

TRANSPORTATION

In post World War II Portland, Portlanders were in love with their automobiles, while civic leaders and engineers planned freeways and expressways and vacant land in the central city was paved over with parking lots. Robert Moses came to Portland in 1943 and laid out a blueprint for the future of Portland, one hatch marked with freeways and thoroughfares slicing and dicing the city into areas separated by high speed cement rivers. Freeways completed during this period, such as Interstate 5, tore through minority and poor neighborhoods, such as Albina, with little collective resistance. It was a good time to be a road engineer, a poor time if you were African American. Portland was proud of its largest mall, Lloyd Center; for a short period of time the largest mall in the country. It was a sign of progress. Teenagers spent their time driving between drive-in restaurants and drive-in movies, or cruising downtown streets to be seen. Adults spent their time at home in front of that marvelous new invention, the television, or often in private clubs. Nearly a quarter of all civic associations were temples, lodges or clubs.

Planning and building highways, a popular civic pastime of the 1950s, as with other civic issues, drew spotty broad civic involvement. The overall plan for highway development in Portland was created during the 1940s when the Portland Area Postwar Development Committee brought Robert Moses to Portland to help it create an economic vision for the city that would capitalize on the wartime economy. Moses created the Portland Improvement Plan in 1943, a scheme, as grand as all of Moses' plans, that included vast investments in highways. Moses' plan was never fully realized, but nonetheless provided a starting point for many highway plans after that, *including*

Portland/Vancouver Metropolitan Area Transportation Study. It suggested the construction of 30 highways, including several freeways.

Planning these freeways in Portland in the 1950s involved citizens only at the last minute, when plans were announced and citizens were shown detailed drawings of how they were inevitably, not optionally, going to be affected. There were citizen protests in the 1950s and early 1960s, but the collective actions were impromptu and often with little effect. The activists were those most directly affected, and they had relatively little power to influence the State highway department. The force and effectiveness of opposition to highway projects depended on the class or race of the most affected population. The Minnesota (I-5) freeway, that tore 5 miles through inner northeast Portland, with Portland's largest concentration of African Americans, had very little organized resistance. But, freeways that were to be built near or through more affluent neighborhoods met with staunch resistance. The Willamette Heights Protective Association, for example, was formed in the early 1960s to oppose a highway connecting Route 26 with the soon-to-be-built Freemont Bridge, that would have abutted wealthy upper-middle class Willamette Heights neighborhood. The Association brought out 200 people to meetings, even though the highway project only directly affected 50 homes. The connector was never built, although it stayed on the books for another decade and re-emerged later in the form of another project, I-505.

As late as 1970, transportation plans for Portland focused on the development of freeways, expressways and thoroughfares. The *1990 Transportation Plan* issued in 1970, called for the implementation of over 50 transportation improvements, in excess of \$600 million in public expenditures, to accommodate population growth and traffic. By 1990

most of the larger projects were not built, or even under consideration.

There is a de facto monument to the end of the car-centric planning and development era on one of Portland's aesthetically-deficient bridges. At the east end of the Marquam Bridge which channels Interstate 5 traffic through Portland, there is a ramp that goes nowhere that was meant to feed traffic on to the Mt. Hood freeway, a freeway stopped by concerted resistance from the Southeast Legal Defense Fund and other citizens, and ratified by Governor Tom McCall, and Mayor Neil Goldschmidt. From the top of the Marquam bridge one can also see another icon of the revolt against pavement, Riverfront Park, turned from a thoroughfare, Harbor Drive, into a park, through the concerted efforts of Riverfront for People, and Governor Tom McCall, and Mayor Neil Goldschmidt. Nestled in the core of downtown, yet another symbol of the shift, Pioneer Square, destined in the 1970s to become a parking lot, but through the concerted efforts of citizens turned into Portland's "living room."

Neighborhood resistance to the development of freeways was one of the driving forces that led to Portland's neighborhood system. A map drawn in 1956, which was an update of the Portland Improvement Plan, crafted by Robert Moses, projected a Portland with a "great heart pumping fast-flowing traffic in all directions (This is how Portland's traffic, 1956)." The plan included the Mt. Hood Freeway, but also the Johnson Creek Expressway, Multnomah Expressway, Sunset-St. Johns Expressway, Burnside Expressway, Laurelhurst Freeway, and Freemont Expressway, none of which were ever built.

