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## *Chicago and Its Skyway: Lessons from an Urban Megaproject*

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**T**he Chicago Skyway's effects on urban development and real estate values have been shaped by dramatic changes over the last half century. The eight-mile roadway and bridge facility was built in the 1950s, just as the city was entering into a long period of spatial reorganization, political transformation, and economic decline. The structure's awkward design and anachronistic toll-based financing made it an obstacle to local development, and its lack of integration with regional highways resulted in anemic traffic and chronic revenue shortfalls. By 2005, however, its function had been redefined and its value redeemed: in the context of a new political and economic landscape, a 99-year lease to a private consortium transformed it from one of Chicago's greatest liabilities into a major financial asset. This chapter traces the history of the Skyway, first as a component of a regional transportation system, and later as a distinct urban megaproject. The Skyway's history reflects broad changes in the purpose of urban infrastructure for aspiring global city leaders and some of the consequences for neighborhoods and communities.

Just which lessons Skyway history offers, and whether the structure should be understood as a success or a failure, depends on the perspective and values of the observer. The Chicago Skyway was one of many unsuccessful projects undertaken after World War II by city leaders hoping to somehow harness or reorient the emerging highway system to counter its powerfully centrifugal effects. In this, the Skyway clearly failed. Instead, the Skyway's actual function as a link connecting Chicago's business district to an expansive network of interurban toll roads and far-flung suburbs made it a prototype for a new and completely different infrastructure paradigm. Starting in the 1970s, city leaders self-consciously

adopted new strategies to achieve economic success, prioritizing investment in the central business district, and cultivating a service-based economy catering to international corporations and the financial industry. Not only did the Skyway provide a convenient conduit for traffic to bypass peripheral urban districts and connect with national and international networks, but its privatization also provided an increasingly entrepreneurial city government with immediate financial value.

Globalization has transformed city governance throughout the world. The history of the Skyway represents some of the most important urban policies promoting a global city economy: the emphasis in transportation policy on long-distance connections rather than local or regional integration, the role of high-profile megaprojects in attracting investment and signaling status and power, and the shift toward financially driven urban governance. Its history also represents the uneven development associated with globalization; the Skyway was typical of large infrastructure projects dedicated to ensuring the success of the central business district and downtown elites even as they undermined the well-being of other urban populations and places, contributing to greater social and economic inequality. The history of the Skyway evokes the “splintering urbanism” described by Graham and Marvin (2001) that is reflected in international trends in the design, administration, and development of infrastructure serving internationally prominent cities. The Skyway was an early component of a transportation network that at the same time both connected and disconnected, serving Chicago business interests by “bind[ing] spaces together across cities, regions, nations and international boundaries” while defining “the material and social dynamics, and divisions” within and between Chicago neighborhoods (11).

### *Origins and Intention*

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From a contemporary perspective, the Chicago Skyway fits easily into the category of “megaproject.” While its initial cost does not reach the threshold of most definitions of the term, the \$1.83 billion generated by its lease certainly does. It also meets the criteria outlined by Gellert and Lynch (2003, 15–16) as a project that required “coordinated applications of capital and state power” and that transformed surrounding landscapes “rapidly, intentionally, and profoundly in very visible ways.” Today, analysts generally evaluate megaprojects based on their financial performance as distinct, independent facilities. Other functions or relationships with surrounding areas are treated as secondary if they are considered at all. Most contemporary scholars would condemn the decision to build the Skyway because of its abysmal financial performance. However, to its original backers, its primary purpose was not to generate revenue. As they addressed an impending traffic crisis in the early 1950s, Chicago city leaders sought to assert control over the form and function of a regional highway system.

The impetus for the Skyway came from an egregious failure of coordination between Indiana and Illinois officials as various state agencies took the initiative

to develop highways by any means available. When the chairman of the Indiana Toll Road Commission announced the final route of the state's new east-west highway in 1953, Chicago leaders were shocked. Originally, plans had called for the cross-state route to extend from the Ohio border to "somewhere south of Gary," where it would feed onto the Tri-State Expressway, which was already under construction (figure 7.1). Instead, the toll road was scheduled to begin unloading traffic directly onto some of Chicago's most congested streets early in 1956 ("City protests" 1953).

Indiana Toll Road traffic was destined to enter the city in the middle of a heavily industrialized bistate region known as the Calumet, which includes southeastern Chicago and the cities of northwest Indiana. Starting in the 1860s, inexpensive land combined with good transportation access attracted large industrial operations to the area. Steel mills, petroleum refineries, and chemical plants proliferated along the banks of the Calumet, Little Calumet, and Grand Calumet Rivers and along the southern shore of Lake Michigan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Colten 1985; Lewis 2008). They were interspersed with working-class residential areas and company towns like Pullman and Gary. Calumet industries drew workers from Indiana cities including Gary, Hammond, East Chicago, and Whiting, as well as from the neighborhoods of Southeast Chicago, particularly Riverdale, Hegewisch, East Side, and Pullman (Buder 1967; Mohl and Betten 1986; O'Hara 2011).

