

“Urgent and Necessary”: Tennesseans and Their Competing Visions of the Interstate System

by

Andrew W. McMahan

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in History

Middle Tennessee State University

May 2018

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Louis Kyriakoudes, Chair

Dr. Carroll Van West

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank Dr. Louis Kyriakoudes for being the first to give me the idea to write about the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. I would like to thank Dr. West for agreeing to act as a reader. I also want to thank the staff of the Albert Gore Research Center and Tennessee State Library and Archives for assisting me in finding primary source material. I wish to thank my colleague J. Ethan Holden for reading multiple drafts, giving constructive feedback, and recommending a number of secondary sources to provide context for my work. I want to thank my parents for encouraging me pursue my interest in history throughout my high school and undergraduate education. Lastly, I want to thank my wife Alexandria for all of her patience, support, and understanding during these last two years of study. It means more to me than I could possibly communicate.

ABSTRACT

The interstate system had a profound impact on the state of Tennessee and the rest of the nation. Several historians have explored the interstate system and its many impacts. However, not much has been written on the interstate highways in Tennessee or how Tennesseans thought of them during the months leading up to the passage of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. Using constituent mail sent to Senator Albert Gore in 1955 and 1956 as well as Tennessee Department of Transportation records, this thesis explores different visions of the interstate system held by groups of Tennesseans. Ordinary citizens saw the superhighways as the way to fast, efficient, and safe transportation. Commercial interests in the state, such as trucking and advertising companies, saw the new highways as a way to expand their business opportunities. Tennessee's railroad companies wanted the trucking industry to pay for the interstate in order to remain competitive.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|------------|
| INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| The Political Ideals of Albert Gore, Sr..... | 18 |
| Building Better Highway Legislation | 20 |
| CHAPTER ONE: ORDINARY CITIZENS AND THE INTERSTATE SYSTEM..... | 24 |
| Tennesseans and Their Continued Support | 38 |
| Tennessee State Highway Department and Citizen Distress..... | 42 |
| CHAPTER TWO: TENNESSEE’S TRANSPORTATION INDUSTRY AND THE INTERSTATE SYSTEM | 49 |
| Tennessee Truckers and Highway Legislation..... | 49 |
| The Struggle to Secure the Railroad | 58 |
| CHAPTER THREE: ADVERTISING, EMINENT DOMAIN, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE INTERSTATE HIGHWAYS | 69 |
| The Taking of Private Property..... | 83 |
| State Road Building Agencies and the Landscape..... | 87 |
| Race and the Interstate System | 90 |
| CONCLUSION | 95 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 105 |

INTRODUCTION

The young man stepped out of the automobile and retrieved his books, parcel of clothing, and fiddle. He thanked his Uncle Charlie for the lift and the job, and waved goodbye as the older man wheeled the automobile around and pattered down the road. The young man had just recently graduated from high school in 1925 and obtained a teaching certificate from Middle Tennessee State Teachers College. Charlie had arranged for him to begin his career teaching in High Land, otherwise known as “Booze” due to its reputation for producing moonshine, in Overton County. Although his automobile ride was over, he still had some five miles to go before he reached the mountain community. The roads did not permit automobiles to travel to the isolated community. He resolutely shouldered his belongings, including his trusty fiddle, and marched up the mountain road. As he walked those five miles, Albert Gore probably had little idea of the impact he would have on the state through his support of the federally-funded highways that became the interstate system.¹

America’s interstate highways constitute a monumental system of infrastructure. These highways tie the east, west, north, and south together, enabling citizens to travel to virtually any region of the continental U.S. by automobile relatively easily. This system enables families to plan vacations while being confident they will make it to their destination. Musicians can go on tour for months on end, traveling easily from city to city on well-maintained superhighways. Commercial trucking companies use these highways

¹ Gore, Albert, “The Making of a Senator,” in *The Eye of the Storm: A People’s Politics for the Seventies*, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 10, 11.

to transport goods quickly and efficiently all over the country.² Many Americans likely forget that the U.S. did not always have the luxury of adequate highways. Before assuming office as President of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower was well aware of the nation's need for adequate highways. In 1919, just after the First World War, he joined the U.S. Army's first convoy that traveled across the continental U.S. Traveling from Washington D.C. to San Francisco, the convoy encountered poor roads, wooden bridges, and adverse weather conditions. It took them 62 days to reach San Francisco.³ By today's standards, crossing the country by automobile in 62 days is agonizingly slow progress. However, at that time automobiles were not as reliable as today's offerings and the nation's highways were not suited for such travel. When commanding allied troops in World War II, Eisenhower noticed that his forces were far more mobile once they were able to take advantage of Germany's autobahn.⁴ This left a lasting impression upon him. Eisenhower planned on addressing the country's highway problems upon taking office.⁵ He met with strong support.

² The title, "Urgent and Necessary," is derived from the reply that Senator Gore frequently sent to his constituents in response to their letters about the Federal-Aid Highway Act.

³ Richard F. Weingroff, "Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956: Creating the Interstate System," Federal Highway Administration, publications, *Public Roads* 60, no. (1995), last modified January 31, 2017, <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/publicroads/96summer/p96su10.cfm>. Weingroff's article provides a thorough description of the development of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 and briefly mentions most of the key players. He also quickly summarizes the highway legislation that led up to the 1956 bill.

⁴ Weingroff, "Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956."

⁵ Mark S. Foster, *A Nation on Wheels: The Automobile Culture in America Since 1945*, (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2003), 12, 13, 14, 15., Eisenhower was certainly not the first to do. Americans recognized the need for better highways early in the twentieth century. In 1916, Congress passed the Federal Aid Road Act which authorized the use of \$75 million to improve roads. State highway departments were responsible for spending these funds, as well as providing 50% of the cost. Although Congress had passed the Federal-Aid Road Act of 1916, by 1921 the vast majority of America's roads remained unpaved. Although this was progress, America improved its roads very slowly. During the 1930s, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt relied on road building to provide jobs for the unemployed. Little mileage was added to the nation's highways, but several improvements were made.

Federally funded superhighways were popular among many people and politicians throughout the United States. This thesis examines the attitudes of different groups of Tennesseans towards a federally funded interstate system in the months prior to the passage of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. Using letters from constituents pulled from the Albert Gore Sr. Senate files at the Albert Gore Research Center, I found that Tennesseans largely supported an interstate system and had several reasons to do so. Citizens, trucking companies, and railroad interests in Tennessee frequently voiced their opinions through letters and telegrams. Ordinary citizens, small business owners, trucking company executives, truck drivers, and railroad worker and Union leaders sent letters and telegrams. While many of these individuals were prominent, several were ordinary citizens that likely had little political pull. However, they sent hundreds, even thousands of letters and telegrams believing that their status as constituents made their opinions matter. Based upon these letters, it is clear that Tennesseans supported highway legislation because they viewed their roads as inadequate and unsafe and thought the interstate was beneficial to national defense. Their objections were largely because based on questions of funding rather than the new highways. Likewise, Tennessee railroad interests did not oppose the interstate system outright, but sought tax legislation that heavily charged the trucking industry in order to secure fair competition. Lastly, Tennessee trucking companies advocated for highway legislation that taxed commercial trucks and commuter vehicles equally and did not regulate the size and weight of their machines. Many of these views reflected those held elsewhere in the United States, thus representing a national trend with local implications.

Although the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 authorized the interstate system as we know it today, it is challenging to pin down the exact origins of the highway system. In *A Nation on Wheels: The Automobile Culture in America Since 1945* Mark S. Foster does not explicitly state the precise origins of the interstate system, but does imply its primary influence. He outlines the introduction and rapid expansion and transformation of American car culture after World War II. He explores the myriad ways in which automobiles affected American society. For example, he frequently discusses the relationship between cars and mass transit, asserting that automobile culture caused a marked decline in mass transit systems before and directly after the Second World War. Additionally, he situates the popularity of the automobile in postwar America as a reaction by Americans to their forced parting from their treasured machines by wartime rationing.⁶ Although this book's primary focus is the automobile, Foster spends much of it discussing road building, effectively demonstrating that the two subjects cannot be divorced from each other in twentieth century history. Significantly, Foster discusses road-building efforts in the early twentieth, but asserts there was little real progress before the Great Depression. He does acknowledge that World War I revealed the shortcomings of America's roads. However, he asserts that road building during the Depression deserves greater attention than the previous decades, as it was an important component in New Deal programs.⁷ While Foster does summarize road construction before World War II, it is remarkably brief. This is likely because the book's primary temporal scope is postwar America. However, his assertion that New Deal road building

⁶ Foster, *A Nation on Wheels*, 32, 33, 55,

⁷ Foster, *A Nation on Wheels*, 11, 14.

projects are more significant than those that came before indicates that he believes they had the most influence on the interstate system. In doing so, he seems to discredit the early federal-aid road programs. In his study of Montana's interstate system, "A Massive Undertaking: Constructing Montana's Interstate Highways," Jon Axline points out that federally funded highways like the interstate system was not a new idea in the 1950s. In fact, he asserts that they started to gain more popularity during the 1920s. He also asserts that the standards for the American interstate system originated with the German Autobahn in the 1930s, although the U.S. was not as concerned with the highways' military potential.⁸

Tammy Ingram takes a significantly different approach than Foster in advancing the historiography of road building in the United States in her book *Dixie Highway: Road Building and the Making of the Modern South, 1900-1930*. As the title suggests, she focuses on the Dixie Highway and its construction between 1915 and 1926. She points out that although the highway was originally planned as road to funnel tourists from Indianapolis to resorts in Florida, it became the first "full-fledged interstate highway system" in the U.S. She argues that road building was an essential component of the modernization of the South and influenced the political institutions and infrastructure of the region. She also asserts that the modern interstate system is actually the "legacy" of the Dixie Highway and that the vision for these superhighways did not come out of nowhere.⁹ Ingram also explores the relationship between ordinary southern citizens,

⁸ Jon Axline, "A Massive Undertaking: Constructing Montana's Interstate Highways," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 63, no. 3 (Autumn 2013), 48, 49.

⁹ Tammy Ingram, *Dixie Highway: Road Building and the Making of the Modern South, 1900-1930*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 2014, 1, 2, 3, 10.

business interests, northern tourists, and the federal government. She asserts that the construction of the Dixie Highway “exploded into a national dialogue over the politics of state power, the role of business in government, and the influence of ordinary citizens.” In doing so she contests the traditional assumption that southerners opposed federal intervention in their lives. Instead, she claims that they readily took federal-aid when they were able to use it in order to meet their needs.¹⁰ Ingram spends much of her book describing in detail the poor condition of the South’s roads in the early twentieth century. Adequate roads were not available to most southerners. The sub-par dirt roads isolated farmers. According to Ingram, the railroad did little to alleviate this isolation. Railroad companies often held monopolies in rural areas and charged high freight rates for short distance hauls. Additionally, rural roads primarily served as feeder roads to railroad depots. However, the increasing popularity of automobiles in the South, especially Ford’s Model T, and northerner’s desire to tour the region influenced automobile industrialists, ordinary citizens, and politicians and officials to lobby for better highways.¹¹ Ingram also outlines several hopes for the highway. Supporters of the Dixie Highway asserted that it would help to unify America and that it served everyone’s best interests. Perhaps most crucially, she asserts that the Dixie Highway Association fundamentally changed how Americans thought about highways in the twentieth century by framing the Dixie Highway as a national defense asset. During the First World War, the military had difficulty moving men and supplies to the east coast, revealing the inability of railroads to handle the increased traffic and the poor state of the roads. Additionally, successful

¹⁰ Ingram, *Dixie Highway*, 2, 8.

¹¹ Ingram, *Dixie Highway*, 14, 19, 20, 32, 42.

military truck tests proved the viability of using freight trucks on the roads. Military officers even wrote statements both extolling the benefits of the Dixie Highway and highlighting the need for better roads.¹²

Perhaps going in a more radical direction than her colleagues, Diane Perrier pushes the narrative of the interstate system in the U.S. all the way back to the trails and paths used by Native Americans before European contact. She states that any traveler on a particular road follows those who came before them, essentially making these early routes used by Native Americans and settlers direct ancestors to the interstate system. For example, she uses the modern day Interstate 81, which stretches from New York to Tennessee, to describe interstate travel in this large area during the colonial period and early American republic. She describes the movements of several notable figures in American history and places their travel in the context of modern day interstate routes. She relies heavily on anecdotes in order to explore complex issues such as the development of interstate commerce.¹³ These anecdotes are largely outside of chronological order, forcing the reader to expend a great deal of effort in order to decipher her argument. Yet, she provides some valuable insights. She discusses the interstate system and the desire of Americans “to see what is beyond the next bend in the road” while also equating it with our sense of adventure and visions of the future.¹⁴

Americans were optimistic about the interstate system, yet its history is complex and often troubling. In “Huntsville, the Highway and Urban Redevelopment: The Long

¹² Ingram, *Dixie Highway*, 43, 44, 92, 93, 94, 96, 103.

¹³ Dianne Perrier, *Onramps and Overpasses: A Cultural History of Interstate Travel* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2009), xiii, 30, 31, 37, 69.

¹⁴ Perrier, *Onramps and Overpasses*, 378.

Road to Connect Downtown Huntsville, Alabama to the Interstate Highway System”

Joshua Cannon acknowledges that many American saw the interstate system as a way to increase the efficiency of automobile transportation and encourage economic growth. However, he also demonstrates that promoters of these highways saw them as tools for the “redevelopment of blighted and declining downtown areas.”¹⁵ He uses the debate surrounding the construction of a spur to connect downtown Huntsville to the interstate system. He reveals that highway engineers and local leaders in Huntsville collaborated to run the highway spur through low-income areas. A few residents, the Alabama Conservancy, the local NAACP chapter, and the Northwest Huntsville Civic Association led an opposition movement against the spur. Although they delayed construction for a decade, they were ultimately unsuccessful. Business leaders and the overwhelming majority of the City Council supported the spur. Councilwoman Jane Mabry, the only one in the council to oppose the spur, led an effort to cancel the urban segment in order to divert funds to mass transit systems. However, the popularity of the automobile had devastated urban transit beginning in the 1950s. Therefore, few Huntsville politicians supported the measure.¹⁶ Cannon shows in his article that despite the seemingly overwhelming support for the interstate system and superhighways, there was opposition among segments of the population. He also shows many of the adverse effects of the construction of the superhighways and increased reliance upon automobiles as America’s primary mode of transportation. He also states that in response to opposition in the 1960s

¹⁵ Joshua Cannon, “Huntsville, the Highway and Urban Redevelopment: The Long Road to Connect Downtown Huntsville, Alabama to the Interstate Highway System,” *Journal of Planning History* 11, no. 1 (2012), 29

¹⁶ Cannon, “Huntsville, the Highway and Urban Redevelopment,” 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 39.

and 1970s, the federal government took significant portion of decision-making authority from highway engineers and federal officials and placed it into the hands of local leaders.¹⁷ This is significant because much of the historiography demonstrates that road building gradually placed greater power in the hands of the federal government.

Historian Raymond A. Mohl offers a similar argument in “Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities” and frames the interstate system as a conflict between local citizens and highway engineers. He contrasts the early period of interstate planning and construction in the mid-1950s with the 1960s, arguing that highway engineers held all the power initially because they had professional expertise, the control of large sums of federal highway funding, and the support of local political power. He points out that in instances where highway builders were quick to plan their urban routes significant opposition did not manifest. This was also true for Southern cities in which the white majority largely supported placing freeways through black communities. He uses Miami, Florida as an example. In 1956, the city hired outside consultants to formulate a plan for its urban expressways. The consultants placed the route so that it passed directly through Overtown, the black residential district. Black leaders gave in to the expressway plan but demanded the State Highway Department create an agency to assist in the relocation of black residents. The department responded that this was not their job. Opposition to this expressway faded merely months after the plan was announced. The plan only severely impacted one community in the city, which gained little popular support, and no opponents filed lawsuits to challenge construction. A

¹⁷ Cannon, “Huntsville, the Highway, and Urban Redevelopment,” 30.

freeway revolt in Baltimore, on the other hand, was successful. Baltimore's elite did not decide on a plan until the mid-1960s, well after the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. Additionally, the plan allowed for highways that ran through several white and black neighborhoods. This created opposition that was both cross-class and multiracial. Furthermore, unlike in Miami, opposition was highly organized. The primary opposition organization, MAD, created a network with other "freeway fighters" across the United States, thus creating a national network of opposition. They also filed numerous lawsuits on both procedural and environmental grounds. Mohl places this freeway opposition in a larger trend of "rejection of top-down decision making" during the 1960s as people increasingly came to dislike the feeling of powerlessness they felt at the hands of the federal government.¹⁸ In many of these narratives, it is relatively easy to chalk the federal government up to nothing but an uncaring bad-guy, ruthlessly bisecting neighborhoods and displacing thousands. However, Mohl makes the claim that freeway opposition was only successful in certain circumstances because of new laws and legislation put in place by the federal government. Some officials within the federal government made to changes to highway policy. Department of Transportation Secretary Alan S. Boyd who asserted in 1968 that designers needed to integrate expressways into existing communities rather than build highways that also served as barriers.¹⁹ Through his work, Mohl successfully accounts for the ironies of highway building and highway opposition as well as the impact of the interstate system on minority groups.

¹⁸ Raymond A. Mohl, "Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities," *Journal of Urban History* 30, no. 5 (July 2004), 674, 675, 683, 685, 686, 687, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700.

¹⁹ Mohl, 681, 700.

Mohl's 2014 article "Citizen Activism and Freeway Revolts in Memphis and Nashville: The Road to Litigation" examines opposition to the construction of I-40 through two of Tennessee's most prominent cities. These revolts emerged in response to the possible destruction of significant portions of the inner city during the 1960s. In Memphis, highway engineers as well as city elites and politicians planned to run I-40 through Overton Park by building the Overton Park Expressway. Local citizens managed to mobilize an effective and long-lasting resistance that established connections with other freeway revolts in the nation. Using environmental concerns, they were able to defeat the plan. Citizens of a vibrant African American community in North Nashville fought plans to run I-40 directly through their home by asserting it violated the civil rights of every member of the community. Federal courts rejected this argument, and resistance fell apart in 1967.²⁰

The interstate system has had both positive and negative impacts on American society. Historians have explored these in detail. In *Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life* Tom Lewis tells the story of the creation of the interstate system while also discussing its myriad effects. He not only examines how the public works project benefitted Americans, but also how it displaced thousands. He deals with the ironies of interstate highway construction. He states, "On this stage we see all our fantasies and fears, our social ideals and racial divisions, our middle-class aspirations and underclass realities." He spends a large portion of the book describing developments and societal changes that led to the interstate system. Notably,

²⁰ Raymond A. Mohl, "Citizen Activism and Freeway Revolts in Memphis and Nashville: The Road to Litigation," *Journal of Urban History* 40, no. 5 (September 2014), 870, 871, 876.

he credits Thomas Harris MacDonald, chief of the Bureau of Public Roads with the creation of the interstate system. MacDonald relied heavily on the concepts of cooperation and technical expertise and used these to accomplish his road-building goals. Through his ability to compromise, he was able to gather a large number of groups that supported federal-aid highways to his cause and his vision as a technocrat was that every road he built was a part of a national highway system, not a solitary road. However, Eisenhower dismissed him in 1953 and thus he was not in charge of the construction of the interstate system. Lewis states that those who designed and built the interstate could not have anticipated the “social and economic revolution” it caused. Not long after construction began, the Bureau of Public Roads faced opposition from citizens all over the nation. Citizens in Nebraska, for example, had little experience with superhighways and were justifiably apprehensive. While drivers were fond of the highways, residents in the area often felt differently as many towns were bypassed completely. Additionally, citizens were concerned about potential impacts on aesthetics and the natural landscape. City residents also became angry when highways cut their cities in two.²¹ Although a professor of English and not a historian, Lewis constructs a readable and engaging narrative of the construction of the interstate system that accounts for all of its ironies and complexities.

