



Fast Lanes West

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Stranded

The weather was 86 degrees and sunny on the afternoon of Wednesday, July 3, 1957. Commuters who rode the Chicago Aurora & Elgin commuter train from their homes early that morning looked forward to their Independence Day holiday as they bumped and lurched their way to Forest Park on the Garfield Park elevated train. They gazed out the window at the twin ribbons of concrete of the Congress Expressway, portions of which had opened two years earlier to provide automobile access between their homes in the western suburbs and downtown Chicago.

It was a slow trip on the elevated train. The tracks previously stood in the path of the new Congress Expressway. It had been an uneasy compromise to move the tracks to a temporary right-of-way along Van Buren Street to accommodate the new highway. The moving of the elevated train tracks also eliminated their convenient one-seat Chicago, Aurora and Elgin train ride from downtown Chicago. CA&E, or its insurance company, or both, declined to use the temporary Van Buren Street track, so the daily commuters had to change trains at the Forest Park train platform.

On that afternoon of July 3, the commuters were rudely introduced to the new world of transportation. The CA&E trains were gone! The service was suspended at noon that day and would never run again. Confusion and anger reigned! What now? West Towns Bus Company hastily arranged a shuttle bus to the Chicago & North Western commuter train station, a mile away. That would get people at least to some of the western suburbs. As soon as buses and

drivers could be marshalled, Leyden Bus Company implemented provisional service in CA&E territory in accordance with a contingency plan established months before.¹

The angry and confused passengers were staring face to face at a change in public policy, a change that was 40 years in the making; a change that would bring about a transformation of the Chicago region unparalleled in human history. That policy change involved the de-emphasis of fixed route rail transportation and accommodation of both the landscape and the habits of daily life to the automobile. Most of the passengers were not yet even born when the policy change began, imperceptibly at first, then incrementally growing over a period of 40 years until, by the mid-1950s transportation resources such as the Chicago, Aurora & Elgin were scarcely relevant but to the small number of commuters who rode it to work that summer morning in 1957.

Automobiles

To try to specify an exact date or event that signaled the beginning of the policy change is difficult. A good place to start would be with the Daniel Burnham's 1909 *Plan of Chicago*. Before the Burnham Plan, transportation planning in Chicago, to the extent it was carried out as formation of public policy instead of market based public transit route configurations, was focused entirely on the "traction problem", namely working cooperatively or not so cooperatively with the streetcar companies to provide a more useable and convenient route structure and to address the economics of streetcar operation. Daniel Burnham's Plan of Chicago changed the

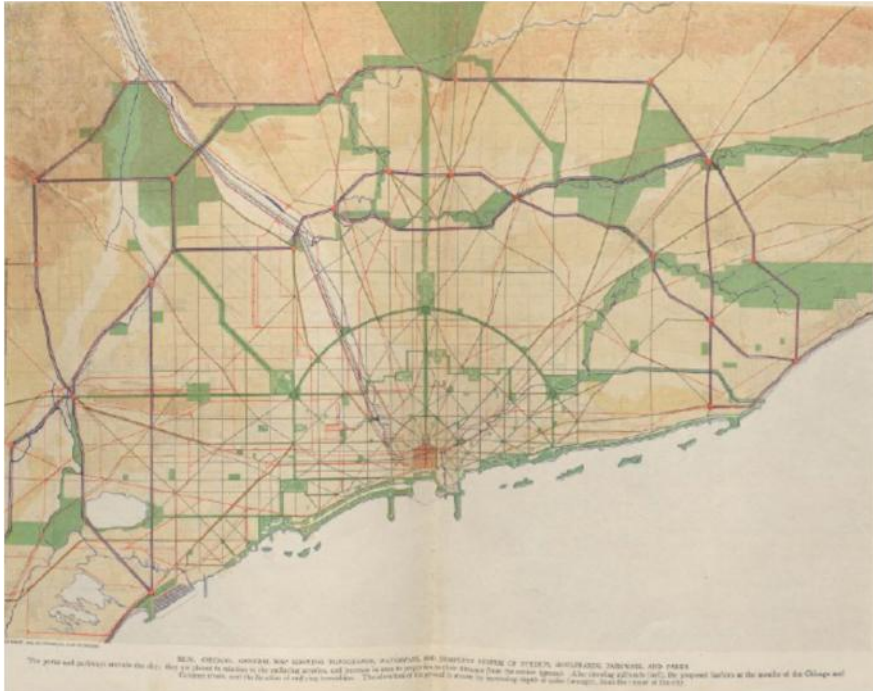


Figure 1 Burnham Plan of Chicago - 1909

perspective. Burnham himself loved automobiles. He leased his first one in 1903. By 1905 he owned three cars. He sat next to Henry Ford at a banquet where Ford announced his plan for his “people’s car” the Model T.² Burnham’s world view was not view out

the side window of a streetcar; he saw the world through the windshield of the automobile. The Burnham plan of 1909 reflected his perspective. An examination of the Burnham Plan general map reveals roadways radiating from the city center, along with circumferential roadways at various distances, connecting parts of the city and its environs with other parts without passing through the center. Most prominent of the radial roadways is the green strip extending straight west beyond the Des Plaines River valley then opening into a general green space.³ The green strip was Burnham’s Grand Axis roadway, a centerpiece of his circulation plan (figure 1).

For Burnham the importance of connecting outlying suburban towns with the city and with each other was integral to the well-being of the city, both to facilitate intraregional communication and to stimulate the regional economy through reduction of agricultural

production and distribution costs. Burnham clearly identified the deconcentration process in Chicago in the publication of the plan; his vision of roadways anticipated its continuation.⁴

Burnham was not the first idealist to incorporate widespread if not nearly universal automobile use or advocate for deconcentration of residential and commercial development even before Henry Ford introduced the “peoples’ car.” Edward Bellamy, while not expressly referencing automobiles in *Looking Backward* in 1888, predicted that desire for social mobility would inevitably lead to a desire for enhanced physical mobility.⁵



Figure 2 Aurora, Elgin & Chicago Railroad

Chicago already had a long history of simultaneous concentration and suburbanization, leading to daily travel between the central business district and outlying locations. Development of railroad commuter services, notably those of the Chicago & North Western and Chicago Burlington & Quincy railroads in the 1850s, resulted in strings of bedroom suburbs radiating outward from the central city. First in a trickle, but growing to a torrent, were the streams of

daily riders, inbound to their offices in the morning and outbound to their homes at night. Construction of the Aurora, Elgin and Chicago interurban (figure 2) in 1902, and its subsequent extension to downtown Chicago over the elevated lines added another connection and further stimulated suburban development.

Closer to the city, streetcar lines, beginning in 1859, and elevated rapid transit lines, beginning in 1892, spread their iron web of transit routes through the present day city of Chicago and inner ring suburbs. By

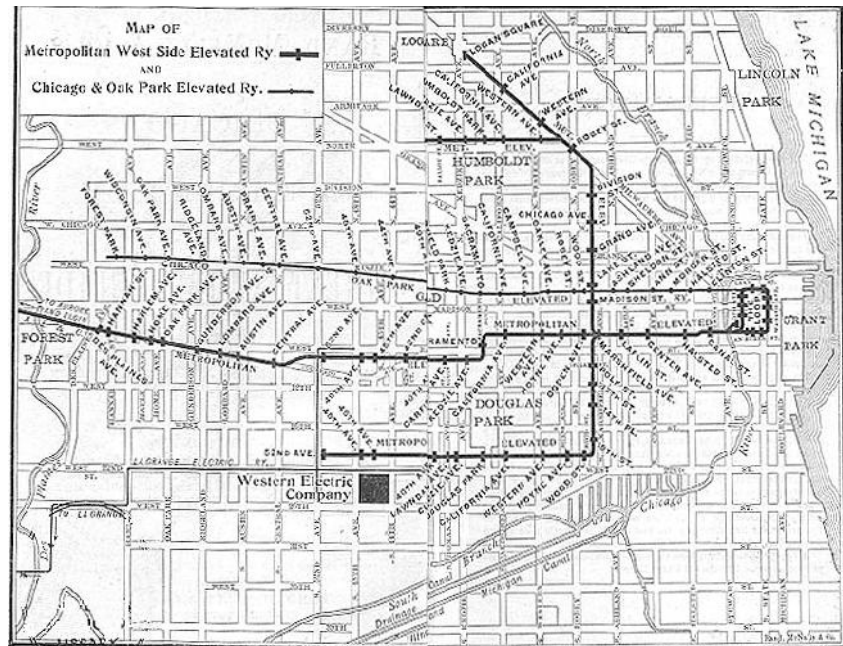


Figure 3 Chicago's West Side Elevated Railroads

the turn of the 20th century, thousands of commuters arrived in the city and departed in the afternoon on the well-developed system of transportation.

Concentration of economic activity in was accelerated in the 1880s by two technological innovations. Steel frame style of office construction and mechanically propelled elevators “took the lid off” downtown office construction. Between 1885 and 1888, 3,300 new offices (offices not office buildings) were constructed in the central business district, resulting in a corresponding increase in peak period travel.⁶

The consequence of all this growth was a burden on the transportation systems. Technological innovation addressed it to a great degree. The development of the rapid transit system began in 1892 to the South Side and routes were extended to the West Side in 1893 through 1902. It was the extension of the Metropolitan West Side Elevated Railroad (figure 3) extension to 52nd Ave. (present day Laramie Ave.) that facilitated the establishment of the Chicago, Aurora and Elgin interurban service that so suddenly and unceremoniously ceased on that hot July day in 1957.⁷ Continuous expansion of the transit service further aggravated the downtown congestion problem so that by early in the 1920 century there were frequent studies and proposals for its alleviation.

Sometime in about 1892 the first horseless carriages appeared on the streets of Chicago. At that time they were the toys of the very rich, to be paraded around on Sunday afternoons and shown off to startled spectators, but as yet not sufficiently mechanically sound or weather-proof to be used as practical transportation. The Sunday parades carried on a decades long tradition of outings, previously done in horse drawn carriages, and whenever possible in parks.

Olmsted's Paths

The industrial city of Chicago developed so rapidly in the mid-19th century that it was literally and figuratively being choked by industry. A public desire emerged for development of a system of parks to be connected with carriageways creating in effect a "green necklace" of parkways around the city. Further impetus was provided by real estate developers who had seen the effect of Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux's Central Park in New York on surrounding

property values.⁸ In designing Central Park in New York, Delaware Park in Buffalo (figure 4) and Prospect Park in Brooklyn, Olmsted was uncompromising in his insistence that the roadways were “havens of natural beauty” and that wagons, omnibuses, hacks and street railways were banned from park drives. In the planning of Prospect Park, Olmsted extended the concept to include access roads which he named “parkways.”⁹



Figure 4 Olmsted's Delaware Parkway in Buffalo – 1905

Olmsted came to Chicago in the late 1860s to work on the new Chicago park system and a new residential real estate development named “Riverside.” He brought his parkway concept with him and the necklace of carriageways became a reality. Chicago’s carriageways had another characteristic with far reaching consequences. Perhaps anticipating the development of the Olmsted’s parkways, certain traffic arteries had been named “boulevards” in Chicago. The City Council had, in 1863 passed an ordinance requiring that vehicles on intersecting streets stop at boulevard crossings. Thus the traffic on the boulevards, having to stop only at arterial street crossings, traveled on what were in effect “express ways” for carriages and cyclists.¹⁰

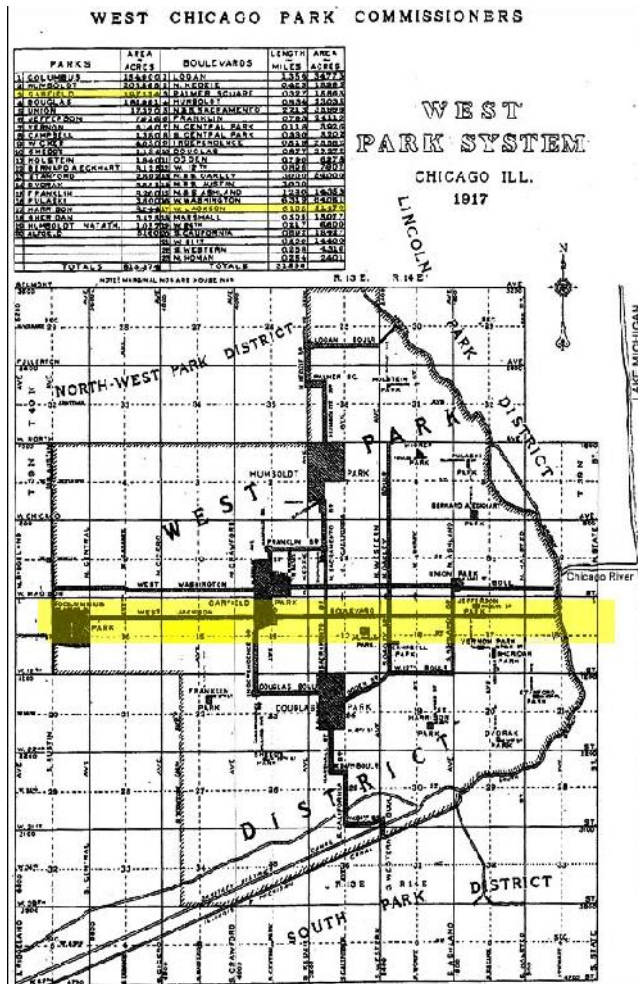


Figure 5 Jackson Blvd. - Chicago's Original Fast Lanes West

As passageways primarily for cyclists and carriages, the boulevards were not subject to the pounding of heavy wagons and were free of the bumps and irregularities of streetcar tracks. When considered in tandem with the general freedom from cross traffic, the boulevards became natural raceways for the rich men's toys, the automobiles. After some initial legal tussling over whether the "gas buggies" could be prohibited from the parks, park districts relented and the automobiles were here to stay. So natural were the park roadways and boulevards for use as automobile raceways that in 1895 the

Chicago Inter-Ocean newspaper sponsored the nation's first ever automobile race and conducted it on the boulevard system.¹¹

It was natural that the boulevard style roadways would stretch westward from downtown Chicago to the newly developing residential areas and to Garfield Park. Olmsted offered up the first proposal with the design for Riverside Boulevard which would lead to the emerging suburb of his design. His broad carriageway was for a "suburban highway" incorporating a central

boulevard for through traffic movement flanked by service roads for local traffic.¹² But for the lack of grade separated intersections, his proposal anticipated the exact design of present day expressways. For economic reasons unrelated to Olmsted or the roadway design, the thoroughfare was not built, though a remnant (as a common arterial street) exists as gently winding Riverside Drive in Berwyn.

