

# Community Values and Urban Transportation Systems

THOMAS W. FLETCHER  
*Deputy Mayor Commissioner*  
*Washington, D. C.*

**A**ROUND the District of Columbia the subject of freeways evokes highly charged emotions, but since limited-access highways are so intertwined in the fabric of the modern city and play such a substantial part in our nationwide transportation picture, I do not think any speaker talking on urban transportation can avoid the subject.

Now, why does the Nation's Capital need greater transportation capability? Why do we need to change the status quo? The answer I think lies in a series of circumstances that are now almost clichés since they have been recited so often:

1. The Washington area has been one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the United States for a decade and a half. The population has practically doubled since 1950.

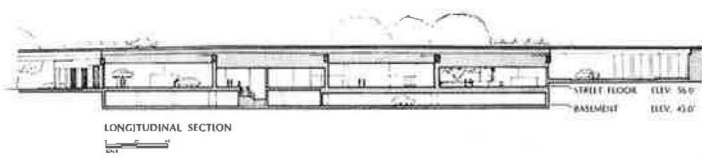
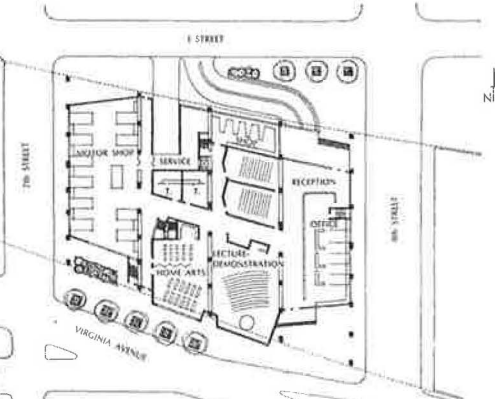
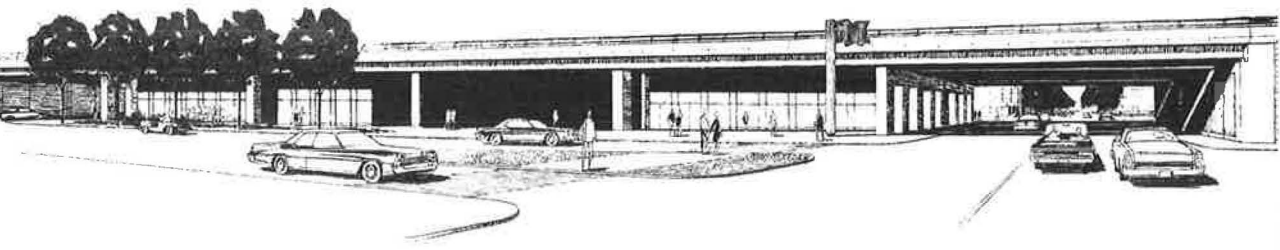
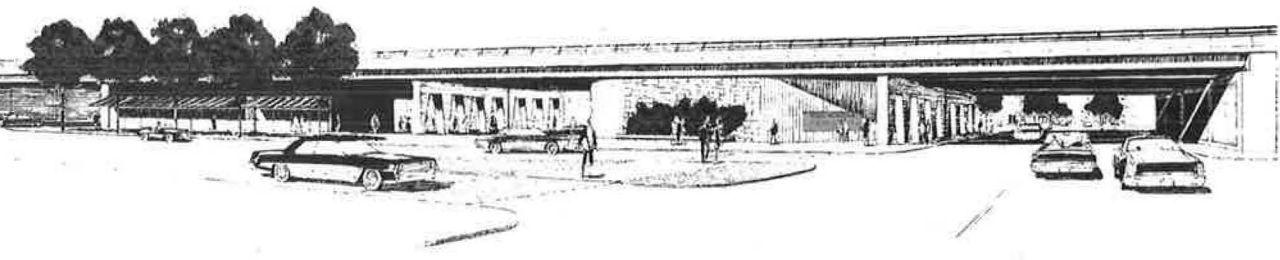
2. To accommodate the population increase and accompanying business increase, building has been going on at a terrific rate — up to a billion dollars per year.

