

No Freeways on the Horizon: The Path to Livability

Byron Hon

Amanda Lu

Cheryl-Lee Madden

Nick Penner

University of British Columbia

Geog 419

Prof. Jessica Dempsey

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Executive Summary

Ranked once again as one of the “Most livable cities in the World” by the Economist Intelligence Unit, Vancouver has been consistently praised for its high quality of life (The Economist, 2016). A key component to the city’s livability has been its unique urban fabric, untainted by freeway infrastructure. This study will investigate how Vancouver has grown without any freeways, and how this may be related to the rise in ‘livability’ as a planning discourse in the city. Several social, economic, and political factors have played into this social change, many of which were condensed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Working within this time period, our research interpreted an interview and archival sources, public surveys, and regional planning strategies to understand what roles SPOTA (Strathcona Property Owners and Tenants Association), TEAM (The Electors’ Action Movement), and the ‘livability’ concept had in preventing the construction of freeways within Vancouver. Through this research we found that SPOTA’s ultimate contribution to the lack of freeways in Vancouver today is only influential given that its progress was carried on by TEAM and the promotion of livability in the following decade. TEAM played a largely underappreciated role in the stopping of freeways and from the beginning, the principles of livability held strong opinions against the use of automobiles. The results of this research will be key in exposing the history of ‘livability’ as a planning discourse, and why Vancouver will not accommodate for freeway construction. Through our research, we have identified a few instances of social amnesia among these topics in Vancouver, and our results are intended to alleviate some of this memory loss to maintain this social change.

Introduction

In 2016 Vancouver once again, made the list of the “Most livable cities in the World” by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) (The Economist, 2016). The researchers compared 140 cities based on living conditions and challenges affecting way of life. This included weighted categories such as stability, healthcare, culture and environment, education and infrastructure. Dramatically tucked between the waters of the Fraser River and the North Shore mountains, Vancouver’s status as a livable city should not come as a surprise. However, the livability we enjoy today did not just grow out of the Earth but through active effort on by city planners informed by the people. This way of publicity involved planning was not always how the City of Vancouver’s approached development. The change occurred during the protest and subsequent debates between the people of Vancouver and city hall over a freeway proposal through Chinatown and Downtown. The Electors’ Action Movement in 1968 had a strong professional management and academic representation, and won the civic election against the ruling Non-Partisan Association. As pioneers of livable city planning, freeways did not fit in this framework. Although the values of livability have changed, the founding concept has not

because until today there are no freeways in Vancouver. We hypothesize that the freeway debates were a catalyst for the 'livable city' concept in Vancouver. TEAMs 'livability' was key in keeping freeways out of Vancouver until the present day.

Statement of the Problems

One of the central tenets of Vancouver's urban mythology is that the people defeated a major freeway proposal in the late 1960s (Berelowitz, 2006, p. 81). The people of Vancouver fought and won against the similar urban renewal plans that swept through many other major cities like Toronto and Seattle. In our report we aim to tackle the myth head on, and investigate the parties at play during and after the freeway debates. How did we end up with no freeways in Vancouver? Was it just the Strathcona Property Owners Tenants Association (SPOTA), or are there other actors/ideologies involved in this change? How did the events of the freeway lead to pursuing the "livable city" ideologies of the 1970s? What were the outcomes in planning strategies? We will start addressing these questions by examining the Great Freeway Debates of 1967, investigating the birth of TEAM and its values, and analyzing the Livable Region Plan and other Vancouver plans. By studying these critical documents, we can establish the social, political and economic context of Vancouver during the late 1960s and 1970s that fostered this change. This study is important as we assess how social change was achieved. It enables us to understand how we can maintain this change in the future. It serves as a recitation, as "We need litanies or recitations or monuments to these victories, so that they are landmarks in everyone's mind. (Solnit, 2016, p. 25)". This report comes at a time when the Georgia Viaduct, one of the last reminders of the freeway proposal, is about to be demolished. This highlights that freeway infrastructure issues still exist today. By going over the documents of that time we hope to alleviate public amnesia to allow for a more unified understanding of livable transportation between the public and government.

