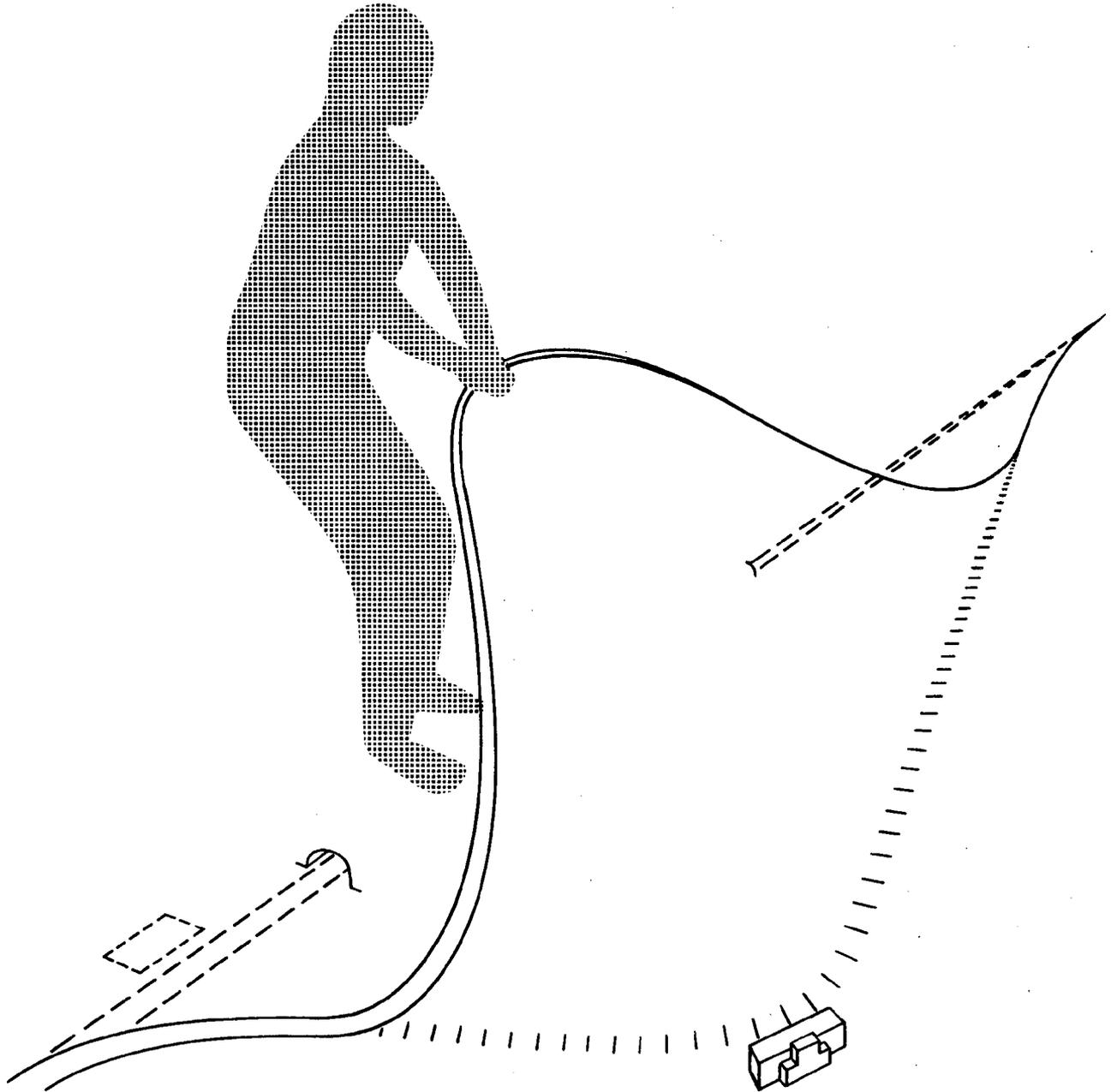


RAILROAD RELOCATION

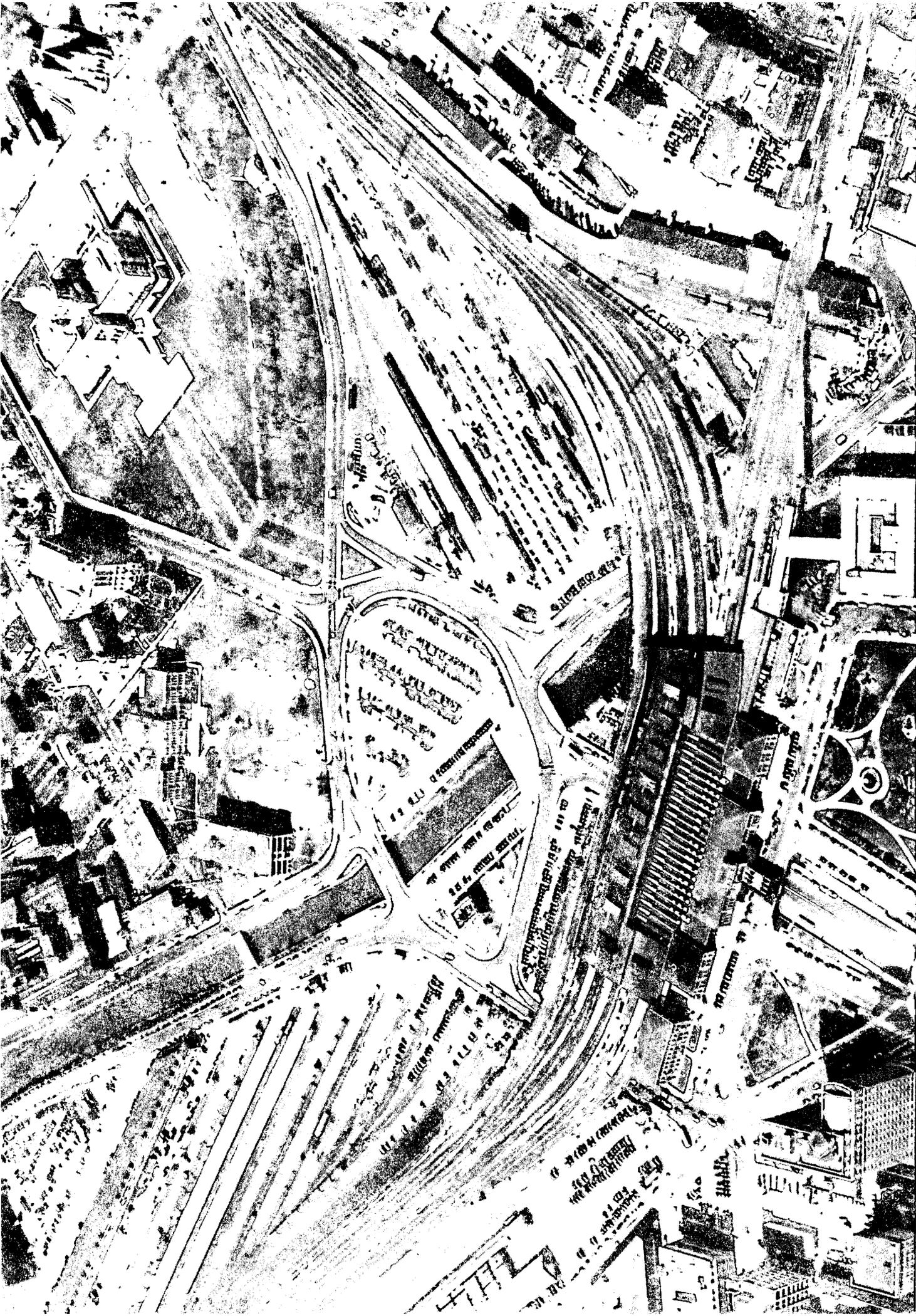


PUBLICATION NUMBER ELEVEN — SEPTEMBER 1953
THE CITY PLAN COMMISSION OF PROVIDENCE, R. I.

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE STUDY OF THE
PROPOSED RELOCATION OF UNION STATION

298

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THE CITY PLAN COMMISSION OF PROVIDENCE



"A PROJECT OF THIS SIZE . . . CAN HAVE GREAT INFLUENCE . . . OF THE FUTURE OF THE COMMUNITY."

Photo: Courtesy Providence Journal-Bulletin



City Plan Commission

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LUCIO E. CARLONE, *Secretary*

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FRANK H. MALLEY, *Director*
MILLARD HUMSTONE, *Senior Planner*

*Suite 103, City Hall,
Providence 3, Rhode Island*

September 22, 1953

Honorable Walter H. Reynolds, Mayor
City of Providence
City Hall
Providence, Rhode Island

Dear Mayor Reynolds:

In view of the fact that the New Haven Railroad and the Mayor of the City of Providence have been discussing the removal of the Railroad Station from the center of the City to make room for development of property now occupied by the Railroad, the staff of the Commission has made an extensive study of the effects and possible results of such action, and has made a preliminary survey and referred it to the Commission.

The Commission has accepted this preliminary survey and submits it herewith as a PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE STUDY OF THE PROPOSED RELOCATION OF UNION STATION.

In this work the staff was assisted, on a consulting basis, by Mr. Coleman Woodbury an outstanding Land Economist from Harvard University.

As this report goes to press the New Haven Railroad has evidenced some consideration of an alternative plan for relocation of its tracks and the Union Station. Although the development of this new plan may vary the net amount of land available for subsequent re-use, the preliminary conclusion relative to the proper uses and their physical relationships will remain valid and applicable to any railway-highway plan that may unfold.

Very truly yours,

GEORGE HURLEY
CHAIRMAN
CITY PLAN COMMISSION

IN CITY COUNCIL

MAY 6 - 1954

GH:MMH

WHEREAS: IT IS ORDERED THAT
THE SAME BE RECEIVED.

D. Everett Whelan
CLERK

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CONSULTANT

Coleman Woodbury, Land Economist

Preliminary Report on the Study of the
Proposed Relocation of Union Station

This Report presents preliminary findings of the City Plan Commission staff on possible re-uses of the properties to be abandoned when the New Haven Railroad carries out its contemplated plan for relocating the Union Station. Ever since May 1952, when President Dumaine of the New Haven first discussed the possibility of relocating Union Station, there has been a continuing interest in the improvements this project can make possible in the center of Providence.