In 2000, Evan P. Bennett explored the perspective of a small town in Florida in his article “Highways to Heaven or Roads to Ruin? The Interstate Highway System and the Fate of Starke, Florida” because Southern historians have not adequately explored the

²¹ Tom Lewis, *Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life* (New York: Penguin, 1997), ix, 5, 12, 13, 14, 127, 153, 157, 158, 170, 174.

effects of roads on small towns. He argued that Starke largely benefitted from road building prior to the interstate system. The town was able to capitalize on a postwar boom in the state. State Road 13 provided Starke with access to the outside world during the 1920s. After World War II, the state prospered and sought to attract tourists. Starke's position on U.S. Highway 30, a busy regional highway, had it poised to prosper from the tourist industry. However, the new highway plans devised after Eisenhower signed the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 into law bypassed Starke completely. Because the town was a rest-stop rather than a tourist destination, most of the tourism industry went elsewhere.²² Bennett clearly demonstrates the power of roads and their importance to small towns. He shows that Starke's prosperity wholly depended on the roads. Highway 301 was the town's lifeline, for it relied on tourists driving down the highway stopping to rest in the many establishments there. The locals also used their location on the road to attract industry. Interestingly, the citizens of Starke did not seem concerned about the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, which authorized the creation of the routes that completely bypassed the town. Evidently, the town leaders presumed most tourists would continue to drive on the older highway. Bennett shows that they were wrong. He points out that the Starke of today is "backwater Florida come to life." The highway running through it serves only to connect motorists from one interstate highway to another.²³

Axline, the historian at the Montana Department of Transportation, reveals the impact of the interstate system on the state of Montana in "A Massive Undertaking:

²² Evan P. Bennett, "Highways to Heaven or Roads to Ruin? The Interstate Highway System and the Fate of Starke, Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (Spring 2000), 451, 453, 454, 462, 464,

²³ Bennett, "Highways to Heaven or Roads to Ruin?" 452, 456, 457, 462, 463.

Constructing Montana's Interstate Highways, 1956-1988." Unlike Bennett, he takes a statewide approach rather than focusing on one locale. Axline asserts that the construction of the interstate system was the state's most transformative event in the postwar era. He cites several factors that contributed to this transformation. Due to the interstate system, the state's population paid higher taxes, lost property due to construction, and had to adapt to an unfamiliar limited access system. Funding was also an issue. Because Montana was a large state with a sparsely settled population, the state had trouble raising its share of the funds needed to build the highways. The government acquired a significant portion of the land acquired for the interstate through condemnation, which created tension state agencies and citizens. Furthermore, the Montana Highway Department drastically expanded to handle the increased workload and employed hundreds of citizens between 1956 and 1988.²⁴ The myriad effects of the interstate system, both good and bad, have permeated the scholarly discussion of road building.

In order to place the interstate system within the broader narrative of transportation in America, one must also consult John R. Stilgoe's *Metropolitan Corridor: Railroads and the American Scene* in which he demonstrates how the railroad industry ordered and shaped the American landscape in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. He asserts that the dominance of the railroad industry created "an unprecedented arrangement of space" which he refers to as the metropolitan corridor. However, he says this corridor vanished from national attention during the 1930s as

²⁴ Axline, "A Massive Undertaking," 48, 49, 50, 56, 66,

automobiles became increasingly popular. To prove America's obsession with the railroad between 1880 and World War II, he points out that authors wrote romantic accounts of it in articles and books. The toy industry capitalized on train replicas. He states that the rapid transit the railroad provided allowed thousands of people to move out of the cities and encouraged the creation of the suburbs. He discusses terminal buildings in detail, asserting they were the gateways into this well-ordered corridor that offered an escape from "urban scurry and congestion." He discusses several commonalities of the metropolitan corridor, including the buildup of industrial zones. Reformers in the Progressive era often criticized and lamented these zones, however, Stilgoe points out that the popular press and Americans viewing the zones growing on the outskirts of the cities from trains praised the "industrial aesthetic" and proclaimed the glory of newly-built factory buildings. However, the stock market crash in 1929 ended the positive depiction of the industrial zone and replaced it with one far more menacing. Power stations are another important component of this corridor. These structures came to symbolize the future in the minds of Americans. Coal fueled these "powerhouses," requiring that they reside on the waterfront so that large hoists could retrieve the fuel source from boats. These hoists dominated the waterfront landscape, drawing the attention of observers with their "rhythmic rise and fall." Additionally, power lines and central stations were key features of the corridor, for they powered much of the railroad's electric mechanisms. Train passengers were mesmerized by not only the scenery, but also the engineering marvels of the railroad which helped it to overcome, even alter, the topography. The railroad turned intersections between it and other roads hazardous,

transferred the center of small town life from older institutions to the depot, and homogenized the appearances of several town through standardized architecture. Lastly, towns and communities far away from the railroad suffered and declined. However, it was these isolated areas, such as the rural Northeast, that served as “the proving ground of the automobile.” This invention, Stilgoe concludes, caused the ultimate demise of the corridor.²⁵ While this book provides an engaging history of the railroad, its significance lies in Stilgoe’s interpretation of the landscape.

Stilgoe continued his work interpreting landscapes with his book *Outside Lies Magic: Regaining History and Awareness in Everyday Places*. He challenges readers to go exploring, look around, and be curious about their surroundings. He favors the bicycle as the vehicle for exploration because it allows an individual to ride slowly enough to inspect the landscape.²⁶ He covers a broad array of features prominent on today’s landscape such as power lines, mailboxes, and shopping malls. The most significant chapter in terms of road building and automobiles is the chapter titled “Interstate.” He asserts that the interstate is worthy of close inspection, but admits that it is challenging to do so because of its status as a limited access system. He discusses its use as a transportation system as well as its “existence as a weapon.” He devotes a considerable portion of the chapter exhibiting the visible military features of the highway system. He

²⁵ John R. Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor: Railroads and the American Scene*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 3, 5, 11, 25, 26, 44, 79, 80, 81, 103, 109, 111, 118, 132, 139, 141, 167, 193, 221, 315, 322, 328, 339.

²⁶ John R. Stilgoe, *Outside Lies Magic: Regaining History and Awareness in Everyday Places*, (New York: Walker and Company, 1998), 5, 9

also recognizes the interstate system has a troubled past, revealing that it divided neighborhoods and demolished structures.²⁷

Lastly, Catherine Gudis' *Buyways: Billboards, Automobiles, and the American Landscape* has been a crucial resource for understanding the impact of outdoor advertising on roads in the United States. She asserts that the widespread adoption of the automobile in the first three decades of the 19th century increased the audience for billboards and other forms of outdoor advertising. In fact, the outdoor advertising industry claimed that their outdoor location made them ideally suited to reach an American population that was increasingly on the move. She claims that billboards along the road turned the landscape into a consumable product and drivers into consumers. The outdoor advertising industry was also responsible for the adoption of the logo or trademark, which was a method of ensuring that motorists traveling at increasingly high speeds were still able to comprehend the message of the advertisement. Furthermore, effort by the industry to consolidate in the 1930s ensured that outdoor advertising practices were uniform across the nation and allowed for national ad campaigns. Most importantly, Gudis examines the creation of the commercial strip, demonstrating how outdoor advertising and roads worked hand in hand to extend the commercial boundaries of towns and cities. This, coupled with the billboards of large hotel and restaurant chains in the 1950s, leveled distinctions between many locales.²⁸

²⁷ Stilgoe, *Outside Lies Magic*, 89, 90, 91, 96, 101.

²⁸ Catherine Gudis, *Buyways: Billboards, Automobiles, and the American Landscape* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 49, 54, 110, 112, 151, 160.

The Political Ideals of Albert Gore, Sr.

As acknowledged by several of these historians, Senator Albert Gore was central to bringing the interstate system into Tennessee and the rest of the country. His support of the interstate system can be attributed to his early life in rural Tennessee and the influence of Southern progressives and the New Deal. The Senator grew up in a relatively isolated area. Gore's family resided in the Upper Cumberland region of Tennessee. Most of the people who lived in this area farmed. Shortly after his birth in 1907, they moved to Possum Hollow, near Carthage in Smith County, Tennessee. He remained tied to this area until his death. This area was also relatively isolated. As a young adult, after obtaining the qualifications necessary to become a teacher, he got his first job at High Land in Overton County, Tennessee. His uncle drove him as far as the roads allowed. He had to walk the remaining five miles up the mountain.²⁹ Gore clearly grew up and worked in a relatively isolated area of the state. It is possible that this made him truly understand the value of good roads. Gore was also heavily influenced by the Populist Party and Southern progressives. These progressives sought to modernize the South, which included building better infrastructure.³⁰

The senator was also heavily influenced by the New Deal. Historian Anthony J. Badger points out in his analysis of the Tennessee politician, "Gore pushed a New Deal economic liberalism, a combination of populism and social democracy." This certainly explains why he supported legislation such as the Highway Bill in 1956. New Deal

²⁹ Kyle Longley, *Senator Albert Gore, Sr.: Tennessee Maverick*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 8, 10, 14; For more information of Gore's life, consult the final chapter of Gore, Albert, *The Eye of the Storm: A People's Politics for the Seventies*, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

³⁰ Longley, *Senator Albert Gore, Sr.*, 20.

policies were crucial to the economic transformation of the South, and the highway legislation can be seen as an extension of the political ideals behind the program.³¹ Thanks to the New Deal, the South modernized very quickly, drastically transforming the region. Historian Anthony J. Badger states, “Seldom has modernization of a traditional rural economy occurred so quickly.” During World War II and the Cold War, the federal government funneled millions of dollars into the region. This undoubtedly encouraged its rapid transformation. Farmers diversified their crops and new industry was encouraged to move to the region, creating a booming economy.³² This rapid transformation of the South’s economy thanks to New Deal policies shows that the region by 1956 was relatively more economically diverse than in the past and stood to benefit greatly from the improved transportation infrastructure of the interstate system. Gore stated in his 1972 book *Let the Glory Out: My South and its Politics* that public works was one of his major concerns while in office. In fact, he states that the passage of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 earned him a notable degree of popularity. Gore’s political mentor was Cordell Hull. Hull was a major advocate of economic reform, specifically improving trade relations with Latin America. Gore admitted that his aspiration upon being elected to his first term in Congress was to follow in Hull’s footsteps. As Gore’s predecessor in Congress, Hull preferred to make well-reasoned and measured decisions rather than attempt to foster an image of brilliance through snap decisions. In fact, Hull instructed Gore to keep a level head while in the Senate, even after his success with the Federal-Aid

³¹ Anthony J. Badger, “Albert Gore Sr., Liberalism and the South in the 1960s,” in *Making Sense of American Liberalism*, edited by Jonathan Bell and Timothy Stanley, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 159.

³² Anthony J. Badger, *New Deal/New South*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 45, 46.

Highway Act of 1956. Gore's success won him some prestige and made him a potential running mate for Adlai Stevenson in the presidential election.³³ Perhaps much of Gore's popularity can be attributed to his role in securing federally funded highways as road building has typically been seen as positive.

Building Better Highway Legislation

Despite Senator Gore's support, constructing highway legislation proved difficult. Lewis argues in *Divided Highways* that it took two years of bartering, arguing, and compromising in order to pass highway legislation in 1956. This involved congressmen, senators, President Eisenhower, and trucking and railroad interests. In fact, it seemed doubtful that an adequate agreement could be reached in order to pass the bill.³⁴ Lewis effectively demonstrates the extraordinary amount of conflict there was among politicians, lobbyists, and private citizens over the interstate system. While such a system was widely desired, people disagreed over details such as funding. This highlights the power of lobbyists from the trucking industry and suggests Gore's constituents who feared the trucking lobby were right.³⁵

³³ Bell and Stanley, "Albert Gore Sr., Liberalism and the South in the 1960s," 159; Albert Gore, *Let the Glory Out: My South and its Politics* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 49, 86, 112; Harold B. Hinton, *Cordell Hull: A Biography* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1942), 7; Albert Gore, "The Making of a Senator," 2, 27.

³⁴ Tom Lewis, *Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highways*, 98. Lewis goes into far more detail in his book about the development of highway legislation than I have space to permit in this chapter. He also examines the social impacts of the interstate system, both positive and negative and delves into the issues caused by its construction.

³⁵ James E. Gardner to Senator Albert Gore, letter, February 14, 1956, B52 5/8, Folder 1/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee. James Gardener stated that he suspects trucking lobbyists were attempting to shape highway legislation to benefit the trucking industry.

The struggle to develop a workable highway plan was long and highly contentious. In 1955, after considerable study, the Clay Committee proposed selling \$20 billion in construction bonds in order to fund the interstate system, which required the federal government to pay \$11.5 billion in interest over the next thirty years. The chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Senator Harry Byrd of Virginia, or “Mr. Economy” as he was known, crushed this proposal. This same senator had opposed “fiscally progressive” programs dating back to the New Deal. Therefore there was little chance he would take favorable action on such a proposal. He stated that the administration’s plan was detrimental to good government bookkeeping. Newspapers across America echoed his opinions, including the *Tennessean* in Nashville. General John Stewart Bragdon and allies in the executive branch attempted to convince the senator of the value of toll roads in funding the highways after construction, but Byrd stuck to his pay-as-you-go philosophy. He preferred to save up revenues from federal gasoline taxes until there was enough to finance the roads.³⁶ Although the public and several policymakers supported the construction of superhighways, the debate over how to finance such a large project seemed to be deadlocked.

Before the Clay Committee had even submitted their plan, Senator Gore used information from the Public Works Committee Hearings to draft his own highway bill that called for the Bureau of Public Roads to spend \$10 billion on the interstate up to 1961. The federal government was to fund 75% of the construction. Furthermore, the Bureau of Public Roads had to seek funding from congress annually. The program would

³⁶ Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 114, 115.

last five years instead of ten. However, he did not include a plan for obtaining funds. The Senate passed his bill in May 1955.³⁷ Apparently this more fiscally conservative approach was favored over the Clay Committee plan.

However, Congressman George Hyde Fallon, a Democrat from Maryland, knew that Eisenhower would never sign Gore's bill because it raised the public debt and that the Senate would not approve of the Clay Committee's bill that forced the government to pay \$11.5 billion in interest. He and his colleagues drafted their own bill in which they kept the main ideas of Gore's bill but extended the project to thirteen years. Fallon's bill called for the creation of a highway trust fund supplied by revenues earned from federal gasoline taxes. The gasoline tax was to rise from 2 to 3 cents and diesel from 2 to 4. Representatives, constituents, and trucking interests staunchly opposed an increase in taxes and voted down the legislation, killing the superhighways for 1955.³⁸ This fiscally conservative pay-as-you-go approach was more palatable to the likes of Senator Byrd, yet the American people and trucking companies were not ready to accept a tax increase on gasoline.

Undeterred, Gore and his allies mustered for yet another push to enact highway legislation. Fallon introduced the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 to congress, leaving the financing of the bill to the House Ways and Means Committee. Hale Boggs of New Orleans introduced the Highway Revenue Act which included a tax on gasoline, diesel, and lubricating oils, tires, and heavy trucks. The revenues were intended for the highway trust fund, allowing for the pay-as-you-go approach encouraged by Byrd. Apparently, by

³⁷ Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 115, 116.

³⁸ Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 117, 118.

1956, commuters, truckers, and various other organizations realized increased taxes were insignificant compared to the benefits of the interstate system. Congress passed the Fallon and Boggs Bills on April 27, 1956. Gore proposed almost exactly the same bill as he had the previous year, which was in agreement with the House legislation. The Senate passed the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 on May 29. Gore's and Fallon's bills were merged in conference. Both houses approved the conference bill on June 25, 1956. Eisenhower signed the legislation on June 29 in Walter Reed Army Medical Center. The bill authorized \$25 billion to accelerate construction, created a Highway Trust Fund supported by tax increases from 2 to 3 cents on gasoline and diesel, and increased the federal government's portion of the cost to 90%.³⁹ Evidently, Gore was intent on his and Fallon's bills going into conference. He wrote on May 10, 1956 in a letter to Congressman Brady Gentry, "I am hopeful that the Senate will pass the highway bill substantially as the Committee reported it. If this be done, then it will be my hope that we can take the best of the two bills and expeditiously send a vigorous highway improvement bill to the President for his signature."⁴⁰

³⁹ Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 119, 120, 121, 122. Gore was given one of the pens. The pen is not in the possession of the Albert Gore Research Center. In fact, the archivist believes it is at the Clinton Library.

⁴⁰ Albert Gore, Sr. to Brady Gentry, May 10, 1956, letter, Albert Gore Sr. Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

CHAPTER ONE: ORDINARY CITIZENS AND THE INTERSTATE SYSTEM

As demonstrated by the prolonged debate surrounding the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, the proposed interstate system was an important issue for many different parties in America. As early as December of 1955, citizens of Tennessee sent letters and telegrams to Senator Gore expressing their opinions on the highway bill. Based on these letters, it is unlikely that many of these people had personal relationships with Gore that could gain them any more consideration than another individual. Rather, these people wrote as constituents to their representative, which is the sole reason Gore had to seriously consider their opinions. These letters account for a large portion of the Gore's papers dealing with the legislation. Based on this constituent mail, Tennesseans had a distinct vision of the interstate system during the 1950s. Although Tennessee citizens had several concerns about the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, they viewed the interstate in a positive way. They envisioned the interstate system as wide-open lanes of asphalt on which they could travel at high speeds, unimpeded by traffic congestion. Additionally, they envisioned the interstate highways as avenues of supply and escape in the event of a war.

