



Filename: 1965\_The-Interstate-Highway-Program-Panel\_Internal-Memo

Box: 7

THE WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON NATURAL BEAUTY

The Interstate Highway Program Panel\*

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Panel remarks. Nearly 60 per cent of the Interstate System is completed or under construction, and the design of 30 more per cent is underway. To improve the appearance of interstate freeways, some retroactive measures must thus of necessity be considered. Many of them may be "cosmetic" in nature, but there is no reason to impute a pejorative meaning to the term. Aside from a major expansion of billboard control to attack the real eyesores in urbanized and commercial areas ~~and~~ and from extending the principle of access control to suburban arterial roads ~~and~~ subjects covered by a different panel ~~and~~ a commitment to rectify some past omissions would mean:

1. Additional right-of-way acquisition, particularly in growing suburban and resort areas, to guarantee, wherever feasible, a 150 foot minimum buffer zone between edge of shoulder and the taking spots (ponds, treestands) within the ROW.
2. Correction of awkward grading through generous rounding and warping of slopes, flatter embankments, cleaner rock cuts; substitution, wherever median width and climate permit, of planted earth berms and similar devices for metal barriers.
3. Encouragement of native vegetation on the roadsides, and more generous artificial landscaping of prominent areas, particularly near urban interchanges. Utilizing upward slopes, or downslopes protected by guardrails, to bring tree growth closer to the roadway, thus breaking the monotony of the "wide open swath" with spots of more intimate space confinement.

\* preliminary text - varies slightly from remarks actually delivered.

4. Employment of grading, landscaping, and added ROW acquisition to screen objectionable views and open desirable ones.

On freeways whose location and geometric design are not yet finalized, more fundamental improvements are possible via three avenues of approach.

The first is a vigorous infusion of esthetic considerations into design standards for alignment and profile; the requirement of much longer vertical curves, encouragement of the use of spiral transitions, discouragement of tangent alignment, and the favoring of long arcs with radii in the 5,000' to 30,000' range in open terrain. A variable median and independent roadways do not in and of themselves produce beauty, if the alignment is discontinuous.

The second is a basic policy decision on, as President Johnson put it, "increased respect for the natural and social integrity and unity of the landscape and communities through which the highways pass." In high-density residential and downtown areas of our cities, the highway must be subordinated to the amenity of the dominant pedestrian spaces. This means avoiding esthetically valuable urban sections, more green buffer zones, more respect for the geometry of the street grid. This rules out elevated or at-grade facilities through such areas and their parks. Many cities, including Philadelphia and New York, are fighting an uphill battle to depress key downtown expressways; these needs must be met, for it is here that the esthetic stakes are the highest. Even if the cost may be 50% more, the cost-benefit ratios of urban facilities are usually so favorable that an increase of this magnitude will not throw them out of reason. In the next stage, we will have to proceed to counseling the removal of existing urban elevated structures such as the Embarcadero

Freeway in Staten Island and the West Side Highway in New York.

Finally, the third avenue of approach is an administrative change in design procedures, aimed both at greater specialization, and at a more interdisciplinary approach. As an example, there are engineering consultant firms which include landscape architects, architects and other visually trained professionals on their team, and who have achieved a high level of expertise in refined geometric design and location. These teams should be allowed to specialize in the initial, visually decisive stage of location and geometric layout, while the extremely time consuming, but esthetically not too relevant phase of preparing working drawings, developing drainage details and computing quantities should be left to firms proficient in these supporting tasks. This is similar to Minoru Yamasaki designing the World Trade Center and Emery Roth and Sons doing the working drawings, and is a way to maximize the utilization of scarce talent.

5/27/65