

## **CHAPTER 6 The Battle of the Route 2 Extension**

### **STEP TWO REPORT on the Inner Belt**

**by Stephen H. Kaiser, PhD**

The social conflict triggered by the ultimately unsuccessful Inner Belt plan began slowly with the issuance of the 1948 highway master plan. It reached an early peak with a raucous public hearing in 1960, when Mass DPW made the first state presentation of the Brookline-Elm Street roadway alignment. Whatever interaction there was between the state and its citizens began with a series of internalized official decisions, followed by responses from citizens and their political representatives. Participation was little more than just that.

Over the years, residents talked among themselves, but their first face-to-face confrontation with the highway advocates came at that 1960 hearing. Subsequently, citizens called meetings, passed resolutions, and organized protest rallies. Their elected representatives submitted bills to the legislature and offered both general critiques of the state's road plan. Public reaction tended to be emotional and negative.

In those early years, the state highway department presented only the master plans of 1948 and 1962, with public information usually kept to a minimum. At that time, slide shows and PowerPoint presentations were unheard of.

By contrast, Route 2 generated much less opposition at public meetings – until 1969. Design work continued into the early 1960s with little certainty as to road alignment. Primary attention focused on the Inner Belt and the citizen opponents who organized against it. Route 2 had no such glorious history of citizen organizing and emotional speeches at hearings. Indeed, the record shows the objections to Route 2 coming late, with key criticism coming from politicians, lawyers, and businessmen.

Save Our City was the Cambridgeport Group associated with grass roots organizing against the Inner Belt. There appears to have been no such group in North Cambridge.

## TRADITIONS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

The organization known today as the Federal Highway Administration began life as the Bureau of Public Roads in the Department of Agriculture at the turn of the century. Only as the decades passed were provincial rules of thumb displaced by professional expertise of engineers. The new traditions tended to be somewhat bureaucratic, even militaristic, in the sense that engineers received their orders and followed them, with no public participation. Citizens could attend the required public hearings for a road, but suggestions normally were not received positively, and unhappiness with road plans usually required intervention by someone with considerable political power.

It is strange to think that 1960s highway planners made up their own minds what they want to build and where -- sometimes in combination with public officials, but never by referendum. There was no advertising department to sell a road plan to the neighborhoods most likely to be affected. Acceptance was a matter for Congress and top government officials alone. Governors who risked opposing one highway program could find their total highway subsidies trimmed considerably.

Prior to 1969 the Federal Highway Administration rarely made a public appearance. They were a mighty force with little inclination to show its face in public. They came across as unapproachable and non-communicative. Federal officials seemed to leave no evidential trail, no visual record of their dominating influence on public policy. They were quite unlike the wizard of Oz -- a false front, a sham. They had power and they used it, and stayed away from parades. That low profile would change in January 1969, with the focus on the Route 2 Extension in Cambridge and Somerville.

Federal Highway reached its peak of fundamental influence and public awareness due to its funding ninety-percent of the cost of the interstate expressways, when an expanding post-war nation seemed to want more cars and more roads. These preferences were to shift dramatically over a period of only a decade. Public opinion veered away from acceptance of government road plans and ended up as a libertarian rejection of new roads as an undue exercise of government power.

The Route 2 Extension proposals during the early months of 1969 were most unusual because federal officials came out openly and aggressively. This move may have been a first in-the-nation entrance into the public realm, and certainly the first in

Massachusetts memory. The reason for this dramatic change was a loss of support from the Governor's office and also from the State Department of Public Works. Top highway advocates needed a credible force to move the approval process forward for Route 2 and to disarm the opposition at the local and state levels. It was indeed steamroller time, but with an increasing sense of desperation.

In theory, Federal highway officials were often presumed to have little influence on roadbuilding, other than to be a funding pass-through. In reality, Federal Highway realized that money was power, and their views could influence the way roads were planned and built. The agency dictated adherence to "AASHTO standards" and did so in a manner whereby few state engineers dared show independent judgement. When Federal Highway spoke, their words were received as dictates from the Gods, and there was no room for dissent.<sup>1</sup> Criticism from local and state officials often was unwelcome. Having a federal engineer change his mind was indeed a rare event.

Since late 1966, Cambridge had been stepping up the militancy of its challenges to the Inner Belt. The city had worked cooperatively with Secretary of Transportation Alan Boyd and Federal Highway Administrator Lowell Bridwell – both critical of urban roadway construction. Within the Federal Housing and Urban Development office, they had a willing ally in Deputy Housing and Urban Development Secretary Robert Wood, a former MIT Political Science Professor (and father of current New Hampshire Senator Maggie Wood Hassan). Cambridge also had strong advocates in Congress : Tip O'Neill, Senator Ted Kennedy and Senator Ed Brooke.

On January 25, 1969 highway critics received an encouraging response from Governor Francis Sargent who announced to a Boston Common protest rally that highways should no longer be designed from a traditionally narrow and insensitive perspective. A new outlook was needed. The prospects seemed more favorable for those critics, but the battle still was far from over.

A different smell in the air had been created in early January by the incoming Nixon Administration. Boyd, Bridwell and Wood had departed, to be replaced by John Volpe as Secretary of Transportation and Frank Turner as Federal Highway Administrator. Former auto magnate George Romney became Secretary of HUD. The times appeared highly favorable to the roadbuilders, who otherwise were under siege.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "Federal Highway" is routinely used by Massachusetts state highway engineers, more from a sense of overriding authority than a form of agreement and respect. "Federal Highway" is superior in the chain of command.

During the Johnson administration, the Great Society and civil rights experience was reflected in deeper sympathy for urban neighborhoods. In 1965 state DPW leaders sought to reduce citizen opposition to the Inner Belt by presenting a new proposal with the Inner Belt below grade. Their report admitted that elevated highways have a blighting effect.<sup>2</sup> Federal Highway Administrator Lowell Bridwell intervened to seek a restudy of the need for the Inner Belt, commonly referred to as Task A.

With the new Nixon Administration, highway officials saw a possible return to more favorable times. Change did not come immediately. The Inner Belt was still tied up in restudies. Because of his earlier involvement with Boston road plans, new Transportation Secretary John Volpe had recused himself and promised to remain neutral. He would let the government process work things out.

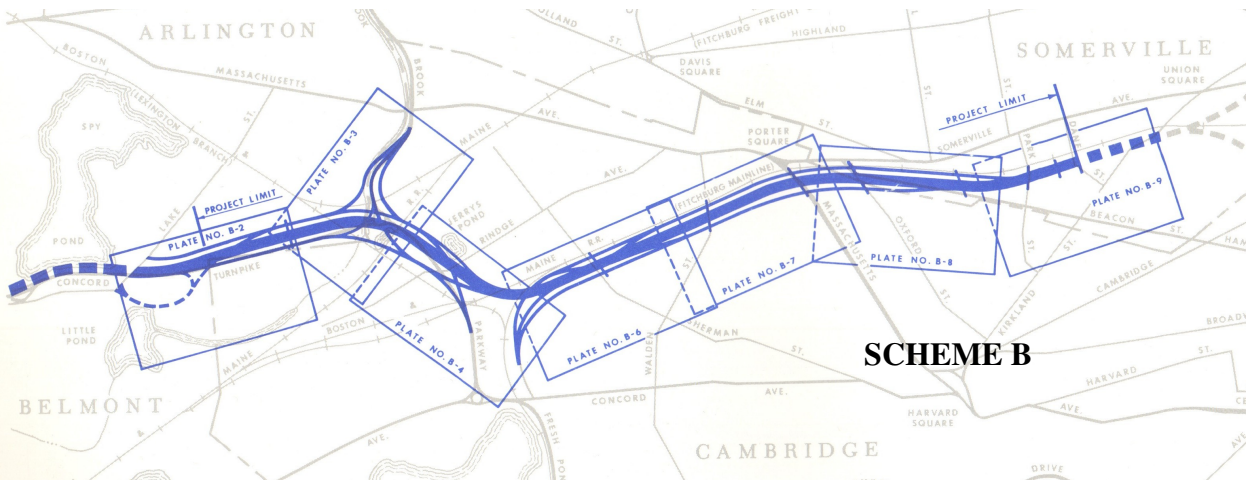
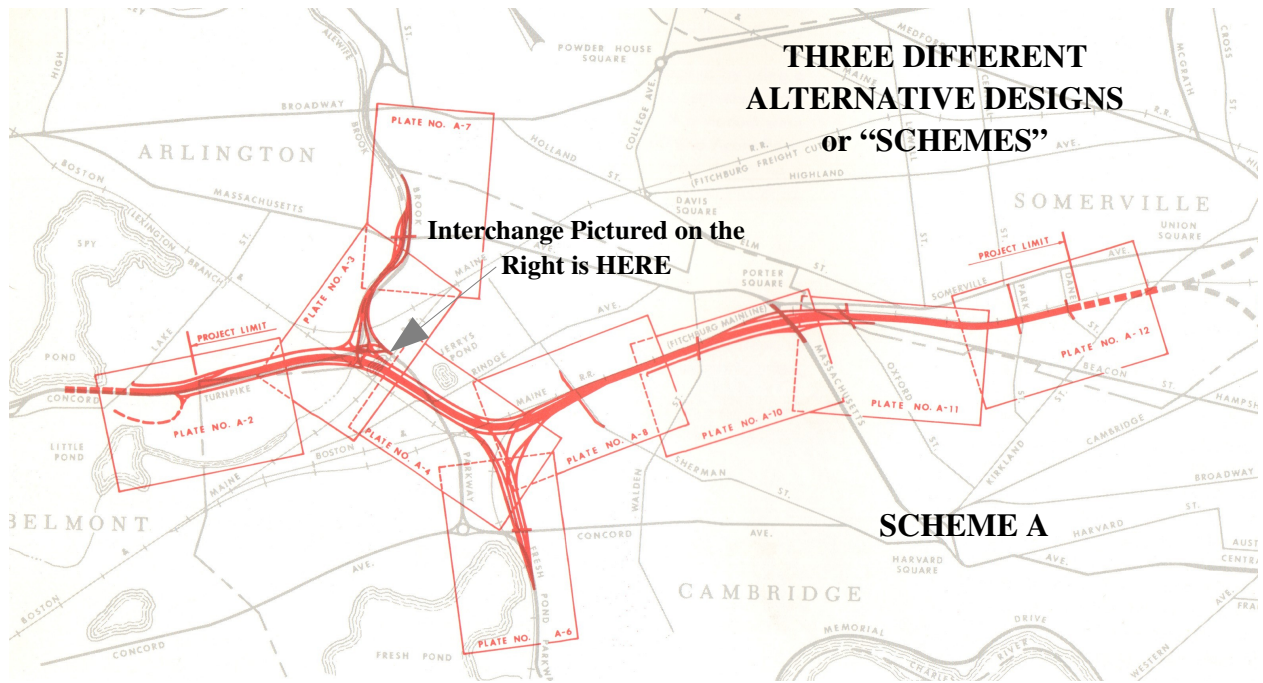
With Volpe's neutrality, Regional Federal Highway officials saw opportunities, even as public opposition to urban road plans was rising nationwide. A quarter-century trend of favorable public response to new roads was losing momentum, and officials recognized a need to move quickly. Energized mid-level Federal Highway administrators centered at regional offices in Albany, New York now saw in Boston a special challenge : to push the twenty-year-old master highway plan into full construction, and to subdue other flash points of anti-highway resistance in the region.

