

# “Must everything give way to the automobile?” The Ancaster and Dundas Expressway Disputes in Ontario, 1967-1968

Danielle Robinson

Volume 100, Number 1, Spring 2008

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065727ar>  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065727ar>

[See table of contents](#)

## Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

## ISSN

0030-2953 (print)  
2371-4654 (digital)

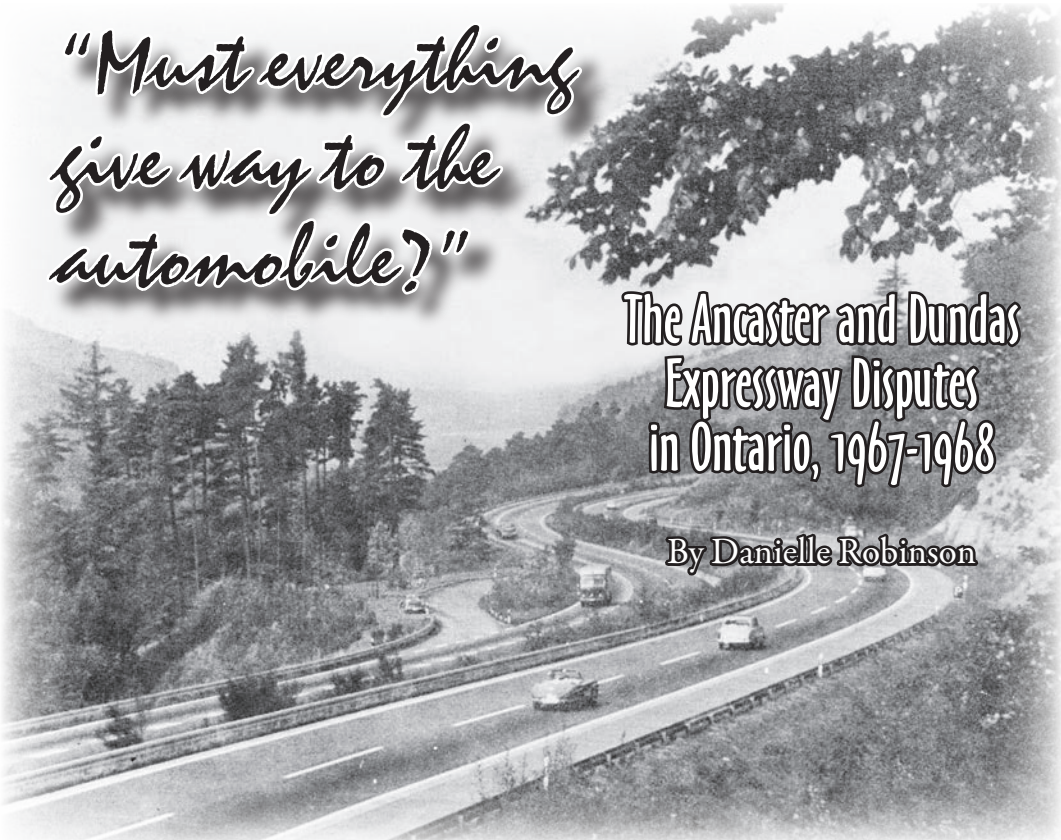
[Explore this journal](#)

## Cite this article

Robinson, D. (2008). “Must everything give way to the automobile?": The Ancaster and Dundas Expressway Disputes in Ontario, 1967-1968. *Ontario History*, 100(1), 57–79. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065727ar>

## Article abstract

In Ontario in the late 1960s, the provincial government’s plan to build an expressway through the Ancaster-Dundas region sparked widespread protests from local residents. Objectors who vehemently opposed the proposals before they were officially tabled protested only more vigorously as the controversy wore on, until the plans were ultimately shelved indefinitely. The conflict between government officials and residents over the ways in which postwar planning and development would affect the region offers valuable insights into the public and political mood of the late 1960s in southern Ontario. As government officials sought to support sprawling development and increased demand on transportation networks, citizens mobilized to defend not only the rapidly dwindling natural environment, but also their own communities. The case of the expressway proposals involves emblematic themes dominating Canadian post World War II urban and suburban history, exemplified by one protestor’s simple and direct plea – “Must everything give way to the automobile?”



*"Must everything  
give way to the  
automobile?"*

## The Ancaster and Dundas Expressway Disputes in Ontario, 1967-1968

By Danielle Robinson

In the late 1960s a controversy that has since largely disappeared from the historical record dominated local politics in the two southwestern Ontario towns of Ancaster and Dundas. The fervour spread from these areas to municipal and metropolitan political bodies, and even to provincial level politicians in Toronto. The source of discontent was the provincial government's plan to build an expressway through the Ancaster-Dundas region.<sup>1</sup> As government officials

sought to support sprawling development and increased demand on transportation networks, citizens mobilized to defend not only the rapidly dwindling natural environment, but also their own communities. Local residents vehemently opposed the proposals even before they were officially tabled, protesting only more vigorously as the controversy wore on until the plans were ultimately shelved indefinitely. The conflict between government officials and residents

---

<sup>1</sup> I refer throughout the paper to the proposals as affecting either Ancaster-Dundas or Ancaster and Dundas for two reasons. First, the original plan as well as the revised version would have affected both areas. Second, and perhaps more importantly, government officials and protestors often spoke in broad terms. The great number of routes protestors suggested as alternatives, as well as the number of alternatives officials claimed to have investigated means it was often difficult to determine from the documents which routes were being addressed. What is important is that there was an original route, a revised version, and a multiplicity of partial or full alternatives.

over the ways in which postwar planning and development would affect the region offers valuable insights into the public and political mood of the late 1960s in southern Ontario.

When an anti-expressway protestor asked in 1967 – “Must everything give way to the automobile?”<sup>2</sup> – the very fact that such a question was even posed indicated how dramatically and relatively quickly attitudes were changing. Following World War II urban growth and suburban sprawl dominated city-planning schemes. This expansion stressed existing roads which were often unable to service the ever-increasing volume of traffic, and politicians and planners responded with plans to expand and improve transportation networks – plans which typically relied on expressways as key arteries to alleviate congestion. Such autocentric<sup>3</sup> development was compatible with dominant postwar notions of progress that upheld

the automobile as a symbol of modernity, and thus applauded planning schemes that reinforced the primacy of the automobile. Increasingly during these years, however, more people were questioning this purportedly progressive vision. These growing concerns about the impact of autocentric development on the natural and built environments as well as the communities that lived there resulted in the climax of anti-expressway disputes in the late 1960s.

The existing literature on American anti-expressway protests has established these controversies as important events in many urban centres including San Francisco, Miami, New Orleans, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C.<sup>4</sup> Although there is hardly any literature on Canadian expressway disputes, the one academic work that exists brings to light similar fights in Vancouver, Edmonton, and Toronto.<sup>5</sup> What the existing works in both countries neglect, however, is the simultaneous ex-

<sup>2</sup> Archives of Ontario [hereinafter cited as AO], RG 15-1-0-216, Ancaster property owner to Ray Connell, 6 April 1967. The files from the Archives of Ontario used in this paper are subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. In accordance with these regulations, I have written citations to avoid disclosing sensitive personal information. As a rule, if individuals wrote letters in a public capacity (government officials, or representatives of larger organizations), I have included the names. I have not disclosed authors of letters written in a personal capacity. In these cases, I have identified protestors by where they lived, and if possible, their occupation. In the few cases where letters were co-signed by married couples, I have simply used the plural form of resident. In one case this refers to a whole family who signed their protest letter together.

<sup>3</sup> I use the term autocentric to refer to growth and development patterns that simultaneously encouraged and reinforced the primacy of the automobile above all other forms of transportation.

<sup>4</sup> The literature here is plentiful – examples include: Raymond A. Mohl, “Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities,” *Journal of Urban History* 30:5 (2004), 674-706; Richard O. Baumbach Jr. and William E. Borah, *The Second Battle of New Orleans: A History of the Vieux Carré Riverfront Expressway Controversy* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1981); Michael P. McCarthy, “Baltimore’s Highway Wars Revisited,” *Maryland Historical Magazine* 93:2 (1998), 136-57; Zachary M. Schrag, “The Freeway Fight in Washington, D.C.: The Three Sisters Bridge in Three Administrations,” *Journal of Urban History* 30:5 (2004), 648-73.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Leo, *The Politics of Urban Development: Canadian Urban Expressway Disputes* (Toronto: Institute of Public Administration of Canada, 1977).

istence of suburban expressway disputes. Urban expressways were typically designed to facilitate the flow of suburban traffic to urban centres, while suburban expressways were routed almost entirely through suburban regions to accommodate traffic flow from one urban centre to another. Consequently, although suburban expressway disputes were born out of the same context as their urban counterparts, the different locations produced important variations that changed the nature of the debates. Unfortunately, since the existing Canadian and American literature is focused on urban cases, the Ancaster-Dundas debates cannot be compared to other suburban controversies. Accordingly, a study of this case and the peculiarities produced by its suburban nature will ideally serve as a point of departure for future studies so that scholars may gain a better understanding of the similarities and differences between urban and suburban development in the postwar period.

