Well, we can start, I guess, with the first question that you have here... what was the need for a regional planning commission and who were the individuals who organized the DVRPC.

I think that we have to go back and think that there were two... probably different reasons that the regional planning commission was formed. The first was the need that was felt by the people in the region... elected officials... in the region... to get something done... and by planning commissions in the region. And the other was the mandate of the federal government... that federal funds for such areas as planning, housing, transportation... really all of these in the planning areas... transportation, planning, housing programs...

(WMP: Airports?)

... airports, land use... all of those kinds of physical plannings... not in the areas of health and that kind of thing, but in the physical sense, the federal government said that no funds would be available in a region that didn't have a regional planning commission, and that didn't have a regional planning commission that would screen these funds... the needs for these funds. For example, if they want to build the high-speed line from 30th Street to the airport, that had to be... those plans had to be approved by a regional planning commission before the federal government would allocate any funds for the construction.

So there was that pressure, of course, which was tremendous. But the other pressure had really started before that, and was, I think, primarily felt in the areas of mass transit. If you go back to think of the days before SEPTA, there was a regional authority that was created... and I can't remember the letters... whatever it was called... but there was a regional authority that was created to subsidize mass transit in the region... to subsidize the... primarily the commuter rail lines, outside the city of Philadelphia, and the bus and trolley lines inside the city. And this...

(WMP: Where did the funds come from?)

The funds were local, but some federal funds too. But they were local and state for this. And this program came about
as a result, primarily, of the negotiations between myself and Dick Dilworth, when Dick was mayor, and I was chairman of the county commissioners in Montgomery County. And the two planning commissions that we had at that time were.... well certainly I don't think the city had a better planning commission than they did when Dick was mayor. Maybe you...I mean Joe carried it on, certainly, but...I mean carried on from Joe...Dick carried it on from Joe, but I don't think any progress was made better in the city than under those two men. And as you remember, the planning commission had some really top people in it.

And one of their programs was to try to subsidize and to keep alive the mass transit facilities as we knew them in this area. It was in those days that San Francisco was trying to float a $1,000,000,000 bond issue, or maybe a multi-billion dollar bond issue, to build a mass transit system. And here we had one that was better than any one in the country and we were sort of sitting around watching it deteriorate. I guess we still are!

At least that was the program and the planners got together. And the planners in Montgomery County and in the city really were the ones that pushed this. And Dick and I worked together on it and it took...oh, a couple of years, because we couldn't get Delaware County or Chester County to co-operate. They felt that they didn't care about planning...they said it was a political problem...that you couldn't have the Republican counties of the suburbs co-operating with the Democratic city. And this was more important to them than any progress that might have been made in this area.

So for two or three years....Bucks County came along. So it was Montgomery, Bucks, and the city of Philadelphia.

(WMP: Was Dick Dilworth a social friend of yours?)

Yes.

(WMP: That helped a lot.)

Yes, that helped a lot. It really did. But, you know, what almost killed it was Dave Berger, who was the city solicitor. And Dave was so arrogant and so difficult to deal with...and he didn't seem to understand the counties' problems at all. That for a Republican in a county to make concessions with the city, was a very dangerous thing for a suburban county politician to do. But Dave couldn't see that at all. Dave was....and he just couldn't have been more arrogant, more disagreeable...and it was as much Dave's fault as anybody's that the thing didn't gel.

(WMP: He's not my favorite person.)
He's very bright.

(WMP: He's on my list to be interviewed.)

Good. Well, ask him about the beginnings of...whatever this authority was called, and I'll bet you he takes credit for putting it all together! And in fact, we never got the thing really off the ground at all, until one Sunday morning, I went into Dick's house, down at Washington Square...and we spent the whole morning together and then had lunch together. And we worked out what we thought was a workable program. And Dick promised me that he would sell that to Dave Berger...and that at the next meeting Dave Berger would not open his mouth! And Dick was able to pull that off, and so we got the thing started.

But then, unfortunately, Dick resigned as mayor, to run for governor, and Jim Tate became mayor. Remember, Jim was president of City Council, and so he became mayor. And then the whole thing got bogged down again, because Tate kept Berger on as city solicitor...and took Berger to all the meetings and the whole thing got bogged down again.

