



Citizens *for* Regional Transit

CRT News

**A Quarterly Publication of Citizens for Regional Transit
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Citizens for Regional Transit Next Public Meeting

**20 April 2022
5:30 - 7:00pm**

TBD Location or Zoom Call Login

Topic:

**The Amherst Metro Rail Extension
Seeking the Final Design**

Speakers:

**Jeff Amplement, Amherst Extension Project Manager, NFTA
Doug Funke, President, Citizens for Regional Transit**

Summary:

After 40 years of anticipation and 10 years developing the locally preferred alternative (LPA) and draft EIS, the Amherst high-capacity transit extension is in final planning. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has agreed to be the lead federal agency for the project's NEPA review process. As part of this process, the FTA has asked that a bus rapid transit (BRT) alternative be evaluated along with the locally preferred light rail alternative. Jeff Amplement, the NFTA's Project Manager for the project will provide an update and the projected schedule for the project. CRT's Doug Funke will compare the alternative modes — light rail and BRT — from capacity, performance, and social equity perspectives. TBD panel members will provide feedback on the alternatives being considered from their respective perspectives and experience.

President's Column At the Crossroads

By CRT President Doug Funke

We are at a critical juncture, facing two existential crises, both of which call for new and significant investments in public transit. These crises are *climate change* and *social equity disparities*.

Climate Change. The NYS Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), now NYS law, sets ambitious requirements for addressing climate change. (Reference 1). It calls for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) generation by 40% by 2030 and by 85% by 2050 compared to 2016 levels. The largest contributing sector for GHG generation is transportation with most coming from private vehicles. Clearly, GHG reductions from the transportation sector needs to be a focus for meeting the ambitious CLCPA law requirements.