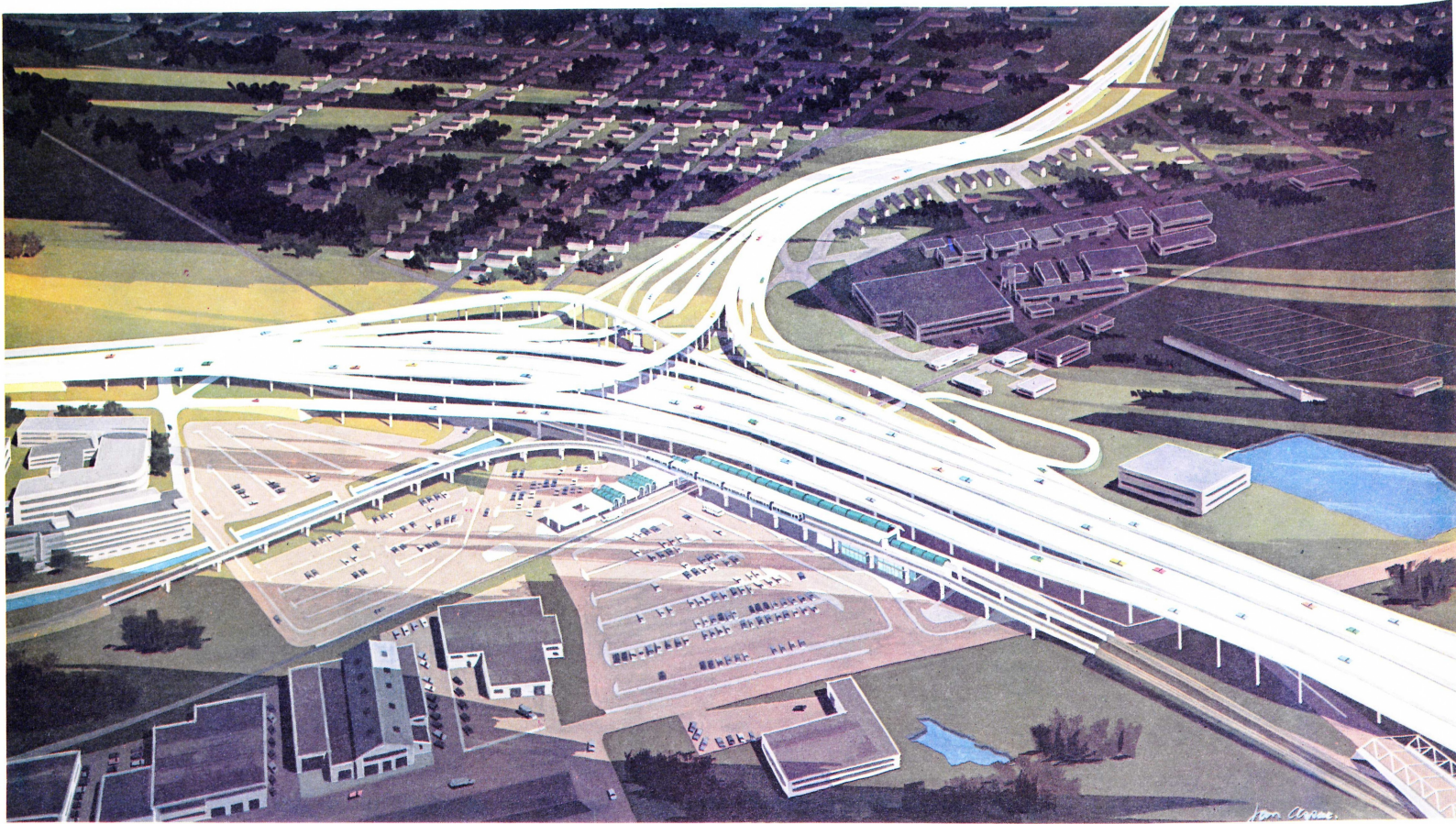
The Boston strategy was to hold off on the most controversial elements : the Inner Belt and Southwest Expressway in Jamaica Plain. Two lesser vulnerabilities were selected. First came the extension of Route 2 from the Alewife area on the outskirts of Cambridge, to pass through Somerville to join I-93 and the Inner Belt. A second initiative was to defeat an environmental challenge to the preferred Southwest Expressway path through Fowl Meadow in Canton and Milton. The next three chapters will tell the story of how both of these highway offensives were turned back and in the end served to reinforce highway opposition in Cambridge and Jamaica Plain.

Route 2 in Cambridge had originally been built as a four-lane road in 1934. In 1967 the road was widened to a six-to eight-lane expressway between Route 128 to Lake Street in Arlington. Unexpectedly, some Arlington and Belmont residents expressed locally intense opposition to the partial filling of Spy Pond, and some of them made their objections known directly to Governor Volpe. The amount of filling was reduced, but

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2 Basic Design Report, "Inner Belt EXPRESSWAY : Cambridge and Somerville", Goodkind & O'Dea 1965





THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
 DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS  
 UNIVERSAL ENGINEERING CORP.  
 CONSULTING ENGINEERS

INTERCHANGE WITH  
 ALEWIFE BROOK PARKWAY

RELOCATED ROUTE 2  
 SCHEME A

**INTERCHANGE OF ROUTE 2 (from the left)  
 WITH ALEWIFE BROOK PARKWAY (Route 16)**

Arlington and Mass Avenue is to the left-rear of the graphic. The Alewife MBTA station and parking garage is located near the center of the parking lot in the lower middle. The former Arthur D. Little property (now Discovery Park) is on the left. North Cambridge and the Grace property is in the right rear. Four lanes of MDC parkway were to be replaced by twelve lanes of expressway. At one point the interchange is four levels deep – one level below grade and another three levels above ground. Little River and Alewife Brook have been buried in a closed culvert. DPW graphic for Scheme A, Basic Design Report for Relocated Route 2, September 1968, page 16a.

the road was completed as planned almost to the Cambridge line. The next phase of Route 2 work was the Route 2 Extension from Arlington through Alewife and into Somerville. This revitalized project became the great controversy of 1969, pitting the City of Cambridge in opposition to state and federal highway agencies.

### **A SUMMARY VIEW OF THE CONFLICT**

For Cambridge, the year 1969 began with a sudden initiative announced by state Public Works Commissioner Edward Ribbs. His stated goal was to move the Route 2 project into a second public hearing, and thereafter go directly into construction with no further restrictions. Because other communities (Arlington and Belmont) were interested in Route 2, Cambridge sought a special process to deal with Route 2 separately. Regional Federal Highway Administrator John Hansen agreed to the separation. Cambridge now became vulnerable because the city had left itself open to a flank attack. In their intense attention to tying up the Inner Belt in delay, they had neglected Route 2.

DPW Commissioner Edward Ribbs announced an effort to move speedily to a design public hearing on Route 2, probably in mid-1970 : "We can't wait for the Inner Belt and the main Route 2 connection."<sup>3</sup> Somerville was supportive of Route 1-93, and Charlestown had accepted a double-deck elevated highway connecting to the downtown Central Artery. If these segments of the master plan could have been built, the entire north and northwest areas of the highway Master Plan would be complete. This package includes Route 2 .... I-93 .... the Tobin Bridge .... and Central Artery .... as well as a section of the Inner Belt for over a mile through Charlestown and Somerville. With the northerly section of the Belt plan fully in place, the pressure on Cambridge to capitulate on the Inner Belt could have become overwhelming. Only Cambridge would be left opposing Route 2 and the Inner Belt. The city had become isolated and suddenly vulnerable.

Cambridge had been slow in recognizing its mistake, and in the following months, offered intense resistance while not making further missteps. From now on the key errors would be made by the Federal Highway Administration.

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3 *Boston Globe*, January 16, 1969

This Route 2 revival strategy seemed credible as a way to reverse the shrinking fortunes of road advocates. Moving the road process to where Cambridge was most vulnerable seemed like a clever strategy at the time, but when Cambridge recognized the full extent of the threat it pulled out all the stops in opposition.

The normally powerful highway forces still displayed certain weaknesses in government strategy. Louder highway opposition in Somerville was beginning to be heard, especially among more liberal elements in the Somerville electorate. Residents in the Route 2 corridor were not supportive of the road. Urban Planning Aid had an Somerville office and staff, seeking to influence anti-highway sentiment. Unhappy residents were planning to file a court suit to stop I-93 the following year. Only a year later, an anti-highway Mayor was to be elected in Somerville : S. Lester Ralph.

Federal Highway also lacked an enthusiastic state Department of Public Works. This hesitation was clear when Commissioner Ribbs declared a public hearing to be held “probably next year” could become “a real blood bath.” This statement was the first indication that the DPW was having cold feet about seeking a public hearing in Cambridge.<sup>4</sup>

Cambridge began by stressing procedural flaws in the Route 2 initiative. They claimed a “quickie” hearing was premature and unjustified, because Route 2 was not on a scheduled fast track. Cambridge Assistant City Manager Justin Gray further identified a scheduling conflict – with Task A and Task B studies needed to be completed first, before hearings could begin on highway construction.

The City's argument was a trifle awkward. Its primary demand was to stop a public hearing, while the highway agencies wished to hold one. Why refuse a hearing to allow the public to be heard? Nevertheless the highway conflict has already stirred up national attention.

In April the *National Observer* reported on national trends in resistance to highway construction, and placed the Route 2 case front and center.<sup>5</sup> The conflict was personalized as highway commissioner Ed Ribbs versus city planner Justin Gray. Many people across the nation were alert to what was happening in Boston.

On April 11, Federal Highway escalated the conflict by introducing the threat of

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4 Boston Globe, January 15, 1969

5 National Observer, April 14, 1969



lost HUD funding for Cambridge housing. The months of April and May reflected increased contention, as Cambridge attacked both Federal Highway and HUD for their actions. Meanwhile Ed Ribbs became a secondary member of the cast.

The conflict now became all about housing, with Justin Gray against regional Highway Administrator John Hansen and compliant regional HUD officials. A letter from Regional HUD officials raised the possibility of conflicts between new highways and proposed new housing, with the housing obligated to avoid any possibility of conflict with highways. On April 11, a joint FHWA/HUD meeting, with Cambridge in attendance, boiled over and caused Cambridge to lobby for corrective action from regional HUD officials in New York. Discussions between Cambridge and HUD remained behind the scenes until a Globe Article by Abe Plotkin publicly disclosed the dramatic escalation in the conflict.<sup>6</sup> Gray had urged Plotkin not to publish the article, but now the key issues were out in the open.

