transportation successes of this century. Your area also reflects the transportation excesses in our society that we must move to correct.

THE FIVE FACTORS OF CHANGE

There are five constraints affecting our transportation policies and programs. They are: energy -- perhaps the single most important factor -- congestion, safety, environmental protection and the economy. In each of these areas there are concerns that affect the ways we plan, develop, build and use our transportation systems.

Unfortunately, when we talk about problems or constraints, we get the idea that our freedom to travel is going to be limited or our mobility impaired. What I have been trying to say to the people, and to the Congress, is just the opposite -- that if we don't recognize the problems before us, and if we don't begin now to change some of our habits and our policies, then at some point in the future we will lose some of the mobility we take for granted today. When the oil runs out, and our cities are clogged with traffic, and the Treasury is empty, then it will be too late.

So let me outline the actions I believe we must take in each of these areas, to keep our transportation systems healthy and responsive to our needs.

ENERGY

When we talk about priorities, we must begin with energy. It's been nearly five years since the oil embargo of 1973-74. Unfortunately we seem to have learned very little. We are importing more, not less petroleum. We are paying five times the price. And while the growth rate in energy use has been reduced slightly, consumption continues to increase.

It has been more than a year since President Carter proposed his energy program. Congress still hasn't acted. We are wasting time as well as fuel and, as the Los Angeles Times declared editorially last month, many people still foolishly believe the energy problem is a myth.

Demand is running at 19 to 20 million barrels a day. Eight million barrels of that comes from abroad. We use seven million barrels a day in our cars -- nearly 30 percent of our total petroleum consumption. So whatever else we do to conserve energy, we must concentrate on the automobile and its role in our society.

There are three ways to reduce motor vehicle fuel consumption. One approach is technical; to improve fuel economy.

Gasoline consumption went up only 2.7 percent last year despite significant increases in the number of vehicles on the road and total miles driven, because the newer cars are delivering more miles to the gallon. With new fuel economy regulations coming on line the auto industry is demonstrating that it can build cars that are lighter and more fuel-efficient and still acceptable to the public.

I continue to believe that the industry can meet the 27.5 mpg standard set for 1985, if it focuses on building lighter, smaller cars and cultivating the public's taste for them. The new fuel efficient cars are "best sellers" in Southern California. Since this region has long been a trend-setter in automotive fashions, I hope that the rest of the nation will follow your example. If the industry should decide just to pay fines rather than meet the 1985 standard -- and pass those added costs along to a willing public, as a recent Department of Energy report suggests -- I can tell you I will move to reassess the extent and severity of the law's penalties. I do not agree with that premise and will fight it at every point.

A second approach is: to encourage a greater use of high occupancy vehicles.

The private vehicle occupancy rate during peak hours in the Los Angeles area is 1.2 persons per car -- which means that practically everybody is traveling alone. For a long time we have been urging a greater use of carpools and vanpools -- with some success, but the response nationally is still far below its potential. To the commuter, the private car is his or her "inner sanctum."

A number of "carrot" or "stick" programs are being tried throughout the country to encourage ride-sharing. At the Department of Transportation buildings in Washington, for example, employees must be carpool members to qualify for garage parking. In some cities the cost of parking is simply too steep for the lone driver.

The "come together" program launched here last month is a cooperative venture to increase ridesharing and to promote better use of your region's excellent freeway and street system. Our Urban Mass Transportation Administration provided \$250,000 to get the program started.

Unlike other pool and computer matching programs, the "come together" project is not limited to carpooling. The program's sponsors are focusing on a number of options -- including better freeway transit services, commuter bus service improvements and employee incentives, as well as carpool and vanpool matching services. This is a program that deserves the support of the business community. In fact, it must have active employer participation to succeed.

The third approach to the reduction of motor vehicle fuel consumption is to develop alternatives to the automobile.

Now, I hope no one rushes out and says Brock Adams is against the automobile. I'm not. The car is a part of our society, and I'm not saying it should be displaced as much as saying that the car in the city is misplaced -- it's become a vehicle for personal urban travel that is simply too big, uses too much fuel and takes up too much room. It's the principal cause of congestion, which I want to discuss next.

