

Community Conflict and Highway Planning

The Case of a Town That Didn't Want a Freeway

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An objective analysis is attempted of the types of community conflicts that develop when a new freeway is proposed through an urban area. This is done chiefly through a case study showing what actually occurred in one particular city. Although the name of the city and the names of the participants are disguised, the events are based on facts and describe accurately the chief events and the conflicts that developed over a period of 12 years between a State highway department and a local community and its officials over the choice of a freeway location through that city. Although the case describes events and conflicts in just one city, the experience is typical of what has happened and what continues to happen in many cities throughout the country. The case study, together with an analysis of the chief events and the public issues raised by the conflict, gives insight into the fundamental questions that arise with the location of every new highway in an urban area. Also, for public officials involved in selecting highway routings and in gaining public support for new highways, the case and its analysis will suggest approaches that can be used to encourage constructive public debate of the crucial issues involved at a time in a way that can facilitate a wise decision on the final location. By examining the case of a community where attitudes and events frustrated any real possibility for a calm and dispassionate public discussion of the highway location problems and where public passions prolonged and impeded a rational decision on the location by the highway department, attention is focused on the need for better procedures that involve the public in the decision in a more constructive way in harmony with the democratic philosophy of government.

•ONE OF THE major problems facing the contemporary American city is that of adjusting itself to the automobile as the primary urban transportation form. The adjustment calls for a variety of programs, ranging from provisions for additional parking and the regulation of traffic to the location and construction of modern freeways. The freeway, a novelty just a few years ago, is rapidly becoming commonplace, particularly in the larger American city. The master plans of virtually all urban areas provide for freeway construction immediately or in the near future.

URBAN HIGHWAY PLANNING AS INTERGOVERNMENTAL PROBLEM

Highways and Urban Development

The recognition of the need for a freeway is one thing; the resolution of all the questions and conflicts connected with its construction is something else again. Few capital improvements pose as many serious questions for city officials and the citizenry as does

a new freeway. In one way or another, a freeway touches the lives of virtually all citizens of a community and is a key lever in controlling and directing the future physical development of the city.

Depending on where the freeway is located, either it can act to strengthen the central business center by improving access from the suburbs to the central city, or it can work to encourage decentralization and hasten the demise of the central business center. Between these extremes, lesser variations in the location of a transportation route will likewise influence urban growth and may alter the relative attractiveness of different parts of a city for business or for residences. A freeway interchange located near an existing shopping center will greatly enlarge the center's market area and thereby improve business. Its corollary effect on other centers may be to reduce trade, or in the case of marginal businesses, even to bring bankruptcy.

Land values and the attractiveness of open land for commercial and industrial development often undergo startling changes as the results of new highways. Similarly, the character of residential areas may be altered by the changed pattern of traffic movements on local streets which often follows from a new highway. Streets that were once relatively quiet and free of heavy traffic may be transformed into thoroughfares if they become connections between freeway interchanges and points of traffic generation. However, streets in other neighborhoods may experience the reverse effect, being changed from busy routes carrying noisy commercial truck traffic to quiet residential streets.

All such changes carry with them a far-reaching impact on the daily lives of people. Virtually every person living in the urban area is affected in some way by a new freeway. Those directly in the path of the road lose their homes and businesses to make way for the highway. To some families this brings personal distress and sometimes considerable hardship, even if the monetary compensation is fair and reasonable by market standards. Conversely, other persons and groups are benefited by the highway. Thousands each day travel to their jobs in less time and with greater convenience. Downtown business men find not only that more people from outlying areas shop downtown, but that the cost and time to bring in the goods they need and to make their deliveries to customers drop.

The effect of the highway permeates all parts of the city and beyond. This impact will be felt not only for years or for decades, but perhaps for centuries. Few public works projects are as permanent as highways. Few have such a profound effect on the lives of cities and people.

Because of its widespread impact and because of its permanence, a proposed new freeway poses crucial questions for the community and its leaders. Besides the choices it makes necessary for the community as a whole, the freeway proposal impinges on the individual interests of numerous smaller groups. Conflicts between groups with conflicting interests inevitably erupt. The solution of these conflicts and the resolution of the many public issues that are raised are some of the important challenges facing the people living in metropolitan areas today. They also create some of the most difficult and pressing problems confronting the several levels of government involved.

Transportation Policy and the City

One of the complicating factors in establishing transportation policies in urban areas arises from the necessary involvement of several levels of government. At first glance, the issues raised may appear to be a matter of local interest to be settled by the people of the city within their own political structure. In the case of freeways, however, the urban portion of the route is usually only part of a State route that extends far beyond the city boundary. Its impact reaches to many other parts of the State. On the Federal level, the route may be viewed as a segment of a national system of highways tying together key areas of the country and as an influence on both the national economy and the general welfare. Questions relating to the location of urban freeways, therefore, give rise not only to conflicts between private groups, but also to clashes of policy and points of view reflecting the interests of different levels of government.

Perhaps the chief reason the city has not been able to retain control of the urban transportation problem and its solution is financing. Urban freeways are extremely

expensive; costs running from \$5 million to \$10 million per mile are not unusual. Few cities have been able to raise such large sums for highway improvement within the tax structures available to them. For a long time the State and Federal governments took little interest in urban highway problems. They took the position that the provision of urban highways was really the city's problem, to be solved by the city government with its own funds. In the 1920's and 1930's they felt that because the cities already had good paved streets, the main problem was to improve and surface the rural roads and to "get the farmer out the mud."

The urban problem, therefore, lay virtually neglected for two decades while traffic congestion mounted. Soon after World War II, however, fears of "traffic strangulation" were being voiced in major cities throughout the country.

Federal Aid to Urban Highways

A 1944 change in the Federal-aid highway law helped focus the attention of State governments on the urban highway problem. In that year Federal-aid funds were made available to the States on a 50/50 matching basis specifically to finance highway improvements in urban areas. The total Federal funds available, however, were feeble compared to the size of the problem. It was not until 1956 that a large-scale attack was launched on the highway problem, including routes through urban areas. This came in the form of a Federal law providing for the construction of a 41,000-mile National System of Defense and Interstate Highways. The general routing of the Interstate system had been designated as early as 1944 as the key highway system in the nation, a system that would interconnect 90 percent of all the cities with populations of 50,000 or more. Almost half of the total estimated cost of \$41 billion to be spent on the system was scheduled for freeways in urban areas. The Federal government would pay 90 percent of the cost. Administration of the program in each State—including the location, design, and construction of the urban sections—rests with the State highway department, subject to review and approval by the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads at each stage in the development of the project.

