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The Implications of Freeway Siting in California: Four Case Studies on the Effects of Freeways on Neighborhoods of Color

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# The Implications of Freeway Siting in California: Four Case Studies on the Effects of Freeways on Neighborhoods of Color

March  
2023

A Research Report from the Pacific Southwest  
Region University Transportation Center

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<p>California’s freeways have come under increasing scrutiny for their disproportionately adverse impacts on low-income populations and populations of color. This study uses empirical research to not only understand but also quantify and describe in detail the historical impacts of freeways on communities of color in four California cities and areas: Pasadena, Pacoima, Sacramento, and San José. In these neighborhoods, freeways displaced many residents, significantly harmed those that remained, and left communities divided and depleted. The four cases differ in notable ways, but they share a disproportionate impact of freeway construction on communities of color. In Pasadena and Pacoima, decision-makers chose routes that displaced a greater share of households of color than proposed alternatives.</p> <p>Demolition and displacement were the most visible and immediate effects of the freeways, but toxic pollution, noise, economic decline, and stigmatization remained long after. In suburban areas, white, affluent interests often succeeded in pushing freeways to more powerless neighborhoods. Massive roadway construction complemented other destructive governmental actions such as urban renewal and redlining. Freeways and suburbanization were key components in the creation of a spatial mismatch between jobs and housing for people of color, with few transportation options to overcome it. Understanding the history of racism in freeway development can inform restorative justice in these areas.</p>			
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The Pacific Southwest Region UTC conducts an integrated, multidisciplinary program of research, education, and technology transfer aimed at *improving the mobility of people and goods throughout the region*. The program is organized around four themes: 1) technology to address transportation problems and improve mobility, 2) improving mobility for vulnerable populations, 3) Improving resilience and protecting the environment, and 4) managing mobility in high growth areas.

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## Disclosure

Principal Investigators Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Susan L. Handy, Co-principal Investigators Paul M. Ong and Jesus Barajas, and UCLA and UC Davis research teams conducted this research titled, "The Implications of Freeway Siting in California: Four Case Studies on the Effects of Freeways on Neighborhoods of Color" at the UCLA Institute of Transportation Studies, UC Davis Institute of Transportation Studies, and UCLA Center for Neighborhood Knowledge. The research took place from

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## Abstract

California's freeways have come under increasing scrutiny for their disproportionately adverse impacts on low-income populations and populations of color. This study uses empirical research to not only

understand but also quantify and describe in detail the historical impacts of freeways on communities of color in four California cities and areas: Pasadena, Pacoima, Sacramento, and San José. In these neighborhoods, freeways displaced many residents, significantly harmed those that remained, and left communities divided and depleted. The four cases differ in notable ways, but they share a disproportionate impact of freeway construction on communities of color. In Pasadena and Pacoima, decision-makers chose routes that displaced a greater share of households of color than proposed alternatives.

Demolition and displacement were the most visible and immediate effects of the freeways, but toxic pollution, noise, economic decline, and stigmatization remained long after. In suburban areas, white, affluent interests often succeeded in pushing freeways to more powerless neighborhoods. Massive roadway construction complemented other destructive governmental actions such as urban renewal and redlining. Freeways and suburbanization were key components in the creation of a spatial mismatch between jobs and housing for people of color, with few transportation options to overcome it. Understanding the history of racism in freeway development can inform restorative justice in these areas.



# The Implications of Freeway Siting in California: Four Case Studies on the Effects of Freeways on Neighborhoods of Color

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## Executive Summary

### Introduction

Freeways crisscross and bisect urban and suburban neighborhoods across the U.S.—and notably in California. Once celebrated as extraordinary accomplishments of modernity and transportation planning, and credited for improving regional mobility, U.S. freeways have come under increasing scrutiny for their disproportionately adverse impacts on low-income populations and populations of color. This study uses empirical research to not only understand but also quantify and describe in detail the historical impacts of freeways on communities of color in four California cities and areas: Pasadena and Pacoima in Southern California and Sacramento and San José in Northern California (See **Figure ES-1**). These neighborhoods, chosen in consultation with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), represent a range of built environments and ethnic compositions. Collectively, the case studies of these neighborhoods add to the existing scholarship by showing freeways' effects on suburbs and the (then) edges of growing cities.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the Golden State undertook its largest infrastructure development project to modernize its older roadway system into an extensive network of freeways. This contributed to a restructuring of cities and regions by further fostering suburbanization and the production of single-family housing beyond the urban core. While this decentralization of the U.S. urban landscape had begun earlier, with streetcars and pre-Interstate roadways (Wachs, 1984), it accelerated with the advent of freeways and the offering of government subsidies for homeownership after World War II. This geographic transformation reshaped the racial structure of metropolitan areas, enabling white residents to move into highly segregated and outlying suburban places. People of color were locked out, formally or in effect, from these spaces and suffered from both a spatial and a transportation mismatch between their housing and available, accessible jobs (Rothstein, 2017; Kain, 1968; and Blumenberg, 2017). The story was more nuanced in some California neighborhoods of color: established Black areas of prewar suburbs like Pasadena, diverse postwar suburbs like Pacoima, and urban areas that became home to people displaced by the first wave of freeway construction like Sacramento's Oak Park. Like the central cities examined in other studies, these areas too were split apart by freeway construction and faced ongoing effects thereafter.

Unlike previous studies relying only on qualitative methods to determine the impact of freeways on communities, this project employs both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and utilizes data and techniques that allow us to empirically document four outcomes. This study explores:

1. Was the choice of freeway alignments racially biased?
2. What were the direct effects of freeway construction? How many housing units did freeway construction destroy, and what was the racial composition of affected households?
3. What were the indirect effects of freeway construction? What impacts did it have on areas surrounding the freeway and the broader housing market?
4. What other impacts did residents of the affected neighborhoods experience?

Figure ES-1. Case Study Areas



- Major freeways discussed
- Case study area
- Other freeways discussed
- Other California numbered routes

Data source: Caltrans, 2022b; base map: Esri, 2023a

We examine an extended timeline of freeway-building, spanning from initial studies to opening ceremonies, but also look at some impacts reaching years after freeway completion. To examine the freeway impacts quantitatively, we employ newly digitized spatial information from historical documents specifically for this project and analyze these data with geospatial analysis tools. We complement this quantitative inquiry with qualitative research that includes review of local newspaper

articles, university and local archives, planning documents, professional studies, maps, and citizen correspondence on the plans. We also report on interviews with some civic leaders, residents, and community members, who experienced the construction of freeways in their community firsthand.

## Findings

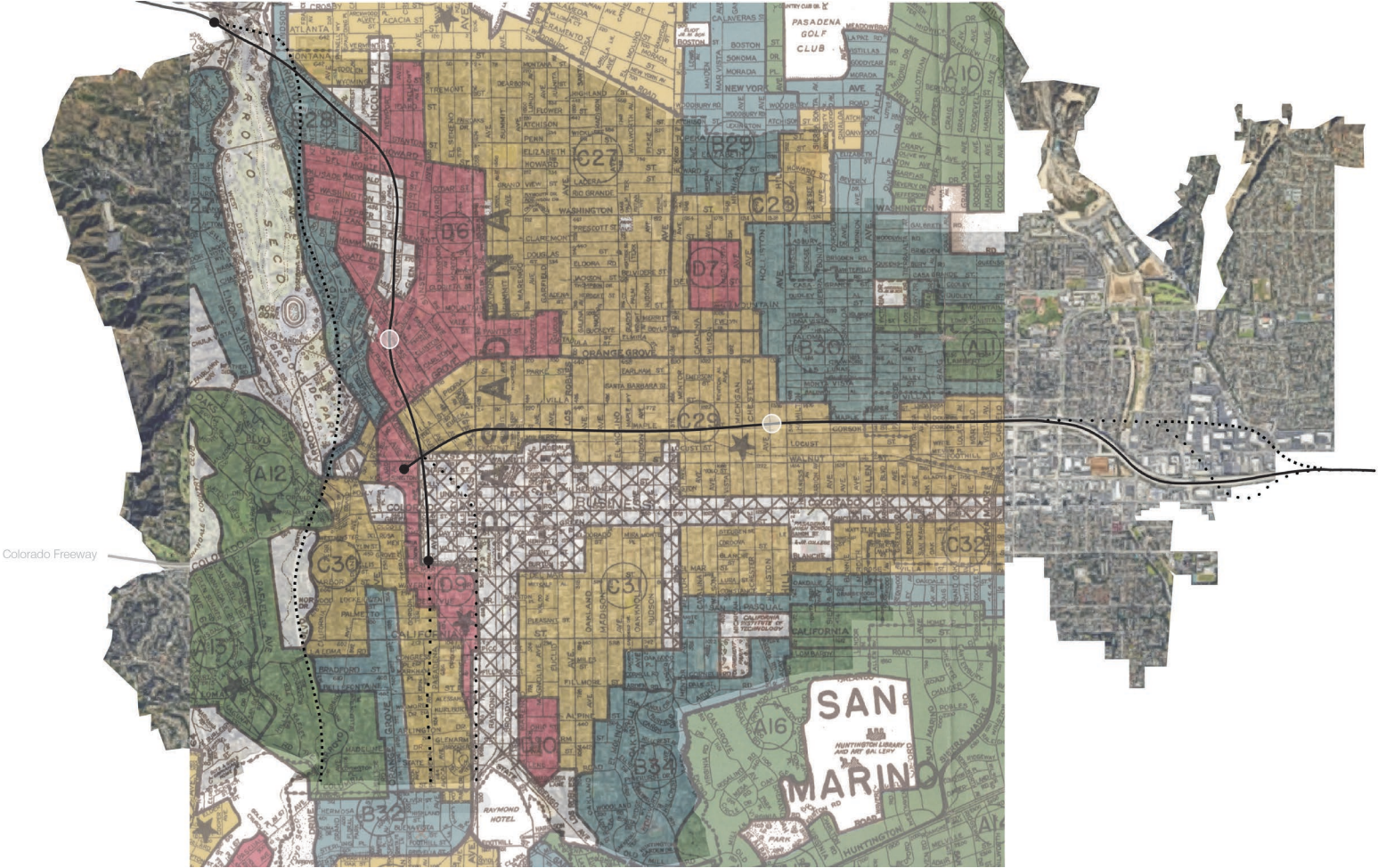
### Pasadena

In Pasadena, a historic suburb of Los Angeles, the Foothill Freeway/Interstate 210 was routed through the city's thriving Black neighborhoods of Orange Grove-Lincoln and Fair Oaks. Local officials and state highway engineers engaged in a concerted push to lay the groundwork for the Foothill Freeway. By the time state engineers were planning out freeway routes, Pasadena's Black neighborhoods lacked investment, had been identified as blighted and redlined (See **Figure ES-2**), sat upon cheaper land than the rest of the city, had residents too disempowered to fight back effectively, and were part of a general plan that predicted and rationalized freeway construction running through them.

The cost and destruction of the chosen freeway routing was comparatively higher than any of the proposed alternative routes. Faced with the starkest choice of any of the four case studies in terms of households to be displaced (See **Table ES-1**), the City chose a "Green route" that bisected northwest Pasadena's neighborhoods of color over a "Blue route" running largely through uninhabited parkland along the eastern edge of the Arroyo Seco valley by the Rose Bowl stadium (See **Figure ES-3**).

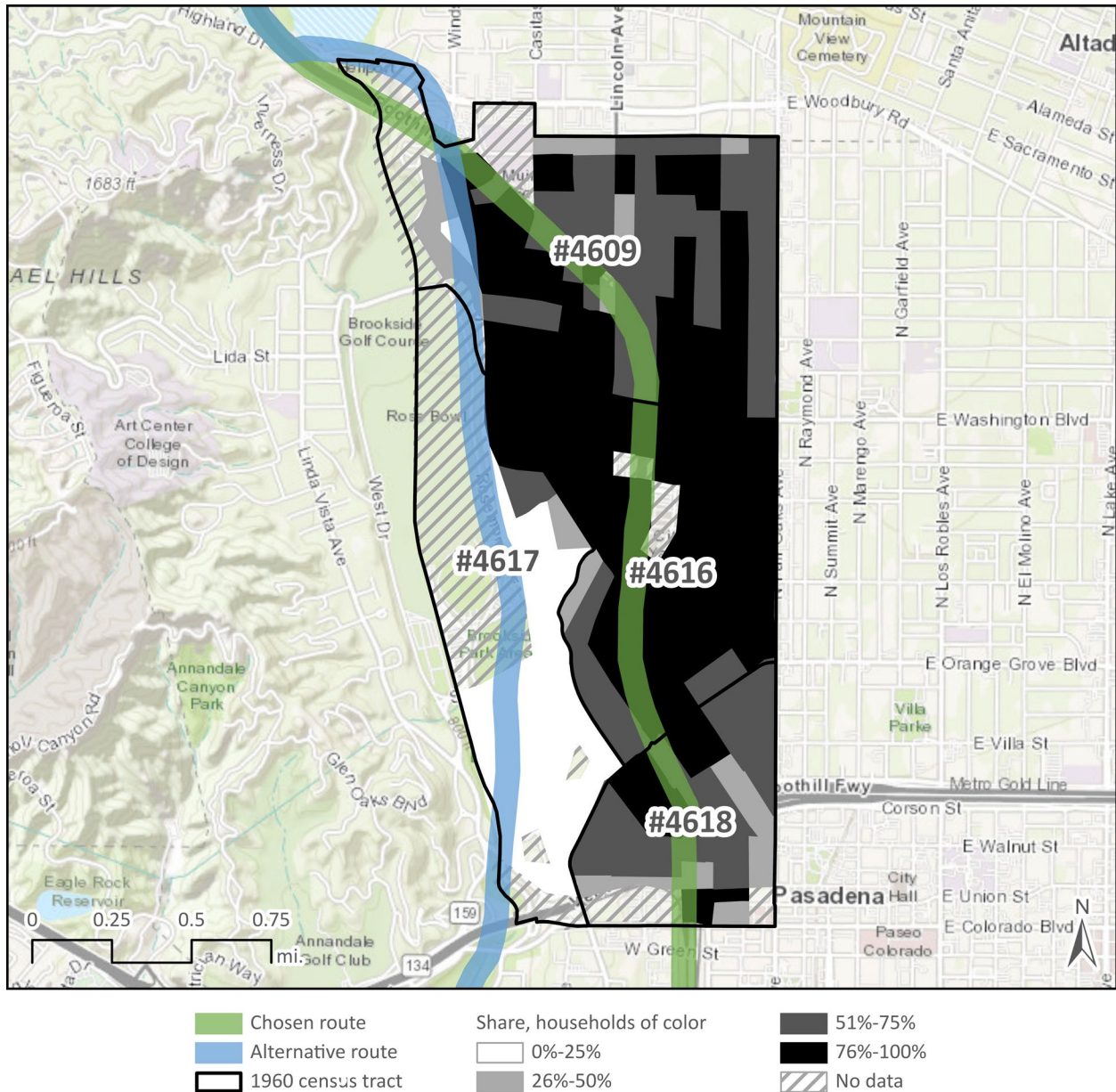
After years of racialized urban renewal and systemic discrimination in these neighborhoods, the impact of the freeway on these communities of color was significant. Based on collected data, we estimate that it destroyed over 900 housing units in the Pasadena study area, displacing about 2,600 to 2,700 people. A large majority of the impacted households were people of color (See **Table ES-2**). According to our analysis, the freeway lowered the home values of remaining houses adjacent to it, relative to the values in the city overall, and depressed the relative rents. That the construction of another segment of the same freeway plan was ultimately abandoned in white, organized, and wealthy South Pasadena nearby simply places an even finer point on this inequity.

Figure ES-2. Redlining Map and Freeway Routes in Pasadena



Source: Nelson et al., n.d., with routes added by authors

Figure ES-3. Pasadena Freeway Alternatives: Households of Color by Census Blocks, 1960



Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961b); base map: Esri, 2023b

Pacoima

If northwest Pasadena was sliced by a freeway, Pacoima was minced by them. The largely white residents of the San Fernando Valley, north of the Los Angeles Basin in the City of Los Angeles, pushed

most freeways to Pacoima, where three major freeway segments cut through an ethnically diverse but largely disenfranchised neighborhood that was left virtually absent from public participation and decision-making processes.

Pacoima is intersected and encircled by three freeways, of which we focus on the Simi Freeway/State Route 118. When these freeways were being built, Pacoima was a thriving, diverse community, inhabited by a population that included Hispanic, Asian, Black, and white residents. By siting three interconnected highway systems in Pacoima, planning authorities imposed an enormous amount of infrastructure on a thriving, yet powerless, community of mostly people of color.

**Figure ES-4. Anti-freeway Protest Meeting of Valley Homeowners, to the West of Pacoima**



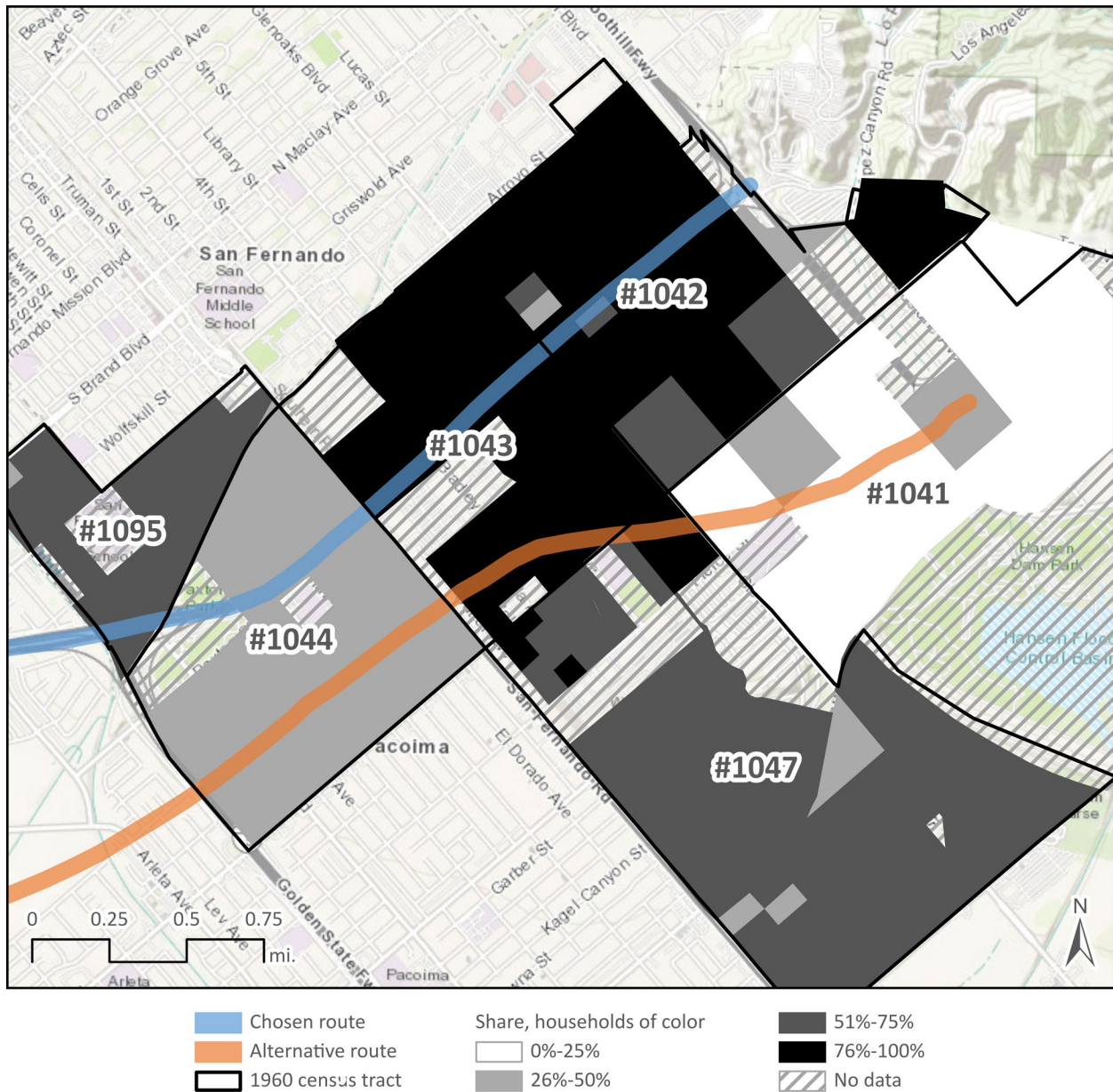
*Source: Dean, 1965*

Two sets of white neighborhoods west of Pacoima battled in meetings and the press over the routing of the Simi Freeway (See **Figure ES-4**). In contrast to these public hearings and debates, the state chose the route through Pacoima without recorded input from local residents, as merely a consequence following from their decision on the routing to the west. In spite or because of this lack of consultation, the “Blue”



route chosen through Pacoima cut through more neighborhoods of color than the alternate “Orange” route would have (See **Figure ES-5** and **Table ES-1**).

**Figure ES-5. Pacoima Freeway Alternatives: Households of Color by Census Blocks, 1960**



Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961a); base map: Esri, 2023b

In Pacoima, the Simi Freeway destroyed over 200 housing units, displacing about 800 to 900 residents. Most displaced and affected households comprised people of color (See **Table ES-2**). We also find negative impacts on housing adjacent to the freeway, lowering change in the number of units and inflation-adjusted home values, relative to changes in the city's overall, though rents adjusted after an initial drop.

Pacoima residents of color disproportionately faced the impacts of the San Fernando Valley's freeways, which included residential and commercial displacement, loss of social ties, and enduring environmental degradation in need of remediation. Presently, Pacoima's civic leaders and planning professionals claim that the population continues to feel disenfranchised and excluded from equitable planning. The case of Pacoima's freeways exposes flaws in participatory planning processes, where white, affluent interests dominated the decision-making process and eventually succeeded, at the expense of disempowered groups of color.

### Sacramento

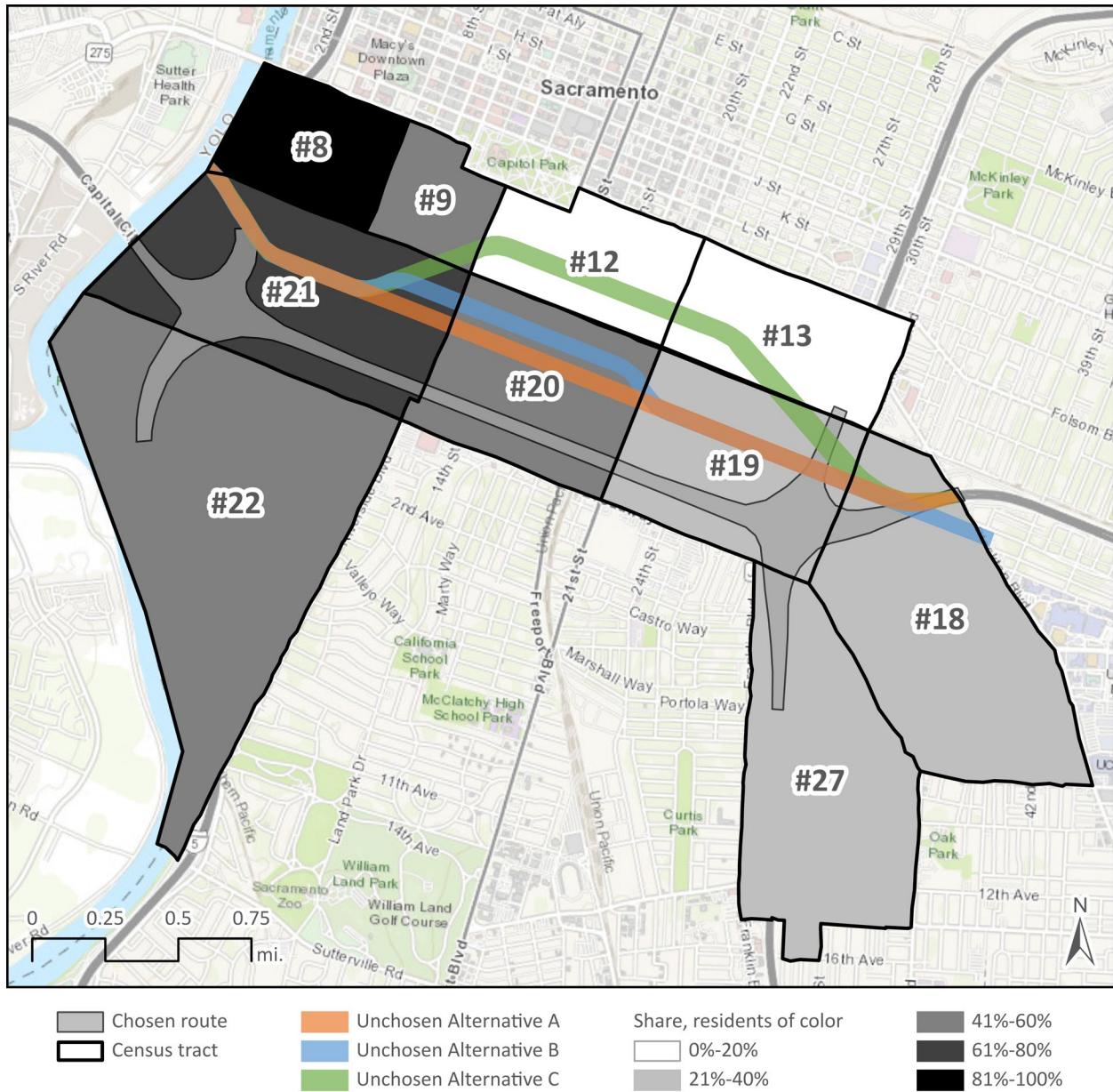
To the north, some communities in the state capital, Sacramento, suffered from a double displacement. Planners demolished much of the West End neighborhood, home to seven out of ten non-white Sacramentans at the time, for the Capitol Mall redevelopment and construction of freeways. Leaving the West End, many uprooted residents settled in another neighborhood, Oak Park. However, Oak Park too was later cleaved from the rest of the city by the intersecting US-50 and SR-99 freeways.

Compared to the two Southern California case study areas, the story of racialized freeway planning is perhaps less clear-cut in Sacramento. Segments of both US-50 and SR-99 faced organized opposition from residents and businesses in their paths, which was reported in the press. Like the other study areas, the neighborhoods where US-50 was planned and constructed (the focus of the quantitative analysis) had higher percentages of communities of color than the remainder of the city. But the chosen route for US-50 south of downtown—a new alternative created following debate over the initial routings—was not the one that would have displaced the most households nor residents of color, as of just before construction started (See **Figure ES-6** and **Table ES-1**).

However, by the time the construction of that freeway was complete, the combination of redevelopment, redlining, and racial covenants had pushed residents of color out of their traditional neighborhoods and into areas adjacent to the planned freeways. Along US-50 at the south edge of downtown, white residents fled to the suburbs when their efforts to stop the freeway failed, while households of color, who mostly could not participate in the freeway debate in ways recognized by those in power, took their place. Twenty years later, Black and Latino/a residents were more likely to be concentrated in freeway-adjacent neighborhoods compared to those near unchosen alternatives and elsewhere in Sacramento.

Nearly a third of the 4,500 displaced households from the US-50 construction south of downtown belonged to people of color (See **Table ES-2**). Farther east, Oak Park, eventually home to a sizable share of the Black population of Sacramento, was cut off from downtown and from whiter areas by US-50 on

Figure ES-6. Sacramento Freeway Alternatives: Residents of Color by Census Tracts, 1960



Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1962b); base map: Esri, 2023b

the north and SR-99 on the west. Incomes and property values in the quantitative study area declined relative to the rest of the city during and after the freeway construction.

The combination of urban renewal and freeway construction, requiring large-scale displacement of residents and businesses, reshaped Sacramento's landscape and contributed to a recurring cycle of displacement for communities of color in Sacramento, especially for the Black community. Although the exact siting of freeway routes among possible alternatives does not appear to have specifically targeted communities of color, other policies ensured that communities of color were concentrated near the freeway by the time it was built and thus experienced its negative impacts most directly thereafter. The West End never rebounded as a residential neighborhood, and Oak Park faced the challenges of declining economic fortunes and growing civil unrest at the time of freeway construction in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Presently, Oak Park struggles with both long-term underinvestment and more recent gentrification pressures.

### San José

The construction of freeways shaped San José as it grew to be one of the largest cities in California. Freeway building accompanied the city's redevelopment efforts and tremendous population growth. Reports identified traffic congestion as the city's greatest problem in the wake of postwar population boom and increased suburban sprawl. In response to traffic concerns, the U-shaped Interstates 280 and 680 were constructed to increase access to central San José and connect it to the larger San Francisco Bay Area.

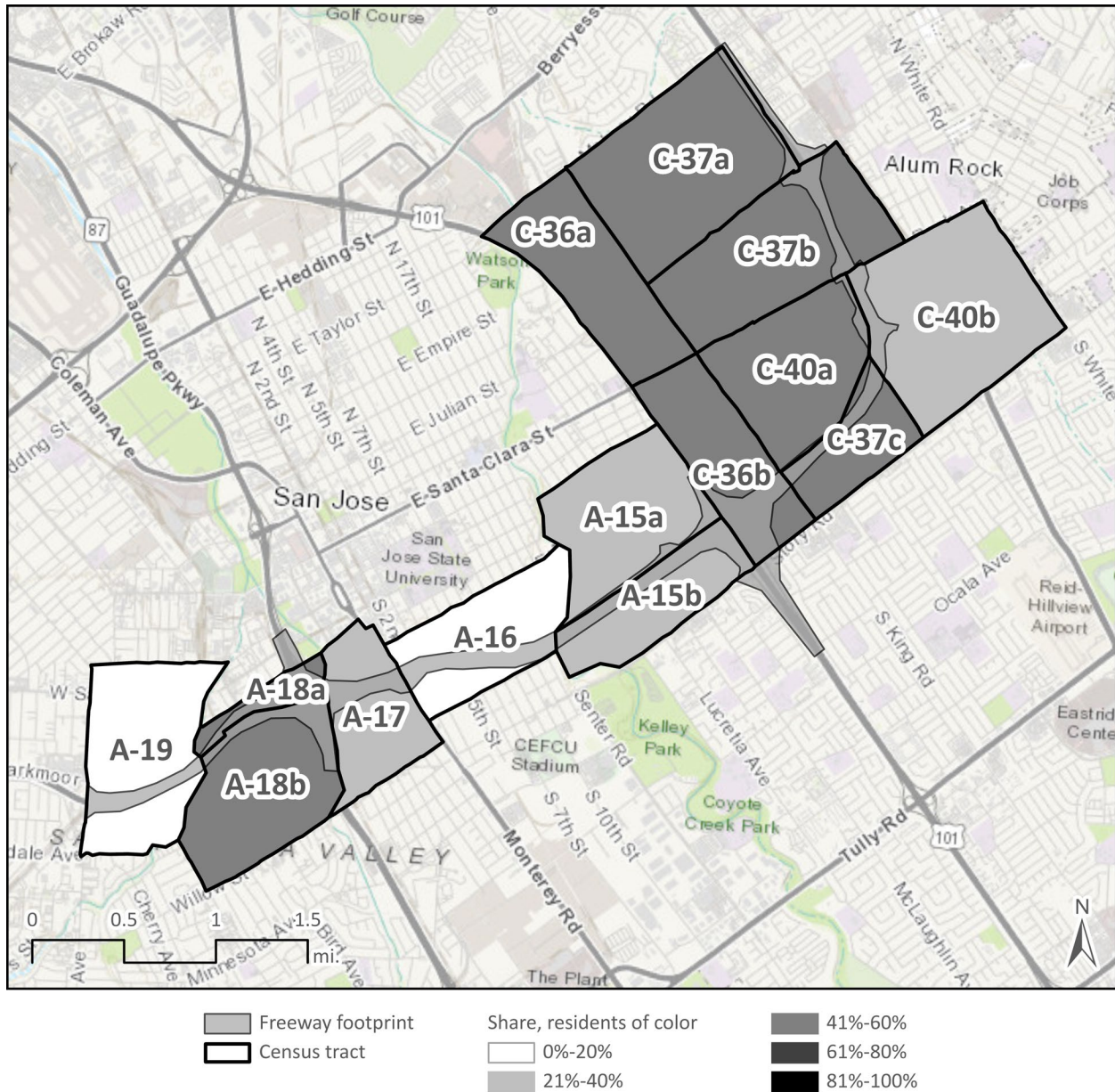
In San José, it appears that only one possible route for I-280 and I-680 was ever considered. Community leaders revealed in interviews that the placement of the freeways cut through the lowest-cost land in the city (including in Little Saigon, Little Portugal, and Eastside Mexican neighborhoods) and ran between San José State University and a city-owned industrial dump site. This route passed through communities of color located south and east of downtown but also through wealthier white neighborhoods to the west (See **Figure ES-7**). In our quantitative analysis of the area near downtown, we find that the freeways were constructed in neighborhoods with higher shares of Black and Latino/a residents and lower median incomes than the rest of the city.

Fewer households were displaced for the construction of these freeways than in the other three cases, though the displaced households, as in the other cases, were disproportionately households of color (See **Table ES-2**). The freeways inhibited the growth of the affected neighborhoods relative to the rest of San José. The neighborhoods adjacent to the freeways today have higher shares of Latino/a residents than the city as a whole, with lower median incomes and property values.

The effects of the construction of I-280 and I-680 on San José were more moderate than in many other cities. Because the freeways were constructed at the same time that the overall population, housing stock, and land area of the city were growing, they did not always result in a net loss of housing or businesses. When homes were lost due to direct construction impacts, they tended to be closer to the historic city core, while outside of the core, the city grew up around the new freeways.

However, the freeways still acted and continue to serve as a barrier, disconnecting neighborhoods of color from the economic core of the city. As residents keenly note, the negative externalities of the

Figure ES-7. San José Freeway Footprint: Residents of Color by Census Tracts, 1960



Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1962c); base map: Esri, 2023b

freeway, including trash, pollution, and displacement, tend to land on the south side of the freeway rather than the north. Likewise, planners left freeway-adjacent neighborhoods disinvested for decades: the interchange between US-101, I-280, and I-680 was left half-built and not completed until the 1980s (See Figure ES-8), and many families, especially Latino/a families, were forced to relocate multiple times

as construction and widenings proceeded over the course of several decades. Yet the sense of community in these neighborhoods remains high, despite the negative impacts of the freeways and the threat of future displacements and gentrification related to planned public transportation projects, including a regional subway extension and high-speed rail.

**Figure ES-8. Unfinished US-101/I-280/I-680 Interchange, 1976**



*Source: Whittle, 1976*

### Comparisons and Conclusions

Our historical and quantitative examination of freeway planning and construction in California reveals that neighborhoods of color were often chosen as sites for disruptive freeway projects, which displaced many residents, significantly harmed those that remained, and left communities divided and depleted. The four cases are different in notable ways, but they share in common a disproportionate impact of freeway construction on communities of color.

Analysis of the two case studies in Southern California yielded both differences and similarities in outcomes. Both cases expose flaws in participatory planning processes, showing that in suburban areas, white affluent interests dominated decision-making procedures and often succeeded in pushing freeways to more powerless neighborhoods. In Pasadena and Pacoima, planning and transportation authorities deliberately routed major freeways through such neighborhoods, ignoring alternative routes through adjacent areas inhabited by wealthier, primarily white residents. The differences are due in part

to stages of development. By the time that the freeway paths were chosen and construction began, the Pasadena site was home to a more established and mature community and built environment, while the Pacoima site was growing as a part of the suburbanization of the San Fernando Valley. Though the impacted neighborhoods were predominantly occupied by people of color, their racial compositions and trajectories were not the same. The Pasadena area had a sizable Black population at the start, and Black residents remained a large majority. Pacoima also had a sizable Black population at the start, which was largely displaced, and the area eventually became predominantly Latino/a and remains so today.

The Northern California case study areas offer further nuances. In both Pasadena and Pacoima, the more racially unfair freeway alignments were chosen, but this does not appear to have been the case in Sacramento or San José (the latter of which had no documented alternative route options) (See **Table ES-1**). Sacramento demonstrates the repeated effects of freeway construction and displacement on neighborhoods radiating out from the city center. The San José case study joins the Pacoima case study in showing that in rapidly growing areas at a time of housing and population expansion, freeways hampered opportunity and investment in surrounding areas of color, even if they did not stop it altogether.

**Table ES-1. Comparison of Alternate Freeway Routes, 1960 Demographics**

	Chosen Route	Unchosen Route(s)	
<b>Pasadena Study Area</b>	Population	1,702	221
	Housing Units	530	68
	Households	500	62
	Share, Households of Color, Including Latino/a	76%	54%
<b>Pacoima Study Area</b>	Population	720	1,128
	Housing Units	173	277
	Households	159	265
	Share, Households of Color, Including Latino/a	85%	49%

		Chosen Route	Unchosen Route(s)
Sacramento Study Area	Population	4,503	4,019 (Alternative A) 4,748 (Alternative B) 7,358 (Alternative C)
	Housing Units	1,802	1,536 (Alternative A) 1,803 (Alternative B) 3,503 (Alternative C)
	Households	1,659	1,433 (Alternative A) 1,680 (Alternative B) 3,170 (Alternative C)
	Share, Households of Color, Including Latino/a	32%	39% (Alternative A) 34% (Alternative B) 19% (Alternative C)

*Note: Statistics for Pacoima and Pasadena differ from those in **Table ES-2** because **Table ES-2** uses actual freeway footprints, including ramps, while **Table ES-1** uses standardized freeway footprints for those areas to fairly compare chosen and unchosen routes.*

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961a, 1961b, 1961c)*

What the four cases have in common are the impacts of freeway construction. In all four areas, hundreds of residents were displaced, although the magnitude differed. An estimated two thirds of those displaced in the Pasadena and Pacoima study areas were people of color, while in San José, half of those displaced were people of color; in Sacramento, one third of those displaced were people of color (See **Table ES-2**). If demolition and displacement were the most visible and immediate effects of the freeways, toxic pollution, noise, economic decline, and stigmatization remained long after and affected those residents whose homes or stores were spared. Hundreds were thus indirectly affected, forced to live close to freeway traffic in a fragmented landscape. Beyond the directly adjacent areas but still close to the freeways, we found mixed outcomes and often more moderate changes, consistent with the concept that freeway costs and benefits decrease with distance. Freeways produced few benefits for these neighborhoods. The massive infrastructure of concrete and asphalt left a damaging legacy in all four areas.



**Table ES-2. Estimated Direct Population and Housing Displacements by Freeways in Case Study Areas**

	<b>Population Displaced under Freeway</b>	<b>Housing Units Lost under Freeway</b>	<b>Share, Households of Color under Freeway, Including Latino/a</b>
<b>Pasadena Study Area</b>	2,681	923	66%
<b>Pacoima Study Area</b>	841	252	66%
<b>Sacramento Study Area</b>	4,503	1,802	32%
<b>San José Study Area</b>	4,149	1,812	51%

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 and 1970 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961a, 1961b, 1961c, 1961d, 1962a, 1962c; U.S. Census Bureau et al., 1972; and Manson et al., 2022)*

The freeway stories we uncovered clearly underline the power of white privilege. White communities were informed about the planning projects early on and had the power, clout, and resources to mobilize opposition. Their voices were heard and proved more effective in shutting freeway projects down (as in the case of South Pasadena), in having alternative routes approved that did not impact their own neighborhoods (as in other parts of the San Fernando Valley beyond Pacoima), or, at the very least, in being able to best relocate away from the freeway (as in Sacramento). State planning processes failed to represent residents equitably, reflecting broader mechanisms of environmental racism.

The findings from our quantitative and qualitative analyses of the impacts of freeway development on neighborhoods of color in California are consistent with the broader literature on this topic. Numerous qualitative studies have documented how the Interstate Highway System and associated state freeway systems affected residents of color throughout the country. This study contributes to this scholarly field by providing new insights and by quantifying the patterns, magnitude, and consequences, at a more geographically granular level than in most previous studies. This study also expands the scope of inquiry by examining the planning and selection stage, the externalities beyond the edges of the freeway, and the post-construction effects. Our findings support a broader thesis about systemic racism in the restructuring of America's metropolitan infrastructure.

Much critical scholarship demonstrates the freeway effects on core, urban neighborhoods. Our case studies expand this analysis to other parts of the regional landscape in the U.S. Freeway construction was a key component of a broader policy-driven attack on communities of color not just near the urban core (as in the San José case study) but also in long-established towns that became inner-ring suburbs

(as in the Pasadena case study), former streetcar suburbs incorporated into the main city (as in the Sacramento case study), and enclaves of color in suburban areas of major cities that emerged postwar (as in the Pacoima case study). In other words, the now-famed destruction of many U.S. city centers by freeways was replicated in the suburbs and at the edges of growing cities, too.

The massive roadway infrastructure development complemented other destructive governmental actions such as urban renewal and redlining. In the 1950s and 1960s, the federal government provided funding for states and cities throughout the country to raze “blighted” or “slum” neighborhoods, euphemisms for low-income, marginalized communities. Though improved housing opportunities was the ostensible goal, over time, governmental agencies used federal funds to stimulate commercial and industrial redevelopment. These programs displaced hundreds of thousands of families from their homes and neighborhoods, with people of color suffering a disproportionately high share of the burden in the name of progress and the common good. In Sacramento, redevelopment efforts not only displaced residents of color but, when combined with redlining and racial covenants, pushed them into areas that were in the path of planned freeways.

Moreover, freeways and suburbanization were key components in the creation of a spatial and transportation mismatch for people of color that increased the distance between place of residence and employment opportunities for residents who lacked private transportation resources to overcome that separation. This mismatch results from the combination of and interaction between housing discrimination and segregation, labor-market discrimination and depressed earnings, and the high cost of buying and owning a vehicle. These racial disparities are compounded by the fact that pollution from mobile sources is more severe in neighborhoods of color, due not just to freeway siting but also to systematic disparities in pre-existing health conditions and a lack of access to medical care. Compared with more affluent and whiter neighborhoods, the same level of pollution thus imposes greater negative consequences in neighborhoods of color. These disparities in freeway use, accessibility to opportunities, and health impacts are integral to the production and reproduction of racial inequality over time and generations. Freeways, therefore, played a critical role (albeit not by themselves a sufficient one) in reproducing racial inequality from the 1960s to the 1980s.

The findings from this study should be viewed and interpreted with caution given its data and methodological limitations. But it is clear that decades after freeway construction, environmental degradation and social inequity persist, suggesting that the path towards restorative justice from freeway construction is still long and fraught. Understanding the history of racism in freeway development informs the discussion on restorative justice that aims to rectify past wrongs, to develop current policies and practices for equity, and to bend the arc of future history toward social justice.

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*For a full listing of references, see the References sections at the end of each chapter of the main body of the report.*

# 1. Introduction

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## Study Purpose and Scope

Freeways crisscross and bisect urban and suburban neighborhoods across the U.S.—and notably in California. Once celebrated as extraordinary accomplishments of modernity and transportation planning, and credited for improving regional mobility, U.S. freeways have come under increasing scrutiny for their disproportionately adverse impacts on low-income populations and populations of color. This study uses empirical research to not only understand but also quantify and describe in detail the historical impacts of freeways four on communities of color in California: in Pasadena and Pacoima in Southern California and in Sacramento and San José in Northern California (See **Figure 1-1**). These neighborhoods, chosen in consultation with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), represent a range of built environments and ethnic compositions. Collectively, the case studies of these neighborhoods add to the existing scholarship by showing freeways' effects on suburbs and the (then) edges of growing cities.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the Golden State undertook its largest infrastructure development project to modernize its older roadway system into an extensive network of freeways. This contributed to a restructuring of cities and regions by further fostering suburbanization and the production of single-family housing beyond the urban core. While this decentralization of the U.S. urban landscape had begun earlier, with streetcars and pre-Interstate roadways (Wachs, 1984), it accelerated with the advent of freeways and the offering of government subsidies for homeownership after World War II. This geographic transformation reshaped the racial structure of metropolitan areas, enabling white residents to move into highly segregated and outlying suburban places. People of color were locked out, formally or in effect, from these spaces and suffered from both a spatial and a transportation mismatch between their housing and available, accessible jobs (Rothstein, 2017; Kain, 1968; and Blumenberg, 2017). The story was more nuanced in some California neighborhoods of color: established Black areas of prewar suburbs like Pasadena, diverse postwar suburbs like Pacoima, and urban areas that became home to people displaced by the first wave of freeway construction like Sacramento's Oak Park. Like the central cities examined in other studies, these areas too were split apart by freeway construction and faced ongoing effects thereafter.

Unlike previous studies relying only on qualitative methods to determine the impact of freeways on communities, this project employs both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and utilizes data and techniques that allow us to empirically document four outcomes. First, we assess whether the selection of freeway routes exhibits racial biases or racially disparate impacts. This enables us to understand the systematic racism in the planning stages of the development of California's freeway system. The choice of the freeway path set into motion the destruction that followed. The second empirical outcome is quantifying the number of housing units and characteristics of households directly displaced by freeway construction. While much attention has concentrated on those directly displaced, freeways also generate spillover effects that have economic, health, and quality-of-life impacts. A full accounting of the historical impacts of freeways requires acknowledging and measuring such externalities. We thus additionally examine the characteristics of households nearby but not directly under freeway footprints.



1. Was the choice of freeway alignments racially biased?
2. What were the direct effects of freeway construction? How many housing units did freeway construction destroy, and what was the racial composition of affected households?
3. What were the indirect effects of freeway construction? What impacts did it have on areas surrounding the freeway and the broader housing market?
4. What other impacts did residents of the affected neighborhoods experience?

To respond to these questions, we tried to reconstruct and present planning processes and decisions that eventually led to specific freeway routings through neighborhoods of color in Pasadena, Pacoima, Sacramento, and San José. The freeways in these four contexts took decades to complete. Planning authorities at municipal, state, and federal levels had to first identify prospective routes and conduct numerous studies. They then presented proposed routes to residents at public hearings. Construction was undertaken in phases, the first of which was right-of-way acquisition through eminent domain. Demolition and grading followed, and finally the freeways themselves were erected. We thus examine an extended timeline of freeway-building, spanning from initial studies to opening ceremonies, but also look at some impacts reaching years after freeway completion.

To examine the freeway impacts quantitatively, we employ newly digitized spatial information from historical documents specifically for this project and analyze these data with geospatial analysis tools. We complement this quantitative inquiry with qualitative research that includes review of local newspaper articles, university and local archives, planning documents, professional studies, maps, and citizen correspondence on the plans. We also report on interviews with some civic leaders, residents, and community members, who experienced the construction of freeways in their community firsthand.

### The Context and Framing of Freeway Planning

The planning and development of California's freeway system paralleled and followed broader planning and political processes. After surviving the Great Depression, staving off the threat of Nazism, and showing American power to the world, there was a renewed sense of pride and a regeneration of the ideal of manifest destiny in the U.S. in the years following World War II. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, manifest destiny drove the movement of white settlers westward, unflinchingly displacing indigenous communities and laying claim to their lands in the name of supposed moral and material progress. While the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s was no longer expanding physically across the continent, the drive to establish an interstate highway system to connect the 48 contiguous states was colored by a similar narrative of technological and racial advancement.

The film *Conquering Roads*, produced by General Motors in 1937, is a prime example of this type of framing and helps to explain how freeway construction became conflated with modern life and modernity writ large. This was an updated version of the American dream, predicated on a tremendous faith in the power of technology, and on efficiency, individualism, and speed for Americans' increasingly busy lives. In the film, transit is declared as an outdated mode of transportation that is incongruous with a modern lifestyle, where speed rules all. Similarly, the existing road network was deemed obsolete (Chevrolet, 1937). In the film, the narrator states, "Cars have progressed, but many roads have stood

still” (Chevrolet, 1937), placing the construction of freeways at the center of modernization efforts and characterizing them as entirely necessary and essential for the country to progress.

According to historian John Lloyd (2017, p. 6), “This assumption of the supposed incompatibility of the modern automobile with previous forms of transportation forms a key part of the narrative of modernity that highway boosters employed to create a vision of the modern that was both teleological—and thus seemingly inevitable—and total.” Indeed, the presumed inevitability of freeway construction and its direct connection to a modern lifestyle made freeway critics appear as relics of the past. The association of freeways with modernity created a self-fulfilling prophecy, with a “superficial enthronement of ‘the modern’ as an end in itself often heedless of the social consequences of remaking dense cities around the automobile” (Lloyd, 2017, p. 4).

Importantly, and as we discuss in Chapter 2, freeway-related externalities such as displacement of residences and businesses, noise, air pollution, and quality-of-life degradation, fell disproportionately upon communities of color. Indeed, many scholars have argued that freeway planning processes were imbued with racism. This is not to deny that professional transportation practice was partly based on considering rational criteria, such as the ability to connect major activity centers, avoiding sensitive and difficult-to-build terrain, assessing costs and benefits, and determining economic feasibility. The process was ostensibly data-driven, using scientific methods and forecasting models. Despite the claims of objectivity, however, transportation planning had implicit biases. Highway engineers and planners were predominantly white (and male), and it is likely that they brought with them the mainstream cultural biases and stereotypes of the time. A process does not necessarily need to be overtly prejudicial or discriminatory to produce racially unfair decisions. Unjust outcomes may also be the product of unconscious biases.

Another form of institutionalized bias was the exclusion or lack of acknowledgment of the unequal distributional consequences of freeway development. Our review of planning documents indicates that economic analysis, as practiced by freeway planners, seldom examined how benefits and costs were allocated across income classes; if this topic was addressed, it was considered secondary to the network’s overall economic efficiency. Equally important was the absence of any mention of race. Likewise, the process was embedded within historical and societal inequalities. For example, cost-benefit analysis values travel time as a function of wage rates. Past and contemporaneous racism in labor markets and education systems depressed wages for workers of color, and this structural disparity was incorporated into transportation planning analyses and models. The same systemic inequality was true for home values, which were a factor in calculating the fiscal impacts of alternative freeway routes. By simply taking prevailing wages and property values at face value, freeway planning inherently reproduced societal racial disparities.

Such problems permeated transportation planning below the federal level as well. As we explain, freeway planning called for collaboration with state, regional, and local governments to solicit and incorporate their priorities, preferences, and grounded knowledge. Intergovernmental relationships, however, were often a source of conflict and tension among governmental entities. There were

competing ideas of what was ideal and right, along with a desire for control. Indeed, elected officials and politics played a role in the ostensibly bureaucratic work of freeway planning. Those with greater political, social, and economic power could influence the distribution of the impacts, garner a disproportionate share of benefits, and offload a disproportionate share of freeways' costs to others. Given that communities of color were relatively powerless in the power structures of the time, the racial bias behind decisions followed. One final layer to the freeway planning process was the inclusion of citizen participation through public hearings, which provided another venue for incorporating underlying societal inequalities in shaping choices because white residents were in a better position to speak and be heard. Chapter 2 discusses prior research on these broad issues, and Chapters 5-8 document how they played out in our four case study areas.

## Organization

The rest of this report is organized as follows: Chapter 2 presents a literature review, focusing first on the national and then on the California context, of the physical, social, economic, health, and political impacts of freeways. Chapter 3 discusses the research design of our empirical work and presents the data sources and analytical methods adopted to answer the key research questions. Chapter 4 introduces the background and sociopolitical context of Southern California during the era of freeway planning and construction; it also gives a review of the historical background of housing and residential segregation in Southern California. Chapters 5 and 6 present the impact of the freeways on the Pasadena and Pacoima neighborhoods and their residents, while Chapters 7 and 8 do the same for some Northern California neighborhoods in Sacramento and San José, respectively. Lastly, Chapter 9 presents our conclusions. The report includes an appendix with additional statistics (Appendix A) and a second appendix discussing how this study differs from others and the potential contributions of our methodological approach (Appendix B).

In this report, we use "I-" to abbreviate Interstates, "US-" to abbreviate U.S. Routes, and "SR-" to abbreviate California State Routes. U.S. Routes (the pre-Interstate system of federal highways) and State Routes were previously built to lower capacity than postwar Interstates, but many rerouted or redesigned to equivalent highway standards during the period of Interstate construction. Many freeways in California also have geographic or honorific names (such as the "Foothill Freeway"). These named routes may comprise multiple numbered highways, and vice versa; we match named and numbered routes to each other in each case study chapter. During the planning process in different cities, planners used different schemes to denote possible alternative routes: some colored, some lettered, some inconsistent over time even in the same area. In each chapter, we use the naming scheme used by that area's planners. Finally, we use the terms "freeway" and "highway" interchangeably.



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## 2. Literature Review: Impacts of Freeways on Communities of Color and Ethnic Minority Communities

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## Introduction

The North American highway system is often touted as one of the greatest public works in history, and its scope and scale distinguish it from the transportation infrastructure of other countries (Jones, 1989). Mostly constructed over several decades, from the 1950s to the early 1990s, this ambitious project sought to modernize the nation, relieve congestion, optimize productivity, reduce crashes, and even contribute towards potential military defense efforts (Biles, Mohl, and Rose, 2014; Karas, 2015; and Weingroff, 2017). Importantly, highway construction has fundamentally influenced travel patterns and urban form in the United States. Yet, highway-builders often overlooked or ignored the effects of highways on land use, city form, and neighboring communities. While the achievements of this massive piece of infrastructure are indisputable (Karnes, 2009; Kaszynski, 2012; and McNichol, 2006), a growing body of literature exposes some of the Highway Era's shortcomings and its diverse negative impacts.

While the scholarly literature on highway construction in the United States reflects its monumental importance across a number of disciplines and generations, for this study, we examine the literature specifically on the impact of highways on communities of color and their neighborhoods.

## Methodology

We identified approximately 120 scholarly works, including entire books, book chapters, reports, and journal articles. We obtained sources from online research on Google Scholar, the UCLA Library catalog, and the UC Davis Library catalog, using the search terms “displacement,” “equity,” “freeway,” “highway,” “impact,” “justice,” “minority,” “policy,” “race,” and “transportation.” We undertook a rigorous review of the bibliographies of these identified sources to further expand our list and consulted with scholars at the UCLA and UC Davis Institutes of Transportation Studies.

We reduced our initial selection of sources for this chapter to around 80 scholarly works, based on the originality of their contribution to the field and their relevance to our research questions. We classified the retained sources according to their national or regional (California) scope and also classified highway impacts in five categories: physical, social, economic, environmental, and political. We discuss each of these in turn in a national context and a California-specific context.

Studies about *physical impacts* discuss how highways transformed the physical landscape and physically separated neighborhoods. These studies document the land use, material, and physical impacts, as well as the housing destruction brought about from highway construction.

Studies about *social impacts* identify different social effects of highway development projects on communities in the U.S. and California. This category includes works that primarily inquire about the impacts of highway development on the well-being of different social groups and disadvantaged communities. The review suggests that differential effects of highway development were largely felt by people of color and low-income households.

*Economic impacts* concern the economic hardships faced by the different disadvantaged communities identified in the prior category. We reviewed the different types of costs and burdens that highway development imposed on various social groups, including business displacement and access to jobs. Highway development not only eliminated businesses along freeway routes but also led to the sprawl of new employment opportunities in suburbia, making it difficult for low-income communities to access jobs far away from the city center. The high cost of owning homes in the suburbs and the cost of transportation further exacerbated the economic hardships of disadvantaged communities, as discussed extensively in the literature. Finally, academic research also highlights the ways highway projects were financed, which created an indirect burden on taxpayers.

The literature on *environmental impacts* provides extensive evidence about the negative impacts of highways on the environment. It highlights how highway development and the associated urban renewal process exerted pressure on natural resources and led to their unsustainable consumption. The reviewed studies also discuss how highways have contributed to high levels of air pollution and emissions and imposed negative externalities on communities located adjacent to them. Additionally, studies discuss health impacts associated with high pollution exposure and the differential impact of environmental policies on disadvantaged communities.

The dominant political perspective in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was that the development of the Interstate Highway System was a tool to improve U.S. cities, in part by clearing slums and aging neighborhoods. Scholarly work sheds light on how these *political impacts* shaped land use, zoning, and transportation policies in ways that supported the development of highways. Public participation and activism in some communities also played a key role in the routing or cancellation of certain highways, as a number of highway projects were re-planned due to opposition from white communities. Some studies in this category touch upon how policy responses changed with the emergence of citizen-led movements against highway development.

## The National Context

Boosted by the Federal Highway Act of 1956 and generous federal funding, the U.S. interstate highway program radically transformed and connected most major American cities. The program built close to 43,000 miles of highways across the nation, representing one of the largest public works in history (Biles, Mohl, and Rose, 2014; Karas, 2015; and Weingroff, 2017). Initially, there was so much funding available, that, as Brown, Morris, and Taylor (2009a, p. 36) put it, “state highway engineers literally couldn’t build highways fast enough.” The program’s financing (90 percent of capital costs covered by the federal government) and organizational structure (planning managed by state highway engineers with prior experience designing high-speed, high-capacity rural highways) incentivized and led to out-of-scale freeways rammed through urban neighborhoods. But eventually, by the late 1970s, funding dried up, and this along with emerging criticism against the program brought the age of large-scale freeway construction to an end in the early 1980s (Jones, 1989; Jeffrey Brown, Morris, and Taylor, 2009a; Morris, Brown, and Taylor, 2016; Taylor, 2000; and Wasserman et al., 2022).

Highways were originally considered the epitome of modernity and efficiency, but starting in the early 1970s, the euphoria about their efficiency and transportation benefits waned. Strong criticism surfaced while the highway modernization program was still in full swing. Armed with facts and figures, scholars from across many disciplines attacked highways and their failures. Leavitt's (1971) *Superhighway—Superhoax* challenges the logic of the highway system, the people and institutions behind it, its exorbitant and unjustified costs, as well as its irreparable destruction to many communities. In *Autokind vs. Mankind: An Analysis of Tyranny*, Schneider (2001) describes the loss of urban space to suburban sprawl, the effects of congestion, and the highway system's environmental impacts. Buel's (1972) *Dead End: The Automobile in Mass Transportation* presents a comprehensive argument against the automobile industry and a broader transportation system that does more harm than good to its citizens. Among the most controversial works was *Pavers and the Paved*, written by Ben Kelley (1971), a former employee of the Federal Highway Administration, who added to the mounting criticism of the highways and their destruction across the country but also explicitly encouraged public opposition with instructive guidelines on "how to halt the highway" (Lewis, 2013, p. 220).

Research and discourse about the American highway system has continued to grow in recent years, as scholars document one of the most dramatic urban transformations in U.S. history. Several scholars have produced sweeping histories that situate the highway era within complex political, social and cultural circumstances (Lewis, 2013; Murphy, 2009; and M. Rose and Mohl, 2012). Initially, many authors celebrated highway construction as an unprecedented accomplishment. However, more recent editions of these histories also acknowledge the damaging effects of highways. For example, the latest edition of *Interstate* (M. Rose and Mohl, 2012) addresses the system's environmental cost, lost open space, residential destruction, widespread civic opposition to stop the construction, racialized politics that deliberately targeted black neighborhoods, and the fact that the victims of the highway were overwhelmingly poor and black. Similarly, Lewis (2013) includes a final chapter to his later edition of *Divided Highways*, recognizing the impetuosity and short-sightedness of the interstate vision, he acknowledges the extent to which "bulldozers and wrecking balls cut deeper into the heart of the city" (Lewis, 2013, p. 296).

Still, some scholars argue that the full effects of the highway system continue to be both understudied and underestimated, particularly in urban environments (Boarnet, 2014). More pessimistic critics of freeways suggest that in the long run, their effects may have been more detrimental than constructive (Plotkin, 2003). Indeed, highways across America have disproportionately affected low-income populations and populations of color: scholars have shown that U.S. transportation policy has not facilitated and at times has restricted the access of these communities to housing, education, and economic opportunities, while simultaneously causing significant healthcare disparities (Sanchez, Stolz, and Ma, 2004). While many affluent and white communities successfully protected their neighborhoods, low-income, Black, and ethnic communities lacked political power to stop the highway from tearing through their neighborhoods (Avila, 2014a, 2014b and Mohl, 2014).

This literature review focuses on the discriminatory forces that shaped the U.S. highway system and disproportionately impacted neighborhoods inhabited by poor, Black, and ethnic minority residents.

## Physical Impacts

### *Land Clearance, Housing, and Redlining*

The accommodation of the automobile became a critical consideration in urban planning by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As private vehicles proliferated, thousands of miles of highways across the country grew alongside them to accommodate them. However, highways became more than just a means of facilitating movement—they were also used as a tool for reshaping urban form (Brown et al., 2009). Planners deliberately routed highways through certain neighborhoods to accomplish “slum clearance” in “blighted” areas (Hanlon, 2011). The urban renewal process, which began with the Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954 and coincided with the development of the Interstate Highway System, also targeted Black neighborhoods and displaced their residents. The land that became available through demolition was used for commercial and industrial development or for housing primarily for white residents (Retzlaff, 2020). Many key considerations in planning, such as land use patterns, urban form and other environmental impacts that were not directly related to traffic flow maximization were ignored, as state highway departments jettisoned sensitivity to the urban context and the channeling of growth (Jeffrey Brown, Morris, and Taylor, 2009b).

The planning of highways relied on a racialized hierarchy of space, which was solidified by the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). These agencies mapped neighborhoods and classified them on their eligibility and desirability for mortgage lending, basing these assessments largely on the racial composition of neighborhoods. This practice of denying loans to areas of color was termed “redlining,” based on the color-coding of HOLC’s least “desirable” areas. Deeming areas “hazardous” and “undesirable” made it extremely difficult for families in these places to purchase homes and build assets, contributing to a racial wealth gap that would span multiple generations (Rothstein, 2017 and Phillips et al., 2022). Though recent research has complicated the causality of the history of redlining—FHA’s since-destroyed maps may have most significantly contributed to loan discrimination (Fishback et al., 2021)—federal agencies certainly did establish criteria for racially coding neighborhoods and identifying blight. The HOLC appraisal form evaluated nine categories, the first of which was social composition. Among the subcategories, percentage of Black residents was the first indicator of blight, before any other. Master plans for highways targeted these “decaying slum areas,” because they were thought to hinder modern traffic standards. Planners often deemed cutting through these neighborhoods more cost-effective than construction in other parts of the city. Planners also expected communities of color and low-income populations to present less resistance to eviction and disruption than their wealthy, white counterparts (Avila, 2014a, 2014b).

The Interstate Highway System ended rural isolation and accelerated suburbanization, while simultaneously creating new problems in some urban neighborhoods that were destroyed or bisected by the highways (Karas, 2015 and Warner, 1972). As expressways cut through the social and physical fabric of American cities, they destroyed housing and displaced entire communities, creating severe relocation problems and environmental degradation (Mohl, 2004). While the physical impact of highways is largely visible today, the devastation they imposed on poor communities and communities of color is not always apparent. The extent of impact on these communities, which we further describe

below, has only recently gained recognition in the academic literature, as more researchers bring evidence to light (Karas, 2015).

### *Housing Destruction*

As the discussion of redlining above demonstrates, the histories of housing policy and highway construction in the U.S. are intertwined (Fotsch, 1999 and Kuswa, 2002). Together, they played a critical role in impeding access to housing for Americans of color. Highway construction destroyed thriving residential neighborhoods and displaced many of their residents, who were most often low-income, Black, or ethnic minorities. Fotsch (1999) describes how the interests of the white working and middle classes aligned to create a top-down system that was imposed on the poor and people of color. Postwar policymakers and highway planners facilitated the development of white, affluent suburbs, shopping malls, office parks and residential neighborhoods. Simultaneously, they selected core urban neighborhoods for freeway siting. Between 1957 and 1969, an estimated 330,000 housing units were demolished in American cities as a result of highway construction. Approximately 32,400 families were dislocated every year throughout the 1960s. An overwhelming majority of them were low-income and black (Mohl, 2000). Avila (2014b) lists numerous cases across America where federally funded highways were instruments of white supremacy through the purposeful selection of black neighborhoods for destruction in Detroit, Baltimore, Montgomery, Nashville, Kansas City, Charlotte, Atlanta, Saint Paul, and New Orleans. Beginning in the 1960s, many communities tried to resist highway development in a movement known as the “Freeway Revolt” (discussed further below), but without support from the business community and larger population, most communities lost the battle against new construction. For instance, Interstate 95 in Miami destroyed a black neighborhood near downtown, with one interchange alone demolishing the homes of 10,000 people (Weber, 2011).

### **Social Impacts**

The building of the Interstate Highway System drastically transformed the geography and demographic characteristics of many metropolitan areas. On one hand, the system facilitated development of new centers of employment and recreational hubs, largely located in the suburbs, creating multiple opportunities and facilities primarily for white households who owned automobiles. On the other hand, it divided many communities of color and other ethnic minority groups in the central cities, reduced the significance of several downtown areas, and increased the hardships of communities who were dependent on mass transit for accessing employment and other amenities. The system created a continuous process of decentralization and perpetuated the burdens produced by a long history of racial discrimination (Rabin, 1973). Highway and road projects cut through neighborhoods of color, isolating some of their residents from the rest of the city and displacing others. Urban displacement resulted in gentrification, limited mobility, reduced housing options, decreased environmental choices and diminished employment opportunities (Shepard and Sonn, 1997).

This section delves into the discriminatory aspects of transportation projects, which historically not only created a spatial divide in American society but also undermined the social and economic growth of disadvantaged communities and exacerbated their adversities by limiting their accessibility.

### *Social and Racial Inequity*

Research persistently reveals that transportation benefits are not spread evenly throughout the population. Scholars have long established that highways have had a disproportionately negative social effect on people of color and the poor (Bullard and Johnson, 1997; Bullard, Johnson, and Torres, 2004; Fotsch, 2007; Karas, 2015; Kuswa, 2002; Mohl, 2004; and M. Rose and Mohl, 2012). Fotsch (2007, p. 169) depicts the highway as a “racist institution” that has forever changed the fabric of American cities, inserting physical barriers between communities—especially Black ones, from New Jersey to Minnesota to Los Angeles (Mohl, 2000 and Karas, 2015). Weber (2011) recounts that in 1955, the interstate planning process in Birmingham, Alabama largely centered on racial segregation, with several facilities located downtown to preserve boundaries between black and white neighborhoods and with others curved to spare white neighborhoods at the expense of Black neighborhoods. Such rerouting led to mass relocations of both Black residents into white neighborhoods and white residents to newly developed suburbs. As Mohl (2004, p. 700) summarizes, “Trapped in inner-city ghettos, African Americans especially felt targeted by highways that destroyed their homes, split their communities, and forced their removal to emerging second ghettos.”

Other ethnic minority neighborhoods were also targeted for urban highway construction. In 1963, construction of Interstate 5 through Barrio Logan in San Diego forced Mexican American residents to leave and dismantled their community (Delgado, 1998). The Cross Bronx Expressway in New York City destroyed a vibrant, working-class Jewish community (Mohl, 2002 and Caro, 1974). Planners in Detroit cut through neighborhoods occupied by Jewish, German, and Italian immigrants, as well as Black residents, to make way for new highway projects (Vejendla, 2020). Scholars conclude that the federal highway program and its planners acted both with deliberate discriminatory intentions and with racially disparate effects, in geographies across the country (Karas, 2015 and M. Rose and Mohl, 2012).

### *“White Flight” and Increased Segregation*

During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, white residents migrated out of city centers and into the suburbs. This “white flight” was largely facilitated by investment-intensive highway projects, which offered white residents the opportunity to access central-city employment while living in the suburbs (Karner et al., 2017). As a result, the highway system dramatically changed the geography and demography of central cities. From 1950 to 1990, the U.S. metropolitan areas grew by 72 percent, but the population in central cities declined by 17 percent. Researchers attribute this shift to several factors. In his land use theory, Alonso (1964) argues that faster commuting times expanded the distance that people were willing to travel and therefore increased the demand for suburban land. Other research indicates that suburbanization was also driven by racial preferences, the sudden change in core urban racial composition (Tiebout, 1956 and Boustan, 2010), and negative perceptions of downtowns as a place of crime and blight (Cullen and Levitt, 1999). Likewise, in Kuswa’s (2002) counter-history of the American highway, linking one of the country’s greatest accomplishments to institutional racism and white privilege, he argues that federally funded infrastructure drove waves of migration out of American cities, especially wealthier white families looking to fulfill their suburban dreams. Baum-Snow (2007) estimates that one third of the change in central city populations can be explained by the construction



of highways. Using planned but never built freeway segments as a comparison, he offers empirical evidence that highways were responsible for population decline in cities; if the Interstate Highway System had not been built, these cities would have grown by eight percent. Rabin (1973) notes that highway construction was followed by metropolitan decentralization, growing concentration of Black residents in central cities, and the exodus of white population and jobs to the surrounding suburbs. He reveals that between 1960 and 1970 in the 66 standard metropolitan statistical areas having populations of 500,000 or more, the central cities lost 1.92 million in white population, while experiencing an increase of 2.81 million in Black population.

### *Displacement*

As discussed earlier, many families of color lost their homes because of highway construction through their communities. Nevertheless, relocation of displaced individuals was not a priority for federal highway or local housing officials. Mohl (2000) notes that any housing destruction caused by the expressway was thought to be a highway problem, not a housing problem. Throughout the 1950s and until 1965, the federal government rejected planning policies and legislation that would link urban expressway construction to relocation housing. An estimated one million people may have been displaced by interstate construction in the early 1960s. By the late 1960s, highway construction was responsible for the demolition of 62,000 housing units every year. Until this time, no provision was made to relocate and build replacement housing for those communities that had been displaced (Weber, 2011). Biles, Mohl, and Rose (2014) document the difficulty Black residents faced trying to relocate to safe and sanitary replacements after their residences were taken by eminent domain. The fact that officials prioritized land clearance over housing relocation reveals the racial politics that guided these developments. Under pressure to find new housing, dislocated Black populations relocated to working-class, white neighborhoods and created “second ghettos” on the fringes of former black ghettos (Hirsch, 1998 and Mohl, 2000). Though some large-scale, high-rise public housing was built, it was not nearly enough to replace the blocks and blocks of urban housing that were demolished and could therefore not absorb the many displaced families. In the end, higher land values and associated demolition of homes and businesses significantly did raise the social and economic costs of urban highway construction, slowing it (Weber, 2011).

### **Economic Impacts**

The benefits of increased mobility, productivity and prosperity created by the Interstate Highway System came at great cost to cities and their residents. The primary focus of engineers was on maximizing throughput with a secondary focus on safety, while they overlooked most other concerns (Jeffrey Brown, Morris, and Taylor, 2009a, 2009b). Highway capacity expansion plans have been cited as insensitive to the needs of disadvantaged demographic groups. Given that low-income people and people of color generally own fewer automobiles, have shorter commutes, and carpool more often than higher income, white populations, highway expansion projects disproportionately favored the latter group (Karner et al., 2017).

The automobile-centric development of highways largely undermined the effectiveness and viability of transit systems. It also led to inequitable distribution of access to employment and other opportunities. The dispersed pattern of decentralization not only resulted in racial and economic polarization of metropolitan areas but also created barriers for central-city, transit-dependent populations of color wishing to access businesses located in the suburbs (Rabin, 1980). In the wake of the 1960s' urban unrest, Kain (1968) was the first to identify and discuss the "spatial mismatch" between transit-dependent individuals' places of residence and their everyday needs, which may include education, employment and healthcare. Because one of the outcomes of the highway era was low-density sprawl, low-income individuals and people of color were physically distanced from economic opportunity and services. Scholars later refined spatial mismatch theory to include access to transportation and private vehicles—Government investment in the highway system prioritized automobile owners, who were primarily white, employed and more affluent. Cutting through low-income neighborhoods, highways failed to meet the travel demand of many low-income travelers who had less access to private cars because of the high cost of vehicle ownership (Blumenberg, 2017).

Transportation policies fostered a widespread dependence on the automobile. Since 1982, the federal Highway Trust Fund has allotted 80 percent of its funding to highways and only about 20 percent to transit projects. However, low-income populations and communities of color have significantly lower rates of car ownership. Privileging investment in highway infrastructure has therefore created an important obstacle for these communities in accessing entry-level and career employment, for decades increasingly found in suburban areas (Sanchez, Stolz, and Ma, 2004). Sanchez, Stolz, and Ma (2004) demonstrate that low-income people and people of color spend a higher proportion of their income on transportation, and the cost of transportation is rising faster for these households. Highways and the subsequent urban sprawl facilitated increased travel distances, which also contributed to the rising cost of transportation. Sanchez, Stolz, and Ma (2004) also note that low-income travelers tend to subsidize their higher-income counterparts, in that low-income people pay a disproportionate amount for highways that are funded publicly.

The resources necessary to remunerate those in the path of highway construction, who lost their homes or their jobs, were instead largely consumed by suburban projects and populations (Kuswa, 2002). Because plans for highway construction were announced in advance, property values dropped significantly and depreciated in many neighborhoods, with Black neighborhoods seeing the greater negative effects on property values (Biles, Mohl, and Rose, 2014 and Cohen, Lownes, and Zhang, 2022). Families and businesses that relocated to "second ghettos" were not given much formal support or assistance (Biles, Mohl, and Rose, 2014 and Mohl, 2004). For example, within a year of the construction of I-40 in Nashville, most businesses had suffered significant financial loss or closed, and property rates declined by one third (Karas, 2015).

### Environmental and Health Impacts

Historical evidence suggests that white flight and economic disinvestment, tied up with freeway construction and disproportionately affecting residents of color, left those residents exposed to multiple environmental hazards (Schulz et al., 2016).

The negative effects of highways on human health have been widely studied. Environmental studies demonstrate that high-volume traffic directly impacts air quality and pollution, which increases health risks for adjacent neighborhoods (Fuller et al., 2012). In particular, widespread evidence shows the correlation between respiratory diseases and residential proximity to heavy highway traffic (Mortimer et al., 2002 and Wjst et al., 1993). The disproportionately low-income populations and populations of color that live in close proximity to highways, therefore, face more acute health risks from more polluted environments (Sanchez, Stolz, and Ma, 2004 and Schulz et al., 2002). Kuswa (2002) argues that urban highways must be thought of as physical and discursive arteries of containment, which help foster narratives of urban pathologies and the need for suburban escapes.