Since the advent and popularization of the automobile in the early twentieth century, cars were especially popular in Ontario. Ontarians affection for automobiles was unique in Canada, reflecting the popularity of the

## Abstract

*In Ontario in the late 1960s, the provincial government's plan to build an expressway through the Ancaster-Dundas region sparked widespread protests from local residents. Objectors who vehemently opposed the proposals before they were officially tabled protested only more vigorously as the controversy wore on, until the plans were ultimately shelved indefinitely. The conflict between government officials and residents over the ways in which postwar planning and development would affect the region offers valuable insights into the public and political mood of the late 1960s in southern Ontario. As government officials sought to support sprawling development and increased demand on transportation networks, citizens mobilized to defend not only the rapidly dwindling natural environment, but also their own communities. The case of the expressway proposals involves emblematic themes dominating Canadian post World War II urban and suburban history, exemplified by one protestor's simple and direct plea – "Must everything give way to the automobile?"*

**Résumé:** *À la fin des années 1960, l'initiative du gouvernement de l'Ontario de construire une voie express dans la région d'Ancaster-Dundas, provoqua de vives protestations de la part des résidents de l'endroit. Ces protestations vigoureuses ne firent que s'amplifier à la suite du dépôt du projet, et finalement celui-ci fut enterré. Dans les années d'après-guerre, deux conceptions opposées de la manière dont devait être organisé le développement des régions, celle du gouvernement et celle des résidents, se sont affrontées; et l'étude de ce conflit nous offre des aperçus intéressants sur le climat politique et l'état de l'opinion publique à la fin des années 1960 dans le sud-est de l'Ontario. Alors que le gouvernement s'employait à favoriser les développements urbains et à répondre à la demande accrue de réseaux routiers afin de faciliter les transports, les citoyens se mobilisaient pour défendre non seulement la rapide détérioration de l'environnement mais aussi leurs propres communautés. Ce cas du projet de voie express dans la région d'Ancaster-Dundas, est emblématique des différents thèmes qui ont dominé l'histoire du développement urbain et suburbain après la deuxième guerre mondiale au Canada, des thèmes qu'exemplifie l'adjuration, simple et directe, d'un des opposants : « Est-ce que tout doit céder devant l'automobile ? »*

automobile in America more than the existence of any uniform domestic national sentiment.<sup>6</sup> In Hamilton specifically, the number of noncommercial passenger ve-

<sup>6</sup>Peter A. Baskerville, *Ontario: Image, Identity and Power* (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2002), 186.

hicles registered skyrocketed from 4,948 in 1919, to 96,706 in 1968.<sup>7</sup> Massive highway construction projects dominated the provincial civic works agenda during this period, as 40,000 kilometers of roads and highways were built between 1950 and 1975; a large portion of which ran between Toronto and Hamilton.<sup>8</sup> Traditionally, the most pressing concern in accommodating traffic in the Hamilton area was navigating the escarpment that bisects the region.<sup>9</sup> The urban core lay below, while the predominantly suburban communities of Ancaster and Dundas straddled the escarpment. Expanded transportation networks facilitated the migration of former city residents to outlying areas, and suburban sprawl quickly grew to dominate the region's development.

Suburban expansion in the Hamilton region was compounded by the annexation of numerous outlying regions

in the postwar period: between 1949 and 1957 the Hamilton region more than doubled in size.<sup>10</sup> The territorial acquisitions contributed to the pressure to create new transportation networks that would link the outlying areas of the region. Additionally, while the population in the City of Hamilton increased thirty-five percent between 1951 and 1966, the population in the neighbouring municipalities increased 150 percent during the same period.<sup>11</sup> The population of the Greater Hamilton Region also experienced remarkable growth, skyrocketing from 83,347 in 1901 to 449,116 in 1966.<sup>12</sup> Between 1951 and 1961 alone, the population jumped from 280,293 to 395,189.<sup>13</sup> The demand to maintain and facilitate the mobility of this burgeoning populace further supported expressway schemes. These circumstances meant the need for expressways was rarely debated

<sup>7</sup> John C. Weaver, "Table XIII: Noncommercial Passenger-vehicle Registration Statistics for Hamilton, 1919-1968," in *Hamilton: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: J. Lorimer and National Museum of Man, National Museums of Canada, 1982), 201.

<sup>8</sup> Baskerville, *Ontario*, 208.

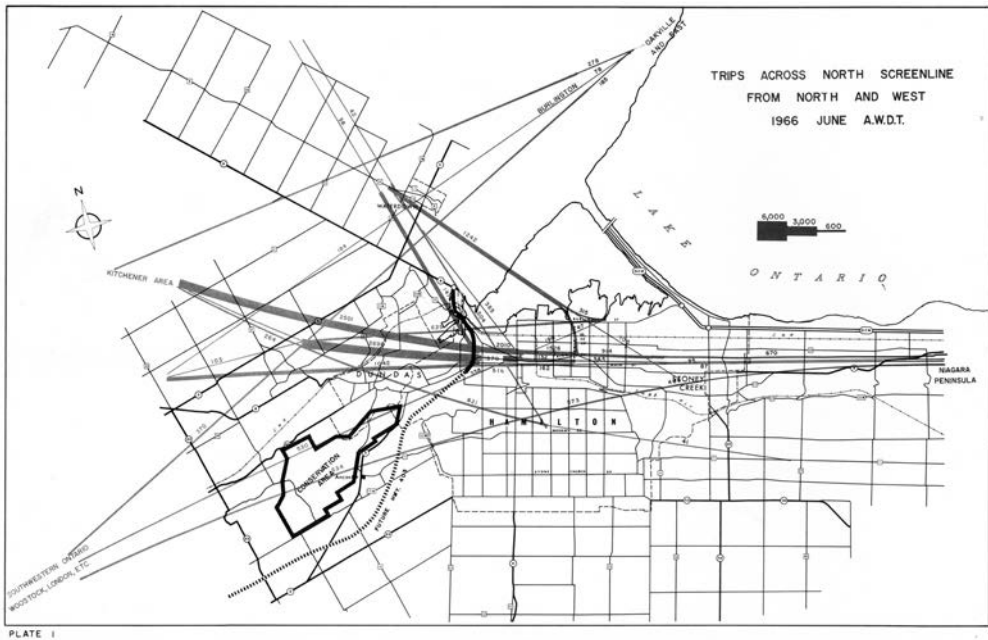
<sup>9</sup> The importance of the impact of the escarpment on city and regional development has generally been recognized in the many local histories of the city written by amateur historians, and collaboratively by local history groups. Refer, for example, to: Marjorie Freeman Campbell, *A Mountain and a City: The Story of Hamilton* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1966); Lois C. Evans, *Hamilton: The Story of a City* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1970); Bill Freeman, *Hamilton: A People's History* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Ltd. Publishers, 2001); Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society, *Mountain Memories: A Pictorial History of the Hamilton Mountain* (Hamilton, Ontario: Seldon Griffin Graphics Inc., 2000); C.M. Johnston, *The Head of the Lake: A History of Wentworth County* (Hamilton, Ontario: Robert Duncan & Company, 1958); Head-of-the-Lake Historical Society, *Around and About Hamilton 1785-1985* (Hamilton, Ontario: W.L. Griffin Printing Limited, 1985); Head-of-the-Lake Historical Society, *Hamilton: Panorama of Our Past: A Pictorial History of the Hamilton-Wentworth Region* (Hamilton, Ontario: D.G. Seldon Printing Limited, 1994); Brian Henley, *1846 Hamilton: From a frontier town to the Ambitious City* (Burlington, Ontario: North Shore Publishing Inc., 1995).

<sup>10</sup> Weaver, *Hamilton*, 186.

