

In all the DBMA campaigns, downtown was presented as a single entity in much the same way as Hollywood, the Miracle Mile, and Westwood Village were by their respective boosters. DBMA advertisements went so far as to imply that the precinct functioned like an integrated business development. Yet the very existence of such material implied that downtown's once impregnable position was no longer secure; at best, the new promotional programs could keep the core's trade from further eroding. Unlike Eberle, the DBMA never tried to advance downtown at the expense of outlying centers, for most of its leaders now had substantial businesses in both places.<sup>26</sup> Their objective was to find a balance that would enable both territorial expansion and core stability.

#### PARKING

No matter more concerned the DBMA and other parties with an interest in downtown than did parking. During the 1930s, adequate off-street space for automobiles was considered a central factor—perhaps the decisive one—in bringing renewed vitality to the precinct, a belief that was widely shared in cities coast to coast.<sup>27</sup> After the war, the issue seemed even more urgent. Soon after victory over Japan, the *Times* cast the parking problem as “Gargantua”—a latter-day King Kong, poised to destroy the city center as swiftly as Admiral Yamamoto had destroyed the fleet at Pearl Harbor (figure 144). Despite endless rhetoric, efforts to improve off-street facilities remained uncoordinated and piecemeal.

Throughout the 1930s the city's major department stores continued to address the matter individually. Instead of planning more multistory parking garages, however, department store executives focused on the expeditious use of car lots. The most integrated plan came from Robinson's, which, as part of its 1934 renovation program, included a new motor entrance at the rear from which attendants drove cars to an adjacent surface lot, replicating the arrangement at Bullock's Wilshire.<sup>28</sup> But most emporia could not expand so conveniently, and instead had to reach accords with independent lot operators. By 1935, the May Company had established such relationships with a half-dozen parking businesses to supplement its own garage, which had been designed with an excess capacity less than a decade earlier (figure 145).<sup>29</sup> Bullock's, whose central location in terms of pedestrian movement rendered it among the least accessible to motorists, created the most elaborate scheme among retailers, securing space at no less than twenty-five lots within a five-block radius of the store by 1940 (figure 146).

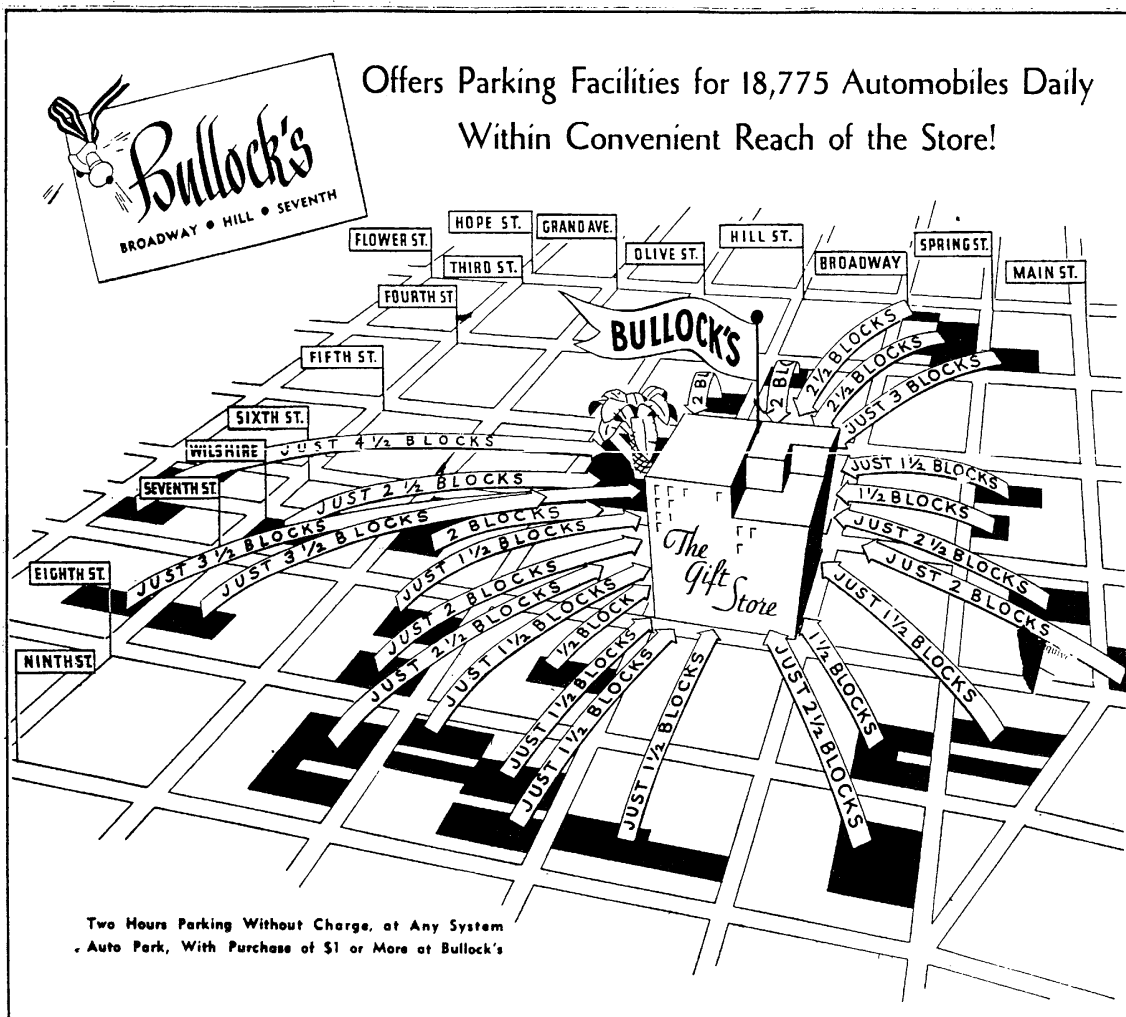
Downtown business interests were generally supportive of plans for a regional network of high-speed, limited-access freeways, which began to be advanced in the late 1930s.<sup>30</sup> All these proposals called for routes from every direction to converge on the city center. Since it was generally believed that improving access to the core would restore the district's competitiveness with outlying centers, retailers heralded the freeway program