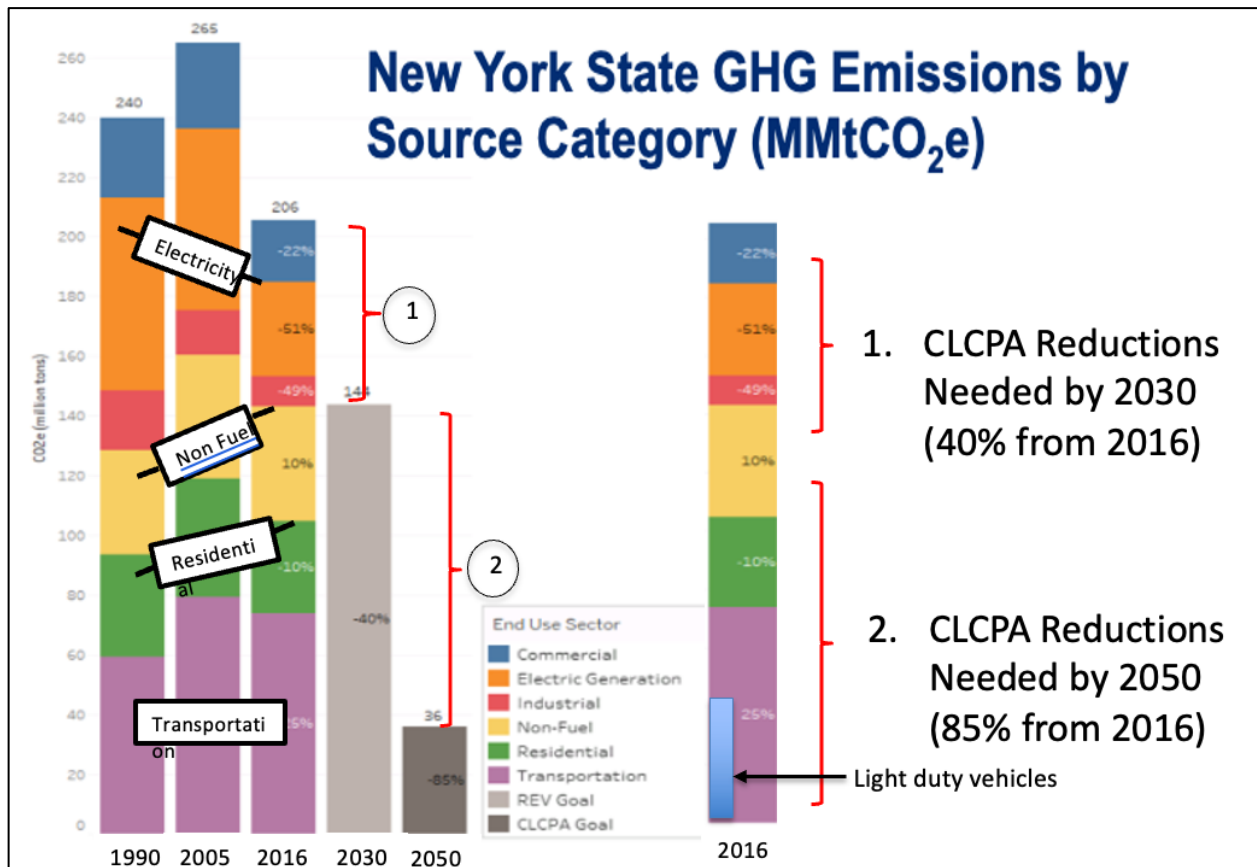


Figure 1. NYS Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) Law GHG Reduction Requirements (Reference 2)

The NYS Draft Scoping Plan lays out approaches for meeting the CLCPA requirements and moves us in the right direction. (Reference 3). It calls for doubling transit service statewide

and investing in high-capacity transit like Buffalo's light rail rapid transit (LRRT) system. We concur that these steps are critical. But we can't wait until the Scoping Plan is finalized to begin making improvements. We need to start now. We thank NYS Senator Tim Kennedy, NYS Assemblyman Bill Magnerele and their committees for proposing significant increases in state support for transit operating and capital expenses. We are hopeful these increases are included in the final budget signed by Governor Hochul. More will be needed in the coming years to build on this important first step.

While we are pleased that transit improvements are called for in the Draft Scoping Plan we are disappointed that there is too much reliance on electric vehicles (EVs) for meeting CLCPA requirements. EVs don't help those who can't afford them, and they don't reduce congestion and the seas of CO₂-producing parking lots and lane miles that cars demand.

The Draft Scoping Plan correctly calls for reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT) but doesn't achieve this. VMT is reduced *compared to doing nothing*, but still increases by 2050. Electric vehicles are still personal vehicles and have many sources of GHG generation beyond the actual propulsion system, which are given no consideration. Some of these are summarized in Figure 2. Further, we question whether we can really achieve a green energy grid if everyone just switches to electric vehicles and we don't reduce the VMT. Call us skeptical.

