

Visit report 12/10/2016: Recovery Roads

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Recovery Roads project is a project which tries to repair the damage done to the roads in New Orleans which was caused by hurricane Katrina. After this hurricane, FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) granted a subsidy of 2 billion US dollar. With this money the department of public works of the City of New Orleans is able to start 200 individual projects to reconstruct or redesign the damaged roads. The roads were selected by looking at three main aspects; the current state of the road, the state of the utility lines below ground and the traffic intensity. The damaged roads were ranked based on these criteria and the top 200 were chosen. One of our colleagues asked if the future demand was taken into account, were the excursion guide told us that there was no future demand since the city of New Orleans has shrunken from 750.000 citizens (1960) to 350.000 citizens (2015).

The day started off with a nice and descend long sleep, after that we departed from our hostel to go to the Recovery Roads excursion. After a short drive (5 minutes) we arrived at the first stop of the day Amen Centre, which is a local meeting point for residents of the neighbourhood to come together. The Amen centre tries to improve the surroundings of the neighbourhood. They also provide affordable housing with rents starting from \$590. This meeting point was an excellent starting point for our excursion since recovery roads project also improves the surroundings of New Orleans.

The idea was that we would visit nine of the 200 projects of recovery roads, to better understand what is done and what they were planning to do. Unfortunately due to a tight time schedule problems we were only able to visit six projects. The need of renewal of the roads was immediately clear to us. The first project we visited was OC Haley Boulevard Streetscape project, which consisted of the renewal of the top layer of the asphalt. This project also consisted of some design changes which added a bigger in-between lane. One might think that this in-between lane would be constructed out of grass or other plants, but unfortunately they made it out of concrete. The idea for this design is that it is possible to hold festivals or parties on the street, which according to our tour guide could not be held on grass, because of wheelchair accessibility.

The second project Jackson Avenue reconstruction project was also about renewing the top layer of asphalt without any design changes. Interesting to see where the huge holes that were present in the exposed underlayer of the asphalt, when asked about these holes to our excursion leader, he replied that these holes would not be filled, only if there were above a certain height the holes would be fixed. We asked ourselves what these repairs would be worth if this is not done correctly. The excursion leader also pointed out that because of the limited guarantee of one year, that these roads are sometimes not correctly repaired.

Totally different from Jackson Avenue reconstruction project was the third project Lafitte Greenway. This project claimed back some of the lots of destroyed homes after Katrina and turned it into a park. They planted a total of 500 trees and the cost for this project was topped around 6 million US dollar. Most of this money went to soil improvement which was heavily contaminated with hazardous materials. Before their were homes on the lots, the site contained an old canal, which was later replaced by a rail yard only being later demolished to build homes on top of the lots. The excursion guide was especially proud of the fact that around 1000 cyclists passed this area every day, which in Dutch terms is less to nothing.

The fourth project we visited was St. Bernard Avenue reconstruction project. The problem of this road was that it was quickly made by the property developer back in the days and was constructed to only last around 10 years, because after this period all homes should be sold which made the road not a problem of the developers anymore. Under the road was “old swamp stuff” according to our excursion leader, which made the foundation of these road very hard to construct and design. Instead of choosing for asphalt the Department of public works of the city of New Orleans chose for concrete since this was a cheaper solution.

The fifth project Gentilly Resilience District/Mirabeau water garden project is a 20 million US dollar planned project to turn an old private property into an emergency retention area. The property was donated by nuns who decided after hurricane Katrina to not come back since there building was destroyed.



Figure 1 Panorama picture of the Gentilly Resilience District/Mirabeau water garden project site

Lastly we visited the Storm water lot project. This project turned an abandoned home lot into a small water retaining area. Not only does this lot functions as a water retaining area but also as a park to recreate in. It gives the neighbourhood a new and fresh look, which also causes that the property values to go up. After this project we unfortunately ran out of time and decided to end the tour at this point and not to see the other 3 remaining projects.