

ANNABELLE: (Like a dramatic movie trailer narrator) In a world where Seattle has transits...

INDIA: Um, I'm pretty sure that we do have transits.

ANNABELLE: Well, not like the ones we have right now. We could have had a subway system.

INDIA: Woah, subway system? Like New York? Or London?

ANNABELLE: Yeah, we could have. Crazy, isn't it?

INDIA: (Enthusiastically) yessiree, sure is, yuuup, (laughter) yes indeedly

[intro music plays]

Voice 1: Seattle is...

Voice 2: Well, we don't use umbrellas.

Voice 3: Coffee. Computers?

Voice 1: It's a city with a needle.

Voice 2: Home to Sasquatch!

Voice 4: Home to the Museum of History and Industry.

Voice 2: Innovation.

Voice 1: Rain!

Voice 5: A story. A history.

[intro music finishes]

INDIA continues: Wowiee wow.....wowiee wow wowwww.... (laughter)

ANNABELLE: I'm Annabelle.

INDIA: And I'm India. We're youth advisors at the Museum of History and Industry in Seattle.

ANNABELLE: And this is *Rainy Day History*, a podcast by the MOHAI Youth Advisors that explores inclusion, exclusion, objects, people, and how the Seattle we know-

INDIA: - the questions we grapple with now about what it means to be a Seattleite...

ANNABELLE:— Are all part of a bigger story.

INDIA: This season we're taking a closer look at the physical and intangible marks that aspirations of growth have left on the city, and ways periods of growth have impacted Seattle communities differently.

ANNABELLE: This season was also recorded from our homes via the wonderful internet during the coronavirus pandemic.

INDIA: So stay safe, stay healthy, stay at home, and enjoy the show, whether it's raining outside or not.

[rain sounds fade in and out]

ANNABELLE: So, Seattle transit. Everyone loves to complain about it.

INDIA: Yup... too slow, too crowded, traffic stinks, not frequent enough, the light rail is too small...

ANNABELLE: And one of the things that a lot of people wish for the most, is a more expansive rapid transit system. The Link Light Rail is just one line, and the expansions to add stations take such-a-long-time.

INDIA: And transit really struggles at the polls in Seattle. In 2019, voters approved a potentially unconstitutional initiative, put forth by anti-tax crusader and quote-unquote “serial initiative filer” Tim Eyman to cut car tabs down to \$30, statewide.

ANNABELLE: The approval of ST3, the \$54 billion dollar light rail expansion approved by voters in 2016, had recently caused an increase in car tab bills.

INDIA: Eyman’s initiative, I-976, in response, could have a huge impact on the King County Metro, taking away a large portion of its funding. It would destroy programs that benefit low-income riders, as well as students.

ANNABELLE: This struggle is real, and has been going on for decades. One notable push for rapid transit came as part of the Forward Thrust campaign in the 1960s and 70s, which we’ll explore a bit more in a future episode.

INDIA: The Rapid Transit plan was impressive. It called for a 49-mile, 30-stop railway system that would have been completed in 1985, 17 years after it was introduced in 1968.

ANNABELLE: 12 proposals were up for a vote during the Forward Thrust, but Rapid Transit did the worst out of all of them by far.

INDIA: Forward Thrust was more than just a rapid transit proposal - it had ballot initiatives for parks, stadiums, low-income housing, and more. It was a package meant to improve life in Seattle in a comprehensive way. In fact, some people have even called it a “modern day Bogue plan”

[musical interlude – slow piano music – fades in during the above portion, fades out under next]

ANNABELLE: What does Bogue Plan mean?

INDIA: I’m so glad that you asked!

INDIA: The Bogue Plan was Seattle’s first attempt at comprehensive planning.

ANNABELLE: An extensive, 273-page plan, including dozens of maps, illustrations, diagrams and photographs, it proposed a grand, European-style civic center in the middle of what is now Belltown, turning Mercer Island into one massive park, and (we saved the best for last) a 90-mile transit system.

INDIA: It’s actually almost scary how similar the Bogue plan was to ST3, which was a plan to build light rails in Snohomish, King, and Pierce counties. Thankfully, that one was passed, so it doesn’t have to be included here as a failed transit system. That’s an honor that the Bogue Plan doesn’t share.

ANNABELLE: On the heels of the Great Fire in 1889 and the 1909 AYP Expo, which (is a throwback to last episode), city planners thought that Seattle needed to get ahead of an ongoing population boom.

INDIA: Seattle at the time was a quote “mill town metamorphosing into a metropolis” unquote - the population grew from 80,000 to 240,000 in a mere decade, and local newspapers heralded a real-estate boom.

