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'People Versus Concrete'

Now the Real Highway Fight Begins

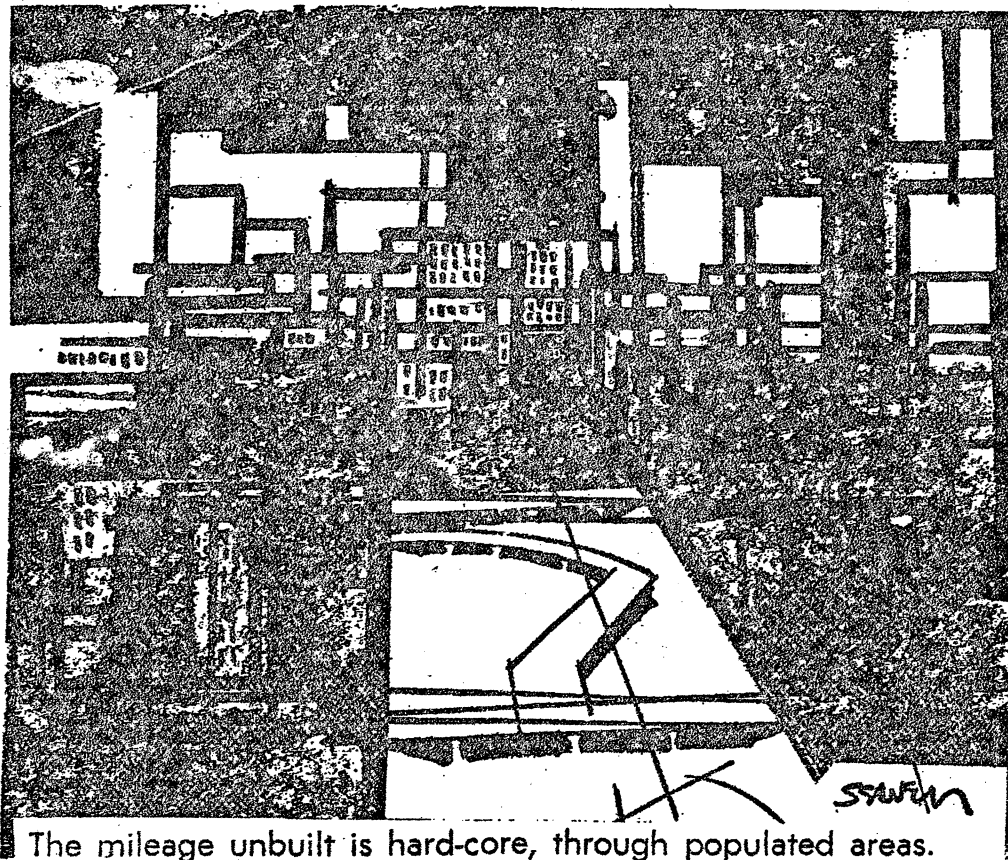
CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

Nature worked overtime to create two men as different as Edward J. Ribbs and Justin Gray. Then fate placed them on opposite sides of a controversy involving \$300,000,000, the welfare of some thousands of Cantabrigians, and much of the shape of Boston's future urban growth. Now time has brought the two right back to where their causes began—at an impasse.

Mr. Ribbs is Massachusetts' public-works commissioner, and he is determined to build an interstate highway through Cambridge to relieve traffic congestion in downtown Boston. "Any ordinary layman who's got the sense that God gave a goose can see that Boston is going to be strangled if this highway isn't built," he asserts.

Mr. Gray, who heads Cambridge's community-development office, is determined to stop the expressway as it is now planned. He has succeeded for two years. "They are not going to run any highway through here," he says flatly. "It's inconceivable. This is another age. Highways just aren't going to be built any more simply because a Department of Public Works decides it."

Dialog like this, representing totally different philosophies of urban highways and their impact on the people who live in their paths, can be heard these days in two dozen major cities across the nation.



The mileage unbuilt is hard-core, through populated areas.

Should They Be Built at All?

In Nashville, New York City, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Philadelphia, Baltimore, New Orleans, and elsewhere, citizens groups and sometimes local governments are resisting the encroachments of expressways. Urban dwellers are demanding not only a voice in the routes the highways follow, but in whether the road is to be built above, below, or at ground level. Moreover, urban groups are increasingly questioning whether more expressways should be built at all.

