



Buffalo Harbor Bridge Project

PIN 5758.17



DRAFT PURPOSE AND NEED STATEMENT

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project is to directly connect the downtown business district and the outer harbor area with a multi-modal (pedestrian, bicyclist, and motorized traffic) transportation facility over the Buffalo River and/or City Ship Canal between the Ohio Street Lift Bridge and the Erie Basin Marina in the City of Buffalo. This proposed transportation facility will be referred to as the Buffalo Harbor Bridge Project.

Need Statement

The overall need for the Buffalo Harbor Bridge Project is to address the current transportation inadequacies and deficiencies associated with the lack of a local crossing between downtown and the outer harbor. The following are specific project needs:

System Linkage Needs

Since the former South Michigan Avenue Bridge over the City Ship Canal was closed in the late-1950s, local access between the inner and outer harbor areas has been inefficient. The confusing and circuitous routes that remain between downtown and the outer harbor require a 4-mile trip compared to a ± 600 -ft. river crossing.

The existing Michigan Avenue Bridge over the Buffalo River provides access to the outer harbor via Kelly Island and, given the industrial nature of the Island, Michigan Avenue/Ganson Street mainly function as truck access roadways for several large-scale, active manufacturing plants, mills and distribution centers.

Modal Interrelationships

The present routes between downtown and the outer harbor do not provide for adequate multi-modal access. NY Route 5, an elevated expressway commonly referred to as "the Skyway," prohibits pedestrians and bicyclists. Both Ohio Street (and the Ohio Street Lift Bridge) and Michigan Avenue/Ganson Street (and the Michigan Street Lift Bridge), are locally designated truck routes that impede pedestrian and bicyclist access with high truck traffic volumes and speeds, and the lack of appropriate streetscape and refuge areas to facilitate safe access. In addition, the lift bridges are not compliant with the current Americans with Disabilities Act.

While access to the waterfront by land has been wanting, commercial and recreational watercraft users enjoy the nearly unimpeded boating/shipping use of the Harbor, River and the City Ship Canal. A new bridge must maintain adequate waterway access and allow quick access to the harbor by commercial and recreational watercraft seeking refuge during storms.

Transportation Demand

Previously, two City of Buffalo reports, the Engineering Report for Gateway Bridge, February 1987 and the Expanded Project Proposal for a Proposed Bridge - Inner/Outer Harbor Link, February 1999, were completed to determine the feasibility and cost of constructing a bridge across the Buffalo River. While a bridge project was determined to be feasible, the inability to finance the project led to its demise each time.

The need to reconnect the City with the waterfront has remained. The City of Buffalo's Draft Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (January 2007) specifically states as a policy standard (Standard 9.1(D)(7)):

Improve public access from downtown Buffalo and the Inner Harbor area to the Outer Harbor for both pedestrian, bicycles and motorized vehicles.

The Buffalo Harbor Bridge project (PIN 5758.17) is included in New York State's Long-Range Transportation Plan (Strategies for a New Age: New York State's Transportation Master Plan for 2030, approved 2006), the Region's Plan (Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC) 2030 Long-Range Transportation Plan for the Erie and Niagara Counties Region, approved June 2007), the 2008-2012 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) approved June 22, 2007 and the New York State Department of Transportation's Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) for Federal Fiscal Years 2008-2011, approved December 10, 2007.

The GBNRTC's Long-Range Plan states that the project is intended to improve access to the waterfront by constructing "Outer Harbor Bridge(s) over the Buffalo River." The plan does not specify any location(s) for the transportation facility; these issues will be addressed by developing the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Social Demands and Economic Development

A Buffalo Harbor Bridge will directly connect local traffic between downtown and the outer harbor, and support the economic development of the waterfront. Current and/or planned development projects in the area include the Buffalo Lakeside Commerce Park, Queen City Landing, Greenway Nature Trail, as well as two on-going and one potential Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) studies.

In addition to the economic benefits, the connection of downtown and the outer harbor will yield returns that extend beyond a monetary value. As stated in the

City of Buffalo's The Buffalo Waterfront Corridor Initiative, An Inventory and Analysis of Buffalo's Waterfront Planning Legacy (August 2005):

“Altogether, the community has a vision of a waterfront that is the beautiful, active, public edge of our City, continuously accessible from Riverside Park to Gallagher Beach and inland along the Buffalo River and Scajaquada Creek. It is a vision in which residents go down to enjoy the water as a part of daily life, and whose neighborhoods are better off for being there. It is a vision of a waterfront where visitors arrive and immediately see and understand what is so special about this place. It is a vision of a waterfront that is a safe and healthy place to visit. *It is a vision of a waterfront that is an important part of our economy, providing an impetus for new development while we protect what is most valuable about it. It is a bundle of connections between our City and the world, but also between the City and the waterfront, braided carefully to accommodate the needs of transportation and safeguard the precious resources of the waterfront.*”

The City has a long history of waterfront planning and development of harbor crossing studies. To realize the community's vision, a transportation solution that balances public access, and economic, social and environmental competing values is required.