ANNABELLE: In 1910 Seattle voters approved an amendment creating a 21-member Municipal Plans Commission, chartered (quote) "to procure plans for the arrangement of the city with a view to such expansion as may meet probable future demands." (unquote)

INDIA: R.H. Thomson, city engineer responsible for many of Seattle’s regrade projects, pushed the commission to hire Virgil Bogue to create the city’s first comprehensive plan.

ANNABELLE: You know, R.H. Thomson actually made the earliest known pitch for a Seattle subway system in 1906. In 1907 a local streetcar company also offered up the subway plan.

INDIA: Matthew Klinge, in [Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle](#), says that 1900s Seattle urban planning was somewhat of a rivalry between R.H. Thomson and John Olmsted (of the famous Olmsted brothers firm). Olmsted wanted to prioritize scenic parks above all else, whereas Thomson, an engineer, advocated for sewers, water mains, sidewalks.

ANNABELLE: Civil engineer Virgil Bogue, believed that quote “society should build things that benefit everybody - in both economic and aesthetic terms” unquote.

INDIA: He had advised on major construction projects from Arkansas to New Zealand - supervised construction of a trans-Andean railroad in Peru, portions of Northern Pacific Railway, railroad terminals in San Francisco & Baltimore, and Brooklyn’s Prospect Park.

ANNABELLE: The plan was dramatic and beautiful, but the city was already engaged in a costly public works binge of regrades, waterworks, sewers, roads, and canals.

INDIA: Seattleites of all classes voted no on the plan – working class residents and white collar business people concluded the Municipal Plans Commission would wield too much power or take money away from local needs like playgrounds.

ANNABELLE: The increasing power of neighborhood improvement clubs and civic organizations in Seattle politics, coupled with voters’ fatigue over spending money on public works projects were likely reasons for the plan’s failure.

INDIA: All 3 of Seattle’s major newspapers, *The Daily Mail*, *Star*, and *Post-Intelligencer* came out in stark opposition to the plan, with the *Daily Mail* even going so far as to say that the Bogue Plan would be a quote-unquote “lamentable spectacle” of taxpayer waste.

ANNABELLE: Seattle’s business establishment also didn’t like the plan, fearing that commerce would move north to the new civic center and leave their downtown holdings, in Pioneer Square, in the dust.

INDIA: On March 5, 1912, 40,000 Seattleites voted on the plan. The combination of these factors would prove to be insurmountable for the Bogue Plan, and it failed by an astonishing 10,000 vote margin, which was massive when taken into context that only 40,000 people voted at all.

ANNABELLE: The Bogue Plan was huge, but as they say, the bigger they are, the harder they fall, and the Bogue Plan definitely fell hard.

INDIA: The automobile took over Seattle and other cities; Bellevue & Kirkland became separate cities, linked to Seattle by floating bridges, and Bogue's proposed suburban parks became housing developments.

ANNABELLE: But... some of the harbor improvements in Bogue's plan were folded into Seattle's Harbor Island project. *And* minus the tunnel, the pathways and arterials for today's Metro transit largely follow the layout that Bogue designed.

INDIA: Something that *is* interesting to think about though, is that even if it was passed, World War 1 and the Great Depression likely would have forced progress to come to a halt, or even forced the abandonment of the project.

ANNABELLE: It's really interesting to think about all of these alternate timelines. Eric Scigliano, a writer for the *Seattle Times*, has written a few different articles exploring Seattle that might have been.

INDIA: We were lucky to sit down with him and learn more about the Bogue Plan!

[jaunty piano music plays and fades out underneath]

SUE (unnamed interviewer): First of all, could you give a short introduction of yourself and what you do?

ERIC: Well, I mean I've been a working journalist and author in Seattle for ooh, just for 40 years now. I write most often on environmental subjects. You know, last book was on arctic permafrost, previous ones on elephants and things. But I've also been a writer and editor at several local newspapers, magazines, a news-site or two. I write a little bit for *Crosscut* and *Post Alley* lately, and *National Geographic*, *Wildlife Watch* and *Politico*. I've been kind of puzzling off and on - I can't say all the time - but off and on about this curious city we live in or are around for a long time.

SUE: If you were to describe the Bogue Plan to someone who had never heard of it, how would you describe it?

ERIC: Well, if you could imagine one big scheme for transforming a still kind of fairly raw post-frontier city into a...gracious, grand, European capital: with broad highways, and boulevards going in a radial spoke, and a grand central boulevard parkway, a palace-like city hall, municipal center, scenic boulevards, parkways going all the way out to Mount Rainier and Stampede Pass, a tunnel under Lake Washington...Also try imagining Mercer Island as pretty much a wild park... (chuckles) A transformation of a city in one great big swoop. That would be the Bogue Plan.

