

The Highway Administrator Looks at Values

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It is all too often said that the highway organization and, more particularly, the highway engineer are basically insensitive to the preservation of those items of value that are difficult to measure and broadly included under the term of "community values". We do not believe that this has ever really been the case, but we do believe that there is room for improvement and that better ways of blending urban freeways into the fabric of our communities can be found.

Like any other highway organization, the California Division of Highways has learned a great deal in the past 20 years about working with local communities in reaching solutions to route location and design problems. In this period we have had adopted locations for several hundred miles of urban freeways. Obviously there has been considerable controversy on some routes, but when compared to the total miles the controversial miles become a fairly small percentage.

There is one main point that we believe is essential in every route study and that is adequate communication between the highway organization and the people involved. These people are all the people, from a single resident to all parts of the local governing bodies. An open-door policy with best understanding possible of just what is being studied helps eliminate any problems that are based on fear of the unknown, and places the honest disagreements on a more factual basis. We never expect to reach utopia and obtain 100 percent acceptance, but that does not mean we should give up trying.

In 1959 the California State Legislature adopted a master plan for freeways and expressways. This plan included some 12,600 miles of roadway with only the general location of the routes and the termini being described. This master plan was adopted only after a thorough study of the future highway needs of the entire state, along with considerable discussion of the proposals in almost every area of the state. This plan is subject to a mandatory review and recommendations for changes by the state legislature every four years, although additions or deletions can be made at any time by the legislature if they so desire. Of this 12,600-mile system, 7,700 miles have been adopted and 5,900 miles completed or under construction. This system incorporates all of the 2,300 miles of the Interstate System in California.

The final decision on a specific route location, within the general description established by the legislature, is made by a seven-member lay commission, appointed by the governor, called the California Highway Commission. This is a non-salaried commission and each member represents the state at large. The three principal factors that are considered by the Commission in reaching a decision are (a) community effects, (b) traffic service, and (c) right-of-way and construction costs of the freeway.

The last two, which played the more dominant role in the decision-making process for many years, have recently been relegated to the subordinate position, and now the community, or socioeconomic effect on the community, is generally the item of primary importance. The problem, of course, is determining the values and goals of a community as related to the freeway's impact in order that some measure can be applied to community effects. We have never attempted to assign real values related to community effects for any of our studies but, as stated earlier, we have not been oblivious to the problems and certainly make every effort to recognize them.

For each of our freeway location projects, we try to obtain a full comprehension of community values and effects from an exchange of information with the community itself. We are bound by laws, rules, policy, and procedures to communicate with local jurisdictions and groups affected by our studies. Specifically, some of these laws and procedures include:

1. Local approval of the project limits. This is to avoid the piecemeal approach and the problem of pointing the route without due consideration of the next community. It of course leads to longer and more complicated studies.
2. Initial and continuing contact with the governing bodies and technical staffs of local agencies during the study period.
3. Full dissemination of the results of our studies through a public hearing with the presentation of the local agencies' and public's views of community effects. Illustrations and models of the various alternate locations of the proposed freeway are shown.
4. Distribution of the State Highway Engineers' recommendation to other State agencies concerned with resources and planning, and also to the local governments affected.
5. A recommendation as to a specific location by the Director of Public Works to the California Highway Commission after having taken all factors into consideration.
6. Notification to all local agencies that the California Highway Commission intends to adopt a route.
7. A second public hearing by the Highway Commission if required by a local agency, or considered desirable by the Commission itself.
8. Adoption of a route location by the Highway Commission with a report detailing the reasons for adoption of this specific location.
9. After the adoption, and before right-of-way acquisition or construction can begin, an agreement must be reached with the local agency concerning the effect on its streets. Concurrence must be obtained on street crossings, closures, adjustments, and interchange location.

Our philosophical approach to route location studies enthusiastically embraces these statutes and procedures. In fact, we go much beyond these. We attempt to communicate with all elements in the community that are concerned and interested in our studies. The elements would include the schools, the overall business interests through the local Chamber of Commerce, specific businesses and industries directly affected, churches, and home-owner groups, as well as the local governing bodies. Only by contact with all these elements can we begin to obtain the full spectrum of opinion, views, and attitudes that make up the community values.

In an effort to reconcile differing viewpoints between adjacent cities involved in a particular route study, we often help organize or participate in already existing committees comprised of local staffs and/or officials representing the communities affected in the studies. This helps bring an understanding of the other city's values and goals to the participants. Sometimes these committees are fruitful in recommending a mutually agreeable alignment to the councils of their respective cities.