Certain age groups are especially vulnerable to the hazardous impact of pollution generated by highway traffic. Appatova et al. (2008) find that a significantly large number of public schools were located within a quarter-mile of highways. In metropolitan areas such as Boston and Philadelphia, students had a particularly higher risk of developing acute and chronic respiratory disorders, as almost 50 percent of the student population attended schools within a quarter-mile of major roadways. Gauderman et al. (2007) demonstrated that children between the ages of 10 and eighteen living within 500 meters of highways develop more lung deficiencies and lifetime respiratory conditions, in comparison to children living at least 1,500 meters from a highway. Another study by Volk et al. (2011) concludes that women living within 1,000 feet of a highway are more likely to have children who develop autism.

## Political Impacts

### *Policies*

U.S. transportation planning and policy has long favored the private automobile as the primary means of transportation. Ellis (2001) argues that *Toll Roads and Free Roads* in 1939 and *Interregional Highways* in 1944 are among the most important regional planning documents in American history: the first responsible for recommending a 26,700-mile interregional highway system connecting major American cities and often passing through their cores; the second specifying where the routes should be sited and devoted an entire section to the topic “Locating the Interregional Routes in Urban Areas.”

The era of interstate construction further advanced policies that prioritized the automobile and separated housing from jobs and services. Automobile-centric transportation planning policies subsequently created mobility barriers for those who cannot or do not drive (Bullard, Johnson, and Torres, 2004). Financed by federal and state funds, state highway departments played a major role in determining the spatial distribution of suburban development. However, these same agencies gave little consideration to the impact that highways would have on the redistribution of housing and employment opportunities. While selecting the locations of and points of access for highways, authorities often failed to consider their impact on their immediate contexts and on broader metropolitan areas (Rabin, 1973). Engineers and highway planners relied primarily on codified standards to design the national highway system. These manuals suggested certain locations for routes, which prioritized blighted areas for redevelopment. Despite some criticism arising in the mid-1950s, the matter of highway construction was seen as exclusively an engineering task that excluded other urban professions and civic groups

(DiMento and Ellis, 2012). Algorithms and mathematical formulas created what Seely (Seely, 1984, 1987) terms a “scientific mystique” that insulated the profession from public accountability.

According to Brown, Morris, and Taylor (2009a) the role of local planners with more intimate knowledge of the districts and neighborhoods was minimal, as they were able to only recommend minor changes subject to state and federal approval. The new highway system divided many low-income neighborhoods, while their wealthier counterparts often were able to stop the proposed projects altogether. According to Ellis (2001), regional planning and automobile-dependent patterns of urban development in the U.S. were shaped by interstate and urban highways, and not by local agencies that could have made critical decisions in tandem about infrastructure and land use.

### *Social Movements and the “Freeway Revolt”*

The 1960s witnessed the evolution of passionate social movements and struggles for civil rights, environmental protection, and peace. Mohl (2002) argues that one powerful movement is often overlooked or underestimated—the so-called “Freeway Revolt.” Though highway planning and construction had been well underway for decades, it was not until legislation passed for stretches of the Interstate Highway System to cut through urban residential neighborhoods that sustained protests broke out across several dozen cities (Karas, 2015 and Wells, 2012). Regardless of their outcome, highway opposition movements brought together various communities and social groups, as well as concurrent environmental, preservationist and citizen causes. Communities joined forces against the “concrete monsters” and the agencies behind them (Mohl, 2004, p. 674). According to Mohl (2004), successful freeway revolts involved persistent activism with cross-city, cross-class and interracial alliances, strong support from some local politicians and the press, legal action that could delay land acquisition and construction, and, ultimately, shut-down orders from the courts or highway planning bureaucracy. It is therefore no surprise that successful freeway revolts generally protected white, affluent enclaves from demolition but not Black or ethnic minority neighborhoods. Comparative case studies of freeway revolt in white and Black communities persistently reveal different outcomes (Avila, 2014b; Bullard and Johnson, 1997; and Mohl, 2014).

Avila’s (2014b) account of freeway revolts across the country offers a racialized narrative in which protests garnered different results. Access to resources and influence gave white, affluent communities the power to deter highway projects. Following the nation’s first popularly recognized freeway revolt in San Francisco in 1959, similar movements took place in well-off neighborhoods like Beverly Hills, California and Princeton, New Jersey. While some anti-highway coalitions were more diverse in Boston, New York City, and Baltimore, the multi-racial victories that stopped the highways in these cities did little to address inequality and spatial segregation. Avila (2004, pp. 30, 38) argues that white, affluent communities “tapped into local political networks to fight the freeway,” but remained themselves “trapped within the parameters of new highway infrastructure.” Comparable freeway revolts in communities of color remained largely invisible. These populations lacked time, language skills, information, and power to organize and resist in ways that achieved commensurate anti-freeway results. Their story is not one of triumph but of reckoning and remembrance (Avila, 2014b).

The height of the Freeway Revolt era coincided with the creation of the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) in 1966 and the Federal-aid Highway Act of 1968, both of which reflected efforts to reconcile conflicts between highway construction and housing. Despite some progress in legislation and marginal victories for the movement, the conflicts were far from resolved (Avila, 2014b).

Feminist movements also played a role in freeway activism. These movements denounced the masculine commitment to modernist efficiency, while advocating for spatial freedom for women and families. Most such critiques emerged from white, suburban women protesting against the gendered hierarchy of the highway system. Avila (2014b, p. 57) acknowledges “housewife activists” and their reform agenda, but also notes a racialized narrative. Well-known activists like Jane Jacobs were effectively color-blind in their advocacy, and others employed white, ethnic pride as part of their rhetoric. White women’s achievements are prominent parts of history and popular culture, yet the voices of women of color are far less known or celebrated (Avila, 2014b).

Avila (2014b) emphasizes the diversity and strength of social movements that responded to freeway construction, confronting a long history of inequity and discrimination. Communities across the country found creative ways to express themselves and their cultures, in relationship to the infrastructure that devastated their neighborhoods. These acts of transformation reflect pride, heritage and empowerment.

Political dissent, spearheaded by civil rights activists, city residents, and a nascent environmental movement brought about an end to the highway boom by the late 1960s. Widespread highway building came to a halt by the mid-1970s because of rising economic costs, relatively stagnant revenues, and the realization that more highways did not reduce congestion (Jeffrey Brown, Morris, and Taylor, 2009a). Nevertheless, some scholars question the success of the Freeway Revolt and argue that its impact was relatively minimal, as engineers were able to build most highways wherever they wished (Ellis, 2001 and M. Rose, 1979). Avila (2014b) praises some of the indirect impacts of the Freeway Revolt, as meaningful cultural responses from communities of color and women.

### *Public Participation*

The passage of the 1956 Federal Highway Act authorized more than \$31 billion in grants by the Bureau of Public Roads. Shortly after, state highway departments began transforming the urban fabric of cities around the country. However, the early years following the implementation of the Act were characterized by stark injustices, as public participation was limited to a single hearing minimum and only increased to two hearings in 1969, after a huge backlash (Karner et al., 2017).

Public participation in transportation development projects has since evolved to make the process and outcomes somewhat more inclusive (Karner et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the early exclusion of citizen participation in highway planning and construction largely impacted low-income communities and communities of color. For instance, preservationists in New Orleans’s predominantly white Vieux Carré neighborhood succeeded in protecting their community from urban renewal, while Black residents in the Faubourg Tremé neighborhood could not stop the construction of the highway over their

neighborhood and the destruction of twelve city blocks. Black New Orleanians did not have a strong political voice in the 1950s, and they were excluded from the public participation processes that protected Vieux Carré (B. Wright, 1997). Avila (2014b) attributes the success of Vieux Carré and other preservationist movements in New York City's Little Italy to racial and class privilege. Similar to Faubourg Tremé in New Orleans, Miami's Overtown and St. Paul's Rondo neighborhoods could not deter highway schemes because they lacked the resources and political connections for public participation (Avila, 2014b).

After years of civic efforts to protect the built environment, Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966, one of several policies that gave citizens a legal case to oppose highway projects. Unfortunately, preservationist legislation furthered the nation's racial divide by protecting some communities and not others (Avila, 2014b). Avila (2014b, p. 117) poignantly asks why certain efforts to preserve white neighborhoods were considered "everyone's fight," but black neighborhoods were left to resist the highway alone and unsuccessfully.

### *From Environmental Justice to Transportation Equity*

Transportation racism has shaped civil rights and social justice efforts for decades. From the Montgomery Bus Boycott in the 1950s to the Freedom Riders of the 1960s, individuals across the country have organized and mobilized to demand equity and fair treatment. Bullard and Johnson (1997) discuss the historical relationship between transportation infrastructure and racism. The environmental justice movement developed in the late 1980s, when the Commission for Racial Justice from the United Church of Christ released a report in 1987, titled *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States*, which revealed that low-income populations and populations of color faced alarming disparities in environmental degradation and pollution. In the 1980s, disposal sites for highly toxic waste were deliberately located in poor, mostly Black areas. As it became evident that poor communities of color in urban areas received less environmental protection than their suburban, affluent, white counterparts, grassroots groups around the country sprang up in protest. In the early 1990s, the environmental justice movement adopted a broader agenda that included issues of public health, cultural survival, land rights, economic justice, community empowerment, and transportation (Bullard, Johnson, and Torres, 2004). In *Just Transportation*, Bullard and Johnson (1997) discuss commonalities between environmental and social justice agendas. In particular, they offer a definition of transportation equity that incorporates ethical and political questions from environmental justice about "who gets what, when, why, and how much" (Bullard and Johnson, 1997, p. 11).

The environmental justice framework uncovers conditions that produce inequity and injustice. Following a preventive model for action, it seeks to protect all individuals' rights against direct, indirect, cumulative, or counterbalancing impacts of environmental degradation (Bullard and Johnson, 1997). Bullard and Johnson (1997) describe how transportation justice builds upon that framework of analysis and action in case studies across the country—for example, communities of color in Washington, D.C. and James City, North Carolina which employed the environmental justice framework to oppose freeway construction (Shepard and Sonn, 1997). Nevertheless, while environmental justice efforts addressed some inequalities in transportation policy and their effects, they mostly focused on inequity

concerning the natural environment. Environmental justice has therefore often ignored transportation equity issues, as well as attempts to improve mobility for disadvantaged neighborhoods and communities (Sanchez, Stolz, and Ma, 2004). Federal transportation authorization bills passed in 1991 and 1999 put more emphasis on environmental and social equity goals than previous ones, an emphasis which was continued in subsequent bills. Despite this shift, research indicates that low-income populations and populations of color continue to disproportionately rely on transit (Jakowitsch and Ernst, 2004).

Transportation justice continues to be a contested topic. Despite the glaring evidence of race-based discrimination in transport history, few studies focus on transportation racism as a central theme. Researchers question the effectiveness of civil rights legislation and the legality of policies, practices, and procedures, indicating that transportation policy is far from color-blind (Bullard, Johnson, and Torres, 2004).

### *The Freeway Teardown Movement*

The teardown movement dates back to the 1970s, when several American cities replaced their expressways with alternatives. Teardowns in Portland, Oregon (1974), Oakland (1989), Boston (1991), San Francisco (1991, 2002), Milwaukee (2003), Providence (2011), Oklahoma City (2012), Rochester (2017), and Seattle (2019) are evidence of the failures of mid-century transportation planning and policy (M. Rose and Mohl, 2012 and Mohl, 2012). Teardown proposals continue to raise interest and support across the country; according to Karas (2015), over 20 cities have planned or considered removing urban sections of a highway. In 2010, U.S. DOT and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded \$20 million in grants to remove sections of urban highways in New Orleans, New York City, and New Haven (DiMento and Ellis, 2012).

Some arguments in favor of highway removal are practical and opportunistic. If highways are approaching the end of their useful life cycles, why not invest in valuable redevelopment projects instead (DiMento and Ellis, 2012)? However, an important part of the movement is rooted in social and environmental justice activism. Community groups, municipal agencies, and urban design professionals seek compensation and restoration for the destruction that was caused (Mohl, 2012). Activists have confronted the racist history of highway construction with bold demands to remove the structures that destroyed black neighborhoods (Dewey, 2020). Many advocate the removal of highways and investment in mass transit as an alternative to automobile-centric cities (Mohl, 2012).

Despite some success, the teardown movement has seen only limited successes. The handful of examples of torn-down highways pales in comparison to the enormous impact of past highway construction, the highways that still stand, and even new highway construction and widenings today. Like the Freeway Revolt, teardown movements and their success are limited to certain neighborhoods and communities that have access to resources and political leverage. When new land uses replace former highways, they may instigate gentrification or displacement. For example, Portland, Oregon, San Francisco, and Toronto replaced aging highways with new waterfront development. Though redevelopment clearly improves the urban environment, it also may trigger speculation in the real

estate market (Freilla, 2004). Freilla (2004) writes about two New York City neighborhoods that were devastated by highway construction in the Bronx and Brooklyn. Environmental activists organized in anticipation of demolition projects, in order to ensure access to affordable housing, prioritize community needs, and avoid gentrification.

### The California Context

As discussed in the previous section, during the postwar years, highways became an intrinsic part of the built environment in every U.S. state. California led the way by setting the pace and the standard for highway planning across the country. In California, limited-access highways came to be known as “freeways,” because they did not require a toll, unlike some counterparts in other parts of the country. California and Los Angeles in particular created the earliest and most expansive plans for freeway construction (Jones, 1989). The Golden State adopted a 12,241-mile freeway plan in 1959, which was the network equivalent to one-third of the length of the entire Interstate Highway System (Taylor, 1993).

Freeways played an exceptionally prominent role in California, enabling suburban dispersion and creating the quintessential image of suburban life. At first, many scholars viewed Southern California’s freeways as a great achievement, and many celebrated the freeway as a democratization of transportation that enabled individuals to pursue their interests beyond their immediate geography. Brodsky (1981, p. 5), in his book *L.A. Freeway: An Appreciative Essay*, refers to the Southern California freeway as “the cathedral of its time and place.” Architecture critic Reyner Banham (2009), in his book *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, devotes one of his four ecologies to the freeway, which he calls “Autopia.” Authors like Brodsky and Banham write about the freeway experience in admiration, from the driver’s seat, praising the exhilarating feeling of fast movement. Some of these authors, however, largely ignored the cost of the freeway and its victims (Bottles, 1991).

More recently, however, scholars have begun to compile counter narratives of freeway construction in California. Avila (2004, 2014a, 2014b) narrates the history of the freeway in Los Angeles, through the eyes of residents of color who were displaced but also those who resisted freeway intrusion. He finds that while freeways represented monuments of progress for white Angelenos, they left deep “scars” for the Mexican residents of East Los Angeles (Avila, 2004, p. 83). Focusing on Southern California’s Inland Empire, Carpio (2019) writes about how transportation and race shaped the American West. Her historical work exposes racial hierarchies that granted a privileged group the freedom to move, while denying others the same opportunity. Case studies across the state document how freeways destroyed certain neighborhoods and displaced their residents. As vast tracts of open land were transformed into crowded, traffic-clogged cities, Californians became more aware of the effects of freeway development on daily life and community values (Silen, 1970). It is also in California that groundbreaking research has exposed the hazardous impact of freeways on environment and human health.



## Physical Impacts

In California, Los Angeles experienced outward growth during the 1920s and 1930s due to regional infrastructure improvements, transportation technology, and population growth. A vast streetcar system first helped to disperse development in the region (Wachs, 1984), but freeway building magnified the trend. In the 1940s, with both federal and state governments advocating for more freeways to quickly transport supplies, armament, and men to meet war demands, the defense industry enhanced the need for automobiles, and the region sprawled further (Perez, 2017). As discussed further in Chapters 4 and 5, the groundbreaking Arroyo Seco Parkway, opened in 1940 and connected Pasadena to downtown Los Angeles (Loukaitou-Sideris and Gottlieb, 2005). Throughout the following decades, development of the massive freeway system in Southern California facilitated the relocation of middle- and upper-class residents to the suburbs (See Chapter 4), as federally funded highways propagated suburbs and led to the disinvestment and demise of many urban neighborhoods across the entire country.

New freeways were central to the mid-century suburban population boom that took place across Southern California. Local and national media celebrated the quintessential suburban lifestyle, complete with new single-family homes, new cars, and appliances. However, this version of the American Dream was contingent on prosperity from rising income and home ownership, both of which were racially circumscribed to white workers. Black residents were systematically excluded from the “pleasant way of life” that typified Southern California (Sides, 2006, p. 59).

Simultaneously, a darker narrative of blight emerged from the urban core. Freeways were perhaps the most conflicted symbols of the “new” Los Angeles; they simultaneously represented the promise of postwar progress and the destruction of urban neighborhoods (Avila, 2004). The freeway system may have supported the pleasant life of suburbia but to do so, it cut through neighborhoods inhabited by the poor and disadvantaged people of the region.

Current social disparities within Southern California are a result of historical and structural processes of racial segregation, concentrated poverty, uneven land use development, and also the construction of the area’s transportation system. Many of the freeways built in Southern California cut through neighborhoods of color, which concentrated lower-income populations and populations of color in the industrial center, fragmenting institutions and communities. These neighborhoods tend to have higher population density, lower housing values, and a higher density of freeways and major roads (Houston et al., 2004).

In Los Angeles, freeway construction in the 1950s was closely associated with slum clearance. The four major freeways and interchanges that surround downtown today pass through areas which were formerly residential and had been identified as blighted by HOLC (Avila, 2014a, 2014b). Half of the population in these neighborhoods was Black, with Mexican, Japanese, and Italian populations as well (Avila, 2004). Following this, when Banham celebrated Los Angeles in 1971, he limited his commentary on downtown to a note in his book because “that is all it deserved” (Banham, 2009, p. 201), as the

freeways depressed property values, increased vacancies, and diminished the image of the center city (Avila, 2004).

Displacement of Mexican Americans in East Los Angeles by freeway building has been extensively discussed by scholars (Avila, 2004, 2014a, 2014b; Acuña, 1984; and Estrada, 2005). Estrada (2005) writes about the Mexican American history of displacement in East Los Angeles, a neighborhood that lost 19 percent of its land to the freeway. In comparison, only four percent of the total land in the rest of the city is devoted to freeways. Encroachments from numerous freeways into East Los Angeles were deemed unavoidable, as many planned freeways in suburbia were entirely erased from planning maps. Indeed, only 61 percent of planned Los Angeles freeways in 1958 were actually built, yet over 100 percent of those planned for East Los Angeles were constructed.

The impact of freeway-induced segregation and destruction was no different in Northern California. Opened on June 11, 1957, the Cypress Street Viaduct was the first double-decker freeway in California. Part of Interstate 880 (originally designated State Route 17), it linked Interstate 280 in San José to Interstate 80 in Oakland. Constructed to connect drivers to the Bay Bridge and to reduce local road traffic, the freeway ran directly through the middle of the West Oakland neighborhood (Congress for the New Urbanism, n.d.). The elevated structure bisected and physically segregated this East Bay neighborhood, a redlined area predominantly occupied by Black communities now divided into oddly shaped units (Patterson and Harley, 2019 and Golub, Marcantonio, and Sanchez, 2013).

The construction of Interstate 980 to the south further isolated the Latino/a and Black population from downtown Oakland. Property demolitions from the construction of the Cypress Freeway displaced an estimated 600 families (Congress for the New Urbanism, n.d.). The urban renewal projects undertaken in concert with the development of other freeways in the area further destroyed more than 5,000 housing units and sealed off West Oakland, limiting Black residents' access to the employment base at the Port of Oakland. West Oakland, which had once benefited from the services of regional rail and local streetcar lines, now faced environmental nuisances as well from the freeways (Connect Oakland, 2015; Patterson and Harley, 2019; Congress for the New Urbanism, n.d.; and Golub, Marcantonio, and Sanchez, 2013).

### Social Impacts

Enabled in part by freeways, white flight dramatically affected race relations and spatial segregation in California. In the early years of freeway planning, transportation engineers in California selected freeway routings on the basis of their cost, anticipated user benefits, and engineering considerations, irrespective of the effect on nearby communities. Such decisions did not consider the not easily monetized social costs or the preferences of surrounding communities (Silen, 1970).

Freeway construction was among the most influential and discriminatory forces that shaped California's urban and suburban patterns. Avila (2004) describes the rise of a white, suburban civic culture in postwar Los Angeles, as a result of interstate highway construction. He argues that freeways are a critical part of understanding the (sub)urban cultural system of postwar America because they

separated “chocolate cities” from “vanilla suburbs,” literally and figuratively (Avila, 2004, pp. 9, 11). The “white city” imposed freeways upon ghettos, roads that simultaneously mobilized white flight (Avila, 2004, pp. xvii, 11). White Angelenos abandoned the center city and established themselves in the neighboring suburbs that became iconic to the (white) Southern California way of life (Avila, 2004).

In his essay on the Los Angeles freeway system, Brodsky (1981, p. 5) praises the “individual freedom...and democracy of personal mobility.” However, in California as elsewhere, this freedom and democracy only applied to drivers. Disproportionate freeway spending resulted in poor transportation options for non-drivers. Sides (2006) describes the dismal transportation options given to Black residents of Los Angeles, many of whom depended on public transportation to access employment. For instance, the bus commute from Watts to Santa Monica included several transfers and took up to two hours. For those who did not own an automobile, resources and services were geographically restricted. Lacking the transport to access a wider range of shops, Black Angelenos would often have no other choice to “take what [they] can get and pay what [they were] asked” at local stores (Underwood, 1997, p. 399 and Sides, 2006, p. 114).

In 1944, the construction and rerouting of Santa Ana Freeway in Boyle Heights led to the destruction of 200 residential buildings. Freeway planners justified the destruction by saying that communities would benefit from increased proximity to work, school, and social activities. However, in reality, many residents were forced to relocate further away, and many viewed this freeway development as only benefiting downtown Los Angeles businesses (Perez, 2017). Similarly, in the 1950s, the Harbor Freeway brought large-scale destruction, tearing through South Central Los Angeles and destroying over 15,000 homes (Avila, 2004). Fotsch (1999, p. 112) describes the freeway in Southern California as an “urban shield” that allowed white, suburban residents to avoid low-income urban residents and urban denizens of color. Keil (1998) describes the freeway era in Los Angeles as a “transit apartheid”, where mobility through time and space was dictated by class and color (in Avila, 2004, p. 241).

Similarly, Smith (1990) describes the development of Interstate 880 in the Bay Area as a disaster for the lower-income residents of color of West Oakland. The freeway forced them to drive for miles instead of walking a few blocks to reach a major grocery store. The freeway created a class divide which worsened over the years. On one side, the city saw people turning Victorian relics into chic neighborhoods. On the other side, civic neglect, poverty, drug abuse, crime, and violence ruled the day. In the words of a resident, “the freeway caused a barrier[;] it caused separation of family[;] it caused a separation of community. It created an attitude of ‘I’m better than you because I live on this side of the freeway’” (Smith, 1990, p. 7). Proximity to Oakland ports and railroad terminals had been an asset and a source of prosperity to the Black communities of West Oakland. However, the postwar urban renewal process divided the neighborhood, as massive infrastructure such as the freeways, warehouses, and industries encroached on it (Golub, Marcantonio, and Sanchez, 2013).

In 1950, the trade magazine *California Highways and Public Works* openly paid tribute to the state’s explorers, conquistadores, and colonial rulers, celebrating them as “immortal padres,” “California’s first pioneers,” and “founding fathers” (in Avila, 2004, p. 200). In honoring these figures of colonialism, the

editors echoed the racial history of oppression that drove transportation planning in the state (Avila, 2004). These same editors staged a photo-op for the opening of the Arroyo Seco Parkway in 1941 with a “Chief Tahachwee” in exuberant attire transferring his people’s rights to the Arroyo (Avila, 2004, pp. 201–202). Avila (2004, p. 201) criticizes the dramatized images that historically present “White Man” and “Indians” as friends and collaborators in the “modernization” project. In reality, American Indians were among the groups that succumbed to the freeway agenda in California and suffered from displacement and dispossession (Avila, 2004).

Avila (2004) captures artistic expressions of folklore and revolt that women of color produced to confront freeway and marginalization in California. For instance, Chicana artist Judith Baca, who grew up in Pacoima (an area discussed in Chapter 6), depicts the division of the barrios and Chavez Ravine (discussed further below) in one of her murals, in which a freeway splits a Chicano/a family (Avila, 2004, 2014b). Baca and other ethnic women reflect on the racist history of the freeway, but they also feminize the freeway through artistic critiques depicting freeways destroying their neighborhoods.

### Economic Impacts

The postwar population boom in California increased the demand for freeways. In response, the 1947 Collier Burns Highway Act created additional tax funds to build freeways within metropolitan areas. The Act created a cycle: gasoline consumption funded freeway construction, which promoted automobile use (Avila, 2004). But freeway construction often came along with other, negative economic consequences in California (Silen, 1970).

For example, the freeways impaired the “thriving regional economy” of East Los Angeles (Avila, 2004, p. 212). Avila (2004, p. 212) quotes numerous business leaders who denounced the impact of freeways that “favored suburban development at the expense of inner-city communities.” The newspaper *Eastside Sun* reported a decline of 57 percent in downtown retail sales throughout the 1950s, as a direct result of freeway construction (Avila, 2004). As employment shifted to the suburbs, it left people of color stranded in the center city, where they had far fewer employment opportunities. Geographer Edward Soja (1989, p. 197) describes this threshold as the Alameda “White Curtain,” beyond which lay the third largest Black ghetto in the country (in Fotsch, 1999, p. 121). In Los Angeles, construction of freeways affected the local businesses of middle-class white owners and non-white owners, and caused many residents and businesses to relocate. As a result, racially and economically mixed communities soon transitioned to low-income communities with a majority population of color. With the departure of wealthier residents, civic services started to neglect the remaining residents due to a plummeting tax revenue base (Perez, 2017).

To the north, in West Oakland, the community later had to bear the additional burden of the construction of another infrastructural barrier, the Bay Area Rapid Transit system (BART). The above ground portion of BART through West Oakland demolished the Black commercial district there. Acres of parking covered what once were prime locations for thriving businesses: jazz clubs, barber shops, grocery stores, and restaurants (Golub, Marcantonio, and Sanchez, 2013).

While low-income Californians and Californians of color suffered the consequences of transportation misinvestments, others enjoyed the freedom to access new destinations. Suburban development and freeway construction encouraged Walt Disney to locate his theme park strategically in suburban Anaheim. Disneyland and the Santa Ana Freeway were developed simultaneously, and the park's commercial success was built on the publicly funded freeway. Even the park's attractions surrounded by huge parking lots reflected a cultural obsession with automobiles and the freeway (Avila, 2004). Likewise, Avila (2004) and Estrada (2005) write extensively about the construction of Dodger Stadium and the displacement that it caused to the working-class Chicano/a community of Chavez Ravine. The construction of Dodger Stadium and Disneyland demonstrate how the freeway engendered a new spatial culture that disfavored the ethnic, urban neighborhood and sponsored white suburban development.

### Environmental and Health Impacts

As nationwide, a growing amount of data-driven scholarship has drawn attention to the impact of freeways on the environment and human health in California. In the Golden State, a significant amount of this research also reveals racial and economic disparities among those who bear the burden. As traffic density or close proximity to a major freeway or roadway often suppresses property values, these neighborhoods eventually become affordable housing options for many low-income families. In Southern California, many disadvantaged neighborhoods are surrounded by regional job centers; as a result, the traffic density in these neighborhoods is twice that of the rest of the region. As many residents in these neighborhoods live in older and multifamily housing, proximity to major freeways is also associated with higher rates of indoor exposure to outdoor pollutants (Houston et al., 2004 and Morello-Frosch, Pastor, and Sadd, 2001).

Environmental and health implications directly affect schools, parks, and residences in close proximity to freeways, raising serious concerns about the well-being of local residents. There is abundant evidence linking a neighborhood's proximity to freeways to its residents' respiratory problems, cancer, and premature birth (Künzli et al., 2003; van Vliet et al., 1997; Wilhelm and Ritz, 2003; and Zhu et al., 2002). Childcare facilities located near roadways have high concentrations of harmful vehicle-related pollutants, which affect children's health. According to Houston et al. (2006), children of color from families of modest means have a higher probability of exposure to pollutants. Though California has enacted legislation and rules to reduce this, additional mitigation approaches are still necessary (Houston et al., 2006). Further research indicates that heavy-duty diesel truck traffic in, to, and from the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach has increased dramatically, impacting the low-income communities of color adjacent to the ports (Houston, Krudysz, and Winer, 2008 and Kozawa, Fruin, and Winer, 2009). In East Los Angeles, the concentration of seven freeways in 16 square miles results in one of the most polluted environments in the country. Estrada (2005) quotes a study concluding that 80 percent of the area's air pollution is a result of vehicular traffic from the freeways. Hu et al. (2012) offer empirical evidence of elevated air pollutant concentrations across the residential neighborhood of Boyle Heights in East Los Angeles, due to its proximity to superhighways.

As described above, in the 1940s and 1950s, highways in California were often constructed in areas where community resistance to land acquisition was the weakest. These areas often coincided with areas categorized as hazardous in HOLC maps. This is partly the reason behind the prevalence of asthma in communities of color, whose residents are disproportionately affected by higher ambient air pollutant concentrations compared to those in predominantly white neighborhoods (Nardone et al., 2020). Morello-Frosch, Pastor, and Sadd (2001) calculated the potential lifetime cancer risks associated with outdoor air pollutants in Southern California and found that transportation and small-area sources are the primary source of such toxic air pollutants, rather than the large industrial and waste facilities. In their analysis, race plays an explanatory role in risk distribution even after controlling for other economic, land-use, and population factors. According to Nardone et al. (2020), the present-day prevalence of asthma among residents of several Californian cities can be attributed to the redlining policies that denied employment opportunities in communities of color and undermined the physical environments of neighborhoods.

## Political Impacts

### *The Environmental Justice Movement*

According to Golub, Marcantonio, and Sanchez (2013), the building of transportation infrastructure has led to devastating local impacts in California, in the form of construction-induced destruction and permanent disfigurement of low-income neighborhoods, housing removal and displacement, pollution, noise, barrier effects, and an abundance of parking lots. To find affordable housing, people from poor communities and communities of color have had little other choice but to live disproportionately in denser areas with more freeways and major roads close by (Houston et al., 2004). Building on earlier civil rights and environmental movements, the environmental justice movement of the 1980s brought attention to the links between pollution of various types and the location of low-income communities and communities of color. Eventually, Executive Order 12898 on environmental justice, signed by President Clinton in 1994, required federal agencies to identify and address disproportionate adverse health and environmental impacts on low-income populations and populations of color (Golub, Marcantonio, and Sanchez, 2013). Lee (1997) recounts the legal claim to block a freeway in Southern California, led by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Legal Defense and Education Fund, the Natural Resources Defense Council and the National Health Law Program, on behalf of East Los Angeles and El Sereno grassroots community groups. The complainants protested fair housing violations, as well as the failure to enforce environmental justice orders.

### *Policies and Protests*

Freeway development in California followed federal and state regulations that promoted new infrastructure as an indisputable mechanism for modernization. Most, if not all, planning surveys assumed the automobile to be the primary mode of transportation. By collecting data that illustrated the need for unrestricted flow of traffic, planning professionals justified the construction of freeways as a necessity. This supposed scientific objectivity preceded any political consideration regarding the freeway system's potential effects and implications. In fact, planners considered congestion itself to be

an automatic and consensual call for more freeways (Brodsly, 1981; Avila, 2004; and Estrada, 2005). These studies did not consider the social and political impacts of freeways, especially on neighborhoods of color and non-driving residents.

In spite of this conviction and commitment by city planners and engineers, many would eventually oppose plans to expand the freeway system because of its destructive effects, as described above nationally. Urban freeway projects that displaced homes and businesses provoked controversy and some local opposition in California as early as the 1940s. Opposition to specific freeway projects increased as freeway development expanded in the 1960s (Taylor, 1995), when working-class people of color from urban neighborhoods began protesting and exposing the disruptive effects of the freeways.

During the 1960s, San Francisco activists emerged as pioneers in the Freeway Revolt movement to halt the planned construction of the fully extended Embarcadero Freeway and the Central Freeway. Opposition to indiscriminate destruction of central-city neighborhoods grew into the early 1970s. The following years saw the implementation of new federal and environmental laws that made freeway building far costlier and more litigious (Cervero, Kang, and Shively, 2009).

To the south, for most of the 1950s and 1960s in East Los Angeles, opposition to freeways brought together a diverse, multicultural front that organized demonstrations and fought ultimately unsuccessfully to save their neighborhoods. Likewise, in 1954, Black homeowners in West Adams in Los Angeles protested against the proposed route for the Santa Monica Freeway, which would cut through their thriving community (Avila, 2004 and Sides, 2006). Despite protests and grievances voiced to state policymakers in Sacramento, the freeway eventually followed its original course, destroying residences and establishments and running through what a Black local newspaper described as “the most prosperous, best kept[,] and most beautiful Negro-owned property in the country” (in Sides, 2006, p. 124). As Avila (2004, p. 206) notes, “Southern California’s racial groups also imposed a set of counter definitions on the new freeways—not as icons of progress but as emblems of destruction.”

The rising opposition to freeway development eroded political support for new highway taxes and fees during the 1960s and 1970s, eventually leading to the end of the urban freeway building era (Taylor, 1995). The number of freeway miles constructed in California dropped by 95 percent from 1966 to 1978—from 341 miles to just 17 miles (Taylor, 2000). However, even canceled freeways disrupted California neighborhoods, as homes first seized by eminent domain fell into disrepair in the years since (Dillon, 2022).

## Conclusion

As literature from a variety of fields clearly demonstrates, beginning in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, freeway construction across the U.S. and in California has had a devastating effect on low-income neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color, as it destroyed many neighborhoods physically, socially, and economically. Today, such neighborhoods continue to bear an undue burden from freeways in the form of air and noise pollution and other impacts. Although the controversy over freeway construction

spurred community activism that contributed to changes in the process by which freeways are planned, inequities still remain. A deeper understanding of what happened in California is an important starting point for rectifying the wrongs of the past.

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## 3. Methodology

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## Introduction

We employed a mixed-methods approach to explore the effects of freeway siting and construction on neighborhoods of color in our four case study areas. In this chapter, we discuss the rationale behind our research questions and explain in detail our research methodology and data sources, quantitative and qualitative. We conduct a socioeconomic comparison of different freeway routing alternatives considered, an exploration of demographic and economic changes in areas directly cleared for freeway construction and indirectly affected beyond them, and a synthesis of findings from primary historical, archival, and interview sources.

## Research Questions and Methodology, Contextualized

Of our research questions listed in Chapter 1, the first focuses on whether the choice of freeway paths was *de facto* racially biased; the second inquires about the number of housing units displaced and the racial composition of those directly impacted and displaced by freeway construction; the third inquires about the indirect and longer-term impacts of the freeway on the housing market. Lastly, we seek to explore possible other impacts incurred by residents of the case study areas.

An analysis of which route was selected is critically important, as that choice set into motion the subsequent construction and associated destruction. A typical initial step in the planning of the freeway system—especially its parts passing through urban areas—was the development of alternative routes, from which a final path was selected (e.g., Smock, 1962 and A. Turner and Miles, 1970, 1971). Planners compared the alternatives in order to maximize outcomes for a given set of criteria, such as geological challenges, design needs, vehicle capacity, cost, and social impacts. The alternatives were also used to inform the public, elected officials, and other stakeholders, with the objective of soliciting community input and local preferences and priorities (e.g., Fielding, 1972). Freeway planners developed alternatives both at the regional level and at the local level; in some neighborhoods, competing potential routes could be within a mile or less of each other. A decision would spare one set of residents, while hurting another. Consequently, the choice mattered dearly to those who would subsequently be directly and indirectly impacted.

Political, economic, and social power shaped the development of alternatives and final choices, as the broader literature on spatialized racism (discussed further in Chapter 2) shows (Ong and González, 2019). Within America’s racially and economically stratified structure, marginalized populations and neighborhoods were the most vulnerable. In part, this was anchored in pre-existing systemic inequalities. For example, being relegated to the least desirable and lowest paying jobs and racialized housing restrictions meant that people of color were not able to accumulate assets and wealth in the form of homeownership. When they did buy homes, it was frequently in segregated places that suffered from institutional racism, with redlining creating undervalued properties and neighborhoods (discussed further below). These were exactly the places that created “low-cost” paths for potential freeways.

People of color were also less able to influence the planning and decision-making process. The fight for civil rights was nascent when the interstate system was conceived. Although the struggle and protests

for social justice were picking up momentum when the freeway planning process unfolded, people of color were still relatively powerless within the formal political structure. Racial differences in political voice played a visible and overt role in helping white neighborhoods to avoid becoming freeway victims. Previous case studies have documented that people of color were less fortunate (Mohl, 2004, 2008 and Avila, 2014b). Given the broader context, we hypothesize that the final outcomes and impacts of the freeway system ultimately mirrored and reinforced larger patterns of societal inequality.

To test for potential biases and injustices in the route selection process at the neighborhood level, we compared the route that was ultimately chosen and the alternatives that were not. We were particularly interested in the racial composition of the different routes. If our hypothesis was correct, then we would see that people of color comprised a higher share of the population in affected neighborhoods, compared with neighborhoods not chosen for freeways. We also examined if the route choice was reinforced by or occurred despite other factors associated with economic class and total displacement. Quantitatively, we analyzed the income levels of the census tracts containing the alternative routes and the number of homes that would have been destroyed if the alternative route had been chosen. A quantitative assessment of the alternatives can help answer this question, but it should be noted that the results can only be reviewed as *de facto* outcomes materially observed. These findings alone do not reveal the underlying political and economic processes or whether the outcomes were the result of purposeful governmental action. To get an understanding of these factors, we also reviewed historical sources and media accounts of the time to reconstruct prevailing narratives about the particular freeway choices.

The second type of analysis focuses on the direct impacts of freeway construction: the homes and people in the freeway's ultimate path. One of the most obvious and visible outcomes of freeway construction was the destruction of buildings along the route to make room for the placement of the multi-lane infrastructure. Such impacts are often depicted by researchers through images and photographs of the urban landscape before, during, and after the building of the freeway (Caltrans, n.d. and Susaneck, 2022). This provides visual clues to the scale and magnitude of the physical transformation but does not offer quantitative measures of what was lost. Given that these freeways ran through communities of color, it would not be surprising that the destroyed housing consisted disproportionately of the homes of residents of color. The unanswered question is how many households were affected and how many were people of color, which we explore by tapping digitized historical statistics and utilizing spatial analytical techniques. At the same time, our qualitative interviews with former neighborhood residents and community leaders provide a direct account of their feelings of loss.

The third type of analysis examines nearby housing, which could be impacted by externalities of freeways. Freeways create negative spillovers due to air pollution, noise, traffic accidents, and other disamenities. At the same time, freeways can generate positive benefits by increasing accessibility and reducing travel time to regional amenities and opportunities well beyond the immediate neighborhood. The impacts vary by distance from the freeway, with those adjacent suffering more and those further away gaining net advantages. There are also differences in outcomes for single-family homes and

multifamily homes. The physical attributes of the freeway can also dampen or accentuate amenities and disamenities. Existing studies have documented that these externalities impact property values, although the net effects can vary complexly with multiple factors (Carey and Semmens, 2003; Allen, Austin, and Swaleheen, 2015; Levkovich, Rouwendal, and van Marwijk, 2016; Higgins et al., 2019; Anderson, 2020; and Kocak et al., 2021). Although the underlying theory is sound, empirically testing out the outcomes requires sophisticated analytical tools (e.g., hedonic pricing) and extensive data (e.g., parcel-level transaction information for multiple time periods). As market-driven outcomes, the economic impacts can evolve over time, as awareness increases. For example, when sellers and buyers become more cognizant of new evidence on the negative environmental and health consequences, that knowledge would translate into lower housing prices.

Moreover, impacts can vary systematically across neighborhoods along socioeconomic and demographic lines. For example, residents in disadvantaged communities are less likely to own a private vehicle and have fewer vehicles per person, due to a combination of cumulative historical and contemporary discriminatory patterns that lower their earnings and inflate the cost of purchasing and owning a car (Ong, 1996, 2002 and Ong and Stoll, 2007). They also face more explicit and implicit obstacles to utilizing regional opportunities and amenities. These factors, consequently, lower the positive benefits of having a freeway running through their neighborhoods. There are also likely systematic variations on the negative side, due to, for example, greater morbidity and mortality from the same level of air pollution. Residents of color and low-income residents are at greater risk due to disparities in pre-existing vulnerability associated with a lack of access to health care, healthy food, and infrastructure for exercise (González, 2020 and J. Wright et al., 2016).

To study this spillover phenomenon associated with historical freeway construction in neighborhoods of color, it is necessary to compare changes to nearby housing units, focusing on home values and rent levels. This analysis, however, is far from being comprehensive or conclusive, and these limitations are discussed below. Despite such limitations, our analysis does provide a first-order approximation of the indirect impacts of the freeways, thus representing an original contribution to the study of how freeways affected marginalized communities.

## Quantitative Methods and Sources

### Data Sources and Construction

To identify the appropriate time periods and decennial censuses, we compiled a detailed timeline covering the period from the initial freeway planning stage to final completion (See **Table 5-2** for Pasadena's timeline). Unfortunately, there is no singular definitive source of information on the timing of key events; nonetheless, various documents do provide sufficient insights to construct a reasonable timeline. Along with information for the entire study area, we also examined the timing for four subsegments of the freeway within the study area to verify the dates for critical activities and events.

Based on the timeline, we assembled demographic, socioeconomic, and housing data from the decennial census reports for Pasadena, Pacoima, and San José for 1960 (pre-construction), 1970

(beginning of right-of-way purchasing and construction), and 1980 (post-construction) from the U.S. Census Bureau (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961a, 1961b, 1961d, 1962a, 1962c, 1963, 1972a, 1972c, 1980, 1982; U.S. Census Bureau et al., 1971b, 1972; and Manson et al., 2022). In Sacramento, the timeline was slightly different, as initial freeway planning began prior to 1960. For that city, we included data from the 1950 decennial census reports as well (U.S. Census Bureau, 1952b, 1961c, 1962b, 1972b; U.S. Census Bureau et al., 1971a; and Manson et al., 2022). The data were digitized and geocoded for analysis. In some cases, additional information was constructed or estimated. We used a combination of census tracts and census blocks as the geographic unit of analysis.<sup>1</sup>

Census tract-level data are available online, although some additional information required entry. The project required manually transcribing block-level data from printed census reports into a digital format. We digitized the 1950 block-level data, the 1960 block-level data, and parts of the 1970 block-level data (U.S. Census Bureau, 1952a, 1961a, 1961b, 1961c, 1961d and U.S. Census Bureau et al., 1971a, 1971b, 1972). The remaining 1970 and all of 1980 block-level data came from IPUMS National Historical Geographic Information System (NHGIS) (Manson et al., 2022)<sup>2</sup> and *Social Explorer* (U.S. Census Bureau, 1980). We used housing units, households' race, average home value, and average contract rent (the agreed-upon monthly rent in a lease, which may or may not have included furnishing, utilities costs, or other services or fees, depending on the unit) as key indicators at the block level.

**Figure 3-1** displays an example of a printed page of block-level data from the 1960 Census report that required data entry. We initially attempted to use optical character recognition, a process that converts images of text into a machine-readable text format, through Adobe Acrobat, but the conversion either did not work due to the format of the document or introduced numerous errors requiring correction. Instead, we opted to manually input the data. The process involved first identifying the tracts in the study area and then the blocks within it. As errors can easily be introduced whenever manual data entry is involved, we assigned multiple people to the task to minimize potential errors. Each person was involved in manually entering the data and verifying another person's entry. We also built internal checks by summing up the counts of all blocks located in the same census tract and comparing those counts to what was reported at the census tract level (i.e., do the values of the summed-up block counts

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1. Tracts are small geographic entities that usually have a population between 1,200 and 8,000 persons, with an average of 4,000 people. They tend to be largely homogeneous in terms of their demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Census blocks are smaller units within a tract, the smallest level of geography for which one can get basic demographic and housing data (such as population, race, and housing units). In a city, blocks look like city blocks: small in area and bounded by streets. In more suburban and rural areas, block areas may be larger and bounded by a variety of other features such as roads, streams, and railroad tracks. Both geographic units are delineated by the U.S. Census Bureau once every ten years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022b and Rossiter, 2011).

2. NHGIS does not have available 1950-1980 block-level shapefiles for the case study areas nor 1950 or 1960 block-level data. It has available partial 1970 and 1980 block-level data (Manson et al., 2022). Some data for 1970, including average home values and rent, were manually entered for this project. We also discovered some errors in the 1980 block-level data from NHGIS (The values for median home value and median rent were exactly the same.), which are now corrected.

match or come close to what was reported at the tract level?). Ideally, the two values were identical or, at least, came close. When differences exist, they may be due to data suppression at the block level. When we found major differences between the sum of block counts and the counts reported for the tract, we undertook multiple rounds of checking to identify the problem.

Figure 3-1. Example of 1960 Block Data from a Census Report

6

City Block Characteristics

Table 2.—CHARACTERISTICS OF HOUSING UNITS, BY BLOCKS: 1960—Con.

[“Total population” contains no persons in group quarters unless preceded by asterisk; one asterisk (\*) denotes less than 10 percent; two asterisks (\*\*), 10 percent or more]

Blocks within census tracts	Total population	All housing units by condition and plumbing								Occupied housing units								
		Sound			Deteriorating			Dilapidated	Owner occupied			Renter occupied			Occupied by non-white	1.01 or more persons per room		
		Total	With all plumbing facilities	Lacking some or all facilities	Total	With all plumbing facilities	Lacking some or all facilities		Total	Average value (dollars)	Average number of rooms	Total	Average contract rent (dollars)	Average number of rooms				
38***	2	1	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
39***	15	3	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
40***	39	13	13	13	***	***	***	***	***	***	9	10500	4.1	3	***	***	***	2
41***	76	20	20	20	***	***	***	***	***	***	16	10500	4.4	4	***	***	***	4
42***	4	1	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
43***	62	19	18	18	***	1	1	***	***	***	13	9500	4.5	6	66	3.7	***	3
44***	80	18	17	17	***	1	1	***	***	***	11	11000	4.5	6	79	4.2	1	6
45***	49	14	14	14	***	***	***	***	***	***	10	11500	4.5	4	***	***	***	3
46***	45	16	16	16	***	***	***	***	***	***	13	11000	4.3	1	***	***	***	4
47***	71	24	23	23	***	1	***	***	1	***	15	11500	3.9	7	79	4.0	***	6
48***	***	2	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
49***	31	8	8	8	***	***	***	***	***	***	6	16000	5.3	2	***	***	***	1
50***	133	42	39	39	***	3	3	***	***	***	27	21000	5.6	13	88	4.6	***	3
1042***	*5689	1504	1390	1384	6	94	92	1	1	20	1027	15000	5.2	378	69	3.3	1019	298
1***	*213	52	52	52	***	***	***	***	***	***	41	15000	5.6	5	74	4.8	35	12
2***	44	12	12	12	***	***	***	***	***	***	11	13500	5.4	***	***	***	11	1
3***	84	21	21	21	***	***	***	***	***	***	20	16000	5.4	***	***	***	20	3
4***	38	11	11	11	***	***	***	***	***	***	11	15500	5.0	***	***	***	11	1
5***	88	22	22	22	***	***	***	***	***	***	22	18000	5.4	***	***	***	22	3
6***	95	22	22	21	1	***	***	***	***	***	19	15500	5.5	3	***	***	22	6
7***	54	17	17	17	***	***	***	***	***	***	13	16000	5.1	3	***	***	16	3
8***	109	33	33	32	1	***	***	***	***	***	23	15000	5.7	3	***	***	24	4
9***	23	5	5	5	***	***	***	***	***	***	5	16000	5.8	***	***	***	5	2
10***	106	22	22	22	***	***	***	***	***	***	21	14500	5.3	1	***	***	20	5
11***	86	22	22	22	***	***	***	***	***	***	21	14500	5.3	***	***	***	21	2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1961b, p. 6

Much of the census data, however, needed to be transformed or used to create new information. For example, statistics reported in dollars (e.g., income, home values, and rents) need to be adjusted for inflation when comparing across time (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). We also calculated block-level average home value and average rents for some years. For 1950, 1960, and 1970, average home value and rent were reported, but for 1980, we needed to calculate them by taking the aggregated home value and rent in each block and dividing it by the total number of owner-occupied or renter-occupied units, respectively.

One of the major challenges was creating ethnic/racial categories. Since race is socially constructed, the salient classification changes over time as the concepts of ethnicity and race evolve. The challenge of creating a consistent definition for race and ethnicity is further compounded by differences in what was

asked and reported in each census and in the level of disaggregation even within the same decade (Pratt, Hixson, and Jones, 2015).

In response, we used the following method to harmonize racial/ethnic classifications. The available block-level data report the number of “non-white households.” In 1950 and 1960, the Census Bureau defined “non-whites” as “Blacks” and persons of “other races.” It is much more challenging to estimate the number of Latino/a residents because persons of Spanish/Hispanic origin were counted as “whites” and therefore not included in the counts for “non-whites.” Thus, caution should be taken when interpreting the results in this first step. Second, we used tract-level information to estimate the number of displaced Latino/a households. The Census does provide population counts of whites with a Spanish surname in the 1950 and 1960 tract tabulations. We used this as a measure of white Hispanics to develop a Hispanic-to-white ratio for each tract. We applied that ratio to the counts of white households at the block level to estimate the number of white Hispanic households in each block.<sup>3</sup> Finally, we used spatial allocation to estimate the number of displaced white Hispanics. The total number of people of color and displaced people of color at the block level was the sum of the respective estimates from the two steps above (non-white households plus estimated white Hispanic households). For the northern California case studies, we recalculated the census category of “non-white” to include Hispanic households at the tract level.

In addition to digitizing block data, we also digitized geographic boundaries, as historical census block shapefiles are not digitally available. We constructed 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980 census blocks shapefiles by digitizing block maps from printed census reports (U.S. Census Bureau, 1952a, 1960, 1961a, 1961c, 1961d, 1982 and U.S. Census Bureau et al., 1971a, 1971b, 1972) using georeferencing (taking the image of the block maps and transforming them it a digital map by adding locational coordinate information, so that geospatial analysis programs can determine where the photo is located on the Earth’s surface). We used 1990 block shapefiles derived from NHGIS (Manson et al., 2022) to help guide and align the drawing of these blocks from earlier censuses.

Census geographies can change over time to reflect population growth or decline; therefore, blocks from two different decades are not necessarily the same. This can be seen in **Figure 3-2**, which depicts the blocks along the western edge of Pasadena. While some blocks remain the same, others have been redrawn, split, or consolidated. Particularly evident and germane to this project, the impact of I-210 can be seen even in these tract boundary changes, with the freeway running down the center of the area in the 1980 map at right. There are other issues that make compiling and comparing block-level data

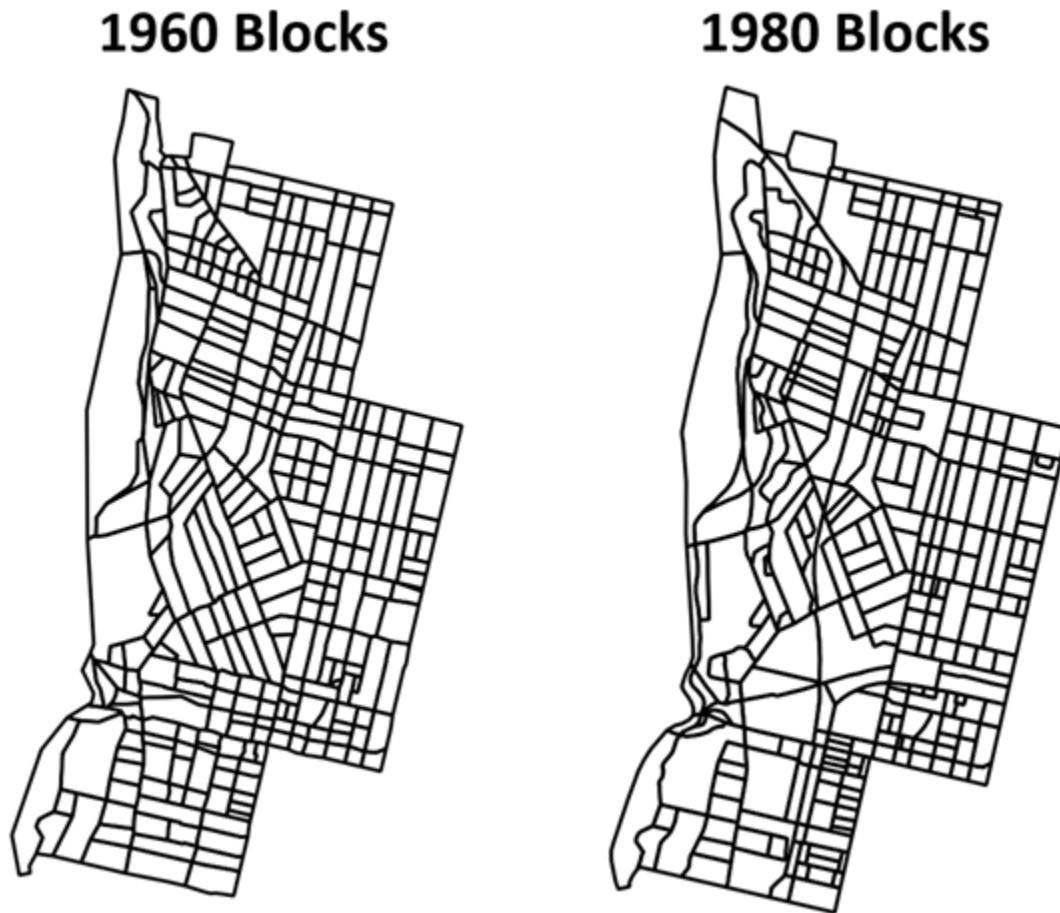
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3. This method makes two assumptions. First, it assumes that the white-to-Hispanic ratio based on population is the same as the white-to-Hispanic ratio for households. This is equivalent to assuming that average household size for non-Hispanic whites is the same as for households with Spanish surnames. Second, it assumes that the white-to-Hispanic ratio at the tract level is uniform across blocks within a tract. This is equivalent to an assumption that non-Hispanic white households and households with Spanish surnames are equally distributed across places. Deviations from either assumption can affect the estimates. Unfortunately, there is not sufficient information and resources to examine the possible biases.



difficult. Some apparent changes can be artificial because of differences in the precision of the underlying geographic coordinates, the choice of projection, the degree to which lines and curves are stylized, recording errors, and repeated transformation of shapefiles over time. Such real and artificial differences across time create challenges in generating comparable statistics across decades, requiring spatial allocations techniques discussed below.

**Figure 3-2. Illustration of Example Digitized Census Block Maps for Pasadena**



Along with census blocks, we also constructed shapefiles for the actual and alternative freeway footprints. We derived alternative routes for the freeway from planning documents and historical newspaper articles. It is important to note that information provided in the newspaper articles may not always be entirely accurate. To avoid such inaccuracies, we drew on a combination of historical maps from Caltrans and other historical documents.

For the actual freeway footprint, we used a combination of parcel (property) shapefiles from the Los Angeles County Assessor (Los Angeles County Assessor, n.d.) and Google Maps (Google, 2023). For San José and Sacramento, we used Google Maps only. The parcel data helped guide the drawing of the

freeway footprint, as it showed where property lines ended in the area around the freeway. Google satellite maps were used as a reference. The drawing of the footprint is based on the current-day freeway due to the lack of consistent historical images of the freeway footprint.

### Analysis of Alternative Routes Methodology

Our analysis of alternative potential routes uses a combination of tract- and block-level data. We sought to answer:

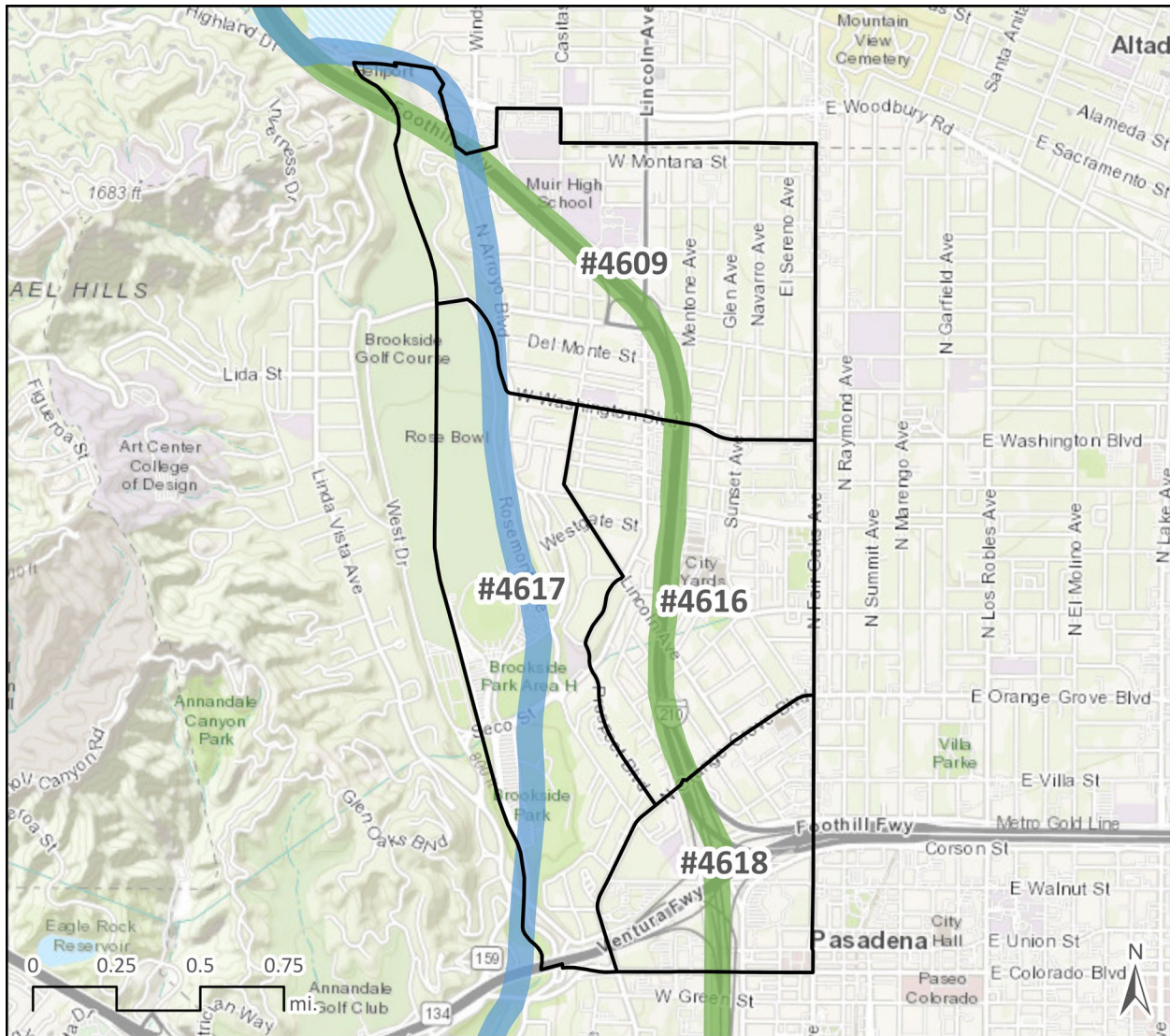
1. What would have been the neighborhood-level impact of an alternative route, relative to the one chosen, as it relates to demographics?
2. What would have been the neighborhood-level impact of an alternative route, relative to the one chosen, as it relates to socioeconomic issues?
3. What would have been the neighborhood-level impact of an alternative route, relative to the one chosen, as it relates to housing costs?
4. What would have been the potential number of housing units lost and the racial composition of their households from the construction of an alternative route, relative to one chosen?

We first compared the neighborhoods surrounding any alternative freeway segments. In San José, there were no alternative segments, so we compared neighborhoods only to the rest of the city. We defined the neighborhoods using census tracts and examined their racial composition, socioeconomic (e.g., family income), and housing cost (e.g., home value) characteristics. We estimated average income for areas comprising multiple census tracts by interpolating counts by income brackets. In this analysis, for housing costs, we focused on home value instead of the cost of rent because of the inequality of asset building at play. For areas comprising multiple census tracts, we calculated average home value using a weighted average by the number of owner-occupied units.

We then used block-level data to compare the housing units that would have been lost under proposed alternative freeway segments and hypothetical footprints. To create these hypothetical freeway footprints, we applied the width of the actually constructed footprints along the alternative routes. However, neither Caltrans nor any other sources could provide clear definitions of the width of the constructed footprints. Therefore, using planning documents and maps and geospatial analysis, we determined a rough average footprint width of the actually constructed freeways: 250 feet in Pasadena and Sacramento and 175 feet in Pacoima. We used these respective widths along the alternate routes in each area. In Pasadena and Pacoima, hypothetical footprints did not include any ramps because some of the plans did not designate on- and off-ramps or only did so only very preliminarily. In Sacramento, the ramp areas were included at the interchanges with I-5 and SR-99, the two other freeways not part of the quantitative analysis.

**Figures 3-3** and **3-4** display the analytical study areas for Pasadena and Pacoima, respectively, for the alternative route analysis, using the colors given by freeway planners at the time. In Pasadena, the green route was ultimately selected, while the blue alternate route was spared from the disruptions of freeway construction (for nuances of the alternate routes, including sub-options, see Chapter 5). One

Figure 3-3. Pasadena Analytical Study Area, Alternative Route Analysis



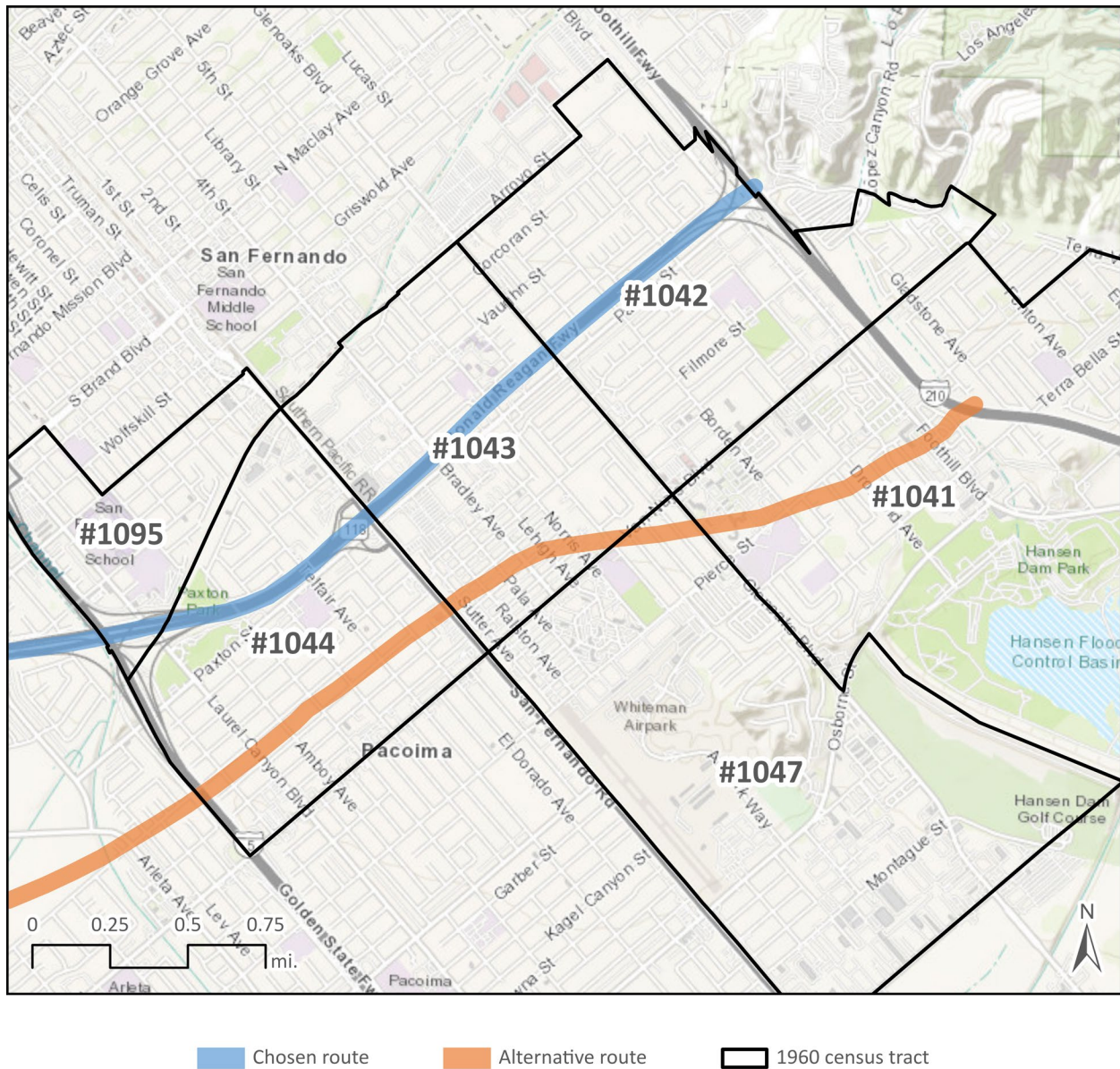
Chosen route
  Alternative route
  1960 census tract

Base map: Esri, 2023b

tract contained both routes (#4609), two tracts contained only the ultimately constructed route (#4616 and #4618), and one tract contained only the route not chosen. In Pacoima, the blue route was ultimately selected, while the orange alternate route was not (for nuances of the alternate routes, including sub-options, see Chapter 6). One tract contained both proposed routes (#1044), two tracts

contained only the route that was later selected (#1042 and #1043), and two tracts contained only the route that was not selected (#1041 and #1047).

**Figure 3-4. Pacoima Analytical Study Area, Alternative Route Analysis**

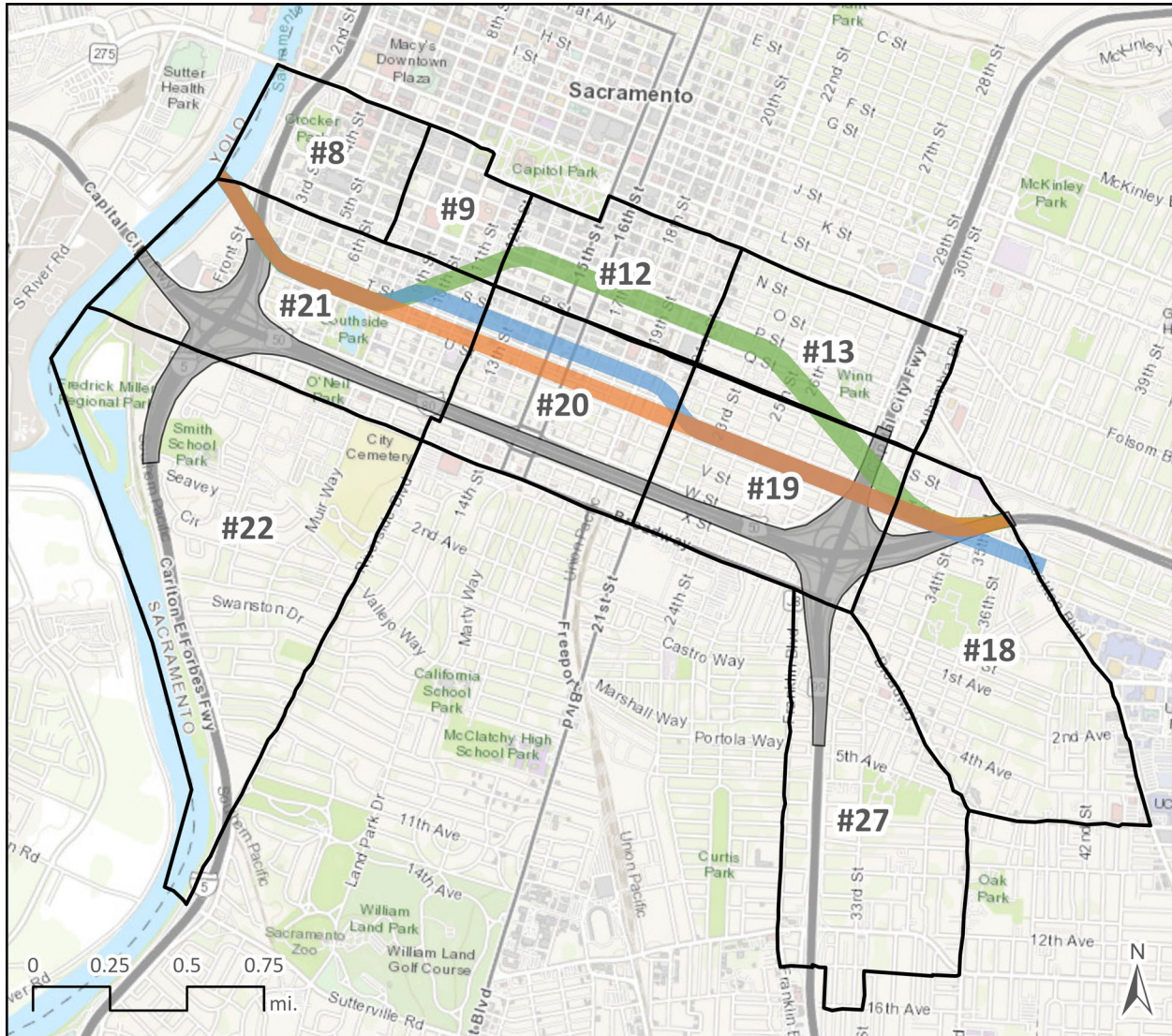


Base map: Esri, 2023b

Figures 3-5 and 3-6 show the study areas for Sacramento and San José, respectively. In Sacramento, Alternatives A and B were in the same census tracts as the route ultimately selected for US-50 (Tracts

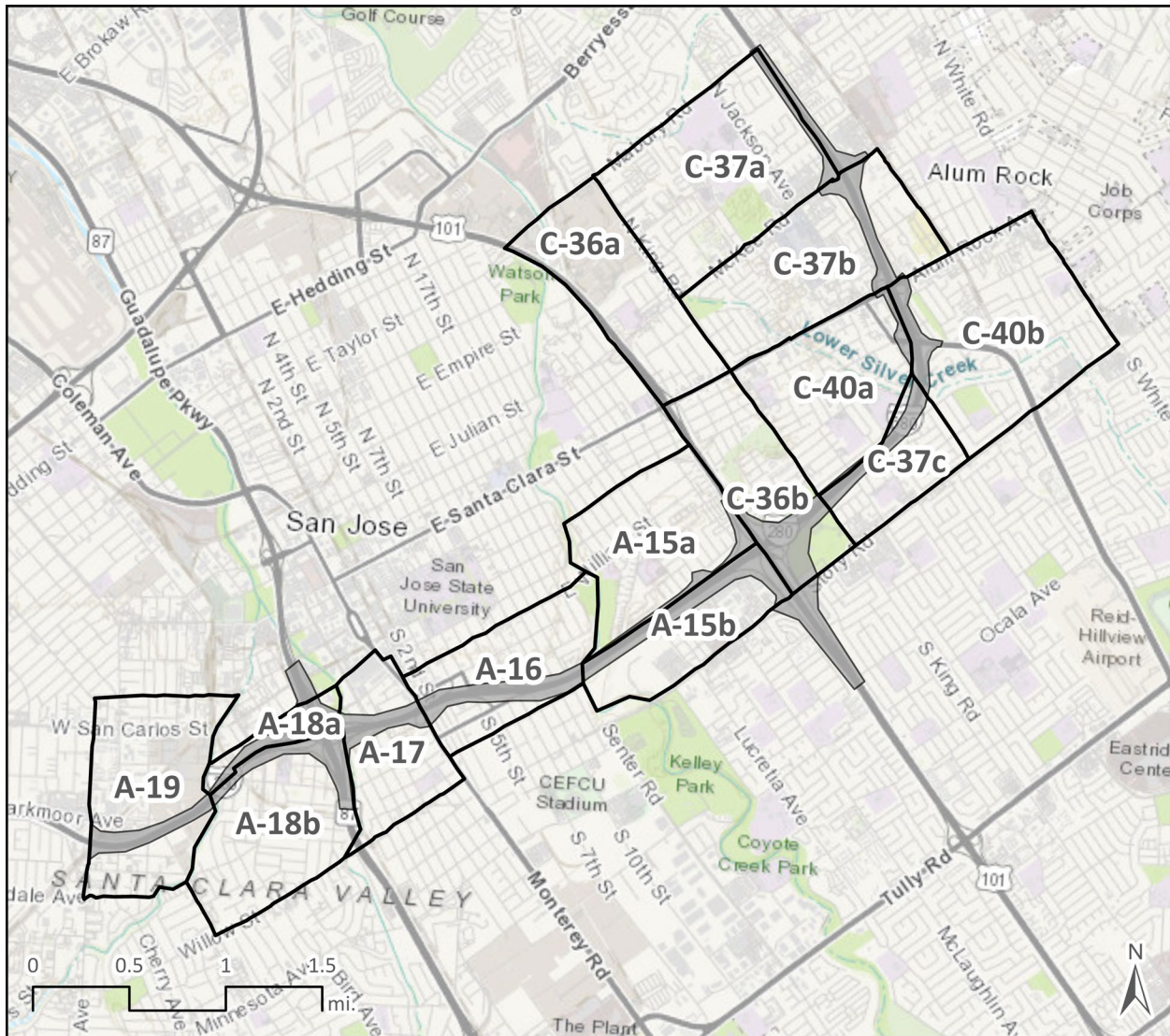
#18, #19, #20, and #21), with a small additional corner of the alternate routes in Tract #8. Alternative C did not pass through Tract #20 but did pass through Tracts #9 and #13. In San José, no alternate routes were considered.

