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REPORT OF THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

History And Status Of The East Street Valley Expressway, Interstate Highway 279, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

The East Street Valley Expressway has been plagued with problems. However, most of the problems, including the route design, preparation, and submission of an environmental impact statement, have been resolved.

Final Federal approval is expected by the end of July 1976. If this occurs, property acquisition is scheduled to be completed in 2 years and construction is scheduled to be completed by 1982. The total cost of this section of I-279 is estimated to be \$82 million.

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MAY 28, 1976



COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

B-164497(3)

The Honorable William S. Moorhead
House of Representatives

The Honorable H. John Heinz, III
House of Representatives

Pursuant to your separate requests of February 11, 1976, and March 2, 1976, respectively, we reviewed the East Street Valley Expressway project, a section of proposed Interstate Highway 279 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and the history and current status of the project are set forth in the appendixes.

We made our review at the headquarters offices of the Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration, Washington, D.C.; at the Federal Highway Administration's division office in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; at the headquarters office of the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation in Harrisburg; and at the State's district office in Pittsburgh. We discussed the report contents with Federal and State officials and considered their views in preparing this report.

The report discusses the Expressway's history, which dates back 25 years to the first planning study, and covers the project's design plans, right-of-way activities, and environmental impact statement. We point out that it took from January 1971, the date of the public design hearings, to June 1975, for the city of Pittsburgh and the State of Pennsylvania to reach agreement on an acceptable design alternative--a six-lane expressway with the median strip reserved for potential use of either mass transit or two additional lanes.

Two areas which must be completed before construction can begin are the final Federal approval of the environmental impact statement and the clearing of the Expressway's right-of-way. However, we observed no areas that could expedite the project's completion based on its current status. It seems that the conditions that caused delay in the past are being resolved.

The State is awaiting Federal approval of the final environmental statement before completing the project's preliminary design and advancing to the final design stage. The environmental statement, which the State formally submitted to the Highway Administration in September 1975, is being reviewed by the Office of the Secretary, Department of Transportation. The Department expects to complete its review by the end of May 1976, clearing the way for the Highway Administration's release of the statement for comment to the Council on Environmental Quality and the public.

As of May 24, 1976, the State had acquired 58 percent of the properties in the Expressway's right-of-way, and had completed 71 percent of the necessary relocations, at a cost of about \$18.7 million. The State estimates that the Expressway's right-of-way will be cleared by July 1978, however, construction for a temporary road will start in January 1977. Construction for the entire East Street Valley project will take 5-1/2 years to complete, at a cost of about \$51 million. An official in the Executive Office, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, told us that the Expressway has high priority in the State and that the necessary finances will be available to complete the Expressway.

The current status of the other two major sections that comprise the proposed I-279, the lower North Side and suburban North Hills sections, are also discussed in the appendixes.



ACTING Comptroller General
of the United States

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ABBREVIATIONS

ICC	Interstate Commerce Commission
OST	Office of the Secretary of Transportation
Penn DOT	Pennsylvania Department of Transportation

SUMMARY OF HISTORY AND CURRENT
STATUS OF INTERSTATE 279 IN
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

INTRODUCTION

Interstate 279, when completed, will be a 17.6 mile-loop originating west of the city of Pittsburgh, Pa., at an interchange with I-79 near Carnegie, Pa. It will pass through Pittsburgh and connect I-79 to the north, near Franklin Park, Pa. (See app. II.) A 5.5-mile portion of I-279 already is open to traffic from I-79 west of Pittsburgh along the Penn Lincoln Parkway to the Pittsburgh central business district area at the junction of the Allegheny and Monogahela Rivers.

Most of the remaining 12.1-mile section of I-279 is yet to be built. This section will proceed north and east to an interchange with proposed I-579, serving as part of an inner-belt around the central business district and then proceed northward, serving as a spur between the innerbelt and I-79 north of Pittsburgh at Franklin Park. The Franklin Park interchange is the only completed segment within this section.

