This article analyzes the freeway revolts that erupted in American cities in the 1960s and early 1970s. Until the mid-1960s, state and federal highway engineers had complete control over freeway route locations. In many cities, the new highways ripped through neighborhoods, parks, historic districts, and environmentally sensitive areas. Beginning in San Francisco, citizen movements sprang up to challenge the highwaymen. New federal legislation in the 1960s gradually imposed restraints on highway engineers, providing freeway fighters with grounds for legal action. Leaders in the new U.S. Department of Transportation pushed for a more balanced transportation system and more sensitive highway decision making. Case studies of freeway building and citizen opposition in Miami and Baltimore illustrate larger patterns of the national freeway revolt.

**Keywords:** transportation; expressways; freeway revolt; Miami; Baltimore

Beginning in the late 1950s, a nascent freeway revolt emerged in San Francisco and a few other cities. Typical of the countercultural sixties, the antifreeway movement accelerated nationally as interstate highway construction began penetrating urban America and knocking down neighborhoods. Pushing expressways through the social and physical fabric of American cities inevitably resulted in housing demolition on a large scale, the destruction of entire communities, severe relocation problems, and subsequent environmental damage. Opposition movements sprang up to defend neighborhoods against the “concrete monsters” rolling through the cities. Initially, the struggle pitted grassroots citizen organizations against the state and federal highway engineers and administrators who directed these vast construction projects. Later, freeway fighters sought the intervention of political leaders or used legal challenges to halt highway projects. In some cities, freeway construction coincided with black political empowerment and the rising civil
rights movement, developments that took on added significance when black neighborhoods were targeted by the highwaymen. In other cities, protecting parklands, schools and churches, historic districts, and sensitive environmental areas stimulated citizen movements to “Stop the Road.” At some point in the 1960s, then, many Americans came to focus on the negative consequences of highway building, as opposed to the demonstrable advantages of modern, high-speed, express highways serving a nation addicted to automobiles and to mobility.1

The timing, progress, and outcome of the emerging freeway revolt differed from city to city. With a few exceptions, in cities where the highway builders moved quickly in the late 1950s to construct the urban interstates, the inner beltways, and radials, opposition never materialized or was weakly expressed. In southern cities, where African Americans had little political leverage at the time, building a freeway through the black community was not only the most common choice but the choice that generally had the support of the dominant white community. Where freeway construction was delayed into the 1960s, however, neighborhood leaders, institutions, and businesses had time to organize against the highwaymen. In some cases, freeway fighters forced the adoption of alternative routes, even shutting down some specific interstate projects permanently. In their writings, influential urbanists such as Lewis Mumford, Jane Jacobs, Herbert Gans, and others provided a powerful critique of urban expressways and other redevelopment schemes. In the late 1950s, planners and policy experts also began questioning the interstate program. The ink was barely dry on the 1956 interstate bill when city planners began challenging the single-minded devotion of highway engineers to pouring concrete, urging instead the need for comprehensive planning and a balanced transportation system that included mass transit. In an influential 1960 article in The Reporter, rising urban analyst Daniel Patrick Moynihan criticized urban interstates for their lack of comprehensive planning and potentially damaging impact on urban life and metropolitan structure. In later years, these arguments for coordinated planning, mass transit, and preservation of small-scale neighborhood life in the modern city resonated with freeway opponents and buttressed antihighway movements.2

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.3

The freeway revolt involved organization and political coalition building in defense of neighborhood and city. But each city had its own history, geography, demographic characteristics, physical structure, neighborhood patterns, political culture, and other unique features. These variations help explain why freeway fights had different histories and diverse outcomes from place to place. Nevertheless, successful freeway revolts generally shared several commonalities. First, persistent neighborhood activism, committed local leaders, and extensive cross-city, cross-class, and interracial alliances were needed to bring a high level of attention to the freeway problem over a sustained period of time. Second, such movements needed strong support from at least some local politicians and from influential newspapers and journalists. Third, as Zachery M. Schrag has suggested, cities that had strong and historic planning traditions, such as San Francisco and Washington, D.C., responded more passionately and more effectively to the freeway threat. Fourth, legal action over highway routing was a necessary ingredient; litigation sometimes delayed land acquisition and construction for years, but without such legal action, state highway departments could move ahead with dispatch. And, in the last analysis, the freeway revolters often needed a final shutdown decision from the courts, from highest levels of the highway bureaucracy, or after the early 1970s, from state governors. Grassroots, populist struggle against the urban interstates was crucial, of course, but without these other ingredients, there was a very good chance that the freeway would get built anyway.4

THE FREEWAY AND THE CITY

Passage of the Federal-Aid Highway Act in 1956 set the stage for dramatic change in urban America. During the previous two decades or so, big-city mayors, civil engineers, urban planners, public-works officials, and downtown business and real estate interests all envisioned new urban expressways that would revive the declining urban core. “Saving” the central business district (CBD) became a primary goal of the urban elites by the 1940s. Similarly, over many years, state and federal highway engineers developed their own visions of technologically efficient freeways that would speed autos and trucks to their destinations, bypassing the monster traffic jams that increasingly clogged downtown streets. In the late 1930s, these conceptions of an urban freeway future coincided with new urban imagery inspired by the stunningly popular Futurama exhibit sponsored by General Motors at the 1939 New York World’s Fair. Futurama portrayed the “Cities of Tomorrow” and featured modernized expressways speeding traffic through great skyscraper cities at one hundred miles per hour—all part of a contemplated free-flowing
“National Motorway System” connecting all cities with populations of more than one hundred thousand. Industrial designer Norman Bel Geddes used the *Futurama* exhibit and his subsequent book *Magic Motorways* (1940) to promote the advance of technology and link the nation’s urban future to the automobile and the freeway. *Futurama* seemingly had the desired effect. The General Motors exhibit, one scholar has suggested, “stimulated public thinking in favor of massive urban freeway building.” Advocates of these varied freeway visions anticipated that central cities would have to be at least partially restructured to accommodate the automobile and essential, high-speed traffic arteries.

The urban expressway vision was given concrete bureaucratic form in two major highway reports prepared by federal agencies. In 1939, the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) issued *Toll Roads and Free Roads*, an early statement of the need for a national highway system. Largely written by BPR commissioner Thomas H. MacDonald and his assistant Herbert S. Fairbank, both engineers, the 1939 report conceptualized the links between highway building and urban redevelopment, suggesting that “the whole interior of the city is ripe for . . . major change.” The report contended that proper planning of highways would facilitate slum clearance and rebuilding along modern lines. In 1944, the National Interregional Highway Committee, appointed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt and headed by MacDonald, issued a second report, mostly written by Fairbank. Titled *Interregional Highways*, it built on the 1939 study and mapped out a 40,000-mile interregional highway network not too different from the system that was actually built in the late 1950s and 1960s. Like the 1939 report, *Interregional Highways* recommended that new limited-access highways penetrate the heart of the nation’s metropolitan areas, where careful planning would integrate the new roads with “the future development of the city.” The committee’s plan also called for inner and outer beltways encircling the largest cities, as well as radial expressways tying the urban system together. Pushed by state highway engineers, road builders, truckers, and other members of the emerging highway lobby, Congress passed the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944, incorporating much of the *Interregional Highways* report.

