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The Highway to Hell in the City of Angels: The Automobile and its Role in Influencing the Transportation Infrastructure of Post- World War II Los Angeles

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements of the University Honors Program
of Loyola Marymount University

by

William Rehbock

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Introduction

LA has historically been a motoring city for reasons greater than mere interest in automotive style or conveying status. In this way, many Angelinos epitomize the American desire to be an individual, with all of the freedom and liberty that accompanies living the capitalistic ideal. Los Angeles' infrastructure grew as a result of the optimism and wealth that accompanied the period immediately following World War II, and much of the existing roads follow a lineage back to this period. Los Angeles has earned a negative reputation as a result of its infamous freeway system, which serves as the existing scheme for mass transportation. Despite general frustration with the unfeasibility of this structure, the public's dissatisfaction has yielded negligible action on the part of the city. Many still yearn for individualized transportation, as evinced in Tesla's recent popularity, both in terms of its revolutionary electric drive systems and advances in autonomous drive. Some seek working mass transit, invoking the London Underground, the Chicago L, or New York's subway system as evidence that large Western cities can and do have viable alternatives to the automobile. The city's masses still prefer private and personal transportation in the form of the car, whether fueled by gasoline, diesel, electricity, or hydrogen. Meanwhile, the LA Metro is renewing its efforts to gain and maintain customers, whether they ride the train or bus, or pay for FasTrak to use Metro Expresslanes. Both the public and the transportation authority continually fail to make meaningful movements toward fixing a system that is universally understood as being broken.

My research was guided by the following questions: To what extent have the promise of freedom and individuality associated with the automobile in Los Angeles since World War II and

the open road influenced their popularity among the masses? To what extent has this popularity influenced the way people have chosen to travel in a city as Los Angeles, home to the television and film industries, which is known globally for its obsession with image, freedom, and individuality? What other factors played a role in the way the car came to be the dominant mode of transportation in Los Angeles and why does this continue to be the way that people move around the city? What are the implications of this research and how can my work be used as Los Angeles seeks to find new ways to move its residents around the city more efficiently in the twenty-first century?

To answer these questions I initially turned to *Los Angeles Times* newspaper articles from the Cold War period. These articles give a great deal of insight to both the reason LA's freeway organization is the dominant form of transportation and also offer insight into the problems the public has with the system as well. I also applied the work of Proust, Matisse, and the Futurists to establish a theoretical foundation for the study of the automobile as a symbol of speed, independence, individuality and progress. Early thinkers and artists first encountering cars in Europe also gave greater insight about how motoring was received in its early age and serve as a comparative lens for the way the car is viewed by the public in the twenty-first century. Additionally, advertisements for both automobiles and for mass transit is informative about the techniques automakers and the LA Metro use to appeal to consumers in order to get them to use their services. Additionally secondary sources in the forms of history textbooks, scholarly articles, and contemporary websites provide greater historical context for the primary sources.

Through an analysis of the history of motoring and the Los Angeles transportation system, I argue that Angelenos continue to utilize the car as their primary mode of mobilization because it synthesizes longstanding ideals of freedom, individuality, and escape with the

practicalities of convenience and immediacy. However, the automobile has ultimately failed to deliver on these promises and while the industry is constantly seeking to reinvent the car to sustain its use for posterity, and Los Angeles must turn to a working public transportation system that both fulfills its residents' practical needs of convenience and immediacy while simultaneously offering an experience of utmost autonomy for those using its system. All the while, LA must take into account the needs of the racially and economically marginalized in order to offer this experience to every living in the city.

Chapter 1: Early Motoring – Infrastructure, Theory, and Design

Los Angeles was founded in 1781 and developed in earnest during the California gold rush, but Wilshire Boulevard became a major thoroughfare essential to mass transportation of people and goods as early as the 1900.¹ This period gave birth to many of the Angelino motoring institutions known today such as the Automobile Club of Southern California, which is now known as the American Auto Association or AAA.

By 1920, the Wilshire Boulevard Center was developed to become the “world’s first linear shopping center,” and with this Los Angeles officially came into its own as a motoring city.² One of the elements that made Wilshire Boulevard so advanced for its time was the inclusion of parking lots behind the shops. A.W. Ross, the developer responsible for this stage of the boulevard’s growth, mandated that parking lots be placed behind the stores to make the shop fronts more accessible to those on the street. These examples from Los Angeles’ early development, suggest that significant of the urban planning occurred not as a result of

¹ Peterson Automotive Museum. *History/Industry/Artistry: The Peterson Automotive Museum*. South Korea, Peterson Automotive Museum, 2015, 10.

² Ibid, 11.

government legislation, but instead as the result of private parties utilizing their power and wealth to accomplish their goals.

As it stands today, Los Angeles represents the accumulation of over a hundred years of automotive tradition. This legacy is the result of an association of the automobile with the ideals of speed, freedom, and progress, associations that cannot not hold up in the congestion of LA's urban sprawl. Before the roads were overloaded with drivers, however, the automobile revolutionized individual transportation because of the speed and efficiency with which a motorized carriage could travel. According to Brian Ladd, author of *Autophobia*, an automotive writer acknowledged in 1902 that "in time the intoxication of the rapid motion of the automobile will be found in the opportunity that it gives to enjoy fresh air, change of scene and the beauties of nature, with the sense of freedom and independence that cannot be enjoyed in railroad trains."³ This anonymous reviewer's insight has stood the test of time; even though the values of "rapid motion" never truly lost their appeal to commuters, the automobile still promises escape and freedom from an urban landscape. Wealthy consumers were the primary owners of the automobile at the turn of the century. Ladd writes, "In 1900 car owners were almost by definition wealthy, especially since they often employed chauffeurs," many wouldn't have dreamed of trying to operate their own vehicles."⁴ This emphasizes the image of status with which the automobile has carried into the future. Owners of automobiles in the current period, while they largely operate their own vehicles, still benefit from the freedom that personal transportation offers. In this early period, the automobile experienced a great degree of resistance, both in Europe and the United States. In the latter nation, "Farmers near Sacramento, California, dug

³ Ladd, Brian. *Autophobia*. (University of Chicago Press; Chicago and London, 2008), 16.