Citizens frequently stated in their letters that they supported highway legislation because they wanted to improve road conditions. The state of Tennessee's roads and highways was not ideal in 1956. Several citizens expressed their displeasure in their correspondence with the Senator. Albert Huddleston of Alcoa, Tennessee wrote a letter to Gore on January 17, 1956. Huddleston stated that highways had not kept pace with

increased traffic. He went on to say that the use of automobiles in his area of the state had increased significantly.¹ Huddleston was not alone in lamenting the poor conditions of Tennessee's roads and linking better highways with improved traffic conditions. Fred Goldner, a medical doctor in Nashville, sent Gore a letter in which he evaluated Tennessee's roads. "During my period of hospital training these last several years, I have had the opportunity to do a considerable amount of driving over the highways of the northeastern parts of the United States and also in Texas. The natural beauty of Tennessee always beckons one but one must admit that the highways of Tennessee are abominable."² The comparison of highways was not favorable to Tennessee. Furthermore, Goldner's testimony stands out among the other letters because of his extensive travel throughout the United States. This gave him several references from which to compare the conditions of Tennessee's highways. It seems that several individuals found Tennessee to be lagging behind in highway development. R. E. Philbeck of Kingsport, Tennessee penned a letter on January 24, 1956 and made one of the more interesting comparisons. Like Goldner, he confirmed that other states had roads superior to those of Tennessee. However, he also said that "With some bit of reservation I could say the native Koreans, after taking over from the Japanese, did almost as well in maintaining their roads as we have done for our native state of Tennessee."³ It is unlikely that Philbeck intended this comparison as a compliment. Based on their letters, it is

¹ Albert Huddleston to Albert Gore, January 17, 1956, B52 5/8, Folder 3/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

² Fred Goldner to Albert Gore, February 13, 1956, B52 4/8, Folder 2/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

³ R. E. Philbeck to Albert Gore, January 24, 1956, letter, B52, 5/8, folder 2/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

evident that few citizens at the beginning of 1956 were satisfied with that condition of Tennessee's roads and highways. Tennesseans readily compared the poor conditions of their roads to other states, even countries, in order to prove their inadequacy. Citizens in other states also sought better, more efficient roads. The interstate system was designed to connect major cities with populations of 50,000 people or more, however Huntsville, Alabama was excluded even though its population was of sufficient size. Its population had increased dramatically during the 1950s thanks to its role in the booming space program. In 1968, the Federal Highway Administration approved funds for the construction of a highway spur to connect Huntsville to the interstate. The Huntsville Planning Commission and the Chamber of Commerce saw this as an opportunity to provide for efficient automobile travel, encourage economic growth, and acquire a tool for urban redevelopment in their declining central city. Likewise, historian Jon Axline highlights the desire for efficient travel by pointing out that the highways were designed with limited and controlled points of access as to allow traffic to flow unimpeded. Axline notes that this theoretically allowed commuters to drive from coast to coast without stopping.⁴

There were several reasons as to why the poor condition of the state's roads agitated citizens. Among the most pressing of these concerns was safety. Many Tennesseans stressed in their letters that they supported legislation for a federally funded highway system in order to lessen the number of yearly traffic accidents and prevent

⁴ Cannon, "Huntsville, the Highway, and Urban Redevelopment," 27, 28, 29; Axline, "A Massive Undertaking: Constructing Montana's Interstate Highways, 1956-1988," 47.

deaths. A. L. Elrod concentrated solely on the issue of safety in a letter to Senator Gore on February 7, 1956. Elrod urges Gore to cast his vote for better highways. He argues that the highway problem in Tennessee is considerable.

The tremendous death rate in our state should certainly make us all stop and try to do something about the highway problem. The traffic problems and the many miles of roads which curve a lot are certainly something to be considered also, as well as the death rate. I believe, as many others, that all of the problems mentioned will become greater unless additional Federal help is secured in this session of Congress.⁵

Interestingly, Elrod did not mention any economic concerns. He appears to have written as a private citizen and therefore may not have had an economic stake in the highway legislation. However, safety does appear to have been a crucial concern for Elrod.

Similarly, Albert D. Huddleston insisted to Gore that an increase of automobile traffic on roads caused a dramatic increase in accidents.⁶ This is sound logic. Certainly, if road conditions in Tennessee were as poor as Gore's constituents suggested, it is not at all surprising that the increasing number of drivers resulted in more accidents. It appears that the concerns of Tennesseans over highway safety were not unfounded. In 1955, there were 906 fatalities caused by automobile accidents. This substantial number is even more concerning when compared to previous years. There were 740 traffic fatalities in 1954.⁷ That is an increase of 164 deaths between those two years alone. Furthermore, there were more traffic fatalities in 1955 than in any other year in the 1950s. This increase

⁵ A. L. Elrod to Albert Gore, February 7, 1956, letter, B52 4/8, folder 2/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

⁶ Albert Huddleston to Albert Gore, January 17, 1956, letter, B52 5/8, folder 3/7, Albert Gore Sr. Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

⁷ "Tennessee Traffic Fatality Rate, 1950-2014," Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security, Tn.gov, accessed November 1, 2017.
<https://www.tn.gov/assets/entities/safety/attachments/FatalityRate1950-2014.pdf>

corresponds with increasing numbers of automobiles on the nation's roads. By 1955 Detroit automobile manufacturers were selling 8 million cars per year. This is roughly four times the number sold in 1946.⁸

Clearly, there was a real problem, and Tennesseans perceived the condition of their roads to be the cause. They embraced a federally-funded highways system as the means to rectify the perceived shortcomings of the state's roads.⁹ Rather than economics or convenience, average Tennesseans were overwhelmingly concerned with the safety of public highways. The problem of inadequate roads was echoed on a national level. As of 1953, only about 24 percent of the nation's highways that crossed state lines were in a condition to accommodate the current level of traffic.¹⁰ Although efforts to improve highways had been undertaken prior to the 1950s, it seems that automobile traffic drastically outpaced construction.

In addition to safety, several Tennesseans were concerned with national defense. They often saw the proposed interstate system as a means to improve the nation's security against attack or invasion by a foreign power. In his letter to Gore, Huddleston largely focused on the interstate system's potential to provide evacuation routes for citizens living in his area of the state. He claimed that Oak Ridge and his town of Alcoa were likely targets for a nuclear strike. Therefore, he asserted that good highways were essential in order to provide for the evacuation of Tennesseans in these towns.

⁸ "Tennessee Traffic Fatality Rate," Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security"; Perrier, *Onramps and Overpasses: A Cultural History of Interstate Travel*, 257.

⁹ Lee A. Enoch, Jr. to Albert Gore, February 8, 1956, letter, B52 box 5/8, folder 1/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee; James L. Montague, Jr. to Albert Gore, letter, B52 box 5/8, folder 1/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers;

¹⁰ Weingroff, "Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956."

Huddleston claimed to have experience in civil defense planning. Drawing from this experience, he informed Gore that certain shortcomings in Tennessee's highway system caused "bottlenecks" in the event of a mass evacuation. As a result it was difficult to formulate a sufficient and effective evacuation plan.¹¹ Huddleston did raise a good point. It is logical to assume that the nuclear-related activities undertaken at Oak Ridge made it a potential target in the event of a nuclear attack by the Soviet Union. Clearly, he was greatly concerned about a potential attack because of his proximity to Oak Ridge. Otis Manner of Dyersburg encouraged Gore to support the pending highway legislation because such a system was instrumental in the transport of supplies in the event the United States became involved in a war.¹² This highway system cannot be divorced from its Cold War context. Because of the seemingly constant threat of war with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, many Americans viewed the creation of a federal highway system as an excellent measure in allowing troops and supplies to be transported efficiently throughout the country in the event of an attack or an invasion.¹³

While these concerns were prevalent, not all Tennesseans wrote to Gore in order to express their concerns over the condition of the state's roads, safety, or national defense. T. M. N. Lewis, head of the anthropology department at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, wrote a letter to Senator Gore in which he expressed concern for

¹¹ Albert Huddleston to Albert Gore, January 17, 1956.

¹² Otis Manner to Albert Gore, February 7, 1956, B52 5/8, folder 2/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

¹³ Foster, *A Nation on Wheels*, 110. Foster points out that any nuclear attack on U.S. soil would have certainly been a surprise. Evacuation of population centers under such circumstances would have been unrealistic. Additionally, required roadside services would not be operational. It seems from his argument that the primary function of the interstate system in the nation's defense is to provide large roads and direct routes for military convoys in order to facilitate the swift transport of men and material.

archaeological sites in the path of the proposed interstate system. Lewis advocated for the use of federal funds to conduct archaeological salvage on sites that were to be developed for the highway system. He highlighted the work of the department of anthropology at the university to salvage the archaeological record before the TVA construction of reservoirs between 1934 and 1942. He was primarily concerned for Tennessee's prehistoric sites.¹⁴ He also proposed a budget:

Therefore, I would respectfully request you as a member of the Tennessee delegation on the Public Works Committee to exert every effort to include in the new highway bill a clause which might read "Any part of the funds herein appropriated not to exceed ½ of 1% of any project, Federal or Federal Aid, may be used for the purpose of archaeological salvage in compliance with Federal Statute 34 Stat. L. 225 (1906), and state laws where applicable."¹⁵

This was not a major concern among policy makers. On February 8, 1956 Gore responded to his letter by thanking him for bringing this matter to his attention and stated that no such provision had yet been made.¹⁶ Lewis's letter does raise an excellent point, yet this was not a major concern for most Tennesseans.

Like Lewis, many Tennesseans were concerned with federal funds and frequently wrote to Senator Gore in order to express their concerns over funding for the interstate system. Several were particularly concerned over the prospect of having to pay an increased tax on gasoline in order to help finance the project. F.C. Dorman of Maryville

¹⁴ T. M. N. Lewis to Albert Gore, January 26, 1956, letter, B52 5/8, Folder 2/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

¹⁵ T. M. N. Lewis to Albert Gore.

¹⁶ Albert Gore to T. M. N. Lewis, February 8, 1956, letter, B52 5/8, Folder 2/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

wrote to Gore in order to protest such a means of obtaining funding. He attached a newspaper clipping to his letter in which the writer asserted that every time consumers purchased gasoline for their cars, they were also paying for sections of highway that they were likely never to use. He wrote, "I like the clipping I am sending with this letter as I object to paying for all these better roads with more of my taxes." He asked Gore to consider making these new highways toll roads so that those who use them are the only ones that have to pay.¹⁷ Interestingly, Dorman did not argue that he was entitled receive access to infrastructure without having to pay for it. In fact, he explicitly stated that he did not intend to ever use these planned highways.¹⁸ Instead, he simply objected to having to pay increased taxes in order to fund the construction of roads that he had no intention of ever using. Furthermore, his letter also expresses a desire that has remained among Americans to the present day: the desire for cheap gasoline.

Likewise, Mayor Ben West of Nashville wrote that he felt compelled on behalf of all gasoline consumers in Nashville to oppose the Harris Bill (H.R. 6645). He stated that this legislation promised to cost them an additional \$800,000,000 per year. He asserted that regulating pipelines and distributors while leaving a small number of producers unregulated was ill-advised. He wrote that he and those in Nashville were afraid of rising gas prices if the whole industry was not under regulation of the Federal Power

¹⁷ F. C. Dorman to Albert Gore, January 1956, letter, B52, 5/8, folder 2/ 7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee. This letter also includes a newspaper clipping from an unidentified newspaper that elaborates on Dorman's argument.

¹⁸ F. C. Dorman to Albert Gore.

Commission.¹⁹ Like Dorman's letter, this shows that Tennesseans highly valued cheap gasoline.

The gasoline tax also affected small business owners. John A. Kiningham, the manager of Pearson Oil and Tire Company of Cowan was what was referred to as an independent oil jobber, meaning that he ran a small business that purchased gasoline from a large oil company and then sold it at his local place of business. In his letter, he expressed disapproval of how the gasoline tax was set up and hoped that Congress and the Senate altered it in the coming highway legislation. Large oil companies paid the gasoline tax when they sold the product, but independent jobbers paid the tax when they purchased it. He states that out of the 200,000 gallons a jobber purchased per month, 4,000 gallons were lost because of spillage and evaporation. Because of this, he claims that they had to pay taxes on gas they were unable sell. He advocated that the jobber pay the tax at the time of sale to the consumer²⁰ Kiningham echoed the concerns of Mayor West of Nashville in his letter. Both men took issue with the regulation of gasoline distributors but not the producers. Clearly, paying taxes on gasoline that they were unable to sell cost distributors substantial sums of money.

R. G. Morrow of Memphis penned one of the more interesting letters dealing with funding and taxation. Morrow asserted that it was well worth it for the federal government to disband the Bureau of Roads and turn over the revenue from federal taxes on gasoline to the states. This, according to Morrow, enabled the states to sort out their

¹⁹ Ben West to Albert Gore, December 31, 1955, letter, B52, 5/8, folder 3/7, Albert Gore Sr. Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

²⁰ John A. Kiningham to Albert Gore, May 14, 1956, letter, B52 Box 6/8, Folder 5/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

own problems. He also approved of turning over road construction to private companies and allowing them to build toll roads so that individuals paid for the roads but tax payers did not.²¹ He disapproved of his tax dollars paying for sections of highways that he could not use and thought the best solution was to construct toll roads that only users fund.

Gore responds on March 19, 1956 with a well-written argument extolling the benefits of federal involvement.

“I believe, however, that Federal participation in the program is desirable. Many of our highways are truly interstate in character. By coordinating construction at the Federal level we can avoid situations whereby a fine highway might terminate abruptly at a State line. Then, too, coordination at the Federal level facilitates the maintenance of adequate standards of construction. At any rate, the Federal government has been in the road building business for a long time and I believe is there to stay”²²

Tennesseans concerns over increased taxes were legitimate and were echoed elsewhere in the country. As Axline points out, the citizens of Montana were forced to pay higher taxes in order to pay for the interstate highways there. Funding proved to be a lasting issue with Montana’s road building efforts. The state had few inhabitants at that time and was very large. However, a significant amount of Montana was federally owned. Therefore, Congress designated it as a “Public Lands State.” This increased the federal government’s share of the cost to 91%. Montana had to pay just over \$40 million out of the total \$446,797,000 for

²¹ R. G. Morrow to Albert Gore, March 12, 1956, letter, B52 box 6/8, folder 6/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, 1, 2.

²² Albert Gore, Sr. to R. G. Morrow, March 19, 1956, letter, B52 box 6/8, folder 6/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

the completion of its interstate highways. Even so, the state was frequently unable to procure its share of the funds.²³

As previously demonstrated, several Tennesseans expressed their support for the interstate system in their letters to Senator Albert Gore late in 1955 and 1956. This was the direct result of a concerted effort to build popular support for better highways in the state of Tennessee. The organization responsible for this widespread support was Tennesseans for Better Roads (TBR).

TBR held several events all over Tennessee in order to inform and gain the support of the public. Robert A. Everett and Herbert J. Bingham, co-chairmen of Tennesseans for Better Roads wrote to Commissioner William Leech of the State Highway Department to request that at least 25 people associated with the Highway Department attend a road rally on January 26, 1956 in order to entice more people to attend. They hoped that at least 1,500 people would attend the rally.²⁴ This was a part of what the organization claimed they planned to do in order to promote support for better roads in their resolutions. TBR devised a plan of action early in 1956. First, they sought to gain support among the leadership of Tennessee's county governments. Leaders of 51 out of the 95 Tennessee counties voted to send resolutions to their congressmen and two U.S. senators to show their support of expanded federal highway legislation. Commissioner Leech, Mayor Ben West of Nashville, Mayor P. R. Olgiati of Chattanooga, Wade D. Thomas became deeply involved with TBR. They explained in

²³ Axline, "A Massive Undertaking," 48, 49, 50.

²⁴ Robert A. Everett and Herbert J. Bingham to William Leech, Commissioner, Tennessee Department of Highways, letter, January 12, 1956, record group 84, box 73, folder 6.

meetings throughout the state the poor condition of Tennessee's roads and called for action. While they were more than willing to make a stand for better highways, they were reluctant to engage in debates over financing. TBR stated that they realized an expanded federal highway program meant more taxes, but they refused to take sides in the debate in Washington over user charges. Instead, they stated that they hoped these charges were equitable to all users.²⁵

TBR made extensive use of their Better Roads Resolutions. Dozens of community clubs and organizations in Tennessee adopted resolutions from Tennesseans for Better Roads and sent them to Governor Frank G. Clement as well as their congressmen and senators. These organizations included Moose Lodges, parent-teacher associations, and local citizen clubs. These resolutions acknowledged that the country was in the midst of "a national road emergency" and that the only solution was an increase in Federal funding of highways. Governor Clement responded to these resolutions sent to his office, assuring these organizations that he was doing everything in his power to see highway legislation passed in Congress. In their Highway Policy Statement which was attached to these resolutions, Tennesseans for Better Roads stated that they intended to hold conferences and keep citizens informed in order to acquire popular support for highway legislation.²⁶

Tennesseans for better roads went to great lengths in order to keep citizens informed about the highway legislation and other matters concerning the condition of

²⁵ "Tennesseans for Better Roads Release," Tennesseans for Better Roads, February 1956, record group 84, box 73, folder 6.

²⁶ Tennessee Better Roads Resolutions, Record Group 84, Box 73, folder 5.

Tennessee's and the nation's roads. One method was the distribution of their newsletter that contained organizational news and excerpts from newspapers in Tennessee and the broader U.S. These newspaper articles usually dealt with highway legislation or road conditions. In one such excerpt, the writer talked about the TBR's methods of drumming up support for better highways. The author stated, "They have an aggressive selling point which should get reaction from every county in the state. The point is simply that better roads will do more than anything else to cut the death rate-a toll which is nothing short of appalling."²⁷ The TBR's selling point resembles many of the letters Tennesseans sent to Gore in which they expressed concern over the death rates on the roads. It is very likely that many of these people were first influenced by the TBR. TBR newsletters also expressed the frustration that many people felt over the prolonged battle in Washington D.C. to craft highway legislation, which left the roads inadequate and unsafe. To some people, this political maneuvering cost lives. The author of a newspaper excerpt included in a TBR newsletter was clearly frustrated by Washington D.C. The disgruntled individual wrote,

"President Eisenhower advanced a bill at the last session for immediate action on a federal roads program. It was killed. It was killed by politics. It's high time to call a halt to political see-sawing on this vital problem. The men who represent us in congress are supposed to be smart enough to act without shilly-shallying around, it's high time they learned. Some of them take trips to Europe to "investigate" situations when right here at home, we have the disgraceful slaughter of almost a thousand people in one week for them to worry about."

They go on to say the number of non-commercial vehicles on the road had long outpaced their capacity. The writer argues that four-lane superhighways must cross the nation.

²⁷ "Better Roads-Or Coffins," Collierville Herald, January 19, 1956, Tennesseans for Better Roads Newsletter, 1956, record group 84, box 73, folder 6, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

They stated that just about everyone in America had a car.²⁸ While they certainly call attention to a real issue, they did ignore those Americans who did not have access to automobiles.

As part of their effort to keep Tennesseans informed, TBR sent out breaking news bulletins entitled “Road-O-Grams.” These contained urgent messages pertaining to the state of highway legislation in Washington. A striking example is the Road-O-Gram sent out in April 1956 about the Fallon Bill. The top of the message read, “FLASH BULLETIN!!!! ACT IMMEDIATELY TO SUPPORT FEDERAL ROAD BILL.” It proceeded to inform Tennesseans that debate over “unnecessary riders put in (the) bill by pressure groups” were likely to defeat federal highway legislation. TBA stated that sources had informed them that the House was likely to vote on the bill during the week of April 16. TBR then asserted, “Now is the time for maximum effort to support Tennessee’s hard-working delegation in Congress. Get off your resolutions, telegrams, telephone calls and letters at once! Let them know you are backing them 100%. And, urge them to postpone and eliminate pressure group amendments which beat highway bill last year and could do it again!”²⁹ Such tactics show the frustration that many felt over the prolonged debate to build effective highway legislation. This was also an effective tool for keeping Tennesseans informed and involved in the process.