In this talk, Mr. Dumaine stated that the railroad was interested in moving because of possible improvements in efficiency. Since that time the railroad has received engineering reports on the basic plan, which involves a tunnel under Smith Hill. This plan will permit the abandonment of the present station and considerable trackage.

There have been at least three station locations considered. One near Harris Avenue, one near Bath and Calverly Streets and more recently one in the vicinity of Charles and Admiral Streets. The first engineering estimates made public envisioned two twin-track tubes and the station location at Bath and Calverly Streets. The estimated cost was about \$18,000,000. A more recent estimate, considering only a one-tube tunnel and a smaller station at the Charles and Admiral Streets site has reduced the estimated cost to less than \$12,000,000.

The state and city governments are both greatly interested in cooperating with the New Haven in its plans for relocation. When the decision to move becomes fact and a construction time table is established, numerous proposed state and city projects will be affected.

The possibility of locating "Stage II" of the Freeway along the old railroad right-of-way can mean a considerable saving to the state in its construction costs for the North-South Freeway--perhaps as much as \$5,000,000 according to independent engineering estimates.

The City of Providence is interested in the project for many reasons. The route of the Freeway, the location of the station, the re-use of the railroad property can all have a great effect on the future of the City. Few, if any, cities have been presented with a development of this proportionate size. It is an opportunity for a major street and land development in the heart of the city. A project of this size (a possible addition of 50% to the area of the Central Business District) can have great influence, for good or for evil on the future of the community. The city is pleased at the opportunity presented for such a major and unprecedented overhaul and is gratified at Mr. Dumaine's statement that the railroad does not plan to sell any property "without approval of the community". Such an assurance will be most helpful in preventing any undesirable development.

This report is the result of the first part of the relocation study being carried out by the City Plan Commission. The purpose of this first phase of the study has been to provide a general

"coarse screening" of a great variety of possible new uses for the railroad properties. In this phase of the survey many types of public, commercial and industrial activity have been examined. The hope has been to find not only some desirable, economically feasible uses; but also to determine those locations best suited for specific types of uses. There has been no attempt at this stage to establish definite locations and site plans; but rather to point out some likely choices. A thorough market analysis of the whole Providence area would be required to confirm or reject some of these choices. The City Plan Commission hopes to conduct further research on some of the uses that "looked good" in a coarse screening, but the prospective investors may well wish to conduct this phase of the study themselves.

It is hoped that these results, while somewhat tentative and incomplete, will serve to indicate the proper direction for further, more detailed study as well as to indicate some of the problems that will be encountered. It is also hoped that this report may prove of some help to the New Haven Railroad in its attempt to reach the best possible decision, for both the city and the railroad, in its plans for relocating Union Station and the development of the areas to be abandoned.

The basic goal in planning the available areas has been to find those new uses which so supplement and complement the existing businesses and industries of the area as to give the greatest net gain to the city. While it would be desirable for tax base and employment considerations to have large scale new construction in this

area; such a development, if at the expense of traffic congestion and discouragement of our existing facilities, could be most unfortunate. Some uses, not in themselves undesirable, could be most incompatible with the Central Business District. The desirability of high land value uses has to be balanced against the possibility that some lower value land uses, off-street parking, for example, might result in the greatest advantage for the downtown area as a whole.

In the study of this area, many problems were encountered making it difficult to arrive at definite choices for new uses. Certainly, however, the size of the area, its location, and the economic structure of the city indicate that a considerable variety of uses will be required. In planning for specific types of business, much more detailed data will be required to indicate those types of business or industry that could expand into this area with a good chance of being profitable.

Another major problem is the size of the area. Of a total of approximately 90 acres under consideration for re-use, about 25 acres are so located as to provide additional area for growth of the Central Business District. This space is equal to about 50% of the existing core area of the Central Business District. While this is a great opportunity, it is also a problem. Were Providence a "boom town" this much space could easily be absorbed without harm to the rest of the city. In the case of Providence, with its stable economy, much more care must be exercised.

Another complication has been the uncertainty over the

disposition of the railroad tunnel under the East Side. The New Haven has indicated a desire to give up the little used tunnel with all its heavy fixed costs. The tunnel will have to be abandoned when the station is relocated, and may be abandoned anyway. It appears that the nature of the tunnel limits the re-use of the East Side tunnel to highway purposes.

Any plans for the area near the tunnel must take into account the possibility of its being used. At present, no decision has been achieved. The city is weighing the estimated conversion cost of the tunnel against the traffic relief it might provide. No price has yet been set on the tunnel by the New Haven Railroad.

One of the greatest problems has been the uncertainty over the new location of the station. The first site mentioned was between Harris and Kinsley Avenues, in the vicinity of the old abandoned city incinerator and the New England Transportation Company's repair shops. The second location, used in the Maguire engineering report, given the New Haven in February 1953, is in the vicinity of Calverly and Bath Streets, near the Coca Cola Bottling Works. More recent plans are for the station to be located at the northerly end of the tunnel in the vicinity of Charles and Admiral Streets.

