The rapid growth of the suburbs had some negative effects on cities. Rouse was tapped to serve on the Eisenhower Task Force on Housing Programs and Policies and chaired the committee that recommended the urban renewal program embraced in the Housing Act of 1954. In 1959 he became president of ACTION, the American Council to Improve Neighborhoods, formed to broaden people’s knowledge and perspective about urban problems. He used that pulpit to push his fervent belief that without bold action, the growth of every city would be outpaced by deterioration.

In the 1970s, Rouse turned his attention to cities again. A proposal from architect Benjamin Thompson to transform the old market buildings in Boston into a modern marketplace drew an enthusiastic response from Rouse. It put Rouse on the path to development of festival marketplaces. The success of Faneuil Hall Marketplace and Baltimore’s Harborplace landed Rouse on the cover of the August 24, 1981 issue of Time magazine with the headline “Cities Are Fun!”

“We must hold fast to the realization that our cities are for people and unless they work well for people they are not working well at all. We should think and plan and program, not in terms of schools, highways, streets, stores, offices or even dwelling units; but we should begin our total plan and program with the first and fundamental purpose of making a city into neighborhoods where a man, his wife and family can live and work and, above all else, grow . . .”

“We went to Boston to undertake Faneuil Hall Marketplace. We did it because we had a deep conviction that there is a yearning on the part of the people for a lively, festive marketplace at the heart of the city.”

“The task is to make the city work for its people, to create new life, to humanize the city.”