

TRANSITIONS

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***For the Road Gang
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The title of my talk is transitions – and there’s no end to the meanings we can assign to that phrase today.

I will be speaking personally – not for the transition group in which I and others in this room are pleased to participate - certainly not for “an about to be” new administration - ACTUALLY, I’M NOT EVEN SPEAKING FOR ME – I JUST FOUND THESE NOTES OUT IN THE HALL ON THE WAY IN HERE!! AND THOUGHT YOU’D FIND THEM INTERESTING!!!! THESE NOTES DO SEEM TO HAVE SOME THOUGHTS– ABOUT TRANSITIONS

The most obvious transition – outside the Beltway – is to a new year (all in transportation know that the new year starts with TRB). / but also a new century – even finally the purists agree - a new millenium.

But inside the Beltway – transitions means changes of government – and in this room - changes in transportation.

One part of that transition we need to recognize! - We have colleagues and friends phasing out after very productive years at the US DOT. Rather than offering any critique of their tenure my thoughts today are to say thank you for serving the nation’s transportation system and your country well. You have our appreciation and respect.

Some additional transitions have come to light since I began preparing these remarks a week or so ago:

- The transition of Sect’y Norman Mineta from a Democratic Administration to a Republican one – from the Dept of Commerce to DOT;
- AND PERHAPS THE MOST MOMENTOUS - The transition of Chairman Bud Schuster from transportation leadership in the House of Representatives to private life.

Its hard to know where to begin in thinking about where we are and where we need to go - A LOT OF STARS THAT GUIDE US HAVE SHIFTED IN THE SKY - but now is the time to start that thinking process. We have serious work ahead of us. We need to start to make those mental – maybe even emotional – transitions to new modes of thought to address the new environment in which we will all have to work. What’s ahead?

THE OVERRIDING AGENDA ITEM I SEE IN THE NEW LANDSCAPE IS THE CRITICAL NEED FOR MAKING THE CASE FOR MOBILITY - MAKING THE CASE FOR TRANSPORTATION AS THE TOOL OF MOBILITY

I have spent my professional life as an unabashed advocate for transportation. I have always argued for its immense value to the nation -- to the economy -- and to the society. One of the things that seems to have gotten lost in recent years is the recognition of that value. A few years ago BTS hosted a conference on the costs and benefits of transportation – it got 32 papers on costs – and one on benefits – it came from Europe. Dr Lakshmannon, then head of BTS, said no wonder no one uses transportation, it has no benefits.

Too often today, we tend to see transportation only in terms of its negatives – the delays, the resources consumed, the lives lost, the pollution generated, – to the point where our current goals for transportation can be met best by everyone’s just staying home.

WE HAVE HIGHLY ARTICULATED GOALS AND EXPLICIT MEASURES FOR WHAT TRANSPORTATION SHOULD STOP DOING – NONE FOR WHAT WE WANT IT TO ACHIEVE!

TRANSPORTATION’S GOALS ARE ALL ABOUT SPEED, COST AND RELIABILITY AND THOSE ARE THE THREE THINGS WE ARE TERRIBLE AT MEASURING IN TRANSPORTATION !

In years past those of us who plan and build and operate the nation's transportation system were able to depend on the implicit recognition of the value of transportation among the general public. That recognition of the value of transportation's product – mobility – was and is very real but its kind of vague – kind of soft. The recognition of the need for new services and facilities had a comfortable, almost automatic, consensus, years ago. Today that consensus has almost evaporated as a social force.

IT IS OUR OWN FAULT! In general, we have done a very poor job of making the case for the value of transportation in our society, depending on the public's own very sound sense of their needs to make that case for us. That may not be enough in a future filled with public policy prescriptions.

As Brad Mallory has said: If you base a program on litigiousness and advocacy – you shouldn't be surprised that it yields advocates and litigation!

We must begin today to re-establish recognition in the new Administration and the new Congress of the value of mobility as one of the great goals of our society. I can tell you that that recognition – that appreciation is there – we need to reinforce it and support it. We must make the value of mobility tangible and real to all our institutions and to all Americans.

Some of the tenets we need to transition to in making the case for mobility are these:

To me transportation is about society building – not just economy building – society building ! It ties people together across distances. Especially today when families are dispersed over the entire nation.

