



WHAT
HAPPENED

On July 9, 1969, the federal government officially canceled plans to build the Riverfront Expressway.

Battles over a proposed **Riverfront Expressway** and the now-demolished **Rivergate Convention Center** have had a lasting impact on New Orleans' downtown riverfront.



A rendering of the Riverfront Expressway as presented to the City Council in 1966



Designed by the local architectural firm of Curtis and Davis Architects and Planners, the Rivergate featured a cantilevered roof with six gently curving barrel vaults. The expressionist-style building had 130,000 square feet of meeting space.

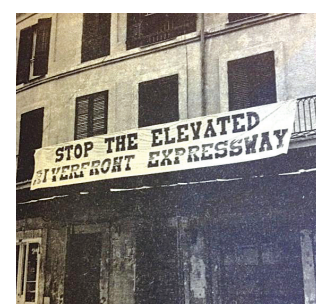


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The Expressway was initially proposed in 1946 by planner Robert Moses who recommended a six-lane elevated highway along the Mississippi River through the French Quarter linking Elysian Fields Avenue to the not-yet-built Pontchartrain Expressway. Moses said the expressway would improve traffic in and out of the city. Preservationists were concerned the expressway would destroy the character of the French Quarter. While the city and the federal government were at first in support of the idea, growing opposition in the 1960s helped lead to two pieces of legislation to protect historic sites from highway construction. In 1969, the Federal Highway Administration reversed its decision on the proposal. An expressway was instead built along Claiborne Avenue.

But before the project was canceled, a tunnel for the expressway was constructed under the city's Rivergate Convention Center, at the juncture of the river and Poydras and Canal streets. The Rivergate was completed in 1968 and was the city's first major convention space. The center's modern architecture featured a swooping roof that was compared to Australia's iconic Sydney Opera House. But in the 1980s, with the opening of the nearby larger convention center, Rivergate was closed.

Though preservationists fought to repurpose the building, it was demolished in 1995 to make way for Harrah's New Orleans Casino. The tunnel, however, is still there and is used for parking by Harrah's.



French Quarter citizens began protesting against the elevated expressway, eventually winning support from Interior Secretary Stewart Udall, who declared the Vieux Carré eligible for both the National Historic Landmark and National Register of Historic Places.