Figure 3-5. Sacramento Analytical Study Area



Base map: Esri, 2023b

Figure 3-6. San José Analytical Study Area



Freeway footprint      Census tract

Base map: Esri, 2023b

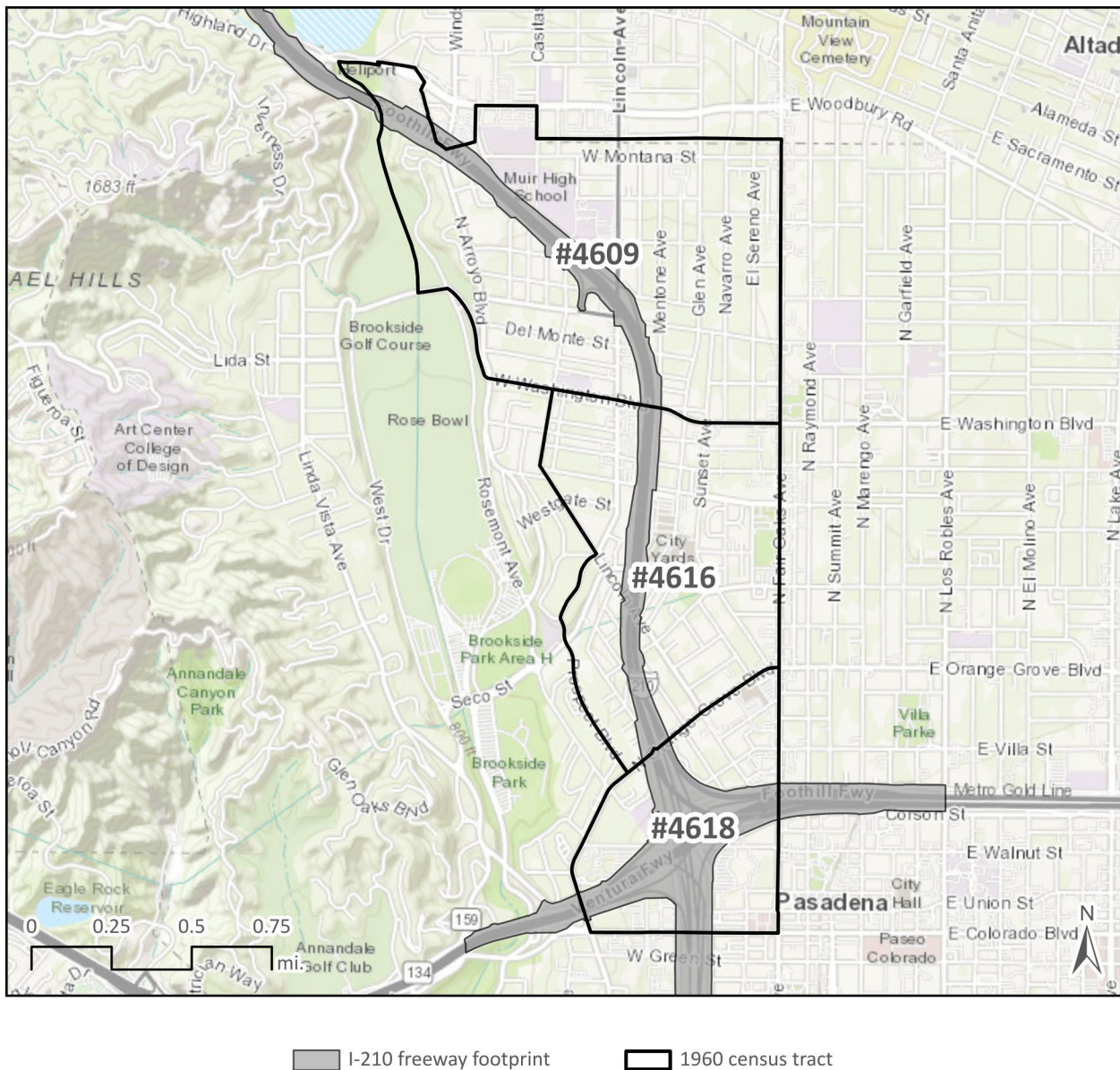
### Analysis of Direct Impacts Methodology

Our analysis of direct impacts is based on estimating the number of housing units lost under the actual freeway footprint and the racial composition of this loss. This analysis used block-level information to respond to two empirical questions:

1. How many homes were directly displaced by freeway construction?
2. What were the demographic characteristics of the displaced households?

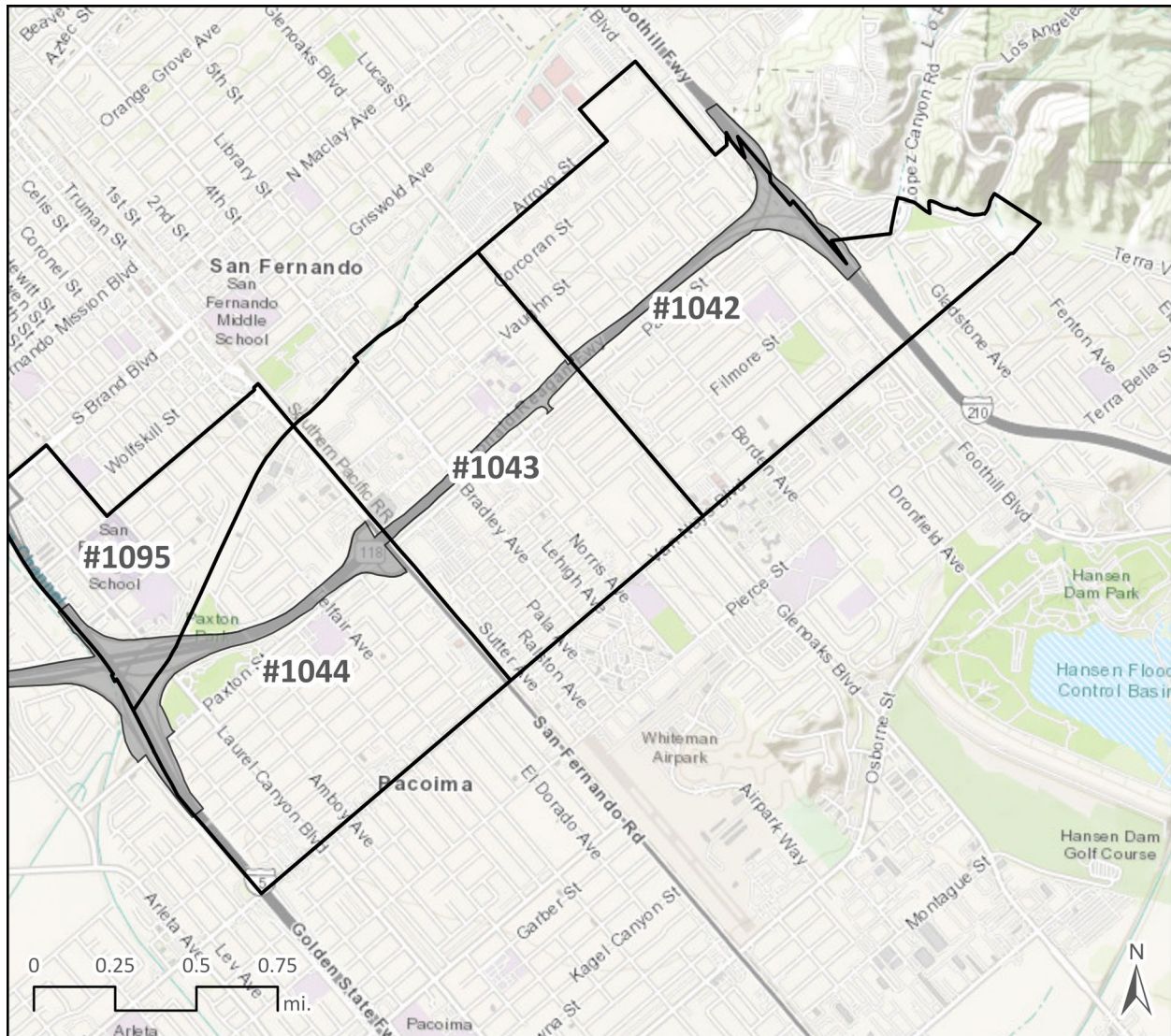
To operationalize the analysis, we first constructed the freeway footprint (including ramps), as described above. We intersected the footprint with 1960 block shapefiles to create areal allocation factors,

**Figure 3-7. Pasadena Analytical Study Area, Direct Impact Analysis**



Base map: Esri, 2023b

Figure 3-8. Pacoima Analytical Study Area, Direct Impact Analysis



SR-118 freeway footprint      1960 census tract

Base map: Esri, 2023b

defined as the proportion of each intersecting block’s area that fell under the freeway footprint. We applied this allocation factor to the number of housing units and non-white households in each intersecting block to get an estimate of each under the footprint. This approach assumed housing units and households to be uniformly distributed within census geographies, which is not always the case. In addition to providing the actual estimates of housing units loss, we also include high estimates,



assuming the block section under the freeway had a housing density that was 1.5 times denser than the block section outside the freeway footprint. In Sacramento only, we had complete data at the block level for number of housing units, number of households, average home values, average contract rent, and number of non-white households (excluding Spanish surname or Hispanic households). Thus, we could estimate the direct impacts more precisely without having to estimate from census tract values.

**Figures 3-7 and 3-8** display the analytical study areas for Pasadena and Pacoima for the direct impact analysis. For Pasadena, the analytical study area was defined by 1960 Tracts #4609, #4616, and #4618. The freeway footprint is along I-210 roughly between Woodbury Road in the north and Colorado Boulevard in the south. In Pacoima, the analytical study area was defined by 1960 Tracts #1042, #1043, #1044, and #1095. The freeway footprint lies along SR-118 roughly between I-210 in the east and I-5 in the west. In Sacramento, the direct impact study area was in Tracts #13, #18-22, and #27, encompassing all of US-50 between I-5 and SR-99 (See **Figure 3-5**). In San José, the study area consisted of all the tracts as shown in **Figure 3-6** above. We considered the study area as the tracts along I-280 and I-680 between Meridian Avenue to the west and Maybury Road to the northeast.

### Analysis of Indirect Impacts Methodology

Our analysis of indirect impacts was based on a simple difference-in-difference comparison of the adjacent units, housing units beyond the freeway but within the study area, and housing units in the cities within which the study areas are located, to answer:

1. How did the housing stock change over time?
2. How did home values change over time?
3. How did rent levels change over time?

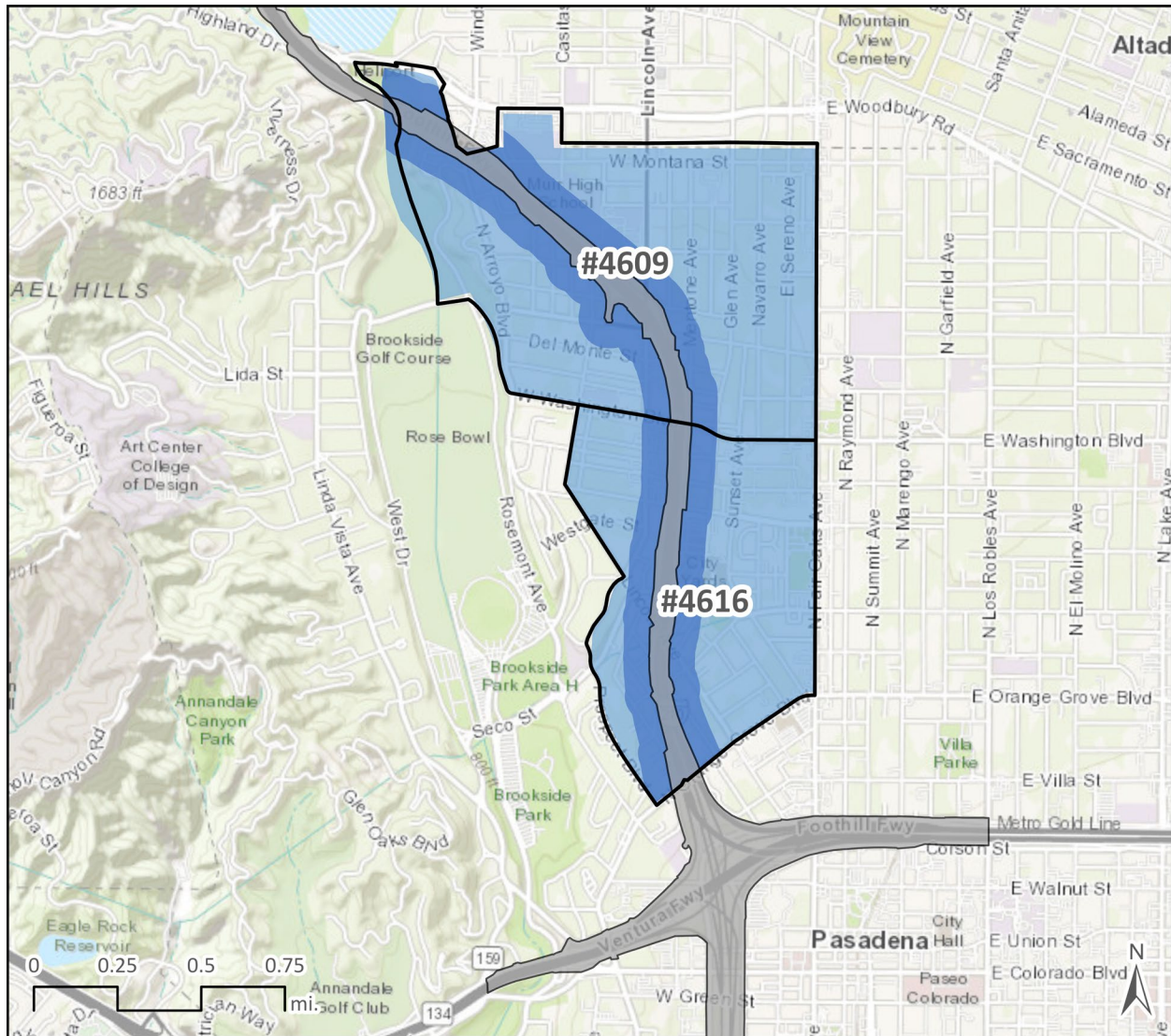
In Pasadena and Pacoima, adjacent (or “nearby the freeway”) units were defined as those falling within 150 meters of the edge of the freeway footprint, but not under it. In San José and Sacramento, the nearby units included those that fell within the freeway footprint as well as those within the 150-meter buffer of the footprint. We classified housing units outside of the adjacent area but within the study area tracts as “beyond the freeway.” Finally, housing patterns and trends for the City of Pasadena, the City of Los Angeles, the City of Sacramento, and the City of San José were used as broader geographic benchmarks.

The comparisons may provide some insights on spillover impacts. If the net outcome of freeway construction on local housing was positive, then we would expect that the change in housing metrics for the study area would increase more over time, relative to the city-level benchmark. If it had no net impact, then we would expect that the metrics would move similarly to those for the cities overall. Finally, for a net negative outcome, we would expect that the change in the metrics would be lower than those for the whole cities.

The “nearby the freeway” and “beyond the freeway” sectors with the study areas may have had different outcomes because they experienced a different mix of amenities and disamenities. While both

had access to the freeway and the potential benefits of greater mobility, the directly adjacent areas were most fully exposed to pollution, noise, and other disamenities. Consequently, the housing outcomes could differ.

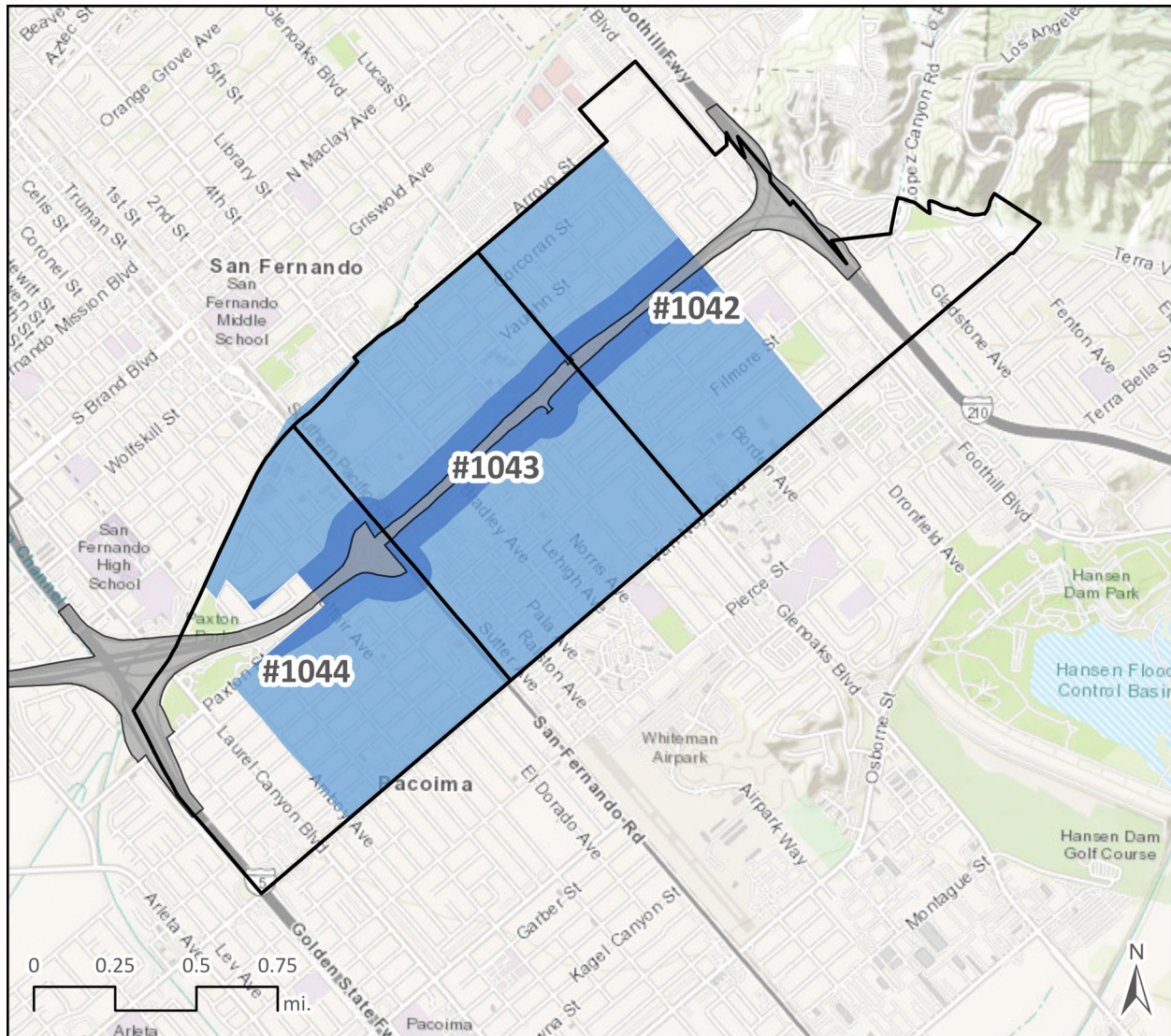
**Figure 3-9. Pasadena Analytical Study Area, Indirect Impact Analysis**



- Nearby the freeway
- Beyond the freeway
- I-210 freeway footprint
- 1960 census tract

Base map: Esri, 2023b

Figure 3-10. Pacoima Analytical Study Area, Indirect Impact Analysis



- Nearby the freeway
- SR-118 freeway footprint
- Beyond the freeway
- 1960 census tract

Base map: Esri, 2023b

We contended with imprecise and inconsistent geographic units, as our 150-meter buffer did not neatly align with census block boundaries in Pasadena and Pacoima. We thus used areal allocation to estimate housing units and their characteristics for the “nearby” and “beyond” geographies. Again, estimates of the characteristics of these geographies assume housing units are uniformly distributed within census geographies. The analysis also did not account for other factors (besides spatial position relative to the

freeway) that could have affected the outcomes in the adjacent area and other locations. At best, we could only speculate on how these unobserved factors could influence the results. Given these limitations, we looked for general patterns rather than detailed outcomes. For Sacramento and San José, we used the same 150-meter buffer but defined blocks “nearby” the freeway as those blocks that intersected at all with the buffer to avoid imprecision with areal allocation. Thus, the true buffer of “near the freeway” is a minimum of 150 meters and may vary by small distances along the freeway route.

**Figures 3-9 and 3-10** display the analytical study areas and the “nearby” and “beyond” sectors for Pasadena and Pacoima, respectively, for the indirect impact analysis. The study area for Pasadena was defined by 1960 Tracts #4609 and #4616, which remained fairly consistent over the study period. We were unable to include the southern section, Tract #4618, which contains the interchange with SR-134 and the stub of the planned I-710, because its boundaries had changed dramatically by 1980, thus introducing too many uncertainties. The Pacoima study area, between Arroyo Street to the north and Van Nuys Boulevard to the south, was defined by 1960 Tracts #1042,<sup>4</sup> #1043, and #1044—except, for consistency with the analysis of Pasadena, was truncated by Dronfield Avenue to the east and Amboy Avenue to the west, in order to exclude areas containing freeway intersections.

### Qualitative Methods and Sources

We complemented this quantitative work with qualitative archival and ethnographic research, to better understand and link initial conditions to outcomes. By comparing the two case studies, we examined complex processes within two specific times and places, rooted in qualitative process tracing. We employed archival research and oral histories to link initial conditions to outcomes, considering multiple types of evidence. For each case study, we drew on both primary and secondary sources.

We began by searching for newspaper articles from 1950 to 1980 in archival databases (such as ProQuest and the California Digital Newspaper Collection) using geographic and topical keywords. For the Southern California cases, we identified 140 relevant newspaper articles (80 for Pasadena and 60 for Pacoima) from ten local newspapers, some of which are no longer in print.<sup>5</sup> For Sacramento, we found 46 relevant articles from *The Sacramento Bee*. For San José, we found just five relevant articles from the *San José Mercury*. These articles gave us information on timelines and milestone events, the stakeholders engaged in decision-making processes, and expressed public sentiments during freeway planning and development. For Pasadena, Pacoima, and Sacramento, they explicitly revealed that multiple routes were considered and in fact contested.

4. Tract #1042 split into two tracts by 1980, but the overall boundary did not change from 1960.

5. *Los Angeles Times*, *Valley Times*, *Valley News*, *Van Nuys News*, *Citizen News*, *Pasadena Star News*, *California Eagle*, *El Sereno Star*, *Pasadena Independent*, and *Los Angeles Sentinel*

We complemented our newspaper archival research with other primary sources: planning documents, professional studies, and maps.

For the Southern California cases, we reviewed correspondence associated with the Pasadena General Plan of 1962 (Pasadena Planning Commission, 1962) and the Community Development Plans for Arleta-Pacoima of 1973-1974 (Los Angeles Department of City Planning, 1974b). Additionally, we examined redlining maps, accessed via the *Mapping Inequality* platform (co-created by University of Richmond's Digital Scholarship Lab) (Nelson et al., n.d.), as well as Pasadena's *Ethnic History Research Project* (1995).

For the Pasadena case study, we also consulted with historian John Lloyd from California Polytechnic University, Pomona and with Bridgette Ramirez at A Noise Within theater, who have studied the history of freeway construction and Black communities, respectively, in the area. For the Pacoima case study, we drew from archives at California State University Northridge (CSUN), including papers of chambers of commerce, residents' associations, and planning commissions.

For the Pacoima case study, we reviewed various archival collections at CSUN, primarily their Urban Collections and Map Collections. In the former, we reviewed documents from the Industrial Association of the San Fernando Valley Collection, the Pacoima Revitalization Inc. Collection, the Los Angeles City Planning Commission Collection, the Boberg Collection, the Arleta Chamber of Commerce and Residents' Association Collection, the Associated Chambers of Commerce of the San Fernando Valley Collection, the Albert Zoraster Collection, and the Northridge Civic Association Papers. Additional consultation took place at the Records Management Unit of the Los Angeles Department of City Planning and the City Archives and Records Center, where we reviewed early drafts of the community development plans for Arleta-Pacoima, along with supporting documents that included professional studies, maps and correspondence.

We found significantly more archival data for Pasadena, which is its own municipality, than for Pacoima, a suburban part of the larger City of Los Angeles. We therefore undertook a series of interviews with local stakeholders. We interviewed five civic leaders and seven planning professionals, from the San Fernando Historical Society, Pacoima Historical Society, Pacoima Neighborhood Council, Pacoima Beautiful, Pacoima Neighborhood Legal Services, Los Angeles City Library, San Fernando Valley Japanese American Community Center, CSUN, and Los Angeles Department of City Planning. We also interviewed over a dozen Pacoima residents and community members who experienced the construction of the freeways firsthand. Several of them still live in the neighborhood, though not in the exact same location.

For the Sacramento case study, the City of Sacramento's historic redevelopment plans and the *Oak Park Historic District Plan* (City of Sacramento, 2021) were important sources, as were published histories of the West End and Oak Park neighborhoods. We also interviewed four civic leaders and two planning professionals, from the City of Sacramento and from Valley Vision.

For the San José case study, we reviewed historic plans for the City of San José as well as other planning documents and published histories on racial issues and affordable housing problems in San José and

Santa Clara County. Local publications were also helpful. We interviewed six residents and two officials, including a state representative and an official from the City of San José Department of Transportation.

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## 4. Southern California Context: Background to Freeway Construction in the Los Angeles Region

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## Introduction

Southern California played a key role in the development of freeways. The Los Angeles metropolitan region created the earliest and most expansive plans for freeway construction, adopting a freeway plan in 1959 that was the network equivalent to one-third of the length of the entire Interstate Highway System (Jones, 1989 and Taylor, 1993). From the 1940s to the next three decades of federally funded construction, freeways radically transformed the Southern California landscape.

Given the importance of Southern California to the freeway system and the freeway system to Southern California, Chapters 5 and 6 examine two case studies in Los Angeles County: the northwest region of the City of Pasadena and the neighborhoods in the Pacoima section of the San Fernando Valley in the City of Los Angeles. Most of the literature on the adverse impacts of freeways (See Chapter 2) focuses on central-city neighborhoods of color (Avila, 2004, 2014b and Estrada, 2005). In this chapter and the two that follow, we rather focus on the impact of freeways on two suburban areas of color. Black residents were a majority in our case study section of Pasadena, while Latino/a and Black residents together comprised a majority in Pacoima. Long before the freeway burrowed through the two study sites, these places were already established neighborhoods, born out of racist housing segregation but also vibrant communities.

Our research reveals that when selecting the routes for freeway segments passing through Pasadena and Pacoima, freeway planners, supported by local planning departments and city councils, targeted neighborhoods of color and spared adjacent areas populated by wealthier, predominantly white residents. We find that the more affluent residents of these latter areas were successful in pushing freeway routings away from their own homes and onto the neighborhoods of color of their municipality.

Comparing the considered alternative routes, in both study areas, we found that there was a racial bias in both process and effect in the ultimate selections of freeway alignment, which disproportionately harmed people of color. The chosen routes ran through neighborhoods with lower-value homes, consistent with a lower-cost criterion per housing unit in route selection. Lower home values, however, were the product of past housing discrimination. We also found certain variations in the number and cost between the two study areas, indicating that outcomes can be site-specific. These routing decisions were shaped by prominent voices from white residents but also by artificial silence from residents of color, who did not have a seat at the table. We argue that these decisions represent evidence of white privilege and pervasive socio-spatial processes that amount to environmental racism (Pulido, 2000). While massive investment in these freeway projects arguably increased mobility across the entire region, their construction displaced hundreds of residents and placed enormous burdens on residents of neighborhoods of color. Moreover, pervasive outcomes related to environmental degradation, racial segregation, and social inequity persist to this day.

This chapter provides an introduction and context to our two Southern California case studies. The sections that follow describe the sociospatial and transportation planning background to freeway construction in Pasadena and Pacoima and how national and regional policies paved the way for the local displacement in these two areas.

## Space and Race in Southern California during the Era of Freeway Planning

Our two Southern California case study areas are embedded in a larger social and historical trajectory. Much of the freeway system in the region was built from the late-1950s to the early 1980s, a span that coincided with a tumultuous era in race relations in the U.S.—a time of rising non-violent and violent protests against injustices and for equality but also reactionary resistance to preserve white privilege. The era witnessed significant civil rights gains, which unfortunately only partially dismantled the country's racial hierarchy. Protests, radical militancy, and urban unrest drove much of the change (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968; Haines, 1984; Correa, 2006; Tachiki, 1971; and Banks and Erdoes, 2005).

A major accomplishment during this period was the dismantling of *de jure* racism through the elimination of overtly discriminatory laws. Access to housing (most relevant to this study) was one of the cornerstones of systemic and overt racism (Rothstein, 2017), but equally important were schools and immigration. State-sanctioned school segregation isolated young people of color, while federal, racially motivated immigration barriers prevented Asian immigration, often separating men, who were exploited for their labor in the U.S., from women and children, who were barred from entry (Ong, 1999).

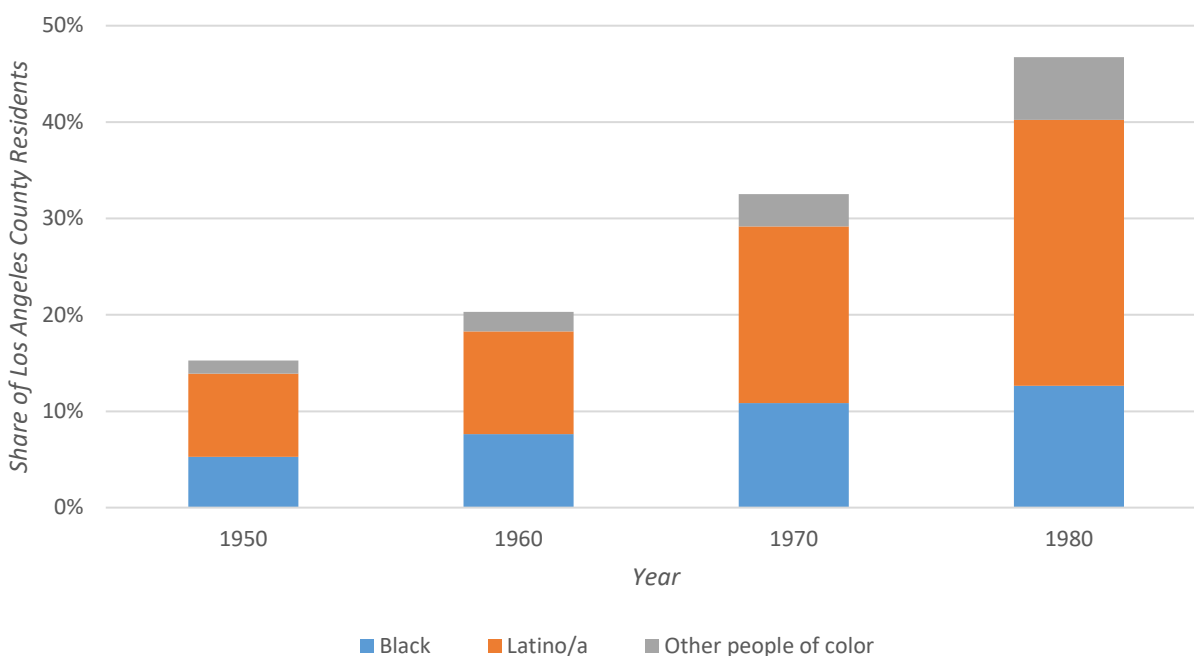
This system of *de jure* racism came under attack in the decades after the Second World War. Some victories came through the courts, which, for example, prohibited overt racial segregation in public schools, ended bans on interracial marriage, and barred racial restrictions in private and public housing. The 1960s also witnessed the passage of national anti-discrimination laws in employment, housing, and voting (Ong, 1999).<sup>6</sup> Formal ethnic discrimination in the immigration system, which had particularly targeted Asians, ended too, leading to a dramatic demographic transformation with renewed large-scale immigration from Asia and Latin America (Kennedy, 1966 and Keely, 1971).

Los Angeles County, which contains the two case studies in Chapters 5 and 6, was very much a part of and contributor to the racial restructuring. It was, for example, the site of urban unrest (e.g., the Watts Riot) and protests of Black and Latino/a Angelenos (Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, 1965; Soldatenko, 2003; Gutiérrez, 1996; and Paris and Cifor, 2017). Equally important was the demographic and economic transition brought about by the ending of discriminatory immigration laws (Ong, Bonacich, and Cheng, 1994; Morales, Ong, and Payne, 1990; and Ong and Morales, 1992). Prior to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the region had already been home to people of color, many migrating nationally and internationally in search of economic and social opportunities. The ending of *de jure* racism led to a dramatic growth of populations of color and a corresponding recomposition of the region's populace. In absolute terms, people of color grew through in-migration and natural growth (births minus deaths), from a little more than a third of a million in 1950 to 3.5 million in 1980. As shown

6. Including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, preventing racial and other forms of employment discrimination and establishing the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; the Voting Rights Act of 1965, outlawing racially-motivated barriers to registering and voting and enabling federal review of state and local election practices; and the Fair Housing Act in the Civil Rights Act of 1968, extending equal housing opportunity regardless of race, religion, and national origin (Ong, 1999).

in **Figure 4-1**, Angelenos of color also increased their share of the county population from less than a sixth to slightly less than half (Manson et al., 2022). The county was on its way to becoming “majority-minority,” and housing this population growth proved a major challenge.

**Figure 4-1. Share of People of Color in Los Angeles County, 1950-1980**

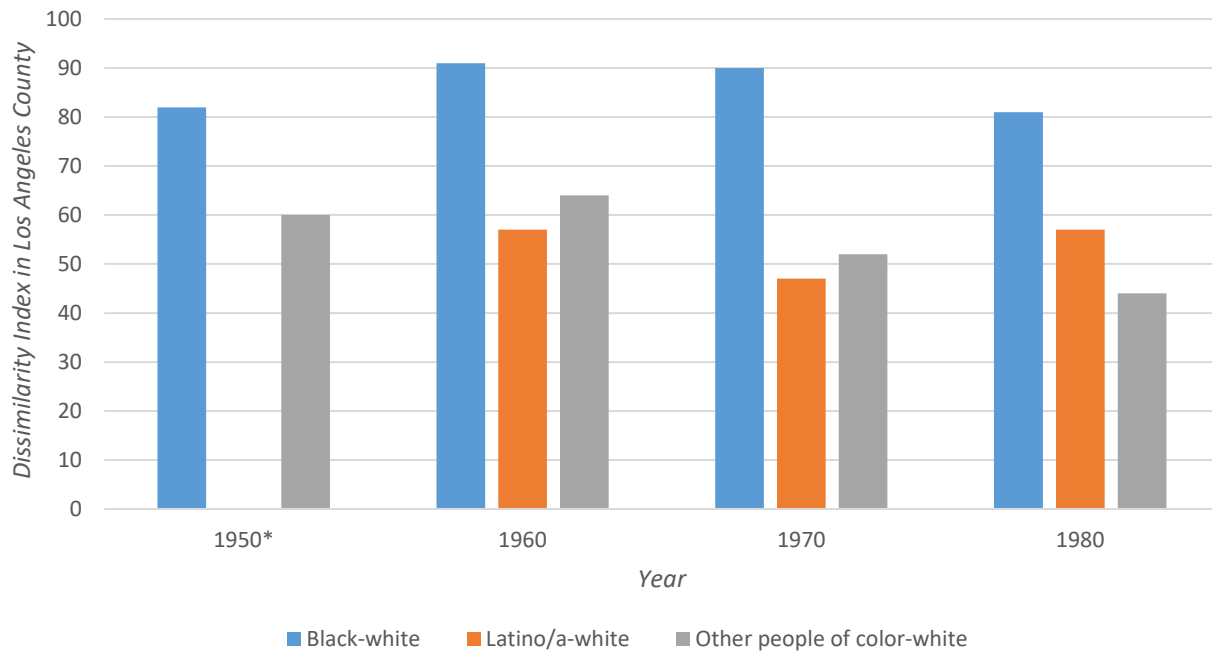


Data source: Manson et al., 2022

Despite the ending of *de jure* racism, *de facto* housing discrimination persisted. Finding housing was daunting for many people of color because not all neighborhoods were accessible to them. This can be seen in the dissimilarity index, which measures levels of residential segregation; its value represents the percent of a population that would have to relocate to achieve full integration. **Figure 4-2** tracks the index in Los Angeles County over the decades. While the results should be interpreted with care (See Chapter 3 for a discussion of changing reported racial/ethnic categories over time), one apparent pattern is the substantially higher value for Black residents, indicating that they likely faced the most severe housing discrimination. While there were improvements in the last two decades for Black and Asian American residents (the latter of which makes up the overwhelming majority of the “other” category), the picture is more mixed for Latino/a residents, first declining then increasing. The later uptick was probably due to an increase in immigration, with many immigrants residing in Latino/a

enclaves because of language, culture, and economic barriers. Despite some progress, housing discrimination practices continued despite legal prohibition.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 4-2. Dissimilarity Index, Los Angeles County**



*Note: “Whites” in 1950 include Latino/a residents while “whites” for all other decades represent non-Hispanic whites.*

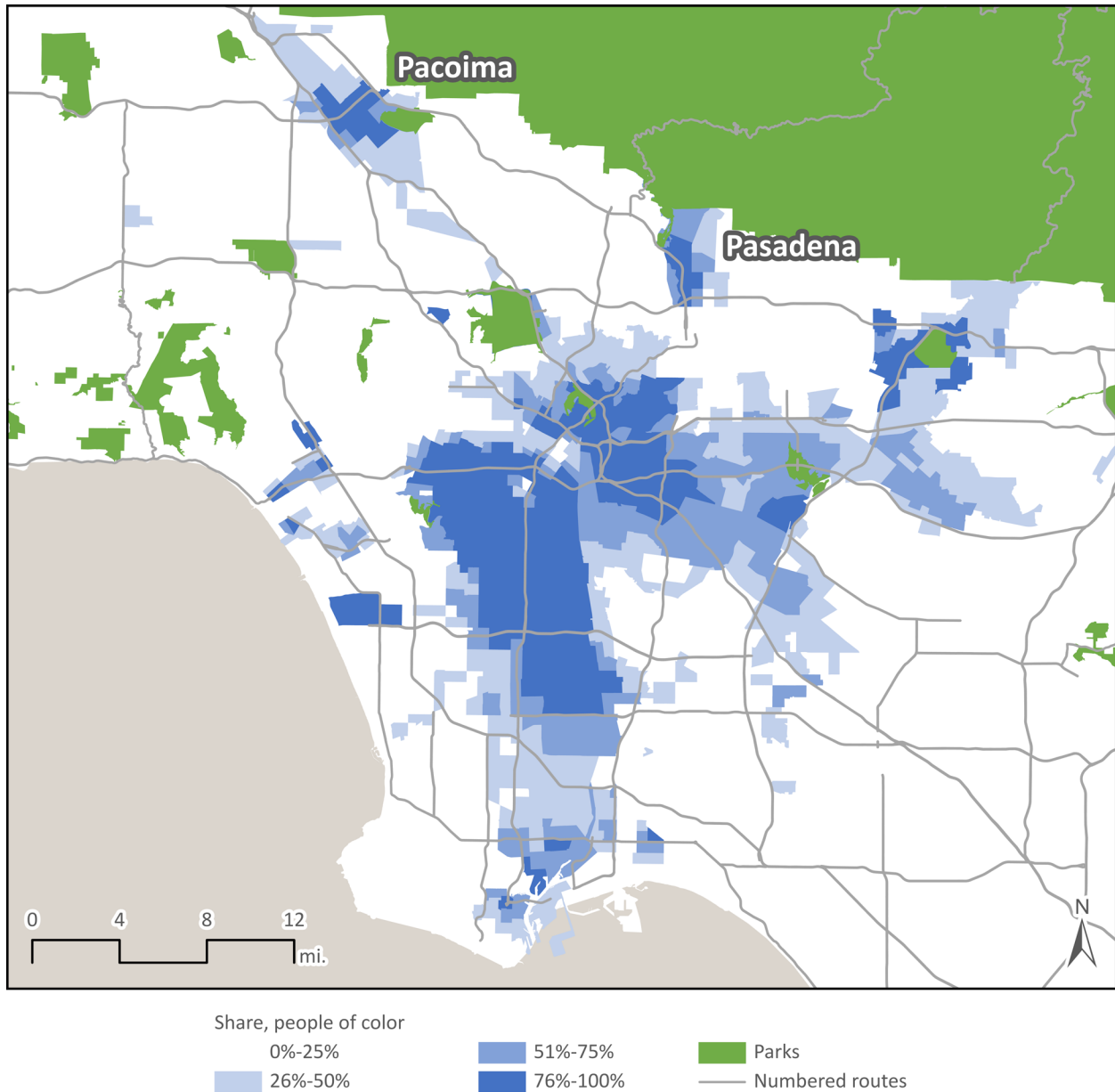
*Data source: calculated by authors from 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (Manson et al., 2022)*

**Figure 4-3** shows geographically the segregation patterns of the Los Angeles region in 1970. The dark blue areas are neighborhoods where people of color made up at least three quarters of the population. The largest cluster, south and southwest of downtown Los Angeles (including South Central Los Angeles and Watts), was predominantly home to Black residents. An emerging Hispanic population was growing in the eastern section of this cluster. Northeast of that and east of downtown, the second-largest cluster was chiefly Hispanic but also included the Asian enclaves of Chinatown and Little Tokyo. While the two largest clusters were located in the region’s urban core, there were also smaller concentrations in outlying cities and expanding suburbs, including our case study areas of Pasadena and Pacoima.

7. This remains true even up to recent decades nationally and in Los Angeles (M. Turner et al., 2002 and Oh and Yinger, 2018).



Figure 4-3. People of Color by Census Tract, Urban Los Angeles County, 1970



Data sources: calculated by authors from 1970 U.S. Census (Manson et al., 2022); Caltrans, 2022b; and Esri, 2010

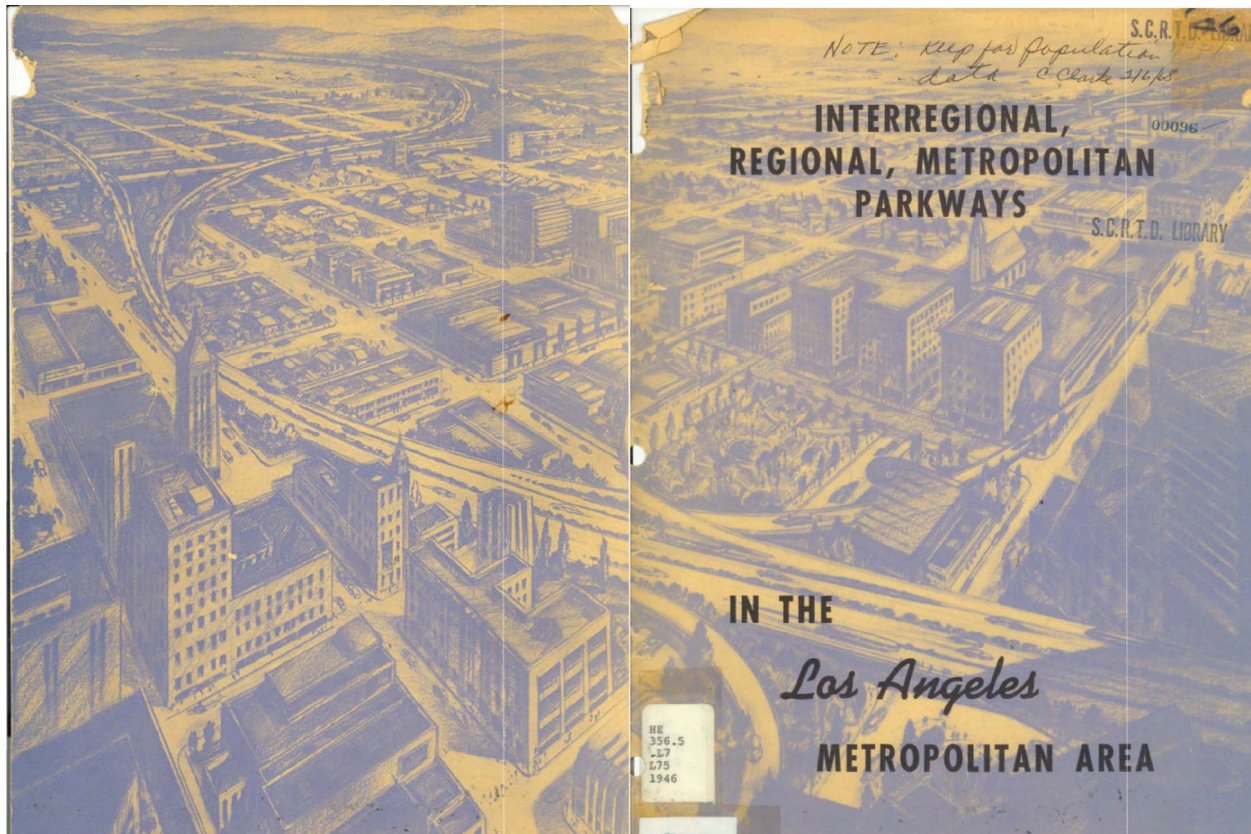
Persistent residential segregation had a compounding and cumulative impact as it became a basis for *de facto* segregation of the education system, with students of color disproportionately concentrated in poorly performing schools (Ong and Rickles, 2004). Indeed, California had a long history of isolating youth of color into non-white schools (Wollenberg, 1978 and Kuo, 1998). As late as 1945, the state had a

law that enabled local districts to establish and maintain separate schools for Asian and Native American students, and additional local practices segregated other students of color (Wollenberg, 1974). Because schools were geographically embedded in racialized spaces, school segregation was achieved in large part through neighborhood assignments, thus isolating students of color. This pattern persisted even after the landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* U.S. Supreme Court case ended *de jure* school segregation, exposing the power and persistence of societal institutions and individual prejudices to reproduce racial inequality for subsequent generations, even without the formal force of government (Ong and Rickles, 2004). There was an effective resegregation of schools in the late 1980s for Black Americans and in the early 1980s for Latinos/as (Orfield and Yun, 1999).

### Freeway Planning in the Los Angeles Region

Freeway planning was inherently racialized in the Los Angeles region, and understanding it as such provides an interpretation of the stages of its planning and building over the next decades. Indeed, nowhere was freeway vision more loudly trumpeted, heard, and adopted than in Southern California. Writing about transportation policy in the region, transportation planning scholar Martin Wachs (1996,

**Figure 4-4. Cover of the 1946 Los Angeles Metropolitan Parkway Engineering Committee Report**



Source: Los Angeles Metropolitan Parkway Engineering Committee, 1946

pp. 115–118) notes that “the rise of the automobile had a lot to do with images of modernity associated with the different transportation modes and also with the balance of political power within the Los Angeles area.” An increasing array of policymakers, civic leaders, and suburban land developers considered the private car as the epitome of modernity. A coalition of them, spearheaded by the Automobile Club of Southern California, pushed hard and successfully for a regional transportation system centered around the private automobile (Loukaitou-Sideris and Gottlieb, 2005).

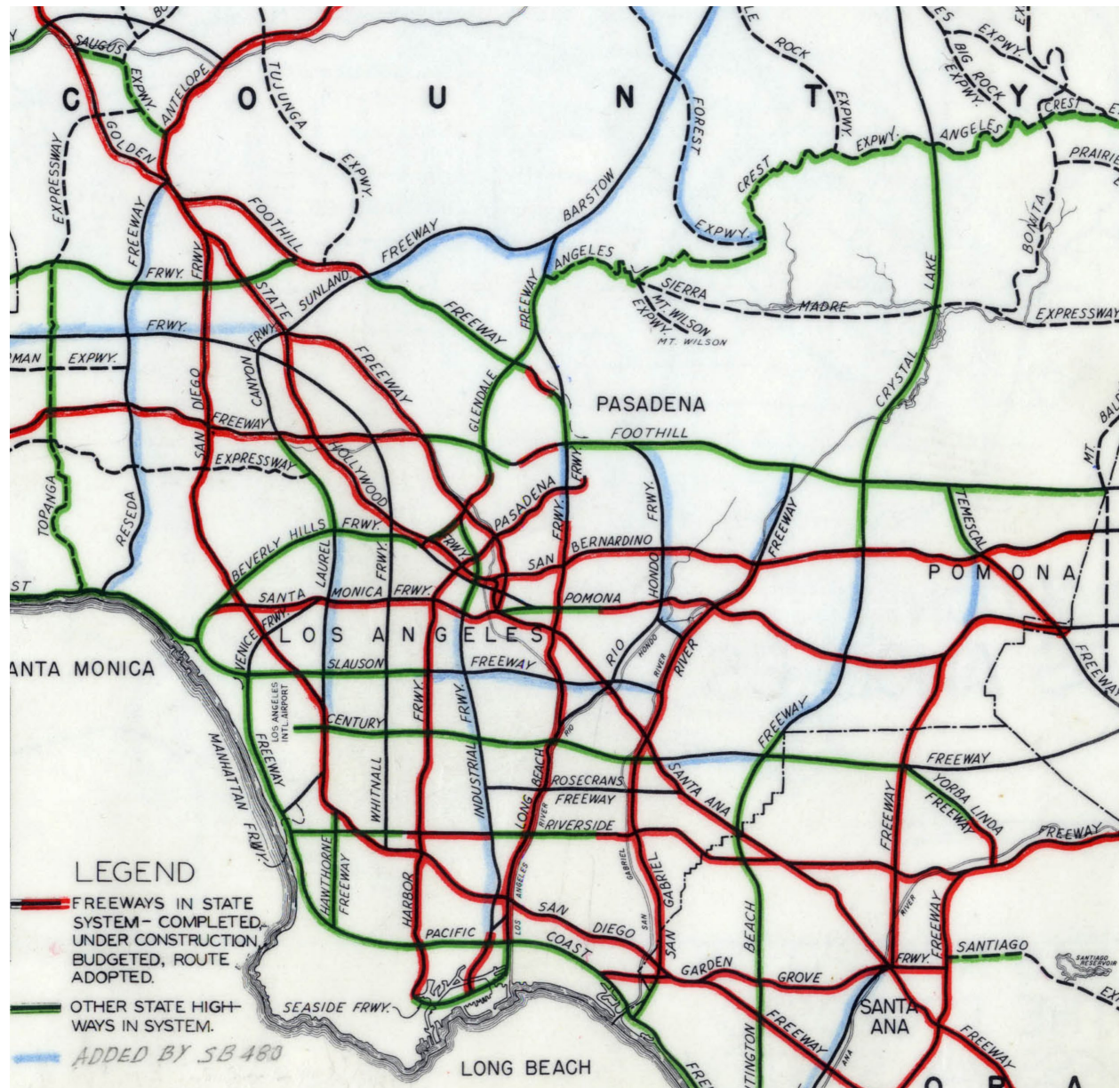
In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Los Angeles had one of the most extensive streetcar systems of any city in the U.S. But by the 1960s, the city’s streetcar system was largely dismantled. Though the popular notion of a conspiracy led by General Motors is overblown and streetcar operators were largely unprofitable long before their operations ended, the demise of streetcars was nonetheless the result of public policy choices: subsidies for the automobile, roads, and sprawl; burdensome streetcar franchise agreements; and the allocation of street space in cities (Bianco, 1998; Elkind, 2014; and Loukaitou-Sideris and Gottlieb, 2005). Indeed, the intersecting forces of automobile proliferation and real estate boosterism led to the expansion of single-family housing in outlying suburbs, and suburbanization and highway construction were largely encouraged and underwritten by federal funding. In place of the abandoned streetcar network, Los Angeles planners and government officials began to construct freeways, beginning with the Arroyo Seco Parkway, “the first Freeway of the West,” opened in 1940 (Loukaitou-Sideris and Gottlieb, 2005). In the two decades that followed, many regional planning reports laid out the city’s vision for a new, roadway-based transportation network (Los Angeles Metro Transportation Library and Archive, 2018). The cover of one major report (See **Figure 4-4**) indicates the lack of concern among government officials for constructing a web of “parkways” over top existing neighborhoods, with the goal of efficient regional interconnectedness taking precedence over preservation of the built fabric of those neighborhoods. (Los Angeles Metropolitan Parkway Engineering Committee, 1946).

**Figure 4-5** shows the “Master Plan of Freeways and Expressways” drawn up in the late 1950s by the Metropolitan Transportation Engineering Board (1958). The densest part of the proposed network lay in the areas surrounding downtown Los Angeles. This would enable many workers to hold a job in the central business district while residing miles away. At the same time, other planned routes connected outlying smaller cities, and cross-region routes directly connected suburbs.

The original plans for the freeway network in Greater Los Angeles called for a denser network of relatively smaller highways (at least compared to the superhighways ultimately constructed). However, in order to secure generous federal funding, planning and design of the region’s freeways fell to the state department of transportation, which, like others across the U.S., built larger, faster freeways to rural design standards through urban areas (See Chapter 3) (Taylor, 2000 and Wasserman et al., 2022).

**Figure 4-6** shows what had been built or was under construction in 1975 (Regency Advertising, 1975). While many of the planned routes proposed two decades earlier were adopted and implemented, some were not constructed, concentrating traffic on those that were. Their absence reflects the differential decision-making power among communities and neighborhoods. Two notable missing freeways were

Figure 4-5. Master Plan of Freeways and Expressways, Los Angeles Region, 1958



Source: Metropolitan Transportation Engineering Board, 1958

ones that would have run through Beverly Hills (the Beverly Hills Freeway) and the beach cities along the coast (the Pacific Coast Freeway) (Perez, 2017; Duginski, Lin, and De Groot, 2014; and Morrison, 2022). These are overwhelmingly white areas of relative affluence. Also missing is a segment of the proposed Long Beach Freeway/Interstate 710, which would have gone through the largely white City of South Pasadena (See Chapter 5) (Farhat, 2015).



Figure 4-7. Inset of Freeway and Artery Map, Case Study Areas, 1975



Note: Freeways under construction marked by dotted red lines

Source: Regency Advertising, 1975 and authors

In the chapters that follow, we discuss the findings of our empirical research on freeway planning and development in these two case study areas and the associated impacts.

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## 5. Pasadena: Assessing the Historical Impacts of Freeway Construction on a Suburban Southern California Black Neighborhood

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## Introduction

In Pasadena, a historic suburb of Los Angeles, the Foothill Freeway was routed through the city's thriving Black neighborhoods. Though the cost and destruction of this freeway routing was comparatively higher than any of the proposed alternative routes, planners chose it after years of racialized urban renewal and systemic discrimination in these neighborhoods.

This chapter examines the neighborhood impact of the northern spur of the Foothill Freeway (referred to as the "northern spur," "Foothill Freeway," and "Interstate 210"/"I-210" interchangeably), which runs along the southwestern edge of the San Gabriel Mountains and through the northwest Pasadena neighborhoods of color of Orange Grove-Lincoln and Fair Oaks. Prior to freeway construction, these areas were home to Pasadena's Black community, who lived along with Mexican American, Japanese American, and working-class white families in single-family and multifamily homes (Ramirez, 2021).

The impact of the freeway on these communities of color was significant. Based on collected data, we estimate that it destroyed over 900 housing units in the Pasadena study area, displacing about 2,600 to 2,700 people. A large majority of the impacted households were people of color. According to our analysis, the freeway lowered the home values of remaining houses adjacent to it, relative to the values in the city overall, and depressed the relative rents.

## Pasadena Context

Pasadena, in the eastern part of the San Gabriel Valley, is an independent city with its own local government, incorporated in 1886. It is located 11 miles northeast of downtown Los Angeles and is perhaps best known around the country today for its New Year's Day Rose Parade and as home to the California Institute of Technology. Historically, Pasadena's central business district was located in the western part of the city in a walkable, multiethnic community (City of Pasadena, 2022 and Ramirez, 2021). Pasadena also serves as the end point of one of America's first modern freeways, the Arroyo Seco Parkway, which connected Pasadena to Los Angeles (discussed further in Chapters 2 and 4) (Goodwin, 1965 and Loukaitou-Sideris and Gottlieb, 2005). By 1950, Pasadena had a population of over 104,000 residents but grew very slowly to 118,000 residents by 1980 (Sørensen, Taeuber, and Hollingsworth, 1975). Pasadena was highly segregated,<sup>8</sup> with people of color, the majority Black, concentrated in the city's northwestern section just east of the Arroyo Seco valley, the home of the Rose Bowl stadium. As of 2019, Pasadena was a regional employment center with more jobs than local workers living within it and considerable movement of commuters into and out of the city (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

## Demographics, Housing, Residential Segregation, and Urban Renewal in Pasadena

Before the Second World War, northwest Pasadena was among the few places in suburban Los Angeles where people of color could reside (Loukaitou-Sideris and Gottlieb, 2005 and Cole, 2021). Indeed, in the

8. In 1970, the white-other dissimilarity index was 75 for Pasadena, compared with 78 for the City of Los Angeles (Sørensen, Taeuber, and Hollingsworth, 1975).

middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Pasadena had a rapidly growing and diversifying population, as evidenced by the city’s Black population growing during the Great Migration and doubling between 1940 and 1950 (City of Pasadena, 2022). Other residents of color included Chinese and Japanese immigrants who came to Pasadena to work in agriculture, produce, and laundry businesses (Ling, 2012 and Ethnic History Research Project, 1995).

The Second World War brought the dramatic, forcible removal and internment of Japanese Americans from Pasadena and California, when wartime hysteria combined with the long history of anti-Asianism resulted in the infamous and racist federal Executive Order 9066 in 1942, which interned about 120,000 Japanese, two-thirds of whom were American-born (Roosevelt, 1942; Nakanishi, 2009; *Civil Liberties Act of 1987*, 1988; Yamamoto, 1998; Muyskens and Steckelberg, 2017; and Gee, 2021). This massive eviction destroyed a vibrant Japantown in Pasadena and forced Japanese Americans to sell their properties at far below market value (Pease, 2007).

**Table 5-1. Demographics of Pasadena Study Area and Comparisons**

	Los Angeles County	City of Pasadena	Pasadena Study Area, Including Main Interchange	Pasadena Study Area, Excluding Main Interchange
<b>Total Population</b>	6,038,771	116,407	15,852	11,899
<b>Share, Residents of Color</b>	19%	20%	80%	84%
<b>Share, Black</b>	8%	13%	60%	66%
<b>Share, Latino/a</b>	10%	4%	9%	7%
<b>Share, Other Residents of Color</b>	2%	3%	11%	11%
<b>Share, Non-Hispanic White</b>	81%	80%	20%	16%
<b>Median Family Income, 1960 \$</b>	\$7,046	\$6,922	\$4,898*	\$6,387*

1960

	Los Angeles County	City of Pasadena	Pasadena Study Area, Including Main Interchange	Pasadena Study Area, Excluding Main Interchange
<b>Total Population</b>	7,477,503	118,550	unavailable	10,230
<b>Share, Residents of Color</b>	47%	45%	unavailable	93%
<b>Share, Black</b>	13%	21%	unavailable	73%
<b>Share, Latino/a</b>	28%	18%	unavailable	14%
<b>Share, Other Residents of Color</b>	7%	6%	unavailable	6%
<b>Share, Non-Hispanic White</b>	53%	55%	unavailable	7%
<b>Median Family Income, 1980 \$</b>	\$21,125	\$20,848	unavailable	\$14,488*

1980

Note: \* Estimated using interpolation of income brackets

Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1963, 1980)

By 1960, the Pasadena study area was significantly more diverse than the city overall and Los Angeles County (See **Table 5-1**). In the study area, 80 percent of residents were people of color (84% excluding the main Pasadena freeway interchange)<sup>9</sup>—60 percent Black, 11 percent other people of color, and nine percent Latino/a—compared to just 19 percent residents of color in the county and 20 percent in the city. The median income was much lower as well.

However, restrictive covenants written into property titles and enforced by the government (C. Rose, 2016) prohibited people of color from living in other parts of Pasadena. By one estimate, three fifths of the properties in Pasadena had such restrictions in 1942, as salespeople went door to door to get white homeowners to sign racial covenants (Cole, 2021). One city councilperson assailed “the Negro problem”

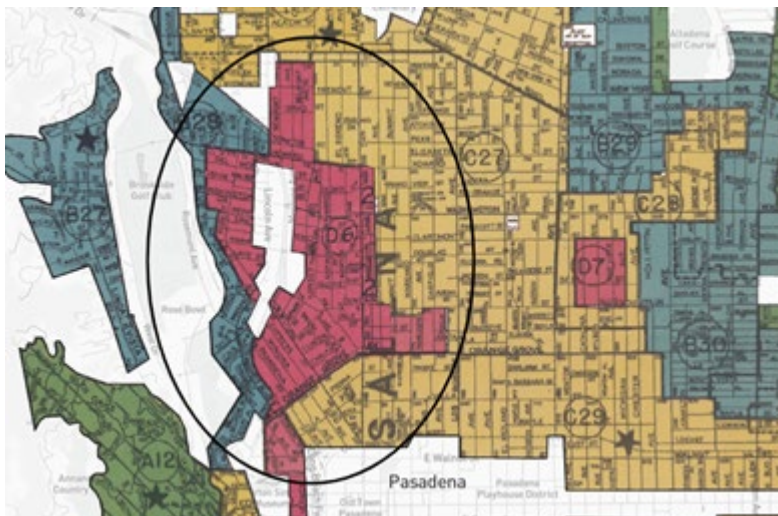
9. For data availability reasons described in Chapter 3, we give statistics in **Table 5-1** and elsewhere for the Pasadena study area with and without the main interchange between I-210, SR-134, and the stub of the planned I-710 freeway.

in Pasadena and declared that the “only sensible solution” was strict racial segregation (Cole, 2021). Racist housing practices worked in conjunction with other factors that further marginalized people of color in the area. Just to the south of our northwest Pasadena case study area, the town of South Pasadena operated as a “sundown” community, a place where people of color could work as laborers and servants but were forbidden to reside within the jurisdictional boundaries (South Pasadena City Council, 2022).

Residents in northwest Pasadena fought back, to expand residential opportunities and mobility by ending housing discrimination in the area. This would relieve the pressure on the segregated housing market for people of color and allow them the chance to access opportunities and amenities in traditional non-Hispanic white neighborhoods. The fight against racially motivated laws and practices extended well back, before the Second World War, with much of the actions taking place in the courts. Civil rights legal organizations and their supporters were active litigators behind these cases, particularly the NAACP. Black residents in Pasadena took up this fight. Represented by civil rights lawyer and journalist Loren Miller, the Raines family in northwest Pasadena won a seminal 1944 California Supreme Court case allowing them to stay in their home despite racial covenants, a precursor to the U.S. Supreme Court case that later overturned all covenants as unconstitutional (Cole, 2021; *Fairchild v. Raines*, 1944; Entin, 2020; Vose, 1955; Ware, 1989; Saxer, 1998; and James, 2005).

Residential segregation, though, provided a foundation for other forms of racial disparities. Redlining, as described in Chapter 2, split Pasadena by race into areas with and without access to federally backed mortgage lending and its asset- and wealth-building potential. Similar to other urban areas, developed suburbs like Pasadena were also categorized by HOLC in 1939 and redlined, leading to subsequent racial disparities in the area. **Figure 5-1** shows the HOLC map for the Pasadena study area; the worst category

**Figure 5-1. HOLC 1939 Redlining Map, with Pasadena Study Area Circled**



Sources: Nelson et al., n.d. and authors



were neighborhoods depicted in red, characterized as “hazardous,” while the second-worst category were neighborhoods depicted in yellow, considered to be “in decline.” Most of the area fell into the red category (Nelson et al., n.d.). Thus, a quarter-century before the Foothill Freeway bisected Pasadena’s neighborhoods of color, these same areas were deemed “hazardous” and were redlined.

As in other parts of the nation and Los Angeles County, northwest Pasadena continued to be plagued by persistent housing discrimination and segregation in the decades after the Second World War. Following the 1948 Housing Act that allocated federal funds towards redevelopment, Pasadena, like many cities across the U.S., turned to urban renewal. Throughout the nation, a number of central business districts experienced economic decline, caused in part by the movement of white residents to the suburbs made possible by the emerging freeway system. To combat and reverse this “urban decay,” cities embarked on urban redevelopment, with state and federal support. Of course, what benefits urban renewal brought were not equally distributed, and studies have shown urban renewal had a disproportionate toll on marginalized communities. Urban renewal was touted as a “war against blight” or “slum clearance,” which affected primarily neighborhoods of color adjacent to business districts. Urban renewal targeted these areas deemed as “blighted” or “slums,” often replacing them with office developments, new commercial centers, or, in this case, freeways (See Chapter 2). Freeways served both to pave over such neighborhoods or to cordon them off from more well-off areas nearby (Baum-Snow, 2007; Mieszkowski and Mills, 1993; von Hoffman, 2008; Collins and Shester, 2013; Manvel, 1968; Carriere, 2011; Hanlon, 2011; and Jeffrey Brown, Morris, and Taylor, 2009b). The process of urban renewal ultimately eased the condemnation of land for freeway construction.

In 1955, the Pasadena Planning Commission employed this new planning tool to designate the Fair Oaks and Orange Grove-Lincoln neighborhoods for redevelopment (Pasadena Planning Commission, 1962). An article from the same year in local Black newspaper *California Eagle* reacting to this designation stated:

*“[Black] Residents of this city girded themselves for an all-out battle to forestall what they charge is a scheme to turn over to private industry one of the largest Negro residential areas and to squeeze its residents into another smaller section of the city also heavily populated by Negroes and members of minority groups” (California Eagle, 1955, p. 1).*

When the City of Pasadena updated its General Plan in 1962, before the construction of the freeway, the areas that were designated for urban renewal closely matched those redlined by the HOLC. This redevelopment, proposed in 1955 and reiterated in the 1962 General Plan, called for changing the Fair Oaks neighborhood to industrial zoning, displacing many of its 2,348 residents, who were expected to move to the Orange Grove-Lincoln area. At the same time, the expected Foothill Freeway construction, discussed below would commandeer 15 acres of the 32-acre Orange Grove-Lincoln neighborhood (Pasadena Planning Commission, 1962; *California Eagle*, 1955; and Nelson et al., n.d.). According to Charles B. Johnson, then-president of the Pasadena NAACP chapter:

*“The remaining 17 acres would then have to accommodate most of the 1,233 persons who already live there and another 1,200 to 1,500 people pushed out of the S. Fair Oaks district. Homeowners would have to stand for re-zoning of their properties from R-1, single family use, to R-4, apartment house use” (California Eagle, 1955, p. 3).*

Though these neighborhoods were characterized as showing “evidences of blight” (Pasadena Planning Commission, 1962, p. 103), the General Plan described much of their housing stock as “in good to fair condition” (Pasadena Planning Commission, 1962, p. 83). Residents remembered a vibrant community, one that had “some of the city’s highest concentration of classic Victorian and craftsman style architecture, [which were] within walking distance of local stores, the downtown business district and the city’s Civic Center” (Lloyd, 2017, p. 9). One former resident, Bob Gonzalez, described:

*“From our house towards Fair Oaks, there were some beautiful old homes, two-story homes. And right across the street from where we used to live there was a little street that came from Fair Oaks to Lincoln, Eureka, ok[ay]? And right at the corner of Eureka and Lincoln there used to be a beautiful old home, a Victorian, right at the corner” (Lloyd, 2017, pp. 9–10).*

Another resident, Alma Stokes, stated, “The area really wasn’t blighted. It wasn’t. It was just Black removal” (Ramirez, 2021).

Pasadenans of color, in some cases allied with sympathetic white residents, resisted urban renewal. For instance, in northwest Pasadena, the Pepper Project, the city’s first urban renewal initiative, met with organized opposition from residents (Ramirez, 2021; Blumberg, 1964; and Pincetl, 1992). “Who is going to protect the interests of Negroes? Surely not Pasadena’s white people,” Ramirez (2021) quotes a community leader saying at the time. The city’s redevelopment agency hired Black staff but proceeded with the clearance of hundreds of residential and commercial structures, in an area previously home to 94 percent non-white residents. In this and other urban renewal projects, Pasadena displaced nearly 300 families by the late 1960s; of them 91 percent were families of color (Ramirez, 2021; Blumberg, 1964; and Pincetl, 1992).

All told, the same areas in northwest Pasadena were denied federal mortgage support, then slated for urban renewal, and finally selected for freeway construction, all through racialized policy-making processes.

## Freeway Planning and Construction

### Early Planning

The story of freeway planning and construction in Pasadena poignantly demonstrates that freeways in Los Angeles inequitably burdened suburban and small city communities of color in much the same way as they did in countless cities across the county (N. King and Inskeep, 2021). It shows how a cycle of inequitable and racially tinged decisions can compound and build momentum until the prospect of freeway construction becomes inevitable, despite the disproportionately negative effects on certain communities.

With the decline of the “Red Car” streetcar network (See Chapter 4) and the proliferation of automobiles by the early 1960s, the main business district of Pasadena moved east of Fair Oaks Avenue (N. King and Inskeep, 2021). At the same time, the post war economic boom brought industry and technology jobs to Pasadena. These industries, as well as the growing relocated business district, convinced civic leaders that freeways would ultimately be a boon to the city and that Pasadena needed the access the freeways would provide to the rest of the Los Angeles Basin (Snyder, 1974). This optimism amongst governmental and monied interests in the city continued throughout the freeway’s construction, as reflected in a *Los Angeles Times* article from 1971:

*“Communities along the route of the Foothill Freeway are looking eagerly to its completion in 1975 despite a few trepidations. They see increased opportunities for business as the freeway creates greater accessibility; a higher degree of mobility and population growth. And in the case of Pasadena, which is most fervid in pinning its hopes on the freeway, there are dreams of becoming an important headquarters city for national firms”* (Leiren, 1971, p. San Gabriel Valley A1).

Pasadena was also a key location in the plans of regional leaders for a continuous, interconnected freeway network. The city lay at the confluence of three proposed freeways: the Long Beach Freeway/Interstate 710, the Colorado Freeway (part of which was later renamed as Ventura Freeway)/State Route 134, and the Foothill Freeway/Interstate 210. These routes were intended to form a plus sign meeting in central Pasadena: I-710 coming from the south, SR-134 coming from the west, and I-210, the focus of our case study, coming from the north (connecting to the San Fernando Valley), bending, and heading to the east (towards San Bernardino) (See **Figure 5-2**). The top of this plus sign, the northern spur of the Foothill Freeway, would end up plowing through Pasadena’s neighborhoods of color.

As shown in **Table 5-2**, the first published mention of a freeway through Pasadena is in the 1943 report *Freeways for the Region* by the Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission, in which a proposed freeway route is shown following the old State Route 118 (Los Angeles County Regional Planning District Regional Planning Commission, 1943). Yet it would take more than 20 years before the purchasing of land for the freeway right-of-way would start. Construction of the freeway started in 1971, and over the next four years, different segments were completed. Between June 1973 and February 1976, the Foothill Freeway/Interstate 210 opened in stages (See **Figure 5-2**), with the final spur opening to much fanfare on March 20, 1976 (Hemmerick, 1976).

