



Historic Project: Reconnecting Pasadena 710 Master Plan Executive Summary

Overview

The purpose of this executive summary is to consolidate the findings of three independent projects (collectively, “Historic Project”) that were undertaken as part of the Reconnecting Pasadena 710 Master Plan project:

- *Historical Data/Setting*, prepared by Architectural Resources Group (July 2025)
- *Impacts of Freeways and Other Mechanisms on Segregation in Pasadena*, prepared by the University of California Los Angeles Institute of Transportation Studies (May 2025)
- Oral History Project, including the *Amplify* documentary and a report of findings titled *710 Reconnecting Communities Oral History Report*, prepared by Allegra Consulting (March 2025)

Collectively, these three projects identify and memorialize various aspects of the community that existed in the neighborhood displaced by the construction of the SR-710 Freeway in Pasadena. The Historic Project acknowledges not only impact of the freeway routed into the neighborhoods of communities of color, but it also documents a lesser-known chapter in the history of Pasadena.

Project Background and Purpose

The Reconnecting Communities 710 Master Plan will develop a master plan for the State Route (SR) 710 Freeway relinquishment area. The Historic Project serves as background for the master plan. It documents the displacement of the established community formerly located within the footprint of the SR-710 Freeway in Pasadena and the impacts of freeway construction on that community. In 2023, the City of Pasadena City Manager’s Office retained Architectural Resources Group, Allegra Consulting, and the University of California Los Angeles Institute of Transportation Studies to prepare three reports which document different aspects of the history of the SR-710 Freeway construction.

Historical Data/Setting frames the discussion of the impacts of freeway expansion in Pasadena and gives an overview of freeway construction in Pasadena in the twentieth century, with a focus on the SR-710 and to a lesser extent the I-210 freeway. It examines the laws and policies that drove the construction of the freeway and the process by which the Division of Highways (now the California Department of Transportation, or Caltrans) acquired property in the area. It also provides statistical data related to residents, businesses, and institutions that were displaced.

Impacts of Freeways and Other Mechanisms on Segregation in Pasadena documents patterns of racial and ethnic segregation in the city and examines the role of freeway construction and other mechanisms in shaping those patterns. It analyzes demographic changes that occurred as a result of the SR-710 and I-210 Freeway construction, as well as urban redevelopment and other racist and discriminatory policies in the city.

Oral History Project was conducted with displaced residents and their descendants and provides a personal, human perspective on the events surrounding the SR-710 construction. The recorded interviews were compiled into a documentary entitled *Amplify* and findings were compiled in

Following is a summary of all three projects, including their methodology and findings.

Summary of Reports

Historic Report on the 710 Displacement

Overview

The *Historic Report on the 710 Displacement*, prepared by Architectural Resources Group, serves as background for the Reconnecting Pasadena 710 Master Plan. It documents the history of the construction of the SR-710, the impacts of its construction, and the community that was lost as a result. The report lays out how the history of freeway construction is inextricably linked to racism, discrimination, and systematic segregation that marginalized and penalized communities of color. The creation of the nation's freeway system – and the history of planning and land use more generally – were intertwined with then-prevailing ideas of race, ethnicity, and class. By the time freeway planning started in Southern California in the 1940s, these ideas were deeply entrenched and heavily influenced the transportation planning process. The report examines how these forces played out in Pasadena in the 1960s and the consequences to the city's communities of

color as a result. It also documents the residents, businesses, and institutions lost because of the 710 Freeway construction, and it details the property acquisition process and the residents, businesses, and institutions lost because of that construction.

Methodology

The report was informed by extensive primary and secondary source research which focused on the history of freeway construction at the national, state, and local level, as well as research into history of the SR-710 in Pasadena. In addition, ARG conducted research on other discriminatory planning policies and private sector practices that contributed to segregation in the twentieth century. The project team consulted with California Department of Transportation staff to determine the scope of archival records available and to inquire about policies that shaped property acquisition and displacement. ARG searched for specific details related to property acquisition as well as property value data, including a public records request and consultation directly with Caltrans staff. Staff informed the project team that acquisition records related to property purchase before a final property transaction are not publicly available because they contain personal property owner information. The project team was informed that property acquisition and notification processes have not changed since the 1960s, so these current processes informed the report when specific information related to Pasadena residents was not found.

Summary of Findings

The *Historic Report on the 710 Displacement* is organized into two parts. Part I provides background and context for the history of freeway construction in Pasadena in the 1960s and 1970s. Part II outlines the effects of displacement and freeway construction in Pasadena and details the tangible impacts of freeway construction in the city, including the buildings, institutions, and businesses lost as a result.

The first portion of the report, as noted above, details the history of freeway construction in the country, beginning in the early twentieth century, to provide background for freeway construction as it played out in Pasadena. The construction of the 710 Freeway in Pasadena was one of many instances in which land use and planning policies deprioritized communities of color and deemed them acceptable locations for redevelopment. Land use policies put in place in the first half of the twentieth century influenced later freeway siting as the country's transportation network evolved and expanded in the post-World War II period. These policies, and the patterns

of development they engendered, privileged White affluent residents over working class residents and residents of color.