The Interstate highway program stimulated the upsurge of urban highway planning and building that has been in progress in the past eight years. In 1956 most of the highway departments had a long backlog of urban highway deficiencies crying for attention, but which they were unable to act on because of inadequate funds. Public demands for relief of traffic congestion in the cities were mounting everywhere. Consequently, as soon as the promise of Federal funds became definite, State highway engineers moved rapidly to advance plans for urban freeways. In many cases they moved so rapidly that some city officials and city planners protested that they were not being given an opportunity to integrate highway plans with their master plans for the city.

Urban Highway Planning by State Highway Departments

In the initial stages of the Interstate program, except in a few cases, there was little close consultation between State highway engineers and local officials and planners about future highway plans. One of the reasons was the speed necessary to get the program under way. Another reason was that both the responsibility and the authority for carrying out the highway program were in the hands of highway engineers, many of whom saw the highway location problem almost exclusively in terms of moving traffic and keeping down cost. They did not have extensive prior experience in constructing freeways in urban areas, and they viewed urban freeway location and design as just a more complicated version of their experience in rural areas. The new engineering problems alone were enormous and would demand their full attention. As for finding the right location for the freeway, some highway engineers had been making urban traffic studies for years and the needed solutions seemed clear to them. They felt confident of how to locate the routes to give the most traffic service at the least cost; they were eager to get on with the job. They showed little understanding or patience for the numerous and time-consuming consultations and debates needed to win local support in the city. Nor did they appreciate the power of public opinion. Consequently, the public information machinery of the State highway departments during the early years of the program was weak and sluggish when measured against the monumental program they had to carry out.

Similarly, in the early stages of the program, the rapport between highway engineers and city planners was strained. The highway engineers, believing they knew what the solution to the urban highway problem was, were anxious to proceed with the steps that would lead to early construction. They were inclined to be unsympathetic to the urgings of local city planners who wanted more time to study the overall problem to find an ideal highway location that would harmonize with other city objectives. The city planners, on the other hand, were resentful of the intrusion of highway engineers into their bailiwicks. Many were genuinely alarmed at the possible harmful effects on the city of a highway location that was conceived too narrowly, that is, in terms of vehicular traffic alone. They recognized perhaps better than anyone else that any important transportation artery, particularly a freeway, structures the growth of a community more than any other single influence. They saw the traffic-carrying function of the freeway as only one part of the contribution it should make and wanted to use the freeway to promote other values as well—for example, to physically separate incompatible land uses, to create better neighborhoods, and to stimulate the growth of new industries in selected parts of the city.

The highway engineers, though generally sympathetic to these additional goals, became frustrated by the city planners' inability to translate generalities into specific and workable design recommendations. They were also reluctant to change the location or design of freeways (and thereby to enlarge the costs of right-of-way and construction) for city planning goals that to them seemed speculative at best.

An additional antagonism that produced disharmony between the city planner and the highway engineer was the viewpoint of some city planners that freeways built into the downtown area did not solve any problems but rather aggravated those already existing. These city planners saw improved rail mass transit as a better investment than freeways, and often were outspoken in publicizing this view. Some particularly articulate planners received national publicity when they denounced the entire Interstate program as ill-conceived and a threat to our cities.

Inexperienced in their understanding of city politics, inadequately prepared either by inclination or skill for effective public relations, and suspect by the city planners with whom they should have been naturally allied, the highway engineers, once they began to get serious in urban areas, soon found that they had a tiger by the tail. Storms of protest erupted throughout our cities at any and every proposal that was introduced, public hearings were crowded with angry mobs who shouted derision at the moderators and the highway departments, and letters of protest flooded the governors' offices and the offices of Congressmen in Washington.

The early violent public reactions to urban freeway proposals stunned and shocked the State highway departments into awareness of the complex of values and interest which were inextricably intermeshed with their proposals. It confronted them with the difficult problem of how to discover all the values and interests involved in the question, how to interpret them correctly, and finally how to combine them with engineering considerations so as to achieve the greatest public benefit in the final design.

Highway Public Hearings

To insure that highway engineers would hear all sides of the issue before proceeding to carry out a highway proposal, the Congress in enacting the 1956 Highway Act provided that a public hearing be held on any Federal-aid urban highway project before any irrevocable action is taken to execute the project. The purpose of the highway public hearing is described as follows in instructions to field offices by the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads, the agency responsible for overall administration of the highway program:

The objective of the public hearings is to provide an assured method whereby the State can furnish to the public information concerning the State's highway construction proposals, and to afford every interested resident of the area an opportunity to be heard on any proposed Federal-aid project for which a public hearing is to be held. At the same time the hearings

afford the State an additional opportunity to receive information from local sources which would be of value to the State in making its final decision as to which of possibly several feasible detailed locations should be selected.

The hearings are not intended to be a popular referendum for the purpose of determining the location of a proposed improvement by a majority vote of those present. They do not relieve the duly constituted officials of a State highway department of the necessity for making decisions in State highway matters for which they are charged with full responsibility. The public hearing procedure is designed to insure the opportunity for or the availability of a forum to provide factual information which is pertinent to the determination of the final location considered by the State to best serve the public interest and on which improvement projects are proposed to be undertaken. (1)

The Federal law itself requires that any highway department when submitting a Federal-aid project located in an urban area to the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads for approval must certify that a hearing has been held and that the department has considered the economic effects of the location.

The public hearing, although it has succeeded in providing an opportunity for all those interested in the proposal to express their views, has not visibly reduced the controversy that usually follows an urban highway proposal. Some observers even believe that the hearing, by providing a convenient platform for public opposition by small private interests, actually increased the frequency and intensity of conflict and often became spectacles tending to exaggerate both the size and severity of opposition to highway proposals.

