



Citizens *for* Regional Transit

CRT News

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15 July 2023

Next CRT Public Meeting:

Tentative Details

Date: October 18th. 5:30 pm

Location: TBD Niagara Falls location

Speakers: Sara Capen,
Executive Director of Niagara Falls National Heritage Area
and others...



President's Column

People Have to Get Places on Weekends Too!

By CRT President Douglas Funke

If the goal is to make transit a viable alternative to driving for everyone, which it is, then shortening headways (increasing bus frequencies) and extending service duration, with full weekend service available are priorities. Sure, weekend ridership is down relative to weekdays, but weekend trips are just as important as weekday trips for those who make them – getting to jobs, attending kids' sports events, going to church, getting groceries, etc. We recently interviewed an NFTA customer who does not own a car and struggles on weekends. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pjDZWiFu3rI&t=29s>).

The NFTA has made some improvements in bus frequency on some routes and are working to find drivers to make more improvements. We commend them for these efforts. If you know anyone who wants a job driving bus, contact the NFTA. We also thank our legislators, especially Senator Tim Kennedy, for increasing the state operating assistance that has been critical in helping the NFTA make the needed improvements. More is needed.

The effect of not providing high frequency service, including on weekends, is making transit reliant people lower class, disadvantaged people. Or worse, it drives everyone into wanting or needing a car. This costs everyone! It costs families more just to live keeping more people in poverty. It also costs society more, requiring more roads, bridges, and parking. This leads to more pollution and more demand on the electric grid as we move to electric cars.

I can say from personal experience that on weekends that transit is very difficult to make work. For example, I tried to take transit to the Juneteenth Festival. The earliest #34 is 8:30 getting me to UB at 9:00 and to LaSalle Station at 9:15 or so. But the next #23 is 10:10 getting me to Juneteenth at 10:30, too late to help setup the CRT table. I had to ask Dolores to drive and drop me off – not an option for the 30% of Buffalo residents who don't have a car. Let's work to make transit viable for everyone for all city and near-in suburban travel.

We call on the NFTA to continue improving service frequencies and to strive to be the best transit system in the US as their aspirational goal states. CRT stands ready to help them achieve this. And we call on our legislatures to continue to increase funding support and seeking new sustainable funding sources to make this happen.

Honoring Departed Transit Leaders

We were saddened at the passing of two CRT supporters, Joan Bozer and Walter Simpson. Joan was a past CRT Board Member and Walter was a long-time member and speaker and panelist at CRT public meetings and author of several books on rail technology. We were saddened at these losses.



CRT Tabled at Juneteenth

CRT tabled at the Juneteenth Festival again this year. We had a better location this year and were able to talk with many East Buffalo residents about transit service and to solicit their support for promoting improvements, including and especially extending Buffalo Metro to East Buffalo / airport and the Bills Stadium. Several hundred signed our 2023 petition, which is reproduced in the appendix below.





We also conducted an informal survey on whether the Kensington should be restored as a tunneled 6-lane expressway as planned, or whether we should fill it in and restore Olmstead's Humboldt Parkway as a surface, slow speed parkway. The cost of capping a portion (12-blocks) of the expressway is \$1B vs. \$55M for infilling. We asked respondents to help us demand that NYSDOT give us a choice.

This was not our main focus, the 2023 petition was, but for those who completed the informal survey, here's the results.



Tell NYSDOT to Give Us a Choice!

RESTORE TREES AND HUMBOLDT PKWY	OR	TUNNEL WITH TREES
		
Use the \$55M from the Federal Reconnect Communities Project to restore Humboldt Parkway as a surface level street.		Add \$1B NYS money to the \$55M to rebuild the Kensington as a tunnel from Sidney Street to Best Street.
22 yes (81%)		5 yes (19%)

CRT to NYDOT: Please give us a choice on the Kensington Project

CRT is disappointed that the cap option appears to be the selected approach for the Kensington Project instead of infilling and restoring Humboldt Park and Parkway on the surface. This is disappointing, because we could fully restore the Humboldt on the surface using just the \$55M provided by the Feds. (Rochester's Inner Loop infill cost \$30M.) The billion dollars (more than NYS is spending on the Bills Stadium) would be enough to extend Buffalo Metro to East Buffalo & airport AND the Bills Stadium (with the Federal match). An extended light rail rapid transit would reduce traffic demand negating the need for 6-lanes of expressway.

Here is a link to the letter CRT wrote to NYSDOT objecting to the tunneling approach (http://citizenstransit.org/sites/default/files/0722%20CRT%20198%20and%2033%20Comments_0.pdf). We also produced a video with our concerns about the capping approach. (<http://citizenstransit.org/node/212>). There are arguments in favor of all the options ranging from maintaining the expressway to restoring Humboldt Park and everything in between. We say put these choices before the public for a community-driven decision like done for Region Central (Scajaquada) Project.