⁴ *Ibid*, 17.

ditches across roads in 1909 and actually trapped thirteen cars.”⁵ This resistance demonstrates that the transition to the standardization of the automobile an instantaneous process, but once automakers refined their products, the automobile eventually won the hearts of motorists around the world. Ads such as this flier promoting the Bentley drop-head Coupe promote the exclusivity and class an automobile offers.¹ It portrays two elite women in the countryside, adorned in the style of the era, backgrounded by a dramatic range of mountains. This ad conveys the notion freedom and escape consumers would come to associate with the automobile, in addition to the practicality that has caused “millions of people across the world [who] have come to see it as a necessity,” Angelinos included.”⁶ This being said, many members of the elite classes still resisted the popularization of the automobile, as they expressed fears of the corruption of nature or the harm that would come to the established mode of transportation, horses.⁷ When the racket of the engine was quieted down after “mufflers became obligatory” in the Edwardian Era, a wider audience began to accept the automobile as an acceptable facet of everyday life.⁸

Wealthy consumers were not the only group who saw this value in the car and were not the only people enamored with this new invention, however. Additionally, some contingents of artists embraced the machine the epitome of beauty, especially since it was seen as a luxury item. Members of the artistic community such as Proust and Matisse viewed the windshield of the automobile as a lens through which their art was expressed, whether through writing or painting.⁹ The most notable artists to do so were the Futurists, whose member Filippo Tommaso Marinetti proclaimed the superior beauty of the motorcar.¹⁰ He writes that “a racing car whose hood is

⁵ Ibid, 24.

⁶ Ibid, 16.

⁷ Ibid, 16-21.

⁸ Ibid, 17.

⁹ Danius, Sara, “The Aesthetics of the Windshield: Proust and the Modernist Rhetoric of Speed,” *Modernism/Modernity*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2001), 99-126.

¹⁰ Ibid, 113.

adorned with great pipes, like serpents of explosive breath – a roaring car that seems to ride on grapeshot is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace,” demonstrates artists were utilizing the aesthetic of speed in their work to get at something greater.¹¹ The ability to go fast and make the surrounding world a blur is empowering for anyone behind the wheel, and it also conveys the same sense of power and independence that the rest of “Futurist Manifesto.” This can be seen in the fifth tenet, where Marinetti writes, “We want to hymn the man at the wheel, who hurls the lance of his spirit across the Earth, along the circle of its orbit,” indicating that individuals may free themselves with the use of a motorcar because it enables an escape from the “pensive immobility” the Futurists believed plagued Western Civilization.¹²

The European artists and thinkers who belonged to the futurists and those who subscribed to their beliefs subsequently were fundamental in establishing many of the myths and lore that reign over automotive culture to this day. Early twentieth century modes of thinking may no longer exist in their original context, but the auto industry’s global reach helped keep original ideas of independence, speed, and escape alive and also helped spread these ideas from Europe to the United States. The lust for power and speed still dominates the market in the United States among a significant demographic of automobiles’ owners. The advent of Tesla’s popularity represents a modern transmission of these ideas in the present. A manufacturer of all electric cars based in California, Tesla sells the Model S, its top of the line flagship, with an optional “Ludicrous Speed,” package, enabling a sprint to 60 miles per hour in 2.8 seconds. This makes the P90D the first sedan to ever accomplish such a feat.¹³ On the massive screen that dominates

¹¹ Marinetti, F.T. “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism,” translated by R.W. Flint (Thames and Hudson Ltd; London, 1973).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Sherman, Don. 2015 Tesla Model S P90D: The First Sub-3.0 Second Sedan We’ve Ever Tested. So That’s Something.” *Car and Driver*, January 2016. <http://www.caranddriver.com/reviews/2015-tesla-model-s-p90d-test-review>.

the dashboard, a visual based on the warp drive sequence from *Star Wars* (stars outside the spaceship are stationary and then blur into lines because of the spaceship's speed) accompany the theatrics of the launch, demonstrating that the sensation artists painted at the start of the twentieth century is still something for which drivers and passengers yearn.¹⁴ This harkens back to the early years of the intersection of art and motoring and provides an example of the way European modes of thinking about the car remain relevant in modern American culture. Artists focused on the way objects changed as they appeared to approach the subject in the car, and this has again been implemented in the form of warp-drive graphics on the Tesla's seventeen inch displays. According Sara Danius, author of argues that Henri Matisse's *Le Pare-brise: Sure la route de Villacoublay* captures the multiplicity of views and brings to life "the affinity between modern technologies of speed and the emergence of new ways of seeing," in the same way that Marcel Proust described "the automobile ride, the excitement of speed, and the dazzling views through the windshields is a brilliant example of precisely the kind of modernist aesthetic."¹⁵ Tesla's vehicles are a modern incarnation of these ideas, and the reception reviewers and consumers provides an example of the ways traditional methods of thinking about the car are alive in the twenty-first century.

Early twentieth century artists strongly emphasized the automobiles ability to grant a change in perspective. Before Fernand Léger began producing highly structured paintings in reaction to the destruction of World War I, he wrote in an essay in 1914 and argued that "When one crosses a landscape by automobile or express train, it becomes fragmented; it loses descriptive value but gains in synthetic value" and the "view through the door of the railroad car or the automobile windshield, in combination with the speed, has altered the habitual look of

¹⁴ Danius, "The Aesthetics of the Windshield: Proust and the Modernist Rhetoric of Speed," 113.

¹⁵ Ibid, 105.

things.”¹⁶ This suggests that the allure of motoring may in fact originate from the appeal of the act itself based on the premise of speed and escape from outdated modes of seeing the world. It incorporates entities that play on these seemingly innate desires to have access to freedom and individuality that many humans crave.

As enticing as these values may appear, access to the car was limited before they were mass manufactured because cost of production was very high. Artists who had access to the motorcar were from a privileged group, but their communication of their experiences helped promote the idea that cars were more than tools or toys that promoted the image of privilege. They argued that they brought people closer to the ideals for which they strove. Bentley’s advertisement for its 1935 drop-head exemplifies the premise of this analysis. It portrays the car as the intersection of practicality and frivolity. Its luxury may be excessive, but Bentley ownership promises freedom and release from the constraints of urban society by presenting the opportunity for travel to the countryside. Through the influence of the wealthy, artists, and advertisers, the automobile accrued an image that was associated with freedom and escape and enhanced its desirability among all classes.