Opposing reaction came primarily from Cambridge, with Assistant City Manager Gray and later City Manager James Sullivan responding in a frenzy of protest aimed at Federal officials. Gray painted the Federal Highway as "Highways-before-homes." He highlighted the danger of an "accepted plan" for a highway becoming a threat to HUD-funded housing in Cambridge and anywhere else in the country. Gray called out the practice as a form of blackmail. He claimed it was holding housing funds for 800 housing units as hostage – including Walden Square, a project near Route 2. He saw the theme of blackmail as applying pressures on Cambridge to relent and support construction of both Route 2 and the Inner Belt – or lose vital housing funds.

Federal Highway may have placed Cambridge in a difficult position, but strategically it had just undermined its own Route 2 strategy .... by making housing the key issue. Gray did not focus on the 300-plus homes to be lost in North Cambridge. Instead he stressed the policy implications of lost promises for new housing, and the manipulated role of HUD.

Now it was the Regional HUD office that was under fire, not Cambridge. The issue was housing and its unfair domination by powerful highway officials. (His very challenging letter to HUD's regional office is shown on the following two pages.)

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6 Boston Globe, April 27, 1969 p. 43



# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CITY HALL, CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139 • (617) 876-6800

Office of the City Manager  
Community Development Section

Justin Gray  
Assistant to City Manager  
for Community Development

April 29, 1969

Mr. Dominic Felitti  
Renewal Assistance Administration  
Region One  
U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
26 Federal Plaza  
New York, New York 10007

Dear Dom,

Events have moved so fast I couldn't get in touch with you until now.

1. As I told you on the phone over a week ago, Cambridge was not going to fight this suspension threat (made by you people at the April 11 meeting with DOT in Boston) in the press.

2. The facts are that we did not even make the issue public in Cambridge and that I did not go before our City Council on the matter. In other words, no one was informed of the possibility of suspension in Cambridge other than those of us who attended the meeting and a small group around the City Manager who discussed the situation immediately after the meeting. Of course, as you know, I did inform the Governor right after the meeting of Ribbs' intent to hold a public hearing on Route 2 within 60 days.

3. On last Friday I was informed by Abe Plotkin, a columnist on the Boston Globe, that he had the story and that he was going to publish it. Clearly, both from the context of the article that later appeared and from the fact that no one in Cambridge gave the information to Plotkin, Ribbs broke the story to Plotkin. I tried to talk Plotkin out of the article but failed.

4. I immediately informed the City Manager that Plotkin was going to publish the article in Sunday's Globe. He felt it imperative to inform the City Council and the community at large of exactly what took place on April 11. I therefore prepared the attached memorandum to the City Council on Saturday (which because of mimeographing difficulties was

Mr. Felitti

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April 29, 1969

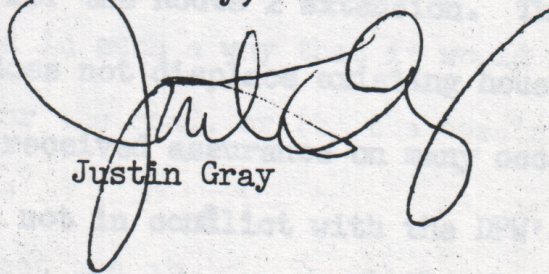
not delivered until Sunday - the day of the article) which, incidentally, I enclose. (See enclosed.) I spoke on the content of this memorandum to a large anti-Belt meeting that was previously scheduled that night.

In conclusion, Cambridge did not initiate this fight about what took place at the April 11 meeting. Ribbs did this by breaking the story to Plotkin, but now that he did we are fighting back with everything we've got.

For your information, we have gone to Congressman O'Neill, Senator Kennedy and Senator Brooke.

If you want my opinion, all this could be stopped by a simple communication from HUD's regional office that no suspensions will take place and that Wellington-Harrington's and Walden Square's previous commitments will be honored by HUD. I can assure you, as the memorandum says, Cambridge is going to continue the fight against an early public hearing on Route 2 and the Inner Belt studies which are so structured as to preordain a Brookline-Elm Route.

Sincerely,



Justin Gray

JG:kpp

Enclosures: 3

cc: Other HUD participants at April 11 meeting:

Douglas Manley

Linda Ellenbogen

Linda Broderick

Once the dispute became public, Gray felt he had no choice except to escalate the conflict, over the heads of Regional HUD and directly to Washington. He went over the heads of regional FHWA to appeal to Senators Ted Kennedy and Ed Brooke and to Federal HUD officials in Washington to protest the threat to Cambridge housing programs.

The result was two months of highly intense “warfare” between two highway factions, with the focus increasingly shifting to two identified leaders – Justin Gray of Cambridge and John A. Hansen of Federal Highway. Cambridge had discovered that Hansen was calling most of the shots, and they increasingly directed their criticism towards federal officials.

It is doubtful if the anti-highway war ever got hotter than this, with the competing sides often in open confrontation. For the first time Federal Highway was seen as entering the fray as an overt participant and controlling agent -- and undermining the role of the state in making the planning decisions.

Cambridge felt forced to convey maximum resistance. If Cambridge was compelled to fold, it would leave no opposition resisting a public hearing. Governor Sargent would be forced to confront the entire burden of pro-highway pressures. From this perspective, the Federal Highway strategy was brilliant and should have worked.

What John Hansen had not counted on was the breadth of the Cambridge resistance – protesting from below, at the local level on the housing issue – and going over and above the regional FHWA and HUD officials to top agency offices in Washington D.C. Volpe was neutral, and the Nixon Administration was suffering considerable distress, because of Vietnam war protests. The administration did not need additional public protests and unrest over highway plans.

Congressmen criticized HUD for caving in to FHWA pressure and threatening urban housing policies. Previously agreed-upon promises to approve HUD funding for local use had now been undermined at the regional government level. None of these changes had been accomplished with proper Congressional and public review. The tumult appeared to be triggered by an uncontrolled bureaucracy.

Meanwhile, a formidable coalition of businesses and other professionals was created under the banner of the Cambridge Advisory Committee. An alliance of sorts

was formed between City Hall forces under Justin Gray and the CAC, which was technically a part of Cambridge government. Gray would tend to lead from the top, while the CAC worked at local grass roots levels, including producing their own reports.<sup>7</sup>

The Cambridge Advisory Committee organized a petition drive to send 5,000 signatures to Governor Sargent opposing the hearing proposal. The issue remained -- whether or not to call a public hearing in mid-July. HUD quickly backtracked, and the housing threat disappeared. The Nixon Administration would not have appreciated Federal Highway stirring up a major controversy unnecessarily.

If one hammer works, put another one on the table. By early June, Gray proposed his own expressway plan. It was quite different from the DPW design for Route 2. Now an alternative concept was on the table, and the highway battlefield had been expanded. From the original concern about planning and hearings, the agenda had expanded into housing .... and now into roadway alternatives. The new road plan placed the focus back on Ed Ribbs, who would need to decide to study the plan or not.

In retrospect, Federal Highway could have chosen to limit the issues only to holding a public hearing. If they had not introduced the housing issue, they would have stood a better chance of victory. A public hearing date is not something a community appeals to Washington DC for resolution. Cambridge needed another, stronger complaint, and Federal Highway handed it to them.

The message to communities across the nation was that HUD-funded housing projects anywhere near a planned highway could trigger similar "blackmail" tactics. Communities would be vulnerable both to cut-offs in housing funds, and to restrictions on their ability to criticize controversial highways. If John Hansen had been successful at establishing this new form of highway power, he could have reversed the trends for

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<sup>7</sup> The Cambridge Advisory Committee had been set up in the 1950s pursuant to the requirements of Federal urban renewal regulations. The original objective was to provide citizen advice on urban renewal plans, but from the beginning the membership was primarily composed of businessmen and academic officials, such as President James Killian from MIT and President Nathan Pusey from Harvard. The net effect was to offer "independent advice" that was invariably supportive of redevelopment and city policies. Thus in 1957 the CAC accepted the goal of developing a support program for building the Inner Belt, but by 1964 reflected uncertainty about the future of the road program. A local businessman, Paul Frank, had been designated as the Executive Director in 1967, but his role was diminished when prominent lawyer George McLaughlin was appointed as the General Chairman in 1968. Quickly two CAC committees were formed : the Western Gateway Committee and the Committee to Save North Cambridge. With the escalation of the Route 2 conflict in early 1969, the CAC was transformed into an anti-Route 2 support group for City Hall for the next two years. The role of the CAC and George McLaughlin will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7. Source : William Cunningham, "Belonging..." April 1, 2018 draft, p. 73.

local communities to successfully block highway plans. The Hansen strategy had definite advantages from a Machiavellian point of view, and with more timid political leadership in Cambridge he might have won the battle.

Instead, Federal Highway both triggered the Route 2 controversy and brought about its failure. The agency emerged sufficiently weakened that Governor Sargent could make his decision on June 24 to postpone any hearing on Route 2 until a long-planned task force study on highway policy was complete.

There are several key mistakes made by Federal Highway in its Route 2 strategy :

*First*, FHWA's allegations of conflicts between housing and highways were based on bluff. Cambridge officials and HUD staff had already met numerous times to assure that there would be no conflict between the North Cambridge Housing at Walden Square and Route 2. Everything had been worked out and agreed to. There was no working conflict between housing and highways. The Federal Highway concern was either fictitious or a trivial detail. Yet highway officials were able to convince regional HUD officials that a conflict indeed might exist. Under new pressure regional HUD restored both approvals and funding. By June 24, Federal Highway had lost.

*Secondly*, the local sponsoring agency for Walden Square housing was the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority, a former ally of DPW in coordinating highway and urban renewal landtakings for the Inner Belt. Walden Square would displace no residents, business jobs or any other community activities. DPW needed all the allies they could get. In Cambridge, Federal Highway had just alienated a very important one : the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority. Highway opponents gained a new supporter to speak out against the Route 2 gambit. With its housing funds restored, the CRA proceeded to build the Walden Square housing by 1972.

*Thirdly*, by injecting HUD into the middle of the highway debates, Federal Highway came across as the big bully who could manipulate the smaller HUD to its wishes. Anyone who wanted housing in Cambridge but was neutral on the road work, now had good reason to object to Federal Highway actions in Cambridge.

*Fourth*, the state DPW was a reluctant warrior on Route 2 and Inner Belt issues. Commissioner Ribbs had resisted because of the likelihood of a "blood bath" -- a public relations nightmare, especially if things got out of hand. His concern was not frivolous:

in 1967 to 1969 there were numerous public protests against the Vietnam War that public officials saw as rioting in the streets.

