10

THE PRODUCTION OF THE TRAVELING PUBLIC

Rest Stop Interior Design, 1950–1970

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Introduction

On September 23, 2021, I was southbound on the New Jersey Turnpike and stopped at the Molly Pitcher rest stop on the last day it was open before it closed for renovations. Molly Pitcher was a favorite rest stop of mine, frozen in time as an interior design of food courts from the 1990s—soft pink pastel tiles, black metal fan-backed chairs, and postmodern faux metal arches that surrounded eateries like Burger King and Nathans Hot Dogs. In 2017, Governor Chris Christie announced that all Turnpike rest stops were to become the "safest, cleanest, modern highway rest stops" through facelifts over the next several years that would feature trendy factory-aesthetics of exposed HVAC systems, hanging Edison bulbs, and white-and-black paint color schemes for restaurants like Pret-a-Manger and Honeygrow.[1] I stood in Molly Pitcher as the page was turning from yesterday's *everyday* to make way for the new *everyday*. But whose everyday is this? The new interiors have close ties to widely critiqued gentrification aesthetics—what user was in mind when this space was conceived? Whose experiences with food and travel do these spaces reflect? Consciously or not, the turnpike decided its user is someone who wants avocado toast from Pret-A-Manger, not someone who craves a Nathan's hot dog. I began to wonder, why do rest stops get remodeled? Who decides when they get remodeled and why?

Liminal spaces that host transitory interactions, rest stops have eluded critical attention but are ubiquitous forms of vernacular architecture, lining state and federal roadways throughout the United States. However, they were much less common in midcentury, only emerging in the wake of postwar highway development and the mass consumption of automobiles. As Gabrielle Esperdy has explained, automobiles and highways had profound implications for architectures of roadside consumption, where restaurants and gas stations, formerly in cities and towns, were reconstituted along emerging typologies of mega highways.[2] The New Jersey Turnpike was one such road: a critical piece of state infrastructure, opened in 1951, that relieved the extreme congestion caused by New York and Philadelphia (the first and third largest US cities at the time) and was at the heart of Jean Gottman's Megalopolis.[3] While planning the limited access toll-road, the New Jersey Turnpike Authority became one of the earliest state agencies to design and produce rest stops. Their archives reveal an evolving practice of rest stop interior design where public government and for-profit business converged to produce concession stands, gas stations, and tourist information centers. A conduit to understand how highways share an unexpected edge with interiors in the United States, particularly the relationship between public government and private enterprise, rest stops are illuminative interiors to interrogate US history.

While interior designers and architects are common actors in design histories, the Turnpike rest stops reveal the porous edges of professional practice and prompt us to ask: *how do public authorities produce built environments?* A form of statecraft popularized in the New Deal era, public authorities are quasi-public, autonomous entities that are affiliated with the city, state, or federal governments but operate privately. They are usually tasked with financing, building, and maintaining public service infrastructure—such as New York City's Metro Transit Authority (MTA) and the Federal Housing Authority (FHA).[4] In the New Deal era, authority financing was secured tax-back bonds (also known as general obligation bonds), where repayment was made through tax legislation levied by elected officials. This meant that the public would have a say in how infrastructure was financed through elected officials and public review processes related to tax policies and civic budgets. However, in the 1940s and 1950s, authorities increasingly opted to use a new financial instrument: the revenue bond, where state entities borrowed against future earnings, in most cases the profits that were garnered through the project that the bonds funded.[5] This meant that private investors had to be convinced of the profitability of a project before investing in bonds. Thus, the Turnpike was expected to serve the public's traveling needs as well as exhibit a profitable business plan to attract bond investors.

Historians have noted that revenue bonds shifted "the institutional character of public economic activity" wherein midcentury authorities reimagined the practice of democracy by expanding responsibilities of the state while simultaneously relegating them to private business practices.[6] Since authorities are "guided by the logic of the market," rather than "pursuing goals determined by democratically elected legislatures," practices of the free market make their way into how the Turnpike Authority conceives of what the rest stops *do*.[7] Authorities represent a unique, and still debated, border in US capitalism between public government and private enterprise. How do authorities design public space that aims to produce a profit? To that end, how does a "municipal enterprise" approach interior design?

