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SEPTEMBER 9, 1974

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY  
(Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)

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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AT THE SIXTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON URBAN TRANSPORTATION

Pittsburgh Hilton Hotel

AT 11:35 A.M. EDT

Will Rockwell, Senators Scott and Schweiken, my former colleagues in the House of Representatives, Governor Shapp, Mayor Flaherty, distinguished local officials, ladies and gentlemen:

It is a very great privilege and an exceedingly high honor for me to participate in this conference on urban transportation, and I am especially grateful to be participating here in the Golden Triangle in the area where the City of Pittsburgh has done so much in the field of urban transportation.

And may I also express my appreciation for the Secretary of Transportation, Mr. Claude Brinegar, and Mr. Russell Train of the Environmental Protection Agency for joining me on this trip on this occasion.

I am told that some people in Europe heard about my nomination of Governor Rockefeller and concluded that we had solved our transportation problems in America. The Europeans said that we now have a combination of a Ford -- who makes automobiles -- and a Rockefeller -- who makes gasoline.

In any event, you are international authorities -- all of you are international authorities on urban transportation. You know better than I that we have too many automobiles at the wrong place and at the wrong time, and not enough gasoline at the right place at the right time.

So it is essential that you in this conference proceed, move ahead with the problems that you see, and the problems that must be solved.

Even though I am not in the transportation business, I am dedicated to the revival of efficient transportation in our great urban centers here in the United States. Pittsburgh, where we are meeting, in the Golden Triangle, has done an effective and efficient job, and I compliment the citizens and public officials who have made this possible.

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Your theme of this conference -- Marketing Urban Renaissance -- is appropriate, appropriate not only for those of us in America, but I think worldwide. And all of our cities, obviously will be observing the work, the recommendations, the proposals that come from this conference.

The relationship between urban regeneration and urban transportation is extremely close. Among our most pressing urban problems -- and your presence here highlights it -- is transportation, especially the automobile. For the last 25 years, two decades and a half, automobiles have been the most important factor in shaping urban centers and expanding suburbs. The statisticians tell me that there are some 100 million automobiles on nearly 4 million miles of American streets and highways. That makes one automobile for every two Americans and most of those 100 million cars are in our way when any one of us tries to go downtown.

Many Americans have moved to suburbs where there is less and less traffic. My wife, Betty, and I can vouch for the very restful suburban life and we picked it for reasons that most Americans select it. We raised our family in Alexandria, Virginia, just outside of Washington, D. C., and on a personal note, I miss it, especially my backyard swimming pool.

In the last two decades, suburban population grew far faster than our central city population. And in some instances, the population growth in our suburbs resulted in an actual numerical decline in our central cities. Americans, as a result, by the millions on a day-to-day basis, drive to and from work. Most took the road or the highway or the street, approximately at the same time of day as everybody else. Frankly, I admire the fortitude and the driving skill of the millions of Americans who are on time going to work without police and Secret Service escorts.

And may I thank the Governor and the Mayor for the State and local police in Pittsburgh for their fine courtesy and efficiency this morning. I am sure everyone, everyone here especially, along with thousands, or literally millions of other Americans have been caught in rush-hour traffic jams. I know I have for a number of years while serving in the House of Representatives and living in Alexandria. Sitting in bumper-to-bumper traffic has become a way of life to far too many Americans.

As a Congressman, I was in New York City about ten years ago and I asked a New York City policeman the best way to get to Brooklyn, and he was very blunt in his answer. "Buddy," he said, "the best way to get to Brooklyn is to be born there." (Laughter)

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Obviously America must have better solutions. That is what this conference is all about. Solutions must be found for the growing problems of congestion and pollution. The challenge now is complicated very severely by our energy conservation.

As a Michigander with the name of Ford, you can be sure I am not going to say anything unkind about automobiles, but it is self evident that excessive use of cars in dense urban areas increases pollution levels, causes unbelievable traffic jams, massive headaches, and bumper-to-bumper tie-ups which burn too much scarce and expensive fuel.

I think last winter's serious energy crisis drove home a message to our fellow Americans. The net result is we must make major progress in improving urban transit. We must move promptly, we must have a well-planned, a well-coordinated action, an action program.

Priorities at the local level must be very carefully laid out. If there is to be a renaissance of urban transportation, that renaissance must be built on solid, defensible concepts.

We must in this conference address ourselves to the high priority need for action to halt the decline which has developed over the past decade in existing or traditional urban transit systems. And time is of the essence.

Progress, fortunately, is being made. The approximately 750 separate capital grants, totaling more than \$3 billion since 1970, which the Federal Urban Mass Transportation Administration made to our cities to buy buses and to add urban and commuter rail systems has certainly helped.

It was encouraging, I think, to find that mass transit ridership in the United States this past year has risen above last year's level. And I think it should be even more encouraging. This is the first time such an increase has taken place since the end of World War II.

Our Nation has to develop urban mass transit systems that people want to use. Until we develop those systems that offer convenience, comfort, and reliability expected from the automobiles that Americans have been traditionally using, transit service, even in our most congested urban areas, will continue to be under-used.

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That is why I believe this conference, with its accent on transit marketing, is exactly on the right target.

We know that most Americans for a wide variety of reasons have simply not bought the concept of public transit. Unlike the appealing and heavily used mass transit of cities like London, Paris, Montreal, Munich, and Moscow, public transportation in America is considered by most of our fellow Americans as a painful last resort.

