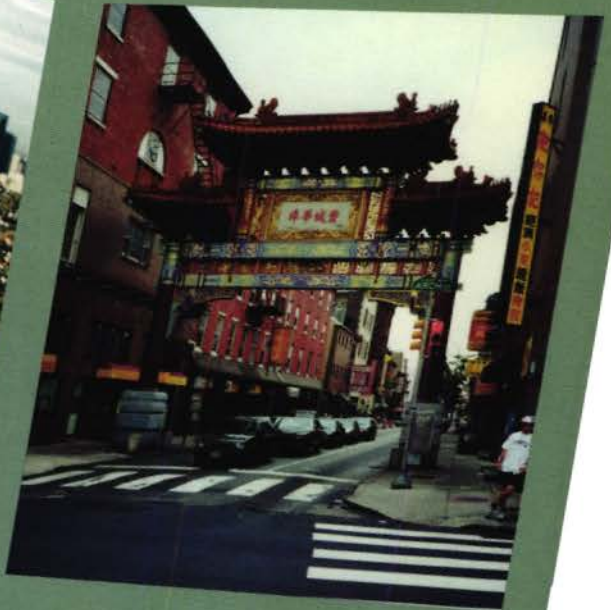


# Community Impact Mitigation



Department  
of Transportation  
Highway  
Division

Case Studies

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# **Community Impact Mitigation**

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## **Case Studies**

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Office of Environment and Planning  
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# Introduction

In 1969, Congress passed the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which requires the Federal Government, in cooperation with State and local governments and other concerned public and private organizations, to use all practicable means and measures to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony and fulfill the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations of Americans.

Since 1970, the Federal-aid Highway Program has required full consideration of possible adverse social, economic, and environmental effects during project planning, development, and decisionmaking. Final decisions are to be made in the best overall public interest, taking into consideration the need for fast, safe, and efficient transportation, public services, and the costs of eliminating or minimizing the following: adverse effects on community cohesion; public facilities; employment; tax and property values; displacement of people, businesses, and farms; and adverse impacts on community and regional growth.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has built a framework of policies and procedures to help meet its social, economic, and environmental responsibilities while accomplishing its transportation mission, and is committed to the protection and enhancement of our environment, communities, and neighborhoods. The FHWA *Environmental Policy Statement* issued in November 1994 defined “environment” to include “the natural environment, the built environment, the cultural and social fabric of our country and our neighborhoods, and the quality of life of the people who live here. This quality of life is enhanced not only by economic security and ample natural resources, but by enduring community values and thriving neighborhoods where all citizens have access to safe, comfortable, and efficient transportation.”

Many neighborhood residents, representatives, and leaders claim the transportation-planning, NEPA, and civil-rights-complaint processes do not routinely address community, neighborhood, social, economic, and “people” impacts. Transportation planners, project managers, and environmental specialists repeatedly claim that these types of impacts are qualitative and that methodologies do not exist to address them, even though laws and requirements to address social, economic, and environmental impacts during transportation planning, project development, and decisionmaking have been around for 30 years. The impacts of transportation investments on communities, neighborhoods, and people are often introduced late in the process, prompted by controversy, complaints, or lawsuits.

## Community Impact Mitigation

This document contains five case studies on community impact assessment, mitigation, and enhancement.

**Community Mitigation and Enhancement:**  
Durham, North Carolina

**Community Cohesion:**  
Oak Park, Michigan

**Community Preservation:**  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**Community Reconstruction:**  
Seattle, Washington

**Community Revitalization:**  
Prichard, Alabama

In 1996, FHWA initiated efforts to re-educate transportation professionals and enhance their expertise on how to address these issues. A user-friendly primer, “Community Impact Assessment,” was published in September 1996 on how to conduct a community impact assessment to address the impacts of proposed transportation actions on communities, neighborhoods, and people. To complement the primer, this document, “Community Impact Mitigation: Case Studies,” is designed to provide examples of how transportation projects have been planned, designed, and constructed across the Country to be neighborhood friendly; avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts; and, where appropriate, enhance the livability of communities and neighborhoods.



This document contains five case studies on community impact assessment, mitigation, and enhancement:

- Community Mitigation and Enhancement—Durham, North Carolina ..... 1-1
- Community Cohesion—Oak Park, Michigan ..... 2-1
- Community Preservation—Philadelphia, Pennsylvania ..... 3-1
- Community Reconstruction—Seattle, Washington ..... 4-1
- Community Revitalization—Prichard, Alabama ..... 5-1

Maps provided by SEPTA, Rand McNally, GeoSystems Global Corp and AAA. FHWA has had several names over time, but this document will routinely use “FHWA.”



# Community Mitigation and Enhancement Durham

# Community Mitigation and Enhancement: Crest Street, Durham, North Carolina

## Introduction

In 1959, the East-West Expressway (a 10-mile, limited-access highway) was planned near the central business district of Durham, NC. The East-West Expressway was to pass through a mixture of industrial, railroad, and older residential land uses and was designed to connect I-85 with I-40 in central North Carolina. It would serve a severely congested area of Durham, then a rapidly-growing city of over 100,000 persons and now part of the “Research Triangle” area. By the early 1970s, about half of the East-West Expressway had been constructed. The right-of-way for part of the project had been acquired with urban-renewal funds and as a Federal-aid project. In 1973, plans were proceeding for right-of-way acquisition for the remainder of the highway when the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) required the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969.

The remainder of the East-West Expressway traversed a small African-American neighborhood known as Crest Street. Crest Street had been in existence for over 100 years, originally as an agricultural settlement of former slaves on the outskirts of Durham. Later, Crest Street became a semi-urban, residential neighborhood near the rapidly growing employment centers at Duke University, the Veterans Administration Hospital, and industries in the area. Plans for the East-West Expressway called for relocating the residents of Crest Street to another area in or near Durham. The residents of Crest Street, who were well acquainted with the unpleasant experiences of other African-American neighborhoods relocated by other segments of the East-West Expressway during the 1970s, decided to oppose the expressway.



*Before the project, many Crest Street community residents walked to their jobs at the Durham, NC, Veteran's Hospital (shown in background) as well as nearby Duke University Medical Center. Because the Crest Street project reconfigured the community using nearby vacant land, the Crest Street residents who walked to work were able to keep their jobs.*



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*The final section of the 10-mile East-West Expressway that began near downtown Durham, NC, crossed the Crest Street community northwest of Durham.*

overtone, became the impetus for one of the most creative community mitigation and enhancement efforts the Federal-aid Highway Program has ever experienced. The mitigation and enhancement plan for Crest Street serves as an outstanding example of how Federal, State, and local governments can work with an affected community and its residents through a collaborative problem-solving approach to develop a solution that benefits the community itself, the overall economic development of the city and region, the environment, and public health.

The leaders of the Crest Street neighborhood worked closely with a dedicated group of professionals from FHWA, NCDOT, the city of Durham, Duke University, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and others to develop a comprehensive mitigation and enhancement plan to preserve the cohesiveness of Crest Street. Developing and implementing the comprehensive mitigation and enhancement plan preserved this truly cohesive neighborhood and fostered warm feelings among the participants and residents.

From 1973 to 1983, the opposition, which began as a heated disagreement with racial

## The Crest Street Neighborhood

At first, many doubted that the Crest Street neighborhood could have the quality of “cohesiveness.” By appearances alone, the neighborhood looked severely distressed. To casual



*A view of the Crest Street neighborhood before the project. From outward appearances, the neighborhood was distressed; but inside these buildings lived a vibrant, cohesive community.*

observers, the neighborhood seemed to have little physical value, and probably represented an opportunity for what was referred to informally in the 1960s as “slum clearance.” During the EIS process, sociological studies were commissioned to show the community’s cohesion, and they did so, resoundingly. However, statistics and surveys can reveal only so much. The cohesiveness of Crest Street was reflected in the daily interaction between people. They lived as though they were all related (but not all were), looking after each other’s children, borrowing and lending items, and sharing emotional good times and bad—a community where all the residents knew and cared about each other.



The Crest Street neighborhood was formed in the decades immediately following the Civil War. Originally, it was an area of small subsistence farms on the outskirts of Durham. In the 1920s and 1930s, the construction of Duke University generated jobs that were filled by many Crest Street residents and stimulated the growth of the community. Crest Street is located within a mile of Duke University and its University Medical Center. The residents of Crest Street attained a modest but stable standard of living over a long period of time, filling a need for laborers, food service workers, housekeepers, and grounds maintenance workers; and farming part time on open parcels of land in the vicinity. By the 1970s, the neighborhood included over 200 households.

Prior to the 1960s, the Crest Street neighborhood had only one paved road. Other streets were later paved minimally, without sidewalks. The housing stock, which had never been substantial, began to deteriorate steadily when plans for the highway became known, and obtaining mortgages or funding for housing improvements became difficult. Community businesses that had served residents for years began to move away in anticipation of relocation.

However, to those who looked beneath the exterior, Crest Street was, in fact, a strong community. Despite limited material wealth, residents seemed content with their lives. Sociological surveys showed that the Crest Street neighborhood exhibited several characteristics of a highly cohesive community (see sidebar). Most of the residents had relatives in the neighborhood, and many families had been in the neighborhood for generations. The presence of extended family and close friends enabled Crest Street residents to survive quite well in a low-wage environment (40 percent of the households were under the Federal poverty limit). Residents provided child-care and transportation to one another, cooperated during times of need, and participated freely in neighborhood improvement activities, such as periodic community clean-up days. These informal, social-support systems provided access to jobs for people who otherwise might have been dependent upon unemployment compensation or welfare. They also allowed elderly and disabled residents to live in their own houses and near their families, thereby avoiding the substantial expense of State-financed, long-term-care facilities.

Two other characteristics of the Crest Street neighborhood also deserve special notice: the presence of a strong church and the continuity of its leadership. The New Bethel Baptist Church, to which nearly two-thirds of Crest Street's residents belonged, was founded in the

## **Crest Street: A Cohesive Community in Durham, NC**

**Average Residence in the Community:** 36.5 years (10.1 years for tenants); 30 percent have lived there 50 years or over.

**Relatives in the Community:** 65 percent of residents had at least one relative in the community; nearly 56 percent had five or more.

**High Degree of Job Stability:** Mean length of employment at job was more than 8 years.

**Local Employment:** 44.3 percent of the work force works within a mile of the community.

**Perception of Physical Safety:** 90 percent considered the neighborhood safe; no complaints about the community's minors.

Source: Friedman, Elizabeth, *Crest Street: A Family/Community Impact Statement*, Institute of Policy Sciences and Public Affairs, Duke University, 1978.

1880s and, over time, became the focus of community activities. In the 1960s and 1970s, the church was providing many services, such as day-care and tutoring, and was serving as the organizational focus for political activities.

The Crest Street Community Council, the group that handled most negotiations concerning the East-West Expressway project, was an outgrowth of the church organization. The leaders of Crest Street, who organized the opposition to the East-West Expressway, were long-term residents who occupied prominent positions in the community. The outstanding characteristics of these leaders are, in hindsight, strong indicators of community cohesion: they remained in their leadership roles throughout the long and complex negotiation process, obtained a strong community consensus on project issues, and remain in leadership positions to this day. This type of “staying power” is one of the key indicators of a community with a high degree of cohesiveness.

## What Happened

Planning for the East-West Expressway began in 1959 (see chronology sidebar). The highway was intended to provide access to a corridor characterized by high employment density, including the Durham central business district, major nearby manufacturers, and the Duke University

Medical Center complex. The route was to generally follow the Southern Railroad tracks through the city, where increasing congestion was hampering the city’s growth.

Several urban-renewal programs were undertaken during the 1960s in conjunction with the East-West Expressway project. The programs concentrated on the older neighborhoods located along the proposed East-West corridor. Many households and businesses were relocated at a time when relocation benefits were limited, and many relocated residents accused the city of not keeping promises it had made. A major

African-American community, known as Hayti, was virtually dismantled by a combination of urban renewal and the East-West Expressway, resulting in long-term resentment and distrust of government agencies among African-American residents of Durham.

The Crest Street neighborhood was the next African-American community to face the prospect of relocation. Beginning in the 1960s, Crest Street residents became active in opposing efforts to complete the East-West Expressway, which was already being delayed because of funding problems. They clearly recognized that, if implemented as planned, the proposed highway would be a threat that their neighborhood would not survive.



*The New Bethel Baptist Church, built in 1965, was the focus of community life in Crest Street, Durham, NC. The church is shown as it was before the project.*

Opposition by the Crest Street neighborhood was noticed early because, throughout Durham, this large African-American neighborhood had achieved a significant degree of economic and political power over the years. Crest Street residents were able to effectively use their long-term connections and respect in the Durham area to develop political alliances with sympathetic activist groups such as ECOS (a Duke University group that was fighting the expressway for environmental reasons). An important milestone was reached in 1973, when ECOS achieved a court decision that required NCDOT and FHWA to prepare an EIS to comply with NEPA.

During the preparation of the EIS in the mid-1970s, NCDOT, FHWA, and the city of Durham worked together to prepare a restructuring plan for Crest Street. This plan, which would have dispersed Crest Street residents throughout the city, was actively opposed by the Crest Street neighborhood. In 1977, the Crest Street neighborhood was declared eligible to receive legal aid from the North-Central Legal-Assistance Program. The help of legal-aid attorneys was crucial to Crest Street residents' ability to make themselves heard.

The Crest Street neighborhood was able to obtain the services of experts to assist them on technical issues during the development of the East-West Expressway. For example, a qualified traffic engineer offered credible counter-arguments to NCDOT proposals. In 1978, a sociological survey of the community was carried out by a Duke University group. The findings of that survey, while disputed at the time, were subsequently validated by a survey commissioned by a project Steering Committee in 1980. These surveys were important in convincing people of the value of preserving the Crest Street neighborhood.

In 1978, the Crest Street Community Council, assisted by legal-aid attorneys, filed a Title VI administrative complaint with the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) alleging racial discrimination in the planning of the East-West Expressway project. Today, most parties agree that this complaint and the resultant favorable ruling by the

## Project Chronology

- 1959 East-West Expressway appears in the thoroughfare plans of North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) and the city of Durham, NC.
- 1967 Construction begins.
- 1970 First expressway segment opens.
- 1973 NCDOT is required to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the remaining expressway construction.
- 1975 Crest Street Community Council (CSCC) is formed.
- 1977 CSCC obtains assistance from North-Central Legal-Assistance Program attorneys.
- 1978 CSCC files a Title VI administrative complaint with U.S. DOT alleging racial discrimination; NCDOT completes the Draft EIS; Duke sociological survey is conducted.
- 1980 U.S. DOT issues a preliminary ruling that the proposed East-West Expressway alignment is discriminatory; the Steering Committee is established; another survey is commissioned.
- 1981 Small Task Force convenes and begins negotiations for community-impact mitigation and enhancement plan.
- 1982 Final mitigation and enhancement plan is agreed to by CSCC, city of Durham, NCDOT, and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA); Final EIS is completed; Record of Decision is issued by FHWA.
- 1986 Construction of the new Crest Street neighborhood is completed.
- 1992 Final East-West Expressway construction is completed.
- 1996 Crest Street neighborhood celebrates its 10th anniversary and continues to sustain its cohesiveness and strong leadership.

Office of Civil Rights of USDOT in 1980 were the critical elements in making FHWA, NCDOT, and the city enter into serious negotiations with the Crest Street neighborhood.

A series of meetings was convened among all parties, including a representative from FHWA's Headquarters Office, Washington, D.C. These meetings established the basic structure for formulating the collaborative process that developed a comprehensive mitigation and enhancement plan for the Crest Street neighborhood. Objectives and structure were established, including a technical operating committee (the "Task Force") composed of

representatives from the Crest Street Community Council and the principal public agencies and private organizations involved in the project, including FHWA; and a Steering Committee composed of Task Force members, top government officials, and private interest groups. Although the process was interrupted for 11 months to resolve a zoning dispute in the Crest Street neighborhood, the basic structure held up and resulted in completion of a comprehensive mitigation and enhancement plan in 1982.

The completion of the East-West Expressway had become a volatile and racially charged political issue in the city of Durham. Several elections turned on the issue. In the end, however, the Durham City/County Planning Department began developing a mitigation and enhancement plan with NCDOT and FHWA.

