



Citizens *for* Regional Transit

CRT News

A Quarterly Publication of Citizens for Regional Transit

Vol. 25, Issue 2, April 2023

**Special Edition:
Transit and the Environment**

15 April 2023

Next CRT Public Meeting:

Tentative Details

Date: October 18th. 5:30 pm

Location: Niagara Falls Multimodal Transportation Center

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

President's Column

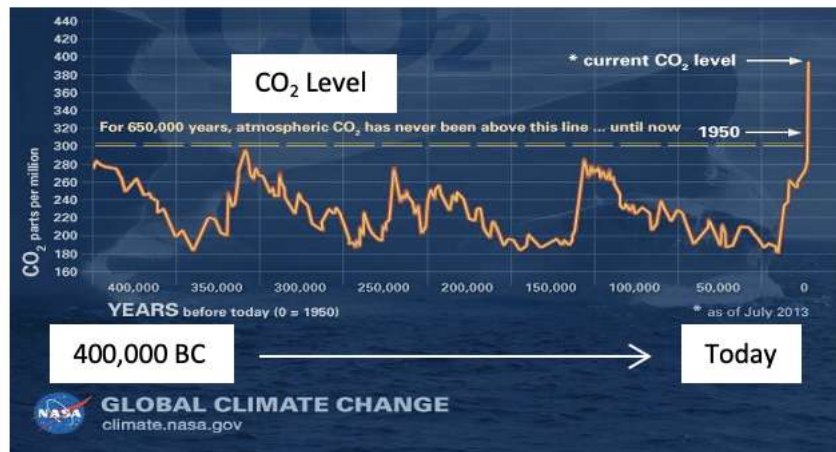
It's Time to Take Climate Change Seriously, and Transit Must Play a Central Role!

By CRT President Douglas Funke

The NYS CLCPA Scoping and Erie County Climate Action Plans are finalized. Both call for transformative actions including reductions in vehicle miles travelled (VMT) and investments in public transit, to fight against climate change and its effects. The goals are ambitious and will require major changes across all segments of society. As the NYS scoping plan puts it (Appendix G, Section I, Page 15):

“Transformative, challenging, and potentially disruptive levels of effort are required across all sectors...”

We agree. Climate change is real, dangerous, and upon us; and it is human caused. As the chart below shows, CO₂ levels appear to be climbing exponentially since the beginning of industrialization and heading into uncharted territory. The Earth's ecosystems and economies hang in the balance.



CO₂ levels are increasing exponentially since industrialization.

Source: [Climate.NASA.gov/evidence](https://climate.nasa.gov/evidence)

The latest UN report on climate, “AR6 Synthesis Report Climate Change 2023”, verifies and updates prior climate reports. It quantifies man-made emissions and climate pollutants with greater certainty and presents 5 scenarios predicting the range of possible futures. It emphasizes that climate change mitigation actions are needed now to avoid the worst outcomes. We’re all in this together and NYS needs to do its part. The mantra “think globally, act locally” applies here. Actions ultimately must be accomplished locally everywhere. Here’s a link to the latest UN report.

<https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/>

In NYS the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) calls for significant greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions across all sectors from housing and transportation to agriculture, industry, and waste. Here’s a table showing reductions required by the CLCPA law:

