

BUFFALO

A STUDY OF THE BUFFALO SKYWAY



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CHAPTER 1: BUFFALO - AN OVERVIEW

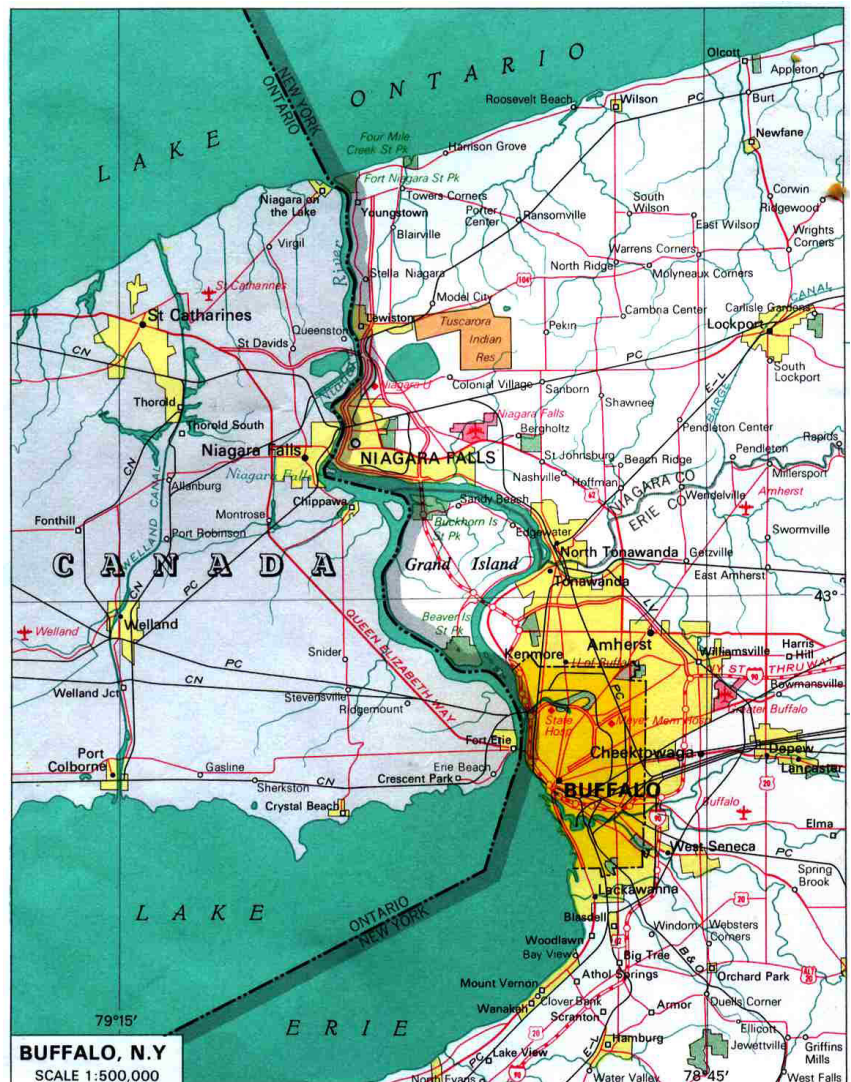
Today, Buffalo is a city of regional importance. With a metropolitan population of slightly over 1 million people, it is the second largest urban area in the state of New York.

At the turn of the 20th century however, Buffalo was the nation's 8th largest city and the world's 6th busiest port. Its grain mills and steel plants exported products across the world. The terminus of both the Erie Canal and many of the nation's railroads, it rapidly grew from a small town in the early 1800s to one of the most important industrial centers of the country by the end of the century.

The latter half of the 20th century saw its slow demise as manufacturing jobs left for overseas and the many corporations based in the city merged with businesses headquartered elsewhere.

This long economic collapse has left the metropolitan area with a population that is still smaller than its 1970s peak. This shrinkage has left the city burdened with excessive infrastructure it no longer needs nor can afford.

