

The Davison Freeway from
M-10 to Oakland Avenue,
Davison Freeway (~~Davison Limited Highway~~)
From M-10 to Oakland Avenue
Highland Park
Wayne County
Michigan

HAER No. MI-103-A

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Great Lakes Systems Office
Department of the Interior
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The Davison Freeway from M-10 to Oakland Avenue,
Davison Freeway

HAER No. MI-103-A

Location: Between M-10 and Oakland Avenue, Highland Park, Wayne County, Michigan

Quad: Highland Park, Michigan 1:24,000

UTM: A: 17.326320.4696000
B: 17.328300.4696830

Date of Construction: 1941-1942

Engineers: Leroy C. Smith, County Highway Engineer; John K. Norton, Road Engineer; Julian C. Meade, Engineer of Structural Design; and Harry A. Shuptrine, Engineer of Bridges and Structures, Wayne County Road Commission.

Builder: William J. Storen Construction Company, Charles J. Rogers Construction Company, Cook Contracting Company, and others.

Present Owner: Michigan Department of Transportation, 425 West Ottawa Street, Lansing, Michigan 48909

Present Use: Limited-access vehicular highway to be replaced by a similar highway at the same location.

Significance: The Davison Freeway was the first below-grade limited access highway built in Michigan and the first built in a Michigan city. It was one of the first depressed urban freeways in the United States. It relieved crosstown traffic congestion in Highland Park and Detroit, and served as a model for later Detroit freeways.

Historian: Charles K. Hyde, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan 48202, May 1996.

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PLANNING AND CONSTRUCTION

The construction of the Davison Limited Highway in 1941-1942 was the last phase of a long-term effort to widen and upgrade Davison Avenue over its entire 7.5 mile length from Wyoming Avenue in Detroit on the west and Van Dyke Avenue, also in Detroit, on the east. In Highland Park proper, Davison Avenue became Windemere Avenue between Woodward and Oakland Avenues. Davison Avenue provided the only crosstown route passing through the City of Highland Park and had been a major traffic bottleneck since the late 1920s. Wayne County widened part of Davison Avenue west of Hamilton Avenue in 1933, installing an 80-foot pavement, and in 1935 straightened and widened to 68 feet a section of Davison east of Oakland Avenue. When Wayne County and the Grand Trunk Western Railroad created a grade separation east of Oakland Avenue in 1939, the county widened the street pavement to 80 feet.¹

Building the expressway segment through Highland Park began slowly, in part because of political wrangling between the city and the county. The Highland Park Council initially voted against the project in May 1937, largely because Wayne County expected the city to use the weight and gasoline taxes refunded by the state to pay \$300,000 of the total cost of \$1.5 million. In July 1938, Blaine Coleman, the Mayor of Highland Park, reiterated this position, forcing the Wayne County Road Commissioners into further discussions. Less than a year later, Highland Park demanded that Wayne County pay the city \$200,000 to make up for its loss of property tax revenues resulting from the freeway. The Road Commissioners rejected Highland Park's "counter-offer" and continued negotiations.²

In late April, 1940, the Highland Park Council approved "in principal" new plans presented by the Wayne County Road Commissioners and agreed that Highland Park's share in the cost would not exceed \$100,000. Two of the five Commissioners objected to including any dollar figure in the resolution. On 3 June 1940, the Highland Park Council finally signed a contract with the Road Commissioners to get the project started. Commissioner Patterson insisted that the Clerk read the entire contract before he would vote and then he abstained.

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Patterson argued that the project would cost Highland Park over \$1 million in taxable property and \$100,000 in cash, with no real benefit to the city, but he also recognized the need to improve crosstown traffic. In late July, the Wayne County Road Commissioners began legal actions to acquire the properties. They immediately proceeded with a blanket condemnation suit incorporating all the properties east of Woodward Avenue and planned a second blanket suit in October for the parcels west of Woodward. In mid-March 1941, the Highland Park Council gave its approval to the final plans for the expressway.³

The resident engineering staff of the Wayne County Road Commission designed the Davison Limited Highway and supervised its construction. The Road Commissioners were Charles L. Wilson, Chairman; Michael J. O'Brien, Vice-Chairman; and John F. Breining. Leroy C. Smith, the County Highway Engineer, had overall responsibility for the project. His staff included John K. Norton, Road Engineer; Harry A. Shuptrine, Engineer of Bridges and Structures; Julian C. Meade, Engineer of Structural Design; and Paul Holland, Assistant Road Engineer. F.S. Roser was responsible for field supervision and inspection. The Road Commission's Safety Engineer, J.L. Weymeyer, was in charge of traffic routing and traffic signals. Highland Park's City Engineer, L. C. Whitsit, represented the city's interests.⁴

The Road Commissioners divided this ambitious project into several distinct, overlapping stages spread out over eighteen months in roughly the following order--moving or demolishing the buildings on the right-of-way; relocating and rebuilding of public and private utilities in the construction zone; paving of the south service drive; building the seven bridges crossing the new expressway; excavating the depressed section for the roadway; constructing the drainage systems, including storm sewers and pumping facilities; and paving the finished highway. Clearing the right-of-way of existing buildings began in early 1941 and was largely completed by late May. The surviving records do not identify a demolition contractor. The Wayne County Road Commissioners subsequently awarded nine contracts to seven different contractors for the remainder of the work. The Road Commission completed the final landscaping with its own personnel.

