

MEMORANDUM

To: Chuck Banas, John Norquist
From: Lucinda E. Gibson, P.E.
Date: 4 December 2007
Re: Development Opportunities Gained by a Multi-way Boulevard for Route 5

The Boulevard alternative for the Southtowns Connector Project will provide much greater opportunity for waterfront area development than the NYSDOT preferred alternative. This is due to the smaller footprint of the Boulevard, but even more importantly, due to the greater access and on-street parking that come with the boulevard. The value of the development will be greater too, due to the lower speed traffic, less noise, less air pollution, and other benefits of a thoroughfare of 35 mph rather than a limited access highway.

This memorandum provides some measures of the advantages of the Boulevard alternative in terms of development opportunity. While the construction cost of the Boulevard may be higher than the preferred alternative, the long term value and economic benefits will outweigh the costs.

NYSDOT Plan

NYSDOT has characterized their plan as converting Fuhrman Avenue into an “Olmstedian Boulevard”. This is a dubious description at best of a road that will be lined on one side by an embanked limited access highway, and on the other side by single use driveways of new development. Olmsted was an unparalleled landscape designer, and created beautiful natural landscapes in many cities, including Buffalo, that provide respite from urban life. He generally did not, however, design urban streets – and while Olmsted’s parkways are wonderful places of extraordinary value in our cities, they may not be the correct model for creating a vibrant urban place on Buffalo’s outer harbor.

The NYSDOT Preferred Alternative is designed to support a vision of private, auto-oriented development, as shown in the “Vision Plan” illustrated at the right. This vision of development may not represent the aspirations of the community, nor does it provide the most flexible plan to engage in long term economic development and placemaking.



Multiway Boulevard Plan

While the traffic volumes as projected for Route 5 would be adequately served by a four lane avenue, for purpose of this analysis, we are assuming a wider Multi-way boulevard. This design would address the concerns that have been expressed about the need to accommodate through traffic on a separate facility. The Multiway Boulevard provides the ideal facility to accommodate movement and create a vibrant place, allowing for pedestrian-oriented development.

Comparison of NYSDOT and Multiway Boulevard Options

The following table provides a comparison of the allocation of the public right of way for each option.

NYSDOT PLAN			MULTIWAY BOULEVARD PLAN		
Width (m)	Width (ft)		Width (m)	Width (ft)	
1.2	3.9	Fuhrmann W. sidewalk	4.6	15	W sidewalk
3.9	12.8	Fuhrmann lanes	2.1	7	Bike lane
3.6	11.8	Fuhrmann lanes	0.6	2	tree lawn
2.4	7.9	Fuhrmann paved median/lights	2.1	7	on-street parking
3.6	11.8	Fuhrmann lanes	3.4	11	Access lane
3.9	12.8	Fuhrmann lanes	2.7	9	tree lawn
1	3.3	Fuhrmann landscaped buffer	3.4	11	through lane
1.5	4.9	Fuhrmann E. sidewalk	3.4	11	through lane
2	6.6	landscaped buffer	4.3	14	landscaped median
2.4	7.9	Multi-use path	3.4	11	through lane
5	16.4	landscaped buffer	3.4	11	through lane
5	16.4	embankment to Route 5	2.7	9	tree lawn
0.7	2.3	Route 5 guardrail	3.4	11	Access lane
3	9.8	Route 5 shoulder	2.1	7	on-street parking
3.6	11.8	Route 5 lanes	0.6	2	tree lawn
3.6	11.8	Route 5 lanes	2.1	7	Bike lane
1.2	3.9	Route 5 inside shoulder	4.6	15	E sidewalk
0.6	2.0	Route 5 jersey barrier median	-		
1.2	3.9	Route 5 inside shoulder	-		
3.6	11.8	Route 5 lanes	-		
3.6	11.8	Route 5 lanes	-		
3	9.8	Route 5 shoulder	-		
0.7	2.3	Route 5 guardrail	-		
5	16.4	Route 5 embankment	-		
65.3	214.2	Total Width	48.8	160.0	Total Width

The table above shows that the NYSDOT preferred alternative has a typical cross section that is 54 feet wider, or 33% wider, than a multi-way boulevard option.