Land use and zoning policies, which “began [in the nineteenth century] as a desire for civic improvement, soon also became ‘a mechanism for protecting property values and excluding the undesirables.’ Early planning principals became embedded with then prevailing ideas about racial and class hierarchies. At this time, city officials often viewed communities of color and the working class through a racist lens that inaccurately equated them with immorality, disease, and inferiority.”¹ Zoning became a means of controlling the location of these populations through the regulation of land uses. Freeway construction in the decades after World War II was one of the iterations of those policies. While highways existed since the early twentieth century as a means to promote rapid travel, the larger long-distance, high-speed freeway led to the large-scale reconfiguration of urban landscapes. Freeway building became not only one of the primary tenants of urban planning at mid-century but also a mechanism of urban redevelopment – the process by which older urban centers, often the location of communities of color or working-class communities, were razed and redeveloped in the decades after World War II.

By the time the planning of the SR-710 and I-210 Freeways was underway in the 1940s as part of the creation of a broader network of freeways in the Los Angeles region, freeway construction was tacitly synonymous with this type of redevelopment. Building on decades of inequitable planning policies, the region’s freeways decimated its neighborhoods of color in the postwar period.

In the post-World War II years, Pasadena experienced rapid and unprecedented growth. It wanted to reposition itself as a forward-looking city with strong commercial and industrial sectors, as opposed to its more tourist-dependent and suburban character of decades past. To achieve this goal, it needed to be more accessible to the rest of the Los Angeles region, and freeway planning took on a new importance to city leaders. At the same time, city officials sought to redevelop those neighborhoods they saw as “blighted” as a way to further encourage this shift in its economy.

Pasadena’s 1962 General Plan set out its new intentions in this era of economic transformation. The plan outlined improvements to land use and zoning, circulation and transportation, community facilities, and neighborhood design, among others. The plan, however, prioritized

¹ Architectural Resources Group, “Historic Report on the 710 Displacement, Task 1: Historical Background and Data,” prepared for the City of Pasadena City Manager’s Office, July 2025, 29.

these needs in White neighborhoods, while ignoring them in neighborhoods of color. It also established redevelopment areas, which were most frequently synonymous with neighborhoods of color, and outlined a rationale for freeway citing in the city. The General Plan singles out Northwest Pasadena and the South Vernon Avenue neighborhoods as locations for future freeway citing, ignoring the well-established communities there. Despite opposition from area residents and the possibility of other freeway routes through the city, the SR-710 route through the South Vernon Avenue area was ultimately selected. Property acquisition started in the late 1960s.

Part II outlines the specific and tangible effects of the construction of the SR-710 Freeway construction. It outlines the process by which the California Department of Transportation (then the Division of Highways) acquired property for the construction of the freeway. It also lays out the process of displacement. It summarizes the general effects of displacement and freeway construction and how those effects played out in Pasadena.

A combination of different types of property acquisition was utilized for the construction of the 710 Freeway in Pasadena. These included hardship acquisition, fee acquisition, quitclaim deed, eminent domain, and others.² Each is defined according to the Caltrans Right-of-Way Manual. The most common type of property acquisition found in the study area was *fee acquisition*, a type of right-of-way purchasing that involves the usage of grant deeds to transfer property from one owner to another (in this case, the Division of Highways).³ *Hardship acquisition* occurs early in the project planning process and involves the purchase of property before the completion of the environmental review process for a proposed transportation project. It is used in situations in which an owner's unusual circumstances are "aggravated by a proposed transportation facility and cannot be solved by the owner without acquisition by the State."⁴ As noted in the ARG report, "There are variety of reasons that owners can request immediate sale, including medical and financial reasons as well as monetary loss from the proposed project."⁵ It is unknown how often this type of purchase was used for the SR-710. It was used prior to routine right-of-way purchasing and was therefore not recorded in the right-of-way maps for the study area – the foremost source for purchase information related to the SR-710. Records of this type of acquisition were not found in the Caltrans archives. *Eminent domain*, a type of condemnation

² For a full list and definitions, see ARG, 71-76.

³ ARG, 74.

⁴ Caltrans Right of Way Manual Chapter 5, 5.03.01.00 qtd. in ARG, 71.

⁵ ARG, 71-72.

proceeding, occurs if a sale cannot be resolved through typical right-of-way purchase (for example, if a property owner and Caltrans cannot agree on the terms of a sale). It refers to “the act of taking private property for public use upon payment of just compensation.”⁶ Research indicates that the Division of Highways used a combination of property acquisition types for the purchase of properties for the construction of the 710 Freeway, with the most common type being fee acquisition, according to the right-of-way maps documentation.

