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Address by George L. McDonald, Manager of Planning & Marketing,
Southern California Rapid Transit District, to Town Hall of California,
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Title: "An Action Plan for Rapid Transit"

Almost every responsible citizen agrees that a modern rapid transit system should be as much a part of the Southern California scene as our highway and freeway network, and I am pleased to report to you today that we can have, if we so desire, major components of such a system on an operational basis by the end of this decade, and that is as it should be. Our country is first among nations in the scope and quality of its technology. Yet, we're nearly last among modern nations in providing even half-way adequate transportation facilities and services to our people.

For thirty years, public transit in America has been neglected as operating costs increased and revenues steadily decreased. More and more revenue passengers abandoned public transit in favor of the private automobile. This "generation gap" in public transportation has been the result of a virtually single-minded devotion to the automobile on the part of government and private interests as the only way to travel as a means of solving our public transportation crises.

The sad result is something we all experience every time we drive our cars, on or off the freeway.

Automobile use has grown out of all proportion to its true role as a needed component of a balanced transportation system. A system that includes several modes. A system that serves all the people, not merely the individual motorist.

The Southern California Rapid Transit District was created as a public agency in 1964 by the State Legislature and given two mandates. The first was to operate the existing 4-county bus system. The second was to design, engineer and build a modern rapid transit system for Los Angeles County.

Up to now, we have had all the elements required to build a rapid transit system except one: the large sums necessary to build it.

In 1968 the District proposed a Five Corridor Plan conceived as a grade-separated rail system to serve all major activity centers in the Los Angeles Basin. It was placed on the November Ballot during the national elections as Proposition "A". Voters were asked to authorize a one-half cent sales tax in the county to provide the necessary funding. It received almost 45% of the 60% vote required for passage.

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It failed to pass. But the vote was a definite indication of the public's feelings in the matter: more than one million people did opt to pay higher taxes to build a viable rapid transit system in Los Angeles County.

In 1969, the State Legislature passed Assembly Bill 2136 which authorized a one-half cent sales tax in the District for six months, beginning July 1, 1970. Until that time, the Rapid Transit District had operated its surface bus fleet 100% from farebox revenues, and we were the last major transit system in the nation to do so. Funds from this short-term pioneer bill enabled us to maintain the existing level of fares--unchanged since 1967--and permitted modest improvements in our bus system.

Then, in 1970, President Nixon signed into law amendments to the Urban Mass Transportation Assistance Act of 1964. Under its provisions, federal funds are allocated to transit properties on a "matching fund" basis. This means that local governments must provide one-third the cost of a proposed transit project to be eligible for funds from the Urban Mass Transportation Administration on a 2 for 1 basis.

It became vitally important that funding mechanisms be set up at the local level to qualify the state and its transit agencies for their fair share of these federal subsidies.

The State Legislature recognized and responded to this emergency need for such a funding mechanism by passing Senate Bill 325. This new law removes gasoline from its former tax-exempt status, beginning July 1st of this year. Under this new law, the overall sales tax remains at 5%. The state's current 4% share of that 5% will be reduced to 3-3/4%, which will be applied to the larger tax base and will now include the sales tax on gasoline. The 1/4% taken from the state's share will be made available at the local level for improving public transportation throughout the state.

All claims for public transit, including roads and streets, must first be approved by the regional planning agency involved--in the case of the Rapid Transit District, this will be the Southern California Association of Governments, SCAG.

The new sales tax will raise approximately \$150 million in California, of which \$30 million will go to the cities and counties for general fund use. The remaining \$120 million will become available for public transit in urban areas and for roads and streets in rural counties. The amount each county will receive is based on the amount of sales tax generated in that particular county. Los Angeles County is projected to receive about \$43 million from the funds allocated to transit beginning in 1973, the first full year the law

will be in effect. The Rapid Transit District may receive as much as \$35 million of this amount, and the eight other municipal transit properties in the county will share the balance of \$8 million.

So, for the first time, a national-local fund "mix" of not insubstantial size is available to us, if we act in a concerted fashion, and, of course, I underscore this latter qualification. We will, I believe, fail to obtain an orderly construction start on our system only if the respective local governmental jurisdictions fail to agree upon how and where we should get started.

Now, I'd like to point out here that passage of Senate Bill 325 didn't just happen because the legislature happened to be in a good mood on that particular day. The bill received active statewide support from citizens' groups, chambers of commerce, civic organizations and environmental groups. It became law because the people of California and their lawmakers recognized the manifest need for long-term financial support for California's ailing transit properties. It was passed not just because these transit properties "were there"; but because the services they provide are urgently needed in the balanced transportation mix.

Since 1968, the public's concern about traffic congestion on the freeways, in the Central Business District and other activity centers in the Los Angeles basin--not to mention the rising awareness of environmental problems--has become more and more vocal. This mounting public concern has been the moving force that made 1969, '70 and '71 landmark years for setting up funding mechanisms for public transit through progressive legislation at both the federal and state levels.

