

Public Roads Official Outlines Freeway Development Plan

CHICAGO—A concept to help congested and growing urban areas meet some of their needs through the joint development of freeways and other community facilities was presented last week before the American Public Works Congress by an official of the Department of Commerce's Bureau of Public Roads.

Speaking at a session devoted to Urban Transportation Problems and Prospects, Francis C. Turner, chief engineer of the Bureau, described joint development as a means of getting maximum use of that part of scarce urban land which must be devoted to highway transportation.

The Objective

He said the objective is to stimulate local programs through which cities can meet some of their needs for better housing, parks, playgrounds, open spaces, and other improvements, and for business and commercial redevelopment, by combining their development with planned freeway construction.

Mr. Turner said the joint development concept deals directly with the critical problems of urban areas—the problems of money, space, and time.

Through joint development, he said, cities can provide the facilities they most urgently need in less space and with less total cost, and they can begin doing it now as a part of planned freeway construction.

He pointed out that with some 2,500 miles of urban freeways still to be built under the Interstate highway program alone there is ample opportunity to apply the concept in the immediate future.

Land Acquisition

Mr. Turner explained that the economics of land acquisition and use provide the key to the concept, because in heavily built-up areas the land required for multiple uses can be acquired for little more than the cost of land for freeway use alone.

Normally, he said, urban freeways are planned and designed to use a minimum right-of-way, to minimize the displacement of people and businesses, and any other possible community disruption. In acquiring such land, however, highway departments often have to pay considerable amounts to affected property owners for severance damages; that is, payments for decreased value to remaining property because of the sale of part of the property for the freeway.

Mr. Turner said preliminary studies by the Bureau of Public Roads show that in some urban situations the cost of acquiring whole blocks or squares of property would be about the same or only slightly higher than the cost of acquiring freeway rights-of-way including severance damage payments.

In this situation, he said, a city, through a public corporation or agency, could acquire entire blocks or even wider areas on the route of a planned freeway, sell to the highway department the space needed for the freeway, and have available for other development valuable land at a fraction of the cost of acquiring it alone.

A number of Federal, State and local programs are available that might be used to help liquidate costs, he said, and some of the land could be used for private developments to continue tax-paying uses.

He said that out of whole blocks acquired for joint development, the highway department would need only

a permanent three-dimensional easement, or "air tunnel," for the freeway, which it could buy for an amount equal to its appropriate share of the right-of-way costs, thus supporting the joint development concept without increase in its planned highway expenditure.

The considerable remaining space, alongside, over and under the freeway—which might be elevated, depressed, or at ground level—could be developed to meet any mixture of the city's needs, Mr. Turner said.

An obvious use, he said, would be replacement housing. He said the typical tenement housing of blighted areas could be replaced under a joint development program with an equal

number of comparable-cost housing units on one-third the land area with modern high-rise air-conditioned buildings, possibly making use of air space over the freeway.

The remaining two out of three blocks, he added, would be available for other developments—parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, schools or public buildings, parking, additional housing, private buildings, or stores which could be located under an elevated freeway.

Mr. Turner said freeway construction could be coordinated with other developments so that new replacement housing and buildings would be available for those displaced as construction progressed.

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