

OP-ED

Close the 710 gap. Now.

By James E. Moore II

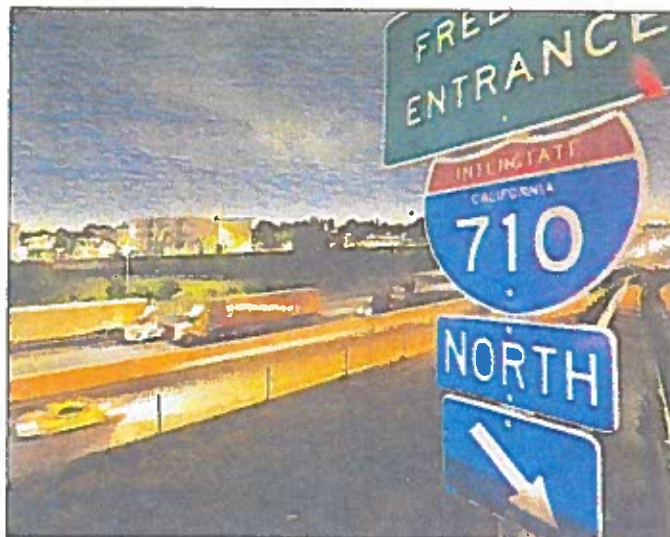
THE RESOLVE to complete the 710 Freeway — closing its 6.2-mile gap between Interstate 10 and the 210 Freeway in Pasadena — dates to 1959.

Had it been completed then, the extension would have cost \$6 million. The estimated price now is \$5.6 billion. What could account for such a staggering cost increase? Inflation accounts for less than a tenfold increase in construction costs. Nor has the proposal to build a tunnel rather than a surface link added substantially to the bottom line, because the cost of condemning urban real estate and the cost of digging just about cancel each other out.

Instead, the nearly thousand-fold increase in cost comes mainly from two factors: ever more demanding government requirements, and an element I like to call “the malarkey factor.”

The 710 extension environmental impact review, for which discussions began in 2008, has satisfied no one. Environmentalists designed the process, yet they are the ones challenging its findings. Supporters of the extension don't like it because it has thus far added seven years and \$41 million to this project. By the time it's over, that figure could reach \$60 million. But that's nothing compared with the increases caused by the malarkey factor.

“We used to be a country that celebrated people who get things done,” columnist George Will (among others) has opined. “Now we celebrate people who stop things from getting done.” We've turned into a society that elevates naysayers to the level of builders and allows the needs of the many



Los Angeles Times

DECADES OF opposition mean that the 710 Freeway comes up 6.2 miles short of connecting with the 210.

to be hijacked by the noise of the few. Public officials have given the same weight to the mindless schemes of 710 opponents as they have to facts that favor the public good.

In 1993, South Pasadena introduced with great fanfare a “multi-mode, low-build alternative” to the 710 extension. It claimed that a mix of surface street improvements would achieve much the same traffic reduction as completing the freeway.

This sounds crazy because it is. Caltrans and other related agencies studied this plan and found that it would actually make things worse. Yet then-Rep. James Rogan (R-Glendale) managed to secure \$46 million for the discredited plan and nothing at all for an extension. For a decade, South Pasadena officials trumpeted their nonsensical low-build plan without the media or elected

officials calling them on it.

In 2007, the 710 opponents came up with a new public works principle. They demanded that any study of the extension be “route neutral.” That meant all feasible alternatives had to be explored, including options far from where the freeways end. Their champion was Rep. Adam Schiff (D-Burbank), and studies were conducted of routes through Glendale and under the San Rafael neighborhood of Pasadena, stirring up wrath along these illogical lines. Not surprisingly, the original plan turned out to be the shortest and the cheapest option.

Then, in March, the anti-extensionists outdid themselves with their “Beyond the 710” plan. They suggested a grab bag of ideas that they claimed would serve much the same purpose as completing the freeway: a separated

bike path; longer service hours for Metro's 762 bus line; using the proceeds from Caltrans property sales to buy transit passes for every student at Cal State L.A. and East Los Angeles College. Sad to say, the media covered this glibberish without challenging the tortured logic behind the notion that any of it could substitute for closing a gap in a freeway network.

