

# The Death and Life of Great American Highways

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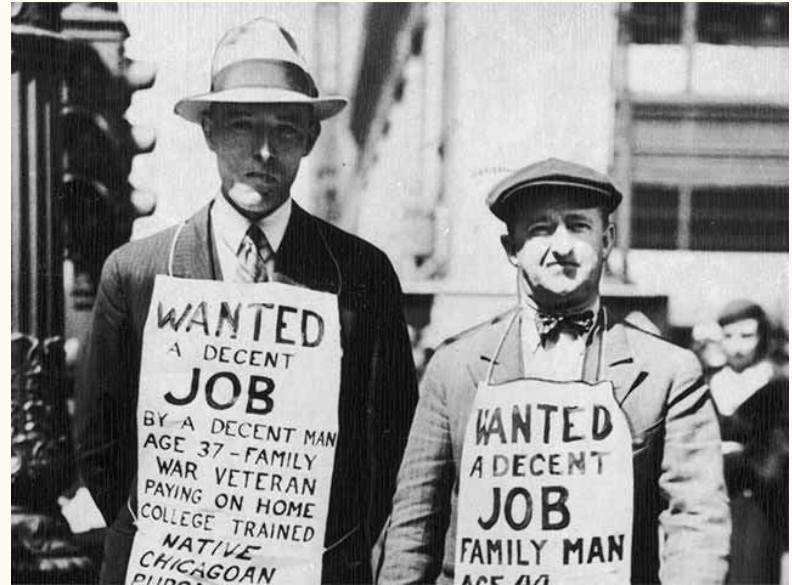
A historic look from 1920 to nowish

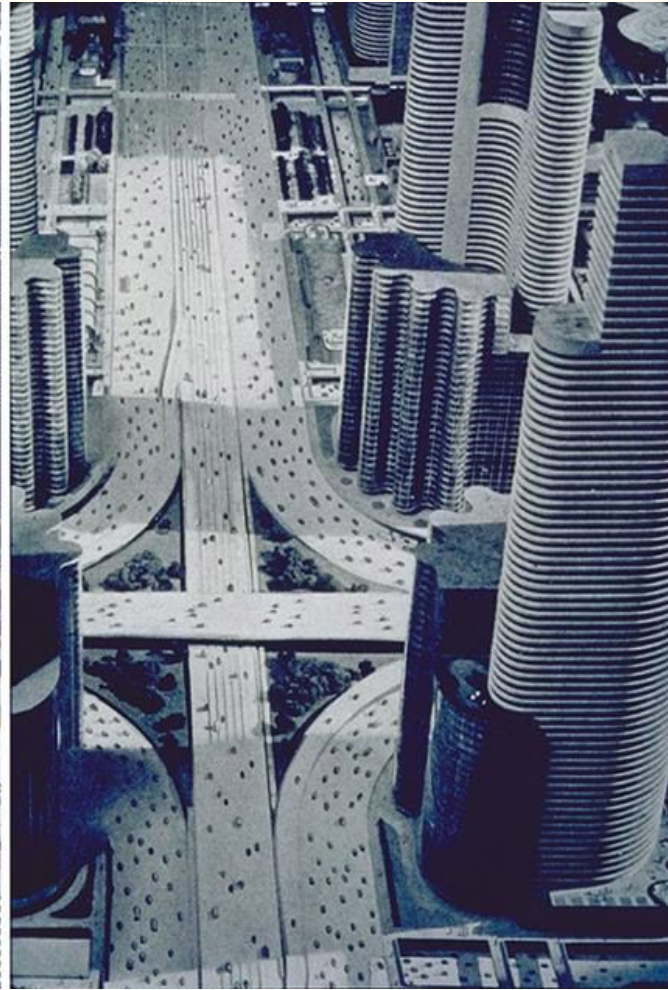
# 1: Futurama



# It's the 1930s

- Great depression - not good
- Pinball was just invented - also not good
- You're looking for some inspiration and hope
- You buy a ticket to the 1939 World's Fair in NYC