For industrial interests, the rivers, wetlands, and shallow lakes of the Calumet region were mixed blessings. Railroads converged in a narrow corridor, providing easy access to suppliers and markets to the east but complicating street development. Federal funding supported the expansion and engineering of Calumet waterways into an industrialized complex of docks, harbors, and canals. Marshes and streams provided convenient disposal sites for industrial wastes, but unregulated dumping also created the need for unending dredging (Colten 1985, 1986, 1994; Cutler 2006; Hurley 1995).

By the 1950s, Chicago planners were warning that growth in the Calumet region posed serious challenges, particularly for transportation: "[w]ithout careful control, . . . transportation planning could become the hopeless task of attempting to build facilities for mammoth land use bodies generating hordes of traffic onto a pigmy street and transit skeleton" (Chicago Plan Commission 1956, viii). Multiple lift bridges over the Calumet River represented particularly egregious problems, stopping traffic whenever ships traveled in or out of the port and posing hazards to large lake freighters. City planners anticipated an enormous increase in shipping volume and in the size of ships with the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1959. The Illinois state legislature created a regional port district in 1951 to expand and modernize Calumet facilities, and the construction of a new ship-truck-train freight exchange terminal was already under way. However, there were no specific plans for replacing or updating nearly a dozen obsolete bridges (Chicago Plan Commission 1956; Chicago Regional Port District 1953).

**Figure 7.1**  
Map of the Chicago Skyway and Environs



Source: Dennis McClendon, Chicago Cartographics.

The route of the Indiana East-West Toll Road as announced in 1953 would severely exacerbate Calumet traffic problems. The decision-making process for the toll road took place behind closed doors as appointed commissioners conferred with financial and engineering consultants, maintaining secrecy to “prevent real estate speculation” (“Gov. Craig” 1953). The result reflected little regard for the interests of local neighborhoods or communities: the toll road sliced through Gary’s downtown, for example, and protests and lawsuits did nothing to ameliorate the damage it caused. Alderman Emil Pacini, who represented much of Chicago’s portion of the Calumet, was outraged and called for immediate action to address an “emergency situation.” The Chicago public works commissioner accused “engineers and bankers” of cynically exacerbating congestion to maximize toll revenue. Official protests from the Cook County highway department and the Chicago city council had no effect. Representatives of the banking syndicate handling toll road financing warned that any changes to the route would threaten the viability of the entire project. Commissioners insisted that “politics” should not come into consideration (“City protests” 1953).

In the era before the federal highway trust fund, local and state governments struggled to pay for urban highways. In 1953 Cook County’s share of state gas taxes was already committed for the foreseeable future, and did not even come close to meeting demand for new routes. The new Illinois Toll Highway Commission, dominated by state-appointed Republicans unsympathetic to Chicago’s problems, refused to build a connection to the new Indiana terminus because of the high cost of urban land acquisition. Chicago leaders had no recourse but to finance their own solution to the impending local traffic disaster, and they took action. By the time Indiana Toll Road construction was under way in 1954, the City of Chicago had secured \$88 million to build a bridge and toll road to funnel traffic from the state line, over the Calumet River, and northwest seven miles toward the Loop (Dyble 2012).

The quick financing and construction of the Chicago Skyway reflected a long tradition of unwavering elite support for large-scale city-centered transportation. The city’s boosters had always viewed infrastructure as the key to achieving regional dominance and making Chicago a world-class city. Transportation infrastructure was the basis for its history of spectacular growth; a continental network of canals and railroads supported an empire, their centralization reinforced by commuter service and urban transit that converged in a downtown “Loop.” In the automobile age, Chicago leaders sought to reinforce long-standing patterns through highway development (Cronon 1991; Miller 1996).

Canals and railroads helped make Chicago a major power center by the beginning of the twentieth century, and they also served a regional purpose: they defined and sustained a centralized urban territory. Based on an “integrated ideal,” the success of cities was understood to depend on effective command of a regional economy (Graham and Marvin 2001, 89). The role of government was to promote and direct development by, among other things, working closely with financial, industrial, and commercial elites to provide for the development of

cohesive infrastructure networks that would provide effective connections at the local, regional, and national scale. The vast railroad system that enabled Chicago's domination of the midwestern economy was both the product of this modern paradigm of urban development and essential to its success.

### *Design and Purpose*

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The unexpected Calumet crisis created by the routing of the Indiana Toll Road posed major problems for Chicago, but it also presented opportunities. The original toll road plans would have routed Indiana traffic onto the peripheral Tri-State Expressway, which bypassed Chicago. With responsibility for developing a solution to the Calumet traffic crisis, Chicago leaders could take the chance to ameliorate a larger problem: the city's declining regional centrality relative to its booming suburbs.