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In late July, the Road Commissioners awarded the contract for the south service drive to the Frank Weir Construction Company, in the amount of \$30,544.67. Weir built a 22-foot pavement and a 6-foot side sidewalk on the southern edge of the right-of-way. The south service drive opened to traffic on 1 October 1941 and carried eastbound Davison traffic.⁵

In early August 1941, the federal Office of Production Management (OPM) granted the Davison highway project a favorable Priority Preference Rating (A-10) to receive critical scarce materials, including steel, for construction. The OPM recognized the value of the new expressway in moving workers, raw materials, and products for the defense industry. The Davison received an upgraded preference rating in late November, further assuring sufficient materials.⁶

Rebuilding and relocating of the utility lines which crossed the new expressway was a major undertaking that had to be completed before work on the bridges could begin. The Wayne County Road Commissioners had the responsibility of relocating the public utilities, namely water mains, sanitary sewer lines, and signal lines for the Highland Park police and fire departments. Water mains and sewers had to be lowered to a depth of 25 feet, to run under the depressed roadway, and placed in new locations. A total of 5,000 linear feet of water mains and 600 feet of sanitary sewers had to be removed and replaced. In mid-August 1941, the Commissioners awarded a contract to the Waterway Construction Company of Detroit, who submitted a bid of \$40,280.50 for the work.⁷

The private utilities--the Detroit Edison Company, the Michigan Bell Telephone Company, and the Michigan Consolidated Gas Company--bore the expense of relocating their underground lines. Detroit Edison had important "duct lines" at the Second, Woodward, and Oakland Avenue crossings. They relocated these lines in new conduits built below the footings for the bridges. At Third, John R, and Brush streets, where Detroit Edison had no existing lines, the utility laid new duct lines for future use. Michigan Bell Telephone avoided deep construction by relocating their lines in conduits in the ten-foot wide sidewalk slabs on the bridges. The gas mains and the fire-police signal lines were relocated in a similar fashion.⁸

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Construction of the bridges carrying the seven cross streets was done in stages as well. In mid-September 1941, the Road Commissioners asked for bids for four identical bridges at Third, Second, John R, and Brush. They awarded the contract on 21 November to the William J. Storen Company, in the amount of \$290,322, and Storen immediately began the work. The original plan was to build only half of each bridge at a time. The Road Commissioners followed that strategy on the Third and Second Avenue bridges. To save time, however, they shut down Brush Street entirely, built the bridge in one operation, and then did the same for John R. The contractor completed the Third, Second, and Brush Street bridges in mid-April 1942 and finished the John R bridge in early July.⁹

The first bridge contract produced the only controversy over the bidding process for the entire Davison project. The Road Commissioners asked contractors to submit multiple proposals for the four single-span bridges. They asked for separate bids on two single bridges (Second Avenue and Third Avenue); a bid for the John R and Brush Street bridges together; and a single bid for all four structures. The Frank J. Knight Company was the low bidder for all the bridge contracts, but Harry Shuptrine did not think the firm was capable of doing the work. Shuptrine proposed that the second low bidder, the William J. Storen Company, which was a competent firm and submitted reasonable bids, should be awarded contracts for at least two of the four bridges. Knight's bid for all four bridges was \$219,375, whereas Storen's was \$290,323. The Road Commission opened the bids on 10 November 1941. Frank Knight sent the Commissioners a memorandum on 14 November asking permission to withdraw his bid, which was based on erroneous calculations. When corrected, his bid would have increased by \$92,533 to \$311,908, well above Storen.¹⁰

After Knight refused a contract for two of the bridges, the Board awarded the contract for all four bridges to Storen, but kept two of Knight's bidding checks, each for \$4,000, as a penalty for damages. Knight sued the Road Commissioners to recover his \$8,000 and the Wayne County Circuit Court ruled in his favor on 21 April 1942. The Road Commission did not, however, have to pay Knight interest or penalties.¹¹

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The Road Commissioners also awarded the contract for the remaining bridges to the William J. Storen Construction Company in March 1942, for \$329,957.20. The three bridges (Hamilton, Woodward, and Davison avenues), which carried double-track streetcar lines, were wider, stronger, and more costly than the other four. After consulting with Highland Park, the Road Commissioners decided to completely shut down Woodward and Hamilton avenues to speed construction. Even with this tactic, Storen did not complete the Woodward Avenue bridge until early October 1942. The Detroit Street Railway lines, however, remained in service throughout the Davison construction.¹²

The rest of the project moved ahead rapidly with the completion of most of the bridges in the spring and summer of 1942. The Thomas E. Currie Company completed pumphouses at Hamilton, Second, and Oakland, along with a large retaining wall at Hamilton by April 1942, for a contract price of \$48,651.14. The G. Vella Company finished a pumphouse and retaining walls at Woodward Avenue at a cost of \$28,202.

The Waterway Construction Company, which had relocated water mains and sewer lines in the early stages of construction, also built the storm sewer system to provide for drainage for the expressway, for a contract price of \$75,909. The drainage system included four pumphouses located next to four of the major crossings--Hamilton, Second, Woodward, and Oakland. The Hamilton pumphouse had two independent pumps, each with a capacity of 2,400 gallons per minute, while each of the remaining pumphouses had three pumps of the same capacity. Each pump was driven by a 25 horsepower, direct-connected electric motor. Only two of the three pumps would normally operate at one time and the third would cut in only one of the others had failed. The two pumphouses east of Woodward (at Second and at Hamilton) were interconnected, and theoretically one could handle runoff from a storm dropping 2.5 inches of rain per hour even if the other entirely failed. The same was true for the two pumphouses west of Woodward (at Woodward and at Oakland). None of the pumphouses were staffed.

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The rest of the construction project involved two major contracts. The Charles J. Rogers Company completed the excavation for the depressed section, which required removal of 400,000 cubic yards of earth, at a contract price of \$327,374. The Cook Contracting Company of Detroit, with a bid of \$224,540, completed the paving, curbs, and walks on the depressed main artery.¹³

The Wayne County Road Commissioners opened the Davison Limited Highway on Wednesday, 25 November 1942, one day before Thanksgiving. No formal dedication ceremonies were held because wartime priorities prohibited such wasteful celebrations. The expressway was not landscaped at the time of the opening and other minor work remained unfinished until the following spring. On Thanksgiving Day, 32,000 cars used the new highway.¹⁴

A minor controversy developed as the new highway opened. Residents living on the north service drive, east of Woodward Avenue, formerly called Windemere Avenue, protested the use of "Davison" as their new street addresses. They petitioned the Highland Park Council to name the new highway "Highland Park Drive" instead of Davison Avenue. Commissioner Patterson, however, strongly urged the continued use of "Davison Avenue" on historic grounds. Jared Davison settled in what later became Highland Park in 1845 and his son William Davison (1845-1913) owned the farm which was subdivided and platted in 1906 to create Davison Avenue.¹⁵

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A summary of project costs is a reminder of the complexity of the Davison Limited Highway construction effort:

