

Citizens Regional Transit Corporation

Annual Report 2016

(Final)

Submitted by:

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CITIZENS *for* REGIONAL TRANSIT

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Citizens Regional Transit Corporation 2016 Annual Report

This report summarizes the accomplishments, milestones and activities of Citizens for Regional Transit Corporation during 2016. Citizens Regional Transit Corporation is known as Citizens for Regional Transit (CRT). This shorter designation will be used in this report.

During 2016 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, and former long-time CRT Board Member Joan Bozer served as Emeritus Board Members. Collectively these Board Members logged 2,374 hours of service to the community valued at \$65,498 (using the NYS volunteer hourly rate of \$27.59).

At the end of 2016 CRT had 50 members. The CRT Secretary and Treasurer maintain the names and addresses of CRT members. CRT has 534 Facebook likes (up 15%) and 158 Twitter followers (up 35%). Our newsletter email list has 721 recipients (up 69%). Our media contacts list has 93 recipients (up 13%).

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 at large 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, 4 published newsletters, and timely Twitter messages throughout the year. Seth Triggs has continued to manage the CRT website; Carl Skompinski manages our Facebook page, Derek King leads the Twitter effort and Lynn Magdol is the CRT Newsletter Editor. CRT 2016 Committee Chairs were:

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

CRT held three public meetings in 2016 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.

Highlights of the Year

- **Transit Awareness Day.** Doug, Lynn and Gladys attended the NYPTA-supported Transit Awareness Day in Albany on 2 Feb 2016. Visited with numerous State Legislators to promote transit and increased transit budget support during the visit.
- **PPG Plank on Replacing Buffalo's Exchange Street Amtrak Station.** CRT's plank for replacing Buffalo's Exchange Street Amtrak Station was selected as a Partnership for the Public Good (PPG) 2016 Community Agenda item. CRT worked with PPG to highlight the need for a new station and called on Buffalo's Common Council members to lead an effort to plan the Exchange Street Station replacement. We met with legislators at the Federal and State levels to highlight the need for a new train station and held a public forum with a panel of experts to discuss the issue. We also were interviewed on local TV and appeared on the PPG radio show to promote the issue. This effort was very successful.
 - Governor Cuomo has promised \$25M for a new train station



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- US Congressman Brian Higgins and US Senator Charles Schumer have pledged to help seek Federal funds for the project.
- Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown has convened a committee to select a location for a new station. CRT President, Douglas Funke, has been appointed as a member of the committee. Recommendation for the location of the future new train station is expected by June 2017.
- ***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 was presented to the NRGC Commission on Jan 20th and the Buffalo & Erie County Greenway Fund Standing Committee on March 4th. Creative Urban Projects, international gondola experts, were our partners on the proposal.
 - Our proposal was not successful, but did publically raise the issue. We have been encouraged to resubmit but still do not have necessary support from Buffalo’s Office of Strategic Planning. Since the City of Buffalo’s focus has shifted to Buffalo’s new train station we are deferring further action on the gondola for now. We may resubmit in 2018 or later.
- ***Continued Organizations Petition Drive.*** CRT petition drive for signing by community organizations and area municipalities has continued. The petition calls for (1) extension 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 public transit funding.
 - So far a total of 58 community organizations and 9 municipalities have signed. This effort will continue in 2017.
- ***Worked to end the practice of exempting the Mortgage Recording Tax.*** CRT supported legislation (A.9490 (Magnarelli)/S.7442 (DeFrancisco) prohibiting Industrial Development Agencies (IDAs) from exempting the Mortgage Recording Tax – a tax that supports the NFTA – as part tax exemption packages offered to local businesses locating to Western New York. CRT has worked to eliminate this practice for many years and partnered with the Partnership of the Public Good in 2015 toward this end.
 - Bill was passed by both houses and signed by Governor Cuomo.
- ***Worked to increase STOA.*** We 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. This was part of the annual budget legislation.
- ***WNYEA Plank.*** CRT has worked since 2013 and joined with PPG in 2015 to get trolley service between Niagara Falls and Old Fort Niagara.
 - This long-term effort was successful with service beginning on May 26th, 2016. The trolley is being operated by the Niagara River Heritage Area Association as a 2-year trial period. The service is offered for free. Over 30,000 riders used the service during 2016.
- Provided inputs to NFTA. Reviewed NFTA draft service plan and provided feedback.