There is a terrible reluctance to go from what they were brought up to use to something that is new and different. There has to be something extra if we are going to achieve a viable, mass transit system in most of our urban metropolitan areas.

But let's take a look or a leaf, I should say, from the book of the automotive industry. They have done quite well with the product that they have promoted in our country. We must compete with the automakers in the effective promotion of products, in their imagination, enterprise, and marketing skills.

I don't think there is a group of men and women better qualified to carry out that mission than all of you here today. But I quickly add, I don't minimize the challenge that you are faced with.

Now as we move to improve our transit systems, we must not lose sight of one very important fact: The automobile is and will continue to be our chief transportation vehicle. The automobile fits America's traditional life style.

No matter how plush the bus, no matter how comfortable the train, Americans, to one degree or another, will continue to drive their automobiles. The car will be with us for a long, long time to come.

But what we must do is to learn how best to live with them in the urban scene. We have to develop, to achieve the end that you seek and we must have, we must develop and come forth with sound planning procedures, transit programs and policies that are sufficiently flexible to match the diversity of our many, many cities.

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I think diversity of the community is the key and it does require some flexibility in our planning for an adequate, usable, desirable transit system.

Because of this diversity, there is no one best transit solution that will fit all of our cities. Some are better suited for bus systems, others for subways, fixed guideway systems, or for a combination of such services.

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And in developing these systems, long-term considerations require that transportation and land-use planning be closely coordinated. And this, of course, can only be done, in my judgment, wisely and well at the local level.

There is a legitimate and major role to be played by the Federal Government in assisting urban mass transit systems. But I emphasize here that role must be carried out in complete and total partnership with States and localities. The heavy hand of the Federal Government must not be the dictator that tells how Pittsburgh or other communities should utilize their systems or the funding.

Obviously, we will help with urban planning, although under the new, better communities legislation recently approved local planning and decision-making will be controlling.

The Federal Government will assist with important technological development, yet it should be clearly understood that the chief objective of the Department of Transportation grant programs is to help cities solve their transportation problems. It is not a program primarily aimed at the restructuring and rebuilding of our cities in America.

Federal assistance, as I see it, must be primarily directed at finding cost-efficient solutions to the problem of moving people. It must only secondarily be viewed as a means to stimulate urban area economic growth, or to increase central city density.

Federal taxpayers just can't afford to pay for the whole package, and I won't ask them to do so.

Washington, obviously, has to help with the funding, but that funding must have realistic restraints. This is especially true as the Congress, Members of the House and the Senate, join with the White House as inflation fighters in a policy of fiscal responsibility. Investments in local mass transit systems must have reasonable cost to benefit ratios or relationships. The House passed Federal Mass Transit Act of 1974 proposes an \$11 billion spread over a 6-year period and I add emphatically, an absolute upper dollar limit.

In addition, I have a problem with the program structure in the House bill and its treatment of Federal operating assistance for public transit. A committee of the Senate will be considering a transit bill whose program structure is similar to the Administration's transit proposal. I am confident that this problem, or this conflict between the House and Senate versions can be overcome in a House and Senate conference.

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It is probably known to many here, I have opposed in the past transit operating subsidies, particularly out of the highway trust fund, because of my strong belief that such a program would lead to the Federal Government in the local day-to-day transit operating matters. And also, I have learned, from my experience with other Federal categorical grant programs for operating expenses, that these funds often do not result in better or more service. Instead, they simply result in greater cost and less efficiency.

It is my conclusion, however, that our current inflexible urban mass transit grant program encourages States, encourages cities to adopt what you can call capital intensive solutions, such as subways, as a response to their transportation problems.

Accordingly, as a compromise for my own long, deeply held previous convictions, I am supporting some limited Federal operating assistance such as the proposal I mentioned a few moments ago, submitted in February and currently being considered by the Senate.

I recognize that this change will allow a limited portion of Federal urban transit funds to be used for operating expenses as an integral part of a comprehensive transit program and as a result, primarily of decisions by local and State officials.

The key here, therefore, is that Federal officials are not involved in the capital operating trade-off. Local officials will make that decision.

And although, the operating assistance provisions of the House bill do not meet these standards, the Senate will have, and I hope does, correct this deficiency and I trust the final version will contain that specific provision.

I am convinced that with enough imagination, with enough determination, with enough flexibility and with careful ordering of your local priorities, we can achieve our national transportation goals. I am determined to do so without further feeding the fires of inflation or busting the Federal budget.

Let me leave you with one final thought. From the early days of this Nation, we have been a mobile people. We have carved canals out of the countryside to carry our commerce. We journeyed West following the only roadmaps we knew, the wagon ruts of those who had gone before.

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Today, with modern methods of movement, we have achieved miracles of mobility in America and in many, many parts of the world. But we have to maintain and expand the avenues of movement for all Americans, young and old, rich and poor.

The wheels of this Nation cannot stop turning, whether they are on cars, or trucks, or buses, or trains, or planes. If we are to continue to be a great Nation, and I think we will, as Americans we must move forward together in the future.

With your dedicated, inspired efforts here this week, I think you can contribute very significantly to make this journey a memorable one in the years ahead.

Thank you very much.

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(AT 11:58 A.M. EDT)