Literature Review

Strathcona Property Owners and Tenants Association (SPOTA)

The Strathcona Property Owners and Tenants Association (SPOTA) was formed in 1968 as a result of the proposed demolition of homes to create a route for the Georgia Viaduct and freeway. SPOTA provided a strong unified voice to maintain what was left of their community and to challenge Mayor Tom Campbell's planning office. This grassroots movement of residents challenged structures of authority to protect their homes, as well as reforming the democratic structures that left them in marginality (Bruce, 2005, p. 14). SPOTA had the support of numerous students, professionals and consultants who allied with residents. Notable supporters

included: the City's Neighborhood Service Coordinator, Darlene Marzari, lawyer and later Premier of British Columbia, Mike Harcourt, head of the Neighbourhood Service Association, Margaret Mitchell, and the architectural firm Birmingham and Wood (Ley et al., 1994, p. 113). The unique blend of ethnic cultural forms and mainstream institutional practices and discourse was critical in leveraging power to influence political actors outside the community (Lee, 2007, p. 3). The result was the mobilization of racialized 'others' to claim a right to place against the tide of willful determination to displace those seen as undesirable.

The initial protests against the freeways were based on economic values. Chinatown argued that businesses would be negatively affected by freeways, and it would result in the loss of one of Vancouver's most popular tourist attractions. They also argued that the revitalization of Chinatown would be much more difficult with the presence of freeways (Gutstein, 2000, p. 155). Many sources have highlighted that SPOTA played a key role in the lack of freeways in Vancouver today (Gutstein, 2000; Green et al., 2014, p. 24, Lee, 2007, p. 383). Because of the wide variety of sources on SPOTA, we tried to focus on the key events following the freeway debates, to see how the values represented by SPOTA were carried on in the following decades.

Late 1960s Government

We found a considerable amount of sources speaking to the political issues surrounding urban renewal and freeway projects in Vancouver in the late 1960s. The municipal government under Tom Campbell had a rather authoritative, pro-development stance on city planning. The planners advocated for two freeways through Chinatown and Gastown effectively cutting through the Downtown Eastside. Campbell ran afoul of citizens opposed to the proposal to complete a 30-year-old transportation plan that would have seen a highway punched through Chinatown. He understood the value of publicity at the cost of citizenry losing long-time homes to the wrecking ball. Under Campbell's transportation planning, Hogan's Alley was demolished for the Georgia Viaduct expansion resulting in the eviction of many of Vancouver's Black Canadian citizens. When questioned about the reason of displacing Chinese citizens by a six-lane freeway Campbell responds, "[the freeway] ... only affects those living in that neighbourhood (Ley & Barnes, 2014).

These pro-development ambitions of the municipal government were dampened by the inactive provincial government. Large scale projects, such as Project 200, fell apart due to disagreements within the partnerships planning the project (Gutstein, 2000, p. 162). The province also prioritized building freeways in rural British Columbia rather than in Vancouver because that was where the dominant Social Credit Party voters lived (the dominant provincial party at the time) (Gutstein, 2000, p. 162).

The political discourses of the municipal government were contrasted with those of the federal government. Paul Hellyer, the Minister of Transportation of Canada between 1967-1969, who led the Task Force on Housing and Urban Development. He arrived at Vancouver when SPOTA was presenting its petition to City Council. Strathcona residents appealed to Hellyer to save their neighbourhood from demolition. After a tour of over forty communities across Canada, the Task Force concluded that urban renewal schemes produced adverse and disrupting conditions for Canadian communities. Consequently Hellyer froze the federal funding for all urban renewal projects on the docket for approval. The minister was one of the first in the federal government to change his/her attitudes on urban renewal programs. Thus, the federal government withheld funding (Stone, 2014, p. 396) unless the residents would be involved in the new plans, stating that they “supported renewal, not demolition” (Gutstein, 2000, p. 161). The municipal government thus had to give in, resulting in the first time that a citizen organization had equal power with the government (in this case SPOTA) (Gutstein, 2000, p. 161).