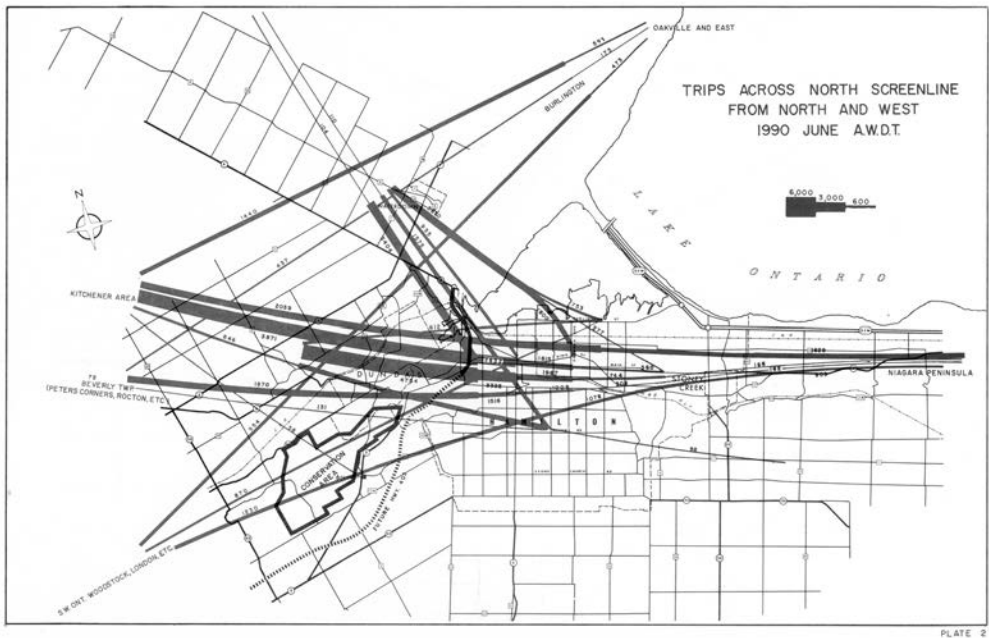
<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Weaver, "Table XIV: Population of the Greater Hamilton Area and of its Constituent Municipalities, 1901-1966," 201.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*



Maps demonstrating the anticipated increase in traffic in the Greater Hamilton Region from 1966 to 1990. Hamilton Public Library Special Collections: Local History Collection, Location Study (Dundas Valley), proposed route from Peters Corners to Highway 403 (Mohawk Road) [Report], (Department of Highways Ontario, Planning Branch, Functional Planning Division, 1968).



in the 1950s and early 1960s.

The late 1960s and early 1970s were widely recognized as a period of crisis among planners, both in terms of urban expansion and population growth.<sup>14</sup> The need to expand highway networks across the Hamilton-Wentworth region dominated political and public debates alike. A 1965 report, for example, from the city-appointed Road Needs Study Co-ordination Committee called for 187 miles of roads to be constructed in the County of Wentworth, 159 of which would fall within the Hamilton-Wentworth region.<sup>15</sup> Though extensive, the construction plans did not involve creating a completely new set of roadways, but rather repairing and expanding existing well-traveled regional routes.

The rise of the automobile as an undisputable force in urban, suburban, and rural growth attracted disdain from commentators who argued in retrospect, “The words ‘car’ and ‘community’ are becoming increasingly antithetical in

the context of civilization, progress and prosperity in Hamilton.”<sup>16</sup> Indeed, commentators increasingly criticized planning and development schools focused on the automobile.<sup>17</sup> In his writings on the impact of the car on American urban and suburban development, for example, James J. Flink points to three key features of the modern landscape as evidence of the car’s impact – highways, driveways, and parking lots.<sup>18</sup> The automobile was undoubtedly a central force behind post-war urban and suburban planning, development, and renewal schemes, but too often contemporaries and historians with the benefit of hindsight demonize its influence. While efforts to accommodate cars dominated numerous postwar planning schemes, we must remember it was humans that prioritized the automobile in that way. Jane Jacobs makes this point precisely in her landmark work, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Jacobs argues automobiles were not the root cause of all city planning problems,

---

<sup>14</sup> Ira M. Robinson, “Misconceptions About Present and Future Canadian Urbanization: Conventional Wisdom,” ch. 1 in *Canadian Urban Growth Trends: Implications for a National Settlement Policy* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1981), 3-7.

<sup>15</sup> Hamilton Public Library Special Collections: Local History Collection. *County of Wentworth Road Needs Study* [Report] (Road Needs Study Co-ordinating Committee), 1965: 1-5.

<sup>16</sup> Bill Manson, “The Trails, Roads, and Highways: Hamilton’s Road Network,” Ch. 3 in *Getting Around Hamilton: A brief history of transportation in and around Hamilton* (Burlington, Ontario: North Shore Publishing Inc., 2002), 47. For another similarly disdainful account of the impact of the automobile on the development of the Hamilton region, refer to Jerry Johansen, *Concession Street: In Context: A Chronological History of the Concession Street District: Hamilton, Ontario* (Hamilton, Ontario: D.G. Seldon Printing Limited, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> Margaret T. Rockwell includes some discussion of these recurring debates in her M.A. thesis, *Modernist Destruction of the Ambitious City: Hamilton, Ontario’s Experience with Urban Renewal* (M.A. Thesis, McMaster University, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> James J. Flink, *America Adopts the Automobile, 1895-1910* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1970), 2-4. Refer also the Flink’s *The Car Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1975).

but rather their predominance in shaping urban landscapes was a product of unimaginative and uninspired city planning.<sup>19</sup> She says urban designs increasingly revolved around the automobile because it provided a convenient and simplistic organizing principle, and was easier for planners to work with than attempting to address the diverse and complex needs of cities.<sup>20</sup>

Jacobs' argument is an important one because it urges historians to think innovatively in considering the role of the automobile in postwar development schemes. The automobile did not exert a mythical or sinister force over planning. Instead, it was the beneficiary of conscious and deliberate choices about urban and suburban planning that positioned the predominance of autos and the proliferation of suburban communities as mutually reinforcing phenomena. Humans planned these regions, and thus humans chose the degree to which cars would be accommodated. Urban and suburban planning, development, and renewal were not by any means immune to the changing tides of cultural influences. While networks were increasingly designed to accommodate motorized vehicles over other forms of transporta-

tion, this move was not a forgone conclusion of the automobile age, but rather the product of deliberate and conscious decisions about the direction of postwar planning.

Historical geographer Richard Harris explains the connection between cars and suburban sprawl, arguing cars facilitated suburban development, shuffling people between their urban jobs and suburban homes. This connection was also significant with respect to the socio-economic profile of suburban communities. As Harris notes in his study, *Creeping Conformity: How Canada Became Suburban, 1900-1960*, suburbs were accessible only to higher income earners. Not only were suburban lots and homes expensive to purchase, but they required auto transportation to reach from the cities, thus implying an additional measure of wealth.<sup>21</sup> The expense associated with living in the suburbs acted as an unofficial filter, facilitating the development of a relatively socio-economically homogeneous citizenry.<sup>22</sup> This was the case in much of Ancaster and Dundas, and residents often drew attention to the region's high property values in their letters. As Harris notes, "Suburbanites are thought to value privacy and domesticity, to have

---

<sup>19</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Toronto: Random House Inc., 1993; first edition 1961), 10.

<sup>20</sup> Jacobs, *Death and Life*, 10-11.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Harris, *Creeping Conformity: How Canada Became Suburban, 1900-1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 6-7. Adam Rome's excellent exploration of suburban sprawl, urban planning, and environmental activism post World War II compliments and confirms many of the themes Harris touches on in the Canadian context. Refer to Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>22</sup> Harris, *Creeping Conformity*, 10.



turned their backs on the city and, by implication, those who are less fortunate than themselves.”<sup>23</sup> In the case of the expressway controversy, it is worth considering how suburbanites’ socio-economic status affected the way in which they framed their objections, as well as how their complaints were received by government officials.

