

Trolley Speculations, 11 December 2009

Dan-- yeah...the drive to Lockport, especially if the weather's not good. Your prediction sounds like a solid possibility. What I return to is: this was billed as a feasibility study. The main question, then, is: "Is it feasible?" If the answer is: "Yes, if you throw enough money at it," then it could have been answered without the "study," as easily as I did just now.

2) If the question is expanded to "How can we encourage visitors to stay here longer & see more of what we have to offer (and as a result spend more of their money here)?" then how that question is answered becomes more complicated. If the answer is "We provide a trolley to take them to various points of interest," that brings up other questions. The first one is "Who will pay for the trolley?"

The second one is "Will the money spent to establish, operate, and maintain the trolley be repaid by the fares visitors spend to ride it?" That is, "Will it be self-supporting?" The short answer is, "No, not even close." We now go back to the first question of who will pay for it. Thus far the answers have been relatively easy and the team at Niagara University had arrived at this point quickly--hence their speculation about "corporate sponsors." Maybe that's possible. Perhaps machines vending Coca-cola on the trolleys would be enough payback as was one idea floated by the team--as well as logos on the trolley sides, etc. I can't speak to that.

But these questions have to be answered by the study:

How much would it cost to establish a trolley system? How much for each trolley? How many are needed? What would the fuel costs be per mile? How much would it cost annually for insurance? Would the trolleys run beyond the approximately 100 day tourist season? From what segments of the tourist population would the ridership come? Would couples and families who drove their own vehicles here be willing to embark on an hours-long trolley ride to Murphy's Orchards, the NT Carousal museum, Wine Trail, Lockport Caves, and so on, away from their cars, unable to make a decision to stop for lunch when & where they wanted to, take a side trip, etc etc? How much time would be taken up by these trips? Seems as if 3 hours wouldn't be an over-estimate. (To each location.)

How about those who arrive here on tour buses? That would seem to be natural--these people don't have their own cars to drive to Fort Niagara, for example. But tour buses already go to Fort Niagara...and these drivers have a schedule to maintain, too. They aren't going to sit around drinking coffee waiting for their customers to take a trolley ride. "Okay, everybody out. Take a look over the gorge edge. Thirty minutes here at the Power Vista, and everybody back on the bus. Here we go. Next stop Goat Island."

At what location would these trolley-loads of tourists be picked up to begin their "stay-with-us-longer" tours? Has this question even been considered by the Niagara University study team? It's a logistical nightmare from which there is no escape, if we are looking for the effort to have an economic payoff and not be just another instance of tens of millions of taxpayer dollars poured down yet another rat hole of special interests.

I suspect as you do that this "study" will be a subjective mass of speculations and fictions that will conclude there is a need for further study and that it remains what it was to start

with: a transparent attempt to justify the continued existence of the gorge parkway coupled with the goal of trolleying tourists to Lewiston businesses (and to Old Fort Niagara, at Bob Emerson's insistence as the initiative evolved). (This route will be the "pilot" part of the proposal.) Further, Legislator John Ceretto, also an employee of OPRHP, seems not to understand the concept of "conflict of interest," in spite of his earlier efforts to get a County resolution passed calling for the retention of the gorge parkway and being forced to withdraw it because he was in conflict. Having Niagara University and students there function as his proxy doesn't shield him from engagement in this further conflict. The study conducted by NU must state the parkway will not be a utilized route--it is insufficient to say that "study findings are not dependent upon" the gorge parkway. And what "findings" would those be?

A very good map (made new, not some cobbled together version of an old one) clearly showing tourist attractions throughout the County and the roads to get to them, made readily available to every tourist arriving here--even at a cost of a million or two or more--would put us further ahead economically, I believe. The map itself should be of a quality that would make it a keepsake, a souvenir, an advertisement for our region. And the map could largely pay for itself from contributions made by the attractions listed & shown, restaurants, gift shops, and so on. NCTC should pick up a share as should OPRHP & NYPA.

Anyway--that's my take on it,
Bob

-----Original Message-----

From: DANIEL DAVIS

Still here,

I haven't decided if I want the drive to Lockport or not. I'll predict the outcome of the study will be that it is a terrific idea and that they will need further study to determine what the implementation process should be. Then, they will need a few million to buy buses (trolleys) and hire consultants to determine the best routes. They will likely try to bypass Main Street in favor of the Aquarium and Whirlpool Park (of course they will have to double back for the new train station). When the "Garden Parkway" is complete, they will be able to drive right past there (new station) on their way to Whirlpool Park. The big question will be, how they route to Niagara University and the Power Vista and get back on the Parkway before they reach the top of Lewiston hill. None of this fares well if you have business interest on main street or are in favor of parkway removal to Lewiston.

I think someday there will (and should) be a trolley service through the city to north towns and back. How it is routed is a different situation. If our civic leaders are concerned about the livelihood of main street, they will insist it is routed from the Aquarium down main to the new depot and beyond. It is unlikely they will recommend going through Deveaux. There is a slight chance it could be routed to the Country Club, at the top of Lewiston hill eliminating the need to use the parkway past Devils Hole.

Take Care,
Dan

P.S. What do you think John Ceretto's motives are? Does he want a "People Mover" that promotes the entire area, or does he want a fast track to Lewiston. His actions in respect to the routing will have the answer.