The history of rest stop interiors, what the Authority calls service areas, compliment and complicate economic histories that articulate the profound shift from the New Deal order of the 1930s and 1940s, marked by government funded social services, to the New Federalist order of the 1960s and 1970s, where privatization of social services was seen as a "superior alternative to the state and state-based services" and laid the groundwork for neoliberalism in the late twentieth century.[8] The prominent economic historian Gary Gerstle has urged historians to look beyond the election cycle to identify the underlying cultural shifts from the New Deal political order to the neoliberal political order—I argue that analyzing the design-decisions of commercialized government spaces sheds new light on the "genealogy of neoliberalism".[9] While private businesses levied to privatize services such as insurance and housing, promising better service to the American people than government, scholars like Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor have documented that US public-private partnerships had particularly detrimental effects for Black Americans seeking housing where racial discrimination was good business—and government supported.[10] Similarly, Mia Bay has documented Black mobilities in twentieth century travel histories and argues that as "transportation and accommodations developed, new forms of segregation followed."[11]

While the turnpike was not fully privatized, the archival records of the Turnpike Authority reveal an approach to interior design and spatial policy that was guided by an obsession with service design in order to produce a profit, resulting in a desire to keep the rest stops "new" and "updated" which led to frequent remodelings. Indeed, the constant evolutions of restaurant design and information centers reveals how the Authority came to adopt free market practices into their "lexicon of public policy" and reveal moments where racial and class segregation proliferate inside government-operated interiors.[12]

The history of rest stop design shows how structural inequalities are normalized into one of their most hidden forms—in everyday environments, a "commonplace of the given."[13] As Diane Harris has written, everyday spaces are "so pervasive and seemingly ordinary as to become critically unobserved" warning that the ubiquitous can become the ideological.[14] Rest stops illuminate the complicated tensions of the political economy that endure today, asking whether private business or public government is better equipped to serve (or design for) society? Negotiating the edges between citizen and consumer, rest stops reveal how interiors inform evolving statecraft and democracy itself—providing lessons for how public and private interests can, or should, co-shape public space for the future of roadway travel in the United States.

The Turnpikes Origins and the Profit Motive

After winning the 1947 state gubernatorial race, Republican Alfred Driscoll went to work to fulfill his biggest campaign promise: alleviating New Jersey's crowded roadways by building a megahighway.[15] Driscoll would have to make a number of decisions before he broke ground on this new, state-wide infrastructure, the first of which was deciding between a toll road or state funded, and thus toll-free, roadway. While groups such as the American Automobile Association opposed toll roads as a form of "double taxing," Driscoll decided to build a toll-road after the financial success of the Pennsylvania Turnpike.[16] While the toll road solved operating costs for a megahighway, he still had to figure out how to finance the initial construction costs. In order to avoid raising taxes, Driscoll opted for the use of revenue bonds, which would be paid back with profits made from the highway project.[17] Driscoll's decision recalls a significant shift in the motivations of statecraft in midcentury America that soon commercialized the public sector and were a part of what historian Lizabeth Cohen has dubbed the "consumerization of the republic"—where the meanings of "citizen" and "consumer" grew closer.[18] American studies scholars Angus K. Gillespie and Michael Aaron Rockland argued this meant the turnpike would have to be operated not as a state-project, but a "straight-forward, business-like enterprise" because "the bond market had to be convinced" that they would see a return on their investment.[19] Therefore, the use of revenue bonds resulted in motivations that secured profit first, and satisfied public needs second.

Most importantly, Driscoll had to decide if the Turnpike would be managed through existing state departments or if yet-to-be established public authority would take on the task. In order to build a road that was "needed yesterday," Driscoll decided that the time-consuming bureaucracy of the State Highway Department could not build expeditiously enough and also "lacked the philosophical

approach needed" needed to effectively manage revenue-bond infrastructure and thus advocated for the establishing an authority, arguing that their autonomous and entrepreneurial nature avoided bureaucratic stasis and would best satisfy the bond market.[20] Republican state senator Robert Meyer vocally opposed the establishment of an Authority, believing that the Authority was a "shadow" department that had no democratic oversight and transgressed the state constitution (which only outlined twenty-one departments). Driscoll's own State Highway Department fiercely resisted the establishment of an authority, arguing that critical state infrastructure should be operated by public offices and subject to public review.[21]

They further argued that the enabling act was unconstitutional as it gave the Authority the power "to take state-owned lands in acquiring property for its super-highway."[22]