On Chicago's west side Jackson St. and then Washington St. were turned over to the West Side Park Commission for conversion into boulevards (Figure 5). Though lacking the divided lanes and service roads, they did enjoy comparative freedom from intersecting traffic and easy movement facilitated by smooth asphalt pavement and unimpeded by streetcars and wagons. As the use of automobiles gradually and then rapidly changed from toys to regularly used transportation, the boulevards became preferred roadways for motorists' seeking fast lanes west to their homes and to recreational venues west of Chicago.¹³

Congestion

In the first decades of the new century automobile registrations and usage soared. In 1915 there was one automobile registered for every 61 residents. By 1925 there was one for every 30, and by 1930 there was one for every 11 people.¹⁴ Suburbs by their deconcentrated nature had even higher rates of car ownership. Usage, the practical measure in defining the congestion problem, reflected an even steeper and more immediate climb. A cordon check (namely cars passing that location in a given time period) at Jackson and Sacramento on the West Side counted

765 cars passing in 1911. By 1914 the count had quintupled to 3551.¹⁵ Traffic was growing and continued to grow. By 1926 a survey revealed that 1/3 of people arriving or leaving the central business district did so in a private automobile.¹⁶ A similar check of vehicles crossing the Rush St. bridge into downtown Chicago counted 1,421 automobiles in a 12 hour period in 1907. The count for a similar 12 hour period in 1915 was 10,158 automobiles, representing a more than sevenfold increase.¹⁷

The nature of urban planning changed to reflect both the increase in automobile usage and in the conflict between streetcar and vehicular traffic. In 1902, before automobiles were anything but an annoyance on the boulevards and in parks on Sunday afternoons, the City commissioned Bion J. Arnold, a noted transportation expert, to prepare a report on the “engineering and operating features of the Chicago transportation problem.” Commissioning of Arnold and the perceived specifics of the problem had long range impact. The selection of Arnold as the consultant was a conscious effort to separate analysis of the problem from the politics of private vs. municipal ownership of the transit system, or whether this set of geographic or economic interests would have an advantage over that one.¹⁸ A second significant change is the view of the problem as one of “transportation” and not just that of “streetcars.” Third, among Arnold’s recommendations was the separation of streetcars from vehicular traffic, quite the mirror image with the same effect of Frederick Law Olmsted’s advocacy for separation of the vehicular traffic from the streetcars. The refocusing of problem definition set the stage for

Burnham's advocacy for broad boulevards, particularly the one headed straight west, enunciated in the 1909 Plan.

Vision

The 1909 Plan was the logical place to start in implementing changes to alleviate congestion and adapt the city to greater use of automobiles. Following publication of Burnham's plan, Chicago Mayor Fred Busse appointed Charles Wacker, a dynamic civic leader, to a newly formed organization, the Chicago City Plan Commission. The new organization, comprised of leading business and political leaders, was charged with the responsibility of enacting the provisions of the 1909 *Plan of Chicago*.¹⁹

From the time of Arnold and Burnham and then Wacker, city transportation planning increasingly emphasized facilitation of automobile movement, and the separation of functions on city streets and arteries. What still impeded automobiles from moving quickly and efficiently? Streetcars, wagons, and intersecting traffic movements had already been addressed through the creation of boulevards using separation of functions to accomplish the task. Narrow streets and pedestrian interference were the "new frontier" for impediment removal.

The first task was redefining the purpose of the streets, namely to change the legal and social culture to emphasize primacy of automobile traffic movement as the purpose of the street. Cultural interpretation of the right-of-way in streets shifted during 1920s. Safety First campaigns were aimed at pedestrians, mothers and children, admonishing the youngsters not to play in the

streets and to look both ways before crossing streets. Jaywalking rules, specifying that pedestrians could only cross streets at intersections, were enacted and enforced.²⁰

Street widening to accommodate more throughput also was used. Existing arterial streets were widened. Jackson Blvd., carrying 28% of total automobile traffic in and out of the Loop was widened from 38 to 48 feet in 1926 to accommodate additional flow. The city experimented with making Jackson one-way inbound in the morning and one-way outbound in the afternoon to further maximize peak period capacity.²¹

Acting in concert, traffic management at intersections, segregation of automobile traffic from trucks and streetcars, restriction of pedestrian traffic and widening of existing streets, provided a modest mitigation of traffic congestion, but was more than offset by the tidal wave of increased automobile usage. Traffic planners and policy makers sought more effective solutions.

The conception of more effective solutions took two forms, consideration of the street system as a network, and the search for bigger and better roadway designs. Burnham's 1909 Plan notwithstanding, traffic engineering in the World War I era still focused primarily on the dynamics of individual streets; if Jackson's and Washington's capacity could be expanded then a solution could be found. As traffic conditions deteriorated in the early 1920s and automobile usage dramatically accelerated suburbanization, policy makers realized the necessity of thinking of traffic management in terms of a regional network.

Regionally, the traffic could be envisioned as having five components. Intra-city traffic, movement between city and close in suburbs, traffic seeking access from outer regions, DuPage County in particular, inter-city traffic coming to and from Chicago, and inter-city traffic passing through Chicago, all converged to give the fine, newly widened boulevards all the fluidity of cold molasses.

The State of Illinois, with the ability to sell bonds, refundable through license fees and gas taxes, was rapidly creating a statewide system of paved roads, diverting journeys that previously had been made by steam or interurban railroad travel, to automobile usage. By 1922 the Lincoln Highway had been paved from Geneva, Illinois, to Clinton Iowa. The Chicago Tribune opined that “this artery should be used for practically all trips to the west, including trips to Rockford, Beloit and Janesville and cities in the Illinois Northwest.”²² Thus, Jackson and Washington Boulevards were expected to bear the burden of even more concentrated regional and inter-regional travel.

The elegant, richly illustrated copies of the 1909 Plan of Chicago still occupied the shelves and table tops of civic leaders, and as traffic conditions worsened Daniel Burnham’s reasoned, regional conception took on increased relevance. The City Club of Chicago, consisting of Chicago’s top business and political leaders commissioned the publication of *Metropolitan Planning for Chicago and its Environs*, laying out a vision for regional cooperation, and conducting a one-day planning session attended by more than 200 municipal presidents and mayors from the Chicago region to consider the need for a cooperative planning organization. Out of that session came

formation, in late 1923, of the Chicago Regional Planning Association, which functioned as a regional version of the Chicago City Plan Commission.²³

Antecedents

Policy makers in other metropolitan areas enacted bold roadway design solutions to traffic congestion. Practical examples of Burnham's radial boulevards had already been constructed in congested eastern cities. New York's Grand Concourse, completed in 1907, was grand indeed, consisting of eight traffic lanes, four in each direction. It was comprised of two inner express lanes from which trucks were restricted and two outer service lanes. Raised islands separated the express and service lanes. Some intersections were grade

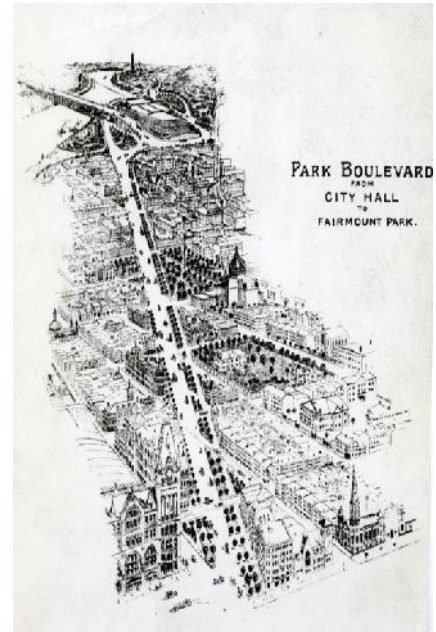


Figure 6 Benjamin Franklin Parkway

separated. Philadelphia's Benjamin Franklin Parkway, completed in 1914, was carved out of a previously dense built up area to connect City Hall with museums and monuments in an emulation of Paris' Champs- Elysees (figure 6). It functioned similarly as a super-boulevard, with separation of through and local traffic and minimized cross street interference. Each was extraordinarily wide for the time, ranging from 200 to 250 feet.²⁴

Still more dramatic was the Bronx River Parkway in New York. Conceived in the finest Olmsted tradition, it began its life as a park drive. In 1907, seeking to protect the winding Bronx

River from encroaching trash dumps and landfills, the State of New York created an elongated park, through which was run a recreational roadway, four lanes wide. The parkway connected public parks in New York City with upper Westchester County. Adjacent park land separated the parkway from any intersecting roadways and arterial intersections were grade separated. Though designed as a recreational roadway, Bronx River Parkway, like Chicago's boulevards, rapidly became the preferred route of automobile commuters.²⁵

Plans

These early thoroughfares, as well as high-profile highways planned to crisscross Detroit, captured the imagination of Chicago traffic planners. Visions of some version of Burnham's West Side boulevard increasingly informed traffic planners' vision of the future. Proposals abounded for express highways of varying sizes and configurations, both in the city and in the outlying region. DuPage County wasted no time in proposing a \$25 million dollar series of four cross-county, 200 foot wide roadways to provide connection to Chicago. North Avenue, Roosevelt Road, Butterfield Road, and 79th St. were all designated for upgrade. Three days later the City of Chicago announced approval of a plan to widen Monroe St. to a 200 foot width "...to supplement the inadequacy of Jackson and Washington Blvds."²⁶

Barely a month later, the Chicago West Park Commission (owner of Jackson and Washington Boulevards) proposed upgrading Jackson and Washington, as well as conversion of Warren Ave. to a boulevard and matching it with Washington Blvd. in a paired one way

configuration.²⁷ The proposal marked the beginning of decade long period of organizational and geographical internecine warfare that would seriously hamper Chicago's effort to develop bold solutions to westward traffic flow so desired by planners and motorists alike.

For the next several years there was no shortage of creative proposals to implement some version of fast lanes west. Cook County was in favor of two 100 foot highways instead of a single 200 foot version.²⁸ The Mayor Thompson supported widening of Madison St. to 120 feet.²⁹ The inner-ring suburbs of Oak Park, Berwyn and Cicero advocated for a superhighway to run via Roosevelt Road from Michigan Avenue at the lakefront to Geneva, on the Fox River.³⁰ Edward Bennett, Burnham's collaborator on the *Plan of Chicago*, now acting as consultant to the Chicago Plan Commission, restated and elaborated on the Congress Street "axis of Chicago" concept. Bennett's detailed refinement of the Daniel Burnham's great boulevard amalgamated the design features of New York's Grand Concourse and Bronx River Parkway, namely a depressed grade separated roadway with express lanes flanked by separated service lanes (figure 7).³¹

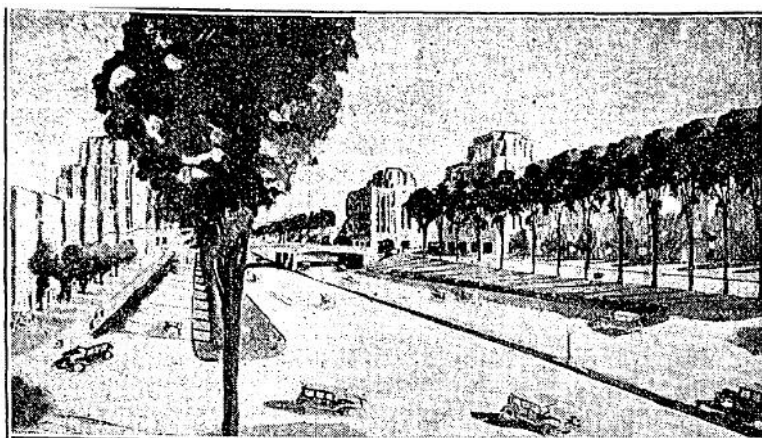


Figure 7 Bennett's Proposed West Side Boulevard

His proposal was curtly rebuffed by the City of Chicago Committee on West Side Street Improvements, characterizing the proposal as "...a mere incident of a grandiose architectural composition whose rationale for

existence had (ceased) to exist.” Chief Engineer, Hugh E. Young countered with plan for three West Side superhighways aligned along (1) Illinois-Austin (roughly present day Hubbard)-Kinzie; (2) Monroe; and (3) Polk as providing better access to western city neighborhoods and suburbs.³²

The Chicago City Council subcommittee on Two Level Streets and Separated Grades headed by Alderman John Massen, issued its report in 1928 acknowledging the need for a comprehensive system of superhighways, but favored use of existing railroad rights of way and adjacent properties.³³ Massen’s proposal, like the subsequent attitudes of aldermen, sought to minimize the “taking” of existing properties, thus minimizing the terrible damage the ultimate construction of the Congress Expressway would wreak on the neighborhoods.

In mid-1929 Hugh Young, Chief Engineer for the Chicago Plan Commission, proposed a west side highway alternative incorporating rapid transit tracks into the design. Young envisioned a 120 foot wide multi-level roadway with multiple elevated express lanes, entirely grade separated from cross traffic, two local and freight driveways at ground level, and four rapid transit tracks in trench below street level. Young cited economy in construction cost, comparing the proposed \$11.8 million per mile cost with an estimated \$18.3 million per mile cost to construct highway and rail transit rights of way separately. Though no specification was given as to location, Young’s description of the need for rapid transit construction implied the eventual demolition of the West Side Garfield Park elevated line, then occupying the site of the Congress Street alignment.³⁴

While various west side highway proposals were being publicized and evaluated, Dr. John Dill Robertson, President of the West Chicago Parks Commission was systematically advancing projects of his own. First, the Commission completed widening of Jackson Blvd., successfully acquired Warren Ave. from the City, upgraded it to Boulevard status, and implemented the previously proposed paired one-way street (with Washington Blvd.) scheme between Ogden Ave. and Garfield Park. Robertson went further with his own proposal for a two level, grade separated roadway; this one along Fulton St. or Kinzie St. alongside the already elevated right of way of the Chicago & North Western Railway.³⁵ Robertson more than proposed. He acted.