The I-505 freeway controversy was one of the issues that forged the activism of northwest Portland and in many ways was a critical underpinning for neighborhood

activism and the creation of Portland's neighborhood system. In 1971 the Oregon Environmental Council, two neighborhood associations, and businesses and individuals sued to stop acquisitions for the planned freeway. This moved the State to try a different approach. Richard Ivy, working with the consulting firm of CH2M-Hill, was hired by the state to secure neighborhood approval for the plan. He created an innovative method for involving citizens in examining routes for the freeway and its overall design. At public meetings citizens were provided "do-it-yourself" packets to design the freeway. Ivy hired Mary Pederson to act as citizen participation coordinator for the project. Later Ivy (Bonner, 1995) recalled,

We hired Mary Pedersen, who had been the staff director of the Northwest District Association (NWDA), and she did a wonderful job for us in mobilizing the citizens and representing the district. We brought her right inside the program and paid her half time [she was only being paid half-time by NWDA]. But she could not be co-opted. I mean, it never occurred to me or anyone that because we were paying Mary that she would in any way be on our side if she and [NWDA] thought differently.

In February 1974 the City Council approved a compromise route for I-505 that retained the residential edge of Northwest Portland. It was far from the original design that would have brought the highway near the pricey Willamette Heights neighborhood.

The hiring of Mary Pederson to coordinate citizen participation for the I-505 freeway project also precipitated a move toward the institutionalization of Portland's grassroots neighborhood movement. In 1969 the Portland Development Commission created the Northwest District Association (NWDA) to represent the interests of

northwest Portland as PDC laid plans to acquire and clear several blocks of land there at the request of Good Samaritan Hospital and the Consolidated Freightways company. When PDC held its first meeting to discuss the plans in May, 1969, 450 people showed up, and a chaotic meeting ensued. Eventually, NWDA separated from PDC and became one of the first strong new-wave neighborhood associations, still under the direction of Mary Pederson. The NWDA talked the City Council into allocating \$75,000 for the neighborhood to develop a comprehensive neighborhood plan, a process that became a model for other neighborhoods. Later, when Mayor Neil Goldschmidt sought someone to head the new Office of Neighborhood Associations (ONA), he turned to Mary Pederson. She left NWDA in 1974 to become ONA's first director.

In Southeast Portland the Mt. Hood Freeway is often regarded as one of the most critical events that shaped neighborhood politics and Portland's progressive planning policies. Since the early 1960s policy makers in Portland and state highway planning agencies had taken for granted that there would be a freeway through southeast Portland. It was included in the 1966 Comprehensive Plan and met the approval of influential Portlanders on the Planning Commission, City council, Multnomah County Commission, Chamber of Commerce, and the editorial board of the *Oregonian*. Even, Commissioner Neil Goldschmidt, who later, as mayor took decisive action that resulted in the death of the freeway, at first felt it was inevitable.

The proposed freeway ran into resistance by southeast Portland residents in 1969 as the state begin to purchase property in the right of way. Two citizens, Al and Kayda Clark, a couple in their mid-thirties, helped form the Southeast Legal Defense Fund and took the matter to court, claiming that proper procedures had not been used to select the

project. The suit took 4 years to wind its way through the court system, when the U.S. District Court ruled in favor of the citizens.

Resistance to the project led the authorities to temper the project. The first change in the City of Portland's approach to the Mt. Hood Freeway came from Commissioner Lloyd Anderson who wanted a stronger environmental impact assessment. Through his insistence the City hired architectural firm Skidmore, Owning and Merrill (SOM) to develop a more thorough impact analysis. As part of its work, SOM held public meetings for citizens to help design a freeway that would have the least impact on livability. The SOM consultants tried to transform the identity of the project from freeway to transportation corridor, providing citizens with a way of examining it in the context of broader transportation planning concerns. However, SOM's impact statement also made it clear that the freeway "would not relieve congestion and would be obsolete by the time it was completed (Young, 1999)."