Local municipalities also vocalized opposition for similar reasons: many towns and counties were worried that the Authority would take taxable lands away, causing a deficit of taxes accrued to local governments. Local governments specifically argued that the service areas would cause a loss of "ratables" (taxable goods or services) to local businesses such as diners and gas stations, impacting not only taxes collected for city budgets, but also individual livelihoods—an issue that the City of Elizabeth sued the Authority over.[23] Even at the federal level this was a major consideration: under policy advisement from the American Association of State Highway Officials' Committee on Planning and Design Policies, President Eisenhower's Interstate Highway system stipulated that rest stops were to be "noncommercial spaces," designed exclusively as safety areas for fatigued drivers, so as to not compete with local businesses offering gas and food.[24] Despite these concerns, Driscoll's 1948 Turnpike Authority legislation won fifteen-to-one in the state senate.[25] Before the Turnpike construction even began, patterns of consumption were being reconstituted through legal means. As Driscoll's administration authorized for-profit businesses inside rest stops along a government-sponsored roadway, the edges of the public and private sphere began to blur even further.

In 1949, Driscoll appointed three men from the private sector to the board of directors: construction management entrepreneur Paul Troast as Chairman, President of Johnson and Johnson George Smith as Vice-Chairman, and financial analyst Maxwell Lester as Treasurer.[26] As the directors prepared financial and business proposals for the bond market, they began early imaginings about how the rest stops, in addition to tolls, could be "revenue producers" and "crowning amenities" that would attract drivers to use the toll road. While tolls made up the dominant revenue for the Turnpike, the Authority speculated that the service areas, where "concession revenue, obtained as a percentage of gasoline, oil, restaurant and miscellaneous merchandise sales," could

potentially produce "substantial" profit and are "expected to prove a very important factor in the satisfactory and successful operation of the Turnpike."[27] Early financial evaluations made the service areas activities essential to the financial operations of the Turnpike, making the service area spaces and interiors essential to infrastructure.

Profit Centers: Designing the Rest Stops

While other scholars of the Turnpike have asserted that its designs were dominated by an austere vision of "American pragmatism" with "virtually no attention to aesthetics," a close reading of rest stop design tells a more nuanced story.[28] The first visualization of a Turnpike service area, seen in the 1949 annual report, reflects stylistic and operative choices that the Authority deemed "more complete and convenient" than any other such facilities on US tolls roads (Figure 10.1). The service areas combined facilities such as gas pumps, restrooms, food services, convenience shopping, and lounge areas—from which "substantial revenue" could be earned.[29] Designed by Arthur Gorman Lorimer (a friend and former architect for Robert Moses, a known supporter of the authority model whose infrastructure legacy is tied to discrimination against low-income neighborhoods), the initial exterior designs of the service areas were in a streamlining style, characterized by tear drop and aerodynamic forms that were detailed with "horizontal lines in keeping with a high-speed highway."[30] Streamlining was a popular style for automotive habitats—such as Norman Bel Geddes and Raymond Lowey's designs for trains, cars, drive-in restaurants, and gas stations—and was also a style closely linked to consumerism. Streamlining designers employed methods such as the annual model change, or planned stylistic obsolescence, to encourage sales, a technique emerging from the consumer engineering ethos.[31]

