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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION ELIZABETH HANFORD DOLE
TO THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE AMERICAN
PUBLIC TRANSIT ASSOCIATION
WASHINGTON, D.C.
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I have long admired both the professionalism and dedication of the transit community and I continue to value APTA's counsel. My door has always been open to transit, for to me, an open door is symbolic of an open mind. I appreciate, too, the open door you have given me to your convention. I am here today primarily to tell you personally that I share -- very strongly -- your commitment to better mass transportation. I know how essential good transit is to our cities. I know as well the problems transit officials face in providing quality service at affordable fares. But the face on the other side of the problem coin is opportunity. You will agree, I'm sure, that opportunities abound in this industry. I pledge my full support in working with you to realize those opportunities, to make transit increasingly responsive to our people's urban transportation needs.

I am also delighted to meet with so many professional transportation colleagues here in Washington's new Convention Center, itself a symbol of urban America's ongoing renaissance. One of the keys to this Center's rapidly growing popularity is its location on Washington's Metro rail line. Here, as in so many other communities, transit is taking its rightful place as an integral part not only of urban transportation, but in the life of the city itself.

As an essential part of the community, transit must serve all the people. That responsibility extends both to the elderly and the young; to the disabled as well as the able-bodied. I have a deep concern for the plight of the handicapped, and great admiration for those who seek to be self-reliant in a society structured for the non-handicapped. Last year, we published a notice of proposed rulemaking designed to give disabled persons adequate access to local mass transit services. Under that proposal, transit authorities receiving Federal funds would be required to make at least half of their peak-hour bus fleet accessible to disabled persons, provide paratransit or special

services for the handicapped, or offer some combination of those options. Together, I am confident, we can meet their needs -- provide the mobility they require and deserve.

I say this mindful of your very valid concerns over cost and the importance of providing local solutions to the problem. Our proposed rule asks that transit authorities provide service to the disabled at comparable hours, in comparable geographic areas, and at comparable fares as is provided for non-handicapped users. Under the proposed rule, transit authorities would retain flexibility in determining how to meet those criteria.

I realize this is a complex and controversial issue. I recognize as well that there are a variety of opinions on how best to improve transportation services for persons with restricted mobility. We have been made aware of some of these viewpoints through correspondence received from many individuals and organizations speaking on behalf of the transit providers and on behalf of persons with various disabilities, through research and demonstration projects carried out with Federal financial assistance, and through participation in meetings such as this by DOT personnel at all levels. We received more than 650 comments on the proposed rule alone, and are continuing our evaluation of the whole issue. In evaluating the course we should follow in the final rule, we have studied how cities across the nation provide mass transit service to their disabled users. We found a great variety of approaches: one city may make its buses accessible to disabled persons, another may operate demand-responsive paratransit systems, and a third may coordinate the services of private and non-profit service providers.

We can meet our responsibilities to our disabled citizens. We can do it by planning together, by working together, by putting our skills to use in new and innovative ways. As an industry, it is what you do every day.

As managers and professionals in mass transit enterprises, you assure the safe and efficient operation of systems that commuters depend on for their jobs, and communities rely on for much of their mobility. Our role in supporting your activities has continued to grow. You will be especially interested to know that since we last met, the Department has awarded over 1,000 grants totaling \$3.6 billion in transit capital funds to over 350 cities in the United States. We are confident that in your hands those funds are being well and wisely spent. Transit investments today reach far beyond buses or rail cars, shops and stations. Public transit is close to the heart of every urban community's economy.

I come before you at a time when the economy throughout the country is causing many of the experts to revise their assumptions and reprogram their computers. Families and businesses are once again able to plan for their future, secure in the knowledge that our economy is healthy, perhaps stronger than it has been in two decades.

Transportation is sharing in this new economic prosperity and is in fact, responsible for some of it. In turn, as you know, we are investing more heavily in the infrastructure so essential to our transportation industries and our personal mobility.