In short, expressways—particularly interstate highways—are in trouble. And the trouble is likely to get worse before it gets better, because in most states much of the mileage yet unbuilt is "hard-core" mileage through heavily populated areas. Although it makes up less than 15 per cent of the total interstate mileage, the hard-core segment will gobble up 40 per cent of the \$56 billion total cost and carry 50 per cent of the traffic.

Begun in 1956, the interstate system was projected to cost \$41 billion, or \$1,000,000 a mile, when completed in 1972. The Federal Government pays 80 per cent and each state 10 per cent of local costs. Last year, however, Congress extended the completion deadline to 1974 and the price tag went to \$56 billion. If delays like the one here persist, inflation is likely to drive the price even higher.

Cambridge Classic

The controversy in Cambridge is a classic one. The principals could not have been chosen better by Central Casting.

Commissioner Ribbs is a retired Army Corps of Engineers colonel, meticulously groomed and with a parade-ground bearing. His handsomely paneled office is replete with maps and thick volumes of traffic and engineering surveys to which he refers as he states his case in well-ordered, thorough, B-follows-A sentences.

"I don't personally believe that they [Mr. Gray and other Cambridge officials] speak for the people of Cambridge. I know every family on this expressway route. I

know how many children they have. They say this is a low-income area; the average income is \$400 a month. This is a student area: people move on an average of every two years, and 75 per cent rent their homes. They were talking about 9,000 people being affected. We can count only 2,600. . . . The joke of it is, as public servants what have we got to gain from hurting Cambridge?"

Mr. Gray's staff is housed in a cavernous third-floor room in Cambridge's City Hall. Plywood dividers delineate work areas and support pots of blooming chrysanthemums but don't keep out the noise, and the visitor takes a seat in an old armchair with a chunk missing from one arm. A city planner by profession, Mr. Gray sprinkles his conversation with terms like "peer-group status" and gesticulates with outrage as he discusses highway engineers.

"Mr. Ribbs represents an anti-intellectual point of view, probably the worst form of it," he says. "There are many other state commissioners of public works who have the same attitude: that their charge is to build highways. But they're just not imaginative within that framework. These goals are very simple. They are designed to bring the man from [suburban] Lincoln into Boston and bring him home at night. They are not concerned with the impact on the black community. . . . Society has got to weigh these costs against that of getting a man to work 10 minutes earlier."

Others Who Are Involved

This is more than a two-man disagreement, of course. Others directly involved are Boston Mayor Kevin White, a Democrat; Gov. Francis W. Sargent, a Republican; Secretary of Transportation John A. Volpe; Daniel P. Moynihan, President Nixon's adviser on urban affairs; and several prominent academicians from Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which lie on either side of the proposed expressway route.

Mr. Volpe was Massachusetts' Department of Public Works (DPW) commissioner in 1956 when President Eisenhower named him to be the first Federal highway administrator. He left the post in 1957 after four months. He became Massachusetts' governor in 1961 and, as he had as DPW commissioner, insisted that the so-called Boston Inner Belt expressway was necessary.

