



Citizens *for* Regional Transit

CRT News

A Quarterly Publication of Citizens for Regional Transit

Vol. 27, Issue 1, January 2025

CRT Annual Meeting

22 January 2025

6:00 – 8:00pm

(On-line opens at 5:30)

Speakers:

Doug Funke, President, Citizens for Regional Transit

James Gordon, Treasurer, Citizens for Regional Transit

Meeting access virtually only:



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President's Column Making Transit Work in WNY: A Primer

By Douglas Funke, CRT President

The Transit Prime Directive: Make Transit a competitive alternative to driving for everyone!

If we don't achieve the *transit prime directive*, public transit will continue to be everyone's transportation choice of last resort; the choice made only by those who can't afford a car or who can't drive. We will continue to have increased congestion on our roadways, cancer-causing chemicals in our lungs and waterways, and worsening climate-caused weather disruptions everywhere.

The Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), now NYS law, requires reducing greenhouse gases (GHG) by 40% by 2030 and by 85% by 2050. Since transportation is one of the largest GHG-producing sectors – mostly from cars – the draft Scoping Plan that will implement the CLCPA, includes a major focus on reducing vehicle miles travelled (VMT). It calls for public transit investments, especially for high capacity like Buffalo's Metro Rail. It calls for new dedicated revenues for transit capital investments and operations. It suggests doubling transit budgets. The NFTA needs to be ready with plans in place.

So how do we achieve the transit prime directive? Three public transit components must be deployed region wide. These are:

- High capacity, *light rail rapid transit* (LRRT) serving as the fast, low polluting, spine connecting high value destinations across the region.
- Medium capacity and optimized *bus rapid transit* (BRT) deployments on important corridors and *tactical transit lanes* at key locations throughout the system to optimize transit priority.
- *High frequency bus network* connecting with the light rail rapid transit (LRRT) spine and BRT for long distance trips to high volume destinations. 24-hour span of service should be the goal.

We call on the NFTA and our political leaders to join CRT in accelerating progress in meeting these goals. There is no time to waste.



Figure 1. High frequency bus network with BRT where feasible connecting to Buffalo Metro LRRT is the key.