These ideals continued to fester as a result of their proponents, and World War II’s conclusion ushered in a time when motoring had become deeply entrenched in American culture. The automotive community began taking design and modification into their own hands. One example of a vehicle that had undergone such a process are two 1939 Mercury Convertible Coupe, as seen at the Peterson Auto Museum. This model was notable for its affordable price of \$1000 in the year it was sold, which is the equivalent of \$16,900 today, just under the starting

¹⁶ Léger, Fernand. “Contemporary Achievements in Painting,” *Functions of Painting*, ed. Edward F. Fry, trans. Alexandra Anderson (New York: Viking, 1973), 11, quoted in Danius, Sara, “The Aesthetics of the Windshield: Proust and the Modernist Rhetoric of Speed,” *Modernism/Modernity*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2001), 119.

price for the most basic 2016 Ford Focus.¹⁷ A factory fresh version of the car featured a 3.9 L Flathead V8 capable of producing 95 horsepower and could attain a top speed of 95 miles per hour. However, the Peterson also showcased an example of the car that was modified by a previous owner. The owner lowered the suspension for better handling and they also massaged the engine for higher output, increasing power to 130 horsepower and increasing the top speed to 100 miles per hour. This demonstrates that individuals have long taken an interest in the aesthetics and performance of the vehicles they drive and adjusted them based on personal taste. The tuners' yearning for higher performance harkens back to Proust and Matisse's experience in early motorcars, where the surrounding landscape appeared to rush toward the driver or passenger. By modifying their vehicles, owners of cars like the 1939 Mercury Convertible Coupe were able to pursue the ideals presented by advertisements such as Bentley's 1935 piece and come closer to the intangible goals of freedom and escape. Tuning remains popular among the global automotive community, as seen by events such as Hot August Nights or the Wörthersee Volkswagen enthusiast gathering, and these two Mercuries demonstrate continuity in the way that automobiles have been perceived by the public and people modify the cars they drive to improve their status within their own community and those they encounter in their social and professional lives.¹⁸¹⁹ During World War II these vehicles represent the desire to achieve the social status of the middle class which had established a solid presence due to the military industrial complex. As Ladd writes in *Autophobia*, "After the deprivation and immobility enforced by depression and war, car-centered recreation...returned with a vengeance."²⁰ Two and a half consecutive decades of austerity caused a yearning for the roots of automotive culture

¹⁷ Peterson Automotive Museum. *History/Industry/Artistry: The Peterson Automotive Museum*.

¹⁸ *Hot August Nights*. <https://hotaugustnights.net/>, 2016.

¹⁹ *Wörthersee Treffen*. <http://woertherseetreffen.at/#fwdmSPPlayer0?catid=0&trackid=0>, 2015.

²⁰ Ladd. *Autophobia*, 43-44.

that epitomized freedom through the control of a motor vehicle. Its return to prominence in post-war society demonstrates that individuals on many levels of the socio-economic spectrum could purchase and own vehicles that could grant access to the upper echelons of the freedom offered by the automobile.²¹ Ladd argues that “A car was, apart from a house, the largest item in consumers’ budgets. It was their badge of prosperity, their most cherished possession, and the means to fulfill such other desires as outings and vacations.”²² By commercializing the car in such a way that granted more of American society access to the open road, the Big Three were able to capitalize on an even greater portion of the population.²³ The automobile had finally secured a lasting place among the mass consumer culture of the postwar middle class.

In the period following World War II, automotive design was married with the idealistic standards to which consumers held motoring. Designers in Detroit strove “to express glamour, power, and freedom—impossible design objectives during the war” in the automobiles they penned.²⁴ With the influx of wealth that resulted from the wartime economy, a more ornamental approach was taken, and chrome accents, open greenhouses, and fins became staples in Detroit’s design language. In this period, automobiles were designed with more organic shapes in mind, and influential designers like General Motors’ Harley Earl used curves modeled after those seen on a woman’s body.²⁵ This directly relates to the Futurists who portrayed masculinity as the epitome of human existence and regulated femininity to reproduction, which “OWE HUMANITY SOME HEREOS, NOW MAKE THEM!”²⁶ The Futurists saw women as a source of reproduction, but masculinity as a sexuality that demonstrated power and strength. The

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, 44.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Armi, C. Edson. *The Art of American Car Design*. United States: The Pennsylvania State University (1988), 7.

²⁵ Ibid, 18.

²⁶ Saint-Pointe, “Manifesto of the Futurist Woman: Response to F.T. Marinetti”

automobile was analogous for these associations with the male gender; it was seen as individual and strong, all traits the automobile also represented in artists' mind. In this way, the role of the automobile was reinforced as being a supplement to the strength, beauty, and individuality the Futurists valued as being at the heart of masculinity. The role of the automobile in the United States followed this model; it served as an instrument that provided practical transportation for an individual and his family, as seen in an advertisement such one for the 1955 Studebaker station wagon.ⁱⁱ The wagon was equipped with the option of one of "two great engines... a V-8 or a 6!" This gave drivers the ability to both cater to the needs of their family in addition to harness the power necessary to attain speed the Futurists could not have imagined in the early twentieth century while simultaneously securing their masculinity. Vehicles such as the SUV or crossover have carried the idea of freedom and convenience into the twenty-first century, while still maintaining the status masculinity boosting vehicles granted in the mid-century period. Cars grant greater access without requiring an individual to rely upon a public transportation system, a reason for why many Angelinos may see the automobile as a necessity. It is individualized and personalized transportation. Sitting in traffic may not convey the same sense of power and speed that the Futurists experienced when they drove early automobiles for the first time, but the car still grants drivers the power to choose their destination and travel there on their own accord, independent of timetables. The development of the freeway system during the duration of the twentieth century reflects drivers' desires to have both the freedom the automobile provides and the practicality of individual transportation.

Chapter 2: Highway Development in the Golden Age of American Cars

In the post-World War II era, articles from the *Los Angeles Times* expressed a great deal of optimism regarding modifications to the road system in the city that reflected the increase in

demand for automobiles. The additional strain on the existing infrastructure pushed the city to sign the Collier Burns Highway Act of 1947, which added 67 miles of city streets to the state highway system, added taxes, and reconfigured the administration for increased efficiency. The ambitious nature of this legislation can be seen in the juxtaposition of a map of Los Angeles in 1944 and a 1947 projection of the freeway system in 1949.^{iii iv} The project road system very closely resembles the current highway infrastructure, and was a dramatic evolution from the freeway system that existed at the end of World War II. The *Los Angeles Times* covered the effects of this transition in 1949 in an article, and determined the additions were a success.²⁷ They measured that a total of 86,127 vehicles traveling over the newly added roads over a period of 24 hours, demonstrating how absolutely necessary these additions were to the infrastructural system.²⁸ According to Cortelyou's article in the *Los Angeles Times*, bridge building was also a tremendous part of the urban planning that occurred in this period, and reorganization of the freeway systems was being done to accommodate the increased traffic flow.²⁹ Expensive projects such as these accelerated as the 1950s began, with plans for the Santa Monica freeway toward Lincoln being pushed at the conclusion of the decade. *The Los Angeles Times* presented freeway development in the 1950s and 1960s in an extremely optimistic light of planning and expanding Los Angeles in articles such as these, maintaining and stimulating the opinion of the public with their articles. It is doubtful that the ideas of philosophers and artists who wrestled with the automobile and modernity at the start of the century still had sway with Cold War consumers, but the sentiment of their ideas carried forward into popularly read periodicals that drummed up support for the expansion of the freeway system. Individuality and freedom are the center of

