

Tunnel visions

Plans were more than pipe dreams



Ronald Delaney, general manager and vice-president of the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel Corp., expounds on a point in the office overlooking the tunnel's U.S. entrance. Delaney, of Troy, began working for the corporation as a bus driver.

By Louise Okrisky
staff writer

MORE THAN 100 years ago the thought of a tunnel under the Detroit River stirred promoters so much that generations of them remained undaunted by setbacks which had beset their predecessors.

And for the Ronald Delaney, the man who oversees the underwater passage-way that others had dreamed about, the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel has kept its allure for the last 28 years.

For Delaney, general manager and vice-president of the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel Corp., the subject of tunnels isn't confined to workdays.

"I saw the Fort McHenry Tunnel. It has eight lanes and carries more traffic, we have only two. It was impressive, I felt like a kid looking at a brand new car," said Delaney, a Troy resident.

Others feel that way about the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel. In April, the American Society of Civil Engineers designated it as a historic landmark. "It surprised us. We just took everything for granted," Delaney said.

When he first hired on, Delaney's workday didn't start in a spacious office decorated with paintings of the old West and overlooking the tunnel's entrance.

In the early 1950's, he was a driver for the company's now defunct bus line. "It was just a job at the time. Jobs were few and far between," he said. Even with that pragmatic attitude, the then-21-year-old Delaney soon discov-

ered that driving from one end of the 5,168-foot tunnel to the other was a monotonous way to earn a living. "The day I turned around and saw myself coming back from the other direction"

prompted the decision to seek a promotion. Progressing to head of the maintenance engineering department, he eventually reached the board of direc-

tors of the privately owned firm which operates the tunnel.

BY THE time he had climbed to the top, he found himself in the ironic posi-

tion of having to cut the bus system, which was used less and less.

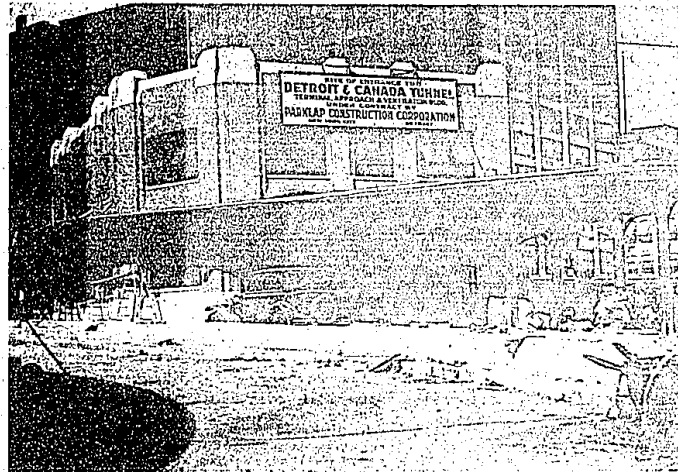
More than 50 years old at the time it was discontinued, the system shuttled 8 million passengers a year in its heyday immediately after World War II.

The very nature of the tunnel casts Delaney in the role of a diplomat between the corporation and the two

countries and two cities it serves. That means having to deal with laws and officials from federal and municipal governments. "Whatever we do, we do on both sides," he said. The firm pays taxes to each government, as well.

Although both sides take for granted

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At the beginning of construction this is the scene which surrounded the site of the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel.

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