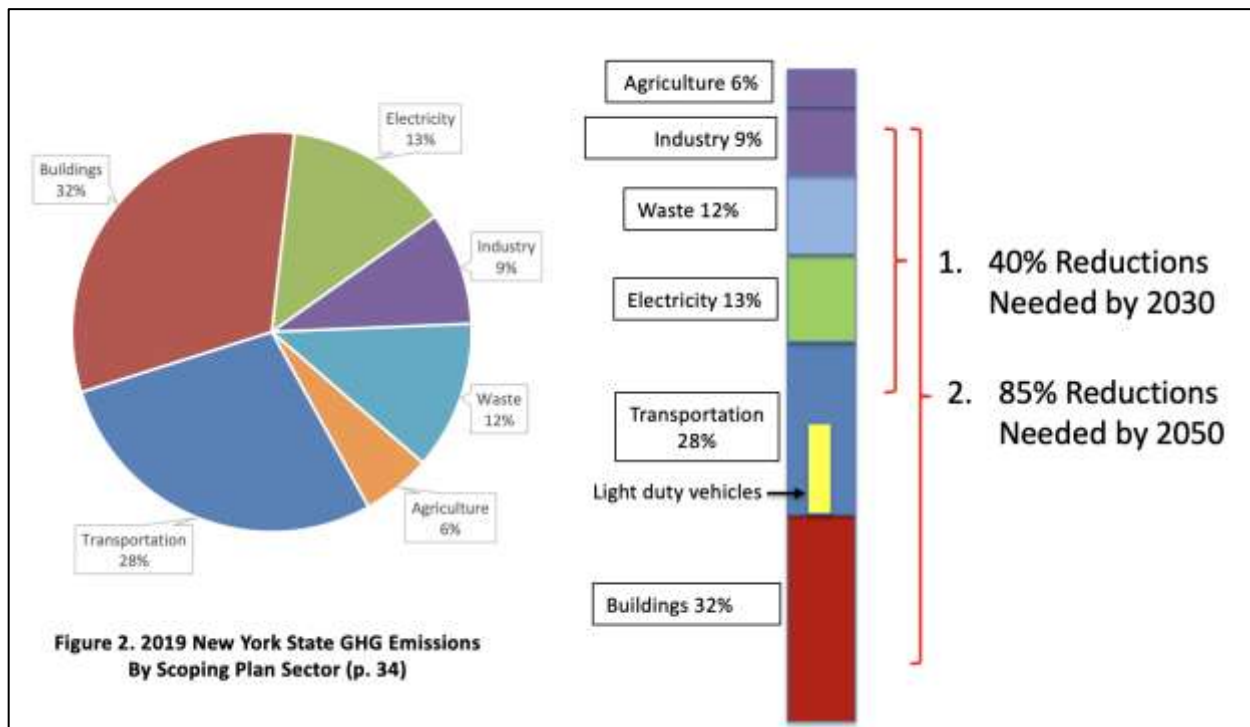
New York's Nation-Leading Climate Directives

- 40% reduction in GHG emissions by 2030
- 85% reduction in GHG emissions by 2050
- 100% zero-emission electricity by 2040
- 70% renewable energy by 2030
- 9,000 MW of offshore wind by 2035
- 3,000 MW of energy storage by 2030
- 6,000 MW of solar by 2025
- 185 trillion Btu of end-use energy savings

The NYS CLCPA Law requires significant reductions in GHGs.

Source. NYS Climate Action Council. Scoping Plan Full Report. December 2022

This ain't chump change. If we are to be successful, it will require significant changes on how we live and move around. The Scoping Plan lays out recommendations for meeting the CLCPA requirements. The two biggest sources of GHG in NYS and Erie County are housing / buildings and transportation, so significant efforts will need to focus on these sectors. I focus on transportation in this article.



