



CITY OF PORTLAND
OREGON

FAST FREEWAYS - FLEEING FAMILIES

We have been hearing a good deal of late about the federally-aided freeway program now underway. The potential impact of this program on Oregon residents is staggering. The City Planning Commission has estimated that in Portland alone some 5,000 households will be displaced. Of these, 2,575 households are in the path of freeways approved by the Bureau of Public Roads during the present interstate freeway program to be completed in 1971. An additional 1,185 households are in the path of freeways applied for but not yet approved as part of the interstate freeway program. Area-wise and in terms of the percentage of households displaced, smaller communities will be even more drastically affected by the freeway construction.

The Federal Government, through its Bureau of Public Roads, pays 90% of the costs of these freeways. Oddly enough, that arm of government completely ignores the fact that its tremendous concrete swaths plow through the lives of people. True enough, home owners are paid a fair price for their property. But the Bureau of Public Roads assumes no responsibility for where these people go next or for what happens to other displaced people who are not so fortunate as to own their living quarters.

Contrast this with the requirements of another arm of the Federal Government, the Housing and Home Finance Agency. This is the organization which

administers the federally-aided urban renewal program; it pays two-thirds of the net cost of any urban renewal project. HHFA will not enter into an urban renewal contract with a local public agency until that agency 1) has determined the number of families and individuals to be displaced and their economic circumstances, and 2) has developed a feasible plan for the relocation of these people in decent, safe, and sanitary quarters that are within their price range. This relocation plan must show either that the existing housing supply is adequate to take care of the needs of the displacees or that additional housing units are being programmed.

Once an urban renewal project gets out of the planning stages and into operation, the local public agency must set up a relocation office in the project area and must staff it with personnel to help occupants of the area find other places to live. Before sales or rental vacancies are referred to families or individuals, they must be inspected by a member of the relocation staff to be certain that they comply with local health, sanitation, and housing codes.

If minority groups, particularly non-white people, are represented to a substantial degree in the project area, HHFA requires evidence that consideration has been given to their special housing problems and that adequate quarters will be available to them.

Finally, the Congress of the United States has enacted legislation providing for the payment of moving costs to those displaced by urban renewal activities

-- up to \$200 in the case of residents, and up to \$3,000 in the case of businesses and institutions. These costs are paid entirely by federal funds.

The Urban Renewal and Redevelopment law of the State of Oregon provides that a redevelopment project may not be initiated until there is a plan for the relocation of persons living in the area and until there is a plan for providing, unless already available, decent, safe, and sanitary quarters substantially equal in number to the substandard quarters to be demolished, at rents within the means of those displaced from such substandard quarters as prescribed by federal and state urban renewal regulations and statutes.

The problem of freeway displacement in its present and potential form has not existed previously. Until recently, those affected have been largely home owners. Such people, after the Highway Department pays them for their property, have some means of taking care of themselves. However, in many cases the prices they receive are not sufficient to enable them to buy comparable homes without considerable difficulty. Too, the accelerated freeway program will result in a great increase in the number of displaced owners. Tenants are at an even greater disadvantage. They have no control over their quarters, and, since the Highway Department rarely has any dealings with them, frequently they have little knowledge as to the timing of right-of-way acquisition.

Freeway displacement in large volume is not peculiar to Oregon. Eastern and middle-western states have long since become familiar with it and have

dealt with the problems it brings in varying ways. The Illinois Division of Highways, for example, contracts with the tenants' Relocation Bureau of the City of Chicago for relocation services to people displaced by its activities. These services are available not only to families and single individuals but also to commercial and industrial establishments. Expenditures include the salaries of the personnel involved, telephone, light and gas bills for offices on the right-of-way, bills for signs when necessary, transportation costs for personnel while on duty, bills for such incidentals as stationery and office supplies, and a portion of the overhead for the central office of the Tenants' Relocation Bureau.

The Chicago District Engineer for the Illinois Division of Highways has this to say about the relocation program:

"Before setting forth details of cost or contractual arrangements, I would like to state that the assistance rendered to us by the Tenants' Relocation Bureau of the City of Chicago not only met a need but helped tremendously in good public relations in a situation which, at best, is always disagreeable to some."

We in Portland have tried to provide at least a minimal relocation service to freeway displacees through our Development Commission -- which is our urban renewal agency. However, we have been advised by the City Attorney that the Development Commission may not properly expend its own funds for relocation activities in any but urban renewal areas. Thus, we are unable to make available any type of relocation service to what will be a very large group of people.

While the Highway Department recognizes that a problem does exist in this connection, it has traditionally emphasized its lack of legal responsibility for -- and its inability to deal with -- relocation problems. However, during the 1959 session of the Oregon State Legislature, a measure was passed requiring the State Highway Commission under certain circumstances to 1) make studies of occupants of property scheduled for highway acquisition, 2) keep these studies current until the premises required for highway acquisition are vacated, 3) obtain other appropriate information to aid in the relocation of displaced persons and make such information available to the persons involved.

It is as yet not clear what plans the Highway Department has for implementing this legislation.

In any case, it is my strong feeling that the Federal highway law should be amended to provide for certain relocation services to persons uprooted by highway activities. I believe that such relocation services should include:

1. Occupancy surveys in right-of-way areas. Such surveys are necessary in order to determine the volume and character of the displacement in each instance. If cities or counties wish to avail themselves of special federal relocation aids (see item 3), this type of information must accompany the localities' requests for such aids.
2. Information as to available sales and rental housing.

3. Information as to special FHA mortgage insurance available to persons displaced as a result of government action.
4. Such other aids as can be provided to minimize the difficulties of moving.


MAYOR