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Co-founder of Citizens Coordinate, Esther Scott, and present president, Dorothea Edmiston, symbolically stand guard over the Cabrillo Freeway, San Diego's most beautiful scenic drive. The five-year-old pressure group for urban beauty has forced city re-examination of plans to widen, primarily by cutting into the slopes on the west side of the freeway, the existing road from four to eight lanes. (Photographs by Bill Reid)

Cabrillo freeway fight

CITIZENS COORDINATE TAKES ON THE CITY AND THE CHAMBER

By Harold Keen

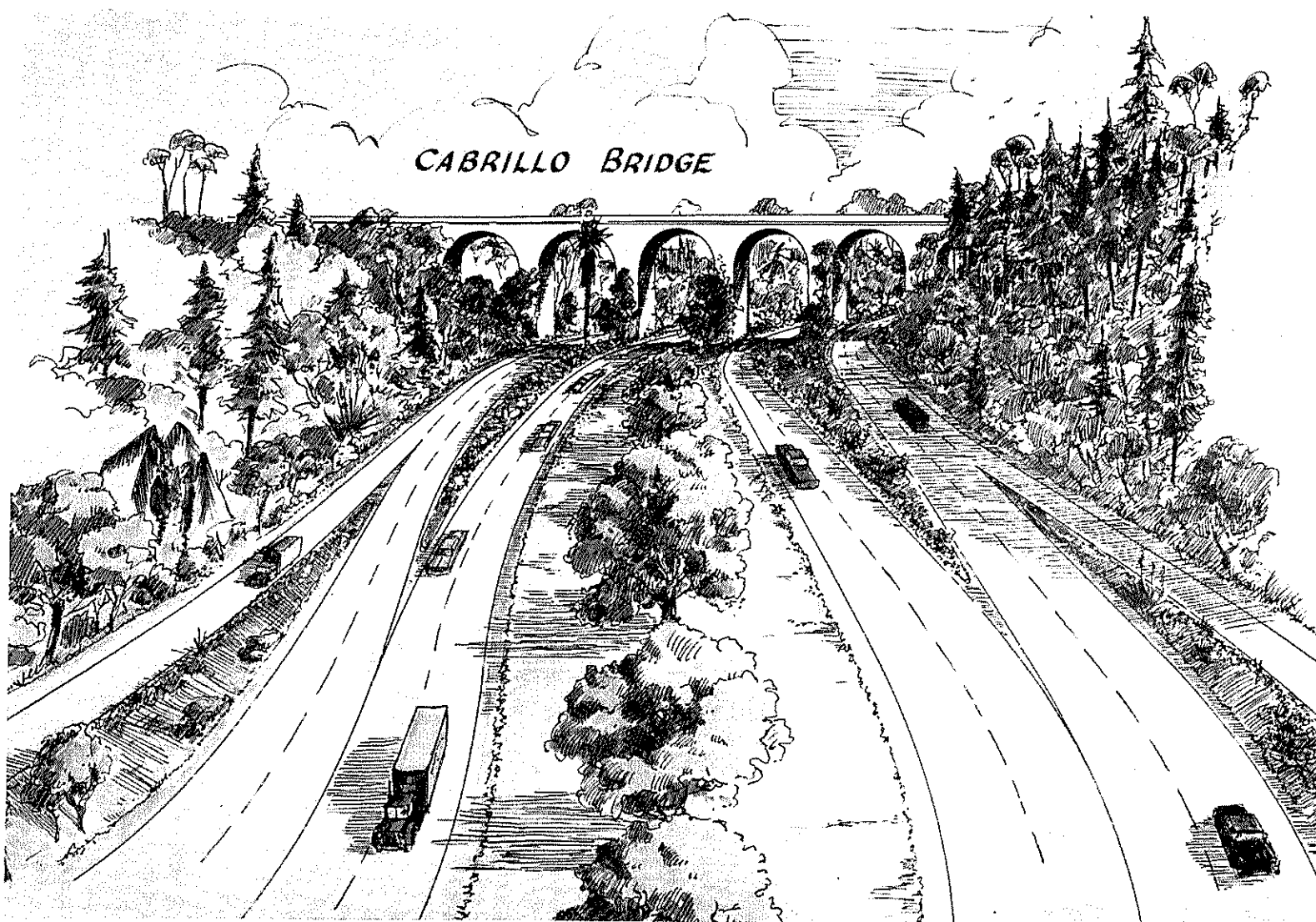
• The small band of politically inexperienced urban conservationists who formed Citizens Coordinate in 1961 is engaged in the prime battle of its short, combative existence. In manning the barricades against the pell-mell rush toward megalopolis, it has, at least temporarily, slowed what appeared an irresistible momentum toward widening of Cabrillo Freeway, San Diego's only truly scenic highway, ranked as one of the most beautiful entrances to any city.