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Right of Way | \$1,450,000 |
| Seven Bridges (Oakland, Brush, John R. Woodward, Second, Third, Hamilton)..... | 670,000 |
| General Excavation | 479,000 |
| Permanent Paving, Curbs, and Walks | 435,000 |
| Drainage and Rebuilding Deep Sewers | 157,000 |
| Retaining Walls and Stairs | 128,000 |
| Water Mains and Other City Utilities | 85,000 |
| Pumphouses | 57,000 |
| Sodding and Planting | 45,000 |
| Maintenance of Traffic During Construction | 85,000 |
| Engineering, Including Surveys, Plans and Field Supervision | 90,000 |

TOTAL \$3,618,000

The Wayne County Road Commissioners were justifiably proud of the Davison Limited Highway and believed that it would serve as a model for future expressway construction throughout Michigan:

Davison Limited Highway takes its place among the pioneer highways of the world, for it was designed only after careful study of the very few highways at all similar, and every effort was made to embody in it the latest engineering principles of design and construction economy. The Davison project is unique in that it provides non-stop highway travel directly through a solidly built-up and long-established neighborhood.¹⁶

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NOTABLE DESIGN FEATURES AND CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUES

The design of the Davison freeway reflected wartime conditions, including the need to finish the project quickly. The depressed segment of the expressway consisted of two 33-foot wide concrete pavements 10 inches thick, without reinforcing. The engineers and contractors experimented with a variety of concrete curing methods. With the onset of cold weather in November 1941, calcium chloride was added to the concrete mix to speed curing. During the warmer months of 1942, segments were cured with the aid of "Rite Cure," the use of "Vinsol Resin," or by means of the "Battenfield Oil Cure," but these experiments ceased in early October 1942, when insulating the uncured concrete with hay began.¹⁷

The Davison Limited Highway was designed to keep "local" and "through" traffic largely separated. With the exception of a single eastbound exit between Hamilton and Third avenues, traffic could not exit or enter the freeway within the Highland Park city limits. The Davison, however, had two extra lanes at the Woodward Avenue bridge to allow busses to pick up and discharge passengers, who used stairways to move to and from Woodward Avenue above. On the upper-level artery, passengers could transfer to Detroit Department of Street Railways trolleys or busses. The one-way local traffic on the east-west service drives was also isolated from vehicles using the main north-south surface streets. The bridges had turning lanes which were accessible only from the service drive and allowed drivers to make U-turns without entering the cross streets. Concrete safety islands separated the turning lanes from the arterial streets and curved wing walls at the abutments permitted service drive turns. All the bridges had two turning lanes except for the bridges at Hamilton and Oakwood avenues, which had only one.¹⁸

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The design of the bridges carrying surface streets over the expressway was also notable. The Wayne County Road Commission engineers selected a hinged, reinforced concrete, rigid-framed bridge design, which permitted maximum underclearance without raising the grade of the streets crossing above. The crowns on the deck slabs of the double-span bridges at Hamilton, Woodward, and Oakland were only 1 foot 3 inches thick. For the single-span bridges at Third, Second, John R, and Brush, the crowns were 1 foot 9.50 inches thick. All the bridges allowed for a minimum underclearance of 14 feet. While the bridges were under construction, braces made up of railroad rails were built into the bottom segment of the abutments to prevent the abutments from overturning before the deck slab was poured. Once the deck slab was sufficiently solid, the braces were burned away.

Under normal circumstances, the steel reinforcing bars which extend up the back of the bridge abutments and then out into the deck slabs would have been bent in the steel fabricating shop and then placed within the forms before the concrete was poured. But the bars needed for the single-span bridges, which had a clear length of over 77 feet, were too long (29 feet and 29 feet 9 inches) to transport through city streets without special permits. To avoid this problem, the steel was shipped as straight bars, encased in the concrete abutments, and then bent over a templet into the required shape.¹⁹

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DESCRIPTION

The Davison Limited Highway is approximately 7,050 feet long and occupies a right-of-way 205 feet wide. The western end originally began at grade level at Lincoln Avenue, about 700 feet west of Hamilton Avenue, with the central roadway descending to 17 feet below grade at Hamilton. Today, a multi-level interchange links the Davison with the John C. Lodge (M-10) Freeway. Similarly, at the eastern end, the depressed central roadway originally passed under Oakland Avenue and then gradually ascended back to grade level approximately 800 feet further east. That segment is also radically different today, with a massive interchange linking the Davison with the Walter P. Chrysler (I-75) Freeway.

The highway does not have a precise east-west alignment. It runs perpendicular to the seven major cross streets within Highland Park, but those run in a south southeast-north northwest alignment. Running from west to east, the seven cross streets (Hamilton, Third, Second, Woodward, John R, Brush, and Oakland) are not evenly spaced. Hamilton and Third, along with Woodward, John R, Brush, and Oakland Avenues, are all approximately 850 feet apart. Third and Second Avenues, however, are only about 720 feet apart, while Second and Woodward are 1,000 feet distant.

The Davison's general cross section is symmetrical throughout the length of the freeway. Starting from both the north and south boundaries of the right-of-way, at grade level, there is a 9-foot wide strip between the adjoining private property and the curb of the service drive. This strip holds street lights, hydrants, and a concrete sidewalk 6 feet wide. Each service drive consists of a concrete pavement 22 feet wide, divided into two 11-foot traffic lanes. Although the north service drive is no longer in use, the pavement and sidewalks are extant. A sloped embankment extends down to the level of the depressed central highway from the edge of each service drive. Each embankment has an elevation of 17 feet, is 35 feet 6 inches wide at the base, and 30 feet wide on the slope, with a narrow berm at the top separating the sloped section from the service drive.²⁰

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Retaining walls were used in place of earth embankments at four places where the right-of-way was not wide enough to accommodate other related features. All were cantilever-type walls with footing widths approximately half the height of the wall. The first (Wall A) was southwest of Hamilton Avenue, where a large four-story brick school building (the Willard School) stood. There is no service drive at this location as this would have required the demolition of the school. A retaining wall was constructed to support the school foundation. At the eastern end of the wall, next to the Hamilton Avenue bridge, the wall rises 19 feet 9 inches above the pavement level, but only 5 feet 1 inch at the western end. Measuring 1 foot six inches thick and 420 feet long, the retaining wall extends some 14 feet below the school foundations where it runs alongside the school. The retaining wall footings range from 3 feet thick and 12 feet 6 inches wide at the eastern end to only 1 foot 6 inches thick and 3 feet 8 inches wide at the western end.

