

## **ABSTRACT**

Title of Dissertation: "LET THE PEOPLE HAVE A VICTORY":  
THE POLITICS OF TRANSPORTATION IN  
PHILADELPHIA, 1946-1984

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Urban transportation planning in the United States underwent important changes in the decades after World War II. In the immediate postwar period, federal highway engineers in the Bureau of Public Roads dominated the decision-making process, creating a planning regime that focused almost entirely on the building of modern expressways to relieve traffic congestion. In the 1960s, however, local opposition to expressway construction emerged in cities across the nation, reflecting growing discontent with what many citizens perceived to be a closed planning process that resulted in the destruction of urban neighborhoods, environmental degradation, and inadequate attention paid to alternative modes of transportation. Local freeway protestors found allies in the new U.S. Department of Transportation, which moved in the mid-1960s to absorb the Bureau of Public Roads and support legislation promoting a planning process more open to local input as well as a greater emphasis on federal aid for urban mass transportation.

The changing culture of transportation planning produced a series of freeway revolts, resulting in the cancellation or modification of interstate highway projects, in major American cities. Changes in transportation planning played out differently in every city, however. This dissertation examines controversies over Philadelphia's major

expressway projects – the Schuylkill Expressway, the Delaware Expressway, and the never-built Crosstown Expressway, in addition to major mass transit developments such as the city's subsidization of the commuter railroads, the creation of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, and the building of a railroad tunnel known as the Center City Commuter Connection, in order to trace the evolution of the city's transportation politics between 1946 and 1984.

Significantly, Philadelphia's own freeway revolt succeeded in eliminating the proposed Crosstown Expressway, which would have created a daunting racial barrier while decimating several low-income African American neighborhoods. The Crosstown Expressway revolt, however, failed to change the overall trajectory of Philadelphia's transportation planning politics, which continued to be dominated by an exceptionally strong alliance between City Hall and large business interests. Philadelphia's turn to mass transit in the 1970s, in contrast to those of other cities, failed to redistribute transportation resources to its low-income residents, mainly because the city chose to devote a massive percentage of its federal funding to the Center City Commuter Connection, a downtown rail tunnel designed to serve approximately 8% of the region's commuters. The prioritization of a rail system serving predominantly affluent white suburbanites left Philadelphia's lower-income population saddled with a crumbling urban mass transit system, demonstrating that, despite a more open planning process and a greater emphasis on mass transportation, fundamental inequalities persisted.

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TRANSPORTATION IN PHILADELPHIA, 1946-1984

by

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During my years at Maryland, I have been fortunate to be a part of a vibrant intellectual community. There are so many individuals who, whether or not they played a direct role in this dissertation, contributed to my growth as a historian. Too numerous to mention are the professors with whom I took classes and for whom I served as a teaching assistant, as well as the fellow graduate students with whom I took seminars, studied for comprehensive exams, and commiserated about the drudgery of grading, but I thank them all.

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## **Introduction**

While conducting research for my dissertation on the history of transportation planning in post-World War II Philadelphia, I made extensive use of the city's transportation systems. To reach the outstanding Urban Archives at Temple University, for instance, I took either the Broad Street Subway or the Regional Rail system, both run by the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA).

Although both the subway and the commuter railroad were operated by the same transit authority, the contrast between the two could not have been more striking. The Walnut-Locust subway stop, in the heart of Center City, was dilapidated, crumbling, and dirty, its dank stairwells reeking of urine. The subway came infrequently even at rush hour and, seemingly, at random times. The track area and subway cars were often littered with trash.

The commuter railroad system's Suburban Station, although only a few blocks away, may as well have been in a different country. The concourse was clean, brightly lit, and filled with bustling shops. A bank of video screens, one for each railroad line, listed the upcoming trains with time, track, and destination displayed clearly. Loudspeakers announced the same information in a precise, robotic voice, audible throughout the station. The track area was freshly painted and free of debris. The clean and comfortable trains arrived with surprising promptness, typically on time, but at most a minute or two behind schedule. A glance at the SEPTA system map revealed that the commuter railroad lines extended outward from downtown in every conceivable

direction, terminating at fourteen different points, while subway service was confined primarily to two lines, one running east-west and the other north-south, crisscrossing at City Hall.

Riding the commuter train after having experienced the subway, I could not help but wonder why two forms of rail transit, run by the same authority in the same city, had evolved so differently. The inquiry seemed especially important in light of the contentions of many historians that American transportation planning became more democratic in the second half of the twentieth century. If that was true, then why did Philadelphia's mass transit seem so decidedly undemocratic? For although SEPTA does not compile information on the demographics of its ridership, my observations suggested that the less well-heeled, many of whom were African American, were relegated to a second-class transit system while briefcase-laden professionals, mostly white, were the beneficiaries of relative luxury during their commutes.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Neither the Philadelphia Transportation Company nor the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (the two entities responsible for running the city's mass transit system since World War II) ever compiled demographic information about urban mass transit riders in Philadelphia. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence suggests that throughout the postwar period, Philadelphia's subway, bus, and trolley patrons were largely poor and working-class, and many of them were African Americans. See, e.g., Greater Philadelphia Movement, Minutes of Board of Directors meeting, 18 June 1958, Papers of the Greater Philadelphia Movement, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA (containing remarks of Philadelphia Transportation Company president Douglas Pratt that PTC riders "come, for the most part, from the community's lower income groups"); Thomas Reiner to Cushing Dolbeare, 14 March 1968, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA (asserting that "the poor stand less to gain from a transportation system that is road-oriented compared with one that is based on mass transit"); Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, "Report to the Public," 1974, SEPTA Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE (pointing out that in the postwar period, urban transit riders "went from masses to minorities . . . those few who could not afford a car, or were too old, young, or infirm to drive one"); *Philadelphia Daily News*, 30 March 1977, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo (noting the need of poor and handicapped citizens for improved urban transit service); David Williamson to Warren Corbin, 14 July 1980, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.7, Administration of William J. Greene, III (recommending the hiring of an African American advertising firm to improve SEPTA's image with its urban ridership); Frederic Tulskey, "SEPTA Gropes for Ways to Keep Commuters on the Rails,"

In his study of Washington, D.C.'s Metro system, historian Zachary Schrag remarked, "The particular system chosen by a community will express that community's political values."<sup>2</sup> This is true in a way, but the statement taken in isolation fails to illuminate a more complex reality. Communities, of course, possess multiple sets of political values, which often come into conflict. The unwieldy process of democracy determines which values will win out at any given moment in time, and which will lose. This dissertation examines the history of Philadelphia's post-World War II transportation systems in order to determine whose values won out, why they won, and how (if at all) the identities of the winners and losers changed over time. Looking carefully at battles over transportation projects is one of the best ways I can think of to gain greater insight into a city's politics and the way its democracy functioned in a given era.

In an effort to examine whether Philadelphia's transportation politics became more democratic in the 1960s, as the current literature would lead us to expect, I have explored some of the most important decisions government officials made – as well as the influence different groups had on those decisions. I have based this dissertation on specific case studies rather than attempting to document every detail of the city's transportation history. A great deal of my analysis centers on the various controversies that surrounded Philadelphia's three major expressway projects planned between the 1940s and the 1970s – the Schuylkill Expressway (later Interstate 76), the Delaware Expressway (later Interstate 95), and the never-built Crosstown Expressway. I have also examined major developments with respect to mass transportation, including the city's

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*Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 November 1981, p. H1 (noting the objections of urban transit riders to subsidizing "presumably more affluent" commuter railroad patrons).

<sup>2</sup> Zachary M. Schrag, *The Great Society Subway: A History of the Washington Metro* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 1.

early subsidization of the commuter railroads, the creation of SEPTA and its eventual takeover of the urban mass transit and commuter railroad systems, and the city's efforts, eventually successful, to build a downtown railroad tunnel known as the Center City Commuter Connection.

Overall, Philadelphia's transportation planning became significantly more democratic between the 1940s and the 1980s, mirroring a national trend. In other words, the decision-making process evolved from one dominated by a small group of technical experts to one that allowed for input by a wider and more diverse set of interests, including various local constituencies that stood to be affected directly by planning decisions. The democratization of Philadelphia's transportation planning was evidenced by the increasing extent to which local officials pushed the state and federal governments to prioritize certain projects and modify or even cancel others – as well as those governments' increasing receptivity to such pressure – in response to the exhortations of local interest groups that focused on projects' social and economic, rather than merely technical, impacts.

Until the mid-1960s the federal engineers who worked for the Bureau of Public Roads dominated every aspect of the nation's highway planning. Although the federal government could not force states to build expressways, the Bureau derived powerful influence from its carefully-maintained reputation for apolitical expertise as well as its efforts to create stronger highway departments on the state level. Of course, politics did intrude on highway planning to some extent, as every decision on infrastructure funding tended naturally to serve some constituents more than others. When Congress began to discuss a new system of federal highways after World War II, for example, a split arose

over the allocation of federal funds between urban and rural areas. The Interstate Highway Act of 1956 – the most significant piece of federal legislation – was, without a doubt, the product of political wrangling. In the words of highway historian Bruce Seely, however, the law “provided something for everyone without forcing any radical shifts in principle.” The BPR engineers had “resorted to politics,” he wrote, “but without disturbing their reputation as objective experts.” As a result, technical factors continued to play a major role in shaping federal highway policy, with engineers making the most important decisions about route selection, the use of traffic statistics, and the like.<sup>3</sup>

Highway planning thus remained highly technocratic well into the 1960s, when local politics became a major element of the decision-making process. Generally, historians pick 1965 as the year when the tide began to turn and federal and state highway engineers lost a substantial amount of their power over road building. Citizen discontent over both the destructive effects of urban highway construction and the failure of government on all levels to prioritize mass transportation intensified at a time when grassroots social movements were challenging top-down authority at every turn. Concurrently, the Bureau of Public Roads, which had operated with near autonomy, was placed into the new U.S. Department of Transportation, which began immediately to decentralize authority over transportation planning, curtail the ability of engineers to build roads wherever they pleased, and support new federal legislation aimed at improving urban mass transportation. As greater authority over transportation planning devolved to the local level, decision-making became less technocratic and more political,

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce E. Seely, *Building the American Highway System: Engineers as Policy Makers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 3-4, 85, 186-87, 217-18, 222-23.

and therefore more democratic, now being subject to influence by a diverse array of local interests<sup>4</sup>

More democracy did not mean that all constituencies had equal input into the decision-making process, or even that everyone was able to participate meaningfully. It did, however, entail greater governmental responsiveness to certain groups that stood to be affected directly by transportation planning, whether or not those groups resembled what historians have tended to characterize as “grassroots” coalitions. By the early 1970s, believing that urban expressways had contributed to air pollution and traffic congestion while destabilizing cities by promoting massive decentralization or “urban sprawl,” most cities had begun to deemphasize expressway construction in favor of a greater focus on mass transit improvements.<sup>5</sup>

As historian Raymond Mohl explained, however, the precise dynamics of transportation politics were different in every city.<sup>6</sup> While the decentralization and greater inclusiveness of transportation politics meant that local citizens’ interests gained more influence upon the planning process, local interests were far from monolithic. The primary way in which historians have documented the concrete ramifications of the democratization of transportation planning (as opposed to lumping transportation issues into a broader study of postwar urban renewal) has been to focus on the freeway revolts

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<sup>4</sup> Raymond A. Mohl, “The Interstates and the Cities: The U.S. Department of Transportation and the Freeway Revolt, 1966-1973,” *Journal of Policy History* 20, no. 2 (2008): 194; Mark H. Rose, *Interstate: Express Highway Politics, 1939-1989* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 101-12; Mark H. Rose and Bruce E. Seely, “Getting the Interstate System Built: Road Engineers and the Implementation of Public Policy, 1955-1985,” *Journal of Policy History* 2, no. 1 (1990): 33-37; Zachary M. Schrag, “The Freeway Fight in Washington, D.C.: The Three Sisters Bridge in Three Administrations,” *Journal of Urban History* 30, no. 5 (July 2004): 648-673; Seely, 231-32.

<sup>5</sup> Owen D. Gutfreund, *Twentieth-Century Sprawl: Highways and the Reshaping of the American Landscape* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Raymond A. Mohl, “Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities,” *Journal of Urban History* 30, no. 5 (July 2004): 676.

that swept the country from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s. Historical accounts of expressway opposition in San Francisco, Baltimore, Miami, Boston, New Orleans, and Washington, D.C., to cite the examples most prominent in the literature, have revealed political circumstances that differed from city to city and a multiplicity of factors bearing on the relative success each anti-freeway movement achieved.<sup>7</sup>

Generally speaking, the democratization of transportation politics in American cities opened up significant space for greater involvement by grassroots groups in setting planning priorities and weighing in on specific projects. Activists in each of the cities listed above (with the exception of Miami, in which Interstate 95 devastated the African American community of Overtown) achieved some degree of success in having major urban expressway projects cancelled or modified. In every case but one, groups other than large business interests – such as neighborhood associations, anti-expressway coalitions, unofficial citizens’ planning organizations, historic preservationists, and environmentalists – were able to assume a powerful role in transportation planning and exert strong influence on the city establishment. The one exception was New Orleans, in which the freeway revolt’s success lay not in French Quarter preservationists’ influence on the local planning regime – which continued to be dominated by the Chamber of Commerce – but rather in their direct appeal to the federal government, which rejected a proposed waterfront expressway on environmental and historic preservationist grounds.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> On Washington, D.C., see Schrag, “The Freeway Fight in Washington, D.C.” On Baltimore and Miami, see Mohl, “Stop the Road.” On San Francisco, see Joseph A. Rodriguez, *City Against Suburb: The Culture Wars in an American Metropolis* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1999). On Boston, see Alan Lupo, et al., *Rites of Way: The Politics of Transportation in Boston and the U.S. City* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971). On New Orleans, see Richard O. Baumbach, Jr. and William E. Borah, *The Second Battle of New Orleans: A History of the Vieux Carre Riverfront-Expressway Controversy* (University, Ala.: The University of Alabama Press, 1981).

<sup>8</sup> Baumbach and Borah, 243.

In the City of Brotherly Love, I have found that greater democratization entailed the shifting of power from a technocratic elite made up of planners and engineers not to neighborhood groups or environmentalists, but to another elite composed of downtown business interests involved primarily in the white-collar fields of retail, banking, insurance, real estate, and law. These business interests were the same ones who had dominated Philadelphia's urban renewal since the end of World War II, and as a result, the move toward greater local control of transportation planning left them uniquely positioned to exert great power in that arena as well. The business community exerted its influence primarily through powerful coalitions focused on Center City development, such as the Greater Philadelphia Movement (GPM), the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation (OPDC), and the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia. While those affected by transportation planning decisions gained greater influence over those decisions, Philadelphians who lacked close connections to the city's tight alliance between business and government – most especially racial minorities and the poor – were unable to exert a significant degree of control over the aspects of transportation planning that impacted them most directly.

The precise trajectory of Philadelphia's mass transportation politics was not identical to that of its expressway politics, although the end result was the same – business-oriented planning that was focused on Center City. Because the federal government did not become involved deeply in urban mass transportation until the mid-1960s, when transportation politics were becoming more localized and democratic, control over Philadelphia's mass transit planning remained in local hands throughout the post-World War II period. City Hall's priorities in this regard dovetailed consistently

with the business community's, manifesting in a primary focus on preserving the area's commuter railroads to help maintain the central business district as a place of white-collar commerce. The region in the 1960s took advantage of the federal government's greater openness to providing aid for mass transit, mainly by creating SEPTA and seeking funding for the Commuter Connection, but Philadelphia's greater emphasis on mass transit was not reflective of a fundamental change in transportation planning priorities.

Although large business interests came to dominate Philadelphia's postwar transportation planning, those with less political and economic power were able to score occasional victories, most importantly in Philadelphia's own freeway revolt. The grassroots movements of the 1960s and 1970s, with their emphasis on participatory democracy and the neighborhood as a locus of political action, combined with the fear of racial violence to disrupt the power of the business community now and then and in some cases produced results that benefited racial minorities and impoverished Philadelphians directly. In particular, African American activists, ministers, and liberal white professionals not allied with the city's major business groups prevented the construction of the Crosstown Expressway, which would have torn through a corridor that was 90% African American, displacing its residents and walling it off from the central business district.

The defeat of the Crosstown Expressway was the high point of the democratization of Philadelphia's transportation politics, despite activists' apparent failure to achieve large-scale mobilization of the low-income African Americans whom the highway would have displaced. Those who lived in the Crosstown corridor opposed the expressway overwhelmingly and got the result they wanted with the project's

cancellation. While some leaders of the anti-expressway movement got involved because they felt the road would be harmful to the city as a whole, others, including but not limited to African American community leaders, were acting clearly in a representative capacity on behalf of corridor residents, stressing themes of racial justice as their primary motivation for attempting to halt the highway's construction.

The prevention of the Crosstown Expressway in 1973 represented a significant defeat for the downtown business community, which saw the expressway as a necessary transportation project as well as an important tool of urban renewal. It should be noted, however, that there were substantial obstacles to the road which, in addition to citizen opposition, helped to prevent its construction. The Chamber of Commerce was successful in reviving the project in 1969, a year after City Hall had abandoned it, but was stymied by the impossibility of relocating those who resided in the proposed expressway's corridor – by then a requirement under federal law – as well as an unfavorable consultant's report. The City Planning Commission's attempt in 1972 to revive the expressway a second time by proposing to build replacement housing on top of it never got off the ground due to financial and legal barriers in conjunction with massive citizen protest.

While Raymond Mohl, Zachary Schrag, and other scholars have identified changes within the federal bureaucracy of the 1960s and 1970s as crucial to the emergence of more effective citizen opposition to highway construction, the Philadelphia story serves as a reminder that events on the local level were often just as influential.<sup>9</sup> Paradoxically, the city's redevelopment coalition, in conjunction with the massive

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<sup>9</sup> Mohl, "The Interstates and the Cities," 194, 199, 201-3, 206, 213; Schrag, "The Freeway Fight in Washington, D.C.," 649, 651, 668-69.

upheaval and cultural change caused by the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, helped to create the conditions that allowed the Crosstown Expressway to be wiped off the Philadelphia map. An earlier fight to have the Delaware Expressway in Society Hill lowered and topped with a landscaped cover, conducted by affluent professionals with close connections to the business community, helped to shift power away from the city's technocracy, democratize its highway politics, and demonstrate that plans laid by engineers were not set in stone but instead could be disrupted with enough effort. Although many of the same people that sought to have the Delaware Expressway lowered and covered nevertheless favored the Crosstown Expressway, they found it difficult to put the genie back in the bottle.

The Crosstown Expressway notwithstanding, the opening of the city's transportation planning process to more input from local interests, as well as its shift away from expressway construction and toward a greater emphasis on mass transportation did not alter the fundamental trajectory of Philadelphia transportation politics. Kirk Petshek, a professor of urban affairs and business administration as well as Philadelphia's Urban Development and Economic Coordinator between 1954 and 1962, admitted in his 1973 work, *The Challenge of Urban Reform: Policies & Programs in Philadelphia*, that Philadelphia's development activities during that period were "essentially of middle-class bias." Petshek stressed that it would have been unfair to judge what happened in the 1950s and early 1960s "in the light of the attitudes prevailing in the late 1960s and early 1970s." He argued, however, that lower-income groups,

including racial and ethnic minorities, began to gain more influence in the late 1960s.<sup>10</sup> Although Petshek was writing of the city's development as a whole, his argument did not hold up well when it came to Philadelphia's transportation planning. The people and social groups most responsible for driving the city's priorities changed from highway engineers and city planners to white-collar business interests, and the focus remained on revitalizing the downtown area as a destination for middle-class white suburbanites to work, shop, dine, and possibly even return to live. This mindset resulted, for example, in the clear prioritization of the region's commuter railroads, which served suburban whites of relative means, over the inner-city mass transportation system of buses, subways, and trolleys, patronized heavily by the poor and racial minorities. The best evidence for the inequitable treatment of the city's mass transit systems was Philadelphia's decision in the 1970s to use federal money to build the Center City Commuter Connection, a \$300 million commuter rail tunnel, at a time when the urban mass transit system was crumbling.

Historians have not done enough to document the material ramifications of the federal government's greater emphasis on mass transportation in the 1960s and 1970s and the ways in which cities responded to the opportunities this shift created. In Philadelphia, the Commuter Connection project ensured that the city's greater emphasis on mass transit produced virtually no redistribution of transportation resources to its working-class and poor residents. Intuitively, one might expect the opposite to have been the case, and indeed it was in many American cities – particularly cities like San Francisco, Atlanta, and Washington, D.C., each of which built new mass transit systems in the 1960s and

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<sup>10</sup> Kirk R. Petshek, *The Challenge of Urban Reform: Policies & Programs in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1973), xvi-xvii, 46, 266.

1970s. San Francisco's Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system was, admittedly, designed to serve the city's central business district, much as Philadelphia's commuter railroads were. Many African Americans living in the West Oakland neighborhoods through which the transit lines passed opposed construction of the system, believing – similarly to freeway protestors – that it would lead to both residential displacement and the suburbanization of jobs. BART's planners, however, felt they were providing West Oakland a valuable service by placing stations in what they characterized as “ghetto” neighborhoods and thereby enhancing residents' mobility. Without trivializing the significant concerns of those who opposed BART, it can nevertheless be acknowledged that planners intended to, and did, provide more extensive transit service for lower-income people in the Bay Area.<sup>11</sup>

The new transit systems built in Atlanta and the nation's capital also provided a significant degree of service to a wide spectrum of patrons in terms of race and class. The Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) was created in 1965 but could not begin operations until the passage of a referendum in 1971. Because an earlier vote in 1968 had failed due to a lack of African American support, MARTA promised to keep fares low, to support affirmative action job and training programs, and to place a high priority on service to low-income African American neighborhoods. The degree to which MARTA kept its promises has been the subject of intense debate, and MARTA has become, as historian Miriam Konrad put it, “a scapegoat for white animosity toward poor blacks as well as a locale in which African American resentment of white mobility privilege has been situated.” What is clear, however, is that the creation of MARTA

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<sup>11</sup> Rodriguez, 41, 48-49.

increased transit service to low-income and African American communities.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, on Washington D.C.'s Metro system (run by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority), as Zachary Schrag pointed out, rail riders were somewhat more affluent than bus passengers, but were nevertheless diverse in terms of both race and class. In fact, as of 2000, white and black workers in the Washington area used Metro in proportion to the racial makeup of the region as a whole.<sup>13</sup>

It may be comparing apples and oranges to some extent when drawing a distinction between newer systems like BART, MARTA, and WMATA on one hand, and older systems like SEPTA on the other. That being said, San Francisco, Atlanta, and Washington, D.C. each faced uphill battles in undertaking the mammoth task of creating a new transit system. Philadelphia, however, found itself in the decidedly easier position, in the 1960s and beyond, of being able to take advantage of federal aid for mass transportation to enhance an urban transit system that already existed. In light of what other cities were able to accomplish in providing improved mobility to a broad spectrum of metropolitan residents, perhaps Philadelphia should be judged even more harshly for its utter failure to alter its transportation planning priorities to deliver higher quality and more extensive service to those who depended on mass transit the most.

To get a clear picture of the extent to which the greater emphasis on mass transportation that began in the 1960s resulted in the redistribution of transportation benefits to low-income and minority urban dwellers, historians must conduct a fuller investigation of the improvements made to older transit systems during the latter decades

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<sup>12</sup> Miriam Konrad, *Transporting Atlanta: The Mode of Mobility Under Construction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 51-57.

<sup>13</sup> Schrag, *The Great Society Subway*, 245.

of the twentieth century. New York began an expansion program in 1968 that was to include a Second Avenue subway line connecting Manhattan with the Bronx as well as other lines between Manhattan and Queens. The city's severe financial problems in the mid-1970s resulted in much of the project, including the Second Avenue subway, being scrapped, but New York did engage in a major overhaul of the system in the 1980s. Between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s, Boston undertook a modernization program using federal money and took over the area's commuter railroad lines. Chicago likewise began a modernization program of its own in the early 1970s.<sup>14</sup> None of these programs, however, has been examined to determine the extent to which it redistributed transportation resources downward along the socioeconomic scale.

It is perhaps unsurprising that historians have not engaged in deep analyses of the maintenance and improvement of postwar mass transit systems. Scholar David Edgerton has pointed out that most histories of technology have focused on invention and innovation (meaning the creation and use of new ideas, respectively), but have neglected the issue of maintenance. Edgerton has promoted a new history of "technology-in-use," as a counterweight to innovation-centric accounts, which will explore questions of "the place of technology within wider historical processes."<sup>15</sup> By focusing much of my attention on what Philadelphia did (and didn't do) to maintain its existing transportation systems, I hope to begin a trend that will broaden the scope of urban transportation history in the United States.

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<sup>14</sup> Jon C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 237-38; Clifton Hood, *722 Miles: The Building of the Subways and how they Transformed New York* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 259.

<sup>15</sup> David Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History since 1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), ix, xi, 77, 211.

Although Philadelphia's development in the postwar period was for the most part typical of large American cities, a closer look at the evolution of its transportation systems reveals unique dimensions in the city's history. Perhaps most interestingly, class coexisted with race as a major determinant of the distribution of the benefits and costs of highway construction further into the postwar period than most historical accounts acknowledge. Historical literature on urban renewal and highways in the postwar United States has focused heavily on the displacement of, and failure to provide adequate replacement housing for, African Americans. As Raymond Mohl put it, the issues of "black housing and black neighborhoods" "assumed a dominant role in most big-city freeway controversies."<sup>16</sup> The impact of redevelopment on race relations was also a central theme in studies of postwar cities like Chicago, Oakland, Detroit, and others, such as Arnold Hirsch's *Making the Second Ghetto*, Robert Self's *American Babylon*, Alison Isenberg's *Downtown America*, and Thomas Sugrue's *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*.<sup>17</sup>

Federal urban renewal policy in the late 1940s and 1950s, while racially neutral on its face, was tremendously damaging to urban African American communities. The seminal piece of federal legislation, the Housing Act of 1949, had as one of its major purposes the provision of federal funds to clear areas urban officials had deemed "slums" or "blighted" and to construct low-income housing in place of deteriorating structures. The Act's primary political appeal lay in its promise of housing for white urban workers.

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<sup>16</sup> Mohl, "Stop the Road," 679. Also see Paul Barrett and Mark H. Rose, "Street Smarts: The Politics of Transportation Statistics in the American City, 1900-1990," *Journal of Urban History* 25, no. 3 (March 1999): 417.

<sup>17</sup> Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

African Americans, who because of segregation often owned homes in neighborhoods with old and deteriorating housing stock, were made vulnerable by renewal programs giving municipal governments both the power and the funds to raze such areas. In 1954, the situation for African Americans worsened when a conservative Congress passed a new Housing Act that had downtown redevelopment, rather than low-income housing, as its central focus. Under the new legislation, cities were able to acquire and clear “blighted” sections more easily and turn them over to private developers who were encouraged to build not houses, but more profitable industrial, commercial, and institutional structures such as hospitals, universities, office buildings, and retail centers. As Robert Self put it in his study of postwar Oakland, “Renewal became a federal-local partnership in which the national state financed nearly anything local cities and developers wanted, a scenario in which downtown American business emerged to set the redevelopment agenda.”<sup>18</sup>

The result of the shift in federal renewal policy, as Arnold Hirsch pointed out, was a change from “slum clearance and redevelopment” to “urban renewal” aimed at rebuilding central cities rather than diminishing inequalities.<sup>19</sup> The shift impacted African Americans most heavily; as Self noted, “local residents knew the difference between low-interest loans and bulldozers: the former meant restoration and community improvement, the latter symbolized what became widely known nationwide as ‘Negro Removal.’”<sup>20</sup> The construction of highways through cities went hand-in-hand with urban renewal and usually had a disproportionate and decidedly negative effect on African

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<sup>18</sup> Self, 138, 142-43.

<sup>19</sup> Hirsch, 271.

<sup>20</sup> Self, 139-40.

Americans. As Self wrote, such highways were powerful tools of spatial organization, acting not only as physical barriers, but as signals that guided capital investments toward certain areas and away from others.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Alison Isenberg asserted in her study of postwar renewal of central business districts that highway construction was one of the methods cities used to exclude non-white shoppers from downtown and lure white consumers back from suburban shopping malls.<sup>22</sup>

Scholars writing about Philadelphia's postwar history have likewise emphasized the disproportionate effects of urban renewal on African Americans. In particular, John Bauman, Matthew Countryman, and James Wolfinger all argued that the growth-oriented consensus that dominated the city's renewal was concerned primarily with the revitalization of Philadelphia's downtown core as a place of white-collar business, resulting in the failure of public housing reform, the intensification of residential segregation with a large portion of the city's African American population being forced into a large, racially homogeneous area in North Central Philadelphia, and a lack of decent housing for non-whites.<sup>23</sup>

Clearly, Philadelphia's urban redevelopment program as a whole had a disproportionate effect on the city's African American population, but nearly all of those displaced by its highway construction were white, with the one project that would have uprooted a large number of African Americans never being built. The city's first major highway, the Schuylkill Expressway, included the Roosevelt Boulevard extension, which

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<sup>21</sup> Self, 18.

<sup>22</sup> Isenberg, 207.

<sup>23</sup> John F. Bauman, *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal: Urban Planning in Philadelphia, 1920-1974* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 103-5, 116-18; Matthew J. Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 50-53, 69-71; James Wolfinger, *Philadelphia Divided: Race & Politics in the City of Brotherly Love* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 200-1.

cut through the white, working-class Nicetown neighborhood in North Philadelphia. The Delaware Expressway ran the length of the city's waterfront, having a significant impact on several mostly white neighborhoods in Northeast Philadelphia, Center City, and South Philadelphia.<sup>24</sup> More affluent whites, who enjoyed closer relationships with the city's business-government coalition, had the most success in mitigating the effects of highway construction upon their communities. White professionals in the newly-gentrified Society Hill neighborhood, for example, conducted in the 1960s a successful campaign to have their portion of the Delaware Expressway lowered and topped with a landscaped cover. In the 1970s, residents of Queen Village, by then an up-and-coming area itself, prevented the construction of entrance and exit ramps that would have dumped expressway traffic onto the neighborhood's narrow streets. In both cases, less affluent white neighborhoods made similar efforts and failed.

Bolstering the conclusion that race was not the most important factor in determining who bore the costs of the city's highway construction was the story of the Crosstown Expressway, which, as mentioned above, would have displaced thousands of African Americans had it not been defeated by community opposition. Opposition to the Crosstown Expressway crossed both geographic and racial lines. While the protestors

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<sup>24</sup> While a high percentage of those displaced by the Delaware Expressway were white, the project was beneficial to the city's African American community in at least one respect. In April 1968, the federal government halted construction on a \$12 million leg of the highway, in addition to several other federally-aided projects in Philadelphia, pursuant to an executive order stating that not enough African Americans had been hired to work on the projects in question. In response, the Pennsylvania Department of Highways began a program not only to increase African American participation in the state's interstate highway construction projects, but to train African Americans for, and place them in, higher level jobs. In June 1969, the *Philadelphia Tribune*, an African American newspaper, reported with respect to the Delaware Expressway that "For the first time in U.S. history, black engineers and inspectors, instead of only black laborers, are part of the construction of a major highway operation." "Lack of Negro Workers Stops Construction," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 20 April 1968, p. 3; Clay Dillon, "New Route 95 is Road to Opportunity for Negroes: Black Engineers, Surveyors, Equipment Operators Working," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 24 June 1969, p. 6.

who fought the Delaware Expressway in Society Hill, like those in many other cities, were defending their own neighborhood, anti-Crosstown Expressway groups included African American and white activists who engaged in a citywide campaign to prevent the construction of the Crosstown, believing it to be an unwise transportation project, an unacceptable barrier between the city's white and black communities, and a potential cause of racial violence.

It is true that Philadelphia was not the only major American city in which whites were displaced, yet the particular dimensions of its highway construction remain unique. Boston's Central Artery (Interstate 93), for example, displaced working-class white residents downtown and in the heavily Italian North End. That highway, however, was constructed in the 1950s, prior to the democratization of transportation politics and the emergence of Boston's powerful anti-expressway movement, crossing both racial and class lines, which achieved the cancellation of two other major highway projects by 1972.<sup>25</sup> Philadelphia, on the other hand, built the Delaware Expressway during the 1960s and 1970s, uprooting large numbers of white people at a time when anti-highway sentiment was more widespread and influential, and most urban highways were being built through African American neighborhoods.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps ironically, it appears that Philadelphia's intense residential segregation, which was firmly in place by the end of the 1950s, was partly responsible for the fact that its highway construction impacted whites disproportionately.<sup>27</sup> The city's largest African

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<sup>25</sup> Teaford, 234.

<sup>26</sup> See Rose, 101, 107.

<sup>27</sup> Matthew Countryman noted that by World War II, the city's "focal point of black ghettoization" was North Central Philadelphia, an area that was 39% black in 1940, 69% black by 1960, and 93% black by 1970. Racial segregation was intensified by the aforementioned failure of public housing reform in Philadelphia. As James Wolfner wrote, whites came to identify public housing with black housing, with

American section was North Central Philadelphia, far from the central business district and an unlikely candidate for an expressway given City Hall's desire for roads that would alleviate downtown traffic congestion and help to revitalize the urban core. On the other hand, planners and engineers had since the 1940s perceived the Delaware River waterfront, populated mainly by working-class whites, to be a natural place for an expressway, mainly because of its industrial character. Those responsible for transportation planning in the immediate postwar period saw a future Delaware Expressway as not only easing downtown traffic woes, but providing better access to Philadelphia's piers, warehouses, and manufacturing facilities, thereby increasing production and improving the city's economy. Although Philadelphia began in the 1950s to lose its manufacturing base, it had enough left by the time the federal government stepped in with 90% financing for the road pursuant to the Interstate Highway Act of 1956 that the business community never wavered from its support for the expressway. Some of the residential areas in the highway's path were in steep decline when plans for the Delaware Expressway were formulated, and this undoubtedly contributed to planners' feeling that some displacement was an acceptable price to pay in achieving the highway's stated goals, particularly when placing the highway too close to the waterfront to take fewer homes would have inhibited the port operations the road was supposed to enhance.

The case studies this dissertation explores, including various controversies over the Schuylkill and Delaware Expressways, the defeat of the Crosstown Expressway, and

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the result that housing officials "found they could rarely build new units anywhere but in the ghetto." Philadelphia's black population increased dramatically during the 1940s and reached 380,000, the nation's third-largest, by 1950. In that year, two-thirds of the city's census tracts contained African American residents, but segregation worsened throughout the decade as planners focused most of their efforts on profitable downtown development and public housing became, in Jon Bauman's words, "the unloved stepchild of urban renewal." Countryman, 52-53; Wolfinger, 200-1; Bauman, 84-86, 118.

the battle over the Center City Commuter Connection, help to shed more light on the particular dynamics of politics and democracy in post-World War II Philadelphia. They demonstrate that as transportation planning became less technocratic and more democratic in the postwar period, the strong business-government coalition that controlled the city's redevelopment emerged as the dominant force shaping Philadelphia's modern transportation systems. While a strong business-government relationship in the context of urban renewal was a common feature of postwar cities and hardly unique to Philadelphia, the coalition that dominated in the City of Brotherly Love maintained a tighter grip on transportation planning than seemed to be the case in many other cities. The result was a transportation planning regime that focused heavily on revitalizing the central business district to the benefit of middle-class and affluent whites and often to the detriment of working-class and poor Philadelphians. While African Americans bore a disproportionate share of the costs of redevelopment in many cases, the city's highway construction burdened primarily white residents of lower socioeconomic status. Despite a shift in power from one type of elite to another, those who controlled Philadelphia's transportation planning could not impose their will completely, instead finding themselves bounded occasionally by the emerging social movements of the 1960s and 1970s that impacted thinking about transportation systems on the national and local levels.

## Chapter 1

### **“The Only Satisfactory Program”: Philadelphia’s Expressway Era Begins, 1946-1959**

The end of World War II began the golden age of highway construction in the United States. Americans already had a love affair with the automobile dating back to the 1920s – an affair that the war interrupted by necessitating a ban on civilian auto production and the rationing of gasoline. The return of peace opened the floodgates of pent-up consumer demand for cars and new roads on which to drive them. Older cities found their narrow streets choked with traffic and looked to the modern expressway as the solution.

The federal government was only too happy to oblige. The Bureau of Public Roads (or BPR, also known at some points in its history as the Public Roads Administration) had been providing the states with financial assistance for highways since 1916 and was largely responsible for the creation of modern state highway departments. The BPR’s highway engineers used their carefully cultivated reputation for apolitical expertise to dominate the process of highway planning in the United States until the mid-1960s.<sup>1</sup> An engineer-dominated planning regime, focused on the efficient movement of automobile traffic and the relief of traffic congestion to the exclusion of environmental, aesthetic, or social factors, was the result. At the same time, the federal government’s racially biased subsidization of the mortgage market contributed to the

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce E. Seely, *Building the American Highway System: Engineers as Policy Makers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 3, 37, 72, 85.

mass exodus of middle-class whites out of the nation's cities and into the suburbs.<sup>2</sup> The suburbs' rapid growth was accelerated by federal-aid highway construction and at the same time served to justify more and more of it. The circular relationship between suburbanization and highway construction became even more intense after Dwight Eisenhower signed the Interstate Highway Act of 1956, which provided for 90% federal funding for interstate highways and laid the groundwork for the massive expressway system that came to crisscross the United States with concrete.

Philadelphia joined the rest of the nation in the expressway craze, beginning planning for its first major highway, the Schuylkill Expressway, in the late 1940s and finishing the road in 1959. The city also began in the 1950s to plan for its second major highway, the Delaware Expressway, although construction of that project did not begin until the 1960s. While federal highway engineers had strong influence over expressway planning in the postwar period, they did not push roads on Philadelphia that it did not want. On the contrary, there existed a consensus among officials at the federal, state, and local levels that limited-access expressways were the solution to the city's transportation problems.

Philadelphia's main complaint regarding expressways in the postwar period was a consistent belief that Pennsylvania allocated too much money to the construction of rural roads and shortchanged urban areas. The availability of state funds for road construction had long been a sore point for Philadelphia, as was illustrated by a 1954 report, issued jointly by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission and the Department of Streets,

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed analysis of the federal government's role in creating racially segregated residential suburbs in the postwar period, see David M.P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy & White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

indicating that over the past 30 years Philadelphia motorists had paid \$388 million in gasoline taxes toward the state motor fund while the city had received back only \$83 million for highway projects over the same period. Philadelphians had paid \$305 million, the report concluded, toward “getting the farmers out of the mud” while the city became “more and more deeply mired in traffic congestion.”<sup>3</sup> The fact that Philadelphia perceived itself as in competition with other parts of the state for highway funds created a sense of urgency when making expressway plans for fear that if local projects were delayed, the state simply would allocate the money elsewhere. Such fears intensified after 1956, of course, when Philadelphia began competing for the state’s share of a much larger pool of federal highway money. Anxieties over losing state and federal funds created incentives for planners and politicians to quell dissent and rush to decisions.

The process of planning and building federal-aid highways was federalist in nature, as the federal government delegated a great deal of authority to the states.<sup>4</sup> States were required to maintain highway departments meeting certain standards in order to receive federal funding, and these departments were responsible for allocating the state’s share of federal highway money to specific projects, selecting routes, acquiring property along the right-of-way, making engineering studies and blueprints, and hiring contractors to build the roads in question.<sup>5</sup> In Pennsylvania and other states, highway departments

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<sup>3</sup> Philadelphia Department of Streets and Philadelphia City Planning Commission, “Philadelphia’s Program of Major Highways,” Report, 1954, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>4</sup> Seely, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Typically, state funds were used for acquiring property for an expressway, although the state often delegated the actual process of acquisition to local bodies, such as the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority. After the passage of the Interstate Highway Act of 1956, federal funds became available to assist with right-of-way acquisition. Richard F. Weingroff, “Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956: Creating the Interstate System”; [essay on-line]; available from <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/rw96e.cfm>; Internet; accessed 13 January 2010.

decentralized the process further, delegating many of their responsibilities to local governments. In Philadelphia, the City Planning Commission, assisted prior to 1951 by the Department of Public Works and thereafter by the Department of Streets, proposed urban highway routes and procured engineering and design studies.<sup>6</sup> The Planning Commission was purely an advisory agency without legal authority to enforce its decisions, submitting proposals instead to Philadelphia's City Council for its approval.<sup>7</sup> In truth, however, City Council often acted as nothing more than a rubber stamp for the Planning Commission. Aaron Levine, who had worked for the Planning Commission in the postwar years, once boasted that citizen support for planning had "permitted the City Council to approve the passage of every major planning proposal brought before it between 1943 and 1960."<sup>8</sup>

Once city officials came to an agreement on preliminary highway plans, as evidenced by City Council's authorization, the city submitted its plans to the Pennsylvania Department of Highways in order to enter into a formal agreement for construction of the road (under which the state promised to pay a significant portion of the cost not covered by federal funds, and the city pledged to make a financial contribution as well). In addition to reaching an agreement with the city – signed by the mayor of Philadelphia and the governor of Pennsylvania – the state was responsible for sending the plans to the Bureau of Public Roads, the blessing of which was needed for the allocation of federal highway funds to the project.

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<sup>6</sup> John F. Bauman, "Expressways, Public Housing, and Renewal: A Blueprint for Postwar Philadelphia, 1945-1960," *Pennsylvania History* 57 (January 1990): 48.

<sup>7</sup> Occasionally, other Philadelphia city agencies had authority over certain aspects of expressway planning, depending on the specific circumstances at hand. For example, as is detailed below, parkland within the city could not be used for an expressway without the approval of the Fairmount Park Commission.

<sup>8</sup> Conrad Weiler, *Philadelphia: Neighborhood, Authority, and the Urban Crisis* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 147.

The decentralized nature of the process did not weaken the influence of federal highway engineers, who were perceived to be the ultimate authorities on expressway construction and whose prioritization of the efficient movement of automobile traffic was embraced wholeheartedly by state highway officials and Philadelphia planners alike. Moreover, the state and federal governments (and especially the latter after 1956) controlled the purse strings for expressway construction, meaning that local planners lacked the ability to fund projects that failed to conform to the expectations of federal highway engineers. As historian John Bauman put it, “the structure of federal highway involvement, that is the process of project review, approval, and funding, diminished the role of the local agency in favor of the policy making role of the [federal] and state highway department engineers.”<sup>9</sup>

While Philadelphia’s expressway boom began in the immediate postwar period, its mass transportation declined severely. To be precise, the city and its suburbs were home to multiple privately owned transportation companies: the Philadelphia Transportation Company (PTC), which ran buses, subways, and trolleys throughout the city; the Philadelphia Suburban Transportation Company, or Red Arrow, which operated buses and trolleys in the nearby suburbs; and the Pennsylvania and Reading Railroads, which operated separate commuter railroad systems. After World War II, all of these companies were plagued by spiraling operating costs due to inflation, aging infrastructure and equipment, labor problems, declining patronage, and governmental regulation that prohibited them from raising fares enough to compensate for diminishing revenue. Although certainly the public’s embrace of automobiles contributed to the decline of

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<sup>9</sup> Bauman, “Expressways, Public Housing, and Renewal,” 48-49, 60.

mass transportation, the problems enumerated above were inherent to mass transit and existed independently of this trend.

City officials were aware of the crisis, but continued throughout the 1940s and 1950s to prioritize building highways over aiding mass transit, mirroring the attitude prevalent within the federal government. Philadelphia's favoritism toward expressways was undoubtedly a product of Cold War America, in which highways and autos were symbols of freedom and individualism and urban mass transportation was associated with collectivism and deprivation – a perception fueled by white flight, which made inner-city mass transit riders disproportionately poor and black. But the disparity was also due to the fact that the state and federal funds available for expressway construction influenced priorities on the local level, and to government officials' reluctance to make improvements to privately-owned mass transit systems that many would have perceived as benefitting shareholders at taxpayers' expense. When the city made tentative first steps at the end of the 1950s toward the preservation of mass transit, it did so in a way that began a pattern of preferential treatment of the commuter railroads over the urban transit system.

Both the building of expressways and the first efforts to save the commuter railroads were associated with Philadelphia's drive to revitalize its central business district, which officials and planners saw as the city's most urgent problem of the postwar era. In the aftermath of World War II, urban America experienced a sharp decline, and Philadelphia was no different. As occurred elsewhere, middle-class whites fled to the suburbs and took much of the tax base with them. Manufacturing, for generations the backbone of the city's economy, began the long downward spiral that caused

Philadelphia to lose 90,000 industrial jobs between 1950 and 1965.<sup>10</sup> Like other cities, Philadelphia in the postwar years began the transition from a manufacturing to a service economy, but this transition did not occur overnight. In the meantime, as historian Jeanne Lowe put it in *Cities in a Race with Time*, her study of postwar urban decline and renewal, “Philadelphia was like a doughnut, a vast metropolis built up around a hollow center.” Lowe wrote of deserted and dirty streets, polluted water, and antiquated practices like collecting garbage by horse-drawn carriage and lighting some streets with gas lamps.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps Philadelphia’s biggest problem in the 1940s was the corruption and lethargy that had infected its city government. When the city’s civic and business leaders lost their faith in the Republican political machine that had run the city since the Civil War, a reform movement emerged, having as its first goal the creation of a new city charter. A group of businessmen known as the Young Turks (which included future city planner Edmund Bacon) spearheaded the movement. Although early efforts at charter reform failed, the Young Turks succeeded in getting City Council to create a stronger City Planning Commission in 1942 and, soon afterward, formed the Citizens’ Council on City Planning to act as a private watchdog organization. The new version of the Planning Commission, while still an advisory agency, now had a budget, a full-time staff, and the statutory authority to prepare six-year capital programs to be submitted to City Council, which retained authority over the expenditure of municipal funds.<sup>12</sup> The Citizens’

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew J. Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 50.

<sup>11</sup> Jeanne R. Lowe, *Cities in a Race with Time: Progress and Poverty in America’s Renewing Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 319.

<sup>12</sup> Lowe, 327, 331-32.

Council was run by large business interests but represented neighborhood groups from all over the city. As Bauman wrote, the organization was “an ideal vehicle for creating the illusion of citizen participation in the planning process and imparting legitimacy to the city’s housing and redevelopment plans.”<sup>13</sup> Because it was founded by the same business and civic leaders who were responsible for Philadelphia getting a stronger Planning Commission during World War II, it was unsurprising that the Citizens’ Council of the 1940s and 1950s was in near total harmony with planners’ goals and philosophies regarding downtown revitalization and expressway construction.

In 1948, a powerful group of business leaders – most of them presidents of major corporations, banks, department stores, and universities – created the Greater Philadelphia Movement (GPM) to oversee and influence the direction of Philadelphia’s urban renewal. The GPM’s main focus was on revitalizing downtown, and according to Bauman, its leaders “realized that the city’s future growth hinged not only on the prospect of federal redevelopment aid but also on the cooperation of city government with enlightened business and civic leadership.”<sup>14</sup> The new organization picked up the banner of charter reform and backed Democrat Joseph Clark, a reform candidate who was elected mayor in 1951, breaking finally the dominance of the Republican machine. Clark, a liberal, was both a business-oriented mayor and a technocrat who believed that problems could best be solved by hiring the most qualified professionals to work in city government rather than abiding by the patronage system that had mired City Hall in mediocrity for so long. Clark’s election coincided with the breakthrough of charter

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<sup>13</sup> John F. Bauman, *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal: Urban Planning in Philadelphia, 1920-1974* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 100.

<sup>14</sup> Bauman, *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal*, 102-3.

reform, which stripped City Council of many of its administrative powers, created new mayoral cabinet positions, and gave the mayor the ability to hire and remove bureaucrats without council approval, ostensibly to weaken the influence of politics upon such decisions.<sup>15</sup>

As scholars Judith Goode and Jo Anne Schneider have written, both Clark and his Democratic successor Richardson Dilworth (the two of whom served from 1951 to 1962), were allied strongly with the city's "corporate elites in the rising service sector: banking, insurance, large-scale retailing, and real-estate development." The new approach of this technocratic, professional alliance was "to reconstruct the center as the site of corporate headquarters, financial institutions, business services, and retailing, which would bring people back to the city as workers, shoppers, and residents."<sup>16</sup> A great deal of Philadelphia's redevelopment in the postwar period was spurred by quasi-public corporations, made up of business leaders and government officials, solidifying further the close relationship between white-collar business interests and the city's Democratic reform administrations.<sup>17</sup>

The relationship between business and government in postwar Philadelphia helped to shape the city's transportation planning. A consensus existed among Philadelphia's planners and its business leaders that easing traffic congestion on downtown streets and providing for the free flow of automobile traffic was crucial to downtown renewal. Embracing the assumptions of the federal highway engineers they perceived as the ultimate experts, they also believed that building modern, limited-access

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<sup>15</sup> Bauman, *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal*, 118-19; Lowe, 326.

<sup>16</sup> Judith Goode and Jo Anne Schneider, *Reshaping Ethnic and Racial Relations in Philadelphia: Immigrants in a Divided City* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 45.

<sup>17</sup> Lowe, 315.

expressways that would draw suburbanites back to the downtown was the key to achieving the aforementioned goals. While transportation planning in the 1940s and 1950s occurred in a relatively closed environment, with little public input into major decisions, the symbiosis between business and government in Philadelphia ensured that the planning philosophies and goals of each remained virtually the same. To put it another way, big business was practically *part* of Philadelphia's government in those days, to the extent that it would have been inaccurate to consider the city's law firms, banks, large retail establishments and other major corporations just another constituency. Although the strong relationship between business and government in the context of urban redevelopment was in no way unique to Philadelphia, the democratization of transportation politics that occurred in the 1960s opened up less space for influence by grassroots groups in Philadelphia than was the case in many other cities.

### **The Schuylkill Expressway: Philadelphia's First Expressway**

The Schuylkill Expressway, planned in the late 1940s and built in the 1950s, was Philadelphia's first major expressway. It was built during a time of consensus that limited-access expressways were the only satisfactory solution to cities' traffic and transportation problems. Because Philadelphia's transportation planning process in the immediate postwar period was decidedly undemocratic, allowing for little input by ordinary people, the public controversy surrounding the road's construction, while irritating to planners at the time, proved to be quite minor in comparison to the public opposition to highway projects that arose in the 1960s and 1970s. The result, unfortunately for Philadelphia, was a highway that was dangerous, inadequate to handle the traffic demand placed upon it, and perceived to be obsolete on the day it opened.

This outcome did not, however, change the fundamental assumptions that led to the Schuylkill's construction in the first place, instead serving only to convince planners and engineers that more highways were needed.

On a chilly day just before Thanksgiving of 1958, a crucial section of the expressway running past Center City Philadelphia opened for business. The mood that day was festive, with the Vine Street Bridge decked out in colorful bunting and a band made up of police officers and firemen providing the music. Chamber of Commerce president Andrew Young presided over the ceremonies as Mayor Richardson Dilworth and Pennsylvania Department of Highways head Lewis Stevens made speeches. At 11 a.m., Mayor Dilworth cut the ribbon and the traffic began to flow. Despite the optimism of that day, it was not long before critics, citing heavy traffic and a frightening accident rate, charged that the Schuylkill “was obsolete before the blueprints were dry.”<sup>18</sup> In fact, Philadelphians started complaining about the Schuylkill before it was even completed. In September 1959, two months before the highway's final link opened, the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* (Philadelphia's leading newspaper until 1980) lamented, “the irritating fact that the new \$65,000,000 Schuylkill Expressway can be clogged for miles bumper-to-bumper simply by taking one lane out of service demonstrates how close to capacity this superhighway normally operates.”<sup>19</sup> The opening of the final section on November 25 became not a cause for celebration, but rather an opportunity for the paper to point out that “new highway facilities so often prove inadequate before they are complete.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> “What Went Wrong with the Schuylkill Expressway?” *Greater Philadelphia Magazine* 52 (August 1961): 17-18, Pamphlet Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>19</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 26 September 1959, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>20</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 25 November 1959, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Some transportation planners had envisioned a system of expressways for the Philadelphia region since the early 1930s, but the Great Depression and World War II put the goal out of reach until the mid-1940s.<sup>21</sup> Philadelphia's expressway era began in 1946 when, with World War II over and hopes abounding for a return to normality, planners began to think about how to revitalize their city.<sup>22</sup> One of the most pressing problems they faced was a transportation infrastructure that most saw as grossly inadequate to serve Philadelphia's needs. Pennsylvania's Republican governor, former Pittsburgh attorney James Duff, decried the lack of highway access in the commonwealth's cities, claiming, "I know of no cities in the country where the access is worse."<sup>23</sup> The City Planning Commission's thinking on the matter was never in doubt; the Commission embraced "the principle that the only satisfactory program is to build a primary system of express highways – made express by building them as elevated or depressed routes or by limiting local access."<sup>24</sup> The Planning Commission made no secret of the fact that

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<sup>21</sup> In 1923, a group of businessmen from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware formed the Tri-State Regional Planning Federation, a private group that made planning recommendations for land development and transportation. Sam Bass Warner, *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of its Growth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), 209. In 1932, the Tri-State Federation published a regional plan in which it stated that "The motor vehicle has widened tremendously the radius of highway transportation and has made it necessary to plan and construct modern highway systems throughout every section of the United States." In accordance with this realization, the Federation proposed an extensive system of major highways for the Philadelphia region with the goal of serving the traffic needs of 1980. Regional Planning Federation of the Philadelphia Tri-State District, *The Regional Plan of the Philadelphia Tri-State District* (Philadelphia: Wm. F. Fell Co., 1932), 148-51, 165-68.

<sup>22</sup> John Bauman dated the beginning of the city's expressway era to 1944, when Philadelphia began efforts to turn Vine Street into a depressed expressway. The project was not completed until the 1980s, however. Bauman, "Expressways, Public Housing, and Renewal," 49-50.

<sup>23</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Annual report, 1946, p. 15, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>24</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Annual report, 1946, pp. 19-20, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

expressways were its first priority, announcing that it was deferring work on a comprehensive plan to improve the city's mass transit.<sup>25</sup>

The following year, planning for the Schuylkill Expressway began in earnest. The Planning Commission described the route it proposed as extending from the Island Avenue – Essington Avenue traffic circle in South Philadelphia up the west bank of the Schuylkill River (a longstanding transportation route that was already home to West River Drive and the Reading Railroad tracks) to the city limits at City Line Avenue, and then continuing to follow the river in a northwesterly direction through suburban Montgomery County before veering west to connect with the proposed extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike at King of Prussia, approximately 20 miles to the northwest of downtown Philadelphia.<sup>26</sup> Planners felt that the extension of the turnpike eastward to King of Prussia, which the state's Turnpike Commission planned to complete by 1950, heightened the need for the Schuylkill Expressway.<sup>27</sup> In July 1947, city and state officials met to discuss the fact that they expected the turnpike extension to bear a load of 6,000 cars and trucks a day, but had no definite plans for how to get traffic from the end of the turnpike to Philadelphia.<sup>28</sup>

One planner concerned by this scenario was Edmund Bacon, who became the Executive Director of the City Planning Commission in August 1948. Bacon exerted

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<sup>25</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Annual report, 1946, pp. 19-20, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>26</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Annual report, 1947, p. 7, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>27</sup> The Pennsylvania Department of Highways requested that the Philadelphia City Planning Commission propose a route for the entire length of the Schuylkill Expressway, from King of Prussia to Philadelphia, despite the fact that a sizeable portion of any route chosen would lie outside the city limits. Philadelphia City Planning Commission, "Chronological outline of major events on Schuylkill Expressway," Memo, 1 December 1953, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>28</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 21 December 1948, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

tremendous influence over Philadelphia's planning in the postwar period and gained national prominence for his efforts. A native Philadelphian, he received his degree in architecture from Cornell University in 1932. In the ensuing years, he broadened his perspective by traveling in Europe, working for an architectural firm in Shanghai, China, and obtaining a graduate fellowship to work under famous architect and city planner Eliel Saarinen at Cranbrook Academy in Michigan. By 1940, he had returned home to assume the directorship of the Philadelphia Housing Association while holding several other positions, including secretary of the Citizens' Council on City Planning. After a stint in the U.S. Navy during which he took part in the invasions of Iwo Jima and Okinawa, Bacon became the senior land planner of the City Planning Commission in 1946, a position he held until the Planning Commission's executive director, Raymond Leonard, passed away in 1948 and Bacon was appointed to fill his place.<sup>29</sup> Over the next 22 years, Bacon built a sparkling reputation as the person most responsible for shaping Philadelphia.<sup>30</sup> Those that interacted with him and witnessed his handiwork described him with terms such as "God-like" and "the god of city planners."<sup>31</sup> In 1964, Bacon's

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<sup>29</sup> Citizens' Council on City Planning, Newsletter, June 1948, Papers of the Citizens' Council on City Planning, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>30</sup> According to Kirk Petshek, Bacon's main weakness as a planner was that while he was an expert at design, "he was not particularly concerned with social or economic aspects of new development." He was also occasionally guilty of "projectitis," or a tendency to focus on a project in isolation without considering it in relation to the city's overall development. Despite Bacon's enormous influence, press accounts of his efforts to shape Philadelphia's renewal varied widely, with national publications such as *Time*, *Architectural Forum*, and the *Saturday Evening Post* highly complementary of his work, and local outlets such as the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Greater Philadelphia Magazine* often harshly critical. Moreover, the active involvement in Philadelphia's renewal of civic organizations and quasi-public corporations, which were composed of the city's business leaders and enjoyed close ties to City Hall, put constraints on what Bacon could do. As Petshek put it, "An authoritarian like New York's Robert Moses could not have been successful in Philadelphia." Kirk R. Petshek, *The Challenge of Urban Reform: Policies & Programs in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1973), 24, 86-89, 91-92, 167.

<sup>31</sup> Stanhope Browne, Interview by author, Tape recording, Philadelphia, PA, 27 January 2009.; Paul Levy, *Queen Village: The Eclipse of Community* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Civic Values, 1978), 57.

efforts to revitalize Center City Philadelphia landed him a glowing profile in *Time* magazine, complete with a flattering portrait on the magazine's cover.<sup>32</sup>

In the late 1940s, Bacon believed that if the turnpike extension to King of Prussia opened before an access road to Philadelphia were completed, "there would be a terrific pile-up of traffic on the feeder roads out of King of Prussia and the Philadelphia area would not be adequately served." The Schuylkill Expressway, he felt, would provide easy access from the turnpike to Philadelphia's Center City, reduce traffic on feeder roads between the suburbs and the city, "and furnish a necessary link in the city's highway system."<sup>33</sup>

Because city and state officials intended the Schuylkill Expressway to be a federal-aid highway, meaning that the Bureau of Public Roads and the Pennsylvania Department of Highways would share primary financial responsibility for the road, any plans made in Philadelphia were subject to both state and federal approval. During early discussions about the expressway, federal officials disagreed with the City Planning Commission and the state Department of Highways about the road's purpose, but it does not appear as though this disagreement ever jeopardized federal funding for the project in any serious way. The disagreement stemmed from the fact that Philadelphia planners were portraying the Schuylkill Expressway as designed to serve mainly regional traffic coming to and from the Pennsylvania Turnpike, while federal highway engineers believed the road would be used mostly by local drivers traveling between Philadelphia

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<sup>32</sup> "Under the Knife, or All for Their Own Good," *Time*, 6 November 1964 [magazine on-line]; available from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,876419-1,00.html>; Internet; accessed 25 September 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Citizens' Council on City Planning, Newsletter, November 1948, Papers of the Citizens' Council on City Planning, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

and its northwestern suburbs. One federal official, J.L. Stinson, told state highway officials that the amount of traffic expected to head for Philadelphia from the turnpike was “relatively small in comparison to [the amount] originating within the urban area of Philadelphia.” The city’s approach, he felt, gave “a misleading impression” as to the purpose and intended use of the Schuylkill Expressway.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, federal official C.N. Connor, while reiterating Stinson’s point, wrote in July 1949 that the Bureau was “glad to observe that efforts are under way to relieve traffic congestion in the Philadelphia area with Federal-aid participation.”<sup>35</sup> Clearly, officials at all levels wanted the expressway to be built, even if no firm consensus existed as to its precise purpose. In their zeal to push the project forward, it appears that no planners or engineers considered the possibility that the new expressway might exacerbate, rather than alleviate, traffic congestion within the city by encouraging more automobile use.

The Citizens’ Council on City Planning, which served as a liaison between the City Planning Commission and the public, supported the Schuylkill Expressway strongly from the start. Although the Citizens’ Council later took a more critical stance toward governmental actions, its primary function in the 1940s and 1950s was to explain to the public the decisions of the City Planning Commission and enlist support for those decisions. In 1947, the Council attempted to answer questions the public might have regarding the proposed expressway. In providing a definition of an express highway that later generations of Philadelphians might have found humorous, the Council proclaimed that “such a highway provides for continuous movement of traffic, unhampered by start

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<sup>34</sup> J.L. Stinson, “Comments: Philadelphia-Schuylkill Expressway,” Memo, undated, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>35</sup> C.N. Connor to A.G. Siegle, 20 July 1949, Correspondence FAS Pennsylvania, Classified Central File, 1912-1950, Bureau of Public Roads, RG 30, National Archives, College Park, MD.

and stop driving, parking or pedestrian problems and with danger of accidents greatly reduced.” Posing the question, “Is There No Other Answer?” the Citizens’ Council noted the limited success of other means of reducing traffic congestion, such as street widening and parking limitations, but did not mention mass transit improvements as a possible solution. The group pointed out that the Planning Commission was already aware that “a system of express highways is THE solution for the city’s traffic ills,” and appealed to the public to put pressure on City Council to grant its quick approval to proposed highways.<sup>36</sup>

Because city, state, and federal officials shared a narrow focus on the efficient movement of traffic, they based their decisions about the Schuylkill Expressway almost entirely on traffic data. Such an emphasis was not surprising given the philosophy surrounding expressway construction in the 1940s and 1950s. It seems, however, that planners’ rush to complete the expressway led them to make preliminary decisions about route and design – decisions that, while subject to change, would guide all future discussions – before they had even finished analyzing the traffic data in question. In 1947, Philadelphia conducted an origin-destination survey with financial support from all three levels of government. The survey – which collected data on the beginning and end points for trips made by various methods of transport in the Philadelphia metropolitan area, was intended to assist planners in determining, as the Planning Commission said, “where and what type highways should be built.”<sup>37</sup>

Field work for the study was completed in 1947, but it was some time before all of the data was available for analysis by the engineering firm of Clarke, Rapuano,

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<sup>36</sup> Citizens’ Council on City Planning, “Express Highways for Philadelphia,” Report, 1947, Pamphlet Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>37</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Annual report, 1946, p. 16, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

Holleran, Hardesty, and Hanover, which the Planning Commission had hired to consult on the Schuylkill Expressway. In its annual report for 1947, the Planning Commission announced that the punch cards containing the data were being prepared and were expected to be ready for tabulation by March 1948. The Commission's next annual report revealed that planners expected the full report on the data to be finished by late 1949, but had provided the consultants with a limited amount of data to work with in the meantime. The lack of a completed study in 1949 did not stop the Commission from issuing a report entitled "Philadelphia's First Expressway," which stated boldly that data derived from the origin-destination survey showed "sufficient traffic volumes to justify a six-lane express highway along the west side of the Schuylkill River." Apparently, however, Philadelphia's planners did not complete a full analysis of the data in 1949, or even in 1950. The Commission's annual report for 1951 indicated that "From the 1947 Origin and Destination Survey data were assembled, analyzed, and mapped, showing the number of persons traveling to the Central City by various modes of transportation. Analysis by zone of origin and purpose of travel was initiated."<sup>38</sup>

While the analysis of the origin-destination data was underway, government officials barreled ahead with the Schuylkill Expressway. In December 1949, the city sent first-phase engineering plans for the expressway to the state highway department, which resulted in the expressway being placed officially on the state highway system on January 1, 1950. In May 1950, lead consultant Michael Rapuano issued his engineering and design report. Soon after, both the Pennsylvania Department of Highways and the

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<sup>38</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Annual reports, 1947, p. 10, 1948, p.8, and 1951, p. 23; Philadelphia City Planning Commission, "Philadelphia's First Expressway," Report, 1949, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

Bureau of Public Roads approved preliminary plans for the expressway. In November 1950, Philadelphia City Council voted its approval, paving the way for the city to enter into a formal agreement with the state. By December 18, Philadelphia's Republican mayor, Bernard Samuel, and Governor Duff had both signed the agreement, leaving no legal obstacles to construction of the highway.<sup>39</sup>

The fact that final, detailed engineering plans for each section of the expressway had not yet been completed should not obscure the reality that officials made crucial decisions about the project before planners had finished analyzing the data from the origin-destination survey. All three governments involved had approved the expressway in principal and committed to provide their share of the funding, thus ensuring that the road would be built. The consultants' engineering report, which informed future discussions on the details of route and design, had also been completed. In other words, circumstances at the end of 1950 would have made it difficult to backtrack had further analysis undermined initial assumptions.

As John Bauman explained, Michael Rapuano used only samples of the traffic data for calculating traffic flow and making design decisions, a shortcut that worried federal officials.<sup>40</sup> In September 1949, the BPR expressed its "disappointment that such limited use had been made of results of the origin-destination survey." While it was willing to accept the consultants' traffic analysis this time, the Bureau "wanted it clearly

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<sup>39</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Press release, 30 December 1949; Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Annual report, 1949, p. 26; Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Annual report, 1950, p.4, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission; *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 23 April 1950, 19 December 1950, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA; L.E. Boykin to Ray Smock, 5 August 1950, Correspondence FAS Pennsylvania, Classified Central File, 1912-1950, Bureau of Public Roads, RG 30, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>40</sup> Bauman, "Expressways, Public Housing, and Renewal," 56.

understood that acceptance was not an endorsement of [the consultants'] procedure as a method for future studies."<sup>41</sup> Once the data analysis was complete, however, neither Rapuano nor the Planning Commission offered any hint that the Schuylkill Expressway would have been routed or designed differently had they waited longer or that any of their baseline assumptions had changed. If federal, state, or local officials ever harbored doubts in this regard, they did not air those doubts in public.

In such a rushed atmosphere, preliminary discussions about the Schuylkill Expressway proceeded with all the suspense of a one-party election involving an unopposed candidate. Never did those responsible question seriously the decision to build the expressway. A 1950 memo from H.E. Hilts, Deputy Commissioner of the BPR, to Division Engineer S.L. Taylor provided evidence that the justification for building a highway was sometimes an afterthought. After reading a draft of the Rapuano report on the Schuylkill Expressway, Hilts noted, "There remains the problem of [economic] justification which is not touched upon in the report except in a very general way citing the need for expressways to take traffic off existing streets and provide better facilities for travel. Some measure of justification is desirable and it may not be too much of a job to make such calculation."<sup>42</sup> Federal officials had been discussing the Schuylkill Expressway in detail with the state of Pennsylvania and the city of Philadelphia since 1948, and in March 1950 were close to signing off on the plans, so it was more than a bit late to be concerned with planners' failure to articulate an economic justification for the project. As Bauman pointed out, the economic and social aspects of expressway

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<sup>41</sup> R.W. Darling to J.L. Stinson, 21 September 1949, Correspondence FAS Pennsylvania, Classified Central File, 1912-1950, Bureau of Public Roads, RG 30, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>42</sup> H.E. Hilts to S.L. Taylor, 14 March 1950, Correspondence FAS Pennsylvania, Classified Central File, 1912-1950, Bureau of Public Roads, RG 30, National Archives, College Park, MD.

construction “rarely if ever intruded into these usually technical discussions. . . . Socio-economic considerations, short and long-term, were at best incidental. . . . Indeed, belief in the utility of expressways was so great and so widespread in the 1950s that [the subject of justification] hardly warranted further amplification.”<sup>43</sup>

To the limited extent planners considered factors other than the efficient movement of automobile traffic, their analysis could be short-sighted. The City Planning Commission, rather than expressing concern that expressways might contribute to a flow of people and capital out of the city, embraced the idea. Pointing out that the “century-old trend toward decentralization” was “based on the natural and healthy desire of people for more space, air, and light,” the Commission asserted that the city’s future development should “be in accordance with this trend, leading to a reduction of densities.”<sup>44</sup>

As a result of prevailing attitudes among those in power, discussions about the highway focused only on the precise details of the route and design; everyone agreed, however, that the road would follow the Schuylkill River. Perhaps most importantly, very few groups were included in these discussions. In choosing a route, the City Planning Commission consulted the city’s Department of Public Works, state and federal highway officials (who, as explained above, combined to provide most of the funding for the project), the Fairmount Park Commission (FPC) (the approval of which was needed for portions of the proposed route passing through city parkland), the Chamber of

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<sup>43</sup> Bauman, “Expressways, Public Housing, and Renewal,” 58.

<sup>44</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Annual report, 1949, p. 5, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, local officials of the American Automobile Association, and the Citizens' Council on City Planning.<sup>45</sup>

The Citizens' Council had the greatest ability to represent members of the public who wished to participate in decisions regarding the expressway, because it represented, at least ostensibly, neighborhood groups from all over Philadelphia. At this point in its history, however, the Council acted primarily as a booster for the City Planning Commission and did not take an aggressive role in pressing planners to be receptive to citizen input. Although the Council itself was composed mainly of neighborhood groups, its board of directors was made up of wealthy and powerful men from the ranks of business, law, education, media, and labor.<sup>46</sup> These men decided that the Schuylkill Expressway was necessary for Philadelphia's future before it would have been possible to gauge accurately the feelings of their member organizations, and never wavered from their initial support of the expressway.

In December 1948, the Citizens' Council held a meeting at which Edmund Bacon, with Governor Duff looking on, explained the details of the Schuylkill Expressway to more than 200 delegates representing 125 member organizations, who then passed a resolution approving the Planning Commission's highway plan.<sup>47</sup> The minutes of this meeting seem not to have survived, however, making it unclear as to whether any of the delegates dissented from the resolution or expressed sentiments critical of the expressway plan. It is clear that the leaders of the Citizens' Council perceived no unfairness in the

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<sup>45</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Schuylkill Expressway Correspondence, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>46</sup> See, e.g. Citizens' Council on City Planning, Annual report, 1956-57, Annual Reports Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>47</sup> Citizens' Council on City Planning, Newsletter, December 1948, Papers of the Citizens' Council on City Planning, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

way the Planning Commission went about its business. Council Executive Director S.B. Zisman commended the Planning Commission for considering suggestions from various groups such as the Chamber of Commerce, the Fairmount Park Commission, and the Citizens' Council itself. The Planning Commission, he wrote, "has demonstrated the right approach in city planning. Citizen understanding and citizen participation are essential in a democratic procedure in planning and do, as in this case, help develop better plans."<sup>48</sup> Citizens' Council President Walter Hudson soon echoed Zisman's praise to Edward Hopkinson, the chair of the Planning Commission.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the kind words from the Citizens' Council, the Planning Commission made clear that while it was willing to listen to a select few groups, it would not accept input from everyone. When the Civic Club of Philadelphia requested that the Planning Commission hold public hearings on the issue of using land in Fairmount Park for the Schuylkill Expressway, Hopkinson responded that public hearings would be held only once City Council had accepted the Planning Commission's recommendations and introduced an ordinance authorizing the city to make an arrangement with the state for construction of the expressway. Holding separate hearings before then, he asserted, could not be done "without confusing issues."<sup>50</sup> Ironically, Hopkinson sent his response on the same day Hudson sent his letter praising the Planning Commission for its openness to citizen input. Although it is impossible to be certain, public hearings may have made a difference. The Fairmount Park Commission gave the expressway its tentative approval

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<sup>48</sup> S.B. Zisman to Editor, *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 27 October 1948, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>49</sup> Walter Hudson to Edward Hopkinson, 5 November 1948, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>50</sup> Civic Club of Philadelphia to Edward Hopkinson, 3 November 1948; Edward Hopkinson to Civic Club of Philadelphia, 5 November 1948, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

during the early stages of planning in October 1948, believing the highway to be necessary for Philadelphia, but the parkland portion of the expressway became a point of contention when more detailed plans were developed in late 1952, as is discussed below.<sup>51</sup>

The closed environment in which officials planned the Schuylkill Expressway could not quell controversy completely. The disputes that did arise, while vexing to highway boosters at the time, nevertheless proved to be rather minor and short-lived when compared to the expressway battles that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. In contrast to later expressway protesters, opponents of the Schuylkill Expressway did not question the decision to build the highway or demand a broader inquiry into its social, environmental, or economic impact. Instead, the battles revolved primarily around two specific portions of the route – the aforementioned section through Fairmount Park, and the Roosevelt Boulevard Extension – because of the parkland and homes they were slated to destroy.

The fight over the Roosevelt Boulevard Extension was the first significant controversy to arise, as residents of the Nicetown neighborhood in North Philadelphia protested the taking of their homes the extension would require. From the earliest stages of thinking about the Schuylkill Expressway, the Planning Commission intended for an extension to cut across North Philadelphia in a northeasterly direction before connecting a few blocks east of Broad Street with Roosevelt Boulevard, the main thoroughfare carrying traffic to the vast expanses of Northeast Philadelphia – a booming area with suburban-style housing to which many whites moved in the postwar years. In order to

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<sup>51</sup> Fairmount Park Commission, Meeting minutes, 11 September 1952, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 149, Fairmount Park Commission.

reach Roosevelt Boulevard from the Schuylkill River, the extension would have to cut directly through Nicetown.

In 1950, Nicetown was a mostly white, working- and middle-class neighborhood. The area was roughly coincident with census tract 43-B, which contained 6,410 residents, 6,081 of whom were white. Of the approximately 18% of the white population that was foreign-born, the largest numbers came from Poland and the Soviet Union. The households in tract 43-B had a median income of \$3,044 (as compared with a national median household income of \$3,319), and most residents in the labor force were classified as operatives or clerical workers.<sup>52</sup> Because the Schuylkill Expressway followed a river route through the city, the main stem of the road required the taking of very few properties. As a result, Nicetown stood nearly alone in its battle. In the overwhelmingly pro-expressway atmosphere of the immediate postwar period, the humble neighborhood never stood a chance. Philadelphia's first anti-expressway movement, which began in 1949, was over by the end of 1950 when Mayor Samuel and Governor Duff signed the agreement to build the expressway, including its Roosevelt Boulevard extension.

Early on, it appeared that the Planning Commission was concerned mainly about the businesses in the proposed extension's path. In January 1949, Edward Hopkinson wrote to the president of the Philco Corporation to let him know that one of the routes under consideration would affect the Philco plant in North Philadelphia. Believing it to

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<sup>52</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "Census of Population: 1950"; [document on-line]; available from <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/41557421v3p3ch7.pdf>; and <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/41557421v3p3ch8.pdf>; Internet; accessed 25 September 2009; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "Historical Income Tables – Families"; [document on-line]; available from <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/histinc/f07ar.html>; Internet; accessed 25 September 2009.

be “highly desirable” that Philco “be consulted in this early planning stage,” Hopkinson invited the corporation to designate a representative to meet with Michael Rapuano, the City Planning Commission’s lead consultant on route selection.<sup>53</sup> After Rapuano visited the Philco plant, he informed Edmund Bacon that the route in question, which would require the destruction of an entire wing of Philco’s freezer division, would be too expensive for the state to acquire and too burdensome for Philco. The planners should, he advised, “bend every effort to find another solution.”<sup>54</sup> Rapuano’s suggestion was well taken, as in February the Planning Commission announced it had decided to run the extension through Fernhill Park, a small neighborhood park near the Philco plant, to save on construction costs and cause less disruption to industry.<sup>55</sup> Unsurprisingly, the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia met the decision with approval.<sup>56</sup>

The residents of Nicetown, however, did not receive the same consideration, because city planners perceived building the extension without taking homes to be impossible.<sup>57</sup> When the Planning Commission announced plans for the extension in early 1949, anxious residents, wanting to know whether their homes would be taken, flooded the Commission’s offices with letters. The Commission responded to each letter in a timely and courteous fashion, giving homeowners as much information as was

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<sup>53</sup> Edward Hopkinson to William Balderston, 12 January 1949, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Rapuano to Edmund Bacon, 18 January 1949, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>55</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 12 February 1949, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA..

<sup>56</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 29 March 1949, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>57</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, “Philadelphia’s First Expressway,” Report, 1949, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

available.<sup>58</sup> It was clear, however, that citizen opposition was not going to prevent the road from being built, or protect homes from being taken. In April, Edmund Bacon tried to reassure residents by informing them that their homes would not be taken for at least two years and that they would be paid “fair and equitable sums” for them. Above all, Bacon asked residents “to consider the overall welfare of their community and the vast benefits which would accrue to Philadelphia by construction of the expressway.”<sup>59</sup> To help smooth over concerns, the Planning Commission pointed out that the Schuylkill was much less destructive than expressways in other cities, with only 6% of its ten-mile city route requiring residential demolition.<sup>60</sup>

Such assurances failed to placate those whose homes were threatened, however. In March, executives of the Nicetown Business and Civic Association formed a committee to oppose the construction of the extension through their neighborhood. More than 1,500 Nicetown residents packed into a local junior high school to hear the association’s president, Emil Schurgot, estimate that the project would require that 1,000 homes be torn down. Bacon, who attended the meeting, disputed Shurgot’s assessment but did not offer one of his own, noting that plans were still in the development stage.<sup>61</sup> When the Planning Commission did supply City Council with an estimate, it anticipated

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<sup>58</sup> Mr. Chantigian to Files, 27 April 1949, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>59</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Press release, 29 April 1949, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>60</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, “Philadelphia’s First Expressway,” Report, 1949, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>61</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 25 March 1949, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

the demolition of 261 homes and 19 small apartment houses resulting in the displacement of approximately 1,200 people.<sup>62</sup>

This announcement spurred more protest from Nicetown, as Schurgot claimed that the Planning Commission was misleading City Council and that at least 600 to 700 homes would need to be destroyed for the extension. Schurgot railed against the project, saying:

This highway serves no purpose to the community or the city. Its only beneficiary would be high speed traffic and the motor freight interests. They would be able to run fresh eggs and butter from Ohio to New York City more cheaply than by railroad and at our expense. I am amazed that City Council appears to be willing to sacrifice the tax income the city receives from the houses that would be demolished.<sup>63</sup>

In May, the Pennsylvania Highway Department came up with its own estimate, splitting the difference between Schurgot and the Planning Commission and projecting 480 homes to be demolished. Predictably, the new estimate set off another round of citizen complaints, as more than 800 people attended a community meeting at which a state representative indicated that more than 2,500 people were now slated to lose their homes. Someone at the meeting read a letter from a city councilman claiming that any alternate route for the extension would cost the city an extra \$6 million.<sup>64</sup>

While the Nicetown protests had no immediate impact, residents received some good news in November 1949. Citing a recent engineering survey conducted by the state indicating that four lanes, rather than six, would be sufficient, the Planning Commission

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<sup>62</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 19 April 1949, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>63</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 20 April 1949, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>64</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 11 May 1949, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

announced that it had revised its plans for the extension by narrowing the right-of-way required. The change was predicted to result in the demolition of 116 fewer homes than had been anticipated.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps seeking to maximize the public relations value of the alteration, the Commission announced the revision to coincide exactly with another community meeting scheduled to take place in Nicetown.<sup>66</sup> The *Evening Bulletin* cheered the decision while calling the loss of what was now believed to be 321 homes “a necessary and unpleasant incident” to progress. In doing so, the paper attributed the change in plans to the protests that had arisen, writing:

Not content with its original plans in the light of the protests that developed, the Commission has worked out various expedients to save a home here and another there. . . . By its technique of working with open mind with citizens’ groups to smooth off every rough edge possible the Planning Commission shows a fine appreciation of its responsibility.<sup>67</sup>

Despite the paper’s praise of the Planning Commission, there was no reason to believe that citizen protests had anything to do with the change, which appeared instead to be solely the product of an engineering assessment that fewer lanes, at less cost, would be acceptable.

