Environmental Information

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Russell E. Train, Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, recently told a national meeting of urban planners that congestion in our metropolitan areas "is not too many people in too small a space but rather too many people spread out all over creation." As a result, Train said, "To far too great a degree, central cities are organized for the care and convenience of cars, not people."

If we are to make the best of our cities and urban areas, Train said, "we are going to have to develop, as rapidly as possible, effective and democratic institutions at the State, local and regional levels to direct and regulate growth" in this country.

Train made his remarks before the National Conference on the Urban Environment meeting in New York City on April 1. A copy of his speech is attached for your information and use.

Office of Public Affairs

REMARKS BY THE HONORABLE RUSSELL E. TRAIN
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PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BEFORE THE
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MAKING THE BEST OF OUR CITIES

I am delighted to take part in this conference on the urban environment -- for that is the environment in which the vast majority of Americans lives and, not always without difficulty, breathes.

I am tempted to address you as "fellow elitists" -- for it has been suggested, by one of our more recent philosophers of the absurd, that people who care about the environment, and people who care about cities, have one thing in common: they are all elitists.

We can take comfort in the fact that we are in good and ample company. A Harris poll released earlier this month showed that the American people rank water and air pollution as the nation's third and fourth greatest problems respectively, above the energy shortage and second only to inflation and unemployment.

Moreover, the poll reveals, three out of four Americans are unconvinced that a temporary slow-down of water and air pollution control programs will "help ease the energy shortage," "get the economy moving again" or "ease unemployment." They believe, instead, that we can deal with our economic and energy difficulties while at the same time maintaining our progress toward pollution control.

By roughly the same proportion -- three out of four -- most Americans live in metropolitan areas. Whether they do so by choice or by necessity is not a simple matter to decide, and I will not

attempt to do so here.

Americans have, in fact, almost always displayed an ambivalent attitude towards the city. Nor is that surprising. For unlike the cities of Europe which grew slowly -- I might even say aged, like good wine -- over many centuries, ours have often been transformed from trading post to giant metropolitan complex in little more than a single century. "The strength of ancient metropolises," historian Daniel Boorstin has written, "came from the inability, the unwillingness or the reticence of people to leave, but New World cities depended on new-formed loyalties and enthusiasms, shallow-rooted, easily transplanted." Europe, after all, was what Americans came to escape. And if Europe was characterized by those close and corrupt accretions of the past called cities, America was characterized by its openness, its limitless horizons and frontiers. John Steinbeck said it well, and said it all, when he wrote upon his arrival in New York City: "I was going to live in New York but I was going to avoid it. I planted a lawn in the tiny soot-covered garden, bought huge pots and planted tomatoes, pollinating the blossoms with a water-color brush."

We have rarely, and only reluctantly, regarded cities in this country as places where we expected to stay, to raise our children, and to watch them raise theirs. They were, for the most part, places where we came only to earn or acquire enough to enable us to get out. Europeans may not have looked at their cities with greater affection than we have. But they have generally known, or assumed, that they would have to live out their lives in their cities, and they have generally tried to make the best of them -- in both senses of that phrase. They

built cities to last. And because land was scarce and areas were small, they built them in compact form.

Unlike the cities of Europe, ours have not generally grown up or grown in -- they have grown out. In part, our spread patterns of urban settlement and development are the legacy of our old illusion that we had endless acres of land to build on and unlimited energy to burn. In part, they are the result of the fact that we have regarded our cities as places to leave rather than live, as places to "process" immigrants and laborers, as places to make enough in order to be able to afford to move out. And so our cities have become what one authority has called "accidental cities" which put a "premium on moving" because they "offer so little in the way of living." The fact that the automobile is responsible for so much of our air pollution, and the fact that our dependence on Arab oil can be completely accounted for by our dependence upon the automobile, suggest how dearly we have purchased that "premium on moving."

The simple fact is that our energy and environmental problems are, in no small degree, the result of the haphazard, helter-skelter patterns in which so much of our urban growth has occurred. We cannot expect to make much progress toward conserving energy or clearing our air unless we change those patterns.

It is no accident that, fifty years ago, it was Henry Ford who declared that: "The city is dead" and that "we shall solve the City Problem by leaving the City."

