



CITIZENS for REGIONAL TRANSIT NEWS

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Healthy Transportation?

Ozone, aka smog.
Crashes.
Sprawl.
Global warming.

The litany goes on, and never ends: the impacts of our car-dependent culture on human health and safety are deadly. The sad irony is that many of us are gasping for breath, even as we go to go buy more gas that adds more pollution to the air--in order to be mobile.

When you travel the Kensington Expressway, you see an electronic message board just west of the Thruway. Recently, the message read, "High ozone day, combine trips. Please consider using transit." This sign had little value, except as a warning. Drivers on the expressway have already committed themselves to travel by car, and there is no public transit easily available after leaving the Kensington.

As I waited recently in a bus stop on Main Street, I saw an ad about asthma attacks. Such sweet irony. You can certainly get an asthma attack while waiting for a bus, breathing in fumes from passing cars and the bus itself.

What can we do about it?

There is one urgent action we can take now, while Congress is in recess--take the time to visit our Senators and Representatives, to urge them to work harder on the Federal transportation bill. Tell them how air pollution impacts us personally. Tell them to support greater funding for mass transit. Tell them to keep the pressure on their colleagues to ensure fair distribution of transportation revenues.

Let Congress know that we care about transportation--and we vote.

Air Quality Chokes on Feeble Government Response

by Gladys Gifford

Recent reports and headlines concur--there is little progress on the battle to reduce air pollution.

The June 25, 2003 (ENS), headline proclaimed, "Eastern Cities Under Red Ozone Alert." More than 31 million Americans on the East Coast were warned to stay indoors, to avoid ozone-spiked smog. The tag-line added the usual warning: ground-level ozone is formed from the incomplete burning of fossil fuels, primarily from power plants and gasoline engines (i.e., automobiles).

Two studies by UCLA, issued last fall (ENS), indicated that people living near freeways are exposed to 30 times the normal concentration of dangerous ultra-fine particles. The researchers examined exposure levels for people who live, work or travel within 165 feet downwind of a major freeway or busy intersection. Such exposures are linked to neurological changes, mild pulmonary inflammation and cardiovascular problems.

In April, 2003, a London paper (The Independent) reported an international study which showed that small rises in urban air pollution can trigger an increased number of potentially fatal heart attacks. The study had potentially far-reaching conclusions for city councils and environment agencies.

In May, 2003, (Reuters) teams of researchers from Taiwan and Germany reported that chemicals in vehicle exhausts lead to an increased risk of respiratory disorders in children living in heavy traffic areas.

Closer to home, the American Lung Association (ALA) issued its annual State of the Air report in May, 2003. This report covers 1999-2001, the most recent data available from the EPA.

Comparisons of ozone days reported by county, from the previous year's report: Chautauqua +5, for a total of 30; Erie -2, for a total of 20; Niagara +4, for a total of 20; Albany +6, for a total of 10; Richmond (NYC) +7, for a total of 38. Monroe's total this time is 11; Cattaraugus and Genesee offered no report.

A recent public outreach effort by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation is an ozone hotline, at 800-535-1345. The recorded voice reports whether there is an ozone alert for the day, and then proclaims:

"Auto exhaust is the primary cause of ground-level ozone and the most serious air pollution problem in the Northeast. To help reduce ozone, please refrain from driving and use public transportation if available."

Logically, if New York State has concluded that automobile exhaust is the culprit, then NYS should also become an even greater supporter of public transit.

Further, the ALA reported that 49% of Americans are suffering from the effects of air pollution. Surely, the ultimate watchdog over human health and safety--Federal government--must take notice.

Instead, the ALA reported on August 1st that the nation's environmental watchdog, the EPA, has proposed new rules for implementing 8-hour ozone standards which will create more loopholes and uncertainty, rather than tighten ozone regulations. In cooperation with environmental and legal groups, ALA has submitted formal comments to the EPA to protest these new rules. They insist that this latest federal proposal promising to help clear up the nation's smog and soot problems will fail to reach that goal.

For more info: www.lungusa.org

From the NFTA press room..

7-30... To better identify and link the locations of the Metro Rail stations to the section of the community they serve, the NFTA announced that the names of four of its 15 rail stations will be changed.

South Campus Station will become University Station, Delavan College Station will become Delavan-Canisius College Station, Allen Hospital will become Allen-Medical Campus Station, and Auditorium Station will change to Eric Canal-Harbor Station. All of the other locations will keep their present names.

7-29...The Seneca Nation paid \$3 million for the NFTA's Transportation Center in Niagara Falls, adjacent to its casino. The sale will enable the NFTA to build a permanent state-of-the-art transportation facility at a location to be determined.

7-24...The New York State Energy Research and Development Authority has awarded the NFTA a \$62,000 grant for a demonstration project to use biodiesel fuel in 140 buses.

