

PROTESTING PORTLAND'S FREEWAYS: HIGHWAY ENGINEERING AND
CITIZEN ACTIVISM IN THE INTERSTATE ERA

by

ELIOT HENRY FACKLER

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Ellen Herman, Chair of the Examining Committee

6/2/09
Date

Committee in Charge: Ellen Herman, Chair
Jeffrey Ostler
Matthew Dennis

Accepted by:

Dean of the Graduate School

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From its inception, the Oregon State Highway Department and Portland's political leaders repeatedly failed to address the city's automobile traffic problems. However, in 1955 the Highway Department published a comprehensive freeway plan that anticipated new federal funding and initiated an era of unprecedented road construction in the growing city. In the early 1960s, localized opposition to the city's Interstate system failed to halt the completion of three major routes. Yet, politically savvy grassroots activists and a new generation of local leaders used the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act and the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1973 to successfully stop the construction of two freeways in the mid 1970s. Though favorable legislation and the efforts of local politicians were instrumental in thwarting the Highway Department's plans, this study will focus on the crucial role played by the citizens who waged an ideological battle against recalcitrant highway engineers for Portland's future.

pressures resulting from globalization by engaging in subtle protests within in the maquiladoras, opting to participate in the informal economy, and utilizing community groups to facilitate social change.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Eliot Henry Fackler

PLACE OF BIRTH: Mansfield, Ohio

DATE OF BIRTH: February 6, 1982

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon
The College of Wooster, Wooster, Ohio

DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts, History, 2009, University of Oregon
Bachelor of Arts, History, 2004, The College of Wooster

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

United States History

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Teaching Assistant, Department of History, University of Oregon, Eugene,
2007-2009

Student Advisor, Department of History, University of Oregon, Eugene,
2008

GRANTS, AWARDS AND HONORS:

Oregon Heritage Fellowship, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, 2009

Graduate Teaching Fellowship, University of Oregon, 2007-2009

Ohio Environmental Fellowship, Ohio Environmental Council, 2004

Cum Laude, The College of Wooster, 2004

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For Jen, my driving buddy

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1955 the Oregon State Highway Department published a report outlining the proposed locations of 14 limited-access freeways that would slice through Portland's century-old neighborhoods. The 150-page document, entitled *Freeway and Expressway System, Portland Metropolitan Area*, anticipated the passage of a new Federal-Aid Highway Act that would fund the long-anticipated Interstate Highway System. The following year, Oregon traffic engineers began building the state's portion of that system. As they oversaw the design and construction of urban freeways over the next two decades, highway engineers and planning officials in the local and state government met resistance from citizens whose homes, businesses, and neighborhoods would be destroyed by the interstates. By the mid 1970s, after a decade of widespread resistance against planned freeways, neighborhood groups in southeast and northwest Portland successfully halted the construction of two routes and ushered in a new era of citizen participation in city planning.

Portland's anti-freeway movement is the story of two paradigm shifts that led to a fundamental transformation of local planning practices and increased neighborhood activism. The first was an ideological shift that resulted from the imposition of a massive highway system onto an already existing cityscape. The destruction caused by urban freeway building raised the ire of residents in the path of the bulldozers. Mounting concerns about the ecological impacts of human consumption and automobile-centered

planning gave freeway protests an additional sense of urgency and encouraged the support of local leaders. These environmental concerns had antecedents in earlier battles to preserve wilderness areas, but only in the 1960s and 1970s did Portlanders – and citizens across the country – become involved in efforts to actively reduce road construction and automobile usage in order to protect the urban environment.

The second shift had far-reaching political consequences for Portland and ultimately set it apart from other cities. Because state highway engineers were given considerable funding and authority by the federal government, they dominated city planning after 1956. As a result of this bureaucratic control, residents of American cities found that they were effectively excluded from the decision-making process. As freeway projects threatened to carve up San Francisco, Boston, New Orleans, and dozens of other cities, protesters fought to save their neighborhoods and gain a measure of control over transportation and land use planning. In their efforts to wrest control from the Oregon Highway Department, Portlanders achieved a victory unique among the urban freeway revolts: the institutionalization of a neighborhood planning organization. In creating the Office of Neighborhood Associations (now called the Office of Neighborhood Involvement) the city of Portland gave residents a say in local planning matters. This move toward greater democratic participation remains the unique legacy of Portland's anti-freeway movement.

Portland today is often called an “ecotopia” or a planner's paradise, and for good reasons. Metro, the nation's only elected regional government, coordinates planning in the surrounding region while the Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI) gives

neighborhood groups a voice in local planning. No freeways have been built in the city since the completion of Interstate 205 in 1982, and city officials routinely reject plans for new parking garages, street widening, and other projects that would accommodate automobiles. At the heart of these planning principles is an “environmental imagination” shared by many Oregonians and rooted in a reliance on and appreciation for the state’s diverse and verdant landscape. This environmental imagination has permeated state politics for most of the past century.¹ It is no coincidence that many of the leaders and citizens who eventually voiced concern over the social and environmental impacts of freeways were natives who took pride in their state.² Thus, when freeway protesters coalesced in Portland in the 1960s, they urbanized Oregon’s environmental imagination and continued the debates about development that had been occurring for decades along the riverbanks and shorelines, and in the expansive mountains, forests, and fields of the Oregon countryside.

In addition to their desire to preserve the character of individual neighborhoods and the city in general, the citizen activists who led Portland’s anti-freeway campaigns also demanded to be included in planning decisions. In one of the few accounts linking

¹ See Richard W. Judd and Christopher S. Beach, *Natural States: The Environmental Imagination in Maine, Oregon, and the Nation* (Washington, DC: Resources for the Future, 2003). Judd and Beach use the term “environmental imagination” when referring to the popular imagery and ideals that inform the views of the residents of Maine and Oregon. See also, William G. Robbins, *Landscapes of Conflict: The Oregon Story, 1940-2000* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004). Both of these books trace the history of environmentalism, resource use, and land use planning in Oregon. These two excellent monographs examine the broader historical events and political discourses in which this history of Portland’s freeways is situated.

² See Ernie Bonner, “PlanPdx.org: Interviews with Planning Participants,” Portland State University, <http://www.pdx.edu/usp/planpdxorg-interviews-planning-participants>. Specifically, see interviews with Don Clark, Frank Frost, and Charlotte and Ogden Beeman.

Portland's repudiation of freeways with the city's revolution in neighborhood participation, historian Gregory Thompson emphasizes the importance of the political elite in harnessing neighborhood activism to transform transportation and land use planning.³ The watershed mayoral election of Neil Goldschmidt in 1972 and the emergence of a Portland City Council and Multnomah County Commission comprised of freeway critics certainly altered the ways in which the city would develop in the coming years. However, as important as the political elites have been, neighborhood activists were the crucial element in the reformulation of transportation and neighborhood planning practices in Portland. Organized citizen groups were instrumental in bringing a halt to the freeways, electing and influencing politicians, and reimagining the local planning process. The paradigm shifts that marked Portland's emergence as an "ecotopia" were not articulated by Goldschmidt or others so much as they were exemplified by the groups that organized against freeways.

Citizens like architects Howard Glazer, Ed Wagner, George Sheldon, and Bob Belcher, engineer Ogden Beeman, lawyer Charles Merten, and activists Betty Merten, Albert and Kayda Clark, Charlotte Beeman, Mary Pedersen, Ron Buel, and Allison Belcher articulated a vision of livable neighborhoods that questioned highway engineers' auto-centered planning. These activists represented The New Left. They were intellectual elites – experts, academics, and insiders – who were, in the words of C. Wright Mills,

³ Gregory Thompson, "Taming the Neighborhood Revolution: Planners, Power Brokers, and the Birth of Neotraditionalism in Portland, Oregon," *Journal of Planning History*, vol. 6, no. 3 (2007): 214-247.

“agencies of historical change.”⁴ Working from outside the system, they protested freeways and created a sense of civil unrest that leaders could not ignore. Working from within the system to create neighborhood plans, they gave Portland’s decision makers the opportunity to implement alternatives to the Highway Department’s proposals. The emergence of citizen activism ultimately proved to be the most important element in halting urban interstates in Portland and replacing a doctrine of mobility with a more ephemeral vision of livability.

The freeway revolts that developed in urban areas across the United States, Western Europe, and Australia in the 1960s and 1970s all shared a basic rejection of traffic engineers’ doctrine of mobility.⁵ As engineers worked to link suburbs with city centers and accommodate the automobile traffic that clogged overburdened street systems, they focused only on moving motor vehicles from points of origin to final destinations. Those neighborhoods that would bear the burden of noisy, disruptive freeways generally stood to benefit little from the improved mobility. Rather, local access to churches, schools, and grocery stores was often inhibited by the presence of divided highways. Ultimately, the areas that were rent asunder by urban freeways bore all of the costs and none of the benefits of the doctrine of mobility. Anti-freeway protests sprang from this obvious inequity and focused on preserving the livable character of the

⁴ C. Wright Mills, “Letter to the New Left” in *New Left Review*, No. 5 (1960). This letter is also available online at <http://www.marxists.org/subject/humanism/mills-c-wright/letter-new-left.htm>.

⁵ Brian Ladd, *Autophobia: Love and Hate in the Automotive Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), chapter 4. In his brilliant analysis of the pro-automobile and anti-automobile forces that have shaped the debates over the motorcar in the western world, Brian Ladd provides a comprehensive summary of the history and arguments surrounding freeway opposition in the United States, Europe, and Australia in the 1960s and ‘70s.

threatened neighborhoods. In Portland, the desire to protect livable areas gave rise to 95 neighborhood associations that would prevent unpopular construction projects in every quarter of the city.

This study is divided into three substantive chapters. Chapter Two, *The Emergent City*, traces the rise of the modern city planner and the highway engineer in the early twentieth century. Both planning professionals and traffic engineers sought to reshape cities, but with very different ends in mind. Urban planners like John Olmsted, Harland Bartholomew, and Lewis Mumford hoped to create orderly social spaces. Their design principles, though quite different, focused on human experiences in cities. Highway engineers, on the other hand, were trained to build structures to accommodate automobiles. Their plans generally did not extend beyond the simple goal of alleviating traffic congestion and improving automobility.⁶ Many of the most famous planners in the United States were hired by proactive organizations and government bodies in Portland to develop comprehensive plans for the rapidly expanding river city. The city government's failure to implement any plan meant that by the 1940s the powerful and pragmatic Oregon Highway Department could begin outlining major highway plans with little opposition from local leaders. The support of famed road builder Robert Moses lent credence to the department's preliminary ideas. By the early 1950s, as suburban growth and increasing automobile usage choked the city's roadways, every major political player

⁶ For a clear explanation of the conflicting ideologies of city planners and highway engineers, see Cliff Ellis, "Professional Conflict over Urban Form: The Case of Urban Freeways, 1930 to 1970," in *Planning the Twentieth-Century American City*, ed. Mary Corbin Sies and Christopher Silver (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 261-279.

in Portland welcomed traffic-centered planning, which asserted that “The highway engineer in the proper and intelligent discharge of his function must promulgate a transport system which will adequately serve existing as well as anticipated future demands of vehicular traffic.”⁷ Automobile accommodation, then, became the primary goal of local decision makers in the Interstate Era, the period of rapid federal freeway construction following the 1956 federal highway bill.

Chapter Three, *The Mobile City*, examines the freeway construction and early citizen protests that followed in the decade after the passage of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. In the early years of interstate construction, the Oregon Highway Department built Interstate 5 and Interstate 84 (then called Interstate 80 North) through the vast rural expanses of the state. By the late 1950s, engineers began designing and purchasing rights-of-way in Portland. Interstate 5 was completed first. The north-south freeway became the primary highway in western Oregon, stretching from the California border to the Columbia River. In the early 1960s, the inner-belt freeway, Interstate 405, entered the planning stage. By the time construction commenced in 1968, the short urban loop was already the most expensive 4.3 miles of road in the state. I-405 was completed in 1973 with little organized opposition. The third route, Interstate 205, proved to be the most controversial freeway ever built in Portland. With several alignment changes and major opposition delaying construction throughout the 1960s, the portion of the route

⁷ Oregon State Highway Department, *Freeway and Express System, Portland Metropolitan Area, 1955* (Salem, OR: Oregon State Highway Department, 1955), 2. Hereafter cited as *Freeway and Expressway System*.

planned for Multnomah County and Portland itself did not move into the construction phase until the late 1970s.

Chapter Four, *The Livable City*, explores the origins and aftermath of Portland's successful freeway revolts, which culminated in the creation of the Office of Neighborhood Associations in 1974 and the cancellation of the Mount Hood Freeway and Interstate 505 in 1976 and 1978, respectively. Because the freeway protesters articulated a vision of a livable city, demanded greater citizen participation in local planning, and elected sympathetic politicians to local office, the Rose City ultimately rejected the freeway as a crucial component of the modern city.

In the end, the history of Portland's interstate highways and the protests surrounding them, centers on two competing visions. Highway engineers and proponents of automobile-centered lifestyles have sought to increase Americans' mobility while anti-freeway activists, environmentalists, transit supporters, and many contemporary city planners have worked to improve the livability of the modern metropolis. In the Rose City, these visions came into conflict when freeways were planned through neighborhoods. This history, then, begins with an examination of the planners and engineers who would design and build the controversial urban interstates.

CHAPTER II
THE EMERGENT CITY:
PLANNERS, HIGHWAY ENGINEERS, AND PORTLAND BEFORE 1956

“Apparently there is no basic difference between the objectives of the State Highway Commission and the conclusions of our consultants.... It is our earnest recommendation that design funds sufficient for a \$20,000,000 construction program be allocated to the Portland area.”¹

– Robert Moses, 1943

In 1943 the Portland Area Postwar Development Committee (PAPDC) hired New York’s eminent road builder Robert Moses to produce a plan to accommodate the city’s anticipated postwar population explosion. The committee paid Moses’ \$100,000 fee and the planner arrived for a week in September. Moses and his team of engineers produced *Portland Improvement*, an 87-page document that was completed in early November. *Portland Improvement* called for extensive investment in highways and the creation of a civic center and other public facilities.² PAPDC ostensibly adopted Moses’ recommendations, although most of the proposed road improvements had already been planned by the proactive Oregon State Highway Commission.³ Moses himself acknowledged this. “The state of Oregon has been exceptionally progressive in its

¹ Robert Moses, *Portland Improvement* (New York: Madigan-Hyland, 1943), 13-14.

² E. Kimbark MacColl, *The Growth of a City: Power and Politics in Portland, Oregon, 1915 to 1950* (Portland: The Georgian Press, 1979), 587.

³ MacColl, *The Growth of a City*, 589.

attitude toward urban traffic,” he wrote.⁴ The report received public attention and validated state highway engineers’ efforts, but few major changes would result directly from *Portland Improvement*.⁵ In the years following the war, city leaders busied themselves dealing with a major housing shortage and the return to a peace-time economy. Highway construction projects, which Moses believed the state should finance, remained in the planning stages until Congress passed the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956. After the bill’s passage, the vision of the Oregon Highway Commission and the recommendations of Robert Moses could finally be realized.

Moses was the last in a series of notable urban planners brought to Portland by various government and civic organizations in the first half of the twentieth century. These men were called upon by local boosters to create comprehensive plans for the rapidly-growing river city. A close examination of the proposals for Portland shows a marked change in focus. From the 1904 Olmsted Plan to Moses’ *Portland Improvement*, urban planning became virtually synonymous with road building. The automobile had transformed American cities as it went from being a luxury item for the wealthy to an affordable and important form of transportation for the masses in a few short decades. Planners came to realize that in order to promote economic growth or implement urban revitalization projects they first needed to manage traffic.

⁴ Moses, *Portland Improvement*, 14.

⁵ One major exception would be the purchase of much of the land that would become Forest Park. See MacColl, *The Growth of a City*, 588.

By the time World War II ended, an auto-centered ideology dominated the planning profession, a shift that reflected the now-nationwide automobility. Bureaucrats at all levels of government increasingly viewed freeway construction as the only solution to urban transportation problems. However, despite promoting road building projects, city planning officials often lacked the ability to influence local politicians, largely because the federal government began to give state highway engineers the authority and funding to construct urban roads, thus excluding local planning commissions from the decision-making process. In Portland, local leaders welcomed both the changes within the planning profession and the shift toward traffic-focused development.

By the time Congress passed the 1956 highway bill, American cities had already been influenced more by traffic engineers than planning professionals. Like other cities, Portland toyed with comprehensive urban plans from the beginning of the century through the 1930s.⁶ Ultimately the city rejected a number of proposals to integrate road building with urban beautification or redevelopment projects. By the end of the Second World War highway engineers at all levels of government had virtually dismissed the use of road construction projects as part of larger social engineering schemes. This chapter will examine the reasons for the dominance of auto-centered planning ideology in Portland and the United States. It is significant that highway engineers played a greater role than planners in shaping urban spaces during the Interstate Era. Comprehensive

⁶ Mark H. Rose, *Interstate: Express Highway Politics, 1939-1989* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 21 for a discussion of Cincinnati's somewhat similar planning history. Urban planners also developed famous plans for cities like St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Newark, and Kansas City in the early twentieth century.

plans often advocated the removal of “blighted” areas and the dispossession of politically-marginalized groups. However, traffic-centered planning had equally detrimental effects, though this fact came as a surprise to many engineers. Because road builders operated under pretensions of apolitical expertise, they were often blind to the social ramifications of their plans. This myopia would lead to frequent clashes between state highway departments and urban residents across the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. In order, then, to explain the history of Portland’s interstate highways and the controversies that surrounded them, we must first examine the city’s planning history, the rise of the highway engineering profession, and the intersection of postwar urban planning and traffic engineering practices and ideologies in the years before 1956.

Planning in Portland, 1900-1945

John Olmsted, the nephew of famed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, was the first professional planner to turn a critical eye toward Portland. After a visit to the Rose City in 1903 at the behest of the Board of Parks Commission chairman Thomas Eliot, Olmsted released a report that called for a harmonious integration of buildings and parks.⁷ He and other planners of the day hoped to craft pleasing public spaces where citizens could easily escape the bustle of urban life. As part of the growing City Beautiful Movement, Olmsted and his contemporaries developed human scale urban plans that focused on the creation of wide boulevards and pastoral landscapes to encourage virtue

⁷ Carl Abbott, *Portland: Planning, Politics, and Growth in a Twentieth Century City* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 59.

and civic-mindedness amid the sin and decay of the industrial city. The Olmsted plan was praised, but increasing land values prevented the city from enacting any of his suggestions.⁸

Like Olmsted, Edward Bennett's 1912 Greater Portland Plan was part of the City Beautiful Movement. Bennett, however, paid more attention to the automobile. He called for the creation of tree-lined urban highways, like William K. Vanderbilt's recently completed Long Island Motor Parkway in New York, to shuttle automobile traffic from the east side of the Willamette River to the downtown area on the west side. Bennett's plan assumed that the metropolitan area would ultimately grow in population to two million, but he never imagined that the majority of those two million people would drive cars. Because the plan was premised on population growing by a factor of ten, supporters were necessarily thinking long-term. The majority of residents, however, could not support the expenditures required to make the Bennett Plan a reality, particularly in the face of a sharp economic downturn in the years leading up to the First World War.⁹

In 1918, the city hired Charles Cheney, a planner whose focus was not on beautification or social control but on designing organized, efficient cityscapes.¹⁰ Cheney was hired to study and devise solutions for the postwar housing crunch. He advocated the adoption of zoning laws and encouraged the creation of a permanent city planning

⁸ Abbott, *Portland*, 60.

⁹ Abbott, *Portland*, 67.

¹⁰ Abbott, *Portland*, 71.

commission.¹¹ The 1924 zoning ordinance, the culmination of Cheney's work in the city, showed Portlanders that local government could effectively guide urban growth. By the 1920s, in large part because of Cheney, local leaders understood that comprehensive planning was a crucial part of political decision-making. Still, Portland continued to grow in a more-or-less ad hoc manner through the 1920s as the newly-formed Portland Planning Commission tried to accommodate the now ubiquitous automobile on city streets.¹² By the end of the Roaring Twenties, according to historian E. Kimbark MacColl, the automobile had transformed Portland: "Over 30 percent of the city's land was now related to automobile uses and Oregonians spent nearly \$100 million in 1928 on automobile related expenses."¹³ Thus, future plans for the city would pay particular attention to accommodating traffic.

The Portland Planning Commission hired St. Louis planner Harland Bartholomew in 1931 to address the city's traffic congestion and declining waterfront area.¹⁴ Bartholomew endorsed a 1927 street widening plan produced by the Planning

¹¹ MacColl, *The Growth of a City*, 296; Abbott, *Portland*, 79. The Portland City Planning Commission was created by the Portland City Council on December 26, 1918.

¹² Abbott, *Portland*, 93. Annual vehicle registrations in Portland exploded during the 1920s according to historian Carl Abbott. "Multnomah County registered fewer than 10,000 motor vehicles in 1916, 36,000 in 1920, and over 90,000 at the time of the great crash." It should be noted that older forms of transportation and street life did not quietly acquiesce to the automobile. Peter Norton's *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008) provides a thorough account of the movement to regulate street space for the motorcar.

¹³ MacColl, *The Growth of a City*, 324.

¹⁴ Abbott, *Portland*, 103.

Commission and encouraged the construction of several Eastside arterial streets.¹⁵ The Bartholomew Plan was largely ignored by Portland officials for two reasons. First, as the Great Depression worsened the local coffers dried up. Portland would have little money to spend on street improvements until the end of World War II. Second, the plan lacked the imagination and scale of many of Bartholomew's other works, notably the 1930 St. Louis County Plan wherein he called for 42 miles of superhighways to link St. Louis to its suburbs.¹⁶ This plan along with other early projects had established Bartholomew as an expert at integrating urban highway designs with comprehensive city plans. He advocated using zoning, mass transit, and well-placed highways to reign in the sprawling suburban growth of the 1920s and to revitalize blighted urban areas. Overall, though, Bartholomew did not bring these principles to bear on his Portland plan. He did, however, warn city and county officials that increased automobile use would extend suburban boundaries to the point that public services, including mass transit, would be unable to reach outlying residents.¹⁷ Despite Bartholomew's limited recommendations, Portland leaders recognized that the St. Louis planner was correct. Automobile traffic was creating a serious problem, even in the lean years of the Depression. Congestion in the central business district continued to worsen, and local officials worried that this

¹⁵ Abbott, *Portland*, 105.