Within this proposed section is the controversial East Street Valley Expressway which is approximately 2.8 miles in length. It begins about three-quarters of a mile north of the Allegheny River and follows the valley, now occupied by East Street, to near the city line. The other two major parts of this section of I-279 include the lower North Side segment which would connect the Fort Duquesne Bridge to the East Street Valley Expressway, and the suburban North Hills segment which would connect the Expressway with the I-79 Franklin Park interchange.

The history of the three I-279 sections and their current status, including potential problems, are summarized below.

EAST STREET VALLEY EXPRESSWAY

Early history 1951 to 1969

The selection of a north-south corridor into Pittsburgh is based upon several planning studies which go back 25 years. From July 1951 to January 1952 the Pennsylvania Department

of Transportation 1/ (Penn DOT) conducted an origin-destination survey which provided basic traffic information for other studies in the 1950s. An April 1954 report prepared by Pittsburgh's regional and city planning groups concluded that a high density highway facility was necessary to serve the city's North Side and its suburbs.

From June 1958, when the Federal Highway Administration 2/ authorized preliminary design work for the East Street Valley Expressway, to 1963, both Penn DOT and the city of Pittsburgh studied corridor alignments. Basically these alignments consisted of the East Street Valley hillside and the valley floor alternatives.

In July 1963, a corridor public hearing was held for the East Street Valley portion of I-279. At that time Penn DOT supported the hillside alignment and the Pittsburgh Department of City Planning supported the valley floor alignment. As a result, additional design studies were undertaken which were completed in 1967, and State and city officials concurred with the valley floor corridor alignment. Afterwards, Penn DOT continued developing the design and right-of-way plans for this alignment.

Acquisition and relocation problems, 1970 to 1973

In January 1970 the Highway Administration authorized right-of-way acquisition of the East Street Valley floor properties which were required under the design alternatives being considered. The project became controversial when Penn DOT started right-of-way acquisition negotiations. The local valley citizens considered the property and relocation reimbursements insufficient to allow purchase of comparable replacement homes.

The early relocations from the area were covered by the 1968 Federal-Aid Highway Act relocation payment provisions (82 Stat. 815) which provided for State supplemental housing payments up to \$5,000 and rental supplements up to \$1,500. In January 1971, the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Land Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 (84 Stat. 1894) increased the amount of payments that the States could make. However,

1/Pennsylvania Department of Highways prior to July 1, 1970.

2/Bureau of Public Roads, Department of Commerce, prior to April 1, 1976.

the lower limits remained in effect in Pennsylvania until the State passed Pennsylvania Act 169 on December 29, 1971, which increased maximum payments on supplemental housing and rental supplements to \$15,000 and \$4,000, respectively, and made the legislation retroactive to the effective date of the Federal law.

The change in payment limits, as well as the retroactive nature of the revision, caused Penn DOT great difficulty in administering this project and the controversy over reimbursements continued. As a result, on February 9, 1972, the Governor of Pennsylvania placed a moratorium on all right-of-way acquisitions. The Governor removed the moratorium on April 8, 1973.

Preparation and approval of environmental impact statement, 1971 to 1976

Although the right-of-way controversy delayed progress on the project, work continued on the design and environmental impact statement. In January 1971, Penn DOT held a public hearing on a proposed preliminary design for the East Street Valley Expressway--an eight-lane Interstate facility without service roads. Penn DOT received comments concerning the reimbursement controversy and the need for service roads adjacent to and across the Expressway.

During the next year Penn DOT worked on revising the preliminary design in response to the comments and prepared an environmental statement for the project. On February 11, 1972, Penn DOT submitted a draft environmental statement, which included an alternative design for service roads, to the Highway Administration for review. Subsequently, on March 1, 1972, the Highway Administration cleared the draft statement for circulation to the public.

Penn DOT presented the revised design at a public hearing on June 4, 1972. Local valley residents again voiced opposition to the project. Although the project had been coordinated with the City of Pittsburgh, the Mayor of Pittsburgh withheld project approval stating that the project was not needed for the city's economic progress.