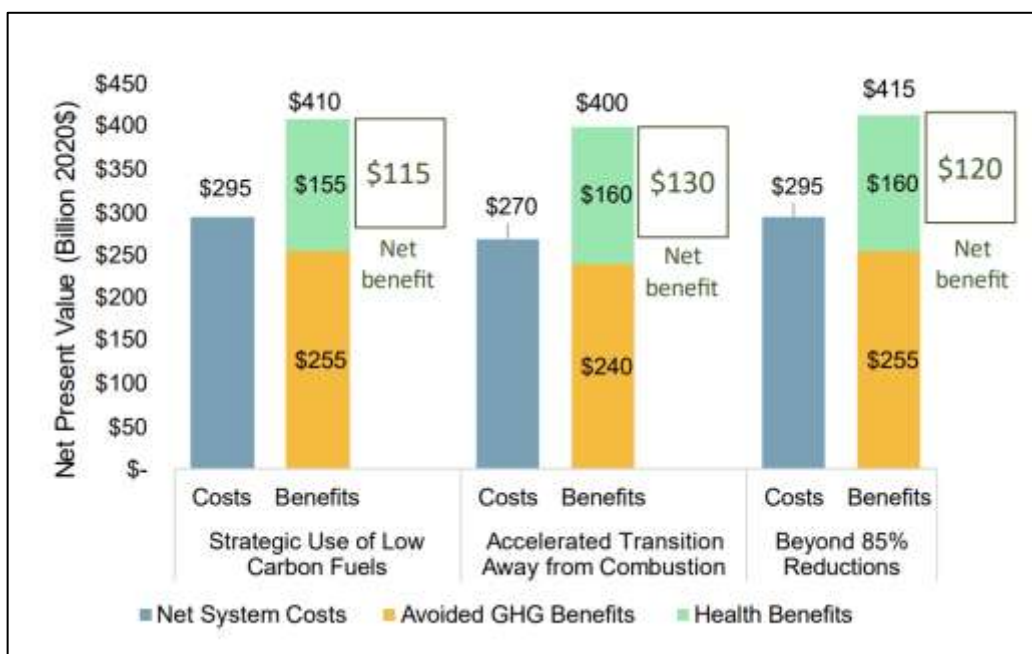
GHG Emissions by Sector Source.

NYS CLCPA Scoping Plan, P 48

We commend the NYS Climate Action Council in developing plans that can meet the ambitious requirements of the CLCPA law. Of course, the proof is in the follow through. The Scoping Plan recommendations must be implemented in legislation. The recommendations call for a range of solutions. In transportation this includes switching to 100% electric vehicles, doubling public transportation service availability in urban and suburban areas and implementing new funding mechanisms like including a cap & invest on carbon pricing, congestion, and parking pricing, and added registration fees. These are all necessary next steps that CRT endorses. The changes will need to include greater reliance on public transit. As the NYS scoping plan puts it (Page 10)

“... a substantial portion of personal transportation in urbanized areas will shift to public transportation.”

The Scoping Plan notes that the investments needed (\$300B) are a small portion of NYS’s Gross State Product (\$1.5T) and will provide a return on investment greater than the costs incurred, long term, including avoided GHG impacts and health benefits. This doesn’t minimize the difficulties we will face. The solutions will require significant investments in public transit and societal changes across all sectors and call on our political leaders to pass the necessary enabling legislation.



Cost of Scoping Plan recommendation alternatives and benefits compared to reference case (business as usual).

Source: Scoping Plan, P. 130.

The Erie County Climate Action Plan lays out approaches for meeting the Scoping Plan’s requirements in Erie County. Like the NYS Scoping Plan it addresses all major sources of greenhouse gases. We commend Erie County for taking leadership on this issue. The transit and land use section of the Erie County Climate Action Plan calls for:

- Expansion of the County’s current light rail system.
- Development of bus rapid transit service throughout the County.
- Expansion of the County’s “hub and corridor” transit system.
- Development of alternative transportation programs, including microtransit options, that address transportation gaps.
- Expansion of transit options for rural residents, including the County’s Rural Transit Services program.
- Education of the community on the benefits of alternative commuting options such as work from home, alternatives to single occupancy vehicles, and public transportation.
- Implementation of the NFTA Equitable Transit Oriented Development Plan for Metro Rail in alignment with state and federal initiatives.
- Identification of opportunities to expand programs that make transit more affordable to low and moderate-income residents.

- Development of programs to ensure transportation for vulnerable residents during extreme weather events.

Here's a link to the Erie County Climate Action Plan:

<https://www3.erie.gov/climateaction/public-comment-action-plan>

Here's a link to the Plan's Transportation Section:

https://www3.erie.gov/climateaction/sites/www3.erie.gov.climateaction/files/2023-03/draft_erie_county_climate_action_plan_3_18_ch6_transportation.pdf

How to Get People to Take Transit

According to the CLCPA Scoping Plan (Page 10).