SUE: Would you say that a lot of people in Seattle know about the Bogue Plan or that Seattle could have had rapid transit a long time ago?

ERIC: Well, whether Seattle could have had a rapid transit system there... the plan certainly proposed that and in fact R.H. Thomson the city engineer, who is kind of the Robert Moses of Seattle and very ambitious builder and regrade-er, proposed one four years earlier in 1906. So, there was certainly a drive for it and there were a few more attempts. You know, Bogue's plan would have had miles of a rail transit, about half of them underground, which was really ambitious in a you know, pretty raw mostly frontier city with (I believe) only a couple of hundred thousand people.

SUE: Could you give a short description on who Virgil Bogue was and why he was a person for this job?

ERIC: Well he was an engineer, not an architect, so he didn't just think in terms of buildings but in terms of broader plans and in terms of the technologies. He had toured Europe and had kind of taken in the great capitals there, of the Belle Epoque as they called it. And he was also someone who was ready to think big like R.H. Thomson and that appealed to *one* side of Seattle, which was likewise ready to think big.

Bogue was a kind of an ardent stalwart of the City Beautiful movement and it was a time when American cities were I think both feeling their own, kind of their own oats. There was a new sense of pride and expansion in the United States generally – this was coming in 1910 toward the, what turned out to be a pretty big grand expansionary epic, and at the same time looking toward the European capitals. Americans were taking grand tours in Europe, they were collecting European art, they were building mansions in imitation of European palaces, and building you know, train stations - the original Penn Station and Grand Central station in New York, the various Union Stations around the country - looking toward those grand European models. And it was, it was a time (chuckles) I mean America was somewhat of a nouveau riche country and wanted to both show its wealth and show that it also had culture and refinement.

SUE: What else was going on in Seattle around the time that also influenced the Bogue Plan?

ERIC: Well Seattle of course, just the year before, kind of celebrated its newfound wealth with the Alaska Yukon Pacific Exposition. The uh, you know, the tremendous infusion of money that came from the Canadian and Alaskan gold rushes for which Seattle kind of served as the supplier and commercial center and shipping off point. And new technologies were transforming the city - the automobile, I mean, it really was looking pretty far forward to imagine the network of boulevards and roads which the Bogue Plan also included, as well as rail technologies. Streetcars and subways weren't quite brand new, but they were expanding rapidly across the city. And we were transforming from a steam and horsepower-driven world to a petro, petrol and electric-driven world. And I should also mention that Seattle had also...the city of Seattle itself had also grown greatly recently. Sort of...1907 was a great year of annexation. When the city acquired Ballard, West Seattle, most of southeast Seattle, and uh nearly doubled in size almost overnight. So it was a time of ambition.

SUE: So, you were saying that a lot of Seattle's population was thinking big? Who were the people who weren't thinking big?

ERIC: (Chuckles) well I mean, you know big plans like this are upsetting, and there's...(chuckles) they often have some collateral damage. The downtown property owners, of course, landlords, were pretty scared. The center of commercial gravity in Seattle has been moving northward almost since the city was founded in part on filled land down along the tide flats at the south end of downtown now; what's now called Pioneer Square being the original center. The commercial and banking district had moved north there, retail was moving further north, and the idea that this would all get pulled up farther north, and their property would lose value led them to mount a pretty concerted campaign against it. It's not recorded in anything I can find but I found one really fascinating anti-Bogue Plan cartoon in the City Archives. Unfortunately, it had been excised from whatever document it was in and there is no identification for it, so the *Times* couldn't print it. But it showed kind of overbearing image of I guess what was supposed to be Bogue with a giant scalpel slicing off Queen Anne Hill, suggesting this was going to be the next regrade. And people there had just watched Denny Hill get regraded and a whole neighborhood displaced, sluiced down into the ground and into the bay, so there seems to have been a lot of fear that that would come further forward. And of course just, you know, property owners or ordinary homeowners as well who didn't see spending a lot more in taxes in order to get these grand monuments. They liked the town the way it was.

SUE: Then for all of the failed ideas of the Bogue Plan, how would you say that some showed up later in the future?

ERIC: Well I mean, concurrently we had the Olmsted plan underway for a kind of network of parks and wooded boulevards around the city, and while that was never completed, a large share of it was built and was preserved. And so we do have these you know, wonderful wooded boulevards: Interlaken, Lake Washington Boulevard notably, and parks. An incomplete but still pretty rich network. So that legacy survived. I mean you know, the aspiration for a transit system didn't end then. There was an entirely separate and with no official and premature proposal for an elevated monorail plan in 1918 and subsequent subway proposals in the 20s.