The most encouraging and inspiring part of the Crest Street story is the evolution of the mitigation effort. The working environment changed in the space of less than 2 years from angry and adversarial to a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect rarely, if ever, found in negotiations among opposing parties on a highway or other type of project. The community leaders offered the church fellowship hall—the center of most community activity—as a place to hold project-related meetings. The neutral, convenient site, along with some refreshments provided by the hosts, created a friendly, relaxed setting for discussions and reasoned negotiations.

Credit is due to all who were involved in the collaborative process. Both NCDOT and FHWA made sure that the right personnel were assigned to do the job properly. The Crest Street neighborhood extended courtesies to the project task force that led to a friendly meeting environment in which real progress was possible. The agencies' representatives were chosen to participate, it seemed, on their ability to get along with people and to get things done. They were also empowered to make decisions independently and in a timely manner.

## The Players

**Task Force Members** (developed community impact mitigation plan):

Crest Street Community Council (and their legal counsel, the North-Central Legal Assistance Program)  
Duke University  
City of Durham (the Durham City/County Planning Department)  
Federal Highway Administration, North Carolina Division Office, Raleigh, NC  
North Carolina Department of Transportation

**Steering Committee Members** (set preliminary structure for problem resolution; provided oversight of relocation planning process):

Task Force Members  
Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People  
Federal Highway Administration, Headquarters Office, Washington, DC  
The Peoples Alliance (an environmental coalition opposed to the project)

### Other Parties

ECOS (a group of Duke University Law School students opposed to the project)  
The Durham Voter's Alliance (involved in the City Council elections and politics in Durham as it related to the project)

## Mitigation and Enhancement Measures

The mitigation and enhancement plan was made a part of the final EIS for the East-West Expressway.

The mitigation and enhancement plan developed for Crest Street involved a comprehensive restructuring of the entire neighborhood, keeping it intact in the process. This sounds like a simple concept, and in fact, it was discussed several years prior to the completion of the mitigation and enhancement plan. However, the implementation was not simple and required innovative use of program resources as well as enormous amounts of time from agency and community leaders and residents.

The Crest Street mitigation and enhancement plan would not have been feasible without suitable vacant land on which to re-establish the neighborhood. To avoid adverse impacts on people who walked to work, a site near the old location proved to be vital to the design solution. Fortunately, sufficient vacant land was located nearby. However, the difficulty of assembling the new site was increased dramatically when the city rezoned some of the proposed site for a health-club facility. The city justified this on the grounds that commercial facilities near an expressway interchange were economically important in terms of tax revenues and jobs. This decision removed a critical parcel from the proposed site. Additional land had to be assembled, and the only remaining location was a community cemetery. This might have been an insurmountable obstacle had it not been for expeditious action on the part of NCDOT and FHWA to secure approval by the Crest Street neighborhood and relocate all of the graves to a satisfactory site nearby. Over 1,000 graves were involved in this relocation. The resultant vacant parcel allowed the elements of the mitigation and enhancement plan to fall into place, and a new site for the Crest Street neighborhood was successfully created.

The Federal “housing-of-last-resort” provision of the Uniform Relocation and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 provided the flexibility FHWA needed to commit Federal funds to construct replacement dwellings for the new community configuration. However, because the State of North Carolina had not previously enacted legislation commensurate with the Federal Act (including housing of last resort), an act of the North Carolina Legislature was required to make State matching funds available.

## Mitigation and Enhancement Measures

- Moved over 1,000 graves to provide an adequate community site.
- Realigned an expressway interchange to maximize the land available for the reconfigured community.
- Moved and rehabilitated 65 houses.
- Rehabilitated 12 housing units in place.
- Constructed 178 new housing units (112 single-family and 66 multi-family).
- Renovated a former school for elderly housing.
- “Stacked” relocation benefits and housing assistance programs to maximize home-ownership (56 percent home ownership was achieved).
- Constructed infrastructure for the new community location, including streets, sidewalks, sanitary and storm sewers, and street lighting.
- Constructed two new parks and a community center.

The community successfully argued that replacement housing should be provided as a means of preserving the family relationships and social fabric of the Crest Street neighborhood. This reasoning permitted the neighborhood to be treated as a whole and enabled some Crest Street residents outside the highway footprint to be included as part of the mitigation. In addition, based on 23 U.S.C. 109(h) of the 1970 Federal-aid Highway Act, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and NEPA, FHWA is required to consider fully not only the direct impacts but also secondary and cumulative impacts of proposed Federal-aid highway projects. This further buttressed the idea that the entire Crest Street neighborhood, not just that portion of it within the project footprint, should be included in the mitigation and enhancement plan.



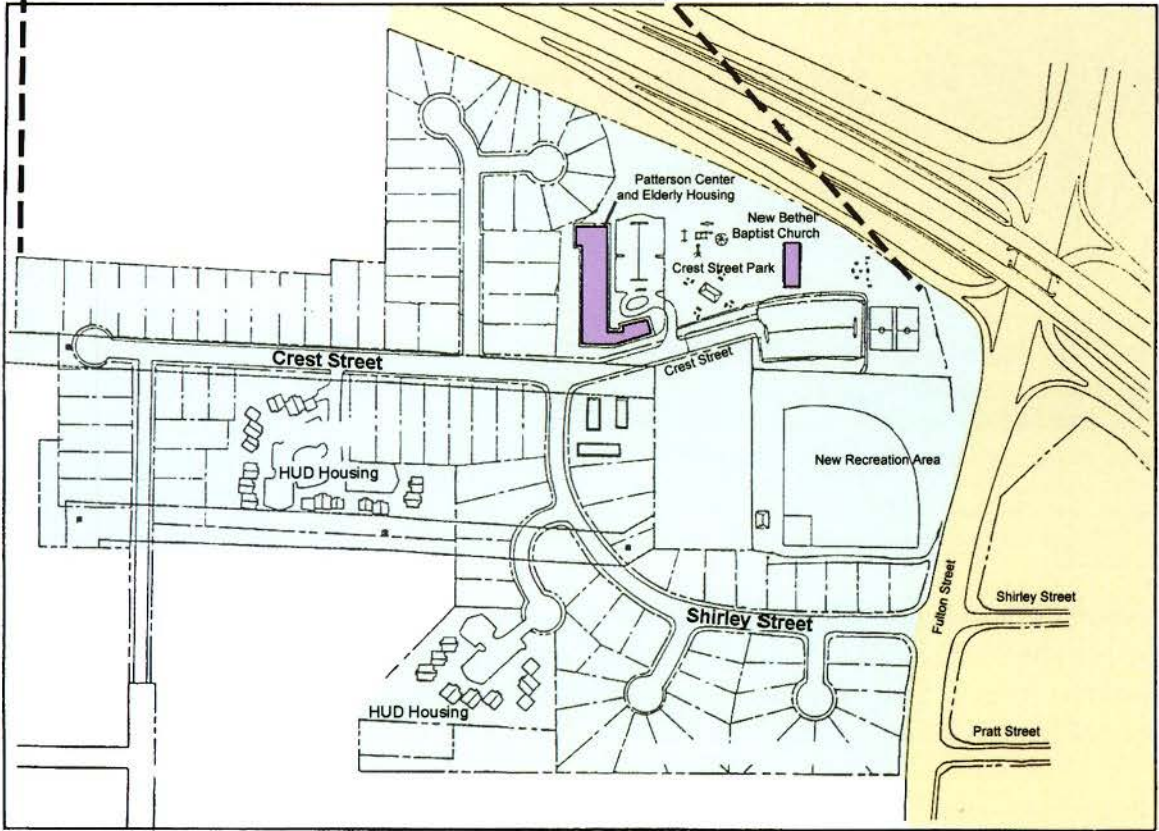
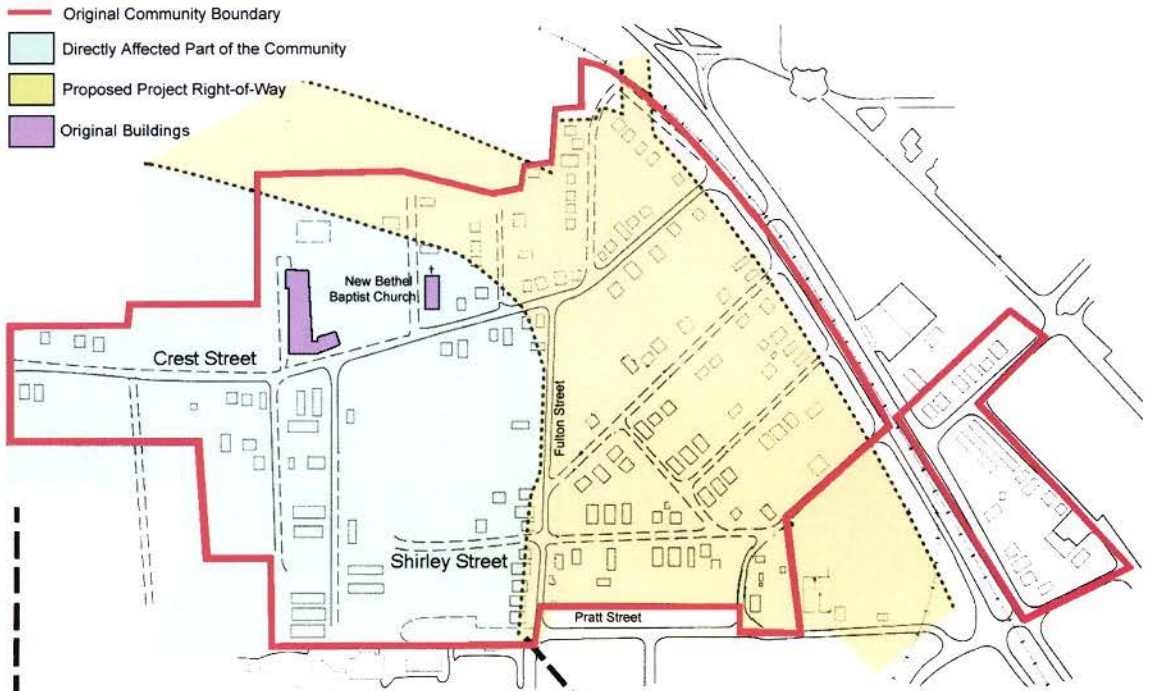
*An abandoned school building in the Crest Street community was transformed into housing for the elderly and a community center named after one of the community leaders.*

Many houses were rehabilitated with entirely new interiors and modern conveniences. Sixty-five houses were moved from the old neighborhood to the new. In addition, several new single-family homes were built; housing for the elderly was provided in a renovated former school building; existing houses on the new site were rehabilitated; and apartments were built for those who could not afford to purchase homes.

Section 208 rental housing was built with the help of the city of Durham and HUD. Section 208 housing allows residents to pay rent based upon their income, with the remaining cost financed by Federal funds. Although Crest

Street residents were given ample opportunity to rent these units, some felt that disruptive tenants from outside the community might prove to be a problem. The Crest Street Community Council attempted to protect the community in this regard by acquiring the right from HUD to purchase a controlling share of the rental units in the event that the private investors experienced financial difficulties.

Another key element in the mitigation and enhancement plan was the provision of modern infrastructure in Crest Street. This included paved streets, sidewalks, sewers, and recreation facilities. The city, NCDOT, FHWA, and HUD shared the cost. NCDOT waived the usual North Carolina requirement that a city acquire a prorated portion of a State highway right-of-way based on its projected use by local traffic. This saved the city of Durham a substantial sum of money that was then made available for infrastructure improvement in the new Crest Street community.



The top map shows the original Crest Street community superimposed on the East-West Expressway right-of-way. The mitigation and enhancement plan called for the reestablishment of the community into the West Fulton Street area. The plan implemented for that area is shown on the bottom map. The East Fulton Street area, across a major thoroughfare, was used as the site for a parking garage for the Duke University Medical Center.



*Two parks were built in the Crest Street, Durham, NC, community as part of the mitigation and enhancement plan. The top photo shows a picnic area and playground located adjacent to the New Bethel Baptist Church. A baseball field was constructed in the middle of the community.*

Before the mitigation and enhancements, 22 percent of the households owned their homes (although another 20 percent of the buildings were owned by residents for use as rental properties). To encourage people to own homes, FHWA, working with HUD, NCDOT, and the city of Durham, worked out an arrangement whereby subsidies were used to give residents maximum flexibility in deciding whether or not to purchase a home. The subsidies included a combination of relocating homes at salvage value (costing residents nothing), payment of moving costs, city rehabilitation grants, and deferred second mortgages. At project completion, 56 percent of Crest Street's households were homeowners.

As of 1996, there were 155 dwelling units in the Crest Street community, about half of which are single-family homes. The Crest Street Community Council now owns or is obtaining title to all of the multi-family units. This has been made possible because the council owns the housing for the elderly, which it developed with the assistance of HUD and the city of Durham. Using this property as collateral, the council has been able to acquire title to other units and is now in the process of obtaining title to the 45,

Section 208 rental units. The former owner of these units went bankrupt, and the apartments had become a liability to the community because of their poor physical appearance and some disruptive tenants. Since they were placed in charge of managing the apartments, the council has rehabilitated them and evicted trouble-makers.

The credit required for this real-estate acquisition was made available by virtue of the council's ownership of other properties, as well as another Federal program, the Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) fund. The CDFI made possible the formation of "Self-Help," a Durham equity investment fund whose purpose is to make loans to organizations



that have typically been shunned by larger lenders. Self-Help lends money at market rates, accepts prudent financial risks, and is backed by some of Durham's largest commercial banks. Self-Help has loaned the Crest Street Community Council \$225,000 to assist the council in purchasing the Section 208 rental units.

The total cost of the mitigation has been calculated at approximately \$15,700 per housing unit above what would normally have been spent for a relocation project. FHWA's share of expenditures on this project was not significantly more than FHWA normally spends for housing of last resort. HUD and the city of Durham provided the additional funds.

Today, Crest Street is a viable neighborhood with modern streets, sidewalks, and infrastructure. The houses are well maintained with neatly mowed lawns and landscaping. Two parks provided for in the mitigation and enhancement plan are located within the community, one for active sports such as baseball and the other a picnic shelter and playground with swings and apparatus for younger children.

The W. I. Patterson Community Center is part of a former school building that was renovated during the project. The community center includes housing for the elderly as well as facilities for use by the community as a whole. The Crest Street neighborhood, as well as the lots within it, are physically smaller than they were before the project, which has led to a few complaints from people who liked the more rural environment that existed prior to the mitigation plan. However, the community's attractive, compact appearance more than counters such criticisms.



*The mitigation plan resulted in the construction of new homes, repositioning and rehabilitation of others, and the installation of modern infrastructure facilities at the new community location. It also succeeded in keeping residents near major work centers, such as the Duke University Medical Center, Durham, NC.*



*The New Bethel Baptist Church remained at its original site, in the Crest Street, Durham, NC, community. Though the church remained at its original location, the mitigation and enhancement plan included careful landscaping of the church grounds.*



*The community center's housing for elderly citizens can be seen in the right of the photo. It has enabled the elderly to remain in their long-time neighborhood, preserving bonds with family and community.*

Even more important, Crest Street retained its sense of togetherness. The New Bethel Church's importance in the community has grown even stronger, while the community center's elderly housing has enabled three and four generations to retain close family ties.

Perhaps the most important legacy of this project is the Crest Street Community Council, whose five governing members are elected by the residents. The council ensures that homes in the community are properly maintained and sponsors periodic "cleanup" days. It effectively serves as a central organization for the social support systems that have existed for generations. With its real-estate holdings, the council has managed to finance its operation without imposing dues on the members. Through its positive influence, it enables Crest Street to retain its cohesiveness and family-oriented environment.

## **Lessons Learned**

The development and implementation of the Crest Street mitigation and enhancement plan is an example of what a collaborative problem-solving approach can accomplish when pursued during transportation decisionmaking. Using existing programs in creative combinations, FHWA, NCDOT, and the city of Durham were able to work with the Crest Street Community Council to develop an effective, comprehensive mitigation and enhancement plan. Representatives from FHWA and NCDOT were instrumental in helping

preserve the social bonds that had existed for generations within Crest Street. Once trust, communication, and an understanding of the community's values were achieved, productive decisionmaking was possible.

