



Citizens *for* Regional Transit

CRT News

A Quarterly Publication of Citizens for Regional Transit

Vol 21, Issue 3, June 2021

Citizens for Regional Transit Next Public Meeting

20 October 2021

5:30 – 7:00pm

Zoom link: To Be Provided

Tentative Topic

**The East Side / Airport Metro Rail Extension:
Catalyst for Equity and Regional Success**

Speaker:

Lizzie Taber, Cornell / PPG Highroads Fellow (invited)

Summary:

We will discuss the proposed East Side / Airport Metro Rail extension from the perspectives of achieving regional goals of equitable access and economic development. Research conducted over the summer of 2021 by CRT's High Roads Fellow will be presented.

**Buffalo's Metro Rail:
The Transit Workhorse Doing the Heavy Lifting in Buffalo-Niagara**
By CRT President Doug Funke

Metro Rail, Our Transit Backbone

Buffalo's Light Rail Rapid Transit (**LRRT**) is just 6.4 miles long, yet carries 23% of all NFTA passengers! This includes passengers on all 61 NFTA bus routes and the hundreds of miles of transit service they provide. The LRRT percentage will grow to over 40% on just 13 miles when extended to Amherst. When fully built-out, as originally planned, it will form a high-capacity spine providing fast, broadly attractive service throughout the region, connecting with slower, more local and cross-town bus service feeding in.

When you compare the capabilities of LRRT with municipal bus the reasons for LRRT's stellar performance are obvious. The capacity of Buffalo's LRRT is 600 to 700 per 4-car train, every 10 minutes (in each direction of service) and it moves at 50 mph, between stops. This compares to a capacity of 50 people on NFTA buses moving at 35 mph in traffic. In addition to its high capacity and speed – maybe because of it – LRRT is best able to attract riders and reduce congestion.

Focusing on Equity and Diversity

The new Amherst extension will address mobility equity by improving service to the poorest area of Western New York, West Amherst. The diverse body of UB students, who on average graduate \$26,000 in debt will directly benefit from the extension. It will also serve city residents, many poor, gain access jobs and education opportunities in Amherst, especially UB.

Correcting Past Mistakes

There is finally momentum toward removing or downscaling the Kensington Expressway, a scar on Buffalo's East Side that carries over 60,000 cars everyday through one of the highest percentage minority populations. In Buffalo; and through what was one of the most beautiful Olmstead parkways ever built. If we downsize the Kensington and just distribute the traffic across available arterials (e.g., Seneca, Broadway, Genesee, etc.) we'll still have all the pollution, congestion, and parking nightmares plaguing Buffalo. A fully deployed LRRT system connecting to park & ride locations can easily handle the load now carried by the Kensington.

Addressing Pollution

Even electric cars create massive amounts of pollution from tires, plastic parts and brake pads^{1,2}. And every ton of steel generates 1.8 tons of CO₂³. Every ton of cement needed to serve congested highways generates 1 ton of CO₂³. Buses offer reduced pollution per passenger mile compared to single occupancy vehicles, but even if increased to every 10 minutes, can't handle this load. Light rail offers the best performance in reducing green house gas (GHG) production per passenger mile^{4,5}. And experience tells us only fast light rail will be able to attract large numbers of new transit riders.