But finally, Jim Tate did what I considered to be a very statesman-like thing, and probably something that in the end was not really very good for the city, but it made at least this mass transit program work. And that was...we were hung up on the problem of how many votes each member government would have. And the logic was that the city, that had more people, and was putting more money into the program...would have more votes. But Delaware County wouldn't go along, unless everyone had an equal vote...which was a really, I thought, ...a stupid position. But that was their position. And Jim Tate finally, in a moment of exasperation at a meeting that we had at the Marriot Motel...Jim said...All right; to get this thing off the ground, the city will agree. Each government will have one vote. And Delaware County will have an equal vote with the city of Philadelphia.

So, in effect, the suburban counties could outvote the city. Then, to balance that a little bit, they gave the governor an appointee, feeling that the governor's appointee would probably vote with the city.

This, then, made that program work. I don't know...all of this may not be of any real interest to you, but...

(WMP: No, it's part of the history. We want it.)

And the program really began to work. And then that program eventually became SEPTA. But this was the early beginnings of the feeling among the more enlightened planning commissions and the more enlightened governments in the region...that we
needed a regional planning commission. Then when the federal government came along and said...if you don't have a regional planning commission, you aren't going to get any money...well that put the cap on it. And then we had to get the legislature of Pennsylvania, the legislature of New Jersey to approve identical pieces of legislation establishing the planning commission.

(WMP: It spreads how far into New Jersey?)

It goes from...the planning commission goes from Trenton to Chester, and it takes in the cities of Trenton, Camden, Philadelphia and Chester, and the counties of Mercer, Burlington, Camden, Gloucester...I think that's all on the Jersey side. And then over on our side, of course, there's Bucks, Montgomery, Delaware, Chester...counties.

But I'm not sure why the state of Delaware was left out of this. It seems to me it would have been a much stronger region if the state of Delaware had been involved, because you know that when John Bodine was.....after John Bodine left Drinker, Biddle, he was very active in ....

(WMP: PENJERDEL.)

...in PENJERDEL. And he tried to put PENJERDEL together as a really going organization. PENJERDEL at that time was the ....was really a loosely formed voluntary organization of local governments and planning commissions. And he included Delaware in that. But when the regional planning commission became an entity under the aegis of the two legislatures, Delaware was left out. And, as I say, I can't recall why that happened, but it always seemed to me that it was a big mistake.

(WMP: Don't you think it was because the people down in Delaware...particularly the DuPonts, didn't want to get inter-meshed in this sort of thing.)

Probably. I think you're right. They probably felt they would have been gobbled up by the bigger states.

But, remember when John Bodine had PENJERDEL, after that, or inside of PENJERDEL, he formed a regional council of elected officials. I think that was a part of PENJERDEL. And that was helpful, also. Dick was the first chairman of that, and I was the second chairman. And that helped to bring the region together a little bit. So that we had some experience in regional co-operation and regional planning, before the planning commission actually came into being.
So, as I recall it, that's pretty much how the thing got started. And I would say....was there considerable citizen support for such a commission?

Not from the citizenry as a whole; I don't think they really understood the idea at all. But from certain of the planners, from people like Bodine...

(WMP: How about Greater Philadelphia Movement?)

...from the Greater Philadelphia Movement...those people understood it. But the average person on the street, I don't think even knew there was such a thing going on.

And certainly the politicians...the average politician was opposed to anything like regional co-operation, because it weakened his power base...especially the ones in the counties...

...Remember they used to always get excited about what they called "the Green Grab"? When Bill Green's father was city chairman and he made some kind of a proposition to annex part of Cheltenham Township to the City of Philadelphia?

(WMP: Just for elections at the federal level.)

Yes. Yes. But, I don't think there was any real citizen support; there was citizen support from the more educated, enlightened people...like the Greater Philadelphia Movement.

How did I become involved?

Well, I was involved in these earlier movements...I mean earlier regional planning movements, and earlier efforts at regional co-operation.

(WMP: Were you on a planning commission in your county?)