²⁷ Cortelyou, Spencer V. "By the Sea, Over Mountains, Through the City – New Roads. *Los Angeles Times* (1923-*Current File*), January 3, 1949. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

these articles, and are reflected in the promises to reduce congestion and offer better connections between areas in the city.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, administrative focus shifted from freeway development to maintaining and modifying the existing infrastructure. The initial building process cost the city and state vast sums of money, and once Los Angeles' capacity for freeway was met, the existing roads then required state resources to maintain. Beautification processes were announced as early as 1969, and stress was placed on "[making new routes] compatible with the communities they serve."³⁰ A 1969 *Los Angeles Times* article expressed excitement over "big improvements" for the freeway system in the valley in the '70s." The article asserts that its "development and improvement" was to be funded with "millions of dollars" in gas tax funds."³¹ Articles such as this maintain a blind optimism that projects such as the ones planned for the Simi, Foothill and Golden State Freeways by commenting that "motorists already are travelling" on newly added segments.³² The *Los Angeles Times* presented additions such as these as solutions to the problem of congestion as though they would be permanent solutions, even though they were only temporary fixes that had the possibility of failing in the event of population growth or infrastructural degradation. The temptation of a return to "the emptier highways of the 1940s," a period for which Americans are perpetually nostalgic as Ladd describes in his book, remained a highly influential factor in garnering public support for new freeway projects, especially because they married the ideas of freedom and everyday livability.

³⁰ Hebert, Ray. "State Tries to Improve Freeways' Appearance: Planners Stress Ideas That Make New Routes Compatible With Communities They Serve." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*; May 26, 1969; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times pg. B1.

³¹ Kennedy, Howard. "Valley Freeways Assigned Big Improvements in '70s: First Priority to Simi, Foothill and Golden State." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*; November 27, 1969; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times pg. SF1.

³² Ibid.

Even during the period between World War II and during which oil was still extremely affordable, articles of contradictory degrees of optimism were published, confirming the public's insistence on using their own cars to commute rather than to subscribe to a socialized system of public transportation. In this case, socialized describes a system where commuters pay the government to provide the trains, buses, and necessary infrastructure to move people around the city. This contrasts to transit via automobile, which is a highly individualized form of transportation in which everyone commutes in a privately owned vehicle. A 1969 article titled "Engineers Wrestle Again with Santa Barbara Freeway Plan" demonstrates the difficulty that accompanies the process of accommodating a freeway within previously established districts, in this case U.S. 101. The article cites concerns from Santa Barbarans who at the time were "fearing an elevated road would create a wall between the downtown and beach areas" and favored a depressed highway.³³ This demonstrates that people want freeways to work with the lifestyles they have developed over the course of the car ownership, but in some cases, as this article mentions, the interests of the public conflict with what the engineers deem to be the most efficient and sustainable designs. A quotation from then Mayor Gerald S. Firestone denotes this as "the most controversial issue [Santa Barbara] ever had," giving further indication as to how important motoring convenience is to Southern Californians, and how individuals yearn for the convenience that allows them to live their lives regardless of the needs of other communities.³⁴ The article also conveys how problematic planning new routes or making additions to the road can be because of the uncertainty that accompanies both making alterations to traffic flow and also factoring in the way nature interacts with the infrastructural system. Car travel appears to be

³³ Overaker, Ken. "Engineers Wrestle Again with Santa Barbara Freeway Plan." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*; September 29, 1969; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times pg. A1.

³⁴ Ibid.

free while public transportation infrastructure is costly and requires the implementation of intricate infrastructure, but herein lies deeper socioeconomic problems for vast portions of the urban community. As long as projects such as these do not occur in the purview of the upper-classes, they are not problematic. As seen in Santa Barbara in the above article, on the other hand, the privileged have the capability of utilizing their power and wealth to foist undesirable projects on lower-income communities. This reveals the nature of how transportation infrastructure disproportionately affects communities of disparate class and race, and calls into question for whom the American Dream of liberty and progress belongs.

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, the Orange County Chamber of Commerce placed the extension of its own freeway system as a top priority in the same year Santa Barbara was wrestling with the modification of the 101. The article cites two primary reasons for why such an addition was marked as a matter of high precedence. As with many of the other infrastructural modifications that were planned during this period, “a heavy flow of traffic has been established” in a particular portion of the road network, in this case “Brea Canyon and down State College Blvd.” specifically.³⁵ The existing infrastructure’s inability to support the quantity of vehicles on the road is a repeated trend, and the solution of adding more road to the infrastructure is one that has been repeated historically.

This can be explained by the second reason the *Los Angeles Times* provided in this 1969 article: according to John Haskell, a member of the chamber’s Highway and Transportation Committee, people want “a freeway, once started, constructed to a meaningful system to allow people to get from one place to another.”³⁶ This point serves as a reminder that the automobile is

³⁵ “Orange Freeway Tops Chamber Priority List: County Group to Give Recommendations to Board of Supervisors After 12-Month Study.” *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*; August 10, 1969; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times pg. OC16.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

actually a practical implement for transportation, and people do want functional and efficient road systems for utilitarian purposes. Despite this complication, it aligns with Americans' overarching desire to have the assurance of freedom to go where they please at a moment's notice. The importance of the freeway system is a vital component of the American persona, and when new road systems fail to deliver on that promise, that veneer collapses. Haskell's commentary within the article demonstrates the dualistic draw of Los Angeles' infrastructural system, which promises both freedom and convenience. In his responses to the *Los Angeles Times*' interview questions, he asserts that the Southern California freeway projects will offer solutions to longstanding problems. For example, Haskell is also quoted as saying "The Orange Freeway will offer relief to the heavily traveled roads in the north part of the county," as though the solutions the chamber intends to implement will solve the greater issue that lies within the system itself.³⁷ It isolates the contradictory nature of the public's desires and the infeasibility of the system, which has never delivered on its promised intent.

The freeway construction boom caught up with city authorities by the late 1960s as they began to realize that as the intricate and complex road systems aged, they would be very expensive to maintain. Given that freeways serve as symbols of individuality and the freedom to be mobile, a crumbling infrastructural system undermines that logic and causes people to be dissatisfied. To mitigate this dissatisfaction, California began a project to improve freeways' appearances. However, Ray Hebert of the *Los Angeles Times* acknowledged in his article "State Tries to Improve Freeways' Appearance" that "Angry and impatient motorists stalled in a long line of traffic won't be impressed but drivers who enjoy a well-designed interchange or a sculpted freeway column might notice the changes."³⁸ This supposition of the way motorists may

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Hebert, "State Tries to Improve Freeways' Appearance...", 1969.

actually perceive the planned alterations is quite accurate, as drivers in the twenty-first century primarily pay attention to the quantity of vehicles on the road and the amount of time in traffic rather than the design of interchanges or overpasses.

