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## Technical Report Reveals Impediments to Ramp B Alternatives

*Engineering findings reinforce difficulties of replacement and tunneling options following extended comprehensive analysis*

BUFFALO, NY/FORT ERIE, ON – As part of the ongoing Peace Bridge Project effort, the Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority (PBA) today released the findings of a recently completed technical report assessing various potential alternatives related to placing the Ramp B structure under the I-190.

This technical report, which will be included in the expansion project final environmental impact statement (FEIS) due out early next year, was commissioned by the PBA and New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), following renewed calls in March of this year by U.S. Rep. Brian Higgins (NY-27) and the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy to reevaluate Ramp B options, based on the Conservancy's interest in improving select view sheds to Lake Erie from Front Park. Ramp B was originally constructed in the early 1960's by the NYS Thruway Authority to connect the I-190 to the Peace Bridge and thereby remove bridge traffic from the surrounding neighborhoods.

"At the urging of Congressman Higgins and other vocal Front Park advocates, the expansion project engineering team took another serious look at removing and replacing Ramp B with a tunnel" said PBA Chairman Ken Schoetz. "This good faith effort resulted in NYSDOT and our consultant team going the extra mile and dedicating almost seven months, and nearly a half million dollars of additional study to this request."

The additional engineering report work undertaken concluded several impediments to the overall feasibility of replacement and tunneling options for Ramp B. Such impediments include:

- Design constraints related to I-190 connection steep road grading and the presence of a CSX railroad line, additional cultural resource investigations required based on proximity to the former Erie Barge Canal, and significant impacts to adjacent connecting ramps.
- Substantial constructability issues and traffic volume impacts on the local City of Buffalo street network, as well as neighborhood detours, and increases in the expansion project build-out schedule by an additional 1-3 years.
- Potential for considerable “border avoidance” and adverse impacts on Buffalo-Niagara region businesses that rely on a free-flowing border, while severely diminishing toll-revenue forecasts critical to expansion project financing.
- Permanent operational impact concerns regarding proposed Customs exit control facilities, commercial staging areas, maintenance and winter control issues.
- Additional permitting, project coordination and bureaucratic review by various local, state, and federal entities.
- Massive overall project costs increases, estimated between roughly \$45 million - \$107 million (USD) in year of construction dollars.

“We’re disappointed in the findings of the latest technical report, especially the sizeable cost estimates and the negative potential effects on project financing,” said Schoetz. “Our hope was for the best case scenario that no impediments existed – financial or otherwise – to tackling Ramp B as part of the expansion project. Unfortunately, the results tell a different story.”

While the report findings reinforce various difficulties associated with altering the Ramp B structure, plans to enhance Front Park remain intact as part of the expansion project and will dramatically improve the usability of the park compared to what currently exists. For instance, the project design seeks to remove all commercial and passenger vehicle traffic from Front Park by eliminating the bisecting Baird Drive roadway. Such an improvement will yield an increase in overall park space by nearly 2.74 acres of land. New trees, landscaping, and visual buffering will also help enrich local streetscapes and separate parklands from area ingress/egress ramps and expressways. Better traffic circulation patterns and depressed access ramps within the plaza will also reduce visual and sound impacts for park users.

“We appreciate Congressman Higgins’ continued recognition of the importance of the Peace Bridge corridor to the overall economic vitality of Western New York and Southern Ontario,” concluded Schoetz. “His willingness to bring people to the table and fight for the best and most practical expansion project possible should not go unnoticed.”

The findings of the analysis were shared with the Olmsted Conservancy and Congressman Higgins in October and then with other consulting parties including neighbors and the Olmsted Conservancy in a meeting this past Friday November 19, conducted by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP).

The Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority, a binational bridge authority, has owned and operated the Peace Bridge since 1933. The bridge, which was opened to traffic in 1927, spans the Niagara River between Fort Erie, Ontario, and Buffalo, New York, and is a key international border crossing.

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