



CITIZENS REGIONAL TRANSIT NEWS

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Between Budget Lines

by Gladys Gifford, CRTC Chair

When we construct a household budget, we usually seek financial discipline--some understanding of what bills will come due at what time and a better handle on where the money is coming from to make the payments.

That budget document reveals a lot about the shape of our personal lives. It shows our current priorities, as established by our obligations. A budget allows us to evaluate those priorities, to better shape our future according to our personal goals.

What does the NFTA budget reveal about the organization?

First, that Metro Bus and Rail is two-thirds of the NFTA. Surface transportation must be its primary focus. Management of real property, such as the Small Boat Harbor, is only 3% of the total picture.

Second, that Metro Bus and Rail is its real work. Bus and rail drivers, bus and rail maintenance workers, transit police, support personnel--the budget says that the cost of employing 1500 people takes up 75% of the NFTA's operating expenses. So it should. The Authority can be proud of its contribution to the local economy through its employees.

Third, that Metro Bus and Rail is a vital service supported by all levels of government. As such, the NFTA is a major conduit for the return of tax dollars to the region.

Examination of the NFTA budget affirms that Metro Bus and Rail is a vital asset to our region. Keep it that way.

Tracking Transit Dollars (Part I): an Analysis of the NFTA Budget for 2003

by Gladys Gifford, CRTC Chair

Public agencies have an obligation to show the public that they are managing taxpayer dollars responsibly. Therefore, the NFTA will present its 2004 budget to the public on March 24th.

To help prepare the public for the latest budget offering from the NFTA, CRTC has reviewed their 2003 budget, and offers the following summary and evaluation. The [NFTA Annual Operating Budget and 5-Year Capital Plan](#) for 2003 is available in the Buffalo Library, downtown.

The NFTA's fiscal year runs from April 1-March 31. The NFTA operates three business centers: surface transportation (Metro Bus, Metro Rail and the bus terminals in Buffalo and Niagara Falls), airport (both Buffalo and Niagara Falls), and property (including the Boat Harbor). The NFTA supports these business centers with its central administration group, which includes executives, engineers, public affairs, personnel service, finance and management. The NFTA employs about 1500 people.

The consolidated budget adopted for 2003 showed total revenues and government assistance which amounted to over \$121 million. Local revenues were \$59.8 million and assistance from all levels of government was \$61.5 million.

Total budgeted operating expenses came in at \$109.9 million, leaving a balance of \$11.4 million. Of that balance, the budget designates \$3.4 million for capital spending and \$8 million for "non-operating expenditures," such as debt service and operating reserve.

The smallest NFTA business, real property management, was expected to earn \$4.2 million from rentals and fees.

The budget for the airport group was estimated at \$32.7 million. The Buffalo airport showed a small surplus. The Niagara Falls airport showed a deficit.

NFTA's largest business is its surface transportation group. Metro Bus and Rail operations involved \$82.6 million, or two-thirds of the NFTA budget. Metro operations were projected to produce a small surplus which was then invested in capital expenditures.

In contrast, the bus terminals were expected to operate at a loss. Additional capital investments at the terminals were planned, further multiplying red ink. The bus terminals (transportation centers) in 2003 were expected to earn NFTA about \$1.6 million at a cost of \$2.1 million.

On balance, the NFTA budget of 2003 is a conservative document which achieves its stated goal to "protect the financial well-being of the Authority without increasing transit fares to our customers."

This budget demonstrates that the NFTA is a major employer in the region. The Authority creates quality, long-term jobs for Western New York.

This budget shows that the NFTA depends on government subsidies. Bus and rail receive direct assistance from local, state, and Federal sources. The new airport makes payments on outstanding bond debt.

Our main criticism of the NFTA budget document is its failure to publish separate data for Metro Rail and Metro Bus. Those figures can be supplied to the public in the budget, since that data is required for Federal records.

Part II, in April, will analyze the NFTA's 2004 Budget.

PATH Sets Downtown NYC Reopening Timetable

...tstc.org 2-24-03

The Port Authority has announced that a temporary PATH station at the World Trade Center site is scheduled to open in December. Additionally, the Exchange Place station in Jersey City will open in June, with new connecting ferry service to lower Manhattan.

The World Trade Center station was destroyed on Sept. 11, 2001. The destruction of the Trade Center caused flooding in the downtown PATH tunnels and at Exchange Place.