It is no accident that, fifty years later, a former Secretary of Transportation went so far as to describe a city as, originally and

essentially, "a way of making transportation unnecessary . . . of enabling more people to get more of [the things they need and want] for the least amount of transportation."

It is no accident that both the energy crisis and the clean air effort have combined to encourage far more compact and conservative kinds of growth that will permit us to break the strangle-hold -- one might even say the "death-grip" -- that the private, single-passenger automobile has exerted upon our cities.

It is no accident that, together, our energy and environmental imperatives should help give the cities of America a new lease on life. For the city, at its best, may well be the greatest conservation device ever invented by man. The whole idea of a city is to give people access to the broad range of opportunities and activities they need and want without having to spend so much energy, time and money in order to get them.

The days of sprawl may not yet be over, but I suspect they are decidedly numbered. The costs, as we are starting to understand, are becoming far too high.

Early last year, the Regional Plan Association of New York, together with Resources for the Future, released the results of a study showing that for all its bright lights, traffic jams and World Trade Centers, New York City consumes only about half the energy per resident that the rest of the nation does. More than that, the study showed that -- per dollar of income -- "spread city" residents use up three times more energy in their homes than people in high-density developments. More recently, the "Costs of Sprawl" study -- jointly sponsored by EPA, the

Council on Environmental Quality, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development -- shows that the environmental, economic and energy costs of higher density planned developments are 40-50 percent less than those imposed by unplanned sprawl.

There are, as Edmund Faltermayer of Fortune has pointed out, other forces besides our energy and environmental efforts which are moving us toward more compact and concentrated patterns of urban growth and settlement. Already, the rapid and apparently endless rise in land prices has meant the construction of more townhouses and apartments. Today, multi-family residences account for about half the units built in the United States (excluding mobile homes); in the late 1950's multi-family units comprised only one-fifth of the units built. There is, in addition, a sharp shift away from large, child-oriented households toward smaller, adult-oriented households. The Census Bureau says there will be at least 13 million more households in 1985 than in 1975. The 25- to 34-year-old group -- the age span in which people generally buy their first home -- will grow by 9.6 million by 1980. That is four times the population increase in that age group during the comparable period in the 1960's. This burgeoning number of young households with fewer children and with less interest in the suburban life style; the growth in the number of working wives; the increased emphasis or leisure -- these and other related demographic and cultural changes are generating a growing demand for closer in, more compact kinds of development.

All of these factors and forces add up to a very real opportunity to reshape and restructure our urban environment in ways that will

make it a far better place to live. If we are to take full advantage of this opportunity, we are going to have to do at least two things. The first is to rid ourselves of some rather serious misconceptions. I think, in particular, of the thoroughly erroneous notion that density is synomous with congestion on the one hand and high-rise on the other.

We often hear it said that most of our urban ills are the result of overcrowding and congestion. There are just too many people, we are told, jammed together in much too small a space. We hear it said that what's wrong with central cities is too many people and too many cars. Well, the problem with central cities is <u>too few people and too many cars</u>. To put it another way, the congestion that we experience in our central cities -- both in our streets and in our lungs -- is mainly the result of the fact that there are too many cars driven by too many people who don't live there. To far too great a degree, central cities are organized for the care and convenience of cars, not people.

And the problem with urban areas is not too many people in too small a space but rather too many people spread out all over creation. Despite all the talk about overcrowding in our metropolitan areas, the fact is that density in this country -- defined as the number of people per given area of land -- has been steadily declining since early in this century. In our urbanized areas, population per square mile has declined from 6,580 in 1920 to 4,230 in recent years -- and is expected to decline to 3,732 by the end of the century. It has been estimated that, in the year 2000, urban regions

in this country will occupy one and a half times as much land as they did in 1960.

Nor is high density the same thing as high rise. With all due respect, we do not need to choose between Los Angeles and Manhattan, between being strangled by crabgrass or submerged in concrete. Paris has 2 1/2 times the density of New York, but until recently the hordes of American tourists drawn to the delights of Parisian street scenes saw nothing remotely resembling the towers of mid-town Manhattan. For that matter, outside mid-town and lower Manhattan, New York's predominant residential structure is the five- and six-story walkup. Preference polls always show that Americans regard San Francisco as far and away the most desirable of American cities. Yet some of its most popular neighborhoods -- such as those in the North Beach-Telegraph Hill area -- achieve densities of as much as 100 dwelling units per acre without high rise.