A key question arises with respect to a successful project like this: "Could it be repeated elsewhere?" There were a number of unique aspects of the Crest Street project, in particular the existence of an adequate supply of land nearby to facilitate the mitigation and enhancement plan. Also, substantial funding happened to be available at the right time for many of the programs involved, especially those dealing with housing. Finally, the proximity of agency offices to the project may have contributed to the planning outcome because it enabled frequent interaction and face-to-face meetings with community and agency members, as well as more rapid decisionmaking. The effort that was expended by all parties in this project would probably produce similar results in another situation. The spirit of dedication and cooperation that developed during the final planning period continue to produce different but no less effective solutions in different circumstances. Therefore, it was the collaborative problem-solving approach, not the physical circumstances of the community, that was the vital element of its success. The specific elements of the Crest Street collaborative problem-solving approach are shown in the sidebar.

One of the most important findings of this case study is that when a cohesive community is encountered, it is possible to preserve the community through special efforts. Through the efforts of NCDOT and FHWA working closely with the residents, not only was the Crest Street neighborhood preserved, but a significant, positive contribution was made to the city of Durham and the Federal-aid Highway Program as a whole.

## Making the Planning Process Work

Key elements of the Crest Street, Durham, NC, portion of the East-West Expressway project planning process (from the sponsoring agencies' point of view):

- Clear assessment and understanding of the community social cohesion. (This was not initially done by sponsoring agencies, but by the community itself.)
- Willingness of the Federal Highway Administration and North Carolina Department of Transportation personnel to meet with the people in the community. (Most meetings were held in the New Bethel Baptist Church fellowship hall.)
- Task Force of key parties, with minimum supervisory interference, but free flow of information between the Task Force's agency personnel and their supervisors.
- Proper choice of personnel assigned to the Task Force: people senior enough to make key decisions; junior enough to commit significant amounts of time to this project; emotionally mature; and experienced in handling emotionally charged, public-comment situations, such as occurred at meetings early in the process.
- Staff continuities through implementation as well as planning periods of the project.
- A carefully worded, detailed, and precise plan to mitigate community impacts, signed by the key participants in the process (Task Force members).

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**Community  
Cohesion  
Oak Park**



# Community Cohesion: Oak Park, Michigan

## Introduction

The I-696 project was slated to go through the Orthodox Jewish neighborhood of Oak Park, MI. The critical concern of the community was that the I-696 project would physically divide the community and prevent worshipers from walking to synagogue for worship on Saturdays, the Sabbath. Orthodox Jewish custom prohibits driving on the Sabbath and other Jewish holy days. The unique needs of this community were, at first, not fully recognized by transportation planning officials. However, from 1979 to 1981, the Orthodox Jewish community made its needs known and intervened effectively in the project-planning process to ensure the implementation of a significant, community-impact mitigation plan. In the end, the Rabbi-led group that had vigorously petitioned to protect their community against the impacts of this major project ended up proud of the outcome. Clearly, something had gone right.



*The Jewish Community Center (above) is an important public facility for the Jewish community of Oak Park, MI.*

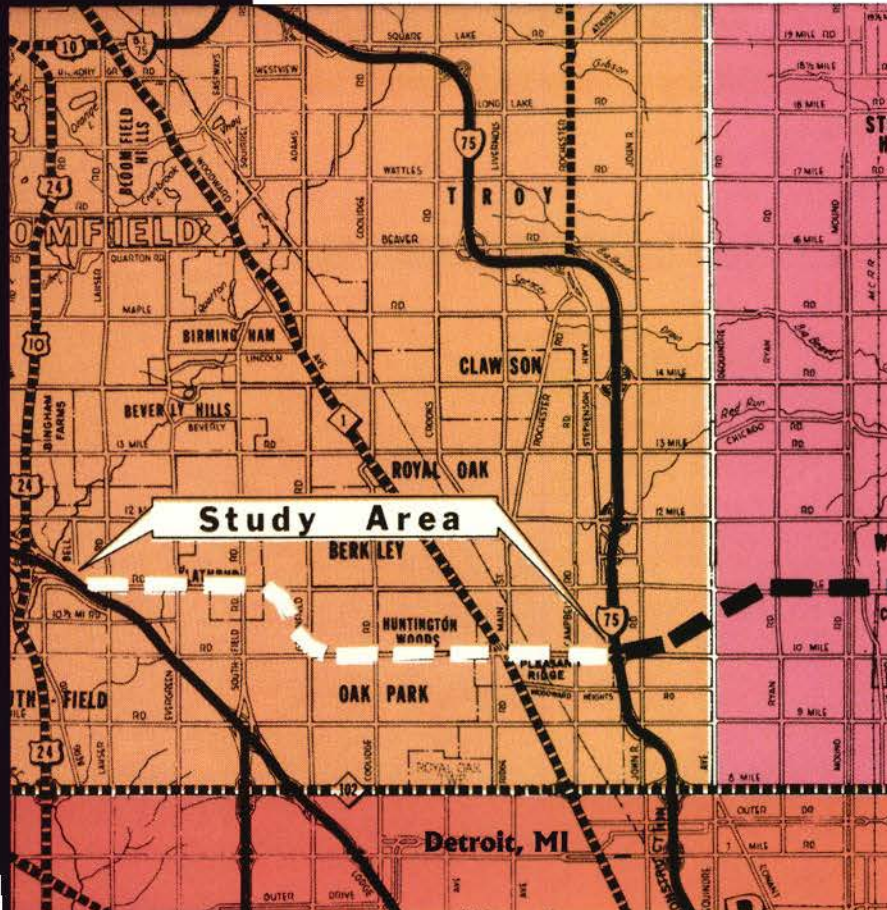
After highway engineers had designed and built nearly 20 miles of I-696 from the late 1950s to 1979, they were faced with a unique problem—mitigating impacts of the highway on a highly pedestrian community. The completion of I-696 through Oakland County, MI, in 1989 came after two decades of controversy, arbitration, litigation, and negotiation affecting numerous municipalities. However, the most extensive mitigation of the project, which involved the Orthodox Jewish community, was designed only at the very end of the project-planning process.

The highway alignment traversed the heart of a large Jewish community that extended from Southfield to Oak Park, which are both Oakland County suburbs of Detroit, MI.

## The Players

### Key Agencies and Groups Involved in the Oak Park, MI, Section of I-696:

- Federal Highway Administration, Region 5
- Michigan Department of Transportation
- The city of Oak Park, MI
- The city of Southfield, MI
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Orthodox Coalition



*This site location map shows the Oak Park, MI, neighborhood and the proposed route of the final section of I-696. Oak Park is a northern suburb of Detroit, MI.*

of I-696 north of their neighborhood. When realignment of the roadway appeared futile, the community revised their strategy and pressed for mitigation to preserve pedestrian circulation and aesthetics within their neighborhood. Their efforts were successful. In 1981, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) approved the last segment of I-696, contingent on the implementation of specific pedestrian-sensitive mitigation measures. The final roadway (a depressed, limited-access, divided highway) included a network of continuous sidewalks, noise walls, pedestrian bridges, and two decks over I-696 in Oak Park to facilitate pedestrian access across the freeway as well as to provide a noise buffer from the highway. To help the decks better fit into the community, they were landscaped for active and passive recreation. These deck parks, as they are called in the community, were, however, principally mitigation to maintain pedestrian access.

## The Community

The Orthodox Jewish community of metropolitan Detroit was concentrated in the middle of the proposed I-696 right-of-way through Oak Park, a suburban town just north of Detroit. Oak Park is the core of Jewish life for both the secular and Orthodox Jews in the Detroit area, with a high concentration of religious, educational, and Jewish retail facilities. The Orthodox Jewish

The impacts of the highway would have been greatest on the tightly knit, cohesive Orthodox Jewish community of Oak Park. The core of the Jewish community was concentrated in a 4-square-mile area and was the most vulnerable to transportation-project impacts because of its residents' special needs for pedestrian access to community facilities.

The area's community facilities, which serve both Orthodox and secular Jews, include 19 synagogues, over 20 retail businesses catering to a Jewish clientele, and 9 religious schools. Religious leaders of the Orthodox Jewish community feared the possible social disintegration of the neighborhood. Pedestrian access to synagogues is critical to the Orthodox Jewish community, and the preliminary design of the depressed highway would have separated residential areas from local synagogues.

In 1979, threatening litigation, the Orthodox Jewish community organized and petitioned Federal and State decisionmakers to relocate the last segment



community was created in the 1950s by middle-income families who belonged to common synagogues and who had moved together to suburban Oak Park from Detroit. According to a 1980 community assessment, estimates of the population of the Orthodox Jewish community ranged from over 3,600 to over 8,000.

Over the years, the Jewish community invested over \$60 million from private fund-raising for the construction of synagogues, pre-kindergarten to advanced post-graduate religious schools, a Jewish community center, and housing for the elderly. Out of the 19 synagogues in Oak Park, 7 (5 of them Orthodox) were adjacent to the I-696 right-of-way. The area, which was rich in educational institutions, included two Jewish day schools, five religious afternoon schools, and two rabbinical schools. These facilities provided convenient access for the pedestrians of the community, who strictly adhered to Jewish religious law and did not drive on the Sabbath. The Orthodox Jewish community actively encouraged the development of retail businesses catering to their specific needs. In the early days in Oak Park, local leaders successfully encouraged a kosher butcher from New York City to relocate his business to the neighborhood. The range of commercial establishments in this area has expanded to include more kosher shopping facilities catering to Jewish needs, including restaurants, butcher shops, and bakeries as well as a bookstore. The location of these particular retail facilities in Oak Park was convenient for elderly members of the community who lived in the apartment buildings nearby.

The fabric of this community was maintained through growth in the number of Orthodox Jewish families seeking to live in a close-knit, religious community. While some Orthodox Jewish families had come to suburban Oak Park from Detroit, others had moved there from other parts of the Nation, attracted by the area's educational day schools, synagogues, and other facilities for Orthodox Jews. The rabbinical schools brought young families involved in religious study into the area. Controversy over the freeway, however, suppressed strong growth in the community. But upon the completion of I-696 in 1989, the community resumed its growth, with new immigrants from Russia and Israel joining the population.

One of the important characteristics of the Oak Park Orthodox Jewish community was its high numbers of educated and professional residents. Many people in the Orthodox Jewish community were college educated and knowledgeable of the local and national decisionmaking

## Indicators of Community Cohesion

- Concentration of neighborhood residents sharing a common religion and participation in common religious institutions.
- Concentration of common religious and educational institutions, with members within walking distance of facilities.
- Numerous community facilities within Orthodox Jewish community, including: 19 synagogues, 10 kosher butcher shops, 10 Jewish-style bakeries, 2 Jewish day schools, 5 afternoon religious schools, 2 post-graduate rabbinical schools, and a Jewish Community Center. Many of these facilities were built with funds provided by families within the community.
- Most homes sold by word of mouth to members of the larger Orthodox Jewish community.
- A high degree of effective community interaction, evident from the ability to mobilize the community to action at the start of community involvement.
- Continuity of leadership within the community.

## Project Chronology

- 1955: I-696 is approved as part of the National Interstate Highway System.
- 1956: Planning begins for 28-miles east-west I-696, connecting I-96 to I-94.
- Late 1950s: First Orthodox synagogue moves into Oak Park, MI, from Detroit, MI, with its congregation.
- 1963: The first 9-mile, western section of I-696 opens.
- 1964: Realignment is recommended for the remaining sections of I-696, marking the beginning of several years of disputes among State officials and community leaders.
- 1968: Michigan Legislature passes the Highway Route Arbitration Act.
- Arbitration Board decides final alignment for the highway.
- Workers begin constructing the eastern section of I-696.
- 1972: Draft Environmental Impact Statement is completed.
- 1979: Orthodox Coalition begins lobbying against the completion of I-696.
- 1980: Dr. Harry Peristadt produces a social-impact study of I-696 on the Orthodox Jewish community.
- 1981: Final Environmental Impact Statement is approved with a mitigation package addressing impacts to the Orthodox community.
- 1985: Jewish Welfare Federation starts the Neighborhood Project in Oak Park, MI, and Southfield, MI, to stabilize the Jewish community.
- 1989: The 150-unit Teitel Building opens with HUD funds for elderly housing.
- Final link in I-696 is completed through Oak Park, MI, and Southfield, MI.
- 1991: Deck parks open over I-696.

process with respect to projects like I-696. Consequently, they were able to bring their influence quickly to bear at the right places—and with telling effect. This community character made its members highly influential during the planning of mitigation for project impacts and led to the implementation of what was a highly satisfactory mitigation plan.

## What Happened

Planning began in 1956 for a 28-mile, east-west, limited-access highway connecting I-96 to I-94 in suburban Detroit. The purpose and need for the highway resulted from the suburbanization of Detroit and the resulting change in traffic flow. Originally designed for a rural population, the basic roadway network consisted of a grid system of north-south and east-west roads spaced 1 mile apart. This grid connected the north-south arterial roadways to downtown Detroit.

The planning for the last 8 miles of I-696 was bitterly contested. The proposed right-of-way traversed numerous communities, including Oak Park. At the time, State law required that before construction could commence, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MIDOT) must receive local approval from each of the communities through which a proposed highway would traverse. The local municipalities contested the highway alignment and delayed the final completion of I-696 from Lasher Road to Interstate 75, leaving an 8-mile gap in the roadway. To overcome the impasse, the Michigan Legislature passed the Highway Route Arbitration Act in 1968, which mandates arbitration in highway projects when agreements with local communities cannot be reached. The law was written purposely to facilitate completion of I-696 and has not been invoked since the completion of that highway. So, in 1968, a three-member arbitration board was appointed by the State Legislature to select the final alignment after hearing testimony on I-696. The arbitrated alignment passed through the middle of the Orthodox Jewish community in Oak Park.

By 1979, the final 8-mile portion of I-696 remained unfinished. The Orthodox Jewish community did not organize to oppose the highway until 1979. Residents opposed the idea of the entire community having to move from Oak Park before I-696 could be completed. But when the cost of moving became prohibitive (interest rates were at an all-time high), the community began to actively oppose the project, organizing to block it on community-impact grounds under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969.



*Many community retail establishments on Greenfield Avenue and 10-Mile Road in Oak Park, MI, cater to Orthodox Jewish clientele.*

Community activists invited State and Federal highway officials to a meeting at a local synagogue to discuss the impacts of I-696 on the Orthodox Jewish community, although they doubted any would attend. Much to their surprise, however, both highway officials and politicians attended. The Orthodox Coalition, as the community group became known, consisted of over 20 rabbis representing families within their synagogues. MIDOT appointed a staff ombudsman to work solely on this project. The ombudsman worked closely with a coalition-selected, MIDOT-paid liaison, who, in turn, worked closely with the community. To document their cohesiveness and uniqueness, the Orthodox Jewish community requested that MIDOT conduct a sociological study of the community. MIDOT agreed, and the study proved to be the community's most critical asset.

A sociologist at Michigan State University was retained by MIDOT and spent several days in the community attending religious and social functions, walking from one venue to another with community members. The resulting report, *I-696 Social Impact Study: Orthodox Jewish Community*, stated that the Orthodox Jews are like most other suburbanites during the week. But on the Sabbath, from sundown Friday until nightfall Saturday, and on 11 Jewish holy days, they are pedestrians—Sabbath walkers—who travel to various synagogues, community events, and private homes by foot. The depressed highway would greatly increase the distances members had to walk and would, thus, decrease the number of community visitations during the Sabbath.



*Two decks built over I-696 in Oak Park, MI, allowed fluid pedestrian movement across the freeway to shopping, synagogues, schools, and the Jewish Community Center (above).*

Orthodox Jews in the community typically belong to more than one synagogue and, as devout members, may attend the closest synagogue to their workplace during the day and a synagogue closer to home on the weekend. This practice added to the complexity of creating a mitigation plan for pedestrian access. The report concluded that access to all of the area's five Orthodox Jewish synagogues would be impacted. In 1980, about 700 families were found to be Sabbath walkers.

The social-impact report also explained Jewish religious law as it pertained to the proposed depressed highway. Jewish religious law defines the space within which worshipers can carry their possessions on the Sabbath as a domain surrounded by a partition or a trench. This concept is important, as carrying objects outside of such a space would be considered a form of work, which is forbidden on the Sabbath. There was a question among the community's religious scholars as to whether or not the highway would act as a trench and symbolically divide the residents into two Orthodox Jewish communities. The report indicated that some meticulous observers might take it upon themselves not to cross the highway via a pedestrian bridge, regardless of rabbinical opinion. Residents also feared that construction noise and traffic on the highway would impact the serenity of the religious community and diminish the quality of worship at the various synagogues.