The second retaining wall (Wall B) supports the earth embankment extending along the south edge of the exit ramp leading from the eastbound central artery, between Hamilton and Third, to the south service drive. The wall is 318 feet long and 15 feet high in the center section, but tapers to a height of 6 feet 8 inches at the west end and 5 feet 5 inches at the east end. It runs nearly the entire length (351 feet) of the 12 foot-wide ramp. A pipe railing on top of the wall runs the entire length. This consist of cast grey iron posts 3 feet 6 inches high, 5 inches wide at the base and tapering to 3 inches wide at the top. The posts, placed between 8 feet 1 inches and 9 feet 6 inches apart, have three round holes to hold the 1.50-inch diameter pipe which makes up the rails. The bottom rail is 1 foot above the top of the wall, the top rail is at the apex of the post, with 1 foot between the middle rail and the others. The third retaining wall (Wall C) was built on the south side of the central artery, between Hamilton and Third, to allow for an exit ramp to the service drive. It extends for 165 feet, is 14 feet 7 inches high at its mid-point and 6 feet 9 inches high at the ends. Catch basins are built into both ends of the wall.²¹

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A set of eight retaining walls were required at the Woodward Avenue bridge, to allow for bus-loading lanes and four sets of stairs at that location. These walls will be discussed in a separate report on the Woodward Avenue bridge.

The central artery, depressed approximately 17 feet below grade, has two concrete pavements, each 10 inches thick and 33 feet wide, divided in turn into three 11-foot wide traffic lanes. There are two additional 10-foot lanes, each 450 feet long, at the Woodward Avenue bridge, to allow for bus stops. The median dividing the two pavements is a reinforced concrete "New Jersey" barrier, 2 feet 8 inches tall, 2 feet 9 inches wide at the base, and 9 inches wide at the top.

The six bridges carrying the surface streets over the depressed section of the Davison Limited Highway are reinforced concrete, hinged, rigid-frame designs. Four of the original bridges (at Third, Second, John R, and Brush) are identical single-span structures providing a clear span of 77 feet 4 inches. The remaining three (Hamilton, Woodward, and Oakland Avenues) were double-span structures with a center pier, designed to carry double streetcar tracks. Each had a 17-foot wide center section for the street railway lines, with thicker slabs than the adjacent sections carrying only vehicular traffic. The Hamilton and Oakland Avenue bridges each had two clear spans of 37 feet 2 inches, for a total length of 74 feet 4 inches. The Woodward Avenue bridge spans each have a clear-length of 42 feet 6 inches, for a total length of 85 feet. The four single spans are each 96 feet 8 inches wide, while Woodward Avenue has an overall width of 137 feet 8 inches.

Four of the extant bridges (Second Avenue, Woodward Avenue, John R, and Brush) have a simple stone nameplate (22 inches by 14 inches) on the southeast pylon, with the following inscription: Wayne County Road Commission - Charles L. Wilson - Michael J. O'Brien - John F. Breining - 1942. None are found on the Third or Hamilton Avenue bridges, nor is there physical evidence that either of these bridges ever had a nameplate.²²

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ALTERATIONS AND RECENT HISTORY

The Davison Freeway has undergone remarkably little physical change since it opened, although the volume of traffic using the Davison has increased greatly. With the completion of Detroit's freeway system, the Davison has become primarily a connection between the John C. Lodge Expressway (M-10) on the west and the Walter P. Chrysler Expressway (I-75) on the east. Today, this short stretch of highway one of the most congested and dangerous in Michigan. Designed with no shoulders or break-down lanes, the Davison has been the site of hundreds of serious accidents over the years involving disabled vehicles stopped in the traffic lanes.

When the Davison opened in 1942, the Wayne County Road Commission planners correctly predicted that the traffic volumes using the highway would increase greatly with the end of gasoline rationing. Traffic counts for the depressed sections alone revealed a jump from a total of 24,270 vehicles for 24 hours in 1944 to 50,540 in 1950. Traffic on the service drives increased from roughly 8,500 vehicles per day in 1944 to 18,500 in 1950. By the late 1980s, the Davison carried over 100,000 vehicles on weekdays.²³

The Davison became an integral part of Detroit's evolving freeway network. The first major new Detroit freeway in the postwar years was the John C. Lodge Expressway, extending from downtown some twelve miles to the northwest. Plans for the Lodge were in place in 1945, construction began in 1950, and the first section, from downtown to the Ford Freeway, was opened in 1954. The Lodge runs slightly west of Hamilton Avenue, with direct ramp connections to the Davison Freeway. The Lodge-Davison interchange was completed in 1957, following temporary closures of parts of the Davison.²⁴

At the east end of the Davison, the original bridge carrying Oakland Avenue over the freeway was replaced in 1968 by a pair of three-lane steel girder bridges, part of the overall design of the future interchange of the Davison with the Walter P. Chrysler Expressway (I-75). Construction of the Chrysler Freeway began in the early 1960s in downtown Detroit, but motorists had to wait until spring 1971 before the interchange with the Davison was fully opened.²⁵

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Additional alterations over the past fifty years have been minor and primarily cosmetic. To improve safety, the Wayne County Road Commissioners replaced the original median consisting of a six-foot wide strip planted with a barberry hedge, with a steel guard rail in October 1952, and later by a concrete "New Jersey" barrier in 1974. The federal government paid 90 percent of the total cost of \$246,000 for the concrete barrier, which extended from west of Hamilton Avenue to east of Brush, a total length of 0.89 miles. The contractor was Champaign and Webber, Inc. The original pumps at Second Avenue were replaced in 1974 and in 1984-1988, Wayne County installed new pumps in the Hamilton, Woodward, and Oakland pumphouses.²⁶

