

# Another Voice: Urban highway research center should be part of Skyway plan

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**By Another Voice**

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**By Andrew Nash**

Rep. Brian Higgins is right when he says the Skyway can be replaced with a combination of intelligent transport systems and minor roadway improvements. Major urban highways have been torn down and replaced by sustainable transport systems in a growing number of cities with great results, but often these projects have been driven by strong political leadership, not traffic engineering.

In short, planners know that traffic can melt away, local economies can benefit and neighborhood livability can improve by replacing urban highways with sustainable transport systems – but don't know exactly how or why.

This creates two problems for the Skyway. First, how can Higgins' ideas be transformed into an effective design alternative for the Skyway Environmental Impact Statement? And, second, how can this alternative be evaluated accurately in the EIS?

Both questions could be answered by spending part of Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's \$10 million EIS jump-start funding to create an urban highway research center. The interdisciplinary center could be managed by the University at Buffalo. It would work directly with EIS planners to design effective solutions for replacing the Skyway, and develop more precise traffic analysis techniques for the EIS.

But the research center would also be a great opportunity for Buffalo's economy.

Cities throughout the world are grappling with the problem of aging urban highways. Rehabilitation is expensive and funding is tight. New transport solutions are essential if we are to rescue our planet from climate change and enrich society.

The proposed research center would enhance Buffalo's economy by spinning off new companies specializing in sustainable transport technologies, products and consulting – a market sure to grow quickly. These companies would develop the tools and techniques cities need to successfully replace aging urban highways with environmentally friendly multimodal transport systems.

Products such as smart traffic signals, integrated traffic control systems and software that accurately models sustainable transport would be developed at the research center and tested in the Skyway corridor.

But Buffalo needs to act fast – if we don't begin this research another city will. Funding is available from Cuomo's EIS jump-start funds and Higgins should seek additional research funds from the upcoming federal transport reauthorization.

Creating an urban highway research center would help us design a more efficient and environmentally sensitive replacement for the Skyway while at the same time supporting the creation of new sustainable businesses.

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

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