

Plans began for MoPac back in 1944

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1944.

Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected to an unprecedented fourth term.

The Second World War was raging and a major Allied force hit the beaches of Normandy June 6. A fire in a Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus tent in Hartford, Conn. caused a stampede which killed 168, injured 487.

MoPac Boulevard was proposed in a transportation report from Austin's planning commission.

They suggested the Missouri Pacific Railroad's right-of-way be used for a thoroughfare.

Included in the April 24, 1975 city manager's report on MoPac to the city council is a short chronology of the boulevard-cum-freeway.

Much of the following chronology is taken from that report:

— March 23, 1950. The city council adopted a "Thoroughfare Plan" which included "Railroad Boulevard," the early name of MoPac. Railroad Boulevard, as proposed, ran from Anderson Lane south to West Fifth Street.

(News reports of the time record no opposition to the plan during the council meeting, but that may have been because of the fire. A \$150,000 fire destroyed the T.H. Williams and Co. at Fifth Street and Congress, killing three employees trapped in the basement. The news account says the council rushed through emergency business and canceled everything else because of the event.)

— 1953. The city council passed a resolution asking the Missouri Pacific Railroad to make available to the city a portion of its right-of-way for a boulevard.

— 1958. The "Austin Plan," prepared by planning consultants, showed MoPac extending from FM 1325 in the north to the present location of the U.S. Hwy 290-Loop 360 interchange in the south. With one exception, that is almost exactly the plan upon which MoPac was built.

MoPac now bypasses that southern intersection, crossing Loop 360 to the west and intersecting U.S. Hwy. 290 to the south. The consultant was a firm called Wise and Associates.

The chronology in the report does not indicate that the council adopted the "Austin Plan," but two years later the entire city made its first financial commitment to MoPac.

— Aug. 6, 1960. Austin voters approved a street and bridge bond program which included funds for construction of overpasses along the railroad, pending approval by the railroad company.

— June 8, 1961. The Austin Development Plan was adopted by city council. It followed the same route as the Wise Plan, but showed the intersection with Loop 360 west of the Lamar Boulevard interchange.

— November 1961. A consulting engineer presented to city council a preliminary report on the design of MoPac from the First-Fifth-Sixth Street interchange to U.S. Hwy 183.

— Dec. 15, 1961. The City of Austin and the Missouri Pacific Railroad Co. reached an agreement on the construction of a boulevard. The railroad deeded to the city the outside 50 feet on both sides of its right-of-way from Hancock Drive to West Fifth Street. In return, the city eliminated all grade crossings (same-level intersections) with the railroad tracks.

The right-of-way was obtained for

the purpose of building a boulevard.

— The Austin Transportation Plan 1962-1982 was prepared by the city, the county and the Texas Highway Department, with the cooperation of the Federal Highway Administration.

Design of the road in this plan was changed from a boulevard to a freeway. It basically followed the route proposed in earlier plans and received the highest priority of any project in the plan.

— Aug. 22, 1964. Another bond program approved more money for MoPac.

— Sept. 1, 1966. City of Austin and Travis County representatives asked the Texas Highway Commission to help build a "controlled access highway facility" (freeway) along the MoPac route.

— Oct. 28, 1966. The THC agreed to participate with the city and county in planning and construction of MoPac Freeway. The route, as previously planned, reached from FM 1325 in the north to U.S. Hwy. 290 in the south.

— March 16, 1967. The city council adopted the "Expressway and Major Arterial Plan" which included MoPac Freeway.

Feb. 6, 1968. The "schematic" for the highway was shown at a combined route and design public hearing. "No objections concerning the route were received," the report notes. It says further, "Spokesmen for various organizations, public officials, and interested citizens voiced their general approval of this proposed facility." The report was written by the city Urban Transportation Department, which favors an all-open ramp policy on the soon-to-be-completed freeway. Some local citizens have requested that certain ramps in West Austin be closed to traffic because of expected adverse conditions caused by higher automobile traffic.

— Jan. 12, 1968. Route-sketch map submitted to Bureau of Public Roads (which became the Federal Highway Administration) by the Texas Highway Department.

— May 27, 1968. Route-sketch map approved by BPR.

— September 16, 1968. The BPR approved the schematic layout of MoPac Freeway which had been submitted Dec. 21, 1967 and supplemented with additional information.

With this final hurdle cleared, construction of MoPac Freeway began in earnest. Following are some completion dates for various aspects of the project.

— July 1970. Missouri Pacific Railroad overpass over RM 2222.

— October 1971. Westover Road, Windsor Road and Enfield Road overpasses.

— November 1972. Northland Drive, 45th Street and 35th Street overpasses.

— June 1973. North Bank of Colorado River south to RM 2244.

— September 1975 (estimated). From north of Northland Drive south to Enfield Road.

— September 1975 (estimated). Town Lake interchange including First Street, Fifth Street and Sixth Street.

Meanwhile, almost all right-of-way both north and south of the central section has been purchased.

When the freeway opens it will be the climax of more than 30 years of dreaming and planning by city officials.

No specific dates have been set for completion of the entire facility.