

## Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System

---

Relocation of Families Displaced by Expressway Development: Milwaukee Case Study

Author(s): Patricia A. House

Source: *Land Economics*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Feb., 1970), pp. 75-78

Published by: [University of Wisconsin Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3145426>

Accessed: 07-11-2015 17:03 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System and University of Wisconsin Press are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Land Economics*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

complicating the evaluation of its relative successes and failures. It is therefore likely that MXC will provide more insight into problems of (1) resettlement rather than renovation, and (2) planning for substantial changes in social institutions, rather

than for restructuring those in existent urban communities.

JAMES R. PRESCOTT

*Associate Professor (Economics),  
Iowa State University,  
Ames, Iowa*

## Relocation of Families Displaced by Expressway Development: Milwaukee Case Study

URBAN RENEWAL AND expressway programs have caused the displacement and relocation of large numbers of families, many from ethnic and racial minorities.<sup>1</sup> This study analyzed the impact of relocation on about 600 families displaced by construction of the North-South Expressway on the Inner-Northside of Milwaukee.<sup>2</sup> The most startling result was that living conditions were *improved* for the majority of families, and changes in housing induced positive psychological attitudes. But relocation increased the concentration of Negroes within the ethnic area.

Previous studies have concentrated on relocation occasioned by renewal and have suggested that expressway projects have a different impact.<sup>3</sup> Our findings indicate that the results of relocation are more dependent on local conditions than on the type of displacing force.

*Methodology and Limitations.* Relocated families were traced through official city directories, the best source available. Comparisons of conditions before and after relocation were made, first at the general aggregate level using Census data, and then at the individual level, based on a 25% sample interview survey.<sup>4</sup> Analysis focused on the relocation pattern and the effect of relocation on housing quality, living space, costs, and occupancy structure. Three limitations of the study must be noted. First, since it was confined to a post-relocation analysis, comparison of before and after conditions relied on the memory

of the people involved. Secondly, it was restricted in scope to the spatial and residential effects of relocation due to limited time and funds; but, as Gans has noted, the success of relocation cannot be judged on physical criteria alone.<sup>5</sup> Thirdly, as a case study, it yielded certain unique features, making generalization difficult.

*The Displacement Area and Its Residents.* The North-South Expressway bi-

<sup>1</sup> The number of families displaced by urban projects in the past fifteen years was estimated at 202,000. See, Daniel Thursz, *Where Are They Now? A Study of the Impact of Relocation of Former Residents of Southwest Washington who served in a Demonstration Project* (Washington D.C. Government Printing Office: Health and Welfare Council of the National Capital Area, 1966), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Patricia A. House, "Families Displaced by Expressway Development in Milwaukee; A Geographical Study of Relocation" (unpublished M.S. thesis in Geography), University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1968.

<sup>3</sup> Past studies and issues have been fully discussed by, Chester Hartman, "Housing of Relocated Families," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, November 1964, pp. 166-186.

<sup>4</sup> The sample was obtained by abstracting every fourth name from the list of pre-relocation addresses. This yielded a sample of 81 families. A questionnaire was constructed and administered by the researcher. Although returns were low (only 55% successfully completed due to families having moved again, refusal to answer or failure to make contact), the sample was tested and found to be representative of the relocating population on four criteria, namely, race, distance of movement, family size, and income.

<sup>5</sup> Herbert J. Gans. "The Human Implication of Current Redevelopment and Relocation Planning," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, August 1962, pp. 15-25.

sects the city's Negro area and, according to the 1960 Census, 70% of the residents in the sixteen blocks cleared were Negro. Housing conditions varied from predominantly "poor" at the southern, inner-city end of the zone, to "good" at the northern end (Table I). Overall, conditions were below average for the city. Housing consisted mainly of duplexes and single family homes rather than multiples. There was little overcrowding and a higher level of home-ownership than is common in central cities. Housing costs were among the lowest in the city for renters and owners, and the rent/income ratio was only 13%.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, although housing was structurally quite poor, the other characteristics created a relatively stable Negro neighborhood.