¹⁶ Jeffrey Brown, "A Tale of Two Visions: Harland Bartholomew, Robert Moses, and the Development of the American Freeway." *Journal of Planning History*, vol. 4, no. 3 (2005): 12.

¹⁷ MacColl, *The Growth of a City*, 500.

problem along with population decentralization would harm the downtown core, further undermining the city's tax base.

As the national economy limped along during the early years of the New Deal, government officials, planners, and policy experts from Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington formed the Northwest Regional Council (NRC), an agency whose purpose was to gather and disseminate data to policymakers.¹⁸ Though it wielded no real authority, the NRC aimed to coordinate urban and rural planning efforts and promote economic growth in the entire region. In 1938, the Council hired literary critic and urban theorist Lewis Mumford “to observe and critically appraise the growth and development of the region.”¹⁹ Mumford was, in many ways, a departure from the previous planners who had visited Portland. He lacked the scientific expertise of men like Bartholomew, Cheney, and Bennett. His credentials did not include training in engineering, architecture, or policy. Rather, he was a prolific writer whose elegant style had landed him a job as the architectural critic for *The New Yorker*. However, like the other planners who had visited the Rose City in the past 35 years, Mumford expressed a faith in technological progress and rational expert planning.²⁰ And, like Bartholomew, he worried that if American cities continued to grow haphazardly, they would face insurmountable

¹⁸ For information on this organization, see Charles McKinley, *Five Years of Planning in the Pacific Northwest* (Portland: Northwest Regional Council, 1939).

¹⁹ George Yantis, in his “Forward” to Lewis Mumford, *Regional Planning in the Pacific Northwest: A Memorandum* (Portland: Northwest Regional Council, 1939).

²⁰ For an insightful analysis of Mumford and his work, see John M. Jordan, *Machine Age Ideology: Social Engineering and American Liberalism, 1911-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 211-212, 257-261.

logistical and social problems. To help solve these problems, Mumford advocated the development of comprehensive regional plans. He was, therefore, hired by the NRC to trumpet their cause.

Mumford arrived in Portland in July 1938 and traveled extensively through the region before writing a memorandum, *Regional Planning in the Pacific Northwest*. Rather than offering specific policy prescriptions the memorandum gave general recommendations based on his regionalist philosophy. He encouraged leaders to think about plans that would bring stability and prosperity to both rural and urban areas without endangering the social fabric of either. Speaking of Portland specifically, Mumford argued that state-level bureaucrats needed to coordinate with local planners to avoid potentially disastrous urban problems. Singling out the highway commission, he wrote, “highways and bridges which will have a drastic influence upon the distribution of population, and the tax burdens of cities are planned right up to the city’s limits – and sometimes into them – without the faintest respect for the municipal problems involved, still less without any attempt being made to bring the municipal authorities themselves into the planning picture.”²¹ This critique would be leveled by citizen activists and local leaders 25 years later as the Interstate Highway System pushed into Portland and other American cities.

In addition to his regionalist approach to planning, Mumford was concerned with citizen participation in the political process. He believed that large cities could not

²¹ Mumford, *Regional Planning in the Pacific Northwest*, 17.

promote democracy and warned the NRC of Portland's apparent pretensions of becoming a city of three million instead of 300,000.²² Rather, he encouraged satellite cities to grow up around urban areas like Portland. These autonomous communities would contribute to the regional economy while allowing citizens to be fully involved in civic life. Mumford believed, according to planning historian Martha Bianco, "that the ideal urban population should be small enough to allow for full democratic participation by all inhabitants."²³ Furthermore, smaller, independent communities would reduce the need for a mobile populace by ensuring that necessary goods and services were close at hand. By increasing accessibility and reducing mobility, Mumford hoped that his proposed pattern of settlement would protect democracy and the natural environment as well.

Shortly before arriving in the Northwest, Mumford had finished *The Culture of Cities*, a book in which he promoted regional planning as the key to slowing rapid urban sprawl. In the book's introduction, he conflated the promotion of democracy with the preservation of agricultural landscapes. "Instead of clinging to the sardonic funeral towers of metropolitan finance," he wrote, "[humans should] march out to newly plowed fields, to create fresh patterns of political action, to alter for human purposes the perverse mechanisms of our economic regime, to conceive and to germinate fresh forms of human culture." Mumford admonished Americans to see the relationship between sprawling urban areas and the surrounding countryside, and to take action to prevent cities from

²² Martha J. Bianco, "Robert Moses and Lewis Mumford: competing paradigms of growth in Portland, Oregon," *Planning Perspectives*, 16 (2001): 98.

²³ Bianco, "Robert Moses and Lewis Mumford," 97.

swallowing the natural world and democracy as well.²⁴ These strong sentiments were not altogether unusual in this period. And, as we will see, echoes of Mumford's dissatisfaction were heard on other fronts during the interwar years.

Like the plans before it, Lewis Mumford's regional plan was generally ignored by policymakers, particularly with the onset of World War II. Wartime mobilization pushed all thoughts of comprehensive development from the minds of local leaders. Workers poured into the city to work at Kaiser Shipyards. The new population taxed an already underfunded infrastructure. In response, the city council formed the Housing Authority of Portland (HAP) in 1942 to deal with the crisis. HAP scrambled to find housing for the thousands of newly-arrived workers. The city would have failed to meet all housing needs if not for Edgar Kaiser's independent action. Kaiser secured federal funding for the construction of cheap apartments on the Columbia floodplain. The Vanport housing project addressed the crisis and gave the city a chance to catch up with the sudden population explosion. Once again, and despite a stack of comprehensive plans gathering dust in city hall, Portland continued to follow a tradition of ad hoc planning.

By 1943, The Portland Area Postwar Development Committee was planning for the city's emergence from the war. William Bowes, the acting mayor and head of PAPDC and the Planning Commission, made decisions about the city's future with the business leaders and experts who comprised PAPDC. With the widespread publication of Moses' *Portland Improvement* and Bowes' reliance on the Development Committee and

²⁴ Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1938) in *The Sustainable Urban Development Reader*, ed. Stephen Wheeler and Timothy Beatley (New York: Routledge, 2004), 19.

state-level experts to make planning decisions, the City Planning Commission, an advisory body to the Portland City Council, found itself effectively excluded from the decision-making process. According to historian Carl Abbott, “The Planning Commission complained to the city council that most major construction projects in the city were being submitted for its approval after their location was fixed. A few months later it raised the same complaint with the State Highway Department.”²⁵ The Portland Planning Commission existed in a sort of limbo, disconnected from the action and lacking the mandate to do anything but give advice to willing listeners. The commission would remain in a marginal role until well into the Interstate Era. As Portland emerged from the war, urban planning would be directed by political leaders, the business elite, and, increasingly, bureaucrats at the Bureau of Public Roads and the Oregon Highway Department.

The Bureau of Public Roads and the Oregon Highway Department, 1893-1955

The Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) was the official road building agency of the United States Government. Formed in 1893, the BPR, then known as the Office of Road Inquiry (ORI), was initially charged with researching better road surfaces and improving farm-to-market routes throughout the country.²⁶ Not surprisingly, the ORI was housed

²⁵ Abbott, *Portland*, 140.

²⁶ Though I will call the agency the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) in this chapter, it actually went through several relatively insignificant name changes between 1893 and 1949. The Office of Road Inquiry first changed its name to the Office of Public Roads (OPR) in 1905, then to the Bureau of Public Roads in 1915. Between 1939 and 1949 the BPR was moved from the Department of Agriculture to the Federal Works Agency and its name was changed to the Public Roads Administration (PRA). In 1949, with the closing of

under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture, though it would become part of the Department of the Commerce in 1949. Almost from the outset the ORI concerned itself with using scientific engineering methods to devise better road surfaces. The organization began to employ researchers with degrees in highway engineering, a field that grew rapidly with the proliferation of the automobile.

During the 1910s, more citizens called for better roads across the nation. Catalyzed by the efforts of bicycle enthusiasts who formed The League of American Wheelmen, the “Good Roads” movement was rapidly co-opted by the growing contingent of American car owners and citizens who were fed up with the high rates charged by the monopolistic railroad industry.²⁷ In response to the call for better roads, state governments began to form highway departments. These new agencies accomplished much in the prewar years, but it was not until the 1920s that a concerted effort was made to build a comprehensive highway system across the United States. Several factors had contributed to the increased impetus for road construction during the second decade of the twentieth century. First, in 1914 Logan Page, the director of the Bureau of Public Roads, stepped down from his position and assisted in the creation of

the Federal Works Agency, the PRA was moved to the Department of Commerce and renamed the Bureau of Public Roads. In 1967 the BPR was folded into the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) as part of the newly-created Department of Transportation. For a full account of each of these transformations see Tom Lewis, *Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life* (New York: Penguin, 1997). It should be noted that none of these name changes altered the goals of the agency until the formation of the Department of Transportation at least theoretically reconfigured the road building paradigm.

²⁷ Stephen Goddard, *Getting There: The Epic Struggle Between Road and Rail in the American Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), chapters 1 and 2. Goddard argues that the high rates, greed, and increasing consolidation of rail lines eventually caused a public backlash against railroads that helped fuel public sentiment for improved roads and encouraged government investment in automobile transportation.

the American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO). The AASHO, while not a governmental body, unified highway engineers and bureaucrats from each state's highway department. The organization developed road surface tests and supplied highway design standards to state engineers. Second, after a century of debate about whether the Federal Government should have a role in building roads, Congress passed the Federal Aid Road Act of 1916. The law provided 50 percent federal funding for a small portion of state roads for five years. Third, in addition to federal monies provided by the 1916 Road Act, Oregon and other states enacted a gasoline tax to pay for road improvements. Within a decade all 48 states had imposed a gas tax to fund construction. In addition to better organization among state highway departments and the creation of reliable funding mechanisms, the demand for roads also increased.

The automobile became much more affordable during the years surrounding World War I. The Ford Model T, for instance, cost \$850 when it was released in 1908 and less than \$300 by the early 1920s.²⁸ Not surprisingly many more people were able to purchase cars, and they increasingly demanded better driving surfaces. Finally, in 1919 President Woodrow Wilson appointed Thomas Harris MacDonald chief of the Bureau of Public Roads. MacDonald proved to be a tour de force in Washington during his 34 years at the helm of the BPR. He pushed for increased federal road funding and was a strong advocate for a toll-free system of interstate highways.

²⁸ Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 33.

MacDonald had attended Iowa State College, earning a degree in the new field of highway engineering in 1904. As the head of Iowa's highway commission, his early efforts were aimed at improving roads for farmers using horse-drawn carts. Road conditions were often so bad that Iowans had trouble getting to railroad stations to ship their products during any but the driest summer months. As automobile use increased, motorists joined the farmers in their calls for improved roads. MacDonald successfully lobbied the State of Iowa for more road building funds. Using Portland concrete and brick, he constructed highways throughout the state. Within ten years, Iowa had the best roads and the largest number of automobiles per capita in the nation, proving that improved roads led to higher volumes of traffic.²⁹ MacDonald's reputation as a no-nonsense, politically savvy highway engineer made him an obvious candidate for the job as chief of the BPR. During his first two years on the job, MacDonald worked with the AASHO to establish road construction standards and to pass legislation that provided more federal funding. His first piece of legislation, the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1921, allocated \$75 million for road construction and made MacDonald's Bureau of Public Roads responsible for administering the funds to the states.³⁰ With this system in place,

²⁹ Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 10.

³⁰ Richard O. Davies, *The Age of Asphalt: The Automobile, the Freeway, and the Condition of Metropolitan America* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1975), 10. See also Richard F. Weingroff, "The Federal Highway Administration at 100," *Public Roads*, vol. 57, no. 2 (1993), United States Department of Transportation-Federal Highway Administration, <http://www.tfrc.gov/pubrds/fall93/p93au1.htm> (accessed March 12, 2009). In addition, see Richard F. Weingroff, "The Federal-State Partnership at Work," *Public Roads*, vol. 60, no. 1 (1996), United States Department of Transportation-Federal Highway Administration, <http://www.tfrc.gov/pubrds/summer96/p96su7.htm> (accessed March 12, 2009).

MacDonald became the primary director of highway construction efforts in the United States.

During the 1930s and 1940s the BPR continued to work closely with the AASHO and construction, automobile, shipping, and oil interests to gain federal support for a major highway construction project to improve America's primary road system. Even though highway bureaucrats, private industry, and average Americans clamored for more roads, federal investment in a massive network of interstate highways was by no means a foregone conclusion. It took rising death tolls, revolutions in highway design and construction practices, increased urban traffic congestion, a unique vision of the future of American cities, and years of political wrangling to win popular approval for an expenditure of the magnitude envisioned by highway engineers.

President Franklin Roosevelt met with Thomas MacDonald in 1937 to discuss developing a major highway system. Roosevelt traced six lines across a map of the continental United States – three running north and south, and three running east and west. These lines represented a rudimentary interstate highway system. Though he wanted to facilitate commerce between the nation's major urban centers, Roosevelt mainly hoped that a huge road building project would provide jobs for a large number of unemployed or underemployed Americans. MacDonald argued against paying for the system with toll roads as Roosevelt had suggested, but he approved of the overall plan.³¹ Unable to devise a satisfactory funding mechanism, the president dropped the idea and

³¹ Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 50.

turned his attention to other matters. Despite this setback, the success of the limited-access turnpikes being completed in Pennsylvania and New York during the early 1940s encouraged highway engineers.

In 1941, Roosevelt appointed an Interregional Highway Committee to formulate a means of paying for his proposed system of highways. Among those on the committee were MacDonald and St. Louis planner Harland Bartholomew. MacDonald, the typical highway engineer, advocated designing the system simply to accommodate traffic, while Bartholomew hoped to integrate the highway construction with urban redevelopment plans. The Interregional Committee presented their plan in a 1943 report that advocated building a massive road network that would serve farm-to-market traffic as well as urban commuters. The proposed system, they reasoned, could help reduce urban blight and revitalize downtown business districts. However, when legislation was finally passed, the broad goals of the Interregional Highway Committee were reduced to more general plans of traffic mitigation.³²

In late 1943, the AASHO drafted a new highway bill that went before the U.S. House and Senate road committees. When the bill emerged as the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944, there were a total of four road networks designated by the federal government. The first three – including the primary road system (featuring the U.S. numbered routes), the farm-market routes, and the urban highway network – were all partially funded by the government. The newly-designated National System of Interstate

³² Rose, *Interstate*, 19-21.

Highways, planned by the Interregional Highway Committee, did not receive any government funding, nor was it introduced in conjunction with any urban renewal schemes. State highway departments would be in charge of allocating as much or little money as they saw fit for this proposed freeway system.³³ With no federal aid, the states waited to begin construction.

Following Roosevelt's death and the end of World War II, President Harry Truman faced the challenge of moving the United States to a peacetime economy and aiding in the rebuilding of Europe. Truman prioritized building new housing for returning veterans and devoting resources to Europe rather than constructing highways.³⁴ When Dwight Eisenhower took office in 1953, however, he picked up the plan for a new highway system where Roosevelt had left off. The nation needed faster, safer roads and Eisenhower envisioned a network of freeways similar to Germany's autobahn. In 1954, Eisenhower instructed Vice President Richard Nixon to announce plans for the federal government to provide funding for the proposed, but as yet nonexistent, Interstate Highway System at the annual Governor's Conference at Lake George, New York.³⁵ In his speech, Nixon outlined the dire state of American roadways, stressing the annual death toll on American roads, the problem of traffic congestion, and the loss of time and money due to an inefficient transportation system. He concluded that "These penalties

³³ Rose, *Interstate*, 25-26.

³⁴ Goddard, *Getting There*, 173.

³⁵ Goddard, *Getting There*, 184.

warrant the expenditure of billions to correct them.”³⁶ After Nixon’s speech to the governors, each state fell in line with Eisenhower’s plan to fund the estimated \$50 billion interstate highway project with gasoline and tire taxes that would pay off the note in twenty years.³⁷ Nearly two years later, and following months of political wrangling, Congress passed the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 and the Highway Revenue Act, which funded the Interstate Highway System through an increased gasoline tax of three cents per gallon.³⁸ With a funding mechanism in place and a reduced price tag of \$27 billion, construction could finally begin.

While the Bureau of Public Roads and the AASHO provided the capital and coordination between state highway departments, it would be those individual state agencies that actually designed and built the freeways. Thanks to 40 years of accumulated power, Oregon’s Highway Department was able to begin building its portion of the interstate system as soon as funding became available. The department was formed in 1913 by the Oregon Legislative Assembly with the slogan “Get Oregon out of the Mud” and the mandate of constructing rural farm-market roads.³⁹ Because the state’s economy

³⁶ Richard Nixon, “Address of Vice President Richard Nixon to the Governors Conference” (Lake George, New York, July 12, 1954), United States Department of Transportation-Federal Highway Administration, <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/rw96m.htm> (accessed April 1, 2008).

³⁷ For the most comprehensive accounts of the political wrangling that occurred in the years leading up to the passage of the 1956 Highway Act, see Rose, *Interstate*. See also Lewis, *Divided Highways* and Goddard, *Getting There*.

³⁸ United States Department of Transportation – Federal Highway Administration, “Financing Federal-Aid Highways,” <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/fifahiwy/fifahi05.htm> (accessed 3/29/09).

³⁹ Oregon Department of Transportation, “Business Services History Center,” State of Oregon, <http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/CS/BSS/historycenter.shtml> (accessed February 27, 2008).

was based heavily on timber and agriculture, Oregonians relied on roads and trails to transport commodities to railroad stations or directly to local and regional markets. For much of the year, however, frequent rain made western Oregon a quagmire, posing significant challenges to those traveling with goods. With limited funds the Highway Department set about building roads until the outbreak of the First World War.

In 1919 Oregon became the first state to institute a one-cent gasoline tax to pay for road improvements. The tax soon became common practice in every state. The logic was simple: the more a person drove, the more he or she would pay for the use of state highways. Because the early drivers tended to be rural residents transporting commodities, the Highway Department focused primarily on developing efficient ways of moving traffic across the countryside. Increasingly, though, the agency's decision-making body, the Oregon State Highway Commission, would allocate significant sums of money for urban road improvement projects that linked Portland to the surrounding countryside. As more people purchased automobiles, the rural highways that had been designed to facilitate rural travel and commerce provided urbanites with a convenient means of escaping the city and experiencing the state's natural beauty. This dual function of highways as facilitators of both commercial and leisure activities led to early opposition to road projects in the first decade after World War I.

In the 1920s millions of Americans took to the newly paved cross-country highways in sleek new GM automobiles or the inexpensive late Model T Fords. Middle and upper class Americans were now not only mobile, but also financially stable enough

to take vacations from work.⁴⁰ Some of the most popular destinations were National Parks and coastal areas. In 1932 Oregon State Highway Engineer R.H. Baldock designed a road along the northern Oregon Coast to facilitate such travel. However, Neahkahnie Mountain was in his way. A part of The Northern Coast Range, the mountain was shrouded in lore. Tillamook Indians had called it “home of the gods” and rumors of Spanish treasure buried in the mountain existed for centuries. All of this mattered little to Baldock, who planned to lay a straight ribbon of asphalt right across the base of the mountain. Not surprisingly, the design involved dynamiting parts of Neahkahnie into the Pacific Ocean. The Oregon Parks Commission tried to persuade Baldock to rethink the plan, but to no avail. In disgust, the entire commission resigned.⁴¹

The Oregon Highway Commission was equally reticent to change the route. After being in existence for nineteen years, the Highway Commission had become singularly focused on creating a safe, efficient network of highways throughout the state. Oregon Governor Julius Meier worried over the resignation of the Parks Commission and the fate of Neahkahnie Mountain. Yet, his hands were tied. The State Parks Commission was under the control of the Highway Department, and Chief Highway Commissioner Lesley Scott opposed any expenditure on parkland. Governor Meier appointed a new Parks Commission comprised of 21-year-old Portland architect John Yeon and others who he believed could convince Scott to rethink his position. Yeon tried in vain to persuade the

⁴⁰ Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 39.

⁴¹ John Yeon, Interview by Marian Kolisch, December 14, 1982-January 10, 1983. Transcript: Portland, Oregon, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/yeon82.htm> (accessed February 28, 2008).

highway commissioner to use funds from the gasoline tax to set aside more parks and redesign the Oregon Coast Highway. “Trees. All they’re good for is birds,” Scott told Yeon. “I was here when it was all trees and mud and it was terrible.” The money controlled by the Highway Commission, he asserted, would go only toward road building.⁴²

Yeon himself was an advocate of highway construction. His father had financed the Columbia River Highway, a narrow, windy road built through the scenic Columbia River Gorge and offering sweeping views of the river. However, even before designing the highway that would spell doom for Neahkahnie Mountain, the Highway Commission had planned a new Columbia River Gorge Highway that would destroy several miles of bottomland, the low-lying alluvial plain near the river’s edge. The original Columbia River Highway was now accommodating truck traffic as construction on the Bonneville Dam began. And, though Yeon would make a strong case for the construction of freeways in the coming years, his primary goal now was to preserve natural areas that the Highway Commission seemed only too happy to pave over or blast into the sea. Knowing that he was waging a losing battle in Oregon, Yeon decided to go around both Scott and Baldock. He gathered several aerial photographs of Neahkahnie Mountain and the Columbia River Gorge, and arranged to meet with Thomas MacDonald in Washington, D.C.

⁴² John Yeon, Interview by Marian Kolisch.

