

# Slabtown renewal?

Only after two-thirds of the Interstate Highway System had been completed did freeway planners and builders recognize that moving automobiles and trucks was not their only concern. Sharp public criticism, especially in urban areas, led to a new policy statement: That effects on the environment in a freeway "corridor" must be considered along with the engineering. This new concept may result in substantial improvement for Portland's Slabtown.

Ever since Weidler's Steam Sawmill was built at the foot of Savier Street in the 1870s, this section of northwest Portland has been a jumble of industrial and residential buildings, the latter mostly small workingmen's homes which have become dilapidated with the passing years. In the early days, slabs from the Weidler mill were stacked over a wide area, hence the popular term Slabtown.

In the early 1950s, an urban renewal project was proposed for the northwest section of the city, but was rejected by the voters. Now, in response to the commendable concept that freeway planning should take into account the economic and social effects of such construction, a new plan has been proposed that would separate industrial and residential areas. It would replace old dwellings along NW Thurman Street that are beyond repair with multifamily housing. Landscaped buffer zones and open spaces, shopping centers, pedestrian and bicycle paths extending from Macleay Park to the river, and use for offices, parking and other facilities of the ground under the soaring approaches to the Fremont Bridge are among other proposals made by the City Planning Commission in a report to the State Highway Commission.

The corridor covered by the plan includes that part of I-405 (Stadium Freeway) which rises north of Johnson Street to join the Fremont Bridge high over the Willamette River. However, I-505 (Industrial Freeway) which is to be built to connect the bridge with St. Helens Road and give access to the Guilds Lake industrial area plays an even greater role in the plan. This freeway, running west and northwest from the bridge, will form the main dividing line between residential and industrial areas.

It has been pointed out that the plan is a guideline only for the State Highway Department and that a final plan will be prepared only after hearings and further study. Some criticism of the Planning Commission's proposals, especially as they affect industry access, has been expressed. On the whole, the plan appears to offer a new lease on life for Slabtown. The recognition of highway builders that the effects of a freeway on its surroundings must be considered along with its traffic-carrying capacities should be welcomed by all.