The report then details the effects of freeway construction and displacement in Pasadena. It describes the existing communities in the path of the freeway, which was a well-established neighborhood of single- and multi-family homes (the former being the majority), commercial businesses, and pockets of industrial uses. Due to decades of discriminatory land use planning policies, neighborhoods of color such as the South Vernon Avenue area faced disinvestment and lower property values than comparable areas elsewhere.⁷ In addition, the announcement of planned freeway construction tended to lower property values and depreciate real estate. These circumstances likely had a profound impact on property purchase:

Even though property owners were supposedly reimbursed with the fair market value of their property, this value would likely have been less than an equivalent property in another part of Pasadena due to both earlier redlining and declines in property values following the announcement of freeway work.⁸

The report documents the aftermath of freeway displacement and its impacts, including physical, social, and economic effects. Freeways such as the SR-710 divided established communities, resulted in a loss of generational wealth inherent in real estate, and impacted people’s livelihoods and social networks as their businesses and institutions were forcibly sold. The tally of buildings demolished for the construction of the 710 Freeway is shown below:

⁶ ARG, 75.

⁷ ARG, 82.

⁸ ARG, 83.

Building Counts in the Study Area ⁹	
Building Type	Numerical Count
Residential Buildings	117
Residential Units	168
Commercial Buildings	50
Institutional Buildings	10
Industrial Buildings	8
Vacant/Unknown	21
Total Buildings (Known)	188
Total Buildings (incl. vacant/unknown)	209

A full list of displaced residents, businesses, and institutions is included in the appendices of the report.

In all, the report lays out the policy and planning decisions that influenced the placement of the SR-710 Freeway in Pasadena, and the consequences of freeway construction felt by the community displaced. The construction of the 710 freeway has had lasting impacts that are still felt today.

Racial Segregation in Pasadena: The Role of Freeway Development and Institutional Mechanisms

Overview

Racial Segregation in Pasadena: The Role of Freeway Development and Institutional Mechanisms, prepared by the University of California Los Angeles Institute of Transportation Studies, documents historic and current demographic patterns in Pasadena and the ways that freeway construction and other planning decisions have shaped these patterns. The report is based on quantitative data, using it to compare “racial segregation in Pasadena with that in the rest of Los

⁹ The study area for the report varies from the Caltrans relinquishment area. It is defined as Walnut Street on the north, Pasadena Avenue on the east, California Boulevard on the south, and St. John Avenue/Havendale Drive on the west as well as the parcels cleared immediately south of Bellefontaine Street on either side of S. Pasadena Avenue). It also includes the area bounded by St. John Avenue, Walnut Avenue, and what would have been Holly Street and Terrace Drive prior to their removal for the 710 Freeway. In addition, it includes non-contiguous parcels bounded by Bellefontaine Street, South St. John Avenue, Barclay Alley, and South Pasadena Avenue.

Angeles County and analyzes demographic changes in the neighborhoods containing Interstate 210 and State Route 710 before and after their construction.”¹⁰

Methodology

The UCLA project team used historic and current population data (from 1940-2020) to examine segregation and demographic change in the neighborhoods flanking the SR-710 and I-210 Freeways, with a focus on the period between the late 1950s to the 1970s. The report divides the development of the study area into two periods: the freeway period (1950-1980) and the period of post-freeway effects (1980-2010).¹¹

Population data was extracted from the U.S. Census records. The report cautions, however, that “one problem with the U.S. Census is differential undercount—that is, the enumeration and survey tends to disproportionately miss disadvantaged groups. Unfortunately, it is impossible to make adjustments for this within the project’s scope and resources. One of the consequences is the potential of underestimating the number of people of color impacted by the freeway and related developments.”¹² Therefore the data presented in the report is as accurate as possible given the potential limitations of said data. Census tracts and blocks served as the geographic units for the analysis. The analysis focuses on census tracts along the I-210 and SR-710 corridors.

To track patterns of segregation and diversity in Pasadena, the UCLA project team examined three metrics - the dissimilarity index, the entropy index, and the entropy score. The dissimilarity and entropy indexes measure segregation (in different ways), while the entropy score measures diversity. The report describes each index thusly:

The dissimilarity index measures the degree of residential segregation between two groups. A higher value in the dissimilarity index indicates greater segregation and spatial separation between groups within a geographical area. [...] In examining Los Angeles County and Pasadena, we calculated the dissimilarity index between two groups, non-Hispanic white residents and residents of color. [...] The entropy index offers an alternative measure of segregation, capturing the level of segregation across multiple populations. We calculated the entropy index for four groups: non-Hispanic white

¹⁰ Paul M. Ong, Chhandara Pech, Jacob L. Wasserman, and Casey Chung, “Racial Segregation in Pasadena: The Role of Freeway Development and Institutional Mechanisms,” University of California Los Angeles Institute of Transportation Studies, prepared for the City of Pasadena City Manager’s Office, May 2025, xi.

¹¹ Ong et. al., 16.

¹² Ong et. al., 59.

residents, Black residents, Latino/a residents, and a residual group labeled “Other” (encompassing Asians and all remaining racial and ethnic groups).¹³

The team looked at segregation trends over time using these indices. The entropy score can be used to measure the diversity of an area. Using calculations of the degree of randomness in an area (entropy), the entropy score can measure the level of diversity in that area.¹⁴

Summary of Findings

The report studies demographic shifts and segregation in Pasadena in the second half of the twentieth century. Part 1: Racial Diversification and Segregation in Pasadena and Los Angeles County, 1940-2020 lays out population trends in the areas flanking the SR-710 and I-210 freeways, comparing them to broader trends in Los Angeles County.