In spite of the homes saved by the lane reduction, the expressway protests continued. In December, the *Evening Bulletin* editorial page, seemingly irritated that

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<sup>65</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 18 November 1949, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>66</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Press release, 18 November 1949, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>67</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 19 November 1949, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA. The *Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine* concurred in praising the revision, asserting that the number of people to be displaced constituted “a fairly light toll, by comparison with expressway building projects in other cities.” Edgar Williams, “\$260,000,000 Traffic Solution: Superexpressways Should End City’s Congestion by 1970,” *Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine*, 19 February 1950, Pamphlet Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

opponents had not yet been silenced, cited the Nicetown protests as “point[ing] up the need not only for early and final decisions on routes, but also for speed in construction.”<sup>68</sup> Later that month, however, the scope of the protests widened to surrounding neighborhoods in the northwestern part of the city near the Roosevelt Boulevard Extension’s proposed path. At a meeting on December 19, 1949, the Germantown, Mt. Airy, and Chestnut Hill Improvement Association announced its opposition to the extension.<sup>69</sup> The Planning Commission was undaunted, however. Announcing that the revised plans would result in 500 fewer people having to move, Bacon let it be known that he regretted that anyone would be dislocated by the extension, but stayed firm in his conviction that “the highway must go ahead.”<sup>70</sup>

As protests continued into 1950, the Planning Commission continued to be inundated with letters from angry and anxious homeowners. Bacon and his staff continued to respond dutifully to each letter received, even ones such as that from George Wilk, who accused the Planning Commission of proposing “to defile the American flag and the principles and way of life for which it stands” and demanded that the Commission choose between “democracy or fascism.”<sup>71</sup> The Planning Commission could take heart, however, in the fact that several community groups had gone on record as approving the Roosevelt Boulevard Extension, many of them business groups, such as the Chamber of Commerce of West Philadelphia, the Northeast Chamber of Commerce,

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<sup>68</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 7 December 1949, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>69</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 20 December 1949, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>70</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Press release, 24 January 1950, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>71</sup> George Wilk to Philadelphia City Planning Commission, 12 March 1950, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

and the Business Men's Association of Germantown.<sup>72</sup> In addition, many residents of Northeast Philadelphia, whose homes were not threatened, were in favor of a link that would provide them with better expressway access. In October 1950, the United Northeast Civic Association delayed a public meeting on the project after a vocal group of Nicetown residents showed up and disrupted the meeting with loud protests. Association president Elroy Simons informed members that the meeting would be held again later that month and urged them to round up supporters of the extension and bring them to the meeting.<sup>73</sup>

As for the Citizens' Council on City Planning, it continued its steadfast support of the City Planning Commission and its expressway plans. Having already approved the Schuylkill Expressway at its December 1948 delegates' meeting, the Council called another delegates' meeting for February 1950 to discuss the fact that the Roosevelt Boulevard Extension would require some residents to move. The meeting resulted in the reaffirmation of the Council's original resolution approving the expressway. In informing Governor Duff of the Council's support, Executive Director John Mladjen told him, "The Citizens' Council recognizes the hardships that will occur and have expressed their [sic] regrets that the interests of a few people must sometimes be sacrificed for the general welfare of all the citizens."<sup>74</sup>

The Council's decision to support the expressway extension was not unanimous, however, as the aforementioned Germantown, Mt. Airy, and Chestnut Hill Improvement

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<sup>72</sup> Memo to Files, 31 July 1950, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>73</sup> Elroy Simons to Members of United Northeast Civic Association, 11 October 1950, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>74</sup> John Mladjen to James Duff, 7 March 1950, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

Association, a member of the Council, continued its opposition. The group's president, Albert Redles, claimed at a public meeting on October 17, 1950, that the Nicetown Civic Association, the Nicetown Businessmen's Association, and several other groups opposed the extension as well.<sup>75</sup> Edward Hopkinson, who attended the meeting, reminded the assembled group that at Bacon's March 1949 meeting with Nicetown residents, four alternate routes had been proposed, and that the Planning Commission had given detailed study to three of them before discarding them. Planners had rejected immediately the fourth proposal, which entailed building a bypass to the north of the city, feeling that only routes within the city limits would reduce traffic congestion adequately by taking cars off local streets and shifting them to the expressway.<sup>76</sup> The lack of unanimity within the Citizens' Council's membership had no discernable effect on either the attitude of city officials or the Council's leadership's staunch support for the expressway.

The City Council hearing of October 31, 1950 was the last gasp for community opposition to the Roosevelt Boulevard Extension. Members of the Greater Philadelphia movement, in response to a personal plea from Director of Public Works Thomas Buckley, showed up at the hearing to demonstrate the business community's support for the proposed expressway route.<sup>77</sup> The GPM also helped to lay the groundwork in terms of public relations, helping to arrange a meeting between Buckley and *Philadelphia*

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<sup>75</sup> Albert Redles, "Statement of Albert H. Redles, Chairman of the Civic Planning Committee, and President of the Germantown-Mt. Airy and Chestnut Hill Improvement Association at Public Hearing, October 17, 1950, Before the Public Works Committee of Philadelphia City Council Opposing the Construction of the Roosevelt Boulevard Extension," 17 October 1950, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>76</sup> Statement of Edward Hopkinson, 17 October 1950, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>77</sup> Greater Philadelphia Movement, Minutes of Board of Directors' meeting, 4 October 1950, Papers of the Greater Philadelphia Movement, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

*Inquirer* editorial director Paul Warner “for the purpose of explaining the necessity of retaining the Roosevelt Boulevard spur in the plan.”<sup>78</sup>

At the hearing, protesting residents questioned consultant Michael Rapuano about the proposed route, with much of the questioning focusing on who was to be served by the extension. Countering the argument that the extension was being designed to serve people trying to get through Philadelphia, rather than to Philadelphia, Rapuano claimed that 85% of the traffic entering the city on the Schuylkill Expressway would be bound for destinations within the city.<sup>79</sup> Rapuano’s statement illustrated clearly planners’ and engineers’ failure to consider that expressways, in generating their own demand, could add to a city’s traffic congestion. In November, City Council’s committee on public works approved the Schuylkill Expressway plan, including the Roosevelt Boulevard Extension, by a 9-0 vote, paving the way for the December 1950 city-state agreement for construction of the highway.<sup>80</sup> Philadelphia’s first anti-expressway movement had failed.

With the City Planning Commission, the Department of Public Works, the Pennsylvania Department of Highways, and the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads all in agreement that Philadelphia needed the Schuylkill Expressway, little outside pressure was needed to push the project through. Nevertheless, in the wake of the December 1950 agreement, two of the city’s most important business groups rushed to take credit. Saying in a letter to Gimbel Brothers department store head and Chamber of Commerce president Arthur Kaufmann that the planned highway “could generally be termed the

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<sup>78</sup> Greater Philadelphia Movement, Minutes of Executive Committee meeting, 25 October 1950, Papers of the Greater Philadelphia Movement, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>79</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 31 October 1950, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>80</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 28 November 1950, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

greatest single improvement in our city's history," Greater Philadelphia Movement board member and Philadelphia National Bank president Frederic Potts took note of the delay the Nicetown protests had caused, and highlighted his organization's role in overcoming the opposition. The GPM, he stated, wrote an October 1950 letter to Mayor Samuel backing the expressway, which was then published in the newspapers, and organized a meeting with city officials and planners aimed at discrediting alternative expressway proposals from Nicetown residents. Chamber of Commerce member W. Jordan passed Potts' letter on to C.V. Conole, the Chamber's executive director, decrying the GPM's effort to take credit for the Schuylkill Expressway. The Chamber, he emphasized, had been cooperating closely with city and state officials since 1948 and had taken "the leading part" in the Schuylkill and other road projects.<sup>81</sup> The competitive crowing of the city's business leaders aside, the evidence suggests that officials at all levels of government were committed to building the Schuylkill Expressway regardless of what outside groups thought of the project.

The Nicetown protest was not the last controversy to arise during the planning for the Schuylkill Expressway. Another minor revolt erupted over the portion of the expressway slated to tear through Fairmount Park. As with the Nicetown controversy, the Fairmount Park battle did not implicate larger questions about the purpose or necessity of modern expressways or the larger impact such roads had on the cities through which they passed. Moreover, this was not a grassroots fight, but one that existed almost entirely within the Fairmount Park Commission, which was charged with

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<sup>81</sup> W. Jordan to C.V. Conole, 23 January 1951, enclosing Frederic Potts to Arthur Kaufmann, 18 January 1951, Papers of the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

preserving Philadelphia's parkland for use by the public. Like the Nicetown situation, this controversy was short-lived and failed to alter what seemed to be the expressway's inevitable course.

Fairmount Park, beloved by residents of the Philadelphia region, was a long chain of parkland stretching from the city to neighboring Lower Merion Township, immediately to the northwest.<sup>82</sup> The urban portion of the park hugged the Schuylkill River, with most of the parkland on the river's west bank. Building an expressway through what had been a long-cherished place of peace and relaxation for generations of Philadelphians generated surprisingly little public protest. Planners' concerns, from the beginning, focused on how the FPC – the approval of which was required to use parkland for the expressway – would react to the preliminary plans.

Although passenger cars already passed through Fairmount Park on scenic West River Drive, Edmund Bacon worried at first that the FPC might object to building an all-purpose expressway through the park that would allow trucks. If trucks were not allowed through the park, he feared, the state might decline to extend financial assistance in building the expressway.<sup>83</sup> Bacon's concerns were justified, at least initially, as the plan to allow trucks to rumble through the park raised "strong objections" from the park commissioners.<sup>84</sup> The protest over trucks was extremely short-lived, however, and the

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<sup>82</sup> Fairmount Park was officially founded in 1855, when the city acquired the Lemon Hill estate and dedicated it as a public park. The city established the Fairmount Park Commission in 1867, giving it the responsibility of preserving for the public all of Philadelphia's parklands. City of Philadelphia, Department of Records and Free Library of Philadelphia, "Philadelphia Information Locator Service: Agency Information"; available from <http://www.phila.gov/phils/Docs/Inventor/graphics/agencies/A149.htm>; Internet; accessed 6 January 2010.

<sup>83</sup> Edmund Bacon to Edward Hopkinson, 11 August 1948, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>84</sup> Hans Blumenfeld to Edmund Bacon, 11 September 1948, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

FPC relented in October 1948, giving its preliminary approval after being assured that the “the integrity and beauty of the West River Drive and West Park area would be preserved.”<sup>85</sup> A report issued soon after by the Citizens’ Council on City Planning, detailed below, shed some light on how planners intended to keep the expressway from ruining the natural ambiance of the park.

In November 1948 Bacon and assistant site planner (and future Executive Director of the Citizens’ Council) Aaron Levine met with members of the Citizens’ Council to discuss the expressway. While some Council members had entered the meeting with doubts about running the road through Fairmount Park, they were persuaded quickly that the Planning Commission’s plan was best.<sup>86</sup> Later that month, the Citizens’ Council went public with its support, proclaiming:

The Expressway route has been carefully located to avoid as far as practicable interference with the appearance and the functioning of Fairmount Park. Along most of its length the Expressway is located just to the west of the Reading [Railroad] tracks where it is shielded from the rest of the Park both by planting and by differences in elevation. Owing to its location near the tracks and the sloping terrain, this strip is of small scenic and recreational value.<sup>87</sup>

Perhaps because the Citizens’ Council’s steadfast support of the Schuylkill Expressway route made it appear to be a *fait accompli*, there seems to have been no organized public opposition by Philadelphians to building the expressway through the park. As a result,

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<sup>85</sup> Fairmount Park Commission, Meeting minutes, 11 September 1952, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 149, Fairmount Park Commission.

<sup>86</sup> Aaron Levine to Files, 4 November 1948, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>87</sup> Citizens’ Council on City Planning, “Report on the Schuylkill Expressway,” 29 November 1948, Papers of the Citizens’ Council on City Planning, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

the FPC stood virtually alone when some of its members began to have qualms about the expressway a few years later.

The first phase of the Schuylkill Expressway was built between 1950 and 1954 in suburban Montgomery County, connecting the eastern terminus of the Pennsylvania Turnpike at King of Prussia with City Line Avenue, the border between Philadelphia and its northwestern suburbs. As a result, the Planning Commission and Pennsylvania Department of Highways did not develop detailed, final plans for the Fairmount Park portion of the road right away. When such plans emerged in late 1952, however, some of the park commissioners were displeased with what they saw, leading to a flurry of activity at FPC meetings between September and December that year. In September, following a presentation by city and state officials, the FPC gave the proposed route its tentative approval, with two caveats – first, that the state build underpasses to provide access to parts of the park that would otherwise be isolated, and second, that the design of the road be altered to preserve rather than fill in the Schuylkill Canal locks in the vicinity of the park which, despite the decline of commercial shipping traffic on the Schuylkill, were still used by pleasure boaters.<sup>88</sup> Before these issues could be resolved, Commissioner John B. Kelly complained at the October meeting that the proposed route would “ruin the appearance” of a large section of the park, “do away with the locks,” and would interfere with the Philadelphia Zoo. “Mr. Kelly felt that the present plan would be

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<sup>88</sup> Fairmount Park Commission, Meeting minutes, 11 September 1952, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 149, Fairmount Park Commission.

a mistake,” according to the minutes of that meeting, “and he wished to be recorded as having said so.”<sup>89</sup>

Kelly, a former bricklayer who gained fame in the 1920s as an Olympic rowing champion (and whose daughter, actress Grace Kelly, later became Princess Grace of Monaco), had run for mayor as a Democrat in 1935, losing by 49,000 votes at a time when the Republicans maintained a stranglehold on City Hall. He joined the FPC in 1939, becoming vice-president in 1952 and president in 1958. During his tenure, Kelly was known as a vociferous advocate for Fairmount Park who was responsible for two innovations in the park that met initially with opposition – the building of a playhouse and an Olympic-sized swimming pool, the latter of which was named in his honor.<sup>90</sup> Despite his earlier victories, Kelly’s protests regarding the locks fell on deaf ears, because state officials estimated it would cost an additional \$1 million to preserve the locks, an expense they considered “untenable.” Although Kelly relented on the issue of underpasses, he remained staunchly opposed to the destruction of the locks. In this position he was joined by Commissioner Harold Saylor, who reminded the other commissioners that had been entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining the park for the people of Philadelphia and that doing away with the locks would destroy a significant part of the park’s utility. After a heated discussion that included a warning from Mayor Joseph Clark that the city could lose state funds by delaying its approval over the lock issue, the commissioners voted 10-4 in favor of the state-approved route.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Fairmount Park Commission, Meeting minutes, 9 October 1952, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 149, Fairmount Park Commission.

<sup>90</sup> “John B. Kelly, Sr., Contractor, Dies,” *New York Times*, 21 June 1960, p. 33.

<sup>91</sup> Fairmount Park Commission, Meeting minutes, 6 November 1952, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 149, Fairmount Park Commission.

Commissioner Kelly charged Clark and his administration angrily with pressuring the city officials on the Fairmount Park Commission to approve the state's route by telling them that the state would refuse to build the Schuylkill Expressway otherwise. Kelly sought unsuccessfully to have the city officials removed from the FPC.<sup>92</sup>

At another meeting on December 11, the FPC reversed course twice – first by overturning its earlier acceptance of the state's route (based on a change that moved a ramp to land the commissioners wanted to use for parking at the Philadelphia Zoo), and then by accepting it again, this time by a 9-2 vote. An outraged Kelly, one of only two remaining dissenters, proclaimed, "I'm against the whole business. The state wants to wreck the park just to save a little money. We've got a park you couldn't buy anywhere and now the state wants to pour concrete all over it."<sup>93</sup> Most of the commissioners, however, continued to express concern that they would be responsible for the city losing \$8 million in state funds were they to delay the expressway.<sup>94</sup>

One issue remained open, however, as the FPC decided at its December 11 meeting to prepare its own plan for how to route the expressway around the zoo, which stood within the park on the west bank of the Schuylkill River. An easterly route, which the state preferred due to its lower cost, would run between the zoo and the river, while a westerly route, advocated by the FPC, would leave the land between the zoo and the river undisturbed. On December 17, the FPC presented its alternate plan to Edmund Bacon, Mayor Clark, and other city officials, who agreed to ask the state to postpone work on

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<sup>92</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 7 December 1952, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>93</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 12 December 1952, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>94</sup> Fairmount Park Commission, Meeting minutes, 11 December 1952, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 149, Fairmount Park Commission.

that portion of the expressway until the alternate plan could be evaluated.<sup>95</sup> In June 1953, however, the Planning Commission rejected the idea of proposing the westerly route as its preferred plan due to the extra \$5.4 million the city would have to pay toward the increased cost. Money was not the only issue – state officials let it be known that regardless of cost, they considered the FPC’s westerly route to be too dangerous for drivers due to its many curves.<sup>96</sup>

Pennsylvania Secretary of Highways E.L. Schmidt claimed that the state was “of a mind” not to build the expressway through the park until city officials could get their act together and agree on a definite route. Schmidt, of course, coupled his threat with a reminder that the state would have to use the money for other projects if Philadelphia could not commit quickly. Fairmount Park Commission chair Charles Thompson was concerned, fretting that “if the state stays out, that means they’ll drop the expressway at City Line, leaving thousands of automobiles to find their way through the park as best they can.” Commissioner Joseph Gaffney scoffed at Thompson’s fear, replying, “We’re not children. Why should we be frightened by a lot of wild talk like that from Schmidt? He’s not going to drop that road at City Line. He’s got to build it south and we ought to make him put it where we want it.” Mayor Clark was not so bold, proclaiming, “We don’t like it, but we will take it, because we can’t afford to leave it.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Fairmount Park Commission, Meeting minutes, 17 December 1952, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 149, Fairmount Park Commission.

<sup>96</sup> Fairmount Park Commission, Meeting minutes, 14 May 1953, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 149, Fairmount Park Commission.

<sup>97</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 3 June 1953, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.; Fairmount Park Commission, Meeting minutes, 3 June 1953, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 149, Fairmount Park Commission.

Seeking a compromise, the FPC proposed building a viaduct that would elevate the expressway in order to carry it past the east side of the zoo without wrecking the riverbank. Republican Governor John Fine, a former judge in northeastern Pennsylvania, said that he would consider the compromise plan, not wanting his administration to go down in history as having “chopped down thousands of trees.”<sup>98</sup> The City Council approved the FPC’s viaduct route, but needed final approval from the city’s Art Commission, which had the ability to veto certain structures that would affect the city’s physical appearance.<sup>99</sup> City officials did not anticipate that this would be a problem, but the Art Commission surprised everyone by voting down the proposed viaduct, saying it would destroy the natural beauty of a long stretch of river frontage in the park. The failure of its compromise plan left the FPC with no alternative but to accept the state’s plan to route the expressway east of the zoo at ground level.<sup>100</sup> The city’s business community, represented most prominently by the Greater Philadelphia Movement, urged that the city approve the ground-level route quickly so that construction could begin.<sup>101</sup>

The battle over Fairmount Park was now, for all intents and purposes, over. The Fairmount Park Commission had lost on every single point on which it had challenged the route and design of the Schuylkill Expressway. Three Philadelphians, acting on a

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<sup>98</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 24 September 1953, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>99</sup> The Art Commission, known prior to 1951 as the Art Jury, had the power to approve or disapprove certain items that would affect the city’s physical appearance, including “structures or fixtures to be erected over highways, streams, lakes, squares, parks or other public places within the city.” City of Philadelphia, Department of Records and Free Library of Philadelphia, “Philadelphia Information Locator Service: Agency Information”; available from <http://www.phila.gov/phils/Docs/Inventor/graphics/agencies/A140.htm>; Internet; accessed 25 September 2009.

<sup>100</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 7 October 1953, 13 November 1953, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>101</sup> Greater Philadelphia Movement, Annual report, 1953, Papers of the Greater Philadelphia Movement, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

suggestion from former Pennsylvania Supreme Court justice Grover Ladner that “some public spirited citizens” should sue to prevent the expressway from cutting through the park, did sue the FPC in November 1953 to prevent it from ceding the necessary land to the state.<sup>102</sup> The lawsuit seems to have generated little public support. An editorial in the *Evening Bulletin* expressed disapproval, calling it “unthinkable” that “any Philadelphian would deliberately kill the [expressway] project,” and bemoaning the “danger that it will die or be seriously delayed” or that the city would lose state funds “to other communities that know what they want and can speak with undivided voices.”<sup>103</sup>

To the relief of many, the legal challenge to the expressway failed. Because the road would affect the physical appearance of the park, officials still needed the approval of the Art Commission. Feeling, evidently, that a ground-level expressway would be less unsightly than a viaduct, the Art Commission approved the state’s plan in early 1954.<sup>104</sup> Later that year, construction on the first section of the Schuylkill Expressway within Philadelphia began.<sup>105</sup> Ironically, several years later, the *Evening Bulletin* – seeming to have forgotten its earlier desire that the community “speak with undivided voices” – grumbled about the damage being done to Fairmount Park in an editorial entitled “Park Beauty or Roads?” After recounting the story of the Fairmount Park Commission’s expulsion in 1871 of surveyors attempting to lay a new railroad line across the park, the

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<sup>102</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 June 1953, *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 17 November 1953, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>103</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 20 November 1953, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>104</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 26 January 1954, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>105</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Annual report, 1954, p. 12, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

paper observed, “No one would dare behave that way with these lords of creation, the modern concrete highway engineers.” The editorial continued as follows:

It makes no difference (although John B. Kelly put up a stout fight) whether the Schuylkill Expressway will cut off ready access to about a mile of the river bank. . . . We know the force of one magic formula, which runs as follows: If you people won't accept the highway line as we have traced it, then you don't get this wonderful State money. The Federal Highway Act has multiplied many times the power of this appeal. But, in the case of park land and park amenities created for other purposes, it amounts to saying: If you don't give us what doesn't belong to you, we won't ruin the beauty you keep in trust for all the people.<sup>106</sup>

The paper's change of heart came too late to make a difference. By 1958, the section of the Schuylkill Expressway cutting through Fairmount Park was complete.

The controversies over the Roosevelt Boulevard Extension and the Fairmount Park portion of the route delayed the Schuylkill Expressway a bit, but did nothing to stop the steamroller, both literal and figurative, of highway planning and construction in the 1940s and 1950s. Neither battle resulted in a reexamination of Philadelphia's transportation planning priorities or a searching analysis of the overall impact of urban expressways. The overwhelming consensus in favor of expressway construction on the part of planners, engineers, and elected officials resulted by 1959 in a highway that Philadelphians considered dangerous, obsolete, and clogged hopelessly with bumper-to-bumper traffic.

For city officials, battles over expressway routes were dangerous nuisances that at best delayed projects, and at worst threatened the loss of funds for projects they perceived as desperately needed. This fear was exacerbated by the knowledge that the federal

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<sup>106</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 17 May 1957, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

government was preparing to pass what ultimately became the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act (commonly known as the Interstate Highway Act) of 1956, a landmark piece of legislation that raised the financial stakes considerably for all concerned with expressway planning. The lesson city officials learned from the Fairmount Park fight, which had delayed the project by approximately 18 months, was to do everything possible to get quick City Council approval of future expressway routes before complications could arise. This issue loomed particularly large in 1955, as planners worked on the Delaware Expressway, a highway they expected to be built largely with federal money.<sup>107</sup>

### **The Delaware Expressway: Early Controversies**

As early as 1949, before ground was even broken for the construction of the Schuylkill Expressway, many – including expressway proponents – predicted accurately that the expressway would be inadequate to serve the city’s traffic needs. This realization, however, did not prompt a wholesale reassessment of Philadelphia’s transportation planning strategy. On the contrary, the prevailing philosophy in favor of expressways was so strong that planners and politicians alike believed that if a highway built to relieve traffic congestion became clogged with traffic itself, the solution was simply to build another highway. “The answer” to ensuring that the Schuylkill Expressway would not become overwhelmed with traffic, reported the *Evening Bulletin* in 1949, “is the Delaware Expressway.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 19 June 1955, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>108</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 21 August 1949, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

The Delaware Expressway was the manifestation of planners' longstanding vision of a major highway running along the Delaware River, which formed the city's eastern boundary as well as the boundary between Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Back in 1944, planners had considered putting an expressway on a widened Delaware Avenue, the city's existing waterfront thoroughfare, but engineers expressed doubt as to whether this could be done without interfering with port operations.<sup>109</sup> The idea was put on hold while attention turned to the Schuylkill Expressway, but it was clear from the beginning that planners expected the two highways to work in tandem one day. The Planning Commission's first explicit mention of the Schuylkill Expressway, in its 1947 annual report, declared that the highway would "extend from the Delaware Expressway" without at that time giving further detail on the latter.<sup>110</sup> In 1949, once the city had forwarded initial plans for the Schuylkill Expressway to the state highway department, the Planning Commission identified the Delaware Expressway as its next priority in transportation planning.<sup>111</sup> City officials such as Edmund Bacon and Thomas Buckley, despite advocating vigorously for the Schuylkill, were already concerned that it would be inadequate to handle the traffic it would attract, and told state officials in 1949 that the Delaware Expressway was essential for drawing congestion away from the Schuylkill.<sup>112</sup>

To Philadelphia planners, the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 heightened the need for more expressways. Reviewing its plans "in the light of war demands," the

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<sup>109</sup> Edward Hopkinson to Victor Moore, 16 February 1955, Papers of the Citizens' Council on City Planning, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>110</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Annual report, 1947, p. 7, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>111</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Annual report, 1949, p. 20, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>112</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 21 August 1949, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Planning Commission concluded that “the grave international situation” created the need for a modern expressway system, “valuable both for increasing efficiency of war production and aiding in civilian evacuation problems.” Construction of the Delaware Expressway should begin as soon as possible, said the Commission, “to further the defense effort.” The proposed location of the expressway made it particularly crucial, planners believed, to the development of Philadelphia’s wartime economy, due to the large amount of industry concentrated on the waterfront. As the Commission explained, “The Delaware Expressway would become in effect the conveyor belt of Philadelphia as a producing unit, providing for the transportation of materials and parts between the various units in the total process of producing the finished product. It will provide access to the piers and the warehouses essential for operation of the port. In addition it will help workers to get to the industrial areas and would be of great value in the event of a disaster requiring civilian evacuation.”<sup>113</sup>

The Greater Philadelphia Movement supported the Delaware Expressway from the beginning, agreeing with the Planning Commission’s rationale that a waterfront highway would help to spur economic development and keep the city’s port busy. As the GPM’s Executive Committee stated in 1953, the expressway “would provide good highway transportation facilities from the industrial development taking place in the Bucks County area to the Philadelphia Port. If construction of this expressway is delayed, it is possible that business which should come from this area to Philadelphia

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<sup>113</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Annual report, 1950, p. 1, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

Port will find it easier to get to Port Newark.”<sup>114</sup> The GPM’s reference to Bucks County, a growing suburban area immediately to the north of the city, showed that highway proponents thought of the Delaware Expressway as a way to keep Philadelphia economically relevant during an era in which it was losing population and jobs to the suburbs. In this vein, the Planning Commission released a report calling the expressway a “Regional Life Line,” and pointing out that it “connects with the United States Steel plant at Morrisville [and] the Levittown, Fairless Hills and other rapidly expanding residential areas of lower Bucks County.”<sup>115</sup>

Also contributing to the rationale for the Delaware Expressway was the ongoing effort to build a new Food Distribution Center to replace the decaying wholesale food market in Center City, near the waterfront. In February 1955, the Greater Philadelphia Movement took the lead by chartering the Food Distribution Center Corporation with a board of directors consisting of GPM members, other businessmen, and city officials. Consistent with Philadelphia tradition, private business interests cooperated closely with city government to undertake a major redevelopment project. The site of the new center was in South Philadelphia, not far from the Delaware River, on land the city had been using as a dump site. The Food Distribution Center was a huge undertaking; the first phase was completed in 1958, but the center continued to evolve until its final completion in 1966.<sup>116</sup> The food wholesalers who moved into the new facility were eager to see the

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<sup>114</sup> Greater Philadelphia Movement, Minutes of Executive Committee meeting, 29 April 1953, Papers of the Greater Philadelphia Movement, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>115</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, “Delaware Expressway – Regional Life Line,” Report, undated, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>116</sup> Petshek, 184-91.

new expressway completed, as it would pass close by the distribution center, aiding greatly the transportation of foodstuffs.

The Planning Commission spent much of 1951 studying various routes for the Delaware Expressway, and by January 1952, had come up with preliminary plans.<sup>117</sup> In keeping with the closed atmosphere surrounding highway planning in the 1950s, it appears that the Commission consulted the public neither on the need for the expressway nor on the preliminary routes to be studied. By 1953, the Commission turned its focus to the thorny problem of how the project would be funded.<sup>118</sup> Because a large amount of city and state money was already tied up in the Schuylkill Expressway, planners and other officials considered seriously the prospect of making the Delaware Expressway a toll road, a strategy the Planning Commission's consulting engineers, Madigan-Hyland, found feasible.<sup>119</sup> Democratic mayor Joseph Clark, who had been elected in 1951 to replace Samuel (who had served two terms and was not eligible for reelection), took the opportunity to chide the state Department of Highways for shortchanging Philadelphia on road construction funds relative to rural areas of the state. The Delaware Expressway, he lamented, "will have to be a toll highway unless the State Highway Department is prepared to be more generous to Philadelphia in the future than it has been in the past."<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Annual reports, 1951, p.23, 1953, p. 10-11, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>118</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Annual report, 1953, p. 10-11, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>119</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11 June 1953, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA; Bureau of Municipal Research and Pennsylvania Economy League, "The Delaware Expressway: Free or Toll? A report in the interest of further discussion," 1955; Madigan-Hyland Consulting Engineers, "Economic Feasibility of Delaware Expressway, First phase study," 1955, Pamphlet Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>120</sup> Joseph Clark, "Our Traffic Problem and its Solution," Transcript of radio address, 4 June 1954, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

By 1955, however, federal legislation for a new interstate highway system seemed closer to reality. Proponents of the Delaware Expressway wanted desperately to have all of their ducks in a row by the time Congress acted so that Philadelphia would have first crack at a giant new pot of federal money. Planners recalled nervously the fight over the route of the Schuylkill Expressway that had delayed the project and hoped that a similar result could be avoided this time. What the city needed, said the *Evening Bulletin*, was “a route which will get [City] Council support without a prolonged wrangle. A fight will hurt, and perhaps doom, the project.”<sup>121</sup>

When the Interstate Highway Act became law in June 1956, bringing with it the possibility of having the federal government pay for 90% of the Delaware Expressway, the question of building a toll road faded away, replaced by a focus on ensuring that Philadelphia could obtain enough of Pennsylvania’s share of federal funds under the new law. Delaware Expressway proponents were well aware that they would be competing with other localities throughout Pennsylvania for the state’s share of federal money. Deputy Managing Director John Bailey told his boss, Managing Director Donald Wagner (a member of the mayor’s cabinet), of a conversation he had had with Arthur Wiesenberger, Chief Engineer of the state highway department. He had gone to meet with Wiesenberger to complain that the state had not yet placed the Delaware Expressway on its preliminary highway plan and was resisting making a financial contribution to engineering studies for the road.

Bailey came away from his talk with Wiesenberger with a sense of the “obvious reluctance in the State to paying for any planning which would tend to get more interstate

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<sup>121</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 19 June 1955, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

money into Philadelphia.” In fact, Wiesenberger had said plainly that unless Pennsylvania elected another Democratic governor in the next election, Philadelphia had little hope of completing the Delaware Expressway due to the “terrific amount of sniping in the hinterland about the amount of work being done in Philadelphia.”<sup>122</sup> If the city hoped to get its highway built, Wiesenberger advised, it had to be willing to spend the money to create sound engineering studies upon which to base its application for federal aid.<sup>123</sup>

The Planning Commission already had its consultants from the firm of Edwards, Kelcey, and Beck working on engineering studies to be submitted to the state and federal governments.<sup>124</sup> Early on, it was apparent that the prevailing ethos of prioritizing expressway construction to the exclusion of mass transportation improvements had not changed. One question the engineers resolved quickly was whether to integrate mass transit into the design of the Delaware Expressway. R.F. Tyson, the president of the Philadelphia Transportation Company, advocated building the highway with a wide median strip to accommodate mass transit tracks. “For too many years,” he complained, “too many highway and traffic engineers were almost completely engrossed in meeting the requirements of the motorist, giving very little if any attention to the needs of those who use mass transportation.”<sup>125</sup> The engineers rejected the expressway as a mass transit

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<sup>122</sup> Pennsylvania’s governor in 1956 was Democrat George Leader, who had assumed office in January 1955. Leader was followed by another Democrat, David Lawrence, who served until January 1963. William Scranton then reclaimed the governorship for the Republicans, who held it traditionally, having defeated Democrat Richardson Dilworth when the latter resigned as Philadelphia mayor in order to run.

<sup>123</sup> John Bailey to Donald Wagner, 10 July 1956, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>124</sup> Philadelphia Bureau of Public Information and Service, Press release, 30 July 1956, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>125</sup> R.F. Tyson to John Bailey, 5 July 1956, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

route, however, because the waterfront route provided an “extreme marginal rather than axial location.”<sup>126</sup> An independent engineer named Charles Elcock wrote to Edmund Bacon proposing that bus stops be placed along the expressway, with dedicated lanes to allow the buses to enter and exit the main travel lanes safely, but Bacon rejected this idea as well, replying that buses could pick up passengers in their own neighborhoods and then use the expressway for non-stop runs.<sup>127</sup> Planners never revisited the question of using the Delaware Expressway corridor for mass transit.

The consulting engineers had listed public opinion as one of the factors that would bear on choosing an expressway route, but given the tenor of the times, it is likely that they underestimated how influential a factor it would become. Planners hoped that the Delaware Expressway would be less controversial than the Schuylkill Expressway – a hope that was, frankly, incredibly naive. The Schuylkill Expressway followed a river route for the vast majority of its course through the city, with only the Fairmount Park section of the road and the Roosevelt Boulevard spur cause for serious unrest. In contrast, the Delaware Expressway was to run the length of the city’s historic waterfront on a course totaling 30 miles from one city line to another, demolishing the factories, warehouses, homes, and churches in its path. The multiple battles that occurred over the expressway between 1956 and 1979, when the highway was completed, made the difficulties surrounding the Schuylkill Expressway appear less than insignificant by comparison.

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<sup>126</sup> Philadelphia Bureau of Public Information and Service, Press release, 30 July 1956, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>127</sup> Charles Elcock to Edmund Bacon, 29 June 1956; Edmund Bacon to Charles Elcock, 6 August 1956, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

Although the Delaware Expressway did prove to be an extremely controversial and drawn-out highway project, the early struggles over the road's planning, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, were minor compared to the battles of the later 1960s and 1970s. As was true with the Schuylkill Expressway controversies, some citizens sought alterations to the route to preserve their own homes, churches, or businesses, but failed to question the basic assumptions that underlay the era's expressway construction. Because no one was able to get planners to reconsider their devotion to expressways in the 1950s, the Delaware Expressway's completion was a foregone conclusion by the time expressway planning became more democratic and more citizens awoke to the destructive consequences of the concrete monsters tearing through the nation's cities.

The battle over the expressway route began in 1956, with the first question being whether to run the expressway along Delaware Avenue, on the waterfront, or closer to Front Street, one block farther inland. As was the case in the 1940s, some were concerned that placing the highway too close to the Delaware River would interfere with port operations. Transportation consultant James Buckley pointed out that placing the Delaware Expressway on Delaware Avenue would have:

a blighting effect both on the adjacent waterfront property to the east, and on the related commercial and warehouse facilities to the west. Since waterfront and waterfront-related activity is basic to the Philadelphia economy and to its continued growth and prosperity, the installation of the Expressway in Delaware Avenue is not compatible with the best interests of the City and its people. An alignment west of Delaware Avenue should be adopted.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> James C. Buckley, Inc. to Fredric Mann, 10 September 1956, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

Others concerned with the highway's impact on the business community and economic life of the city shared this concern. Harry Schad, chair of the Joint Executive Committee for the Improvement and Development of the Philadelphia Port Area, told Bacon that placing the Delaware Expressway right on the river would present "an unalterable obstacle to the free and easy movement of traffic within the port area."<sup>129</sup> James Sutton, chair of the Philadelphia Committee on City Policy, agreed.<sup>130</sup>

The prospect of moving the highway farther inland caused substantial distress in several quarters of the city where leaders and residents had advocated a waterfront route, which they believed would be less disruptive to their communities. Objections to a Front Street route were based on concerns about the destruction of treasured buildings and homes in the waterfront area – the most historic part of one of America's most historic cities. One area of particular concern was Elfreth's Alley, a small residential lane in the Society Hill neighborhood between Front and 2<sup>nd</sup> Streets and containing some of the most historic homes in America, which looked much as they did in colonial days. The Elfreth's Alley Association and the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks wrote to Albert Greenfield, chair of the Planning Commission, asking that he prevent the Delaware Expressway from harming the beloved street and its irreplaceable homes.<sup>131</sup>

Southwark, a mostly Catholic neighborhood near the waterfront in South Philadelphia, was the site of significant anxiety regarding a potential inland route for the

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<sup>129</sup> Harry Schad to Edmund Bacon, 15 October 1956, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

<sup>130</sup> James Sutton to Albert Greenfield, 10 October 1956, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>131</sup> Marghrita Peacock to Albert Greenfield, 27 September 1956; Symington Landreth to Albert Greenfield, 2 October 1956, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

Delaware Expressway. The generally agreed upon boundaries of Southwark were the Delaware River and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street on the east and west, and South Street and Washington Avenue on the north and south. Being a waterfront neighborhood, Southwark was one of the oldest parts of Philadelphia; Swedes were the first Europeans to settle there, in 1653, and the neighborhood experienced dramatic growth between 1740 and 1770. In the 1960s, Southwark was populated mainly by white ethnic groups, including many people of Polish, Russian, and Irish descent. It was a decidedly working-class neighborhood: the three census tracts encompassing Southwark had median family incomes in 1960 of \$4,933, \$3,988, and \$3,987, compared to a national median of \$5,620.<sup>132</sup>

Residents of Southwark were worried that shifting the expressway route closer to Front Street would result in the destruction of several historic churches, some of which had served the area's various ethnic communities for centuries. They were also concerned about a route that would isolate the most well-known of these churches, Gloria Dei, also known as Old Swedes' Church, from the rest of the neighborhood. Old Swedes' was built on the waterfront in 1700 and was the oldest church in Pennsylvania. The area around it, like Society Hill, was studded with historic houses, many of which lay in the expressway's proposed path. The Colonial Philadelphia Historical Society was moved to say that "location of the proposed Delaware Expressway on Front Street between Elfreth's Alley and Old Swedes' Church would mean the greatest slaughter of

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<sup>132</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "U.S. Censuses of Population and Housing: 1960"; [document on-line]; available from <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/41953654v8ch06.pdf>; Internet; accessed 25 September 2009; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "Historical Income Tables – Families"; [document on-line]; available from <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/histinc/f07ar.html>; Internet; accessed 25 September 2009; *The Sunday Bulletin Magazine*, 8 January 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

early Philadelphia houses ever proposed.”<sup>133</sup> The Reverend Henry Walsh of Sacred Heart Rectory asked Democratic mayor Richardson Dilworth, a close ally of Mayor Clark’s who had succeeded him in 1956, whether he was “on the side of human beings, or on the side of the engineers whose hearts are apparently made of the steel and concrete with which they would build a highway on the crushed homes of thousands of people and the ruins of six Catholic parishes.”<sup>134</sup>

The protests over an inland route were not limited to South Philadelphia and Center City. Joseph Schafer, chair of the Traffic and Transportation Committee of the United Northeast Civic Association – an umbrella community organization in the large, mainly white section of the city known as Northeast Philadelphia – denounced the Planning Commission’s engineers for dismissing the waterfront route his organization had suggested, accusing them of “gross misrepresentation” and having “distorted the true facts” in order to comply with the wishes of the Northeast Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce that the area be reserved exclusively for industrial use. “To shield a few industrialists from a highway across [sic] the river,” he charged, “the Northeast Chamber, the engineers, and the city officials would sacrifice many other industrial plants and homes affecting thousands of people.”<sup>135</sup> A few months later, in his role as president of the Businessmen’s and Taxpayers’ Association of Frankford, Schafer continued to argue for a riverfront route, asserting that it would result in virtually no homes being destroyed in his area and that the highway could be designed to avoid interference with business

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<sup>133</sup> Colonial Philadelphia Historical Society, Press release, 28 September 1956, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>134</sup> Henry Walsh to Richardson Dilworth, 4 October 1956, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>135</sup> Joseph Schafer to Richardson Dilworth et al., 6 August 1956, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

operations. In fact, he claimed, a riverfront expressway would invite improvement of that area and result in the expansion of port facilities in the Northeast section of the city.<sup>136</sup>

Although planners made no final decisions on the Delaware Expressway route in 1956, the Planning Commission seemed at the outset more receptive to the concerns of Philadelphia's business community about the highway's potential impact on port operations. In October 1956, the Commission proposed officially moving part of the route that would most affect the port area west from Delaware Avenue to the area of Front Street.<sup>137</sup> As 1957 dawned, planners were expending much of their energy trying to determine how the expressway would affect the city's businesses. A consultant the Planning Commission hired to assist with this issue compiled a list of companies whose property might be taken for the highway; the companies named revealed a broad array of potentially affected industries, including sugar refining, metal, transportation, warehousing and safe deposit, dairies, plywood, groceries, auto body works, bags, syrup, electric power, trucking, tools, soap, oil products, chemicals, fabrics, auto parts, packing coal, and lace.<sup>138</sup> Mayor Dilworth assured businesses in the area that "if it becomes necessary for you to relocate your plant, every effort will be made to help you find a place in the City, with a minimum of inconvenience to your operations." The city's Department of Commerce, he told them, had already begun to make arrangements, such as listing all the available manufacturing and warehousing floor space in the city, listing all available land in the city on which new plants could be built, and offering emergency

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<sup>136</sup> Joseph Schafer, "Supplemental Report on the Delaware Expressway," 25 October 1956, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>137</sup> Albert Greenfield to James Sutton, 12 October 1956, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>138</sup> Kenneth G. Smith & Associates, Inc., "Report on Delaware Expressway," January 1957, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

engineering and economic assistance to businesses required to move.<sup>139</sup> Clearly, Dilworth and his administration were committed to ensuring that the expressway, which was designed in part to enhance the city's economic life, not be allowed to decimate Philadelphia's industries.

By early 1957, City Council had decided on the inland route, the state Department of Highways had approved the same, and the Bureau of Public Roads had placed the Delaware Expressway on the Interstate System.<sup>140</sup> Dilworth, unaware of the difficulties yet to come, told Pennsylvania Secretary of Highways Lewis Stevens in late 1957 that the "short but sharp argument" over the route of the expressway had been resolved in favor of Front Street because the Delaware Avenue route "met with violent, and I believe sound, objections from port interests, railroads, and our own Department of Commerce."<sup>141</sup> Although the United Northeast Civic Association continued to object strenuously to an inland route, Managing Director Wagner felt that the mayor should advise state officials to ignore these protests as "not representative of any large group."<sup>142</sup> In truth, Northeast Philadelphia was divided on the issue. Bruce Beaton, another Northeast Philadelphia civic leader whose organization was a member of the United Northeast Civic Association, asserted a few months later that Schafer and his supporters were not representative of the area as a whole or even of the UNCA, and that many

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<sup>139</sup> Richardson Dilworth to All Firms Affected by the Installation of the Delaware Expressway, 6 March 1957, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>140</sup> "Mayor's Route is Accepted for Delaware Expressway," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 15 January 1957, p. 19.

<sup>141</sup> Richardson Dilworth to Lewis Stevens, 22 November 1957, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>142</sup> Donald Wagner to Richardson Dilworth, 31 October 1957, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

residents joined the Northeast Chamber of Commerce in preferring a river route because it would be less disruptive to industry.<sup>143</sup>

Mayor Dilworth's belief that the expressway route was settled was disproven soon afterward when the Department of Highways rescinded its original acceptance of the city's route based on its engineers' determination that eight lanes, rather than the four- and six-lane sections the city had called for, were necessary. As a result, the Planning Commission's engineers went back to the drawing board and came up with a new design, approved by City Council and the Department of Highways by mid-1958, calling for a route that would swing even further west, cut into more residential areas, and act as a barrier between residential neighborhoods and the more industrial areas on the waterfront.<sup>144</sup>

The *Evening Bulletin* fretted that the new expressway route would create "an imposing barrier" that would, along with future urban highways, make Philadelphia "more sectionalized than ever."<sup>145</sup> Controversy over the route continued to rage, particularly in South Philadelphia, where the route was slated to impact heavily both houses and Catholic parishes. In response to the inquiries of worried citizens, Dilworth downplayed the city's role in selecting a route, insisting that the location of the expressway was "entirely within the control" of state and federal authorities because they would be providing most of the funding.<sup>146</sup> Dilworth's claims were disingenuous at best,

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<sup>143</sup> W. Bruce Beaton to James Richardson, 15 January 1958, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>144</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 4 June 1958, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>145</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 5 June 1958, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>146</sup> Richardson Dilworth to Mary Hayn, 29 April 1958, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

for City Hall was clamoring for the Delaware Expressway and the city's Planning Commission, as always, played a major role in developing proposals for route and design. Had Philadelphia declined the Delaware Expressway funds, of course, the Pennsylvania Department of Highways would have been happy to allocate its share of federal highway money to other projects throughout the state.

In the summer of 1958, city councilman Victor Moore of South Philadelphia, who chaired City Council's Delaware Expressway Committee, proposed a drastic change to the route in an effort to relieve his constituents' anxiety. Under his plan, the Delaware Expressway would be built only as far south as Lombard Street or Washington Avenue (which would spare all or most of South Philadelphia) and then swing westward over one of those streets to connect with the Schuylkill Expressway, thereby creating a loop around Center City. Rather than soothe the controversy, Moore's plan served only to stoke it. Objections abounded, from residents who were concerned that a westward swing would take even more homes; from clergy worried about losing homes in their parishes; from South Philadelphians who did not want to lose a recreation center lying in Moore's route; and from executives of Philadelphia's Food Distribution Center, deep in South Philadelphia, who wanted the new expressway to reach their facility.<sup>147</sup> Dilworth derided Moore's proposal, calling it the "counsel of timidity and fear."<sup>148</sup>

After several months of haggling, City Council reached a compromise in November 1958 by which the expressway route in South Philadelphia would once again be shifted farther toward the waterfront – specifically, east of Water Street, a small north-

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<sup>147</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 24 August 1958, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>148</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 27 August 1958, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

south thoroughfare running in between Delaware Avenue and Front Street. Placated somewhat, Councilman Moore agreed to recommend this route to his committee.<sup>149</sup> A report from consulting engineers Simpson & Curtin, whom the GPM hired to study the issue at the mayor's request, aided the compromise. The engineers found that if the expressway were not built to reach South Philadelphia, the area would become, as the GPM put it, "an isolated island of economic stagnation" and "a congested superslum overrun with automobiles and trucks by 1975." The GPM later took credit for breaking the "bottleneck" on the South Philadelphia question and ensuring that the expressway would be built as far south as Packer Avenue.<sup>150</sup>

In 1959, three years of controversy and route alterations had taken their toll, and the expressway was already far behind schedule. In July of that year, engineers had completed final designs for only 2.9 miles of what was to be a 30-mile route through the city, and only \$5 million had been spent out of an expected \$300 million. Moreover, the Department of Highways was saying it was now short the funds it would need to pay for its 10% of the road.<sup>151</sup> Mayor Dilworth had predicted in May that the expressway would be delayed a dozen years if both federal and state gas taxes – the primary sources of highway funds – were not increased.<sup>152</sup> The funding issue seemed to be a major obstacle,

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<sup>149</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 18 November 1958, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>150</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 16 November 1958, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA; Greater Philadelphia Movement, Annual report, 1958, Papers of the Greater Philadelphia Movement, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>151</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 14 July 1959, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>152</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 21 May 1959, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

but those anxious to see the Delaware Expressway become a reality were unaware that even darker days lay ahead.

While delays mounted, Commissioner of Streets David Smallwood, a fierce expressway advocate, bemoaned the fact that the newly-completed Schuylkill Expressway was already inadequate to handle its traffic demand, heightening the need for expedited construction of the Delaware Expressway.<sup>153</sup> No one in power, however, seems to have questioned whether the Delaware Expressway might, when completed, become just as clogged with traffic as the Schuylkill was. Planners and politicians assumed the need for a new expressway so strongly that few bothered to suggest that it might not be the best solution to Philadelphia's transportation problems. A letter to the *Evening Bulletin* in August 1959 asserted that rather than solving traffic problems, a new expressway would exacerbate them. Road construction, the writer pointed out, led to a rise in car ownership, which in turn led to the need for more roads. "The net result," he wrote, "has been the destruction of public transportation systems through lost patronage until it is predicted that within the next decade we will see the disappearance of intercity railway passenger traffic. . . . Have we gone too far in this direction to be able to reverse?"<sup>154</sup> In the Philadelphia of 1960, however, no answer was forthcoming, and few seemed interested in the question. The *Evening Bulletin*, while admitting that the most "peaceful" course of action would be to forego the expressway completely, asserted that "the peaceful way is not always the best." "The Schuylkill Expressway, in 1960, seems indispensable," the paper claimed, and "the Delaware Expressway quite likely will have

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<sup>153</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 26 August 1959, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>154</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 24 August 1959, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

the same status a decade hence.”<sup>155</sup> In 1960, however, the expressway was about to enter a new and even more contentious phase when engineers completed detailed plans for the Delaware Expressway’s Center City and South Philadelphia sections. The result was more protest, political wrangling, and above all, delay.

### **Mass Transportation: The Postwar Decline**

Philadelphia’s expressway era, which began with the construction of the Schuylkill Expressway and early planning for the Delaware Expressway, coincided with the steep and severe decline of mass transportation. City officials in the 1940s and 1950s prioritized expressways over mass transit consistently, mirroring a pattern that occurred in cities throughout the nation. The disparity in priorities was, to some extent, the product of the Cold War and its accompanying Red Scare – a phenomenon that influenced virtually every area of American public policy. Planners, politicians, and automobile drivers perceived new expressways to be the wave of the future, representing the things that distinguished the United States most from the Soviet Union. Highways would, they believed, promote economic growth and allow more citizens to realize the American Dream by owning homes in the mushrooming suburbs. Perhaps most importantly, Americans loved the automobile – a mode of transport over which individual drivers were supposed to have total control. In contrast to the individualism and prosperity represented by autos and highways stood mass transportation, thought of by policymakers and others as a relic of the past, associated with collectivism, urban decay, and poverty. White flight, which decimated Philadelphia and other cities, making

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<sup>155</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 15 July 1960, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

their populations and their mass transit ridership proportionately poorer and blacker, contributed to these associations.<sup>156</sup>

Postwar cultural beliefs that promoted expressways at the expense of mass transportation helped to create structural factors that pointed in the same direction. Specifically, large amounts of state and federal money were available to assist cities with expressway construction, particularly after the passage of the Interstate Highway Act of 1956, which made available 90% federal funding for interstate highways. The money, and the perception that Philadelphia was in competition with other areas of the state for Pennsylvania's share of federal money, influenced priorities on the local level to a great extent. There were no similar federal programs for urban mass transit prior to the 1960s, and the state was not willing to provide such funds either. As a result, any mass transit improvements Philadelphia wanted to undertake had to come out of the city's own coffers with no outside assistance. Prior to 1968, all of Philadelphia's mass transportation was run by private companies, making unpopular the idea of large capital expenditures, at taxpayers' expense, for the benefit of private shareholders.<sup>157</sup> The city sometimes urged the transit companies to make improvements, but the companies pleaded poverty. Moreover, the city had no ability to force private companies to upgrade their systems short of terminating the operating agreements under which those companies provided service.

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<sup>156</sup> On the subject of how changing racial demographics influenced the image of mass transportation in the postwar era, see Clifton Hood, "Changing Perceptions of Public Space on the New York Rapid Transit System," *Journal of Urban History* 22, no. 3 (March 1996): 308-331.

<sup>157</sup> The Philadelphia Transportation Company owned the urban mass transit system with the notable exceptions of the Broad Street Subway and the Frankford elevated line, to which the city held title. The PTC operated the entire system of buses, subways, and trolleys within the city limits pursuant to a 1907 operating agreement Philadelphia had signed with the PTC's predecessor, Philadelphia Rapid Transit.

Problems inherent to mass transit, combined with the expressway boom, hastened its decline. After the war, all of the area's private transit companies – the Philadelphia Transportation Company, the Philadelphia Suburban Transportation Company, the Pennsylvania Railroad, and the Reading Railroad – experienced declining patronage, shrinking revenues, aging infrastructure and equipment, higher operating costs, increasing customer dissatisfaction, and bitter fights with their customers, their workers, and city government over wages, fares, and service cutbacks.

Even prior to World War II, urban mass transportation in Philadelphia had a troubled history. The modern system took shape over the first few decades of the twentieth century: electric streetcars were prominent by 1900; the city's first transit line, the Market Street subway, was built in 1908 to serve the booming West Philadelphia suburbs; and an extensive modernization program between 1916 and 1934 resulted in the opening of the Frankford elevated line to Northeast Philadelphia in 1922, the North Broad Street subway in 1928, and the South Broad Street Subway and Ridge Avenue Connector in 1934-36. Historian Sam Bass Warner called Philadelphia's prewar transit program "an enormously expensive failure" because the amount of money spent was wildly disproportionate to the benefits gained. The expansion of mass transportation had the unintended consequence of pushing the city's population farther and farther outward, thereby increasing reliance on the automobile. As Warner explained, "no transit system could satisfy all the many paths of travel of the diffuse residential suburbs," making the private automobile a necessity for those who moved away from the downtown area. Transit ridership increased only 4.5 percent from 1912 to 1934, and downtown businesses

suffered as new shopping centers opened on the city's fringes to serve suburban consumers.<sup>158</sup>

The war interrupted what otherwise might have been a steady decline. Philadelphia, like many cities, experienced a large increase in mass transit patronage due to wartime circumstances such as the halting of civilian auto production and the rationing of gasoline. The spike in transit riders ended in 1946, however, after which the PTC lost riders steadily. By 1955, the 1946 peak of over 1.1 billion riders had been cut nearly in half, to 620 million.<sup>159</sup> The number of base fare passengers dropped every single year from 1946 to 1963, from 715 million down to 270 million.<sup>160</sup> By early 1947, it was clear that any goodwill the PTC had accrued during the war had dissipated. The company revealed that compared to 1940-41, it had in 1946 experienced a significant rise in customer complaints, including 75% more complaints about missed stops; 104% more about discourtesy; 97% more about rough and reckless driving; 46% more about service and equipment, and 85% more miscellaneous complaints. Complaints had decreased (by 20%) only with respect to tickets and fares.<sup>161</sup>

The relative dearth of complaints about fares was understandable, as the PTC's base fare of 8 cents (or two tokens for 15 cents) remained in place from 1924 all the way to early 1947.<sup>162</sup> Beginning in 1947, however, there were nearly constant battles between

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<sup>158</sup> Warner, 191-93.

<sup>159</sup> H.G. Loomer to Edmund Bacon, 10 April 1957, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>160</sup> Philadelphia Transportation Company, "Vehicle Miles Operated per 1,000 Base Fare Passengers By Years – 1946 to 1963 Inclusive," Memo, undated, John F. Tucker Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>161</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 28 January 1947, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>162</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 March 1955, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

the PTC, the city, and mass transit patrons over fare increases driven by increased labor costs. That December, despite having received a wage increase a few months earlier, Local 234 of the Transit Workers' Union notified the PTC of its desire to terminate the contract set to expire in February 1948.<sup>163</sup> Tense negotiations took place that winter, and a threatened strike was averted narrowly when Mayor Samuel brokered a compromise that included a 15-cent raise for both the transit workers in Local 234 and the clerical workers in Local 187.<sup>164</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the new labor contract was followed by the PTC's announcement of a fare increase to take effect in March 1948.<sup>165</sup> The city challenged the proposed increase, as it often did, before the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC), which had the authority to allow or disallow the new fare. After the PUC affirmed the higher fare, the city appealed to the Pennsylvania Superior Court seeking to have the PUC's decision overturned.<sup>166</sup> Before the Superior Court had a chance to rule, the PTC filed for yet another fare increase to take effect in January 1949.<sup>167</sup> Mayor Samuel protested immediately, asking the PUC to block the increase and charging in a formal complaint that the PTC was "endangering the health of the traveling public" by making passengers stand for long periods on crowded vehicles and "not making a sincere effort to

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<sup>163</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 14 December 1947, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>164</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 12 February 1948, 16 February 1948, 17 February 1948, 1 March 1948, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>165</sup> PTC Advertisement, *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 19 March 1948, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>166</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 18 June 1948, 11 October 1948, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>167</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 22 December 1948, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

render service to the public at a minimum cost and in an efficient manner.”<sup>168</sup> Within a week of the fare announcement, the PTC and Local 234 began negotiations on a new labor contract, with the union asking for a substantial raise.<sup>169</sup>

Things seemed to be looking up for the PTC in January 1949 when the Superior Court dismissed the city’s appeal of the March 1948 fare increase. Less than a month later, however, Local 234 rejected the PTC’s wage offer and announced that there was no hope for a peaceful settlement. The union also rejected Mayor Samuel’s offer to mediate the dispute, perhaps because the mayor had decided that it would be unfair of him to pressure the PTC to increase wages while fighting fare increases vigorously at the same time.<sup>170</sup> As a result of the impasse, Philadelphia was forced to suffer through a 10-day transit strike, particularly unwelcome in the dead of winter, before the union settled for an 8-cent wage increase and other benefits.<sup>171</sup> Meanwhile, the PUC suspended the PTC’s latest request for a fare increase, and denied its request for a temporary emergency fare increase while the case was pending.<sup>172</sup> In May 1949, however, the PUC did approve an increase to 13 cents (or 3 tokens for 35 cents).<sup>173</sup> The PTC’s victory was short-lived, however, as the Superior Court ordered a return to the previous 10-cent fare until the

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<sup>168</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 23 December 1948, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>169</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 29 December 1948, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>170</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 10 February 1949, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>171</sup> Department of City Transit, Annual report, 1949, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 69, Department of City Transit.

<sup>172</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 1 March 1949, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA. Due to the PTC’s often dire financial condition, the PUC on occasion allowed the company to charge a higher fare while a challenge to that fare was pending, on the condition that the PTC gave passengers vouchers allowing them to redeem the amount of the increase in the event the higher fare was rejected.

<sup>173</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 14 May 1949, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

company could present more information regarding how much additional revenue it would need to maintain service and how it could be obtained.<sup>174</sup>

PTC fare increases, while outraging the public, inspired little grassroots protest, perhaps because City Hall was already committed to fighting each and every proposed increase. In hindsight, it seems doubtful that more citizen protest would have strengthened the city's already vigorous advocacy of the riding public's interests. In January 1949, a citizens' committee formed to fight fare increases, but the group was headed by prominent citizens – such as Pennsylvania state senator Jerome Jaspan, Congressman Earl Chudoff, former City Solicitor Joseph Sharfsin, and chair of the Committee on City Government Maurice Burrison – rather than springing up from the grassroots. The committee's initial meeting drew about 100 people, a small crowd considering that transit fare increases affected residents throughout the city.<sup>175</sup>

Another meeting in May 1949 of what was now called the Philadelphia Citizens Committee against a Fare Rise did draw 500 people, but it seemed that most Philadelphians were content to express their displeasure over transit fares by writing letters to newspaper editors rather than through mass political action.<sup>176</sup> Some, such as Mrs. James A. Sine, chose to write directly to city officials. Mrs. Sine told Mayor Samuel in 1950:

If you really want to do something for the City of Philadelphia prevent that “other fare raise.” For the sake of all the Philadelphians whose weekly wage scale is about half of that of the P.T.C. employees. Also, realize that if

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<sup>174</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 11 June 1949, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>175</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 8 January 1949, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>176</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 25 May 1949, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

people could afford to pay such high fares they would own cars.<sup>177</sup>

The PTC complained bitterly about the city's constant opposition to fare increases, calling it "nothing less than cold-blooded confiscation." The city, claimed the PTC, blamed declining mass transit patronage entirely on fare increases while ignoring factors such as the shift to a five-day work week, television (which kept people at home in the evenings), and the decentralization of both industrial and residential areas, not to mention the surge in automobile ownership.<sup>178</sup> On several occasions, the PTC threatened to cut service if it did not receive permission to raise fares, as in the summer of 1952, when it claimed that it was in immediate danger of bankruptcy and would need to cut 20 to 25 Sunday routes if fares were not increased.<sup>179</sup> Of course, the public, city government, and transit workers opposed threatened service cuts vociferously.

Although most members of the public seemed to blame the PTC for fare increases and what they perceived to be subpar service, some believed that the problem stemmed from the greediness of Local 234 and its members, who, as previously mentioned, sought constant wage increases during the late 1940s and 1950s. The *Evening Bulletin* went on record as blaming labor for transit's troubles in a January 1950 editorial in which it noted that the PTC had operated at a loss of \$2.5 million in 1949, and continued:

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<sup>177</sup> Mrs. James Sine to Bernard Samuel, 8 February 1950, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.2, Administration of Bernard Samuel.

<sup>178</sup> PTC Advertisement, *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 22 March 1952, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA. City Controller and future mayor Joseph Clark had in 1951 presented an analysis purporting to demonstrate that PTC passenger losses had coincided with fare raises from 1947 to 1950. *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 18 February 1951, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>179</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 4 June 1952, 22 July 1952, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Mr. Quill [head of Local 234] is not interested in this fact. Speaking for his union, he says its members want more pay. Not because living standards have increased – they haven't. The men just want more money. Another fact of importance is that the company is entitled to earn a profit. That is recognized by the law. It is common sense. PT[C] is not a public charity. It needs profit to maintain its plant in good shape, to establish its credit, to replace worn-out equipment. The law has set up machinery to ensure that the company shall furnish satisfactory service and earn no more than a reasonable sum. It does not furnish satisfactory service, and it doesn't earn enough to furnish such service. No inquiry is needed to establish the fact that even increased fares have not brought in the revenue which alone would justify another increase in wages. Fare boosts do not solve the good service problem when the proceeds thereof are taken away from the company in wage boosts before it even gets its hands on them.<sup>180</sup>

The *Bulletin* editorial reflected changing perceptions of organized labor after World War II. In her 2005 study *Pocketbook Politics*, historian Meg Jacobs detailed the fracturing of the labor-consumer alliance in the postwar period. In short, the United States experienced rampant inflation in the late 1940s, exacerbated by the end of wartime price controls. Large business interests attempted to put the blame on organized labor's efforts to obtain higher wages – a strategy that paid off with the election of a conservative Congress in 1946 and the passage of the anti-labor Taft-Hartley Act a year later. As many Americans came to see themselves primarily as consumers, defined increasingly by their material possessions, they perceived their interests as divergent from those of labor, particularly as cost-of-living wage increases ensured a wage-price spiral.<sup>181</sup> It was in this

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<sup>180</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 11 January 1950, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>181</sup> Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 222-249.

environment – part of a general rightward turn in American politics during the Cold War – that the PTC, Local 234, and City Hall conducted their battles over wages and fares.

The 1949 fare battle ended with a denial of the base fare increase with an allowance for a small rise in transfer fares to take effect in October 1949. The Department of City Transit called the result “a complete victory for half the City riders, who use one vehicle, and a partial victory for the other half by keeping the transfer charge down.”<sup>182</sup> Just as the 1949 fare case was coming to its conclusion, Local 234 sought to open its 1950 contract talks with the PTC.<sup>183</sup> Although the union threatened another strike, the parties reached an agreement in January 1950 for another wage increase which, of course, spurred the PTC immediately to announce another fare increase, followed by the standard proclamation of outrage from Mayor Samuel.<sup>184</sup>

The events of 1947-1950 were typical of the pattern that continued for most of the 1950s. The PTC’s annual report for 1948 reflected the company’s frustration at governmental resistance to fare increases in conjunction with workers’ demands for higher wages:

Your company is fighting to preserve its ability to render good service to the public. It is fighting for the right to earn a fair return on the capital which provided the privately-owned transit lines carrying over 80% of all system passengers. High costs and inadequate rates of fare are straining the resources of this transportation system, one of the finest in the world. Unreasonable demands are

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<sup>182</sup> Department of City Transit, Annual report, 1949, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 69, Department of City Transit.

<sup>183</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 11 October 1949, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>184</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 31 January 1950, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

pressed by labor leaders. Opposition to every move to bring revenues into line with higher costs is encountered.<sup>185</sup>

Despite City Hall's opposition, fares continued to rise steadily (although not nearly as quickly as the PTC would have preferred). Between February 1947 and January 1954, for example, fares rose six times, beginning with a February 1947 increase to 10 cents (or 4 tokens for 35 cents) and ending with the January 1954 increase to 18 cents (or 2 tokens for 35 cents, with regular riders having the option of purchasing a book of 10 fares for \$1.50).<sup>186</sup> In 1955, the *Evening Bulletin* expressed the frustration that many in Philadelphia were no doubt feeling. Seeming to absolve the city, the paper blamed both the PTC and the union, asserting that "if the private citizens' comments were translated supernaturally into action, both houses would have plagues on them long ago." Simply put, the paper claimed, "There must be a better way of doing things than this."<sup>187</sup>

Many Philadelphians believed there was indeed a better way. Weary of the constant battles between City Hall and the PTC over wages, fares and service, some called for public ownership of mass transit, as had already been established, or was in the process of being established, in most major cities.<sup>188</sup> Cries for public ownership reached

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<sup>185</sup> Philadelphia Transportation Company, Annual report, 1948, Philadelphia Transportation Company Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>186</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 March 1955, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>187</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 13 January 1955, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>188</sup> Most major cities established municipal transit authorities in the late 1940s and 1950s to assume control of privately-owned mass transportation systems. These agencies were then absorbed, beginning in the mid-1960s, by regional transit authorities. In contrast to other cities, Philadelphia skipped over the first stage, never having a public transit authority prior to the creation of SEPTA, a regional authority, in 1964. Boston's Metropolitan Transit Authority was created in 1947 and absorbed the entire transit system the same year. New York City began acquiring private subway and bus lines in the 1940s and established the New York City Transit Authority to manage them in 1953. The Chicago Transit Authority began operations in 1947 and became the city's predominant operator of mass transit when it acquired the bus lines in 1952. In Los Angeles, the Metropolitan Transit Authority was created as a planning agency in 1951 and given the power to acquire privately-owned transit facilities in 1957. In Pittsburgh, the state

a fever pitch when transit workers engaged in five wildcat strikes between August 1955 and May 1956.<sup>189</sup> Disgruntled riders complained in droves to the newspapers. One exclaimed, “I’ve just about had it. I have a car in my garage and have been using the PTC, but with the PTC persisting in its public-be-damned attitude, I’m going to pay the extra expense and ride to and from work in comfort.”<sup>190</sup>

Mayor Dilworth was among those who believed strongly that the city should purchase the PTC. In 1955, city negotiators began preliminary efforts to reach an agreement for purchase of the PTC system, but reached a stalemate quickly.<sup>191</sup> By September 1956, Dilworth had reached the boiling point, calling the PTC’s demand of \$102 million “strictly a pistol-at-the-head job” and warning that the company might soon “find itself out of business.”<sup>192</sup> In the mid-1950s, Dilworth watched with dismay the flood of higher-income Philadelphians moving to the suburbs and expressed his desire to maintain the city’s central business district as a vibrant place of business, shopping, and entertainment. Modernization of Philadelphia’s mass transit was crucial, he believed, and

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legislature created the Port Authority of Allegheny County in 1956, and gave it the power to own and operate a public transit system in 1959, although the authority did not begin to exercise that power until 1964. Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, “About the MBTA”; available from [http://www.mbta.com/about\\_the\\_mbta/history](http://www.mbta.com/about_the_mbta/history); Internet; accessed 10 March 2010; Metropolitan Transit Authority, “New York City Transit – History and Chronology”; available from <http://www.mta.info/nyc/ffhist.htm>; Internet; accessed 10 March 2010; Chicago Transit Authority, “CTA Facts at a Glance”; available from <http://www.transitchicago.com/about/facts.aspx>; Internet; accessed 10 March 2010; Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transit Authority, “Los Angeles Transit History”; available from <http://www.metro.net/about/library/about/home/los-angeles-transit-history/>; Internet; accessed 10 March 2010; Port Authority of Allegheny County, “History of the Port Authority”; available from <http://www.portauthority.org/PAAC/CompanyInfo/GeneralStatistics/History/tabid/55/Default.aspx>; Internet; accessed 10 March 2010.

<sup>189</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 9 May 1956, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>190</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 4 February 1956, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>191</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 13 June 1956, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>192</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 September 1956, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

only the city had the financial resources to make the needed improvements.<sup>193</sup> Implied clearly was that the city did not desire to sink large amounts of capital into a system it did not own and allow private stockholders to reap additional profits by using taxpayers' money.

Dilworth's detractors argued that municipal operation of mass transit would be inefficient, but Dilworth explained that he was advocating only city ownership, not operation, of the transit system. His goal was to have a private operator (possibly even the PTC) run the system for a fixed fee with financial incentives for attracting additional passengers. Without attracting more riders to mass transit, he believed, Center City Philadelphia would quickly "become a ghost town."<sup>194</sup> When negotiations with the PTC continued to go nowhere, Dilworth even threatened to go into competition with the PTC, a plan he dropped quickly due to the opposition of the business and banking community, which advised that such a move would ruin the city's credit.<sup>195</sup>

Mayor Dilworth remained convinced throughout the remainder of his administration that city ownership of the PTC was an absolute necessity. For nearly five years, negotiations between the parties waxed and waned. Under the city's original 1907 operating agreement with the PTC's predecessor company, Philadelphia Rapid Transit, there were two ways the city could acquire the mass transit system. One way was simply to negotiate a purchase price. The second method stemmed from an option clause in the agreement, under which the price would be set by formula. The city was reluctant to

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<sup>193</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 14 September 1956, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>194</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 23 September 1956, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>195</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 26 December 1956, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

invoke the option clause, because by its calculations, the sale price under the option formula would be \$62 million, but the PTC maintained that it would be \$95 million, far more than the city was willing to pay. In the event that a court agreed with the PTC, the city would not be obligated to purchase at the option price, but would find itself in a weaker negotiating position.<sup>196</sup> The operating agreement, which prevented the city from acquiring the transit system by eminent domain, as Pittsburgh's Port Authority eventually did, placed Philadelphia in a difficult position in its efforts to take over the PTC. As a result, the 1950s came to a close with the parties far apart in their bargaining positions, and public ownership of mass transit appearing to be a remote possibility.

Although the PTC had problems – such as aging equipment, labor strife, increased operating costs, and government hostility – that existed apart from the rise of the automobile, its decline was hastened by the fact that Philadelphia's planners and politicians prioritized expressways over mass transit. As is mentioned above, the City Planning Commission's 1946 annual report made its priorities clear, providing extensive detail on the city's need for an expressway system while deferring work on a comprehensive mass transit plan.<sup>197</sup> In its 1949 annual report, the Planning Commission remarked on rapid residential decentralization, asserting that “the primary need” this trend created was for a modern expressway system. The Planning Commission cast the alternatives as widening existing streets or remodeling certain intersections, but did not even mention upgrading the city's mass transit system as a possibility. It was telling that

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<sup>196</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 8 December 1960, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>197</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Annual report, 1946, pp. 19-20, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

unlike previous annual reports, the 1949 version did not contain a separate section for mass transit.<sup>198</sup>

Other city entities, such as the Philadelphia Highway Traffic Board (PHTB), seemed to share the Planning Commission's disregard for mass transit.<sup>199</sup> The PHTB was an advisory board charged with making recommendations to the mayor and City Council on how best to improve the city's traffic conditions.<sup>200</sup> During its 1948-1952 tenure, the board was most concerned with reducing congestion on local streets and its advice included removing trolley tracks, widening streets, and building garages to ensure that the city had adequate off-street parking.<sup>201</sup> The PHTB was extremely concerned about the threat to downtown Philadelphia posed by decentralization, but seems not to have considered improvements to mass transit as a potential solution, focusing most of its energy instead on adding as many off-street parking spaces as possible.<sup>202</sup>

Not all city agencies were silent on mass transit, however. The Urban Traffic and Transportation Board (UTT), established in 1954 to serve as an advisory body to Mayor Clark on all aspects of traffic and transportation problems, advocated a balance between

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<sup>198</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Annual report, 1949, pp. 20, 26, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>199</sup> The Philadelphia Highway Traffic Board was established as part of the Department of Public Safety in 1948 and existed until 1952. The Board consisted mostly of mayoral appointees representing the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, the Philadelphia Merchants' Association, the Philadelphia Real Estate Board, the Philadelphia Theatres Association, the Philadelphia Hotel Association, the Automobile Club of Philadelphia, the Keystone Automobile Club, the Philadelphia Transportation Company, the Yellow Cab Company, and the Pennsylvania Motor Truck Association. City of Philadelphia, Department of Records and Free Library of Philadelphia, "Philadelphia Information Locator Service: Agency Information"; available from <http://www.phila.gov/phils/Docs/Inventor/graphics/agencies/A083-100.htm>; Internet; accessed 6 January 2010.

<sup>200</sup> Philadelphia Highway Traffic Board, Questionnaire for Mayor's 1949 annual report, 1949, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 83-100, Philadelphia Highway Traffic Board.

<sup>201</sup> Philadelphia Highway Traffic Board, Data for 1948, 1949, 1950, and 1951 annual reports, 1948-1951, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 83-100, Philadelphia Highway Traffic Board.

<sup>202</sup> Philadelphia Highway Traffic Board, Booklet for off-street parking plan, undated, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 83-100, Philadelphia Highway Traffic Board.

expressways and mass transportation. In 1955, the UTTB released its Plan and Program, a detailed report on the city's future transportation planning needs, much of which the City Planning Commission incorporated into its 1960 Comprehensive Plan.<sup>203</sup> The Plan and Program recommended 300 miles of new expressways for the region, 75 miles of which would be in Philadelphia itself. The UTTB envisioned an extensive system of both circumferential and radial highways extending in every possible direction, burying the region in concrete.

Despite its embrace of expressways, the UTTB acknowledged that its proposed highway improvements could be expected to handle only a 25% increase in vehicular traffic to the central business district. "Excellent highway access to the area should be afforded to those who need it and are willing to pay for it," the Board concluded, "but, at the same time, large volumes of people must continue to depend on public transportation." To that end, the UTTB made specific recommendations for improving Philadelphia's mass transit, including improving the Market-Frankford elevated, extending the Broad Street subway in several directions, and providing express bus service to areas not accessible by rapid rail transit.<sup>204</sup>

The UTTB's 1955 plan, with its call for vast improvements to both expressways and mass transit, had something for everyone. In reality, however, limited funds made it necessary for the city to prioritize its transportation needs. The dynamics of expressway

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<sup>203</sup> City of Philadelphia, Department of Records and Free Library of Philadelphia, "Philadelphia Information Locator Service: Agency Information"; available from <http://www.phila.gov/phils/Docs/Inventor/graphics/agencies/M011-2.htm>; Internet; accessed 6 January 2010. The UTTB was made up of representatives from business (including banks, real estate, oil, airlines, railroads, and mass transit), automobile clubs, labor, and academia. Urban Traffic and Transportation Board, "Plan and Program," 1955, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, Urban Archives, RG 60-11-2, Urban Traffic and Transportation Board.

<sup>204</sup> Urban Traffic and Transportation Board, "Plan and Program," 1955, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, Urban Archives, RG 60-11-2, Urban Traffic and Transportation Board.

financing, which provided the city with large returns on its investments in the form of state and federal funds, made it almost a foregone conclusion that planners and elected officials would give highways priority over mass transit. Soon, the UTTB recognized that “the maintenance of an adequate and improved public transportation system presents difficult financial problems in the face of declining patronage, obsolete equipment and rising costs of transit operation.” The Board suggested that some of the capital costs of rehabilitating mass transit could be raised by sharing the revenue from a total, integrated mass transit system.<sup>205</sup> The Philadelphia region did not have such a system until the 1980s, however.

Despite its consistent agitation for better mass transit funding, the UTTB came eventually to believe that it would be a mistake for Philadelphia to contribute substantial funds until it had wrested control of the urban transit system from the PTC. Robert Mitchell, the Board’s first executive director, recalled in a 1975 interview that the UTTB recommended “that the city should make no more capital investments in transportation in Philadelphia until the city had not only a veto but a positive power of determining the quality and quantity of transportation service it should receive.”<sup>206</sup> As the 1950s came to a close, a note of frustration that such a takeover had not yet occurred could be detected in the Board’s reports. “If we want to improve our transportation system,” the Board pleaded, “we must place our limited funds where they will bring the greatest benefit. . . . that is, improved and modernized commuter railroad and high-speed transit systems. Even this will require far greater sums of local money than the region has been willing to

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<sup>205</sup> Urban Traffic and Transportation Board, Annual report, 1957, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-11-2, Urban Traffic and Transportation Board.

<sup>206</sup> Robert B. Mitchell, Interview by Walter Phillips, Transcript, 5 March 1975, p. 5, Walter Phillips Oral History Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

invest.” After pointing out that Philadelphia was the only major city with a privately-owned transit system, the Board asked:

Should Philadelphia continue to be the only holdout? Do we continue the division between the City and the company which has cost us so dearly over the past fifty years, or do we find some way to put service to the riders as the top-policy consideration? Of course, this is not compatible with profits to the stockholders! The City is going to be in serious trouble unless this dichotomy is ended.<sup>207</sup>

The UTTB’s agitation for a public takeover of mass transportation spurred Mayor Dilworth’s failed attempts to have the city purchase the PTC, but more importantly, laid the groundwork for the eventual creation of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority.

Other agencies spoke up as well about the need for better mass transit. The Department of City Transit, in its annual report for 1951 (its last before its functions were transferred to the Department of Public Property in early 1952), advocated the construction of “a network of subways and high-speed transit facilities serving every sector of this great city” which it saw as possibly “the only solution of the surface traffic problem that troubles all major municipalities.”<sup>208</sup> In addition, Mayor Clark tried to persuade Philadelphia commuters to make better use of the city’s mass transit facilities, taking to the airwaves to give several radio addresses to this effect in 1954. In one such address, Mayor Clark spoke of his frustration with the city’s traffic congestion, recalling that recently it had taken him 35 minutes to fly the 150 miles from Washington, D.C. to

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<sup>207</sup> Urban Traffic and Transportation Board, “Transportation in the Philadelphia Metropolitan Region,” 1959, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-11-2, Urban Traffic and Transportation Board.

<sup>208</sup> Department of City Transit, Annual report, 1951, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 69, Department of City Transit.

Philadelphia, and then another 60 minutes to reach his home in Chestnut Hill, 15 miles from the airport. Clark proposed several ways of reducing traffic congestion, listing the first as getting citizens out of their cars and onto public transit.<sup>209</sup>

In 1955, the Chicago engineering firm of De Leuw, Cather and Company presented a comprehensive report on Philadelphia's mass transit at the request of the Department of Public Property. The report explained that the city had not been active in improving its mass transit system, with most of the prior planning and development work having come from PTC proposals.<sup>210</sup> "The City has generally not," the engineers observed, "been able to take the initiative in the determination of basic Philadelphia transit requirements or in the overall planning for necessary or desirable modifications of the system." If Philadelphia's transit situation were to improve, the report cautioned, the Department of Public Property must take a more active role. Although the firm made some specific recommendations for improving mass transit – such as improving the transfer system, redistributing or altering certain routes, adding some surface bus routes to get more people to rail stations, utilizing skip-stop and express service to improve speed, and modernization of equipment – it did not call for major additions to existing

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<sup>209</sup> Joseph Clark, "Our Traffic Problem and its Solution," Transcript of radio address, 4 June 1954, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>210</sup> This was especially true, the report noted, with respect to the conversion of surface trolley lines to trackless trolleys or buses, which was already underway and continued throughout the 1950s. Between 1954 and 1959, for example, the PTC reduced its number of streetcar routes from 46 to 14 while increasing the number of bus routes from 52 to 84. *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 28 February 1960, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA. In 1955, control of the PTC was acquired by National City Lines, Inc., a General Motors subsidiary that many believed to have engaged in a nationwide conspiracy to wreck urban mass transit systems by replacing streetcars with buses. Historians have debunked the notion of a conspiracy, however, pointing out that the switch to buses, which were cheaper to operate by the 1950s, was driven by market forces. See, e.g., Cliff Slater, "General Motors and the Demise of Streetcars," *Transportation Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 45-66.

transit lines, concluding that more study was needed before deciding whether to extend the Broad Street subway or the Frankford elevated line.<sup>211</sup>

The De Leuw, Cather report ended on a fairly grim note, citing the nationwide downward trend in mass transit revenue and the “phenomenal” increase in automobile use. The rapid decentralization taking place in Philadelphia and throughout the nation, combined with aging equipment, increasing operating expenses, and declining patronage, presented mass transit operators with “an almost impossible financial problem.” Rising fares had not helped the revenue situation, leading instead to a further decline in patronage. As a result, many cities had been forced to pay for capital improvements themselves, or provide assistance in the form of tax relief or direct subsidies in order to maintain adequate mass transit service. If mass transit were not improved, the engineers warned, so many people would be induced to prefer the automobile that the city would be unable to provide expressways sufficient to meet the demand.<sup>212</sup>

Philadelphia’s prioritization of expressways, in conjunction with its failure to acquire the PTC, led to a dramatic decline in its funding for mass transportation. Each year, the City Planning Commission published a six-year capital budget report indicating the amount of city funds scheduled to be spent on physical improvements over the ensuing six-year period. The capital budgets for 1947-1952 to 1950-1955 contained planned six-year mass transit expenditures of \$27.9 million, \$38.4 million, \$15.4 million, and \$32.4 million, respectively. By 1950, however, construction of the Schuylkill Expressway had begun, and ensuing reports showed a drop in expected transit

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<sup>211</sup> De Leuw, Cather and Company, “Philadelphia Transit Studies,” 1955, Pamphlet Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>212</sup> De Leuw, Cather and Company, “Philadelphia Transit Studies,” 1955, Pamphlet Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

expenditures – at first gradual, to \$13.9 million and \$12.5 million – and then dramatic, to \$3.6 million, \$5 million, \$2 million, and then, in accordance with the UTTB’s recommendation to stop capital expenditures until a public takeover had been accomplished, zero for the 1956-1961 report.<sup>213</sup>

As of 1955, the only major postwar improvements to Philadelphia’s mass transit system were the extensions of the Market Street subway-elevated line to 46<sup>th</sup> Street and of the subway-surface line to 40<sup>th</sup> Street and Woodland Avenue (at a total cost of approximately \$38 million).<sup>214</sup> At the ceremonies celebrating the completion of these projects, Mayor Clark hailed them as major improvements that would serve to attract many new passengers to mass transit. Clark stressed the need to bring mass transit to other areas of the city, including Germantown, South Philadelphia, North Philadelphia, and the far reaches of Northeast Philadelphia.<sup>215</sup> The large-scale expansion of Philadelphia’s mass transit system, of which Mayor Clark spoke so optimistically that day, never came to fruition.