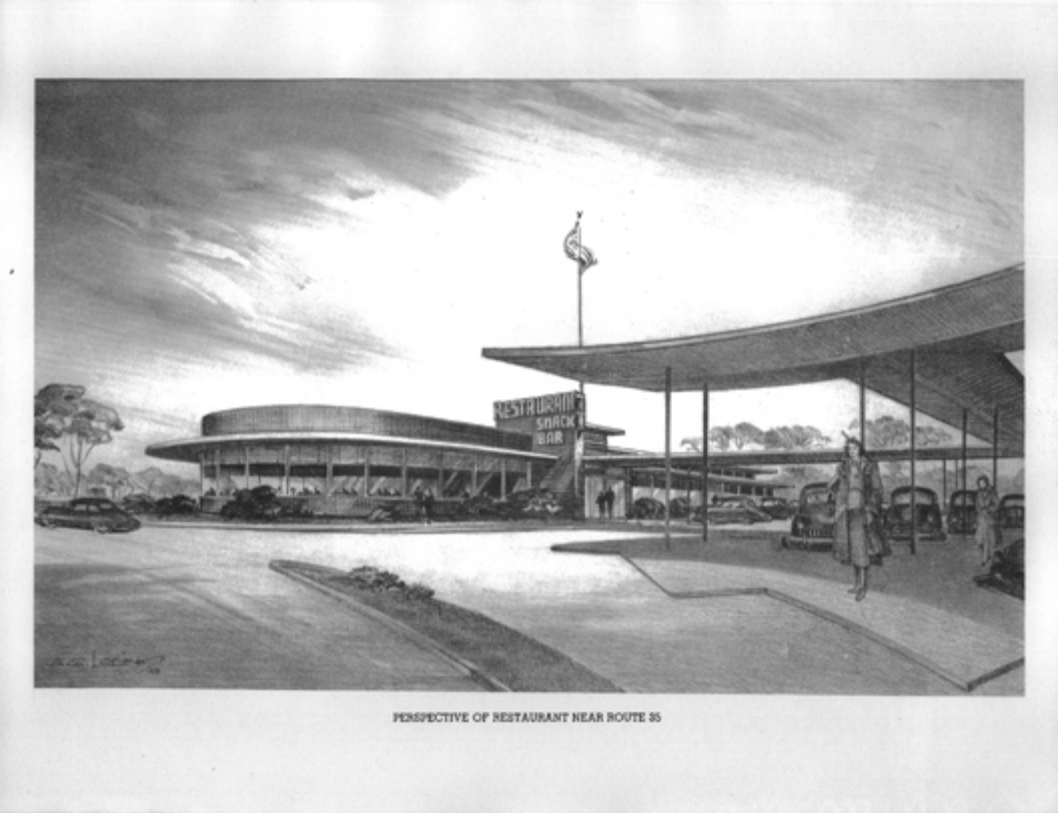

FIGURE 10.1 "Perspective of Restaurant Near Route 36" Annual Report 1949, p. 40. The New Jersey Turnpike Authority. New Jersey State Library.

Lorimer's rest stop design stylistically and literally connected itself to streamlining and consumption. The design features a large restaurant mixed with the covered roofs of drive-ins, with the words "Restaurant" and "Snack Bar" occupying the focal point of the image and there is a notable lack of reference to public services such as restrooms or picnic tables where one could eat without purchasing something. This imagined rest stop is driven by private consumption of goods and services, rather than public spaces for sitting or resting, suggesting that public services were not a priority for the Authority.

Lorimer's streamline designs were abandoned, however, in 1950 after the Authority received feedback on design proposals from the State Highway Department, public safety officials and gas and electric utility providers.[32] In 1950, the final rest stop schemes were designed by Modernist architect Roland Wank of Felliheimer and Wagner, famous for his work in co-op housing and for his work as the Chief Architect for the Tennessee Valley Authority, as well as serving as an architectural consultant to the United Nations Headquarters from 1947 to 1951.[33] Wank designed new service areas in a "restrained contemporary style" that aimed to "harmonize with the countryside" and, according to chief engineer Charles Noble, "provide a quiet atmosphere for the traveling public" (Figure 10.2).[34]

FIGURE 10.2 "Typical Restaurant New Jersey Turnpike," Annual Report 1950, p. 31. The New Jersey Turnpike Authority, New Jersey State Library.

While Modernism had a wide variety of interpretations and applications in the United States, European and state-side Modernists shared a broad belief in the "machine as the vehicle for social change," which could "express a new and democratic society."[35] Wank espoused Modernist beliefs such as a rejection of historic ornamentation in favor of functionally legible architectural forms, and the embrace of mass production and modern materials such as aluminum and prefabricated concrete. Wank also, like many other modernists in the post-war era, believed prefabrication and modular building components were cost-effective solutions to post-war housing needs—espousing the Modernist belief in the promise of technology to provide single family housing for all, a belief intricate tied to suburbia in the United States.[36] Wank's "restrained modern" rest stop design for the Turnpike Authority utilizes visual associations with suburbia: manicured lawns, brightly colored shrubbery, and grass-lined walkways that transport the traveler off the asphalt mega-highway and into the "countryside" (Figure 10.2).