No, not really. See, I had been the county treasurer, and then I was county commissioner and chairman of the county commission. And so it was through that that I really became involved with the planning commission. I never actually served on the planning commission, but the commissioners were ex-officio members of the planning commission. So that in that respect...

(WMP: I see. So you were involved...)

Oh, yes, very much involved. It was back in 1961 or '62, I guess, I tried to interest the county governments in strengthening their form of government, and taking some of the power away from the townships, and making the counties a stronger governmental unit. And then having the counties work with each other. And I wrote an article for the Pennsylvania Bar Association magazine, which just about got me
thrown out of the county, because the parochial feeling, of course, in the townships, is very strong. And some people just love township government. And my feeling was that the county was the lowest level of government that you needed...that you could do everything at the county level more efficiently and better. And, for example, in Montgomery County, you have, I think, 62 municipalities, within the county. And each one has a police force, each one has a township manager, each one has a township building...fully staffed. And a little place like the borough of West Conshohocken...West Conshohocken has one policeman!...and a township manager!

(WMP: It's practically all torn down, isn't it?)

Yeah. But, I mean...how ridiculous! You could have a county police force that would be far more efficient than these townships, but ....oh, my God...that was met with such a roar of disapproval...you couldn't believe it!!

So, I was involved in all of these kinds of things, and then, after I left....I left as county commissioner to go into Bill Scranton's administration as chairman of the Pennsylvania Securities Commission. And it was while I was serving as chairman of the Securities Commission that DVRPC was formed. And so the then county commissioners thought that I was the most logical person to serve on the commission to represent the county. And so they appointed me...that, and they've been re-appointing me ever since. So that was how I got on the commission.

(WMP: You're still on it, aren't you?)

I'm still on...I'm chairman again this year. It seems whenever they can't find...everybody becomes too controversial...They go back to me, because nobody cares a thing about what I say any more!

Now, let's see. If you were one of the original members of the commission, tell how you came to appoint Walter Johnson.

The commission had become very political under the...not the chairmanship...yes, the chairmanship, of a fellow from Delaware County whose name escapes me...maybe I'll remember it. He was a heavy-set fellow who later went to Congress. And he was one of the political "ins" of the Republican party in Delaware County. Very powerful in that War Board or whatever they called it...that they had in Delaware County. And he later went to Congress, served a couple terms in the Congress and died of a heart attack, while making a speech. I just can't think of his name. But we can fill that in...I can call you and give you his name. It will come to me as I'm driving into town.

*Congressman Lawrence Williams
But he was anxious to do with the commission just what the commission was not supposed to do, and that was to make sure that when you approved a project for a highway, or anything...sanitary sewer project...that the commission saw that the engineer, the contractor, were all loyal Republicans, and that nothing got built in Delaware County that wasn't built by somebody who was friendly to the powers that be.

(WMP: Was Mr. McClure still the boss?)

McClure was still alive then. He was, I think, getting sort of weak, physically, but he was still the boss. And this was his type of...way of playing politics. And it was hard to prevent this fellow from doing this; he did it quite subtly. But he influenced the personnel on the commission and he influenced the hiring policies of the commission, and he...the executive director of the commission was a man...he's still around town. He's now with the Delaware River Basin Authority.

(WMP: Really?)

Yup. A fellow about my age who was highly trained...always been interested in planning and...oh, I can't think of his name either...isn't that awful? But I'll get you both of those peoples' names 'cause you can just fill them in.

But the guy who was the executive director was interested in doing a good job and he just rubbed this old politician the wrong way. Constantly they were fighting and bickering and arguing. And in the early days of the commission, it was totally funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Highways, which was a very dangerous thing, because it meant that the employees of the commission were not their own people. They were beholden to the highway department.

(WMP: And they knew it.)

And they knew it. And the highway department could be politically influenced by this man from Delaware County. And that's the way he....if he didn't sit at a meeting of the commission and say.....We must hire Mr. Smith because he just contributed $5,000 to the party...Republican party of Delaware County...I mean, he was too smart for that...but he would make sure that the employees of the commission, as they screened the contractors, knew what he wanted done and if they wanted to get a raise, or if they wanted to keep their job, they knew darn well how to do it.