Route determinations in California take a much longer time to accomplish than either we, or the people involved in the communities, would like. Four years is often a minimum and this is largely due to rules and procedures that are needed to keep everyone involved informed and that guarantee their right of participation. We have not found that delay or a continual extension of the study process either makes that final decision any easier or more palatable.

The following are some observations on what attitudes and values we have encountered during our studies.

Opposition to a proposed freeway might be categorized as individual and community. An individual's opposition is often emotional and is rooted in the economic and financial stake he has in his home. Nearly all individuals that are opposed to freeways are single-family home owners who are on or near one of the study lines. The home owner does not know whether the freeway will take his house and he fears he will suffer economically if it does, or it may leave his house right next to the freeway with the subsequent problems, some real and some imaginary. Those who rent homes or apartments are generally not concerned. They have no economic stake in their home, consider themselves transient, and for the most part believe they will move long before the freeway is built.

Owners of businesses and industries are not generally worried by the prospect of a freeway nearby. In fact, they usually are pleased with the exposure and accessibility

such a freeway would afford. However, they do strongly prefer that the freeway stay outside of the industrial or business development. If it is necessary that the freeway encroach within such a development, businessmen can face it less emotionally than home owners because they are generally confident they will be compensated for full value.

Communities acting through their city councils reflect to some extent the views and fears of the home owners and businessmen threatened by the freeway. In addition, many of our smaller cities act in a very chauvinistic manner. They fear the freeway will split and disrupt their city. They fear loss of identity and a loss of tax revenue and population. They may recognize the need for a freeway in the area but very often they desire that it be on their boundary just inside the next city. They are very jealous of their territorial integrity and are not prone to subordinate their own interests for the overall good of the area.

The positive factors favoring freeways are difficult to bring out. In our location studies, there are numerous forces that recognize the need for added transportation facilities and silently support the freeway. The great majority of people, who are not directly affected by any of the studies, are the silent majority. The vocal minority is very outspoken, but we find it difficult to determine to what extent they are supported by the community as a whole. Community leaders also have the same problem and sometimes they tend to bow to that vocal minority. It takes a degree of civic responsibility and courage for community leaders to stand up in positive support for a freeway through their community. Sometimes these leaders may privately desire the freeway, but for political expediency will be publicly ambivalent or even oppose it.

Business and industrial leaders, who generally recognize and support our freeway system, often favor some of our study lines that avoid industrial or business properties, even at the expense of encroaching into residential areas. Many times these industrial and commercial leaders will not publicly support a specific freeway alignment. Perhaps this is due to a reluctance on their part to antagonize groups of local home owners.

Opposition, then, is vocal and sometimes very strident and emotional. Our supporters are usually low-keyed. The net effect can deceive a casual observer into thinking that the proposed freeway is a necessary evil or even an unnecessary evil.

In general, we have a conflict of interests on most of our studies. Home owners want the line through industrial areas rather than residential areas. Business interests feel that they support the community and provide jobs, while home owners can relocate any where. A city or community wants and needs the freeway but it should be located just outside their city limits. And when any study line appears to be gaining support from several elements in the area, the residents on that line may oppose and question the need for any freeway at all, sometimes arguing that another mode of transportation is really needed rather than more freeways.

As a generalization, we have found that all but the very largest cities are very concerned about preserving the maximum acreage for future industry and commerce. Most cities in southern California abhor the bedroom-suburb identification. They aspire to become a well-balanced city with their own distinct identity. To achieve this, they try to attract industry and commerce so their citizens can shop and work near home. To enhance their image and instill pride in its citizens, many of the newer cities have invested in new, very attractive civic centers and maintain all their own staffs, complete with police and fire protection. There are a few cities, usually of well-established expensive homes, that are the exception and want to remain primarily residential. We must identify and seek to conform to each city's goals early in our studies. Since there are 77 cities in Los Angeles County and 25 cities in Orange County, often with very irregular boundaries, trying to accommodate the diverse desires of all the communities involved in any one of our projects has proved to be one of our knottiest problems. Also, since the majority of our cities are less than 100,000 in population and still growing rapidly, their goals and objectives are not always too stable.

No one city of the size we generally affect can easily analyze, nor can we compute, the direct benefits they may receive if a given route is built, or the losses if no facility is constructed. They must recognize that, in an urban complex, transportation is

absolutely essential and without it a particular city or community may have little reason for being. A community cannot reap the benefits of close association in an urban complex and not accept its responsibility in seeing that the total goals of the area, including transportation, are fulfilled.

