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SPECIAL EDITION

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THE BATTLE OF FOUR MILE RUN

Locals call it “The Run.” This small neighborhood in the heart of Pittsburgh is fighting for its existence on two fronts: severe flooding caused in part by unchecked development in surrounding neighborhoods; and plans to support additional development with a new road—most commonly known as the Mon-Oakland Connector (MOC)—through two historic communities and an adjacent public park.



Aerial view of the Junction Hollow Trail, part of Pittsburgh's historic Schenley Park

An OPN News Special Report

The History

An August 29, 2015 *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* article announced the Oakland-Transit Connector project, since renamed the Mon-Oakland Mobility Plan or Mon-Oakland Connector (MOC). Using driverless shuttles, the proposed roadway would cart students and university personnel every 5 minutes between Oakland campuses and the Hazelwood Green (HG) development site—running through the Junction Hollow portion of Schenley Park and the neighborhoods of Panther Hollow and Four Mile Run (The Run) at either end. The article announced the plan as a “done deal,” but city officials and private partners held closed-door meetings to plan the project without consulting or even informing residents—a violation of Pennsylvania’s Sunshine Act. The roadway announcement kicked off an uprising from the two neighborhoods in its path.

The project’s unveiling showed a public-private partnership formed between the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), Pitt, and CMU filed a grant application with the State of PA Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). In response to a resident’s Right to Know (RTK) request, the URA provided a copy with missing pages, but residents had already received a complete copy from the DCED in Harrisburg that exposed numerous falsehoods. Although the grant app states “the act of knowingly making a false statement or overvaluing a security to obtain a grant and/or loan from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania may be subject to criminal prosecution,” Allegheny County District Attorney Stephen Zappala failed to return resident phone calls and emails and never responded to a hand-delivered letter to his office requesting an investigation.

Opponents say the MOC will not improve transportation for the public or residents of Hazelwood and would permanently degrade Schenley Park and both communities along the route. In spite of a large and growing opposition throughout surrounding neighborhoods, and a projected \$100+ million deficit this year due to the economic effects of COVID-19, local officials and their private partners have insisted on pushing through the publicly subsidized, \$23 million private development project, come Hell or high water.

The High Water

Run residents have suffered from chronic flooding for many years, yet were repeatedly told the City lacked funds to stop the heavy stormwater mixed with raw sewage that has become more frequent and severe over time. An August 2016 flood captured on video, showing firefighters rescuing a resident and his young son from the roof of their car, received long overdue press coverage and forced city officials to publicly acknowledge the issue. They announced a \$40 million plan headed by the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority (PWSA). But over the adamant objection of residents, city officials insisted the MOC was to be forced onto the 4MR Stormwater Project.

Expert sources in infrastructure/flood mitigation have told residents that including the MOC could harm flood control and residents have made repeated requests for the “comprehensive detailed hydraulic flood mitigation model(s),” but the city has yet to prove that forcing the roadway onto the flood plan will not harm flood control.

Residents have repeatedly asked PWSA if they had produced or will produce a flood mitigation model that does not include the MOC. In an email reply to the question, PWSA stated they haven’t because they were not directed to do so. But a PWSA official revealed on September 15 that *they did* produce a flood mitigation model without the MOC roadway—the first model they produced. PWSA has been in charge since 2017, so why has the PWSA repeatedly stated they had not?

RTK requests filed with PWSA in June of 2020 brought a retaliatory response: Residents were given a 7,185-page unsearchable PDF document, which raises the questions: If officials are certain of the effectiveness of their flood mitigation plan, why not provide all requested documents without the need to file RTKs? Why erect roadblocks and hurdles to the truth about the MOC and its possible effect on flooding in the neighborhood?

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Community Demands Flood Relief

By Junction Coalition

Run residents and supporters, community organizations, and public representatives urged the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP) and the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) during the recent public comment period to have the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority (PWSA) remove the MOC road from their Four Mile Run Stormwater Project permit application. The stormwater project, sold as a solution to The Run’s chronic flooding problem, enjoys nearly universal public support. But independent experts’ analysis shows the current plan is inadequate, partly because it includes the MOC.

