

BRIAN HIGGINS
27TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE
HIGHWAYS, TRANSIT AND PIPELINES
WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT
COAST GUARD AND MARITIME
TRANSPORTATION

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT
REFORM
ENERGY AND RESOURCES
NATIONAL SECURITY, EMERGING THREATS,
AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3227

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
431 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-3306
(202) 226-0347 (FAX)

WESTERN NEW YORK OFFICES:
LARKIN BUILDING
726 EXCHANGE STREET
SUITE 601
BUFFALO, NY 14210
(716) 852-3501
(716) 852-3929 (FAX)

FENTON BUILDING
2 EAST 2ND STREET
SUITE 300
JAMESTOWN, NY 14701
(716) 484-0729
(716) 484-1049 (FAX)

WEBSITE: www.house.gov/higgins

November 19, 2012

Hon. Joan McDonald
Commissioner
New York State Department of Transportation
50 Wolf Road
Albany, NY 12232

Re: The Buffalo Skyway and the I-81 viaduct in Syracuse

Dear Commissioner McDonald:

I am in receipt of correspondence from your regional office indicating that they will shortly be undertaking an analysis of alternatives to the rehabilitation of the Buffalo Skyway. I commend this decision.

Relatedly, I read with great interest the Syracuse Post Journal's recent account of your positive response to proposals to tear down the elevated I-81 viaduct in downtown Syracuse.^[1] As with the Buffalo Skyway, your agency is in the process of studying whether to rehabilitate and maintain that infrastructure or replace it with more suitable alternatives. The two facilities have much in common. They are both remnants of the Robert Moses era, they are each about 1.5 miles long, each structure is "functionally obsolete," "structurally deficient," and "fracture critical." Significantly, they are both nearing the point where their continued upkeep will require major reconstruction and will cost vast sums of money.

The Buffalo Skyway and the I-81 viaduct are also dissimilar in important ways. Without diminishing the case for replacing the I-81, it can be fairly stated that the replacement of the Buffalo Skyway with more suitable infrastructure is actually an easier undertaking, in several respects. For one thing, the Skyway carries substantially less traffic today (40,000 vs. 100,000 daily). Even more significant are the cost considerations. Replacing the Buffalo Skyway with more suitable infrastructure would actually cost less than keeping it in place (\$75 million vs. \$117 million). In Syracuse, while the estimated costs of all of the proposals have not

1 <http://www.cnycentral.com/news/story.aspx?id=808916>

been released, replacing the viaduct with more appropriate infrastructure will require more than the considerable cost (\$500 million) of rebuilding the viaduct as it stands today.^[2]

Again, I commend the Department's decision to finally undertake an alternatives analysis relative to the Buffalo Skyway. It is an important and necessary next step in the development of Buffalo's waterfront and the region's transportation infrastructure.

Sincerely,



Brian Higgins
Member of Congress

Enclosure: Syracuse I-81 and Buffalo Skyway Comparison Fact Sheet

2 <http://www.npr.org/2012/07/24/155917247/a-city-faces-its-berlin-wall-an-interstate-highway>