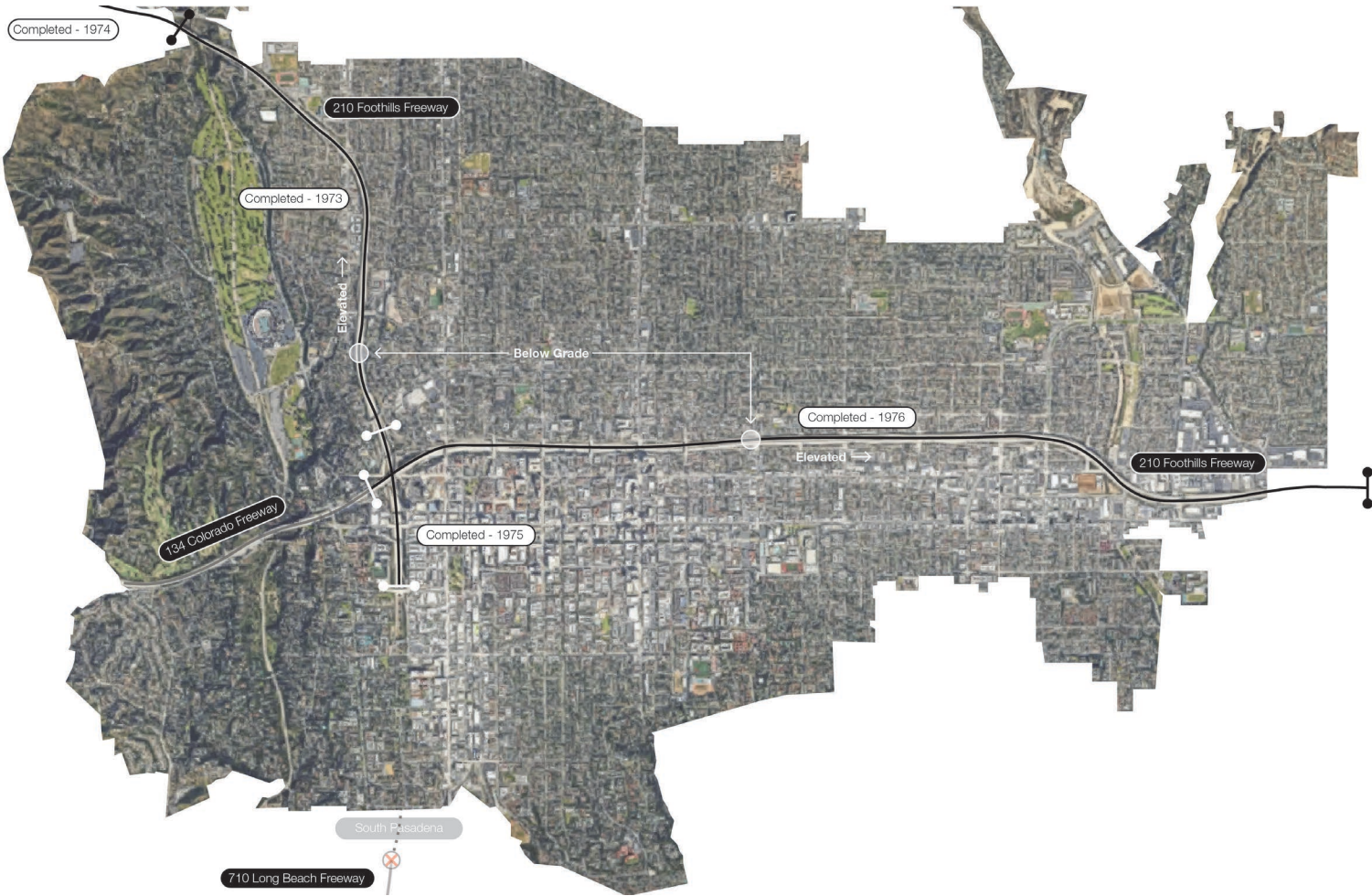
Substantive freeway planning work did not begin until the late 1950s. But compared to the enthusiasm from civic leaders, early discussions in public meetings (See **Figure 5-3**) between highway engineers and Pasadena residents about constructing the freeway through the city were characterized by uncertainty and skepticism. In July 1958, an estimated “1,400 persons...packed Pasadena City College auditorium” to hear a presentation by state highway officials on the proposed Foothill Freeway route through the city (*Pasadena Star News*, 1958, p. 21). Attendees expressed concerns about their homes being destroyed and the impacts on their property values and quality of life, while a spokesman for the Pasadena Chamber of Commerce worried about possible disruption of local business. In response to these

**Table 5-2. Timeline of Freeway Planning, Selection, and Construction for Pasadena**

Source	Early Planning	Alternative Routes Presented	Route Chosen	Right-of-way Purchasing	Construction	Completed or Opening
Los Angeles County Regional Planning District Regional Planning Commission, 1943	Proposed further to the east					
Los Angeles County Regional Planning District Regional Planning Commission, 1953	Appears to follow old SR-118 route					
Metropolitan Transportation Engineering Board, 1958		Alternative to west	General route shown			
Caltrans, 1963		Shown but not classified	Shown but classified as not yet adopted			
Caltrans, 1965a			Adopted; southern segment still undecided	Purchasing should start		

Source	Early Planning	Alternative Routes Presented	Route Chosen	Right-of-way Purchasing	Construction	Completed or Opening
Caltrans, 1968			Adopted	Purchasing likely to continue		
Caltrans, 1971				Most parcels should have been purchased	Under construction	
Caltrans, 1975						Completed

Figure 5-2. Stages of Freeway Construction, Pasadena



Base imagery: Google, 2023

concerns, state highway engineers warned of dramatic traffic congestion, of large and increasing automobile flows through the city, and of the necessity of a modern roadway to handle the increased demand (*Pasadena Star News*, 1958). They quickly dismissed the fundamental question of whether or not to build the freeway, as its construction had already been settled. A *Los Angeles Times* article from 1964 suggests as much, under the subheading “Freeway Inevitable”: “A spokesman for one active Pasadena citizens group said that there is grass roots sentiment in the city...for no freeway at all. ‘But it is impractical and impossible to stop it’” (Hebert, 1964, p. 1). But the audiences for these meetings (and potentially also the opposition quoted in the papers) were not representative of the areas slated for demolition. As the discussion shifted to where to route the freeway, photographs from public meetings about this and other nearby sections of the Foothill Freeway show entirely white audiences (See **Figure 5-3**) (*Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, 1966), a clear indicator of whom the engineers were hearing and whose concerns and livelihoods they were predisposed to take into account.

**Figure 5-3. Crowds at Freeway Routing Meetings**



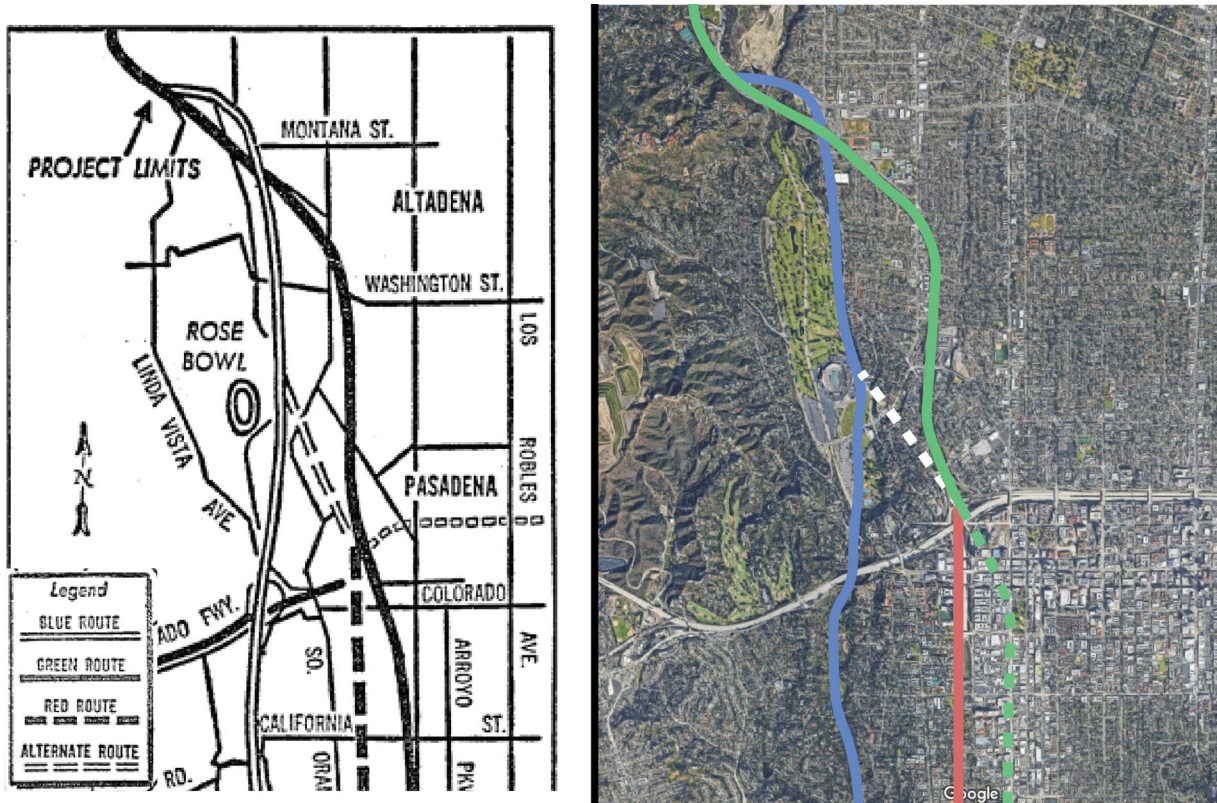
*Source:* Los Angeles Herald Examiner, 1966

These hearings represented one of many concerted steps that transportation planners took to ignore or suppress the concerns of residents of color, while listening to those in other areas when they objected. Residents of color largely lacked a political voice to participate and oppose the freeway. As a result, only the white neighborhoods managed to avoid the freeway burdens. Indeed, the story of freeway construction in Pasadena reveals a cycle of racially tinged decisions and disproportionately negative effects of the freeway on populations of color.

Different portions of the Foothill Freeway received differing levels of scrutiny. Wealthy, white homeowners in La Cañada Flintridge, northwest of the Pasadena study area along the Foothill Freeway/I-210, organized and pushed back against freeway construction through their community (See **Figure 5-3**). Some of their public officials went so far as to threaten to refuse to sign the street closure agreements required for construction (Hebert, 1964).

### Alternate Routes and Route Selection

**Figure 5-4. Foothill Freeway Northern Spur in Pasadena: Alternative Routing Options**



Sources: Hebert, 1964, p. 1 and authors; base imagery: Google, 2023

During the Foothill Freeway’s planning process, state highway engineers and Pasadena government officials explored multiple routing options for the city’s planned interstates, including the northern spur of the Foothill Freeway/I-210. As depicted in **Figure 5-4** using the colors planners gave them at the time, a few of these routes for this northern spur were presented to the public (Hebert, 1964):



- A “Blue route” running largely through parkland along the eastern edge of the Arroyo Seco valley
- A “Green route” that bisected northwest Pasadena’s neighborhoods of color
- An otherwise identical version of the “Green route” that took a more direct “Red” cut-off in its southern portion
- An “Alternate route” (shown in white), combining parts of each

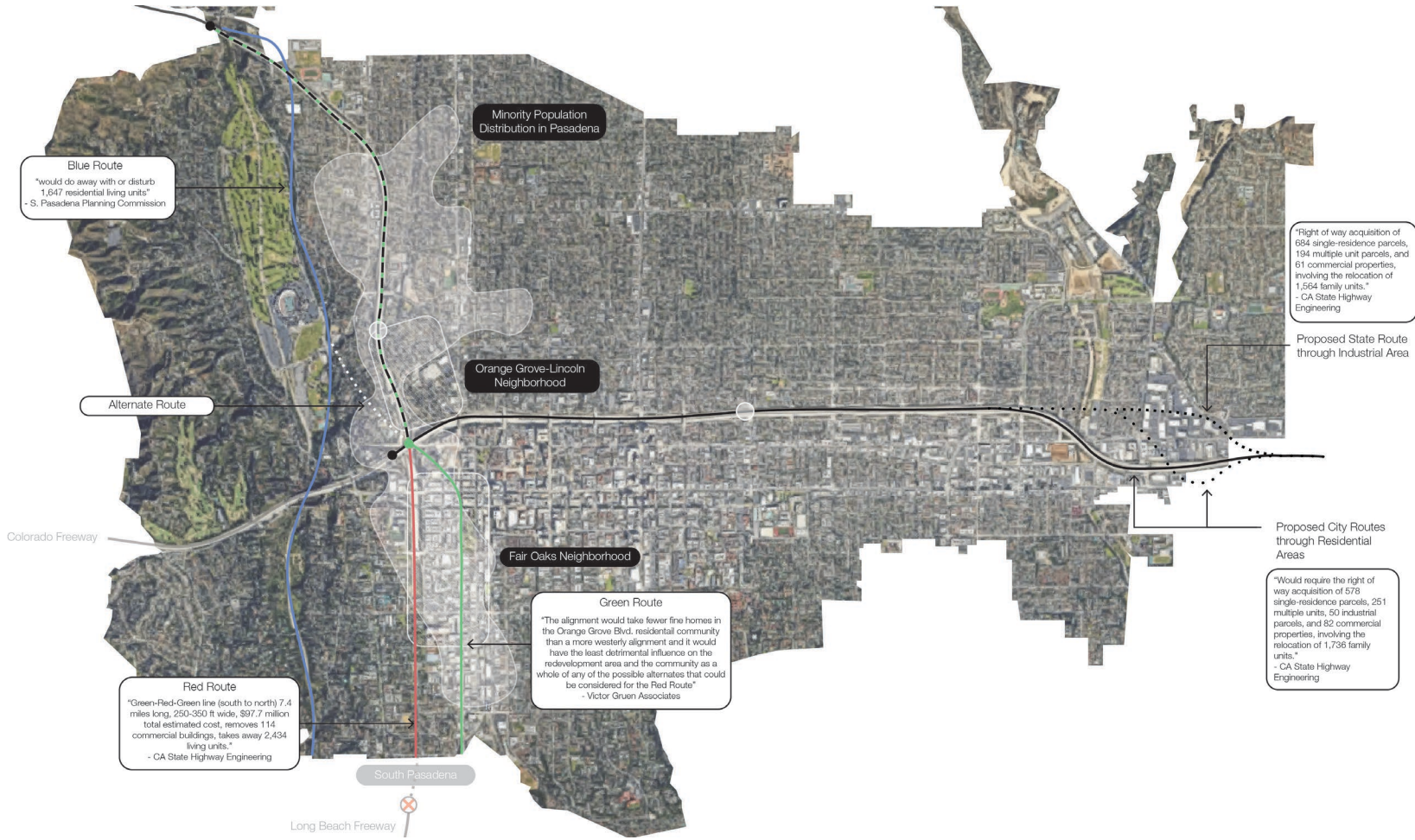
**Figure 5-5** shows different alternative routes—including these color-coded routes for the Foothill Freeway’s northern spur, as well as other alternatives not discussed in depth here for its east-west alignment in eastern Pasadena—with comments about their impacts expressed about them in newspapers of the time. The difference in the impact of potential routes was substantial. The city ultimately put its weight behind the Green route, which, as we will discuss later, affected the most homes and destroyed the highest possible number of neighborhoods of color, using the circular logic and the thinly veiled excuse that these particular routes fit best with the city’s General Plan.

The General Plan demonstrates that the chosen route through neighborhoods of color was no accident. The 1962 Pasadena General Plan that launched the city’s urban renewal program played a major role in the cycle of inequity that ultimately determined the location of the Foothill Freeway route. The Plan indicated the future route of the Foothill Freeway, showing its northern spur between California Boulevard and Devil’s Gate Dam cutting through northwest Pasadena along the Green route (See **Figures 5-4, 5-5, 5-6, and 5-7**). The General Plan depicts the freeway routing, but the report does not mention that there were other routing options at the time, nor does it mention the possibility of the freeway not being built at all. Rather, in image after image of this document, a “proposed” route is shown that reinforces that particular route option and makes it appear as a part of the community already. The routes defined in the General Plan almost exactly mirror those ultimately built. Per the General Plan itself, the northern spur goes through the most densely populated areas of the city (See **Figure 5-6**) (Pasadena Planning Commission, 1962).

In the General Plan, the northern spur of the Foothill Freeway is the only portion that splits an area zoned for residential use in half (circled in **Figure 5-7**) (the residentially zoned area in central Pasadena appears split by the freeway as well, but an active rail line already existed in that location, functionally dividing the area) (Pasadena Planning Commission, 1962). Planners took care not to divide neighborhoods in other parts of Pasadena, but the northwestern parts of the city did not receive this same treatment (See **Figure 5-7**). The northern spur appears strange in the General Plan, as if it is arbitrarily drawn to have an excessively negative impact on this part of Pasadena.

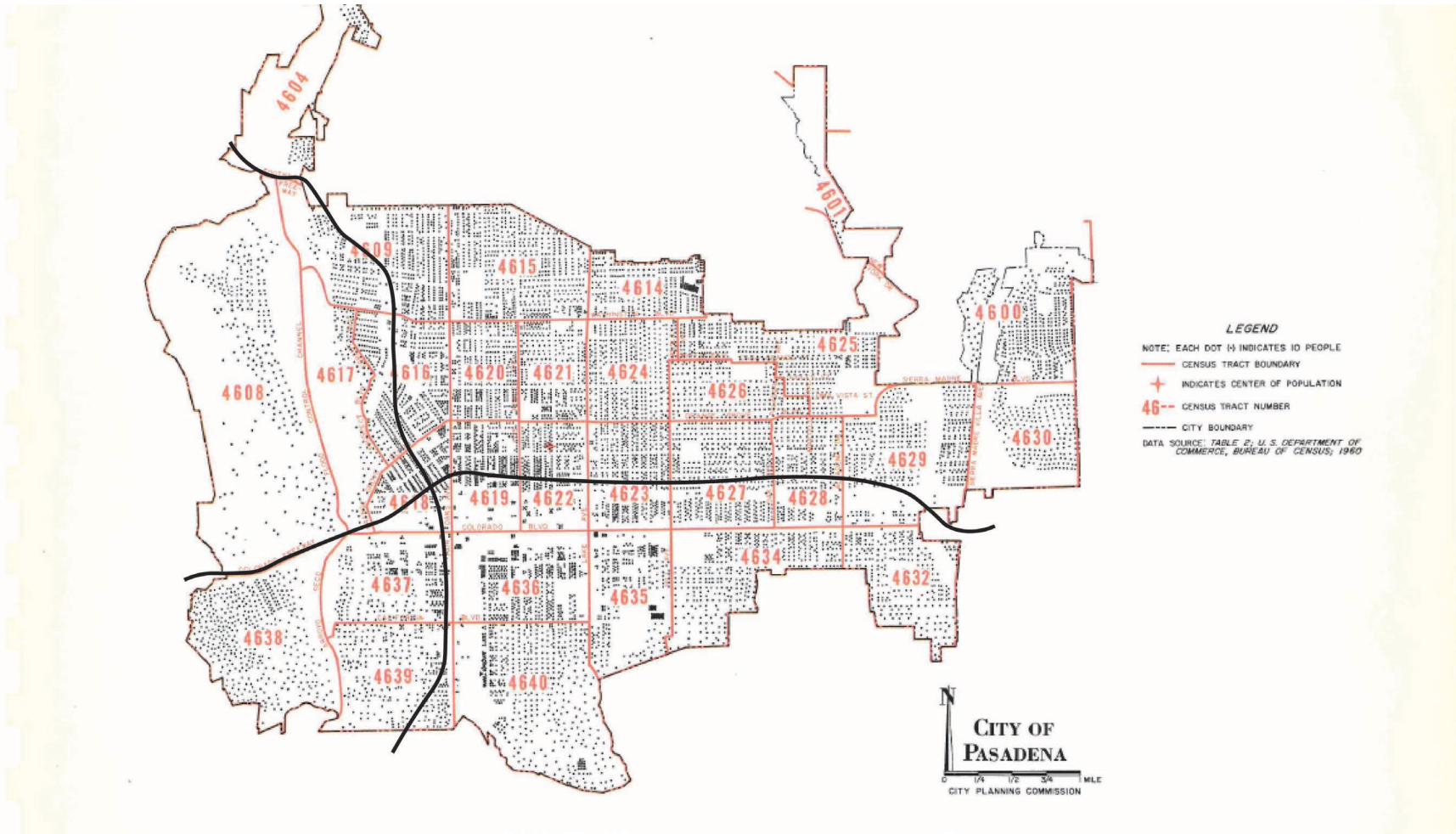
**Figures 5-8, 5-9, 5-10, 5-11, and 5-12** show the influences that ultimately led to this routing decision and highlight how these areas were identified. Decades before the northern spur was aligned to bisect Pasadena’s neighborhoods of color, these neighborhoods had been characterized as “hazardous” in HOLC redlining maps (Nelson et al., n.d.), as discussed previously (See **Figures 5-1 and 5-12**). **Figure 5-8** shows that the freeway was routed through neighborhoods that were colored red (“hazardous”) and yellow (“in decline”).

Figure 5-5. Pasadena Alternative Freeway Routes and Expressed Impacts



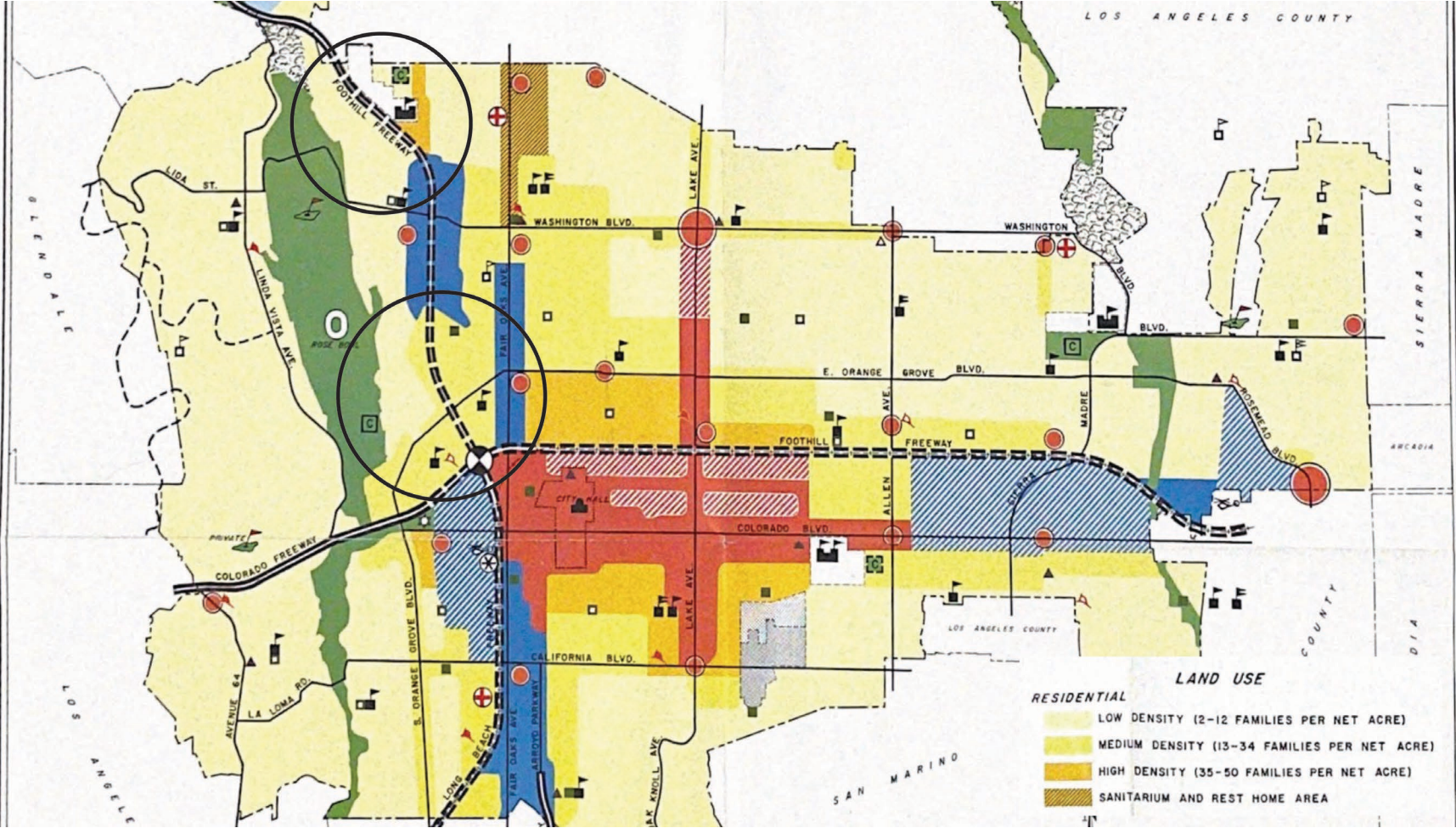
Sources: Los Angeles Times, 1962, p. 8, 1964, p. San Gabriel Valley 9, 1966a, p. San Gabriel Valley 1; Sherlock, 1964, p. San Gabriel Valley 1; Ethnic History Research Project, 1995; and authors; base imagery: Google, 2023

Figure 5-6. Population Distribution Map in Pasadena, 1962



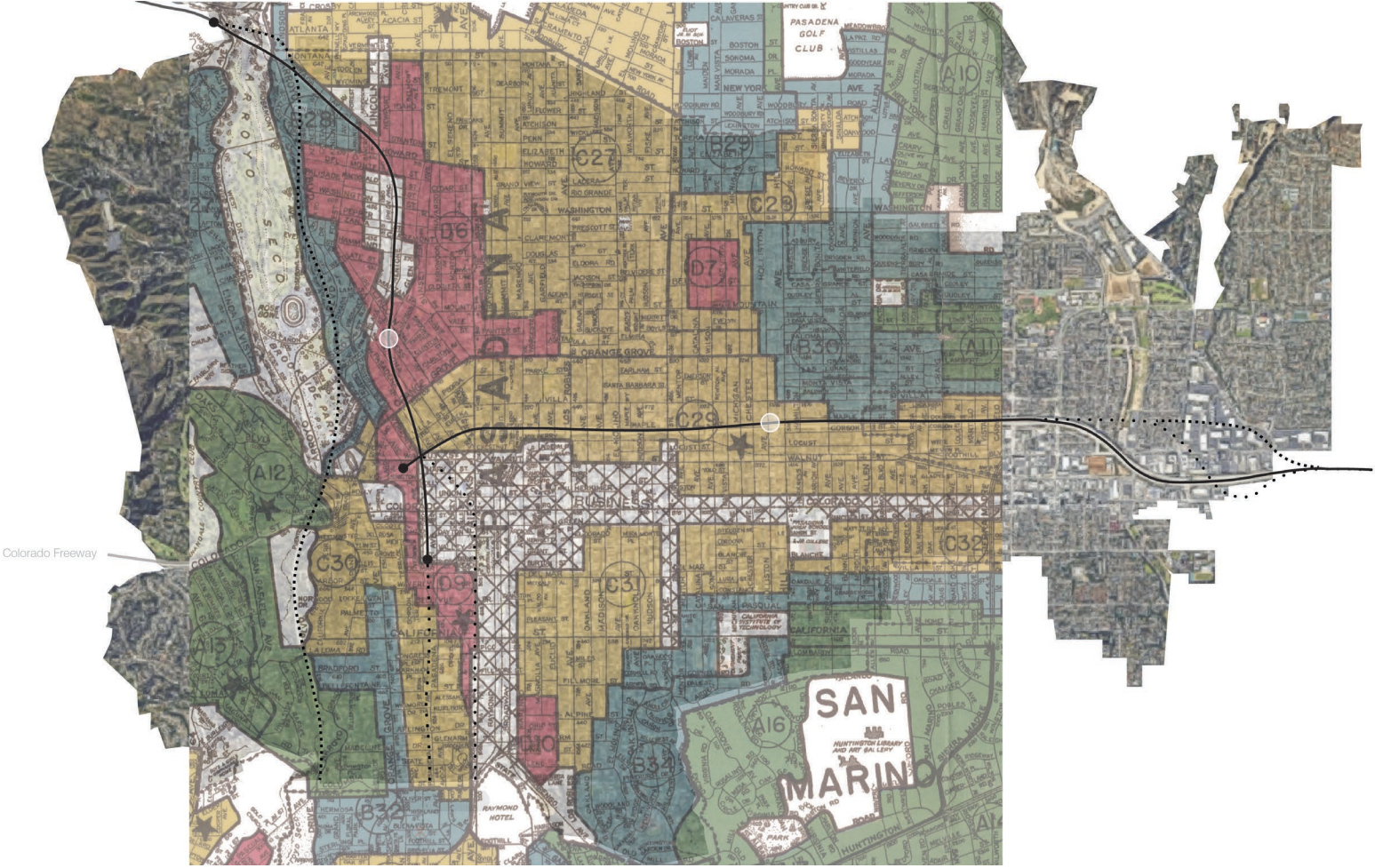
Source: Pasadena Planning Commission, 1962, with routes added by authors

Figure 5-7. Zoning Map of Pasadena, 1962



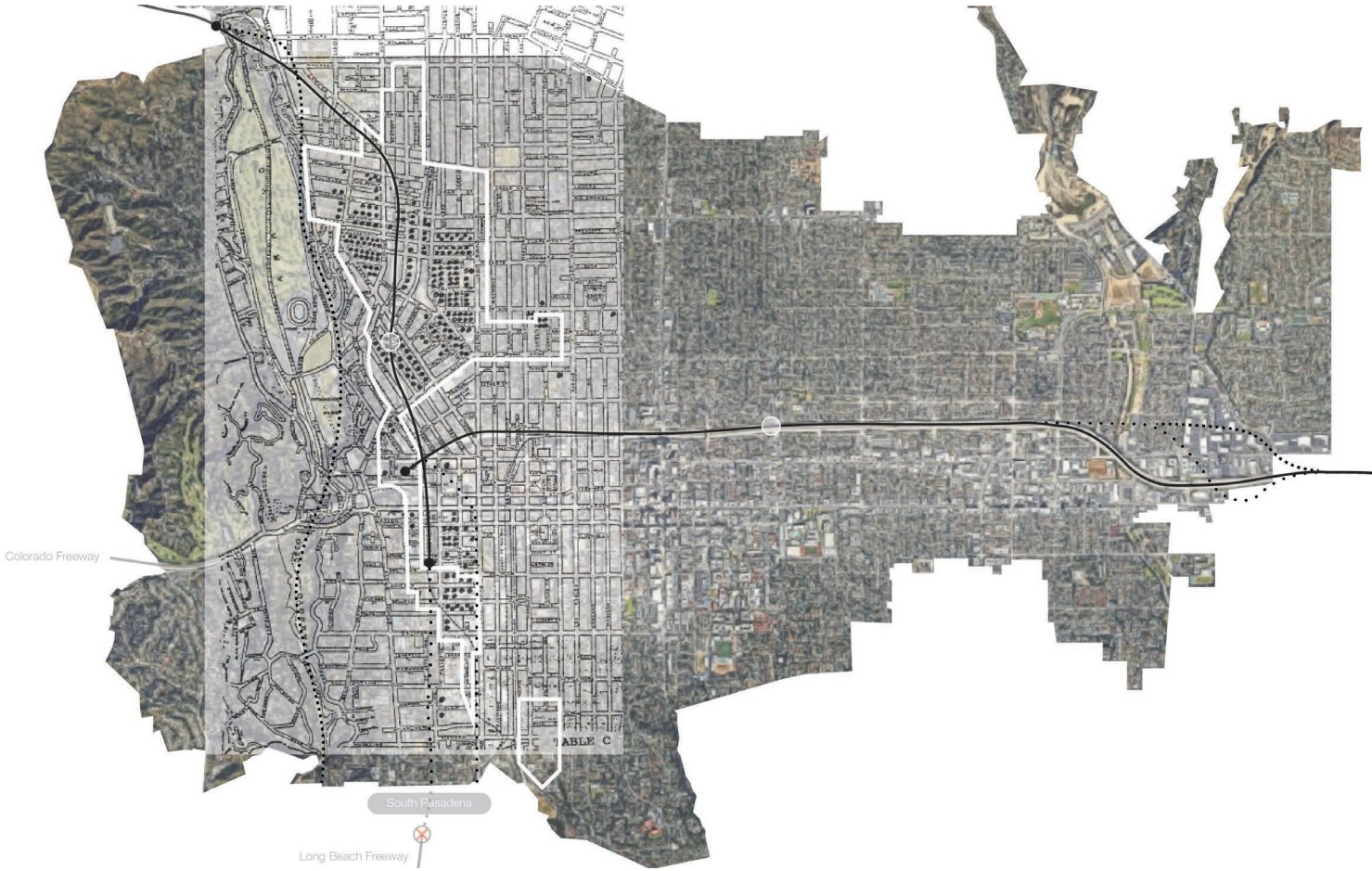
Sources: Pasadena Planning Commission, 1962 and authors

Figure 5-8. Redlining Map and Freeway Routes in Pasadena



Source: Nelson et al., n.d., with routes added by authors

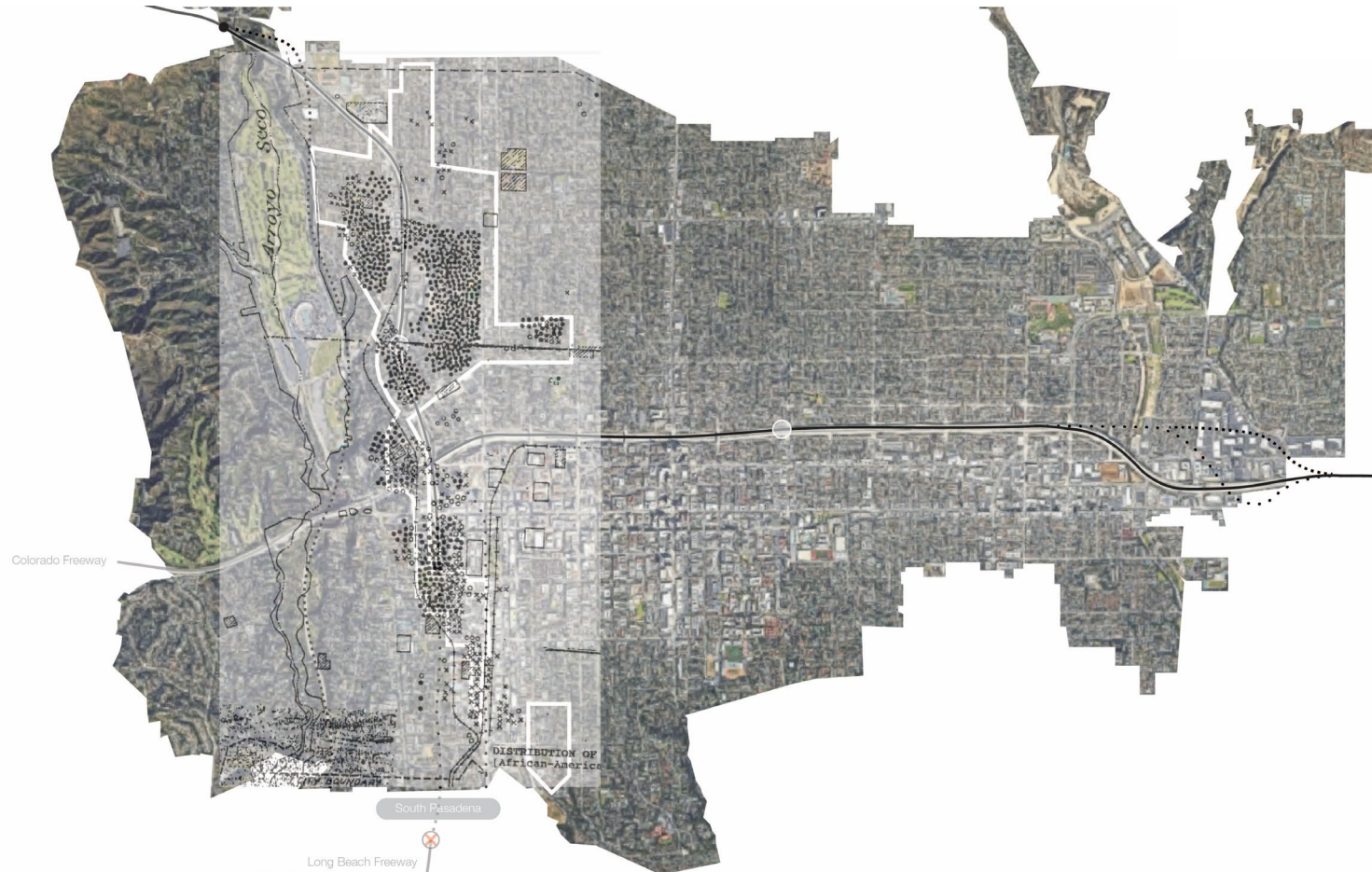
Figure 5-9. Population Distribution of Black Pasadena Residents, 1935, and Future Freeway Routes



Note: 1939 redlined areas demarcated by solid white lines

Sources: Ethnic History Research Project, 1995; Nelson et al., n.d.; and authors; base imagery: Google, 2023

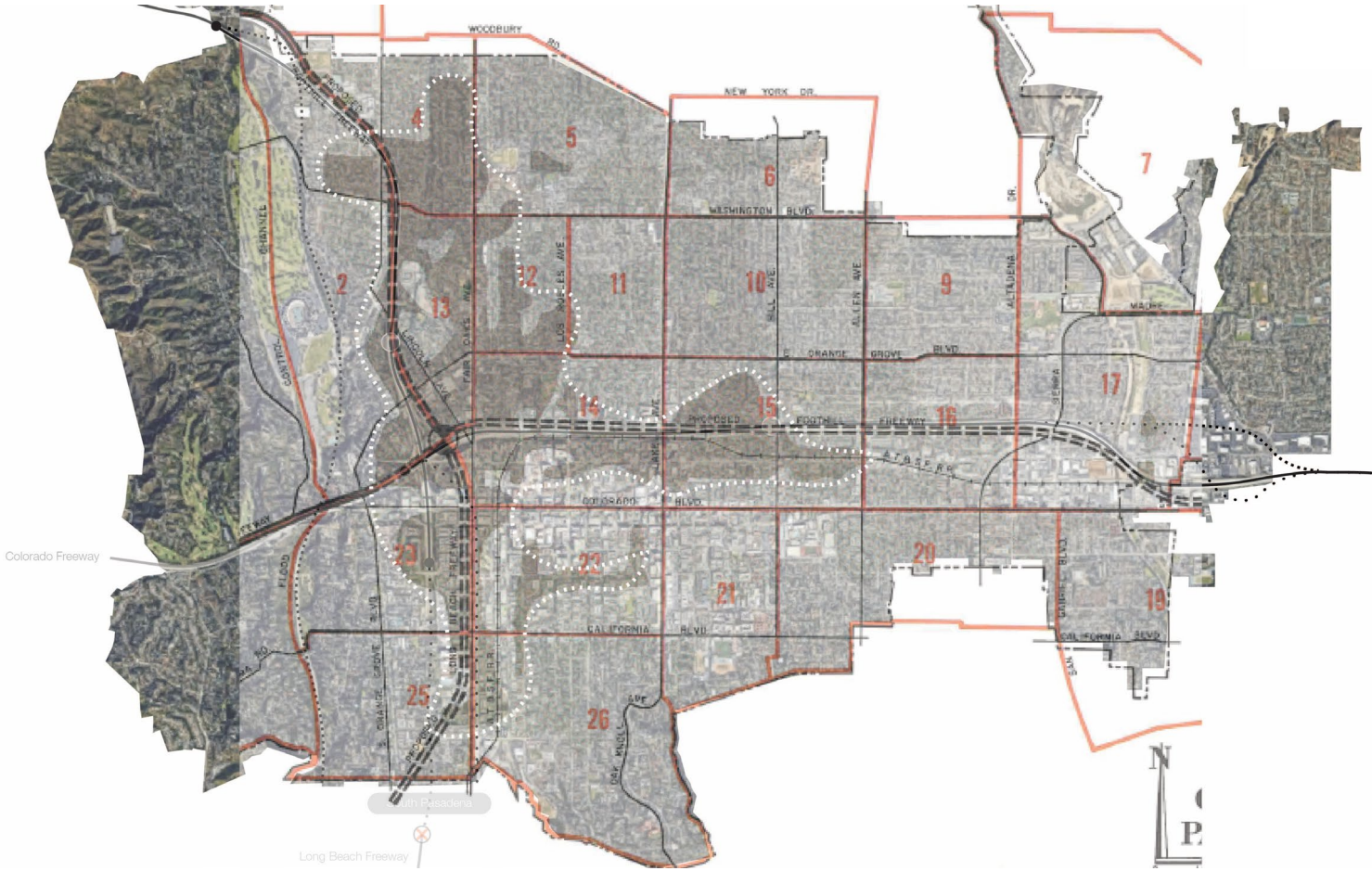
Figure 5-10. Population Distribution of Pasadena Residents of Color, 1935, and Future Freeway Routes



*Note: 1939 redlined areas demarcated by solid white lines*

*Sources: Ethnic History Research Project, 1995; Nelson et al., n.d.; and authors; base imagery: Google, 2023*

Figure 5-11. 1962 Pasadena Redevelopment Areas and Freeway Routes

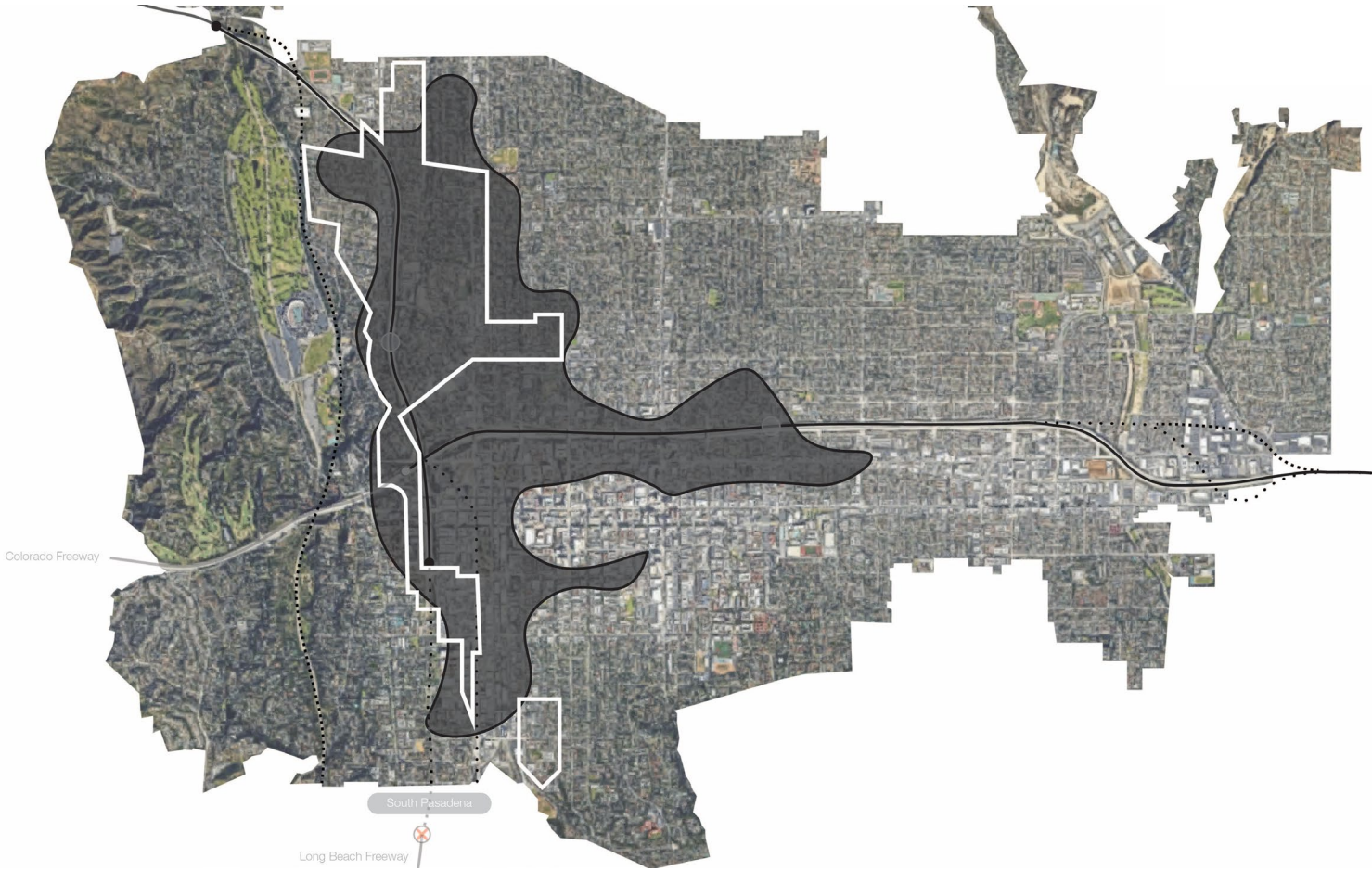


Note: Redevelopment areas demarcated by dotted white lines

Sources: Pasadena Planning Commission, 1962 and authors; base imagery: Google, 2023



Figure 5-12. Pasadena Redlined Areas, Redevelopment Areas, and Freeway Routes

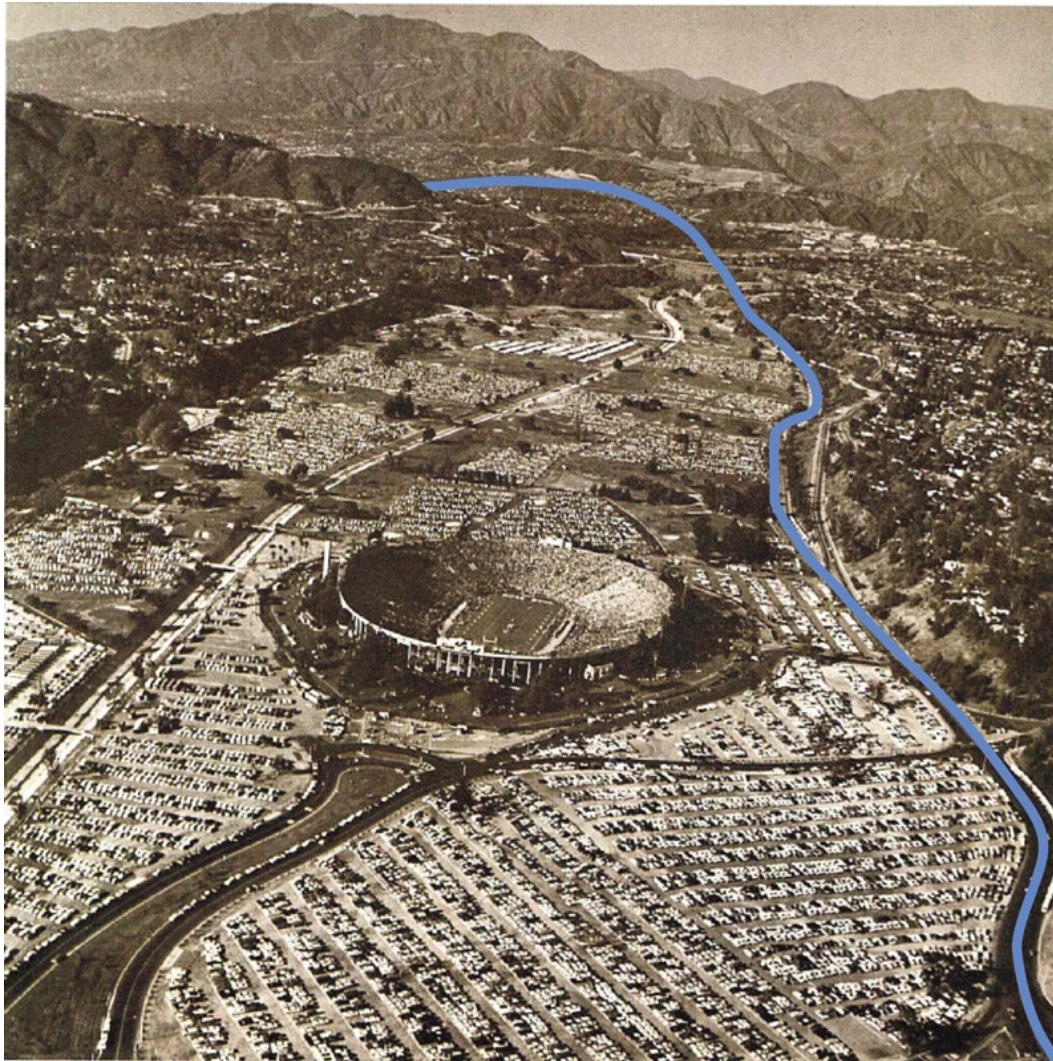


Note: 1939 redlined areas demarcated by solid white lines and redevelopment areas shaded

Sources: Pasadena Planning Commission, 1962; Nelson et al., n.d.; and authors; base imagery: Google, 2023

If we overlay the redlining maps in **Figure 5-8** with, in **Figure 5-9**, the population distribution of Black residents in Pasadena in 1935 and with, in **Figure 5-10**, the population distribution of all residents of color in Pasadena in 1935 (redlined areas demarcated by solid white lines), we see the direct relationship between race, redlining, and freeway routing and construction clearly in northwest Pasadena, the only part of the city where populations of color lived at the time. Twenty years later, when the City of Pasadena was updating its General Plan in 1962 and designating areas for urban renewal, these renewal plans tied in too. **Figure 5-11** shows the close relationship between the area slated for renewal (demarcated by dotted white lines), and the freeway paths; **Figure 5-12** the comparable overlap between renewal areas (shaded) and redlined areas (demarcated by solid white lines). These overlaps gave a rationale to city officials who advocated for the selected highway routes.

**Figure 5-13. View of the Rose Bowl Showing Proposed Blue Route**



*Source: Pasadena Planning Commission, 1962, with route added by authors*

Here were areas of the city that were designated as “hazardous” by the federal government and as “deteriorating” by the city (Pasadena Planning Commission, 1962; Ethnic History Research Project, 1995; and Nelson et al., n.d.).

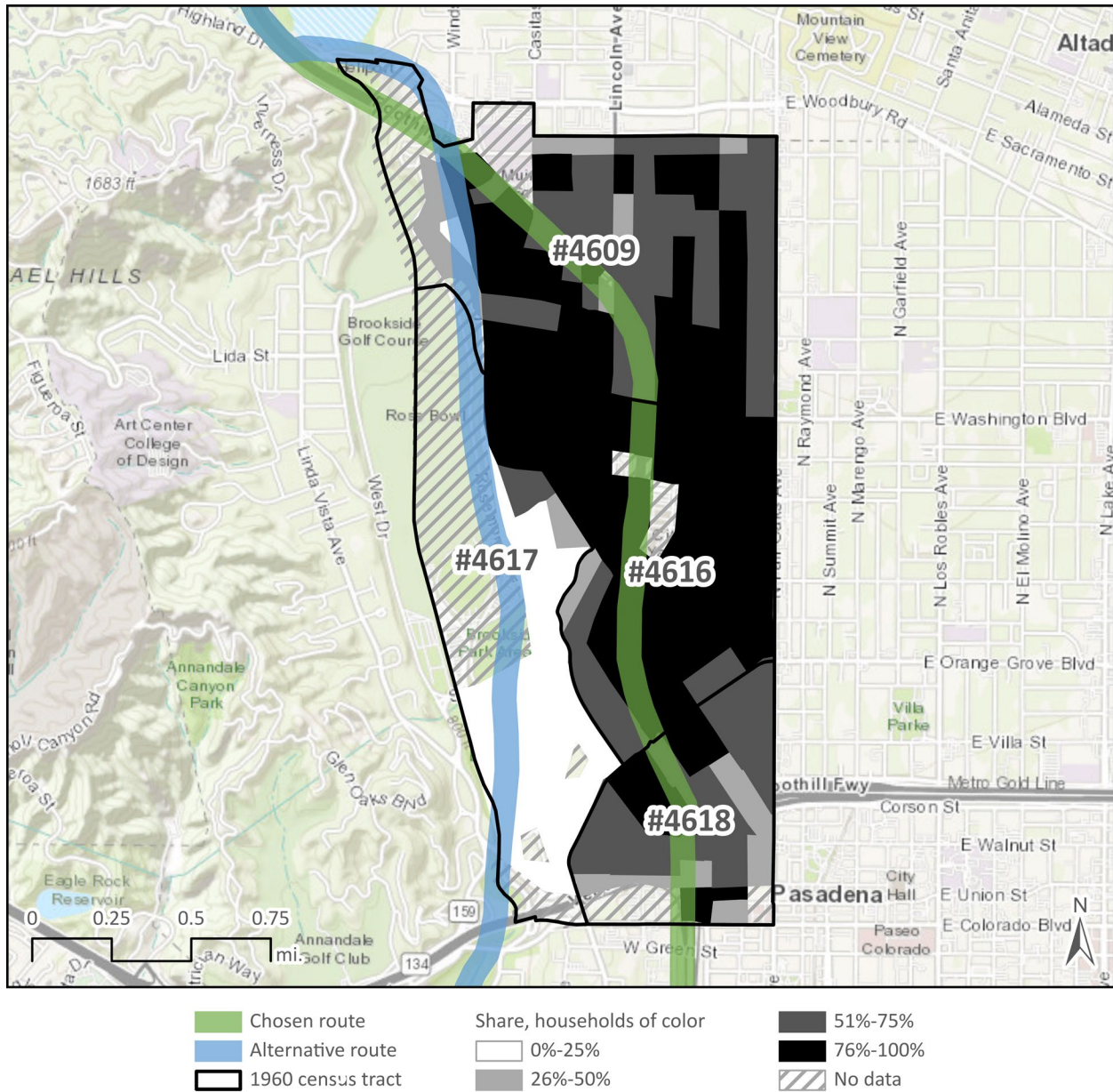
The routing decision therefore rested on decades of racialized planning and urban renewal efforts in Pasadena. In the press and to the public, Pasadena leadership thus presented the Green route as the only feasible option, as opposed to the Blue route through the parkland of the Arroyo Seco (*Pasadena Star News*, 1964) (See **Figure 5-4**). According to State Assemblyman George Danielson, “There is no logical choice except to follow the Green Route [north of the interchange]” (*Pasadena Star News*, 1964, p. 1). He argued that it would have the greatest benefit for traffic efficiency, users and “communities concerned” (*Pasadena Star News*, 1964, p. 1). Pasadena’s City Manager agreed, stating that the Blue route was “unequivocally unacceptable...the Green route...offers the highest community values in terms of its effect on land development and the neighborhoods through which it passes” (*Pasadena Star News*, 1964, p. 1).

The main argument against the Blue Route was that it would destroy the natural beauty of the Arroyo Seco and the land around the Rose Bowl. The Pasadena Citizens Committee on Freeways, a group chaired by *Pasadena Star News* editor Lee M. Merriman (Lloyd, 2017 and Hebert, 1964), described the “Arroyo Seco [Blue] route as a ‘relentless monster’ that would ‘destroy for all time the one outstanding natural feature of our city” (Hebert, 1964, p. 2). However, as shown in **Figure 5-13**, the Arroyo’s “natural feature[s]” (Hebert, 1964, p. 2)—and its many stadium parking lots—would have remained intact, as the proposed Blue route would have passed along its edge.

Our quantitative analysis bears out in stark terms the difference in effect between the actually constructed Green route and the proposed alternate Blue route. In Pasadena, the chosen Green route ran through both residential and commercial lots, while a good part of the unchosen Blue route ran through sparsely populated areas or open spaces. **Figure 5-14** displays the estimated proportion of households of color at the census-block level in 1960. People of color comprised a higher share of both the surrounding neighborhoods and actual housing under the footprint of the chosen path than of the path not chosen.

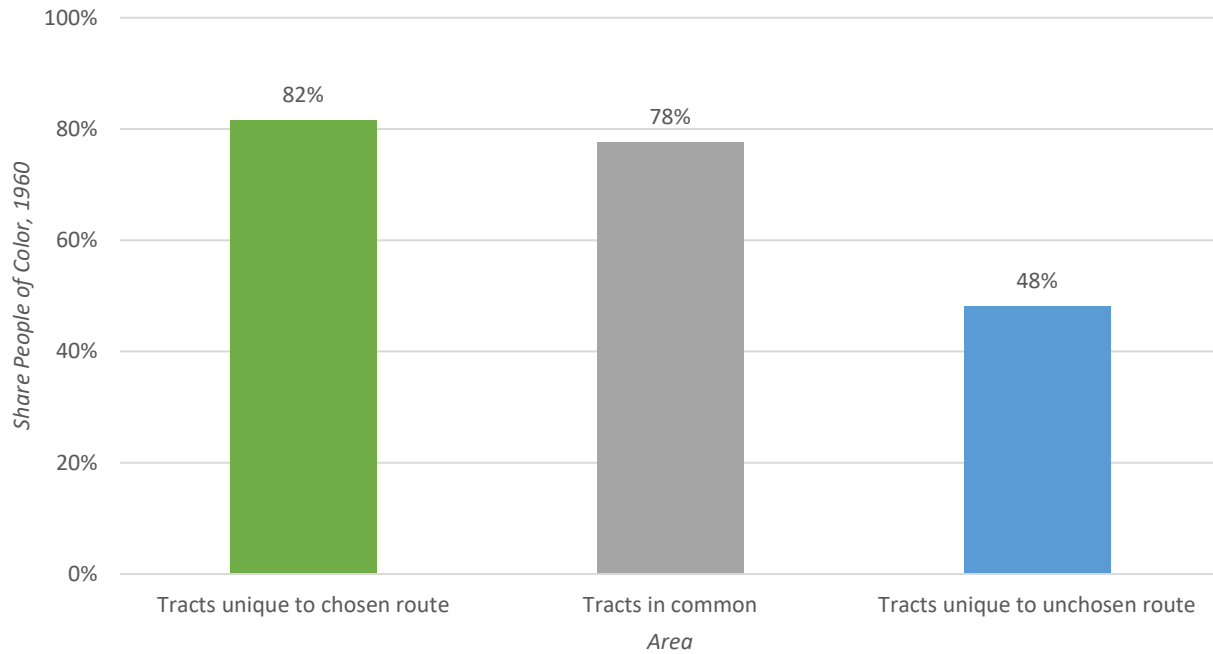
The Green route ran through many more communities of color than the Blue route. In **Figure 5-15**, we organized census tracts into three categories: tracts that included only the chosen Green route, tracts that included both the chosen Green and unchosen Blue routes, and tracts that included only the unchosen Blue route. People of color made up the largest proportion of the population in the chosen tracts—over 80 percent of the tracts exclusive to the Green route—but a much smaller proportion of the population in the unique unchosen tracts. The gap between the unique chosen and unchosen areas is substantial: 33 percentage points more residents of color (See Appendix A for additional statistics).

Figure 5-14. Pasadena Freeway Alternatives: Households of Color by Census Blocks, 1960



Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961b); base map: Esri, 2023b

**Figure 5-15. Pasadena Freeway Alternatives: Residents of Color by Census Tracts, 1960**



*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1962a)*

We also find systematic differences in median family income, as shown in **Figure 5-16**.<sup>10</sup> The gap was extreme, with the average income for tracts with only the chosen Green route only half of that for the tract with only the unchosen Blue route (See Appendix A for additional statistics).

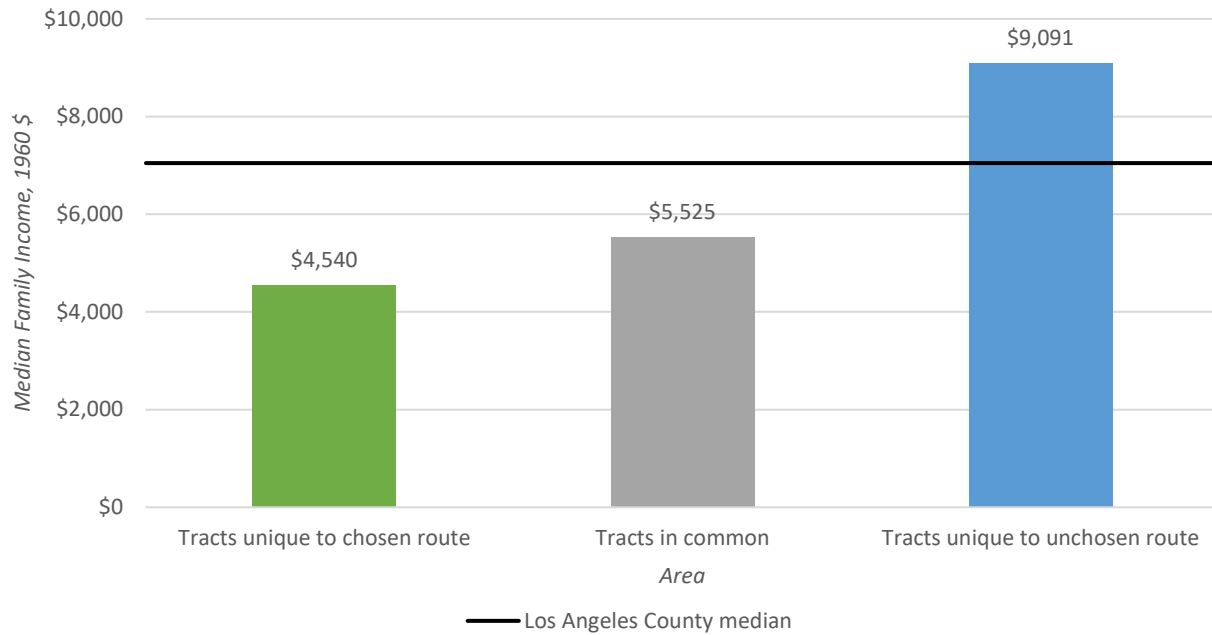
Atop the differences in income, we found stark differences in average 1960 home values, as shown in **Figure 5-17**.<sup>11</sup> The home value average for tracts with only the unchosen Blue route was twice as large as for the tract with only the chosen Green route (See Appendix A for additional statistics).

The Green route slated for destruction and displacement far more of Pasadena’s housing stock and residents than the Blue route would have (See **Table 5-3**). The chosen route in the Pasadena study area would have affected over five hundred housing units, compared to less than one hundred units for the unchosen Blue route. An overwhelming majority of the homes along the chosen path were occupied by people of color, an estimated 76 percent.

10. As a point of reference, Los Angeles County’s median family income in 1959 was \$7,046 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1963).

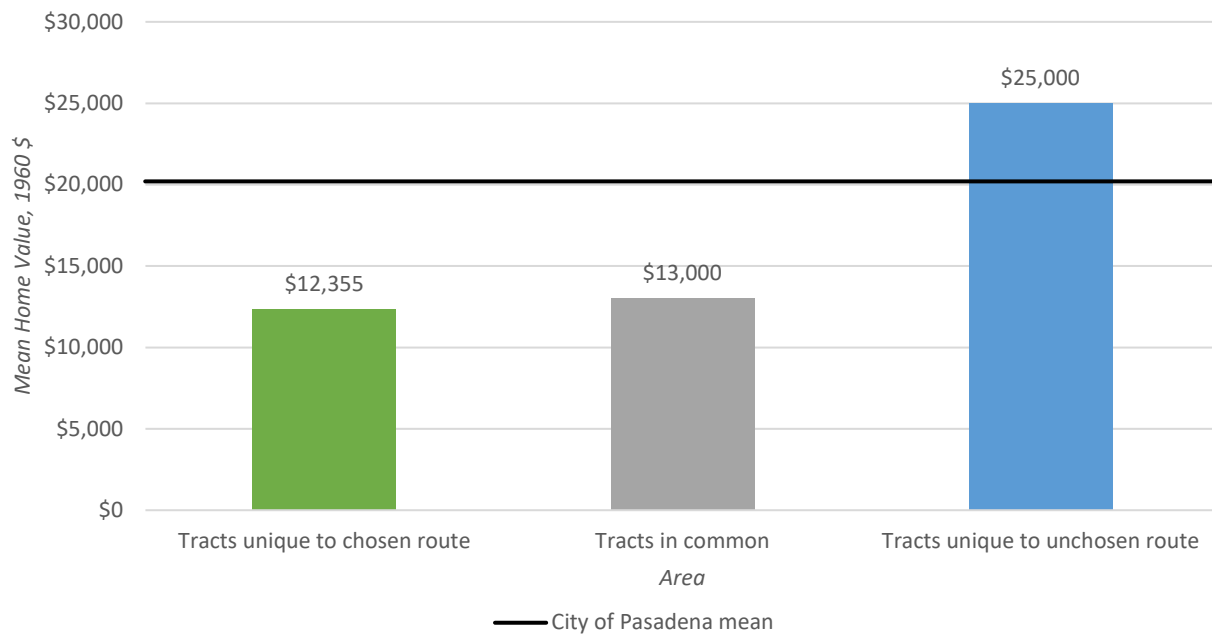
11. For reference, the mean home value that year in Pasadena was \$20,200 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961b).

**Figure 5-16. Pasadena Freeway Alternatives: Interpolated Median Income by Census Tracts, 1960**



Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1962a, 1963)

**Figure 5-17. Pasadena Freeway Alternatives: Mean Home Value by Census Tracts, 1960**



Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961b)

**Table 5-3. Comparative Impact of Pasadena Freeway Alternatives**

	<b>Chosen Green Route Footprint</b>	<b>Unchosen Blue Route Footprint</b>
<b>Population</b>	1,702	221
<b>Housing Units</b>	530	68
<b>Households</b>	500	62
<b>Non-white Households, Excluding Latino/a</b>	323	27
<b>Share, Non-white Households, Excluding Latino/a</b>	65%	44%
<b>Households of Color, Including Latino/a</b>	380	33
<b>Share, Households of Color, Including Latino/a</b>	76%	54%

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961b)*

The numbers are clear: the Green route was far more destructive, especially to Pasadenans of color. And the effects of these choices were not lost on observers of color. In 1961, the Los Angeles Black newspaper the *California Eagle* directly addressed the detrimental impacts that freeway construction was having on Black neighborhoods (Miller, 1961). As *Eagle* owner and lawyer Loren Miller stated:

*“Take me to a strange city where I’ve never been before and point out the areas in which Negroes live, and I will lay you some neat odds that I can point out the route of the city’s next freeway. There’s nothing magic about it. I don’t know whether it is a required subject in engineering schools or not, but I do know that one of the cardinal articles of faith among highway engineers is that the areas of Negro residence offer the best, the most feasible, and the most economical routes for highway construction....*

*To use a military term, Negro home owners are expendable....There’s no question about that the displacement of Negroes and other non-whites works a greater hardship than is worked when whites are roaded out of their homes.*

*The white residents can find someplace else to live without undue hardship. The Negro is put into a bad position. He can't go out to the new suburban areas and buy a new home simply because he has the money and the desire....*

*After it is all over, the Negro victim of freeway construction will wind up, more often than not, in another restricted area where he will have to pay through the nose for a second-hand home in a community a cut below that in which he formerly lived.*

*Freeways benefit an entire city, and it seems to me the social, as well as financial, cost ought to be borne by all who benefit....I don't think it's fair to require the condemned man to pay for the hangman's rope" (Miller, 1961, p. 4).*

Statements like this make it clear that the inequities were visible at the time. Residents and public officials were at the very least familiar with arguments outlining the harm and injustices caused by their freeway plans and the inequitable impact that these plans had on communities, in Pasadena and elsewhere, but they simply chose to ignore this reality.

Talking to historian John Lloyd (2017), former resident Bob Gonzalez conveyed his sense of helplessness that he and other residents of color felt, watching their homes and neighborhood disappear: "Well, you know what happened at Chavez Ravine. See? The government. The city. Money. We couldn't do nothing. We couldn't fight city hall."

The one group in opposition to the ultimately chosen Green route that was quoted in the mainstream press and listened to by planners to at least some degree was not residents of color. Instead, in an odd confluence, it was the town of South Pasadena—as described above, an exclusionary sundown town. While the analysis above focuses on the northern spur of the Foothill Freeway/Interstate 210 through northwest Pasadena (the top of the plus sign in **Figure 5-2**), the same color-coded proposed routes in **Figures 5-4** and **5-5** extended south of the main interchange as well (the bottom of the plus sign in **Figure 5-2**). As the possible routes stretched south beyond Pasadena, other jurisdictions weighed in, such as relatively affluent and white South Pasadena. Officials there preferred the Blue route, as it would remove fewer housing units in their municipality (Sherlock, 1964).

This confluence of interests between a white suburb and Pasadena's neighborhoods of color, though, was not enough. Despite the fact that the Blue route that would have had the least impact on already established neighborhoods, would have removed the fewest number of housing units, and would have received South Pasadena's support as well, ultimately, the Green route (with the Red cut-off) was chosen in 1964. The city put its weight behind a more expensive route that affected more homes and disrupted primarily neighborhoods of color (*Los Angeles Times*, 1964).

In 1966, two years after the official adoption of the freeway route for the northern spur, the acclaimed architecture consulting firm Victor Gruen Associates suggested revising Pasadena's freeway routing. While they did not touch on the key choice of the much more destructive Green route over the Blue route for the northern spur, they did ask for the City and the state Department of Transportation to



revisit their decision-making process south of the main interchange and at least change from the selected Green route with the Red cut-off to the Green route over its entire length (See **Figure 5-5**) (*Los Angeles Times*, 1966a). This change, they argued, would “have the least detrimental influence on the Orange Grove Boulevard residential community...and would have the least detrimental influence on the redevelopment area and the community as a whole of any of the possible alternatives” (*Los Angeles Times*, 1966a, p. San Gabriel Valley 1). But as had happened previously, Pasadena city officials ignored their appeal towards preserving housing units and community cohesion in neighborhoods of color, despite they themselves having commissioned Gruen Associates’ report. Hearings were not reopened (*Los Angeles Times*, 1966a).

City officials did not, however, apply the same criteria when deciding between alternative freeway alignments in other parts of Pasadena. In determining the routing for the eastern alignment of the Foothill Freeway (the right of the plus sign in **Figure 5-2**), the City did listen to its wealthier white residents who argued against a route south of Colorado Avenue (See **Figure 5-5**). Per Lloyd (2017), they said:

*“[Such a route will] first...destroy ‘hundreds of...attractive residences,’ and displaced families ‘will be unable to relocate in Pasadena’ because of lack of residential areas of similar quality. Second, ‘It will cut off many north and south streets’ that local residents use to access merchants on Colorado St. Third, ‘It will create a blighted area between Colorado and the freeway, where no one will care to own a home’”* (Lloyd, 2017).

Almost identical arguments could have been made to push back against the northern spur’s Green route that was chosen by the city, but they did not ring as true nor have an appreciable impact, in the ears of decision-makers, when applied to protect communities of color instead.

## Effects of Freeway Construction

### Housing and Demolition

The construction of the massive freeway infrastructure in Pasadena brought dramatic physical impacts on the landscape. Freeway building cleared land in preparation (See **Figure 5-18**) and demolished housing and businesses. **Figure 5-19** shows the clearance and division of West Pasadena’s main business district by the northern spur of the Foothill Freeway, demonstrating the extensive land clearance and physical separation of neighborhoods caused by its construction.

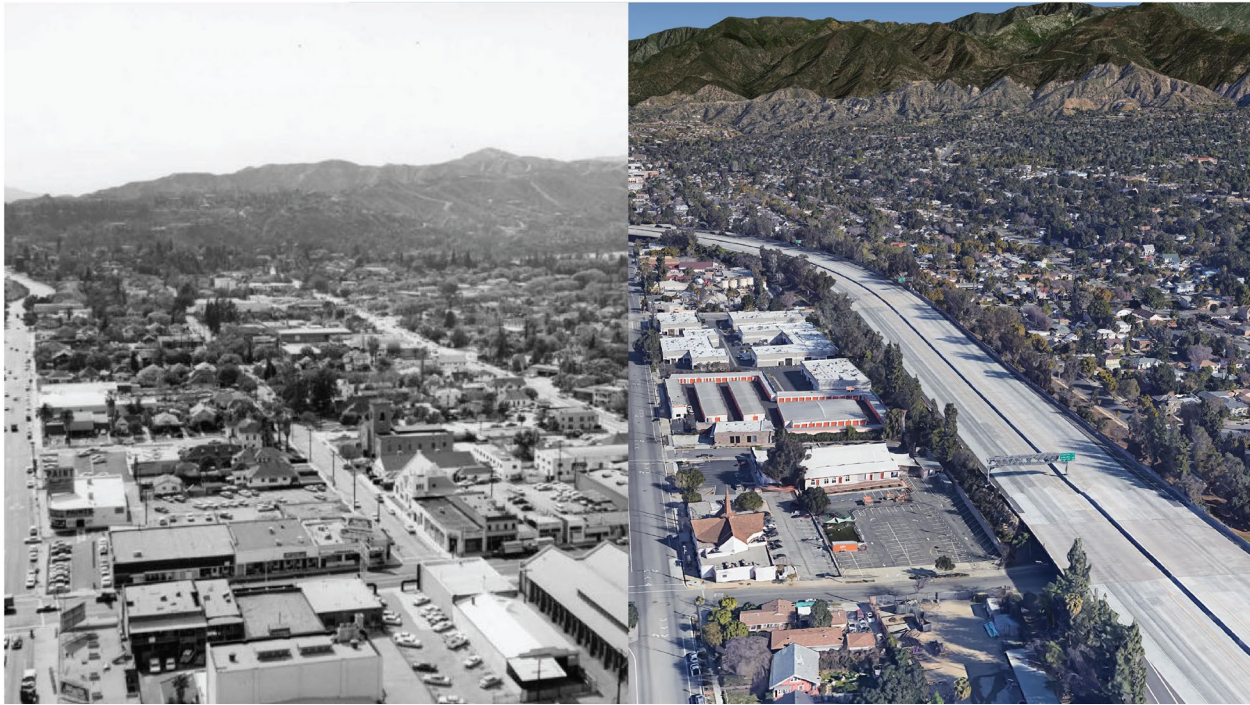
One of the most immediate effects of the Foothill Freeway’s construction on northwest Pasadena was a loss of housing. Census data reveal a dramatic decline of housing units in the Pasadena study area between 1960 and 1970, coinciding with the building of the freeway (See **Table 5-4**). By 1980, unit counts had only partially recovered in the geography for which we have consistent data.

**Figure 5-18. Cleared Land in Pasadena for Freeway Construction**



*Data source: 210 Construction at Fair Oaks Ave (1972), 1972*

**Figure 5-19. West Pasadena Business District before Freeway Construction and Today**



Sources: A Dense Street Network Connected Neighborhoods in NW Pasadena to the City’s Commercial West Side Prior to the 210 Freeway, *n.d.* and Google, 2023

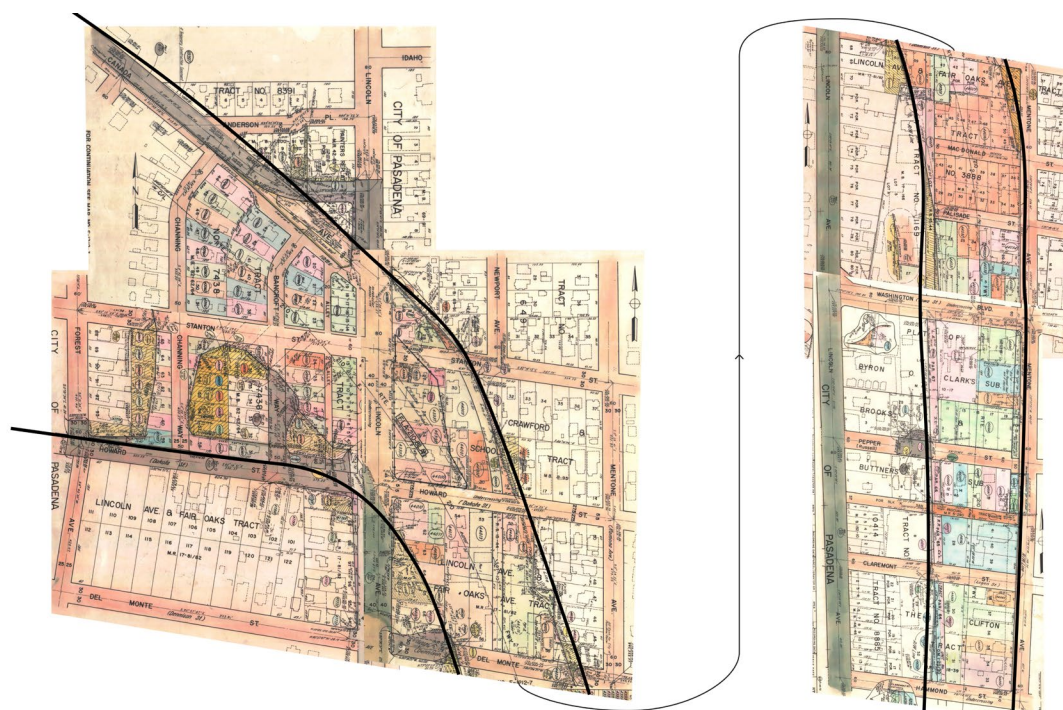
**Table 5-4. Housing Units in Pasadena Study Area and Comparisons**

	Los Angeles County	City of Pasadena	Pasadena Study Area, Including Main Interchange	Pasadena Study Area, Excluding Main Interchange
<b>1950</b>	1,450,641	37,943	5,014	3,544
<b>1960</b>	2,142,139	46,687	5,309	3,827
<b>1970</b>	2,538,910	47,049	3,760	3,157
<b>1980</b>	2,853,653	49,683	unavailable	3,465

Data source: calculated by authors from 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1952b, 1962a, 1972a, 1980)

The freeway itself paved over many of these units (See **Figure 5-20**). **Table 5-5** reports estimated housing units destroyed for the constructed I-210 freeway in the study area. These estimates, using the actual freeway footprint, are not the same as the unit counts for the comparison of alternative routes in the previous section, which were estimated using hypothetical footprints without ramps. The footprint of the freeway destroyed over 900 housing units that were in the study area in 1960—over 1,000 using the high estimate methodology described in Chapter 3—displacing about 2,681 residents. The biggest impact was in the interchange section (Tract #4618) (See **Figure 3-7**). Freeway displacement appears to account for about 63 percent of the decline in total housing during the 1960s in the study area, with the urban renewal efforts described above contributing to the rest.