The community has been asking for flood relief for more than a decade. They were told the city lacked funds as the problem worsened from combined effects of climate change and overdevelopment of surrounding areas. Run residents learned of the MOC from a 2015 *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* article reporting it as a done deal. In 2016, a 25-year flood event gained citywide attention when dramatic footage showed firefighters rescuing a resident and his son from the roof of their car. Later that year, Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto tasked PWSA with finding funds and developing a plan to fix the flooding. PWSA secured \$40 million for the Four Mile Run Stormwater Improvement project, which has been hijacked to accommodate MOC.

“We need the watershed improvement plan to work,” stated Run resident Ziggy Edwards. “We don’t need to spend tens of millions of our tax dollars on a shuttle roadway that may hinder flood relief and eventually wipe two historic neighborhoods off the map.”

Frustrated by the city’s lack of transparency about plans for their neighborhood, Run residents began filing Right-to-Know (RTK) requests in 2018 with the City of Pittsburgh and PWSA. In addition, they consulted with independent experts in infrastructure and flood mitigation. These are their findings so far concerning the stormwater project:

PWSA’s plan has been scaled back and does not live up to its promise.

Meetings at Mayor Peduto’s office in 2019 show Chief of Staff Dan Gilman “wondering if instead of a 25-year storm which is what current development designs for, should we be designing for a larger storm event?” But in 2020, PWSA announced they were using a 10-year plan for a community that experiences 10-year events yearly, along with 25- and even 75-year floods semi-regularly.

PWSA has chosen to use its funds elsewhere. Of the \$40 million budget for this project, PWSA plans to spend \$14 million. When asked where the remaining \$26 million would be spent, PWSA responded via email, “The remaining funding can go towards future projects in the upper portions of the watershed” and “provide opportunities to collaborate with the universities.”

At a public meeting on September 15, PWSA was asked, “Using the same exact circumstances, including rainfall per hour, location, etc. of the 2009 flood, if a 75-year storm event occurred after your 10-year plan is completed, how many inches or feet of water and sewage can residents expect in their basements?” PWSA answered, “A reduction of about 45 percent”—which translates to 38+ inches. PWSA’s current plan means residents would still have to decontaminate their homes and replace furnaces, hot water tanks, and washers and dryers out-of-pocket year after year.

PWSA’s plan prioritizes the MOC above flood mitigation.

PWSA chief of program management Alex Sciulli stated the 10-year event plan was more “cost effective.” Given former executive director Robert Weimar’s repeated public statements that PWSA has “one shot at getting this right,” a more cost-effective plan would prepare for larger storm events while the neighborhood is torn open. Pittsburgh’s Department of Mobility and Infrastructure (DOMI) uses this same logic to justify piggy-backing the MOC on the stormwater project.

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Left: The 2009 75-year flood event. Right: The 2016 25-year flood event. City officials have long cited a lack of funds to resolve the severe flooding.



The Junction Hollow Trail from above. Pittsburgh officials and private partners are pushing to build a road through the public park to shuttle students and university personnel to and from a private development.

Preserving Our Parks

By Chris Zurawsky

Pittsburgh's Schenley Park was once a horseback riding haven. While the stables and a racetrack are long gone, the Bridle Trail remains—a reminder of a bucolic past and a refuge from the surrounding city. At its eastern end, the 1.4-mile walking and biking path starts at a busy five-way road intersection but quickly dips into dense woodland, clinging to a rocky hillside above an interstate highway. Built in the 1950s, the high-traffic commuter route skirts the park in a stream valley—Four Mile Run—where a neighborhood of approximately 172 households and a handful of businesses hangs on amid the roar of tractor trailers, overpass infrastructure, and persistent flooding caused as much by municipal neglect as geographic location.

When the trees are bare, the Bridle Trail affords a birds-eye view of “The Run”—including the twin onion domes of St. John Chrysostom Byzantine Catholic Church, Andy Warhol's childhood place of worship. Unfortunately, the noise and visual pollution of the interstate mars the natural and man-made beauty.

About halfway along its route The Bridle Trail takes a sharp turn north above another, smaller streambed, Junction Hollow. As the trail crosses multiple stone bridges, built by the federal Works Progress Administration at the end of The Great Depression, one is struck by the quiet: a sharp shift from the drone of speeding vehicles to bird songs, creaking tree branches, and the rustle of leaves.

Formerly a residential and industrial corridor serving steel mills on the Monongahela River, today Junction Hollow is home to a soccer field and a popular bike trail connecting the city's universities to the riverfront. While a train line still runs through, the occasional blast of a locomotive's whistle and the clank of steel wheels on rails are as much a romantic reminder of simpler times as modern-day intrusions.

