Breakthroughs

RE-CREATING THE AMERICAN CITY

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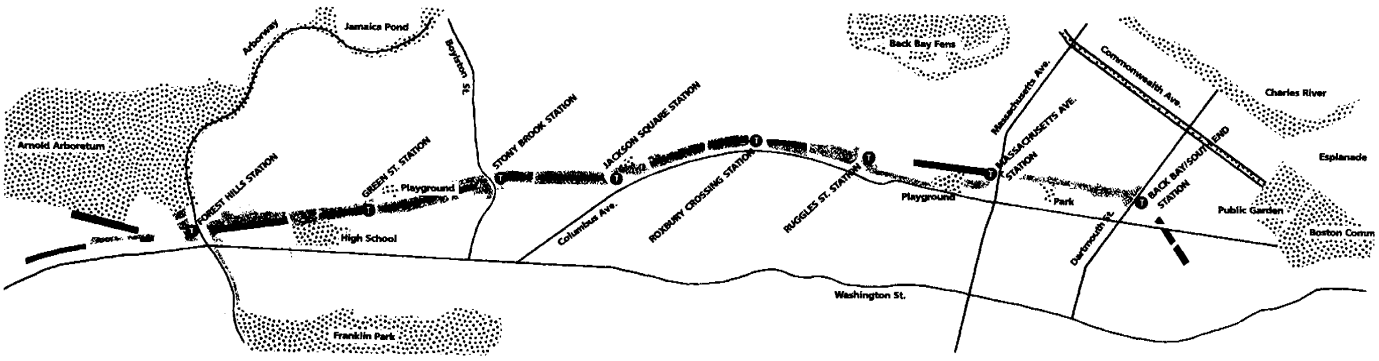
CHAPTER 3

Boston's Southwest Corridor: People Power Makes History

Viewed from the lofty reaches of the Prudential Center, fifty stories above the crowded streets of Boston, the city spreads northward to the horizon and the New Hampshire mountains peaking through distant haze. The patrician stone and brick mansions of the Back Bay continue for blocks, forming a clean, orderly grid that looks as though it was lifted intact from a drafting table. The emerald green Esplanade runs along the Charles River, which itself is dotted with teams out for crew practice and sailboats. Beyond the Charles River stand Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and Cambridge. To the east, past the steely blue reflecting presence of the John Hancock Building and the downtown skyline, the North End juts into the murky gray water of Boston Harbor. Across the harbor, planes taking off and landing at Logan Airport are stacked in the sky as far as the eye can see.

The precincts of the ordinary Bostonian spread north, south, and west. Closeby, Fenway Park sits adjacent to the Back Bay Fens, one of the grand spaces created in the nineteenth century as part of Boston's "Emerald Necklace" of parkland. The South End, with block after block of brick row houses, continues for a mile and then blends into low-slung, mostly poor Roxbury and its red-brick public housing projects and wide, empty spaces. Beyond Roxbury lies the hilly greenery of densely packed, working-class Jamaica Plain, one of Boston's biggest neighborhoods.

From fifty stories up, the Southwest Corridor looks like a spine of greenery curving through the cityscape in a five-mile-long path, out from Back Bay and the downtown, out toward the suburbs. Or-



A map of the fifty-two-acre "linear" Corridor Park.
(Drawing courtesy of Places, A Quarterly Journal of Environmental Design)

ange subway cars looking like brightly painted toy trains from a distance run up and down tracks through the corridor. Bridges criss-cross the tracks. Walking and bicycle paths dart in and out of greenery.

At the ground level, standing in the small red-brick plaza that serves as the entrance to Corridor Park in the South End, details obscured by altitude come into focus. Teenagers shoot hoops at a basketball court alongside an apartment building. Neighborhood residents—young and old, black and white—stroll through the park. Students lugging backpacks filled with books wander by on a path planted with trees and bushes, mixing with lawyers toting shiny leather briefcases. Kids moving a little too fast for the territory zoom by on neon-bright skateboards, jockeying for position with bicycle riders. Children play in a nearby playground, and further along an older woman works in a vegetable garden. An occasional car slowly moves down an adjacent street deliberately designed with curves and bends to discourage traffic. The incessant sound of construction noise emanates from nearby buildings, structures wrapped liked gifts in plastic tarps to keep the weather out and construction debris in. Town houses are being renovated. Some new office towers are taking shape behind them. A rumble gradually builds in the distance, becoming clearer and more resonant as a train thunders through the tunnel underfoot.

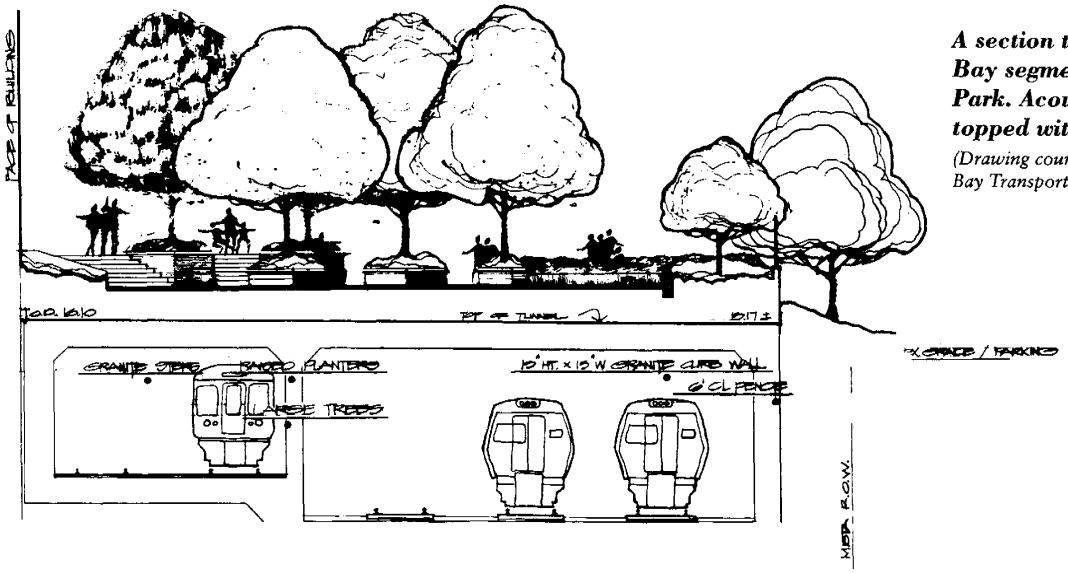
Come sunset, the streetlights in Corridor Park flicker to life. Floodlights throw soft light onto the marble and granite of Copley Place, a ritzy complex of shops, restaurants, and two forty-story hotels, complete with an outpost of Neiman-Marcus. Across Dartmouth Street, which always buzzes with the flow of traffic, the huge neon sculpture at the Back Bay subway and train station bathes both the sidewalk and passing pedestrians in warm, glowing tones of red, yellow, and blue. The activity in the park, which functions as a huge backyard for thousands of neighbors, does not skip a beat. A couple sits hugging and kissing on a bench, with the electronic sounds of

dance music blaring out of a boom box decorated with yellow happy face stickers, emblems of the late 1980s and early 1990s resurrected from the 1960s.

Life along the Southwest Corridor. Day and night. Winter and summer. Work and play. Beginning as a narrow park shoehorned into the crowded South End, the corridor's long skein of parks, playgrounds, basketball courts, gardens, and recreational areas becomes wider as it curves across Boston, one of the most attractive, inviting ribbons of greenery in urban America. In the park, kids play ball. Underground, commuters read their papers on the way to work. Beneath this oasis, under concrete decking in the South End, lies the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority's relocated Orange Line subway, plus commuter rail and Amtrak lines serving the busy Northeast Corridor.

Thanks to the careful community planning and sensitive urban design that went into building it, the Southwest Corridor thrives precisely because it has a split personality. Even for Boston, a city with entire neighborhoods such as Back Bay reclaimed from the water in the nineteenth century, the corridor project stands out as one of a kind. It was the biggest public works project in Massachusetts's history and one of the most ambitious planning, design, and construction jobs—with one of the largest casts of characters—ever undertaken in any American city.

It took more than two decades, and nearly $750 million, to get the job done. When work began, the area was an inner-city wasteland, an ugly no-man's-land overrun with ailanthus that had been created in a rush to clear the way for a new interstate "inner belt" highway to the suburbs. The highway never came, thanks to the



A section through the Back Bay segment of Corridor Park. Acoustic decks are topped with landscaping.
(Drawing courtesy of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority)

Bostonians—poor, middle-class, wealthy, black, white, and Hispanic—who flexed their political muscles and eventually killed the plans to build the road. However, the damage had already been done by bulldozers and wrecking balls. The long gash cleared for the highway curved out from downtown, up to a half mile wide in some places, roughly paralleling the course of the Penn Central Railroad's tracks to New York City. It looked as though someone wielding a giant machete had gouged out the city's heart.