There are assumptions being made on this project that we disagree with. Here are a few:

Assumption #1. ROCC speaks for all Kensington Project stakeholders.

Reconnect Our Community Coalition (ROCC) is a highly respected stakeholder for this project. They identified and tirelessly highlighted the injustice imposed on East Buffalo by the Kensington in the first place. It was ROCC that started the discussion. However, there are other stakeholders that also deserve to have to have a voice in this decision like the Buffalo Olmstead Conservancy, Fruit Belt Coalition, Fillmore Forward, Preservation Buffalo Niagara, Friends of the Broadway Market Community, The UB Regional Institute, and others. The Kensington Expressway was imposed on Buffalo's East Side 60 years ago despite community opposition. Let's make sure that doesn't happen again.



Assumption #2. ROCC prefers the cap over other options like infilling.

ROCC's official position is in favor of the cap because they don't believe any other option is available. We asked ROCC whether they would like to get the park back with a slow speed parkway if offered. They said yes, but it is not being offered. NYSDOT should ask ROCC if they would prefer a slow speed parkway along the entire length of the Kensington if that were an option.

Assumption #3. Rebuilding the Kensington is compatible with the requirements and goals of the CLCPA, the Federal Justice 40 Initiative, and the Erie County Climate Action Plan (ECCAP).

The Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) calls for reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT), doubling public transit service, extending high-capacity rail transit, encouraging and facilitating non-vehicle-based travel. Rebuilding the Kensington works against these goals. Even if capping the 6-lane expressway can be construed as serving some CLCPA requirements it certainly is the antithesis of the spirit of CLCPA, Justice 40, and Reconnecting Communities Program. It also runs counter to the Erie County Climate Action Plan that also calls for reducing VMT.

Assumption #4. The cap will reconnect the communities split apart when the Kensington was built.

The planned cap will only extend between Best and Sidney Streets (50% of the Kensington impacted area). It will do nothing for the Fruit Belt south of Best and the neighborhoods north of Sidney. These neighborhoods will remain split apart by the Kensington and the 70,000 cars each day. The streets connecting these neighborhoods (e.g., Mortimer, Spring) will remain disconnected and the pollution from the Kensington will continue to plague these disadvantaged communities.

Assumption #5. The cap will provide a quiet parklike environment along the 12-block stretch to be covered.

The tunnel will not completely quiet the 70,000 cars traveling at highway speeds on the improved underground Kensington. Based on the experience on the Seattle highway tunnel we will still experience the highway noise and vibrations, especially near the portals. See the linked video describing the Seattle highway tunnel. Also, the tunnel will use moving traffic and fans to blow unfiltered exhaust fumes out of the tunnel at each end. This will be a source of pollution for the neighborhoods near the tunnel ends.

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dMW3p8Rs_iE)

Assumption #6. Removal or downsizing of the Kensington will negatively impact downtown business and cause congestion.

It is true that traffic now funneled (induced) onto the Kensington will be diverted to Buffalo's other arterials. However, this will reinvigorate businesses on those routes that were lost when the Kensington was built. Also, overwhelming congestion was not experienced in other cities that removed urban expressways as this ROCC article notes (<https://risecollaborative.com/rise/kensington-expressway-cap-fill>). Also, if the Kensington is replaced with Buffalo Metro extensions to the East Side / Airport and the Bills Stadium, many will choose transit reducing congestion and the pollution burden. Change is hard and requires some adjustments.

Here's a clickable link to CRT's video on the Kensington Expressway Project.

<https://youtu.be/PKJwMvhKOWk>



CRT Work Highlights (May – July, 2023)

Tabled at Juneteenth. Completed informal survey on the Kensington Project (above) and obtained signatures on the CRT 2023 petition (see appendix)

CRT's PPG 2023 Plank. Continued our support for the Partnership for the Public Good's (PPG) 2023 plank advocating for the City of Buffalo to clear snow on city sidewalks and at bus stops. We are partnered with Buffalo Transit Rider's Union (BTRU) and GObike. BTRU is the lead.

Continued Expressing Our Opposition for Capping the Kensington. Attended the NYSDOT Public Meeting on the project and spoke with all NYSDOT representatives expressing our opposition. Submitted comments to NYSDOT stating the reasons for our opposition. Here's a link to our letter. (http://citizenstransit.org/sites/default/files/0722%20CRT%20198%20and%2033%20Comments_0.pdf).

Served on Niagara Branch Rail Working Group. This working group is led by GBNRTC and includes representatives from CRT, the Empire State Passenger's Association, and several regional rail experts.

Attended Workshops and Public Meetings. These included: (1) NYSDOT Public Meeting on the Kensington Project (2) ROCC's Social Justice / Olmstead Parks meeting, (3) Buffalo Urban Development Corporation's (BUDC) Public meeting on Smart Streets, (4) a Justice 40 Webinar; (5) the stop Amherst Metro Extension public meeting.

