



This Issues Statement is based on the preliminary studies of **edr** and is submitted on behalf of **Wild Ones Niagara** by **edr Companies** for consideration when developing the scope of work for the “RMP North Project”. To understand the potential impacts of future use of Robert Moses Parkway, its *full removal* between the City of Niagara Falls and Lewiston must be considered as an option.

Introduction.

edr is currently developing a plan for ecological restoration of the Niagara Gorge Rim which includes, the option of *full removal* of the Robert Moses Parkway (RMP).

The primary focus for this study is to illustrate the ecological, economic and social / cultural benefits for the local community. It is documented that eliminating motorized traffic along the Niagara Gorge Rim from the Peace Bridge to the Village of Lewiston will allow for a substantive ecological restoration of the Niagara Gorge Rim. This action will, in turn, bolster tourism to this area and provide direct social, economic, and public health benefits for residents, business owners, and visitors.

Issue Identification and Rationale.

It is a logical assumption that the primary outcome of the “RMP North Project” will be a comprehensive understanding of the highest and best future use of the northern section of the RMP between the City of Niagara Falls and Lewiston. To achieve this result, a thorough review is needed to study the range of alternative options, including the option of *full removal* of the RMP. To be comprehensive, this critical review must include consideration of all impacts (positive and negative) associated with *full removal*, including the redirection of all motorized traffic and the ecological restoration of the Rim.

The Niagara River Greenway is a linear system of state and local parks currently linked by a motorized parkway and a network of non-motorized multi-use trails. Eliminating the motorized traffic along the northern section of the Niagara Gorge Rim could create a dynamic confluence of ecological, economic, and cultural systems with multi-faceted benefits for residents, business owners, and visitors. The potential of this proposal can only be understood by critically assessing the impacts associated with the *full removal* of the RMP, to create an ecologically unique, non-motorized trail linking the city, minor municipalities, and citizens to the restored botanically unique landscape.

The potentially significant impacts of *full removal* of RMP are:

1. Redirection of parkway traffic:

The removal of RMP will require a review of the potential traffic impacts. A redirection of parkway traffic is viable in light of the many alternative routes between the City of Niagara Falls and Lewiston. A review of potential impacts on travel time, travel patterns and capacity analysis of local intersections will likely reveal no significant change in travel time, easy optional travel patterns, and

that the local roadways can easily absorb the additional parkway traffic. Each existing New York State Park within the Niagara Greenway will remain fully accessible by vehicles and pedestrians with minimal, if any, conflict. As stated in the "Niagara Greenway Plan" *For routes near the water, the focus should be on access by alternate transportation modes, including non-motorized traffic, rather than a singular focus on the efficient movement of traffic.*

2. Economic revitalization:

Research studies have identified the positive impacts parks have on local and regional economies. In addition to revitalizing and enhancing the economy, strong healthy parks that are well stitched into the community's fabric can influence business location decisions and improve the quality of life for the local workforce (*New York State Park System: An Economic Asset to the Empire State, 2009*). Parkway or highway removal, in exchange for improvement to park systems, neighborhood reconnection, and recreational opportunities, is a reality in many communities across the country. Many progressive communities have successfully restored their neighborhood fabric by removing underutilized highways/parkways. Two economically-centered issues which must be addressed are: (1) the direct and indirect economic benefits of reconnecting the parks and open space within the Niagara Greenway system with the urban fabric of the City of Niagara Falls and (2) the economic cost of parkway removal and ecological restoration of the Niagara Gorge Rim compared to the long term cost of maintaining the RMP.

3. Environmental and public health:

Research studies have proven that healthy parks support healthy neighborhoods, healthy citizens, and healthy economies. Environmental improvements with restoration of native ecology along the Niagara Greenway would provide innumerable public health and education benefits, in addition to bolstering the local economy by supporting creative tourism, eco-tourism, and attracting an educated workforce to the area.

Safe pedestrian access to existing recreational trails is critically important to the success of the Niagara River Greenway. What public health benefits would derive from improving pedestrian access in terms of convenience and safety to the many parks and open spaces along the Niagara Gorge and Rim? As stated in the "Niagara Greenway Plan" *Transportation projects within the Greenway should also prioritize land use over efficiency of traffic movement. Where there is overbuilt capacity, there should be a preference for returning excess pavement to another use.*

4. Social and cultural reconnection and improvements:

The RMP is a physical barrier cutting off residential neighborhoods and the City of Niagara Falls as a whole from the natural beauty and wonder of the Niagara Gorge Rim. Removing the RMP is necessary for a healthy reconnection between the City of Niagara Falls, the river, gorge and rim.

Improvements to the environmental, cultural, and scenic resources within the Rim will enhance a healthy reconnection with the local urban fabric. The rich cultural heritage of the Niagara Gorge Rim is intricately connected to that of the City of Niagara Falls. Strategic locations for social and cultural reconnection should be reviewed and included in the NYS Parks scoping process for the north RMP. As stated in the "Niagara Greenway Plan" *Transportation projects within the Greenway should avoid creation of barriers between the water's edge and the neighborhoods surrounding it...Transportation projects should seek to minimize their intrusiveness.* The most efficient and effective method of avoiding barriers between the water's edge and the surrounding neighborhoods is complete removal of RMP. Removal of the parkway will allow the community to sharpen its focus on improving the richness of the Niagara Greenway System in terms of its environmental, cultural, and scenic beauty.