



BOPC Position Statement on Route 198 Scajaquada Expressway

Updated July 2020

Road History:

In the 1950's, the City of Buffalo Planning Commission executed an initiative to channel traffic onto a limited access expressway through Olmsted's Delaware Park in the area known as the Scajaquada Corridor. The Commission determined that the "Scajaquada Creek Arterial Highway" could be created with minimal impact, as the right of way was predominantly through Delaware Park on City owned "vacant land." This 'vacant land' included the Humboldt Parkway (see Humboldt Parkway Restoration Position Statement), Delaware Park, Scajaquada Parkway and the shoreline of Scajaquada Creek. As a result, a policy decision was made to funnel a huge volume of traffic into and through Delaware Park to link the Kensington Expressway (Rt. 33) with the NYS Thruway (I-190).

At the heart of the Scajaquada corridor is the section running through Delaware Park where restoration and reunification of the park is urgently needed. This is a key strategic opportunity to invest for a tangibly visible, safe, multi-modal, park-appropriate road solution to reconnect Delaware Park and restore this historic place to Olmsted's intended vision.

The Scajaquada Expressway was built in the late-1950s. The development divided and destroyed acres of parkland in Delaware Park, cut off residential sectors from the park and waterfront, obliterated Humboldt Parkway, bisected established neighborhoods, created barriers, and limited access to Main St. This gash in the urban fabric resulted in economic deterioration and a negative impact on quality of life. Development in the area from Black Rock to the Hamlin Park neighborhood receded. Residential housing values declined.

The absence of an organized advocacy group contributed to the project going forward. There was no organization to advocate for the Olmsted Parks at the time. The "Friends of Olmsted Parks" was not created until the end of the 1970s, and the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy (BOPC) did not begin maintaining and working to preserve and restore the Olmsted Parks until the new millennium.

BOPC Advocacy History:

The BOPC has had a sustained advocacy effort calling for the elimination of high speed expressway traffic from Delaware Park for decades. A 30-40 mph recommended design alternative from the 2005 Expanded Project Proposal (EPP) was incorporated into the BOPC's Plan for the 21st Century in 2008. In 2014, after years of advocacy, and out of concern that an acceptable compromise solution would not be reached through the pending Environmental Impact Study (EIS) process by New York State, the BOPC Board of Trustees passed a resolution and called for the complete removal of the expressway through Delaware Park and the restoration of Humboldt Parkway from Agassiz Circle to Main St.

BOPC Position:

It is the position of the BOPC that the high volume of traffic cutting through Delaware Park on Route 198 is an unwarranted intrusion into the landscape and compromises the historic integrity of Frederick Law Olmsted's design for the Park. Olmsted intended the park experience to be that of immersion into the natural environment leaving behind all the distractions and stress of urban life, not to be subjected to the sights and sounds of expressway traffic. The construction of Route 198 through the park in the late 1950s destroyed that pastoral and picturesque experience in a way that cannot be mitigated through barriers, walls or shrubbery.

It is the BOPC's stated position that the former expressway should never have been imposed on Delaware Park, and it should be removed.

The BOPC believes, however, that an alternative to any literal removal could be developed. The design philosophy for a new park road along the corridor first and foremost should be in harmony with the surrounding historic landscape. Within Delaware Park, "harmony" is to be defined as the least possible intrusion for the park user experience.

As such, it is the BOPC's position to support an Olmsted Delaware Park-appropriate corridor, which can be defined as:

- Constructing any roadway through the Park in a manner faithful to Olmsted design.
- Restoring unimpeded access from the Meadow to Hoyt Lake, removal of vehicular traffic and restoration of the Stone Arch Bridge over Delaware Ave to park activities and the uses for which it was designed and intended.

- Improving park access for multi-modal use from surrounding neighborhoods and providing connectivity between landscape features of Delaware Park, through improved at-grade intersections at Agassiz Circle, Delaware Ave, Lincoln Pkwy, Elmwood Ave and Grant St and improved grade-separated routes between intersections.
- Providing traffic-calming measures along the entire corridor with a 30 mph or less roadway design, including the use of gateway features and diverting commercial traffic from the Park.
- Removing median features from the roadway corridor between intersections in order to narrow the overall roadway intrusion to the greatest extent possible, and to maximize valuable historic landscape restoration and increase natural landscape buffers.
- Recessing or lowering elevations of the roadway corridor through the Park to the greatest extent possible and minimizing the visual and auditory intrusion to the park user experience.