*Fifth*, DPW did not strongly oppose Cambridge's highway alternative -- as a replacement for both Route 2 and for the Inner Belt. The DPW – despite listing six reasons why the the new alternate plan was defective – conceded to allow its inclusion in the Task A study. This additional study effort would mean a delay of several more months. Although evidence is lacking, Ribbs may have seen the restudy of Cambridge's alternatives as a way to postpone his feared blood bath.

Finally, the least visible factor in the weakening of the Inner Belt case was a long dispute over traffic. A 1957 consultant study<sup>8</sup> for the DPW had indicated that the Inner Belt could become swamped with traffic, with severe congestion on the elevated Central Artery requiring twenty-four lanes. These conclusions were repeated in the 1962 Green Book.<sup>9</sup> As a result of these disclosures, the Boston Redevelopment Authority in 1965 proposed a traffic relief bypass expressway through Brookline and West Cambridge as a way to relieve traffic congestion in the Boston CBD.

Two years later DPW adopted the basic concept of a West Cambridge bypass in its master plan for highways in the post-1975 era. These traffic “relief road” concepts all shared a key element : a new elevated road following the Fresh Pond/Alewife Brook Parkway corridor. Justin Gray extended the purpose of this new road to serve as a replacement for Route 2 and the Inner Belt.

All of these factors helped to isolate regional Federal Highway and undermine its strategic goals. After the Governor's June 24 decision to postpone any Route 2 hearing, Federal Highway never again played a leadership role in advancing the Boston expressway plan. Postponing any hearing was linked to allowing completion of the task force report on highway planning. The Federal Highway collapse over Route 2 also smoothed the path for the Governor's ultimate decision in February 1970 to impose a moratorium on major highway construction in the Boston area, including Route 2. Cambridge and the Governor now knew they had the support of Washington and that Regional Federal Highway had been driven from the field. DPW's moribund response on Route 2 also signalled that the Governor's patient step-by-step approach had made strides in breaking down resistance within the state highway agency.

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8 Coverdale and Colpitts, consultants, *A Report on Traffic Studies for the Boston Metropolitan Area*, 1957

9 Mass DPW, *Inner Belt and Expressway System*, Boston Metropolitan Area, Section III, 1962

When the dust settled, highway advocates had lost what seemed to be their last great battle. The Southwest corridor would stay in play for another two years, with highway officials slowly losing. Ed Ribbs would make a last desperate appeal to the Governor for the Southwest expressway in 1971, but that request triggered his replacement as Commissioner by Bruce Campbell.

The Route 2 conflict had begun with a simple request to hold a public hearing, and in the end the highway agencies were denied. The lack of support for Route 2 had been exposed. Who liked it? No one except Somerville's Alan McClennen. The pro-highway cause had been set back, and its credibility diminished. The clock was winding down : it would be only eight more months before Governor Sargent would announce his highway moratorium in February 1970.

We will never know what would have happened if highway officials had simply sought to hold the necessary hearings -- without threatening HUD-funded housing in Cambridge. The collapse of highway forces over Route 2 made other issues easier to resolve, including freezing and rejecting the Inner Belt, Southwest Expressway, and I-95 North. The coalition of Cambridge, Boston and Brookline had been strengthened, and they emerged the winners against this last-gasp charge by a weakening transportation potentate.

## **BACKGROUND DETAILS FOR THE ROUTE 2 CONFLICT**

The beginnings of a movement to place Route 2 in contention can probably be traced back to 1967, when a contract to prepare a Basic Design Report for Route 2 was signed with consultants Universal Engineering Corporation. The lengthy report was submitted to the DPW in September 1968,<sup>10</sup> with a submission letter signed by David Nassif, Universal's President and an old friend of John Volpe.

This *Basic Design Report* could serve as the basis for holding a design hearing. Cambridge had opened up the Route 2 issue when in October 1968 city officials insisted that any study of the Inner Belt should be kept separate from any assessment of Route 2.<sup>11</sup> This design report is the document that was being rushed forward by the expedited public hearing. Cambridge's objections were to the plans shown in this report.

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<sup>10</sup> Mass DPW, *Relocated Route 2 Arlington-Cambridge-Somerville*, Basic Design Report, September 1968.

<sup>11</sup> *Cambridge Chronicle*, October 10, 1968.



The January 25 March Against the Inner Belt (and Route 2) brought two-thousand protesters to Boston Common. Governor Sargent came out of his State House office and spoke to them with a statement that had been jointly prepared with his new friend Justin Gray. Gray and his team in Cambridge went on to write speeches for the Governor, such as the Urban America address<sup>12</sup> written by Ellen Feingold and John Culp. In effect, the city of Cambridge was paying its own team to be speech writers for the Governor.

About three weeks later on February 20, 1969 the Eastern Mass Regional Planning Project (EMRPP) released its highway and transit proposals for the Boston area.<sup>13</sup> Its report reflected the "old way of planning" with a heavy dose of highway analysis and minimal mass transit -- combined with domination of the study by the Department of Public Works.

The EMRPP regional plan was of little consequence, because it was thoroughly handicapped by a proposal for a "middle circumferential" expressway passing through key suburban enclaves of Danvers, Lexington, Bedford, Lincoln, and Weston, to the north and west, and Norwell to the South. DPW engineers were simply tone-deaf to the anti-highway protests then in full bloom. Like the Western Corridor Bypass Commissioner Ribbs had approved two years earlier, the "middle circumferential" was dead on arrival. No one saluted. The "middle circumferential expressway idea was never heard from again.

As the Route 2 issue grew in controversy, a joint memo from Boston, Cambridge and Brookline<sup>14</sup> noted a hardening position from John Hansen of Federal Highway. The three communities claimed that Hanson had taken the position that Federal DOT would "not fund a comparative evaluation study of a 'No Belt' design as part of Task B." In other words, the integrity of the Inner Belt study was under attack.

Commissioner Ribbs claimed that "Any ordinary layman who's got the sense that God gave a goose can see that Boston is going to be strangled if this highway isn't built."<sup>15</sup> "They are not going to run any highway through here," said Gray. "This is

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12 Governor's Remarks, Annual meeting of States Urban Action Center of Urban America, Boston Mass, May 20, 1969

13 EMRPP grew out of an early 1960s planning effort that preceded the creation of MAPC and MBTA in 1964. The Boston Regional Transportation Plan had proceeded under the awkward acronym BRPP, and covered a similar study area of Eastern Massachusetts.

14 Joint position memorandum of Boston, Cambridge and Brookline, March 31, 1969

15 *National Observer*, first page lead article on "People Versus Concrete," April 14, 1969

another age. Highways just aren't going to built any more simply because a Department of Public Works decides it.”

“The principals could not have been chosen better by Central Casting,” said the *National Observer*. Gray escalated the rhetoric : “Mr. Ribbs represents an anti-intellectual point of view, probably the worst form of it.”

On the issue of the three municipalities seeking stronger representation in the upcoming Inner Belt study, the *Observer* asked what would happen if Governor Sargent ordered that the study contract be approved? “Then I won't sign the contracts,” said Ribbs. The paper quoted an aide in Mayor White's office : “If you tripped and fell down, Commissioner Ribbs would pave you.” And Secretary Volpe? “He'd pave Ribbs.” That aide sounds very much like Fred Salvucci, but the comment also measures the tensions of the times. In reality, Ribbs did not appear to be the ogre his opponents sought to create. The true decision-making power was now coming out of John Hansen.

Abe Plotkin's blockbuster *Globe* article<sup>16</sup> reported that the Walden Square housing plan in North Cambridge appeared to be conflict with Route 2. Regional HUD and Federal Highway both made a finding that an interagency agreement had been violated, specifically one that was designed to avoid conflicts over use of land. As applied to the Walden Court housing in North Cambridge, a third alternate design was judged to be in conflict with the location of the Route 2, which – as an approved plan – had priority and protection against a project proposed by another federal agency. Up until April 11, the federal agencies had been giving approvals to Walden Square. “The City now feels it is being subjected to a sudden and unexpected squeeze play by two Federal agencies,” reported Plotkin.

Plotkin quoted Ribbs : “We're not trying to be rough. I told them emphatically that it was not blackmail – or anything like that, despite their accusations.” Ribbs continued : “But as far as I knew, HUD cannot take favorable action on any grant until they are sure there is no conflict with another Federal-aid project in the area.”

The next day Justin Gray issued a three-page memo to the Cambridge City Council on the road-vs-housing conflict. “I am hopeful the Governor will not permit the public hearing on Route 2 as contemplated by Commissioner Ribbs.” The debate simmered as

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16 *Boston Globe*, "Rte.2 Squeeze Hits Cambridge," (Abe Plotkin) April 27, 1969

Gray sent a two-page letter to Dominic Felitti at the HUD office in New York.<sup>17</sup> His April 29 letter claimed that everyone in Cambridge had decided to remain tight lipped, but Abe Plotkin (who was close to highway sources) was given the story by Ed Ribbs and insisted on running the article. Gray informed the City Manager James Sullivan, who agreed to go public with a memo to the Council. "I spoke on the content of this memorandum to a large anti-Belt meeting that was previously scheduled that night," wrote Gray.

Gray told HUD, "Cambridge did not initiate this fight ... Ribbs did this by breaking the story to Plotkin, but now that he did we are fighting back with everything we've got. For your information, we have gone to Congressman O'Neill, Senator Kennedy and Senator Brooke." So it was that HUD was put on notice of Cambridge's strong feelings about the Route 2 strategy.

Gray pointed out that the entire conflict was newly contrived, because the housing proposals were assuredly not in conflict with the preferred locations for either Route 2 or the Inner Belt. Prior negotiations had worked everything out and HUD had approved. Gray described how "Commissioner Ribbs has been trying to have the Inner Belt study framed in such a way that it would never question (a) the need for the road, or (b) the possibility of several alternative routes. He is also trying to ensure that his department will design and direct the study. In other words, the study will not really question anything." And any hearing on Route 2 would similarly conclude in favor of Route 2.

Gray in his letter to HUD shifted his focus from Ribbs to the Federal Department of Transportation : "DOT is trying to force Cambridge to accept this version of the study by ... holding, in 1969, a hearing to make the final determination for a Route 2 extension corridor scheduled to be built between 1975 and 1990." Why rush a public hearing when road construction is at least six years away? Gray challenged the fairness when "HUD programs which might inconvenience DOT programs must be held up."

In fact, a DOT program was "seriously jeopardizing HUD programs which are already approved and under way. Where was the parity between Departments? Who should be invoking the interagency agreement?" Gray noted that "priorities are seriously distorted. ... thousands of dollars for two housing programs are withheld so that millions can be spent on two roads ...."

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17 Letter from Justin Gray to Dominic Felitti, HUD regional office in New York City April 29, 1969.