The Electors’ Action Movement (TEAM)

Immediately following the freeway debates of 1967, a new municipal party named TEAM formed, with forming members Art Phillips, (who later became mayor) and UBC professor Walter Hardwick. TEAM (The Electors’ Action Movement) revolutionized how planning was done in Vancouver by encouraging public participation, accountability, and reducing the control of the city manager (Punter, 2003, p. 56). Alderman May Brown said “we wanted something not so authoritarian and we wanted more local participation. We wanted to hear more from citizens.” (Vancouver Sun, 2012, n.p.). These polarizing views led to Tom Campbell’s early forced retirement when in 1972, TEAM won a majority on city council. One of TEAM’s main goals was to directly benefit the middle class by increasing quality of life on small scales (Langford, 2012, n.p.). Through the creation of the Urban Design Panel, TEAM was also able to improve relationships between architects and planners, thus creating higher quality urban designs of public space (Punter, 2003, p. 57). TEAM became a key player in the absence of freeways throughout the 1970s as they advocated for “balanced transportation” plans focused on walking, cycling, and public transit (Pendakur, 1972, p. 81). The Livable Region Plan in 1975 (which inspired the Livable Region Strategic Plan of 1997) implemented these ideals into the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD).

Other Reasons for Absence of Freeways

The literature provided us with a variety of potential reasons for Vancouver’s lack of freeways today. Freeways were arguably built primarily in global cities to facilitate the rising populations entering them. Since Vancouver did not become a global city until after the 1970s when the popularity of freeways had died down, the city now is imbued with more public transit

systems such as the Skytrain (Perl, Hern, & Kenworthy, 2015, p. 108). The transportation needs of the industrial businesses and the average citizen often differ, and since the industrial and modern ports in Vancouver are spatially segregated, designing a single freeway system that satisfies all has been difficult (Stone, 2014, p. 401). Prior to the freeway age, Vancouver had a large streetcar system, which was later replaced by North America's largest trolley bus system; this encouraged this pace of transport in the city rather than the rapid-speed freeway (Berelowitz, 2005, p. 80). Also, Vancouver is completely void of any military establishments, which were commonly the impetus for building freeways in cities in the United States (Berelowitz, 2005, p. 81). Finally, it has been said that the protests may not have been stopping the government as much as the costs of building this infrastructure was (Leo in Perl, Hern, & Kenworthy, 2015, p. 101; Pendakur, 1972, p. 35; Macdonald, 1987, p. 162).

Methods

Our methodology included both archival and interview methods. We chose archival sources because our research topic involves the birth and early years of a term that started around 50 years ago. This meant that interviews of people directly involved in these events were hard to come by. Speaking to UBC Geography department, Professor David Ley was critical in our research as he has been studying Vancouver urban geography since 1970 providing vital institutional knowledge. Issues surrounding transportation planning, quality of life, social change are largely out of the common imaginary of the public, therefore a survey may not have been that helpful on gathering insight on these topics.

Our research was focused on the late 1960s and early 1970s in Vancouver; particularly on the political, economic, and social environment of the city, province and the country during that period. We also studied other case studies (Seattle, Toronto) to compare with Vancouver's context. We wanted to focus on how social change occurred in this period 50 years ago, and has forever altered the city's growth.

Data was collected largely from official studies and strategic plans committed during the 1970s, which were high quality, primary sources that demonstrated the values and meaning behind livability and livable transportation planning. Our official studies included the Urban Futures Project Opinion Survey, 1971, and A Report on Livability, 1972 while the strategic plans included the Livable Region Plan, 1975; Goals for Vancouver, 1980, and Freedom to Move, 1989. Newspaper articles were also examined which highlighted the values of the mayor and the public.

The sources proved to be very valuable as the professional nature of these documents were clear in their underlying motives behind why certain decisions were made. Despite this, we were limited by the data in several ways. Our archival research was committed with

considerable difficulty due to the lack of categorization of these older documents in the themes that we had determined for our research. For example, at the City of Vancouver Archives, the newspaper clippings were organized in terms of ‘traffic and transit’, ‘Gastown’, and ‘planning’. Thus, the articles concerning freeways were dispersed among these various folders. At the UBC Archives, none of the newspaper articles before the 1980s were indexed; thus, the entire newspapers had to be skimmed manually for underlying themes. The handwritten notes found within TEAM’s fonds were extremely helpful in stating concise livability values, although often times these documents were provided with only a date and no situational context or author. Were these hand-written changes made at meetings only among city planners, or were these concerns voiced by the community?