as the salvation of their downtown plants (figure 147). But these results could only be realized if parking capacity was substantially augmented and parking spaces conveniently related to freeway interchanges. Calls for a regional freeway plan prompted initiatives to create a unified parking plan for downtown. The first scheme was unveiled in 1941 by a group called United Taxpayers.<sup>31</sup> To cure the precinct's "heart disease," the proposal required purchase of fifty adjacent blocks around the core area for surface lots. Customer charges would be minimal: \$.15 per half-day of use. Work would be financed through first-mortgage bonds on the acquired property and from patron revenues. Still, it would be necessary to remove the acreage from the tax rolls, a proposition that ensured the idea a swift demise.<sup>32</sup>

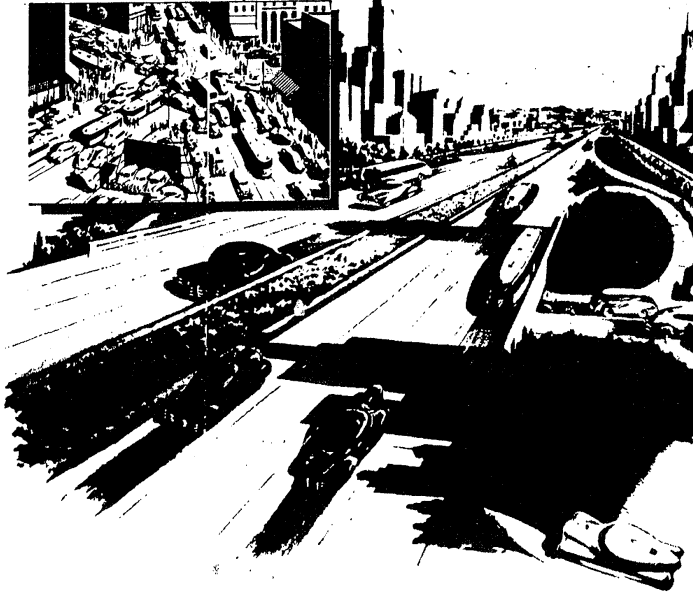
Devising a feasible alternative preoccupied both the city's planning department and especially the DBMA during the war years. The latter commissioned what the Urban Land Institute called one of the most extensive studies of its kind in the nation. Presented in January 1945, the proposal called for establishing a single agency—public or otherwise—to create a comprehensive program to develop permanent, well-situated facilities that could hold around 45,000 cars.<sup>33</sup> By that November two new sur-

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Bullock's downtown store. Advertisement showing car lots available to customers. (*Los Angeles Times*, 9 December 1940, II-3.)






# WHICH?



That depends on YOU!

### Do You Want to...

-  Save approximately one-half of the time it now takes you to get home from work?
-  Drive farther... see more... with far greater safety, economy and comfort?
-  Eliminate the traffic jams that make today's driving a hazard and ordeal?
-  Travel rapidly and comfortably in uncrowded, streamlined motor buses...?
-  Provide for the tremendous number of passenger autos that will travel our streets?
-  Keep California in step with America's parade of progress and advancement?