On May 4, Justin Gray wrote a four-page letter to Father Richard Butler, Priest of the Blessed Sacrament Church, and temporary chairman of the Meeting on Housing and Highways. He alerted him to the national importance of the housing vs. highway issues, because actions giving highways precedence over housing were a problem across the country. Extensive local and state organizing was a priority. He reported that Senator's Brooke office was beginning a probe into HUD's apparent capitulations. At the meeting of the Coalition of Cambridge Community Organizations concerning the conflict between housing and transportation, the group opposed any action that “puts highways above homes...”

Federal Highway's strategy of interfering with Cambridge housing programs had the side effect of stimulating a long-time concern among opponents of the inner Belt – that housing values were being sacrificed to highway priorities. Route 2 seemed to them like a repeat of the Inner Belt error. The emotional level of the conflict had reached new levels.

If the highway advocates had thought they could intimidate Cambridge, it appeared that they had achieved exactly the opposite response. On May 5 Senator Brooke reported that “the Department of Transportation informs me that they are now proceeding with a re-evaluation of the Inner Belt program and that until that study is completed (which may take more than a year) no decision will be taken on this controversial question.” He was correct with respect to the status of the Inner Belt. Route 2 was a separate issue, not resolved in the Senator's report.

Gray's memos also mentioned the option of going directly to the White House, notably newly appointed urban expert and former anti-highway advocate Pat Moynihan. They preferred to stay with known allies in the House and Senate, and did not team up with Moynihan.

On May 6, Assistant Secretary Floyd Hyde of HUD wrote to his counterpart, James Braman, DOT's Assistant Secretary for Urban Systems and Environment, “Knowing of your deep personal concern and commitment for the proper development of freeways in such a way as not to destroy a community, I felt you should be advised of this situation.” Braman, a former Republican Mayor of Seattle, was an avowed supporter of transit and defender of the environment and played a part in cancelling highway programs in New Orleans and San Antonio. From 1969 to late 1970 he was the primary highway critic

within Federal DOT.

In early May the conflict reached a fever pitch. The Cambridge Chronicle reported on May 15 that City Manager James Sullivan believed he was powerless to do more and implored “the people in every neighborhood ... to write or wire Governor Francis W. Sargent requesting that he not permit the State DPW to hold a hearing on Route 2 within 60 days as Commissioner Ribbs has threatened.” Sullivan sought citizen actions because there was “nothing more he could do” to stop the roadbuilders.

The article disclosed significant information on the aggressive role of Federal Highway. “John Hansen, of the Federal Bureau of Roads regional office, recently requested Ribbs to hold a Route 2 hearing within 60 days.” Sullivan said “Ribbs at first refused, declaring the State was not prepared, but later agreed to hold the hearing.” Sullivan continued, “Even though the officials of the higher echelons expressed amazement that such a threat had been made, the threat nevertheless was made by regional officials in Boston.”

This description of events cast a new light on the internal tensions. The scenario now had Federal Highway Regional Administrator John Hansen as the instigator. His “request” -- more likely a demand – had originally been refused by Commissioner Ribbs, on the grounds that the state was not ready, which was true. When Ribbs later agreed to hold the hearing, the likely explanation was that Hansen ordered him to. Federal Highway was paying for 90% of the Interstate construction costs, and typically along with money comes power. How many of Ribbs' previous actions that had seemed so threatening could have been the result of pressure from Hansen? The push for the hearing in 60 days came from Hansen, not Ribbs.

Ribbs had described John Volpe as being hands-off towards the Inner Belt and willing to allow his underlings to handle the belt issue. For Route 2 this meant that John Hansen was calling the shots.

## **JUSTIN GRAY PROPOSES HIS WESTERN CORRIDOR ALTERNATIVE**

At the May 23 Task A Inner Belt Committee meeting, Justin Gray was not to be outdone by threats from Federal Highway. Gray was the constant strategist to delay highway plans by proposing new alternatives. His plan would have followed Fresh Pond

# Cambridge Offers Belt Alternative

By A. S. PLOTKIN  
Staff Writer

Cambridge, which has long fought the state's proposed Inner Belt route, has

suggested as an alternative a network skirting the city, based on converting 5½ miles of MDC parkways into highspeed expressways.

It would use the Mystic Valley, Alewife Brook and Fresh Pond Parkways in, or bounding, Medford, Arlington, Somerville and Cambridge. They would be widened, straightened and all access cut off except from a few specified interchanges.

The expressway would have six traffic lanes, shoulders and median strip, and handle 90,000 vehicles a day.

The plan promptly drew criticism from the state DPW, which called it "another delaying tactic" and unworkable. Nevertheless, said Comr. Edward Ribbs, it would be included in a study already underway as a gesture of fairness to the communities.

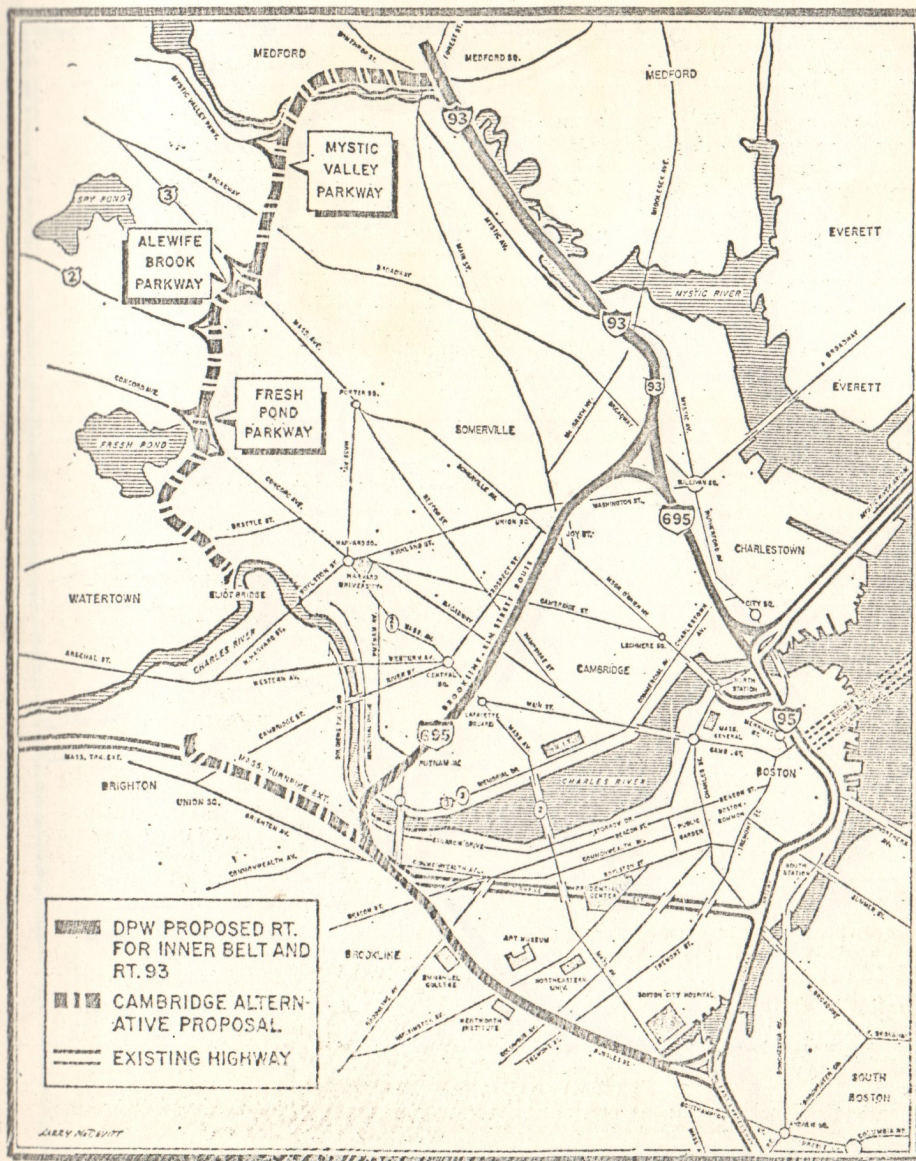
The idea came from Justin Gray, assistant to the Cambridge city manager for community development. It will be analyzed by DPW as part of the restudy of the Belt problem ordered last year by then-Federal Highway Administrator Lowell Bridwell.

Gray said last night that Cambridge was forced into submitting its alternative idea because Ribbs' plan to press for extending improved Rte. 2 eastward, especially in the area of interchange with Alewife Brook Parkway.

Cambridge's proposal also suggests a way of tying in with other parts of the Belt in Brookline and Boston. DPW's preferred route would tunnel under the Charles River near the Boston University Bridge.

Cambridge would carry the expressway South across the river from Elliot Eridge, and turn right in North Brighton at the Mass. Turnpike extension. It would abut; or run above the 'Pike road, and tie into the belt near the B.U. bridge.

The Boston Globe—Wednesday, June 4, 1969



INNER BELT ALTERNATIVE

Parkway to the Charles River, with an undefined connection to the Turnpike.

DPW had positioned itself very awkwardly because in February 1967 it had proposed a six-lane circumferential expressway in the Fresh Pond/Alewife Brook corridor. The idea originated from a 1957 finding by DPW consultants Coverdale & Colpitts that the Central Artery would be severely overloaded with traffic when the expressway system was completed.

In response to the evidence of future Inner Belt congestion, the Boston Redevelopment Authority tried fruitlessly to come up with a traffic relief plan to solve congestion on the Central Artery in Boston. They considered many options, including a new relief road extending through the center of Boston to Arlington Street and then connecting across the Charles River in a straight line to I-93 in Somerville. Finally in September 1965 the BRA's Transportation Coordinator, Bill McGrath, proposed a new expressway – not through Boston – but through Brookline and West Cambridge.<sup>18</sup>

This plan was accepted with revisions by Mass DPW in its plan for post-1975 Boston highways, issued in January 1967. West Cambridge residents showed less than convinced enthusiasm, and the DPW quietly dropped its support. The West Cambridge concept did not appear in the EMRPP regional plan issued in February 1969.

In June Justin Gray adopted a version of the same plan, which he labelled the “Western Corridor Bypass.” Another boost for the plan came in October from the Western Gateway Committee of the Cambridge Advisory Committee. Thus the same basic plan of using the Fresh Pond/Alewife Brook Parkway corridor to support an elevated six-lane highway was proposed by the Boston Redevelopment Authority in 1965 .... the Mass Department of Public Works in 1967 ..... the City of Cambridge via Justin Gray in early 1969 .... and the Cambridge Advisory Committee in late 1969. How could the same basic plan be adopted at different times subject to such a wide range of interests? How could such a plan never show up on the radar of official plans considered for application to the Alewife area, and never get beyond the magic marker stage of conceptual representation?