SUE: How do you think that cities should plan for growth?

ERIC: (sharp intake of breath) Boy...that's a very big question! You know... I have to wonder, and a lot of people are wondering if we're kind of at an inflection point right now with the pandemic. I mean, transit systems around the country, around the world, are really hurting now for the obvious reason that people don't want to ride it, and a whole lot of people don't have to. If they aren't working or are working at home, are avoiding it. And it's a big question. You know before then, it seemed like mass transit was the wave of the future in order to make cities as they work function, to keep them from just collapsing of all of the impacts - from congestion to pollution - that automobiles bring.

But are people going to still gather to work in cities and to seek culture and entertainment in cities the way they use to? Are people going to want to spend the kind of money it takes to live in Seattle now, much less to live in Silicon Valley if they can work at home and live cheaply by the ski slopes in Utah or the beautiful lake in Minnesota?

I think it's always, as they say, I mean, you know the uh ... it's very hard to make predictions, especially about the future, but...especially hard right now while we're going through changes that we don't know where they will lead. I'll say one thing generally about city planning is that it can be wise to keep your options open and not become too wedded to the uh, to the technology of the moment. You know, we've got a 65 billion dollar Sound Transit package by the way, with you know plans taking us out to uh, what is it almost the middle of the century? That's a long time to plan ahead.

[jaunty piano music fades in underneath and finishes out]

ANNABELLE: Thanks to Eric Scigliano for talking to us.

JULIA: Hi, this is Julia, one of the producers of this episode. To close out, I have a few questions for our hosts about what their thoughts are on what we've learned.

What was the most surprising or interesting thing you learned in researching or interviewing for this episode?

INDIA: Something I thought was really interesting was that part of the Bogue Plan was to like, tunnel under Lake Washington. It's really weird to like, imagine that happening in 1912? I just don't – I guess they built the Brooklyn Bridge and stuff around that time or earlier. But like, it's just hard to imagine how that would work technology-wise.

ANNABELLE: And it's crazy also on that note how...recently they were building a tunnel in downtown Seattle and it took several years to finish. I have no idea how long it would've taken them to create a tunnel all the way under Lake Washington. It just seems like kind of an overachievement (both laugh) just might not have been possible at that time with their technology...or lack thereof.

JULIA: Why was this a topic you wanted to explore?

ANNABELLE: I think it's interesting to see – I know there are some maps of the Bogue Plan at MOHAI – I just think it's so interesting to see what could've been and just explore what our city might have looked like if there was just a few people that had decided something different. And for some people those are our grandparents who voted no on it, or our great grandparents. So, it's just fascinating to think about how just like, the fact that they voted no changed our whole city plan and Seattle as how we know it today.

INDIA: Yeah I picked to explore this topic just because I really love transportation and public transit and I had never heard of the Bogue Plan until we had started planning this season. And, that was just crazy that there was just this huge thing and I had no idea about it.

Because the theme that we're going for is growth, and a lot of the stuff that we talk about is stuff that actually happened and actually caused the city to grow. I think it's also cool to talk about things that didn't happen and how that changed how the city grew.

JULIA: So...what do you think we get from exploring "what ifs" in history? And how does it help us understand the city we *do* have or know today?

ANNABELLE: I think "what ifs" give us a picture of what could've been and what didn't become, which sounds just like basically what you asked, but I think it's just something that... it's a part of our history even if it doesn't still exist. Just like, things that happened in the past are still a part of our history even if they weren't actually made or didn't actually happen. And it's just interesting to think about how they could have impacted our world today if they were existing. And even how Seattle has been shaped from them *not* existing.

INDIA: Yeah, I think it's interesting to imagine what is happening in parallel universe Seattle where you know, a couple hundred thousand people voted differently. It's just interesting to think, would we have the bus lines, or the streetcars, or I don't know, would the city layout be the same if we had passed the Bogue Plan? It kind of bums me out that we didn't pass it 'cause...I just feel like the city would've changed a lot faster than it has and like...we wouldn't have to be dealing with all of the construction of the new light rail extensions - cause it is really cool to watch them get built, but it's also like...you know, it kind of sometimes causes traffic and stuff. I don't know if it would've changed the way our city budgets?...I don't know...

JULIA: So...on this topic. Let's answer the question: What parts of the Bogue Plan would you have liked to see pass, if any at all?

