

The West Side's Future

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should come first, chicken-or-egg-style, land use or transportation plan. They are inseparable.

This is one issue the administration cannot finesse politically; it must provide vision and leadership immediately. The West Side Highway, in any form, is the key to a sizable part of New York's future.

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There is more involved in hearings this week and next on plans for the West Side Highway than how to get traffic moving again. Although the five so-called alternate schemes developed by the state and city are the immediate subject of debate, it would be a serious error to look at the matter as anything less than the virtual rebuilding of the city's West Side—with all of the opportunities and responsibilities that this entails.

Certain facts are indisputable. The highway is literally falling down and beyond repair. To consider rebuilding it in its present form would be an exercise in folly; it is not only antiquated in concept and function, but offers a historic object lesson in how to destroy a city's waterfront resources.

Nor is it just the highway that is in ruins. Extensive sections of the West Side are in need of rehabilitation, and even the healthy neighborhoods suffer an uncertain future, as the local communities that so strongly oppose the current proposals are quick to admit. This is essentially a land use as well as a transportation problem, and one of the most critical total planning challenges that any city faces.

The necessity here is to seize the challenge, which will never come again, using all possible government and financial aids to do a major, constructive planning job that will provide desirable environmental amenities that are available in no other way. This includes the reclamation of the waterfront and the potential of new land for recreation and housing.

For this purpose, the most ambitious plan, to build the highway beyond the water's edge, serves best. But this scheme, in addition to its extraordinary expense, needs careful examination. There are legitimate questions of size as well as form. Would a road of more modest scale have less potentially harmful impact on neighboring communities? In what way will the city act to control increased traffic and its effect on surrounding streets?

If new land is created, to what purposes will it be put? Will it be a commercial or high-rent wall to the river, or parkland and accessible waterfront? Again, on what scale, and in what form? Officials are vague and there are no design details.

It would be inexcusable if this unparalleled planning opportunity were lost in arguments about Interstate designation (there are positive ways of using it without highway overkill) or pointless debates about which