Earlier that Spring, Cambridge had retained consulting engineer Ivan von Szilassy (a Professional Engineer living in Medway) to make a feasibility study of the Western

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18 Letter of William McGrath, BTA Transportation Coordinator to Mayor John Collins, "Report on the Alternate Master Highway Plan for the Boston Metropolitan Area," Initial version September 1965, resubmitted February 1966.

Corridor Bypass in Cambridge, Somerville and three other municipalities. His draft report of March 25 was prepared for Justin Gray and the Community Development Unit. It is unclear whether a final report was ever prepared. However, it did support two key elements and was silent on a third :

- \* It supported the feasibility and desirability of an 8-mile six-lane expressway similar in many ways to the McGrath plan of 1965/1966 and the approved plan by DPW in January 1967.
- \* It supported the option as an “alternative” to the Inner Belt, not as a supplement to the Inner Belt as suggested by McGrath and presumed by DPW.
- \* It said nothing about the failure of the Eastern Mass Regional plan to include any mention of the “Western Corridor Bypass” expressway.

The draft von Szilassy report stated its purpose as being a preliminary location study related to the Task A study. He claimed that fewer than 200 dwelling units would be displaced, “less than one-tenth the number of dwelling units” taken by the Inner Belt and Route 2 extension. He noted that the state DPW “has for a number of years talked about the need for a limited access circumferential using the Revere Beach Parkway, Mystic Valley parkway, Alewife Brook and Fresh Pond Parkways .... The Boston Redevelopment Authority also has studied such a possible alignment.” The Western Bypass Expressway “would avoid the need to construct both the Inner Belt in the eastern portion of Cambridge and the Route 2 extension.”

By this description, the Western Bypass Expressway would supplant both Route 2 and the Inner Belt. The von Szilassy report provided a positive consultant argument for Justin Gray to use against the Inner Belt. It made the Route 2 extension unnecessary. Gray could have used the draft report as evidence of technical support, while it is also possible that no one asked to see his evidence. There is no indication that traffic details were discussed by either side.

Justin Gray's support of this highway concept was risky, because its essence was a six-lane elevated expressway passing through West Cambridge and a portion of Brattle Street. Could the plan have been explained to concerned residents that the plan had already been rejected by the state, so there was no need to worry? Could residents support the City's posture of placing all alternatives on the table, even if those plans do



not have a technical chance? How could the poor quality of the proposal and lack of details be defended against the engineering precision of DPW's plans?

Gray's Western Corridor plan needed a protector, and it found one in the most unlikely places : the state highway agency itself. Since DPW's January 1967 updated highway master plan had approved the same basic highway concept, it could not criticize Gray for introducing the same concept two years later. DPW's hands were tied, and one again the agency was tripped up by another one of its many mistakes. Gray could also have used (but apparently never did) the evidence of the 1957 and 1962 traffic studies that showed a future Inner Belt as a traffic failure, with extensive peak hour congestion. Such evidence would have undermined the credibility of the state engineers, and damaged the prospects for both Route 2 and the inner Belt.

In any technical discussion, neither Gray nor DPW had any incentive to get into a discussion of traffic. Gray did not have the skills and DPW did not have the answers. As a city planner Gray could claim that his Western Corridor plan would do away with the need for both Route 2 and the Inner Belt, and the DPW was speechless in response – because they were not prepared to discuss traffic and did not wish to engage the topic. Throughout later discussions with the Altshuler Task Force, DPW negotiators demonstrated that they did not have the traffic numbers to respond to task force questions. If anyone had the numbers, Urban Planning Aid or the Greater Boston Committee GBC had them.<sup>19</sup> DPW engineers proved to be very poor advocates for their own plan. A rather thin plan like the Western Corridor alternative would survive the limited level of knowledge and analysis during DPW review.

There is no evidence that Justin Gray truly believed in his Western Corridor plan. He merely sought to have it introduced into the analysis as an alternative. He was never a salesman for the merits of the plan. He sought only its potential as a subject for further study, having the consequence of added delay for several months. He was fully aware of the changing momentum of the Inner Belt fight, and that with time official road plans tend to lose credibility and public opposition rises in importance. Road plans were being stopped in Baltimore, Washington D.C., New York City and New Orleans. All were defeated by a rising crescendo of opposition.

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<sup>19</sup> Lupo, Colcord and Fowler, *Rites of Way*, Little Brown 1971 p. 91

On May 23, several Task A committee members were critical when presented with the Cambridge proposal. The minutes of the meeting<sup>20</sup> included a highly charged exchange between the Somerville and Cambridge representatives. Alan McClennen, now representing Somerville, had been the Cambridge Planning Director for the previous decade and was well aware of the early responses of Cambridge officials when they lost the veto in 1965.

*Mr. McClennen* (Somerville) : “This is a very dilatory response made to a request from the DPW in January. It would have only taken a few days to review what the DPW had proposed and come up then with a response, rather than now when the committee is struggling with a time problem.” ...

*Justin Gray* (Cambridge) : “Cambridge is willing to accept an alternative expressway. We couldn't do this before because the city council would not allow us to – but now we can propose an alternative.” ...

*Mr. McClennen* (Somerville) : “It is utterly inexcusable that this is being brought up so late in the project. This plan had been prepared in 1964 or 1965 for Mr. Hayes and was available all along.”

*Mr. Gray* (Cambridge) : “This is a very serious situation and we've had to proceed cautiously.”

*Mr. Hayes* (Cambridge) : “I brought up this plan because we were looking for an alternative.”

*Mr. Gray* (Cambridge) : “We have official backing to bring up this proposal now.”

From this extraordinary dialogue we learn several things. Dan Hayes was aware of the alternative circa 1965 when the BRA report was issued for the first time. McClennen was aware of the 1967 DPW plan for the alternative. In the moment of crisis and in the desperate search for alternatives over Route 2, Dan Hayes was the one who brought up the alternative – and persuaded (or directed) Justin Gray to accept it as a strategy. Adding an alternative was a priority for Cambridge to supplement their basic strategy of opposing a hearing and objecting to any housing “blackmail.” The late adoption of this expressway alternative was a measure of the desperation Cambridge was feeling as they struggled to win this showdown battle at any cost.

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20 Minutes of Task A meeting of May 23, 1969, as written by Joe Manning of DPW.

Going back to Gray's comment that “”Cambridge is willing to accept an alternative expressway,” we can see how deep anti-highway beliefs can create very odd strategic postures. An elevated six-lane expressway along Fresh Pond Parkway with full grade separation and interchanges would have major impacts on Fresh Pond Parkway and would go further than the taking of 200 homes. It would be a massive intrusion into a middle- and upper-class neighborhood that had considered itself exempt from damaging forms of construction. The only project that would be more objectionable in all of Cambridge would be to run an elevated six-lane expressway down Brattle Street.

Normally, supporting such a highway design would have been thought to be a death sentence for any politician or government official. Yet in the desperate hours of the Spring 1969, Dan Hayes and Justin Gray felt driven to take that risk. It was possible because at different times both DPW and Cambridge had supported the same road plan. Both sides could not blow the whistle on the other without blowing the whistle on themselves. So they remained muted in their awkward shared interest in the Western Corridor plan.

The May 23 meeting ended with a decision “that Cambridge would submit to the DPW a written proposal.” If the review could proceed without delay and additional cost “the DPW would accept the proposal.”

Gray submitted his alternative on May 27 to the DPW. The DPW responded on June 2 indicating that there were six reasons why the Department could not accept Cambridge's proposal, including cost and time delays.

However, the DPW decided “we shall accept the Cambridge proposal because this Department wished to complete the study in a way that will leave no opportunity for any community to claim 'foul.'”<sup>21</sup> The DPW letter noted “We are pleased to note that the present Cambridge officials acknowledge the need for some expressway facility within the boundary of their City.”

Abe Plotkin wrote up the Cambridge plan in the *Boston Globe*.<sup>22</sup> Gray claimed that Cambridge had been forced to submit an alternative for two reasons. The Task A guidelines did not allow for a transit alternative, and “Ribb's plan to press for extending improved Route 2 eastward ...” had compelled a Cambridge response.

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21 Letter of George Wey, DPW Bureau of Transportation Planning to Justin Gray, June 2, 1969

22 *Boston Globe*, "Cambridge Offers Belt Alternative" (Abe Plotkin) June 4, 1969

Commissioner Ribbs claimed that the Cambridge plan was a delaying tactic, which it probably was, and that it was flawed in traffic terms, yet everyone's plans were flawed for traffic. Ribbs then agreed to study the alternative, and the study would take several months. Justin's strategy had succeeded in monkey-wrenching the Federal Highway hearing plans. Ribbs was opposed to the hearing and foresaw a "blood bath," so it was not unreasonable for him to agree to a study and a delay. The penalty that Cambridge received for presenting the Western Corridor plan was .... victory. Their plan was accepted for study, with associated delay. With the coming of the February moratorium and the BTPR restudy, memories of Cambridge's desperate ethical sacrifice had disappeared into the fog of history. Most histories of the Inner Belt make no mention of these intense strategic moments over Route 2.

But Ed Ribbs helped too. His agreeing to study the Cambridge plan was a diplomatic escape for both sides. If it allowed a victory for Cambridge, it also allowed a victory for Ed Ribbs. He did not get the expedited hearing that he had opposed. Studying Cambridge's plan was Win-Win.

Surprisingly, Alan Lupo in his otherwise excellent 110-page condensation of the full history of the Inner Belt makes only one brief reference to the Battle of Route 2 : "Cambridge was successfully delaying any real work on the proposed extension of Route 2." <sup>23</sup> He missed all of the action in Cambridge.

On June 24, Governor Sargent wrote to Boston, Brookline, Somerville and Cambridge : <sup>24</sup>

"I am creating a Special Transportation Task Force to reconsider fully how the state can best attempt to meet our transportation needs in the future. I said then -- and I re-iterate --that we can no longer indiscriminately build highways. Instead, we must at every step insure that we seriously evaluate the construction of every mile of highway road for its impact on the community."

"I am accordingly directing Commissioner Ribbs, and he has given me assurance of his full cooperation, to postpone any hearing on a Route 2 corridor of the nature requested by

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<sup>23</sup> Alan Lupo, *Rites of Way* p. 72

<sup>24</sup> Letter from Governor Francis Sargent to Mayor Kevin White of Boston, Selectman George Brown of Brookline, Mayor Brennan of Somerville, and City Manager James Sullivan of Cambridge, June 24, 1969.

Mr. Hansen of the Federal Highway Administration until the results of the 'joint concept' study are known. I am doing this in order that options open for study will not be foreclosed by such a hearing.”

Sargent's letter recognized what had been obvious for several months. Ed Ribbs was in the awkward position of having two bosses, one at Federal Highway and the other was the Governor. He was being placed in an impossible position if instructions from the Governor and from Federal Highway were in conflict. To establish the Governor's primacy to instruct state agencies, Sargent made clear that he had directed his highway Commissioner to postpone the hearing, and in effect to negate Hansen's “request” for a hearing. The Governor was in charge of his personnel, and he as Governor gave the commands to the state DPW, not Federal Highway.

