

May 31, 2012

## WHY AMELIORATION BY ENLARGING THE TRUCK PLAZA AT THE PEACE BRIDGE WILL NOT WORK

The Honorable Mayor of the City of Buffalo

Thank you for inviting me to the meeting on Wednesday May 30, 2012. In the meeting, you established a climate in which we were all able to talk and listen to one another in a respectful manner, and for community members to voice their concerns. I also wish to thank the Governor for his willingness to have the residents voice their concerns. I also wish to thank you for bringing to the table the administrative experts to help us understand factors that some of the questions raised at our previous meeting.

From the most recent meeting, I understand that the main reason homes and historic landmarks are proposed to be torn down is to build a duty-free store and a truck parking lot, deep in an already stressed community. This is a community in which residents have high asthma prevalence and other illnesses which are believed to be related to truck pollution. Such an action will worsen the illnesses and increase health care costs, and hurt children and adults. I now believe that the duty free shop should be removed since it is associated with idling trucks. The land that was previously proposed to be taken over should be returned to the city and funds previously allocated for parking lot enlargement used to rehabilitate the homes and other structures in the community. I particularly note that the eight leading contributions attributed to the Peace Bridge to Buffalo and the surrounding areas that were presented at the meeting, do not require trucks and are currently served by cars. Even the current duty free-shop and the associated truck parking lot should be removed. This move will attract more visitors to Buffalo and decrease air pollution. I do not believe that visitors come to Buffalo to see the largest truck parking lot!

There are a number of ways to decrease the current operating costs of running the bridge:

- 1) Merge the two bridge Authorities that are within a few miles of one another.
- 2) Eliminate the highly paid public relations personnel. People do not need to be persuaded to use the bridges. They do so because they have to!
- 3) Trucks that cause or aggravate health conditions should pay the increased tolls, if tolls need to be increased. Currently, the health care costs are paid by New York State residents. Communities that are downwind from the bridge suffer from asthma and other health conditions which are not paid for by long haul trucks. A silver lining is that higher costs of trucks

crossing the Peace Bridge may cause truckers to use the Lewiston Bridge which may decrease traffic congestion at the Peace Bridge.

Another attendant observed that “Other factors may contribute to increased asthma attacks.” I agree. However, we should not knowingly expose children and adults with known chronic conditions to harmful environmental triggers. This, for example, would be similar to forcing a person with known congestive heart failure or coronary heart disease to do a Marathon race uphill.

There are also steps the City can take right away without a need to go through the state. When operating off the Peace Bridge property, the PBA is governed by state laws.

1. The city can deny issuing building permits until proper environmental assessment has been done.
2. The city can deny hooking up the sewers because of unresolved issues relating to the 100 year old sewer system.
3. The city can deny hooking up the water system because of potential breaks again resulting from the age of the water system.
4. Then, there is the problem of controlling water rat infestation resulting from digging up the old sewers. Arrangements have to be made and the costs need to be paid to the city.
5. The impact of operating through traffic on side roads has to be assessed before any expansion plans can be even considered.

Another meeting attendant observed that the area around the Peace Bridge was blighted and overgrown with weeds. The area was bought by the PBA which left it to decay. This is what the community can expect to put up with if the parking lot is expanded...an expanding blighted area in the community.

Still another participant observed that the buildings on the proposed parking lot expansion are unsafe to enter and should be demolished. However, it was pointed out that only a week previously real estate agents were being taken for a walk-through the buildings!

I now wish to present my reasons for believing that the proposed enlarging the truck parking lot in the community (amelioration) will not work and would actually make matters worse. Since you have the Governor's ear please, advise him that the proposed move to construct a truck plaza deep in the community should be abandoned and will meet strong community resistance.

After a transient decrease in traffic congestion at the bridge, traffic volume will increase as truckers take advantage of decreased congestion at the bridge and the US Customs Control booths. Increased truck volume will trigger a new round of congestion and a requirement for parking lot enlargement paid for by the tax payers. The proposed plan does not address increased pollution from diesel trucks accelerating out of the plaza or idling at the duty-free shop parking lot. The new round of congestion and increased pollution will require still more expansion of the parking lot deep into the community, which will increase illnesses associated with truck pollution exposure. This will result in still further widening of the parking lot and pollution due to additional traffic. The number of buildings at the parking lot will have to be increased to service parking lot customers. Since space at the parking lot is limited, multi-story buildings may have to be erected on the parking lot. Spaces between multi-story buildings form channels with increased wind flow which will drive pollutants deeper downwind of the community. Multi-story buildings ruin the quality of life for community residents by obstructing the lake and river views and rendering the historic Front Park unusable because of increased pollution.