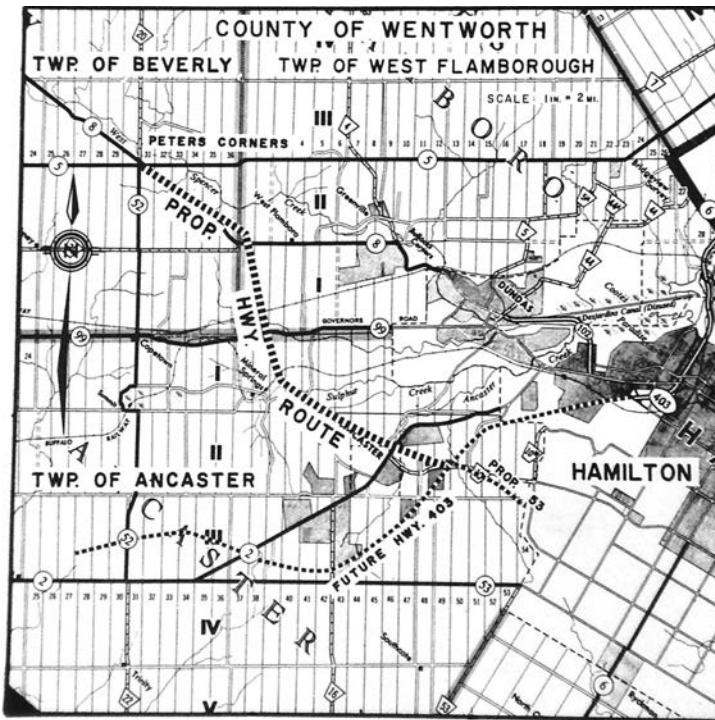
What the Ancaster-Dundas case has in common with its more extensively studied urban counterparts is the general context of the debates: both began with planners and politicians who encouraged postwar growth with autocentric planning, and ended with environmentally concerned citizens who demanded a re-evaluation of the assumptions behind autocentric policies. There were, however, three important differences distinguishing this suburban case from other urban clashes. First, urban expressway schemes threatened densely populated and usually fully developed areas. In the suburbs, housing density was much lower and commercial and industrial development was less advanced. Accordingly, proposed roadways of comparable size and scope to urban arteries threatened less residents and businesses with expropriation, and affected an overall lower number of property holders. The resultantly smaller scale of the Ancaster-Dundas dispute may account for its prior omission from the region’s history. A second difference was the way in which protestors expressed their environmental concerns. In urban

centres, protestors were concerned with the urban environment as a whole, including built and natural environments.<sup>24</sup> While residents in Ancaster and Dundas certainly expressed concerns about the overall impact of the planned road on their communities, they spoke at greater length about the potential impact on the region’s natural environment. The difference here is again a product of the suburban locale – quite simply, the towns of Ancaster and Dundas were both situated among vast natural areas – parks, conservation regions, and extensive tracts of undeveloped land. Any expressway running through the towns would, just by virtue of these features, have to traverse more natural spaces than an urban route. A final feature of this case that distinguished it from urban disputes were protestors’ repeated calls for the preservation of the small town atmospheres of both areas, an appeal that was obviously unavailable to protestors in major urban centres.

The Ancaster-Dundas expressway scheme was designed to provide a direct connection between northern and eastern highway networks, to accommodate heavy traffic and to allow for future increases. The controversy began in the spring of 1967 when the plans were introduced by the Provincial Department of Highways. Almost immediately letters of protest poured into government offices. Both of the two principle government officials involved – Ray Connell, the Provincial Minister of Public Works, and

<sup>23</sup> Harris, *Creeping Conformity*, 7.

<sup>24</sup> While there is a whole other set of debates that accompany the conceptual division of the environment into “built” and “natural,” those discussions are beyond the scope of this paper.



*Map of the original proposed expressway route. Hamilton Public Library Special Collections: Local History Collection, Location Study.*

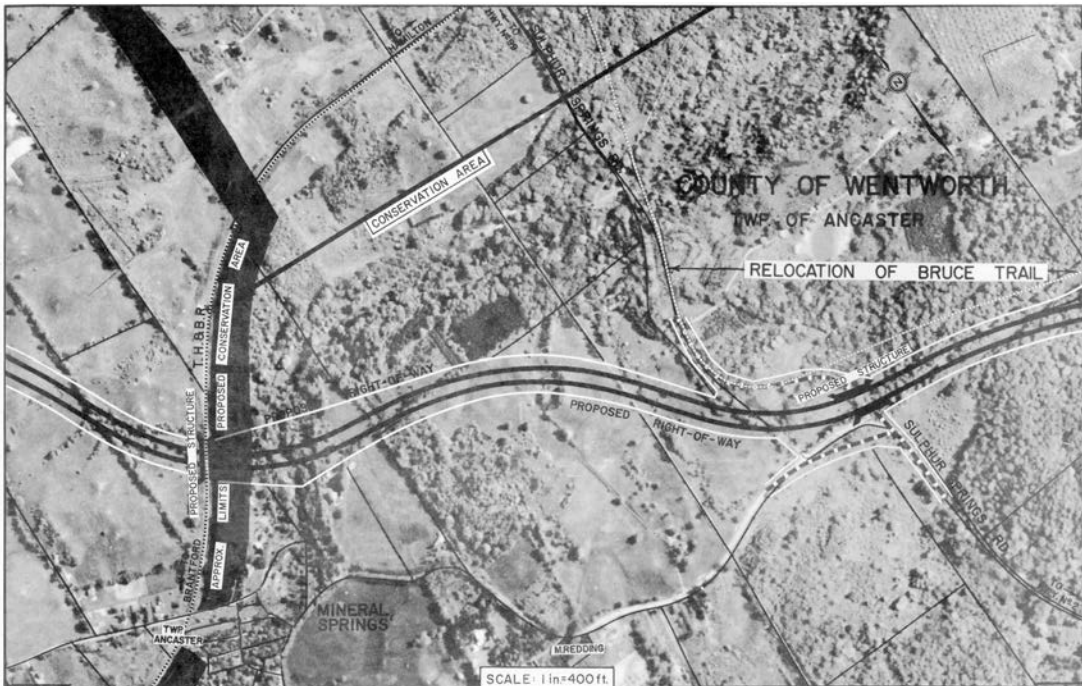
urban expansion, and the rising number of automobiles did not cease or decline, but in the face of persistent opposition, the plans were shelved indefinitely. Ultimately, none of the proposed routes were constructed.<sup>25</sup>

Government conflict and citizen protest were the two key factors that paralyzed

George E. Gomme, the Provincial Minister of Highways – were inundated with letters. While the public outcry spurred the consideration of multiple potential routes in the spring of 1967, alternative plans were greeted with similar protests. Several months of on going conflict eventually brought plans to a standstill, as the prospect of successfully constructing an expressway became increasingly unlikely. The need for expanded transportation systems due to traffic congestion, sub-

the expressway plans. Provincial politicians orchestrated the Ancaster-Dundas proposals, but Ray Connell, the Provincial Minister of Public Works harboured mixed allegiances as he was originally from Ancaster and owned a farm there. Consequently, Connell sympathized with and defended the interests of local residents. As an advocate of local interests positioned directly among provincial officials, Connell's presence made it impossible for provincial authorities to

<sup>25</sup> As late as December 1968, Department of Highways officials were advising protestors that alternative routes were still under consideration (Refer to AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, George E. Gomme to Hamilton resident, 12 December 1968). While the issue remained unresolved, the need for improved and expanded highway networks in the Hamilton region was stated as just as pressing a need for the region in a 1977 report as in those preceding the Dundas Expressway controversy. Refer to Hamilton Public Library Special Collections: Local History Collection, *Hamilton: General Background Information* [Report], (Planning and Development Department of the Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth, 1977), 33-34.



*Aerial photograph with a portion of the proposed expressway marked. Hamilton Public Library Special Collections: Local History Collection, Location Study.*

avoid or ignore local opposition.

Throughout the controversy, Connell opposed the expressway plans “on behalf of those Constituents who have objected so vigorously.”<sup>26</sup> Almost immediately after Department of Highways officials’ announced the original expressway plan for Ancaster-Dundas, Connell wrote Gomme to formally request alternate routes be investigated, due both to early concerns voiced by his constituents as well as his own misgivings about the plan. Connell outlined his early objections on three counts – the separation of

Ancaster Heights from the remainder of the town; the irreversible destruction of “beautiful and extensive” Ancaster properties; and the bisection of the Dundas Valley Conservation Area.<sup>27</sup> In a cooperative tone uncharacteristic of his later correspondences, Gomme assured Connell alternative routes would be fully investigated, citing the “number and violence of the comments against this plan.”<sup>28</sup>

The lack of communication between Gomme and Connell was evident, however, when Connell was surprised by a protestor’s report that preliminary sur-

<sup>26</sup> AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Ray Connell to Ancaster resident, 6 October 1967. Many writers thanked Connell for defending local interests, even while they protested the expressway schemes. Refer to, for example, AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Ancaster resident to Ray Connell, 4 April 1966 [sic].

<sup>27</sup> AO, RG 15-1-0-216 Ray Connell to George E. Gomme, 22 March 1967.