This rest stop design caters to the inhabitants of suburbia, who in the 1950s were predominantly white, middle-class citizens—the type of person who could afford the aspirational pink convertible car, the only car present in the rendering. As Diane Harris has argued, popular representations of the postwar house and garden contributed to an "iconography of racially based spatial exclusion" where prefabricated housing projects such as Levittown were highly discriminatory toward Black homeowners—falling short of a "housing for all" ideal.[37] By utilizing such coded elements as

gardens and suburban architecture, this design extended suggestions of racial spatial exclusion into government-service structures. These sites that signified racial segregation became the sites of segregation performed when contracted food concessionaire, Howard Johnson's, refused service to Black travelers on the Turnpike.

Inside of the rest stops, however, is where the Authority focused its efforts in designing for maximum profitability. To accommodate future desires of the motoring public, the Authority decided that the service areas should be designed with flexibility in mind, what I call a profit driven flexibility.[38] Service areas expanded from a central lounge from which pathways radiated to a variety of services—like "bathrooms, candy cashiers, tobacco counters, restaurants, and telephone booths" and any other services as "future use and demand dictated"—a plan that could incorporate any future amenities desired by the motoring economy into one-stop shops along state owned roadways[39] (Figure 10.3). The early designs were dominated by flexibility in dining, in particular. All thirteen of the service areas were designed so that they could be "readily enlarged to major restaurants if service to the public requires such expansion."[40]

FIGURE 10.3 "Typical Service Area," Annual Report 1954, p. 31. The New Jersey Turnpike Authority. New Jersey State Library.

With financial and spatial goals articulated, the Authority began to bid out contracts for the operations of food services and gas concessions, which also included automotive repair and

information services. For the contract to operate all the food concessions, the Authority selected Howard Johnson's, a midcentury chain diner. For the exclusive automotive and information services contract, the Authority selected Cities Services (now known as Citgo). Howard Johnson's and Citgo fit their own corporate architectural and design schemes into authority designed and owned buildings, where private enterprise and public space became one and the same. Howard Johnson's food services had to abandon their iconic orange-roofed colonial revival design and fit their services into the two different versions of Turnpike's thirteen rest stops: a lunchroom type, with seating for up to 60, and restaurant type, which could expand, as future use dictated, for seating up to 200. Howard Johnson's had to abandon their own interior schemes for Wank's restaurant designs—a dining room with iron partitions, walnut wall paneling, terrazzo flooring, and floating biomorphic artwork that was echoed in abstract lighting fixtures.[41] However, Howard Johnson's was charged with outfitting the snack bars, which they dressed with standing tables and awnings (Figure 10.3). Between sit down restaurants and stand-up snack tables, the built environment of the rest stops catered to multiple temporalities: an option for the less rushed driver who preferred a sit-down meal, and an option for the hurried traveler who wished only to eat briefly at standing-height tables.[42] The multitemporal scheme was produced under the flexibility imperative, and would soon be put to the profitability test when the Turnpike opened its toll gates in 1951.

While the service areas lagged slightly and opened in 1952, they would soon show that the "crowning amenities" most certainly did generate a profit for Turnpike operations. The Turnpike reached record numbers across all expected flows of revenue. The ridership in 1952 was at the level that highway consultants estimated for 1967, achieving annual toll revenue goals fifteen years ahead of schedule.[43] This included prolific use of the service areas: while tolls collected 127% more revenue than projected in 1952, the concession facilities made 183% more and 198% more the following year, generating 2.3 million dollars in revenue in a single operational year.[44] This fiscal success proved the flexibility approach a wise one, and the Authority paid more attention to these facilities in order to continue to capture profits.

The intense explosion of riders put a strain on the service areas, and they were quickly slated to be remodeled to hold a higher capacity of travelers. The Authority drew up more financial plans, with more revenue bonds, to finance "winterizing" the snack bars so they could operate year-round, expanding operations for 24-hour operating eateries and create a "takeout service" for "consumption while traveling," enabling a third temporality that were happening at the same time as the "perfection" of the fast food system, another automotive habitat responding to autopia.[45] The

remodels created interiors that mixed the typologies of lunchrooms and restaurants. The Authority honed their understanding of dining habits and leveraged the built-in flexibility to offer dining temporalities that stretched across day and night and across the seasons, further increasing temporal participation in rest stop services. Because of this increase in food services, the service areas became more technologically complex with new refrigeration, food storage facilities, and garbage management systems as well as new mechanic facilities that were planned and paid for by the Turnpike, financed through additional revenue bonds.[46]