Robertson arranged for enabling legislation to be pushed through the Illinois General Assembly and sent to Governor Emmerson for approval. To finance the Fulton/Kinzie highway, Robertson drafted a \$20,000,000 bond issue and arranged for its placement on the November, 1929 ballot. Interest groups, for and against, mobilized. Prominent West Side political figures favored the project, most likely seeing opportunity for access and jobs, while alleviating traffic congestion for local residents. The Chicago Plan Commission likewise stated support.³⁶

Allied Civic Associations, a group of seven downtown oriented improvement clubs opposed the project. Most likely they represented business interests at the south end of downtown, opposed to a highway that would focus on the north end. At the west end, the Austin Businessmen's Civic Improvement Association, opposed the project claiming it would be a "Chinese Wall." That argument was absurd since the elevated C&NW tracks already formed a barrier at the same location. The Austin group further objected to the Fulton/Kinzie proposal

based on the financing, namely a bond issue to be repaid from taxes generated within the city. "West Siders don't want the superhighway. It would have bottlenecks at both ends. It would be useful only to the people in Lombard, Glen Ellyn and Wheaton, and they wouldn't pay a cent for the highway."³⁷

The Chicago Bureau of Public Efficiency also opposed the bond issue because of the financing arrangement.³⁸ Other West Side business interests, banding together as the West Side Through Streets Association, opposed the highway, seemingly on the grounds they didn't want any express highway bypassing their businesses.³⁹ The bond issue was defeated by a 7-4 margin in the November 5, 1929 election.⁴⁰ The Fulton/Kinzie project, it would appear, was off the table. It is that kind of parochial wrangling that prevented meaningful progress on addressing the west side congestion and access problem.

With or without meaningful progress on creating a West Side Superhighway, DuPage County was growing and planning for more growth...phenomenal growth. Soaring residential development in communities from Hillside to Wheaton was swelling daily ridership on the Chicago, Aurora & Elgin interurban. Parking spaces at train stations were scarce.⁴¹ Filled parking lots made a statement of their own. In times past DuPage rail commuters generally began their journeys by walking to the train stations. Crowded parking lots reflected ownership and use of automobiles and residential development beyond walking distance from the trains.

Commuters reading their September 9, 1929 *Chicago Tribune* were greeted with a headline “Du Page Highway Plan Incentive to Subdividers – County Sees big expansion in population.” The article went on to describe highway construction plans:

Du Page County working on highway system that would promote subdivisions over its entire area, 18 miles square. Present population of 80,000 largely on farms must presently bear cost of county road improvement. The solution is to turn farm land over to realty sub-dividers. Roads have been designed and parts of right of way acquired for this purpose. Roosevelt, Ogden, Lake, Joliet and St. Charles Roads, as well as north south SBI routes 53, 54, and 59. County acquiring rights of way for extensions of 22nd and 75th Sts. "In 25 years Du Page County will be as densely populated as the North Shore for the same distance at the present time.⁴²

The seeming reversal of logic reasoned that residential development was necessary to pay for highways rather than the highways being built or expanded to accommodate growth. Roosevelt Road and Butterfield Road were prioritized for expansion to the emerging standard of 200 foot width, with express and service lanes. With benefit of hindsight we can now regard DuPage County’s expansive growth plan as premature, as the stock market crash and subsequent Great Depression, followed by World War II, would postpone meaningful growth for another 15 years.

Back in the city, the planning process, if it can be called that, along with daily roadway congestion, soldiered on. Each interest group interpreted the failed Fulton/Kinzie bond issue as validating its position. Infighting cost opportunities. In 1931, Governor Emmerson, seeking to break the deadlock, proposed that the State of Illinois take over City of Chicago streets that were

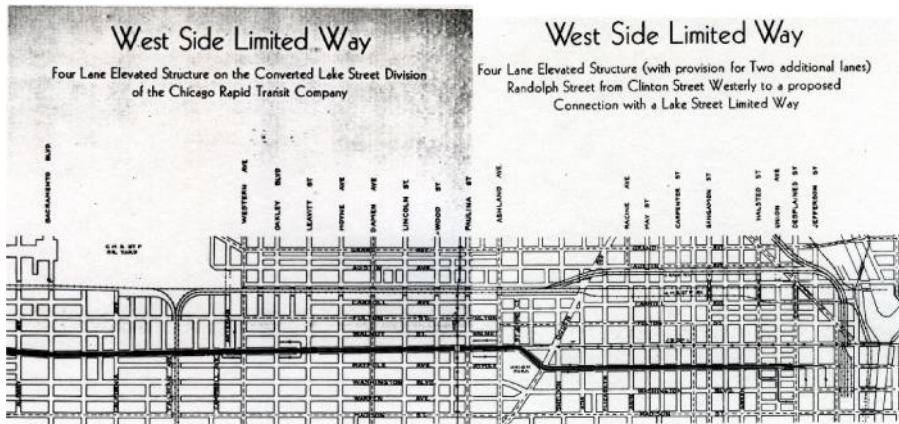


Figure 8 The Limited Ways Proposal

continuations of state highway. Mayor Cermak refused the offer, on the grounds that the state would only pay a small portion of maintenance costs.⁴³ In 1933 the City,

in the progressive era tradition, believed that the highway location and design should be left to experts. The City Council Traffic Committee retained nationally known traffic consultant Miller McClintock to make recommendations for implementing a system of superhighways for the city. McClintock's recommendations were published in a report titled *Limited Ways: A Plan for the Greater Chicago Traffic Area, A Report to the City Council of the City of Chicago by the Committee on Traffic and Public Safety* (figure 8), which was presented to the committee in October, 1933. McClintock was unequivocal in his recommendation that the West Highway be prioritized over those directed south or northwest. The report proposed running the roadway out Randolph St. from downtown to Ashland Ave. then as the primary option proceed westward to Oak Park using the elevated structure currently used for rapid transit trains. Foretelling in a sense the “we don't

need the Red Car” scene in the movie *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, McClintock was dismissive of the further need for the rapid transit trains.⁴⁴

Though no direct action resulted from the report, the expectation of converting various west side elevated train lines to highways informed Chicago transportation planning throughout the 1930’s. Proposal after proposal was submitted and publicized as the answer to the city’s transportation problems, without any meaningful progress toward building a highway. In the meantime, despite depressed economic conditions, traffic continued to worsen. In a January, 1939 cordon count, 839,000 people entered the central business district each weekday (from all directions, not just the West Side), of which 245,000, or 29% arrived by private automobile.⁴⁵

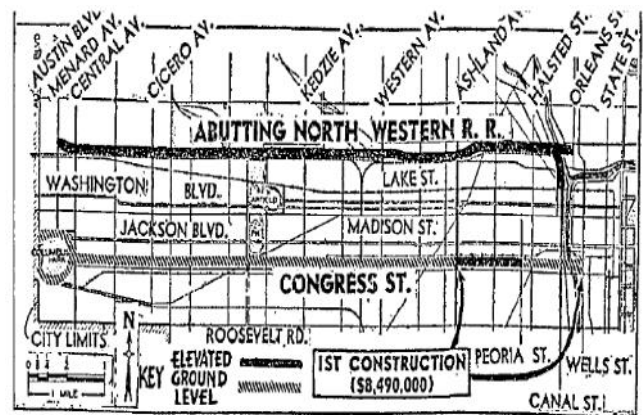


Figure 9 Alternate Routes for Superhighway

Action

Nearly three decades had passed in early 1939 since Daniel Burnham had first proposed the western axis boulevard. By then Chicagoans had read in their newspapers about improvements to Jackson and Washington Boulevards, had voted (negatively) on the Fulton/Kinzie Elevated Highway, had heard Edward Bennett elaborate on Burnham’s original Congress St. proposal, had read of 200’ wide roads on Roosevelt, or maybe on Harrison, or maybe

on Congress, or maybe on Monroe, or maybe on Lake, or maybe on Kinzie. Chicagoans heard about the Miller McClintock's *Limited Ways* proposal for a network of express highways. They had heard proposals that combined rapid transit with highways and proposals that replaced rapid transit with highways. They had seen diagrams of highways below the street and above the street. They had seen proposals for double deck highways. What Chicagoans had not seen was a highway...nor even a hint that any highway would actually be built!

Ironically it was the city's desire for federal funding of subway construction that resolved the location issues and got the highway project started in earnest. Seeking to take advantage of New Deal economic stimulus money made available through the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1938, Mayor Kelly's administration applied for a federal subway construction grant through the Public Works Administration (PWA). The city's grant application to the Public Works Administration requested funding for a subway under State Street and for two east-west streetcar subways crossing downtown Chicago.

The PWA agency was managed by U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, a Chicagoan who was personally familiar with geography and transportation issues in Chicago. While Mayor Kelly had a cordial rapport with President Roosevelt and various other New Deal administrators, his relationship with Secretary Ickes was antagonistic. Ickes was contemptuous and distrusting of Kelly and the political organization that supported him, calling the backers "the rottenest crowd in any section of the United States today." Ickes' disdain was enough for the Secretary to consider returning to Chicago as an opposition candidate in the 1939 mayoral election.⁴⁶

It was in this context of distrust that Ickes reviewed the \$27 million grant request. Ickes convened his own team of engineers to review the project. In September, 1938, Ickes and his engineering staff reported their findings, recommendations that profoundly changed the character of the subway construction project. In place of the two streetcar subways, the Ickes team recommendations specified a second north-south tube under Dearborn Street (figure 10) to extend south from Milwaukee Ave. or Lake St. to Congress St. “because we believe there is a need for a major highway to the west side from the lake front (emphasis added).”⁴⁷

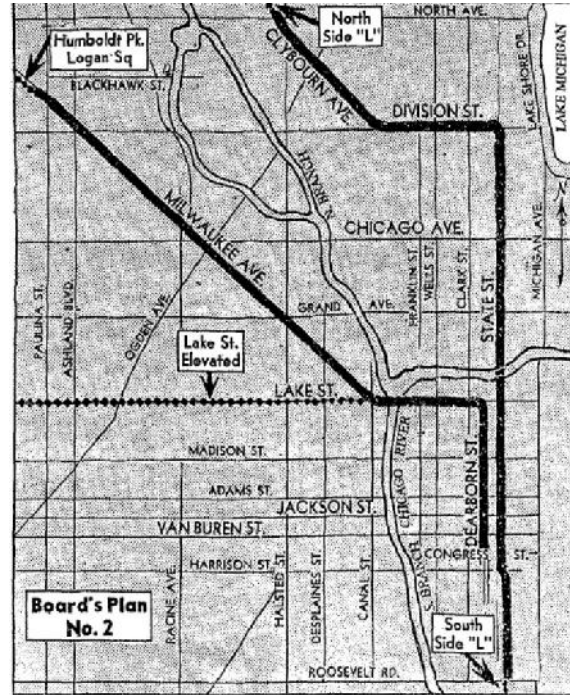


Figure 10 Ickes' Subway Proposal

“because we believe there is a need for a major highway to the west side from the lake front (emphasis added).”⁴⁷

Ickes more than hinted that the “recommendations” were really non-negotiable conditions. With the October 1, 1938, grant application deadline less than a week away, there was little time to disagree. The city of Chicago desperately needed the PWA grant, as much to alleviate unemployment as to provide the city with the long desired new subways. Mayor Kelly himself needed this victory to assure his reelection the following year. Finding themselves with no negotiating room, Mayor Kelly and a reluctant city council approved Ickes’ changes.

Secretary Ickes’ final approval of the grant application specified that the engineering team “will extend its studies to highway needs of Chicago's west side and coordinate the subway and

highway program with the city's traction.” In approving the grant with the condition of westward extension of the Dearborn Subway, Secretary Ickes intentionally or unintentionally resolved the location issue of the west side highway. If the grant depended on the train tracks extending westward into Congress St., there had to be a Congress St. for them to extend into. Governor Horner promptly wired Mayor Kelly offering state assistance with development of the west side highway and proposed subway.⁴⁸

With funding in place for two major civic projects, the subway and the west side highway, Mayor Kelly and the city council acted quickly. The council approved Secretary Ickes’ grant condition resulting in preparation of the *Comprehensive Plan for the Extension of the Subway System of the City of Chicago*. The comprehensive plan proposed the extension of the Milwaukee-Dearborn subway westward in conjunction with the building of the West Side Superhighway and replacing part or all of the existing Garfield Park elevated.⁴⁹ As plans for the West Side Superhighway went forward, they now included a provision for the rail tracks in the right-of-way.

On March 1, 1939, Mayor Kelly presented to the City Council a broad concept for building and financing superhighways. By the end of June the Illinois General Assembly passed enabling legislation for superhighway design and construction. The legislation authorized the City of Chicago and Cook County to each pledge a portion of its share of the motor fuel tax (but not to exceed 50 per cent) for this purpose, and required that plans showing specific highway locations be filed with the State Division of Highways on or before March 1, 1940.⁵⁰ An informal engineering

committee was formed, with representatives from the Federal Bureau of Roads, Chicago Park District, the Chicago Plan Commission and the Chicago Regional Planning Association, as well as other public and civic bodies. All gave their full cooperation.⁵¹

The City created a Department of Superhighways, with Philip Harrington, who already served as Commissioner of Subways and Traction as its acting Commissioner. By the end of the year the City consolidated Harrington's two departments as the Department of Subways and Superhighway, with Harrington as commissioner.⁵² Subsequent design characteristics of the highway would reveal the wisdom of that consolidation. Bureaucratic silos began to crumble.