Ongoing Activities and Meetings. Continued to attend meetings of local public organizations, including the NFTA, GBNRTC and Buffalo Place. Also served on the Erie County Climate Change Task Force representing transit issues and on NFTA's Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC).

Keep CRT On Track

To join as a new member, renew your membership, or make a donation please click here. Thanks.

Can You Help Us?

We are looking for volunteers to help us be more effective. Can you help us plan and staff tabling events? Can you help us update outreach material? Are there other skills you can help us with such as data entry tasks (e.g., maintaining our email lists? writing grant applications?) Please use this link if you are willing to help:

<https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=CnS5DfwPA0CIDBbWG6yI3JZGKz70PIpCoSv86E81dwtUMDVGUjlYQ0xKVDY1RDc5MFhGVkIDM1NDUi4u>

Calendar

Our next CRT public meeting is tentatively planned for October 18th. The topic will be transit and regional tourism and feature Sarah Capen, Executive Director of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area and other TBD speakers.



Appendix A. CRT 2023 Transit Petition

Let the Transit Revolution Continue!

A 2023 Petition for Investment in Sustainable Public Transit

Whereas; political leaders from across Buffalo Niagara (including mayors, city/town/village councils and the Erie County Executive) and thousands of citizens have signed earlier CRT petitions calling for a Transit Revolution!

Whereas; over 50 community organizations (including Coalition for Economic Justice, GObike Buffalo, Housing Opportunities Made Equal, League of Women Voters, Network of Religious Communities, Partners of a Livable WNY, Partnership for the Public Good, PUSH Buffalo, Sierra Club, VOICE Buffalo) and a growing list of business leaders (including Carmina Woods Morris, Ciminelli Real Estate, Douglas Development Corp.) signed an earlier CRT petition for a Transit Revolution.

Whereas; transportation is the single largest source (40%) of greenhouse gas emissions in WNY, meeting Erie County's commitment to the Paris Climate Accord and CLCPA goals will require moving from car-centered transportation to public transit, bicycles, eBikes, scooters, hoverboards, golf carts, walking and other forms of transportation.

Whereas; every \$1 invested in public transportation generates \$4 in economic returns and over 70% of public funding in public transportation flows to the private sector creating and supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Whereas; public transportation for businesses and schools also aids those unable to travel by automobile (low-income, older, and disabled citizens) and other riders.

Whereas; hotels in cities with direct access to airports raise 11% more revenue per room than hotels in cities without direct transit access.

Whereas; Our region has publicly owned rights-of-way (ROW) making extensions to Metro Rail among the most affordable in the country for transporting large numbers of people. Further, since the Eastside / Airport ROW is not on public roads; disruptions to businesses during construction will be minimal.

Whereas; The federal government has passed a sweeping, but time-limited, infrastructure bill that provides funding for transit projects.

Whereas; Public transportation is critical for closing the mobility equity gap that requires the 30% of Buffalo households and many other area households that do not own cars to spend twice as long for commuting than those with cars.



Therefore, we call on the NFTA with the Governor and state, county, and municipal legislators to:

1. Make transit a competitive alternative to driving *for everyone*.
 - a. **Extend Buffalo Metro Rail Rapid Transit** along heavily travelled corridors to provide fast, high-capacity network connecting major destinations (especially UB campuses, downtown, the airport, Highmark Stadium, Sahlen Field, Keybank Arena, Exchange Street Amtrak Station).
 - b. **Provide high frequency bus service** (e.g., 10-minute frequencies on core routes and 20-minute frequencies on secondary routes). Increase frequency on holidays and weekends, as well.
 - c. **Increase service hours** on all major routes and Buffalo Metro.
2. Coordinate *road diets with transit improvements*, including:
 - a. **Restore the Humboldt Parkway in parallel with light rail extension** to the East Side and airport.
 - b. **Coordinate Scajaquada corridor improvements with high-frequency bus alternatives** connecting the many attractions along the corridor (e.g., museums, zoo, Darwin Martin House, Wegmans/Tops, Elmwood Village, Buffalo State College.) These should be integrated with Buffalo Metro Rail Rapid Transit.
3. Make regional and long-range rail a viable reality in WNY:
 - a. Initiate formal study and planning for transit *connectivity between Buffalo, Niagara Falls, and Southern Ontario*, especially for tourism.
 - b. Take advantage of Amtrak expansion programs to *implement NYS High Speed Rail (HSR)* giving WNY equal priority with downstate. *Improve westbound service with more trains* and *build the long planned Amtrak maintenance in Niagara Falls*.
4. *Integrate transit with regional planning initiatives*.
 - a. IDA's should **mandate transit access when evaluating project incentive applications** **and** incentivize siting on Metro Rail Rapid Transit and existing Metro Bus routes using e-TOD principles.
 - b. Highway projects should **first consider transit alternatives**.
5. *Fix the transit funding problems*. Fix the public transit and highway funding gaps.