The strength of our economy is the division of labor and the mobility of workers nationwide. Transportation knits families back together.

The planners still think in terms of “community” as the people physically next door – our communities today, as Mel Webber noted years ago, are a product of multiple voluntary links across vast distances– supported by communications and transportation.

We need studies of mobility to clarify its function and its value – and to make the case – to turn the soft, implicit recognition that every American has for its value into something – tangible and real – that can engender action.

ONE WAY OF MAKING THE CASE FOR MOBILITY IS LOOK AT THE LACK OF IT -- AND ITS EFFECTS.

- Remember the Russian food shortages – not from lack of ability to grow food but lack of ability to move the crops from the field to the city. The produce rotted in the fields! When our prodigious American grain-handling system shipped them grain – it rotted on the docks.
- 100 YEARS AGO Sears Roebuck was built on the fact that from Chicago all America had become a single mass market accessible rapidly by train with mass produced products – Europe and Asia are still catching up to that stage.
- Think of what lack of mobility does to those in our center cities and rural areas (17% of Rural African Americans households with no vehicle) in lack of access to social services and to opportunities – and the price of a quart of milk or a head of lettuce.

We are a nation that drives to where it wants to walk! A nation that brings water from France and puts it on the shelf in the super market next to water from Italy and Switzerland and NJ. Mobility is central to our being as a society.

As part of making the case we have to challenge some assumptions that have crept into our rhetoric and thinking. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, another who is transitioning to private life, is quoted in the Economist magazine this week having said:

“Beware of certainty where none exists.” “Ideological certainty easily degenerates into insistence upon ignorance.”

Among some of the “certainties” we need to examine.

CERTAINTY #1. “AMERICA’S TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM IS PRETTY MUCH COMPLETE!”

The first Secretary to say that was probably the first Secretary! I would say Thomas Jefferson was the first to say it, but he was too smart!

A nation that adds 25 million people every decade;
whose economy adds 4 trillion \$ per decade:
That is still a beacon to immigrants from all over the world –
can never say that its transportation job is done!!

CERTAINTY #2. “YOU CAN’T BUILD YOUR WAY OUT OF CONGESTION!” –

Yes, you must operate the system well , yes, you must manage the system well; But yes you must build !

CERTAINTY #3. “TRANSPORTATION IS ABOUT MORE THAN CONCRETE AND STEEL” –

Yes it is, but there’s a lot of concrete and steel required to make the promise of transportation come true!

CERTAINTY #4. IF YOU BUILD MORE - IT JUST FILLS UP AGAIN

Most trips we make have economic transactions at their ends, and if not they have social interactions of great value to those making the trips. Given that, “induced travel” which is so reviled today seems like a very attractive concept to me. Think of all the “induced travel” we will produce from getting personal vehicles into the hands of minority populations! We should celebrate it not condemn it.

Let me tell you where induced demand is going to come from in the future From mobility impaired – rural populations and minorities gaining access to a greater range of jobs and opportunities; gaining greater participation in the economy and the society; from the majority of the population gaining the affluence to act on their social and economic goals.

MY DEFINITION OF CONGESTION: Congestion is people with the means to act on their social and economic aspirations getting in the way of other people with the means to act on theirs.

If the price of that new found mobility for those on the lower rungs of the economy is a little congestion - We should celebrate it not condemn it.

CERTAINTY #5. WE ARE A CUSTOMER-DRIVEN AGENCY –

I am amused by statements saying we are customer-driven – customer driven organizations meet their customers needs – they do not pass judgement on them.

Too often our planning has looked like plotting against the American people instead of planning for them.

It all comes down to respect for the judgement of the American people – they are not recalcitrant children to be led to someone’s idea of a more enlightened mode of living – certainly not someone in Washington. The American people have no obligation to live in ways that make it convenient for government to serve!

6. CERTAINTY #6. “AMERICA HAS THE BEST TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM IN THE WORLD?”

Really? Shouldn't perhaps we examine that assertion? Maybe the US transportation system is not the best in the world anymore. Not the best in safety, not the best in speed or reliability. The best air traffic control system? The best built roads? Its still good – but the best? If not; why not; and how do we get back to being the best are an important set of questions for all of us to pursue. We are a high labor cost nation – without trans to reduce our effective costs we will suffer in world competition.