ANNABELLE: I think it would have been cool to make a more centralized city center because I think like, at the moment we have Pike Place Market and we have downtown, but it's not the most centralized. Like, if you refer to downtown Seattle there's a lot of different areas you can mean. So I think it would've been cool to have a sort of civic center that felt like like, unifying to the city. I know some other cities have stuff like that, so I think that would've been cool.

INDIA: Like I said earlier, I think the Lake Washington tunnels would've been pretty neat, and I also think it would have been interesting if all of Mercer Island was just like a park...cause I love parks as much as I love transit. And so it's kind of...yeah, I think that would've been interesting to have such a big park so close to the city. 90 miles is a lot of rail though, I don't know - how big is the light rail? I don't think it's 90 miles...I wonder if this had passed because the transit system they proposed was so extensive, I wonder if Seattle would've ended up being a bigger city? Like, if we would've gone further north or south because there was so much connection planned.

ANNABELLE: Yeah I wonder...it's interesting to think about.

JULIA: So what do you think of when you think of the Seattle transit? Or what words come to mind?

INDIA: I love Seattle transit just 'cause I'm super scared of driving and so it's very nice to not have to worry about that. I am pretty much contained within in a very specific section of the city – downtown and sort of the southern parts –so I feel like there's a lot of connection and that I'm able to get where I need to go relatively easily which I really appreciate.

Seattle transit is just so friendly! Like, we've had family and friends visiting from other parts of the country and then they come here and take the busses and they're like, the bus drivers are so friendly! Like, I love *all* the bus driver's, they're the best.

ANNABELLE: Yeah I mean I agree with that, but I have to say I kind of disagree – I mean it could also be like, the bus systems or where we're taking the bus – but I've definitely had some bad experiences taking the bus systems in Seattle, and I just feel like in other cities I've taken the bus or the metro and it's so much more convenient, and they come so much more frequently and there's so much more, just there's a lot more ease in taking them. Cause when I try to bus to school sometimes it's really unreliable and I don't always know when it's going to come and it...like, the bus drivers are always incredibly kind and that's great... so I think, I think it's a good system but there's definitely room for improvement.

JULIA: So, what do you think this history and learning about this kind of history helps us understand?

INDIA: Is it corny if I - it helps us understand the power of democracy?

(collective laughter)

ANNABELLE: No that's accurate!

JULIA: Good.

(laughter fades out)

[ending theme music plays]

INDIA: Thanks for listening to this episode of *Rainy Day History*. We hope you enjoyed what you learned.

ANNABELLE: And a thank you to Eric for sharing with us. If you want to read some of Eric's writing, we've linked a few articles of his in the show notes.

INDIA: The show notes also have research highlights and images of some of the things we mentioned in this episode.

ANNABELLE: To learn more about MOHAI, visit the MOHAI website at mohai.org that's m-o-h-a-i-dot-org.

INDIA: You can also follow us on Instagram @mohaiteens and follow the museum @mohaiseattle.

ANNABELLE: When we safely re-open, come visit the museum in sunny South Lake Union, Seattle!

[jaunty piano music plays and continues underneath credits]

TK: Hello, this is TK - and I'm here with the credits. Stay tuned through the end for a sneak peek trivia question from India!

Thank you so much to Eric Scigliano for talking to us about the Bogue Plan, and thanks to Rachel at MOHAI for connecting us!

The script was researched by India & Ethan, written by Atul & Jason, edited by India, Karl, and Ethan. This episode was produced by Sue & Julia and edited by Karl, Sue, & Vance. Show notes and transcripts were built by Julia, Ziah, India, & Ethan. Marketing help came from Ziah & Ethan

This season was imagined by the 2020 MOHAI Youth Advisors. The podcast was developed by the 2019 MYA. Grace designed the logo, and Finch wrote the theme music and performed it along with Tyler and friend of the pod Sylvie Wang.

Thank you to all of our MOHAI staff cheerleaders, and special thanks for this season goes to Chris, Leonard, Sondra, Tori, and of course Emily T.

[8-bit elevator music starts playing and plays softly underneath]

INDIA: Hi! It's your trivia master India. So, last time we asked:

Which urban planning philosophy was Virgil Bogue particularly influenced by? And the answer was C, the City Beautiful Movement. The City Beautiful Movement was rooted in the idea that uh, a beautiful place would perform better than a less attractive one. It involved features such as large parks, monumental buildings, public gathering spaces, wide boulevards, and fountains.

Here's a bit of a preview of what's coming up in the next episode: Which of the following buildings did Minoru Yamasaki NOT design? Was it...

- a. the original World Trade Center
- b. Rainier Tower
- c. the Michigan Medical Society building
- d. Columbia Tower

Find out the answer on the next episode of *Rainy Day History!*