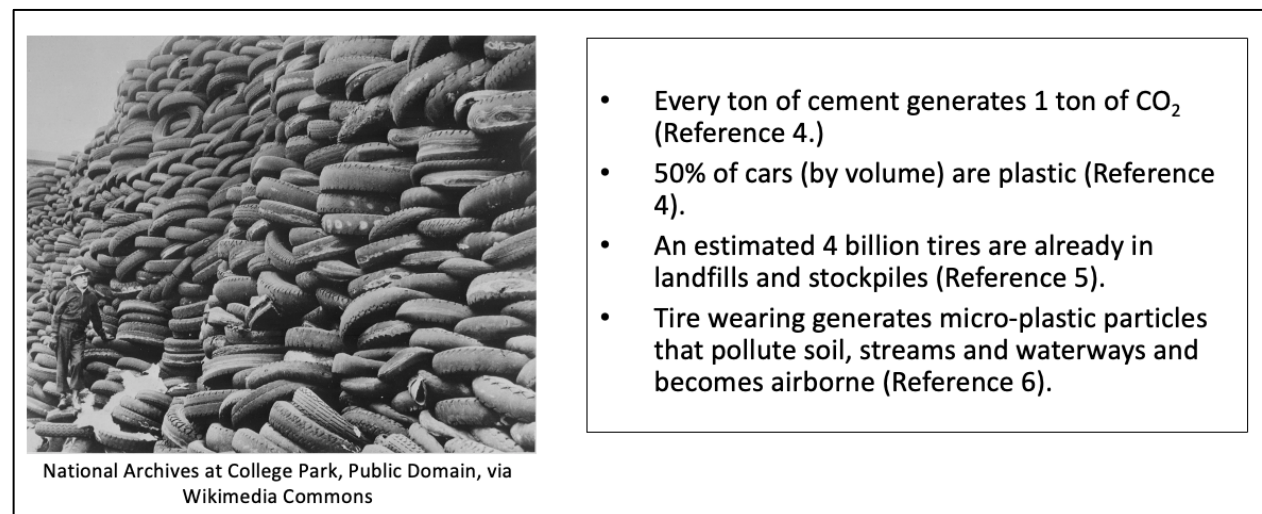


Figure 2. Switching to Electric Vehicles Alone won't solve the Problem.

Social Equity. The second crisis is social equity, which the CLCPA is also intended to address. The CLCPA requires that a significant portion of climate change mitigation investments be applied in ways that help disadvantaged communities. This means that public transit improvements need to be prioritized.

Many Buffalo-Niagara households cannot afford a car. According to a recent Partnership for the Public Good report (Reference 7) commuting by transit can take more than twice as long as driving and many jobs are not accessible by transit at all. You can see from Figure 3 that 48% of NFTA transit riders earn less than \$15,000 and 66% earn less than \$25,000

(Reference 8). The survey also shows that higher-income households are very under-represented on transit relative to their population levels. They can afford cars and drive, relegating the poor to inadequate mobility options – infrequent bus service with limited or no amenities.