Just a few years ago there was near-universal anxiety over the deteriorating state of that infrastructure. Clearly something had to be done and this Administration took decisive action, persuading Congress to pass the Surface Transportation Assistance Act. As a result of the nickel a gallon increase in the Federal gasoline tax -- the first in nearly 25 years -- Federal highway assistance to the states increased more than 50 percent in just two years. Our commitment to rebuilding America's transportation systems extends as well, of course, to urban public transit. Thanks to the STAA, and

your invaluable support in the formulation and passage of that law, we are able today to commit one cent of the five-cent Federal gasoline tax increase to transit. Together we succeeded in breaking new ground. We established, for the first time, a dedicated source of funding for mass transit capital projects. At the time that legislation passed, we projected additional revenues of \$1.1 billion a year through 1986. These dollars represent not merely numbers on a ledger, but improvements in public service throughout America. All across the country, communities are adding new buses to existing fleets, improving rail systems and providing more efficient facilities -- from maintenance shops to bus shelters -- to ensure better urban transit service. It is a tribute to growing public support for an essential industry in which Americans take great pride. You should know that over the last four years, community transit projects have received nearly \$15.5 billion in Federal funds -- nearly 40 percent more money than between 1977 and 1980. And that translates into good news for many communities -- and commuters -- across the land.

There's other good news as well. We are also spending approximately \$2.4 billion per year from general funds for a new formula program funding regular capital and maintenance needs plus limited operating assistance. While the Federal government has a valid role in assisting capital investments by transit systems, we continue to believe that local communities should bear primary responsibility for operating costs.

In this era of budget austerity, Federal transit funds -- as all funds in government -- are limited. Thus, along with the Federal commitment to capital improvements of existing projects, we can consider funding a limited number of new fixed guideway transit systems.

We published a proposed new starts policy in the May 18 issue of the Federal Register. By July 18, we received 50 comments -- including APTA's -- on this policy. Two weeks ago we met with representatives from transit authorities, APTA and other interest groups to discuss new starts criteria. We are preparing a reply to the comments we have received thus far and based on your input, are actively considering possible revisions to the policy. However, there is no doubt in anyone's mind that there must be criteria, if only because to fund all the "new starts" projects currently before UMTA to completion would require \$19 billion in Federal funds. Under current projections, only about \$400 million will be available annually to meet those needs. Because we want to allocate these limited resources as fairly as possible, all requests are being considered on three counts: cost-effectiveness, degree of local financial commitment and evidence of sufficient local funds to maintain and operate the system.

There are, of course, other considerations as well. But they come down to really one issue: the degree of support shown by the community and the local governments -- how effectively and innovatively the public and private sectors can work together to meet transit needs. We believe that just as the penny from the surface transportation legislation of two years ago established a dedicated funding source for transit, so can public and private sector partnerships provide a similar commitment at the state and local level. Certainly, there is no lack of opportunity; no shortage of challenges. And there can be progress. Let me cite one local example.

Prior to the concern expressed by this Administration, there was no precise plan to use the remaining Stark-Harris authorization for construction of the Washington Metrorail system in a way that could make all construction elements operational. Due to our efforts and the initiatives of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit

Authority, I am pleased to say that the region now has a construction plan for the balance of the Stark-Harris funds. This is a highly positive step in the development of this rail system in the Nation's capital. We all want future construction of the Metrorail to be completed in operable segments, thus adding revenue service at the earliest possible date and at the lowest possible cost to the Federal government and local jurisdictions. Carmen Turner, the System's General Manager, has been a driving force behind this plan and I would like to publicly commend her for her outstanding efforts. Her Authority's construction plan is presently under final review by Metro's participating jurisdictions. We at the Department of Transportation are also reviewing it and look forward to receiving it when it has been endorsed.

There are also new visions and new incentives in evidence throughout the transit community because your own constituency is expanding. Look at the growing participation of the private sector in promoting, supporting and developing public transportation. As you know, one of this Administration's key initiatives is encouraging the development of local public and private partnerships in the planning, financing and operation of mass transit services. We believe deeply that if transit systems are to be improved and remain financially viable, we need private sector help.

For example, in Westchester County, New York, the county contracts with 16 separate bus companies to operate its bus system, which currently carries over 100,000 passengers per day.

Many jurisdictions -- including Houston, Cleveland, Hartford, Chicago and Boston -- have contracted successfully with privately-operated express commuter bus services. These programs have helped decrease both peak hour congestion and operating costs, while boosting consumer satisfaction.