After purchasing 28 acres of Junction Hollow from a private parking lot owner in 2000, the city solidified its status as a natural area in 2005 with a resolution declaring that the parcel “shall hereafter officially be dedicated for park purposes and shall be added to the boundary of Schenley Park.”

Twenty years on, however, the explosive growth of Pittsburgh's “eds and meds”—higher education and health care—is posing a serious threat to Schenley Park, especially a proposed shuttle bus road primarily serving Carnegie Mellon University.

Schenley Park's value as a protected natural space has never been clearer than in this time of pandemic-induced social isolation and limited travel. Pittsburghers have rediscovered the profound health benefits of their city parks and the need to preserve them.

And yet, for the past five and a half years, the city and its Department of Mobility and Infrastructure have gone to bat for CMU and real estate developers, pushing hard for the shuttle bus at numerous community meetings and linking its construction to a

large stormwater management project in the park that would greatly enhance the park's natural amenities by expanding wetlands and daylighting Four Mile Run, which is currently buried in a pipe under the hollow.

City officials insist the shuttle road will be low-impact—a “trail” for “low speed and enclosed transportation vehicles,” as they characterize it. But urban planning experience has shown that if you build it, they will come.

Put another way, increasing capacity increases demand. The axiom was famously illustrated in Robert Caro's *The Power Broker*, a biography of Robert Moses, the king of New York City infrastructure. Moses connected the Bronx and Queens with a bridge that quickly filled with traffic. A second bridge also jammed up. Then another. Moses' parkways suffered the same fate.

The Schenley shuttle bus road may start small, but locals have already raised concerns about public safety vehicles using the existing bike and pedestrian path as a shortcut. And as commuters discover the new “trail,” pressure will build to turn it into another high-traffic artery for motorized vehicles, like roads strung along streambeds throughout the Pittsburgh area.

Given its location in the middle of Pittsburgh's thriving East End, everyone wants a piece of Schenley Park. It's home to a skating rink, golf course, and the sprawling Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens; and it hosts numerous large events each year, including a vintage car race and auto show that attracts tens of thousands of people. Beyond the shuttle bus route, heavy traffic may be generated by proposals to build a parking garage behind the Phipps Conservatory, along with a Department of Public Works facility on the golf course, where a new \$5 million clubhouse and events venue recently went up.

Over the years there have been many proposals to develop sections of the park or build infrastructure that would diminish its natural qualities. Most famously, the University of Pittsburgh floated a plan in 1958 to build six professional buildings and several student dormitories in Junction Hollow, essentially filling the natural ravine with concrete. And the shuttle bus proposal itself has deep roots, going back at least to 2001 when a study found a desire among park users and local residents “to retain the tranquil setting in the hollow” and to ensure “that the kinds of development and transit connections being considered will be sensitive to the quiet natural setting of the neighborhoods in and near Junction Hollow...”

Instead of shrinking Schenley's natural spaces, the city should be looking for opportunities to expand them. Another large Pittsburgh park, Frick, created a connection to the river by rehabilitating a former industrial site in a stream valley, and work is underway on a similar project in Highland Park.

Like the frog in the pot of boiling water, the demise of Schenley Park as a sylvan refuge could happen bit by bit—a shuttle bus road here, a maintenance building there, more cars traveling to a holiday flower show or another wedding reception overlooking the 18th green. For our mental and physical well-being, we need more nature, not more traffic.

Community- continued from page 1

Expert sources tell residents that PWSA's plan:

- Concentrates the flood work in the Schenley Park/Oakland end of the watershed, which does little to address flooding in The Run. Two-thirds of The Run's flooding comes from the opposite end of the watershed.
- Fails to account for 5,200 structures above Panther Hollow Lake in Oakland that feed an enormous amount of wastewater, sewage, and runoff into a 50-inch pipe—which completely bypasses the Panther Hollow/Junction Hollow area of the watershed and feeds directly into The Run. Even though it only accounts for one-third of the cause of flooding, PWSA's plan does not address that specific water/sewage mix and its effects on the neighborhood.
- Is designed around the MOC, which undermines flood control efforts. The road adds at least 0.80 acres (34,850 square feet) of paving to the area. With the types of storms Pittsburgh has had in the past 10 years, a year with 50 inches of rain would generate 1 million+ gallons of runoff. The design in the permit application shows no stormwater inlets of pipes along the road.
- Levels approximately 7 acres of tree canopy, beginning with 900 trees in the northern end of the park. These trees will never be replaced in the space the roadway would commandeer. Planted saplings cannot equal the water absorption of 7 acres of mature trees.