Wartime financial exigencies prevented any immediate efforts to fund and build the system. Disputes among highway builders, engineers, truckers, and automobile interests over who would pay and who would benefit from the proposed road network further delayed congressional appropriations until the early 1950s. Meanwhile, MacDonald and others, such as public-works builder Robert Moses of New York, embarked on a long campaign promoting urban expressways. As in the federal highway reports of 1939 and 1944, MacDonald and Moses also argued that building these new traffic arteries provided an opportunity to clear out central-city slum housing and rebuild the urban core according to modern standards. Big-city mayors and city managers, along with downtown developers, landlords, department store operators, and their
advocacy organization, the Urban Land Institute, also championed the postwar dream of new downtowns and high-speed traffic arteries crisscrossing the cities. Virtually all of the powerful interests involved in urban America shared these widely held views about the links between expressways and “reconstruction” of the postwar city.7

The concrete jungle of elevated and depressed expressways that rammed through city neighborhoods in the 1950s and 1960s never came close to matching the artistic designs of the futuristic and technological city beautiful, as depicted for instance in Bel Geddes’s *Futurama* exhibit. Interestingly, the ever-practical Robert Moses dismissed Bel Geddes as a melodramatic dreamer: “The *Futurama* sold cars, but solved no highway problems and, if anything, made the task of the road builder tougher because the public was taught to expect magic.”8 Even the more practical, nuts-and-bolts approach of public builders like Moses and highway engineers like MacDonald eventually ran into tough public opposition in many cities. The problem was that the freeway visions of the highway technocrats and urban business and political elites never anticipated the widespread and negative popular reaction to the massive demolition of the physical city. However, much business and political leaders talked about a downtown revival, the destruction of densely populated residential neighborhoods to make way for freeways was a tough sell among residents in affected communities.

Experienced highway builders expected public opposition when they began knocking down neighborhoods. In a 1954 statement to the President’s Committee on a National Highway Program, generally known as the Clay Committee, Moses noted that urban expressway segments of the interstate system would be “the hardest to locate, the most difficult to clear, the most expensive to acquire and build, and the most controversial from the point of view of selfish and shortsighted opposition.”9 Moses was prophetic on this point. By the mid-1960s, citizen-led freeway revolts stalled urban interstate construction in a dozen or more major cities. Rather than negotiate or compromise on route location, most state and federal highway officials initially sought to forge ahead, the operative theory seemingly being to build expressways quickly before opposition coalesced and politicians caved in to an outraged public.

The freeway revolt first found expression in San Francisco in 1959, when the city’s board of supervisors withdrew support for any new freeway construction and then maintained that position into the 1960s. But trouble had been brewing there since 1955, when public outrage mounted over construction of the massive double-decked Embarcadero Freeway, a preinterstate freeway that ran along the city’s historic waterfront, cut off the city from the bayfront harbor, and enraged aesthetic sensibilities. San Francisco had a long planning and environmental tradition dating back to the early twentieth century, a tradition emphasized by freeway opponents. Plans to extend the Embarcadero and push additional freeways through the city’s Golden Gate Park, upscale residential neighborhoods, and some outlying business districts,
primarily for the benefit of central-city business interests and suburban commuters, stirred opposition at the neighborhood level. The multiple freeways planned by California state highway engineers and San Francisco city planners were sidetracked by a powerful coalition of neighborhood associations, by environmental groups, by the locally oriented board of supervisors, and by the eventual commitment of the city’s business and political elite to alternative forms of urban transit. Providing important support for the freeway fighters, the city’s major newspapers conducted a long campaign against the planned highway system. In an editorial endorsement of the local freeway revolt in 1959, for example, the San Francisco Examiner noted that the road opponents were “rebelling against freeways that barge along in an unyielding straight line, knocking down everything in their path, or that stride along as huge ugly elevateds or that slash great gashes through residential or business districts.” A supportive press was significant, but one additional feature, unique to California, contributed an essential element to the early success of San Francisco’s freeway opponents. Under state law, no street or road could be closed until approved by local government authorities. Because freeway building involved multiple road closures, this provision gave the San Francisco Board of Supervisors veto power over the entire freeway system for the city.10

San Francisco’s freeway fight pitted neighborhoods against CBD interests, as well as city residents against suburban commuters. It also brought environmental, aesthetic, historic preservation, and mass-transit issues into the debate. Housing destruction was only one of several concerns, and not the most important one, involved in the San Francisco’s freeway revolt. By contrast, this issue—especially black housing and black neighborhoods—assumed a dominant role in most big-city freeway controversies. In Washington, D.C., for instance, expressway issues became racialized in the mid-1960s, when a black militant group distributed flyers demanding “no more white highways through black bedrooms.” Concentrating on building the interstate system, highwaymen were slow to react to opposition movements such as the one in the nation’s capital. Since the 1930s, they had used traffic-flow studies and cost-ratio analyses to determine highway and then expressway location. Engineers expected individual citizen complaints over housing demolition and haggling with owners over property values but settled most of those matters in the course of acquiring right of way. When the first large-scale opposition to housing and neighborhood demolition appeared in the 1960s, road engineers were ill prepared. In response, state highway engineers and federal highway administrators at the BPR adopted a uniform, hard-nosed, technocratic stance: their job was building highways; housing and relocation problems were the responsibility of other agencies. From their perspective, housing destruction was a necessary social cost if new highways were to accommodate growing traffic demands. After the mid-1960s, however, it became increasingly more difficult for highway agencies to rigorously sustain this position as the reality of massive urban housing demolition began to hit the
public consciousness. Indeed, by the late 1960s, according to the U.S. House Committee on Public Works, federal highway construction was demolishing over 62,000 housing units annually—affecting possibly as many as 200,000 people each year. And as one urban planner noted, “Displacement will be particularly serious in the big city black ghettos where the supply of housing is inadequate and relocation beyond the confines of the ghetto is severely limited by racial segregation.”

