

#39 **BROOKINGS IS BACK ON MOBILITY AND ACCESS**

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The 28 March edition of the *Brookings Metropolitan Policy Update* provided a summary and a link to *Stop trying to solve traffic and start building great places* by Lara Fishbane, Joseph Kane and Adie Tomer.

With this document The Brookings Institution is back to where it was in the 40s and early 60s with respect to Mobility & Access and Functional Human Settlement Patterns. That is a very good thing.

In the mid-40s to the early 60s the Brookings transportation research program was led by Wilfred Owen. Bill retired in 1978 after 32 years at Brookings. His most important contributions were made between the late 40s and the early 70s. During that time Owen wrote *Automotive Transportation: Trends and Problems* (1949), *The Metropolitan Transportation Problem* (1956 / 1966 2nd edition), *Strategy for Mobility* (1964) and *Cities in the Motor Age* (1970).

Bill Owen's Perspective that I will always remember is:

“There are almost no transportation facility solutions to transportation congestions problems.” Wilfred Owen (1913 / 2001)

Want to UnderStand how important Owen's view of Access and Mobility was? Check out the new Fishbane, Kane and Tomer “Policy Update.”

Highlights of Owen's work from the Human Settlement Pattern / Mobility and Access perspective included organizing the 1956 conference that commemorated the opening of the new Connecticut General Insurance Company “suburban” office complex. Frazar Wilde, CEO of Connecticut General was surprised and disturbed by the negative reaction to the corporate headquarters move from URban Hartford to a large campus in the low density scatteration of “suburban” Bloomfield. Wilde turned to Brookings to help put together a fair, comprehensive conference to explore the ramifications of the move. The conference organization job was given to Will Owen.

Owen brought together a transportation and urban planning / design A-list that included Lewis Mumford, Jim Rouse and many others. This first meeting between Wilde and Rouse resulted in the partnership that produced Columbia, MD. The Connecticut General meeting was featured in a five page spread in *Life* and is examined at some length in *Pastoral Capitalism: A History of Suburban Corporate Landscapes* by Louise Mozingo (2011).

Owen was also the key organizer and featured speaker in the Currier family launch of **Urban America**. His opening remarks became a cover story in *US News & World Report* (3 Oct 1966) titled *A Fable of the American Cities*. This talk opens with “citizens at the national level are very rich, at the local level citizens are quite poor and, as luck would have it, everyone lives at

the local level.” The promising **Urban America** initiative died with the Carriers when their plane went down in the Carribean in January of 1967.

Perhaps Bill’s greatest contribution to demonstrating how to solve “the transportation problem” was in his role as a citizen activist and member / chair of the Arlington County Economic Development Commission (50s to 90s). He organized and led the German Marshal Fund tour of transportation and land use relationships in Western Europe. Participants on this tour generated and maintained support for the development / redevelopment that is “The Rosslyn Ballston Corridor.”

EMR met Bill through John Milliken former Arlington County Board Chair and Virginia Secretary of Transportation. Bill convinced John to create the Governor’s Telework Advisory Committee upon which Bill, EMR and EMR’s pardner and wife Linda Risse served.

Some of Bills observations are found in Chapter 13 Box 6 of ***THE SHAPE OF THE FUTURE***. Most of the ideas in Chapter 13 (Transportation – ***The Canary in the Minefield***) and especially those in Chapter 13 Box 3 were reviewed with Wilfred Owen before publication.

If Bill had is way the US would have had an Inter-REgional highway system (as proposed in 1924) instead of an Interstate Highway System. Bill was more in tune with Kenneth Schneider (***Autokind vs Mankind*** – 1971) than with TRB or the Federal Highway Administration. This did not suit the supporters / leadership of Brookings well. Toward the end of Bill’s tenure at Brookings, his work was shunted to international venues rather that addressing fundamental Mobility & Access parameters in the United States.

Now Brookings is back with this Policy Update and the recent skewering of the use of “level of Service” as a measure of Access & Mobility. Bill would be proud.