

# Century Freeway (Watts)

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**I**NTRODUCTION of a major transportation improvement in the urban environment disrupts the community, its patterns and established relationships. Means of minimizing the disruption and obtaining community support for our programs is one of the objectives of this conference.

In California the adopted route of the proposed Century Freeway has achieved not just community support, but advocacy from a community which it severely affects — the community of Watts.

*Time* magazine claimed that one of the causes of the Newark riot was the "Negro removal" by three Interstate freeways. Replacement housing was not available for the thousands displaced by freeways.

In Watts, we face a similar problem — only we have already had a riot. Two freeways interchange in the heart of the community. The displacement of 2600 families will be necessary. The housing units affected are low cost. Half are owner occupied. Twenty percent of the occupants are retired and on fixed income. It is impossible to replace this housing. The average value of the houses to be acquired is \$13,000. The cost of comparable homes outside of Watts is between \$18,000 and \$22,000.

Watts is not an average community — it is black and it has been wracked by a riot. Today it is not much different than it was in August 1965 — the root causes of the riot are still there.

There is one major difference that had tremendous impact on our freeway proposals. Since the riots, Federal, state, and local agencies and universities from all over the world have launched studies of Watts. Residents are besieged by door-to-door surveys. Even the U. S.

Census Bureau did a special census. Tours of Watts are constant, and dozens of remedial programs are proposed by innumerable government agencies. Millions of dollars have been spent in Watts in the last three years. The results have been a great many promises for change and a significant increase in the daytime white population.

But even more foreboding for highways, the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency for a number of years had studied Watts and had submitted a plan for redevelopment to public hearings. Coming on the heels of a great many other proposed programs, some seemingly exploiting the community, the redevelopment plans were completely rejected by the community and nearly all proposals for community improvement began to be suspiciously regarded as an attempt by the white power structure to break up Watts and scatter its residents all over Los Angeles. This issue and this idea were beginning to pervade Watts at the time our freeway proposals were introduced.

In the face of this, we obtained acceptance of the freeway and support and advocacy of a route right through the community. The results are dramatic, but they came about through the routine practices of the California Division of Highways and good planning procedures.

We achieved these results by involving the community in the development of our plans and by taking into consideration the impact and effect of the freeway. It has always been the practice of the California Division of Highways to involve the local community, local groups, and service clubs at early stages in the planning process.

In California, terminals are set by the state legislature when they designate a highway as part of the state highway system. The California Highway Commission selects the specific location of the highway or freeway after public hearings. Although broad design features may be set by the location of the highway, detailed design follows location of the highway.

Throughout the highway route location process, prior to adoption by the Commission, the highways staff present their studies to local city technical staffs, to concerned government agencies, to local interest groups, service clubs, garden clubs — in fact, to anyone who is interested in hearing our story. The net result, we hope, is a fully informed public at the time of the Division's hearings on the route location.

Such a policy preceded hearings on the Panhandle Freeway in San Francisco. The Technical Report on the Panhandle Freeway was a joint city, county, and state study of freeway route locations and design. This report publicly presented early concepts of joint development and multiple use of rights-of-way. However, despite local participation in planning and employment of well-qualified consultants, we lacked the legal means, then, of achieving some of the broad planning goals; and that freeway, and ultimately others, was rejected by the community.

Public involvement in our planning activities continues after route adoption during the design stage. In addition, the California Division

of Highways negotiates and executes with the local community a freeway agreement that sets some of the features of the proposed freeway.

Identical procedures were followed in Watts during the route location stage. We contacted local groups in Watts, including the militant organizations that receive so much publicity in the national press. We contacted home improvement associations, street improvement associations, garden clubs, churches — every conceivable group that seemed to have an interest in the effect of the highway on this community, and Watts has a plethora of groups. We presented our story to them, what we proposed, the nature of the highway investment, and the anticipated impact on residential property within the community.

It became evident that the huge right-of-way investment to be made (about \$100 million) provided a rare opportunity for Watts. Unless a program was developed, it could be dissipated throughout Los Angeles. That is, the recipients — the homeowners, the individuals directly affected by the freeway — most likely would take their payment and leave Watts. Yet, this community, which had suffered so much during and after the riots, could use the investment in right-of-way to improve and upgrade the community.