**Figure 5-20. Map of Displaced Parcels on Lincoln Boulevard, Pasadena**



*Sources: Caltrans, 1965b, 1966a, 1966b, 1966c, 1966d*

The destroyed homes were mainly occupied by people of color. **Table 5-6** reports the racial composition of households directly impacted by the freeway construction. It includes estimates of households directly under the freeway footprint and households outside of the footprint but still within the study area. Freeway construction displaced a diverse set of households, including some non-Hispanic whites. Interestingly, non-Hispanic whites were slightly more present under the footprint than in the rest of the study area. Nonetheless, a majority of those displaced were people of color—two thirds, including Latino/a households.

**Table 5-5. Estimated Housing Units Lost, Pasadena Study Area (Including Interchange)**

	Housing Units in 1960 Lost under Freeway		Total Housing Units Lost in Tract, 1960-1970	Housing Units Lost in Parts of Tract Not under Freeway, 1960-1970
	Estimate	High Estimate	Estimate	Estimate
<b>Tract #4609</b>	158	182	173	3
<b>Tract #4616</b>	163	205	497	313
<b>Tract #4618</b>	602	652	879	252
<b>Total</b>	923	1,039	1,549	568
<b>Occupancy Rate</b>	92%	92%	N/A	N/A

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 and 1970 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961b and U.S. Census Bureau et al., 1972)*

Property owners whose properties were condemned for freeway construction were ostensibly reimbursed according to “fair market values.” However, property values were considerably depressed due to historical redlining (Lloyd, 2021). When the freeway routes were announced, land and property prices continued to dip. The artificially low cost of land facilitated the route choice, and in turn, prices dropped even further after Pasadena made its final route selection in 1964 (*Pasadena Star News*, 1964), quantified below. Residents of color struggled to find housing in the rest of Pasadena due to continued segregation; large swaths of Pasadena were inaccessible to the displaced residents of color, because the aforementioned racialized restrictions and discriminatory federal loan policies made it difficult for them to move into other city neighborhoods (Ramirez, 2021 and Shook, 2020).

**Table 5-6. Racial Composition of Households, Pasadena Study Area (Including Interchange)**

	Share, Non-white Households, Excluding Latino/a		Share, Households of Color, Including Latino/a	
	Under Freeway Footprint	Remainder of Study Area	Under Freeway Footprint	Remainder of Study Area
<b>Tract #4609</b>	64%	65%	73%	74%
<b>Tract #4616</b>	79%	86%	87%	91%
<b>Tract #4618</b>	40%	44%	61%	63%
<b>Total</b>	51%	68%	66%	78%

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961b, 1962a)*

### Indirect Housing Effects

The effects of the freeway’s construction extended beyond the direct displacement it caused. In the 1960s, the area adjacent to the freeway but not under the footprint itself (“nearby the freeway,” as defined in Chapter 3) suffered a loss of housing units. It continued to drop slightly in the 1970s. The areas “beyond the freeway” but still within the study area (as defined in Chapter 3) fluctuated, with the housing stock being roughly equivalent at the start and end of the study period. All the while, the city overall grew (See **Table 5-7**).

This analysis reveals negative spillover effects beyond the freeway itself in the case study area. The changes in housing stock, graphed in **Figure 5-21**, are consistent with the interpretation that the net externalities were negative, making locations across the study area less desirable for residential use and development. In other words, freeway construction harmed the surrounding neighborhood.

In 1960, homes in the study area were worth about 60 percent of the mean value in the City of Pasadena overall (See **Table 5-8**). For comparison, the average family income in the study area was about 71 percent of the city’s (See **Table 5-1**). In other words, owners around the freeway were less able to leverage their earnings into assets, a byproduct of racial housing segregation, redlining, and lending discrimination.

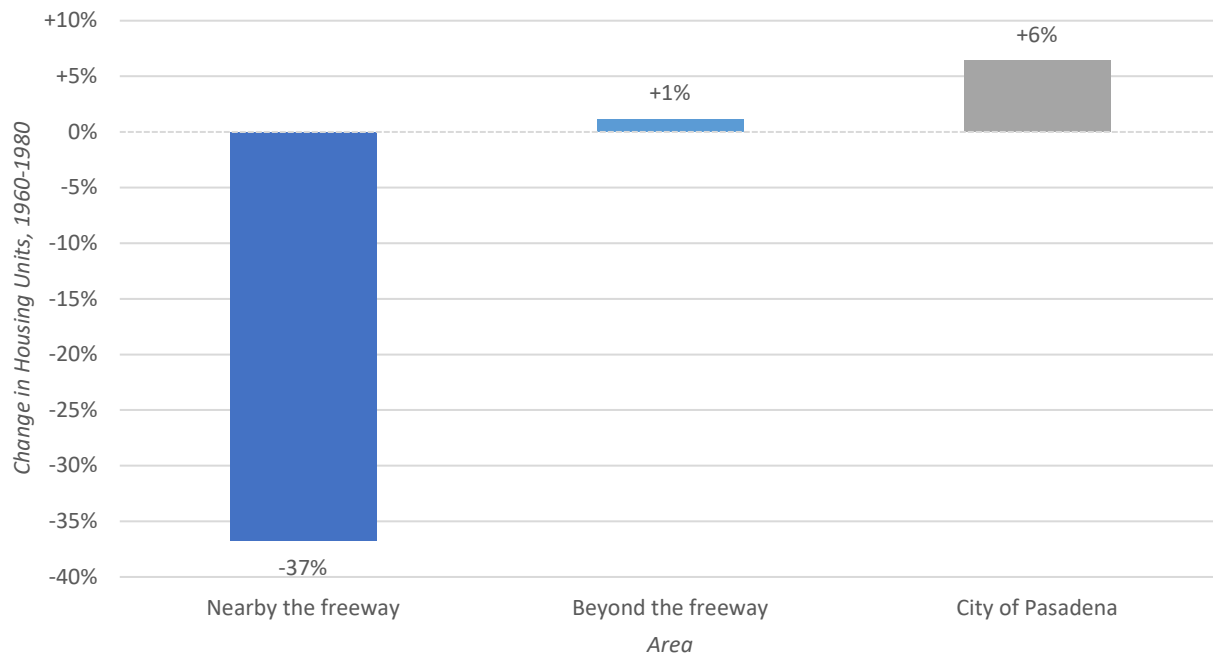
Disparities in home values persisted throughout the study period (See **Table 5-8**). Homes nearby the freeway were more adversely affected over time than neighboring homes beyond the freeway in the

**Table 5-7. Housing Units nearby and beyond the Freeway in the Pasadena Study Area**

	Nearby the Freeway	Beyond the Freeway	City of Pasadena
<b>1960</b>	1,062	2,747	46,687
<b>1970</b>	704	2,485	47,049
<b>1980</b>	672	2,779	49,683

Data source: calculated by authors from 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961b and Manson et al., 2022)

**Figure 5-21. Changes in Housing Units in the Pasadena Study Area, 1960-1980**



Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961b and Manson et al., 2022)

study area. Though the nearby homes actually had a higher value in 1960 (eight percentage points higher, relative to the city mean), the gap declined substantially by 1980 (to two percentage points, relative to the city mean). While home values in both areas, adjusted for inflation, did increase, they stayed well below the city average.

**Table 5-8. Mean Home Value in the Pasadena Study Area**

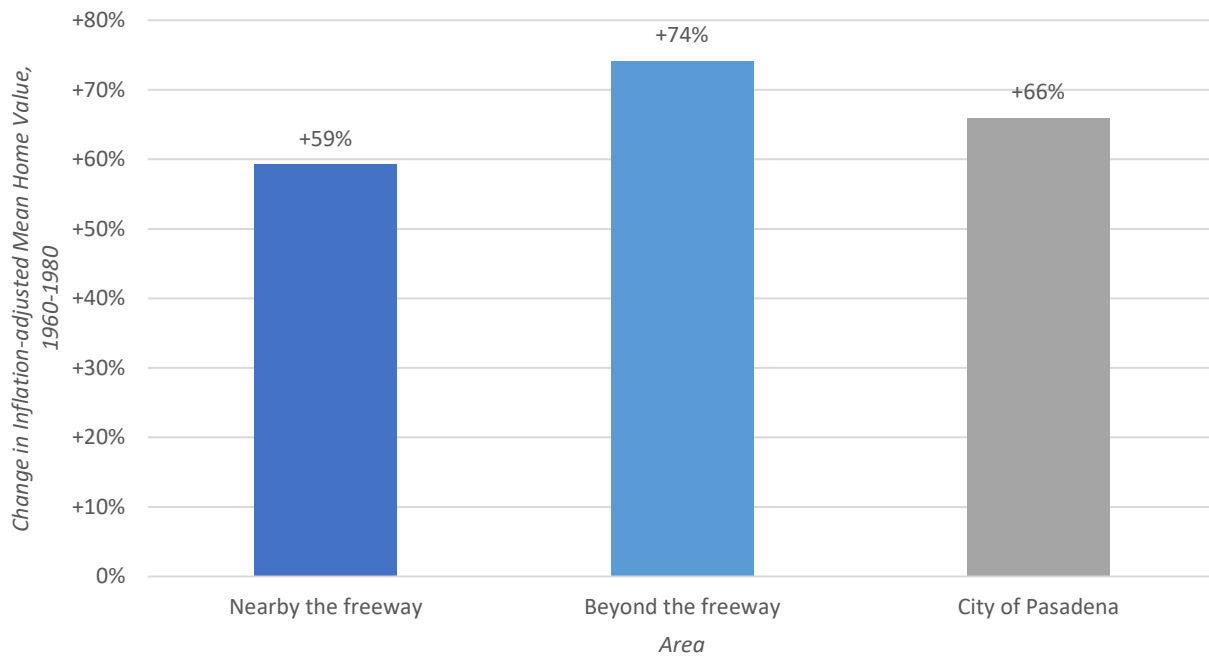
	Nearby the Freeway			Beyond the Freeway			City of Pasadena	
	Mean Home Value		Home Value Relative to City Mean	Mean Home Value		Home Value Relative to City Mean	Mean Home Value	
	Nominal \$	2022 \$		Nominal \$	2022 \$		Nominal \$	2022 \$
<b>1960</b>	\$13,697	\$134,235	68%	\$12,047	\$118,064	60%	\$20,200	\$197,966
<b>1970</b>	\$21,421	\$160,857	71%	\$19,514	\$146,537	65%	\$30,100	\$226,031
<b>1980</b>	\$59,897	\$213,787	65%	\$57,617	\$205,649	63%	\$92,074	\$328,635

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961b; U.S. Census Bureau et al., 1972; Manson et al., 2022; and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)*



**Figure 5-22** graphs home values between 1960 and 1980, after adjusting for inflation. Homes nearby the freeway lagged in value behind those in both the area beyond the freeway and the city overall, indicating that the freeway had a net negative impact on the nearby homes. The “beyond” area did prove an exception to the pattern of depressed relative appreciation of home values. However, it should be noted that homes in the “beyond” area started at a much lower value, only 60 percent of the average for the city (See **Table 5-8**). Overall, the bulk of the findings from this analysis support the conclusion that negative externalities outweighed positive externalities on home value.

**Figure 5-22. Changes in Mean Home Value in the Pasadena Study Area, 1960-1980**



*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961b; Manson et al., 2022; and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)*

Statistics for contract rent reveal another troubling pattern when comparing the relative cost of housing to income. In 1960, rents in the study area were lower than in Pasadena as a whole (See **Table 5-9**), but the income difference was even greater (See **Table 5-1**). This suggests that residents in the study area paid more of their income for housing. This greater financial hardship created an additional barrier to homeownership and asset-building.

Rents in the “nearby” area fell from 84 percent of the city average in 1960 to 76 percent in 1970 and then recovered to 83 percent in 1980. Rents in the “beyond” area also declined in the 1960s, from 83 percent to 75 percent, and declined further in the 1970s to 71 percent (See **Table 5-9**).

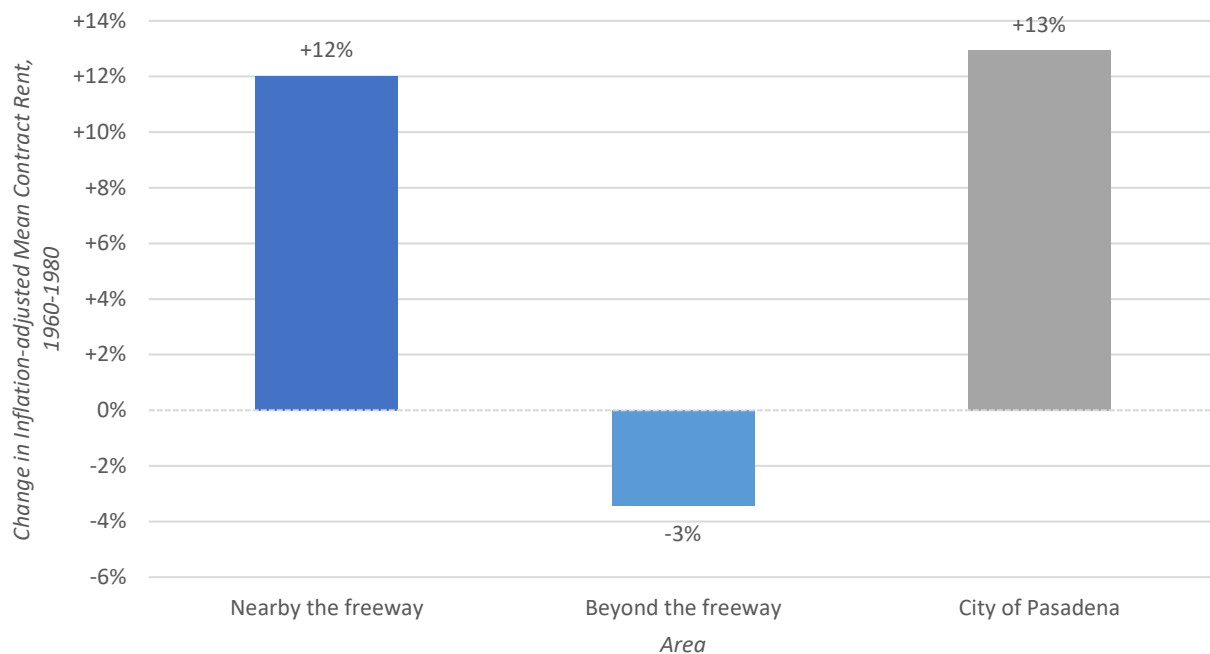
**Table 5-9. Mean Contract Rent in the Pasadena Study Area**

	Nearby the Freeway			Beyond the Freeway			City of Pasadena	
	Mean Contract Rent		Contract Rent Relative to City Mean	Mean Contract Rent		Contract Rent Relative to City Mean	Mean Contract Rent	
	Nominal \$	2022 \$		Nominal \$	2022 \$		Nominal \$	2022 \$
<b>1960</b>	\$66	\$647	84%	\$66	\$647	83%	\$79	\$774
<b>1970</b>	\$90	\$676	76%	\$88	\$661	75%	\$118	\$886
<b>1980</b>	\$203	\$725	83%	\$175	\$625	71%	\$245	\$874

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961b; U.S. Census Bureau et al., 1972; Manson et al., 2022; and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)*

Over time, changes in the rent levels paint a more complex picture than changes in home values. The noticeable drop in the relative rent levels indicates that early freeway planning and construction had a greater impact, perhaps due to the fact that residential turnover is typically faster among renters than homeowners. Changes at this stage indicate a net negative effect on the rental market. In the “nearby” area, rents relative to the municipal average recovered by 1980, but in the “beyond” area, relative rents continued to fall. **Figure 5-23** summarizes the total changes in contract rent between 1960 and 1980, adjusted for inflation. While the effect of the freeway on rents over time is mixed, the rent burden relative to income remained.

**Figure 5-23. Changes in Mean Contract Rent in the Pasadena Study Area, 1960-1980**



*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961b; Manson et al., 2022; and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)*

While direct and indirect displacement pushed away many residents of color, the area increased in its share of residents of color from 1960 to 1980 (See **Table 5-1**). In 1980, 93 percent of those living in the study area were residents of color, potentially as a result of white Pasadenans being more able to live farther from freeways and their disamenities.

### Environmental Effects

The freeway presented a health hazard to remaining residents of the study area. The dangers to human health posed by freeway proximity were already known by 1970, when the California legislature added a statute restricting siting of new schools within 500 feet of a freeway (*Environmental Quality Act of 1970*, 1970). In addition to the negative health effects brought about by emissions, increased vehicle traffic

also causes noise pollution. Residents of wealthier La Cañada Flintridge elsewhere along the I-210 route had been voicing their concerns about this noise since the 1980s. Noise pollution is particularly acute when a freeway is elevated, as the press reported at the time (Walker, 1984). But tellingly, I-210, while below ground for much of its path through central Pasadena, elevates when entering northwest Pasadena.

### A Comparison to the South

We close this chapter with an illustrative comparison of a nearby area that did stop a freeway altogether—indeed, a continuation of the very same route as went through northwest Pasadena. The freeway plans called for the Long Beach Freeway/I-710 to connect heading south from the main interchange in Pasadena, as the bottom of the plus sign of planned area freeways in **Figure 5-2**, but today, only a stump of the route exists.

White residents in South Pasadena and surrounding towns actively organized and staged a successful campaign to block the extension of the Long Beach Freeway through their community. As described above, South Pasadena had objected to freeway routing decisions earlier in the planning process, when coincidentally their interests aligned with those of northwest Pasadena. But their objections were only heeded later, once the section of the freeway that threatened their town directly was being readied and after the section through northwest Pasadena was set. Their organizing efforts made this part of the network so controversial that it was never finished, leaving a hole in the Los Angeles freeway system to this day (Scauzillo, 2019).

In 2017, South Pasadena residents stopped a revived proposal to construct this leg of the freeway completely in a tunnel. Because of its submerged nature, the tunnel would have had less direct impact on South Pasadena than the impact of the freeway segment that was built through northwest Pasadena. This also would have been a massively expensive plan, and yet even with money for extreme underground mitigations proposed, it was nixed (Scauzillo, 2019).

Thereby, South Pasadena and its neighbors avoided being along Interstate 710, one of the busiest cargo corridors in the U.S. I-710 connects to the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, through which collectively flow around 40 percent of U.S. container imports; its huge volume of truck traffic has earned it the nickname the “diesel death zone” for its many adverse health effects on communities of color south of central Los Angeles (Uranga, 2022; Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation, 2022; Treebumrung and Lee, 2022; and Wasserman et al., 2022).

In contrast, the northern spur of the Foothill Freeway/I-210 was sited as planned and built with little delay. Lack of political recognition for the voices of northwest Pasadena residents, many of whom were people of color, and the groundwork laid by Pasadena officials made that route location seem pre-ordained and gave no heed to residents’ frustrations and concerns. Thus, rationalized by Pasadena’s General Plan as the optimal location for the new freeway and characterized as “blighted” and ready for urban renewal by city officials, Pasadena’s neighborhoods of color were divided by design. In turn, some of their residents were displaced, while those who remained inherited increased environmental

degradation and adverse health effects. Meanwhile, freeway construction was rerouted elsewhere and abandoned altogether in South Pasadena, a neighborhood that was primarily white, politically organized, and wealthier. Such stark contrasts live on in the freeway maps of the area today.

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## 6. Pacoima: Assessing the Historical Impacts of Freeway Construction on a San Fernando Valley Neighborhood of Color

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## Introduction

If northwest Pasadena was sliced by a freeway, Pacoima was minced by them. The largely white residents of the San Fernando Valley, north of the Los Angeles Basin in the City of Los Angeles, pushed most freeways to Pacoima, where three major freeway segments cut through an ethnically diverse but largely disenfranchised neighborhood that was left virtually absent from public participation and decision-making processes.

Pacoima is intersected and encircled by three freeways, the Golden State Freeway/Interstate 5, a different segment of the Foothill Freeway/Interstate 210 from Pasadena, and the Simi Freeway/State Route 118, which were planned and built over the course of almost three decades (from the 1950s to the 1970s) (See **Figures 6-6** and **6-7**). We focus on the last, the Simi Freeway/SR-118, for our primary analysis in this chapter. When these freeways were being built, Pacoima was a thriving, diverse community, inhabited by a population that included Hispanic, Asian, Black, and white residents. Despite the significant physical destruction and displacement that the three freeways brought, we could find little evidence of organized opposition in Pacoima to any of the freeway projects. Newspapers, planning documents and civic records occasionally mention Pacoima only as the site for the path of the freeways, but they fail to report on its inhabitants, their displacement, or their sentiment.

Adjacent communities, on the other hand, reacted visibly to the proposed neighboring segments of the same freeways. An abundance of archival documentation discusses community organizing, engagement, opposition, and action against freeway projects in whiter neighborhoods to Pacoima's west, such as Arleta, Granada Hills, Mission Hills and Northridge. The absence of historical documentation addressing the freeways in Pacoima may be reflective of important racial biases in the planning process and raises questions about the families and businesses that were silently displaced. The case of Pacoima's freeways illustrates how planners often chose neighborhoods of color as sites for infrastructure projects that displaced individuals and decimated communities. It also exposes flaws in participatory planning processes, where white, affluent interests dominated the decision-making process and eventually succeeded, at the expense of disempowered groups of color.

In the Pacoima case study area, the Simi Freeway destroyed over 200 housing units, displacing about 800 to 900 residents. Most displaced and affected households comprised people of color. We also find negative impacts on housing adjacent to the freeway, lowering change in the number of units and inflation-adjusted home values, relative to changes in the city's overall, though rents adjusted after an initial drop.

In addition to the immediate destruction and displacement that the freeways caused in Pacoima, their legacy persistently contributes to the area's environmental degradation and spatial injustice to this day. Today, the area is among the most polluted in California. Numerous state and federal agencies, as well as non-profit civic organizations have recognized the need to identify and address environmental degradation caused largely by the freeways.

## Pacoima Context

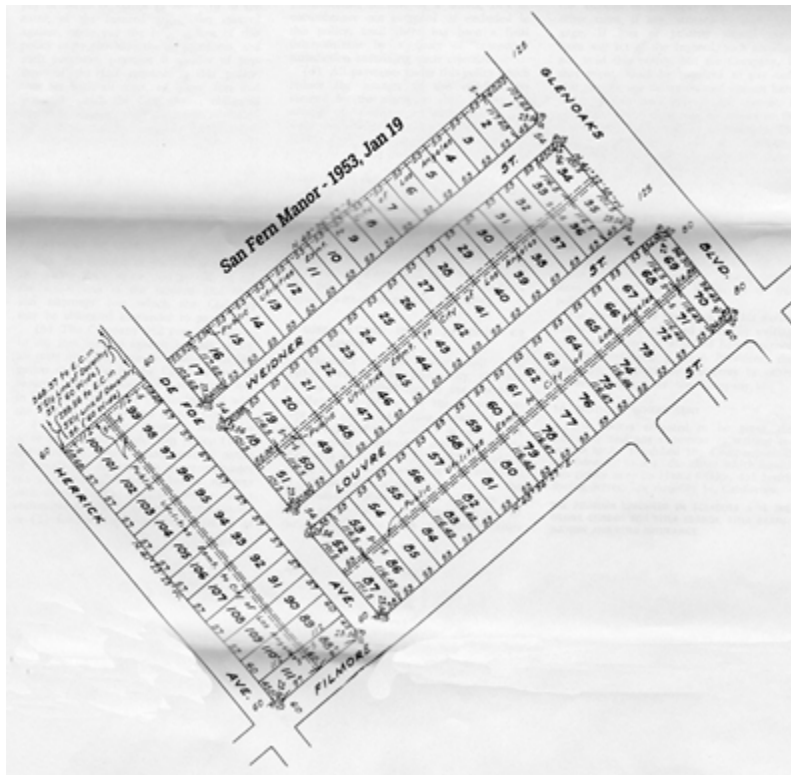
Pacoima is a subsection of the City of Los Angeles located in the northeastern part of the San Fernando Valley, today low-income and predominantly Hispanic compared to the rest of the Valley. Largely agricultural land during the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Valley started growing as a residential suburb in the 1940s, a process accelerated by military contracts during the Second World War. With development continuing at a rapid pace over the next three decades (Preston, 1965 and Kotkin and Ozuna, 2002), population in the San Fernando Valley grew from about 381,000 to 814,000 residents, an increase of 114 percent, from 1950 to 1980 (Manson et al., 2022 and *Los Angeles Times*, 2010).<sup>12</sup> The vast majority of Valley neighborhoods were almost totally white, with Pacoima being one of few exceptions. Indeed, Pacoima has a rich legacy of ethnic diversity, as railroads, agriculture, and early land speculation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century drew a diverse population to the area. Mexican migrants flocked to the San Fernando Valley as early as 1920, fleeing war and seeking employment opportunities. At the same time, Japanese farmers came in search of arable land. White landowners enacted the state Alien Land Laws of 1913 and 1920 to restrict land ownership, especially among Japanese migrants. Nevertheless, the Japanese found ways to continue farming despite the discriminatory laws. Finally, until the 1930s, only a few Black residents lived in Pacoima. However, following the Second World War, first responding to the demand for labor by military contractors, the Black population steadily increased into the mid-1960s, migrating to the region for employment opportunities (Jackson, 2019 and deGuzman, 2014).

## Demographics, Housing, and Residential Segregation in Pacoima

Unlike Pasadena, Pacoima was relatively undeveloped and even agricultural until the 1950s. During this decade, the San Fernando Valley and Pacoima experienced an unprecedented population boom (*Los Angeles Sentinel*, 1956a, 1956b, 1956c, 1956d). In April 1956, the *Los Angeles Sentinel* (1956a) reported that the price of land in one development, Pacoima Park Estates, was soaring. “The heart of the thriving San Fernando Valley,” Pacoima earned the boosterish description in the press of “...the world’s fastest growing residential area” (*Los Angeles Sentinel*, 1956d, p. A4). But uniquely, a significant amount of housing built in Pacoima throughout the 1950s was designed to appeal to Black residents. The *California Eagle*, read primarily by Black Angelenos, consistently ran advertisements for housing developments in Pacoima and invited readers to attend free Sunday brunches at a furnished model home (Jackson, 2019 and *California Eagle*, 1957). The ads celebrated “a magnificent new community in the heart of [the] San Fernando Valley,...just minutes away from shopping centers, schools, parks, churches, and transportation” (*California Eagle*, 1957, p. 12). One development, the Joe Louis Homes, borrowed the name of the Black heavyweight boxing champion to attract Black residents (though Louis himself had no relationship to the project nor knowledge of it). Additional units were built at San Fern Manor in 1953 (See **Figure 6-1**) and in the San Fernando Gardens Housing Project in 1955, among others. Pacoima, along with Watts in south Los Angeles, was the only area in the entire City of Los Angeles that accepted

12. Estimates based on authors’ calculations using census tract data for 1950 and 1980 and a slightly modified *Los Angeles Times* neighborhood boundary (Manson et al., 2022 and *Los Angeles Times*, 2010)



**Figure 6-1. San Fern Manor Tract, Built in 1953**

Source: Tract No. 17691, 1953

GI loans from “colored” people. Thus, by the 1960s, Pacoima had become a recognized and desirable housing destination for Black families from Greater Los Angeles and as one of the few places in the San Fernando Valley that welcomed them (See **Figure 6-2**). Pacoima was often seen as the center of Black life in the Valley (See **Figure 6-3**). As the neighborhood grew, housing prices steadily climbed from an average of \$7,000 advertised in 1949 to \$11,999 in 1953 (Jackson, 2019).

As a result of these housing trends, Pacoima was far more racially diverse than the County and the City of Los Angeles and especially the San Fernando Valley. In 1960, Los Angeles County and City had a large share of non-Hispanic white residents (81% and 73%, respectively), with the San Fernando Valley 92 percent white. However, the Pacoima study area was composed of 70 percent people of color (42% Black; 26% Latino/a, and 2% other people of color) and just 31 percent white residents (See **Table 6-1**). According to our interviewees, most Latino/a residents lived west of San Fernando Road. Japanese Americans also lived west of San Fernando Road and towards the Hanson Hills neighborhood (Pacoima Civic Leader 2, 2021; Pacoima Civic Leader 3, 2021; and Pacoima Civic Leader 4, 2021). From San Fernando Road east, the population was mostly Black (Jackson, 2019). Pamela Broadous, one of 11 children of Hellery and Rosa Broadous, who moved to Pacoima in 1953 (See **Figure 6-4**), remembered,

**Figure 6-2. Pacoima Resident at the Joe Louis Homes, 1951**



*Source: Mazie McGee at the Joe Louis Homes in 1951, 1951*

**Figure 6-3. A Birthday Party in Pacoima, 1951**



*Source: Paxton Street: Wilson Family Birthday Party in 1954, 1954*

“It was like a little United Nations on [my] block. It was a long block, but it was African American, Filipino, Hispanic, white, Asian...and that was the beauty of the community. The neighbors taught my mother to cook Mexican food” (Jackson, 2019, p. 158).

Table 6-1. Demographics of Pacoima Study Area and Comparisons

	Los Angeles County	City of Los Angeles	San Fernando Valley	Pacoima Study Area
<b>1960</b>				
<b>Total Population</b>	6,038,771	2,479,015	814,469	18,883
<b>Share, Residents of Color</b>	19%	27%	8%	70%
<b>Share, Black</b>	8%	14%	1%	42%
<b>Share, Latino/a</b>	10%	11%	6%	26%
<b>Share, Other Residents of Color</b>	2%	3%	1%	2%
<b>Share, Non-Hispanic White</b>	81%	73%	92%	30%
<b>Median Family Income, 1960 \$</b>	\$7,046	\$6,896	\$8,016*	\$5,941*
<b>1980</b>				
<b>Total Population</b>	7,477,503	2,966,850	1,073,278	23,644
<b>Share, Residents of Color</b>	47%	52%	27%	93%
<b>Share, Black</b>	13%	17%	3%	28%
<b>Share, Latino/a</b>	28%	28%	19%	64%
<b>Share, Other Residents of Color</b>	7%	8%	5%	1%
<b>Share, Non-Hispanic White</b>	53%	48%	73%	7%
<b>Median Family Income, 1980 \$</b>	\$21,125	\$19,467	\$24,759*	\$17,904*

Note: \* Estimated using interpolation of income brackets

Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1963, 1980)

Figure 6-4. Broadous Family, 1950s



Source: Broadous-Duncan, n.d.

The San Fernando Valley had covenants and formal and informal racial restrictions that confined non-whites to a few pockets like Pacoima (Barraclough, 2011). Therefore, Pacoima was surrounded by more affluent, predominantly white neighbors to the west in Arleta, to the northwest in San Fernando, and to the north in Lake View Terrace. These white neighborhoods to the west in the San Fernando Valley had more expensive housing (Pacoima Resident 5, 2021). Racial covenants explicitly prohibited homes in these areas from being leased, sold, or occupied by colored residents. Even after the milestone U.S. Supreme Court case *Shelley v. Kramer* in 1948 ruled that enforcement of the racial covenants violated the Constitution, segregation continued in the San Fernando Valley. According to the San Fernando Valley Fair Housing Council, only one Black family managed to find a home in a white neighborhood between 1950 and 1960, and Black renter applicants often had less than a one percent chance of being accepted by landlords with vacancies. Owners and managers believed that they did not have to adhere

to the state's fair housing laws unless they were forced to do so by lawsuits through the courts (Slater, 2021; Nelson et al., n.d.; and Fair Housing Council of the San Fernando Valley, 1966).

Other people of color in Pacoima were Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino residents who immigrated to Southern California due to economic opportunities in the area prior to the Second World War. But Asians faced a unique challenge to acquiring property because of the state's Alien Land Laws, discussed above, which prevented immigrants from purchasing real estate (Ferguson, 1947 and Gaines and Tam Cho, 2004).<sup>13</sup> And as mentioned, the federal government forcibly removed the largest Asian American group, Japanese Americans, during the Second World War, leading them to have to sell property at low value (Nakanishi, 2009). According to former Pacoima resident Nancy Takayama, "When the Japanese came to live here in the San Fernando Valley, no one would sell them land outside of Pacoima. So, the block where my family ended up purchasing a house in 1952 had maybe about five or six Japanese American families....Anything west of San Fernando Road had this enormous amount of Japanese American families" (Jackson, 2019, pp. 101–102). Similarly, Patricia Takayama, a resident of Pacoima in the 1950s, remembered a substantial Japanese population living in the area because "it was a place where they could buy homes and not suffer a lot of discrimination" (Jackson, 2019, p. 104). She also recalled that Black people were only allowed to live on the east side of San Fernando Road (Jackson, 2019).

Like Pasadena (See **Figure 5-1**), parts of Pacoima were graded by HOLC in 1939 (See **Figure 6-5**). A section of central Pacoima was categorized red—the largest and one of the few red areas in the San Fernando Valley. But the rest of Pacoima was not given a better category. Unlike the more established suburbs at the time, most of the area was not graded at all, as the land was still used for agricultural purposes. As not having a designation also meant not being designated as desirable places for lending for financial institutions, the non-graded areas thus likely suffered from the same economic disadvantages as the "hazardous" blocks. As in Pasadena, other areas beyond were effectively closed to people of color.

Within Pacoima, residents struggled to develop affordable housing for local residents. At the time, the only major housing subsidy program was public housing, funded by the federal government and administered by local housing authorities. This program was established prior to the Second World War to help low-income families secure decent, safe, and affordable housing. But, as with other public programs, public housing was entangled with societal issues and systemic problems. Affordable housing was not seen as an absolute right but a privilege for the "worthy" poor, ideally working, traditional families. Because of financial considerations, projects were overly concentrated in areas with relatively cheap land and low-priced properties that could be purchased and cleared. These were, not surprisingly, redlined areas, lower-income areas, and areas of color. As more people of color gained access to public

13. The law remained on the books until 1952, when it was declared unconstitutional by the California Supreme Court (Gaines and Tam Cho, 2004).

**Figure 6-5. HOLC 1939 Redlining Map, with Pacoima Study Area Circled**

Sources: Nelson et al., n.d. and authors

housing, many nearby white residents left (Stoloff, 2004).<sup>14</sup> In Los Angeles, many of the neighborhoods targeted by the Housing Authority for public housing were in disadvantaged communities, including Pacoima. Local activists in Pacoima actively lobbied for a public housing project because of the dire economic needs of many residents. They succeeded in constructing the only public housing project in the San Fernando Valley (Bloch, 2020; Pacoima Historical Society, 2019; and Pledger, 1977). Yet while it provided much needed affordable housing, it also reinforced spatial stratification and segregation, geographically concentrating and isolating people of color and poor people in that location.

14. This illustrates the paradoxical dilemma of liberal progress. New legal rights are not evenly implemented but follow existing inequality contours. This produces unexpected consequences that harm those who the change was designed to help, while the privileged are able stall and resist progress.

## Freeway Planning and Construction

### Pacoima in the Freeway Network

The Golden State Freeway/Interstate 5 was the first freeway to reach the northern San Fernando Valley (See **Figure 6-6**). The six-mile stretch between Osborne Street and the City of San Fernando was one of the final segments completing the 29-mile freeway, from near downtown Los Angeles (intersecting the Santa Ana Freeway southeast of the Los Angeles Civic Center) up through the San Fernando Valley (intersecting the San Diego Freeway/Interstate 405 in the North Valley) (See **Figures 4-6** and **6-7**). When the state Division of Highways chose the route in 1953 (*Los Angeles Times*, 1960), it faced opposition from groups of color in East Los Angeles, at the other end of the route from Pacoima (*Los Angeles Times*, 1953). Nevertheless, construction began, and the freeway was open to traffic a decade later in November 1963 (*La Habra Star*, 1963).

The I-5 freeway solidified the boundary between Pacoima and whiter Arleta to the west. In the 1950s, Pacoima and Arleta were considered the same neighborhood, but the former was gaining residents of color, while the latter remained white and more affluent. By the 1960s, Arleta residents campaigned to create a separate identity. The I-5 functionally served to physically separate Arleta from Pacoima, thus strengthening and reifying the race and class housing segregation between the two areas and reinforcing Arleta's "secession" drive (Water and Power Associates, n.d.; Mohan, 1993; and Los Angeles Department of City Planning, 1974a).<sup>15</sup>

The Foothill Freeway/Interstate 210—the same one driven through Pasadena's neighborhoods of color (See **Figures 5-5** and **5-10**)—also extended up to Pacoima's northwest (See **Figure 6-6**). This five-mile stretch was part of the broader regional highway network described in Chapter 4, the final northern section of a connection between the Valley (intersecting the Golden State Freeway/I-5 in Sylmar) and the Inland Empire to the southeast (See **Figures 4-6**, **4-7**, and **6-7**). The route was chosen in 1965, and construction began in 1968. It opened in 1980, delayed largely because of the challenging terrain (Campbell, 1980).

Finally, studies for the Simi Freeway/State Route 118 (later renamed the Ronald Reagan Freeway), the primary focus of this chapter, began in the mid-1950s, though only in 1964 was a final route selected (See **Figure 6-6**). One of the newest freeways in Greater Los Angeles, the full 19-mile freeway runs from the Foothill Freeway/I-210 in Pacoima west to Ventura County (See **Figure 6-7**). It was completed in 1979, after several delays (Burleigh, 1970; Lubas, 1977; and *Los Angeles Times*, 1977).

15. Even after the I-5 freeway barrier was erected, planning documents in the 1970s and an organizing drive in the 1990s show Arleta residents seeking not to be associated with Pacoima (Los Angeles Department of City Planning, 1974a and Mohan, 1993).

Figure 6-6. Freeway Siting in Pacoima



Base imagery: Google, 2023



Figure 6-7. Freeway Siting in the North Valley



Base imagery: Google, 2023

### Alternate Routes and a Neighboring Freeway Revolt

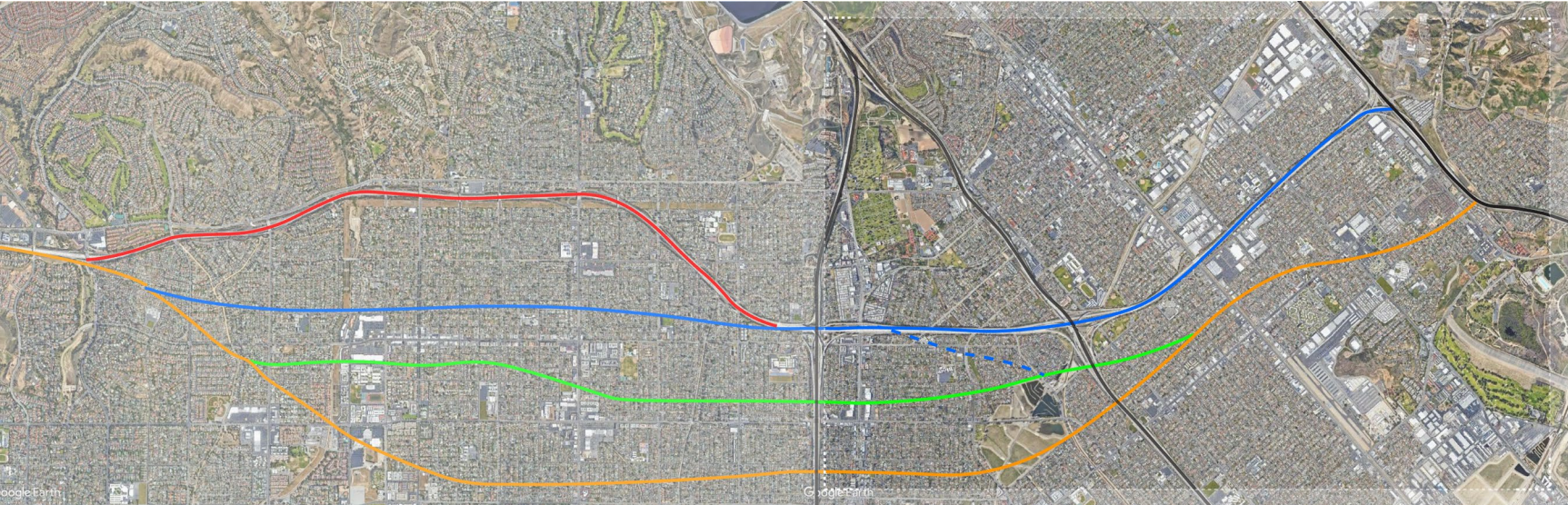
Though freeway routes through Pacoima may not have been welcome by many residents, there is no evidence in available sources that they were ever locally contested, at least in an organized manner. On the other hand, as in Pasadena, Pacoima demonstrates the much greater sway that whiter neighboring communities had over freeway siting. Areas to the west of Pacoima were much more successful making themselves seen and heard. As early as 1961, residents of South Arleta, just southwest of Pacoima, protested street closings for the construction of the Golden State Freeway/I-5, which would lock them in a “20-block island,” cut off from major access routes (See **Figure 6-8**) (Michel, 1961). But the most significant freeway revolt in the Valley—and the most striking contrast to the way Pacoima was treated—arose against the Simi Freeway/SR-118.

**Figure 6-8. South Arleta Residents Protest against Freeway Construction, 1961**



*Source: Pacoima Street Blockade Protested, 1961*

Figure 6-9. Simi Freeway/SR-118 Alternative Freeway Routes, with Pacoima at the East (Right) End



Base imagery: Google, 2023

In 1960, a Valley-wide Committee on Streets and Highways and Transportation began collaborating with local industrial organizations and associations, chambers of commerce and planning commissions to study possible pathways for the Simi Freeway and corresponding right-of-way purchases (*Valley Times* West Valley Bureau, 1960). While sources report widespread agreement that the freeway across the Valley was necessary and practical, whiter communities west of Pacoima in Chatsworth, Granada Hills, Mission Hills, and Northridge all opposed building it through *their* neighborhoods. By 1963, anticipation over the last segment of the freeway had grown considerably. Local civic organizations loudly voiced their position and advocated for each of their perceived best interests. As a result, the state's Division of Highways presented four different routes—as in Pasadena, color-coded: Orange, Green, Blue, and Red (See Figure 6-9).

The Valley State College (today, CSUN) and the Northridge Chamber of Commerce joined forces in favor of the northern (Red) route. They adamantly opposed the southern (Orange) route, as it would damage the development of the college and complicate the existing campus masterplan (Jay Brown, 1964 and

**Figure 6-10. Anti-freeway Protest Meeting of Valley Homeowners**



Source: Dean, 1965

*Valley Times* West Valley Bureau, 1963). The Homeowners Freeway Committee, along with the chambers of commerce of Granada Hills, Mission Hills, and Sepulveda favored the southern (Orange) route, which would spare their residential neighborhoods (Jay Brown, 1964 and Burleigh, 1964). Mission Hills residents condemned the Red route because it would create a “Chinese Wall” around their neighborhood (Estes, 1964, p. San Fernando Valley 8). Local newspapers reported extensively on the “showdown battle” (Burleigh, 1964, p. 12) between the two parties, and correspondence among the organizations’ leadership demonstrates the importance of the matter (See **Figure 6-10**) (Burleigh, 1964 and Jay Brown, 1964).

All the while, though, the different routing options would have different effects on Pacoima at their eastern end. The choice of whether the freeway ran through Chatsworth, Granada Hills, Mission Hills, and/or Northridge did not just affect them, because the planned routes through each neighborhood stretched into the area around Pacoima (See **Figure 6-9**). Yet debates between white residents and business interests to the west received all the press and governmental attention.

State officials presented the four routes to the public in two separate hearings to allegedly give local government officials, civic groups, and all individuals an opportunity to express their views. Over two thousand citizens attended the hearings in January 1964 (See **Figure 6-11**). Ultimately, a combination of the Blue route (through Pacoima and Mission Hills) and complementary Red route (through Chatsworth and Granada Hills) for the Simi Freeway was adopted (See **Figures 6-6, 6-7, and 6-9**). The Division of Highways concluded that this route would affect 174 fewer homes than the other alternatives and cost \$2.9 million less (*Los Angeles Times*, 1963, 1965 and Estes, 1964). In response, members of the Homeowners Freeway Committee, a group composed of residents again to the west of Pacoima, raised funds and hired a private planning consultant to prove otherwise (Burleigh, 1964). They promised “surprising new evidence” that the selected route would compromise 1,200 more homes and cost \$1 million more than estimated (Burleigh, 1964, p. 12). This evidence, though, was never released, and their efforts proved unsuccessful.

In contrast to these public hearings and debates, the Division of Highways chose the route through Pacoima, four of SR-118’s 11 miles, without recorded input from local residents and with little if any recorded discussion, as merely a consequence following from their decision on the routing to the west. But we found no record in the press, interviews, or relevant archives that Pacoima’s civic organizations or residents of color were invited to or participated in any of the hearings or formal planning processes (To be sure, the records that exist today are themselves filtered, but either Pacoima’s residents were not given the ability to participate, or authorities discounted their participation to the degree that their involvement was not preserved.). Unlike their wealthier, predominantly white neighbors to the west, Pacoima residents lacked political clout and economic power to engage in the planning process that took place prior to the route selection. Indeed, one interviewed civic leader remembered growing up in Pacoima after her parents moved to a house on Filmore and Judd Streets in 1955. Her mother and their neighbors recalled that when SR-118 was built, none of them were ever asked for their opinion (Pacoima Civic Leader 5, 2021).

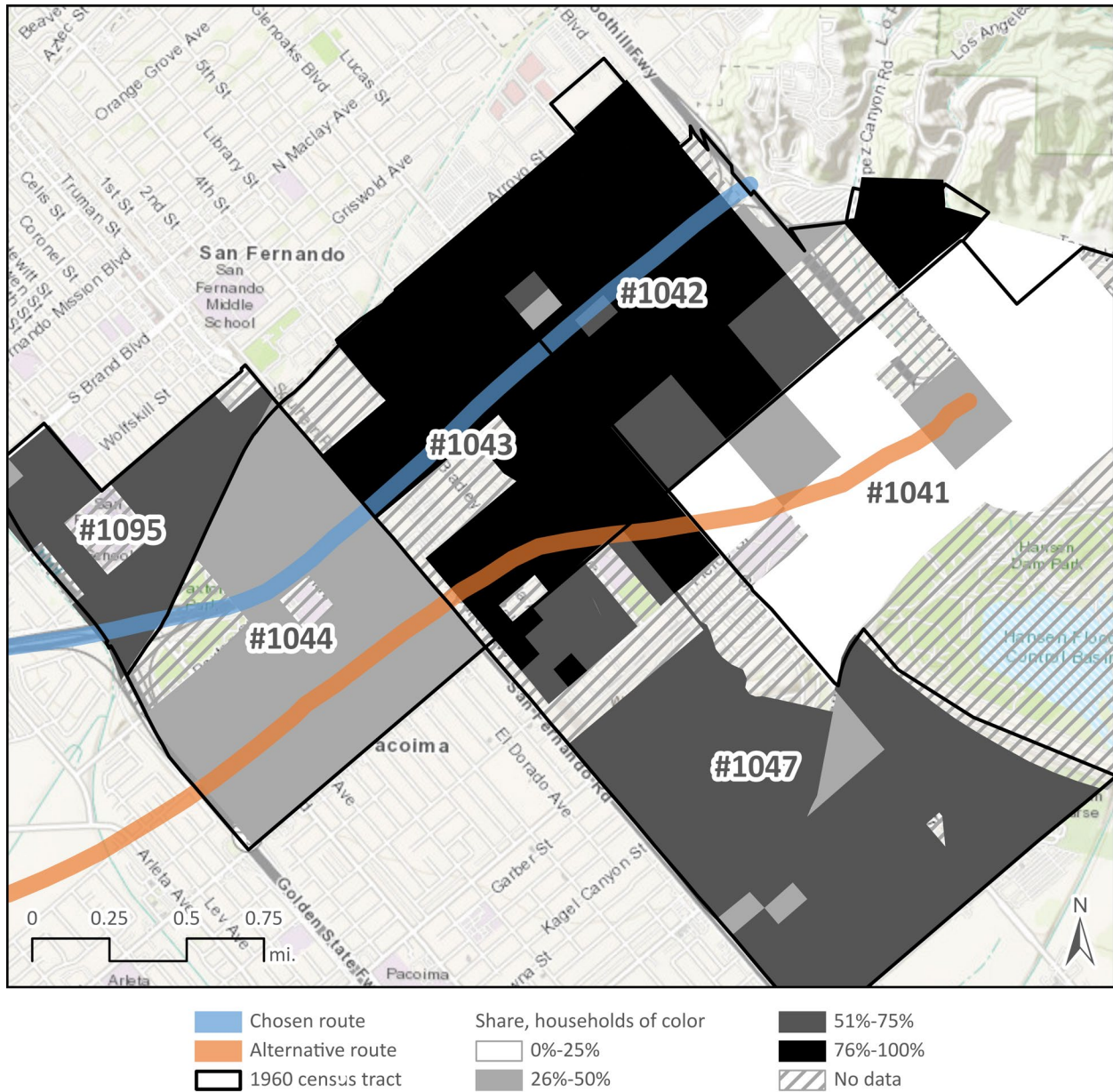
**Figure 6-11. Simi Freeway Hearing**

*Source: Dean, 1964*

In spite or because of this lack of consultation, the Blue route chosen through Pacoima cut through more neighborhoods of color than the alternate Orange route would have. In Pacoima, the selected path ran through both residential and commercial parcels, while the Orange route not chosen would have traversed a range of residential areas, more densely populated to the west than at its east. **Figure 6-12** maps the share of households of color by census block in 1960. Residents of color made up a greater percentage of households under the actually constructed freeway footprint and in its surrounding blocks than for the alternative route.

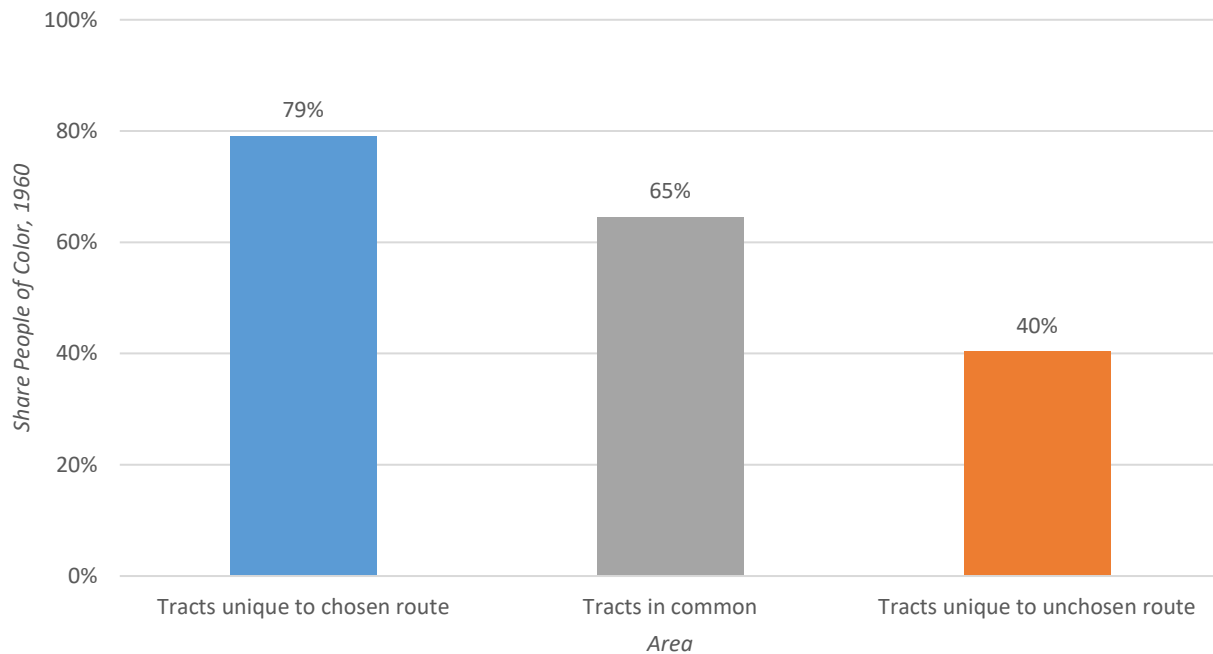
As in Pasadena (See **Figure 5-15**), the share of people of color in tracts with the chosen route was much higher than in tracts with the route not selected. In **Figure 6-13**, we divided tracts into three categories: tracts that included only the chosen Blue route, tracts that included both the chosen Blue and unchosen Orange routes, and tracts that included only the unchosen Orange route. The difference is striking, with

Figure 6-12. Pacoima Freeway Alternatives: Households of Color by Census Blocks, 1960



Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961a); base map: Esri, 2023b

nearly 80 percent of residents of the tracts unique to the Blue route people of color, compared to just over half that share in tracts unique to the Orange route. The gap between the unique chosen and unchosen areas was 39 percentage points more residents of color (See Appendix A for additional statistics).

**Figure 6-13. Pacoima Freeway Alternatives: Residents of Color by Census Tracts, 1960**

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1962a)*

The difference in median family income is not as clear.<sup>16</sup> **Figure 6-14** does not show any substantive variation in income across the three categories. However, disaggregating the tracts for the unchosen route, one subarea that would have been most impacted (Tract #1041) stands out, with a noticeably higher median income (\$7,440) (See Appendix A for additional statistics).

We found a disparity, albeit a small one, in home values (See **Figure 6-15**).<sup>17</sup> The mean home value for the area with only the chosen Blue route was about seven eighths of the average home value for the area with only the unchosen Orange route. Again, Tract #1041, slated to have been most impacted by the alternative route alone, had higher home values of \$18,000 (See Appendix A for additional statistics).

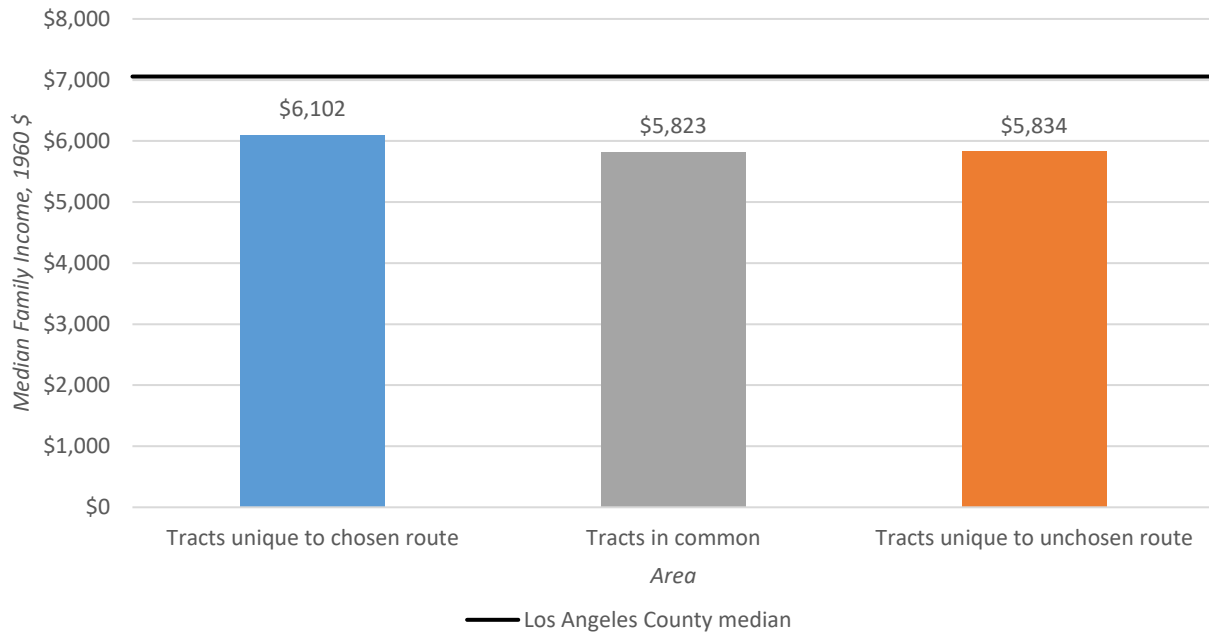
The chosen Blue route through Pacoima did affect fewer housing units than the alternative (See **Table 6-2**). But, nearly three-quarters of these households were occupied by non-white residents and another 12 percent were Hispanic households classified by the Census as white. All told, while the numbers paint

16. For reference, Los Angeles County's median family income in 1959 was \$7,046 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1963).

17. As a point of reference, the mean home value in 1960 in the City of Los Angeles was \$19,500 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961a).

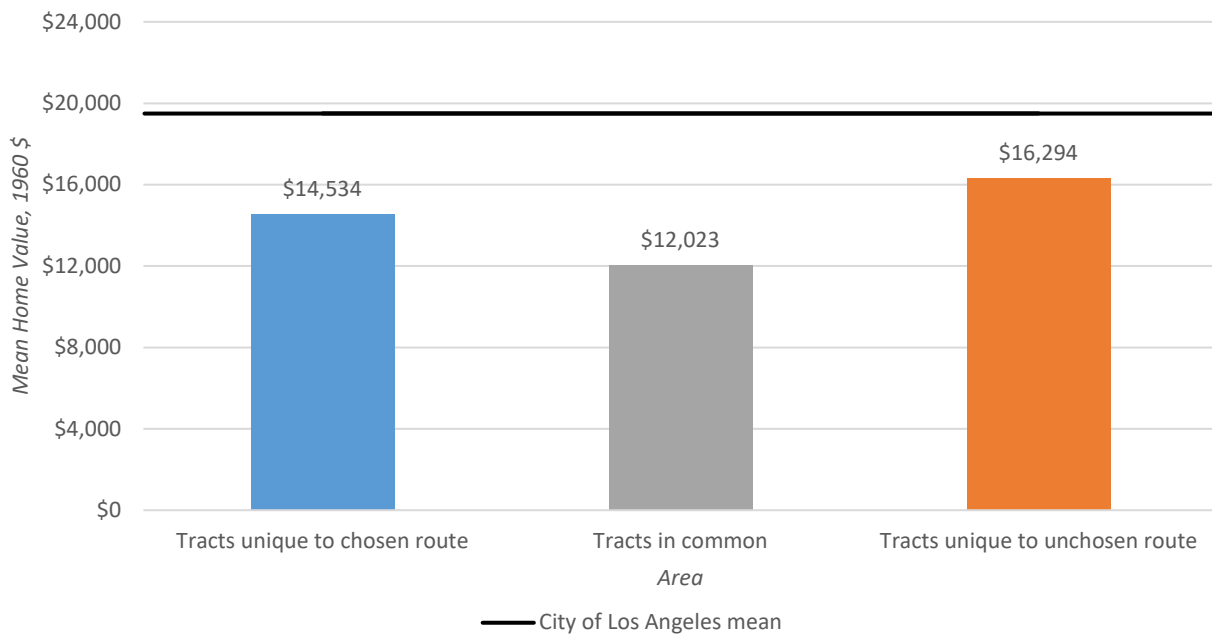


**Figure 6-14. Pacoima Freeway Alternatives: Interpolated Median Income by Census Tracts, 1960**



Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1962a, 1963)

**Figure 6-15. Pacoima Freeway Alternatives: Mean Home Value by Census Tracts, 1960**



Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961a)

a less clear-cut picture than in Pasadena (See **Table 5-3**), the Blue route through Pacoima did demonstrably have a greater negative effect on residents and especially neighborhoods of color. Scores more non-white Pacoima residents lay in the path of the chosen route than would have been with the alternative.

**Table 6-2. Comparative Impact of Pacoima Freeway Alternatives**

	<b>Chosen Blue Route Footprint</b>	<b>Unchosen Orange Route Footprint</b>
<b>Population</b>	720	1,128
<b>Housing Units</b>	173	277
<b>Households</b>	159	265
<b>Non-white Households, Excluding Latino/a</b>	116	42
<b>Share, Non-white Households, Excluding Latino/a</b>	73%	16%
<b>Households of Color, Including Latino/a</b>	135	131
<b>Share, Households of Color, Including Latino/a</b>	85%	49%

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961a)*

### Demolition and Displacement

The effects of the freeways on Pacoima were profound. Massive concrete structures replaced farmland, parks, public spaces, commerce, housing, and entire local streets. Below, we describe our quantitative and qualitative findings of these effects.

#### Housing

Freeway construction in Pacoima helped dampen the prior housing boom in Pacoima. While the area did not see an absolute decline in units, as in Pasadena, Census data do show a slowdown in the growth rate

of housing units in the Pacoima study area relative to the San Fernando Valley, a change that coincided with the construction of the SR-118 freeway (See **Table 6-3**).

**Table 6-3. Housing Units in Pacoima Study Area and Comparisons**

	Los Angeles County	City of Los Angeles	San Fernando Valley	Pacoima Study Area
<b>1950</b>	1,450,641	698,039	125,721	1,919
<b>1960</b>	2,142,139	935,507	256,155	4,702
<b>1970</b>	2,538,910	1,077,413	349,278	5,378
<b>1980</b>	2,853,653	1,188,935	423,201	5,798

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1952b, 1962a, 1972a, 1980)*

While the overall study area still net gained units, the freeway demolished hundreds of homes in its path. **Table 6-4** provides estimates using the actual freeway footprint, different from the unit counts in the previous section for the comparison of alternative routes, estimated using hypothetical footprints without ramps. SR-118 destroyed over 250 homes—over 300 using the high estimate methodology described in Chapter 3—displacing around 841 residents. The largest impact was in the northeastern area (Tract #1042) (See **Figure 3-8**), probably due to the fact the other tracts had less residential uses. The displacements in our study area made up a good share of the 1,500 properties one newspaper article gave as the total to be taken for the whole Simi Freeway/SR-118 over its course in the San Fernando Valley as of 1966 (*Los Angeles Times*, 1966b), though we have not verified that number by replicating calculations for the entire route.

Overall, the total number of homes destroyed by freeway construction was lower in Pacoima than in our Pasadena study area (See **Table 5-5**), largely due to the longer length of the freeway section in the Pasadena study and the difference in residential density (As noted earlier, Pasadena had significantly higher density, while Pacoima was continuing to develop.). Moreover, Pasadena was more impacted by other destructive activities such as urban renewal. Unlike in Pasadena, the housing stock in Pacoima in areas outside of the freeway footprint continued to grow, though again more slowly than for the rest of the San Fernando Valley (See **Table 6-3**), suggesting that the areas became less desirable as a residential space.

**Table 6-4. Estimated Housing Units Lost, Pacoima Study Area**

	Housing Units in 1960 Lost under Freeway		Net Change in Total Housing Units in Tract, 1960-1970	Housing Units Change in Parts of Tract Not under Freeway, 1960-1970
	Estimate	High Estimate	Estimate	Estimate
<b>Tract #1042</b>	-160	-203	+437	+618
<b>Tract #1043</b>	-38	-50	+51	+95
<b>Tract #1044</b>	-42	-54	+96	+144
<b>Tract #1095</b>	-11	-13	+92	+104
<b>Total</b>	-252	-322	+676	+963
<b>Occupancy Rate</b>	95%	95%	N/A	N/A

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 and 1970 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961a and U.S. Census Bureau et al., 1972)*

People of color lived in the homes under the freeway footprint. Counting Latino/a households, **Table 6-5** shows that both under the freeway and in the rest of the study area, households of color made up most of the population (99% of those under the footprint in Tract #1043). Compared to Pasadena (See **Table 5-6**), a relatively larger number of Latino/a households were present under the footprint, comprising over a quarter of those displaced. The Latino/a presence was particularly noticeable in the two westernmost tracts (Tracts #1044 and #1095), whereas Black households comprised a large majority in the middle of the study area. Though, as in Pasadena, non-Hispanic white households were slightly more present under the footprint than in the remainder of the study area, most of those displaced were residents of color.

The SR-118 and Pacoima's other freeways gobbled up whole streets. Approximately 90 percent of Fielding Street, a three-mile residential street, and the homes along it disappeared under the SR-118 freeway, leaving almost no trace of what it had once been. "Fielding went all the way through [Pacoima], and there were houses everywhere, but when [the freeway] got through, it wasn't that many

**Table 6-5. Racial Composition of Households, Pacoima Study Area**

	Share, Non-white Households, Excluding Latino/a		Share, Households of Color, Including Latino/a	
	Under Freeway Footprint	Remainder of Study Area	Under Freeway Footprint	Remainder of Study Area
<b>Tract #1042</b>	34%	88%	56%	92%
<b>Tract #1043</b>	89%	72%	99%	97%
<b>Tract #1044</b>	8%	2%	37%	33%
<b>Tract #1095</b>	0%	7%	57%	60%
<b>Total</b>	36%	45%	66%	71%

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961a, 1962a)*

houses left,” remembered one interviewed resident, who lived in one home in Pacoima with his parents and whose uncle lived in another (Pacoima Resident 1, 2021). Others recalled their parents and families being reluctant to move (Pacoima Resident 9, 2021 and Pacoima Resident 12, 2021). But their homes—most of which were only a decade old—sat in the path of the freeway and were seized by eminent domain with little warning and demolished (Pacoima Resident 1, 2021).

One resident who moved to Pacoima in 1963 was soon informed that her and her family’s home stood in the way of the freeway, and they had to relocate. For some reason, the house was never demolished, and she lamented having been displaced in vain (Pacoima Resident 13, 2021). Another resident and civic leader, the daughter of important spiritual leaders in the community, recalled that many members of their church congregation lived in proximity to the church but had to relocate because of the SR-118 freeway construction. “There were sections by the church, where there was house after house, and those houses were gone. Rows and rows of houses between Foothill and San Fernando Road were gone, just gone” (Pacoima Civic Leader 2, 2021).

Residential displacement persisted into the 1970s, as freeway widening and ramps demanded additional space. In 1971, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that 15 homes would be removed to accommodate changes in the plans for the freeways. At this point, members of the Los Angeles City Planning Commission did raise questions about displacements, arguing that homeowners were not aware of the

plans (Burleigh, 1971a). Commissioner David Moir complained to the State Division of Highways, “You mean the homes are to be acquired by the state and the people have no idea of it?” (Burleigh, 1971a, p. San Fernando Valley 6). A freeway planner’s response, per the article, was that “the proper public hearings on the probable freeway route had already been held some time ago” (Burleigh, 1971a, p. San Fernando Valley 6), but those affected had very likely not attended or truly been invited to the meetings in the first place.

### Businesses and Community Facilities

Even before the Simi Freeway passed through Pacoima, the neighborhood had lost a 40-acre park to the Golden State Freeway/I-5, which required 31 acres for a cloverleaf interchange. When the state purchased the area from the City Recreation and Park Commissioners in 1956, the parties agreed to compensate the community by building another park elsewhere (*Los Angeles Times*, 1956a, 1956b, 1956c). That promise remained unfulfilled. In fact, Pacoima is today among the most deprived Los Angeles neighborhoods in terms of access to green spaces (Pacoima Planning Professional 6, 2021 and Pacoima Planning Professional 7, 2021).

Nowhere in Pacoima is the imposing scale of the freeway system more visible than at San Fernando High School, which witnessed the construction of two freeways adjacent to it over the course of two decades. Prior to the freeways, hundreds of teenage students walked northwest on San Fernando Road and across Paxton Street to get to class. After the freeway was built, students could no longer cross the road to reach the school directly. Instead, they were forced to walk to the closest underpass or through a narrow tunnel that interviewees described as dark and dangerous. Despite numerous efforts to correct the connectivity to San Fernando High School, the SR-118 freeway continues to present an enormous physical obstacle for students (Pacoima Planning Professional 6, 2021; Pacoima Resident 5, 2021; and Pacoima Planning Professional 7, 2021).

Another victim of freeway construction was the Laurel Drive-in Theater (See **Figure 6-16**). Though it survived the construction of the Golden State Freeway/I-5, it was eventually demolished to make way for the Simi Freeway/SR-118. One interviewee who was raised in San Fern Manor vividly remembered the construction of the Simi Freeway because “it displaced the only entertainment we all had....We used to sit behind the Drive-in and watch for free because it was open....You could pull up a chair any summer and sit on the street and watch the movies that were there” (Pacoima Resident 5, 2021).

Many of the businesses that residents patronized disappeared, even if some of their own homes were spared. An interviewee recalled moving to Pacoima in the 1950s and going to a small family market on the corner of Chatsworth Drive and Laurel Canyon Boulevard. Shortly after the Golden State Freeway/I-5 was built, however, the market was replaced by a gas station (Pacoima Resident 4, 2021). Near Glenoaks and Paxton, one of Pacoima’s most important commercial intersections, several interviewed residents remembered the Hudson Shoe Store, the Shop Easy Grocery Market, a fish market, an ice cream parlor, and a liquor store, with a malt store close by called Herb’s Market (See **Figure 6-17**). When construction on the SR-118 freeway commenced in 1970, eminent domain claimed most of those businesses (Pacoima Civic Leader 4, 2021; Pacoima Resident 3, 2021; and Pacoima Resident 1, 2021).

Figure 6-16. The Laurel Drive-in Theater before Freeway Construction, 1964, and the SR-118 Freeway on the Same Site Today



Sources: Laurel Drive-in Aerial Shot, 1964 and Google, 2023

**Figure 6-17. Customer at Herb's Market**

Source: African American Customer at Herb's Market on Herrick and Paxton, *n.d.*

## Indirect Effects of Freeway Construction

### Housing

The freeway's effects on Pacoima's housing stock radiated out beyond the footprint itself. Despite the sustained growth of the San Fernando Valley, the area "nearby the freeway" (as defined in Chapter 3), though it was not under the footprint of the freeway itself, lost housing units in the 1960s. It only slightly recovered in the 1970s, not nearly regaining its original tally. In contrast, the area "beyond the freeway" within the study area (as defined in Chapter 3) continued to grow in the 1960s and 1970s, driven by the ongoing suburbanization of the Valley (See **Table 6-6**).

The effects of the freeway thus extended beyond its immediately adjacent areas, though not as clearly as in Pasadena (See **Table 5-7** and **Figure 5-21**). While Pacoima's housing stock beyond the freeway had a similar growth rate as housing in the city overall (See **Figure 6-18**), it most likely lagged behind that of the San Fernando Valley. To some degree beyond the freeway and to a great degree next to it, its siting, construction, and later use depressed development.

The value of homes nearby and beyond the freeway in the study area were much lower (around 66% of the value) than the mean for the City of Los Angeles in 1960 (See **Table 6-7**). As Pacoima residents made 86 percent of the city average family income that year (See **Table 6-1**), the data show that homeowners there were not as able to turn their income into assets like homes.

Over the 1960s and 1970s, the relative value of a home in the study area compared to the city overall fell further, in the areas both nearby and beyond the freeway. Moreover, the area nearby the freeway

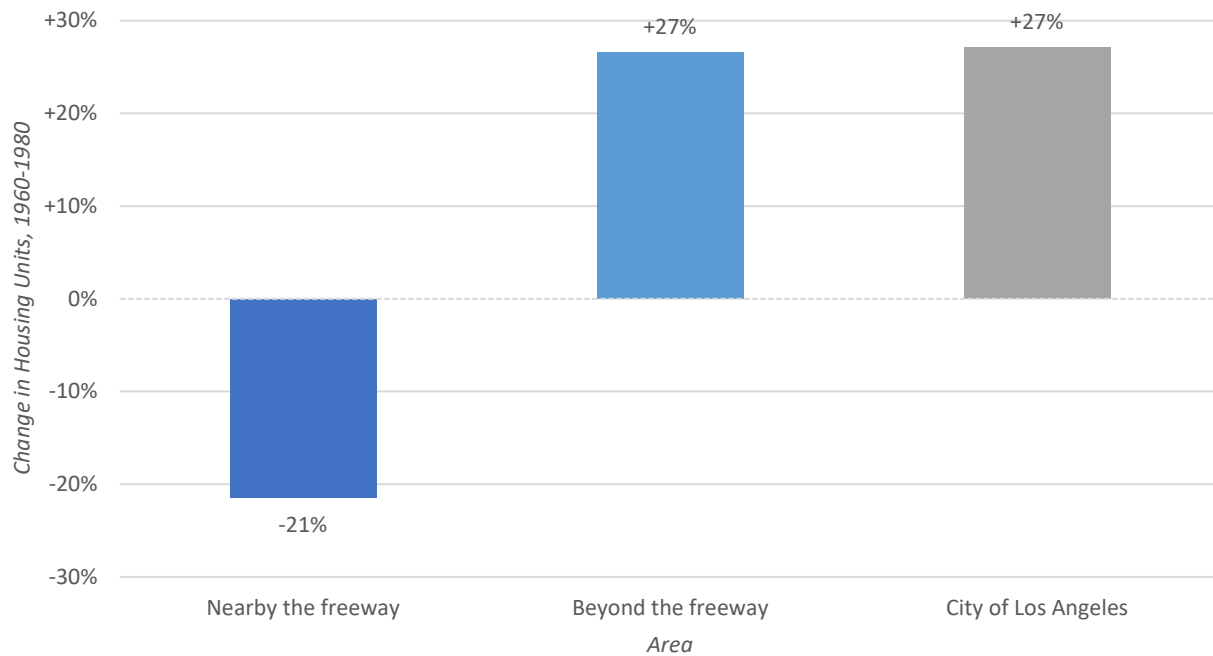


**Table 6-6. Housing Units nearby and beyond the Freeway in the Pacoima Study Area**

	Nearby the Freeway	Beyond the Freeway	City of Los Angeles
<b>1960</b>	523	2,654	935,507
<b>1970</b>	366	3,037	1,077,413
<b>1980</b>	411	3,358	1,188,935

Data source: calculated by authors from 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961a and Manson et al., 2022)

**Figure 6-18. Changes in Housing Units in the Pacoima Study Area**



Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961a and Manson et al., 2022)

had lower home values every decade than the area beyond it, though in absolute terms, home values in both places continued to increase, even adjusted for inflation (See **Table 6-7**).