In order to bring some of the problems and values more into focus and to explain our approach in dealing with the communities, let us take examples from our Los Angeles-Orange County urban complex. The suburbanization that has spread outward from major communities like Los Angeles in the past 20 years has developed and continues to develop large areas that are almost totally dependent on the automobile. Even with this dependency on the automobile, with other modes of transportation quite some time in the future, there is always some resistance to the intrusion of a new freeway into a community.

The first of several projects we will use as examples is a 7-mile segment of Route 39, which runs north from the coastal area of Orange County. The studies began on this route in the early 1960's, and at that time there were several established communities clustering around their old downtown cores. The large part of the area was open flat farmland just on the verge of development. Because of effort needed on other projects in the area, we were unable to proceed as rapidly as we would have liked. As the studies progressed the area changed almost faster than we could keep up with it. For example, the population of one city involved increased from 11,500 in 1962 to 93,500 by 1967. What was unimproved land traversed by our study line alternates quickly became built up largely with homes.

There were five incorporated cities directly affected by these studies and several more by the study line extensions to the north. In 1964 the mayors and staffs of these cities formed a committee to try to resolve their differences on where the route should be located. After a number of meetings over a one-year period, no agreement could be reached. We attended most of these meetings to present information and discuss possible alternatives. Several of the cities favored study alternates that stayed almost completely outside their corporate limits. Two cities, which could not be avoided, were primarily concerned with keeping the freeway outside their industrially zoned but as yet unimproved areas. We were unable to devise any practical study alignment that would meet the desires of all the cities involved.

As we neared the completion of our studies in 1966, the County Supervisor representing this area set up a series of discussions and meetings between the leaders of the communities, trying to obtain some acceptable compromise route location. The Division of Highways staff participated at these meetings to the extent of presenting the economic and land-use results of our studies and answering questions. On one occasion, to insure that each community had an understanding of the other's problems, we conducted a bus tour (arranged by the County Supervisor). This tour was along each of the study lines through all the cities, for all of the community leaders. At this point, prior to our public hearing, we had no line preferences.

In the weeks before our public hearing in June 1967 each of the five cities directly affected had its own public hearing. Private citizen reaction at this stage was generally indifferent except for one city. That city's preference traversed a well-established neighborhood where a large number of homes were less than five years old. The home owners organized themselves in opposition to the City Council's preference and supported, instead, an alignment adjacent to a railroad that affected very few homes in the city but would have required industrially zoned land. Despite their efforts, the City Council refused to change its position.

As a result of information obtained at our first hearing, the Division held a second hearing to present a compromise alignment that we believed might gain acceptance. We were not successful. After sifting through the mass of testimony from the two hearings, the State Highway Engineer recommended the most easterly line that lay adjacent to a power line, an existing barrier. His recommendation affected the most homes, but no industry or industrially zoned property. In the absence of any agreement among the cities, his recommendation for the route distributed the impact of the freeway, in terms of homes taken and tax loss, most equitably among the cities.

After this recommendation several individuals in housing tracts affected by our studies mounted a crusade against two of the study lines that affected the most homes. These few active individuals through their strenuous efforts galvanized the entire community. Thousands of signatures were collected. There was extensive local news coverage. The beach city council after some stormy meetings was forced to retract its previous preference for the residential line, and recommend the railroad-industrial line. This alignment virtually wiped out a new subdivision and new industries under construction in the neighboring city to the north.

A third hearing, this time by the California Highway Commission, was held in July 1968 and there was considerable local citizen opposition to the recommended line. Again, no basis for any compromise line acceptable to everyone could be found. The California Highway Commission adopted the recommended line in October with a split vote, which is extremely unusual, but does indicate the difficulty in finding one route that is completely acceptable to any group that tries to make an evaluation.

Even though there was never total agreement among the cities on route location, there were two items on which everyone could agree: first, that a freeway was needed, and second, that the decision should not be delayed. When this type of an atmosphere can be obtained during the route selection process, the final design of the project usually proceeds much more smoothly.

The second project is Route 1 in Laguna Beach. Laguna Beach is a rather unique community along the south Orange County coast. It, along with several adjoining county areas, completely occupies a narrow shelf between the Pacific Ocean and a small mountain ridge. It is an artists' colony and a tourist center, with essentially no industry. The traffic demand obviously was parallel and reasonably close to the ocean. All of our initial studies attempted, where possible, to squeeze in between homes and the steeper hillside above them.