One such piece of infrastructure is the Buffalo Skyway, part of New York State Highway 5, completed in 1953 to alleviate traffic to the city's downtown and port facilities. This report delves into both the context behind the highway section and the potential ramifications of its removal.



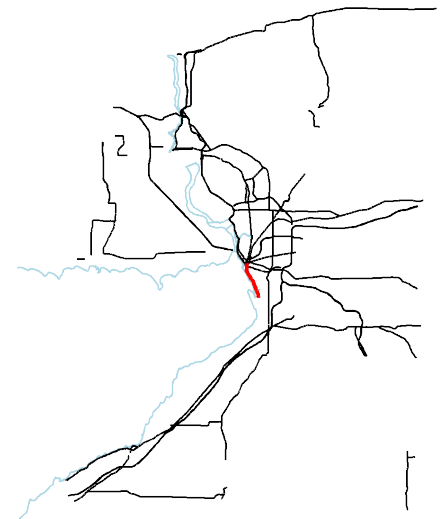
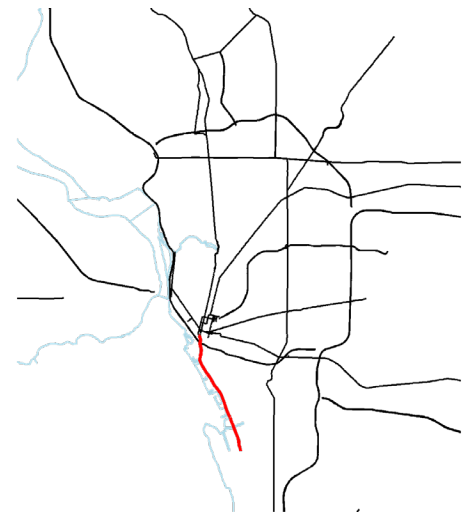
CHAPTER 2: THE SKYWAY PROPOSAL

Built during the heyday of the city's manufacturing prominence, the Buffalo Skway stands today as a stark monument to the region's past.

Today, this underutilized span carries approximately 46,000 vehicles daily, including 5,000-7,000 trucks. It, along with the nearby Interstate 190, are the primary southern approaches to the city's port and downtown areas.

With the port's reduced prominence (the city no longer being a large importer/exporter of grains, iron, steel, etc.), and the expressway's negative impacts on the downtown area (the highway, along with its entrance and exit ramps consume numerous city blocks and deprive large areas of sunlight) arises a proposal to remove the Skyway within much of the city limits.

In addition to its current impact on the city's southern neighborhoods and its downtown business district, it currently passes through sizeable areas of lakeshore wetlands and nature preserves. Advocates of the removal proposal tout both the improved ecological conditions of the lakeshore and an increased desirability for both businesses and residents to relocate to the city center. Opponents have raised concerns regarding increased congestion and decreased accessibility to neighborhoods adjoining the skyway.