BOPC remains focused on - and will maintain - its advocacy and concern for the entire length of this corridor, including the Scajaquada Creek watershed, out to the Niagara River, and the Humboldt Parkway destroyed through the construction of Rt. 33 and Rt. 198. The Governor and New York State, and the City of Buffalo, have made significant investments in the cultural institutions along this corridor over the last decade, including a significant investment protecting/restoring the future of the Scajaquada Creek Corridor through a variety of funding sources including the State's Clean Water Infrastructure Act.

It is the BOPC's position that the strategic investments being made by the government and the philanthropic and environmental communities deserve a comprehensive planning effort in coordination with this roadway in order to maximize their potential mutual benefit. The BOPC strongly advocates that this is a once in a generation chance to design the right road for this corridor and community, and that such an opportunity should be met as a challenge for best practices.

Equally so, at the east end of the corridor, the Governor has made significant commitments to improve the future of the east side of Buffalo. In partnership with Assembly member Crystal Peoples-Stokes and Mayor Byron Brown, the NYSDOT will study the reestablishment of Humboldt Parkway along with adjoining community investments, thus there is a real need for comprehensive planning with this roadway project to maximize the critical revitalization of this community.

BOPC urges the NYSDOT to reengage the stakeholder community in scoping out a comprehensive, community-based design approach that rebuilds our infrastructure to

reunite the park and reconnect the community, improve accessibility through safe complete streets, and enhance the economic vitality of this corridor for our City.

Status Updates:

In 2014, the BOPC joined Go Bike Buffalo, through the advocacy process of the Western New York Environmental Alliance (WNYEA) in the establishment of the Scajaquada Corridor Coalition (SCC). The SCC is a coalition of community based and institutional stakeholders along the Scajaquada corridor. It is the mission of the SCC to unite the communities north, south, east and west and to advocate for the removal of the NYS Route 198, which lacerated Delaware Park and shredded the connections within our community. The SCC believes that a comprehensive, community-inspired 21st century design alternative to this 20th century highway will restore our historic parks and parkway system, connect our neighborhoods, create complete safe streets and enhance the economic vitality of the City of Buffalo.

2017 - The NYSDOT distributed the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) in November 2017 after holding a Public Hearing in August 2017. It was clear from public statements at the hearing and through written comments provided, that the NYSDOT did not propose a build alternative for the Route 198 that meets the community's goals for this important corridor.

Region 5 Director Frank Cirillo issued a statement on January 8, 2018 that the NYSDOT would rescind the FEIS and will not move forward with the project in its current form. Noting that "more than two-thirds of the most recent public comments received by NYSDOT were not in favor of the proposed Scajaquada Corridor project moving forward," Director Cirillo stated that NYSDOT "will continue to engage the community and make safety improvements as necessary. In the coming months, we will hit the 'reset' button and begin a fresh dialogue with stakeholders."

In April 2018, representatives from the Governor's office initiated preliminary conversations with the BOPC and other members of the Scajaquada Corridor Coalition in relation to the process of restarting the community engagement dialogue.

In 2019, representatives from the Governor's office assigned the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Commission (GBNRTC) to reach out to the BOPC and engage the public on a new plan for the 198. The directive was to enlist as many community stakeholders as possible to re-envision the road for the future based on urban planning and design principles. The GBNRTC leadership in communication with the BOPC and SCC has started to review and develop a process for public inclusion.

In early 2020, the GBNRTC released the scope of its tactical plan, assembling a multidisciplinary team of planners, traffic engineers and community engagement specialists. The estimated 18-month timeline for this planning process has been impacted timewise by the recent Coronavirus public health crisis. At the Federal level of this evolving emergency, aid for infrastructure investment is being considered at greater levels, and local state and federal officials are showing renewed interest in funding a transportation transformation, not only for the 198, but for the 33-Kensington as well.

The BOPC and SCC will continue to work on bringing back together corridor stakeholders to revitalize this critical conversation.

Notations:

The City of Buffalo is the property owner and landlord authority of all public parks. The BOPC and City operate in a public-private partnership for the maintenance of the Olmsted parks, as well as collaborate on park capital projects and improvement priorities.

BOPC is still reviewing issues related to commercial traffic, multimodal routes and intersection with city street network, and how they affect our core mission to preserve and restore the Olmsted Parks.

This position statement is fluid and ongoing in meeting the mission and resolve of the BOPC.