Recognizing perhaps that his company’s acrimonious relationship with the city was contributing to the deterioration of mass transit, PTC president Douglas Pratt went to the Greater Philadelphia Movement Board of Directors in 1958 to plead his case. Pratt complained that his buses were the only vehicles the city taxed to use the public streets, pointing out that “others who use the City’s streets and who add so materially to traffic snarls are exempt from special City levies. The motorist, in fact, is the beneficiary of

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<sup>213</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Capital Budgets for 1947-52, 1948-53, 1949-54, 1950-55, 1951-56, 1952-57, 1953-58, 1954-59, 1955-60, and 1956-61, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>214</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Capital Budget for 1956-61, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>215</sup> Joseph Clark, Excerpt of remarks, 31 October 1955, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

vast sums now being spent for expressways and improved highways to bring even more cars into the traffic-jammed City.” Transit riders, Pratt told the GPM, were generally lower-income individuals and deserved at least as much help from City Hall as automobile drivers were receiving.<sup>216</sup> Charles Frazier, chair of the UTTB, made a similar point, telling the GPM’s directors that city taxes subsidized car drivers to the tune of 50 cents per day, and that similar subsidies for mass transit were “necessary for the survival of the City of Philadelphia.”<sup>217</sup> It seems, however, that the GPM listened politely to both men but did not attempt to influence Philadelphia’s government to alter its pro-expressway bias.

Philadelphia’s mass transportation problems in the postwar period were not limited to the PTC’s urban transit system of buses, subways, and trolleys. The region’s two commuter railroad systems, run by the Pennsylvania and Reading Railroads, were experiencing severe decline at the same time, and for many of the same reasons. Specifically, both patronage and revenue declined sharply as costs increased, equipment aged, and more Philadelphians embraced the automobile for their commuting needs.

The Philadelphia area had a long and distinguished history of railroad travel. Pennsylvania took the lead in building railroads as early as the 1830s, with the first lines having been designed to link the state’s coal mines with canals and rivers. By the 1860s, Pennsylvania had in excess of 2,500 miles of railroads – more than all but three other states.<sup>218</sup> Toward the end of the nineteenth century, as historian Michael Bezilla put it,

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<sup>216</sup> Greater Philadelphia Movement, Minutes of Board of Directors meeting, 18 June 1958, Papers of the Greater Philadelphia Movement, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>217</sup> Greater Philadelphia Movement, Minutes of Board of Directors meeting, 17 September 1958, Papers of the Greater Philadelphia Movement, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>218</sup> George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1962), 78-79.

“thousands of Philadelphians began flocking to the suburbs to escape the increasingly unattractive conditions of life in the city,” resulting in a greater emphasis on passenger railroads. For this reason, commuter railroad service – by the 1890s provided primarily by the Pennsylvania and Reading Railroads – expanded dramatically in the last years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth.<sup>219</sup> By World War II, Philadelphia had for many years possessed one of the best and most extensive commuter railroad systems in the United States. Actually, the region had two separate systems comprised of 12 lines, with the Pennsylvania and the Reading operating six lines apiece.

The Pennsylvania and the Reading, despite their long histories, could not escape national trends affecting twentieth-century railroads. As historian Stephen Goddard explained, passenger railroads began to lose money as early as the 1920s, when the automobile began to achieve mass popularity. World War II halted briefly a decline that had been underway for decades, as the railroads “won a grateful public’s newfound respect through their wartime efforts.” Once the war was over, however, “the trickle of red ink from passenger service became a river, in the face of inflation, motor competition, and onerous union settlements.”<sup>220</sup> The Pennsylvania Railroad’s annual reports from the late 1940s illustrated the company’s frustration at not being able to share in the postwar prosperity that lifted the nation in those years. In its 1947 report, for example, the railroad complained:

The year 1947 should have been one of your Company’s most satisfactory years. The country has been prosperous, labor has been well employed and well paid, farmers have

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<sup>219</sup> Michael Bezilla, *Electric Traction on the Pennsylvania Railroad, 1895-1968* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), 58-60.

<sup>220</sup> Stephen Goddard, *Getting There: The Epic Struggle Between Road and Rail in the American Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 173-75.

had bumper crops at good prices, and industry as a whole has operated at a good profit. Railroads, including your railroad, handled a tremendous volume of business, both passenger and freight, and out of this volume – if adequate rates had been in effect – your Company could have made sufficient earnings not only to have paid its stockholders a proper dividend, but to have made up part of the deferred maintenance brought about by the war and to have set aside reasonable funds for improvements to plant and equipment, so essential to provide the type of service now desired. The reason your Company did not have a satisfactory profit for the year was due to the lag between advancing costs and the rate increases allowed by regulatory authorities.<sup>221</sup>

As losses mounted, railroads asked the Interstate Commerce Commission to allow the abandonment of passenger lines so they could concentrate on more profitable freight service. The ICC forced railroads against their will to maintain commuter service, with the result that remaining passengers, according to Goddard, “complained increasingly of passenger cars strewn with debris, chronically late, too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter, and of abuse from surly conductors.” Once Congress passed the Interstate Highway Act of 1956, passenger railroads were doomed. By 1958, commuter rail service in the United States had been cut to half of its 1920s level.<sup>222</sup>

Like other railroads across the country, the Pennsylvania and the Reading suffered large losses on their commuter business after World War II, and just like the PTC, they sought relief through fare increases. In 1957, both the Reading and the Pennsylvania sought Mayor Dilworth’s support for higher commuter fares. Reading president J.A. Fisher told Dilworth that the railroad’s passenger operations ran a \$6.7 million deficit in 1956. James Symes, president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, reported that his company

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<sup>221</sup> The Pennsylvania Railroad Company, Annual report, 1947, Papers of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>222</sup> Goddard, 196, 202-3.

suffered annual deficits of more than \$4 million and asked for help in offsetting these “staggering losses.”<sup>223</sup> Unsurprisingly, the idea of higher railroad fares for commuters met resistance. One local businessman likened the railroads to public utilities, arguing that they were entitled to a fair return on their investments, but should not be able to cut service on one money-losing operation if they were making good profits overall.<sup>224</sup> Dilworth agreed that the idea made “a great deal of sense.”<sup>225</sup>

Apparently the railroads were expecting Dilworth’s support for their fare increases and were surprised when they didn’t get it. A puzzled Symes wrote to Dilworth in February 1958 asking him to explain his prior statements that he didn’t oppose new fares when the city’s lawyers had “vigorously opposed the proposed fare increases and on three occasions made motions to dismiss the proceedings” before the PUC. “In these circumstances,” wrote Symes, “it seems clear to me that the City has in fact both opposed and delayed the commutation fare increase.”<sup>226</sup> Frustrated, Symes testified before Congress in early 1958 that local, state and federal governments were “treating the railroad industry as if it were still the wealthy monopoly it was considered generations ago. The result of this treatment is that railroad earnings have been kept abnormally low, even in good times. But railroads are not a monopoly. They must compete for their

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<sup>223</sup> J.A. Fisher to Richardson Dilworth, 4 June 1957; James Symes to Richardson Dilworth, 3 June 1957, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

<sup>224</sup> Joseph McLaughlin to Richardson Dilworth, 17 May 1957, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

<sup>225</sup> Richardson Dilworth to Joseph McLaughlin, 21 May 1957, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

<sup>226</sup> James Symes to Richardson Dilworth, 13 February 1958, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

living with the users of untold billions of dollars worth of publicly-provided and untaxed highways, airways, and waterways.”<sup>227</sup>

After proceedings lasting nearly a year, the PUC rejected the Pennsylvania Railroad’s request for new fares in April 1958, ruling that the company had not met its burden of proof that new rates were needed. In its request to reopen the proceedings so it could submit more evidence, the railroad complained of its “critical plight” as a result of “sharply reduced freight traffic, high operating costs, and crushing passenger deficits.” Previous losses on commuter service had been absorbed by freight profits, but this had required raising freight rates, which had placed the railroad at a “competitive disadvantage.” Whereas in 1957 passenger losses had eaten up 57% of freight profits, now the profits were not large enough to cover commuter service losses. The Pennsylvania told the PUC that now, its combined freight and passenger operations were running a deficit, “with no end presently in sight.”<sup>228</sup> The PUC relented, allowing a fare increase to take effect in June 1958, but this concession did not change the bleak outlook for the region’s commuter railroad service.<sup>229</sup>

The Reading and Pennsylvania Railroads continued to lose money, a fact that concerned Dilworth greatly. As he wrote in 1958:

We have very good commutation lines in the City of Philadelphia, much better ones than most big cities, and it is essential that we preserve these and improve the service on them. Otherwise, fewer and fewer people will come

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<sup>227</sup> The Pennsylvania Railroad Company, Annual report, 1957, Papers of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>228</sup> The Pennsylvania Railroad Company, “Petition for Reopening for Further Hearing and for Interim Relief in *Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission v. The Pennsylvania Railroad Company*,” undated, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

<sup>229</sup> The Pennsylvania Railroad Company, Annual report, 1958, Papers of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

into the city, and also, more and more people will turn to the automobile, and our narrow old streets just won't hold many more automobiles.<sup>230</sup>

Believing higher fares to be a mistake, but realizing that the commuter railroads faced an existential threat, Philadelphia's city government began "Operation Northwest" – a program debuting in October 1958 whereby the city subsidized the Pennsylvania and Reading lines to Chestnut Hill in the city's northwest section in exchange for improved service and lower fares. The subsidies expanded in 1959 with "Operation Northeast," an identical program focusing on service to Northeast Philadelphia.<sup>231</sup> The goal of both Operations – based on recommendations the Urban Traffic and Transportation Board had made in 1956 for improving commuter railroad service – was to see if better service and lower fares could induce commuters to give up their cars and return to the railroads.<sup>232</sup> If the programs succeeded, it was hoped, the railroads' commuter operations might return eventually to the black without the need for higher fares. The railroads were pleased to be receiving some government assistance, but the Pennsylvania took pains to point out that the Operations "emphasized rather than solved the problem," with the limited subsidies being insufficient to cover its losses entirely.<sup>233</sup>

Operations Northeast and Northwest were the tentative beginnings of what became, in the early 1960s, a much more extensive program of city and county subsidies for the railroads. The events of the late 1950s established a precedent of government

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<sup>230</sup> Richardson Dilworth to Cubia Harris, 16 September 1958, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

<sup>231</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 16 February 1964, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>232</sup> Charles Frazier to Richardson Dilworth, 12 June 1958, Papers of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>233</sup> The Pennsylvania Railroad Company, Annual report, 1959, Papers of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

assistance, and also helped to set Philadelphia on a path that led eventually to the creation of a regional transit authority and a wholesale public takeover of the commuter railroads. Equally significant was the beginning of a pattern of disparate treatment by Philadelphia's city government of the commuter railroads on one hand, and the urban mass transit system on the other – a discrepancy that was later the subject of considerable political tension. As the 1950s came to a close, expressways still dominated the thinking of Philadelphia's government officials, but the ground was already beginning to shift.

## Chapter 2

### **“A Sea of Discontent”: Expressway Protest Intensifies, 1960-1963**

In the 1940s and 1950s, transportation planning in Philadelphia took place in nearly a closed environment. The Philadelphia City Planning Commission was akin to a fiefdom, making its decisions behind closed doors with little public input. Although the Planning Commission had no actual authority, the City Council acted like a rubber stamp, approving nearly every planning proposal brought before it. Philadelphia’s planners shared fully the assumptions of the state and federal engineers to whom they were required to answer in order to have their highway projects funded – most importantly, that traffic congestion was the city’s biggest problem and that modern, limited-access expressways were the solution. Alongside the expressway boom, the city’s mass transit declined precipitously. In addition to Cold War cultural beliefs that made the individualistic practice of driving automobiles seem more American than the collectivism of mass transit, the availability of state and federal funding for expressways (but not for mass transit) created financial incentives that contributed to planners’ skewed priorities. The city attempted in the 1950s a public takeover of the Philadelphia Transportation Company’s urban transit system – in part to solve the thorny problem of using public funds for capital improvements that would have benefitted private shareholders – but got nowhere due to the parties’ inability to agree on a price.

At the close of the 1950s, Philadelphia had completed its first major highway project, the Schuylkill Expressway, and was well into the process of planning for its second, the Delaware Expressway. Both expressways generated public protest. The city faced two important controversies over the Schuylkill Expressway between 1949 and

1953 – one over the displacement of residents in Nicetown for the Roosevelt Boulevard Extension, and the other regarding the expressway’s route through beloved Fairmount Park and past the Philadelphia Zoo. In the mid-1950s, as plans for the Delaware Expressway took shape, residents who lived along the waterfront began to object to the potential destruction of homes and churches that lay in the expressway’s proposed path. The expressway protest that occurred prior to 1960 was limited in scope in the sense that only those whose homes or churches faced an immediate threat of destruction were moved to complain, and very few asked larger questions about the purpose of expressways, their broader impact upon the city and its residents, and planners’ lack of balance in their thinking about roads and mass transit. The Fairmount Park Commission, for example, stood virtually alone in its battle to alter the Schuylkill Expressway’s route through the park. The idea of paving public parkland for an expressway failed in the early 1950s to arouse significant hostility amongst the Philadelphia citizenry.

In the 1960s, however, the tide began to turn. The release of detailed plans for the Delaware Expressway in Center City and South Philadelphia unleashed protest far beyond any the city had experienced previously. Much of the increase in highway opposition was due to one simple difference between the Schuylkill and Delaware Expressways. Although both were riverfront highways, the Schuylkill was built along a relatively undeveloped riverbank, in a pre-existing transportation corridor that was home to both West River Drive and the Reading Railroad tracks. As a result, the expressway’s main stem took almost no homes. The Delaware Expressway, by contrast, was built along the city’s main waterfront, which was not only one of the most historic areas in the United States, but contained the city’s port, a wide variety of industries, and a great many

homes and churches. Because of these fundamental differences, it would have been surprising had the city's second expressway project not generated more controversy than its first one.

The Delaware Expressway protests that arose in the early 1960s differed in content, as well as in volume, from those that occurred in the 1940s and 1950s. For the first time, a significant number of people began to question the nature of the relationship between the City Planning Commission and the people for whom, ostensibly, it planned. Protestors now focused not only on the specific details of highway routes, but on the process by which planners and engineers chose those routes. The neighborhoods through which highways were to pass, the protestors believed, should have more input into the initial development of plans, rather than being presented with plans after the fact, when decision-makers would be less receptive to changes. Significantly, the Citizens' Council on City Planning, which had up to this point acted mainly as a booster for the Planning Commission, joined disgruntled residents in asking for a more inclusive planning process.

By questioning the planning process in addition to its results, highway protestors in early 1960s Philadelphia were engaging in something more meaningful than were their 1950s predecessors. The years between 1960 and 1963 represented a transitional period in this regard, as the objections to urban expressways that arose in these years did not run as deep as those of the later 1960s and 1970s. Beginning in 1964, some Philadelphians began to ask larger questions about expressways, focusing not only on the destruction of homes and churches, but on the roads' environmental, aesthetic, and social impacts. The charged issue of race relations eventually became an integral part of highway opposition

as well, but not until the late 1960s, when racial tensions in northern urban America reached a crisis.

As it continued to move forward with the Delaware Expressway, Philadelphia's City Hall began in the early 1960s to build on the tentative steps it had taken at the end of the 1950s to save the region's faltering commuter railroads. The city joined with the southeastern Pennsylvania suburbs to expand existing railroad subsidies on a regional basis – a development that represented a substantial step toward the creation of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority in 1964. Expanding the railroad subsidies solidified a pattern of disparate treatment whereby Philadelphia gave preference to the Pennsylvania and Reading Railroads while refusing similar aid to the struggling Philadelphia Transportation Company and its urban mass transit system of buses, subways, and trolleys. Such a discrepancy was the result of City Hall's focus on bringing suburban whites back to the central business district so they could work in downtown office buildings and patronize shops, theaters, and restaurants. The PTC's less affluent riders, whom city officials and planners perceived as less integral to Philadelphia's postwar downtown renewal, were simply not as high a priority.

The earliest years of the 1960s did not represent a radical change from the transportation planning atmosphere of the 1950s, but bridged the gap between two distinct eras. Philadelphia in these years began the gradual shift to greater democracy in its planning process, and laid the groundwork for an eventual move away from expressways and toward a greater emphasis on mass transportation.

### **“The Present State of Uncertainty”: The Delaware Expressway**

At the close of the 1950s, despite a general agreement between the city, the state, and the federal government to build the Delaware Expressway, no final, detailed route existed yet for the expressway’s route through Center City and South Philadelphia. The Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia complained that the delay was costing businesses near the route millions of dollars in foregone economic opportunities; due to the uncertainty surrounding the route, companies were avoiding renewing leases, entering into long-term commitments, or making capital investments.<sup>1</sup> City and state officials announced in April 1960 that they had reached agreement on a Center City/South Philadelphia route, but rather than rejoicing, the Chamber of Commerce blasted state highway secretary Park Martin for “inaction, indecision, and lack of planning,” and chastised his department for “its complacency and satisfaction with its do-nothing policy.”<sup>2</sup> On July 6, 1960, officials made the chosen route public and announced that the state highway department would hold a public hearing on July 27.<sup>3</sup> The sequence of events was representative of the anti-democratic planning process still in place – planners and engineers made detailed blueprints, officials approved them, and only then did they inform the public of the plans and hold a hearing.

From the outset, it was apparent that the expressway route would face considerable resistance from Philadelphia residents. On July 18, Mayor Dilworth attended a protest meeting with 1,500 angry residents in a South Philadelphia church.

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<sup>1</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 12 April 1959, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>2</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 18 April 1960, 15 May 1960, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>3</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 6 July 1960, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Those present met his announcement that he intended to recommend the proposed route to City Council “even though this may cost me a great many votes,” with an outburst of shouting, booing and foot-stamping. The meeting returned to order only when Reverend Carl Werner reminded protestors that they were in a house of worship.<sup>4</sup> Years later, Dilworth’s deputy managing director John Bailey said, “I’ll never forget Dilworth getting up and saying he was not elected to be a popular Mayor, but to be an effective Mayor and even though people in South Philadelphia didn’t want the expressway he thought the rest of the region required it and he was going to do all he could to run it through their neighborhood.”<sup>5</sup>

The state’s first official public hearing on July 27 went no better. In what the *Evening Bulletin* described as a “wild, stormy” meeting, more than 1,000 irate Philadelphia property owners carried protest signs, “booed, catcalled, whistled and stamped their feet in disapproval of the project.” Streets Commissioner David Smallwood’s announcement that the 15-mile section of the road between Montgomery Avenue in Northeast Philadelphia and the Delaware County line at the city’s southern border would take 1,140 homes, 762 industrial and commercial properties and nine institutions did not improve the collective mood. In fact, the crowd was so loud that many who tried to speak in favor of the proposed route could not be heard. In utter frustration, John Rezzolla, chief counsel for the Pennsylvania Department of Highways, told the assembly, “it is apparent you want to hear only one side of this question.” When the audience responded with cries of “yes, yes,” Rezzolla suspended the rules of the

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<sup>4</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 19 July 1960, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>5</sup> John Bailey, Interview by Walter Phillips, Transcript, 23 June 1976, pp. 3-4, Walter Phillips Oral History Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

hearing, discontinued the speeches in favor of the route, and allowed representatives of the residents to begin their speeches immediately.<sup>6</sup>

One of the people who attended the hearing to criticize the plan was Aaron Levine, formerly an employee of the City Planning Commission and now the executive director of the Citizens' Council on City Planning. The Citizens' Council had since its inception acted as a booster for the Planning Commission and had supported the Schuylkill Expressway wholeheartedly in the 1940s and 1950s. In 1960, however, it broke new ground by criticizing publically a major highway project. The proposed route, Levine argued, would create isolated pockets of residential land east of the expressway. Bisecting residential areas, he pointed out, would "lead to eventual isolation and decay of the remaining residential pockets." Moreover, Levine asserted that engineers had failed to consider how the elevated highway structure proposed for part of the expressway's run through South Philadelphia would blight the landscape – particularly in view of the fact that planners had found no productive use for the land beneath the expressway. The elevated portion would become, he predicted, "a neighborhood nuisance and a police problem."

In addition to its substantive complaints regarding route and design, the Citizens' Council was less than pleased about the procedure City Hall and the Pennsylvania Department of Highways used to present the proposed route to the public. Levine did not go so far as to suggest widespread citizen participation in the earliest stages of the planning process. He did ask, however, that public meetings on the route be held in the

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<sup>6</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 27 July 1960; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 28 July 1960, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

evening, rather than during the day, so that more people would be able to attend; that plans be made public further in advance of public hearings; and that the Citizens' Council be allowed to review the engineering studies, made using public money, on which the final plans were based (a request that City Council had denied).<sup>7</sup>

The always vigorous competition between Philadelphia and rural areas of Pennsylvania over the state's share of federal highway money provided Dilworth with his primary tactic to counter the Delaware Expressway naysayers. A week before the July 27 public hearing, he revealed that in April state and federal officials had delivered an ultimatum: "After four years of planning and studies it's come to this: either we build the Expressway on this plan or the \$300 million will be spent in western Pennsylvania."<sup>8</sup> Dilworth was not necessarily bluffing, as there were indeed other bidders for Pennsylvania's highway money. Many in upstate Pennsylvania wanted the state to build the Keystone Shortway, which would have traversed the northern part of the state from Stroudsburg to Sharon in order to provide easier access to northern counties for business and farming interests.<sup>9</sup> It was clear that Philadelphia and its Delaware Expressway had first crack at the state's share of federal highway funds, but it was not out of the question that undue delays and political wrangling within Philadelphia and between Philadelphia and Harrisburg could alter the situation.<sup>10</sup> *Greater Philadelphia Magazine* pointed out

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<sup>7</sup> Citizens' Council on City Planning, "Statement on Proposed Delaware Expressway presented at the Public Hearing of the Pennsylvania Department of Highways," 27 July 1960, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>8</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 20 July 1960, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>9</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 20 January 1959, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA. The Keystone Shortway was built later and as of 2010 was part of Interstate 80.

<sup>10</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 31 January 1960, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

that the Shortway, which was to be a free road, would compete with the Pennsylvania Turnpike, a toll road connected to Philadelphia via the new Schuylkill Expressway – a situation that could be harmful to Philadelphia’s economy. Nevertheless, the magazine lamented, South Philadelphia remained a “sea of discontent,” with protests emanating chiefly from the area’s clergymen and considerable hostility directed toward Mayor Dilworth and Councilman Victor Moore, whom many in South Philadelphia considered a “double-crosser” for backing off from his 1958 plan to have the expressway swing west before reaching their area.<sup>11</sup>

Dilworth’s threat that Philadelphia could lose its highway funds failed to win over disgruntled Center City and South Philadelphia residents. On the contrary, the protests continued unabated throughout 1960. At least one objection came from within city government, as Dennis Clark, supervisor of the Housing Division of the Commission on Human Relations (a body that enforced anti-discrimination laws and attempted to ensure fair treatment of the city’s African Americans), was concerned that the expressway would disrupt what were then cohesive ethnic enclaves within South Philadelphia. Clark told his boss George Schermer that he was not concerned about the Italians, who lived mostly west of Fourth Street, out of the way of the proposed highway; the Germans, who were not concentrated enough to be disrupted; and the Irish, who did not represent a cohesive group in South Philadelphia. Clark was, however, worried about the Lithuanians attached to St. Casimir’s parish at 3<sup>rd</sup> and Wharton Streets; the Polish community attending St. Stanislaus near 2<sup>nd</sup> and Fitzwater; and the African American population north of Fitzwater Street. One hundred Lithuanian families, he told Schermer, would lose

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<sup>11</sup> “The Great Road Squabble,” *Greater Philadelphia Magazine* 51 (August 1960), City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

their homes if the proposed route were constructed, while the Poles would be displaced heavily, their enclave cut in half by the expressway. Shifting ethnic geography, he said, would create racial problems in the area, explaining:

In the event of an exodus of Polish families in this area along each side of the Expressway, the Negro group to the west and north would no doubt move into the vacancies. This succession would probably be rather vigorously resisted. The Polish group has been strongly adverse [sic] to racial change in many situations. The pocket of population east of the Expressway would be a particular problem. The natural boundary of the Expressway would heighten the sense of solidarity, but the movement of white families from houses immediately adjacent to it would create tempting opportunities for infiltration by non-white families. . . . The various ethnic groups have been united in their opposition to the proposed Expressway route. Their movement, due to the construction work and other results of the new highway, will be the first major change in population patterns in South Philadelphia since the construction of public housing projects west of Broad Street during and after World War II.<sup>12</sup>

Clark's memo to Schermer reflected the fact that the Delaware Expressway, like the Roosevelt Boulevard Extension of the Schuylkill Expressway, was slated to displace primarily working-class whites. Philadelphia's expressway planning was unique in this respect, for by the 1960s, highways in other cities were built mainly through African American neighborhoods.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, as Clark's analysis demonstrated, even roads that displaced whites could pose a threat of racial conflict by promoting residential integration in areas where remaining whites were likely to be deeply antagonistic to such a development.

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<sup>12</sup> Dennis Clark to George Schermer, 23 August 1960, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>13</sup> Raymond A. Mohl, "Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities," *Journal of Urban History* 30, no. 5 (July 2004): 679.

Clark's objections seem to have fallen on deaf ears, but controversy continued. Although many Philadelphia citizens wrote to Dilworth urging him to reconsider the route of the expressway, some, such as Edward Kane of the Foley Brothers construction firm, advocated a more decisive course. Kane opined that "what we sadly need is another [New York City planner] Bob Moses. Let's face whatever or whichever way the damned thing is routed, there will be a hue and cry – so it boils down to knocking the objectors out of the way, it requires a little courage."<sup>14</sup> Dilworth agreed that it was impossible to quell dissent completely. When it came to taking people's homes, he acknowledged, "no amount of consultation makes them happy. They become convinced they have not been treated fairly, and are equally convinced they have never really been given a chance to express their views."<sup>15</sup>

David Smallwood reacted with irritation to citizen opposition to the expressway and objected to efforts to make the planning process more democratic. His ultimate goal was not to accommodate protest, but to eliminate it. In July 1960 he rejected the suggestion of some activists that a city advisory group with community representation be created. "It has been our experience in the past," he asserted, "that the representatives of these groups, in many cases, have served to crystallize opposition to highway improvements rather than to lend assistance." While he approved of some efforts to "mitigate" highway opposition, he refused to believe "that the establishment of any citizens group will ever serve to result in its complete elimination."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Edward Kane to Richardson Dilworth, 17 August 1960, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

<sup>15</sup> Richardson Dilworth to Leon Raider, 26 July 1960, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

<sup>16</sup> David Smallwood to Richardson Dilworth, 26 July 1960, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

Smallwood, despite his hard-line attitude toward highway protestors, drew Dilworth's wrath in mid-1960 when he suggested, inexplicably, that expressway plans were not set in stone. In late July 1960 Dilworth attended a community meeting at which he stated that neither the Bureau of Public Roads nor the Pennsylvania Department of Highways would accept any further changes to the Delaware Expressway route. Either Philadelphia could accept the present route, he said, "or forget about the Delaware Expressway." To Dilworth's "amazement," however, Smallwood then issued a statement saying that the route was still subject to change because construction in South Philadelphia would most likely not begin for five years. "I think it is time we wrap up the Delaware Expressway and stop horsing around," Dilworth fumed, "and I also suggest, very strenuously, that if any official in the City Government wants to issue a statement or arrange a meeting to make himself look good, that he at least let me know before he acts at my expense."<sup>17</sup>

Dilworth's insistence that the Delaware Expressway route was final failed to deter community leaders – and especially the South Philadelphia clergy – from continuing the fight. The mayor kept up his strategy of making it seem as though City Hall had no say in the matter. He told *Catholic Standard and Times* editor Reverend Monsignor Anthony Ostheimer that the federal government had the final say over the route and that planners had done everything possible to minimize the number of houses that would be lost to the expressway. "In short," Dilworth argued, "I believe the time is past when we can ask for further reconsideration. I am convinced that the route proposed is as good a route as we

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<sup>17</sup> Richardson Dilworth to Donald Wagner, et al., 1 August 1960, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

can hope for, and takes a minimum number of houses.”<sup>18</sup> Ostheimer was not persuaded, and soon afterward the *Standard and Times* decried the mayor’s “spirit of defeatism.” A major point of contention was the four years that elapsed between the time planners and engineers began serious discussions over the route in 1956 and disclosed the route to the public in 1960. “One of the most serious charges leveled against the planners,” the paper intoned, “is the manner in which developments were held from the public until it amounted to telling the public: ‘Here it is, take it and like it!’” As to the threat that public dissent would cause Philadelphia to lose the expressway, the paper asked, “Why must the great City of Philadelphia run scared? . . . Have Philadelphia voters no longer a voice in Harrisburg, and no voice in Washington? If we have no such voice, then we had better close up shop and resign ourselves to being pushed around – while we keep on paying our taxes!”<sup>19</sup>

As controversy continued to rage in Philadelphia, the Bureau of Public Roads remained above the fray and reviewed the proposed plans, which the state highway department had already submitted for its approval. In January 1961, the BPR approved the use of federal funds for the controversial Center City/South Philadelphia piece of the expressway – the 15-mile stretch between Montgomery Avenue and the Delaware County line.<sup>20</sup> Although the federal government had agreed to pay 90% of the construction costs pursuant to the Interstate Highway Act of 1956, the BPR’s approval of the expressway route was not necessarily a final verdict on the particular details of the

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<sup>18</sup> Richardson Dilworth to Anthony Ostheimer, 21 July 1960, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

<sup>19</sup> *Catholic Standard and Times*, Newspaper clipping, 29 July 1960, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

<sup>20</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 5 January 1961, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

plan. Federal highway dollars were limited, and BPR officials were not anxious to fund projects that were likely to become mired in controversy and perhaps left unfinished. As a result, when city and state governments requested changes to a federally-approved route, the BPR often obliged.

In early 1961, Philadelphia took a significant step toward the democratization of its transportation politics when Dilworth and City Council agreed to a major change to the Delaware Expressway route in response to citizen protests. In January, just after the BPR approved the route, Mayor Dilworth and Democratic governor David Lawrence received a petition, signed by 12,000 people, to save historic Elfreth's Alley in Society Hill from destruction.<sup>21</sup> In response to the petition, as well as the protests at the July 27, 1960 public hearing, engineers and planners restudied the route and decided that it would be feasible to shift a large portion of the expressway in Center City and South Philadelphia half a block east – a modification that would save Elfreth's Alley, a small offshoot from the alley known as Bladen's Court, and Workman's Place, a group of homes in Southwark dating back to 1748.<sup>22</sup> The Pennsylvania Department of Highways came on board, primarily because it determined the change would make the project cheaper by about \$12 million. In July 1961, Mayor Dilworth, his staff, state highway officials, and members of Pennsylvania's congressional delegation went to Washington to present the proposed modification to Federal Highway Administrator Rex Whitton. Philadelphia Managing Director Donald Wagner told Whitton that the change would save

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<sup>21</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 8 January 1961, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>22</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 12 February 1961, 28 March 1961, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

historic buildings and leave a smaller pocket of isolated land between the expressway and the river. State officials chimed in about the reduced cost.<sup>23</sup>

In August, the Bureau of Public Roads approved the new route. The *Evening Bulletin* proclaimed (perhaps with excessive grandiosity) “Victory in Southwark,” attributing the modification directly to citizen protests and opining that residents would consider the extra \$5 million in city funds now necessary – because the new plan required the relocation of the Frankford El – to be “a bargain compared to the price they had been asked to pay in neighborhood obliteration.”<sup>24</sup> While this particular change did not end the controversy over the Delaware Expressway by a long shot, it was nevertheless the first time the mayor and City Council had authorized a significant expressway alteration because of popular discontent.

The 1961 route change brought to light once again the ongoing tension between business interests, who wanted the road completed as quickly as possible and preferred a route that would not encroach on the waterfront, and residents, who delayed progress with protests and sought to push the route farther toward the water to minimize its impact on homes and churches. Business groups, irritated with delays stretching back to 1956, became more vocal in the spring of 1961. In April, the Old Christ Church Neighborhood Businessmen’s Association urged rapid construction of the expressway, claiming that the delay was harming businesses and depressing real estate values.<sup>25</sup> A month later, it joined with several other groups – including the Arch Street Businessmen’s Association,

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<sup>23</sup> G.M. Williams to August Schofer, 17 July 1961, Pennsylvania FAS 1961, Washington Office, General Correspondence and Related Records, 1912-1965, Bureau of Public Roads, RG 30, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>24</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 16 August 1961, 18 August 1961, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>25</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 25 April 1961, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

the Chestnut Street Association, the Philadelphia Produce Exchange, and the Philadelphia Warehousemen's Association – to form the Delaware Expressway Realization Committee.<sup>26</sup> The Committee, which boasted of 948 members, argued that the Delaware Expressway, when completed, would relieve the Schuylkill Expressway of excessive traffic, benefit business and create jobs in the industrial areas of South Philadelphia, provide a boundary for proposed waterfront development, and create a major portion of an expressway loop around the city. As the group told Dilworth:

We speak with the united voice of hundreds of businesses representing the livelihood of thousands of Philadelphians and millions of dollars invested in Philadelphia. Our voice is the voice of those who will be most directly and drastically affected by the construction of the Expressway – those owners, landlords and tenants who must eventually relocate, but who can make no adequate plans because of the present state of uncertainty. Ours is the voice of those who will not in the end actually lose their places of business, but who are stalemated because as yet they have no assurance that this will be the case. Ours is the voice of those who are now forced to exist in an area which will not return to desirability until the Expressway becomes a reality. It is the voice of those who have plans for the area which will not be implemented until the great upheaval and disturbance that necessarily accompany heavy construction is finished. And, finally, ours is the voice of a great body of businessmen in center city and the Food Distribution Center who recognize the many benefits which will accrue to all upon the final completion of the Delaware Expressway.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 21 May 1961, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>27</sup> Homer Ingram to Richardson Dilworth, 26 October 1961, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

The Chamber of Commerce, which helped to create the Realization Committee and maintained a close relationship with it, also lent its voice to the effort.<sup>28</sup> The Chamber estimated that the expressway would not be completed until 1967 while lamenting that it was “needed now instead of five years hence.” “The overcrowded Schuylkill expressway is particularly in need of immediate relief, but it doesn’t seem in sight,” complained the group.<sup>29</sup>

In the midst of the tug-of-war over the Delaware Expressway, there arose the first strong stirrings of dissent about Philadelphia’s transportation priorities. In 1960, the City Planning Commission issued its Comprehensive Plan for the City of Philadelphia. Although the document was by definition comprehensive, it included a heavy emphasis on transportation planning. Above all, the plan showed Philadelphia’s city planners to have been, along with much of the nation, on a highway craze in the late 1950s. The Commission’s highway plan, some of which was based on the Urban Traffic and Transportation Board’s 1955 recommendations, would have crisscrossed the region with an immense tangle of expressways. Planners envisioned no less than four concentric loops around Center City in addition to radial highways that would have distributed traffic in every conceivable direction.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, Description of Streets and Highways Committee, 1961-1962, Papers of the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>29</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 19 October 1961, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>30</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, “Comprehensive Plan for the City of Philadelphia,” Report, 1960, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission. According to the plan, the innermost or Center City loop was to consist of the Schuylkill Expressway on the west, the Delaware Expressway on the east, the Vine Street expressway to the north, and the Crosstown Expressway to the south. This loop would have been encircled by a midtown loop in addition to a Five Mile Loop and a Ten Mile Loop. Proposed radial expressways included the North Penn, Main Line, Mid-County, Cobbs Creek, Industrial, Roosevelt, Tacony, and Northeast Expressways.

Most comments on the Comprehensive Plan were positive. The *Evening Bulletin* gave the Planning Commission a representative compliment when it assured its readers that “the transportation headache of the 1960s will be soothed by 1980.”<sup>31</sup> In 1962, however, the Citizens’ Council on City Planning issued its analysis of the Comprehensive Plan, and it was decidedly less complimentary with respect to both the planning process and its results. The Council began by accusing the Planning Commission of making all of the decisions itself rather than coming up with alternatives from which elected officials could choose, thereby overstepping its bounds as an advisory body with no actual policymaking authority. Next, the Council noted that 59% of all public funds needed to implement the Plan would be devoted to transportation. This high figure, the Council believed, was due to an overemphasis on “the relatively expensive facilities for private transportation (expressways, streets, highways) rather than on public mass transit which is a more efficient and economical means of transportation and which, in terms of passenger-carrying capacity, can be provided more inexpensively.” The Council pointed out that 45.7% of the total plan cost was devoted to roads while transit would receive only 13.5% of the money. Moreover, the Council doubted that the huge system of expressways proposed in the Plan could be completed by the goal years of 1980-1990. Recognizing that the proposed expressway system would encourage those entering the city from the suburbs to do so by car, the Council suggested building additional public

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<sup>31</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 22 May 1960, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

transit facilities, and recommended deemphasizing expressways to avoid exacerbating traffic in already congested areas.<sup>32</sup>

The Citizens' Council's position on the Comprehensive Plan showed the evolution of its approach to planning and its conception of its own role since the 1940s and 1950s. In short, the Council became in the early 1960s an engine helping to drive the shift toward greater democracy in planning. As the group explained, "The whole concept of citizen participation in the local planning process has recently been undergoing serious re-evaluation in the face of new citizen movements now taking place in sectors of the community where in the past there was little or no expression of public concern." As a result, where the Council's role had been largely to publicize the actions of the City Planning Commission, it now saw itself as being responsible for "the review and constructive criticism of city plans and the development of greater citizen participation in the planning process." The new role of the Council was therefore two-fold: to assist its member organizations with planning issues, and to act as an independent agency and study planning proposals to ensure sound and responsible planning for the Philadelphia region.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the Citizens' Council's aggressive new stance, planners failed to heed its warnings about overreliance on expressways, and for the time being, the 1960 Comprehensive Plan remained the chief blueprint for Philadelphia's transportation future. Although they did not share the same philosophy about expressways, both the Citizens'

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<sup>32</sup> Citizens' Council on City Planning, "Analysis of the Comprehensive Plan for the City of Philadelphia," Report, April 1962, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>33</sup> Citizens Council on City Planning, Annual report, 1963-64, Papers of the Citizens' Council on City Planning, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Council and the Chamber of Commerce agreed that the Plan had not addressed fully the movement of goods, in addition to people. As the Council said, “the Plan does not indicate that any substantial consideration has been given to goods-handling, such as location of truck terminals, availability of rail facilities to serve industrial areas, rail-to-truck transfer arrangements, connections with the Port, and the like. Since these factors are critical to Philadelphia’s economy, they should be treated more fully in the Plan.”<sup>34</sup>

Despite approval by all three levels of government for the 1961 route change, construction of the Delaware Expressway could not begin right away. There were still other issues to hammer out, including a funding agreement between the city, the state highway department, and the BPR, and the approval of the Fairmount Park Commission for a piece of the expressway slated to cut through Franklin Delano Roosevelt Park deep in South Philadelphia.<sup>35</sup> Those in favor of the Delaware Expressway experienced anguish at slow progress and mounting delays, while business owners, residents, and clergy railed against the uncertainty to which they were subjected. By 1963, the lack of discernable progress on the project became a political liability for city and state officials alike. In July, Democratic mayor James H.J. Tate – the former president of City Council who replaced Dilworth in 1962 when the latter resigned to run for governor – accused the state highway department of using “indefensible stalling tactics” to delay \$40 million in Delaware Expressway construction funds in favor of other road projects within the

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<sup>34</sup> Citizens’ Council on City Planning, “Analysis of the Comprehensive Plan for the City of Philadelphia,” Report, April 1962; Economics and Taxation Council, Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, “Review of the Comprehensive Plan of the City of Philadelphia,” Report, June 1961, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>35</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 29 March 1962, 4 June 1963, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

state.<sup>36</sup> State highway secretary Henry Harral (a Republican) fired back, claiming that Tate was seeking to use state officials as scapegoats in order to bolster his reelection campaign. Denying that his department had downgraded the expressway, Harral attributed the delay to a dispute between the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission and the Bureau of Public Roads.<sup>37</sup> Harral's explanation did not placate Tate, who in September offered that the expressway would be completed more quickly under a Democratic gubernatorial administration than it had been under the leadership of the "Republican foot-draggers in Harrisburg."<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, Harral assured the public that the Philadelphia section of the expressway would be in operation by 1967, a prediction that turned out to be off by more than a decade.<sup>39</sup>

The Chamber of Commerce continued to push for quicker completion of the expressway, appealing directly to federal highway officials in the spring of 1963. James Summy, the chairman of the Chamber's Streets and Highway Committee, wrote to Rex Whitton asking that the BPR depart from its usual policy of prohibiting the state from seeking bids for construction contracts until a particular segment of the route had been approved fully for construction. Summy emphasized the expressway's importance to the business community, writing:

The Delaware Expressway is the most important single highway project in the nation's fourth largest metropolis

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<sup>36</sup> City of Philadelphia, Office of the Mayor, Press release, 29 July 1963, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate; *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 29 July 1963, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>37</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11 August 1963, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>38</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 26 September 1963, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>39</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 20 October 1963, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

which contains nearly four per cent of the entire national economy. It is vital to this major economy which is vital to the national interest. Responsible estimates of two years ago still appear valid although not updated with any new surveys. They indicate that every month of delay on the Delaware Expressway occasions business losses in Greater Philadelphia of \$3.6 million<sup>40</sup>

The Chamber's plea was to no avail, however.

Uncertainty about the future continued to plague homeowners in the highway's potential path. The Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority told homeowner Karl Weigold in December 1962 that his home would be taken and that he should purchase another one. Along with this advice came a rather short timetable – an assessment of his existing home by March 1963, payment of compensation by April, and a moving deadline of September. Weigold did purchase another house, only to be told by the Redevelopment Authority in February that progress on the expressway had slowed and that no compensation would be immediately forthcoming.<sup>41</sup> Other citizens in the same boat threatened to bring legal action against the RA and then to press their case with Republican governor William Scranton.<sup>42</sup> Tate's only reply was a vague assurance that he would investigate the possibility of the RA acquiring residents' homes early, but it seems the city took no action in this regard.<sup>43</sup>

In early 1963 David Smallwood was already beginning to exhibit signs of the frustration that led to his departure in 1970 as Commissioner of the Department of

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<sup>40</sup> James Summy to Rex Whitton, 4 April 1963, Pennsylvania FAS 1963, Washington Office, General Correspondence and Related Records, 1912-1965, Bureau of Public Roads, RG 30, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>41</sup> Karl Weigold to James Tate, 29 April 1963, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>42</sup> Mrs. Charles Kasiewski to James Tate, 2 May 1963, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>43</sup> James Tate to Karl Weigold, 9 May 1963, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

Streets. In an exasperated letter to Tate, he recapitulated the alterations that had been made to the route of the Delaware Expressway, resulting in running the highway to the west, rather than the east, of the Shot Tower (constructed in 1808 to make shot used in the War of 1812) in order to prevent the isolation of the historic structure; taking fewer certified historic homes; eliminating what would have been isolated residential pockets east of the highway; and saving approximately 450 homes over the route first proposed. Remarking on the “considerable effort and persuasion on the part of the City to gain these costly concessions from the State and the Bureau of Public Roads,” Smallwood asserted that this section of the expressway “has had more study, re-study and concession to local objection of any similar length of the entire highway.” Now that these concessions had been made, he felt, the highway was well-located and in a position to serve as a useful buffer between residential and industrial areas.<sup>44</sup> Smallwood’s message was clear – the public had had its say, City Hall had been responsive, and now it was time to move forward. What he did not yet realize, however, was that the first cracks in the façade of the expressway planners’ dominance had done permanent damage.

### **Closing the Loop: The Crosstown Expressway**

While controversy raged over the Delaware Expressway, Philadelphians paid little attention to the Crosstown Expressway, next on the list for construction in the city’s highway plan. Eventually, however, the Crosstown became the most controversial transportation project in Philadelphia history. Since the 1940s, city planners had intended to build an east-west highway along the southern border of Center City, linking the Schuylkill and Delaware Expressways and creating a downtown expressway loop.

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<sup>44</sup> David Smallwood to James Tate, 26 February 1963, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

Philadelphia's government, focused heavily on downtown renewal in the postwar period, saw the Crosstown Expressway as an integral part of its plan to revive Center City as a haven for white-collar business. Viewing the neighborhoods within the proposed highway corridor as slums, officials intended that the Crosstown clear these areas while easing traffic congestion by taking cars off the city streets and providing a connection between other major expressways. Had it been built, however, the Crosstown would have cut a wide swath through a series of poverty-stricken neighborhoods that were populated almost entirely by African Americans. It would also have operated as a daunting racial barrier, cutting off the expressway corridor from the central business district.

To the shock of many, community opposition defeated the Crosstown Expressway, and the road was never built. Its defeat – or rather its three separate defeats between 1968 and 1973 – exemplified the democratization of Philadelphia's transportation politics in the 1960s and 1970s. At the dawn of the 1960s, however, this transformation was only just beginning. The Crosstown was in the earliest stages of planning, and none of its backers had any inkling of the trouble that lay ahead.

The idea for the Crosstown had existed since 1946, and was first shown to the public in the City Planning Commission's 1949 annual report. The first detailed treatment of the highway plan, however, appeared in the Urban Traffic and Transportation Board's 1955 Plan and Program. Beginning in 1947, planners wanted to build the expressway along Lombard Street, on the southern edge of downtown. Studies the Planning Commission conducted during the late 1940s and 1950s, however, made it clear that Lombard would not provide a suitable route. For one thing, the street was

home to several entities – including Graduate Hospital, a Bell Telephone exchange, a Philadelphia Electric substation, and Abbotts Dairies – that the Planning Commission did not want to disrupt. Moreover, engineers and planners came to the conclusion that the highway would need to be wider than first thought, which would require building it between two streets rather than on one street alone.

As a result of the problems with the Lombard route, in 1959 the Planning Commission shifted the proposed route south to encompass the block between South and Bainbridge Streets. The new route had several advantages from a planning standpoint: it was a narrow block, continuous across Center City, and fairly close to the central business district. Particularly important was the fact that acquiring the right-of-way for the new route would be less expensive, which would make it easier for local planners to obtain approval from the always budget-conscious state and federal governments, which were likely to share the condemnation costs. Planning Commission Executive Director Edmund Bacon liked the South-Bainbridge route because it would eliminate what he called “blighted conditions” in that part of town without using redevelopment funds. In short, when Streets Commissioner David Smallwood made the new route public in October 1959, Philadelphia’s planning community was solidly behind the decision. The Planning Commission then incorporated the new route into its 1960 Comprehensive Plan as well as its 1963 Plan for Center City.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Donald Wagner to Richardson Dilworth, 28 December 1958; Edmund Bacon to John Bailey, 10 July 1959; Damon Childs to Robert McMullin, 23 May 1967, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission; Lenora Berson, “The South Street Insurrection,” *Philadelphia Magazine* 60, no. 11 (November 1969): 91-92, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA; Alan M. Voorhees & Associates, Inc., “South Central Transportation Study: A Report Submitted to the Mayor’s Crosstown Study Committee and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation,” November 1971, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Francis L. Rizzo.

Although planners had already studied the Crosstown route extensively, Smallwood and other city officials believed that work on the expressway would not begin for at least a decade. The main issue was money; with the Schuylkill Expressway nearing completion and planning for the Delaware Expressway well underway, the Pennsylvania Department of Highways could not predict exactly when funds would be available for the Crosstown Expressway.<sup>46</sup> City officials assumed, however, that the Crosstown could not be started until the Delaware Expressway was completed – a date believed to be no earlier than 1971. Funding for the project presented a significant hurdle for Philadelphia and the state because the road, while a federal-aid highway, was not to be part of the Interstate Highway System and was eligible only for 50% rather than 90% federal funding.<sup>47</sup>

Knowing that the highway's construction was not imminent did not prevent city officials from becoming impatient with respect to the preliminary planning and funding processes. In the early 1960s, David Smallwood and other highway boosters became annoyed with the state's failure to commit money to the project. In 1962, the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia raised the long-familiar complaint that the state was shortchanging Philadelphia in terms of highway funding.<sup>48</sup> Despite the complaints of those eager to see Crosstown Expressway plans put in motion, the financial burdens presented by the Delaware Expressway prevented the state from coming up with the needed funds for several years more.

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<sup>46</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 8 October 1959, 25 November 1959, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>47</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 17 January 1961. George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>48</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 20 February 1962, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

In its earliest stages, the Crosstown Expressway generated next to no public protest, despite the fact that it was slated to tear through several residential neighborhoods. In all likelihood, the lack of protest was attributable to the fact that the expressway seemed a remote possibility due to its high cost and its low priority in the minds of state highway officials. Moreover, controversy over the Delaware Expressway captured the public's attention and the newspaper headlines in those years. Nevertheless, the planners' decision to locate the expressway in the South Street-Bainbridge Street corridor set Philadelphia on a path that led, later in the decade, to the greatest transportation controversy in its history.

### **To Save the Railroads: PSIC and SEPACT**

In the early 1960s, as Philadelphia's transportation politics began the gradual transformation that led to a more democratic planning process, the city's priorities shifted subtly as well, resulting in a greater focus on mass transportation and laying the groundwork for a regional transit authority. From the end of World War II through almost the entire 1950s, City Hall paid little attention to Philadelphia's declining mass transit systems. Cultural attitudes favoring automobiles and highways played an important role in this dichotomy, as did the state and federal funds available for highway construction and the political difficulties inherent in making improvements to systems owned by private companies. Philadelphia made a concerted effort in the 1950s to acquire the Philadelphia Transportation Company and its urban transit system of buses, subways, and trolleys, to no avail. At the close of the decade, the city began Operations Northeast and Northwest to provide subsidies to the Pennsylvania and Reading Railroads' faltering commuter operations. While the measure helped bring some riders

back to the rails, it began a consistent pattern of favorable treatment of the commuter railroads – whose affluent, white patrons city officials considered necessary to the downtown revival – as opposed to the urban transit system and its poor and working-class ridership.

Philadelphians were well aware of the urgency of the city’s mass transportation problem. In June 1961, legendary broadcaster John Facenda (known to those outside Philadelphia as the longtime voice of NFL Films) hosted a one-hour television special on WCAU entitled, “Dead End 1975?” The program included shots of terrible traffic jams on the recently-completed Schuylkill Expressway and on downtown Philadelphia streets. “How can it be,” Facenda asked in his famous baritone, “that modern technology has so turned on itself that it is working toward its own destruction?” “If you’ve ever burned a roast because your husband was late for dinner because he was stuck on the Schuylkill Expressway for over an hour and a half . . . this program is for you,” he informed his viewers.

After spending some time addressing the city’s traffic and parking problems, the show turned to potential solutions. Taxis could help somewhat, but were often too expensive. Buses provided a more efficient use of space by carrying more passengers, but more buses would eventually clog the streets the way cars did, and “it would be the same problem all over again.” The real solution, according to Facenda, was to focus on rail transport, which wasn’t affected by traffic problems, could maintain a uniform speed, and was slowed rarely by weather conditions. But, the program acknowledged, “railroad commuting has not increased in proportion with population growth or the increase in automobile travel in the Philadelphia area in recent years.”

To help explain why Philadelphia's commuter railroads were in crisis, Facenda interviewed Pennsylvania Railroad vice-president W.W. Patchell, who said he was "discouraged" by the railroad's losses on its commuter service. When Facenda asked whether the Pennsylvania had "an obligation to offer adequate public service," Patchell agreed, but added, "We're also supposed to get a return on our investment and make a profit out of our business." Losses on commuter service were practically inevitable, argued Patchell, because equipment and crews had to be available around the clock for a service that was used heavily only 20 hours per week – two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening, Monday through Friday. Without the cooperation of elected officials, he said, the railroads could only continue to raise fares. Even fare increases would not be sufficient, however, because government would never permit fares high enough to allow the railroads to reach the break-even point, and even if such fares could be charged, they would cause commuters to return to their cars. A Reading Railroad executive Facenda spoke with agreed with Patchell, adding that in any business not regulated as extensively as transportation, companies would drop the unprofitable parts of their business.

The show did not close with any definite solutions, but Facenda said, "It seems certain that railways will have to be relied upon to carry the major burden of commuters if they are to be moved rapidly, comfortably, and economically."<sup>49</sup> "Dead End 1975?" reflected a growing commitment to rail transit, evidenced by actions the city was already taking. City government and the business community were unwilling to see the commuter railroads perish because their primary function – shuttling affluent

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<sup>49</sup> WCAU-TV, "Dead End 1975?," DVD recording of television program, June 1961, Provided to author by Paul Levy, President and CEO of the Center City District.

suburbanites between their homes and Center City – was crucial to the city’s primary goal of revitalizing its downtown as a home for white-collar business and upscale restaurants, shops, and hotels.<sup>50</sup>

In February 1960, the city expanded upon Operations Northwest and Northeast by creating the Passenger Service Improvement Corporation (PSIC).<sup>51</sup> The PSIC, which was to absorb the preexisting Operations and add others, was a non-profit corporation, separate from both the city government and the railroads. Its board consisted of 15 members: 11 mayoral appointees (including the chair), one representative chosen by each railroad, and two members appointed by the Railway Labor Executives Association, which represented 23 railroad brotherhood unions.<sup>52</sup> The PSIC’s charter application explained its purpose as follows:

To promote, develop, maintain and improve passenger service on public transportation facilities to the end that all people desiring to enter and leave Philadelphia and to travel within Philadelphia will be furnished the best and most economical public passenger service; and in furtherance thereof, to make studies and plans in the field of transit and transportation; and to act as the management agent for the City of Philadelphia in connection with the operation and financing of passenger transportation facilities and rights.<sup>53</sup>

Because the PSIC was purely a creation of the city of Philadelphia (which encompassed the entirety of Philadelphia County), its subsidies created lower fares only for those riders traveling between Center City and outlying areas – such as Chestnut Hill and Northeast

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<sup>50</sup> James McConnon, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 4 March 2009.

<sup>51</sup> City of Philadelphia, Office of the Mayor, Press release, 20 January 1960, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth; *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 5 February 1960, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>52</sup> City of Philadelphia, Office of the Mayor, Press release, 20 January 1960, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

<sup>53</sup> Passenger Service Improvement Corporation, “PSIC Policy Paper,” 28 January 1960, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

Philadelphia – within the city limits.<sup>54</sup> City officials hoped to expand the program to include the suburban counties as soon as possible, despite the lack of a recent history of cooperation between Democratic Philadelphia and its traditionally Republican suburbs.

By the end of 1960, the PSIC had six “Operations” to its credit – entailing lower fares and more frequent service – and had received public accolades for its success.<sup>55</sup> As early as May 1960, it was reported that the first two Operations had resulted in 2,000 less cars on the streets, “left home by converts to rail commuting.”<sup>56</sup> In September, it was estimated that Operation Northeast would attract 405,000 new passengers to its lines, an increase of 250%, by year’s end. PSIC chairman Casimir Sienkiewicz crowed that the program’s success “indicated a public response probably without precedent in modern railroading.”<sup>57</sup> In the first half of 1961, city-subsidized trains carried more than 3.2 million riders, a 44% increase over pre-subsidy levels.<sup>58</sup>

The emphasis on downtown renewal of which the PSIC was a product displeased some in outlying parts of the city who felt discriminated against. Joseph Schafer of the United Northeast Civic Association derided the PSIC, claiming that its true purpose was “for the welfare of certain bureaucrats to perpetuate themselves in a newly created public corporation.” His substantive criticism was that not all sections of the city would benefit to the same extent. Those in Kensington (the part of Northeast Philadelphia closest to

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<sup>54</sup> *New York Times*, 21 January 1960, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>55</sup> Passenger service improvement Corporation, Press release, October 1963, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>56</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 1 May 1960, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>57</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 1 September 1960, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>58</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 13 September 1961, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Center City), for example, might resent having their tax dollars used to pay the fares of those in outlying parts of the Northeast. Working-class residents of South Philadelphia might not like paying to encourage wealthier people (perhaps from the affluent Chestnut Hill area to the northwest) to travel downtown for “amusement and entertainment at expensive movies and theaters and then fancy restaurants and lush night clubs.” Business owners throughout the city would be hurt by policies encouraging people to shop at Center City department stores rather than neighborhood establishments. “Local merchants also must do business,” he reminded City Council.<sup>59</sup>

Schafer’s complaints had no discernable impact on the city’s transportation policy. In fact, his comments were opposed diametrically to Mayor Dilworth’s philosophy, which was shared by the city’s business leaders. “Every great urban area,” he said in 1960, “must have a heart. . . . a center for its business headquarters; its commerce; its entertainment; its culture; its medicine, and everything else which makes a great urban area tick.” Commuters, he explained, “are very important people to any city, because they are, by and large, the more well-to-do, the people who fill our office buildings, patronize our fine stores, the restaurants, theatres, etc.”<sup>60</sup> Edmund Bacon shared Dilworth’s view that reviving the central business district was the key to the city’s progress as a whole. In a 1975 interview, Bacon reflected on the necessity of “holding of Center City alive in the face of suburban sprawl” and opined, “I think if we had let Center

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<sup>59</sup> Joseph Schafer to Special Committee on Mass Transportation of the Council of the City of Philadelphia, 28 June 1960, Papers of the Citizens’ Council on City Planning, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>60</sup> Richardson Dilworth, “Talk by Mayor Richardson Dilworth, New York – The Park Lane Hotel,” 18 March 1960, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

City go downhill, as really happened in Newark, we would have done a disservice to the entire region and everybody in it.”<sup>61</sup>

From the very start, Dilworth hoped to remedy the spending imbalance between highways and mass transit by lobbying Congress to pass legislation providing federal aid for PSIC subsidies.<sup>62</sup> The concept of federal subsidies for commuter railroads met with immediate and stiff resistance. As historian Stephen Goddard explained, America’s growing automobile culture, along with poor railroad service and a long-standing perception (more accurate with respect to the nineteenth century than the twentieth) that railroads received preferable government treatment helped to create public hostility toward the railroads.<sup>63</sup> Even the *Evening Bulletin* was skeptical about the idea of federal subsidies. The paper acknowledged in an editorial that the federal government did “invest heavily” in interstate highways that competed with railroads. These contributions, it claimed, were based on national defense and were not made for the benefit of any particular city. Cities, the editorial continued, would not be justified “in going to Washington for the means of bringing their residents from outlying areas to city centers.”<sup>64</sup>

Not even all railroads supported the idea of federal subsidies. Those in the east were generally in favor of the concept, but western and southern railroads were opposed,

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<sup>61</sup> Edmund Bacon, Interview by Walter Phillips, Transcript, 9 January 1975, p. 22, Walter Phillips Oral History Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>62</sup> Richardson Dilworth, “Supplemental Statement of Richardson Dilworth, Mayor of Philadelphia, Before the Surface Transportation Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce,” April 1958, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

<sup>63</sup> Stephen Goddard, *Getting There: The Epic Struggle Between Road and Rail in the American Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), passim.

<sup>64</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 25 January 1960, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

perhaps because they would receive less assistance, or because subsidies would have made it more difficult for them to abandon unprofitable passenger service.<sup>65</sup>

Pennsylvania Railroad president James Symes reminded Congress, however, that “Other areas which once had similar rail networks [to Philadelphia’s] permitted them to deteriorate by permitting government support exclusively for auto-dominant transportation systems, and completely ignored the value of the rail systems and their need for similar public support as part of the total transportation system.”<sup>66</sup> Initially, the chances of Congress passing legislation to subsidize commuter railroads seemed between slim and none, due in part to the hostility of members of Congress from rural areas to the concept of federal transit aid for large metropolitan areas. As one western congressman put it, “The cities for years have been after us for billions of dollars in slum clearance money to halt the flight of their people to the suburbs. Now they want more billions from us to carry the people to and from the suburbs.”<sup>67</sup>

Dilworth’s appearance on NBC’s *Today* show in February 1960 to promote the idea of federal subsidies for rail transit provoked angry responses from across the nation, like the one from a Florida resident who wrote the mayor, “GET OFF MY BACK! . . . I see no reason why my taxes from Florida should help you solve the [transportation] problem through the Federal Government.”<sup>68</sup> Not all correspondents were so hostile. Dilworth did receive some supportive letters, complimenting him for his “courage” in

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<sup>65</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 30 January 1960, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>66</sup> James Symes, “Statement by James A. Symes, Chairman, The Pennsylvania Railroad Company, Before the House Sub-Committee of the Senate Banking and Currency Committee,” 24 May 1960, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

<sup>67</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 12 February 1960, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>68</sup> W.D. Robert to Richardson Dilworth, 17 February 1960, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

asking for federal rail subsidies despite widespread opposition and “cries of ‘socialism.’”<sup>69</sup> Some who admired the mayor’s stance even suggested he run for governor (which he did, unsuccessfully, in 1962).

In addition to scarce funding, the PSIC’s biggest limitation was its inability to provide subsidies for those portions of the commuter rail lines outside the city limits. Dilworth and other city officials knew that in order for the subsidy program to serve its true purpose – getting affluent suburbanites to use the commuter rails to come downtown to work, shop, and dine – Philadelphia would have to form an alliance with its suburban counties to expand the program. “There is no doubt,” Dilworth said, “that the Philadelphia metropolitan area is a physical entity, and that no part of it can long remain healthy unless all parts of it are healthy.”<sup>70</sup>

The initial reaction from suburban politicians, however, was one of skepticism over both the legality and the cost of the PSIC.<sup>71</sup> In March 1960, Delaware County refused to join a city-suburb alliance. State senator and chair of county commissioners Robert Watkins explained, “We would never agree that our county become a member of a corporation on transportation that Philadelphia is running.”<sup>72</sup> Montgomery County – home to the area’s wealthy Main Line – was also initially hostile; a report the county commissioned advised it to refrain from joining the PSIC to avoid “partisan political

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<sup>69</sup> Stanley Sandler to Richardson Dilworth, 21 March 1960, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

<sup>70</sup> Richardson Dilworth to Jack Davidson, 28 March 1960, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.4, Administration of Richardson Dilworth.

<sup>71</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 21 January 1960, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>72</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 6 March 1960, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

domination.”<sup>73</sup> The railroads were concerned about the potential impact of politics upon the program as well, delivering to Dilworth an ultimatum that they would withdraw immediately from the PSIC at the first hint of political interference. The Pennsylvania and Reading were, the mayor acknowledged, “worried about reports that PSIC will be scrapped for a transit authority or some other type of public agency that is subject to political control.”<sup>74</sup> Such fears were not totally unfounded, as the newspapers reported that some in City Council wanted indeed to turn the PSIC into a public agency.<sup>75</sup>

The passage of the Housing Act of 1961 – the first piece of federal legislation to address urban mass transit directly – may have helped to break the impasse between Philadelphia and the counties. Spurred by the severe decline of commuter railroads, the Act allowed for low-interest loans for purchasing equipment and making improvements, as well as funds for a demonstration program.<sup>76</sup> Hoping undoubtedly to benefit from the new federal program, representatives from Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester and Montgomery Counties signed the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Compact (SEPACT) – a counterpart to the PSIC – on October 4, 1961, with Delaware County continuing in its refusal to join. Over the next few years, SEPACT created several additional subsidy Operations, including Operation North Penn-Hatboro, Operation Levittown, Operation Southwest, and Operation Main Line.<sup>77</sup> In 1962, some in Delaware County reconsidered

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<sup>73</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 7 April 1961, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>74</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 9 August 1960, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>75</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 10 August 1960, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>76</sup> Edward Weiner, *Urban Transportation Planning in the United States: History, Policy, and Practice* (New York: Springer, 2008), 28-29.

<sup>77</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 16 February 1964, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

joining, but Watkins remained steadfast in his opposition, asserting that the railroads had unfairly shifted to Philadelphia's suburban counties the responsibility to provide service and that non-riders objected to subsidizing those who did use the service. Moreover, he said, if Philadelphia wanted more shoppers, it should build more parking lots downtown, explaining that his wife wanted to be able to park near the stores at which she shopped, finding it inconvenient to take a taxi between the railroad station and the department stores, especially while carrying packages.<sup>78</sup> Delaware County never joined SEPACT.

While the PSIC and SEPACT Operations provided the commuter railroads with some relief, the subsidies did not cover losses completely, and it was clear that the railroads needed more assistance in order to survive. In early 1962, the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission found, in dismissing various complaints stemming from a 1960 fare increase, that the Pennsylvania and the Reading both "earned less than a fair return" on their passenger business between 1945 and 1960, and that "all available information indicates deficit operations in the future." In making its ruling that the 1960 fare increases were appropriate and lawful, the PUC emphasized the need for Philadelphia to improve its commuter rail service:

Philadelphia possesses a system of electrified suburban rail lines which, in terms of area coverage and convenience of downtown terminals, is unsurpassed in any other metropolitan area of the nation. This rail network radiating from center city is a valuable transportation asset to the lower Delaware Valley which is undergoing vigorous expansion and development in its suburban areas. Suburban rail service, however, must be considerably improved if it is to attract and hold additional patronage from suburbanites. Speed, comfort, and convenience must

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<sup>78</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 15 April 1962, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

be enhanced over present levels to compete with improved automobiles and highway facilities.<sup>79</sup>

On October 23, 1962, almost exactly a year after the creation of SEPACT, the federal government stepped in with crucial aid pursuant to the aforementioned Mass Transportation Demonstration Grant program of the Housing Act of 1961. The Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency granted SEPACT \$3.1 million to be matched by \$1.5 million in local funds for a three-year trial program.<sup>80</sup> Although the federal funds in question were “demonstration grants,” intended merely to demonstrate the efficacy of SEPACT’s subsidy Operations, the money was in fact keeping the commuter service alive.<sup>81</sup>

SEPACT, the alliance between Philadelphia and its suburban counties aimed at saving the region’s commuter rail systems, was the direct precursor to the creation of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority in 1964. The Urban Traffic and Transportation Board had advocated a regional transit authority back in 1955 and Mayor Tate supported the idea even before he took office in 1962. (In 1960, while Tate was still president of City Council – and Dilworth’s heir apparent – the *Evening Bulletin* contrasted the two men by explaining that Dilworth thought like an executive, creating the PSIC and then encouraging the suburbs to join in a similar alliance, while Tate thought like a legislator, favoring a five-county transportation agency created by the state

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<sup>79</sup> Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, Order, 15 January 1962, Papers of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>80</sup> Passenger service improvement Corporation, Press release, October 1963, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission; *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 16 February 1964, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>81</sup> James McConnon, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 4 March 2009.

legislature.)<sup>82</sup> Proponents of such a regional authority pointed out that privately-owned transit was subjected to such heavy government regulation as to eliminate the benefits of private ownership; that automobile use was subsidized to such an extent that mass transit would never survive unless it were also subsidized, an outcome that would be much more politically viable under public ownership; that a publicly-owned system would be more efficient at eliminating redundant service and adding service where it was most needed; and that multimodal service would improve as a result of eliminating competition between bus lines and rail lines, for example.<sup>83</sup>

Of course, policymakers had to consider how a new regional mass transit agency would be funded. Experts were divided on how much government support would be necessary to augment revenue derived from the fare box. Another issue concerned the role of the state in such an agency; historically, mass transit funding had come only from local governments, and more recently, the federal government.<sup>84</sup> Mayor Tate began campaigning actively for a regional agency in mid-1963, telling Governor Scranton that such an agency would provide residents of Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester, Montgomery and Delaware Counties with “speedy, economical and attractive service,” that would result in more riders for mass transit and fewer cars on the roads.<sup>85</sup> In an effort to drum

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<sup>82</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 14 September 1960, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA. Lewis Van Dusen, who served as General Counsel to the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, had a different recollection, saying in a 1980 interview that Tate became interested in transportation issues because of Clark and Dilworth’s influence and that he had inherited the idea for SEPTA from Dilworth. Lewis Van Dusen, Interview by Walter Phillips, Transcript, 2 July 1980, p. 9, Walter Phillips Oral History Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>83</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 1 July 1963, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>84</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 2 July 1963, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>85</sup> James Tate to William Scranton, 2 August 1963, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

up public support for the idea, Tate sent the newspapers a lengthy letter setting forth his reasoning, writing:

I believe that a regional transit authority offers real hope for a fast, economical, efficient, and adequate five-county transit system. It should be able to meet all its operating expenses from the fare box, while still financing some capital improvements. Divested of the profit motive, exempt from certain taxes, and able to avoid wasteful duplication, the new authority will be able to achieve savings that will go into better service. Operating as a truly efficient, regional transit system and dedicated to serving the public as its primary interest, the new authority may well be able to arrest the downward trend of transit riding and to lure some drivers off the overcrowded highways.<sup>86</sup>

Tate's letter was so long that the *Inquirer* declined to publish it. As the editorial page director told Tate, "You know that we are always glad to hear from you. We are even gladder when you hold your enthusiasm down to, say, one page or less."<sup>87</sup>

Philadelphia was the last major metropolitan area in the United States not to have a public transit authority of any kind, but Mayor Tate hoped it would be one of the first to have a regional authority.<sup>88</sup> Tate's publicity blitz included a 1963 report, commissioned by his office, entitled "The Public Transit Authority: A Study of Five Cities," which investigated public transit authorities in Chicago, Los Angeles, St. Louis, Cleveland, and Toronto and laid out additional arguments for a such an authority in southeastern

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<sup>86</sup> James Tate to *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *Philadelphia Daily News*, 5 August 1963, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>87</sup> Paul Warner to James Tate, 14 August 1963, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>88</sup> The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, created in 1964 to serve 78 municipalities in the Boston area, was one of the earliest regional transit authorities in the United States. New York did not have a regional authority until 1968, when the state legislature created the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to provide service in 12 counties. Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, "About the MBTA"; available from [http://www.mbta.com/about\\_the\\_mbta/history/?id=968](http://www.mbta.com/about_the_mbta/history/?id=968); Internet; accessed 13 January 2010; Metropolitan Transit Authority, "New York City Transit – History and Chronology": available from <http://www.mta.info/nyct/facts/ffhist.htm>; Internet; accessed 13 January 2010.

Pennsylvania. The report asserted that the public had lost faith in the Philadelphia Transportation Company, which had failed to provide adequate service and had made improvements only when coerced by the city; that the PTC's parent company, National City Lines, Inc., was not concerned with regional transportation issues; that a private company was incapable of self-financing improvements but aroused hostility when subsidized by the government; that the federal government was much more likely to provide financial assistance to a public agency; and finally and perhaps most importantly, that the Philadelphia metropolitan area was growing and was desperately in need of a single, coordinated agency to run its transportation systems.<sup>89</sup>

Mayor Dilworth had tried for years to effectuate a city takeover of the PTC, but when he resigned to run for governor in 1962, his successor Tate made clear that he was firmly against having the city acquire the urban transit system, preferring a regional authority instead.<sup>90</sup> Tate's plan found strong support from important constituencies, including Philadelphia's business community and the Citizens' Council on City Planning.<sup>91</sup> The Chamber of Commerce, despite its strong advocacy of expressway construction, had begun recently to press for more balance between highways and mass transit. Its statements on mass transportation focused almost exclusively on the commuter railroads, as opposed to the PTC's urban transit system. The Chamber had supported both the PSIC and SEPACT, seeing the latter as "a good interim step in solving

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<sup>89</sup> City of Philadelphia, Office of the Mayor, "The Public Transit Authority: A Study of Five Cities," Report, 26 July 1963, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>90</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 1 May 1962, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>91</sup> James McConnon, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 4 March 2009; Edwin Folk to James Tate, 30 July 1963, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

the regional transportation problem.”<sup>92</sup> The Greater Philadelphia Movement wanted a regional authority as well.<sup>93</sup>

In late December 1963, the state legislature complied with Philadelphia’s wishes, passing the Metropolitan Transportation Authorities Act, which created a regional transportation authority for Philadelphia and its four suburban counties. Known as the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority or SEPTA, the authority was governed by an 11-person administrative board and was considered an agent of the state of Pennsylvania. The legislature gave the new authority a broad range of powers, including the power to determine routes and services, to make plans for the improvement of mass transit, and to apply for and accept grants from federal, state and local governments.<sup>94</sup>

James McConnon, who was SEPTA’s first vice-chairman (1964-68) and second chairman (1968-78), stressed that “SEPTA came about because of the decline of the commuter rail system. . . . Historically, it was directly derived from that.” SEPTA existed, at least at first, solely for the “purpose of enabling the region to get [federal] funds to support the commuter railroads.” The key to getting the enabling legislation passed, according to McConnon, was that by the terms of the law, neither the county governments nor the state government “was going to have to put any money in.”<sup>95</sup> It was not long before it became evident that SEPTA could not survive without state and county

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<sup>92</sup> Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, Description of Mass Transportation Council, 1961-1962, Papers of the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>93</sup> Greater Philadelphia Movement, Minutes of Executive Committee meeting, 12 June 1963, Papers of the Greater Philadelphia Movement, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>94</sup> Pennsylvania Economy League and Bureau of Municipal Research, “Citizens’ Business Newsletter,” 23 December 1963, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>95</sup> James McConnon, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 4 March 2009.

financial contributions, but by then, the authority was well established and allowing it to die would have created political liabilities for those involved. As 1963 came to a close, with SEPTA slated to become a functioning authority in January 1964, Philadelphia stood on the cusp of a new era in its transportation history.

### Chapter 3

#### **“Let the People Have a Victory”: The Democratization of Transportation Politics, 1964-1968**

In the 1960s, American democracy expanded dramatically as previously neglected and oppressed social groups – including African Americans, women, Native Americans, students, and others – made great strides toward attaining increased participation in civic life, greater representation in government, better treatment under the nation’s laws, and a higher degree of control over decisions affecting their lives. The social movements historians identify as such a salient feature of the decade resulted in challenges to the imposition of top-down authority and hierarchy in virtually every area of American life.

Transportation politics were among the many facets of U.S. society affected by greater democratization in the mid-1960s. The most obvious manifestations of this transformation were so-called “freeway revolts,” which entailed large groups of citizens – such as neighborhood associations, religious congregations, historic preservationists, environmentalists, or citizens’ planning organizations – banding together to oppose the construction of an expressway slated to tear through one or more urban neighborhoods. This phenomenon occurred with varying degrees of success in major cities across the nation including San Francisco, Baltimore, New Orleans, Washington, D.C., and Boston, just to name a few.<sup>1</sup> As highway historian Raymond Mohl explained, these revolts were very much a product of the political ethos of the 1960s and had their greatest success in the latter part of that decade and in the early 1970s:

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<sup>1</sup> See p. 7, n. 7.

As a collection of discrete, bottom-up movements beginning at the neighborhood level, the freeway revolt shared many aspects of sixties countercultural and change-inducing activity. Typical of the time was rejection of top-down decision making, the normal practice of the highway establishment in routing and building highways. Freeway fighters sought citizen participation in important decision making on expressway routes and urban policy. However, the citizen army of homeowners and neighborhood groups usually came up against an inflexible bureaucratic force of state and federal highway engineers and administrators reluctant to yield professional and legal authority to popular protesters. Only when decision making on controversial interstate routes became politicized and subject to litigation in the late 1960s and after did freeway revolters achieve a measure of success and satisfaction.<sup>2</sup>

As Mohl explained, freeway revolts were directed primarily against the virtually untrammelled authority over highway construction that state and federal highway engineers enjoyed. From its inception in 1916, a federalist system governed the federal-aid highway program, whereby the federal government provided a portion of the funds, but route selection, design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction were the states' responsibilities (with varying degrees of local input), subject to federal approval. Despite a system under which ostensibly authority was decentralized, in reality the federal highway engineers in the Bureau of Public Roads dominated the process of highway construction in the United States until the mid-1960s. The Bureau derived its power from a carefully-maintained reputation for apolitical expertise as well as its role in overseeing the creation of stronger highway departments on the state level in the early years of federal-aid road construction. Most state highway engineers had close relationships with BPR engineers, sought their advice consistently, and adopted their mindset regarding the

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<sup>2</sup> Raymond A. Mohl, "Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities," *Journal of Urban History* 30, no. 5 (July 2004): 675-76.

purposes of highway construction. The result was an engineer-dominated highway planning regime that for decades focused almost entirely on the movement of automobile traffic while ignoring social, aesthetic and environmental factors. Historians Paul Barrett and Mark Rose summed up the situation: “Engineers and their numbers were in charge.”<sup>3</sup>

State and federal highway engineers began to lose their dominance over road building in the mid-1960s, when the process became less technocratic and more politicized. Changes within the federal government’s transportation bureaucracy coincided with growing citizen discontent, altering the course of expressway politics and resulting in a shift in emphasis away from highway building and toward urban mass transportation improvements. Most significantly, the BPR was in 1966 placed within the new U.S. Department of Transportation; now subject to much greater oversight, the Bureau was stripped of the near total autonomy with which it had operated for so long. The nation’s first Secretary of Transportation, Alan Boyd, and his successor John Volpe, were sympathetic to the concerns of highway protestors and moved toward a true decentralization of authority so that local opinion, rather than the technical analyses of federal engineers, would become the primary factor governing highway planning.<sup>4</sup> In addition to curtailing the engineers’ power and moving expressway construction into the

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Barrett and Mark H. Rose, “Street Smarts: The Politics of Transportation Statistics in the American City,” *Journal of Urban History* 25, no. 3 (March 1999): 415; Mark H. Rose, *Interstate: Express Highway Politics, 1939-1989* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 101-12; Mark H. Rose and Bruce E. Seely, “Getting the Interstate System Built: Road Engineers and the Implementation of Public Policy, 1955-1985,” *Journal of Policy History* 2, no. 1 (1990): 33-37; Bruce E. Seely, *Building the American Highway System: Engineers as Policy Makers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 231-32.

<sup>4</sup> As Zachary Schrag explained, prior to becoming Secretary of Transportation, Boyd had been chair of the Civil Aviation Board, and therefore lacked intimate ties with highway engineers. He surrounded himself with people likely to question the conventional wisdom regarding expressway construction, such as his assistant general counsel for litigation, Peter Craig, who had been an anti-freeway activist in Washington, D.C. Zachary M. Schrag, “The Freeway Fight in Washington, D.C.: The Three Sisters Bridge in Three Administrations,” *Journal of Urban History* 30, no. 5 (July 2004): 655-56.

realm of local politics, the Department of Transportation gave strong support to new federal legislation aimed at improving urban mass transit. Such legislation culminated in what was possibly the clearest indication of shifting priorities on the federal level – a 1973 provision allowing states to receive federal money for mass transportation improvements by cancelling interstate highway projects.<sup>5</sup>

Mirroring the national trend, Philadelphia's transportation politics also became more democratic in the mid-1960s, allowing for greater input by those affected directly by planning decisions. The high point of the move toward greater democracy was Philadelphia's own freeway revolt, which began in 1964, reached a fever pitch in 1967, and in 1968 achieved the first of the three defeats of the Crosstown Expressway that were needed to kill the controversial road for good. The expressway's final cancellation in 1973 spared thousands of African Americans, many of them living in poverty, from losing their homes, and prevented the construction of a racial barrier that would have separated the neighborhoods in the expressway corridor from downtown. The mid-1960s also saw the beginnings of a successful movement by affluent residents of Philadelphia's Society Hill neighborhood to have a portion of the Delaware Expressway in their area lowered and topped with a landscaped cover for aesthetic and historic preservation reasons.

The Crosstown Expressway proved exceptional, however. The democratization of Philadelphia's transportation politics, unlike that of many other cities, did not result in substantial gains in power by grassroots citizens' organizations. Instead, the city's white-

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<sup>5</sup> Raymond A. Mohl, "The Interstates and the Cities: The U.S. Department of Transportation and the Freeway Revolt, 1966-1973," *Journal of Policy History* 20, no. 2 (2008): 194; Schrag, "The Freeway Fight in Washington, D.C.," 649, 655, 668.

collar business interests, represented in large part by the Greater Philadelphia Movement, the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, and the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, took the reins and emerged as the dominant force shaping transportation planning. These were the same organizations – the directors of which were drawn from fields such as retail, banking, real estate, insurance, and law – that had controlled the city’s redevelopment since the end of World War II. As a result, they already had close ties to City Hall and were well positioned to exert strong influence in the area of transportation as well. The Citizens’ Council on City Planning was moved in 1966 to declare with some measure of concern that quasi-public corporations such as OPDC possibly had “more effect on the physical development of the city than all of the plans of the Planning Commission.”<sup>6</sup> The consequence of the emergence of business interests as more powerful actors in the field of transportation politics was that Philadelphia’s priorities, which were already focused on revitalizing the urban core rather than outlying neighborhoods, underwent little discernable change. Those standing outside the tight alliance between City Hall and the large business interests – especially racial minorities and the poor – were unable to exert a great degree of long-term influence over transportation planning decisions that impacted them directly.