Our single interview involved speaking to David Ley. We chose Dr. Ley because of his vast knowledge on Vancouver transportation and the evolution of livability in the city. Creating questions for this interview was challenging, and we may have kept our questions a little too broad for a truly effective interview. The interview was unfortunately committed rather early in our research of the livability concept, causing us to depend very heavily on the lessons learned from Dr. Ley regarding this concept. Some of our questions were loaded; creating unsupported assumptions at times regarding how different actors have influenced the lack of freeways in Vancouver. Overall, the interview provided us with a better understanding of the history of livability in Vancouver and a few more potential reasons as to why it may have started in the 1970s specifically.

Results and Analysis

What was SPOTA’s role on freeways?

By investigating the chain of events following the Great Freeway Debate of 1967, we discovered that SPOTA did not have as strong of a role in the prevention of freeways compared to the economic and political factors during this period. Several freeway proposals released after 1967 included the ND Lea plan (1968), and Alternative Routes for Brockton Point (1969). In 1970, there was great confusion between the mayor at the time, Tom Campbell, and the city council about whether the city council had committed to a freeway plan that may have led to a study for a rapid transit plan in Vancouver. As a result of insufficient funds, the ND Lea plan was rejected. With this intention, it appeared as though they were actually preferring the older freeway proposals for the purpose of affordability (Pendakur, 1972, p. 83). Thus, by 1972, freeway plans were officially out of the picture of Vancouver; and instead, rapid transit, and improved bus systems were in discussion (Gutstein, 2000, p. 166).

What is livability?

By searching through the archives and other literature, it became apparent that livability was a term that was undefined from its first use in planning discourses. ‘Livability’ was a “catch word” (A Report on Livability, 1972, p. 4) which allowed the GVRD to base an entire plan based on the term without a definition “because the livability concept is readily understood but too subtle for simple definition” (Faubert, 1990, p. 64). There is no true universal definition for livability, but instead everyone has their own idea of what it means (Faubert, 1990, p. 64), by emphasizing different aspects of what it looks like to “live safely and peacefully” or to “retain healthy living conditions and the natural scenic beauty of the region” (Faubert, 1990, p. 65).

Despite this, we were able to find a couple discrete examples of what livability means. In the Sun, January 3rd 1973 edition, Mayor Art Phillips promised a more livable city, defining it as pedestrian oriented places emphasising the downtown area (Leiren, 1973, p. 1). The finest definition for livability was found in An Introduction to Livability, which states: “Livability is a sense of belonging to a small community. Going to the community facilities by car breaks down neighbourliness” (1971, p. 2). We found this to be the summarizing statement of what livability entails, as it highlights the importance of human-scale in a city. David Ley mentioned that livability is exemplified by the area of South False Creek between Granville Island and Cambie Street. It includes developments “with lots of open space, with medium density, not high density buildings, and with social mixing” (Ley, 2017). The community also contained no automobiles (Ley, 1980, p. 254).

What values in livability have influenced transportation planning in Vancouver?

The survey results from the Urban Futures Project highlighted livability values in the Livable Region Plan of 1975. They stated that: “People want to reduce the time and effort involved in travelling... They also want to be able to reach parks, beaches and the mountains easily...People are willing to rely less on their cars, but they want fast, frequent and convenient public transit to take them to work, shopping and recreation areas” (GVRD, 1975, p. 7). These results show that the public defined livability as preserving and connecting with one’s natural environment, while also giving up the car as their primary mode of transportation; acknowledging that it is a quick way to commute, but not environmentally friendly. The Livable Region Plan continues to express the public’s concerns about noise and air pollution from transportation (GVRD, 1975, p. 24). Again in the Freedom to Move report of 1989, it mentions that livability is being conscious of the environmental effects of transportation (Faubert, 1990, p. 60). This was also reflected in TEAM’s transportation policy which aimed to “preserve the scenic beauty of Vancouver” (TEAM, 1972).

A number of sources emphasized the importance of the human-scale of transportation in cities. Timmer and Seymoar iterate that, “Overall, a livable city is one in which the car is

accommodated but other forms of transportation are encouraged. Streets can then adopt a different role within the community and the city can focus on designing for its residents rather than for its cars” (Timmer & Seymoar, 2005, p. 22). Thus, walking was prioritized to keep transportation “safer, healthier and [to] improve the quality of life for residents” (Timmer & Seymoar, 2005, p. 21). Ley also mentioned that the ‘small is beautiful’ movement and downzoning contributed to a reduction in density and therefore a more livable city (Ley, 2017).