Yeon knew MacDonald's reputation and wondered if he could convince the engineer to see the merits of preserving Oregon's natural beauty. When they met, MacDonald enthusiastically looked through Yeon's photographs of Neahkahnie Mountain and the Columbia River Gorge and agreed to send his chief landscape architect, Wilbur Simonson, to Oregon. After observing the Gorge and Neahkahnie himself, Simonson met with the Oregon Highway Commission and Chief Engineer Baldock. According to Yeon, Simonson "persuaded them to put in a very gradual curve through the bottomlands [of the Columbia River Gorge]... a straight gash across there would have been a very angry scar." Similarly, at Neahkahnie Mountain, Simonson "persuaded them to give up this straight line and modulate the alignment, so that the pinnacle and the buttresses were not blasted into the sea." Victory belonged to Yeon, but the architect understood that he had not changed the attitudes of the Highway Commission. "Scott, or Baldock, wasn't very influenced by me at all," he concluded.⁴³

Yeon's efforts illustrate some of the early criticisms of modern highways. While Baldock focused on building straight, wide roads to shuttle traffic quickly across the expanses of Oregon, Yeon and others saw value in the scenic beauty of the state. Road building should not occur at the expense of the natural world, Yeon argued. This attitude would be reflected in Lewis Mumford's memorandum to the Northwest Regional Council. Likewise, the Wilderness Society, formed in 1935, sought to protect vast tracts of land throughout the United States from the ravages of automobiles, roads, and

⁴³ John Yeon, Interview by Marian Kolisch.

commercial development. However, while Yeon wanted roads to be built around the natural features of the landscape, the Wilderness Society tried to prevent roads from being built at all.⁴⁴ Yeon's call for comprehensive road designs to preserve natural beauty would eventually be echoed by freeway protesters who desired to protect their homes and neighborhoods, but recognized a need for freeways. The Wilderness Society's more critical argument that automobile use and highway projects should be severely curbed because of their environmental consequences would also find voice in Portland's anti-freeway battles of the early 1970s. Thus, the arguments over the place of roads in the natural world set the tone for the urban freeway battles that were to come.

Before the outbreak of the Second World War, politicians and highway officials at both the federal and state levels became aware of major deficiencies in the current road system. During the 1930s, although Oregon and other states continued to build crucial primary highways, the overall condition of American roads deteriorated. In addition, even though less than one-quarter of Americans owned automobiles during the Depression, almost 32,000 people were killed in car accidents each year.⁴⁵ Despite the absence of federal or state funds, engineers in state highway departments planned safer, controlled-access freeways and experimented with asphalt and new concrete mixtures to replace the

⁴⁴ Sutter, *Driven Wild*, 55, 96. Sutter shows that the formation of the Wilderness Society was not simply a reaction to the loss of natural areas, though that was part of it. Nor was it the result of a growing understanding of ecological systems, though that was part of it, too. The major reason Aldo Leopold, Robert Sterling Yard, Benton McKaye, Bob Marshall, and others formed the Wilderness Society was as a response to American consumer culture and the automobile.

⁴⁵ Norman Bel Geddes, *Magic Motorways* (New York: Random House, 1940), 2. Compare this with the 38,588 fatalities recorded in 2006 when the vast majority of America's now much larger population took to the roads. Fatality Analysis Reporting System online, <http://www.fars.nhtsa.dot.gov/Main/index.aspx> (accessed April 8, 2008).

crumbling roads.⁴⁶ In Oregon, R.H. Baldock tinkered with every aspect of highway design. From a road's width and slope to its surface and subsurface composition, Baldock tailored every feature to the speed his engineers thought was best for a particular highway.⁴⁷ These engineering developments were reported to the AASHO and then replicated by highway departments in each state. This standardization, occasionally overseen by the BPR, allowed traffic engineers to act with undisputed authority. They could boast that they knew the latest science and were acting as part of a coordinated effort to improve America's transportation system. It did not seem farfetched, then, to envision the creation of a unified system of safe, efficient highways linking the nation as never before.

Inspired by the design standards of the Pennsylvania Turnpike, John Yeon prepared a 1938 study advocating the construction of limited access highways. *Freeways for Oregon* cited the need for increased safety and efficiency on the state's highways. Yeon saw problems with current Oregon highway zoning laws. He argued that the limited-access status of the new grade-separated turnpikes needed to be worked into statewide construction practices. "The development of cross-country highways was undertaken for the primary purpose of providing fast routes between cities and between remote sections of the state," he wrote. However, he continued, "the legal status of the new thoroughfare road remained the same as for the former access roads. These new

⁴⁶ I.B. Holley. "Blacktop: How Asphalt Paving Came to the Urban United States," *Technology and Culture*, vol. 44, no.4 (2003): 732-733.

⁴⁷ John Hawkins and Ward Hawkins, "The Man Behind the Plans," *Freedom of the American Road* (Detroit: Ford Motor Company, 1956), 27.

highways were legally like city streets constructed through open country. While their alignment and surface underwent revolutionary changes their legal status was a survival of the pre-motor era when there was no differentiation in rights of property owners along a city street or country road.”⁴⁸ The new four-lane roads that had been built in and around Portland in recent years featured these major zoning and construction flaws. Intersecting routes crossed primary highways to create hazardous driving conditions. “It becomes increasingly difficult to enter or cross the highway with two lanes of traffic streaming in opposite directions,” Yeon concluded.⁴⁹ Future road construction in Oregon, he claimed, needed to reflect the new limited-access highway designs that eliminated grade crossings with overpasses and underpasses.⁵⁰ Despite support from the Highway Commission, however, the relative lack of federal funds prevented the state from acting on Yeon’s suggestions.

Road construction stopped entirely during the Second World War. Even in the early postwar years federal and state funds were diverted to housing projects and other sorely needed civic and infrastructure improvements. Therefore, it was with great interest that the Oregon Highway Commission followed the highway funding debates that raged in both houses of Congress throughout 1955 and into 1956. In order to secure federal monies and alleviate the state’s traffic problems as quickly as possible, State Engineer

⁴⁸ John Yeon, *Freeways for Oregon: The Advantages of Freeways in Increasing Safety and Efficiency in Highway Travel* (Salem, OR: Oregon State Planning Board, 1938), 1.

⁴⁹ Yeon, *Freeways for Oregon*, 6.

⁵⁰ Yeon, *Freeways for Oregon*, 13.

Baldock submitted *Freeway and Expressway System, Portland Metropolitan Area* to the Highway Commission in June 1955. The report examined “the need for arterial highways in the Portland Metropolitan Area based on forecasts of traffic 20 years hence.” To address Portland’s transportation needs, Baldock claimed, an expenditure of \$371 million would be necessary. A price tag of this magnitude, he knew, was beyond the spending capacity of the city or the counties that comprised the metropolitan area. “It is my personal opinion,” Baldock wrote, “that, based upon equity, the State Highway Commission should eventually assume approximately 75 per cent of the cost, meeting this part of the cost in part with federal-aid funds and in part with state funds.”⁵¹ Though he did not know how much of the Interstate Highway System the federal government would finally pay for, Baldock understood that by designing a freeway system and waiting for funding, the Oregon Highway Commission could get federal dollars to pay for a large percentage of the cost.

Portland, like all cities, welcomed federal investment in freeway infrastructure as hundreds of new cars clogged city streets each day. Earlier plans for the Rose City had offered grand visions without a way to pay for them. Here was a plan that would solve the traffic problem and give the city a huge influx of federal aid. Coordination with the Housing Authority of Portland, taxpayer approval, and other roadblocks would be nonexistent. Portlanders clamored for relief from traffic congestion and local leaders welcomed the interstate system’s promise to revolutionize travel and commerce. Urban

⁵¹ Letter from R.H. Baldock to the Oregon State Highway Commission, June 30, 1955 in the preface to *Freeway and Expressway System*.

planning in Portland would now be largely controlled by federal and state highway engineers.

Engineers, Planners, and the Politics of Mobility, 1939-1956

The planners from PAPDC, the Portland Planning Commission, and other local agencies that would ostensibly oversee the city's development in the Interstate Era sought to make the city less congested and more easily navigable. To save the central business district from the disinvestment caused by commercial and residential decentralization, planners endorsed the construction of multi-lane arterial highways to provide suburban residents with direct access to downtown areas. Increasingly, local bureaucrats saw road building as a way to address a multitude of problems from traffic accommodation to zoning, slum clearance, and economic development. For these reasons planning professionals made road projects central to their development strategies. Thus, because highway engineers, city planners, and politicians all agreed on the importance of new roads and welcomed the influx of federal funds, rapid construction of the interstate system was virtually guaranteed. The comprehensive plans that Portland's political elite had rejected in the years before Moses' influential *Portland Improvement* had provided alternatives to the auto-centered development that was to come. However, urban planners came to embrace the potentially-transformative interstate project. Ultimately, the goals of planners and highway engineers were not dissimilar. As the plans of industrial designer Norman Bel Geddes will show, the differences between city planners and traffic-minded

engineers like Moses were only differences in scope of vision. The faith in freeways and the liberating power of the automobile was the same.

In 1939, the New York World's Fair opened in Flushing Meadows, the former site of the Corona Ash Dumps. Earlier in the year New York City Parks Commissioner Robert Moses had cleared the dumping grounds to make way for the fair. The site was fitting. In F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*, the dump – then referred to as “the valley of ashes” – was the location of the climactic scene where Daisy Buchanan inadvertently hits and kills her husband's lover with Gatsby's car. This famous depiction of automobile violence brought notoriety to the area. Now, erasing the memory of Fitzgerald's bitter portrayal of twentieth-century decadence, the fair's most popular attraction, Futurama, drew millions of visitors.

The General Motors Highways and Horizons exhibit at the well attended World's Fair showed millions of Americans a future that featured sleek, bullet-shaped cars traveling at high speeds across the country on smooth, safe limited-access freeways. At the center of the exhibit was Futurama, an enormous model of the cities and highways of 1960 as envisioned by industrial engineer Norman Bel Geddes. Futurama became popular for its faith in growth and progress while raising the level of public interest for a large-scale freeway project. Like John Yeon in Oregon, Bel Geddes argued that current roads were unsafe and inefficient. In his book *Magic Motorways*, a follow up to the Futurama exhibit, he went one step further, writing, “The answer is not that there are too many cars, but that the roads have not been designed to perform their function properly.... The real trouble with American highways is the simple fact that they are not designed for the

traffic they bear.”⁵² The exhibit received media attention and captured the imaginations of Americans who had been driving on roads that had not been repaved, widened, or otherwise improved in more than a decade.

Futurama also gave Americans their first glimpse of the revolutionizing potential of superhighways. The exhibit featured sprawling, decentralized cities, vast factory farms, and expansive freeways separating commercial, industrial, and residential areas.⁵³ Highway construction, in Bel Geddes’ vision, would occur in tandem with urban redevelopment projects. Tenements, dirty factories, and traffic congestion would become obsolete.⁵⁴ Decentralizing the city and improving the speed and convenience of personal transportation, Bel Geddes and other modern planners believed, could save the viability of central business districts while allowing residents to live in garden suburbs or magnificent high-rise apartments far from industry and commerce. The narrator of the exhibit’s official promotional film, “To New Horizons”, extolled the virtues of these cities of the future. “Here is an American city,” his deep voice boomed as the camera panned over the Futurama model, “re-planned around a highly developed modern traffic system.... On all express city thoroughfares, the rights-of-way have been so routed as to displace outmoded business sections and undesirable slum areas whenever possible. Man

⁵² Bel Geddes, *Magic Motorways*, 11-12.

⁵³ Bel Geddes, *Magic Motorways*, 6.

⁵⁴ Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 45.

continually strives to replace the old with the new.”⁵⁵ Futurama appealed to fair visitors and movie viewers because it imagined cities free of industrial blight, traffic congestion, and inefficiency. Even more, it tapped into the American zeitgeist, equating mobility with freedom. “Over space, man has begun to win victory,” the film assured viewers.⁵⁶

The Highways and Horizons exhibit predicted many features of the freeways that would be funded by the 1956 Highway Act. In the estimation of historian Tom Lewis, “It was Bel Geddes’ and General Motors’ vision, not [Robert] Moses’, that became the reality of the Interstate Highway System.”⁵⁷ Moses’ ideas, according to Lewis, lacked the grand scale of Futurama and the proposed transcontinental freeway network. While Bel Geddes did anticipate a system of high-speed freeways linking the entire United States, Lewis fails to acknowledge that Moses’ plan for Portland featured similarly-constructed urban freeways.⁵⁸ Both the master builder and the visionary designer strongly advocated the limited-access highway designs that would distinguish the Interstate Highway System. However, the scope of their road building plans differed greatly. Moses’ freeway designs focused on accommodating automobiles and decreasing travel time. He believed that highways should be designed simply to mitigate traffic congestion. Plans that placed freeway projects at the center of radical redevelopment efforts were “bunk” according to

⁵⁵ Handy (Jam) Organization, “To New Horizons,” 1940, Internet Archive, <http://www.archive.org/details/ToNewHor1940> (accessed March 24, 2009). Quotes appear at 18:45 and 19:27 in the 23:00 film (accessed March 24, 2009).

⁵⁶ Handy (Jam) Organization, “To New Horizons.” Quote appears at 17:00.

⁵⁷ Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 45.

⁵⁸ Brown, “A Tale of Two Visions,” 23.

Moses.⁵⁹ However, the successful road builder would eventually come under scrutiny for his own alleged slum removal plans. Critics pointed out that his New York freeways were generally built through the neighborhoods of African Americans and other politically-marginalized groups.⁶⁰ Whether racial prejudice or socioeconomic bias influenced Moses' plans, it is certain that local road builders like Moses or Portland Commissioner William Bowes, and a large number of America's highway engineers for the most part ignored the social consequences of urban freeway projects until after the construction had been completed.

Bel Geddes' vision of the transformative power of freeways did more to capture the imaginations of World's Fair visitors than did the Moses-designed roadways over which they had driven to arrive at the fairgrounds. Bel Geddes hoped that faster, safer freeways would transform American cityscapes and reshape society. Like Harland Bartholomew and other planners, he made it clear that he wanted to integrate freeways with slum removal, restrictive zoning, and urban redevelopment efforts. The scope of his vision far surpassed that of Moses and traffic-minded highway engineers. Yet, Lewis' assumption that the Interstate Highway System was based on the ideas of Bel Geddes or other mid-century planners rather than on the traffic-focused ideology of engineers underestimates the role of the highway engineering profession and fails to analyze the danger of their shortsightedness.

⁵⁹ Brown, "A Tale of Two Visions," 23.

⁶⁰ Brown, "A Tale of Two Visions," 23.

The Interstate Highway System was heavily promoted by BPR Chief Thomas MacDonald and the engineers in his employ. State-level road builders from R.H. Baldock in Oregon to James Shocknessy in Ohio worked to construct limited-access freeways and expressways even before the passage of the 1956 highway bill.⁶¹ They created working examples of multi-lane freeways on which the post-1956 system would be based.

Because the Federal-Aid Highway Act called for oversight by the BPR, and because the AASHO had spent years implementing professional construction standards for roadways, highway departments designed and built most interstates on the basis of traffic volume calculations. State and city highway engineers set up electronic counters to record daily traffic volumes. In addition, they conducted origin-destination studies determining where automobile trips generally began and ended within a given urban area. By integrating these studies, engineers composed maps illustrating traffic desire lines (See Figure 1).⁶²

The lines showed the most congested routes and suggested freeway locations for alleviating that congestion. Highway departments, then, focused on the traffic service aspects of freeway route design at the expense of the social effects of building through neighborhoods.

While engineers responded to the political circumstances of interstate highway legislation by privileging the drivers who paid for the roads, they asserted that they were

⁶¹ As a case in point, turnpikes in New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois were under construction or completed by 1956.

⁶² The Origin-Destination Study conducted by the Oregon State Highway Department in 1946 was the basis for highway design and construction in the 1950s and 1960s. The Portland Planning Commission updated the study in 1956 by using traffic volume statistics and 1975 traffic projections. See Portland City Planning Commission, *Trafficways Plan: Vehicle Trip Desire Patterns* (Portland: City of Portland, 1956).

merely using factual data to better serve an increasingly mobile citizenry.⁶³ Hence, patterns of traffic congestion became known on maps as “*desire* lines,” and the new freeways “served” motorists. This belief in using scientific knowledge for the supposed benefit of society had long been a stated goal of engineers. Late nineteenth century technological innovations, the rise of scientific management, and the broad application of scientific principles during the Progressive Era had shaped the young profession. According to historian John Jordan, early twentieth-century engineers and rational reformers “wanted to escape political demagoguery and deadlock by invoking the method of applied science, convinced that it would lead to logical consensus from which purposeful action could proceed.”⁶⁴ Highway engineers held fast to this ideology because it gave them legitimacy in the face of a seemingly corrupt and increasingly complex urban society. The result was a growing profession that measured success in terms of roads built, congestion alleviated, and travel time decreased. Despite these goals, the traffic problems of metropolitan America continued to worsen until the 1956 highway act gave engineers the green light to revolutionize urban transportation.

Highway engineers would reshape Portland in the wake of the Federal-Aid Highway Act, and they would receive the support of the city’s own planning agencies and politicians despite their somewhat divergent goals. The consensus among the elite

⁶³ Paul Barrett and Mark H. Rose, “Street Smarts: The Politics of Transportation Statistics in the American City, 1900-1990,” *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 24, no. 3 (1999): 405-433. Barrett and Rose trace the use of statistics in transportation planning beginning with the trolley car engineers who measured ridership in order to increase profit margins and better serve customers. They continue with an analysis of highway engineers and airport developers, both of whom relied heavily upon statistical data to inform their decisions.

⁶⁴ Jordan, *Machine Age Ideology*, 4.

and most citizens was that freeways were crucial for the city's continued development. However, by the late 1960s citizen groups, local leaders, and a new breed of planning professionals would make a concerted effort to halt urban interstate projects. Anti-freeway movements throughout Portland eventually brought the heady years of unrestrained highway construction to an end by the middle of the 1970s. In order to understand how the consensus dissolved in Portland and elsewhere, we must examine not only successful freeway revolts, but also other instances of large-scale and minor freeway opposition that, despite their failures, signaled the weakening of support for urban superhighways in the 1960s.

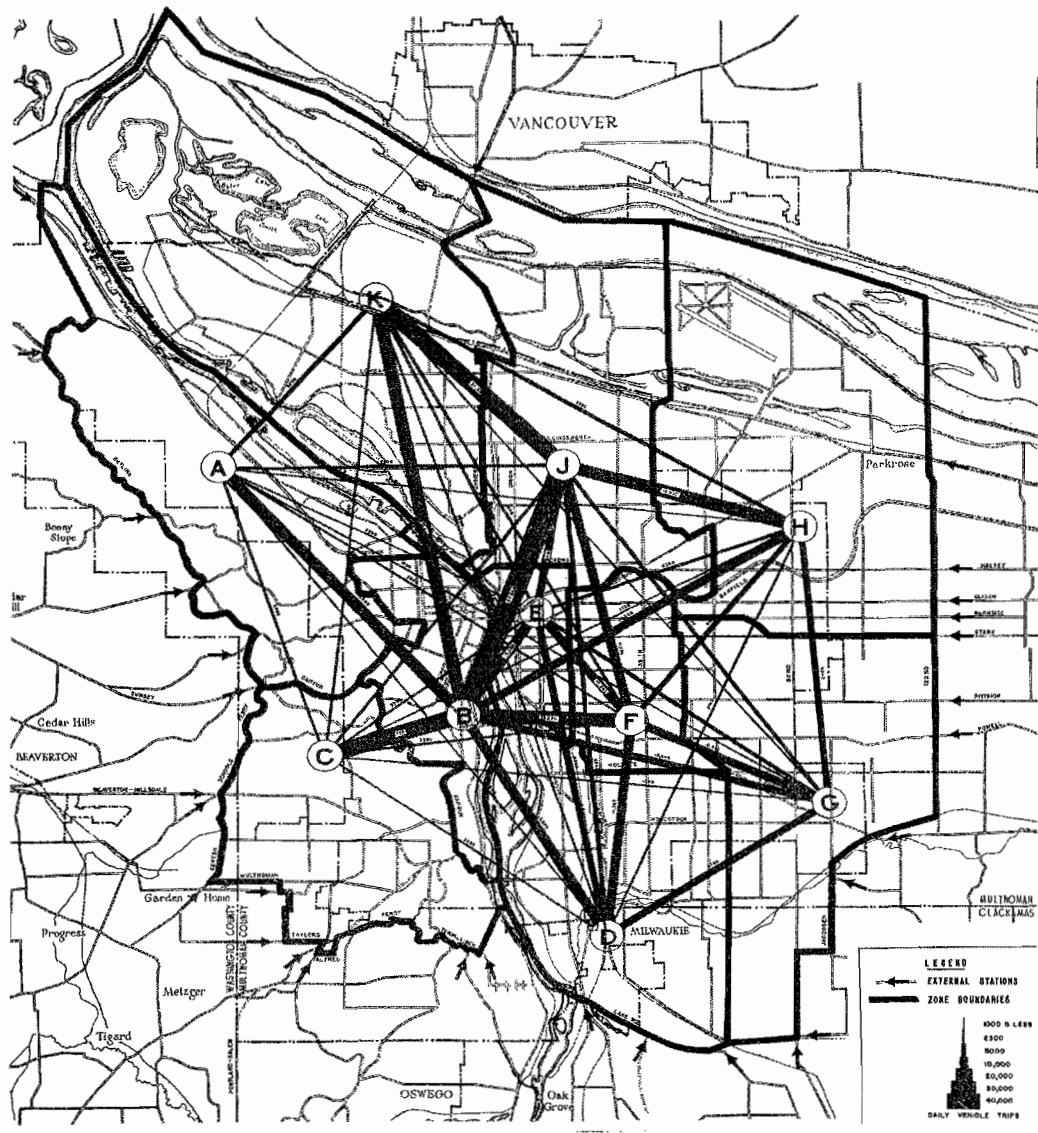


PLATE 2
1946 PATTERN ZONES A TO K
 VEHICLE DRIVERS ONLY - MASS TRANSIT & OTHER PASSENGERS NOT INCLUDED
 VEHICLE TRIP DESIRE PATTERNS
 PORTLAND CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

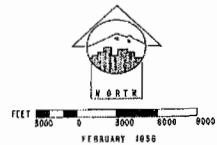


Figure 1. 1946 vehicle trip “desire” patterns, Portland, Oregon.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Portland City Planning Commission, *Trafficways Plan*, plate 4.