Between June 1972 and January 1974, Federal, State, and city officials sought compromise solutions for the controversial project. There was no further progress on the design until November 1973 when Penn DOT and city representatives

jointly reanalyzed the East Street corridor and developed a solution to the design controversy. On January 10, 1974, Penn DOT presented an alternative plan to the Highway Administration. The plan reduced the number of lanes from eight to five and made removal of the Saint Boniface Catholic Church unnecessary. The State previously acquired the Church in 1971 as part of the project's right-of-way.

Subsequently, on January 15, 1974, Penn DOT requested the Highway Administration's design approval for the alternative plan. Also, at that time Penn DOT provided copies of the final environmental impact statement. The Highway Administration, however, withheld design approval pending a determination on the need for additional public hearings and the finalization of the environmental statement.

The status of the Saint Boniface Church became questionable when the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh issued a news release on March 29, 1974, stating that it was not going to accept the State's proposal to reconvey the Church property to the Diocese. Penn DOT, however, did not formally offer the Church property to the Diocese until February 24, 1975. The Bishop of Pittsburgh officially declined Penn DOT's offer on May 27, 1975.

On July 23, 1974, the Highway Administration's Division Engineer gave Penn DOT extensive comments on the final environmental statement. The comments mainly dealt with the need to provide additional information concerning the effect of the five-lane alternative on the East Street Valley. The Highway Administration also stated that since final determinations concerning the retention and use of the Saint Boniface Church had not been made, alternative solutions to this problem should be discussed in the environmental statement.

Another issue about the Church was settled on May 28, 1975, when the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission ruled that the Church was not eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Subsequently, at a June 3, 1975, meeting, the Secretary of Penn DOT, the Mayor of Pittsburgh, and the Highway Administration's Division Engineer formulated a plan to proceed with the development of the Expressway. This plan called for a six-lane expressway with the median strip reserved for potential use of either mass transit or two additional lanes. The key to

adding the sixth lane was the Diocese's decision to phase out Saint Boniface Church, thereby providing a usable right-of-way within the limits of the compromise plan.

Although the State and city agreed on the recommended alternative design, the environmental impact statement still needed Federal approval before the project design could be advanced. Therefore, during the next 3 months, Penn DOT revised the final environmental impact statement to reflect the latest project status. On September 2, 1975, Penn DOT submitted the revised information to the Highway Administration's Division Engineer and requested that the revised final environmental statement be processed.

The Highway Administration, in cooperation with Penn DOT, made several revisions to the environmental statement and forwarded it for preliminary review to the Office of the Secretary of Transportation (OST) on October 29, 1975. In a November 22, 1975, memorandum the Office of Environmental Affairs, OST, stated that it was unable to concur in the proposed statement because

- it did not conform with OST's guidelines and was of overall poor quality,
- other sections within the proposed I-279 were not included, and
- air quality data conflicted with Federal standards.

The Highway Administration addressed these concerns in a February 18, 1976, memorandum to the Office of Environmental Affairs and requested it to reconsider the statement. The Highway Administration said that the cost of delay, resulting from rewriting the final statement in a new format, would far outweigh any achievable benefits, and that the functional intent of the three sections within the proposed I-279 and their stage of development when the National Environmental Policy Act (83 Stat. 852) was implemented, logically permitted the preparation of three separate environmental statements. In addition, the Highway Administration clarified the air quality data and reaffirmed that the Expressway would not violate Federal air quality standards. On March 2, 1976, the Highway Administration formally submitted the final environmental statement for OST's review and approval.

Right-of-way problems, 1975 to 1976

Right-of-way acquisition became an issue again in early 1975 when property owners on the East Street Valley slopes began requesting the State to proceed with the remaining acquisitions. The properties, however, were not in the acquisition plan previously authorized by the Highway Administration.

In June 1975, Federal, State and city officials agreed that the additional East Street properties should be acquired and Penn DOT submitted a formal acquisition plan to the Highway Administration in October 1975. Penn DOT did not acquire any of the new properties because of fiscal restraints within the State.

