The Death and Life of Great American Highways
—
A historic look from 1920 to nowish
1: Futurama
It’s the 1930s

- Great depression - not good
- Pinball was just invented - also not good
- You’re looking for some inspiration and hope
- You buy a ticket to the 1939 World’s Fair in NYC
Futurama (1939 World’s Fair)

- A 1 acre interactive exhibit featuring transportation of the future
  - Higher driving speeds
  - Partitions of isolated traffic moving both ways
- Predicts a bold increase of automobiles for the next 20 years
- Sponsored by Shell and General Motors
- Voted most interesting exhibit by fairgoers
Dwight D. Eisenhower

- US President 1953 - 1961
- A big fan of highways
- 1919 Transcontinental motor convoy
  - DC - San Francisco trip, took 2 months
  - Painful, with many breakdowns
- Inspired by the autobahn while fighting in WW2
Dwight D. Eisenhower

- Quote from his book:
  - "The old convoy had started me thinking about good, two-lane highways, but Germany had made me see the wisdom of broader ribbons across the land."
Dwight D. Eisenhower

- Signs the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956
  - $25 billion over 10 years for highway construction

- Cold War also big motivator
  - Moving across country from 2 months to 5 days
NATIONAL SYSTEM OF INTERSTATE AND DEFENSE HIGHWAYS

LEGEND
Interstate System urban routes designated in September 1956
Urban areas served
Suburbia in USA, 1960s onwards

- Economic boom: housing and automobile growth
- Highways that run right into the city
  - “We don’t have to live in the city anymore!”
    - Avoid crime in cities
    - Own land, front yard
Suburbia in USA, 1960s onwards
Urban sprawl (Los Angeles)
2: Highways go up!
It’s the 1950s, and people need highways.

- You’ve got this great national interstate highway.
- You want to connect it right into the core of your city.
- But….there’s no space
- How are you going to make it happen?
A: Follow a convenient no-construction area (river)
B: Build across the waterfront
Or even two!
C: Try to build it through pre-constructed areas?

- Tear down the buildings on a stretch of land
- Build a highway!
- They won’t mind right?
Moses vs Jacobs

- Famous 1950s highway dispute: Lower Manhattan Expressway
- Robert Moses, “master builder” and Jane Jacobs, local resident
Jane Jacobs

- After successfully defending NYC, she became a hero
- Goes on to write the bible of planning, 1961
- Moves to Toronto in 1968, influential in highway revolts
Highway revolts across America (1960s - 70s)

- In other cities, residents gathered to protest highways
D: The other way

- Build through a politically weak neighborhood
Hogan’s Alley

- Predominantly African immigrant neighborhood in Strathcona
- Destroyed in the 1970s for the Georgia Viaduct
3: Highways go down
Why are highways bad?
Why are highways bad?

● Nobody wants to be around them
  ○ They are borders, they sever communities
● Bad for land value, environmentally bad
● Studies have shown they increase congestion in surrounded areas
  ○ Bigger streets $\neq$ lower traffic
● Expensive, harder to maintain than roads
  ○ Funding to build highways was high.
    Funding to maintain them is low.
Why are highways bad?

- General Theory of Walkability
- A quality walk:
  - **Useful**: Convenient, accessible
  - **Safe**: from high speed vehicles
  - **Comfortable**: tight better than vast
  - **Interesting**: signs of humanity
- Which of these come with highways?
Why are highways bad?
Case Study: San Francisco Embarcadero 1989
1989 Loma Prieta earthquake

- Santa Cruz/San Francisco
- During 1989 World Series Game 3 (which apparently saved lives)
- 63 killed, $6 billion in damage
- The embarcadero freeway collapses
  - Local government choose not to reconstruct
A happy accident: Wait, that worked?

- Other cities take notice
  - Seattle
  - Boston
  - Seoul
  - Toronto (we’re still working on that one)
  - Many more: [Highway Hitlist](#)
Six Freeway Removals That Changed Their Cities Forever

Alissa Walker
5/25/16 12:30pm • Filed to: BAN CARS

America’s 10 worst urban highways

This group of roadways could soon meet the wrecking ball

By Megan Barber | @meggcbarger | Feb 6, 2017, 1:50pm EST
Thanks y’all

● Videos
  ○ About Here (Youtube)
  ○ Vox

● Reading
  ○ The Death and Life of Great American Cities
  ○ Walkable City
  ○ r/urbanplanning