At the very beginning of our studies a community organization was formed called the League of Orange Coast Community Associations (LOCCA). Although they obviously had strong feelings about where they would prefer the freeway, and were primarily organized to oppose a coastal freeway, we were able to work with them and exchanged information.

Because of what we learned through this contact and in part through their urging, we agreed to look at an inland line some two or more miles removed from the basic studies. We did not initially believe that an inland line would satisfy the transportation needs of the area but did believe it warranted study. On completion of our studies, when weighed against the impact of the coastal alignments, the inland line appeared to be a reasonable alternate. It would provide fair traffic service to the coastal area and good service for future development inland.

As mentioned earlier, we do not hold a public hearing until after the results of our studies are furnished to those who will probably be making presentations at the hearing. On this particular route we allowed extra time between the time our results were furnished and the hearing, to allow the LOCCA group to study and prepare for the hearing. One of their prime goals was to weigh community values (with a dollar figure) to prove the worth of the inland line over the coastal lines. They were unable to accomplish their goal even though they had a group of citizens with more than average talent to put to the task. They did, however, put forth a rather detailed discussion on the many items of community value that should be considered; schools, art and cultural center, library, hospital, parks and neighborhoods. They also accented the positive values of the inland line in terms of future growth. This was one of the most effective and constructive groups with which we have ever worked. The inland line was recommended and adopted without the need of a Commission hearing, largely due to the thorough understandings developed with the local people during the studies. This citizens' group was headed by six community leaders who met regularly for almost four years to obtain information from us, to understand the problems, and to discuss alternatives.

A third example is where two cities have made serious efforts to determine where the freeway should be located within their borders. This is along the northerly 8-mile

segment of the future Route 39 Freeway in Los Angeles County. Staff members and officials banded together in a committee along with highway representatives beginning in 1967 to mutually study and possibly agree on an acceptable route location. We had only begun our studies a short time before, and the cities felt they should not wait until the alternatives became too well fixed. At about the same time, one of the cities hired a recognized consulting firm to analyze route alternates and make recommendations to that city. Near the conclusion of this report, the city appointed a Citizens Critical Issues Committee of about 80 citizens to study various aspects of the freeway's impact and arrive at their own independent conclusions. The committee and its subcommittees worked many hours in completing their reports, and presented their recommendation to the City Council.

Similarly, the second city also hired a consultant and simultaneously appointed a Citizens Blue Ribbon Committee to study the freeway location problem. We make every effort to furnish all available information to consultants and committees working on projects such as these. We also are more than willing to meet with them at any time to discuss the project.

At the present time, neither city council has acted upon these reports. In one city, the residents living along the line recommended by the Blue Ribbon Committee and the consultant angrily faced the council when they were to consider the recommendations. The council postponed any action.

The results of these local efforts have been to focus on a possible freeway alignment that is practical and could be acceptable to all the communities affected—at least this is the determination of the coordinating committee, the consultants, and the citizens' committees. There has been as much local citizen involvement in this decision-making process to date as can normally be expected. But, characteristically, most of the people directly affected by the study lines have not yet raised their voices to any great extent. This is because their councils have not taken action on the recommendations made to them for a particular line, and we have not announced a public hearing. We expect our studies to be complete in about a year and we will be interested to see if the intensive local involvement and efforts of the cities' leaders will make the route selection process more palatable.

A fourth situation is the Route 1-107 Freeway in the South Bay area of Los Angeles County. This is an almost completely developed area of moderate to expensive homes with extensive industry and commerce. For several years, beginning about 1965, we worked closely with a committee representing all five cities directly affected. They had no success in agreeing on any alignment. Although there was good publicity regarding our studies, we developed little citizen interest. Finally, our studies were completed in mid-1968 and we conducted a number of public informational meetings in the area. Public informational meetings are held at any time during the study period but most often just after we have completed studies and prior to the public hearing. This allows for maximum dissemination of information so that people can decide if they need or desire to attend the formal public hearing. We were surprised by the intensity of the public reaction. Our meetings were attended by thousands of people. The cities conducted local public hearings, also attended by thousands, so that they could make recommendations at our public hearing, which was held in October 1968. State law requires that before a local agency can make a recommendation on a freeway alignment, it must hold a public hearing.

In the South Bay, the community leaders and the populace could not seem to get interested in our studies until our hearing and a decision was near. When they realized the imminency of the decision their reactions were mixed. Many thousands of families felt threatened by the various study lines. There was strong feeling among many home owners to oppose any freeway intrusion into the area. One city did, in fact, officially take this position. The council of the major city affected endorsed one alignment but the vote was split, with several members opposed to any freeway.