HIGHWAY POLITICS IN THE SIXTIES

As the interstate highways pushed into the central cities in the 1960s, Congress responded—tentatively at first—to rising levels of citizen outrage. Several important legislative initiatives gradually altered the structural framework of interstate construction and imposed new requirements for state road builders. For example, the Federal Highway Act of 1962 required state road departments to work with local governments in developing “a cooperative, comprehensive, and continuing urban transportation planning process,” a process that considered both other transportation modes and local land-development patterns. These mandates had the potential to challenge the power of state highway engineers. So also did a second provision that for the first time required state highway departments to provide relocation assistance to displaced families and businesses. However, these new requirements for transportation planning and housing relocation did not take effect until July 1, 1965, thus undercutting the intent to protect urban communities from arbitrary highway decisions. Subsequent study also demonstrated that the BPR, which worked with the state road departments in building the interstate, developed a series of policies and procedures that for all practical purposes undermined and frustrated congressional intentions as expressed in the 1962 Highway Act.

A second initiative, creation of the cabinet-level U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) in 1966, had major implications for the interstate highway program. An administrative reorganization pushed by President Lyndon B. Johnson to rationalize and concentrate executive power, DOT legislation brought together a number of previously separate agencies involved in transportation. Formerly within the Department of Commerce, the BPR now became a subagency within the DOT’s Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). In past years, senior BPR officials such as Thomas MacDonald had largely exercised a free hand, but now, federal highway engineers were subjected to a level of administrative supervision and control they had never before experienced. A similar process was underway in the late 1960s and early 1970s at the state level, where state DOTs were replacing highway departments and where governors were taking control of state highway policy through appointment and funding powers.
Creation of the federal-level DOT provided the start of something new in federal highway policy—an effort to provide a balanced or “multimodal” transportation system. Moreover, the first DOT secretary, Alan S. Boyd, responded to the public clamor over the damaging impact of the interstates in urban neighborhoods. An attorney with varied experience in several state and federal transportation agencies, Boyd seemed willing to challenge basic BPR highway engineering strategy—that is, that transportation policy simply meant building more highways, pouring more concrete, and worrying about the consequences later. Speaking in California in 1967, Boyd must have shocked his audience of transportation experts by stating, “I think the so-called freeway revolts around the country have been a good thing.” He elaborated by urging more citizen involvement in highway decision making and advocating a balanced transportation system. In another speech in 1968, Boyd asserted that expressways must be “an integral part of the community, not a cement barrier or concrete river which threatens to inundate an urban area.” To reign in BPR highway engineers and administrators, Boyd appointed Lowell K. Bridwell, a former journalist and former deputy undersecretary for transportation in the Department of Commerce, as FHWA administrator. Like Boyd, Bridwell wanted to get the interstates completed, but he too displayed a new sensitivity on issues of expressway location. Boyd also directed DOT staffers to set up a new monthly reporting system on interstate “trouble spots” so that the agency could react before local controversies reached “crisis stage.” Responding to serious highway displacement issues, in 1968, Boyd’s DOT issued a new policy and procedure manual requiring two public hearings on interstate routes (only one had been required previously). In addition, Boyd took seriously provisions of DOT legislation that required him to assure that parks, historic districts, and environmentally sensitive areas were protected from road builders. Reflecting these concerns, as Zachery M. Schrag notes in his article in this issue, Boyd became deeply embroiled in the long-simmering battle in Washington, D.C., to halt the Three Sisters Bridge linking expressways across the Potomac River. Within a year of taking office at the DOT, Boyd had seemingly become the most effective national spokesman for the freeway revolt (see Figure 1).

Several other initiatives brought further structural change to federal highway policy. For example, the Federal Highway Act of 1968 required that states provide decent, safe, and sanitary relocation housing prior to property acquisition for interstate routes. Considerable federal funding was made available to states for moving expenses, housing relocation, and housing and rent supplements. The 1968 law, along with the subsequent Uniform Relocation Assistance Act of 1970, required greater attention to the troublesome relocation issue than ever before. Moreover, additional environmental legislation—the National Environmental Policy Act (1969) and the 1970 amendments to the Federal Clean Air Act—posed new mandates and regulations curbing highway builders and opened new avenues for litigating the freeway revolt.
that time, John A. Volpe had replaced Boyd as DOT secretary in the first Nixon administration. A building contractor and former public-works director and governor of Massachusetts, Volpe had been a “hard-line road builder” who "possessed a record of unfettered prohighwayism," critics said, but new legislation and congressional mandates forced him to consider environmental issues and alternative transit methods. Soon after taking office, Volpe confronted two highly publicized urban trouble spots on the interstate map, ending long-running disputes by canceling the New Orleans Riverfront Expressway in 1969 and approving a costly restudy of a contentious innerloop highway in Boston in 1971, effectively killing the project.¹⁷

By the end of the 1960s, interstate troubles had become political troubles, both locally and nationally. Freeway revolters took to the streets, noisily packed hearings and meetings, and forced highway issues onto the front pages of metropolitan newspapers. Congress became a major battleground, as conflicting interests faced off in House and Senate committee hearings. During the Johnson years, the appointment of a new breed of administrator in the transportation and highway agencies signaled greater receptivity to local concerns about housing demolition, relocation problems, environmental damage, and civil rights issues. The Nixon administration, too, proved receptive to community concerns about urban interstates, a responsiveness that eventually led to the Federal Highway Act of 1973 and other legislation in the mid-1970s that permitted states to cancel interstate sections and that opened the Highway...
Trust Fund for mass-transit alternatives.\textsuperscript{18} The freeway revolt had a major impact in raising these issues to the national level. Local freeway revolts had many common elements, but specific circumstances differed from city to city, as illustrated in the following case studies of expressway building in Miami and Baltimore.\textsuperscript{19}

**EXPRESSWAYS IN MIAMI**

Initial interstate planning for Miami called for a single north-south expressway that cut through the central city. Given South Florida’s unique geography, with the Atlantic Ocean to the east, the Everglades to the west, and no other major cities to the south, the Interstate-95 route simply terminated in downtown Miami. As in many other large cities, Miami city planners began mapping an urban expressway system even before the federal interstate highway legislation in 1956. A 1955 Miami expressway plan sliced into downtown Miami on the edge of residential neighborhoods, along an abandoned rail corridor, and through warehouse and “low-value” industrial areas. As the planners noted, these locations had been chosen “in order to preserve and help protect existing residential neighborhoods and promote an economically desirable use of land.” A year later, after Congress fully funded construction of the interstate system, Florida State Road Department officials assumed control of interstate planning in Miami. They hired outside highway consultants, who in short order scrapped the 1955 expressway plan and advanced a new route with substantial changes. Prepared by the engineering consulting firm of Wilbur Smith and Associates, which designed interstate plans for many states and cities, the new expressway plan shifted the downtown portion of the highway several blocks to the west, as the Wilbur Smith report noted, to provide “ample room for the future expansion of the central business district in a westerly direction.” It also anticipated an inner-city beltway with the eastern leg built on stilts along the Biscayne Bay waterfront, as well as a huge midtown interchange with a planned east-west expressway stretching from Miami Beach to the western reaches of Dade County (see Figure 2).\textsuperscript{20}

