

Bureaucratic Roadblock

New York Times (1923-Current file); Mar 13, 1967; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times
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ning that the city is trying to face constructively and creatively, efforts that deserve maximum encouragement and high priority help. Nothing shifts more rapidly or is more explosively fluid than urban problems, and nothing is more rigidly inflexible than the bureaucracy designed to deal with them. This, in the end, may be the real crisis of the cities.

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There was a time when all roads led to Rome; now they lead to Washington. In the case of the Cross Brooklyn Expressway, the route is a slow circle embracing the city, the state and the Federal governments. The Interstate Highway System is apparently constructed of miles and miles of tangled red tape.

New York City is thoroughly enmeshed in it right now in its determination to substitute the Cross Brooklyn Expressway for the Bushwick Expressway as Brooklyn's chief share of the interstate system. The city went to Washington—through Albany, since the Federal Bureau of Public Roads speaks officially only to the State Department of Public Works—with hat and plan in hand. Its own studies had indicated not only the distinct advantages of the Cross Brooklyn route but its right to urgent priority. The proposal was rejected. The process, in a not-too-mythical reconstruction, went something like this:

Bureau of Public Roads: We do not accept substitutes. New York City: But the Cross Brooklyn route is preferable, according to expert studies. B.P.R.: We are not judging it on its merits. N.Y.C.: How is it to be judged? B.P.R.: As part of the total New York City system, and all its links. On our maps the linkage is complete. Your road does not connect with the Lower Manhattan Expressway. The Bushwick route does. N.Y.C.: We don't think the best solution is to send commercial truck traffic pouring across lower Manhattan on its way to other places. The Cross Brooklyn Expressway bypasses it. B.P.R.: We do not consider that the two roads serve the same purpose.

N.Y.C.: But we don't want the Bushwick route. How can we convince you? B.P.R.: Bushwick cannot be removed without a complete re-examination of the system in the New York area. N.Y.C.: What then? B.P.R.: After that, we can take Bushwick off our maps, if we approve. N.Y.C.: Does that mean you will put Cross Brooklyn on? B.P.R.: No. When we de-map a road the mileage goes back into the national pot. N.Y.C.: In that case, is there any way for you to give us the Cross Brooklyn route? B.P.R.: Just possibly, we could map Cross Brooklyn in addition to Bushwick. N.Y.C.: What are the chances? B.P.R.: Well, all 41,000 miles of the interstate system are committed, give or take a few miles. New York is fully mapped. N.Y.C. (shuffling papers and untangling tape): We will find a way.

This dialogue, unfortunately, is not straight out of Parkinson's manual on bureaucratic obstructionism. It is, as the expression goes, out of real life. It is just as real as the critical issues of circulation and plan-