6-2...The NFTA 's Greenback Plan will now be named "Metro Advantage." The program was begun by the NFTA in January, 2000, based on a provision in the current Transportation Equity Act (TEA-21). Since its inception, hundreds of Buffalo Niagara companies and their employees have paid for public transportation using pre-tax dollars.

Citizens Regional Transit Corp.

aims to improve and expand bus and rail transit for all of WNY through citizen involvement and education.

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The Papers Agree: Light Rail Is Working

...by Daniel G. Jennings CNSNews.com Commentary July 22,

2003

A sampling of newspaper reports from around the country demonstrates one thing: Light rail transportation is a success because it attracts riders, increases property values and lures commuters out of their cars.

The Dallas Morning News reports that investors have spent \$65 million to buy office towers with 980,000 square feet of office space along the DART (Dallas Area Rapid Transit) light rail line. Investors see the proximity of office towers to DART stations as a plus, the News reports.

The city of Pasadena is faced with an interesting problem, according to The Pasadena Star-News. It doesn't have enough parking spaces for all the people who will be parking their cars to use the new Gold Line, a light rail line which will be opening this summer that will connect the historic suburb with downtown Los Angeles. The city of Pasadena is searching for temporary parking lots to serve as a stopgap measure until it can build a permanent parking garage for all the commuters in supposedly car-crazy southern California who will park their vehicles to take the Gold Line.

Officials in Vancouver, Washington, are envious of the success of light rail in Portland, Oregon, across the Columbia River, The Vancouver Columbian reports. Portland's light rail has created \$3 billion worth of new development and 10,000 housing units according to the Columbian while eliminating 187,000 car trips a day. Officials are now meeting and looking for ways to get light rail expanded across the Columbia to Vancouver and its suburbs.

Light rail in St. Louis, Missouri, has been so successful that officials across the Mississippi in Madison County, Illinois, are conducting a feasibility study to see how much it would cost to get light rail expanded into their area. In fact, Madison County is thinking of spending its own money on the effort.

Residents of one central Phoenix neighborhood want light rail so badly that they're begging the city council to put a stop on the Arizona city's light rail line which is now under construction in their neighborhood.

According to The Arizona Republic, officials of the Wilson Elementary School District and local residents joined forces to demand a light rail station in their neighborhood after the city eliminated the station from their rail plans in order to better serve the city's airport.

These diverse press reports from different newspapers in different parts of the country agree on one thing: light rail transportation works. It attracts economic development, creates jobs, gets commuters out of cars and makes life better for average people.

Now, that's news that's fit to print.

(Daniel G. Jennings is a freelance writer and journalist who lives and works in Denver, Colo.)

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H.R. 2989 Passed Committee, Congress to Act in Sept. !!

STPP Action Alert 8-6-03

Legislators are currently in the process of reauthorizing TEA-21, but have not yet acted to reauthorize or extend TEA-21 and perpetuate its programs. In this vacuum, the Appropriations committee has taken advantage of an unusual window of opportunity to make policy and funding changes to transportation programs as they author the FY04 spending bill. In the process, they have sparked the first real battle over what the next bill, referred to as 'TEA-3', will look like. The proposed changes reveal an intent to dismantle key reforms established by the landmark 1991 transportation law, ISTEA. In late July, the Appropriations Committee voted to approve H.R. 2989, (Transportation, Treasury, and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act, 2004), which if approved by the full House in September would lead to substantial disruption to the nation's surface transportation systems.

If approved by Congress, H.R. 2989 would:

- Shut down Amtrak. Funding for the nation's passenger rail system amounts to \$900 million, only half of the \$1.8 billion needed to keep rail service a choice for Americans. Amtrak President David Gunn's request of \$1.8 billion for the new fiscal year was affirmed in a letter of support signed by 219 House Members, online at <http://www.narprail.org/house6.htm>.
- Terminate the Transportation Enhancements program. The 10 percent set-aside of Surface Transportation Program funds for bicycle, pedestrian, scenic and historic preservation projects would be eliminated. Although this program accounts for only about 1% of overall transportation spending, it is the most popular and widespread, having supported projects in many of the nation's counties. Find additional details and advocacy resources online at <http://www.railtrails.org/whatwedo/policy/tea21b.asp>.
- Stagnate transit funding while expanding highways. H.R. 2989 would basically hold funding for the overall transit program at the level set by TEA-21 for FY03, \$7.2 billion. Meanwhile, highway spending, set at \$27.8 for the last year of TEA-21, instead got a \$3.8 billion boost for \$31.6 billion in FY03. H.R. 2989 would provide another \$1.7 billion boost for \$33.3 billion in FY04 -- that's a 21% increase for highways above baseline levels over the past two years. This trend undermines the overall ratio of spending on highways and transit, which was established at 80/20 in ISTEA and led to more balanced investments in the nation's transportation system. H.R. 2989 would set an 83/17 ratio for highways and transit.
- Slow development of new transit systems. The Committee report on H.R. 2989 (not the bill itself) directs the Administration to impose new criteria on "New Starts" projects (e.g. commuter and light rail projects or other fixed guideway investments) that will make it very difficult for new projects to move forward. The Committee included additional language that directs the Federal Transit Administration to fund "New Starts" projects at no more than a 50 percent federal share, despite current law which permits up to a 80 percent federal share. Find what projects would be affected in your area in FTA's FY04 budget request, online at <http://www.fta.dot.gov/library/policy/ns/ns2004/nsfy04toc.html>.
- Slash Jobs Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) program funds. Funding for this small but effective program, designed for welfare-to-work projects, was set to be \$150 million in FY03, but appropriators last year diverted nearly one-third of those funds away from the program. H.R. 2989 would cut the program even further, to \$85 million for FY04.