Disparagingly referred to at one time as "beautniks" and "scenic sisters"—with all the ridiculing connotation of progress-crippling that attached itself to San

Diego's "geranium-growers" of a generation ago—Citizens Coordinate achieved its pinnacle of civic prestige last month on the day the City Council decided to take a fresh look at the recommendations of its own and the state of California's traffic experts. Appointment of a 10-member citizens' committee, headed by Ralph Phillips, retired vice president of the San Diego Gas & Electric Co., to make a thorough evaluation over the next few months, with independent engineering assistance, was a triumph for the idealists who believe that aesthetics is as tangible an asset to the city's economy as payrolls—and, as a matter of fact,

bears a direct influence on the economy.

"It's not our intention to turn back the clock to the so-called good old days or to revive the controversy of 'geraniums versus smokestacks,'" says Mrs. Dorothea Edmiston, a "city beautiful" crusader and Citizens Coordinate chairman for two and one-half years. "We say we can have a healthy economy *and* a beautiful city. As a matter of fact, we *must* have beauty to enjoy a healthy economy. What is truly beautiful is also functional and economically feasible, particularly for San Diego, which is attracting science- and research-oriented industries. The scientists and researchers we are seeking in a



highly competitive market look to the beauty of a city. If we want to continue attracting this kind of activity, we must avoid disfiguring our environment."

There is encouraging evidence that San Diego's business interests appreciate the practicality of aesthetics. Joseph F. Sinnott, president of the San Diego Gas & Electric Company, and the new president of the Chamber of Commerce, told that organization's 96th annual meeting last month: "We have the gargantuan job of planning our area to accommodate, to please, to adorn, to attract, to educate, to inspire. The time is running out. When the megalopolis arrives—and it is almost here—will we have adjusted to the demands while enhancing the amenities, the beauties, the cultural assets, the 'flavor' of this truly unique area we live in?"

So this emphasis on the quality of environment is not the unattainable goal it seemed to be when a City Councilman remarked, in the early days of Citizens Coordinate when it was "bothering" the city government about such controversial matters as billboard control: "That bunch is always coming down asking for impossible things." Part of Citizens Coordinate's function, of course, is to ask for impossible things," Mrs. Edmiston points out. "Dreaming the big dream, favoring the hard alternative, speaking up for the unpopular cause are some ways this group can serve as the voice of the citizen who

cares. And more and more of our citizens do care."

Without preconceived intent, Citizens Coordinate is in a position to become the aesthetic conscience of the community, the catalyst that spurs otherwise timid or hesitant individuals and groups into the struggle against mutilation of the city's open spaces and pleasing vistas. This is how Mrs. Esther Scott, of La Jolla, co-founder of CC, regards the organization (whose identifying maxim is "the link to a handsome community"). "Ours is a seeding operation which provides a focus around which others can gather," she explains. "Comparatively few people can accomplish a great deal if they perform an intelligent research job and bring together the groups that would have a common concern for a particular issue. Thus, Citizens Coordinate has been allied with different groups on different issues. In the successful fight to prevent an attempt by selfish interests to gain control of San Diego city planning—and with it, control of the city—through the Jobs and Growth Association, we were working with the League of Women Voters, the Labor Council, and the Chamber of Commerce. But on a previous battle, for billboard control, the Chamber of Commerce was on the opposing side. We would just as soon say in the background, play a low-key role, and credit others who would spearhead the project. The ad hoc

One of the plans advocated by the City to accommodate anticipated congestion is this split-level scheme which will create "two additional medians for further landscaping." The new lanes would use two additional arches of Cabrillo Bridge.

committee approach is the most effective for each issue. For instance, in the fight against the ballot measures that would have completely upset our city planning procedures, we contacted individuals we knew would be concerned, urged them to attend a meeting, and from this the Citizens for Good Government was formed to conduct the campaign."