<sup>28</sup> AO, RG 15-1-0-216 George E. Gomme to Ray Connell, 22 March 1967.

veys of the original route were already underway in April 1967, shortly after the Department of Highways publicly announced alternatives to the original route were under investigation.<sup>29</sup> Connell told his constituents Gomme had assured him he would not move ahead with the original plans without considering objections.<sup>30</sup> Opponents of the scheme, however, argued that Gomme's subsequent actions were not consistent with his pledge to Connell. Almost immediately after the first scheme was introduced in March 1967, protestors spoke out not only against the plan itself, but also the way in which officials handled it. Common complaints included the lack of notice given prior to a few public information sessions that were held, and the unwillingness of provincial officials to share full details of the plans at various stages.<sup>31</sup> By December 1967, Gomme's frustration with the stalled plans was beginning to show as he referred to expressway protestors in a much-quoted interview as "bird watchers or something."<sup>32</sup> Only a few weeks later, Ontario Premier

John P. Robarts recognized the explosive nature of the situation and assured locals no final decisions would be made until residents had the chance to fully air their concerns.<sup>33</sup>

When a revised scheme was introduced in March 1968, Connell privately expressed his approval to Gomme as he felt the revisions addressed earlier concerns.<sup>34</sup> Protestors, however, would not be so easily appeased, as they greeted the arrangement with renewed charges that Gomme and his supporters were "bulldozing" adversaries. They argued these politicians were unresponsive to local opposition, and had failed to address the concerns and questions objectors had over the original scheme.<sup>35</sup> The similarities between the original and revised schemes lent weight to the accusation, although Gomme maintained alternative routes had been investigated, but deemed impractical due to cost and location. A confidential Department of Highways memo confirmed that officials did indeed have the cavalier attitudes protestors suspected. In recounting the

<sup>29</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4W. Bidell (Director of Planning, Department of Highways) to R. Fraser (Commission Engineer, Hamilton-Wentworth Suburban Roads Commission), 7 April 1967.

<sup>30</sup> AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Ray Connell to Copetown, Ontario resident, 11 April 1967. Connell issued similar reassurances to a number of concerned citizens of Gomme's commitment to fully investigating the options. See, for example, AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Ray Connell to Hamilton lawyer, 17 April 1967; and, AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Ray Connell to Hamilton resident, 28 April 1967.

<sup>31</sup> Refer to, for example, AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Ancaster resident and Ancaster and Hamilton property owner to Ray Connell, 20 March 1967.

<sup>32</sup> AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Ancaster resident to John P. Robarts, 29 December 1967.

<sup>33</sup> AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Ancaster resident to John P. Robarts, 29 December 1967.

<sup>34</sup> AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Ray Connell to George E. Gomme, 7 March 1968.

<sup>35</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, "Bulldozing' Accusation On Bypass," 19 April 1968. Many letter writers also leveled this charge at Gomme and his associates. See, for example, AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Ancaster resident to John P. Robarts, 11 April 1968.

proceedings of a public meeting held to discuss the plans, for example, two vocal and well-known opponents of the roadway were described as having made “the usual impassioned pleas for saving the Valley.”<sup>36</sup>

In April 1968 a citizen protest group unearthed a 1960 study from the Department of Highways which deemed the Dundas Valley route incapable of accommodating projected traffic flows, while also acknowledging and supporting local calls for the preservation of the valley as part Ontario’s greenbelt.<sup>37</sup> At the time the report was uncovered, Gomme claimed it was too outdated to be relevant. Prior to the recovery of the plan, however, Gomme told protestors he was “quite amazed” at the opposition to the highway plans since a similar route proposed in a 1963 public report attracted little attention.<sup>38</sup> The obvious contradiction here is that Gomme argued earlier reports were both completely irrelevant and at the same time foreshadowed what was to come. More importantly, the episode highlighted the ways in which public response to expressway plans had changed

during the 1960s. Earlier in the decade, a proposed route attracted little attention, while only a few years later, citizens mobilized quickly against the emergence of a new scheme. The different reactions reflected the broader shift that unfolded at this time, as citizens increasingly raised concerns about the impact of autocentric planning on their communities.

From this point, endorsements in the months following the introduction of the revised scheme were inconsequential. Hamilton’s City Council, the Hamilton-Wentworth Suburban Roads Commission, the Wentworth County Council, the West Flamborough Municipal Council, Beverly Township Council, and Glanford Township Council all issued letters of support to no affect.<sup>39</sup> Despite the increasingly obvious likelihood the expressway would not be built, by May 1968 George E. Gomme’s form response to protestors implied that the expressway plans were settled, and no longer open to discussion. Gomme told objectors “the road *will* be constructed in such a way as to fit the aesthetics of the adjacent landscape,” and also referred

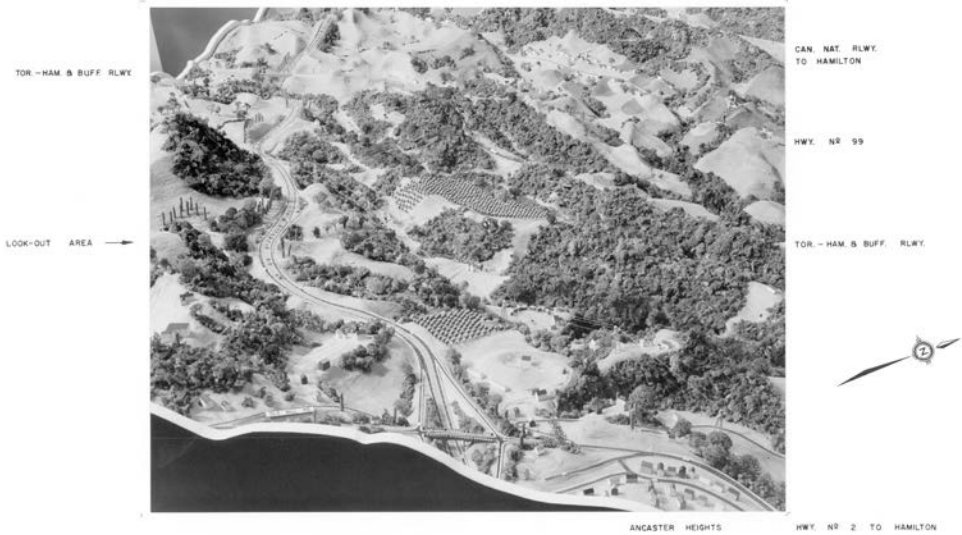
<sup>36</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, W. Bidell (Director of Planning, Department of Highways), “Re: Dundas By-Pass,” 13 September 1968.

<sup>37</sup> “Experts” Studies Conflict: Bypass Route Rejected in “60 Ontario Report,” *Hamilton Spectator* (hereafter cited as *HS*), 9 April 1968.

<sup>38</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, George E. Gomme to Dundas resident, 13 April 1967.

<sup>39</sup> Refer to AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, E. Simpson (City Clerk, The Corporation of the City of Hamilton) to George E. Gomme, 13 June 1968; AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, R.E.F. Eddy (Secretary, Hamilton-Wentworth Suburban Roads Commission) to George E. Gomme, 10 April 1968; AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, R.E.F. Eddy (Clerk-Treasurer, County of Wentworth Council) to George E. Gomme, 22 April 1968; AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, James A. Smith (Clerk-Treasurer, West Flamborough Municipal Council) to George E. Gomme, 1 April 1968; AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, James L. Whetham (Clerk-Treasurer, Corporation of the Township of Beverly) to George E. Gomme; 10 April 1968; and, AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Annie Reed (Clerk and Treasurer, Township of Glanford) to George E. Gomme, 16 April 1968.

# DISPLAY MODEL



FROM HIGHWAY Nº 2 - VIEWING WEST

## PROPOSED PARKWAY



FROM CHRISTIES CORNERS VIEWING EAST

*Photographs of the Department of Highway's display model of the proposed expressway. Hamilton Public Library Special Collections: Local History Collection, Location Study.*

to “*when* [the project] is undertaken.”<sup>40</sup> His aggressive approach could only take him so far, however, as he admitted only weeks later that “a final decision [has] not been made.”<sup>41</sup>

It seems likely Gomme recognized the potential political cost of pushing the plans in the face of such vehement resistance. In letter after letter, protestors threatened to vote for the opposition in the next election if the expressway was approved.<sup>42</sup> Many also asserted it was not a vocal minority that opposed the expressway, but rather the vast majority of Ancaster and Dundas residents disliked the plans and would not vote for an administration that had literally put an expressway in their backyards. Such was the perspective of a petitioner who advised Gomme and his supporters to heed the public outcry, commenting, “The avoidance of a vast amount of permanent resentment might merit some consideration.”<sup>43</sup> Another letter writer issued a similar warning, saying, “A meeting was held recently at which . . . the Deputy Minister of Highways advised those present that the

Department of Highways knows best. Best for whom? This is the attitude which will topple any government.”<sup>44</sup> One particularly animated letter writer chastised officials, saying the expressway proposal “should never have made it past the janitor’s garbage can,” and demanded the Premier address citizens’ concerns “without any political double talk and vagueness.”<sup>45</sup>

The role of Premier John Robarts is indeed one that merits some consideration. Protestors regarded Robarts as a wild card because he was largely absent from the controversy, but as premier he was implicated by association. In November 1967 an editorial in the largest local newspaper, *The Hamilton Spectator*, suggested the promise to study alternative routes might have been nothing more than a political maneuver to ensure Robarts’ success in the October 1967 election.<sup>46</sup> Privately, Robarts responded to the scrutiny by reprimanding George Gomme for arousing public concern unnecessarily by giving the impression the expressway plan was a done deal as early as the fall of 1967.<sup>47</sup> Publicly,

---

<sup>40</sup> Emphasis added. See, for example, AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, George E. Gomme to Hamilton resident, 6 May 1968.

