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THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF AN ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT
TO BE DELIVERED AT THE
SIXTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON URBAN TRANSPORTATION

Thank you for inviting me.

I am told that some people in Europe heard about my nomination of Governor Rockefeller and concluded that we had solved our transportation problems. 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 on urban transportation. You know that we have too many automobiles --- and not enough gasoline. So it is good to go ahead with this conference.

Even though I am not in the transportation business, I am dedicated to the revival of efficient transportation in our great urban centers. Pittsburgh, where we are meeting, has done a particularly good job.

Your theme --- Marketing Urban Renaissance --- is appropriate. All of our cities are observing the work you are doing here.

The relationship between urban regeneration, and transportation is extremely close. Among our most pressing urban problems is transportation -- especially the automobile. For the past 25 years, automobiles have been the most important factor in shaping urban centers and expanding suburbs.

There are some 100 million automobiles on nearly 4 million miles of American streets and highways. That makes one car for every two Americans. And most of those 100 million cars are in our way when we try to drive somewhere.

Many Americans have moved to suburbs where there is less traffic. Betty and I can vouch for the restful suburban life. We raised our family in Alexandria, Virginia, just outside Washington. Frankly, I miss it -- especially my backyard swimming pool.

But suburban population grew faster than our central city population. Americans by the millions drove to and from work. Most took to the road at approximately the same time of day as everyone else. I admire the fortitude and driving skill of Americans who are on time without police and Secret Service escorts.

I'm sure everyone here has been caught in rush-hour traffic jams. I know I have, many times -- even with the Secret Service to guide me. Sitting bumper-to-bumper in traffic has become a way of life to many Americans. I remember when I was a Congressman, and I asked a New York City policeman the best way to Brooklyn. And he was very blunt about it. "Buddy, he said, "the best way to Brooklyn is to be born there."

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America must have better solutions. That's what this conference is all about. Solutions must be found for the growing problems of congestion and pollution challenges now complicated by energy conservation.

As a Michigander with the name of Ford, you can be sure I'm not going to say any unkind things about automobiles. But excessive use of cars in dense urban areas increases pollution levels, causes jammed traffic, massive headaches, and the bumper-to-bumper tie-ups burn too much scarce and expensive fuel.

Last winter's energy crisis drove home a message: We must make major progress in improving urban transit. We must move promptly. Well-planned action is essential.

Priorities must be carefully laid out. If there is to be a "renaissance" of urban transportation, that renaissance must be built on solid concepts.

We must address ourselves to the high priority need for action to halt the decline which has developed over the past decade in existing urban transit systems.

Progress is being made. The approximately 750 separate capital grants -- totalling more than \$3 billion since 1970 -- which the Federal Urban Mass Transportation Administration made to help our cities buy buses and add urban and commuter rail systems has certainly helped. Mass transit ridership in the U.S. this year has risen above last year's level -- the first time such an increase has taken place since the end of World War II.

Our Nation has to develop urban transit systems that people want to use. Until we develop systems that offer the convenience, comfort and reliability expected from our cars, transit service will continue to be under-used.

That's why I believe this conference, with its accent on "transit marketing," is right on target.

Most Americans have simply 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 here is considered by most Americans as a painful last-resort.

Let us take a leaf from the book of the automotive industry. We must compete with the automakers in the effective promotion of products, in their imagination, enterprise and marketing skills. There is no group of men and women better qualified to carry out that mission than you here today.

As we move to improve our transit systems, we must not lose sight of one 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 will still drive their cars. Automobiles will be with us for a long time to come. What we must do, is to learn how best to live with them on the urban scene.

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We must develop planning procedures, transit programs and policies that are sufficiently flexible to match the diversity of our cities. There is no one "best" transit solution that will fit all cities. Some are better suited for bus systems, others for subways, fixed guideway systems or for combinations of services. And in developing these systems, long-term considerations require that transportation and land-use planning be closely coordinated. This, of course, can only be done locally.

There is a legitimate and major role to be played by the Federal Government in assisting urban transit systems. But that role must be carried out in partnership with States and localities.

We will help with urban planning and with transit technology development. Yet, it should be clearly understood that the chief objective of Department of Transportation grant programs is to help cities solve their transportation problems. It is not to restructure and rebuild cities.

Federal assistance 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. I won't ask them to do so.

Washington will help with funding, but that funding simply must have realistic restraints. This is especially true as the Congress and the White House join as inflation fighters in a policy of fiscal responsibility. Investments in local mass transit systems must have reasonable cost-benefit relationships. The House-passed Federal Mass Transportation Act of 1974 proposes \$11 billion, spread over six years, an absolute upper limit dollar amount.

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 can be overcome.

I have opposed transit operating subsidies in the past because of my strong belief that such a program would lead the federal government into local transit operating matters. 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 and more service. Instead, they simply result in greater costs and less efficiency.

It is my conclusion that our current inflexible urban mass transit grant program encourages states and cities to adopt capital-intensive solutions, such as subways, as a response to their transportation problems. Accordingly, I am supporting some limited federal operating assistance such as the proposal submitted to Congress last February by the Administration. This 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 of decisions by local and state officials.

The key here is that federal officials are not involved in the capital-operating trade-off; local officials make that decision. Although the operating assistance provisions of the House bill do not meet these standards, the Senate will have a chance to correct this deficiency.

I am convinced that with enough imagination, with enough determination, and with a very careful ordering of our priorities, we can achieve our national transportation goals. And I am determined that we do so without further feeding the fires of inflation by busting the Federal budget.

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Let me leave you with this thought:

From the early days of this Nation, we have been a mobile people. We carved canals out of the countryside to carry on commerce. We journeyed West following the only road maps we knew -- the wagon ruts of those who had gone before.

Today, with modern methods of movement, we have achieved miracles of mobility. But we have to maintain and expand the avenues of movement for all Americans. The wheels of this Nation cannot stop turning -- whether they are on cars or trucks or buses or trains or planes.

As Americans, we must move together into the future. With your dedicated and inspired efforts here this week, you can make this journey memorable.

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