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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
 WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

September 10, 1974

Honorable John L. McClellan
 Chairman
 Committee on Appropriations
 United States Senate
 Washington, D. C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

We would like to enlist your support for an increase in the scope of the urban mass transportation assessments currently being conducted for the Committee by the Office of Technology Assessment. As you will recall, one of these assessments is concerned with the question of the degree of automation which is technically feasible, economically justifiable or otherwise appropriate to rail rapid transit. The second assessment addresses the process by which communities select, plan and implement a new transit system or modernize an existing one.

While the need for these studies of conventional rail transit remains unchanged, there have been significant developments since the date of our original request to the Office of Technology Assessment which indicate that the coverage of the assessments should be expanded in two directions.

--First, it seems clear that we will be required to deal with the issue of "personal rapid transit" and related high technology projects earlier and in greater depth than had been anticipated.

--Second, the increasingly serious condition of the economy suggests that these assessments should be expanded to consider the development and potential of urban mass transit under conditions in which federal funding may be severely decreased -- or greatly increased in the event that unemployment becomes an overriding problem.

To expand on the first point, communities (such as Minneapolis and Las Vegas) are showing increasing interest in new types of fixed guideway systems. Personal rapid transit (PRT) systems are increasingly discussed as alternatives to more conventional rail transit. Implementation of new technologies may be proposed such as magnetically levitated vehicles. The considerable effort underway in other countries to advance the state of the art in fixed guideway systems should be further investigated. The current assessments do address some of these issues. However, if addressed

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they lie at the boundaries of the ongoing assessments rather than being fully included in the scope of work.

Concerning the second suggestion for expanding the assessments already underway, the economic picture has changed greatly since these assessments were initiated. As you know, a major purpose of a technology assessment is to identify policy alternatives and quantify the probable effects of such alternatives. Certainly, these assessments should address the full range of contingencies affecting policy alternatives and their impacts. Examples of varying economic outlooks that should be considered are as follows:

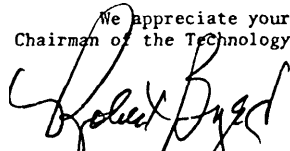
1. A revived fuel shortage leading to greatly increased (and funds for) mass transit. How much of the additional funds should be spent for fixed guideway transit, including personal rapid transit? How would R and D be affected? Would private industry have the capacity to support increased demands upon it?
2. A severe recession or actual depression. Should major

On the other hand, if funds for major transit projects were severely curtailed, how quickly could communities, low planning or building new transit systems alter their plans? What are the probabilities associated with such a future? Are they sufficiently high that communities should be encouraged to place more emphasis on staging the development of new transit systems so that working subsystems are obtained if development of the entire system is interrupted?

To summarize, we feel the needs of the Committee will be best served by extending the current assessment efforts. These extensions would

- increase the range of technologies under assessment; and,
- permit assessment of the interrelationships between alternate economic futures and a variety of mass transit policy alternatives.

We appreciate your assistance in transmitting this request to the Chairman of the Technology Assessment Board.



Robert C. Byrd, U.S.S.
Chairman, Transportation
Appropriations Subcommittee

Sincerely,



Clifford P. Case, U.S.S.
Ranking Minority Member
Transportation Appropriations
Subcommittee