CRT Membership Meetings

Three CRT membership meetings were held in 2016. 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

Date	Speaker	Summary
Wednesday, January 20, 2016	Doug Funke, President, CRT Kelly Dixon, Principal Planner, Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council	Doug presented the initial results of CRT’s organizations petition and gave interviews to the press on the initiative. Kelly presented an overview of planned next steps on the One Region Forward initiative (1RF). 1RF, sponsored by GBNRTC, The Buffalo Niagara Partnership and the UB School of Architecture. 1RF plan included extensive community outreach and developed a comprehensive planning resource for regional development.
Wednesday, April 20, 2016	Walter Simpson, Environmental Advocate, Shaun Cleaver, Transit Advocate with the Toronto Transit Riders Union and Chris Hawley, Buffalo City Planning Department	Speakers discussed the transit experience in three transit friendly cities. Walter described the transit experience in Portland, OR based on a recent visit. Shaun described Toronto’s transit system and issues that his organization is working on, and Chris Hawley presented his experience visiting and using the extensive transit system operating in Bogota, Columbia.
Wednesday, October 19, 2016	Paul Dyster, Mayor of Niagara Falls (NF), Tom DeSantis, NF City Planner, Bruce Becker, VP National Association of Railway Passengers (NARPA), and Dan Leonard (Director of Economic Development with the Buffalo Niagara Partnership)	Mayor Dyster provided opening remarks on regional transportation opportunities enabled by the new NF multimodal transportation center (Amtrak station). Tom described the successful process that led to development of the new Amtrak station. Bruce presented location alternatives and tradeoffs for a new train station in Buffalo, and Dan presented the business case driving the need for better regional public transportation that would be served by a new train station.

Community Education

- **Hosted information table at area festivals and events.** Distributed the CRT brochure, promoting transit as an important component of the Buffalo-Niagara transportation system and a necessary tool for economic development and fighting climate change.
 - **WNY Earth Day Expo** (6/25/16).
 - **Termin8or Bike Rally** (6/4/16)
 - **United Way volunteer day.** (8/17/16).
 - **Elmwood Festival of the Arts.** (8/27/16 – 8/28/16).
 - **WNY Environmental Summit.** (9/26/15).
 - **World on Your Plate Conference.** (10/10/15).
- **Conducted workshop at the annual World on Your Plate Conference.** (10/10/15). CRT President, Doug Funke held a transit workshop at the conference highlighting the importance of public transit for healthy food access.
- **Addressed Buffalo Common Council** (9/13/16). Doug Funke addressed a meeting of the Buffalo Common Council to highlight the importance of public transportation in mitigating the traffic gridlock that was experienced when the “giant rubber ducky” was on display at Canalside.



- **Radio interviews**
 - Lynn Magdol and Rebecca Reilley were interviewed on the WUFO’s PPG program to discuss the need for a new train station to replace the inadequate Exchange Street Station. This was in support of the CRT-sponsored PPG plank on transit funding (9/27/16).
 - Doug Funke was interviewed on WBNY (8/8/16)
- **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, and Jason Kulaszewski had letters published.
- **Published Quarterly Newsletter.** Published the CRT News for the 17th year. Four issues of the newsletter were published during 2016.
- **Website, Facebook and Twitter.** Continued to maintain a CRT website (www.citizenstransit.org) and Facebook page (“CitizensforRegionalTransit”). Also maintained a Twitter account where upcoming events are publicized and links to relevant information on transit are noted.

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. Derek King 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.
- **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 for connecting Buffalo’s inner and outer harbors. Doug 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 called for a multi-modal transportation center to replace the aging Exchange Street Station. The center would integrate local transit with inter-city rail, air, and bicycle transportation. Lynn Magdol is CRT’s representative.
- **VOICE Buffalo.** Gladys Gifford represents CRT on the VOICE Transportation Committee.