<sup>41</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, George E. Gomme to Hamilton resident, 27 May 1968.

<sup>42</sup> Refer to, for example, AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Hamilton lawyer, 29 March 1967; AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Hamilton resident to George E. Gomme, 13 April 1968; and, AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Toronto resident to George E. Gomme, 23 April 1968.

<sup>43</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Ancaster property owner to George E. Gomme, 21 March 1968. In addition to individual voices of protest, the Town Clerk continually opposed the plans on behalf of the Town of Dundas. Refer to AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, D. Brauer (Town Clerk, Town of Dundas) to George E. Gomme, 27 May 1968.

<sup>44</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Arthur, Ontario resident to John Root, 4 June 1968.

<sup>45</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, McMaster University Professor and Ancaster resident to John P. Robarts; 9 March 1967.

<sup>46</sup> “Dundas Valley Vows,” Editorial, *HS*, 17 November 1967.

<sup>47</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, John P. Robarts to George E. Gomme, 22 November 1967.

however, Gomme and Connell remained the key personalities. Because of Robarts' relative quiet on the issue as well as his powerful position within the provincial government, many protestors appealed to him to make a policy statement, optimistic he would not support the forceful Gomme, but rather back Connell's slower, more cautious approach. Robart's pledge in early 1967 to preserve the Niagara escarpment region led many protestors to suspect he would side with them.<sup>48</sup> These hopes were expressed in many letters including one which stated, "your reported policies concerning the Niagara Escarpment are very similar to our ambitions for this community,"<sup>49</sup> and another which read: "I can only hope that the policy stated by The Honourable John Robarts on several occasions with respect to making the Niagara Escarpment a true conversation area will come to pass."<sup>50</sup> These sentiments were echoed in a February 1968 editorial which called Robarts "the one man who can save [the Dundas Valley]" and urged him to make a policy statement on the expressway plans.<sup>51</sup> When he finally did get involved publicly with the controversy, it was indeed to back an approach similar to the one Connell had taken. Af-

ter the public backlash against the revised scheme of 1968, Robarts reassured protestors that the new plan was "intended as a starting point for a dialogue between the Department [of Highways] and interested municipalities, organizations and individuals."<sup>52</sup> He reiterated the intent of the government to engage local interest groups and seek opinions and advice on the scheme, as well as reassuring protestors that Gomme was intent on giving all comments "careful consideration."<sup>53</sup>

Objectors presented their arguments in letters addressed to Gomme, Connell, and occasionally, to Robarts. They typically expressed their complaints in environmental, economic, or ideological terms, and their grievances help historians better understand how broad concerns about autocentric development manifested in specific points of contention. Anti-expressway advocates often spoke of the Ancaster and Dundas communities as a whole, and similarly discussed environmental and economic threats to the region in more general terms. This approach was likely the product of two factors. First, it would have been difficult to speak in more specific terms as the lack of communication between government

<sup>48</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Numerous protestors cited this pledge. See, for example, Hamilton doctor to George E. Gomme, 30 March 1967.

<sup>49</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, P.W. Speller (President, Ancaster Citizens to Improve Our Neighbourhood) to John Robarts, 17 July 1967.

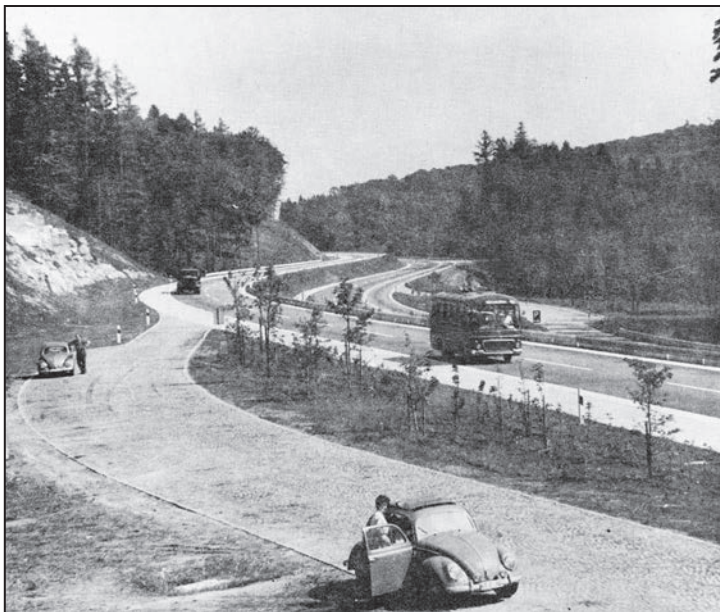
<sup>50</sup> AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Hamilton businessman to Ray Connell, 3 October 1967.

<sup>51</sup> "Dundas Valley Hopes," *HS*, Editorial, 23 February 1968.

<sup>52</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, John P. Robarts to W.A.T. Gilmour (Secretary, Hamilton Naturalists' Club), 12 June 1968.

<sup>53</sup> These comments were taken from a form response, variations of which were sent in response to several protestors. AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, John P. Robarts to W.A.T. Gilmour (Secretary, Hamilton Naturalists' Club), 12 June 1968.





*Like the other “Typical Parkway Scenes” in the official Ancaster-Dundas freeway proposal, this photo (and that on page 57) depict a European parkway. Hamilton Public Library Special Collections: Local History Collection, Location Study.*

officials and local residents meant protestors were speculating on potential routes just as often as they were addressing actual plans. Second, the threats to the environment, economy, and atmosphere of the region were viewed in broad terms, thus slight alterations in the proposed route were not seen as significantly reducing the overall detrimental affects of the highway. In this respect, geographic variations between schemes were a peripheral consideration as the potential impact on the region in any case would be similar.

The anticipated environmental impact of the expressway was the most fre-

quently cited complaint against the plans. Opponents lamented the visual effect of the expressway on the region, while also objecting to the extension of the road through local conservation areas. Concerns over the impact on conservation areas fell into two categories – the destruction of the natural environment, and the

loss of recreational lands.<sup>54</sup> Protestors argued instead of making the Dundas Valley more accessible to local residents and visitors, the expressway would destroy the “beauty spot.”<sup>55</sup> The destruction of the “unspoiled and beautiful” Dundas Valley and the “picturesque” Village of Ancaster was frequently cited as reason enough to oppose the expressway.<sup>56</sup>

Where recreational facilities were concerned, government officials argued an expressway penetrating conservation territory would make the area more accessible. One respondent argued walking paths, not roadways, should be used to

<sup>54</sup> AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Ancaster resident and municipal employee to Ray Connell, 13 March 1967.

<sup>55</sup> AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Dundas residents to Ray Connel [sic], 29 March 1967.

<sup>56</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Hamilton resident to George E. Gomme, 21 March 1967. For a sampling of similarly toned letters, refer also to AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Hamilton resident to John P. Robarts, 15 April 1968; AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Hamilton resident to George E. Gomme, 10 April 1968; AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Hamilton resident to George E. Gomme, 18 April 1968; and, AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Ancaster resident to James Auld (Minister of Tourism), 17 April 1968.

“open up” conservation areas.<sup>57</sup> Most opponents, however, countered government reasoning by arguing that growing population figures and expanding suburbs meant conservation areas had to be protected from future development.<sup>58</sup> As one letter writer noted, the fact that increasing numbers of southern Ontarians had “industry at their back door and heavy traffic at their front” meant it was evermore important to preserve “retreats” like the Dundas Valley, including the Coote’s Paradise marsh.<sup>59</sup> Several writers noted the need to protect outdoor recreational areas to ensure future generations would have a refuge where they could escape the pressures of modern life.<sup>60</sup> Opponents also argued the threatened conservation areas were patronized not only by local residents, but also by visitors from neighbouring communities including the Cities of Hamilton and Burlington.<sup>61</sup>

As mentioned previously, many anti-expressway advocates prefaced their remarks by noting Premier Robarts’ pledge to preserve the Niagara Escarpment, arguing the expressway plans constituted a direct and blatant violation of this promise.<sup>62</sup> Others said running a road directly through conservation areas would reverse earlier achievements by conservationists in protecting these areas from human encroachment. Writers also objected to the obstruction of the popular hiking route, the Bruce Trail, with one praising the route as a “refuge for walking, riding, bird-watching, picnicing [sic] and general restoration of mind and body.”<sup>63</sup>

The environmental damage construction would cause was also a key concern for protestors. The elimination of trees, the interruption of streams, and the invasion of wildlife habitat were all sources of anxiety.<sup>64</sup> According to a study by the Ham-

<sup>57</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Hamilton resident to George E. Gomme, 2 April 1968.