²⁸ “American Progress Rests on 4-Wheels,” Cleveland Daily Banner, January 9, 1956, Tennesseans for Better Roads Newsletter, February 24, 1956, record group 84, box 73, folder 6, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

²⁹ Mayor P. R. Olgiati and Judge George Thomas, “Road-O-Gram,” Tennesseans for Better Roads, April, 1956, record group 84, box 73, folder 6, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

Senator Gore was certainly aware of TBR's efforts to support the interstate system. He sent a message to the organization that was later sent out in a Road-O-Gram.

The message read,

Your organization is performing a distinct public service in alerting the people of Tennessee to the urgency of a far-reaching program to improve the highways of the nation. Construction of the various segments of our highway system to standards adequate to meet the nation's needs will require concerted effort of federal, state and local governments, such a program can become a reality only if strongly supported by the American people. The Senate has already passed a bill to expand the role of the federal government in highway construction. I am confident, that, with the support an informed public, the Congress will complete legislative action on a sound highway program during this session.³⁰

This demonstrates the Senator Gore was keenly aware of the actions of the TBR and their success in raising awareness among Tennesseans about highway issues.

Tennesseans and Their Continued Support

Tennesseans continued to support the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 in the years after its passage. Not only did they show continued support for interstate highways, but they also combated efforts to redirect the funding to other projects. E. L. Morris expressed his continued support for the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 and asked Gore to "keep up" the bill. He claimed, "I think in case of attack we would never get out of town on some of the highway(s) we have here in Knoxville, Tenn." Continued support for the highways among Tennesseans after 1956 utilized many of the same arguments used to fight for the legislation. Several, as shown by Morris, maintained that the new highways were crucial for evacuation from population centers in the event of attack.

³⁰ "Road-O-Gram," Tennesseans for Better Roads, February 18, 1956, record group 84, box 73, folder 6, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

Morris also expressed some degree of frustration and took on an accusatory tone in his letter. He stated, “I hear you Senators have had your hand in the pot. Keep it out off [sic] the pot. I am for better highways in Tenn.”³¹ Clearly, he suspected politicians of appropriating funds from the highway budget to do other things. James Cox stated in a letter on March 24, 1958, “As a tax payer, I think the federal road building program should be stepped up. I would like for you to support the program as it was originally set up in 1956, and to vote against taking the funds that were set up for this program and using them on other programs. I think that this road building is also vital to our defense in case of an enemy attack. I would appreciate your support of the road program.” M. L. Parsley also spoke out against other projects appropriating funds from the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. Parsley claimed “I believe we need these federal highways, if our national defense program is to achieve its purpose.” Once again, national defense is used to justify maintaining the budget for the interstate system.³² Once again, a Tennessean argued against using road funds for other projects. Additionally, Cox invoked the national defense argument, which seems to have been present in the minds of several people.

Robert Lawson of Knoxville also used the national defense argument. He stated, “As a tax payer I think the Federal Road Project is a big step in defense and it will mean safer better roads. I think the road program should be increased and maintained as

³¹ E. L. Morris, “E. L. Morris to Albert Gore,” letter, March 24, 1958, A21, Box 2/8, folder 1/1, Issue Mail, series IV Box 16, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Files, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

³² James Cox, “James Cox to Albert Gore,” letter, March 24, 1958, Box A21, 2/8, folder 1/1, Series IV, Issue Mail, Albert Gore, Sr. Senate File, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee; M. L. Parsley, “M. L. Parsley to Albert Gore,” letter, March 24, 1958, Box A21, 2/8, folder 1/1, Series IV, Box 16, issue mail, Albert Gore, Sr. Senate Files, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

originally planned in 1956.”³³ Lawson discusses both national defense and road safety. Both arguments were used early in 1956 in order to support the original bill. M. K. Helton also supported maintaining the highway bill as set up in 1956. Helton called attention to the poor condition of the roads in East Tennessee, asserting that “Most roads are in bad shape and need replacing.” She argued that this meant the funds set aside for the interstate system should remain for that purpose only, and not be appropriated for other projects.³⁴ E. L. Sharp of Knoxville also wrote to Gore on March 24, 1958 in order to express their concerns about the status of the highway bill. Sharp stated that Gore and other senators were spending the money set aside for highways on other projects. Sharp instructed Gore not to do so and ended the letter saying, “We in Tenn. want good roads.”³⁵

Robert White also supported leaving the Federal-Aid Highway act of 1956 as it was set up. He stated that the funds appropriated for the interstate system were to be used only for the interstate system. Additionally, he claimed that construction should be sped up. He also discussed national defense and stated, “The roads in this area are in such a condition that evacuation in case of an emergency would be practically impossible.”³⁶

³³ Robert R. Lawson to Albert Gore, letter, March 24, 1958, Box A21, 2/8, folder 1/1, Series IV, Issue Mail, Box 16, Albert Gore, Sr. Senate Files, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

³⁴ M. K. Helton to Albert Gore, letter, March 24, 1958, Box A21, 2/8, folder 1/1, Series IV, box 16, issue mail, Albert Gore, Sr. Senate Files, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

³⁵ E. L. Sharp to Albert Gore, letter, March 24, 1958, Box A21, 2/8, folder 1/1, Series IV, Box 16 Issue Mail, Albert Gore, Sr. Senate Files, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

³⁶ Robert E. White to Albert Gore, letter, March 25, 1958, Box A21, 2/8, folder 1/1, Series IV, box 16, issue mail, Albert Gore, Sr. Senate Files, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

Another citizen from East Tennessee wrote to Gore in order to show continued support for the bill. James Martin stated in a letter on March 24, 1958 that he desired the government to further support the highway program put in place in 1956. Additionally, he wrote, “The fund that was set up in 1956 need(s) to be increased instead of decreased and other funds set up for other things as well.”³⁷ Martin went a step further than Morris and argued for increased funding. As shown by these letters, many Tennesseans continued to support the highway legislation years after its passage through Congress. Not only did they simply speak out in favor of the interstate system, but they also attacked attempts to appropriate the project’s funds to other endeavors. Several even asserted that the government should increase the pace of construction and allocate more money to the highway system. To do so they repeated the two major arguments that they used to support the legislation in 1955 and 1956. They called attention to the poor condition of the roads, especially in East Tennessee. They maintained that the answer to their road problems was the interstate system. They felt the large, modern highways were the perfect way to alleviate traffic and improve safety on the road. Furthermore, they continued to argue that the interstate system was vital to national defense, specifically the evacuation of population centers. They repeatedly emphasized that their roads were ill-equipped to facilitate the successful evacuation of civilians in the event of an attack. They believed the interstate highways provided far more direct, quick, and efficient routes with which to flee from danger. Tennesseans envision the interstate highways as broad, well-

³⁷ James Martin to Albert Gore, letter, March 24, 1958, Box A21 2/8, Issue Mail, Series IV Box 16, Albert Gore, Sr. Senate Files, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

built roads that allowed them to travel to their destinations both quickly and safely, as well as avenues of escape.

Tennessee State Highway Department and Citizen Distress

Many of the troubles caused by the interstate system in the United States can be attributed to its design. From an efficiency standpoint, these designs were not poor. In fact, they were often rather good, outlining the most efficient routes between destinations. However, many of the problems originated in the manner the highway engineers approached designing the interstate highways. Obviously, engineers were crucial in the planning and construction of the interstate system. Their education and training influenced how they worked, and therefore influenced America's interstate highways. Notably, this education was very specialized in scope, focusing on subjects directly related with engineering, and paid little attention to the humanities or social sciences. As Tom Lewis points out, "Though they were charged with executing the largest civil engineering project in the history of the world, the students learned next to nothing about the effect their actions would have upon millions of citizens." Even the few such classes they did take were largely were the easiest courses available that met the requirements.³⁸ They did not evaluate how their plans would impact the lives of the poor or minorities. They were unconcerned with for those without access to automobiles. Those involved with state highway departments often valued scientific knowledge. William Leech, Commissioner of the Tennessee State Highway Department, echoed the technocrats of the 1920s in his statement regarding the Automotive Safety Foundation report on

³⁸ Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 133.

Tennessee's roads in which he said, "I wish to commend it as a sound, impartial and scientific approach to one of Tennessee's most pressing problems today—the provision of safe and efficient and streets in the face of constantly mounting travel demands. Directed by some of the nation's outstanding engineers with advice and counsel from specialists in the United States Bureau of Public Roads, this was nonetheless a Tennessee study carried out by Tennessee engineers most familiar with their own needs and problems." Like the technocrats such as MacDonald of the Bureau of Public Roads, Leech clearly prized scientific knowledge and expertise as the answer to Tennessee's highway problems. Interestingly, he stated, "As one more acquainted with the problems and needs of state highways, I was quite impressed with the importance pointed up in the survey of many of our less heavily traveled county roads and streets, such as mail and school bus routes and farm-to-market roads, all of which play a vital part in our overall economic and social progress." He also quotes Thomas H. MacDonald's statement, "We pay for roads whether we have them or not and we pay more if we don't have them than if we do."³⁹

Additionally, there was a lack of substantial diversity among engineers. These professionals were primarily white, male, and Christian. Lewis points out that 62 women earned engineering degrees in 1956 compared to 2000 men. In fact, the number of working female engineers had declined since the Second World War. Also, civil engineering programs did not welcome female students, there were no women in the

³⁹ William M. Leech, "Statement on Automotive Safety Foundation Report," Tennessee Department of Highways and Public Works, record group 84, box 73, folder 6, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

Association of State Highway Officials, and no women worked in the Bureau of Public Roads until the 1960s. Furthermore, very few African Americans worked as civil engineers. By 1956, the Bureau of Public Roads employed only a small number of African Americans, and none show up in archived photographs.⁴⁰ Therefore, many of their decisions when building the interstate system had unforeseen effects on American citizens. Given their lack of diversity and training in the humanities and social sciences, it is unsurprising that the civil engineers responsible for designing the interstate highways did not foresee the negative impacts of their work upon certain groups of American citizens. Engineers conducted extensive studies in order to determine a highway's cost, economic impact, and effects on traffic. Engineers primarily focused on acquisition costs and traffic flow. They frequently overlooked social or cultural factors. Initially, federal highway officials opted to construct highways quickly before operation mobilized and halted construction.⁴¹

State Highway Departments utilized both in-house engineers and consultants. Leon Cantrell, the State Location Engineer for Tennessee, wrote to H. M. Bates, the State Highway Engineer and recommended that several projects be located and designed by Consulting Engineers. He stated that both he and Bates agreed that the states would have to use "Consulting Engineers" in order to maintain sufficient progress towards the completion of the interstate system in Tennessee. He recommended several proposed bridges to be tackled by consultants as well as a few highways, including Route #505

⁴⁰ Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 131, 132, 133

⁴¹ Mohl, "Stop the Road," 677; Mohl, "Citizen Activism and Freeway Revolts in Memphis and Nashville," 874, 880.

from State Route #48 to Nashville.⁴² Clearly there was a massive workload on the state's highway department. This large work load was likely too much for the engineers employed in the Highway Department, which required them to contract work out to private firms.

The Highway Department hired several firms throughout the country to design sections of the interstate in Tennessee. Herbert M. Bates informed W. M. Leech, commissioner of the State Highway Department that both he and Patton flew to Washington, Philadelphia, and New York in order to review the design progress of the contractors hired to work on Tennessee's interstate highways. He spent much of the letter discussing the plans for Nashville. He stated,

On Friday, June 13, we spent the entire day with the firm of Clarke and Rapauno in New York, during which time it was our purpose to review the entire work that had been performed on the preliminary location and design of the Interstate System in, around and through Nashville. We were advised by Mr. Rapauno that the work in and around Nashville had been the most complicated job that they had ever experienced and consequently had consumed more time in submitting their basic design than had been anticipated in the beginning. Even though this work has been complicated, they are progressing very satisfactorily with the completion of this work, having at the present time 40 men assigned to the designing of the job with others available at such times when needed. I wish to add that at this time our Department is negotiating with this construction firm for construction plans on that portion of the Interstate System of the eastern loop in Nashville from the Trinity Lane interchange to the McGavock Pike, which will, when completed most certainly relieve traffic congestion in the City of Nashville.⁴³

⁴² Leon T. Cantrell, "Leon T. Cantrell, State Location Engineer to H. M. Bates, State Highway Engineer," letter, October 19, 1956, Record Group 84, box 67, folder 8, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁴³ Herbert M. Bates, "Herbert M. Bates, State Highway Engineer to W. M. Leech, Commissioner State Highway Department," letter, June 1, 1957, record group 84, box 67, folder 8.

As shown by this letter, significantly important segments of the interstates were designed by firms outside of Tennessee. One has to wonder how familiar these engineers were with the areas they were handling.

The introduction of the interstate system stressed state highway departments to their limits, as shown by their use of several contract engineers. In fact, several states had difficulty explaining how the proposed interstate highways differed from the local roads, particularly the states with no existing freeways and toll roads. The state of Utah had neither of these roads and a small highway department with a relatively small budget. In 1956, their highway budget increased from \$6 million to \$60 million. Additionally, the standards for the interstates exceeded those of the state's roads. The citizens of Utah had little familiarity of limited access highways. Instead, those residing in small towns relied on local highways to connect them with the outside world and bring in business. However, after the passage of the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956, highway planners informed citizens that the interstate was to bypass their towns and businesses. Utah citizens attended public hearing en masse to voice their fears of loss of livelihood. Lewis states, "Being bypassed by the Interstate had the same effect on some towns and cities in the 1950s and 1960s as being bypassed by a railroad line did in an earlier age. Commerce suffered, businesses shut down, the tax base eroded, and people moved away."⁴⁴ Construction of the interstate system had similar effects all over the United States. Many towns it touched were bolstered by commerce while those it bypassed withered away. In Tennessee, the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 bolstered the State Highway

⁴⁴ Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 139, 140, 141.

Department. In fact, Tennessee highway officials began spending and planning for larger projects as early as 1955, anticipating an influx of federal funding.⁴⁵

The Tennessee Highway Department feared opposition and lack of support among its citizens for the interstate system as it passed through certain areas. As early as February of 1957, people began inquiring as to where the interstates routes were planned to run. Horace D. Linton asked, “What areas and Nashville will be first considered and approximately what time elapse from current date will occur before actual purchase of easements will be attempted?” As a resident of Nashville, he was concerned about what properties the interstate was to run through. He was also concerned with how right-of-way affected businesses. He inquired “If the need for a right-of-way requires acquiring a site housing an industrial operation valued at several hundred thousand dollars, will the State allow ample time for re-locating and removal; or is the program set up to be completed at an early date; or in what anticipated time for any completed portion of the system?” In a reply on February 7, Bates assures Linton, “In the location of not only the Interstate System but all State Highway land use is taken into consideration very heavily.”⁴⁶ Unlike the letters to Senator Gore, citizens expressed concern over the appropriation of land to the State Highway Engineer.

Gore constituents in Tennessee largely supported the construction of the interstate system. In their opinion, the state’s roads were poor, possibly even lagging behind those of the rest of the United States. They blamed road conditions for traffic congestion and

⁴⁵ Mohl, “Citizen Activism and Freeway Revolts in Memphis and Nashville,” 879, 880.

⁴⁶ Horace D. Linton to Mr. Bates of the Department of Highways, letter, February 6, 1957. Record Group 84, box 67, folder 8; W. M. Bates to Horace D. Linton, letter, February 7, 1957, Record Group 84, box 67, folder 8, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

deaths due to automobile accidents. Also, Tennesseans asserted their roads were unfit for national defense. They envisioned the interstate vision as the answer to their road problems. Certain areas of Tennessee were not readily accessible until a few short years before the interstate system. Harold B. Hinton claims in his 1942 biography of Cordell Hull that his section of the state “skipped directly from riverboats to automobiles.”⁴⁷ For the most part, any objections they had were confined to specific tax provisions, not the highway system itself. Interestingly, almost nobody wrote to Gore expressing concern over the possible appropriation of private property in order to build the new highways. However, the State Highway Department Records reveal that, at least after the act was passed, some Tennesseans feared their property was subject to eminent domain. However, support for the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways was strong in Tennessee.

⁴⁷ Hinton, *Cordell Hull*, 17.

CHAPTER TWO: TENNESSEE'S TRANSPORTATION INDUSTRY AND THE INTERSTATE SYSTEM

Tennessee Truckers and Highway Legislation

Today, freight trucks are a seemingly constant presence on the interstate system. At all hours of the day, seven days a week, they haul their cargoes to the north, south, east, and west. At certain times, they even outnumber regular automobiles on the highway. On these trucks are company names, ranging from large corporations to small businesses consisting of one or two vehicles. Cross-country trucking is an undeniably essential component of the transportation industry in the United States. The observant traveler can see this by merely gazing out the window while driving on America's superhighways. On these major routes, the government as well as private enterprises have constructed truck stops, gas stations, weigh stations, and rest stops all for the convenience of long-haul truckers. The interstate system had undoubtedly contributed to both the success and prevalence of the trucking industry. Instead they utilized local and state roads. It is therefore unsurprising that legislation to expand federal road building and create the interstate highway system excited trucking companies. The owners and employees of these companies recognized the opportunities such a modern system provided in terms of business. They envisioned a wide-open road system which they could use freely in order to transport freight further and faster at little extra cost. However, this vision did not go uncontested, for it directly conflicted with those of many individual citizens and other sectors of the transportation industry.

Because the economic possibilities were so great, trucking interests in Tennessee sought to secure legislation that was favorable to their business needs. However, private citizens were determined to make trucking companies pay their fair share of the costs of road construction and maintenance. On March 1, 1956, 100 citizens of Memphis signed a letter that was sent to Senator Gore's office. These citizens asserted they were in favor of an expanded highway system, but were concerned with funding. They opposed H.R. 9075 (more commonly known as the Boggs Bill) because it applied highways user charges equally to all vehicles regardless of size or weight. They stated that while trucking lobbyists and companies were in support of this, it placed an unfair burden on private citizens travelling in commuter cars or farmers using light trucks.¹ It is easy to see why trucking companies supported this bill. Under this legislation, they had to pay no more to use the highways than the average citizen. In fact, average citizens were to fund the vast majority of the Interstate System because the most numerous vehicles on the roads were regular automobiles. This left trucking companies with a disproportionately small burden to shoulder for highway funding. Several trucking companies and organizations in Tennessee wrote to Gore in order to secure legislation favorable to their interests. As shown by the Memphis letter, this was also done on the national stage by trucking lobbyists. Clearly, private citizens of Tennessee were suspicious of such action.