As was explained in earlier chapters, Philadelphia’s business and government establishment had been concerned about the decline of mass transportation (authority over which had remained in local hands throughout the postwar period, in contrast to expressways) since the mid-1950s, well before the problem garnered significant national attention. The changes that occurred in the realm of national transportation politics in the

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<sup>6</sup> “Report of the Evaluation Committee of Citizens’ Council on City Planning,” Draft report, January 1966, p. 13, Papers of Walter Phillips, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

1960s allowed the city and the region as a whole to expand on earlier efforts to improve the area's mass transit. A crucial piece of legislation was the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964 (UMTA), which authorized federal money to aid cities in upgrading their mass transportation infrastructure. In anticipation of greater federal aid, the Pennsylvania legislature, at the urging of Philadelphia's City Hall and its business community, created the regional transit authority SEPTA to act as a conduit through which federal grants would pass to the region's mass transit systems. SEPTA, which began operations early in 1964, was an outgrowth of the region's existing subsidization of the Pennsylvania and Reading Railroads' commuter operations through the Passenger Service Improvement Corporation and the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Compact, and took over those subsidy operations in 1965. Although the new authority in 1968 acquired the city's urban mass transit system of buses, subways and trolleys, it maintained the bias toward the commuter railroads that its origins suggested. Business and political leaders in Philadelphia had since the 1950s perceived the maintenance of the commuter railroads, which brought suburban workers and shoppers downtown, to be necessary to the preservation of the central business district.

Although SEPTA's disparate treatment of the commuter railroads and urban transit system did not cause major controversy right away, in 1964 Philadelphia planted the seeds of future conflict when it asked the federal government to help it fund the Center City Commuter Connection, a downtown rail tunnel that would unify the region's two separate commuter railroad systems. The project stalled during the 1960s, but became the subject of a heated debate in the 1970s, when funds were scarce and the urban transportation infrastructure was deteriorating rapidly. Many urban residents came

to believe that SEPTA and their own city government cared more about helping affluent white suburbanites get to work than about the transportation needs of the inner-city residents.

The years between 1964 and 1968 were notable for the democratization of Philadelphia's transportation politics, in keeping with the national trend, as local interests gained greater influence over transportation planning decisions. Although some power did devolve to grassroots citizens' organizations, resulting in the city's temporary abandonment of the controversial Crosstown Expressway, white-collar business interests focused on downtown revitalization emerged as the most important actors in the transportation arena. Because Philadelphia's planning regime was already focused on the renewal of Center City as a vibrant central business district, transportation planning priorities did not change in any meaningful way. The southeastern Pennsylvania region did in this period take advantage of changing priorities at the federal level to make great strides toward improving its mass transportation, but it did so in a way that set the stage for future conflict over the prioritization of affluent suburbanites over the inner-city working class and poor.

### **The Battle of Society Hill: The Delaware Expressway**

In the mid-1960s, affluent white professionals in Philadelphia's Society Hill neighborhood, many of whom were affiliated with the city's large corporate interests, began a successful campaign to have a portion of the Delaware Expressway built below ground and topped with a landscaped cover. Although the city had experienced some opposition to expressway construction in the 1950s and early 1960s, the Society Hill fight was qualitatively different, and represented a new kind of expressway battle. Earlier,

those living in the paths of the Schuylkill and Delaware Expressways had objected, understandably, to routes that were slated to destroy their homes and churches. In contrast, the Society Hill protestors were focused on larger issues of how expressways impacted cities in terms of environment, aesthetics, and historic preservation. While some tried to characterize their movement as a group of wealthy people desiring to insulate themselves from inconvenience, Society Hill residents skillfully promoted the notion that they were acting primarily to preserve some of the most historic ground in the United States – a strategy that garnered them national support and was crucial to their success. While the democratization of transportation politics, a federal government that was more responsive to local concerns about highways, and a national base of support were all vital factors, the fact that the Society Hill protestors had intimate ties to the business-government coalition that ran the city's redevelopment may have been most important to the overall result.

The campaign to modify the design of the Delaware Expressway in Society Hill took place within the context of an urban renewal program in which the city, the federal government, and private interests had invested large sums of money, elevating dramatically the socioeconomic status of the neighborhood. The new residents who sought to have their portion of the expressway modified (including descendants of the Founders) were part of the city's establishment, enjoying close connections to centers of power in both business and government. What happened in Southwark, a less affluent area immediately to the south of Society Hill in which a large number of homes and churches were lost to the expressway, illustrated the significance of class in shaping transportation decisions. Southwark had not yet become gentrified and was populated

mostly by working-class whites whose socioeconomic status and eastern European ethnicity left them further removed from City Hall and corporate boardrooms. Despite possessing historic value, Southwark lacked the famous institutions, such as Independence Hall, that gave Society Hill's quest national appeal. As a result, Southwark residents failed in their copycat effort to have their portion of the Delaware Expressway lowered and covered, and the expressway impacted the community severely.

In the fall of 1964, the Delaware Expressway made a leap forward when the first section of the road, running six miles from Bucks County to Woodhaven Road in Northeast Philadelphia, opened for traffic.<sup>7</sup> The controversial Center City section of the highway, however, was about to enter a new and even more contentious phase. The epicenter of the controversy was Society Hill, a historic but physically deteriorated neighborhood hugging the Delaware River on the eastern side of Center City Philadelphia. In the mid-1960s, the area was undergoing a renaissance as Philadelphia's city government began efforts to draw affluent professionals back to the city. At the forefront of the effort was Edmund Bacon, the executive director of the City Planning Commission, who had been focused since 1949 on renewing Society Hill. A November 1964 profile of Bacon in *Time* explained that "Society Hill is studded with 18<sup>th</sup> century houses and historic landmarks, and Bacon opened up vistas around them by chopping out factories and dingy warehouses, threading greenery through them and building new houses in harmony with the eighteenth century beauties."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 11 September 1964, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>8</sup> "Under the Knife, or All for Their Own Good," *Time*, 6 November 1964 [magazine on-line]; available from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,876419-1,00.html>; Internet; accessed 25 September 2009. Philadelphia's Redevelopment Authority was vested with the power of eminent domain, which it applied to Society Hill beginning in 1957. Petshek, 225.

Society Hill Towers, a trio of high-rise apartment buildings designed by I.M. Pei, also helped to spur the area's renewal. Local attorney Stanhope Browne of Dechert, Price & Rhoads, who led the effort to get the Delaware Expressway modified, moved from affluent Chestnut Hill to Society Hill with his wife in October 1964, taking the twelfth apartment to be rented in the Towers. Although the Towers caused some controversy, Browne agreed with Bacon that they were crucial to the neighborhood's redevelopment. Getting affluent professionals to move to Society Hill, "with a very iffy situation, with no stores and shops, empty streets at night, it was going to take a long time, and it might just peter out," he said. "You had to bring in a lot of people fast."<sup>9</sup> One observer referred to pre-renewal Society Hill as "a bombed out area," with few stores and poor schools, badly in need of outside assistance to become attractive as a residential area.<sup>10</sup>

The city's Redevelopment Authority placed primary responsibility for directing the Society Hill renaissance in the hands of the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, a private group run by, as Browne put it, "the power elite of the city," including bank presidents and heads of major corporations. OPDC was an outgrowth of the Greater Philadelphia Movement, the powerful group of corporate presidents established in 1948 to spearhead reform of the city charter and accelerate Philadelphia's postwar development. GPM preferred to oversee development on a grand scale, often helping to create new organizations to deal with specific projects. At a 1956 meeting in Mayor Richardson Dilworth's office, Dilworth, GPM member Harry Batten of

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<sup>9</sup> Stanhope Browne, Interview by author, Tape recording, Philadelphia, PA, 27 January 2009.

<sup>10</sup> James Martin, Interview by Walter Phillips, Transcript, 16 March 1977, p. 4, Walter Phillips Oral History Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

advertising agency N.W. Ayer, and powerful real estate mogul turned chairman of the City Planning Commission Albert Greenfield (whose company owned a lot of property in the southeastern quadrant of Center City) hatched the idea for OPDC, which was to be a quasi-public corporation composed of both corporate executives and top city officials.<sup>11</sup>

The new organization's first role was as the official consultant to the Redevelopment Authority on the Society Hill project, and its main responsibility was to sell crumbling houses to buyers who agreed to restore them.<sup>12</sup> The process of urban renewal forced out most of the previous residents, including a small number of African Americans but mostly working-class whites of eastern and central European descent. OPDC's focus was on restoring houses rather than tearing them down, so existing owners were spared losing their homes to eminent domain if they promised, at a minimum, to restore the façade. Despite being offered low-interest loans to do so, most did not. As a result, the neighborhood gentrified quickly.<sup>13</sup>

Society Hill's renewal set the stage for the expressway controversy. Affluent new residents began to realize that the elevated expressway engineers had planned for their section would have a blighting effect on the area – by creating an unsightly and noisy barrier between the city and its waterfront – and thus interfere with redevelopment plans. The earliest protests against the elevated expressway were not highly organized, but nevertheless caught the attention of city and state officials, perhaps because the citizens

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<sup>11</sup> Jeanne R. Lowe, *Cities in a Race with Time: Progress and Poverty in America's Renewing Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 325, 344-45; Kirk R. Petshek, *The Challenge of Urban Reform: Policies & Programs in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1973), 220.

<sup>12</sup> Lowe, 346.

<sup>13</sup> Stanhope Browne, Interview by author, Tape recording, Philadelphia, PA, 27 January 2009.

involved were prominent and were already allied with the Redevelopment Authority and OPDC.

In October 1964, property owners, residents, and real estate developers in Society Hill began to object to the “Chinese Wall” that would be created by elevating the expressway up to 25.5 feet above ground between Dock and Lombard Streets.<sup>14</sup>

Commissioner of Streets David Smallwood was quick to dismiss this characterization, claiming that the concept of a wall was misleading because there were to be underpasses to the waterfront at both Dock and Spruce Streets.<sup>15</sup> Despite the fact that his department, while participating in the highway planning process, lacked final authority over issues such as route and design, Smallwood proclaimed that the elevated design would not be changed. Democratic mayor James H.J. Tate, who had replaced Dilworth in 1962, felt differently, and he persuaded the state highway department to agree to study the issue.<sup>16</sup> Republican Pennsylvania Secretary of Highways Henry Harral, perhaps recognizing the near unanimity of local opposition to an elevated highway, promised immediately to eliminate the “Chinese Wall” from the Society Hill plans. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* listed possible alternatives as a highway at grade level with overpasses to the waterfront; a slightly elevated highway with overpasses or underpasses; or a tunnel through the area.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 18 October 1964, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>15</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 1 November 1964, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>16</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 18 December 1964, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>17</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 December 1964, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Only a few days after Harral's promise, however, his department reneged, refusing to have its engineering consultants make a full restudy of the expressway in Society Hill. William Day, the president of OPDC, complained that "the position taken by the highway officials completely overlooks the importance of the urban renewal program and the hundreds of millions of dollars of government and private money being invested" in Society Hill and nearby projects, such as the waterfront area known as Penn's Landing.<sup>18</sup> The state's position, he lamented, "was taken despite the leadership and strong position of Mayor Tate" who had advocated strongly for a review of this portion of the highway.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the drumbeat of criticism from Philadelphians concerned about the historic properties that would be destroyed by the expressway continued. The Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks called the Delaware Expressway "the greatest single massacre of old Philadelphia houses ever proposed." The expressway would take 173 certified historic buildings between

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<sup>18</sup> Penn's Landing was the Delaware River waterfront area in Center City, named for the spot where Pennsylvania founder William Penn docked when he arrived in Philadelphia in 1682. Architects hired by the city drew up the first redevelopment plan for the area in 1963. In 1970, Mayor Tate formed the Penn's Landing Corporation (PLC), a quasi-public organization and Old Philadelphia Development Corporation subsidiary, to manage development activities. The new corporation created more extensive plans that included a museum, shops, restaurants and entertainment facilities. Stanhope Browne, the leader of the effort to have the Delaware Expressway lowered and covered in Society Hill, served on the PLC board of directors for much of the 1970s and was its chairman from 1981 to 1997. Although some development did occur between the 1970s and the first years of the twenty-first century, Penn's Landing failed to achieve its potential in the eyes of many Philadelphians. In 2009, the PLC was replaced by the Delaware River Waterfront Corporation, a new non-profit group that promised "to transform the Central Delaware River Waterfront into a vibrant destination location for recreational, cultural, and commercial activities for the residents and visitors of Philadelphia." Independence Hall Association, "A Short History of Penn's Landing"; available from [http://www.ushistory.org/tour/tour\\_landing.htm](http://www.ushistory.org/tour/tour_landing.htm); Internet; accessed 27 January 2010; Alan Jaffe, "A long view of the Penn's Landing Corp.," available from <http://planphilly.com/node/5469>; Internet; accessed 27 January 2010; Delaware River Waterfront Corporation, "Master Plan for the Central Delaware Waterfront"; available from <http://www.delawareriverwaterfrontcorp.com/index.php?pageID=62&image=62a>; Internet; accessed 27 January 2010.

<sup>19</sup> William Day to Gustave Amsterdam, 22 December 1964, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

Lombard Street and Washington Avenue, the group claimed, 73 of them built prior to 1800.<sup>20</sup>

After having been met by initial resistance from the state highway department, Philadelphia politicians and business leaders turned to the federal government for help. In January 1965, former Philadelphia mayor and current U.S. senator Joseph Clark joined with William Rafsky, the former city Development Coordinator turned executive vice president of OPDC, to meet with federal highway administrator Rex Whitton. Clark and Rafsky appealed to Whitton on behalf of Society Hill residents and city officials who were concerned about the potential blighting effect of the expressway.<sup>21</sup> It seems that Clark and Rafsky were able to convince Whitton of the merits of their position, as Whitton announced on February 1 that engineering firm Ammann & Whitney had conducted a study to determine whether a ground-level expressway would be feasible, reporting in the affirmative.<sup>22</sup> Two days later, bending apparently to pressure from both Philadelphia and the federal government, Harral approved a new design that would lower the Delaware Expressway from 25 feet to two or three feet above street level.<sup>23</sup>

Harral's concession, although ensuring a major change in the design of the expressway, did not end the Society Hill controversy, which instead became more heated. Soon afterward, the Society Hill Civic Association arranged for Edmund Bacon, along with a state highway engineer, to present to area residents a model of the redesigned

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<sup>20</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 3 January 1965, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>21</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 12 January 1965, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>22</sup> "Report of the Interdepartmental Task Force on the Delaware Expressway in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania," 1967, Pamphlet Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>23</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 3 February 1965, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

expressway. When Bacon had finished his presentation, a prominent Philadelphian named Jared Ingersoll stood up to speak. Ingersoll, a Pennsylvania Railroad executive descended from a signer of the Constitution, whose wife Agnes served on the board of OPDC, was a pioneer of the Society Hill renaissance, being one of the first citizens of note to restore a house in the neighborhood. Ingersoll let Bacon know in no uncertain terms that Society Hill residents were still not satisfied with the expressway design and intended to fight him on it.<sup>24</sup>

Bacon had told *Time* in 1964, “If you wait until someone else does a plan, you’re licked. We always have a proposal ready.”<sup>25</sup> Those who wanted to challenge Bacon’s expressway design took this philosophy to heart, realizing that their quest would be futile unless they had an alternative proposal ready to go. Fortuitously, a group of young, socially-conscious architects, who according to Browne were not part of “the architectural establishment of Philadelphia,” also opposed the expressway design and had recently come up with a plan. Led by Frank Wiese and calling themselves the Philadelphia Architects Committee, the group had sketched designs for an expressway built entirely below ground in Society Hill and topped with a cover. Almost immediately afterward, in March 1965, members of the Society Hill Civic Association who opposed Bacon’s plan for the expressway formed the Committee to Preserve Philadelphia’s Historic Gateway (CPPHG), with Browne in the lead. As Browne recalled, the architects had a good plan but lacked experience with politics and public relations, areas in which

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<sup>24</sup> Stanhope Browne, Interview by author, Tape recording, Philadelphia, PA, 27 January 2009.

<sup>25</sup> “Under the Knife, or All for Their Own Good,” *Time*, 6 November 1964 [magazine on-line]; available from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,876419-1,00.html>; Internet; accessed 25 September 2009.

many members of the CPPHG were well-versed. As a result, the two groups “rushed into each other’s arms.”<sup>26</sup>

The Architects Committee and the CPPHG proposed to drop the expressway into a tunnel 30 feet below ground from Arch to Pine Streets – a distance of six blocks.<sup>27</sup> Composed of bankers, lawyers, businessmen, publishers, insurance executives and the like, the CPPHG garnered immediately high-profile supporters including Mayor Tate and both of Pennsylvania’s U.S. senators, Joseph Clark and Hugh Scott.<sup>28</sup> The Citizens’ Council on City Planning also lent its support to the effort. In accordance with its more activist role in the 1960s, the Council took note of the “great and possibly growing gap between community-wide planning programs and the interests and concerns of neighborhoods or various groups within political jurisdictions.” The Council’s support for a depressed Delaware Expressway in Society Hill was based in part on “a rising awareness that the concern of planning must not be restricted to physical development alone but that it must deal with the social and economic as well.”<sup>29</sup> Mayor Tate assured Citizens’ Council president Samuel Ballam that he did “not intend to see historic values sacrificed to engineering expediency.”<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, the CPPHG enjoyed very strong support from OPDC, the extremely powerful group that was in charge of Society Hill’s urban renewal. Stanhope Browne

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<sup>26</sup> Stanhope Browne, Interview by author, Tape recording, Philadelphia, PA, 27 January 2009; *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 14 January 1966, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>27</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 4 March 1965, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>28</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 20 March 1965, 24 March 1965, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>29</sup> Citizens’ Council on City Planning, Annual report, 1965-66, Annual Reports Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>30</sup> James Tate to Samuel Ballam, 23 March 1965, Papers of the Citizens’ Council on City Planning, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

remarked that the Delaware Expressway battle in Society Hill was “a three-pronged fight,” with the Architects Committee providing the technical expertise, the CPPHG acting as the public face of the movement, and OPDC, which attempted to avoid public controversy, exerting its influence behind the scenes. The low-key manner in which the CPPHG conducted its activism – treating officials in a collegial manner rather than marching, picketing, or shouting – was reflective of the extent to which the group’s members were tied to, and part of, the city’s establishment. As Browne said, “We had to be very gentlemanly and ladylike. . . . You were never going to get Mrs. Ingersoll to go camp out on the governor’s front yard. That wasn’t our style.”<sup>31</sup>

Edmund Bacon was one of the few among Philadelphia’s elite who was not on board, telling Jared Ingersoll that he did “not think it would be either wise or practical to try to depress the Delaware Expressway at this point.”<sup>32</sup> Around the same time, Bacon told *Time* that burying the expressway would cut off the driver’s view of the redeveloped Society Hill, a statement that aroused indignation in Philadelphia attorney William Logan Fox, who wrote Bacon, “I had supposed Society Hill was to be made a good place in which people may enjoy living. I had not supposed it was to be in the nature of a zoo – to be viewed by the passing motorist.”<sup>33</sup> Other than the comment to *Time*, Bacon said almost nothing in public about his opposition to depressing the Delaware Expressway, perhaps because he realized he was facing stern opposition and did not want to tarnish his

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<sup>31</sup> Stanhope Browne, Interview by author, Tape recording, Philadelphia, PA, 27 January 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Edmund Bacon to C. Jared Ingersoll, 6 April 1965, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>33</sup> “Hitting the Road,” *Time*, 9 April 1965 [magazine on-line]; available from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,898602,00.html>; Internet; accessed 25 September 2009; William Logan Fox to Edmund Bacon, 8 April 1965, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

sterling reputation as the maestro of Philadelphia's postwar development.<sup>34</sup> Mayor Tate explained later that Bacon and William Rafsky of OPDC had a "major clash" over the issue, but Tate pressured Bacon to present a united front, particularly once the possibility of federal assistance for the project arose.<sup>35</sup>

Despite Bacon's influence over Philadelphia planning, the CPPHG and the Architects Committee were effective because they had all of the elements needed for success: a solid plan, political clout, powerful allies, and a perhaps most importantly, a shrewd strategy. From the beginning, the Society Hill activists knew they needed to counter the perception that, as Stanhope Browne put it, "those rich people in Society Hill want their view of the water." In the first place, said Browne, not everyone in Society Hill was wealthy. Furthermore, "hardly anybody" had a river view in the first place, except for some residents of Society Hill Towers who were too high up to lose their views regardless of what happened with the Delaware Expressway. Refuting the charge that the CPPHG was looking out only for the rich was not enough, however. The activists knew they would need an affirmative argument with broad appeal in order to garner widespread support for their expressway plan. The CPPHG therefore articulated its cause as being "about the historic district [and] not about Society Hill." Activists emphasized that the area through which the expressway was to pass – just a few blocks from Independence Hall – was "the place where Philadelphia was born, and because of

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<sup>34</sup> Stanhope Browne, Interview by author, Tape recording, Philadelphia, PA, 27 January 2009.

<sup>35</sup> James Tate, Interview by Walter Phillips, Transcript, 13 October 1976, p. 2, Walter Phillips Oral History Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

what happened here, it's the place where the United States was born." As Browne recalled, "we wrapped ourselves in the flag."<sup>36</sup>

The CPPHG's tactic of emphasizing Society Hill's historic value proved to be extremely persuasive. Before long, historical societies, civic associations, women's clubs, and veterans' groups had endorsed the plan. The city's labor unions, realizing they stood to prosper from the additional construction the plan would require, also came on board – helping undoubtedly to dispel the notion that only the rich would benefit – as did the Chamber of Commerce.<sup>37</sup> With the mayor and OPDC firmly behind the concept of a depressed and covered expressway, it was not long before the CPPHG achieved concrete results. In late March 1965, bowing to the weight of political pressure, Henry Harral promised that the state would conduct a study of the issue.<sup>38</sup>

By the end of April, the expressway activists had made significant progress. Both the state and federal governments had approved building the Delaware Expressway below ground through Society Hill, while leaving the issue of a cover up in the air.<sup>39</sup> While the Society Hill activists could certainly claim much of the credit, correspondence between Mayor Tate and Pennsylvania's congressional delegation made clear that the state's members of Congress also played an important role in acting as liaisons between the city and the state and federal governments. A grateful Tate thanked federal official Rex Whitton for his "enlightened handling of the problem," remarking that "it would

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<sup>36</sup> Stanhope Browne, Interview by author, Tape recording, Philadelphia, PA, 27 January 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Stanhope Browne, Interview by author, Tape recording, Philadelphia, PA, 27 January 2009.

<sup>38</sup> Henry Harral to James Tate, 29 March 1965, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>39</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 11 April 1965, 30 April 1965, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

have been disastrous if an elevated highway had been allowed to desecrate what is destined to become one of the most beautiful historic areas in the United States.”<sup>40</sup>

The announcement that the Delaware Expressway would be lowered but not necessarily covered presented a crisis for the CPPHG, the leaders of which had to decide whether to accept their partial victory, or fight on. The decision, according to Stanhope Browne, rested on whether the group could count on the continuing support of OPDC in pushing for the expressway cover. William Rafsky of OPDC expressed concern that the Architects Committee, being composed mainly of young and relatively inexperienced architects, lacked the requisite credibility. Obtaining greater technical expertise was difficult because the engineers whose opinions carried the most weight were aligned with state and federal government highway departments and not citizens’ groups. The CPPHG solved this dilemma when it reached out to Earl Allebach, a highly respected civic engineer who was retired and therefore not beholden to any government agency. When Allebach approved what the Architects Committee had proposed, a relieved OPDC board gave its blessing to continuing the fight. Immediately upon hearing what Allebach had to say, board member Stuart Rausch, president of the Philadelphia Saving Fund Society (the nation’s oldest mutual savings bank), picked up the phone and called Republican governor William Scranton, informing him that Philadelphia still wanted the Delaware Expressway covered.<sup>41</sup>

The cover issue turned out to be extraordinarily contentious, with Henry Harral the main opponent in the CPPHG’s eyes. As Browne related, “We had to have a villain,

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<sup>40</sup> James Tate to Rex Whitton, 8 June 1965, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>41</sup> Stanhope Browne, Interview by author, Tape recording, Philadelphia, PA, 27 January 2009.

and we decided to make Henry Harral the villain.”<sup>42</sup> Harral said that a six-block cover from Arch to Pine Streets would cost \$70 million extra; the CPPHG said it would cost only \$17 million. By December 1965, engineers for both sides had completed their estimates, and the gap had narrowed considerably, with the state claiming a cost of \$25.2 million and the CPPHG predicting \$11.2 million but willing to accept the state’s higher estimate. Harral, believing that covering a highway was not the business of the state or federal governments, balked at contributing state funds to the project and refused to attempt to convince the federal government to provide the funds either.<sup>43</sup> The *Evening Bulletin* reflected the opinions of many when it editorialized that the idea of a covered expressway was too important to abandon, especially in light of the fact that Philadelphia’s historic district would be a focal point of bicentennial celebrations in 1976:

This is an important issue, of even some national importance. Will the United States, one might ask, be proud to show the world its birthplace in the planned 1976 commemoration, cheek by jowl with a ten-lane highway carrying 100,000 cars, trucks and buses a day? Can Philadelphia afford a virtual moat separating its developing riverfront from its center and historic nucleus, creating monstrous traffic bottlenecks and preempting 15 acres of its prime land?<sup>44</sup>

The *Bulletin* editorial reflected an important shift in the CPPHG’s strategy.

Realizing that convincing the state to build an expensive expressway cover would be an uphill battle, OPDC advised the Delaware Expressway activists to make their campaign

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<sup>42</sup> Stanhope Browne, Interview by author, Tape recording, Philadelphia, PA, 27 January 2009.

<sup>43</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 20 December 1965, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>44</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 20 December 1965, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

national in scope, continuing to press the theme of preserving America's historic treasures. An important ally in this regard was Harry Batten, the head of powerful local advertising agency N.W. Ayer and founding member of OPDC. Batten gave the CPPHG invaluable public relations advice, such as helping the group create a booklet with visual aids showing the relationship between the expressway and the neighborhood's historic buildings and advising the group to change its name to the Committee to Preserve the Nation's Birthplace (CPNB), a snappier name with explicit national appeal.<sup>45</sup>

The newly-named CPNB had a simple yet highly effective strategy for garnering and demonstrating national support for its cause. Early on, Martha Schober, one of the founders of the CPPHG, had sought the advice of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The National Trust agreed to help by releasing to Schober its entire list of member organizations. Once it became clear that the CPNB would need national support in order to win its fight for the cover, it sent letters to the organizations on the list asking them to endorse formally the concept of a six-block cover for the Delaware Expressway in Society Hill. With the CPNB not asking for money or any effort beyond a signature on a form, the pitch worked beautifully. Moreover, casting the appeal in terms of the preservation of historic treasures was – at least to those who weren't being asked to pay for it – relatively non-controversial. As Browne recalled, “people fell over themselves to sign this thing.”<sup>46</sup> As a result of its efforts, the CPNB was able to create a letterhead containing an impressive list of endorsing individuals and organizations from across the country, including national organizations such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the American Institute of Architects, and the American Association for

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<sup>45</sup> Stanhope Browne, Interview by author, Tape recording, Philadelphia, PA, 27 January 2009.

<sup>46</sup> Stanhope Browne, Interview by author, Tape recording, Philadelphia, PA, 27 January 2009.

State and Local History, Philadelphia groups like the AFL-CIO Philadelphia Council, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and the Philadelphia chapter of the Pennsylvania Society of Professional Engineers, in addition to historical societies and preservation groups from at least 22 different states and Washington, D.C.<sup>47</sup>

Although the CPNB framed the issue as one of historic preservation, money was the central issue for Henry Harral. The federal government's Highway Trust Fund, he claimed, was already having trouble meeting increased interstate highway costs. Funding a cover for the Delaware Expressway would therefore mean cutting back on funds for other planned Philadelphia highway projects.<sup>48</sup> Harral's warning did not stop City Council from passing a resolution asking Governor Scranton to use his influence to seek federal funds for the cover. The Delaware Expressway in Society Hill, City Council said, would create "an ugly, noisy, open ditch if not properly constructed fully below grade and covered by a concrete roof to be landscaped, providing 15 acres of parks."<sup>49</sup> Senator Clark added his strong support, pledging to ask Scranton personally to support the cover.<sup>50</sup> Clark's announcement was soon followed by an endorsement from his Senate colleague Hugh Scott.<sup>51</sup> One of the few dissenting local views came from Streets Commissioner David Smallwood. Smallwood, who was impatient and already frustrated by slow progress in expressway construction, objected on the grounds that a cover would

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<sup>47</sup> See, e.g., Stanhope Browne to Peter Schaffler, 30 April 1968, Papers of the Greater Philadelphia Movement, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>48</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 23 December 1965, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>49</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 24 December 1965, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>50</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 26 December 1965, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>51</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 30 December 1965, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

delay the completion of the expressway. Mayor Tate brushed aside Smallwood's concerns, pointing out that Smallwood had been opposed to any changes to the road from the very beginning.<sup>52</sup>

While the cover issue was debated in Philadelphia, Harrisburg, and Washington, another potential problem was bubbling just under the surface in Southwark, a white, working-class area on the Delaware River, immediately to the south of Society Hill. Like Society Hill, Southwark had a long history, having been settled by Swedes in 1653 and experiencing dramatic growth in the mid-eighteenth century. In the 1960s, the neighborhood was mostly white, with Catholics of eastern European descent, such as Poles and Russians, predominating.<sup>53</sup> When the Society Hill activists began their campaign, Southwark residents began to wonder why no one was considering putting the highway underground in their area as well. Southwark's attempt to get the expressway design modified failed, and the reasons are not difficult to understand. In contrast to Society Hill, Southwark had not yet undergone a transformational cycle of urban renewal and gentrification. (Part of Southwark did experience renewal in the early 1970s, becoming known as Queen Village – a development that had consequences for the Delaware Expressway later on.) In the meantime, Southwark remained a relatively humble neighborhood whose working-class residents were not part of the close alliance between Philadelphia's major business interests and its government. Without urban

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<sup>52</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 29 December 1965, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>53</sup> *The Sunday Bulletin Magazine*, 8 January 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "U.S. Censuses of Population and Housing: 1960"; [document on-line]; available from <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/41953654v8ch06.pdf>; Internet; accessed 25 September 2009.

renewal, without the backing of OPDC, and without nationally-recognized historic structures such as Independence Hall, Southwark's attempt to have its stretch of the expressway tunneled was doomed to failure.

In March 1965, Edward Parnum, the secretary of Gloria Dei Church (which, also known as Old Swedes' Church and dating to 1700, was the oldest church in Pennsylvania), asked Grant Simon of the Philadelphia Historical Commission, "While the protests which have been made by the residents north of Pine Street to have the Expressway tunneled seem to be having consideration, is there any reason why this possibility should not be carried out at least as far south as Washington Avenue?"<sup>54</sup> Simon agreed, and in early April, just before the state approved an underground route through Society Hill, both the church and the Historical Commission demanded that the underground portion be extended south to Washington Avenue, just south of the church grounds.<sup>55</sup>

At the beginning of 1966, a copycat group formed, calling itself the Committee for the Preservation of Philadelphia's Historic Southwark (CPPHS). On January 4 the CPPHS held a meeting attended by 100 people and presided over by Gloria Dei rector Reverend John Craig Roak. At this meeting, Southwark residents railed against both state and city officials for a highway plan that would destroy over a hundred historic homes in the area and isolate Gloria Dei. Those at the meeting adopted a resolution appealing directly to the federal government, the final approval of which would be needed for any modification, calling on the Bureau of Public Roads to consider a

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<sup>54</sup> Edward Parnum to Grant Simon, 30 March 1965, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>55</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 2 April 1965, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

depressed expressway through Southwark that would be covered for the quarter-mile between Bainbridge Street and Washington Avenue.<sup>56</sup> The group released a statement the same day requesting that interested citizens send letters and telegrams both to federal highway administrator Rex Whitton and state highway secretary Henry Harral. “The alternatives are clear,” the press release blared, “UNNECESSARY DESTRUCTION of an historic heritage – or – an act of SIGNIFICANT PRESERVATION AND BEAUTIFICATION.”<sup>57</sup>

Neither the City Planning Commission nor the Pennsylvania Department of Highways responded favorably to entreaties from Southwark. David Hamme of the Planning Commission, in recounting the events of the CPPHS meeting to Edmund Bacon, made note of Roak’s “long and intemperate attack” on the Commission, which contained “many factual errors.” Roak and others were given a private audience with the Planning Commission a year and a half before the plan for the Delaware Expressway in Southwark was published, said Hamme, and no significant changes to the plan had been made since that time. Moreover, he reminded Bacon, five public meetings had been held to explain the plan and more than 25 meetings had been held with various community groups in the area. “It was from these meetings,” he explained, “that the plan actually evolved.”<sup>58</sup> David Smallwood, unsurprisingly, was annoyed with the Southwark protests, informing Mayor Tate that the expressway design in this area was “a completely accepted concept” until a depressed and covered expressway became a possibility in Society Hill. Acting as

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<sup>56</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 5 January 1966, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>57</sup> Committee for the Preservation of Philadelphia’s Historic Southwark, Press release, 4 January 1966, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>58</sup> David Hamme to Edmund Bacon, 4 January 1966, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

though it were entirely up to him, Smallwood lectured the mayor that “The design, location and treatment of the Expressway in [Southwark] is a closed matter.”<sup>59</sup>

Harral responded to the protests by proclaiming that he was going “full speed ahead” on the Delaware Expressway through Southwark. Like Smallwood, Harral made sure to point out that Southwark residents hadn’t sought major modifications to the expressway design until those in Society Hill had. Once the Society Hill activists made some progress, he remarked, those in Southwark “rightly decided to see if they can’t pull a power play too.” Despite the implications to the contrary, Harral said he felt the Southwark protests were just as legitimate, but nevertheless couldn’t help mentioning that compared to Society Hill residents, Southwark denizens “are not as well organized and do not have such powerful backing.”<sup>60</sup> Frustrated by Harral’s attitude, Roak turned to Congressman William Barrett. Acknowledging that “we do not have [Society Hill backer] Alcoa Aluminum or a ‘silk stocking’ group behind us,” Roak told Barrett that the CPPHS was backed by several important institutions, including churches and neighborhood organizations, the Philadelphia Historical Commission, and the *Catholic Standard and Times* newspaper. “What we cannot understand is why we cannot reach Mayor Tate and Senator Clark,” he wrote.<sup>61</sup> A few days after Roak’s letter, the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania, motivated primarily by the expressway’s impact on Gloria Dei Church, directed a formal protest to state and local authorities.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> David Smallwood to James Tate, 4 February 1966, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>60</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 16 January 1966, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>61</sup> John Craig Roak to William Barrett, 16 January 1966, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>62</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 23 January 1966, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Throughout 1966, the rumblings from Southwark continued. In June, the editorial board of the *Evening Bulletin* supported depressing and covering the expressway through the area, comparing its historical value to that of the Georgetown section of Washington, D.C.<sup>63</sup> In the meantime, residents picketed both City Hall and a temporary state highway department office – consisting of a table and chair in front of a condemned house on Front Street – manned for three hours a week by a state employee.<sup>64</sup> Despite the protests, the City Planning Commission rejected formally in August a request to recommend a change in the Delaware Expressway route through Southwark.<sup>65</sup> At a press conference, Roak ripped into Bacon for the Planning Commission’s refusal: “We accuse Edmund Bacon of preventing the free exchange of ideas and comments on this matter. We accuse him of not caring or being concerned with truth in this matter.”<sup>66</sup> Deacon Richard Stevens of Emanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church told Bacon that those present at Roak’s press conference “were appalled [sic] that the City Planning Commission would turn down an appeal to discuss possible alterations in the plans of the Expressway in Southwark, in light of the volume of protest.” With respect to officials’ claims that depressing the expressway in Southwark presented a danger of flooding, Stevens pointed out that no such concerns had been raised with respect to Society Hill and asked, “Can it be that the soil characteristics change so radically in only a few hundred yards of distance?”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 26 June 1966, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>64</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 27 July 1966, 4 August 1966, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>65</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 16 August 1966, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>66</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 18 August 1966, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>67</sup> Richard Stevens to Edmund Bacon, 23 August 1966, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

Southwark's fight to have the Delaware Expressway depressed and covered was not successful, despite garnering more high-profile support in 1967, nor was the effort, ongoing since 1960, to keep the expressway from taking a large number of Southwark homes. In March, City Council requested that the state highway department change the route to save more homes, and Senators Scott and Clark both intervened, with the former seeking to get President Lyndon Johnson involved, and the latter reaching out to moderate Republican governor Raymond Shafer.<sup>68</sup> The aforementioned efforts came to naught, as the *Evening Bulletin* reported soon afterward that the state's land acquisition in Southwark was on schedule despite the protests.<sup>69</sup> Things went downhill quickly from there. In May, evictions began, accompanied by sympathetic press reports of elderly residents crying as they packed up their belongings and the tale of a widow whose husband dropped dead of a heart attack immediately upon receiving an eviction notice.<sup>70</sup> In July, officials abandoned a plan to save some of the historic Southwark homes in the path of the expressway when the city, state and federal governments could not agree on it.<sup>71</sup> In November, workers began demolition.<sup>72</sup> The battle to keep the Delaware Expressway from ravaging this humble, working-class, South Philadelphia neighborhood had failed. The result was a lingering sense of resentment, from Southwark and other

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<sup>68</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 10 March 1967, 12 March 1967, 17 March 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>69</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 19 March 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>70</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 May 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>71</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 26 July 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>72</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 30 November 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

quarters of the city, against the more prosperous and influential residents of Society Hill, who were much more successful in altering the course of the expressway.

While Southwark fought its losing battle, the Society Hill effort toward getting an expressway cover made progress. In 1966, however, matters for a time looked grim. The Bureau of Public Roads rejected the notion of federal funding for the cover on the grounds that covering a highway was a matter for the state.<sup>73</sup> While Smallwood fumed that the cover controversy had delayed the expressway by at least 18 months, others raged over the government's failure to step up to the plate to protect one of the country's most historic areas.<sup>74</sup> The Society Hill fight caused many to consider not just the implications of one particular stretch of the Delaware Expressway, but of the nation's highway program as a whole. As the *Evening Bulletin* editorialized:

Sentiment is growing in Congress for some form of control over the road-builders, both state and federal . . . [Members of Congress] are concerned that inadequate planning and single-minded concentration on engineering requirements are resulting in the wholesale defacing of cities, the disruption of neighborhoods, and the ravaging of historic sites and parklands.<sup>75</sup>

In 1966, America's highway politics were in the embryonic stages of a transition to greater democracy, spurred in part by the Bureau of Public Roads becoming part of the new U.S. Department of Transportation, which was more receptive to local opinion about expressway construction. For advocates of the Delaware Expressway cover, however, change was not coming quickly enough. Some used brutal language in expressing the

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<sup>73</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 2 January 1966, 26 March 1966, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>74</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 29 March 1966, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>75</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 25 April 1966, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

need for more government action to ameliorate the effects of road-building on America's cities. Former mayor and then-school board president Richardson Dilworth exclaimed, "The stupidest people in the world are highway secretaries and the U.S. Department of Roads [sic]. They can't think of anything except spreading more miles of concrete."<sup>76</sup> Senator Clark concurred, saying, "It is time that Congress took a look at the highway program, because it is presently being operated by barbarians, and we ought to have some civilized understanding of just what we do to spots of historic interest and great beauty by the building of eight-lane highways through the middle of our cities."<sup>77</sup>

Some federal officials agreed that the U.S. government needed to take action. Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall was a crucial supporter of the Delaware Expressway cover, putting a high priority on protecting the Independence Hall area.<sup>78</sup> In June, Senators Clark and Scott introduced a bill, with Udall's support, to place the expressway cover under Interior's control. Governor Scranton supported the bill, despite Harral's opposition.<sup>79</sup> The *Evening Bulletin* expressed hope for the bill's passage: "Congress should realize that what is at stake here is not just a length of highway in a city's downtown section but a priceless piece of historical geography. From the river straight up to Independence Hall must be regarded as a single piece of hallowed national

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<sup>76</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 29 April 1966, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>77</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 3 June 1966, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>78</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 12 May 1966, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA. Independence Hall was approximately six blocks west of the expressway portion in question.

<sup>79</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11 June 1966, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

ground.”<sup>80</sup> Soon after, cover advocates gained another powerful ally when Housing and Urban Development Secretary Robert Weaver expressed his support and suggested a federal task force to address the issue of funding.<sup>81</sup>

The prospects for a federal task force on the expressway cover brightened soon afterward, and it is quite possible that the First Lady of the United States was partly responsible. Lady Bird Johnson, already a well-known advocate for the beautification of the nation’s highways, came to Philadelphia to attend a Pennsylvania Horticultural Society luncheon in her honor on the occasion of the Society’s opening a new garden in Independence National Park. The Committee to Preserve the Nation’s Birthplace had lobbied without success to make a presentation at the luncheon, held at Philadelphia’s famous Old Original Bookbinder’s seafood restaurant. Undaunted, Harry Batten arranged to be seated next to the First Lady and was, over lunch, able to pique her interest in the Delaware Expressway cover issue. Learning that the CPNB’s model was located at Society Hill Towers, practically next-door to Bookbinder’s, Johnson agreed enthusiastically to have a look at it. Batten and Browne escorted her to the Towers with anxious Secret Service agents, unhappy at the sudden change in plans, in tow. Although no one knew for sure whether Mrs. Johnson spoke to the president about the matter, Lyndon Johnson suggested soon afterward that Vice President Hubert Humphrey look

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<sup>80</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 15 June 1966, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>81</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 22 June 1966, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

into the issue.<sup>82</sup> In July, Humphrey requested formally that Interior, HUD, and Commerce come together to form the federal task force that Weaver had suggested.<sup>83</sup>

By January 1967, Mayor Tate was able to report a “solid commitment” from Humphrey that the expressway would be covered, at least partially, in Society Hill.<sup>84</sup> A month later, the task force (consisting of HUD secretary Weaver, Interior secretary Udall, and Transportation secretary Alan Boyd) released its report, recommending that the Delaware Expressway be depressed and covered from Delancey Street to Chestnut Street (approximately two and a half blocks, or three-tenths of a mile). Engineers Ammann & Whitney projected the cover to cost \$9 million, and the task force recommended that two-thirds of this amount come from the federal-state highway program on a traditional 90-10 basis, with the rest provided by the city and certain non-highway federal programs, such as HUD’s Open Space program and Interior’s Land and Water Conservation Fund.

In explaining its recommendation, the task force took note of previous federal assistance aimed at fostering Philadelphia’s development while preserving its historic character, such as the restoration of Independence Hall and the expansion of the national park surrounding it, the building of a new U.S. Mint, and urban renewal assistance to the Society Hill area. “An incompatible design of the expressway,” the report proclaimed, should not be allowed to dilute “the full benefits of both governmental and private investment in the area.” The expressway cover would “represent a positive and

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<sup>82</sup> Stanhope Browne, Interview by author, Tape recording, Philadelphia, PA, 27 January 2009; Greater Philadelphia Movement, Minutes of Executive Committee meeting, 15 June 1966, Papers of the Greater Philadelphia Movement, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>83</sup> U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Interior, and Transportation, “Report of the Interdepartmental Task Force on the Delaware Expressway in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,” 1967, Pamphlet Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>84</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 27 January 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

innovative contribution to the improvement of the quality of the urban environment,” while failure to take action would restrict opportunities for further development.<sup>85</sup>

Philadelphians who supported the cover rejoiced – even though the task force had proposed covering only two and a half blocks rather than the six the CPNB had wanted – as the *Evening Bulletin* proclaimed, “Victory in Expressway Fight.” “It now looks,” the paper predicted, “as if the Delaware Expressway will be the first United States urban highway to be designed right.” The *Bulletin* praised the federal task force as “a fantastic example of how three levels of government plus citizen participation can cooperate on a specific project.”<sup>86</sup> The seeming resolution of the cover issue made national news, with the *New York Times* characterizing the situation as an example of the “urban hostility to expressways . . . rising in volume and emotion” that was delaying highway construction to the extent that the federal government had begun to warn cities “against hasty planning that ignores esthetic, social and economic considerations.”<sup>87</sup>

Mayor Tate dampened the excitement very quickly, however, for just a few days before the *Times* report, he had reconsidered the city’s financial contribution to the cover, thinking out loud that the money might be better spent on housing in poverty-stricken North Philadelphia.<sup>88</sup> Recent political developments shed light on Tate’s apparent change of heart. On November 7, 1967, Tate won his reelection campaign over Republican Arlen Specter in Philadelphia’s closest mayoral election in 32 years. Specter

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<sup>85</sup> U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Interior, and Transportation, “Report of the Interdepartmental Task Force on the Delaware Expressway in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,” 1967, Pamphlet Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>86</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 10 March 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>87</sup> *New York Times*, 15 November 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>88</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 11 November 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

had been a heavy favorite to win the election, largely because the city's Democratic Party was divided bitterly, with much of the political establishment defecting to Specter's camp.<sup>89</sup> Observers credited Tate's narrow victory to his strong support from Catholics, African Americans, and organized laborers, who turned out in large numbers. Tate, after winning what he called "the fight of my life," credited organized labor as the "deciding factor" in the election.

Although many unions supported the cover, Tate may have felt that he had been deserted by those identified most strongly with the project – the city's upper crust. Described by the *Inquirer* as "the personification of rowhouse Philadelphia," Tate grew up working-class and attended local schools, starting with parochial school and then moving on to St. Joseph's College and Temple University Law School. He then worked his way up the political ladder, starting in 1939 as a research clerk in the Court of Common Pleas and then spending several years in the state legislature before returning to Philadelphia to join City Council, of which he eventually became president, allowing him to succeed Richardson Dilworth as mayor in 1962 when Dilworth resigned to run for governor. Tate, who lived in the North Philadelphia neighborhood of Hunting Park a mere dozen blocks from where he was born, ran a campaign with a populist tinge to it,

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<sup>89</sup> It was nearly a universal belief among prominent Philadelphians, both within city government and the business community, that Tate was an honest and hard-working mayor yet was a pale shadow of the two Democratic reform mayors that had preceded him – Joseph Clark and Richardson Dilworth. The opinion that Tate was less a reform mayor than a machine politician of less than remarkable talent can be found again and again in the transcripts of interviews Walter Phillips – a leader of the Philadelphia postwar renaissance who was involved with both the Greater Philadelphia Movement and the Citizens' Council on City Planning – conducted in the 1970s and 1980s. See Walter Phillips Oral History Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

and the defections of many top Democrats to Arlen Specter may have contributed to what seemed to be his turn away from the city's elite.<sup>90</sup>

Alarmed cover proponents begged Tate not to jeopardize the project. Responding to Tate's comments that he had done enough for the "establishment" in Society Hill, attorney and Chamber of Commerce president John Bracken stressed to the mayor that the campaign for the cover "was no Society Hill effort." "The people there," he continued, "merely sparked a drive that was picked up by civic and patriotic organizations throughout the City of Philadelphia and throughout the entire country."<sup>91</sup> Likewise, Stanhope Browne and his vice-chair Gregory Harvey continued their efforts to submerge the issue of class, insisting that the cover "is not for the purpose of helping the residential areas of Society Hill," being intended instead to preserve the waterfront and Independence Park.<sup>92</sup> In response to these entreaties, Tate backpedaled a bit. His deputy, Anthony Zecca, explained to Bracken that the newspapers had misconstrued Tate's remarks. In fact, the cover was one of many projects being reevaluated due to funding limitations. While Tate was still very much in favor of the cover, said Zecca, no final

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<sup>90</sup> On the 1967 mayoral election, see "Remaking City Politics," *New York Times*, 8 November 1967, p. 45; Joseph H. Miller, "Tate Defeats Specter by 10,957; Democrats Keep Council Control: Democrat Wins 'Fight of my Life': Majority Smallest for Phila. Mayor Race since 1911," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 8 November 1967, p. 1. As an example of Tate's populist approach, he backed controversial police commissioner Frank Rizzo, claiming, "While other cities were being burned, sacked and pillaged, Philadelphia had law and order." Specter, on the other hand, declined to promise that he would, if elected, retain Rizzo as commissioner, for fear of alienating Rizzo's many detractors. "Search for an Heir," *Time* 27 October 1967 [magazine on-line]; available from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,841097,00.html>; Internet; accessed 28 September 2009.

<sup>91</sup> John Bracken to James Tate, 22 November 1967, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate. After Tate's reelection, the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia found its access to City Hall diminished. In response, Bracken – a supporter of Tate's reelection bid – was named president of the organization in hopes of forging closer ties with the mayor's office. Lenora Berson, "The South Street Insurrection," *Philadelphia Magazine* 60, no. 11 (November 1969): 176, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>92</sup> Stanhope Browne and Gregory Harvey to James Tate, 29 November 1967, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

decision could be made until it and other projects were studied further.<sup>93</sup> By January 1968, Tate had changed his mind back (if he had ever changed it in the first place), and was once again on board in full support of the expressway cover.<sup>94</sup>

In early 1968, it appeared that the issue of covering the Delaware Expressway in Society Hill had been resolved once and for all, but reluctant state highway officials, who still prioritized building highways quickly over everything else, had another wrinkle in store. After city, state and federal officials had agreed that the cover would be built, engineering studies had shown it to be feasible, and the federal task force had created a reasonable funding plan, a dispute arose over whether the covered section of the expressway would constitute a “tunnel.” This was a potential problem, because if that part of the highway were deemed a tunnel, trucks carrying hazardous materials would not be able to use it, state officials argued, pursuant to regulations promulgated by the federal Hazardous Substances Transportation Board.<sup>95</sup> For a time, it appeared that the project was in serious jeopardy, as both state officials and highway builders expressed doubt as to its feasibility.<sup>96</sup> The Committee to Preserve the Nation’s Birthplace, however, compiled evidence that there were “no legal or engineering impediments” to vehicles carrying hazardous materials along that portion of the expressway.<sup>97</sup> On the advice of Earl Allebach, Stanhope Browne spoke to members of a professional association of

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<sup>93</sup> Anthony Zecca to John Bracken, 1 December 1967, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>94</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 23 January 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>95</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 1 February 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>96</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 7 March 1968, 22 March 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>97</sup> Stanhope Browne to Edmund Bacon, 21 March 1968, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

tunnel designers in Boston as well as Ole Singstad, who had designed the ventilation system for New York's Holland Tunnel. All of the experts Browne consulted concurred that worries about hazardous materials were, as Browne put it, "nonsense."<sup>98</sup> As a result of the CPNB's research, the issue simply faded away by mid-1968. Nevertheless, because of this and other delays related to logistics and funding, the covered section of the expressway was not completed for almost another decade.

The battle over lowering and covering the Delaware Expressway in Society Hill – the bulk of which was fought in 1964-68 – was a new kind of expressway protest. For the first time, activists expressed strong objections to a Philadelphia expressway for reasons other than the buildings it would demolish in its path. Those who sought to alter the Delaware Expressway's design were concerned about the blighting effect, both visually and environmentally, the road would have on one of the nation's most historic areas. Of course, the Society Hill activists were particularly poised for success: they were mainly white, affluent professionals with strong ties to the city's government and business community. Moreover, the existence of several historical sites – including Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell – in Society Hill gave the expressway fight national importance. In short, these protestors had powerful allies in both the city and federal governments from the very start, an advantage that enabled them to overcome the state's resistance to expensive design modifications.

Southwark residents' failure either to have the expressway rerouted significantly so as not to demolish so many homes or tunneled to minimize visual blight and pollution provided a stark counterpoint to what occurred in Society Hill. In twentieth-century

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<sup>98</sup> Stanhope Browne, Interview by author, Tape recording, Philadelphia, PA, 27 January 2009.

America, urban expressways often exposed racial inequities. With respect to the Delaware Expressway, however, class and ethnicity, rather than race, were the most relevant factors. The white, working-class residents of Southwark, who stood outside the city's tight business-government alliance, were unable to mobilize enough support at the highest levels to accomplish their goals. Moreover, Gloria Dei Church and the other historic buildings in Southwark did not carry the same weight as Independence Hall, depriving the neighborhood of national attention for its cause. It would be a mistake to conclude, however, that only expressway protests emanating from affluent, white areas of the city could be successful in the mid-to-late 1960s. The events surrounding the Crosstown Expressway in this period proved as much.

#### **“Let the People Have a Victory”: The Crosstown Expressway**

The Crosstown Expressway proved to be the most controversial transportation project ever proposed for the city of Philadelphia. Since 1959, planners had expected the road to run the length of the city, from river to river, along the South Street/Bainbridge Street corridor, as the southern portion of an expressway loop around Center City. The neighborhoods in what was referred to as the Crosstown corridor were mostly African American and low-income. South Street, once the heart of the city's African American culture and life, had in the eyes of many observers deteriorated in the years since the war, leading the Planning Commission and others to believe that the highway would remove what they viewed as blight while serving a vital transportation need by easing traffic congestion on downtown streets.

To the shock of many, the expressway was never built, due primarily to overwhelming citizen opposition. Philadelphia's freeway revolt was made possible by

the democratization of transportation planning in the 1960s – a product of the era’s cultural upheaval whereby authority and expertise were challenged at every turn. In a bygone era, engineers and planners had drawn a line on the map along South Street, connecting the Schuylkill and Delaware Expressways, without considering the road’s potential effects on those who lived and worked along that line. By the mid-1960s, before a drop of concrete could be poured for the Crosstown, people in cities across America were awakening to the destructive effects of urban expressways. As authority over highway planning moved into the realm of local politics, citizens pressured elected officials to think beyond the goal of moving automobiles from Point A to Point B, and to consider expressways’ potential social, environmental, and aesthetic impacts.

The Crosstown Expressway revolt was the high point of the democratization of transportation politics in Philadelphia, providing perhaps the most important exception to the overall dominance of the city’s business community in setting planning priorities and achieving its desired results. Business interests, led by the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, saw the road as a vital transportation project, hoping that it would ease Center City traffic congestion by allowing cars to cross the city without using local streets, thereby contributing to the postwar downtown renaissance. Planners agreed on the expressway’s traffic benefits, and also saw the project as a way to clear what they felt were blighted residential areas using state and federal highway money rather than urban renewal funds.

Proponents of the Crosstown, however, were faced with several daunting factors springing from a more democratic planning process and an increased awareness of the often disastrous effects of urban highways. The proposed residential displacement of

thousands of low-income African Americans aroused intense opposition, not only from those who lived in the expressway corridor, but from socially-conscious whites who objected on grounds of social justice. Federal legislation played an important role as well; of particular significance was a 1968 law forbidding the use of federal funds for a highway project until the state (which acquired the right-of-way for a new highway and was therefore the entity responsible for displacement) had presented an adequate plan for relocation of those affected. The relocation issue proved to be one of the most serious obstacles to the Crosstown Expressway's completion.

Changing views about race relations as a result of the national movement for African American civil rights, which reached its crescendo in the 1960s, impacted the fate of the Crosstown as well. In postwar America, urban expressways often divided cities into segments, walling off African American neighborhoods from central business districts in the process. Historians such as Alison Isenberg and Robert Self have argued that such barriers were not accidental, but rather were intended to provide visual cues to developers about where to concentrate their investments, as well as to keep non-white shoppers away from downtown in the hope that segregation would make urban retail establishments more attractive to suburban whites, women especially.<sup>99</sup> The proposed Crosstown Expressway would have separated a long and predominantly African American residential corridor from the central business district and its adjoining affluent, white neighborhoods. In the 1960s, however, the civil rights movement forced the issue of racial segregation to the forefront of American consciousness. To a nation that had

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<sup>99</sup> Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 18; Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 207.

just witnessed the Freedom Rides, Bull Connor's brutal attacks on demonstrators in Birmingham, the March on Washington, and the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the notion of an urban expressway as an obvious racial barrier was becoming less and less acceptable.

Events in Philadelphia's own history of race relations helped to bring about the Crosstown's demise. On a late August evening in 1964, Philadelphia police responded to a call of a car blocking an intersection in North Philadelphia – a poverty-stricken area that was home to an overwhelming majority of the city's African Americans. Upon finding a married couple having an argument, the officers at the scene attempted to pull the woman out of the vehicle and were met with kicks and punches. The officers called for backup, but the situation spiraled out of control quickly. Before long, residents of the area were smashing police cars with bricks and bottles thrown from rooftops, destroying storefront windows and looting the goods inside, overturning cars, and setting fires. In addition to a staggering amount of property damage, the final tally included 150 injuries, including 35 to police officers, and 165 arrests.<sup>100</sup>

North Philadelphia, where the riot occurred, was home to an area that some called "the Jungle" – a two and a half square mile section spanning 10<sup>th</sup> to 33<sup>rd</sup> Streets between Poplar Street and Lehigh Avenue. As historian Matthew Countryman explained, the Jungle received its derogatory name because of its "grinding poverty and racial homogeneity." South Philadelphia was neither quite as poor nor as racially segregated as North Central Philadelphia, but still possessed the potential for racial violence of its own.

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<sup>100</sup> "The North: Doing No Good," *Time*, 4 September 1964 [magazine on-line]; available from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,830558-1,00.html>; Internet; accessed 25 September 2009.

In May 1967, for example, a dispute between the owner of a hardware store on South Street and a black customer led to a “mini-riot of bottle tossing,” which newly-appointed Police Commissioner Frank Rizzo stopped by sending in 500 police officers in riot gear. Rizzo’s crackdown led to widespread protests led by the city’s Black Power and NAACP activists, directed at what they perceived to be brutal and racially-motivated police tactics. Another South Philadelphia mini-riot occurred in July, sparked by the arrest of a black teenager after a protest at another store. Again, Rizzo summoned hundreds of riot police to disperse the crowds. The proximity of whites and African Americans in South Philadelphia also caused trouble, including bouts of violence, between students at the area’s high schools in the late 1960s.<sup>101</sup>

In the late 1960s, opponents of the Crosstown Expressway warned city officials that displacing a huge number of poor African Americans in South Central Philadelphia for the benefit of affluent whites could lead to racial violence. The 1964 North Philadelphia riot, the smaller outbreaks of racial tension and violence in South Philadelphia, and major riots in other cities such as Newark and Detroit provided context for these warnings and helped to convince decision-makers that the expressway was unworkable. It was no coincidence that officials first decided against the expressway in 1968, the same year President Johnson’s Kerner Commission summed up the cause of urban riots with its famous declaration that the nation was “moving toward two societies, one black, one white – separate and unequal.”<sup>102</sup> The Crosstown Expressway, like a

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<sup>101</sup> Matthew J. Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 158, 231-32, 247-55.

<sup>102</sup> National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, “Excerpts from the Kerner Report,” 1968; [document on-line]; available from <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6545>; Internet; accessed 27 December 2009.

horror movie monster, had to be killed three times before it died for good. The 1964-1968 period witnessed the first of those three times.

In the early 1960s, the Crosstown Expressway project stalled due to a lack of funding. In 1964, a frustrated David Smallwood accused state officials of failing to live up to their “moral obligation” to expedite studies on the road.<sup>103</sup> It seemed that the state had other priorities, however. Whereas Smallwood felt that the Crosstown was of vital importance, Pennsylvania Secretary of Highways Henry Harral was more interested in a Tacony Creek Freeway for Northeast Philadelphia and a City Line Avenue bypass to ease congestion in the northwest.<sup>104</sup> As late as mid-1965, the state released a six-year improvement plan for Philadelphia that made no mention of the Crosstown, leading Smallwood to vent his fury. Calling the report “ridiculous” and “very distressing,” he lamented that the state was “completely oblivious to the urgent highway needs of Philadelphia.” Without the Crosstown, he complained, the city would be left with a Delaware Expressway interchange at South Street and no major route to carry traffic west across downtown.<sup>105</sup>

Smallwood’s mood did not improve when Harral explained that the Crosstown would be part of the next federal-aid highway program, slated to begin in 1973. Harral pointed out that obtaining sufficient funding for the highway would be extremely difficult due to its location through a densely populated urban area; the road was expected to cost

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<sup>103</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 11 October 1964, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>104</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 20 October 1964, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>105</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 18 July 1965, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

an unbelievable \$20 million per mile, largely due to condemnation costs.<sup>106</sup> Soon afterward, however, matters improved considerably when the Pennsylvania legislature put forth a plan to borrow money to speed up the state's highway program, with \$89.4 million earmarked for Philadelphia and \$60 million of that money designated for the Crosstown Expressway. The State Highway Commission approved the plan, and by October 1966, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) had approved and forwarded to the federal government a plan for the expressway.<sup>107</sup> Federal approval was required, because although the Crosstown was not to be an interstate highway, Pennsylvania intended for it to be part of the primary federal-aid highway system, entailing 50% federal participation.<sup>108</sup>

While government officials were trying to resolve the financial side of the picture, other obstacles arose. As the highway became more than just a line on a planner's map and moved closer to reality, citizens' opposition to the road increased markedly. Prior to

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<sup>106</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 25 July 1965, 29 August 1965, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>107</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 11 October 1965, 13 October 1965, 27 October 1966, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA. The Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission was the successor to the Penn-Jersey Transportation Study, which was founded in 1959 "to plan a coordinated highway and public transportation system to promote and serve a desired pattern of regional development" in a nine-county area spanning southeastern Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey. Renamed the DVRPC in 1965, the organization began to function as a regional planning commission that year in response to a 1962 amendment to the Federal Aid Highway Act requiring highway projects in metropolitan areas to be based on cooperative regional planning. The DVRPC, which continued Penn-Jersey's heavy emphasis on transportation planning, was strictly an advisory agency, with all actual planning authority continuing to rest in the hands of state and local officials. The commission's primary functions were to ensure compliance with federal regulations requiring comprehensive regional planning as a condition for grants and to act as a conduit for those grants. Penn-Jersey Transportation Study, *PJ News* 2, no. 11 (Aug.-Sept. 1963), City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate; Penjerdel Council of Governments, "Preliminary Findings and Recommendations, Penjerdel COG, Delaware Valley Regional Governance Study," Report, 7 August 1970, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate; Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, "Transportation in Motion: An Annual Transportation Report of the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission," Annual report, 1973, Pamphlet Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>108</sup> Federal Highway Administration, "Flash Report," 9 May 1968, Central Correspondence, 1968-1978, Records of the Federal Highway Administration, RG 406, National Archives, College Park, MD.

1964, public protest against the road was minimal. In early 1964, residents of the Grays Ferry neighborhood – one of the few sections in the expressway’s path that contained a substantial number of whites – formed the Schuylkill-Grays Ferry Neighbors Association. The purpose of the group, which represented the area bounded by 22nd Street, the Schuylkill River, Washington Avenue, and Spruce Street, aimed not to stop the road from being built, but rather “to deal with the problems which result from [its] construction.”<sup>109</sup>

When public hearings on the expressway were held in May 1964, the first significant stirrings of citizen opposition became visible. While the Schuylkill-Grays Ferry Neighbors Association continued to take a moderate approach, others were not as accommodating. Roger Kolm, a member of engineering firm Modjeski and Masters – which had completed a major study of the proposed expressway – testified that the road would take 1,725 homes, resulting in howls of protest from the approximately 500 members of the public present. In addition, two clergymen expressed their opposition to the expressway.<sup>110</sup> Democratic committeewoman and Crosstown Expressway opponent Lenora Berson (the wife of state legislator Norman Berson) wrote in her 1969 *Philadelphia Magazine* article “The South Street Insurrection,” that much of the early opposition to the highway came from middle-class African Americans who lived to the

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<sup>109</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 7 April 1964, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA. Census tract 30-B, which included the area delineated above, had in 1960 a total of 9,240 residents, 1,566 of whom were white. See U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, “U.S. Censuses of Population and Housing: 1960”; [document on-line]; available from <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/41953654v8ch06.pdf>; Internet; accessed 25 September 2009. A *Philadelphia Inquirer* article from 1968 identified a different group from the same area, the Grays Ferry Community Council, as one of the predominantly white groups fighting the Crosstown Expressway. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 14 January 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>110</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 27 May 1964, 28 May 1964, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

south of the proposed route. These residents, she explained, “had witnessed the havoc wreaked in other stable Negro neighborhoods by sudden and large influxes of low-income blacks” caused by urban renewal projects that displaced people without adequate provision for their relocation, and the “terrible social disorganization” that had resulted.<sup>111</sup> At a public meeting held by the predominantly black Rittenhouse Community Council, residents voiced their complaints, with one comparing the proposed highway to the Mason-Dixon Line, saying it would “separate the rich people from the poor and property values will decrease,” a proposition David Smallwood rejected.<sup>112</sup> It was notable that Mayor Tate paid special attention to the highway’s potential impact on the substantial number of whites in Grays Ferry, asking Henry Harral if that portion of the route could be changed so as not to “destroy a good, stable community.”<sup>113</sup> Senator Hugh Scott asked the same of federal highway administrator Rex Whitton, but Whitton told him that the suggested alternative of Grays Ferry Avenue was “less desirable.”<sup>114</sup>

Although the Crosstown had begun to arouse the ire of those who lived and worked in its path, opponents were generally not in 1964 determined to wipe the highway off the map. The protestors’ activities instead centered on advocating design changes to the project, including depressing and covering the expressway (as was being discussed

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<sup>111</sup> Lenora Berson, “The South Street Insurrection,” *Philadelphia Magazine* 60, no. 11 (November 1969): 90, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA; Lenora Berson, Interview by Walter Phillips, Transcript, 16 November 1978, p. 15, Walter Phillips Oral History Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>112</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 29 May 1964, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA. On the racial composition of the Rittenhouse Community Council, see Art Peters, “6,000 Families Facing Loss of Homes to Expressway,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, 15 April 1967, p. 1.

<sup>113</sup> James Tate to Henry Harral, 15 July 1964, Central Correspondence, 1968-1978, Records of the Federal Highway Administration, RG 406, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>114</sup> Rex Whitton to Hugh Scott, 10 September 1964, Central Correspondence, 1968-1978, Records of the Federal Highway Administration, RG 406, National Archives, College Park, MD.

with respect to the Delaware Expressway), building relocation housing on top of the highway, and finding a way to bridge what some called a “Chinese Wall” between low-income, largely black areas of South Philadelphia and the affluent, white Center City neighborhoods immediately to the north.<sup>115</sup> When funding for the expressway itself was in doubt, however, none of these proposals was likely to gain much traction, and indeed none of them did.

By 1966, inspired by the early stages of a move toward greater democracy in America’s transportation planning, and influenced quite possibly by the progress Society Hill residents had made in altering the Delaware Expressway, opponents of the Crosstown Expressway became more aggressive, now focusing on eliminating the expressway from the city’s plan entirely. In May of that year, 400 residents of Grays Ferry attended a public hearing; the *Evening Bulletin* reported that they “booed and jeered engineers from the State Highways Department who told them not to make major repairs to their homes which lie near the route of the proposed Crosstown Expressway.”<sup>116</sup> The murmurs of opposition in 1966 turned into full-throated shouts by 1967, and for the first time, the Crosstown Expressway became a major controversy.<sup>117</sup> The *Evening Bulletin* seemingly could not decide where it stood on the matter, changing its tune over the course of a few months. In early 1967, the paper acknowledged that

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<sup>115</sup> Lenora Berson, “The South Street Insurrection,” *Philadelphia Magazine* 60, no. 11 (November 1969): 92, 176, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.; Alan M. Voorhees & Associates, Inc., “South Central Transportation Study: A Report Submitted to the Mayor’s Crosstown Study Committee and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation,” November 1971, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>116</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 26 May 1966, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>117</sup> Lenora Berson, “The South Street Insurrection,” *Philadelphia Magazine* 60, no. 11 (November 1969): 174-75, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

most of the estimated 8,000 people the highway would displace were low-income African Americans and admitted that “the Crosstown Expressway as a divider of affluent society from poverty areas [is] an indefensible concept.” If the expressway were built, the paper asserted, it would constitute “a physical expression of social amputation.”<sup>118</sup> Former mayor Richardson Dilworth, who was now the president of the Philadelphia School Board, added his voice to those who felt the expressway would constitute an unacceptable racial barrier. Such a barrier, said Dilworth, “would have a very harmful effect upon educational programs and upon the degree of integration that we are striving to maintain and develop throughout the school system.”<sup>119</sup>

Only a few months later, the *Evening Bulletin* shifted to a tone of sympathy for the planners and engineers responsible for determining where the highway should be built. “There is no dispute that [the expressway] is needed,” stated an April 1967 editorial, which reflected accurately the reality that not one of the many studies and reports prepared on the issue had questioned this basic assumption. Planners and engineers, the paper continued, “try to lay out a route dispassionately, where it will do the most good at the least cost and the least harm to those whose buildings and homes lie in the route’s path,” but were nevertheless beset by “public clamor.” The unfortunate result was that “years go by while alternate routes are studied and objections met. Costs go up and the roads are not built.” “The Crosstown Expressway,” concluded the *Evening Bulletin*, “should not be delayed, and delayed and delayed.”<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 6 January 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>119</sup> Richardson Dilworth to G. Holmes Perkins, 5 May 1967, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>120</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 15 April 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

The Citizens' Council on City Planning straddled the fence, still favoring the expressway in general, but backing off a bit from its previously unqualified support and asking for those in the road's path to be protected. By 1967, the Council still wanted the expressway, but noted that it had received "numerous communications from persons and organizations who are concerned over the potential impact of planned expressways upon their communities and homes." The planning of new highways, the Council stated, must take into account "their total impact upon the physical, social and economic character of the City." With respect to the Crosstown specifically, the Council stressed that the city should ensure that all residents and businesses could be properly relocated and consider depressing and covering the highway to ensure that it would not become a barrier between communities.<sup>121</sup>

In March 1967, the Citizens' Council reached out to community groups in the path of the Crosstown Expressway, acknowledging that it had "not been as active on this matter as we, and perhaps you, would have liked" and promising "from now on to give this matter priority attention." The Council also circulated a proposed statement for community leaders to discuss with their groups with the aim of producing a document that all groups could endorse and send to city officials. The statement's main thrust contained echoes of the 1962 Port Huron Statement, in which Students for a Democratic Society called for "a participatory democracy," influencing profoundly the way people thought about their relationship with government. All affected by the proposed expressway, advised the Council, "must participate actively and meaningfully in the

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<sup>121</sup> Citizens' Council on City Planning, Excerpt of 1967 analysis of Philadelphia Capital Budget Report, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

review of the state's proposals and in the development of the policies and plans submitted to City Council."<sup>122</sup> For the Citizens' Council on City Planning – once a staunch advocate of all that the Planning Commission proposed – to be parroting Tom Hayden represented a remarkable change indeed.

Despite the urging of the Citizens' Council, planners did not pursue vigorously relocation plans for those who would be displaced by the highway. The managing director of the Philadelphia Housing Authority slammed the Planning Commission for having made “no serious effort” in this regard.<sup>123</sup> A *Philadelphia Inquirer* editorial gave reason for pessimism when it told the story of a woman who, after her house was condemned as unfit, was unable to find a new one for five months. When she did find a new house, it was not much better than her old one, and was in the path of the Crosstown to boot. The city already had 6,185 pending applications for public housing, the *Inquirer* reported, and only 75 vacancies.<sup>124</sup>

Because of the dire circumstances surrounding relocation, the Planning Commission had begun to explore the idea, rejected previously, of covering the expressway and selling the air rights to private developers who would put residential and commercial buildings on top of the cover. The idea didn't go far, however. William Rafsky, the executive director of the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, explained that the high cost of land made private developers unlikely to be interested in

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<sup>122</sup> Edwin Folk to Community Groups Along the Crosstown Expressway Route, with enclosed “Proposed Statement to City Government From Communities Affected by the Crosstown Expressway,” 14 March 1967, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>123</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 4 May 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>124</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 June 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

the air rights. Patrick McLaughlin, the city's development coordinator, agreed with Rafsky that the cost of a highway cover, estimated at \$30 million, would make the air rights prohibitively expensive. Despite the bleak financial picture, Mayor Tate announced that he was committed to constructing low-income public housing on top of the expressway and said he intended to explore the idea of a state subsidy to help attract private builders.<sup>125</sup> Bernard Meltzer, a real estate expert who later became chairman of the Planning Commission, said that of course everyone would prefer "a tunnel topped with houses, stores and parks" to "a depressed open ditch," but acknowledged that financial realities made the possibility of the former scenario remote.<sup>126</sup>

While city officials and others debated solutions to the relocation problem, opposition to the expressway became more organized. In May 1967, fifteen local activists established the Citizens Committee to Preserve and Develop the Crosstown Community (CCPDCC), an anti-expressway coalition made up of groups from the proposed expressway corridor.<sup>127</sup> The group's attorney and one of its main spokespersons was 31-year old Robert Sugarman, a white man whom *Philadelphia Magazine* described as "a shaggy-haired lawyer who practices by day in the old-line firm of Dechert, Price & Rhoads." Sugarman first became aware of the issues surrounding the Crosstown Expressway when he looked at an apartment on Lombard Street and was assured by the realtor that the neighborhood would soon be "protected" by the

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<sup>125</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 4 May 1967; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 April 1967, 27 August 1967, 2 September 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>126</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 8 September 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>127</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 4 May 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

expressway from the lower-income areas to the south.<sup>128</sup> Recoiling at the idea of such “protection,” Sugarman in April 1967 organized a public forum on the Crosstown under the auspices of the Society Hill Residents Association – an event that helped to draw media attention to the highway opposition and stoke the flames of controversy.<sup>129</sup> Once the CCPDCC was formed, it held a press conference at which it demanded that planning for the Crosstown Expressway cease until solutions to the problems of relocation and neighborhood redevelopment were hammered out.<sup>130</sup>

The CCPDCC began immediately grassroots efforts to organize the communities in the proposed expressway’s path, a task that proved difficult despite the fact that two of the group’s most prominent leaders were African Americans who headed mostly black neighborhood organizations – George Dukes of the Rittenhouse Community Council, and Alice Lipscomb of the Hawthorne Community Council. Both activists had deep roots in their communities. Lipscomb was an indefatigable advocate for better housing who pushed city officials for better enforcement of building codes and often went house-to-house helping Hawthorne residents fix up their homes. Her actions were responsible for

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<sup>128</sup> In his study of housing in postwar metropolitan Detroit, historian David Freund discussed the role of realtors in creating and maintaining racially homogenous neighborhoods. While the Supreme Court outlawed race-based restrictive covenants in 1948, both the real estate industry and federal housing officials continued to perceive racial integration as a risk to property values. The Federal Housing Administration removed explicit references to race in its 1947 *Underwriting Manual* but, as Freund explained, continued to take account of race in its guidelines for evaluating property and borrowers with thinly-veiled references to “recognizing market conditions” and avoiding “inharmonious uses.” White realtors did not depart from their longstanding practice of excluding African Americans, believing their presence in white neighborhoods would, as the Chicago Real Estate Board said in 1950, “clearly be detrimental to property values.” Even after the Fair Housing Act of 1968 barred private discrimination in the sale or rental of property, real estate publications advocated maintaining “common characteristics of population” or “population characteristics [that] are qualitatively homogenous.” David M.P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy & White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 208-10, 351.

<sup>129</sup> Lenora Berson, “The South Street Insurrection,” *Philadelphia Magazine* 60, no. 11 (November 1969): 90, 174, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>130</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 5 July 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

the construction or rehabilitation of 350 housing units for her neighbors. When she passed away in 2003, Pennsylvania's governor, Edward Rendell (a former Philadelphia mayor), remarked, "Nobody fought harder for her neighborhood than Alice Lipscomb did."<sup>131</sup>

Dukes, a former teacher, served in the Air Force during the Korean War. A Republican, he twice won party nominations in the early 1970s – once for the state senate and once for city commissioner – but lost the general election both times. In addition to founding the Southwest Community Council, which aided local residents with housing, Dukes served as director of civil rights for the Environmental Protection Agency.<sup>132</sup> Despite the intense involvement in the Crosstown fight of these two prominent and highly visible activists, the CCPDCC was not very successful in its efforts to mobilize the low-income African Americans who lived in the expressway corridor. The Rittenhouse and Hawthorne groups represented by Dukes and Lipscomb, however, were among those that joined predominantly white neighborhood groups in an interracial rally at City Hall to protest the Crosstown Expressway in November 1967.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Gayle Ronan Sims, "Alice Lipscomb, 87, Phila. activist," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10 October 2003, p. B10.

<sup>132</sup> John Morrison, "George Dukes, political leader, activist," *Philadelphia Daily News*, 19 May 2008, p. 48.

<sup>133</sup> Art Peters, "6,000 Families Facing Loss of Homes to Expressway," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 15 April 1967, p. 1; Lawrence Geller, "Crosstown Expressway Rally Set for Saturday," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 4 November 1967, p. 7. The *Philadelphia Tribune*, established in 1884, was the city's most prominent African American newspaper. It is worth noting that a search of its archives – available on-line at the Library of Congress – revealed very little about African American participation in the battle over the Crosstown Expressway. Searching for the three terms used for the project at various points in time (Lombard Expressway, Crosstown Expressway, and Southbridge) turned up a mere ten relevant articles, all between 1967 and 1972. None contained detailed evidence of grassroots activism in the African American community, and some provided documentation of white participation. See, e.g., "X'way Would Destroy Oldest Black Section in Philadelphia, Thomas Gilhool Charges," *Philadelphia Tribune* 30 September 1969, p. 4, which addressed the concerns of a white attorney and independent Democratic candidate for City Council who was extremely outspoken in his opposition to the expressway on grounds of racial justice.

DeLois Cuthbert, the co-chair of the CCPDCC's Subcommittee on Community Involvement, informed community leaders that "No group has ever been successful in stopping a road or expressway once it's been planned. Our task will not be easy because in order to be successful, we must involve all the people along the proposed route."<sup>134</sup> At one of the initial meetings of the Program Subcommittee, volunteer Trixie Farrar was dismayed to see that "there were no residents of the community present. Their inclusion at this point did not seem a major concern of the group present. . . . It was assumed by the group that indigenous participation would increase."<sup>135</sup> In the summer of 1967, Farrar elaborated on some of the problems the organization was facing. The CCPDCC's program was written entirely by professionals and community workers with little involvement by anyone who lacked a professional interest in the area or in city politics. The non-professional residents of the area "had very few comments to make on it other than to nod approval," she remarked. A proposed community survey about the Crosstown Expressway went nowhere because some thought it would alarm and upset people, an attitude Farrar felt was "terribly paternalistic." The leadership of the organization, she pointed out, had spent more of its time trying to get media attention than on grassroots organizing, and had failed to give non-professionals positions of responsibility in the group. To make matters worse, members of the group were often divided by loyalties to their own ethnic communities, and when the executive committee was made more diverse in order to represent all citizens affected by the highway,

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<sup>134</sup> DeLois Cuthbert to Dear Block Leader, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>135</sup> Trixie Farrar, Memo, 18 May 1967, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

conflicts increased. In short, for its first few months of existence, the CCPDCC “did not function too well.”<sup>136</sup>

Despite her criticisms of the movement’s leadership, Farrar recognized that there were inherent difficulties involved in trying to organize the residents of the Crosstown corridor. South Philadelphia, she noted, was “not ‘hungry’ – or nearly as volatile as North Philadelphia,” where racial segregation and poverty were significantly worse and a major race riot had broken out in 1964. In the areas of the CCPDCC’s concern, she wrote, “there are fewer blatant reasons for the creation of a social movement.” Farrar also acknowledged that social action was riskier for working-class and poor African Americans than it was for middle-class whites, and that the organization’s programs could fail to find broad appeal for this reason. She did advocate continuing to try, however, if for nothing else than to inform the residents of what was going on and to learn their views to the extent possible.<sup>137</sup> Farrar also pressed those in power to open up their meetings and discussions to allow more community involvement in the decision-making process.