In the decade following World War II, city leaders assumed that the same basic patterns would continue as a regional highway system was added to Chicago's transportation web. Both Daniel Burnham's 1906 *Plan of Chicago* and the 1939 *Comprehensive Superhighway Program* described radial regional road systems centering on downtown. However, highways were fundamentally different from previous transportation facilities, both functionally and institutionally, and cities had much less influence over their form. In the years following World War II, it became increasingly clear that the effect of highways was not to concentrate population and resources in the city but rather to disperse them (Barrett 1975, 1987; Dyble 2009; Fogelson 2001; Smith 2007; Spatz 2010). The result was a highway system that bypassed and undermined the power and vitality of Chicago rather than supporting it. The Skyway was one of several infrastructure projects initiated under Mayor Martin Kennelly designed to counter the "tug of decentralization," along with a subway system and street expansions that improved access to downtown (Hirsch 2005, 132).

The Skyway's most revealing aspects were its approaches and the system of one-way streets that fed them. The Skyway was more than just a bridge; its seven miles of three-lane approaches made it an important addition to Chicago streets. However, the Skyway's design made it more of an obstacle than a benefit to local traffic (figure 7.2). Heading west, motorists exited onto streets that directed them toward the Loop and made it difficult or impossible to turn around or otherwise navigate local streets. Eastbound motorists could not exit before they reached Indiana. Built alongside the Pennsylvania railroad tracks to minimize land-acquisition costs and building demolition, the Skyway reinforced and widened a band of infrastructure that already obstructed local traffic (De Leuw, Cather and Company 1954; Spivey 2001). As planners recognized, the area was desperately in need of separated grades to reduce delays and increase street capacity (Chicago Plan Commission 1956). The soaring span took grade separation too far, exacerbating rather than alleviating Calumet congestion.

**Figure 7.2**  
Main Span of the Chicago Skyway

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The Skyway rises 125 feet above the Calumet River and is served by seven miles of limited-access approaches.

Source: Historic American Engineering Record (1999).

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Of course, there were reasons for this design. Skyway underwriters paid for its engineering, and to them, limited access made sense financially. It eliminated the need for more than one collection point, and congestion would motivate drivers to pay a toll. The Skyway was not intended to serve the workers, trucks, and commercial traffic of the Calumet; its only benefit to them was to prevent significant new congestion. Its designers assumed that most users would be the same white-collar suburban commuters or long-distance travelers who used turnpikes elsewhere. These motorists would be eager to bypass the smoke, soot, and fumes emanating from Calumet smelters and smokestacks, as well as the scents of some of the city's only active sanitary landfills (figure 7.3). The expectations and rhetoric surrounding the 1953 Skyway proposal reflected long-standing priorities of Chicago development and infrastructure policy: to integrate the regional economy around a central urban core through investments in transportation.

**Figure 7.3**  
1960 Chicago Skyway Promotional Map

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This map was issued soon after the name of the structure was changed from the Calumet Skyway to the Chicago Skyway to reduce confusion among out-of-town motorists. The image suggests a remote destination and highlights the structure's detachment from its immediate surroundings. The Skyway was a route "to and through Chicago" but was implicitly not part of the city.

Source: University of Chicago Library Map Collection.

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## *Traffic and Finances*

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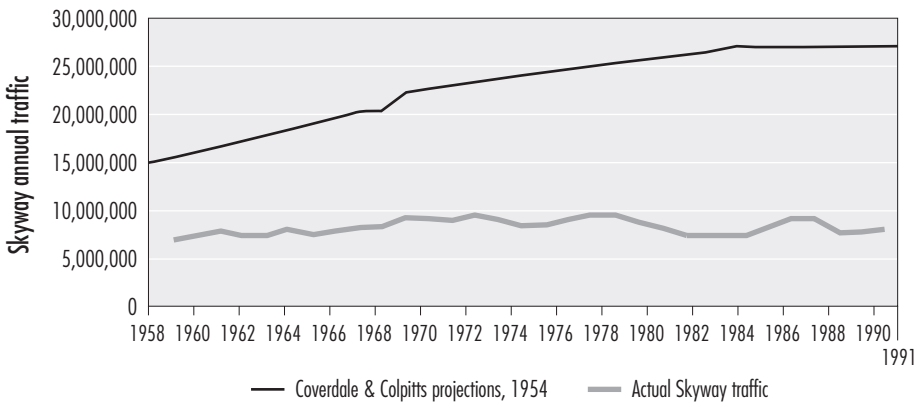
If the Skyway's backers were working on the assumption that the project would have a beneficial effect on the Calumet economy while supporting the centrality of the Loop as other transportation systems had, they were quickly proven wrong. On opening day in April 1958, fewer than half of the expected motorists crossed the span, and traffic did not improve significantly for decades. There was little to suggest that the project did anything to spur development either in the Calumet area or downtown. By 1963 Skyway bonds were in default, and they remained in default through the 1990s.

As with most toll roads, financiers were directly involved in Skyway planning from the beginning. The firms selected to underwrite the structure not only paid for its routing and design, but also provided all financial analysis. Coverdale & Colpitts, a transportation consulting firm based in New York that had done studies for all U.S. toll roads since 1945, developed detailed traffic and revenue projections (Ryan 1954). Analysts adopted several problematic assumptions. They predicted that most of the traffic of Indianapolis Avenue, the major Calumet area artery for commercial traffic in both Chicago and Indiana, would be diverted to the Skyway, disregarding the impracticality of the structure for local traffic. They also estimated 25 percent induced traffic, predicting that the Skyway would cause a "major relocation of industry and residential areas and [change in] travel and recreation habits of large numbers of people." Most significantly, the analysis discounted plans to extend the Tri-State Expressway to connect with the Indiana East-West Toll Road east of Gary, which would give motorists easy access to a toll-free alternative parallel to the Skyway (Coverdale & Colpitts 1954, 10).