And it was an unfortunate time for the commission. And one of the weaknesses was that the commission was funded by highway department funds. So we were almost entirely a highway planning
agency in those days. There was no real thought given to housing, to open space, to land use; we just worried about building roads. And that—but, getting back to Walter Johnson...I keep wandering around...

It finally blew up so that this man who was the executive director, just couldn't take it any more. And he was about ready to quit, I think, when he was fired. And then we had to look for someone. And they had a search committee that I was not on. And the search committee came up with Walter, who is, as you know, Walter is a very highly trained, highly educated fellow...came from the mid-west...I think he came from Minneapolis, or Saint Paul, or...out there. And as I've always told Walter....You're one of the few people who has all those degrees that can ever get anything done! See, most people who have that many degrees can't do anything! But, Walter, as you know...he's a lawyer, he's an engineer, he's a Ph.D., he's an architect! And Walter is a very effective, I think, chairman. He can balance all these interests and he...

(WMP: He's not chairman, is he?)

I mean executive director. And I think Walter's done a good job. It's a hard job, too. One of the difficulties, and I guess this is getting into Number 5...what sort of co-operation with other planning commissions.

The other planning commissions in the area...the counties and the city...looked really, on DVRPC, when it first started, more as a necessary evil, created by the federal government, than as anything that could be of any real value. And, despite the fact that we had had some co-operation before, I think, really, basically, most of these men thought....well, the federal government has said we have to have this, so okay, we've got it. And they used it only to pass federal funds through...to the local governments.

(WMP: Well, in effect, they did have to have it, didn't they?)

Yes, they did. But the thing was, it was...at first it was, really, I think, fairly weak. One; because it was controlled by the Highway Department, and the other...that the county planning commission just used it as a way of getting federal money. And they did just what they had to do to get the money and the money siphoned right through planning commission to the counties.

(WMP: From what part of the federal government did that money come?)

HUD and then later, the Department of Transportation. And still later, HEW. HEW got into the area of housing also, and in environmental problems. Now, one of our big sources of...or areas
in which we're planning, is in air and water quality control, which is under the Environmental Protection Agency, and gets their money from Health, Education and Welfare. So that all those big departments of the federal government, I mean HUD, HEW and the Department of Transportation, all of those funds, practically, that come into this area, have to go through the planning commission.

(WMP: So that, in effect, the planning commission now is much more powerful than it was.)

Much.

(WMP: Because it has the power of the purse.)

Yes, exactly. And at first it was...it didn't really have that much power, but it was being used by these people. And I think, today, after the planning commission came out with its first set of plans, they worked on, Walter probably told you, I guess, and I think there were five or seven plans called the "1985 Plans" that the commission came up with, under Walter's...when Walter first came their, he started to work on those. There was land use, open space, transportation...

(WMP: Airports?)

Airports....I've forgotten. But...those are four, but there were a couple of others. And they were really good; they were well done, well thought out. And when those plans came out, and then people began to try to work with the plans, and saw the value of them, I think the planning commission really came into its own.

It is still looked on a little bit askance, I think, by some of the local planners. They would rather be doing most of the planning themselves, but the feeling that I get, at least, is that regional co-operation is a less active force today, in 1979 than it was five or six years ago. That, whereas five or six years ago, it was sort of the vogue for a person running for office to say he was in favor of regional co-operation on all these environmental problems and regional co-operation in mass transit...today I see them more shrinking back into their own areas. I see less co-operation by the city; I see less co-operation....and that isn't only due to Frank Rizzo, because I see less co-operation in the counties. The counties are now worrying more about themselves. This all may be because there's less money around. The federal government, you know, are making budget cuts and they just aren't throwing the dollars around the way they were...say, in the Johnson and early Nixon administrations.\(^\text{\cite{WMP}}\) Johnson had all of those social programs, there was so much money available for these planning agencies that...

(WMP: What's the general magnitude of the budget of the Region-
Planning Commission?)

Isn't that awful? I can't remember. I'm sure it's in Walter's... in what Walter tells you.

(WMP: Probably is.)