On examination of these three sites it appears that the Harris-Kinsley Avenue site is best for the city. This location is such that quick and convenient street layouts could be provided with the least difficulty. Connections with other means of transportation would be relatively easy, keeping the station close to the center of the city in point of time. The Charles-Admiral Street

location would be much more difficult to connect with the downtown area. The distance is greater and the route would be somewhat involved unless the station could be connected with the North-South Freeway and the Louisquisset Pike. After examining maps of the proposed station layout, the Freeway, and the Louisquisset Pike, it seems, partly because of the proximity of the station site to the elevated Louisquisset Pike and the Freeway, that it would be most expensive to get a direct connection with the station, and impossible to make such a connection adequate. Unless it can be shown that a direct connection to the Freeway and Louisquisset Pike can be established without great expense, this location will be the least desirable as far as the City of Providence is concerned. There would be some complications involved if the Bath-Caverly Street site were to be used, but not as many as for the Charles-Admiral Street location. Of these three sites, the Harris-Kinsley Avenue site is the most satisfactory for obtaining quick transportation with downtown Providence.

One factor presumably in favor of the Charles-Admiral Street location is that this property is already owned by the railroad and apparently is not needed for other purposes. The other two locations are not owned by the New Haven. The land costs might be rather high for the Bath-Calverly Street location. While the land cost at the Harris-Kinsley Avenue site is not cheap, much of this property will have to be taken by the New Haven for trackage right-of-way wherever the station is to be relocated. The additional land required to locate the station here would be small since part of several lots must be taken anyway. When it is con-

**CITY PLAN COMMISSION
PROVIDENCE, R.I.**

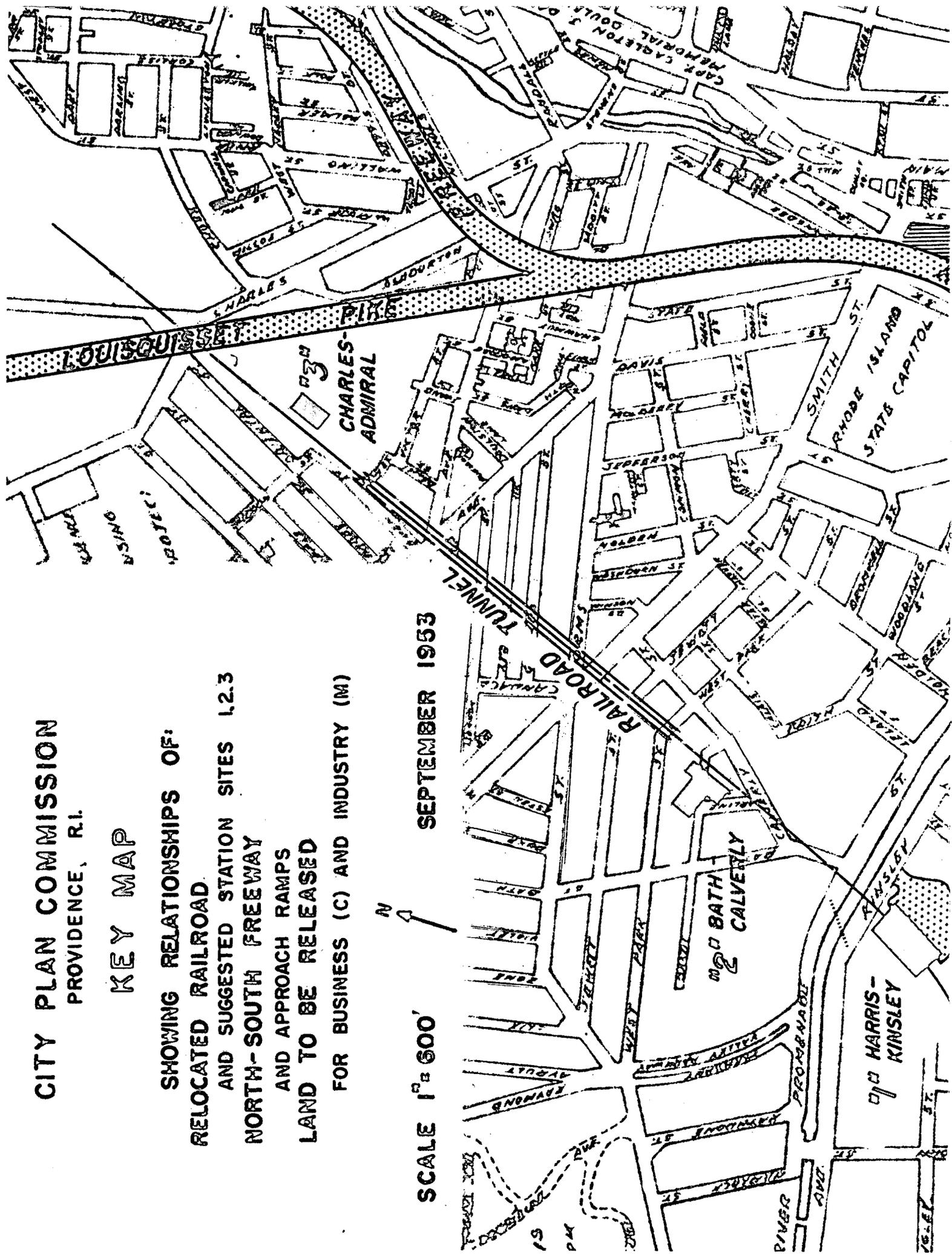
KEY MAP

**SHOWING RELATIONSHIPS OF:
RELOCATED RAILROAD
AND SUGGESTED STATION SITES 1,2,3
NORTH-SOUTH FREEWAY
AND APPROACH RAMP
LAND TO BE RELEASED
FOR BUSINESS (C) AND INDUSTRY (M)**