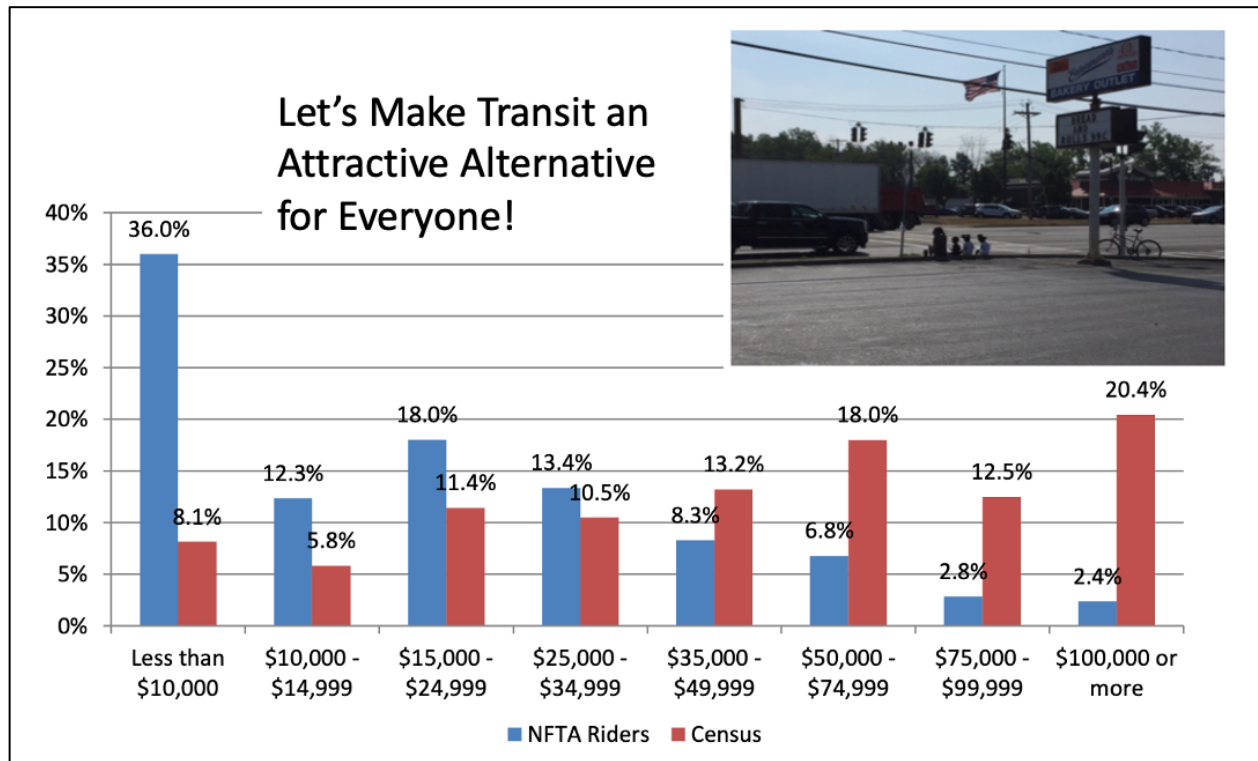


Figure 2. Infrequent Bus Service with Few Shelters Relegates Its Use to Those Who Cannot Afford to Drive

The solution. The solution to both crises includes, at its center, better public transit – This means high-speed, high-capacity transit with comfortable amenities connecting to high frequency bus service. For example, we are calling for expansion of Buffalo’s LRRT as originally planned complimented with more frequent and enhanced bus service.

The good news is that for the first time in decades there is federal money available for transit investments and in Buffalo we have the foundation – an operating, hydro-powered light rail rapid transit system with publicly-owned rights-of-way available for affordable expansion. We call on the NFTA, GBNRTC, and our WNY legislators at all levels to commit to aggressive pursuit of federal money for expanding Buffalo Metro, deploying high frequency bus networks such as bus rapid transit, and adding comfortable amenities like bus shelters throughout the system.

How to Pay for the Enhanced Transit System

By CRT Board Member, Elizabeth Giles

Discouraging News for Adoption of the TCI

Last year at this time, CRT's commitment to campaign for New York State's adoption of the Transportation and Climate Initiative (TCI) was voted onto the Partnership for the Public Good's 2021 Community Agenda with the idea that the \$1.4 billion in annual revenues it would generate for New York would become a new, long-needed source of funding to expand, operate, and maintain improved public transportation service throughout the state, including the local share of the cost for light rail extensions.

To recap briefly, the TCI is a regional “cap-and-invest” program originally proposed by New York and 11 neighboring states (Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Virginia, and Vermont) and the District of Columbia, that would reduce pollution and carbon emissions from combustion engines by taxing fossil fuel distributors and using the money to invest in better, cleaner, and safer transportation solutions in urban, rural, and suburban areas of New York – *especially* in frontline disadvantaged communities, which would have made it a logical dedicated funding stream for public transit.

We had hoped that the new governor might be more favorable to adopting the TCI than Gov. Cuomo was, and that the TCI might still be included as a recommendation in the New York Climate Action Council's Scoping Plan. After all, the state did pass the CLCPA, whose ambitious carbon reduction demands must somehow be met.

Positive News about what might Replace TCI

Although Governor Hochul has declined to support the TCI, the Draft Scoping Plan recognizes the need for additional funding to pay for the needed transportation system improvements. The scoping plan lists several potential new funding sources to be considered, including a vehicle mile traveled (VMT) tax, additional vehicle registration fees, and other ideas. The scoping plan also lists TCI as a possible source of funding, but recommends against it in favor of the other options. Comments on the Scoping Plan are due in May.

NFTA's Corporate Pass Program

Do you work for a corporation? Do you work for a municipality or government? Your employer may be able to take advantage of the NFTA's Corporate Pass Program. You will personally be able to purchase monthly transit passes at a \$20 discount if your employer joins the NFTA's corporate pass program and agrees to cover half of the discount (\$10). The NFTA pays the other \$10. This reduces your cost of the monthly pass from \$75 to \$55, a 27% savings!