CONGESTION

The Southern California system of freeways is probably the most successful of the postwar experiments in inter-urban highways but it is becoming congested. Cities today lack the land resources needed for massive highway developments. In Los Angeles, the freeway at peak hours has reached the point of diminishing returns -- traffic on the "surface" streets often moves faster.

To answer the problem of congestion, we must go back to an earlier day when public transit carried a larger share of the urban travel load.

I know that a succession of Secretaries have come here over the years to caution the planners of extensive subway systems that the Federal resources available to support such systems would be limited. We say that because of the enormous distances and costs involved.

My advisors tell me that I should warn you about not trying to mix apples and oranges. I think what you need to know is that money contained in certain program categories -- people movers (DPM), light rail, and certain other categories -- is not transferrable. That is, if you decide to cancel one program, the Federal money may not be moved over and added to another type of program.

I am optimistic about the prospects for transit developments in the Los Angeles area now that we are getting one regional transit plan which includes plans for making better use of freeway capacities, and if we can pass it the Administration's surface transportation legislation will make more money available to cities for transit purposes.

The regional transit plan sponsored by the City Redevelopment Agency, Caltrans, and the Southern California Rapid Transit District incorporates the Wilshire-La Brea corridor study with the proposed Downtown People Mover and a number of other transportation strategies, including a 370-mile freeway/transit system designed to make more efficient use of freeway capacities. What your local and state agencies are talking about in this plan are more exclusive bus and carpool "diamond" lanes -- but additional, not existing lanes -- more bus collection stations, more metered ramps and more emphasis on high occupancy vehicle programs.

Your busiest freeways are now carrying up to 247,000 vehicles a day. Nearly 175 of your 625 miles of freeways are heavily congested during peak commuter hours. Caltrans estimates that by 1990 two-thirds of the system will be immobilized at rush hours, unless the logjam is broken.

In that respect, I am prepared to proceed with final discussions with your Congressmen and Senators on the final environmental impact statement for I-105, the Century freeway, as part of the total plan which should consider:

- High-occupancy vehicle lanes in the median;
- Buffer strips to separate the High-Occupancy Vehicle lanes from other traffic; and
- Ramp metering with preferential bypass lanes for carpools.

Similarly, I will give careful consideration to the proposal by the California Department of Transportation for construction of a 7.6 mile elevated busway on the Harbor freeway, contingent on the addition of that freeway to the Interstate system. Any planned freeway extensions or additions should include provisions for encouraging high occupancy vehicle traffic, or else we have no ability to deal with the ever increasing traffic.

Second, we're asking for legislative changes in the way highway and transit programs are funded, so that real world needs don't go begging because funds are tied up in "narrow pork barrel type" categories. We would like, for example, to make funds available with as few strings as possible, and permit transfers between highway and transit projects.

SAFETY

A third limit is safety.

Transportation overall enjoys a high safety rating. But we have some problem areas. Rail is one. There were about 10,000 derailments last year -- 500 of them involving hazardous materials. Just last week I recommended that several modifications be made to tank cars carrying hazardous cargoes, and that those safety "fixes" be expedited.

Air safety is a constant concern.

The airlines set a record last year -- in earnings, and in passenger travel. The U.S. carriers became more competitive, through "supersaver" and other discount fares, and found that competition can be better for business than regulation. We are continuing to press for regulatory reform of the airline industry, so that regardless of the composition of the Civil Aeronautics Board and its interpretation of regulatory rules the airlines will have the freedom to compete like other businesses. The Senate already has acted on this issue and we are hopeful the House will follow suit.

I want to emphasize that changes in economic regulation will have no effect on safety regulation, except to increase our investment in safety equipment and our enforcement of safety requirements as air travel grows.

There were 64 million safe take-offs and landings last year. We are forecasting a 50 percent increase in airport operations, an increase in scheduled airline traffic and in the number of instrument flights handled by our air traffic control centers -- over the next 10 years. In other words, air traffic in the United States -- already heavy -- is going to continue to grow. In fact, we expect the airlines to be carrying 420 million passengers by 1979 -- compared to the 240 million who flew last year.

