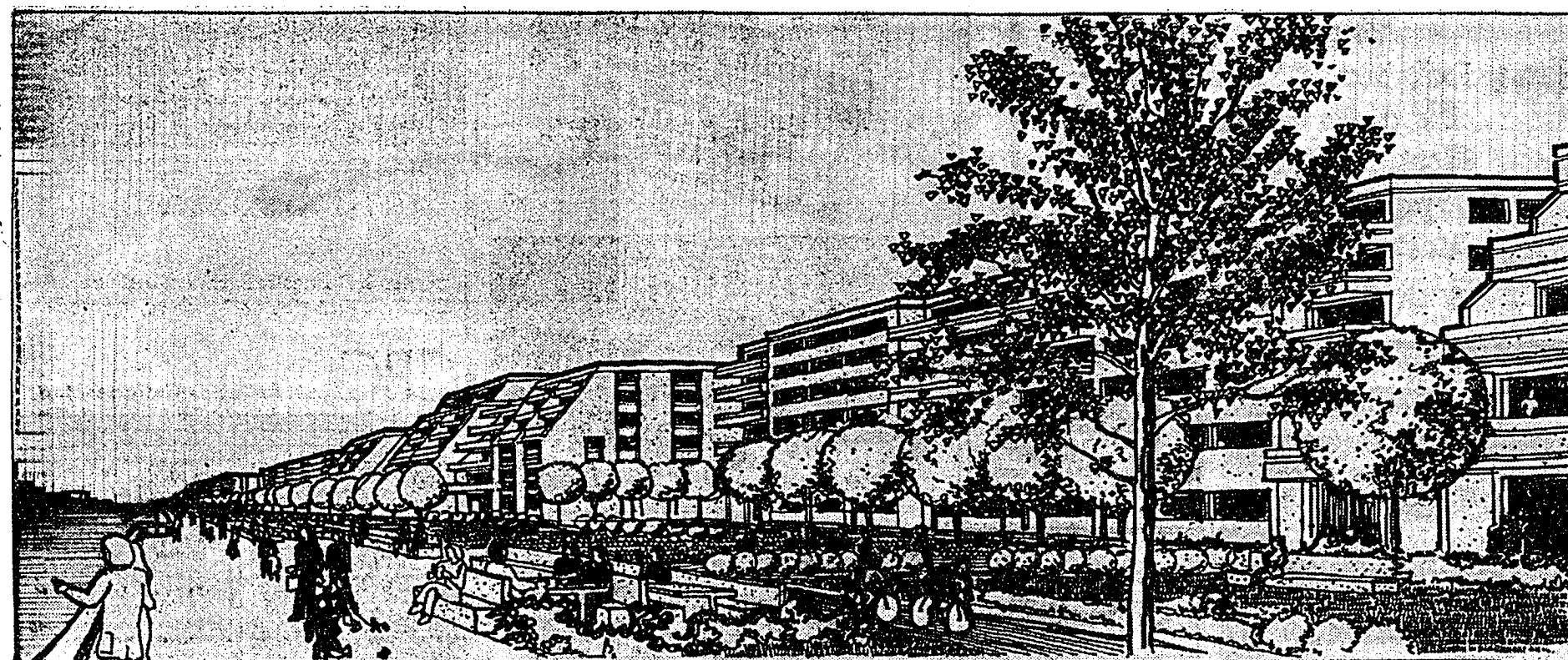


ARCHITECTURE VIEW: WILL WESTWAY TURN INTO THE OPPORTUNITY OF A CENTURY? ARCHITECTURE

Huxtable, Ada Louise

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Drawing by Bernard Tschumi

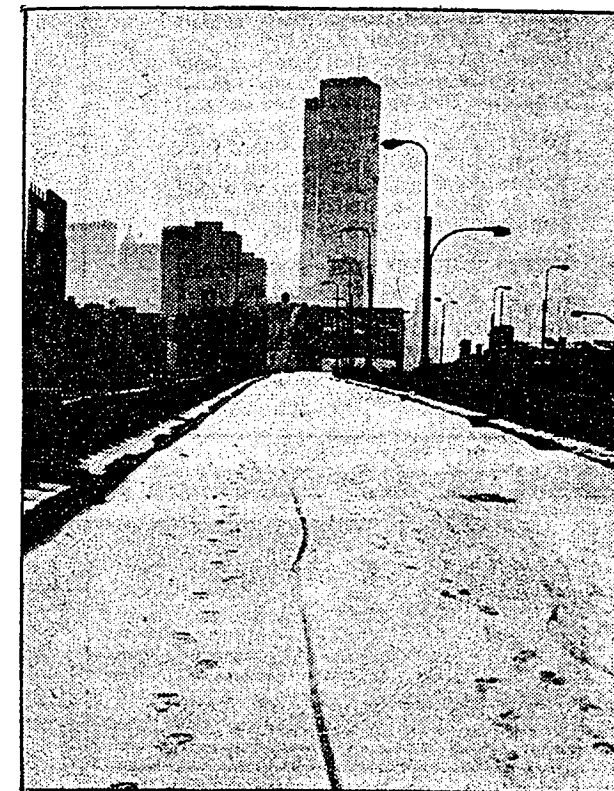


Photo by Irene Lieberman

A wide promenade with a bicycle path and new housing are part of the ambitious plans for replacing New York's dilapidated West Side Highway.

The West Side Highway is not exactly a majestic ruin. It is still operative above 46th Street, and the cars it carried until the demise of its downtown segment have not gone away. The traffic and pollution have simply moved to other roads. There are 360 percent more vehicles on Tenth Avenue now, and 27 percent more on the F.D.R. Drive. Measure that increase in terms of truck noise and air quality and the environmental impact is awesome.

Add to this the continuing explosion of express buses—the only really successful form of mass transit today with popular appeal, a hard fact from which the subways are suffering—all of them fouling Fifth, Madison and the Avenue of the Americas and other arteries east and west, because they have no other way to go.

And then look at that rotting hulk of elevated roadway dividing the city from the waterfront, the decaying and largely unused piers, the wasted and maltreated land along the river, the sabotaged potential for housing and recreation.

Logic says that Westway, the replacement for the West Side Highway for which the city has just received \$1.16 billion in Federal Interstate funds as one of the last acts of the Ford Administration, is an excellent solution.