Implementing the Florida Road Department’s plan had dramatic consequences. Shifting the downtown expressway to the west now placed the route squarely through Miami’s large black residential district known as Overtown. The massive interchange, eventually taking up almost thirty square blocks, was slated to wipe out Overtown’s business district, the heart of black Miami, often considered by virtue of its many nightclubs and music venues to be “the Harlem of the South.” Thirty years of racially driven local politics lay behind the Wilbur Smith expressway plan.\textsuperscript{21}

Miami had a relatively small, compact CBD. It was hemmed in on the north and west by Overtown, which had a population of about 40,000 in 1960. Biscayne Bay to the east and the Miami River to the south precluded expansion
in those directions. As early as the 1930s, Miami civic and business leaders expressed concern about geographical constraints on downtown development. As New Deal programs emerged, Miami leaders seized upon the new public housing program as a potential solution. Federal funding permitted the Miami
Housing Authority to build the Liberty Square public housing project in an undeveloped area outside Miami’s municipal boundaries some five miles northwest of the CBD. Public discussions among politicians and planners at the time made it clear that Liberty Square was expected to become the nucleus of a new black community that would siphon off Overtown’s population. The ultimate goal, one leading Miami planner stated, was “a complete slum clearance effectively removing every Negro family from the present city limits.” Eventually, as a consequence of persisting patterns of racial zoning, the housing project did become the center of a sprawling new black district known as Liberty City, but the downtown dream of eliminating Overtown and making Miami white remained unfulfilled by the 1950s.22

The interstate highway program provided Miami’s civic elite with a new opportunity to achieve their racial goals and recapture central city space for business purposes. Florida consulting highway engineers worked with the Dade County Commission, the Miami City Commission, and the Miami-Dade Chamber of Commerce in developing the Miami expressway route. The Florida Road Department, the largest state agency, was heavily politicized, a patronage plum for the politicians. Wilbur E. Jones, the road department chairman, was a Miamian and close to the Miami civic elite. The final routing of Miami’s north-south expressway in 1956 emerged from these connections and from meetings between state highwaymen and county politicos.23

Building Interstate-95 into downtown Miami created devastating consequences for the densely settled, inner-city black community. Nevertheless, the expressway initially generated strong support from many interest groups in metropolitan Miami, who saw its completion as essential for the area’s continued economic progress. Businessmen in real estate and tourism found much to like in the new transportation plan, as did local politicians and newspapermen. Surprisingly, the Greater Miami Urban League, although concerned about eventual relocation problems, issued an official statement in 1957 supporting the expressway as “necessary for the continued progress of our city.” Similarly, the city’s black newspaper, Miami Times, worried about housing and relocation issues but also editorialized in 1957 that “with the expansion and progress of a city, there is little you can do about it.” Three years later, in discussing a local expressway bond issue, the paper once again emphasized the theme of progress: “We are living in a progressive state. We cannot afford to take a backward step.” Black spokesmen quietly acceded to the expressway plan, but both the Urban League and the Miami Times urged the establishment of a relocation agency to assist thousands of black Miamians in finding new homes. Florida road chairman Wilbur Jones appreciated black support and agreed that relocation plans deserved “serious study,” but he affirmed that this was not the responsibility of the state road department. In 1957, Miami’s civil rights movement had not yet developed, and black militancy would have to wait until the late 1960s. The planned Miami expressway route through
Overtown was widely known by the late 1950s, a decade before it was actually built, but this knowledge did not stimulate a black opposition movement at the time. However, Miami freeway opposition did stir in some corners of the white community. At a state road department public hearing in February 1957, former Miami mayor Abe Aronovitz spoke out against the expressway plan, portraying the elevated structure planned for downtown as “a monstrosity straddling the City of Miami” that would create new slums and destroy property values. In a subsequent telegram to Governor LeRoy Collins, Aronovitz complained that the public hearing was a farce and that state road engineers had no interest in responding to overwhelming citizen opposition to the expressway. Aronovitz kept up his campaign for several months, badgering Florida’s senators and congressmen and eventually meeting with Governor Collins in person, all to no avail. In addition, many Miamians wrote the governor, the Florida road department, and the BPR recommending changes in the route or complaining about the expressway coming through their property. One woman from North Miami, for example, borrowed Aronovitz’s imagery in suggesting that the expressway would “be a monstrosity which would arch like the back of a huge dinosaur over an area of the city, depreciating property and displacing homeowners.” More important, perhaps, “it would cause dissatisfaction and dissension between the races here, because it would necessarily displace many of the Negro race. They would have to move into the outer fringe of white sections, with the accompanying flaring up of hatreds.” In fact, displaced inner-city blacks did move to white transition areas, eventually transforming northwest Dade County into a massive second-ghetto community.

Initial opposition to the Miami expressway mostly died out within a few months of the February 1957 public hearing, with one exception. Elizabeth Virrick, a white, middle-class housing reformer launched a one-woman campaign against the Miami expressway system that lasted a decade. Virrick had been involved in an interracial movement for slum clearance and public housing since the late 1940s, fighting mostly against Miami slumlords, rental agents, black housing developers, and local politicians who failed to enforce housing codes. As the Miami expressway plans became public in 1956 and 1957, Virrick immediately recognized the devastating consequences for black Miami. Influenced by the San Francisco freeway revolt and the writings of Jane Jacobs, Virrick intensified her attack on the highway builders in the 1960s. In a series of hard-hitting articles in her monthly newsletter, *Ink: The Journal of Civic Affairs*, Virrick painted a bleak picture of the consequences of expressway building in Miami. She went on to ask, “Hasn’t anyone heard of San Francisco where the road program was stopped and replanned because an alert citizenry demanded it?” Virrick kept the expressway issue barely alive into the mid-1960s, when the final downtown leg through Overtown was...
completed. She was the closest thing Miami had to a freeway revolt, but a one-
woman crusade was not enough to stop the highwaymen in Miami. 26

The Miami expressway system was completed by 1968 as originally
designed by the highway engineers, minus the bay-shore leg of the inner-loop
beltway, dropped because of limited ramp space in the CBD. No public hear-
ings were held in the black community, a source of bitter complaint in later
years. Construction of the downtown expressway resulted in the virtual
destruction of Overtown as a viable community. The sweeping, four-level
downtown interchange alone destroyed the housing of about 10,000 people
(see Figure 3). Simultaneous urban renewal projects in the area added to hous-
ing demolitions. Most of those dislocated ended up in Dade County’s expand-
ing second ghetto in and north of Liberty City. Over time, CBD functions
expanded into the Overtown area: government office buildings, parking lots,
upscale apartments, shopping centers, and a sports arena. By the end of the
expressway-building era, little remained of Overtown to recall its days as a
thriving center of black community life. The traumatic events of the interstate
era have remained vividly etched in the historic memory of black Miami. 27