I will now talk about children's health. Sick children cannot concentrate on their school work. A child who has stayed up all night, or in an emergency room and/or hospital, because of asthma, sinusitis, ear ache, cough or nasal congestion, watery eyes, he/she and the parents are not able to attend school or go to work. This contributes to poor school attendance, school achievement and high health care costs. Parents have to stay at home or leave work to care for their children. This will contribute to a permanent underclass that will last for the next 50 to 100 years. In the meantime, an organization will make profits from tolls and shops at the ever enlarging parking lot. The City of Buffalo will provide services for water, sewers, connecting roads and truck traffic will clog side streets. The number of jobs coming to Western New York will be low paying and often short-lived. Most likely the workers will not even come from the affected community. Workers at the toll booths are exposed to truck pollution and develop chronic illnesses that will increase as traffic increases. Because pollutants are distributed to other organs in the body, people do not associate their illnesses with traffic pollution. The diseases include: heart attacks, stroke, certain cancers and other inflammatory conditions. In many cases, such illnesses will be paid for by taxpayers. Parking lot owners keep the profits.

Construction of a large parking lot, in a densely populated urban community is ill-conceived, horribly unjust and progress in reverse, especially when other cities are diverting pass-through traffic away from their downtown communities. Proper environmental impact assessment of this historic community with a rich history has not been conducted because of unachievable rushed deadlines. Yet, residents are threatened with property seizures when all they request is justice. Such threats create uncertainty and a further deterioration of a stable diverse and historic community. The rushed air monitoring schedule does not take into account seasonal variations and is likely to invalidate environmental assessments.

In collaboration with nine US universities, we designed and conducted a landmark air pollution study on Buffalo's west side. The study included a pilot study and followed with two summer campaigns. We measured over 90 traffic-related air pollutants at multiple sites, upwind and downwind of the Peace Bridge Plaza during the day and night. The study sponsored by the Health Effects Institute (HEI), Cambridge, MA and the study design was reviewed and approved by the HEI and an impartial review committee. The link to the HEI report "Air Toxics Exposure from Vehicle Emissions at a U.S. Border Crossing: Buffalo Peace Bridge Study" is: <http://pubs.healtheffects.org/view.php?id=362>. The study findings confirmed our earlier findings and were reviewed by three independent panels that included members of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Health Effects Institute (HEI) and other universities as well as representatives of the automotive industry. The 196 page document was published in 2011 and is available on the HEI website. I find it amusing that the findings from this careful, extensive, peer-reviewed study that been published, have been set aside by people who have no scientific training or any kind of understanding of air quality assessment. At least, their comments do not show such an understanding. Their naivety is demonstrated by the lack of appreciation of seasonal and year to year variation and other factors which can affect results of air pollution assessment. It appears that the proposed rushed, short-term air pollution studies are designed to cherry pick results that support the destruction and poisoning of a stable, vibrant, historic community by construction of a large parking lot.

Their model is easy to see. They create a pollution problem that poisons a densely populated urban community. This ensures that one has large enough population base. They then come up with a solution that on the surface seems like it will improve community health when in fact the solution will make air pollution worse. They then conduct bogus air pollution studies to get results they want to justify their proposed solution to the problem. This will get the tax payers to foot the bill while their company keeps the profits. They take the surrounding community land and properties by force, if community residents ask for justice. The cycle continues until they are satisfied that they and their highly paid public relations people are making enough profits at tax payer expense and that they have a permanent underclass under your control.

The case on Buffalo's west side should draw national attention and outrage because it resembles earlier times when African American famers in the South lost valuable farmlands. I travelled extensively in the South in the 1960's. The current state of affairs is a blue print in which minority communities are disenfranchised, unfairly exposed to pollution, valuable historic, community residents in picturesque communities are bullied, their homes are destroyed, their lands and other properties are seized and in this case, replaced by a truck parking lot to profit the wealthy with well-greased relationships with the powerful, at tax payer expense. If it happens in Buffalo, it can happen elsewhere.

Respectfully submitted,

Jamson S. Lwebuga-Mukasa, MD, PhD.

Founder, President and CEO

Respiratory and Environmental Exposure Consultants, LLC.