Hebert's article is critical of the broken nature of the system as it stood in the late 1960s, and remarks that Los Angeles was "already criss-crossed by the world's heaviest concentration of freeways, the region has been warned it may become a 'concrete jungle.'"³⁹ This concern is quite relieving because the notion of a city-scape marred with grey buildings, roads, and structures is the antithesis of the open-road sensation that a freeway is meant to evoke within drivers. The plans for beautification of the freeway system were meant to alleviate this concern, with engineers arguing that each piece of the infrastructure are individual 'showpieces' that will be used "so people will 'see and believe when [engineers] tell them a freeway does not have to be a blight on the community.'"⁴⁰ This tension between those designing the infrastructure and those actually driving on the state's highway system on a daily basis represents the juxtaposition of what freeways represent to Americans and how they work in practice.

Hebert also points out that communities view the insertion of freeways in their region to be an invasion and a violation, which demonstrates another difference in the theory and practice of road networks. There is a disconnection between the way the freeway is perceived by the public and the way it responds to actual implementation. In theory, freeways grant mobility the ability to travel uninhibited by socialistic timetables and schedules but the fact is that they create unnatural divides within single regions in a city, and cause a separation in the congruence of communities. Affluent locales may have the power to combat the state and prevent roadwork from infringing on their regions, as evinced by Hebert's conclusion that "bitter freeway battles

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

have left their scars on many cities and communities,” but wealthy regions such as “Beverly Hills and Newport Beach” were able to successfully keep routes out after fighting against planned projects for their regions.⁴¹ Hebert’s article reveals that socioeconomic and race are important factors in shaping infrastructure systems because they have the power and wealth to influence the government in such a way that the noisy, dirty, unhealthy and undesirable swaths of freeway are a comfortable distance from their homes. In Los Angeles today, communities of color live in the areas with the densest amount of freeways, such as the primarily Latino region within Boyle Heights that is enclosed by the 110, 101, 10, and 5.⁴² Overall, the inevitable degeneration of the infrastructure system undermined the sense of universal freedom and progress conveyed in articles that announced the plans of their creation. Instead, they insinuate that the freedom of the wealthy and privileged comes at the expense of the quality of life for the working classes and communities of color.

Chapter 3: Into the Malaise

In the late 1970s, frustration with the system increased but due to inflation and the increased cost of roadbuilding the cost of fixing the problems of the past was simply too high to make the necessary changes. By 1979, newspapers such as the *Los Angeles Times* began to express remorse over the overdevelopment of the freeway system, and the errors within the existing system could “be corrected only at costs 10 times or more greater [*sic*] than the price tags when the system was put together in the late 1950s and 1960s.⁴³ By the end of the 1970s, Caltrans learned that many of the promises offered by a freeway system did not hold up in a city with a population as large as Los Angeles. This was partially true because of the dangerous

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “Boyle Heights.” *Los Angeles Times*. <http://maps.latimes.com/neighborhoods/neighborhood/boyle-heights/>. 2016.

⁴³ Smollar, David. “You Can’t Get There From Here: Caltrans Stuck With Freeway Mistakes of Past.” *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*; October 14, 1979; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times pg. SD_A1.

layouts from earlier decades. Old designs, such as “on- and off-ramps from a freeway’s inside lanes,” popular in the 1950s, were prohibited in this decade because of the tremendously high death rate they caused.⁴⁴ Rather than forsaking a system that has not been able to maintain pace with the rate of population growth, Caltrans continued to study existing routes to find new ways of streamlining travel on those channels. This is one instance where alternative means of transportation was truly considered by the newer generation of engineers to lighten the burden on the road system. However there was still internal resistance within the state to make these concessions. David Smollar remarks in his 1979 article “You Can’t Get There From Here” that “many old-time engineers still have a difficult time adjusting to Caltrans subsidizing trains or publishing bicycle route maps.”⁴⁵ The world where the enticing prospect of a fast and efficient freeway system was still a reality for these veteran engineers, and despite their scientific background, their bias potentially stymied some progress. The region of Watts is a prime example of an isolated zone where a community of color is ostracized as a result of their ethnicity. It has historically been treated worse than other areas of the city, and Robert Mayer’s *Los Angeles: a chronological & documentary history, 1542-1976* reveals the nature of these racial tensions, even if the author had no intention of doing so. This 1978 text describes the start the Watts Riots as follows, “Racial violence broke out in Watts after a White policeman arrested a Black driver for drunken driving. Blacks claimed this was an act of racism and rioting ensued.”⁴⁶ The instigating event of one of the most violent and trying times from LA’s past is not only another example of the ways racism is manifest within the road system, via toxic relationships between officers and people of color, but the location of Watts and the adjacent

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Mayer, Robert. *Los Angeles: a chronological & documentary history, 1542-1976*. (Oceana Publications, Dobbs Ferry; New York, 1978).

freeways are demonstrative of the racialization of infrastructural planning in LA. A map of the Los Angeles freeway system from 1979 reveals that Watts has long been the subject to the whims of the city's urban planners, and was initially hemmed in by the 11 and 91, major routes, until more recently the 110 and 105 encroach on the region's limits.^{v 47} From historical and contemporary accounts and maps, evidence can be drawn to suggest that race has a large factor in determining the placement of new freeways, and oftentimes communities of color must suffer the consequences of having major routes intersect with their locales. This is another example of the way that the freedom and convenience initially offered by the highway system does not reach all members of the city; deeper issues of race and class influence government decision-making in this regard.

Despite the increased anxiety over freeway design among the public and those responsible for upkeep and further planning, continued interest in automotive culture indicates that concern for the car's role did not override popular interest, particularly among more privileged cultural groups. The 1979 *Los Angeles Times* report of the 29th Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance indicates that the infatuation with the automobile remained strong even as gasoline prices were at all-time high.⁴⁸ Tia Gindick writes:

“Forget the gas shortage, high prices, long waits, odd-even days and the prospect that you might not even be able to get home. Most visitors to Monterey on the weekend were people paying tribute where automobile design was as important a function as when people took pride in craftsmanship as well as ownership.”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ “Watts.” *Los Angeles Times*. <http://maps.latimes.com/neighborhoods/neighborhood/watts/>, 2016.

⁴⁸ Gindick, Tia. “Bentley vs. Rolls in Classic Weekend: ‘Understated Elegance.’ *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*; August 21, 1979; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times pg. F1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

This remark represents that society has not given up on the way the automobile was originally intended to be used, for open-road motoring. In fact, Gindick romanticizes prewar automotive culture, most likely as a result of the austerity that accompanied the malaise of this period. Due to the nature of the Concours, the article focuses on the wealthy owners of very expensive classics and the rivalry that exists between the two groups. While it is amusing to read these narrative accounts, it also provides evidence of how alive car culture remained among this elite group and foreshadows its continued popularity today.