This public concern was demonstrated again in Proposition 18, which proposed a constitutional amendment to permit use of gasoline tax monies for public transportation, as opposed to highways only. It was defeated, but the fact that it was on the ballot at all was another straw in the wind indicating the public mood, and it is with us again. The Foran Amendment, ACA-16 is practically the same proposal, and if approved by the full Senate, will be on the November Ballot for the citizens to once again judge.

As we've seen, at this point in time, the RTD and our partner local agencies--the City of Los Angeles and the County of Los Angeles--have the funding mechanisms required to get on with the job of building rapid transit. But I must interject here a word of caution about the proposed Watson Amendment concerning the state's property tax structure: If this initiative passes, any funding gains to the District made possible by Senate Bill 325 will be totally cancelled, since the Amendment would completely shut off SB 325 funds soon to be available to the District. If it passes, there will be no beginning for rapid transit in Los Angeles County--and no end of financial problems for

the existing surface system which provides 80% of the public transportation available in this area.

But what does the District mean by "rapid transit"? And what are some of the basic planning considerations against which a rapid transit system must be judged?

The goal of the Rapid Transit District has always been to get its vehicles out of proliferating traffic. We don't wish to compete with the automobile; we want to cooperate with the auto in the balanced transportation mix. Therefore, our definition of rapid transit is as follows: the exclusive use by our vehicles of grade-separated rights-of-way, whether concrete, rail or whatever.

In keeping with our definition of rapid transit as exclusive use by our vehicles of grade-separated roadways is the new San Bernardino Freeway Express Busway, soon to be operating between El Monte and Los Angeles. The Busway will operate in exclusive lanes in the median and alongside the heavily traveled San Bernardino Freeway, and will speed commuters to and from downtown Los Angeles during peak morning and evening commuting hours in 18 to 22 minutes each way. It now takes 36 to 45 minutes to make the same trip by car.

We believe the Busway represents an evolutionary step between the present bus system and the county-wide rapid transit system to come. Both state and federal highway agencies are interested in improving the people-moving capacities of freeway corridors in Southern California. The Busway appears to be a logical way to accomplish this purpose at a relatively low cost without endangering the environment. It will preserve an existing strategic transit right-of-way for public use, and if extended to other freeways as planned, the Busway concept could prevent removal from state and local tax rolls of private property which might otherwise be required for new transportation corridors. And by keeping public transportation vehicles out of congested traffic, the Busway will be definitely in the context of rapid transit--even though we are frank to admit problems when the buses re-enter non-exclusive vehicular lanes when they arrive downtown.

As noted before, we do plan to consider extension of the Busway concept to other existing and proposed freeways in the county. We are fortunate in having the fine cooperation of California Division of Highways and other state, federal and local agencies in planning and building the San Bernardino Freeway Express Busway, and in planning other such facilities to come.

The Division of Highways has done an excellent job up to now in this area. However, I note that now it is encountering increasing difficulties in obtaining approvals for new freeways. The list of proposed freeways stalled

by local action is impressive: it includes the Beverly Hills Freeway, the El Segundo-Norwalk Freeway, and the Pacific Coast Freeway.

This brings us to one hard fact: there is only so much land in Southern California and most of it has been assigned functions of one kind or another. When it is used up--it is gone--more land can't be "manufactured", as can concrete or other commodities. Efficient land use, therefore, becomes one of the foremost problems in planning for rapid transit.

Here, if I may, I'd like to emphasize the experience of the San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit system. Fully one quarter of the new BART rail system shares its rights-of-way with existing freeways, utilizing the median, or alongside, or both. Experts who have studied the BART system are highly complimentary of the system's efficient land use. This joint sharing of freeway rights-of-way by a rail system poses certain vehicular congestion problems at stations and interchanges, but they are problems BART is in the process of solving. I submit that similar planning for effective and efficient land use must go into our plan for rapid transit in this area.

In the 1970's, those cities which qualify as vibrant metropolitan areas --worldwide--have rapid transit systems--Stockholm, Mexico City, Paris, London, Tokyo, Montreal and San Francisco.

In the United States, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia already have rapid transit, and with the aid of federal funds, are extending their systems. New York has requested over \$500 million for new subway and commuter projects. Chicago has been assured of two-thirds matching funds to begin construction of a \$190 million distributor subway through the heart of the downtown "loop". With extensive plans for a central city commuter rail connector and several transit extensions and commuter improvements, Philadelphia will be a major beneficiary of recent federal transit legislation.

Atlanta's Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority is already programmed for action on a totally new rapid transit system. The extensive Washington D. C. System is in construction now. And are the traffic and smog problems of Los Angeles any less severe than those of San Francisco, where BART will soon be literally carrying its weight in helping to relieve those problems?