Trucking interests in Tennessee overwhelmingly supported the interstate system but were concerned with taxation. This system offered substantial opportunity for economic gain. Historian Diane Perrier states in her book *Onramps and Overpasses: A*

¹ Memphis citizens letter to Gore, March 1, 1956, B52 box 6/8, folder 4/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

Cultural History of Interstate Travel that “time was money in the booming trucking industry.” She demonstrates how the new highways transformed local economies. She points out that the interstate substantially improved Georgia’s postwar economy. It provided an almost direct link from the port of Savannah to Atlanta, which drastically improved shipping efficiency.² Although they were about to reap the benefits of this more efficient highway system, Tennessee truckers were concerned about taxation in order to pay for the interstates. E. Ward King, President of Mason and Dixon Lines Inc. of Kingsport, Tennessee expressed his support for the federal highway program and stated that the country desperately needed the 40,000 miles of highways that were proposed. King declared, “We are perfectly ready, willing, and able to pay our share of any taxes that may be imposed to complete this program. We only ask that these taxes be on a fair and equable [sic] basis and across the board on all motorists alike with no unjust discrimination against any segment of the highway users.”³ This opinion is in direct opposition to those of the railroad industry and commuters. Those such as King did not want the trucking industry to have to shoulder the burden of funding the highways. Instead, a tax applied equally to all motorists placed the burden on individuals in commuter cars. Additionally, the toll roads that some politicians supported were not a viable alternative to ensure commercial trucks paid their share. Trucking companies in the U.S. were hesitant to pay tolls as well. Perrier states that authorities realized in 1955

² Perrier, *Onramps and Overpasses: A Cultural History of Interstate Travel*, 110, 256, 257.

³ E. Ward King to Albert Gore, February 8, 1956, letter, from Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

that truckers were avoiding using the Ohio Turnpike, a toll road, because they thought the fees were too high.⁴

Trucking companies and employees were also concerned about potential limits to weights and sizes of commercial trucks. Dan Billings wrote to Gore as an employee of a motor carrier. He stated that he was afraid that the potential measure freezing weights and sizes of commercial trucks put his job in danger. He felt the Boggs bill was more favorable to him as an employee and his industry.⁵ Foster states in his book that auto groups believed that trucks had to pay higher licensing fees because their weight had the possibility of damaging the new highways.⁶ Gore shared their concerns. At this time, Fallon and Gore had presented the highway bills to the Senate and Congress respectively. While very similar, there were a couple of differences; this potential freezing of size and weight was one of them and was elaborated in section 2 (d) of Senator Gore's bill. Several workers employed in the commercial trucking industry feared such a provision put their jobs in danger and advocated that it be replaced by Section 108 (j) of H.R. 10660.⁷ Several companies were opposed to stringent regulations on size and weight of transport trucks. Ed Seaton Jr., President of the Tennessee Petroleum Transport Association, indicated that the organization was in favor of Section 108(j) of H.R. 10660

⁴ Perrier, *Onramps and Overpasses*, 256.

⁵ Dan Billings to Albert Gore, May 21, 1956, letter, B52 box 6/8, folder 6/7. Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

⁶ Foster, *A Nation on Wheels*, 107.

⁷ James E. Curtis to Albert Gore, May 17, 1956, letter, B52 box 6/8, folder 6/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee; Charlie L. Janus to Albert Gore, May 11, 1956, letter, B52 box 6/8, folder 6/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee; W. D. Sartain to Albert Gore, May 11, 1956, letter, B52 box 6/8, folder 6/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

as approved by the Bureau of Public Roads.⁸ Several other companies and organizations latched onto this ruling by the Bureau of Public Roads in an attempt to attain Gore's support in procuring more favorable regulations. Neely B. Coble owned the Neely Coble Company in Nashville. This business was a distributor of Mack trucks. He pleaded with Gore to accept the position of the Bureau of Public Roads regarding size and weight. He said, "We have a great deal at stake in this legislation, and very much need your assistance in passing a bill that is reasonably fair to the trucking industry." Coble was fairly persistent. Coble sent another letter on May 16, 1956. He stated that he and others in the industry realized that building the new highways was going to cost a substantial amount of money. He further stated that everyone desired better highways but wanted others to pay for them. Like others, he stated he was willing to pay his fair share of the cost but did not want to pay disproportionately. He informed Gore that he had 22 employees and that they were all intently watching the developments of the Highway Bill. Yet another owner of a trucking industry company was quick to tell Gore that his employee's jobs were on the line.⁹

Trucking companies used the ruling by the Bureau of Public Roads in order to assert that they cared for the safety and maintenance of the new highways. In a telegram to Gore, M. M. Gordon, President of Gordon's Transport Inc., stated, "It would be a great favor to the thousands of us who earn our living in the trucking industry if you would reconsider your position and favor Section 108(j) of H.R. 10660 in line with (the) letter

⁸ Ed Seaton Jr. to Albert Gore, telegram, May 16, 1956, B52 Box 6/8, folder 5/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Files, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

⁹ Neely B. Coble to Albert Gore, letter, May 9, 1956, B52 Box 6/8, folder 5/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Files, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

from Acting Commissioner Henry J. Kaltenbach of (the) Bureau of Public Roads. He states that axle limitations are the limitations that are significant in the preservation of the highway structure and consequently of the investment in it. We in the trucking industry would not be in favor of this position if we did not sincerely feel that these limitations would safeguard the highways.”¹⁰ Gordon was able to use the Bureau’s decision in order to reinforce his company’s position and demonstrate that they cared about maintaining the integrity of the highways.

L. C. Miller of Cook Truck Lines in Memphis expressed his displeasure by letter. He urged Gore to reconsider his desire to substitute Section 108 (j) of the house bill for Section 102 (d) of the Senate bill because it could jeopardize jobs. He claimed that one out of seven of all non-farm based paychecks in Tennessee came from the trucking industry. He argued further, “The highway engineers who are experts agree with the House section and all of the states permit 32,000 pounds on tandem axles without damage to present highways.” Senator Gore responded on May 26, 1956 and claimed “My interest in this matter is motivated solely by my desire to preserve the roads to be built. I believe the provision of the Senate bill is sound and reasonable.”¹¹

Several Tennesseans contested claims made by Miller and others in the trucking industry. Several citizens argued that the trucking industry had an undeniably negative impact on Tennessee’s roads. W. H. Hamblen stated in a letter, “You probably could not

¹⁰ M. M. Gordon to Albert Gore, telegram, May 10, 1956, B52 Box 6/8, folder 5/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Files, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

¹¹ L. C. Miller to Albert Gore, letter, B52 Box 6/8, folder 6/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee; Albert Gore to L. C. Miller, letter, B52 box 6/8, folder 6/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

live in a better state to see the result of turning the roads over to the trucking industry.” He referred to the trucks as “monsters” and asserted that they were destroying the state’s roads. He asserted that 79,000 pound trucks were bound to destroy the new roads in a relatively short amount of time.¹² According to Hamblen, freight trucks were simply too heavy and threatened to quickly destroy the modern and efficient highways. He also claimed that many traffic accidents were directly caused by trucks. He asserted that they frequently disregarded the speed limit in Tennessee, which made them a significant threat to those traveling in regular automobiles. Clearly, he favored making trucking companies pay for the interstate system.¹³ This letter effectively demonstrates in what ways the trucking industry threatened citizens’ vision of the interstate system. They wanted modern and well-constructed highway that allowed for quick and efficient travel. However, they feared that the weight of freight trucks had the potential to destroy the new roads in just a few short years. Additionally, they envisioned the interstate system as both well-maintained and safe. The potential wear and tear caused by the trucking industry threatened to reduce the new highways to poor conditions. Furthermore, the truckers’ disregard of the speed limit threatened the safety of motorists. However, it appears that L. C. Miller and the trucking industry were able to get what they wanted in terms of sizes and weights. The version of the Federal-Aid Highway Act that was approved on June 29, 1956 permitted a maximum of 32,000 pounds on tandem axles, or 18,000 pounds per axle. However, weights and sizes were frozen. Trucks could not exceed 73,280 pounds or

¹² W. H. Hamblen to Albert Gore, letter, February 27, 1956, B52 Box 5/8, folder 2/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Files, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

¹³ Hamblen to Gore.

a width of 96 inches.¹⁴ While this may not have been as restrictive as they had feared, clearly they were not able to escape regulation. According to Gore's statement to Miller, this is unsurprising because lawmakers, and undoubtedly citizens as well, desired to preserve the highways as best as possible. Several automobile groups and other organizations argued prior to the highway bill's passage that trucks needed to pay higher licensing fees or adhere to some other form of regulation because they deteriorated roads much faster than other vehicles.¹⁵ Furthermore, given the poor state of much of the nation's roadways prior to 1956, the new highways were to be well maintained and regulated.

In order to ensure their vision of the interstate system remained a possibility, members of the trucking industry asserted that they were too important of a sector in shipping to damage through regulation and taxation. R. D. Herbert, Jr. the treasurer of T. L. Herbert & Sons Builders Supplies in Nashville, claimed that the subcommittee of the House Public Works Committee planned to finance the interstate system through "prohibitive highway user taxes." He further claimed, "These taxes will in our estimation eliminate the trucks from the highways for which they will be built." As an employee of a company that used trucks fairly extensively, he was concerned that the business would have to pay far more than its fair share to fund the highway system. He wrote, "We are aware of the fact that the taxes have to come from some source, but to levy them all from

¹⁴House of Representatives Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956, 84th Cong., 1956, 381.
<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-70/pdf/STATUTE-70-Pg374.pdf>

¹⁵ Foster, *A Nation on Wheels*, 107.

the trucks alone would in effect kill the goose that laid the golden egg.”¹⁶ Herbert made several notable assertions in this letter. He claimed that large trucks and the interstate highways were built for each other. As a result, increased taxation threatened to disrupt this seemingly natural pairing. Secondly, he referred to the trucking industry as “the goose that laid the golden egg.” He also stated that this “goose” was in danger of being killed by taxation. Essentially, he claimed that the trucking industry was too valuable to be hampered by this additional taxation.

Federal highway legislation also affected industries that utilized large trucks off of the interstate highways. One of these was the lumber industry. C. Arthur Bruce recommended in a telegram that Gore take into consideration the interests of lumber companies that operated off of public highways. He pointed out that they used large trucks, gasoline, tires, and other taxable items and asked that the lumber industry be exempt from such taxation.¹⁷ Bruce clearly viewed such taxation as a user tax. His lumber trucks did not utilize the highways. Therefore, in his mind, they did not need to pay a user tax.

Trucking companies envisioned the interstate system as an artery encouraging free-trade. They vehemently opposed efforts to contradict this vision, asserting that anything less contradicted the ideals of the United States. Roy Matlock and Royce Cope of Matlock and Cope Truck Bodies, Trailers, Dump Bodies, and Tandems in Nashville

¹⁶ R. D. Herbert, Jr. to Albert Gore, letter, July 14, 1955, Series IV, Issue Mail, Box 3, folder 3/5, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Files, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

¹⁷ C. Arthur Bruce to Albert Gore, telegram, May 23, 1956, B52 Box 6/8, folder 5/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Files, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

informed the senator that they felt they were being penalized by H.R. 7072. They claimed the trucking industry was already burdened by unreasonable taxation and regulation. They further stated, “We, therefore, urge you to oppose this discriminating taxation which is very UNAMERICAN.”¹⁸ The aforementioned taxation threatened to reduce the profits that the interstate offered to the trucking industry. It is also telling that Matlock and Cope designated such taxation as un-American, especially during the Cold War when such a designation was likely far more foreboding and threatening. Opposition to increased taxation was fairly common in roadbuilding projects, yet these groups still desired the roads. Farmers wanted better roads in the early twentieth century, but felt particularly burdened by the taxes needed to fund them.¹⁹ According to Gore’s constituent mail from Tennessee trucking companies, it appears that this had not changed significantly by 1956.

The Struggle to Secure the Railroad

While citizens focused on issues of road conditions, safety, defense, and taxation, Tennessee railroad interests were concerned about how the interstate affected them economically. The proposed legislation for the creation of a federally funded interstate system had the potential to dramatically alter the landscape of American transportation and commercial shipping. Indeed, the present iteration of this system allows travelers to journey from coast to coast and north to south with relative ease and efficiency. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, railroad companies were major players in

¹⁸ Roy Matlock and Royce Cope to Albert Gore, letter, July 15, 1955, Series IV, Issue Mail, Box 3, folder 3/5, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

¹⁹ Ingram, *Dixie Highway*, 17..

transportation and commercial shipping. The railroad industry was concerned about the impact of a national highway system on their profits. In their heyday, railroads ordered and structured what Stilgoe refers to as metropolitan corridors. He establishes that this corridor extends out from city centers to industrial zones, suburbs, small towns, and even the wilderness. He states that this was an “unprecedented arrangement of space.” It is truly difficult to overstate the importance of the railroad on American culture. Authors wrote extensively on the railroad in the period between 1880 and World War II. In fact, railroads were so influential in shaping the American landscape that they even established whole towns. For example, historian Owen D. Gutfreund points out that the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad established the town of Smyrna in 1851 as a stop between Nashville and Murfreesboro. Likewise, Atlanta was established in 1837 as the end of the Western and Atlantic railroad. However, increased reliance on the automobile caused a noticeable decline in the railroad industry and the use of these corridors after 1930. As early as World War I, Americans began to realize the shortcomings of the railroad in moving large amounts of war material to the coast, demonstrating the need for better roads. Prior to this, railroad companies actually supported the Good Roads Movement in order to secure feeder routes to the train depots. Early in the twentieth century, few people considered long-distance travel by automobile, thus it was not a threat to the railroad’s dominance. In fact, roads in the South often only connected farms to the local train depot. Additionally, Southerners were often isolated by train lines that did not run to their desired destinations. Railroad companies also held monopolies in several areas in the South and charged exorbitant rates. Successful truck tests by the military changed

everything. Both railroad passenger and freight traffic decreased substantially. The ordered environment of these corridors then underwent a long decline, although this was stalled by increased traffic because of wartime demands. However, increasing reliance on automobiles and limited access highways saw these areas abandoned to the wilderness.²⁰ Stilgoe grapples with the effects of the introduction of the automobile to the railroad industry and its creations. Clearly, the railroad industry had already been significantly impacted by the introduction and widespread popularity of the automobile well before the Interstate System was introduced. These effects were felt by railroad interests in Tennessee. These groups were also concerned about the potential impacts of highway legislation and voiced their opinions to Senator Gore through letters and telegrams.

While railroad interests in Tennessee may have had concerns about the proposed interstate systems, they did not come out in opposition to such development outright. Instead, they informed Gore as to how they believed the federal government needed to raise funds. It seems that by this period in time, the automobile had won the battle over who transported Americans around the country. Prior to the ascendancy of the automobile, people used the railroad in order to escape the “scurry and congestion” of urban transportation.²¹ However, by 1956 it seems that the answer to traffic congestion in the minds of the people was not the railroad, but the interstate system. Americans saw

²⁰ Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor: Railroads and the American Scene*, 3, 4, 339, 341. Refer to this work for an in depth analysis of how railroads shaped the American landscape. While he does not discuss the interstate system in detail, his work is important for understanding the development of transportation in America; Gutfreund, *Twentieth Century Sprawl Highways and the Reshaping of the American Landscape*, 198; Foster, *A Nation on Wheels*, 13; Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 21; “History,” City of Atlanta, GA, atlanta.gov, accessed March 6, 2018, <https://www.atlantaga.gov/visitors/history>; Ingram, *Dixie Highway*, 2, 14, 19.

²¹ Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor*, 44.

wide asphalt ribbons of limited access highways as the way to eliminate traffic problems and provide easy travel. Therefore, railroad companies and organizations in Tennessee did not discuss the needs of passengers in their letters to Gore. Instead, they focused on commercial shipping. In fact, one Tennessee railroad representative argued that it was absurd for automobiles to have to subsidize the trucking industry by paying for the interstate highways.²² The primary battle was between railroads and commercial trucking companies. Because of this struggle, several Tennessee railroad organizations attempted to persuade Gore to enact legislation that impeded the success of trucking companies. S. A. Para, State Legislative Representative of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen in Nashville, wrote a letter to Gore explaining the concerns of the organization. Para affirmed the importance of highways to all Tennesseans employed in the railroad industry. He assured Gore that the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen did not oppose a federal highway program. However, they did have opinions on how it was to be funded.

Definitely any highway program should be financed on a pay-as-you-go basis, paid for entirely by those who benefit directly, with payments in the form of use charges assessed in proportion to the benefits received. In this connection we oppose any program financed only by taxes on fuel, or by any other taxes which fails to exact from heavy commercial trucks payment in proportion to their highway use as compared with highway use by ordinary automobiles. Any system of charges which does not recognize both tons and miles as controlling factors in measuring relative use is inadequate and unjust and compels the automobiles to subsidize the trucks.²³

He echoed the concerns of many private citizens in terms of taxes and funding by stating that those who use them ought to pay for the highways. He was specifically

²² S. A. Para to Senator Albert Gore, February 2, 1956, letter, B52 box 5/8, folder 2/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

²³ S. A. Para to Senator Albert Gore, February 2, 1956, letter, B52 box 5/8, folder 2/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

concerned with charges being levied based upon how much a certain party benefits from the interstate system. He was not looking to place the burden of highway funding on regular commuters. Instead, he claimed that he and the organization he represented were not happy with simply paying for highways through increased taxes on gasoline. Instead, he hoped to place the burden upon trucking companies. This made perfect sense from a business perspective. Trucking companies were major competitors of railroads for overland transportation of goods. Providing a national system of excellent highways that commercial trucks could use at little to no cost in order to transport material was a grave threat for the railroad industry. The trucking industry threatened railroads before the construction of the interstate system. William H. Joubert, a transportation economist, noted in his 1949 work *Southern Freight Rates in Transition* that high freight rates of Southern railroads made them particularly vulnerable to the trucking industry. Rates on short hauls were much higher in the South than in the North. Therefore, more people opted to use the trucking industry in order to ship goods over relatively short distances.²⁴

C. S. Stanfield of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and the Tennessee Central Railway shared Para's views in his correspondence to Gore. Stanfield, as a representative of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and the Tennessee Central Railway, clearly felt that he needed to make his opinions known to Gore and perhaps felt that his position warranted his views further consideration. He also discussed ways to place different shipping industries on equal footing. He advocated for lower freight rates in order to attract more business for the railroads. He thought that doing so promoted fair

²⁴ William H. Joubert, *Southern Freight Rates in Transition* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1949), 347, 360, 361.

competition between trucks, water transportation, and railroads. Like Para he did not oppose highways outright. Instead, he opposed trucking companies benefitting at the expense of the railroad and the consumer. He wrote, "Our highways have, of course, long been neglected. Everybody agrees that there is need for them and that more should be built. But its good business to provide the means when we plan to spend. And lets [sic] tax the ones that use our highways in line with the benefit they get."²⁵ Like private citizens of Tennessee, he lamented the condition of the state's roads and affirmed that federally funded highways were needed. Like Para, he asserted that those who benefitted the most from use of the highways must bear more of the financial burden. Here, he specifically targeted trucking companies.

