

# Citizens for Regional Transit Corporation

## Annual Report 2015

Submitted by:

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**CITIZENS *for* REGIONAL TRANSIT**

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## 2015 Annual Report

This report summarizes the accomplishments, milestones and activities of Citizens for Regional Transit Corporation during 2015. Citizens for Regional Transit Corporation is known as Citizens for Regional Transit (CRT). This shorter designation will be used in this report.

During 2015 Citizens for Regional Transit was led by the following Board of Directors and Officers: Douglas Funke (President), Seth Triggs (Vice President), Lynn Magdol (Secretary), and Bunny Malone (Treasurer). In addition the following persons served as members of the Board of Directors: Gladys Gifford, Elizabeth Giles, Carl Skompinski, Rebecca Reilly, Derek King, and Jason Kulaszewski. Also, former CRT President Ed Deutschman, Jack and Betty Howell, and former long-time CRT Board Member Joan Bozer served as Emeritus Board Members. We were sad to mark the loss of former CRT VP and Board Member Emeritus, Dick Olday, during 2015. Collectively these Board Members of the Board logged 2,799 hours of service to the community valued at \$75,181 (using the NYS volunteer hourly rate of \$26.86).

At the end of 2015 CRT had 47 members. The CRT President and Secretary maintain the names and addresses of CRT members. CRT has 456 Facebook likes and 106 Twitter followers. Our newsletter email list has 421 recipients. Our media contacts list has 84 recipients.

CRT continued to advocate for an integrated multi-modal public transportation system that serves everyone fairly in WNY. We also continued to educate the public and leaders from both public and private sectors. We kept members and the public informed about transit issues and events via the CRT website and Facebook page, and published 4 newsletters. Seth Triggs has continued to manage the CRT website; Carl Skompinski manages our Facebook page, and Gladys Gifford is the CRT Newsletter Editor. CRT Committee Chairs are:

- Nominating Committee – Lynn Magdol
- Membership Committee – Derek King
- Communications and Public Relations Committee – Rebecca Reilly
- Legislative Committee – Gladys Gifford
- Grants Committee – (open)

CRT held three public meetings in 2015 featuring guest speakers on topics relevant to public transit. The meetings were held in January, April and October at the United Way headquarters on Delaware Avenue.

CRT celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> birthday this year, having been formed under the name South Towns Area Rapid Transit (START) in 1965. Now known as Citizens for Regional Transit and a registered 501(c)3 non-profit organization, we celebrated at our anniversary with a birthday cake at our April public meeting.

### Highlights of the Year

- **PPG Plank on Transit Funding.** CRT's plank on improving funding for public transit was selected as a Partnership for the Public Good (PPG) 2015 agenda item. CRT worked with PPG to seek improved public funding for transit. We participated in numerous press events; met with Erie County legislators to seek ending the practice by Industrial Development Agencies (IDAs) of including the Mortgage Recording Tax – a tax that supports the NFTA – as part tax exemption packages offered to local businesses locating to Western New York. We also met with WNY State legislators seeking an increase to the State Transit Operating Assistance (STOA) that supports operation and maintenance of public transit.
  - We were successful on the State level getting an increase in STOA for upstate agencies, thus avoiding pending NFTA budget shortfalls that would have required service cuts.



- The Erie County IDA exemption initiative was partially successful. Legislators agreed to support legislation in 2016 that could end the exemptions in the FY 2017 budget. We will follow-up to track progress.
- **Held Gondola Press Event.** (5/18/15). CRT organized and coordinated a public presentation on the potential for an aerial gondola connecting Buffalo’s inner and outer harbors. CRT Vice President Seth Triggs and Creative Urban Projects (CUP) Research Director Nick Chu made presentations summarizing the potential for a “sky gondola” deployment in Buffalo. Local media covered this event.
- **Gondola Feasibility Study Proposal.** Submitted proposal to the Niagara River Greenway Commission (NRGC) for New York Power Authority (NYPA) “relicensing funds” to support a feasibility study of an aerial gondola that would connect Buffalo’s inner and outer harbor. This proposal will be evaluated for funding in 2016.
- **CFTE Transit Initiative Conference.** (6/1/15 – 6/3/15). CRT Board Member Lynn Magdol attended the Transit Initiatives and Communities Conference held in Grand Rapids, MI. The conference was sponsored by the Center for Transportation Excellence (CFTE) and focused on local initiatives (especially ballot initiatives) for increasing funds for public transit. The conference had lessons for coalition building and messaging.
- **Developed New CRT Brochure.** Developed and printed a new CRT brochure updating the old brochure with a more current map, pictures of key places that would be connected by expanded Metro Rail, a summary of benefits that would be achieved by extending Metro Rail, and a summary of top CRT priorities.
- **Launched Organizations Petition Drive.** CRT Launched a petition drive for signing by community organizations and area municipalities. The petition calls for (1) extension Metro Rail along the highest-demand corridors with (2) intermodal connectivity to air and inter-city rail, and (3) establishment of long-term sustainable public transit funding. Obtained over 35 community organizations and six municipalities. This effort will continue in 2016.