The City of Pasadena and Los Angeles County were majority White until well after World War II.¹⁵ This population began to decline slowly after World War II, a trend that accelerated in the 1970s (see graph below). Based on an examination of U.S. Census data, Pasadena itself quickly became more diverse in the 1960s and 1970s, with substantial increases in its African American, Latino, and Asian populations. Yet while the city was becoming more diverse, its populations of color were confined to certain areas (mostly notably the west side of the city) by segregationist government policies and private sector practices.¹⁶ The increase in the city’s diversity lines up with the passage of fair housing laws, such as the Supreme Court decision in the case *Shelley v. Kraemer* in 1948, which made the enforcement of restrictive covenants unconstitutional, the Rumford Fair Housing Act (1963), and the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (the Fair Housing Act).¹⁷

Part 2: Impacts of Freeway Developments, I-210 and SR-710, 1950-1980 documents the impact of freeway development on population trends between 1950 and 1980 in Pasadena. The study area was defined as census tracts on either side of the I-210 and SR-710 freeways, as well as south of the SR-710 along the unbuilt portion of the freeway. The population of the study area remained stable through the 1950s and then declined significantly in the 1960s, just before freeway construction, and partially recovered beginning in the 1980s.¹⁸ The report notes that “initially, the

¹³ Ong et. al., 6-7.

¹⁴ Ong et. al., 66.

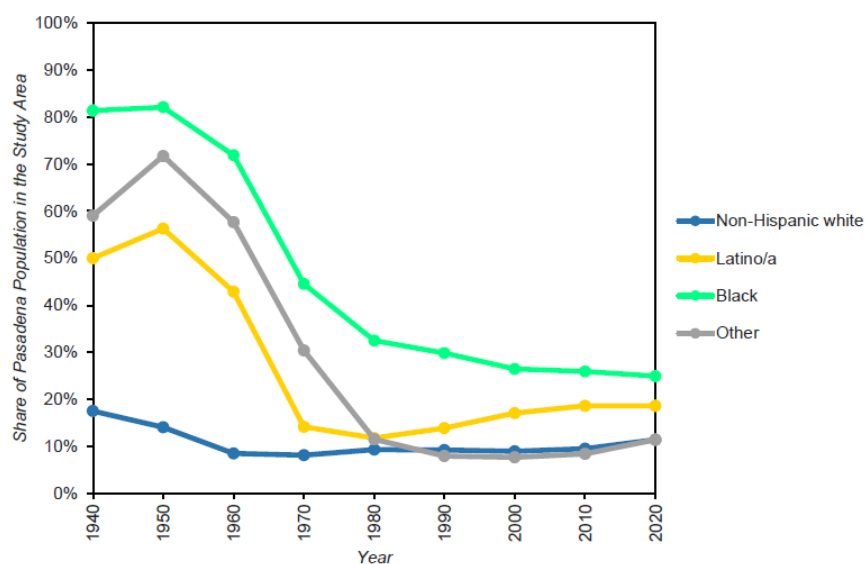
¹⁵ Ong et. al., 4.

¹⁶ Ong et. al., 5.

¹⁷ Ong et. al., 8.

¹⁸ Ong et. al., 16.

study area held a disproportionately high share of Pasadena’s population of color before and during much of the freeway development period; however, this share decreased over time.”¹⁹ Within the study area, the population experienced marked shifts over time. The White population decreased dramatically in the 1950s, while the area’s populations of color increased. The African American population increased significantly, while the numbers of Latino and Asian residents remained relatively small in comparison until the 1980s.²⁰ See figures below.²¹



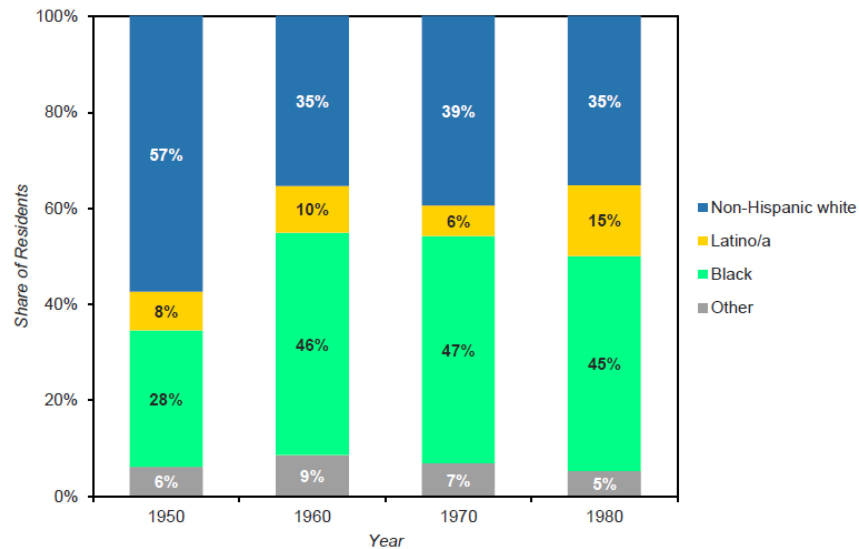
Data source: calculated by authors from 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010, and 2020 U.S. Censuses (Manson et al., 2024 and U.S. Census Bureau, 1950, 1952b, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010, 2020)

Study Area’s share of Pasadena’s population by race/ethnicity, 1940-2020. Source: UCLA, 20.