SCALE 1" = 600'

SEPTEMBER 1953



cation will take place and that the New Haven will cooperate with the community in any developmental plans for the area; second, that the planning will be for the whole area involved, will include in one package, railroad property, city property contiguous to the area, and the Rhode Island College of Education site (the State has indicated it is studying moving the College of Education); third, that the existing Moshassuck and Woonasquatucket Rivers might be bridged, placed in culverts or otherwise eliminated where necessary for redesigning the area involved; fourth, when the railroad does relocate the station, that the plans for "Stage II" of the Freeway will be modified to take advantage of any savings from using the existing right of way.

In examining the desirability of specific types of developments, the following factors are among those that were considered. The nature of the subsoil conditions indicates that wherever other considerations were not overriding, buildings requiring heavy foundations should be located where bed rock is close to the surface or at least where the subsoil is relatively stable. Generally speaking, bed rock is 20 to 40 feet beneath the surface at North Main Street and falls off at a rate of roughly one foot for each 6 feet further to the west. Much of the area does not have especially good subsoil characteristics, as might be expected in an area where much of the land is filled.

Another factor considered was the probable land values of various parts of the area. The value of the property varies considerably throughout. This difference in land values can help deter-

sidered that a large part of the area required at this site is currently occupied by an unused city incinerator and a repair shop of the New England Transportation Company (a New Haven subsidiary) together with the possibility of marketing some or all of the unused land at the Charles-Admiral Street location, it would seem that any objection to land cost at the Harris-Kinsley Avenue site would be at least partially dispelled.

There is another advantage that might well accrue to the railroad if it should choose the Harris-Kinsley Avenue site in preference to the Charles-Admiral Street site. To the extent that its commuter business is of value, the location of its station should be convenient and considerate of time for most of its commuters. An investigation of the origin and destination of the regular customers of the New Haven could be most helpful in establishing which of the possible sites would best serve the most passengers.

One objection to the Harris-Kinsley Avenue location is the necessity of locating the station at a point where the tracks would be curving. This would make it difficult to have car level loading platforms without some sort of sliding platform. The track would be straight at the Charles-Admiral Street site. However, since the DE R3 Diesel engines are 6 inches wider than the passenger cars, a car level loading platform, if it is to be used, might have to incorporate a sliding device whether the tracks were straight or curved.

Throughout this study, the City Plan Commission has operated under these basic assumptions: First, that the railroad relo-

mine future possible uses. For example, an area worth \$3.00 a square foot might be too expensive for industrial development but not for commercial use.

A major factor considered was, of course, the need for given types of developments. In the case of certain commercial operations, the estimates were based on market evaluations that were of necessity, far from complete. In addition to determining need for a specific project, it was necessary to consider whether or not there were areas other than the abandoned railroad site more desirable for expansion.

Furthermore, the effects on the existing commercial facilities of competing concerns established at some distance from the existing center are to be considered. It is certainly desirable to modernize the business and office space in the Central Business District; but would new concerns on the perimeter help or hinder this process? Also, one must consider that in the existing Central Business District there is room for much remodeling.

Certainly the effect on traffic of any new development must be considered. This is an opportunity not often offered--a chance to design streets the same time as land uses are being established. With all the money that is being spent to improve traffic flows, it would be most foolish to establish any traffic generating uses where increased traffic flows cannot be properly handled.

For study purposes, three main categories of use were established; public, commercial and industrial. In the following

section there is a description of some of the uses considered under each category, with indications of why some are believed to merit further examination. This list does not pretend to be exhaustive. There are undoubtedly other uses not mentioned that would prove successful and perhaps some that appeared good prospects in this preliminary screening might not pass a more detailed investigation.

PUBLIC USES

Federal Government

Investigation shows that the U. S. Government is now renting about 145,000 square feet of office space in Providence in three separate locations. This amount of space is equal to a good sized office building. Realization of such a structure will depend, of course, upon policies currently being established by the administration in Washington.