The newly formed Department of Subways and Superhighways reviewed the many previous plans and proposals and concluded that Burnham was right. Congress Street was the logical alignment for an express highway west from downtown Chicago. In their review they considered the eastern access, namely the widening of Congress Street through downtown and the development of two-level Wacker Drive as a distributor highway.⁵³

Previous plans for the West Side highway had generally confined planning to the route within the Chicago city limits, namely Austin Boulevard, with vague suggestions about desirability of extending the road westward. As the city plans became more specific, DuPage County and Fox Valley interests restated the need for the express highway to extend through the inner ring suburbs to connections with western arterial roads.⁵⁴

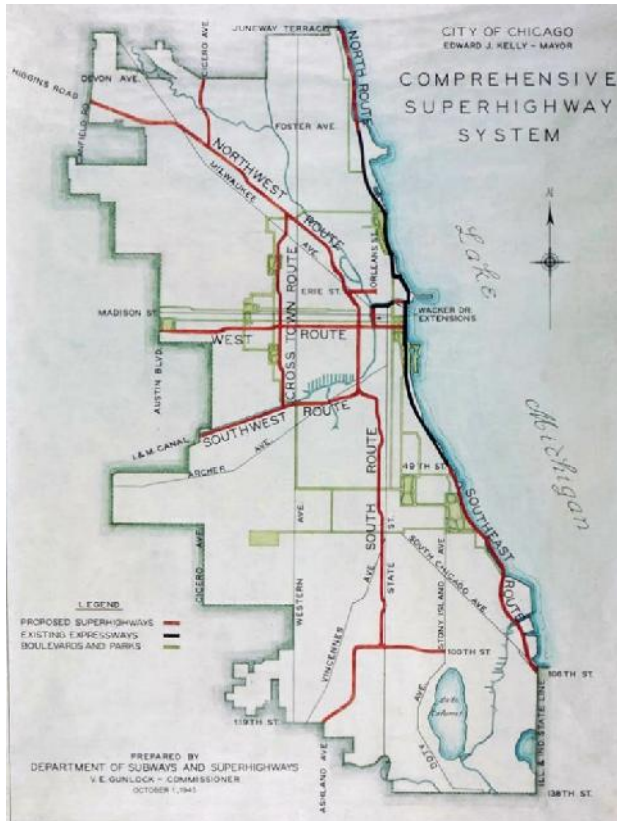


Figure 11 Proposed Superhighway System

The highway implementation process continued. In rapid succession the Federal Public Roads Administration approved the routing and design for the road, the proposed network of express highways was included in the City's official Arterial Highway System map, and the right-of-way dedicated as a public street. In October 1940, the City Council prioritized the West Side route as the first of the radial highways to be built and the State designated it as a Motor Fuel Tax Fund project (figure 11).⁵⁵

Despite the solid progress finally being made, parochial bickering continued. Commercial leaders in Oak Park and on the West Side, not wishing to have the highway diverting traffic away from their businesses, still pressed for selection of the alignment proximate to the C&NW Railway.⁵⁶ The Committee on West Side Superhighways acknowledged the continued viability of this route, considering the Congress route to be adequate for the foreseeable future, but open to consideration of the Kinzie Street alignment should a second superhighway be necessary.⁵⁷ The *Chicago Tribune* continued its opposition to Congress Street. Editorials complained that the highway was really just an instrument for slum removal and that it was playing into the hands of

speculators; that it the highway would run “from nowhere to nowhere,” or that the C&NW alignment should have been chosen. The *Tribune* continued its editorial opposition until 1944, when land was already being acquired for right of way preparation.⁵⁸

Though opposition continued from the *Chicago Tribune* and others, preparation for construction of the West Side Highway moved forward. A Joint Highway Design Committee, consisting of city, county and federal officials, was convened to establish and administer design and construction standards for the Congress Highway and all express highways in the proposed network. The committee would continue in that role until the mid-1970s, when construction of the region’s expressway network was effectively complete.⁵⁹

In 1942 the Chicago City Council authorized acquisition of the first nine land parcels in the path of the new highway.⁶⁰ In November 1944, City, County, State and Federal highway administration officials met to finalize design plans, including the rapid transit tracks, in preparation for the start of construction of the long awaited highway. Five days later President Roosevelt signed the Federal Aid Highway bill, authorizing distribution of 1.5 billion dollars to the states for postwar highway construction.⁶¹

Regional Plans

Since early 1939 focus had been on getting the Congress Street construction underway, but only within the city limits. Though planners reasonably expected the highway would extend farther west, immediate plans only took the highway to Austin Boulevard and the border with

Oak Park. While existing traffic on Jackson and Washington Boulevards had for decades continued on out through Oak Park, the prospect of the dumping of superhighway traffic onto tree lined suburban residential streets was not appealing. That expectation no doubt informed Oak Park's commercial community's continued advocacy for the more northerly C&NW embankment routing.

It was in fact, time to start thinking regionally. The Chicago Motor Club had taken the advocacy lead by systematically reminding Chicago highway officials that connection to DuPage County

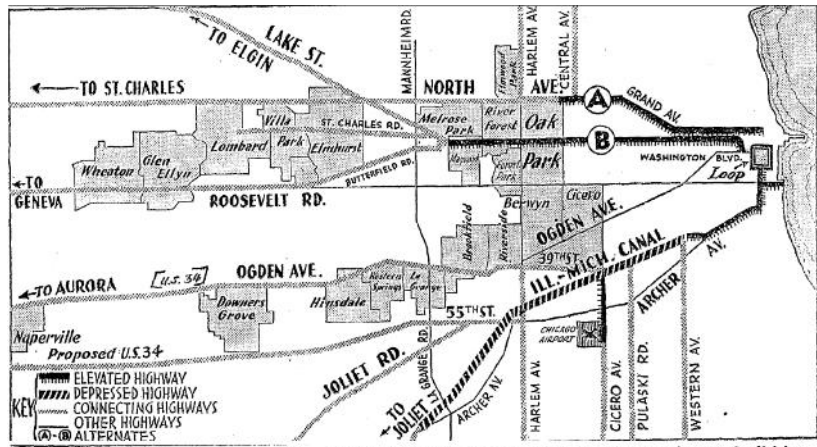


Figure 12 Western Connections to Superhighways

would ultimately be necessary. DuPage officials experienced similar posturing among interest groups regarding which routes to prioritize and what the design features would be. They were unified, however, in expressing the need to have a direct superhighway connection to the Chicago's West Side Highway.

The Cook County Highway department commissioned a study in 1940 to determine what construction could and should be undertaken with existing and proposed revenue streams for the next 20 years. Studies were made of present traffic flow, expected influence of population

growth, theoretical highway location for proximity to population. From the results of those studies, recommendations were made for regional express highways in Cook County.⁶²



Figure 13 County Express Highway Plan

In 1941 the State of Illinois created the five member Cook County Highway Authority, as the Governor's advisory body, in preparation for negotiation over the state's role in expressway funding, but also as a reflection of the need to focus attention west of the Chicago city limits. In early 1943, the Chicago Plan Commission and the Chicago Regional Planning Association jointly sponsored meetings of highway officials of the various jurisdictions to discuss region wide highway planning and convene a joint technical committee to reconcile the City and County express highway plans and develop an implementation action plan.⁶³

Cutting the Swath

World War II was over, engineering studies were moving along, city and suburbs had a general agreement of highway location, and land purchases were underway. By late 1947 the stage was set for demolition. Early clearance and demolition in the blocks west of Canal Street involved mostly industrial properties and proceeded comparatively easily (figure 14). Residential

demolition was another matter. In 1947 and 1948, Chicago continued to feel the pinch of the post-war housing shortage. Seldom in Chicago's history was the time for required relocation so inopportune.



Figure 14 Superhighway Land Clearance

Notices of impending demolition started going out in late 1947. The process proved difficult. Though properties were legally acquired, residents resisted relocation. Aldermen, sensitive to the needs of their constituents, intervened, requesting delay in demolition. The United States Public Roads Administration, hearing of similar circumstances around the nation, and anticipating the housing shortage to last indefinitely, admonished highway administrations not to let up on the demolition process. PRA suggested taking an entire construction season focused on relocation and demolition before attempting construction.⁶⁴

Virgil Gunlock, who had succeeded Philip Harrington as Commissioner of Subways and Superhighways, suggested establishment of a Housing Relocation Bureau to facilitate property clearance. Gunlock estimated that 3,000 families would have to be relocated by the time land clearance reached Austin Boulevard (figure 15).⁶⁵



Figure 15 In the bulldozers path

Residents in the path of demolition were in denial. They had read and heard of the proposed West Side Superhighway for decades, some for their entire lives, but it had never really happened. In many instances it was not until the building next door was demolished that the need for relocation became evident.⁶⁶ Some residents had owned their homes for 30 to 40 years. Neighborhood ties were strong, especially for older people.⁶⁷ Even for those whose

homes were not directly in the demolition path, their neighbors and neighborhoods were gone. The fabric of the neighborhood was torn asunder.

Demolition continued through the early 1950s, taking with it residential, institutional and industrial buildings alike. Cook County and Presbyterian Hospitals between Ashland Boulevard and Damen Avenue were spared, though the Presbyterian Hospital Nurses' home and the West Side YMCA were sacrificed. Loretto Hospital at Central Avenue was spared, but the 133 bed Loyola Hospital at Wolcott Avenue was not. It held out until 1951, when patients were discharged or relocated, and the wrecking ball removed it from the path of the new highway. One industrial structure, a recently constructed five story building housing an ink factory, was simply moved intact one block from its original site.⁶⁸

Ribbons

On December 7, 1949, shovels went into the ground and construction was underway. The task was enormous and challenging in the city. East end construction required reaming a corridor through the downtown, shaving back the sides of some buildings, drilling through others, and bridging a navigable waterway. It required the relocation of an entire elevated rapid transit route. The roadway consisted of six to ten traffic lanes, entrance and exit ramps, and rapid transit tracks. The route intersected two north and south freight railroads, and 12 arterial streets, some of which had streetcar routes whose tracks required temporary diversion.

More challenges awaited the builders in the suburbs. The task would require relocation of more railroads and, perhaps most challenging of all, relocation of nearly 4,000 graves in three cemeteries. By the time construction began, the west side highway gradually took on a new name. It was now referred to as the “Congress Street Superhighway.” Initial construction was on the drainage system. Since the highway was below grade level, water run-off couldn’t flow naturally into the sewer system. Massive drains paralleled the highway from the Chicago River to the city limits. Pumping stations brought the run-off water to the surface for discharge into the river.⁶⁹

Construction through Oak Park required the temporary relocation of the Garfield L and a main line railroad. To minimize building demolition, the combined footprint of the highway, L and railroad were confined to a trench. The process consisted of squeezing the relocated L and

railroad tightly along the north side of the right-of-way, digging the trench on the south side, relocating the rail lines to their permanent locations in the trench, then digging out the trench on the north side to accommodate the new highway (figure 16).

To the west, through the suburbs of Maywood, Bellwood, Westchester and Hillside, construction was only somewhat less challenging. Homes and businesses, though fewer than on the east end, lay in the path. There were two more



Figure 16 Digging the Oak Park trench

railroads to cross, one railroad to be relocated, and a stone quarry to be skirted. Nonetheless, construction moved more quickly at the west end, allowing for an earlier completion date than for the segment in the city.

On December 15, 1954, Cook County Highway Department workers removed the barricades leading to two miles of newly constructed lanes of the Congress Superhighway between 1st Avenue and 25th Avenue in Maywood. Incredibly, considering the momentous significance of the opening, there was no ceremony, no politicians congratulating themselves on bringing this highway into being, no marching band, no oversize scissors cutting a ribbon, no photographers. Simply the removal of barricades.⁷⁰ Today we call that a soft opening. One week later the roadway was extended to Mannheim Road, affording more logical access to Butterfield

Road and Lake Street for continued westward travel. On the occasion of the December 15th opening, the Mannheim steamroller had not quite finished its work at the soon to be opened cloverleaf.

Date	From	To
12/15/1954	1st Ave.	25th Ave.
12/21/1954	25th Ave.	Mannheim Road
12/15/1955	Ashland Ave.	Laramie Ave.
8/10/1956	Columbus Dr.	Ashland Ave.
11/21/1958	Mannheim Rd.	East West Tollway Connection
1/29/1960	Laramie Ave.	Central Ave.
7/30/1960	Des Plaines Ave.	1st Ave.
10/12/1960	Central Ave.	Des Plaines Ave.

After 35 years of planning and eight years of construction, the first segment of the highway was open. It would take another six years to open the

roadway in its entirety.⁷¹

It was open! The opening ceremony was held at Lombard Ave. in Oak Park on that fall day, October 12, 1960 (figure 17). Mayor Richard J. Daley, Cook County Board President Daniel Ryan (for whom the South Expressway would soon be named) and other speakers waxed enthusiastic about the time saving and lifesaving attributes of the new expressway.



Figure 17 The Highway is Open! - October 12, 1960

Governor Stratton made a sensational arrival by helicopter.⁷² Now a person could drive on twin ribbons of concrete between Wells Street in Chicago 40 miles through the city and suburbs to Highway 30 west of Aurora without a stop (except to pay tolls on the East-West Tollway).