However, on April 1, 1976, Penn DOT requested financial assistance from the Highway Administration to facilitate acquisition of the East Street slope properties. On April 7, 1976, the Highway Administration informed Penn DOT that about \$3 million of right-of-way revolving funds (23 U.S.C. 108(c)) had been allocated to the State. On April 8, 1976, the Governor instructed Penn DOT to begin completing all appraisals and negotiate final settlements in the East Street Valley. Penn DOT's renewed activities, however, have caused the local valley citizens to again protest the project.

Current status of the East Street Valley Expressway

Penn DOT estimates that preliminary design plans incorporating the six-lane alternative will be completed and ready for submission to the Highway Administration in July 1976. As of May 24, 1976, Penn DOT has incurred \$.9 million in design costs with an estimated \$1.5 million to complete, bringing the total Expressway design costs to about \$2.4 million. Penn DOT estimates that the final design plans for the first of five segments within this section could be completed by January 1977, if the environmental statement receives Federal approval by July 1976. Design plans for the remaining segments would be completed over an 18-month period ending in June 1978. (See apps. III and V.)

As of May 21, 1976, the environmental statement was with OST for review and concurrence. The Department expects to complete its review by the end of May 1976. Upon Department concurrence, the Highway Administration expects to release the final environmental statement for comment to the Council on Environmental Quality and the public. After a 30-day waiting period, Penn DOT must obtain the Highway Administration's approval for the project's detailed design and construction plans.

As of May 24, 1976, Penn DOT had acquired 614 of the 1,065 land parcels and completed 1,059 of the 1,487 relocations required for right-of-way clearance at a cost of about \$18.7 million--\$15.9 million for property and \$2.8 million for relocations. The remaining 451 parcels and 428 relocations are primarily on the East Street slopes which were not included in the project's original right-of-way plan. Penn DOT estimates completion by July 1978 at a cost of about \$28.7 million. (See apps. III, IV and V.)

No construction has started on the project. Penn DOT estimates that construction should start on the first segment in January 1977; the entire East Street Valley section will take 5-1/2 years to construct at a cost of about \$51 million. An official in Penn DOT's Executive Office advised us that the Expressway has high priority in the State and the necessary finances to complete the Expressway will be available.

LOWER NORTH SIDE SECTION OF I-279

History and current status

The lower North Side section of I-279 when completed will connect the north end of the Fort Duquesne Bridge with the south end of the East Street Valley Expressway. The Highway Administration authorized work on the preliminary design in June 1958 and in August 1961 Penn DOT held a public hearing on the corridor alignment. The Highway Administration approved a sufficient number of design elements before January 1969 to constitute design approval for the project.

The design and location of this section of I-279 was developed in conjunction with the proposed I-579 and depended on the removal of the 11th Street Railroad Crossing (Fort Wayne Bridge) over the Allegheny River. The issue of removing the bridge, however, has created some controversy about the project.

The removal of the railroad bridge was part of a 1970 property settlement between Penn DOT and the Penn Central Railroad. The sale agreement was submitted to and approved by the U.S. District Court administering Penn Central's receivership. The city of Pittsburgh, however, appealed the sale before the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals and obtained an order for the U.S. District Court to reconsider its approval. In addition, Penn Central requested in February 1972 and received in May 1973 the Interstate Commerce Commission's (ICC) approval to abandon the mainline tracks and remove the bridge. However, in June 1973 the city of Pittsburgh and the Railroad Brotherhood filed exceptions to this approval. As of May 1976, the Penn DOT funds paid to Penn Central remain frozen by the court order and no further court or ICC decisions have occurred.

Furthermore, a July 30, 1973, settlement in a National Wildlife Federation v. Tiemann suit, required the Highway Administration to reassess all highway sections for which design had been approved prior to February 1, 1971, and no environmental statement had been processed. The lower North Side section of I-279 was in this category and the Highway Administration notified Penn DOT in February 1974 that an environmental statement was required. On January 13, 1975, Penn DOT retained a consultant to prepare the environmental statement. However, the unresolved controversy over the removal of the railroad bridge has delayed completion of the statement. This has prevented the completion of the necessary right-of-way acquisitions and relocations.

