

January 28, 2014

MEMORANDUM TO THE TRUSTEES

FROM THE PRESIDENT and CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

SUBJECT: Funding for Preliminary Engineering and Environmental Clearance for the Niagara Gorge Corridor Project – Authorization

SUMMARY

The Trustees are requested to approve funding of up to \$2 million for preliminary engineering and environmental clearance for Phase I of the Niagara Gorge Corridor Project, extending from NYS Route 104 (Main Street) to Findlay Drive in Niagara Falls, NY

Funding will be provided through an agreement with Niagara USA Development Corporation, a subsidiary of the Empire State Development Corporation.

BACKGROUND

In accordance with the provisions of the Niagara Redevelopment Act and as part of the Niagara Power Project construction, the New York Power Authority (“NYPA”) built the Robert Moses Parkway (“RMP”) from the North Grand Island Bridge to the International Bridge in the Town of Lewiston. During that time, the construction of the RMP was viewed as a necessary project by the people of the City of Niagara Falls and nearby communities to help transform the area into a tourist capital that emulated the Canadian side of the river. Jurisdiction over the roadway was originally held by New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (“NYOPRHP”); however, since 1975, operations and maintenance of the RMP has been handled by the New York State Department of Transportation (“NYSDOT”). NYPA retains ownership of the sections of the RMP that exist on NYPA-owned land.

DISCUSSION

As originally conceived, the RMP was to provide a scenic and efficient route for vehicular travel between nearby parks, communities and attractions. Today, the needs and concerns of the region have changed significantly from the early 1960’s. The population has decreased nearly 50% since 1960. The original 4-lane limited access highway is underutilized. Economic development and support for the local business community are now near the top of the list of community concerns. Preservation and restoration of the upper rim of the Niagara Gorge, as well as unimpeded pedestrian/bicycle access to the Gorge rim from neighborhoods adjoining the RMP (which for safety reasons are fully cut off in the City of Niagara Falls and portions of Lewiston, except at a few pedestrian overpasses) are now considered vital in promoting the City of Niagara Falls as a unique waterfront community and promoting the beneficial use of the area’s natural resources. In addition, the growth in cycling and walking has led to increased efforts to provide suitable and sustainable multimodal routes.

The changes in community goals, decreases in population, efforts to promote the beneficial use of the natural environment, along with a nearby robust transportation system, have raised questions concerning the future usefulness of the RMP in its current state. Numerous economic development studies, City of Niagara Falls planning documents, and citizen group documents have debated its future. A need remains for a critical link between the state parks located along the gorge and the multitude of existing and proposed attractions in Niagara Falls, Lewiston and Youngstown. The parks and attractions located immediately along the RMP include The Reservation State Park, Whirlpool State Park, DeVeaux Woods State Park, Devil's Hole State Park, escarpment overlook areas, Artpark, and the commercial districts along Main Street in the City of Niagara Falls and the Village of Lewiston.

The need for reconfiguration or removal of this section of the RMP to help reconnect the City of Niagara Falls to the Niagara Gorge is greater now than it ever has been. The City has completed, or is in the process of completing many new projects that will help revitalize the local business districts and bring additional visitors to the area.

The project is officially designated as the Niagara Gorge Corridor ("NGC") Project (including the RMP and parallel roadways from Main Street in the City of Niagara Falls to Center Street in the Village of Lewiston. This Project is primarily a highway modification project identified by NYSDOT Project Identification Number ("PIN") 5757.91.121.

The Project seeks to develop an appropriately scaled transportation network to link together existing and proposed roadways, attractions, overlooks, trails and cultural/historic sites in a more natural, park-like setting along the corridor while improving vehicle, pedestrian and bicycle access and safety features along the NGC. It addresses the future transportation needs of park visitors, commuters and people from the surrounding communities while improving the park environment and providing additional access to the Niagara Gorge from the adjacent communities.

The Project also meets the Niagara Greenway Commission's vision to celebrate and interpret the unique natural, cultural, recreational, and scenic and heritage resources in the NGC and provides access to, and connections between, these important resources while giving rise to economic opportunities for the region.

With significant stakeholder input and participation, NYSOPRHP, in partnership with NYSDOT, the City of Niagara Falls, USA Niagara Development Corporation, and in cooperation with the Village of Lewiston, prepared a Final Scoping Report for the NGC Project.

Consensus stakeholder support exists for the removal of the RMP from NYS Route 104 (Main Street) to Findlay Drive in Niagara Falls, NY; landscape/habitat restoration of the Niagara Gorge rim landscape on land to be reclaimed from the RMP removal; and reconstruction of Whirlpool Street, which directly adjoins the current alignment of the Parkway, as a conventional, at-grade, landscaped street to provide all north-south access in this portion of the corridor.

Accordingly, the Trustees are requested to approve a funding agreement with the USA Niagara Development Corporation for preliminary engineering and environmental clearance for Phase I of the NGC Project, NYSDOT Project PIN 5757.91.121 extending from NYS Route 104 (Main Street) to Findlay Drive in Niagara Falls, NY. The funds provided will pay for, among other things, the design and planning for:

- Design/planning for the removal of the current expressway facilities, bridges, and other associated features of the RMP in this segment;
- Design/planning for landscape/habitat restoration of the Niagara Gorge rim landscape on land to be reclaimed from the Parkway removal; and
- Design/planning for the full-depth reconstruction of the Whirlpool Street, which directly adjoins the current alignment of Parkway, as a conventional, at-grade, landscaped street to provide all north-south access in this portion of the corridor.

FISCAL INFORMATION

The estimated cost is \$2 million for preliminary engineering and environmental clearance for Phase I of the Niagara Gorge Corridor Project.

RECOMMENDATION

The Vice President – Public, Government and Regulatory Affairs recommends that the Trustees approve the funding as described above.

For the reasons stated, I recommend the approval of the above-requested action by adoption of a resolution in the form of the attached draft resolution.

Gil C. Quiniones
President and Chief Executive Officer

Att.
RM Park Engineering Study –
Authorization

RESOLUTION

RESOLVED, That the Trustees hereby authorize a funding agreement with the USA Niagara Development Corporation as recommended in the attached memorandum of the President and Chief Executive Officer; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the Chairman, the Vice Chair, the President and Chief Executive Officer, the Chief Operating Officer and all other officers of the Authority are, and each of them hereby is, authorized on behalf of the Authority to do any and all things, take any and all actions and execute and deliver any and all agreements, certificates and other documents to effectuate the foregoing resolution, subject to the approval of the form thereof by the Executive Vice President and General Counsel.