Community Engagement

During 2016 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 2016.



Table 2. Met with Legislators and Community Leaders and Supported Various Community Events

Category	Summary
Community leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pat Whalen, Interim Director, Niagara Global Tourism Institute
Private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Micheal Ceone, Galleria Mall General manager • Steve Fitzmaurice and Harry Stinson re. Central Terminal redevelopment
NYS DOT	Ron Hayes
NYS / Empire State Dev. Corp.	Sam Hoyt, Regional President, WNY
Non profit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kirk Laubenstein, Exec. Director, Coalition for Economic Justice (CEJ) • Lauren Gousy, Meals on Wheels • Bruce Becker, Dir. of Special Projects, NARP
Niagara Falls	Mayor Paul Dyster and Senior Planner Tom DeSantis
GBNRTC	Hal Morse, Executive Director
City of Buffalo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spoke at Buffalo Common Council meeting. • Met with Council members Franzcyk, Rivera, and Fontana • Met with Chris Hawley, City Planner
US Congress	Office of Congressman Brian Higgins
Erie County Legislature	Betty Jean Grant, Barbara Miller-Williams
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	Tom George (Surface Transportation Manager), and Darren Kempner (Grants Manager) Participated in NFTA press conference on the proposed NYS 2017 budget. Attended and provided comments to the NFTA Annual Budget Public Hearing

Also made presentations to area community organizations including:

- UB Professional Environmental Co-Ed Fraternity of Alpha Chi (2/16/16)
- Association of Block Clubs (3-31-16)
- University District Community Development Association (5-4-16)
- BNMC Rotary Club (8-8-16)
- Riverside Salem UCC Church (10-16-16)
- Unitarian Universalist Church of Amherst (12/11/16)

We updated the CRT brochures and had 5,000 printed. We also had large map display for use at festivals made with CRT Logo. CRT is grateful to the NFTA for producing this large map display for us.

Finally, we participated in numerous community and public meetings including: NAPTA/CFTE seminars, NYSDOT information and public meetings on the downscaling of the Scajaquada Expressway, Tonawanda Complete Streets Public Information meeting, Amherst-Niagara Falls Boulevard study and focus group meetings, the Buffalo-Niagara Partnership Transportation Alternatives Public Meeting,



Niagara Falls Train Station open house, NYSDOT Robert Moses Parkway Removal Public Meeting, NFTA Fare Restructuring Public Meeting, the Governor's Conference on Sustainable Development, Buffalo Outer Harbor Planning meetings and presentations, CEJ Bus Riders Union training session, and the Sierra Club electric bus presentation. We also worked with interns from Buffalo State College to promote student use of school-provided NFTA transit passes.



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Appendix A

Citizens for Regional Transit 2017 Budget

Citizens for Regional Transit			
2017 BUDGET (Adopted, 12-6-16)			
Budget Items	2016 Accepted Budget	2016 Actual	2017 Budget
INCOME			
Donations	900.00	465.30	900.00
Dues	1,300.00	1,156.13	1,300.00
Grants	600.00	700.00	600.00
Totals	2,800.00	2,321.43	2,800.00
EXPENSES			
Copy & Printing	900.00	1,379.52	870.00
Postage	50.00	27.95	40.00
Office Supplies	200.00	106.44	190.00
Festival Registration	0.00	100.00	100.00
Conferences - Tickets, Transp. etc.	900.00	531.00	900.00
Ads	300.00	75.00	150.00
Memberships	90.00	190.00	300.00
Miscellaneous	360.00	174.45	250.00
Totals	2,800.00	2,584.36	2,800.00
Difference between income & expenses		262.93	
Checkbook balance as of 11-25-2016		1,144.68	
Proposed balanced 2017 budget	2,800.00		2,800.00





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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-



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Oriented Development). Buffalo is blessed with existing, publicly owned rail rights-of-way 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 CO₂ 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 21st 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.