It is sometimes not possible to resolve all controversies raised by a proposed urban freeway by the time a final decision on the routing must be made. In the case of most States the final authority to fix a highway location rests with the head of the State highway department. If a local community is seriously dissatisfied with the highway department's decision, its final resources may be to appeal to the Governor of the State, or to influence the State Legislature to enact legislation preventing the highway department from carrying out its action.

In the case of Federal-aid projects subject to approval by the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads, the local community also can appeal to the Federal agency to withhold approval, at least until the community has had an opportunity to present its side of the case. Failing proof of dereliction or outright fraud, it is not clear on what grounds the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads could reject a route decision by a State highway department which usually has full legal authority to make the decision. Undoubtedly, if the Bureau had grounds for believing that the location proposed by the State is seriously deficient and against the general public interest, it could force the highway agency to reconsider its proposal by refusing to approve the project for Federal financing. Where the State's proposal is fundamentally sound, however, and where the dispute with the local community is simply one of difference of opinion, it is difficult to see how under the law the Federal agency could follow any other course but to uphold the State highway department.

Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962

The experience of State highway departments in urban highway planning since 1956 has produced in many States better procedures than existed then and immediately thereafter for soliciting public views on highway proposals and for achieving close cooperative relationships with local officials. Section 9 of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962 carries this trend even further by requiring that after July 1, 1965, all Federal-aid projects in urban areas of more than 50,000 population must be based on an urban transportation planning process carried on cooperatively by States and local communities. Whereas this new provision of the Federal law will undoubtedly further advance the structure for State-local cooperation, sources of possible conflict over urban highway proposals will still be numerous. The highway administrator will always be challenged

to appraise correctly the potential for community conflict inherent in his proposals and to take advance action to reduce such conflict to the extent possible. Recognizing that the conditions described thus far and in the following case have certainly improved in many States, the fundamental issues and principles brought out here are nevertheless as relevant to the future as they were to the past.

THE CASE OF A TOWN THAT DIDN'T WANT A FREEWAY

North-South Highway Through North Ridge

Many of the problems and conflicts involved in reaching a decision on the location of an urban freeway are illustrated by the case of a specific American city which, for present purposes, we shall call North Ridge. The actual name of the city and the names of the participants have been fictionalized. The real names are of no special significance for this purpose. What is important is the nature of the conflicts that occurred and the events that led to their occurrence. Though these conflicts are reported as they happened in one particular city, many readers will recognize them as typical of community conflicts in cities throughout the country where freeway locations are being debated. It is this universality that makes these conflicts of interest to highway administrators. By exposing some of the fundamental issues that lay behind highway conflicts, this report aims to encourage and assist highway administrators to examine objectively similar conflicts they may encounter in their own experience so that they can plan in the early stages of projects courses of action to minimize conflict and to reduce opposition to highway proposals by local officials and by the general public.

The controversy over the location of the north-south highway through North Ridge raged for a period of 15 years, from 1945 to 1960. The conflict was a stubborn contest of wills between the State highway department, which had the responsibility for locating and constructing the highway, and the local officials who saw the highway as a threat to the preservation of their community in the form its citizens desired to keep it.

Ten alternate lines for the route were studied during the 15-year period before a final decision was made: eight developed by the State highway department and two proposed by representatives from North Ridge. The final location adopted was not the line most preferred by the highway department, nor was it a line desired by the town itself. It was a location that the town fought unrelentingly to the bitter end, when its final appeal to the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads in Washington was denied.

The case of North Ridge raises a number of questions of interest to the student of highway administration. Recognizing the mutual interests of both the State highway agency and the government of North Ridge in the location of the freeway, is there some procedure that would have made possible a better and an earlier resolution of the conflicting points of view? Was the highway department too narrow in the factors it was willing to consider in selecting the highway location? Were the city officials of North Ridge too parochial in their own point of view, willing to sacrifice arbitrarily consideration of regional transportation needs for their own local interests? Did the State highway department adequately consult with North Ridge officials about the highway location? And most importantly, is it possible to make the highway public hearing a more effective forum for a constructive public discussion of broad questions of values and goals related to the freeway, instead of a protest rally as was the case in North Ridge?

These are some of the questions the reader should keep in mind throughout the following report. Although neither the case itself nor the discussion following the case will provide complete answers to these questions, they should expand the reader's awareness of the nature of these crucial issues. Hopefully, they may also expose insights into the directions that can be followed to find better solutions to the problem of determining highway locations through procedures consistent with the rights of local communities and the democratic process.

A Route Through North Ridge

The first discussions on the part of the State Highway Commissioner with the Mayors of Ridge City and North Ridge about the possibility of a north-south freeway through

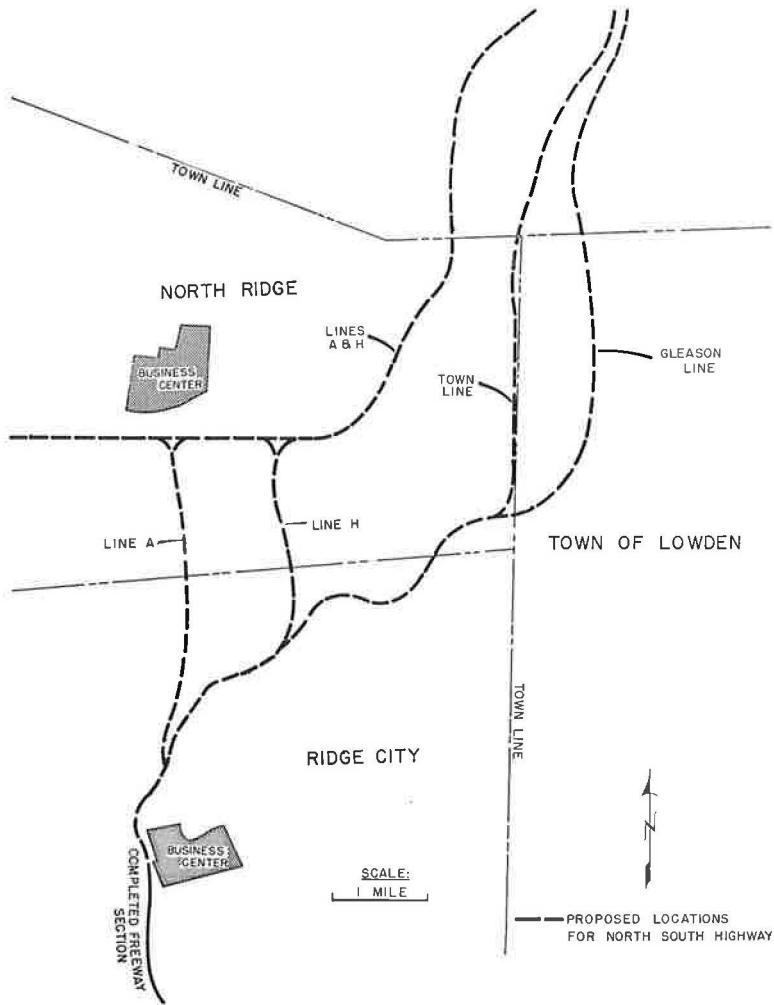


Figure 1.