<sup>58</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, William F. Scandlan (Secretary, Hamilton & District Labour Council of the Canadian Labour Congress) to George E. Gomme, 23 February 1967.

<sup>59</sup> AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Ancaster resident to Ray Connell, 21 March 1967.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, John B. Isbister (Recording Secretary, United Steelworkers of America, Local 1005) 5 June 1967; AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, W.A.O. Gilmour (Secretary, The Hamilton Naturalists’ Club) to C.S. MacNaughton (Ministry of Highways), 10 May 1967; AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, James Woodford (Executive Director, Federation of Ontario Naturalists) to George E. Gomme, 19 April 1967; and, AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Dundas residents to George E. Gomme, April 1967.

<sup>61</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Dundas resident to George E. Gomme, 17 April 1968.

<sup>62</sup> Robarts’ promise was mentioned in several letters. For example, refer to AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, P.W. Speller (President, Ancaster Citizens To Improve Our Neighbourhood), 17 July 1967; and, AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Hamilton businessman to Ray Connell, 3 October 1967.

<sup>63</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Hamilton resident to George E. Gomme, 17 March 1967. The President of the Bruce Trail Association also wrote to register his complaint that the Dundas section of the trail would be obliterated with the proposed expressway. Refer to AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, W.T. Cannon (President, The Bruce Trail Association) to George E. Gomme, 17 March 1967; AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Ancaster residents to Ray Connell, 21 March 1967. The Bruce Trail also merited praise in AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Hamilton resident to George E. Gomme, 12 May 1968.

<sup>64</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Hamilton resident to George E. Gomme, 7 April 1967.

ilton-Wentworth Area Planning Board for the Hamilton Region Conservation Authority, a diverse group of tree species were threatened by the roadway, including cedar, birch, beech, willow, swamp maple, hickory, ash, hemlock, chestnut, elm, sugar maple, pine, and spruce.<sup>65</sup> Where wildlife was concerned, objectors often cited the destruction of a region highly populated by deer herds.<sup>66</sup> The before mentioned conservation study added raccoons, red foxes, ground hogs, squirrels, chipmunks, muskrats, deer mice, rabbits, woodcock, ruffed grouse, ring necked pheasants, hawks, owls, crows, finches, and woodpeckers to the list of threatened species.<sup>67</sup>

Opponents feared environmental destruction would not cease with the completion of the expressway's construction. Instead, they argued degradation of the area would only intensify once the project was completed, with increased pollution from passing cars, and grading and drainage changes to the terrain that would permanently ruin the region's ecology.<sup>68</sup> One letter-writer argued the detrimental affects on the region's water supply would not be limited to streams in the immediate vicinity of the express-

way, but rather that construction would interrupt the natural watershed processes of the whole region.<sup>69</sup> Another petitioner offered an exhaustive list of ways in which the expressway was environmentally problematic – “land conservation, recreation area formation, nature region preservation, water resource control, wildlife preserv[ation] and anti-pollution measures” all made the list.<sup>70</sup> Some protestors also pointed to more pragmatic geographic considerations, arguing the hilly terrains of Ancaster and Dundas made the towns ill suited to expressways.<sup>71</sup> Several objectors noted the area's soil – glacial till – as too soft to provide a firm foundation for a major roadway.<sup>72</sup> The often dramatic tone of these complaints was captured succinctly in the title of a letter to the editor appearing in *The Hamilton Spectator*, “Highways Main Cause Of Landscape Rape.”<sup>73</sup> Some citizens even tied the loss of conservation areas to public health problems. As one exceptionally distressed citizen warned,

If the heritage of our wild life and wilderness areas is not preserved, our mental hospitals, already overcrowded, will be unable to cope with the increasing numbers of persons

<sup>65</sup> “Dundas Valley Hopes,” *HS*, Editorial, 23 February 1968.

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Dundas resident to George E. Gomme, 27 March 1967.

<sup>67</sup> “Dundas Valley Hopes,” *HS*, Editorial, 23 February 1968.

<sup>68</sup> “Dundas Valley Vows,” *HS*, Editorial, 17 November 1967.

<sup>69</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Ancaster resident to George E. Gomme, 17 April 1968.

<sup>70</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Dundas resident to George E. Gomme, 16 March 1967.

<sup>71</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Ancaster resident to George E. Gomme, 17 March 1967.

<sup>72</sup> AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Town and Country Planner and Hamilton resident to Ray Connell, 17 March 1967. Other letters questioning the soil quality included AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Engineer and Ancaster Resident to George E. Gomme, 17 March 1967.

<sup>73</sup> A. Bowland, “Highways Main Cause Of Landscape Rape,” *HS*, 10 April 1968.

needing treatment due to mental illness caused by the pressures of urbanization and the lack of natural areas where man can regain his perspective by contact with nature.<sup>74</sup>

Economic concerns also punctuated the expressway debates. Many petitioners identified themselves as local residents immediately in their letters. This self-identification demonstrated their vested interests in the issue, while also reminding officials it was tax-paying voters who opposed the expressway. Both residential property owners and farmers who held extensive tracts of land on the outskirts of burgeoning suburban areas used this approach. One farmer who wrote to Ray Connell, for example, complained that the planned roadway would bisect his farm, and put much of the other fertile farmland in the area out of commission.<sup>75</sup> Another farmer whose land would be divided by the roadway requested George E. Gomme “keep the proposed road off my doorstep.”<sup>76</sup>

While almost all complainants cited the potential environmental destruction the expressway would cause, several pinpointed the affect on property values as a key concern. In one letter the escarpment was described as “one of the finest and most sought-after building locations” and, as Ray Connell was informed, “These brow properties, if available, change hands at substantial values.”<sup>77</sup> An-

other protestor simply said the scheme would “destroy land values.”<sup>78</sup> Ironically, many who pointed to property values as a concern also charged the government with prioritizing the region’s economic development at the expense of environmental preservation. For example, one protestor accused officials of only defending values “that can be translated into dollars,” but then argued against the roadway because it would bisect the park land that “enhance[d] real estate values in the suburbs” where he lived.<sup>79</sup>

The vast majority of protest letters came from middle class suburbanites in Ancaster and Dundas. While rising concerns about the environmental impact of autocentric development were clearly an issue, the economic emphasis in many of the letters suggests protestors were not inspired by environmentalism alone. The socio-economic status of the region’s residents reinforced the value of their homes, businesses, and broader communities. The region’s affluence established a fundamental reality: that something of value – whether it be property, businesses, community atmosphere, or natural refuges – would be irreversibly injured if the expressway was built. Halting the expressway was essential in order to preserve community prestige.

Socio-economic status was also im-

<sup>74</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Toronto resident to George E. Gomme, 11 June 1968.

<sup>75</sup> AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Copetown, Ontario farmer to Ray Connell, 3 April 1967.

<sup>76</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, West Flamboro [sic] farmer to George E. Gomme, 15 April 1968.

<sup>77</sup> AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Lawyer, on behalf of Ancaster family to Ray Connell, 14 April 1967.

<sup>78</sup> AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Hamilton businessman and Ancaster resident to Ray Connell, 21 April 1967.

<sup>79</sup> AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Ancaster resident to Ray Connell, 20 March 1967.

portant in another respect. The Ancaster-Dundas expressway schemes threatened regions inhabited largely by middle and upper middle class citizens, and objections from prominent members of the local business elite likely carried considerable political weight, much more so than similar protests from citizens of lower socio-economic status would. The point raised here is a largely speculative one, but still worth considering particularly in light of the concept of “environmental inequality.” Environmental inequality is measured by examining variations in access to natural resources and how citizens are burdened by the negative environmental consequences of development.<sup>80</sup> According to this theory, low income typically translates into low agency – meaning those of lower socio-economic status lack the financial resources to exercise options available to more privileged citizens, particularly in choosing where to live. Furthermore, this theory holds that urban planning reinforces existing inequality as privileged members of the

community exert their greater political influence to protect their properties and communities.<sup>81</sup> This concept is particularly intriguing as it pertains to suburban expressway disputes in light of the typically more affluent communities that inhabit these regions. Future studies of other similar controversies will ideally provide the comparative cases necessary to substantiate or refute these links.