Not only were Tennessee railroad interests concerned with taxation, but they were also concerned with the size and weight of commercial trucks permitted on the interstate system. Para asserted to Gore that the Federal-Aid Highway Act must first be based upon regulations for maximum size and weight for motor vehicles. He stated, "We do not oppose highway legislation which contains these two vital provisions; first, user charges producing enough to pay the money spent which charges reflect, in some way, both weight and miles; and second, proper restrictions as to the present and future size and weight of motor vehicles. On the other hand, we will oppose any bill which does not contain these two provisions."²⁶ This can be viewed as another way to prevent commercial trucking companies from gaining a substantial advantage over railroad

²⁵ C. S. Stanfield to Albert Gore, February 2, 1956, letter, B52 box 5/8, folder 2/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

²⁶ S. A. Para to Albert Gore.

companies. Limiting the size and weight of commercial trucks was one way for railroads to ensure that the trucking industry could not transport as much material per vehicle. Additionally, it made sense from a road maintenance standpoint because commercial trucks damaged pavement more quickly than smaller automobiles.²⁷ Stanfield asserted that any vehicle that was too heavy needed to be kept off the road. The trucking industry was the obvious target of this remark. Furthermore, Stanfield promoted fair competition. He stated, “It is said that competition is the life of trade,” hoping to show that fair competition was needed in order to promote good business and argued that railroads needed to be able to offer lower freight rates. He actually supported the interstate system and admitted the highways had been neglected for a long time.²⁸ Perhaps the railroad industry knew that opposing better roads was an unwise tactic, and hoped that such regulations made railroads the more efficient choice in terms of shipping goods overland as railcars accommodated more material and supported more weight.

Railroads also used national defense to assert their importance. Even in terms of arguments from the railroad industry, historians cannot ignore the Cold War context of the interstate system. Para claimed railroads were vital to national defense, and should not be undermined by subsidies to their competitors. He claimed that railroads still composed the backbone of the transportation industry, which made them vital to national defense. He asserted that considering to provide subsidies to their competitors was “unwise, short-sighted and unfair to the great majority of the American people.”²⁹ This

²⁷ Foster, *A Nation on Wheels*, 107.

²⁸ C. S. Stanfield to Senator Albert Gore.

²⁹ S. A. Para to Albert Gore.

last statement is fairly ominous, implying that railroads would undoubtedly one day be needed to assist in another war effort. Railroad interests were ready and willing to play on fears of hostilities with the Soviet Union in order secure their economic future against commercial trucking companies. However, their claims did have precedent. As Stilgoe mentions in *Metropolitan Corridor*, railroads figured prominently during the world wars as a means to transport men and supplies.³⁰ A statement submitted to the Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Public Works on April 22, 1955 from Burton N. Behling, an economist with the Association of American Railroads, supported this argument. He asserted that railroads were more efficient in terms of manpower and gasoline than large trucks and other automobiles. He pointed out that this is a crucial factor during times of war.³¹

Burton N. Behling's statement to the Senate Committee on Public Works also supports the arguments of Tennessee railroad interests in terms of taxation and highway funding. As the economist for the Association of American Railroads, he stated that taxing gasoline failed to charge large commercial trucks enough because fuel consumption did not increase proportionally to the size and weight of an automobile. He asserted that all of the states have seen it as necessary to supplement the fuel tax with additional charges on heavy vehicles.³² He elaborated further, saying:

³⁰ Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor*, 341.

³¹ Burton N. Behling, "Statement to Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Public Works," April 22, 1955, letter, Box D36, folder 10/231, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, 7

³² Behling, "Statement to Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Public Works," 11, 12.

What is needed is a mileage form of user charge upon the heavy commercial trucks, graduated by weight classes, and directly variable with the actual use made of highway facilities in each particular state. Each state can have its own highway user tax structure, geared to its own highway cost conditions and revenue needs, and applied to resident and nonresident heavy trucks alike.³³ He advocated for “user charges” in order to have a highway system that funded itself. “Unless highway users are made fully accountable for highway costs with adequately scaled charges by classes of vehicles, highway deficiencies and congestion will continue to plague us indefinitely and we are not likely ever to catch up.” He asserted that it was not fair for individuals to be able to use highways for economic gain with no charge, and that in order for fair competition between railroads and commercial trucking companies, truckers had to pay fully for their use of the highways.³⁴ Essentially, it appears the railroads were afraid the interstate system was going to adversely affect them economically by providing a substantial advantage to the commercial trucking industry. Tennessee’s railroad interests did make their voice heard to Senator Gore. Their letters do account for a relatively small portion of those found in the senator’s files. However, individuals such as C. S. Stanfield represented labor unions or railroad companies wrote several of the letters in the collection. Therefore, they spoke for a large group of people. These statements largely support the arguments that were made on a national level. However, Behling did make

³³ Behling, “Statement to Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Public Works,” 12.

³⁴ Behling, “Statement to Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Public Works,” 3, 4.

one statement that was contrary to what many Tennesseans wrote in their letters. He claimed that the states needed to bear more of the cost than what they did.³⁵

As demonstrated, although the railroads around the country and in Tennessee had been facing decline due to the growing popularity of the automobile for decades, they did not argue against the interstate system. Motorists were about to gain access to better routes all over the country. By this point in time, the railroad had already lost the battle over passengers. As a result, they confined their focus to shipping. Their best strategy was to secure legislation that was unfavorable to the trucking industry. Based on the final version of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, they were not as successful as they had hoped. However, the railroad has soldiered on in the sixty years since the interstate system was introduced and remains an active component in the transportation industry.

Trucking and railroad companies struggled to secure their visions of the interstate through influencing legislation. It is notable that neither part was particularly concerned about passengers. However, one industry was invested in passengers and interested in attaining favorable legislation. Transit companies were apprehensive about the new interstate system. Even though they primarily operated in cities, the interstate system had the potential to affect these companies as well. In fact, many of these companies were worried about how highway legislation may impact their business. Carmack Cochran, President of the Nashville Transit Company, wrote to Gore in reference to transit exemptions to tax provisions in the highway legislation. He was concerned that he had not been able to convince the Senator of the importance of such exemptions. He argued

³⁵ Behling, "Statement to Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Public Works," 28.

that local transit companies were “fighting a losing battle.” He revealed that these companies had lost sixty percent of their “revenue passengers” due to competition with privately owned automobiles. He then argued that the remaining passengers were saddled with higher tax burdens. He argued that a tax on a transit company was not, in reality, a tax on a company but a tax on the citizens who use them. In fact, he stated additional tax would discourage private capital from investing in the transit industry. Furthermore, he said this tax would hurt transit companies in Memphis, Nashville, Chattanooga, and Knoxville. He ended his letter saying that small local transit businesses needed to be protected, and that the fifty-seven small bus companies that went out of business in New York in the prior three years indicated that they were in trouble.³⁶ Given the rapidly increasing popularity and availability of automobiles in postwar America, it is not entirely surprising that city transit companies were undergoing hard times. The interstate system, which catered to Americans with access to automobiles, further undermined transit companies. These three sectors of the transportation industry provide an interesting glimpse at an important moment of transition. Railroad and transit companies may not have necessarily had a vision of the interstate. They fought to survive in spite of it. By the 1950s, many railroad companies were on the verge of bankruptcy.³⁷ Trucking companies did have a distinct vision, and were able to harness it.

³⁶ Carmack Cochran to Albert Gore, letter, May 25, 1956, B52 Box 5/8, folder 6/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

³⁷ Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 84.

CHAPTER THREE: ADVERTISING, EMINENT DOMAIN, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE INTERSTATE HIGHWAYS

Albert Gore and his constituents may not have realized it, but their support for the interstate system aided in the creation of a vast new landscape in America. The interstate highway landscape stretches into every state in the Continental U.S. John R. Stilgoe devotes an entire chapter in his book *Outside Lies Magic: Regaining History and Awareness in Everyday Places*. The interstate system has become so integral to American transportation and culture, it is easy to view the highways as merely “everyday places.” However, thoughtful inspection and, perhaps, a small amount of research reveals the historic and dynamic landscape of the highways. In his book, Stilgoe states, “To the explorer stopped atop a bridge arching over the twin ribbons of asphalt or concrete, the interstate highway becomes many things, an engineering marvel, almost an art form disappearing into the distance, perhaps a corridor of the imagination, always an expression of the power of the national government.”¹ The federal government envisioned the interstate as a uniform, consistent, and expertly engineered highway system as well as military weapon in the event of war. As a result, the federal government, through the Bureau of Public Roads, exercised its power in order to make that vision a reality.

The vision of the interstate as an economic opportunity came under intense attack for a specific business sector before Congress even passed the legislation. The federal

¹ John R. Stilgoe, *Outside Lies Magic: Regaining History and Awareness in Everyday Places*, New York: Walker and Company, 1998, 89.

government discussed prohibiting advertising along the interstate highways in the interest of safety and efficiency. Officials within the federal government worried that the new interstate highways were on the verge of becoming “rivers of pavement through tunnels of billboards.”² Intense debate ensued between the interested parties. The opposing interests sent pleas and demands to Senator Gore’s office as well as the State Highway Department. From this correspondence, it is clear that the government attempted to preserve the landscape using regulations on outdoor advertising along the interstate highways. They did so in the name of vehicular safety, although several individuals argued that unimpeded views of the Tennessee’s scenery were essential to tourism. However, these efforts met prolonged and rigid opposition from both advertising agencies and citizens who owned property along the highways.

Establishing restrictions on billboards along the interstate was a threat to many businesses. Advertising agencies saw the new road system as an opportunity to increase their business. In fact, outdoor advertising agencies had profited immensely from the use of the automobile. Highways connecting cities became commercial routes that the advertising industry used to reach motorists with their messages. Driving created a chain of consumption that the industry exploited. As Gudis states in *Buyways*, driving created the need for gasoline and exposed the motorist to more advertisements. Senator Richard Neuberger, a conservationist, proposed an amendment that allowed states to purchase land along the interstate system and require all signs except those necessary to drivers

² Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 168, 169.

remain at least 500 feet from the road.³ The limitation or prohibition of outdoor advertising along the interstate highways posed a dire threat to the opportunity envisioned by advertising agencies. On May 20, 1955, Norton Rosengarten of Rosengarten and Steinke, a Memphis advertising agency, wrote to Gore in order to protest a clause in Bill #1048 that restricted advertising along the proposed highways “to such an extent as to be unusable.” He asserted that outdoor advertising was a crucial component of advertising in general and was quite displeased that politicians sought to limit its presence. He made a very interesting argument, stating, “We understand that in the case of some turnpikes the very fact that there is no advertising along the right of way has contributed immeasurably to high accident rates. It seems that a driver lulls himself to sleep by the very monotony of the landscape and I have heard it said on several occasions that if his attention was heightened by an inclusion of even an occasional sign the accident rate would be affected beneficially.”⁴ He attempted to combat the assertion that advertising negatively impacted road safety by arguing that the monotony of highways with no billboards was far more dangerous. Businesses beyond the transportation industry were clearly counting on the interstate system to increase their profits and were willing to fight in order to secure this opportunity.

Other firms claimed that barring billboards from the interstate highways was dangerous for the entire industry and its thousands of employees. W. Glenn Hick, the vice president of the Sign Post Co. in Knoxville, asserted to Gore that depriving

³ Gudis, *Buyways*, 40, 48, 219.

⁴ Norton Rosengarten, “Norton Rosengarten to Albert Gore,” letter, May 20, 1955, Box A18, 3/8, folder 1/5, Series IV, Box 3, Issue Mail, Albert Gore, Sr. Research Files, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

advertisers the use of the roadside along superhighways “would kill the outdoor advertising business, which employs thousands of men across the country which means millions of dollars in payrolls killed and millions of dollars lost in materials and supplies, as well as leases from land owners.”⁵ Clearly, a significant portion of the American population relied on highways to earn a living, whether farmers, truckers, or employees at an advertising agency. As a result, they all had a stake in the interstate system.

Advertising agencies also pointed out that banning billboards on the interstate highway may damage the tourism industry in the state. Harry Phillips, an attorney in Nashville, claimed that barring advertising from the sides of highways would negatively impact those who owned “tourist courts.”⁶ Motels and similar establishments needed signage in order to inform motorists of their location. Phillips wrote on behalf of John Ozier, a man he claimed was prominent in out-door advertising. At the end of the letter, he expresses his hope that Gore would take his words into consideration because “he is your personal friend.”⁷ Interested parties were willing to call upon personal relationships in order to sway legislation in their favor. William C. McKelder, the owner of M and O Poster Advertising Company in Kingsport, Tennessee, informed Gore by letter that he favored Gore’s bill and acknowledged that the country needed better highways. However, he felt the proposed amendment by Senator Neuberger targeted his business and “sole livelihood.” He also pointed out that Tennessee was a state with a significant tourist

⁵ W. Glenn Hicks, “W. Glenn Hicks to Albert Gore, letter, May 18, 1955, Box A18, 3/8, folder 1/5, series IV, box 3, issue mail, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

⁶ Harry Phillips, Harry Phillips to Albert Gore, letter, May 19, 1955, box A18, 3/8, folder 1/5, Series IV, box 3, issue mail, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

⁷ Phillips, “Harry Phillips to Albert Gore.”

industry. He wrote, “Many stores, hotels, motels, restaurants and garages rely exclusively on outdoor advertising to call attention to their facilities.”⁸ He and others readily called attention to the tourism industry and asserted that it depended upon outdoor advertising. Additionally, the American Motor Hotel Association informed Gore by telegram that they represented more than fifty-thousand establishments all over the United States and that they were opposed to federal legislation restricting advertising along interstate highways. They argued this legislation threatened the very existence of many buildings.⁹

Parties other than advertising firms posed to suffer because of this legislation. Mrs. J. D. Campbell of White Creek also opposed the amendment limiting advertising along highways. Like several others, she stated that the amendment deprived her of the ability to rent out her land for advertising space.¹⁰ Agnes Howe Archey of West Nashville wrote to Gore and informed him that the proposed amendment deprived her and her husband of advertising space on their farm. She claimed that they were both elderly and the revenue from renting out part of their property for advertising helped them pay taxes each year. Similarly, J. R. Coarsey of Madison, Tennessee informed Senator Gore “This bites right in my bread basket as I own a piece of land on the Murfreesboro Highway, U.S. 41, which is exactly 500 feet deep and on which I collect each year \$200. The said \$200 being about equal to the State and County Real Estate

⁸ William C. McKelder, “William C. McKelder to Albert Gore,” letter, May 18, 1955, Series IV, Issue Mail, Box 3, folder 1/5, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

⁹ Victor Anderson, President, Motor Hotel Association, to Albert Gore, telegram, May 22, 1955, Series IV, Issue Mail, Box 3, folder 1/5, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

¹⁰ Mrs. J. D. Campbell to Albert Gore, letter, May 20, 1955, Series IV, Issue Mail, Box 3, folder 1/5, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

taxes.” He acknowledged that signs on the side of the road might be a safety hazard. However, he asserted that a 500-foot limit was excessive. It seems that several people in the state relied on advertising to pay their taxes.¹¹ John S. O’Neill, a partner at O’Neill Advertising Company in Knoxville, argued barring outdoor advertisements along highways was “a threat on free enterprise.”¹² Highways often symbolized the future and efficient transportation to Americans, but to businesses it was an important component of free enterprise. Gore sent a form letter to all those who wrote to him regarding a proposed advertising amendment in 1955. He stated, “Yesterday, the Senate, by unanimous consent, eliminated this provision from the bill.”¹³ Undoubtedly, resistance to this provision was staunch in other states as well as Tennessee.

Large advertising agencies were not the only parties that fought against billboard regulation on the interstate highways. Tennesseans who owned property along the highways were highly invested in the outcome of the advertising battle. Interestingly, they largely opposed government regulations and prohibitions against outdoor advertising along the interstate highways. Agnes Howe Archey of West Nashville wrote to Gore and informed him that the proposed amendment deprived her and her husband of advertising space on their farm. She claimed that they were both elderly and the revenue from renting

¹¹ Agnes Howe Archey, “Agnes Howe Archey to Albert Gore,” letter, May 19, 1955, Box A18, 3/8, folder 1/5, series IV Box 3 Issue Mail, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Files, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee; J. R. Coarsey, “J. R. Coarsey to Albert Gore,” letter, May 19, 1955, Box A18, 3/8, folder 1/5, Series IV. Box 3, issue mail, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

¹² John S. O’Neill, “John S. to Albert Gore,” letter May 19, 1955, Series IV, Issue Mail, Box 3, folder 1/5, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

¹³ Albert Gore, “Robotype Letter to All Who Wrote on Advertising Provision of Highway Bill,” letter, May 24, 1955, Series IV, Issue Mail, Box 3, folder 1/5, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

out part of their property for advertising helped them pay taxes each year.¹⁴ It seems that several people in the state relied on advertising to pay their taxes. Clearly, Senator Neuberger's amendment to section 4(a) of Bill 1048 had the potential to affect more parties than just advertising agencies. J. R. Coarsey of Madison, Tennessee informed Senator Gore "This bites right in my bread basket as I own a piece of land on the Murfreesboro Highway, U.S. 41, which is exactly 500 feet deep and on which I collect each year \$200. The said \$200 being about equal to the State and County Real Estate taxes." He acknowledged that signs on the side of the road might be a safety hazard. However, he asserted that a 500-foot limit was excessive.¹⁵ Based on correspondence sent to Senator Gore by property owners, it seems that citizens owning property along the highways largely opposed government regulation of outdoor advertising. They did not welcome attempts by the government to preserve the landscape. In their minds, such measures deprived them of the use of their private property and income.

Despite the loud and insistent objections by many Tennesseans, several parties supported the regulation and restriction of outdoor advertising on the interstate highways. Loye W. Miller, editor of the *Knoxville News Sentinel*, asserted in a letter to the Tennessee Legislative Council on July 31, 1959 that an act sponsored by Senator Albert Gore "is a declared national policy that erection and maintenance of outdoor advertising, signs, displays etc. should be strictly regulated." However, he stated this only applied to

¹⁴ Agnes Howe Archey, "Agnes Howe Archey to Albert Gore," letter, May 19, 1955, Box A18, 3/8, folder 1/5, series IV Box 3 Issue Mail, Albert Gore, Sr. Senate Files, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

¹⁵ J. R. Coarsey, "J. R. Coarsey to Albert Gore," letter, May 19, 1955, Box A18, 3/8, folder 1/5, Series IV. Box 3, issue mail, Albert Gore, Sr. Senate Files, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

the interstate highways. He also pointed out that Eisenhower declared on January 16, 1958 that the nation needed regulations on billboards to ensure safety on the interstates. Additionally, he stated that Admiral Neil Phillips believed that billboards on the side of the interstate highways was hazardous to national defense and may prohibit soldiers and civilians from moving off of the highways when necessary. He also asserted that “thousands of tons of inflammable and splinterable [sic] billboards and advertising material” was hazardous to have close to defense highways, and claimed the Nazi invasion of France would have been much worse had the French evacuation routes been crowded with billboards.¹⁶ National defense weighed heavily on the minds of Tennesseans, as it frequently showed up in their letters to government officials.

