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# CRT News

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**Citizens for Regional Transit Quarterly Public Meeting**

**April 15, 2015, 5:30-6:30 pm  
United Way, 742 Delaware Ave., Buffalo**

**“State and Local Funding for Transit:  
Past, Present and Future Opportunities”**

President Doug Funke will moderate a panel discussion on the need for increased state and local funding for the Niagara Frontier Transit Authority, in view of the impact public transit has for sustaining and growing Western New York’s economic renaissance.

The event will consist of brief talks about the need to increase transit funding by panel speakers from New York State and Erie County, with special attention to the role of the Erie County Industrial Development Agency’s tax exemptions.

Following the panel presentation there will be Q & A discussion with the audience.

**Panel Speakers:**

**State Assemblyman Sean Ryan**

**Erie County Legislator Patrick Burke**

**Lynda Stephens, Subsidy Action Committee, Coalition for Economic Justice**

Doors open at 5:00 pm



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*“I believe that mass transit is a necessary investment and a core function of federal, state and local governments. Managed properly, mass transit investment is a very wise use of public money as it will reduce the need for expensive roads and highways, increase mobility, promote economic growth and commerce and improve air quality and the quality of life in communities that adopt transit systems.”*

**Greg Hughes, Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the Utah Transit Authority; House Republican Majority Whip, Utah House of Representatives**, at the U.S. House of Representatives, Transportation and Infrastructure Committee - 12-11-13

## BUFFALO NEEDS TRANSIT \$\$ INCREASE

to be presented at the Quarterly Meeting, April 15

Concern about Buffalo’s sustained commercial and labor market growth is everybody’s business —topic of CRT’s public meeting on **April 15th**.

The immediate need for an increase is to address a \$10 million shortfall in the NFTA’s current budget. Assemblyman Ryan has been leading the recent charge in Albany to address this need. His plan recognizes the positive economic impact of encouraging increased ridership on public transportation as a reason for additional funding for the system. Erie County currently provides minimal portions of tax revenues to the NFTA , chiefly through its mortgage recording tax.

The Erie County IDA offers exemption to this tax as part of its incentive package to developers and businesses, further limiting the funds available to transit from Erie County.

The Western New York region has recently seen cutbacks in transit services and is now threatened with further cutbacks of critical routes if budget solutions are not found. These transit services facilitate the upward mobility of urban residents

who otherwise lack access to well-paying jobs— employees who are needed by area businesses.

Reports such as Economic Impact of Public Transportation Investment, written by Glen Weisbrod for the American Public Transportation Association, [apta.com](http://apta.com), have shown that labor market mobility has an **outsized positive impact** on a region’s economic health through travel time savings, transportation cost savings, travel reliability and safety improvements. Thus it stands to reason that increased availability and use

of public transportation will not only alleviate traffic congestion and reduce less obvious environmental costs, but will also help sustain and expand Buffalo’s renaissance.

Past failure to invest in Western New York’s public transportation has already led to ever worsening traffic congestion on already

over-used public thoroughfares such as the Youngman, NYS Route 400, Kensington Expressway, and Interstate 90. Current support for NFTA’s budget will provide breathing room for the region to make real plans for the positive impact of improved and effective public transit.





## Public Transit and the 2015-16 NYS Budget

reviewed by Gladys Gifford, CRT legislative chair

Negotiations between the two chambers of the NYS legislature and Gov. Cuomo have produced a NYS budget document for 2015-2016. What are the impacts of this budget for public transit?

Analysis by the New York Public Transit Association (NYPTA) shows an increase of \$10 million for upstate transit operating assistance and an additional \$15 million for upstate transit capital projects. Overall, this represents a modest improvement over the previous year.

Once the budget is accepted, there may be other avenues for increased funding to help transit providers cope with shortfalls. One example is the New York Works program, which will be under review by the legislature and can be accessed for transit needs.

As for the NFTA, additional funds are: \$2,589,000 additional for transit operating needs; \$3,883,115 added for transit capital needs.

Since the NFTA had identified operating and capital needs at \$10 million, this budget deal allows positive adjustments to the authority's budget. However, this NYS Budget does not address expected financial stress for future years.