How did TEAM contribute to this social change?

Several sources indicated that the freeway debates in one way or another, led to the creation of TEAM (Macdonald, 1987, p. 162; Ley, 1980, p. 250; Green et al., 2014, p. 24). It can be argued that the impetus for the creation of TEAM came from the lack of public participation in the planning of freeways in the late 1960s. Along with encouraging public participation, John Volrich (TEAM mayor in 1978) stated that one of TEAM’s greatest achievements was “terminating plans to make Vancouver a freeway city” (Ley, 1980, p. 239). TEAM implemented public participation into Vancouver’s planning discourse, and it has remained ever since. It started with Hardwick’s Urban Futures Survey (1974) which influenced the values portrayed in the Livable Region Plan (1975). Even after the death of TEAM, livability, and public participation continued. Creating Our Futures (1990) was a revisitation of Hardwick’s survey of 1974 and later in 1996, the Livable Region Strategic Plan was issued; essentially an update of the 1975 plan. The 1996 strategy has been cited by Metro Vancouver as a resource in constructing its Metro Vancouver 2040: Shaping Our Future plan (Metro Vancouver, 2016).

Significance of Research Results

Upon the completion of our results, we have discovered that the effects of social amnesia were documented previously within the history of freeway development. Although planning of freeways as a transportation solution were thought to have been deemed implausible by all actors, it was revisited again by ND Lea engineering consulting firm in 2000, who proposed that freeways are “required to handle increased automobile traffic” (Pendakur, 1972, p. 44). This proves that social amnesia does exist on a certain level despite the large ordeal in the 1960’s to the 1980’s which deemed the local social disapproval for freeways.

Tying into this idea, the largest factor for the decommission of freeways was determined within our results and literature review to be the lack of federal economic funding and support. Despite the public backlash and social activism surrounding freeways emphasized by the formation of SPOTA, its influence on the overall withdrawal of freeways plans was minimal. In

contrast to this, TEAM was much more significant with its participation within the municipal government as a governing party who ultimately instigated the arrival of the concept of livability. Unlike the previous government in power, the Non-Partisan Association, who used a closed door policy planning method, TEAM was adamant on being receptive to public opinions and demands especially within the confines of what livability means to them. The concept of livability thus incorporated the values and priorities of locals at the time which were centralized on reducing pollution and increasing community public spaces. However, the literature detailing the role of TEAM in livability and prevention in freeways were much less compared to SPOTA signifying an existence of social amnesia.

The relative ineffectiveness of SPOTA's influence, compared to TEAM, suggests that there is rhetoric of structural power and agency within the relationship between the city and its people. Despite encompassing a large amount of activists and supporters, SPOTA remained comparatively unsuccessful in its persuasion for the dismantling of freeway plans. The structural power in our research is represented by the municipal government of Vancouver which socially "exert enormous power and constraint over lives" (Musolf, 2003, p.1). On the other hand, the emergence of TEAM targeted the municipal government and set its sights on changing structural power from within the office through its participation in municipal elections, eventually winning the mayoral seat. This ultimately proves, that "endowed with agency, the oppressed can oppose [these] structures" (Musolf, 2003, p. 3) which would previously ostracize the rights of local residents without their consent.

It's important to revisit the roots of the disapproval for freeways as they provide us context to why, to this date, it is still not a viable solution for alleviating transportation congestion or enhancing the urban fabric within Vancouver in any way. Understanding the concept of livability established at the time provides insight towards the rationale behind the disintegration of freeway plans. Effectively, this could be summarized to the public's support at the time for environmentalism and preservation which the automobile mode of transportation does not enthruse. Like the livability objectives created at the time, this is directly relational to current public concerns over the environment, which discontinue any spur to reinstate freeway plans again as a solution for congestion. Moreover, observing the success of "Vancouverism" which arose due to the Livable Region Plans supplementing the absence of freeways, serves as a powerful indicator for why freeway plans should not be reintroduced again.