It is notable that even outdoor advertising, when associated with the interstate system, became a problem of national defense. National defense was a major motivation for the interstate system. Therefore the federal government wanted to keep anything that impeded the military purposes of the interstate to a minimum. Stilgoe also argues for the importance of the interstate system’s Cold War context. He states that the interstate is essentially a weapon. These highways were a departure from 1930s parkway design in which certain areas experiments with limited access roads in order to provide truck and congestion free routes for automobiles. However, by the 1950s, Stilgoe states that several interest groups, like those I have examined, banded together to lobby for a highway system to fulfill military purposes, similar to the German Autobahn. An early example in the United States is the Pennsylvania Turnpike. This highway was watched closely by

¹⁶ Loye W. Miller, “Loye W. Miller to the Tennessee Legislative Council,” letter, July 31, 1959, Record Group 84, Box 80, Folder 6, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

U.S. Army officers as well as officers of the Wehrmacht. The Turnpike had enormous military potential, as it was bomb proof and could serve as a makeshift runway for airplanes. The highway as a military weapon became even more prominent during the Cold War. Pentagon officials realized that a large armored vehicle carrying a nuclear weapon unimpeded over a national highway systems was extraordinarily difficult for the Soviets to track.¹⁷ Military function dictated the design of the interstate system to a large extent. The military had learned from attempts to bomb axis airfields that the damage to asphalt runways was easily repaired by bulldozer. Additionally, they knew from Hiroshima and Nagasaki that the interstate highways could withstand direct hits from atomic weaponry. Most potential damage could be repaired by the Army Corps of Engineers quickly. Additionally, long stretches of straight highways in the Great Plains were ideal landing strips for B-52 bombers. The idea behind this design was that Soviet missiles would have targeted U.S. airbases. The highways were intended to provide alternative airfields from which the planes could refuel and resupply. As a result, no powerlines adjoin the interstate highways. Plant life is confined to mowed grass.¹⁸ Taken out of context, Admiral Phillips' claims may seem outlandish. However, if one is familiar with the basic military functions of the interstate system, his staunch opposition to billboards along the highways is grounded.

Miller also outlined several other points in favor of billboard regulation besides national defense. These were:

¹⁷ Stilgoe, *Outside Lies Magic*, 91, 92, 93.

¹⁸ Stilgoe, *Outside Lies Magic*, 94.

1. To Prevent unreasonable distraction of operators of motor vehicles.
2. To provide maximum visibility along controlled access highways and, preferably, connecting highways.
3. To prevent confusion with traffic lights, signs, and signals.
4. To preserve natural scenic beauty of areas adjacent to highways.

Drawing on information from letters sent by his readers, Miller stated that he believed citizens wanted “view obstructing signs” prohibited along the highways in rural areas. He wrote that he knew the topic was controversial, but that he felt it was the people’s right to ban billboards from the interstate. He ended his letter saying “Despite the fierce opposition of a vociferous self-interested minority, I believe the public generally favors legislation by Tennessee that would accept billboard regulation to guarantee maximum highway safety—preserve unobscured the treasured beauty of Tennessee’s precious hills, plains and waters that are an invaluable tourist attraction—and earn the three-million dollar bonus.”¹⁹

Several high-ranking members of the Tennessee Federation of Garden Clubs sent a statement to the Legislative Council Committee regarding advertising along the interstate highways. They asserted that the drawbacks to placing billboards close to the highways outweighed any advantages. They claimed “This new System is built to encourage motor travel. The modern car is built to encourage speed. It must be admitted that the existence of eye catching and amusing pictures, signs, and slogans along the highway tends to reduce the driver’s effectiveness of operation.” They also asserted that such signs hurt the tourist industry by hiding the state’s scenery. They advocated for a

¹⁹ Miller, Loye W. Miller to the Tennessee Legislative Council.”

zoning law that permitted an area near a town or city for signage.²⁰ In their opinion, the speed allowed by newer automobiles and the new highways did not need to be sacrificed in order to placate advertising firms. Speed was the point of the system.

On July 22, 1959 Herbert Bates, the Chief Urban Engineer of the State Highway Department, wrote a letter to Thomas A. Johnson, the Executive Director of the Legislative Council Committee, in reference to the regulation of advertising on the interstate system. He confirmed that he believed such regulation was necessary. He asserted that according to Section 131, Title 23 of the U.S. Code that Congress intended for the states to police outdoor advertising. He also maintained that the regulation was necessary “In order to promote the safety, welfare, comfort, convenience and enjoyment of the public in the use of said Interstate Highways.” However, stated at the end of his letter that “it is not believed feasible to purchase or condemn an interest in lands fronting on the Interstate System right of way in order to control billboards.”²¹ Several aspects of this correspondence are notable. Firstly, a high-ranking official in the State Highway Department believed that the states had the right to police outdoor advertising. Secondly, he argued that this was not only necessary for safety, but also enjoyment. This implies that aesthetics were important.

In order to assess the viability of advertising restrictions, the Tennessee State Highway Department sought to obtain data from other states regarding advertising on the

²⁰ Tennessee Federation of Garden Clubs, “Tennessee Federation of Garden Clubs to the Legislative Council Committee,” letter, July 29, 1959, Record Group 84, Box 80, Folder 6, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

²¹ Herbert M. Bates, “Herbert M. Bates to Thomas A. Johnson,” letter, July 22, 1959, Record Group 84, Box 80, Folder 6, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

interstate highways. John C. Mackie, Commissioner of the Michigan State Highway Department, circulated a questionnaire among the highway department of several states. The Tennessee State Highway Department obtained a copy for study. In response to the question, "Do you have legislation to control outdoor advertising?" Seventeen states answered yes while 24 answered no. Three states said their legislation met the requirements of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1958 to qualify for federal funds while 36 said they did not.²² As shown by this study compiled by the Michigan State Highway Department, several states were unsure how to proceed in terms of outdoor advertising regulations and sought to find examples. Based on this study, it seems that very few successful models existed at that point in time. However, the Tennessee State Highway Department still kept tabs on measures being introduced in other states. For example, they possessed copies of a bill passed by the Kentucky General Assembly on March 9, 1960 prohibiting "advertising devices" within 660 feet of the right-of-way of the interstate highways.²³

Sinclair Weeks, secretary of the United States Department of Commerce stated that the guidelines for the regulation of outdoor advertising along the interstate system were essential for "preserving the beauty of our country's scenic assets along the new Interstate highways." The guidelines themselves stated, "To promote the safety, convenience, and enjoyment of public travel and free flow of interstate commerce and to protect the public investment in the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways,

²² John C. Mackie, Commissioner, Michigan State Highway Department, "Summary of Response to Outdoor Advertising Legislation Questionnaire," Record Group 84, Box 80, Folder 6, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

²³ Kentucky General Assembly, "House Bill No. 250," March 9, 1960, Record Group 84, Box 80, Folder 6, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

hereinafter called the ‘Interstate System,’ it is in the public interest to improve areas adjacent to such system by controlling the erection and maintenance of outdoor advertising signs, displays and devices adjacent to that system.” For example, these guidelines included signs that were and were not permitted in “protected areas.” Those not permitted included signs advertising illegal activities, obsolete signs, signs that were dirty or in poor repair, and signs that were “not securely affixed to a substantial structure.”²⁴ It is important to note that the federal government recognized the importance of maintaining the landscape by placing value on scenic views.

The State Highway Department followed the federal government’s lead and recommended that outdoor advertising along the interstate highways should be regulated. Commissioner D. W. Moulton informed Attorney General George F. McCanless that he and the State Highway Department believed that legislation regulating billboards needed to be passed so the state could receive the bonus of “one-half of one percent of the construction cost of the interstate (exclusive of right-of-way costs) which is provided in the Federal Act if the States comply with the requirements of the Bureau of Public Roads of the Department of Commerce.” He also stated, “It has been the thinking of us in the Highway Department that the Act should be under the police powers of the State, which would give the Highway Department the authority to make rules and regulations that would comply with the requirements without necessity of purchasing the right-of-way

²⁴ “Standards for the Guidance of the States in Regulating Outdoor Advertising Signs, Displays, and Devices Adjacent to the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways,” United States Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C., November 10, 1958, Record Group 84, Box 80, Folder 6, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee, 2, 7.

privileges in this strip 660 feet wide and parallel to our right-of-way on each side.”²⁵ The bonus offered by the federal government clearly indicates their desire to control the landscape adjacent to the new interstate system.

Government agencies were quick to try and regulate outdoor advertising along the new highways, using safety, aesthetics, and national defense as justification. Several Tennesseans fought against this regulation of the landscape by the government, asserting that it attacked free enterprise, advertisements actually made highways safer by reducing boredom, and that the tourist industry relied heavily upon advertising. Today, billboards are common along Tennessee’s interstate highways. The federal government did pass Highway Beautification Act of 1965, which restricted advertising within 660 feet of the interstate system. However, the bill does allow billboards in areas zoned either commercial or industrial. Additionally, advertising along the state’s interstate highways falls under the policing power of the Tennessee Department of Transportation. Outdoor advertising along Tennessee’s interstate highways requires a permit from TDOT. Furthermore, TDOT has numerous regulations for billboards constructed within 660 ft. of the interstate right of way. For example, billboards may only be placed in areas zoned for industrial or commercial use. There are also restriction on the size, lighting, and spacing of billboards.²⁶ While outdoor advertising still exists on the interstate system in Tennessee, it is clearly under strict control. Yet the billboards stand as a testament to two

²⁵ D. W. Moulton, Commissioner, Tennessee Highway Department, to George F. McCanless, State Attorney General, letter, November 15, 1960, Record Group 84, Box 80, Folder 6, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

²⁶ Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 173; Gudis, *Buyways*, 224; “Rules of Tennessee Department of Transportation Maintenance Division, Chapter 1680-02-03: Control of Outdoor Advertising,” Tennessee Department of Transportation, December 2008, 4, 5, 6.

sometimes conflicting visions of the interstate system. Outdoor advertising is a reminder of the vision of ad agencies, small business, the tourist industry, and local landowners of the highways as an economic opportunity. At the same time, the regulation of this same advertising demonstrates the federal and state government's vision of well-ordered and engineered highways, built as a weapon as much as for commerce.

The Taking of Private Property

The interstate system drastically had a large effect on many property owners throughout the United States. An infrastructure project of such magnitude requires land, and much of this land was privately owned. The interstate system in the United States is the longest engineered structure ever built. In fact, highway builders appropriated an amount of property roughly equivalent to the state of Delaware in order to build the roads (ix).²⁷ Much of this property was privately owned. It is relatively easy for the motorist to forget that much of the land they speed over on the lengthy asphalt lanes was once likely privately owned. It was once likely farmland, houses, or possibly even whole neighborhoods in the case of urban areas. Once again, the federal government and state government drastically affected the landscape through the power of eminent domain.

The University of Illinois College of Agriculture published an article in their newsletter in which they discussed eminent domain in relation to farms. The article acknowledged that the government can take farmland in order to build highways. However, the owner is entitled to compensation. The landowner and the government can

²⁷ Lewis, *Divided Highways*, ix.

privately agree on a price, otherwise the matter is sent to court. The article stated that the landowner had to produce evidence in court that proved the land's value. They were also permitted to prove to the court that the government was taking more land than necessary. The article concluded by stating that a landowner should consider any offer made on their land and as well as damages construction may cause on land not taken. It also stated that in any case that winds up in court, the landowner should get an attorney.²⁸ This newsletter was sent to the Tennessee State Highway Department. Clearly, landowners were becoming nervous over the potential of losing their land to construction and wanted to be sure the Highway Department knew of their unease.

As early as February of 1957, people began inquiring as to where the interstates routes were planned to run. Horace D. Linton asked, "What areas in Nashville will be first considered and approximately what time elapse from current date will occur before actual purchase of easements will be attempted?" As a resident of Nashville, he was concerned about what properties the interstate was to run through. He was also concerned with how right-of-way affected businesses. He inquired "If the need for a right-of-way requires acquiring a site housing an industrial operation valued at several hundred thousand dollars, will the State allow ample time for re-locating and removal; or is the program set up to be completed at an early date; or in what anticipated time for any completed portion of the system?" In a reply on February 7, Bates assured Linton, "In the location of not only the Interstate System but all State Highway land use is taken into

²⁸ "Land for Highways," *Law on the Farm*, College of Agriculture, University of Illinois, October 18, 1956, record group 84, Box 73, Folder 6, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

consideration very heavily.” Unlike the letters to Senator Gore, citizens expressed concern over the appropriation of land to the State Highway Engineer.²⁹

Similarly, Phil Williams of Brownsville, Tennessee was concerned about how construction of the interstate system would affect his property. Leon Cantrell replied to his letter on June 6, 1957 and discussed the possible effects on Williams’ property. He states “The line as is now run in the field, is still in a preliminary stage and since it is altogether likely this section of road will be constructed in the later part of the proposed ten-year program, I do not think that you need to be unnecessarily alarmed because of the stakes now on your property. At some later date when we have had time to review this line and consider the land use in this particular area, I will be very glad to contact you and go over the line in detail with you.”³⁰ Other citizens expressed similar concerns. D. P. Roberts of Brentwood was also concerned with the new superhighways and their potential impact upon his property. He was specifically worried about Interstate Route 504. Cantrell stated in a letter in November 1957, “I would like to assure you at this time that all of the various economic phases of sound location and construction will be thoroughly explored before the final location is decided upon. I do not anticipate the section of highway, which could conceivably affect your property, will be finally located this year.” He also claims that the effort to construct the interstate system is of such magnitude that it greatly increased the Highway Department’s work load, implying that

²⁹ Horace D. Linton, “Horace D. Linton to Mr. Bates of the Department of Highways,” letter, February 6, 1957. Record Group 84, box 67, folder 8, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville Tennessee; H. M. Bates, “H. M. Bates to Horace D. Linton,” letter, February 7, 1957, Record Group 84, box 67, folder 8, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

³⁰ Leon T. Cantrell, “Leon T. Cantrell, State Location Engineer to Phil Williams, Brownsville, Tennessee,” letter, June 6, 1957, record group 84, box 67, folder 8, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

nothing would be done to his property for some time.³¹ It is somewhat amusing to note that the Location Engineer, in order to reassure this citizen, asserted that the department was so overworked that it would be some years before they were able to take his property in order to build new highways. While the correspondence between Gore and his constituents did not show a fear of losing property to the interstate system, it seems that the actual survey work alarmed several citizens.

The appropriation of private property did not just affect individual citizens. Large companies were also concerned about how Tennessee's interstate highways were to impact their property. Cantrell responded to a letter from the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company in reference to their property in the state. He stated, "In my reply I pointed out that the Tennessee Highway Department had contracted with a firm of Consulting Engineers to locate and design a section of road extending from Magnolia & Gay Streets eastwardly to the Holston River, this section of road is a part of the Interstate System of Defense Highways and will be a fully controlled access facility. I further pointed out that due to the time schedule of the above mentioned contract it will likely be early in November of this year before I can give you specific information in regard to the effect of this location on the Firestone property."³² Clearly, private property, whether owned by individuals or large companies, was up for grabs by state highway departments.

³¹ Leon T. Cantrell, "Leon T. Cantrell to D. P. Roberts of Brentwood, TN," letter, November 4, 1957, record group 84, box 67, folder 8, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

³² Leon T. Cantrell, "Leon T. Cantrell, State Location Engineer to George Medigovich, manager Real Estate Department, The Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, Akron, Ohio," letter, June 28, 1957. Record group 84, box 67, folder 8, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

Lewis points out that the interstate system often negatively affected homeowners. He uses Utah as an example. He says, “In one area where the Interstate cut through, Armstrong recalled, it “took out half a block of old houses that were in the \$12,000 to \$20,000 class.” The replacement cost for houses of comparable size and quality was far greater, yet the law held that those homeowners must be compensated at the market rather than the replacement value. In this case the Utah’s Department of Highways and the federal government forced those in the Interstate’s path to accept less than what they had had before.” Ellis Armstrong, the state’s highway commissioner, viewed eminent domain as beneficial and necessary despite the fact that it angered many people. He stated, “Risk is part of being a member of a free society.”³³

State Road Building Agencies and the Landscape

The federal government intended for the interstate system to be built to extraordinarily precise and rigid standards. This philosophy had a profound influence upon the landscape. Naturally, the Bureau of Public Roads intended a national highway system to show consistency. Therefore, the Bureau used its power and control of federal funds in order to direct state highway departments undertaking highway construction projects. Through their guidance and exertion of authority, the Bureau helped to create a largely consistent interstate highway landscape.

The new interstate highways were intended to be strictly maintained and regulated. In order to receive federal funds, the states had to design and construct their highways to precise standards. In a circular distributed on February 13, 1959, Ellis L.

³³ Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 142.

Armstrong, the Commissioner of the Bureau of Public Roads, referenced a decision by the Wyoming Legislature regarding yellow markings on the highways. He asserted that uniform pavement markings were vital for safe travel in all states. Furthermore, he confirmed that white paint was required for all pavement markings except barrier lines, which required yellow paint. He stated that Federal-Aid was impossible for projects that did not follow these standards for markings.³⁴ This may seem like a relatively minor point. However, the Bureau of Public Roads' assertion that even the paint color of highway markings was subject to their direction indicates that they intended for this system to display an unprecedented degree of consistency. Withholding federal-aid funds proved to be a useful tool for enforcing their standards. It was highly unlikely that a state was able to afford completing all of their interstate highways entirely from their own funds. The Bureau of Public Roads also used its power in order to ensure that the interstate highways remained a limited access system. As the states were busy planning and constructing their highways, the Bureau distributed a circular in which they stated, "Under Section 111, Title 25, a State may not add any points of access to, or exit from, projects on the Interstate system, in addition to those approved in the plans."³⁵ They intended this to be a limited access system that allowed for fast and efficient travel free of congestion.

The Bureau of Public Roads influenced the interstate highway landscape by relentlessly pursuing the scientific and precise construction of the interstate system. They

³⁴ Bureau of Public Roads to Regional and Divisional Engineers, letter, February 13, 1959, Record Group 84, Box 74, Folder 4, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

³⁵ Bureau of Public Roads to Regional and Division Engineers, letter, February 25, 1959, Record Group 84, Box 74, Folder 4, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

widely distributed studies of the best methods and materials to use in construction. One example is a circular sent out on August 15, 1960 that discussed the benefits of asbestos fibers included in concrete resurfacing. The circular mentioned successful experiments with the mixture in Canada. It also pointed out that the pavement increased tensile strength plastic strengths and possibly reduced the thickness required for overlay, which posed to be cost-saving. The Bureau requested that any states that wished to experiment with the material contact them so that they may participate in the preliminary planning.³⁶ Another part of this effort to ensure the highways were modern, efficient, and consistent was the Bureau's dispersal of reports. The Bureau of Public Roads sent out special reports to all regional engineers in order to keep them informed of new developments in highway construction. The regional engineers then distributed them to state highway departments. Once such report stated, "The opinions expressed or conclusions indicated in these special reports are not intended as endorsements of equipment or methods, but rather to call attention to innovations that may prove to be of benefit in construction operations." The report included descriptions by division engineers throughout the country of various projects associated with the construction of the interstate highways. The Bureau also included several photographs showing the construction of several bridges and roads. Additionally, this report featured the use of the most up to date construction and equipment.³⁷ These reports did not demand that state highway

³⁶ Bureau of Public Roads to Regional and Division Engineers, letter, August 15, 1960, Record Group 84, box 74, folder 4, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

³⁷ "Special Report of New Developments in Use of Equipment and Methods of Construction by the Construction Planning and Management Branch, Construction and Maintenance Division, Department of Engineering," Bureau of Public Roads, Washington, D.C., October 9, 1959, Record Group 84, box 74, folder 4, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

departments use the techniques or machinery featured. However, they promote uniformity and consistency by highlighting what the Bureau considered as best practices.