It's the amount of money that passes through the commission,... is, of course, tremendously greater than the budget of the commission. The commission's budget for its own personnel and salaries and that kind of thing, is nowhere near the amount of money that they handle in federal projects.

(WMP: Has there been any challenge on the part of the politicians to wreck the Regional Planning Commission?)

No, not really. Since that fellow...the congressman from Delaware County's days, it went practically without any real political squabbles, I think, until Rizzo...

Rizzo and Shapp of course, as you know, had a falling out, and so that there was a lot of feeling on the commission by the Shapp appointees to the planning commission. The governor has really, three people on the commission. He has the head of the planning agency, the state planning agency, and the head of the state transportation department. And he has what's known as the governor's appointee. So he has three people. And one of the worst features of the commission is that the state people have a veto. Even if all the counties and all the cities vote together, if the state people vote against it, the motion dies.

(WMP: They all have to vote?)

I think...two out of the three vote against something...it dies. So they do have a veto. And I have maintained, as have some others, over the years, that we should get the legislation changed. Because with that provision in there, it's really more of a state planning commission than it is a regional planning commission, if the region hasn't got the power to carry the vote. But they never have changed it. I think they've been worried to take it back to the legislatures. The legislatures might kill the whole thing.

(WMP: Well, does the highway planning dominate it so much, is that a factor?)

That was one of the problems, but I don't think that's as true today. Today, I think, most of our money is coming from housing and from environmental projects. 'Cause there really isn't as much highway construction being done anymore. The Pennsylvania Department of Highways is broke; they can't even fill the potholes, let along build anything new!
(WMP: Would you say that the major highway plan had been pretty well completed...the work had been done...)

Yes, I think so, except there're a few very visible exceptions, like I-95 where it goes through Society Hill and out to the airport.

(WMP: Well, that's almost finished, isn't it?)

Yes, that's getting there, but it's still...that's still not finished. And then all the way to....it doesn't look to me as if they're making any progress from the Schuylkill River out to the airport. I haven't seen anything being built there. I know the plans are approved, but I don't see anything going on.

And the other one that you can think of, at least I can think of, is the Blue Route, so-called; the road that was supposed to go from Chester to Plymouth Meeting.

One of our real weaknesses in this area in the way of highways has been the so-called circumferential routes around the city. Most cities..take Boston, for example....Route 128 around Boston...and they have a route that goes around on the other side........have roads that take through-traffic around the city, and we don't have a single one. 202 is just about the only road... or on the New Jersey side, the New Jersey Turnpike. But there aren't any really important roads that take you around the city of Philadelphia. The city was built with all the roads running out from the center of it, as if the city was a hub with all these spokes running out. And then there's nothing cutting across the spokes. And that was one of the....'member, they were thinking of a Cobbs Creek Parkway at one time, that was to take people around the center city. But it never got built because the residents in the Cobbs Creek area didn't want the place torn up.

And the same things happened to the Blue Route. People around Villanova College stopped that for years.

So that, I think, yes...the answer is yes. Most of the highways are built. And there're just a few of these that are being held up. And I would hope that we could see more money going into mass transit...especially when this tunnel is completed between the Reading Terminal and Suburban Station.

But whether you'll ever get the American out of his automobile is doubtful. I think he'd still rather drive than he would take the train. So there is a feeling now among planners, that a lot of money spent on mass transit is money wasted.
But I still would hope that we haven't seen the end of improving mass transit. If we could get the parking areas improved at the suburban commuter stations, it would be a lot easier. You know, to try to park here in Chestnut Hill is almost impossible, unless you catch a train before 8 o'clock in the morning. If you get there any time after 10 minutes of 8, the parking lot is full. Then you park somewheres on the street about four blocks away, and you get a ticket, or somebody runs into your car...and knocks the fender off. The same thing is true in Ambler. I sometimes take the train from Ambler. There's a tiny little lot by the railroad station in Ambler; it probably holds 75 cars.

(WMP: What does your commission do about this?)

We have in our plans, in our 1985 plans...we advocated that all of those parking areas be extended. And I know that in Montgomery County, many of them...the commission was all ready to go ahead and buy the land, and then the money wasn't available. The county commissioners felt that the money was better used somewheres else. They just said there wasn't enough money for parking. So this is one of the real problems.