The Ancaster-Dundas schemes also evoked ideological opposition. Complainants typically cited concerns about urban planning, suburban sprawl, and the impact of the automobile. The preservation of the small town atmosphere in both regions was also a key rallying point. Letters of protest frequently cited the long histories of Ancaster and Dundas, as well as the regions’ traditional values as reasons to save the towns. One letter detailed family history reaching back to the late nineteenth century to emphasize what would be lost by bulldozing through the communities.<sup>82</sup> In Ancaster specifically, many protestors pinpointed the potential separation of the

<sup>80</sup> Ken Cruikshank and Nancy B. Bouchier, “Blighted Areas and Obnoxious Industries: Constructing Environmental Inequality on an Industrial Waterfront, Hamilton, Ontario, 1890-1960,” *Environmental History* 2004 9 (3), 464-96.

<sup>81</sup> Cruikshank and Bouchier, “Blighted Areas,” 464-96.

<sup>82</sup> AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Lawyer on behalf of Ancaster family to Ray Connell, 14 April 1967. AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Hamilton resident to George E. Gomme, 7 April 1967. This image of both Ancaster and Dundas as small towns, steeped in history, and composed of close-knit communities is evident in the many histories of each town written by amateur historians. For works on Ancaster exemplifying this perspective, refer especially to: Ancaster Township Historical Society, *Ancaster’s Heritage: A History of Ancaster Township* (Ancaster Township Historical Society, c. 1970); Arthur Bowes, *Ancaster – A Pictorial History* (Hamilton, Ontario: Seldon Griffin Graphics, c. 1990); Roger Zsiros, *Ancaster’s Early Settlers* (Ancaster, Ontario: Golden Arc Publishing and Type-Setting Ltd., 1988); Lauder, Mrs. Dick, Mrs. Carr, R.K. Kernighan, et al. *Pen and Pencil Sketches of Wentworth Landmarks: A Series of Articles Descriptive of Quaint Places and Interesting Localities in The Surrounding County*. Hamilton: The Spectator Printing Company Limited, 1897. For similarly written histories of Dundas, refer to: Larry Button, *Dundas 1947-1973* (Dundas, Ontario: Corporation of the Town of Dundas, c. 1976); Gary Evans, and Russ Powers, *The Prints of Paradise: Old Dundas through the eyes of photographers* (Burling-

Ancaster Heights community from the rest of the town as a prime example of the havoc the road would wreak on their communities.<sup>83</sup> Residents in this neighbourhood worried about the impact of the expressway on their ability to interact with the rest of the Ancaster community. They feared going to work, shopping in town, and dropping their children off at school would all become high-risk activities if they involved crossing an expressway.<sup>84</sup> These concerns were voiced repeatedly by the citizen advocacy group, Ancaster Citizens To Improve Our Neighborhood (ACTION), which petitioned government officials while fostering further support for their cause. ACTION enjoyed widespread support in its anti-expressway campaign, including allegiances with The Ontario Federation of Naturalists, The Hamilton Naturalists Club, The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, The Royal Botanical Gardens, The United

Steel Worker of America, The Isaac Walton Club, The Letter Carriers Union, The Hamilton Conservation Authority, The Bruce Trail Association, and the Ancaster Township Council.<sup>85</sup>

Preserving the small town atmospheres in both Ancaster and Dundas by protecting the regions from unlimited autocentric development were clear priorities for many letter writers. As one petitioner argued, it was the surrounding wildlife that gave Dundas its “unique character,” one that would be destroyed if the expressway were constructed.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, many letter writers relied heavily on alarmist rhetoric about the deterioration of small town communities and values in the name of progress and urban development. One stated, “Altogether too much of the natural beauty of our area is being destroyed in the name of progress and I seriously object.”<sup>87</sup> These protestors did not acknowledge how they benefited from

---

ton, Ontario: North Shore Publishing Inc., 1997); Olive Newcombe, *Picturesque Dundas Update 1981* (Hamilton, Ontario: D.G. Seldon Printing Limited, 1981); Olive Newcombe, *Picturesque Dundas Revisited* (Hamilton, Ontario: Seldon Printing Limited, 1997); Olive Newcombe, *The Wheels of Progress* (Hamilton, Ontario: D.G. Seldon Printing Limited, 1980); Olive Newcombe, and Frank Woods *The County of Wentworth 1853-1973: A Pictorial Parade* (Hamilton, Ontario: D.G. Seldon Printing Limited, 1973); Darrell A. Norris, *Beyond Paradise: Building Dundas 1793-1950* (Dundas, Ontario: Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee of the Town of Dundas, 1996); T. Roy Woodhouse, *The History of the Town of Dundas* (Dundas, Ontario: Dundas Historical Society, 1965).

<sup>83</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Doctor and Ancaster resident to George E. Gomme, 31 March 1967. For other similar letters, refer to AO, RG 14-4, T-47, File 905-4, Ancaster residents to George E. Gomme, 21 March 1967; AO, RG 14-4, T-47, File 905-4, Dundas resident to John P. Robarts, 27 March 1967.

<sup>84</sup> AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Hamilton businessman and Ancaster resident to Ray Connell, 21 April 1967.

<sup>85</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, P.W. Speller (President, Ancaster Citizens To Improve Our Neighbourhood) to John P. Robarts, 17 July 1967. The Ancaster Township Council also passed a movement against the expressway, though they had no official governmental role in deciding whether the scheme would be approved. Refer to AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, “Proposed New Highway – Peter’s Corners to Mohawk Rd. & Highway #403 Interchange: Motion No.2,” 28 March 1967.

<sup>86</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Ancaster residents to George E. Gomme, 16 March 1967.

<sup>87</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Burlington resident to George Kerr (M.P.P.), 6 May 1968.

urban and suburban expansion. Instead, they focused on decrying further development of the region in almost all forms. Some tied their objections to the protection and preservation of the region's natural environment, such as one letter writer who commented, "Surely cars and speed should be secondary to conservation."<sup>88</sup> Others criticized bowing to "present convenience"<sup>89</sup> by constructing "yet another highway"<sup>90</sup> which would destroy natural areas needed to counter the "tensions and strains of this turbulent age."<sup>91</sup> Still others argued wilderness areas and established communities should be carefully guarded for "future generations"<sup>92</sup> instead of being "sacrificed for 'progress.'"<sup>93</sup> Another opponent argued too much of Southern Ontario had already been "bull-dozed out of existence" to make way for the automobile, which the writer called "an insatiable god to which everything must be sacrificed."<sup>94</sup> One activist blamed the "sick, demoralizing, dehumanizing society" of the time on the fact that people had "given over our souls to the worship

of supertechnology [sic], concrete constructions and materialism."<sup>95</sup> All these statements exemplified the ideological hostility protestors harboured towards autocentric planning, despite the fact that most objectors were suburbanites themselves – beneficiaries of the incredible growth they now wanted to halt.

The Ancaster-Dundas expressway controversy encapsulated many of the most prominent themes characterizing postwar urban and suburban history. In the midst of phenomenal growth, planners and politicians who advocated autocentric policies that reinforced the primacy of the automobile faced growing opposition from concerned citizens who rejected such policies because of the detrimental impact on their communities' environments, economies, and values. In terms of the existing historiography, this suburban case serves a counterpoint to the more extensively studied urban expressway disputes across North America. Hopefully, the Ancaster-Dundas case will spark broader interest in such

<sup>88</sup> AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Ancaster resident to Ray Connell, 16 March 1967.

<sup>89</sup> AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Dundas resident to Ray Connell, 27 September 1967.

<sup>90</sup> AO, RG 15-1-0-216, Hamilton resident to The Reeve and Council of the Township of Ancaster, 31 July 1967.

<sup>91</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Hamilton resident to John P. Robarts, 23 February 1967.

<sup>92</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Ancaster resident to George C. Gomme, 28 March 1968.

<sup>93</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Downsview, Ontario resident to George C. Gomme, 29 July 1968.

<sup>94</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Hamilton resident to John P. Robarts, 25 February 1968. This writer's reference to southern Ontario as a whole was unusual, as petitioners typically addressed the Ancaster-Dundas case specifically and only offered broader criticism as it pertained to autocentric planning generally without providing specific examples. Although these protestors did not connect their struggle to others unfolding in urban centres across North America, the nature of their complaints as well as the rhetoric used still positions them firmly within the same context and ideological evolution of other disputes.

<sup>95</sup> AO, RG 14-4, Box T-47, File 905-4, Doctor and Toronto resident to Edward Dunlop (M.P.P.), 10 June 1968.

clashes, encouraging other historians to further investigate similar controversies. With a broader body of literature, we can gain a better understanding of the ways

in which interaction between citizens and government officials was increasingly instrumental in shaping development patterns in the postwar period.