CHAPTER III
THE MOBILE CITY:
FREEWAY CONSTRUCTION AND FAILED OPPOSITON, 1955-1972

“An adequate transportation system is essential to the economic health of any urban community. A transportation plan which will be within the framework of predictable quantities and patterns of travel must make use of all types of facilities – surface streets, freeways and mass transit – but appropriate care must be exercised in the location, design and building of such facilities to insure that there will be maximum benefits and minimum disbenefits to the urban environment.”¹

– Portland-Vancouver Metropolitan Transportation Study, 1964

It did not take long for Portlanders to see the negative consequences of imposing massive interstate highways on a functional cityscape. On June 23, 1961, the Portland City Council and state road engineer Tom Edwards met with citizens concerned over permanent street closures caused by the partly-finished Minnesota Freeway. The route, a section of Interstate 5, sliced through the city’s Albina neighborhood. Fifty-one streets had already been dead-ended to make way for the new depressed highway in the city’s only predominantly African American neighborhood. “I think it is unfortunate that this has not come to our attention until at this late time,” Howard Cherry, a member of the Portland School Board stated. “I would like to be heard at a proper time with the council

¹ Portland-Vancouver Metropolitan Transportation Study, *Interim Report, I-205 Location Social-Economic Study* (Salem: Bureau of Municipal Research, University of Oregon and Oregon Highway Commission, 1964), i.

and the highway commission.” Likewise, Daniel McGoodwin of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) implored the Highway Commission to “find a less damaging solution.” Reading from a statement prepared by the AIA, McGoodwin argued that the freeway “would create a great problem for the city and disrupt long established neighborhood patterns.”²

The criticisms made by a qualified architect like McGoodwin put City Commissioner William Bowes on the defensive. “We have done everything you can think of to make it as attractive as possible,” he said, adding, “if you can call a freeway attractive.” The most incisive critique came from local architect Howard Glazer who complained that the highway designers’ failure to consult with residents was “an example of what’s happened before and will undoubtedly happen again.” When presented with a map showing the freeway skirting the edge of the neighborhood, Glazer pointed out that the map “is a slice of the city and doesn’t show adjacent territory.” No matter how carefully they were planned, urban interstates would reduce residents’ ability to quickly get groceries, visit friends, go to school, or attend church. At the meeting’s conclusion, state engineer Edwards assured those in attendance that “every attempt will be made to solve these problems.”³ The freeway opened to traffic in December 1963.⁴ No changes were made to the route.

² “Minnesota Freeway Role Muddled At Road Hearing,” *The Oregonian*, June 24, 1961.

³ “Minnesota Freeway Role Muddled At Road Hearing,” Howard Glazer would become a prominent member of the Northwest District Association during the late 1960s and early 1970s. He would help that neighborhood group in its successful battle to halt the construction of Interstate 505.

⁴ “East Bank, Minnesota Freeway Construction in High Gear,” *The Oregonian*, November 7, 1963.

The Oregon Highway Commission, like highway departments across the nation and the Bureau of Public Roads itself, justified the social costs of urban freeway construction by claiming that the goals of traffic accommodation and congestion mitigation were their primary concerns.⁵ The neighborhoods through which the new superhighways would be built were small sacrifices on the altar of efficiency. The Highway Department's 1955 report, *Freeway and Expressway System*, reflected this philosophy. The report was filled with charts showing local traffic volumes and maps illustrating directional desire lines. It verified the need for new highways and offered recommendations for the locations of those highways. The evidence was based on data collected in the 1946 "Portland Metropolitan Area Traffic Survey: Origin-Destination Study." Using information from the decade-old study and current traffic volume statistics, the Highway Department's 1955 report provided a comprehensive assessment of Portland's over-burdened street system and offered a solution that anticipated the impending federal highway bill (See Figure 2).⁶

The passage of the Federal-Aid Highway Act in June 1956 provided funds to each state highway department and charged state engineers with designing and constructing the freeways. However, highway officials exhibited varying degrees of

⁵ *Freeway and Expressway System*, 12. The report states, "The freeway-expressway system developed in this report has been designed to give motorists in these expanding areas and in the existing populated areas within the city, easy access to the commercial and industrial areas and other important generators of traffic in the Portland study area."

⁶ *Freeway and Expressway System*, 2.

autonomy. They were generally forced to interact and coordinate with local planners and councils. Consequently, there were differences in how the interstates were constructed in each American city. In some places, strong preservationist attitudes pervaded both the citizenry and local government, making opposition to freeways strong and road projects difficult to complete. In other cities, state highway officials worked closely with local councils and urban planners to target specific “blighted” areas for demolition and redevelopment. In still other locations, state engineers made essentially unilateral decisions and intimidated any opposition with the threat of withdrawing highway funds. In Oregon, state law mandated that highway commissioners hold public hearings and consider the recommendations of local officials before finalizing routes. In Portland itself, the Portland Development Commission, the Portland City Planning Commission, the Multnomah County Commission, and the Portland-Vancouver Metropolitan Transportation Study (PVMTS) all negotiated interstate highway route locations with the Highway Department. Alternately motivated by traffic accommodation and urban development goals, the local planning agencies sought to shape the city’s future. State law and the profusion of planning and decision-making bodies combined to make highway building a collaborative effort in the Rose City. Yet, the collaboration had limits. Citizen input about route locations were rarely given serious consideration. The public hearings were held merely to comply with state law. And, because state engineers wielded federal authority and funds, they could browbeat opponents in local government. It would be the early 1970s before a new generation of sympathetic politicians and environmentally conscious, politically-savvy activists would reshape transportation

policy and public participation in Portland. In the interim, the late 1950s and 1960s would be a period marked by the persistent authority of highway engineers, isolated opposition to interstate routes, and the first large-scale freeway resistance.

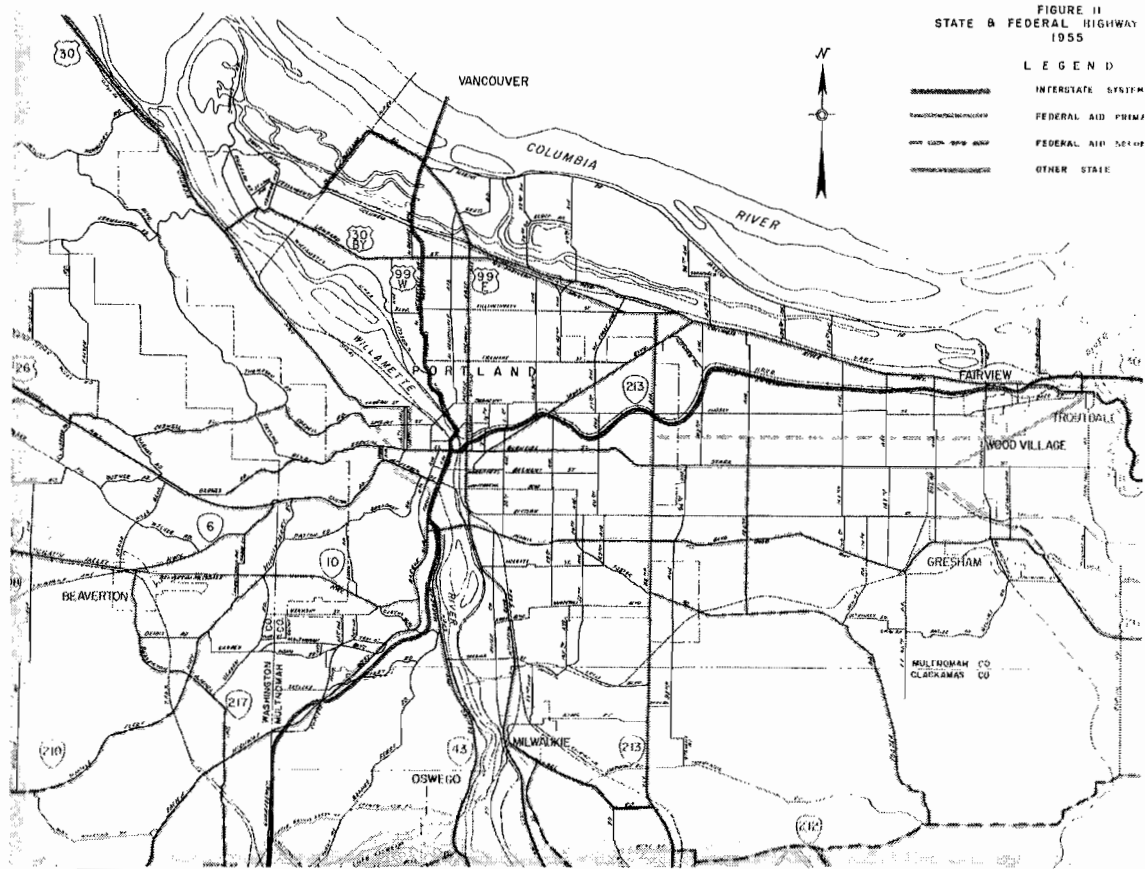


Figure 2. Portland's proposed freeway system, 1955.⁷

⁷ *Freeway and Expressway System*, 31. Interstate 405 is conspicuously missing from the map. The route would not be planned until after the passage of the 1956 highway act.

Interstates 5 and 405: Local Support and Isolated Resistance, 1956-1963

In 1958, Portlanders voted to create an urban renewal agency dubbed the Portland Development Commission (PDC). The city's postwar boom had slowed and residential and industrial blight threatened property values.⁸ Soon after its inception, the PDC implemented large-scale urban renewal projects on the southwestern edge of downtown, in the Albina neighborhood, at Portland State College, and in the Lair Hill section of the city.⁹ As interstate construction progressed, the PDC integrated their renewal plans in the South Auditorium and Albina neighborhoods with the freeway plans. When the Highway Commission proposed two route alternatives for the inner-belt, the PDC urged the City Council to approve the plan favored by state engineers.¹⁰ At every opportunity, the PDC trumpeted the Oregon Highway Commission's projects, creating a powerful voice of support within local government. This relationship also meant that freeway projects would be more obviously connected with urban renewal plans that targeted low-income and minority neighborhoods.

Under the direction of Lloyd Keefe, the Portland Planning Commission generally supported the goals of the interstate program and the decisions of highway engineers and

⁸ Craig Wollner, John Provo, and Julie Schablisky, *Brief History of Urban Renewal in Portland, Oregon*, Portland Development Commission, 5, http://www.pdc.us/pdf/about/urban_renewal_history.pdf (accessed April 11, 2009).

⁹ Wollner, Provo, and Schablisky, *Brief History of Urban Renewal in Portland*, 6-11.

¹⁰ Portland Development Commission, *Minutes of the Portland Development Commission*, November 17, 1958, 4, <http://www.pdc.us/commission-archive/1958/minutes/Minutes%20-%20Nov%2017%201958.pdf> (accessed April 10, 2009). Hereafter cited as *Minutes of the Portland Development Commission*. See also *Minutes of the Portland Development Commission*, June 24, 1960, 4; and March 12, 1962, 4, <http://www.pdc.us/commission-archive/default.asp> (accessed April 11, 2009).

commissioners. However, unlike the Highway Department, the Planning Commission had no control over highway funds. Thus, they were free from the financial constraints of the federal government when they made recommendations, but unable to actually carry out road building plans. During the early years of freeway construction, the Planning Commission found itself outmaneuvered by the Highway Department when disagreements arose.

Like the Planning Commission, the Portland-Vancouver Metropolitan Transportation Study served in an advisory role. In 1959 PVMTS was created by the Columbia Regional Association of Governments (CRAG), a newly-formed regional planning agency, to analyze the traffic demands of the region. The study was chaired by Portland City Commissioner William Bowes, a staunch advocate of freeways. Working with local governments, the states of Oregon and Washington, and the Bureau of Public Roads, PVMTS adopted the same methods for measuring the “transportation problem” as state and federal highway engineers. The study’s Technical Advisory Committee relied primarily on origin-destination and traffic volume statistics when planning new highways.¹¹ It is unsurprising, then, that the reports released by PVMTS arrived at the same conclusions for solving urban traffic problems as the BPR and state highway departments. Though the study had a mass transit component, PVMTS dismissed the importance of transit on economic grounds and focused instead on serving the region’s ever-increasing automobile traffic. Transit riders, the study concluded, were mostly

¹¹ Portland-Vancouver Metropolitan Transportation Study, *Volume 1: Factual Data Report*, (Salem: Oregon State Highway Commission, 1963), 2. Hereafter cited as PVMTS, *Factual Data Report*.

women (63 percent) and were generally not “professional people, proprietors, officials, salesmen, and laborers.” According to the study, many riders were “‘captive’ – that is, for some reason or another they are forced to take the bus.”¹² From an economic standpoint, these demographic figures meant that transit was less important to the city than freeways. “Even though mass transit in Portland is oriented towards the Central Business District and schools,” the Technical Advisory Committee asserted, “the Central Business District is not as dependent upon mass transit as is Chicago, Pittsburgh, or Philadelphia.” The Study concluded that transit “is not as clearly identified with the worker as might be expected.”¹³

During the early years of interstate highway construction, local agencies like the Portland Development Commission, the City Planning Commission, and the Portland-Vancouver Metropolitan Transportation Study encouraged the federal freeway project and advanced an agenda that generally fell in line with the goals of the BPR and the Oregon Highway Department. In addition, elected officials from the Portland City Council to the Multnomah County Commission welcomed the massive investment in local infrastructure. As interstate construction progressed, it appeared that everyone was in favor of the progress represented by the superhighways. However, the first eight years of road building would show that no matter how well-planned or carefully orchestrated the project, there were bound to be dissonant voices.

¹² PVMTS, *Factual Data Report*, 24-25.

¹³ PVMTS, *Factual Data Report*, 25.

In 1955, R.H. Baldock oversaw the construction of Portland's Banfield Expressway and the Portland-Salem Expressway. Along with the already completed Harbor Drive in downtown Portland, these new limited-access freeways were the first in the state. The Banfield followed Sullivan's Gulch to the eastern edge of Portland near Rocky Butte State Park, while the Portland-Salem Expressway linked the state capital with its major urban center. The Highway Department followed up these accomplishments with the publication of *Freeway and Expressway System*. In Baldock's last year as State Highway Engineer, he had ushered in a new era of highway construction for the city. After passage of the interstate highway legislation, the Highway Department, with new Chief Engineer W.C. Williams, began work on the state's two major federal freeways: Interstate 5 and Interstate 80 North (now I-84). The Banfield, when completed in 1958, would be integrated into I-80N, meaning that the City of Portland had already accommodated one major freeway in the transcontinental system.¹⁴ Construction on Interstate 5 commenced in 1956 in southern Oregon near Myrtle Creek, and the Portland-Salem Expressway was soon incorporated into I-5.¹⁵

The first two years of freeway construction in the state saw road engineers making great progress on overall mileage while addressing frequent complaints from rural landowners. The Federal-Aid Highway Act had mandated that state officials conduct public hearings prior to construction. So, in cities and towns along the proposed

¹⁴ Oregon State Highway Department, *Portland Freeway System*, (Salem: Oregon State Highway Commission, 1958), 6.

¹⁵ Oregon Department of Transportation, "Interstate 5," Oregon Department of Transportation, http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/COMM/interstate50_I5.shtml (accessed April 15, 2008).

I-5 and I-80N routes, field engineers met with concerned residents to hear their objections and occasionally to get local input on route specifics.¹⁶ In late 1957, the Highway Commission's Chief Counsel and the Right of Way Engineer along with several field engineers found that their method of negotiating directly with property owners often resulted in "dissatisfaction because of apparent inequities in some settlements for similar classes of properties."¹⁷ Roughly ten percent of property owners took the matter to court, hoping either to hold on to their land or to get a better price for it. While many Oregonians were successful in getting more money, they were all forced to sell. By 1961, large portions of the rural freeways had been completed, and the Oregon Highway Commission received national recognition from the Bureau of Public Roads for having the highest percent of interstate mileage finished.¹⁸

In Portland, the process of completing highway mileage was much more time consuming than in the vast expanses of southern and eastern Oregon. Densely populated neighborhoods, an already existing street system, and the need for frequent interchanges

¹⁶ Oregon State Highway Department, *Minutes of the Oregon Highway Commission*, vol. 41, 3 (Salem, OR: State of Oregon, 1956), 27249-27258. Hereafter cited as *Minutes of the Oregon Highway Commission*. These pages record the meeting minutes of the public hearing conducted in Medford. This may have been the first public hearing under the provisions of the 1956 Highway Act conducted in Oregon. In regard to the federal legislation, the meeting minutes state: "The Highway Commission proposes to finance construction of this freeway partially with Federal monies, and accordingly must comply with certain Federal requirements. Including Section 116c of the 'Federal-aid Act of 1956,' which provides that: - 'Any state Highway Department which submits plans for a village, either incorporated or unincorporated, shall certify to the Commissioner of Public Roads that it has had public hearings, or had afforded like opportunity for such hearings, and has considered the economic effects of such a location....' This hearing also was held to satisfy the requirements of the State of Oregon, particularly those contained in ORS 373.015."

¹⁷ Oregon State Senate, *Report of Legislative Highway Interim Committee in Oregon*, Senate Joint Resolution No. 25 (Salem: State of Oregon, 1957), 13.

¹⁸ *Minutes of the Oregon Highway Commission*, vol. 44, 1 (1959): 31394. See also George Kramer, "Interstate 50th Anniversary: The Story of Oregon's Interstates," 5, Oregon Department of Transportation, http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/COMM/docs/Oregon_Interstate_Background.pdf (accessed April 12, 2009).

made highway design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction long and arduous undertakings. In 1958, the Highway Department's engineering division began designing the Rose City's portion of Interstate 5. In the original plan outlined in *Freeway and Expressway System*, I-5 would have hugged the west side of the Willamette – subsuming Harbor Drive in the process – until the river curved westward at the northern edge of downtown where the route would cross the Steel Bridge into Northeast Portland and follow Interstate Avenue and U.S. 99 across the Columbia River to Vancouver, Washington. In a 1958 report entitled *The East Bank Freeway*, state highway engineers designed a new alignment wherein I-5 would cross to the east side of the Willamette on the Marquam Bridge just north of Ross Island. They now deemed the Steel Bridge crossing “entirely inadequate.”¹⁹ The new configuration also had the highway running parallel to Greeley Avenue in Northeast Portland rather than Interstate Avenue. This route would plow through the western edge of the Arbor Lodge and Overlook neighborhoods in northeast Portland. By the next year, however, the Interstate Avenue alignment was shifted a few blocks east to Minnesota Avenue. This final route took the freeway through Albina, Portland's only predominantly African American neighborhood.

As the state began purchasing homes in the neighborhood, Mayor Schrunk and city relocation chief Joy O'Brien advocated providing assistance to displaced residents. The PDC's urban renewal projects in Southwest Portland and Albina had begun to take shape by 1959 and, although federal urban renewal funds could not be used to help

¹⁹ Oregon State Highway Department, *The East Bank Freeway* (Salem: Oregon State Highway Commission, 1958), 8-9.

residents displaced by freeways, the mayor sought a way to finance a relocation assistance plan. Ultimately, city hall was unable to appropriate any funding. To make matters worse, the Albina neighborhood began to crumble. The Urban Renewal Project, the new freeway, the Lloyd Center, The Memorial Coliseum, and Emmanuel Hospital would all be constructed during the 1960s. These projects displaced thousands of residents and destroyed much of the old neighborhood.²⁰

For their part, highway engineers worried that because the East Bank Freeway would dislocate hundreds of residents the project would face widespread opposition. In late 1959, the Highway Commission established a right-of-way office in Northeast Portland to acquire land and address local resistance to the recently-announced sections of Interstate 5.²¹ Over the next year, the state acquired rights-of-way in the Albina neighborhood and other areas along the east bank of the Willamette. As route designs were finalized in 1960 and 1961 the Highway Department held public hearings like the one attended by Howard Cherry, Daniel McGoodwin, and Howard Glazer. These forums gave citizens an opportunity to voice their opposition, but no power to actually influence route designs. In 1960, several hundred residents living on Minnesota Avenue, a street that would be largely destroyed by the impending freeway, formed the Minnesota

²⁰ Portland Civil Rights Project, "Whiteness and Racism," Portland State University, <http://whitestudiesblackstudies.wordpress.com/2008/12/23/psu-portland-civil-rights-project-documentary-script-part-2/> (accessed April 13, 2009). For a more limited perspective on dispossession caused by the East Bank Freeway see Gene Klare, "Multimillion East Bank Freeway to Uproot Residences, Industry," *The Oregonian*, February 13, 1959. See also "160 Families in Road Path," *The Oregonian*, February 20, 1959, Section III.

²¹ *Minutes of the Oregon Highway Commission*, vol. 44, 2 (1959): 32036; vol. 44, 3 (1959): 32145-32146.

Property Owners Association to protest the state's plans. State Highway Engineer W.C. Williams met twice with the group and, though no transcripts or minutes elucidate the content of the meetings, Williams told *The Oregon Journal* that "the Minnesota Property Owners Association dissolved apparently for lack of necessity for a common cause."²² Evidently, Williams and other highway officials were able to assure residents of fair compensation for relocation and housing costs, and convince them of the benefits of the new superhighway.

As construction proceeded on Interstate 5, the Highway Department finalized design plans on a part of the freeway system not included in the 1955 report. Interstate 405, a ring of steel and concrete linking both sides of the Willamette, would provide easy access to the business district. Initially proposed by Robert Moses in *Portland Improvement*, the route was only officially designed by the Highway Department and designated as part of the Interstate Highway System after the passage of the 1956 Highway Act.²³ I-405, known locally as the Stadium Freeway, would be similar to the other inner-belt freeways that encircled American cities. And, because it met I-5 at two interchanges, the Stadium Freeway was designed in conjunction with the East Bank Freeway.

In January 1959, Fred Fowler, chief highway engineer for the City of Portland, and Lloyd Keefe met with City Commissioner William Bowes and the Portland

²² Jim Running, "Minnesota Freeway Property Harmoniously Acquired," *The Oregon Journal*, July 24, 1961.

²³ Moses, *Portland Improvement*, 87.

Development Commission to discuss the I-405 alignments recently proposed by the Highway Department. Fowler recommended the more expensive Clay-Market Route, a depressed freeway that would skirt the edge of downtown and require the demolition of several commercial buildings. The Highway Commission had already endorsed the Foothills Route, a configuration that would follow the contours of the Southwest Hills and displace more residences and churches than the alternative. “The Highway Department,” Keefe stated, “appears to have made their decision based on cost rather than function.” This jab at the highwaymen was, no doubt, meant to hurt. Highway engineers claimed to be solely concerned with function. Money was political and, therefore, beyond their interest. Keefe’s anger may speak to the powerlessness felt by the Planning Commission as they watched the city being rebuilt around them by forces outside their sphere of influence. However, there was also some truth to the statement. Commissioner Bowes, a longtime advocate of freeways, explained that the Federal Government was finding the cost of the Interstate Highway System to be “25 to 30 percent more than estimated.” With this in mind, Bowes asserted, the city would have to show that the cost of the Clay-Market Route was similar to that of the Foothills alignment. Bowes went on to point out that “cities all over the country are facing the same problem. Although the route has to be approved at a public hearing and by the local city government and Planning Commission if it can be shown that the route preferred by the State Highway Department and Federal Government is comparable and is less costly, all they would have to do is drop their plans if the City did not concur. The City would

then lose part of the funds provided in its five-year allocation.”²⁴ The prospect of losing federal funding was appealing to no one, least of all city planners. In the end, the Planning Commission bowed to the wishes of the Oregon Highway Department and a public hearing was scheduled.

