



Citizens *for* Regional Transit

CRT News

**A Quarterly Publication of Citizens for Regional Transit
Vol. 26, Issue 1, January 2024**

Citizens for Regional Transit Next Public Meeting Our Annual Meeting

**Frank E. Merriweather Jr. Library
1324 Jefferson Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14208**

**24 January 2024
5:30 – 7:00pm**

You can also join remotely:

[Click here to join the meeting](#)

Meeting ID: 244 467 004 219

Passcode: ehMP6b

Topic:

**CRT Annual / Public Meeting
CRT 2023 Highlights and 2024 Priorities**

Speakers:

**Doug Funke, President, Citizens for Regional Transit
Jim Gordon, Treasurer, Citizens for Regional Transit**

Summary:

This is our Annual Meeting. There will be three agenda items: (1) Approve the proposed CRT By-Laws update; (2) Finalize the vote to accept the 2024 slate of CRT officers and Board Members; (3) Summarize CRT's 2023 accomplishments and discuss 2024 priorities and projects. A lot of exciting things are happening so come and learn more. See details below.

President's Column Annual Meeting Preview

By Douglas Funke

The CRT annual meeting will be held on 24 January 2024. At 5:30. Here's the agenda with a preview:

Approval of by-laws. The By-laws Committee has enthusiastically recommended updates to the CRT by-laws that will be approved at the meeting. Our bylaws had not been refreshed in more than a decade. Here are some key updated provisions:

- COVID required changes to the NY State laws allowing online meetings and voting within not-for-profit Corporations. The proposed bylaws incorporate this new policy.
- Membership quorum requirements changes are included to reflect CRT's recent increase in membership and more members residing outside of WNY.
- Committee quorum requirements were adjusted to eliminate mathematically impossible situations.
- Contradictory language regarding committee chairs was corrected. Committees may choose their own chairperson.

Here's a link where you can see the proposed by-laws changes:

<https://onedrive.live.com/?authkey=%21AEMvUeVMe%2DWNvGo&cid=025998536364CAF0&id=25998536364CAF0%2167455&parId=25998536364CAF0%2144542&o=OneUp>

Here's link to where you can vote for both the revised by-law changes and the nominated slate of officers (see below).

[Voting Link](#)

Only paid CRT members can vote. Vote promptly. There's still time to join.

<http://citizenstransit.org/join>

We will finalize the vote and announce the results at the Annual Meeting.

Approval of 2024 Officers and Board Members. The Nominating Committee has recommended a slate of officers and Board Members for 2024 to be approved by CRT Members.

Once approved our CRT 2024 *Officers* and *Board Members* will be: Douglas Funke (continuing as president), Seth Triggs (continuing as Vice President). James Gordon (continuing as Treasurer), Rebecca Reilly (continuing as Secretary), Bradley Bethel, Thomas DeSantis, Carl Skompinski, and Patrick Whalen (all continuing as Board Members).

Here's a link to the 2023 Officers and Board Members (<http://citizenstransit.org/leadership>). Except for Gladys Gifford who will be moving to Board Member Emeritus (see below) this is the same slate as last year.

Emeritus Board Members. In addition to the 2024 CRT Officer and Board Member nominees the Board has approved two ***Emeritus Board Members*** in recognition to their many years of service to CRT. They are:



Gladys Gifford

Lynn Magdol

Both Gladys and Lynn have many years of service to CRT and continue to support CRT on an as needed and available basis. Lynn served as a CRT Board Member for over 10 years with service as CRT Secretary and newsletter editor. During 2023 she represented CRT on the Partnership for the Public Good (PPG) plank to advocate the City of Buffalo clear snow on sidewalks and at bus stops. Lynn also keeps us informed about relevant multimodal issues drawing from her work on the Buffalo Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Board. Gladys served as a CRT Board Member for over 20 years and was CRT President for 12 years. We thank both Lynn and Gladys for their many years of service to CRT and are honored to have them as Emeritus Board Members.

Discussion of CRT Accomplishments and Priorities. Most of the meeting will focus on discussion of 2023 CRT accomplishments and 2024 priorities. Doug and Jim will lead the discussion. Some areas of focus will be the Amherst Buffalo Metro extension and our work with the East Side Parkways (ESP) Coalition. CRT and ESP are advocating that NYS Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) abandon its plan to put an 0.8 mile portion of the 6-lane Kensington Expressway into a tunnel for \$1B and instead fully restore Olmsted's Humboldt Parkway on the surface connecting MLK and Delaware Parks as well as the adjoining neighborhoods.