WHERE ARE SOME OF THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES?
I WILL MENTION JUST A FEW TODAY

1. MOBILITY FOR THE NEW WORKER AND WORKPLACE – THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF MOBILITY
2. SAFETY
3. TANGIBLE DELIVERABLES – A COMPACT WITH THE AMERICAN PEOPLE Funding for the future
4. FUNDING AND JUSTIFYING A NEW PROGRAM

1. MOBILITY FOR THE NEW WORKER AND WORKPLACE –
DEMOCRATIZATION OF MOBILITY

I believe that the major sources of growth in travel demand in the future will come from the expansion of travel freedom and the range of travel choices available to our minority populations.

Policies that would increase travel costs or otherwise constrain choices as a matter of public policy “for our own good” will fall most heavily on the emerging travel markets – particularly minorities.

So much of current public policy, aimed at suppressing auto ownership and use, is unintentionally aimed squarely at those on the margin of the ability to own and operate a vehicle. Often these people are actually those who are most auto-dependent. It is clear that those most affected by such policies will be those on the lower rungs of the economic ladder.

If the last decade was one of too many commuters the next will be the decade of too few. There will be a severe lack of skilled workers in the future – apparent already. It is this that keeps Mr. Greenspan up at night! We will have to employ everyone who is employable. Transportation will have to help. Connecting rural populations and inner city residents to suburban job centers – Getting retired workers into new careers – attracting even more women into the working world. Jobs in the future will be flexible in a more humanized work place – women have seen to that – jobs of the future will look to us from this vantage point like part-time jobs.

We can, in this new administration, dedicate ourselves to the final democratization of mobility. We can focus on the carless make sure that they have the means to access opportunity. If compassionate conservatism is about anything it must be about creating access to better opportunity – economic and social – and better transportation is the way to achieve it.

2. our second challenge - SAFETY

Our view of safety has to be very ambivalent– we can take great pride in the reductions in fatalities in both rates and absolute numbers over the years; but at the same must be chastened by the annual losses that are unconscionably high. The aging of the population and the resurgence in new drivers will play havoc with our trends in accidents and fatalities – the new Secretary will have to double and redouble his efforts – just to hold on to current average rates.

Dean Carlson in his presentation of emphasis areas for his tenure as AASHTO President challenged us to envision one day in a coming year with no highway fatalities all across America. What a wonderful vision! I ask how many states know how many fatality-free days they had last year? Dean's State of Kansas, for example, averages less than two fatalities per day. How many fatality-free days were there last year in Kansas or any other state– 20? 50? 100? How do we make that number grow bigger next year?

3. REAL DELIVERABLES IN REAUTHORIZATION

We should commit to real deliverables in reauthorization – Steve Lockwood and I have talked about this –

THE TRANSPORTATION COMMUNITY SHOULD:

MAKE A COMPACT with Congress and the people, to produce real, tangible products by the end of the next reauth cycle– Number one; measurable improvements in safety – more fatality free days – as we just discussed.

MAKE A COMPACT TO achieve measurable improvements in congestion – not in general but in specific places – take the key bottlenecks that “Highway Users” identified and lets fix them all – and then move on to the next bottlenecks!

MAKE A COMPACT TO institute operations systems that will show the public the time savings that are being produced – that travel time was 30 min before; and its now 25. Demonstrate that lives have been saved, and time too, as access times to accidents and all disabled vehicles by emergency vehicles has improved.

MAKE A COMPACT TO achieve real streamlining of FHWA’s and other agencies provision of services to the states and local governments and their citizens. With Performance measures of FHWA’s success. As part of that - take the great success story that has been transportation’s response to air quality problems and show the public and their officials what has been accomplished. Can we declare victory in air quality? – No – but we can show that immense progress has been made.

4. FINALLY WE HAVE A NEW CASE TO BE MADE FOR OUR TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM AND THE REVENUE NEEDED TO SUPPORT IT !