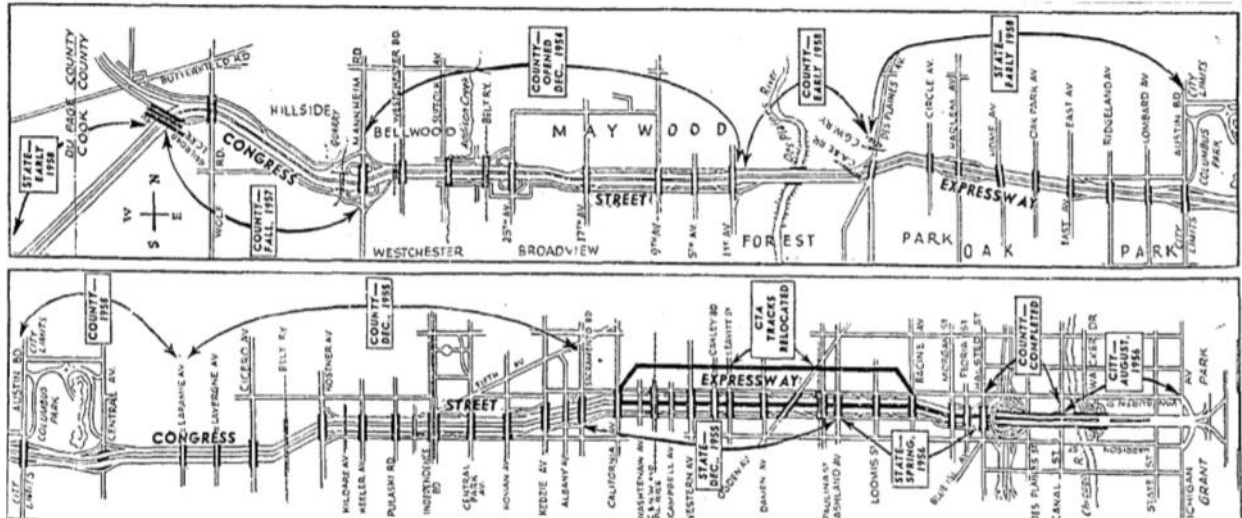


Figure 18 Congress Street Expressway - 1955

Obstacles – The Living and the Dead

The six years difference between the unceremonious barricade removal in 1954 and the triumphant ribbon cutting in 1960 were six years of obstacles. Yes, the basic land clearance had been done, the excavation dug, the drainage system installed, the pavement laid, the ramps constructed, the lighting installed, but the overcoming of several significant obstacles warrants description.

Before construction of the great highway, Congress St. east of the Chicago River only existed in tiny, narrow segments. Nearly a mile of entirely new street had to be cut through the dense urban fabric. What little street existed (Michigan Ave. to State St.) had to be widened, widened to the point where there was no room for sidewalks. Modifications were necessary to

Adler and Sullivan's Auditorium Theater and to the Congress Hotel. The first floors of those historic structures had to be altered to accommodate the sidewalks inside the first floors, in an arcade arrangement.⁷³

Six blocks to the west lay LaSalle Street Station. Home to the daily departure and arrival of the tony 20th Century Limited and Golden State passenger trains and thousands of daily Rock Island line commuters, the station would need to remain undisturbed while Congress St. burrowed underneath it. Baggage, mail and express facilities located directly under the platforms in the path of the roadway required relocation to the north or the south. Structural support for the train tracks and platforms above street level necessitated construction of a support "yoke" above the roadway.⁷⁴

The highway crosses the Chicago River on the Clarence Wagner bridges. Two of them are necessary, one eastbound and one westbound, to carry Congress Parkway over the Chicago River, because of the angle of the river at the highway crossing (figure 19). Though engineering planning had begun as early as 1942, approval for the crossing was an arduous administrative



Figure 19 Clarence Wagner Bridge

process. The Chicago River was (and still is) a navigable waterway, resulting in its placement under the jurisdiction of the War Department during World War II. Securing approval was difficult and time consuming for as seemingly trivial a project as a river crossing when

assaults were being planned for Normandy beaches, and aircraft carriers battled in the Pacific Ocean. But eventually approval was granted and the twin bascule bridges were designed and built.⁷⁵

Later designation of Congress Parkway crossing of the Chicago River as part of the Interstate Highway system created one of the very few places where an Interstate Highway crosses a moveable span bridge. Clarence Wagner, for whom the bridge is named, was 14th Ward alderman, and before his untimely death in an automobile accident, one of Chicago's powerful politicians. Had he survived, Chicago's politics in the 1950s might have taken a different course.⁷⁶

To the west of the Clarence Wagner Bridge is the old Chicago Post Office. The highway passes through the center of the building. The building was built in 1933, squarely in the path of Burnham's Grand Axis. Edward Bennett, Burnham's partner in the publication of the 1909 Plan of Chicago, led the lengthy fight to require an opening 120 feet wide and 22 feet high for future construction of the proposed roadway through the 13 story structure. The City and the Treasury Department eventually agreed on a permanent easement.⁷⁷ Over the next decade, in the absence of roadway construction, the Post Office used the arcade for inter-floor mail truck ramps. Actual construction of Congress Parkway reignited the controversy. Long negotiations delayed highway construction and ultimately cost the City \$1.3 million in retrofits to accommodate the roadway.⁷⁸

The two biggest obstacles were the living and the dead. The living were the daily commuters on the Garfield Park elevated, a substantial portion of which lay directly in the path

of the highway. The dead were the permanent residents of three cemeteries in suburban Forest Park. Relocating of the rail line and disinterment of the graves were the primary cause of the delay in completion of the highway until that fall day in 1960.

Promoters of the Metropolitan West Side Elevated Railroad and Daniel Burnham perceived the geography of the city in the same way. The logical avenue of commerce was straight west from downtown providing access not only to the city's West Side but also to make connections to the outlying Chicago region. The company was incorporated to build elevated rapid transit rail lines west from downtown. The route structure resembled a fleur de lis on its side, with the main stem running from downtown to Marshfield Avenue, in the midst of the present day Illinois Medical District. From there the north "leaf" extended north and west to Logan Square, the south "leaf" proceeded south and west to Douglas Park and Cicero, and the central "leaf", the Garfield Park branch ran straight west along the future Congress Street alignment to 52nd Street (present day Laramie Avenue).⁷⁹

The Garfield Park route was completed in 1902 and made connection with the newly built Aurora, Elgin & Chicago interurban railway, extending westward through suburban and rural Cook and DuPage Counties to its namesake cities. In 1905 the two companies negotiated a reciprocal agreement whereby the AE&C could operate into downtown Chicago on the Garfield Park elevated, and the Metropolitan could extend its service to Forest Park and eventually to Westchester.⁸⁰ The two companies' success in attracting a corridor of development would have influenced Daniel Burnham's vision of the corridor as the logical western axis.

The 1939 Subways and Superhighways plan had already conceptually anticipated co-locating rail and highway in a common right-of-way. The challenge was what to do with the Garfield Park L while construction was underway. Planners and engineers crafted the “least worst” solution, that of a 2 ½ mile temporary bypass between Racine Avenue and Sacramento Boulevard. The initial concept was to construct a temporary timber structure alongside the highway construction site. Aldermen objected to the expected unsightliness of the structure and the decision was made to locate the temporary trackage at ground level.⁸¹

Ground level trackage had terrible adverse consequences. It required co-opting one half of Van Buren Street further disrupting street life. It prevented the placement of intermediate stations, depriving the community of rail transit service. Train operation at ground level had no traffic signal priority, waiting at red lights along with motorists on adjacent Van Buren St. Trains moved haltingly, pausing at each intersection, lengthening running times. And it compelled the Chicago, Aurora & Elgin Railroad (successor to the AE&C) to terminate trains at Forest Park.⁸²

The lack of intermediate stations was contentious. There issues of safety, engineering and running time impact involved in the decision. Alderman Vito Marzullo and other West Side Aldermen objected to the temporary reduction from 13 to 9 west side stations. Upon hearing that intermediate stations placement would adversely impact running times, Marzullo was quoted as replying "if the suburbanites are so concerned about four minutes (of running time) they can use helicopters."⁸³

In September 1953, Garfield Park trains were relocated onto the temporary Van Buren street trackage. CA&E trains terminated at Forest Park. Promptly half of CA&E's riders defected to the C&NW commuter trains or to automobiles. No meaningful plan was developed for CA&E terminal access in anticipation of permanent placement of the tracks in the Congress Expressway.⁸⁴ Without a reasonable expectation of future terminal access and with the emerging formidable automobile competition facilitated by the highway, CA&E suspended passenger service on that hot afternoon in July, stranding homeward bound passengers and completing the "Roger Rabbit like" transition from rail to automobile transportation.

It took nearly five years to complete the placement of the permanent rail line in the Congress Expressway median. On June 22, 1958, the Chicago Transit Authority introduced the new West-Northwest service through the New Deal financed Milwaukee-Dearborn-Congress subway and out into the newly completed Congress Expressway. The trains were faster but the damage was done. The neighborhood was decimated and commuting habits had changed with the lurching ride over the temporary track. The CA&E connection was lost. There was a brief "bump" in CTA Congress route ridership. 13% more riders rode the trains in 1959 than in a comparable period in 1958. Then again the 1958 ridership consisted of the few hardy souls still willing to ride during the time of the lengthy reroute. CTA Congress branch ridership has never recovered to pre-1953 levels.⁸⁵

Neither the quick nor the dead were safe. If the living CA&E and CTA commuters and the displaced west side and suburban residents felt inconvenienced, they were no more so than the

“permanent” residents of Concordia, Forest Home and Waldheim Cemeteries in Forest Park. As expressway construction continued west through Oak Park and into the suburbs it came up hard against a stone wall, really a wall of stones...gravestones. Since the 1870s cemeteries had lined the east side of the Des Plaines River south of Madison St.

To make room for the highway, the Highway Authority ultimately had to arrange for disinterment of 3,762 bodies and reinter them elsewhere. For each gravesite it was necessary to determine lot owners and next of kin and as sensitively as possible negotiate a settlement with them. Negotiations were concluded in June 1957, culminating in a 395 page Judgment Order by the Superior Court of Cook County.⁸⁶

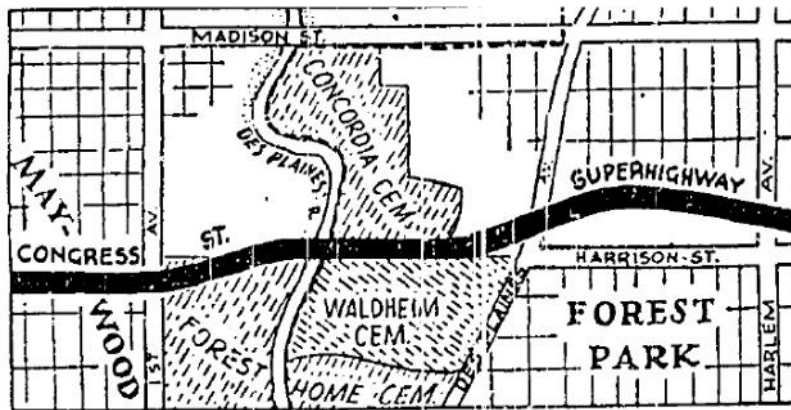


Figure 20 Congress St. Superhighway and the Cemeteries

Complicating the acquisition of cemetery land was the presence of the CA&E Railroad, whose tracks crossed the river at the same location. For engineering purposes it was necessary to shift the tracks

northward onto Concordia Cemetery land, with the Highway Authority incorporating gravesite relocation as part of the larger project. Discussions with CA&E had begun in 1954, but the complexity associated with the gravesite problem stretched out the negotiations with the railway company for five years. The Highway Authority paid for a new bridge and tracks using it to

connect with the CTA Forest Park terminal, but by the time the bridge was completed, CA&E had suspended operations. The bridge was never used.⁸⁷

Fast Lanes (Farther) West

From the 1920s regional planning efforts followed Burnham's vision. Burnham's west side Grand Axis was to extend westward to make various regional connections. Among the most prominent was that of Butterfield Road, until the 1930s, a two lane gravel access road connecting with Chicago's Washington Blvd. and ambling southwestward toward Warrenville. In the 1920s DuPage County planners envisioned Butterfield as the logical extension of the Chicago's eventual West Side Highway. Frederick Law Olmsted would have been delighted with the design. The 200 foot right-of-way was to consist of two 40 foot paved two lane pavements, one in each direction,

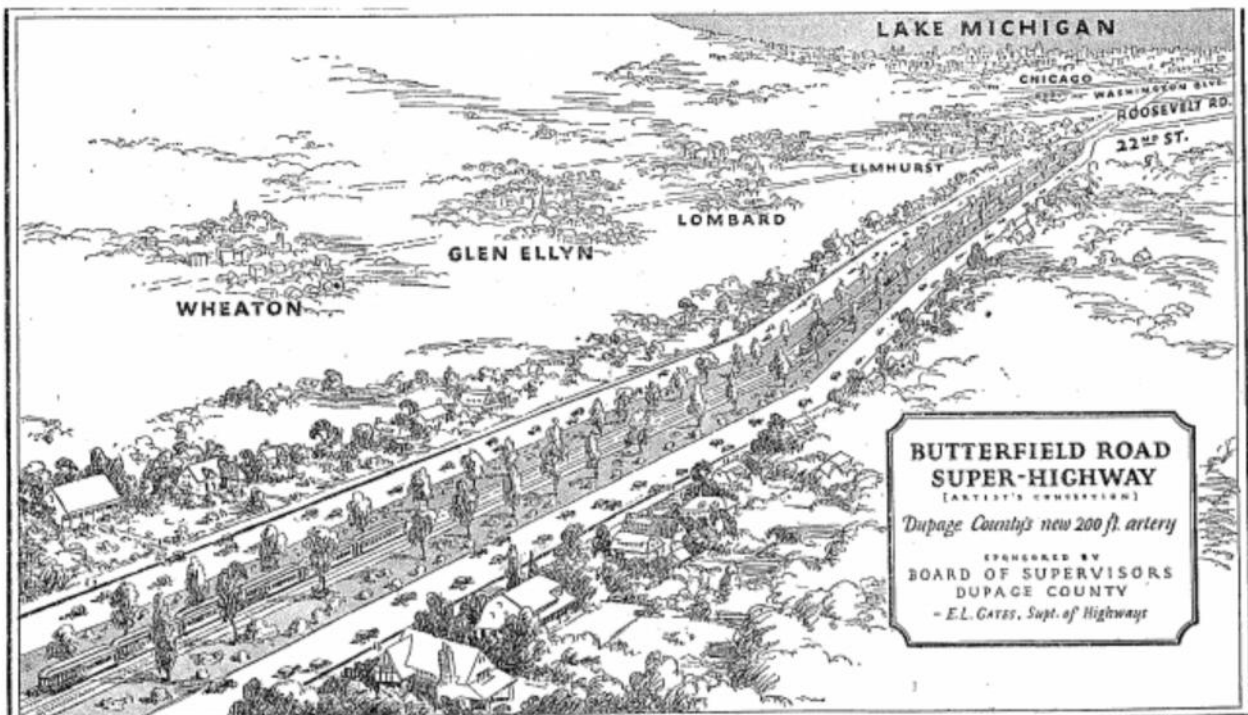


Figure 21 Butterfield Road Super-Highway Proposal- 1926

with a 20 foot median set aside for future rapid transit, as well as 50 foot greenways on each side. The county quietly began buying land along the route in anticipation of constructing the cross-county boulevard.⁸⁸