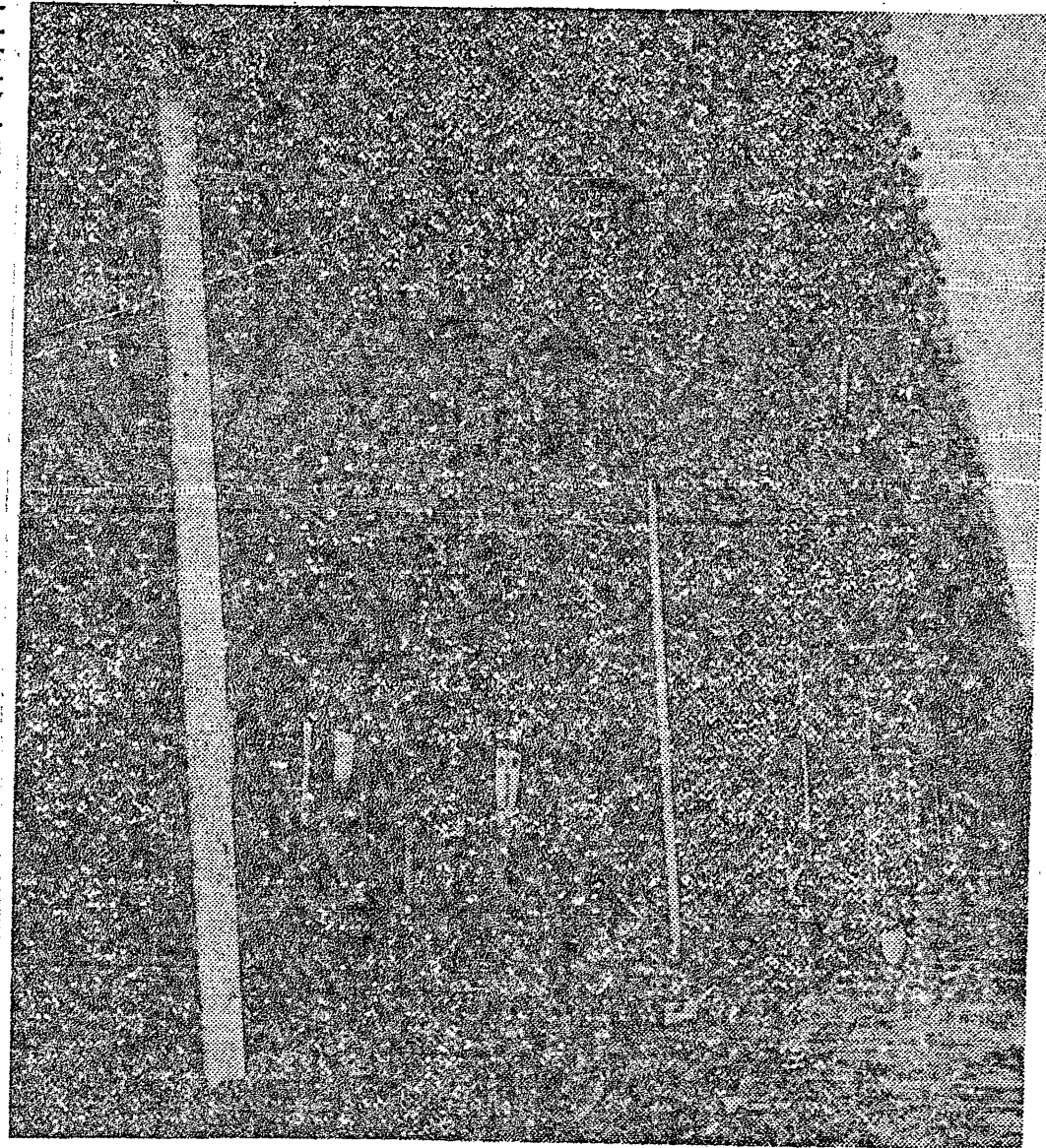
Governor Sargent was DPW commissioner in 1966, and as such he recommended to Washington the route now in dispute. He became governor when Mr. Volpe became Secretary of Transportation, and three days later 3,000 Cantabrigians, including policemen and firemen accompanied by the radical Students for a Democratic Society, marched on the State House to protest the expressway.

Mr. Moynihan entered the dispute as a member of the Mayor's Advisory Committee on the Inner Belt, a group put together for the mayor of Cambridge by Mr. Gray to study the expressway proposal. Other members included John Kenneth Galbraith, the economist; James Vorenberg, the Harvard Law School professor who was executive director of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice in 1967; and Lewis Mumford, author of *The City in History*.

What the Committee Found

This blue-ribbon committee reported back in December 1967, and said that DPW studies justifying the inner-belt route were "marked by serious deficiencies and inconsistencies." The committee noted that all later studies proceeded from a 1948 transportation plan recommending an inner belt, and that "none of these studies questioned the validity" of the belt.

"Clearly," the report said, "these studies have been circular in logic. First the designed system was used to predict future spatial distribution of populations, employment, and land use. Then these predictions were used to justify the proposed system design. This procedure, of course, provides no independent justification for the proposed expressway system."



—Bill Wingell

Above-ground or below-ground? In Philadelphia, elevated answer.