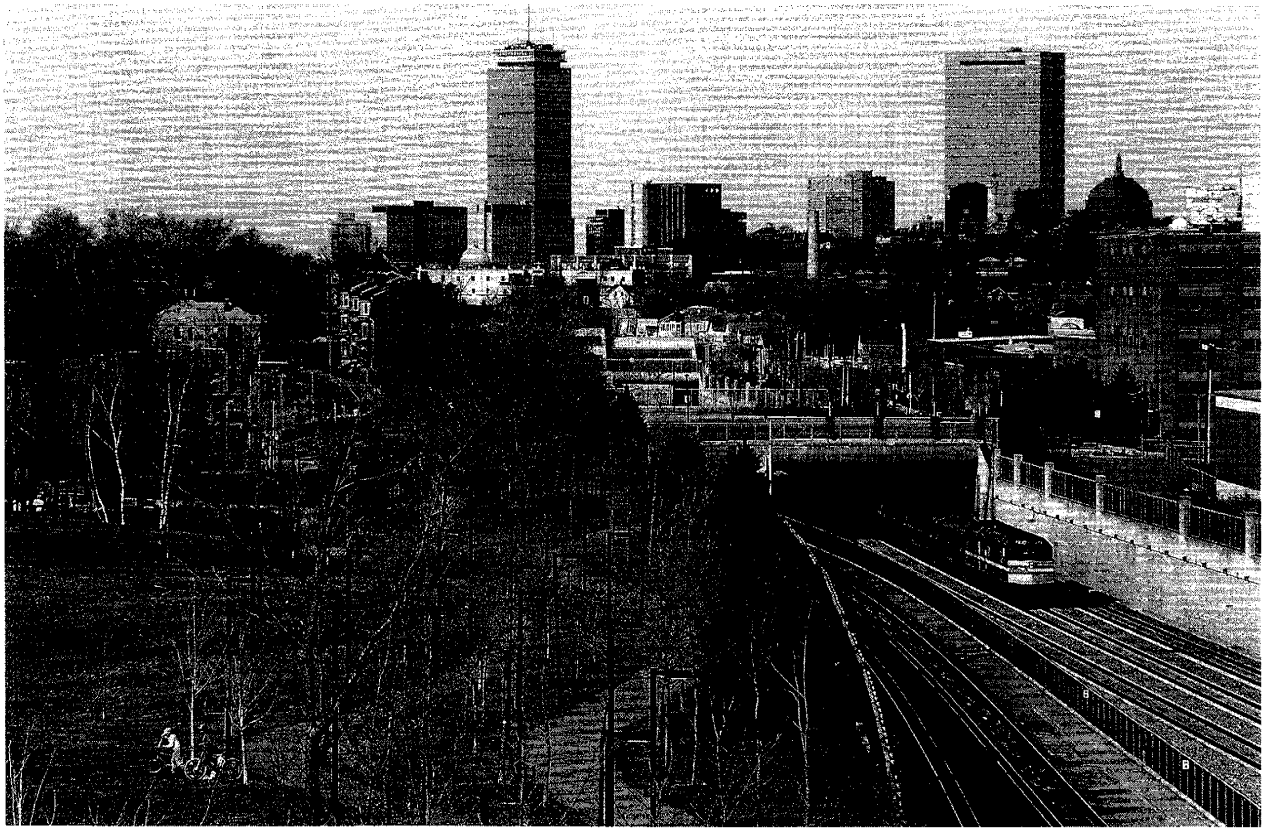
The corridor had never been an attractive place. The railroad tracks had been there since early in the nineteenth century, cutting through Boston atop a high granite embankment that cut off neighborhoods and severed access across the city. Clearing land for the aborted highway only made matters worse, but when planners, designers, builders, and ordinary residents were finished, the park they created had become the biggest addition to Boston's open space inventory since landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted transformed the swampy, malodorous "Fens" into green space. In places, Corridor Park runs above the subway and rail lines. In other areas, it continues along both sides. All told, there are fifty-two acres of parkland, twenty playgrounds, sixteen basketball, street hockey, and tennis courts, and ninety community gardens. Moreover, there are nine architecturally unique subway stations (some doubling as stops for commuter and Amtrak trains), twenty-six new bridges across the corridor, a huge new storm drainage conduit for a thirteen-square-mile area, a community college in Roxbury with thousands of students, two high schools, five hundred units of housing, and other development projects.

It takes just fifteen minutes on the Orange Line subway to travel the Southwest Corridor in its entirety from the Back Bay station to the end of the line in Forest Hills, but along the way the rider—or better still, the walker, jogger, or bicyclist—gets to sample integral parts of Boston the average visitor rarely sees. This is not the Boston of historic Revolutionary War monuments and historical sites or the picture postcard streets of well-heeled Beacon Hill. This is the heart and soul of the city, gritty and workaday, in all its rough beauty and glory.

As it wends its way through the city, the corridor skirts nearly one-third of Boston's people and traverses seven distinct neighborhoods. The journey begins in the South End, a 1990s melting pot neighborhood of old and new, rich and poor. The neighborhood did not even exist until a huge landfill project in the late nineteenth century created dry land out of underwater tidal mud flats. Today, the South End is a neighborhood of attractive Victorian brick row houses and walk-up apartment buildings lining quiet side streets. It

is one of Boston's most diverse neighborhoods, a mixture of whites, blacks, Latinos, Asians, Arabs, and dozens of other ethnic groups. Along the South End's edges are some of the most recognizable skyscrapers on the Boston skyline—the Prudential Center and the John Hancock Building—plus the Christian Science complex and Symphony Hall. To stroll down Columbus Avenue, the main street of the South End a couple of blocks from Corridor Park, is to walk through a curious mixture of the upscale—with expensive gourmet food shops, boutiques, and galleries—and the old—butcher shops open since the early 1900s, unpretentious eateries, and pawn shops.

Little was spared to design and build Corridor Park in the South End. A mile of concrete decking was built to cover the transit corridor, creating a narrow park that has won plaudits from urban designers and landscape architects. Where trains once roared on open tracks, noise levels are now equivalent to normal street noise. Ventilation stacks to clear smoke from the tunnels were ingeniously designed so that they would appear to be avant-garde additions to existing red-brick row houses. They blend into the landscape so well that one scarcely notices them unless they are pointed out.



Where trains once roared on open tracks, noise levels are now equivalent to normal street noise. *(Photograph courtesy of Peter Wrenn, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts)*

At Ruggles Street in the heart of Roxbury, a giant cantilevered steel and glass station rises from empty land, beckoning as the neighborhood's new "front door." At night, the station comes alive with light, a beacon in drab surroundings. Roxbury is one of Boston's oldest neighborhoods, settled in 1630 on solid land by the British. Today it is the heart of black and Hispanic Boston and also Boston's poorest neighborhood. Along Columbus Avenue, which becomes part of Roxbury as it exits the South End, signs of inner-city commerce are everywhere. "Money exchanges," those inner-city substitutes for banks with big signs proclaiming "Checks Cashed," dot the street. Other placards and posters fill in more details: "Save Money." "Roach Killer." "Christ Died for Our Sins." "Mandela" is a reference to the black-led movement in Roxbury to secede from Boston and form the independent city of Mandela, not some memorial to the South African antiapartheid leader.

Traveling the mile and a half of the Southwest Corridor in Roxbury, one gets a snapshot of what the neighborhood was, what the demolition for the highway left in its wake, and glimpses of what it might someday become if promises to rebuild are kept. As Columbus Avenue leaves the old, dense heart of the neighborhood, it passes through sobering territory. Along the way are four grim, large public housing projects. Some of the buildings fit the depressing stereotype of public housing. The structures are boarded up, surrounded by weeds and trash, and covered with forbidding graffiti. Some buildings are neat and well-maintained, though. Part of the Bromley-Heath public housing project, they have been taken over by tenants, who now run and maintain them.

In Forest Hills, the busiest of all the stations at the southwestern terminus of the Orange Line, about two miles distant from Roxbury, a metallic white modernistic clock tower climbs from the station, a new landmark in the neighborhood. Near the station, community residents are out cleaning the park. Garden plots mark its boundaries. Children bounce up and down on a teeter-totter in a new playground a few blocks away. Nearby are the Arnold Arboretum and Franklin Park, two huge expanses of greenery linked by Corridor Park.

This is Jamaica Plain, part of Boston since 1874, nestled between Roxbury and the independent town of Brookline. It is a venerable neighborhood of tightly packed wood-frame houses dotted with the empty hulks of local breweries that used to be a main industry. Jamaica Plain still shows the marks of its domination by the breweries—block upon block of homes built by the brewing companies for their employees. There are only a few feet between buildings, and their designs are as identical as the boxy little houses in any prefab suburban subdivision. Many of the homes in Jamaica Plain are what

the locals call "triple deckers," modest, three-story Victorians often shared by two families.