3. As a result, traffic has been increasing 3 to 7 percent per year.

4. Heavy-type traffic movements are beginning to infiltrate residential streets to an unsatisfactory degree.

These are the physical manifestations of our need. Coupled with them, of course, are the specific needs of the community, particularly those of the underprivileged segments. For one thing, our residents do not need any more through-type traffic on neighborhood streets; secondly, it is easy to observe the need for better quality and probably cheaper — even subsidized — mass transit.

You may recall the incident reported in the newspapers last summer wherein a domestic worker required two and one-half hours to go



The areas under elevated freeway offer opportunities for a variety of multiple uses. Three schemes for under structure use of the proposed Southeast Freeway in Washington, D. C., are presented. The illustrations show possible recreation, commercial, or educational development of a site. (Source: Richardson, Gordon & Associates and Harbeson, Hough, Livingston & Larson, Inner Loop Freeway System, Washington, D. C., Southeast Freeway Understructure Study 7th to 8th Streets, Philadelphia, Pa., 1968.)

via bus from her home in Anacostia to the western edge of the District where she worked.

Ridiculous? Certainly! George Avery, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Commission Chairman, made some quick changes and, presto, it was changed to forty-five minutes to an hour.

This is merely an indicator. There are others. Foremost is the community requirement that any of our solutions not be overly disruptive to the fabric of the community and most important that they serve the needs of our residents. Here are some other requirements:

- We want to do everything within our power to protect homogeneous neighborhoods, to keep them from being fragmented, truncated, or destroyed.

- We want no "Chinese walls" separating residents from their schools, churches, recreational, and other essential facilities.

- We want to see freeways carefully planned and integrated with the areas through which they run so that there is no through-traffic on local streets.

- We want the Freeway System to pursue its course as unobtrusively as possible and yet be aesthetically pleasing.

- We want the legislative tools and authority that will promote the economic health and development of our city, particularly its downtown area, since these will also promote the welfare of our citizenry.

- We want to develop additional sources of revenue for the District. We especially want to see the tax dollars replaced that are lost through the demolition of residential and commercial structures.

- More important, we want to protect the employment opportunities of our citizens.

- We want to encourage the development of relocation housing for low and moderate income families and individuals, especially the elderly and the handicapped. Whenever possible, they should be relocated in or adjacent to their old neighborhoods.

- Most important, there should be full community participation in the determination of the need for a balanced transportation system and the decision as to its location.

As you probably know, here in the District we are trying mightily to build a balanced transportation system, in its true sense. I know "balanced" lately has become a fighting word to some, but when we examine alternatives and when we look at the experience and supposed good practice in other cities — Montreal, Toronto, Cleveland, Chicago — we still come up with this objective:

An improved network of major streets and arterials plus a minimal heavy duty freeway system connecting to Interstate routes and distributing traffic to centers of heavy use; an adequate rail rapid transit system to handle movement in heavy density corridors particularly rush hours; and a very much expanded bus system on both streets and freeways.

Now, how to achieve these objectives? I must confess, we do not know completely. Frankly, the solution is just evolving; we must guide its evolution into a correct form.

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority has just received a mandate on its bond issue in five political subdivisions and we are pressing for release of funds from Congress on its proposed 97-mile rail rapid-transit system.

Our own Department of Highways and Traffic is coming along satisfactorily on street improvements — not so good on Freeways. Of a minimal 29-mile system, 10 are built and carrying up to 80,000 vehicles per day on Southwest Freeway, 140,000 vehicles per day on 14th Street Bridges; 5 miles are under construction and 14 are yet to be nailed down. On these 14 miles, emotions run high.

As you know, WMATC, by law, controls the bus companies; they carried 172 million passengers in 1967 for a year's increase of 1.3 percent, thereby bucking the national trend. They have a future role of greater importance. They recently solved a most difficult bus robbery situation, by instituting scrip for fare change. Right now they are being threatened with a bus boycott, and we have fare trouble.

Lest you think however, our lot is peculiar to this time and generation, let me quote Sir Edmund Burke, a distinguished English statesman of the eighteenth century, on performing public works: "Those who carry on great public works must be proof against the most fatiguing delays, the most mortifying disappointments, the most shocking insults and, what is worst of all, the most presumptuous judgments of the ignorant upon their designs."

Accordingly, let us continue to press for success.