Not everyone was enthusiastic about more citizen participation, however. Some local officials clung to the view, now becoming obsolete, that plans should be made by experts and experts alone. When Farrar met with L.M. Loy of the Department of City Streets, he “was not at all receptive. He spent a long while telling me his doubts about citizen participation. His general approach is typical – present a final plan to the

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<sup>136</sup> Trixie Farrar, “Planning Assistance: Crosstown Expressway Summer 1967,” Memo, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>137</sup> Citizens Committee to Preserve and Develop the Crosstown Community, Subcommittee on Community Involvement, Memo, 31 May 1967, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

community and let them work from there.” When Farrar pointed out that such an approach could preclude “meaningful citizen participation,” Loy responded that “the process of involving citizens was too long and frustrating. His main job was to get the cars through an area and to gain the most in user benefits.”<sup>138</sup>

Although the CCPDCC stumbled in its early attempts at grassroots organizing and promoting civic involvement, its leaders carried on with efforts at delivering their message to city planners and elected officials. One tricky issue, however, was that the organization had not agreed on a single message. Some of the group’s leaders favored blocking the Crosstown Expressway entirely, while others were more concerned with making sure that the road was planned in a way that would aid the area’s redevelopment. Early on, the latter position seemed to be the dominant one. A report by the Program Subcommittee that was sent to Edmund Bacon in July 1967 asserted that “the impact upon the neighboring communities of the expressway and the dislocation caused by it will be devastating, unless comprehensive plans for the joint development of highway and neighborhood, and for the physical and social revitalization of the entire area are developed before proceeding with plans for the road.”<sup>139</sup>

Later on that year, the CCPDCC’s position hardened into more of an anti-expressway stance. Robert Sugarman was one of the first people with a public platform to question whether the highway was actually necessary. Not only were there no studies of how the highway would impact the surrounding community, he pointed out, no

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<sup>138</sup> Trixie Farrar to Edwin Folk, 19 June 1967, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>139</sup> Citizens Committee to Preserve and Develop the Crosstown Community, Program Subcommittee, Report, enclosed in Robert Sugarman to Edmund Bacon, 5 July 1967, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

computerized traffic models had been created to determine how Philadelphia's highway network would function without the Crosstown Expressway.<sup>140</sup> Mayor Tate was sympathetic to the CCPDCC's views, but only to a point, agreeing at a minimum that the highway should not proceed until the government had figured out how to relocate displaced residents. Tate's insistence on a solution to the relocation problem was no doubt influenced by a confidential police report in his possession that identified South Street as a likely site for a riot.<sup>141</sup> In November, the day before his reelection to a second full term as Philadelphia's mayor, Tate accused state officials of trying to embarrass him by continuing to plan for the Crosstown Expressway and appraising properties along the route when he had indicated that such activities should halt until a relocation plan had been worked out.<sup>142</sup>

As mentioned, Tate won reelection in 1967 by a razor-thin margin, and observers saw the working-class vote as crucial to his success. A few days after Tate's reelection, he gathered his cabinet together for a meeting at which Executive Director of the City Planning Commission Edmund Bacon, Commissioner of Streets David Smallwood, and Managing Director Fred Corleto argued that the city should move forward with plans for the Crosstown Expressway. Tate ended the discussion quickly by announcing that he no longer favored the construction of the expressway. "Let the people have a victory," he told his cabinet. Robert Sugarman later cast some light on Tate's thinking, explaining, "The Mayor is a kind of populist. He thinks of himself as being against the interests. He

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<sup>140</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 25 September 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>141</sup> Lenora Berson, "The South Street Insurrection," *Philadelphia Magazine* 60, no. 11 (November 1969): 175, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>142</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 6 November 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

felt in the last campaign the people were with him against the interests.”<sup>143</sup> The *Evening Bulletin* dropped a bombshell on the city with its November 10, 1967 headline: “Tate Suggests Crosstown Expressway May Be Abandoned.”<sup>144</sup>

Tate’s grand pronouncement did not spell the end of the Crosstown Expressway, however. Neither the city nor state governments took any immediate action to delete the expressway from official plans. As a result, lobbying continued from those on both sides of the issue. State highway official William Lamb tried to rally the Citizens’ Council to stronger support for the expressway at a mid-November meeting. Lamb, an engineer, spoke in highly technical terms, referring often to the various studies of the road that had been completed over the years. The statement Lamb delivered to the Council seems, when read today, to be shockingly tone-deaf and out of touch with the reality of late 1960s urban America and changing national expressway politics. One particular section, in which Lamb appealed to his listeners to accept the judgments of those with more expertise, bears quoting at length. After informing the Council that the Planning Commission was “represented by some distinguished, highly qualified, professional men” including the “internationally recognized” Edmund Bacon, he continued:

When a doctor vaccinates against tetanus it hurts. It does not follow that the doctor doesn’t know it hurts, nor that he enjoys hurting you. It does follow that he is trying to avoid a greater hurt in the future. When planners and highway engineers propose a highway that forces the relocation of people, it hurts. It does not follow that planners and highway engineers are unaware that it hurts, that they are not compassionate, nor that they enjoy hurting people. It does follow that in their informed professional judgment

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<sup>143</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 25 August 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>144</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 10 November 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

they are avoiding a greater, more severe, economic and emotional hurt affecting a larger number of families in the future. You are the leadership of the community. Your leadership should be in the direction of doing what is best for the community. This philosophy does not lend itself to opposition for opposition's sake. You, as leaders, have a responsibility to determine factually, objectively what direction your leadership should go. If you study the facts, I am convinced that you will concur with the professional men in the field that the Crosstown is, indeed, a very worthy, essential project to the continued growth of Philadelphia.<sup>145</sup>

Lamb's reference to the Citizens' Council as "the leadership of the community" was somewhat myopic. In truth, the Council's leaders were primarily well-to-do white males drawn from the city's business, media, labor and academic communities. They were not at all representative of the low-income African Americans who were most threatened by the Crosstown Expressway. In any event, Lamb failed to sway the Council's board of directors, which in 1968 was still generally in favor of the highway but insistent that the "human issues" surrounding the expressway's construction had to be dealt with first.<sup>146</sup>

One prominent source of opposition to the concept of the Crosstown Expressway came from one of the experts most responsible for its existence, demonstrating the extent to which the culture surrounding urban transportation planning was changing in the 1960s. Robert B. Mitchell – who had been the executive director of both the City Planning Commission (1943-48) and the Urban Traffic and Transportation Board (1953-55) and now taught city and regional planning at the University of Pennsylvania – sent

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<sup>145</sup> William A. Lamb, "The Crosstown Expressway, presented to the Citizens' Council on City Planning," Transcript of speech, 15 November 1967, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>146</sup> Citizens' Council on City Planning, Excerpt of 1968 analysis of Philadelphia Capital Budget Report, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Tate an impassioned letter begging him to abandon the expressway once and for all. When the Crosstown Expressway was first conceived, he explained, “planners tended to think almost entirely in terms of physical form.” Mitchell denied the claims of some highway opponents that the expressway was intended as a racial barrier, asserting, “We were thinking mainly only of the transportation effects of a highway, as many highway engineers still do today, and did not really consider the social effects.” Now, said Mitchell, he was horrified at the potential destruction of South Street, which was “a community center for many people” with “great symbolic significance.” Most importantly, he argued, Philadelphia could not afford “one more symbol of separation between the black community and City Hall. . . . At this point in time the preservation of interracial relations and of equal justice to groups of citizens with little economic power is of primary importance.”<sup>147</sup>

Highway proponents and opponents continued to battle over the Crosstown Expressway in 1968. The *Evening Bulletin* changed its editorial position once again, echoing Mitchell’s claim that the planners who first dreamed up the expressway had focused exclusively on physical form to the detriment of those whom the expressway would affect most directly. “Times have changed,” the paper asserted, as planners “have come to see that land use planning in the past has benefited only the affluent, often victimized the poor, and in fact contributed to the present urban crisis. Boiled down, what all this means to Philadelphia is that the Crosstown Expressway as presently

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<sup>147</sup> Robert B. Mitchell to James Tate, 5 December 1967, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

planned is obsolete.”<sup>148</sup> Some city officials, however, continued to believe the expressway would be built. Fred Corleto and David Smallwood claimed that the city was continuing “to support the Crosstown Expressway as a vital link in the Regional Expressway System” and was “giving no thought to its abandonment.”<sup>149</sup>

Meanwhile, Tate had softened his stance somewhat since his post-reelection pronouncement, at least in public. In March, he told those assembled in his reception room that the Crosstown was “dead or dying a slow death,” but later that same day, in front of television cameras, he tempered his remarks, saying only that “there must be some rethinking on the part of the State Highway Department.”<sup>150</sup> Either way, Tate’s position drew fire from state officials. Highway secretary Robert Bartlett opined that deleting the Crosstown would have a “wide-ranging impact on the transportation network in the Philadelphia area.”<sup>151</sup> An official in Governor Raymond Shafer’s administration went so far as to accuse Tate of abandoning the Crosstown Expressway as a way of backing out of the city’s commitment to fund its share of the Delaware Expressway cover. “Maybe he hasn’t got the money,” the official said, “and if that is the case, he should say so.”<sup>152</sup>

State officials who were putting heat on Mayor Tate to move ahead with the expressway found support within the federal government. The CCPDCC appealed

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<sup>148</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 5 January 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>149</sup> Fred Corleto to David Smallwood, 11 March 1968, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>150</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 25 March 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>151</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 26 March 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>152</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 31 March 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

directly to Transportation Secretary Alan Boyd, telling him that the purpose of the Crosstown Expressway “was to create a buffer zone between an all white and a mostly Negro community.”<sup>153</sup> But Boyd gave short shrift to arguments that the Crosstown would constitute an unacceptable racial barrier. “Separating white and black may not be a particularly bad thing,” he remarked, explaining that all cities had ethnic, racial and religious groupings and that it would be harmful if a highway were to interfere with these “logical divisions.” Boyd rebuffed assertions that the highway would constitute a “ghetto wall,” and decried the “tendency to talk and act as if the only place highways go is through black property.”<sup>154</sup> Boyd’s remarks were surprising in light of his role as one of the individuals most responsible for the new federal transportation planning regime, emerging in the 1960s, that gave significant weight to local opinion and treated the complaints of urban highway protestors with sympathy.<sup>155</sup>

Those who were studying the situation on the ground were concerned about the potential reaction to the expressway of area residents and were especially worried about the possibility of racial violence. Francis Lammer, the executive director of the Redevelopment Authority, wanted to make a study of the area to aid in relocation plans should the expressway be built, but he and his staff, influenced by the epidemic of urban riots that shook the United States in the late 1960s, were concerned about the threat of physical violence.<sup>156</sup> Development Coordinator Philip Kalodner did not assuage Lammer’s fears when he reported that some residents of the area had made “radical

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<sup>153</sup> Robert Landis to Alan Boyd, 26 March 1968, Central Correspondence, 1968-1978, Records of the Federal Highway Administration, RG 406, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>154</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 24 April 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>155</sup> See Schrag, “The Freeway Fight in Washington, D.C.,” 649, 655, 668; Mohl, “Stop the Road,” 681.

<sup>156</sup> Memo from Francis Lammer to Clarence Farmer, March 15, 1968, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

proposals . . . such as organizing children to block off South Street traffic” – a situation that could get out of hand quickly.<sup>157</sup>

Robert Sugarman felt that fears of urban unrest were more than justified. He told Cushing Dolbeare, Managing Director of the Philadelphia Housing Association, that the Crosstown Expressway created the possibility that Philadelphia would soon face a riot similar to those that Newark and Detroit experienced in 1967. While only 10-15% of “ghetto residents” in Detroit had participated in that riot, Sugarman explained, this was most likely because the grievances in that city were “relatively undefined.” He saw Philadelphia’s situation as much closer to Newark’s, when approximately 50% of area residents participated in a riot stemming partly from “the proposed dislocation of a substantial portion of the Negro community for a medical school.” Philadelphia simply could not afford to have “white governmental officials deliberately affronting and turning off the Negro citizenry,” Sugarman warned, predicting that this “arrogance,” if left unchecked, would “lead to the 1968 crisis.”<sup>158</sup>

Dolbeare, a former speechwriter for Hubert Humphrey who had worked on low-income housing in Baltimore and Philadelphia since the early 1950s, was opposed to the Crosstown Expressway because of the people it would displace. She later remembered the proposed highway “as another example of the kind of plan which is carried out for the benefit of middle and upper-income people, with very severe negative effects on lower-income people.”<sup>159</sup> She took heed of Sugarman’s warning, and the Housing Association

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<sup>157</sup> Philip Kalodner to Francis Lammer, 19 March 1968, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>158</sup> Robert Sugarman to Cushing Dolbeare, 4 March 1968, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>159</sup> Cushing Dolbeare, Interview by Walter Phillips, Transcript, 28 September 1980, pp. 1-3, 28-29, Walter Phillips Oral History Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

passed it on to the Philadelphia Crisis Committee, which had been created to deal with racial problems in the city. “We cannot ignore the similarity,” a Housing Association representative told the Crisis Committee, between Newark’s proposal to displace part of its black community “and the proposal to dislocate so many persons, most of whom are black, from the route of the Crosstown Expressway.”<sup>160</sup>

Clarence Farmer, the executive director of the city’s Commission on Human Relations, eased fears of violence somewhat when he conducted a small survey of residents in the South Street/Bainbridge Street area and concluded that a larger relocation study could be completed safely. He told Francis Lammer that while there was “considerable resistance” to the expressway throughout the Crosstown corridor, that resistance took two forms. The first was the “strident” resistance of CCPDCC leaders which, Farmer felt, lacked “widespread support in the community.” The second and more pervasive type of community opposition took the form of anxiety over relocation rather than vehement antagonism to the highway itself. While there was always a possibility that violence could break out, Farmer’s gauging of residents’ attitudes led him to believe that such an outcome was unlikely.<sup>161</sup>

The Redevelopment Authority’s Centralized Relocation Bureau did conduct its study of the Crosstown area in March 1968, surveying two-thirds of the households in the area, and the results were “extremely grim.” Adequate relocation of those who would be displaced by the Crosstown Expressway, the study concluded, would be next to

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<sup>160</sup> Philadelphia Housing Association, “Statement of Philadelphia Housing Association at the Open Public Hearing of the Philadelphia Crisis Committee,” 3 April 1968, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>161</sup> Clarence Farmer to Francis Lammer, 20 March 1968, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

impossible. The statistics were discouraging, to say the least. A large percentage of residents – 43% of families and 61% of individuals – were supported completely by fixed incomes such as public assistance, pensions, or Social Security, and many others had some employment but still needed supplementary income. Of those whose incomes were known, it was estimated that 72% would be unable to afford an average moderately-priced rental home. Of the 1,725 households that would likely be displaced by the expressway, 1,332 would need “some form of subsidized housing,” and probably only half would be able to receive such assistance. The impact of dislocation would fall almost entirely upon African Americans, who constituted 90% of the households surveyed.<sup>162</sup> Other experts, including a Wharton professor, prepared an additional analysis for the CCPDCC that bolstered the CRB’s conclusions, indicating that of the 6,500 people who would probably be displaced, 85% would be black and more than 50% would be below the poverty line. Moreover, the city already faced a shortage of 50,000 low-income housing units.<sup>163</sup>

Motivated largely by the seemingly intractable relocation problem, Mayor Tate demanded in April 1968 that the state remove the Crosstown Expressway from its highway program and “cease and desist from any and all efforts” to proceed with the

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<sup>162</sup> Redevelopment Authority of the City of Philadelphia, Centralized Relocation Bureau, “Crosstown Expressway Survey,” Report, 29 March 1968, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate; Emily Achtenberg to Cushing Dolbeare, 10 April 1968, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>163</sup> Harriet Johnson and Thomas A. Reitner, “A Technical Critique of the Proposed South Street – Crosstown Expressway, by Harriet Johnson, M.C.P. with Thomas A. Reitner, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Wharton School, U. Pa., Prepared for the Citizens Committee to Preserve and Develop the Crosstown Community,” Report, March 1968, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

project.<sup>164</sup> In explaining his decision, Tate proclaimed to the Fair Housing Council of Delaware Valley that he intended “to keep placing immediate human values above all others for the duration of my Administration.” The city was, he believed, “reaping a bitter harvest from the seeds of dissent which were sown in the early stages of urban renewal when the human requirements were placed in a secondary position.”<sup>165</sup> Despite Tate’s demand, the State Highway Commission refused to go further than halfway, voting to defer rather than delete the project so that officials could continue to work on relocation and other issues.<sup>166</sup> At the local level, Tate had more influence, ordering the City Planning Commission to remove the Crosstown Expressway from the city’s plans and ending, apparently, any chance that the highway would ever be built, for the state could not proceed with the road without an agreement with Philadelphia.<sup>167</sup>

The relocation problem would have presented a legal obstacle to the completion of the Crosstown Expressway if federal funds were to be used for the project. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1968, in accordance with the federal government’s increasing sensitivity to the social effects of expressways, declared that “the prompt and equitable relocation” of those displaced by federal-aid highways was needed “to insure that a few individuals do not suffer disproportionate injuries as a result of programs designed for the benefit of the public as a whole.” To achieve this policy goal, the Act

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<sup>164</sup> James Tate to Robert Bartlett, 18 April 1968, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>165</sup> James Tate to Bertram Wolfson, 22 April 1968, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>166</sup> Robert Bartlett to James Tate, 15 May 1968, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate; *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 15 May 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>167</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 18 June 1968, 27 June 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

prohibited the use of federal funds for highway projects unless the state had a plan in place before uprooting residents to provide them with “decent, safe, and sanitary dwellings” comparable to those they had occupied previously.<sup>168</sup> Interestingly, several months prior to the passage of the 1968 Act, Pennsylvania withdrew its request for federal assistance with right-of-way acquisition, intending to finance the acquisition entirely with state funds. Whether or not the state took such action in anticipation of more stringent federal relocation requirements is unclear, although the Federal Highway Administration took note of the fact that Philadelphia hadn’t approved the Crosstown due to the state’s failure to come up with an adequate relocation plan.<sup>169</sup>

In its eulogy of the highway, the mercurial *Evening Bulletin* switched its position once again, now bemoaning the state of affairs that had cost Philadelphia an expressway.<sup>170</sup> The expressway, said the paper, had become “a symbol of human rights over property rights.” While the issues raised were valid, they nevertheless “obscured the needs of the whole city, the entire region.” Could Philadelphia ever achieve progress, asked the editorial, if it could not resolve conflicts that plagued all major public works projects?<sup>171</sup> William Lamb was aghast, calling the loss of the Crosstown “a tragic thing . . . almost inconceivable.” The highway was “vital to the economic growth of the entire metropolitan area,” he pointed out, because “nothing is more essential or vital to

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<sup>168</sup> Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1968, *Statutes at Large* 82, sec. 30, 830-31 (1968).

<sup>169</sup> Federal Highway Administration, “Flash Report,” 9 May 1968, Central Correspondence, 1968-1978, Records of the Federal Highway Administration, RG 406, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>170</sup> It appears that the paper’s chameleon-like attitude toward the Crosstown Expressway was not simply a product of different columnists having conflicting views. In 1969 *Evening Bulletin* columnist Michelle Osborn told an anti-expressway activist that she was not permitted to write columns directly in opposition to the paper’s editorial policy. This prohibition extended to the Crosstown Expressway issue, with the result that Osborn could not interview Robert Mitchell for an anti-expressway column. Paul Turner, “Turner Log,” Memo, 28 August 1969, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>171</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 27 June 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

economic growth than transportation.”<sup>172</sup> A forlorn headline in the *Evening Bulletin* reflected, “Dream Highway Went Nowhere for 23 Years, Ending in Detour of Civil Rights and Politics.”<sup>173</sup>

While the defeat of the Crosstown Expressway represented a lull in the power of Philadelphia’s business community over transportation planning, the city’s business leaders seem not to have made strenuous efforts in favor of the road during 1964-1968. After Tate killed the highway in 1968, the powerful Greater Philadelphia Movement, rather than issuing a forceful protest, was open to the possibility of helping to develop the South Street corridor rather than running an expressway through it. In fact, the GPM held a board of directors meeting to discuss the issue on the same day that Stanhope Browne, who led the fight to have the Delaware Expressway lowered and covered in Society Hill, joined the board.<sup>174</sup> Robert Sugarman and George Dukes of the CCPDCC visited the GPM board and struck a conciliatory note, saying that they were not necessarily opposed to having a Crosstown Expressway under any circumstances, but felt that planners had failed to prove the need for it or to consider alternate routes, in addition to the city and state’s failure to resolve the relocation issue. Sugarman told the board that his group was “interested in working with the community and with the businessmen in resolving this problem.”<sup>175</sup> The GPM board continued to hold internal discussions on

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<sup>172</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 18 July 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>173</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 25 August 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>174</sup> Greater Philadelphia Movement, Minutes of Board of Directors meeting, 24 July 1968, Papers of the Greater Philadelphia Movement, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>175</sup> Greater Philadelphia Movement, Minutes of Board of Directors meeting, 17 July 1968, Papers of the Greater Philadelphia Movement, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

developing the area and looking at other potential expressway routes, such as Washington Avenue, but seems not to have engaged city officials directly on these matters.<sup>176</sup>

Although the Greater Philadelphia Movement did not in the summer of 1968 make a strong push to get City Hall to reconsider the Crosstown Expressway, new board member Stanhope Browne was concerned by some of the assumptions he heard at his very first meeting. Reluctant to make waves so soon after joining the organization, and cognizant of the fact that Robert Sugarman, a fellow attorney at Dechert, Price & Rhoads, represented the CCPDCC, Browne sent a private letter to GPM executive director William Wilcox. In the very long missive, Browne challenged what he felt were unproven assumptions about expressways on the part of GPM members, including the beliefs that more expressways in Center City would ease traffic congestion, and that the city could solve the relocation problem with enough effort. Most importantly, Browne stressed that the expressway had “become a symbolic issue for the black community,” which saw the issue “as a question of providing highways for white suburbanites, to make it easier for them to live out in the suburbs and yet use the city, as against the needs of the black ghetto dwellers.” Mayor Tate, he believed, had the right idea in cancelling the project.<sup>177</sup> In the end, Browne’s private urgings were to no avail, as the GPM would in 1969 take a more active role in pushing the city to move forward with the Crosstown Expressway.

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<sup>176</sup> Greater Philadelphia Movement, Minutes of Board of Directors meetings, 28 August 1968, 25 September 1968, Papers of the Greater Philadelphia Movement, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>177</sup> Stanhope Browne to William Wilcox, 24 July 1968, Papers of the Greater Philadelphia Movement, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

In the summer of 1968, it seemed that the Crosstown Expressway was dead, but the uncertainty surrounding the project had left considerable damage in its wake. The Office of the Development Coordinator asserted that due to the threat of the expressway, properties in the area had “seriously deteriorated.” The decline occurred because “those businessmen who could afford to move elsewhere did so; those who could not afford to move either remained without making improvements to their properties or closed as business dwindled and property values deteriorated.” The result was that South Street, “which had been one of the City’s outstanding retail and wholesale areas,” could claim this status no more.<sup>178</sup> One business owner who signed their letter “A South Street Football,” told Mayor Tate much the same thing, complaining that many business owners wanted to sell their businesses and retire, but could find no buyers due to the threat of highway construction. As a result, businesses deteriorated while owners waited to make repairs out of concern that the buildings would soon be torn down, depriving them of their investments. The letter writer asked Tate angrily, “How do you rehabilitate these men and women who have endured with patience for the past few years, not having the ability to sell what they have acquired, not being able to maintain businesses and properties without interference?”<sup>179</sup> A glum article in the *Philadelphia Tribune* told of the demise of the Royal Theatre – once a popular entertainment venue for the city’s black community – as one of the more upsetting manifestations of the area’s decline. Some merchants, the paper reported, believed that the city’s expressway plans were part of a

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<sup>178</sup> City of Philadelphia, Office of the Development Coordinator, Memo, 13 August 1968, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>179</sup> A South Street Football to James Tate, 15 July 1968, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

“conspiracy” to drive out businesses and acquire property at bargain prices in order to sell it to developers.<sup>180</sup>

Despite the grim condition of South Street and much of the Crosstown corridor, Philadelphia’s first true expressway revolt had succeeded, at least for the time being. For the first time in the city’s history, citizens had convinced elected officials to wipe a proposed highway off the map, reflecting a significant change in urban planning culture over the span of just a few years. The Crosstown Expressway fight in 1964 through 1968 was, without a doubt, a grassroots effort, yet it seems that many of the activists who carried out the day-to-day activities of the CCPDCC, the group that existed ostensibly to represent the residents of the Crosstown corridor, were middle-class professionals rather than the low-income African Americans that formed most of the corridor’s population. The evidence shows that the campaign against the Crosstown succeeded in this period despite the failure of its leaders – among the most important of which were Alice Lipscomb and George Dukes – to mobilize those who stood to be affected most deeply by the expressway. Grassroots upheavals not related directly to the Crosstown – including incidents of racial violence in Philadelphia and elsewhere – may have been just as important as the anti-expressway movement itself.

The first iteration of the Crosstown Expressway revolt was not entirely unique, having counterparts in several other American cities where grassroots organizations fought planners, engineers, and government bureaucrats to prevent the construction of an urban highway. In several other places, however, freeway protestors were able to influence the city establishment to the extent that it not only agreed to cancel or modify a

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<sup>180</sup> Clay Dillon, “Royal Theatre Closed After 50 Yrs.; Now ‘Gravestone’ in a ‘Dying Era,’” *Philadelphia Tribune*, 7 December 1968, p. 1.

particular project, but adopted an anti-expressway stance generally. Such was the case in Boston, Washington, D.C., and San Francisco, for example. Philadelphia's freeway revolt, however, failed to alter the city's fundamental transportation planning priorities and did not even ensure the permanent demise of the Crosstown Expressway itself. A seemingly unquenchable desire for the highway on the part of the business community, city planners, and some government officials meant that its opponents would be required to defeat the project twice more before achieving a final victory.

### **The Turn to Mass Transportation**

From 1964 to 1968, the power of urban planners and engineers to build highways where and how they pleased was on the wane. This was particularly true in Philadelphia, as the campaign to lower and cover the Delaware Expressway in Society Hill made great headway and the Crosstown Expressway was defeated for the first time. As expressway construction became more problematic, Philadelphia's city government began to increase its focus on mass transportation. Although City Hall and the business community had been concerned since the 1950s about the demise of mass transit, there was little they could do about it prior to the mid-1960s. Events on the federal level, such as the passage of the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964, provided new opportunities, however. Philadelphia and its suburban counties responded by creating the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, which acted as a conduit for federal grants, took over existing commuter railroad subsidy programs, and began efforts to acquire the Philadelphia Transportation Company's urban mass transit system. In 1964, Philadelphia also sought federal funding for the Center City Commuter Connection, a downtown rail tunnel intended to unify the region's two separate commuter rail systems. This project,

more than anything else, helped to create the perception that Philadelphia's mass transportation planning was biased strongly in favor of affluent, white suburbanites while paying inadequate attention to the needs of the inner-city poor.

1964 was a watershed year for mass transportation in Philadelphia, as the newly-created Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority became operative on January 15. The fact that commuter railroads in Philadelphia had been receiving subsidies from the Philadelphia and suburban governments for several years, with positive results, undoubtedly made a regional public transportation authority easier to swallow for those who might have been wary of the concept. Observers credited the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Compact with paving the way for SEPTA and, as City Solicitor David Berger put it, "the beginning of a new era of Philadelphia-Suburban County cooperation."<sup>181</sup> Likewise, the *Evening Bulletin* proclaimed that without SEPTA, the region could never have experienced "the cooperation between, and the breaking down of antipathies among, the counties of Greater Philadelphia."<sup>182</sup>

The region's five county governments – Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery – joined together in SEPTA primarily for the purpose of funneling federal aid to the commuter railroads to prevent what was otherwise expected to be their imminent demise. To that end, SEPTA expected that one of its first items of business would be the acquisition of both the Passenger Service Improvement Corporation and SEPTA so that it could merge, take over, and expand their railroad subsidy operations. Railroads were not to be SEPTA's sole focus, however. Those who created the authority

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<sup>181</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 14 March 1964, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>182</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 4 March 1964, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

also envisioned that it would take over eventually the Philadelphia Transportation Company and the Philadelphia Suburban Transportation Company in order to assume control of the area's subways, buses, and trolleys; the only question was when these acquisitions would occur. SEPTA began negotiations with the PTC right away, beginning a process that was at first expected to be completed quickly but in fact lasted until 1968.<sup>183</sup> Getting SEPTA up and running and involved in both commuter railroad and urban mass transit operations was an urgent priority for Mayor Tate, who warned that with delays, "I am afraid we will be doomed to slow stagnation as our taxable real estate is eaten up by highways, parking lots and service stations, more and more of our resources become allocated to traffic signals and cars whiz by our stores and shopping centers without stopping."<sup>184</sup>

While SEPTA was getting on its feet, proponents of mass transportation were excited by developments at the national level. On July 9, 1964, President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964, calling it "one of the most profoundly significant domestic measures to be enacted by the Congress during the 1960s." "Congressional support of transportation," the president continued, "has been a major constructive influence on the progress and development of our American society and our American economy."<sup>185</sup> The Act authorized the Housing and Home Finance Agency to provide funds to both public and private mass transportation

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<sup>183</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 29 March 1964, 14 October 1964, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>184</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 13 May 1964, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>185</sup> Lyndon Johnson, "Remarks of the President at the Signing of S. 6, Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964, in the Cabinet Room," 9 July 1964, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

companies through state and local governments.<sup>186</sup> The initial outlay was \$375 million, and it was hoped that Philadelphia would receive \$36 million of those funds.<sup>187</sup> In fact, Mayor Tate announced the day before the bill was signed that Philadelphia had already applied for its first grant under the new law. A press release from the mayor's office trumpeted Tate as "a prime mover" of the bill, as he had testified before both the House and Senate about the need for federal urban mass transit legislation.<sup>188</sup> Tate was ecstatic about the legislation and proud of the role he played in lobbying for it. He attended the signing ceremony and afterwards planned to frame a photo of the president signing the bill along with one of the pens Johnson had used.<sup>189</sup>

In many respects, the mass transit situation in Philadelphia and its suburbs seemed to be looking up in 1964 due to the creation of SEPTA and the passage of the Urban Mass Transportation Act. Moreover, the PSIC and SEPACT continued to report overwhelmingly positive results of their Operations, which they credited for drawing national attention to the concept of federal assistance for regional rail transit and helping to convince Congress to pass the UMTA.<sup>190</sup> In January 1964, for example, Bucks County Commission chairman John Bodley noted that the Pennsylvania Railroad had experienced a 64% increase in ridership since November 1962. "This astounding gain in

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<sup>186</sup> The federal urban mass transportation program, which had its tentative beginnings in 1961, was at first the responsibility of the Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA) and later that of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which succeeded HHFA in 1965. In 1968, the program became known as the Urban Mass Transportation Administration and was transferred to the Department of Transportation, which had been created in 1966. Edward Weiner, *Urban Transportation Planning in the United States: History, Policy, and Practice* (New York: Springer, 2008), 2.

<sup>187</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 9 July 1964, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>188</sup> City of Philadelphia, Office of the Mayor, Press release, 8 July 1964, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>189</sup> James Tate to Lawrence O'Brien, 14 July 1964, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>190</sup> Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Compact, Press release, 20 January 1964, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

rail passengers,” he said, “is sure proof that improving public transportation with low fares and better service will draw more riders to it, thus alleviating congestion on our over-crowded highway network.”<sup>191</sup>

At the same time, however, PSIC and SEPACT officials realized that much more needed to be done to sustain and build upon the progress they had made in improving the region’s commuter rail service. In April 1964, SEPACT urged a “complete modernization” of the region’s rail system, including completing the electrification of the system, new rail cars, and improvements to both tracks and stations, among other things. All of this was estimated to cost \$103 million in addition to the \$27 million that had already been committed and invested, primarily by the city of Philadelphia, since 1961. Although the project required a serious investment, things could have been much worse had the region’s railroad infrastructure not been relatively well-maintained. San Francisco was rebuilding its rail system, which it had allowed to deteriorate severely, at the staggering cost of \$979 million for 75 miles of track. SEPACT estimated Philadelphia’s cost to be only 3.6% of San Francisco’s.<sup>192</sup>

But improving the rail system would not be enough. Philadelphia was in danger of losing its commuter railroads entirely, and the danger was not confined merely to the deterioration of the physical infrastructure. For years, both the Pennsylvania and Reading Railroads cut service and increased fares in response to the losses they suffered on their commuter operations. PSIC and SEPACT Operations provided some relief, as government subsidies reduced the railroads’ losses and provided improved service. But

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<sup>191</sup> Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Compact, Press release, 29 January 1964, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>192</sup> Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Compact, Press release, 24 April 1964, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

the subsidies were far from a cure-all for the railroads' systemic ills. The Reading, in fact, stated its intention to drop commuter rail service completely unless it could be relieved of all of its losses, a situation that SEPACT found untenable:

Discontinuation of commuter rail services would be disastrous for metropolitan Philadelphia. Loss of commuter services would require inordinately large expenditures for alternative transportation facilities. Discontinuation of service would disrupt the economic growth of the region; it would reduce property values and tax collections in communities served by rail lines. Discontinuation would eliminate a mode of transportation that, when called upon during storms or other emergencies, has proven itself capable of carrying two or three times its normal burden of passengers.<sup>193</sup>

With such a potential disaster looming on the horizon, SEPTA placed a high priority on a merger with PSIC and SEPACT, intended to allow the new authority to deal more directly with commuter rail issues. SEPTA general counsel Lewis Van Dusen acknowledged the importance of merging with the commuter rail corporations so that southeastern Pennsylvania could “speak with one voice” when dealing with government agencies on railroad matters.<sup>194</sup> Compared to SEPTA’s efforts to take over the PTC, the integration of commuter rail entities was accomplished with lightning speed. By September 1965, SEPTA had entered into management agreements with both the PSIC and SEPACT to transfer to SEPTA those organizations’ responsibilities for rail Operations in Philadelphia and the suburbs, respectively.<sup>195</sup> In doing so, SEPTA inherited a headache, and an expensive one to boot. The Reading Railroad quickly let it

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<sup>193</sup> Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Compact, “SEPACT: PA-MTD-1 18-Month Report,” 1 May 1964, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>194</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 11 November 11, 1964, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>195</sup> Passenger Service Improvement Corporation, Press release, 21 September 1965, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

be known that it wanted \$36 million in government subsidies so that it could improve commuter service and wipe out its operating deficit. In addition, the Reading reiterated its threat to drop commuter service entirely if it did not receive the requested assistance.<sup>196</sup> SEPTA also faced the pressure of high expectations. As news station KYW put it, “Now that the Transit Authority no longer is a paper organization, we can find out if the region’s confidence and hopes are well placed. . . . If it succeeds, the Transit Authority can be a model for the solution of many problems that threaten the region’s future.”<sup>197</sup>

By February 1966, SEPTA had entered into agreements with both the Pennsylvania and Reading Railroads to bring the entire Philadelphia-area commuter railroad system under contract for subsidy Operations.<sup>198</sup> The new relationship proved beneficial. At the end of the first year of the new subsidy programs on the Reading lines (known collectively as “Operation Reading”), weekday passenger traffic had grown substantially and the railroad’s overall operating deficit had shrunk. The parties attributed the positive results to a new fare system which distributed costs more equitably; improvements in service and schedules; and better cooperation between labor and management.<sup>199</sup> Roderick Craib, a public relations man for the Reading, noted that PSIC/SEPACT programs between 1958 and 1964 had increased ridership nearly 50%, but had not resulted in major deficit reductions due to increased service and lower fares.

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<sup>196</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 24 October 1965, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>197</sup> KYW, Television and radio editorial, Transcript, 26 November 1965, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>198</sup> Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, Press release, 11 February 1966, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>199</sup> Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority and The Reading Company, Press release, 14 June 1966, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

The difference now was the federal aid SEPTA was funneling to the railroads pursuant to the UMTA. Craib hailed southeastern Pennsylvania as “one of the first regions in the nation” to try to correct the imbalance between spending on highways and rail facilities “so that all forms of transportation would be developed efficiently as part of a complete transportation network.”<sup>200</sup>

Craib was correct – although it had a long way to go, the region was indeed moving toward a truly integrated transportation system. SEPTA laid out its blueprint in September 1966 when it announced a \$458 million capital program with the goal of creating “a coordinated public transportation system to serve the entire five-county area, permitting persons to travel conveniently throughout the region, eventually with only one ticket needed for any trip.” In announcing the program, SEPTA chair Casimir Sienkiewicz portrayed it as an alternative to expanding the region’s expressway network; according to the press release, the cost of highways sufficient to replace the area’s mass transit system would be more than \$1 billion. Most of the money to implement the improvements to the commuter rail system was to come from state and federal grants. While the Pennsylvania and the Reading would continue to operate the railroads, they would agree to meet SEPTA’s service standards in return for having all of their commuter service losses covered.

The capital program also contemplated large expenditures for improvements to the urban mass transit system, financed by a combination of federal, state and local grants in addition to the system’s operating revenues. The plan called for significant

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<sup>200</sup> Roderick Craib, “Remarks of Roderick Craib, Director of Public Relations, Reading Railroad, at the Association of Railroad Advertising Managers, Denver, Colorado,” 6 June 1966, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

improvements to the urban mass transit infrastructure, including the extensions of the Broad Street Subway into Northeast Philadelphia and South Philadelphia and the replacement of the Frankford El viaduct. Moreover, SEPTA planned to modernize transit equipment and make improvements to the suburban bus and trolley lines. The authority was also interested in improving the city's subway concourses, which, it admitted, many considered "neither clean enough, comfortable enough, safe enough, nor appealing to the eye."<sup>201</sup>

Although SEPTA had grand plans for the future of urban mass transit in Philadelphia, the PTC resisted the authority's attempt to take it over – something that had to be accomplished before anyone would consider spending the large sums the capital program contemplated. According to then-SEPTA vice chairman James McConnon, the political dimensions of SEPTA's effort to take over the PTC were somewhat different from those surrounding its assumption of responsibility for the commuter railroad subsidy programs. In the case of the railroads, the city's business community took the lead, wanting to preserve the rail lines that filled downtown office buildings with suburban workers. The Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, for example, had since the early 1960s pushed for more aid, including state and federal subsidies, for the railroads.<sup>202</sup> With respect to urban mass transit, however, the business community was

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<sup>201</sup> Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, Press release, 16 September 1966, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>202</sup> See, for example, Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, Traffic and Transportation Council, "Identifiable Problems Facing the Traffic and Transportation Council," Memo, 8 September 1961; Paul J. McNamara, "Statement of Paul J. McNamara on Behalf of the Traffic and Transportation Council, Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia to Special Committee on Mass Transportation, etc., Council of the City of Philadelphia, at its Public Hearing March 19, 1962 in support of Bill No. 1648," 19 March 1962; Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, Minutes of Board of Directors meeting, 15 March 1965; Papers of the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

not as visible. Instead, Mayor Tate, who represented the constituency that made up most of the system's riders, placed himself at the forefront of the effort. Perhaps equally important was the transit union's insistence that a public takeover be accomplished, because SEPTA's enabling legislation required the authority to fund fully the workers' pension program in the event SEPTA bought the PTC.<sup>203</sup>

Despite substantial political pressure on SEPTA to accomplish the takeover, it took several years and a court order for Philadelphia to have a publicly-owned mass transportation system. As was mentioned earlier, the city's 1907 agreement with the PTC's predecessor, Philadelphia Rapid Transit, contained an option clause that included a formula for setting the purchase price. When the parties failed to reach agreement on their own by June 1965, SEPTA notified the PTC of its intent to exercise its option under the 1907 agreement to purchase the company as of July 1, 1966.<sup>204</sup> In response, the PTC repudiated the agreement, leading to a lawsuit by the city of Philadelphia and SEPTA to affirm the validity of the purchase option and compel the sale of the transit company. SEPTA also filed a suit to compel the PTC to allow SEPTA to examine its property and financial records – a step that was necessary before SEPTA could sell bonds to advance its purchase of the PTC.<sup>205</sup>

While the lawsuit was pending, the PTC and its president, Albert Lyons, fought SEPTA's takeover attempt by appealing to the court of public opinion. As part of the

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<sup>203</sup> James McConnon, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 4 March 2009.

<sup>204</sup> The city of Philadelphia had transferred to SEPTA its purchase option under the 1907 agreement. WCAU-TV, Editorial, Transcript, 15 June 1965, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>205</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 22 June 1965, 30 July 1965, 14 August 1965, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA; Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, Press release, 31 August 1965, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

company's public relations campaign, Lyons sent prominent Philadelphia citizens a letter pointing out the evils of government ownership and operation and claiming that the community would best be served by a continuation of private ownership of mass transit. The letter included proofs of two advertisements for which the PTC had already purchased space in local newspapers. The first advertisement, headlined "What does government-owned transit cost the taxpayer?" reported that transit agencies in New York City, Pittsburgh and Boston were suffering losses that forced taxpayers in those cities to "dig deep" to cover them. The second one, entitled "Is Government Ownership the Magic Answer to Urban Transportation Problems?" asserted that in other cities, "transit riders often get less for their fares than do riders in Philadelphia."<sup>206</sup>

The PTC's publicity campaign evoked a heated response from SEPTA chairman Casimir Sienkiewicz, who pointed out that in 1963, the Pennsylvania legislature had called Philadelphia's mass transit "underdeveloped, uncoordinated [and] obsolete" and concluded that these problems could not be solved by a private company. It was this belief that spurred the legislature to create SEPTA in the first place, said Sienkiewicz, and now the PTC was refusing to cooperate out of a simple desire for more money. "The only profit which PTC has made in recent years has come out of increased fares and decreased service," he fumed, asserting that the company had "not taken one concrete step during the past ten years to improve the overall service to the people of Philadelphia."<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Albert Lyons to Community Leaders in Philadelphia, with enclosures, 15 September 1965, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>207</sup> Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, Press release, 14 September 1965, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

James McConnon agreed wholeheartedly that the PTC's resistance was simply a ploy to extract more money from SEPTA, remarking that the PTC "had no interest whatever in keeping [the transit system] going. They were running it into the ground." At the same time, however, the PTC's difficult financial situation deprived it of leverage. As McConnon put it, "You can only extort when you've got the gun. They didn't have the gun."<sup>208</sup> Perhaps realizing that delaying the inevitable was only hurting the company, the PTC's Executive Committee struck a deal with SEPTA in November 1965 to sell the company for \$59.75 million. The agreement was subject to approval by PTC stockholders as well as the court, and was also contingent on SEPTA's ability to finance the purchase through the sale of revenue bonds.<sup>209</sup>

A group of dissident PTC shareholders opposed the deal, intervening as defendants in the still-pending lawsuit and seeking to have the court declare the purchase option invalid. In July 1966, however, the Court of Common Pleas ruled that the option was valid, as was Philadelphia's transfer of that option to SEPTA. The purchase price under the option formula was \$54 million, with the result that the dissidents had succeeded only in costing themselves and their fellow shareholders several million dollars by voiding the original purchase agreement. When the Pennsylvania Supreme Court affirmed the ruling in July 1967, the battle was essentially over.<sup>210</sup> After four years of negotiation and legal wrangling, the PTC passed formally into public ownership on

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<sup>208</sup> James McConnon, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 4 March 2009.

<sup>209</sup> Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, Press release, 16 November 1965, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>210</sup> James McConnon, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 4 March 2009; *Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority v. Philadelphia Transportation Company*, 426 Pa. 377, 233 A.2d 15 (Pa. 1967) [database on-line] (accessed 5 March 2009); available from LexisNexis; *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 14 July 1966, 28 July 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

September 30, 1968.<sup>211</sup> Philadelphia, the last holdout among major metropolitan areas, had at last a publicly-owned mass transportation system.

The mechanics of the transfer were as follows: SEPTA purchased the PTC, leased its assets to the city of Philadelphia, and then leased them back from the city along with the planned extensions of the Broad Street Subway for an annual rent of \$14.7 million. The reason for the leaseback arrangement was that public transit agencies were known, from the experiences of other cities, to run chronic deficits. Structuring the deal this way limited SEPTA's financial commitment to its annual rent, with the city agreeing to pick up the tab for any difference between net revenues and rental payments. The money to cover any such difference would have to come either from fare increases or public subsidies. "Either way," the *Evening Bulletin* pointed out, "the public pays." The deal was, however, reflective of Philadelphia's status as home to most of the population that SEPTA would serve. While the arrangement did not give the city veto powers over fares, the extension of service to the suburbs, or personnel decisions, observers believed that it would nevertheless give Philadelphia more control over its mass transportation than ever before.<sup>212</sup>

Although proponents of mass transit had reasons to rejoice, the picture in the wake of the PTC takeover was not entirely rosy. The biggest problem, according to McConnon (who became SEPTA chairman in 1968, the year of the takeover), was that, "The minute the pensions were funded, we lost all of the most experienced and ablest

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<sup>211</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 1 October 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>212</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 12 September 1968, 24 November 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

employees. They had been holding off retiring until the pensions were funded. As soon as the pensions were funded, they all retired.” Hiring and training new employees created “a tremendous expense problem for the authority.” Labor issues also presented a huge political problem for Mayor Tate. On one hand, Tate counted the labor unions as an important part of his constituency. The union’s constant demands for pay increases, however, created the need for more revenue. When SEPTA sought to increase fares to offset its higher costs, Tate pressured the authority not to do so in order not to upset his even larger constituency of mass transit riders. The inherent political tension between wages and fares strained relations between Tate and McConnon over the years.

Problems with workers and unions were far from the only issues confronting SEPTA in its new role as owner and operator of the urban mass transit system. Part of the PTC’s strategy during the years it was in a purchase price dispute with SEPTA was to make its balance sheet look healthier than it really was by deferring maintenance, which allowed it to show phantom profits. The PTC’s gambit led to complacency among politicians, who believed that the transit system was making money and would, once taken over, practically run itself. As McConnon put it, “part of the mythology at that time was that there would be no public money needed.” The reality, however, was grim. Because “the PTC had stopped putting money into the system,” the urban transit system “was really on the rocks when [SEPTA] took over.” The PTC had not only stopped maintaining the system, but “had simply stopped paying any attention to the public” as well, with the result that the “whole relationship to the passengers had become virtually non-existent.” Now that it was in charge, SEPTA became the target of public complaints about service, equipment, employees, and fares. Prior to 1968, when all SEPTA did was

administer the commuter rail programs, it enjoyed a favorable public image, but after the PTC takeover, “the world changed,” and public relations became a significant headache for the authority.<sup>213</sup>

In addition to the problems cited above, the delay SEPTA experienced in acquiring the PTC was costly for the city of Philadelphia, which lagged far behind other municipalities in federal funding. Although it was the fourth-largest city in the nation, Philadelphia ranked only eleventh in federal transportation grants by the end of 1968, receiving only \$4 million out of the approximately \$450 million the federal government had handed out since 1965. In addition to the slow PTC takeover, problems with the proposed Center City Commuter Connection – a tunnel that would connect eventually the Penn Central and Reading Railroads – were responsible for the shortfall in federal subsidies.<sup>214</sup>

The Commuter Connection, a major part of urban planners’ vision for Philadelphia since the late 1950s, was intended to remedy a significant limitation hampering Philadelphia’s commuter rail service.<sup>215</sup> The fact that the region was served by two competing railroads – the Pennsylvania and the Reading – was both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, the area had more rail lines, extending in more directions, than just about anywhere else in the United States. On the other hand, the two railroads

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<sup>213</sup> James McConnon, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 4 March 2009.

<sup>214</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 17 December 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA. The Pennsylvania Railroad and the New York Central Railroad merged on February 1, 1968, becoming known thereafter as the Penn Central. Richard Saunders, Jr., *Merging Lines: American Railroads, 1900-1970* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001), 269.

<sup>215</sup> The Commuter Connection was first proposed by the Urban Traffic and Transportation Board in 1958, was endorsed by the City Planning Commission in 1959, and was included in the city’s comprehensive plan in 1960. *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 11 October 1959, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA; Greater Philadelphia Partnership, “Center City Commuter Connection,” Report, 1976, Pamphlet Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

operated as completely separate systems, using separate stations, with no way for passengers to connect directly from a Pennsylvania line to a Reading line and vice-versa. To make matters even more difficult, the Center City stations for each railroad – Pennsylvania Suburban Station and Reading Terminal – were dead ends for all lines, meaning that valuable time was lost waiting for trains to turn around and begin another run out to the suburbs.

Urban planners and government officials wanted to solve the dilemmas posed by having separate rail systems by building a tunnel that would connect them – the heretofore “missing link” – thus allowing Pennsylvania customers to switch easily to Reading lines and vice-versa. The result would be, for the first time, a completely unified commuter rail system, achieved through either the formation of a new operating company or the use of operating agreements between the two railroads. Once the tunnel was completed, passengers would be able to travel from one end of the system to another – Norristown in the northwestern suburbs to Fox Chase in Northeast Philadelphia, for example – without needing to emerge from underground and walk several blocks in order to change trains. All inbound and outbound trains would stop at three stations – 30th Street Station and Suburban Station, both owned by the Pennsylvania, as well as Market East, a new station on Market Street east of City Hall intended to replace the aging Reading Terminal.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 18 December 1961, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

The city's consulting engineers approved a design for the tunnel in early 1962, a significant step toward obtaining federal aid for the project.<sup>217</sup> Engineering, although enormously complicated, would turn out to be the easy part, relatively speaking. The real problem, as was often the case for Philadelphia transportation projects, was funding. The city made its first request for federal funding on July 8, 1964, asking the Housing and Home Finance Agency to assist with the project under the UMTA on the day before Johnson signed the bill into law.<sup>218</sup> From the beginning, Philadelphia planners envisioned that the bulk of the money for the tunnel would come from the federal government with additional funding to come from the city and the railroads.<sup>219</sup> The tunnel project was presented as the centerpiece of SEPTA's aforementioned \$458 million capital project announced in 1966, with SEPTA describing it as "a focal point for the entire regional public transportation system, where connections between rail, bus, trolley, and subway would be conveniently and rapidly made, for trips to and from all points."<sup>220</sup>

The Commuter Connection was much more than just a transportation project, however. Some of the strongest proponents of the tunnel and the new rail station to which it would connect saw the project as the best way to spur the development of retail and office space in the deteriorating Market East area.<sup>221</sup> According to James McConnon, the stimulation of business activity was the prime motivation for the

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<sup>217</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 13 February 1962, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>218</sup> James Tate to Robert Weaver, 8 July 1964, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>219</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 4 January 1965, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>220</sup> Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, Press release, 16 September 1966, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>221</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 2 January 1966, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

undertaking, with the corporations who owned properties in the area generating the necessary political pressure.<sup>222</sup> The Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, which had up to this point focused mainly on the renewal of Society Hill, created in 1965 the Market Street East Committee, which included representatives from the major downtown department stores, such as Lit Brothers, John Wanamaker, Gimbel Brothers, and Strawbridge and Clothier. The Committee's main goal was to lure retail customers – many of whom now did their shopping in the suburbs – back downtown by building a new shopping center that would “rival or surpass any suburban center.”<sup>223</sup> The results of a survey the Committee sent to merchants in the Market East area revealed that retailers “were concerned at the decline in quality of stores in Market Street, and with the loss of ‘quality’ shoppers.”<sup>224</sup> The worry over “quality shoppers” had obvious racial overtones. As Alison Isenberg explained in her history of postwar central business district renewal, “Many supporters of urban renewal in the 1950s hoped to reverse the trend of nonwhite shoppers downtown with the demolition of close-in black neighborhoods, new highway construction, and drastic downtown rebuilding. These actions were taken in the name of business district improvement and the attempt to bring back the white suburban shopper.”<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> James McConnon, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 4 March 2009.

<sup>223</sup> William Rafsky, Report from Old Philadelphia Development Corporation to Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, Meeting minutes of Board of Directors of Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, 15 November 1965, Papers of the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>224</sup> Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, Market Street East Committee, Meeting minutes, 14 December 1965, Papers of the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>225</sup> Isenberg, 207.

In the case of Market East, OPDC saw the commuter tunnel and railroad station as linked intimately with redevelopment of the area as a bustling retail center.<sup>226</sup> The linkage of the two commuter railroad systems would allow passengers on any train, whether on a Reading or Pennsylvania line, to reach Market East with ease from any suburban point of origin. In addition to Philadelphia's business community, the city's construction unions were strongly in favor of the tunnel because of its potential for large-scale job creation.<sup>227</sup> Although the business and labor communities did not exert strong political pressure right away, in the 1970s they became the key constituencies that helped the tunnel move past political and financial obstacles to its completion. As will be explained later, the tunnel's non-transportation benefits later became the subject of controversy when the federal government balked at using transportation funds for what seemed to be a neighborhood redevelopment project.

Early on in the funding process, the tunnel encountered trouble. In early 1966, the *Evening Bulletin* reported that the city stood to lose as much as \$6 million in federal funds because it lacked a comprehensive regional plan for mass transportation meeting the requirements of the Urban Mass Transportation Act. Without such a plan, the tunnel would be eligible for only one-half federal financing rather than two-thirds.<sup>228</sup> A year later, in March 1967, Philadelphia still lacked a plan that complied with the requirements of the Act and was projected to be \$7 million short of what it would need to construct the

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<sup>226</sup> William Rafsky, report from Old Philadelphia Development Corporation to Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, Meeting minutes of Board of Directors of Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, 15 November 1965, Papers of the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>227</sup> James McConnon, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 4 March 2009.

<sup>228</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 28 February 1966, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

tunnel.<sup>229</sup> Walter Johnson, the executive director of the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, which was responsible for publishing a regional transportation plan, expressed certainty that the federal government would come through with the full amount of the requested grant.<sup>230</sup> Unfortunately, Johnson's optimism was misplaced, as the federal government soon afterwards revealed that it would make only a partial commitment because the DVRPC had yet to become a permanent agency. Once New Jersey, which had resisted making the agency permanent, gave its agreement to enter into a permanent arrangement with Pennsylvania and the DVRPC adopted a long-range transportation plan, the city would then be able to apply for the remaining funds.<sup>231</sup>

As 1967 turned into 1968, the issue of funding for the tunnel seemed no closer to resolution. In April, the railroads balked at paying the rental fee for the tunnel, demanding that it be included in SEPTA subsidies.<sup>232</sup> This announcement was followed by a statement from Secretary of Transportation Alan Boyd that his department had made no commitment to approve federal funding for the project. City Transit Engineer Edson Tennyson perhaps betrayed his true opinion as to whom the tunnel would benefit when he said that the tunnel would have a better chance of approval once the federal mass transit program moved from HUD into the new Department of Transportation. Boyd was "a

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<sup>229</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 5 March 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>230</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 8 April 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>231</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10 April 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>232</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 18 April 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

more efficient business-like type,” he explained, while HUD was more interested in “poor people and the urban image.”<sup>233</sup>

Tennyson’s prediction seemed unwarranted when city and SEPTA representatives met with the Department of Transportation in August and failed yet again to secure a funding commitment. Multiple obstacles existed, including the lack of agreements to ensure compliance with the requirement that labor rights not be injured by a federally funded project, the need for assurance that commuter railroad service would be maintained on a long-term basis, and a protest from the Philadelphia Suburban Transportation Company that its Red Arrow lines would be injured by the tunnel which, it claimed, was designed “to increase the measure of competition between the railroads and existing transit carriers.” At the same time, Red Arrow objected to SEPTA’s seeking state and federal aid to purchase new commuter railroad cars, which it called “a continuation of the policy of aiding a competing carrier to the detriment of comparative service to the patrons of Red Arrow Lines.”<sup>234</sup>

Red Arrow’s complaints echoed grievances that both it and the PTC, prior to its acquisition by SEPTA, had held for years. From the PSIC’s inception in 1960, both companies had charged the city government with favoring commuter railroads over their bus, trolley and subway lines. In 1962, the PTC had complained that the city was trying to prevent it from expanding its bus service because it was afraid of competition detracting from its railroad subsidy programs. “The city’s position is a curious one,” the

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<sup>233</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 24 April 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>234</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 24 August 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA; Arnold Frueh to Leo Cusick, 23 March 1967, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

company charged. “It promotes one type of public transportation – the railroads – even at the cost of large sums of tax-supported subsidies. On the other hand, [the city] resists progress in express bus operations which . . . are operated without any city subsidy, and achieve the same objective of cutting down the volume of auto traffic.”<sup>235</sup> Later on, the companies’ ire was directed at SEPTA, which Red Arrow once called “nothing more than a funnel through which federal, state and local funds pass to the Pennsylvania and Reading Railroads.” Meanwhile, SEPTA ignored the PTC and Red Arrow, allegedly to depress their value and make them easier to acquire.<sup>236</sup> As late as 1967, when SEPTA’s battle to acquire the PTC was still underway, Albert Lyons threatened to seek an injunction to halt state subsidies to SEPTA if the competitive imbalance between urban mass transit and commuter railroads were not remedied.<sup>237</sup> SEPTA chairman James McConnon scoffed at the notion that government aid to the commuter railroads put the PTC and Red Arrow at a competitive disadvantage, stressing that the railroads served a completely different constituency with the possible exception of a very few passengers in Delaware County who might have been inclined to switch from a Red Arrow bus to a train to get to the city.<sup>238</sup>

At a meeting of SEPTA and city officials in February 1968, Deputy City Solicitor Jerome Shestack suggested that the federal government be asked to waive in the case of Red Arrow the requirement that federal funds – such as those to be spent on the tunnel – not be used to the disadvantage of private transit companies. Tennyson estimated that

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<sup>235</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 20 May 1962, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>236</sup> Philadelphia Suburban Transportation Company to Leo Cusick, 21 September 1966, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>237</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 1 May 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>238</sup> James McConnon, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 4 March 2009.

competition from SEPTA was costing Red Arrow \$125,000 per year and that this number could be used to forge a settlement of the transit carrier's complaint. Some at the meeting expressed the opinion that what Red Arrow was really after was permission to run its bus lines into the city in order to level the competitive playing field.<sup>239</sup> When Tate and others asked why Red Arrow should not be given license to operate wherever it wanted in order to improve service for all Philadelphians, Tennyson responded that this would cost the city millions due to increased competition with the PTC (at this time very close to being acquired by SEPTA) and the railroads. If Red Arrow were allowed to run a few buses into Center City, however, Tennyson was confident that the company would drop its objection to the commuter tunnel.<sup>240</sup> While Red Arrow's protest did present a temporary stumbling block to the tunnel, it became a moot point when SEPTA acquired the company and its suburban transit lines in 1969, taking another significant step toward the creation of an integrated regional transportation system.<sup>241</sup>

In the meantime, tunnel delays prior to the DOT's assumption of the federal mass transit program had caused Mayor Tate to lose patience with HUD's mass transportation director, William Hurd. In a letter to Philadelphia's congressional delegation sent a day after meeting with federal officials, Tate called Hurd "obviously antagonistic" and "dissatisfied with the manner in which Philadelphia's requests [for funding for the tunnel] had been made." The city had reached accords with the PTC, SEPTA, and both

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<sup>239</sup> Red Arrow lines operated in suburban Delaware County, with the result that a Red Arrow passenger desiring to travel into the city was forced to transfer to a PTC line and pay a separate fare. SEPTA eliminated this problem by acquiring the PTC in 1968 and Red Arrow in 1969.

<sup>240</sup> Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, Minutes of meeting with SEPTA and city officials, 28 February 1968, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>241</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 2 August 2 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

commuter railroads, Tate pointed out, but had received “little in return” from the federal government.<sup>242</sup> “This is most unfortunate,” he concluded, “and I do hope that some effort will be made to clear the air and give Philadelphia the relief we so badly need at this level.”<sup>243</sup> Soon afterwards, Tate and McConnon wrote directly to Hurd, begging his assistance. The commuter connection tunnel was “the keystone of this region’s entire program of public transportation improvements,” they told him, and would be “the most important element in a major confluence of transportation services to be developed in Center City Philadelphia.”<sup>244</sup>

Still, no progress on federal funding for the tunnel was forthcoming. By December 1968, Tate’s patience was reaching its limit. Blaming tunnel delays in part on McConnon, Tate demanded the SEPTA chairman’s resignation. McConnon had aroused Tate’s ire by opposing the establishment of a separate corporation to run the commuter rail lines in the event that SEPTA acquired them – a mechanism the federal government was demanding in order to protect railroad workers’ federal retirement benefits. SEPTA’s suburban representatives opposed such a corporation, not wanting to become involved with railroad labor issues.<sup>245</sup> McConnon refused Tate’s demand that he resign, blaming both Tate and the railroad unions for holding up the tunnel.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> The railroads subsequently changed their minds regarding financial contributions to the tunnel, as is mentioned above.

<sup>243</sup> James Tate to Senator Clark and Philadelphia Congressional Delegation, 15 March 1968, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>244</sup> James Tate and James McConnon to William Hurd, 26 March 1968, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>245</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 11 December 11 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>246</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 12 December 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

At the close of 1968, proponents of mass transportation in the Philadelphia region were frustrated by the fact that plans for the Center City Commuter Connection – intended to be the centerpiece of SEPTA’s major capital improvement program and the key to the creation of a unified regional commuter railroad system – were stuck in neutral. The city’s attempt to come to an agreement with the federal government on funding for the tunnel had run up against several obstacles, placing the project’s future in doubt. Tunnel enthusiasts didn’t realize it in 1968, but there were even rougher waters ahead, for when the project did get closer to reality, more financial problems and public opposition to the tunnel complicated matters further.

Despite the difficulties in moving forward with the tunnel, Tate and others who shared his goal of an integrated regional transportation system could look back over the previous five years with pride at what they had accomplished. The notion of the city acquiring for itself the PTC’s mass transportation system, which so many had regarded as folly, had been put to rest forever. In its place had arisen a regional mass transit authority with the potential one day to provide Philadelphia and its growing suburbs with seamless service. SEPTA took a major step toward realizing this potential when it concluded in 1968 its long battle to acquire the PTC. Just as important, the federal government had awakened finally to the problems facing urban America in the 1960s, including the desperate need for improved mass transportation. The Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964, combined with the creation of SEPTA, ensured a crucial flow of federal money into the Philadelphia region for transportation projects. It would be another decade and a half before the region would have its integrated transportation system, but by the late 1960s, the groundwork had been laid.

## Chapter 4

### **“We are Fighting for a Community”: The Expressway Revolt Succeeds, 1969-1973**

Between 1969 and 1973, the democratization of transportation politics in Philadelphia reached its apex, as citizen discontent over the proposed Crosstown Expressway resulted in the project’s final cancellation, sparing thousands of African Americans, many of them living in poverty, from losing their homes. The city’s abandonment of the Crosstown in 1973 was a substantial victory for the anti-expressway activists who fought for a decade to convince elected officials to look beyond the efficient movement of automobile traffic to take account of highways’ social, economic, and environmental impacts. On the other side of the equation were the City Planning Commission and the business community, represented most prominently by the Chamber of Commerce, both of which saw the expressway as a necessary tool for the relief of traffic congestion, essential to the renewal of Center City as an economically viable downtown, and a means to clear what seemed to them a corridor in physical decline. The defeat of the Crosstown was a victory for democracy in terms of both process and result; those who opposed the road had their voices heard and, despite lacking affiliation with the city’s business and government elites, achieved their goal of wiping the expressway from the map.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Crosstown’s defeat also reflected the increasing prevalence in the late 1960s and early 1970s of concerns over the environmental effects of highway construction. As historian Mark Rose noted, beginning in the mid-1960s, “proponents of environmental preservation identified the Interstate system with gashes in the earth, with destruction of the pristine beauty of mountainsides and wildlife habitats, and with despoliation of the air.” Mark H. Rose, *Interstate: Express Highway Politics, 1939-1989* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 101. The Nixon administration responded to such concerns with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, which required the filing of environmental impact statements before any federal action likely to have a significant environmental effect, adding another dimension to the way highways routed through already polluted cities were evaluated. The government’s newfound

Not all constituencies benefitted equally from the more inclusive transportation planning process that began in the mid-1960s and peaked with the Crosstown's cancellation. Class, as much as race, proved to be a major determinant of the degree to which various groups could alter transportation plans to their benefit, as controversies over the Delaware Expressway ramps demonstrated. Shortly after the cancellation of the Crosstown Expressway, residents of Society Hill and Queen Village – a newly-gentrifying portion of Southwark – began a campaign to eliminate certain Delaware Expressway entrance and exit ramps that, without an interchange with the Crosstown, would have dumped huge volumes of traffic onto narrow, residential streets. They were opposed by state highway officials and large business interests, such as the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation and the Chamber of Commerce, which sought to prevent further delays to the expressway's completion and retain the ramps, the elimination of which they perceived as harmful to the city's economic development.<sup>2</sup>

While those who protested the Delaware Expressway ramps had some success in achieving their goals, their victories served at the same time to demonstrate the limits of the democratization of Philadelphia's transportation politics. Just as the residents of

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sensitivity to the air pollution created by automobile traffic impacted Philadelphia in 1972, when objections raised by the Environmental Protection Agency played a role in the Crosstown Expressway's demise.

<sup>2</sup> The Queen Village protestors, who were generally not as wealthy or as connected to City Hill and Philadelphia business as were residents of Society Hill, bore strong similarities to a small group of white residents and business owners who moved to the eastern end of South Street during the Crosstown Expressway controversy. Both groups were representative of a 1970s trend whereby young, white, educated professionals returned to urban neighborhoods, restored homes, and attempted to foster a sense of community. Many of these newcomers formed grassroots organizations to fight the plans of the government bureaucrats, city planners, and real estate developers who had controlled urban renewal since the end of World War II. Seeking "neighborhood power," local activists in many cities sought to replace the domination of big business with a grassroots approach to redevelopment. Suleiman Osman, "The Decade of the Neighborhood," in Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 108-15.

Society Hill were able to have a portion of the expressway lowered and covered while their less affluent neighbors in Southwark were not, the Queen Village protestors had more success in their fight than did the white working-class residents of Port Richmond, a Northeast Philadelphia neighborhood that failed in its earlier effort to prevent an off-ramp from bisecting a playground.

As pressure both from below (in the form of citizen protests) and above (in the form of a federal bureaucracy more sympathetic to those protests) forced Philadelphia to curtail its expressway construction, the city and its region shifted more attention to mass transportation. The turn to mass transit, however, did not entail a significantly wider distribution of transportation benefits across social groups. On the contrary, middle-class and affluent whites, along with the business community, continued to be the biggest beneficiaries of transportation policies. In the specific instance of the commuter tunnel, organized labor benefitted as well. That benefit, however, extended only to workers actually employed in building the tunnel and not to the broader working-class communities in Philadelphia's neighborhoods. The financial difficulty in which Philadelphia found itself in the 1970s, along with many other U.S. cities, placed both its commuter railroad and urban transit systems in crisis. By making its highest priorities the acquisition of the bankrupt commuter railroads and the construction of the expensive Center City Commuter Connection, City Hall and SEPTA ensured that less affluent urban transit customers would continue to be saddled with an antiquated and crumbling system.

**“A Crosstown Expressway should not be built”**

Although citizen opposition defeated the Crosstown Expressway in 1968, resulting in Mayor Tate's order to have the project removed from the city's plans and the

state's formal deletion of the road from its plans in January 1969, the matter was far from over.<sup>3</sup> Philadelphia's business community – the Chamber of Commerce in particular – continued to push city officials to resurrect the Crosstown Expressway plans. At the forefront of the pro-Crosstown movement was John Bracken, who had been named president of the Chamber of Commerce specifically because he had supported Tate's reelection bid in 1967. Tate's victory over Republican Arlen Specter, made narrow by the defection of much of the city's Democratic establishment to Specter's camp, had caused Tate to pull back from the business community, at least in the Chamber's view. Andrew Young, a former president of the Chamber, recalled of Tate's time in office that "City Hall was a vacuum. As a matter of fact, you couldn't get a phone call through."<sup>4</sup> Putting Tate ally Bracken in charge, the Chamber felt, would give the group better access to the mayor.<sup>5</sup>

The Citizens' Committee to Preserve and Develop the Crosstown Community accused the Chamber of using "misleading, misinforming tactics" in trying to convince residents that they would be compensated well by the federal government if they relocated to make room for the expressway. Anti-highway leader Alice Lipscomb alleged that welfare recipients, a category into which many corridor residents fell, were ineligible for relocation payments under the Federal Highway Act of 1968 – an allegation that was technically inaccurate, although those living in poverty were not likely to receive

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<sup>3</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 7 January 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Young, Interview by Walter Phillips, Transcript, 12 October 1978, p. 4, Walter Phillips Oral History Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>5</sup> Lenora Berson, "The South Street Insurrection," *Philadelphia Magazine* (November 1969): 176, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

large payments.<sup>6</sup> A Chamber spokesperson denied any attempt to deceive, calling it “unfortunate” if people had misunderstood federal regulations regarding how much money they would receive.<sup>7</sup>

The April 1969 creation of the Citywide Coalition to Oppose the Crosstown Expressway (CWCOCE), made up of 28 civic, religious and civil rights groups including the American Friends Service Committee, the Philadelphia chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, illustrated that many in Philadelphia – including those living outside the proposed expressway corridor – still considered the Crosstown to be a significant threat. As was true of the CCPDCC, the CWCOCE included some predominantly African American groups; in addition to the local chapter of the SCLC, the Council of Black Clergy, the Tri-State NAACP (a regional office covering Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware), and the Citywide Black Community Council were members.<sup>8</sup> There is a lack of evidence, however, to demonstrate that these groups participated actively in the anti-Crosstown effort; it seems, rather, that their main contribution was to lend their names.

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<sup>6</sup> As was mentioned in Chapter 3, the Federal Highway Act of 1968 declared Congress’ intent “to insure that a few individuals do not suffer disproportionate injuries as a result of programs designed for the benefit of the public as a whole.” In keeping with this policy, the Act authorized federal payments (separate from compensation paid for property seized via eminent domain) to reimburse people displaced by federal highway projects for expenses incurred in relocating. In addition, the Act provided for payments to homeowners of up to \$5,000 in the event the acquisition price of their home was not adequate for the purchase of a comparable home, and payments of up to \$1,500 for non-owners who had occupied the dwelling from which they were displaced for at least 90 days, if such a payment was necessary to allow them to rent a similar dwelling. Contrary to Lipscomb’s assertion, the Act did not contain a provision excluding welfare recipients from receiving either relocation payments or replacement housing payments. Because welfare recipients were mainly renters of inexpensive houses and apartments, however, they were likely to receive payments much lower than those to homeowners and more affluent renters. Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1968, *Statutes at Large* 82, sec. 30, 830-32 (1968).

<sup>7</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 13 April 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>8</sup> Lawrence Geller, “25 Groups Blast Crosstown Xway,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, 26 April 1969, p. 1.

African American organizations' seeming lack of interest in the Crosstown fight was in no way reflective of a weak civil rights movement in Philadelphia, which in fact had a vibrant movement, including a strong interest in Black Power, throughout the 1960s. From the end of World War II until the mid-1960s, the Philadelphia branch of the NAACP was the most important civil rights organization in the city, and Cecil B. Moore, elected its president in 1960, was Philadelphia's most prominent African American activist, noted for his ability to mobilize the working class. The NAACP focused much of its attention on jobs and desegregation; its two main activities in the mid-1960s were a campaign to get City Hall to enforce the antidiscrimination provisions in the city charter by refusing to deal with construction firms and unions that excluded black workers, and an effort to desegregate Girard College, a city-founded but privately-run boarding school for orphans located in North Philadelphia. In the later years of the 1960s, the local NAACP lost membership and influence, in part because the national office elected to break up the branch into smaller neighborhood units. Black Power organizations – such as the Black People's Unity Movement, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and the Black Panthers – were extremely active in late 1960s Philadelphia, however. These groups aimed primarily to stop police brutality and establish community control over the police, organize the city's black youths, and help African American neighborhoods gain more control over their public schools and introduce black studies courses into the curriculum. As a result of their work on these causes, during what historian Matthew Countryman called an “explosion of civil rights protest in Philadelphia,” African American civil rights and Black Power activists may simply have

lacked the time and resources to devote much attention to the Crosstown Expressway battle, particularly when groups existed whose sole mission was to fight the highway.<sup>9</sup>

The fact that African American civil rights organizations did not engage fully in the Crosstown fight may help to explain why the CWCOCE's day-to-day activities seem to have been dominated by whites. CWCOCE activist R.W. Tucker, a Quaker who belonged to the Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, penned a memo on this topic that contained echoes of earlier accounts of CCPDCC meetings. Of an early meeting of the CWCOCE, Tucker wrote, "It was an all-white gathering and some distress was expressed over this, though at least two black people were not there because of flu." But, noted Tucker, the racial homogeneity of the CWCOCE was not necessarily a problem, as the organization was not created "to rally the South Street black community" – something the CCPDCC was already working on, albeit with limited success. Rather, the Citywide Coalition, as its name suggested, was intended to drum up support beyond the Crosstown corridor and obtain more "organizational support" for its cause. Because the Coalition already had, according to Tucker, "very good contact with the existing black and other neighborhood groups," the prevailing feeling was that the CWCOCE "should be white – that is, white and relatively influential organizations should be its affiliates."<sup>10</sup>

Tucker's lack of concern over the CWCOCE's racial homogeneity might be construed as a lack of sensitivity toward African Americans throughout the city who might have opposed the Crosstown Expressway. His deep commitment to racial justice,

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew J. Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 120-22, 136, 170, 208, 213-14, 228, 230-31, 282, 286-87.

<sup>10</sup> R.W. Tucker to Paul Turner, et al., undated, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

however – as evidenced by his other writings – makes it more likely that he was making a pragmatic judgment that a white group would be most successful at influencing a business-government establishment that was also mostly white, rather than expressing a paternalistic desire to exclude African Americans from the political process. In any event, the CWCOCE appears to have remained overwhelmingly white, as minutes of a meeting in February 1970 reflected another all-white gathering.<sup>11</sup>

Seymour Toll, president of the Citizens' Council on City Planning, announced the creation of the CWCOCE, explaining that the groups that comprised it had “long admired the stand taken by the community groups living in the area through which this road will pass,” but that “other citizens groups concerned with the future development of the city as a whole must unite to express their concern with the direction events are taking.”<sup>12</sup>

Activists had concrete reason for concern, as James Tate, the most powerful Crosstown Expressway opponent of all, backtracked again on what had appeared to be a final decision. In March 1969, he had asked Managing Director Fred Corleto to meet with the Chamber of Commerce to hear the group's views on the matter. The ensuing discussions led to the creation on April 25 of the Crosstown Expressway Study Committee, known commonly as the Corleto Committee, which explored the possible reinstatement of expressway plans.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Citywide Coalition to Oppose the Crosstown Expressway, Meeting minutes, 9 February 1970, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>12</sup> Seymour Toll, Statement, 23 April 1969, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA; *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 23 April 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>13</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 26 May 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

The Chamber of Commerce was pleased that the Crosstown Expressway was once again a possibility. Philadelphia's large retailers, the department stores in particular, hoped that the expressway would eliminate competition from smaller stores on South Street and make it easier for wealthy suburbanites to drive downtown to shop. Harry Reichner, the Chamber's traffic and transportation expert, said, "If the major retail stores, such as Gimbels, Lit Brothers, Wanamakers and Strawbridge, have to depend solely on those shoppers who already live in town, they will be treading water. They need the affluent customers who live in the suburbs. And let's be honest about it, these shoppers won't come to town on mass transit no matter how we improve it. They will only arrive by automobile and we have to do everything we can to make it easier for them."<sup>14</sup> The Greater Philadelphia Movement agreed wholeheartedly, passing the following resolution in May 1969: "GPM endorses the urgent need for the construction of a Crosstown Expressway at once. Time is of the essence!"<sup>15</sup>

As soon as Corleto began his talks with the Chamber and even prior to the Corleto Committee's formation, Crosstown opponents got nervous. Some of the most visible discontent came from the African American clergy in and around the Crosstown corridor. On March 13, the Citywide Black Community Council and a group of clergy calling themselves Ministers of the Crosstown Expressway Area sponsored a protest meeting at Waters Memorial Church, an African Methodist Episcopal church near 10<sup>th</sup> and South Streets. At the meeting, ministers discussed organizing 23 local churches into a protest

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<sup>14</sup> Lenora Berson, "The South Street Insurrection," *Philadelphia Magazine* (November 1969): 89, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>15</sup> Greater Philadelphia Movement, Minutes of Executive Committee meeting, 14 May 1969, Papers of the Greater Philadelphia Movement, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

organization. If they were unable to stop the Crosstown by appealing to Mayor Tate, they said, they would take to the streets with protest demonstrations.<sup>16</sup>

It appears that the ministers neither formed an active protest organization nor sponsored street demonstrations. However, Reverend E.G. Williams of Waters Memorial Church, who felt that the expressway was a means of moving African Americans farther away from affluent Society Hill, was named to the Corleto Committee, the composition of which was somewhat balanced between pro- and anti-expressway forces.<sup>17</sup> On Williams' side were CCPDCC leaders Alice Lipscomb and George Dukes, South Street barbershop owner Stanley Thomas, and University of Pennsylvania housing expert Louis Rosenberg. Committee members John Bracken and Richard Herman from the Chamber of Commerce, state Secretary of Highways Robert Bartlett, state Secretary of Community Affairs Joseph Barr, and Hannah Share, who represented some white business owners in the area, favored the project. Despite the even split among regular committee members, Chairman Fred Corleto backed the expressway, giving the pro-highway group a 6-5 advantage.<sup>18</sup>

Anti-Crosstown Expressway activist Paul Turner felt that Corleto didn't know much about the highway and was trying simply to stall the issue until Tate figured out what to do, but added, "the truth is that no one knows what the Mayor wants, including

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<sup>16</sup> "Protesting Crosstown Expressway," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 11 March 1969, p. 1; Fred Corleto to John Bracken, 8 April 1969, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>17</sup> "Protesting Crosstown Expressway," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 11 March 1969, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 24 April 1969, 26 May 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA; Lenora Berson, "The South Street Insurrection," *Philadelphia Magazine* (November 1969): 178, 181, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

the Mayor, who I suspect simply doesn't want to commit himself."<sup>19</sup> Lenora Berson wrote in *Philadelphia Magazine* that at first many considered the Corleto Committee "a kind of elongated public hearing," at which "the opposition would be heard but they would not be allowed to interfere with any predetermined decisions." Such skepticism was soon tempered, however, when it became apparent that the committee was in fact "conducting a genuine in-depth review of a major public policy."<sup>20</sup>

As was portended by the emergence of the Citywide Coalition, protest against the expressway became more widespread in 1969, extending far beyond the expressway corridor. As for South Street itself, the *Evening Bulletin* called it "a street of black rage and white despair, of rates and rotten housing, of gang warfare and hoodlum terrorism, of bad dreams and broken promises." From the birth of New York's Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s until World War II, many had referred to South Street as "Philadelphia's Harlem." Now, reported the *Bulletin*, African American residents of the area hoped to create a new "promenade of Negro culture" on South Street if the threat of the Crosstown Expressway could be removed once and for all.<sup>21</sup> White liberals from Center City continued their activism, many of them opposing the Crosstown Expressway for reasons of social justice but also because of the air pollution, parking problems, and street congestion they believed it would bring to their neighborhoods. The Society Hill Civic Association voted 103-9 against the expressway, with chairman Stanhope Browne – the leader of the effort to have the Delaware Expressway lowered and covered in Society Hill

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<sup>19</sup> Paul Turner, "Turner Log," Memo, 28 May 1969, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>20</sup> Lenora Berson, "The South Street Insurrection," *Philadelphia Magazine* (November 1969): 181, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>21</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 3 June 1969, 11 June 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

– calling the project “another instance of the oil, rubber, trucking and commercial interests – the highway lobby – banding together and encouraging the highway departments to do what they do best – lay down miles of concrete through communities that don’t need and [don’t] want the road.”<sup>22</sup>

Whereas it was difficult to find vocal supporters of the Crosstown Expressway among the African American community, some Philadelphia whites did want the road. Hannah Share, Corleto Committee member and chair of a group called Citizens of the Crosstown Corridor, presented a statement to the Committee in which she claimed to represent 500 members, including residents, property owners, and businesses in or near the highway corridor, all of whom saw the Crosstown Expressway as the only solution to what they construed as the area’s decay.<sup>23</sup> Lenora Berson’s *Philadelphia Magazine* article alleged that some realtors had promised whites who bought homes between South and Pine Streets “that their newly refurbished town houses would eventually be protected from the jungle to the south by a concrete stockade filled with a fast-flowing stream of cars and trucks.” (As was explained above, anti-Crosstown Expressway leader Robert Sugarman reacted with horror at the notion of such “protection” when buying his home on Lombard Street.) These residents were joined in support for the expressway by some white South Street business owners who Berson said were “intimidated by vicious roving gangs and insulted by the increasing hostility of their black clientele.”<sup>24</sup> Land speculators also wanted the road badly, having bought up many crumbling properties along the route

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<sup>22</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 17 August 1969, 10 December 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>23</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 31 July 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>24</sup> Lenora Berson, “The South Street Insurrection,” *Philadelphia Magazine* (November 1969): 88, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

for practically nothing in hopes of a windfall profit from state condemnation. Despite the lack of unity among the city's whites, participation in the anti-expressway movement by liberal groups such as Americans for Democratic Action, the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, and the Citizens' Council on City Planning made the Crosstown Expressway – in Berson's words – “a kind of litmus test for liberalism.”<sup>25</sup>

With anti-Crosstown sentiment spreading, it seemed as though Fred Corleto wanted expressway proponents, especially John Bracken, to know that getting the Crosstown Expressway built would be an uphill battle. Corleto got this message across by keeping the Chamber of Commerce updated on citizen opposition to the Crosstown Expressway. In April 1969, for example, he relayed to Bracken an account from Gordon Cavanaugh, the city's Deputy Managing Director for Housing, of the aforementioned March 13 protest meeting at Waters Memorial Church. The plan of which the ministers spoke at that meeting, Corleto told Bracken, “reflects the continued opposition of the residents and leaders in this area. I am certain you are interested in being made aware of the local reaction to the reconsideration of the construction of the Crosstown Expressway.”<sup>26</sup>

The city's clergy continued to press for an end to Crosstown Expressway plans, as 36 of them wrote jointly to Tate in May, admonishing him that it would be “grossly immoral” to proceed with the road because of the people it would displace and the racial

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<sup>25</sup> Lenora Berson, “The South Street Insurrection,” *Philadelphia Magazine* (November 1969): 90, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>26</sup> Fred Corleto to John Bracken, 8 April 1969, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

barrier it would create.<sup>27</sup> The churches endorsing the letter were scattered throughout South Philadelphia; some resided within the Crosstown corridor itself, while others lay farther to the south but may have drawn some of their congregants from the highway corridor. Several different denominations were represented, including heavily black Baptist and African Methodist churches in addition to predominantly white Roman Catholic parishes.<sup>28</sup> John Bracken pushed back against the clergy's objections, writing to one of the signatories, Reverend James Hagan, to argue that the highway was crucial to Philadelphia's economy, for "we must have trucks passing through the City to serve our Port, our City industrial facilities and our retail stores." Bracken also objected to Hagan's charge that the Chamber was representing the interests of racists rather than poor African Americans by pushing a project that would separate the latter from downtown. Disavowing any racist intent on the part of Crosstown backers, Bracken wrote, "I can state unequivocally that to my knowledge, nobody has ever pushed construction of the Crosstown as a racial barrier."<sup>29</sup>

In part because of the race issue, tensions often ran high during the Corleto Committee's proceedings, as the expressway's fate – in limbo for so many years – was an emotionally charged issue for city residents and government officials alike. A local Black Power youth group known as the Young Afros appeared before the committee in July 1969.<sup>30</sup> The group's leader, James Lester, criticized the Committee for requiring his

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<sup>27</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 26 May 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>28</sup> "Protestant, Catholic Clergy Blast Crosstown Expressway," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 27 May 1969, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> John Bracken to James Hagan, 24 June 1969, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>30</sup> David Richardson, the youth leader of the Black People's Unity Movement, a major local Black Power organization, helped to found the Young Afros at Germantown High School, in the city's northwest section, in 1967. The Young Afros preached racial unity, attempted to create truces among neighborhood

organization to write a letter asking to come to the meeting, arguing that citizens should be allowed to present their opinions at any time of their choosing. Lester also protested the location of the Committee's meetings at City Hall, saying that they should be held in the areas affected directly by the proposed expressway.<sup>31</sup>

In August, the Committee entertained statements from community leaders on both sides of the issue, including former city planner Robert Mitchell, who had urged Mayor Tate so passionately in 1967 to drop the expressway. At the Committee's September meeting, however, it was revealed that the transcript of the previous meeting was incomplete, leaving out a substantial part of Mitchell's remarks. The omission led to a heated argument – during which Bracken fueled the fire by calling Crosstown opponent George Dukes a “boy” – including accusations that pro-highway members of the Committee had altered the transcript deliberately. “Obviously it was a blatant example of how uptight Highway Department and Chamber people were put by the Mitchell presentation,” remarked anti-expressway activist Paul Turner.<sup>32</sup> Whether the omission was intentional was unclear, but soon after, Corleto asked Mitchell for a written copy of his remarks, claiming that the tape from the August meeting could not be transcribed fully.<sup>33</sup> The entire incident revealed the extent to which nerves had become frayed as distrust grew between pro- and anti-highway forces.