Hilly and with a tangle of narrow, twisting streets, Jamaica Plain has long been an Irish stronghold in Boston, though its northern reaches experienced a large influx of blacks and Hispanics during the 1960s and 1970s. Along some streets, red-brick "fixer uppers" have been restored by the neighborhood's increasing community of young professionals attracted by the relatively low housing costs. On some little side streets, such as Mozart Street, however, Jamaica Plain's poverty is obvious. The buildings have seen better days. Paint is peeling. Garbage is everywhere. A few wrecked cars sit at the curb. Large knots of Hispanic kids occupy street corners. Viewed from the top of a nearby hill, the skyline of downtown Boston with its imposing skyscrapers can look like a mirage.

Any visitor to the Southwest Corridor in the early 1990s had to admire its vitality. The park was heavily used. The transit line was a success, providing fast and clean transportation to some 50,000 riders every day. Yet the Southwest Corridor remained very much a work in progress, a project whose outcome was still in doubt. Huge parcels of vacant land still sat beckoning on the corridor's periphery. In Roxbury, idle land often seemed to stretch as far as the eye could see, awaiting the promised development of shops and more housing to replace what bulldozers leveled.

Immediately east of the busy Roxbury Ruggles Street station sat a five-and-a-half-acre parcel of land begging for redevelopment, land known locally as Parcel 18. The stark expanse, kept neatly mowed and free of trash, was a symbol of both the hopes for the future of the Southwest Corridor and for progress that appeared to be a long way off. A local task force was still meeting in 1990 trying to figure out just what to do with the land, which planners had foreseen as a new center of shops, offices, and hotels. Many residents were visibly angry that the promised development and jobs had not materialized. They suggested that their neighborhood was being left behind as the rest of the corridor thrived.

The original plan described Roxbury's future in the kind of glowing, flowery verbiage that planners are wont to write: The Ruggles Street station, the plan said, would

> embrace a major new mixed use urban center. It will include extensive retail, residential and institutional space, as well as limited office development totalling 500,000 to 750,000 square feet. It also offers the first opportunity in years for a new hotel and entertainment center in Roxbury.

In some ways, the Southwest Corridor plan was typical of its species. It was too boring, too long, and in places too hard to follow. Yet it was also unique since many planning documents bear only a

slight resemblance to the final product. Not infrequently, they sit on a shelf and gather dust—but not along the Southwest Corridor. Anyone who looked could see quite concrete ways that the plans had materialized. There was only one major failure: Roxbury. The plans had focused most heavily on economic development in Roxbury, but little of the promise had been fulfilled. An attempt in 1988 by then Governor Michael Dukakis to get a state agency to relocate to Parcel 18 as its anchor tenant was rebuffed when the agency declined to move to the inner-city site.

Along Washington Street, another one of those urban commercial strips with shops offering cheap, bargain goods to customers with limited incomes, the old El tracks had been torn down and the sun shined on sidewalks that had sat in the shade for most of this century. The girders that used to support the elevated tracks poked out of the sidewalk or the middle of the street like amputated limbs. The old Dudley Street station, an elevated monstrosity that served as a major transfer point, sat rotting. "Replacement service" was supposed to come to Washington Street as soon as the old Orange Line was torn down, inasmuch as the Southwest Corridor is a brisk fifteen- to twenty-minute walk away. Yet "replacement service" was slow to materialize. The neighborhood, city, and transit authority continued arguing about what constituted replacement service, and many Roxbury residents missed the convenience of the old El service. In Jamaica Plain, where a trolley line was taken out of service, some residents were still trying to get the old trolley service restored.

Anthony Pangaro—the man who oversaw much of the Southwest Corridor's planning in the 1970s—called this the project's "unfinished business," elements of the project no one expected to be resolved immediately. As Massachusetts entered a money squeeze even tighter than the one it struggled through in the 1970s, however, prospects for an early solution to the corridor project's unfinished business, the needs of Boston neighborhoods most desperately in need of redevelopment, appeared dimmer than ever.

The Rise and Fall and Rise of the Southwest Corridor

Back in 1948, a warm public response awaited the Master Highway Plan for eastern Massachusetts with its recommendation of building Interstate 95 (I-95) through Boston. The plan seemed to be a matter of keeping up with the Joneses. The late 1940s were the dawn of the

national race to build highways, and Boston would not be a laggard. It would have a new eight-lane, elevated highway linking downtown with the loop highway around the city (Route 128, Massachusetts's famed high-tech development corridor). The plans seemed reasonable enough. No one could foresee the forty years of conflict the highway would engender.

The original plans actually envisioned a network of highways to carry thousands of cars daily through Cambridge as well as densely populated southwest Boston. More than 90 percent of the bill was supposed to be footed by the federal government, which was freely dispensing money for interstate highways. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Massachusetts started acquiring land for the highway by eminent domain. By the late 1960s, the state Department of Public Works was relocating families and demolishing homes and businesses that stood in its path.

Yet as the public taking continued, public outcry was also intensifying about the extent of demolition, the loss of homes and businesses, the negative impact of the empty land, and threats to neighborhood stability. Real physical devastation undermined some neighborhoods. The specter of the roadway and demolition looming in the near future threatened others. Anger mounted along with community action aimed at stopping the highway. Concern spread to areas outside the city, such as Cambridge, where many politically influential residents felt threatened by a roadway network that was eventually supposed to pass hard on their community too. Recalls Pangaro:

> It was the dawn of the environmental era and the urban antihighway people found a common ground with the suburban environmental people. There were a lot of people in Cambridge for whom the example in Roxbury was very vivid. They saw black people's homes in Roxbury and white people's homes in Jamaica Plain getting tumbled. They didn't want it to happen there.

The highway project, as it turned out, died long before the state government turned to taking and clearing land in Cambridge, but not before antihighway political fervor had hit a high pitch. Bostonians and suburbanites—far removed from each other not only by location but also by ethnic origins and economics—joined in groups such as "Save Our City," "Operation Stop," and the "Coalition to Stop I-95." The latter eventually became the Southwest Corridor Land Development Coalition, the major community force in redeveloping the cleared land.

Land in the corridor was cleared to make way for the highway in the late 1960s. The roadway was not officially abandoned, how-

ever, until 1972 on the heels of public protest and a change in the political winds that had favored urban highway building. Left to await some new use, the corridor became a desolate trail of emptiness from Back Bay and the South End out to Roxbury and Jamaica Plain. Decay and arson began along the edges of the Southwest Corridor and fanned outward like a rash, although the extent of damage varied according to neighborhood.

In the South End, minimal demolition for the highway took place. Open railroad tracks continued to separate Back Bay to the north from the South End on the other side of the tracks as they had for more than one hundred years. With each passing train, the neighborhood shook and a plume of blue diesel smoke settled over the local streets. Uncertainty over whether a superhighway would replace the railroad tracks led to the neglect of property and serious disinvestment.

Roxbury bore the brunt of the damage. There, a corridor of man-made devastation took shape as acres of land on both sides of the railroad tracks were cleared to make way for the planned eight-lane, elevated highway. More than sixty-two acres were cleared in Roxbury for a section of highway that was supposed to be less than 1.5 miles long. More than three hundred businesses fell to the wrecking ball, taking more than two thousand jobs from the neighborhood. Some nine hundred families lost their homes. The landscape in the vicinity of the highway corridor was ruined.

More land was cleared and more homes and businesses were felled in Jamaica Plain, the neighborhood that was to become one of the key battlegrounds in the long fight to stop the highway and repair the damage from wholesale land clearance. In Jamaica Plain, the harbingers of urban decay—trash-strewn lots and boarded-up and burned-out homes—radiated from the empty corridor land.

The state had moved to clear property in Jamaica Plain and Roxbury with unusual dispatch. About 110 acres of land had been emptied for the roadway by 1969; plans for even more clearance were alive and well. In Roxbury alone, another one thousand people were living under immediate threat of displacement by the highway, even as the opposition coalesced. In both neighborhoods, servicemen coming home from Vietnam found the solid communities where they had grown up bearing a sad resemblance in places to the Southeast Asian country they had just left behind. The battle cry became "Stop I-95. People Before Highways."

Ellen Anderson, who was an aide to Pangaro during the rebuilding period and was in college when the first buildings were leveled to make way for the planned highway, described the devastation and the protest this way:

> The thing I remember about the Southwest Corridor was coming up to the old railroad underpasses and seeing all of the "People Before Highways" graffiti. In Cambridge you saw signs saying "Cambridge Is a City Not a Highway." I remember taking bike rides and seeing it all. Along Columbus Avenue [in Roxbury] I'd look at all of the buildings that had been torn down and think that it looked like a bomb had hit. It made you sick. Who'd take a community and rip it down like that? Thousands of people were displaced in close-knit neighborhoods. And it was not all done gently.