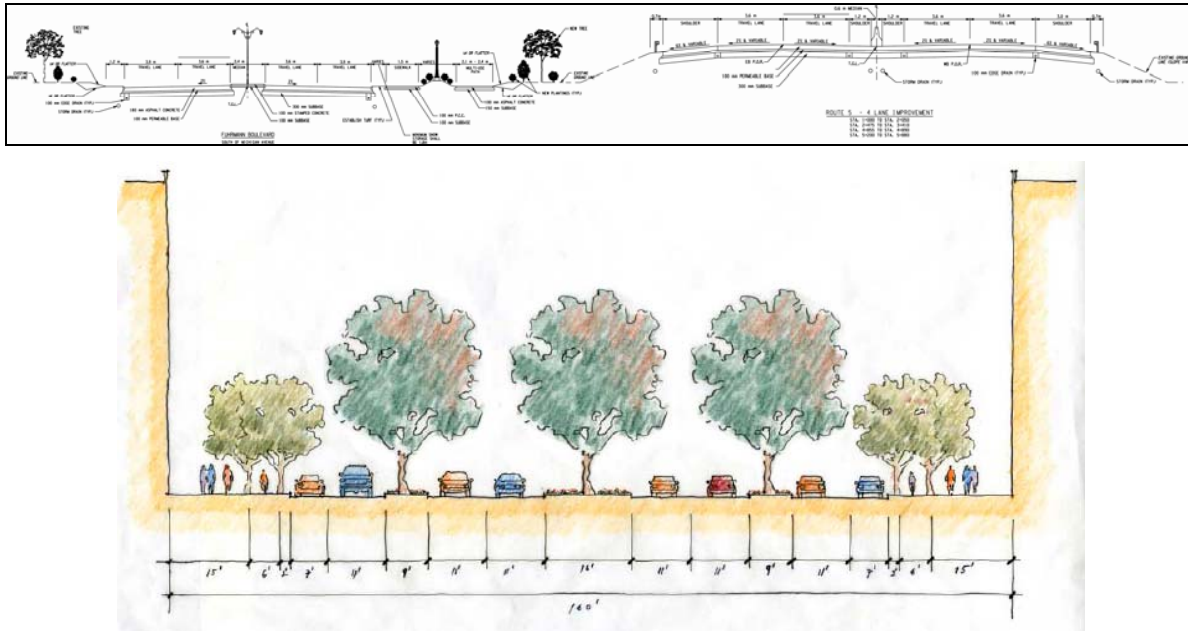
The following table shows the allocation of the right way among the different uses that should be accommodated in an urban street network.

NYSDOT PLAN			MULTIWAY BOULEVARD PLAN		
feet	% of total	Use	feet	% of total	Use
26.2	12%	% landscaping	36.0	23%	% landscaping
171.3	80%	% pavement or embankment	66.0	41%	% pavement or embankment
16.7	8%	% for pedestrians and bicyclists	44.0	28%	% for pedestrians and bicyclists
-	0	% on-street parking	14.0	9%	% of on-street parking
214.2	100%		160.0	100%	

The NYSDOT option is 33% larger overall, and includes over two and a half times more pavement. There is less space allocated for landscaping, and only about one third the space for pedestrians and bicycles. The NYSDOT plan offers no space for on-street parking, which is essential for creating a welcoming urban place.

Figure 1 below illustrates the street design cross sections described in the tables above at approximately the same scale.

Figure 1: NYSDOT and Multi-Way Boulevard Right-of-way Options



Increased Development Opportunities with the Multiway Boulevard Plan

The Multiway Boulevard Plan will provide substantially more developable road frontage, and therefore greater economic development opportunity, than the NYSDOT plan. Figure 2 below compares the frontage provided in each alternative. This comparison focuses on the segment of Route 5 between the touchdown point of the Skyway Bridge and the Tift Avenue intersection. South of this point, Route 5 is an at-grade alternative in the NYSDOT plan. The Outer Harbor area north of the Skyway Bridge will be served by an extension of Fuhrmann Avenue in either option, which should be addressed after the release of the report on the Skyway Bridge future alternatives. The Mutliway Boulevard option can be implemented immediately, with the Skyway Bridges still in place, and then be adapted to a potential future replacement of the Skyway bridge with a grade-level lift bridge to downtown Buffalo at Main Street or Erie Street.

Figure 2: Route 5 Corridor

Comparisons of existing, NYSDOT and Multiway Boulevard Alternatives

Existing Typical Width of the Route 5/ Fuhrmann Avenue right-of-way: varies, 170 to 350 feet

Proposed NYSDOT Preferred Alternative right of way width: 214 ft

Multiway Boulevard Alternative right-of-way width: 160 feet

Length of Boulevard Frontage for Future Development on Route 5 Corridor between the Skyway touchdown and the Union Ship Canal:

NYSDOT Preferred = 2.4 miles

Multiway Boulevard = 4.3 miles

Additional development Area provided by Multiway Boulevard = 16.5 acres

Because the Multiway Boulevard is much narrower than many portions of the existing Route 5/Fuhrmann Avenue right-of-way, this alternative will create development opportunities within the publicly owned right-of-way, which could help finance the infrastructure improvements. In addition, the Multiway Boulevard alternative will provide much greater access to other developable property. Just one example is illustrated below, along Route 5 between the NFTA Boat Harbor and the Tiff Nature Preserve. The NYSDOT plan includes a large area devoted to a grade separated interchange, which is not required in the Boulevard Plan, according to the FEIS¹.