Comparing Miami to San Francisco helps explain the weakness of freeway
opposition in the Florida city. San Francisco planned multiple freeways cut-
ting through diverse neighborhoods, whereas Miami had a single expressway
that did relatively little damage except in the heavily populated black central
city. San Francisco had dozens of strong neighborhood organizations that built
cross-city and cross-class alliances. Miami had few community organizations,
most of them property owners’ associations primarily interested in keeping
blacks out of their neighborhoods. Although the city was undergoing demo-
ographic change with Jewish migration from the north and Cuban migration
from the south, Miami was still very southern in orientation in the 1950s and
erly 1960s, making interracial cooperation problematic. In the western city
on the bay, politicians on the board of supervisors, elected by district, repre-
sented their constituents and spoke against freeways. Simultaneously, many
influential journalists were attacking freeways in daily newspaper columns,
keeping a spotlight on the highway issue. In the eastern city on the bay, local
politicians, all elected at-large, and all the newspapers, even the black paper,
supported the expressway. By virtue of a quirk in California law, the San Fran-
cisco Board of Supervisors had a veto over expressway building, but in Miami,
the city commission and the county commission had no such power; if they
did, it is unlikely they would have used it to stop the interstate. No citizen law-
suits challenged the highway builders in Miami. In addition, the entire Miami
expressway system was either completed or under construction by 1965, when
the first, very minimal federal curbs on interstate routing took effect. Thus,
highwaymen in Miami never faced the requirements for community planning,
relocation assistance, or environmental sensitivity, all of which were initiated
by Congress in the mid-1960s and after. Finally, the Miami expressway system
was virtually completed by the time Alan Boyd took the reins of the DOT in Washington. In the Miami case, the timing of highway construction, the structure of local political power, and a southern cultural pattern of white domination muted expressway opposition and shaped the outcome.
HIGHWAY POLITICS IN BALTIMORE

Building Interstate-95 into downtown Miami was simple and uncomplicated, compared to what happened in Baltimore. The Baltimore expressway story is much more complex and drawn out, with many different plans and players, a more expansive freeway system, many more levels of review, much more vocal and organized citizen opposition, and ultimately, a much different outcome. Baltimore’s leaders and citizens wrestled with no less than twelve different expressway plans between 1942 and the 1970s. Downtown business leaders began thinking about the need for expressways in the early 1940s. One of the largest cities in the nation at the time, Baltimore had high levels of through traffic, as well as significant local traffic generated by its own downtown, industrial, rail, and port activities. In 1942, engineers commissioned by the Baltimore City Planning Commission proposed two major east-west expressways. One route traversed the city just north of the CBD along the so-called Franklin-Mulberry corridor linking U.S. 1, the main highway between Washington and New York, with U.S. 40 entering Baltimore from the west. The second route forecast a bypass south of the Inner Harbor for through traffic and involved construction of a bay bridge or harbor tunnel. In 1943, the Baltimore Association of Commerce proposed a still more ambitious freeway plan to serve anticipated traffic needs and by which the CBD might be “rescued and redeemed.” This plan projected an east-west freeway connecting with three north-south freeways. The business group noted approvingly that “a great many of the freeways would pass through blighted areas” or sections “approaching blighted conditions.” In 1944, concerned about the cost of such an elaborate freeway network, the city planning commission recommended only the east-west expressway, prompting the mayor to appoint a special traffic committee to restudy the issue.

The traffic committee hired the peripatetic Robert Moses, a dominant national voice on urban expressways at the time. The 1944 Moses report minimized the amount of through traffic and promoted the Franklin-Mulberry east-west (or midcity) expressway, primarily to serve downtown commuters. The Moses plan projected the displacement of some 19,000 people in the central city, mostly slums, Moses said, and “the more of them that are wiped out the healthier Baltimore will be in the long run.” The Moses plan drew widespread opposition, primarily from people in the targeted neighborhoods but also from respected Baltimoreans; journalist H. L. Mencken, for instance, labeled the Moses plan “a completely idiotic undertaking.” Some on the mayoral committee challenged the Moses plan on several grounds. The New Yorker’s report, one member of the Harbor Crossing-Freeway Committee suggested, was nothing more than a “sales brochure” that purposely obscured the true cost of the highway, glossed over serious relocation problems, and drew “illusory” conclusions about the positive impact of the freeway on nearby neighborhoods. The Moses plan, committee member Herbert M. Brune Jr. wrote,
"poses a mountain of human misery." On the other hand, the Downtown Committee, representing Baltimore's business elite, seemed predisposed toward the midcity expressway idea because it would "lend a powerful force toward restraining decentralization and rehabilitating blighted areas." The Franklin-Mulberry highway corridor bisected one of Baltimore's black ghetto neighborhoods. Like their counterparts throughout urban America, business and political leaders in Baltimore believed that expressways would boost sales and property values, rescuing the CBD from the twin evils of blight and decentralization.  

Reflecting disagreements among Baltimore's civic elite, as well as concerns about the anticipated $40 to $50 million cost, little was done at the time to implement the Moses expressway plan. Over the next twenty years, planners and highway engineers developed variations and expansions of the expressway concepts of the 1940s. In the mid-1950s, the city's Department of Public Works began building a less controversial north-south city expressway along the Jones Falls corridor, with the first leg into the city from the northern suburbs completed in 1960. The northern leg of the Jones Falls Expressway ran through the eastern edge of Druid Hill Park, a historic Olmsted-like wilderness park laid out in the late nineteenth century, but only later did freeway opponents recognize the aesthetic and environmental damage to the park. Interstate highway legislation in 1956 prompted still more ambitious highway planning in Baltimore, as did the completion of the Baltimore outer beltway (Interstate-695), a Baltimore County project with the state roads commission. Powerful downtown business groups such as the Greater Baltimore Committee pushed urban redevelopment schemes to revitalize the city center, now endangered by shopping malls and suburban growth along the outer beltway. A regional planning agency worked on one highway plan, the Baltimore Department of Planning worked on another, and the state roads commission hired Wilbur Smith and Associates to prepare still another Baltimore transportation and highway study (see Figure 4). In 1961, overcoming an entrenched pattern of factious local politics, the city's business, political, and engineering elite coalesced around an extensive new expressway plan—called the 10-D plan.