both cities were held in 1944. This was the year before the State published its detailed reports on the most urgent traffic bottlenecks in the Ridge City metropolitan area. The report listed the priority projects to which the State would need to direct its attention in the years immediately following. When the report was released it showed the State's recommended location for the north-south highway, Line A, as running almost due north from the business center of Ridge City to the business center of North Ridge about four miles away (Fig. 1). The freeway would parallel Elm Street, the main thoroughfare between the two centers. At the southerly limits of the North Ridge business center, the route would turn east and then northeast in its eventual course toward the northern end of the State. The primary function of the proposed north-south highway as conceived in that early report was to link the centers of the two cities with a high-type traffic facility to relieve the already seriously overburdened north-south streets, particularly Elm Street. This would be only its first function, however. The route would continue northward beyond North Ridge to permit eventual connections with two important State highways running to the northeast and northwest corners of the State. In this single north-south highway, the highway department aimed to combine service for long-distance traffic traveling across the state with service for one of the most heavily traveled com-

muter corridors between Ridge City and North Ridge. In the succeeding 15 years of controversy over the location of the route, the State engineers never lost sight of these original goals; any compromises they were willing to make stopped at the point beyond which the accomplishment of these objectives would be jeopardized.

When the 1945 report was released to the public, the initial reaction was not noticeably unfavorable insofar as the North Ridge section was concerned. The reason for this may have been the lack of funds in the highway budget for the project which made it seem far off in the future. The portion through Ridge City, however, ran into opposition from the very beginning. Large companies that were to be displaced or otherwise adversely affected by the route immediately raised objections. These objections, as well as opposition from downtown businessmen over the routing near the central business district of Ridge City, occupied the full attention of the highway department planners from 1945 to 1948.

Public Opposition Mounts

In the fall of 1948, public dissatisfaction with the North Ridge section began to show itself. At an informal public hearing in that town, homeowners and others directly in the path of the route protested its location to the attending highway department engineers. Members of the City Council asked if the present streets could not be widened to accommodate the growing traffic. They were concerned over the route's dislocating 175 families and over the possibility of creating a psychological barrier across the town. Their doubts were later reinforced by the growing protests of the affected homeowners.

An independent engineering study of the north-south traffic problem was completed in 1945 by a New York consulting firm. The consultants were engaged by a committee representing five large Ridge City companies who wanted a competent and independent appraisal of the highway department's north-south freeway plans. The committee probably hoped the study would differ with the highway department's conclusions and would thus give them a basis for attacking the department's plans. As it turned out, however, the consultants' findings in most part agreed with the 1945 report. Nevertheless, as a demonstration of good faith, the companies had the report printed and distributed to all interested parties.

To point out the long-range impact of a freeway location and the consequences of a weak solution, the consultant cautioned in the report: "Doctors, we are told, bury their mistakes, planners by the same token embalm theirs, and engineers inflict them on their children's children. Of these three types of error, the engineering variety in the long run is the most costly to the community."

The study did not alter the views of North Ridge Town Manager Andrews or the Town Council. In the ensuing years their convictions about the undesirability of the freeway through the developed portion of North Ridge were only to become more deep-seated. State Highway Commissioner Donal A. Clark and his engineers continued to meet periodically with Town Manager Andrews in an effort to persuade him to relax his opposition to the line, but with no success.

Commissioner Clark had full legal authority to make the choice himself and to disregard the views of town officials. He wished to avoid adverse publicity as well as the political consequences that would follow from a unilateral decision. In any event, there was no need for haste. Funds for the construction of the north-south highway were not available, and highway department engineers were fully occupied on other high-priority projects elsewhere.

Public Information and North-South Issue

A review of the newspaper coverage of the north-south highway throughout this early period showed that much of the initiative in focusing public attention on the issues raised by the highway location was taken by the North Ridge town officials. Council meetings were open to the public and the press; the views of Council members were given prompt and full coverage in both local papers. The engineers of the State highway department, however, did not take the press into their confidence, and consequently their views were given little newspaper coverage. Routine press releases from the highway department

were dry with statistics and lacked public appeal. In most cases the newspapers avoided printing the department's press releases, preferring instead to summarize the salient points in an editorial or a short article on one of the back pages. That the highway department failed to capitalize fully on the news value of the issue in making their side of the question clear to the public is apparent.

As the issue dragged on into 1954, neither side altered its views. In an effort to give added weight to its position, the highway department in the early part of 1954 released its second printed report on the north-south highway. This report showed all eight lines studied by the department and presented complete traffic and cost information for all lines. The report explained why the department preferred its proposed line (Line A) over the others. The concluding recommendation of the report was as follows: "In order to provide a facility that will afford the greatest relief to traffic congestion and the greatest benefits to the road users and the communities, commensurate with the cost, it is recommended that line A be adopted. . . ." The report included four pages of discussion on the highway's effect on the community. This showed for each alternate line the number of buildings that would be displaced, the tax loss, the effects on city street traffic patterns, and the railroad grade-crossing eliminations.

Strangely, this extensive report failed to receive much coverage in the press. Although statistics from the report were occasionally referred to in future articles on the north-south highway, there was no large-scale coverage of the report immediately on its release. One reason for this may have been that it was a technical engineering report requiring considerable work to make it readable to the general public. The press may not have been interested in going to this effort. Secondly, the report was released to the press at exactly the same time as it was sent to other interested parties, which may have eliminated some of its news value.