And so it is today in the Cabrillo Freeway controversy. Constant pressure by CC, which questioned the extent to which alternatives to widening that voracious 1.85-mile stretch were explored, has resulted in formation of a one-purpose, ad hoc committee, on which CC is represented by Mrs. Edmiston. When that committee completes its work, it will be dissolved, and Citizens Coordinate will plunge into other issues. It is safe to say that, by the time this dispute is settled, tens of thousands of San Diegans will have sharply increased their awareness of environmental factors they have either taken for granted or which have entirely escaped them. In that alone, CC will

have achieved a major objective—regardless of whether its inflexible opposition to the freeway widening is vindicated.

CC has squared off against the Establishment in a big way on this issue. Arrayed against it are the official voices of the city government—the City Manager, the City Engineer, the City Transportation Engineer—as well as the State Division of Highways, the Chamber of Commerce and the Highway Development Association. As in the billboard contest, which resulted in a compromise restriction, such organizations as the Sierra Club, the American Institute of Architects, and the American Society of Landscape Architects will be on the CC side.

The arguments for widening Cabrillo Freeway from four to eight lanes between San Diego Freeway (Interstate 5) and the Mission Valley Freeway (Interstate 8), as outlined by City Manager Tom Fletcher early this year, are based on compelling statistics. The present weekday traffic volume northbound and southbound is 64,000 vehicles, with the peak hour southward-bound traffic in the morning, 3,400 vehicles, and in the evening northbound peak hour, 3,700 vehicles, in excess of the capacity of 3,200 vehicles per hour in a single direction. "Forecasts indicate that the volume of motorists desiring to use Cabrillo Freeway will increase to 86,000 a day north of the San Diego Freeway interchange, and to 110,000 north of the proposed Maple Canyon

interchange," Fletcher said.

As the result of the congestion, the accident rate is twice the average on State freeways, according to Fletcher's figures. He points out that the California Division of Highways will purchase, and dedicate to the city land contiguous to Balboa Park equivalent to the acreage needed for widening the freeway, so that total park lands will not be decreased. As for use of alternate routes to avoid widening Cabrillo Freeway, Fletcher contends that even with complete development of the planned network of freeways, "the growth of traffic desires" will still require eight lanes through Balboa Park. Such widening will enable many more persons—namely, the motorists—to enjoy the park through the aesthetic experience of driving along a landscaped freeway, Fletcher says. Beauty of the freeway, including its present center parkway, would be maintained by a plan of split-level roadways which would actually create two additional medians for further landscaping. Those who cried havoc when park land was taken for the interchange network at the southern end of Cabrillo Freeway several years ago, found their fears groundless after the State Division of Highways restored greenery to the raw cuts, Fletcher and Jacob Dekerna, local State Highway engineer, point out. (Since landscaping, like art, evokes subjective judgments, there is no unanimity over sightliness of the state's creation).

An extensively researched rebuttal by Citizens Coordinate showed that, since 1870, when the Legislature declared the 1400 acres of Balboa Park land to be held in trust forever for purposes of a "free and public park . . . and for no other or different purpose," 322.5 acres have been removed, 109 acres alone for State highway rights. The Bartholomew Report of the late 1950's, proposing a master plan for Balboa Park, commented: The freeways (and the Naval Hospital) are the most regrettable of the encroachments, constituting uses which are diametrically opposed to those intended for a park and creating problems of noise, unsightliness and traffic generation.

Citizens Coordinate deplores narrowing of a highly developed strip—along Sixth Avenue—in the proposed widening by cutting into the slopes on the west side of the freeway, and is sceptical of the state's promise to replace the lost land with land contiguous to the park. It wants to know where, and at what value—inasmuch as average value per acre of park land, as far back as 1959 was estimated at nearly \$1 million—and how the acquired land will be used. (State Highway

Opponents of the Highway 395 widening point to the lush planting that will be destroyed on the west side, and to "unacceptable" reduction of space from the narrow Sixth Street section. Proponents say many of the trees that will go are dying and area will be fully re-landscaped.



officials admit they do not know exactly where the "contiguous" lands would come from. They are certain only that these replacement lands would not be the most expensive available.) CC pointed out that compensation for land used several years ago in building the Interstate Five interchange at the south end of Cabrillo Freeway consisted of fill for three parking lots, near Balboa Park Bowl, near the Zoo and in front of the Naval Hospital, all developed at city taxpayers' expense. Widening will increase noise and air pollution as the "encouragement of high volumes of through traffic can only lead to domination by automobiles. San Diego can at least say, 'Parks are for people, not cars.'"

