

The Niagara Heritage Partnership has advocated for total (all 4 lanes) Niagara gorge Robert Moses Parkway removal since 1997. Our rationale for removal has been provided to the scoping team during this process. We are taking this further opportunity to make additional remarks in support of total removal, to state more clearly what we may have fallen short of stating previously.

We have already tried the two-lane “compromise” solution for nearly nine years. The failure of this “pilot” program to provide the necessary impetus for serious regional ecotourism marketing predicts the future failure of anything less than total removal. The current parkway is nothing more than a commuter route that happens to go past three state parks, degrading them in the process. It’s a constant reminder that decision-makers of the past lacked the necessary courage to make the best choice for the highest possible use of the unique gorge rim: total removal of the Robert Moses Parkway and the restoration of the natural landscapes.

The main argument made against total parkway removal is that villages north of Niagara Falls will be cut off from their share of tourists that they believe use the parkway to reach their businesses. Villages such as Wilson, NY, about twenty-five miles northeast of Niagara Falls, are also making this argument. They are fond of calling the parkway, this six mile piece of road situated as far west and south as it is possible for a road to be in Niagara County, their “vital artery.” They produce, however, absolutely no significant evidence in support of this claim, none, after 14 years of the issue being discussed, beyond anecdotal “testimony” from a few individuals. The reason no evidence has been produced is: there is no evidence to support this claim.

This “vital artery” argument is a smoke-screen for communities who wish the parkway to be maintained as a commuter route. When Lewiston, for example, is inundated with thousands of “tourists” who attend Artpark concerts, they do not attempt to cater to them for business purposes. They complain about traffic congestion. Comments made by the Old Fort Niagara Association and Artpark & Co. regarding the scoping should be inadmissible. Both are worthwhile and valuable organizations, but their close relationships with OPRHP, contractually, economically, etc, adds up to OPRHP talking to itself. Artpark concerts and other entertainments are propped up as a result of budgetary allocations and donations--a corporate welfare that could come to an end. Viewing the parkway as a solution to these seasonal traffic congestion problems is preposterous. A road that degrades what could otherwise be unique

landscapes shouldn't be retained as a "back-door" exit. The reenactments at the Old Fort are marvelous events--but the notion that all the re-enactors stay at the Howard Johnson's near the entrance to the gorge parkway north and emerge once a year to drive on it toward the Fort--or that the long event wouldn't draw spectators without the gorge parkway is unsupportable.

A good tourist map of the entire county, and beyond, has the potential to create enough genuine regional interest here to satisfy everyone. Though suggested previously, this idea was not embraced, perhaps because the north towns think "regionalism," a term with which they've recently become enamored, means only what they believe benefits them. Given that millions of visitors choose Niagara as a destination each year, and spend at least a few hours here at the major attraction, it is our opportunity to invite them to extend their visits by informing them of what our region has to offer. One of the ways to do this is with a collectible tourist map of the region, which lists and shows the location of attractions, points of interest, museums, bicycle paths, restaurants, historical sites, the Wine Trail, hotels, motels, fishing spots, wildlife observation areas, suggested self-tour routes, hiking opportunities, and so on. Obviously, some of this has already been done in isolated and subject specific guides, pamphlets, and online. This would be something different, with coded locations, some one sentence descriptions, histories, and so on. This would be a high-quality "keeper" souvenir that, for example, each person entering a State Parks parking lot at the Falls or other facility would be given free of charge. A packet of individual pamphlets could accompany the map. To defray the costs, each business or attraction would contribute funding (sliding scale) toward the printing of the map to be advertised beyond a simple dot-location on a route. This might take organization and cooperation beyond what the region is accustomed to, but if we are truly interested in promoting what we have, embracing the concept of regionalism beyond using the word as a charm, it might be considered. There are positive steps to take (other than maintaining obsolete infrastructure links because of unsupported beliefs) to ensure visitors know what our region offers – and that some of this is to be found in directions other than north from Niagara Falls: the Lockport caves, canal tours, the Wilson-Tuscarora State Park, the Wine Trail, Golden Hill, the Carrousel Museum, Murphy's Orchard, and so on.

In summary: there is sound rationale, and multiple reasons, for the total removal of the Niagara gorge parkway. There are no legitimate reasons for retaining even two lanes of it for a commuter route and, given the positive benefits of total removal, some immediate and some long range, total removal of all four lanes between the City of Niagara Falls and the Village of Lewiston is the option that should be endorsed by OPRHP.

Bob Baxter

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