Other, more conventional, DuPage thoroughfares such as North Ave., Roosevelt Road, Cermak Road and Ogden Avenue were also projected for connections to the West Side Highway. Planners likewise anticipated construction of circumferential highways in keeping

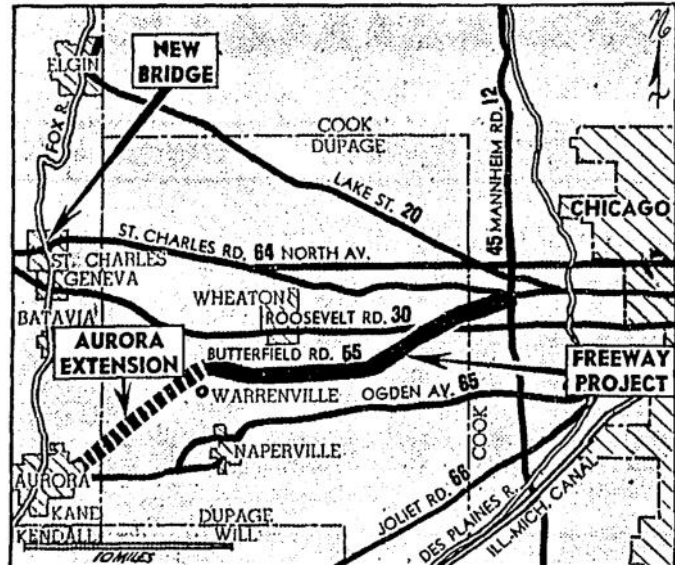


Figure 22 Proposed Western Access

with the vision of the Burnham Plan. In 1927 the Regional Planning Association designed the location for the first 11 miles of the 200 foot wide Three States Boulevard, linking Wisconsin, Illinois and Indiana, from Milwaukee to Michigan City, but bypassing the city of Chicago to the west.⁸⁹ Construction began in the 1930s and by the end of that decade, the partially grade separated highway was taking shape, passing west of Elmhurst and Hinsdale and intersecting Butterfield Road on its north-south trajectory through DuPage County. That roadway is present day Illinois highway 83.

Chicago's 1939 Superhighways plan specified the intention to connect to specific western arterial roadways and cooperative planning followed. Completion of the Congress Expressway to Mannheim Road left the western connections as yet unfulfilled, but specific plans were

underway for an array of connections at the Cook-DuPage County line. The Highway Plan of Cook County incorporated analysis of historic and projected traffic flows and made specific proposals for connections at the county line.⁹⁰

Interestingly, as plans came and went, the Butterfield alignment disappeared and reappeared periodically, despite the logic of its southwesterly route and the fact that right-of-way had already been acquired. Fox Valley, and Aurora in particular, business interests continued to promote the Butterfield alignment as the only option providing their city with direct superhighway access to Chicago.⁹¹

Coordination with the state highway department brought the various western connections into sharper focus in the early 1950s. By 1952, State of Illinois and DuPage County planners had forsaken the exact

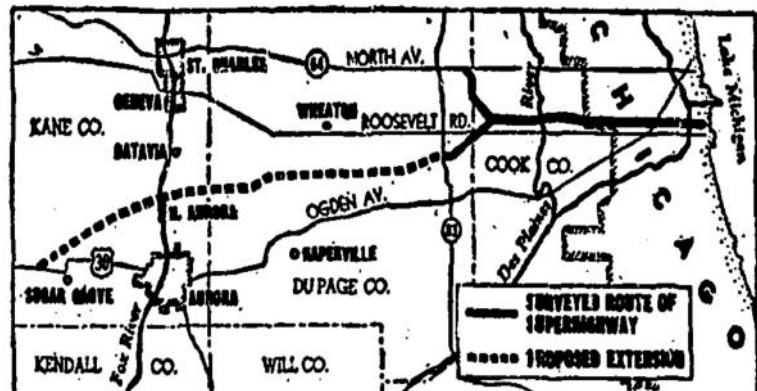


Figure 23 Proposed Congress St. Superhighway Extension - 1952

Butterfield Road plan but recognized the worth of the approximate alignment. The recommendation was made to extend the then being constructed Congress Expressway westward through DuPage County to a connection with U.S. Highway 30 at Sugar Grove, several miles west of Aurora.⁹²

The proposal made perfect sense. It addressed the need to provide direct access between DuPage County and Chicago. It envisioned for the first time, a limited access connection, beyond the Fox River, with U.S. Highway 30, the arterial access to Western Illinois and beyond. At that time motorists traveling to and from points beyond the river traveled through the congested communities of Aurora or Geneva.

The desire was there, the logic was there, the plan was there, but the money wasn't. The enormous expense of pushing the Congress Expressway through the dense West Side of Chicago was consuming available motor fuel tax funding. Unless funding could be found, extension beyond the Fox River would remain a dream for the foreseeable future.

The State of Pennsylvania provided the solution. As national solutions to funding new superhighways were sought in the 1930s, United States Bureau of Public Roads was vehemently opposed to the concept of toll roads, expecting them not to generate sufficient traffic to recover their construction costs. State of Pennsylvania officials thought otherwise and in 1937 legislation passed authorizing creation of a Turnpike Commission to build a cross-state limited access highway. The new highway opened on October 1, 1940 and was a spectacular success.⁹³

Ohio and Indiana followed, authorizing creation of toll road authorities in 1949 and 1952 respectively. In the years just before creation of the Interstate Highway System many states followed suit, creating a "toll road craze" rivalling that of the early 19th century.⁹⁴ In Illinois, Republicans favored construction of a toll highway system while Democrats opposed it. A

political deal was struck. Democrats agreed to support the Tollway enabling legislation in exchange for additional motor fuel tax funds for continued construction of the Cook County expressway system.⁹⁵ With that compromise, Chicago's dual system of tollways and free expressways was born.

The newly created Illinois State Toll Highway Commission proceeded to sell \$415 million in revenue bonds to finance the first stage of construction of the tollway system. Still faithful to Burnham's plan, a system of regional radial and circumferential limited access highways was planned, among them the Tri-State Tollway, mimicking and effectively replacing the Three State Boulevard circumnavigating Chicago from the between the Wisconsin and Indiana state borders, and the East-West Tollway, the extension of the Congress Expressway across DuPage County that had been proposed in 1952. Construction proceeded quickly and both the Tri-State and East-West Tollways were opened in late 1958.⁹⁶

With the opening of the East West Tollway and the completion of the interrupted segment of the Congress Expressway through the cemeteries, fast lanes west whisked motorists non-stop between downtown Chicago and the Fox River Valley and beyond.⁹⁷ The task that remained was to make the connections to the other western thoroughfares that had been proposed over the previous three decades.

On December 18, 1961, two west end connections were completed. One extension ran straight westward connecting to Roosevelt Road at Illinois Highway 83, in time to provide access

to the soon to be opened Oak Brook Shopping Center. The other extension angled northward, first to a connection with Lake St., then three years later another ½ mile to York Rd. Another seven years later, in 1971, the expressway was extended beyond York Rd., another, 10 miles to Schaumburg, providing expressway access to the newly opened Woodfield Mall and direct connection with the Northwest Tollway. A final extension came in the form of the extension of the East-West Tollway, westward beyond Sugar Grove, across Northern Illinois, as part of the Interstate Highway System. Its completion past DeKalb and Rochelle to Rock Falls in 1974, marked the completion of fast lanes west as we know them.⁹⁸

Keeping the Fast Lanes Fast

Completion hardly meant solution. In 1960 peak period traffic on the newly opened Congress Expressway averaged 21.6 miles per hour between Mannheim Road and downtown, the exact speed measured using Washington Blvd. in 1951.⁹⁹ A similar comparison the following year (after the Congress Expressway gap had been closed) yielded a similar finding. Three times were taken between Austin Boulevard and Michigan Avenue via the expressway, Jackson and Washington. Completion times were:

Route	Time	Average Speed
Congress	19:55	25.2 mph
Jackson	21:20	23.6 mph
Washington	23:15	21.7 mph

In fairness, travel time had been reduced. Travel time on Jackson Blvd. before expressway opening had been 37 minutes.¹⁰⁰ Capacity expansion had expedited traffic flow, at least in the short term. But rapid suburbanization caused traffic volume to continue to grow. While the expressway provided fast access west during much of the day and (generally) on weekends, peak period traffic only got worse. Duration of peak period slow time continued to stretch out.

Lane expansion was no longer an option for the roadway in the city. Citizen opposition to the building of the proposed north-south Crosstown Expressway had made that clear. Reflecting on building of the various urban expressways one newspaper described the construction between 1945 and 1962 as “second only to the Great Fire of Chicago in “devastating” the city through displacement; property destruction; and tax increase.” A leading cause of citizen opposition to crosstown construction was “the social and physical destruction of the local community.”¹⁰¹

Yet construction continued in the outlying region. In 1989 the North-South (now Veterans) Tollway was completed, linking the I-290 in Schaumburg with I-55 in Bolingbrook. In the planning stage since 1964, the new north south highway created the third circumferential highway (after Illinois highway 83 and the Tri-State Tollway). The new highway intersected I-88 between Downers Grove and Lisle. Intended as a means of alleviating I-88 congestion by providing an alternate route to O’Hare Airport and points north, it ultimately created more traffic on I-88 by stimulating development of additional nodes of commercial activity.

The biggest congestion improvement project in the history of the roadway was the rebuild of the “Hillside Strangler.” In designing the west end of the Congress Expressway to make connections with several roadways in the early 1960s, engineers had created an eventual traffic nightmare. By making the Congress Expressway the trunk, and the various western connections the branches, too much traffic from too many sources was fed into the Congress Expressway:

I-290 from Schaumburg	3 lanes
I-88 from Aurora	3 lanes
Roosevelt Road	3 lanes
I-294 from the north	2 lanes
I-294 from the south	1 lane

Total:	12 lanes

Twelve lanes of traffic squeezed down to three lanes. Some traffic was siphoned off to Mannheim Road, but most continued east. By the 1990s congestion had become intolerable. 80,000 to 90,000 vehicles passed through each day. The one mile trip from the East-West Tollway York toll plaza to Mannheim Rd. routinely took 20 to 30 minutes. The passage was congested for 14 hours each day.

Illinois Governor Ryan turned the first shovelful of dirt on March 14, 2000, beginning the two year project to alleviate the congestion. Lanes were expanded, dedicated lanes for Mannheim Road exit were created, and Roosevelt Road traffic was required to divert during certain hours.¹⁰² Reconfiguration offered some relief by alleviating the suddenness of the roadway contraction and the elimination of “weaving motion” (cars changing lanes in front of other cars to get to the opposite side of the roadway).

But the fundamental problem remained. 12 lanes squeezed down to three. The “strangle” point was simply moved a half mile to the east. The need still arose to expand the expressway from three lanes to four between 25th Avenue and

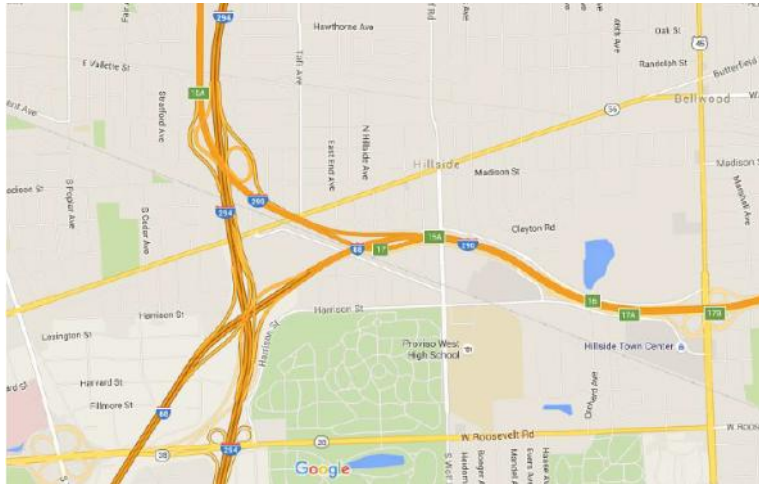


Figure 24 Hillside Strangler - Many lanes into one

Austin Blvd. Very much as a result of the devastation of Chicago’s West Side and in other cities during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, federal grant process now requires an Alternatives Analysis and an Environmental Impact Statement asking the questions “do we really need this roadway expansion?” and “what will be the impact on the community if we build it?”