To help resolve the controversy Penn DOT authorized a feasibility study in January 1975 to retain the rail service across the river. On the basis of information developed in the study, Federal, State, city, and railroad officials met on May 3, 1976, and concurred with an alternative that would leave the railroad bridge in place, but remove rail service from the lower deck, and build a new railroad structure to overpass the Expressway. The new alternative places the I-579 and I-279 interchange in the same location as originally planned.

With the bridge controversy resolved, Penn DOT plans to submit the draft environmental statement to the Highway Administration for approval in July 1976. Before completing the environmental statement however, Penn DOT must determine whether Saint Mary's Catholic Church is eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. An affirmative determination would cause further project delay.

Penn DOT will not complete the project's final design plans and the remaining right-of-way acquisitions and relocations until Federal approval of the environmental statement is obtained. Penn DOT estimates that if Federal approval is obtained by December 1976, the final design for the lower North Side will be completed by December 1977. As of May 24, 1976, Penn DOT has incurred \$4.2 million in design costs and estimates that an additional \$1 million in design work remains to be done, bringing the total section design cost to about \$5.2 million.

As of May 24, 1976, Penn DOT had acquired 507 of the 703 parcels and completed 1,140 of the 1,565 relocations required for right-of-way clearance at a cost of about \$21.2 million--\$19.3 million for property and \$1.9 million for relocations. However, except for hardship cases, Penn DOT will not acquire further right-of-way property or relocate residents until the environmental statement is approved by the Highway Administration. Penn DOT estimates that the remaining 196 right-of-way acquisitions and 425 relocations will be completed by July 1980 at a cost of about \$8.2 million. (See apps. III, IV and V.)

Highway Administration officials stated that the remaining relocations will be difficult and time consuming because most of the remaining residents are low-income tenants who depend on public assistance or social security and the needed replacement housing is limited.

Penn DOT estimates that construction for this section will cost \$98.5 million and should start on one segment in January 1977, with all segments completed by July 1983. (See apps. III and V.)

SUBURBAN NORTH HILLS SECTION OF I-279

This section, when completed, will connect the north end of the East Street Valley Expressway with I-79 near Franklin Park. The Highway Administration authorized preliminary design plans in 1957. This section is split into three segments and Penn DOT completed final design plans for one of the segments in May 1972. The plans, however, need to be updated to meet current safety standards.

