

Urban Arterial Developments Which Benefit the Community

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● THE NEW YORK parkway system in the New York City area is the oldest and most comprehensive urban arterial development which benefits its community. Starting with the old Bronx River Parkway Commission in the Bronx and Westchester Counties more than forty years ago, and soon thereafter with the Long Island system, these two suburban systems on the outskirts of New York City in New York State finally were joined within the city itself to form an extensive urban network. The principles governing their establishment, extension, and development were adopted by the State Council of Parks in 1929, after wide experience in the initial development of this program. These principles were amended in 1955 to become effective January 1, 1956 by approval of the State Council of Parks headed by Robert Moses. They are repeated below:

1. Definition. A parkway is an elongated, restricted landscaped park with pavement for the exclusive use of automobiles classed and used as pleasure vehicles, running through it, with neither crossings at grade nor traffic lights, and with access only at specified public entrances.

2. Location. Parkway should be located so as to provide an attractive means of travel, to relieve existing congested trunk highways and to provide easy access to park and recreation areas.

3. Right-of-Way. The width of a parkway right-of-way should be liberal in order to provide for requirements of design and for protection. In the future, the minimum width of a parkway right-of-way should be at least 400 feet except in cases where extraordinary cost or damage would result. Where existing dwellings are affected by parkway improvements or extensions, homes should be relocated for the owners to new properly laid out sites whenever possible.

4. Crossings. No crossings at grade or left turns should be permitted. The question of whether a parkway should be elevated over a local or crossroad, or whether the load or crossroad should be elevated over the parkway should depend upon topography and cost. In flat country and especially in suburban centers every effort should be made to keep the parkway down. Other conditions being equal, the cost of elevating the parkway will be greater than the cost of elevating a narrower crossroad, but the damage to adjacent property may be greater in the latter case. Sufficient land should be obtained at crossings so that private property will not be damaged by the elevation and to afford adequate space for planting and landscaping and for entrances. Accelerating and decelerating lanes should be provided to facilitate access to and exit from the parkway.

5. Entrances. Public entrances and exits should be spaced a considerable distance apart and normally should be constructed only in connection with the elimination of important crossings. In heavily populated suburban areas, interchanges with full access are desirable where cross roads are of major importance, but the number of roads where access drives are provided should be kept to a minimum. Private entrances should not be permitted.

6. Pavements. Parkway should include two separate, hard-surfaced paved roadways, each with a minimum of two lanes, each designed for safe, uninterrupted traffic in each direction. Grades and curves on one paved roadway may be completely independent of those required on the other and generally the minimum curvature and maximum grade should be determined by local conditions and the established maximum speed limit. Steep grades and sharp curves should be avoided. The two paved roadways should be separated from each other by a dividing strip and from adjacent properties by a protective landscaped strip. Both such strips should be of varying width as may be deter-

mined by topography, land value, curvature and necessary connections to intersecting roads. Wherever the right-of-way is sufficiently wide and there is sufficient prospective use, bridle paths, bicycle paths and pedestrian walks should be considered.

7. **Bridges.** Bridges should be designed not only for strength but for appearance and minimum necessary maintenance. Architecture, appearance and landscape treatment are as important in the design of parkway bridges as structural features. Generally, bridges should have stone facing.

8. **Planting.** Planting and landscaping of parkway are fully as important as pavements and bridges, and should be designed to provide a scenic setting and wherever necessary to mask out glaring headlights and to screen out undesirable nearby developments. No state parkway should be constructed without assurance of adequate funds for planting and landscaping. To avoid excessive maintenance costs plant material indigenous to the site should generally be used in plantings and the areas of open spaces and of trees and shrubs should be properly balanced.

9. **Lighting.** Where traffic conditions make parkway lighting necessary, the poles and fixtures should be appropriately rustic, and should blend with landscaping and other parkway structures. The feed for the lighting system should be underground and no overhead wires should be permitted.

10. **Structures.** There should be no structures along a state parkway excepting those necessary to its normal use as a driveway and to incidental recreational facilities on its borders. Filling stations and other necessary parkway structures should be attractive in appearance and simply and appropriately designed in permanent materials.

11. **Zoning Restriction.** The area within 500 ft of a parkway should be zoned by appropriate authorities against commercial and industrial uses, and so as to encourage a high-class residential development. Such zoning should especially prohibit billboards and other forms of outdoor advertising.

12. **Signs.** Signs to guide and regulate traffic should be kept to a minimum and be simple, clear and large enough to be easily read at the regulated speed so that the flow of traffic will not be retarded by indecision.

The provisions of Section 675 of the Conservation Law which authorizes the state Park Commission to regulate signs within 500 ft of state parkways should be strictly enforced.

13. **Subdivision Planning.** Marginal roads should be required by local planning authorities in connection with their approval of plans for subdivisions abutting upon a parkway. Only in certain unusual cases where the topography, size of the tract or existence of previously filed subdivision maps preclude such marginal roads should exceptions be made, and in these instances the local authorities should require the developer to provide screen plantings, fencing and deep rear or side yards for all lots adjacent to the parkway.