Since the riots, normal economic activity has dwindled in Watts. Investment institutions, banks and speculators, conservative in most cases, are reluctant to invest any money in Watts. As a result, there has been almost no money for housing since 1965. Loans for new housing have been nearly nonexistent. The right-of-way acquisition program of the Division of Highways could be an opportunity to stimulate real estate development within the community again, an opportunity to use the right-of-way investment to renew or rehabilitate the community, to give it a new start on building its own identity in a more satisfactory environment.

With this in mind, we developed a different strategy for land acquisition in the Watts community. The key item in this strategy involved replacement housing.

Ninety-five percent of the properties to be acquired in Watts are residential and, as we previously stated, half are owner-occupied. Our survey indicated only one-third of the affected residents really wanted to relocate outside of Watts. Most of them had lived there many years — their roots were there, their friends were there, community activities and organizations remained in the community — they had no desire to leave. The people affected by the Century Freeway are part of the most stable elements in Watts. Displacing them would leave a vacuum in Watts that would be hard to fill.

Learning from our experience in San Francisco, we formalized our replacement housing strategy before the freeway route was adopted by seeking legislative sanction of the idea. The Governor included in his 1968 legislative program a bill proposed by the Assemblyman from Watts to provide for the development of a replacement housing pro-

gram in California. This legislation provides that the Division of Highways may acquire and condemn vacant unoccupied property outside freeway right-of-way and that it may contract with public and private entities for the financing, planning, development, construction, management, sale and exchange or lease of replacement housing, in order to provide replacement housing for low-income individuals and families who reside in economically depressed areas and who are displaced by freeways. It further provides that we may acquire other property for such purposes by means other than condemnation.

Freeway planning and the replacement housing program in Watts may or may not involve joint right-of-way development or the multiple use of rights-of-way. At this stage, we are not certain. We feel that community improvement projects that are stimulated and developed in relation to the housing program, especially for recreational purposes, will probably be developed on large remainders adjacent to the freeway. Total community planning, at this stage, has just begun, but the impact of the freeway on Watts will certainly be much wider than the narrow corridor involved in joint development or the multiple use of rights-of-way.

Our first approach to the problem, in fact, was very similar to our proposals in San Francisco for the Panhandle Freeway, with high-rise apartments alongside and straddling the freeway. We envisioned the freeway as upgrading the living conditions and environment of Watts through modern buildings. We even embellished the corridor with industrial sites to provide jobs for the 40 percent unemployed in Watts. But these visions do not fit Watts. They do not represent the aspirations of its residents, most especially those affected by the freeway.

The vast majority of people live in single-family dwellings — small units, but with fenced yards, privacy, and a garden. Their house is a status symbol, especially to the retired Negro who worked and saved all his life to acquire his own home. An apartment may easily replace the functional utility of the home, but it would never have the same dignity, meaning, and comfort.

For Watts, then, joint development is for nonresidential units — multiple use of airspace is not likely on the scale originally conceived. Our replacement housing program will involve mainly single-family dwellings.

At the present time, it is proposed that the Division of Highways acquire scattered lots throughout an area roughly six blocks from the core of the freeway. These lots will be developed individually with single-family residences and a few multiple units. It is expected that such activity in this community will generate additional activity by other nonprofit organizations that are attempting to develop programs in the community. We expect that the improvement of housing in the neighborhoods we affect will stimulate additional development adjacent and in the vicinity of our housing. We expect that the total develop-

ment of all this housing will encourage owners to apply for loans to upgrade their own housing. We expect that the investment involved in both our program and the other programs will persuade banks and lending institutions to make additional loans in this community for upgrading the community.

In Watts, we intend to implement the replacement housing program through continued community involvement. The replacement housing program will offer the community an opportunity to change the shape of its environment in the manner of its own choosing. In this connection, California proposes to involve a unique organization in Watts — the WLCAC, or the Watts Labor Community Action Committee.

The WLCAC is a community union. It is headed by an international representative of the UAW, and it is supported by the AFL-CIO. Its purpose is to put union skills and organizational experience to work in the community to attempt to improve and revitalize it by promoting and providing much-needed services to its neglected citizens. It also seeks to develop the economic base necessary for the area to become a healthy, self-sustaining segment of Los Angeles.