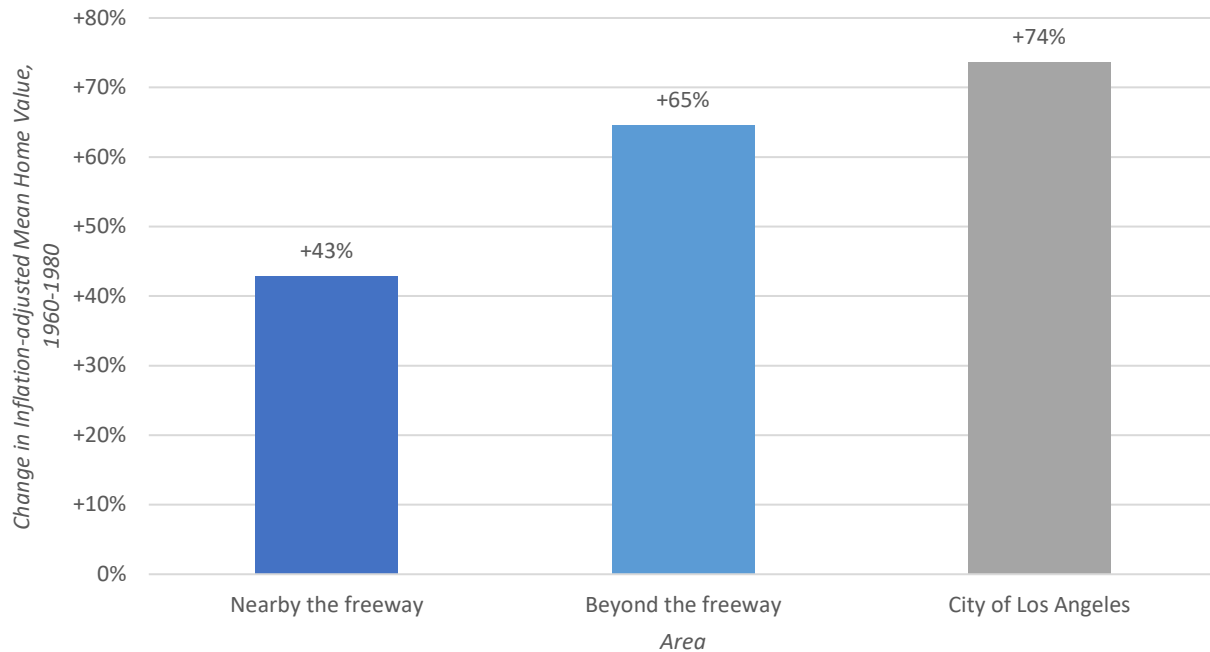
Table 6-7. Mean Home Value in the Pacoima Study Area

	Nearby the Freeway			Beyond the Freeway			City of Los Angeles	
	Mean Home Value		Home Value Relative to City Mean	Mean Home Value		Home Value Relative to City Mean	Mean Home Value	
	Nominal \$	2022 \$		Nominal \$	2022 \$		Nominal \$	2022 \$
<b>1960</b>	\$12,698	\$124,444	65%	\$12,808	\$125,522	66%	\$19,500	\$191,106
<b>1970</b>	\$17,731	\$133,148	58%	\$18,545	\$139,260	61%	\$30,400	\$228,283
<b>1980</b>	\$53,719	\$191,736	56%	\$54,441	\$194,313	57%	\$96,267	\$343,601

Data source: calculated by authors from 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961a; U.S. Census Bureau et al., 1972; Manson et al., 2022; and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)

**Figure 6-19** plots this increase in home values between 1960 and 1980, adjusting for inflation. Areas nearby the freeway experienced much less growth than areas beyond it, which in turn had less growth than the city overall, a particularly pronounced effect compared to Pasadena (See **Figure 5-22**). The findings for the homes in Pacoima’s “beyond” area also indicate that freeway disamenities outweighed amenities even not directly abutting the route, thus holding down values.

**Figure 6-19. Changes in Mean Home Value in the Pacoima Study Area, 1960-1980**



*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961a; Manson et al., 2022; and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)*

The study area also faced a high rental burden. Contract rents in 1960 were roughly on par with the City of Los Angeles (See **Table 6-8**), but the average family income in the study was only 86 percent of the city average (See **Table 6-1**). Again, this may have hampered renters in building wealth and purchasing homes.

Rent in the “nearby” area fell from 102 percent of the municipal average in 1960 to 95 percent in 1970 and then rose to 105 percent in 1980. The trajectory for the “beyond” area is similar but at a slightly lower level: from 95 percent in 1960 to 88 percent in 1970 and finally back to 95 percent in 1980 (See **Table 6-8**). Thus, while rents relative to the city fell initially, indicating a negative effect of early freeway work on the rental stock and rental housing market, after the completion of the freeway, relative rent levels recovered. They returned to above or near the municipal mean by 1980, in the “nearby” and “beyond” areas, respectively (See **Figure 6-20**). This suggests some adjustments of the rental market to the new infrastructure. Taken by themselves, these findings suggest no net effect from externalities and

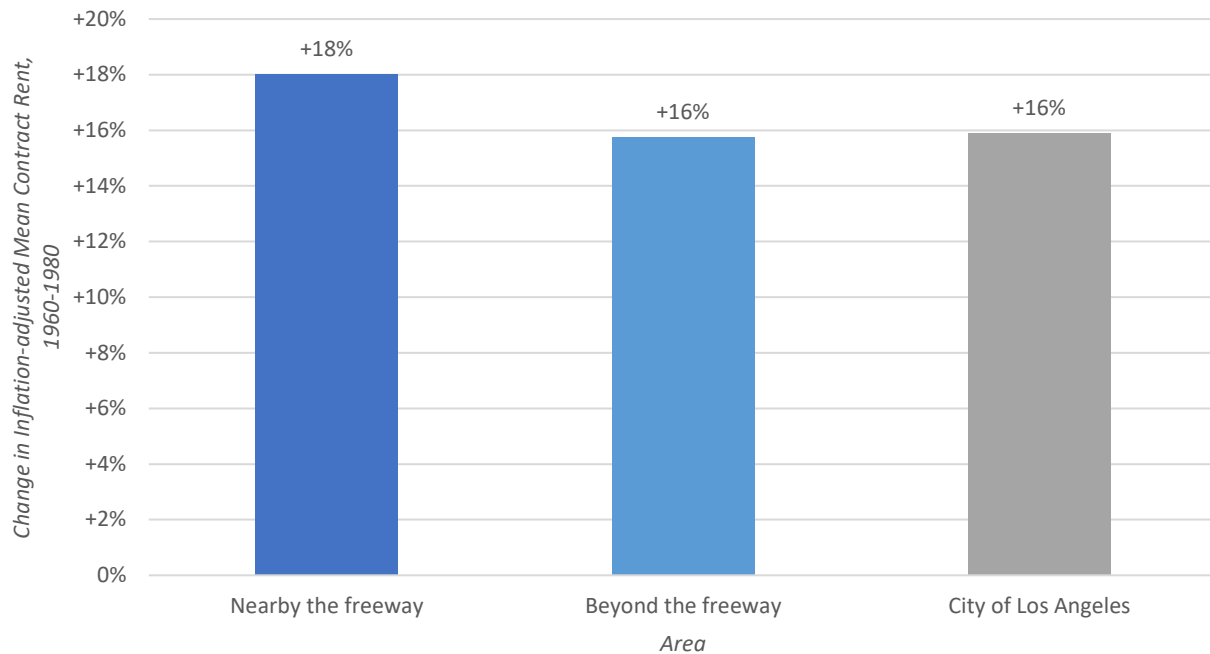
**Table 6-8. Mean Contract Rent in the Pacoima Study Area**

	Nearby the Freeway			Beyond the Freeway			City of Los Angeles	
	Mean Contract Rent		Contract Rent Relative to City Mean	Mean Contract Rent		Contract Rent Relative to City Mean	Mean Contract Rent	
	Nominal \$	2022 \$		Nominal \$	2022 \$		Nominal \$	2022 \$
<b>1960</b>	\$79	\$774	102%	\$73	\$715	95%	\$77	\$755
<b>1970</b>	\$114	\$856	95%	\$105	\$788	88%	\$119	\$894
<b>1980</b>	\$256	\$914	105%	\$232	\$828	95%	\$245	\$874

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961a; U.S. Census Bureau et al., 1972; Manson et al., 2022; and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)*

travel accessibility. However, the areas nonetheless returned to a level that imposed a high burden relative to income for Pacoima residents.

**Figure 6-20. Changes in Mean Contract Rent in the Pacoima Study Area, 1960-1980**



*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961a; Manson et al., 2022; and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)*

### Environmental Effects

Beyond the physical alteration of the neighborhood, the freeways continue to have social and environmental impacts on Pacoima’s residents. Though less visible than the freeways themselves, these issues have persistently lingered and progressively worsened over time, affecting the health of Pacoima residents.

Studies in Southern California have found that areas located adjacent to freeways, most often neighborhoods of color and high-poverty neighborhoods, are associated with a higher risk of exposure to vehicle-related pollutants (Houston et al., 2004). In 2005, the California Air Resources Board released a seminal report summarizing numerous scientific studies that demonstrate negative health effects associated with freeway proximity and its resultant air pollution. These studies showed reduced lung function in children, increased asthma hospitalizations, increased bronchitis risk in children, and a general increase in pediatric medical visits for those living within 1,000 feet of a freeway (with strongest correlations found at 300 feet) and increases in cancer risk (California Air Resources Board, 2005). One study showed dramatic findings of cancer risk as high as 100 in one million for those within 300 feet of a

freeway (Hand et al., 2004 and California Air Resources Board, 2005). As described in Chapter 2, many of these dangers were known by the 1970s.

In Pacoima, the environmental impacts of freeways were in many ways immediate. Demolition and construction for three different freeways produced enormous amounts of waste, continuously across almost three decades. Once open to the public, the freeways increased vehicular traffic, subsequently creating a spike in air and noise pollution.

In 1970, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) was enacted to better understand and control the negative effects of infrastructure on the built environment. But many freeways in California—like I-5 in Pacoima—had already been built by the time CEQA and its federal counterpart, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), were implemented (*Environmental Quality Act of 1970*, 1970 and Caltrans, 2022a). Others, like SR-118 and I-210 were still under construction. The newer freeways, therefore, received some attention from environmentalist groups and in environmental reports.

In 1971, the Los Angeles City Council approved a motion to speed the construction of the Simi Freeway/SR-118. The North Valley Ecology Council, a local environmentalist group, and the Northridge Civic Association, objected; the president of the Ecology Council, Allan Land, called for the type of environmental studies dictated by CEQA and NEPA before moving forward with construction (Burleigh, 1971b). “We are not taking a wild-eyed conservationist approach but are saying let’s slow down and look at the environmental impact, which has never been done,” he said (Burleigh, 1971b, p. San Fernando Valley 6). Speaking on behalf of other environmentalists and civic groups, another civic leader argued:

*“We must question a freeway that bisects the community and substitutes freeway fumes for the clean air now at least occasionally wafted into the Valley by Santa Ana winds.*

*We believe it may be necessary to postpone additional freeways until our elected officials and planners build balanced transportation systems instead of just talking balance and building only freeways”* (Burleigh, 1971b, p. San Fernando Valley 6).

Councilperson Robert Wilkinson sided with the State Division of Highways and concluded that because the route was adopted in 1964, it predated the requirements for environmental impact studies (Burleigh, 1971b). One of his main concerns instead was that “the Valley [was] being shafted,” not receiving its fair share of state gas tax funds for freeway projects and facing delays on its projects (Burleigh, 1971b, p. San Fernando Valley 6).

Not only did Pacoima’s freeways avoid environmental review, but subsequent environmental analyses of initiatives like the Pacoima Community Plan treated the freeway as a given, not something subject to mitigation (Los Angeles Department of City Planning, 1974b). The environmental impact report for the Pacoima Community Plan in June 1974 announced that the freeways had progressed to the point of no return, recognizing that their presence “[would result] in an increase in air pollution and noise levels” (Los Angeles Department of City Planning, 1974b, p. iii). “Airborne pollutants will increase almost

proportionately with the increase in the number of internal combustion vehicles in the area,” it stated (Los Angeles Department of City Planning, 1974b, p. 47), especially because the nearby mountains would trap in smog and pollutants (Los Angeles Department of City Planning, 1974b). The document also pointed out that the Simi Freeway “already had a direct, irreversible impact on the Community as it has cut a 300-foot-wide path across single-family residential areas” (Los Angeles Department of City Planning, 1974b, p. iii).

Even before scientific research would later fully confirm freeways’ negative impact on health and child development, this planning document issued an alarming warning about schools’ proximity to the Simi Freeway (Los Angeles Department of City Planning, 1974b). That same year, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that “fears [were] expressed that completion of the...freeways through the community could adversely affect physical activities at three schools within a few hundred yards of the freeway” (Burleigh, 1974, p. San Fernando Valley 6).

Despite the adverse environmental effects, residents were weary after years of construction and growing impatient to see the freeways finished. An article from 1972 paraphrased Edward Kussman, Housing and Community Action Chairman of the Valley NAACP, protesting the living conditions along the freeway routes under construction, whose residents were “plagued by dust blowing into their homes off vacant lots” and “...mounds of dirt piled up along the Simi Valley, Foothill, and Golden State Freeway” (Willman, 1972, p. San Fernando Valley 6). In a letter, Kussman urged the state to complete the freeways, as the area around them had become, as the reported put it, “unsightly” (Willman, 1972, p. San Fernando Valley 6). Kussman argued that “the State of California has a responsibility to make conditions better by a revised allocation of state gas tax monies and to acknowledge the fact that each area is entitled to its fair share....It’s difficult for us to believe we are getting ours” (Willman, 1972, p. San Fernando Valley 6). Unlike areas to the west, where residents’ objections caused delays in construction’s start, Kussman’s letter reveals that in Pacoima, financial challenges instead delayed SR-118—and only after building was well underway. He lamented that “the sacrifice made by those who gave up their homes should at least be rewarded with a better area for those who remain. The quality of life should not be lowered for those who cannot move because of economic circumstances” (Willman, 1972, p. San Fernando Valley 6).

### Repercussions and Lasting Effects

Pacoima’s omission from the public debates around freeway siting put this neighborhood first on the chopping block. The freeway section through Pacoima itself was initially slated to be built last, as the work progressed west to east. However, as whiter communities to the west bickered over the route, the easternmost section, through Pacoima, was finished in the mid-1970s, while construction of the segment to the west had not even begun. In 1973, 13 homeowners in Granada Hills to the west resisted eviction from state homes claimed by the state through eminent domain and were given permission by the court to stay for another year. Strong opposition from communities and a lawsuit filed by the National Wildlife Association delayed construction there further (Burleigh, 1970; Lubas, 1977; *Los Angeles Times*, 1977; and Willman, 1973). The delay coincided with the new environmental legislation discussed above, which required the completion of an environmental impact report on projects like

freeways. In 1974, only after the Pacoima segment was well underway, was such a report produced—solely for the segment to the west (Caltrans, 1974), which ended up being one of the last superhighways to be built in Los Angeles (*Los Angeles Times*, 1977). Retroactive environmental studies for Pacoima were not required, and therefore the freeway impacts on the environment and residents went largely ignored (Burleigh, 1971b).

Meanwhile, the eminent domain process and indirect impacts gutted Pacoima’s social fabric. Having been absent from the public hearings, many residents in the way of the freeway were caught off guard when they were given a relatively short notice (Pacoima Resident 1, 2021).

The state did compensate homeowners for their property, and in some cases, they received more than what they had spent a few years earlier. One resident and her family moved to Fielding Street in 1968 and had to relocate in 1971. They were among the last residents displaced from Fielding Street. She recalled purchasing their home for \$12,950 and receiving \$18,500 only three years later (during a period of rapid inflation (Pacoima Resident 5, 2021 and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). However, finding another home proved difficult and expensive (Pacoima Resident 12, 2021). Many could not afford to relocate in the area, even with the money they had received from the government. One interviewee recalled that “people didn’t think it was a fair price....Homes were going up, prices were going up, so whatever you got, it wasn’t enough. You were still going to have to get a bigger loan” (Pacoima Resident 13, 2021).

A 1966 article in the *Los Angeles Times* described Valley residents’ varying opinions about right-of-way purchases. One wealthier homeowner along a different freeway whose home and pool were in the route of the freeway was delighted to have the state as a ready-made buyer. But less affluent homeowners lamented the circumstances, as they never intended to move away (*Los Angeles Times*, 1966b). “There always are cases where individuals lose even though the state pays market value for property” the *Times* reported. “One example...is the man who has a low 4.5% GI loan which he won’t be able to get when he buys a replacement” (*Los Angeles Times*, 1966b, p. San Fernando Valley 1).

While many of the residents relocated within Pacoima, most Black residents moved out to other neighborhoods. As explained above, Pacoima was once home to a thriving Black community. But many Black residents could not find alternatives after their homes were destroyed and were forced to look outside of Pacoima. Black life in Pacoima dwindled. One interviewed resident recalled that he knew just about everybody before joining the military, but when he came back, he no longer knew anyone, nor did he know where everybody went (Pacoima Resident 1, 2021). Pacoima’s transformation took place during the era of the Civil Rights Movement, when racial tensions were high and discrimination prevalent. Some of the displaced Black families sought to relocate to neighboring areas that were predominantly white. One interviewee moved to Lake View Terrace and enrolled in a predominantly white school. He was one of two black children in a class of 30 and remembers experiencing racial discrimination for the first time in his life (Pacoima Resident 6, 2021). In part because of the freeway’s direct and indirect displacements, Pacoima’s Black population decreased from 42 percent in 1960 to 28 percent in 1980 (See **Table 6-1**).



As some left, those who remained suffered from the freeway. As a real estate broker observed in 1966, “the people who really suffer, are the ones whose homes won’t be bought by the state but will be so close to the noise of the freeway that their property will depreciate badly” (*Los Angeles Times*, 1966b, p. San Fernando Valley 1). For those who remained, the neighborhood and sense of community they remembered prior to the freeways was lost. Interviewees who lived in Pacoima prior to the construction of the freeways remembered a strong sense of community, where neighbors knew everyone on the block and looked out for one another. Children biked and skated down the sidewalks. Residents were part of a diverse, yet closely knit community (Pacoima Resident 1, 2021 and Pacoima Resident 5, 2021). But in the decade between 1965 and 1975, that strong community life that defined Pacoima deteriorated significantly. Some were displaced, while others faced unemployment due to the closing of important factories. The prolonged freeway construction had many negative effects including noise, foul air, and the closure of multiple businesses (Pacoima Resident 1, 2021; Pacoima Resident 3, 2021; Pacoima Resident 5, 2021; and Pacoima Civic Leader 3, 2021).

In the 1980s, after the freeways’ completion, the demographics of Pacoima changed (See **Table 6-1**). Pacoima’s population of color had increased to 93 percent. As Black residents left, Pacoima’s new and rapidly growing majority was Latino/a (64%). Few new Asian immigrants settled in the Pacoima area; although large-scale immigration had renewed starting in the late 1960s, other new ethnic enclaves in the region had emerged (Zhou, 2009).

Economic circumstances in Pacoima had deteriorated by the mid-1970s. In 1974, Mayor Tom Bradley spoke on the high unemployment in the northeast Valley and urged bus links for Pacoima’s youth to access potential jobs in the West Valley. At the time, planners were studying the need for public transportation in Pacoima. In spite of its three new freeways, many Pacoima residents were largely unemployed and isolated, with little means to access nearby employment opportunities (Burleigh, 1974).

One interviewee who grew up in Pacoima also argued that the freeways reinforced stereotypes of the area and notions of “them and us,” stigmatizing Pacoima residents and depicting them as conducive to gang culture and violence (Pacoima Civic Leader 3, 2021). For instance, shortly after the last segment of the SR-118 freeway was completed, police attributed a rise in crime in whiter areas to the west to thieves and robbers using the new freeway as “a quick and handy escape hatch out” (Pool, 1983, p. Valley 1). Given that stigma, throughout the 1970s, the neighboring communities of Lake View Terrace, Mission Hills, and especially Arleta (discussed above) resisted redistricting that would include them in the city’s Pacoima Community Plan. Alarmed residents sent hundreds of letters to the Los Angeles City Planning Commission protesting planning efforts to label their neighborhoods as part of Pacoima, claiming to have distinct neighborhood identities of their own (Los Angeles Department of City Planning, 1974a). The freeways both created visible boundaries between families and friends and erected concrete structures that segregated neighborhoods with physical markers that fostered strong divisions. Carved out from the rest of Los Angeles by three different freeways, some Pacoima residents lost their homes, while others found themselves increasingly literally and socially isolated from the adjacent communities.

Finally, the environmental issues raised by Kussman remain, decades later. In 2002, Pacoima Beautiful (a local non-profit) and researchers from CSUN and University of California, Irvine tested soil and air quality around Pacoima. They found the highest concentration of lead in the soil at the intersection of San Fernando Road and Paxton Street, just next to SR-118 and two blocks from an elementary school; the worst air quality was found at the athletic field of San Fernando High School, again adjacent to SR-118. Three Pacoima elementary schools and one middle school lie within 1,000 feet of freeways. Soil lead represents an enduring public health problem over time and traces in the soil reflect a “profound sense of the cumulative burden that some communities have to bear due to a history of neglect,” the study authors wrote (Lejano and Ericson, 2005, p. 301). In line with research showing the negative relationship between lead contamination, poor air quality and health, children in Pacoima have experienced difficulties in learning because of exposure to lead poisoning, according to an interviewed Pacoima civic leader. Indeed, over 20 percent of Pacoima residents had asthma in 2017, a three-percentage-point increase from just five years prior. Community leaders interviewed believe that the freeways created a precedent for other environmentally detrimental projects and land uses in Pacoima. Since the freeways, the neighborhood came to host an asphalt recycling center, refineries, landfills, and dumping sites (Pacoima Civic Leader 1, 2021; Lejano and Ericson, 2005; Grossman, 2007; Pacoima Planning Professional 7, 2021; and Pacoima Planning Professionals 4 and 5, 2021). One interviewed resident, living a block away from a freeway, indicated that her husband had installed an air extractor because their house was always dusty. “It still is really dusty, if you leave the door open from one day to the next it’s dusty. You can feel it,” she confided (Pacoima Resident 5, 2021).

## Conclusion

Despite the decades of environmental degradation and social injustice caused by the freeways, Pacoima continues to be a vibrant, diverse community. Grassroots organizations and civic groups have created important programs to clean up the neighborhood, promote arts and culture, empower youth and counter the negative effects of freeway infrastructure (Pacoima Beautiful, n.d.; Meet Each Need with Dignity, 2022; and Boys and Girls Club of San Fernando Valley, n.d.).

Yet the scars still remain. Duane Pierfax grew up after the Second World War in Pacoima. His stepfather worked at Lockheed Martin, and his sister worked at the General Motors plant in Van Nuys and had bought one of the Joe Louis Homes. In 2019, he turned 62 and lives unhoused among dozens of other mostly Black people in tents under the Simi Freeway (Holland, 2019)—the only shelter left under the freeway footprint, where once stood hundreds of homes.

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## 7. Sacramento: A Tale of Two Neighborhoods and Three Freeways

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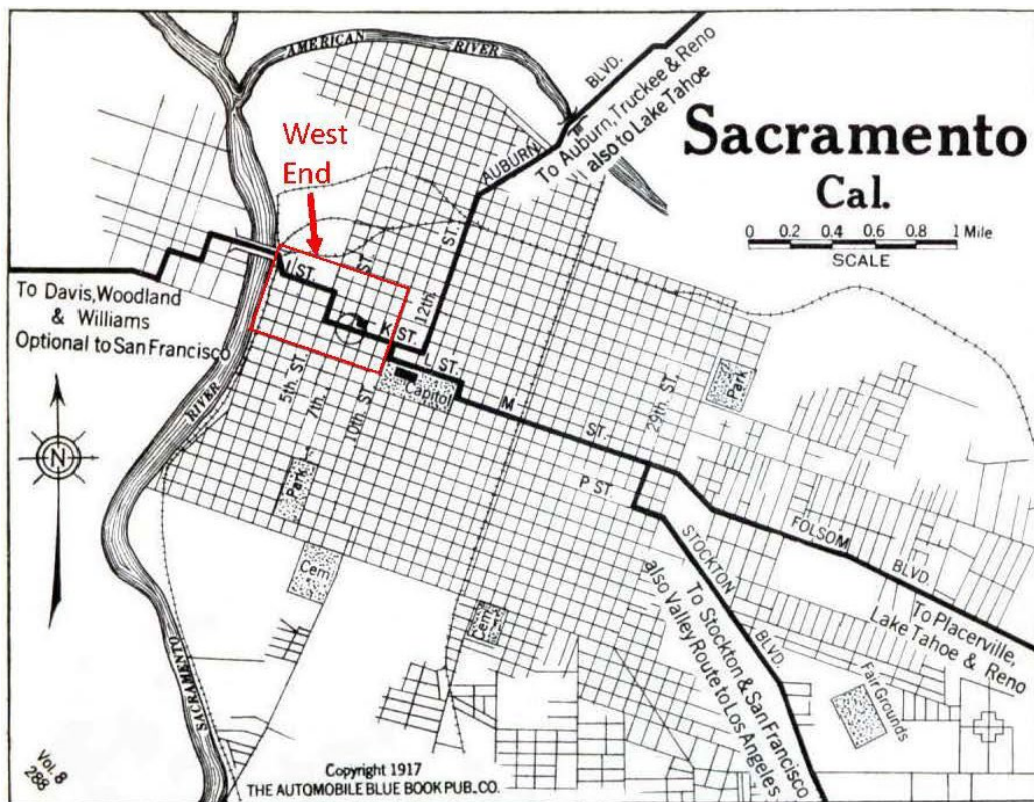
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## Introduction

### Context

Sacramento is located at the confluence of the Sacramento River and the American River (See **Figure 7-1**). In 1854, the California State Legislature officially moved to Sacramento, and Sacramento was named as the permanent state capital at the 1879 Constitutional Convention (City of Sacramento, 2022). Originally known as the “Gateway to the Gold Rush,” the city has also come to be known over the years as the “City of Trees” and “River City” (Lango, 2016).

**Figure 7-1. 1917 Map of Sacramento**



Source: *Automobile Blue Book*, 1917, p. 214

The West End, which lies between the State Capitol and the Sacramento River north of M Street (at left in **Figure 7-1**), was the city’s original business district and was known for its rich ethnic diversity as it welcomed people from around the world. A mixed-use, mixed-income area, it became Sacramento’s most populated, diverse, integrated, and historically significant neighborhood (Lango, 2018). It was originally home to Japantown, the fourth-largest Japanese community in California (Caiola, 2014).

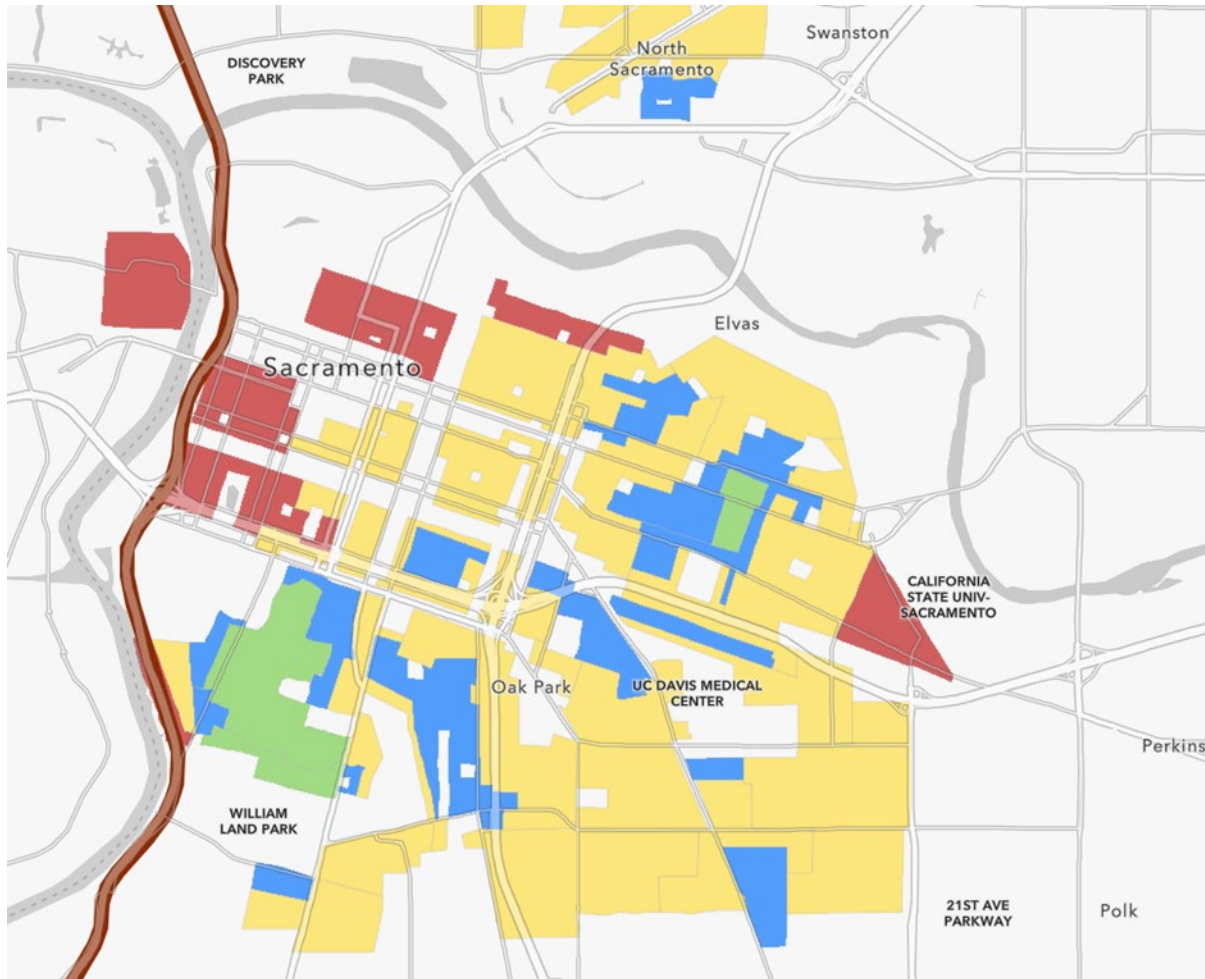
The 1940s, however, brought about significant change to the West End. The internment of Japanese Americans during the Second World War displaced this population *en masse*, while the war effort brought an influx of Black and Latino/a workers. Upon the return of Japanese American families to Sacramento in 1946, this community soon faced displacement stemming from the Capitol Mall Redevelopment Project (Caiola, 2014). The neighborhood was vulnerable owing to the FHA's practice of denying mortgage insurance to older buildings in low-income neighborhoods and areas of color (See Chapter 2). This practice contributed to the characterization of the area as "blighted" under the Housing Act of 1949 (Prince, 2011), enabling the City to demolish buildings and then sell or lease the cleared land for urban renewal projects or freeway construction. Sacramento designated 62 blocks of West End as "Redevelopment Area No. 1," and in 1957, the Sacramento Redevelopment Agency proceeded to demolish many of the buildings in the area. The decline in the neighborhood was substantial: the population of single men declined from 5,500 in 1957 to just 1,400 in 1963 (Avella, 2003); in one census tract, the population dropped from 4,467 residents in 1950 to 377 residents in 1970 (Joo, 2018). The overall population loss in the downtown area from the Capitol Mall redevelopment, the construction of SR-99 and US-50, and zoning changes was 31,000 between 1950 and 1970 (Burg, 2013).

The West End neighborhood was an ethnically diverse area at the time of the urban renewal effort. In addition to the Japanese community, the neighborhood was home to large Black and Latino/a populations. In 1950, the West End was home to seven out of ten non-white Sacramentans (Paul, 2012 and Pyke, 2018), and almost two-thirds of the area's residents were people of color (Joo, 2018).

Most of these residents were forced out by urban renewal. From the West End, many uprooted residents settled in another neighborhood, Oak Park (See **Figure 7-2**). Oak Park was one of the few areas of Sacramento where Black residents displaced by redevelopment were able to settle due to the discriminatory housing policies in place at the time (City of Sacramento, 2021). Although some of the displaced moved farther out (Pyke, 2018), many landed in Oak Park, located conveniently close to downtown and other employment centers.

Oak Park started out as a working-class neighborhood, one of the first "streetcar suburbs" of Sacramento in the 1890s. One of its selling points was a lower tax rate than neighborhoods within the city, but residents soon realized that sewage problems and a lack of water supply outweighed the advantage of no city taxes (Burg, 2010). Thus, the neighborhood was annexed to the City of Sacramento in 1911. In 1950, 93.5 percent of Oak Park residents were white (Pyke, 2018), and the Home Owners' Loan Corporation maps put Oak Park in the "yellow" category (See **Figure 7-2**). In the late 1950s, as Black residents displaced by the West End redevelopment moved into the neighborhood, white families moved out to the newly developed suburbs, with many local businesses following them (City of Sacramento, 2021). Before long, as the neighborhood came to house more residents of color, the City also designated Oak Park as "blighted" (Lango, 2018) and, in 1973, classified it as a redevelopment project area (Hayes, 2013).

The construction of several freeways in and around downtown Sacramento in the 1960s and 1970s added to the challenges these neighborhoods faced. The construction of Interstate 5, a north-south

**Figure 7-2. Modern Freeways and Home Owners Loan Corporation Map of Sacramento**

*Data source: Nelson et al., n.d.*

freeway—the same interstate that borders Pacoima hundreds of miles south (See Chapter 6)—played a role in the demise of the West End. Next, although U.S. Route 50, an east-west freeway (See **Figure 7-5**), was planned at a time when the neighborhoods it affected were largely white, it contributed to the demographic transformation and economic decline of Oak Park. The construction of State Route 99, a north-south freeway which intersects with US-50 just west of Oak Park (See **Figure 7-5**), also affected the neighborhood and now serves as its western boundary. When these freeways were first planned in the 1950s, much of the public opposition to them came from white residents who feared the impacts on their neighborhoods. They did not succeed in swaying public officials. The voices of the Japanese American and Black residents are not apparent in accounts of the debates.

The combination of urban renewal and freeway construction, requiring large-scale displacement of residents and businesses, reshaped Sacramento's landscape and contributed to a recurring cycle of

displacement for communities of color in Sacramento, especially for the Black community. The West End never rebounded as a residential neighborhood, and Oak Park faced the challenges of declining economic fortunes and growing civil unrest at the time of freeway construction in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Oak Park, located not far from downtown and close to the UC Davis Medical Center, presently struggles with both long-term underinvestment and more recent gentrification pressures.

### Sacramento Demographics

Both the demographics and the borders of the City of Sacramento changed over time. The original boundaries of the city extended to the Sacramento River to the west, Broadway to the south, Alhambra Boulevard to the east, and just beyond the Southern Pacific Railroad lines to the north. Like other cities in the state, Sacramento grew through annexations, beginning in 1911 with East Sacramento, Oak Park, Land Park, and neighborhoods in between, followed by significant portions to the south in the 1950s and 1960s and North Sacramento and Natomas in the 1960s.

While Sacramento grew significantly between 1950 and 1960, growth slowed into the 1970s and beyond (See **Table 7-1**). The city diversified considerably through the decades. The Black share of the population nearly doubled between 1950 and 1960, from 3.3 percent to 6.3 percent, and again grew by two thirds by 1970. The Latino/a population grew at a similar rate, while the Asian population grew faster later. Between 1990 and 2000, Sacramento became a majority person-of-color city.

Table 7-1. Sacramento Racial/Ethnic Demographic Profile, 1950-2010

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
<b>Total Population</b>	126,889	191,667	254,413	275,741	369,365	407,018	466,488
<b>Share, White*</b>	89.3%	79.7%	68.5%	62.3%	53.4%	40.5%	34.5%
<b>Share, Black</b>	3.3%	6.3%	10.7%	13.1%	14.8%	15.0%	13.9%
<b>Share, Latino/a*</b>	3.0%	6.4%	12.9%	14.2%	16.2%	21.6%	26.9%
<b>Share, American Indian/Alaska Native</b>	not available	not available	0.5%	0.6%	0.9%	0.8%	0.6%
<b>Share, Asian/Pacific Islander</b>	not available	not available	not available	8.7%	14.4%	17.3%	19.4%
<b>Share, Asian (East/South Asian)</b>	not available	not available	not available	8.6%	not available	16.4%	18.0%
<b>Share, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</b>	not available	not available	not available	0.1%	not available	0.9%	1.4%



	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
<b>Share, Other</b>	4.5%	7.6%	7.3%	1.1%	0.2%	4.8%	4.8%

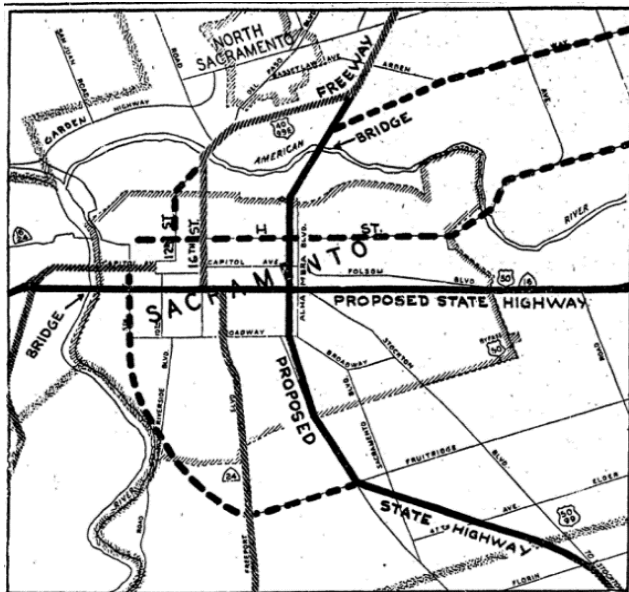
*Note: \* Racial and ethnic definitions and terms have changed over the decades (discussed in Chapter 3). The terms reflect the most comparable labels between years. For example, Hispanic/Latino/a/of Spanish origin did not exist as a Census category until 1980. Prior to that, the population was estimated from the population with a Spanish surname, of Puerto Rican heritage, or who spoke Spanish.*

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1952c, 1962b, 1972b, 2022a and Manson et al., 2022)*

## The Freeway Planning Process

Highway officials and city and county leaders first discussed the need for a freeway system in Sacramento in 1946 (Lythgoe, 1958d). A general plan for the construction of freeways through the city was developed by the State Division of Highways and the Federal Public Roads Administration based on a traffic survey done in late 1948 (Markson, 1955). The recommendations based on the survey, including proposed routes for SR-99 and US-50, were presented to the representatives of the City, the County, and the Sacramento Chamber of Commerce in early 1949 (See **Figure 7-3**) (Arden, 1949).

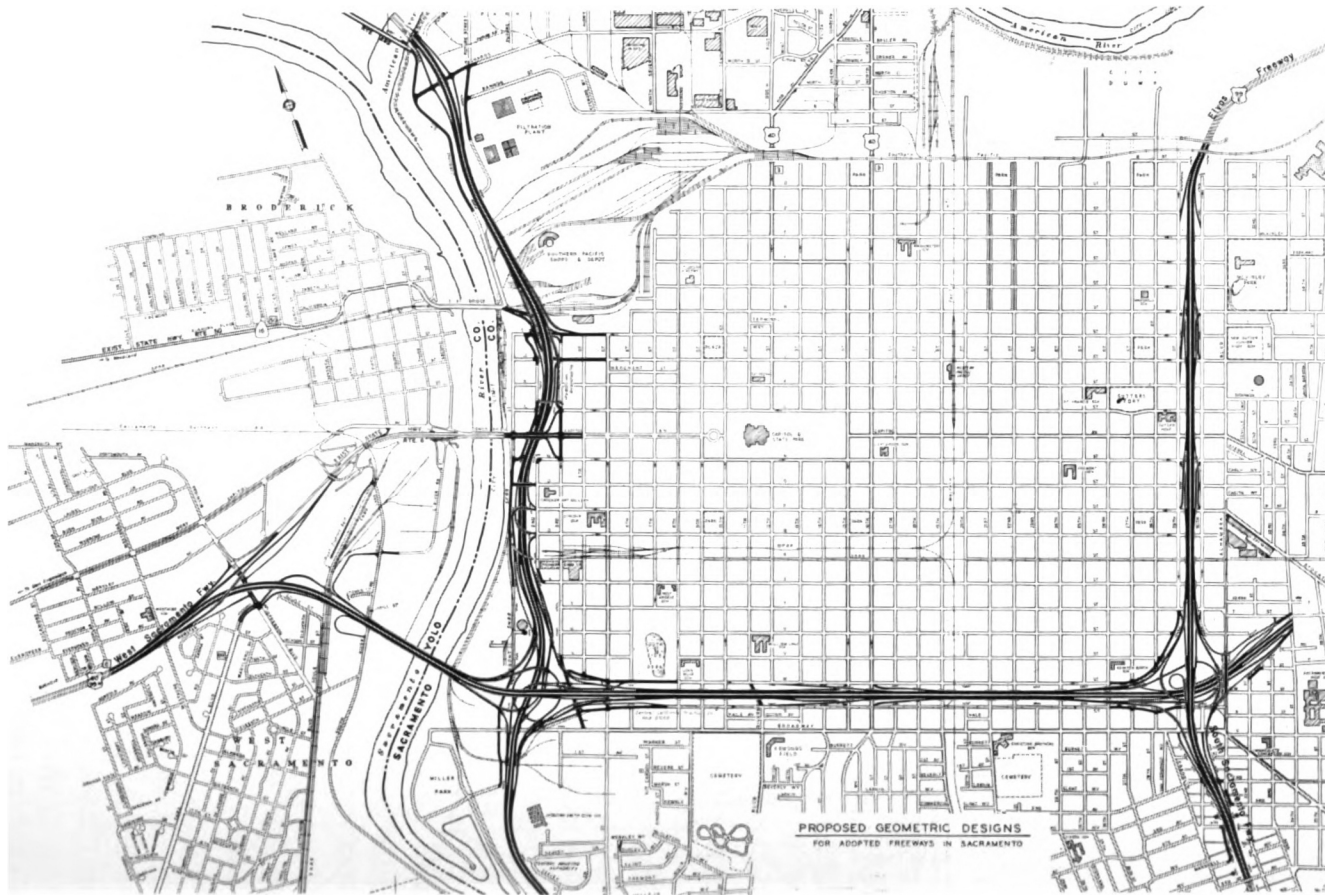
**Figure 7-3. Proposed Routes for US-50 and SR-99**



Source: Arden, 1949, p. 4

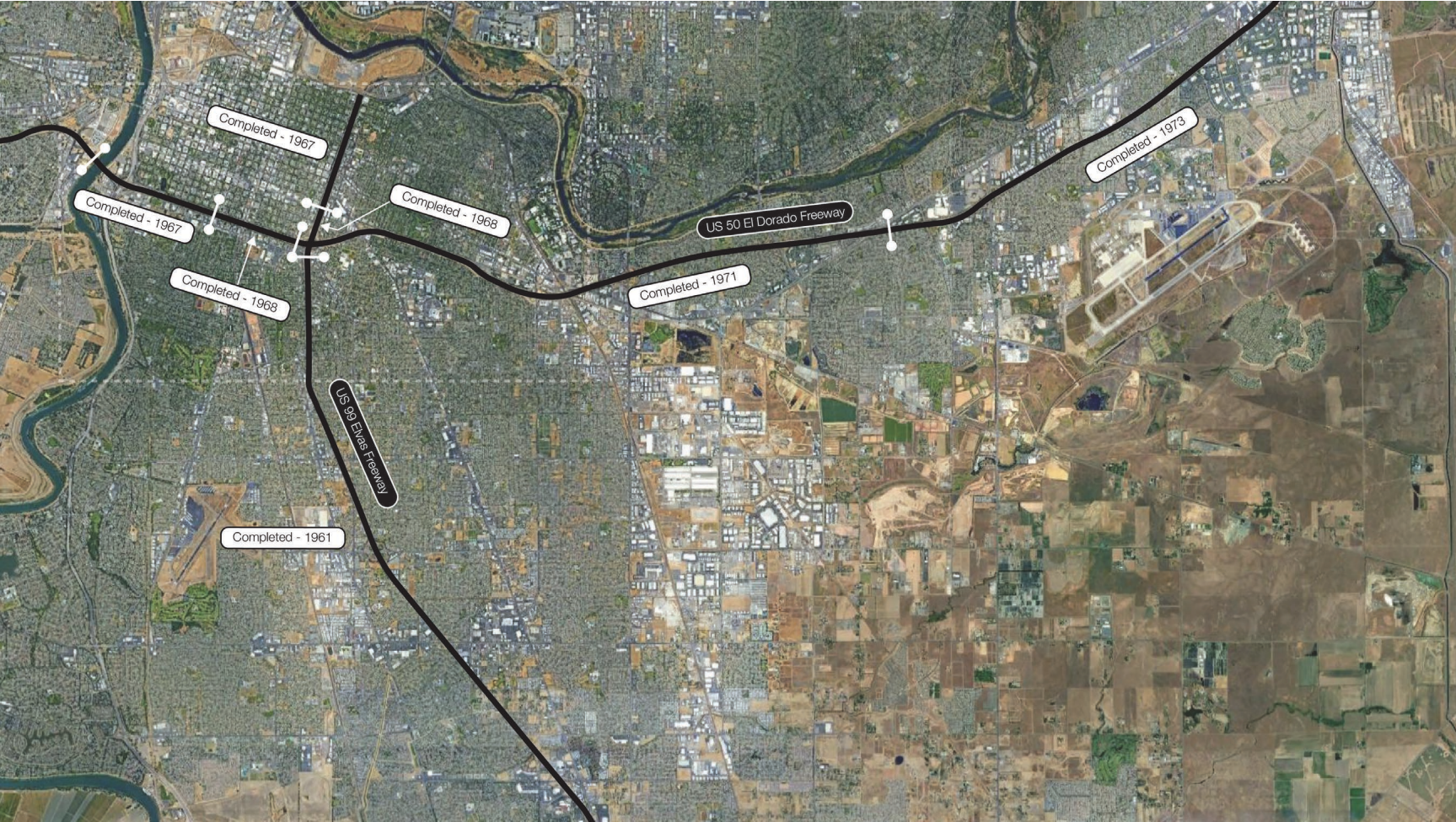
A map from the early 1960s (See **Figure 7-4**) shows the proposed routes of a north-south freeway between 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Streets (what would become the Elvas Freeway and SR-99), and an east-west freeway between W and X Streets (what would become the El Dorado Freeway/US-50). These two freeways were at the time a part of the plans for Interstate 80, with I-5 planned along the western edge of the city along the river (Hart, 1963). Residents and businesses opposed the construction of the north-south freeway through the center of the city and the potential adverse impact of the east-west freeway on neighborhoods. The placement of Interstate 5 was also debated and contested because of its impact on Sacramento's historic core. Despite the opposition, the California Highway Commission adopted the freeway plans (See **Figure 7-5**).

Figure 7-4. Sacramento Central City and Planned Freeway Network



Source: Hart, 1963, p. 564

Figure 7-5. Chronology of US-50 and SR-99 Freeway Construction



Base imagery: Google, 2023

### The West End Freeway/Interstate 5

The plans for the west-side freeway (See **Figure 7-4**) began in the 1950s, in alignment with the city's redevelopment plans for the West End. Most of the initial planning and public hearing processes for this freeway also coincided with the planning of US-50. With most residents of the neighborhood displaced by redevelopment by the late 1950s, opposition to the freeway came mostly from concerns over the impact of the freeway on historic parts of the city. In the end, I-5 faced a much longer period of public scrutiny and opposition than US-50 or SR-99. In the late 1960s, planners proposed the routing for the west-side freeway between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets from I to N Streets (Meagher, 1960). One analysis showed that 15 state-designated historic buildings and five blocks of the area bounded by I, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and N Streets would require clearance to make way for the freeway (*Sacramento Bee*, 1960). Given the historical importance of the area, several historians, historical organizations, and individuals expressed their opposition to the freeway development plan. The National Trust for Historic Preservation in Washington D.C. and the California Historical Society also showed support for the cause (*Sacramento Bee*, 1961d).

The public hearing for this freeway was combined with the second public hearing for US-50 on February 20, 1961. At the hearing, planners proposed three alternative routes for the west-side freeway. These were (Hart, 1963):

1. Between Front and 2<sup>nd</sup> Streets, as close to the river as possible
2. Between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets
3. West of the river in its entirety, in Yolo County

After the public hearing, more arguments in opposition to the freeway flowed in: the freeway would brutally uproot the landmarks of the history of the Gold Rush, the freeway would blight the remaining landmarks, the freeway would inundate the new investments in the redevelopment area with unwanted traffic, the freeway would deface the entrance to the city and bring blight to the Capitol Mall, and it would become an obstacle for riverfront redevelopment (*Sacramento Bee*, 1961b).

Later, more than 200 petitions containing more than 4,000 signatures opposing the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street alignment were presented to the State Highway Commission. People from across the State signed the petitions (*Sacramento Bee*, 1961c). The preservation of the neighborhood became a matter of community, civic, and historic values. Despite the opposition, the California Highway Commission adopted the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets route for the west-side freeway, but it could not yet move forward with construction plans. U.S. Secretary of Interior Stewart Udall sent a telegram to Governor Pat Brown advising that the Big Four Building (birthplace of the first transcontinental railroad), which lay in the proposed path of the freeway, was eligible for national historic landmark status and should be protected from destruction or displacement. This telegram restricted the approval of federal funds until a consultation with local authorities could take place. By late 1961, an agreement was reached regarding the preservation of these buildings, and the Highway Commission agreed to work with the State Division of Beaches and Parks and the National Park Service to clearly lay out a plan for preserving and recreating

historical sites, buildings, and areas (Hart, 1963). Even so, the freeway was not completed until the first half of the 1970s.

### U.S. Route 50

In the early 1950s, plans were adopted for the construction of the east-west freeway, known as the El Dorado Freeway (*Sacramento Bee*, 1952). The San Francisco-based consulting firm De Leuw, Cather, and Co. provided recommendations for the routing of highway sections of US-50 and SR-99 through the central city. Based on these recommendations, the State Division of Highways in 1958 conducted route studies to explore alternate routes for US-50 (Hart, 1963). In November 1958, the Division proposed three alternative routes for a section of the El Dorado Freeway to the City Council. The Division also planned a public hearing on the matter for January 14, 1959 to present the alternative routes and get public feedback (*Sacramento Bee*, 1958b). A month before the public hearing, the Division unveiled maps with lettered alternative routes for the first time to the public. All alternate freeway routes would run from West Sacramento, cross the river at a bridge at about R or S Street, and dip south to between T and U Streets east to 8<sup>th</sup> Street (Lythgoe, 1958a). From 8<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> Streets, three routes were proposed, Alternatives A, B, and C (See **Figure 7-6** and left of **Figure 7-8**):

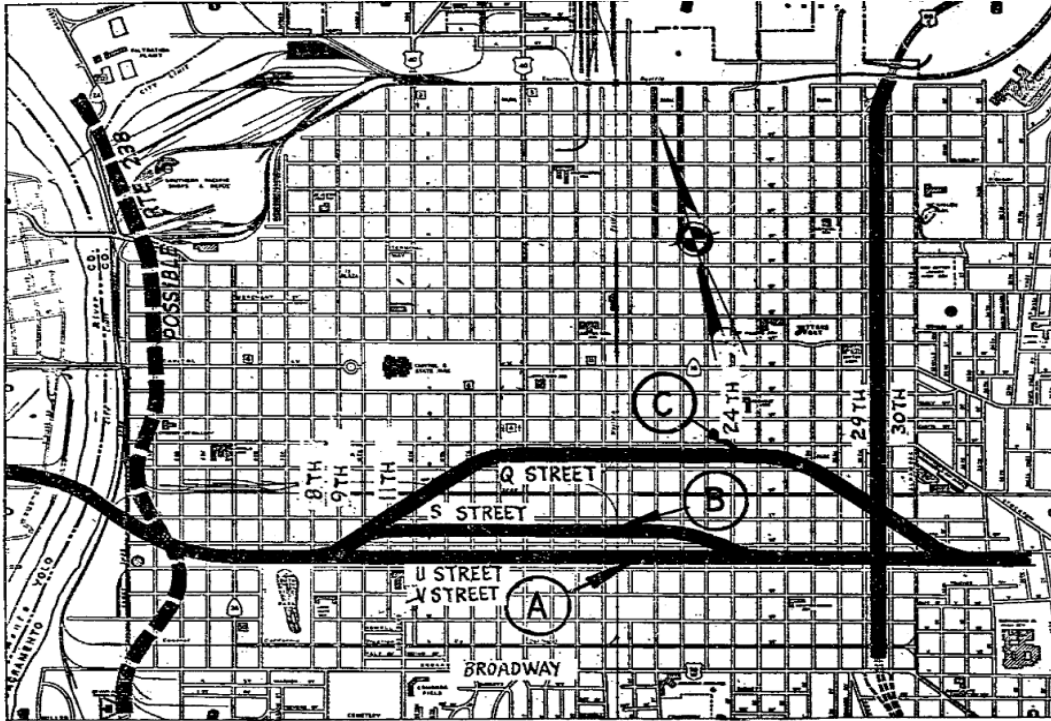
- A. A straight route between T and U Streets
- B. A small jog north to between S and T streets, dropping back at 23<sup>rd</sup> Street
- C. A larger jog north to between P and Q streets, gradually turning south at about 26<sup>th</sup> Street

Highway officials also stated that any proposed route through the interchange with the SR-99 would cover more than 20 blocks of area (Lythgoe, 1958a).

*The Sacramento Bee*, the leading daily newspaper in Sacramento, closely followed the developments related to the highway planning process and was continuously involved in public outreach. The newspaper played a crucial role in reflecting the opinions of residents and businesses, and it was the main platform the citizens of Sacramento used to opine their views and express their opposition to the highway routing system. The paper, though, clearly did not reflect all views in the community, and the voices of the Japanese and Black communities were not apparent in the paper's coverage of the freeway plans.

In December 1958, *The Bee* started a series of articles on the plans for the proposed freeway routes and the associated complexities that state highway officials faced in planning the routes. The articles mainly discussed how surveys in the 1940s and recent studies by De Leuw, Cather, and Co. resulted in a plan for the development of an extensive system of freeways to meet the future traffic needs of the city. The articles further highlighted the problems associated with the route selection and the acquisition of rights-of-way. The newspaper took the position that freeway development would lead to economic development by promoting residential and commercial growth. The articles emphasized the need for acquainting interested persons and groups about the plans for freeway development and providing everyone an opportunity to contribute to the process. The newspaper failed, however, to discuss the

Figure 7-6. Alternative US-50 Routes West of the Interchange with SR-99



Source: Sacramento Bee, 1958b, p. A-8

potential negative consequences of freeway development (Lythgoe, 1958a, 1958b, 1958c, 1958d, 1958e, 1958f, 1958g).

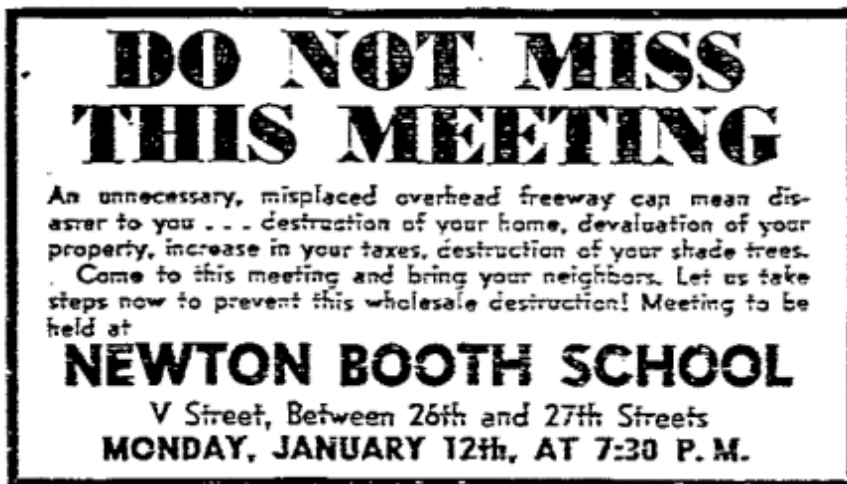
Soon after the alternative routes on the west side of the interchange were presented to the public in December 1958, many residents confronted the decision to construct the freeway through the heart of the city. One of the residents of U Street, Otto Pearson, opposed the routing of the freeway between the Sacramento River and Alhambra Boulevard. In his letter to the council, he identified several concerns and talked about an organized effort to stop the proposed freeway from being built through the heavily populated section of the city (*Sacramento Bee*, 1958c). Some of the concerns he highlighted were:

- “1. It will take millions of dollars from our tax roll and increase the cost of maintenance and protection.
2. The cost of more than \$1,000,000 a block for an impractical, misplaced highway is a waste of the taxpayers’ money.
3. In this part of the city, we have enough streets to take care of all local traffic and through-traffic should be routed around the city for a number of reasons” (*Sacramento Bee*, 1958c, p. B-1).

He also said that the freeway would lead to the destruction of at least 600 trees and a part of Southside Park, including a section of the lake and buildings. According to him, the proposed alternatives would destroy more than 1,200 homes, places of business, factories, and stores and would devalue the properties on both sides, leading to loss of millions of dollars (*Sacramento Bee*, 1958c). In an open letter, other residents (from V and X Streets) also supported Pearson's solution of routing the freeway instead north or south of the city and hoped that the matter would be considered in the public hearing (Ritchey and Ritchey, 1959). Several residents from N to U Streets whose houses and businesses were in the way of proposed routes began protesting against the construction a few days before the hearing (*Sacramento Bee*, 1959a).

Two days before the public hearing, a separate neighborhood meeting was planned at the Newton Booth School on V Street by the residents who were living along the proposed alternative routes to the west side of the interchange (See **Figure 7-7**). This meeting was called to organize opposition to the freeway and provided an opportunity for protestors to act as a group for the coming public hearing. Most of the estimated 500 people who joined this planning meeting opined that the proposed freeway would not benefit the area. Many resided in the path of the proposed freeway. Selected members from the group (including Pearson) formed a committee to represent the objections of the group at the public hearing. The group together passed a resolution citing that the freeway would not only destroy homes and other land uses but would also depress real estate values (Lythgoe, 1959a). They highlighted that "engineers and city planners in both Los Angeles and San Francisco have stated that city freeways do not serve the purpose for which they are planned. They use too much valuable city land and they lead to traffic congestion rather than relieving congestion" (Lythgoe, 1959a, p. D-1). Smog from motor vehicle exhaust and use of the freeway by trucks and trailers were other points of concern. The resolution also brought forward the point that many of the potentially dislocated property owners were elderly couples

**Figure 7-7. Announcement in *The Sacramento Bee* for Neighborhood Meeting**



Source: *Sacramento Bee*, 1959b, p. A-3



who would have to incur a debt in locating elsewhere. Copies of this resolution were sent out to the State Division of Highways, Highway Commission, Governor Brown, the City Council, and the Chamber of Commerce. Another resolution was adopted to invite all organizations in the city to join the group in fighting the freeway (Lythgoe, 1959a). For all this, no mention was made, it appears, of the impacts on the Oak Park community to the east of the US-50/SR-90 interchange.

Two days later, more than 800 people gathered at the Sacramento Junior College auditorium to learn about the freeway plans at the public hearing organized by the State Division of Highways. Alternative routes for the freeway were proposed, and the related advantages, disadvantages and costs were discussed with the public. Highway officials told the protestors that more opportunities would be provided to them to be heard (Lythgoe, 1959b). Following the hearing, the Central Community Club, the midtown neighborhood group led by Pearson, gathered petition signatures (Lythgoe, 1959c). The city's planning board also urged the Division of Highways to revise its proposed routings and interchanges, including to avoid detrimental effects to residents who would be sandwiched between the freeway and an industrial zone (*Sacramento Bee*, 1959c, 1959d).

After several rounds of protests and requests by the residents, the City Council hired Leo A. Daly and Associates of San Francisco to undertake a comprehensive study for the city's core area development plans (See **Figure 7-8**). In addition to Alternatives A, B, and C (on the left side of **Figure 7-8**), the firm suggested two further routings: what Hart (1963) later labeled Alternative D, a route combining Alternative C west of 18<sup>th</sup> Street and cutting down to Alternative A east of it (not shown in **Figure 7-8**), and what Hart (1963) labeled Alternative J, an alignment south of all the others, between W and X Streets (shown in black at left in **Figure 7-8**) (*Sacramento Bee*, 1961a). A second public hearing was scheduled for February 21, 1961 to discuss these alternatives with the general public, which was attended by 650 people. At this hearing, the Central Community Club presented maps and data on their proposed system of bypass freeways around downtown in place of any of the central city freeway alternatives. However, the Division of Highways and the consultants retorted that bypass freeways would not provide sufficient access to sustain the planned expansion of the central city area (Hart, 1963).

In 1961, based on the recommendations of the consultant, the California Highway Commission adopted Alternative J west of the interchange—the southernmost route and not one of the original three, but still a central city routing. Even this new route was not accepted by many in the city. Downtown businesses found the approved route to be too far away (Thurston, 1961). And residents in the way protested that they did not want the freeway to pass through the center of the city, as it would destroy their homes and businesses. A resident who wrote a letter to the editor in the *Bee* also expressed concern about the compensation from the state being insufficient to buy a new house at prevailing market rates and expressed emotional attachment to their house, slated to be demolished to make way for the freeway (S., 1961).

Planning for the construction of the second leg of US-50, from the interchange with SR-99 at 30<sup>th</sup> Street east to Mayhew Road began in 1962. For this section, at the north edge of Oak Park, two alternative

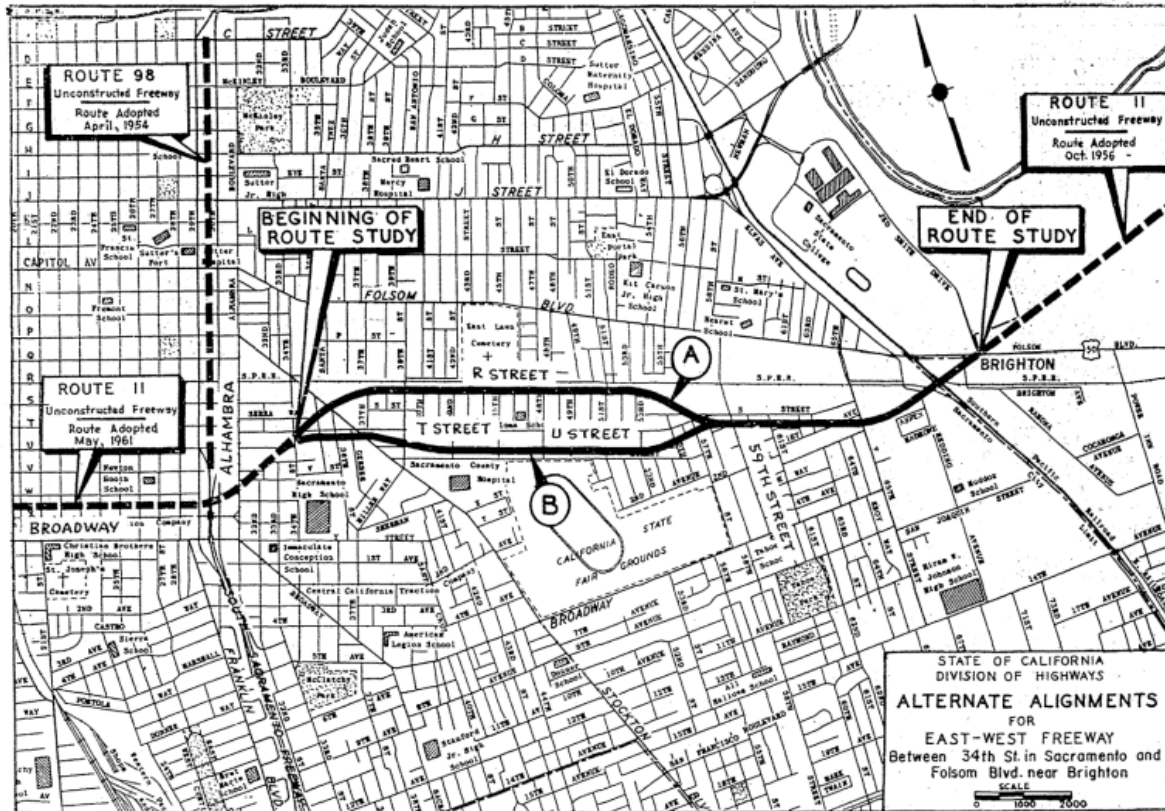
Figure 7-8. Alternate Routes for US-50 East and West of the Interchange with SR-99



Base imagery: Google, 2023

routes were proposed, an alternative also labeled as A, via R Street, and an alternative also labeled as B, between T and U Streets (See **Figure 7-9** and right of **Figure 7-8**). The more northern R Street route was adopted. Compared to the fight to the west of the interchange, there were no reports of public backlash this time (*Sacramento Bee*, 1962a). However, as can be seen in **Figure 7-9**, this part of the freeway bounded Oak Park and cut off its connections to the rest of the city.

**Figure 7-9. Alternative US-50 Routes East of the Interchange with SR-99**



Source: *Sacramento Bee*, 1962a, p. C-2

### State Route 99

The first section of the north-south Elvas Freeway was built from the northern boundary of the city to A Street in 1955, and the section from A Street to P Street was completed in 1967. But the section of the freeway south of that, from the intersection with US-50 starting at U Street and 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Streets (See **Figure 7-10**) to Stockton Boulevard—popularly known as the South Sacramento Freeway and now SR-99—proved more controversial. This freeway now forms the western boundary of Oak Park, creating another barrier between the neighborhood and downtown. The planning for this segment of freeway began in the early 1950s.

Figure 7-10. Incomplete Interchange of SR-99 (Left-right) and US-50 (Bottom)



Source: Horton, 1968, p. A1

The public hearing for SR-99 was held on February 20, 1953 at the Governor Hall on the State Fairgrounds (*Sacramento Bee*, 1953a). The public hearing was attended by 675 people, many of whom voiced their objection to routing the freeway through the center of the city (See **Figure 7-11**). One resident from I Street pointed out that the route would cut Sacramento into two parts and would cause damage that could never be repaired. Another resident expressed his fear that the freeway would draw too much truck and through-traffic into populated areas. Others expressed their sense of belonging and attachment to the homes they would have to leave, saying that any amount of money would not be able to pay for the emotional loss caused. People also voiced concerns that freeways would become an obstacle for churchgoers, schoolchildren, and fire trucks (Markson, 1953b).

In response, one of the district engineers, A. M. Nash, explained how and why the freeway route was selected (Markson, 1953b). He commented on people's concerns, saying, "It is, of course, obvious that many individuals whose property is affected in one way or another will be dissatisfied and critical of the selection of the route which has been made. This is only natural and human. But it is a physical impossibility to build a modern traffic facility in a metropolitan area without taking someone's property"

(Markson, 1953b, p. 8). The chief right-of-way agent, Frank C. Balfour from the Division of Highways, assured the property-owners in the way of the freeway that scientific methods had been used to determine the fair market value of land taken and that every owner would receive their fair share of entitlements. Per his estimates, approximately 330 single-family dwellings and 26 multifamily dwellings would be affected by the proposed freeway. The freeway would also destroy a church and eight miscellaneous moderately sized commercial buildings (Markson, 1953b).

**Figure 7-11. Public Hearing for SR-99 Freeway**



Source: Markson, 1953a, p. 21

As happened with US-50, one resident, Walter L. Cox from Sacramento Boulevard, was chosen as representative of 1,000 property-owners who were in the vicinity of the proposed freeway. Cox asked the City Council to hold another public hearing (*Sacramento Bee*, 1953b). However, the State Director of Public Works, Frank B. Durkee, denied the need for another hearing. He also suggested that the first hearing was well-publicized and that enough opportunity was given to interested parties to ask questions (*Sacramento Bee*, 1953c). In response to a letter from the City Manager, Durkee argued, "It is not the policy of the commission to reopen formal public hearings on highway routings, and we do not believe any useful purpose would be served by doing so in this case" (*Sacramento Bee*, 1953c, p. 1). A citizen attempt to place an anti-freeway initiative on the November 1953 ballot failed when the City Council refused to back it, citing a similar measure in San José that the courts had declared invalid (*Sacramento Bee*, 1953d). The construction of the segments of SR-99 and US-50 surrounding Oak Park

began in 1958 and 1970, and they opened in 1961 and late 1971, respectively (Norris, 1971 and *Sacramento Bee*, 1958a, 1961e, 1970a).

### Community Impacts

**Figure 7-12** shows the alternatives proposed by the Division of Highways for US-50 on both sides of the interchange, overlaid on the HOLC map of the city from 1937. As can be seen from the map, a large section of the residents in the way of proposed routes were living in areas in HOLC's "C" category (yellow on the map). This indicates that if the freeways were to be routed along the proposed alternatives the people impacted would have primarily been working-class people and/or immigrants. All of the alternatives passed through areas classified as "D" (red on the map) (Nelson et al., n.d.). The clarifying remarks for the red section on the western edge of the map stated:

*"This old area is the 'melting pot' of Sacramento. It contains the principal Japanese colony and the greatest concentration of Negroes in the city. There are no deed restrictions, and zoning is for general commercial uses. Dwellings are very cheap to medium construction. The quality of maintenance, for a district of this character, is much above the average. It is stated that many buildings in the area violate the State Housing Act and city housing ordinances, and Grand Jury investigation is under way at the present time. Heterogeneity, age and obsolescence of improvements, and predominance of subversive racial elements are the area's chief hazards. Rated "low red" grade" (Nelson et al., n.d.).*

Routing the freeway through these areas (See **Figure 7-13**) contributed to the redevelopment of the area that was underway at the time and served the joint purpose of creating freeway access to the redeveloping downtown from outer parts of the city and razing the remaining areas that fell just outside of the Capitol Mall Redevelopment Project boundaries. After displacement resulting from the redevelopment project, some Japanese American residents moved to the Southside Park area, but this area in turn was also demolished during the construction of the downtown section of US-50. April Adachi, a former resident of Sacramento's Japantown, recalled, "My father had a fish market business on 3<sup>rd</sup> [Street] between K and L [Streets and] then built another building, a fish market on 10<sup>th</sup> and X [Streets], until the freeway construction came in, and he made a move again" (Lango, 2016).

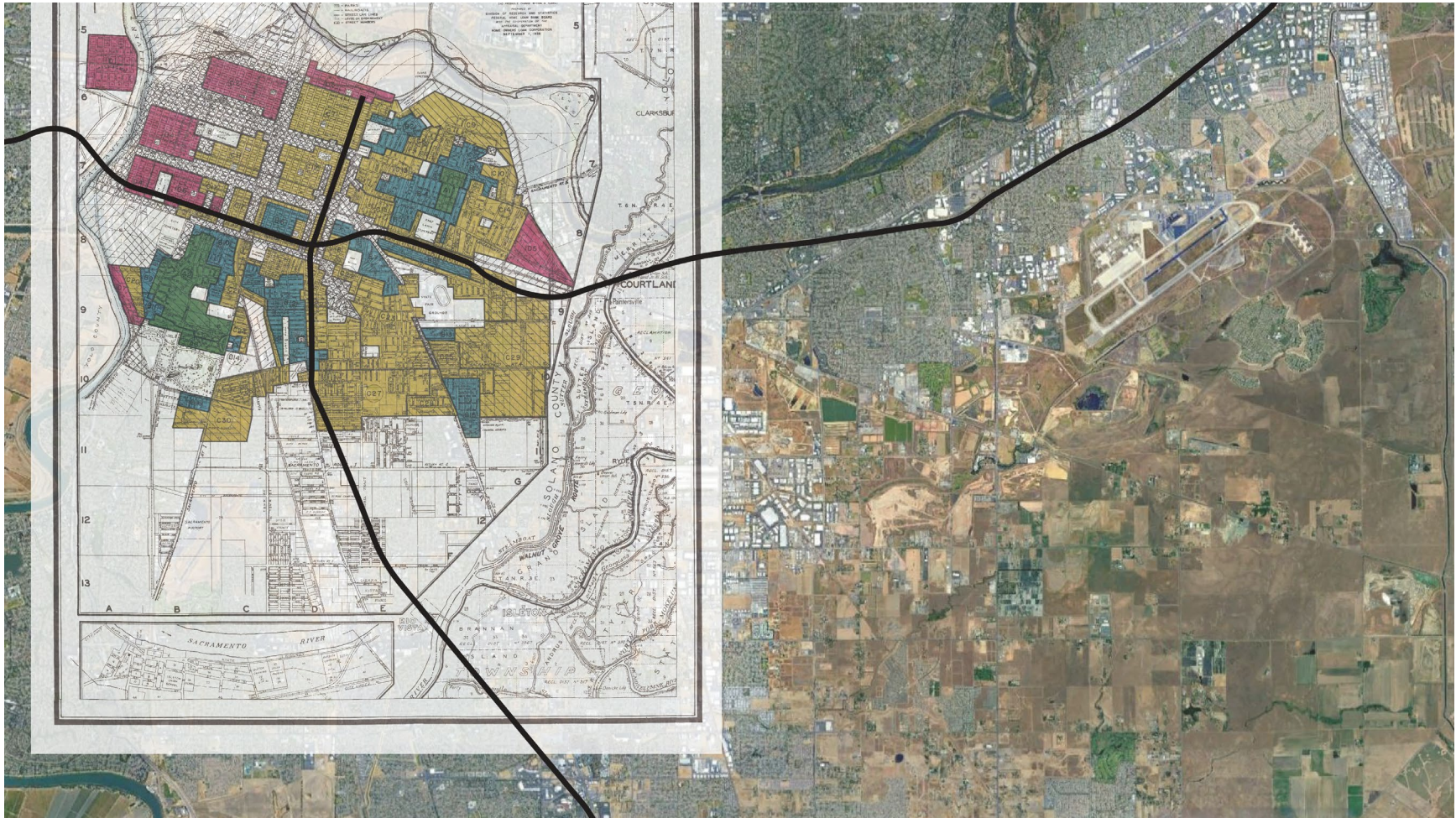
The construction of US-50 impacted residents in the W Street corridor from the river through the Oak Park neighborhood. Two residents interviewed for this report grew up in the area around what is now the junction of SR-99 and US-50. One interviewee recalled the car barns where streetcars would be repaired (Sacramento Resident 3, 2022). Another interviewee said, "I remember it was a mix of people that I grew up with. My family is Italian and my wife's is Mexican. There were definitely a lot of minorities—I would say most were lower- to middle class. Nobody was rich there." The same interviewee also remembered, "There were a few friends of mine that lived in the area but they all had to move" (Sacramento Resident 2, 2022). These comments suggest the tangible loss of neighborhood social connections that is less documented than the physical infrastructure changes.