New Traffic Study

North Ridge officials still doubted the report's conclusion that it was necessary to take the route through the built-up area of the town to the edge of the business district. In Ridge City, local officials were also dubious about portions of the proposed route within their borders. In July 1954, the two cities joined together to hire a nationally known traffic engineering firm to make an entirely new study. The main question to be answered was whether it was necessary to take the line close to North Ridge center or whether a route bypassing North Ridge altogether might not be as good or even a better solution.

There must have been considerable dismay in the North Ridge City Hall five months later when the consulting firm reported its final conclusions. These coincided very closely with those of the highway department. However, the new report did not deter the town officials or the affected homeowners from their opposition. Indeed, by the end of 1954 their opposition increased as rumors circulated that the approaching session of the State Legislature might appropriate funds for the north-south highway. Early in the following year, protest groups led the North Ridge Town Manager to call a public meeting on the question to which the Governor and the State Highway Commissioner were invited. Both agreed to attend.

Although the meeting was scheduled to be held in the town courtroom, the overflow attendance of 250 persons forced relocation to the high school auditorium. Once the meeting got under way, one speaker after another rose from the audience to object to the line. Most protested because the route would take their homes or disturb their neighborhoods. In a hand vote, only ten persons favored the State's route. All others were opposed.

To what degree this vote reflected the views of the town's total population of 52,000 is unknown, but from all indications the Governor and local officials all interpreted this consensus as the prevailing view of the townspeople. By the end of the meeting the Governor was visibly impressed by the amount and intensity of feeling of the opposition, and he then and there sounded the death knell for the straight-line connection between the centers of Ridge City and North Ridge: "While a straight-line highway is probably the best designed, I am deeply concerned with the economic and social factors in the

highway's construction." The Governor instructed the highway department to look for another line.

A New Highway Commissioner Takes Office

In March 1955, the same month as the hearing, State Highway Commissioner Clark left office for private reasons and the Governor appointed as the new commissioner a professional engineer from the northern part of the State, Richard D. Farrell. Commissioner Farrell had been in private civil engineering practice throughout his career and had no prior experience in highway planning. His first order of business in his new office was to restudy the controversial north-south highway problem.

In compliance with the Governor's instructions, Farrell sent North Ridge officials a compromise line located about three-quarters of a mile east and parallel to Line A. The new line joined the original line southeast of the central business district. This was the route designated Line H in the 1954 report (Fig. 1). The State engineers considered this new proposal inferior to the original Line A primarily because of the in-direction of travel between the centers of Ridge City and North Ridge, and also because the line would require an additional connector to service the North Ridge business center. It would be inferior in terms of traffic service and more costly. Also, the changed section still cut through high-type and compact residential areas.

It did not take long for the same kind of opposition to mount against Line H as had expressed itself against Line A. Whereas homeowners on Line A gave a sigh of relief and withdrew from the controversy, a new set of homeowners mobilized themselves into protest groups, doubtlessly encouraged by the success of the earlier group in defeating the highway department's proposal.

In May of 1956 at a meeting of the Town Council held to discuss the latest routing, more than 300 persons attended to protest Line H. Many objected to having the route in the town at all. A few days later the Town Council went on record against Line H and moved to ask the highway department to explore further and to consider instead the widening of present north-south arteries in the town. From that point on, the highway department was relentlessly beset by objections to the route; the letters-to-the-editor columns of both newspapers carried numerous attacks on the highway and on the highway department. The storm clouds were gathering.

Federal-Aid for North-South Highway

Meanwhile in Washington, D. C., an event was taking place that was to have a profound impact on the north-south highway. In June 1956, Congress enacted a bill providing financing to construct a 41,000-mile National System of Interstate and Defense Highways with the Federal government paying 90 percent of the cost and the States 10 percent. Being a link in a cross-state route that had several years earlier been made part of the Interstate highway system, the north-south highway was now brought much closer to reality. With the problem of financing solved, the State highway department now became especially anxious to reach an early decision on the route through North Ridge and to proceed to eliminate this traffic bottleneck once and for all.

One of the provisions in the highway act required the States to prepare a detailed estimate of the cost of building the Interstate system; the apportionment of funds to each State was to be based on the relationship of the estimated cost within that State to the overall nationwide estimate. The U. S. Bureau of Public Roads instructed its field division office in each State to ask their respective State highway departments to have the Interstate route locations fixed by September 15, 1956, if possible, so that a reliable estimate of cost could be prepared. The instructions provided, however, that if it were not possible to fix the location of a particular section of a route by that date, a tentative location could be adopted for estimating purposes subject to change later on if necessary.

Commissioner Farrell decided to use this date to try to force agreement to Line H by North Ridge. In his meetings with town officials he hinted that if the location of the line was not submitted to the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads by September 15, the north-south highway would not qualify as part of the Interstate system. This approach added great pressure to the already tense situation, but the effort collapsed when someone

from the town called the Washington office of the Bureau and found out that the deadline was only for estimating purposes.

Councilman Douglas C. Freeman, representing the area most affected by Line H, called another public hearing in North Ridge for September 11, 1956, to allow public discussion of the highway. Chief Planning Engineer James W. Killian of the highway department attended to answer questions about Line H. The mood of the 300 people in attendance was hostile. They made it plain that they feared the route would damage too many homes and would cut the town in half; they went on record as wanting no part of Line H.

On September 15, the highway department submitted Line H as a tentative location through North Ridge for the official Interstate route.

Introduction of Gleason Line

Richard G. Gleason, Representative from North Ridge to the State legislature and a stalwart of the "Out" political party, now began to take an interest in the dispute. An attorney, he was also skilled in the art of political maneuver. He saw the controversy as an opportunity to become champion for a popular cause against the "In" party administration. He also believed that here was an encroachment by State bureaucracy on the rights of a town to direct its own destiny. "Does the commissioner and his staff presume that despite the official protests of the Town Council, the legislators from North Ridge, the Chamber of Commerce, the Development Commission, and of virtually every civic group, in their overriding judgment from their lofty perch on the fifth floor of the State office building, they can tell us without fear of contradiction that they know what is best for us?" he said at one of the public hearings.