The Port Authority described work on the PATH system at a meeting of advisory committees to the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) last Thursday [2-20]. To make Exchange Place a temporary terminal, the PA has had to excavate a new track crossing. Flooding in the tunnel required a thorough overhaul of the line under the Hudson, including new electrical and signal equipment, and new track underpinnings.

The temporary World Trade Center site station now being built will be roofed, but not fully enclosed or heated. The PA says its work on the temporary station anticipates construction of the permanent station on the same site.

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Congress Clears '03 Budget, Boosting Highway Support Above TEA-21 Level

...Transfer 2-19-03

The House and Senate approved the Fiscal Year 2003 Omnibus Appropriations bill [on 2-18, providing \$31.6 billion in highways spending and \$7.2 billion for transit programs. Highway spending receives a boost of about \$4 billion over the "guaranteed" spending level of \$27.6 billion set in TEA-21, with transit programs receiving the level set in the 1998 law, minus a .65 percent reduction applied to federal discretionary spending.

The final spending levels for this fiscal year are particularly important, as this is the last year of the six-year TEA-21 period, with the higher level moving the baseline spending level upward. Rep. Don Young (R-AK), the chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, said, "despite the small cut I'm satisfied with the level of funding for highways and transit."

The action closes out a lengthy negotiation over many funding priorities, with the broad appropriations measure addressing most of the federal government's spending for the remainder of FY'03, which began October 1 and concludes September 30. The 3000-page bill is loaded with provisions, many of which go well beyond simply funding matters, including provisions that override existing law and regulations and even add entire provisions to federal law. Changes affecting federal lands, for example, were strongly debated during Senate action on the bill (H.J. Res. 2), provisions that fundamentally reshape how the U.S. Forest Service particularly can manage federal land and private party access to these lands for logging.

Included in the FY 2003 Omnibus spending agreement is a cut in funding for the Job Access and Reverse Commute Program (JARC). While the JARC program was slated for \$150 million, it will receive \$105 million, a 30% reduction. The JARC program assists low-income workers and people moving from welfare to work.

Congressional action now shifts to the President's FY'04 Budget Request, focusing on approval of a budget resolution for the Fiscal Year 2004 budget.

Local Officials Call for Greater Suballocation of Federal Funds

...Transfer 2-19-03

On February 10, a new coalition of local elected officials released a common platform for TEA-21 reauthorization that seeks to strengthen their voice in influencing transportation decisions and increase their access to federal funds.

The 11-member Local Officials for Transportation, which includes the National League of Cities, The U.S. Conference of Mayors, the National Association of Counties, and Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations, indicated support for suballocating a greater share of federal transportation funds to the regional level and improving local decision-making powers over project selection.

The groups noted that only about six cents of every dollar is certain to reach local officials, yet they own about 75 percent of the highway and road network, 90 percent of transit systems, and nearly half of all bridges. Reflecting the need for an equitable share of federal transportation resources, Dallas councilmember Sandy Greyson said "Members of the Local Officials for Transportation coalition know what needs to be done, because we are closest to the problems."

"Our coalition is calling for adjustments in the new transportation bill that will provide a greater sub-allocation of resources to local governments through metropolitan planning organizations, or MPOs," said Fort Worth Mayor Kenneth Barr.

"Suballocation is the tool that gives local government entities the resources and decision-making ability to direct transportation funds where they are most needed."

The group also recommending increasing funding for the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality program in anticipation of new non-attainment areas being designated and taxing ethanol at the same rate as gasoline to generate new revenues for the Highway Trust Fund.

Way to go, San Diego!

...www.fta.dot.gov

San Diego Trolley, Inc., an operator of the Metropolitan Transit System, scored its own touchdown on Super Bowl Sunday [1-26] with near perfect transit service to handle the huge increase in volume. "Compared to five years ago, this thing was like magic today," said Senior Transportation Consultant Paul Ridgeway.

The Metropolitan Transit System reports that 23,000 fans were carried to the big game by trolley, representing one-third of the total game attendance. The postgame operation went flawlessly according to San Diego Trolley, Inc., which cleared out the stadium in just two hours after the end of the game.

San Diego planned ahead to provide additional services-and security-for the Super Bowl, and by all accounts their planning paid off in smooth service. Staff set up manual ticket sales units to augment the regular machine ticket sales, provided 665 additional train trips (53 percent more than the regular schedule), and deployed special station teams to respond to possible glitches or incidents.

