



Hamburg is burying the Autobahn and putting parks on top

Updated by Joseph Stromberg on January 9, 2015, 12:10 p.m. ET

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A rendering of Hamburg's highway burial project. HOCHTIEF Solutions

The **Autobahn 7** (

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bundesautobahn_7),

Germany's longest highway, runs straight through Hamburg.

Over the years, it's grown more and more congested, now carrying about **152,000 cars and trucks** (

<http://www.rehau.com/group-en/corporate-information/press/customer-magazine/furniture-solutions-19/major-project>) per day.

To deal with the increasing traffic, the city is turning to a

pretty conventional solution (

[http://www.vox.com/2014/10/23/6994159/traffic-](http://www.vox.com/2014/10/23/6994159/traffic-roads-induced-demand)

roads-induced-demand): widening virtually the entire stretch of the highway that runs through the city.

But to deal with the noise — and the way that the highway has severed neighborhoods that were connected before it was

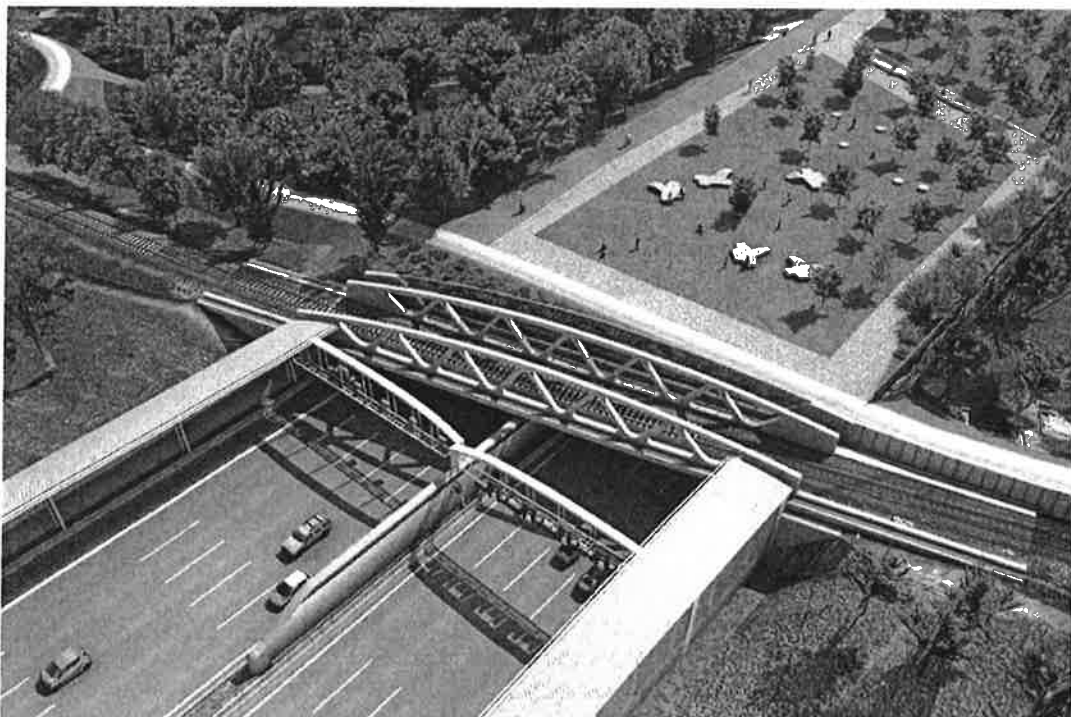
built in the 1980s — **Fast Company reports (**

[http://www.fastcoexist.com/3040310/theyre-going-](http://www.fastcoexist.com/3040310/theyre-going-to-bury-a-stretch-of-german-autobahn-and-cover-it-in-parks#1)

