

Another Voice: Buffalo's Skyway corridor demands bold thinking

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By **Andrew Nash**

I've lived in Boston and San Francisco and seen how removing an aerial expressway can transform dreary strips of wasted land into wonderful and exciting places. As an engineer and Buffalo native who helped plan San Francisco's freeway removal, I'm sure Buffalo can do the same.

But what about the traffic? In fact, cities from San Francisco to Seoul, Rochester to (soon) Syracuse have shown that removing urban expressways can vastly improve livability, quality of life and the local economy – without causing gridlock.

The traffic can be accommodated by a new Skyway Parkway, improvements to existing roadways and a sustainable transport network. And, as proved in other cities, some of the traffic will simply disappear.

The Skyway Parkway should resemble San Francisco's Embarcadero or Boston's Rose Kennedy Greenway: an attractive landscaped boulevard, with protected cycling paths and safe walkways. And, just like in San Francisco and Boston, tearing down the expressway wall and improving local access will spur development of neighboring properties.

Intelligent transport systems, or ITS, will help the new parkway and surrounding roadways accommodate traffic demand while improving safety and reducing environmental impacts. ITS is a new and rapidly growing technology, so why not make the Skyway corridor a living lab for ITS development by building an urban transport research center as part of the project?

In addition to offering practical support for Skyway corridor planning, this research center would provide space for entrepreneurs. It would form the nucleus for a transport innovation cluster – helping generate jobs and economic development. And, wouldn't it be great to put it in the Central Terminal?

Buffalo should use the project to help build the city's Bicycling Master Plan. Start with a full network of cycling and walking paths throughout the corridor. Then connect this network with routes in downtown and South Buffalo to make bicycling a viable commute option while improving access to the Skyway corridor.

And, why not go further? Why not reinvent Frederick Law Olmsted's parkway design – created for Buffalo in the 1870s – for the 21st century? For example, rebuild a route like: Richmond – Pennsylvania – Niagara into a landscaped roadway, with safe, separated paths for bicycles.

And finally, why not build a new Skyway? This time with a cable car. Cable cars are a popular and efficient form of urban transport. Buffalo's cable car could connect the Canal District with a visitor center at the Buffalo Harbor State Park via an observation deck over the Buffalo River.

Buffalo should use this opportunity to show once again how clever investments in new transport ideas can build economically viable cities – just like the Erie Canal 200 years ago.

Andrew Nash, a Buffalo native, is a transport planner working in Vienna, Austria.

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