Security measures were especially paramount on game day. Throughout the year of preparation San Diego Trolley Security and Operations coordinated with state, local, and federal authorities to enhance security. They are delighted to report that there was not a single security incident that interrupted service.

Two "Smart Growth" Events Coming to Buffalo:

both free, and open to the public

***** April 3, 5:30 PM at UB Main Street Campus,
301 Crosby Hall**

a public lecture: **"Moving 'Smart Growth' beyond Ideology:
Toward a Scientific Foundation for Urban Design"**

by Professor Gerrit J. Knapp

***** April 4, 5:30 PM at the Burchfield-Penney Art Center,
Buffalo State College**

a panel discussion: **"No Growth? Slow Growth? Sprawl?--
Can Western New York Grow 'Smart'?"**

Moderator: John B. Sheffer, II

Panelists: Joel Giambra, Erie County Executive (invited)

Anne Huberman, Co-Chair, Local Government/Regionalism

Committee, League of Women Voters of Buffalo/Niagara

Dr. Gerrit J. Knapp, Director of the National Center for Smart
Growth Research and Education, University of Maryland

Dr. Kathryn A. Foster, Chair of the UB Department of Urban and
Regional Planning

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Following the one-hour panel discussion,
a **reception** in the Burchfield-Penney Gallery
to open the **national traveling exhibit** titled
"Smart Growth and Choices for Change."

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**Two Recent Surveys of NFTA Transit Riders:
Methods Diverge but Results Converge**

In order to update their data, the GBNRTC employed a consultant, NuStats, to do a detailed passenger survey of both bus and rail riders, April 22-May 10, 2002. Results of that survey will be posted on the GBNRTC website.

In a similar move, VOICE Buffalo, a faith-based advocacy group, conducted an informal survey of bus and rail riders, December 12-14, 2002, to gather information for their transportation task force.

A detailed comparison is impossible, since the methods and purposes of either group were widely divergent. However, in their search for the average NFTA transit rider, the convergence of their results are striking:

- * most riders are female
- * most riders use transit to go to work every day
- * most riders are working-age (20-50 years old)

For more detailed information, contact:
Doug Struckle, at GBNRTC, 856-2026
Allan Ryan, for VOICE Buffalo, 842-6571

Featured at CRTC Monthly Meeting, March 18, at noon:

“Light Rail or Streetcar?”

See footage of Toronto’s streetcars and light rail, plus the streetcars of Portland, Oregon. Learn first-hand how to compare streetcar and light rail lines.

a video by Richard Olday, CRTC vice-chair

Richard Olday is a long-time member of CRTC. He has recently retired from his career as senior marketing representative, at New York State Electric & Gas. He is an enthusiastic member of the Niagara Frontier National Railway Historical Society and belongs to the Electric Railroaders’ Association. He serves CRTC as chair of the Vintage Trolley sub-committee.

The CRTC meets monthly in the education wing of University Presbyterian Church, corner of Main Street and Niagara Falls Blvd., Buffalo. Enter via parking lot door, and take the elevator to “ML.” Meetings are free and open to the public. Brown bag lunches are welcome.

CALENDAR

Mar. 10 6:00 PM
“Airport-Transit Road Corridor” by CRTC, at Partners for Livable WNY EPIC Bldg., 1000 Main St., Buffalo

Mar. 12 9:30 AM
PCC meeting of GBNRTC
Rath Bldg., Rm. 1403, Buffalo

Mar. 18 Noon
CRTC monthly meeting
3330 Main St., Buffalo

Mar. 18 4:00 PM
Regional Coalition for Education on Sprawl, 1272 Delaware Ave., Buffalo

Mar. 24 9:00 AM
NFTA Budget Hearing
Central Library Aud., Buffalo

Apr. 4 5:30 PM
LWVBN panel on sprawl
Burchfield-Penney Art Center, Buffalo

Apr. 15 7:30 PM
CRTC monthly meeting

Quotable Quotes:

“If bus service was not available, 31% of respondents riding NFTA bus routes would ask a friend to drive them to their destination and an additional 20% would walk. If rail service was not available, 27% of Metro Rail passengers would ride a bus and 25% would drive.”

...GBNRTC On-Board Passenger Survey, done spring of 2002

Citizens Regional Transit Corporation

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return service requested