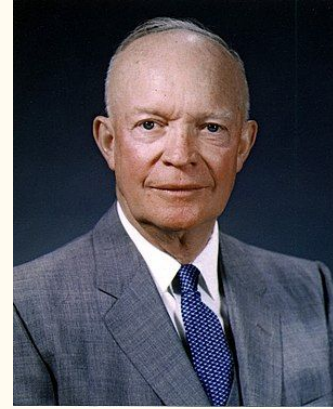


# Futurama (1939 World's Fair)

- A 1 acre interactive exhibit featuring transportation of the future
  - Higher driving speeds
  - Partitions of isolated traffic moving both ways
- Predicts a bold increase of automobiles for the next 20 years
- Sponsored by Shell and General Motors
- Voted most interesting exhibit by fairgoers

# Dwight D. Eisenhower

- US President 1953 - 1961
- A big fan of highways
- 1919 Transcontinental motor convoy
  - DC - San Francisco trip, took 2 months
  - Painful, with many breakdowns
- Inspired by the autobahn while fighting in WW2



# Dwight D. Eisenhower

- Quote from his book:
  - "The old convoy had started me thinking about good, two-lane highways, but Germany had made me see the wisdom of broader ribbons across the land."

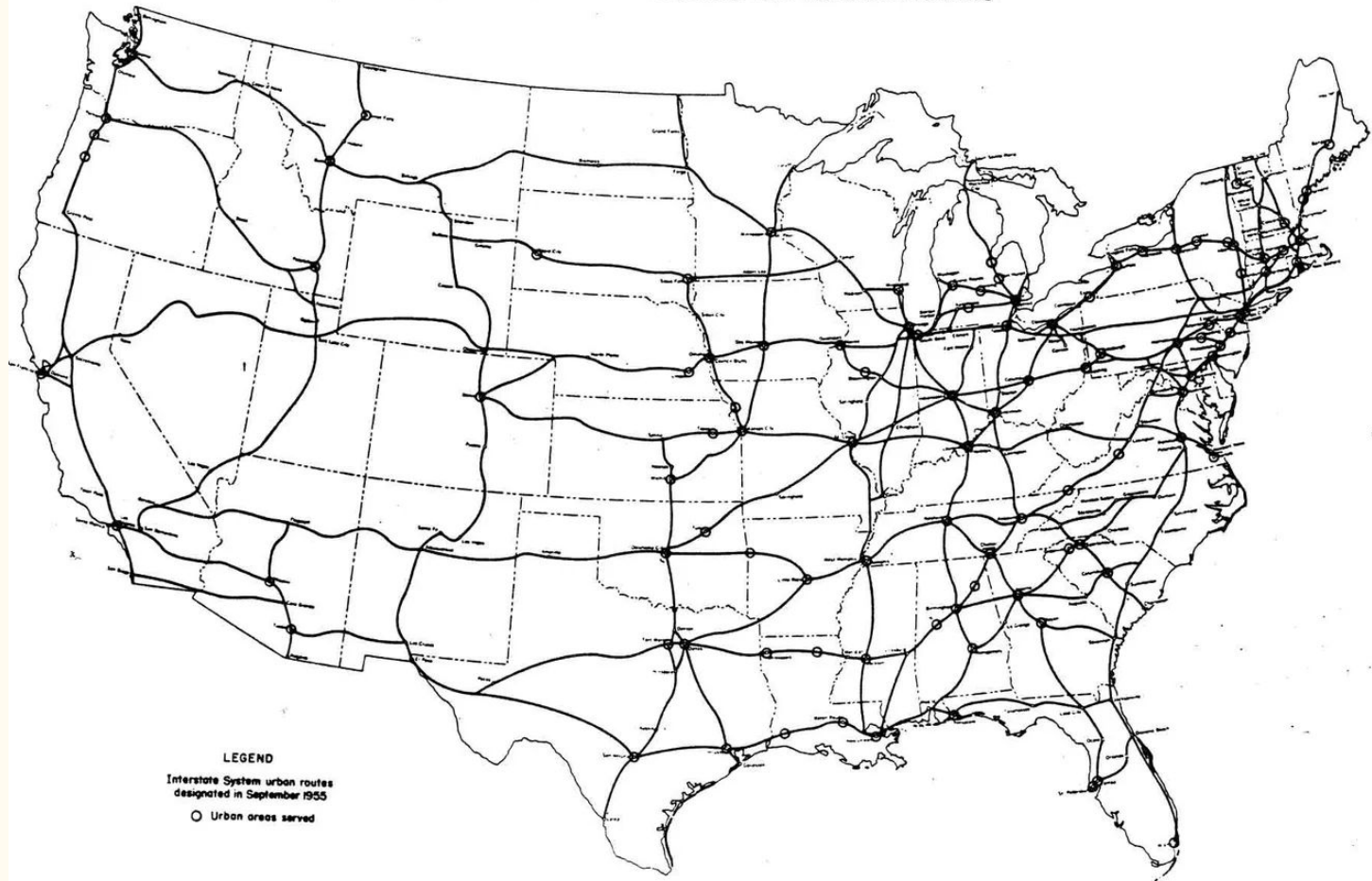
# Dwight D. Eisenhower

- Signs the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956
  - \$25 billion over 10 years for highway construction
- Cold War also big motivator
  - Moving across country from 2 months to 5 days





# NATIONAL SYSTEM OF INTERSTATE AND DEFENSE HIGHWAYS



# Suburbia in USA, 1960s onwards

- Economic boom: housing and automobile growth
- Highways that run right into the city
  - “We don’t have to live in the city anymore!”
    - Avoid crime in cities
    - Own land, front yard

# Suburbia in USA, 1960s onwards



# Urban sprawl (Los Angeles)



2: Highways go up!

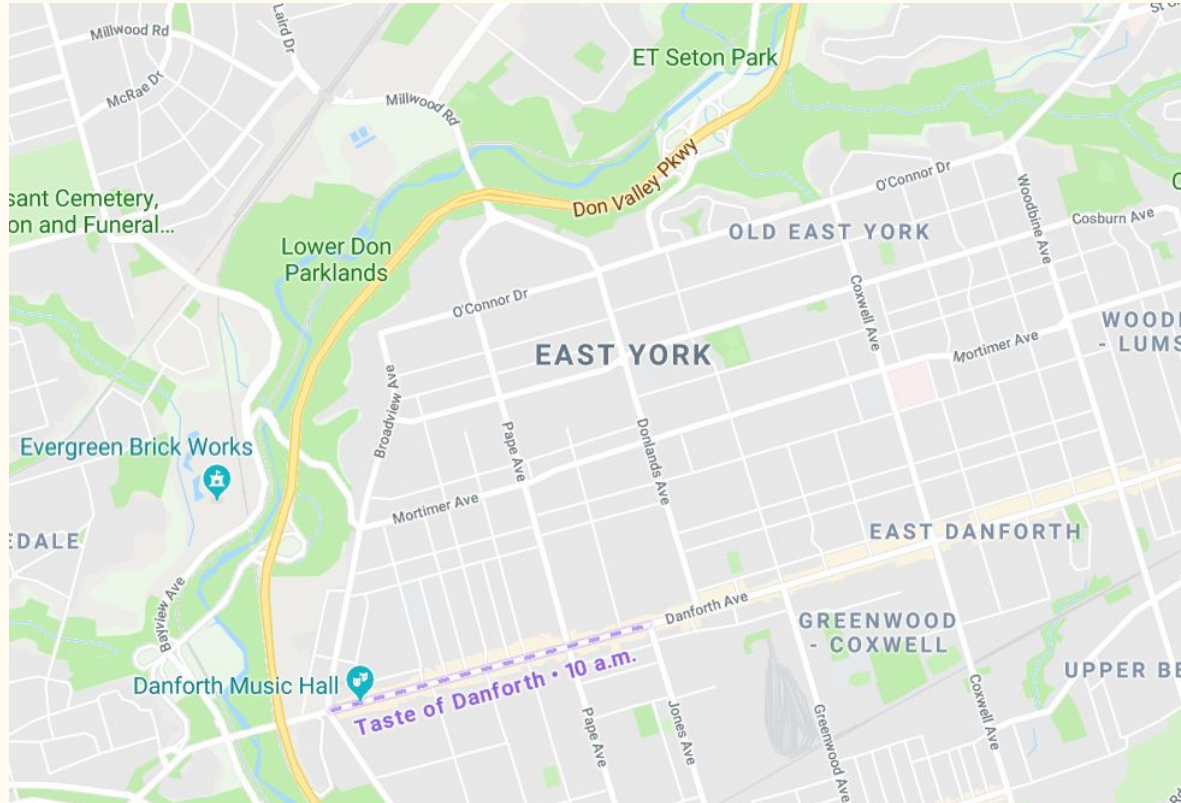
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# It's the 1950s, and people need highways.