Other changes cannot be precisely dated. The original lighting system for the depressed roadway consisted of 1,500-candle-power lights mounted on decorative brackets from metal lamp posts, placed 3 feet 8 inches back of the outer curbs and placed at 100-foot intervals. On the service drives, similarly-mounted 1,000-candle-power lamps were placed 200 feet apart on the outer edge of the roadway. The original lamps and posts, installed by the Detroit Edison Company in 1942, were replaced by modern street lights in the late 1970s or early 1980s. Only three of the original lamp posts survive, all on the north service drive just east of M-10, but are equipped with lamps probably installed in the 1970s or before.²⁷

The stairs at Woodward Avenue leading down to the depressed part of the Davison were blocked off after bus service was discontinued on the Davison in the late 1950s. Finally, the original north service drive was closed and blocked by concrete barriers when a new service drive was constructed further to the north in 1994-1995, in anticipation of the reconstruction of the entire Davison Freeway. E & L Development Inc. of Sterling Heights, Michigan, built the new service road, and rebuilt water mains, sewer lines, and the drainage system, at a cost of \$8.9 million. The bridge turning lanes for the service drives were blocked by concrete barriers at that time.²⁸

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Although the Davison Freeway was considered "state-of-the-art" or "modern" when it opened in 1942, this expressway was not designed to handle the volume of traffic that it carried by the early 1960s. The lack of shoulders where disabled vehicles could pull off from the regular travel lanes made the Davison a hazardous highway from the beginning.

Highland Park and Wayne County have long recognized the need to widen and modernize the Davison, but political wrangling and lack of funds prevented any significant progress until 1995. The Wayne County Road Commission developed a detailed plan in 1965 to widen the Davison. The 1965 proposal called for a 350-foot right-of-way, with additional property acquired north of the existing right-of-way. The new expressway would have four 12-foot traffic lanes in each direction, outside shoulders of 12 feet 8 inches, and a median strip 26 feet wide. The Road Commission estimated a total cost of \$22,455,000 (in 1966) for right-of-way and construction.²⁹

The Michigan State Highway Department approved Wayne County's proposed reconstruction of the Davison in late 1967, but the state highway director announced at the same time that the project would probably be postponed until after 1972 because of funding shortages. Modernization was delayed until the state, county, and city authorities could decide the final shape of Detroit's freeway system. The Davison was viewed by the state highway planners as the center link in a new crosstown freeway.³⁰

Highland Park continued to lobby for renovations and approved Road Commission plans in 1971 and 1972, only to have the project delayed for lack of funding. The modernization project was postponed again in 1975 to allow Detroit to reassess its plans for the Davison-Mound Road corridor. In October 1975, Detroit Mayor Coleman A. Young vowed to fight any new freeway construction in Detroit, citing the devastation brought by previous freeways to the city's tax base. Frustrated Highland Park residents who owned property along the north edge of the Davison demanded that the state and county buy their properties. They complained bitterly that they have not been able to sell their properties since 1965, while their property values plummeted.³¹

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In April 1977, the Wayne County Road Commission announced an agreement with the State of Michigan whereby federal funds would pay for 70 percent of a Davison Freeway renovation. Wayne County began to acquire property for the enlarged right-of-way in 1977. But in May 1978, the Road Commission estimated that the project would not begin for at least three years, and possibly five years down the road. The processes of appraising properties for the enlarged right-of-way, conducting condemnation proceedings, and settling condemnation lawsuits took an entire decade. A new north service drive was finally built through the new right-of-way in 1994, anticipating the reconstruction of the entire freeway.³²

The fate of the aging expressway became enmeshed in a larger disagreement between state, county, and Detroit officials. Wayne County wanted the state to take jurisdiction of the Davison and therefore the responsibility for upgrading the highway. The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) was willing to take control only if the Davison would be part of a larger crosstown freeway project linking the Jeffries Freeway (I-96) on the west with the Edsel B. Ford Freeway (I-94) to the east. Detroit's Mayor Young vehemently opposed any new freeway construction within Detroit, citing the devastating effects of past projects on neighborhoods and the city's tax base. This stand-off extended through the 1980s. Young softened his position in early 1990, suggesting that he would agree to extending the Davison at both ends with wide boulevards, but nothing further developed.³³

The Davison Freeway became an unclaimed orphan among Michigan highways. The Wayne County Road Commission transferred ownership of this well-worn, outmoded expressway to the State of Michigan in October 1995. The Michigan Department of Transportation (M-DOT) planned an immediate partial closure of the Davison to reduce traffic volumes, but Highland Park and Wayne County challenged M-DOT's decision in court and won. The rebuilding and widening of the Davison Freeway which began on 28 April 1996 simply implements the plans first developed in 1965 for modernization. The reconstruction project is the final outcome of this seemingly endless political struggle.³⁴

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NOTES

¹Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the Board of County Road Commissioners of Wayne County, Michigan, For the Fiscal Year From December 1, 1932 to November 30, 1933, 27; Twenty-Ninth Annual Report December 1, 1934 to November 30, 1935, 15; Thirty-Third Annual Report December 1, 1938 to November 30, 1939, 11-12; Sanborn Map and Publishing Company, Insurance Maps of Detroit, Michigan, Vols. 10-A, 14 (New York: 1915, 1925); and "Wider Davison Project Begun: County Road Commission Tackles Big Job at Oakland Avenue," The Highland Parker, 6 June 1935.

²"H.P. Opposes Plan to Widen Davison," The Detroit News, 11 May 1937, p. 10; letter, Blaine Coleman to Leroy Smith, 11 July 1938, in Minutes of the Meetings of the Board of County Road Commissioners, meeting of 12 July 1938, 936-939; meeting of 7 March 1939, 245-247; and meeting of 25 April 1939, 551-552.

