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Public Places
For Community, Democratic Dialogue,
Health & Equity
Hiro Hata, University at Buffalo/SUNY
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DL&W Greenway:
From Rail-to-Trail as Social Infrastructure:
A Vision for the DL&W Greenway
Buffalo, NY

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Introduction:

My presentation will focus on urban rail-to-trails as Public Places

A Conceptual Plan for repurposing the Buffalo’s Delaware, Lackawanna & Western (DL&W) Railroad to a greenway

Key Words: Public Places, Social Infrastructure, Liminal Spaces, Urban Rail-to-Trails, the Buffalo’s DL&W Greenway, the High Line Park, the 606 Bloomingdale Trail

Eight Principles for making successful Urban Rail-to-Trails
Urban Edges: liminal spaces
sources of inspirations

Rackstraw Downes painting the liminal space under the George Washington Bridge. Courtesy of Rima Yamazaki, documentary filmmaker

Buffalo’s grain elevators. Courtesy of Burchfield Penny Art Center
Buffalo, NY, planned as an industrial city, offers the wealth of urban liminal space.
“Problems of the 21st century are more infrastructural than architectural”
Thom Mayne, Morphosis, 2017

American Industrial & Infrastructural Evolution:

19th century:
- canals and railroads

20th century:
- cars highways and airports

21 century:
- preservation, maintenance, and repurposing of the previous Infrastructure and more ......

Take-Home Values:

- Discover abandoned or dormant urban railroads for public places in your city;
- Preserve them in your city as American cultural and industrial heritage;
- This presentation will take a look at the potential for transforming Buffalo’s long-abandoned railroad: DL&W (the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western) to new public place:
  A greenway.
History of the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western: DL&W Railroad

A US Class 1 Railroad
400 mile long: Connected Buffalo and Hoboken, NJ. It played a major role for Buffalo’s economic growth.

1. Pre-DL&W 1832-1853
2. Expansion and Profit 1853-1940s
3. Decline 1940s-1960 (termination)
Finding Assets of Urban Edges: liminal spaces
the DL&W railway right-of-way offers
A potential asset for preservation and adaptive reuse

Map showing the Buffalo’s DL&W ROW, left; street view, right.
Assets of Urban Edges:
Views from the DL&W right-of-way

What if we have easy access to some of the Buffalo’s most unique places and views?
Urban Rail-to-Trails as Social Infrastructure
Finding Assets from the obsolete rail-ways

This presentation will take a look at the potential for transforming Buffalo’s long-abandoned railroad: the DL&W to a greenway as new public place.
Precedent Study 1: The High Line Park, NY
Learning from the Precedents and the DL&W: Eight Recommendations for Rails-to-Trails in your cities

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Principle 1. Seek Stakeholders’ Support: identify major supporters and friends

DL&W Greenway
• Lead agency
  WNY Land Conservancy

Public Sector
• NFTA (Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority) is the current land owner
• Fed & State Elected Officials
• County & City Agencies

Community Stakeholders
• The Old First Ward
• The Valley Community
• Larkin District Community
• Commodore Perry Housing
• Tesla Solar
• Interested citizens
1. The Old First Ward
2. The Valley Community
3. Larkin District Community
4. Commodore Perry Housing
5. Interested citizens
6. Tesla Solar

Affected community stakeholders

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Principle 2. Making a Conceptual Vision
2. Making a conceptual vision
Principle 3. Obtain the Title to Land

The Highline Park:
• From New York Central Railroad to Friends of the High Line

The Bloomingdale Trail:
• From the Canadian Pacific Railroad Company to the City of Chicago
• Friends of the Bloomingdale Trail with the City and the Trust for Public Land

The DL&W Greenway
• From NFTA to the City of Buffalo: would-be-Friends of the DL&W

Friends of DL&W
Principle 4. Plan as part of Region’s Ecosystem and Connectivity
The Governor’s Empire State Trail
Connecting two anchors: from Buffalo to New York via the 750-mile of multi-use greenway systems

Niagara River Greenway:
Niag-Wanda Park, Tonawanda, NY

Hudson River Greenway:
Riverside Park, NY, NY
4. Plan as part of Region’s Ecosystem
Preserve, restore, and enhance unique wetland ecosystem

Map: Courtesy of Buffalo Water Keeper
Principle 5. Establish Good Access and Connectivity

Connecting the DL&W to the Olmsted Parks & Parkways Systems
5. Establish Good Access and Connectivity
classifying the DL&W Greenway to Eds & Meds
The Highline Park
Good Accessibility and Connectivity

Images: courtesy of Google maps.
The 606 Bloomingdale Trail
Good accessibility and connectivity connecting many neighborhoods on both sides of the trail with the park and bike-path
Principle 6. Enhance Nature in the City

the DL&W Greenway Vegetation Typology
6. Enhance Nature in the City
existing aspen forest as habitat for songbirds and deer

DL&W Greenway vision: Red Jacket Nature Preserve: existing, left and proposed conditions, right
Principle 7. Promote Public Health and Equity for exercise and recreation for everyone

Above: A vision for the DL&W Greenway: proposed café, kayak launch, and the foot of Smith Street
Below: a family fishing day on Buffalo River and the view of the River Bend.
Principle 8. Preserve and Develop Affordable Housing:
Preventing gentrification next to new urban greenways from happening

• Gentrified the Highline Park in Chelsea – affecting Chelsea Public Housing and other neighbors

An aerial view of Chelsea Housing above and high-end hotel, condos, and offices next to the High Line Park, below: images courtesy of Wikipedia.org.
8. Preserve and Develop Affordable Housing

Buffalo should learn lessons from others

- A future DL&W Greenway should preserve existing affordable housing including Commodore Perry Housing in Buffalo.
Key Take-Home Lessons

• Discover abandoned or dormant urban railroads for public places in your city;
• Preserve them in your city as cultural and industrial heritage;
• Take a good look at the potential for transforming them to new public place: a greenway;
• Make sure you will improve accessibility and connectivity to draw as many users as you can;
• Draw up a good vision to get started.
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