

Debate continues on Buffalo Skyway

Local opposition grows to plans for removal

BY TERRY DUFFY

Editor-in-Chief

"What to do with the Buffalo Skyway?"

As the New York State Department of Transportation continues its extensive review on the future of this heavily used waterfront span with a push for demolition, the debate in Buffalo-Niagara continues.

The span first opened in the early 1950s to serve the transit needs of a then-growing metro region plus numerous waterfront interests, including a large steel industry, related coke manufacturing, forge plants, flour-milling operations and ship-building/maritime facilities. Today, the Skyway remains in service as a primary transportation link from downtown Buffalo to the south towns. It serves approximately 46,000 vehicles daily, including an estimated 5,000 to 7,000 trucks and commercial vehicles.

Despite its heavy use, a push continues to take down the span in order to allow for new and continued development on the waterfront and outer harbor areas. U.S. Rep. Brian Higgins, whose 26th Congressional District includes the Skyway, has been a leading voice in calling for its demolition.

"A decade of expressway building in the nation in the 1950s, including Buffalo, fed that era's obsession with automobiles," Higgins said in recent congressional testimony in support of Buffalo projects as the Biden-Harris administration considers a massive federal infrastructure bill. "It hurt city neighborhoods and destroyed a lot of quality of life."

Included in his remarks were calls on the federal level to address the major arterials in Buffalo – namely the Kensington (Route 33) and Scajaquada (Route 198) expressways. Higgins also included his call for removal of the Skyway in correspondence to U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Peter Buttigieg on this issue. He argued the span has become obsolete, has critical infrastructure and safety issues, and is impeding development of the Buffalo waterfront.

"In the Biden-Harris administration we will make righting these wrongs an imperative," Higgins wrote. He went on to call Buffalo and Western New York, "a case study of this damaging period in urban history."

Higgins' backing has won the support of Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who has directed the New York State Department of Transportation to undertake an exhaustive scoping study to determine the Skyway's future. Since early 2020, DOT has been considering a plan to remove approximately 3.5 miles of interchanges, highway approaches and infrastructure on the span extending from Church Street in downtown Buffalo to Tiff Street in the Outer Harbor area. It would call for complete removal of the 1.4-mile Skyway complex. In turn, a new highway connector starting at New York State Thruway I-190 Exit 3 (Seneca Street) and continuing through South Buffalo neighborhoods to the Tiff Street interchange at Route 5 would replace it.

Estimated cost for removal of the Skyway complex itself is said to be in the range of \$600 million to \$1.4 billion, according to the DOT. Costs for the connector are still in



An evening shot of the 800-foot American Mariner lake freighter in the Buffalo River, with the Naval Park and the Skyway in the background. (Photo by Marcus Gillebarrd, as posted on the Facebook group page Buffalo Area Transportation, Industry, Architecture and Defense)

development, and funding for either project has yet to be secured.

"The Skyway has become a physical and visual barrier to waterfront development," said Susan Surdej, DOT regional public information officer and engineer, in February 2020, as she echoed calls for removal by Higgins and Cuomo. "Not only waterfront development, but recreational on the waterfront and mixed-use development. It has served a useful life."

She said DOT is looking at the future and alternatives.

Calls for removal come off a massive, nearly \$30 million Skyway redecking project completed recently by DOT that is projected to extend the span's service life at least two decades.

It has also led to many residents in Buffalo Niagara questioning the reasoning of both Higgins and Cuomo for removal of the span at this time. The topic has become prominent on social media pages, notably on Facebook where two groups – the Skyway Club and also the Buffalo Area Transportation, Industry, Architecture and Defense – have come out in opposition to any plans for removal.

Rachel Schneekloth, a Buffalo public school teacher who serves as administrator of the Skyway Club on Facebook, said her group organized soon after what she discovered was a growing commonality of love for the bridge and opposition for its removal.

"This past winter, I was chatting with my friend ... about the city and the Skyway," she said. "We discovered that we both love the Skyway and he told me about the plan to tear it down. ... I decided to start Skyway Club on Facebook to find out how many other people feel the way I feel – affection and admiration for the Skyway bridge."

What she soon discovered is there's a large segment of Buffalo-area online followers who do not want the Skyway removed at all. Launched just recently, "The club has grown through word-of-mouth and we are up to over 850 members," Schneekloth said. "We also started a petition, asking for a public conversation about priorities and plans before demolishing the Skyway. We are up to 2,200 signatures to save the Skyway with more added every day. There is lot of love and positivity for the Skyway out there!"