³"Council Accepts Davison Widening Plan 'In Principle,'" The Highland Parker, 25 April 1940; "Execution of Contract With Road Commission Is Voted By Majority: Com. Patterson Forces Reading of Agreement," The Highland Parker, 6 June 1940; "Davison Project Physical Work to Begin Next Spring, Wayne County Road Commission Plans Two Blanket Condemnation Suits," The Highland Parker, 25 July 1940; "A \$2,500,00 Depressed Highway For Detroit Area Motorists," The Detroit News, 18 March 1941, 34; "Six Lane Depressed Highway Permits Non-Stop Route on Davison," The Highland Parker, 20 March 1941; and "Construction Starts on Davison Sunken Highway," Michigan Roads and Construction 38 (20 March 1941), 2. Details of the agreements between Highland Park of the Road Commissioners are found in Minutes of the Board of County Road Commissioners, meeting of 11 June 1940, 877-880; meeting of 21 June 1940, 963-964; meeting of 25 March 1941, 482-483; and meeting of 28 March 1941, 502.

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⁴Harry A. Shuptrine and Julian C. Meade, "Davison Limited Highway, Wayne County, Mich., Part I. Planning to Expedite Crosstown Traffic," Civil Engineering 12 (December 1942): 676.

⁵"Davison High'y Project Heads Construction," The Highland Parker, 22 May 1941; "Award Davison South Surface Road Contract," The Highland Parker, 24 July 1941; "New Davison South Drive Is Underway," The Highland Parker, 11 September 1941; and "Pour Concrete For Davison Project," Michigan Roads and Construction 38 (11 September 1941): 5.

⁶"Road Project Given Priority; Materials Are Assured for Davison Highway," The Detroit News, 20 August 1941, 22; "Davison Project Granted Priority Rating by OPM - County Engineer Makes Grant Known," The Highland Parker, 21 August 1941; Minutes of the Meetings of the Board of County Road Commissioners . . ., minutes of the meeting of 8 August 1941, Memorandum, E.E. Duffy, Priorities Division of the Office of Production Management, to the Board, 8 August 1941, 1566; and minutes of the meeting of 21 November 1941, 2453.

⁷"Davison Water, Sewer Contract Awarded," Michigan Roads and Construction 38 (21 August 1941): 4. Information on the nine separate contracts the County Road Commission awarded, including the precise amounts, is found in the vertical files retained by the Wayne County Department of Public Services (formerly the Road Commission), Division of Engineering, 415 Clifford, Detroit, MI 48226.

⁸Harry A. Shuptrine and Julian C. Meade, "Davison Limited Highway--Wayne County, Mich. Part II. Factors Affecting Design and Construction," Civil Engineering 13 (January 1942): 18.

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⁹Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Board of County Road Commissioners of Wayne County, Michigan For the Fiscal Year from December 1, 1940 to November 30, 1941 (Detroit: 1941), 27; "New Plans Speed Work on Highway, County Proposal Wins Approval of Council," The Highland Parker, 8 January 1942; "Four Davison Highway Bridges 50 Per Cent Completed," Michigan Roads and Construction 39 (19 February 1942): 2; and "Open Brush, Third Bridges On Davison, Second Avenue Will Be Opened This Weekend," The Highland Parker, 9 April 1942. Contract details are found in the vertical files in the engineering offices of the Wayne County Department of Public Services. There are inconsistencies in the newspaper reports regarding which of two bridges--John R or Brush--was completed first.

¹⁰Minutes of the Meetings of the Board of County Road Commissioners . . ., Memorandum, Harry Shuptrine to the Board, 17 November 1941 and Memorandum, Frank J. Knight to Leroy C. Smith, 14 November 1941, meeting of 18 November 1941, 2429-2430.

¹¹Minutes of the Meetings of the Board of County Road Commissioners . . ., meeting of 21 November 1941, 2452-2453; meeting of 25 November 1941, 2482; meeting of 14 April 1942, 699-701; and meeting of 24 April 1942, 757-758.

¹²"Speed Plans For Highway Once Again--Woodward, Hamilton to be Closed Completely," The Highland Parker, 29 January 1942; "Bridge Contract Let by Wayne Commission," Michigan Roads and Construction 39 (19 March 1942): 2; "Contract Let for Last 3 Davison Highway Spans," The Detroit News, 14 March 1942, 9; and "Davison Project to Be Completed 10 Months Early," The Highland Parker, 3 September 1942. A summary of Davison construction costs in a Wayne County Road Commission pamphlet, Davison Limited Highway (1942) shows a total of \$607,000 spent on bridges.

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¹³Vertical files in the engineering offices of the Wayne County Department of Public Services; "Four Davison Highway Bridges 50 Per Cent Completed," Michigan Roads and Construction 39 (19 February 1942): 2; and "\$300,000 Jobs O.K.'s for Davison Highway," The Detroit News, 28 February 1942, 24. The drainage and pumping system is described in Shuptrine and Mead, "Davison Limited Highway--Wayne County, Mich. Part II, Civil Engineering 13 (January 1943): 17.

¹⁴"Davison to Be Open November 25," Michigan Roads and Construction 39 (19 November 1942): 2; "Omit Dedication Ceremonies Because of War Conditions," The Highland Parker, 19 November 1942; "Detroit Cracks Bottleneck, New Davison Highway to Open Wednesday," The Detroit News, 24 November 1942, 1; "New Davison Road to Be Open Today," Detroit Free Press, 25 November 1942; and "Alter Traffic Rules on New Davison," The Highland Parker, 3 December 1942.

¹⁵Helen C. Hathaway, From Wilderness to City, unpublished history of Highland Park (1940), 25-26 and "Citizens Protest Change of Name to East Davison, Suggest Highland Park Drive for Super Highway," The Highland Parker, 26 November 1942.

¹⁶Wayne County Road Commission, Davison Limited Highway (1951 reprint), no pagination. The cost summary is included in this brochure.

¹⁷Calcium Chloride Association News 8 (1 December 1942): 1-2 and "Davison Avenue, Concrete Admixtures and Curing Methods in Pavements and Walks," drawings in Folder D-1, Wayne County Road Commission Job 275, Wayne County Department of Public Services, Department of Engineering, 415 Clifford, Detroit, MI 48226.

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¹⁸Shuptrine and Mead, "Davison Limited Highway, Wayne County, Mich.," Civil Engineering 12 (December 1942): 674-675.

¹⁹J.C. Mead, "The Davison Limited Highway," Proceedings of the Twenty-Ninth Annual Highway Conference, Held at the University of Michigan February 10 to 12, 1943, 61-62.