In December 1956, Representative Gleason announced his own proposal for a routing of the north-south highway. He sent a map to the highway department suggesting an easterly route that would virtually bypass North Ridge altogether (Fig. 1). He contended his route would traverse less densely developed land and thus would avoid disrupting settled residential neighborhoods in North Ridge to the same degree as did Line H.

The State's reaction to the Gleason line was cool, to say the least. As they saw it, this line would require abandoning the primary purpose of the highway, namely as a route to carry the heavy traffic between Ridge City and North Ridge to relieve the congestion on the north-south streets. The Gleason route, by being so far east, would also rule out any possibility of connecting to the cross-state route to the north, another of the original objectives. Even so, the highway commissioner asked a local engineering firm that was assisting the State in its studies of the north-south highway, William Lewis Associates, to make a comparative study of Line H and the Gleason line.

As the year 1957 began, the north-south highway became the top-priority issue before the North Ridge Town Council. In the previous year the town had hired a new Town Manager, Harold C. Canney, and instructed him to do everything possible to defend the town against Line H. Early in 1957 Canney became persuaded that the town's position in the debate was too negative. He believed that rather than just turning down every State proposal, the town should use its own engineering and planning staffs as well as outside experts, if necessary, to make a well-planned and coordinated argument in opposition to the proposed route and to come up with a positive recommendation of its own. Also, because the Federal law requires the highway department to consider the economic effects of the route, North Ridge would find evidence to show that the economic effects of Line H would be harmful to the town.

In August 1957, the State's consultant, William Lewis Associates, published its report comparing the State's Line H with the Gleason line. The overall cost for the Gleason line would be less, \$28,100,000 as compared to \$29,900,000 for Line H. The number of developed properties to be taken would be very similar, 174 on the Gleason line as opposed to 166 on Line H. However, the fatal deficiency of the Gleason line, the report contended, was that it did not serve the main north-south corridor of traffic and thus neglected the problem that the route had originally set out to solve.

North Ridge Hires a Consultant

Soon after release of the Lewis report, North Ridge Councilman Freeman expressed the sense of frustration of the Town Council when he said, "For every valid objection raised by the town, the commissioner and his palace guard have answers made up in advance. Until such time as we get someone on a par with the State highway department experts engineer-wise, we're not going to get satisfaction. Anyone handy with statistics can prove anything. We need someone who can outstatistic the highway department experts." The Council thereupon unanimously voted to find the best consultant available to study the problem and to "defend the town of North Ridge in its battle with Farrell."

Three months went by, and after Town Manager Canney had approached several highway consultants, he reported to the Council that he was running into trouble getting someone to take the assignment. Undoubtedly the severity of the conflict between the highway department and the town and the fact that the problem had already been studied and restudied by other consultants caused reputable consultants to shy away from the assignment.

Soon after Canney made his report to the Council, Commissioner Farrell announced that the public hearing required by the Federal law would be held in North Ridge on January 9, 1958, to receive the views of the officials and the public on the route through that town. He announced that "The general objection (by the highway department) to the Gleason line and the need for expediting the establishment of the north-south location through North Ridge to forestall development from taking place along the proposed route have led me to the conclusion that we must immediately establish a definite location for the north-south highway through North Ridge."

Town Manager Canney, after several meetings with Commissioner Farrell, finally persuaded him to postpone the meeting for three months, until March 4. Canney then immediately hired a consultant with whom he had been negotiating, Clarence H. Newcomb of New York City, to begin studies for the town, to have the results ready in time for the hearing three months later.

Three weeks before the hearing date, Canney met with Commissioner Farrell to present a new line developed by the town's consultant (Fig. 1). Canney asked that the hearing be postponed again so that more complete studies could be made on the new line. The State took the matter under advisement. Commissioner Farrell announced a week later that the new line "has less merit than the Gleason line," and that "a preliminary appraisal of this new proposed line shows it does not warrant postponement of the hearing or change in the line."

Expressing disappointment at what they felt was arbitrary rejection of their line, the North Ridge officials now became determined to carry their fight to the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads if necessary. Approached on the question of an eventual appeal to the Federal highway agency, one of the State's U. S. Senators, a former resident of North Ridge, forecast the outcome of the final appeal when he said that "the Federal Government has little choice but to accept the recommendation of the State Highway Commissioner. The solution must be arrived at on the State level. The Federal Government, as far as can be ascertained, can act only upon the final recommendation and certification of the State highway department."

Final Public Hearing Held

The public hearing on the night of March 4 was described by observers as exciting, stormy, and turbulent. More than 1,400 persons filled the high school auditorium, 200 others were turned away by police from the overfilled hall. Most of the people present were from North Ridge and opposed Line H. But about 500 persons were from Lowden, the town east of North Ridge through which the Gleason line would pass. The latter were there to oppose the Gleason line and to support the State's Line H.

Commissioner Farrell opened the hearing by describing the history of negotiations over the north-south highway. Using giant maps, engineers from his staff described in detail the main features of the three most prominent alternate lines. Traffic and accident statistics were presented in support of Line H. But the State's presentation was frequently interrupted by outbursts from the crowd; the audience obviously had little interest in technical information at this stage of the game.

The State's presentation took about an hour. The chairman then recognized State Representative Gleason, who came to the platform to make his statement. Gleason criticized Commissioner Farrell and the highway department for their "bureaucratic type of thinking" and for callous disregard for the rights of the town. He proceeded into a defense of his own line, claiming it to be superior to all others proposed.

Town Manager Canney came next to the platform to present the town's case. With the aid of two traffic engineers from the consultant firm hired by the town, he attacked the State's line as unnecessarily cutting through the built-up part of the town. "The T line does less damage and is more consistent with Interstate highway needs," Canney argued. The town concluded its presentation by handing Commissioner Farrell a lengthy brief stating its position in detail.

Following Canney, a representative of the North Ridge Chamber of Commerce told the hearing that the 450 businessmen in the Chamber favored the Gleason line. An attorney from Lowden, the town adjoining North Ridge on the east, then took the platform to appear in favor of Line H, saying that he had submitted a petition containing 1,659 names of Lowden and North Ridge residents favoring the State's line. Representatives of a variety of groups spoke next, followed by individual citizens. The meeting adjourned at 1 AM, when all but about 60 persons had already left.

The 1958 hearing proved to be the climax of the long dispute. After the hearing was held, the highway commissioner had only to study the transcript and consider the economic effects of the location before making his final decision.