The eventual death of I-95 was a landmark in public opposition to the type of highway building projects that required the eviction of thousands of people and the clearing of hundreds of acres of land. Responding to the protests in 1970, then Governor Francis Sargent declared a temporary moratorium on highway construction within the confines of the Route 128 outer belt. The bulldozers and earth-moving equipment in southwest Boston fell silent. Meanwhile, Sargent commissioned a regional planning study called the Boston Transportation Planning Review, a $3 million undertaking subsidized mostly by federal money. The exercise was designed to come up with alternatives to the old highway construction strategy. Based on the recommendations of that study, which was conducted with heavy community input, Sargent in 1972 formally cancelled the I-95 routing. In its place, he endorsed relocating the Orange Line, one of four Boston subway lines that, at that time, ran along the elevated tracks through Roxbury. Thanks largely to neighborhood pressure, the substitute plan went well beyond replacing the highway with a subway line. It called for redeveloping all of the land that had been cleared in the corridor, making it available for recreation, for business, and for housing.

Republican Sargent's killing of I-95 may have been warmly received in the neighborhoods that faced even more clearance and decay but his decision was immensely unpopular with the state agencies that would have been charged with building the new highway, with the labor unions representing potential construction workers, and with a variety of local politicians who remained avidly prohighway. In Roxbury itself, opposition came from residents angry about relocating the Orange Line and losing the El service the neighborhood had long enjoyed. Many of the opponents of the recooked plan privately bet the decision would be reversed when Sargent left office in 1974.

Plenty of reasons remained to bet against the plans to rebuild the Southwest Corridor. The construction project would be a logistical nightmare, one involving thousands of citizens and dozens of consulting firms. No model existed to manage a project of such

scope, with so many vocal actors and dependent on so many state and city bureaucracies. Designers and administrators alike would have to struggle with the intense political dynamics of a project passing through dense urban neighborhoods. Engineers would have to work in areas with ancient infrastructure and contend with thousands of little obstacles—digging up and replacing ancient wooden water mains, for example. The builders would have to figure out how to do a major construction project in a congested urban area while minimizing the impact on daily life. It was no small task in neighborhoods like the South End, where the construction corridor was a mere one hundred feet wide and the outer walls of many adjacent row houses ended three feet from where the subway tunnel would have to be dug. Another major problem still had to be finessed: the federal money that would be needed to build the new subway line, improve commuter rail service, and build the park was still legally earmarked for building the highway.

"There were a lot of people who felt portions of the highway system should be built because the land was already cleared," Pangaro says. He was Sargent's choice, in 1973, to be the Southwest Corridor's development coordinator, and he became the broker between dozens of competing interests. He recalls:

> The strongest argument for the highway was that the thing was ready to go. You couldn't get the 1,000 houses or the 300 businesses back. The land was a mess. So why not build the highway? The state took a huge gamble on several levels—that they could get the money, that they could figure out what to do with it if they got it, and, finally, that they could organize the project at all.

It would take until 1975 to get the federal money transferred to the rebuilding project and another three years for final approval of the environmental impact statement required to get federal funding, but Boston's timing was fortuitous. There was a rising tide of political resistance to pushing interstate highways through urban areas. Advocates of mass transit were gaining power around the country, particularly in the aftermath of the oil crunch and gasoline lines of the early 1970s. After hard lobbying by the influential Massachusetts congressional delegation, the U.S. Congress made a move that would affect transportation policy for decades to come. It changed the Federal Highway Act in a fashion that permitted transferring the half billion dollars in federal money that had been dedicated to building the highway to the new mass-transit line and park.

The money swap from the Highway Trust Fund to the Urban Mass Transit Administration was, on the surface, a mere bureau-

cratic reshuffling of government cash, but it was a milestone in federal action, a real policy watershed. The message was clear: No longer would highways be regarded as the premier solution to urban traffic problems. For the first time, a major expressway project had been relegated to the scrap heap and the land and money devoted to other uses. The legislation that enabled Boston to make the switch could also be used by any other state or city that had a change of heart. It was still being used in the early 1990s to transfer money intended to build highways to mass transit instead.

While the scrap over money played out in Washington, D.C., the equally tortuous exercise of writing an environmental impact statement got under way. Hearings on a draft of the voluminous document were held in 1976; the final document was not accepted by the federal government until 1978. Washington officially released $750 million for the transit and park project in 1978, the same year that Ed King, a conservative Democrat who campaigned against the subway project and for the highway, trounced incumbent Michael Dukakis. Once in office, King changed his mind. Construction work on the Southwest Corridor project began in earnest in 1979 and the first passengers rode the new Orange Line in May 1987.

The task of orchestrating the never-ending, three-ring circus fell to Anthony Pangaro and about a dozen associates. Their charge: to run the project office responsible for collecting and refining plans, to build consensus within the bureaucracy and neighborhoods, and to make recommendations to the officials and agencies that had the statutory authority and fiscal responsibility. The office had neither fiscal nor political power. Its only power was the "power" to reach decisions that different state officials would approve. The office was greeted with initial hostility in agencies that were worried about potential transgressions upon their bureaucratic turf, among them the state Department of Public Works, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), and even the Federal Highway Administration.

As a spring snow squall worked on creating a curtain of white partially obscuring the Boston skyline across the water, Pangaro sat in his spacious office on the banks of the Charles River in Cambridge (he had become a real estate developer after his stint on the Southwest Corridor project). Reflecting on the tangled job he was hired to do, and the nebulous authority he was given to do it, he ruminated:

> The state had to do a funny thing. It was going to be responsible for the Southwest Corridor project and it needed someone to pull all these pieces together—streets, transit, city planning, urban design, housing development, and land management. The state owned 120 acres of land, including

> homes, a couple of schools, and a church. People were upset. So they decided to find someone to pull it all together. The only thing was, they didn't give him any real power. The job was cuckoo. On paper it was very loose. It was the power to be persuasive.

Later, as the Southwest Corridor went from planning to design, Pangaro was given formal authority as project manager at the MBTA, the agency charged with constructing the new subway line. The managers of the project were responsible for coordinating fifty-two different firms of architects, engineers, planners, and consultants as they worked with neighborhood residents to determine their needs, to design the subway line and park, and finally to begin the construction project. A small army of consultants came on board, including acoustic experts (hired to quell the noise from the subway and railroad trains), surveyors, geotechnical experts, exterminators (brought in to kill the rats that would be displaced by construction), and aerial photographers. Pangaro left the project in 1980 and construction began under the direction of the transit authority's construction managers.

People Power

Charlie's Sandwich Shoppe on Columbus Avenue in the South End is the kind of place where they have never put Brie on the hamburgers—and never will. The choice is simple: American. It is the kind of place where some of the waitresses still call the customers "hon" and the patrons, who have not taken to the glories of bran muffins and bean sprouts, run the spectrum from construction workers to city workers and lawyers to sweating kids taking five from a game of street hockey. Charlie's Sandwich Shoppe is the kind of place where the fixtures—the old Formica counter and the orange stools for starters—look as if they dated back to the days when Herbert Hoover was in the White House. Some of the mementos, though, like the autographed photo of the New Kids on the Block, the pop music sensation that came out of Boston with a bullet in 1989, are from the era of MTV.

The cramped diner is full of conversation at high volume. The accents are pure Boston. The sound "aaaa-hhhh" wins hands down over "rrr." The sign near the entrance to Charlie's Sandwich Shoppe says it all: "Established 1927. Where Quality and Service Rule." The other sign, hung over the counter packed with people wolfing down burgers and sandwiches with nary a trace of radicchio or arugula but a lot of just-plain-lettuce, says even more: "No Parking After Eating."

Michael Reiskind (occupation: audio-video technician; avocation: community activist) is sitting at a table battling an oversized *Cheeseburger Americanus* with lettuce, tomato, onions, a touch of mayo, and a side of fries. Reiskind moved to Jamaica Plain in 1972, a "newcomer" by the standards of a neighborhood where "old-timers" measure residency by the half century. He is tall, casual, and clearly at home within the crowded confines of Charlie's.

