

Property Values as Affected by Highway Landscape Developments

MORRIE CHERNER

Landscape Engineer, Cook County Highway Department

•BECAUSE there are no known statistics or precise formulas to gage the true effect of highway plantings on adjoining property, it is apparent that the information and data available must be judged in a broad manner, and any conclusions drawn must be in the form of a generalization.

The greatest changes in land, both physically and economically, in the Chicago land area have occurred on the sites adjacent to the Chicago Metropolitan Expressway System. When completed, a total of 120 miles of expressways will be in operation, radiating in all directions from the central business district (the "Loop") to connections with interstate expressways and toll roads at the boundaries of Cook County.

From the congested Loop these expressways pass through every type of zoned land conditions, including slums, that exist in any large city. Eighty-two miles of existing expressways pass through single- and multiple-residential districts, commercial and industrial areas, educational and recreational sites, and they have direct access to railroad stations and airports. Because many portions of the expressway network have been given more intense landscape treatment than other roads, except those in the Chicago Parks Boulevard System, this study has been limited to a portion of the expressway system.

Limitations of time made it necessary to confine investigations to Edens Expressway, the most northerly route; to J. F. Kennedy Expressway, the O'Hare Airport Highway and to D. D. Eisenhower, an east-west expressway.

Not being trained as real estate brokers, bankers or economists, it was decided to pursue three available avenues of approach to obtain cogent facts and data, as follows:

1. Trace the changes in values of property adjoining expressways, and areas within a half mile range, to note the effects, if any, of living along a modern highway as compared to a convenient location a short distance away;
2. Investigate the resale of excess property by the Cook County Highway Department for changes in values; and
3. Conduct a house-to-house survey of the actual experiences, reactions and opinions of people living in the vicinity of these roads.

The prime target was Edens Expressway. Its fifteen miles became operational in 1951, and it has had greater changes occur along its borders than along any of the Chicago expressways. Ever since its opening, this road has been a vital factor in a tremendous and fantastic change in land development patterns. Most of the mileage of Edens adjoins some of the better suburban neighborhoods which contain thousands of homes, large shopping centers, two \$5,000,000 high schools and a great number of fine commercial establishments constructed in areas that were formerly open farmland or old abandoned subdivisions untouched since the depression years.

Edens passes through a number of higher-income villages and towns, and for most of its length is at grade with surrounding terrain so that the adjacent residents look directly across and into the expressway. The landscaping, therefore, should be of

vital importance in these neighborhoods, and should definitely influence the character and values of the surrounding countryside.

The 16.7 miles of the J. F. Kennedy Expressway, on the other hand, runs its course through old established neighborhoods of Chicago and its northwest suburbs to its terminus at O'Hare Field, one of the world's largest airports. It is logical to presume that the airport itself would have a direct effect on the value of property along this highway. An entirely different aspect of the problem was analyzed along this expressway. The investigation here was limited to cut sections with adjacent areas occupied with multiple dwellings and apartment buildings from which the residents looked "down-into" the right-of-way.

On Eisenhower Expressway, which cuts through 14.5 miles of the west side of Chicago and the western suburbs, attention was focused on the slum area just west of the Loop and through the established Village of Maywood where the highway was opened in 1954. The area in Maywood was chosen because extensive plantings have created a more parklike landscape effect than on any of the other expressway sites located in heavily populated areas. This particular section is also in cut and its borders contain a mixture of single-family units and small apartment buildings.

Olcotts Land Value Blue Book of Chicago was used as a guide in tracing the changes in land values along the sections of these three expressways. This publication is issued yearly and is, in fact, the "bible" of property values in the Chicago and Cook County areas. Inasmuch as negotiations for right-of-way acquisitions were actually started in 1939, that year was used as a starting point for the study, and the following years of 1945, 1950, 1955, and 1963 were used to gain a fair representation of the changes in values.

According to the charts, land values remained static during the war years, doubled shortly after the war, and then increased at a fantastic rate after the advent of the expressways system. In some instances, these increases have been as high as 500 percent—due not only to the expressways but more probably to prosperity and the population explosion. Inasmuch as this pattern, no doubt, has occurred in areas far distant from the expressways, a most interesting observation is that the value of property has risen and remained stable in areas adjacent to the expressways just as it has in areas two and three blocks removed. Thus, there is an implication that landscaping probably affected adjacent properties so as to impart a value equal to lots several blocks away, which are considered more desirable.

This is even more surprising because the subdividers and builders along Edens always priced homes along the expressway at several thousand dollars less than those a block away, yet, in a comparatively few years involving few resales, these "close in" homes are equal in value with adjoining homes.

Although values have doubled along the Kennedy Expressway, the fact remains that adjacent property values have increased along with the more distant desirable properties. Similar changes have taken place through the slum area of Eisenhower Expressway where rehabilitation and remodeling of existing undesirable property have occurred due to the spaciousness and green freshness of the highway, and the influence of a new transportation facility and its promise of rapid transit.

This same pattern of land value increases was found associated with the resale of excess property along Edens Expressway. Two typical examples were 8,100 sq ft of land originally purchased in 1944 as part of a unit for \$1,333.26, and resold in 1959 for \$3,600. Two triangular parcels, purchased as part of full lots in 1943 for \$796.73, were sold for \$3,150 in 1960 without benefit of any change in zoning to affect the values. Again the increase must be attributable to proximity to a landscaped highway.