The Westway plan, the product of a joint planning group set up by the City and the State, deals with all of these environmental issues in addition to the transportation problem. It calls for a 4.2 mile, six-lane interstate highway, a large part of it to be underground in new landfill in the Hudson River, from the Battery to 42d Street. Two lanes would be reserved for buses and car pools during peak hours. The funds are 90-10 Federal and State, with no cost to the city. The next section to be studied will go from 42d to 57th Street, where all trucks will eventually leave. The final, future leg, to 72d Street, would narrow,

dropping all commercial traffic, to meet the restricted Henry Hudson Parkway.

But New Yorkers have little faith in logic. They have been burned too many times—too often lied to and co-opted in the name of some greater good. They are partisan, protective and paranoid. Logic is converted to lunacy while they march their protest banners over the cliff.

People, cities and countryside have been ravaged by expressways. Mother wisdom says resist; the evil that we have is better than the evil to come. Resist, because we are smart now about the dislocations and disruptions of highway construction, because we fear for our neighborhoods, because we have learned that the status quo is safer than change.

Against this background, it is hard to sell New Yorkers on Westway. They are skilled street fighters who love the game. They also have a secret pleasure (which I share)

ARCHITECTURE VIEW

ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

Will Westway Turn Into The Opportunity of a Century?

in the perverse wonder of silent bicycles and quiet strolls on the wrecked highway turned into an inadvertent and rather absurd promenade with a superb river view, Sunday morning offers poignant, peaceful pleasures on shabby, isolated piers for the solitary visitor to the water's edge with its pigeons and old wooden piles. The cast-iron fronted railroad piers downtown offer fine architectural nostalgia. It is all surreal and surprisingly exhilarating in contrast to the city's busy pragmatism.

