



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

**19 January 2022
5:30 – 7:00pm**

Register in advance for this meeting:

Zoom registration link to be provided

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

Topic

**CRT Annual / Public Meeting
The Past Year in Public Transit and the Exiting Year to Come**

Speaker:

Doug Funke, President, Citizens for Regional Transit

Summary:

We will also Vote on the CRT 2022 Board. (See the President's column for the list of 2022 nominees.) Doug will also summarize CRT accomplishments from 2021 and lead a discussion of CRT 2022 priorities.

President's Column
2021 in Review and Looking forward to a Successful 2022

By CRT President Douglas Funke

First, please join me in welcoming our 2022 CRT Board nominees: Doug Funke (continuing as president), Seth Triggs (continuing as Vice President). Jim Gordon (continuing as Treasurer), Gladys Gifford, Elizabeth Giles, and Carl Skompinski (all continuing as board members). Maddie McCauley will be leaving the board. Our website has short bios (<http://citizenstransit.org/leadership>). I want to thank Maddie for her many contributions during her years on the board and wish her well as she moves on. Finally, I am very pleased to introduce our newest addition to the board, if approved, Bradley Bethel.



Born and raised in Buffalo, Bradley brings an interest in transit and a passion for undoing the harm done by the Kensington that cuts through Buffalo's East Side. He holds two degrees: Bachelor's in Environmental Design from the University at Buffalo, and a Master's in Visual Communications from the Rochester Institute of Technology. Bradley has worked at Locust Street Arts, Clean Air Coalition, the United Way of Buffalo & Erie County, the Restore Our Community Coalition and Preservation Buffalo Niagara.

Some highlights from 2021.

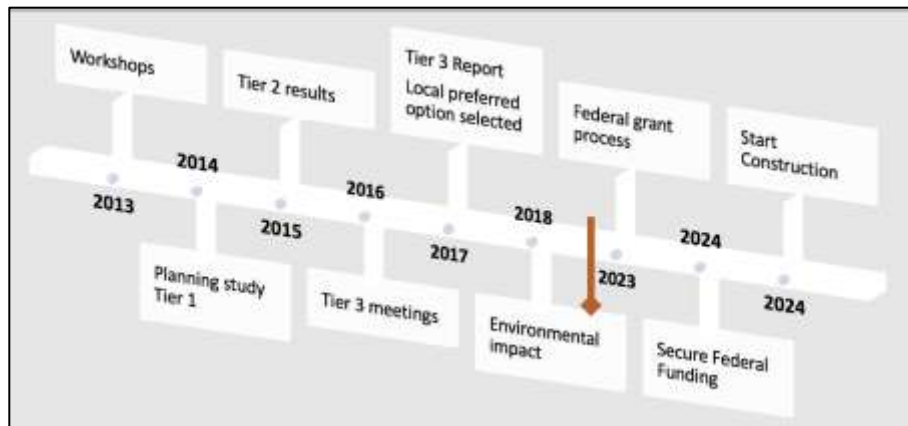
- PPG / Cornell High Road Fellow. CRT was awarded a paid fellowship from the High Road Fellowship program, sponsored by Cornell University in partnership with the Partnership for the Public Good (PPG). Our High Road Fellow, Elizabeth Taber, evaluated the latest concepts of eTOD (equitable TOD) in association with the possible expansion of light rail through the East Side to the airport. A presentation summarizing her results and her final report are available on our website.
- FTA agreed to serve as lead agency for the Amherst Buffalo Metro extension. This provides the mechanism for obtaining federal funds, which is good news. However, it is disappointing that FTA has asked that we re-examine bus rapid transit (BRT) as an alternative to light rail. CRT believes that BRT is a poor choice and we will continue to push back on this alternative. See Jim Gordon's article below for more details.
- Continued our public education and outreach efforts including holding several public meetings, publishing op-eds in the Buffalo News and holding media interviews.
- Met with federal and state legislators emphasizing the importance of transit investments, especially for extending Buffalo's light rail. With the federal infrastructure bill now law, support of our representatives will be critical

We look forward to continuing these efforts during 2022. We have been awarded another Cornell / PPG High Road Fellowship and plan to continue the East Side expansion eTOD analysis including some deep community outreach. We will also stay on top of the Amherst extension work to make sure that it stays "on track" and the public interest is represented.

Amherst Extension Is Moving Forward

By CRT Treasurer Jim Gordon

Long-time members of CRT might recognize this timeline for the Amherst Rail Extension project. The timeline was established in 2013. Our current position on the timeline is indicated by the red marker.



There are two phases of Environmental Impact Statements. In the first phase, the NFTA provided a detailed assessment of environmental considerations followed by a period of public comment. This resulted in the NFTA's Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) that selected light rail as the preferred mode using an alignment incorporating Niagara Falls Boulevard.

The NFTA presented their DEIS to the public and offered a period of public comment. Citizens for Regional Transit (CRT) submitted comments on the NFTA DEIS on March 22, 2020 which you can obtain online: <http://citizenstransit.org/node/158> After the closing of the comment period. The NFTA presented its DEIS to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) as a starting point for the federal phase.