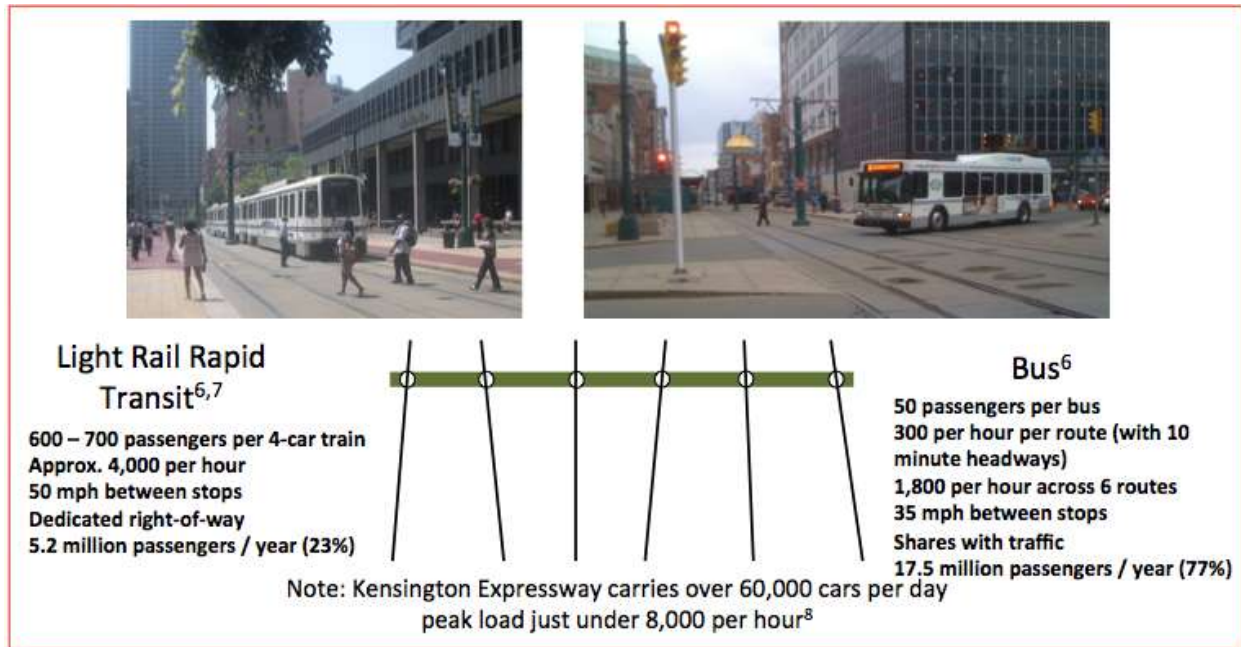


Figure 1. Buffalo Metro's Light Rail Is the Workhorse Gets the Job Done in Buffalo

Investing in Buffalo's Future

In Buffalo, we have the foundation for building the full LRRT system and to compete for Federal light rail dollars. Our existing, operational LRRT system represents over \$1 billion dollar public investment that can be leveraged. We also have publicly-owned rights-of-way available for cost-effectively building the rest of the system.

With the promise of Federal investments for rail projects, now is the time for expanding Buffalo's rapid transit system. We need to initially complete the Amherst and DL&W extensions, already in development, followed by extensions to the East Side / airport and Southtowns. We should immediately initiate a study of the East Side / airport and Southtown extensions, which were part of the original plan, in parallel with the Amherst extension work. This will add relatively little to ongoing engineering and construction costs, while establishing the foundation for a continuous expansion effort. Click here to download the CRT [brochure for a map and description of the full system](#).

The need and desire for high capacity transit investments aren't just obvious to us here in Buffalo-Niagara. A growing list of cities across the US has established rail connections between their downtowns and airports and across their regions. Many have passed ballot initiatives to generate tax revenue to support the investments. In 2020 90% of ballot initiatives (47 out of 53) calling for tax increases to fund transit investments and operations were successful. (APTA Center for Transportation Excellence⁹.) We need to extend our light rail just to keep up.

A Call for Leadership

It's a new era. There's a movement to undo the car-focused mistakes of the 50's and 60's by replacing poorly conceived inner-city highways with high capacity transit. We are well positioned to make the transition and to remain competitive. We call on our leaders at all levels of government to support Buffalo's LRRT extensions, which are critical to our long-term competitiveness.

References

1. World Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2008.
<http://docs.wbcsd.org/2008/08/EndOfLifeTires-FullReport.pdf>. (Includes description of scrap tire reuses and recycle approaches with links to EPA and other websites.)
2. Simon, Matt. Your Car Is Spewing Microplastics That Blow Around the World. Science 87.14.2020, 11:00 AM. WIRED Staff Writer. (<https://www.wired.com/story/your-car-is-spewing-microplastics/>)
3. Gates, Bill. "How to Avoid a Climate Disaster: the Solutions We Have and the Breakthroughs We Need." Alfred A. Knopf. New York, Toronto. 2021.
4. USDOT, Federal Transit Administration. Public Transportation's Role in Responding to Climate Change. 2010.
(<https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/docs/PublicTransportationsRoleInRespondingToClimateChange2010.pdf>)
5. Cambridge University Press. Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change, Working Group III Contribution to the Fifth Assessment Report of the International Panel on Climate Change. 2014. (https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/02/ipcc_wg3_ar5_full.pdf)
6. NFTA. Service Guidelines & Deliver Standards. 2021 Revision.
7. RAILFAN GUIDES of the U.S"> Todd's Railfan Guide to the Buffalo, NY NFTA Light Rail System.
8. New York State Traffic Volume Viewer, 5/13/2021.
9. APTA Center for Transportation Excellence.
(<https://cftc.org/initiatives/campaigns/?campaignyear=2020&startdate=1577858400&enddate=1609480800>)

We Applaud the NFTA's Call for Public Input in Distributing More Bus Shelters, But There Should Be More Opportunity for Public Involvement for Planned Service Changes

The NFTA's program to add more bus shelters and the opportunity provided for public input is greatly welcomed. We encourage our readers to use the following NFTA link to suggest locations where shelters are most needed (<https://metro.nfta.com/contact-metro/shelter-requests>). It is possible that shelters on busy roadways like Niagara Falls Boulevard (pictured below) with 40,000 cars every day would generate enough advertising revenue over time to significantly offset or maybe even cover the maintenance and replacement costs.