**...then make sure the State Legislature votes "yes" on the Freeways bills!**

Sponsors of the bill include:  
 California State Chamber of Commerce  
 League of California Cities  
 County Supervisors Association of California  
 Automobile Club of Southern California  
 California State Automobile Association

California is desperately in need of a modern state-wide network of city and suburban freeways. Indefinite and disastrous delay in construction may result if the State Legislature fails to vote "yes" on the Freeways Bills now waiting for its action. Take no chances! Ask your state senator and assemblyman to vote "yes"! Make known your desire for a greater, safer California.

**Write today to your State Senator and Assemblyman to vote "YES" on the State Freeways Bills! Don't leave it to someone else!**

*These bills provide for plans and construction of the new freeways, and their financing through a 1% gasoline tax (to be spent in each county in proportion to automobile registrations).*



**Bullock's** DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES

Telephone Tucker 4103 for the names of your State Senator and Assemblyman

face lots, with a combined capacity of 1,300 cars, had opened under the DBMA's auspices. Two months later a meeting was convened with the mayor and civic groups to broaden the campaign; by March 1946, one of those parties, the Central Business District Association, completed a complementary plan for extensive parking areas between Flower Street and the path of the Harbor Freeway, then under construction. Soon thereafter, the DBMA organized its own subsidiary group, the Los Angeles Downtown Parking Association, for purposes of implementation, vowing to create new space for 10,000 cars over the next three years.<sup>34</sup> The association's efforts, however, soon refocused on the creation of an enormous parking facility at Pershing Square.

Bounded by Hill, Olive, Fifth, and Sixth streets, Pershing Square had become a strategic location with the growth of downtown west of Broadway and north of Seventh during the 1920s. Most parking initiatives of the period focused on peripheral sites, which were best suited to employee parking but considered too far removed from the retail core to attract many shoppers—the group most prone to abandon downtown. By contrast, Pershing Square lay a short distance from the densest part of the city center, including three of its major department stores, yet, like several of the early multistory garages, it was close enough to the edge to enable convenient vehicular access. Proposals began to advance in the late 1920s for an underground garage there that could accommodate as many as 3,000 cars, but the huge cost combined with the economic downturn made the plans impracticable.<sup>35</sup> The site's appeal nevertheless grew steadily over the ensuing years as the parking situation seemed to deteriorate.

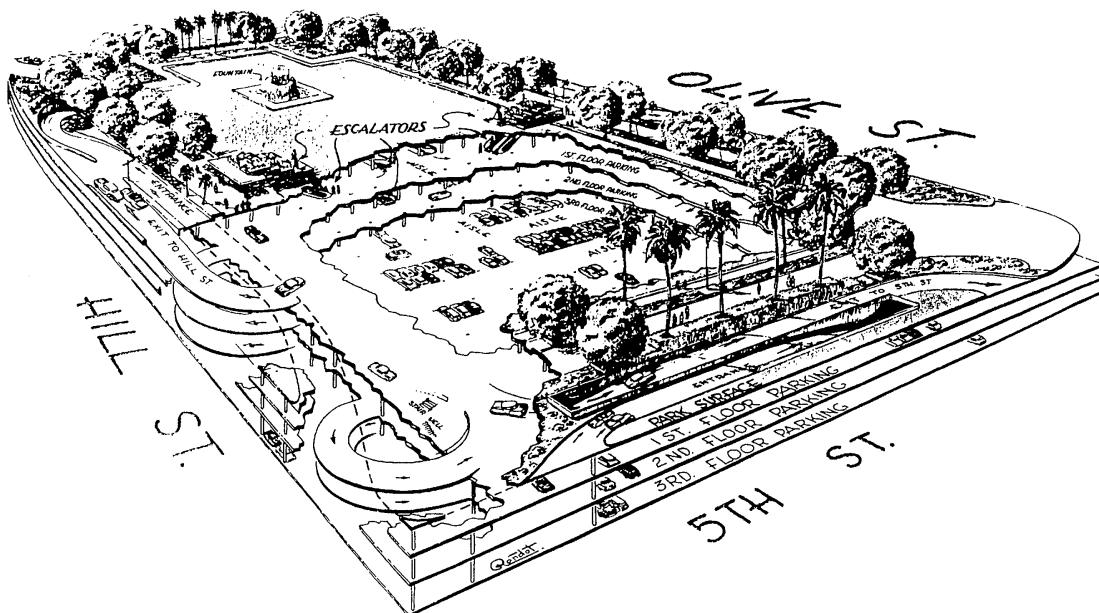
Not surprisingly, then, Pershing Square emerged as the DBMA's top priority. The association commissioned a preliminary study, which was unveiled in January 1947 and strenuously promoted in the months that fol-

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Bullock's downtown store. Advertisement supporting implementation of freeway plan. (*Los Angeles Times*, 19 March 1945, III-3.)