In Dallas, a consortium of private developers has offered up to \$23 million in right-of-way and \$4.4 million in station construction for a light rail line between that city and the Dallas-Fort Worth airport. In Hartford, Connecticut, a Transportation Management Association -- with the support of former UMTA Administrator Bob Patricelli -- has been formed of private and public sector managers. Their task has been to "manage" travel demand in Hartford by developing the most appropriate solutions to the areas travel needs.

Elsewhere, other private interest groups have banded together to provide free or low-cost volunteer transportation service. In addition, there are several places where private investors, builders and local employers have contributed funds, land or facilities for the construction and operation of projects promising to impact positively on the local economy.

The ways in which the private sector has become involved are impressive. So are the creative means integrating community growth with mass transit. For just as rail and bus and highway connections spin a vital web of personal and economic ties, so we in government seek to foster a new network, a road map of ideas about the place of transit in our communities.

One idea, of course, is as old as the republic itself -- the idea of equal opportunity and equal access to economic participation. It is with that idea in mind that we are expanding minority businesses' opportunities in public transit. I am pleased that -- together -- we have made such progress. In the first half of this fiscal year, \$1.1 billion

in Federally-funded transit contracts were awarded by transit authorities. Of that total, \$143 million -- or almost 13 percent -- went to disadvantaged business enterprises. An additional \$34.2 million was awarded to women business enterprises. We fully expect this year to top those levels of DBE and WBE participation. With your help we will meet that goal. Here as elsewhere, APTA's support was exceptional. Our joint sponsorship, along with the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, of five highly successful regional DBE/WBE Conferences helped identify qualified minority and women-owned businesses. Each Conference provided an opportunity for recipients, transit vehicle manufacturers and minority and women business owners to learn about STAA provisions affecting them. I hope they also helped open a door of new opportunity for individual business men and women.

While ours is one of the finest national transportation systems in the world, we must work together to improve it. We are privileged to use a system noted for its safety, but we are no less committed to making it even safer. I have often said safety is my highest priority, and I share with you a pride in mass transit's enviable safety record. And I have made the safety resources of my Department's various agencies available to assist the transit community in its quest to assure undiminished safe travel to its riders.

This spring, for example, I directed our Federal Railroad Administration to assist UMTA in responding to a request for technical assistance from the New York City Transit Authority to inspect the condition of its subway track. A safety inspection of the track was conducted and the inspection training program evaluated. The Federal Inspection Team's report indicated some needs for improvement that would result in better service at higher levels of safety in the system.

The UMTA staff worked directly with APTA in conducting peer reviews of existing rail transit systems, as well as those under construction. These reviews, initiated at the transit agency's request, provide valuable insight into potential safety problems.

The safety of specific types of buses in the U.S. transit fleet has been questioned several times in recent years. In each case, UMTA, often working with the Department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, has investigated the question. With cooperation from APTA members, we have explored the problem and worked with manufacturers and operators to assure the safety of the riding public.

Together with representatives of the rail transit industry, we have initiated a voluntary Safety Information Reporting and Analysis System for Rapid Rail Transit Operation. This program is designed to identify accident trends and common generic causes. It will assist in planning and research to reduce safety-related problems. Also, we have published guidelines recommending fire safety practices for testing the flammability and smoke emission characteristics of interior materials used in mass transit vehicle construction.

Your own industry's commitment to safety is apparent -- even here at the Convention Center. Your annual APTA Bus Rodeo -- with its theme of safety and driving skills -- showcases 72 outstanding bus drivers from around the country. These drivers and their competitors in the local rodeos that led to this national gathering collectively boast 43 million miles of accident-free service.

As public transit officials, you work everyday to promote a spirit of community cooperation. Your concern for meeting the mass transit needs of the nation is our concern. The theme for this week's conference -- "Showcase for Excellence" -- speaks of high standards we both seek to emulate. I am proud to join you in this commitment to excellence, not just one but 52 weeks a year, as together we work to meet the traveling publics' needs, while realizing public transit's future potential. I spoke earlier of open doors and open minds. I cannot promise open purse strings. But we will do our best -- and together, I have no doubt that our best will make the ride better for the over six million Americans who depend everyday on mass transit.

Thank you very much.

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