For the most part, highways in the 1950s and 1960s experienced surging traffic, and toll roads throughout the United States generated revenue well beyond expectations. In contrast, the Skyway was uniquely positioned to avoid traffic because of its relationship with surrounding areas and its lack of integration with emerging regional highway systems. The Indiana state highway commission dealt the most devastating blow to Skyway solvency in 1964. That year, the Burns-Harbor interchange connected the Indiana East-West Toll Road to the toll-free Tri-State Expressway just east of Gary. This meant that traffic heading west could avoid the Skyway toll and never had to cross through the Calumet industrial district at all. Once the interchange opened, the Skyway primarily served traffic between the Calumet cities of Gary, Whiting, and Hammond and Chicago's South Side or the Loop. Several better, less expensive routes were available to suburban commuters that skirted central Chicago and avoided the Skyway toll.

Over the long term, the inaccuracy of traffic projections (figure 7.4) is not surprising. No one predicted the rapid economic decline and population loss that affected South Chicago and the Calumet area in the decades to come. While the Calumet region maintained its industrial economy through the 1960s, the neighborhoods of the South Side had already entered into a period of social and economic transition, as white residents and jobs left en masse for the suburbs

**Figure 7.4**  
Actual and Projected Traffic on the Chicago Skyway, 1958–1990



Several bondholder lawsuits forced toll increases, so revenue improved relative to projections in the late 1980s. Bond interest was brought up to date for the first time in 1989, and the structure was refinanced in 1994.

(Squires et al. 1989). In addition, the Skyway was a completely independent city project. State highway officials had no interest in its financial problems and no sympathy for its financiers, and they proceeded to build a series of competing “free” routes supported by gas taxes in the 1960s.

Immediate shortfalls are harder to explain. There were no precedents for the wildly inaccurate Skyway traffic projections or for its spectacular financial failure; it was the largest public revenue bond default in U.S. history until 1983 (Cohen 1989). Previous Coverdale & Colpitts reports had underestimated demand for toll roads, including a study for the New Jersey Turnpike that caused a minor scandal when the facility faced almost immediate congestion. However, manipulating cost estimates to ensure that megaprojects are approved and funded is not unusual and may even be considered a standard practice. This raises the question of whether this was a case of “lying” at the behest of financiers to ensure the sale of bonds, or if it was simply a case of incompetent analysis (Flyvbjerg, Holm, and Buhl 2002; Wachs 1986). Regardless of the answer, bondholders bore the brunt of inaccurate forecasts. There were ample incentives for consultants, engineers, and financiers to ensure that the Skyway was financed and constructed, whether or not it was financially viable. Well-connected investors could also expect that their confidence would be rewarded in other ways. There are many ways to make money on a big public project, but none on one that is canceled.

For city leaders, the imperative of maintaining the centrality of downtown Chicago easily justified swift and decisive action to build the Skyway, despite

financial or ethical risks. Mayor Richard J. Daley, Kennelly's powerful successor, fully supported the project and took action to ensure that its financial problems would not jeopardize any other potential city infrastructure projects. After a few years of dismal Skyway performance, evidence emerged of insider trading and financial manipulation by city officials to ensure underwriter profits. In addition, Daley repeatedly sought state or federal takeovers that would result in full debt redemption (Dyble 2012).

### *Decline and Decay*

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The Skyway failed to achieve its original goals. Rather than preventing traffic congestion in the Calumet area, it added another obstacle to movement around its struggling steel mills, factories, and port. Its dismal traffic suggested that any benefit it might have had for the Loop was negligible. Rather than stimulating development as other transportation systems had, urban highways hastened the decline of the city, dispersing and decentralizing resources and population. The Skyway's performance was just one of many indications that the previous model of urban development was breaking down as deindustrialization and disinvestment transformed the urban Midwest into the nation's "Rust Belt."

These changes were already well under way in Chicago when the Skyway opened in 1956. The city's population peaked in 1950 at 3.6 million, and 1960 census numbers came as a shock. Hinterland had transcended city: 3.3 million city dwellers were surrounded by 3.6 million suburban residents. Chicago's demographics were also transformed as the city lost 1.1 million white residents while gaining half a million black residents. Incomes plummeted, and poverty and segregation increased. These numbers marked the beginning of long-term trends: in the decades to come, Chicago's economy declined while that of surrounding areas surged (Abu-Lughod 1999). As in many urban areas, highway development contributed to these trends, providing the fundamental infrastructure of decentralization and facilitating the shift of population and jobs away from the city (Gutfreund 2005; Jackson 1985; Jones 2008).