“New Yorkers will have substantially greater access to low-carbon modes of transportation including public transportation... These strategies will help reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by providing alternatives to driving personal vehicles.”

This need should be obvious given the large portion of GHG from transportation, mostly light duty vehicles. Remember that for every trip we have a choice. When we choose transit we add a negligible amount of energy demand and generated pollution to a bus or train already in service, but avoid GHG and pollution we would cause if we drive, including ancillary pollution components from driving – all the tires and road lane miles and parking spaces that cars demand – all with significant environmental costs.

Every full bus can carry up to 40 passengers and every 4-car Buffalo Metro Rail train can carry 700 passengers (every 10 minutes). The figure below highlights the number of cars that can be taken off the road by a full bus. Buffalo Metro Rail can remove many more – in fact, all the cars in the picture below every 10 minutes!

According to transit guru, Jarrett Walker, the best way to get people to use transit is to maximize access to all the things people travel to. Walker says that frequency of service is the most important driver of ridership because people put a high value on their time. As Walker puts it:

“People will only use a service if it is useful, which means that it completes the trip they need to make, in an amount of time and money they can afford...”

“... High frequency means transit is coming soon, which means that it approximates the feeling of liberty you have with your private vehicle – that you can go anytime. Frequency is freedom!”

“... Frequency ... is an overwhelmingly important factor because it is so dominant in determining actual travel time in the urban context.”

- Jarrett Walker, The professional blog of public transit

Here's a link to Jarrett Walker's blog: <https://humantransit.org/basics/the-transit-ridership-recipe#frequency>



A city bus can remove up to 40 cars and Buffalo Metro can remove up to 700 cars (all the cars in this picture!) every 10 minutes.

[This Photo](#) (pre-annotated) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](#)
Figure by CRT Treasurer, Jim Gordon

Leaders Setting the Example

We commend Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus for helping lead the move to transit. They, along with other environmentally conscious employers, participate in the NFTA Corporate Pass Program and encourage their employees to use public transit, walk or bike for their commute. The NFTA together with participating employers jointly subsidize employee transit passes. Employees pay just \$55 / month (\$38 if paid with pre-tax dollars). This reduces traffic and parking demand and helps meet State and County climate action goals. We encourage all organizations to sign up for the NFTA corporate-pass-program. Here's a link to where you can get more details.



The NFTA Corporate Pass Program offers reduced transit fares.

<https://metro.nfta.com/programs/corporate-pass-program>

NFTA Metro also encourages its employees to use transit by providing transit passes as an employee benefit, an incentive for leaving their cars at home and taking transit. This is especially important for the NFTA because in addition to helping meet the State and County climate action goals and setting the example, it provides invaluable hands-on transit system experience for more effective system management. And it increases the NFTA “eyes on the train,” called for in Transit Police Chief Patterson’s Ride Nice Program.

CRT board members are also proud transit users. Personally, I use transit (bus and train) as my primary travel mode and use our electric car or my bike only when a transit option is not available or viable. We encourage all Erie and Niagara County employers to join the NFTA Corporate Pass Program and to encourage their employees to take advantage of the transit incentives; to join CRT and the NFTA in meeting the ambitious State and County climate action goals by using public transit. And to help preserve the Earth for our grandchildren!