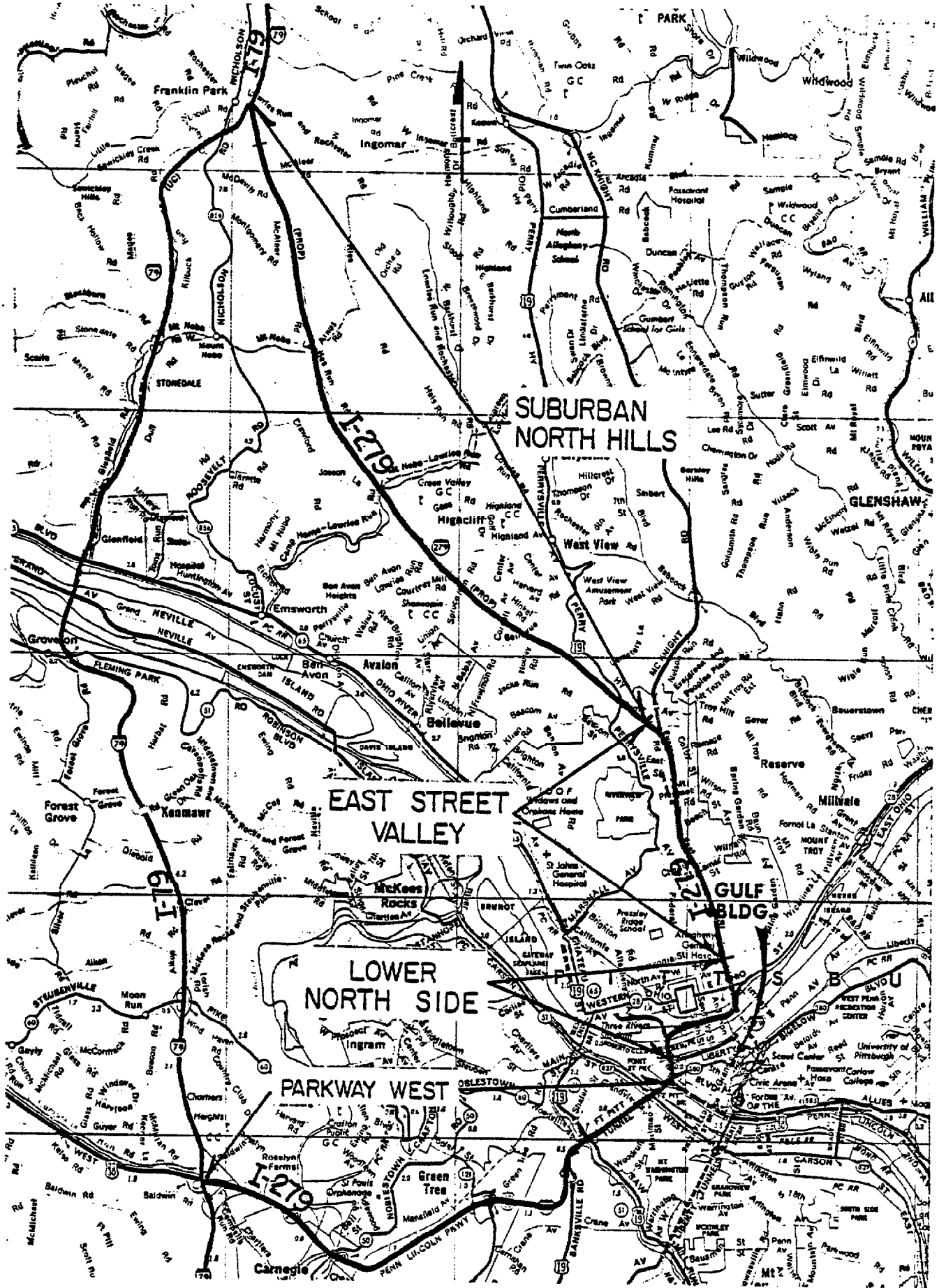
Final design was underway on the other two segments when Penn DOT recognized severe soil problems in the proposed alignment and possible problems resulting from the use of recreation land. Therefore, in February 1972 Penn DOT proposed an alignment change to eliminate the need for the recreation land and to reduce the soil problem. The Highway Administration approved the alignment revisions in May 1972, pending a public hearing. Subsequently in November 1974, the Highway Administration authorized, and Penn DOT retained, a consultant to prepare an environmental statement.

Penn DOT officials stated that advertisements would be placed in September 1976 for an October 1976 public hearing on the proposed project design. A draft statement is expected to be completed for the October public hearing. Penn DOT, however, does not anticipate Federal approval of the final statement before June 1977.

Penn DOT estimates that if the environmental statement is approved by June 1977, the section's final design plans will be completed in December 1980. As of May 1976, Penn DOT had incurred \$1.3 million in design costs with an estimated \$3.5 million to complete, bringing the suburban North Hills section design costs to about \$4.8 million.

The Highway Administration approved Penn DOT's right-of-way plan for one segment in the suburban North Hills section of I-279 on February 29, 1968. Right-of-way acquisition and relocation for this segment is complete. As of May 1976, Penn DOT had incurred about \$6.6 million in right-of-way costs--\$6 million for property and \$641,000 for relocations. Penn DOT does not plan to start right-of-way acquisition in the other two segments until after the environmental statement is approved. Penn DOT estimates that right-of-way clearance for these segments will be completed in December 1981. (See apps. III, IV and V.)