Seeking a continuous return on their facilities investments, the Turnpike spent the next several years enlarging many of the interiors to accommodate higher lunchroom capacity and introducing new styles to satisfy the evolving taste of the motoring public. In 1960, just three years after the latest remodel, the Authority decided the rest stops were "no longer new" and planned a "complete program of rehabilitation of restaurant interior decor, making them more attractive to the traveling public"—reflecting some of their initial impulses to the streamlining ethos which included the annual model change.[47] This "complete rehabilitation" debuted two new interior schemes: one that catered to the projected desires of a car-driving public and another that catered to bus riders. The upscale restaurant design was to feature "new color schemes, furniture design, draperies, lighting … and wall-to-wall carpeting"[48] (Figure 10.4). This scheme included abstract metal wall art, more detailed table settings and decorative wrought iron room dividers. As Katharine Grier argues rooms are forms of rhetorical statements by displaying "agreed-upon sets of associations," this interior design is a departure from the more blue-collar diner interiors and deploys associations with white-collar fine dining.[49]

FIGURE 10.4 "Newly furnished interior of restaurant on Mercer County," Annual Report 1961, p. 20. The New Jersey Turnpike Authority. New Jersey State Library.

Also debuted that same year was a charter bus facility at the Cranbury service area. This was the only rest stop that would allow buses, a "specially designed haven" to ease the congestion that bus riders caused, or as the Authority characterized it: relieving the "swarm" of bus riders that caused "near riots" at other service facilities (Figure 10.5).[50] As explained by Manager of Patron Services Ernst Buchner, whose department oversaw the operations of the service areas, everything in the $2.6 million charter bus service station "was designed to save time" and would introduce a takeaway food service from Howard Johnson's and an integrated intercom system to announce bus departures. Reorienting their typical sit down service to a new function once again, Howard Johnson's charter bus-station cafeteria was a highly controlled space where turnstiles led to cafeteria-style lanes and then to temperature-controlled cabinets with individually wrapped food, a development that the Authority labeled a takeaway service—a contribution to the evolution of fast food systems.[51] Despite the efficiency-oriented design that this facility offered to a bussing public, it produced more sinister effects as well: keeping bus riders, typically of lower-economic status and more frequently people of color, out of the other service areas that catered to private-car owners, typically of higher

economic status and who were usually white. While car drivers were offered a variety of eating experiences, the charter bus stop users were given a singular experience that centered around getting bus riders out of the service areas as soon as possible while still capturing concession revenue. This design effectively kept bus patrons out of the other twelve service areas designed for higher-paying Turnpike customers.

FIGURE 10.5 "Interior of bus stop at Cranbury," Annual Report 1961, p. 20. The New Jersey Turnpike Authority. New Jersey State Library.

As bus riders were relegated to one rest stop service, Black US citizens were offered no service at all, as Howard Johnson's was a known pro-segregation business. Variety in dining experiences became an imperative for the Authority's rest stop design but were produced in an age when Black travelers had little access to Turnpike service, let alone the multiple varieties of it, and had to consult texts like *The Negro Motorist Green Book* in order to know what roadside businesses allowed black patrons.[52] While there is scant evidence recorded in the Authority's archive, itself a telling point, white historian Herbert Aptheker recounts that when he and Black activist William Patterson were traveling on the New Jersey Turnpike in the early 1950s, Patterson knew that they would be denied service at a Turnpike-operated Howard Johnson's—and to Aptheker's shock, they were.[53] The same year Governor Driscoll proposed the Authority in 1948, he also proposed his civil rights legislation, the Freeman Bill, which prohibited discrimination based on race in any place of public accommodation.[54] Despite passing in 1949, Driscoll's so-called commitment to civil rights was obscured through the practices of racial segregation underneath his own nose, inside the interiors of the state infrastructure on which he prided himself. His hypocrisy could be reasoned away: that private enterprise made those decisions, not the Authority. Ironically, the Authority boasted in its 1963 Annual report that the bus service station successfully handled the influx of travelers for the

March on Washington protest in 1963, while some of its very service area segregationist practices were what citizens marched against.