The Real Battle Now Begins Over Urban Highways

Continued From Page One

The bickering went on until last May, when the Federal Highway Administration tried to make peace. It ordered two more studies done simultaneously. The first was to see whether a highway network around Boston that excludes the inner belt, which would circle the city and shunt traffic from one expressway to another without bringing it downtown, is feasible. That study should be done soon.

The other was to be a "joint-development" study that would assume the inner belt was necessary. It would use the

DPW's proposed Cambridge route as a baseline to evaluate other, Cambridge-suggested routes, and it would also investigate further the beltway's social, economic, and other effects on the city.

That study has gone nowhere. A few days ago the DPW and its adversaries, which now include Cambridge, Boston, and the town of Brookline acting in concert, reported to Governor Sargent that they are at an impasse again. The cities and the DPW differ on three points, the main one being whether the DPW will share the direction of the study.

'I Won't Sign the Contracts'

Commissioner Ribbs says that he alone has the legal responsibility for ensuring that DPW funds are properly spent and highway work properly done. He insists that he cannot share that with the three cities. Suppose Governor Sargent decides that they are right and orders them given joint direction of the study? "Then I won't sign the contracts," the commissioner replies.

The cities counter by saying that the commissioner is asking them to give up authority that is also theirs alone. They

point to zoning, land-use, and other decisions that highway location will require. "We're not asking that the DPW abdicate its responsibility," says Mr. Gray. "We're just asking that they not ask us to abdicate ours."

The situation is now in Governor Sargent's hands. If he decides in favor of the DPW, he is sure to be criticized in Cambridge because he has a stake in the route; it was he who originally recommended it. If he decides Cambridge is right and the DPW wrong, he must be prepared to make a strong argument in Washington before Secretary Volpe, who has his own record on the question, plus his much broader responsibilities for improving urban transportation nationally, to consider.

How the matter will end is anybody's guess. As an aide to Mayor White put it: "Look at it this way: If you tripped and fell down, Commissioner Ribbs would pave you." And Secretary Volpe? "He'd pave Ribbs."

Other Key Disputes

While militant Cantabrigians are fighting off Interstate 695, urban residents around the country are doing much the same. Three of the key disputes are in New Orleans, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C. New Orleans is fighting to save the French Quarter from possible visual ruin, Baltimore is fighting to prove out a planning principle that holds great promise for the rest of the country if it works, and Washington is battling Congress itself over the issue of "white men's roads through black men's bedrooms."

As in Boston, New Orleans' proposals for big expressways go back to the 1940s but became feasible only when the interstate program made available 90 Federal cents for every state dime. The biggest squabble there involves 1.5 miles of Interstate 310, which highway officials proposed to run alongside the Mississippi River in front of Jackson Square, heart of the French Quarter.

Jackson Square is the site of the nation's oldest cathedral, St. Louis, and of the Cabildo and the Presbytere, buildings used by the Spanish when Louisiana belonged to Spain, as well as the Pontalba

Apartments, the nation's oldest. Beyond them is the Mississippi.

The first proposal called for an elevated expressway between Jackson Square and the river. Historical and civic groups screamed. They wanted a depressed roadway if one had to be built, but engineering studies showed this might undermine the city's levees and risk flooding New Orleans. A few months ago advocates and opponents alike had pretty well agreed on a surface-level road as a compromise.

Then, on March 3, the President's Council on Historic Preservation, appointed by President Johnson, said the highway as proposed would blight the French Quarter. The council said the road should either be depressed or not built there at all. New Orleans business interests urged Secretary Volpe to disregard the council's recommendations, and there the matter stands.

Residents of Washington have been bucking Congress for months over plans for a proposed system of expressways connecting the capital with the Maryland and Virginia suburbs. Shifted from earlier proposed corridors that would have taken them through white middle-class neighborhoods, the corridors now run through predominantly Negro areas.

The freeway plan also envisions a large bridge, the Three Sisters, from Washington to Virginia that would gobble up 54 acres of parkland and, opponents say, detract from the Potomac River view. Congress has refused to vote any funds for Washington's proposed rapid-transit system until construction of the freeway systems gets going. When Congress ordered the expressways begun, citizens went to court and got an injunction stopping it. That situation, too, is still stalemated.