Can we handle this increased traffic -- safely? Absolutely -- but we have to plan now. And the key to the future is system improvement, not system expansion. In other words, as I've said before, there probably will be no new hub airports built in the U.S. in the next 12-15 years -- with the possible exception of Palmdale, and Miami. Instead, we will:

- Introduce higher capacity traffic control systems, like the microwave landing system -- a replacement for the 40-year old instrument landing system. We have spent some \$100 million in microwave landing system development and the U.S. version was adopted last month as the world's standard. The system will greatly increase the number of aircraft operations an airport can handle, and make landings under near-minimum conditions routinely safe.
- Reduce the number of operations as more high-capacity aircraft come into use. At Los Angeles International, for example, passenger traffic has increased greatly in the past 10 years but the number of actual aircraft operations is down 10 percent.

But the safety issue of greatest concern to me is safety on our highways.

Fatalities dropped impressively when the 55 mile per hour speed limit went into effect. Now speeds -- and deaths -- are creeping up again. There were nearly 500 more traffic deaths in California in 1977 than in 1976 -- and the percentage of drivers exceeding the speed limit is rising. We killed 47,000 people on the highways in 1977 and if speeds -- and fatalities -- continue to increase at last year's three percent pace, we will soon be over the 50,000 mark again.

I have said I believe in the "socially responsible" automobile -- one that is as safe as we can reasonably make it, as fuel-efficient and as "clean" as is technically possible. I ruled in favor of passive restraint systems. I believe a nationwide seat belt law (like the speed limit law) would reduce fatalities and serious injuries but we have not a single state adopting one. I also believe states must make every effort to enforce the speed limit and drunk driving statutes.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

The fourth problem is to maintain a livable environment for all of us.

We handle more environmental impact statements at the Department of Transportation than all other Federal agencies combined. This has not stopped road-building where new roads are needed and make sense for the community, but we are in constant arguments. Today's highways are better and safer and more attractive but the confrontations go on.

Another major environmental concern, and one that affects the people of Southern California, is aircraft noise. After long years of frustration, we are closing in on this problem. The FAA has developed an "integrated noise model" -- a profile of flight patterns, procedures and operating hours designed to help airport operators curtail noise.

Airports themselves are developing buffer zones. Since 1965, Los Angeles airport has been acquiring about 500 adjoining acres of residential property -- a program now 90 percent complete.

The greatest gains, however, will come as more of the new, quieter aircraft come into airline use. We are trying to speed that modernization program by

supporting legislation that would provide the means to help air carriers retrofit their noisiest aircraft or replace them.

Frankly, we favor replacement. Our commercial air fleet is getting old. And after years of surplus capacity, demand is now increasing, and airlines contemplating new routes do not want to be late in placing orders.

THE ECONOMY

Finally, let me conclude by saying just a word about the nation's economy.

We cannot solve our transportation problems, or any of the nation's ills, simply by voting more tax dollars to throw at them. President Carter is engaged in a pitched battle against inflation. I can't help him, or the taxpayers of the country, by simply acceding to each new costly government program. I am trying, instead, to listen to what the people want, go out and see what our cities and communities and the residents of our rural areas need, and then structure the Federal-aid programs to meet those needs and at the same time deliver more value for the dollar. For example:

- I recommended last week that about one-fourth of the Amtrak passenger train system be discontinued because the deficit is increasing and the general taxpayer is absorbing all the costs of inflation.
- I have strongly supported a user fee on all water carriers. As it is now, the barge operators in this country get a "free ride" on our inland waterways.
- I criticized, publicly, the House Public Works and Transportation Committee for reporting out a surface transportation bill that far exceeded what we had recommended and what the states could realistically spend. The \$50 billion, five-year bill proposed by President Carter is realistic, based on needs specified by the states, and included reforms to permit the funds now tied up to be spent they are most needed. The committee bill, on the other hand, called for expenditures of \$66 billion in four years. This is too much.

CONCLUSION

Transportation is our lifestream in America -- a sparkplug of our economy, the thread that ties the country together and the magic carpet of personal mobility.

The future of our transportation systems and services is beset by troubles, but we will not be defeated by them. As President Carter said in his statement proclaiming National Transportation Week: "We are dependent on mobility. Transportation helps maintain our prosperity, ensure our national defense, and bind us together as a people. An efficient transportation network is important to our quality of life."

I appreciate your interest in the transportation needs of our nation and of this region. We will continue to support your plans and programs as we work together to bring our transportation programs and our national objectives closer together.