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UNDERSTANDING TRANSPORTATION IN THE COMMONWEALTH—HOW DECISIONS OF THE PAST AFFECT US TODAY

Kentucky Overview

When the Forum Planning Committee was arranging the program for this Forum, it was suggested that I be the one to talk about the transportation decisions of the past and how they affect us today. It was stated that I was the oldest person they knew who had been involved in transportation and was still "living." Someone has said in introducing a speaker that if you can answer these three questions it would be complete: *Why this person, at this time, on this subject?* It was the planning group's opinion that I was the appropriate person to discuss this subject. When it came time to prepare my comments I thought I could sit down and write something profound, but I found this not to be true.

My comments will cover the past five decades. I will try to combine these five decades into an interesting commentary that I hope will have some meaningful effect on our transportation decisions of the future.

I should say, up front, that my recollections and opinions of transportation decisions in the past will be my personal opinions and they do not reflect the opinions of the University of Kentucky or state government.

I will start at the beginning of my college career in 1941 when, as a 16-year-old college student, I enrolled in the University of Kentucky with hopes of graduating as a civil engineer. My introduction to the University, especially in the College of Engineering, was most rewarding to a young freshman student. I found Dean D. V. Terrell and some of the CE professors to be most interested in talking to a freshman even though they did not know if I would make it through the first two years. Without their help and guidance, my first year of college would have been very difficult. During my sophomore year, I got to know many of the professors in the Department of Civil Engineering and Dean Terrell.

In September 1942, I received one of those famous letters that stated, "Greetings, you have been drafted and are requested to report to Draft Board 40 for service to your country." I was able to get an extension and did not have to go to service until 1943. I also was given credit for those

subjects that I had completed, which was 50 percent of the work required to graduate.

After more than three years in service in the South Pacific (including 16 months in the hospital), I returned to UK as a veteran under the G.I. Bill. In my opinion, the G.I. Bill was the most beneficial government program because it provided more benefits to the students and to the country than any other program that I have had the opportunity to work with in my career. Each veteran was allowed to select a university to attend. Because I was a wounded veteran, I was asked to take a test to be sure that my choice of profession for rehabilitation was one that was within my capability.

The existing student environment after the war was completely different from the one before the war. Those of us who had been in combat came back with a different philosophy—we no longer believed we were young students, but mature persons who had a need and a desire to prepare ourselves for a professional career. I should note at this time that the same cooperative partnership arrangement between the Highway Department and the College of Engineering existed and, in 1948, the Highway Department initiated the first scholarship program, which has continued until today with one interruption. The decision by the Highway Department to fund a scholarship program was one of the best investments made by the Department.

The 1940-1950 decade

As I look back, it seems that the paradigm for transportation investment focused on “opening up the country,” sometimes referred to as farm-to-market roads.

During the 1950-60 decade, the Interstate Defense System of Highways legislation was passed by Congress. President Eisenhower, the prime mover for this program, is credited for saying “Plans are worthless, planning is everything.”

In 1956, the Highway Trust Fund was established. I believe most of us would agree, it was one of the most significant decisions of the past five decades.

The decade of the 1960s was one of the most memorable decades because Kentucky took a strong lead in public policy. Design work was initiated on the Mountain Parkway, which was the first of many parkways to be constructed for developmental purposes. Kentucky took a pro-active role instead of a re-active role, and the benefits from the decisions in this decade are still being received.

During this period, the first functional classification study was initiated and completed by Kentucky before it became a requirement by the federal government. An advanced planning group was established and the planning function strengthened the central office. District planners were placed in all 12 district offices. It was during this time that the Kentucky Highway Department employed its first economist.

In 1965, the Appalachian Development Act was passed establishing the Appalachian Development Highway System. Kentucky placed more than 400 miles on this developmental highway system. The Mountain Parkway, which was designed and constructed in the early '60s, was used as a model for the development highway system for Appalachia. During this decade, federal legislation was passed requiring the 3-C process that mandated metropolitan areas to initiate a *comprehensive, continuing, and cooperative* planning process or federal funds would be withheld. This was an excellent step for transportation planning; however, the requirement of making jurisdictions sign cooperative agreements did not lend itself to maximum cooperation. However, this requirement did cause people to begin to discuss transportation facilities and their developmental effects.

1970-80

During this period, state government was reorganized into a cabinet structure and the Department of Highways was placed in the Department of Transportation. I was involved during this transition period wherein all modes of transportation were placed under the Secretary of Transportation's Office. During this period, more professional young people were added to the DOT cadre than in any other time in history. For the first time, the Division of Planning was asked to develop system maps for highways, airways, waterways, and railroads. In addition, statewide modeling was initiated so we would be able to integrate all modes of transportation into the transportation network for Kentucky. During this time, I had an opportunity to visit Transpo at Dullis Air Terminal in 1972 to look at people movers, MAGLEV trains, and many other new technical innovations. I have always been disappointed since that time because we have never seen the real fulfillment of this high moment in transportation technology.