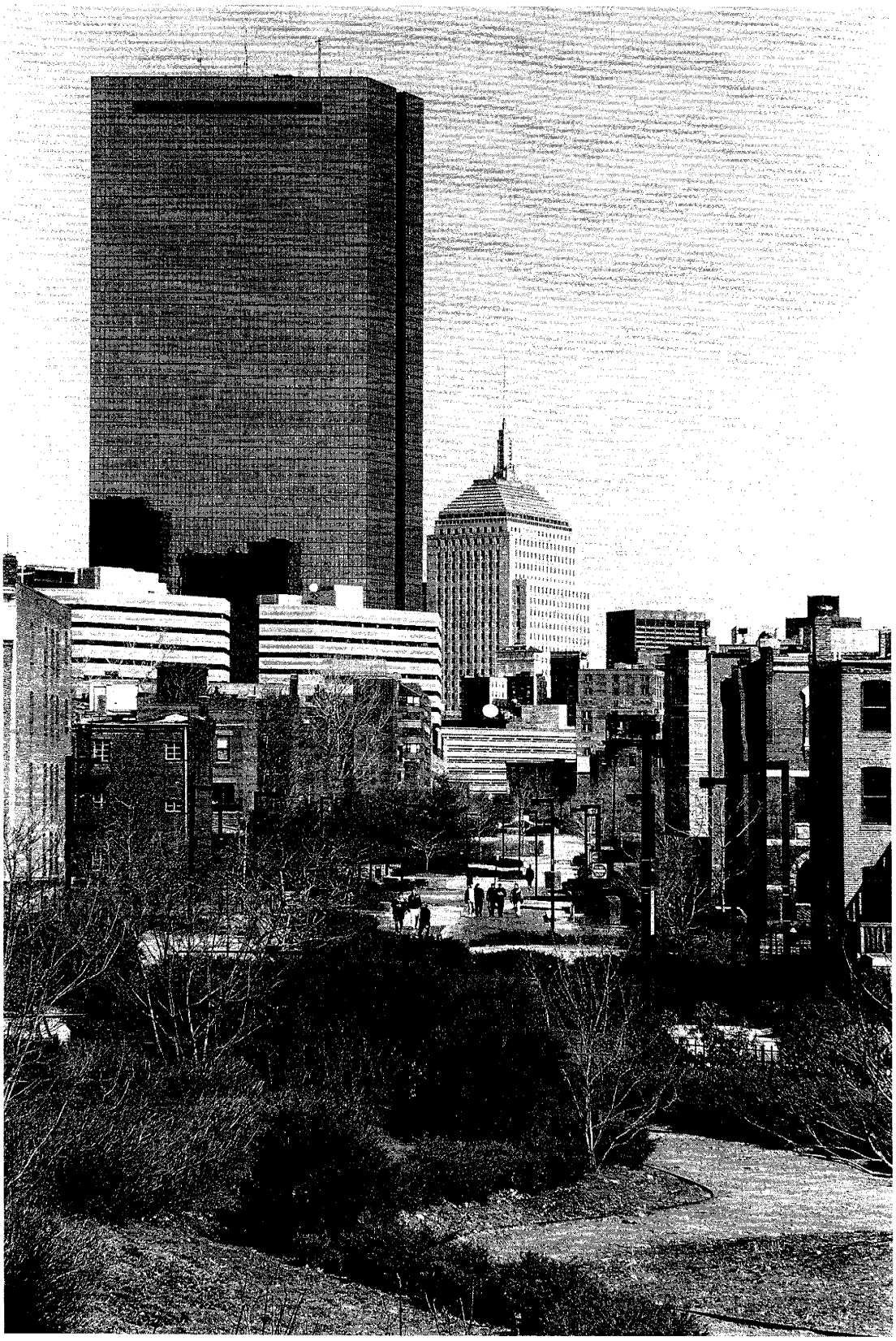
Reiskind's introduction, to what would become more than a decade of work on the fifty-two-acre Southwest Corridor project, came in the form of a flyer dropped off by the postman. He was living in a six-bedroom house he shared with a group of roommates in ethnic, working-class Jamaica Plain, a neighborhood where suspicions ran deep and hostility toward the government after a decade of ruinous bureaucratic meddling was so thick you could cut it with a knife.

Pushing aside his cheeseburger, Reiskind notes:

> These people got burned. Housing was abandoned. Businesses were closed. There was disinvestment. There was arson. The visible lack of people caring was killing the neighborhood. These people had been social science investigated by every college in the area. People would come in and say "I want to help you." Then they'd write their thesis and leave town. Not to mention all of the bureaucratic lying and the broken promises.
>
> I was suspect because I was a newcomer. I was young, living with a bunch of people, unmarried, and didn't grow up in Boston, never mind Jamaica Plain. People tested you. They'd yell at you and see if you backed down and whimpered away. If you passed the tests, slowly, you'd start getting invited to things.

After he was accepted by other neighborhood activists, Reiskind laughs, someone even asked him to run for a state representative's seat from the neighborhood. He eventually gained a seat on the board of directors of the Southwest Corridor Land Development Coalition, the preeminent corridorwide community organization during the planning and construction of the new project.

In Jamaica Plain, hundreds of people like Reiskind painstakingly hashed out even the smallest details of the Southwest Corridor project. There were more than one thousand community meetings. "The courage of the people in the neighborhood was remarkable," he says. "Some people coming to the meetings were in their nineties and knew they were designing a project they wouldn't live to see. Some of them died and never rode it. They came out on snowy nights. If the bureaucrats had half as much courage as the people in the neighborhoods . . ." Reiskind's voice trails off and he doesn't finish the sentence. Traveling the corridor on a sunny day in 1990, pointing out the bright spots in Jamaica Plain and all of the blem-



Planning for the fifty-two-acre Corridor Park included a thousand community meetings.
(Photograph courtesy of Peter Wrenn, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts)

ishes that remain to be taken care of, he seemingly could tell a story about every bridge, bench, and hedge in Corridor Park.

Hundreds of other Bostonians who became intimately involved in the corridor project can do the same kind of thing. Planning for the corridor included more than one thousand community meetings to discuss everything from station location and design to the flow of auto traffic, construction materials, landscaping requirements, and use of the adjacent parkland. The huge cast of architects, engineers, and other professionals found that within every mile, and often within each city block, conflicting demands were to be heard. Thousands of residents from the affected neighborhoods were involved with the project, showing up for the frequent meetings and strategy sessions.

From the gritty sidewalks of St. Botolph's Street near the South End, where hookers ply their trade, to the commerical heart of Centre Street in Jamaica Plain, where old Green Line trolleys used to clang to and from downtown, the Southwest Corridor project developed a superstructure requiring a long organizational chart to depict, let alone explain. All told, twenty-five task forces and neighborhood communities took part in the process. The community, of course, was just one layer in the hierarchy of the hundreds of contractors and consultants that worked on the project. Nearly ten years after he left the Southwest Corridor project, Pangaro still remembered the players, the lines of communication, and the responsibility as if he was still on the job.

A joint venture of two engineering firms was selected to coordinate the entire project and watch over systemwide plans and design criteria and station and landscape architecture in the park. The project was divided into three sections—essentially, the South End, Roxbury, and Jamaica Plain. A different set of engineers and architects was responsible for each segment of the project. Each section also had a designated "section planner," charged with keeping up the relationship between the project and the community. Staffers sent mailings and copies of meeting minutes to residents and met frequently with homeowners, business people, and community leaders. Pangaro insisted that all consultants attend the public meetings and moderated many of them. He even had aides conduct "dry runs" before the meetings so that the staff could warn him about potential controversies.

The agreement that was worked out between community leaders and the governor's office, when Pangaro was hired to oversee the project, turned out to be the bible that was used to keep the complicated project on track. Before a word of the environmental impact statement was penned or a spade of dirt turned, the various interests

had worked out a "memorandum of understanding" between public officials and local groups active in opposing the highway plans. The agreement mandated that 10 percent of the money for planning and 5 percent of the money for basic design contracts for the corridor be used for community participation and technical assistance. Some twenty local, state, and federal agencies signed on. Pangaro notes:

> There were two principles. One was that we'd look at everything together. And the second was that we wouldn't do anything that we didn't talk to people in these neighborhoods about. The state wouldn't apply for money, the city wouldn't build anything, the park department wouldn't even chop down a tree without airing it at a public meeting. We were trying to fill in the grass-roots side, the part that the government never gets to. Ultimately, most people bought into the project.

The frequent public meetings and hearings called under Pangaro's auspices were open to any and all comers. They operated on a consensus basis: all viewpoints were heard. If consensus emerged, Pangaro was willing to make recommendations on the spot. If there was still disagreement, all of the opinions were forwarded to the transit agency. Engineers, agency staff, designers, and even contractors were required to attend all meetings.

A formal structure allowed residents to have a say in determining the relationship of the new subway line to their neighborhood, including the opportunities for revitalization and redevelopment. Neighborhood committees took part in major engineering decisions, such as the alignment of the corridor, the depth of excavation, and the extent of decking. They also reviewed detailed plans for landscaping, fencing, and graphics. Station area task forces, established for each of the planned new subway stations, kept an eye on station design, development plans, and countless other issues relating to individual stations. Other task forces were set up, on an ad hoc basis, to address individual issues as they arose—everything from reviewing structural canopies designed to cut down the noise from the transit line to trying to get specific parcels of land near the corridor project developed. In the late 1970s, many of the community committees and task forces met nearly on a weekly basis. A few task forces were still meeting in 1990, trying to hash out some of the issues that remained around land development.

The project opened field offices so residents could stop in to learn more about the undertaking. The field offices also distributed the *Corridor News,* a bimonthly tabloid, to more than 10,000 people. The newspaper was distributed at convenience stores, libraries, and transit stops. It was also sent to a mailing list of people who had participated in the project at any point. On top of all that, the

project developed a small library of informational handouts to explain any and all possible points about the project, from utility disruption and parking by construction workers to the niceties of rat control. Says Pangaro:

> The biggest problem was convincing people that people from outside the neighborhood weren't going to come in and tell them what to do. We plodded through it. We assured people that we were going to figure out what made sense within their neighborhood. The corridor needed to mend two halves of a neighborhood. So we went about land use planning and determining station location by asking ourselves "What do people on both sides of the project really need?" It turned out to be everything from housing to commercial development. In Roxbury people were ready for large-scale stuff. In other neighborhoods we had old homes to sell off. We simply dealt with each neighborhood separately.