The study had documented a tightly knit, religious community at risk of social disintegration if disturbances to their pedestrian lifestyle were not mitigated. The report recommended that a tunneling approach be used in project construction to minimize community impact and address

the trench issue. The report proved to be a critical document in re-evaluating the initial design of the project and was widely circulated—along with the project’s environmental documents—among highway officials.

When it appeared to the Orthodox Coalition that the likelihood of permanently blocking the project was slim, they immediately approached MIDOT and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) officials with a request for mitigation measures to eliminate or reduce the pedestrian and vehicular access impacts, and noise impacts of the project. The ombudsman

and community liaison worked closely with the community and MIDOT project officials to ensure the community’s concerns were part of project decisionmaking. Citing the importance of preserving strong neighborhoods and the importance of the Orthodox Jewish community, with its numerous schools of Jewish religious study, to the Jewish community nationally, the Orthodox Coalition also called for help from national Jewish groups in a letter-writing campaign to the White House. Petitioning others to write on behalf of the Orthodox Jewish community paid off. In 1981, the U.S. Secretary of Transportation approved the I-696 project, provided that the highway design incorporate various mitigation measures oriented toward pedestrian access, including the creation of two platform decks across the highway in Oak Park.



*An aerial view of the two landscaped platforms over I-696 in Oak Park, MI. These decks provide pedestrian access and recreational areas for Oak Park residents.*

## Mitigation Measures

As the tunneling approach recommended in the social-impact report was deemed infeasible given the nature of the soils in the study area, the concept of platform decks across the roadway was developed and agreed upon as a mitigation feature. The I-696 mitigation plan included the following:

- **Appointment of an Ombudsman for the Planning and Construction Process.** To ensure that the community would have a voice in the planning and construction process, a full-time ombudsman from MIDOT was selected to serve as a liaison between the general community, which included residents of all the affected municipalities, and MIDOT. As part of the ombudsman’s staff, an advocate specifically for the Orthodox Jewish community and selected by the Orthodox Coalition was hired with project funds to serve as a liaison between the Orthodox Jewish community and MIDOT.

## Mitigation Measures Employed

- **Ombudsman and Community Liaison.** A Michigan ombudsman was appointed specifically for the I-696 project, and a community-appointed liaison was hired to work with the ombudsman.
- **Staged Construction and Noise Abatement.** To reduce noise impact to the community, construction was staged and not allowed on the Sabbath and Jewish holy days except with permission from the Orthodox community.
- **Two Platform Decks.** Landscaped decks over the highway allowed for fluid pedestrian access to the neighborhood's five Orthodox synagogues and served to improve the quality of life.
- **Pedestrian Circulation.** Extensive provisions for pedestrian circulation during and after construction included the construction of continuous sidewalks on the service roads and through the deck parks.
- **Replacement Housing.** The 150-unit Teitel Building was built in the same neighborhood, with Federal funds, to accommodate primarily elderly Jewish residents who were displaced.

- **Staged Construction and Noise Abatement.** The community was concerned that construction noise would impact the serenity of worship at synagogues. To mitigate these noise impacts, construction on I-696 was prohibited on weekends and other Jewish holy days. Waivers to this restriction were given by the Orthodox Jewish community via the community liaison working with the ombudsman. The width of the decks, the depressed roadway, and extensive landscaping also helped reduce the community's noise concerns.
- **Decks Over the Highway.** The creation of decks or pedestrian plazas over the highway was perhaps the most important community-impact mitigation measure. Two decks were built over the depressed freeway in Oak Park to enable fluid pedestrian movement across the freeway to shopping facilities, the Jewish Community Center, schools, and houses of worship. The decks also addressed the strict religious concept whereby an open depression might have been interpreted as a community divider. Pedestrian bridges would neither have addressed the religious boundary concept nor allowed the fluid crossing patterns required by the community. The two decks measure 700 feet and 650 feet in length and fully span the width of the eight lanes of highway. Parks created on top of the decks add to neighborhood open space and feature recreational equipment, pedestrian/bike paths, and seating areas.



*Playground at Rothstein Park, part of one of the highway decks over I-696 in Oak Park, MI.*

- **Pedestrian Circulation During and After Construction.** Pedestrian access to synagogues was critical both during and after construction. To ensure that construction inconveniences were minimized, MIDOT, with FHWA funding and oversight, built pedestrian overpasses and facilities before they began all other stages of construction. Flagmen were used to direct pedestrian traffic, and dust control was carefully implemented to minimize soiling of residents en route to synagogue. To ensure that pedestrian circulation was not impeded after construction, the project design incorporated continuous sidewalks along the service roads, within the deck parks, and on other bridges in the area.
- **Replacement Housing.** The highway necessitated the displacement of 889 persons from 256 families in the project area (not all of these were from the Orthodox Jewish community). Many of those displaced, however, did come from an apartment building in the core of the Orthodox Jewish community, and many elderly residents who walked to area religious facilities were affected. The mitigation for this land acquisition for the roadway was in the form of a 150-unit apartment building for the elderly, funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The new Teitel apartment building was built in the Jewish Federation Apartments complex, one block from the original site.



*Paved and lighted pedestrian/bike paths alongside I-696 replaced informal, unlighted paths in use prior to the completion.*

The I-696 project was a divisive event for the Oak Park Orthodox Jewish community. Some residents felt the community should have continued fighting to stop the project; others believed that the completion of I-696 was inevitable and negotiation over mitigation was necessary to avoid being left out of the design process. Some families, fearful that the highway would depress housing values, sold their homes and left Oak Park. These divisive effects were short-lived, as families that left the community were rapidly replaced by an influx of younger families seeking housing in affordable areas with good community facilities. As of 1996, community leaders indicated their neighborhood was stronger than it had ever been, and the historic center of the Jewish community remains strong and vital.

Because of the length of planning, design, and construction of the I-696 project and the uncertainties that accompanied it, personal and institutional investment in the community declined. Highway planners referred to this phenomenon as a “shadow of displacement.” Once I-696 was completed, the shadow of displacement disappeared quickly after over 30 years of contention and uncertainty. Families that had postponed improvements to their homes during the planning of I-696 began and continued investing in their homes and community without fear of displacement. According to community leaders, second and third additions to homes are increasingly common, as large Orthodox Jewish families, eager to stay in their neighborhood, have become willing to make investments in their homes over and above the prevailing local market rather than move away to obtain more space.

To ensure the vitality of the Jewish community and participation in Jewish schools and synagogues in the Oak Park area, the Jewish community took a proactive approach. In 1985, the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit established the Neighborhood Project, a not-for-profit organization, to offer interest-free loans of up to \$7,000 as an incentive to Jewish families to locate within the Oak Park area. Since the program’s inception, over 900 families have participated.

As of 1996, the local housing market was stronger than it had ever been, with many homes selling through word of mouth in the Jewish community. Due to the proximity of the neighborhood to major employment centers and the affordability of homes in Oak Park

compared with elsewhere in suburban Detroit, Oak Park is generally a real-estate sellers’ market.

I-696 did not physically divide the community as many residents had feared; in fact, it has effectively kept Oak Park together. As a symbolic gesture of the overall positive outcome from the innovative process and mitigation plan for I-696, MIDOT held a ribbon-tying ceremony (instead of a ribbon-cutting ceremony) to celebrate the official opening of the highway.



*The 150-unit replacement housing, the Teitel Building, was constructed with Federal funds for elderly citizens displaced by the I-696 project in Oak Park, MI.*



The area strengthened as the core of Jewish life in Detroit with the first renovation of the Jewish Community Center, which began only after the completion of I-696. The relocation of a girls' Jewish day school from outside the community into Oak Park and the expansion of a local Jewish middle school reflect the community's renewed investment in Oak Park.

Community leaders say the root of the renewed investment in and strengthening of the Orthodox Jewish community lies in the success of the mitigation, the degree to which I-696 reduced east-west travel times, and the removal of displacement uncertainty. The deck parks have proven to be well received and an important neighborhood amenity. With their walkways, benches, shuffle-board courts, and children's play areas, these parks have become central meeting places for community gatherings, in addition to providing access across the highway.

Pedestrian access to and from synagogues was improved as a result of the project. Before the decks were installed, people traveled to their synagogues on informal paths that were unpaved and unlighted. The network of pathways on and along the I-696 deck parks is paved, lighted, and cleared of snow in the winter; the park benches entice people to stop and chat.

The reduction in travel times played a vital part in strengthening community ties. As a result of the I-696 construction, reduced congestion on local roads has significantly reduced cross-town travel time. Residents say that they make more trips to community facilities, such as the Jewish Community Center, as a result of reduced congestion on the local roadways. Before completion of I-696 and because of local traffic congestion, separate community events were planned for each side of the community. The project design



*Preschool children from Temple Emanuel playing on Rothstein Park, built atop one of the highway decks in Oak Park, MI.*

## Making the Planning Process Work

- Clear assessment and understanding of the community and its needs:
  - community cohesion through a sociological study
  - prohibition of construction on weekends and Jewish holy days
  - maintenance of pedestrian access during and after construction
- Willingness of highway officials to meet and work well with key community representatives and leaders.
- Effectiveness of the ombudsman and liaison to gather and provide community information for decisionmaking.

elements and mitigation changed the need for separate activities and encouraged more community interaction. For example, in 1996 the Neighborhood Project worked closely with the Oak Park Arts and Cultural Commission to produce the first annual fine arts festival. It was held in Oak Park at a single, centrally located site—the Rothstein Park deck.

## Lessons Learned

Many I-696 project elements contributed to successfully preserving community cohesion in Oak Park. The experience of project managers and the community participants on the I-696 project suggests a number of community-relations practices that would be broadly applicable:

- On the I-696 project, the Orthodox Jewish community provided clear and continuous leadership during the intense, 2-year negotiations for mitigation measures.
- The Orthodox Coalition provided a single point of communication for presenting problems to highway planners.
- The community recognized the need to document its uniqueness and expressed that need to MIDOT, convincing highway officials to conduct an independent sociological analysis of the community. The analysis documented the community's cohesion and accomplished three critical objectives:
  - It provided highway officials with a clear picture of the Orthodox Jewish customs practiced in the community.
  - It outlined how the highway design and construction would negatively interfere with the community's customs and impact the fabric of this religious community.
  - It provided the evidence that the community needed to present a strong case for revising the highway design and providing impact mitigation.
- With the social-impact report as an accepted foundation, highway officials worked with the Orthodox Coalition to develop a unique set of mitigation measures with specific community practices in mind, such as limiting I-696 construction to weekdays and developing pedestrian-circulation plans for all phases of construction. With the report as an aid, the Orthodox Jewish community mobilized national Jewish groups to support their cause. Their knowledge of whom to contact, and when, was critical.

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INCLUDING KOSHER

*The I-696 deck provides a central location for community events in Oak Park, MI.*

- Although it occurred late in the process, the development of the ombudsman position was critical for the remainder of the project design and construction, as it helped ensure that the agreed mitigation measures were implemented. The MIDOT-appointed ombudsman and the Orthodox Jewish community-appointed liaison devised quick solutions to problems that arose during design and construction of the highway and decks.
- The ombudsman’s office was located within the community on the project site to maintain construction oversight from the community point of view and to provide a visible authority figure to whom the community could voice their concerns.

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# Community Preservation Philadelphia

# Community Preservation: Chinatown, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

## Introduction

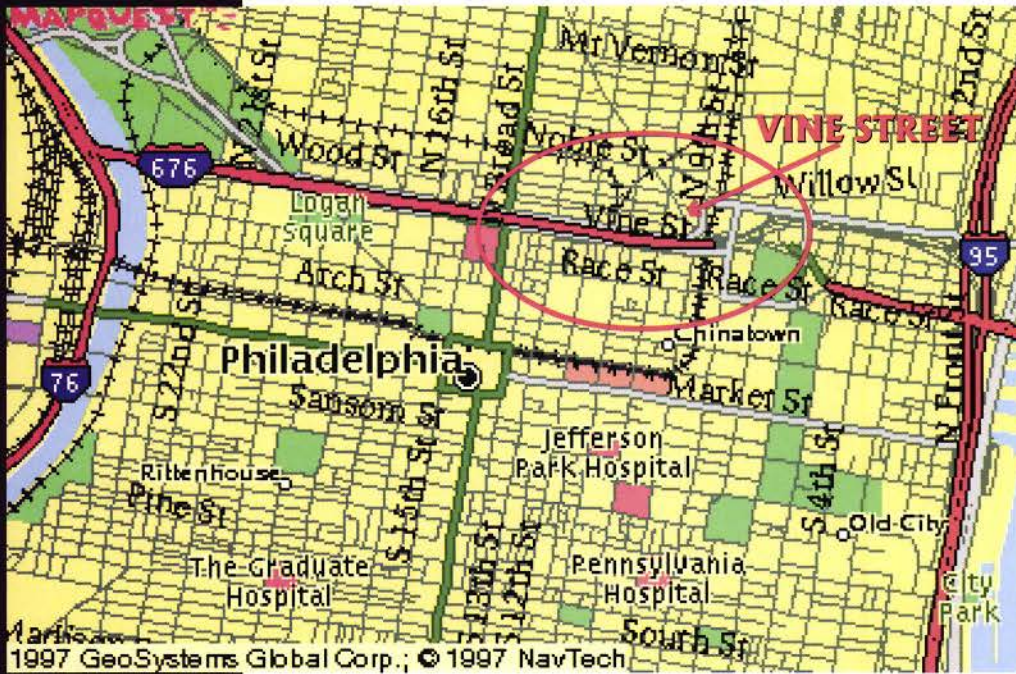
In the 1960s, the city of Philadelphia, PA, had gained National recognition for its aggressive downtown planning and urban-renewal programs. A combination of clearing substandard buildings, creating new parcels for development, and providing improved vehicular access had significantly brightened the prospects for its aging central business district (CBD). A critical part of these plans was a major cross-town expressway to be located within the right-of-way of an existing urban arterial, Vine Street. The expressway was designed to link I-95 and the Benjamin Franklin Bridge, on the eastern edge of Philadelphia at the Delaware River, with the Schuylkill Expressway 2 miles to the west. The purpose of the new highway was to connect these major existing highways as well as provide enhanced traffic access to downtown Philadelphia. The proposed Vine Street Expressway became the focus of a protracted dispute between communities along its route and proponents of downtown improvement.

The story of the Vine Street Expressway involves several innovative approaches to highway design and community interaction, and is representative of the unique problems that can be encountered in the large, older, urban areas of the Northeast. The planned route of the Vine Street Expressway passed through several older, urban communities and attracted intense opposition from most of them. Among them was Philadelphia's Chinatown, a century-old community of ethnic Chinese already feeling threatened by the many construction projects underway nearby.

## The Players

### Key Agencies and Groups Involved in the Chinatown Portion of the Vine Street Expressway Project in Philadelphia, PA:

- Federal Highway Administration, Region 3
- Pennsylvania Department of Transportation
- Office of the Mayor, City of Philadelphia
- Philadelphia City Planning Commission
- Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority
- Committee for the Preservation and Advancement of the Chinatown Community (after 1969, the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation)
- Chinese Benevolent Association
- Archdiocese of Philadelphia
- Holy Redeemer Church and School
- Chinese Christian Church and Center
- Chinese Gospel Center



*The Vine Street Expressway is shown on this map of Philadelphia, PA, which was included in the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the project.*

was to follow. This dispute would extend to 1983, when a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) filed by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) and Region 3 of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) contained a compromise plan for the expressway that met most of the needs of Chinatown. The result: a sensitively planned and aesthetically pleasing, below-grade, limited-access highway design that has helped not only to preserve but also to expand this energetic and cohesive community. Moreover, the Vine Street Expressway provides ample vehicular access to a successfully redeveloped downtown Philadelphia.

## The Chinatown Community

Philadelphia's Chinatown was founded in 1871. However, the first Chinese people probably arrived in Philadelphia and established some small businesses there by the mid-1800s. Like Chinatowns and other communities of immigrants in many U.S. cities, Philadelphia's Chinatown provided people with a secure base for establishing roots in America and the opportunity to improve their economic status.