Furthermore, there will be no exalting aesthetic experience to the motorist, claims CC. "With eight lanes of high-speed traffic, the picture is dominated by asphalt and cars, and attention must be concentrated on safety," CC says. "The scenery, being close by, becomes a blur."

Citizens Coordinate attacked Fletcher's reference to future traffic "desires" to use Cabrillo Freeway. "Highway planners seem unwilling to concede that highways stimulate 'traffic desires,' the report declares. "Massive interchanges at each end make it *easy* to use Cabrillo Freeway. The great majority will follow 'the path of least resistance,' and planners have made Cabrillo Freeway that path. Highway planning assumes that practically all motorists want the straightest, shortest, fastest route possible. It is slowly being discovered, however, that large numbers of motorists do not want such routes at the price of other things they value more, particularly parks. If the engineers could record car-pool conversations for use in their computers, they would learn, too, that many commuters actually prefer to drive more slowly when surrounding areas are uncluttered and scenic. Traffic counts do not measure accurately such desires."

CC claims that by the time widening is scheduled to start—not before 1973—20 years will have elapsed since the last metropolitan-wide origin and destination studies were made. This is enough time for revolutionary technological rapid transit developments, as well as housing pattern changes (downtown high-rise apartments from which residents will walk to work; suburban self-contained communities with factories and offices and shopping centers near clusters of homes). These possible eventualities, combined with the completion of Park Blvd. improvement, extension of Interstate Five and the Inland Freeway, and construction of other planned arteries, may well obviate any need for widening Cabrillo Freeway, CC reasons. Therefore, the organization maintains, "In the face of

so many unknowns, it is surely common sense not to take such a drastic step as widening Cabrillo Freeway without trying first all possible alternative solutions to preserve the integrity of the park, while reducing accidents and congestion." Among proposed alternatives: Remove the section of Cabrillo Freeway between Interstates Five and Eight from the Freeway Plan, change the name to Cabrillo Drive, reduce the speed limit and ban trucks. Divert future traffic to other routes by widening Highway 94, now congested at peak hours, and designing the Inland and Escondido (395) Freeways to discourage use of Cabrillo "Drive" (when the proposed interchange of 395 and Murphy Canyon is completed, proper signs there could route traffic to East San Diego, Southeast San Diego, and Mexico through Murphy Canyon, Ward Road and Wabash Freeway); eliminate the proposed Maple Canyon interchange with Cabrillo Freeway in the heart of the park for east-west traffic; eliminate undesirable on- and off-ramps; improve remaining ramps; add longer approach lanes and possibly a "No Left Turn" at Sixth Avenue off-ramp and University.

Unless some such steps are taken, San Diegans may lose faith in the good intentions of the Council to guard city parks from encroachments, jeopardizing the \$23.8 million bond issue for parks in November, including \$7.62 million for Balboa Park, Citizens Coordinate warns.

But even beyond any existence of alternatives, Citizens Coordinate is unalterably opposed to widening of Cabrillo Freeway, Mrs. Edmiston emphasizes: "We're determined to save Balboa Park—and all city parks—from through traffic," she said. "We're not starving as a nation so that we have to steal parks, and I'm sure that the urbanite's love of his car does stop short of such a crime. If it were left to a vote of the people, I am confident that they would not approve further encroachments into Balboa Park." In this regard, a possible future CC objective: abrogate the 1953 amendment to the City Charter which permits the City Council to authorize use of park lands for street and highway purposes without approval of the electorate. This is in keeping with the grassroots nature of CC from the time it was conceived by Lloyd Ruocco, the architect, and Mrs. Scott, wife of a retired Pacific Telephone Company executive.