Driscoll's own political beliefs were guided by anti-federal sentiments that emerged in protest of a New Deal order. Calling his approach "working federalism," Driscoll argued for less government oversight and more individual freedom, political stances that led him to choose the authority model in the first place. Driscoll's "working federalism" shares contours with Richard Nixon's "New federalism," wherein federal granting policies shifted away from federally determined categories of spending, such as municipal health services or road improvement, and instead was given to states as lump sums for governors and mayors to use at their own discretion, which, as Jane Berger argues, turned mayors into entrepreneurs instead of civic stewards.[55]

Howard Johnson's segregationist policies were validated by Driscoll's "working federalism," that sought less governmental oversight which enabled private sector discrimination to flourish inside government-sponsored structures. Howard Johnson's would exclusively operate the service areas until 1973, while regularly making national news throughout the 1960s for their segregationist policies. In 1962, 500 Black citizens protested a Durham, North Carolina, location; in 1963 Black activists lodged a civil suit against a location in Washington DC; and most famously, Howard Johnson's made national headlines when a Maryland location refused service to William Fitzjohnson, a visiting Sierra Leonean diplomat—an incident for which President Kennedy personally apologized.[56] The Authority continuously worked with Howard Johnson's for twenty-three years, inscribing the "traveling public" and the "motoring economy" as white.

While the Authority, and the New Jersey legislature more broadly, ignored Howard Johnson's segregationist practices, they closely monitored consumer pricing for the white motoring economy. According to its contract, Howard Johnson's was not allowed to raise prices in service areas unless it was cleared by the Authority first.[57] When the Authority denied a request for a price increase in 1964, Howard Johnson countered with the assertion that they had successfully managed food "services for the public" and even won "public esteem for the operators, its service and products, and for the Turnpike as a whole."[58] The Authority compromised that in light of their excellent service (to the white traveling public)—Howard Johnson's could raise prices of certain foods but would have to offer free coffee refills for Turnpike riders at all thirteen service areas. Through this compromise, the Authority acted as a consumer advocate by leveraging its statewide network of interiors. Service for the white motoring economy remained the pinnacle of design and policy decisions, outweighing concerns, or even acknowledgment, over discrimination against Black

members of the traveling public. When the Authority eventually did end Howard Johnson's contract in 1973, it was on the basis of the company's poor service, not on its segregation policies. Howard Johnson's pushed back against the poor service allegations, stating that the Authority's unending search for glamorous "new eating concepts" were impossible to satisfy.[59]

The "Tourist Information Centers" are another site where the Authority's focus on service blurred the distinction between public and private practices. The Authority had explicitly contracted out the tourist information centers to avoid governmental critiques of favoritism. Cities Services were contracted to manage the information centers, as well as supply gas services. Their approach to information services were interactive and customer service oriented: they hired Pikettes, women in Turnpike-branded suits who would provide travelers with "the latest information on hotels, motor courts and the best routes" (Figure 10.6).[60] Marketed as the concierges of the Turnpike, the Pikettes were a popular service that added "experience of pleasurable driving" but soon fell to bribery and corruption.[61] According to a saga outlined by Max Weiner, Cities Services came under fire for taking bribes from New York hotels to recommend their businesses to Turnpike travelers.[62] To curb this illegal practice, the Authority and Cities Services entered a formal agreement with New York City hotels where the hotels would reserve a block of rooms exclusively for Turnpike travelers in exchange for the Pikettes recommending them over any other hotels. In this agreement, the Authority would receive a commission for every hotel stay booked and paid for—essentially averting the flow of money as bribes to Cities Services to the Authority as commissions.

FIGURE 10.6 "Entrance to tourist center," and "Pikettes supplying information to motorists," Annual Report 1958, p. 17. The New Jersey Turnpike Authority. New Jersey State Library.

As the Pikettes began to roll out this policy, the New Jersey Hotel Association raised a complaint that a state entity was encouraging patrons to do business in another state. Further, they argued, it

was unethical to coerce hotels to reserve rooms for Turnpike users in order to be recommended to travelers, a practice they believed was too discriminatory for proper statecraft. The Association suggested that interested travelers should be given a list of hotels and provided free phones to call the New Jersey hotels themselves, which the Authority rebuked since it "did not provide much of a service."[63] The Authority also stated that because most patrons were destined for New York, recommending New Jersey hotels was not an appropriate service. As the Authority defended Cities Services' hotel recommendations as a matter of business policy to attract customers to the Turnpike, the Association escalated their demands, requesting that Cities Services should be removed entirely from the tourist information function and should be staffed and financed through the Authority. The Association finally won and the Authority required Cities Services to end the practice of the Pikettes recommending hotels and replaced them with a more "objective" machine called a Directomat (Figure 10.7).[64]

FIGURE 10.7 "New Directomat", July 1961, NYJA000709, B092, Cities Service Buildings, New York Journal-American photo morgue, Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas. https://norman.hrc.utexas.edu/nyjadc/ItemDetails.cfm?id=709.