The third phase of the investigation was based on a house-to-house survey conducted on a modest scale, because the people interviewed (150) constituted a small percentage of the population living along the expressways. Inexperience in poll and opinion surveys is a factor to be considered; however, the results have an important bearing on the conclusions arrived at. Following are the landscape survey questions and answers:

1. How long have you resided here?
 Edens 5 yr (House)
 Kennedy 3 yr (Apts.)
 Eisenhower 19 yr (Mixed)
2. Did you live here prior to the construction of the Expressway?
 Edens 3% Yes 97% No
 Kennedy 20% Yes 80% No
 Eisenhower 50% Yes 50% No
3. Why did you choose to live near the Expressway?
 Edens 74% House, neighborhood, convenience of highway
 Kennedy 80% House, neighborhood, convenience of highway
 Eisenhower 50% House, 50% relocated by construction
4. Does the noise disturb you?
 Edens 83% No
 Kennedy 67% No
 Eisenhower 50% No
5. Do you think that the Expressway has affected the value of your home?
 Edens 40% No
 Kennedy 50% No
 Eisenhower 33% No
6. Do you consider the Expressway a thing of beauty?
 Edens 70% Yes
 Kennedy 100% Yes
 Eisenhower 80% Yes
7. Due to the landscaping?
 Edens 100% Yes
 Kennedy 83% Yes
 Eisenhower 100% Yes
8. Do you think that there is a sufficient number of trees and shrubs planted on the Expressway in the view from your home?
 Edens 70% Yes
 Kennedy 50% Yes
 Eisenhower 67% Yes
9. Would you like to see trees and shrubs planted so as to block out the view of the Expressway from your home?
 Edens 14% Yes
 Kennedy 17% Yes
 Eisenhower 0% Yes
10. After living here and knowing what it's like to live near an Expressway would you consider purchasing another home near an Expressway?
 Edens 69% Yes
 Kennedy 83% Yes
 Eisenhower 50% Yes
11. Multi-residence building: Has the Expressway affected rental of your apartment(s)?
 Edens 73% Increased
 Kennedy 100% Increased
 Eisenhower 50% Increased
12. Do the tenants stay longer?
 Edens -
 Kennedy 100% Yes
 Eisenhower 70% Yes
13. Comments:

It is interesting to note that: (a) 64 percent were willing to purchase another house adjacent to the highway, (b) 74 percent would like additional landscaping in their area of the expressway, (c) 44 percent did not think that the highway would affect the value of their property in any way, (d) only 25 percent wanted a screen planted to block

their view of the highway, and (e) almost 100 percent agreed that the beauty of the highway was due to the landscaping.

In answer to the general comments question, the consensus of opinion indicated that on Edens Expressway people purchased their homes because they wanted the particular building, liked the neighborhood, wanted the direct access convenience of the expressway to get to work and recreation, and preferred to view the expressway planting and openness rather than look across the street at a neighbor's house. The noise problem was minor and only affected those sections where trucks "gun" their motors to drive up a grade under a structure.

On Kennedy Expressway the apartment dwellers and home owners were most happy to exchange a crowded built-up street location for the open cut area of greenery which this highway presented. This green belt, in fact, drew people to its borders for the open beauty as well as for the convenience of transportation.

On Eisenhower Expressway the road was a definite factor in revitalizing the slum areas adjacent to the highway. Obviously, the grass and plantings encouraged these people to "breathe" again and certainly stimulated the cleaning and rehabilitation of the area. In the Maywood section of Eisenhower Expressway, the residents have come to regard the area as their park—to be enjoyed visually, not physically. Many of these residents were relocated from their original homes on the right-of-way, preferred to remain in the neighborhood, and were happy with their decision because of the beauty of the expressway planting.

Now that the data have been compiled for portions of the three expressways, what conclusions can be drawn? It is obvious that property values along these roads have increased from 100 to 500 percent; residents are cognizant of the landscaping and will increase their appreciation of it as the plants mature. Recognition must be given to the fact that the landscape designs were intended to benefit the driving public and that the by-product has been the enhancement of the areas adjacent to these highways.

Imagine the adverse effects if these same roads were merely pavements, retaining walls and steel structures. When the original plans for the expressway system were announced many years ago there were vehement objections from home owners associations, nature lovers, and others with selfish interests. They thought in terms of individual inconvenience and had the mistaken notion that their properties would decrease in value with the advent of the expressways. After turf and plantings of woody species were established, no objections were heard from individuals or organizations; only comment indicating surprise at the limited amount of planting. Property values along the expressways certainly have kept pace with those in surrounding areas.

The exodus of great numbers of families and businesses to "suburbia" was spurred by the opening of the expressway system and the lack of adequate middle income housing in the city. It does not appear that this trend will be reversed, especially when it is noted that since 1949 the number of families owning more than one car has increased from 1,500,000 to 12,000,000—meaning that one of every five families is now a multiple-car owner. While personal incomes have risen $1\frac{1}{2}$ times in this period and the suburban population has doubled, the increase in multiple-car ownership has been sevenfold. Because limited public transportation has exerted so tremendous an influence, it becomes increasingly clear that the interstate highways will become the life lines of this country.

Approximately 575,000 cars per day use the 82 miles of existing expressways in the Chicago metropolitan area. This represents more than 17 million trips per month. Because the character of urban environment precludes long scenic views, but affords instead mile after mile of "built up" background, the landscape developments have provided values far in excess of the initial $1\frac{1}{2}$ percent of the total cost of construction. Landscape plantings have influenced the constantly increasing value of adjoining properties by far more than $1\frac{1}{2}$ percent.