What a Determined Band Can Do

Community participation in the Southwest Corridor was more than an abstract civics textbook exercise. Neighborhood involvement produced results and left an indelible imprint on the project. Residents limited the availability of parking where they felt traffic might be overwhelming. They led architects to design and redesign stations so that the scale and character of the adjacent area would not be threatened. They helped select fences, lighting fixtures, and furniture. They helped control construction procedures so that disruption was kept to a minimum while the new transit corridor was built.

In Jamaica Plain, residents determined where the subway and railroad tracks would be covered over and where they would remain open. In Roxbury, the neighborhood helped select the route of new streets that were built as part of the project. In the South End, community groups negotiated minute details of the project with consultants: how the street ends would meet the park, whether garbage trucks would have enough room to turn around, the height of the curb so that people could not park on the sidewalks any more, the location and design of the ventilation stacks needed for the tunnel.

Community groups such as the Southwest Corridor Community Farm and Boston Urban Gardeners (BUG), a nonprofit established to help poor Bostonians build community gardens, were instrumental in securing land for more than ninety garden plots in the park. They even rescued one thousand old railroad ties and ironwork fencing from the railroad embankment for gardeners to use in landscaping their plots.

For the engineers, accustomed to building projects with little

outside input, the entire process became a catechism of sorts. Recalls Robert T. Loney, a soft-spoken senior vice president of Fay, Spofford and Thorndike, the engineering firm that coordinated the entire Southwest Corridor project for the transit authority and designed the South End segment of the project:

> We originally looked at it as just another job, attacking it from the technical viewpoint alone. We were going to go in and do our thing. The more we got involved, the more we realized it wasn't just another subway project. There was more to it and it broadened us. The 1950s' generation of engineers cranked up the bulldozers and went and did the job. This was different. You considered what the effect of everything you did was going to be on the neighborhood. You tried your damnedest to minimize the adverse impact of construction. It wasn't us and them. It was all of us in it together.

Loney laughs when he remembers his first visit to the South End, on the same day his firm won the contract on the project, but it is clearly one of those laughs brought on by the passage of time. Visiting one of the neighborhoods with a colleague, he was confronted

One of the oases shoehorned into the South End. Community groups negotiated every detail. *(Photograph courtesy of Peter Wrenn, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts)*

by a woman walking a big dog. She was not happy over the prospect of outsiders coming into the community to do a major project. The woman and the dog let him know in no uncertain terms. With a small trace of a grimace and maybe a flash of professional pride, Loney notes:

> In the early days there was a definite hostility toward the engineers. Some people flat-out told me they didn't need some lilly white guy from the suburbs coming in telling them what they'd get. But they found out we'd listen to them, not jam things down their throats. We had open-door policy in the office if anyone wanted to come in.
>
> We got religion. Today there's a growing awareness among my peers that the community does have a say. A lot of us remember the baby carriage in front of the bulldozer that stopped a project. We don't want that. And we won't have it if we take the community along in the process. No surprises. Get them in early. Get their input. Most people realize there's a limit to what can and can't be done in any project. And as long as people are brought in early and kept aware of what is going on it pays incredible dividends.

Residents played a huge role in making sure that security concerns were key in the design of Corridor Park and the new Orange Line—perhaps *the* key issue in ensuring the success of urban parks and mass transit. They helped design the project so that it would be resistant to vandalism, neglect, and tight local budgets that could hurt maintenance and policing. (It was a fortuitous decision considering Massachusetts's precarious finances in the early 1990s, a development that necessitated massive budget cuts and tax increases.) Bicycle paths, for instance, were designed to be wide enough to accommodate police cruisers. Graffiti-resistant construction materials were used wherever possible. Only small trees and shrubs that grew to low height were planted so that security would be easier and there would be no isolated areas removed from public view. Two separate paths—one for pedestrians and another for bicyclers—were created to keep people and bikes apart. Ball courts were clustered around play areas and benches to discourage loitering and keep them under the watch of a variety of residents. In the South End, basketball backboards were actually placed at lower than normal heights in order to preserve the courts for younger children and discourage taller teenagers from using them. In the subway stations, all nooks and crannies where people could hide were eliminated. Pedestrian underpasses were designed so they would be visible in their entirety from fare collection booths.

The touchiest issue arousing neighborhood passions during the planning phase was access across the corridor. Since 1815, the railroad corridor, which ran across an elevated embankment, had di-

vided the neighborhoods. In many areas, the population on one side of the tracks was white, on the other black. Loney recalls:

> In the early days of development people didn't want anyone to be able to come across the corridor. There was real opposition to free access. Everybody wanted access to the park, but they didn't want the people on the "other side" to be able to cross over. As the project developed, people got together at the meetings. They found out that the guy on the other side of the tracks wasn't that bad after all.

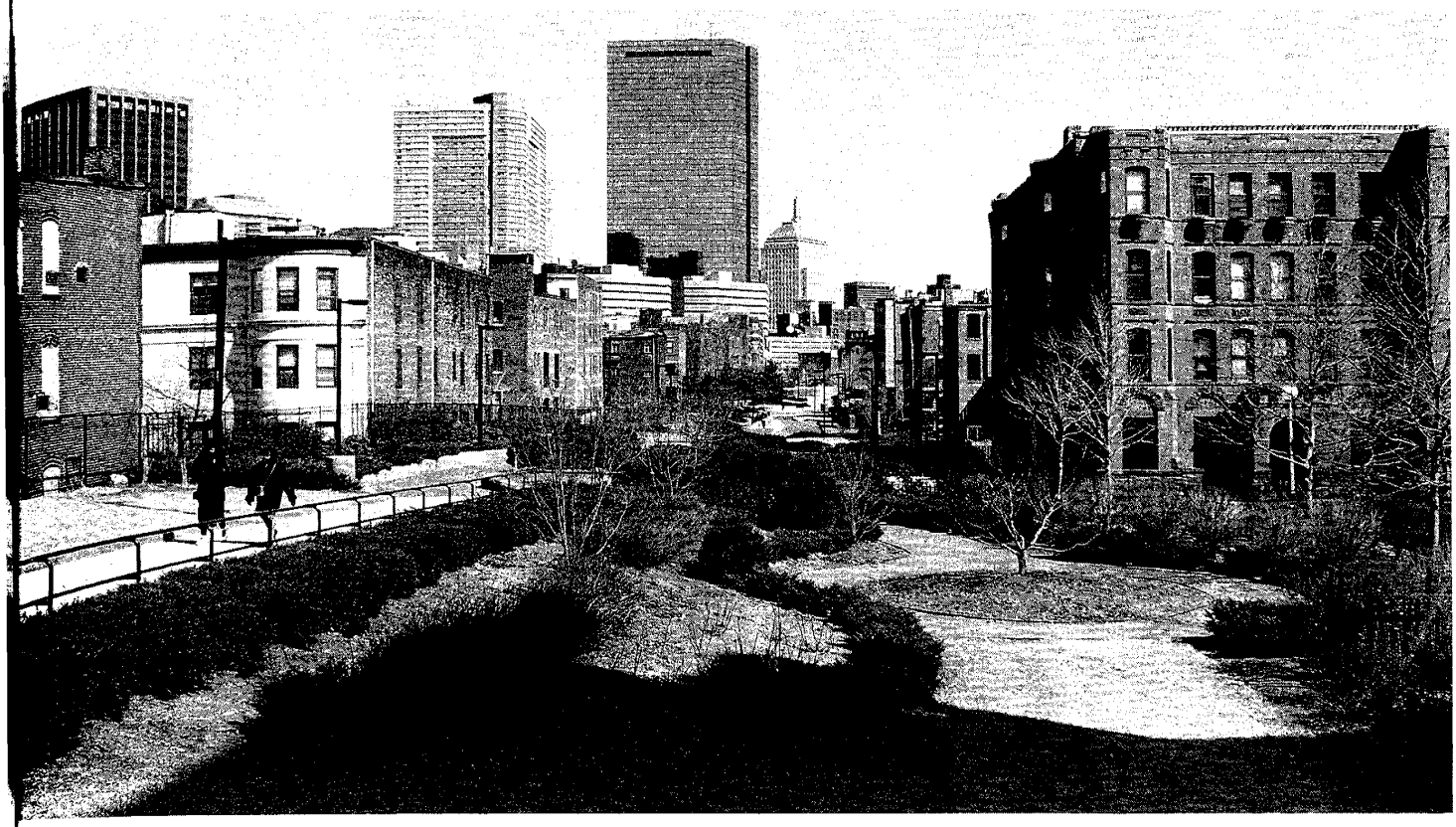
In most instances, disputes were resolved by providing access across the park where railroad overpasses permitting access previously existed, but in a few cases, access residents opposed to a free flow of people across the corridor managed to limit access.

