

OPE 21-26

Gas Tax Use For Mass Transit Backed

WASHINGTON, Feb. 7. — (UPI) — Transportation Secretary Claude S. Brinegar said Wednesday that urban areas, their streets choked with cars, must be allowed to use federal gasoline tax money for mass transit systems.

Brinegar also opposed a plan to add 10,000 miles to the interstate highway system and urged that Congress make no changes in the government's program to rid the highways of billboards.

Testimony from Brinegar marked the opening round of debate on a new 5.35-billion-dollar federal aid highway bill. The major question is whether to break a 16-year precedent and allow states and certain cities to use a portion of the highway trust fund for buses, subways or railroads.

Brinegar suggested that 1.1 billion be used for this purpose. This would be about 20 per cent of the 6.1-billion-a-year funds, which comes from the 4 per cent federal tax on gasoline and oil, and which until now has been limited to highway construction.

Brinegar's statement brought hope to mass transit advocates and



Claude Brinegar

environmentalists, but little solace to the many lobbyists from highway-related industries.

However, Brinegar later told the Senate subcommittee on housing and urban affairs that he opposed giving

cities money to operate their mass transit systems. He said federal money should go for the actual purchase of buses and subway cars, not for operating expenses.

Brinegar said operations expense was the business of state and local governments. But he noted that general revenue sharing funds are available for any purpose, and could be tapped for operating expenses by local governments.

Brinegar said a portion of the 1.1 billion in flexible money could bypass state government and go directly to 55 urban areas of 400,000 persons or more, if they formed an agency to handle areawide transportation problems.

In addition to the 1.1 billion flexible urban fund, Brinegar asked for 3.25 billion for the interstate highway program and one billion for the rural highway program.

However, Brinegar said the administration was opposed to a proposed 10,000-mile "priority-primary" road system, which would amount to an extension of the interstate system.

9-11-73

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Feb. 8, 1973