

Many metropolitan areas are tending toward very low densities in new residential development. There is a question as to how long this trend toward lower density patterns in housing may continue despite what people may want. Other limitations may produce a different density or distribution pattern 20 years from now and give us quite different considerations as to the kinds and spacing of street systems that would be required. Even as we look at present trends in distribution, we have significant alternatives in the way in which we might direct the rapid development in our metropolitan areas. Yet only cursory attention is being given to these alternatives and to the ways in which the highway systems might be shaped to support a selected pattern of metropolitan area growth.

**The New York Thruway Beckons Researchers**  
**F. William Davidson**  
**New York Thruway Authority**

Basically, I am here as an observer. My field is public relations and public information. I do know, however, of something like \$400 million in capital investment along the New York Thruway route. Granted that this may not be a net gain for our state-wide economy and that much of it might have come to New York if the Thruway never had been built; but tremendous projects and developments have been created only because the Thruway was built. For example there is a \$30 million county-wide shopping center in Yonkers. The promoter of this development told me that if it had not been for the Thruway they never would have gone ahead with this project.

It is not claimed that all of the industrial developments along the Thruway have been created solely because of the Thruway. In fact, I should like to discuss the difficulty that people in my field have in claiming such things. We greatly desire to claim that because of the Thruway there have been new jobs and new money, and the higher we can go into the millions of dollars the better we like it. We use that approach, of course, but I must admit that there are times when I have my doubts as to the firmness of the ground that I am treading upon. Perhaps a brief review of the research done on the Thruway will explain.

I am the acting director of a department in the Thruway Authority—the Department of Public Information and Business Promotion. It is strictly a public relations outfit. That is our whole effort—news releases, promotion, speeches. The business promotion comes in chiefly through out activities in persuading more commercial accounts, more trucking companies, and more bus companies to use the Thruway, which is one of the longest toll highways in the county.

The sources of information are basically these: Every two weeks we get literally hundreds of news clippings about the Thruway from papers all over New York, and that material is catalogued. By analyzing these newspaper clippings over a long period and watching the developments, we see the story unfolding. These news clippings also have valuable information as to capital investment and the reasons people locate where they do.

Some people are reluctant to admit that the Thruway influenced their move. In any case where there is some question as to the role the Thruway played in any substantial industrial or residential development, we usually try to contact the promoter or some local Chamber of Commerce official personally, to clear the matter up.



A view of the new and huge General Electric Electronics Park adjacent to the New York Thruway, just north of Syracuse in Central New York. The thruway is having a profound economic impact on business and industry in the State of New York.



Before the New York State Thruway was built, this area east of Buffalo had developed only scattered residential tracts. The opening of the Expressway has opened up the entire area. It is reported that \$50,000,000 in new building has been inspired by the thruway and that another \$50,000,000 will be spent on capital outlay in this area when the the Thruway's Erie and Niagara sections are completed.

The Chambers of Commerce are a very important source of information. We have utilized in the past direct personal letters, and even form letters, to contact their officials and various other groups, such as truckers and local business men, that we hear about moving into the Thruway area. In this way we try to get the facts relating to the effect of the Thruway on land use.

**If We Can Measure the Benefits, Could We Devise the Taxation?**  
**R. M. Zettel, Institute of Transportation and Traffic Engineering**  
**University of California**

There are a few things we should think about, particularly in relationship to the reasons we are here; that is, the problems of finding some answers rather quickly for the Congress, for the state legislators, and for the highway engineers who must make immediate locations.

I think all of us accept the point made some time ago <sup>1/</sup> that new increments of value are likely to decrease as the highway system improves and expands. The spectacular effects that have been observed may have come about because we have dealt with a very local area or an area within a community.

We have talked about the area of influence of the Dallas Freeway. Another freeway and another direction would change the pattern and would not have, as several people recognized, such dramatic effects on land values and land use as the first freeway development.

From the point of view of the Bureau of Public Roads there is also a larger problem—the net social gain. We may have a benefit to Boston or a benefit to Massachusetts and a benefit to Los Angeles, all of which tend to offset each other. When Congress is dealing with a highway system for the whole nation, presumably it would have to evaluate its impact in terms of the total effect.

One of the things that I am frequently asked and don't have the answer to is: "When we talk about impacts on land values, to what extent are we talking about benefits to highway users, the so-called idea of the transmitted benefit?" More specifically, there have been frequent references to savings in time and operating economies. These are regarded as benefits to highway users. Then an effort is made to find out the effect on land values, calling these benefits to land owners. To what extent are the same things being counted both ways?

With reference to financing the highway program, if we are talking primarily about the same benefit but measuring it in two different ways, then our conclusions with respect to the appropriate distribution of the fiscal burden will be quite different than if we assume that they are separable things.

If land values and the other possible impacts are net rather than transmitted benefits, is there any practical way of applying the known facts to the financing of highways? If we found increases in land values, we have assumed that we should impose property taxes in order to finance the highways, to make the property owner pay part of the costs. We have

<sup>1/</sup>Zettel, R. M., Proc., Institute of Traffic Engineers (1953).