

# MANSFIELD MEMORIES: MANSFIELD'S BIG DIG. Town chooses radical \$2.9M plan to abolition grade crossings in 1950s

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By Kevin McNatt and Andrew Todesco

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*MANSFIELD - This is the second of a four-part series on the Underpass Project of the 1950s which eliminated grade-level train crossings.*

By the early 1950s, most citizens agreed that the grade crossings where Mansfield's streets and railroads met were dangerous. On the evening of July 16, 1952, the Board of Selectmen took a major step to solve the problem and change Mansfield forever.



This is the Chauncy Street bridge over the Rumford River before the underpass project. [Courtesy/Mansfield Historical Society]

The selectmen met until 1:20 am that night discussing the abolition of grade crossings. The board authorized Town Manager Ervin Welch and Chairman Royal B. Patriquin to investigate the abolition of all grade crossings along the main rail line (then commonly called the 'New Haven line').

An advisory committee was formed, and the Boston firm Charles Maguire and Associates was hired to produce a design. Maguire initially proposed a \$2 million plan calling for two underpasses, one overpass, the relocation of the Old Colony line and the rerouting of the Rumford River near Chauncy Street. Local officials worked with Maguire to refine the plan.

The scope of the project likely startled some residents. The revised plan had a price tag of \$2,972,000, and called for the following: the elimination of all grade crossings; a new train station on a section of Buck's Pond, which was to be filled for the construction of the Chauncy Street underpass; the underground relocation of the Rumford River for a quarter of a mile; four new parking lots to accommodate 229 vehicles; a new road (now known as Old Colony Way) to replace a stretch of the Old Colony line; and a "towering" overpass at Central Street.



Above is the Chauncy Street grade crossing with arms designated to stop vehicular traffic.

The Central Street overpass ran into immediate opposition from selectmen. The long approaches needed for clearance over the tracks would have created a terrible eyesore. Maguire reworked the plan to create a "new 140" (now known as Copeland Drive). The "new 140" would rejoin Central Street near the Foxborough border. This new underpass would eliminate the need to cross the railroad at Central or West streets, leaving those two roadways as dead ends bisected by the New Haven line. The "new 140" was designed to accommodate a flow of 6,000 vehicles daily by 1975.

The Maguire plan also called for a curving new underpass at North Main Street. This created a new one-way traffic pattern of Crocker Street, Oakland Street, and what we now call Mansfield Avenue. Destruction of retail property in the area would be minimal.

The most radical aspects of the Maguire plan were at Chauncy Street. It called for: a “portion” of the North Common to be taken for the new underpass; the extension of Chauncy Street (Route 106) over North Main Street through “Card’s Field” directly to Pratt Street; filling Buck’s Pond; the burial of a quarter-mile of the Rumford River; and a new train station to replace the aging one that was built in 1860. The plan called for 28-foot wide driving lanes that could handle up to 12,000 cars by 1975. The new plan was radical, but it was adopted.