



Reject the Kensington Highway Proposal Return Humboldt Parkway

Frederick Law Olmsted and partner Calvert Vaux created a system of parks and parkways in Buffalo, NY to benefit the ENTIRE community, earning Buffalo the moniker of “the best planned city in the world.” Key to the plan was Humboldt Parkway, connecting the city’s two largest parks (Delaware and Martin Luther King, Jr. (formerly known as Humboldt Park)) via a wide tree-lined boulevard.

One hundred years later, the intrusion of the 33-Kensington Expressway devastated Humboldt Parkway, dividing neighborhoods and prompting economic, social and cultural consequences, which haunt Buffalo to this day. In addition, the intrusion of the 198 Scajaquada Expressway tore apart Delaware Park, the “crown jewel” of the Olmsted Park and Parkway System in Buffalo, NY. Rather than the “best planned city in the world,” Buffalo became a city segregated by design, displacing thousands of African Americans.

Now sixty years later, thanks to the Governor and state and federal leaders, there is a real chance to right that wrong. There is an opportunity to pay respect to Olmsted’s Park and Parkways, duly recognized on the National Register of Historic Places, by returning to their vision of a city united through greenspace.

The current plan for the 33 - Kensington Expressway is neither a good design nor good use of funds. The proposed cap will “cover” a mere 4,500 feet of the expressway— at an immense per foot cost. It will do nothing to return Frederick Law Olmsted’s original parkway design. It won’t ensure a beautiful allées of trees. It won’t significantly reduce heat and provide shade. It won’t stitch back the community. It will be just one more insulting “solution” imposed on the residents of Buffalo’s East Side without real consultation or expertise.

State leaders, Federal Highway Administration and NYSDOT have ignored environmental and health impacts and are continuing the abusive behavior practiced in the 1960s when the 33-Kensington Expressway was imposed on Buffalo's East Side. The proposed cap is not acceptable for the neighborhoods around the 33; they deserve better and the residents of the entire City of Buffalo deserve better.

The 33-Kensington Expressway proposal is unacceptable and should be rejected. It's time to return the Humboldt Parkway to its original grandeur.

When the city and state first began to revisit the designs of 198, community members opposed the solution by the NYSDOT, demanding a tree-lined boulevard that would reunite the cultural assets in keeping with Olmsted's original plan. Ultimately the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC) took over the planning process. As a result, after decades of hard-fought advocacy, these neighborhoods succeeded in identifying a safe and park-appropriate multi-modal roadway through Delaware Park. The same is demanded for the 33-Kensington Expressway and the totality of these roads must be stitched back together - "One Road Now."

According to NYSDOT, there is just one solution for the 33-Kensington Expressway— a partial cap. But that should not be the end of the discussion. The cap will NOT restore Humboldt Parkway; it is just another temporary fix to a historic divide. Unless other options are explored, the same communities that have borne the brunt of racism, pollution and inequitable investment will be victimized once again.

One real option is creating a boulevard. Much like the 198 solution, a boulevard approach to the 33 would reunite the communities and come close to restoring the Humboldt Parkway. Rather than seriously studying this option, NYSDOT has summarily rejected it on the grounds that there is too much traffic on the 33.

However, in Milwaukee, WI, faced with a similar situation, the communities aren't taking no for an answer. Local leaders have told their state DOT that saving a few minutes of commute time should not take preference over restoring neighborhoods. Officials there note that removing the freeway has the potential to connect the neighborhood, make the area more walkable and safer, while regaining more public space. In the neighboring state of Michigan, Governor Gretchen Whitmer has acted in much the same way— applying for federal funds to eliminate I-375, which divided downtown Detroit forty years ago to create an ["urban boulevard."](#)

It's understandable that many in the neighborhood have previously been willing to accept the cap design, having waited so long for some action. But desire for action should not get in the way of thoughtful and integrated solutions, particularly when so much money is involved. As the Conservancy has outlined, there is an urgent need for a cultural landscape report that documents what happened to Olmsted's Humboldt Parkway. Nor should NYSDOT and others be allowed to ignore what is now overwhelming community support for a ONE ROAD NOW solution, endorsed by our partner the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy.

Buffalo needs to rebuild ALL its infrastructure for a more equitable future. Returning the 33 to a boulevard can be an important step to achieve that goal. And it can be a way for the NY governor to show leadership in the cause of social justice.

It's time that the Governor and citizens demanded the same kind of ambitious planning that leaders demanded in Olmsted's time. By thinking at the scale of the problem and reimagining both of Buffalo's expressways, Buffalo can develop a holistic plan that will be economically and environmentally sensible, connect communities rather than separate them and be worthy of Buffalo's Olmsted heritage.

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