State of Rhode Island

The most important use, of course, will be the Freeway and its major access routes. This will probably require nearly 30 acres. The amount that can be saved by the use of the railroad right-of-way is estimated to be in the vicinity of \$5,000,000. An additional saving would be in the fewer families displaced. To build the Freeway without considering relocation, or to build prior to relocation, would mean a sizeable financial bite for bridge work that would be needed for only a very few years. Objections which have been raised in regard to delay in the construction of the scheduled "Stage II"

of the freeway are very largely invalid. The construction of the traffic rotary at Pershing Square has, for the immediate future, alleviated the traffic problem in that area which was the prime reason for scheduling the crossing of the railroad yards as the second stage. A far better purpose will consequently be served by extending "Stage I" of the freeway clockwise around the business district, as rapidly as financing is available. This will result in no total delay in construction as the railroad property will be vacated by the time the freeway reaches that area. In addition, constructing the freeway in adjoining sections will result in fewer disruptive connections to the existing street pattern.

State Office Building

The state is now renting about 120,000 square feet of office space in various downtown locations. Because of the fact that the types of operations requiring downtown locations make up only a small part of the total, this does not appear to be enough space to justify consolidation into a new office building downtown.

Court and Record Building

The Sixth District Court, Providence Probate Court, the Recorder of Deeds, and the Providence Police Court are all in cramped, inadequate, and inappropriate quarters. There is a severe lack of safe storage space for irreplaceable records, many of historical interest.

It is believed that further consideration should be given to a consolidation of these functions at one location, providing

ample space for buildings and parking. Perhaps should the Rhode Island College of Education be moved, that site would be appropriate.

Helicopter Service

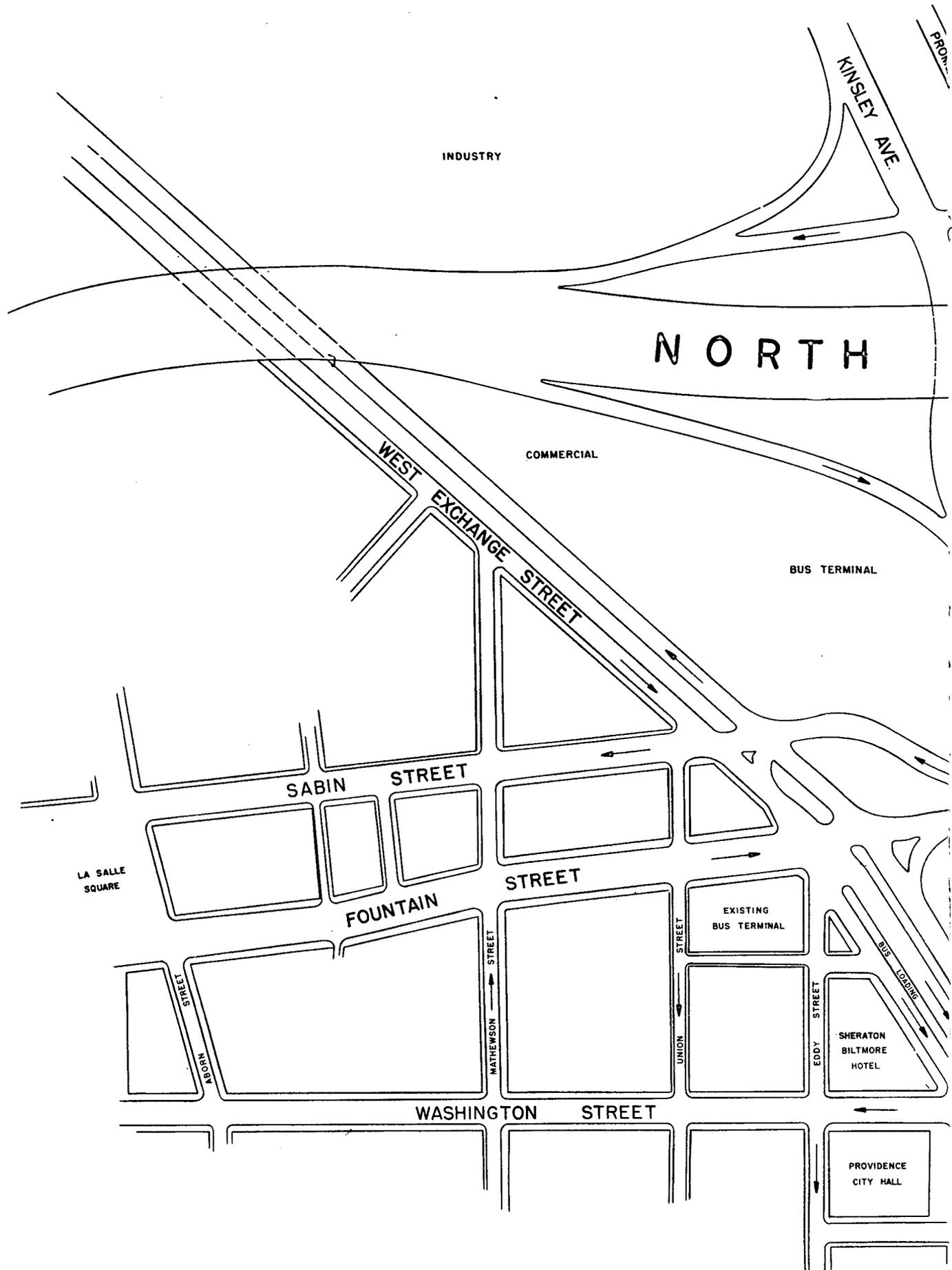
The commercial feasibility of helicopter service is far from sure. Those studies already accomplished elsewhere (by the Port of New York authority, for example) indicate that it will be several years before the proper equipment will be available. Even then the per passenger per mile cost will be great. The state is currently carrying out a study of the market potential for helicopter service. The results of this study should be carefully examined before assigning any valuable space to this use..