Chinatown, however, functions as much more than a cultural icon: it furnishes essential services for new immigrants from China and Southeast Asia and provides a cultural identity for many American Chinese. Philadelphia's Chinatown has relatively few residents compared with the Chinese population of the Delaware Valley or metropolitan Philadelphia, but it is still considered vital by those who live in the region and desire to maintain close ties with their cultural heritage. According to a 1970 Drexel University study of Philadelphia's Chinatown, "the true essence of Chinatowns is found in the sense of identity and belonging they impart to the Chinese living beyond as well as within their borders" (see references).

### Community Preservation: Philadelphia, PA

In the 1960s, Chinatown, located south of Vine Street and just to the northeast of the Philadelphia CBD, was surrounded on three sides by urban-renewal projects. In 1966, the community learned about the proposed Vine Street Expressway, which they felt, if undertaken as planned, would form a fourth and final barrier to the community.

Despite a lack of political power, the Chinatown community entered the fray in March 1966. Upon learning of the Vine Street Expressway plans through the newspapers, the leaders of Chinatown began to organize for the dispute that

Until the advent of the Vine Street Expressway, leadership in Chinatown was almost entirely in the hands of the Chinese Benevolent Association, a group consisting of the elders of the major families in the community. In China, the term “family” has a much broader meaning than it does in America. The family is more a kinship group or clan. In China, many generations and their offspring live under one roof, under the guidance of one patriarch or matriarch. Families come together in Philadelphia’s Chinatown to protect and assist their members, particularly the recent immigrants. They tend to form their own associations to provide a form of quasi-government that sets rules and regulations, resolves differences, cares for the needy, and acts as a liaison with the world outside Chinatown.

Because of their cultural commitment to education, family life within the strictly Chinese family is focused on raising the children. It is not surprising, then, that one of the most important institutions in Philadelphia’s Chinatown was (and remains) Holy Redeemer Church and School, located on Vine Street at the northern edge of the community. Holy Redeemer was built in 1941 expressly for Chinese Roman Catholics, and the church and adjacent school serve as the focal point for community activity. In the early 1970s, the Holy Redeemer School had 140 children enrolled. All were Chinese, some 40 of whom were very recent immigrants. Initial plans for the Vine Street Expressway called for the demolition of both Holy Redeemer Church and its school.

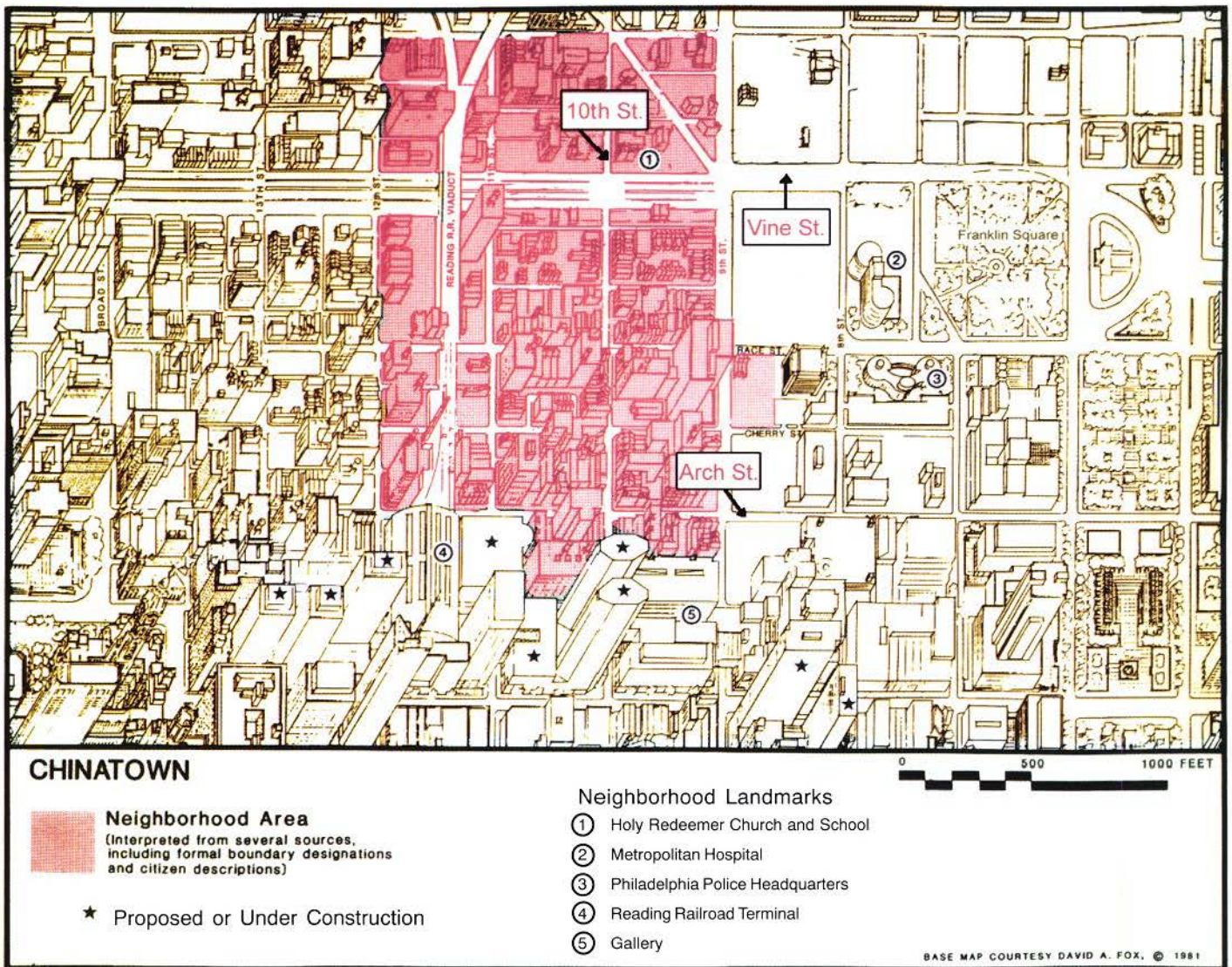
After the mid-1960s and the relaxation of U.S. immigration laws with regard to Asians, the demand for housing in Chinatown became intense as large numbers of Chinese chose to immigrate to Philadelphia. This was one of the major precipitating factors behind the struggle by Chinatown residents to preserve their community in the face of downtown revitalization and highway projects. While Chinatowns up and down the East Coast expanded rapidly in response to changes in immigration laws during the 1960s, Philadelphia’s Chinatown was constrained by surrounding redevelopment and transportation projects. Because of the small physical size of the Chinatown community, no new construction had taken place there for years.

A 1975 planning report on Philadelphia’s Chinatown (known as the “Chadbourne Report”) that was commissioned by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission counted approximately 500 Chinese people, 50 small-scale Chinese businesses, and 20 associations as forming the social fabric of Chinatown. The Chinatown community also included a mixture of loft structures serving the garment and printing industries as well as assorted wholesalers, distributors, and manufacturers. Land uses were intermingled

## The Chinatown Community

The following statements describe the Chinatown community in Philadelphia, PA:

- It is a strongly ethnic community geared toward assisting Chinese immigrants and preserving Chinese cultural traditions.
- Support for Chinatown is strong among the larger Chinese community in the Delaware Valley and metropolitan Philadelphia.
- The focus of Chinatown is the Holy Redeemer Church and School.
- The community has the ability to attract capable volunteer assistance.
- Community leaders have been in their positions for years, showing a strong commitment to the community.
- Community growth is vibrant, requiring room for expansion.
- Chinatown had an Asian population of 500 persons and 50 businesses during the height of project controversy.



*Chinatown is the shaded area shown on this drawing of downtown Philadelphia, PA. It shows the original configuration of Vine Street before the expressway project. The drawing was included in the Final EIS and exemplifies the great care that was taken in preparing the graphics for that document.*

rather than segregated. Most of Chinatown, however, was actually dedicated to the movement and storage of motor vehicles: the Chadbourne Report estimated that 52 percent of the gross land area in the Chinatown study area was used for this purpose.

## What Happened

The Vine Street Expressway first appeared in plans for downtown Philadelphia in 1945 as a multi-lane, below-grade, limited-access highway. Traffic congestion and access problems were widely recognized, even at that time, as being major contributors to the overall decline of the Philadelphia CBD. It was logical, therefore, to pick the widest existing rights-of-way and utilize them to relieve traffic problems. Vine Street was one of the oldest major arterial streets in downtown Philadelphia, with 10 at-grade lanes and a right-of-way width of 170 to 180 feet.



In 1957, the proposed Vine Street Expressway was included as part of the National System of Interstate Highways. In 1959, the western-most portion of the expressway (from the Schuylkill Expressway to 16th Street) was constructed as a below-grade, six-lane, limited-access highway with four at-grade service lanes.

City officials expected that the remainder of the Vine Street Expressway would fall into place in the 1960s as part of overall redevelopment efforts in the Philadelphia CBD, which were by that time attaining national prominence. Redevelopment plans called for ringing the downtown area with high-capacity, limited-access highways and implementing extensive redevelopment and transit improvements in the entire area, including Chinatown. Before redevelopment, Chinatown extended from 11th Street eastward past 9th Street. Urban renewal cleared the east side of 9th Street. Then a major indoor shopping center (the Gallery) was constructed on Arch Street along the southern edge of Chinatown, with the backs of the parking garages facing Chinatown. At that time, the western edge of Chinatown was constrained by an elevated railroad line, and redevelopment was being discussed in that area as well. The residents of Chinatown recognized they were effectively being hemmed in on three sides by urban renewal just as the floodgates of Chinese immigration were opening.

In March 1966, Chinatown learned about plans for the Vine Street Expressway. These plans called for an extension of the six-lane, below-grade, limited-access highway from 16th Street to 10th Street, at which point it would head above grade to its intersection with I-95 and the Benjamin Franklin



*A 1996 view north on 10th Street, the heart of Philadelphia, PA's, Chinatown. The gate was built by artisans in the Chinese city of Tianjin and shipped to Philadelphia in the late 1980s.*



*Tenth Street looking south from Vine Street in 1996. Note the China gate, which is on Arch Street at the south end of Chinatown, only a few blocks from the Vine Street Expressway in Philadelphia, PA.*

## Project Chronology

- 1945: Vine Street Expressway first appears in Philadelphia, PA's, plans.
- 1957: Vine Street Expressway is proposed as part of the Interstate Highway System.
- 1959: Western end of Vine Street Expressway is constructed to 16th Street.
- 1962-65: U.S. immigration laws are changed, permitting entry of more Chinese.
- 1966: Chinatown community learns of State plans for the Vine Street Expressway.  
  
Committee for the Preservation and Advancement of the Chinatown Community is formed.
- 1968: Right-of-way acquisition/demolition begins for the remainder of the Vine Street project.
- 1969: Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation is incorporated.
- 1973: There are protests in Chinatown aimed at preventing the State from demolishing buildings for the Vine Street project.  
  
Chadbourne report is commissioned by the city to study ways of preserving Chinatown.  
  
The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) requires the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Vine Street Expressway.
- 1975: Chadbourne report on the Chinatown Community is completed.
- 1977: Draft EIS is completed, calling for relocation of Holy Redeemer Church and School.
- 1980: Vine Street Task Force is created.
- 1981: Revised Draft EIS is completed, recommending adoption of reduced-scale Vine Street Expressway and significant community impact mitigation.
- 1983: Final EIS is completed; Record of Decision is issued by FHWA supporting the mitigation plan and reduced-scale project.
- 1991: Vine Street Expressway construction and associated mitigation measures are completed.

Bridge. The fact that this proposal was perceived as forming the final of four walls around Chinatown was only one problem; another concern, even more serious, was that the Vine Street Expressway would require the acquisition and demolition of the Holy Redeemer Church and School, the cultural focus of Chinatown.

Chinatown's residents faced yet another barrier: they had never had much political clout, never having even protested before. Now, however, the soul of the community was being threatened.

The same month they learned about the Vine Street Expressway plans, Chinatown residents formed the Committee for the Preservation and Advancement of the Chinatown Community. In 1969, this committee became the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation, whose focus was not only on the Vine Street Expressway but also on providing housing in Chinatown.

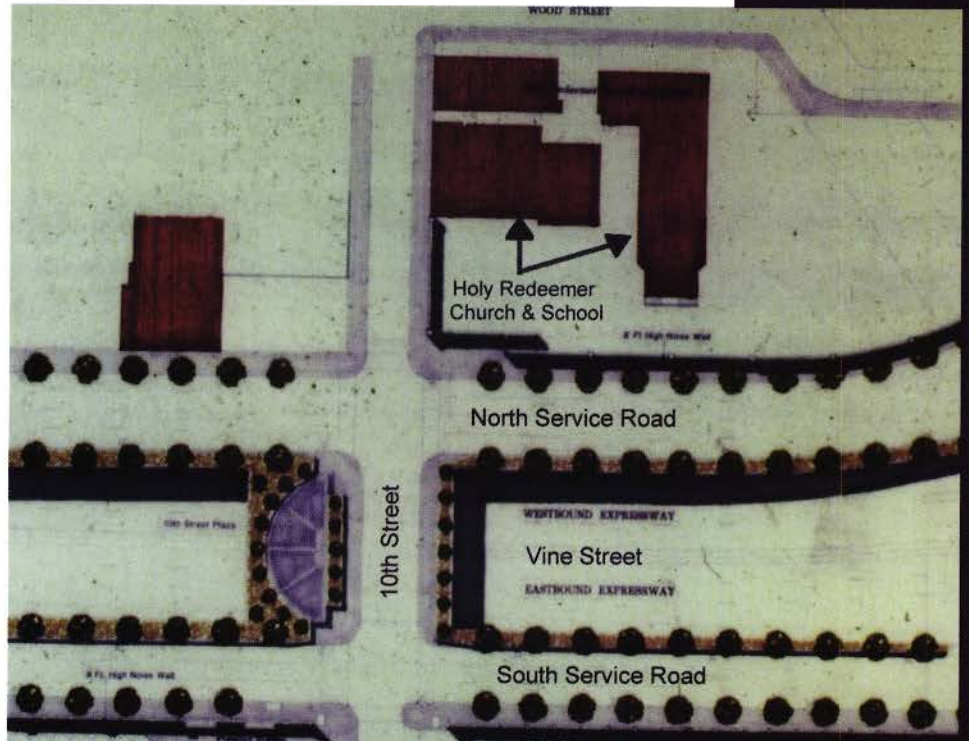
At first, Chinatown's involvement in the project moved slowly. The traditional method of dealing with political matters in Chinatown was to approach the elders, in this case the Chinatown Benevolent Association. Convincing this group required considerable time and patience. Also, initially, Chinatown residents concerned about the Vine Street Expressway were mainly associated with Holy Redeemer Church and School. It was necessary, however, for this group to broaden their constituency to include other associations in Chinatown, in particular the other two Christian churches in the community. The other groups had to be persuaded that it was in their interest to become involved in the Vine Street project. Finally, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, which owned and administered Holy Redeemer, had to be brought on board. The Archdiocese leadership was circumspect for some time in its approach to Vine Street, carefully weighing its options and nearly alienating the Chinese community while doing so. It was not until 1973 that the Archdiocese made its position clear: it opposed the acquisition of Holy Redeemer Church and School.

Planning and transportation officials, on the other hand, headed into the Vine Street project largely unaware of



*Philadelphia, PA's, Vine Street around 1980, viewed from its intersection of 10th Street. Vine Street was a total of 10 lanes wide at this point. The elevated railroad in the background was demolished in the 1980s to make room for an accessway to the Philadelphia Convention Center.*

the potential for community opposition. At the time, downtown renewal in Philadelphia had built significant momentum. Vine Street was viewed as a "missing link" between operable super-highways. Among traffic planners in PennDOT and FHWA, the necessity for the Vine Street Expressway was self-evident. It also seemed nearly everyone wanted the Vine Street Expressway and other major downtown improvements to be completed in time for the 1976 Bicentennial celebration. In the planners' enthusiasm over the nationally momentous events about to occur in downtown Philadelphia, the needs of Chinatown were nearly overshadowed by the flurry of activity.