*The Impact of Relocation.* Relocation was characterized by the predominance of short distance movement and resettlement on the city's Northside. The mean distance of movement was 1.45 miles. Forty-six percent of the families relocated within one mile of their original locations and 78% within two miles. These findings are in line with previous results, falling between the extremes of dispersion, as in Boston<sup>7</sup> and Washington,<sup>8</sup> and concentration, as in Providence.<sup>9</sup> The tendency for reconcentration of relocated families has been demonstrated in past studies. From this expressway clearance, 70% of the families relocated in blocks where they were the only relocatees. Only 4% relocated in blocks contiguous with the clearance area. Families were unevenly distributed through the city, 97% relocating on the Northside, only six families on the Southside and only five on the Eastside.

Many other studies have reported deterioration in housing conditions when families are moved.<sup>10</sup> The Milwaukee survey showed that the proportion of families living in "poor" housing was reduced from 39% to only 14% after relocation (Tables I and II). Post-relocation housing was *perceived* as better by 62% of the respondents, while only 23% reported their conditions as worse. The comparative success of relocation in this case may be attributed to better overall housing conditions here than in larger American cities; it certainly could not be attributed to aid rendered by pub-

TABLE I—COMPARISONS OF RESIDENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS FOR AREAS OCCUPIED BEFORE AND AFTER RELOCATION

Characteristics	Before	After
Housing Quality		
% sound	60.5	85.0
% deteriorating	34.4	12.6
% dilapidated	5.1	1.5
Overcrowding		
% dwellings with 1.01+ persons	14.0	8.5
Housing Costs		
Average House Value	\$9,681	\$12,312
Average Monthly Rent	\$ 60	\$ 72
Occupancy Structure		
% Owner-occupied	44.0	41.0
% Renter-occupied	56.0	59.0

Source: United States Census of Housing, 1960.

TABLE II—COMPARISON OF INDIVIDUAL HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS BEFORE AND AFTER RELOCATION

Characteristics	Before	After
Housing Quality		
% Good/Fair	60.5	86.0
% Poor	39.5	14.0
Overcrowding/Living Space		
% more space after		62.0
% no change		29.0
% less space after		9.0
Housing Costs		
Average monthly mortgage payment	\$67	\$75
Average monthly rent	\$45	\$72
Occupancy Structure		
% Owner-occupied	50.0	70.0
% Renter-occupied	41.0	30.0

Source: Sample Interview Survey conducted by Researcher in January 1968.

<sup>6</sup> Gans., *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Hartman, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> Thursz, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Sidney Goldstein and Basil Zimmer, *Residential Displacement and Resettlement of the Aged: A Study of the Problems of Rehousing Aged Residents Displaced by Freeway Construction in Downtown Providence, Providence, Rhode Island, Division on the Aged, 1960.*

<sup>10</sup> See, footnote 3.

lic agencies or to public housing, both of which played little part in relocating families. Probably the high home-ownership levels and limited number of multiple units contributed to the successful outcome.

Relocates moved to less crowded areas and units. Sixty-two percent experienced an increase in living space (defined in persons/room), 29% retained the same amount, and only 9% reported a reduction. Even families that were not crowded before benefited from increased space after relocation. These relocates fared better than most of their predecessors in other American cities.

Housing costs increased substantially with relocation as families moved into more expensive areas and units. The survey showed an average rent increase of 12%, from \$67 to \$75 per month, and an average increase in monthly mortgage payments of 61%, from \$45 to \$72. The latter is due to resumption of mortgage commitments by families who had previously owned their own homes. Increases in housing costs were reported by 50% of the families, while only 20% reported reductions; increases were proportionally much greater than reductions (an average of 70% compared with 29%).

Increased costs were expected but they did raise two issues: first, were these increases attributable to improved conditions as implied by public agencies, and secondly, did they become a burden on families affected? The first issue is difficult to evaluate because housing costs depend on more than quality. With the housing shortage and operation of the dual housing market (where Negroes pay higher prices than whites for comparable housing), inordinately high prices may have resulted. At least increased costs were accompanied by better housing, which has not always been true in the past. On the second issue, nearly half the families were paying a higher proportion of their income for housing after relocation. The proportion of families above the 20% allocation level increased from 38% to 55%, and those experiencing difficulty meeting costs increased from 9% to 18%. More unfavorable results would have been forthcoming had it not been for income increases by

the majority, principally by the wife becoming a wage-earner. Higher incomes, whether achieved through choice or necessity, helped absorb increased costs. For the 25% of families who were retired or unemployed and unable to increase their income, the burden of increased costs was acute.

About a third of the families experienced change in occupancy status resulting from relocation, with a net increase in homeowners (from 59% to 70%). Although the percentage change was small, the increase is significant in view of the high initial level of ownership.