As Mrs. Scott recalls it: "When my husband was transferred to San Diego in 1953 from San Francisco, we found it a delightful spot, with a natural setting full of great potential. But we were appalled by the harm being done—hills being sliced, the shoreline being cut off from view, highways through canyons

and valleys. I had always been content with my own small attempts to create and maintain beauty in my home garden. I was a private, not a public person. But what clicked me into action was learning in 1960 that 200 trees would have to come out of Balboa Park to make room for the crosstown interchange at the southern end of Cabrillo Freeway, in an unusually scenic spot where the trees had stood for 60 years. This was a tragic thing, and I began thinking what I could do other than write letters to the editor.

"There must be others like me," I thought. "If we could just get together, we might be able to do something effectively." Then, in January, 1961, I read about Lloyd Ruocco's talk to the League of Women Voters, in which he urged preservation of environmental beauty in San Diego. I learned that he had called a meeting of representatives of groups connected with the visual arts. There were about 65 at that meeting in the House of Hospitality, Balboa Park. The idea was to form a solid bloc of spokesmen for beauty. I had meanwhile been doing research, contacting such organizations as the California Roadside Council, for clues on how to form an effective unified approach in dealing with problems of urban design. We used some of that research and, from the group at that first meeting, a small committee was formed to meet regularly.

"We have always been a small organization, but I don't think size is the important thing for us. What has made Citizens Coordinate go is the devotion of a few individuals to particular projects. We didn't really have any time to get organized before we became involved in the dispute over regulation of billboards. It was a battle that went on for 18 months, and it was the best thing that could have happened to us. We were a group of individuals aiming for the moon but not experienced in the ways of politics. We got a first-rate training course and, although we had only partial success in our campaign to ban billboards from freeways, scenic highways and public recreation areas, we became known for our goals, and attracted increasing support. Concessions were obtained only as result of a strong demonstration of citizens' opinions and the backing of 60 organizations, based on our research." Mrs. Scott was the first acting chairman of Citizens Coordinate, with Minos Generales, State College political science professor, as first permanent chairman, followed by Richard B. Wilson, Convair Astronautics engineer, and Mrs. Edmiston, who served as "interim" chairman for two years and on August 25 was elected president by the enlarged board.

The billboard battle was followed by the successful campaign against the at-

tempts of Mission Valley hotel operator Charles Brown (Jobs and Growth Association) and City Councilman Jack Walsh (the "Walsh Amendment") to upset the city's planning structure; the unsuccessful campaign favoring the General Plan (in which CC shared defeat at the polls with the city administration, which it has had occasion to challenge as well as support on specific issues); rejection by the city of CC's Tourmaline Canyon surfing beach plan, in which natural features would have been retained instead of destroyed; and the victorious marshalling of public opinion that led to the Council's adoption of a height limitation in the La Jolla high-rise controversy.

Without losing stride during these major struggles, Citizens Coordinate raised \$32,250 as half of the purchase price of Old Town lots to serve as a scenic gateway to Presidio Park; has saved historic trees that were either dying or were due to be removed; has contributed to the Community Concourse building fund; has raised \$3,000 for trees to beautify the vast black asphalt parking expanse at the new Lindbergh Field terminal; and is now advocating a city environmental design advisory board, the only tangible recommendation to emerge from the Mayor's recent "San Diego Tomorrow" conference in Balboa Park.

All this has been accomplished with a membership of only a few hundred, a minuscule budget, and no full-time staff. "We speak for many more than our own small paid membership," explains Mrs. Edmiston. "We speak for thousands who are deeply involved in the desire to maintain a handsome, functional community. But we are being pushed into the big leagues. We've had to turn down projects for lack of manpower and money. Now our first concerted membership campaign is planned and we'll soon name a full-time executive director. Much has happened since CC began, almost informally, in 1961. You can tell the difference in our reception when we appear before the City Council. We're listened to more intently now. The Council realizes we're more than just another bunch of dogooders, and we actually receive calls from City Hall now to learn how Citizens Coordinate stands on an issue.

"We have no aspirations to become a political force as such, or to support candidates. This is in the province of such organizations as Citizens United in their quest for good government. We will continue to concentrate on improvement of environment, and in that respect we hope to expand our influence over public opinion. We don't expect to win all our battles, but we do aim to make San Diegans more conscious of the need for protecting the natural beauty that is threatened by population pressures and the automobile." #