Displacement is not a bug—it's a feature of PWSA's plan.

One source concluded that the 10-year plan “makes no sense” unless the ultimate goal is to “change the floodplain and eliminate properties.” A Mayor's office meeting shows Mr. Sciulli stating just that: “More cost-effective options may be to change the floodplain and purchase the affected properties.” The “cost-effective” 10-year plan makes sense only within a larger, longer-term plan to raze the neighborhood, forcing residents out and demolishing structures. And, as sources have revealed, this is the preferred result stated by Civil & Environmental Consultants (CEC), PWSA's partner in the design: “Let the water go where it wants to go.” After the first public meeting that introduced CEC as lead designer in the flood mitigation plan, CEC representatives asked Run residents if they would take offers for their properties.

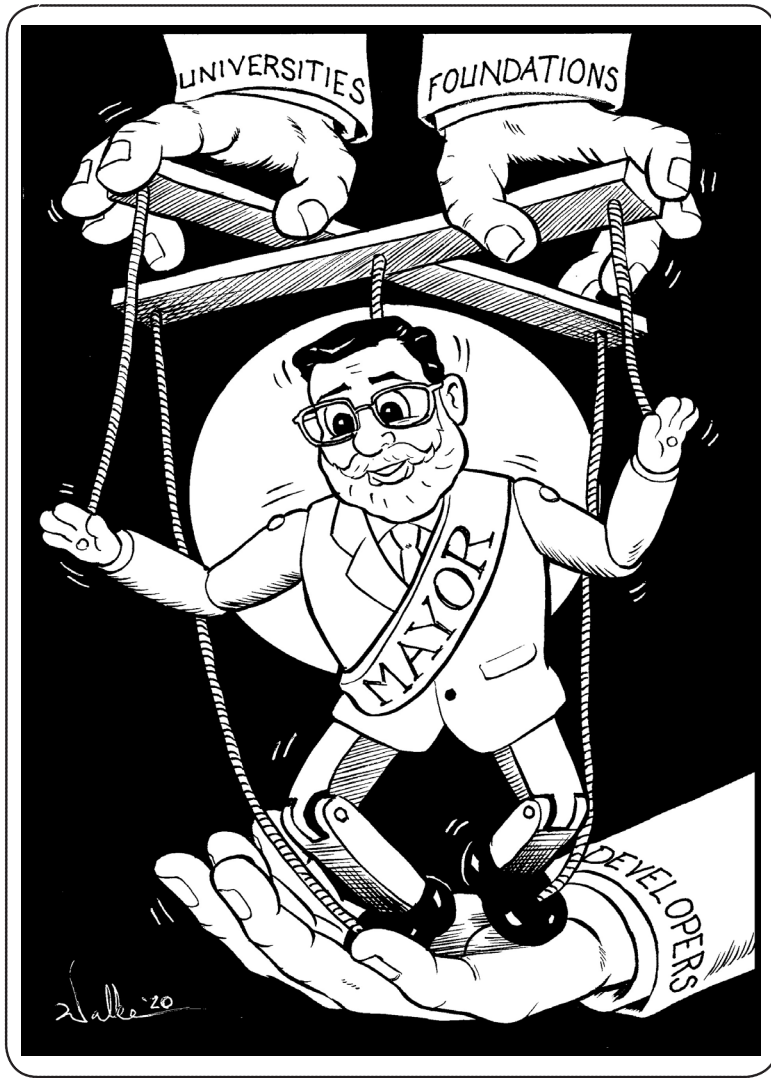
Mayor Peduto, a longtime proponent of the road through Schenley Park, effectively controls the PWSA.

Partnering with DOMI to prioritize the MOC at the expense of Run residents belies PWSA's stated independence and autonomy as a public entity.

Following PWSA's June 2020 board meeting, executive director Will Pickering responded to resident concerns over undue influence over PWSA by Mayor Peduto and the private interests that define his administration's agenda. A resident had stated that all except one board member were nominated directly by Mayor Peduto. Mr. Pickering clarified via email, “All appointments to the PWSA board are nominated by the Mayor and approved by Council.”

Evidence shows PWSA's stormwater project fails to prioritize the severe flooding issue and was designed to accommodate the MOC.

