

Robert Moses: Enemy of Railroads

Born in New York City in 1888, Robert Moses attended Yale and then Oxford University, where in 1913 he wrote a doctoral thesis on the British Civil Service. He praised it as the means by which the “upper division”—by which he meant the wealthier men drawn from the “best” schools—ruled. Moses became a close ally of New York Gov. Al Smith, who in the 1930s helped lead the pro-fascist American Liberty League, which in 1933 attempted a coup against Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Moses became both New York City’s Park Commissioner and its Construction Coordinator. In 1945-46, he planned out the construction of the Van Wyck Express-

way, to run from the Borough of Manhattan into the northern part of the Borough of Queens, and then to the southern part of Queens, close to what would become Idlewild Airport—now called Kennedy Airport. At its peak, the Van Wyck could accommodate only 2,300 cars per hour. A leading city planner proposed that in the expressway’s median strip or alongside it, there be built a mass transit train system that could accommodate, at its peak, 40,000 persons per hour. Moses crushed this sane proposal, so that it never saw the light of day. He deliberately built every expressway and bridge in and around New York City and parts of New York State that he had a hand in, so that it would offer no access to mass transit or heavier rail traffic.

Moses brought this anti-rail bias with him when, in 1956, he held several meetings with Gen. Lucius Clay to plan out the Interstate and Defense Highways Act.