Well, let's see. What else do we have here? Physical growth...Well, I guess, we sort of covered, I think, some of that.

The members of the commission...how are they selected....

They are appointed. Each of the counties has one member. Each of the cities has one member. And then....

(WMP: What cities?)

Trenton, Camden, Philadelphia and Chester. Each of those cities has one person. And then each of the counties has one person. And then the state of Pennsylvania, state of New Jersey...each have three. And they're all appointed for a one year term. They have to be re-appointed every May, I think it is.

(WMP: That makes a pretty big commission. How many are on it?)

It is big. And then a lot of alternates sit in. To try to make the commission a little bit more wieldy...or less unwieldy, they have a very strong executive committee. And the executive committee...one person represents all of the counties in Pennsylvania, and one person represents all the counties in New Jersey. And the counties get together and appoint that person. And so that makes a smaller commission...for the executive committee. And the executive committee deals with most of the important matters, and then when the full commission meets, they sort of just ratify what the executive committee's done.
(WMP: Well how does the state of New Jersey dovetail into this set-up?)

They work in very well, I think. We've found that their planners are very competent and generally speaking, their county planning commissions have been co-operative. I found in the last year or two...we're now working on plans for the year 2000, which should be out this spring, I think. And one of the very controversial areas in there were population estimates for the year 2000. 'Cause if these counties estimated that their population was going to grow significantly, then all of the plans would be drawn to take care of that increased population growth. And so therefore, there would be more roads, there'd be more building, more sewage disposal plants, more water treatment plants, and all of those kinds of things that are all ....valuable to local politicians, and the local builders, and the local highway construction people.

So we tried to watch to make sure that these guys didn't over-estimate what their population would be. And that was the only area where I've seen any real problem with the New Jersey people. In those counties around Camden...Gloucester, Burlington and Camden County itself...they really over-estimated what they thought. And we really had some fights with them about their population estimates.

(WMP: Did they threaten you with withdrawing?)

Oh, yeah, they always threaten you with withdrawing, you know. Then you say....Well, that's fine; go ahead and withdraw. Then there just isn't any federal money for your county!

(WMP: You mean, not for planning, but for construction.)

Well, yes. For the plan, you see, you wouldn't allow the construction unless the plan had been approved. But, well, I guess that really is about.....

(WMP: Elkie, I have some questions. Was Colonel Wetherill part of your family?)

Who?

(WMP: Colonel...)

Colonel Sam?

(WMP: Yeah.)

Sure. He was my father's first cousin. He was probably the first person in this area to really talk about regional planning.
(WMP: You're right about that. I've got his report right here.)

He was really a very interesting old guy.

(WMP: That's quite a thing.)

It is. It's quite a thing. He really did quite a job of that.

(WMP: I was wondering how much of what's in there...you're carrying out now.)

A lot. This plan, if you take a look at some of our 1985 plans, you'll see a great many of the things are somewhat similar to this. And the City Planning Commission in Philadelphia...when ....who was the fellow who was so instrumental in moving that City Planning Commission ahead?

(WMP: Well, first it was Bob Mitchell and then it was Ed Bacon.)

Ed Bacon...Bacon, especially. Bacon told me one time...I never bothered to check it, but he said....You look at some of the plans that were drawn up in the Clark-Dilworth days, and look back to see some of these tri-state plans, and you'd be amazed at how far-thinking these people were.

You know, he was an interesting old guy and funny...towards the end of his life, most people didn't remember that he had ever had any of these...you know, done any of these things. They looked on him as just a garrulous old bore!!!

(WMP: I formed an organization called the City Policy Committee and he was one of my first speakers.)

Was he really?

(WMP: Yeah, that was way back....before the war.)

But,especially.....give him a couple of bourbons...he loved to drink bourbon...give him a couple of bourbons, and he'd start talking about these 1930 city plans, and I guess they just weren't very interesting to most people.

(WMP: Well, they were interesting. They did one in Chicago, one in New York and one in Boston. It was quite a movement.)

Well, that's good. Well, is that about what I can do for you today?

(WMP: Yeah. That's very good, Elkie!)

Good!