- Run residents say an acceptable plan must include:
- Pulling the submitted permits filed to the PA DEP/USACE.
 - Revising the plan to prioritize flood mitigation over the road.
 - Commissioning an Environmental Impact Study on the effects of the overall stormwater plan with and without the road.
 - Resident-approved independent analysis of the revised plan.
 - A Community Benefits Agreement with residents of The Run, whose community will be directly affected by their work.



Battle- continued from page 1
The Circular Excuses

Reasons for constructing the MOC continually shift. At one point the project was pitched as a “proof of concept” for autonomous vehicle shuttles. But in July of 2019, Pittsburghers for Public Transit produced a position paper titled “**Wait, Who’s Driving This Thing?**” showing that AV feasibility is 30 years away, causing the city to respond, “There is no such thing as an autonomous vehicle” and claim they are abandoning the AV element. Other reasons given for the MOC include:

- “Economic development and job creation” – Opponents have repeatedly asked for a list of jobs that will result from the roadway, but the city has never produced a list or responded to the question.
 - “It’s needed for people to travel the route on e-bikes and e-scooters” – The existing Junction Hollow Trail already provides for those alternate forms of transportation. Filling in a few gaps along the existing route, as identified and suggested by the Southwestern PA Commission, would improve public mobility at a much lower cost.
 - “Hazelwood residents need a faster route to Oakland to get to grocery stores, doctors’ offices, and hospitals” – The MOC will not save time, Oakland does not have a supermarket, and taking a 15 mph shuttle to Oakland would not save a life if seriously injured. Opponents say a better use of public money for revitalization would be a supermarket, doctors’ offices, and an urgent care facility in Hazelwood.
 - “It may not even include shuttles!” – Then why build a \$23 million shuttle roadway? (An RTK document shows Don Smith of RIDC development group stating, “Let’s get an imperfect connector road there now and more perfect long-term solution implemented later.”)
 - “It’s good for Hazelwood because it’s good for Hazelwood Green” – This reasoning evokes “trickle-down” economics, but even Mayor Peduto knows most people never benefit from this economic model, as evidenced in his recent Tweet: “Mid-sized & smaller cities, who have taken on the expenses & lost the revenue, are being told no relief in sight. Yet extremely wealthy & politically connected are being handed 100s of millions. This will never bring back our economy. It has never trickled down to the people.”
- A comprehensive study by Tech4Society (T4S), **A People’s Audit of the Mon-Oakland Connector**, shows that the shuttle would not save time and would come at a much greater cost than the **Our Money. Our Solutions.** alternative plan proposed by the neighborhoods of The Run, Panther Hollow, Greenfield, and Hazelwood. The resident-driven plan addresses their long-neglected infrastructure and transportation needs.
- Bonnie Fan, a T4S researcher states, “We examined the City’s arguments in favor of the Mon-Oakland Connector and found that a similar service could be provided with shuttle consolidation between the universities and UPMC, that the Connector would barely serve the projected [Hazelwood Green] ridership, and that it provided no travel time benefits compared to transit improvements from Our Money, Our Solutions.”

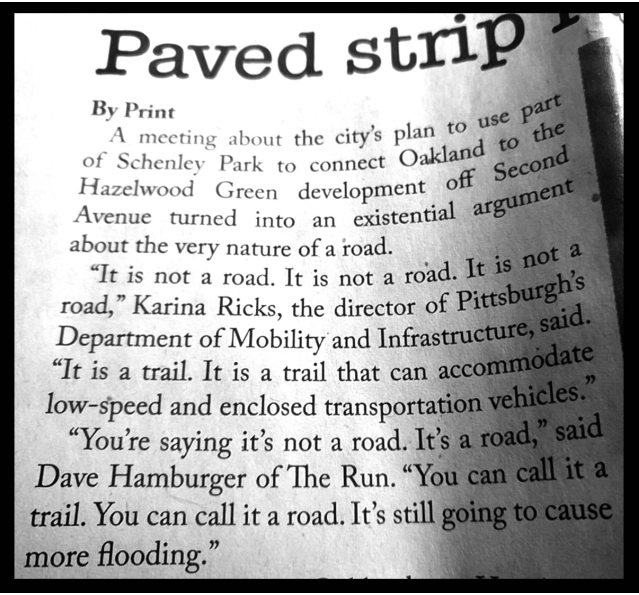
“Schenley Park belongs to the people not the universities”
-Barb Warwick
Greenfield Community Association board member

The Degradation of the Park

The existing Junction Hollow Trail/Three Rivers Heritage Trail is the only route that allows bicyclists and pedestrians to travel between Oakland, Greenfield, Hazelwood, South Side, and Downtown without sharing space with motorized vehicles. A soccer field and practice area along the trail is in frequent public use by athletes of all ages, and is an especially popular spot for youth soccer. Families, hikers, bikers, runners, commuters, and dog walkers all use the trail—and the park is home to many indigenous species of western PA wildlife.