Finally, in June 1960, the Highway Commission held a public hearing to discuss the finalized Foothills Route. With the alignment already decided upon, the hearing, like the one for the East Bank Freeway, was scheduled mainly to fulfill legal responsibilities. At the hearing Mark Schnitzer and David Robinson, local members of the Congregation Shaarie Torah, an Orthodox Jewish congregation, requested that the Highway Commission reexamine the route alternatives because the proposed alignment would require the demolition of their recently constructed synagogue. Schnitzer explained that no properties were available in the neighborhood for relocation and, because Orthodox Jews walk to their synagogue on Sabbath, the current synagogue was of vital importance. Highway Commission chairman M.K. McIver “thanked the delegation for bringing this matter to the Commission’s attention.”²⁵ A month after the public hearing the Foothills Route was officially adopted. In August, Highway Department engineers announced that “it would not be economically feasible to change the location of the highway.”²⁶ In the

²⁴ *Minutes of the Portland Development Commission*, January 13, 1959, 4-5, <http://www.pdc.us/commission-archive/1959/minutes/Minutes%20-%20Jan%2013%201959.pdf> (accessed April 10, 2009).

²⁵ *Minutes of the Oregon Highway Commission*, vol. 45 (1960): 32772.

²⁶ *Minutes of the Oregon Highway Commission*, vol. 45 (1960): 32803.

following months, the Highway Department reached a settlement with the Congregation Shaarie Torah and a new synagogue was constructed two miles away.²⁷

Construction on I-405 finally began in earnest in early 1968 after four years of ground-clearing and excavation to prepare for the most expensive 4.2 miles of Oregon's road system.²⁸ In Northwest Portland, construction of the Stadium Freeway planted seeds of discontent. The Grace Lutheran Church parish was split down the middle by the highway and pastor Llano Thelin became a vocal opponent of the freeway. Meanwhile, the Highway Department designed I-405 with a stub jutting out into the northwest residential neighborhood so that it could easily connect the proposed Industrial Freeway (Interstate 505) to the inner-belt. On the west side of the Willamette the growing dissatisfaction would blossom into a full-fledged neighborhood revolution when plans for the Industrial Freeway were finally announced. Meanwhile, on the River's east side, the Highway Department would soon find that it had run out of goodwill. In the coming years, the unbuilt Mount Hood Freeway would stir the ire of a motivated group of activist-experts and become an emblem of Portland's freeway opposition and environmental ethic. But first Interstate 205, the proposed outer-belt, would become the most contentious freeway ever constructed in the state.

The early years of the Interstate Era in Portland reinforced the authority of the Highway Department. The creation of the PDC and PVMTS bolstered local institutional support for major freeways while broad public support for the projects drowned out the

²⁷ Congregation Shaarie Torah: About. <http://www.shaarietorah.org/about.html> (accessed April 10, 2009).

²⁸ Kramer, *Interstate 50th Anniversary*, 10.

isolated voices of opposition. For their part, the highway engineers and bureaucrats shrugged off the dissenters who appeared at every public hearing. They understood that people would always resist being displaced, but were sure that everyone, except perhaps for idiosyncratic architects, could understand that roads were necessary for progress.

However, the opposition to Interstate 205 that soon developed in Lake Oswego, Maywood Park, and elsewhere showed that even as symbols of progress freeways were an unwelcome intrusion into neighborhoods. The Highway Department's years of holding nominal public hearings, receiving broad support from local politicians and bureaucrats, and quelling the first signs of protest were coming to an end. The I-205 controversy would mark the beginning of organized opposition to freeways and a questioning of the Highway Commission's authority. Yet, it was also a continued affirmation of superhighways and the interstate project.

Interstate 205: Localized Opposition to a "Necessary Freeway," 1961-1972

In the 1960s, many Americans began questioning the alleged benefits of an automobile-centered life. Ralph Nader's 1965 book *Unsafe at Any Speed* exposed the auto industry's failure to implement safety features in cars, while A.Q. Mowbray's *Road to Ruin* (1969), Helen Leavitt's *Superhighway – Superhoax* (1970), and Kenneth Schneider's *Autokind vs. Mankind* (1971) examined the demolition of homes, ecological degradation, and the high economic costs associated with the interstate system. A growing environmental awareness, catalyzed in part by the recent successes of wilderness advocates and highly publicized crises like the 1969 Cuyahoga River fire and Santa

Barbara oil spill, made many people more aware of the planet's fragility and the need to protect natural landscapes and livable cityscapes from destruction.

Simultaneously, many city dwellers embraced a new set of urban design principles. In 1961, Jane Jacobs, an architectural magazine editor published *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Jacobs had recently fought and helped defeat the construction of a Robert Moses-planned road extension through Washington Square. Her book criticized the primacy of automobiles in American life. More importantly, though, she thrashed the incompetence of modern city planners. "Planners, including the highwaymen with fabulous sums of money and enormous powers at their disposal, are at a loss to make automobiles and cities compatible with one another," she wrote. "They do not know what to do with automobiles in cities because they do not know how to plan for workable and vital cities anyhow – with or without automobiles." Enraged at the plans of men like Moses and the amount of authority given to state and federal highway engineers, she continued: "The simple needs of automobiles are more easily understood and satisfied than the complex needs of cities, and a growing number of planners and designers have come to believe that if they can only solve the problems of traffic, they will thereby have solved the major problem of cities. Cities have much more intricate economic and social concerns than automobile traffic."²⁹ Jacobs encouraged citizens to think about what the cities of the future should look like and to question the tenets of mid-century urban planning. Her rhetoric was increasingly echoed by citizens and

²⁹ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1961) in *The Sustainable Urban Development Reader*, ed. Wheeler and Beatley, 31.

planning professionals. It would signal the beginning of a nationwide shift in Americans' understanding of metropolitan core areas from unitary centers that required suburban access to a conglomeration of potentially-vital neighborhoods and sub-districts.³⁰

As the decade progressed, anti-freeway activists organized at the local level to protect not just their homes and neighborhoods but their entire cities by bringing highway projects to a permanent halt. Transportation officials across the country were soon confronted by angry urban residents who were prepared to initiate legal battles against both state highway departments and the Bureau of Public Roads. Unlike the informal opposition that road engineers had become accustomed to dealing with at public hearings during the first decade of interstate construction, the protests that sprang up in New York, Boston, New Orleans, San Francisco, and elsewhere were better organized and had clearer goals.

When Oregon highway engineer Tom Edwards met with the Portland City Council and frustrated citizens in June 1961, it was probably not the first time he had heard such vehement criticism from the public. Historian Mark Rose has interviewed many engineers involved in the interstate program during the 1950s and 1960s. He notes that he was struck by the number of people “who, as late as 1987, were able to recall distinctly that moment at which they first encountered opposition to highway

³⁰ Carl Abbott, “Five Downtown Strategies: Policy Discourse and Downtown Planning Since 1945” in *Urban Public Policy: Historical Modes and Methods*, ed. Martin V. Melosi (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 7.

construction.”³¹ For these men, it came as a surprise that people – motorists – would reject the fast, safe freeways that had taken years to design and build. To the highway engineer, whose only goal was to satisfy the needs and desires of a mobile populace, the freeway revolts made little sense. However, the early instances of grumbling, dissatisfaction, and opposition from people in the paths of freeways spoke to a general desire to protect property that, for many, extended outward to encompass not just the home, but entire streets, neighborhoods, and even cities. Although, the opposition may have seemed strange, the highwaymen in Oregon had plenty of warning before they were confronted by the first organized freeway opposition in Portland.

It is unsurprising that controversy surrounded the urban freeway routes. Highway engineers were trying to accommodate four or six lane roads with 300 foot rights of way and no intersections in cities that already had fully developed street networks. The decision to build interstates through cities had been made during the Bureau of Public Road’s Congressional lobbying in the months leading up to the passage of the 1956 Federal-Aid Highway Act. To get the support of Congress members who represented large cities, the BPR had guaranteed that the new freeway system would feature a major urban component. Thus, the Bureau designed urban interstate routes, and state highway officials enthusiastically carried out the plans. Neither the politicians nor the engineers thought that residents would reject the revolutionary transportation system being built for them.

³¹ Mark H. Rose and Bruce E. Seely, “Getting the Interstate System Built: Road Engineers and the Implementation of Public Policy, 1955-1985,” *Journal of Planning History*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1990): 33.

From the outset, as we have seen, residents in affected neighborhoods voiced opposition to freeways. Yet, the majority of these early dissenters did not dispute the necessity of freeways, but merely that they should be built elsewhere. And, though the phrase NIMBY (“Not in my backyard”) was not coined until the 1980s, it accurately describes the complaints of these early freeway opponents. By characterizing their position as one of concern for their neighborhoods and not a broader rejection of cars and highways, residents ensured that they would not be perceived as Luddites. However, their pleas for route alignment changes generally did not sway engineers or policymakers. Moving a route might save a neighborhood, but only at the expense of another one. Officials knew that every neighborhood would resist being uprooted. But, they were also certain that far more people would benefit from a road than would be harmed by it. Thus, highway routes were rarely reconsidered.

Anti-freeway sentiment in Portland existed at this NIMBY level during the early years of interstate construction. Few people questioned the need to alleviate traffic congestion, and there was certainly no widespread opposition to automobile use in general. In fact, the Portland-Vancouver Metropolitan Transportation Study pointed out in 1963 that mass transit use was still declining as more automobiles clogged the region’s roads.³² So, with Interstate 5 nearing completion and I-405 well under way, the Oregon Highway Commission turned its attention to the next major project, a partial loop around eastern Portland that would cross the Columbia River and link up with Vancouver’s east

³² PVMTS, *Volume I: Factual Data Report*, 20, 23.

side freeway. This route, now called Interstate 205, had figured prominently in the 1955 *Freeway and Expressway System* report. According to the report, however, there would be two north-south limited-access highways traversing the neighborhoods of eastern Multnomah County. The first, the Laurelhurst Freeway, would originate at a point on Interstate 5 near Tualatin, pass along the southern edge of Lake Oswego and turn north following 40th Avenue through Portland. The second route, dubbed the Cascade Freeway, would begin in Oregon City on the banks of the Willamette and head north through Portland along 82nd Avenue.³³ The Bureau of Public Roads, however, would support the construction of only one outer-belt loop around the city. In late 1961, the Highway Department began planning an alignment for the single route.

By December, the Highway Department had released the locations of the five possible route alignments being considered for the section of the freeway originating at I-5 and going through Lake Oswego. Each of the proposed routes would bisect the city and school district. The Lake Oswego School Board opposed the plan from the outset. Assistant highway engineer Tom Edwards, now familiar with local freeway opposition, admitted, “No one wants to be dispossessed by a freeway. Few homeowners, with considerable investment in their property want a freeway running past their front doors.” However, he continued, “Our responsibility is not only to the immediate area affected by a freeway, but also to a number of other factors, not the least of which is practical

³³ *Freeway and Expressway System*, 80, 86.

economics.”³⁴ By April 1963, however, the Highway Department had to admit defeat in Lake Oswego. Resident petitions led the local council to adopt a resolution barring highway construction “anywhere within a distance of several miles of this city.”³⁵ Spurred on by the Oswegans, citizens of the Laurelhurst neighborhood actively campaigned against the freeway. In early 1962 Laurelhurst residents agreed to petition the Portland City Council to formally oppose the route if it were to be built within their school district.³⁶

Over the next year, the Portland-Vancouver Metropolitan Transportation Study conducted research on possible route alignments for Interstate 205.³⁷ On June 11, 1964, after three exhaustive studies analyzing desire lines, daily traffic volumes, costs, and economic effects, the PVMTS Technical Advisory Committee recommended an alignment that would originate at a point on Interstate 5 several miles north of Lake Oswego. The route would head east before curving northward following 52nd Avenue in eastern Portland.³⁸ There was, however, dissention among the local planning agencies. Portland Planning Commission Director, Lloyd Keefe, a member of PVMTS, supported

³⁴ William Sanderson, “Lake Oswego School Board Opposes Road Dividing District,” *The Oregonian*, December 22, 1961.

³⁵ R.J. Edward Reid, “Oppose Freeway,” *The Oregon Journal*, April 3, 1963.

³⁶ “Laurelhurst, Shattuck Citizens Weigh Proposed Freeway Effects,” *The Oregonian*, January 19, 1962.

³⁷ The PVMTS studies include *Volume 1: Factual Data Report* (1963), *Interim Report I-205 Location* (1964), and *Interim Report I-205 Location: Social-Economic Study* (1964), all published by the Oregon Highway Commission with the latter prepared by the University of Oregon Bureau of Municipal Research and Services.

³⁸ Don Holm, “52nd Avenue Freeway Route Recommended,” *The Oregonian*, June 11, 1964.

the route while the Multnomah County Planning Commission opposed it, citing their desire for a 96th Avenue route that would allow for the development of Government Island on the Columbia River as a recreation area.³⁹

Meanwhile, the announcement of the 52nd Avenue route impelled citizens of Milwaukie and Oak Grove to formally oppose the route. Likewise, on June 18 the Lake Oswego Citizens Freeway Committee, Inc. continued their official opposition to any route planned in the vicinity of the community. “The highway department has stated repeatedly that it will not cram a freeway down our throats,” a member of the committee reminded highway commissioners.⁴⁰ Over the next several weeks more opposition groups began to form throughout Portland’s East Side. Led by the “militant” Oswegans, associations in potentially affected neighborhoods like Laurelhurst, Alameda, Hollywood, Rose City, Glencoe, Woodstock, Milwaukie, and Oak Grove were joined by the Clackamas County communities Molalla and Mulino, neither of which were located near the proposed interstate.⁴¹ Representatives from each of the groups met on July 6 and outlined a unified position. Temporary Chairman Alfred Lauber explained, “We are battling bad planning. This is not a good place to build a freeway.” Similarly, Glencoe Community Council chairman Lynn Kirby asserted, “We are fighting for our homes. [This group is] not anti-freeway.”⁴²

³⁹ “Proposed Freeway Route Said Favored,” *The Oregonian*, June 11, 1964.

⁴⁰ “Freeway Route Sent to State for Formal OK,” *The Oregonian*, June 18, 1964.

⁴¹ “Glencoe Organizes Freeway Opposition,” *The Oregonian*, July 7, 1964.

⁴² “Glencoe Organizes Freeway Opposition,” *The Oregonian*, July 7, 1964.

By July the Highway Department had settled on a route that would skirt the border of Lake Oswego, a fact that did not diminish opposition from the community.⁴³ Simultaneously, the Multnomah County Commissioners reinforced their support of an east side alignment following 96th Avenue rather than 52nd. This new plan satisfied the majority of groups opposed to the interstate. However, residents of the Parkrose and Maywood Park neighborhoods of Portland announced their resistance to the route, which would now bisect both school districts.⁴⁴

On August 27, freeway opponents converged on Salem to attend a Highway Commission meeting. The Citizens Freeway Committee, now an umbrella organization for all of the groups opposed to the 52nd Avenue alignment, came face-to-face with the 96th Avenue Committee, a coalition of residents from Maywood Park, Parkrose, and other neighborhoods that would be affected by the easterly configuration. At the meeting, the 96th Avenue Committee expressed support for the 52nd Avenue proposal. Committee spokesman C.M. McCoy stated, “We don’t feel the 96th Avenue route should be rammed down our throats.”⁴⁵ In an effort to assert the legitimacy of his group’s resistance, McCoy’s statement employed almost the exact phraseology used by the Citizens Freeway Committee two months earlier. Now, with no sense of irony, both groups were arguing

⁴³ “New Freeway Plan Said ‘Acceptable To State,” *The Oregonian*, July 11, 1964.

⁴⁴ “Parkrose Group Declares Opposition To Freeway Anywhere Within School District Area.” *The Oregonian*, July 15, 1964.

⁴⁵ “Antifreeway Forces Attend State Highway Meeting to Protest New Route,” *The Oregonian*, August 28, 1964.

that the freeway they so adamantly opposed in their own neighborhoods should be forced on people living two or three miles away (See Figure 3).

It is unsurprising that neither group questioned the need for the proposed interstate. Federal highway funds represented a huge government investment in the local infrastructure and most people seemed to think that congestion relief on the East Side was necessary. An editorial in *The Oregonian* reminded readers that traffic volumes were projected to increase exponentially over the next 20 years, and that the PVMTS Technical Advisory Committee was “a professional body composed of traffic engineers, urban planners and administrators.” Their recommendations should be heeded because they would “move traffic with maximum efficiency and minimum disruption of property and social values.”⁴⁶ As each of the proposed routes faced increasing resistance, the newspaper’s editorial staff again argued that “Unless we can, fairly soon, stop talking and start digging there will be no I-205, and if we are to credit [the Technical Advisory Committee’s] startling forecasts of vehicular traffic by 1975, this would be a disaster for the entire Portland metropolitan area.”⁴⁷ As the controversy over the route alignment heated up in July, the Western Section of the Institute of Traffic Engineers held their annual meeting in Portland. Though the highwaymen in attendance did not discuss the local battle over Interstate 205, one panel at the conference asserted that the interstates

⁴⁶ Editorial, “Freeway Route,” *The Oregonian*, June 11, 1964.

⁴⁷ Editorial, “Let’s Start Hearings,” *The Oregonian*, July 1, 1964.

saved drivers both time and money. In short, they were “a working girl’s best friend,” according to the engineers.⁴⁸

With the Multnomah County Commissioners and the Citizens Freeway Committee advocating the 96th Avenue alignment, and PVMTS and the 96th Avenue Committee supporting the 52nd Avenue route, the Highway Commission deliberated in December 1964. Realizing that Lake Oswego was not going to withdraw its opposition unless the route was significantly altered, state engineers proposed a configuration for I-205 that would make the Mount Hood Freeway the southern section of I-205.⁴⁹ The Mount Hood was a proposed east-west route that would be constructed between Division Street and Powell Boulevard in Southeast Portland. It would connect suburban Gresham to the near east side of Portland. This alignment would eliminate the portion of the route that would have passed near Lake Oswego and it would make the Mount Hood Freeway a part of the interstate system, thereby qualifying it for 92 percent federal funding. The Portland City Council, however, rejected the plan in a 4-1 vote in April 1965, citing the dispossession of residents living along 96th Avenue as the reason.⁵⁰ The Portland Planning Commission, directed by PVMTS member Lloyd Keefe, had recently recommended the 52nd Avenue route to the City Council. Likewise, city commissioner William Bowes a PVMTS coordinating committee member, supported the initial I-205 route. Influenced by the prominent bureaucrats, the Council recommended the adoption

⁴⁸ “Freeways Win Praise,” *The Oregonian*, July 15, 1964.

⁴⁹ William Sanderson, “Interstate 205 Faces Scrutiny,” *The Oregonian*, December 6, 1964.

⁵⁰ “City Council Kills 96th Avenue Freeway Plan,” *The Oregonian*, April 8, 1965.

of the 52nd Avenue alignment. The Citizens Freeway Committee, however, had done enough to convince the Highway Department to abandon that route altogether. With the City of Portland now opposed to the 96th Avenue route, the local freeway opponents had created an impasse. To make matters worse, the Bureau of Public Roads also rejected the Mount Hood-96th Avenue configuration, and refused to make the Mount Hood Freeway part of the interstate system.⁵¹

The Highway Department continued working to find the path of least resistance for the embattled I-205. In July engineers proposed a route through West Linn, Oregon City, and Gladstone that would then turn north and follow the 96th Avenue route through Portland.⁵² By November the Highway Commission approved the freeway. Meanwhile, the threat of losing federal dollars encouraged the Portland City Council to reconsider its opposition despite the City Planning Commission's assertion that "the 52nd-47th route would fit the urban fabric better than other possibilities for a north south freeway between Mt. Tabor and the Willamette River."⁵³ In March 1966, with the Oregon Highway Department, the Portland City Council, and the Multnomah County Commission all in support of the route, the Bureau of Public Roads gave official approval.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Stan Federman, "State switches to West Linn-96th Route For I-205. City Okays Mt. Hood Road Plan," *The Oregonian*, August 11, 1965.

⁵² Oregon State Highway Division, *Draft Environmental Impact Statement: administrative action for Interstate 205* (Salem: Oregon State Highway Division, 1972), 2.1.

⁵³ Robert Olmos, "State Picks Route for Controversial I-205," *The Oregonian*, 20 November 1965; Portland City Planning Commission, *Interstate 205 Freeway* (Portland: Portland City Planning Commission, 1965), 34.

⁵⁴ *Draft Environmental Impact Statement: administrative action for Interstate 205*, 2.1.

The Maywood Park Steering Committee continued to oppose I-205, however.⁵⁵ Neighborhood leaders recalled that Highway Department officials had said they would never force a freeway through a city.⁵⁶ The Steering Committee, therefore, recommended that the neighborhood incorporate in order to stop the freeway. In a close election in August 1967, Maywood Park became the newest municipality in Oregon. The community of 1,200 was now the last vestige of opposition to Portland's eastern bypass.

In May 1968, local leaders filed a complaint with the Multnomah County Circuit Court against the Highway Commission. The complaint charged that transportation officials had not consulted with the city's management or held public hearings when acquiring rights of way for the new interstate.⁵⁷ The following April, Circuit Judge Dean Bryson ruled that the Highway Commission had acted in accordance with state laws. Bryson claimed that the legislature did not intend for small groups of citizens like those in Maywood Park to halt major projects. "Today the wheelbound public has also acquired an interest through investment of millions of dollars in public throughways," he stated. Highway Department chief counsel George Rhode agreed: "If 150 persons were allowed to hold up a major freeway it could kill future highway development in the state."⁵⁸ The worth of freeways, Bryson and Rhode implied, must not be measured by their effects on

⁵⁵ "Maywood Park Plans to Battle Encroachment By New Freeway," *The Oregonian*, November 20, 1965.

⁵⁶ Editorial, "New City," *The Oregonian*, August 4, 1967.

⁵⁷ Phil Cogswell, "Maywood Park Begins Lawsuit To Bar Freeway Construction," *The Oregonian*, May 10, 1967.