The Regional Transportation Authority and IDOT jointly conducted a multi-modal corridor analysis known as the Cook-DuPage Corridor Study specifically centered on the I-290 – I 88 corridor. The goal was not just to identify the best “treatment” for the congested I-290 but to identify the best mobility options for the corridor overall, on and off the highway. Travel analysis results were forwarded to the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), successor to the Northeastern Illinois Metropolitan Area Planning Commission (NIPC), which in turn was a successor to the Regional Planning Association that had been formed back in the 1920s.¹⁰³ The Illinois General Assembly approved the creation of NIPC on July 6, 1957, three days after the

CA&E suspended rail service to DuPage County. CMAP's purpose was to include the findings in the Go to 2040, long term regional plan.¹⁰⁴

IDOT is using the findings of the Cook-DuPage Corridor Study to develop a plan to alleviate the remaining three lane bottleneck between 25th Ave. and Austin Blvd. Stated goals of the plan

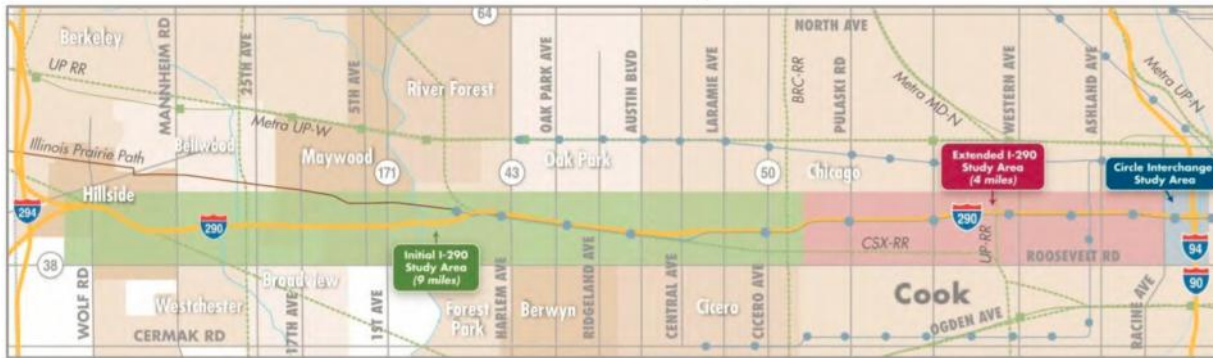


Figure 25 I-290 How do we increase the capacity?

in process are to:

- Improve mobility for regional and local travel
- Improve access to employment
- Improve safety
- Improve transit connections and opportunities
- Improve roadway deficiencies

IDOT's expectation is to widen the highway to eliminate the bottleneck and improve the highway configuration.¹⁰⁵ Since the project is still in the planning stage and no funding has yet been identified, actual widening of the highway is still many years in the future.

The Magic in Our Pockets

By the 1980s despair had set in among highway planners. Expressways had been built and widened, sometimes at terrible cost to the quality of life of individuals and the health of impacted communities, but the highways were just as crowded. Citizens demanded, just as they had in 1925, in 1935, in 1945, in 1955, in 1965, in 1975, in 1985, and in every year in between, that somebody do something about traffic congestion. In describing the intractable problem of congestion, Charles McLean, Operations Manager for the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), was quoted as saying "we don't have too much more magic in our pockets."¹⁰⁶

But they did have magic. In 1960, when the fast lanes west were completed, engineers used pencils and slide rules in their analysis. Motorists used the view out their windshields to assess traffic conditions. Traffic cordon studies were conducted by people standing along the roadways counting the vehicles. The times, however, were changing. By 1963 electronic technology had evolved to allow for installation of ramp metering on the young Congress Expressway. The meters, consisting of little red and green traffic lights on the entrance ramps served to regulate the flow of traffic entering the roadway. The meters served to break up platoons of automobiles emerging from previous traffic lights. The pilot project for metering began with a police officer standing at the top of the ramp, waving one car through at a time.¹⁰⁷

On November 24, 1958, three days after the East-West Tollway opening, police officer Len Baldy took to the sky in a helicopter. Each weekday morning and afternoon Baldy flew over the expressway network, providing direct broadcast of traffic conditions. The era of expressway traffic surveillance had begun.¹⁰⁸



Figure 26 WGN Trafficopter

In January 1961, a central communications center was established for radio and telephone communications, providing for the first time a “real time” sense of traffic conditions on the expressway network. Three months later an Expressway Surveillance Research project was begun, to investigate means of electronic applications to improve traffic flow. In October 1962, the first non-visual traffic monitoring technology was in place. Over the next decade electronic monitoring had progressed to the point that in 1974, IDOT established computerized connections with commercial radio stations to provide real time reports for broadcast over the airwaves.¹⁰⁹ While these advances provided motorists with information beyond the windshield view, information only became available in batches. “Traffic and Weather on the 1s” provided some decision criteria for motorists, but not necessarily at the time they needed it.

In March, 1979 Highway Assistance Radio was activated, whereby immediate travel time information was transmitted directly to car radios using low power roadside AM radio

transmitters. Motorists need only tune in to 1610 on the radio dial and get a traffic prognosis for their own roadways. In 1982 dot-matrix computer display technology facilitated introduction of variable message signs to provide traffic information without the need to turn the radio dial. The rise of cellular telephone use in the 1980s led to establishment of the “*999” incident reporting system, empowering motorists themselves to be part of the traffic management process.¹¹⁰



Figure 27 Real Time Traffic Conditions

The expressway system harnessed the power of the internet in the 1990s to increase motorists’ traffic condition knowledge. In 1993, the United States Department of Transportation designated Gary-Chicago-Milwaukee Corridor (GCM) as an Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) priority corridor. Combining new traffic management technology with regional cooperation GCM, later reconstituted as the Lake Michigan Interstate Gateway Alliance (LMIGA) to use technology to monitor and aggregate current travel time, congestion, incident, construction, special event, and weather information and display it in graphical map display form on the Travel Midwest website.¹¹¹ For the first time motorists planning expressway journeys could comparatively evaluate conditions on different expressways and plan their routes accordingly.

Travel Midwest’s shortcoming was that it didn’t help motorists’ decision making once they were in transit, nor did it address conditions on parallel streets. A motorist approaching

the “Hillside Strangler” might know the expected transit time, but conditions on Roosevelt Road, Washington Blvd. or other alternates were still unknown, and motorists could not make informed decisions in a way that would optimize network capacity.

The new millennium brought still more sophisticated technology, both roadside and in the automobiles. Introduction of geographic positioning system (GPS) technology, real time interactive electronic maps, and hand held smartphones, has combined all the technological advances since the start of the ramp meters more than a half century ago into a new world of empowerment of motorists’ decision making (and driving while distracted).

Out on the East-West Tollway, by then renamed the Ronald Reagan Memorial Tollway, electronic technology expedited traffic flow through the implementation of the I-Pass toll payment process and open road tolling. Beginning on that November day in 1958 when the East-West Tollway opened, motorists waited in short or long or longer lines while one by one, each car inched up to toll gates and drivers tossed coins into the hopper. Relief came, first in the mid-1990s with the introduction of the I-Pass transponder, allowing motorists to pass uninterrupted through specially modified toll gate lanes, albeit at a low rate of speed.¹¹²

The big breakthrough came in 2006 with the institution of the open road tolling system. Using a combination of I-Pass transponder and video vehicle identification technologies, automobile traffic can now flow uninterrupted past the toll gate, reducing motorists travel times and stress levels, and keeping traffic conditions (more) fluid.¹¹³

During the despair of the 1980s, Lyle Saxton, a Federal Highway Administration official, spoke of the day when highways would be automated, where cars would be “...driven in a steady stream of speed and steering instructions relayed from transmitters planted in the road.” “It’s kind of ‘Buck Rogersy’ but construction costs would be comparable to conventional highways.” Prescient words for 1984!¹¹⁴

A Road by Any Other Name...

On that November morning in 1958 when the roadways were joined to create fast lanes to the Fox River, the Cook highway and the DuPage highway were named the Congress Expressway and East-West Tollway respectively. In the many years since Daniel Burnham’s 1909 vision, the two thoroughfares have been labeled with nearly two dozen names and numbers. Burnham originally referred to the great central boulevard heading west as the Grand Axis.¹¹⁵

In the 1920s, as planners conceived of enhancements to existing Jackson or Washington Boulevards, the vision became the “West Side Boulevard.” By the 1930s, the conception of the roadway became that of a limited access thoroughfare and it became known as the West Side Highway or West Side Elevated Highway. In 1924, the Chicago Tribune began using the term “super highway” or “superhighway” to designate extraordinarily wide (200 feet or more) roadways and implying some degree of restricted access.¹¹⁶ Thus the still dreamed of unbuilt roadway between 1928 and 1942 was known the “West Side Super Highway”, to describe its design, but also to remain deliberately vague about its specific location.

Once consensus was reached about location, media reference gradually changed to “Congress St. Superhighway.” By the time the first city segment was opened in 1955, the road had become the “Congress Expressway.” That name would only last nine years. On January 10, 1964, Congress Expressway was renamed the Dwight D. Eisenhower Expressway in honor of the former United States President who was substantially responsible for creation of the Interstate Highway System.¹¹⁷ The renaming was somewhat ironic given President Eisenhower’s opposition to urban expressways. East of the Circle (now Jane Byrne) Interchange (with the Dan Ryan and John F. Kennedy Expressways), through the old post office and across the Clarence Wagner Bridge, the thoroughfare was and is, Congress Parkway.

The tollway segment has a simpler history with regard to names. It opened in November, 1958 as the East-West Tollway and was renamed the Ronald Reagan Memorial Tollway following the former president’s death in 2004.¹¹⁸ So it is that the entire roadway west of the Jane Byrne Interchange out beyond the Fox River is named for Republicans in a Democratic city.

Numbers of the highways have a more complex story. The initial segments of the Congress Expressway were opened before passage of the Interstate Highway Act. It was designated internally for funding purposes as Federal Aid Highway #6. With the institution of the Interstate Highway system the Congress became I-90 and remained so until 1973. In that year, shortly after the completion of the Eisenhower Extension to Schaumburg, the I-90 designation was moved over to the Kennedy Expressway, and the Eisenhower renumbered I-290.¹¹⁹ The

easternmost ½ mile of I-290 in Chicago, east of the Jane Byrne interchange, continues to carry the “Congress” name through its designation as Congress Parkway.

The East-West Tollway began life as Toll U.S. Highway 30. The number was changed to Illinois Highway 190 in 1966, until changed again in 1972 to Illinois Highway 5.¹²⁰ Following the 1973 Arab Oil Embargo, a national speed limit of 55 miles per hour was established as a fuel conservation measure. An unexpected side benefit was an apparent correlation between the lower speed limit and a reduction of highway collision fatalities. In time, however, the speed limit on limited access highways was perceived as unreasonably low. Federal legislation passed in early 1987 lifted the maximum speed limit for “rural interstate highways” to 65 miles per hour. To allow the East-West tollway, then marked as Illinois Highway 5, to qualify as a “rural interstate highway” it was added to the Interstate Highway network and re-signed as I-88.¹²¹ Apparently wide discretionary latitude was allowed in determining what highways were “rural.”

Out west of the Fox River, Reagan Tollway carries yet another number. With the opening of the East West Tollway in 1958, Illinois Highway 55 (Butterfield Road for most of its length) was extended on the west end upon the new tollway for the westernmost five miles to connect with U.S. Highway 30 at Sugar Grove. The number was changed in 1965 to Illinois Highway 56, to avoid confusion with newly built Interstate 55, the Stevenson Expressway. Those five miles west of the Fox River remain signed as Illinois Highway 56 to this day.¹²²

Most recently, the states of Illinois and Missouri have collaborated on the formation of the “Chicago-Kansas City Expressway” (CKC), extending between the cities of its name. Unlike the Congress Expressway which was established as an entirely new road, CKC has stitched together a series of existing roadways, some interstate, some not, some limited-access, some



Figure 28 Names and Numbers

not, to “brand” the corridor. The two purposes are to alleviate congestion on the existing I-55/I-70 corridor and to provide “interstate-like” access to portions of rural western Illinois and northern Missouri that were bypassed in the establishment of the original interstate highway network.

Effective with the passage of Illinois General Assembly Senate Resolution 118 in early 2010, the Eisenhower Expressway and Reagan Tollway were designated as components of the new Chicago-Kansas City Expressway. Since CKC is merely a brand, IDOT designated all Illinois CKC component roads as Illinois State Highway 110.¹²³

“A Time to Break Down, A Time to Build Up”

“To everything there is a season...a time to break down, a time to build up. So said King Solomon circa 950 BCE.¹²⁴ Though King Solomon did not have the Chicago expressway system in mind when he pronounced those words, he certainly did anticipate the impacts of the construction and use of the expressway and the tollway. The purpose of the expressway had

originally been to get people from regional places to the city center. Daniel Burnham's Plan envisioned "...connecting the urban fabric of the city" and "...spatially integrating the region."¹²⁵ The effect of the creation of the highway was ultimately to connect and disconnect, to integrate and segregate, to break down and build up.

Clearing the land for the West Side Superhighway was the "time to break down." Hundreds of homes, factory buildings, commercial buildings, churches, hospitals and schools were demolished, leaving residents and business owners to resume their lives elsewhere. The policy recommended by the Public Roads Administration of taking a full season of land acquisition before beginning construction had adverse consequences. The lengthened lag time left neighborhoods in "destruction limbo", with abandoned buildings and rubble proliferating. A local newspaper, the *Garfieldian* complained that "Organized hoodlums, vandals, morons and just ordinary scavengers loot the vacant buildings that are to be wrecked to make way for the Congress St. highway in broad daylight as well as at night time."

For others, the coming of the expressway was positive. A new level of access to downtown, to other parts of the city, and to the region. Sears, Roebuck, whose headquarters and fulfillment center were located in North Lawndale, just blocks from an entrance to, but out of the path of, the new highway, cited the coming of the expressway as a reason to maintain the company headquarters in the community.¹²⁶

Temporary relocation of the Garfield Park elevated tracks resulted in closure of seven rail stops between Sacramento Blvd. and Racine Ave. Alternative transit services, streetcar and bus,

were available both north and south of the construction site, but longer transit times and general diminishment of the travel experience resulted. More serious, was the loss of the downtown terminal access for the Chicago, Aurora & Elgin Railroad, a circumstance that contributed in large part to the ultimate discontinuance of all service, to the dismay of those homeward bound commuters that July day in 1957.