Despite residents proposing existing alternative routes that would bypass the park and their neighborhoods, City officials have insisted the only viable route was through Schenley Park. But RTK documents reveal Department of Mobility and Infrastructure (DOMI) Director Karina Ricks stating that the MOC is not a transportation solution and indicating other routes would have to be used—the very same resident-proposed routes derided by city officials as non-viable.

At a packed and contentious November 2019 public meeting, attendees from various Pittsburgh neighborhoods, including Squirrel Hill, Hazelwood, Greenfield, and The Run, vehemently denounced the roadway project. At one point, DOMI Director Ricks interrupted the meeting, trying to defend the construction of the road through Schenley Park by declaring, “It is not a road! [repeated twice more] It is a trail! It is a trail that can accommodate low-speed and enclosed transportation vehicles.”



An excerpt from an article in East End Print describes a contentious public meeting in November 2019.

“The very idea that the City wants to allow vehicles on the path where we walk, run, and bike is incomprehensible to me,” said Greenfield Community Association Board member and Run resident Barb Warwick. “CMU and Pitt want to run their shuttles steps away from the field where our kids play soccer—and Peduto and City Council are just letting them do it. It’s total disregard for our neighborhood and our kids’ safety. Schenley Park belongs to the people, not the universities.”

The \$63 Million Question

\$40 million for a stormwater mitigation plan that doesn’t fix the chronic flooding and \$23 million for a roadway through a park that is not a transportation solution raises many important questions, including one at the root of it all: While the current pandemic has devastated our city’s economy for years going forward, and with Mayor Peduto stating that all major development projects should be put on hold for several years, why are city officials so determined to bulldoze through two healthy neighborhoods and Schenley Park when evidence shows that their proposed shuttle roadway is non-essential?

The Reveal

Documents received through numerous RTK requests, along with statements and actions by proponents of the MOC, reveal many concealed truths—including Mayor Chief of Staff Dan Gilman referring to the overall 4MR Stormwater Project that presently includes the MOC as “a clusterf@sk.”

In October 2017, a source in the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy stated that the roadway “has to happen” because “no one will sign onto it [the development] unless [the MOC is] built.” And in October 2018—when directly asked by Run resident Kristen Macey, “Why is putting this roadway in so important to you?” County Executive Rich Fitzgerald answered, “This isn’t for you; this is for the universities to get down to the Hazelwood [Green] plan.”

A “Mayor’s Meeting Minutes” RTK document reveals Heinz Endowment (owners of the HG site) representatives stating: “The connector road to Oakland is incredibly important. Developers have indicated their interest in the Almono site is contingent on the road being constructed.” The roadway project is indeed a sign-on condition for potential HG developers and tenants, rather than a necessity that would serve the affected communities and public.

“The Mon-Oakland Connector fails as a transit project,” says Laura Wiens, executive director of Pittsburghers for Public Transit. “The resident-led Our Money. Our Solutions. alternative transportation plan is far more effective than the MOC across all key metrics—speed, ridership capacity, cost, accessibility, the impact to the natural environment, and impact to housing affordability in the corridor. \$23 million in public money should be used to meaningfully address transportation barriers in Hazelwood, Greenfield, and Oakland, and not advance private development agendas that push residents out.”

“This isn’t for you; this is for the universities to get get down to the Hazelwood plan.”
-Allegheny County Executive
Rich Fitzgerald

The Multibillion-dollar Answer

Essentially, the public is expected to pay for the MOC so that the multibillion-dollar non-taxable entities and others who stand to profit from the roadway... can profit from the roadway. The roadway would provide the sign-on condition demanded by universities—a publicly financed private driveway to the private HG site from Oakland campuses. And it would establish a beachhead for university expansion by seizing a portion of Schenley Park and commandeering neighborhood streets and green space with the eventual goal of erasing two healthy communities along the route.