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gangs, protested police brutality, and advocated a greater focus on black studies in their school's curriculum. Countryman, 3, 228, 243, 319.

<sup>31</sup> Crosstown Expressway Study Committee, Meeting minutes, 16 July 1969, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Turner, “Turner Log,” Memo, 11 September 1969, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>33</sup> Fred Corleto to Robert Mitchell, 17 September 1969, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

Nerves were frayed further on December 30, 1969, when the *Evening Bulletin* published a picture of new directional signs being placed on an unopened section of the Delaware Expressway in Center City. To the horror and astonishment of many, one of the signs said “To I-695/Crosstown Expressway.” When asked about the sign, a baffled Corleto sputtered, “That’s wrong. That could start a controversy. That could mean . . . I don’t know what that means, I’m confused.” Wes Simmet, an engineer with the state highway department, explained that “as far as the highway department’s concerned, some day there will be a Crosstown and we can just cover up the sign until then.” He added that putting up the sign now made sense from an engineering perspective – the beam on which the sign hung needed to be strong enough to support four signs, and it would cost the state money to use a lighter beam and then replace it later. The *Bulletin* reporter failed to call Simmet on his nonsensical explanation and ask him why the state did not use a heavier beam but omit the Crosstown sign for the time being.<sup>34</sup> Just two days later, however, heart rates in Philadelphia returned to normal when the state took the sign away and explained that it had been a mistake. Paul Thomas, a district engineer for the state highway department, emphasized that the sign “should not be construed as an attempt by the State Highways Department to influence the Mayor’s Crosstown Committee, City officials or the public.”<sup>35</sup>

State officials’ claims of innocence rang hollow, for it remained clear that the State Highway Department was very much in favor of building the Crosstown Expressway. Just a few weeks before the flap over the highway sign, state officials had

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<sup>34</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 30 December 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>35</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 2 January 1970, 5 January 1970, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

agreed to the Corleto Committee's suggestion of another study of the need for the expressway so that "local community opposition can be reduced or eliminated." The language of this statement conflicted with an earlier pronouncement by state Secretary of Highways Robert Bartlett that any study made would not take the expressway's construction for granted.<sup>36</sup> By admitting that the new study was aimed at overcoming community opposition, the state sent a strong signal that the study would be less than fully objective. In the meantime, residents of the area were frustrated by the fact that the continuing threat of highway construction was holding up badly needed redevelopment. As an official with the Department of Housing and Urban Development told the City Planning Commission in 1969, the federal government could not authorize federal renewal funds for the South Central or Grays Ferry areas until it was clear whether or not the expressway would be built through those neighborhoods.<sup>37</sup>

The pressure on Philadelphia to come up with a decision one way or the other on the Crosstown Expressway increased in early 1970 when HUD warned that if no definite expressway route had been chosen by September 1, the entire South Central area of the city would lose federal renewal funds.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, the fate of the expressway hung in limbo, as the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, or PennDOT (which had just replaced the Pennsylvania Department of Highways) had not yet signed a contract for a new Crosstown Expressway study, and the Corleto Committee was unwilling to make a final decision without one. The *Inquirer* cited the huge number of studies that had

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<sup>36</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 7 December 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Traussi to Edmund Bacon, 3 April 1969, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>38</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 14 January 1970, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

already been made on the proposed expressway throughout the 1960s and lamented, “the thing isn’t one bit closer to a construction start than it was in 1960.”<sup>39</sup> One reason for the delay in beginning the newest study, to be performed by Alan M. Voorhees & Associates for \$450,000, was that Robert Bartlett, supported by Mayor Tate, was trying to secure federal support for the study. The Federal Highway Administration declined to participate, as administrator F.C. Turner explained to Tate, because of the persistent local opposition to further studies, which many citizens perceived as delaying progress on other development projects. “In such an atmosphere,” said Turner, “the Federal presence too often is a complicating factor.”<sup>40</sup> Bartlett tried to get the FHWA to reconsider its decision, telling division engineer George Fenton that the residents of the Crosstown area supported the survey, which drew an angry rebuke from George Dukes of the CCPDCC, who was “shocked” that Bartlett would “willfully persist in misstating” his group’s position.<sup>41</sup>

The CWCOCE continued in 1970 to plot ways to bring about the expressway’s demise so that renewal funds could be used to rehabilitate the area. Things were getting desperate. In July, two *Inquirer* reporters walked through the South Street/Bainbridge Street corridor to get a first-hand look at conditions and speak to the residents. What they found was grim. The area, they wrote, was “seedy and dilapidated,” with most of the houses “in bad condition and occupied by transients and the very poor.” “The stores are

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<sup>39</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 28 May 1970, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>40</sup> F.C. Turner to James Tate, 1 July 1970, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>41</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 22 June 1970, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA; George Dukes to Robert Bartlett, 23 June 1970, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

uninviting. Razed buildings give the blocks the appearance of dentures with missing teeth.” One demoralized merchant told the reporters, “We’ve been here 40 years. It was a wonderful old neighborhood. Now the old customers have moved.” Some small pockets – such as the area between 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Streets – were improving a bit, with cheap rents attracting younger business owners hoping to spur a revival, something one of the older merchants called “a false hope.” From 8<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Streets was virtually devoid of commerce but for a small amount of activity around Broad Street. Yet another merchant summed up the problem caused by uncertainty over the Crosstown Expressway: “We don’t know where we stand.”<sup>42</sup>

As activists tried to put an end to the uncertainty plaguing the prospective highway corridor, one area of concern was tension between the CWCOCE and the CCPDCC. George Dukes said he was worried that the CWCOCE would undermine his group and that he did not want the other group to assume a leading role in the expressway fight. It seemed to some in the CWCOCE that Dukes was worried about his own leadership being threatened “and is not as worried about not having the Crosstown built as he is about his position.” To soothe tensions, some members of the CWCOCE suggested that the group change its name to the Citywide Coalition to Support the Citizens Committee to Preserve and Develop the Crosstown Community, but the unwieldy name was never adopted.<sup>43</sup> The CCPDCC, perhaps wanting to avoid blurring

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<sup>42</sup> Dennis Kirland and Elliot Brown, “Expressway Threat Erodes South St. but Youth Bring Vitality,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 12 July 1970, sec. 2, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Citywide Coalition to Oppose the Crosstown Expressway, Meeting minutes, 17 February 1970, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

the lines between itself and the CWCOCE, reorganized itself to exclude any groups not located in the expressway corridor.<sup>44</sup>

CWCOCE members discussed several strategies for squelching a revival of the expressway, including protesting the Corleto Committee meetings to try to get them opened to the public, holding a fundraising benefit, having spokespersons appear on talk shows to debate expressway advocates, publishing pamphlets, and trying to find businesses opposed to the Crosstown Expressway in order to undermine John Bracken's contention that the business community was united behind the project.<sup>45</sup> While most established business leaders were in favor of the expressway, the next generation had its doubts. In September 1970, the city's Junior Chamber of Commerce – an organization for young professionals focused on developing leadership skills through service – released a position paper asserting that the Crosstown would exacerbate traffic problems; make truck deliveries to downtown more difficult by increasing the number of cars in the city; and be seen “as a means of making Center City an enclave for the white and well-to-do.”<sup>46</sup> The Junior Chamber's statement conformed nicely to the CWCOCE's most important message: that “the need for the highway has never been demonstrated, that it

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<sup>44</sup> Paul Putney to Bernard Borish, 2 February 1970, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>45</sup> Citywide Coalition to Oppose the Crosstown Expressway, Meeting minutes, 2 March 1970, 14 May 1970, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>46</sup> Philadelphia Junior Chamber of Commerce, “Position Paper on the Crosstown Expressway,” September 1970, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

would not solve Philadelphia's traffic problems but would instead worsen them, and that it would create a human disaster which Philadelphia cannot afford."<sup>47</sup>

Quaker and CWCOCE member R.W. Tucker agreed that construction of the highway would be nothing short of a disaster that was to be avoided all costs. His antipathy toward the project was strong enough to cause him to propose measures of which he admitted his fellow Quakers would not approve. The black community in the Crosstown area, he felt, was "increasingly embittered and radicalized" and saw the expressway "as the other half of a white man's pincers movement whose purpose is to get rid of what is possibly the oldest and most stable urban black community in America." Building the expressway could lead only to either an immediate "urban insurrection" or "apathy and despair," which would ultimately foment violence as well. The threat of violence could be used to discourage those interested in the highway, Tucker advised. A potential contractor could be visited and told that "the people in the area just will not tolerate this road being built," which would have the effect of getting some to drop out of the bidding and others to raise their cost estimates. Tucker went further, however, discussing the possibility of carrying out "a-violent" activities, which he defined as "violence against property used for evil ends, but carefully not against people." Such activities could include anything from "mass pilferage of construction materials" to "dynamiting bulldozers," methods that Tucker found unobjectionable in situations where

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<sup>47</sup> Citywide Coalition to Oppose the Crosstown Expressway, "Position on the Crosstown Expressway," Statement, 5 May 1970, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

the democratic process had broken down and “a-violent” activities constituted the only alternatives to violence against people.<sup>48</sup>

Fortunately, events soon obviated the need for either violent or “a-violent” protest. In August, PennDOT signed a contract with the Voorhees firm for the Crosstown Expressway study, although the late date meant that the city would fail to meet the September 1 deadline for HUD funding.<sup>49</sup> In November, his study complete, Alan Voorhees dropped this bombshell on the Corleto Committee and PennDOT: “A Crosstown Expressway should not be built.” The highway, he explained, “would not be a worthwhile investment” compared to other possible transportation projects because it would not be “a cost-effective means of serving the purpose for which it was originally intended.” The Crosstown Expressway would be “poorly located,” Voorhees felt, and would fail to “attract a large volume of through traffic,” making it inadequate for regional traffic demands. Instead, Voorhees recommended an elevated spur connecting Grays Ferry Avenue with the Schuylkill Expressway and other improvements to both roads in addition to Washington Avenue, all of which he believed would provide more cost-effective transportation benefits than would the Crosstown Expressway.<sup>50</sup> Voorhees’ conclusion that the proposed expressway would not attract enough through traffic represented a radical departure from the 1950s, when transportation consultant Michael Rapuano listed as a selling point for the Schuylkill Expressway the fact that 85% of its

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<sup>48</sup> R.W. Tucker, Memo, undated, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>49</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 4 August 1970, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>50</sup> Alan M. Voorhees & Associates, Inc., “South Central Transportation Study: A Report Submitted to the Mayor’s Crosstown Study Committee and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation,” November 1970, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo; *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 1 December 1970, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

traffic would be bound for the city. By 1970, planners and engineers had attained a greater awareness of the ways in which highways generated their own demand and often increased, rather than alleviated, traffic congestion – an understanding Voorhees’ report reflected.

Immediately upon getting the Voorhees report, the Corleto Committee voted 10-1 on December 1, 1970 to kill the Crosstown Expressway, leading the *Evening Bulletin* to proclaim: “The Crosstown Expressway is dead.”<sup>51</sup> Voorhees admitted that he was “probably the first transportation consultant ever to recommend that a highway not be built,” which was made all the more surprising by the revelation that had he made a positive recommendation on the Crosstown, the city would have hired him for more work at possibly double his original contract. For Voorhees, the *Bulletin* noted, honesty was perhaps the best policy, but was nevertheless a “costly policy.”<sup>52</sup> Although the main thrust of the Voorhees report was that the Crosstown Expressway would increase congestion by funneling traffic into Center City rather than serving through traffic, citizen opposition had clearly played a role in the expressway’s demise as well. Somewhat puzzlingly – given that despite the involvement of African American leaders, the low-income residents of the Crosstown corridor seemed not to have participated actively in the anti-expressway campaign – the *Bulletin* offered this epitaph: “It was the

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<sup>51</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 2 December 1970, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA; also see Stephen Seplow, “Don’t Build Crosstown, Consultants Urge Mayor,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 December 1970, p. 1; Stephen Seplow, “Panel Rejects ‘Crosstown,’ OKs New Plan,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 December 1970, p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 4 December 1970, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

campaign waged against it by poor, black residents of the Crosstown community that really brought the highway down.”<sup>53</sup>

The *Inquirer* emphasized, without specifying as to race, that its interviews with those involved “point up clearly that it was local citizen protest, more than anything else, that delayed construction of the Crosstown Expressway long enough for it finally to be killed.” The events surrounding the Crosstown presaged a new kind of transportation politics, which gave rise to mixed feelings: “Some are not happy about it, arguing that neighborhood groups almost always take a narrow view and refuse to consider the regional necessities. Others say it is immensely useful, contending that neighborhood preservation is at the heart of our cities.” Harry Reichner of the Chamber of Commerce summed up the situation by claiming, “The pendulum has swung from ‘The highway department can do no wrong’ to ‘The citizens groups are always right.’”<sup>54</sup>

The Voorhees study focused mainly on the traffic and economic aspects of the Crosstown Expressway while making some reference to “the extensive and adverse non-transportation impacts which would be imposed on the community.”<sup>55</sup> But soon after, Voorhees told the Corleto Committee that the impact on neighborhood residents was uppermost in his mind when he decided to reject the Crosstown Expressway. The highway, he estimated, would have displaced 2,050 households containing 5,360 people. Most of those displaced would have been African American, and Voorhees believed that

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<sup>53</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 8 December 1970, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>54</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 27 December 1970, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>55</sup> Alan M. Voorhees & Associates, Inc., “South Central Transportation Study: A Report Submitted to the Mayor’s Crosstown Study Committee and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation,” November 1970, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

an influx of black refugees into neighborhoods populated by whites, such as nearby Grays Ferry, would have exacerbated existing racial tensions in the area.<sup>56</sup> Undoubtedly, the specter of racial violence following riots in Philadelphia and other cities – which Crosstown opponents had raised in convincing City Hall to drop the project in 1968 – informed Voorhees’ analysis as well.

In the wake of the expressway’s 1970 defeat, public attention turned to what would become of the Crosstown corridor. The *Philadelphia Tribune* lamented that “South Street has suffered tremendously over a long period of time because of the indecision . . . Many businesses pulled up their stakes and located elsewhere . . . Many of the buildings along the street from 6<sup>th</sup> and South to the River are in shambles.”<sup>57</sup> Crosstown Expressway booster Bernard Meltzer, now chairman of the City Planning Commission, said in a newspaper editorial that the area would either remain “a slum” or be turned into an asset by private development. The construction of public, low-income housing in the area would be the worst thing that could happen, he felt. This type of development would prevent the southward expansion of the Center City residential district, resulting in more affluent whites fleeing to the suburbs and the further decline of the city. The Crosstown corridor had several things going for it, including its location within walking distance from Center City and its status as one of the few areas into which Center City – bordered by rivers on the east and west – could expand. Allowing market forces to operate, said Meltzer, would produce the best results in terms of increasing the

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<sup>56</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 21 March 1971, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>57</sup> “Rebirth of South Street Looms,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, 5 December 1970, p. 8.

city's real estate and wage tax bases.<sup>58</sup> After being let down by the city's failure to build the Crosstown Expressway, however, Meltzer did not have high hopes for the area's progress, believing that it would be allowed to decline even further.<sup>59</sup>

Although no one knew it then, Meltzer's December 1970 editorial was an omen of the next great battle in the war over the Crosstown Expressway. It appeared – for at least the second time – that the Crosstown Expressway was gone for good, but Meltzer was working on a plan to revive it yet again. In January 1972, Philadelphia's new Democratic mayor Frank Rizzo – the police commissioner whose tough tactics against African American protestors helped to spark the city's Black Power movement amid claims of police brutality – took office after being elected to replace Tate, who had been elected to the maximum two consecutive terms. In March, Rizzo began publicly to discuss the plan known as Southbridge. Described by some as a “city within a city,” Southbridge was to include two uncovered four-lane highways – one running west along Bainbridge Street and the other running east along South Street. In the space between the two highways would be constructed a massive new commercial and residential development, with houses and apartments for 10,000 people of various income levels plus offices and commercial buildings expected to create 20,000 new jobs. Although city officials believed that Southbridge would displace 2,000 low-income residents, this was to be

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<sup>58</sup> Bernard Meltzer's reference to the free market was reflective of the evolution of white thinking about racial segregation in the post-World War II period. As David Freund argued in *Colored Property*, biological justifications for segregation were in the 1940s eclipsed for the most part by explanations resting on the imperatives of the free market. The federal government's racially biased intervention in the mortgage market allowed whites to believe that they functioned more effectively than African Americans in a housing market in which all competed on an equal footing. White homeowners asserted the right, therefore, “both to choose their neighbors and to be free from government interventions that might interfere with the market mechanisms that had allowed them to prosper.” David M.P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy & White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 19.

<sup>59</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 18 December 1970, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

more than offset by the 3,600 low-income people the new housing would accommodate. In addition to the residential and commercial buildings, Southbridge would be home to a park, a middle school, and 13,000 new parking spaces.<sup>60</sup>

Even before the city revealed the Southbridge plan formally on April 22, the new mayor knew the plan would be highly controversial.<sup>61</sup> Rizzo proclaimed that if the community rejected the new plan, he would comply with its wishes, but said he believed the response would be favorable.<sup>62</sup> One strong early objection came not from the community but from EPA regional administrator Edward Furia, who expressed “grave doubts” about running a huge number of cars through a densely populated area in a city with already dangerously high air pollution levels.<sup>63</sup> Meltzer took no heed, however, and continued to press for Southbridge. Claiming that he didn’t care “one way or the other” about the highway, Meltzer asserted that the highway was only a means to get federal funds to help with the rest of the development: “To get the benefits, I need the highway. So I’m for the highway.” On the subject of community opposition, Meltzer offered that the poor African Americans living in the Southbridge corridor would be in favor of the plan. Opposition, he believed, came mainly from white liberals “who patronizingly speak for the black community.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 23 March 1972, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>61</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 23 April 1972, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>62</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 24 March 1972, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>63</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 27 March 1972, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>64</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 27 March 1972, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Meltzer's charge raised some hackles. One Philadelphia architect urged Mayor Rizzo to disregard it, stating, "As a white member of the community, the Crosstown simply does not make sense!"<sup>65</sup> The characterization of white liberals as speaking for black citizens may have had some basis in reality given corridor residents' seeming lack of involvement with both of the major anti-Crosstown Expressway groups. In any event, George Dukes, Alice Lipscomb and the rest of the CCPDCC continued to fight on behalf of black residents of the Southbridge corridor. In early April, after a meeting with Meltzer, Lipscomb told Rizzo she was upset by the fact that Meltzer's plan "is simply to move Negroes because he thinks the land will be valuable to developers." Although the community had come up with its own renewal plans for the neighborhood, the Planning Commission had taken no action upon them. "Why is it," Lipscomb asked the mayor, "that we cannot go ahead with the community's plans? Why do we have to always be moving poor and black people?"<sup>66</sup>

When the city announced the Southbridge plan formally later that month, more citizen opposition poured forth. The very next day, 15 civic groups held a protest rally at the Theater of the Living Arts on South Street between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Streets. As one of the protestors put it, "We are not just fighting against the expressway. We are fighting for a community." Rizzo held quite a different view of the community, saying in an interview that South Street was "frightening – empty stores, the horrible condition of the buildings. They should be torn down. I don't think it'll ever be rejuvenated."<sup>67</sup> Some merchants –

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<sup>65</sup> Bud Ross to Frank Rizzo, 4 April 1972, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>66</sup> Alice Lipscomb to Frank Rizzo, 7 April 1972, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>67</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 23 April 1972, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

particularly those who had been in the area for some time and had watched the neighborhood deteriorate – agreed strongly with Rizzo. According to an informal survey by the *Evening Bulletin*, however, residents of the corridor opposed Southbridge “overwhelmingly,” as did some merchants who had come to the area more recently in hopes of taking part in its redevelopment.<sup>68</sup>

Samuel Bortnick, a longstanding South Street merchant, sent a letter to all of the major Philadelphia newspapers revealing that he had long been opposed to the Crosstown Expressway but had finally changed his mind. Unlike Alice Lipscomb, who blamed city government and the Planning Commission for the lack of progress in the area, Bortnick put his blame squarely on the neighborhood groups themselves. “I had hoped that perhaps the concerned groups would really be able to accomplish something concrete,” he wrote, “but, unfortunately, the many vocal, militant and bleeding heart organizations have done NOTHING in the last five years but talk. I do not believe that the new hippy businesses and communes will be able to do anything to either improve the area or better living conditions for the local residents.” Bortnick reserved his final shot for the “Center City intellectuals” who had done “nothing for 20 years.”<sup>69</sup>

Samuel Bortnick did not speak for all South Street merchants, as was made clear by Barney and Tobias Weinstein, the co-chairmen of the Established Merchants of South Street, who opposed the Southbridge plan vehemently. Blaming the area’s deterioration on the constant threat of destruction that had loomed for decades, the Weinstains made an impassioned plea for the restoration of South Street’s former grandeur, writing to Rizzo:

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<sup>68</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 30 April 1972, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>69</sup> Samuel Bortnick to Dear Editor, 27 March 1972, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

We have been here a long time. This street is more than just a street to us. There is a heart and a soul and a song here. This street is our life as well as our livelihood. Ask yourself, or a relative of yours who is “39 plus” about South Street, and there will appear a glint in his eye of fond memories and a hustle and bustle of business activity that many shopping centers of today would envy. . . . We say it is time to stop holding up progress. We are for progress, but progress does not mean highways only. Personally, most of the merchants would be proud to enlarge and continue to make South Street “The Street For All The People.”<sup>70</sup>

The largest forum for the expression of public opinion on Southbridge was a public hearing the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission held at the Philadelphia Civic Center on April 26, 1972, just a few days after the formal unveiling of the plan.<sup>71</sup> The hearing was drawn-out, contentious, and occasionally raucous. It began in the early afternoon, recessed briefly for dinner, and continued into the early hours of the following morning as speaker after speaker took the podium to rail against the project. So many people wished to speak that attendees wishing to stay for the whole hearing were required to move their cars before the Civic Center garage closed at midnight.<sup>72</sup> A wounded Meltzer, reminding his audience that “there was a time when if

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<sup>70</sup> Barney and Tobias Weinstein to Frank Rizzo, 7 April 1972, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>71</sup> As was explained in Chapter 3, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, which began operations in 1965, was an advisory agency that developed regional plans for southeastern Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey. The DVRPC bore responsibility for ensuring that projects requiring federal funding met all conditions for the receipt of federal grants. Although the Philadelphia City Planning Commission took the lead on developing plans for the Crosstown Expressway/Southbridge project, the DVRPC included those plans as part of its regional transportation plan in accordance with 1962 federal legislation requiring that highway planning in metropolitan areas be conducted on a cooperative regional basis.

<sup>72</sup> Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, “Transcript of Public Hearing on Crosstown Expressway, Philadelphia Civic Center,” 26 April 1972, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

you said you were chairman of the Philadelphia Planning Commission people would bow down to you,” was met with derisive laughter from the assembly.<sup>73</sup>

Meltzer’s primary goal at the hearing was to disabuse his audience of the notion that they were there “this afternoon and tonight to discuss a highway known as the Crosstown.” The Crosstown, he stressed repeatedly, “is dead.” Southbridge, on the other hand, while containing a highway, was really an “urban plan . . . for housing; for parking; for mass transit; revitalization of a commercial area; it is a highway plan; it is a plan for open green spaces; it is a plan to provide employment for the area; it is a plan to provide significant, new municipal revenues . . . it is not a highway plan.” In trying to explain his curious statement that Southbridge was “a highway plan” and “not a highway plan” at the same time, Meltzer admitted that “as a highway plan, the Crosstown stinks,” and reiterated that he wanted to keep the highway only to obtain federal funding for the project “so that Philadelphia doesn’t pay hundreds of millions of dollars for this plan.”

Although some – including representatives of the Philadelphia Department of Streets, the Citywide Coalition for a Crosstown Expressway (not to be confused with the Citywide Coalition to Oppose the Crosstown Expressway), and Citizens of the Crosstown Corridor – spoke in favor of Meltzer’s plan, a large majority of speakers opposed it. Ira Brind, chairman of the CWCOCE, expressed skepticism about the legality of Meltzer’s plan, saying the only “imaginative” thing about it was that “he wants to use the Highway Trust Funds to build houses instead of highways.” To applause, Brind said that Meltzer “ought to go to Congress, go to the President, and get them to change the rules and regulations of the Highway Trust Funds so that they can use that money for housing, and

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<sup>73</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 28 April 1972, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

let's not build any more highways, and let us not have to attach housing projects and high-rise buildings to Highway Trust Funds. It just isn't going to work." EPA administrator Edward Furia came to the hearing to reiterate his prior concern: "To my knowledge, from an environmental standpoint, there is no way to design the so-called 'Southbridge' highway, housing project, whatever project, such that it will not have a devastating environmental effect." Countering Meltzer's claim that more study was needed, Furia asserted, "there is no technology available at this time" to remove air pollution from a highway.

Other speakers focused their remarks on the residents the Southbridge project would displace. Stephen Lockwood – whom the Corleto Committee had placed in charge of finding a consultant and who had recommended the Alan Voorhees firm – unleashed a blizzard of statistics to illustrate the dire situation in which these people would be placed. The Southbridge area was 85% black, more than 60% of residents were over 50 years old, 85% did not own their dwelling, and 60% were on public assistance or a fixed income. Most of the households, Lockwood asserted, could not afford more than \$50-60 per month in rent. In short, he said, the situation would not be like "the relocation caseloads that exist in other parts of Philadelphia. The people are older, black, single, poor, living alone in rented quarters on fixed incomes."

Shirley Dennis, the managing director of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, took a more emotional approach. Her incredulity that "in 1972, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania should be embroiled in a debate over whether or not to continue the practice of 'Negro removal' in the guise of urban renewal" met with applause. "This city has historically and relentlessly moved its Black population out of

the way for institutions, highways, society hills, shopping centers, police stations, and playgrounds,” she railed. Alleging that African Americans were dislocated constantly while white Philadelphia residents were bought out on generous terms “to move to the shelter and protection of the suburbs,” Dennis called for an end to “this racism and exploitation of the people.” Another Housing Association executive presented the statement of chairman (and future Philadelphia mayor) Wilson Goode, which asserted, “What will be built will be determined by what is most profitable for developers, not by the paper idea before us.”

Leaders of the anti-Crosstown Expressway citizens’ organizations had their say as well. CCPDCC leaders Alice Lipscomb and George Dukes played on similar themes. Lipscomb assailed the Planning Commission, claiming that “Every time they have an idea to build something, the first thing they have to do is say, ‘You have to get all the colored people out of the community.’” Dukes compared Southbridge to Manifest Destiny and Indian removal. What Meltzer really wanted, he said, was “to start moving black folks,” along with poor whites, out of the area. Reverend George McMillan, president of the Forgotten Community Association, spoke in even harsher terms, alleging that Southbridge would lead to “more overcrowd conditions, more gangs, and more crime,” creating “one of the greatest disasters in the history of Philadelphia.” The plan would divide the community, he said, and cause “more racial unrest than this city has ever seen.” The reverend concluded with this parting shot: “A Southbridge in South Philadelphia? God forbid.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, “Transcript of Public Hearing on Crosstown Expressway, Philadelphia Civic Center,” 26 April 1972, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

After the public hearing, some tried to counter the (accurate) perception that most of those at the hearing had opposed the Southbridge plan. Mayor Rizzo, Democratic governor Milton Shapp, and Chairman Meltzer received letters claiming that gubernatorial representative John Blum had at the hearing “acted as chief prosecutor and judge” and “humiliated” those favoring the project; that most at the hearing supported Southbridge but were drowned out by a minority that “heckled to a point far past rudeness”; that Southbridge opponents were “super-liberals,” “unwashed hippies,” “pseudo-intellectuals,” and “rabble rousers . . . who incite hatred of ‘whitey’ and the police”; that opponents of the plan were seeking financial gain for themselves; and that the hearing had been dominated by “dirty barefooted hippies, who were doing all the shouting and carrying on.”<sup>75</sup>

Despite the assertions of some proponents, the handwriting was on the wall for Southbridge. It was clear to most that a new day had dawned in Philadelphia’s culture of city planning. The *Evening Bulletin*’s editorial page summed up how things had changed, referring to the prestige of the City Planning Commission – exemplified by Edmund Bacon’s 1964 appearance on the cover of *Time* – as from “another age . . . The Age of Innocence”:

It was a time when most people thought slum clearance was wonderful and never thought of what happened to the people who had lived in the slums. It was a time before we worried about pollution and noise. It was a time when those who made fortunes in redevelopment were honored as leading citizens. It was a time when people believed

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<sup>75</sup> Charles Volpe to Sir, undated; Olan Lowrey to Frank Rizzo, 25 April 1972, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission; Jerry Haas to Milton Shapp, 3 May 1972; Fred Weiss to Bernard Meltzer, 9 May 1972; Robert Cunningham to Frank Rizzo, 13 May 1972, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

what city officials told them. . . . Promises are not believed any more. The Planning Commissions of the fifties and sixties simply don't look as good today as they did in their own time. We have learned a lot in recent years. We have learned that sometimes when city officials say they are going to do something for us . . . it turns out they do something to us.<sup>76</sup>

The paper's reference to 1964 – the year in which Lyndon Johnson announced his War on Poverty and Philadelphia suffered a race riot born of segregation and poverty – as a time when most people “never thought of what happened to the people who had lived in the slums” was a bit myopic. But by 1972 it was difficult for anyone to ignore the distrust of government bureaucrats and so-called experts that had been building since the early 1960s.

The Crosstown Expressway was in its final death throes, but the end was drawn out, in keeping with the expressway's tortured history. In May, those opposed to the expressway continued a public-relations blitz. Business owners in the eastern part of South Street, between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Streets, attempted to show Meltzer and the DVRPC that a vibrant community still existed there, holding an evening festival where businesses remained open, pushcart vendors sold food, stands sold craftwork, and bands played live music until midnight.<sup>77</sup> George Dukes took to the airwaves on radio station WCAU, assailing planners for “acting as if they have just discovered an uninhabited area between South and Bainbridge Streets that can only be developed by their urban Disneyland plan.” Meltzer, he claimed, “proposes to use unavailable highway money to build an unnecessary road – in order to clear land to build housing too expensive for the people

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<sup>76</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 28 April 1972, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>77</sup> “South St. Holds a Joyous Wake,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, 13 May 1972, p. 6.

who need it, parking for enough cars to asphyxiate Center City, and offices that . . . can never be filled.” Taking aim at those who sought to justify Southbridge by calling the surrounding neighborhoods “blighted,” or “slums,” Dukes argued that South Street would no longer be a “decaying community” once the Planning Commission stopped driving businesses and people away and allowed the community to rehabilitate itself with federal money.<sup>78</sup> While Dukes and Lipscomb gave Frank Rizzo a petition with 2,000 signatures opposing the highway, the mayor continued to resist, even floating the idea of a citywide referendum on the question.<sup>79</sup>

At the same time, Governor Shapp urged the DVRPC to drop the Crosstown from its regional plans in accordance with the wishes of most of those at the public hearing. Shapp’s aide John Blum told the DVRPC that the Southbridge plan was simply not feasible because it called for \$50 million in Highway Trust Fund money to be used for non-highway purposes – a plan the federal government would reject. The state, he said, had “no responsible choice other than to act now upon this long delayed issue, and no technical or other justification for any course other than to delete the Crosstown.” Moreover, he reminded the DVRPC, the Voorhees study had already proven the expressway to be unfeasible, and to refuse to accept this conclusion would only hurt “a community which has already suffered too much, partly as a result of our delay.”<sup>80</sup> The governor sent his own letter to the DVRPC the same day, stressing that “a great majority” of those at the public hearing had expressed “intensive and substantial” resistance to the

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<sup>78</sup> George Dukes, WCAU radio editorial, Transcript, 9 May 1972, Papers of the Housing Association of the Delaware Valley, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>79</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 23 May 1972, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>80</sup> John Blum to DVRPC Commission Members, 19 May 1972, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

expressway, and that those who lived in the area wanted rehabilitation, not relocation.

Governor Shapp also reminded the DVRPC of the EPA's serious concerns about the air pollution the expressway would create.<sup>81</sup>

The concern Shapp and his aide expressed over the feasibility of Southbridge was more than justified. Correspondence amongst federal officials from April 1972 made clear that they viewed Meltzer's plan with extreme skepticism, particularly with respect to his desire to use highway money for things other than highways. Federal official Dick Griffin told Undersecretary of Transportation James Beggs, "The problem lies in Philadelphia's proposal that Federal Highway funds be used to purchase a 100 yard wide median strip – which in turn would be given to the city for urban redevelopment purposes. This is apparently illegal within the context of existing statutes." Other federal highway officials agreed that no special funds for Southbridge were available under existing laws and that for this reason the Department of Transportation "should be essentially negative in its informal reactions to the latest Expressway plan."<sup>82</sup> As mentioned earlier, it was not only transportation officials who were unimpressed with Southbridge. Edward Furia of the EPA continued his criticism, visiting the GPM board of directors to tell them that the DVRPC was focusing too much on highways rather than mass transit and that his agency intended "to take a hard line" on the matter.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Milton Shapp to Paul Anapol, 19 May 1972, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>82</sup> John Hibbs to August Schofer, 14 April 1972, Dick Griffin to James Beggs, 24 April 1972, Jeffrey Shane to Dick Griffin, 24 April 1972, Office of the Secretary, General Correspondence, 1967-1972, General Records of the Department of Transportation, RG 398, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>83</sup> Greater Philadelphia Movement, Minutes of Board of Directors meeting, 24 May 1972; "Points Raised by Edward Furia at a GPM Board Meeting," Memo, 24 May 1972, Papers of the Greater Philadelphia Movement, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

When the DVRPC voted 11-7 to retain the Crosstown on its plans, Rizzo called it a “victory for the people,” while Shapp slammed the decision as leaving a “dark cloud” over the area and claimed that it might delay the completion of I-95 because the state would not know whether to build a Crosstown interchange or not.<sup>84</sup> The DVRPC’s refusal to delete the Crosstown appeared to be political. Upset with the Pennsylvania state government’s alleged domination of the DVRPC, some members from the suburban counties rallied behind Philadelphia in its efforts to prevent Shapp from killing the project.<sup>85</sup> The Crosstown Expressway’s continued presence on the regional transportation plan prevented federal funds from being available for urban renewal, while at the same time, Shapp’s opposition meant that Southbridge would not go forward. This situation, as radio/TV news station KYW noted, threatened the Crosstown area with “years of stalemate.” Renewal without the highway would be preferable, opined the station, but above all else a compromise had to be reached to keep the area from sinking still further into physical decline.<sup>86</sup>

Incredibly, the stalemate dragged on for more than another year until Rizzo broke it, making good at last on his promise that he would respect the wishes of the community. More community meetings convinced the mayor that those who lived and worked in the area did not, by and large, want the Southbridge project. As a result, Rizzo asked the DVRPC in October 1973 to delete the project from its regional plan.<sup>87</sup> “This action,”

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<sup>84</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 24 May 1972, 25 May 1972, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>85</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 30 May 1972, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>86</sup> KYW, Editorial, Transcript, 31 May-2 June 1972, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>87</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 30 October 1973, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

said the mayor, “will ease the minds of residents, erase the cloud of uncertainty that has been hanging over this South Philadelphia community for more than 20 years, and allow major improvements and new development to begin immediately.”<sup>88</sup> It took two months from Rizzo’s announcement, but on December 20, 1973, the DVRPC removed the Crosstown Expressway from its 1985 Regional Plan.<sup>89</sup> The idea of building a southern leg to enclose Center City in a loop of expressways, conceived more than a quarter of a century earlier, was put to rest, once and for all. Philadelphia had experienced a full-fledged expressway revolt, and though the battlefield sustained heavy damage, the rebels had emerged victorious.

Philadelphia’s downtown business community was stung by its defeat. Stewart Rausch – the chairman-elect of the Chamber of Commerce as well as one of the leaders, in his role with OPDC, of the campaign to have the Delaware Expressway lowered and covered in Society Hill – gave a press conference in mid-1973 to express his displeasure. He railed against “the apparent unwillingness of public official[s] to mesh the needs of the region with those of small pressure groups whose personal interests are adversely affected by regional transportation plans.” Predicting that the omission of the Crosstown Expressway would hurt Philadelphia’s economy, Rausch said that companies who had invested in the area would engage in “rethinking” about investing further, and that other companies who might have brought new jobs to the city might change their plans.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Office of the Mayor, Press release, 23 October 1973, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>89</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 20 December 1973, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>90</sup> “Snagged highway projects jangle investors’ faith. Hacking of 1985 highway system riddles beltway around Phila.,” *Delaware Valley Business Fortnight*, 11 June 1973, Papers of the Greater Philadelphia Movement, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

The battle over the Crosstown Expressway – including the three separate times community opposition defeated the project – was by far the high point of the democratization of transportation politics in postwar Philadelphia. The fight not only spanned two eras, but played a major role in driving the shift from one to the next. When planners and engineers first conceived the Crosstown, they thought almost entirely in terms of moving automobile traffic, giving little if any thought to the way the expressway would affect the human beings in its path. Seeing an area that appeared to be in physical decline – like much of urban America after World War II – the planners thought not of neighborhood redevelopment, but of an expressway that would provide transportation benefits and clear what they viewed as slums at the same time. Crucial to the expressway's fate, however, was its place third in line behind two larger expressway projects – the Schuylkill and the Delaware. Because of the Crosstown's lower priority, the city had trouble arranging the necessary funding to move the project forward expeditiously. While the expressway hung in limbo, the culture and politics surrounding highway planning changed dramatically due to developments on the national level, but also to residents' dissatisfaction with the recently-completed Schuylkill Expressway and the ongoing planning and construction of the Delaware Expressway, itself plagued by controversy.

By the time planners were ready to put the Crosstown Expressway into motion in the mid-1960s, they faced a world far different from the relatively serene, insulated atmosphere of urban planning in the 1940s and 1950s. The emergence of protest movements challenging top-down authority and hierarchy in all areas of American life, the struggle for racial justice, and emerging concerns about harm to the environment

meant that highway planning would never be the same again. Citizens' groups formed quickly, determined not merely to influence the route selection or design, but, for the first time, to wipe the proposed highway off the map.

Despite the involvement of prominent African American leaders, the anti-expressway activists seemed not to have achieved large-scale success at mobilizing the poor and working-class African Americans making up the majority of the Crosstown corridor's population. In fact, internal memos and meeting minutes from both major advocacy groups – one based in the Crosstown corridor and one citywide – revealed activists' frustration with the lack of diversity among the participants. Moreover, these groups had to deal with opposition from within the white community – from the Chamber of Commerce and business owners who saw the expressway as a tool of downtown renewal and the solution to physical deterioration; from land speculators hoping to profit from condemnation; and from government officials at the city and state levels who remained convinced of the Crosstown Expressway's transportation benefits. Despite these obstacles, the anti-expressway activists took advantage of the 1960s' burgeoning culture of resistance to authority to convince officials that the Crosstown Expressway would be a disaster for the community and its residents, who wanted desperately to renew, rather than abandon, their crumbling neighborhoods. Although renewal would be an uphill battle, Philadelphia had experienced nothing short of a revolution.

### **“An Accumulation of Frustrations”: The Delaware Expressway**

While the defeat of the Crosstown Expressway represented the apex of the democratization of Philadelphia's transportation politics, concurrent developments concerning the Delaware Expressway demonstrated the limits of that democratization. In

particular, class distinctions, even more so than racial ones in this specific context, played a major role in determining the extent to which various constituencies were able to mitigate the expressway's effects upon their neighborhoods. Affluent Society Hill's effort, ongoing since the mid-1960s, to have its portion of the Delaware Expressway lowered and topped with a landscaped cover came to a successful conclusion. Queen Village, a rapidly-gentrifying portion of Southwark, made progress in its campaign to eliminate certain expressway ramps that would have flooded its streets with traffic, despite the failure of working-class whites in Port Richmond to prevent a similar ramp from tearing through a children's playground.

During the final, apocalyptic stage of the Crosstown battle, work on the Delaware Expressway progressed, but did so at a rate that was maddeningly slow in the eyes of its proponents. A combination of funding problems, bureaucratic red tape, and continuing citizen opposition to the expressway's design caused the project to crawl along at a snail's pace, dashing hopes that it would be completed by 1976, in time for Philadelphia's celebration of the nation's bicentennial. The main problems were reaching an accord for funding of the Society Hill cover, and opposition from the city's waterfront communities to the prospect of entrance and exit ramps funneling traffic to and from the Delaware Expressway through narrow, residential Center City and South Philadelphia streets. As a result of these and other issues, the expressway was not completed until 1979, more than a decade later than planners had hoped.

Despite the recommendation of a federal task force in 1967 that at least part of the Delaware Expressway be covered in Society Hill, the struggle was not quite over. The task force report, although persuasive, was not binding, and a firm agreement for funding

the cover between all of the entities involved – Philadelphia City Council, the Pennsylvania Department of Highways (PennDOT as of 1970), and the U.S. Departments of Transportation, Interior, and Housing and Urban Development – was not forthcoming immediately. As time dragged on, the projected cost of the cover rose, largely due to inflation. At the same time, budgetary constraints at all levels of government presented difficulties, calling into question the abilities of the federal, state and local governments to meet their recommended funding commitments for the cover. In particular, the Vietnam War drained federal resources, slowing down Great Society programs and jeopardizing the most important source of interstate expressway funding. Pennsylvania had lost \$65 million of the \$258.3 million it expected for 1968 due to a 25% cutback in federal highway funds.<sup>91</sup> Commissioner of Streets David Smallwood grew more and more frustrated by the delays that were holding up a highway he felt the city needed badly. Earlier projections had placed the completion date of the Delaware Expressway at 1967, 1972, and 1974.<sup>92</sup> In April 1969, however, Smallwood opined that the expressway

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<sup>91</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 16 February 1968; see also *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 6 March 1968 (Transportation Secretary Alan Boyd said that construction of the Delaware Expressway would have to be slowed due to inflation and the demands of the Vietnam War); 17 July 1968 (The Pennsylvania House of Representatives voted against the state's financial contribution to the expressway cover); 25 August 1969 (A new bill to finance the cover was pending in the state legislature, but the state had not yet agreed to Philadelphia's latest proposal for executing the federal task force funding proposal); 16 March 1970 (Mayor Tate accused highway secretary Robert Bartlett of dragging his feet on funding the cover); 20 March 1970 (City Council president Paul D'Ortona said that the cost of the cover had jumped by \$7.4 million); 20 April 1970 (D'Ortona criticized the federal government for failing to commit to paying its share of the increased cost of the expressway cover), George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>92</sup> In 1961, the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia predicted the expressway would be completed in 1967. State highway secretary Henry Harral insisted in 1966 that the highway would be completed by 1972, calling Mayor Tate's statement that it would not be finished for 10 years (i.e. 1976) "completely irresponsible and without any foundation in fact." State highway department district engineer William Lamb predicted in 1969 a completion date of 1974. *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 19 October 1961, 17 June 1966; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 February 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

would not be completed until 1976, blaming the delay mainly on the cover controversy and calling even the 1976 projection very optimistic.<sup>93</sup>

As it turned out, Smallwood was right to be pessimistic, as his 1976 projection ended up being off by three years. But Smallwood was not present to witness the opening of the final Center City stretch of the expressway in 1979. In February 1970, the *Evening Bulletin* reported Smallwood's resignation due to "an accumulation of frustrations," including his exasperation with the slow progress being made on the Delaware Expressway as well as opposition to the Crosstown Expressway.<sup>94</sup> The resignation may have been a cover story to shield the outspoken Commissioner of Streets from embarrassment, however. Six years later, Mayor Tate told civic leader Walter Phillips that he had fired Smallwood for insubordination.<sup>95</sup> Not long after Smallwood's departure, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* remarked bemusedly, "Expressway Taking Longer to Construct Than Chinese Wall," explaining that "China's Great Wall was built by hand at an average of 31 miles a year. The Delaware Expressway is being built by machine at an average of 2.9 miles a year."<sup>96</sup>

In late 1970, the Delaware Expressway cover issue reached a crisis point. The primary sticking point was that the state and federal agencies involved were refusing to guarantee that they would increase their financial commitments to cover increased construction costs. Tate had set a deadline of December 15 for an accord on this point,

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<sup>93</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 23 April 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>94</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 2 February 1970, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>95</sup> James Tate, Interview by Walter Phillips, Transcript, 1 December 1976, p. 2, Walter Phillips Oral History Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>96</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 April 1970, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

and when the deadline passed without such an agreement, he called on the state to proceed with construction of the Society Hill section of the expressway without the cover.<sup>97</sup> In responding to charges of defeatism from the *Inquirer*, Tate explained that it had been four years since the task force report had appeared to resolve the funding issue, yet there still existed no firm commitment from the state, Interior, or HUD on even the original funding amounts the task force had recommended. In the meantime, the estimated cost of the project had risen from the \$9 million the task force had projected to over \$28 million. The issue was not defeatism, said Tate, but “facing reality.” “We cannot continue to view the inaction on this vital project indefinitely while a few hope, and the great mass of our citizens are denied the use of a completed Delaware Expressway,” he concluded.<sup>98</sup>

Television and radio network KYW agreed with Tate, citing the five-year delay, the huge increase in construction costs, and the danger of not having a completed expressway in time for the bicentennial celebration of 1976.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, without firm commitments from the state and federal governments, City Council was skittish about committing money from its own budget for the cover. As City Council president Paul D’Ortona told Managing Director Fred Corleto, the lack of an agreement on funding was sure to “lead to a new round of negotiations” between city, state and federal officials

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<sup>97</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 24 December 1970, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>98</sup> James Tate to Editor of *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 29 December 1970, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>99</sup> KYW, Editorial, Transcript, 29-31 December 1970, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

“based on revised – and higher – costs. No thank you! Get your costs. Get your commitments. Then come to City Council.”<sup>100</sup>

Stanhope Browne and the Committee to Preserve the Nation’s Birthplace continued to press their case with all parties. The CPNB circulated a newsletter asking its members to write to City Council urging passage of a bill authorizing the expenditure of the city’s share of funds for the cover. The newsletter stressed again that the cover would serve primarily to preserve the city’s historic areas and benefit its tourist business, rather than help Society Hill residents in particular. In addition, the CPNB pointed out that the cover would provide needed space for the city’s bicentennial celebration while helping to create jobs and increase tax revenue.<sup>101</sup>

On December 30, 1970, Browne wrote to Tate to protest his decision to proceed on the expressway without the cover, asking him to reconsider his position and predicting that federal funds would come through in the near future.<sup>102</sup> Tate was not persuaded, however. He responded to Browne that the cover was “no closer to success than it was 2 years ago,” that state officials had deliberately delayed the project, and that the city had been “let down badly by you and your group.”<sup>103</sup> Tate did not clarify why he was upset with Browne and his committee, although it seems possible that he blamed the CPNB for failing to persuade the state and federal governments to commit their shares of the cover funds.

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<sup>100</sup> Paul D’Ortona to Fred Corleto, 9 April 1970, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>101</sup> Committee to Preserve the Nation’s Birthplace, “Newsletter No. 3,” undated, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>102</sup> Stanhope Browne to James Tate, 30 December 1970, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>103</sup> James Tate to Stanhope Browne, 5 January 1971, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

Fortunately, events in early 1971 vindicated Browne's optimism. The Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, which had been a strong ally of cover proponents from the start, stepped in when PennDOT proposed building the highway without the cover but with footings to allow a cover to be added in the future. Stewart Rausch, chair of OPDC's Delaware Expressway Committee, met with Federal Highway Administrator Frank Turner, telling him that Philadelphia citizens interested in historic preservation (meaning, presumably, the CPNB) would file a lawsuit if the state built the expressway without the cover. William Rafsky, the executive vice-president of OPDC, told Republican senator Hugh Scott about the meeting, and soon after, Scott, Pennsylvania's other Republican senator Richard Schweiker, and Governor Shapp met with U.S. Secretary of Transportation John Volpe to discuss the matter. After the meeting, Volpe wrote Scott, "I have personally reviewed the details of this project and am committed to finding a way to provide the cover. Accordingly, I have instructed the Federal Highway Administrator to approve Interstate financing for the entire Delaware Expressway facility, including the cover."<sup>104</sup>

The cover, in other words, was to be funded on the traditional 90-10 federal-state basis along with the rest of the highway.<sup>105</sup> As Federal Highway Administration division engineer George Fenton explained to new PennDOT secretary Jacob Kassab, the money from Philadelphia, Interior, and HUD called for by the task force report would no longer be needed. Although cover advocates in Philadelphia had focused most of their

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<sup>104</sup> William Rafsky to Hugh Scott, 28 January 1971; John Volpe to Hugh Scott, 10 February 1971, Office of the Secretary, General Correspondence, Files, 1971, General Records of the Department of Transportation, RG 398, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>105</sup> James Tate to John Volpe, 19 February 1971, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

arguments on historic preservation, the Department of Transportation was motivated by concern for the environment, justifying its decision to fund the cover by reference to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, which encouraged federal agencies to find less harmful alternatives to projects with heavy environmental impacts.<sup>106</sup> Six long years after activists raised the issue of covering the Delaware Expressway in Society Hill, the funding dilemma was solved, or so it seemed.

At a PennDOT meeting in September 1971, Stanhope Browne presented a statement on behalf of the Committee to Preserve the Nation's Birthplace endorsing the cover design under consideration. In doing so, he stressed yet again that "contrary to certain misrepresentations of this committee's position," the group's reasons for supporting the cover related "to the city and state as a whole, and indeed to the nation, and are not put forth in the interest of any particular section of the city." Browne ended his statement with a stern warning to those who would seek to squelch the cover:

Should such an attempt be made, I here pledge that the full force of this committee, all of our constituent organizations and all of our friends will be brought to bear to stop that attempt dead in its tracks. We would win again, and the only purpose to be served by an eleventh-hour attempt to remove the cover would be still further delay.<sup>107</sup>

Browne's admonishment was not the result of paranoia. Despite the CPNB's attempt to emphasize historic preservation and downplay the benefit to affluent residents of Society Hill, the cover issue sparked some degree of class resentment. In the spring of 1972, Joseph Schafer, an executive of multiple civic groups in working- and middle-class

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<sup>106</sup> George Fenton to Jacob Kassab, 23 February 1971, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>107</sup> Committee to Preserve the Nation's Birthplace, "Statement of the Committee to Preserve the Nation's Birthplace to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation," 22 September 1971, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

Northeast Philadelphia, wrote to both Volpe and Vice President Spiro Agnew on behalf of his organizations, objecting to the use of federal highway funds for the tunnel.<sup>108</sup> Although Schafer's efforts had no effect, the project's final stages did not go exactly as planned. Despite the federal government having assumed most of the financial responsibility for the cover, PennDOT ran into financial troubles in the 1970s and was never able to come up with its full share of the cost. As a result, the Center City portion of the expressway opened in 1979 without the completed cover the federal task force had envisioned.<sup>109</sup> As of 2010, rather than the continuous cover from Delancey to Chestnut Streets the task force had called for, the Delaware Expressway was topped by two separate covers, one spanning Delancey to Dock Streets and the other Gatzmer to Chestnut Streets, with a large gap in between. The covered portion was approximately two-thirds of what it would have been had the state been able to construct a single, continuous cover. At the time, Stanhope Browne was disappointed not to have gotten the full six blocks his group had sought initially to have covered. Later, he came to believe that the Society Hill activists had scored a great victory, considering the obstacles they had faced, in getting the highway depressed and a portion of it covered.<sup>110</sup>

The battle of Society Hill was not the only one of its kind. Although the "typical" 1960s freeway revolt centered on the destruction of homes – especially in African American neighborhoods – issues of historic, environmental, and aesthetic preservation were often at play as well. In New Orleans, for example, opposition to the proposed

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<sup>108</sup> Joseph Schafer, et al. to John Volpe, 30 March 1972; Joseph Schafer to Spiro Agnew, 5 April 1972, Office of the Secretary, General Correspondence, Files, 1972, General Records of the Department of Transportation, RG 398, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>109</sup> "I-95 will open, at last," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 15 August 1979, p. A8.

<sup>110</sup> Stanhope Browne, Interview by author, Tape recording, Philadelphia, PA, 27 January 2009.

Vieux Carre riverfront expressway came from those who feared it would destroy the unique character and atmosphere of the historic French Quarter. Similarly, many freeway opponents in San Francisco were middle-class whites who believed that highways would serve suburbanites at the expense of the urban values and culture that made their city special.<sup>111</sup> What was especially interesting about the Society Hill revolt, however, was that it was carried out by people with exceptionally close ties to the city's pro-highway business and government establishment – ties that aided them immeasurably in achieving their goals. An unintended byproduct of their crusade, however, was a contribution to the wresting of power over highways away from planners and engineers, making the planning process more democratic and susceptible to influence by a wider array of social groups. In disputes over the Crosstown Expressway and other aspects of the Delaware Expressway, many of those who had backed the Society Hill effort found themselves at odds with the freeway protestors they had helped to inspire.

The depressing and covering of the Delaware Expressway in Society Hill was perhaps the most complicated obstacle to completion of the highway, but other difficulties arose. Specifically, some neighborhoods raised objections to the placement of entrance and exit ramps – always a topic of contention when it came to building interstate highways through densely populated urban areas. Rather than passing through a small portion of the city, the highway ran the length of Philadelphia's waterfront – a distance of 30 miles. As a result, several different neighborhoods – with varying ethnic and socioeconomic compositions – had a stake in where the ramps were placed, with none

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<sup>111</sup> Richard O. Baumbach and William E. Borah, *The Second Battle of New Orleans: A History of the Vieux Carre Riverfront-Expressway Controversy* (University, Ala.: The University of Alabama Press, 1981), 3; Joseph A. Rodriguez, *City Against Suburb: The Culture Wars in an American Metropolis* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1999), 31, 40.

wishing to have its narrow residential streets burdened with traffic generated by the expressway. As with the expressway cover, the question of ramp placement pitted neighborhoods against one another, and different outcomes in different areas fueled lingering class-based resentments.

Northeast Philadelphia, a vast section of the city with suburban-style housing, populated mostly by working- and middle-class whites, was one area of controversy. As was the case in Southwark, the prospect of an expensive project to depress and cover the expressway in Society Hill raised eyebrows in areas such as Kensington, just to the northeast of Center City, where homes were slated to be razed to make way for the road. As one resident in the path of the highway put it, “A lot of people around here aren’t getting enough for their homes. I think they’re cutting prices down so they can put that cover on the expressway down at Society Hill.”<sup>112</sup> More controversy arose in the Northeast when the state announced plans in 1967 to open a southbound exit ramp at Allegheny Avenue in the Port Richmond neighborhood. The state highway department had requested the ramp in 1966, and the Bureau of Public Roads had approved it quickly, stating, “There is a need for a southbound off-ramp in this area as this is a highly developed industrial and residential area of Philadelphia.”<sup>113</sup>

Local leaders such as city councilman Joseph Zazyczny objected immediately, accusing the state highway department of having kept them in the dark about plans for

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<sup>112</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 18 May 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>113</sup> J.L. Stinson to August Schofer, 14 April 1966; Rex Whitton to August Schofer, 3 May 1966, Correspondence Regarding Federal Aid Primary and Secondary System Projects, 1961-1978, Records of the Federal Highway Administration, RG 406, National Archives, College Park, MD.

the ramp, which would run through the middle of a children's playground.<sup>114</sup> Mayor Tate announced that the city would attempt to stop the ramp, while civic organizations pledged to close the ramp with a human blockade should the city's efforts fail.<sup>115</sup>

Right away, it was apparent that class distinctions would play an important role in the way those affected by the ramp perceived the issue. Port Richmond's working-class residents wondered openly why the state and city had bent over backwards to modify the Delaware Expressway to the liking of those in Society Hill, while the state was now endangering their children by running an expressway off-ramp through a neighborhood playground.<sup>116</sup> As was often the case when it came to Philadelphia's transportation planning, however, neighborhood residents and business interests found themselves on opposite sides of the issue. The Northeast Chamber of Commerce quickly threw its support behind the ramp, calling it "a boon to the people and industry of the area." The best solution, in the Chamber's view, was to close the east side of the playground so children would not be required to cross in front of the ramp to reach it. "We cannot visualize children running back and forth in front of the ramps from one playground to the other, especially when one playground is only grass," offered Chamber spokesman Bruce Beaton. Beaton also opined that the city should look into relocating the playground because it was located in an industrial area, evidently not realizing the

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<sup>114</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 13 August 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>115</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 27 August 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>116</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 3 September 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

significance of dismissing part of the playground as “only grass,” when for many children it was the only grass within walking distance of their homes.<sup>117</sup>

Needless to say, Port Richmond residents did not take kindly to the Chamber’s assessment of the situation. Zazyczny, who in addition to serving on City Council was a co-coordinator of the Richmond Committee for Community Improvement, accused Beaton of treating the neighborhood like a colony and displaying “a lack of consideration of the human aspect of the structure of the city.”<sup>118</sup> The community won a temporary victory in late September, when highway secretary Robert Bartlett told a neighborhood delegation that the Allegheny Avenue ramp would remain closed, and that a previously-abandoned exit at Wheatsheaf Lane, about a mile north, would be completed instead.<sup>119</sup>

Port Richmond’s victory was short-lived, as the state in 1969 reversed its decision to close the ramp, allegedly at the behest of the federal government. On December 1, 1969, three days before the ramp was to be opened, 100 neighborhood residents, mostly female, took up positions at the foot of the ramp in protest. The following day, Zazyczny and a group of community representatives that included leaders of churches and civic groups met with district engineer Paul Thomas of the state highway department. What one newspaper described as an “emotional meeting” produced no results. Thomas informed the delegation that he was under orders from Bartlett to open the ramp, and that Pennsylvania stood to lose the federal government’s entire contribution to the expressway, comprising 90% of the construction costs, if the ramp were not opened.

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<sup>117</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 14 September 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>118</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 17 September 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>119</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 28 September 1967, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Jack Dempsey, the president of the Richmond Committee for Community Involvement, threatened continued picketing and protests, particularly if the ramp were opened without adequate safeguards to prevent cars from careening off the ramp and into the playground.<sup>120</sup>

On December 4, the ramp was opened with no discernable protest, but later that afternoon, 50 demonstrators blocked the ramp, and their numbers swelled to 200 by the 6 p.m. rush.<sup>121</sup> A few days later, the protestors changed their tactics, trying to expand their base of support by handing out circulars urging residents to “Help Stop This Farce in Richmond,” and listing telephone numbers for concerned citizens to call in order to join the effort.<sup>122</sup> What seemed to be a more peaceful form of protest did not last, however. On December 15, after a meeting of a neighborhood Polish-American club, approximately 100 people walked from the meeting and took up a position blocking the expressway ramp. Police used their cruisers to prevent traffic from exiting the expressway onto the ramp in order to prevent injuries or fatalities. Joseph Zazyczny blamed the situation on the trucking interests, which he felt were the primary beneficiaries of the ramp, the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, and highway secretary Bartlett, whose dire proclamations of losing federal funding he termed

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<sup>120</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 2 December 1969; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 3 December 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>121</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 4 December 1969, 5 December 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>122</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 8 December 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

“a farce.” Things turned ugly when protestors hanged Bartlett in effigy from a pole at the foot of the ramp.<sup>123</sup>

In an effort to rebut Zazyczny’s criticisms, state officials provided him with documentation of the federal order to open the Allegheny Avenue ramp, telling him that the federal government had threatened to withhold \$4.5 million in funding for the Port Richmond section of the expressway. Upon reading the letter, however, Zazyczny asserted that it said only that consideration should be given to opening the ramp and did not make a demand. Moreover, Zazyczny claimed, it was evident that the state had not brought the community opposition in Port Richmond to the attention of federal officials.<sup>124</sup> Nevertheless, Paul Thomas continued to insist that the Bureau of Public Roads would pull its funding commitment if the ramp were not opened. As a result, the protestors lost the support of Mayor Tate, who said he could no longer continue to object to the ramp under the circumstances. As a small concession to the neighborhood, the state installed a traffic light at the bottom of the ramp.<sup>125</sup>

A review of correspondence regarding the Allegheny Avenue ramp suggests that the Pennsylvania Department of Highways did, as Zazyczny charged, mischaracterize the Bureau of Public Roads’ position on the matter. In early December 1969, Democratic congressman William Green (who served as Philadelphia’s mayor from 1980 to 1984) wrote to Paul Green, the congressional liaison for the Federal Highway Administration, asking him bluntly if the federal government would indeed withhold funds for the

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<sup>123</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 15 December 1969, 16 December 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>124</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 18 December 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>125</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 19 December 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

expressway if the ramp were not opened.<sup>126</sup> Paul Green's reply seems not to have survived, but R.R. Bartelsmeyer, the Director of Public Roads, sent William Green an additional response in late December. "In recognition of local concern," he wrote, "we have advised the State that we would be receptive to a request from the Department of Highways to keep the ramp closed if there were good and justifiable reasons for depriving the public of its use. . . . We feel, however, that as the ramp was intended to serve the public and public highway monies participated in the cost of its construction, the public should be permitted its use unless there is justifiable reason otherwise." Bartelsmeyer's letter contained no threat to withhold federal funds should the state fail to open the ramp.<sup>127</sup>

Bartelsmeyer's letter failed to budge state highway officials. Disappointed, Zazyczny said in early 1970, "I have to admit that the ramp off the southbound lane onto Allegheny Avenue is there and has to be accepted." He did, however, express a desire to have the ramp closed until the nearby Bridesburg-Delair Bridge (as of 2010 known as the Betsy Ross Bridge) could be completed, which would lessen the traffic burden on Allegheny Avenue considerably.<sup>128</sup> Even this hope was dashed, however, and the Allegheny ramp remained open. A letter-writing campaign Port Richmond schoolchildren directed at government officials did not do the trick. Republican senator Richard Schweiker told the children that he had spoken with the U.S. Department of

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<sup>126</sup> When Congress created the Department of Transportation in 1966, the Bureau of Public Roads was placed within its sub-agency, the Federal Highway Administration, where it remained until its functions were absorbed by the FHWA in 1970.

<sup>127</sup> William Green to Paul Green, 4 December 1969; R.R. Bartelsmeyer to William Green, 29 December 1969, Central Correspondence, 1968-1978, Records of the Federal Highway Administration, RG 406, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>128</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 2 January 1970, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Transportation about closing the ramp, but the talks did not bear fruit.<sup>129</sup> If the federal or state governments had intended to do anything about the ramp, they probably would have done it in April 1970, when a truck smashed into a guardrail on the ramp, almost falling into the playground below. While this incident stoked more community opposition to the ramp, it failed to move state highway officials, who said that such accidents were not preventable and that the ramp would not be altered. As the always sympathetic district engineer William Lamb put it, “Everyone must realize that accidents will happen.”<sup>130</sup>

A few years later, the complex issue of where to place expressway ramps reared its ugly head in affluent Society Hill and the less wealthy areas to its south as well. Much like the expressway cover, the ramp issue created antagonisms between different neighborhoods based on class differences, real or perceived. The problem began in South Philadelphia, where in February 1973 the City Planning Commission held a meeting to seek citizen input on planning issues. According to Planning Commission chairman Bernard Meltzer, it was the first time the Commission had gone into a city neighborhood to ask the residents what was on their minds. The *Evening Bulletin* saw Meltzer’s “interest in citizen participation and direct democracy” to be “admirable,” but noted that “some of the planning commission’s staff had misgivings over the South Philadelphia meeting. They saw it, essentially, as looking for trouble. And if trouble means upsetting neatly arranged, or even arduously negotiated, understandings with citizens’ groups, they got it.” The primary concern of those attending the meeting was the amount of traffic

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<sup>129</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 5 February 1970, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>130</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 April 1970, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

that the Delaware Expressway entrance and exit ramps would generate in their neighborhoods and how local streets would absorb the traffic.<sup>131</sup>

Within a few days, qualms about the expressway ramps had spread to Washington Square, part of the Society Hill neighborhood. Both Washington Square and South Philadelphia residents complained that the ramps would create too much traffic and pollution in their areas.<sup>132</sup> Merchants worried that the heavy traffic would keep customers away from their stores. Among the planned ramps to which residents objected were those at South and Bainbridge Streets that would have connected the Delaware and Crosstown Expressways. Now that the Crosstown Expressway was not going to be built, residents argued, there was no longer a need for ramps at those locations. If the state persisted in building those ramps, narrow local streets would be forced to carry the traffic the Crosstown would have borne, a situation residents thought untenable.<sup>133</sup> One newspaper columnist wondered openly whether the South and Bainbridge Street ramps could be the city's revenge on the community for opposing the Crosstown Expressway, or were being built in case the Crosstown could be revived some day, or, as a third possibility, were designed to flood the neighborhood streets with traffic so that residents would beg for the Crosstown to be built.<sup>134</sup>

The *Evening Bulletin* took the residents' side in opposing the building of expressway ramps that would dump traffic into the riverfront communities of Society

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<sup>131</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 8 February 1973, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>132</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 13 February 1973, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>133</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 26 February 1973, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>134</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 25 May 1973, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Hill, Queen Village, and Pennsport. Meltzer, the paper noted, was not entirely unsympathetic, and had advised community groups in the area to seek federal funds to have the ramps connected solely with Delaware Avenue, a larger thoroughfare that could handle traffic exiting the Delaware Expressway more easily than could other local streets.<sup>135</sup> No such agreement was reached, however, and in March the newly-formed Neighborhood Preservation Coalition (NPC), made up of 14 Center City and South Philadelphia civic groups, turned down a compromise proposal from the state to redesign the ramps.<sup>136</sup>

The ramp issue caused some political sniping back and forth between city and state officials. When Governor Milton Shapp agreed with residents of Society Hill and Queen Village that ramps should not be built in those areas, Philadelphia's managing director, Hillel Levinson, exploded. "What he did was a minor disaster," Levinson raged, "and I hope we can salvage it." Shapp's stance, he continued, "has the effect of stiffening the back of the community. . . . I can only assume that, by that type of bolstering of their position, they will be less amenable (to negotiation)."<sup>137</sup> An aide to Shapp called Levinson's comments "erroneous, ridiculous" and "a cheap attempt to blame Harrisburg for a Philadelphia problem."<sup>138</sup> Philadelphia, he claimed, was passing the buck by pretending that the ramp issue was out of its hands. The truth was that the

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<sup>135</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 8 March 1973, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>136</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 22 March 1973, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>137</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 9 May 1973, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA (parentheses in original).

<sup>138</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 13 May 1973, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

state and federal governments could not build the road without city approval.<sup>139</sup> That having been said, of course, it was not likely that Philadelphia would have been willing to forego state and federal funding, thus leaving the expressway unfinished, over the ramp issue.

Those who protested the Delaware Expressway ramps were not as well-connected to City Hall and large business interests as were the expressway cover activists.

Although some of the anti-ramp activists were from Society Hill, the real the epicenter of the movement was Queen Village, a much more modest area. The neighborhood lay immediately to the south of Society Hill, running from the Delaware River waterfront west to roughly 8<sup>th</sup> Street. Queen Village was actually part of Southwark – the South Philadelphia neighborhood that had tried with little success throughout the 1960s to keep the Delaware Expressway from tearing through its homes and churches, and had also engaged in the late 1960s in a failed quest to mimic Society Hill’s effort to have the expressway depressed and covered. In the early 1970s, however, part of Southwark underwent gentrification and became known as Queen Village, a “superimposed” name that many Philadelphians believed real estate agents created to draw people to the area.<sup>140</sup>

Queen Village was still in the early 1970s in the midst of its transition from a working-class to a more affluent neighborhood. In 1970, just before gentrification took hold, the area (exclusive of one large housing project) had a median income of \$5,500, compared with \$8,180 for all of South Philadelphia and \$13,343 for Center City. The pre-renewal median house value in Queen Village was lower than that for Philadelphia as

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<sup>139</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 17 May 1973, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>140</sup> Conrad Weiler, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 3 March 2009.

a whole, and only about one-fifth that of Society Hill. The neighborhood was also fairly diverse, being roughly 56% white and 44% black (again excluding the housing project, which was 80% black). The black population, however, was concentrated in the western portion of the neighborhood, farther from the riverfront. The white population consisted largely of Irish, Italians, and Poles, many of whom were first- or second-generation immigrants. Once gentrification began to take hold in the early 1970s, house prices rose, with real estate taxes following suit, creating hardship for some of the older residents and causing tension between old-timers and newcomers. When it came to the Delaware Expressway, however, both old and new residents were for the most part opposed to the ramps.<sup>141</sup>

Unlike the Society Hill activists, who in advocating an expressway cover had pled their case politely in the halls of power, the people fighting the ramps took to the streets in protest, much as those in Port Richmond had done a few years earlier. In late May, 200 people from Society Hill and Queen Village picketed at 3<sup>rd</sup> and Lombard Streets, and a day later at 3<sup>rd</sup> and Spruce Streets.<sup>142</sup> NPC spokesman Conrad Weiler urged citizens to refuse to pay their property taxes until the city agreed to eliminate the ramps, although it is unclear whether anyone took his advice.<sup>143</sup> The Queen Village Neighborhood Association (QVNA), a group belonging to the NPC, held a “Block the Ramps Block Party” to raise money for the fight, complete with live entertainment, a bake sale, a raffle, and an arts and crafts show. The group also held a mock funeral for the ramps; the cars

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<sup>141</sup> Conrad Weiler, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 3 March 2009; Levy, 25-26.

<sup>142</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 30 May 1973, 31 May 1973, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>143</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 17 June 1973, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

making up the funeral procession displayed signs reading “Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust – No I-95 Ramps for Us.” An incendiary editorial in the QVNA’s June 1973 newsletter compared the building of the ramps to rape, complained that highway planners wanted “YOUR parking spaces so these can be turned into a moving lane of trucks, buses and cars,” and asserted that residents forced to park farther from their homes would have their cars stolen or vandalized. The screed culminated in the stark statement, “I-95 + RAMPS = DEATH!”<sup>144</sup> The NPC put out a flyer pointing out that at the same time the city planned to increase real estate tax assessments, Bernard Meltzer had admitted that the ramps would lower property values in the surrounding area. Feeling that neither Mayor Rizzo nor Governor Shapp had responded forcefully enough to the ramp issue, the NPC announced its intent to focus on the “bottom” of the political structure – the local party committeemen and women.<sup>145</sup>

Although community opposition to the ramps was strong, powerful forces were putting pressure on elected officials to press forward in spite of the protests. Letters in favor of quick completion of the expressway, including the Center City ramps, poured into Mayor Rizzo’s office from the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, the Penn’s Landing Corporation, the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Convention & Tourist Bureau, the U.S. Department of the Interior, and the Philadelphia Chapter of the Pennsylvania Motor Truck Association. The thrust of the letters was that the Center City ramps were necessary to the area’s industry and commerce and would provide crucial tourist access to Independence National Park and

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<sup>144</sup> Queen Village Neighborhood Association, *Southwark Queen Village Crier*, Newsletter, June 1973, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>145</sup> Neighborhood Preservation Coalition, “Your Taxes, Politics, and I-95 Ramps,” Flyer, undated, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

the redeveloped waterfront area at Penn's Landing for the bicentennial celebration and beyond.<sup>146</sup> Proponents of the ramps also pointed out that the surrounding communities had raised no objections to the ramps when they were first proposed, but residents replied that their approval had been predicated on the existence of the Crosstown Expressway, which would have carried the traffic that was now going to be dumped onto city streets.<sup>147</sup>

In the summer of 1973, seeing that neither street protests nor six months of negotiations with government officials had succeeded in stopping the ramps, the NPC turned to the courts, filing a federal lawsuit against PennDOT to stop the construction of the Delaware Expressway in Philadelphia. The NPC centered its suit on allegations that the traffic the expressway ramps would funnel into city streets would violate federal air pollution standards, create unacceptable noise levels, and jeopardize the area's historic buildings. Joining the lawsuit on the NPC's side were Henry Cianfrani, the chair of the Pennsylvania Senate Appropriations Committee, and state representative Samuel Rappaport, whose district included the Fifth Ward (covering the eastern half of Center City all the way to the Delaware River waterfront).<sup>148</sup> As expected, the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, the Greater Philadelphia Movement, the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, and the Penn's Landing Corporation opposed the

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<sup>146</sup> James Martin, Eugene Hosmer, P.J. McConnell, Hobart Cawood, Thacher Longstreth, and William White to Frank Rizzo, 8-14 March 1973, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>147</sup> Queen Village Neighborhood Association, *Southwark Queen Village Crier*, Newsletter, March 1973, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>148</sup> "Civic Groups, 2 Legislators Sue to Stop Work on Final I-95 Link," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 4 July 1973, p. 3B.

lawsuit on the basis that the expressway and ramps were needed for the area's development.<sup>149</sup>

In an apparent reversal of its editorial position from March, when it opposed the construction of ramps that would dump traffic into riverfront neighborhoods, the *Evening Bulletin* fretted over the lawsuit, pointing out that it would probably delay the completion of the expressway past 1976 and increase its construction costs. Furthermore, the paper intoned, "It is not reasonable to deny motorists access to the Penn's Landing area. Philadelphia's redeveloped riverfront is too much of a magnet for visitors and business firms – as it was always intended to be."<sup>150</sup>

Adding its voice to those decrying the NPC's lawsuit was the local branch of the American Automobile Association. Its president, John Herd, asserted that the Delaware Expressway had been "held up for five or more years by self-serving interests" and that "a minority must not be allowed to stand in the way of any project designed to benefit millions of other Philadelphia citizens. If Philadelphia is to attain or retain its status as a major city it must think and act as a major city and not a loose conglomeration of local neighborhoods with only local interest."<sup>151</sup> According to the NPC, however, its opponents were concerned about only their own gain, rather than the development of the city as a whole. After a meeting in Harrisburg to discuss the ramps with PennDOT secretary Jacob Kassab, the NPC held a press conference at which it derided Chamber of Commerce claims that the ramps were needed to protect the area's industry. The

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<sup>149</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 8 September 1973, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>150</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 12 September 1973, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>151</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 1 November 1973, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Chamber and other groups, said an NPC spokesman, “pretend they are concerned about economic development of the area and that they are civic-minded and patriotic and that’s just not so.” The real reason for the ramps, he asserted, was to protect the private investments that had been made in the Penn’s Landing redevelopment.<sup>152</sup>

While its lawsuit was pending, the NPC and its member groups continued negotiations with government officials, to no avail. In August, representatives of the QVNA had a meeting with Mayor Rizzo and Managing Director Hillel Levinson at which Rizzo expressed a desire to please those on both sides of the issue. Levinson asserted that the proposed ramps had “no relation to center city traffic,” and that improvements such as changing street directions and installing signs and lights could be used to improve traffic flow.<sup>153</sup> In October, the QVNA rejected a compromise proposal put forth by city and state officials that would have shifted the ramps south with traffic entering and exiting the expressway on Delaware Avenue, the city’s major waterfront thoroughfare. The prevailing opinion in the area was that “as long as a Ramp complex is located anywhere in the community, a large volume of traffic would still find its way to and from such an interchange through the narrow streets of Queen Village.” Moreover, residents predicted that Levinson’s proposal of new street directions, signs, and lights “would probably be guided by the needs of the highway, not the community.”<sup>154</sup>

As 1973 came to a close, the Delaware Expressway in Center City remained mired in controversy. Before expressway proponents had a chance to catch their breath

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<sup>152</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 2 November 1973, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>153</sup> Queen Village Neighborhood Association, *Southwark Queen Village Crier*, Newsletter, October 1973, Queen Village Neighborhood Association files, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>154</sup> Queen Village Neighborhood Association, *Southwark Queen Village Crier*, Newsletter, November 1973, Queen Village Neighborhood Association files, Philadelphia, PA.

following the resolution of the cover fight, residents of the city's waterfront neighborhoods took to the streets, and then the courts, in an effort to modify the expressway's design yet again. The city's business community stood aghast, realizing that the NPC's lawsuit had probably destroyed any hope of having the expressway open to traffic by 1976, when Philadelphia would find itself on the national stage as the focal point of bicentennial celebrations. The latest controversy in the expressway's long and tortured history resulted from the Crosstown Expressway's demise. This was true both indirectly – as citizens awoke to the full potential of protest to modify or even eliminate proposed expressways – and directly, as the elimination of the Crosstown created the potential for the Delaware Expressway to choke historic and residential streets with traffic, noise, and air pollution. The result was a further delay in the expressway's completion lasting six more years, and a battle that persisted to the very day the road opened to traffic.

### **The Commuter Connection: A Tunnel to Nowhere**

Although America's postwar expressway boom had a negative impact on mass transportation, it was not the case that a decline in expressway construction benefitted mass transit automatically. In tough financial times such as those of the 1970s, it was more than possible for proponents of both forms of transportation to struggle at the same time. While expressway planning and construction in Philadelphia stagnated due to the cancellation of the Crosstown Expressway and persistent citizen opposition to the Delaware Expressway ramps, improvements to the region's mass transportation systems slowed to a crawl as well. The main culprit was the city's failure to come to terms with the federal government regarding funding for the Center City Commuter Connection.

The city's business community touted the project's potential to rehabilitate the fading Market Street East retail area, but this strategy backfired, as the Department of Transportation expressed doubt that the tunnel's main purpose was to provide transportation benefits.

The conflict over the tunnel occurred during a time of severe financial instability for SEPTA resulting from a deadly combination of rampant inflation, increased labor costs, and a spiraling need to repair and upgrade equipment and infrastructure due to years of deferred maintenance under PTC ownership. SEPTA's financial problems led to a rash of rider complaints about poor service and posed a danger that the region would lose its commuter railroads, both of which entered bankruptcy in the early 1970s. The desperate straits in which urban mass transportation found itself created tension around the Commuter Connection project. Poor and working-class city residents – who had no choice but to use urban mass transit and therefore constituted most of the system's ridership – argued that SEPTA was discriminating against them by using a massive federal grant for the tunnel in order to benefit affluent, white, suburban commuters while the urban system crumbled. This dispute intensified in the mid-1970s, but had its roots in mass transit's travails in the early part of the decade.