During this time, Kentucky received the first Section-18 grant in the United States. This was, in part, due to the reorganization of the planning function so that all modes of transport might be considered in future transportation planning. During this time, a new position was established in the DOT for a state transportation planning engineer. It was during this period that I was asked to serve as Secretary of Transportation and I also had an opportunity to visit five countries in Europe to view the public transportation systems in their countries.

The first demonstration project using school buses for moving people from rural areas to Morehead was initiated. I believe it was one of the first in the United States. It should be noted that during this decade, because of an effective professional staff in our planning division, Kentucky was recognized as one of the leaders in rural public transportation. New ideas and new methods of providing public transportation services for the rural areas were initiated by the Kentucky DOT. For this reason, I was offered the deputy administrator's job at the Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA).

During my tenure as Secretary working with Gov. Julian Carroll, we were able to develop an Energy Resource Recovery Bond program that was financed by an increased coal severance tax. Funds from this increase were to be used to provide capital improvements for energy resource roads predetermined by the Department. The annual principal and interest payments were to have first call on the increased coal severance tax so that the road funds would not be used to pay off this bond indebtedness. However, as most of you know, this has been violated for the past 10 years and the principal and interest payment on this bond issue is presently being taken out of the road fund.

1980-92

This is the period when, I believe, our transportation organization in Kentucky made some decisions that had a negative effect on our transportation short- and long-range programs. The planning function was reduced, the research program was reduced, people, building, and equipment were sold to the University of Kentucky. The scholarship program was stopped (however, it was re-initiated under a different administration). The tolls were removed from some of the parkways because of political pressures and the professional cadre in the department was reduced.

The most positive step during this decade was taken by Congress in 1991 when they passed the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act which provided new opportunities and responsibilities for state and local organizations.

Why all of this history and looking backwards? Why bore folks who have probably had more interesting lives than I have? Well, for a particular reason, I believe we must always study the people we are dealing with and know who they are. You have to make a real effort to understand people and where they are coming from.

The second point is that people clearly want mobility. They also want energy-efficient transportation, sound economy, and a clean environment. Another truth is that plans have to affect decisions. As Secretary of Transportation, this point was driven home to me almost daily. Today we are evolving towards a transportation investment paradigm which I

would name "strategic development enhancement" rather than just land access.

In summary and conclusion: A look at our transportation system will reveal very quickly that Kentucky is a hub of the nation's transportation system. A look at our past indicates we have sometimes not fully managed or maximized our modes of transportation. Our 70,000 miles of highways, 1,100 miles of navigable rivers, 2,500 miles of railroads, 142 airports, and six urban and 18 non-urban transport systems provide the basic foundation for one of the best transportation systems you will find in any of the 50 states.

Why have we not fully managed and maximized our modes of transportation? I believe there are five basic reasons:

1. The administrative structure of the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet does not provide for continuity of professional leadership. The 26 changes we have had in the last five decades result in an average lifespan for the Secretary of no more than 1-1/2 years. This does not give a person in this position an opportunity to plan, organize, and manage an effective transportation program.
2. It is my perception that there is a lack of coordination between the Transportation Cabinet and the other departments of state government. This is so vitally needed if we are to proceed with the developmental transportation we all desire.
3. There is presently a lack of adequate funding for the maintenance and capital improvements on our highway system.
4. There is no intrastate air commuter service. For example, one can fly from Lexington to Nashville and come home the same day; however, this is not possible if we wish to go to Paducah, because of inadequate intrastate commuter air service.
5. There is an inadequate public transport service, primarily in our rural areas.

I would like to make some suggestions or recommendations that might help us to maximize and manage our transportation systems more effectively:

1. Establish professional criteria for the position of Secretary and provide a mechanism for continuity so that person can be held accountable.

2. Improve the peer review of transportation programs and projects to ensure high professional and ethical standards.
3. Place all modes of transportation, including regulatory agencies, under the jurisdiction of the Transportation Cabinet.
4. Provide an organizational structure to ensure that state and local level transportation services can be operated and administered in a coordinated and efficient manner.

And last, there are two words that I believe hold the solution to maximize our transportation system capabilities—*leadership* and *partnership*. It becomes obvious very quickly to look at the number of highway maintenance personnel presently existing in our Commonwealth: 120 in the Transportation Cabinet, one in each of the 120 counties, and over 250 in cities with populations over 2,500. This is approximately 500 separately operating highway units to maintain and manage 70,000 miles of highways. I believe each of us will readily admit that this is a fragmentation that needs to be changed by consolidation for more efficient use of our transportation funds.

Thank you for your attention. ■