Evidence shows that the Mon-Oakland Connector project is a Trojan horse—the first step in an attempted massive land-grab by Oakland universities and other private interests for profit-seeking expansion and “growth” through premeditated community erasure.

The Op-Ed

“Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell”—Edward Abbey

A 2017 city-mandated survey in The Run shows an overwhelming majority of residents adamantly opposed to the roadway and unanimous demand for effective flood relief. Residents reached clear consensus on their community’s needs through true democratic process, but city officials continue governing via crony capitalism. Deals made behind closed doors are inherently non-transparent and undemocratic—and break the regulations surrounding any development plan that state public officials have an obligation of transparency with full public vetting before any decisions are made. Development plans must have the affected community’s approval, and residents have every right to veto any project that would harm their community—because democracy does not end at the ballot box, it only begins there. If growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell, Pittsburgh city officials are cancer-causing agents.

As city officials and their private partners continue driving down a path toward confrontation with opponents of the roadway, it’s worth pointing out the similarities between the MOC project and attempts to build oil pipelines through sacred indigenous lands. For residents of The Run, their historic community is sacred, and they “refuse to be a sacrifice zone for private development through predatory land speculation and gentrification.” They have vowed to protect Schenley Park as well as their community.

Every justification put forth for building the MOC has been proven false. Proponents now seem to be at a loss for any argument other than, “We have to build it because we’ve been secretly planning this behind closed doors for years!” This may be the heart of the matter regarding the MOC:

- Do elected officials have the right to rule by decree, including striking secret deals that will erase whole communities off the map for profit for their campaign contributors—the privileged and well-connected few?
- Does a healthy, vibrant Pittsburgh neighborhood have the right to decide its own future, or should it be forced to allow shady back-door development deals to erase their community for privatized profit?

The Stand

Opponents say money for neighborhood revitalization need not include tens of millions for multibillion-dollar, tax-exempt institutions. Run residents continue to file RTK requests for hidden details on the MOC and flood-mitigation plans, hold community marches and press conferences, inform through multimedia materials, and lobby City Council among other actions to stop the construction of the MOC. A grassroots, multi-community coalition has grown to include social justice organizations, neighborhood associations, churches, community groups, and others aligning with residents in opposition to the MOC and calling on City Council to reallocate MOC funding to their community-generated Our Money, Our Solutions plan. Although the Mayor’s office continues to ignore the communities’ plan, in December 2020, City Council approved shifting \$4.1 million in roadway funding to bike and pedestrian infrastructure improvements in Hazelwood, along with other more pressing needs in the wake of a pandemic-driven deficit. And Allegheny County Port Authority has added weekend bus service to the 93 Hazelwood route—improving mobility for Hazelwood residents.

Opponents of the MOC are asking the public to join them in rejecting secret deals made by local government officials, and to organize their own communities to participate in a true democratic process for citywide grassroots community development. 🌱

To support residents and opponents of the MOC, sign the petition at:
<https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/our-money-our-solutions>
And for more information, visit:
junctioncoalition.org

Welcome to Hell

By Ohio Valley Environmental Resistance
OVER

On January 28, 2021, not long after 7 a.m., a small group of activists and a large papier-mâché fish set up a blockade on the only access road to Shell Polymer's office in Beaver, Pennsylvania. It wasn't long before private security arrived and instructed them to leave. Protestors weren't concerned with private security, so security called the local police. Upon arrival, police ordered the protestors to move to the adjacent road which is public property, but because the protestors didn't want to stop their blockade, the police threatened arrest. Protestors chose not to go to jail and packed up their fish and left.

Shell Polymers is a subsidiary of Royal Dutch Shell which is building an ethane cracker plant in Beaver, along with the Falcon Pipeline that will provide ethane to the facility. The plant will be used to produce plastic--which, when discarded, will break down into micro-plastics. A great deal of plastic is ingested by animals and humans, causing illness and premature death. The plant will also emit over 2 million tons of CO2 every year, which will render the region's efforts to address climate change worthless.

For the past four years, environmentalists and public health advocates have condemned the Shell plant for the air pollution and waste it will dump on our region. Many people have testified at public hearings run by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), submitted public comment for Shell's toxic waste permits, written letters to the editor, lobbied elected officials, and held countless events to educate the public about the dangers of what Shell wants to do. But after all of these efforts, the construction of the Ethane Cracker plant and Falcon Pipeline are well on their way to completion.