The only ones who look at the total city picture are the planners at City Hall, and they are not infallible. Few others even try for a dispassionate understanding of what Westway really is, and really means.

Westway is not just a billion-dollar road. It has never pretended to be only an answer to transportation needs. There are simpler answers, as opponents claim, but that misses the point. Westway possesses rare vision; it is large-

scale, long-term land use planning for the city's future. It is a chance to reclaim the mutilated waterfront and West Side. It is an opportunity to do something extraordinarily constructive and creative—provided that it is done well.

Those italics are important. Planning and redevelopment have become bad words for good reasons. The record of road building and renewal has been catastrophic in both human and urban terms. The assumption now is that lessons have been learned, that the art of planning and urban design is more sensitive and sophisticated, that we have more environmental skills, that cities are more responsive to public concerns and welfare, and that the public will bloody well see to it that they are.

Westway must not be just a real estate gimmick for developable land; it must be planned, designed and controlled in the interest of a better city, not of a better tax base. Obviously, with the complexity of the project and the many jurisdictions involved, someone will have to set standards. And those standards will have to be translated into creative legal and architectural solutions.

Westway will create 181 acres of new, riverfront land. With existing landfill in the vicinity of West Street, there will be a total of 234 acres. Of this, only 31 acres will be used for the road, since most of it is underground. The rest would be zoned—a power the city has even for a State right-of-way—for 93 acres of parkland and 110 acres of development. The land for development breaks down into 60 acres for residential construction, 18 for institutional and commercial uses, and 32 for industrial purposes.

From Battery Park City to 35th Street there would be a promenade and bicycle path twice the width of the Brooklyn Heights promenade. (Eventually, the river could be accessible to pedestrians as far as the Cloisters. On

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Westway

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the Jersey shore, plans for Liberty Park are moving ahead.) Parks would be continuous all along Westway's water edge.

Housing is visualized on the landfill in three areas—off the West Village, Tribeca and Chelsea. There would be room for about 7,000 units. There is a possibility of containerport facilities, and the Gansevoort sanitation facility south of 14th Street would be rebuilt as a new, more efficient unit with highway funds, which pay for replacement. The Westway tunnel would run under parks and housing for a good part of its length and would be a vented and acoustically treated covered road, 18-feet high.

The city has expressed its intention to zone the new land restrictively and specifically, based on environmental considerations. Housing near Greenwich Village, for example, would have to be low-rise and small scale. The premise is that development would be integrated in character with contiguous neighborhoods, and land uses, such as the location of the larger parks, would be tied to the needs of

the adjacent areas. View corridors to the water would have to be maintained.

None of this will come about automatically, even with \$1.16 billion in hand. There will be serious difficulties in developing the land. The problems the city will face include coordination and management of a vast and lengthy undertaking, as well as specific investment, design and maintenance decisions, but none of this is beyond solution. It can be a 10- to 20-year undertaking to carry out parks and housing in their ultimate form under optimum conditions.

Extreme resourcefulness will be required for funding anything the city wishes to build beyond the basic highway. And superior talent will be needed for design. These must be parks of Olmsted quality, not banal grass strips. Some of the interesting old iron railroad pier facades could be reerected for recreational facilities. Housing must be handsome and imaginative as well as sensitive in style and scale. Design quality is the total project's overriding need and the ultimate determinant of success or failure.

Above all, speculation must be controlled, or the creative chance will be lost and neighborhood damage guaranteed. Land values will zoom on the West Side, adjacent to parks and river and the areas of new construction. Zoning restrictions must set appropriate building, or non-building patterns for both the new land and the bordering neighborhoods. Smart operators are undoubtedly already buying, preparing to fight those restrictions as hardships. The city must be uncompromisingly responsible.

That's the Westway package. It can be great for New York if it is carried out with conscience, vision and control. This should be the work of people who love the city, not of people who exploit it. It could be New York's planning opportunity of the century.