Public Transit Included in the Bills Stadium Community Benefit Agreement

CRT is very pleased that public transit is specifically included in the Buffalo Bills Stadium Community Benefit Agreement. We thank County Executive Poloncarz and NFTA Vice President Thomas George and their teams for including transit in stadium plans. We are pleased that the agreement includes one or more bus or rail stops and a public transportation hub. Having a rail stop in the plans will help us qualify for Federal funds in the future. The agreement also calls for a public hearing on the plans. This is very welcome news. Here's the section of the agreement on public transportation:

"Transportation Improvements. The County and Developer have been collaborating and working in good faith with the Niagara Frontier Transportation Agency ("NFTA") to cause NFTA to expand its provisioning of public transportation to include one or more bus or rail stops within walking distance of the New Stadium (i.e., no greater than one-quarter of one mile (0.25 miles) from the New Stadium) and the addition of one or more new bus routes and shuttles (including free workforce shuttles from locations such as Buffalo, Tonawanda and Lackawanna to the new stadium construction site). A public transportation hub shall be implemented into the New Stadium Complex design, securing safe public transportation onboarding and exiting for patrons, including families with children and public transit riders with limited mobility or special needs. The Developer and NFTA will host a public hearing for County residents to review the plans for the public transportation hub."

CRT Is Disappointed that the Cap Option Has Been selected for the Kensington Project

By CRT Treasurer Jim Gordon

CRT is disappointed that the cap option was selected for the Kensington instead of infill. We had the chance to fully restore the Humboldt Parkway using only the \$55M provided by the Feds (Rochester's Inner Loop infill cost \$30M). Instead, we will spend \$1B of taxpayer money to put a cap over a rebuilt depressed Kensington Expressway. This was the only option offered by NYSDOT and we were told by Senator Kennedy's office that this is the selected option and future discussions will only be on the cap design. Since this is supported by the local community (Reconnect Our Community, ROCC), we will accept this decision. However, we are very disappointed as described in the CRT video linked below and hope this decision will be reversed after further analysis.

Here's a clickable link and QR Code.

<https://youtu.be/PKJwMvhKOWk>



CRT Work Highlights (January – April, 2023)

Below is a summary of the CRT activities during the January – April 2023 period:

CRT's PPG 2023 Plank. CRT's plank for the Partnership for the Public Good (PPG) 2023 agenda was successful again this year. We are working with the PPG and our partners to advocate for the City of Buffalo to clear snow on city sidewalks and at bus stops. Our proposal was jointly submitted with the Buffalo Transit Rider's Union (BTRU) and GOBike. BTRU is the lead. We attended the Buffalo Common Council meeting in April where sidewalk clearing was discussed. GOBike did the presentation.

CRT Public / Annual Meeting – (18 January 2023.) Held CRT's annual public meeting. Doug and Jim summarized CRT's 2022 accomplishments and 2023 priorities and plans.

Launched Campaign Opposing Capping the Kensington. Launched campaign opposing NYS Department of Transportation's (DOT) plan for putting a cap over the Kensington in favor of a comparably priced extension of Buffalo Metro to the East Side and airport. We were unsuccessful in this endeavor. See the above article for more information.

Met with Area Leaders – Met with Mike Finn, PE, the new Executive Director of the Greater Buffalo Niagara Transportation Council (GBNRTC), to discuss transit and regional rail issues.

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.

Supported NYPTA Transit Advocacy Initiative. Met with NYS legislator staff members from offices of Senators Tim Kennedy and Sean Ryan and Assembly Member Karen McMahon to discuss transit, regional rail and budget priorities.

Attended Workshops and Public Meetings. These included: (1) Region Central final Public Hearing on the Scajaquada / Delaware Park redesign, (2) a Buffalo Common Council meeting that discussed proposals for City-provided snow removal on sidewalks and bus stops. (3) Buffalo Urban Development Corporation's (BUDC). Public meeting on Smart Streets, (4) The Erie County Climate Action Showcase, and (5) Reshaping Rochester Public Meeting featuring Urban Planning Leader Dr. Norman Garrick.

Ongoing Activities and Meetings. Continued to attend meetings of local public organizations, including the NFTA and GBNRTC. 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=CnS5DfwPA0CIDBbWG6yI3JZGKz70PIpCoSv86E81dwtUMDVGUjlYQ0xKVDY1RDc5MFhGVklDM1NDUi4u>

Calendar

Our next CRT public meeting is tentatively planned for October. 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.