Their accomplishments, thus far, have been many. They include the development and maintenance of over 20 vest-pocket neighborhood parks, two gas stations, a nursery for the beautification of Watts, a chicken ranch, a credit union, and, last summer, a youth camp for several thousand Watts youths — a camp that will be used in winter for training programs for operating engineers and marine cooks and stewards. Most recently, they shared with the City of Los Angeles the job of preparing the Model Cities Application, and it is expected that if a planning grant is received from HUD, then the WLCAC will play an important role in planning the future of Watts. In the state's replacement housing program their role looms large. Not only do they have planning capabilities, but their job training program provides a source of labor and community participation in the job of providing housing.

For example, one of the replacement plans that our program will make possible involves moved housing. The Division of Highways and other public agencies acquire hundreds of houses every year for public projects in Los Angeles. These are sold at auction, moved, and rehabilitated for resale. This housing could be diverted to Watts. Utilization of this housing in a replacement housing program provides an opportunity to use the unique services of the WLCAC. They can use the site preparation, house-moving, and rehabilitation to provide training and building skills for Watts residents.

The Century Freeway displaces thousands of residents in an area where a depressed real estate market makes replacement impossible through normal means. But, at the same time, it offers the community and the people of Watts an opportunity to improve and revitalize their community through total community involvement in a replacement housing program.

The Century Freeway through Watts could have been like any other freeway in the country. It could have approached the community without regard to the impact and the effect on the people living within that community. It could have been just another case of "Negro removal" in the urban communities, but in California our experience with the Panhandle Freeway in San Francisco has taught us something. Beautiful pictures and sketches of joint development do not buy public acceptance. The changes wrought by the freeway must be channeled to match the needs and desires of the people in that community. The freeway must reinforce the change desired in the community, and most important, the program proposed in the pictures and brochures must be capable of attainment, not merely be an embellishment to sell the product. To sell their product in today's urban environment, freeway planners must become social advocates — they must assure that the programs they advocate — joint development or multiple use of airspace — can be achieved and take the steps to achieve it. Otherwise, their proposals will merely be pictures and brochures, and their freeways will just be lines on the map.

In California we are just beginning to develop our program. It is a long way from achievement, but highway engineers and planners are now in the housing and community development business to assure the success of our program and the acceptance of our product.

## Panel Discussion

MR. KRAUSE: In the Watts project replacement housing will be constructed pursuant to the legislation enacted by the California Legislature in July of 1968. As Mr. Hill pointed out, there is no available housing, nor can substitute housing be constructed at anything near the cost of the housing that is being replaced. Fortunately, the Congress passed the Highway Act of 1968 in August, and that provided a satisfactory answer. Federal funds will participate in the cost of replacement housing up to the limits set in that Act, that is \$5,000.

MR. McGRATH: The actual thrust of important public construction such as highways begins with the application of a whole range of comprehensive planning principles in a single corridor and may indeed produce the interaction among professionals that we have not been able to deliver despite a number of ritualistic statements over the years.

How much further do you feel that the community can actually continue to participate in this interprofessional activity?

MR. HILL: In the case of Watts, the Division of Highways intends to take several actions. The primary one, however, is related to this Watts Labor Community Action Committee which has a very broad-based support within the community of Watts. I think they represent diverse groups in the community also because of the processes they used to obtain community acceptance themselves.

We intend to do something like contract with them directly for their assistance in the production of our replacement housing program. We have to involve the official community in the development of some of the plans for zoning or building ordinances and whatever is involved there. The City and the County of Los Angeles both also use the Watts Labor Community Action Committee as one of the prime contact groups within this community. The Watts Community Action Committee has planning funds of their own. They are also supported by the Ford Foundation and Carnegie Institute and they have in the past employed architects and planners themselves, especially in the development of the Model City proposal. Therefore, they have the capability and contacts to assist us in the development of our program so they are sort of an unofficial representative of the community, having no official status as such, but it offers us a contact point with the community. Other communities have similar community unions also.

MR. PIGNATARO: You mentioned that there has not been much change since 1965 in Watts. I am wondering to what degree if any has the HUD demonstration grant project been exhibited in the Watts area?

MR. HILL: Well, primarily I am speaking of physical changes in the community. There have been a few new structures and there is a medical center in the community but as far as any real program, Federal or state, producing anything that is acceptable within this community or a program which will improve the community, at this stage nothing has happened.