The article reveals that popular race car culture among sports car enthusiasts was also alive and well at the time. The article, as it did with its recounting of British luxury, discusses the pride of owners and the deep engagement of enthusiasts in great detail, even naming the owners of notable vehicles that appeared. This serves to reinforce the theme of escape that surrounds Gindick's article; the 29th Concourse was a place where the troubles of the end of the decade could be forgotten and the glorious chrome past of motoring be celebrated. Even Canary Row, home to some of Monterey's most prestigious establishments, was loaded with "low riders looking like something out of Star Wars, oldies but goodies, replicas of oldies but goodies, new designs like the Hispano-Suiza and Duesenberg."⁵⁰ This represents a conglomeration of cultures from every corner of the automotive world. One central idea brings these groups together more than anything else, freedom. The cars featured at shows such as the Concours d'Elegance are outmoded in terms of their safety and technology, and can no longer serve as practical tools for transportation. As such only the wealthy can afford to own and properly maintain what are essentially historical artifacts. However, the model for high-luxury shows is repeated and reenacted across the automotive community, which grants expanded access to the sense of

⁵⁰ Ibid.

freedom and escape as depicted in Gindick's writing. The article conveys a sense of nostalgia that results from entering a world separate from "the gas lines and the rush home," which serves as the great equalizer among all classes.⁵¹ It illuminates one of the driving reasons why cars are sought after with such demand, because they represent the possibility to both portray who a person is as an individual, and also give them the capability to travel wherever. Regardless of what the reality of motoring is, the idealism this article captures a core element of why car ownership of all kinds is so pervasive.

Despite the idealism that persists alongside automobile ownership, drivers are also becoming increasingly aware of the realities of climate change and urban congestion. In more recent stages of Los Angeles' development, for example, the additions of freeways ran counter to the interests of existing residents and also environmentalists who did not want their communities to change because of invasive freeways or the environmental damage inflicted by increased quantities of drivers.⁵² Research from the 1980s shows concern over gains in solo commuters, with a gain in 22 million such drivers from 1980 to 1990. Infrastructure spending was also at a lull in this period according to a different report, with spending at less than half as in the mid-1960s.⁵³

Sandra Drinning's *The Living City*, is a mural originally painted in 1991 on 124 North Western Avenue between 1st St. and Beverly Blvd. It portrays Los Angeles as a city of diverse communities connected with a looping and swirling freeway system.^{vi} The mass of roads that dominate the image serve to separate the featured communities as much as they connects them,

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ray, Nancy. Inland-Coast Freeway Plan Moves Onto the Fast Track: But residents of housing developments and environmentalists are already raising objecting to east-west Route 56. *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*; December 2, 1989; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times pg. B1B.

⁵³ Marshall, P.G. "Transportation: America's 'quiet crisis.'" *Editorial Research Reports 1989*, Vol. 2 Washington, DC: CQ Press. Retrieved from <http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresrre1989081100>.

underscoring the contradictory nature of the promises and results of LA's freeway system. It also conveys the oppressive nature of the road network on low-income or colored communities within the city. Beverley Hills and Hollywood dominate the left side of the canvas, and is largely isolated from the winding mass of grey road. Though the mural's title suggests that the piece is celebratory of LA's multiplicity of cultures and its ever-changing nature, it still reveals the reality that highway infrastructure is as divisive as it is connective, especially because the wealthy have the power to isolate themselves and push away urban intrusions they deem undesirable. The freedom offered by high capacity road systems does have bias, and Drinning's work offers greater insight as to how this plays out in Los Angeles' urban landscape.

Chapter 4: Self-Driving Cars Driven by the Self-Driven vs. Public Transportation for All

The Department of Transportation made attempts to promote public transportation in Los Angeles but technological innovations in automotive design make the car as popular as ever, as many of these developments serve to maintain the freedom of individualized transportation in cars. Paradigm shifting automakers such as Tesla do not invoke excitement in the media solely for their advancements in electric drive technology, but also for pushing the boundaries of vehicular autonomy. Tesla is not alone in this endeavor; other automakers have been using lane guidance and safety assistance technology for some time, but Tesla is pushing the boundaries further with the degree of autonomy its vehicles afford. The seemingly instant positive reception to self-driving cars is due in large part to frustration with gridlock; computers should be able to figure out traffic better than mere humans and restore the rapidity the highway system supposedly used to offer. This would maintain the independence and freedom the automobile supposedly offers in a world with an ever-grow population an increasingly dense populations. In

“Traffic Congestion,” Charles S. Clark quotes Cheryl Collier, formerly the research director of Commuter Transportation Services in Los Angeles:

““In L.A., driving is cheap,” Collier says. “There are no tolls, and 93 percent of the people get free parking. We're building a subway, but lots of areas are not serviced due to the city's sprawl. And for buses to work, we'd need fewer transfers and more express buses.” L.A.'s reputation as a car-loving city is also a product of culture.”⁵⁴

Though this article is from 1994, the point remains that there is little incentive for anyone to travel using anything other than a car. Servicing the entire city with public transportation may always be an ongoing process, but at the same time driving remains relatively consistent and reliable. This is another reason why the prospect of autonomous vehicles remains so appealing; the only sacrifice they require is the loss of command of the steering wheel and pedals, but the styling and individuality of the car remain part of the experience. In its earliest stages, however, autonomous driving will likely be an added feature to the existing architecture of the vehicle.

Top Gear magazine published a story in April 2016 detailing the results of the tests and reviews its journalists ran on the Tesla Model S P90D, the range-topping version of its flagship, and the BMW 730d, a tech-laden version of its top-of-the-range model with the diesel engine drivers in Britain would likely purchase. The test and review are mismatched in terms of the vehicles' prices and their place within each brand's hierarchy, but both featured the premier technology suites necessary to grant maximum hands free driving. Ollie Marriage, the article's author, expresses the revelatory nature of Tesla's autonomous drive systems in the opening lines:

“Fourteen miles without touching the steering wheel or a pedal. Watching the car steer its way down the road is strange. I hover my hands, but the Tesla seems content getting on

⁵⁴ Clark, Charles. “Traffic Congestion: Can America win the battle against gridlock?” *CQ Researcher*; 4, 6 May, 1994; <http://library.cqpress.com/>.

with things itself. It maintains gaps, waits for slower-moving cars to pull over before accelerating, and generally drives with better discipline than anything else on the road.”⁵⁵

The stress on the fourteen miles of hands-free travel is indicative of the way that the Tesla still grants the sense of open-road motoring drivers crave, but without requiring the driver to keep their hands and feet busy with steering or even throttle modulation. In a sense, the autonomous features of this specific model delivers an even more liberating experience than a conventional grand tourer because it demands so little from the driver. Diehard enthusiasts may be bothered by this because they yearn for the engagement of traditional steering, speeding, and even shifting gears themselves in fossil fueled cars, but others may find the absence of responsibility to be liberating. As Marriage writes in the article, “Everything is automatic, making the Tesla blissfully simple to operate: you get in, the electrics are already up and running, you slot it into gear and away you go.”⁵⁶ While *Top Gear* is based out of the United Kingdom, this article suggests that there might be a new global definition for what is classified as freedom and escape. Rather than emphasizing the driver’s ability to grab hold of their destiny via an immensely controllable and powerful vehicle, this article praises the Model S for enabling the driver to let go. Even though this suggests a modification of the vision of freedom as seen by the Futurists, freedom and practicality are at the heart of the desirability of the autonomous car.