Ongoing changes were not experienced evenly across Chicago neighborhoods, and the areas that most influenced Skyway traffic faced some of the most severe problems. South Side businesses and residents would have been among those likely to benefit from the ability to bypass Calumet area congestion, but the area's economy was in the process of collapse by the 1970s. Increasingly poor neighborhood residents had little incentive or means to pay tolls. Industrial decline and population losses followed. Calumet port traffic grew in the 1960s, but failure to invest in new facilities rendered it uncompetitive with other Great Lakes ports for containerized shipping in the 1970s. In 1980 Wisconsin Steel became the first of Chicago's many large industrial employers to leave the Calumet region, initiating a period of punctuated job losses and economic contractions as a series of large factories shut their doors over the next 10 years (Hurley 1995; O'Hara 2011; Squires et al. 1989; Wiewel 1986).

The Skyway by no means caused the catastrophic decline of the Calumet, but it did exacerbate its existing problems and reduced its chances for economic recovery. One of the reasons large industrial employers were originally attracted to the area was its isolation from the rest of the city; company towns could be established and labor relations controlled without undue influence from Chicago's powerful and often radical unions. The Skyway reinforced this historic isolation, providing a means of avoidance rather than access. It contributed yet another physical obstruction to an area that was already sliced and segmented by converging and often conflicting transportation systems. This infrastructure landscape, along with the myriad of severe environmental problems, obstructed the recovery of neighborhoods like Hegewisch and the East Side in the wake of economic collapse. In 1966 state toll highway commissioner Donald Bonniwell remarked that the Skyway functioned as "a concrete curtain cutting off access by people in the southeast section of the city" (McMullen 1966).

The Skyway came to symbolize neighborhood neglect and decline. Through the 1970s and most of the 1980s, traffic remained flat and the Skyway deficit grew. Negligent maintenance, no-bid contracts, nepotism, and toll-booth theft all generated regular scandal. The Skyway's historical nadir occurred around 1976, when local papers reported damage to cars from potholes in the Skyway roadbed, and sloppy sandblasting left the surrounding homes covered in a layer of lead-tainted coal-like paint dust (Seltzner 1976). Its accumulated net deficit peaked at \$72 million in 1988 (Chicago Department of Streets and Sanitation 1989).

The Skyway remained an unredeemed failure for three full decades, but during that time new ideas and approaches to urban development were tested in the vacuum left by the slow collapse of Chicago's industrial economy. In the 1950s, city leaders expected that industry in Southeast Chicago would continue to thrive. However, they believed that downtown was in serious jeopardy, threatened by declining property values and the steady loss of retail, commercial, and financial establishments. The emphasis of city policy began to shift from promoting diverse development throughout Chicago to a strategy focused primarily on redeveloping the central business district (Miller 1996; Rast 1999, 2001; Wille 1997).

Mayor Kennelly had worked with business and real estate interests on downtown-oriented transportation projects including the Skyway, but when Richard J. Daley was elected mayor in 1955 he took a much more aggressive approach to transforming the area in and around the Loop. He organized the massive Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS), which produced an ambitious plan of multimodal transportation development that transformed the city in the decades to come (Condit 1974; Spatz 2010). Daley also backed the creation of the Chicago Central Area Committee (CCAC) in 1956, comprised of real estate, financial, and business leaders with an interest in revival and redevelopment. The CCAC emerged as one of the most influential policy-advocacy groups in the decades to come, spearheading a broad program of renewal, redevelopment, and construction focused on the central business district (Rast 1999, 2011).

The vision of the CCAC was first articulated in the 1958 *Development Plan for the Central Area of Chicago*, which outlined a program for downtown. Drawing on earlier city highway proposals, the plan emphasized access; the Skyway would be just one spoke in a wheel of highways that would center on the central business district and feed extensive new parking facilities (Rast 2001). One of the ironies of Skyway history was that the structure was financed just before the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 provided generous funding for urban highway construction. The projects proposed by the 1958 plan, in contrast, were well timed to take advantage of federal funding. They had the full support of the influential members of the CCAC and of Mayor Daley, who made public works construction, including transit and highway megaprojects, a key-stone of city policy. Between 1955 and 1976, the Daley administration effectively tapped into new federal funding for a variety of ambitious urban renewal and transportation projects that physically transformed the city (Condit 1974; Suttles 1990).

At the same time, the city also underwent a dramatic social and political transformation. Although the 1958 plan clearly promoted the interests of business elites, it was not generally viewed as antagonistic to the rest of Chicago; at that time, urban development was not perceived as a zero-sum game among neighborhoods. Another report released in 1966 outlined a complementary plan to address the economic problems of the South Side (Mayor's Committee for Economic and Cultural Development 1966). However, Daley did not lend even a fraction of the political support or financial resources to this program that he devoted to downtown rehabilitation (Rast 1999, 2011). As the urban crisis intensified, it became clear that city priorities were resulting in the neglect of most of Chicago's neighborhoods, and particularly those with majority black populations to the south of the Loop. The violence of 1968 following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. intensified racial antagonism and division, accelerating public and private disinvestment.