14. **Public Utilities.** Public utility lines and pipes which must cross a parkway should be installed underground. The regional park commission should obtain the cooperation of local public utility companies in the placing of pole lines at least 100 ft distant from the parkway right-of-way line.

The urban expressways for mixed arterial traffic already constructed in New York City include many of these parkway principles. The rights-of-way necessarily were narrowed to landscaped shoulders but landscaping has been provided wherever there has been room for it. Stone bridges have been replaced by concrete, brick, and steel structures. The larger dimensions of the pavements for both truck and pleasure automobile traffic necessarily occupy a greater proportion of the rights-of-way but the structures have been attractive.

The wide right-of-way required by expressways is in itself a large and desirable open space in the normally congested urban area. The value to the community of this open space can be immeasurably enhanced by proper landscape treatment and marginal recreational development. The trees and grassed slopes of a properly landscaped

right-of-way, in addition to beautifying the community through which it passes and bringing a touch of the suburbs to the congested city, also provide an effective visual screen and noise buffer between the arterial traffic and the adjacent community.

Marginal recreational facilities which can become part of the arterial development include playgrounds, sitting areas, footpaths, bridle paths, promenades, overlooks, and even small beach developments.

Wherever possible, recreational facilities have been provided along the margin of the expressways in New York City. As the expressway curves across the normal grid pattern of city streets, it inevitably leads to the creation of many odd shaped remnants of property and provides opportunity for the construction of recreational areas varying in size from large neighborhood playgrounds to small sitting areas. The larger remnants are adapted as neighborhood playgrounds and include a comfort station, kindergarten play facilities, facilities for the younger teenage groups, a playfield and, where possible, facilities for court games. The smaller areas are adapted as sitting areas. Some are merely shaded areas with benches; others may contain a sand pit and some open space to which mothers may bring young children for safe play; still others contain game tables where the senior members of the community can enjoy a quiet game of checkers or chess. These playgrounds and sitting areas have been not only beneficial to the community for recreational purposes but have been valuable safety measures in keeping children from the side slopes and intercepting them from crossing arterial traffic.

Expressways in the neighborhood of housing developments have, of course, been coordinated with the housing authorities.

The expressways recently built in New York City have been constructed by a number of agencies including the New York State Department of Public Works, the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, and the Borough Presidents. Those built by the State Department of Public Works have been constructed with Federal aid.

In addition to the fundamental traffic relief for which expressways are primarily designed, their most important contribution benefiting the community is in opening up corridors through the city which inevitably end up with better marginal improvements, both public and private. The effect of this can be seen on every expressway recently built in New York City. For example, the great housing developments along the East River Drive would not have happened without the waterfront arterial improvement. Conversion of old private homes on Columbia Heights above the New York City harbor into boarding houses was stopped, and their return to first-class small apartments and private buildings came about following the construction of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. The recent construction of the Queens-Midtown section of the Long Island Expressway, built by the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority through a heavy industrial area, has resulted, in a little more than a year, in junk piles being replaced by modern industrial and institutional buildings. Van Wyck Expressway has also made marked improvements to the community.

These are only a few examples of mixed traffic arterial expressways actually completed in the last few years in New York City. The marginal developments and neighborhood rejuvenations and improvements, following the construction of the network of parkways for pleasure traffic in and around New York City, have had tremendous impact over the last thirty years. Whole neighborhoods have been rejuvenated. Waste lands have been made accessible. Waterfronts, which were partly junk yards, have been replaced with parks along the Hudson River.

The vast developments of the previously inaccessible meadow lands of Jamaica Bay are attributable almost wholly to the influence of the Belt Parkway. Prior to the construction of the Henry Hudson Parkway and the Henry Hudson Bridge, the ridge known as Riverdale was pre-empted by large estates assessed by the acre and yielding only a modest revenue to the city. Today, property values have spiraled. This ridge is now the site of numerous suburban homes and large garden apartment houses which have enormously increased assessed values.

The construction of Shore Parkway has served and expanded residential use of adjacent areas. Large developments of apartment houses have been built along Shore Road farther south at Gravesend Bay, and in the area west of Ocean Parkway many of garden-

type construction. Intensively developed subdivisions of small private homes have been erected facing Gravesend Bay.

The privately owned land adjacent to Grand Central Parkway has become one of the most attractive residential areas of the entire city, with developments ranging from two-story garden-type apartment projects to medium-and high-priced private homes.

The principles which resulted in the successful development of the New York City parkway system should be applied, with modification, to the huge expressway and arterial program for mixed traffic. The corridors through which the mixed traffic arteries will pass will be, on the average, of less width because the vacant land seldom exists through cities where mixed traffic routes must be placed. Realism dictates modification from parkway architectural standards, but the niceties of design should not be ignored. The dimensions of the expressways will be different and parkway details need not be copied, but the effect on the neighborhoods through which the arteries will be constructed will be beneficial if comparable rigid standards are followed.