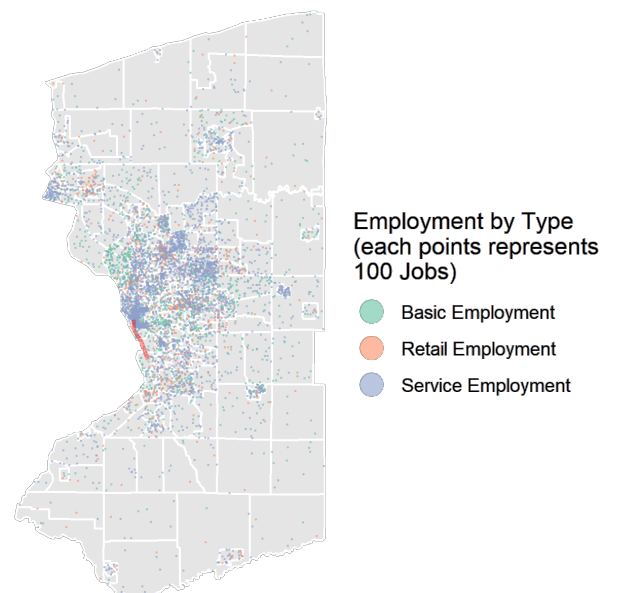
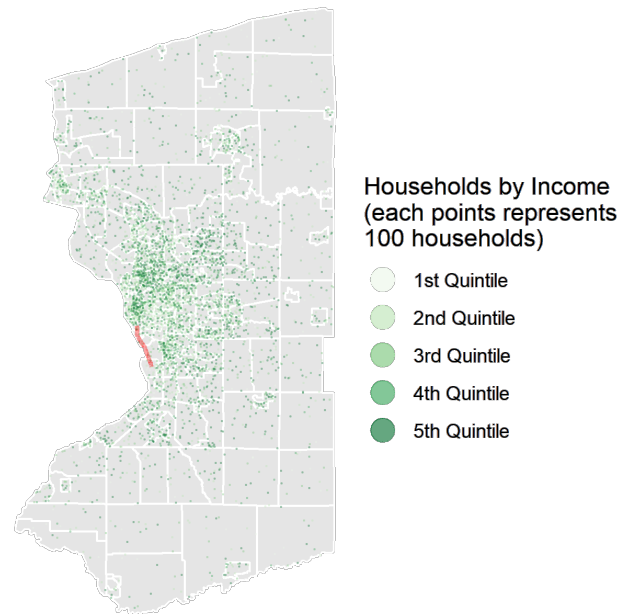
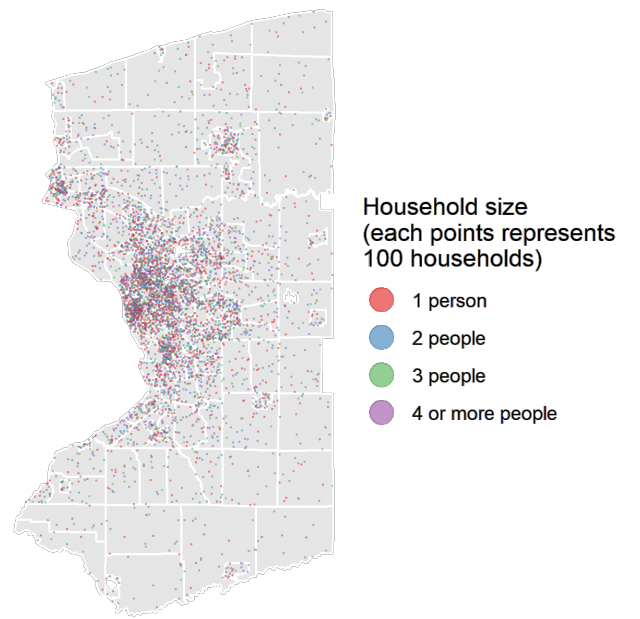
CHAPTER 3: HOUSEHOLD AND ECONOMIC DEMOGRAPHICS

A city whose development mostly occurred before the advent of the mass ownership of the automobile, Buffalo is still, to this day remarkably dense.

Both by income and household size, the inhabitants are relatively equally distributed and concentrated in the urban area.

While the city was historically known as a manufacturing hub and still holds many industrial jobs (today primarily located in the north of the city), the economy has greatly diversified, with many workers employed in the service and retail industries, heavily centered in downtown.

Therefore, any proposal of highway removal must consider the wide range of demographics the proposal may impact. Students commuting to school, white collar workers headed to offices, retail employees to downtown businesses, families traveling to the city seeking amenities, retired residents seeking access to city center offerings and more.



While it is clear that downtown still remains a prominent place for Buffalonians, this does not necessarily mean the Skyway is crucial for this downtown’s vitality and access.

To the contrary, the city’s low commute times and relatively high rates of households without cars holds promise that the elimination of automobile infrastructure may serve to increase downtown land and its value without being too much of a detriment to current and future travelers.

At least 35 of the city’s census tracts, home to dozens of thousands of households, are areas where household car ownership falls below half of all households in their respective tracts.

The city’s relatively low car ownership rates, coupled with its sizeable public transit system (the city even boasts a subway line) and its low commute times, holds promise that the removal of one its many urban expressways could be done without too much of an impact to traffic and downtown economic viability.

