



# CRT News

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**Citizens for Regional Transit Quarterly Public Meeting**

**October 21, 2015, 5:30-6:30 pm  
United Way, 742 Delaware Ave., Buffalo**

**New York State Funding for Public Transportation in the Buffalo-  
Niagara Region**

**Featuring NY State Assemblyman Sean Ryan**

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## **Why a Gondola Makes More Sense than a Lift Bridge to the Outer Harbor** **Douglas Funke, CRT President**

In our September Issue of this Newsletter (<http://www.citizenstransit.org/news/>) we summarized our disappointment with the “Preferred Preliminary Plan” that the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC) put forward for the Outer Harbor. The plan called for significant amounts of new “mixed-use” development with associated roads, sewer, water, and other infrastructure. That is, it called for public investment in more sprawl. If there is anything that is clear in the Erie-Niagara Framework for Regional Growth (<http://www2.erie.gov/regionalframework/index.php?q=FrameworkPlan>) and the more recent One Region Forward draft report, it is that we don’t need or want more sprawl (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1SUr77mjCgDTG12YXZwS0t4cEk/edit>).

The ECHDC Outer Harbor Plan called for the construction of a lift bridge with the possibility of extending the light rail to the Outer Harbor. As we stated in September, we very much support extending Buffalo’s light rail – it is our highest priority! But we need to extend the light rail to the Greater Buffalo-Niagara International Airport (GBNIA) and to the UB Amherst Campus, not to the Outer Harbor. Estimates for a lift bridge are in the \$100 Million range. There are better and less expensive ways to connect Buffalo with the Outer Harbor. One idea is a gondola.

The Outer Harbor is a unique and valuable resource most other cities can only dream of – a large, open, natural space on the shores of one of the Great Lakes; and located immediately adjacent to a major city. It is a resource well suited for recreational uses (and poorly suited for residential development). There’s room for hiking, biking, and cross-country skiing. Visitors can take the kids to the new Buffalo Harbor State Park, tour some spectacular natural areas, or just watch the sun set over the lake. And the Outer Harbor is publicly owned! It can be made available as a large public space, and should be. But how should people get there? If not a lift bridge, what?

We applaud Assemblyman Sean Ryan and the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC) for taking the initiative to put a bike ferry into service connecting Canalside with the northern end of the Outer Harbor. The ferry is affordable, efficient, and fun. Open for less than one month, it’s already a popular attraction and conveyance for visitors and bikes.

But how to get to the southern end of the Outer Harbor near the new Buffalo Harbor State Park and Terminal A, which could be repurposed for a broad range of uses such as bike and cross country ski rentals, restaurants, community events, etc. As developments occur at the southern end of the Outer Harbor it will be important to provide public transportation for several reasons. First, over 30% of Buffalo households do not own cars. Without transit, 1/3 of Buffalo households are disenfranchised. Second, access approaches that encourage more people to drive will create more traffic and require more parking lots – detracting from the natural beauty of the Outer Harbor. We think a gondola can provide an attractive alternative for moving people between Canalside and the Outer Harbor.

There are many reasons to consider a gondola for connecting to the Outer Harbor. ***Gondolas are affordable*** – costing between \$30M and \$60M to build – significantly less than a bridge. ***They minimize environmental impact*** – gondolas only need foundations built at suspension poles and can operate on clean electricity. ***They provide adequate boat clearance*** – gondolas can easily clear boat traffic without any special lift mechanisms. ***They are an attraction in themselves*** – gondolas offer breathtaking views of the lake, Buffalo’s industrial heritage, the Outer Harbor, and the city of Buffalo.

If the southern end of the Outer Harbor is developed in ways that draw large numbers of people, a public transit connection will be important. A gondola offers a very attractive alternative and should be given serious consideration. A gondola could satisfy the public transportation need while becoming a must see tourist attraction in and of itself.



## State and Federal Public Transit Funding Update

Gladys Gifford, CRT legislative chair

CRT and our allies urged our NYS legislators to support better financing for public transit in the NYS Budget for 2015-2016. How did we do?

Here are highlights of the enacted NYS Budget 2015-2016, as affecting public transit in WNY:

- \* total State Transit Operating Assistance (STOA) was raised, with an increase of \$10 million for upstate systems (up 5.6% over last year);
- \* included \$15 million capital aid for upstate transit systems, plus an extra \$5 million via New York Works;
- \* included \$4 million in Department of Health budget to assist rural transit systems;
- \* extended ability of municipalities to bond for transit vehicles.