Public transit must be placed on a sustainable financial footing that recognizes the essential role transit fills in our communities, both now and in the future. Both upstate and downstate recognize this need, but the financial structures for upstate do not allow funding to rise in relationship to upstate growth patterns. NYPTA addresses this need, through proposed legislation that fixes the structural roadblock for upstate transit funding.

For more details, see the New York Public Transit Association website, <http://www.nytransit.org/>.

### **Another Transit Advantage: Can Riding Metro Make You Healthier and Happier?** *by Lynn Magdol*

It is well-known that transit has advantages for the pocketbook and for the environment. The convenience of transit is another advantage that is also often cited: no traffic hassles, no need to find parking, no need to fill up the gas tank. Recent studies have shown that transit also offers advantages for physical and mental health.

The stress associated with driving can have negative health effects. Among the disadvantages of driving, researchers find effects on blood pressure and cholesterol as well as overall life satisfaction and happiness. Aside from stress-avoidance, they propose that public transportation riders might be healthier and happier because they can do other things during the trip: work, read, talk, check email, etc.

More details can be found at Business Insider, Kathleen Elkins, Feb. 26, 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/public-transportation-commuting-health-driving-2015-2>



## Federal Crisis for Transportation Funding Looms— May 31 Deadline for Highway Trust Fund, Transportation Act Reauthorization

*compiled from news outlets*

...on the expiration of the Highway Trust fund...

Transportation Secretary Foxx: “The highway trust fund has been roughly running \$15 billion short on an annual basis. And in recent years, Congress has tried to patch it together, using a variety of legislative duct tape and chewing gum to just keep it afloat,” Foxx said during a speech to the Council on Foreign Relations on Monday evening [March 16].  
[thehill.com/policy/transportation/](http://thehill.com/policy/transportation/)

The Department of Transportation has said that it will have to begin reducing payments to state governments in May if Congress does not reach a deal to extend transportation funding past the end of that month.

Transportation advocates have said that a shutdown would cost the nation thousands of jobs because May is typically the beginning of the busy summer construction period.  
by Keith Laing - 03/23/15 04:38 PM EDT in [the hill.com](http://thehill.com)

...on the **Grow America Act** offered by the Obama administration...

**The GROW AMERICA Act will commit more than \$115 billion over six years to address the urgent transit challenges** facing urban, suburban and rural communities.

**The GROW AMERICA Act proposes a powerful, \$5.1 billion increase in Fix-it-First investments to address public transit’s maintenance backlog.** Unless these needs are addressed, the transit riding public could experience more bus and rail system breakdowns; less reliable service; increased safety risks; and delays making it harder for all commuters to get to work.

The **Grow America Act** proposes the Rapid Growth Area Transit Program, an innovative, six-year \$3.4 billion investment that would help fast growing

communities invest in bus rapid transit and other multimodal solutions to get ahead of the challenges caused by rapid growth.

**Public transportation supports nearly two million jobs across the country.** The transit industry is an economic engine that keeps Americans at work and domestic manufacturing buzzing.

An estimated 13,000 jobs are supported by every \$1 billion invested in public infrastructure.

In 2013, U.S. transit systems operated approximately 128,500 transit vehicles and 12,746 miles of track, and 149 lane miles of bus rapid transit and served 5,017 rail and bus stations – with the fingerprint of the American workforce on almost all of it because of stringent domestic manufacturing requirements.

Transformational transportation projects attract economic development in rural and urban communities. For example, the Dallas region is home to more miles of light rail than any other city in North America and has attracted more than \$7 billion in economic activity. In the Phoenix area, transit has spurred more than \$7 billion in economic activity, while the first rural bus rapid transit line in the U.S. - the VelociRFTA in Colorado’s Roaring Fork Valley – has accelerated the development of new hotel and office space.