The Bureau of Public Roads, to further their attempt to order the interstate highway landscape, consulted with various professional organizations involved in road building in order to develop standards and best practices. These were then distributed to the different state highway departments in reports. The Tennessee Department of Transportation records from this time period are full of these reports and memorandums. These dealt with all aspects of road construction. One of these was a memorandum compiled in order to “set forth a criteria for the design and installation of reinforced concrete pipe culverts under various heights of fills and the various methods of bedding.” In this memorandum they outlined strength requirements for reinforced concrete pipe as well as classes of bedding. The Bureau worked with various professional organizations in order to develop standards for road building. For this particular memorandum, they partnered with the American Concrete Pipe Association.³⁸ They readily used professional expertise in order to scientifically pursue construction standards.

Race and the Interstate System

There is no indication in Gore’s Senate files that Tennesseans were overwhelmingly concerned about how the construction of the interstate system might impact certain minority groups. Gore’s constituent mail dealing with highway legislation does not necessarily reveal the race of the individuals that wrote, although it is likely safe

³⁸ “Design and Installation Criteria for Reinforced Concrete Pipe Culverts,” Bureau of Public Roads, April 14, 1957, Record Group 84, Box 74, Folder 4, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

to assume that the majority were white. Although Tennesseans who wrote to Gore did not express concern about the interstate system negatively affecting minorities, it certainly did happen.

There is evidence in several cities around the nation that freeway construction often displaced African Americans and disrupted their communities. As Mohl states, highway departments and builders acted quickly to construct the highways in the 1950s shortly after Congress passed the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956. This often entailed running freeways through African American communities, which was supported by the white population in many instances. City officials saw the construction of the interstate system as a chance to rebuild the declining city center. This entailed demolishing slums and rebuilding to modern standards. For example, Miami's 1955 expressway plan placed the new highway through Overtown, the city's large black residential district. Some opposition to the construction of I-95 through Miami did spring up, but it dissipated relatively quickly.³⁹ Its construction had severe consequences for the African American community. In Memphis, Tennessee local protestors were enraged at the decision of highway engineers to run I-40 through the city center. Highway builders not wanted to run it over Overton Park, a significant green space within the city, but also demolished a large number of homes. Protestors asserted that highway engineers had specifically targeted African American homes rather than pursue other alternatives. Overton Park, however, was saved. The Citizens to Preserve Overton Park, led by Anona Stoner, successfully defeated the plan to build the Overton Park Expressway in litigation by

³⁹ Mohl, "Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities," 675, 676, 677, 683, 686.

highlighting the potential environmental impacts. The key to Stoner's success was that she fostered connections between Memphis and other freeway revolts around the country, thus gaining more support.⁴⁰ Resistance to the construction of I-40 West running through Nashville was not as successful. I-40 bisected Jefferson Street, home to a vibrant African American music scene, in the early 1960s. Flournoy Coles, a Fisk University professor, led a brief freeway revolt that both began and ended in 1967. Unfortunately, resistance began much too late. Signs of actual freeway construction did not begin in Nashville until almost a decade after the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 became law. As a result, citizens in the threatened area fell into a false sense of security. The African American residents approached the proposed construction as a civil rights issue. However, litigation was unsuccessful. I-40 cut right into the heart of the North Nashville black community, destroying 620 homes, 6 churches, and dead-ending 50 streets. Raymond Mohl argues that this route was "racially determined" and reflected the interests of white political elites and business interests.⁴¹

The City Council, the Huntsville Planning Commission, and the Chamber of Commerce in Huntsville, Alabama viewed the interstate system as a means to undertake urban redevelopment and encourage economic growth. In their eyes, the city center was a blight. However, at least two City Council members and a number of Northwest Huntsville residents saw that this had the potential to divide the city by race and class. This particular effort to construct the spur did not begin until the early 1970s, as

⁴⁰ Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 197; Mohl, "Citizen Activism and Freeway Revolts in Memphis and Nashville," 870, 871, 873, 878.

⁴¹ Reavis L. Mitchell, Jr. "Leaders of Afro-American Nashville: Jefferson Street." Tennessee State University, accessed March 9, 2018, <http://www.tnstate.edu/library/documents/jeffst.pdf>; Mohl, "Citizen Activism and Freeway Revolts in Memphis and Nashville," 871, 880, 882.

Huntsville was not yet large enough to be connected to the interstate system when Congress initially passed the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. By the time the project came under consideration, Americans in several other cities around the country had launched freeway revolts. Several citizens and groups such as the NAACP in Alabama were quick to oppose this project, among them the Alabama Conservancy who disapproved of the potential environmental impact. Locals feared that I-565 would cut off northwest Huntsville from the rest of the city. Although the opposition delayed the project for almost a decade, construction began in 1984. Highway engineers routed the roads through low-income areas, removing housing and people from the central city.⁴²

Mohl asserts that highways became racialized in the 1960s. Communities began mounting resistance movements to highway construction projects through urban areas. This prompted highway officials in the federal government to reconsider their policies. The first Department of Transportation secretary, Alan S. Boyd, argued that expressways must be a part of communities, not barriers to overcome. Beforehand, expressways running through cities often acted as barriers to those traveling beneath them, dead-ending many city streets.⁴³ The citizens that wrote to Senator Gore expressed no concerns that the interstate system would have a negative impact on certain racial minorities. It appears that Gore himself, as well as highway officials and engineers, did not take into consideration the potential negative impacts of a national highway building project on African American communities.

⁴² Cannon, "Huntsville, the Highway, and Urban Redevelopment," 27, 28, 29, 33, 37, 39.

⁴³ Mohl, 679, 681. Stilgoe, *Outside Lies Magic*, 100.

As demonstrated through their many special reports, letters, and memorandums to state highway departments, the Bureau of Public Roads exercised an enormous degree of control in the construction of the interstate highways and used it in order to strictly order the landscape. They were able to control everything down to the minutest details, such as the color of marking paint, through the threatened denial of federal-aid funds. This has resulted in a remarkably consistent highway landscape across county and state lines. Highway marking paint color is largely consistent throughout the country. Signage is consistent. All states had to build their interstate highways to the same exacting standards. Most crucially, the interstate highways have remained a limited access system in every state.

CONCLUSION

The struggle to enact suitable highway legislation was long and arduous. It involved multiple parties, politicians, lobbyists, and citizens. This thesis examines but a single state in the country, yet as Lewis, Foster and others who have written about the interstate system show, the attitudes of its different groups were reflected elsewhere in the United States. Citizens advocated for federally funded highways in order to improve their state's roads and save lives. Railroad companies and unions acknowledged the necessity of good highways, but recommended they be funded through taxation on commercial trucks in order to remain competitive. Commercial truck drivers and trucking companies, knowing the benefits to their businesses that interstate highways provided, pushed for taxation that targeted all classes of vehicles, not just large trucks, and fought the freezing of sizes and weights. Evidently, by the time the legislation was passed, the parties involved were ready to get past all of the disputes and proceed. Forrest M. Durrett of Durrett Transfer Company congratulated Senator Gore on the passage of the act, saying "This is legislation that we needed very badly and there is no question but that the motor carrier industry should bear their full share of the financial responsibility of this highway program. I was very concerned about this taxation measure and did not thoroughly agree with every portion of it however, I am not displeased with the bill."¹ By the time the legislation was signed into law, it seems that the parties involved were weary of the bickering and maneuvering. Yet, few Tennesseans were concerned about how the interstate may alter the landscape. Few envisioned the negative impacts the interstate

¹ Forrest M. Durrett to Albert Gore, June 7, 1956, letter, B52 box 6/8, folder 6/7, Albert Gore Sr. Senate Papers, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

system caused. However, the letters indicate that Gore's constituents were largely unconcerned about these possibilities. Tennesseans were ready for construction to begin.

The landscape created by these visions of the interstate system remains largely intact today. It is uniformly engineered. It displays a remarkable degree of consistency, thanks to government oversight and regulation. The highways are broad, paved, and consist of multiple lanes. Outdoor advertising dots the interstate roadsides, regulated but still present. The interstate system also remains a national defense asset. Crucially, the interstate remains a limited access system. However, this landscape has become commonplace. The average American citizen comes into contact with the interstate system so frequently that they likely do not contemplate the decisions or history behind its design and construction. This is where the public historian comes in. How can we effectively interpret the complex history of the interstate system to the public? What is the best medium? Is it possible to interpret this history for the motorist on the go? How can archives aid in the study of the interstate system and road building in the United States?

The public does have access to works written by historians dealing with the history of the interstate system. John R. Stilgoe's classic *Outside Lies Magic: Regaining History and Awareness in Everyday Places* contains a short but informative and well-written chapter on the interstate system. As a landscape historian, he provides a thought-provoking analysis of the built environment of America's superhighways. Reading this book prompts one to reconsider their surroundings in ways they likely did not think possible beforehand. I gladly admit that the first time I gave any serious thought to the

interstate system was after reading Stilgoe's work. However, this chapter is rather brief, and the history of the interstate highways is complex. Furthermore, there is a need for interpretation tailored to the interstate highways in Tennessee.

Any attempt to interpret the history of these highways to the public must address the multiple visions of the system and how these are visible in the landscape. The major conflict here was between those who saw the interstate as a convenience landscape and those who saw it as a commercial landscape. Ordinary citizens, as stated previously, focused on the convenience and safety potential of the modern highways. They wanted broad asphalt bands crisscrossing the countries. These were to be straight and well-maintained in order to increase safety and efficiency. This vision did not necessarily account for trucks. At best, they were ambivalent toward the industry, at worst, they sought to hinder it. Interestingly, the federal government's vision for the interstate system was remarkably similar to that of the ordinary citizens. The Bureau of Public Roads wanted a consistent, expertly engineered, and well-built national highway system. Like many citizens, the federal government also envisioned the interstate as a military asset. The effects of these visions remain today. In Tennessee, as in the U.S. at large, the interstate highways remain broad asphalt bands that are well-maintained and relatively straight. In the late 1950s, Tennesseans wanted these highways in order to drive their finned Bel Airs, chromed Cadillacs, Rocket 88s, and Ford Fairlanes at high speeds with no traffic. Now, Tennesseans speed down these highways in their Altimas, Corollas, Mustangs, Impalas, and F-150s. However, this speed often slows to a maddening crawl near Nashville and Chattanooga.

Michael Catratzas' "Cross-Bronx: The Urban Expressway as Cultural Landscape" offers important insights into considering infrastructure as historic landscapes. The Cross-Bronx Expressway has an infamous history, and represents to many people the sinister side of urban planning and infrastructure in the 1950s and 1960s. Robert Moses, the mastermind of the project and the New York City Construction Coordinator, ruthlessly pursued its construction. The seven mile expressway cuts across 113 streets and avenues as well as sewers, water lines, a subway, and three railroads. This is all in a densely populated section of the city. One section of the Bronx, East Tremont, could have been easily avoided. However, Moses refused to consider altering his route, and instead demolished 159 buildings and displaced 1,530 families. Worse still, Moses informed the tenants on December 4, 1952 that they had just 90 days to relocate. There was no need for such speed. Moses admitted it was a scare tactic. The Cross-Bronx Expressway was not completed until 1973.² However, Catratzas asserts that the Cross-Bronx has value as a landscape. For example, he points out that the expressway demonstrates the values of the era during which it was built and that it shows what a large segment of the population considered important.³

Based on letters from Tennesseans and records from the State Highway Department and the Bureau of Public Roads, the interstate system in Tennessee also has value as a historic landscape for it reflects the values of the time in which it was constructed. An overwhelming majority of the letters sent to Senator Gore regarding the

² Michael Catratzas, "Cross-Bronx: The Urban Expressway as Cultural Landscape," in *Cultural Landscapes: Balancing Nature and Heritage in Preservation Practice*, ed. Richard Longstreth, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 55; Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 839, 840, 841, 850, 859, 878, 886.

³ Catratzas, "Cross-Bronx," 55, 58.

Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 expressed the desire, benefits, and necessity of the interstate system in Tennessee. Granted, there were those who wrote in order to communicate their objections to the highways, but these were a remarkably small minority. Additionally, the mobilization of Tennesseans for Better Roads and the participation of State Highway Department officials in that organization lends further proof that these highways were widely sought after in the state. These people and organizations valued efficient transportation routes available to automobile owners. They did not concern themselves with mass transit or railroads. Those parties had to look out for their own interests. Mass transit providers argued that federal support for the interstate ignored millions of impoverished citizens in inner cities with no access to automobiles.⁴ These values are reflected on the interstate system today. The majority of interstate highway users are citizens who own their own automobiles. These people are able to live outside of major cities and commute to their jobs day after day. However, is the citizen that does not own an automobile able to do the same? As Stilgoe points out, the interstate system is available only to those tax payers who own vehicles that meet the minimum speed requirements.⁵ As a result, the interstate system wholly neglects those who don't have access to automobiles.

Additionally, the interstate system landscape conveys the desire of humans to conquer and shape nature to suit their values. Tennessee's interstate highways are relatively straight. As Catratzas points out in reference to the Cross-Bronx Expressway, the straightness of highways reflects the ideas of Norman Bel Geddes, who said that

⁴ Foster, *A Nation on Wheels*, 107.

⁵ Stilgoe, *Outside Lies Magic*, 90.

highways and expressways should follow most direct path for in order to optimize the speed and efficiency of transportation. Bel Geddes was the designer of the General Motors Futurama display at 1939 World's Fair, which depicted the future of America's highways.⁶ The highways in Tennessee exhibit this value of speed and efficiency, following the straightest and most direct possible path. This exhibits another point. Catratzas states that the designers of the Cross-Bronx did not attempt to merge the expressway with existing city life. He asserts that this landscape shows that speed was more important than leisure to a large segment of society at the time.⁷

Likewise, Tennessee's interstate highways reflect the importance of speed. The highways link cities together. However, they were not necessarily incorporated into the existing built environment of the state. Its status as a limited access system determines that state roads can only enter the highways at certain points. Some roads, even whole towns, are bypassed completely. Additionally, the construction of the highway consumed urban neighborhoods, houses, and farmland. This is all too evident to the observant motorist. They will see countless acres of farm land bisected by the highways or, in the case of I-40 and I-65, neighborhoods leveled decades ago to accommodate construction. For example, citizens in Montana were forced to give up land for the interstate. In 1957 highway engineers recommended that the interstate from Livingston to Billings run through the Yellowstone Valley. Montana citizens protested this placement, claiming that it required them to give up far too much farmland. However, the state highway

⁶ Catratzas, "Cross-Bronx," 61.

⁷ Catratzas, "Cross-Bronx," 62.

commission supported the engineers' plan.⁸ This hardly seems like the interstate system incorporated existing state "life." Because of the potential of interstate construction to remove people from their homes, a national "Freeway Revolt" emerged in the 1960s in response to urban redevelopment of blighted downtown areas that pushed out minorities and low-income residents. Highway builders were permitted to slash through urban areas without having to consider the negative impacts of their actions.⁹ Once again, this landscape and the destruction caused for its creation reflects the desires of a large segment of Tennesseans during the 1950s and 1960s. Tennesseans wanted speed and efficiency. They wanted straight and wide asphalt bands so that they could drive their personal automobiles or freight trucks at high speeds using the most efficient routes, and creating these routes inevitably required the seizure of private land. Without this acquisition and destruction, today's landscape would not be possible.

Additionally, constituent mail from trucking and advertising companies in Tennessee indicates that many Tennesseans also valued the interstate system for its commercial potential. The interstate system today is a commercial landscape. Although several parties attempted to hinder their success, trucking companies have obviously benefitted from the landscape and remain a prominent part of it. Once again, this landscape reflects the values of a large segment of the population during the time in which it was designed. The same features that allow for automobiles to travel quickly and efficiently do the same for freight trucks. Good flow up and down these highways.

⁸ Axline, "A Massive Undertaking," 55.

⁹ Cannon, "Huntsville, the Highway, and Urban Redevelopment: The Long Road to Connect Downtown Huntsville, Alabama to the Interstate System," 29.

Additionally, the prevalence of billboards advertising goods and services displays the continued profitability of this landscape. This too was a subject of intense debate in Tennessee. Advertising firms maintained that outdoor advertising was needed along the highways to aid business owners and the tourist industry, while several citizens and officials in the State Highway Department felt billboards reduced safety and obstructed Tennessee's scenic views. Today billboards are a common sight along Tennessee's interstate highways, advertising motels, gas stations, fast food restaurants, and tourist destinations. However, these are regulated by the Tennessee Department of Transportation. They must remain a certain distance from the roadside and cannot be spaced to close together. Thus, while they are a constant presence, they do not completely obstruct the state's scenic views. The motorist can drive the highways and still see mountains, fields, and the skylines of Nashville, Knoxville, and Chattanooga. After all, Catratzas maintains that one of the features that makes the Cross-Bronx Expressway a significant cultural landscape is that it provides view of New York City's skyline and the surrounding neighborhoods.¹⁰

The interstate system did promote economic growth in many small towns that it touched. Smyrna, Tennessee benefitted from the new superhighways. The accessibility provided by the interstate allowed Smyrna to tempt companies and new residents to move to the area. In 1980, Nissan announced that they were building a new plant in Smyrna. The company chose this location because they needed at least 400 acres of land with

¹⁰ Catratzas, "Cross-Bronx," 65.

access to the interstate.¹¹ However, towns bypassed by the interstate system often suffered. Starke, Florida reaped the benefits as the state experienced an economic boom after the war. However, the town was bypassed by the interstate system and was negatively impacted by the diversion of the tourist industry and businesses to other locations.¹² Therefore, this commercial landscape had the power to invigorate the communities it connected or starve those it bypassed.

The built environment that constitutes the interstate system reflects the values of the time in which it was constructed, much of which remain in place today. Therefore, it is imperative that historians and public historians in Tennessee recognize the historic landscape of the interstate system. It is infrastructure that many citizens of the state interact with on a daily basis, yet few know of the complex story behind it. Perhaps some effort to include this complexity in the interpretation of the interstate would be beneficial to the public, as it would provide insight as to the reasoning behind its construction and layout. The military and defense applications of the interstate system are generally well known, but the opinions of citizens in various states is not. Some efforts to interpret these opinions in Tennessee would be beneficial. This could take the form of placards or exhibits in local museums or online. The visions of Senator Gore and Tennesseans, both ordinary citizens and companies, have profoundly shaped the landscape of Tennessee and the nation. This fact needs to be better interpreted to the public. The study of the motives and reasoning behind road building is important because roads such as the interstate highways remain vital and necessary elements of our infrastructure and society. At the

¹¹ Gutfreund, *Twentieth Century Sprawl Highways*, 207, 210.

¹² Bennett, "Highways to Heaven or Roads to Ruin," 451, 453.

close of the first installment of “Back to the Future,” Dr. Emmett Brown responds to Marty McFly’s assertion that they did not have enough road to get the Delorean up to 88 miles per hour and engage the time machine. Before activating the flight function on the car, Dr. Brown states with excitement, “Roads? Where we’re going we don’t need roads?”¹³ We have come a long way since 1985, but the promise of flying cars filling sky lanes in 2015 did not come to fruition. It appears that for the foreseeable future, we will continue to need roads.

¹³ Michael J. Fox and Christopher Lloyd, *Back to the Future*, VHS, directed by Robert Zemeckis, Universal City, CA: Universal Studios, 1985.

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