¹⁹ Ong et. al., 19.

²⁰ Ong et. al., 20.

²¹ For additional calculations of population over time, see Ong et. al., 22-25.



Data source: calculated by authors from 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (Manson et al., 2024 and U.S. Census Bureau, 1950, 1952b, 1970, 1980)

Racial/Ethnic Distribution in the study area, 1950-1980. Source: UCLA, 21.

The report also looks at changes in the number of housing units in the study area and Los Angeles County more generally over time. Unsurprisingly, the pattern in Pasadena reflects the impact of freeway construction during the period. Overall, Pasadena saw a decrease in the number of housing units, but this varied in the study area between 1950 and 1980. In general, the number of housing units decreased dramatically during these decades. The south center portion of the study area, which corresponds to the SR-710 freeway footprint, saw a decrease of 25 percent in housing between 1950 and 1980.²² The center tract, which corresponds to the freeway interchange, saw a decrease in housing units of 71 percent in the same period (see table below).²³

²² The area also encompasses tracts to the west of the SR-710.

²³ Ong et. al., 26-27.

Geography		Change, 1950-1960	Change, 1960-1970	Change, 1970-1980
Study area census tracts	North	+9%	-9%	+5%
	North Center	+7%	-27%	+18%
	Center	+1%	-59%	-28%
	South Center	+2%	-20%	-7%
	South	+43%	+17%	+10%
Pasadena		+23%	+1%	+6%
Los Angeles County		+48%	+19%	+12%

Data source: calculated by authors from 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980 U.S. Censuses (Manson et al., 2024 and U.S. Census Bureau, 1950, 1952b, 1970, 1980)

Changes in Housing Units in Pasadena and Los Angeles County, 1950-1980. Source: UCLA, 27.

While the study area experienced increased racial segregation, it also saw economic polarization (as measured by the housing market and income levels). In general, property values and rent trends in the area were lower than the city average between 1950 and 1980. This was especially true for the neighborhoods in Northwest Pasadena. These figures align with the impacts of discriminatory housing and zoning policies which led to disinvestment and lowered property values (discussed in Part 3 of the report).²⁴ The areas south of what would become the SR-134 interchange had higher home values, rents, and income levels over time. This is likely due in part to shifts in neighborhood desirability, a transition to more affluent residents in the South Center and South areas, and the reduced presence of lower income populations and populations of color.²⁵ These trends highlight “the broader socioeconomic changes that took place as freeway development and selective urban projects reshaped the area.”²⁶

Part 3: Institutional Discriminatory Practices in Housing provides broader context for housing discrimination and segregation in Pasadena by outlining the policies and practices beyond freeway planning at work, including redlining – the federal government’s New Deal era policy of grading neighborhoods by color along economic but also racial lines – housing discrimination, school segregation, and White flight. The report notes:

²⁴ Ong et. al., 28.

²⁵ Ong et. al., 29-30.

²⁶ Ong et. al., 31.

Pasadena was very much a part of the contentious history around housing discrimination. While there is no evidence that the city engaged in *explicit* racial zoning, it appears Pasadena implemented land-use regulations that, while not overtly racist, had a disproportionate impact on people of color and reinforced segregation. These zoning ordinances were designed to limit and prevent certain groups—typically low-income residents and people of color—from residing in particular areas. For example, high minimum lot size requirements for single-family housing and the prohibition of multifamily housing limited the supply of affordable housing, making it difficult for lower-income families and/or families of color to find housing.²⁷

Other mechanisms of segregation utilized in Pasadena and cities around the country included restrictive covenants and the use of homeowners' associations, in which property owners banded together to prevent people of color from moving into a neighborhood. In 1939, the Pasadena Improvement Association and other organizations, for example, pushed for "race restrictions on all of the Pasadena residential districts now occupied by Caucasians."²⁸ The enforcement of restrictive covenants was deemed unconstitutional in the 1948 Supreme Court decision *Shelley v. Kraemer*, though private sector housing discrimination continued.

The passage of fair housing laws in the decades after World War II also helped combat housing discrimination but did not eliminate it. The report notes, "The enforcement of residential segregation in Pasadena led to both limited economic opportunities and subjection to poorer living conditions for communities of color, restricting upward mobility and significantly impacting their quality of life and standard of living."²⁹ The effects of these policies and practices were long lasting and are still felt today.