Aftermath of the Hearing

After the stormy public hearing, Commissioner Farrell was undoubtedly wary of making an immediate decision. Passions were high, and if anything, the hearing simply entrenched all interested groups further into their original positions. Besides, a slow-down in the Interstate program would be necessary on account of the reduced Federal-aid Interstate funds that were available to the States as compared to the amounts they expected originally. This relieved some of the pressure for an immediate decision on the north-south highway. Farrell may also have been advised by the Governor to let things calm down before taking any other action; elections were only eight months away.

The elections came and went. The Governor was reelected by one of the highest pluralities in the State's history. By the end of 1958, Commissioner Farrell replied to reporters' inquiries that he was still studying the information brought out at the hearing and was not yet ready to make a decision. Two months later, in February 1959, Representative Gleason publicly criticized the highway commissioner for dragging out the decision so long.

The long delay had an unsettling effect on many people who were in the paths of the three possible routes. Uncertainty about where the route might go made it difficult for anyone to sell his home. Many families and businessmen could not make or act on future plans until the location of the route was decided. Public resentment began to grow over the time it was taking to announce the decision.

A month after Representative Gleason made his statement, the North Ridge Chamber of Commerce and a group of manufacturers in the town publicly called on the highway commissioner to make his decision. Still there was no response from the highway department. Finally in May 1959 the State Legislature passed a resolution, introduced by Representative Gleason three months earlier, calling on the highway commissioner to announce his decision on the route by August 1 of that year.

In turning down another proposed highway in North Ridge over which a second storm was brewing (this was an east-west route in very early stages of planning), the Governor made a statement to the press criticizing Farrell for "poor public relations in not allowing the town to work with him in the selection of an east-west route." Coming at the time it did, this was interpreted by some as an indirect criticism of the highway department's handling of the north-south highway routing. Following the Governor's statement, one member of the Town Council said, "I hope the commissioner has learned his lesson and will proceed with future highways in the correct manner."

On June 17, 1959, barely two weeks after the Governor's public criticism of him, Farrell announced his resignation. The new commissioner was to be Jeffrey E. Banks,

a professional engineer and former Deputy State Highway Commissioner under Clark. Banks had been a long-time career employee of the highway department, but for the past four years had been out of public service and an executive with a large concrete company. Banks was known as a highly competent highway engineer and an able administrator.

Upon assuming office on July 1, 1959, Banks took on as his first order of business the resolution of the north-south highway controversy. He was briefed on all the issues by his engineers, he met several times with Representative Gleason and the officials and staff of North Ridge, he flew the three lines by helicopter on two different occasions, and finally he discussed the entire question with Clyde Barner, the Division Engineer of the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads, who was in charge of the Bureau's office in Ridge City. At a press conference in his office on July 24, 1959, after three weeks of study, he announced that he was persuaded that "the alignment which will be most advantageous to both North Ridge and the State is Line H." His press release went on to say that to disregard the local street considerations, as urged by North Ridge, would be to disregard 93 percent of the problem. "The capacity of the existing street system cannot be expanded sufficiently to handle the growing traffic loads."

On August 12, 1959, the State highway department submitted to the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads office a formal request for approval of the north-south highway project for Federal-aid financing. With the request was the required certification that a public hearing had been held and that the highway department had considered the economic effects before making its final decision.

Being intimately familiar with the long debate over the highway and being personally convinced that Line H, though inferior to the original Line A, was now the best line available, Public Roads Division Engineer Barner took little time to approve the State's request. The State's and Division Engineer Barner's reports then went on to the Bureau's regional office. The Regional Engineer, after reviewing the entire record, also approved the decision and forwarded the record to Washington.

When they learned of Barner's action, the North Ridge Town Council decided in a 5 to 3 vote to carry their appeal to the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads in Washington. A full legal brief was prepared setting forth the town's position and was sent to Washington with a request for a formal review of the case by the Bureau.

North Ridge Officials Go to Washington

On November 2, 1959, six key officials from North Ridge met in Washington with the Commissioner of the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads and members of his staff. The meeting lasted three hours. At its conclusion the Public Roads Washington staff agreed to review the entire record and report its conclusion as soon as possible.

Two months later, on January 15, 1960, the court of last resort for North Ridge rendered its verdict. "The Bureau has examined all facts of the problem. As a result of the studies we do not find any justification for withholding approval of the location selected by the State," read the Bureau's letter.

The State highway department took immediate steps to acquire rights-of-way. Construction was set to begin early in 1962.

IMPLICATIONS OF NORTH-SOUTH HIGHWAY CONTROVERSY

The conflicts that raged over the north-south highway could not all have been avoided even by the best public relations practices or by the closest possible consultations with the town on the part of the State highway department. Many of the conflicts were over basic differences in values and point of view and these are never easily resolved. To North Ridge officials the number of homes that would be razed for the freeway seemed an intolerable price to pay to solve the traffic problem. Also, they felt it their duty to protect the quiet atmosphere of the town's residential communities against the disturbances and pressures for dense land development they believed would come with the construction of the freeway.

These objectives for North Ridge were not compatible with regional and statewide values as interpreted by the State highway department. The latter believed that the

traffic congestion in the traffic corridor between Ridge City and North Ridge would continue to plague them until it was solved, regardless of the willingness of the officials of North Ridge themselves to tolerate it. The Interstate highway program gave them an excellent opportunity to solve several transportation problems at once, and at very little added cost. To build the bypass route recommended both by Representative Gleason and North Ridge, thereby ignoring the local traffic congestion would be only a temporary solution, State engineers believed. Sooner or later the congestion would reach the point where the public would demand another route. Two separate routes would involve almost twice the cost, and they were determined to avoid this.