The District considers that the concept of rapid transit will act as the definitive planning device and catalyst Los Angeles so urgently needs. In this connection, let's take a look at the recent proposals of the Committee for Central City Planning, Inc. With the help of the Los Angeles City Planning Department, it has the task of developing a general plan for downtown Los Angeles.

The Preliminary General Development Plan for downtown Los Angeles relies heavily on trunk-line rapid transit and a secondary distribution--or people-mover--system. An underlying premise of the plan is that these public transportation facilities are essential if the core area of the nation's second largest metropolitan area is to accept its share of the western region's anticipated growth. To quote from the plan, "The analysis of 1990 travel demands and transportation system capacities indicates that the growth of the Los Angeles Central Business District will be achieved only through a greater dependence on transit", end of quote.

The whole region benefits from a downtown center serving as the focal point for the region's economic growth. Such a center serves as the natural meeting place for cultural and entertainment activities. Most importantly, it serves as the economic hub of the Western United States as the headquarters of the region's major businesses.

The key to all this activity in the downtown center is good public transportation. While already well served by freeways, the plan calls for the regional rapid transit system, as well as the secondary distribution system to feed the rapid transit trunk-line. In short, this major activity center--a point of concentration of population, business and cultural activity in the basin --is a vital element of regional planning. And, in turn, rapid transit is vital to the full development of the center.'

Downtown Los Angeles' role as the "Center of the Region" is viewed in the plan as one of obligation to contribute to maintaining and upgrading Los Angeles' quality of life--an obligation also shared by all activity centers such as Wilshire, Century City, Los Angeles International Airport, Beverly Hills, Hollywood, Pasadena, San Fernando Valley and Westwood, and others now under development.

I personally strongly endorse the centers concept which is basic to the pending general plan of the City of Los Angeles.

Initially, the Los Angeles planning group considered four basic growth patterns around which the metropolitan area could develop. They were described as the dispersion concept, the low density concept, the corridor concept and the centers concept. The latter two concepts--corridor and centers--relied heavily on rapid transit for the needed mobility. The centers concept was finally decided on as best reflecting the desires of the communities and best accommodating the present life-style of the population.

The adopted activity centers concept gives strong impetus to the Rapid Transit District's effort to initiate rapid transit. The definitive plan for the city's land use policies of the future is there. Transportation--and in particular, public transportation--plays a vital part in implementing that plan.

Rapid transit and the centers concept complement each other. The concept which emphasizes large centers, a strong central core and some high density housing--which leaves land available for large-scale open spaces--must have rapid transit for access to these centers.

To conclude, then: rapid transit is a must if the regional activity centers concept on which future planning in the city is based is to work at all.

One of the principal objections raised by critics of rapid transit is the expense. However, let us look at the "seed" moneys necessary to get started. The total budget for the City of Los Angeles for the fiscal year 1972-73 is \$598,332,721. Of that total amount, we've suggested that \$4.4 million--or .73%--be allocated for rapid transit. The County of Los Angeles' budget for the upcoming fiscal year totals \$2,348,055,595. The county has allocated \$1.6 million--or .068%--for rapid transit.

Our final technical studies will begin this summer and last for approximately 8 months. They will culminate in a grant application for capital funding, such application to be made to the Federal Urban Mass Transportation Administration.

If the basic recommendations on these corridor studies are approved by UMTA, matching federal funds are expected to be forthcoming to construct the initial phases of what ultimately will become a comprehensive rapid transit system in Los Angeles County.

The work statement to govern the technical studies provides the basis for updating transit needs and travel demands in this area, as well as evaluating available demographic, land use and socio-economic data relevant to the project. Full consideration will be given to the total effect the proposed rapid transit system will have on the environment and the communities involved. The prime thrust of the study will be to identify and assign priority to special rapid transit line components which are basic to any Los Angeles system.

We will examine alternative forms of transit services, in which our existing bus system will play a major role as a "feeder" system in the total mix. Among the alternatives will be various modes of modern rapid transit, tracked air cushion vehicles, rubber tire, etc., as well as small car auxiliary systems to "feed" commuters to trunk rapid transit lines. So-called demand-responsive PRT systems will receive careful analysis. The study must result in selection of the system to serve the basin.

All relevant financing plans will be reviewed, including federal grants, state support and others. However, here again, the study must call for a specific financial plan based upon available funding mechanisms.

Practically, unanimity of local consent is mandatory if we are to get the federal financing we need. For a plan that becomes mired in controversy and misunderstanding is little better than no plan at all. All levels of local government must speak with a strong, unified voice if we are to be heard above the competition of other cities for federal funds in Washington.

Nothing is so powerful as an idea whose time has come. The District takes the position that the time for a balanced transportation system for Los Angeles has come. And rapid transit is an essential ingredient in that balanced transportation formula. The first-stage rapid transit line is the first necessary step.