*The mitigation plan included a wide, landscaped crossing of the Vine Street Expressway at 10th Street. This would connect Philadelphia, PA's, Chinatown with the Holy Redeemer Church and School (the two larger buildings at the top of the plan).*

However, it was not long before the voice of Chinatown was heard in other influential quarters. The newspapers soon noticed the story, and local universities became active in support of

the community. Chinatown attracted the assistance of several highly capable legal and planning volunteers. By 1973, Chinatown's involvement in the Vine Street project had coalesced, and the community, along with several others along Vine Street, had become a force to be reckoned with.

In early 1973, PennDOT held a meeting in the State Office Building in Philadelphia to explain the project to the community. They were greeted with a 3-hour demonstration by 100 residents of Chinatown, and they were surprised further when, at the end of the meeting, the proposed project was found to be unacceptable to the residents. Chinatown residents then pressed the Mayor's office for assistance. None was immediately forthcoming, and the demonstrations continued. Representatives of Chinatown then demanded meetings with the Archbishop and Governor to prevent what they called the "cultural genocide" of the Delaware Valley's 6,000 Chinese people.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, PennDOT had been steadily acquiring and demolishing the buildings necessary to implement the Vine Street Expressway. Their schedule took them to a location in Chinatown in August 1973. They were met there with a headline-making demonstration by 20 Chinese youths who occupied a building slated for demolition. The adverse publicity following this event led the city of Philadelphia to fund the Chadbourne Report, a planning study to determine how Chinatown could be preserved. Then, in November



1A  
10TH & VINE STREETS - LOOKING NORTH AT HOLY REDEEMER CHURCH & SCHOOL

*An artist's conception of the proposed mitigation for the 10th Street crossing of the Vine Street Expressway in Philadelphia, PA. The Holy Redeemer Church and School appear at the right rear of this drawing.*

1973, FHWA decided to require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Vine Street Expressway, in spite of intense opposition from the downtown business community. The projected completion date for a “partial” EIS was January 1974. At the time, it was not anticipated that public hearings would be required, although known public comments were to be taken into account by designers. The FHWA-estimated time to complete the EIS process was a maximum of 18 months. The initial Draft EIS was not completed until 1977 (and the Final EIS completed in 1983).

The final Chadbourne Report was released in 1975. This comprehensive review of the planning situation in Chinatown was sympathetic to the views of the Chinatown community. The community was also engrossed in a second controversial transportation project—a proposed commuter rail tunnel on the east side of Chinatown. That project was the impetus for a lengthy holdout by a widowed Chinese mother of three children living in a home slated for condemnation by the city. The home became known as the “Chinese Alamo” and was not relinquished until 1984.

In the 1977 Draft EIS, PennDOT agreed to relocate, rather than acquire, Holy Redeemer Church and School. This offer was refused by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, and the standoff continued. Ultimately, the potential for withdrawal of Federal funding for the Vine Street project forced the dispute off dead center. Under the Interstate Transfer Program, local and State governments were allowed, with Federal approval, to delete “nonessential” links from the Interstate Highway Program and transfer the funds to other transportation improvements. All transfers had to receive Federal approval by October 1, 1983. Substantial pressure was building in Philadelphia for transferring the Vine Street funding to mass-transit projects. PennDOT and FHWA, therefore, faced the prospect that funding for the Vine Street Expressway could be withdrawn.

The impasse was broken in the spring of 1980 when the Mayor of Philadelphia and PennDOT created a Task Force to recommend actions for feasible and necessary improvements to Vine Street. The Task Force was chaired jointly by a PennDOT official and an official of the Mayor’s office, and included a panel of local, State, and FHWA transportation officials. Although Chinatown was not represented on the Task Force, a change in the officials’ philosophy—driven by the potential for losing funding—facilitated the community’s full participation in the planning process.

Before a revised Draft EIS was issued more than a year and a half later, over 100 meetings were held with Chinatown and other communities along Vine Street. A first major step was a “break-the-ice” meeting at which PennDOT was determined to give a full hearing to the community’s concerns and objections, and to encourage a climate of cooperation with Chinatown and the other communities.

PennDOT’s negotiators were handpicked for their ability to foster trust with the communities, and only those people were chosen to make presentations. The need for the project was thoroughly explained before alternatives were discussed. All meetings were held within the communities, rather than in State or city offices, and food was brought and shared among all participants.

The Task Force developed four alternatives for consideration: (1) the full proposal, including six below-grade lanes, four at-grade lanes, and a complex interchange and ramp system near Chinatown, which would have required the acquisition of Holy Redeemer Church and School; (2, 3) two reduced-scale alternatives with fewer lanes and ramps; and (4) minor improvements to the then-existing Vine Street. The Draft EIS recommended one of the two reduced-scale alternatives. This recommendation was carried forward into the Final EIS in 1983, and a Record of Decision (ROD) was issued by FHWA Headquarters in Washington, DC, on September 30, 1983.

## Mitigation and Enhancement Features

- A reduced-scale project was chosen.
- An extra-wide vehicle/pedestrian bridge at 10th Street maintains access to the church and school.
- Detailed landscaping along project right-of-way and over the 10th Street bridge helps maintain quality of life.
- Design features such as cultural icons and aesthetic fencing were consistent with the community culture.
- A sustainable landscape maintenance plan was developed.
- Air conditioning, central heating, and noise retardant windows in schools and churches helped contain dust and reduce noise.
- Expressway retaining walls were angled inward to minimize traffic noise in the community.

## Mitigation Measures

The compromise design for the Vine Street Expressway opened the way to extensive and innovative mitigation measures. Assisting greatly in this was the designation of Chinatown and several other Vine Street communities as Historic Districts under Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act of 1966. These designations occurred with the agreement of PennDOT and FHWA in the early 1980s. It was widely held at the time that the Historic-District designations would encourage broad flexibility for mitigation design and funding.

The following are highlights of mitigation measures used on the Vine Street Expressway:

- Once the decision was reached not to acquire or relocate Holy Redeemer, the issue became how to preserve or enhance access to the Church and School. A wide, well-landscaped bridge across the depressed Vine Street Expressway at 10th Street was constructed. Careful landscaping and attention to design and construction detail were provided along the bridge to conceal the expressway below.
- Landscaping was placed carefully to conceal views of the expressway.
- Noise walls in the vicinity of Chinatown were designed of brick, with Chinese characters symbolizing longevity imprinted on the walls and on nearby sidewalks at frequent intervals.

- The fence along the Vine Street service roads represents another significant design innovation. The anodized aluminum fence shown in the photograph was not significantly more expensive than a chain-link fence. However, using it required an exception to FHWA design standards.
- The city agreed to pay \$200,000 annually for landscape maintenance, with PennDOT picking up anything in excess of this amount. Over the years, there has been very little evidence of landscape deterioration along the Vine Street Expressway.
- Air conditioning and noise-retardant windows were installed in schools and churches along the route, including Holy Redeemer, to mitigate the effects of noise and dust. In addition, expressway retaining walls, designed to curve inward toward the highway, resulted in additional noise mitigation.
- In order to provide continuity of traffic circulation, retaining walls were constructed in narrow pits deep in the ground prior to removing existing, at-grade traffic ways on Vine Street.



*Special care was taken in the choice and design of fencing in Philadelphia, PA.*

The Vine Street Expressway was completed in January 1991. Chinatown, under continuous leadership, is enjoying a renaissance due, in part, to the mitigation implemented for this project.

Since the early 1980s, the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation has developed 172 units of new housing and is in the process of developing 51 more on the north side of Vine Street, adjacent to Holy Redeemer. This housing project holds the prospect of facilitating Chinatown's northward expansion into the neighborhood of the Church and School. A substantial amount of housing rehabilitation has also taken place. Community leaders estimate that the population of Chinatown is now in the thousands, and growing.

**Before**



*Looking north from Chinatown at the intersection of Vine Street and 10th Street around 1980. Philadelphia, PA's, Chinatown community attempted to mute the effects of the 10-lane Vine Street by planting vegetation in the median strips. The Holy Redeemer Church and School are visible in the right background.*

**After**



*This is a 1996 view of the mitigated crossing of 10th Street over the Vine Street Expressway in Philadelphia, PA, with the Holy Redeemer Church and School are at back right. The mitigation was implemented as planned (see an artist's conceptual drawing on page 8).*



## Lessons Learned

PennDOT used a full-scale, public involvement program on the Vine Street Expressway project. The project involved a number of useful community-relations techniques that are broadly applicable:

- The need for the project must be firmly established. The public must be convinced of the project's need before there can be progress on other issues. The community must be convinced that there is a problem that can best be solved by the proposed project.
- Project managers who relate well to the public should be assigned to community-relations tasks, even if they are not the people who are most familiar with the technical details of the project. Technical presentations and answers to technical questions must be prepared in simple terms that the public will easily understand. Meetings are most productive when held in an informal setting in the community, as opposed to off-site or in a government facility.
- On the Vine Street Expressway, a great deal of latitude was given to agency representatives working directly with the public. This enabled decisions to be made, while keeping the public from feeling they were simply being placated.
- Several agency participants in the Vine Street project stressed that there must be continuity of agency staff throughout the process, particularly to ensure implementation of the mitigation plan as written. Continuity of involvement is also important for the trust and relationships built between agency staff and community leaders.



*Detailed design was a very important component of mitigation for the Vine Street Expressway. To introduce a design theme for the Chinatown portion of the project, the Chinese symbol for "longevity" was imprinted frequently on decorative noise walls and on other concrete and brick surfaces in the community.*



- Continuity of community leadership is one indicator of a cohesive community. Community leaders involved in the Vine Street project in 1966 still functioned as community leaders in 1996–30 years later.
- If used correctly, the FHWA NEPA (environmental) process can be a vehicle for resolving problems. It provides a mechanism to identify and address community issues early in project planning, before the community or the agency has a firm position. It allows for flexibility of design and, consequently, the design can reflect the community's contribution in perpetuity.



*Looking south from the 10th Street crossing of the Vine Street Expressway, one can view a three-story mural celebrating the history and spirit of Philadelphia's Chinatown (top). Among other things, the mural depicts the struggle to preserve Chinatown from the impacts of the Vine Street Expressway (bottom). Note the detail of the Holy Redeemer Church and School in the background.*

learned from Philadelphia's Chinatown is that when community values are recognized and dealt with in a collaborative manner, everyone benefits.

Chinatown is unique in its ethnicity and traditions. The level of commitment and the longevity of its leadership is also somewhat unique in a Nation where people move on average every 5 years and often do not know their neighbors.

It is important to remember that Chinatown has historically been a truly cohesive, cultural community filling a unique role in the larger cultural community. Chinatown's subsequent revitalization and success are indicative of the significant contribution of the Vine Street Expressway mitigation. The most important lesson

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# Community Reconstruction

## Seattle

# Community Reconstruction: Seattle, Washington

## Introduction

The I-90 project in Seattle, WA, was the final segment of that intercontinental highway to be completed. This last section of I-90, which runs from Bellevue to Seattle, was finished in 1993, marking the end of almost 40 years of dissension. Because discussions about completing the I-90 project were filled with protracted controversy, newspapers compared it to the Loch Ness monster raising its head from the depths of Lake Washington (to the excitement or angst of some of the involved parties) only to sink again in the uncertain waters of public process.

The length of the discussion, however, provided the opportunity for all the parties involved to carefully examine the social impacts of the project. As a result of extensive community involvement, the completion of I-90 was accompanied by targeted mitigation measures to address community impacts. The major element of mitigation in the affected Seattle neighborhoods was the creation of a 2,100-foot lid across the width of the eight-lane freeway. This lid reconnected the community severed in the 1940s by the construction of U.S. 10.

The history of the I-90 project is long. I-90 in Seattle was conceived in 1945 and accepted as part of the National System of Interstate Highways in August 1947. The Interstate was to follow the alignment of U.S. 10, a non-divided, four-lane facility built in the early 1940s that essentially severed the Seattle community. By the 1960s, after Seattle and its suburbs had experienced rapid population growth during the post-war period, State Route 90 (SR 90—formerly U.S. 10) needed significant expansion.

## The Players

### Key Agencies and Groups Involved in I-90 Through Seattle, WA:

- Washington State Department of Transportation
- Federal Highway Administration, Region 10
- City of Seattle, WA
- The Municipality of Metropolitan Seattle (Metro)
- Seattle Board of Review
- I-90 Commission
- Citizen Advisory Committee for Seattle (included representatives for the Judkins Park, South Atlantic Street, and Mount Baker neighborhoods)
- City of Mercer Island, WA
- Citizen Advisory Committee for Mercer Island
- City of Bellevue, WA
- King County, WA



Seattle, WA, I-90 project-location map.

Engineering studies for upgrading the four-lane highway to Interstate standards had begun in 1957. By 1960, reversible lanes were implemented on SR 90 as a temporary measure to relieve worsening traffic congestion along the corridor. By the 1970s, the roadway was becoming increasingly unsafe due to rising congestion levels, the absence of separation between opposing lanes of traffic, deficient acceleration and deceleration lanes, and a bend (needed for navigational purposes) in the roadway over Lake Washington.

Although the need to reduce congestion was clear, choosing from the various options to do so created deep contention among the municipalities involved. The final I-90 alignment and lane configuration was decided in 1977 after 5 years of active negotiation and mediation on the part of the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Governor of Washington, the city of Seattle, the Municipality of Metropolitan Seattle, the cities of Mercer Island and Bellevue, and King County. Because of the potential for extensive noise, dust, and visual impacts, as well as the segmentation of communities, mitigation of community impacts was a key issue throughout this period.

The major element of mitigation finally agreed to for Seattle was the construction of a “lid,” or platform deck, to reconnect the community severed by the original roadway in the 1940s. Another important mitigation in the Seattle community was the reduction in the proposed number of lanes for I-90. The freeway design was reduced to 8 lanes from the 12-lane configuration originally proposed in 1966. Other mitigation measures included a new elementary school and landscaping of the lid for active and passive recreation. An extensive network of bicycle trails was created on the lid and along the I-90 bridge across Lake Washington for recreational purposes and to provide an alternative mode of travel for commuters to Seattle. Due to a lack of available detours across Lake Washington, SR 90

### **Community Reconstruction: Seattle, WA**

could not be closed to traffic during construction of I-90 and the lid, and the project took almost 14 years to complete.

## The Community

Within the Seattle community, the neighborhoods of Judkins Park and South Atlantic Street have long been representative of the ethnic diversity of the city. Since the 1960s, these neighborhoods have been composed of primarily African-American as well as Asian-American residents who are largely of Japanese and Filipino descent. The third Seattle neighborhood impacted by the I-90 project was Mount Baker, located along the bluff overlooking Lake Washington and just east of the Judkins Park and South Atlantic Street neighborhoods. Mount Baker is a middle-class neighborhood with fewer racial minorities whose residents were, to some extent, physically separated from their neighbors to the west by elevation. Mount Baker residents tended to be younger, better educated, and had higher household incomes than those living in Judkins Park and South Atlantic Street. The three neighborhoods shared several community facilities, including seven churches, an elementary school, and the South Atlantic Street Community Center.

The neighborhoods of Judkins Park, South Atlantic Street, and Mount Baker were representative of neighborhoods found in older urban-fringe areas throughout the Nation in the 1960s and 1970s.

Lying within 2 miles of downtown Seattle, these neighborhoods were among the first “bedroom” communities in this rapidly growing city. For many years, they provided neighborhoods in which younger families could get a start in the Seattle area.

When U.S. 10 (SR 90) was originally built in the early 1940s, two of the neighborhoods—Judkins Park and South Atlantic Street—were severed. Mount Baker—the third neighborhood—was bypassed by a highway tunnel that ran beneath it. This circumstance,



*View of the neighborhoods (Mount Baker, South Atlantic Street to the right of SR 90 and Judkins Park to the left of SR 90) circa 1984. Some housing had already been cleared and work had begun on the new Mount Baker Tunnel in Seattle, WA.*

## The Community

### **Three Seattle, WA, Neighborhoods Were Affected by the I-90 Project:**

Judkins Park and South Atlantic Street—Two African-American and Asian neighborhoods of low-to-middle-income families physically separated by the 1940s expansion of the highway. They share a common elementary school with the Mount Baker neighborhood.