Making the case for transportation services and facilities will be different in the future - As we look at some of the great things that the infusion of needed funds from TEA-21 produced, we see that by the end of 2003 we will have reached that level of funding adequate to, what the FHWA Condition and Performance Report calls, “Maintain the Existing System” for both highways and transit – at least theoretically – a level that has always been 30% or 40% out of reach in the past -- (still much less reachable has been the “cost to improve the system’s condition and performance” which was often double present levels of spending.)

What that means is that the old “pothole” arguments won’t work anymore – “Give us more money or the bridges will fall down!” – just won’t cut it. Some of us are going to have to learn a new way to talk about the Highway program. No less a personage than Frank Turner said to me a year or so before his death – when you go to the Congress with that “sky is falling argument” you might get away with it twice - the third time they will rightly ask “What did you do with the money we gave you?”

We must demonstrate to the Congress that we were worthy of their trust. The Stewardship report that AASHTO is preparing right now, planned as a mid-course report to the Congress on what we are doing with the money they gave us, - is a great step in the right direction. It will say: you gave us the money – we are spending it – and we are spending it CONSCIENTIOUSLY!!! A great start.

TEA-21 now forces us to address the need to put the case for reauthorization on a sounder basis. In the past the program used jobs creation as the nexus of its justification. That was wrong - and successful. Today, we need a more sound economic and social understanding to base our work on.

To argue that transportation investment is needed for the jobs created is like making the case that education is important for the jobs it creates building and operating schools. It may be true that it achieves that but the real value is the more productive society that comes from greater education – and so with transportation – it is what happens after the road is built – that justifies the investment.

If we cannot make the case for engineering failure of the system we can make the case for economic failure. We are close - there is very good work being done - that can expand our understanding and our horizons. More research can carry us forward. But research can't do it alone.

We need new mechanisms for evaluating and justifying transportation investments and policies. We need tools to transmit the basis for investment decisions to the public. We have to tell the story to the American people and tell it well.

A sense of history would help. Looking back we see that the Interstate program had both the power to attract and to repel. The NHS, the corridors program or ITS have shown no such power! Without such power the entire surface transportation program degenerates into a highway tax-based federal revenue sharing program, with always new “constituencies” willing to spend the money.

Simply defending what we have gained won't do as a strategy! -- a hockey game where everyone is playing goalie doesn't work!

Where will the new funding levels come from?

Most observers would see no new fuel tax at the federal level – for sure; and little room at state level – what's left ?

- New revenue from economic growth - RABA
- Contributions of alternate fuels to road user charges
- General revenue – at least for some of the alternatives
- Toll roads and hot lanes
- Private financial participation

We will have to be open to these new approaches to expand the program. Each of these needs to be examined to assess its ability to make an appropriate contribution to future investment needs. New technologies can help us with these new revenue tools.

AND LAST – IN CLOSE :

WE NEED TO STOP APOLOGIZING FOR TRANSPORTATION !!
WE ARE WORKING EFFECTIVELY TO AMELIORATE ITS
NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES. TRANSPORTATION HAS BECOME
THE UNIVERSAL PUBLIC LEVER FOR ACCOMPLISHING ALMOST
EVERY SOCIAL PURPOSE. WE EXPECT IT TO DO SO MUCH MORE
THAN IN THE PAST. WE MUST DEDICATE OURSELVES TO
ENHANCING THE BENEFITS OF TRANSPORTATION FOR THE
NATION AND THE SOCIETY AND TO BROADEN THOSE BENEFITS
FOR EVERYONE.

WE NEED TO REMIND THOSE AT WORK IN DOT AND FHWA
EVERY DAY OF WHAT A GREAT SERVICE THEY PERFORM AND
INSTILL IN THEM AGAIN THE PRIDE THEY SHOULD HAVE IN
WHAT THEY DO. WE NEED TO TEACH YOUNG ENGINEERS,
PLANNERS AND TECHNICIANS THAT BUILDING ROADS FOR
AMERICA – EXPANDING MOBILITY FOR ALL AMERICANS – IS
NOT SOMETHING TO BE EMBARRASSED ABOUT. IT IS A GREAT
PUBLIC SERVICE. THAT MAY BE THE MOST IMPORTANT
TRANSITION OF ALL WE CAN MAKE IN THE COMING YEAR!

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY TO TALK TO
YOU TODAY. AEP