Discounting the self-driving element of their vehicles, the products from Tesla that are on sale adapt to the current global climate. Their massive popularity and the perfect reviews they received from respected publications such as *Consumer Reports*.⁵⁷ The initial response from

⁵⁵ Marriage, Ollie. “Hands free: Tesla Model S P90D vs BMW 730Ld.” *Top Gear*. <http://www.topgear.com/car-news/future-tech/hands-free-tesla-model-s-p90d-vs-bmw-730ld#1>

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Rechten, Mark. “Tesla Model S P85D Earns Top Road Test Score,” *Consumer Reports*, last modified October 20, 2015, <http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/cars/tesla-model-s-p85d-earns-top-road-test-score>.

testers was strong, they were impressed with the Model S' "instant acceleration" and driving dynamics coupled with "practicality and luxury, resulting in a more than perfect score of 103 that caused *Consumer Reports* to modify its entire rating system.⁵⁸ In the film accompanying the online article, Jake Fisher, their Auto Test Director, claims that it is the "best car that Consumer Reports has ever tested," especially emphasizing that it is a "fully electric car" that is a "glimpse into the future of the automotive industry."⁵⁹ Additionally, it is "faster and more efficient" which is "unheard of for a high performance model from a typical car company."⁶⁰

The Model S P85D appeared to be the automotive Holy Grail, offering everything without compromise, aside from price. The excitement expressed over these vehicles in news and review outlets such as *Consumer Reports* and *Top Gear* parallels that of the *Los Angeles Times* regarding new freeway infrastructure. As argued above, the optimism associated with emptier roads and freer flowing traffic that supposedly accompanies added freeways is merely a Band-Aid incapable of solving a much greater problem. Tesla's cars are very similar in nature because they still occupy space on the road and contribute to all of the problems associated with automotive travel that commuters criticize. Tesla largely cashes in on its promises to synthesize an electric drive train with a familiar driving experience, the integration of electric and hydrogen powered vehicles into the existing fossil fuel infrastructure has long been problematic. Even the progress toward full autonomy suggests that these technologies are just reiterations of an existing system that has largely failed. Just because some people will not have to use a steering wheel to transport themselves does not mean that traffic problems will be solved. However the necessity

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

for individual transportation coupled with the ideas of individual freedom help maintain the allure of the car.

Los Angeles Metro is utilizing a new campaign, marked by the slogan “Metro Eases Traffic,” to appeal to commuters’ desires for a public transportation system that reduces congestion and allows for efficient commuting along any channel. One such advertisement features a bus among traffic, and is captioned with “We move 1.4 million riders a day.”^{vii} However, as much as it is an advertisement for the public transportation system, it also calls out to drivers in order to remind them how many people it keeps off the road, greatly decreasing the amount of traffic they must cope with during their daily commutes. In this way, Metro positions itself as an ally of the driver and the bus rider alike, also calling out to young people with its fresh graphic design approach while simultaneously calling upon older ideas about motoring. In this way, Metro also applies a modernist aesthetic to its campaign, where just as early adapters of the automobile such as Proust valued the automobiles’ ability to grant additional perspective by blurring the surroundings, so too does Metro by positioning the bus so that it appears as though it is breaking away from the billboard. Additionally, the central positioning of the bus also appeals to the sense of individuality that Angelinos crave with automotive transportation, and as such this campaign represents an effort to translate that to a more socialized form of mobilization.

Another ad from the same campaign claims “We’re tackling bottlenecks.”^{viii} The image features a highway with an overpass, but rather than showing bumper to bumper traffic, there is ample space between the cars, buses, and trucks on the road. Again, this advertisement appeals to drivers’ individualism and yearning for freedom while on the road. It emphasizes Metro’s role in reducing congestion for the sake of enabling additionally mobility for drivers. While this billboard offers an aerial perspective that greatly differs from the aforementioned advertisement,

the presence of a bus, located directly under the word “eases,” is meant to demonstrate that the public transportation system is in place to liberate highways for the convenience of drivers, implying that some other group of people will have to commute for this purpose. Just as the residents of Beverly Hills and other high income areas were able to resist the intrusion of freeways into their communities, so too does the LA Metro advertising suggest that the city’s more privileged citizens will not have to change their habits because the public transportation system is getting the “other” people off the road, in this case that means relegating them to a system that does not work at optimal efficiency. As a result, this campaign’s intent becomes unclear; Metro seems to be advertising use of roads for privileged drivers and does little to dissuade them from driving. Perhaps the clearest intent of the advertising is to appeal to young people and to let them know that they have options for transit in LA, especially given the billboard’s vibrant colors, the minimalism, and the cheeky slogans. If this is the case, Metro is making progress by creating an image for a new generation of commuters by stressing that any avenue they choose will get them where they are going reliably and efficiently, calling upon the liberty and individuality Angelinos seek. Only time will tell if these promises will be fulfilled.

Conclusion

My research indicates that the automobile has carried with it the image of being a tool to grant freedom and give drivers the convenience for which they strive. While was only a toy and tool of the wealthy in its infancy, the car is now a necessity in Los Angeles. This is harmful to the quality of living of the socioeconomically disadvantaged and many communities of color, not only because they must pay for expensive automobile ownership and maintenance, but the highway system also makes life hell for many in the City of Angels. Freeways are theoretically free to use with ownership of a car, but members of racially and socioeconomically marginalized

pay a disproportionately large price for a system that fails to offer the benefits it promises. The popular interest in alternative fuel vehicles such as Tesla's and the increasing acceptance of future autonomous vehicles demonstrate that the public is not willing to commit to changing their lifestyle in any meaningful capacity, choosing instead to participate in an oppressive model of mass mobilization. Los Angeles is clinging to a system that is unsustainable, and as its population continues to grow in the twenty-first century, it must implement a public transportation infrastructure that favors the working classes and offers everyone in the city the opportunity to have the freedom and independence of mobility.

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ⁱ Bentley. "The 3½ Litre Bentley Drop-Head Coupé." *The Motor*. 10 December, 1935. Print advertisement.



