THE ARCHIVE SPEAKS VOLUMES

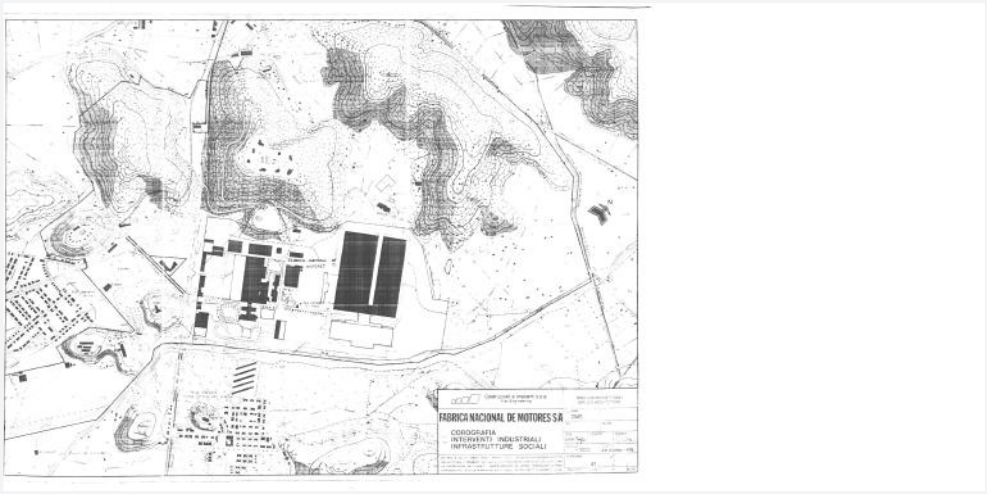
THE TURIN-MILAN MOTORWAY

FONDAZIONE MAIRE

A century-long journey to modernity

Every single Sunday, at around breakfast time, a line of cars trumpets in the direction of the Novara tollbooth: these are the young people of the Piedmontese city, who have given rise to a must-attend event, having coffee at the Pavesi autogrill. The shiny, colorful new facility, called a “bridge” because it straddles over the traffic lanes allowing entry from both sides of the motorway, is open late into the night and offers great service at good prices.

And maybe, among all those sandwiches, there's even a jukebox set up in a corner, to the delight of those lanky northerners fed on bread and rock 'n roll.

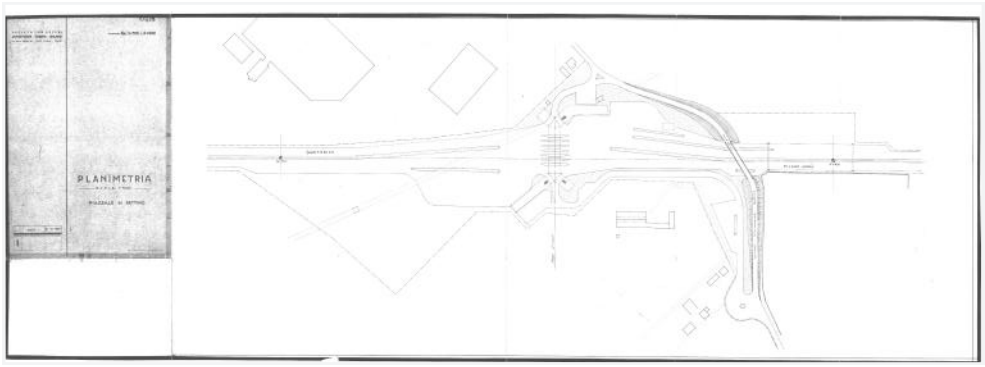


A fairy tale, like those of the '60s. 1962, to be exact.

The autogrill designed by architect and designer Angelo Bianchetti (replacing the refreshment stand established in 1947 at the initiative of Mario Pavesi, the industrialist inventor of “Pavesini” cookies) marks the end of work on the Turin-Milan motorway, beginning in 1952 with the widening of the road by ten meters and then followed by the doubling of the roadway.

An “upheaval” that is necessary because of the staggering increase in traffic and cars, making it one of the busiest motorways in Italy, in a key location for the Italian economy: a substantial piece

of the puzzle, along with the Autostrada del Sole in operation since 1964, contributing to the modernization of the country.



And to think that only 30 years earlier the Turin-Milan roadway appears almost as if it were a 126 km-long country road to the eyes of today's viewers of its black-and-white images, with a single 8-meter-wide carriageway along an essentially straight route, lost among the agricultural areas of the lower region and the textile industries of the Biella province, punctuated by rivers such as the Dora Baltea, the Sesia and the Ticino.

Instead, it is a strategic artery, the fourth motorway in the Bel Paese and the sixth in the world (the first of its kind also being built in Italy in the early 1920s, when engineer Piero Puricelli designs a straight two-lane motorway stretching from Milan to Varese).

Its construction, promoted by a committee founded by personalities from Italian finance and industry, starts in 1929 under a company led by Senator Giovanni Agnelli and engineer Francesco Cartesegna, and is inaugurated in October 1932.

At a total cost of about 110 million lire, the infrastructure - with 173 bridges, 84 underpasses, 16 access aprons, 1530 manufactured goods as well as 400,000 cubic meters of crushed stone and 600,000 quintals of paving cement - sets up an important connection between Turin-Milan and the Bergamo-Milan, Brescia-Bergamo (already in operation) and Venice-Padua (under construction) motorways, fitting into the overall design of the envisioned “pedealpine Turin-Trieste motorway” (the current A4): a

single artery across the north of the peninsula connecting its major cities, including Rijeka, which was Italian at the time.

The data shows the success of the operation: in about seven years the average daily transit rates double.

These are times when Italy seems to be made of modeling clay, to be completely reshaped, invented, expanded; after all, the only roads in use are still those of our Roman ancestors.

But the most robust motorway development in the Bel Paese, inseparably linked to mass motorization, takes place from the 1950s to the 1970s, when the network, from the 500 kilometers in operation before World War II, grows to about 5,000 (there are about 7,000 today).

During that period of economic happiness, Novara's young people continued to see each other at the autogrill bridge, the construction of which Bianchetti replicated around Italy no fewer than 11 times, while the motorway was the focus of continuous and numerous upgrades and expansions; later, the new high-speed rail line built parallel to the roadway was added.

Today the infrastructure has changed a great deal, adapting to the needs that have evolved over the years, and while very much alive and operational for the influx of traffic that it continues to sort, it is beginning to look like a piece of national history. Like the autogrill bridge, which is still in place: run by a different company and more integrated into the landscape, it continues to tell the story of a long journey to modernity.

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