In 1973, the response to the CCAC's second major downtown plan, *Chicago 21*, highlighted deepening divisions within the city. Chicago residents, organized in a growing number of varied neighborhood advocacy groups, objected to its emphasis on suburban commuter rail and highways and to the absence of any regard for intracity integration. The plan described downtown as a white-collar center of finance and big business, lacking substantial ties to the rest of the city (Rast 1999, 2011). It was supported by infrastructure that, like the Skyway, provided access "to and through" the city, emphasizing long-distance connections and generally bypassing peripheral neighborhoods: regional commuter rail, airport expansion, and a series of high-speed, limited-access expressways. This was the vision for Chicago's future that the Skyway best served.

However, policies that sacrificed the interests of neighborhoods outside of the Loop met with resistance. Activists opposed the Crosstown Expressway in the 1970s, the only one of Daley's major public works projects that was defeated by public pressure before his death in 1976 (Spatz 2010). By the time Harold

Washington, who was devoted to supporting neighborhood and community development, was elected mayor in 1983, a myriad of new neighborhood activist groups contributed to a clear “downtown versus the neighborhoods” orientation (Mier and Moe 1991, 67). This antagonism hindered Washington’s ability to implement policy, and although he managed to win approval for a \$185 million city bond issue for neighborhood improvements in 1985, many of his proposals were stymied by downtown opposition (Ferman 1996). Between 1976 and 1989, Chicago officials had lost much of their power to shape the urban landscape or to promote economic development.

### *Redefinition and Redemption*

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In the 1990s, changing economic and political circumstances transformed perceptions of the Skyway and created opportunity for its redemption as a city asset. In 1989 the toll bridge generated enough revenue to bring bond interest payments up to date for the first time since 1969. The same year, Richard M. Daley, the son of Richard J. Daley, won election as mayor. The younger Daley’s approach to urban development and transportation policy in many ways resembled that of his father, dedicating city resources primarily to promoting development and investment in the Loop. However, during his administration city government adopted a new orientation: the second Daley administration represented a model of the “entrepreneurial city,” seeking to promote the interests of city government as an independent entity, maximizing revenue, and building strategic alliances and partnerships with financial and business interests (Eisinger 1988; Hall and Hubbard 1998; Harvey 1989).

There were several reasons for the shift toward entrepreneurial city government that occurred throughout the United States in the 1980s and 1990s. Contributing to the change was growing financial pressure on city government, as reduced federal appropriations and new tax restrictions added to continuing urban economic problems. Cities like Chicago faced declining revenue and chronic, structural budget deficits (Biles 2011; Eisinger 1998; Fuchs 1992). Daley distinguished himself as an innovator, identifying new resources and promoting public-private partnerships designed to attract investment, reduce city obligations, and tap into new sources of revenue. The second important reason had to do with Chicago’s changing aspirations: looking to the financial and economic success of global capitals like Tokyo, London, and New York, city leaders throughout the world sought to attract financial institutions, corporate headquarters, and high-tech firms (Abu-Lughod 1999; Sassen 2001). Daley and his backers hoped to build a “New Chicago” resting on a service-based economy, with highly educated elites catering to the financial and legal needs of international corporations and low-wage workers providing amenities and readily available, inexpensive labor (Koval et al. 2006). To many, this new economic paradigm offered a compelling strategy for urban economic revival after decades of industrial decline.

But it came at the price of greater inequality, not only among social groups, but also among neighborhoods.

Infrastructure once again became a key component of Chicago's economic development strategy under Mayor Richard M. Daley. However, the intended function of transportation infrastructure was different than it had been during the first Daley administration, and so was the relationship of the central business district to the rest of Chicago. Rather than integrate the city and connect various elements of a diverse urban economy, infrastructure supported communication and movement among and between major cities. In addition, infrastructure was no longer primarily something to be supported and subsidized for the sake of promoting city and regional development, but instead any facilities with the potential to generate revenue exceeding the cost of their construction and operation could be financial assets for city government. Infrastructure administration changed as well, with more facilities managed separately as discrete structures, rather than centrally as part of interconnected, coordinated systems. When policy analysts began to discuss megaprojects and their implications (e.g., Altshuler and Luberoff 2003; Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius, and Rothengatter 2003), their discourse reflected trends in urban governance: decentralization, segmentation, and privatization. Whereas previously the Skyway's administration had been anomalous, in this new context it was prototypical. It inspired a new strategy for unlocking the potential value of city transportation facilities.

In many ways, Richard M. Daley continued the downtown-oriented development priorities of his father, emphasizing central city development projects catering to the interests and preferences of downtown real estate interests and the international corporations and financial, legal, and high-tech firms that they hoped to attract. Daley's hallmark infrastructure projects—the expansion of the University of Illinois campus to the west of the Loop, the showcase Millennium Park on the downtown lakeshore, and the aggressive expansion of O'Hare International Airport—were all dedicated to promoting Chicago as a global city. However, his most influential legacy as mayor was not manifest in bricks and mortar but rather in his willingness to surrender control of revenue-generating facilities to promote the immediate financial interests of the city and to facilitate Chicago's transformation into a global city (Bennett 2010, 2011).