Authors of the 10-D plan, engineers from three Baltimore firms, consolidated several highway schemes into an ambitious expressway system: a cross-town, east-west expressway running just south of the CBD and through the white, working-class waterfront community of Fells Point; a "connector" to the western suburbs traversing the Franklin-Mulberry corridor and cutting through the black, middle-class Rosemont section; an extension of the Jones Falls Expressway into the city center; and a bypass expressway south of the Inner Harbor carrying interstate through traffic. These plans anticipated a massive downtown interchange and a colossal fourteen-lane Inner Harbor bridge. Rosemont, Fells Point, and other stable, historic neighborhoods were seen as expendable. The 10-D plan would have demolished over 4,000 dwellings and
many small businesses and bisected urban renewal areas. Like Robert Moses, the 10-D highway engineers favored expressways that cleared out “blighted” housing.31

Baltimore’s civic elite did not anticipate the extent of community opposition to 10-D. At public hearings on different sections of the system, business and political leaders spoke in support of expressways, but large crowds turned out to challenge, heckle, and shout down highway advocates. In 1962, some 1,300 persons showed up at a public hearing on the 10-D east-west expressway, angry that the engineers and planners had declared their neighborhoods expendable slums. In 1965, the Baltimore Sun reported on another large public meeting held by the city council: “Last night’s first hearing on an East-West expressway bill ended in a fashion similar to the city’s entire expressway program—a shambles.” In the early going, debate raged over the exact location of expressways, but by the mid-1960s, support seemed to be growing in the neighborhoods for no roads at all.32
Complicating and slowing progress on Baltimore’s expressway system were two unique provisions of the city’s home-rule charter. First, the city council possessed sole authority to initiate condemnation proceedings for public works or highway projects. Second, the city’s planning commission had power to reject state highway plans that did not conform to the city’s master plan, although the mayor could overrule the planning commission. These were slight variations from the San Francisco situation, whereas in most cities the state highway departments controlled the condemnation and land-acquisition process and could move more quickly toward construction without worrying too much about public sentiment. Essentially, the Baltimore City Council had a veto over any state highway plans within the city boundaries. Complicating matters still further, the council initiated separate condemnation ordinances for small route segments, neighborhood by neighborhood, rather than voting on the entire expressway system at one time. Elected by district, Baltimore’s city council members generally responded to neighborhood concerns, leading to numerous condemnation hearings, delays, and postponements as councilmen tested the extent of popular outrage. As Thomas D’Alesandro, Baltimore’s mayor during that period, recalled in a 1974 interview, “every condemnation ordinance was a real bloodbath.” Nevertheless, by 1967, most of the necessary condemnations for the 10-D system had been completed. By that time, however, officials of the BPR, fed up with delays created by mixing “city hall politics” with highway building, refused to deal any longer with the city on interstate issues. The BPR was concerned about Baltimore’s political infighting, as well as about the looming 1972 cutoff date for federal interstate highway funding. Consequently, the BPR orchestrated the creation of a new interstate administrative unit, the Maryland road commission’s Baltimore Interstate Division, described by some freeway fighters as “a unique bureaucratic animal.” Largely funded by the BPR, the new state road agency sought to work out disputes between city and state and to coordinate the engineering and construction of the city’s interstates. The city still retained a veto over specific interstate routes, but the BPR controlled highway funding allocations, a major bargaining chip in Baltimore’s complicated highway politics. Yet ten years after passage of the 1956 federal highway legislation, concrete had yet to be poured for any of Baltimore’s interstates.

A deep undercurrent of discontent shaped public attitudes toward Baltimore’s 10-D system by the mid-1960s. Responding to these concerns, as well as to the highway standoff between city and state, in 1966, architects in the Baltimore chapter of the American Institute of Architects took the lead in arguing for more aesthetic highways that blended with the natural environment and preserved the texture of the physical city. The architects’ initiative led to state and federal approval of an interstate restudy by an “urban design concept team” composed of experts from several disciplines and headed by Nathaniel A. Owings, founding partner of the architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. Owings accepted the challenge because, as he later wrote,
“the question of how to lace tubes of traffic through vital parts without unduly disturbing the living organism of the city is symptomatic of a national problem and offers a pilot-study opportunity that can be available as an example for the whole country.” The DOT agreed to pay 90 percent of the cost of a two-year restudy of Baltimore’s expressways, with the proviso that the team work within the already designated 10-D highway corridors. “Joint development” of expressway corridors for housing, schools, parks, playgrounds, business uses, and the like became an important part of the design team’s mission. The goal of the design team, all the principals agreed at the beginning, was to link interstates 95, 83, and 70 in downtown Baltimore but to do so in an aesthetic fashion that did not destroy the urban fabric.34

Given the changing circumstances of the late 1960s, it was an impossible task. Freeway critics jumped on the design team as “a desperation move by a city administration faced with citizen revolt and a stern dictum from Washington . . . to do something about it.” James D. Dilts, a reporter who followed the expressway story for the Baltimore Sun, scoffed at the design team’s underlying concept: “‘Blending’ a six or eight-lane highway into the fabric of Baltimore is about as promising an assignment as ‘blending’ a buzz saw into a Persian rug.” Infighting continued over methods and goals, pitting highway builders against politicians, local engineers against outside consultants, engineers against architects, engineers against sociologists, and ultimately, design team members against Baltimore’s neighborhoods groups. The design team inherited the 10-D expressway plan but within a year began to doubt its efficacy, especially after team representatives began meeting with neighborhood groups. After considering several alternatives, and with the support of FHWA’s Bridwell, the design team eventually scrapped the east-west expressway through the southern edge of the CBD and Fells Point and recommended shifting Interstate-95 south of the Inner Harbor, where it ran through other historic neighborhoods. This decision also eliminated both the massive downtown interchange on the waterfront and the huge Inner Harbor bridge. Other elements of the old plan remained in modified form, including the north-south I-83 expressway (originally the Jones Falls Expressway) that would now terminate in the CDB without connecting to I-95. The I-70 route from the west linking with I-95 also remained. This route still cut through western parks but swung slightly to the south to avoid the black Rosemont community, already in decline because of earlier condemnations. Under this new expressway design, the Franklin-Mulberry corridor, more than a mile and a half of which had already been leveled, was recommended as a spur expressway into midcity Baltimore. Labeled the 3-A expressway system, the entire design-team plan eventually was endorsed by the mayor and city council, as well as state and federal highway officials, all of whom wanted to get some expressways—any expressways—built in Baltimore. But the 3-A plan, like the earlier 10-D plan, faced tough opposition in the neighborhoods, now fully aroused by the perceived continued arrogance and insensitivity of the highway engineers,
planners, and politicians who wanted downtown expressways whatever the human and social cost. The *Baltimore Sun*, however, put a positive spin on the city’s highway stalemate: “If expressway planning is a mess in Baltimore, at least the city has been spared the greater mess of those other cities which already have built their expressways.”

**BALTIMORE’S FREEWAY REVOLT**

By the time the urban design team was established in 1966, Baltimore had experienced over twenty years of community opposition to new highways. These expressions of community outrage tended to be sporadic and poorly organized. They crystallized around city council condemnation proceedings or public hearings on highway routes, but interest dropped off once decisions had been made and condemnation ordinances enacted. Many small neighborhood groups participated in these early confrontations, but each was interested in its own small piece of urban turf. However, in 1966, the appearance of the Relocation Action Movement (RAM) marked the beginning of a coordinated and more focused freeway revolt in Baltimore, and several similar neighborhood coalitions soon joined the battle to Stop the Road (see Figure 5).