Mount Baker—Middle-class, predominately white neighborhood, over the Mount Baker Tunnel.

caused largely by the height of Mount Baker Ridge, contributed to the divergence of socio-economic characteristics among the three neighborhoods. Because Mount Baker was not originally severed and enjoyed scenic views of Lake Washington, it sustained higher housing prices than its adjoining neighborhoods.

The Judkins Park and South Atlantic Street neighborhoods, however, were adversely affected not only by SR 90 cutting a swath through their communities, but also by subsequent, lengthy highway planning. Plans in the 1960s had called for the construction of the R. H. Thomson Expressway, a north-south expressway that, ultimately, was never built. When WSDOT began to negotiate and acquire properties for that project, residents began to lose hope that their neighborhoods would ever be stable. A fear of displacement lingered in the neighborhoods for two decades, leading to widespread disinvestment and gradual deterioration.

By the 1970s, prolonged and extensive land acquisition for I-90 and the R. H. Thomson Expressway made the State the largest owner of vacant property in the Judkins Park and the South Atlantic Street neighborhoods. In the 1960s, under procedures established to govern hardship acquisition, WSDOT had acquired 136 parcels in the proposed right-of-way (ROW) and 97 parcels outside the proposed ROW that were no longer needed due to changes in the I-90 alignment in 1970. When the R. H. Thomson Expressway was dropped from the regional transportation plan in the early 1970s due to vociferous public protest, some of these parcels were rendered redundant when the proposed interchange with I-90 was eliminated.

Impacts to the three Seattle neighborhoods from the I-90 expansion were significant, involving the relocation of over 500 people and nearly 200 households. As a result of these circumstances, homeowners postponed upkeep and maintenance of their homes, while others converted their homes into rental properties. According to community residents and city planners, vacancies in the area's housing stock, as well as the high incidence of absentee landlords, provided an environment for unsavory activities. By the late 1970s, 248 parcels had been acquired and cleared by the State. With this loss in density, decline in owner occupancy in the neighborhood, and the large number of vacant properties in the community, the Judkins Park and South Atlantic Street neighborhoods acquired notoriety for open drug dealing and random violent crime. The once-thriving, diverse commercial interests began to dwindle, closing or relocating until only a few essential businesses remained—even the local drugstore moved out of the neighborhood.

## What Happened

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Planning for upgrading SR 90 to I-90 began in 1957 when population forecasts indicated that fast suburban growth would quickly overwhelm the capacity of SR 90 to service the needs of those commuting to jobs in Seattle. The land-acquisition process for the highway expansion began in the 1960s, with the bulk of it occurring in Seattle, not the growing suburbs. By 1970, there was increasing public concern in Seattle over the environmental impacts and equity of the project. Officials in the suburbs largely favored the project because of the decreased travel time to Seattle. Seattle saw the project as favoring suburbanites at the expense of its own neighborhoods and was concerned with the scale of relocations required in Seattle and the repeated disruption of mature neighborhoods. These concerns led to a court case that resulted

### Community Reconstruction: Seattle, WA



## Project Chronology

- 1940s: U.S. 10 is completed as a four-lane road connecting Seattle, WA, to Mercer Island and Bellevue.
- 1947: The general alignment of U.S. 10 is selected for future upgrade to Interstate standards.
- 1955: Designation of U.S. 10 is changed to SR 90.
- 1957: Washington State Department of Highways (WSDOT) initiates engineering studies for I-90.
- 1960s: R. H. Thomson Expressway is proposed, going through parts of Judkins Park and South Atlantic Street neighborhoods. Right-of-way (ROW) acquisition commences.
- 1963: The project alignment is selected for I-90 with a 10-lane project design. ROW acquisition commences.
- 1966: With revised traffic projections, design capacity for I-90 increases to 12 lanes.
- 1969: The design team is appointed for the Seattle segment. Community outreach is initiated.
- 1970: Construction is halted in response to public concern over environmental issues and lane arrangements for the entire facility.
- 1971: The U.S. Court of Appeals orders an injunction against further construction and land acquisition in the project corridor. The court also orders the preparation of a relocation-assistance plan and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.
- 1972: R. H. Thomson Expressway is deleted from the regional transportation plan.
- The Federal Highway Administration convenes a Board of Review to arbitrate Seattle's issues, with the nine members selected by the Mayor and approved by WSDOT and Seattle's City Council.
- 1974: Governor appoints a 10-member commission consisting of State, county, and local officials to develop a solution to the construction impasse. The Governor and Mayor of Seattle propose a revised lane configuration for the project.
- 1976: Serious disagreement persists on the draft EIS among the jurisdictions involved—city of Seattle, two suburban communities, and King County. To address the impasse, the Governor appoints a two-person mediation team to find areas of agreement among the parties. Seven months later, the parties sign a memorandum of agreement stipulating an eight-lane arrangement with two center lanes designated for transit and high-occupancy vehicles as well as other mitigation, including the Seattle lid.
- 1979: The court rules that the EIS is adequate and the injunction is lifted. Construction of I-90 begins.
- 1987: Construction begins on the roadways of the Seattle lid.
- 1991: The new elementary school is completed.
- 1992: Construction of the Seattle lid is completed.
- 1993: I-90 is officially opened. (The project is constructed with the original SR 90 open to traffic throughout the I-90 construction process.)
- 1996: Landscaping work on the lid is largely completed.

in a 1971 Federal Appeals Court injunction prohibiting further I-90 land acquisition and construction. The court ordered the preparation of a relocation-assistance plan and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969.

Six years of impasse followed. Concerns among the affected municipalities were focused on the final scale and alignment of I-90. The impasse inspired the creation of unique groups to find areas of agreement among the municipalities, hear community concerns, and offer design recommendations. In 1972, FHWA convened a board of review to arbitrate disputes between the city of Seattle and WSDOT. It consisted of members appointed by the city of Seattle and WSDOT. At the suggestion of WSDOT, Citizen Advisory Committees were created for Seattle and the suburban communities. Composed of community representatives appointed by their respective city councils, the role of the committees was to hear community concerns and to provide local input to WSDOT. Representatives for the Judkins Park, South Atlantic Street, and Mount Baker neighborhoods sat on the Citizen Advisory Committee for Seattle.

In 1974, a group was created to develop an overall solution to the I-90 impasse. The Governor appointed a 10-member, I-90 Commission consisting of State, county, and local officials from all the affected municipalities. Although the I-90 Commission failed to agree on the alignment or the capacity of I-90, the airing of community concerns ultimately led to the design of acceptable mitigation measures.

The idea of lids was discussed throughout the project, but there was no agreement on their use, even among community members. Originally, the Judkins Park and South Atlantic Street neighborhoods did not want a park over the lid, fearing that the space would attract crime. Later, the neighborhoods wanted a park. Also, the community groups at one time had not wanted an access ramp from I-90 into the community, but changed their position after the highway was redesigned.

The issue of noise and safety impacts of I-90 on an adjacent, common, local elementary school was also a critical concern for the three neighborhoods. The I-90 alignment required the acquisition of a small sliver of land (less than 1 acre) from the Coleman Elementary School playground. The neighborhoods, however, voiced concerns for the safety of school children because during construction they would have to cross a temporary, pedestrian-bridge structure over the active freeway to get to school. The long-term, daytime noise impact on the school children was also a strong concern of parents and educators.

When the draft EIS was completed in 1976, extensive negative comments were received, and serious differences of opinion emerged among the major local participants on the I-90 Commission, including Seattle, two suburban communities, and King County. The Governor appointed a two-person mediation team to identify areas of agreement among the parties—an approach that finally bore fruit.

In 1977, the affected municipalities signed a memorandum of agreement reducing the proposed configuration of the freeway from 12 to 8 lanes. The agreed-upon configuration of the lid over

the freeway in the Judkins Park and South Atlantic Street neighborhoods was fixed at a length of 2,100 feet across the width of the highway. In addition to providing physical access across the freeway, the lid would serve as mitigation to reduce noise and aesthetic impacts from the proximity of the freeway and enhance the landscape of the affected neighborhoods. In 1979, the Federal Court of Appeals ruled that the EIS was adequate and lifted the injunction prohibiting I-90 construction. Work began that year.

## Mitigation Measures

The mitigation measures developed for the Seattle communities were aimed at minimizing the impact of the eight-lane highway on the Judkins Park, South Atlantic Street, and Mount Baker neighborhoods. The major mitigation measure was the construction of the lid over I-90, reconnecting segments of the Judkins Park and South Atlantic Street neighborhoods long divided by SR 90. Through extensive landscaping, the lid is now a 28-acre park with active and passive recreation, available to all three neighborhoods. The city of Seattle added recreational features to the lid, including benches, picnic tables, two tennis courts, and a children's play area. A 12-mile, continuous bicycle and pedestrian trail was built from the Seattle lid, across Lake Washington on the I-90 bridge, to the suburban communities. In the summer months, the trail is used by some commuters to bicycle to work.

Another important mitigation measure for the three neighborhoods was the construction of a new elementary school that all three would use. In response to the noise and safety concerns for the elementary school children during the lengthy construction of I-90, classes for the



*View of the newly planted Seattle, WA, lid over I-90, circa 1993. The old Coleman Elementary School is in the right foreground; and the new elementary school can be seen on the left center of the photo.*



*One of the entrances to the Seattle, WA, I-90 Lid Park is shown.*



*The Seattle, WA, bicycle/pedestrian path to the tunnel through Mt. Baker Ridge is shown. The path continues across Lake Washington to Mercer Island. Public art is visible in the foreground.*



*HomeSight, a non-profit housing corporation, builds housing on vacant lots turned over to the city of Seattle, WA, from WSDOT. The homes above are in Judkins Park.*

school children were held at an interim location away from the construction site. To permanently mitigate the concerns, WSDOT provided the school district with the funds to build and furnish a new school. The new elementary school, recently renamed after U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, is on a residential street north of the project. The old Coleman Elementary School is presently being considered for reuse as an African-American history museum or a community center.

With the completion of I-90, Judkins Park, South Atlantic Street, and Mount Baker are becoming known as attractive neighborhoods. There is now a greater willingness on the part of homeowners to make new investments in the area. Lots that were once vacant and trash-strewn are slowly being converted to housing for low- and middle-income families. Community advocates say the revival of these neighborhoods can be attributed to many factors, but the start of the turnaround began with the resolution of I-90 concerns and the construction of associated mitigation measures.

The new elementary school and new 28-acre open space, replete with recreational facilities, were significant added features to the community infrastructure. Factors external to the community have also been important in the rebirth of the area. The current strength of Seattle's economy and continued migration into the region has placed upward pressure on housing prices in the Seattle area. As a result, the Judkins Park and South Atlantic Street neighborhoods are now being seen as the last opportunities for affordable housing in Seattle and are attracting new immigrant populations, including Southeast Asians and Africans. HomeSight, a nonprofit housing-development organization, has constructed over 30 units of new housing in these communities on previously State-owned parcels not needed for I-90. With less vacancy and more homeowners in the area, community policing has been instituted, and crime has plummeted.

## Mitigation Measures Involved

- A 2,100-foot (28-acre) lid over I-90 in Seattle, WA, reconnected Judkins Park and South Atlantic Street neighborhoods while reducing noise and aesthetic impacts.
- Extensive landscaping was done on the lid, creating a "park" lid.
- Active and passive recreational facilities were added to the park lid by the city of Seattle, including benches, picnic tables, tennis courts, and play areas.
- The scope of the original project was reduced, from 12 lanes to 8 lanes.
- Twelve miles of continuous bicycle and pedestrian trails were built.
- A new elementary school was built to serve all three affected neighborhoods.
- Interim elementary school classrooms, away from the construction site, were used to address noise and safety concerns of the community.
- New streets and curbs were provided on adjacent streets.
- Aesthetically pleasing ventilation towers were designed.



*Noise barriers and outward-sloping buffers to reflect noise upward minimize noise impacts to the adjoining Seattle, WA, communities.*



*The new Thurgood Marshall Elementary School, Seattle, WA, was constructed with funds provided to the local school district by the Washington State Department of Transportation.*

Suburbanites are now showing more interest in these urban neighborhoods, and home prices are rising. As a result of the renewed interest in the area, enrollment is increasing at the new Thurgood Marshall Elementary School. In 1995, the school was selected by *Redbook* magazine as one of the best elementary schools in the Nation. In addition to its primary function, the school also serves as a venue for other community programs, such as a black men's parenting group and independent-living training for disabled persons.

## Making the Planning Process Work

### Key Elements of the Seattle, WA, I-90 Planning Process:

- Need to clearly establish the need for and scale of the facility, and then convey that need and the importance of the project to the impacted community.
- Need to gather community input on design issues. Reach out to the community in a variety of ways outside the public hearing; e.g., project models in supermarkets, door-to-door information campaign, and tours of the construction sight.
- Need to meet the public's expectation to see project managers, not just public information personnel.
- Need to keep continuous rapport with communities. When communities change, needs and desires can change.
- Need to celebrate project milestones with the community. Sense of project ownership is important to the community.

## Lessons Learned

Highway officials, community residents, and city planners felt the major problem for the South Atlantic Street and Judkins Park neighborhoods from the I-90 project was the phenomenon of "blight by announcement." The delay of interjurisdictional negotiations had a serious negative effect on the communities. Due to the uncertainty over I-90, the two neighborhoods with the greatest displacements experienced a significant decline in quality of life. The lessons of this project still apply today, including:

- Clearly establishing and communicating the need for and scale of the facility as well as the project's importance to the community.
- Gathering community input on design issues.
- Creating rapport with the community during project planning through early communication with the community. WSDOT hired a public information officer specifically assigned to the project. That person had an ability to communicate in words the community could understand, rather than technical, engineering terms.

- Communicating with the public using a variety of approaches. WSDOT reached out in a variety of ways to all segments of the population, including those who did not attend meetings. Architectural models of proposed designs were displayed in supermarkets, information packages were hung on community residents' doors, weekly tours of the project site were conducted for the community, and WSDOT produced a quarterly project newsletter.
- Making project staff, including the project manager, available to and prepared to interact effectively with the public to provide technical expertise and agency credibility.
- Maintaining a continuous dialogue with the community. Their needs and desires can change over time. As people moved in and out of the affected area between planning and through construction, the community's position on the I-90 project shifted. Changes within the community must be recognized for effective collaboration between transportation officials and the affected community.
- Sharing and celebrating every phase of construction with the community to encourage a sense of ownership. For example, engineers and construction professionals conducted a community tour of the I-90 site. The professionals' enthusiasm and excitement at the technical achievements seemed to instill a feeling of pride and ownership in the project for local participants. This close interaction also personalized the project and its staff for the community.

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# **Community Revitalization**

## **Prichard**

# Community Revitalization: Prichard, Alabama

## Introduction

I-165 links I-65, which runs just north of Prichard, AL, to I-10 in Mobile, AL. In doing so, it connects one of the poorest communities in the Nation—Prichard—to the thriving port city of Mobile, AL. In the 1950s, local officials recognized the need to connect I-10, a limited-access Interstate highway in downtown Mobile, with I-65, another limited-access Interstate highway to the north that accesses the interior of Alabama. When finally approved as part of the National System of Interstate Highways in 1980, this north-south road was designated as I-210. It was to be an elevated, four-to-six-lane highway extending from Mobile's waterfront at I-10 to I-65 at Prichard, some 6 miles to the north. This connecting road ultimately became I-165.

Although Mobile registered strong opposition to the proposed project, Prichard, just to its north, registered strong support for the project.