On the whole, the period from 1969 to 1973 was a mixed one from the perspective of mass transportation boosters. The financial difficulties that were the period's most salient feature prevented significant improvements to the region's mass transit systems. Both SEPTA and the commuter railroads teetered on the brink of financial disaster and possibly even extinction. The authority's pursuit of the Commuter Connection tunnel laid the groundwork for future controversy based on urban residents'

perception that SEPTA cared only about serving white suburbanites. Despite these daunting problems, the mere survival of mass transit during a period of such crisis was an important accomplishment. Moreover, the 1973 legislation allowing local governments to receive federal funds for mass transit projects in exchange for cancelling interstate highways reflected a new belief at the highest levels of government that mass transit was a necessary part of the nation's future.

Both SEPTA and Philadelphia's city government made the Center City Commuter Connection their top priority in the late 1960s and 1970s. Its proponents in both government and business intended the tunnel not only to unify the region's two commuter railroad systems and bring the Philadelphia area closer to having an integrated mass transportation system, but also, in conjunction with the new station that was to be part of the project, revitalize the crumbling Market East retail area. The Old Philadelphia Development Corporation's Market Street East Committee, formed in 1965, continued to take the lead on pressing for the tunnel. As was true of the Society Hill redevelopment, OPDC maintained a tight relationship with City Hall with respect to Market East. In 1969, Edmund Bacon was a regular visitor to the committee's meetings, requesting that it hold monthly meetings and "act as a strong watchdog" for the city agencies involved with the project. Demonstrating OPDC's influence, Bacon advised the committee to direct the city's Redevelopment Authority to make a study of improvements that could be made for the entire Market East area.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, Market Street East Committee, Meeting minutes, 11 February 1969, 11 March 1969, Papers of the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Financial problems and other logistical obstacles mired the tunnel project in delay after delay, however. In 1968, for example, the tunnel had been delayed because SEPTA had not agreed to create a separate corporation in the event it acquired the commuter railroads – something upon which the federal government and the railroad unions insisted in order to protect workers’ federal pension benefits. The unions agreed eventually to table the issue of a separate corporation until such time as SEPTA acquired the railroads, but this did not put an end to the labor issues.<sup>156</sup>

In May 1969, the U.S. Department of Labor refused to approve a labor agreement signed by 16 unions, both railroads, and SEPTA because it did not include workers from Red Arrow, SEPTA’s urban transit system, or the Camden, New Jersey bus lines. Many were perplexed at the ruling given that the excluded workers were not involved directly with the tunnel, but the parties nevertheless expanded the agreement. When the Labor Department certified the agreement in July, one of the last major procedural obstacles to federal funding for the tunnel disappeared.<sup>157</sup> The tunnel cleared another important hurdle in late 1969 when the DVRPC, now a permanent agency, met federal requirements by formulating a comprehensive regional transportation plan, holding hearings on the plan, and then adopting it formally via resolution.<sup>158</sup> Relevant to later protests that planners placed too much emphasis on the commuter railroads to the detriment of the urban transit system was the fact that the DVRPC’s plan proposed \$406 million worth of

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<sup>156</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 31 December 1968, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>157</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 23 May 1969, 10 June, 1969; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 4 July 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>158</sup> Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, “1985 Transportation Plan,” 1969, Pamphlet Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA; Walter Johnson to Carlos Villarreal, 19 December 1969, Papers of the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

additions and improvements for urban mass transit and \$366 million for the railroads; given its projection that the railroads would carry 8% of the region's transit passengers in 1985, the DVRPC was proposing railroad expenditures of ten times more per passenger compared to urban transit.<sup>159</sup>

Although the parties involved had cleared up many of the issues blocking the tunnel, these issues had held the project in stasis for far too long – three years since SEPTA became involved and five years since the city's first request for federal aid. In the 10 years since the City Planning Commission had endorsed the project, the city's estimate of the tunnel's cost had doubled, from approximately \$40 million to \$80 million. The tunnel remained Philadelphia's top transportation priority with the result that other regional projects needing federal money encountered substantial delays as well.<sup>160</sup> The *Evening Bulletin* continued to support the tunnel, however, pointing out that \$80 million was “a rather paltry sum compared to the vast amounts being spent on urban highway systems that are increasingly choking the cities” and citing the tunnel as an example of why a federal trust fund for mass transportation, similar to the Highway Trust Fund established by the 1956 Interstate Highway Act, should be created.<sup>161</sup>

There was, unfortunately, a lack of agreement between city and federal officials on exactly what the tunnel would cost. C. Carroll Carter, Deputy Administrator for Public Affairs in the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, put the true cost at \$125 million. The real reason why Philadelphia's application for federal funds had not been

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<sup>159</sup> Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, “1985 Transportation Plan,” 1969, Pamphlet Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>160</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 3 August 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>161</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 8 September 1969, 9 September 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

approved, he claimed, was that it had “never nailed down the real cost and effect in terms of the total effect to the community.” Meanwhile, the tunnel delays had been disastrous from the perspective of Philadelphia’s overall transit planning. As of late 1969, the Philadelphia region had received only \$4.8 million in federal transit aid under the Urban Mass Transportation Act, compared to over \$100 million each for New York City, Chicago, Boston, and San Francisco.<sup>162</sup> These numbers had improved by the spring of 1970, however, as SEPTA received \$26.7 million in federal aid for transit, \$21 million of which the authority used for the purchase of 144 new commuter railroad cars. The city’s application for federal funding for the tunnel, which now requested \$87.5 million, was still pending. Nevertheless, Mayor Tate proclaimed that Philadelphia was “getting a better break” from the Nixon administration than it had from Johnson’s.<sup>163</sup>

Tate’s praise for the Nixon administration proved to be premature. In August 1970, the UMTA rejected the city’s application for the tunnel on the grounds that it would provide “minimal” transportation benefits. The federal government took the position that the tunnel’s primary purpose was to revitalize and redevelop the Market East area and that federal transportation funds could not properly be used for such a purpose. Public Property Commissioner William Costello, despairing that the UMTA’s decision was a “death blow” to the tunnel, took issue with the agency’s position, emphasizing the tunnel’s transit benefits.<sup>164</sup> Simply building more tracks would not improve commuter rail service, he asserted. The real bottlenecks in the rail system

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<sup>162</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 27 November 1969, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>163</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 8 April 1970, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>164</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 9 August 1970, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

occurred when trains entered the Center City stations and needed to turn around, a problem that the tunnel would eliminate by allowing trains to pass through the city and continue on to other parts of the region. Moreover, he claimed, the tunnel would allow both Penn Central and Reading riders to reach destinations that had been inaccessible to them by train. Penn Central customers, for example, would be able to reach the federal courthouse and Temple University, while Reading riders would have direct access to the University of Pennsylvania as well as the G.E. and Westinghouse plants.<sup>165</sup>

Some in Philadelphia, such as the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation (whose Market East Committee was, as discussed previously, the tunnel's strongest proponent), attributed the federal government's reticence on the tunnel issue to the antipathy of UMTA administrator William Hurd, who allegedly was blocking the tunnel out of spite because Tate had accused him in 1968 of holding up the project.<sup>166</sup> Hurd denied these charges, maintaining that the delays were due entirely to his doubts, shared by Secretary of Transportation John Volpe, that the tunnel was truly valuable from a transportation perspective. Like Volpe, Hurd emphasized that the federal government could not spend mass transportation funds on what appeared to federal officials to be a neighborhood redevelopment project.<sup>167</sup> SEPTA chairman James McConnon scoffed at the federal government's objections, recalling later, "The fact that it would revitalize the

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<sup>165</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 20 October 1970, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>166</sup> Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, "Philadelphia Commuter Rail Connection," Report, 3 March 1972, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>167</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 27 October 1970, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

area was not a reason not to do it. . . . That doesn't mean it's not a good transportation project. . . . My own view of it was, yes, it's a good transportation project."<sup>168</sup>

The City Planning Commission did not shy away from the fact that the tunnel had significant non-transportation benefits, and in fact released a report analyzing the Commuter Connection from a redevelopment perspective. The January 1970 report focused on the need for the tunnel to reduce automobile congestion – a prerequisite for redevelopment of the Market East area. “Thus, the rail commuter connection begins to come into focus as being far more important to the City than just a transportation improvement. It is one of the basic transportation foundations to the largest commercial improvement program planned by Philadelphia,” the report concluded.<sup>169</sup> Despite the Planning Commission's admission that the city was seeking federal transportation funds to benefit business development, Volpe softened his position when Senator Hugh Scott intervened. When the city filed a new application in late 1970, Volpe approved it, but only partially, finding the project to be only 80% transit-related.<sup>170</sup> The approval's conditions included a reduced percentage of federal funding and, most problematically, an absolute cap on the federal contribution. This meant that the federal government would not share in covering the inevitable cost overruns a project like the tunnel would

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<sup>168</sup> James McConnon, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 4 March 2009.

<sup>169</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, “Relationship Between Economic Development Programs in Philadelphia and the Proposed Center City Commuter Connection Between the Penn-Central and Reading Railroads,” January 1970, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 145, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

<sup>170</sup> John Volpe to James Tate, 2 April 1971, Office of the Secretary, General Correspondence Files, 1971, General Records of the Department of Transportation, RG 398, National Archives, College Park, MD.

face, leaving the city to pick up the tab. City officials understandably were reluctant to proceed with the tunnel under such circumstances.<sup>171</sup>

With the federal government still refusing to fund the tunnel fully, the issue languished throughout 1971. At least one federal official felt that the tunnel's redevelopment aspects should not cause the Department of Transportation to view it negatively. Michael Cafferty, the Acting Assistant Secretary for Environmental and Urban Systems couched his appeal to UMTA administrator Carlos Villarreal in the language of federalism, writing, "DOT . . . must be willing, as we say we are, and as President Nixon says we must be, to accept local judgments on plans and priorities."<sup>172</sup> In early 1972, the DVRPC released a report designed to counter the impression that the tunnel was a boondoggle, asserting that the project would provide \$1.60 in value for every \$1 spent building it.<sup>173</sup> In the meantime, however, Secretary Volpe became convinced that the tunnel was too expensive relative to the benefits it would provide. According to news reports, Volpe was "adamant" in his opposition to the tunnel and insisted that the needed funds, now estimated at over \$200 million, could be spent more effectively elsewhere.<sup>174</sup> As *Philadelphia Magazine* recalled in "The Black Hole," a long 1979 article that was highly critical of the project, Department of Transportation planners

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<sup>171</sup> Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, "Philadelphia Commuter Rail Connection," 3 March 1972, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>172</sup> Michael Cafferty to Carlos Villarreal, 26 January 1971, Office of the Secretary, General Correspondence Files, 1971, General Records of the Department of Transportation, RG 398, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>173</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 21 February 1972, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>174</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 10 April 1972, 12 April 1972, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

felt that “the tunnel bordered on insanity,” because it “would directly affect only about 9,000 people and relieve traffic congestion by only about 6,000 automobiles.”<sup>175</sup>

In May, Governor Shapp weighed in on the matter through an aide, who remarked that the city and federal governments should reevaluate the need for the tunnel and that Volpe’s skepticism over the high cost, now believed to be \$250 million, made “very good sense.”<sup>176</sup> The tunnel looked like it might be dead when Volpe announced DOT’s rejection of the project. Less than two hours after his announcement, however, Mayor Rizzo and his aides gave Volpe a 45-minute presentation on the tunnel. When they were finished, Volpe met with reporters and reversed himself, explaining that he had not understood fully the tunnel’s significance as a regional transportation project. According to a later mayoral press release, the presentation had saved the day.<sup>177</sup> Rizzo aide Anthony Zecca boasted in a 1979 interview, “[Rizzo] talked to him for twenty minutes and Volpe came out and says we changed our minds and he resurrected the tunnel. And the records will show you that.”<sup>178</sup> While Volpe’s decision was a reprieve for the tunnel, it did not come with a guarantee of full financial support, and thus did not resolve the nagging issue of how the project would be funded.

The city remained baffled by the federal government’s reluctance to commit fully to the commuter tunnel. OPDC emphasized that “reams” of information about the tunnel’s transit benefits had been sent to DOT and that “literally thousands of hours of

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<sup>175</sup> Mike Mallowe, “The Black Hole,” *Philadelphia Magazine* 70, no. 7 (July 1979): 156, SEPTA Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>176</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 14 May 1972, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>177</sup> Office of the Mayor, Press release, 28 February 1975, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>178</sup> Anthony Zecca, Interview by Walter Phillips, Transcript, 13 February 1979, p. 13, Walter Phillips Oral History Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

planning and hundreds of thousands of dollars expended in planning have demonstrated significant transportation benefit to the satisfaction of the railroads, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, SEPTA, and every other public and quasi-public transportation and planning agency.”<sup>179</sup> Many in city government and elsewhere continued to blame William Hurd for the delay. William White, president of OPDC, decried the “unique and discriminatory review procedures” that DOT allegedly had applied to the city’s application for funding and stressed that the limits DOT had placed upon its approval were “extremely damaging to the project.”<sup>180</sup> An OPDC memo put the blame squarely on Hurd, citing Tate’s earlier having labeled Hurd “as an obstacle to the project and a liar.” “All of the people who have dealt with the U.S. Department of Transportation have indicated that the stumbling block has been Hurd,” the memo continued. Although both Hurd and Volpe denied this, “independent sources have constantly confirmed that staff opposition has held up the final approval of the project in the form desired by the City of Philadelphia.”<sup>181</sup> Kenneth Klein of the Office of the Managing Director agreed, asserting that Tate’s attacks on Hurd had “affected [Hurd’s] opinion of all projects which he reviews for the City. This has led to a credibility gap between his opinions and ours and he drags his feet to our detriment.” But, Klein admitted, there were other problems with the tunnel, including its high cost and the fact that in order to fund the project, the UMTA would have to increase its allocation of

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<sup>179</sup> Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, “Philadelphia Commuter Rail Connection,” 3 March 1972, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>180</sup> William White to Hillel Levinson, 4 January 1972, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>181</sup> Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, “Philadelphia Commuter Rail Connection,” Report, 3 March 1972, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

transportation money for the Philadelphia region or rescind its approval of other projects for which money had been earmarked.<sup>182</sup>

The question of exactly whom the tunnel would benefit remained a persistent one in the minds of federal officials. In an amended application filed in April 1972, the city stressed the universality of the tunnel's transportation benefits, writing:

Although it will be physically located in center city Philadelphia, the tunnel will benefit riders from the entire five-county area of Southeastern Pennsylvania, and it will also be available to serve the commuter rail lines from South Jersey and the seashore. . . . Perhaps the best single word to describe the object of the Commuter Tunnel is versatility: The ability to board a train at any station on an integrated system and debark at any other station. This will provide a new freedom of movement for commuters within the Philadelphia metropolitan area and at least four suburban counties.<sup>183</sup>

The amended application was followed by a letter from Mayor Rizzo and SEPTA chair James McConnon, reminding Volpe that the tunnel was "the top transportation priority for the entire Philadelphia region."<sup>184</sup> The UMTA remained unconvinced, however.

Weeks after the city submitted its amended application, federal officials were still asking, "Who will benefit from the Center City Commuter Connection? . . . [A] corollary [sic] question is whether this level of investment is appropriate if the vast majority of those benefiting are the upper-income suburbanites."<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Kenneth Klein to Peter Rothberg, 10 April 1972, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>183</sup> City of Philadelphia, "Amended Application for a Center City Commuter Connection Tunnel as Submitted by the City of Philadelphia," 10 April 1972, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>184</sup> Frank Rizzo and James McConnon to John Volpe, 12 April 1972, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>185</sup> Jerry Primo to William Costello, 5 May 1972, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

The decrepit condition of SEPTA's urban mass transit system also gave federal officials pause. UMTA administrator Carlos Villarreal sent Volpe a confidential memo laying out his concerns in detail. Villarreal pointed out that the tunnel would serve only about 10% of the region's transit riders and asserted that "Other facilities – serving 90 per cent of the riders – will suffer from continued neglect of maintenance." Philadelphia had old subway and trolley cars, he continued, and the Frankford elevated line was so deteriorated and dangerous that SEPTA was under a court order to fix it. "It should be noted that funding of the tunnel," he wrote, "will seriously limit further aid to Pennsylvania."<sup>186</sup>

Undersecretary of Transportation James Beggs raised the same concern with Nixon aide John Ehrlichmann, questioning whether the tunnel should be Philadelphia's top priority "given the debilitated [sic] condition of all public transportation there." He continued on the same theme, writing,

Our staff feels that the SEPTA system is so poor, that additional Federal support could be much more wisely spent than on the tunnel project. Admittedly, setting priorities is a local prerogative, and the Mayor has reaffirmed that the tunnel is his first priority; however, when viewed in the light of the state of the existing Philadelphia system, one must question whether all the implications have been carefully thought through.<sup>187</sup>

SEPTA chair James McConnon may have felt the same way. He always proclaimed support for the tunnel in public, recalling later that "Rizzo was always very much concerned as to whether I was strongly enough in favor of [the tunnel]" but "I was always

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<sup>186</sup> Carlos Villarreal to John Volpe, 2 May 1972, Office of the Secretary, General Correspondence, 1967-1972, General Records of the Department of Transportation, RG 398, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>187</sup> James Beggs to John Ehrlichmann, 28 March 1972, Office of the Secretary, General Correspondence, 1967-1972, General Records of the Department of Transportation, RG 398, National Archives, College Park, MD.

in favor of it.”<sup>188</sup> Nevertheless, DOT official James Constantino told Claude Brinegar (who had just replaced Volpe as Secretary of Transportation) that McConnon felt that “transit systems such as SEPTA, badly in need of capital improvement . . . deserve priority treatment in the allocation of scarce Federal resources.”<sup>189</sup>

In 1973, with the question of federal funding still very much up in the air, yet another complication threatened to derail the tunnel project. For over a decade after the Commuter Connection was first proposed, the public remained virtually silent on the issue, perhaps because funding difficulties made construction of the tunnel seem unlikely. Now, spurred possibly by the federal government’s questions regarding the distribution of the tunnel’s benefits, Philadelphia residents began to express opposition to the project. Residents of the low-income, African American East Poplar neighborhood in North Philadelphia, through which the tunnel would pass, argued that it would destroy their only neighborhood playground, at 9<sup>th</sup> and Parrish Streets.<sup>190</sup> John Guinther, a local activist, asserted that the tunnel was designed to “serve the upper middle class only, which is a nice way of saying ‘whites only’.”<sup>191</sup> A consultant’s report, while asserting that the tunnel would be beneficial to the city as a whole, acknowledged the damage it would do to East Poplar, including not only the destruction of the playground but the

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<sup>188</sup> James McConnon, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 4 March 2009.

<sup>189</sup> James Constantino to Claude Brinegar, 20 June 1973, Office of the Secretary, General Correspondence Files, 1973, General Records of the Department of Transportation, RG 398, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>190</sup> The boundaries of the East Poplar neighborhood were 5<sup>th</sup> Street on the east, 9<sup>th</sup> Street on the west, Girard Avenue on the north, and Spring Garden Street on the south. Bauman, *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal*, 108. In 1970, census tract 141, in which East Poplar lay, was 81% African American, and 43.5% of its residents lived below the poverty line. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, “1970 Census of Population and Housing”; [document on-line]; available from <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/39204513p16ch05.pdf> and <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/39204513p16ch07.pdf>; Internet; accessed 29 January 2010.

<sup>191</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 19 April 1973, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

noise, dust, and construction waste it would create for the residents of the Richard Allen Homes, a public housing project.<sup>192</sup> At a public hearing on the tunnel in June 1973, Richard Allen residents claimed that the city had made no effort to work with them on tunnel plans; likewise, representatives of the Chinatown community, which would also be affected, complained that they had not been consulted either.<sup>193</sup>

As a result of financial difficulties stemming primarily from federal government skepticism and a newly emergent opposition from certain segments of the public, the effort to construct the Center City Commuter Connection appeared in 1973 to be an exercise in futility. The project began finally to move forward in the late 1970s, mainly because of a more receptive Department of Transportation. Public opposition to the tunnel, however, became only more heated and widespread as the decade progressed. Opponents were concerned not only with the impact the project would have on specific neighborhoods, but also with the simple fact that any federal money spent on the tunnel was money that would not be spent on badly needed improvements to Philadelphia's crumbling urban mass transit system.

While the tunnel project was foundering, SEPTA found itself in a financial crisis that threatened to shut down the authority and deprive the city of its mass transit system. As was discussed earlier, the PTC had inflated its balance sheet by deferring maintenance prior to its acquisition by SEPTA in 1968, with the result that the authority came under immediate pressure to make repairs. In 1970, after having to negotiate a new contract with its workers, SEPTA said it needed to increase fares. The city's response was no

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<sup>192</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 7 June 1973, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>193</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 30 June 1973, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

different than it had been when Philadelphia's transit was privately-owned, as Mayor Tate objected immediately to the fare increase. Tate, argued the *Evening Bulletin*, was "attacking SEPTA's management as though it was the old privately-owned Philadelphia Transportation Co., bent on 'plundering the public's fares.' This is unfortunate. SEPTA is, or should be, in a partnership relationship with the city, and not its adversary."<sup>194</sup> As McConnon recalled with some sympathy, Tate was often in a politically untenable position, guaranteed to offend some portion of his constituency either by failing to oppose fare increases or by raising city taxes to help fund the authority.<sup>195</sup>

Despite his opposition to fare increases, Tate was not hostile to SEPTA. On the contrary, he played an instrumental role in SEPTA's creation and maintained the deeply-held belief in the benefits of mass transit that caused him to urge the federal government to pass the UMTA in 1964. In 1970 Tate went before Congress again, this time to ask for more federal funding for urban mass transportation. The mayor began by acknowledging the importance of the federal highway program but stressed that highways alone could not "solve our total urban transportation problem." What was needed, he argued, was a federal program for urban transit that matched in significance that for expressways, testifying:

You cannot expect local funds to provide adequate urban public transit. In all of the major cities in this nation, private enterprise has totally failed to meet or solve the transit problem, not for lack of efficiency, but for lack of capital and operating funds to provide the fixed facilities and service that the public must have if it is to respond. . . . Why should we expect cities to rely on highways alone and go without commuter lines, subways, other rapid transit

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<sup>194</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 26 June 1970, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>195</sup> James McConnon, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 4 March 2009.

facilities supplemented by crosstown and connecting trolley and bus lines? In my city we have tried to do all we could with local funds and efficiency. . . . We need federal aid, even with our facilities being most efficient. . . . In the next six years Philadelphia alone will need \$100 million in additional federal transit aid.<sup>196</sup>

One of the primary reasons that SEPTA needed a huge dose of federal aid was that in the midst of its financial difficulties, it began the arduous task of attempting to take over the region's commuter railroads, which were themselves in dire straits. In large part because of decades of losses from passenger operations, which subsidies had ameliorated but not eliminated, the Penn Central went bankrupt in 1970 and the Reading followed suit in 1971.<sup>197</sup> Talks between SEPTA and the railroads began in September 1971, only a few months before the Reading entered bankruptcy, and were imbued with a sense of urgency when Reading president Charles Bertrand threatened to shut down commuter service entirely if SEPTA did not assume responsibility for it. "There are people who tell themselves that the good old reliable Reading Railroad will be around forever," he said. "But don't you believe it. We won't."<sup>198</sup>

Despite these difficult circumstances and the fact that term limits would force him to depart City Hall in January 1972, Tate maintained his commitment to the region's mass transportation when Frank Rizzo, as mayor-elect, appointed him to the SEPTA

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<sup>196</sup> Office of the Mayor, Press release, 9 March 1970, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>197</sup> Richard Saunders, Jr., *Merging Lines: American Railroads, 1900-1970* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001), 414; Reading Company Technical and Historical Society, "RDG Co. – A Brief History," available from [http://www.readingrailroad.org/reading/rdg\\_history.html](http://www.readingrailroad.org/reading/rdg_history.html); Internet; accessed 29 September 2009.

<sup>198</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 20 September 1971, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

board of directors in December 1971.<sup>199</sup> The city's Deputy Commissioner of Transit Engineering, Edson Tennyson, joined Tate on the board, having resigned his position in frustration over funding problems. SEPTA, he told Tate, had become "a serious problem," largely because the state had refused to fund it properly. Tennyson felt his efforts on behalf of the city had not produced sufficient results and hoped that he would be able to do more by joining the SEPTA board and also taking a new position as Deputy Secretary of Local and Area Transportation for the state.<sup>200</sup> Some tension between Tate and Rizzo rose to the surface when Tate toured various subway stations in his new role as SEPTA board member. Upon descending into one station, Tate commented, "This place is like a coal mine. It's shameful!" When reporters asked him why he hadn't done more to improve such conditions while in City Hall, Tate blamed it on his advisors. An annoyed Mayor Rizzo snapped, "Ask the former mayor where he was during the last 10 years."<sup>201</sup>

By late September 1972, SEPTA had reached tentative agreements with both railroads to take over their commuter railroad lines. Penn Central wanted an increase in its subsidies – already totaling \$8 million a year – which it claimed were not covering its losses. When the railroad balked at a SEPTA takeover, the transit agency had to threaten to cut off commuter rail subsidies entirely to get Penn Central to agree. The agreements with both railroads were contingent on the state continuing to fund SEPTA. Governor

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<sup>199</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 20 December 1971, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>200</sup> Edson Tennyson to James Tate, 8 December 1971, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.5, Administration of James H.J. Tate.

<sup>201</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 23 May 1972, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Shapp, however, declared he would not commit to continued support for SEPTA without a full review of the agency's operations and a promise of better rail service.<sup>202</sup>

Shapp's demand reflected the transit authority's poor performance. In the early 1970s, SEPTA came under intense fire for failing to provide the quality of service that was expected of it. In 1972, the transit authority and the city received a huge number of letters critical of SEPTA's overall level of service, rude employees, late buses and subways, service cuts, dirty conditions, and graffiti on its vehicles and in its stations. One angry citizen wrote to Public Property Commissioner William Costello vowing to "lobby like hell" against more federal transit subsidies "until you and the rest of those responsible in government start fulfilling their responsibilities."<sup>203</sup> Costello forwarded the complaint to SEPTA General Manager William Eaton, informing him that Rizzo's office had been "virtually deluged" with similar letters. Government subsidies, he reminded Eaton, entitled taxpayers to demand better service. Costello closed his letter with a sternly worded demand for immediate improvements.<sup>204</sup> The pressure on SEPTA came both from below and from above. In addition to citizen complaints, SEPTA had to contend with the displeasure of both Mayor Rizzo and Secretary of Transportation Volpe, who were harshly critical of delayed improvement projects that threatened to allow allocated federal funds to go unused. Rizzo went so far as to threaten to sue the transit authority if it did not speed things up.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 30 September 1972, 9 October 1972, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>203</sup> William Borsock to William Costello, 16 November 1972, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>204</sup> William Costello to William Eaton, 21 November 1972, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>205</sup> Paul Critchlow and Dennis Kirkland, "Volpe and Rizzo Blast SEPTA for Delays in Transit Projects," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 4 August 1972, p. 25.

One important development occurred in late 1972 when SEPTA reached an agreement with the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission providing that the DVRPC would engage in comprehensive transportation planning for the entire nine-county Delaware Valley region, and that SEPTA and other agencies would make their plans in the context of the regional plans. While SEPTA would still be responsible for both initiating and carrying out plans for improving public transit, the DVRPC would ensure that the region met all requirements to remain eligible for federal transit funding and that all transportation plans were coordinated in accordance with the overall regional plan.<sup>206</sup> The cooperative planning arrangement had positive results, including an increase in transportation planning efforts and the receipt by DVRPC of federal transportation grants it could share with SEPTA.<sup>207</sup>

Still, SEPTA's performance lagged. In 1974, the Department of Public Property released a report in which it praised SEPTA in some areas but was harshly critical in others. The Department compared the authority unfavorably with those in other areas, concluding:

Most people use the rapid transit system by chance rather than choice. The system is considered dirty, dark and unsafe. Unlike Toronto, Chicago or [Pittsburgh's] PAT, SEPTA is tolerated by the community, rather than taken as an object of civic pride. SEPTA management has failed to convey to its employees and to the public the fact that SEPTA is a public body responsible to all the people. Yet one still hears the term "the company" used in reference to SEPTA, which reflects SEPTA's image as a profit-oriented

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<sup>206</sup> Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, "Memorandum of Understanding on Responsibilities on Transportation Planning, Operations and Plan Implementation in the Nine County Delaware Valley Region," 27 September 1972; Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, Newsletter, vol. 6, no. 5, October 1972, Papers of the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>207</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 1 January 1974, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

operation with a self-serving management that has little identification with riders or employees.<sup>208</sup>

The memo reflected accurately the position in which SEPTA found itself in the early 1970s – underfunded, subjected to increasing hostility from both government officials and the public, and struggling for its very survival. James McConnon realized in the early 1970s that the transit authority’s model, which consisted almost entirely of providing commuter service, was not an economical one. On his travels throughout Europe, McConnon saw first-hand how transit systems in London, Paris, and elsewhere provided comprehensive transportation service throughout the day, rather than merely at two distinct times per day. In late 1971, therefore, McConnon announced his hope to transform SEPTA’s commuter system into a “total transportation complex” for the Philadelphia region. At a luncheon meeting of the Delaware Valley Council, McConnon bemoaned the fact that Philadelphia

has seen the flight of highly productive elements of its population to the suburbs, a substantial loss of its industrial tax base – 42,000 jobs in just 18 months – and the isolation of its center-city district by an extensive area of urban blight, housing a substantial number of dislocated under-privileged people. Beyond the inner ring of urban blight lies the outer ring of suburbia with its constantly increasing population extending to the outer boundaries of the region.<sup>209</sup>

In McConnon’s view, the deterioration of mass transportation was both cause and consequence of the current state of the urban environment. Since World War II, he continued, “instead of expanding our public transit facilities, we have surrendered our

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<sup>208</sup> Department of Public Property, Transit Operations and Planning Division, SEPTA-City Transit Division, “Operating Analysis, Comparison with Other Authorities,” Memo, undated, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 82, Department of Public Property.

<sup>209</sup> Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, “SEPTA – A Total Transit Complex,” Press release, 7 October 1971, Provided to author by James McConnon.

internal transportation needs to the private automobile, adopting express highways as the solution to the urban mass transportation problem.” As a result, “There has been during the past 40 years virtually no urban transit development in the Philadelphia metropolitan area.” Less than 20% of the city’s population and less than 10% of the region’s population used the urban mass transit system, compared to the Paris Metro’s 60% ridership figure. The ridership numbers were not surprising, because Philadelphia’s urban system consisted almost entirely of two high-speed lines – the Market-Frankford and Broad Street lines – that intersected only at City Hall. This limited system stood in stark contrast to those of Paris and London, which boasted “a relatively large number of individual lines intersecting at many points throughout the systems” with the result that “any person entering the system at any point can reach virtually any other point within the city by high-speed transportation.” The rail system, although consisting of twelve radial lines, served mainly suburban commuters, and there existed no easy way for most city residents to get onto the system to travel out of the city.<sup>210</sup>

McConnon’s proposed solution to Philadelphia’s transportation problems was to create a “total transportation complex” by implementing four major improvements: adding more commuter railroad station stops within the city limits; putting high-speed passenger cars on existing freight rail lines; creating high-speed bus routes on major streets and possibly even closing some streets to all but bus traffic; and tying together disparate elements of the transit system by creating “transit control centers” at major interchanges to ensure coordination between different modes of transport. The plan, said McConnon, could be put into action for less than the \$1.3 billion being spent to create the

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<sup>210</sup> Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, “SEPTA – A Total Transit Complex,” Press release, 7 October 1971, Provided to author by James McConnon.

Bay Area Rapid Transit System in northern California. Philadelphia's transportation complex would offer "some real hope for changing transit economics for the better" and "insure real mobility to all the people in our metropolitan area."<sup>211</sup>

Unfortunately, at a time when SEPTA was struggling for its very survival, McConnon's idea to create a total transportation complex generated little interest. As McConnon recalled later, "it never really got off the ground; it really didn't have a chance."<sup>212</sup> McConnon was, however, among those who lobbied the federal government in the early 1970s to allow the diversion of funds earmarked for highways to urban mass transportation projects. In 1973, Congress passed legislation allowing cities to receive general treasury funds to be used for mass transit in exchange for cancelling urban interstate highway routes. The new law represented yet another major crack in the dominance of expressway planners and engineers, and just as importantly, allowed SEPTA to survive a rocky period in its history.

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<sup>211</sup> Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, "SEPTA – A Total Transit Complex," Press release, 7 October 1971, Provided to author by James McConnon.

<sup>212</sup> James McConnon, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 4 March 2009.

## Chapter 5

### **“At the Expense of the Inner-City Poor”: The Triumph of the Commuter Railroads, 1974-1984**

Between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s, the democratization of Philadelphia's transportation politics, which reached its apex with the final defeat of the Crosstown Expressway in 1973, came full circle, regressing to become less democratic once again. The city wound down its expressway era by completing the Delaware Expressway in 1979, and then turned most of its attention to mass transportation. Because highways often served affluent automobile owners, many of them living in the suburbs, and mass transit systems were patronized frequently by the working-class and poor, including a substantial number of African Americans, the shift in emphasis from highways to mass transit could have entailed a more equitable distribution of transportation resources across lines of race and class, as was the case in several other American cities. No such transformation occurred in Philadelphia, however. In the City of Brotherly Love, large business interests continued to exert powerful influence over transportation planning, resulting in policies that remained most favorable to middle-class and affluent whites.

Until its final days, the Delaware Expressway was a product of Philadelphia's more democratic highway politics. From 1973 on, the main source of controversy was the effort by community groups, mostly in Queen Village, to eliminate expressway ramps that would have flooded their narrow neighborhood streets with traffic. The ramp protestors emulated those who had opposed the Crosstown Expressway, who had themselves taken cues from the Society Hill activists who sought to have their portion of the Delaware Expressway lowered and topped with a cover. Ironically, the Greater

Philadelphia Movement and the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, both of which had supported the Society Hill effort, now opposed the campaign, which they had helped indirectly to inspire, to eliminate expressway ramps from a nearby section of the same highway. Nevertheless, the campaign was successful, resulting in the elimination of some of the ramps in addition to a pledge from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to build noise barriers along a section of the road.

Shortly after the end of the expressway era, Philadelphia witnessed the culmination of a quarter-century-long effort to save its faltering commuter railroads, both of which had gone bankrupt in the early 1970s after decades of financial instability. SEPTA's urban mass transit system was in dire straits as well. The transit authority had no dedicated, guaranteed source of funding; in addition to acting as a funnel for federal transportation grants, it relied on yearly contributions from the state as well as its five member counties. The city of Philadelphia (identical in scope to Philadelphia County), by far the largest member of SEPTA as well as home to the greatest amount of transit service, provided a large percentage of SEPTA's funding. Like other cities, Philadelphia suffered a budget crunch in the 1970s as the consequences of decades of losing both population and jobs to the suburbs, combined with severe inflation, hit home. While Philadelphia's crisis was not as severe as that of New York City – which avoided bankruptcy narrowly in 1975 after President Ford refused the city a federal bailout – it was nevertheless significant.

Despite all elements of Philadelphia's mass transit needing help, City Hall and SEPTA favored the commuter railroads and their affluent white patrons over the inner-city mass transit system, used primarily by poorer Philadelphians, many of whom were

African American. The city and the authority made their top two priorities the acquisition of the commuter railroads and the construction of the expensive Center City Commuter Connection. The bias in the way the city allocated the mass transit resources available to it reflected the desires of large business interests, who had since the 1940s been concerned with the revitalization of the central business district. The railroads, unlike the subways, buses, and trolleys, were perceived as crucial to keeping Center City full of business executives, office workers, and high-end retail shoppers, diners, and hotel guests.

Philadelphia's actions with respect to mass transportation in the late 1970s and early 1980s were decidedly undemocratic. While some business leaders and politicians tried to portray Philadelphia as overwhelmingly in support of the tunnel, this was far from the truth. In fact, public opinion ran against the project heavily, at least among those willing to express their opinions publicly. Citizens wrote letters to government officials, newspapers, and radio and television stations, formed advocacy organizations, and even filed a lawsuit to stop the tunnel from being built. City residents who had no choice but to ride SEPTA's ancient, neglected urban transit system could not fathom how SEPTA and the city could justify using \$240 million in federal funds to construct a railroad tunnel that would be used primarily by suburban commuters, instead of using those funds to improve and maintain the city's subways, buses, and trolleys. Mayor Frank Rizzo and other city officials claimed that the city had no choice regarding how to spend these federal funds, but the evidence shows otherwise.

In the end, the city's business and governmental elites, along with the construction unions, steamrolled the opposition, pushing the project through over the

vehement objections of most Philadelphians. When SEPTA assumed control of the commuter railroad system in 1983 and the tunnel opened in 1984, the Philadelphia area achieved transportation planners' longstanding goal of creating an integrated regional transportation system. Although the commuter tunnel, by unifying two separate railroad systems, was a crucial element of the regional system, many perceived it as having come at the expense of an increasingly marginalized urban population.

### **“A Reasonable and Dignified End”: The Delaware Expressway**

Philadelphia's era of major expressway construction was coming to a close in the latter half of the 1970s. Times had changed considerably since the City Planning Commission issued its Comprehensive Plan for Philadelphia in 1960. That plan, had it been carried out in full, would have crisscrossed nearly the entire region with pavement, with major expressways encircling Philadelphia as well as radiating from it in every conceivable direction. Beginning in the mid-1960s, however, government budgets tightened, making extensive highway construction difficult. At the same time, cultural changes, embodied in Philadelphia by fights over the Delaware and Crosstown Expressways, made it more difficult for planners and engineers to build highways where and how they chose. Perhaps even more importantly, the city's business community awoke to the reality that highways often created rather than eliminated traffic congestion, and that a greater emphasis on rail transit would contribute more to the preservation of the city's central business district than would additional expressways. As a result of these factors, most of the expressways proposed in the Comprehensive Plan were never built.

Although expressway construction by no means came to a complete stop, the city's only major expressways in the mid-1970s were the Schuylkill Expressway, completed in 1959, and the Delaware Expressway, the downtown portion of which was still mired in controversy. The Neighborhood Preservation Coalition, made up primarily of civic groups from waterfront neighborhoods, had in 1973 filed a lawsuit to stop PennDOT from constructing entrance and exit ramps that would funnel Delaware Expressway traffic through narrow residential streets. While the groups attempting to push the ramps through – including the Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Philadelphia Movement, the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, and the Penn's Landing Corporation – claimed to be concerned about the impact of expressway delays on the city as a whole, the NPC alleged that they represented only the interests of big business and were worried only about lost profits.<sup>1</sup>

The NPC's suspicions were given credibility when Penn's Landing Corporation president Thomas McCloskey revealed that the undertaking had stalled due to Delaware Expressway delays. Potential investors, he said, were reluctant to commit financing to the waterfront development project until they knew the status of the expressway. William Stewart, McCloskey's business partner, said it would be impossible to attract visitors to Penn's Landing without the highway; meanwhile, Philadelphia '76, the official bicentennial planning agency, took steps to move its history exhibit away from Penn's Landing due to the uncertainty hanging over the area.<sup>2</sup> State officials let it be known that they considered the NPC's suit to block the ramps to be the direst threat to the

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<sup>1</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 2 November 1973, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>2</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 6 January 1974, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

expressway's completion. PennDOT head Jacob Kassab offered a compromise that would have routed traffic onto Delaware Avenue rather than South and Bainbridge Streets, but both sides rejected this idea. Groups in favor of the ramps proclaimed their willingness to litigate rather than agree to a compromise, and the NPC was equally unbending, demanding the outright removal of two of the four planned ramps in the Society Hill/Queen Village area.<sup>3</sup>

Tensions rose when ramp opponents accused the four business groups favoring the ramps of "condoning the rape of Philadelphia's historic area." The *Evening Bulletin*, lacking the NPC's cynicism about the motives of business organizations, opined that the charge was unfair, asserting that "the whole history of Philadelphia's efforts to revitalize itself has been marked by the fusion of civic-minded business and government to accomplish specific projects aimed at betterment of the whole community."<sup>4</sup> William Krebs, the president of the NPC, put it bluntly when he said, "it is the Chamber of Commerce against the neighborhood people."<sup>5</sup>

In late January 1974, anxious to put an end to the litigation that was delaying the Delaware Expressway, Kassab agreed to the NPC's demand to eliminate two ramps in Society Hill and Queen Village and thus replace four ramps on the west side of the expressway at Lombard, South, Bainbridge, and Kenilworth Streets with two ramps on the Delaware Avenue, or east side, of the highway. The northbound ramp would be placed at Lombard Street, while the southbound ramp would curl over the expressway

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<sup>3</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 9 January 1974, 13 January 1974, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>4</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 13 January 1974, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>5</sup> William Krebs to Frank Rizzo, 19 January 1974, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

and deposit traffic on Delaware Avenue between South and Bainbridge Streets. This proposal was focused on sparing the Society Hill and Queen Village sections of the city from ramp-generated traffic, a fact that caused discord elsewhere. “Now that the coalition has the state in its corner,” the *Evening Bulletin* reported, “other civic and business groups in affected areas of South Philadelphia are up in arms.”<sup>6</sup> A special mayor’s advisory committee reported that the NPC’s proposal was unacceptable and suggested that negotiations continue for another 60 days in an effort to find a solution that everyone liked with a reversion to the state’s original plans if negotiations failed.<sup>7</sup> But the committee’s recommendation came just after PennDOT had spoken and seems to have been ignored.

State Senator Henry Cianfrani, whose district covered both the Queen Village and Pennsport sections of South Philadelphia, was not pleased by the compromise, which would have left an on-ramp at Morris Street in Pennsport – a mostly white, working-class area below Queen Village – as the only southbound expressway entrance between the Benjamin Franklin and Walt Whitman Bridges. As a result, Cianfrani considered withdrawing his support from the NPC lawsuit and filing another one on behalf of Pennsport. “I’m not going to save one community at the sacrifice of the other,” he said. The Pennsport Civic Association and its 10,000 members had been “very cooperative” with the NPC, he explained, “and they got shafted.”<sup>8</sup> Cianfrani’s protests bore fruit, as almost immediately Mayor Rizzo announced a new agreement that would remove the

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<sup>6</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 29 January 1974, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Gardner to Frank Rizzo, 31 January 1974, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>8</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 30 January 1974, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Morris Street on-ramp in an attempt to quell the controversy and get the Delaware Expressway finished before the bicentennial.<sup>9</sup> As the grateful president of the Pennsport Civic Association told Rizzo, “had this ramp remained, our community would have been a disaster area.”<sup>10</sup> The decision, said Rizzo, was “in line with the city’s policy of seeking community approval of projects which directly affect area residents.”<sup>11</sup> To placate those who feared that inadequate ramp access would kill the Penn’s Landing development, state officials promised that access roads to the waterfront would be provided to avoid cutting off Penn’s Landing from Center City, thereby allowing the \$100 million development project to move ahead and, it was hoped, reach its conclusion by the crucial year of 1976.<sup>12</sup>

By mid-1974, things seemed to be looking up for highway advocates. A tentative compromise had been reached on the ramp issue, the Society Hill portion of the expressway was to be depressed and covered, and to make matters even better, the Federal Highway Administration had given Philadelphia a \$40 million “bicentennial bonus,” to be matched by \$4 million in state funds, to ensure that the Delaware Expressway would be in shape for the bicentennial celebration.<sup>13</sup> As was typical with respect to this highway, however, the good times did not last long. In November, the *Evening Bulletin* reported that due to rampant inflation, Pennsylvania had used up all of

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<sup>9</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 1 February 1974, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>10</sup> Constance McHugh to Frank Rizzo, 4 February 1974, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>11</sup> *South Philadelphia Review*, 7 February 1974, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>12</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 19 April 1974, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>13</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 15 June 1974, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

its highway funds for the fiscal year. Officials projected that the lack of funds would slow down construction of the expressway near the airport and in Society Hill, among other places.<sup>14</sup> A worried Frank Rizzo wrote to U.S. Secretary of Transportation Claude Brinegar complaining of a “cash flow shortage,” the consequences of which were “disastrous.” How, he asked, could the state obtain additional federal funding to complete the Delaware Expressway?<sup>15</sup> Brinegar replied that President Ford had directed that federal highway funds be deferred during fiscal year 1975 “for the purpose of stretching out Federal spending to minimize immediate unfavorable budgetary impact.” Despite his bureaucratic language, Brinegar’s meaning was clear – no additional funds would be immediately forthcoming for Pennsylvania highways.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps because the lack of available funds slowed construction on the Delaware Expressway to a snail’s pace (PennDOT revealed in January 1975 that the final link wouldn’t be completed in time for the bicentennial), it seems that the parties involved did not pursue with urgency the finalization of the ramp settlement.<sup>17</sup> In fact, it was not until

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<sup>14</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 24 November 1974, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>15</sup> Frank Rizzo to Claude Brinegar, 19 November 1974, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>16</sup> Claude Brinegar to Frank Rizzo, 17 December 1974, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>17</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 11 January 1975, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA. Despite the lack of a completed Delaware Expressway, Philadelphia did not experience major transportation problems during its bicentennial celebrations. Officials closed many city streets and encouraged visitors to use public transportation or to park in lots on the outskirts of the downtown area. The elimination of 345 transit jobs created the threat of a July 4<sup>th</sup> strike, but SEPTA was able to avert such a disaster by restoring 30 of the jobs. The authority increased service on several of its transit lines during the week of the bicentennial, although, as one newspaper columnist pointed out, it lacked the funds to advertise this fact to the public, leaving many unaware of the extra service. Even with an estimated two million visitors, it seems that Philadelphia’s transportation systems functioned effectively, with the biggest problem being a major traffic jam in Center City following the fireworks display on the evening of July 4<sup>th</sup>. “SEPTA makes fair deal, but problems persist,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 July 1976, p. A16; Howard Shapiro, “SEPTA service, a well-kept secret,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 July 1976, p. D20; Howard Shapiro, “Surviving in

December 1975 that the NPC, PennDOT, and the city of Philadelphia entered into a formal consent decree, ending the NPC's lawsuit and setting forth the terms under which the state would be permitted to open the Center City portion of the Delaware Expressway, once it was completed. The final agreement provided that there would be only three expressway interchanges between the Benjamin Franklin and Walt Whitman Bridges: a northbound exit at Front and Morris Streets as well as a southbound exit and northbound entrance between South and Bainbridge Streets. All of the ramps were to connect with waterfront thoroughfare Delaware Avenue rather than smaller residential streets.<sup>18</sup>

The *Inquirer* hailed the settlement as “a symbol of the neighborhood’s victory over highway planners and business leaders who argued vainly that other proposed ramps would be good for Philadelphia’s economy and traffic flow.”<sup>19</sup> Conrad Weiler, the head of the Queen Village Neighborhood Association and later the head of the NPC, recalled that the citizen protests and neighborhood demonstrations that took place both before and during the lawsuit were responsible for the favorable settlement, “because that’s what helped the politicians to line up on our side.”<sup>20</sup> Those on the losing side vented their frustration. “We fought them and lost,” said Jim Martin, the director of the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation. “These people are crazy down there. They don’t seem to understand that traffic is like an octopus. If you shove it in a box and close off some of the holes, the tentacles will pop out someplace else. . . . They used to say when

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Center City: A July 4<sup>th</sup> transit guide,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 3 July 1976, p. B1; John Corr, “The Fourth Fills the City: 2 million in town for Bicen.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 5 July 1976, p. A1.

<sup>18</sup> Ray Holton, “Neighbors Win Battle of Ramps,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 31 December 1975, p. B1.

<sup>19</sup> Ray Holton, “Neighbors Win Battle of Ramps,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 31 December 1975, p. B1.

<sup>20</sup> Conrad Weiler, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 3 March 2009.

you came to Philadelphia on a Sunday, it was closed. Now they're going to say they came to Philadelphia and couldn't get off the expressway."<sup>21</sup>

Although the ramp controversy was over, the battle over the Delaware Expressway wasn't finished quite yet. Due to the slow pace of construction on the Center City link of the expressway, things stayed quiet for several years following the 1975 consent decree. But the decree itself, while settling the NPC's lawsuit, planted the seeds of further controversy with its requirement that the state, prior to opening the expressway, construct noise barriers along a significant portion of the route. PennDOT completed the expressway portion in question in March 1979, but had not yet built the barriers. Philadelphia, while finally having an expressway that ran the entire length of its waterfront, could not rejoice, for the state was prohibited by court order from opening the road.

Philadelphia motorists were chomping at the bit to use the new expressway. Especially eager were the people of Northeast Philadelphia, whose automobile travel to Center City was made much more difficult by having to exit the expressway at Callowhill Street. In January 1979, before the entire Center City portion was even complete, someone moved the barriers aside and a few cars made their way onto the highway. This brief, unauthorized experiment was put to an end quickly by NPC head Conrad Weiler, who, waving the consent decree, told motorists that they were in contempt of court and demanded that the barriers be put back in place.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ray Holton, "Neighbors Win Battle of Ramps," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 31 December 1975, p. B1.

<sup>22</sup> Queen Village Neighborhood Association, *Queen Village Crier*, Newsletter, January 1979, Queen Village Neighborhood Association files, Philadelphia, PA.

Once the expressway was completed in March 1979, tensions rose. As Weiler recalled, the issue of whether to wait for the completion of the noise barriers had been more or less academic before the highway was actually ready for traffic, but once everything else was finished, it became a zero-sum game, with the NPC's insistence on its barriers the only remaining obstacle to opening the expressway.<sup>23</sup> City Councilman Melvin Greenberg of Northeast Philadelphia led the charge to open the Delaware Expressway without waiting for the state to finish the noise barriers. Greenberg and his constituents believed that allowing certain neighborhoods to dictate the terms under which the highway could be opened was allowing the many to be inconvenienced to preserve the special privilege of the few. When Greenberg spoke out, using similar logic, against allowing neighborhoods to have input on a proposed ordinance regarding sidewalk cafes, Weiler struck back, writing in an open letter:

You would like outdoor cafes in our neighborhood so that your constituents can come to town and enjoy themselves, and you would like I-95 open in part so that they can have an easier time getting into our neighborhood. The fact that both the outdoor cafes and I-95 are bad for us who live here and have to suffer the noise, dirt, fights, crime, trash, blocked streets, lack of parking, broken curbs, sidewalks and pipes, pollution, shouting and other side effects of people coming through and into our neighborhood for their own enjoyment is apparently of little concern to you or the other sponsors of this bill.<sup>24</sup>

By August, with the barriers still not finished and the otherwise completed stretch of expressway standing empty, tempers reached the boiling point. Councilman Greenberg led a 500-person protest meeting in Northeast Philadelphia at which he

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<sup>23</sup> Conrad Weiler, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 3 March 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Queen Village Neighborhood Association, *Queen Village Crier*, Newsletter, April 1979, Queen Village Neighborhood Association files, Philadelphia, PA.

complained that a handful of people were stopping thousands of drivers from using the highway and threatened a “motorized blockade” of downtown if a resolution could not be achieved quickly. PennDOT was eager to open the road as well, and joined by the Northeast Chamber of Commerce, asked federal judge Clifford Scott Green to allow traffic onto the expressway in spite of the consent decree.<sup>25</sup>

Briefly, it appeared that the NPC and PennDOT had reached a compromise agreement that would have allowed traffic to use the Center City portion of the expressway while construction on the noise barriers continued, but the deal fell apart after a few days of negotiations. An “extremely upset” Greenberg, who had delayed his motorcade protest during the negotiations, announced that the protest was back on, huffing, “I am not a sucker and I’m not going to be played for one.”<sup>26</sup> When PennDOT suspended negotiations on August 9, Greenberg and his constituents sprang into action the following morning with a motorcade designed to tie up traffic and create unbearable noise in Society Hill and Queen Village. At least 70 cars and a few sixteen-wheeler trucks started at the Roosevelt Mall in Northeast Philadelphia, crawled down the expressway at speeds as low as 20 miles per hour, exited at Callowhill Street, and then drove slowly, with horns blaring, down 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and up 3<sup>rd</sup> Street before heading to Penn’s Landing for a rally. Conrad Weiler scoffed at the demonstration, claiming it “had no effect on the community” and that the expressway would be opening soon in any case. What did concern Weiler, however, was that Greenberg and others were “whipping up

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<sup>25</sup> Howard Shapiro, “Protestors vow blockade over I-95 opening delay,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 August 1979, p. B3.

<sup>26</sup> Jan Schaffer, “Pact ready to lift I-95 roadblocks,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 3 August 1979, p. A1; Jan Schaffer, “PennDOT balks at I-95 plan,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 9 August 1979, p. B1.

public rage,” and that the motorcade had presented “a potential for violence.”<sup>27</sup> Weiler’s comments were most likely informed by the fact that as the public face of those seeking to keep the highway closed, he had been receiving death threats from those wanting to use it.<sup>28</sup>

The theme of the protests emanating from Northeast Philadelphia was clear: this was a class issue, and it was the affluent, privileged few who were demanding special treatment at the expense of the working class. As the *Inquirer* reported, many of the people it interviewed at the motorcade protest said “they were there to show the ‘upper classes’ that they would not be pushed around.” “Where do these people in Society Hill get off?” asked one outraged protestor. “There’s a double standard in this country. They have money and we don’t.” Others complained that they lived near the Delaware Expressway in the Northeast and had to deal with the same problems those in Society Hill and Queen Village were trying to avoid. As one put it, “We get the noise. We get things flying off the highway you wouldn’t believe, flares and whole logs and whatnot. But we live with it. . . . Our houses mean as much to us as theirs do to them.”<sup>29</sup> Weiler resented the characterization of the dispute as a class war, protesting that Queen Village was, despite some renewal, still mostly blue-collar, and that Northeast Philadelphia wasn’t entirely working-class either. As Weiler recalled later, Melvin Greenberg “was oversimplifying it on both sides.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Terry Johnson and Donald Kimelman, “Society Hill ‘upper classes’ feel wrath of Northeast,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11 August 1979, p. A1.

<sup>28</sup> Conrad Weiler, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 3 March 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Terry Johnson and Donald Kimelman, “Society Hill ‘upper classes’ feel wrath of Northeast,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11 August 1979, p. A1.

<sup>30</sup> Tom Masland, “Opening of I-95 is OKd,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 14 August 1979, p. A1; Conrad Weiler, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 3 March 2009.

Despite Weiler's protests, the NPC seemed to be losing the public relations battle, as state officials and many Philadelphians wanted the expressway opened. On August 13, the NPC was forced to sign an agreement modifying the 1975 consent decree and allowing PennDOT to open the Center City stretch of the expressway while continuing to build the noise barriers, leading Greenberg to crow, "We won."<sup>31</sup> Judge Green, remembered Weiler, "called us into his chambers and he read us the riot act, off the record. . . He very kindly said, ok now, the city needs to get this highway opened. So you work this out and everything's fine; if you don't work it out, then I'm going to do what I have to do."<sup>32</sup> As Weiler explained in the QVNA newsletter, "It was immediately obvious that the Judge felt I-95 should open. Under incredible pressures, a circuslike atmosphere, and a great deal of exaggeration, distortion and personal abuse from some politicians and media . . . we attempted to negotiate a reasonable and dignified end to this chapter of the I-95 fight."<sup>33</sup>

On August 31, 1979, the final piece of the Delaware Expressway in Center City opened to traffic. An exhausting fight, lasting nearly 25 years in its various phases, was over. There was no ribbon-cutting ceremony; there were no speeches. In fact, only about 25 people witnessed the opening, most of whom were either reporters, police officers, or state highway engineers. A PennDOT official remarked, "Most of them open with a little more fanfare, but it was decided to do it this way."<sup>34</sup> It was therefore with a whimper, and not a bang, that Philadelphia's era of major expressway construction came to an end.

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<sup>31</sup> Tom Masland, "Opening of I-95 is OKd," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 14 August 1979, p. A1.

<sup>32</sup> Conrad Weiler, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 3 March 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Queen Village Neighborhood Association, *Queen Village Crier*, Newsletter, September 1979, Queen Village Neighborhood Association files, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>34</sup> Frederic Tulskey, "I-95 roars to life, a putt-putt leading pack," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 September 1979, p. C25.

### **“A goddamn hole in the ground”: The Commuter Connection**

As Philadelphia began to move away from expressway construction as a result of cultural, political, and budgetary factors, the city focused on how to preserve its mass transportation systems, all of which were in financial crisis. The 1970s were not kind to the Penn Central and Reading Railroads, both of which went bankrupt, or the urban mass transit system SEPTA had acquired from the Philadelphia Transportation Company, which was losing money and deteriorating rapidly. Philadelphia and SEPTA made it clear that they were most concerned with preserving the commuter railroads, which both City Hall and the business community had since the 1950s believed to be vital to the health of the central business district. The Center City Commuter Connection, the enormously expensive tunnel designed to link the two commuter rail systems, remained the region’s number one transportation planning priority.

The Old Philadelphia Development Corporation’s Market East Committee, which the city placed in charge of spearheading the Market East renewal project, had been pushing the tunnel since 1965. The tunnel and the new train station that was to accompany it would allow workers and shoppers from anywhere in the region to disembark in the heart of what was now a deteriorating retail district. OPDC and the area’s retailers, including several large department stores, hoped to make a new shopping center, called The Gallery, the centerpiece of the area’s commercial revitalization, and felt that the venture could not succeed without suburban customers. Other private investments, in office buildings and the like, were made in reliance on the tunnel project. With both big business and the city’s labor unions – desperately in need of work – in favor of the tunnel, City Hall found itself under intense pressure to seek federal funds for

the project. Philadelphia joined with the suburban counties making up SEPTA to ensure that the tunnel was the transit authority's top priority in the 1970s.

Philadelphia residents, however, began to rebel against the idea of the commuter tunnel because they perceived it as a boondoggle aimed at benefitting big business and a handful of suburban commuters at a time when a financial crisis was pushing SEPTA's urban transit system, under strain ever since the PTC takeover, to the breaking point. Moreover, the Department of Transportation was refusing in the early 1970s to commit the full federal funding necessary for the project to move forward on the grounds that the tunnel appeared to be more about neighborhood redevelopment and business growth than about transportation.

The tunnel controversy reached its apex in the years between 1975 and 1977, as many citizens and much of the local media portrayed SEPTA and city officials as choosing to spend federal funds on the tunnel rather than on the crumbling urban transit system. Officials denied making any such choice, contending that the Department of Transportation and the Urban Mass Transit Administration had earmarked funds for the tunnel specifically and that these funds could not be used for any other purpose – a claim that seems in retrospect to have been false. In the end, despite the belief of many that the tunnel was not cost-effective from a transportation standpoint, the combined weight of big business and political pressure overcame resistance to the tunnel within both Philadelphia and the federal government. Ground was broken for the project in 1978, and by 1984 the Philadelphia region had an integrated mass transportation system – a system weighted heavily toward commuter rail travel that favored affluent suburban whites over poor, working-class, and minority inner-city travelers.

In the mid-1970s, the tunnel appeared to be going nowhere. William Grabske, Mayor Rizzo's transportation deputy, fretted over a 1974 speech by new president Gerald Ford in which he stated that the federal government should not be in the business of funding transportation projects that were really aimed at economic development or increasing urban density. The president's attitude, Grabske worried, could jeopardize efforts to find funding for the tunnel. Moreover, the UMTA recommended that the tunnel project be subjected to a three-week review by the Department of Transportation's Systems Center, the track record of which suggested that it would recommend against funding the tunnel. These developments, said Grabske, constituted a "major setback."<sup>35</sup> When the Transportation Systems Center released a generally favorable report, however, Grabske was pleasantly surprised, calling it "a highly professional and technically competent review." While taking issue with some of the report's assumptions, Grabske nevertheless claimed that the report "provides conclusive evidence that the Center City Commuter Connection is a sound public investment decision."<sup>36</sup>

Despite the TSC report, the staff of the UMTA remained strongly opposed to the Commuter Connection. An internal memorandum from October 1974 set forth the agency's objections:

Taken in isolation the connector tunnel may make sense. When set in the context of Philadelphia's broader transit picture, it looks highly suspect. After all, what we are talking about is a \$260 million project that will affect Philadelphia's commuter rail riders – only 8% of the area's total transit ridership. Furthermore, the connector will

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<sup>35</sup> William Grabske to Frank Rizzo, 10 September 1974; William Grabske to Philip Carroll, 6 September 1974, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>36</sup> William Grabske to Jerome Primo, 29 October 1974, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

expand capacity to permit total transit ridership to increase .014% more than it would have without the connector by 1985. Spending more than one-quarter of a billion dollars on this magnitude of ridership expansion seems luxurious, particularly when other high volume segments of the system are crying out for capital investment.<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile, proponents of the tunnel continued to emphasize to the federal government that the project was designed to benefit the entire region and not just the city. William White of OPDC told Secretary of Transportation Claude Brinegar that the tunnel was “much more than a Center City improvement effort or a Center City development catalyst,” but rather would be almost like creating an entire new transportation system for the area.<sup>38</sup> The favorable TSC report and the efforts of both city officials and private citizens notwithstanding, 1975 dawned without an agreement on funding the tunnel. When President Ford nominated Philadelphia lawyer William T. Coleman for Secretary of Transportation (making him the second African American cabinet member in U.S. history), many worried that Coleman’s appointment could spell doom for the tunnel, reasoning that it would look like favoritism for him to award his home city a huge and controversial transportation grant immediately upon taking office. Thus, the race was on to reach an accord for federal funding before Coleman assumed his new position.<sup>39</sup>

According to Mike Mallowe, who penned “The Black Hole,” the highly critical 1979 review of the tunnel that ran in *Philadelphia Magazine*, the UMTA’s doubts about the tunnel’s cost versus its transportation benefits were overridden by political considerations with the strings being pulled by President Ford himself. Allegedly,

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<sup>37</sup> Mike Mallowe, “The Black Hole,” *Philadelphia Magazine* 70, no. 7 (July 1979): 159, SEPTA Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>38</sup> William White to Claude Brinegar, 24 January 1974, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>39</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 11 February 1975, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

prominent Philadelphia Republicans told the Republican National Committee that Ford's ability to carry the city (whose political landscape Democrats had dominated since 1951) – and thus the state of Pennsylvania – in the 1976 election would hinge on federal approval of the tunnel. Ford, who took his marching orders supposedly from the RNC, felt according to Mallowe that “if the decision-makers in Philadelphia were in favor of the tunnel, then the tunnel had to be a good thing.” As a result, the UMTA, at the behest of both the White House and the RNC, requested more information from Philadelphia about the tunnel's costs and benefits in early 1975. Philadelphia's response included, for the first time, an estimate from SEPTA that the new equipment it would need to utilize the tunnel's full benefits would cost an extra \$393 million. This shocking piece of information had no effect because, said Mallowe, with the UMTA receiving under orders from the White House and the RNC, “common sense no longer mattered.”<sup>40</sup>

Just a few days before Coleman took office, the UMTA sent Philadelphia a memo approving the tunnel in principle and laying the groundwork for the negotiation of a formal contract. Even after the approval memo, UMTA administrator Robert Patricelli “made one final plea for sanity,” according to Mallowe, telling Philadelphia officials that they should ask instead for federal funds for urban transit improvements. Whereas the UMTA was funding urban projects in other areas and was assisting with the construction of new subways in Washington, D.C., Atlanta, and San Francisco, “Nowhere was there a

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<sup>40</sup> Mike Mallowe, “The Black Hole,” *Philadelphia Magazine* 70, no. 7 (July 1979): 159-60, SEPTA Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

commuter tunnel like Philadelphia's on the drawing board."<sup>41</sup> Philadelphia ignored Patricelli's entreaty, however.

Mayor Rizzo, who was under pressure from the city's labor unions, which formed a major part of his political base, rejoiced at the 10,000 construction jobs the tunnel was expected to create and proclaimed that the project would "create a comprehensive regional rail network capable of dealing with our mass transit needs for the next 50 years."<sup>42</sup> Secretary Coleman, however, was upon taking office concerned about appearing to show favoritism toward his home city, and refused to give Philadelphia everything it wanted. By October 1975, the estimated cost of the 1.7-mile tunnel had risen to an astounding \$300 million. The federal government was willing to cover 80% of the cost, or \$240 million, with \$180 million up front and the remaining \$60 million once all state and local funds had been committed to the project. There was still concern, however, that the state would renege on its pledge to cover 10% of the costs, or \$30 million. Harrisburg had appropriated only \$9 million so far, and if it failed to approve the remaining \$21 million, the city would find itself on the hook for that amount plus any cost overruns should the tunnel's price rise even higher than \$300 million.<sup>43</sup>

The DOT's financial arrangement – dubbed by some the "Coleman Rule" – whereby the federal government still refused to commit to covering increased costs above and beyond its initial commitment, caused city officials to fear that the tunnel would remain a dream. The city's finance director, Lennox Moak, opposed the tunnel for this

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<sup>41</sup> Mike Mallowe, "The Black Hole," *Philadelphia Magazine* 70, no. 7 (July 1979): 159-60, SEPTA Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>42</sup> City of Philadelphia, Office of the Mayor, Press release, 28 February 1975, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>43</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 3 October 1975, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

reason, considering it unacceptable for Philadelphia to enter into an open-ended funding commitment.<sup>44</sup> As William Grabske pointed out, the DOT's "limited funding" concept had never been used with respect to such a massive project as the Commuter Connection. There were several ways, in addition to the rampant inflation of the 1970s, in which costs could increase – utility relocation costs, larger than estimated condemnation awards, unknown conditions underground which could make construction more complicated, and other unforeseen delays.<sup>45</sup> One local community newspaper asserted that the tunnel would be "Philadelphia's very own Vietnam," explaining, "Like American higher-ups ignoring reports of Viet Cong strength, tunnel supporters, for reasons of their own, are looking right past the single overwhelming reason for halting construction before it begins: the cost will be staggering, possibly twice the estimated \$300 million."<sup>46</sup>

Coleman defended his refusal to fund cost overruns, pointing out that the DOT had taken this position with respect to Atlanta's mass transit system, MARTA, with good results. "I feel that as a public servant my duty is to spend the federal taxpayers' money wisely," Coleman explained. "I do not think anyone can read the history of escalation of costs in large public works projects, many of which costs should have been predicted prior to the time the project was started, and then continue to have respect for a public servant who did not take all possible steps to prevent this disastrous trend."<sup>47</sup> Just days after this pronouncement, however, the Coleman Rule was put to the test when a report from the Greater Philadelphia Partnership (formerly the Greater Philadelphia Movement)

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<sup>44</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 14 December 1975, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>45</sup> William Grabske to Philip Carroll, Hillel Levinson, and Lennox Moak, 18 November 1975, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>46</sup> *the new paper*, 25 November 1975, SEPTA Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>47</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 18 February 1976, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

revealed that the tunnel's cost had already risen from \$300 million to \$307.7 million. OPDC's Market East Committee, which continued to spearhead the drive for the tunnel, had seen a draft of the report in late 1975 and was not pleased. Jim Martin met with members of the GPP to express his "concern at negative connotations in the study."<sup>48</sup>

The *Inquirer* noted that the cost would most likely rise even higher due to "legal delays related to condemnation, delays in the delivery of materials, work slowdowns or strikes, poor cost estimating, revised labor contracts, as well as change orders during the course of construction. Any large public works project is susceptible to these 'unknowns.'"<sup>49</sup> In response, Coleman violated his own policy by agreeing to rewrite the contract to reflect the new estimate of \$307.7 million.<sup>50</sup> Just months later, he made a partial concession, agreeing to pay 80% of all cost overruns due to inflation, acts of God, increases in condemnation costs and other unanticipated costs that could be attributed to federal actions or inactions. The federal government's capitulation on this point was an absolute necessity to proceeding with the tunnel project, as the city had refused to sign an agreement without such protection. The Market East Committee hailed the "major break through [sic] in the former fixed funding rule."<sup>51</sup> Coleman's change of heart did not lead to the immediate negotiation of a final agreement for the tunnel, however.

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<sup>48</sup> Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, Market Street East Committee, Meeting minutes, 14 October 1975, Papers of the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>49</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 February 1976, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>50</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 21 February 1976, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>51</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 April 1976, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA; Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, Market Street East Committee, Meeting minutes, 13 April 1976, Papers of the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Just when it appeared that Philadelphia was making major progress in its long, hard fight to obtain federal funding for the Center City Commuter Connection, the project met its greatest resistance from the urban transit riders of Philadelphia, in large part because of the aforementioned financial crisis in which SEPTA found itself in the 1970s. SEPTA admitted in the mid-1970s that since World War II, Philadelphia's mass transit "systems fell apart and ridership went from masses to minorities . . . those few who could not afford a car, or were too old, young, or infirm to drive one." Although this trend was beginning to reverse, these were "awful" financial times, leaving SEPTA to face "a mammoth mandate and a worldwide mess."<sup>52</sup>

In a time when the urban transit system was under great strain, it was no surprise that many Philadelphia residents objected to a huge expenditure for a commuter rail tunnel. In December 1975, residents protested to City Council that the money the city would spend on the tunnel would mean fewer funds for badly needed neighborhood improvement projects. Father Joseph Kakalec, president of the Philadelphia Council of Neighborhood Organizations, urged that federal money be used for improvements to the city's mass transit system rather than the tunnel. The tunnel, he argued, was "of limited and questionable value to the City and unquestionably of no value to the City's neighborhoods." These protests had little effect, however, for the same day that City Council heard the residents' objections, its Committee on Public Works approved \$20 million to purchase properties needed for the tunnel, and two weeks later the entire City

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<sup>52</sup> Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, "Report to the Public," 1974, SEPTA Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

Council gave its assent.<sup>53</sup> In response, the protests became more organized, and in March 1976, a coalition of four neighborhood groups from North Philadelphia – the Northwest Task Force on Abandoned Housing, the East Poplar Stop the Tunnel Committee, the Ad Hoc Committee for Logan, and Neighbors United for Action – took up the cause.<sup>54</sup>

It had seemed as if the transit authority's financial picture – the main factor driving the tunnel protests – might improve when Congress passed the National Mass Transportation Assistance Act of 1974, which for the first time provided federal transportation grants to be used for mass transit operating expenses (in addition to capital improvements). The Act pledged \$11.8 billion toward mass transportation, with approximately \$7.8 billion earmarked for capital improvements and \$3.9 billion for operating expenses, to be matched by local funds. SEPTA touted the efforts of its chairman in lobbying for the bill, calling James McConnon “the industry’s chief spokesman urging the passage of this breakthrough legislation.”<sup>55</sup>

Despite the increase in federal assistance, SEPTA continued to operate at a deficit. Former mayor James Tate, disheartened by the lack of progress made by the transit authority he had helped to create, resigned in frustration from SEPTA’s board in late 1975. SEPTA, he told Mayor Rizzo, “has not met the challenge originally intended by those who drafted and supported the enabling Pennsylvania State legislation in 1963.” While eliminating private ownership and the profit motive that came with it was

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<sup>53</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 4 December 1975, 18 December 1975, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA; Joseph Kakalec to Frank Rizzo, 6 December 1975, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>54</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 11 March 1976, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>55</sup> Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, *SEPTA Today*, Newsletter, January 1975, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

supposed to have resulted in improved service, SEPTA “was never intended to be a deficit operation,” he said. In order to maintain adequate service, Tate concluded, the authority would need even more subsidies from all levels of government.<sup>56</sup> Apparently SEPTA riders agreed with Tate, as throughout 1975 complaints about poor service and fare increases continued to pour into Rizzo’s office.<sup>57</sup>

The complaints about Philadelphia’s mass transit continued in full force in 1976 as those inside and outside of government voiced their displeasure. William Grabske, the mayor’s transportation deputy, advocated asking for state aid in buying new cars for the Broad Street Subway, which was operated by SEPTA but was actually a city-owned facility. The Broad Street line, Grabske pointed out, had “the oldest subway cars in America” and constituted a “severe embarrassment to the City and to the Mayor.”<sup>58</sup> In addition, a new group known as the Transit Action Coalition (TAC) formed in April 1976, describing itself as “a coalition of individuals and of over forty community and consumer organizations working together for better SEPTA service for all, including the elderly and the handicapped.” The TAC did not identify, either by name or location, the community groups alleged to have joined the coalition’s ranks.<sup>59</sup> That September, SEPTA made significant cuts to its overnight bus and trolley service in neighborhoods throughout the city, impacting primarily blue-collar workers who used the service to

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<sup>56</sup> James Tate to Frank Rizzo, 24 November 1975, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>57</sup> See correspondence in SEPTA file, 1975, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>58</sup> William Grabske to Philip Carroll and John Mitkus, 19 March 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>59</sup> Transit Action Coalition, Booklet, undated, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

travel to late-night or early-morning jobs.<sup>60</sup> Soon after, the TAC wrote to Rizzo, calling SEPTA's service "despicable," demanding the restoration of the eliminated service, and proposing the creation of an independent funding source for the transit authority so it would not be dependent on the vicissitudes of yearly state, county, and city budgets.<sup>61</sup>

A primary goal of the organization was to present its views in person to the SEPTA board of directors. Its initial request met with resistance, however. SEPTA secretary Margaret Nellany told the group that it was not "the policy of the board to use the board meetings for public input."<sup>62</sup> The board was not in unanimous agreement with this policy. When McConnon asked board members for their opinions, Harold Kohn argued that "since SEPTA is required by law to serve the public, it appears to me that the views of the public should be welcomed and entitled to serious consideration."<sup>63</sup> But Kohn was in the minority, and McConnon and the SEPTA board remained, in the TAC's words, "insensitive to the public's needs." The organization considered several different strategies for getting its point across, including blocking corridors and elevators at a SEPTA board meeting, holding their own "board meeting" for the press, a march on City Hall, sit-ins at SEPTA facilities and visits to elected officials.<sup>64</sup>

In the meantime, the TAC finally made some headway when, after writing to Rizzo, its leaders secured a meeting with Deputy Mayor Philip Carroll and SEPTA board

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<sup>60</sup> Howard Shapiro, "SEPTA cutbacks start today," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 5 September 1976, p. B1.

<sup>61</sup> Donna Schaper and Linda Goldner to Frank Rizzo, 11 October 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>62</sup> Margaret Nellany to Donna Schaper, 14 September 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>63</sup> Harold Kohn to Margaret Nellany, 16 September 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>64</sup> Transit Action Coalition, Meeting minutes, 15 October 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

member Lawrence Stoltz.<sup>65</sup> After the meeting, Carroll and Stoltz asked McConnon to hold a special board meeting to discuss some of the issues the group had raised.<sup>66</sup> On October 27, the TAC presented its grievances to the SEPTA board. Reverend Maureen Doggett told the board that SEPTA's service was "inadequate in the extreme. It is dirty, undependable, slow and unsafe. We represent the majority of citizens in the City when we say that the taxpayers of this area deserve better." Doggett and other TAC members presented three specific demands: the restoration of recently eliminated service; the pursuit of a source of permanent funding for the authority; and measures to improve safety and security for riders, such as the use of Lexan glass (actually a strong polycarbonate, or plastic material) and two-way radios in vehicles. With regard to SEPTA's funding, the group pointed out that since 1969, the city's contribution to the authority had risen from \$2 million to over \$20 million, while the state's had gone from \$4 million to \$54 million, with no one held accountable for how these funds were being spent.<sup>67</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the TAC also opposed the commuter tunnel, calling it "a slap in the face to the citizens of this city" and calling for the money to be spent on urban transit improvements. Chairman McConnon acknowledged that SEPTA was aware of the

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<sup>65</sup> Philip Carroll to Frank Rizzo, 21 October 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>66</sup> Philip Carroll and Lawrence Stoltz to James McConnon, 25 October 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>67</sup> Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, Excerpt of transcript of board meeting, 27 October 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo; Howard Shapiro, "80 protest SEPTA cuts at meeting," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 28 October 1976, p. B1.

problems, calling the TAC's testimony "hard to hear," and pleading inadequate funding.<sup>68</sup> Shortly after the SEPTA hearing, the TAC sought to expand its influence by conducting a march on City Hall in order to attract more people to its cause as well as to inform SEPTA "that our struggle for better transit in this city will never mellow or be compromised" until the group achieved its aims. The organization claimed that it began the march with between 75 and 90 people, gathered more supporters along the way, and finished with 300. The march, claimed the TAC, had "broadened the nature of our movement against SEPTA so that it has a city-wide nature."<sup>69</sup>

While SEPTA was struggling to improve the region's mass transportation systems and dealing with an avalanche of criticism, its efforts to acquire the area's commuter railroad operations continued. The 1972 memoranda of understanding that SEPTA and the railroads had signed had not yet been approved by the bankruptcy court, keeping the fate of Philadelphia's commuter service in limbo. In 1973, however, Congress passed the Regional Rail Reorganization Act, which resulted in the creation of Conrail, a federal entity whose purpose was to merge the Penn Central, the Reading, and other bankrupt northeastern railroads in order to keep them in business with the caveat that only freight operations would be maintained. The federal government's position meant that unless SEPTA was prepared to take over the region's commuter rail service by the time Conrail acquired the Reading and the Penn Central, that service would be lost, with devastating consequences to the area's transportation. In 1975, with the Conrail takeover scheduled

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<sup>68</sup> Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, Excerpt of transcript of board meeting, 27 October 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>69</sup> Transit Action Coalition, Press release, 30 October 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

for February 1976, SEPTA informed Conrail of its intent to take over the commuter lines and was scrambling to apply to the UMTA for the funds necessary to do so.<sup>70</sup>

Federal legislation required SEPTA to make a “firm commitment” to acquire or lease the parts of the commuter system not included in Conrail’s Final System Plan. If SEPTA failed to give such a commitment, Conrail was authorized to stop service on those parts of the system (which would result in a shutdown of the region’s entire commuter rail system) on February 27, 1976. If the transit authority could commit to buying the commuter lines by January 8, it would be able to do so at liquidation prices; otherwise it would have to buy directly from the railroads’ trustees, who would seek a higher price on behalf of the companies’ creditors.<sup>71</sup> The bankruptcies of the Reading and Penn Central and the resulting opportunity for SEPTA to take over commuter railroad service in the Philadelphia region could not have come at a worse time, however. SEPTA’s financial woes prevented it from making the necessary commitment, and the deadline passed without it having done so.

With a possible rail shutdown looming, the *Evening Bulletin* reported with exasperation that “SEPTA hasn’t been able to get Philadelphia and suburban county officials together on its own, even when the issue is the basic one of discussing their relative shares of the transit authority’s deficit. This is a disgrace.” The result of this lack of cooperation, noted the paper, was SEPTA’s failure to fulfill its destiny “as an

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<sup>70</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 19 June 1975, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA; W.R. Eaton to Robert Patricelli, 24 November 1975, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>71</sup> William Eaton to Frank Rizzo, 24 December 1975, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo; *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 26 December 1975, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

effective and truly regional transit authority,” a situation that had “understandably puzzled and annoyed” federal officials.<sup>72</sup> Thankfully for Philadelphia-area commuters, the federal government did not follow through on its threats to discontinue commuter rail service. On April 1, 1976, Conrail assumed control of Philadelphia’s commuter rail operations, meaning that for the first time, the region’s commuter rail system was under the control of a single entity. Conrail agreed to operate the lines for the time being under an agreement whereby SEPTA committed to providing \$22.6 million per year in subsidies to cover operating costs – an amount that was, in a curious shell game, expected to be covered by increased federal subsidies to SEPTA.<sup>73</sup> Conrail and its workers were responsible for the day-to-day operation of the railroads, while SEPTA set fares and schedules. The separation of funding and control soon caused controversy, particularly with regard to SEPTA’s inability to control labor costs.

SEPTA’s failure to complete its planned takeover of the region’s commuter rail lines may have been a blessing in disguise, as 1976 proved to be a particularly tumultuous year for the transit authority. The trouble began in April, when the city, under financial pressure itself, proposed to cut its contributions to SEPTA from \$21 million to \$18 million. Finance Director Lennox Moak advised that SEPTA would need to raise its fares from 35 to 50 cents to compensate for the reduction in governmental aid. When SEPTA did so, the city’s representatives on the SEPTA board of directors used their veto power to nullify the fare increase, completing a strange sequence of events that

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<sup>72</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 12 February 1976, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>73</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 31 March 1976, 27 April 1976, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

the *Philadelphia Inquirer* characterized as “a little hard to follow.”<sup>74</sup> Outraged observers asserted that the city’s reducing its contributions served to legitimize the state’s failure to provide adequate mass transit subsidies. As the *Evening Bulletin* pointed out, the state was spending more than three times as much on highways as on mass transit while keeping the state’s transit subsidies “at the same relatively low level for the third year in a row.”<sup>75</sup>

SEPTA’s response to the veto of its fare increase was to request that the city either rescind its veto, or assume responsibility for the transit system.<sup>76</sup> The request – or ultimatum, as some perceived it – was not received well in City Hall. Mayor Rizzo responded angrily to SEPTA General Manager William Eaton, ruling out the possibility that the city would take over the system and chiding SEPTA for its tactics. The main thrust of Rizzo’s argument was that the city was already paying too much to support SEPTA and that suburban governments were not pulling their weight. He wrote Eaton:

The City of Philadelphia will not, as long as I am the Mayor, take over and operate its own transportation system. . . . I also wish to inform you, unequivocally and categorically, that the City’s two members of the SEPTA Board of Directors will continue to exercise their veto over any proposal to increase fares. We will not be intimidated by threat or scare tactics. Your present brinksmanship is the result of your own wasteful extravagance while you have repeatedly refused to adopt the effective management procedures and economies advocated by the City of Philadelphia. The City will not be the scapegoat for your failures and should not rectify your lack of performance by paying higher subsidies which are already excessive when compared to those of the suburban counties. The City and

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<sup>74</sup> Howard Shaprio, “Fare veto means city plans to revamp SEPTA,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 30 April 1976, p. 3B.