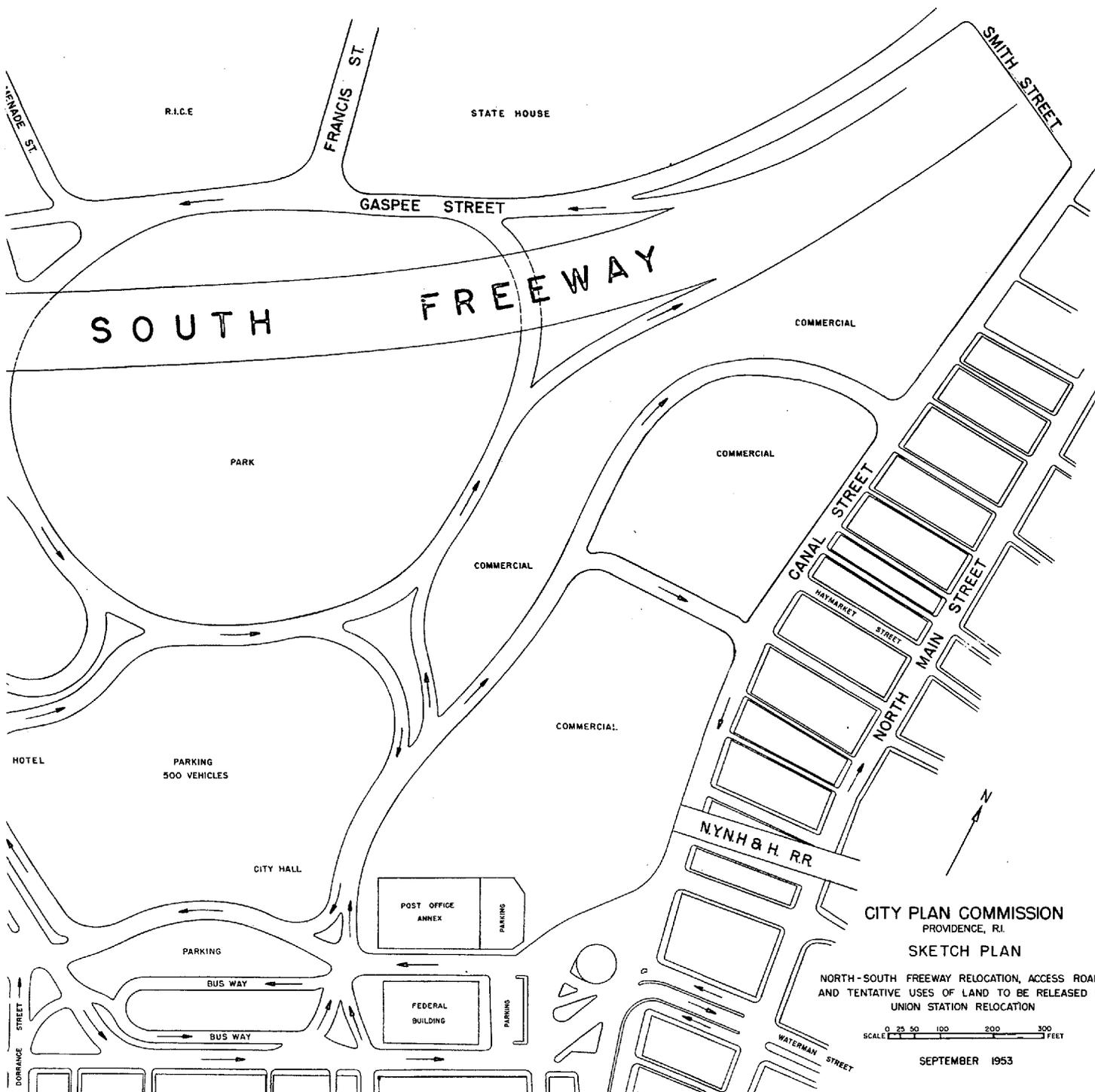
Tourist Information

As part of its recreational and industrial promotion, the state (or private groups on a lease basis) may wish to consider establishing a tourist information center with restaurant facilities in a park area visible from and adjacent to the freeway.

City of Providence

There will be need for a general redesign and relocation of park area. The basic emphasis will be to retain as much downtown park area as possible, and, with the removal of the barrier created by the station and tracks, create an attractive mall or boulevard effect from the existing mall in the direction of the State House. It is strongly believed that such a development will give appreciable support to real estate values throughout the Central Business District.





CITY PLAN COMMISSION
 PROVIDENCE, R.I.
 SKETCH PLAN

NORTH-SOUTH FREEWAY RELOCATION, ACCESS ROADS
 AND TENTATIVE USES OF LAND TO BE RELEASED BY
 UNION STATION RELOCATION

SCALE 0 25 50 100 200 300 FEET

SEPTEMBER 1953

At the same time as much space for building and off-street parking will be provided as close to the Central Business District as is possible.