Figure 7-12. HOLC Map of Sacramento and US-50 Alternative Routes



Sources: Nelson et al., n.d. and authors

Figure 7-13. SR-99 and US-50 on HOLC Map of Sacramento



Sources: Nelson et al., n.d. and authors; base imagery: Google, 2023



The construction of the freeways not only impacted homes and businesses, it also led to the demolition of other structures in the 1960s. Sacramento Children’s Receiving Home, an institution operated by a non-profit citizens’ group which provided temporary care to dependent or neglected children, was relocated from a site on X Street (*Sacramento Bee*, 1963). Several churches were also moved and relocated as part of the drive to clear the areas in the way of the freeway. The New Hope Baptist Church, which had an integrated but mainly Black congregation, was the second oldest Black Baptist group in Sacramento. The church moved for the second time since its formation in 1923, having moved to X Street in 1950 (*Sacramento Bee*, 1962b). Other churches in the path of the freeway were Bethel Temple and the Church of God in Christ (Rye, 1964).

Oak Park was directly affected by both US-50 and SR-99, which together cut the neighborhood off from the rest of the city. During the construction of US-50, a temporary ramp was built to serve the area—to at least provide them access to the infrastructure that ran through their neighborhood. At the completion of construction in the early 1970s, the temporary ramp was closed. Residents of Oak Park protested, and the Highways Division re-opened the ramp but later in 1972 removed it altogether (*Sacramento Bee*, 1972). In an interview, a community member said, “That highway was built to cut off community members from other areas of the city, and there’s no doubt about that this is a redlined neighborhood” (Sacramento Resident 4, 2022).

The construction of SR-99 and US-50 further harmed an already displaced community. By the 1970s, Oak Park had become a predominantly Black neighborhood as a result of an influx of residents displaced by the West End redevelopment project coupled with white flight to the suburbs (Burg, 2019). The construction of the freeways added to the demographic stratification of the area. SR-99 separated Oak Park from the whiter and wealthier Land Park neighborhood (Castañeda, 2010), while US-50 on the north separated the neighborhood from the even wealthier “Fabulous Forties” neighborhood (Simpson, 2004). This separation, together with the California State Fair Commission’s decision to move the fairgrounds from Oak Park to northern Sacramento, escalated the economic decline of the area (Castañeda, 2010).

Freeway construction contributed to the decline of local businesses, resulting in a loss of employment opportunities. SR-99 routed traffic away from Stockton Boulevard, which had been the main commercial thoroughfare for the neighborhood and, as described by one resident interviewed, the main entryway into the city (Sacramento Resident 4, 2022). Businesses along Stockton Boulevard and Broadway experienced a loss of customers as traffic shifted to SR-99, and many closed, leading to job losses in the community (Deering, 2008). Vincent “Ted” Thompson, the Black owner of Thompson’s Funeral Home in Oak Park, reported that SR-99 not only impeded smooth access to Oak Park but also left the area without referral signs to the shopping center, thereby cutting off potential customers of what was once a bustling area (Powell, 1983). Several of Oak Park’s long-standing businesses, such as Steen’s Bar and Clarence Azevedo’s clothing store, closed down and never reopened (City of Sacramento, 2021). Reportedly, the redevelopment of the Old State Fairgrounds and the construction of the SR-99/US-50 interchange did not employ any residents of Oak Park (*Sacramento Bee*, 1970b).

The freeways created other problems for the neighborhood. The beginning of highway construction around Oak Park, along with street widening and underpass construction, changed the aesthetic appearance of the community, leading to many treeless, widened boulevards (See **Figure 7-14**) (Peper, Vargas, and McPherson, 2007). In one interview, a local activist said that the freeway ended up not only preventing high school students from walking to school but led to the need for high school transfers in the case of students whose families were displaced by the freeway (Sacramento Resident 4, 2022). The demolition of most of Oak Park’s historic business district along 35<sup>th</sup> Street as part of the city’s urban renewal projects added on to the economic decline of the neighborhood (City of Sacramento, 2021). This decline coincided with an increase in crime followed by a racially discriminatory “law and order” policing strategy (Powell, 1983).

**Figure 7-14. Corner of Broadway and Alhambra Boulevard, the Entrance to Oak Park, 1910 and c. 2005**



*Sources: Oak Park, Sacramento, CA, 1910 and Peper, Vargas, and McPherson, 2007, p. 7*

The economic decline of the neighborhood continued through the late 1970s and 1980s. As of the 1980 Census, Oak Park remained one of the lowest-income areas of the city. People of color who could not afford to move elsewhere chose to stay in the neighborhood. Oak Park was one of the most racially diverse sections of the city in 1980, with a population that was 44 percent Black and 17 percent Latino/a, compared to the city’s overall 70 percent white population. The neighborhood population dropped at a time when the total population of the city was growing. During the 1970s, the neighborhood lost more than 13 percent of its residents, while Sacramento’s overall population increased by more than 8.5 percent (Powell, 1983).

### Population and Housing Impacts

This section examines the population composition changes and housing changes as a result of the construction of US-50 through Sacramento. The study area, shown in **Figure 3-5** and described in Chapter 3, consists of the census tracts containing US-50 and its interchanges with I-5 and SR-99, plus the proposed alternative routes west of the interchange with SR-99 (See **Figure 7-8**). The total population within the study area and the share of the population that was white decreased substantially between 1950 and 1970, from nearly four out of five residents to less than half, consistent with patterns

Table 7-2. Sacramento Study Area Racial/Ethnic Demographic Profile, 1950-2010

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
<b>Total Population</b>	43,163	40,552	28,033	26,684	31,309	29,608	29,397
<b>Share, White*</b>	79.2%	61.7%	47.5%	47.9%	43.1%	43.0%	48.2%
<b>Share, Black</b>	6.6%	12.9%	17.3%	16.4%	16.4%	15.6%	12.7%
<b>Share, Latino/a*</b>	4.5%	11.3%	17.3%	17.3%	17.9%	19.5%	20.9%
<b>Share, American Indian/Alaska Native</b>	not available	not available	0.4%	1.7%	1.2%	0.9%	0.7%
<b>Share, Asian/Pacific Islander</b>	not available	not available	16.5%	15.5%	21.2%	16.4%	12.7%
<b>Share, Asian (East/South Asian)</b>	not available	not available	16.5%	15.2%	not available	16.0%	12.3%
<b>Share, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</b>	not available	not available	0.1%	0.3%	not available	0.4%	0.4%

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
<b>Share, Other</b>	9.7%	14.1%	0.9%	1.2%	0.2%	4.6%	5.0%

*Note: \* Racial and ethnic definitions and terms have changed over the decades (discussed in Chapter 3). The terms reflect the most comparable labels between years. For example, Hispanic/Latino/a/of Spanish origin did not exist as a Census category until 1980. Prior to that, the population was estimated from the population with a Spanish surname, of Puerto Rican heritage, or who spoke Spanish.*

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1952c, 1962b, 1972b, 2022a and Manson et al., 2022)*

of white flight in major urban areas during those years (See **Table 7-2**). The Black and Latino/a populations grew, commensurate with the decline in the white population, and remained roughly consistent as a share of the population until 2000, after which there was a notable decline in the Black population. The Asian population grew from a maximum of about one in ten residents in 1950 (likely denoted by much of the “Other” category) to over two in ten by 1990, though it decreased by nearly half by 2010. All told, the total population in 2010 was still far below its 1950 number.

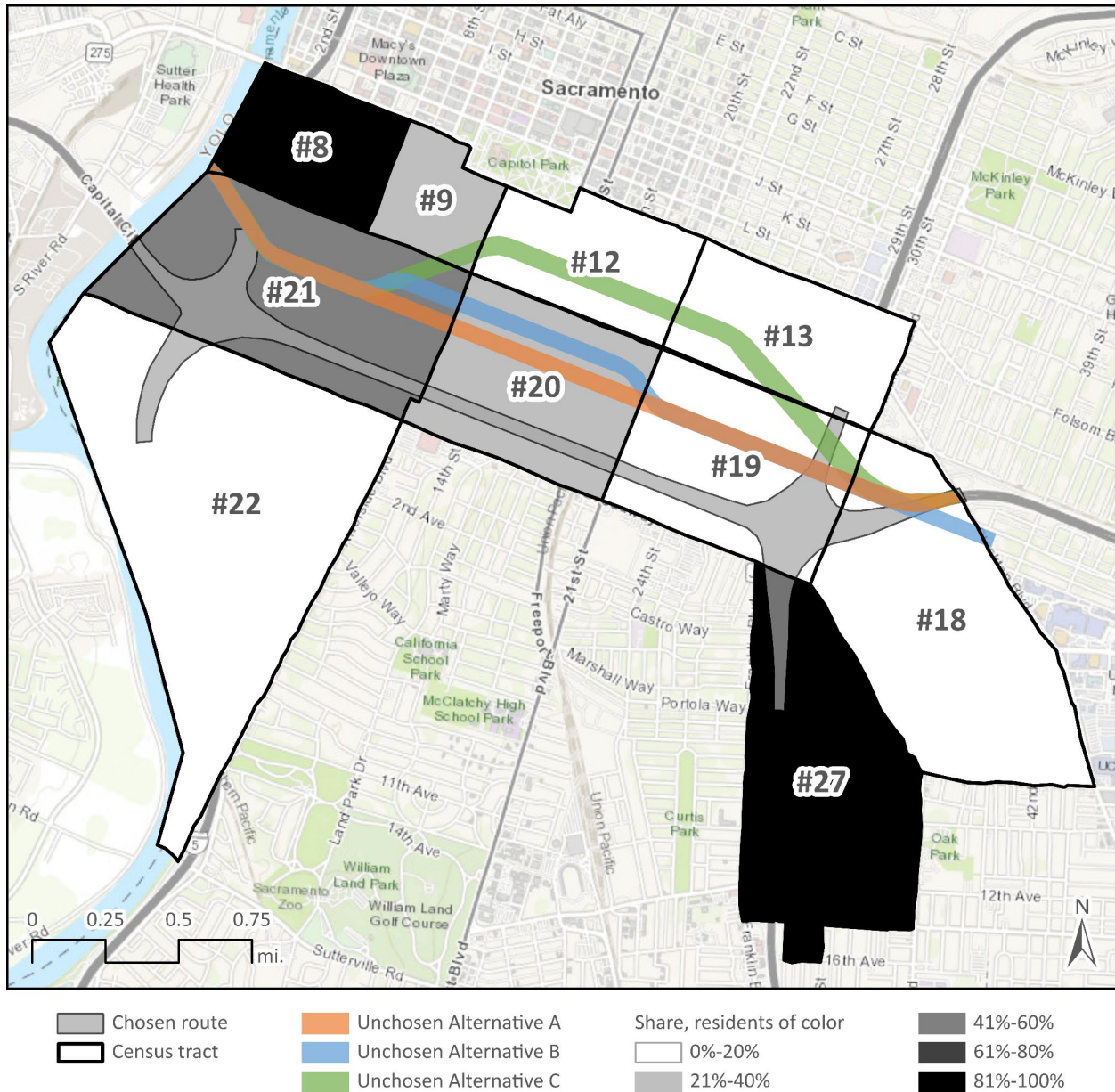
### Alternative Route Analysis

As described earlier, planning for US-50 began in the late 1950s, with three alternatives not ultimately chosen. The construction of the ultimately selected route began in the early 1960s. The changes in the racial composition of the neighborhoods between 1950 and 1980 are shown in **Figures 7-15, 7-16, 7-17, and 7-18**.

The tracts where US-50 was built had higher shares of people of color than the remainder of Sacramento and both the city and county overall (See **Table 7-3**). The disparity grew substantially after planning and construction took place. In 1950, 18 percent of the population in the freeway case study area was either Black, Latino/a, or some other race, compared to 11 percent in the remainder of Sacramento, 13 percent in the city overall, and 12 percent in the county. By 1960, after planning for the freeway had commenced but before construction, the difference in the population of color between the census tracts impacted and not impacted by the freeway had grown, from seven percentage points to 26 percentage points. The difference grew again by 1970 to 35 percentage points. Differences were larger for the Black population than for the Latino/a population. Tract #21, which contains the intersection of I-5 and US-50, grew from 49 percent non-white in 1950 to 83 percent non-white in 1980, largely driven by the growth in the Asian population. Tract #27, the Oak Park neighborhood, grew from three percent Black in 1950 to 39 percent Black in 1980, with a high of 47 percent Black in 1970.

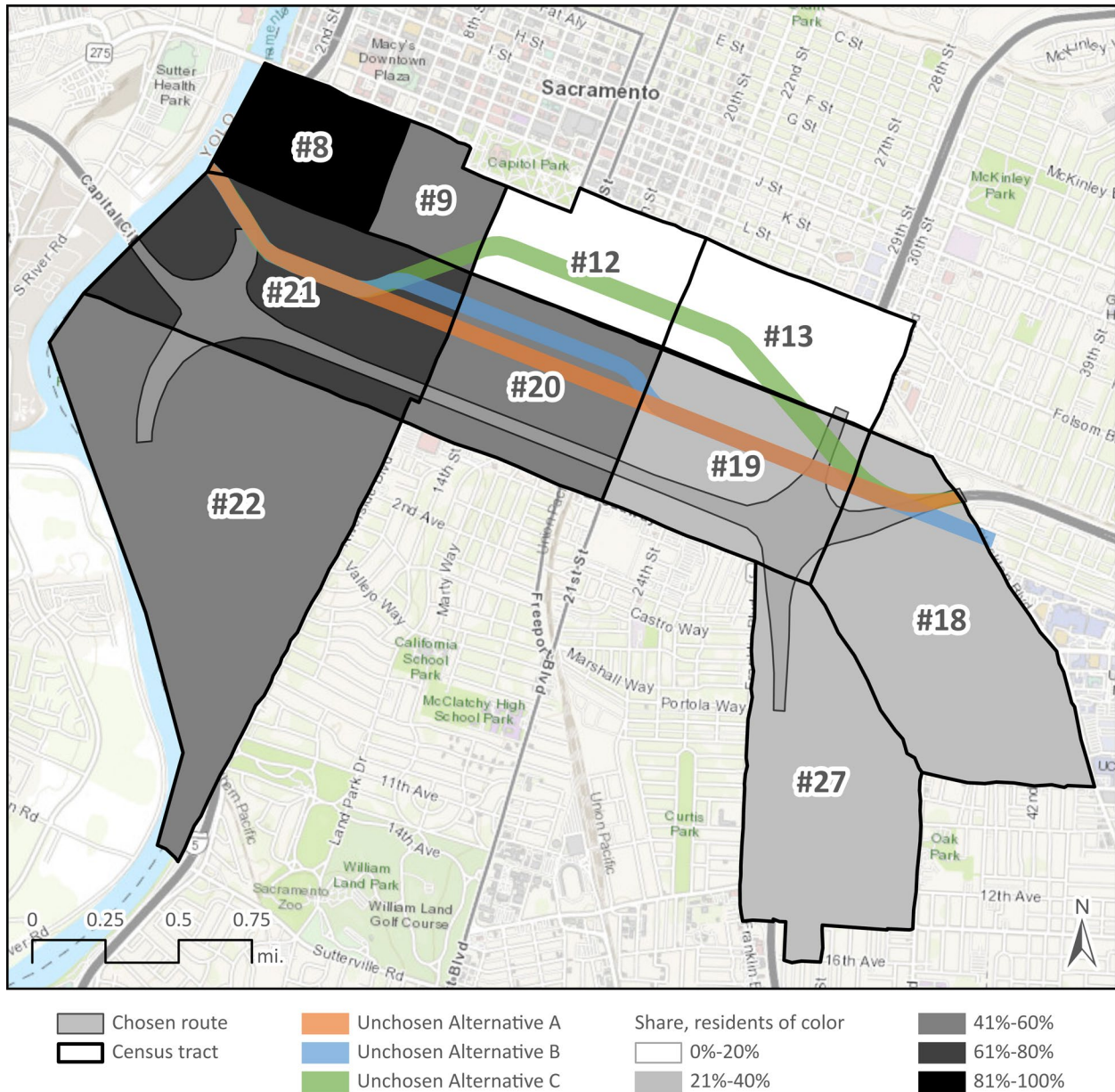
While the city diversified for a time between 1950 and 1980, the data suggest that the population of color became concentrated in freeway-adjacent neighborhoods. The neighborhoods along the route for US-50 that was ultimately selected had a lower share of the non-white population in 1950 compared to all three alternative routes. However, after planning and construction, the share of the non-white population—and the Black population specifically—grew much faster in the impacted tracts compared to the alternative routes (See **Table 7-3**). Alternatives A and B began the period with a non-white population of 34 percent, nearly double that of the actually impacted tracts, but ended with a non-white population of 54 percent, eight points *lower* than the impacted tracts. Similarly, Alternative C had a non-white population of 22 percent in 1950, only four points higher than the impacted tracts, but had a non-white population of 39 percent in 1980, just over half the share of the impacted tracts.

Figure 7-15. Sacramento Freeway Alternatives: Residents of Color by Census Tracts, 1950



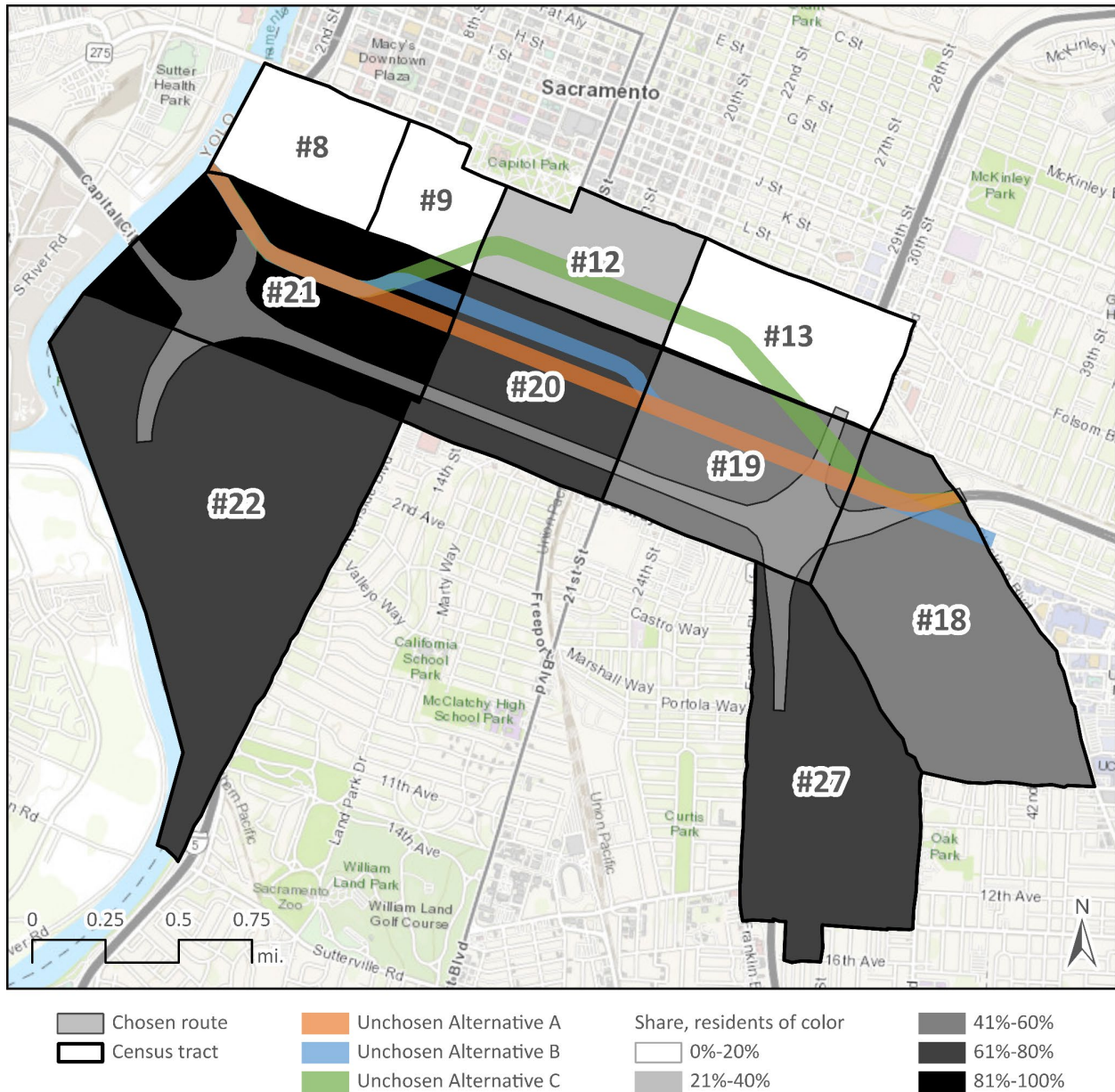
Data source: calculated by authors from 1950 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1952c); base map: Esri, 2023b

Figure 7-16. Sacramento Freeway Alternatives: Residents of Color by Census Tracts, 1960



Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1962b); base map: Esri, 2023b

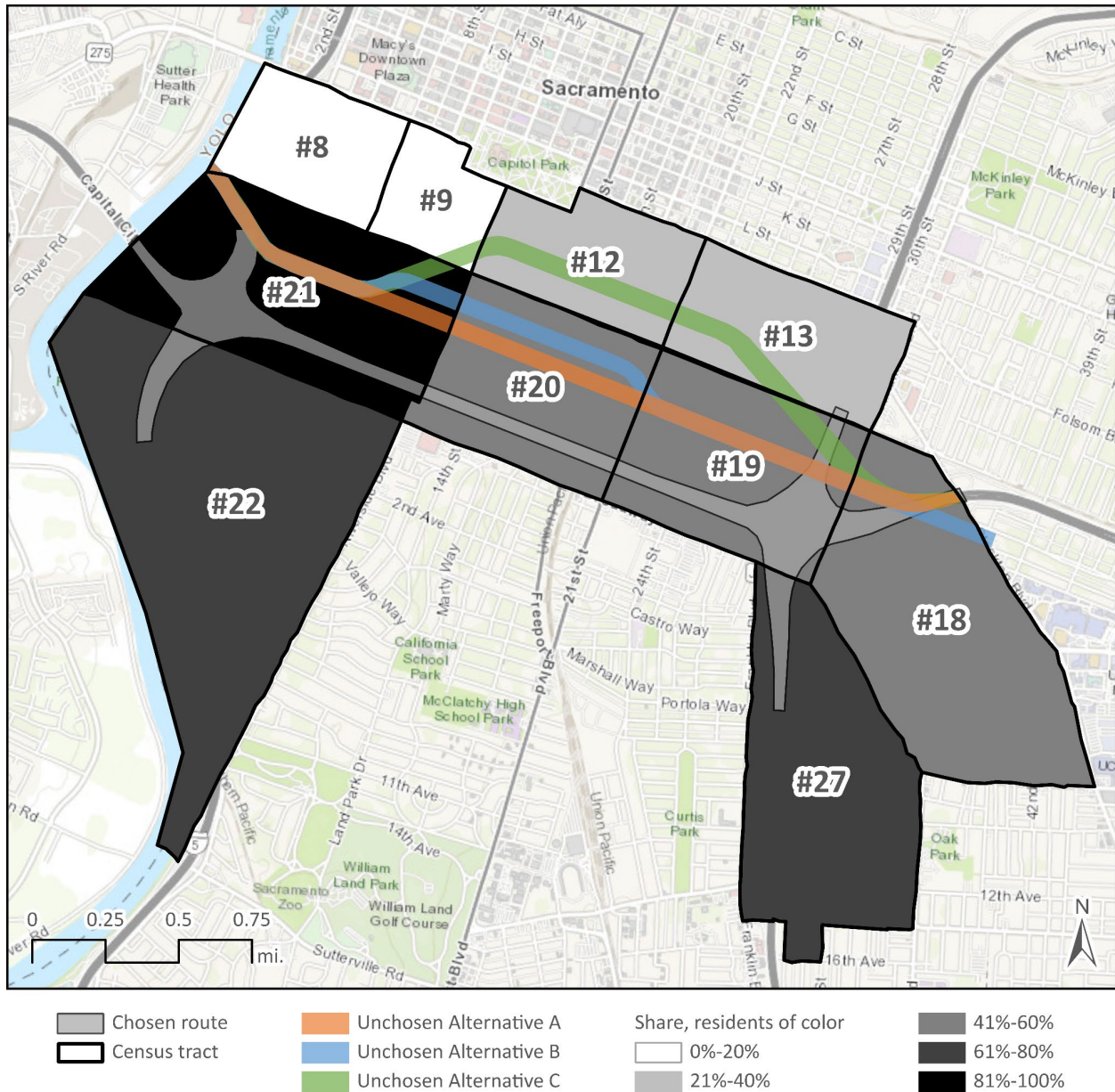
Figure 7-17. Sacramento Freeway Alternatives: Residents of Color by Census Tracts, 1970



Data source: calculated by authors from 1970 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1972b); base map: Esri, 2023b



Figure 7-18. Sacramento Freeway Alternatives: Residents of Color by Census Tracts, 1980



Data source: calculated by authors from 1980 U.S. Census (Manson et al., 2022); base map: Esri, 2023b

**Table 7-3. Racial/Ethnic Composition of Census Tracts along US-50 and Alternative Routes, Sacramento, 1950-1980**

	Share, Residents of Color, Including Latino/a				Share, Black				Share, Latino/a			
	1950	1960	1970	1980	1950	1960	1970	1980	1950	1960	1970	1980
<b>Sacramento County</b>	12%	14%	19%	23%	3%	4%	6%	7%	5%	6%	9%	10%
<b>City of Sacramento</b>	13%	20%	31%	38%	3%	6%	11%	13%	5%	8%	13%	14%
<b>Non-impacted Sacramento</b>	11%	16%	28%	36%	2%	5%	10%	12%	5%	7%	12%	14%

	Share, Residents of Color, Including Latino/a				Share, Black				Share, Latino/a			
	1950	1960	1970	1980	1950	1960	1970	1980	1950	1960	1970	1980
<b>Impacted Tracts</b>	18%	42%	63%	62%	6%	15%	22%	19%	5%	11%	19%	19%
<b>Tract #18</b>	10%	28%	55%	54%	6%	17%	35%	28%	no data	8%	16%	19%
<b>Tract #19</b>	8%	27%	46%	44%	3%	9%	4%	10%	no data	7%	21%	15%
<b>Tract #20</b>	24%	47%	61%	58%	5%	10%	5%	5%	no data	10%	13%	18%
<b>Tract #21</b>	49%	73%	87%	83%	14%	24%	18%	12%	14%	17%	26%	22%
<b>Tract #22</b>	12%	46%	66%	69%	3%	10%	12%	11%	5%	14%	24%	20%
<b>Tract #27</b>	8%	34%	65%	64%	3%	21%	47%	39%	4%	10%	16%	18%

	Share, Residents of Color, Including Latino/a				Share, Black				Share, Latino/a			
	1950	1960	1970	1980	1950	1960	1970	1980	1950	1960	1970	1980
<b>Alternatives A and B</b>	34%	46%	59%	54%	10%	17%	18%	16%	8%	11%	18%	17%
<b>Alternative C</b>	22%	28%	37%	39%	7%	10%	14%	15%	no data	10%	15%	14%

Data source: calculated by authors from 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1952c, 1962b, 1972b and Manson et al., 2022)

In 1950, median family income was distributed relatively equally across the impacted census tracts, alternative routes, the city, and the county (See **Table 7-4**). Family incomes in the census tracts where US-50 was eventually built were about the same as the remainder of the tracts in Sacramento. Family incomes were slightly lower in tracts along the alternate routes. The highest comparative median family income was in Tract #22, where part of the intersection of US-50 and I-5 is located (See **Figure 3-5**).

**Table 7-4. Median Family Income, Sacramento, 1950-1980**

	Median Family Income		Income Relative to Sacramento County				Change in Inflation-adjusted Income
	1950	1980	1950	1960	1970	1980	1950-1980
<b>Sacramento County</b>	\$3,231	\$20,949	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	+113%
<b>City of Sacramento</b>	\$3,310	\$18,844	102%	98%	92%	90%	+87%
<b>Non-impacted Sacramento</b>	\$3,492	\$19,342	108%	102%	97%	92%	+82%
<b>Impacted Tracts</b>	\$3,465	\$11,311	107%	80%	62%	54%	+7%
<b>Tract #18</b>	\$3,477	\$10,807	108%	82%	61%	52%	+2%
<b>Tract #19</b>	\$3,479	\$12,283	108%	87%	69%	59%	+16%
<b>Tract #20</b>	\$3,121	\$13,021	97%	81%	69%	62%	+37%
<b>Tract #21</b>	\$2,902	\$12,161	90%	71%	62%	58%	+37%
<b>Tract #22</b>	\$3,919	\$11,730	121%	80%	61%	56%	-2%
<b>Tract #27</b>	\$3,505	\$9,301	108%	76%	52%	44%	-13%

	Median Family Income		Income Relative to Sacramento County				Change in Inflation-adjusted Income
<b>Alternatives A and B</b>	\$3,101	\$12,255	96%	82%	66%	58%	30%
<b>Alternative C</b>	\$3,218	\$11,769	100%	78%	65%	56%	20%

*Note: The Census reports annual income in the previous year. Change in real income pegged to 1979 dollars. Other values represent nominal dollars.*

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1952c, 1962b, 1972b; Manson et al., 2022; and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)*

By 1960, family incomes started to diverge (See **Table 7-4**). While Sacramento tracts not located along the freeway remained close to the county median family income, impacted census tracts declined relative to the city and the county until 1980. In 1960, impacted tracts had a median family income 80 percent of the county median. In 1970, this figure declined to 62 percent of the county median, and by 1980, it fell to slightly more than half. At the same time, income in the remainder of the city decreased only slightly to 92 percent of the county median by 1980. Interestingly, median family income in the alternate route tracts followed a similar pattern to the impacted tracts.

However, while both impacted tracts and tracts along the alternate routes had substantially lower incomes compared to the city and county three decades after the freeway planning began, income growth stagnated considerably more in the impacted tracts (See **Table 7-4**). Median family income more than doubled in Sacramento County between 1950 and 1980 from an inflation-adjusted \$9,856 to \$20,949, in 1979 dollars. Income grew slightly less in the City of Sacramento over the same period, but still increased by 87 percent. At the same time, income in the impacted tracts remained nearly flat, increasing by seven percent in 30 years. In two tracts—Tracts #22 and #27, which contain the freeway interchanges—the change in real income was negative between 1950 and 1980. By comparison, incomes in the alternate route tracts increased by 20 percent to 30 percent, suggesting a larger suppressive effect of freeway construction on socioeconomic status.

Home values and rents in the impacted area were lower and remained lower than in the remainder of Sacramento and the county for the entire period of 1950 to 1980 (See **Table 7-5**). Unlike with the patterns in median family income, home values remained slightly higher in the impacted tracts compared to the alternate route neighborhoods, except in 1970. The change in home values was also similar in impacted and non-impacted tracts, rising 49 percent between 1950 to 1980 in the freeway-

**Table 7-5. Home and Rent Values, Sacramento, 1950-1980**

	Median Home Value					Median Contract Rent				
	1950	1960	1970	1980	Change, 1950- 1980	1950	1960	1970	1980	Change, 1950- 1980
<b>Sacramento County</b>	\$31,148	\$40,086	\$38,014	\$64,600	+107%	\$141	\$200	\$227	\$216	+53%
<b>City of Sacramento</b>	\$34,813	\$38,138	\$35,254	\$56,800	+63%	\$139	\$184	\$191	\$179	+29%
<b>Non-impacted Sacramento</b>	\$37,051	\$38,916	\$36,275	\$57,658	+56%	\$140	\$184	\$205	\$197	+41%

	Median Home Value					Median Contract Rent				
	1950	1960	1970	1980	Change, 1950- 1980	1950	1960	1970	1980	Change, 1950- 1980
<b>Impacted Tracts</b>	\$30,015	\$32,281	\$29,031	\$44,768	+49%	\$131	\$179	\$162	\$151	+16%
<b>Tract #18</b>	\$26,857	\$29,230	\$25,697	\$38,594	+44%	\$147	\$203	\$176	\$151	+2%
<b>Tract #19</b>	\$31,155	\$34,797	\$31,006	\$49,098	+58%	\$167	\$212	\$193	\$177	+6%
<b>Tract #20</b>	\$28,597	\$33,684	\$31,856	\$45,345	+59%	\$135	\$178	\$170	\$152	+12%
<b>Tract #21</b>	\$27,667	\$32,570	\$29,732	\$40,968	+48%	\$115	\$159	\$153	\$143	+24%
<b>Tract #22</b>	\$43,135	\$38,416	\$35,466	\$61,105	+42%	\$129	\$136	\$121	\$81	-37%
<b>Tract #27</b>	\$25,759	\$25,889	\$23,573	\$32,368	+26%	\$129	\$178	\$164	\$156	+21%



	Median Home Value					Median Contract Rent				
	1950	1960	1970	1980	Change, 1950- 1980	1950	1960	1970	1980	Change, 1950- 1980
<b>Alternatives A and B</b>	\$28,535	\$34,687	\$27,790	\$41,725	+46%	\$125	\$192	\$174	\$166	+33%
<b>Alternative C</b>	\$28,844	\$33,111	\$27,351	\$42,452	+47%	\$140	\$190	\$181	\$165	+18%

Note: Values inflation-adjusted to 1980 dollars.

Data source: calculated by authors from 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1952c, 1962b, 1972b; Manson et al., 2022; and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)

adjacent neighborhoods compared to 56 percent in the remainder of the city, both slightly higher than alternate route neighborhoods.

**Table 7-6. Total Housing Units, Sacramento, 1950-1980**

	1950	1960	1970	1980	Change, 1950-1980
<b>Sacramento County</b>	87,253	164,576	212,247	276,563	+217%
<b>City of Sacramento</b>	44,654	71,763	96,615	101,389	+127%
<b>Non-impacted Sacramento</b>	34,284	59,413	87,232	91,530	+167%
<b>Impacted Tracts</b>	10,370	12,350	9,383	9,859	-5%
<b>Tract #18</b>	2,176	3,080	2,253	2,256	+4%
<b>Tract #19</b>	1,552	2,055	1,501	1,775	+14%
<b>Tract #20</b>	1,408	1,693	1,315	1,422	+1%
<b>Tract #21</b>	1,696	1,767	1,085	1,139	-33%
<b>Tract #22</b>	1,419	1,757	1,694	1,834	+29%
<b>Tract #27</b>	2,119	1,998	1,535	1,433	-32%
<b>Alternatives A and B</b>	6,832	8,595	6,154	6,592	-4%
<b>Alternative C</b>	10,522	13,291	9,242	9,777	-7%

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1952c, 1962b, 1972b and Manson et al., 2022)*

**Table 7-7. Occupied Housing Units, Sacramento, 1950-1980**

	1950	1960	1970	1980	Change, 1950-1980
<b>Sacramento County</b>	82,729	150,936	202,953	299,805	+262%
<b>City of Sacramento</b>	43,290	66,649	91,697	93,286	+115%
<b>Non-impacted Sacramento</b>	33,164	56,380	83,013	84,385	+154%
<b>Impacted Tracts</b>	10,126	10,269	8,684	8,901	-12%
<b>Tract #18</b>	2,139	2,337	2,051	1,995	-7%
<b>Tract #19</b>	1,503	1,715	1,359	1,619	+8%
<b>Tract #20</b>	1,372	1,419	1,247	1,278	-7%
<b>Tract #21</b>	1,646	1,476	1,025	1,015	-38%
<b>Tract #22</b>	1,395	1,709	1,665	1,780	+28%
<b>Tract #27</b>	2,071	1,613	1,337	1,214	-41%
<b>Alternatives A and B</b>	6,660	6,947	5,682	5,907	-11%
<b>Alternative C</b>	10,129	10,556	8,463	8,609	-15%

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1952c, 1962b, 1972b and Manson et al., 2022)*

Unlike for home values, there was an appreciable difference in rent changes over the years (See **Table 7-5**). Median contract rent was similar in both the freeway-adjacent neighborhoods (\$38 in nominal dollars) and the rest of the city (\$41 in nominal dollars) in 1950. In the impacted tracts, rents rose 16

percent in real terms between 1950 and 1980. In the remainder of Sacramento, however, rents rose 41 percent. The change in contract rent was higher in the alternate route neighborhoods as well, with Alternatives A and B having a higher rent increase (+33%) than Alternative C (+18%). Notably, contract rent in the impacted tracts peaked in 1960 and decreased thereafter, while rent in non-impacted Sacramento peaked in 1970 and decreased much less to 1980. Tract #22 (upper Land Park) was the only tract in the study area to have a net decrease in contract rent between 1950 and 1980.

Total housing units (See **Table 7-6**) and total occupied housing units (See **Table 7-7**) in the City and County of Sacramento increased substantially over the three-decade period, more than doubling in the city and more than tripling in the county. This growth in housing was due in part to annexations; much of the area to the south of Sutterville Road was annexed in the 1950s, and North Sacramento was annexed in the 1960s. There was little to no development in either the impacted neighborhoods or the neighborhoods along the alternate routes. In areas along the unchosen alternate routes, the number of total housing units decreased between four percent and seven percent by 1980, while the number of occupied units decreased by 11 percent to 15 percent. While much of the decrease in housing in the impacted neighborhoods can be attributed to the construction of US-50, this cannot account for the housing losses in the neighborhoods along the alternate routes, suggesting greater forces at work in driving change.

### Direct Impacts

**Table 7-8** shows estimates of homes destroyed by the construction of US-50 and the population affected. These estimates reflect the housing units in the census blocks through which US-50 and its interchanges with I-5 and SR-99 were built. The alternate route estimates reflect the blocks through which the proposed freeways would have gone, assuming the same freeway and interchange widths.

In sum, about 4,500 people were displaced by the freeway from a loss of about 1,800 housing units (See **Table 7-8**). Of the housing units that were occupied, just under half the homes lost were owned by their residents. Roughly one third of the displaced households were headed by people of color, a higher share than the city population overall (See **Table 7-1**).

Comparison with the alternate routes shows that what was constructed was neither the most destructive in terms of residents displaced nor the most disparate in terms of the racial composition of households displaced (See **Table 7-8**). Constructing the freeway along Alternative A would have destroyed fewer homes than US-50 did, but a higher share of the households would have been non-white. Alternative B had similar characteristics to the actually constructed route: this alternative would have destroyed 77 additional occupied homes, displacing 300 additional residents, with about the same share in non-white households. Alternate C would have displaced the most individuals and destroyed the most homes of the four routes. However, a larger share of the population in the path of this route was white.

**Table 7-8. Estimates of Homes and Households Directly Impacted by US-50 Construction and Alternate Routes, Sacramento**

	US-50	Alternative A	Alternative B	Alternative C
<b>Population</b>	4,503	4,019	4,748	7,358
<b>Total Dwelling Units</b>	1,802	1,536	1,803	3,503
<b>Occupied Dwelling Units</b>	1,659	1,433	1,680	3,170
<b>Owned Dwelling Units</b>	734	547	679	748
<b>Rented Dwelling Units</b>	925	886	1,001	2,429
<b>Households of Color, Including Latino/a*</b>	534	552	571	595
<b>Share, Households of Color, Including Latino/a*</b>	32%	39%	34%	19%

*Note: \* Racial and ethnic definitions and terms have changed over the decades (discussed in Chapter 3). The terms reflect the most comparable labels between years. For example, Hispanic/Latino/a/of Spanish origin did not exist as a Census category until 1980. Prior to that, the population was estimated from the population with a Spanish surname, of Puerto Rican heritage, or who spoke Spanish.*

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961c)*

The racial composition of households within the US-50 footprint did not differ substantially in aggregate from those located outside the footprint but within the study area (See **Table 7-9**). The share of households headed by non-white people under the footprint was two percentage points *less* than the remainder of the study area census tracts. This pattern comes with an important caveat, however. The individual tracts that did have higher shares of non-white households under the freeway footprint—Tracts #19, #20, and #21—were those that contained the stretch of US-50 between the interchanges with I-5 and SR-99.

**Table 7-9. Share, Households of Color in Sacramento Case Study Area**

	Under US-50 Footprint	Beyond US-50 Footprint
<b>Impacted Area</b>	22.7%	24.6%
<b>Tract #18</b>	3.6%	17.1%
<b>Tract #19</b>	19.3%	11.3%
<b>Tract #20</b>	33.2%	27.1%
<b>Tract #21</b>	52.7%	51.4%
<b>Tract #22</b>	no occupied units	27.3%
<b>Tract #27</b>	14.8%	18.0%

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961c)*

### Indirect Impacts

While the period between 1960 and 1980 was a time of significant growth for the City of Sacramento, the area around US-50 saw significant decline instead (See **Table 7-10**). Between 1960 and 1970, much

**Table 7-10. Housing Units nearby and beyond the Freeway in the Sacramento Study Area**

	Nearby the Freeway	Beyond the Freeway	City of Sacramento
<b>1960</b>	4,921	6,397	71,763
<b>1970</b>	3,790	6,571	96,634
<b>1980</b>	1,774	3,758	101,389

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1962b, 1972b and Manson et al., 2022)*

of the decline in housing in the area “nearby the freeway” (as defined in Chapter 3) was due to losses from freeway construction itself. At the same time, there was a growth of nearly 200 housing units in the portion of the study area “beyond the freeway” (as defined in Chapter 3), away from the shadows of the freeway itself. This, though, was dwarfed by the growth in the city as a whole, as its borders expanded to encompass new areas for development. By 1980, housing loss was common across the entire study area. The area nearby the freeway ended the 1970s with less than half as many housing units as it started the decade with, while the remainder of the study area saw large decreases as well, though not quite so stark. These housing losses stood in contrast to the growth in the city, which added housing units at a more modest pace compared to the 1960s.

The freeway appears to have indirectly affected home values and contract rents during the decade of construction but evened out by 1980 (See **Table 7-11**). Although in all years, home values were lower in the study area than the rest of the city, the average value of homes nearby the freeway were virtually identical to others in the study area in 1960. Home values tumbled everywhere in Sacramento by 1970, and homes nearby the freeway were notably less valuable than those beyond the freeway. However, by

**Table 7-11. Average Home Values and Contract Rent nearby and beyond the Freeway in the Sacramento Study Area**

		Nearby the Freeway	Beyond the Freeway	City of Sacramento
Median Home Value	1960	\$32,320	\$32,620	\$42,035
	1970	\$13,201	\$18,801	\$35,254
	1980	\$43,852	\$44,730	\$56,800
Median Contract Rent	1960	\$192	\$189	\$192
	1970	\$87	\$115	\$191
	1980	\$164	\$161	\$179

*Note: Values inflation-adjusted to 1980 dollars.*

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1962b, 1972b; Manson et al., 2022; and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)*

1980, values of homes nearer to the freeway gained ground and were within \$1,000 of other study area homes.

The average rent in 1960 was virtually identical across the study area and the city (See **Table 7-11**). While rents remained the same in Sacramento in 1970, rents in the study area plummeted, with those closest to the freeway substantially lower than those beyond. As with home values, rents increased again in 1980 and evened out between units nearby the freeway and those beyond it. Rents remained slightly lower in the study area compared to the rest of Sacramento.

### Enduring Legacy of the Freeways

Like other cities, the impacts of freeway construction in Sacramento were most harmful to communities of color. The neighborhoods where US-50 was planned and constructed—the focus of the quantitative analysis—were more likely to be communities of color than the remainder of Sacramento. But freeway building was not the only factor: redevelopment efforts combined with redlining and racial covenants pushed Black and Latino/a residents, as well as Japanese Americans, out of established areas and into areas adjacent to the planned freeway. Although the exact siting of the freeway routes does not appear to have specifically targeted communities of color, these other policies ensured that communities of color were concentrated near the freeway by the time it was built and thus experienced its negative impacts most directly thereafter.

At the initial time of construction, the racial and ethnic composition in the neighborhoods where US-50 was built was similar to the proposed routes that were ultimately not selected. However, 20 years on, Black and Latino/a residents were more likely to be concentrated in freeway-adjacent neighborhoods compared to those near unchosen alternatives and elsewhere in Sacramento. Similarly, growth in family income was comparatively stunted in the freeway-adjacent neighborhoods. Surprisingly, home values were similar between the US-50 neighborhoods and the alternatives, but they remained far lower than the city and county by 1980. These patterns suggest not just the immediate destructive power of the freeway but long-lasting effects as well.

Our estimates indicate that roughly 4,500 people were displaced as a direct result of the construction of US-50, about a third of whom were people of color. The final route contained neither the most homes nor the largest concentration of people of color compared to the alternative routes, but there was a significant impact on Black and Latino/a residents who lived in neighborhoods hemmed in between US-50, I-5, and SR-99, each a major freeway that created barriers and caused displacement.

Yet today, the neighborhoods near US-50 have regained some of their former vibrancy. The sharp total decline in population between 1950 and 1980 was staunchly by 1990 (See **Table 7-2**). However, while the City of Sacramento today is highly diverse in its racial and ethnic composition (See **Table 7-1**), residents near US-50 are much more likely to be white than in the rest of the city, suggesting that not everyone has had equal access to participate in the regrowth.



In recent years, gentrification in Oak Park has displaced Black residents. In the last decade, the Black population of Oak Park decreased by 24 percent despite a two percent increase in Black residents in the city overall (Hooks, 2022). The Aggie Square project, a joint effort by UC Davis and the City to redevelop a 25-acre area adjacent to Oak Park (UC Davis, 2016), may mean one more wave of displacement of Black residents, akin to the displacement that occurred with the redevelopment of the West End. In the meantime, widening of US-50 (DaPrato and Keaton, 2022) is adding to the impacts on Oak Park and other neighborhoods adjacent to the freeway. Freeway building combined with other public policies continues to disproportionately impact communities of color in Sacramento.

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## 8. San José: The Impacts of I-280 and I-680 in the Heart of Silicon Valley

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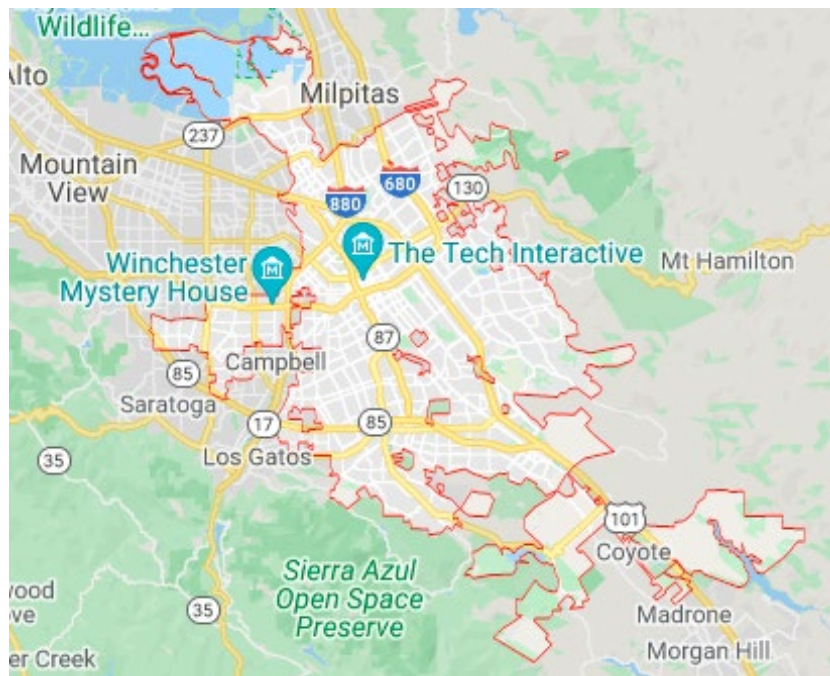
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## Overview

San José, located in the heart of Santa Clara County (See **Figure 8-1**), is the third-largest city in California, with a population of nearly 1 million as of 2021. The city's population, fueled by waves of immigration from many parts of the world, is diverse, and although the median income of \$65,847 is higher than for the U.S., wealth disparities are vast. High housing prices, driven by a chronic under-supply of housing, mean that many low-wage workers commute long distances from outside of the county. The lower-income neighborhoods that remain in San José are those that were historically home to Latino/a and other immigrant communities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022a; Foster-Frau, 2021; and Blumenberg and King, 2021). Many of these neighborhoods were directly impacted by freeway building in the 1960s and 1970s.

**Figure 8-1. Map of San José**



Source: Google, 2023

The original boundaries of the city encompass today's downtown area, bordered roughly by Hedding Street on the north, Coyote Creek on the east, Alma Avenue on the south, and the Guadalupe River on the west. The city first annexed a small area to the east and a larger area to the west of downtown in the early 1900s. The largest annexation growth period took place in the 1950s and 1960s, including in the eastern portion of the study area of this chapter.

The city diversified significantly over the study period as well. The most notable increase was in the Asian population, which made up at most 2.4 percent of the city population in 1960, growing to almost

one third of the population by 2010. There was a significant growth in the Latino/a population, from about one in seven in 1960 to about one in three by 2010 (See **Table 8-1**). The Black population peaked in 1980 with 4.5 percent of the population, declining to about 3 percent by 2010. San José first had a majority of residents of color by the 1990 census.

**Table 8-1. San José Racial/Ethnic Demographic Profile, 1950-2010**

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
<b>Total Population</b>	204,916	445,779	629,442	782,248	894,943	945,942
<b>Share, White*</b>	82.7%	71.7%	63.8%	49.6%	36.0%	28.7%
<b>Share, Black</b>	1.0%	2.5%	4.5%	4.4%	3.3%	2.9%
<b>Share, Latino/a*</b>	14.0%	21.9%	22.3%	26.6%	30.2%	33.2%
<b>Share, American Indian/Alaska Native</b>	not available	0.4%	0.1%	0.5%	0.3%	0.2%
<b>Share, Asian/Pacific Islander</b>	not available	not available	8.3%	18.7%	26.9%	32.1%
<b>Share, Asian (East/South Asian)</b>	not available	not available	7.9%	not available	26.6%	31.7%
<b>Share, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</b>	not available	not available	0.4%	not available	0.3%	0.4%
<b>Share, Other</b>	2.4%	3.5%	1.0%	2.0%	3.2%	2.9%

*Note: \* Racial and ethnic definitions and terms have changed over the decades (discussed in Chapter 3). The terms reflect the most comparable labels between years. For example, Hispanic/Latino/a/of Spanish origin did not exist as a Census category until 1980. Prior to that, the population was estimated from the population with a Spanish surname, of Puerto Rican heritage, or who spoke Spanish.*

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1962c, 1972c, 2022a and Manson et al., 2022)*

U.S. Highway 101, following the historic route of the El Camino Real, has long been the ethnic dividing line in San José, with greater concentrations of white residents to the west of the highway, and greater concentrations of Latino/a, Asian, and Black residents to the east. Interstate 280 was completed in 1972 and cuts through the heart of central San José, affecting many close-knit neighborhoods such as downtown San José, the South University Neighborhood (SUN), Naglee Park, Martha's Gardens, Washington-Guadalupe, Tamien, Alma-Almaden, O'Brien, Spartan Keyes, and Greater Gardner. Interstate 680, completed in 1974, bisects San José's Eastside community and the neighborhoods of Mayfair and Alum Rock. Still burdened by their proximity to these major freeways, these neighborhoods now face significant gentrification pressures. **Figures 8-2** and **8-3** show the close proximity of these freeways to downtown San José. **Figures 8-4** and **8-5** show the route of I-280 through downtown San José.

**Figure 8-2. Interchange of I-280 and SR-87**



*Source: Unfinished Interchange of 87 and 280, 1997*

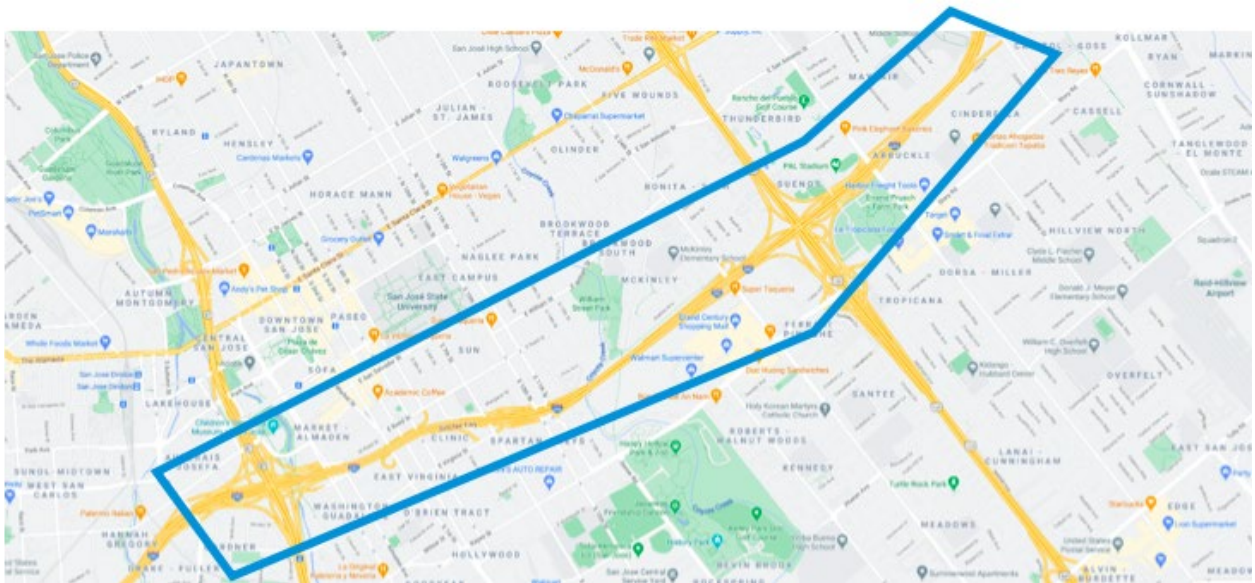


**Figure 8-3. Downtown San José and Interchange of I-280 and SR-87**



Source: City of San José, 2004, p. 11

**Figure 8-4. San José Downtown (I-280) and Mayfair (I-680) Corridor**

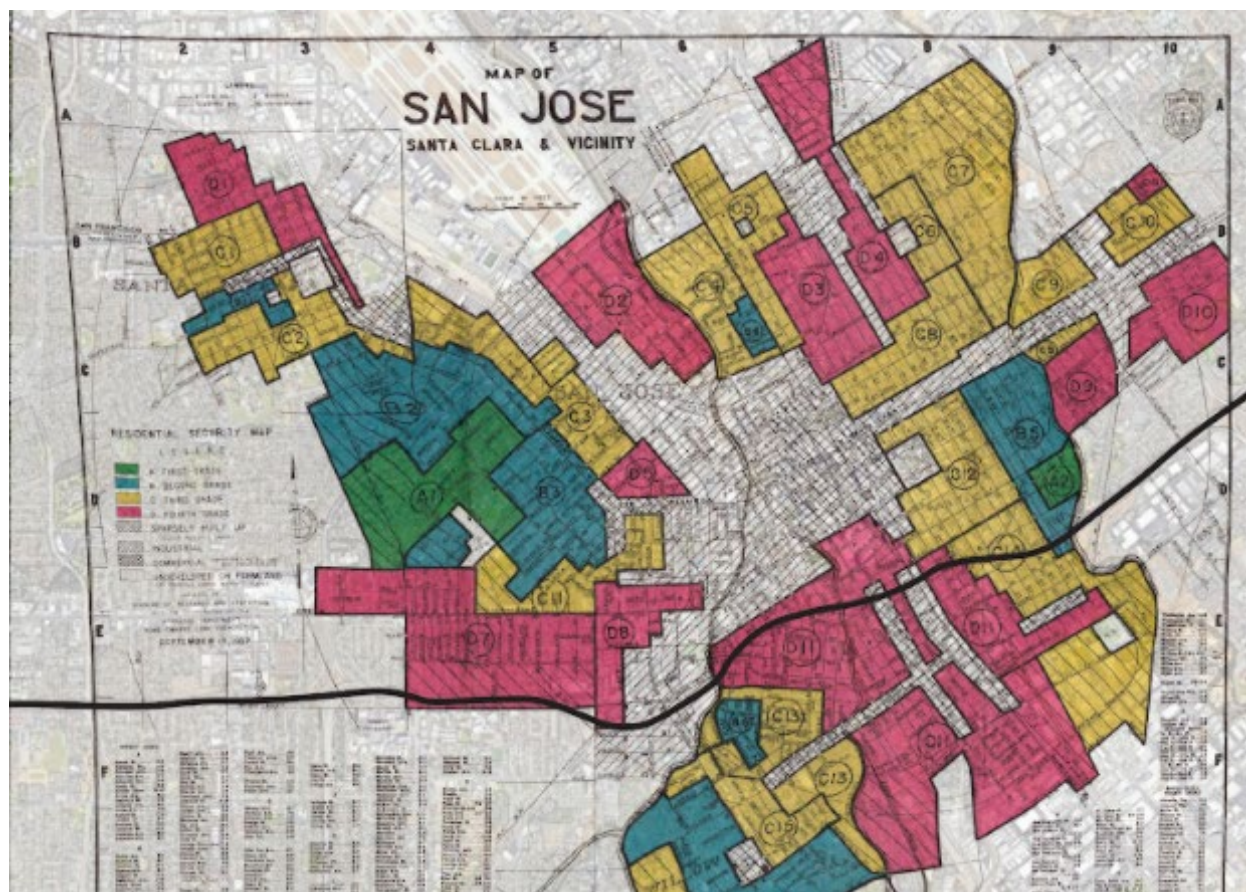


Sources: Google, 2023 and authors



covenants (Pitti, 2003). From 1920 until such covenants were outlawed in 1948, West San José's white residents, fearing that Mexican settlement in their neighborhoods would threaten property values, enforced covenants "barring property from occupancy or use by all non-Caucasians" (Pitti, 2003, p. 88). The only properties free from restrictive covenants were in East San José (Pitti, 2003).

**Figure 8-6. San José HOLC Map**



*Note: Original legend: red = "hazardous," yellow = "definitely declining," blue = "still desirable," green = "best"*

*Source: Nelson et al., n.d.*

East San José became a refuge for the city's non-white and Latino/a populations. Prior to the Second World War, "Eastsider" barrio residents were mostly migrant agricultural workers in San José's fruit economy (Pitti, 2003). These areas were still rural, characterized by unpaved streets and crowded houses, with "no sewers, no sidewalks, no services, no lights" (Pitti, 2003, p. 90). From 1960 to 1970, as the farmers, ranchers, packing houses, and canneries that once provided employment to Mexican Americans were replaced with commercial and industrial businesses that overlooked Mexican-American

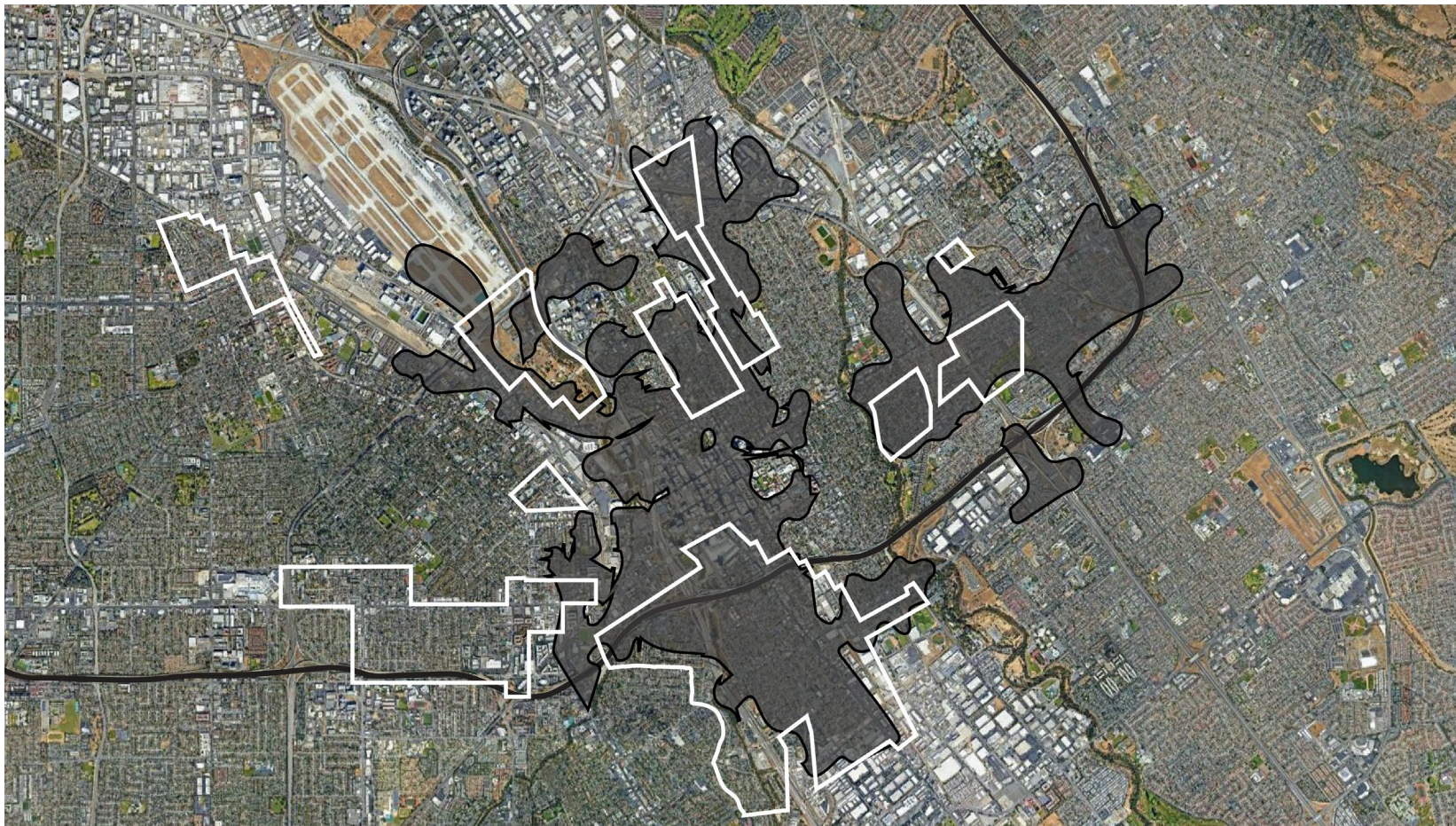
laborers, this community was left uniquely disadvantaged (Ybarra, 1972). Denied high-wage employment opportunities, San José’s sizable Mexican-American community was politically as well as economically disadvantaged. As San José community leader and president of Santa Clara County’s Confederación de la Raza Unida Jack Ybarra described the situation in 1972, Mexican-Americans and other marginalized groups were “unable to buy a house in the neighborhood of [their] choice...[and] unable to voice an opinion in the decision-making process which affects his life” (Ybarra, 1972, p. 131). The Eastside was also home to a sizable Black population: according to the 1970 census, 14 to 18

**Figure 8-7. Map of Areas Categorized as Blighted, 1958**



Source: San José City Planning Commission, 1958, p. 89

Figure 8-8. Areas Deemed Blighted, Redlined Areas, and Freeway Route



*Note: 1937 redlined areas demarcated by solid white lines; 1958 areas deemed blighted shaded*

*Source: Nelson et al., n.d.; San José City Planning Commission, 1958; and authors; base imagery: Google, 2023*

percent of the residents in this area were Black, higher than all other neighborhoods in the city (U.S. Census Bureau, 1972c).

In the 1950s, the City set out to redevelop blighted areas (See **Figures 8-7** and **8-8**), an effort that disproportionately affected low-income communities of color. The City's 1958 Master Plan mapped "blighted" areas to be destroyed and redeveloped in preparation for the massive urban renewal projects which it would soon undertake (San José City Planning Commission, 1958, p. 89). These blighted areas aligned with HOLC's redlined neighborhoods. The redevelopment program thus led to the displacement of marginalized families and contributed to a reduction in the stock of affordable housing. Although the goal was to revitalize downtown San José, the program produced the opposite effect—an outcome unacknowledged by leaders at the time. In a 1965 article in the *San José Mercury*, developers claimed that downtown had been improving since 1960, with a decline in "blight." A city planner argued that "weapons used to combat decay downtown include...better access made possible by developments such as the freeway network and the urban renewal program" (B. Brown, 1965, p. 2R). Yet per interviewees, redevelopment coupled with freeway building left the downtown area largely devoid of an identity, apart from its population of San José State University students, and without the major promised social benefits. As current residents described in interviews conducted for this study, the neighborhood of Tropicana, along US-101, is livelier at night than downtown (San José Resident 1, 2022; San José Resident 2, 2022; and San José Resident 3, 2022).

### Freeway Building

Freeway building accompanied the city's redevelopment efforts. A 1957 report identified traffic congestion as the city's greatest problem in the wake of postwar population growth and increased suburban sprawl (Bergstein and Swartley, 2009). The city invested in improvements to its roadways and supported plans by the State Bureau of Highways (the precursor to Caltrans) to build freeways. By 1955, the Bureau had already initiated route location studies for Interstate 280. I-280 was meant to alleviate traffic congestion as an alternative to US-101 from San Francisco to San José. When construction of the segment of I-280 in West San José began in 1958, the goal was to increase access to Central San José and connect downtown San José to the larger San Francisco Bay Area (*San José Mercury*, 1969).

From San Francisco, I-280 runs south into San José until it reaches US-101 (See **Figure 8-9**), at which point, the bottom of a large "U" shape, the freeway becomes I-680 and turns to run parallel to I-880 through the San Francisco Bay Area's East Bay. Named for Joseph P. Sinclair, the agency's District Engineer from 1952 to 1964, the freeway would be adopted as part of the Interstate Highway System (Faigin, 2020).

Driving along I-280 and I-680 through the heart of San José, it is easy to see the disparities between the stretches of freeway that pass through the hearts of San José's communities of color and those that pass through the whiter and wealthier areas to the west of State Route 87 (also known as the Guadalupe Freeway). To the west of SR-87, I-280 is an eight-lane, mostly depressed freeway. Through central San José and many parts of East San José, the freeway rises above the marginalized communities through which it passes.

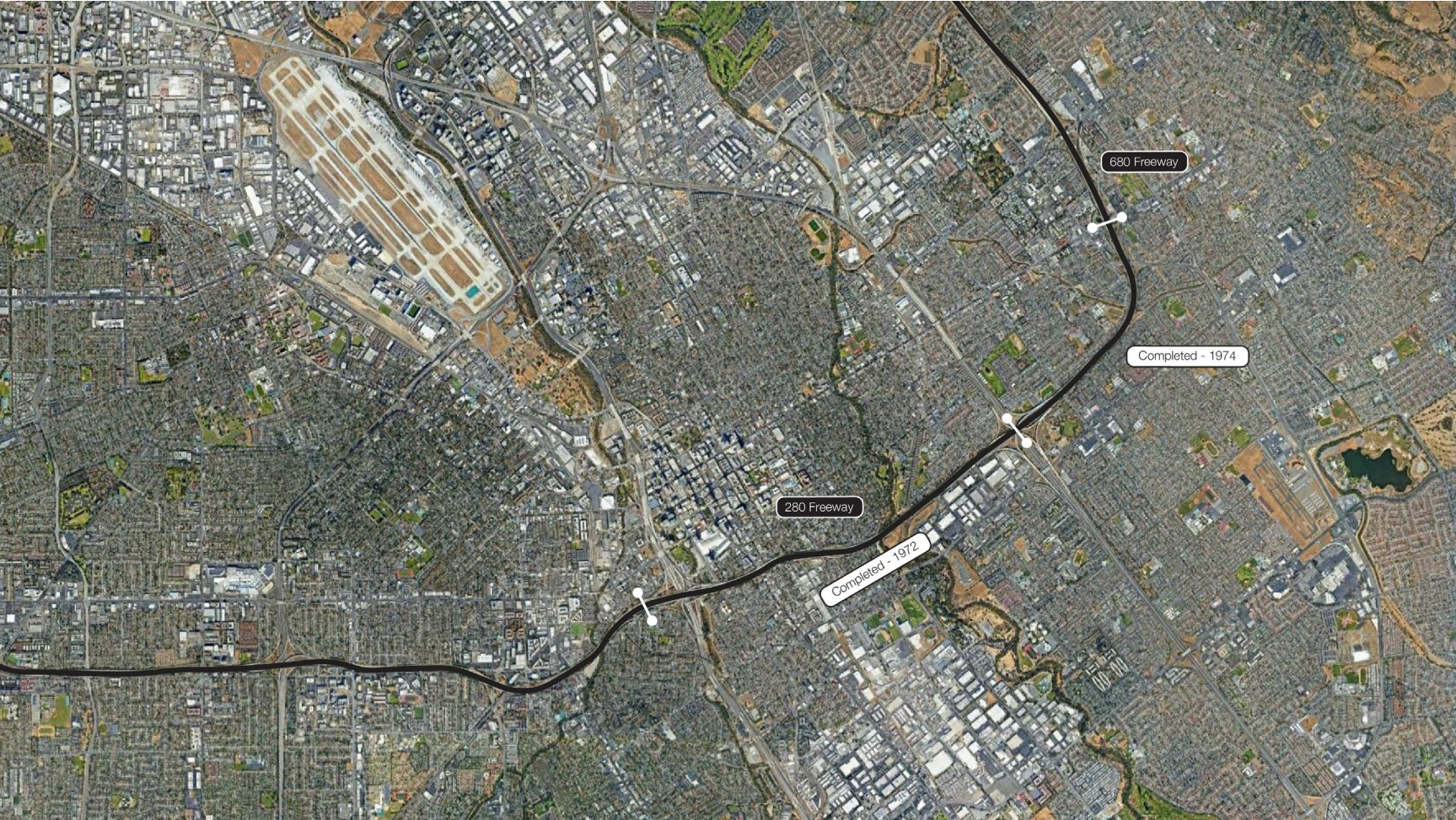
**Figure 8-9. Sinclair Freeway/I-280 at US-101**

*Source: Lyon, 2017*

I-280 and I-680 through central and East San José were largely planned and funded in the 1960s (See **Figure 8-10**). The western portion of I-280 was completed up to the Fruitdale district in West San José in 1963 (not depicted in **Figure 8-10**). I-280 through central San José opened to traffic in mid-1972, but traffic at the east end was diverted to SR-17 and US-101 until the completion of I-680 on September 4, 1974 (Caltrans, 2012).

The interchange between US-101, I-280, and I-680 was not completed until the 1980s (See **Figures 8-11** and **8-12**). In 1970, Santa Clara County voters rejected initiatives for highway funding as well as transit funding. Coupled with dwindling state and federal funding for transportation improvements, the lack of voter support produced a half-built interchange, which sat in a construction limbo for years. In 1976, San José Councilmember Joe Colla used a crane to haul a 1960 Chevy Impala onto the interchange, dubbed the “Monument to Nowhere” (Prado, 2019). In the photoshoot with the stranded Chevy, Colla’s arms are outstretched over the caption “Where Do We Go from Here?” (See **Figure 8-13**) (Silicon Valley Newsroom, 2016 and Herhold, 2013). This publicity stunt redirected state funds back into the interchange project, which was finally completed in 1981 and, in 2016, named the Joe Colla Interchange (Prado, 2019).