We were disappointed that the NFTA Service Design Guidelines & Delivery Standards were updated without an opportunity for public comment. This document lays out guidelines the NFTA uses to define transit service and associated amenities. It is therefore an important document deserving public review. CRT started assembling our comments on the draft document as soon as it was posted but were disappointed when the NFTA Board of Commissioners immediately voted to adopt the document without time for public inputs. The NFTA Board with little discussion and no public comment approved the updated document unanimously.



(Picture credit: Left (missing shelter on Niagara Falls Blvd.) – CRT President Doug Funke; Right: (example NFTA bus shelter) – NFTA website)

Figure 2. We are pleased that the NFTA has a program to deploy shelters where needed throughout the system like the above missing shelter on Niagara Falls Boulevard.

The changes made to the NFTA Service Design Guidelines & Delivery Standards were simply announced as a done deal at the NFTA Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). This is sadly ironic, since the CAC is where representatives from a wide range of citizens groups and transit riders convene to provide inputs on important transit issues and plans. CRT is a long-standing member of the CAC and was disappointed along with other CAC members that there would be no discussion or opportunity to provide comments.

We are pleased that public comment is planned by the NFTA for upcoming service changes but believe the time for Public Hearings is too short. These plans were announced at the May 27th NFTA Board of Commissioners meeting. The service changes will be implemented later this year based on community engagement and ridership. The schedule for the community engagement was summarized. Here is the public engagement schedule based on our notes:

- June 25th. Draft changes to be presented at the June Board of Commissioners meeting
- June 25th – July 19th. Initial community engagement period (specifics not discussed)
- July 25th – August 30th. Formal public comment period. (Written comments only.)
- August 23rd. – 27th. Public Hearings.

We look forward to more details on the anticipated service changes, and on the public engagement process. The schedule for public comment seems very tight, especially the period for Public Hearings. With just 1 week for Public Hearings to be held during the summer vacation months, the ability to receive meaningful public comment will be curtailed. We hope the NFTA will extend the period for public comment, especially for the Public Hearings, which should be extended into September when people are back from summer activities.

CRT Work Highlights:
May - June 2021

CRT Public Meeting. CRT’s spring Public Meeting was held virtually (via Zoom) on May 13th. CRT President Doug Funke was the main speaker, presenting “The case for transit: for Equity, Economic

Growth – and the Planet!” Panelists responding to Doug’s presentation were: Hal Morse, Executive Director of the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council and Thomas George, NFTA Director of Public Transit. The meeting was hosted virtually (via Zoom) by the Partnership for the Public Good (PPG). PPG’s Kristin (Kricky) Kziazek Coordinated the Zoom technology and moderated the meeting. We thank all who participated. Here’s a link to Doug’s presentation and panel discussion: <http://www.citizenstransit.org/node/170>.

Legislative Advocacy. Worked with other community organizations in the Our Outer Harbor (OOH) Coalition to oppose ECHDC’s plan to build an 8,000 person amphitheater on the outer harbor near Terminal B. Sent a letter to the Buffalo Common Council asking them to reject ECHDC’s request for a special use permit that would allow holding large concerts on the site. Our letter pointed out that the application did not include any planning for how 8,000 people will get there. The only public transit connection, the #42 bus, was not even mentioned in the ECHDC permit application and runs only once an hour carrying a maximum of 50 people. Even with 10-minute headways the #42 could only transport 300 people, not nearly the 8,000 expected to attend. This would disenfranchise the 30% of Buffalo households that do not own cars.

Cornell Cooperative Extension / PPG High Roads Fellow. This program, sponsored by PPG / Cornell Cooperative Extension, is starting in June and will run through July. Our Fellow, Lizzie Taber, is examining and documenting the benefits for extending Metro Rail to the East Side and airport. The effort will focus on equity and Transit Oriented Develop (eTOD) potential that can be achieved with this extension. Betsy and Carl will work with Lizzie.

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 were conducted virtually via Zoom or teleconference.
- Continued work on the CRT plank with the Partnership for the Public Good (PPG) on their 2021 PPG agenda. Our plank advocates for continued public funding for transit to maintain service throughout the pandemic and to continue our advocacy for NYS joining the 12-state Transportation and Climate Initiative (TCI).

Keep CRT On Track

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

Calendar

October 20, 5:30 – 7:00. CRT Quarterly Public Meeting (via Zoom)