



APPENDIX L

History



History

Independence Boulevard was a vital connector for communities on Chicago's West Side and provided residents with pleasant and inviting greenspace. It was a significant asset and added great value to the character of the community. The Congress Expressway (later to be renamed the Eisenhower) was the first major expressway to be built in the region. Construction started in 1949, and the first section was opened in Dec 1954.^{1 2} Its construction devastated communities throughout the City's West Side. Nearly 400 feet of Independence Boulevard were cleared and excavated, replaced with two concrete bridges that were designed for automobiles. Homes were destroyed, residents displaced, and communities burdened with a significant disamenity that continues to mar the area.

Connectivity and Mobility

The system of parks and boulevards that are now known as the Chicago Park Boulevard System Historic District dates to the late 1800s, when it was envisioned as a way to establish access to greenspace and places of leisure for current and future residents. Construction was initiated as part of the City's efforts to impress visitors to the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893.³ Independence Boulevard was a central component to the Boulevard System on the West Side, providing direct pedestrian access between Douglass Park and Garfield Park, two large parks that serve as anchors of the boulevard. Independence Boulevard was a key connection for mobility and access to jobs in North Lawndale and along Madison Avenue. This pedestrian-friendly connection was lost with the removal of a portion of the boulevard for I-290.

The expressway better connected the western suburbs with the Loop, fueling growth of Chicago's suburbs.⁴ However, the new CTA Congress Line did not necessarily increase connectivity, especially for people who lived along the existing transportation lines. The area was already serviced by the Metropolitan West Side Elevated (MET) Railroad and streetcars.⁵ There was a stop on this line near the present-day site, at the corner of Harrison Street and Independence Boulevard that served residents traveling downtown or to the growing suburbs to the west. In fact, the CTA Congress Line was built to replace the Garfield Park branch of the MET Railroad, which was torn down following the opening of the Congress Line.^{6 7}

Displacement and Segregation

The construction of the Eisenhower served two purposes. In addition to connecting Chicago's Western suburbs to its downtown, it also served as a means through which undesirable neighborhoods could be demolished. Like in other areas of Chicago, displacement affected immigrant and impoverished population.

¹ <https://interactive.wbez.org/curiouscity/eisenhower/>

² <https://eisenhowerexpressway.com/about/>

³ https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/cdot/CDOT%20Projects/Boulevard-Enhancement/2B_Boulevard%20System%20History%20and%20Map.pdf

⁴ <https://interactive.wbez.org/curiouscity/eisenhower/>

⁵ <https://www.chicago-l.org/maps/route/maps/1898met-map.jpg>

⁶ <https://interactive.wbez.org/curiouscity/eisenhower/>

⁷ <https://www.chicago-l.org/maps/route/maps/1898met-map.jpg>



In the early 1900s Garfield Park (East Garfield Park and West Garfield Park) was working class, racially diverse, and comprised of both longtime residents and Irish and German immigrants.⁸ The Garfield Park community was a middle class “white collar” neighborhood for much of the early 20th century.⁹ North Lawndale, an adjacent Community Area to the south of Garfield Park and near the project site, was home to industrial complexes and a center of many good-quality jobs. Sears, Roebuck & Co. opened its headquarters in North Lawndale in 1906.¹⁰ Independence Boulevard served as a key connection to these jobs. Most of the homes in the area were built in the 1880s and many of its residents were renters. Later, Russian Jews and Italians began to move into the area. It became known as the “Jewish West Side” and was considered the heart of Jewish Chicago at the time. After the Great Depression and World War II, the area began to experience economic decline. The Daughters of Charity opened a home to serve the poor in 1947.¹¹

By the late 1940s the area was labeled as “third grade” by the Home Owner’s Loan Corporation because it had started to see an influx of Italian immigrants and a degree of “encroachment” of black communities.¹² By the time the Congress expressway construction was underway, the community was largely still comprised of Irish, German, Italian, and Russian Jews.¹³ Following the construction of the Congress Expressway, many residents left for other neighborhoods or to suburbs and the Garfield Park area became predominantly black.¹⁴ This population shift was in part driven by the displacement from the Congress Expressway and similar projects across Chicago.^{15 16} The exodus of residents left many vacant and underutilized apartment buildings, and the area soon became viewed as less-desirable. Remaining residents were largely unwelcoming to the black residents and eventually organized to oppose the sale of homes to them.¹⁷

Garfield Park’s segregation and disinvestment was solidified in the 1960s as the Chicago Housing Authority built public housing structures in the area.¹⁸ Despite this, the community has valuable assets, including Garfield Park itself and the Madison Business District. The latter of which was once a major commercial area in Chicago, but is now marred by closed shops and vacant lots.¹⁹

Effects on the Boulevard System

Construction of the interstate expressways in Chicago (I-290, I-55, I-90/94) affected the physical integrity of the boulevard system and broke longstanding connections that visionaries of the system had hoped to safeguard. Throughout the City, portions of boulevards were cleared and destroyed to create space for the new roadways. Logan Boulevard and 31st Boulevard are two notable examples. These pedestrian-friendly

⁸ <https://interactive.wttw.com/chicago-by-l/neighborhoods/garfield-park>

⁹ <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=12/41.922/-87.742&city=chicago-il>

¹⁰ <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/901.html>

¹¹ <https://interactive.wttw.com/chicago-by-l/neighborhoods/garfield-park>

¹² <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=12/41.922/-87.742&city=chicago-il>

¹³ <https://www.chipublic.org/fa-east-garfield-park-community-collection/>

¹⁴ <https://www.chipublic.org/fa-east-garfield-park-community-collection/>

¹⁵ <https://interactive.wbez.org/curiouscity/eisenhower/>

¹⁶ <https://www.metroplanning.org/news/10042/Want-to-see-how-dramatically-highways-changed-Chicagoland>

¹⁷ <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1338.html>

¹⁸ <https://interactive.wttw.com/chicago-by-l/neighborhoods/garfield-park>

¹⁹ <https://www.propublica.org/events/a-history-of-disinvestment-on-chicagos-west-side>



connections were lost, and the once-championed connectivity of the system broken. The character of nearby neighborhoods changed significantly with the loss of pleasant greenspace. The City is making efforts to the reestablish the connected boulevard system and enhance areas that have been neglected. In 2018, the boulevard system was officially registered on the National Register of Historic Places.²⁰

²⁰ <https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/AssetDetail/e3180d63-8f2e-44ec-a1b4-1f0cf14f367a>