⁵⁸ "Judge Supports State In I-205 Route Case," *The Oregonian*, April 24, 1969.

places like Maywood Park, but by their ability to increase overall mobility. The court ruling was a blow to local residents. However, it came only months before Congress passed the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Until the passage of NEPA, the federal government and the State of Oregon provided no mechanism for systematically calculating the environmental impacts of road construction projects. The new legislation forced transportation engineers to look not merely at how federal highway projects affected traffic mobility, but at how they affected the natural and built environments over which they were being constructed. Now environmental impact statements (EIS) would be required before work could begin on any government projects “significantly affecting the quality of the human environment.”⁵⁹

In 1970, the Oregon Transportation Commission pushed the route of I-205 closer to Rocky Butte Park, thereby avoiding most of Maywood Park.⁶⁰ Residents, however, continued to wage a legal battle against the Department of Transportation (DOT). Now, however, there was a distinctly environmental tone to the arguments made by Maywood Park mayor Werner Zeller. “They’re [the DOT] also going to be taking down 70 and 80-year old trees,” Zeller explained in late 1970. He noted the noise pollution the highway would cause and demanded that highway engineers address his constituents’ concerns.

⁵⁹ U.S. Congress, *National Environmental Policy Act of 1969*. (Pub. L. 91-190, 42 U.S.C. 4321-4347, January 1, 1970 sec. 102, c).

⁶⁰ The Oregon Highway Department was expanded into the Oregon Department of Transportation in 1969. The Highway Commission was then renamed the Transportation Commission. The body would henceforth be responsible for developing various modes of transportation, rather than merely facilitating automobiles. On the route alteration see “Maywood park Remains Unhappy, Even though I-205 Rerouting Saved Most Of City,” *The Oregonian*, 12 November 1970.

Soon, it became apparent to Zeller that the rerouting of the freeway was done primarily to accommodate more lanes of traffic.⁶¹ The proposed eight lane highway would slice off the western edge of Maywood Park. Zeller and his fellow citizens continued to fight. In 1972, they lost an appeal in Portland's U.S District Court just a few months before the publication of the *Draft Environmental Statement*. Judge Alfred Goodwin claimed that the Highway Division had taken every necessary step to ensure that the route would have minimal environmental impact.⁶² The battle for Maywood Park was over. What had started as a campaign to alter the freeway route became a quixotic quest by residents and their mayor to protect the natural character of the surrounding area and completely halt the freeway. In the end, 32 homes would be demolished in the small city.

The long, bitter revolt against Interstate 205 showed that the pro-freeway forces in Oregon could be challenged if protesters were willing to organize, form coalitions, and take legal action. The early years of the protests against Interstate 205, however, reinforced the authority of the engineers. Neither the Citizens Freeway Committee nor the 96th Avenue Committee went so far as to call for the cancellation of the freeway. Rather, they appealed their cases to the route engineers with the hope that construction would go forward as long as it was not in their backyards. The persistent efforts of Maywood Park residents to preserve their neighborhood coincided with the proliferation of anti-freeway movements in cities across the United States. Taking a cue from some of these other revolts, residents used legal action to try to get an injunction against the

⁶¹ "Maywood Park Group Fights Highway plan," *The Oregonian*, April 29, 1971.

⁶² "City of Maywood Park continues freeway fight," *The Oregonian*, May 12, 1972.

project. The small community also cited environmental concerns in their quest to protect their borders. These efforts were ultimately unsuccessful for the very practical reason that by the time Judge Goodwin ruled against the city, part of the route had already been built through West Linn and Clackamas County. In the end, the two possible alignments contributed to the long battles that delayed the route by a decade. However, the existence of these two seriously-considered route alternatives divided the opposition and weakened the strength of Portland's first freeway revolt. In the coming years, residents in Portland's southeast and northwest areas would benefit from the efforts of Maywood Park. County Commissioner Mel Gordon, inspired by Maywood Park's tenacity, would vehemently oppose the Mount Hood Freeway. Even in failure, the protesters' efforts helped shift the balance of power away from the highway engineers.

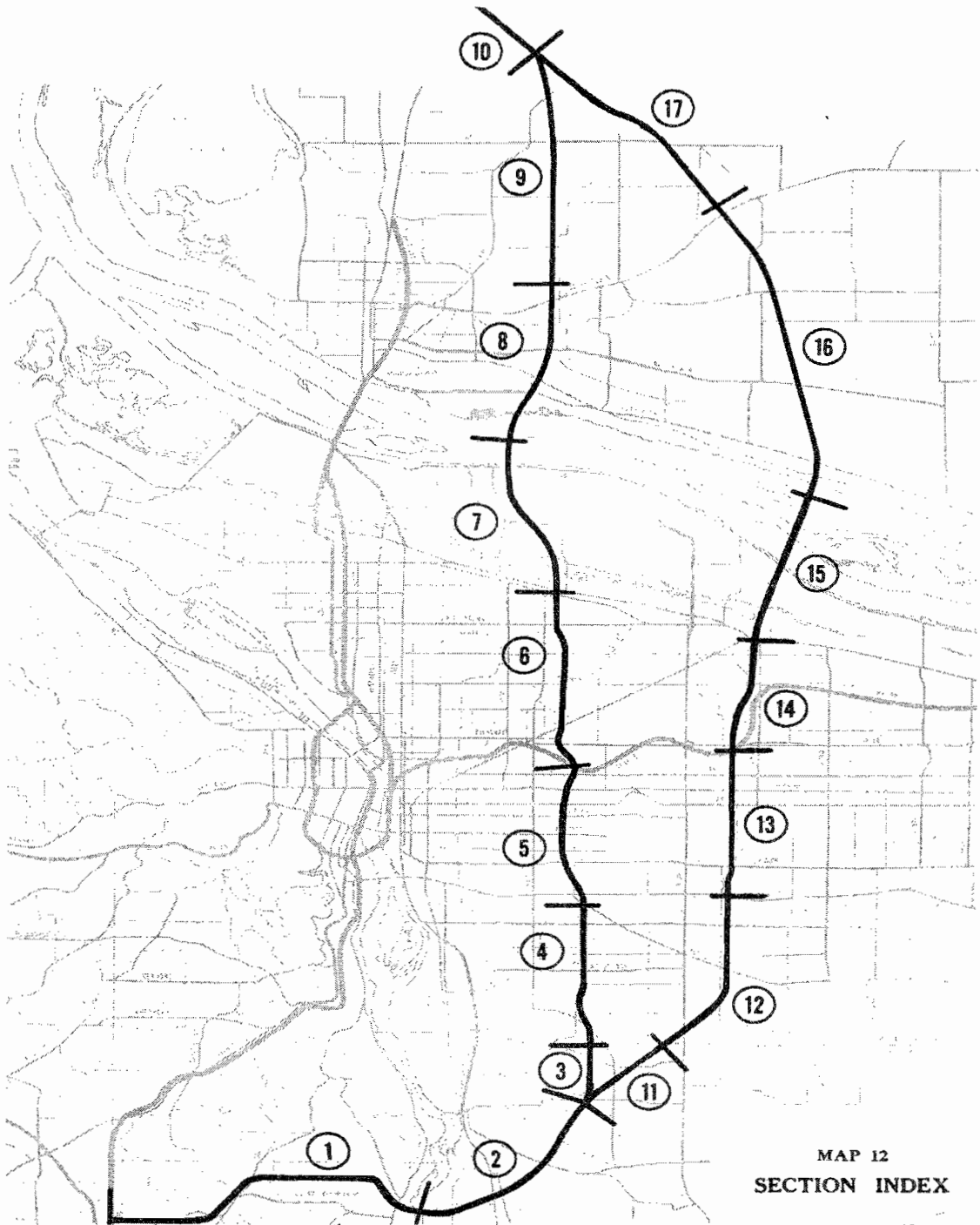


Figure 3. 52nd Avenue and 96th Avenue alignment alternatives for Interstate 205.⁶³

⁶³ PVMTS, *Interim Report, I-205 Location: Social-Economic Study*, 28.

CHAPTER IV
THE LIVABLE CITY:
FREEWAY REVOLTS IN PORTLAND, 1965-1978

“So freeways, by their very nature (their size, their adaptability to truck traffic, their high-speed volume design), are, in a very important way, inherently destructive of the landscape through which they pass, be it urban or rural. And most unfortunately, this inherently deficient tool, the freeway, has been the sole property of American highway engineers.”¹

– Ron Buel, 1972

In 1972 Ron Buel, executive assistant to Portland City Commissioner Neil Goldschmidt, approached Multnomah County Commissioner Don Clark at a public forum on the proposed Mount Hood Freeway. The County Planning Commission had approved the route in the late 1960s, but Clark was a new member who opposed the project. Buel urged Clark to take action against the freeway. “Well, what the hell’s the matter with the City? Why isn’t Neil doing something about that?” Clark asked. Buel explained that Goldschmidt didn’t have the political support to actively oppose the controversial route. Clark left the meeting encouraged, yet frustrated at the council’s lack of action.²

¹ Ronald Buel, *Dead End: The Automobile in Mass Transportation* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), 77.

² Don Clark Interview with Ernie Bonner, February 2000. Transcript: Portland, Oregon, <http://www.pdx.edu/usp/planpdxorg-interview-don-clark> (accessed February 26, 2009). See also, Gregory

This brief exchange between Buel and Clark exemplifies the new political relationships that transformed Portland in the early 1970s. Buel, who in 1973 would become chief of staff to Portland's newly elected mayor, Neil Goldschmidt, was also a member of the local organization Sustainable Transportation Options for People (STOP) and the author of *Dead End*, a scathing critique of the effects of the automobile on American cities. His dual role as a bureaucrat and activist allowed him to influence the local response to unpopular freeways through grassroots efforts and more formal channels. He was characteristic of the other citizen activists who emerged in the 1970s. Similarly Clark represented a new cohort of local politicians concerned with preserving the region's natural beauty.³ It is unsurprising that citizens like Buel began to oppose freeways at the same time that this new generation of politicians surfaced. Portlanders elected Don Clark and others precisely because of these shared beliefs, which included a desire to preserve natural spaces and local neighborhoods.

Planning historian Gregory Thompson has argued that this new era in Portland's political history was marked by compromises resulting from the efforts of the local political elite to institute transportation plans that both neighborhood groups and highway

L. Thompson, "How Portland's Power Brokers Accommodated the Anti-Highway Movement in the Early 1970s: The Decision to Build Light Rail," *Business and Economic History Online*, vol. 3 (2005): 7, <http://www.thebhc.org/publications/BEHonline/2005/thompson.pdf> (accessed February 24, 2009).

³ For first-hand accounts of the transformation of the Multnomah County planning Commission from a body comprised of freeway supporters to one largely opposed, see Don Clark Interview and Dennis Buchanan Interview with Ernie Bonner, June 2001, <http://www.pdx.edu/usp/planpdxorg-interview-dennis-buchanan> (accessed April 3, 2009).

officials would accept.⁴ Thompson has concluded that local input informed the decisions of Portland's leaders, creating "a true synthesis of interests."⁵ His analysis of the relationship between Portland's political leadership and neighborhood groups illuminates the cooperative approach to urban planning that became the city's hallmark. While he is correct to emphasize the ways that politicians and bureaucrats reshaped transportation policy in Portland during the 1970s, Thompson ultimately underestimates the role of the freeway opponents and neighborhood groups who provided the impetus for these sweeping changes. He relies on the theories of political scientist James Dunn, who has argued that the "anti-auto vanguard" fails to see the "mass preference for personal mobility" and seeks to use large-scale planning to halt suburban sprawl and reduce the influence of the automobile.⁶ Dunn himself asserts that Portland's move away from freeway building and toward a reinvestment in mass transit is an aberration in urban planning. Thompson has tried to reconcile Portland's repudiation of freeways with Dunn's theory that the "anti-auto vanguard" can never develop transportation policies acceptable to the majority of people. Thompson claims, much as Paul G. Lewis does, that it was Portland's political elite who harnessed the "neighborhood revolution" (i.e. the anti-auto vanguard) to overcome mass preferences and implement decisions in

⁴ Thompson, "Taming the Neighborhood Revolution, 215.

⁵ Thompson, "Taming the Neighborhood Revolution," 241.

⁶ Thompson, "Taming the Neighborhood Revolution," 216.

conjunction with the leaders of large-scale planning agencies (TRI-MET, PVMTS, the Highway Department, etc.).⁷

What Thompson and Lewis underemphasize, and Dunn fails to see, however, is that although citizen activists were only a vocal minority in Portland, they helped institutionalize the city's neighborhood organizations and influenced the "silent majority" to embrace neighborhood-scale planning, which, by its very nature, emphasized livability and undermined large-scale plans to enhance mobility. While many activists did call for a rethinking of auto-centered transportation planning, others merely wanted to regain control of local development. The success of the anti-freeway activists and the subsequent adoption of neighborhood planning actually allowed mass preferences to be heard, but in such a way as to promote NIMBYism and undermine the supposedly universal preference for personal mobility. In the end, as the efforts to halt the Mount Hood Freeway and Interstate 505 will show, neighborhood groups were the crucial component of successful freeway revolts. In addition, their demand for broad citizen participation in city planning has prevented further freeway construction in Oregon's "ecotopia."

By the late 1960s, Portlanders living in areas that would be affected by interstate highways understood that decision-making had been ceded to state highway engineers

⁷ See Thompson, "Taming the Neighborhood Revolution," 241; James A. Dunn, Jr. *Driving Forces: The Automobile, Its Enemies, and the Politics of Mobility* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1998) 156-158; and Paul G. Lewis, *Shaping Suburbia: How Political Institutions Organize Urban Development* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996). Dunn discusses Lewis' take on Portland in his summary of why Portland is not a good model for normal transportation politics.

and like-minded members of PVMTS and the Portland Development Commission to the detriment of urban neighborhoods. Local activists, therefore, used the ballot and public forums to support sympathetic politicians while they also initiated legal action and employed their own technical expertise to force the Oregon Transportation Commission to alter construction plans. Similarly, the success of several nationwide anti-freeway movements that were largely led by citizen activists influenced the passage of a new Federal-Aid Highway Act that gave more decision-making authority to local residents.

Unlike the isolated voices of dissent and splintered resistance that marked freeway opposition during the early years of interstate construction, the two freeway revolts that reshaped Portland in the 1970s featured the four key components identified by transportation historian Raymond Mohl as crucial to successful anti-freeway efforts. These components include determined neighborhood activism featuring both committed leaders and broad coalitions that can transcend racial, ethnic, class, and geographic boundaries; support from several local politicians and media outlets; a strong history of urban planning within the metropolitan area; and, perhaps most importantly, legal action.⁸ The efforts to halt the Mount Hood Freeway and Interstate 505 both featured these key elements, though in varying degrees.

The Mount Hood controversy was spear-headed by young, environmentally conscious residents of southeast Portland. Their success was contingent on the support of new county commissioners, city council members, and Mayor Neil Goldschmidt.

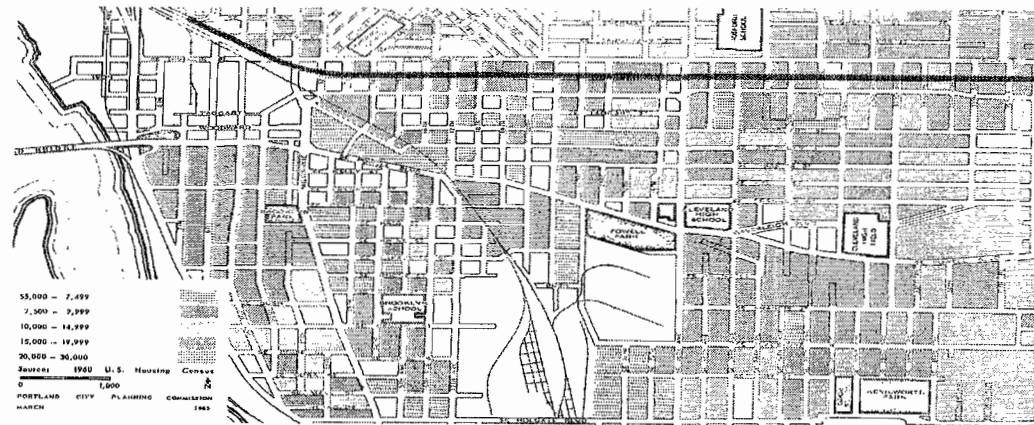
⁸ Raymond A. Mohl, "Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities," *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 30, no. 5 (2004): 675-676.

Likewise, the political atmosphere created by Oregon Governor Tom McCall over eight years helped make a freeway cancellation within the realm of possibility. Portland's planning history over the first half of the twentieth century, as we have seen, could be described as ad hoc at best. Yet, the city's tradition of bringing in some of the best known planners speaks to the importance civic boosters placed on creating a productive and livable city. Finally, the legal action taken by the Southeast Legal Defense Fund postponed the Mount Hood Freeway, and gave freeway opponents in city hall and at the Multnomah County Commission the opening they needed to withdraw support for the route.

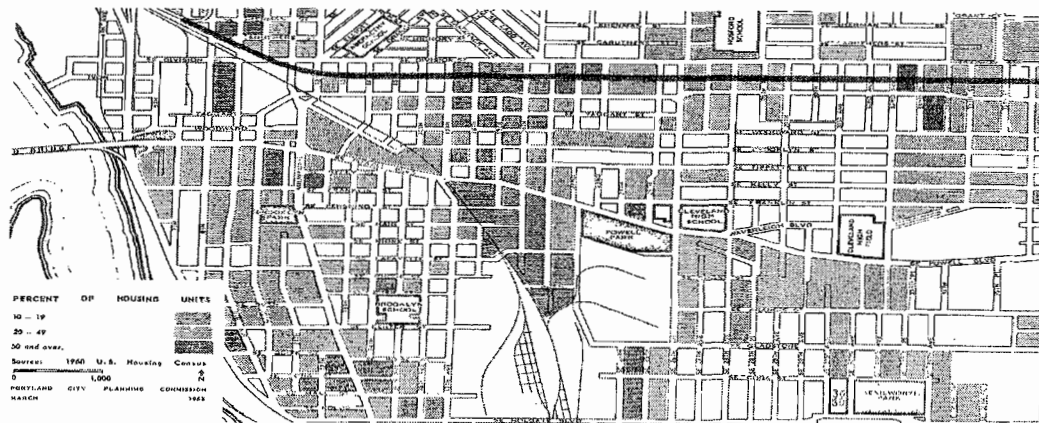
The Interstate 505 freeway revolt was also catalyzed by young professionals living in the affected area. These residents became intimately involved in the local planning process. They benefitted from the support of local leaders, though not as much as the protesters in southeast Portland. Like the Mount Hood Freeway revolt, the efforts to stop I-505 culminated in legal action brought by the neighborhood group. Unlike the Mount Hood, however, Interstate 505 was cancelled with little fanfare and almost as an afterthought in the wake of the Mount Hood controversy. Nevertheless, the efforts to halt I-505 did bring sweeping changes to the river city. Thanks to tenacious residents, Mayor Goldschmidt formalized Portland's neighborhood associations, giving these small social units the power to implement and carry out their own neighborhood plans.

From the Mount Hood Freeway protests, the city's transportation policies changed dramatically. From the Interstate 505 revolt, the city's formal planning structure

was revolutionized. These anti-freeway movements brought the Interstate Era to a close and ended highway engineers' hegemony over local planning.



Value of Houses



Unsound Housing

Figure 4. Mount Hood Freeway alignment in relation to southeast Portland housing.⁹

⁹ Portland City Planning Commission, *Mount Hood Freeway* (Portland: Portland City Planning Commission, 1965), 18. To save money routes were aligned through lower income neighborhoods when possible to cut down on rights-of-way costs.

The Mount Hood Freeway: Activism and the “No-Build” Option, 1965-1976

The Mount Hood Freeway has occupied a special place in the minds of auto critics and planners in Portland since its cancellation in 1976. In a 2005 article in *Willamette Week*, an alternative weekly newspaper published by Ron Buel, columnist Bob Young wrote, “If there was one event that has defined Portland in the last 25 years, it was the killing of the Mount Hood Freeway – a six-mile, eight-lane asphalt behemoth that would have vaulted across the river from Johns Landing to I-205.” The article asserts that the Mount Hood Freeway was an integral part of Robert Moses’ 1943 *Portland Improvement* plan, and that grassroots activists in the affected area of Southeast Portland fought the freeway, but “lacked the muscle” to defeat the Oregon Highway Division, the Portland City Council, the Multnomah County Commission, and the freeway’s other supporters. Salvation came in the form of Neil Goldschmidt, a young, idealistic attorney who ran for city council on an anti-freeway platform, and ultimately harnessed the neighborhood revolution and revived mass transit when he became Portland’s mayor in 1973.¹⁰

The Mount Hood Freeway controversy is generally seen as a central event in Portland’s transformation into an “ecotopia.” Certainly the cancellation of the route was a major triumph for neighborhood activists and the city’s young political elite. The federal funds that would have gone toward building the road were ultimately used to develop light rail. However, the generally accepted narrative creates an overly simple dichotomy between the highway engineers who supposedly followed Moses’ recommendations and

¹⁰ Bob Young, “Highway To Hell,” *Willamette Week*, March 9, 2005.

the embattled citizens who were saved by Goldschmidt's political wrangling. There is a kernel of truth to this narrative. Local leaders like Goldschmidt along with County Commissioners Mel Gordon and Don Clark did fight on behalf of citizen activists against recalcitrant highway commissioners. However, the Mount Hood Freeway did not originate in Moses' 1943 plan. Rather, an expressway on Portland's east side had already been discussed by highway officials, and the actual design was only integrated into official highway plans in the 1955 *Freeway and Expressway System* report.¹¹ Engineers designed the route not on Moses' recommendations, but based on traffic patterns, desire lines, and population growth estimations. Because it would serve projected traffic needs, many Portlanders supported the Mount Hood Freeway. The cancellation of the route, then, did not represent a triumph of "the people" over highway engineers. Rather, it was a victory for a small, but growing group of anti-freeway activists and a compromise among the political elite. The Mount Hood Freeway revolt is significant in Portland's history because it marked the moment when environmentally conscious neighborhood activists and a new group of politicians seized control of local planning. Scholarly treatment of the controversy has emphasized the importance of the political compromises that brought about a shift in transportation policy. I contend that these compromises, while important to the freeway cancellation efforts, were entirely facilitated by the activists and citizen-experts who worked both from within and without the formal power structure.