²⁰"Plan of Davison Expressway," undated and "Typical Cross Section, Davison Limited Highway," Sheet 275-40, engineering drawings, Division of Engineering, Wayne County Department of Public Services, 415 Clifford, Detroit, Mi 48226; Shuptrine and Mead, "Davison Limited Highway--Wayne County, Mich. Part II.," Civil Engineering 13 (January 1943): 15.

²¹Job 128, Sheet 1 (5 May 1941).

²²Ibid., 15-16 and Shuptrine and Mead, "Davison Limited Highway, Wayne County, Mich. Part I," Civil Engineering 12 (December 1942): 675.

²³Wayne County Road Commission, Davison Limited Highway (Pamphlet reprinted in 1951), no pagination, and David Kushma, "Davison Freeway Needs Repairs But No One Wants To Pay," Detroit Free Press, 17 May 1986, 3-A.

²⁴Board of Wayne County Road Commissioners, John C. Lodge Expressway, A Federal, State, County, and City Project. Report of September 1945 (Detroit: 1945); Frank B. Woodford and Arthur M. Woodford, All Our Yesterdays: A Brief History of Detroit (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), 359, 374; "Work on X-Way to Close Davison," The Detroit News, 31 July 1956, 1; and Joseph Hartmann, "Davison X-Way Interchange Opens Tomorrow: Links the John Lodge With James Couzens," The Detroit News, 6 November 1957, 88.

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²⁵Wayne County Road Commission, Report on Improvement of Oakland Avenue in Highland Park, Davison Freeway to South City Limit (Detroit: 1965), 1, 6, 8; Woodford and Woodford, All Our Yesterdays, 359; Ted Douglas, "Chrysler-Davison Link Open; It Blends the Old With the New," The Detroit News, 6 December 1970, D-12; and vertical files, Wayne County Road Commission, Job No. 286, 286-a, and 286-b.

²⁶Highland Parker-North-End News, 7 November 1974; "Project Will Close Part of Davison," The Detroit News, 22 September 1974, A-3; and vertical files, Wayne County Road Commission Job No. 282 (Davison-Second Avenue grade separation) and Job No. 283 (Davison-Woodward Avenue grade separation), Wayne County Department of Public Services, Division of Engineering, 415 Clifford, Detroit, MI 48226.

²⁷Shuptrine and Mead, "Davison Limited Highway--Wayne County, Mich. Part II, Civil Engineering 13 (January 1943): 17-18.

²⁸Cecil Angel, "Wayne County Turns Freeway Over to State," Detroit Free Press, 16 June 1993 and "Davison Freeway Will Get New Service Drive," The Detroit News, 3 February 1994, B-3.

²⁹Wayne County Road Commission, Davison-McNichols-Conner Freeway: John C. Lodge to Oakland Avenue. Engineering Report 1760 and Supplement A, Davison Freeway Improvement (Wayne County Road Commission, 1965), 13, 30.

³⁰"State OK's Rebuilding of Davison Freeway," The Detroit News, 18 October 1967, C-15 and "Freeway Era May Be Ending; SEMCOG Favors Improving Existing Arteries," The Detroit News, 22 June 1972, D-9.

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³¹"Jeffries-Mound Freeway Link Studied by State," The Detroit News, 12 March 1975, B-3; "Young Vows His Opposition to New Freeway," The Detroit News, 7 October 1975, D-7; "Officials Seek Action on Davison Freeway," The Highland Parker-North-End News, 22 April 1976; and "H.P. Homeowners in Road Red Tape," The Detroit News, 15 October 1976, B-2.

³²Barbara Young, "Planning Started on Renovation of Davison Freeway," The Detroit News, 9 April 1977, B-18; Rick Silvain, "Timetable Set for Work on Freeway," The Detroit News, 15 May 1978, B-1; and "A Sterling Heights Firm Will Build One Mile of a New Service Drive Along the Davison Freeway From Hamilton to Oakland Avenue," The Detroit News, 3 February 1994, B-3.

³³Louis Mleczo, "State, County Haggles Over Davison Repairs," The Detroit News, 17 May 1986, B-6; David Kushma, "Davison Freeway Needs Repairs But No One Wants to Pay," Detroit Free Press, 17 May 1986; Louis Mleczo, "Aging Davison Crumbles While Officials Fight Over Funds to Rebuild It," The Detroit News, 23 May 1988, B-1; and Mleczo, "Davison: Finally, It's Going Places," Detroit News, 25 January 1990.

³⁴Tenisha White, "Davison Freeway Due For Face-lift--But Who'll Pay?" The Detroit News, 22 June 1994, B-3; "State Isolating Detroit-Highland Park, Wayne Sue to Open Davison," The Michigan Citizen, 15-21 October 1995; and vertical files in the offices of the Division of Engineering, Wayne County Department of Public Services, 415 Clifford, Detroit, MI 48226.

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SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Engineering Drawings: The original engineering drawings are located in the offices of the Wayne County Department of Public Services (formerly the Road Commission), Division of Engineering, 415 Clifford, Detroit, MI 48226.
- B. Historic Views: The major collection of historic views are located in the offices of the Wayne County Department of Public Services (formerly the Road Commission), Division of Engineering, 415 Clifford, Detroit, MI 48226.
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Detroit News