In 1974 Judge James M. Burns ruled that the proposed Mt. Hood Freeway highway could not be built without a new hearing because the state had made up its mind on the route before it held its public hearing in May 1969. The Multnomah County Commission also adopted a resolution in opposition to the freeway. The Burn's court decision and county action delayed the construction timeline, and firmly introduced the possibility that the freeway could be stopped.

With a construction moratorium in place, the State Highway administration, under the leadership of George Baldwin, attempted to pressure the city into making a decision about how it would use the allocated federal funding, or else lose it. The Governor's Task Force on Transportation, established in 1973, began maneuvers to take advantage of

the Federal Air Highway Act of 1973, which allowed local governmental jurisdictions to transfer monies already committed for construction of highway facilities to mass transit projects. The task force's negotiation allowed the Portland region to keep most of the \$500 million allocated for the Mt. Hood Freeway--a pivotal move to in the fight against the freeway. The negotiation opened the door to Portland's 20-year investment in light rail options and other alternative transportation options.

It wasn't until October 1975, however that the last of the proponents were silenced, when an initiative petition organized by the construction unions, the Portland Chamber of Commerce and the City of Gresham (a suburban community that might benefit the most from the freeway) was ruled not valid based on a suit by the Oregon Environmental Council, Northwest Environmental Defense Center and neighborhood groups. While the Mt. Hood Freeway might have been built without the timely leadership of Neil Goldschmidt, Lloyd Anderson, and Multnomah County Commissioners, it was individual citizens and then organized citizens through neighborhood groups and citizen interest groups who led the charge.

Having lost the Mt. Hood Freeway the State was determined not to loose its proposed north-south highway loop on the far east end of the city. In fact, one of the conditions for the State surrendering the Mt. Hood Freeway was that the Multnomah County Commissioners would not oppose the I-205 freeway project. In addition to being part of the political compromise already achieved between the State and local officials, the route for I-205 ran through poorer neighborhoods where activism was low or nonexistent. The most rampant opposition came from Maywood Park, a middle class neighborhood, that in 1974, along with the Oregon Environmental Council, Sierra Club,

and the newly formed interest group, Sensible Transportation Options for People (STOP), filed a suit to stop the freeway. When the suit failed Maywood Park's residents were so disenchanted with its government's behavior that it seceded from the city of Portland and became a separately incorporated city.

In some neighborhoods housing was the key issue that drove the creation of grass-roots neighborhood organizations. This was true for the Irvington neighborhood in inner northeast Portland, the Corbett Terwilliger-Lair Hill and Goosehollow neighborhoods in southwest and downtown, Buckman in southeast, and the Northwest neighborhood.

In 2008 when Portland embarked on its comprehensive plan process the two elements that were highlighted as crowning past glories and models for the next stage were the closing of Harbor Drive, and the creation of Pioneer square as a plaza instead of a parking lot. In both cases it was citizens who led the charge for these iconic changes in planning; from a downtown design based on automobile access and parking and intensive highway development.

While many of the early actions to "de-pave" Portland, increase alternative transportation modes, such as bicycles, and bring nature back into the city, were often battles won block by block or neighborhood by neighborhood, a sense of the movement to reclaim streets and create a greenspaces system began to take hold in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The neighborhood association activists were clamoring for traffic calming in the neighborhoods and for solutions to congestion. While neighborhood associations sometimes opposed bicycle advocates when it came to removing on-street parking to add bike lanes, there were also points of agreement. This neighborhood movement for more

livable streets and neighborhoods culminated in November 1991 at a Neighborhood Congress on traffic issues, attended by 300 people. Several task forces were established, and two years after the congress, they presented a planning document, "Reclaiming Our Streets." The plan contained many ideas of how to improve traffic problems in neighborhoods and included many bicycle transportation improvement elements (Reclaim City's Streets, 1993).

Civic spaces "ooze" out in Portland, even through cracks in the pavement and as remedies for the treatment of storm water. Even designing stormwater systems in Portland has taken on an element of reclaiming space for civic life. While the primary purpose of Portland's Green Streets initiative is to treat storm water runoff, the greenstreet designs, including rain gardens at schools and other public settings, also create streetscapes and urban greenspaces that buffer the edges between paved surfaces and pedestrian and bikeways.