Today's Kensington Expressway cuts through Buffalo's East Side.

(Picture source: NYS Governor's Website Announcing NYSDOT Public Hearing)

Can You Help Us Advocate for Restoring Olmstead's Humboldt Parkway?

We strongly support the USDOT's Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Program (<https://www.transportation.gov/grants/rcnprogram/about-rcp>) and the Buffalo Kensington Grant to undo the damage done by Kensington Expressway. But we oppose NYSDOT's plans for implementation that puts a 0.8 mile portion of the expressway into a tunnel. There are so many problems with NYSDOT's plan it's hard to know where to start.

- It spends \$1B of taxpayer money to cement in place the 6-lane expressway for another 60 years without considering the larger transportation picture such as Buffalo's many arterials (Genesee, Broadway, Walden) and in the longer-term extending Buffalo Metro, whose capacity can carry all people now using the Kensington, even during rush hour.
- It does not reduce greenhouse gases as required by the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) and increases particulate pollution concentrated at the tunnel portals.
- It does not remove or cover the expressway north of Sidney and south of Dodge Streets. Those neighborhoods will continue to suffer from the noise and pollution from 70,000 cars every day and does not reconnect Delaware and MLK Parks.

Will you join us in signing an ESP e-letter to government and political leaders across local, state, and national levels. Here's a link:

<https://actionnetwork.org/letters/humboldt-parkway-restoration-project>

Please take a minute to add your name to this important e-letter.

The Secret to Downtown's Success (and transit is part of it!)

By Seth Triggs, PhD, CRT Vice President

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, downtown Buffalo had more workers than ever before, despite the historic loss of population in the city. Now structural changes created by the pandemic have fundamentally changed the face of real estate. With the advent of remote and hybrid-work

options, firms have downsized their physical plant. Massive office space vacancies have emerged. This situation is common in American cities.

Buffalo and cities across the US have also lost retail businesses to suburbs. This reflects a long-term suburbanization from automobile-oriented development, which shapes our land-use patterns to this day. In Buffalo, this effect was magnified by the simultaneous loss of heavy industry that had provided well-paying jobs that helped support patronage of local retail.

Whenever a restaurant closes, or someone posts a historical picture of downtown, there will invariably be those who say, “Metro Rail killed downtown,” or “It was better before the ‘subway.’” This is false. It is just difficult to support downtown shopping centers that compete with suburban shopping centers offering convenient free parking, especially in Buffalo where you have lost your two largest employers (Bethlehem and Republic Steel in 1982 and 1983, respectively). Indeed, nearly all cities of Buffalo’s size have lost not only downtown department stores, but downtown indoor shopping malls intended to compete with suburbs.

The real killers of downtowns are suburbanization and the urban “renewal” often inflicted on these downtowns to make them more palatable to auto-oriented and wealthier suburbanites. Block after block of buildings were flattened to build parking lots and expressways. The expressways also have a cumulative effect of making walking dangerous and cutting the downtown off from potential customers in surrounding neighborhoods. It’s much easier to drive to a suburban mall than contend with suburban-oriented high-speed traffic on expressways and “stroads” like Elm and Oak Streets

Downtown Buffalo has started to reverse its sprawl-driven bad fortunes, although, we still do sacrifice some occupied buildings on the altar of parking—the Bachelor Apartments’ sacrifice for 500 Pearl comes to mind. We are using adaptive reuse in previously rare ways in Buffalo, along with new builds. Massive buildings that were abandoned or underutilized in the urban fabric have been saved and given new life. The Trico Plant, a massive, abandoned factory, hums with new life and will host many new apartments. New apartments and lofts have been added to many buildings such as Tent City, the J.R. Barrington Lofts, Seneca One, and numerous others.

These kinds of developments are what we need. And to make them work best, we need good, high quality and dependable transit like Metro Rail, expanded to reach important destinations downtown and throughout the region. Because of the suburbanization and more recent online market trends in retail, Buffalo will never again be a major retail destination.

This is not to say that downtown can’t host retail; small, independent, and niche businesses do exist and can thrive. But the major issue is access. And downtown is not compatible with a suburban style of development where you drive everywhere, park your car out front and go in.