We do not really know how we could have done differently to obtain more local involvement earlier on this project. It does point out that, without thorough understandings during the study period, emotionalism is going to be much greater and good, sound, constructive comments at a hearing will be fewer in number.

In these several projects mentioned there has been little comment regarding specific items that are important community assets. What we have been trying to bring out is that we, in highway organizations, cannot sit in judgment by ourselves and reach conclusions on community values. We must involve ourselves early with the community, and through these contacts attempt to learn what their goals and objectives are so that, wherever possible, we can develop our studies to complement them. We cannot make their decisions for them but we are hopeful that we can assist them in the decisions they must make.

In the past, and probably for some time to come, we will continue to develop data relating to route studies that are almost entirely objective. At each public hearing we have a handout entitled "Report of Route Location Studies", which includes considerable amount of information. Information included consists of a study line map and several tables, appended to a narrative that compares economic and land-use data.

The number of alternates considered and presented usually is greater in number than might be desirable but often is necessary to insure the widest possible range of community effects. Although benefit/cost ratios have been included for some projects, we are tending to use them less and less. We have found that this ratio usually does not vary significantly for urban freeways and therefore is of little value in these areas in helping us, or the communities, reach a decision. Two pages of the handout give detailed information on types of property affected and the effect on the local tax base. This is one way we attempt to relate the effect or impact on one city to another, by comparing several easily computed factors, but there is no subjective analysis of community values.

In order to give the public the best understanding possible of the alternate routes for a project, in addition to the handout material we make a formal presentation. The presentation describes briefly the various physical features of each alternate and the major controls that influenced the selection of routes. Using slides, we show the base map and controls, a description of each alternate line, retouched photos showing major controls, and so forth.

Although we have been doing a good job of evaluating alternatives with the tools available and within the limits imposed on us, I think that in today's society, with today's values, we must find additional methods in order to properly compare alternates.

What are the real values in a community and how should they be ranked? We need more information on types of housing required and affected. We need better understanding of neighborhoods. Are they stable, changing, or where is a change likely to occur? Will the impact of the freeway be beneficial to the adjoining area, or will it just be an intrusion? How will, or should, land use change when the freeway is constructed? Freeways can and do bring change that will increase a tax base in a community. This should be evaluated to offset the mass of data now generated that only indicate loss of tax base. There are many other items that must be considered and the number and type will vary as communities vary in size, goals, and objectives.

Briefly, we need to study more than how we can ease a freeway around and between the many recognized controls. After you have plotted all the usual controls such as schools, churches, hospitals, parks, cemeteries, neighborhoods, and commercial centers on a map, the problem of locating a line through this maze is similar to laying a stiff rubber hose on the map and bending it around until the best balance is obtained. We need corridor planning as a part of the freeway planning. We might just learn that some of these controls can find the freeway a good neighbor, others would benefit through relocation, or a transitional area could use the impetus of the freeway for a more rapid rate of change for the better.

We have yet to try this approach in California on any route study project, but an approach we are using on 17 miles of urban freeway being designed in the Los Angeles area may well be the forerunner for such studies. On this project we believe that studies along this adopted route by a team that includes the highway organization, a multi-discipline consultant, and the local agency will develop opportunities to minimize any adverse effects caused by the intrusion of the freeway, and maximize the potential of the high-volume transportation corridor. Or, as Johnny Mercer indicated in one of

his songs some 25 years ago, "You've got to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, and don't go with Mr. In-between!"

Other states in the country have used, and are using, the "team approach" on their projects with varying success. However, the concept of looking at a wider corridor with a broader base for ideas certainly has tremendous potential and we will surely be seeing more of it in the planning process. We must not lose sight of the fact that, since the local agency controls land use and zoning, they must play a very active role in any corridor planning that is undertaken.

To summarize, then, some of the major points that must be considered in our planning process when we are trying to make community values a part of the analysis are:

1. Try for as much early involvement as possible with all interested and affected groups to better understand local problems, goals and needs.
2. Keep open lines for communication, and do not withhold information unless it is too preliminary and therefore possibly misleading.
3. If local groups do not exist that have an effective base to disseminate and obtain information, try to assist in developing one or more.
4. The freeway should not be thought of as a narrow band for transportation, only; think in terms of the corridor and how it can be enhanced because of changes required by the freeway.
5. Always attempt to keep the local press and public informed regarding the project status; undue controversy and often delay result due to misunderstandings that are widely publicized.
6. Look at all possible alternatives and do not hesitate to try the new or unproven.
7. Above all, be a good listener, to find out just what the community is saying.