THE 3½ LITRE BENTLEY DROP-HEAD COUPÉ



Reprinted from
"THE MOTOR"
December 10th, 1935

ⁱⁱ Studebaker Division of Studebaker-Packard Corporation. "America's 'best deal' in an all around family car!" 1955. Print Advertisement.



America's "best deal" in an all around family car!

A beautiful Studebaker sedan... an all-purpose cargo carrier... all in one!
Brilliant Studebaker power... your choice of two great engines... a V-8 or a 6!
Gas economy team-mate of the '55 Mobilgas Run winner!
Priced right down with the lowest!



You're driving something really smart when you're the proud owner of this distinctive Studebaker station wagon. Easy to park—easy to handle—mothers with active youngsters love it for shopping and other errands. Dads find it just right for business use and vacationing. It's a handsome 6-passenger sedan with plenty of cargo space normally—and 6 full feet of load capacity when you fold up the rear seat. See your Studebaker dealer for a try-out drive right away... and remember these colorful Studebaker station wagons are priced right down with the lowest. "Best deals" anywhere!

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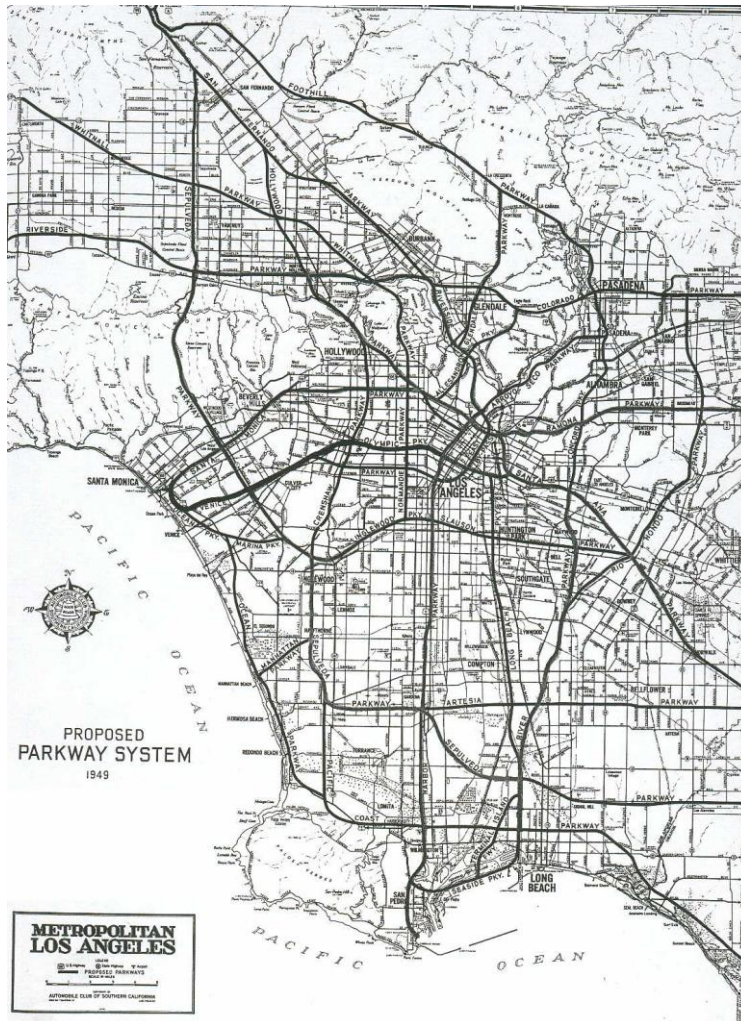
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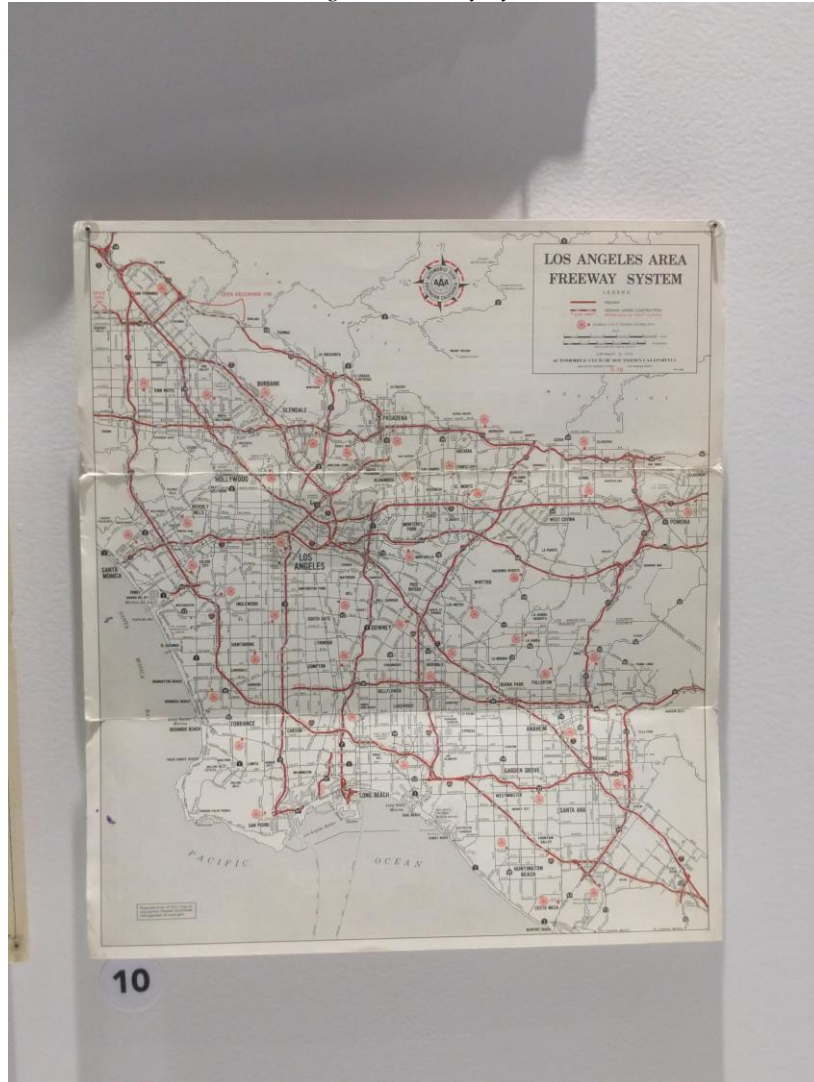
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vii Los Angeles Metro. *Metro Eases Traffic: We move 1.4 million riders a day.* Metro. <https://www.metro.net/>, 2016. Billboard.

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viii Los Angeles Metro. *Metro Eases Traffic: We're tackling bottlenecks.* Metro. <https://www.metro.net/>, 2016. Billboard.

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