¹¹ *Freeway and Expressway System*, 60.

The Mount Hood Freeway remained in the early planning stages until the controversy surrounding Interstate 205 reached a critical juncture in August 1965. In an attempt to devise a route that would skirt Portland's resistant southern suburbs, the highway commission wanted to make the Mount Hood Freeway the southern leg of the planned outer belt. They hoped that the route might also be approved as part of the Interstate Highway System by the Bureau of Public Roads.¹² When the BPR rejected the route alignment and refused to give the Mount Hood interstate status, it was still planned to be a federal primary highway. Although not qualified to receive 92 percent funding from the Highway Trust Fund, the route would still be largely subsidized by the federal government. The Portland City Council approved the proposed Division Street-Powell Boulevard alignment for the Mount Hood in August amid intense opposition by residents in its path (See Figure 4).¹³ At the meeting in which the council approved the route, 300 residents filled the chamber to protest the decision. Among the protesters was architect Howard Glazer who once again voiced his disapproval of city planning practices. "We simply can't let the automobile dominate every public decision to the exclusion of all other community values," he argued.

Over the next three years, the Oregon Highway Commission wrangled with the citizens of Maywood Park, completed large sections of the expensive I-405, and

¹² Stan Federman, "State switches to West Linn-96th Route For I-205. City Okays Mt. Hood Road Plan," *The Oregonian*, August 11, 1965.

¹³ "Angry SE Portland Residents Crowd Council Hearing To Oppose Mt. Hood Freeway," *The Oregonian*, August 11, 1965; see also Portland City Planning Commission, *Mount Hood Freeway* (Portland: Portland City Planning Commission, 1965).

continued planning the Mount Hood Freeway. On January 24, 1969 the Federal Highway Administration reversed their earlier decision and officially made the Mount Hood part of the interstate system. Multnomah County's portion of I-80N, the Banfield Expressway, which followed Sullivan's Gulch through Northeast Portland, was deemed inadequate by the FHWA. Highway officials agreed to allow the Mount Hood Freeway to replace the Banfield as the primary route of I-80N through the city. A portion of I-205 would link the Mount Hood with the rest of Interstate 80. This new alignment would be designated as the official route.¹⁴ The plan was met with early approval. However, as state highway engineers began assessing the necessary rights-of-way, Barlow Grade School and several churches were found to be in the freeway's path. Supporters of the school filed a petition in August to halt construction while church congregations like those at St. Mark's Lutheran resigned themselves to relocating to a different neighborhood.¹⁵ "The people of Southeast Portland should have a voice in the future schooling of our children. As residents we cannot sit back and wait," former Barlow PTA president Kayda Clark told *The Oregonian*. "We are not fighting a freeway, we are trying to keep a school," she added.¹⁶ Once again, local freeway protesters emphasized that they did not oppose freeways or automobiles. They merely wanted to gain a measure of control over local planning.

¹⁴ "Mt. Hood Freeway Wins Federal Nod," *The Oregonian*, January 26, 1969.

¹⁵ "Churches, School Assess Relocation Trouble," *The Oregonian*, July 10, 1969; "School Supporters File petitions Protesting Highway," *The Oregonian*, August 14, 1969.

¹⁶ "School Supporters File petitions Protesting Highway," *The Oregonian*, August 14, 1969.

Clark, her husband Albert, and other local opponents of the Mount Hood Freeway were heavily criticized for being “a verbal minority.” Kayda Clark disagreed: “Instead, we say it is a well organized minority who are forcing their will upon the majority of working people in this area in their efforts to push through this freeway.”¹⁷ Whether or not freeway opponents represented the majority of citizens was debatable. The Highway Division argued that the motoring public demanded easier access to downtown from the east side of the Willamette River. Nevertheless, more opposition to the Mount Hood emerged.

In late 1969 southeast Portland resident Betty Merten and other area women began a campaign to reduce automobile use in the city. As Merten remembers, “It was one of those gorgeous sunny Indian summer days that we sometimes get here, except a thick brownish-yellow smog hung in the air. We couldn't see the west hills from the east side, and nobody could see Mt. Hood.”¹⁸ The realization that air pollution posed a genuine threat encouraged Merten to successfully campaign against the proposed 13-story Meier & Frank parking garage in downtown.¹⁹ Over the next year, Merten and her husband Charles, a lawyer, became involved in opposing the Mount Hood Freeway. In 1971, they helped form Sensible Transportation Options for People (STOP) to promote

¹⁷ “School Supporters File petitions Protesting Highway,” *The Oregonian*, August 14, 1969.

¹⁸ Betty Merten, Interview by Ernie Bonner, December 9, 2001. Transcript: Portland, Oregon, <http://www.pdx.edu/usp/planpdxorg-interview-betty-merten> (accessed February 26, 2009).

¹⁹ The parking garage was to be built where Pioneer Courthouse Square is located.

mass transit and halt the proposed freeway. Among the other founders were Albert and Kayda Clark, Ron Buel, and local architect Ed Wagner.

The controversy over the Mount Hood Freeway became a full-fledged revolt when STOP members argued not just for the route's cancellation, but for a complete rethinking of transportation policy. Wagner and Betty Merten became vocal advocates for reviving Portland's defunct trolley car system. STOP also worked with the recently-formed Tri-County Metropolitan Transit District of Oregon (Tri-Met) to promote the newly-revived bus line and a proposed light rail system. These efforts to revitalize mass transit came just as PVMTS released its *1990 Transportation Plan: interim report*. The report, like other PVMTS publications, predicted further decline of transit ridership and outlined 54 new highway projects to be completed within the next 20 years.²⁰

STOP did little to influence PVMTS or Highway Division engineers. The organization, Betty Merten explains, was formed mainly "to create a sense of great grassroots opposition to the freeway. Again, there were never many people there, but we could pack a punch."²¹ It was a savvy move. STOP published a newsletter to disseminate information about the negative impacts of the freeway and vocalized their opposition to create a sense of neighborhood outrage. Local leaders noticed. Meanwhile, Charles Merten formed the Southeast Legal Defense Fund and prepared to take the Oregon Department of Transportation to court over the freeway.

²⁰ Portland-Vancouver Metropolitan Transportation Study, *1990 Transportation Plan: interim report* (Salem: Oregon State Highway Division, 1971).

²¹ Betty Merten, Interview by Ernie Bonner.

As neighborhood activists engaged in grassroots protests, the local political atmosphere in Portland shifted dramatically. Lloyd Anderson, an urban planner by training, filled William Bowes' seat on the City Council after Bowes' death in 1969. Then, following Earl Stanley's death, Connie McCready was appointed to the council in March 1970. Finally, Neil Goldschmidt was elected to the council in November 1970.²² Goldschmidt, a Eugene native and University of Oregon graduate, had recently begun a career as a legal-aid lawyer after having participated in the 1964 Freedom Summer voter registration campaign in Mississippi and attending law school at Berkeley. The energetic Goldschmidt advocated citizen participation and supported the city's freeway opponents. However, in December 1971 when STOP members asked the council to withdraw support for the Mount Hood, Goldschmidt was opposed by pro-freeway commissioner Frank Ivancie. Ultimately, he was unable to get a majority vote against the freeway.²³

In 1972 the architectural firm Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM) completed the preliminary EIS mandated by the National Environmental Policy Act. The report recommended bus lanes, park and ride stations, and bike lanes on the Mount Hood Freeway.²⁴ During the next phase of research for the final EIS, SOM staffers established an office in Southeast Portland and gathered citizen recommendations for the route. At

²² For a detailed analysis of the political changes occurring in Portland during the early 1970s, see Abbott, *Portland: Planning, Politics, and Growth*.

²³ Val Ballestrem, "In the Shadow of a Concrete Forest': Transportation Politics in Portland, Oregon, and the Revolt Against the Mount Hood Freeway, 1955-1976" (MA Thesis, Portland State University, 2009), 54-55.

²⁴ Miles Green, "Mt. Hood Freeway proposals tossed into hands of public," *The Oregonian*, March 12, 1972.

the same time, the Highway Division continued to acquire rights-of-way between Division Street and Powell Boulevard.²⁵

Rights-of-way acquisitions were halted, however, with Charles Merten's lawsuit in Federal District Court against the Oregon Department of Transportation. With Albert and Kayda Clark as plaintiffs, Merten claimed that the route for the Mount Hood Freeway had been chosen illegally, and that the 1969 public hearing for the freeway had been conducted improperly. The Highway Division requested the authority to purchase properties in hardship cases three times as the case was being reviewed in 1973. Each time Judge James Burns granted permission. Nevertheless, Burns sided with the plaintiffs in his ruling in early 1974. The Transportation Commission would have to conduct new public hearings if it wanted to proceed with the route.²⁶

Adding insult to injury, the Multnomah County Commission withdrew support for the Mount Hood in late February, much to the chagrin of State Transportation Director George Baldwin who stated, "We further remind the commissioners that it was they, along with the City of Portland, who requested the Highway Division to pursue the Mt. Hood Freeway project just four years ago."²⁷ The commission however, was comprised of entirely different people than it had been four years earlier. New commissioners Mel

²⁵ Frank Frost, Interview by Ernie Bonner, October 28, 1999. Transcript: Portland, Oregon, <http://www.pdx.edu/usp/planpdxorg-interview-frank-frost> (accessed April 4, 2009).

²⁶ "Mass transit plan favored," *The Oregonian*, February 22, 1974. For the Highway Division's requests to purchase rights-of-way, see "Road agency asks authority to buy homes," *The Oregonian*, May 18, 1973; "State asking to buy more corridor land," *The Oregonian*, July 6, 1973; "Freeway land purchases OKd," *The Oregonian*, December 8, 1973.

²⁷ "Route support withdrawal vexing," *The Oregonian*, February 22, 1974.

Gordon and Don Clark supported the freeway protesters. Gordon lived near Maywood Park and was sympathetic to the plight of the militant residents. He was a strong advocate for mass transit and citizen participation in Tri-Met transit planning. Similarly, Clark was an environmentalist and opponent of all freeways. The commission's decision was followed in July by the Portland City Council's official withdrawal of support. By this time the popular Neil Goldschmidt had left City Council and was serving as Mayor of Portland. Goldschmidt and Oregon Governor Tom McCall sought to capitalize on the recently enacted Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1973, which allowed states to keep the funds for cancelled freeways and use them for other transportation projects.²⁸

Commissioner Mel Gordon provided the last major bit of assistance to the freeway opponents. Transportation Commission Chairman Glenn Jackson had been called a "highway czar" and "Portland's Robert Moses." He had a reputation much like Oregon's other notable road builder, R.H. Baldock. Though Jackson supported the demolition of Harbor Drive, this fact was generally ignored by highway critics. Freeway protesters and political insiders no doubt wondered if he would try to fight for the Mount Hood Freeway. However, despite Don Clark's desire to kill I-205, Mel Gordon brokered a deal whereby the outer belt would be completed with adjustments to accommodate light rail. Jackson, the pragmatist, agreed to the modifications, accepted the Mount Hood cancellation, and turned his attention toward completing Interstate 205.²⁹

²⁸ Richard Colby, "Mt. Hood Freeway loses support of City Council," *The Oregonian*, July 26, 1974.

²⁹ Dennis Buchanan, Interview by Ernie Bonner; David Hupp, Interview by Ernie Bonner.

In November 1974, during his last two months in office, Governor McCall wrote to U.S. Secretary of Transportation Claude Brinegar seeking permission to transfer highway funds from the Mount Hood project. “The Portland Metropolitan Area desperately needs an efficient and effective system of public transportation,” he argued.³⁰ Upon learning of McCall’s letter to Brinegar, City Commissioner Frank Ivancie called the governor’s actions “hasty.” Likewise, Portland Chamber of Commerce member Keith Gowing stated, “It’s very unfortunate the governor thought he had to do this. The people can best express what they should have. They have to live with it.”³¹ In a statement, McCall conceded what Ivancie and Gowing already knew: “It is quite likely that a referendum would go in favor of the project.” He claimed he did not want to thwart the democratic process, but that “the evidence at hand indicat[ed] quite strongly that the project should not go forward.”³²

The pro-freeway editorial board at *The Oregonian* railed against McCall and Goldschmidt’s failure to bring the Mount Hood Freeway project to a vote before Portlanders. The decision had been made with “no citizen input,” they claimed.³³ Subsequent editorials grouched at Goldschmidt’s declaration that even in the face of a freeway initiative, the City of Portland could only act in an advisory capacity. The

³⁰ Tom McCall, letter to Claude S. Brinegar, 26 November 1974. Oregon Historical Society, Vertical File: Portland-Freeways-East Side (proposed).

³¹ Wayne Thompson, “McCall to seek transfer of funds to mass transit,” *The Oregonian*, November 27, 1974.

³² “Letters ask switch of freeway funds,” *The Oregonian*, November 27, 1974.

³³ “No Citizen input,” *The Oregonian*, February 8, 1975.

ultimate decision, he asserted, remained with the Federal Highway Administration and the Oregon Department of Transportation.³⁴ Ultimately, Keith Gowing and others formed the Committee to Build the Mt. Hood Freeway-Transitway.³⁵ They fought unsuccessfully to get an initiative on the ballot.³⁶

With the official cancellation of the route by the Federal Highway Administration in 1976, the Goldschmidt administration developed plans to build light rail and disburse the estimated \$110 million that would be transferred from the freeway. By the time the funds were allocated, the pool of highway transfer money for the Mount Hood Freeway had grown to almost \$300 million.³⁷ In the early 1980s, the transfer dollars were used to pay for the Metropolitan Area Express (MAX) light rail line.³⁸ Encouraged by STOP members Ed Wagner, Betty Merten, and Elsa Coleman in the citizen advisory section of the city's 1990 regional transportation plan, the development of light rail represented the true victory of southeast Portland's anti-freeway activists.³⁹ Henceforth, transportation planning in the Rose City would feature a strong mass transit component. The first such case involved, ironically, the embattled I-205.

³⁴ "People speak for city," *The Oregonian*, May 21, 1975.

³⁵ "Group fights for freeway," *The Oregonian*, July 3, 1975.

³⁶ "Judge removes chance to vote on Hood freeway," *The Oregonian*, September 20, 1975.

³⁷ Michael Alesko, "\$22 Million Allocation Drains Hood Road Fund," *The Oregonian*, March 1, 1980.

³⁸ Ballestrem, 100.

³⁹ Betty Merten, Interview by Ernie Bonner.

Interstate 205: An Addendum

With U.S. District Court Judge Alfred Goodwin's 1972 ruling rejecting an injunction against Interstate 205 and the completion of the final environmental impact statement in 1976, the Transportation Commission no doubt believed that construction on the last 10 miles of I-205 would commence without further delays. However, the pro-freeway Multnomah County Commission had, by this time, been transformed with the addition of freeway opponents Mel Gordon, Don Clark, and Dennis Buchanan. Clark, a Portland native and fervent environmentalist, wanted to withdraw support for the route as they had done with the Mount Hood Freeway months earlier. Gordon, however, worried about the political repercussions. Instead of opposing the route, Gordon entered into negotiations with Glenn Jackson and the State Highway Division. The highwaymen feared losing the County Commission's support in light of the Mount Hood Freeway controversy, so they agreed to eliminate two interchanges and provide room for bus lanes and a light rail line to be added to the freeway. According to County Commission transportation planner David Hupp, "In the end, I-205 was built because Mel Gordon couldn't counter the fact that the freeway was so far along in construction. But Gordon did exact the listed concessions from the state, and the Multnomah County portion of the freeway was redesigned to incorporate those changes."⁴⁰

During the decade-long struggle over Interstate 205, NIMBY protests, particularly in Maywood Park, delayed the route long enough so that it was still largely unconstructed when a new group of politicians came to power in Portland and Multnomah County. The

⁴⁰ David Hupp, Interview by Ernie Bonner.. See also, Dennis Buchanan, Interview by Ernie Bonner.

County Commission capitalized on the successful cancellation of the Mount Hood Freeway by only agreeing to support I-205 if the structural designs facilitated buses and rail. Ultimately, the unsuccessful freeway revolt over the outer-belt succeeded in stopping the route long enough for public opinion and local political power to shift in favor of freeway opponents and transit advocates. Thus, the Mount Hood Freeway revolt's legacy began with the redesign of I-205. Portland's other successful anti-freeway movement would yield an even greater legacy: neighborhood participation in the local planning process.

Interstate 505: Neighborhood Participation and Urban Planning, 1969-1978

In late 1969, residents of Portland's Northwest District became aware of plans initiated in 1968 by the State Highway Commission to build a 1.3 mile interstate spur through the neighborhood. Initially dubbed the Industrial Freeway, the route – later known as Interstate 505 – would displace several businesses and residents. The Northwest District was comprised of a growing population of young professionals and lower middle-class families who took advantage of affordable housing and proximity to downtown Portland. A slew of commercial businesses permeated the neighborhood while heavy industry occupied the District's eastern border along the Willamette River. Traffic engineers sought an efficient means of funneling the traffic generated by industries and the central business district through the neighborhood. The answer devised by the Highway Commission came in the form of a small interstate route that would bypass the

Northwest District and guide traffic directly on or off of I-405, which partially abutted the neighborhood.

The Northwest District Association (NWDA), an unofficial planning body comprised of district residents, formed in November 1969 at the end of a decade that had seen significant progress on Portland's interstate system. Like the Mount Hood Freeway protests in Southeast Portland, the NWDA's efforts to halt highway projects began with a group of young, energetic citizens. According to Ogden Beeman, an engineer and important figure in the NWDA, "In the mid to late '60s, the nucleus of the neighborhood was just barely beginning. There were only a few professionals when we lived there.... We started finding each other."⁴¹ Two major projects raised the ire of Beeman and the other young professionals living in the neighborhood and ultimately encouraged the formation of the Northwest District Association. First, Interstate 405 was completed. Then, the City of Portland announced plans to expand Good Samaritan Hospital.

Interstate 405 had not been popular with Northwest Portland residents. Llano Thelin, pastor of Emmanuel Lutheran Church on 19th Street, had actively opposed I-405, which split his parish down the middle. Beeman and fellow Northwest resident John Perry also appealed to City Council when plans were announced to widen streets throughout the district to make surface street travel easier. The project required sidewalks to be narrowed along major streets in the neighborhood. Perry argued that too many Elm trees would be destroyed by removing the tree lawns along these streets. Beeman

⁴¹ Charlotte and Ogden Beeman, Interview by Ernie Bonner, December 29, 1999. Transcript: Portland, Oregon, http://www.pdx.edu/usp/interview_beemans.html (accessed April 20, 2008).

separately extolled the virtues of sidewalks and walkable neighborhoods. “We have a great place here where people can live and walk downtown, and we can’t make it more difficult,” he told the Council.⁴² City traffic engineer, Don Bergstrom, replied, “The Council should know that we did a study up there, and we found that the sidewalks were occupied about 12, 14 percent of the time. The street lanes were occupied about 85 percent, therefore it makes sense to narrow one and widen the street.”⁴³ Beeman and Perry’s pleas to prevent the street widening project lost in a 5-0 Council vote. It quickly became apparent to Northwest residents that not only were they working separately – and in vain – toward common goals, but that they were facing a City Council that clearly valued expert opinions over the experiences of local citizens.

In November 1969, Good Samaritan Hospital, located in Northwest Portland, announced a massive expansion project as part of an urban renewal plan created by the Portland Development Commission. The plan called for the razing of sixteen blocks to expand the hospital, much as the PDC had done in Albina with Emmanuel Hospital nearly a decade earlier.⁴⁴ Good Samaritan called a meeting at Chapman School in the Northwest District to explain the plans to interested citizens. Several residents convened at the school to voice their outrage. Llano Thelin was tapped to chair the meeting. In

⁴² Charlotte and Ogden Beeman, Interview by Ernie Bonner.

⁴³ Charlotte and Ogden Beeman, Interview by Ernie Bonner.

⁴⁴ Mary Pedersen, Interview by Ernie Bonner, December 15, 1999. Transcript: Sedona, Arizona, http://www.pdx.edu/usp/interview_rblackett.html (accessed April 20, 2008). See also, Bradshaw Hovey, “Making the Portland Way of Planning: The Structural Power of Language,” *Journal of Planning History*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2003): 142.

attendance were Beeman, local architects Howard Glazer and George Sheldon, grocery store owner George Drougas, and other local residents and business owners. After hearing the details of Good Samaritan's proposed expansion, the neighbors, many having just met for the first time, formed the Northwest District Development Association (NWDDA) to promote a resident-approved plan for the neighborhood, rather than the one forced on them by the City of Portland.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, in southeast Portland the Mount Hood Freeway revolt had begun in earnest. Thirty-year-old attorney Neil Goldschmidt capitalized on residents' growing dissatisfaction with the city and state's planning policies in his campaign for a seat on City Council in 1970. His idealism and support of neighborhood participation in local government made Goldschmidt a popular candidate among the city's citizen groups. He won an easy victory and brought an activist sensibility tempered by the Civil Rights Movement to Portland politics.

The NWDDA dropped the word "Development" from its title as the 1970 election campaign drew near because, as Ogden Beeman remembers, "People kept thinking, 'Development.... You guys are part of the enemy.'"⁴⁶ Despite the name change, NWDA members recognized through the experiences of Thelin, Beeman, and others that in order to institute a neighborhood plan that did not feature the words "urban renewal" – a term everyone now understood to mean the demolition of affordable housing and the

⁴⁵ Charlotte and Ogden Beeman, Interview by Ernie Bonner.

⁴⁶ Charlotte and Ogden Beeman, Interview by Ernie Bonner.

systematic removal of many of the features that made the neighborhood livable – they would have to work closely with “the enemy.” The support of City Council was crucial to the NWDA’s success. One councilman, Lloyd Anderson, had thus far been receptive to requests for a comprehensive neighborhood plan. The other four council members, however, had been dismissive of the NWDA. Charlotte Beeman, Ogden’s wife, realized that Goldschmidt would certainly gain a Council seat in the 1970 election. She decided to back the efforts of local contractor Tom Walsh, an NWDA member. In the November election Goldschmidt won while Walsh lost, allowing pro-freeway incumbent Frank Ivancie, to retain his seat. Despite Walsh’s loss, the NWDA took heart with the popular Goldschmidt now on the Portland City Council.