- You've got this great national interstate highway.
- You want to connect it right into the core of your city.
- But....there's no space
- How are you going to make it happen?



A: Follow a convenient no-construction area (river)



# B: Build across the waterfront





Or even two!



# C: Try to build it through pre-constructed areas?

- Tear down the buildings on a stretch of land
- Build a highway!
- They won't mind right?



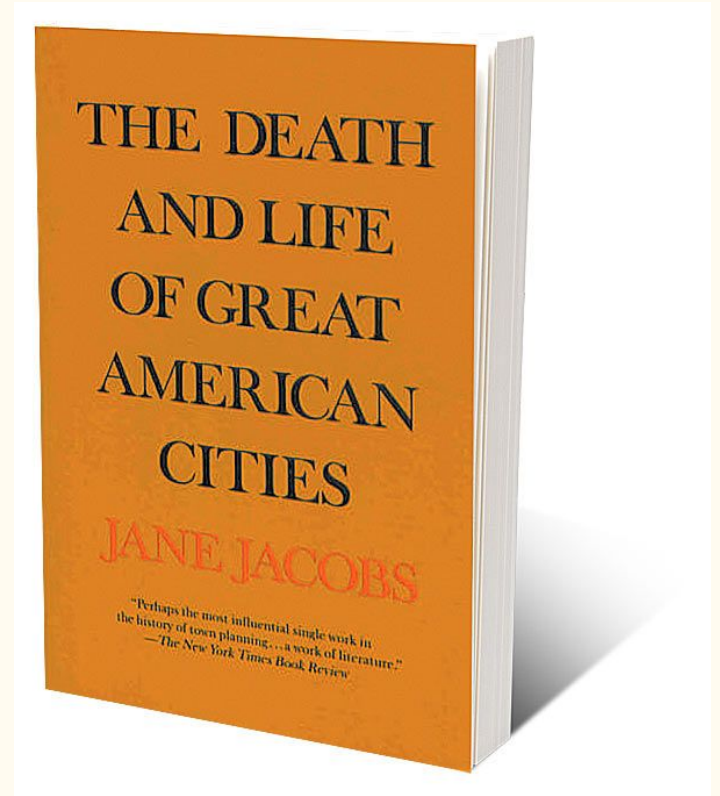
# Moses vs Jacobs

- Famous 1950s highway dispute: Lower Manhattan Expressway
- Robert Moses, “master builder” and Jane Jacobs, local resident



# Jane Jacobs

- After successfully defending NYC, she became a hero
- Goes on to write the bible of planning, 1961
- Moves to Toronto in 1968, influential in highway revolts