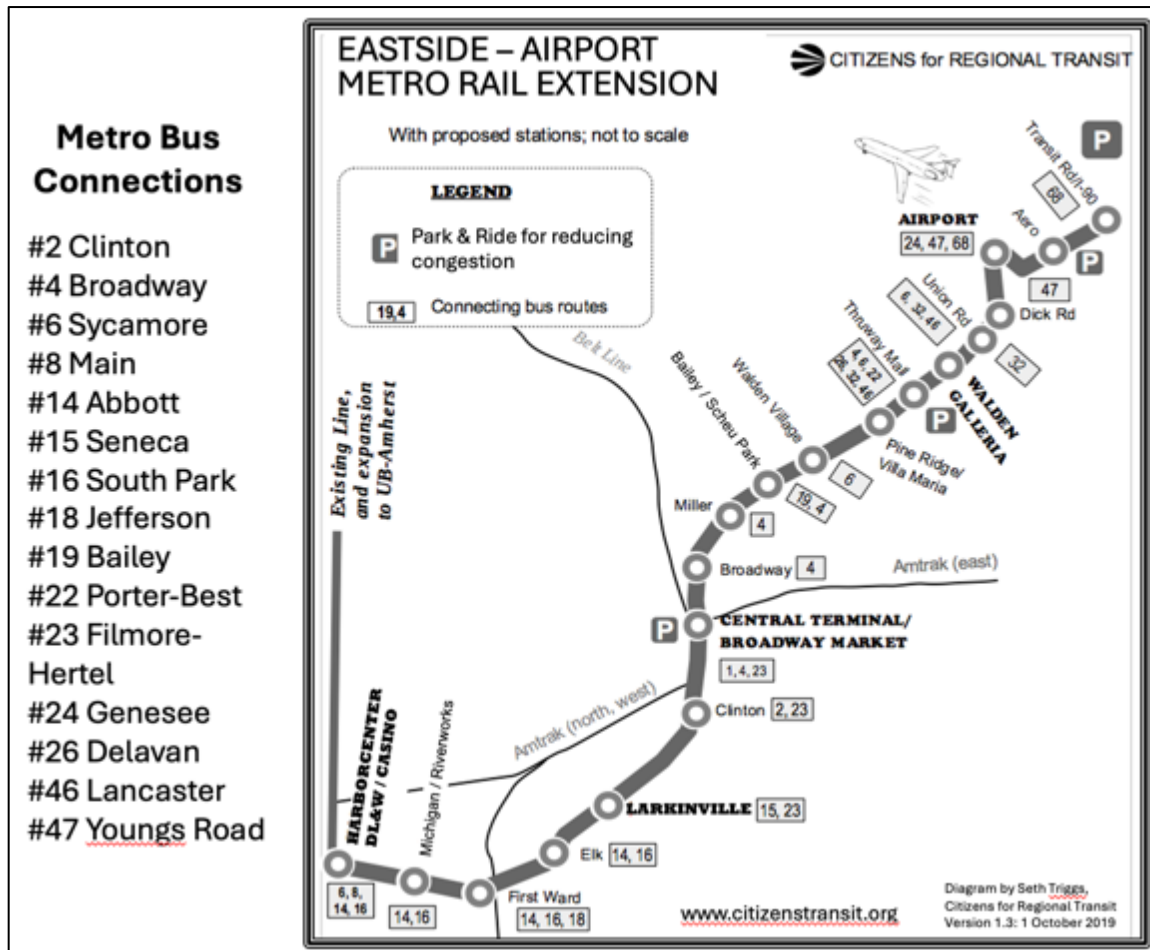


Figure 2. Proposed East Side Airport Extension with connecting bus routes

Bus service:

The NFTA has been successful, with support of CRT, in receiving increased State Transit Operating Assistance (STOA) funding in each of the last several years. The NFTA's STOA increase request was made with the promise of improving bus frequencies but the NFTA has been unable to do so. *We call on the NFTA to fulfil the promise of increased bus frequencies and span of service.* Current service levels are inadequate for meeting basic transportation needs, especially on weekends. We thank our WNY State Legislative Delegation for increasing STOA.

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Tactical Transit Lanes:

We are pleased that the Bailey Avenue BRT project is fully funded and underway. Bailey Avenue serves many bus routes. It will improve comfort and speed on all Bailey Avenue buses while reducing the number of stops and increasing speed on the Bailey Avenue bus (#19). We are also pleased that the NFTA plans to study other bus corridors that may also benefit from BRT. We encourage the NFTA to build on the Bailey Avenue BRT experience to deploy BRT along many high priority corridors.

Many of the innovations employed by BRT (e.g., queue jumping, signal priority, dedicated lanes) can be applied on smaller scales throughout the system on a tactical level (e.g., at specific intersections). In fact, tactical transit solutions can even be deployed on a trial basis with temporary markings to evaluate the concept like has been done with potential bike lanes. The new integrated AI-based traffic light management system, Miovision, being deployed throughout Erie and Niagara Counties will also benefit all bus routes.

Light Rail Rapid Transit (LRRT):

The key to making it all work is the high-speed LRRT spine provided by Buffalo Metro Rail. This is the fast, high-capacity people mover that provides region-wide connectivity. It connects with slower, smaller buses and to park-&-ride lots that integrate with the region's transportation network including roads and bike lanes. The current LRRT extensions to the Amherst Campus and into the DL&W terminal are important first steps for achieving full system capability as originally planned and still needed. We are pleased that the NFTA plans to study additional extensions of Buffalo Metro during the FY 2025 / 2026 budget year. This study should at a minimum look at extension to the East Side / Airport and Highmark Stadium but also evaluate all potential LRRT extensions and BRT deployments guided by the original 1970's plan.

Note that all proposed LRRT extensions in Buffalo are on publicly owned rights-of-way. The value of this cannot be ignored or minimized. For example, the Eastside Airport extension is 12 miles long and will cost an estimated \$1.2B. By comparison, the recent Seattle extension of 3.5 miles without existing ROW cost \$7B!

See our website where you can access our brochure, find out about upcoming events, and access our light rail maps. <http://citizenstransit.org/corridors>. We look forward to seeing you at an upcoming CRT event.

Update on CRT Lawsuit Against the NYS DOT

By James Gordon, CRT Treasurer



Being plaintiffs in lawsuits was not something CRT had in mind for 2024. Yet, plaintiffs we are in lawsuits against the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) as well as a separate lawsuit against the Federal Department of Transportation.

On September 4, 2024 CRT along with Western New York Youth Climate Council, the Coalition For Economic Justice (parent organization of Buffalo Transit Riders United), East Side Parkways Coalition and with directly impacted individuals filed petitions in State of New York Supreme Court. Our ultimate objective is to have the Kensington and Scajaquada Expressways removed with full restoration of Delaware Park and Humboldt Parkway. The expressways have been blamed for widespread death and disease. These places were revered until expressways disrupted and devalued the City of Buffalo.

The lawsuits are being tried together but are still separate suits. We challenged NYSDOT on several fronts. We asserted that:

- NYSDOT was disobeying the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA).
- NYSDOT was disregarding the New York State Constitution's protection of clean air and water for everyone.
- NYSDOT tried to get away with performing an Environmental Assessment as opposed to a more comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement.
- NYS DOT never took the required legal steps that would allow removal of the linear park, known as Humboldt Parkway, and therefore must return the parkway to its former condition.