In the late 1960s and the early 1970s, Baltimore’s freeway fighters took on the so-called highway hawks. Organized in November 1966, RAM represented a coalition of middle-class black activists from Rosemont and militant working-class blacks in the Franklin-Mulberry corridor. Given patterns of previous highway and urban-renewal projects, blacks in Baltimore had good reason to be concerned about the interstates: between 1951 and 1964, about 90 percent of all housing displacements took place in Baltimore’s low-income black neighborhoods. The RAM coalition in the mid-1960s reflected outrage over the destruction of black neighborhoods to satisfy the needs of suburban commuters. “For too long, the history of Urban Renewal and Highway Clearance has been marked by repeated removal of black citizens,” one RAM
position statement asserted. “We have been asked to make sacrifice after sacrifice in the name of progress, and when that progress has been achieved we find it marked ‘White Only.’” Black homeowners in Rosemont challenged the “market value” relocation payments they received from the state highway department. Relocation assistance to black renters in the Franklin-Mulberry corridor, required under the Highway Act of 1962, remained minimal to nonexistent. Facing the removal of 10,000 blacks who lived in the path of the east-west expressway, RAM activists challenged highway engineers who viewed people “as just another obstacle, like a hill to be leveled or a valley to be bridged.”

With the assistance of Stuart Wechsler, a white civil rights activist with the Baltimore Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) who had contacts in Washington, RAM representatives met with Alan Boyd and Lowell Bridwell of the DOT. They received guarantees of “replacement value” for condemned homes in Rosemont and promises of more substantial relocation assistance for renters in other areas, including moving expenses and rent supplements to cover higher-cost apartments. Subsequently, in September 1968, design-team sociologists reported that any expressway development through Rosemont would drive the neighborhood into precipitous decline. In October 1968, Bridwell was informed by Richard R. Reed, his special assistant monitoring the Baltimore situation, that finding sufficient replacement housing in “racial zones” was problematic and that “the city is just not prepared for massive relocation.” A week later, the Baltimore Sun reported that Bridwell “was not likely to look with favor on any route that slashed through the Negro neighborhood of Rosemont in Northwest Baltimore.” One of the consequences of Baltimore’s political fractiousness and the consequent late start in pouring interstate concrete was that highway builders ran up against the militant phase of the civil rights movement. As urban geographer Sherry Olson has noted about the Baltimore freeway battle, “There had already been many uproarious highway hearings, exposes, and confrontations, but the new resistance to black removal was a more serious threat because it resonated with nationwide vibrations.” Ghetto rioting in Baltimore in 1968 following Martin Luther King’s assassination intensified these issues dramatically.

By the late 1960s, highway opponents in Baltimore established several additional groups aimed at stopping expressway construction. The Southeast Council Against the Road (SCAR) was one such group. Formed by neighborhood activists in 1969, SCAR challenged the design team’s proposal to shift the downtown expressway to the south side of the Inner Harbor, where it traversed working-class ethnic neighborhoods. Thomas M. Fiorello, a Catholic priest who played a leading role in SCAR, criticized the urban design team as the “Concrete Team,” whose “concrete cancer will invade residential neighborhoods all over the city.” Similarly, the Southwest Baltimore Citizens Planning Council, which served as a federation of neighborhood groups, fought the 3-A expressway route, hoping to prevent panic selling before condemnation
proceedings undermined housing values. In the early 1970s, another antiexpressway umbrella group emerged in the area, the South-West Association of Community Organizations (SWACO). These South Baltimore organizations recognized that expressways would have a devastating impact not just on the highway corridors but on the entire communities through which they passed. Members of RAM, SCAR, SWACO, and other groups vigorously opposed the incursions of the highway builders and the highway politicians.

Beginning in the late 1960s, Movement Against Destruction (MAD) became the most influential antifreeway voice in Baltimore. Founded in 1968 as a biracial coalition of thirty-five neighborhood groups, MAD engaged the energies of freeway fighters from across the city who persisted well into the late 1970s in a battle to prevent Baltimore from becoming a “motorized wasteland.” CORE activist Stuart Wechsler served as MAD’s first president, but the organization had a dedicated leadership group that attended weekly meetings for many years. One of the freeway activists involved with MAD was Barbara Mikulski, a social worker from an east-side ethnic community who was elected to the Baltimore city council in 1971 on an antiexpressway platform and eventually became a U.S. senator from Maryland.

At first, MAD leaders focused on the proposed east-west expressway, which cut through many distinct neighborhoods, but the coalition soon began challenging the need for any expressways inside the Baltimore beltway. A MAD position statement in 1968 posed the issue: “There is a growing realization that expressways are being built in cities not for the sake of the people who live there, but for the sake of cement, tire, oil, automobile, and other private interests.” Over several years, MAD activists opposed the design team’s 3-A highway plan, packed public hearings, pushed mass transit, badgered officials with letters and position statements, conducted public information campaigns, met with state and federal highway officials, served as a watchdog over the Baltimore city council, and generally challenged the highway advocates at every turn. By necessity, MAD activists became experts on highway matters, refuted official highway statistics and data with hard evidence of their own, and confronted and confused highway engineers and local politicians with expert rebuttals at public hearings and council meetings. As MAD activist Carol Tyson noted in the early 1970s, at every opportunity, “MAD now counter-attacks.”

MAD leaders also connected with freeway fighters in other cities. Minutes of MAD meetings reveal discussions of expressway battles in Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and suburban Virginia. Washington freeway fighters from the Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis (ECTC) attended some MAD meetings to discuss antihighway strategy. MAD members filled buses and traveled to Washington to picket and demonstrate with ECTC. Indeed, by the early 1970s, the freeway revolt had developed a national organizational structure, as highway and environmental activists around the nation networked and exchanged information. This trend was reflected in the creation
of such groups as the National Coalition on the Transportation Crisis, which held antifreeway conferences and legal-action workshops in Washington. The national environmental movement was deeply involved in this battle as well. In 1971, the environmental lobby group Environmental Action spun off the Highway Action Coalition (HAC) to stop freeway construction, combat suburban sprawl, and promote rail mass transit. HAC put out its own newsletter, *The Concrete Opposition*, and initiated litigation using federal environmental requirements “as its chief weapon” in the courts. “Bulldozer Blocking,” a regular column in *The Concrete Opposition*, kept readers informed about the latest developments in the national freeway revolt. Helen Leavitt, author of a popular antifreeway book, *Superhighway-Superhoax* (1970), followed up the book’s success by publishing a monthly newsletter, *Rational Transportation*, that attacked highway building and advocated mass transit. By 1970, Baltimore groups such as RAM and MAD had become part of a nationwide network of freeway fighters that shared information and legal strategies.