Successful downtowns have lots of residents, with amenities and services within walkable distances. To the extent amenities are separated, dependable, frequent transit is needed as a viable alternative to driving. Cities aren’t suburbs.

And to summarize, these are the ingredients for Buffalo’s downtown’s success:

- Continue the trend, ***add more and more residential units downtown***; especially affordable housing.
- ***Provide more infill development*** to replace parking lots with actual tax-producing buildings.

- **Save more of our historic buildings by converting them into residential units.** Do this with vacant office space like was done with the Avant, Seneca One and the Marin. This preserves beautiful irreplaceable architecture by living IN it.
- ***Strengthen transit***, especially with service expansions connecting retail, recreation, and employment centers. Even with the drop in office space there are still many jobs that must be worked in person—make it viable to live downtown and work elsewhere and visa-versa. Metro Rail, as fast and reliable transit, accomplishes this well.
- **Grow the Buffalo Place model** to provide premium services to downtown businesses and residents.

The job is only one quarter done; let's continue to do the job right! I recently hosted friends from Toronto to see the sights of downtown Buffalo (and the city at large) and they were impressed. Imagine if we wow more people like this, maybe we also inspire them to live here?

It's more likely than you think.



Help us make Buffalo walkable again with transit.



Get your yard Extend Metro sign!

Donate and get a free yard sign!

<http://www.citizenstransit.org/YES.Extend>

If you're near the Amherst corridor, we'll drop your sign(s) off.

We can supply any quantity.

CRT Work Highlights

October - December 2023

CRT's PPG 2023 Plank. Completed work with the Partnership for the Public Good (PPG) 2023 plank advocating for the City of Buffalo to clear snow on city sidewalks and at bus stops. While the PPG 2023 Plank is finished, we plan to continue working with our plank partners, Buffalo Transit Rider's Union (BTRU) and GObike on the snow clearing issue.

Continued Working with the East Side Parkways Coalition to advocate for restoration of Humboldt Parkway and oppose NYSDOT's plans to partially tunnel the 6-lane expressway.

- Held several press events arguing that the project should restore Humboldt Parkway as a surface Olmsted Parkway. Several Buffalo News articles and TV interviews were generated.
- Held a Public Meeting with speakers from Rochester and Syracuse where similar urban highway removal projects were successfully advocated for. The similarities with the Kensington are stunning.
- Initiated an e-letter calling for a more complete environmental impact analysis, which is being sent to political leaders across all levels of government (local, NYS, Federal). Received over 10,000 signatures so far!
- Distributed yard signs calling for restoring Humboldt Parkway and opposing the planned toxic tunnel.



Slide from NYSLU's presentation on the successful campaign to remove the I-81 that goes through Syracuse



Rochester Inner Loop before it was filled in



The East Side Parkways Coalition Public Meeting was held at the Delevan-Grider Community Center

Attended City of Buffalo's Smart Streets Public Meetings: This series of meetings unveiled the City of Buffalo's downtown "Smart Streets" improvement plans.

NFTA Budget Public Hearing – Reviewed the NFTA's draft FY 2024-2025 budget and attended the Public Hearing. Read CRT written comments that were also delivered via email. Our comments are posted on our website.

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 (ECCTF) representing transit issues and on NFTA's Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). Attended the final ECCTF celebration event at Chestnut Ridge on August 8th.

.CRT Public Meeting – (18 October 2022.) Held CRT's fall public meeting. Speakers discussed the role of Transit for promoting regional tourism. <http://citizenstransit.org/node/221>. Speakers were:

- Keynote Speaker: Sara Capen, Executive Director, Niagara Falls National Heritage Area.
- Panelists: Patrick Kaler, President and CEO, Visit Buffalo Niagara; Andrea Czopp, Chief Operations Officer, Destination Niagara USA; and Thomas George, PE, Vice President, Operations, NFTA

Media Interviews.

- Doug was interviewed on Joe Beamer's show (WBEN) on October 1st about the Kensington Project. <https://www.audacy.com/podcast/hardline-73616/episodes/doug-funke-10-1-9639c>

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 and prepare outreach material? Can you help us with data entry tasks (e.g., maintaining our email lists)? Can you help us write grant applications? Please contact us at CRTC@citizenstrnsit.org if you want to help.

Calendar

Wednesday, January 24th 5:30 – 7:00. CRT Annual / Public Meeting (Merriweather Library and via Zoom)