A New City Hall

The present structure is worn out, too small (as well as wasteful of space), expensive to heat and maintain. The present functions of the city government have far outgrown their housing. Abandonment of the City Hall location will free for commercial use (and place on the tax rolls) one of the most valuable parcels of real estate in the city, estimated to be worth \$1,600,000 as a building site.

A Health and Welfare building with available federal aid could be scheduled for construction as an independent structure near a new City Hall. These departments are currently ill-housed. A consolidation of their offices will lead to reduced operating costs.

Parking Plaza

If land costs are low enough, land should be reserved for additional off-street parking spaces on a basis similar to Pershing Square. Unfortunately, all, or at least part, of the Pershing Square lot will be lost if the Freeway is relocated to the railroad right-of-way. While there is an obvious need for such facilities, their locations should be established in quantity and in location so as not to contribute to the rush hour traffic problem.

Park Area

Maintaining and improving the attractiveness of a city as well as improving accessibility can't help but encourage more business for the area, as evidenced by the existing Mall. Cost of the land and ownership of the land plus the value of competing uses of the land are all questions that must be answered before any sizeable amount of land can be devoted to park purposes as anything but protection to the Freeway and its approaches.

COMMERCIAL USES

Hotel

Indications are that Providence can use another first-class hotel without hurting existing concerns. There are in Providence most of the facilities required to obtain some of the very attractive convention trade space. The major deficiency is inability to offer enough rooms for any length of time, which has prevented many conventions from being held in this City. More detailed information is required, but all early indications are that another hotel could be absorbed in the Providence market and help in attracting convention business.

Commercial Office Space

Since World War II, first-class commercial office space in Providence has not been lacking occupants. Present indications are that the better properties are occupied at over 95% of capacity.

This indicates that there is a market for additional office space in the city. There are several complicating factors however. The existing price level for office rentals is relatively low, possibly below a minimum profitable return for new construction. Furthermore, there is considerable second-class space in good central locations that could be converted or reconstructed at a cost that perhaps could not be matched by new construction.

The best possibility is for an owner-occupied building with some rental space rather than a thorough going commercial building. Continuance of the present occupancy rate and any increase in rental costs would improve the competitive position of a new commercial building.

Department Store

Indications obtained so far do not give much of an answer on the need for any expansion in this area. The existing stores are, percentagewise holding their own. While another store would be competing with existing operators, it would also be another lure attracting shoppers to the area. It is possible that for anything less than a fairly complete shopping center that the railroad property is too far from major existing stores. Should the City Hall be relocated, that site could well be a most desirable location for a new store.

Bus Terminal

The intercity bus terminal, as presently located, is limited in capacity and contributes to traffic congestion. It should

be moved to a more satisfactory location. A possible site would be on West Exchange Street. This location would be especially good if the new railroad station is in the Harris Avenue - Kinsley Avenue vicinity. There could be easy connections from trains, buses, and downtown. Furthermore, proximity to the Freeway would make it possible to keep these buses from mingling with regular city traffic.

INDUSTRIAL USES

Providence is fairly well supplied with some types of warehouse facilities. There are, however, indications that there is room for expansion of certain types of specialized warehousing; cold storage and distribution warehousing in particular. There are buildings in Providence that could be converted to warehouse use for little expense, but not for warehousing of these specialized types. Modern machines and techniques for frequent loading and unloading work best in one-story buildings. Likewise, the cost of converting old factory buildings to cold storage use might be prohibitive. It might be desirable to construct a centralized meat distribution center similar to the Providence Produce Market, thereby consolidating scattered wholesale meat and other food distributing establishments.

Combined with any expansion in this field should be a study of the desirability of establishing a central truck terminal.

Displaced Industrial Concerns

At present a study is being made of the industries being

displaced by Stage I of the Freeway. Some of them might be interested in relocating in the study area, but there will be a timing difficulty since they will possibly be moving before land becomes available from the railroad. This might be avoided if the New Haven abandons its Yard 17 prior to removing the old Union Station.

Expansion of Existing Industry

Local concerns finding it necessary to acquire additional property for the purpose of expansion should be given primary consideration in the disposition of industrial sites within this area. There is possibility for expansion into an area of about 25 acres close to the population center of the city. The cost of the land, as yet only an estimate, compared with other land will be a major consideration.

New Industry

Once more definite information about land prices is established, an attempt should be made to attract outside industry. The areas appropriate for industry have the advantages of being close to a large labor market, good transportation, and a prestige location within view of the Freeway. Some organizations such as the Rhode Island Development Council, or the Rhode Island Development Company might be of help in exploring specific opportunities.

Conclusion

Should the railroad decide to move even within the very near future, it will probably be a matter of 3 to 5 years before

all the plans can be carried out. It is desirable that some arrangements can be made for the interim use for parking or other purposes of any space in Yards 15 or 17 not needed by the railroad. In the working out of all the problems that must be faced, it is essential that the State, the City, and New Haven work on a cooperative basis. This will help to insure the proper development of the area and to avoid unnecessary delays.