



STEFAN I. MYCHAJLIW

ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER

April 8, 2021

Hon. Brian Higgins
United States House of Representatives
2459 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Higgins,

First and foremost, thank you for your consistent support in turning the dream of building the Arlene Mychajliw Seneca Babcock Community Center a reality. Your efforts helped strengthen services for families in and around the new facility. I look forward to future expansion that will include physical and mental health services for those in the Seneca Babcock neighborhood. Thank you in advance for your help with what lies ahead to best serve families. Your support is greatly appreciated.

Now to the reason why I write, to share my concerns about plans to remove the Skyway. I commend your efforts to redevelop our waterfront. We both agree the Skyway has hindered development for decades. Something bold needs to be done. What you are working on and advocating for is bold and exactly the kind of thinking that will implement change that will have a positive impact on many generations. I wholeheartedly understand the argument that the bridge is a monstrosity serving as an albatross around the neck of future waterfront development. I get it and I agree.

As a resident of the Village of Hamburg, I can tell you that roadway is the primary, and most convenient method of traveling to and from the Southtowns for thousands of commuters, including me. According to the State Department of Transportation, more than 42,500 vehicles travel the Skyway daily. Removal of that roadway, I fear, could cause increased congestion, greater inconveniences, and may even cause several Southtown taxpayers to re-think plans to work or recreate in the city.

Members of my staff recently tried driving three different routes downtown, each time using Hamburg Town Hall at 6100 South Park Avenue as the starting point. On March 30, beginning at 10:56am, staff members turned left onto South Park Avenue, traveled Legion Drive past the high school, and turned right on to Lake Street/Camp Road.

In the first instance, staffers continued on Camp Road to Route 5, over the Skyway, turning right onto Church Street at the foot of the skyway, then left onto Franklin Street, ending in front of the Rath building. On the second trip, staff members entered the Thruway on Camp Road, taking the 190 North, also exiting at Church Street, and ending in front of the Rath building.

The third trip began at town hall, to Legion to Camp Road and Route 5, but this time exiting Ohio Street, turning left onto South Park, and right onto Pearl Street, again, ending the drive at 95 Franklin Street. Bear in mind in

each case the starting point was Hamburg Town Hall, which is located near the Thruway entrance. Thousands of Southtowns commuters do not live as close to the Thruway entrance, and therefore using that roadway would be a greater inconvenience for them.

I should point out we did not drive these routes during rush hour, but we wanted to get an idea how long each drive was with no other factors being considered. Round trip using the skyway took 37 minutes. Using the thruway to the 190 round trip was 49 minutes, plus a toll of 50 cents using the Camp Road entrance/Exit 57. Traveling the Ohio Street route round trip took 53 minutes. If the Skyway were to be removed, certainly congestion, and even more delays would result.

As the State DOT and other entities consider alternatives to the Skyway, I would also like to point out that the state estimates between 8 to ten acres of wetlands would be impacted by other construction, meaning there would be a negative environmental impact to constructing an alternative route. In addition, several freight ships and tugs rely on the easy passage under the skyway, with an estimated 90 annual freight passages, and another 50 tug passages.

Congressman Higgins, in addition to the inconveniences, longer commutes, and environmental issues, another concern of mine is cost. New York State lawmakers have just proposed a budget of \$212 billion. That is an \$18 billion increase in spending. New York State is already losing more population than any other state in the country, and the cost of doing business here will soon become untenable. The price tag for such a project as the Skyway removal and construction of new roadways is sure to be hefty. If we expect to rely on state or federal funds to not only build these new roadways and arterials, but also fund further waterfront development, I question the ability of New Yorkers to pay for it all.

We are certainly living in challenging times. The concerns of Southtowns residents must be strongly considered, and the costs and debt we are unloading onto the backs of our children and grandchildren must be of paramount concern.

Thank you so very much for listening to my concerns and feedback. The Skyway removal to properly develop downtown is a noble and worthy effort. In no way, shape or form am I going to join any chorus of critics who outright reject bold ideas, oppose them publicly and sit on the sidelines without offering solutions, alternatives, or feedback. My mission is to simply ensure Southtowns commuters like myself have a seat at the table of the decision-making process. We cannot afford to make a monstrous mistake of increasing commute times, clogging traffic and increasing the cost of travel for taxpayers.

I would be happy to meet with you and discuss ways we can best continue serving the interest of Southtowns commuters while continuing to improve our beloved waterfront.

Sincerely,



Stefan I. Mychajliw, Jr.
Erie County Comptroller

CC: Ms. Marie Therese Dominguez, Esq., Commissioner New York State Department of Transportation