

**Testimony of Congressman Brian Higgins
Before the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
April 14, 2021**

Chair DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, members of the Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak before you today to talk about the importance of infrastructure investment to the future of the communities I serve in Western New York state.

Mark Zandi, a conservative economist from Moody's Analytics, estimates every one dollar in infrastructure investment generates \$1.60 in economic growth. Beth Ann Bovino, the chief economist for Standard and Poors, thinks that number could be as high as \$2.70 when taking into account current economic conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Chairman, we have a once in a generation opportunity for historic infrastructure investment. We need to get this right, and we need to make sure that our priorities in this bill bring communities together, providing a remedy to past problems.

We need to start thinking about what a post-pandemic world looks like and how we can renew and rebuild.

Under previous national efforts devoted to infrastructure investment, my community flourished.

We built the Erie Canal to connect the eastern seaboard to the Great Lakes, making Buffalo a maritime harbor to connect American goods to the world.

The construction of railroads and the production of cheap and affordable hydropower created by harnessing the power of Niagara Falls, we became an industrial powerhouse and for a time one of the most prosperous communities in the world.

And to address some of the public health challenges we faced in the 19th century, like cholera, we built one of the most significant public park systems in the country, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, a public good that all can still enjoy as a refuge.

But infrastructure decisions can sometimes hurt, not heal. It can tear our communities apart.

Robert Moses used brute political force to construct highways through, and throughout, cities across New York State including Buffalo and Niagara Falls. They destroyed the economic viability of countless neighborhoods and isolated Black and Brown communities from opportunity.

The Skyway, the Kensington, the Scajaquada, the aptly-named Robert Moses Parkway in Niagara Falls – have split up neighborhoods, degraded our public parks, and separated people from the natural resources they should be able to enjoy as well as each other.

So the American Jobs Plan presents us with a new opportunity to fix past mistakes, bring people together and promote equitable development, and improve the life quality and productivity of our community and our country.

I am pleased that the plan proposes a \$20 billion targeted investment to repair the problems caused by past decisions that disregarded the lived environment and experience of people in neighborhoods highways were constructed through.

This program means that an Olmsted-designed park median could be restored by downgrading the Kensington Expressway on Buffalo's East Side, reconnecting a neighborhood designed to be cohesive but that has suffered from being split apart.

The Scajaquada Expressway, could actually be reset as a parkway designed for the safety of nearby residents who want to enjoy Delaware Park, not as an underutilized speed trap. This downgrade would open up new opportunities for recreation and ecological habitat restoration.

It means the obsolete Skyway can be removed so that our community can fully benefit from its waterfront, obscured for over century by industrial development.

And it means the City of Niagara Falls can once again be connected to its natural wonders along the Niagara River Gorge by removing the Robert Moses Parkway.

Mr. Chairman, these are just a few examples of the transformational initiatives that the American Jobs Plan, and specifically this highway bill, could bring to my community.

These investments will create jobs, and good American jobs, but this highway bill presents an opportunity to make our communities better for everyone that live there. I urge you to work with me to help bring voice to my community.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present this testimony today.