Recently, Shell submitted a permit to the DEP to use sulfur hexafluoride, a greenhouse gas 26,000 times more powerful than CO2. Because there has been little public opposition or awareness about the permit, the expectation is the permit will be approved. After all, Shell was also allowed to continue construction at the plant despite the dozens of workers who have tested positive for COVID-19. The Falcon Pipeline was given a permit to be constructed over the Ambridge Reservoir, risking the drinking water for 30,000 people in the event the pipeline leaks or explodes. As the DEP doesn't seem bothered by the 522 tons of volatile organic compounds that the plant will release into the air every year, why should we expect anything Shell wants, or does, to get resistance from the DEP?

In response, activists like those who blocked the entry road on that snowy Thursday morning are going to continue to resist Shell through direct action. While many who read this may see them as outliers, they are not alone. Activists from Standing Rock faced off against water cannons and attack dogs to defend their sacred land.



Ohio Valley Environmental Resistance (OVER) activists block the access road to Shell Polymers office on Jan. 28, 2021.

In Virginia, the Yellow Finch Tree Sit blocked construction on the Mountain Valley Pipeline for over two years. In Ireland, people delayed Shell from building an oil refinery through direct action for ten years. The evidence from these struggles and countless others show that confrontational tactics can work when done in a strategic manner.

This is not to devalue the work of organizations that do political lobbying, filing of lawsuits, educational outreach, and research against what the petro industry is doing, but direct action is needed as well. We must confront Shell and the government agencies and non-profits that have rolled out the red carpet for them to set up shop here. Although some people may have the attitude that Shell being here is a done deal; we aren't those people. We will not allow the Ohio Valley to become another sacrifice zone like the petrochemical industry's "Cancer Alley" in Louisiana. As long as Shell and the other companies continue construction of their petrochemical infrastructure, we must and will resist them every step of the way.

"As someone who lives in a frontline community that will be directly harmed by Shell, as someone who is committed to using much more of the activist toolbox, I applaud the actions of these brave young people," said local activist Michael Badges-Canning. "I also recognize that the impact of Shell's reckless pursuit of profits puts all of us--the entire world--in frontline communities. Shell must be stopped."

The Ohio Valley Environmental Resistance (OVER) is helping form autonomous groups like these. If you feel called to be involved on the front lines or as a support person, please email OVER at overpa@protonmail.com.

**Editorial illustration on page 2
by Marcel Walker
www.marcelwalker.com**

Mike Check Says:



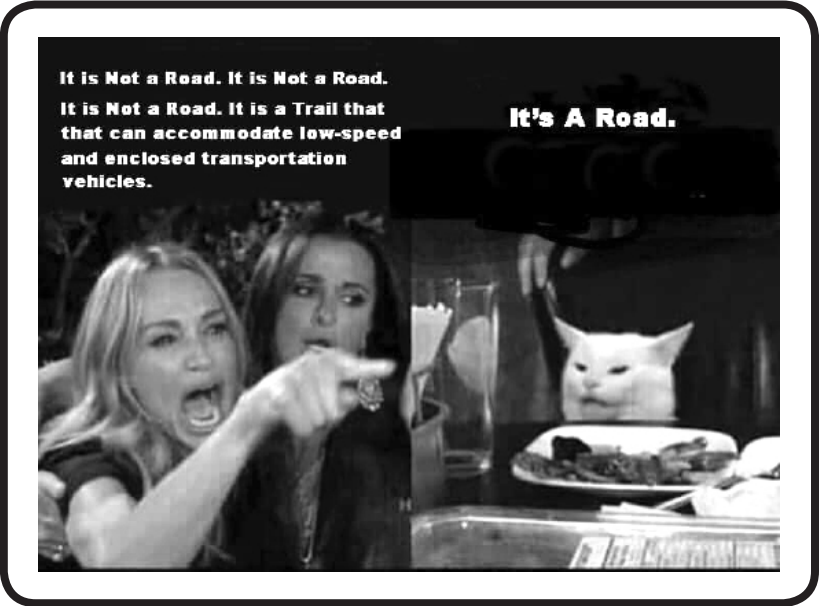
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"Paramount among the responsibilities of a Free Press, is the duty to prevent any part of the government from deceiving the people..."
Justice Black -
New York Times v United States,
403 U.S. 713 (1971)