Southern California transportation agencies have spent more than 50 years studying and re-studying completion of this last link in the core Los Angeles County freeway grid. Study after study have shown that completion of the 710 would remove significant traffic from local neighborhoods in the west San Gabriel Valley and from other nearby freeways. The extension would both accommodate more travel and improve the level of service.

It's clear what we should do: Close the 710 gap. After all the costs are added up and compared, a 4.5-mile tunnel and less than 15 miles of surface construction is the best way to do it. After some short-term construction disturbance, it will preserve rather than divide South Pasadena, which was the long-ago goal of the anti-extensionists, while providing congestion relief between the South Bay and north L.A. County.

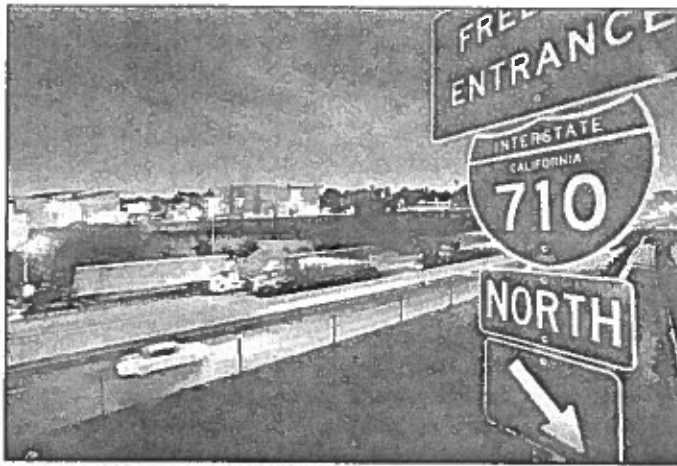
Decision-makers should quit studying the 710 and start building. Otherwise our children and grandchildren will muse over a long-ago time in 2015 when the freeway system could have been completed for a mere \$5.6 billion.

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OPINION

EDITORIALS

LETTERS



DON BARTLETTI Los Angeles Times

CONTAINER TRUCKS on the 710 Freeway en route to the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles.

If we built it ...

Re "Close the 710 gap. Now," Opinion, Nov. 24

How ironic: An Op-Ed article supporting an extension of the 710 Freeway by James E. Moore II appears in The Times on the same day as a report on a recent study by the American Highway Users Alliance showing that 11 of the worst highway bottlenecks in the country are in the Los Angeles area.

To these 11, Moore would add a 12th.

It is obvious that our freeway system is failing as the area's primary mode of transportation. Little wonder. The system was fundamentally planned in the 1940s, at a time when the population of Los Angeles County was less than half of today's and when private ownership of automobiles was less pervasive.

Sure, let's repair and improve our existing freeways, but let's ensure that new investments go into transportation projects that will better move people and goods, not cars. The estimate of \$5.6 billion needed to build this 5-mile freeway tunnel, a study in instant obsolescence, would be much more wisely spent on improving our infrastructure and on alternate modes of transportation.

New freeway construction would simply encourage increasing use of automobiles and guarantee further gridlock for decades to come.

DONALD VOSS
La Cañada Flintridge

Had we spent the \$6 million in 1959 and bulldozed South Pasadena to finish the 710, we'd be experiencing exactly the same traffic problems we have today. Imagine Los Angeles with a 405 Freeway east of downtown as well. Added capacity results in added demand.

Blaming big government and the "malarky factor" (code for "environmentalism") for the cost increase is simply a ruse to protect the failed freeway system. The argument that if we just build one more freeway — if we just "complete the grid" — sounds like something an addict would say.

Please refer to the 405. Please look at the tunnel they're falling at in Seattle. Please look at the budget of the leaky tunnel in Boston.

There's no need to celebrate George Will's manly ideal of "builders" — or Ayn Rand's, for that matter — when they're wrong.

NOEL MCCARTHY
Los Angeles

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Moore probably knows all too well how Spock on "Star Trek" must have felt. However illogical, humankind's decision-making is greatly influenced by emotion, and that's not going to change any time soon (especially as politicians continually pander to constituents' emotions).

In the episode that has been the 710 gap, it's very apparent that the needs of the many do not outweigh the needs of the few.

STEVE SHELburnE
San Marino