The fight for fair housing coincided with the broader civil rights movement and efforts to end other discriminatory policies, including school segregation. People of color faced opposition as they attempted to attend all-White schools in the same way that they saw pushback against moving into all-White neighborhoods. Efforts to desegregate Pasadena's schools occurred, but no effective enforcement mechanisms were put in place to combat White residents' opposition.³⁰

Neighborhood and school integration eventually led to a phenomenon known as "neighborhood tipping." Residents newly occupied by people of color underwent "a process in which

²⁷ Ong et. al., 33-34.

²⁸ Ong et. al., 34.

²⁹ Ong et. al., 36.

³⁰ Ong et. al., 37.

predominantly non-Hispanic white neighborhoods rapidly transitioned to areas of color, as seen in the North tract of the I-210/SR-710 study area.” As people of color moved in, White residents began to move out. Once a certain percentage of residents of color occupied a previously White neighborhood, White residents tended to move out in increasingly large numbers (a phenomenon referred to as White flight) and the area would “tip” and become occupied by a majority of people of color.³¹ The report notes that the area around the I-210 freeway experienced this phenomenon in the 1970s. The construction of the freeway likely started White flight from the area, which then increased through neighborhood tipping.³²

As outlined in Part 4: Urban Renewal and Restructuring Projects, the city’s neighborhoods of color were further shaped by redevelopment projects implemented while the freeway was being built. These included four sites – Pasadena Art Museum (now the Norton Simon Museum), Parsons headquarters, Ambassador College, and Old Pasadena – adjacent to the SR-710 Freeway.³³ While the construction of the Norton Simon Museum did not result in the loss of any housing units, the completion of Parsons headquarters in the early 1970s did result in a substantial loss of housing, nearly one-quarter of which was occupied by people of color.³⁴ Ambassador College, located to the west of the 710 Freeway, expanded its facilities after some of its property was purchased for the construction of the freeway. This too resulted in a loss of housing in the area, approximately one-quarter of which was occupied by people of color. In Old Pasadena, urban renewal efforts in the late 1970s resulted in a loss of housing and demographic shifts. The section of Old Pasadena adjacent to the 710 Freeway was home to over 50 percent of residents of color, many of whom were displaced as the once-residential area was redeveloped with commercial and institutional properties.³⁵ The Pepper Street Redevelopment Project in Northwest Pasadena similarly displaced residents of color to construct a rent-supplemented housing complex.³⁶

These redevelopment projects contributed to significant urban restructuring during the period, most notably a loss of housing occupied by people of color. All told, these projects “exacerbated

³¹ Ong et. al., 41.

³² Ong et. al., 42.

³³ Ong et. al., 48.

³⁴ Ong et. al., 52.

³⁵ Ong et. al., 51-54.

³⁶ Ong et. al., 56.

racial segregation, deepening demographic and economic polarization in neighborhoods along I-210 and SR-710” in the name of city improvement.³⁷ The report notes,

[these] impacts are not just historical. Mid-20th century freeway development in Pasadena left a lasting legacy of environmental and social inequality, particularly when comparing neighborhoods along different freeway segments. Data on air pollution and traffic density reveal stark disparities across the study area. [...] This disparity highlights the uneven impact of freeway infrastructure: while neighborhoods directly bisected by I-210 in the northern part of the study area continue to bear the brunt of pollution and environmental hazards, southern areas near the unbuilt 710 segment have been spared some of these negative externalities. While both sets of areas lie near freeways and suffer from consequences such as pollution and traffic, this ongoing imbalance reflects the enduring effects of past infrastructure decisions on neighborhood health, quality of life, and environmental justice across Pasadena.³⁸

Oral History Project

Overview

Allegra Consulting was retained by the City of Pasadena to conduct an Oral History Project comprising a series of oral history interviews, production of an oral history documentary titled *Amplify*, and a report of findings titled *710 Reconnecting Communities Oral History Report*. The Oral History Project documents the experiences of people displaced by the construction of the 710 Freeway in Pasadena. The project “endeavored to capture and honor the diverse stories of those impacted by the SR-710 Freeway construction.”³⁹

The oral histories completed as part of the project add nuance and provide a richer understanding of the events surrounding the construction of the freeway in the 1960s. They supplement the more traditional historical record and serve “a vital role in preserving the rich tapestry of human experience by capturing personal stories and voices often overlooked”

³⁷ Ong et. al., 57.

³⁸ Ong et. al., 57.

³⁹ Allegra Consulting, “710 Reconnecting Communities Oral History Report,” prepared for the City of Pasadena City Manager’s Office, March 2025, 10.

otherwise.⁴⁰ Information not captured in official accounts and traditional sources is preserved through oral histories, and the daily lived experiences of the individuals who lived through and experienced the event is preserved. Not only that, but oral history:

serves as a powerful tool for education and empowerment. Through oral history, we gain insight into the social, cultural, and political contexts that have shaped communities over time. It helps us understand how historical events have impacted individuals and groups, highlighting both change and continuity. Moreover, oral history fosters empathy and understanding by giving voice to those who have experienced marginalization, trauma, and displacement, thereby contributing to collective healing and social justice. [...] By valuing and integrating oral history into our historical understanding, we honor the diverse voices that contribute to our shared humanity and compel us to work towards a future that recognizes and learns from the past.⁴¹