The relocating population as a whole derived considerable physical benefits from relocation, which induced positive psychological attitudes to relocation. The exception was for the retired and elderly living on fixed incomes, especially those who had owned their own homes before relocation. Being unable to afford houses elsewhere, these families were forced into unsatisfactory rented accommodations.

*The Relocation Process.* Relocation is a non-random, decision-making process involving environmental limitation of choice and consumer preference. Predictive models of the process may be constructed, given basic data about the environment and family needs. With available housing forming the fundamental field of choice for relocating families, certain variables affecting relocation were racial factors, financial factors, and housing quality.

With the established pattern of racial segregation in Milwaukee, and a predominantly Negro relocating population, racial constraints were highly significant. Negro families moved shorter distances than white families (0.95 miles compared with 1.25 miles), and hence were more likely to relocate in the Negro area. In fact, three quarters of the Negro families interviewed had relocated in blocks which had some Negro residents in 1960, compared with only a quarter of the white families.<sup>11</sup> Discrimination against Negroes, whether directly in refusal to rent or sell to them, or indirectly through Negro fears of rebuff,

<sup>11</sup> See, footnote 8.

plus avoidance of Negro areas by white families, were elements of racial constraint. Displacement from the heart of ethnic areas increased concentration of Negroes within the ethnic area and accelerated its expansion. It did not result in desegregation.<sup>12</sup>

The financial limitations on where a family can live are obvious but difficult to demonstrate. Adopting the 20% allocation guideline, the average family could afford to spend about \$100 a month on housing after relocation. For renters, 90% of the families moved to blocks with monthly rents of \$90 or less. By moving the same distance, families could have relocated in high rent areas, as there was a mosaic of rent levels. Avoidance of high rent blocks suggests a price limitation. The lowest rent areas (\$30-\$50 per month) failed to attract relocatees, despite low cost and proximity. For owners, 83% moved to blocks having average house values below the city average of \$15,000. Nearby cheap housing was again avoided. The deterrent to relocation in nearby low cost housing was its poor quality. An additional deterrent to homeownership was fear of imminent renewal.

The relocation pattern can be largely understood by: (a) racial constraints, restricting 97% of the relocatees to the Northside; (b) poor quality of nearby available housing, discouraging relocation near the expressway; and (c) high cost of housing in areas outside the central city, leading to the predominance of short distance movement. Analysis of the study area terminated at this stage; but the next step in development of a relocation model would be to apply probability simulation leading to quantification. There is scope for developing models on relocating populations for use in studies of residential mobility.

*Expressway and Renewal Projects as Displacement Factors.* Basic differences in the aims of these two types of projects have led to the suggestion that their impact would differ. Housing conditions might be expected to improve more with relocation from a renewal project than with relocation from an expressway project. There may be several reasons for this. Renewal

aims to eliminate blight and improve housing, whereas expressways aim to improve transportation. Renewal agencies have a legal responsibility to rehouse those displaced in "decent, safe and sanitary dwellings within the means of displaced families and conveniently located to their place of work," whereas expressway commissions have no such obligation.<sup>13</sup> Besides, renewal affects areas of poor housing almost exclusively whereas expressways remove good as well as poor housing.

Our findings do not support this expectation. Housing conditions improved more in this case than they have in many renewal studies. The success of relocation is particularly surprising in view of the ethnic composition of the relocatees and the lack of official aid. The degree of success apparently depends more on the housing situation in each city than on the nature of the displacing force. However, final conclusions must await parallel studies of renewal and expressway relocatees in the same city.

### Conclusions

Most families benefited from relocation, although increased costs were a serious problem for the elderly on fixed incomes. Psychological as well as physical improvements accrued to relocated families. In future relocation studies the emphasis should be changed from a descriptive to a dynamic approach. There is need to develop modelling and simulation techniques for predicting relocation impact. Our aim is that, as theoretical understanding of the process increases, effective planning for the needs of displaced families will be achieved.

PATRICIA A. HOUSE

Ottawa, Canada

<sup>12</sup> Mel Ravitz, "The Effects of Urban Renewal on Community Racial Problems," *Journal of Social Issues*, No. 4, 1957, pp. 38-49.

<sup>13</sup> Title I of the National Housing Act, 1949, quoted in Jeanne R. Lowe, *Cities in a Race with Time* (New York, Vintage Books; 1968), p. 206.