

Opening Remarks

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I would like to welcome you to this conference and would like to take advantage of that opportunity to give you some thoughts of my own on this conference.

This promises to be a most stimulating session. I think we are all aware that transit is at some sort of turning point, and this is the right time, and you are the right people, and this is the right conference to look into the future.

The shape of things to come in the future, I believe, will emerge from your concerns and your thoughtful search for solutions to problems, which is this conference's mission.

I think everyone concerned with transit is aware that things are not going well. Milton Pikarksy and Christine Johnson, in a paper prepared for this meeting, said of transit, "It is our thesis that the crisis is both the death rattle of outdated institutions for delivering transportation services and a painful birth of many new delivery systems."

We here collectively know a great deal about why transit has had such difficulty in holding its own. Some of these things are rooted in social, economic, and technical changes outside of the reach of any federal policy or local policy to some extent. I am referring to our increasing population, the growth of our suburban communities, and the marvelous convenience and efficiency of the automobile in serving our needs for movement in our cities. But we (at this meeting) are particularly in a position to greatly influence mass transit service in the future.

I am a firm believer in the power of the human imagination to improve things if properly motivated and if reasonably unconstrained. I think we have been too long in our dependence on federal money to solve the problems of urban mobility, too short on the stimulus to recognize that resources are limited.

I believe that we can no longer indulge ourselves

that certain myths hold truths. I would like to pose a tough question to the transit operators (here) to answer. Why do so many transit managers fear and fight the private operators? I would like to ask the scholars...why, when we have all been schooled in the knowledge that monopolies are inefficient and produce costly products and services, is the subject of public monopolies a taboo subject? Finally, why, when the knowledgeable people discuss the private-sector transit service, do we continue to ignore a fundamental fact that laws and regulations at the state and local level have restricted and constricted private activities so severely for so long that the myth prevails that publicly subsidized service is the only way to assure urban transit?

I pose these provocative questions because we are going to witness and experience a period of swift, profound changes in transit. As I read the papers prepared for this conference, I noted and applauded Richard Page's warning of the need for strategic planning. What I did not see is the recognition that sound decisions are based on analysis of all options, and I submit that before we can presume to have identified the future direction of urban transportation, which is the theme of this conference, we would be engaging in self-deception if the eminent minds (here) failed to test some of the fundamental beliefs first.

We need your ideas. I believe this conference may be an extremely important event in transit history, and I am happy to be here to participate. I have very high hopes for the prospects of transit, and I have the highest confidence in you.

I am sure that our understanding of the problems of transit and the promising roads for the future will be enriched for our having been here together.