The potential advantages of the Skyway's independent administration and detachment from the rest of the highway system, particularly for a cash-strapped city government with an entrepreneurial orientation, became clear as its traffic and revenue improved in the 1990s. Daley identified the Skyway as a potential financial asset, taking advantage of it in 1994. That year, Skyway revenue was sufficient to retire the original construction debt and to float an additional \$110 million in revenue bonds, some of which went toward repaying city appropriations for debt payment and operating expenses dating back to the 1960s. Two years later, Skyway tolls supported another bond issue, paying for the structure's rehabilitation as well as a popular city "neighborhood infrastructure plan,"

including pothole repair and park construction. By that time, Skyway motorists were generating a \$17 million annual surplus above maintenance and debt payments (Dyble 2012).

Although Skyway refinancing alleviated severe city budget problems and provided revenue for neighborhood development, it also produced a major political backlash. Tradition dictated that bridge tolls be used exclusively for construction or maintenance, and motorists did not view the Skyway as a legitimate source of city revenue. Critics charged that the facility was becoming the city's new "cash cow," and a lawsuit by toll payers challenged the legitimacy of revenue "diversion" for anything other than highway development (Dyble 2012, 74). While the suit was legally baseless, protest and pressure from motorists threatened to undermine the potential value of the Skyway as a city asset. However, global trends presented a potential alternative. Internationally, private toll roads were becoming a big business, as revenue-generating infrastructure was increasingly constructed and operated as private enterprise. Throughout Europe, Australia, Canada, and Asia, investors were financing or refinancing major tolled facilities, taking over their operation as well as their revenue.

The Daley administration took the opportunity to secure a large, immediate financial return from the Skyway for the city. Rather than endure unending criticism of toll "diversion" under city management, the city could lease the Skyway to a private operator with little exposure to public pressure. In theory, the private operator could tap into the structure's long-term value much more effectively than could public officials. While Skyway traffic remained lackluster, it continued to improve slowly in the context of severe highway congestion on surrounding routes.

In 2004 Daley issued a call for bids for a Skyway lease, and his timing was ideal. International enthusiasm for infrastructure leases was being fueled by the rapid expansion and dramatic profits of the Macquarie Infrastructure Group (MIG), a private fund that was managed by an Australian investment bank (Jefferis and Stilwell 2006; Solomon 2009). In partnership with Cintra, a Spanish construction firm, Macquarie submitted a stunning offer in response to Daley's call for bids: \$1.83 billion to operate the Skyway for 99 years. It was much more than analysts had predicted, and nearly twice the next largest bid. Chicago aldermen unanimously approved the lease, transferring control and the right to collect tolls on January 24, 2005. Alderman Edward Burke called it "the greatest single financial coup in the history of Chicago" and a "windfall" comparable to the purchase of Manhattan (Dyble 2012, 74).

City officials commenced distributing the funds, paying off debt, providing for "the city's continued financial strength and stability," and establishing long- and mid-term reserve funds. One hundred million dollars of the proceeds were used to create a "neighborhood human infrastructure fund" that supported a wide variety of social programs (Chicago City Council 2004). The Skyway lease was one of the defining achievements of Richard M. Daley's political career, and it



inspired a series of similar proposals around the United States, including the lease of the Indiana East-West Toll Road to the same consortium just a few months later. Daley maximized the political and financial benefits of the deal. He was savvy enough to distribute the benefits of the windfall widely, using it to help shore up city finances and consolidate his power as mayor (Johnson, Luby, and Kurbanov 2007).

By leasing the Skyway, Daley sacrificed patronage appointments and a long-term revenue source, but the venerable, ward-based political system that rallied voters at the neighborhood level with city jobs and other favors during the first Daley administration was no longer the foundation of mayoral power. By the end of the century, the outcome of elections depended more on campaign contributions from big business that paid for mass media advertisements and other publicity. Daley was successful in his efforts to reshape downtown Chicago to attract large firms and investors, and his campaign contributions testified to his success (Hogan and Simpson 2001; Simpson and Kelly 2011). Critics described his close relationships with corporate and international interests as “pinstripe patronage” (Betancur and Gills 2004, 98). As during the first Daley administration, the mayor effectively controlled and assembled alliances that allowed him to define a development program and to implement the policy it required. However, in doing so the younger Daley went much farther in prioritizing and promoting the central business district as the locus of a new urban economy based on finance, technology, innovation, and consumption in pursuit of success as a global city.

Daley followed up on the Skyway success with three more transportation infrastructure lease proposals. In 2006 a 99-year lease of four downtown parking garages garnered \$563 million for the city, and Chicago officials traded 75 years’ worth of parking meter revenue for \$1.1 billion in 2008 (Kaplan 2012). The mayor also brokered a lease deal for Midway Airport, Chicago’s regional facility located in South Chicago, in 2008. However, a global financial crisis halted new investment, and the Midway investors withdrew their bid for a lease before the contract was executed. By that time, the value of big-ticket infrastructure leases was coming into question. In 2007 scandal erupted surrounding the management of Macquarie’s investment funds, which included incentives for large deals and significant conflicts of interest (Lawrence and Stapledon 2008; McLean 2007). Criticism led to the resignation of the bank’s CEO, Allan Moss, and a major restructuring of its investment funds to separate low-performing and heavily indebted toll roads, including the Skyway, from more profitable “high-quality assets” (Bennet 2010). The scandal, combined with lagging traffic in the context of a general economic slowdown, resulted in a rapid devaluation of many Macquarie acquisitions. By 2011 the Skyway was listed in investor reports with a carrying value of zero (Macquarie Atlas Roads 2011). There is justification to predict that the Skyway may return to its original status: a disappointing city liability with little value to surrounding neighborhoods or to the city as a whole.