### CRT Membership Meetings

Three CRT membership meetings were held in 2015. These were held in January, April, and October. The January meeting included the CRT Annual business meeting. These meetings featured one or more guest speakers, were publicized, and were open to the public. Table 1 gives a summary.

**Table 1. CRT Quarterly Meetings**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Summary</b>
Wednesday, January 21, 2015	Doug Funke, President, Citizens for Regional Transit	Doug summarized 2014 CRT accomplishments and the 2015 CRT agenda. He then gave an update of the CRT “road show”, The Case for Transit.
Wednesday, April 15, 2015	Patrick Burke, Erie County Legislator, Lynda Stephens, Coalition for Economic Justice	Speakers discussed local funding issues for public transit including the common IDA practice of exempting the Mortgage Recording tax.
Wednesday, October 21, 2015	Nadine Lemmon, Tri-State Transportation Campaign, and NYS Assemblyman Sean Ryan	Speakers addressed ways to increase STOA for upstate NY. NYS Senator Tim Kennedy made a brief statement in support of more transit funding.

### Community Education

- **Press Events for Increased NFTA Funding.** CRT participated in several press events calling for increased transit funding. CRT, together with the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, helped organize a press event calling for legislation to increase STOA and avoid NFTA funding shortfalls.
- **Radio interview.** (3/31/15). Doug Funke and Lynn Magdol were interviewed on the WUFO’s PPG program to discuss pending NFTA funding shortfalls and the need for more State assistance. This was in support of the PPG plank on transit funding.



- **WNY Environmental Summit.** (9/26/15). Hosted information table at this annual conference. Distributing the new CRT brochure, promoting transit as an important tool for fighting climate change, and sought signatures on the CRT petition.
- **World on Your Plate Conference.** (10/10/15). Hosted information table at this annual conference. Distributed the CRT brochure and sought signatures on the CRT petition.
- **Young Nonprofit Professionals (YNPN) Greater Buffalo Summit.** (10/2/15). Derek King attended this networking event to promote transit solutions.
- **Published editorials.** Published several letters-to-the-editor in the Buffalo News. In addition to letters by CRT President Doug Funke on behalf of CRT, individual Board Members Gladys Gifford, Bunny Malone, Elizabeth Giles, Lynn Magdol, had letters published.
- **Published Quarterly Newsletter.** Published the CRT News for the 17<sup>th</sup> year. Four issues of the newsletter were published during 2015.
- **Website, Facebook and Twitter.** Continued to maintain a CRT website ([www.citizenstransit.org](http://www.citizenstransit.org)), Facebook page (“CitizensforRegionalTransit”) and Twitter account where upcoming events are publicized and links to relevant information on transit can be found. The website provides access to current and past newsletters.

### Participation on Committees and with Partner Organizations

- **NFTA.** Served on several NFTA citizen committees.
  - **Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)** This committee meets bi-monthly and includes membership from many community organizations. Plans and issues relevant to transit in the Buffalo-Niagara Region are discussed. Elizabeth Giles is CRT’s representative.
  - **NFTA Buffalo-Amherst Alternatives Analysis Project Advisory Committee (PAC).** This committee provides inputs on the Amherst alignment and design alternatives for providing efficient transit to the Amherst Campus. Doug Funke is CRT’s representative.
  - **NFTA Cobblestone Stakeholder Roundtable.** (10/15/15). Attended the NFTA stakeholder meeting on the alternatives for the cobblestone Metro Rail extension study. Provided verbal and written comments on the study.
  - **NFTA Service Plan Study Advisory Committee.** Elizabeth Giles served on the Advisory Committee providing inputs to the service plan study, a wide-ranging evaluation of ways to improve NFTA transit routes and schedules.
- **WNY Environmental Alliance (WNYEA)** – Served as member of the Transportation and the Energy and Climate Change Committees. Participated in annual and quarterly WNYEA congresses. Our 2014 - 2015 plank with the Energy and Climate Change Working Group calling for green public transit along the Niagara River Greenway was renewed with small changes for 2016. These changes included the possibility of proposing an aerial gondola study for connecting Buffalo’s inner and outer harbors. Doug Funke served as CRT’s representative.
- **Partnership for the Public Good (PPG)** – CRT continued participation in planning meetings and the plank selection process. CRT submitted a competitive plank that was adopted by the larger organization for 2016. The CRT plank will address the need for a multi-modal transportation center integrating local transit with inter-city rail, air, and bicycle transportation. Also attended PPG’s Poverty Workshop on 3/27/15. Lynn Magdol is CRT’s representative.
- **VOICE Buffalo.** 10/25/15. Doug Funke attended the VOICE annual public meeting. Doug also consulted with VOICE leaders who were promoting the extension of transit to areas of Clarence not currently served. Gladys Gifford represents CRT on the VOICE Transportation Committee.