In reviewing the case, it is well to bear in mind that conflict over public issues is not necessarily or inherently bad. As Simon, Smithburg, and Thompson put it:

Conflict may be the means for bringing to bear on individual decisions a wide range of specialized competences. It may also be the means for bringing into the view of high level administrators, of legislators, and the public, basic issues of public policy that need resolution. It may prevent these issues from being decided anonymously at obscure levels of the bureaucracy, and hence may be an important means of securing democratic control. (2)

Though many of the conflicts in the North Ridge case were deep and unavoidable, one still cannot help wonder whether the debate and the search for consensus could not have proceeded on a higher and more constructive level. One difficulty encountered by many who tried to see the problem objectively was the inadequate information available to the general public on both sides of the question. The highway department took little pains to present complete information to the public via the press. Having complete technical reports to support their own conclusions and responsibilities, the State highway engineers seemed unaware of any responsibility to furnish the public with sufficiently complete information to permit the formulation of intelligent opinions.

One can certainly make a good case that the press was also negligent in its failure to adequately inform itself on all sides of the issue to make possible a well-rounded coverage for its readers. As it happened, the press gave heavy coverage to news that was easy to come by and that had immediate dramatic appeal, thus obscuring many of the more complex technical facts and arguments that had an important bearing on the overall public interest. It behooves highway administrators not to assume that their proposals will automatically receive adequate press coverage on their intrinsic merits alone.

Without complete information, and informed debate on objectives, the function of the citizenry in a democracy, is not possible and government is deprived of the views of a community on its choices between competing values. On this point, Laski comments:

Things done by government must not only appear right to the expert; their consequences must seem right to the plain and average man. And there is no way known of discovering his judgment save by deliberately seeking it. This, after all, is the really final test of government; for, at least over any considerable period, we cannot maintain a social policy which runs counter to the wishes of the multitude. (3)

Unless he deliberately seeks the reactions of the public to his proposals the government decision-maker fails to gain the benefit of additional information and other views early in the process when these can be incorporated in the formulation of specific design proposals. According to Banfield:

A decision-maker, even one of long experience and great capacity, is not likely, when an issue first arises, to be fully aware of all the interests that are at stake in it or of the importance that is attached to each interest by those who hold it.

He gets this information (except with regard to the most obvious matters) only as interested parties themselves bring it to his attention. (4)

The officials of North Ridge resorted to the collection of data and to debate over questions having technical substance late in the process. By then they were psychologically and publicly committed to continued opposition to the State's route. It is highly doubtful that any amount of factual information or persuasive argument could have altered their course once they saw their responsibility as not to debate the issues in terms of broad values and community objectives, but rather to stand firmly against any trespass of the town by the highway, regardless of the wider and long-range consequences of such opposition.

Public Hearings and Highway Planning

The experience with the North Ridge hearing raises many questions about the purpose of a public hearing. Is it chiefly to permit the release of passions and emotions, described by Thomas Erskine as an advantage of free speech?

When men can freely communicate their thoughts and their sufferings, real or imaginary, their passions spend themselves in an air like gunpowder scattered upon the surface, but pent up by terrors, they work unseen, burst forth in a moment and destroy everything in their course.

Or is the function of a public hearing of the type held for highways "to provide the opportunity for effective participation in citizenship" by fostering a process of discussion which results in agreement of objectives? Professor Arthur Maass states as an element in his theory of the political process that one of the functions of democratic government is to emphasize the search for consensus or community values through discussion and debate: "A constitutional democratic system is based on man's capacity to debate and determine the standards by which he wishes to live in political community with others" (5).

Laski also emphasizes the same point in his essay on the limitations of the expert:

Every degree by which he (the citizen) is separated from consultation about decisions is a weakening of the governmental process. Neither goodwill in the expert nor efficiency in the performance of his function ever compensates in a state for failure to elicit the interest of the plain man in what is being done. For the nature of the result is largely unknown save as he reports his judgment upon it; and only as he reports that judgment can the expert determine in what direction his plans must move. Every failure in consultation, moreover, separates the mind of the governors from those who are governed; this is the most fertile source of misunderstanding in the state. (3)

The North Ridge public hearings on the north-south highway, although they gave opportunities for men to express "their thoughts and their sufferings, real or imaginary," certainly were a far cry from the type of public forum that would encourage a "search for consensus or community values." Those who attended the hearing had little interest in or patience for facts or views; they were afraid that the highway would seriously hurt them in some way and were there to express their protests and to defeat the proposal.

In reviewing reports by observers at the hearing, there is no indication that any disinterested parties were present to speak concerning the effect of the various routings on long-range community goals. Moreover, the hearing failed to attract any individuals or groups who stood to benefit from the transportation advantages of the route. The local automobile association, trucking companies, commuters, downtown Ridge City businessmen—these and many others had constructive roles to play in the discussion and yet none spoke at the hearing. This can only reflect their view that the hearing was

not a hearing in the sense of a constructive discussion, but rather a protest rally. In creating this impression and failing to attract those with positive views, the hearing again fell short of its possible constructive value.

Whether it was possible for anyone to have an open mind on the question by that time, or to see the question in terms of broad community values and objectives, seems highly doubtful. Yet lacking this, the hearing was not constructive either for the highway department or for the community itself.

It seems likely that the hearing would have been more successful in focusing attention on the important values and objectives if it had been held much earlier in the planning stage when no specific location proposals had yet been formulated. Once the concrete physical proposals are made public, attention becomes immediately focused on the effect of the proposal on individual interests, at the exclusion of any concern for larger goals and objectives.

In the case of North Ridge, the State highway department would have found it easier to get approval for a specific route location through the town from town officials if in the early planning stages it had conducted discussions with them on the broad objectives to be achieved by the route. At that time most of the interested parties in the town may well have agreed to the need to solve the problem of north-south traffic congestion and to connect the two urban centers. It is not unreasonable to assume that a solution in the public interest of differences about a specific highway location would have been reached more easily if there had been earlier agreement about broad objectives.

Highway Planning, Citizen Participation, and Democracy

Earlier discussions with local officials, the public release of full information bearing on the question phrased in plain language, and a public hearing designed to focus on questions of community values and broad objectives rather than on specific designs—all these working in concert would undoubtedly have raised the level of the debate over the north-south highway.

The value of this process goes even further than the resolution of particular questions of public concern, such as the location of major highways; the process itself brings dignity and responsibility to each citizen. It stresses the citizen's responsibility to search for community values and long-range objectives and to make community decisions at this level. It takes away emphasis from the attitude that often prevails that sees the resolution of conflict on the basis of competing private interests and pressure politics. In this way the procedure leads not only to more constructive community decisions but also to a strengthening of the democratic process.

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