Commenting on the span's value to commuters, she continued, "The Skyway is a part of the

region's traffic infrastructure that goes north and south along Lake Erie and the Niagara River. What's important about the Skyway is that, like the Grand Island bridges, it allows both car/truck traffic and boat traffic at the same time without delay. There is still important shipping in our region as well as a significant recreational boating economy. Because of the Skyway, those boats and ships don't have to wait for lift bridges, and vehicular traffic can continue unimpeded.

"In addition, the truck traffic along the north/south corridor is critical for maintaining the manufacturing base of our community, such as (the former) Bethlehem Steel site and in Niagara Falls. A lot of truck drivers have joined Skyway Club!"

She said there continues to be building opposition via Facebook, in calls and emails and on local talk shows.

"I can identify no neighborhood or community, no group or organization of citizens that want to remove the Skyway," Schneekloth said. "Rep. Brian Higgins wants to remove the Skyway; a few developers might be interested in the land for private development; and there a few people interested in removing the Skyway to 'free up land' downtown and on the outer harbor. ...

"The vast majority of informed opinion (that I encountered) is that we need the Skyway as a part of our transportation infrastruc-

ture, and as our unique signature bridge."

In response to area opposition, the state held a contest to gauge alternatives on a future use versus demolition. A preference was given to maintaining a portion of the span as a vista open to pedestrians and cyclists. One entry referred to as the "Cloudwalk" concept could one day see the city side link to the Buffalo River taken down, with the lakeside portion left standing.

Schneekloth said she doesn't view this as being practical.

"The Skyway-as-pedestrian park alternative is not the best choice for our city," she said. "A 'Cloudwalk' will only be usable a few months out of the year due to our cold winter and winds. Additionally, unless removing the Skyway will magically make people stop driving cars in our city, removing the Skyway as transportation infrastructure means that a new road and seven new bridges will have to be built to reroute Skyway traffic. This will be colossally expensive, environmentally destructive, and incredibly destructive."

Instead, she prefers the Skyway to remain as is, and accessible at times to walkers and bikers.

"We can have our 'Cloudwalk' on the structure as is," Schneekloth said.

At this writing, an actual decision has yet to be finalized as to the Skyway's future. Discussions continue on the federal level with Biden's massive infrastructure plans. Any future state action more than likely is dependent on federal funding. In the meantime, local curiosity, opposition and discussions continue.

"The Skyway is a positive, interesting and spectacular part of our waterfront," Schneekloth commented. "We propose that we work together to think of ways to use the Skyway more creatively. Besides closing (it) to traffic on designated summer afternoons, we have some great ideas for using the space underneath more creatively for public art, performance spaces, bike paths, skate parks, etc., as has been done in other cities (such as with the Gardiner Expressway in downtown Toronto)."

"These types of spaces, events and outside-the-box ideas will help grown Buffalo's reputation as a special, unique, welcoming, diverse, creative city."

Village of Lewiston

Board

approves 21-22 budget

Trustees in the Village of Lewiston on Monday voted unanimously to approve the 2021-22 budget, which totals \$4,088,804. The fiscal year begins June 1.

Included in the budget is \$3,279,154 in general fund expenses, \$356,000 in water fees, \$453,650 for sewer maintenance and \$3,576,179 in revenues. The tax rate will be \$7.76 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation, with a tax levy of \$1,226,190.

As part of the budget, the board approved a 5-cent water rate increase – from \$3.70 to \$3.75 per 100 cubic feet of water consumed. Billing is effective starting with the July 1 cycle.

The sewer rate will remain \$4.79 per 100 cubic feet.

Prior to the financial plan's adoption, a public hearing was held and yielded no comments.

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In addition, restoring the proper alignment of the pelvis in women through chiropractic adjustment has also been found to improve the muscle tone of the pelvic floor, which helps the bladder hold its urine and stops the dribbling on coughing or sneezing.

There can also be diet and environmental toxins that can affect body function adversely. These can be in the form of food additives, too much sugar in the diet, perfumes and fragrances in cleaning and laundry products just to name a few.

Rose Chiropractic, P.C. is a natural health care practice focusing on health improvement through designed clinical nutrition and chiropractic, located at 435 Ridge St., Lewiston. Call 754-9039 for a complimentary consultation to see if we can help you or your child.

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