### Community Engagement

During 2015 CRT met with numerous legislators and community leaders, attended public meetings and workshops, and corresponded with area leaders on topics relevant to transit. Table 2 below lists legislators and area leaders we met with during 2015.



**Table 2. Met with Legislators and Community Leaders**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Summary</b>
Niagara Falls	Mayor Paul Dyster and Senior Planner Tom DeSantis
Open Buffalo	Nate Gulley, Director of Civic Capacity.
City of Buffalo	Spoke at Buffalo Common Council meeting summarized CRT petition.
City of Tonawanda	Mayor Rick Davis.
United Way	Participated in United Way Spring It On fund raising event.
Amherst	Board Member Guy Marlette, Planning Board Chairman Rick Gillert and Member Dan Howard. Spoke at Amherst Town Board meeting summarizing CRT petition.
HEAL International	Robert Doyle, a Manager at HEAL International to discuss special transit needs of refugee communities.
Erie County Legislature	Betty Jean Grant, Pat Burke, Peter Savage, Barbara Miller-Williams, and attended legislative session focused on public transportation. Also, Gladys Gifford addressed the Erie County Economic Development Committee on the need to support a transit funding resolution.
Erie County	Maria Whyte, Deputy County Executive, Brian Bray, Assistant Commissioner for Social Services
NYS Assembly	Jane Corwin, Mickey Kearns, Ray Walter, Sean Ryan, Angela Wozniak, David DiPietro, John Ceretto, Crystal Peoples-Stokes,
NYS Senate	Marc Panepinto, Tim Kennedy, Michael Ranzenhofer
US Congress	Brian Higgins, Chris Collins
NFTA	Robert Gower (Consultant leading Amherst and Cobblestone projects), Tom George (Surface Transportation Manager), and Darren Kempner (Grants Manager)
Community Leaders	Tim Tielman (Campaign for a Greater Buffalo), Andy Reynolds (CEJ), Jaime Anderson (American Lung Association), Bruce Becker (Dir. of Special Projects, NARL). Michael Ceone (Manager, Galleria Mall).
Lancaster	Matt Walter (Town Board Member)

Also attended various public meetings, rallies and workshops. These included:

- One Region Forward rollout
- NYSDOT Scajquada Corridor Project information meetings
- Fruitbelt Coalition transit needs community meeting
- CNU “Rethinking Metrics and Rethinking Roads” Workshop
- Buffalo First Power Breakfast on the Outer Harbor
- Buffalo Urban League Annual Meeting
- Restore Our Community Coalition town hall on covering the Kensington Expressway
- Sierra Club Climate Justice Rally
- NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation information meetings on the Niagara Gorge Project.
- NFTA public meetings on the Buffalo-Amherst Alternatives Analysis, the Canalside Cobblestone Metro extension, the Niagara Street Project, and the Annual Budget Public Hearing.
- GBNRTC Annual Plan Review, the bi-annual Policy Meetings, and the BNMC Transit Oriented Development results meeting.

And attended regular meetings of Buffalo Niagara public agencies.

- Buffalo Place Board Meeting
- NFTA Surface Transportation Committee Board meetings. -
- GBNRTC Planning and Coordinating (PCC) meetings



# Appendix A

## Citizens for Regional Transit 2016 Budget

Budget Items	2015 Accepted Budget	2015 Actual	2016 Proposed Budget
<b>INCOME</b>			
Donations (Match-Bozer)	1,000	760.30	900
Dues	1,200	1,124.36	1,300
Grants	500	0.00	600
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2,700</b>	<b>1,884.66</b>	<b>2,800</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>			
Copy & Printing (1-1/2 print)	400	711.08	900
Postage	65	23.52	50
Office Supplies	250	156.47	200
Phone	20	0.00	0
Conferences - Tickets, Transp. etc.	1,500	520.08	900
Ads	75.00	325.00	300
Memberships	190.00	90.00	90
Miscellaneous	200	498.39	360
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2,700</b>	<b>2,324.54</b>	<b>2800</b>
Difference between income & expenses		-439.88	
<b>Checkbook balance as of 11-1-15</b>	<b>\$1,388.46</b>		
<b>Projected balanced 2016 budget</b>			<b>2,800.00</b>





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# Appendix B

## ***Buffalo Needs A Transit Revolution!*** *A Petition for an Integrated and Sustainable Public Transportation System*

We the undersigned call on the NFTA and our business and community leaders to take action to provide more comprehensive and sustainable public transportation service for the Buffalo-Niagara Region. Specifically, we call for: (1) extensions of Metro Rail along the highest-demand corridors with (2) intermodal connectivity to air and inter-city rail and (3) establishment of long-term sustainable transit funding.

