

## URBAN REDEVELOPMENT AND HIGHWAY PLANNING

Edmund N. Bacon, Executive Director  
Philadelphia City Planning Commission

NEW possibilities for highway development in cities are being opened up through the growing activity in urban redevelopment now taking place throughout the country. For the first time there is available, through the powers granted to redevelopment authorities by many states, the means for assembling land in blighted areas and controlling its use so as to obtain rights-of-way for new highways and to secure the rational development of adjacent land. This had the double advantage of making possible intelligent planning of access to the new highway from bordering properties, and of assuring to the community realization of the full benefits created by the new highway through planned development of adjacent areas.

I hasten to emphasize that the primary purpose of redevelopment is not to create highways, and that highway improvements are a byproduct of redevelopment possible only where highway needs and blighted areas coincide. However, they may be a very significant byproduct, as our experience in Philadelphia has shown.

I also stress at the outset that the benefits I am discussing are possible only if the redevelopment program and the highway program have a very strong common planning base. Normally this type of coordination can be supplied only by a competent, well staffed, technical city planning commission that has the respect of, and close working relationship with both the redevelopment authority and the highway planning and building agencies. Without this there is the danger that the tremendous sums that will be spent by both groups will not be well utilized, and that physical opportunities for rational highway development will be lost for all time.

The pattern which we have found in Philadelphia, which I believe is common to most cities, is that of the central business district and the principal secondary business centers being bordered by a blighted mixture of housing and commercial structures. And it is frequently these business areas that are most in need of highway access. The program logically becomes that of clearing the blighted area, and in the process of redistributing the assembled land, providing the right-of-way for new or widened streets.

The first area which we considered was the Germantown Business

10.

Center, an important local district seriously inhibited from development by lack of space in which to expand, lack of parking facilities, and of adequate highway access. The proposals of the planning commission had long called for a highway widening, connecting with major arteries, and paralleling Cheltenham Avenue, the principal business street, one block to the north, but no action was foreseeable before 1955.

In cooperation with the Germantown Businessmen's Association a plan was worked out for acquisition by the Redevelopment Authority of the blighted area between the rear of the Cheltenham Avenue properties and the street proposed to be widened. The area needed for the widened highway would be turned over to the city, and adjacent to it large sites suitable for major commercial enterprises would be provided. The center of the block would be developed with parking facilities, probably by the parking authority, serving both the new and existing establishments. This would make possible the design of an efficient center incorporating many of the principles of the most advanced new regional shopping centers. It would produce much greater benefits to the community than would result if the fragments of small parcels left over after condemnation for highway widening remained in individual ownership. Since the redevelopment authority would control the design of the adjacent commercial development, it can see to it that the approaches to the parking areas, truck loading facilities, etc., are planned in accordance with modern traffic principles.

A second most important proposal is the Lombard Redevelopment Project. This covers an area about two blocks wide extending  $2\frac{1}{2}$  mi. between the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers, bordering the central business district on the south. In this area some of the worst housing in the city is located. Plans for slum clearance here date back to the early thirties. The planning commission saw the possibility of combining clearance projects with the provision of added right-of-way for a much-needed new traffic artery, corresponding with the recently completed Vine Street widening on the north.

Detailed studies showed that, if the area were assembled into one ownership, and the many small streets and alleys that crisscrossed the section were vacated and incorporated into the redevelopment sites, the area of these streets would just about equal the area required for the Lombard Street widening.

The net result of the operation would be that the amount of land used for streets would be the same as before, but in the reshuffling process made possible by redevelopment, a fine new highway would be provided and at the same time excellent new sites for

new developments would be created adjacent to it. While much of the area should be used for public housing to help rehouse those now in the area, the project is extensive enough, and so located as to be suitable for privately built apartments, parking facilities and commercial developments. In the long run the project should prove to be of great direct economic benefit to the city, in addition to removing the detrimental effect of a centrally located blighted area, and resulting in the accomplishment of a highway long thought to be just a dream.

Through the planning controls provided in the Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law it will be possible to secure development of all of the adjacent property in such a way that there is no vehicular access at all to Lombard Street, all entrances and exits being from the cross streets. Thus we can develop a highway with no parking and no stopping through a densely built up area, simply by national land use planning. In this way the full traffic benefit of the widening will be realized, and far greater carrying capacity per square foot accomplished than would be possible under simple widening as normally practiced. Since Lombard Street is to be primarily a distributor artery, expressway type of design would not be logical here.

The realization of projects such as the Lombard Redevelopment Proposal is made possible by the federal appropriation of \$500,000,000 for land write down in clearance areas under the provision of the National Housing Act of 1949. The federal subsidy must be matched, one local dollar to two federal, but city improvements which benefit redevelopment projects may be credited toward the local contribution. Our plans are not yet sufficiently developed to offer concrete experience in the financing arrangements for acquisition of highway right-of-way. The bookkeeping operations are quite complicated, and there is little precedent available for guidance. It would seem evident, however, that a coordinated program such as I have described would produce far greater value per dollar spent by the city than would a conventional widening.

I want to stress the point that, although the federal government's participation in redevelopment is limited to those areas in which housing is the predominant use before or after clearance, many of the state acts authorize redevelopment authorities to proceed where housing is not the predominant use in either case. This makes possible projects such as the Germantown proposal, through purely local action, independent of Washington, either on a self-liquidating basis or with state of Local subsidy.

Even without subsidy, the economic benefits of this procedure are evident. If the city pays its full share on a square foot ba-

12.

sis for the additional right-of-way it received from the redevelopment authority this would normally be less than the cost of condemnation of the front strips of properties, the removal or partial removal of structures which reduce the value of the remainder to the point where the city must pay almost the full value for the entire parcel. Also, through the land assembly process, the redevelopment authority should realize on the new value given to the adjacent property by the highway improvement, in its sale or lease of the assembled land to the new user.

Finally, I want again to state that this type of approach is possible only through comprehensive planning. Redevelopment and housing authorities naturally are primarily interested in property development, and could not normally be expected by themselves to conceive projects in relation to a comprehensive highway system. The highway agencies do not normally think in terms of slum clearance.

You, who are principally interested in highway development, will in the long run I think, most effectively reach your objective if you help to build up an effective, well staffed, official planning commission, encourage it to see highway development in relation to the total functioning complex of the city, and then work with it closely.