We see a bright happy future for Vancouver's livability concept built on a DNA without freeways. On April 5th, 2017, the BC Liberal government proposed 10-lane freeway into Oak Street photo op which protesters gate-crashed. In this photo (below) protesters represent (on the right), the Minister of Transportation and Highways, Todd Stone, (CBC, 2017). Protesters were in front of the camera instead of the Minister. Fears of 1970s pollution and congestion remain as

relevant today as before. While Vancouver's collective memory may experience a freeway protest social amnesia however, once Vancouverites are threatened with carbon-producing cars choking their streets we clearly see citizens have found their voice.

Future Research Direction

The Livable Region Plan of 1976/1986 values were informed by the 1973 Urban Futures Project Survey. Headed by UBC's Department of Geography Professor Walter G. Hardwick and Dr. John Collins, an environmental psychologist, they looked at the attitudes towards a range of economic, social, mobility and lifestyle issues. The survey was comprised of 1,5000 face-to-face interviews. With this knowledge, one question arises, "Who's definition of livability are we using?". Future research should focus on the power relations between the represented and underrepresented. In the original Urban Futures Survey (1973), Dr. Hardwick defined livability:

The term "livability" has roots deep in the past. Forty or 50 years ago citizens of Vancouver viewed the Shaughnessy area of the city as quality urban environment. It was characterized as an area of imposing homes, quiet tree-lined street and beautiful gardens. And the people who lived in the area were those who patronized and supported the cultural life of the city" (UBC Report 1974, p. 2).

Historically Shaughnessy is an exclusive residential area, wrapped in an elite identity of wellbeing and privilege (Ley, 2010, p.177). Further questions emerge on: who's livability standards are reflected in the cityscape? How others like the urban poor interact in these built environments?

In *Liberal Ideology and the Postindustrial City*, Ley describes the housing bubble enabled by TEAM as a result of not keeping housing costs in check:

Fundamentally TEAM was for an active view of man. Its promotion of socio-cultural values was revealed most successfully in public development, most notably in the creativity of the False Creek redevelopment. But in its interaction with private interests, particularly in the land market, the reform movement was perhaps too naive, not recognizing that its humane philosophy might be co-opted by the calculus of the marketplace and lead to an inequitable outcome where the vulnerabilities of the poor would be exposed, (Ley, 1980, p. 258).

Today Vancouver's housing unaffordability emphasizes that livability is available for those who can afford it. The most recent Urban Future Survey 2012, lead by PlaceSpeak's Colleen Hardwick further stresses the disconnection between liveability and affordability. The vast majority of participants had Registered Retirement Saving Plan and the median income is higher at \$100,000 - 120,000 (Place Speak, 2013, 58) than average median income of \$76,040 the

Metro Vancouver area (Canada Census 2011). It is critical to research unaffordability in Vancouver and find processes to balance livability and affordability.

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Assessment of the “other” dissemination method

“A singular voice that is a trumpet for a community, a writer composing a bridge across the gap between thoughts and acts” (Solnit 2016, 85)

The “other” dissemination method will be accompanied by a maximum 500-word justification that can go at the end of your final report. This must include

1. A description of the audience you are trying to reach and the objective you are trying to achieve with your “other” form.
2. A rationale about why you chose this approach and why you think it will be interesting and accessible to the audience or audiences you are trying to reach. Explain how it achieves your objective set out.

Audience

-general uneducated public, who might not know much about these topics

-new generations that did not experience these events

-millennials

Objective

-reduce social amnesia

Why this approach?

-Solnit - triumphs to remember past... (HOPE FOR THEM MILENNIALS:

“Cause-and-effect assumes history marches forward, but history is not an army. It is a crab scuttling sideways, a drip of soft water wearing away stone, an earthquake breaking centuries of tension. Sometimes one person inspires a movement, or her words do decades later, sometimes a few passionate people change the world; sometimes they start a mass movement and millions do; sometimes those millions are stirred by the same outrage or the same ideal, and change comes upon us like a change of weather. All that these transformations have in common is that they begin in the imagination, in hope.”

This technological approach will definitely appeal to the largest demographic of social amnesia, the millennials, in understanding the social, cultural, and political complexities that led to the complications with implementing a freeway within Vancouver.

Infographic method

We decided to display our infographic within an interactive PDF file which would feature a timeline in the shape of a freeway/road, with thumbnails of each significant event highlighted for its importance towards the concept of freeways and livability. When clicking on each thumbnail, the user would be able to access a page with more visual and textual information providing more context towards each significant event.