# Highway revolts across America (1960s - 70s)

- In other cities, residents gathered to protest highways



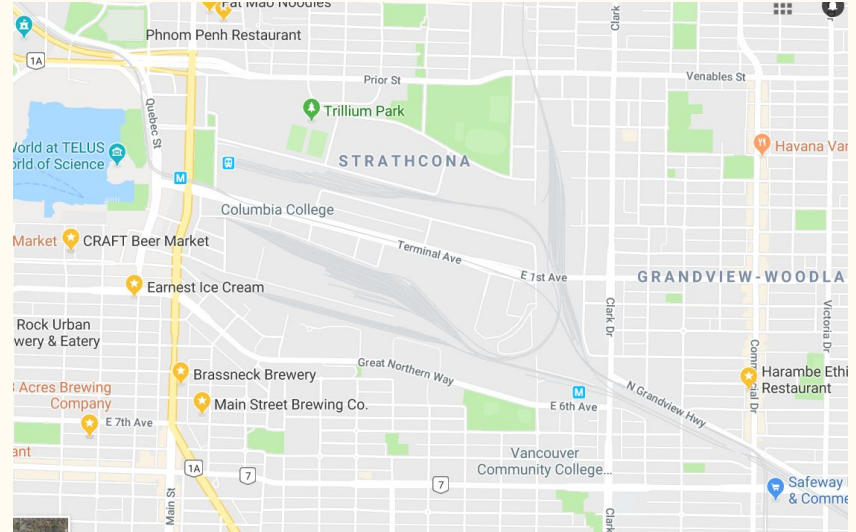
# D: The other way

- Build through a politically weak neighborhood



# Hogan's Alley

- Predominantly African immigrant neighborhood in Strathcona
- Destroyed in the 1970s for the Georgia Viaduct



3: Highways go down

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Why are highways bad?

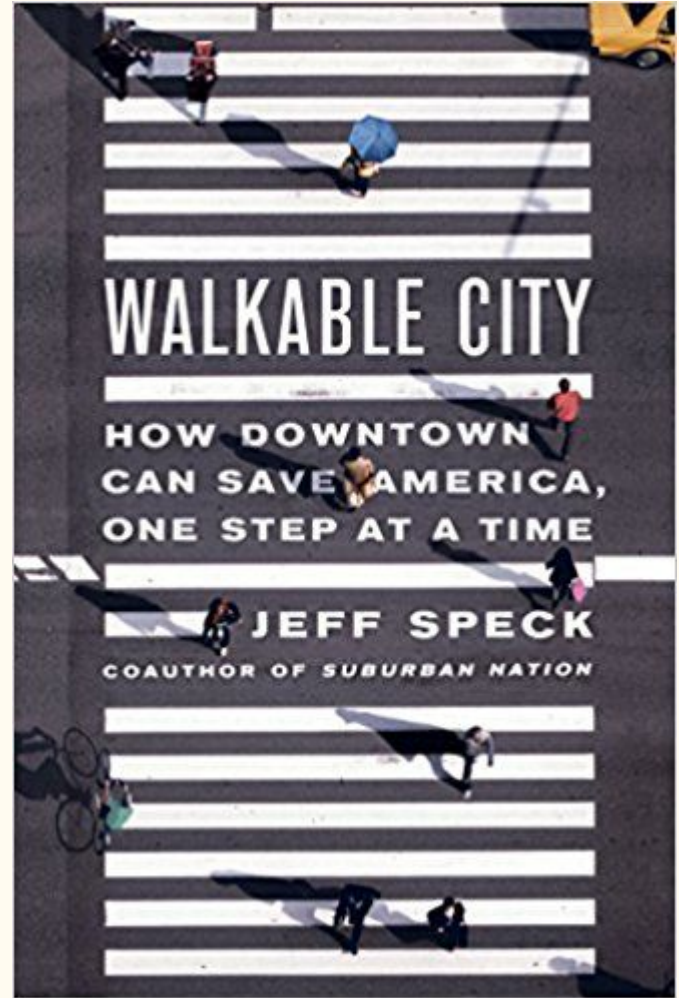


# Why are highways bad?

- Nobody wants to be around them
  - They are borders, they sever communities
- Bad for land value, environmentally bad
- Studies have shown they increase congestion in surrounded areas
  - Bigger streets  $\neq$  lower traffic
- Expensive, harder to maintain than roads
  - Funding to build highways was high.  
Funding to maintain them is low.

# Why are highways bad?

- General Theory of Walkability
- A quality walk:
  - **Useful:** Convenient, accessible
  - **Safe:** from high speed vehicles
  - **Comfortable:** tight better than vast
  - **Interesting:** signs of humanity
- Which of these come with highways?



# Why are highways bad?



# Case Study: San Francisco Embarcadero 1989



# 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake

- Santa Cruz/San Francisco
- During 1989 World Series Game 3 (which apparently saved lives)
- 63 killed, \$6 billion in damage
- The embarcadero freeway collapses
  - Local government choose not to reconstruct





Image AP1991





# A happy accident: Wait, that worked?

- Other cities take notice
  - Seattle
  - Boston
  - Seoul
  - Toronto (we're still working on that one)
  - Many more: [HIghway Hitlist](#)

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Alissa Walker

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