In 1981, the citizen participation paid off politically. The project was threatened by an $81 million budget shortfall. The remaining construction cost estimates exceeded the federal government's willingness to pay. Federal officials began ordering the MBTA to cut costs by scrapping escalators, noise canopies, and buying cheaper construction materials, but the community groups proved to be worthwhile adversaries, so well-informed about the project's technical details from the years of meetings that they made convincing arguments to retain most of the elements threatened with the budget ax. (Luck had a hand as well since the budget gap came in the middle of the recession of the early 1980s and the project benefited from low bids submitted by contractors hungry for work.) In a few instances, they even embarrassed federal officials. Neighborhood activists made sure, for instance, to publicize a federal effort to save $20,000 on a $20 million contract by eliminating a special antigraffiti finish on concrete walls. As it turned out, Uncle Sam spent more than $20,000 just administering the paperwork for the proposed change. Says Pangaro:

> The overwhelming lesson is that if you set up a process, commit to following it, follow it, and show people you're following it, there will be results. They may be small things, but they'll be concrete. And when the time comes to make big decisions the support will be there.

Tent City

Sixty seconds. That is the amount of time it takes to walk from the front door of a red-brick apartment complex called Tent City to the entrance of Neiman-Marcus, the retailer famed for its consumer-paradisiacal extravagance. The contrast is too cute, almost cheeky.



"As the project developed, people . . . found out that the guy on the other side of the tracks wasn't that bad after all." *(Photograph courtesy of Peter Wrenn, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts)*

After all, the library is bulging with stories about urban struggles between the rich and poor. Still, how could anyone familiar with the American city in the 1980s and 1990s avoid the temptation to play with the visual imagery?

In those sixty seconds, a poor Bostonian can stroll from a new clean, modern apartment in Tent City to the cosmetics counter at Neiman's, where a sales clerk wearing a $150 dress and a $75 hairstyle will offer to demonstrate a new facial cream in a six-ounce bottle costing more than the poor person's monthly rent. How did the poor person come to reside in a beautiful apartment with bay windows a short stroll from the woman selling the face cream at Neiman's? That is the crux of Boston's new twist on an old story.

It was 1968, the year inner cities across America exploded in flames in the wake of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In Boston's South End, the seeds of activism had already been planted. The War on Poverty was showing chinks in its armor. Boston had laid out an urban renewal plan for the South End in 1964. Four years later, the plan was still going nowhere. Some residents had been evicted from dilapidated buildings, but with each emptied building came more deterioration. Scores of families had already been driven out of the neighborhood.

So neighborhood residents, led by activists who would go on to

become prominent in Boston politics in the 1980s, erected "Tent City" on the site of a big parking lot serving downtown office buildings. People used to live on the site—before the buildings were torn down with the promise that new low-income housing would be built to replace them. No housing was forthcoming. The protesters camped out on the parking lot for three days, getting heavy media coverage before many of the demonstrators were forcibly removed and arrested.

"The neighborhood was at the point of exasperation," says Kenneth Kruckemeyer, who had moved to the South End not long before the housing demonstrations started. He became one of the leading activists in the neighborhood in the 1970s and later a deputy to Pangaro in running the entire Southwest Corridor project. "It was part of an awakening of people who were new to the neighborhood to urban issues and urban problems and a coming together of the people who'd lived here for many years."

For more than a decade, protests intended to get the city to follow through on its commitment to build new housing in the South End continued. Meanwhile, the neighborhood organized against extending I-95 through the South End. In 1974, Boston made its first stab at trying to develop the Tent City property. Early plans had called for a parking garage and apartment tower on the site. The Boston Redevelopment Authority decided to require that only 10 percent of the apartments that would be built be affordable to low-income people. "Folks went through the roof," Kruckemeyer remembers. "There was nothing to guarantee that the bulk of the housing built would serve the people that were displaced to create it and nothing to ensure that it would be physically appropriate for this historic neighborhood."

The people of the South End responded with a task force, cochaired by Kruckemeyer and Mel King, who later became one of Boston's most prominent black leaders. The task force drafted a set of "development principles" that ended up shaping development in the South End a decade later. There were fifteen items in the development principles. They boiled down to two simple bottom lines: Any housing built on the Tent City parcel would have to be affordable to a "full mix" of neighborhood residents; and the physical design of the project would have to "relate closely" to the existing row houses and streetscape.

The redevelopment agency received three proposals to build on the Tent City site. None were acceptable under the South End's development guidelines. The neighborhood took issue again. By that time, residents had enough clout to block any development to which they objected strongly. In any event, the test of wills never came.

Massachusetts's dire financial situation in the mid-1970s put all of the development schemes on ice.

All was quiet until the late 1970s. Thirteen dilapidated buildings stood on the otherwise empty Tent City parcel. A few were owned privately; the rest were in the hands of the city. A large parking lot weaved around buildings on the property. The lot was owned by William Fitzgerald, the retired city fire commissioner, for his Fitz-Inn Autopark.

At one point, Tunny Lee, an MIT urban planning professor who had taken an active interest in the corridor project and was a key player in schooling many of the participants in the art of community participation, decided to use the Tent City site as a studio for his students. They developed alternative development models for the parcel. (One of the students ended up becoming the executive director of the Tent City group in the early 1980s.)

In the late 1970s, Urban Investment and Development Corporation, the developer of Chicago's swank Water Tower Place retail project and one of the nation's leading builders of upscale downtown projects, began pushing plans to build a huge new retail–entertainment–hotel development across from the Tent City property. The project opened as Copley Place in 1984, largely on decking created over the adjacent Massachusetts Turnpike. The state government, which controlled the air rights over the freeway, insisted that Urban Investment and Development "win" its right to a long-term lease by negotiating an agreement with the surrounding neighborhoods. From 1977 to 1980, in fifty public hearings with Back Bay and South End interests, Urban's man-on-site, Gary Himmel, labored over terms. Some sessions, especially in early stages, boiled over into shouting and impassioned controversy.

Four hundred people poured into one meeting at the Boston Public Library, and there were sharp questions: Would Copley Place's sheer mass overpower the nearby streets and row houses? What would be the impact on local traffic, parking, and pedestrian access? Would the buildings cast shadows and stir up winds? What would Urban do for low- and moderate-income housing needs? Who would get the jobs—in construction and then the six thousand-some permanent positions?

Himmel later acknowledged he had been shaken by the intensity of neighborhood demands, but as his "adversaries" became his design advisers, his attitude shifted. His architects actually worked with citizen guidelines tacked up at their work desks. Urban Investment and Development eventually agreed to modify its design to move the taller buildings back from the street, even though the project still overpowers the surrounding low-rise neighborhood.

Twenty percent of the construction jobs were reserved for minorities. Of the project's six thousand permanent jobs, 50.0 percent were earmarked for Boston residents, which included 50.0 percent women, 30.0 percent minorities, and 17.2 percent people from surrounding neighborhoods.

Eventually, Himmel would say that far from ruining the Copley Place development, the neighborhood input led to a superior project, both economically and aesthetically—a suggestion that even on the periphery of the Southwest Corridor, its new planning ethic was influencing Boston's way of doing things.

The entire neighborhood transition raised, predictably enough, broad concerns in the South End. Kruckemeyer explains:

> The heart of the matter was trying to do things which strengthened the neighborhood in transportation and housing and made it better. It pained me to see that good transportation and nice physical design displaced the people you were supposed to be building for. And it was to me irresponsible to say that the poor would have to be condemned to poor transportation and housing because we couldn't figure out a solution. We had to find ways of solving the problem of affordable housing while we were rehabbing the streets in the South End. Here was a way to do quality design, provide service to the neighborhood, and do it all in a way that would stabilize the neighborhood. And we did create a stabilizing influence despite the real estate pressure to gentrify privately owned units. Affordable housing can be done in a way that's stable and good, both socially and physically.

Exactly what would be built on the Tent City parcel became part of both the Southwest Corridor rebuilding effort and the Copley Place development negotiations. There followed several more years of negotiations—with the owner of the parking lot, the city, the developers of Copley Place, and others. Finally, a year and a half after rejecting a complicated deal with the Tent City group to sell the parking lot for $1.25 million and develop housing and parking on the site, the Fitzgerald interests sold the property to Urban Investment and Development. The price tag: $3 million.

Kruckemeyer picks up the narrative, sitting at a battered table in a meeting room in the Tent City apartment building:

> What was Urban Investment and Development going to do with the property? They wanted more parking for Copley Place, about 1,100 spaces on the site. The neighborhood went bananas again. We'd been at it for 14 years. We tried negotiating but pulled out, thinking that having more than 1,000 parking spaces on the property just wouldn't work. That left us with some unhappy people in the city and unhappy developers who'd been seeing dollar signs in their eyes and parking in their future. The neighborhood held enough cards to stop it and hold out for something that it wanted.

The question of affordable housing in the South End had become a pressing issue. During the 1970s and 1980s, as the value of residential real estate in many parts of Boston skyrocketed, the attractive row houses of the South End began drawing young middle- and upper-middle-class families. Displacement, brought on by gentrification and the accompanying conversion of apartments into condominiums, threatened many longtime residents.