Methodology

Allegra Consulting conducted community outreach from April to July 2024 to engage with and identify residents and their descendants who were displaced by the construction of the 710 Freeway. Allegra also collaborated with stakeholders, as well as area churches and organizations, to identify affected residents and their families. They shared project information on the City of Pasadena's website, the social media feeds of the City of Pasadena as well as several city council members, local news platforms (including *Pasadena Now*, *Colorado Boulevard*, *Pasadena Star News*, and *Rafu Shimpō*), and city council district newsletters. Physical advertising included posters in area bus shelters and printed posters and flyers displayed in public places and community centers. Allegra attended outreach meetings and events, held meetings with local organizations and institutions, including churches and community organizations, and created a dedicated telephone line through which residents could access the project team and share their stories. The goal of Allegra's community engagement was to reach displaced residents and their descendants, displaced businesses, and displaced organizations and institutions. They also sought to reach those who had been impacted but not displaced by the construction of the 710 Freeway. An online survey was also posted on the City's website, the results of which are summarized below. The survey was posted in English, Spanish, and Japanese.

⁴⁰ Allegra, 7.

⁴¹ Allegra, 7.

The oral history interviews completed as part of the project were recorded via audio or video and transcribed (the transcriptions for the video interviews are available online, and links are found in the summary report).

The *Amplify* documentary is a powerful combination of historical background and personal stories taken from the team’s oral history interviews. It features clips of former residents sharing their memories about the events surrounding the SR-710 construction. It captures the voices of those displaced, weaving narrative about the history of the freeway with the intensely impactful stories gleaned from the interviews. It captures the multitude of emotions experienced by residents then and now, proving insight into the lasting impact the construction of the SR-710 had on the city’s residents. The documentary is available online on the City of Pasadena’s YouTube channel [here](#).

Summary of Findings

The *710 Reconnecting Communities Oral History Report* summarizes the oral histories collected as part of the project and the community engagement efforts that identified residents and their descendants. In doing so, it records the stories of those who lived through or were impacted by the construction of the SR-710.

The online survey conducted by Allegra Consulting gathered data on individuals, businesses, and institutions displaced. The results are below:⁴²

SUCCESS METRICS	
Identification of Residents, Organizations, and Businesses Displaced/Impacted	
Survey Responses: 159	
Displaced Residents, Descendants, and Addresses: Residents: 49* Addresses: 45 *Of the 49 displaced residents, 3 people did not take the survey, and 4 of the respondents cited the same address	Impacted but Not Displaced: 116 Respondents and Residents Number of Interviews and Stories Conducted and Completed: 32 one-on-one and group interviews and stories collected.

⁴² Excerpted from Allegra, 12.

Displaced Businesses: 4 Identified by Allegra, and an additional 38 businesses identified by ARG = 42 displaced businesses Displaced Organizations/ Institutions: 3	Number of Videos Produced by KPAS and MD Productions: 14 Video Interviews completed to date
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The demographic makeup of survey respondents is as follows:

- 29.89 percent were Black/African American
- 12.64 percent were Hispanic
- 17.81 percent were Japanese/Japanese American
- 28.74 percent were White
- The remainder of respondents were in other racial/ethnic groups, including Indigenous, Asian Indian, Korean, other Asian groups, and other racial/ethnic groups.

Questions asked as part of the survey included:

- Please identify a historical timeline of when your family/you moved to Pasadena.
- Were you aware of the SR-710 Freeway construction?
- Was your family displaced due to the SR-710 Freeway construction?
- How old were you when you were displaced?
- Did laws such as racist covenants, redlining, and other discriminatory policies, including home lending, dictate where your family could move?
- Was your family's place of worship, cultural organization, market, or places your family spent time displaced due to the SR 710 construction?

As noted above, the survey had 159 responses. Of those, 49 reported being displaced. The report notes that, "this number, while seemingly small, still underscores the lasting effects of the freeway project on the community. This disruption had enduring consequences, particularly for those families directly affected, contributing to long-term challenges in rebuilding community ties and maintaining generational wealth."⁴³

The survey also queried respondents who were not displaced but were impacted by the SR-710 Freeway construction.⁴⁴ Questions included:

- Was your quality of life profoundly impacted by the SR-710 construction?

⁴³ Allegra, 27.

⁴⁴ Allegra, 34-35.

- How was your life profoundly impacted by the SR-710 construction?
- Did anyone in your family or you suffer health problems related to the SR-710 Freeway construction?

As part of the project effort, Allegra conducted 22 one-on-one interviews with displaced residents or their descendants, four group interviews with area organizations, and one panel discussion.⁴⁵ The project team notes that during the interviews, participants “experienced deeply layered emotions, reflecting a complex interplay of loss, resilience, and the enduring consequences of systematic racism. The interviews were often emotional, with interviewees expressing sadness, feelings of community disruption, anger, and frustration over systematic racism. There were also concerns about the city's leadership and a lack of trust in the government to act in their individual and the greater community's best interests. Many interviewees conveyed a deep sense of ongoing injustice and inequality, questioning who is truly listening and whether their voices even matter.”⁴⁶ During the interviews, the team also collected articles, journals, photographs, and other archival materials shared by respondents, adding further layers of history and story to the project.