In early 1971, plans for the I-505 freeway were finalized and the NWDA found itself fighting two major battles: one against Good Samaritan and one against the interstate.⁴⁷ Uniting the hospital expansion battle and the freeway protest was the fact that both represented efforts by state and local authorities to transform Northwest Portland without input from residents. The announcement of the Interstate 505 project at the beginning of the year and the hospital’s failure to address citizen concerns put a damper on the hopeful feelings the neighbors felt about Goldschmidt’s presence on Council. To preserve the character of their neighborhood, the NWDA approached City Council in February with recommendations for developing a multiple-use highway corridor that

⁴⁷ See Oregon State Highway Division, *Interstate 505 Final Environmental Impact Statement* (Salem: Oregon State Department of Transportation, 1977), 2. The report, entitled *Multiple Use and Joint Development of the I-405, I-505 Freeway Corridor* first focused public attention on the I-505 project and led to the formation of the Willamette Heights Neighborhood Association.

would feature green spaces, a depressed route, and pedestrian walkways. After several months of inaction by local government it became apparent that these proposals were being largely ignored.

On September 17, 1971 The Northwest District Association, the Willamette Heights Neighborhood Association, and the Oregon Environmental Council filed suit against the Oregon Transportation Commission in Federal District Court. The NWDA and the Willamette Heights Neighborhood Association had recently withdrawn support for the proposed Interstate 505, and now called for a complete halt to all work on both I-505 and the nearly completed Interstate 405.⁴⁸ On December 3, the Court ruled that the Highway Department could complete I-405, as it had “met all procedural requirements.”⁴⁹ Work on Interstate 505, however, would have to stop until the Highway Division conducted the necessary environmental impact statement in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act.⁵⁰ “We got everything we could possibly ask for,” NWDA president George Sheldon told *The Oregonian*. “[Judge] Goodwin has a specified timetable to the highway people, and essentially is telling them they must consider the desires of a neighborhood group.” The court ruling marked a change in the I-505 freeway controversy. Prior to the decision, the NWDA had been successful only in bringing the

⁴⁸ Oregon State Highway Division, *Interstate 505 Final EIS*, 3. The environmental impact statement provides a chronology of the events leading up to the publication of the EIS in 1974. See also, “Foes sue to Halt NW Portland freeway,” *The Oregonian*, September 18, 1971; “Impact statement ordered for I-505 freeway corridor,” *The Oregonian*, December 4, 1971.

⁴⁹ Oregon State Highway Division, *Interstate 505 Final EIS*, 3.

⁵⁰ Oregon State Highway Division, *Interstate 505 Final EIS*, 3-4.

plight of district residents to the attention of the City Council. After the ruling, the NWDA and the City Council were able to force the Transportation Commission to investigate alternative options.

In the meantime, several NWDA members had been picketing in front of the hospital. The Good Samaritan board of directors began to take stock of the situation and decided to reach out to angry community members. Dr. Spence Meighan, head of medical education at Good Samaritan, hired Northwest resident and Reed College Political Science professor Mary Pedersen to serve as an independent consultant in charge of advising the hospital on ways to develop better communication with the neighborhood.⁵¹ Pedersen quickly became involved in the NWDA and neighborhood relations with the hospital soon improved.

By 1972 the hospital and the NWDA had found common ground. Without the money to buy up houses for the proposed expansion, Good Samaritan's vice president of development, Claire Siddall, suggested closing an adjacent street and building the new hospital wing there. When asked what the NWDA's position on this idea would be, Pedersen smiled, "You know, there's a lot of people around here who don't want the traffic going up Marshall Street because it tends to go into the neighborhood.... I think you could get a street closure and the neighborhood would support that."⁵² By September the hospital and the NWDA approached City Council with the proposal to close Marshall

⁵¹ Mary Pedersen, Interview by Ernie Bonner.

⁵² Mary Pedersen, Interview by Ernie Bonner.

Street. With the support of Goldschmidt, Lloyd Anderson, and even Frank Ivancie the City Council agreed to the closure.⁵³ By that time, Pedersen's contract with Good Samaritan had expired and she was hired as the executive director of the NWDA where she worked on drafting the citizens' environmental impact statement in conjunction with the EIS being conducted by the private engineering consultants Cornell, Howland, Hayes, and Merryfield-Hill (CH2M-Hill) at the behest of the Highway Commission.⁵⁴

CH2M-Hill began preparing the environmental impact statement in August 1972. The EIS estimated the social, economic, and environmental effects of the proposed Interstate 505 corridor and several alternative routes. Pedersen, working closely with CH2M-Hill, recorded the technical details of each proposed route and met with Northwest residents, gauging citizen reactions to each alternative. The residents came out in opposition of the original Upshur Street route as did local business owners, leaving the industrial interests to make a decision on the remaining routes.⁵⁵ Heavy industry in northwest Portland favored the Upshur route, citing the fact that its adoption would require the displacement of the fewest businesses in the northwest industrial corridor.⁵⁶

As the engineers gathered data for each route alternative, Pedersen and the NWDA worked alongside them. It soon became apparent that the neighborhood activists in northwest Portland were becoming integral participants in local decision-making,

⁵³ Mary Pedersen, Interview by Ernie Bonner.

⁵⁴ *Minutes of the Oregon Highway Commission*, vol. 57, 36416.

⁵⁵ Mary Pedersen, Interview by Ernie Bonner.

⁵⁶ Paul Pintarich, "Impasse over I-505 routing persists; final hearing Nov. 29," *The Oregonian*, October 31, 1973.

deftly navigating the political waters with the goal of developing a comprehensive plan for the Northwest District. From the early days of the NWDA when Ogden Beeman was a fixture at City Council meetings to the publication of the draft environmental impact statement, the NWDA had pushed one over-arching issue: neighborhood participation in urban planning. The Interstate 505 freeway revolt, though focused on preserving the integrity of northwest Portland, was now becoming the vehicle through which the Northwest District Association would prove the viability of neighborhood organizations. Rather than advocate “Alternative A,” the no-build option, NWDA members supported the “Long Yeon” route that would shuttle traffic into the industrial area and away from residences and retail businesses, helping to alleviate downtown congestion while still saving homes. In this way the NWDA proved it was aware of larger urban traffic issues and not concerned only with northwest Portland.

As the neighborhood association became more involved in city planning, industrialists in the Northwest District became the outsiders. Feeling increasingly marginalized, they resorted to guerilla tactics to prevent the adoption of the “Long Yeon” corridor. In November 1973, the I-505 Committee of the Concerned, an organization supporting the interests of industrialists and businessmen in the Northwest District, released the results of a survey aimed at resurrecting the initial Upshur Street route that would displace more citizens than any of the alternatives. The survey asked residents living along the Upshur corridor if they would move if provided with relocation benefits. Furious at the survey, state highway officials called it “untimely and disruptive,” claiming that it confused the choices that would be discussed in the upcoming freeway

route hearings. Ed Storms, the new president of the NWDA stated, “It’s a crummy thing to do. This is solely for their own interest and not that of the community. The people feel the Upshur route is a distinct threat.”⁵⁷

The effort to discredit the NWDA and undermine the decision-making process illustrates the desperate situation northwest industrialists felt they were in. It was in the best interest of the industries in the Northwest District to have a freeway connection located in the neighborhood, but the business owners wanted to ensure that not only did highway construction proceed apace but that it did not require area industries to move or shutdown. Unfortunately for the industrialists, Neil Goldschmidt had been elected mayor of Portland in 1972 and the Portland Planning Commission was now being chaired by a progressive urban planner from Cleveland named Ernie Bonner. As local government began to embrace a planning ideology that emphasized livability over transportation efficiency, the industrialists had resorted to underhanded tactics. The efficiency-minded Highway Division, with the politically-savvy Glenn Jackson at the helm, recognized that for any highway projects to be completed, the state needed to work with local leaders and, increasingly, with neighborhood groups who wielded the authority of the National Environmental Policy Act.

By the end of 1973 the Portland City Council had decided to support the “Short Yeon” route for I-505. This route, similar to the “Long Yeon” path favored by the NWDA, would displace fewer residents than many of the alternatives and cost less than

⁵⁷ Paul Pintarich, “Unofficial poll on freeway relocation upsets officials,” *The Oregonian*, November 15, 1973.

the “Long Yeon.”⁵⁸ However, upon the recommendation of the Highway Commission, the Council switched support to the “Long Yeon” in 1974. The stated reason for the switch was that the “Long Yeon” route was more favorable to residents and railroad interests in the district, and when the federal government made additional money available for interstate projects the highway commission wanted to seize it. However, the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1973 provided another reason to switch to the more expensive “Long Yeon”: transfer funds. Because of the widespread dissatisfaction with urban interstates, Congress decided to allow funds that had been earmarked for specific projects to be transferred to other highway plans or entirely different forms of transportation. Realizing that the city could still use the federal funds even if the project was not completed, the highway commission may have suggested amending the route to the more expensive one even as it looked as though more construction delays were imminent.

In 1974 Mayor Goldschmidt decided to explore the possibility of institutionalizing the neighborhood associations. The NWDA leadership had proven to be organized, reasonable, and better equipped to plan their neighborhood than highway engineers. Goldschmidt appointed Ogden Beeman to head a committee to determine the viability of making the neighborhood groups official planning organizations.⁵⁹ Upon the

⁵⁸ BJ Noles, “Council OKs ‘short Yeon’ I-505 path, *The Oregonian*, February 1, 1974. See also, Oregon Department of Transportation, *Minutes of the Oregon Transportation Commission*, vol. 1 (Salem, OR: Oregon Department of Transportation, 1974), 339. The “Short Yeon” route was estimated at a cost of \$47 million while the “Long Yeon” was projected to cost nearly \$80 million.

⁵⁹ Charlotte and Ogden Beeman, Interview by Ernie Bonner.

committee's recommendation, the Office of Neighborhood Associations (ONA) was established later that year, creating an official body to take the planning recommendations of the neighborhoods to the City Council. Mary Pedersen left the NWDA to become the first coordinator of the ONA where she remained until 1978.⁶⁰

By 1978 the political landscape of Portland was markedly changed from that of a decade earlier. Neighborhood associations now largely controlled urban planning decisions as part of a relationship between residents and politicians that to this day remains unique among American cities. After four years of shepherding the fledgling ONA, Pedersen left Portland. Months later, the City Council voted to cancel the I-505 project. For four years the "Long Yeon" route proposal had gathered dust as the Highway Division struggled to complete several contested miles of I-205. On November 30, council members voted 4-1 to cancel the project, freeing up \$100 million to fix roads and develop a light rail system. In a decision that councilman Ivancie called "shortsighted," the I-505 freeway controversy ended with an affirmation that the residents of northwest Portland knew how best to preserve their neighborhood.⁶¹

The successful I-505 freeway revolt brought about the creation of the ONA (now called the Office of Neighborhood Involvement). The neighborhood groups that comprised the ONA were soon required to develop comprehensive plans in conjunction with the City Council. Within a few years of the ONA's formation, 95 neighborhood

⁶⁰ Mary Pedersen, Interview by Ernie Bonner.

⁶¹ Steve Jennings, "City Council kills proposal for Portland highway link," *The Oregonian*, December 1, 1978.

organizations existed in Portland. Each organization fostered public participation and acted as a liaison between citizens and the council. Based on the success of Portland's Model Cities program and on similar institutionalized citizen participation organizations in Fort Worth and San Diego, the city made a major commitment to citizen involvement in planning.⁶² James Dunn's assertion that automobile opponents like those who protested the Mount Hood Freeway and Interstate 505 ignored the mass preference for cars and highways clearly does not hold up in Portland. The anti-freeway campaigns that developed in Portland did lead to alternative transportation planning, but they also led to the creation of a system that promoted citizen participation in local decision-making. Since the completion of Interstate 205, no limited-access freeway has been constructed in the city, parking garages have been continually rejected in and around downtown, and mass transit has grown. The masses have sought to reduce the need for personal mobility in order to promote the viability and livability of urban neighborhoods.

Interestingly, Portland's freeway revolts show that the way neighborhood participation was institutionalized actually shaped the preferences that have emerged since 1974. While the city's neighborhoods and suburbs like Lake Oswego battled with each other over the proposed location of I-205 in the mid 1960s, the eventual determination of an alignment was already a foregone conclusion in the minds of every major actor. The fact that there were two route alternatives virtually ensured that freeway opponents in the path of each proposal would work at cross purposes. Several years later,

⁶² Mary Pedersen, *Neighborhood Organization in Portland Oregon, First Annual Report* (Portland: Office of Neighborhood Associations, 1974), 2, <http://www.portlandonline.com/oni/index.cfm?c=38588&a=81715>, (accessed April 29, 2009).

the Mount Hood and Interstate 505 freeway plans were met with unified neighborhood resistance. Citizens raised environmental concerns and argued for neighborhood participation in planning. Unlike their predecessors, the residents of southeast and northwest Portland rejected the traffic accommodation orthodoxy that had pervaded transportation planning for years. The dismissal of this prevailing ideology shaped Portland planning and the form that neighborhood participation would take. No longer would large-scale plans be so easily foisted upon the residents of the city.

When the ONA was formed, it was assumed that citizens would participate in local planning through their neighborhood organizations. They would vote not as individuals and not as members of one large metropolitan area (though they were both), but as part of a small unit centered around the neighborhood, the city block, the sidewalk. They would have the option of developing plans that featured street widening and freeway construction, or they could choose to preserve their neighborhoods. The ONA was conceived of both as an interface with City Council and as a broad coalition. Since forming under the umbrella office, the 95 neighborhoods have each pursued their own interests, but they have also, for the most part, promoted the interests of the other neighborhood associations as well. In this way, the NIMBY attitudes that shaped the I-205 controversy have been both extended to each neighborhood and modified to an ideology more closely approximating “not in *our* backyards.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The emergence of the highway engineering profession in the pre-interstate years was met with enthusiasm by the nation's increasingly mobile citizenry. Americans demanded better roads and improved mobility as the car became affordable to the masses. Early road-building efforts in Oregon focused on improving farm-market roads, yet conflict erupted as John Yeon fought to preserve Neahkahnie Mountain and the Columbia River Gorge from zealous highwaymen. Postwar urban growth and the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 shifted the early debates over landscape preservation from a rural setting to an urban one.

The Interstate Era saw the Oregon Highway Department turn its attention to Portland for the first time. With the Bureau of Public Roads and the Highway Trust Fund behind them, transportation engineers designed a massive system of urban freeways. From the outset, residents and business owners in the path of the new concrete and steel roadways opposed the alignments, but few people articulated disapproval of an urban freeway system. The construction of Interstates 5 and 405 faced only isolated opposition, while Interstate 205 catalyzed Portland's first organized freeway protests. Yet, the neighborhood groups that formed to resist the eastside bypass worked at cross purposes until an alignment was finalized. The residents of Maywood Park continued to fight the freeway until legal action proved unfruitful. I-205 was ultimately built, but the Oregon

Highway Division was forced to acquiesce to the demands of the Multnomah County Commission and accommodate mass transit.

By the early 1970s, the Southeast Legal Defense Fund and the Northwest District Association had initiated lawsuits against the Oregon Transportation Commission to halt the Mount Hood Freeway and Interstate 505. The success of the lawsuits and the support of newly-elected local officials turned the tide against the highwaymen. In the end, both routes were cancelled and Portland's freeway system remained comprised of Interstates 5, 205, 405, and 84.

The National Environmental Policy Act and the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1973 were instrumental tools in Portlanders' efforts to stop the Mount Hood Freeway and I-505. The environmental impact statements mandated by NEPA postponed construction and gave citizens the opportunity to design route alternatives, while the highway act allowed cities to keep federal funds by transferring them from unpopular federal projects to more accepted alternatives. These pieces of legislation were implemented largely because of the freeway revolts that developed in more than 30 cities across the United States. Coming late enough in the era of anti-highway protests, the Mount Hood and I-505 controversies benefitted from the labors of citizen activists in other cities.

Until the successful anti-freeway protests of the 1970s, Portland was a typical river city. After the victory of the Mount Hood Freeway revolt and the neighborhood revolution led by Northwest District residents, the city became something more. Portland's recent history, shaped largely by highway engineers, the PDC, and business interests, was merely that: history. The creation of the Office of Neighborhood

Associations, the repudiation of freeways, and the revival of mass transit remade the city as an environmentally-friendly metropolis. Yet, the story of interstate highway construction in the Rose City illuminates the scope of the changes that neighborhood activism cultivated.

Ultimately, the cancellations of the Mount Hood and I-505 freeways have overshadowed the stories of the routes that were successfully built through city neighborhoods. The chief legacy of the two triumphant freeway revolts has been the production of a myth that casts Portland as an eco-city, and a bastion of participatory democracy, neighborhood involvement, and transit-oriented planning. This study does not propose to contradict the myth that has such resonance among planners and lovers of cities. Rather, I have intended to provide a gentle reminder that, for a time, Portland embraced the freeway. It took the efforts of neighborhood groups to stop not just road construction, but an entire ideology centered on accommodating cars. Damage had been done, however. The built freeways – Interstate 5, Interstate 205, and Interstate 405 – uprooted residents, and destroyed homes, churches, schools, and neighborhoods. And today the city's freeways carry more traffic than ever before. From Wilsonville to the Columbia and downtown to Gresham, autos choke the interstates. Yet, it has been well-documented that freeways, rather than alleviating congestion, encourage more driving.¹ Portland's neighborhood councils and political leadership have rejected additional highways in the 30 years since the Mount Hood and I-505 were cancelled. Driving past the ghost ramp on the Marquam Bridge where the Mount Hood Freeway would have

¹ Ladd, *Autophobia*, 121-122.

connected with I-5, being shuttled via a small freeway stub from I-405 to the Northwest District, or looking across the river from Tom McCall Waterfront Park to the tangled mess of the East Bank Freeway, one can only wonder how much worse the traffic problem would be were it not for the freeway revolts.

In the end, the legacy of Portland's freeway protests extends even beyond the preservation of urban neighborhoods and the rejection of auto-centered planning. The Office of Neighborhood Involvement provides a forum for direct citizen participation in an age when political corruption, the marginalization of poor and minority groups, and disinvestment continue to subvert urban democracy in too many American cities.

CHAPTER VI

EPILOGUE:

DISMANTLING HARBOR DRIVE

Though not a part of the Interstate Highway System, Harbor Drive was a major freeway in the Rose City. Constructed in 1942, it was the first limited-access freeway in the state. The route followed the west bank of the Willamette River between Clay and Market Streets to the south and the Steel Bridge to the north. It bordered downtown and, with six lanes of streaming traffic, it effectively cut people off from the waterfront. Because U.S. 99 West was aligned with Harbor Drive, the freeway was part of the state's primary north-south highway, and a heavily-travelled thoroughfare in the years before the interstate system.

The decision to dismantle Harbor Drive was made at the behest of citizens and Portland Bureau of Planning staffers in 1968. Somewhat surprisingly, Glenn Jackson, a 15 year veteran of Interstate highway construction, supported the decision.¹ The removal marked a major ideological victory for freeway opponents in Portland and across the nation. The short route was the first completed freeway to be demolished in the United States. However, because it was a street-level highway, Harbor Drive did not receive the same degree of notoriety as the later decisions to eliminate the elevated Embarcadero

¹ Jackson was appointed to the Oregon Highway Commission on May 4, 1959. His tenure on the commission saw the construction of Interstate 5, Interstate 405, and Interstate 205, along with the demolition of Harbor Drive and the cancellation of the Mount Hood Freeway and Interstate 505. For Jackson's confirmation, see Oregon State Highway Department, *Minutes of the Oregon Highway Commission*, vol. 44, 1 (Salem, OR: State of Oregon, 1959), 31516.

Freeway in San Francisco or West Side Highway in New York. Still, Harbor Drive provided proof that Portland's leaders had become committed to preserving public spaces and developing a pedestrian scale city.

In 1968 the Highway Department proposed the widening of Harbor Drive to accommodate future traffic needs. With Interstate 205 and the Mount Hood Freeway in the planning stages and Interstate 405 near completion, no action was taken to put the proposed improvements into motion. In 1969 architect Bob Belcher and his wife Allison, and Mount Hood Freeway critic and architect Jim Howell formed Riverfront for People, an organization dedicated to stopping the plans to expand Harbor Drive.² The fledgling organization's opposition to the road expansion project was supported by Governor Tom McCall, a former television journalist with Portland's KGW-TV and a staunch advocate of environmental protection. McCall informed Highway Commission Chairman Jackson that he supported the creation of a waterfront park in downtown Portland. Jackson acquiesced to the governor and hired the planning agency DeLeuw-Cather to conduct a downtown traffic study. He also agreed to allow the Portland Planning Bureau to use DeLeuw-Cather's resources as they developed the 1972 Downtown Plan. With Interstate 405 and the Fremont Bridge finally completed in 1973, Jackson and the other highway commissioners gave the go-ahead to demolish Harbor Drive. Over the next year, development on Portland's waterfront park began.

² Ernie Bonner, "Planpdx.org: Riverfront for People," *Portland State University*, <http://www.pdx.edu/usp/planpdxorg-riverfront-people> (accessed April 8, 2009).

The actual decision to remove Harbor Drive was made by the Highway Division and the Portland City Council in the midst of the Mount Hood and I-505 battles in 1971. Although it was not part of the interstate system, the Harbor Drive project benefitted from the anti-freeway activism that coalesced in northwest and southeast Portland. The citizens who formed Riverfront for People became part of a larger protest movement stretching to the Northwest District, the southeast neighborhoods, Maywood Park, and Lake Oswego. The movement extended beyond Portland, to Eugene, and beyond Oregon to Boston's Jamaica Plan neighborhood, to New Orleans where two young lawyers killed a Robert Moses plan, to New York where Jane Jacobs had fought Moses on his own turf, and to San Francisco, the site of the first anti-freeway movement. The movements, though not formally connected, were all reactions to the destruction of landscapes and cityscapes and to the engineering ideology that looked upon people as drivers rather than neighbors.

The efforts to halt Harbor Drive succeeded quickly. By 1971, the activists possessed both the political and technical expertise to challenge pro-freeway opposition and they rode a wave of anti-freeway sentiment that Tom McCall was only too happy to indulge. They held public demonstrations and picnics, waged a media campaign in *The Oregonian*, and participated on a citizens' committee as part of the Harbor Drive Task Force. The Belchers and other Portlanders capitalized on the anti-freeway sentiments that had, by now, emerged in nearly every major American city.

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