Though disruptive during the construction process, the net impact for the suburb of Oak Park was generally positive. Since the beginning of meaningful residential development, the CA&E and parallel Baltimore & Ohio Chicago Terminal railroads had cut a wide, surface level swath through the south end of the village. Interruptions resulting from frequent passage of CA&E and rapid transit trains and lengthy, slow freight trains on the adjacent railroad already created a barrier. Moreover the railroads were a safety hazard, with the omnipresent risk of people or vehicles colliding with passing trains or of pedestrians wandering too near to CA&E's exposed electrically charged "third rail." Placement of train and rapid transit tracks in "the trench" did result in closure of various north and south streets, but the railroad and L grade separation ultimately benefited the community.

Farther west, in suburban Maywood, impact consisted primarily of demolition or relocation of houses in the path of the new highway. More westerly still, was the time for building up. Just the anticipation of the coming of the new highway accelerated the development process that had been going on for decades and abetted by 1930s and 1940s federal home loan practices. Residential subdivisions grew like spring flowers. "Building Booms in Suburbs as City Moves Out"

stated the *Chicago Tribune* article heading in May of 1951, nearly a half decade before the opening of the highway. But effect was unmistakable. Northlake, Westchester, La Grange Park, Bellwood, Berkeley, Broadview, and Hillside all ranked among the top ten in housing starts among the west suburbs.¹²⁷

A Villa Park developer made no secret of the coming highway's influence in the naming of the subdivision "Congress Highlands." The development, along Roosevelt Road at Villa Ave. occupied a former farm four miles west of Mannheim Road, the planned west end of the roadway. A spokesman for the developer described that "Modern high-speed motor transportation over Chicago's newest super-highway from the lake front to DuPage County was the main reason for the purchase of the land."¹²⁸ It would be two years before even the western two miles of the highway would open.

Most ironic was the situation in Westchester. The suburb had been promoted in the 1920s by utilities magnate Samuel Insull, who arranged for elevated train service to be extended there in 1926. Onset of the depression stalled development for nearly two decades, with

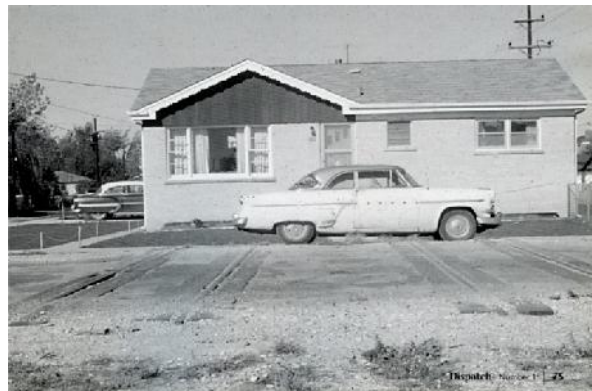


Figure 29 Westchester L tracks in Bellwood

the elevated trains carrying few passengers through the open prairie. By 1951, the Chicago Transit Authority, successor to Insull's Chicago Rapid Transit Company, made the strategic decision to cut the service back to Forest Park...just as residential construction boomed!¹²⁹

Once the expressway and tollway were opened, the land boom intensified and moved farther west, and along with it came retail development. Opening of the Congress Expressway coincided with the opening of the suburban shopping center era. Hillside shopping center opened at Harrison St. and Wolf Rd., one mile west of the Mannheim Rd. end of the Congress Expressway in 1956. The 67,200 square foot shopping plaza was the fourth Chicago area suburban center to open. For anchor tenant Carson, Pirie, Scott, the two level Hillside store was the largest of their five store chain.¹³⁰

Six years later, in 1962, Oak Brook Shopping Center opened at the East-West Tollway and Route 83. The Village of Oak Brook, Oak Brook Shopping Center, and surrounding office complex were all the direct consequence of opening and extending the limited access highway. There was no coincidence. Paul Butler, owner of vast land holdings in the vicinity, monitored closely the tollway development and location. After convincing highway planners to move the Tri-State Tollway alignment to the east to avoid dividing his land, Butler commissioned a master plan to execute his vision for a high-end, exclusive shopping, office, residential and recreational complex.¹³¹

Four years later and two miles west, along the East-West Tollway, the Yorktown Mall opened. When opened in 1968, Yorktown was the fourth largest enclosed shopping mall in the nation, and the 17th regional shopping center in the Chicago area.¹³² The highway influenced both Oak Brook and Yorktown in the attraction of hundreds of thousands of comparatively affluent

new residents to the vicinity, and by extending the market sheds of the retail locations through ease of access from all four directions.

Oak Brook and Yorktown each attracted a “halo” of other retail and economic development especially along Butterfield Road, paralleling the tollway. The result has been a continuous development strip from the Tri-State Tollway on the east to Interstate 355 on the west. By the early 2000s, the East-West Tollway had attracted the next generation of retail development, the Premium Outlet Center, reflecting the continuing outward development process that began with the opening of the Congress Expressway and East-West Tollway in 1958.

Fast lanes west attraction of residential and retail activity was accompanied by the outward movement of research and office facilities. In 1960, Chicago Bridge and Iron moved its corporate headquarters to the new Oak Brook site near the intersection of the East-West and Tri-State Tollways.¹³³ In the same year Sperry & Hutchinson located a regional office and distribution center in Hillside, alongside the Congress Expressway. Within a decade individual corporations had relocated either corporate headquarters or research facilities to free standing buildings at each of the major entrance/exit ramps along the Tollway. Northern Illinois Gas, now NICOR, built at the Route 59 exit in 1962, Bell Labs, an affiliate of Western Electric, broke ground near Naperville Road in 1964. Amoco built and then expanded its offices at Winfield Road between 1969 and 1974.¹³⁴ McDonalds moved out from downtown Chicago to Oak Brook in 1971.



Figure 30 Warrenville Road Office Parks

In the early 1970's land developers, seeing the potential to lure smaller companies out to green field sites along the tollway, began to construct office parks, clusters of buildings along Warrenville Road punctuated by small

lakes, trees and parking lots (figure 30). Corporate West, the Corporetum (emphasizing proximity to the Morton Arboretum), Arboretum Lakes, and similar developments populated Warrenville and Ferry Roads for nine miles. In 1965 there were just eight buildings along the East-West Tollway corridor, by 1978 there were 98 buildings with another 39 under construction.¹³⁵

The speculative building of Opus East and Opus West near the Highland Ave. exit illustrates the dynamic nature of impact. At the time of their conception, the desirable locations were either to the east, near Oak Brook, or to the west, along Warrenville Road. Highland Ave. exit only had tollway access to and from the east. Opus chose the Highland location, anticipating the opening, six years later of the north-south I-355 tollway. A developer spokesman described the locational decision. "We selected this location primarily because of the (Du Page) tollway ... we're at the crossroads of the East - West corridor, and we see a whole new submarket opening here and joining the submarkets of Oak Brook and Naperville."¹³⁶

The highway's attraction and influence extended beyond residential, retail and office development. In the early 1960s the Atomic Energy Commission sought a location for

establishment of a large research facility, requiring an abundance of open land, easy transportation access and proximity to an attractive living environment for the engineers and other employees. DuPage County farmland close to the East-West Tollway fit those criteria. In 1966, eight years after the opening of the highway, the site was chosen and Fermilab was opened in 1973.¹³⁷

Beginning with Bell Labs and Amoco research in the 1960s, and continuing with Fermilab in the 1970s, the tollway's influence became that of a knowledge corridor. By 1987, when the corridor housed 14% of Chicago's total research activity, the organizations along the



Figure 31 Schools in the I-88 Corridor

route banded together and branded themselves as the Illinois Technology and Research corridor.¹³⁸ Branch campuses of numerous colleges and universities now dot the landscape, joining long established institutions such as North Central College and Wheaton College.

Hotels, restaurants, banks, printers, and a whole range of support services have followed the business development to the corridor. The agglomeration is so complete as to make the tollway interchanges centers of new downtowns. The older established residential suburbs flanking the highway, such as Naperville, Downers Grove, Wheaton Glen Ellyn and Lombard have become reoriented as bedroom suburbs to the I-88 business centers.

A time to build up and a time to break down. In the years before the coming of the highway, Downers Grove, Lisle, Naperville, Warrenville and the other DuPage communities were little clusters around the train stations, homogeneous in their racial demographics and outlook. Except for commuters, daily journeys to downtown Chicago for work, or attendance at Chicago sports or entertainment events, the residents were isolated from “citified ways” and content to live their lives in the cult of domesticity.

The coming of the highway, the offices, and the cosmopolitan corporations along Warrenville Road changed all that. With the opening of Bell Labs in Naperville in 1966, thousands of new employees came flooding into the area, looking for homes in their new suburban paradise. Bell Labs, a subsidiary of AT&T, had a non-discriminatory hiring policy. Naperville, the little suburban town where employees wanted to settle, did not have a non-discriminatory housing policy.¹³⁹

Shortly after Bell Labs’ opening, in 1966, a federal housing discrimination suit was brought in Naperville on behalf of “Negroes, both of whom hold Ph.D. degrees” employed at Bell Laboratories. Though the suit was eventually dropped, but it was clearly a time to break down previous attitudes and practices regarding racial exclusion in the communities along the highway. Two years later, in 1968, after considerable spirited discussion and rancor, Naperville did pass an anti-discrimination ordinance.¹⁴⁰

The purpose of the highway had been to create and enhance access between Chicago and its regional surroundings. It did create access, in the sense that travel times were reduced (except sometimes during peak periods), but only for some people travelling some places. The impact of the fast lanes west, with its primary focus on moving automobiles instead of moving people, had been to spread out economic and residential activity and to introduce a pattern of landforms the necessitated the use of automobiles for virtually all access.

Before the coming of the Tollway, public transit systems were designed to move people from concentrated regional fingers of development into the city and out again. All access had been convenient to the train stops. Journeys could be made easily with automobiles. Now, the distributed nature of the employment and activity centers along the highway precludes easy trips by public transit. Transit service providers have tried creatively to provide “reverse commute” resources. The reality is that there are insufficient groupings of individual journey origins and destinations to offer single seat rides or frequency of service. The multi-modal journeys are prohibitively long for commuters and the services are expensive to operate. All with the result that nearly all journeys must be made by automobile. The consequence of this automobile only access is that people back in the city are largely foreclosed from participating in the job opportunity boom along the Technology Corridor.

Fast Lanes to the Future

Limited access highways were planned and built to alleviate or at least manage traffic congestion. Technology has been applied to optimize the highways' capacity. The highways brought changes to the landscape far beyond the imaginations of planners of the earliest 20th century. What's next? Is there as yet more "magic in our pockets?"

Further use of technology in roadway optimization may take the form of high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, wherein a motorist can only use those lanes if he or she is accompanied by at least one other vehicle occupant. Another possibility is extending the toll system to the Eisenhower Expressway in the form of congestion pricing. Congestion pricing can be applied by time of day (peak periods) or by current traffic volume where the toll regularly fluctuates based on time of day or current "priced lane" volume.¹⁴¹

Then there is Lyle Saxton's 1984 "Buck Rogersy" dream of driverless cars. That change is coming. How soon will we whisk past the relocated graves, past the Oak Brook Shopping Center, past the Warrenville Road office complexes and across the obscure bridge over the Prairie Path in autonomously operated cars? Maybe in 15 years? Maybe sooner? Autonomously operated cars are expected to revolutionize highway capacity, according to one estimate, increasing capacity by 273%.¹⁴²

Or perhaps, more than the cars changing or the highways changing, maybe WE will change. A Chicago Tribune headline reads "McDonalds is close to finalizing a deal to relocate its

longtime headquarters to Chicago's Near West Side, a move that could take place as soon as 2018"¹⁴³ The announcement comes in the wake of other smaller, suburbs-to-city, migrations in the past decade. In 2012 Hillshire Farms relocated from Downers Grove, while Guggenheim LLC and Marketing Store both moved headquarters, from Lisle and Lombard, respectively, to downtown Chicago. Now McDonalds. Is this a trend? Is the development influence of fast lanes west waning? Time will tell.

Fast Lanes West

What began as a way to adapt West Side boulevards for use by “newfangled gas buggies” for a few rich folks who wanted to drive them to work has wrought a transformation of the city, the region, and an all pervasive change in social and economic relationships. Imagine the view from the car windows on a journey when the Congress Expressway and East-West Tollway were opened and the view from the car windows now. Save for an occasional building or the cemeteries at the Des Plaines River there are precious few identifiable landmarks along the highways visible in both views between the old Chicago Post Office and the broad expanse of the Fox River crossing.

The story of the creation of the fast expressway and tollway lanes west and the complete transformation they wrought is just one of many occurring in cities across America. A series of public expectations turned into a series of public policies that turned into administrative actions that turned into the use of bulldozers to assert the rights and aspirations of one group of

stakeholders over another group of stakeholders. It is the story of Roger Rabbit, the coming of Cloverleaf Industries and the demise of the “red car” interurban, told over and over again. Who is to judge whether what happened is right or wrong? People and businesses were displaced, dead people were uprooted, but people and businesses achieved previously inconceivable access to all parts of the region.

Out along the Reagan Tollway, a couple of miles east of the Farnsworth Ave. cloverleaf interchange, wedged between Odyssey Fun World recreation center and one of the few remaining DuPage County plowed fields, is a transmission line with a strip of fine white gravel underneath. You have to look for it. No green sign describes it on the highway. It is the Illinois Prairie Path. The recreational trail runs from Aurora and Elgin on the west to Forest Park on the east, on the right-of-way of the Chicago, Aurora & Elgin, whose service suspension on that hot July weekend in 1957, stranded its riders.

The highway crossing of the Prairie Path speaks of more than transformation, it speaks of inversion. In 1905 when the interurban line was new, when Burnham was still in mid-conception of his plan with the broad boulevards, people used the rail line, including the now defunct CA&E for necessary transportation, while boulevards, at least the ones in the city, were intended for recreational purposes. Now the former rail line is the recreational pathway. For necessary trips a person must use fast lanes west.

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- Figure 31 – Schools in the I-88 Corridor - Google Street View

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