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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3226

February 24, 2021

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The Honorable Peter Buttigieg
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

I write today to request a meeting to discuss support at the U.S. Department of Transportation for initiatives to downgrade highways. Your enthusiasm for equitable transportation policy and intent to correct historical wrongs is forward-thinking and essential in national conversations about sustainable transportation practices, racial inequality, climate change, and economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

I was struck by your tweet from December 20, 2020 which reads “Black and brown neighborhoods have been disproportionately divided by highway projects or left isolated by the lack of adequate transit and transportation resources. In the Biden-Harris administration, we will make righting these wrongs an imperative.” Western New York, in particular the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls, is a case study of this damaging period in urban planning history.

Inspired by the urban design in Paris, France, renowned landscape architects Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux created a system of parks and parkways throughout Buffalo in the 19th century, the first American city to have such features. Their vision was decimated by urban renewal and autocentric planning efforts of the 1950s and 1960s, which resulted in four highways that bisect city neighborhoods and Olmsted parks, as well as obstruct access to the Lake Erie waterfront and the natural wonder of Niagara Falls. These are:

- **The Buffalo Skyway, NYS Route 5:** built in 1955, a fracture critical elevated bridge along the Lake Erie waterfront in downtown Buffalo. With the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo, New York State is currently moving forward on its removal.
- **The Kensington Expressway, NYS Route 33:** originally built as Humboldt Parkway, a tree-lined connector between Delaware Park and what is now Martin Luther King Jr. Park, the construction of this expressway harmed the Olmsted Parks system and caused generational damage to surrounding neighborhoods.
- **The Scajaquada Expressway, NYS Route 198:** bisects and disturbs Delaware Park, the largest park in the Olmsted parks system.
- **Niagara Scenic Parkway, formerly known as Robert Moses Parkway, NYS Route 957A:** constructed in the 1960s by the New York Power Authority (NYPA), which used eminent domain to seize property. After our successful advocacy, the parkway is currently being removed to restore access to the Niagara Gorge and Niagara Falls waterfront.

Like so many similar highways in communities across the country, these scourges of outdated infrastructure have perpetuated systemic racism and inequality, promoted the dominance of the automobile, destroyed green space, increased pollution, and limited public access and progress. We face a historic opportunity to enact policies that will ensure our nation's cities are livable and sustainable for all residents, and downgrading highways, relics of misguided and at times malicious past federal policy, is a critical step in doing so.

Thank you for your consideration of this meeting request and I look forward to working with you on this most important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brian Higgins". The signature is stylized with a large "B" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

BRIAN HIGGINS
Member of Congress

Appendix

1. Buffalo Skyway



2. The Kensington Expressway



¹ Cascio, Joe. 2015. Canalside Buffalo. [Photograph] Visit Buffalo Niagara.

<https://www.visitbuffaloniagara.com/businesses/canalside/>

² Bethel Jr., Bradley. Kensington Expressway. [Photograph] Congress for the New Urbanism.

<https://www.cnu.org/highways-boulevards/campaign-cities/buffalo-kensington>

3. The Scajaquada Expressway



4. New trail and park construction on the former site of the Robert Moses Parkway, with Niagara Falls in the background



³ Cascio, Joe. 2014. [Photograph] Buffalo Rising. <https://www.buffalorising.com/2016/02/scajaquada-expressway-to-become-boulevard/>

⁴ Rep. Higgins' Office.