to-bury-a-stretch-of-german-autobahn-and-cover-it-

in-parks#1) that the city has come to a pretty interesting

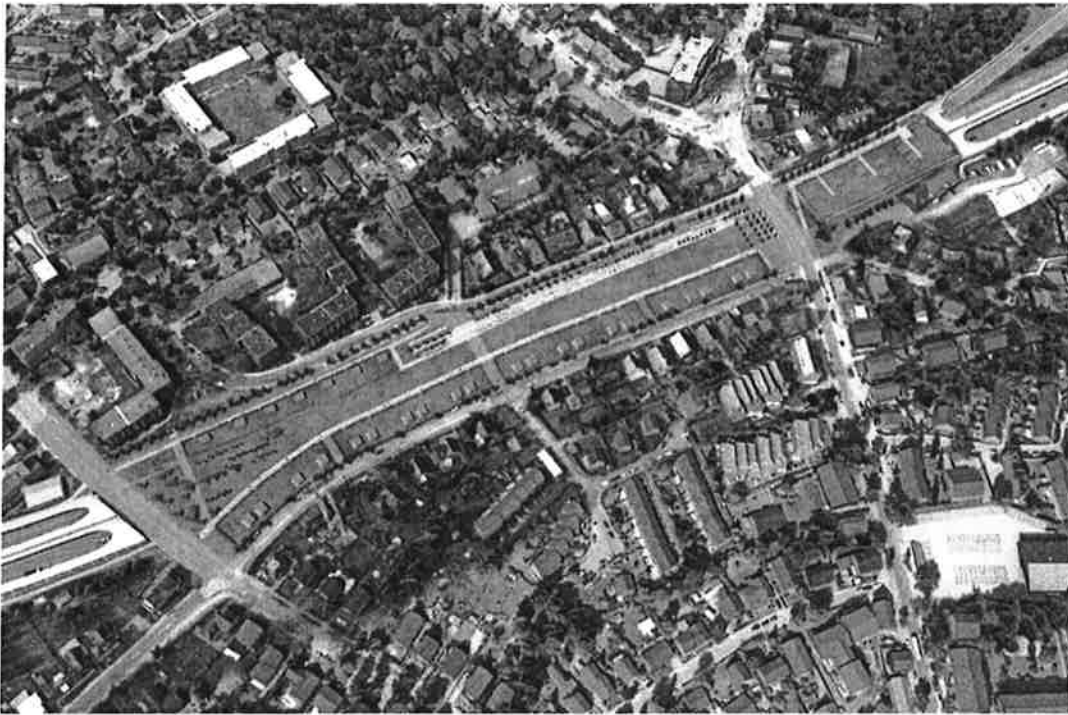
solution: they're burying a few miles of the highway and covering it with parks, community gardens, and housing development.



(City of Hamburg (<http://www.hamburg.de/contentblob/4324620/data/presentation-infomobil.pdf>))

The project, which is called the **Hamburger Deckel** (<http://streetswithoutcars.wordpress.com/2014/08/22/the-hamburger-deckel/>) and is projected to cost \$800 million, comes after 20 years of lobbying from a local residents' initiative called "Ohne Dach ist Krach" (German for "No Roof, Too Much Racket"). Burying the highway is a practical way to meet a city noise abatement ordinance passed in 2005, as the sound barriers built in most places (including virtually everywhere in the US) can only cut down on noise by a factor of **about half** (https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/noise/noise_barriers/

The tunnel project also has some other benefits: in covering what will be an eight-lane freeway, it'll provide a substantial amount of new parkland, along with space to build a neighborhood of 1700 homes. At its northern end, the new park will also link existing parkland, establishing a new greenbelt. Work is starting this year, and it's projected to be finished in 2022.



(HOCHTIEF Solutions (http://www.hochtief-solutions.com/solutions_en/51.jhtml?p=301&s=20))

Of course, there's also another solution to eliminating traffic noise: tearing out urban highways entirely. In the US, Seattle is **[burying a downtown waterfront highway \(http://grist.org/cities/seattles-unbelievable-transportation-megaproject-fustercluck/\)](http://grist.org/cities/seattles-unbelievable-transportation-megaproject-fustercluck/)** at a cost of \$4.2 billion (and counting), and there's a pretty good case to be made that the city **[would have been better off removing the highway \(http://www.vox.com/2014/12/22/7435377/case-against-urban-freeways\)](http://www.vox.com/2014/12/22/7435377/case-against-urban-freeways)** and replacing it with parks or pedestrian-friendly development.

But there are significant differences between the Hamburg and Seattle projects. One is that the Autobahn 7 is a crucial national highway that carries lots of traffic across the country — something that isn't true for Seattle's Alaskan Way Viaduct — making it much harder to tear down without major disruptions.



(HOCHTIEF Solutions (http://www.hochtief-solutions.com/solutions_en/51.jhtml?p=301&s=20))

Additionally, Hamburg's project is less ambitious, in an engineering sense. Its highway is simply being slightly lowered, with a six-to-ten foot cap placed on top of it. Seattle is taking on the huge challenge of digging the widest deep-bore tunnel ever, 120 feet underground — which explains why the boring machine got stuck last year, halting construction until April at soonest and leading to cost over-runs.

Further reading:

[Before-and-after maps show how freeways transformed America's cities \(<http://www.vox.com/2014/12/29/7460557/urban-freeway-slider-maps>\)](http://www.vox.com/2014/12/29/7460557/urban-freeway-slider-maps)

[The case for tearing down urban freeways \(<http://www.vox.com/2014/12/22/7435377/case->](http://www.vox.com/2014/12/22/7435377/case-)

against-urban-freeways)

The "fundamental rule" of traffic: building new roads just makes people drive more (

<http://www.vox.com/2014/10/23/6994159/traffic-roads-induced-demand>)

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