

STATEMENT OF
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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
BEFORE THE
SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING
WITH RESPECT TO THE
TRANSPORTATION PROBLEMS OF THE AGING
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 1974

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the important problem of transportation for the elderly, and the Department's activities in this area.

Travel today is often a trying experience for the young and able; as you are well aware, it can be and often is an ordeal for the nation's aged and infirm. The Department of Transportation has been given the responsibility of improving transportation and mobility for all Americans, and specifically for the elderly of this country. We gladly accept this responsibility.

I, therefore, welcome the opportunity to share with the Committee the information that has been accumulated on this problem, what actions we have taken, and to highlight the changes to the legislation governing our activities under the

Urban Mass Transportation and Federal-Aid Highway programs that the Administration has proposed in the new "Unified Transportation Assistance Act of 1974" (S. 3035), recently transmitted to the Congress.

TRANSPORTATION PROBLEMS OF THE ELDERLY

I am pleased to say that there is an increasing appreciation in the transportation community and within the Department of Transportation that older Americans require continued mobility and access to services and resources. Older persons seek involvement in activities of all kinds, require accessible health care, and in some cases are actively pursuing a better education or a more meaningful job. After a lifetime of interaction with others and of independence of being, the elderly find isolation intolerable.

The challenge of improving transportation services for the elderly is intensified by a number of factors. First, although most of the elderly have per capita incomes in excess of the national average, the number of elderly persons with incomes below the poverty level is about double that of the general population: 5.2 million elderly (about 25 percent) have incomes below the poverty level. Moreover, many elderly

persons rely on some form of public or private retirement income which often does not respond to the rising costs of goods and services, including transportation.

Second, the elderly presently rely on a transportation system that is strongly oriented toward the private automobile. Many elderly persons, however, do not drive. Even those that do are concerned that they will not be able to maintain the driving performance required to maneuver in fast-moving traffic on congested freeways and streets, particularly in urban areas.

Third, there are physical and psychological barriers to their effective and convenient use of public and common carrier inter-city transportation. Frequently the elderly suffer from some loss in sensory perception; their responses become slower, and their strength and agility fall below that of the younger population. These factors often contribute to a loss in confidence, and thereby reduce their willingness to make trips. Architectural barriers (steps, turnstiles, and long walkways) coupled with transfers, adverse weather conditions, and the need to stand and wait for vehicles, raise serious maneuverability problems for the elderly.

Fourth, some of the elderly are also disabled and physically handicapped in ways that aggravate the problems of aging mentioned above, a matter I shall discuss in more detail later.

DOT ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVE TRANSPORTATION FOR THE ELDERLY

The Department of Transportation is using several approaches to help meet the needs of the elderly. We are conducting research and supporting demonstration projects aimed at making equipment, facilities and services responsive to the needs of the elderly. We are also providing capital assistance specifically to mass transit operators for upgrading transit equipment and facilities, and we are assuring that our general programs take account of the needs of this group. Let me cite a few examples of actions by the Department in this area.

Mass Transportation

First, let me discuss with you our major activities and efforts in the area of urban mass transportation.

To begin with, I would like to share with you the results of our investigations from existing data sources and field surveys conducted in representative cities, regarding the potential elderly and handicapped market for mass transportation.

The 1970 Census counted 20,066,000 Americans aged 65 and over, roughly 10 percent of the population. However, the elderly are not distributed evenly throughout the population. They are often concentrated in older neighborhoods of cities, and there has been a tendency for the elderly to move to special retirement housing developments or retirement communities or to areas with relatively attractive climates. There is a resultant variation in the percentage of elderly in urban areas ranging from 2.3 percent in Sterling Heights, Michigan, to 48.7 percent in Miami Beach, Florida. There is thus likely to be wide variation in the needs of the elderly within the communities, a wide variation in public transportation available generally in each community, and a difference in need stemming from their geographical and economic circumstances.

As might be expected, there is a high correlation between the status of elderly and the status of handicapped. A little more than half of the handicapped are elderly; a little more than a third of the elderly are handicapped. The total number, with no double counting, is approximately 26,500,000 persons. Unlike the elderly, the non-elderly handicapped tend to be evenly distributed throughout the population with respect to geographical location and general income characteristics.

We are focusing further attention on the mobility needs of the aged and handicapped, through additional studies undertaken by the university research program. One such study, entitled "Mobility of the Aged and Handicapped," has the objective of establishing the needs and transportation desires of the aged and those with orthopedic infirmities, examining the results in the context of the nature and economics of existing public transportation services, and designing a balanced, effective transportation service delivery mechanism. We are doing other studies on the effect of carlessness.

In addition to these pure research activities, we are aggressively pursuing innovations in the area of demand-responsive systems such as ride sharing, taxi pooling and taxi-oriented dial-a-ride systems. These are mechanisms of great potential benefit to the public at large, and may be an important source of mobility for the elderly and handicapped who need a door-to-door reliable service.

Numerous public transit demonstrations programs also have been conducted, or are currently underway. For example, in 1973, UMTA awarded a grant to the public transportation authority in Syracuse, New York, to design and implement a demand-activated

transportation system utilizing four specially-equipped vehicles. This system will serve the transportation needs of the elderly and disabled in Syracuse and in Onondaga County. The project will determine the latent travel demand of approximately 85,000 elderly and disabled residents, many of whom are completely transit dependent. The service will permit the accommodation of regular scheduled work trips, as well as school, medical, and social trips on a 7-day a week basis throughout the urbanized area.