<sup>75</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 5 April 1976, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>76</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 11 May 1976, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

the Commonwealth are already paying more than their fair share, and SEPTA should place its management house in order by seeking greater subsidies from the suburban counties rather than from the City, State, or fare box.<sup>77</sup>

The facts regarding city versus suburb contributions were not really on Rizzo's side. In 1975, SEPTA vehicles traveled 59.8 million miles in Philadelphia and 15.7 million miles in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery Counties combined. Philadelphia provided subsidies that year equivalent to 22 cents for each resident of the city, while Montgomery County paid 26 cents per resident, Delaware County 41 cents, Bucks County 71 cents, and Chester County \$1.19. "The suburbs, in short," pointed out the *Evening Bulletin*, "get a lot less transit for their subsidy dollars than Philadelphia does."<sup>78</sup> The *Inquirer* agreed with Rizzo that the city had some valid complaints regarding the level of service SEPTA provided in exchange for government aid, but acknowledged that the city could not "reasonably expect the state and the suburbs to increase subsidies to SEPTA when the city is decreasing its subsidy."<sup>79</sup> Regardless of the merits of Philadelphia's position, it soon became clear that the city would have to contribute more to keep SEPTA alive.

A few days after Rizzo's angry tirade to Eaton, Secretary of Transportation Coleman informed the city that a SEPTA shutdown could jeopardize federal funding for the city's pet project – the Center City Commuter Connection. Mayor Rizzo and

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<sup>77</sup> Frank Rizzo to William Eaton, 11 May 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>78</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 11 April 1976, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>79</sup> Howard Shaprio, "Fare veto means city plans to revamp SEPTA," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 30 April 1976, p. 3B.

Governor Shapp had to find a way to keep the system running, admonished Coleman.<sup>80</sup> SEPTA claimed that it was almost completely broke and could guarantee that its employees would be paid only until May 29.<sup>81</sup> The transportation unions, of course, announced that they would not work without pay. “Is SEPTA crying wolf again?” asked the *Evening Bulletin*. “Its critics, including Philadelphia and Pennsylvania transportation officials, say yes. SEPTA’s spokesmen say no, they’ve never cried wolf, and the current crisis is the most serious ever faced.”<sup>82</sup> The problem stemmed largely from increased operating costs, which due to inflation had more than doubled over the past six years. Passenger volume, meanwhile, had shrunk, and the decrease in revenue from fares meant that government subsidies were over a period of several years forced ever higher. By 1976, fares covered less than half of SEPTA’s \$223.5 million in operating costs. All of this occurred at a time when inflation was stretching governmental budgets to the breaking point and Philadelphia was itself in danger of going broke. When the transit authority needed government help the most, therefore, the state and county governments began reducing their contributions to its coffers.<sup>83</sup>

Despite Rizzo’s anger at SEPTA, he recognized the reality of the situation: the city could not afford a mass transit shutdown and would have to step in to prevent one. On May 21, Rizzo announced that “once again” the city was forced to “bail out” the transit authority in order to keep it operating until June 30, when more state and federal

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<sup>80</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 14 May 1976, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>81</sup> Howard Shapiro, “City-run SEPTA suggested,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11 May 1976, p. A1; Howard Shapiro, “Rizzo assails SEPTA, bars takeover by city,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 12 May 1976, p. A1.

<sup>82</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 16 May 1976, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>83</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 16 May 1976, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

funds would be available. Philadelphia agreed to provide \$20.9 million to be matched by the state on a two-to-one basis in addition to \$4 million of unmatched funds. Rizzo, according to the city's announcement, "said this was brought on by mismanagement as well as by insufficient contributions from the other counties, the state and the federal government."<sup>84</sup>

The drama over a possible SEPTA shutdown occurred at the same time as, and provided the backdrop to, the period of greatest controversy regarding the Center City Commuter Connection. While officials at all levels of government scrambled to try to figure out how to keep the region's mass transit system operating, they also forged ahead with the \$307 million tunnel project, a fact that caused consternation among many, especially those who relied on SEPTA's urban mass transit system and were fed up with the poor service they were receiving. In October 1976, a group called the Coalition for Better Transportation for the City, made up of a handful of unidentified community groups, picketed depots and blocked buses, tying up the system and inconveniencing thousands of riders before a court injunction put a halt to their activities.<sup>85</sup> Just days later, Secretary Coleman stoked the fires of controversy when he announced that rather than allocating \$240 million toward the commuter tunnel, he was considering giving Philadelphia a block grant for that amount and allowing the city to spend the money on

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<sup>84</sup> City of Philadelphia, Office of the City Representative, Press release, 21 May 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>85</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 6 October 1976, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

any transportation projects it wished.<sup>86</sup> Jim Martin of OPDC believed that Coleman was motivated by “personal dislike for the project.”<sup>87</sup>

Coleman’s announcement was followed quickly by cries from tunnel opponents to use the money for urban mass transportation projects rather than the Commuter Connection. Managing Director Hillel Levinson, however, made it clear that any block grant would be used for the tunnel, provided the city could secure a final agreement providing for cost overruns.<sup>88</sup> But Levinson’s announcement failed to quell the protests, which thanks to Coleman now intensified. Most of the protests came in the form of letters to the media and various government officials, Mayor Rizzo in particular. A representative letter from a member of the Spruce Hill Community Association stated that the federal funds “should be used solely for capital improvements in the city’s transit system” and, parroting the language Father Kakalec had used earlier, called the tunnel project “of limited and questionable value to the city’s neighborhoods.” The Commuter Connection, continued the author, was “another attempt to subsidize suburban residents at the expense of city residents . . . and I object to this use of my tax money.”<sup>89</sup> Another protestor was even harsher, calling Rizzo “out of step with the people” and the tunnel

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<sup>86</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 14 October 1976, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>87</sup> Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, Market Street East Committee, Meeting minutes, 12 October 1976, Papers of the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>88</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 15 October 1976, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>89</sup> Frances Byers to Frank Rizzo, 2 December 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

“grossly unfair . . . because it tends to increase the already lopsided advantage of affluent suburbanites . . . at the expense of the inner-city poor.”<sup>90</sup>

The letters revealed clearly the tension within cities that regional transportation planning – which the federal government had promoted heavily since the 1960s – could create. As a community newspaper pointed out in 1975, “Federal money must be applied through the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, and DVRPC will back a project that aids commuters over one oriented towards Philadelphia.”<sup>91</sup> While the DVRPC was an advisory planning agency and lacked actual authority over how to spend federal grants, Executive Director Walter Johnson recalled later that the commission’s plans were, “for all practical purposes, more than advisory, because neither of the states, nor the federal government will fund a project that isn’t on our plans and isn’t included in our capital program. . . . Our plans do come with that authority behind them.”<sup>92</sup> The president of one neighborhood organization spoke undoubtedly for many Philadelphians when he told Rizzo, “the city government must be responsive to city residents first and regional problems second.”<sup>93</sup> Five members of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives agreed, asking the mayor to divert the federal money to neighborhood transit improvements.<sup>94</sup> Overall, public opinion in the city stood strongly against the tunnel. Letters to Rizzo’s office critical of the project outnumbered vastly those in favor

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<sup>90</sup> Kenneth Barnes to Frank Rizzo, 16 December 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>91</sup> *the new paper*, 25 November 1975, SEPTA Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>92</sup> Walter Johnson, Interview by Walter Phillips, Transcript, 11 September 1978, p. 13-14, Walter Phillips Oral History Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>93</sup> Ralph Samuel to Frank Rizzo, 9 December 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>94</sup> Robert O’Donnell, et al. to Frank Rizzo, 8 November 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

of it, the same was true of letters to the newspapers, and a *Philadelphia Daily News* poll resulted in a landslide vote of 1,042-29 against the tunnel.<sup>95</sup>

Although most protesting was done by mail, some groups did undertake more active forms of resistance to the commuter tunnel. In late October, 150 demonstrators from the Coalition for Better Transportation marched on City Hall to demand that the federal funds be used for the urban transit system rather than the tunnel. Although the *Bulletin* said the march “went virtually unnoticed,” the protests continued.<sup>96</sup> In November, 66 members of Community Organizations Acting Together (COACT) from the Germantown, Kensington, Logan, Poplar and West Oak Lane neighborhoods in North, Northwest, and Northeast Philadelphia held their own march on City Hall in an attempt to see Levinson.<sup>97</sup> When five of them were allowed in, their spokesman argued that the city could not afford the tunnel, that SEPTA could not afford to operate it, and that the money was desperately needed for urban mass transit and neighborhood

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<sup>95</sup> Howard Shapiro, “Tunnel plan gets a heated airing,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 4 March 1976, p. D20; *Philadelphia Daily News*, 3 November 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>96</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 31 October 1976, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>97</sup> The neighborhoods banding together to oppose the Commuter Connection were geographically, racially, and economically diverse. The East Poplar neighborhood in North Philadelphia was mostly African American and nearly half of its residents lived below the poverty line (see p. 330, n. 190). Boundaries for Germantown, Logan, and West Oak Lane, all in the city’s northwestern section, were less exact; Germantown in particular spanned multiple census tracts. Generally speaking, however, those neighborhoods were racially diverse. In 1970, the proportion of African American residents in the census tracts around major thoroughfare Germantown Avenue, for example, ranged from 12% to 87%, and most of the tracts were quite integrated, having percentages closer to the middle of that range. Logan and West Oak Lane were majority African American areas but still contained substantial numbers of whites, with the tracts comprising them consisting of 73% and 80% African Americans for the former, and 60%, 58%, and 87% for the latter. All of the northwestern neighborhoods were solidly middle-class, with most tracts clustered closely around the national mean income of \$11,106, and a few in Germantown exceeding that number by a significant margin. Kensington was in the lower part of Northeast Philadelphia, not far from Center City, along the Delaware River waterfront. In 1970, the area was virtually 100% white and lower middle-class, with most of its census tracts reporting mean family incomes in the \$9,000 range. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, “1970 Census of Population and Housing”; [document on-line]; available from <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/39204513p16ch05.pdf> and <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/39204513p16ch07.pdf>; Internet; accessed 26 February 2010.

projects.<sup>98</sup> Although these protests were small, the potential for larger marches existed, as was revealed by a letter to the mayor opposing the tunnel from the Philadelphia Council of Neighborhood Organizations, which claimed to represent 113 different groups.<sup>99</sup>

As was mentioned above, Philadelphia's business community was the strongest force behind the tunnel because of the project's potential to revitalize the Market East retail area. In fact, according to some close to Frank Rizzo, the mayor was skeptical about the tunnel and pursued it only in response to overwhelming political pressure from the city's business interests. Reportedly Rizzo had derided the tunnel as "a goddamn hole in the ground," that wouldn't get him any votes from an urban constituency forced to use SEPTA's crumbling mass transit system. According to *Philadelphia Magazine*, however, business leaders with "an enormous financial stake in downtown development," "wound up besieging" Rizzo to live up to his campaign promise of support for the business community. The magazine painted the issue in stark terms, alleging that "the Market Street East renewal project, with the tunnel as a key element, was strictly a regional suburban scenario" and that "city shoppers and city transit riders were never really taken into consideration."<sup>100</sup>

In addition to putting pressure on Rizzo, many members of the business community wrote letters directly to Secretary of Transportation Coleman urging him to make a specific grant for the project. Republican Thacher Longstreth, a two-time

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<sup>98</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 22 November 1976, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>99</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 7 December 1976, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>100</sup> Mike Mallowe, "The Black Hole," *Philadelphia Magazine* 70, no. 7 (July 1979): 158, SEPTA Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

candidate for mayor, former city councilman, and head of the Chamber of Commerce, led the business effort to get the tunnel built and told Coleman in late 1976 that “anticipation of the Center City Tunnel has already put several key office and retail projects into motion” and that once it was built, the tunnel would “trigger a series of further exciting center-city developments” that would reach into several neighborhoods beyond Market East. The Chamber’s support for the project, he made clear, was based primarily on its collective belief that it would “provide an impetus to Center City development resulting in many hundreds of millions of dollars of private investment.”<sup>101</sup>

At the end of 1976, the city sent Secretary Coleman a list of all development activities that could be traced to the commuter tunnel project. In total, Philadelphia claimed, nearly \$1.3 billion was or would be invested because of the tunnel – \$331 million in the Market East area (including development completed, underway, and proposed), \$253 million of development completed or underway in other areas that would be served by the tunnel, and \$674 million of proposed development in those areas. The Gallery retail complex in Market East was the centerpiece. Other projects included new office buildings (including one at 1234 Market Street, which became SEPTA’s headquarters), renovation of existing retail stores, additional parking garages, new apartments and townhouses, a restaurant and museum on the waterfront at Penn’s Landing, and new medical complexes for the Jefferson, Hahnemann, and University of Pennsylvania Hospitals, just to name a few. The projects listed were so wide-ranging in

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<sup>101</sup> Thacher Longstreth to William Coleman, 28 December 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

both geography and purpose that it appeared as though officials attributed virtually all of the city's ongoing development to the Commuter Connection.<sup>102</sup>

In a similar vein, the DVRPC released a report in conjunction with transportation engineers Simpson & Curtin that emphasized the overall economic impact of the tunnel. The project, asserted the report, would stimulate business, relieve the tax burden on city residents by encouraging suburbanites to work in the city and pay Philadelphia's wage tax, and help the construction industry. Without the tunnel, fewer workers would be willing to commute into the city, leading to vacant office buildings and higher taxes on residents.<sup>103</sup> The promotion of the tunnel as a boon to development reflected the fact that the DOT under Coleman's leadership was taking a different approach than it had under former Secretary John Volpe, when the perception that the tunnel was more about neighborhood redevelopment than about transportation weighed against federal funding.

By and large, it is fair to say that Philadelphia's postwar transportation planning favored big business at the expense of the working class and poor. In the particular case of the Center City Commuter Connection, however, an important exception to this general truism must be acknowledged. Whereas most Philadelphians opposed the tunnel in favor of improvements to SEPTA's urban transit system, members of the construction unions that stood to win jobs building the tunnel felt differently. The construction sector of organized labor, along with big business, formed a major constituency pushing for the

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<sup>102</sup> City of Philadelphia, "Development Activities Related to Proposed Rail Commuter Connection," Report, 28 December 1976, included in U.S. Department of Transportation, "The Center City Commuter Connection, Philadelphia, PA, Agreement Between the U.S. Department of Transportation, the Urban Mass Transit Administration, and the City of Philadelphia," 12 January 1977, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>103</sup> Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission and Simpson & Curtin Transportation Engineers, "Philadelphia Center City Commuter Connection: Questions and Answers," undated, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

project, and in the eyes of some, had even more influence over Rizzo. As *Philadelphia Magazine* put it, the economic slowdown of the early 1970s, “had hit labor hard and they let Rizzo know it.” If the union officials who provided Rizzo with crucial support lost their power, asserted author Mike Mallowe, “so too would go the base of Frank Rizzo’s hard-hat constituency.”<sup>104</sup>

Frank Rizzo – and his connection to organized labor in Philadelphia – must be considered in the context of the city’s racial politics. As was mentioned above, Mayor Tate appointed Rizzo Commissioner of Police in advance of the 1967 mayoral election to curry favor with white voters made uneasy by the 1964 North Philadelphia riot and subsequent expressions of black unrest. Rizzo’s methods, characterized by his supporters as a “law-and-order” approach and by his detractors as racially-motivated police brutality, made him Philadelphia’s most polarizing figure. As Matthew Countryman explained, Rizzo was “the focus of black anger about the persistence of racial inequities in the city,” and “the key figure in the resurgence of a racist politics in Philadelphia’s white working-class neighborhoods that demonized black activism as the main threat to the local social order.” A seminal incident in Rizzo’s career occurred in November 1967, immediately after Tate’s reelection, when African American students from several city high schools marched on the Board of Education building for a Black Power protest rally. Rizzo, according to witnesses, ordered his officers to charge the protestors, yelling, “Get their black asses.” The commissioner himself participated in what Countryman called a “vicious” attack on the protestors, “swinging his billy club freely.” His reelection secure, Tate wanted to fire Rizzo in the wake of the incident, but was forced to reconsider after

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<sup>104</sup> Mike Mallowe, “The Black Hole,” *Philadelphia Magazine* 70, no. 7 (July 1979): 158, SEPTA Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

an outpouring of support for the commissioner from the city's white ethnic neighborhoods.<sup>105</sup>

Seeking to become Philadelphia's mayor in 1971, Rizzo continued to capitalize on the white backlash against the civil rights movement, fracturing further the city's liberal coalition, which had, since the days of Joseph Clark and Richardson Dilworth, included African Americans and white residents together. Rizzo ran as "the toughest cop in America," and, according to Countryman, "ran a campaign that explicitly accused the city's liberal elites of cowering in the face of black militants." Rizzo won the election over Republican Thacher Longstreth by capturing the votes of large white ethnic groups such as the Italians, Poles, and Irish as well as those of most white laborers and most white working- and middle-class voters who lived in neighborhoods becoming racially integrated. He lost 21 of the city's 22 mainly African American wards. Rizzo's two-term tenure as mayor was marked by continuing racial, class, and cultural divisions.<sup>106</sup>

Racial tensions in Philadelphia made that city, according to the *New York Times*, "perhaps more than any other major city . . . ripe for Mr. Rizzo's blunt, ethnic based, law-and-order appeal."<sup>107</sup> Historian Rick Perlstein called Rizzo "[Richard] Nixon's sort of Democrat." It therefore made sense that Nixon – who counted Frank Rizzo as one of his strongest supporters – chose Philadelphia as the test case for his strategy to destroy the Democratic Party. Nixon's "Philadelphia Plan" aimed to use voluntary affirmative action goals to increase black employment in the construction trades. While the Republican

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<sup>105</sup> Matthew J. Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 179, 225-26, 240-41.

<sup>106</sup> Wayne King, "Tough Cop Falters: How Rizzo has Slipped," *New York Times*, 4 February 1974, p. 31; Countryman, 312-13, 322.

<sup>107</sup> Wayne King, "Tough Cop Falters: How Rizzo has Slipped," *New York Times*, 4 February 1974, p. 31.

base would not be pleased, the true intent behind the plan was, as Perlstein explained, to drive “a wedge through the *Democratic* coalition at its most vulnerable joint: between blacks and hard-hats.”<sup>108</sup>

Rizzo’s role in Philadelphia’s racial politics and the extent to which he relied on the support of organized white workers helps to explain the dynamics surrounding the tunnel project. Philadelphia’s mass transit was patronized heavily by poor and working-class residents of all races. It is likely, therefore, that some of the white construction workers who later provided most of the labor for the tunnel rode the city’s buses, trolleys, and subways as well. Nevertheless, white construction workers most likely did not perceive their interests as aligning with those of the African Americans who also used the transit system. In the difficult economic climate of the 1970s, it seems that most workers (along with their union leaders) prioritized the opportunity for steady employment over improvements to a communal resource such as mass transportation.

Opposition to the commuter tunnel was interracial, but those who attempted actively to prevent its construction formed a small subset of those who merely disfavored the project. The extent to which Philadelphia’s working class was fractured in the 1960s and 1970s by the racial divisions that helped propel Frank Rizzo to power and inspired Nixon’s Philadelphia Plan most likely prevented working-class whites, whether members of the construction unions or not, from deserting Rizzo solely over the tunnel issue or forming a broad interracial movement to push for mass transit improvements. Likewise, African Americans were not likely to be inspired to support Rizzo under any circumstances, regardless of whether he pushed for major urban transit improvements in

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<sup>108</sup> Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008), 515, 521.

lieu of the tunnel. In sum, the political conditions Rizzo had encouraged in the first place made it rational for him to prioritize the needs of the business and white organized labor communities (whose interests converged in this instance) and ignore the interests of other working-class Philadelphians who used mass transportation, counting on the fact that racial tensions made whites unlikely to turn on him and blacks unlikely to support him in any case.<sup>109</sup>

Many perceived the battle lines as drawn clearly – the question was whether Philadelphia should use the forthcoming \$240 million federal transportation grant for the commuter tunnel or for other urban mass transit projects. In fact, however, a controversy existed over the nature of the grant itself and whether Philadelphia would have a choice in how to use that grant. After Coleman’s October 1976 statement, most of the public believed that how to use the grant was entirely up to the city. Mayor Rizzo and other city officials denied this interpretation, insisting that DOT had not authorized the use of tunnel funds for other projects.<sup>110</sup> KYW, a prominent local television and radio news organization, ran editorials stating that Rizzo’s position “doesn’t seem to fit the facts.” When KYW called Coleman’s office for clarification, it was told that “the federal money is available for the tunnel or any other appropriate transit improvements Philadelphia wants.” Rizzo, the station speculated, “doesn’t want to use the money to fix up SEPTA – which is what you want. Maybe the Mayor wants to stick with that tunnel.”<sup>111</sup> SEPTA

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<sup>109</sup> In the late 1970s, Rizzo was in the second of the maximum allowable two consecutive terms as mayor. Nevertheless, political considerations continued to play a significant role in his actions, as he led an effort to amend the city charter to enable him to run for a third consecutive term in 1979, and when that failed, ran in and lost the following election, in 1983.

<sup>110</sup> Frank Rizzo to Jean Langenbach, 3 December 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>111</sup> KYW, Editorial, Transcript, 5 November 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

chairman James McConnon, who was in favor of the tunnel, recalled nevertheless that those who claimed that the money couldn't be used for other transportation projects "were just trying to make sure it didn't happen."<sup>112</sup>

Others jumped in to defend Rizzo's position, however. City Transit Engineer Edson Tennyson criticized KYW's editorials, admitting that there was "a modicum of legal truth" in the statement that the money could be used for other purposes, but insisting that "it is not practical." Any attempt to divert the federal grant, he explained, would require new studies, approvals, and legislation to provide local matching funds. This lengthy process could result in Philadelphia losing the money entirely, because "the currently available federal funds could be exhausted before the eligibility of alternate projects could be cleared."<sup>113</sup> Augustine Salvitti, the executive director of the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority, also admonished KYW for implying that the \$240 million federal grant was all the federal money available to Philadelphia when in fact Coleman had said the city would receive \$560 million over the next four years.<sup>114</sup> As the battle raged on over the nature of the federal grant and how it should be used, SEPTA's financial crisis continued, which only added to the tension. By the end of 1976, the authority was running on fumes, with a \$14 million deficit, and facing a possible shutdown in the spring of 1977.<sup>115</sup>

By the end of 1976, sources were telling the *Evening Bulletin* that "the city convinced Coleman that it would be impossible to use the \$240 million in federal funds

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<sup>112</sup> James McConnon, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 4 March 2009.

<sup>113</sup> Edson Tennyson to Alan Bell, 8 November 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>114</sup> Augustine Salvitti to Alan Bell, 3 December 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>115</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 9 December 1976, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

earmarked for the tunnel, for other transit projects.” City and federal officials would soon finalize a deal for the tunnel, the paper reported, that would include a promise by the federal government to pay cost overruns due to inflation while leaving the city responsible for increased costs caused by mismanagement.<sup>116</sup> Martin Feldman of COACT wrote to Coleman, denouncing the city’s attempt to justify the tunnel “through these lies about ‘private investment.’” “It is inexcusable for you to agree to this wasteful project knowing that the citizens of Philadelphia are so strongly opposed,” he continued. “You will be making a very tragic mistake if you sell the neighborhoods down the river by sneaking this project throughout [sic] during the last 30 days of your job.”<sup>117</sup>

Despite needing to be convinced that the money could be used only for the tunnel, Coleman had his own reasons for favoring the project. According to *Philadelphia Magazine*, Coleman saw the Commuter Connection as “a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Philadelphia’s construction industry to increase its minority representation dramatically.” The Secretary insisted, therefore, that the final agreement for the tunnel include provisions mandating that African Americans would be involved in substantial numbers in all phases of the project’s construction. By 1979, however, what the magazine called “Coleman’s black power vision” had “faltered badly,” as the city’s construction unions had failed to include more African American workers and contracts awarded to black-owned business constituted a miniscule percentage of the project’s total

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<sup>116</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 22 December 1976, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>117</sup> Martin Feldman to William Coleman, 22 December 1976, Reel 1232, Frame 815, Office of the Secretary, Microfilmed Correspondence, 1973-1978, General Records of the Department of Transportation, RG 398, National Archives, College Park, MD.

cost.<sup>118</sup> Two years later, the situation had not improved. The *Philadelphia Tribune* reported that the tunnel had produced only 1,000 total jobs, a mere 10% of what had been projected. African Americans had been promised 4,000 jobs but had received only 250. According to the paper, “reliable independent sources” estimated that black contractors had received only \$1 million out of the \$30 million of business that had been pledged to them. An attorney studying the matter on behalf of the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia alleged that major contractors were “playing a game” by hiring black subcontractors and laborers to comply with federal requirements and then laying them off quietly.<sup>119</sup>

In January 1977, the long battle over the tunnel neared its end when Rizzo and Coleman signed a contract finalizing the \$240 million federal funding arrangement for the project.<sup>120</sup> The final agreement included as exhibits nearly 50 pages of letters addressed to Rizzo and Coleman, most of them from business leaders, creating a concise historical record of exactly who was providing the necessary political pressure. Among the letters were pleas for the tunnel from banks (First Pennsylvania Bank, Philadelphia National Bank, The Girard Company, the Philadelphia Saving Fund Society, Continental Bank, and Colonial Mortgage Service Company), insurance companies (Penn Mutual Life Insurance Company and Fidelity Mutual Life Insurance Company), retailers (Gimbels, Strawbridge & Clothier, John Wanamaker, and The Gallery at Market East), realtors and real estate developers (Lanard & Axilbund and Franklin Town Corporation),

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<sup>118</sup> Mike Mallowe, “The Black Hole,” *Philadelphia Magazine* 70, no. 7 (July 1979): 160, SEPTA Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>119</sup> Kendall Wilson, “Tunnel is \$300M jobless hole,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, 3 July 1981, p. 1.

<sup>120</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 12 January 1977, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA; U.S. Department of Transportation, Office of the Secretary, Press release, 12 January 1977, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

as well as the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority, the Chamber of Commerce, and the OPDC Penn's Landing Corporation.<sup>121</sup>

In his remarks at the news conference announcing the agreement, Coleman pointed out that “Federal transit investments can have economic and social impacts on their host cities in addition to their direct transportation benefits. . . . While important transportation-related benefits will flow from this project, much of its justification has always been argued to lie in its employment and economic development impacts.”<sup>122</sup>

Among the conditions upon which Coleman approved the tunnel were pledges that \$170 million more would be invested in commercial development and office construction over the next four years and that the mayor and City Council would finance public improvements in the area.<sup>123</sup> Rizzo remained less than thrilled about the tunnel, feeling that political realities had forced the project down his throat. As the story goes, once Philadelphia had inked the deal with the DOT, the mayor called Managing Director Hillel Levinson and engineer George Shaeffer into his office and told them, “I don’t give a damn what you guys do with it. I don’t care where you dig or what streets you close, but I’m just warning you that that tunnel better not fuck up the Mummers Parade.”<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> See letters included in U.S. Department of Transportation, “The Center City Commuter Connection, Philadelphia, PA, Agreement Between the U.S. Department of Transportation, the Urban Mass Transit Administration, and the City of Philadelphia,” 12 January 1977, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>122</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation, Office of the Secretary, “Statement Prepared for Delivery by Secretary of Transportation William T. Coleman, Jr., Philadelphia Center City Commuter Connection News Conference, Philadelphia, Pa.,” 12 January 1977, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>123</sup> Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, Market Street East Committee, Meeting minutes, 11 January 1977, Papers of the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>124</sup> Mike Mallowe, “The Black Hole,” *Philadelphia Magazine* 70, no. 7 (July 1979): 99, SEPTA Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE. A venerable Philadelphia tradition, the Mummers Parade was held every New Year’s Day, typically along Broad Street. The city government described it as “the oldest folk parade in America.” City of Philadelphia, Department of Recreation,

Both before and after the city signed the tunnel agreement, Rizzo's office was deluged with mail, with city residents remaining largely opposed to the tunnel and business owners and labor leaders expressing heartfelt gratitude. Rizzo also wrote to officials of the Plumbers Union, the Wharf and Dock Builders, the Roofers, the Laborers, the Laborers District Council, and the Pennsylvania Building & Construction Trades Council, thanking them for their support.<sup>125</sup> The city's media were generally quite critical of the commuter tunnel and the process by which it was approved, as transcripts from radio and television editorials from late 1976 to early 1977 made clear. Perhaps the harshest was television station WCAU, which in November 1976 urged city officials to use the federal grant for urban transit improvements, editorializing:

If you're a commuter, you already know what riding SEPTA is like. The subway and the el cars are strewn with filth, drunks, graffiti and junkies. The dark, dank stations reek of who knows what, and shelter muggers and rapists. If you take the bus, you stand for endless periods of time waiting for late vehicles with broken windows, faulty heating and seats filled with noisy ruffians looking for trouble. If you're forced to take a trolley, you endure the exquisite torture that only a clanking ride on these antiques can provide. . . . Mayor Rizzo, the people of Philadelphia don't ride a chauffeured limousine to work! Hundreds of thousands of them take public transportation. They don't care about the convenience of a few suburban commuters who have to take a bus between the Reading Terminal and Suburban Station. They have to take SEPTA all the time. So here's your choice, Mr. Mayor: Satisfy big business

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"Mummers Parade"; available from [http://www.phila.gov/Recreation/mummers/Mummers\\_Parade.html](http://www.phila.gov/Recreation/mummers/Mummers_Parade.html); Internet; accessed 5 February 2010.

<sup>125</sup> Frank Rizzo to Thomas Magrann, et al., 14 January 1977; Frank Rizzo to Harry Anderson, 26 January 1977; Frank Rizzo to John McCullough, 26 January 1977; Frank Rizzo to Benjamin Irvin, 26 January 1977; Frank Rizzo to Leroy Burroughs, 26 January 1977; Frank Rizzo to Thomas McNulty, 19 September 1977, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

interests and suburban commuters, or help the little people who need SEPTA to get around this city.<sup>126</sup>

KYW defined the issue in simple terms: “The People Against the Tunnel.”

“Well, the big shots who are used to running Philadelphia don’t like interference from the neighborhood people,” the station fumed. “City Hall is counting on the neighborhood people to give up the fight and go away, and it wouldn’t be the first time that’s happened. . . . But this time is going to be different.”<sup>127</sup> WCAU complained of “an erosion of participatory democracy,” claiming that the tunnel deal was made “in the dark, behind the closed doors of City Hall . . . without any attempt on the part of the City Administration to determine what the public wants.”<sup>128</sup>

KYW was right – tunnel opponents weren’t ready to give up the fight just yet. But now the battle shifted from the court of public opinion to a court of law. The tunnel agreement was followed by a lawsuit, filed in federal court by a coalition of groups – including the Philadelphia Council of Neighborhood Organizations, the Poplar Stop the Tunnel Committee, the Coalition for Better Transportation in the City, the United Northeast Civic Association, and the North Philadelphia branch of the NAACP – seeking to block the tunnel.<sup>129</sup> The involvement in the suit of plaintiffs from both the African American Poplar neighborhood and predominantly white Northeast Philadelphia reflected the continuing interracial nature of opposition to the tunnel. One of the plaintiffs’ lawyers was Robert Sugarman, fresh from his successful fight to block the Crosstown

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<sup>126</sup> WCAU, Editorial, Transcript, 11 November 1976, SEPTA Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>127</sup> KYW, Editorial, Transcript, 19 January 1977, SEPTA Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>128</sup> WCAU, Editorial, Transcript, 17 January 1977, SEPTA Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>129</sup> *Philadelphia Council of Neighborhood Organizations, et al. v. William T. Coleman, Jr., et al.*, 437 F. Supp. 1341 (E.D. Pa. 1977) [database on-line] (accessed 28 February 2010); available from LexisNexis.

Expressway.<sup>130</sup> Back in September 1976, Sugarman had outlined some of his many arguments against the tunnel to UMTA administrator Robert Patricelli, alleging that the UMTA had ignored its own technical reviews, which had recommended against building the tunnel; that the agency had also failed to consider alternate mass transit projects as was required under federal law; that it had ignored the results of an investigation into discrimination against minority and low-income groups; that the sole public hearing held on the tunnel in 1974 had been “a farce”; and that the decision to build the tunnel had been made before an Environmental Impact Statement had been completed.<sup>131</sup>

The crux of the tunnel lawsuit was that the UMTA’s grant to Philadelphia was illegal because it was based on “politics rather than policy.” The plaintiffs relied on both internal UMTA memos expressing doubt about the tunnel as well as the expert opinions of consultants who felt the project was a waste of money. Moreover, the lawsuit claimed, the tunnel would preclude millions of dollars in needed improvements to SEPTA’s urban transit system with the result that railroad passengers would get \$3,000 per year in federal subsidies while urban riders would get only \$187. One especially egregious example was the elimination of a planned two-way radio system on city buses designed to protect operators and passengers from the violent crime now plaguing the system.<sup>132</sup> A study commissioned by Philadelphia’s Institute for Civic Values predicted that over the ensuing six years, only 15% of needed improvements to the city’s buses, subways, and trolleys would actually receive funding, while nearly all requested railroad projects would be

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<sup>130</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10 January 1977; *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 18 January 1977, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>131</sup> Robert Sugarman to Robert Patricelli, 9 September 1976, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.6, Administration of Frank L. Rizzo.

<sup>132</sup> Mike Mallowe, “The Black Hole,” *Philadelphia Magazine* 70, no. 7 (July 1979): 161, SEPTA Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

approved, with the result that a mere one-third of transportation money spent in the region would benefit city neighborhoods. “The decision to fund the tunnel,” the study concluded, “is a decision to put the needs of suburban commuters above those of residents of Philadelphia’s neighborhoods.”<sup>133</sup>

Edson Tennyson – one of the city officials who had argued vehemently that Philadelphia could not use the federal grant for projects other than the tunnel – continued to fight the characterization of the tunnel as solely for the benefit of suburban commuters. “The fact is,” he wrote, “that 67 percent of the commuters use city stations. The commuter lines and the commuters on them support center city land and building values that pay the taxes to fund the schools, the police, and other city functions so essential to low-income neighborhoods which cannot pay enough in taxes to support what they need.” Tennyson had a warning for those Philadelphians who sought to stop the tunnel: “Remember the mythology about the king who killed the goose which laid golden eggs?”<sup>134</sup>

When the City Solicitor’s Office looked like it might lose the tunnel case, the Chamber of Commerce urged Mayor Rizzo to hire outside counsel. The prominent firm of Wolf Block Schorr and Solis-Cohen took over the defense with positive results for the city.<sup>135</sup> The goose to which Tennyson referred was spared the axe when federal judge Raymond Broderick (who was the Republican nominee for governor of Pennsylvania in 1970, losing to Democrat Milton Shapp) dismissed the tunnel lawsuit in September 1977,

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<sup>133</sup> *Welcomat*, 9 March 1977; *Philadelphia Daily News*, 9 March 1977, SEPTA Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>134</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 18 March 1977, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>135</sup> Mike Mallowe, “The Black Hole,” *Philadelphia Magazine* 70, no. 7 (July 1979): 162, SEPTA Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

based primarily on his ruling that Secretary Coleman’s finding that the city had the financial ability to live up to its contract with the DOT was not arbitrary or capricious (the usual standard of review for agency decisions). Joseph Kakalec, one of the leaders of the plaintiffs’ coalition, called Broderick’s decision “a blow for the neighborhoods.”<sup>136</sup>

Because City Council had in April voted 14-2 to ratify Rizzo’s agreement with the DOT, no procedural obstacles to the tunnel remained.<sup>137</sup> The plaintiffs appealed Broderick’s ruling, claiming that the tunnel embodied racial discrimination by prioritizing white railroad passengers over black bus and subway riders, but the federal Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit rejected the appeal immediately.<sup>138</sup> On June 22, 1978 – one day after the dismissal of the plaintiffs’ appeal and twenty years after the Urban Traffic and Transportation Board proposed the Center City Commuter Connection – the city held a groundbreaking ceremony for the tunnel at 9<sup>th</sup> and Arch Streets. Mayor Rizzo put on a jubilant face, proclaiming that “the people who mark dates in Philadelphia’s history should write June 22, 1978, with all the other dates, including the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.”<sup>139</sup>

In 1981, with construction well underway, the *Inquirer* paused to reflect on the history of the tunnel and bestowed much of its praise on former mayor Richardson Dilworth, who had in the 1950s understood how important to the city’s health the suburbs were becoming. “He wanted to make it easy and pleasant for suburban residents to come to the city to work and shop and spend money,” the paper editorialized. “A good railroad

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<sup>136</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 13 September 1977, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>137</sup> “City Council ratifies rail tunnel,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 April 1977, p. B1.

<sup>138</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 21 June 1978, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>139</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 22 June 1978, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

system with convenient access to attractive stores and offices and restaurants and historic places would advance the objective, promote regionalism, and strengthen the city's economic base."<sup>140</sup> But *Philadelphia Magazine* pointed out a couple of years earlier that although Dilworth had seen the value of the commuter tunnel, he "was no fool and he had never spent one dime on the idea." The magazine quoted a planner who had worked with Edmund Bacon on the tunnel idea as calling the project a "god-awful civil engineering nightmare."<sup>141</sup>

Nightmare or not, the tunnel finally was becoming a reality, but Philadelphia's commuter railroads – without which the tunnel would be useless – were still in turmoil. After escaping death in 1976, the railroads faced another possible shutdown in the spring of 1977, but this outcome was averted when SEPTA executed another agreement with Conrail that March, extending their arrangement for another year.<sup>142</sup> Trouble remained on the horizon, as the federal government made it clear it did not intend to subsidize commuter railroads indefinitely. The UMTA threatened to begin to reduce aid in October 1978 and end it entirely in September 1980. Democratic Pennsylvania congressman Robert Edgar of the House Surface Transportation Subcommittee bemoaned the fact that his committee was dominated by rural interests who were unsympathetic to mass transit in large metropolitan areas. In addition, he said, Democratic president Jimmy Carter's administration had "shown little sensitivity to the transit issue." The problem existed on the state and local levels as well. Faith Whittlesey, chair of the Delaware County council,

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<sup>140</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 February 1981, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>141</sup> Mike Mallowe, "The Black Hole," *Philadelphia Magazine* 70, no. 7 (July 1979): 97, SEPTA Collection, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>142</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 19 March 1977, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

complained that “there is no group lobbying for mass transit” and that legislators were unwilling to do anything that would take money away from highways. Mass transit, she asserted, “has always been at the bottom of the list of priorities.”<sup>143</sup>

Although SEPTA’s relationship with Conrail continued, the two entities fought constantly over how much the commuter railroads cost to operate and how much money SEPTA would be required to contribute. Part of the problem stemmed from the fact that Conrail was responsible for the daily operation of the commuter lines; although SEPTA set fares and schedules, there was little it could do to reduce costs, short of cutting service. For example, Conrail’s employees were still protected by work rules that had become antiquated, such as a guarantee of overtime pay for working more than 100 miles in a day, which dated from the days before trains were electrified, when they rarely covered more than that distance. Rules such as this cost the railroads between \$5 and 6 million a year, claimed SEPTA.<sup>144</sup>

As a result of inflated costs, SEPTA was forced to raise fares 65% in nine months in 1979-80. Conrail remained inflexible about reducing costs, however, leading the *Evening Bulletin* to remark that “Conrail is basically a freight railroad. It has no love for commuter trains, which are more of a headache to it than anything.” What Conrail needed to realize, said the paper, was that running the commuter lines was part of the price it paid for the taxpayer support it received for its freight service. Calls for SEPTA to take over the railroads intensified. In the fall of 1980, the Pennsylvania House Committee on SEPTA joined the chorus. As the *Evening Bulletin* pointed out, the

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<sup>143</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 23 June 1977, 1 December 1977, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>144</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 8 August 1980, 21 December 1980, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

existing situation, whereby SEPTA funded the railroads but had little control over their operation, was “untenable.”<sup>145</sup>

The situation worsened in 1981 when the Republican administration of President Ronald Reagan – which was hostile to mass transportation in general, and rail service especially – entered office. The president proposed to “dismantle Conrail immediately” and end all federal operating subsidies for mass transit by 1985. Reagan’s budget proposal included the line, “There is no reason for someone in Sioux Falls to pay federal taxes so that someone in Los Angeles can get to work on time by public transportation.” Observers noted that the federal government was now reevaluating how rail transit would fit into the nation’s overall transportation infrastructure. “From now on,” the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported, “Amtrak and Conrail must compete with trucks, airline, bus and even automobile transportation systems for federal dollars.”<sup>146</sup> Other federal officials chimed in, such as Robert Blanchette, the director of the Federal Railroad Administration, who remarked that commuter rail service was “a drain on Conrail” and that the federal government should not “run Philadelphia and fund it.”<sup>147</sup> Claiming that losses on commuter service had cost Conrail \$80 million over 5 years, the FRA wanted Amtrak to take over the service, a proposition SEPTA opposed because Amtrak’s main focus was intercity service.<sup>148</sup> Reagan’s Secretary of Transportation Drew Lewis (who was the Republican nominee for governor of Pennsylvania in 1974, losing to incumbent

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<sup>145</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 27 June 1980, 20 October 1980, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>146</sup> Frederick Tulsky, “Proposed budget reductions would drive transportation costs up,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 February 1981, p. A12; Arthur Howe, “U.S. proposes to scrap Conrail immediately,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 25 March 1981, p. A1.

<sup>147</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 29 March 1981, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>148</sup> Harry Gould, Jr., “Survival plan: U.S. agency urges Conrail to drop commuters,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 April 1981, p. C1.

Milton Shapp) wanted SEPTA and other transit authorities to take over the nation's commuter lines immediately.<sup>149</sup>

Northeastern politicians reacted with horror to Reagan's plans for mass transportation. Toby Moffett of Connecticut, a member of the House Subcommittee on Transportation and Commerce, protested that Reagan wished "to cut out so much that we would not have train service." Subcommittee chair James Florio of New Jersey called the administration's plan "catastrophic" for his region of the country. SEPTA chair David Girard-DiCarlo expressed pessimism as well, remarking, "I don't think that public transit in the Philadelphia area will succeed unless there are some hard decisions made. This region faces a moment of truth, and I'm a little scared about this region facing this moment of truth."<sup>150</sup> The transit authority's general manager, David Gunn, agreed. The Philadelphia region's commuter railroads would grind to a halt in 1982, he claimed, without a wage freeze, modernized work rules, and a complete switch to electric service. Increasing fares would be counterproductive, as experience had shown that commuters would find other ways to get to work.<sup>151</sup>

Unsurprisingly, railroad workers formed a large and vocal constituency opposing the federal government's plans to abandon rail transportation. In April 1981, an estimated 15,000 Conrail and Amtrak workers from New England, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Ohio came to Washington, D.C. by bus and train to demonstrate at the Capitol

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<sup>149</sup> Harry Gould, Jr., "Lewis wants local transit agencies to operate Conrail commuter lines," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 April 1981, p. A1.

<sup>150</sup> Frederick Tulsky, "Conrail asks shift in service," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 18 February 1981, p. C1; Frederick Tulsky, "Proposed budget reductions would drive transportation costs up," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 February 1981, p. A12; Harry Gould, Jr., "Reagan budget cuts take toll on CETA, SEPTA: Transit chief outlines rescue proposal," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 5 March 1981, p. A1.

<sup>151</sup> Tom Masland, "SEPTA survival plan: Higher fares, service cutbacks," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 April 1981, A1.

against proposed budget cuts, disrupting commuter rail service in several areas.

Following the demonstration, Pennsylvania's congressional delegation expressed strong support for the workers and pledged to protect Conrail from the Reagan administration's axe.<sup>152</sup> Ironically, railroad employees were a major part of the problem, as the escalating cost of labor, which SEPTA was powerless to control, was one of the main factors putting Philadelphia's commuter rail system in jeopardy.<sup>153</sup>

Meanwhile, SEPTA and Conrail continued to disagree over how much in subsidies SEPTA would be required to contribute to keep the railroads running. In mid-1981 the parties were \$6 million apart in their negotiations, with Conrail demanding \$99 million and SEPTA offering \$93 million. When SEPTA asked the suburban counties to help make up the shortfall, it was rebuffed. "We can no longer subsidize inefficiency," proclaimed SEPTA board member Robert Thompson of Chester County. "We cannot be bled to death by outdated work rules."<sup>154</sup> In June, Conrail announced its intent to discontinue running Philadelphia's commuter system as soon as possible – meaning as soon as the Interstate Commerce Commission allowed it to do so. David Gunn lamented, "We have a better-than-even shot of losing commuter rail service in Philadelphia."<sup>155</sup>

As a result of ever higher fares and poor service on the commuter lines, aggravated commuters began to abandon the system, many of them joining van pools. In one year, SEPTA lost 20% of its rail riders, making the future of the railroads even bleaker. Not only would the suburban counties not agree to higher direct subsidies, they

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<sup>152</sup> Harry Gould, Jr., "15,000 workers protest at Capitol over planned rail cuts," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 30 April 1981, A11.

<sup>153</sup> Frederic Tulsky, "Feud may yet derail commuter trains," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 21 June 1981, A1.

<sup>154</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 20 June 1981, 10 July 1981, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>155</sup> Frederic Tulsky, "Feud may yet derail commuter trains," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 21 June 1981, A1.

rejected a regional transportation tax as well. An utterly exasperated SEPTA chairman David Girard-DiCarlo described his interactions with suburban politicians as follows: “Elected officials will say, ‘we don’t want you to cut that service and we don’t want you to raise that fare,’ and I say, ‘okay, fine, now I want more money.’ ‘Well, it’s out of the question,’ they say. ‘Not enough people care.’ ‘Let me see if I have this exactly right. Not enough people care for you to want to pay [for] it, but enough people care that you want me to keep running it.’ ‘That’s right,’ they say, ‘you got it.’”<sup>156</sup>

The region’s commuter rail service hung by a thread, as Conrail and SEPTA signed short-term agreements to keep the trains running through December 31, 1981, and then March 31, 1982.<sup>157</sup> Another potential shutdown loomed in the spring of 1982, however, when Conrail again threatened to drop the service. The area’s commuters begged government officials to find a way to keep the trains running. A citizen attending a public hearing in Norristown spoke for many of the region’s 45,000 commuters when he said, “The public wants and desperately needs the regional rail system. It is a tremendous public asset which should not be carelessly destroyed.”<sup>158</sup> Federal legislation called for Conrail to cease its commuter operations on January 1, 1983, with a new Amtrak subsidiary to step in and run the lines temporarily until SEPTA could take them over. SEPTA, however, opposed this arrangement, with its management of the opinion

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<sup>156</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 9 August 1981, 29 October 1981, 15 November, 1981, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>157</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 21 August 1981, 30 December 1981, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>158</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 13 March 1982, George D. McDowell *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* Newsclipping Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

that the authority would be able to control labor costs adequately only if it took over the lines right away – a goal that was still out of reach financially.<sup>159</sup>

After several more months of wrangling between Conrail and SEPTA, the commuter railroads' fate came closer to a resolution in September 1982 when the SEPTA board voted to run the trains itself beginning on January 1, 1983 – the date Conrail was scheduled to stop its service. James McConnon, the former chairman of SEPTA, attributed the board's sudden willingness to execute the takeover to an increased funding commitment from the state of Pennsylvania, spearheaded by Republican governor Dick Thornburgh, a mass transit advocate. The success of the SEPTA takeover, however, was contingent on the authority's ability to resolve its pending disputes with the railroad unions over wages and work rules.<sup>160</sup>

The labor problem was a major one, because the unions were threatening to go on strike the minute SEPTA took over the commuter lines.<sup>161</sup> In December 1982, SEPTA won an important victory when an emergency board Reagan appointed to deal with the labor dispute decided that the antiquated work rules under which Conrail had operated the commuter lines should not apply once SEPTA took over. SEPTA, the board ruled, “should be viewed as a transit operation and not as a railroad,” such that commuter rail operations should be considered part of the authority's overall transit program and not subject to special railroad labor rules.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Roger Cohn and Frederic Tulsky, “Lewis: Reagan wants SEPTA to run trains,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 7 November 1981, p. B12.

<sup>160</sup> Howard Shapiro, “SEPTA board votes to assume control of rails,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 September 1982, p. B1; James McConnon, Interview by author, Digital recording, Philadelphia, PA, 4 March 2009.

<sup>161</sup> Sara Kennedy, “SEPTA joins in planning for stoppage,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 18 November 1982, p. D7.

<sup>162</sup> Sara Kennedy, “U.S. sides with SEPTA in dispute on rail jobs,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 8 December 1982, p. A1.

The legal victory, while improving SEPTA's bargaining position, did not preclude a strike. Many observers, including the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, still considered a January 1 rail shutdown likely.<sup>163</sup> David Gunn admitted that he didn't know how many workers would show up to run the trains on New Year's Day and announced that SEPTA would have to shut down the lines for two weeks to get things sorted out.<sup>164</sup> In response, commuters filed a class action lawsuit asking the Court of Common Pleas to enjoin the transit authority from interrupting service. The judge obliged, ordering SEPTA to maintain as much service as possible. To comply, SEPTA announced that it would at first run a limited schedule on seven of its twelve commuter lines.<sup>165</sup>

At 6:05 p.m. on December 31, 1982, the last Conrail train left Reading Terminal and headed for West Trenton. As the Philadelphia region's commuters held their collective breath, the Paoli local, under SEPTA control, began operation at noon on January 1, 1983. "So far so good," reported a wary yet optimistic *Philadelphia Inquirer*.<sup>166</sup> The significance of the moment was lost on no one: for the first time in history, the Philadelphia area had a unified regional transportation system under the control of a single entity. The railroads' transition was not as smooth as the events of that

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<sup>163</sup> Edward Colimore, "Alternatives outlined for 'probable' rail shutdown," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 16 December 1982, p. B4.

<sup>164</sup> Sara Kennedy, "SEPTA's nightmare: Who'll show up to run trains?" *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 December 1982, p. A1.

<sup>165</sup> Sara Kennedy and Marc Kaufman, "Suit seeks to keep trains running," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 24 December 1982, p. A1; Sara Kennedy, Frederic Tulsky, and Carol Horner, "Trains Must Run, Judge Rules: Orders as much service as possible," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 29 December 1982, p. A1; Sara Kennedy, Edward Colimore, and Frederic Tulsky, "SEPTA to Run 18% of Trains: Service on 7 of 12 lines is planned," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 31 December 1982, p. A1.

<sup>166</sup> Sara Kennedy, "SEPTA Rail Slowdown Begins: Overnight halt, then some runs," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 January 1983, p. A1; Joyce Gemperlein, "Trying to catch The Last Train," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 January 1983, p. A1; Sara Kennedy, "SEPTA Gets Some Trains Going: Service follows shutdown," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 January 1983, p. A1.

first day might have suggested, however. On March 15, 1983, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers began a strike that lasted for 108 days, impacting the region's commuters severely and forcing SEPTA to modify some of its work rules.<sup>167</sup>

Now that SEPTA controlled the region's commuter railroads, the last piece of the puzzle for an integrated mass transportation system was the completion of the Center City Commuter Connection, which had been under construction since 1979. In March 1984, with the tunnel almost finished, George Wilson of the *Inquirer* editorial board stopped to reflect on whether the project was worth its price tag, now estimated to be \$325 million. "The tunnel's long-time critics will argue that no one needs it and it should never have been built," he wrote. "As one who has supported the tunnel from the outset, I would contend that both the city and the suburbs can benefit from the tunnel and it should have been built decades ago." But Wilson defined the Commuter Connection's benefits to the city largely in economic terms, asserting that the tunnel had already "gone a long way toward paying for itself" due to the investment it had spurred in the Market East area, including a new mall, department stores, and office buildings.<sup>168</sup> Tunnel opponents, rather than claiming that "no one" would benefit from the tunnel, had from the beginning been opposed to the expenditure of transportation funds on a project aimed at helping big business. That argument, clearly, had not prevailed.

Both SEPTA and city officials continued to emphasize the tunnel's transportation benefits, however. Democratic mayor Wilson Goode (the city's first African American

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<sup>167</sup> Sara Kennedy, Howard Shapiro, and Michael Hobbs, "SEPTA Transit Pact Reached: But rail unions' leaders say they are on strike," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 15 March 1983, p. A1; Sara Kennedy, George Anastasia, and Howard Shapiro, "City Takes Rail Strike in Stride: Subways, buses keep moving," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 16 March 1983, p. A1; Sara Kennedy, "Rail Strike Ends After 108 Days: Signalmen agree to SEPTA pact," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 July 1983, p. A1.

<sup>168</sup> George Wilson, "Success of the tunnel is a city-suburb challenge," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 March 1984, p. A15.

mayor, who served from 1984 to 1992 and earned his second term by defeating former mayor Rizzo) proclaimed, “We’ll probably have the most advanced transportation network in the country.”<sup>169</sup> SEPTA’s train operations director John Tucker hailed the tunnel as creating “the first totally unified regional rail system in North America.”<sup>170</sup> The tunnel also, in the eyes of the *Inquirer* editorial board, represented the end of “an era of coherent planning” in Philadelphia. Edmund Bacon and the Philadelphia City Planning Commission had shaped the city’s development in the 1950s and 1960s, the paper asserted, but planning had changed dramatically by the time Bacon stepped down from the Planning Commission in 1970. Planners’ growing social awareness, a greater emphasis on “poor and powerless” urban residents, and a shift to federal block grants had stripped Philadelphia of the incentive to plan coherently, the paper lamented.<sup>171</sup> Many Philadelphians, however, saw the Commuter Connection as a powerful illustration of the fact that coherent planning could often run roughshod over the interests of those without political power.

On November 12, 1984, the Center City Commuter Connection opened officially for business. In roughly 100 years, Philadelphia had gone from a system in which dozens of private companies owned franchises to run individual streetcar lines to an integrated system whereby the area’s buses, subways, trolleys, and now-unified commuter rails were under the control of a single regional transportation authority. A ceremony at the new Market East station marked the occasion with a band and a cake in the shape of a

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<sup>169</sup> “A new SEPTA era dawns as tunnel service begins,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 5 September 1984, p. A14.

<sup>170</sup> Paul Nussbaum, “New rail tunnel to unify system starting Nov. 12,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 25 October 1984, p. B1.

<sup>171</sup> Thomas Hine, “Where’s Phila. going? An era of municipal planning ends as tunnel opens,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11 November 1984, p. A1; Paul Nussbaum, “Commuter tunnel to open tomorrow,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11 November 1984, p. B2.

commuter train. At least one attendee was in a less than celebratory mood, however. Former mayor Frank Rizzo watched the proceedings from the sidelines, hurt that no one had offered him a chance to speak. Although Rizzo had been ambivalent about the tunnel during his time in City Hall, he now spoke to the press “with some bitterness” about the opposition the project had encountered. “I got all kinds of opposition,” Rizzo complained. “I couldn’t do anything right as far as the ultra-liberal press was concerned. You would have thought I was going to spend the money myself.”<sup>172</sup>

The *Inquirer* remembered that the tunnel fights of the 1970s of which Rizzo spoke were driven by the argument that the tunnel was taking away money Philadelphia sorely needed for urban mass transit improvements. But the city, claimed the paper, had ended up getting both the tunnel and urban improvements such as new buses and subway cars and renovations of subway stations.<sup>173</sup> These improvements, however, were band-aids on a patient with life-threatening wounds. Philadelphia’s urban mass transit, in dire straits throughout the 1970s, continued to flounder in the early 1980s. Disgruntled riders continued to deluge both SEPTA and city officials with complaints. In response to the complaints, Planning Commission chair Bernard Meltzer’s office issued a form letter acknowledging that “Public transportation in this City has fallen to a deplorable state . . . Bus and trolley service is notoriously unreliable. Security is a major concern of the riders. All of these problems did not come overnight; instead, transit in this City has been deteriorating gradually over the past 30 years.”<sup>174</sup> Even the *Inquirer* admitted in 1980

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<sup>172</sup> Paul Nussbaum, “Tunnel officially is opened: Mood is festive during ceremony,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 13 November 1984, p. B1.

<sup>173</sup> “The tunnel’s ready to go: A tough test for SEPTA,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 9 November 1984, p. A24.

<sup>174</sup> Bernard Meltzer, Form letter, 25 August 1980, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.7, Administration of William J. Greene, III.

that things were bad, reporting on “buses that break down, subway cars that won’t operate at all, an entire transit system that is antiquated and, literally, falling apart.”<sup>175</sup>

A lengthy *Inquirer* article in April 1981 detailed the shockingly distressed state of the SEPTA transit system. Simply put, wrote reporter Frederic Tulsky, “Philadelphia’s rapid transit systems – the subways and the elevated trains – are among the oldest, worst-maintained, most breakdown-prone systems in the country.” Tulsky recounted a September 1979 fire on the Broad Street Subway caused by a broken power cable on a subway car, which someone had “repaired” by wrapping it with electrical tape and pushing it back into place. The cable broke again two days later, dragging on the third rail and causing an electrical explosion. When the subway operator attempted to call for help, he found the train’s emergency phone was dead. One hundred and forty-eight passengers were injured in the incident, many of them by breaking windows and crawling out of them to escape. Another electrical explosion two months later, on a trolley this time, injured 53 passengers, four of them with serious burns.<sup>176</sup>

The Broad Street Subway was a particular embarrassment. Its cars were relics from the 1920s that broke down constantly. Patchwork repairs began in 1979 only when SEPTA nearly had to shut down the line due to a lack of working cars. New wheels purchased for the cars began to crack because they were made for modern subway cars that were considerably lighter than those comprising SEPTA’s ancient fleet. In addition to the serious September 1979 fire (which occurred on a car that had run nearly 6,800 miles since its last inspection), eight other fires had occurred recently on the Broad Street line, most caused by faulty equipment. “For years,” Tulsky wrote, the authority “has

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<sup>175</sup> “Without adequate fares, SEPTA will wither away,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 15 June 1980, p. E8.

<sup>176</sup> Frederic Tulsky, “Danger rides the subways and the El,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 April 1981, p. A1.

skimped on repairs, safety measures and inspections on its rapid transit system – the Broad Street Subway, the Market-Frankford subway elevated line and the high-speed trolley line between 69<sup>th</sup> Street in Upper Darby and Norristown. For years it has failed to replace worn-out cars, failed to buy new cars, failed to plan improvements needed to maintain the system.” One engineer cracked that the system ran “on Band-Aids and chewing gum.” Federal officials who inspected the system feared that “sooner or later a serious accident will result if these conditions are allowed to continue.”<sup>177</sup>

It could not be denied that the Center City Commuter Connection played a major role in preventing SEPTA from making major enhancements to its disastrous urban transit system. On the same day as the article recounting the authority’s faulty equipment and safety problems, the *Inquirer* ran another piece, also written by Tulsy, about the Frankford El, the supports of which had deteriorated so badly that maintenance workers spent a great deal of their time welding cracks shut to keep the supports from collapsing. SEPTA general manager David Gunn wanted to ask the federal government for money to help rebuild the line, but feared that the project would be so large as to inhibit progress on any other needed improvements to the system. City Hall’s earlier assurances that the Commuter Connection would not affect SEPTA’s future funding were “silly,” according to members of the administration of Democratic mayor William Green, Rizzo’s successor. “Indeed,” Tulsy pointed out, “\$150 million of the \$250 million in federal funds for area capital projects for transportation this year were sunk 12 feet under the

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<sup>177</sup> Frederic Tulsy, “Danger rides the subways and the El,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 April 1981, p. A1.

center of Philadelphia while SEPTA gropes for capital funds to overhaul its decrepit vehicles and refurbish the sadly outdated depots in which they are maintained.”<sup>178</sup>

The problem stemmed in large part from the fact that SEPTA was, as Philadelphia City Council pointed out, “the only major transit system in the nation without a permanent funding base provided by government.”<sup>179</sup> The lack of a permanent source of funding, which required the authority to depend on yearly budget allocations from the federal, state, and local governments, wasn’t the only cause of SEPTA’s problems, however. A report prepared by Mayor Green’s office blamed the transit crisis on the fact that “the region has done a poor job in setting priorities.” Instead of prioritizing new vehicles and maintenance of the existing urban transit system, the report asserted, “the previous City Administration and SEPTA’s previous management agreed to allocate \$240 million in federal aid to build the Center City Tunnel, \$75 million to build the Airport Line, and \$45 million to relocate the Frankford El to the median of I-95 for a distance of a mile.”<sup>180</sup>

As the 1980s continued, SEPTA’s situation did not improve significantly. In February 1982, the state gave the transit authority \$4.5 million to help it keep the commuter railroads running, but coupled the grant with a warning that Harrisburg would not be able to provide enough assistance going forward to make up for the fact that the federal government was reducing its aid. Governor Thornburgh emphasized that the state could not afford to help SEPTA with major improvements, saying, “I don’t foresee any

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<sup>178</sup> Frederic Tulsy, “El renovation: A question not of need, but of timing,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 April 1981, p. A11.

<sup>179</sup> City of Philadelphia, City Council, “Resolution to call upon the Mayor and the SEPTA representatives from Philadelphia to veto fare increases on the City Transit Division,” undated, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.7, Administration of William J. Greene, III.

<sup>180</sup> City of Philadelphia, Office of the Mayor, “Briefing on SEPTA,” Report, June 1980, City of Philadelphia, Department of Records, City Archives, RG 60-2.7, Administration of William J. Greene, III.

major capital budget. There is a limit to what we can stand.” While SEPTA had planned to make improvements to the transit system in 1983, it also faced a \$30 million budget deficit for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1982, and Thornburgh’s announcement put the capital program in jeopardy. SEPTA officials pointed out that a failure to make capital improvements would hurt doubly, because it would lead to increased maintenance costs in the future.<sup>181</sup>

The transit authority did go ahead with modernizing some parts of its system, but scaled down the scope of its upgrades. For the dangerously deteriorated Frankford El, for example, Philadelphia’s Department of Public Property (which could have managed the repairs, because the line was operated by SEPTA but owned by the city) pushed for a complete reconstruction of the line, a project that would have cost \$353 million and taken eight years to complete. SEPTA officials, however, fearing that such an extensive overhaul would cripple proposed improvements to the rest of the system, wanted to perform a much smaller renovation – including less extensive work on the structure supporting the elevated line – at an estimated cost of \$88 million. Mayor Green sided with SEPTA, and in October 1982, the transit authority’s board agreed, paving the way for the quicker and cheaper fix. Community organizations in Northeast Philadelphia – the section served by the Frankford line – objected to “giving the taxpayers Band-Aid treatment instead of major surgery,” and expressed concern about the safety of the line. Their protests went unheeded, however.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Frederic Tulsy, “Warnings on funding for SEPTA,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 7 February 1982, p. B1.

<sup>182</sup> Sara Schwieder, “Green goes with SEPTA – rejects city plan for transit work,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 28 September 1982, p. B1; Sara Kennedy, “SEPTA goes ahead on El project,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 28 October 1982, p. B3.

Despite some improvements to SEPTA's urban mass transit system, conditions remained grim. In early 1984, Philadelphia transit workers complained, according to the *Inquirer*, that the authority "routinely sends out buses and other equipment with serious mechanical defects, such as worn brakes or steering failures, and the transit agency pressures employees to overlook flaws and falsify inspection records." SEPTA general manager David Gunn denied that the authority compromised the safety of its operators and riders, but pointed out that, in the paper's words, "the transit agency was struggling to correct many years of neglect and could not do everything overnight."<sup>183</sup> In August 1984, shortly before the opening of the Commuter Connection, SEPTA proposed a \$215 million capital budget for fiscal year 1985, which was to focus primarily on new buses and rail vehicles as well as the renovation of the Frankford El. A SEPTA official admitted, however, that the proposals outstripped available funds by more than \$25 million, calling the budget "on the very optimistic side of reality" and "both optimistic and a cry for help." The operating budget also faced a deficit of approximately \$20 million. In truth, authority officials conceded, "SEPTA's needs for new equipment, new stations, new vehicles and other improvements exceed the available money by several hundred million dollars."<sup>184</sup> While the commuter tunnel may not have been solely responsible for the hole in which SEPTA found itself, its impact was undeniable.

What happened after the Commuter Connection opened suggested that the city may indeed have misplaced its priorities. In her history of downtown renewal in the post-World War II era, Alison Isenberg pointed out that The Gallery, the new mall in the heart

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<sup>183</sup> Sara Kennedy, "SEPTA attacked on safety – defects ignored, workers testify," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 January 1984, p. B1.

<sup>184</sup> Paul Nussbaum, "SEPTA's plan belies its budget proposal called 'a cry for help,'" *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 7 August 1984, p. A1.

of Market East that was to be the centerpiece of tunnel-related redevelopment, did not work out as its creators had planned. The suburban customers for whom the retail center was designed never came in large numbers, and the mall transitioned eventually into a successful establishment for urban shoppers, most of which arrived via SEPTA's buses and subways. The Gallery's fate undermined many of the assumptions that surrounded postwar urban renewal. As Isenberg put it, "Here was evidence that an integrated clientele could in fact reinvigorate urban commerce – that test question of the 1960s."<sup>185</sup>

Commuter rail ridership did not respond in the way tunnel proponents had hoped, either. The railroads had over 34 million passengers in 1977, but with the service cuts and fare increases brought on by the financial problems of the late 1970s and early 1980s, this number fell to 21 million by 1982 and then 12 million during the disastrous strike year of 1983. Despite the Commuter Connection's opening in 1984, it was not until 1986 that ridership reached pre-strike levels. Ridership continued for the most part on an upward trend for the next twenty years, but it was 2006 when the figure cracked the 30 million mark once again.<sup>186</sup>

While ridership fluctuated, what remained constant was that a large portion of the system's riders came from the suburbs. The Commuter Connection, however, had seemingly no effect on the ratio of suburban to city riders. Because the vast majority of regional rail passengers boarded their trains in the suburbs or in outlying areas of Philadelphia, bound for one of the three hub stations in Center City, SEPTA calculated daily ridership for each station in terms of the number of passengers boarding inbound

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<sup>185</sup> Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 272.

<sup>186</sup> Schuylkill Valley Metro, "Regional Rail Ridership since 1972"; available from <http://www.svmetro.com/septawatch/accounting/ridership/rrd.php>; Internet; accessed 3 February 2010.

trains each day. In the fall of 1978 for example, stations within Philadelphia totaled 16,980 inbound passengers per weekday, compared with 38,123 for Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery Counties combined; 69% of passengers boarded in the suburbs. In the fall of 1985, shortly after the tunnel's opening, Philadelphia had 9,556 weekday passengers compared to 29,087 for the suburban counties, as the proportion of suburban passengers increased to 75%. In 2001, with total ridership up 10 million from 1985, the disparity was similar, with Philadelphia totaling 15,545 weekday passengers compared to the suburbs' 34,929 and the suburban proportion returning to 69%. In 2003, the suburban counties provided 65% of all inbound and outbound weekday passengers, with 69,923 riders to Philadelphia's 37,690.<sup>187</sup>

Although the Center City Commuter Connection did not revitalize the Market East retail area in precisely the way its proponents had envisioned or lead to a boom in commuter rail ridership, the project nevertheless reflected Philadelphia's transportation planning priorities in the 1960s and 1970s. While the defeat of the Crosstown Expressway represented the apex of democratization in the city's transportation politics, the fact that the resulting shift away from expressways and toward mass transit led to a project to which a majority of city residents were opposed was quite significant. The city's decision to back the commuter tunnel left the working-class and poor who used SEPTA's urban mass transit system in a difficult spot in the early 1980s. With no permanent funding source, inflation continuing to drive operating costs ever higher, a

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<sup>187</sup> Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, "Regional Rail Ridership Census 2003"; [document on-line]; available from <http://www.svmetro.com/septawatch/official/septa-regional-rail-ridership-census/septa-rr-census-2003/history.pdf>; Internet; accessed 3 February 2010. The numbers listed above exclude a handful of stations, defunct as of 2003, for which SEPTA did not provide location information.

hostile Reagan administration in the White House, and a need to compete for resources with regional rail, the immediate future of the urban system was not bright. The Commuter Connection, while perhaps not a triumph for the region, was a prime example of the extent to which, despite greater democratization, Philadelphia's transportation planning process continued to privilege the interests of affluent white suburbanites, the white urban elite, and big business over those of marginalized inner-city populations.

## Conclusion

Philadelphia continues in 2010 to grapple with many of the transportation problems it faced in the decades following World War II. In particular, many are unhappy with the legacy left by the city's expressway era, despite the mitigating effects of citizen opposition in the 1960s and 1970s. The Schuylkill Expressway – or, as some locals call it, the “Surekill Expressway” – is still, despite several renovations, clogged perpetually with traffic and the site of frequent accidents.<sup>1</sup> Residents bemoan the fact that the Delaware Expressway, or I-95, cuts off the city from its waterfront and depresses the value of what otherwise could be some of the choicest urban real estate in America. Some citizens and planners have suggested that the entire Center City portion of I-95 be buried underground, similar to what Boston accomplished with the “Big Dig” project begun in the mid-1990s and completed in the early twenty-first century. Others have gone so far as to opine that the stretch of expressway should be eliminated altogether.<sup>2</sup>

The region's mass transportation, under the auspices of SEPTA, still finds itself in constant financial difficulty. Users of the urban mass transit system complain, just as they did in the 1970s, of dirty stations and vehicles, poor service, and a perceived lack of safety, bolstered by occasional outbreaks of violent crime in and around the system.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mario F. Cattabiani and Jere Downs, “Overhead lanes for Schuylkill and I-95?” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 25 February 2004, p. B1; Laurie Hollman, “Crash Course on Whys of Traffic Jams,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 7 October 1990, p. A1.

<sup>2</sup> Inga Saffron, “City's biggest block: The great I-95 divide,” *Philadelphia Inquirer* 5 March 2007; [column on-line]; available from <http://www.philly.com/philly/news/general/6833822.html>; Internet; accessed 10 February 2010; Inga Saffron, “Deep six for I-95 by Penn's Landing?” *Philadelphia Inquirer* 28 June 2009; [column on-line]; available from [http://www.philly.com/philly/news/20090628\\_Deep\\_six\\_for\\_I-95\\_by\\_Penn\\_s\\_Landing\\_.html](http://www.philly.com/philly/news/20090628_Deep_six_for_I-95_by_Penn_s_Landing_.html); Internet; accessed 28 June 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Nussbaum, “How will SEPTA use its funding?” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 July 2007, p. A1; Barbara Boyer and Dwight Ott, “Riders on edge, SEPTA officials on the defensive,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 5 April 2008, p. B1.

Moreover, the labor troubles that plagued the Philadelphia Transportation Company and then SEPTA have not gone away, making transit strikes a frequent and unwelcome disruption to the lives of Philadelphians.<sup>4</sup> For decades, SEPTA existed without a dedicated source of funding, forced to resort to yearly contributions from the federal, state, and county governments. As a result, the authority operated frequently at a deficit, making large-scale improvements impossible. In 2007, the Pennsylvania legislature passed Act 44 with the intent of improving funding for transportation projects throughout the state and giving SEPTA a permanent source of funding. Such funding was to come in large part from highway tolls, which were to be enhanced considerably by converting Interstate 80 in Pennsylvania to a toll road. As of early 2010, however, the federal government had denied the state permission to do so, putting SEPTA's hope of a stable funding source in jeopardy.<sup>5</sup>

Philadelphia's travails in 2010 serve to illustrate that cutting off the story of the city's postwar transportation politics in 1984 – with the opening of the Center City Commuter Connection and the achievement of a unified regional transportation system – is by necessity artificial. In reality, the issues I have explored have no end point. Philadelphia's transportation systems have continued to evolve and have always, as was the case between 1946 and 1984, been the products of battles between competing political and civic values as well as material interests.

What I have attempted to do here is merely to take a snapshot, or perhaps a series of snapshots, of the way Philadelphia's transportation politics operated during what I

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<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Lin, et al., "For commuters, a day that went from bad to worse," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 4 November 2009, p. A1.

<sup>5</sup> Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission, "The Pennsylvania Turnpike and Interstate 80 – Frequently Asked Questions"; available from <http://www.paturndpike.com/I80/faq.aspx>; Internet; accessed 10 February 2010.

believe to have been a particularly important era in its history. As I hope my story has demonstrated, transportation politics have been dynamic. Changes in the economy, political culture, technology, and the environment made and remade the landscape of transportation planning priorities and possibilities. Once more time has passed and the events of the late twentieth century can be placed in better perspective, I and other scholars will be tasked with continuing the story of how transportation has evolved in Philadelphia and other cities – a story that constitutes only one part, albeit an important one, of the rich mosaic that is American democracy.

In the years between the end of World War II and the mid-1980s, Philadelphia's transportation politics changed in important respects, yet remained the same in ways just as significant. The city's transportation planning became significantly more democratic beginning in the 1960s, mirroring a national trend. The emergence of New Left social movements and their challenge to authority and expertise, the struggle for racial justice, and new concerns about the environmental damage caused by human development all played an important role in this transformation. Citizens in cities across the country, spurred by these cultural and political changes as well as a growing appreciation for the destructive effects of urban expressway construction, challenged the authority of the highway engineers and planners who previously had imposed their will without regard to expressways' social, environmental, and aesthetic impacts. The protestors were joined by federal officials in the Johnson and Nixon administrations who sympathized with their concerns and worked toward a greater decentralization of power over transportation planning. The result was a series of "freeway revolts" in Philadelphia and elsewhere,

many of which succeeded in altering or even eliminating proposed urban expressway projects.

In Philadelphia, however, the democratization of transportation politics, and the shift away from expressway construction and toward mass transportation that accompanied it, opened up less space for influence by grassroots organizations than was the case in many other cities. Although large business interests were intimately intertwined with municipal governments in drawing up blueprints for urban renewal throughout the United States, local business-oriented groups and quasi-public corporations such as the Greater Philadelphia Movement, the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, and the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia remained especially influential with respect to Philadelphia's transportation planning priorities. Big business, with its focus on downtown renewal, often had interests that were at variance with those of residents of Philadelphia's working-class and poor neighborhoods. Nevertheless, business interests contributed significantly to the democratization of the city's transportation planning by helping to wrest control away from planners and engineers, thereby making the planning process susceptible to influence by a broader array of social groups. Perhaps the best example was OPDC's backing of the movement for a lowered and covered Delaware Expressway in Society Hill.

Despite the significant hold that Philadelphia's business and political elite maintained on transportation decisions, the defeat of the Crosstown Expressway in 1973 represented a major setback for them. Philadelphia's freeway revolt was also the apex of the democratization of its transportation politics. Massive citizen opposition and the fear

of racial violence, combined with financial, legal, and environmental obstacles, made construction of the highway impossible. As a result, those in the proposed expressway's path won the ability not only to keep their homes and small businesses, but to participate in their neighborhoods' renewal. The anti-Crosstown activists prevented the displacement of thousands of African Americans and eliminated from the city map what would have been a daunting racial barrier. The Crosstown's demise also contributed to an unusual state of affairs in which Philadelphia's expressway construction – in particular the Roosevelt Boulevard Extension of the Schuylkill Expressway as well as the Delaware Expressway – displaced mainly working-class white residents at a time when most urban highways were built through African American neighborhoods. Although Philadelphia's urban renewal program as a whole was highly disadvantageous to its black community, its expressways were most disruptive to the city's white working class.

Historians have written about other freeway revolts, many of them successful, in cities such as San Francisco, Boston, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and New Orleans. The nature of such revolts as well as their degree of success was dependent on a multiplicity of specific factors that varied widely from city to city. There is a paucity of literature, however, placing these freeway revolts in their larger context and analyzing the extent to which they altered the overall trajectory of a city's transportation planning politics. Zachary Schrag's *The Great Society Subway*, which weaves artfully the issue of freeway opposition in Washington, D.C. into the story of Metro's creation, is a notable exception. What can be gleaned from the existing historical accounts of freeway protest, however, is that grassroots citizens' groups in many cities were able to exert powerful and lasting influence upon the city establishment. Widespread highway opposition in

San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Boston in particular caused governments in those cities not only to cancel specific projects, but to take an anti-freeway stance generally – something that never occurred in Philadelphia.

In contrast to the cities listed above, Philadelphia had a highly organized, motivated, and well-connected set of business organizations pushing for highway construction. Although big business did not win every battle – as was evidenced by the Crosstown Expressway’s cancellation – it remained the most powerful force shaping Philadelphia’s transportation planning decisions. The origins of the close relationship between the city’s large business interests and its City Hall stemmed from the 1940s, when business leaders spearheaded charter reform and pushed for a stronger City Planning Commission, and then, in 1951, helped bring about the election of Joseph Clark, the first of Philadelphia’s Democratic reform mayors. Clark and his compatriot and successor, Richardson Dilworth, maintained a close relationship with downtown business interests, solidified by the creation of quasi-public corporations, such as the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, to assist with the city’s renewal. Kirk Petshek, who witnessed events in City Hall firsthand during the Clark and Dilworth years, commented on the novelty of the fluidity with which professionals passed between city government and civic organizations in Philadelphia.<sup>6</sup> While the mayors that followed – James Tate and Frank Rizzo – lacked the intimate ties with business that characterized their predecessors’ administrations, existing connections were too strong to be disrupted completely. Moreover, the Home Rule Charter of 1951 created a strong-mayor form of government under which a weakened City Council, while retaining some power over

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<sup>6</sup> Kirk R. Petshek, *The Challenge of Urban Reform: Policies & Programs in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1973), 271.

expenditures, was admonished not to interfere with the administration of the mayor and his cabinet.<sup>7</sup>

Philadelphia's freeway revolt, while representative of a nationwide change in the politics and culture surrounding highway planning, did not alter the city's transportation planning priorities. Instead, City Hall continued to focus on business-oriented transportation planning with the primary aim of revitalizing Center City as a home for white-collar commerce and luxury shopping, dining, and entertainment. As Philadelphia shifted its focus away from highways and toward mass transportation, therefore, city officials made the commuter railroads and their affluent white patrons the number one transportation priority. Beginning in the mid-1960s, federal transportation policy reflected a growing commitment to mass transportation. Philadelphia took advantage of this trend – which began in earnest with the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964 – by creating SEPTA and seeking funding for the Center City Commuter Connection.

Both major policy initiatives were focused on preserving and enhancing the commuter railroads. The regional transit authority's roots could be traced directly to earlier efforts to subsidize the railroads through the Passenger Service Improvement Corporation and the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Compact. The Commuter Connection was designed not only to link the formerly separate Pennsylvania and Reading Railroad systems, but to serve as the centerpiece of the effort to renew the Market East area as a place for suburbanites to shop. Left decrepit and struggling were the urban mass transit system of buses, subways, and trolleys, and its poor and working-class riders, many of whom were African American. City Hall and the business

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<sup>7</sup> Petshek, 37, 307.

community with which it was so closely connected did not perceive the urban system's patrons to be as crucial to downtown renewal as the riders who came from the suburbs and outlying areas of the city to fill Center City's office buildings, shops, restaurants, and hotels. The result was a mass transit system that most felt to be dirty, dilapidated, unsafe, and simply unworthy of a city with the stature of Philadelphia. The widespread public opposition in the 1970s to using a large federal grant for a commuter railroad tunnel rather than to shore up the urban transit system was of no effect, as large business and labor interests pushed the project through. Nothing demonstrated as well as the Commuter Connection the limits on the democratization of Philadelphia's transportation politics.

The tunnel project, as well as SEPTA's takeover of the commuter railroad system, created a counterintuitive state of affairs whereby a greater emphasis on mass transportation produced virtually no redistribution of transportation resources downward to those of lower socioeconomic status. The notion of making mass transit improvements to enhance central business district redevelopment was not unique to Philadelphia; San Francisco's BART system, for example, was built with a similar goal in mind. Transit systems built in the 1960s and 1970s, however – such as BART, Atlanta's MARTA, and Washington, D.C.'s Metro – served downtown areas while also providing improved mobility to lower-income populations, both black and white. Cities with older transit systems – such as New York, Boston, and Chicago – used federal money to modernize those systems in the 1960s and beyond. Scholars have yet to explore these modernization programs in depth to determine how they affected transit riders and how, if at all, they redistributed resources. Unlike Philadelphia, though, none of these cities poured such a

large share of its transportation resources into a single project designed to benefit such a small proportion of its mass transit patrons. It seems likely, therefore, that upgrades to older transit systems produced results more equitable than those in the City of Brotherly Love.

As the Philadelphia region continues to strive for transportation systems that are funded adequately, serve its residents and workers effectively, contribute to its economic growth, and enhance its stature as a vital metropolitan area, it will be worthwhile and indeed necessary for policymakers to consider how and why those systems evolved the way they did. The lessons of the past always must guide the decisions of the present. The shape of Philadelphia's future transportation systems will, as before, be a product of battles between competing values, and the identities of the winners and losers will continue to reflect the changing nature of American democracy itself.

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