The emergence of a national antifreeway network coincided with shifting legislative and legal circumstances in Washington. During the early and mid-1960s, even after the creation of the DOT, highway builders in Baltimore seemed to have the upper hand. Downtown businessmen, suburban commuters, the engineering community, and most of the city’s politicians and planners supported some form of expressway system. Between 1966 and 1970, however, new federal environmental legislation, new state mandates on housing relocation, and new administrative procedures dramatically altered the highway-building environment. Taken together, these laws, mandates, and regulations posed new hurdles for the highway advocates and highway builders, created administrative confusion and delay at the local level, provided new access to information for citizen groups, and opened new opportunities for litigating the freeway revolt.

The administrative structure of road building had changed dramatically by 1970, but it still remained for local activists to challenge planned highway outcomes. Freeway opponents in Baltimore seized upon these new opportunities. MAD and several of its constituent organizations brought the highway battle into the courts. In 1972, for instance, attorneys for the Society for the Preservation of Fells Point, Montgomery Street, and Federal Hill, representing three historic districts, won an injunction against highway construction in Fells Point. Another group, Volunteers Opposing Leakin Park Expressway Inc. (with the playful acronym VOLPE) sought to protect the largest urban park in the United States from the east-west expressway. In 1972, VOLPE and the local chapter of the Sierra Club successfully challenged the highway builders both on the legality of a 1962 hearing and on environmental grounds. One resulting court case carried the title *VOLPE v. Volpe*, a neat bit of ridicule on the part of the freeway fighters. The Better Air Coalition initiated litigation to protect Baltimore’s air quality. The Locust Point Civic Association went to court to protect historic Fort McHenry on the southern shore of the Inner
Harbor from expressway bridges and tunnels. MAD filed a number of lawsuits challenging the entire Baltimore expressway system on both procedural and environmental grounds. Leaders of Baltimore’s freeway revolt, in short, came to rely on antihighway litigation in the 1970s, court action made possible by changing federal policy on a range of issues affecting highway construction in the cities.43

Baltimore’s interstate history provides a fascinating case study of how not to build expressways. The contrast with Miami is striking. Elite business and political interest groups did not come together around a single expressway plan until long after passage of the federal interstate legislation in 1956. The engineering community was also divided about the proper routing of the highways. Political infighting in Baltimore, and between city and state, muddied the waters for years. The city council’s control over highways through its condemnation powers actually complicated expressway planning, eventually providing an opening for expressway opponents pushing for community control. Mostly ambivalent on expressway plans, the Baltimore Sun nevertheless provided balanced reporting, thus publicizing the antihighway arguments of MAD and other groups.44

Baltimore’s major expressway plans—10-D and 3-A—both anticipated a complex highway system that bisected numerous neighborhoods, black and white, and demolished thousands of homes. In response, rising militancy among highway opponents in the late 1960s set the stage for a true freeway revolt in Baltimore, led by MAD. The cross-class and multiracial character of MAD took the organization beyond the parochial self-interest of smaller neighborhood groups and conveyed the sense that it spoke for the people against the interests. The emergence of MAD, RAM, SCAR, SWACO, VOLPE, and other antihighway organizations also coincided with major changes in federal highway policy and personnel. Miami’s expressway system was virtually completed by the time the DOT was created and new federal guidelines on community planning, relocation housing, park protection, and environmental sensitivity became effective. However, in Baltimore, new laws, new rules, and new procedures made it possible for Baltimore’s freeway fighters to challenge, litigate, delay, and ultimately defeat Baltimore’s “road gang” on many interstate routes. Once again, timing and the shifting currents of policy, power, and local culture determined the outcome of a freeway battle. In Baltimore, the result was a truncated expressway system and the preservation of many, but not all, targeted neighborhoods. Only the Jones Falls Expressway (Interstate-83) penetrated the central city from the north, while Interstate-95 essentially became a bypass route south of the city. Ultimately, a two-mile freeway was built along the already cleared Franklin-Mulberry corridor (see Figure 6). It emptied onto city streets at both ends and never became part of the interstate system, but it sent an inner-city black community into rapid decline and still serves as a reminder of the huge social costs of the interstate era. (In the late 1990s, Baltimore politicians began discussing the idea of demolishing
the “highway to nowhere,” but at this writing, it remains in place.) The long-debated east-west expressway through western parks, Rosemont, Fells Point, and the CBD never got off the drawing boards, although some targeted communities such as Rosemont suffered decline and disinvestment after city council condemnations. The downtown expressway along the waterfront, with its massive interchange and harbor bridge, was never built either, frustrating the plans of the city’s civic and business elite, but its absence did not prevent the remarkable later redevelopment of Baltimore’s Inner Harbor.35

CONCLUSION

The national freeway revolt, then, took place within the context of a changing legislative and administrative environment. In the early years of the interstate highway engineers reigned supreme. They possessed the professional expertise, controlled access to massive federal highway funding, and had support from local power elites. San Francisco was an exception, but elsewhere, when state road engineers and local politicians moved quickly after 1956, they faced few challenges to urban expressways. This was especially true in southern cities, including Miami, where state road engineers had built up a powerful political base over time through patronage and contracting. In other cities, such as Baltimore, where expressway construction was delayed into the late
1960s, outcomes differed dramatically. By this time, as well, the countercultural energy of the 1960s began to change the highway-building climate. As one writer noted at the time, “The highway revolt is against the tyranny of the machine—the highway bulldozer and the political machine that drives it. Being helpless before the highway lobby is just one form of the powerlessness that Americans increasingly resent.” As MAD president Carolyn Tyson put it at a 1972 expressway hearing, Baltimore citizens became “road fighters” out of “a deep sense of futility that comes from powerlessness in governmental process[es] that bear directly on our lives.” Citizen action against urban highway building—the effort to protect threatened homes and neighborhoods—represented an increasingly common response to that sense of powerlessness. Trapped in inner-city ghettos, African Americans especially felt targeted by highways that destroyed their homes, split their communities, and forced their removal to emerging second ghettos. In Baltimore and other cities facing the bulldozer, the wrecking ball, and the concrete trucks, the sixties slogan “power to the people” often meant stopping “The Road.” Where freeway opponents built interracial and cross-class coalitions, as they did in Baltimore, their chances of delaying or defeating the highwaymen improved markedly. However, it is important not to romanticize the freeway fighters. They were successful only to the extent that they used the tools provided by new legislative mandates to challenge, confront, delay, and litigate against the road builders. In an ironic turn, the same federal government that financed interstate construction had also legitimated the activities of freeway opponents. Despite all the talk among road engineers about simply serving traffic needs, in the highway field, politics was always in the driver’s seat.\(^\text{46}\)

**NOTES**


19. This article is part of a larger study of the freeway revolt. Miami and Baltimore have been selected here for case studies because of their contrasting outcomes and because research on those cities is more advanced than on others.