### **REFLECTIONS ON THE ROLE OF JOHN A.HANSEN, FHWA**

John Hansen made the decision to move into an overt leadership position in a highway dispute – an action usually rare for federal bureaucrats. There can be no question that he was seizing a leadership opportunity for himself, seeking little help from Washington D.C. He was to be the man of action, whose initiative and leadership would have been welcomed by the highway fraternity. Instead he was unduly aggressive and found a counterpart – Justin Gray – willing to fight back and overcome him. In the Inner Belt saga, he was the loser and his name has substantially been lost to history.

Hansen's initiatives for Route 2 are consistent with his reputation for extraordinary aggressiveness in pursuing highway projects. While I was at MIT in 1970, Visiting Professor in Civil Engineering John Clarkeson<sup>25</sup> provided me with an insightful description of Hansen's priorities and *modus operandi*. Clarkeson described how Hansen had used his regional Federal Highway position in Albany to force the construction of a four-level interchange in New England. The project could be described as a pride-and-ego achievement.

He chose as his preferred location Interstate 84, west of Hartford at Farmington, at the interchange with what is now Connecticut Route 49. His reported motivation for doing so was that because Los Angeles had a four level interchange on its freeway

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<sup>25</sup> John Clarkeson, c. 1969. President of Clarkeson and Clough, and the consultant designer of the Southwest Expressway interchange within the Fens section of the Inter Belt.

system, he wanted to have one in New England. He insisted that Connecticut build one. It was a matter of pride and jealousy. There was nothing in the geography of Route 84 to justify so many levels. Route 49 was planned as part of Connecticut's Interstate Route 291, a planned ring road around Hartford.

The new interchange was a formidable boondoggle, built in 1966, with large soil embankments to raise roads up to the fourth level. Route 291 was never completed, and was demoted to state Route 49. Local highway opponents prevented the state road from being extended north through West Hartford Reservoir lands. Fifty years later, of twelve different ramp connections built, only six had ever been used by traffic.

This interchange has remained for half a century as a semi-comatose four-level interchange. Once proposed as the site for a 2,000-car parking garage in 1974<sup>26</sup> the state now fifty-four years later has plans to replace it with a simple two-level “trumpet” interchange. Hansen's Folly will be no more.

I-84 in Connecticut and Route 2 in Cambridge share hallmark evidence of an urge for dynamic leadership and expressions of personal power. If not precisely the man on a white horse, he became the individual hero who overcame bureaucratic lethargy and demonstrated how power could be used to bring about highway construction in the late 1960s.

He clearly had contempt for the normal expectations of democracies, and perceived no special rights for those whose property happened to be within a designated highway corridor. He failed to bargain with Connecticut water supply interests who stopped his program in Farmington. He failed to anticipate the resourcefulness of Justin Gray as an opponent on Route 2. While identifying an opening on Cambridge's flank, he ignored his own vulnerability to a counter-attack from Washington, D.C. He failed to win over true allegiance from Ed Ribbs, failed to convert the Governor back to being a full-fledged highway enthusiast and did not anticipate the opposition from local businessmen led by the gritty and resourceful George McLaughlin of the Civic Advisory Committee.

He was no Captain Queeg, consumed by paranoid fantasies. He was firmly rooted in the Machiavellian world of contriving to get things done, and showed no shame in manipulating people who did not satisfy his need for action. Five or ten years earlier he

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26 Boston Globe, January 17, 1974

probably could have achieved all he wanted to do in the spirit of the times. His failing was trying to play by old rules, as those rules were changing in the late 1960s. He might have seen his fate as a time warp, but unlike Ed Ribbs, he could not see the new obstacles of a new era, one of citizen participation and social/environmental concerns.

Hansen was the example of a man seemingly well trained for his times, but while American society went through the anti-Vietnam and anti-highway revolution of the late 1960s, he acted like a fish out of water. He was probably the best person to push for a final advantage for the highway builders, but his best efforts were not enough.

John Hansen might be contrasted with the style of two elected politicians, Frank Sargent and Kevin White. Both when confronted with the highway issue showed strong preferences to side with opponents of urban highways. Both were very cautious and made decisions with great deliberation. Both depended on others to help push decisions along. Both suffered from fears of unknown political backlash.

Both could be criticized as timid and cowardly. Both could procrastinate to put off a tough decision. Both preferred taking small steps towards a solution, rather than a dramatic leap into radical change.

Both were alert to political unknowns and pitfalls, and to enemies and opportunists who would take political advantage of any misstep. Kevin White vacillated on the Southwest Expressway and the Leverett Circle Bridge. Both made it through the later 1960s and early 1970s as popular politicians regarded favorably by historians of their time.

By contrast, John Hansen had great capability for decision-making and fashioning a well-structured strategy. He was fearless and confident, and no would dare call him a wimp. He was Machiavellian and manipulative, but had dramatic ambitions. He was not a shuffling bureaucrat content with mere survival from day to day. He had the courage of his convictions.

Yet this lack of political experience blinded him and others at Federal Highway to the uncertainties and unpredictables, and his manner of action tended to create more enemies than friends. He was indeed a dominant figure in highway building during the late 1960s. Yet his brazenness did him in. He encountered enemies who he underestimated. He could have used a touch of Sargent's and White's caution.

Looking back over the entire Route 2 struggle from the perspective of a half-century later, one would be expected to see an element of tragedy in Hansen's fate. He was exercising courage and decisiveness towards an objective he saw as technically valid. Gray did not accuse him of being anti-intellectual. He did not accuse him of lacking courage.<sup>27</sup> Gray could have accused him of moral insensitivity, but publicly did not.

### **REFLECTIONS ON THE ROLE OF THE DPW, esp. EDWARD J. RIBBS**

The events of 1969 exposed a quite different portrait of Commissioner Edward Ribbs than had previously been recognized. Ribbs had dutifully pushed forward in support of the Southwest Expressway and thus sacrificed his job, but he recognized the differences in societal attitudes, and respected the politics of Cambridge. He may have been a product of the Army Corps of Engineers, but he was not quite the anti-intellectual Justin Gray claimed him to be. His resistance to John Hansen showed that the anti-intellectual he may have been was not of the worst kind.

Cambridge was unique. Cambridge did not have elected mayors whose favors and loyalty could be sought, as in Boston and Somerville. It had a history of vigorous and unyielding opposition to the Inner Belt, especially indicated at the raucous 1960 public hearing.

It was Ed Ribbs who had refused to comply with John Hansen's original demand to call a public hearing on Route 2. For a brief moment he was rebellious. He claimed the state was "not ready," and that could have meant he felt over-matched in dealing with Cambridge. Gray needed only to read the local *Cambridge Chronicle* to know that Ribbs had been overridden by a strong-willed Federal Highway official. While Ribbs was forced to go along, his misgivings were real and sensitive to the local conditions.

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<sup>27</sup> If today I would have selected one man from the past century to lead a program to create a transit master plan for Boston that would last another century, I would choose John Hansen. It would have been John Hansen, not any of the other less tenacious figures involved in the anti-highway battles in Boston fifty years ago. Only Hansen would have the courage and decisiveness to put the plan together. If I disagreed with anything he came up with, I would have something of substance to focus my displeasure. In today's Boston, there is no one who wants to create a transit master plan for Allston or anywhere else, and is prepared to make the decisions necessary to bring it about. No one seems even to have any shame that a transit master plan does not exist .... and that no one wants to prepare one.

The risk of autocracy is great, but the Inner Belt battles showed that the American system of democracy can win out in the end. If ever one wished to have someone to send to Washington D.C. and into battle as the anti-Trump, it would be John Hansen and not any of the Democrats or Republicans of the 21st century.



Yet, ever the military man to obey orders and show loyalty to his allies, he yielded to the power of Hansen's directives.

The most revealing aspect in the affair was Ribbs' description of a potential "blood bath," as he described it. He did not elaborate further, because a bloody conflict could become a blood bath for the citizens, or the state, or both. The situation suggests that a fierce confrontation at a public meeting would be damaging to both sides. In military terms, it is like walking into a mutual slaughterhouse where the fighting is brutal, even catastrophic. Ribbs was a career military man in the Army Corps of Engineers, and may have witnessed much combat during World War II. No good commander wishes to send his troops into a slaughter-house setting, even when the prospect for victory is positive.

Ribbs had witnessed resolute determination in Cambridge over the Inner Belt, and he had to be aware that in late 1966 Cambridge had reconstituted its leadership at City Hall with a unanimous City Council, a new City Manager, a large supporting case of college professors, and a resourceful crew under Justin Gray -- all committed to stopping the Inner Belt. Ribbs had recognized the changing world and the need not to send one's forces into regions where they are not wanted. Route 2 could be a trap.

Ribbs did another strange thing. When Gray introduced his alternative to the Inner Belt, the DPW listed six reasons why his new plan should be rejected, yet agreed in the interests of conciliation not to reject but instead to study Gray's plan and its implications. None of these actions fits the conventional Ribbs image as a highway ogre or someone who goes around relentlessly paving people over. Ribbs may have come to the conclusion that in the context of the times, the Inner Belt (and Route 2) were simply not feasible, and delays would at least avoid brutal confrontations.

During my careers working for the state, I was present at four meetings with Ribbs, including two where I had a direct interaction with him. In all instances, he appeared calm, civic, obedient, neither arrogant nor obnoxious. His misfortune may have been that he was obedient and compliant. He could have been willing to do the bidding of others with a more powerful personality, such as John Hanson of Federal Highway or Ed King of Massport. But inherent abuse of power was not obvious from my observations.

Ribbs was later to oppose the new direction of transportation planning during the the transportation restudy and made himself so unwelcome that Alan Altshuler felt compelled to recommend his dismissal. Ribbs had started his career as a rodman on a state survey party. He left in the 1930s to join the Army Corps of engineers, and over the years was promoted to the rank of Colonel. It is most probable that during his military career he learned to obey orders, as military personnel are expected to do. When he became Commissioner of Public Works in the mid-1960s, he probably brought that obedience to his new job. He became the object of calls for obedience from Federal Highway and from the Governor. The Governor won that contest, but Ribbs remained sufficiently obedient to his allies as to trigger his termination in August 1971. Ribbs died years ago of cancer, but it would be revealing to seek out a wider range of opinions about his character and style as a military man within a civilian government function.