The Directomat was a "new automated device that … printed cards, answers questions about hotels, motels, churches, sports and many other subjects." In August 1961, the Turnpike employee newspaper *Pike Exchange* featured an article titled "Electronic Brain Aids Patrons" that explained how "the robot" had 120 buttons from which to select information. In seconds, the "electronic brain" printed "trip slips," that gave recommendations to hotels and small businesses—reproducing bias toward more service-oriented suggestions but under the guise of technological objectivity.[65] While initiatives like the free coffee refills constitute aspects of consumer advocacy that speak to the public

edge of the Authority, negotiations with the New Jersey Hotel association reveals how the Authority behaved like a private enterprise in competition with the state it is supposed to serve. As the hospitality-driven designs of the Pikette's information centers, mirroring the dress and arrangement of up-scale hotel concierge desks, gave way to the technologically modern machine aesthetic of the Directomats—the interior experiences of these facilities was guided by evolving service policy inside of statecraft, where edges became blurred, contested and reimagined.

Conclusion

Whereas Turnpike users were initially understood as the "traveling public," they came to be the "motoring economy" through the Turnpike's crowning amenity: its rest stops. The interiors show that public needs slowly gave way to private enterprise values and free market ideals. In the grand opening ceremonies of the Turnpike in 1952, the ceremony program stated that, "when revenue bonds are paid off, the Turnpike will become property of the State for free use by the people" which signaled the Authority's early hope for entrepreneurial methods to be leveraged for long-term public benefit.[66] However, the first twenty years of the Turnpike Authority reports discuss did not discuss the service areas in terms of public benefit, public bathrooms or public access to green space or picnic tables, but mostly in terms of profitability remodeling. Along with the constant maintenance of the roadway itself, the remodeling was always funded through new bond-issuances, trapping the Authority into a cycle of debt and profit-driven schemes to pay back investors—to this day the Turnpike has never been free to use by the people. As the private-enterprise values penetrated deeply into the built fabric, they not only essentialized the profit-motive in public spaces, but also naturalized racism and classism in roadside America.

The Turnpike rest stops show that "design decision-making is itself a study in the persuasive representation of ideas" and tell a bigger story about how capitalist values can deeply penetrate culture and inform how democracy is materialized in the built environment.[67] This public-private partnership served the values of private enterprise more than public-oriented amenities, leading the Authority to conceptualize itself in terms of potential profit rather than public service. Defining and naming the practices of private-public relationships matter because they have real implications for how public space is imagined, designed and used. It can enfranchise and disenfranchise, reifying social boundaries along racial and class lines. Government-owned interiors offer a point of view that complicates and complements narratives about the relationship between government and business, aesthetics in roadside America, race in the US landscape, and mobility restrictions in class politics. While service areas are not overtly political, they have the power to distribute assumptions about

people and places—and since they fall under the guise of the everyday, they hold extra power to remain hidden.

Notes

1. "Governor Announces Service Area Contracts: NJTA," New Jersey Turnpike Authority, August 30, 2017, https://www.njta.com/newsroom/2017/august/governor-announces-service-area-contracts; An earlier version of this introduction was written for *Dense Magazine*, G. Von Koenig, "5049 Miles on the Turnpike, *Dense Magazine: Booth Please*, January 2022. https://www.densemagazine.org/post/5049-miles-on-the-turnpike.
2. Gabrielle Esperdy, *American Autopia: An Intellectual History of the American Roadside at Midcentury* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2019).
3. The French geographer famously labeled the region between Boston, MA and Washington, DC "megalopolis" for its high density, containing 20% of the human population in 1960s. He argued that this region started to take on characteristics of a single city, Jean Gottman, *Megalopolis: The Urbanized Northeastern Seaboard of the United States* (The Twentieth Century Fund, 1961).
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