We asked the court for an injunction to halt NYSDOT from going ahead with construction of the Kensington toxic Tunnel Project.

On September 16, NYSDOT provided its reply and the judge set a hearing date. The hearing room was packed with supporters for our side. We had a big surprise for NYSDOT when an attorney who normally works for NY State switched sides and spoke on our behalf. The attendees listened intently as the attorneys for each side presented their legal arguments to Judge Emilio Colaiacovo. The judge granted an injunction lasting until a final decision is handed down. The Judge asked attorneys on both sides tough questions. The Attorneys were instructed to produce a document of no more than 15 pages with their best legal arguments within 10 days.

The attorneys complied, and the judge held another hearing at which he rendered decisions on the suits. CRT and other complainants' petitions were denied except for our demand for a full Environmental Impact Statement. The judge re-opened the floor for discussion about all the arguments and paid special attention to the concept revolving around whether the land in the median of Humboldt Parkway was park or just ordinary land between two streets. Both sides responded. The injunction remains in effect until January 15th or so when Judge Colaiacovo renders his final verdict.

Transit News

Single Tracking Finished! ... Metro Rail trains ended single tracking between Fountain Plaza and Canalside, which was in place for system maintenance for most of 2024. You can always call the NFTA Customer Care line to report problems (716-855-7211).

Amherst Extension EIS Expected in Spring 2025. The updated draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that was supposed to be released in early fall is now expected to be released for public review in April or May of 2025. We are told that design work continues and the final implementation in 2030 will not slip.

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 desired.

CRT Work Highlights

July - December 2024

Community Outreach and Education.

- Tabled at Northland Beltline National Night Out (August 13th, Mt. Olive Baptist Church).
- Tabled at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Amherst (UUCA) Green Festival on September 28th.
- Tabled at NYPTA Annual Meeting on October 16th.



Figure 3. CRT tabled and attended the NY Public Transit Association (NYPTA) Annual Meeting held in Buffalo

- Jim Spoke at Parkside Community Town Hall sponsored Workshop on Highway Removal on October 21st



Figure 4. Jim presented transit components of highway removal at the Parkside Community Townhall

- Doug and Jim spoke at UUCA Green Festival speaker series on November 12th.
- Hosted movie night at AMC Theater in Buffalo Place to celebrate Metro Rail reopening on November 26th.
- Continued support to UB's Small Built Works Program that is designing potential Buffalo Metro stations along Buffalo's "Belt Line" and Buffalo Metro airport extensions.

CRT Public Meeting

- CRT held a public meeting on traffic moving tools and transit solutions for supporting highway removal

NFTA Budget Review

- Reviewed NFTA draft 2026 / 2027 budget. Presented and delivered written comments at the NFTA's Public Hearing on December 5th. Comments are available on the CRT website. <http://citizenstransit.org/node/233>.

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

- Proposed a plank calling for restoration Humboldt Parkways for Partnership for the Public Good's (PPG) 2025 community agenda.
- Lawsuit with ESP and others against NYS DOT continues (described above).
- Attended press conference on October 4th to celebrate judge's restraining order preventing NYSDOT from working on the project while lawsuit is underway.
- Attended NYS Supreme Court hearing on October 25th. Judge's ruling expected in January. (Described above). Protested outside.



Figure 5. Doug helped advocate for restoration of Humboldt Parkway outside the County Courthouse before the NYS Supreme Court Hearing

Supported Buffalo Metro Amherst extension.

- Continued distributing "YES, EXTEND METRO" yard signs.
- If you would like a yard sign, contact us at our email: crtc@citizenstransit.org. We are requesting a \$10 donation so we can purchase more signs.

Regional Rail Promotion

- Participated in Zoom call with Dan Richards, California HSR and Bart Executive, to discuss promotion of NYS HSR.

Communication

- Sent letter to Restore our Community Coalition (ROCC) requesting that ROCC join with ESP to oppose the Kensington Tunnel Project. CRT is listed as a ROCC Partner Organization.
- Submitted letter to the Editor stating that the plan to make the Bills stadium a “destination stadium” include high capacity, high speed transit (i.e., Metro Rail).
- Generated letter to GBNRTC and others commending actions on Niagara Falls Boulevard pedestrian safety with detailed recommendations for additional improvements. Letter available on CRT’s website. <http://citizenstransit.org/node/230>.
- Sent comments to GBNRTC on numerous proposed TIP modifications relating to transit expenditures.

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).

Keep CRT On Track

To join as a new member, renew your membership, or make a donation please click on: <http://citizenstransit.org/join>. 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

22 January CRT Annual Meeting. See above TEAMS link.