### **REFLECTIONS ON JUSTIN GRAY, ADVOCATE PLANNER FOR CITIZENS**

Justin Gray was by nature a radical city planner, yet committed to the cause of his client. In Brookline, he reflected the times of the mid-1960s, when town fathers were passive in their opposition to the Inner Belt. The presence of John Hansen could have been enervating, and Justin benefited from his hiring with the support of MIT and a united City Council. He had a sense for what was happening and the risks that were there, particular those that were real and could not be denied. For this reason, he was considered by some anti-highway activists as too respectful of the devil. Justin could recognize being in a dangerous situation or being pessimistic, while his critics criticized him for being disloyal to the cause.

Gray would have been reluctant to describe his actions as demonstrating "power" but his strategy and leadership during the Battle of Route 2 proved even to his sceptics what an effective scrapper he was. He defeated the very clever and manipulative John Hansen. It is doubtful if any of the state and federal highway leaders could have anticipated the vigor with which he attacked Route 2 and the Inner Belt.

His exertions, however, had been too much for Cambridge. He also talked of the virtues of rent control and the need to control housing speculators. Both positions rankled the real estate industry. He reflected the radical politics of his time in key ways, and that caused problems with business interests and more traditional politicians.

Furthermore, more power for Justin Gray meant less power for the Councillors and their desire to be in charge of affairs in the city. It is a strange twist in the saga of opposing the Inner Belt that in late 1969 both Dan Hayes and Justin's entire Community Development unit announced their departures from City Hall. Hayes had been defeated in the November elections, and Justin Gray announced the formation of an outside consulting group, Justin Gray and Associates. He was prepared to do selected work for City Hall, rather than exercise power in the name of Cambridge government. Justin's influence in the city declined over the next few years, and in one of his last actions in the 1990s he was assisting the Sierra Club in its opposition to the Big Dig depression of the Central Artery. Ultimately he was sidelined by kidney troubles. He was never again to be at that pinnacle of influence as his days at Cambridge City Hall during 1967 to 1969.

### **INCREASED ROLES FOR LOCAL JURISDICTIONS**

The battle of Route 2 finished up with Federal on one side and the City of Cambridge on the other, with DPW trapped in the middle. The Boston Transportation Planning Review ended in 1973 with greater roles for citizens, for favored agencies like the MBTA and for municipal governments. The brief venture of Regional Federal Highway into public leadership remains an isolated event, never to be repeated.

The push for building the Route 2 extension can be seen as an unelected middle-level federal bureaucrat seeking to manipulate and override the Governor of Massachusetts. Hansen overreached, because he did not understand the historic nature of Constitutional government at the state and federal level. The United States is the name of our country, and the states take precedence in a federation. By the end of the Route 2 crisis in June 1969, state authority had overruled federal authority.

Federal officials needed to understand that the United States was constituted in 1787 as a federation of the states, with federal powers duly limited. Deference to local interests has been a tradition of the United States, in contrast to the autocratic models historically favored in Prussia, China and Russia. As Lord Acton noted, "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." The Route 2 crisis in Cambridge in 1969 provided a prime example of such corruption.

This highway conflict over power, policy, and influence was happening while the U.S. was engaged in the Vietnam War. The controversy in Vietnam centered on federal government decisions, not those made by states. In the dust-up over Route 2, Justin Gray had highlighted mistakes by the Federal government, and sought action by the top state official – the governor – to resist federal intervention and instead chart a new course for transportation in Massachusetts. His strategy and energy helped make those changes.

The civil rights experience of a few years earlier had posed Federal judges and military force against southern governors who “stood in the schoolhouse door” to oppose racial integration. The southern governors were on the wrong moral side of the civil rights issue, and lost. In Massachusetts, Governor Sargent was on the right moral side of the highways issue, and won.

### **THE OTHER BATTLEGROUND : FOWL MEADOW**

The primary remaining battleground was Fowl Meadow. A court decision in the *Robbins* case in 1968<sup>28</sup> prevented DPW from seizing areas of Fowl Meadow in Canton and Milton for the extension of I-95, the Southwest Expressway. In addition to the lengthy court battle, legislative authorization for the transfer of park land to highway land required key action by the Legislature, and a signing into law by Governor Sargent.

The Governor's action on Fowl Meadow bore a resemblance to his Route 2 decision. He approved a parkland transfer but suspended implementation until a more comprehensive road study had been completed. This decision was made without Federal Highway interference.

With the suspended actions for both Route 2 and Fowl Meadow, the stage was set for the highway moratorium decision in January 1970. That decision was possible because of the highway defeats of Route 2 and Fowl Meadow in 1969. The political battle that began in 1965 -- with scattered resisters to highways -- ended in 1969 with the victory of those resisters and a resounding defeat for the mighty Highway Lobby.

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28 *Robbins vs. Department of Public Works*, 355 Mass 328 (1969), decision on February 5, 1969. Walter Robbins for the Committee for Safety and Conservation, Interstate 95. To enjoin the transfer of parklands in Fowl Meadow, within the Neponset River Reservation, from the state parks agency, the MDC, to the highway department without prior specific legislation.

## AFTERWORD

During a 1971 meeting of the BTPR northwest corridor restudy, Justin Gray advocated once again for his roadway plan, including the option in the von Szilassy plan for a connection to Watertown via the B&M freight rail track. When a citizen expressed criticism of any new expressway idea, Justin had to explain delicately that he was being strategic and not seriously advocating for the road option. Gray's fears of the highway power again being exercised proved to be unfounded, because he did not appreciate how decisively he had won the 1969 engagement over Route 2. He was still prepared to advocate irrational ideas if in the end it assured final victory.

The BTPR participatory process quickly demonstrated how thin any public support was for new highways. Justin Gray would likely have been alert to any formal reappearance of DPW expressways, but it never happened. Even before the BTPR process began, the highway enthusiasts seemed utterly despondent, their morale shattered, their mighty powers scattered to the wind.

As a participant in many of the BTPR Northwest meetings, I cannot recall a single citizen standing up in any of those meetings and advocating for an expressway option. The primary emphasis during BTPR was on mass transit : on extending the Red Line to Alewife and relocating the Orange Line in the southwest corridor. The Final Northwest Corridor report (the "Red Book") showed nothing more than arterial changes in the Alewife area, with no extension of a roadway into Somerville.

Not everything proceeded in a perfect idyllic manner for the road opponents. Important leaders departed, notably the announcement from Richard Cardinal Cushing in September 1978 that he was resigning as Cardinal of Boston, effective that year. He was persuaded to stay on longer, and formerly resigned in September 1970, dying of cancer two months later. Save Our Cities declined in significance throughout 1969 and lost much of its funding. Prime anti-highway advocate at US DOT James Braman resigned on September 1970.

Another major loss was the election defeat of City Councillor and former Mayor Dan Hayes in November 1969. For almost four years he had been a major force in local

government against highway building in the city. A conservative businessman by nature, he had been willing to cross ideological boundaries and work with citizens groups at all economic levels. He had chaired the Mayor's Advisory Committee on the Inner Belt, with its high-level members of college professors, supported by the presence of Jim Morey from UPA and Henrietta Jackson from Save our Cities.

No final assessment from Justin Gray has surfaced to date, but on December 22, 1969 Dan Hayes wrote a parting message to his compatriots on the City Council. He reported the good news that the Inner Belt and Route 2 had not been built. He noted that

“the Greater Boston Committee on the Transportation Crisis, born out of the demonstration led by Cambridge on the State House last January, has grown into a strong and vigorous organization comprising low income, middle income, and high income neighborhoods in the metropolitan area. .... A large number of professionals in a wide range of disciplines have been mobilised to provide technical assistance in the development of new and constructive ways for dealing with the transportation crisis.”

He cited the numerous calls by public officials for the governor to declare a moratorium on highway construction.

Hayes recognized three negatives :

“Cambridge's Save Our Cities Committee, long in the forefront against the Inner Belt, is no longer a vital force, .... my imminent departure from the City Council and that of Justin Gray, John Culp and Ellen Feingold from the employ of the City Manager's office leaves the City without many of the technical, political and legislative continuities that are needed in our work” with agencies and committees active in highway issues.

He concluded by asserting that :

“The State Department of Public Works seems to be more determined than ever to build the Inner Belt and the Route 2 Extension. They are skilfully manipulating data to show that only the Inner Belt through eastern Cambridge is the best alternative. All evidence indicates that the state's determination is wholeheartedly supported by the Federal Highway Administration.”

“My analysis of the pluses and minuses suggests that we can be cautiously optimistic of our chances to halt the construction of the Inner Belt and the Route 2 Extension. Technical and rational arguments are on our side.

Time is on our side. Politics is on our side."

"But this hopeful situation is very fragile. Cambridge cannot halt the Inner Belt or the Route 2 Extension with rhetoric alone. Hard and technically skillful work is required if we are to prevail. And we must continue to provide the leadership and technical assistance to the other communities. If we don't we can lose the united front which has been developed, and which is absolutely essential to any successful effort to stop Route 2 and the Brookline-Elm Street route of the Inner Belt."

In retrospect it is regrettable that Cambridge voters did not realize the extraordinary level of leadership that Dan Hayes gave to his city. He should at least have been rewarded with the recognition of re-election. In the November 1969 elections he finished eleventh in a nine-person race.

Over the years Fred Salvucci among a few others has come to recognize the important role played by Dan Hayes in those difficult days in the late 1960s. It could have been that his opposition to Route 2 was reinforced by his residence in North Cambridge, his shared ownership of land with his father near the current site of the Alewife MBTA station, and his sympathy for the businessmen who would lose their companies in the Alewife area. The record does not show strong citizen leadership coming from North Cambridge as it did from Cambridgeport, but the business community was a very significant force in opposition to the Route 2 extension, and Dan Hayes was a part of that effort.

When regional highway advocates years later would try to advance the idea of building new highways, the focus was invariably on "we should build the Southwest Expressway." Never was there a call to build the Inner Belt or Route 2. Everyone knew that new expressways in Cambridge would never fly.

John Volpe would look back in 1978 and urge that the Southwest Expressway be completed, as did a handful of transportation officials (such as former Transportation Secretary Kevin Sullivan) over the past four decades. I cannot recall one instance of a call to build the Inner Belt and no proposal to build the Route 2 Extension was ever made after June 1969.

The Route 2 bullying gamble of 1969 was a devastating loss for the highway

advocates, equivalent to Napoleon's final loss at Waterloo. Their powers in Massachusetts have ever since been vastly diminished, as with the state Department of Public Works. Never again would such top-down road-building energies dominate the landscape of the Commonwealth, in disregard to wishes of the Governor.

The experience resulted in a reduction in levels of arrogance by highway engineers. Further criticism from environmentalists in the 1970s helped suppress the levels of arrogance and self-confidence. The state highway Department has survived the tribulations of defeat half a century ago, and had adapted to become more of an operational and rebuilding entity, with an emphasis on "fix it first." The number of houses taken for highway construction in the past two decades has dropped to almost zero. With less ego on the line and more women in the workforce, the ability of state highway engineers to work constructively with cities and towns is far better than it was in the contentious times of Route 2 in 1969.