According to a study by the National Association of Realtors and the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), during the last recession, residential property values performed nearly 42 percent better on average when located near high-frequency public transportation.

from [www.dot.gov/grow-america/fact-sheets/transit](http://www.dot.gov/grow-america/fact-sheets/transit)

## CRT Is Calling for Public Transit Along the Niagara Gorge

By Douglas Funke, CRT President

Representatives from CRT attended the Niagara Gorge Corridor (NGC) Project public meeting held on February 19th. The NGC Project is designing the approach for removing the Robert Moses Parkway (RMP) between Main Street and Findlay Drive. More information about the project and plan is available at:

<http://nysparks.com/inside-our-agency/documents/NiagaraFallsStateParkScopingReport/MosesParkwayNorth/PreliminaryDesign/PublicInformationMeetingHandoutConceptsABC.pdf>.

We were disappointed that in spite of project objectives that called for improved access and transportation, reduced environmental impact of transportation related activities, support for local economic vitality, and minimized traffic impacts in adjacent residential areas; there was almost no mention of public transit. The presentations did not mention public transit and handout material only identified a “potential future trolley connection.” And the materials did not specify how far north the trolley might go. By contrast, the handout material identifies the location of parking throughout the corridor.

CRT sent a letter to the NGC Project Team and local community leaders agreeing that the RMP was a mistake and needs to be removed to reconnect the City of Niagara Falls with the river and restore natural green space along the scenic gorge, but that the redesign must be able to accommodate the movement of potentially large numbers of people to the many attractions along the river. If significant portions of the 8 million visitors to Niagara Falls each year decide to explore the new improved Niagara River Gorge, and do so by car, we are likely to see traffic congestion, increased pollution, and a degraded visitor experience – all in direct contradiction to the stated Niagara Gorge Corridor Project objectives. We stated that public transit should be a primary design element for the project, not a future consideration.

We provided two examples where high frequency public transit services with comfortable shelters and user-friendly maps, have been used successfully to encourage tourism. These were Disney World and Niagara Falls, Ontario. We provided a concept map showing how transit could be implemented along the lower Niagara River, including possible larger regional connections, that could make Buffalo-Niagara a regional tourist destination.



We also included an example alternative alignment that could accommodate dedicated bus lanes within Whirlpool Street without significantly reducing the width of natural green space along the gorge.

The full CRT letter to the NGC Project Team can be found at the CRT website and Facebook page.

## CRT at work for WNY

Doug Funke and Lynn Magdol were interviewed on radio show, 3-31-15, WUFO, 1:00-1:30 pm, on plank for PPG; CRT's plank for improved public funding of transit was selected as one of the PPG 2-15 Agenda items. Presented this item at the PPG Plank rollout meeting;

CRT participated in Spring it On fundraising campaign, via United Way;

CRT met with public officials including Niagara Falls Mayor Dyster, City of Tonawanda Mayor Rick Davis, NYS Legislator Sean Ryan, Erie County legislators Betty Jean Grant, Patrick Burke, and Peter Savage, also staff of NYS Senator Panepinto;

Board members set up Twitter account, continued activity on Facebook and website;

CRT sponsored news conference, 2-19, called for increased NYS transit funding;

Board members participated in One Region Forward rollout (2-12) of its Regional Plan for Sustainable Development;

Board created petition "Buffalo Needs a Transit Revolution" for distribution to organizations;

President Funke submitted extensive comments on behalf of CRT to the Niagara River Gorge Project, 3-30, outlining the need for public transit as the primary transportation mode along the Niagara River Gorge.

For more info, see the CRT website [citizenstransit.org](http://citizenstransit.org) or visit the CRT page on Facebook or follow CRT on Twitter, @WNYTransit

### Calendar

April 9 Stand up for Transportation Day — an American Public Transportation Association event, details at [apta.com](http://apta.com)

April 15 CRT 5:30-6:30 pm, Quarterly Public Meeting, United Way, 742 Delaware Ave., Buffalo

May 9 and on-going AMTRAK Train Days, various locations and dates across USA. See [amtrakraindays.com](http://amtrakraindays.com)

**CRT educates everyone concerning public transit in Western New York: see <http://citizenstransit.org>.**

**Please support our efforts with your dues and donations. Send your payment by [Paypal](https://www.paypal.com), or mail to CRTC, 617 Main St., Buffalo, NY 14203**

Citizens Regional Transit Corporation  
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Buffalo, NY 14203

*return service requested*