The completed interviews reveal the complexity of residents’ experiences, including that of the Japanese American and Mexican American communities in the area.⁴⁷ Japanese American residents drew parallels between their forced incarceration during World War II, after which they had to restart their lives from scratch, and the displacement forced upon them by the construction of the freeway. In both instances, they had to find new homes and schools, relocating their lives unwillingly.

The oral histories confirmed information that was at times implied but not explicitly expressed in traditional historic sources. For example, through these interviews, Allegra was able to confirm that “renters in Pasadena faced profound challenges. Unlike homeowners who had access to compensation through various property acquisition processes such as hardship acquisitions, fee acquisitions, or eminent domain proceedings, renters often received little to no financial assistance or relocation support. This left them especially vulnerable to financial instability caused

⁴⁵ The group interviews were conducted with the West Pasadena Residents Association (WPRA), NAACP Pasadena, 710 Restorative Justice Coalition, and Sequoyah School. The videotaped panel discussion was conducted with First AME Church.

⁴⁶ Allegra, 13.

⁴⁷ Allegra, 21-23.

by sudden evictions.”⁴⁸ One displaced renter said, “I was in my early twenties when my sister called me at work to tell me we had to move immediately. We weren’t given a 30-day notice or any compensation. It was extremely stressful, and I had to sleep on someone’s sofa until I could find better living arrangements.”⁴⁹ This information is left out of the historic record and can only be inferred by a study of the circumstances surrounding the construction of the freeway, property acquisition proceedings, and brief and incomplete discussions in historic newspapers uncovered as part of the *Historical Data/Setting* report of the Historic Project.

In addition to delving into the experience of individuals displaced by the SR-710 Freeway construction, the project also captured details on the displacement of community places and organizations at the time. Approximately 45 percent of survey respondents stated that their place of worship, cultural organization, market, or places where their family spent time were displaced. This helped the project team convey the impact the 710 Freeway construction had on community cohesion as well as the communities’ cultural and social fabric.

The interviews also helped capture the long-term impacts of the freeway from several perspectives, such as the loss of generational wealth. As part of the project, Davis Demographics/MGT completed an analysis of estimated property values belonging to three displaced residents. Estimates were obtained by averaging the appraised land and improvement values of single-family home properties within a half-mile radius of each displaced resident’s address. A table with each address and the current estimated value is included below:⁵⁰

Name	Address Displaced	Est. Land Value	Est. Improvement Value	Est. Total Value
Porfirio Frausto	Cypress Street, Below Villa	\$629,682.32	\$323,552.65	\$ 953,234.97
Orrin Tracy	325, 327, and 329 Kensington Pl.	\$942,490.56	\$1,779,239.50	\$2,721,730.06
Rick Osaka	170 S. Pasadena Ave.	\$1,177,504.50	\$756,082.05	\$1,933,586.55

⁴⁸ Allegra, 17.

⁴⁹ Salvador Lambarem interview qtd. in Allegra, 17.

⁵⁰ Excerpted from Allegra, 45.

Through the oral history component, the project reveals the variety of ways that residents and their descendants were impacted by the construction of the freeway. It provides insight into the families disrupted and “the broader social and familial networks that were disrupted, necessitating a comprehensive approach to addressing the impacts of displacement on diverse types of households on past and future transportation construction projects.”⁵¹ It also documents stories of resilience and empowerment in the face of an event over which residents had no control. For example, residents spoke of individuals who purchased houses slated for demolition and moved them to locations outside the freeway footprint.⁵² Gwendolyn Brown, daughter of the pastor of First AME – once located at 107 N. Vernon Avenue – recounted how the congregation was able to save part of the church: “Fortunately, church elders managed to salvage the beautiful stained-glass windows and front door of the church before bulldozers arrived.”⁵³ This type of rich detail was not captured in the historical record, and without the aid of oral histories, could be lost.

These oral histories – and others like them – help gather information about communities of color, which until recently, were not deemed worthy of documentation in the historical record and about which so much information has been lost. The oral history project places the historic events in the context of people’s real lives and makes it personal. It gives voice to those who have been left out of the historical record and preserves their stories for future generations.

Conclusion

The Historic Project for the Reconnecting Pasadena 710 Master Plan provides background on the events leading up to, surrounding, and occurring in the wake of the construction of the SR-710. Through historical context, quantitative data, and personal stories, the Historic Project paints a picture of the community that existed within the footprint of the freeway and the impacts of freeway construction on that community. The consequences are far-reaching and are still felt to this day by former residents and their descendants, even as the community’s physical remnants have been lost. By laying out the historic circumstances surrounding the freeway and its impacts, City leadership can gain a better understanding of how to move forward.

⁵¹ Allegra, 38.

⁵² Allegra, 88.

⁵³ Allegra, 80.