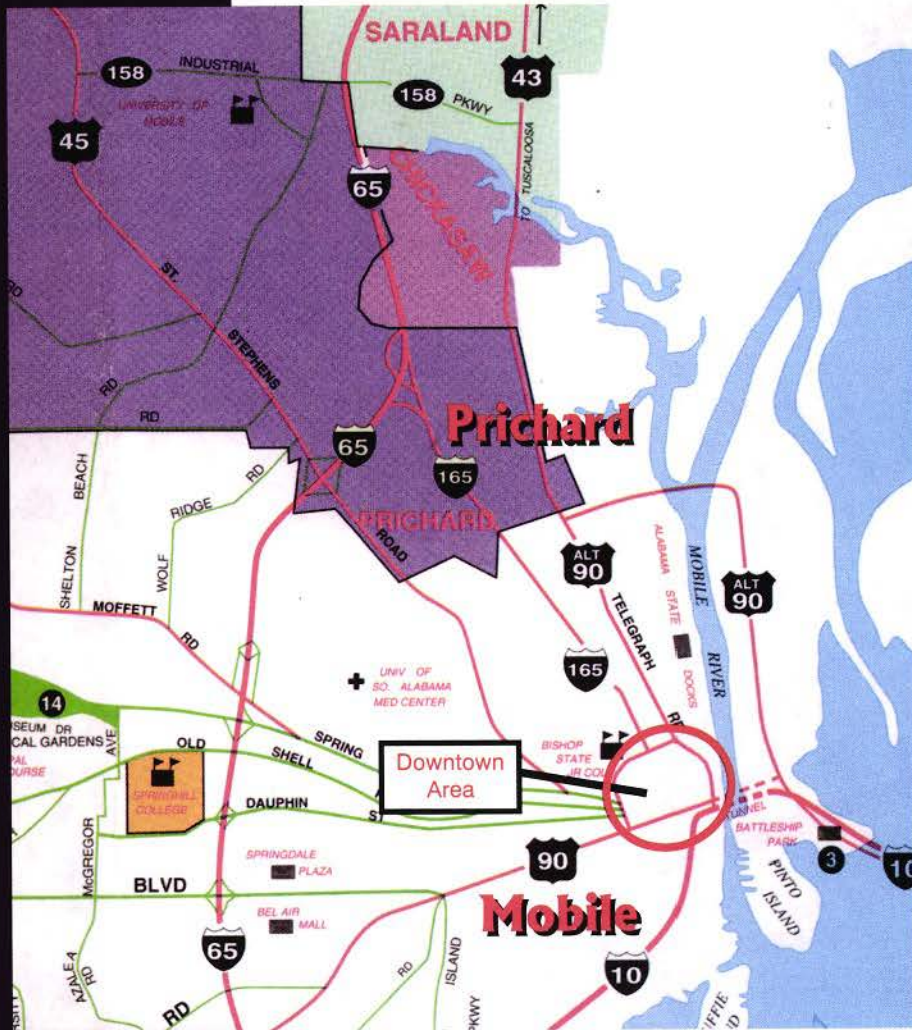
Prichard strongly supported the project, believing that it would spur sorely needed economic development. The Mayor of Prichard sought out the project managers at the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and proposed a partnership to ensure the project progressed smoothly. The Mayor proposed that Prichard be given a voice in the alignment and design of the project.

The road was ultimately built entirely differently from that originally envisioned. Originally, project options included a bypass around Prichard. However, the Mayor asserted his influence on the community and transportation officials concerning the benefits of going through the community, and the negative impacts on the community of a bypass option. In the end, all involved were satisfied—Prichard received its limited-access highway which spared its economy, while needed access to the interior of Alabama was provided from the port city of Mobile.

## The Players

### Key Agencies and Groups Involved in I-165 in Prichard, AL:

- Federal Highway Administration, Alabama Division
- Alabama Department of Transportation
- Two Consecutive Mayors of Prichard (over the course of the project)
- The Design Advocacy Council
- Officials of the Prichard Library and Fire Department
- Prichard City Council



*I-165 connects downtown Mobile, AL, with I-65 in Prichard, AL, a distance of approximately 6 miles.*

lowest per capita income, and the second highest proportion of families living below the official poverty level in the State of Alabama. Prichard also had the lowest median years of school completed for residents 25 years and older.

The community of Prichard was characterized by its struggle against socio-economic disadvantage. When leaders saw the opportunity to improve the city's economic standing with a new highway, they quickly embraced it. To the residents of Prichard, the specific environmental impacts of the highway were not as important as the prospect of economic development that the highway might bring.

According to 1994 statistics, Prichard had a population of only 33,806, 80 percent of whom were black. Median family income was \$13,785, the lowest in Alabama, where the median family income of \$28,688 was more than double Prichard's. In addition, 40 percent of Prichard's families were below the poverty level (the highest in Alabama) compared to the State average of 14 percent. Prichard also led the State in the percentage of its households receiving public assistance (21.4 percent) as opposed to the statewide figure of 8.7 percent.

## The Community

From 1970 to 1980, population in the city of Prichard declined by almost 5 percent compared with a growth rate of 12.9 percent for the State of Alabama. This decline was a continuation of a trend that saw Prichard lose approximately 17 percent of its population from 1960 to 1970. While Prichard's black population declined by 6 percent between 1960 and 1970, the white population declined by 22 percent during the same period. By 1980, nearly three quarters of Prichard's population was black. Prosperity in Prichard was an almost unknown commodity. The crime rate was high. There was an allegedly active drug trade.

During the 1980s, Prichard was among the five poorest communities in the United States according to local officials. According to the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for I-210 (1984), Prichard had the lowest median family income, the

## What Happened

The need for a road that connected the port at Mobile to the center of the State had been clear before 1958, when a formal request had been made to the FHWA for Interstate funding. In the early 1960s, the Metropolitan Planning Organization in Mobile included the proposed road in its regional transportation plan. In 1980, Congress approved a 6.25-mile Interstate connection between I-10 and I-65. I-165 was originally proposed as I-210, an elevated highway that would link I-10 in Mobile to I-65 in Prichard. The road would be elevated throughout its length: four lanes south of Beaugard Street in downtown Mobile and six lanes north, through Prichard, to I-65. In 1982, a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was prepared, and FHWA and ALDOT held corridor hearings.

While there was much opposition and turmoil in Mobile concerning the configuration of the proposed roadway within Mobile, the Prichard scenario was altogether different. City leaders, the mayor in particular, viewed the highway project as something that would bring economic prosperity, both immediately and in the long term. In fact, many within the town believed that much of the success of the project in Prichard hinged on their educated, articulate mayor. Most of the FHWA and ALDOT officials who were involved in the I-165 project concur with the townspeople that the Mayor's role was pivotal. The Mayor had urged ALDOT to have its project consultant, Greiner Engineering, set up an office in Prichard. He met one-on-one with the clergy to keep them and their congregations informed about the project, what it meant to Prichard, and about upcoming public meetings. He also pushed for the establishment of a Design Advocacy Group that would act as an interface between the residents of Prichard and the transportation agencies. This group went into the community and explained to residents what was going to happen and when things were likely to occur. They answered questions and explained things, such as what options were available, in a way residents could understand. They were also effective in getting the word out and urging people to attend the public meetings. Attendance at these gatherings was excellent and remained very strongly "pro"-project.

## Project Chronology

- 1958: The first formal request for funding of I-210/I-165 was made to Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).
- 1968: The second formal request for funding of I-210/I-165 was made to FHWA.
- 1977: The third formal request for funding of I-210/I-165 was made to FHWA.
- 1980: Congress approved a 6.25-mile link between I-65 and I-10.
- 1982: A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was prepared and corridor hearings were held by the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT).
- 1983: The first meetings occurred with Prichard, AL, officials.
- 1984: The Final EIS was approved.
- 1986: FHWA and ALDOT were enjoined, by the Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) referral, from proceeding with right-of-way acquisition and construction in Mobile.
- 1989: The injunction was lifted when all parties agreed with the design concept for Mobile.
- 1993: The Prichard library opened.
- 1994: The Prichard firehouse opened.  
I-165 opened.



*Prichard, AL, just 6 miles north of Mobile, AL, was characterized by a struggling economy, exemplified by this vacant industrial building, a former locomotive plant. Since the completion of I-165, plans have been made to renovate this building as a tourist attraction.*

## **Mitigation Measures**

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Prichard, AL, was a socially, economically, and environmentally depressed community. The project was used to reverse the downward spiral of its social, economic, and environmental conditions. City of Prichard officials collaborated with the FHWA, ALDOT, city of Mobile, and other Federal, State, and local officials to solve problems unique to its community.

The I-210/I-165 project directly impacted the community because it needed to acquire land on which to build the new roadway. The decision to follow the community's wishes and build the new roadway through Prichard presented a number of challenges in acquiring the needed right of way, including the acquisition of 500 tracts of land and the relocation of 276 families, 52 businesses, 9 churches, a fire station, and a library.

- Seven of the nine affected churches built new structures or renovated existing buildings.
- Many of the affected families lived in rental housing; houses that were not decent, safe, and sanitary (DSS); or subsidized housing. The Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policy Act of 1970 provides for "housing of last resort" which allows agencies to exceed the maximum statutory limit for relocation-housing payments for tenants. Many of the larger families needed more bedrooms to meet decent, safe, and sanitary (DSS) requirements. Computations were based on the low incomes of the families, which pushed many replacement-housing payments over \$10,000. Seventy-one percent of the tenants displaced were offered last-resort-housing payments. Some residents used this as an opportunity to move on and others stayed.

- Nine percent of the owner occupants were offered last-resort-housing payments that exceeded \$22,500. One third of the 129 tenants displaced—40 families—became homeowners by using their last-resort-housing payment offers as down payments.

Many of the businesses relocated outside the downtown area. ALDOT discovered through follow-up calls to these businesses that most were doing at least as well as they had done in downtown Prichard. Although there was a net loss of businesses in downtown, officials expect this to be a short-term effect.

Both the library and the fire station were approximately 50 years old and in poor condition. The FHWA and ALDOT initiated meetings with city officials, community leaders, fire department personnel, and library board members in the early stages of project development to discuss the Federal Functional Replacement Program (23 CFR 712.601). This program is designed to pay the necessary cost to replace a publicly owned facility being acquired with a similar facility that offers the same utility, including betterments and enlargements required by present-day local laws, codes, and reasonable prevailing standards for similar facilities in the area. All parties were in general agreement prior to the EIS that the publicly owned structures needed to be functionally replaced rather than acquired for the appraised, fair-market value. Both were replaced under the Federal Functional Replacement Program and opened for business in 1993.

FHWA and ALDOT surveyed other libraries in the area and hired a library consultant to educate the community and agency officials about current library standards. The resulting, 9,200-square-foot library was designed to foster a sense of community. The \$1 million library was 4.8 times the appraised value of the old library. However, its fully equipped multi-purpose room provides a place for community meetings, civic activities, and educational activities. By all accounts, it has become the focal point of the community, where there was none before.



*Prichard, AL's, goal in the I-165 project was to provide better access to the city to stimulate much-needed economic development.*

## Mitigation Measures Involved

- Relocated 276 families.
- Acquired 52 businesses.
- Relocated 9 churches.
- Functionally replaced a firehouse.
- Functionally replaced a library.
- Assisted 40 tenants in becoming homeowners.
- Highway designed to ensure access to main streets.



*A key mitigation in Prichard, AL, was the construction of a new public library under the Federal Functional Replacement Program. The new Prichard Public Library was designed to modern standards and serves as a focal point of the community.*

Prichard seems to have decreased. This might have resulted from fewer substandard houses in the area.

With FHWA and ALDOT working with Prichard officials, I-165 was designed in such a way as to minimize community segmentation. As an elevated roadway, many streets could cross under the facility, unobstructed. However, some streets would be closed due to the roadway structure or large storm water retention ponds needed under the highway. In general, residents believe the road has not impaired their ability to move from one part of Prichard to another, particularly to and from the downtown area. The willingness of ALDOT and FHWA to work with Prichard officials was instrumental in achieving this optimal solution.

A similar process was followed to determine what should be provided for the new fire station. The resulting structure has three bays. Its 8,200-square-foot area also contains up-to-date facilities, such as a dormitory, kitchen, and recreational space. It cost \$1.8 million to build and was 14 times the appraised value of the old facility. The new facility increased the capacity of the fire department to respond to emergencies of all sorts, including those requiring emergency medical services. About 65 percent of calls to the fire station are of this type. And, it seems, there may have been an unanticipated, community-safety benefit. It was reported that the number of fires in



*Another key mitigation in Prichard, AL, was the construction of a new fire station under the Federal Functional Replacement Program. The station has been designed to modern standards to better serve the community.*

## **Lessons Learned**

Prichard was a poor city in 1983 when the project began. It continues to be poor today, now that the project is completed. But its situation is improved, and Prichard's leadership believes it has a brighter future.

Perhaps the most important benefit is that a road linking two major Interstate highways, I-10 and I-65, passes through Prichard. I-65 north of Prichard crosses the Mobile River on its way to two other major cities, Montgomery and Birmingham. Prichard's position relative to these transportation corridors makes it a candidate for a variety of development opportunities.

The roadway seems to have sparked change in Prichard. In the 1980s, downtown Prichard had a 65-percent vacancy rate; in 1996, that had dropped to 25-percent. And Prichard's finances are on sounder footing.

A "border patrol" was established to see that the entrances to Prichard are kept clean. Because of its location and apparent uplift, some land speculation has occurred. After all, it is only a 10-minute drive from Prichard's City Hall to Mobile. No new development had taken place as





*Downtown Prichard, AL, has shown some economic improvement since the completion of the I-165 project. However, much work remains to be done. There are still many commercial vacancies in Prichard's business district.*

## Making the Planning Process Work

### Key Elements of the Prichard, AL, Portion of the I-165 Project Planning:

- Early contact with local government to explain the proposed project and to hear concerns.
- Working with local leaders to reach residents.
- Forming a Design Advocacy Group as a vital link to the community.
- Making sure affected persons understand the what, where, when, and how of the proposed action and mitigation.

of 1996, but plans are afoot for commercial development, with a number of inquiries being made from the trucking industry, a hotel chain, and large retailer. The town is still trying to recover from its reputation for serious crime. It has more than doubled its police force—from 40 to 90 officers—and things are improving. Though progress in Prichard has been slow, there are now tangible prospects for a brighter future.

Other positive activities have occurred in Prichard recently, perhaps as a result of the positive momentum built by the I-165 project. The local football stadium, which services the University of Mobile (located in Prichard) and two of Alabama's best high school football teams, has been expanded, with attempts being made to draw other events to the stadium. Other facilities located in and around Prichard are also likely to benefit from improved access: a 1,000-acre county park should enjoy greater use; a pre-Civil-War locomotive machine shop (see photo on page 4) may

become an historic attraction; and the Whistler historic district in Prichard (which grew up around railroading) has received grants totalling close to \$1 million toward rebuilding and renovating the historic district. (The grants included a \$100,000 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Brownfields Pilot Project grant and \$200,000 allocated by the city of Prichard.)

City officials are optimistic about the future. The city's image is changing. Even its residents seem to have changed their negative feelings and now take a measure of pride in their city. The feeling is that it is only a matter of time until real economic growth occurs, and Prichard wants to be ready. For one thing, the city plans to acquire 28 acres of land to build a new commercial strip that will expand Prichard's downtown.

The history of I-165 and its predecessor concept, I-210, can be considered a success with respect to Prichard. The city had its library and firehouse replaced with modern, up-to-date facilities; a significant number of substandard housing units were removed; and the fire department's fire load was reduced with the removal of substandard housing along the right-of-way. Prosperity has not arrived in Prichard via I-165, but there is optimism that it will.

Prichard was an exercise in public involvement. FHWA and ALDOT recognized the value of working with the Mayor. His idea of using a Design Advocacy Group to provide information, prepare the residents for what was about to happen, and make them feel comfortable with the process was a valuable addition to the project. FHWA's funding of the group enabled it to operate and to minimize opposition to the project and the associated relocation program. With FHWA's and ALDOT's encouragement, the Mayor worked through the local churches and their ministers to secure public support. As a result, well-attended public meetings became a forum for the city of Prichard to provide input concerning the road's design. They also helped FHWA and ALDOT understand the needs of Prichard's residents.

The right-of-way acquisition, with its large number of relocations, was handled smoothly. Project officials recognized that right-of-way acquisition would be delayed by a shortage of relocation staff. To facilitate the process, ALDOT used some of its own retirees who had experience as reviewers, negotiators, and relocation agents. As a result, relocation was expedited.

In general, it was the willingness of all parties to work together that opened communication channels with the public and led to a successful project, not only from a transportation perspective, but also from the community's perspective.

What were the effects of the construction of I-165 on Prichard? Some positive effects have already been realized, more are in the process of being realized, and yet others are anticipated in the future.

## Effects of Revitalization

"The highway project, which included right of way acquisition and functional replacement of a fire station and public library, reversed the downward spiral of the community and created enormous economic growth. Commercial development boomed, the City built low-income and other housing, the budget expanded, and the population grew."

—Jessie Norwood, Mayor, Prichard, Alabama

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