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Pershing Square Garage, Fifth, Sixth, Hill, and Olive streets, Los Angeles 1949–1952, Stiles Clements, architect. (City Planning Commission, *Accomplishments* 1950, 21.)



lowed. That April, voters approved an amendment enabling lease of the land beneath the square to a private-sector party for development as a garage. Yet another three years elapsed before opposition, mainly by public transit interests, and other obstacles were surmounted. The DBMA persisted tenaciously—lobbying public support, working behind the scenes, twice soliciting firms to undertake the venture. Finally, ground was broken in February 1951. When completed a year and a half later, the garage was hailed as a major achievement (figure 148). Still, the 1,500 spaces it provided, after half a decade of intense activism, fell far short of the DBMA's overall goal.<sup>36</sup>

Nonetheless the Pershing Square garage was almost the only such large-scale project realized locally since the 1920s. Several modest facilities housing between 100 and 200 cars each were erected during the depression decade, but contributed little to the precinct's overall needs.<sup>37</sup> Los Angeles even lacked examples of open-air parking garages—"parking decks," as they were often called—which began to appear in a number of U.S. cities on the eve of World War II. Generally consisting of three to four levels and comprised of little more than structure and decking surfaces, these facilities averaged around half the per-square-foot construction cost of the multilevel enclosed garages of the previous decade. Since it had no heating or ventilating and minimal lighting systems, the parking deck enjoyed substantially lower operating expenses as well. Department stores were among the earliest sponsors of such projects, but independent parking companies were quick to see their advantages as well.<sup>38</sup>

Aside from Pershing Square, the only major garage to be realized in downtown Los Angeles between 1928 and 1953 was the seven-level structure built for the General Petroleum Company in 1948.<sup>39</sup> The scheme was not conceived to address shoppers' needs, but rather was a result of a 1946 municipal ordinance, the first of its kind in the country, that required all new commercial buildings downtown to include space for one automobile per 1,000 square feet of office floor area. The facility need not be within, but could lie no further than 1,500 feet from, the parent building. General Petroleum executives took advantage of this provision, selecting a less expensive site two blocks away from their new headquarters for the garage.<sup>40</sup> Holding nearly 500 cars at a time, the structure was among the first in the United States to have the parking surface slope as a continuous ramp from ground to roof levels, an arrangement that reduced the area required for vehicular movement as well as construction costs (figure 149). It was also an early example of a large, multilevel structure incorporating the economies of parking deck design. The garage became a national model, yet it had little immediate impact locally. With new construction downtown remaining a rarity, the ordinance proved ineffective as a quick means of adding to the precinct's parking capacity. The only other major project to be realized before the end of the Korean War was the Statler Center (1946–1952), a hotel-office building complex, which contained underground parking for 465 cars.<sup>41</sup>

If strategic initiatives did little to rectify parking conditions downtown, considerable progress was made through the more traditional method of expanding the quilt of privately owned car lots. Space thus created increased nearly threefold between 1930 and 1953.<sup>42</sup> In sharp contrast to what had occurred during the 1920s, few lots operating at the start of this period closed over the next two decades, owing to low demand for more intense use of downtown property. New lots were added through the 1930s as untenanted vintage buildings were demolished to minimize the tax burden.<sup>43</sup> After the war the process continued, as demand for new building sites failed to rebound while that for more parking space persisted. As a result, off-street parking conditions markedly improved, with an overall capacity in garages and surface lots of some 43,000 spaces, more than double the total figure of approximately 20,000 in 1930. Some of the increase was offset by the few new construction projects of the period as well as ongoing increases in the number of people driving to the city center, yet the improvement was a dramatic one. Downtown became more accessible to motorists than it had been for some three decades. Furthermore, major outlying centers begun in the 1920s were now experiencing conspicuous parking difficulties of their own.<sup>44</sup> Public perceptions may not have changed, and business leaders and city officials alike continued to anguish over parking, but finding off-street space for one's car was no longer a deterrent of consequence to shopping downtown.

#### P R E D I C A M E N T

Ultimately, the dilemma faced by those with interests in the central shopping district was not a matter of appearances, merchandising, or access, but rather one of physical configuration relative to escalating areawide needs. During a six-year period alone—1948 to 1954—retail sales in the metropolitan region rose by 50 percent, the largest such increase in the na-

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General Petroleum Garage, 750 S. Flower Street, Los Angeles, 1948, Wurdeman & Becket, architects; altered. (*Parking—How It Is Financed*, 10.)