Daley announced his retirement from politics soon after the Midway lease fell through, leaving the city with the same persistent structural budget problems that he had inherited upon taking office and fewer options for addressing them. His development priorities contributed to a celebrated revival of the Chicago economy based on the success of a few elite neighborhoods and central business district, but his priorities were also reflected in the landscape of the Calumet and the increasing poverty of the South Side and other neighborhoods. One of his very first proposals as mayor was the construction of a new Lake Calumet Airport; the airport would have mitigated some of the area's toxic waste problems but would have destroyed thousands of homes and several local neighborhoods in the process (Chicago Department of Aviation 1991). While Daley touted the airport's potential to generate jobs, it would have displaced some of the area's largest remaining employers and inflicted new damage on its wetland ecology. In a sense, it would have continued the transformation of the Calumet area from an industrial center to a transportation corridor, serving the interests of global Chicago while sacrificing those of the neighborhood's remaining residents. After Daley dropped the proposal in 1992, he never showed much interest in the fate of the Calumet again. City plans to attract new industry and ecotourism to the area lacked funding and yielded few results (Chicago Department of Planning and Development 2001). The 2010 census revealed that the Calumet and the rest of South Chicago continued to lose jobs, resources, and population. Today, the Skyway provides a means of avoiding a grim postindustrial landscape of abandoned barges and piers, slag piles, salvage yards, and the decaying ruins of factories and steel mills.

## *Conclusions*

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Although the era of infrastructure lease “windfalls” may be over, the economic trends and urban problems that provided the backdrop for the Skyway lease continue to inform infrastructure policy in aspiring global cities like Chicago. Downtown interests remain a priority, and city leaders continue to court international corporations and high-tech firms, and to promote service- and consumption-based economic development. Municipal governments continue to face ideological pressure and financial constraints that limit policy options and promote an entrepreneurial orientation. Urban transportation investments favor long-distance connections via highways and airports. Megaprojects, including bridges and tunnels as well as cultural facilities like stadiums and park complexes, remain appealing as symbols of status and power as well as for their functional or financial value.

The segmentation and reorientation of urban infrastructure over the last half century have had broad social and economic consequences. It is no coincidence that megaprojects, which are scaled to the metropolis and are inevitably disruptive to urban environments and neighborhoods, have met with increasingly vigorous public protest in North America and elsewhere. They both con-

tribute to and reflect policies that result in extremely uneven local and regional development outcomes. As infrastructure systems have been divided into their component parts, so have places become disconnected from regions, and political processes removed from policy. A growing literature on twenty-first-century urbanism emphasizes the resulting environmental and economic inequality and political disfranchisement (e.g., Brenner 2004; Castells 1996; Hackworth 2007; Ranney 2002; Smith 1996, 2008). The history of the Skyway highlights some of the consequences of the “splintering urbanism” that has shaped urban policy and its consequences in major cities throughout the world, as growing physical and institutional divides separate and disconnect urban places, defining their relationship with the global economy and resulting in stark patterns of economic and social disparity (Graham and Marvin 2001).

Once the global city model of urban development prevailed in Chicago, the design problems of the Skyway and its lack of integration with other transportation systems were no longer important concerns to city leaders. Although its traffic and revenue continued to improve through the 1990s, the structure still had basically the same problematic relationship with its surroundings, with the regional highway system, and with the Loop. But because of a change in perspective, a slight improvement in traffic and revenue, and a major shift in economic development policy, the Skyway was redefined as a success. Its lack of integration with local and regional transportation systems was originally a liability; its city administration and financial problems were compounded by the disregard of state and federal officials, who were uninterested in mitigating the damage of its rushed design and financing. However, its institutional disconnection eventually became a benefit: it made it easy for city leaders to transfer responsibility and control while leveraging its financial value to literally capitalize on its singularity. The Skyway’s successful privatization as well as its uneven effects on city development were representative of larger trends, reflecting the splintering effects of infrastructure in the twenty-first-century global metropolis.

Because of its physical detachment from its surroundings and its failure to attract or induce new traffic, the Skyway had a relatively small impact on the development of Chicago. However, the structure did contribute to the transformation of relationships between places, in this case between the central business district and the peripheral Calumet industrial district. This relationship was indicative of momentous change in the orientation and outcomes of urban policy and development patterns that is represented in metropolitan areas throughout the world. The fate of the Calumet suggests the powerful local implications of global city policies. Its history also underscores the importance of considering the effects of megaprojects on urban places and communities, in addition to their financial costs and benefits for city governments.

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