¹ Southtowns Connector/ Buffalo Outer Harbor Project, Appendix C: Traffic & Accident Report for the Final Design Report/Final Environmental Impact Statement Section 4(f) Evaluation.

Figure 3: NYSDOT Preferred Alternative Plan for Ohio Street/Route 5/ NFTA Harbor area

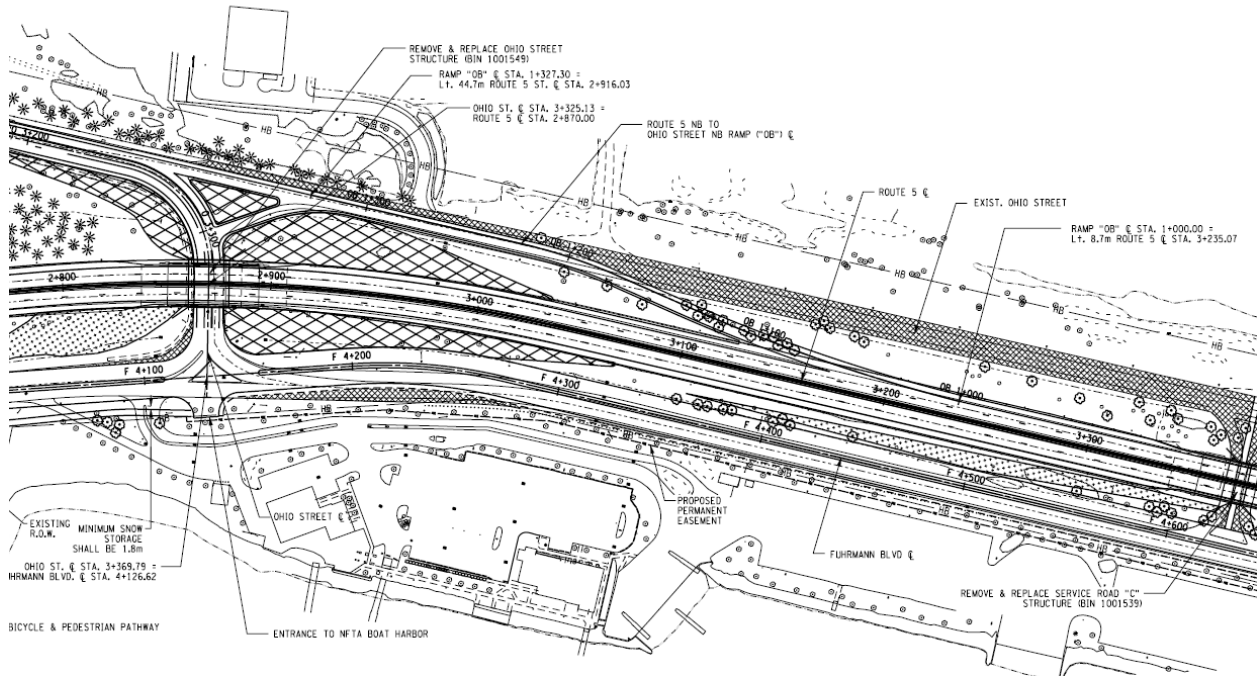


Figure 4 below compares the NYSDOT Boulevard plan for this same area, and the potential developable land that is available with this alternative is highlighted.

Figure 4: NYSDOT Boulevard Alternative for Ohio Street/Route 5/ NFTA Harbor area



Figure 5 below shows that even greater opportunity for redevelopment can be achieved with design modifications, including shifting boulevard alignment to the west, with proposed Multiway Boulevard cross section. Smaller buildings are possible on the lake side of the boulevard, as on-street parking will be provided with Multiway Boulevard.

Figure 5: Potential Development Areas with Multiway Boulevard Alternative



The potential development sites shown above in Figure 5 could be ideal places for mixed use condominiums or live-work units, with a rear alley access. With a nature preserve on one side, and a boat harbor and lake views on the other side, high value opportunities could be realized on publicly owned right-of-way, and help finance the infrastructure investment. In addition, narrow building opportunities could exist on the harbor side of the boulevard, perhaps food and boating services. These uses will be supported by the wide sidewalk, bicycle lanes, and on-street parking provided by the Multiway boulevard design.

Conclusions

The NYSDOT Preferred Alternative will hamper the efforts of the City of Buffalo to implement high quality urban redevelopment of the Outer Harbor area. This is part due to the elimination of access to developable property, as well as the wider corridor right-of-way required for this alternative. The Boulevard Alternative will almost double the length of developable street frontage, and will make at least 16 additional acres of developable property available due to its narrower footprint. This will open up numerous prime development opportunities on publicly owned right-of-way, which could help finance the infrastructure improvements. The Multiway Boulevard, which can be considered a variation of the NYSDOT Boulevard Alternative, will provide even greater economic opportunities by providing on-street parking, and a truly multi-modal, complete street for the Outer Harbor.