This is a good way to save money on commuting costs while helping reduce pollution by leaving your car at home or at a park-&-ride. Here's a link to the NFTA's website where you can get program details. (<https://metro.nfta.com/programs/corporate-pass-program>)

CRT Work Highlights:

January - March 2022

NYPTA Transit Moves the Economy Initiative – CRT participated in NYPTA’s 2022 “Transit Moves the Economy” advocacy campaign.

- We met with several NYS legislators – all via Zoom – to promote better funding emphasizing the transit’s role in fight climate change and overcoming social inequities. We met with Assembly Members Pat Burke, Karen McMahan, Michael Norris, Monica Wallace and Senators Robert Ortt and Ed Rath. More are anticipated. We highlighted specific Buffalo-Niagara needs for capital investments. Specifically noted the need a 5-year State commitment for \$180M to allow the Amherst extension program to continue and for local share for all federal programs.
- Doug participated in NYPTA’s press event on 3/25. Doug highlighted the need for transit funding state-wide while highlighting specific WNY needs.

Cornell Cooperative Extension / PPG High-Road Fellow. Our proposal for a 2022 High Road Fellow was successful again this year and will begin in July. This work will expand on the work done last year and focus on deep outreach to East Side communities and updating the 2021 results with the latest 2020 census data. Met with our 2020 Fellow, Darshana Saakshi Subramaniam. Carl will lead the effort.

CRT Annual Meeting – Held CRT’s 2022 Annual Meeting on 1/19/22. Introduced new CRT Board Members that were approved by CRT membership vote using a virtual ballot. Our 2022 Board Members are Doug Funke (President), Seth Triggs (Vice President), Jim Gordon (Treasurer), Rebecca Reilly (Secretary), and Board Members Bradley Bethel, Gladys Gifford, Elizabeth Giles, and Carl Skompinski. Doug presented an overview of CRT 2021 accomplishments and 2022 priorities. Jim Gordon presented tradeoffs being considered for the Amherst Extension.

Attended Workshops and Public Meetings. These included Erie County Public Hearing on Climate, NYPTA’s Virtual Town Hall, Erie County Legislator Public Hearing on NFTA Service Cuts, and the 2022 Empire State Passenger’s Association Annual Meeting.

Ongoing Activities and Meetings. Continued to attend meetings of local public organizations, including the NFTA and GBNRTC, NYPTA-led NYS Rider’s Coalition. Also served on the Erie County Climate Change Committee representing transit issues and NFTA’s Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). Most of these meetings have been via Zoom.

Keep CRT On Track

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

Are you a member of an organization or company? Consider an organizational or corporate membership. Your organization’s logo will be displayed on our website.

Calendar

Wednesday, April 20th 5:30 – 7:00. CRT Spring Public Meeting (TBD location or via Zoom)

References:

1. NYS Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA). <https://climate.ny.gov/Our-Climate-Act>
2. Climate Action Council meeting (3/3/2020). <https://climate.ny.gov/Climate-Action-Council/Meetings-and-Materials>; <https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2020-04/documents/us-ghg-inventory-2020-main-text.pdf>
3. NYS Climate Action Council Draft Scoping Plan. <https://climate.ny.gov/Our-Climate-Act/Draft-Scoping-Plan>
4. Gates, Bill. How to Avoid a Climate Disaster. Alfred Knopf. New York. 2021.
5. World Business Council for Sustainable Development. 2008.
6. Simon, Matt. Wired Magazine – Science. 7.14.3030 11:08. Your Car is Spewing Microplastics that Blow Around the World.
7. Partnership for the Public Good. Working Towrd Equity; Updated: Race, Employment, and Public Transportation in Erie County.
8. 2017 NFTA / Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council Onboard Survey
([https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56ccbffd3c44d8670dbd1d84/t/594c18bb15d5dbb061b1eb9f/1498159346755/NFTA+2017 Onboard+Survey+FINAL+Report.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56ccbffd3c44d8670dbd1d84/t/594c18bb15d5dbb061b1eb9f/1498159346755/NFTA+2017+Onboard+Survey+FINAL+Report.pdf))