Finally, in the mid-1980s, with work on the Southwest Corridor starting to wind down and a beautiful park taking shape next to the Tent City property, the city, neighborhood, and developers negotiated a deal to develop the property. Urban Investment and Development was allowed to build about seven hundred underground parking spaces on the site, 130 of which were reserved for Tent City and the remainder of which could be used for Copley Place parking. The developers would build the underground garage. Tent City would use a variety of public funds to build low- and moderate-income housing. Ground for the new building was broken in 1985.

So the Tent City site came to be occupied by 269 handsome apartments housed in a large, low-rise, red-brick structure that blended in impeccably with the surrounding neighborhood. One-fourth of the residents were poor; half had moderate incomes. The remaining one-fourth of the apartments were rented at "market rate"—which in the fashionable South End of the 1990s translated into $800 monthly for a one-bedroom apartment, running up to $1,700 for a four-bedroom unit. The rich and poor, elderly and young mixed together throughout the new apartment complex. Virtually the only rule distributing apartments by location was the one that gave families with children first crack at ground-floor apartments so that children could play outside with family supervision. People began moving into the new building in April 1988, almost twenty years to the day of the first demonstration on the site.

Back in Tony Pangaro's office along the Charles, the snow was letting up and subway trains running from downtown Boston to Cambridge continued to clatter periodically across the dowdy old Longfellow Bridge.

"It really is possible to find out what people have on their minds and develop an inclusive process," Pangaro said. He glanced out the window at another passing subway train and the Boston skyline, which had come back into view as the snow abated:

> If you can agree on the goals you can work out how they are accomplished. . . . But no matter how good you are about listening to people, you have to remember than you can't substitute a new government for the existing one. You find a way to augment the process. This would never have worked if we'd set up a superauthority to control the whole process.

> If we had tried to go and get money and power and invent a new form of government, we'd never had gotten the thing done. Our job was to persuade people, politically and technically, and help them get the money. We wouldn't overrun them. We didn't make a single state legislator or city councilman mad. We didn't have to fight those battles. That empowers people in the neighborhoods. It gives them access to government and helps them be more effective without redoing government.

Commentary: Boston

POLLY WELCH: What is remarkable about this success story is the amount of risk-taking, the political balancing among competing needs, the collaborative process. An example: How do you balance a systemwide problem like transit against the need for local input? It would have been easy for a band of engineers to design the transit system in the abstract from the top down. Any time you allow local input, you create that tension between being able to build something cheap and uniform and building something that responds to the individualized needs of local communities.

JOSEPH P. RILEY, JR.: That's what stunned me: the enormous individuality of design. They didn't try to say, "We have one good idea and we'll run it all the way down the line." Every green space, retail outlet, train station, and sidewalk showed the creation of a public realm with individual character. It was more expensive but it was better. The success is in people finding out they can create a public realm themselves, in this case, a marvelous, complex linear park with both transit and flower gardens.

WELCH: Another important example of balance is the decision to spend less money on the stations and more on parkland. The engineers and architects may have preferred to build a "signature" building for each station. They were not permitted to. There were strict guidelines as to materials, color systems, and technical details. Money was spent to customize station design when it would benefit the life of the community. That was the trade-off and it was based on what designers heard at the participatory meetings. It's important to credit citizen participation as central to the success of this project.

RILEY: Any good architect, planner, or lawyer will tell you that they do their best work when their client is well-prepared. Give me

a client that understands the facts of the situation and I can do a better job in the courtroom. Give a designer a community that has thought through the details and he or she will be able to create alternatives.

STEVE LIVINGSTON: The diversity was so great that this can't be called a project. It was many projects linked together over thirty years with government and citizen participation. One of the challenges in urban redevelopment is sustaining government support for thirty years and more.

RILEY: In this generation, the popular model is the suburban model. You have a cornfield and then, almost overnight, you have a regional shopping mall, a cloverleaf, and a mixed-use complex; but in building and rebuilding cities, you must have patience, put it into a historical context, and then do the hard political work.

WELCH: The theme of this project is "healing the scar." The scar is physical, social, economic. Each of these dimensions was addressed—which is what the Rudy Bruner Award is about. The scale of the project is mind-boggling. It had an impact on one-third of the city's population.

Boston had already been through two major urban renewal projects: one in the Back Bay for the Convention Center and one downtown for the Government Center in the old West End, the subject of Herb Gans's *The Urban Villagers*. The city already had sacrificed a community to show its willingness to embrace urban renewal. The idea of tearing down more neighborhoods for "progress" was not a new issue. People were familiar with the social and personal cost.

The other piece of the scar was the railroad: a divider between the haves and have-nots. It linked Boston to the rest of the world but divided its neighborhoods. Transit systems aren't built just to bring people into and out of a city. The new rail system represents a conscious effort to link the people on opposite sides of the tracks. The participatory process was one where people had to confront their prejudices along with their need to get across to the other side.

RILEY: A city is an ecosystem. You have to respect its power and its delicacy. You must respect, for example, that in decking over a transit rail line to create a public space, a planner's egalitarian notion of interaction may disturb the city's balance. The Boston plan was successful because so many citizens were involved, particularly in deciding these details of where—and where not—to deck.

WELCH: The issue of getting across the system also involved this question: If people used it as a recreation path, where would they exit the system and whose street would they end up on? As it turned out, the first third is completely decked over. You get a linear park, and one is unaware of what's below. In the second third, in Roxbury, where there's quite a bit of decking, that community chose carefully where it thought the deck would be useful in creating recreation areas and where they could forego it. The third part has much less decking, and what there is is primarily near the subway stations.

LIVINGSTON: Managers and designers of public spaces realize that something magic happens to people in a space that is working. People are transformed. The magic was allowed to happen in Boston by matching the design to both young and old, to various ethnic groups.

WELCH: One of the social problems inherent in mass transit is that people in more affluent communities at the end of the rail line are afraid of inner-city people using the line to come into their neighborhoods. It was the middle of the line in Boston that had the poorest people, in the Roxbury section. People at both ends of the line were worried that this would have an impact on their neighborhoods.

An additional problem was to balance regional versus local transit needs. Part of the purpose of the line was to get suburbanites into the city without their cars, to make it attractive and convenient to them.

There's also the issue of parkland management. The city has built itself a wonderful green space, but there's an ongoing discussion about how it's going to be maintained and by whom.

LIVINGSTON: The management begins in the design process. Design addresses physical needs but it also addresses participation. People adopt the space at that initial point in the process. Security and maintenance are easier if that foundation of participation is there. Public spaces conjure up fears, but you can handle that through participation in the planning process.

WELCH: The Southwest Corridor project is not yet complete. There are loose ends, as with any large-scale undertaking. Sometimes it is difficult to resolve problems and ensure financial and political support once the project is publically declared complete. Completion and sustainability ideally go hand in hand.

The Metropolitan District Commission, which was going to manage the parklands, experienced drastic budget cuts. In addition, several community task forces wanted the parkland managed at the local rather than the regional level so that they could continue to have the input that they'd had in the planning process. They felt if vandalism were a problem, it could be solved more effectively at a local level. They felt that community gardens shouldn't be managed by a regionwide agency that is too far removed from the users to work out problems.

This project raises the question of how people continue to feel a sense of ownership and pride over these hundreds of acres of green space over time. Part of the answer in this era of "a thousand points of light" is volunteerism. As with Cabrillo Village, those who don't remember the hours it took to create something may have less understanding of, and appreciation for, its benefit to their lives.

Southwest Corridor also raises the issue of how you sustain political support to make sure the promises get fulfilled. The city of Boston has a concept called linkage. It requires that developers who want to construct new buildings downtown have to contribute linkage money for development of buildings in economically depressed neighborhoods.

A large parcel adjacent to the corridor in Roxbury remains vacant and undeveloped because the city and the state struggle in their collaborative effort to get it completed. In a public housing development abutting the corridor, the housing authority and tenant task force have chosen to leave the housing units closest to the subway boarded up as a clear message that they have not yet received the state and local funds to complete the housing renewal work.

RILEY: Money alone is not going to do it, and grass-roots involvement won't do it if you don't have the money.

Cities represent a civilization's statement about their times. You enrich a civilization, and often its poorest people, when you make it possible for quality investments to be made in the city. You lift the tide in the city with programs like the Urban Development Action Grant, and you lift all boats, rural and urban. That's why it is so regrettable when such programs are abandoned.

WELCH: Yet another imaginative dimension of the Southwest Corridor development was the education and training component that got inner-city kids working in the offices of the project design consultants and engineers so they could learn skills and experience professions they might not otherwise know about.

MIT and Harvard faculty and students played a role. The South-

west Corridor project was a perfect field setting for design students to be exposed to the realities of participatory design. In fact, one of the positive outcomes of the project is that now there is, in effect, a class of "Southwest Corridor" graduates in architecture, planning, and urban design who got their feet wet, got their first real world experience, and developed their professional values by devoting a piece of their lives to this project. They are now the current generation of movers and shakers.