Please add \_\_\_\_\_ to the list of organizations and municipalities supporting this petition.

Organization Authorizing Officer:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Why We Need It:**

**Attracting & Keeping Population** - Growing numbers of Americans, notably young adults and baby boomers approaching retirement, prefer to locate in regions that have efficient multimodal mobility systems, including the option to live free of car dependency. The demand is for walkable, bikeable, mixed-use neighborhoods efficiently connected by transit.

**Parking & Congestion** - Transit moves people safely and cost-effectively to work, shopping, and recreation without scarring our waterfront, parkland, and downtown streetscapes with acres of parking. Providing park-and-ride facilities for commuters and visitors outside the central city provides a hassle-free commuting option while decreasing traffic congestion, air pollution, and on-street parking shortages.

**Equity** - Over 1/3 of Buffalo households do not own cars (2000 US Census). Rapid transit expands mobility **options** for all socioeconomic groups, including those who rely on public transportation to get to suburban jobs, shopping, healthcare, educational institutions, and all other personal needs. A household can expect to save \$5,000 to \$9,000 a year for each car it can do without (ConsumerReports.com).

**Economics** - Investments in light rail and bus rapid transit are transforming cities across North America and **stimulating** commercial and residential development along the improved transit lines (Transit-Oriented Development). Buffalo is blessed with existing, publicly owned rail rights-of-way



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along many heavily traveled corridors. These make expansion of our light rail system among the nation's most affordable. Comprehensive analysis of WNY's infrastructure needs and resources – and surveys of what our citizens want – led UB's Regional Institute and the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council to recommend “making transit funding and system improvement a top priority” (One Region Forward Final Draft Plan, 2014).

**The Environment** - Automobiles in NYS collectively emit 70 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year, more than carbon emissions from industrial, residential, or commercial sources (2014 Draft NYS Energy Plan). Of all transportation-generated greenhouse gases, 61% come from passenger cars and light trucks (US EPA, 2013). We must offer car-free options to combat global warming. Buffalo's light rail trains already run partly on clean hydroelectric power - with the potential to run on 100% non-polluting Niagara Falls waterpower.

**We call for the NFTA and Buffalo-Niagara leaders to:**

***Extend Metro Rail***

- To the airport – Prioritize extension of the Metro Rail from Downtown Buffalo to the Buffalo Niagara International Airport along our existing publicly owned rail rights-of-way. This extension will intersect many East Side bus lines while connecting the central business district with Larkinville, Central Terminal, Galleria Mall, Thruway Mall, and a Park-&-Ride off the I-90 in Cheektowaga.
- To the UB Amherst campus – Build on the ongoing NFTA study to connect all three UB campuses and to facilitate access to suburban shopping and jobs.
- Through the DL&W Terminal to Larkinville – Extend Metro Rail through the DL&W Terminal to Larkinville, a first step in taking the existing line to the Buffalo Niagara International Airport while enabling car-free access to the First Niagara Arena, Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, our Waterfront, the Cobblestone District, and Downtown.
- To the Bills Stadium – Any investment in a new or refurbished Buffalo Bills Stadium should ensure Metro Rail access, folding any necessary Metro Rail enhancements into its financing. This will satisfy the intense travel demand on Bills game days while improving the experience for those who choose to drive and tailgate. Any stadium parking facilities could double as Park-&-Ride lots for everyday commuting year-round.
- To the Southtowns and Tonawandas – Preserve existing rail rights-of-way, so the original vision for a comprehensive network of light rail serving the Buffalo-Niagara Region can ultimately be realized.

***Create Multimodal Amtrak / Metro Rail Stations***

- Eliminate the existing Depew and Exchange Street Amtrak Stations and replace them with Multimodal Transportation Centers suitable for 21<sup>st</sup> century passenger service and eventually high-speed rail. These must feature a rapid transit connection to the airport and include bicycle and car share facilities. One station should be near Buffalo's waterfront and a second located further east where it can serve all Amtrak destinations. A restored Central Terminal should be a candidate for the second site.

***Establish long-term, sustainable dedicated funding***

- Establish permanent, reliable and sufficient funding streams for comprehensive multimodal public transportation in Buffalo-Niagara. This funding must be able to sustain the operations and maintenance of Metro Rail and all connecting transit services and infrastructure.