Detroit Free Press

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The Michigan Citizen

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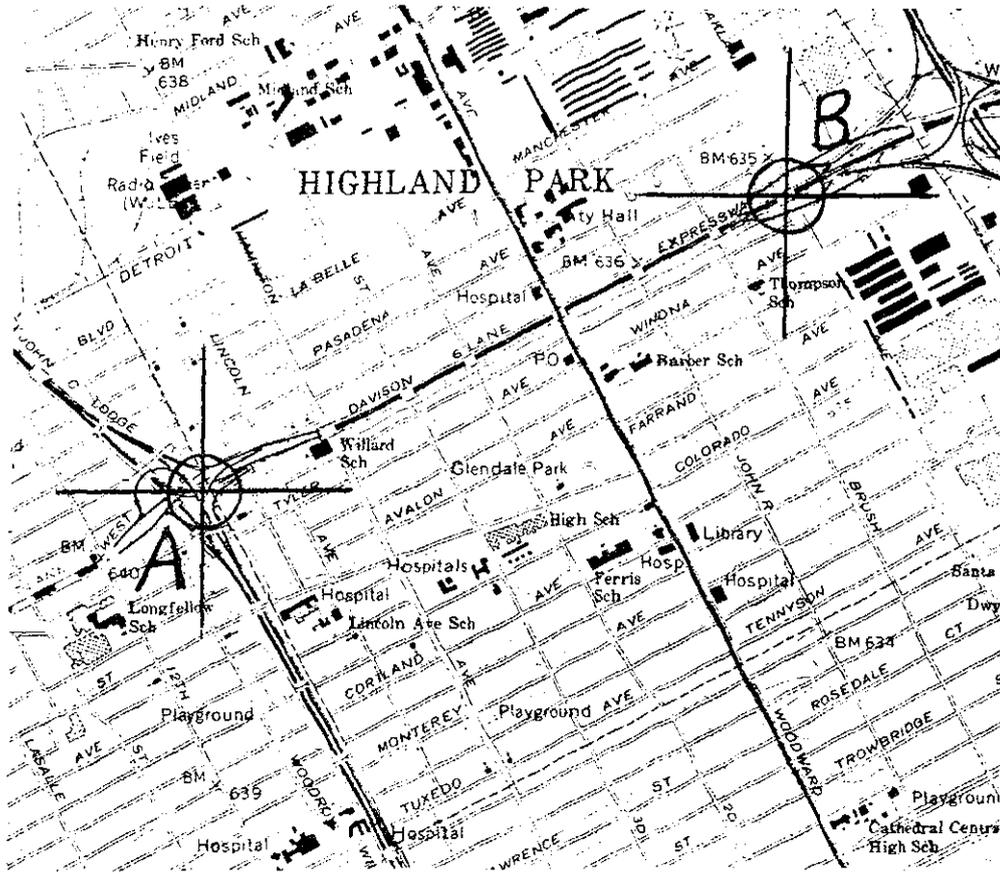
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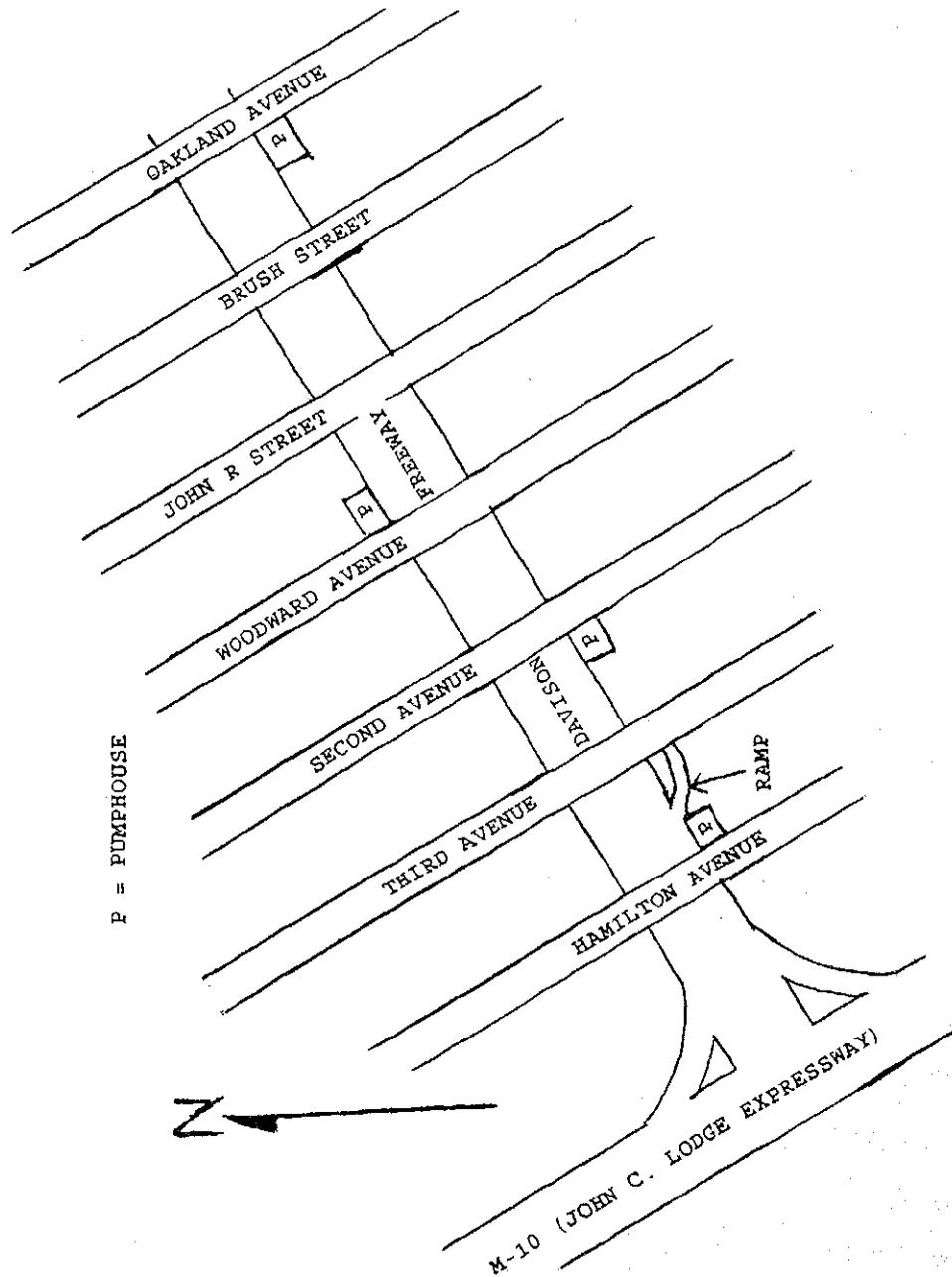
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Davison Freeway (Davison Limited Highway)
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GENERAL SITE PLAN



ADDENDUM TO:
DAVISON FREEWAY FROM M-10 TO OAKLAND AVENUE,
DAVISON FREEWAY
M-10 to Highland Park
Highland Park
Wayne County
Michigan

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