On Track, Here and There

..Railfan & Railroad

...The capital program of the MTA of NYC for Fiscal Year Ending 2004 now totals \$17 billion. MTA is set to begin work on the construction of the Second Ave subway, to add a second north-south transit link to the overcrowded Lexington Ave subway.

...**Charlotte, NC**, is planning to develop rail transit service. In December, 2002, the Metro Transit Commission unanimously adopted the Charlotte area transit system's \$2.9 billion plan. (The voters had approved a one-half cent sales tax dedicated to transit in 1998.) Major elements of the plan include a light rail project to the south and a commuter rail on the north; the commuter line to operate along the Norfolk Southern right-of-way. Enhanced bus service will feed into the commuter rail. An extension of the light rail is planned to the northeast. A bus route will link the light rail with the university research area.

...McKinney Avenue in **Dallas, TX**, has been transformed over the past decade from a sleepy street lined with mom and pop shops and nightclubs to a thoroughfare with upscale restaurants and trendy clothing stores. The McKinney Avenue Transit Authority has prospered with the changes. An extension was opened in May, 2002, which included a spur to the Dallas light rail system. The number of passengers has tripled.

...Earlier this year, **Phoenix, AZ**, received Federal approval for its new light rail system. The \$1 billion, 20-mile project has so far been on time and on target. Light rail will connect Phoenix with Tempe, Mesa and Glendale. Already, extensions are being considered.

What you can do:

Since every member of the House will vote on H.R. 2989, every Representative has the responsibility to ensure that these unfair and destructive features of H.R. 2989 are corrected.

Write, FAX, call, visit your Representative to voice your concerns about H.R. 2989. Urge strong amendments to this appropriations bill that will support and enhance all forms of transit. Insist that the current form of H.R. 2989 is totally unacceptable.

Remind your Representative: We support transit, and we vote!

CRTC Offers Tour of Proposed Corridor, September 12, 16 & 17...

The CRTC and Buffalo Councilman Antoine M. Thompson invite WNY elected officials, community and business leaders, and all CRTC members to take a tour of the proposed Airport/Transit Road light rail extension.

Tours will begin at City Hall, meeting at 1:45 PM to board comfortable touring vans. We will view as much of the surface route as possible, beginning at South Division Street, to the Central Terminal, Walden Village, Galleria Mall, the Airport, and ending at Garden Place Hotel on Transit Road. Refreshments will be served at the Hotel, provided by Buffalo Council President, James Pitts. Return vans will return participants to City Hall.

Reservations are required, since space is limited on the vans. Please RSVP by **August 25** to reserve your seat:

Hon. Antoine M. Thompson
Buffalo City Council
Room #1410, City Hall, Buffalo, NY 14202
(716) 851-5145
FAX (716)851-5443

--SPECIAL NOTICE--

The normal monthly meeting of the CRTC is replaced by the Airport/Transit Road tour.

The next regular CRTC meeting will be held October 21, 7:30 PM, 3330 Main Street, Buffalo, NY.

CALENDAR

Aug. 25 Deadline to register for tour (p. 4)

Sept. 4 7-9AM
“Alternative Transportation Day”
Information and activities to encourage transit, bike, pedestrian modes; includes CRTC booth.
Niagara Square, Buffalo; Wellness Inst. 851-4052

Sept 8 6:00 PM
Partners for a Livable WNY
United Way Bldg, Delaware and Summer, Bflo
speaker: Prof. Mark Gottdiener
“Smart growth, dumb growth, no growth”

Sept. 10 9:30 AM
GBNRTC PCC meeting
City Hall, Buffalo

Sept. 12, 16 & 17 1:45 PM
CRTC Tour of proposed light rail extension
(replaces CRTC meeting, see p. 4)

Oct. 14 6:00 PM
Partners for a Livable WNY
United Way Bldg., Buffalo

Oct. 21 7:30 PM
CRTC monthly evening meeting
3330 Main Street, Buffalo

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return service requested