Baltimore, Washington's seaboard neighbor, started planning its \$600,000,000 East-West Expressway with an entirely new idea. Backed by a \$4,800,000 Federal grant, the city put together an "urban design concept team" and brought in architects—and specialists like sociologists, economists, and even acoustics consultants as needed—to work with state highway engineers.

The team's function is to evaluate the expressway route and build facilities around it, under it, or over it so that it fits the areas through which it passes with the least disruption. A school, for example, is planned in the air space above the expressway.

But the team was soon beset with arguments between the engineers, who decided where the route should run, and the architects, who could only make the best of the engineers' route. Larry Reich, Baltimore's planning director, says reports of friction are exaggerated. "There's been some friction—that's to be expected," he says. "But the remarkable thing is that out of this friction has come something very creative. If there had been no friction at all, nothing would have been created."

By the Dawn's Early Blight?

Even so, the expressway's route calls for a bridge adjacent to Fort McHenry, whose bombardment by the British in the War of 1812 prompted Francis Scott Key, watching from a British ship offshore, to write *The Star Spangled Banner*.

"Imagine the bombardment of Fort McHenry [re-enacted] with a suspension span above it," snorts one disgusted Baltimore official. "It would be like running an expressway through Plymouth and putting Plymouth Rock in the median strip. How can they say they're recognizing the importance of historic monuments when they're desecrating one of the most important monuments in the United States?"

Expressway opponents look to San Francisco as Moslems to Mecca, for San Francisco did 10 years ago what they hope to do today or tomorrow. San Francisco's double-deck Embarcadero Freeway stops in mid-air a short distance from the historic old Ferry Building on the city's water front.

The Embarcadero was to have connected the Golden Gate and Oakland Bay bridges with freeways and funnel traffic south of the city. The south hook-up was finished, but the Golden Gate end remains unfinished—and may stay that way forever.

When San Franciscans saw that the Ferry Building and their water front had

practically disappeared behind the Embarcadero's bulk, they bolted. Public clamor forced the city to halt the freeway in mid-air and to refuse \$270,000,000 in Federal money to complete it and other projects.

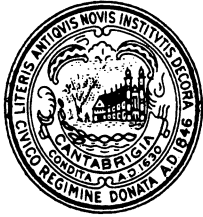
A Rapid-Transit Line Instead

Three years later, voters in the Bay Area counties of Alameda, Contra Costa, and San Francisco authorized a \$792,000,000 bond issue to build a 75-mile network of rapid-transit lines connecting San Francisco, Oakland, and Berkeley. The combined subway-surface-aerial system will take up only one-fourth the space of the Embarcadero, carry five times as many people, and will provide parking spaces for 30,000 commuters' automobiles at 23 of its 37 outlying stations when service begins in late 1971 or early 1972.

"Neighborhoods are fighting with city hall no matter what city you're in," says Cambridge's Justin Gray. "We're past citizen participation. We're talking about citizens having a voice in decisions. Neighborhood people want to be involved, not after the plan is adopted, not during it, but before it has even been considered."

That may be the only way to get the "hard-core" interstate mileage built on schedule, or even at all. For it is becoming increasingly apparent that cities may either have to go the way of San Francisco, which not all can afford, or perhaps go nowhere at all.

—JIM HAMPTON



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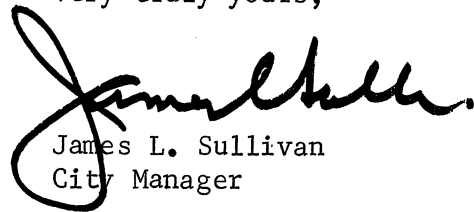
John H. Corcoran
Assistant City Manager

April 14, 1969

To the Honorable, the City Council:

Attached for your information is a copy of an article which appears in today's copies of The National Observer which relates to the Cambridge Inner-Belt and State Public Works Department dispute.

Very truly yours,



James L. Sullivan
City Manager

JLS/eb

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COMMUNICATION

from the City Manager trans-
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copy of an article which appears in today's
copies of The National Observer which re-
lates to the Cambridge Inner-Belt and State
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April 14, 1969

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