Penn DOT estimates that future construction costs for the suburban North Hills section will be \$81.4 million. Penn DOT also estimates that construction will begin in January 1978, with completion about December 1985, thereby, opening the entire length of I-279. The Franklin Park interchange is the only constructed segment in the suburban North Hills section of I-279. Construction and right-of-way costs totaled about \$5.2 million. (See apps. III and IV.)



PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF
TRANSPORTATION'S COST
SCHEDULE FOR PROPOSED I-279
AS OF MAY 24, 1976

<u>Section</u>	<u>Environmental impact statement</u>	<u>Design (millions)</u>	<u>Right- of- way</u>	<u>Construction</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Lower North Side</u>					
Expended	\$.19	\$ 4.20	\$21.18	\$ -	\$ 25.57
Est. in future	-	1.00	8.15	98.50	107.65
Est. total	<u>.19</u>	<u>5.20</u>	<u>29.33</u>	<u>98.50</u>	<u>133.22</u>
<u>East Street Valley</u>					
Expended	a/ -	.90	18.70	-	19.60
Est. in future	-	1.50	10.00	51.00	62.50
Est. total	<u>-</u>	<u>2.40</u>	<u>28.70</u>	<u>51.00</u>	<u>82.10</u>
<u>Suburban North Hills</u>					
Expended	.18	1.30	b/ 9.33	c/ 2.50	13.31
Est. in future	-	3.50	10.29	81.40	95.19
Est. total	<u>.18</u>	<u>4.80</u>	<u>19.62</u>	<u>83.90</u>	<u>108.50</u>
<u>Proposed I-279 Totals</u>					
Expended	.37	6.40	49.21	2.50	58.48
Est. in future	-	6.00	28.44	230.90	265.34
Total	<u>\$.37</u>	<u>\$12.40</u>	<u>\$77.65</u>	<u>\$233.40</u>	<u>\$323.82</u>

a/Cost data is not available because environmental impact statement was prepared by Penn DOT while the lower North Side and suburban North Hills statements are being prepared by contractors.

b/Includes \$2.7 million in right-of-way costs for Franklin Park interchange.

c/Represents construction costs for Franklin Park interchange.

PROPOSED I-279
PROPERTY ACQUISITION AND RELOCATION DATA
AS OF MAY 24, 1976

	<u>Total properties in right of way</u>	<u>Acquired</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>To be acquired</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Lower North Side	703	507	72	196	28
East Street Valley					
1970 authoriza- tion	672	614		58	
1975 increase	347	-		347	
No authoriza- tion	<u>46</u>	<u>-</u>	614	<u>46</u>	42
Suburban North Hills	<u>559</u>	<u>399</u>	71	<u>160</u>	29
TOTAL	<u>2327</u>	<u>1520</u>	65	<u>807</u>	35

	<u>Total relocations required</u>	<u>Relocated</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>To be relocated</u>	<u>Percent</u>
LOWER NORTH SIDE	1565	1140	73	425	27
East Street Valley					
1970 authoriza- tion	1137	1059		78	
1975 increase	300	-		300	
No authoriza- tion	<u>50</u>	<u>-</u>	1059	<u>50</u>	29
Suburban North Hills	<u>442</u>	<u>339</u>	77	<u>103</u>	23
TOTAL	<u>3494</u>	<u>2538</u>	73	<u>956</u>	27

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION'S
ESTIMATED TIME FRAMES FOR PROPOSED I-279

Sections	Activity	Year												
		1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	
Lower North Side	Environmental Impact Statement													
	a/ Design													
	b/ Right of way Construction													
East Street Valley	Environmental Impact Statement													
	a/ Design													
	c/ Right of way Construction													
Suburban North Hills	Environmental Impact Statement													
	d/ Design													
	e/ Right of way Construction													

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- a/ Preliminary design work authorized in June 1958.
- b/ Right-of-way total take plan authorized in March 1966.
- c/ Right-of-way total take plan authorized in January, 1970.
- d/ Preliminary design work authorized in 1957.
- e/ Right-of-way authorization approved for one of three segments of this section. No authorizations have been given for the other two sections.