With funds provided jointly by UMTA and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, the City of Cleveland and the Mayor's Commission on Aging are carrying out a project that will design and implement a flexible route advance reservation neighborhood transportation system to serve the basic transportation needs of the elderly. This system will be part of a total neighborhood service delivery system for the aged. Persons 65 years of age and older will be provided transportation to and from desired destinations which are within or immediately adjacent to their neighborhood. Initially, a 24-hour advance notice will be required. As operation experience is gained, and new data about specific travel demand is collected, basic route structures can be established within each neighborhood. A fare of 10¢ will be charged and service will be provided 7 days a week.

Turning now to mass transit planning, during 1973, among the UMTA planning grants awarded were ones to:

- Identify the unmet transportation needs of the elderly handicapped and other disadvantaged residents;
- Make a determination of the transit improvements required to meet those needs;
- Develop proposed optional system designs incorporating these requirements; and
- Develop, support, and implement programs for the long-term maintenance of the proposed systems.

The UMTA capital grant program, of course, has been the source of Federal funds for capital facilities to help serve the transportation needs of the elderly. During 1973, some of the capital grants awarded by UMTA for this purpose include grants to:

- Bridgeport, Connecticut, to assist in the construction of a new commuter rail station to replace the old station. The new station will be equipped with elevators to facilitate access by the elderly and handicapped.

- The Chicago South Suburban Mass Transit District to purchase rail cars which are equipped with wide doors, and to upgrade station facilities to facilitate travel by elderly and other persons in wheelchairs.
- The Kansas City Transportation Authority for the purchase of new buses which include special features to assist persons with limited mobility.
- Jackson, Mississippi, for the purchase of five 16-passenger transit vehicles which will be used for a free service for the elderly and handicapped. One vehicle will be equipped with a hydraulic lift for accommodating persons in wheelchairs.

All of this activity looks toward meeting the actual mobility needs of the elderly and physically handicapped. As you know, there are existing provisions of law in the Urban Mass Transportation and Federal-Aid Highway programs, that address the planning and design of mass transportation facilities and equipment with respect to their accessibility by elderly and handicapped persons. In Section 108 of the "Unified Transportation Assistance Act of 1974", the Administration has proposed an amendment to this requirement.

Section 108 of the bill would direct the Secretary to require that any bus or other mass transportation rolling stock, station, terminal or other passenger loading facility improved or constructed after June 30, 1974, with Urban Mass Transportation or Federal-Aid Highway funds, be designed with practical and reasonable features which allow their utilization by elderly and handicapped persons. The bill further provides that a recipient of mass transportation funds may satisfy this requirement by providing alternative transportation service for these persons, sufficient to assure that the elderly and handicapped have available transportation service meeting standards to be promulgated by the Secretary. We believe this explicit statutory requirement, which will be common to mass transportation projects financed from either UMTA or highway funds, will help us to meet the Congressional intent of mobility for the elderly set forth in current statutes, while providing greater flexibility to local officials as to the best means for meeting these goals in light of local situations.

In addition, this legislation will for the first time make Federal funds available for transit operating expenses. Under the provisions of UTAP, at least \$700 million annually will be apportioned to the States for use by urbanized areas

for transit capital projects or operating expenses. This program should give transit operators greater flexibility with respect to policy on fares and will provide an incentive for transit service improvements which will be particularly important to the elderly.

As the nation moves toward an increased reliance on public transportation, toward service innovations, toward flexible, demand-responsive vehicles and services, we would like to encourage the recipients of Federal funds to be innovative and responsive to the needs of our senior citizens, within the framework of concepts and standards that assure that the service is undertaken seriously and provided reliably.

Rural Transportation

The improvement of transportation services for the elderly living in rural areas is an important concern of the Department. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1973 authorized, beginning in fiscal year 1975, \$30 million for the capital expenses of a rural public transportation demonstration program, to serve, among others, the rural elderly. Our UTAP bill proposes to increase the funding for this program to \$75 million and make operating expenses an eligible project cost. In addition, the

UTAP bill would make Highway Trust Funds authorized for rural highway purposes available for the acquisition of buses to serve rural and small urban areas.

The findings from an evaluation of rural transportation demonstration projects funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity are being used as the basis for a manual which identifies the characteristics of projects which are important to the successful development and operation of rural public transportation programs. Another study is looking at ways to obtain increased use of existing taxis and private automobiles by the elderly, the poor and the handicapped living in rural areas.

Aviation

The Federal Aviation Administration has a rulemaking action under review, directed toward providing uniform criteria for transportation of mobility-restricted persons in civil air carriers. During 1973, the FAA held a series of public hearings on this subject after receiving more than 300 public comments on its Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking. FAA expects to finalize the rulemaking process during the first half of 1974 by instituting a regulation relating to carriage of the

handicapped. While the physically handicapped will be the primary beneficiaries of this action, we anticipate that the mobility-restricted elderly also will derive substantial benefits.

Railroads

The Federal Railroad Administration has continued to cooperate with the marketing and operating departments of Amtrak to assure that new equipment designs, and new or renovated terminals, include features to facilitate movement of elderly and handicapped individuals. For example, in an engineering design study of a contemplated new metroliner train station in New Carrollton, Maryland, the contractor has received specific directions to include methods of easing the transportation problems of persons with limited mobility. More generally, the special needs of mobility-restricted persons are receiving attention at the FRA test center in Pueblo, Colorado, where the capabilities of conventional and advanced designed passenger equipment are being tested.

In summary, Mr. Chairman, this Department recognizes the transportation problems of the elderly, and has an active program underway to help meet those needs. This concludes my prepared statement, and I now shall attempt to answer any questions the Committee may have.