With careful design and planning, we can build to far greater densities and a far greater mix of uses than we do now and enjoy, as a result, far less congestion, far greater convenience, more open space and recreation areas, greater access to a diversity of activities and services. We can, at one and the same time, achieve a far greater conservation of resources and quality of life with the careful design and planning of higher density and mixed use developments than we can through the endless proliferation of urban and suburban "monocultures" that are the prevailing result of our present development patterns.

Long ago, Aristotle observed that "that which is common to the greatest number has the least care bestowed upon it."

Americans, more than most people, have failed to take good care of the things that belong to all of us together: air, water, land, cities, regions, neighborhoods. Yet unless we start taking care of these things that belong to nobody in particular and everybody in general, we are going to find ourselves faced not only with a narrower range of individual choices than before, but with individual choices that are less worth making.

These common choices must be made through political processes and institutions that are both democratic and effective, that are large enough to encompass the problems and small enough to reflect and respond to the needs and desires of the citizens concerned. Most of these common choices involve problems that simply cannot be contained within any single local jurisdiction. Local governments are too feeble and too fragmented to cope with an increasing range of problems such as transportation, air and water quality, and, above all, the problems of growth -- of the patterns and pace of development, of the way in which housing, jobs, schools, recreation, and similar activities are distributed within a given area. Citizens within each separate jurisdiction are deeply and directly affected by decisions made within other jurisdictions; yet they have no say in those decisions. Each jurisdiction pushes and pulls against the other. And the citizens of each watch helplessly as their region assumes shapes and directions that are determined by forces they do not understand and cannot influence.

If the citizens of this country are going to have the chance to make intelligent, effective decisions about the patterns and problems of growth, and if they are to exercise any real control over those patterns

that so deeply affect and influence their lives, then we are going to have to develop, as rapidly as possible, effective and democratic institutions at the state, local, and regional levels to direct and regulate growth.

If we can develop these institutions and come to grips with these problems, then we will begin to make the best of our cities and urban areas. In so doing, we will not only extend our range of individual choices, but discover that our choices are increasingly worth making.

Environmentalists, as I have suggested at the beginning, are sometimes suspected of concerning themselves only with expanding and improving the choices of an affluent few, who already have more and better choices than the majority of Americans -- especially those who live in our central cities. And environmentalists may, at times, lay themselves open to that suspicion. In their very real concern over industrial pollution and the environmental harm and hazards that have occurred under past patterns of economic growth, they may seem to forget that there are millions in this country who can't find work and don't earn a decent income, and that only during periods of strong economic growth have blacks and other minorities made significant economic gains. In their very real desire to draw the line at further environmental damage as a result of rampant and random suburban growth, they may appear to ignore the fact that there are millions of low- and moderate-income Americans who cannot find, let alone afford, decent housing.

But once this is said, it must emphatically be added that pollution, in all its forms, continues to take a high and heavy toll

upon our lives and landscape. The more we learn about the health effects of pollutants, the worse things look. Researchers at the National Cancer Institute are reported to have estimated, for example, that 60 to 90 percent of all human cancers are caused by environmental factors -- from ultraviolet rays to plastics and pesticides. And it is upon the central city, and its residents, that the burden of pollution falls most heavily. It is they who must inhale the heaviest doses of sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide and the like. It is they who must bear the brunt of such environmental ills and assaults as noise, congestion, litter, decaying neighborhoods and deteriorating housing, the absence of open space and recreational opportunities. It is they who have the most to gain from environmental improvement.

It is they, moreover, who have most to gain from efforts to encourage more compact and concentrated patterns of development that draw people back into the city and bring our metropolitan areas back together again. It is they who have the most to gain from efforts to manage growth and development in ways that give at least as much weight to environmental and social considerations as to economic and commercial ones.

If we can, at long last, take charge of the forces that shape the growth of our urban areas, then I think we can do a far better job of building more human and humane communities and of breathing new life into the old adage: "City air makes men free."