In the federal phase of Environmental Impact Analysis, the FTA accepted the NFTA submission and agreed to take over as the lead agency for advancing the project. The FTA role is to prepare its own DEIS. In a frustrating move, the FTA kicked the project proposal back to the NFTA asking specifically for comments on using Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) instead of Light Rail Transit (LRT).

CRT railed against the FTA's bus proposal. In an interview on WUFO radio, CRT President Doug Funke and I expressed dismay at the FTA's actions. Our push-back against the FTA was reported as a news story and was picked up by news outlets nationwide. The FTA offered a public comment period regarding their BRT option. You can read CRT's pointed comments submitted to the FTA regarding the inappropriateness of the FTA bus option on October 14, 2021. <http://citizenstransit.org/node/178>

Rail~Volution 2021 Plenary Speakers



Just five days after the close of the comment period, CRT board members participated in Rail~Volution 2021, a national conference of transit agencies, metropolitan planning organizations and transit advocacy groups.

The first speaker was FTA Administrator, Nuria Fernandez, who announced the new FTA and DOT policy called Justice40. Justice40 emphasizes equity and access.

Justice40 supplements Transit Oriented Development (TOD) as the main criteria for funding transportation projects. TOD emphasizes having transit projects that benefit real estate developers. Much like “Reaganomics, TOD presumes that whatever is good for developers will eventually trickle down into the community and benefit everyone.

NFTA consultants had insisted that the only way Buffalo could get funding for the Amherst Extension would be if the project were designed using TOD principles. If you read the two sets of CRT comments mentioned earlier, we amplified the ability of the Amherst Metro Rail project to enhance TOD. Now that Justice40 criteria are in place, CRT is in the process of amending our October 14, 2021 submission.

We hope our amended comments will be accepted in time to be considered in the final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). We expect the FTA will provide for public comments soon. CRT will be asking you to join us in submitting comments for the FTA EIS when the opportunity arises.

CRT’s Position on the Bills’ New Stadium

Doug attended the recent public meeting on the best location for a new Bills stadium on December 7th hosted by the Erie County Legislators and read the following statement on behalf of CRT:

Citizens for Regional Transit strongly believes that any stadium location selected include an integrated Metro Rail station. This would provide a fast, zero-emission ride for thousands of football fans and provide access for those without cars! If the Orchard Park location were selected, stadium parking could serve as a Park-&-Ride serving commuters every day. Metro Rail to the stadium would also reduce congestion on game days improving the experience for those who choose to drive and tailgate – a public investment that benefits everyone! Further, we recommend that public investment in extending Metro Rail to the stadium be a significant part of the public share for new stadium.

CRT Work Highlights: September - December 2021

NY for TCI Teach-in – Doug presented arguments for better funding transit operations as a speaker on the NY for TCI Teach-In held on December 1st. Doug's presentation slides are on our website (<http://citizenstransit.org/sites/default/files/TCI%20Teach%20In%20-%20CRT.pdf>) the talk without slides are on the NY for TCI website. (<https://nyfortci.org>).

Cornell Cooperative Extension / PPG High-Road Fellow. Jim and Carl worked with our 2021 High Road Fellow to complete the project's final report. Our proposal for a 2022 High Road Fellow was successful and will begin in July 2022. This work will expand on the work done this year.

CRT's PPG 2021 Plank. Doug and Jim were interviewed on PPG's radio show. They discussed CRT priorities and promoted our upcoming CRT public meeting highlighting the results of the High Road Fellowship and argued against changing the Amherst extension to BRT.

CRT's PPG 2022 Plank. Proposed and presented a plank for the PPG 2022 agenda, which would have expanded from this year's plank. Unfortunately, our proposal for 2022 was not successful.

Rail-Volution. CRT had 3 board members (Jim, Carl, and Betsy) attend this year's Rail-Volution Conference, which was held virtually.

CRT Public Meeting – Held CRT's fall public meeting on October 27th. Doug presented a summary of the High Road Fellow final report. Lizzie participated in the call to answer questions.

NFTA Budget Public Hearing – Attended the annual NFTA public hearing on the draft FYE 2022-2023 budget. Read CRT summary comments and emailed more extensive written comments. Our comment summary is posted on our website.

Attended Workshops and Public Meetings. These included Erie County Budget workshop, the public meeting on the Bills stadium location, and a presentation and discussion on greening the grid hosted by the Sierra Club – Buffalo Niagara Chapter.

Joined the NY State Riders Coalition. This new coalition includes transit agencies and transit advocacy groups from across NYS and is coordinated by the New York Public Transit Agency (NYPTA). Attended the initial kick-off meeting. On 12/9/21

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 Committee representing transit issues and NFTA's Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). These meetings have been via Zoom.

CRT Board Retreat and holiday party – Held a CRT Board retreat on Saturday, 9/11/21 via Zoom and in-person holiday party at Gladys' house on 12/18/21 – Gladys, thanks for hosting. All were masked and vaccinated. It was great to meet in-person again for the first time since the pandemic started.

Keep CRT On Track

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

Calendar

January 19th 5:30 – 7:00. CRT Annual / Public Meeting (via Zoom)