Figure 8-10. Chronology of I-280 and I-680 Freeway Construction



Base imagery: Google, 2023



**Figure 8-11. Joe Colla Interchange**



*Source: Prado, 2019*

**Figure 8-12. Unfinished US-101/I-280/I-680 Interchange, 1976**



*Source: Whittle, 1976*

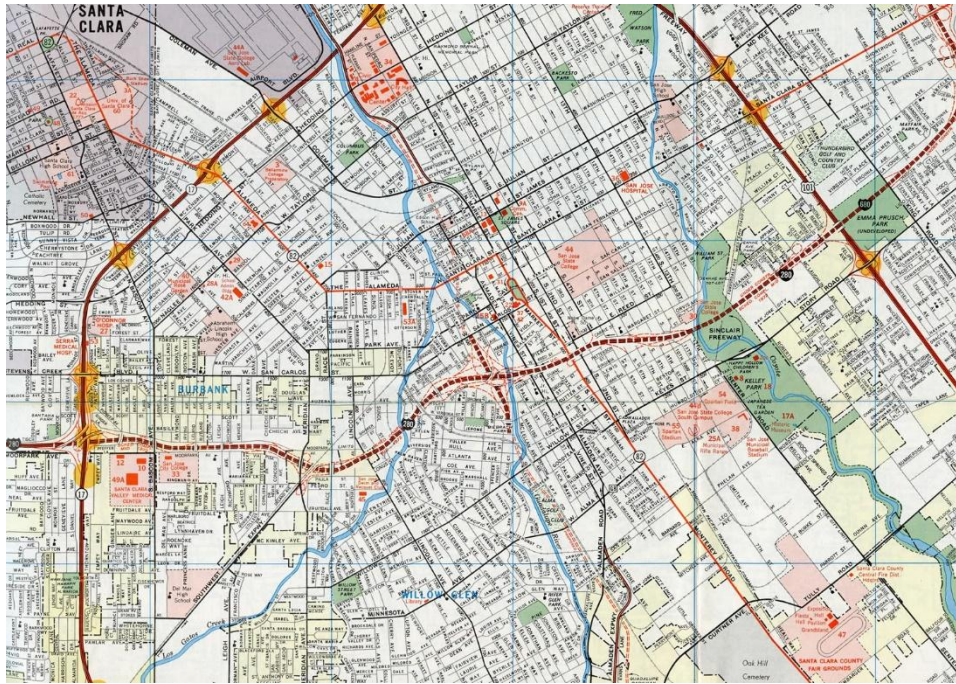
**Figure 8-13. Joe Colla atop the Unfinished US-101/I-280/I-680 Interchange**

Source: Herhold, 2013

Unlike the prior three case studies, it does not appear that any alternative routes were considered for the siting of I-280 (See **Figure 8-14**). Community leaders in central San José revealed in interviews that the placement of I-280, besides cutting through the lowest-cost land in the city, was also an act of “threading the needle” (San José Resident 4, 2022) between San José State University to the north and a city-owned industrial dump site on Remillard Court, along Coyote Creek, to the south (San José Resident 4, 2022 and San José Informant 1, 2022). Other alignments for I-680 were, apparently, not considered. To the west of SR-87, beyond our case study area, I-280 was slightly rerouted to preserve the historic

Roberto-Suño adobe house, protected by federal law on the National Register of Historic Places (Halberstadt, 1997).

**Figure 8-14. Map of I-280 in 1986**



Source: Interstate-Guide.com, 2020

### Community Reaction

The Bay Area was the site of some of the nation's earliest anti-freeway citizen movements (See Chapter 2) (Mohl, 2004). The construction of I-280 in San Francisco was hotly contested through the 1950s and 1960s, primarily by the city's white residents. In 1959, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors voted to cancel several freeway projects, including the connection between I-280 and I-80 south of downtown (Miguel and Smith, 2018).

The freeway opposition in San José differed from that in San Francisco for several reasons. San José's freeway construction era occurred somewhat later, and by then, the city was attuned to the need for a public engagement process. In the 1960s, the "most persistent, if not the most successful Council advisory group" in San José, the Citizens Committee Improvement Committee (CCIC), was formed so that the City of San José could meet requirements for federal urban renewal assistance (*San José Mercury*, 1965). In late May 1965, the CCIC organized a community meeting to look at the long-range capital improvement plans for the city, including highway development plans (*San José Mercury*, 1965). According to a report in the *San José Mercury*, during this meeting, the CCIC had "heard a report, but

took no action on the housing needs of residents of Gardner district whose homes will be obliterated by the future Crosstown and Guadalupe Freeways” (*San José Mercury*, 1965).

The names of the members of the CCIC and the men appointed to a capital improvement committee proposed during the meeting suggest that the majority of these councilmen were white. In 1965, this would hardly have been surprising, as San José did not elect its first Mexican American city councilmember until 1971, when Al Garza was elected (Garza, 2014). In the years since, despite two-thirds of San José’s population being people of color, the city has elected just one Latino mayor, Ron Gonzales, from 1999 to 2006, and one Asian American mayor, Norman Mineta, from 1971 to 1975 (Alaban, 2021). Residents that we interviewed recalled that this lack of representation in elected city offices led to significant barriers for San José’s communities of color in having their needs listened to, much less met in a competent capacity (San José Resident 1, 2022; San José Resident 2, 2022; and San José Resident 3, 2022).

In 1970, Jack Ybarra presented to the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Seminar on the issue of citizen participation in urban transportation planning (Ybarra, 1971). Ybarra espoused the importance of involving poor residents and residents of color in long-term local government decision-making, stating that “elected officials have failed to be responsive to the needs of this substantial segment of society” due to fear (Ybarra, 1971, p. 36). And when they are involved, he continued, it was “to a limited degree in meaningless advisory councils and committees whose recommendations carry little weight in the actual decisions that are finally made” (Ybarra, 1971, p. 36). Particularly in the construction of freeways, the impacts of property condemnation and displacement was disproportionately felt by poor communities, but the community was not engaged in routing decisions (Ybarra, 1971). “The poor have been keenly aware of the fact that this type of construction has meant their removal and relocation, not once, but often several times,” Ybarra observed. “And yet, the only time the poor community has been consulted has been just prior to their eviction” (Ybarra, 1971, p. 36). Referencing I-680 through San José’s Mexican barrio on another occasion, Ybarra spoke of how construction turned hundreds of families into “virtual refugees” within their own city (Ybarra, 1972, p. 131). As Ybarra testified, “it is obvious that there has been little citizen participation in the development of the existing transportation systems” in San José (Ybarra, 1971, p. 37).

A 1972 class-action lawsuit brought by Mexican American residents of Santa Clara and San Benito Counties challenged the 1970 census count as undercounting Mexican American residents and other people of Spanish origin or not classifying them as such. The plaintiffs, which included the Confederación de la Raza Unida among others, noted that this undercount would cause great harm by cutting funding and resources to poor communities and communities of color, leading to disproportionate impacts on the Latino/a communities of East San José (*Confederación de la Raza Unida v. Brown*, 1972). This undercount was one of many city actions that sparked the Chicano/a movement for civil rights in San José.

When civil rights activist and labor leader Cesar Chavez lived in San José’s Mayfair neighborhood from 1948 to 1962, Chavez’s home parish was the historic Our Lady of Guadalupe Church (Team San José,

2022c). In 1953, Chavez helped relocate the chapel to the Mayfair community, where it became the base of San José's chapter of the Community Service Organization (CSO), a California Latino/a civil rights organization. Together the CSO and Father Donald McDonnell, the priest at Our Lady of Guadalupe, led freeway protests and organized against I-680 alongside others in San José's Chicano/a movement. Despite their efforts, the freeway soon encroached upon the Alum Rock neighborhood (San José Resident 6, 2022; San José Activist 1, 2022; and Pitti, 2003). Per Ybarra (1972), participation from certain citizens simply did not mean much to local decision-makers, even with the growing Chicano/a movement in Mayfair and Alum Rock.

Communities in central San José were only marginally better off. Rather than being outright ignored, central San José communities received various minor appeasements, according to local activists. The City offered the Gardner neighborhood, for example, a community center and community pool around the time of the freeway construction that divided the neighborhood (San José Resident 1, 2022; San José Resident 2, 2022; and San José Resident 3, 2022).

### Freeway Impacts on Neighborhoods

*"Las casitas near the gray cannery,  
nestled amid wild abrazos of climbing roses  
and man-high red geraniums  
are gone now. The freeway conceals it  
all beneath a raised scar....*

*I scramble over the wire fence  
that would have kept me out" (Cervantes, 1981).*

### Interstate 280 Impacts

In the heart of San José, I-280 cuts through the census block groups with the city's lowest median household incomes as of 2019 (*City-data.com*, 2019). In recent years, the area north of the freeway has experienced an influx of investment in the form of both residential and commercial development. A stone's throw away, across I-280 to the south, the situation is vastly different. As residents keenly note, the negative externalities of the freeway, including trash, pollution, and displacement, tend to land on the south side of the freeway rather than the north (San José Resident 4, 2022 and San José Resident 5, 2022).

The construction of I-280 brought a host of issues for those who had been displaced as well as those who now live in old houses directly beside a roaring freeway. The freeway, intended to mitigate traffic congestion, in fact created more traffic, leading commuters to seek alternative routes on neighborhood streets (San José Department of City Planning, 1984). This was especially a problem in the neighborhoods of Washington-Guadalupe, Spartan Keyes, and Little Saigon. Commuters from newer sprawling developments in South San José, freight and delivery vehicles traversing San José's downtown and industrial core, and even San José State University students commuting into park-and-rides located

throughout central San José communities added to the traffic on local streets (San José Resident 5, 2022; San José Activist 1, 2022; San José Informant 1, 2022; and San José Informant 2, 2022). The freeway also generated noise and air pollution. Older downtown houses, some built before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, circulate much more dirt, dust, and emissions from I-280 than their newer counterparts, as a resident interviewee observed. In the memories of that resident, constant soot left their mother in a never-ending war with her white windows and sheer curtains that would turn gray from the freeway's pollution (San José Resident 5, 2022).

Construction did not come without some boons. Some neighborhoods that were spliced by I-280 experienced a decrease in traffic when through streets became culs-de-sac where children could safely romp in the streets. This was especially true in the Spartan Keyes neighborhood, near the on- and off-ramps at 7<sup>th</sup> Street and 10<sup>th</sup> Street (San José Resident 5, 2022). Several community members reported in interviews for this project that they have many childhood memories of playing in the construction zone's dirt piles at the ends of their streets (San José Resident 4, 2022; San José Resident 5, 2022; San José Resident 6, 2022; and San José Activist 1, 2022). Today, these culs-de-sac even host San José's National Night Out events, which are annual police-community partnership events to promote parks, recreation, and neighborhood services (San José Resident 5, 2022).

### *Downtown and University Districts*

Before I-280 ripped through the heart of central San José, the neighborhoods known today as South University and Spartan Keyes were a part of a unified downtown community that could trace its name to James Frazier Reed, co-leader of the ill-fated pioneer Donner Party who later lived with his family on 500 acres south of downtown. Three streets in central San José were named after his wife, Margaret, and two daughters, Martha and Virginia (SUN Association, 2022). One hundred years later, I-280 separated Reed and Margaret Streets to the north from Martha Street to the south, and the majority of East Virginia Street would be sacrificed for the freeway itself.

Freeway construction resulted in the displacement of many families. One I-280 on-ramp was built directly over what had once been Reed's adobe home at the intersection of Margaret Street and 4<sup>th</sup> Street (SUN Association, 2022). An examination of streets maps (See **Figure 8-15**) suggests that a single such interstate on-ramp could easily have required demolishing as many as 20 to 25 lots on a single, densely-built street. The number of homes bulldozed underestimates numbers of families displaced. In interviews, residents whose families faced displacement through the eminent domain process recalled instances where they themselves or a family they knew had been evicted, only for the state to ultimately decide that their home was not necessary for the freeway's right-of-way. Many of these homes were redeveloped and resold to different homeowners. Interviewees whose families were displaced by I-280 (or by I-680) did not recall state agents working with or notifying their own families about the possibility of buying back their home (San José Resident 5, 2022; San José Resident 6, 2022; and San José Activist 1, 2022).

**Figure 8-15. Density of Spartan Keys Neighborhood**

Source: Santa Clara County Planning Office, 2022

### *Greater Gardner*

The Greater Gardner community was also bisected by freeway construction. The neighborhood itself and its local school were named after William H. Gardner, who bought land on Delmas Avenue in 1886. Less than a century later, the home on his lot was just one of many demolished in 1970 to make way for I-280 (Maggi et al., 2017). Current Gardner residents remember that before I-280, the community was closely connected to the Sunol and Auzerais neighborhoods and the present-day Diridon Station area to the north of I-280, as well as the Washington-Guadalupe and downtown neighborhoods to the east of SR-87 (San José Resident 1, 2022; San José Resident 2, 2022; San José Resident 3, 2022; and San José Informant 2, 2022).

### *Little Saigon*

Today, San José is home to the largest Vietnamese population outside of Vietnam itself (Team San José, 2022b). San José's Little Saigon came into being in the 1980s when the first wave of Vietnamese immigrants moved into the largely commercial and industrial areas where suburban malls were beginning to shutter and close. Through successive waves of immigration, established families encouraged new immigrants to live near the freeway, where housing was relatively cheap. From Little Saigon, freeway access to other parts of the region is good, but conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists in the neighborhood are not. The community depends on Story Road, running parallel to I-280, as a main street for the community, though it is a six-lane street with heavy car traffic at all hours of the day (San José Informant 1, 2022 and Team San José, 2022b).

## Interstate 680 Impacts

The history of San José's Eastside is deeply tied to its agricultural past and its Mexican American heritage. San José's Eastside barrios were once home to Cesar Chavez, and many of his descendants still reside in the community (Pitti, 2003 and San José Resident 1, 2022). The Chicano movement in San José was grounded in the Eastside.

In the 1950s, when Chicana Civil Rights activist Sofia Mendoza moved to San José, she once recalled:

*"I heard that everybody that was bad lived in East San José. Everybody that was poor lived in East San José. The schools in East San José were no good. I never heard anything good about it. Never. When you drove around, without knowing it, just by appearance, what they were saying was true"* (Alexandra, 2018).

With unpaved roads that turned to mud in the rain, the nickname for the Eastside's largest neighborhood, *Sal Si Puedes* ("get out if you can"), could have been a reference to the automobiles trapped in the mud or the Eastside's economic underdevelopment (Pitti, 2003). From then until today, San José's Eastside remains the center of the city's ethnic Mexican community.

Black residents of the Eastside were also disproportionately affected by the freeway, though more so by displacement. After the construction of the freeway, the neighborhoods with San José's highest percentages of Black residents shifted from the heart of the city to its edges, away from the city's economic center. According to the 2016 American Community Survey, four percent of the Arbuckle neighborhood's population was Black, down from 14 to 18 percent at the time of freeway construction, while the average median household income rose, suggesting that freeway development and its aftermath may have played a part in pricing out Black households (Anti-eviction Mapping Project, 2016). The corridor near I-680, now disproportionately wealthier compared to its neighboring central and East San José census blocks, overlaps those areas where, in the 1970 census, Black households were most heavily concentrated. From 2000 to 2010, across the city, San José saw a four percent decrease in its Black population, putting the city in ninth place in the nine-county Bay Area region for the greatest absolute loss in its Black population (Karner and Marcantonio, 2018).

### *Alum Rock*

As I-680 curves northward, the freeway cuts directly through the neighborhoods of the Alum Rock district, including Mayfair, Tropicana, Dobern, Capitol-Goss, and Alum Rock Village. Interstate 680 was built, quite literally, in the backyards of Eastsiders' homes. The line of houses right beside the freeway face the ever-present noise of moving cars on one side and a parallel neighborhood street packed with ever-present parked cars on the other. Residents today recall how their families were not paid fair market prices for the purchase of their homes for the I-680 right-of-way (San José Activist 1, 2022 and San José Resident 6, 2022). Many families moved to the Eastside during the boom years in the 1950s and 1960s, with little warning of the freeway to come (Pitti, 2003; San José Activist 1, 2022; and San José Resident 4, 2022). Families that had put money into renovating their homes were paid on the same scale



as every other displaced family (San José Activist 1, 2022). Moving elsewhere in San José was more expensive than living in the Eastside, meaning that displaced families often found themselves financially stretched (Pitti, 2003; San José Activist 1, 2022; and San José Resident 4, 2022). If any family had attempted to sue for their home, the money that they would have spent on attorneys' fees would not have been covered by the purchase price of their home, according to residents interviewed for this study (San José Informant 1, 2022 and San José Activist 1, 2022).

### *Little Portugal and Brookwood Terrace*

The Little Portugal, Five Wounds, Olinder, Brookwood Terrace, and McKinley-Bonita neighborhoods were all impacted by the freeway widening and massive construction of the interchange between US-101, I-280, and I-680. Little Portugal is the historic heart of San José's Portuguese American community, as well as home to the historic Five Wounds Portuguese National Church, which has stood in the community since 1919 and continues to serve as a cornerstone of the community today. During the freeway construction era, some families that were displaced by the construction of I-680 were able to relocate to this area (San José Resident 4, 2022 and Team San José, 2022a). However, because the interchange and freeway widenings were not complete until the 1980s, many families, especially Latino/a families, were forced to relocate multiple times over the course of several decades, according to residents interviewed for this study (San José Resident 4, 2022; San José Resident 6, 2022; and San José Activist 1, 2022). The relocations, debt, and reduced quality of life along the freeways put disproportionate stresses upon San José's communities of color.

### Population and Housing Impacts

This section examines in more detail the population composition and housing changes as a result of the construction of the continuous I-280/I-680 freeway through San José. I-280 has a major interchange with SR-87 southwest of downtown and has a major interchange with US-101 in East San José, where it turns into I-680.

**Table 8-2** shows the demographic changes in the study area. The study area population grew steadily between 1960 and 1990, nearly doubling over the 30-year span. The population continued to grow to the turn of the century, increasing by an additional 14 percent, after which it declined slightly by 2010. Compared to the rest of the city (See **Table 8-1**), the study area has had a significant Latino/a presence since the 1960s, which grew to about 37 percent by 2010. The study area has a lower share of white population compared to the city and has had larger declines in the Black population since 1980. The area also has a smaller share of the Asian population than the city overall.

**Table 8-2. San José Study Area Racial/Ethnic Demographic Profile, 1960-2010**

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
<b>Total Population</b>	44,737	53,656	64,248	82,946	94,825	92,640
<b>Share, White*</b>	68.4%	61.1%	33.5%	27.0%	20.9%	22.8%
<b>Share, Black</b>	2.2%	4.3%	4.9%	3.0%	2.2%	1.9%
<b>Share, Latino/a*</b>	27.6%	30.4%	32.4%	36.0%	37.3%	36.7%
<b>Share, American Indian/Alaska Native</b>	not available	0.5%	0.6%	0.4%	0.9%	0.8%
<b>Share, Asian/Pacific Islander</b>	not available	1.6%	7.4%	13.8%	15.5%	17.8%
<b>Share, Asian (East/South Asian)</b>	not available	not available	7.1%	13.4%	15.3%	17.5%
<b>Share, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</b>	not available	not available	0.3%	0.4%	0.2%	0.3%
<b>Share, Other</b>	1.8%	2.1%	21.2%	19.7%	23.2%	19.9%

*Note: \* Racial and ethnic definitions and terms have changed over the decades (discussed in Chapter 3). The terms reflect the most comparable labels between years. For example, Hispanic/Latino/a/of Spanish origin did not exist as a Census category until 1980. Prior to that, the population was estimated from the population with a Spanish surname, of Puerto Rican heritage, or who spoke Spanish.*

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1962c, 1972c, 2022a and Manson et al., 2022)*

## Freeway Route Demographics

As described earlier, construction on the I-280 portion of the route began in the 1960s, while construction of I-680 within the study area was completed by 1974. Unlike in Sacramento, Pasadena, and Pacoima, alternate routes for the freeway were not considered in the planning or design.

The tracts where the freeway was built had higher shares of people of color compared to the remainder of San José and both the city and Santa Clara county overall (See **Table 8-3**). The disparity grew substantially after planning and construction took place. In 1960, 32 percent of the population in the case study neighborhoods was either Black, Latino/a, or some other race, compared to 15 percent in the remainder of San José, similar to the overall share of the population of color in the city (17%) and the county (15%). By 1970, after construction for the freeway was partially complete, the city had begun to diversify considerably, but the population of color in the freeway neighborhoods remained more than double the share of the non-impacted census tracts. By 1980, over two thirds of the population in the study area was people of color, half of whom were Latino/a. The highest concentration of residents of color were in Tracts C-37c, C-40a, and C-40b, located along the bend in I-680 in the eastern part of the study area (See **Figure 8-18**). The changes in racial composition between 1960 and 1980 are shown in **Figures 8-16, 8-17, and 8-18**.

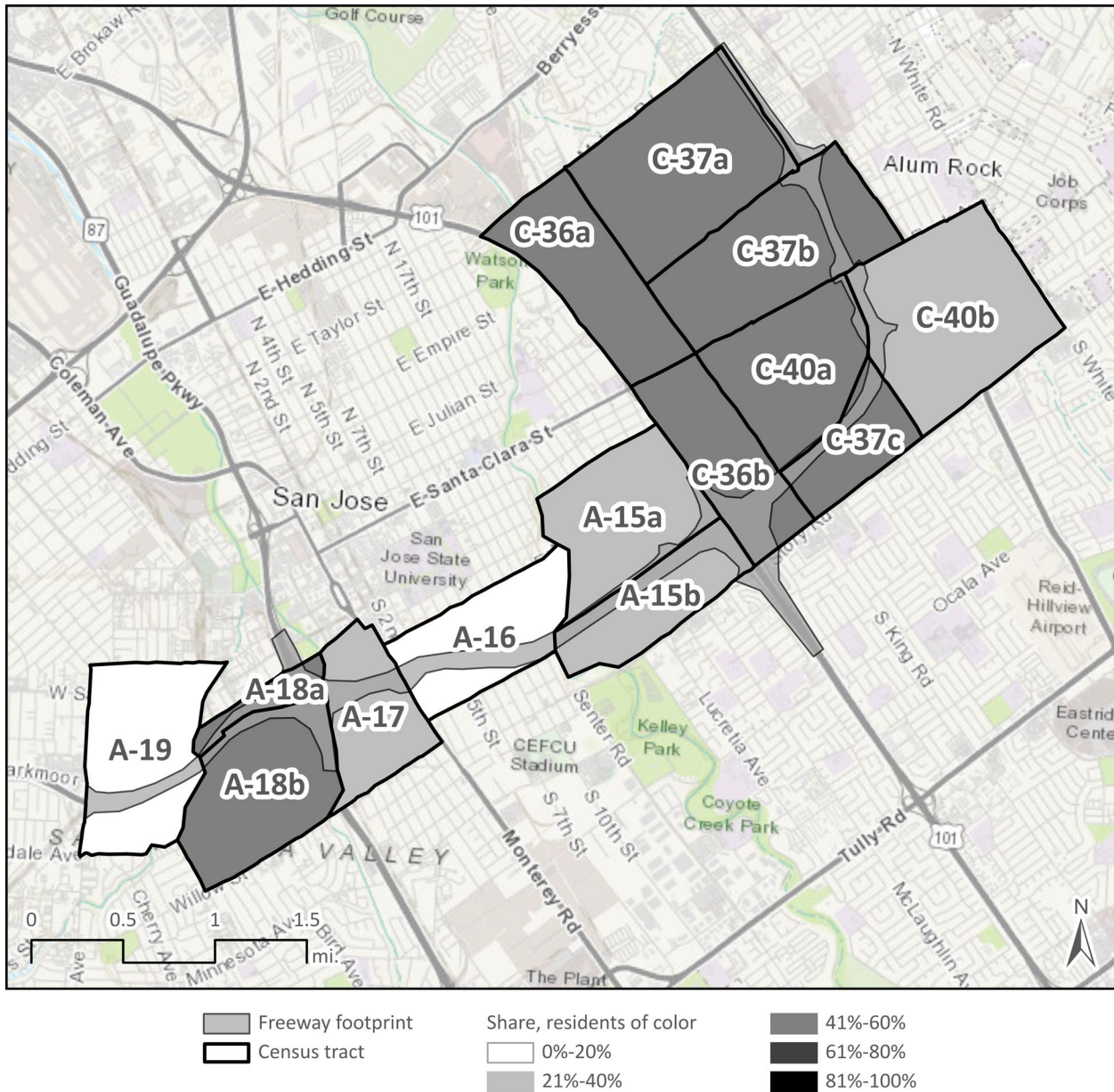
**Table 8-3. Racial/Ethnic Composition of Census Tracts along I-280/I-680, San José, 1960-1980**

	Share, Residents of Color, Including Latino/a			Share, Black			Share, Latino/a		
	1960	1970	1980	1960	1970	1980	1960	1970	1980
<b>Santa Clara County</b>	15%	23%	29%	1%	2%	3%	12%	17%	17%
<b>City of San José</b>	17%	28%	36%	1%	2%	5%	14%	22%	22%
<b>Non-impacted San José</b>	15%	24%	32%	1%	2%	4%	12%	19%	19%
<b>Impacted Tracts</b>	32%	56%	68%	3%	6%	7%	28%	46%	50%
<b>Tract A-15a</b>	22%	56%	78%	1%	5%	4%	19%	48%	63%

	Share, Residents of Color, Including Latino/a			Share, Black			Share, Latino/a		
	1960	1970	1980	1960	1970	1980	1960	1970	1980
<b>Tract A-15b</b>	22%	46%	62%	1%	3%	10%	19%	40%	35%
<b>Tract A-16</b>	8%	25%	46%	1%	4%	6%	5%	15%	27%
<b>Tract A-17</b>	35%	64%	74%	1%	2%	2%	32%	59%	73%
<b>Tract A-18a</b>	42%	54%	57%	1%	2%	3%	41%	49%	58%
<b>Tract A-18b</b>	42%	53%	61%	1%	1%	1%	41%	50%	55%
<b>Tract A-19</b>	19%	38%	33%	4%	2%	2%	14%	33%	31%
<b>Tract C-36a</b>	46%	68%	41%	4%	3%	3%	39%	57%	35%
<b>Tract C-36b</b>	46%	73%	72%	4%	8%	6%	39%	63%	61%
<b>Tract C-37a</b>	43%	56%	80%	8%	11%	6%	31%	41%	53%
<b>Tract C-37b</b>	43%	56%	67%	8%	11%	14%	31%	41%	42%
<b>Tract C-37c</b>	43%	73%	84%	8%	18%	12%	31%	50%	54%
<b>Tract C-40a</b>	42%	81%	91%	7%	14%	6%	31%	63%	83%
<b>Tract C-40b</b>	33%	54%	72%	1%	8%	7%	28%	44%	54%

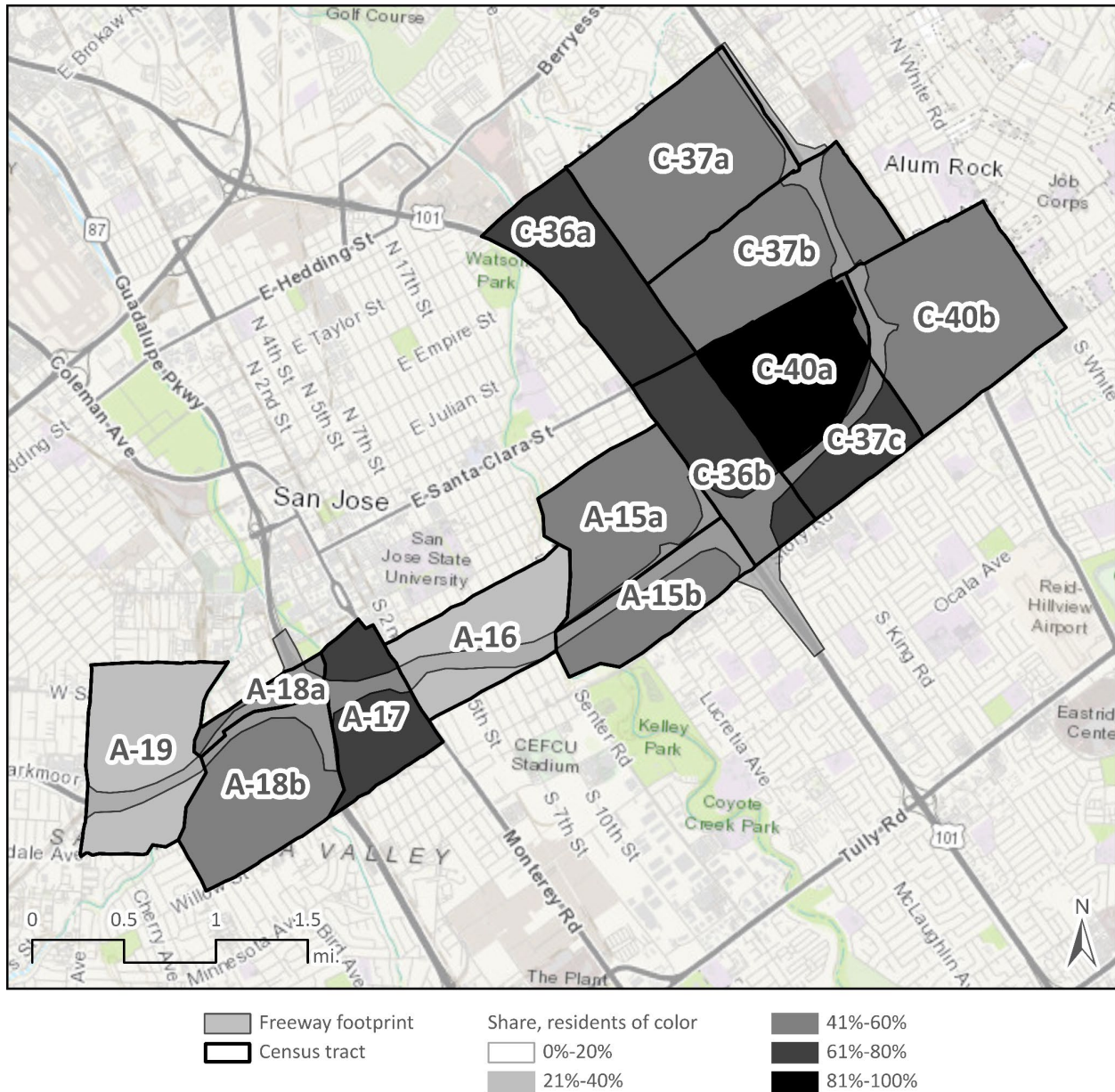
*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1962c, 1972c and Manson et al., 2022)*

Figure 8-16. San José Freeway Footprint: Residents of Color by Census Tracts, 1960



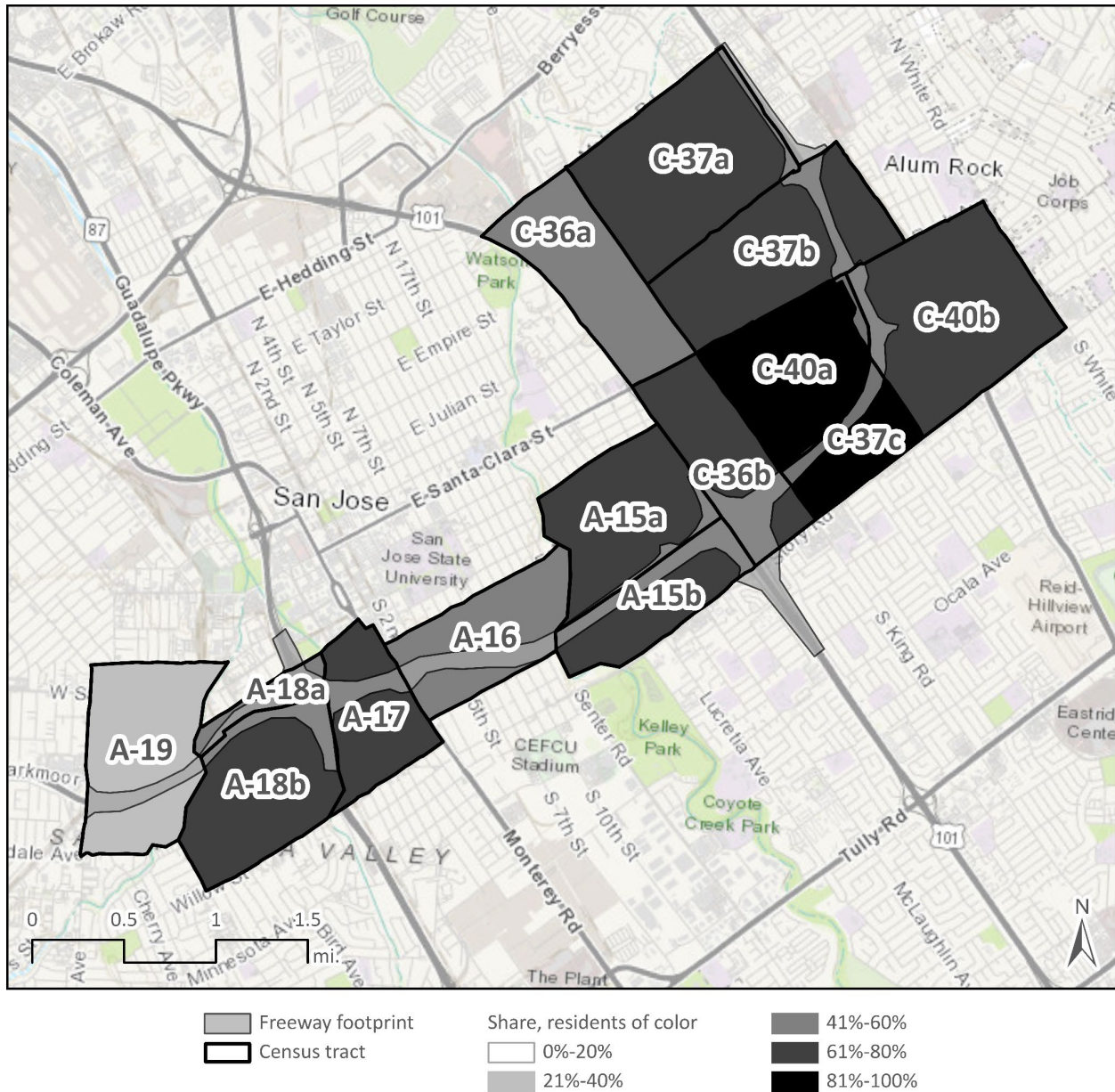
Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1962c); base map: Esri, 2023b

Figure 8-17. San José Freeway Footprint: Residents of Color by Census Tracts, 1970



Data source: calculated by authors from 1970 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1972c); base map: Esri, 2023b

Figure 8-18. San José Freeway Footprint: Residents of Color by Census Tracts, 1980



Data source: calculated by authors from 1980 U.S. Census (Manson et al., 2022); base map: Esri, 2023b

Median family income in 1960 was distributed relatively equally across the impacted census tracts but was substantially lower than for the city and county (See **Table 8-4**). Income in the impacted tracts was 78 percent that of the Santa Clara County median, with most tracts between 75 percent and 85 percent of the county median. Family income in the remainder of San José was within four percentage points of the county median. However, after the freeway was constructed, income in the impacted

neighborhoods diverged substantially from the non-impacted portions of the city. By 1970, the impacted tracts had a median income just 64 percent that of the county, while the median income in the remainder of the city was virtually identical to the county. There was not necessarily a pattern in which some set of impacted tracts fared worse than others, though incomes in the tracts farthest from downtown were lower than those closer. By 1980, incomes in the city and county were again virtually identical, while incomes in the impacted tracts dropped relative to the county again, to 60 percent of the Santa Clara median income.

**Table 8-4. Median Family Income, San José, 1960-1980**

	Median Family Income		Income Relative to Santa Clara County			Change in Inflation-adjusted Income
	1960	1980	1960	1970	1980	1960-1980
<b>Santa Clara County</b>	\$7,417	\$26,659	N/A	N/A	N/A	+46%
<b>City of San José</b>	\$6,949	\$25,598	94%	96%	96%	+49%
<b>Non-impacted San José</b>	\$7,117	\$26,501	96%	99%	99%	+51%
<b>Impacted Tracts</b>	\$5,764	\$16,027	78%	64%	60%	+13%
<b>Tract A-15a</b>	\$6,279	\$14,292	85%	56%	54%	-8%
<b>Tract A-15b</b>	\$6,279	\$19,874	85%	78%	75%	+28%
<b>Tract A-16</b>	\$5,585	\$12,635	75%	70%	47%	-8%
<b>Tract A-17</b>	\$5,119	\$13,772	69%	53%	52%	+9%



	Median Family Income		Income Relative to Santa Clara County			Change in Inflation-adjusted Income
	1960	1980	1960	1970	1980	1960-1980
<b>Tract A-18a</b>	\$5,624	\$13,723	76%	55%	51%	-1%
<b>Tract A-18b</b>	\$5,624	\$17,964	76%	69%	67%	+29%
<b>Tract A-19</b>	\$5,338	\$18,810	72%	60%	71%	+43%
<b>Tract C-36a</b>	\$6,056	\$16,750	82%	67%	63%	+12%
<b>Tract C-36b</b>	\$6,056	\$12,123	82%	56%	45%	-19%
<b>Tract C-37a</b>	\$5,750	\$17,134	78%	63%	64%	+21%
<b>Tract C-37b</b>	\$5,750	\$13,066	78%	63%	49%	-8%
<b>Tract C-37c</b>	\$5,730	\$18,974	77%	69%	71%	+34%
<b>Tract C-40a</b>	\$6,184	\$14,326	83%	58%	54%	-6%
<b>Tract C-40b</b>	\$6,637	\$21,404	89%	75%	80%	+31%

*Note: The Census reports annual income in the previous year. Change in real income pegged to 1979 dollars. Other values represent nominal dollars.*

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1962c, 1972c; Manson et al., 2022; and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)*

In real terms, the median family income in the freeway case study neighborhoods grew much less than in the city or county (See **Table 8-4**). In both the city and county, incomes grew by nearly half between 1960 and 1980, but increased only 13 percent in the impacted tracts. No single tract in the study area

had income growth that matched San José or Santa Clara County over the time period, though Tract A-19 at the far western end of the study area had only slightly lower income growth. Several impacted tracts decreased in median family income in real terms between 1960 and 1980, suggesting a significant suppressive effect of freeway construction on socioeconomic status.

Median home values and contract rents in the impacted area were lower and remained lower than the remainder of San José and the county for the entire period of 1960-1980 (See **Table 8-5**). The differences between the impacted and non-impacted tracts grew modestly over the three decades from about \$10,000 in 1960 to about \$30,000 in 1980 in inflation-adjusted terms (pegged to 1980). This change reflects a slower relative increase in home values as well. One tract, Tract A-19, had a notably higher median home value compared to the other impacted tracts in 1960, nearly double the value of the lowest tract median value. However, this value should be interpreted with caution, as it is based on only 33 homes in the neighborhood; in later years, the median value was within the range of the other impacted tracts.

**Table 8-5. Home and Rent Values, San José, 1960-1980**

	Median Home Value				Median Contract Rent			
	1960	1970	1980	Change, 1960- 1980	1960	1970	1980	Change, 1980- 1980
<b>Santa Clara County</b>	\$47,603	\$57,977	\$109,400	+130%	\$231	\$302	\$308	+33%
<b>City of San José</b>	\$45,376	\$53,942	\$97,900	+116%	\$223	\$283	\$295	+32%
<b>Non-impacted San José</b>	\$45,262	\$54,203	\$99,314	+119%	\$223	\$296	\$309	+39%
<b>Impacted Tracts</b>	\$35,632	\$39,592	\$69,955	+96%	\$217	\$241	\$236	+9%
<b>Tract A-15a</b>	\$37,303	\$40,860	\$66,071	+77%	\$223	\$242	\$230	+3%
<b>Tract A-15b</b>	\$37,303	\$46,414	\$80,199	+115%	\$223	\$217	\$311	+40%

	Median Home Value				Median Contract Rent			
	1960	1970	1980	Change, 1960- 1980	1960	1970	1980	Change, 1980- 1980
<b>Tract A-16</b>	\$42,035	\$41,665	\$77,656	+85%	\$214	\$259	\$226	+5%
<b>Tract A-17</b>	\$33,127	\$33,461	\$59,528	+80%	\$203	\$212	\$214	+5%
<b>Tract A-18a</b>	\$32,292	\$36,721	\$58,372	+81%	\$209	\$174	\$158	-24%
<b>Tract A-18b</b>	\$32,292	\$38,354	\$74,611	+131%	\$209	\$240	\$259	+24%
<b>Tract A-19</b>	\$62,357	\$39,817	\$70,938	+14%	\$245	\$242	\$257	+5%
<b>Tract C-36a</b>	\$36,189	\$40,544	\$66,783	+85%	\$234	\$240	\$222	-5%
<b>Tract C-36b</b>	\$36,189	\$32,431	\$59,214	+64%	\$234	\$238	\$234	0%
<b>Tract C-37a</b>	\$36,189	\$36,749	\$84,139	+132%	\$239	\$257	\$204	-15%
<b>Tract C-37b</b>	\$36,189	\$36,749	\$63,065	+74%	\$239	\$257	\$249	+4%
<b>Tract C-37c</b>	\$36,189	\$41,684	\$69,712	+93%	\$239	\$280	\$232	-3%
<b>Tract C-40a</b>	\$47,603	\$33,162	\$60,670	+27%	\$223	\$248	\$269	+21%
<b>Tract C-40b</b>	\$47,603	\$41,754	\$70,262	+48%	\$223	\$276	\$266	+19%

*Note: Values inflation-adjusted to 1980 dollars.*

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1962c, 1972c; Manson et al., 2022; and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)*

Rents in the impacted area were similar to those in the rest of the city in 1960. The median contract rent in the freeway case study neighborhoods was \$217, only \$6 lower than the rest of the city and \$14 lower than the county. Over time, rents remained relatively stable in the impacted area, rising by 9 percent between 1960 and 1980. In contrast, median rents increased to a greater degree elsewhere, rising by 39 percent in the non-impacted portion of San José and by 33 percent in Santa Clara County (See **Table 8-5**).

Total housing units (See **Table 8-6**) and total occupied housing units (See **Table 8-7**) in the City of San José and Santa Clara County increased substantially over the two-decade period, more than doubling in both. This growth in housing in the city was due in part to annexations: most of the land area in today's city limits of San José was added between the 1950s and 1970s, though largely before freeway construction began. The case study neighborhoods added housing units at a much slower rate, and half of the census tracts in the study area lost housing units between 1960 and 1970. Of those, all had net housing losses or single digit growth between 1960 and 1980.

**Table 8-6. Total Housing Units, San José, 1960-1980**

	1960	1970	1980	Change, 1960-1980
<b>Santa Clara County</b>	199,922	336,443	673,817	+237%
<b>City of San José</b>	68,890	136,246	216,653	+214%
<b>Non-impacted San José</b>	52,782	116,765	192,793	+265%
<b>Impacted Tracts</b>	16,108	19,481	23,860	+48%
<b>Tract A-15a</b>	966	1,830	1,853	+92%
<b>Tract A-15b</b>	655	1,445	3,884	+493%
<b>Tract A-16</b>	2,275	1,986	2,331	+2%

	1960	1970	1980	Change, 1960-1980
<b>Tract A-17</b>	1,867	1,342	1,383	-26%
<b>Tract A-18a</b>	431	1,505	1,309	+204%
<b>Tract A-18b</b>	2,350	1,605	1,655	-30%
<b>Tract A-19</b>	933	789	957	+3%
<b>Tract C-36a</b>	792	736	833	+5%
<b>Tract C-36b</b>	693	617	851	+23%
<b>Tract C-37a</b>	656	1,966	1,886	+188%
<b>Tract C-37b</b>	586	1,966	2,653	+353%
<b>Tract C-37c</b>	227	633	828	+265%
<b>Tract C-40a</b>	2,109	1,313	1,281	-39%
<b>Tract C-40b</b>	1,568	1,748	2,156	+38%

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1962c, 1972c and Manson et al., 2022)*

Table 8-7. Occupied Housing Units, San José, 1960-1980

	1960	1970	1980	Change, 1960-1980
<b>Santa Clara County</b>	184,945	322,870	458,813	+148%
<b>City of San José</b>	62,312	130,607	209,646	+236%
<b>Non-impacted San José</b>	49,038	111,985	186,884	+281%
<b>Impacted Tracts</b>	13,274	18,622	22,762	+71%
<b>Tract A-15a</b>	817	1,755	1,736	+112%
<b>Tract A-15b</b>	554	1,413	3,741	+575%
<b>Tract A-16</b>	1,968	1,904	2,190	+11%
<b>Tract A-17</b>	1,440	1,289	1,340	-7%
<b>Tract A-18a</b>	341	1,380	1,066	+213%
<b>Tract A-18b</b>	1,862	1,573	1,598	-14%
<b>Tract A-19</b>	777	735	919	+18%
<b>Tract C-36a</b>	701	722	818	+17%
<b>Tract C-36b</b>	615	573	799	+30%

	1960	1970	1980	Change, 1960-1980
<b>Tract C-37a</b>	545	1,885	1,832	+236%
<b>Tract C-37b</b>	486	1,885	2,585	+432%
<b>Tract C-37c</b>	188	578	772	+311%
<b>Tract C-40a</b>	1,747	1,237	1,248	-29%
<b>Tract C-40b</b>	1,233	1,693	2,118	+72%

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1962c, 1972c and Manson et al., 2022)*

### Direct Impacts

The estimates of homes destroyed by the construction of the freeways and the population affected are found in **Table 8-8**. Because census block maps were not readily available for the areas of San José unincorporated in 1960, these estimates are based on an apportionment of census tracts by area. The data indicate that while freeway construction contributed to a loss of between about 1,800 and 2,700 homes, there was a net gain of about 10,000 homes in the study area, counteracting the direct effects of the freeway. Most of this growth was concentrated in East San José and the Alum Rock area (Tracts C-37a and C-37b), though what is now Little Saigon (Tract A-15b) also had significant housing growth in the 1960s and 1970s. This was a period of rapid expansion for the City of San José. Much of the area where I-680 was built was annexed late in the planning phases or after construction of the freeway was completed, which suggests that disruption of large areas of housing was unnecessary for its development.

Nevertheless, freeway construction resulted in the direct displacement of an estimated 4,149 people in households under the freeway footprint. Just over half (51%) were people of color, including estimates of Latino/a residents. Particular tracts in the older part of San José had significant housing losses, and several had net losses between 1960 and 1980 (See **Table 8-8**). Tract A-18b (Willow Glen), located directly southwest to the interchange of SR-87 and I-280, had the largest loss, from both freeway construction and other factors. Tract A-17, located directly east of SR-87, also experienced significant housing losses, from both the freeway and additional factors. Tract C-40a (Mayfair) appeared to experience the largest housing loss over the period, but these losses are estimated to be from factors other than direct freeway construction.

Table 8-8. Estimated Housing Units Lost, San José Study Area

	Housing Units in 1960 Lost under Freeway		Net Change in Total Housing Units in Tract, 1960-1980	Housing Units Change in Parts of Tract Not under Freeway, 1960-1980
	Estimate	High Estimate	Estimate	Estimate
Tract A-15a	0	0	+887	+887
Tract A-15b	-122	-183	+3,229	+3,382
Tract A-16	-612	-918	+56	+821
Tract A-17	-339	-509	-484	-60
Tract A-18a	-176	-264	+878	+1,098
Tract A-18b	-334	-501	-695	-278
Tract A-19	-7	-11	+24	+33
Tract C-36a	0	0	+41	+41
Tract C-36b	0	0	+158	+158
Tracts C-37a and C-37b	-216	-324	+3,297	+3,567
Tract C-37c	0	0	+601	+601
Tract C-40a	0	0	-828	-828



	Housing Units in 1960 Lost under Freeway		Net Change in Total Housing Units in Tract, 1960-1980	Housing Units Change in Parts of Tract Not under Freeway, 1960-1980
	Estimate	High Estimate	Estimate	Estimate
<b>Tract C-40b</b>	0	0	+588	+588
<b>Total</b>	-1,812	-2,718	+7,752	+10,017

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961d, 1962c and Manson et al., 2022)*

### Indirect Impacts

As the City of San José grew, in population and through annexations, the area “nearby the freeway” (as defined in Chapter 3) did not (See **Table 8-9**). Between 1970 and 1980, the census blocks nearby the freeway saw a 43 percent decrease in the number of housing units, while the study area “beyond the freeway” (as defined in Chapter 3) saw a 68 percent increase, similar to the change in San José overall.

**Table 8-9. Housing Units nearby and beyond the Freeway in the San José Study Area**

	Nearby the Freeway	Beyond the Freeway	City of San José
<b>1970</b>	7,969	11,512	136,246
<b>1980</b>	4,521	19,339	216,653

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1970 and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau et al., 1971b; U.S. Census Bureau, 1972c; and Manson et al., 2022)*

While the freeways did not disproportionately impact households of color nearby the freeway compared to elsewhere in the study area, they did disproportionately impact households of color in the study area compared to the rest of the city (See **Table 8-10**). About half of the households nearby the freeway were classified as non-white in 1970, compared to a slightly greater percentage in the remainder of the study area. Households of color made up nearly twice the share of all households in the study area compared

to San José as a whole. The differences between the case study areas nearby and beyond the freeway, in terms of the race of the householder, were even more minimal by 1980.

**Table 8-10. Share of Households of Color nearby and beyond the Freeway in the San José Study Area**

	Nearby the Freeway	Beyond the Freeway	City of San José
<b>1970</b>	51%	53%	28%
<b>1980</b>	51%	50%	36%

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1970 and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau et al., 1971b; U.S. Census Bureau, 1972c; and Manson et al., 2022)*

Adjacency to the freeway within the study area had minimal impact on home values (See **Table 8-11**). In real terms, homes within the 150-meter freeway buffer were valued higher than homes elsewhere in the study area. Home values grew similarly in both portions of the study area by 1980, though they remained much lower than the San José average in both 1970 and 1980. In contrast, adjacency to the freeway appeared to suppress contract rents in the study area. While average rents were identical in 1970, they grew much more in the blocks beyond the freeway in the study area by 1980.

**Table 8-11. Average Home Values and Contract Rent nearby and beyond the Freeway in the San José Study Area**

		Nearby the Freeway	Beyond the Freeway	City of San José
<b>Median Home Value</b>	<b>1970</b>	\$43,054	\$40,263	\$53,942
	<b>1980</b>	\$70,207	\$68,733	\$97,900
<b>Median Contract Rent</b>	<b>1970</b>	\$231	\$231	\$282
	<b>1980</b>	\$237	\$281	\$295

*Note: Values inflation-adjusted to 1980 dollars.*

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1970 and 1980 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau et al., 1971b; U.S. Census Bureau, 1972c; Manson et al., 2022; and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)*

## The Enduring Freeway Legacy

The construction of freeways shaped San José as it grew to be one of the largest cities in California. The fear that these freeways would harm San José's communities was salient in the minds of residents as early as 1968. In response to the building of expressways and freeways, a mechanical engineer from San José, A. L. Spivak, "censured the Transportation Policy Committee for concentrating on roadways instead of rapid transit" (*San José Mercury*, 1968). "Ultimately, I fear you plan to cover this bowl we live in with cement," said Spivak (*San José Mercury*, 1968). These fears came to play out in real ways for the communities of color through which I-280 and I-680 were constructed, as traffic dangers, in addition to air and noise pollution, continue to disproportionately impact these communities.

The effects of the construction of I-280 and I-680 on San José were more moderate than in many other cities. Because the freeways were constructed at the same time that the overall population, housing stock, and land area of the city were growing, they did not always result in a net loss of housing or businesses. When homes were lost due to direct construction impacts, they tended to be closer to the historic city core, while outside of the core, the city grew up around the new freeways. However, the freeways still acted as a barrier in low-income communities of color, having been constructed in neighborhoods with higher shares of Black and Latino/a residents and lower median incomes than the rest of the city.

The freeways did inhibit the growth of the affected neighborhoods relative to the rest of San José. Housing values nearly doubled in real terms in the City of San José between 1970 and 1980, yet increased only about 40 percent in the neighborhoods near the freeways. The housing stock grew faster in the wider city, too, at over five times the rate of freeway case study neighborhoods. Immediate adjacency to the freeways did not depress home values compared to elsewhere in the neighborhood, but did keep rents low, suggesting that people were willing to pay a significant premium to live out from under the shadow of the freeways.

Today, the neighborhoods surrounding I-280 in downtown San José and I-680 on the Eastside continue to feel the effects of the freeways. Only after a five-year fight with the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) will the Gardner community be getting sound walls, with construction scheduled to begin in 2023 (San José Resident 1, 2022; San José Resident 2, 2022; San José Resident 3, 2022; San José Resident 5, 2022; and VTA, 2019). Many other freeway effects have gone unabated. At the same time, some of the most dangerous arterials in the city are found in these neighborhoods. The City's Vision Zero program may eventually lead to better conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists, who face far greater risk of injury and death than in other parts of the city (San José Resident 4, 2022; San José Informant 1, 2022; Deruy, 2019; and Walkup, Melodia, Kelly, and Schoenberger, 2022).

Neighborhood residents again face the prospect of displacement. The construction of high-speed rail, though still years away, is one threat. Google's proposed transit-oriented neighborhood in San José's Downtown West, centered around the main intercity/commuter transit hub, Diridon Station, is another. Today, many of the areas redlined in the 1937 HOLC maps and designated as blighted in the 1958 Master Plan are at the highest risk of gentrification, with several neighborhoods, including Japantown

and Little Portugal, having already experienced advanced gentrification (*San José Spotlight*, 2019). A report from UC Berkeley's Urban Displacement Project concludes that most of central and East San José are currently undergoing or are at risk of gentrification (San José Anti-displacement Policy Network Team, 2020). With new developments such as the Google village, new BART stations planned for downtown, and the possibility of a high-speed rail station in the future, the risk of gentrification and displacement in San José is likely to increase, to the detriment of vulnerable San José residents.

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## 9. Conclusion

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Our historical and quantitative examination of freeway planning and construction in California reveals that neighborhoods of color were often chosen as sites for disruptive freeway projects, which displaced many residents, significantly harmed those that remained, and left communities divided and depleted.

In Pasadena, local officials and state highway engineers engaged in a concerted push to lay the groundwork for the Foothill Freeway. By the time state engineers were planning out freeway routes, Pasadena's Black neighborhoods lacked investment, had been identified as blighted, sat upon cheaper land than the rest of the city, had residents too disempowered to fight back effectively, and were part of a general plan that predicted and rationalized freeway construction running through them. That the freeway ended up dividing and forever altering Pasadena's communities was by design, and that the freeway would continue to burden these communities with increased environmental pollution and adverse health effects was an acceptable reality for policymakers. That the construction of the same freeway was ultimately abandoned in white, organized, and wealthy South Pasadena simply places an even finer point on this inequity.

The history of Pacoima exposes systemic discrimination in a diverse, newer suburb. By siting three interconnected highway systems in Pacoima, planning authorities imposed an enormous amount of infrastructure on a thriving yet powerless community of mostly people of color. Wealthier, white communities in neighboring areas had no trouble opposing the freeway, while people of color disproportionately faced the impacts of the freeways, which included residential and commercial displacement, loss of social ties, and environmental degradation. Pacoima was and continues to be a neighborhood of color that hosts major infrastructure that serve the region. Both its civic leaders and planning professionals claim that the population continues to feel disenfranchised and excluded from equitable planning.

Analysis of the two case studies in Southern California yielded both differences and similarities in outcomes. Both cases expose flaws in participatory planning processes, showing that in suburban areas, white affluent interests dominated decision-making procedures and often succeeded in pushing freeways to more powerless neighborhoods. In Pasadena and Pacoima, planning and transportation authorities deliberately routed major freeways through such neighborhoods, ignoring alternative routes through adjacent areas inhabited by wealthier, primarily white residents. The differences are due in part to stages of development. By the time that the freeway paths were chosen and construction began, the Pasadena site was home to a more established and mature community and built environment, while the Pacoima site was growing as a part of the suburbanization of the San Fernando Valley. Though the impacted neighborhoods were predominantly occupied by people of color, their racial compositions and trajectories were not the same. The Pasadena area had a sizable Black population at the start, and Black residents remained a large majority. Pacoima also had a sizable Black population at the start, which was largely displaced, and the area eventually became predominantly Latino/a and remains so today.

The story is perhaps less clear-cut in Sacramento. The chosen route for US-50 was not the one that would have displaced the most residents of color, of the options considered, but by the time the construction of the freeway was complete, the combination of redevelopment, redlining, and racial

covenants had pushed residents of color out of their traditional neighborhoods and into areas adjacent to the planned freeways. Along US-50 at the south edge of downtown, white residents fled to the suburbs when their efforts to stop the freeway failed, while households of color, who mostly could not participate in the freeway debate in ways recognized by those in power, took their place. Nearly a third of the 4,500 displaced households belonged to people of color. Farther east, Oak Park, eventually home to a sizable share of the Black population of Sacramento, was cut off from downtown by US-50 on the north and SR-99 on the west. Incomes and property values declined relative to the rest of the city during and after the freeway construction. Oak Park remains predominantly Black and Latino/a, but as economic conditions in the neighborhood have improved in recent years, concerns about gentrification have grown. Indeed, gentrification is evident along the US-50 corridor, which now has a larger share of white residents than the rest of Sacramento and where median household incomes are approaching the city median as well.

In San José, it appears that only one possible route for I-280 and I-680 was ever considered. This route passed through communities of color located south and east of downtown but also through wealthier white neighborhoods to the west. Fewer households were displaced for the construction of these freeways than in the other three cases, though the displaced households, as in the other cases, were disproportionately households of color. The neighborhoods adjacent to the freeways today have higher shares of Latino/a residents than the city as a whole, with lower median incomes and property values. Here, the freeways serve as barriers, disconnecting neighborhoods of color from the economic core of the city. Yet the sense of community in these neighborhoods remains high, despite the negative impacts of the freeways and the threat of future displacements and gentrification related to planned public transportation projects, including a BART extension and high-speed rail.

What the four cases have in common are the impacts of freeway construction. There were alternatives in both Pasadena and Pacoima that would have been less racially disparate in their impacts, but the more racially unfair options were chosen. In all four areas, hundreds of residents were displaced, although the magnitude differed. An estimated two thirds of those displaced in the Pasadena and Pacoima study areas were people of color, while in San José, half of those displaced were people of color; in Sacramento, one third of those displaced were people of color. If demolition and displacement were the most visible and immediate effects of the freeways, toxic pollution, noise, economic decline, and stigmatization remained long after and affected those residents whose homes or stores were spared. Hundreds were thus indirectly affected, forced to live close to freeway traffic in a fragmented landscape. Beyond the directly adjacent areas but still close to the freeways, we found mixed outcomes and often more moderate changes, consistent with the concept that freeway costs and benefits decrease with distance. Freeways produced few benefits for these neighborhoods. The massive infrastructure of concrete and asphalt left a damaging legacy in all four areas.

The freeway stories we uncovered clearly underline the power of white privilege. White communities were informed about the planning projects early on and had the power, clout, and resources to mobilize opposition. Their voices were heard and proved more effective in shutting freeway projects down (as in the case of South Pasadena), in having alternative routes approved that did not impact their own

neighborhoods (as in other parts of the San Fernando Valley beyond Pacoima), or, at the very least, in being able to best relocate away from the freeway (as in Sacramento). State planning processes failed to represent residents equitably, reflecting broader mechanisms of environmental racism.

The findings from our quantitative and qualitative analyses of the impacts of freeway development on neighborhoods of color in California are consistent with the broader literature on this topic. Numerous qualitative studies have documented how the Interstate Highway System and associated state freeway systems affected residents of color throughout the country. This study contributes to this scholarly field by providing new insights and by quantifying the patterns, magnitude, and consequences, at a more geographically granular level than in most previous studies. This study also expands the scope of inquiry by examining the planning and selection stage, the externalities beyond the edges of the freeway, and the post-construction effects. Our findings support a broader thesis about systemic racism in the restructuring of America's metropolitan infrastructure.

Much critical scholarship demonstrates the freeway effects on core, urban neighborhoods. Our case studies expand this analysis to other parts of the regional landscape in the U.S. Freeway construction was a key component of a broader policy-driven attack on communities of color not just near the urban core (as in the San José case study) but also in long-established towns that became inner-ring suburbs (as in the Pasadena case study), former streetcar suburbs incorporated into the main city (as in the Sacramento case study), and enclaves of color in suburban areas of major cities that emerged postwar (as in the Pacoima case study). In other words, the now-famed destruction of many U.S. city centers by freeways was replicated in the suburbs and at the edges of growing cities, too.

The massive roadway infrastructure development complemented other destructive governmental actions such as urban renewal and redlining. In the 1950s and 1960s, the federal government provided funding for states and cities throughout the country to raze "blighted" or "slum" neighborhoods, euphemisms for low-income, marginalized communities. Though improved housing opportunities was the ostensible goal, over time, governmental agencies used federal funds to stimulate commercial and industrial redevelopment. These programs displaced hundreds of thousands of families from their homes and neighborhoods, with people of color suffering a disproportionately high share of the burden in the name of progress and the common good. In Sacramento, redevelopment efforts not only displaced residents of color but, when combined with redlining and racial covenants, pushed them into areas that were in the path of planned freeways.

Moreover, freeways and suburbanization were key components in the creation of a spatial and transportation mismatch for people of color that increased the distance between place of residence and employment opportunities for residents who lacked private transportation resources to overcome that separation. This mismatch results from the combination of and interaction between housing discrimination and segregation, labor-market discrimination and depressed earnings, and the high cost of buying and owning a vehicle. These racial disparities are compounded by the fact that pollution from mobile sources is more severe in neighborhoods of color, due not just to freeway siting but also to systematic disparities in pre-existing health conditions and a lack of access to medical care. Compared

with more affluent and whiter neighborhoods, the same level of pollution thus imposes greater negative consequences in neighborhoods of color. These disparities in freeway use, accessibility to opportunities, and health impacts are integral to the production and reproduction of racial inequality over time and generations. Freeways, therefore, played a critical role (albeit not by themselves a sufficient one) in reproducing racial inequality from the 1960s to the 1980s.

The findings from this study should be viewed and interpreted with caution given its data and methodological limitations. As an initial effort to quantify the impacts of freeway construction, the analysis is far from complete or comprehensive. For instance, quantification could be improved by using more sophisticated techniques to calculate the direct and indirect economic and other impacts. The value and changes in the value of homes can be better estimated by utilizing hedonic models with longitudinal panel data on transactions at the individual parcel level. This would be useful in evaluating the degree to which displaced homeowners were justly or unjustly compensated. This approach could also be used to estimate uncompensated costs imposed on nearby properties. Cumulative health impact models could be used to estimate the effects from mobile sources of pollution. Beyond aiming for a greater depth and precision in the analysis of impacts, other consequences should be examined, such as by tracking where households went and how they fared after displacement. As our analysis found, both white residents and people of color were displaced, but the latter were the majority. Even with fair compensation (which was not a given), people of color had more limited opportunities for new housing because of housing discrimination and racial segregation, with downstream consequences on the ability to build wealth.

The quantitative results also create new avenues for complementary qualitative research. For example, the evidence points to *de facto* racial bias in the selection of routes in at least some cases, and that bias cannot simply be dismissed as a matter of minimizing the cost of acquiring properties for the right-of-way. Further research into the political and institutional dynamics that led to the siting decisions is needed. While it is obvious that people of color had less power to influence the process, it is critical to examine further the history behind the decisions specific to each case study and whether the outcomes were *de jure*—namely the result of purposeful and biased governmental action. Unfortunately, reconstructing the internal dynamics of freeway planning decision-making within transportation agencies and governing bodies with the sources available fifty to sixty years or more after the fact is challenging. Though the lack of records of anti-freeway protests in some of the cases suggests that residents' voices were neither heard nor heeded in official channels, it does not mean that residents put up no resistance at all. What survives in archives to today is a product of the same racialized disparities that disempowered residents of color at the time (See Appendix B). All told, racial inequality is not a singular process but can take many forms.

Another limitation of this research project, as well as existing qualitative studies, is the reliance on a small sample of cases. While this method offers the opportunity to analyze each case in depth, we cannot guarantee that these cases are representative of all possible sites. In selecting a small number of cases to examine, researchers tend to choose the most obvious and possibly most egregious examples. This intentional approach could skew the overall conclusions drawn from across the set of cases

examined in literature, potentially overstating the degree of racial bias in the distribution of the impacts of freeway development (See Appendix B). We do not believe this is the case, but it suggests the need to conduct quantitative research that examines a representative sample of neighborhoods, not just a select few. Still, even if these cases are not typical, their very existence points to the possibility of systemic racism.

While the production of scholarly knowledge is important, it is equally important to situate the research within a larger societal agenda and goal, namely the need to achieve racial justice. Decades after freeway construction, environmental degradation and social inequity persist, suggesting that the path towards restorative justice from freeway construction is still long and fraught. Understanding the history of racism in freeway development informs the discussion on restorative justice that aims to rectify past wrongs, to develop current policies and practices for equity, and to bend the arc of future history toward social justice. We hope the California Department of Transportation, whom we applaud for commissioning this study, can pursue restorative policies and investments in these and other neighborhoods in response to our findings.

## **Appendix A. Sociodemographic and Housing Characteristics of Chosen and Alternative Routes in Pasadena and Pacoima**

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## Race and Ethnicity

Table A-1. Racial/Ethnic Composition of Census Tracts along I-280, Pasadena, 1960-1970

	Black		Latino/a		People of Color	
	1960	1970	1960	1970	1960	1970
<b>Los Angeles County</b>	8%	11%	10%	18%	19%	33%
<b>City of Pasadena</b>	13%	16%	4%	11%	20%	32%
<b>Tracts Unique to Chosen Route</b>	64%	76%	10%	12%	82%	92%
<b>Tract #4616</b>	80%	83%	6%	9%	91%	97%
<b>Tract #4618</b>	42%	61%	16%	19%	69%	81%
<b>Tracts in Common</b>	54%	73%	8%	8%	78%	92%
<b>Tracts Unique to Unchosen Route</b>	41%	47%	3%	16%	48%	71%

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 and 1970 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961b and U.S. Census Bureau et al., 1972)*

Table A-2. Racial/Ethnic Composition of Census Tracts along SR-118, Pacoima, 1960-1970

	Black		Latino/a		People of Color	
	1960	1970	1960	1970	1960	1970
<b>Los Angeles County</b>	8%	11%	10%	18%	19%	33%
<b>City of Los Angeles</b>	14%	18%	11%	18%	27%	41%
<b>San Fernando Valley</b>	1%	2%	6%	12%	8%	16%
<b>Tracts Unique to Chosen Route</b>	57%	59%	19%	27%	79%	89%
<b>Tract #1042</b>	77%	77%	7%	20%	86%	90%
<b>Tract #1095</b>	0%	5%	54%	75%	60%	85%
<b>Tracts in Common</b>	32%	35%	31%	50%	65%	87%
<b>Tract #1043</b>	65%	67%	31%	29%	97%	97%
<b>Tract #1044</b>	0%	10%	31%	67%	33%	79%
<b>Tracts Unique to Unchosen Route</b>	11%	35%	27%	25%	40%	63%
<b>Tract #1041</b>	0%	30%	8%	14%	11%	48%
<b>Tract #1047</b>	19%	39%	40%	37%	61%	79%

Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 and 1970 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961a and U.S. Census Bureau et al., 1972)

## Median Family Income

**Table A-3. Median Family Income, Pasadena, 1960-1970**

	1960		1970	
	Nominal \$	2022 \$	Nominal \$	2022 \$
<b>Los Angeles County</b>	\$7,046	\$67,610	\$10,972	\$81,607
<b>City of Pasadena</b>	\$6,922	\$66,420	\$10,825	\$80,514
<b>Tracts Unique to Chosen Route</b>	\$4,540	\$43,564	\$6,499	\$48,338
<b>Tracts in Common</b>	\$5,525	\$53,015	\$7,935	\$59,019
<b>Tracts Unique to Unchosen Route</b>	\$9,091	\$87,233	\$14,475	\$107,662

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 and 1970 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1962a, 1963, 1972a; Manson et al., 2022; and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)*

**Table A-4. Median Family Income, Pacoima, 1960-1970**

	1960		1970	
	Nominal \$	2022 \$	Nominal \$	2022 \$
<b>Los Angeles County</b>	\$7,046	\$67,610	\$10,972	\$81,607
<b>City of Los Angeles</b>	\$6,896	\$66,171	\$10,535	\$78,357
<b>Tracts Unique to Chosen Route</b>	\$6,102	\$58,552	\$9,306	\$69,216
<b>Tracts in Common</b>	\$5,823	\$55,875	\$8,560	\$63,667
<b>Tracts Unique to Unchosen Route</b>	\$5,834	\$55,980	\$9,591	\$71,336

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 and 1970 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1962a, 1963, 1972a; Manson et al., 2022; and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)*

## Mean Home Value

Table A-5. Mean Home Value, Pasadena, 1960-1970

	1960		1970	
	Nominal \$	2022 \$	Nominal \$	2022 \$
<b>City of Pasadena</b>	\$20,200	\$193,829	\$30,100	\$223,877
<b>Tracts Unique to Chosen Route</b>	\$12,355	\$118,552	\$19,990	\$148,681
<b>Tracts in Common</b>	\$13,000	\$124,741	\$19,500	\$145,037
<b>Tracts Unique to Unchosen Route</b>	\$25,000	\$239,887	\$36,900	\$274,454

*Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 and 1970 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961b; U.S. Census Bureau et al., 1972; Manson et al., 2022; and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)*

Table A-6. Mean Home Value, Pacoima, 1960-1970

	1960		1970	
	Nominal \$	2022 \$	Nominal \$	2022 \$
City of Los Angeles	\$19,500	\$187,112	\$30,400	\$226,108
Tracts Unique to Chosen Route	\$14,534	\$139,461	\$19,710	\$146,599
Tracts in Common	\$12,023	\$115,367	\$17,346	\$129,016
Tracts Unique to Unchosen Route	\$16,294	\$156,349	\$23,476	\$174,609

Data source: calculated by authors from 1960 and 1970 U.S. Censuses (U.S. Census Bureau, 1961a; U.S. Census Bureau et al., 1972; Manson et al., 2022; and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)

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## Appendix B. Contribution through Quantification

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## Discussion

There is a substantial and growing literature on the historical impact of freeways on communities of color, almost all in the form of case studies, which we have summarized in Chapter 2. The existing studies provide important insights into the people and neighborhoods affected. What we know comes from a mix of qualitative information and limited quantitative data. A more quantitative empirical analysis using better data can offer a different and complementary perspective into a complex and complicated phenomenon. Much, however, remains to be developed in terms of quantification, which holds a promise of uncovering new insights.

On the quantitative side, historical administrative records provide counts of the number of homes and commercial structures purchased through right-of-way acquisition. These are aggregated counts that were frequently listed in publications from local transportation departments, presented in public hearings, or reported by the media. Occasionally, archival records become available that enable researchers to reconstruct the counts and get a glimpse of the characteristics of the people displaced, although they often offer a very limited and partial view. The available statistics rarely give details for individual neighborhoods, and their availability is a “hit or miss” proposition for many impacted neighborhoods of color. We know even less at the statistical level about the people impacted because the archival administrative records do not contain socioeconomic and demographic information.

What we do know about the affected people comes from investigative reporting, oral histories, and personal accounts. At its best, qualitative narratives provide rich ethnographic insights into how people’s lives were disrupted. They humanize large and abstract societal processes, enabling readers to better relate to the lived experiences of those harmed. The inadequacy of this type of approach is that narratives are not and cannot be fully representative of all adversely affected populations. Whose voices are heard and incorporated into narratives are sometimes the product of biased and selective filtering, favoring those who were most able to create and keep records, most prominent and public, and most easily accessible to reporters, scholars, and activists. The latter group also adds another potential layer of filtering. In other words, the information is second-hand, with the secondary sources deciding what is included, and implicitly, what is excluded. Frequently, these secondary sources leave out or do not have knowledge of the experiences of the typical resident. These limitations do not invalidate the importance of the qualitative information but do mean that it is critical to interpret them carefully in what they do and do not represent.

We can expand our understanding of the freeway impacts on communities through careful quantification. To understand the strength and limitations of such an approach, it is useful to review the debate around cliometrics, a subfield in economics that studies history using quantitative data and econometrics. One of the earliest applications was to study American slavery, which produced insights about the financially motivated behavior of slave owners (Crowe, 1976). At the same time, it has been criticized as reframing the discourse away from a question of morality to a clinical assessment of profit incentives. Additionally, cliometrics has generated a better understanding of the role of transportation in America’s development, such as the role of a national rail network in integrating the county’s

economy.<sup>18</sup> What is lacking from such analysis, however, is an acknowledgment of how racialized labor in the form of Chinese Americans helped build an important part of the system, and how much of the land granted to the builders was stolen from indigenous people.

The issue, however, is not about the tool but its application. Used appropriately, historical quantification can discover new insights into historical racism. This includes generating additional knowledge to discover the magnitude, patterns, and characteristics of freeway impacts.

Our quantification approach borrows heavily from spatial analysis, which has become much more common with the availability of digitized data and specialized computer-based tools. Most often, the results confirm what is asserted in many qualitative studies and what the public believes is true.

Quantification offers findings that can help develop more effective and efficient policies and programs. Yet quantitative information can also suffer from inherent biases. For example, this is evident in data and statistics from the decennial enumeration by the U.S. Census Bureau. Despite concerted efforts to have complete coverage and count all residents, the census suffers from what is known as differential undercounting that adversely impacts marginalized populations and neighborhoods (H. King, Ihrke, and Robinson, 2019 and Barrett, 2022). Despite this limitation, the census and other quantitative sources are less biased than many other sources or at least provide alternative insights.

Knowing more precisely the relative magnitude of different outcomes allows policymakers to prioritize and select from alternative strategies and investments. For research, it allows us, for example, to make different claims. Quantification enables us to transform a statement based on qualitative information, such as that “people of color were more likely to be harmed” to one based on quantitative data, such as that, say, that “people of color comprised about four-fifths of those displaced.” Both statements may be true, but the latter adds another dimension to our understanding. Beyond confirming existing hypotheses and offering numerical values, on some rare occasions, quantification discovers unexpected findings and patterns that lead us to rethink the historical process. Of course, quantification is only as good as the underlying data and analytical tools.

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18. See McCloskey (1978) and Goldin (1995) for a summary discussion of the contributions and limitations of cliometrics, including studies on transportation networks.

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