Transit received very little from the \$5.4 billion that NYS received from bank settlement funds. The only transit investment from this windfall was \$250 million to build four new Metro North stations in the Bronx.

The enacted 2015-2016 Budget did not address the structural changes needed to ensure adequate funding for public transit in the future. However, legislation introduced on June 14 (S.5967/A.8242) would transfer a portion of the NYS existing personal income tax to fund transit and highway capital needs. This legislation has the potential of solving the most urgent funding needs of public transit in NYS, since the personal income tax revenue tends to grow over time—unlike the flat rates of revenue included currently in the STOA structure.

As of this writing, the NYS Legislature has entered an extended session in order to finish pending legislation. Will this joint legislation, S.5967/A.8242, be enacted before the end of this session? For more information, see [www.nytransit.org](http://www.nytransit.org).

On the Federal side, President Obama signed a two-month extension of Federal transportation funding on 5-29-15. As described in *The Hill* (5-29-15),

“The measure, dubbed the Highway and Transportation Funding Act of 2015, extends several aspects of infrastructure funding through the end of July. Those include highway aid and transit programs under the Highway Trust Fund, as well as freeing up monies in the fund and allowing tax revenues to be deposited in the fund.

White House press secretary Josh Earnest criticized the short-term funding measure earlier in the day... The stopgap measure represents the 33rd temporary fix for road project funding since 2008, Earnest noted, leading to some uncertainty among states for major highway plans.”

Between now and July 31, Congress must craft another Transportation Act in order to carry forward needed projects and maintenance. Both houses held hearings last week, regarding the need to fund transportation and the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) offered excellent testimony. Here are the major themes that the APTA emphasized:

- \* Congress needs to enact a six-year, \$100 billion authorization for the federal transit program that includes robust funding necessary to grow the program.
  - \* Congress needs to act this year to restore, maintain and increase the purchasing power of the federal motor fuels user fee to support increased federal investment for the public transportation program.
  - \* While the federal motor fuel user fee remains a viable funding source, Congress should adopt a bipartisan mechanism that provides predictable funding for investment in public transportation.
  - \* Short-term authorizations increase project costs and decrease certainty for long-term planning
  - \* Dedicated funding, separate from highway and transit funding, should be available for investment in high-speed and intercity passenger rail.
- See the full text of APTA testimony at [www.apta.com](http://www.apta.com).

Public transit supporters, such as CRT and our allies, should contact their Congressional representatives to urge a reasonable and adequate Transportation Act that brings the USA into the 21st century of public transportation.



**CRT at work for Western New York**  
**Compiled by Doug Funke, CRT President**

The **CRT Quarterly Meeting** was held on 15 April 2015. CRT President Doug Funke moderated a panel that discussed the critical issue of State and local funding for public transit. Panelists were Erie County Legislator Patrick Burke and Lynda Stevens from the Subsidy Action Committee of the Coalition for Economic Justice. The meeting focused on the need for more adequate state and local funding for public transportation including transit impacts of tax exemptions offered by the Erie County Industrial Development Agencies. NYS Assemblyman Sean Ryan was also invited but due to a miscommunication did not make the meeting. We will try to arrange a future date and time for Assemblyman Ryan to speak.

**Gondola Press Event.** CRT co-sponsored a major press event to present ideas for a low-cost gondola that could connect the inner and outer harbors. CRT Vice President Seth Triggs led this effort and made the presentation. We had significant media coverage including print, radio, and television coverage.

**Continued to support the PPG Plank to improve local and state funding for public transit.** Met with political leaders including NYS Senators Marc Panepinto and Tim Kennedy, Erie County Legislator Betty Jean Grant, and Erie County Commissioner Maria Whyte.

The CRT Map and Brochure Committee continued to work on **revisions of the CRT brochure.**

CRT Board Members participated in the GBNRTC **One Region Forward Citizens Planning School.** Workshops focused on issues relating to WNY health including public transportation.

President Doug Funke **presented the CRT vision and priorities for expansion of public transportation to the Board of the Central Terminal Restoration Corporation.** The talk included a focus on the CRT proposed light rail extension to the Buffalo Niagara International Airport that could include the use of a revitalized Central Terminal as a multi-modal transportation center.

Doug Funke met representatives of VOICE Buffalo to discuss **improved public transit service on Main Street east of Transit Road.**

Doug Funke continued to serve on the **NFTA Buffalo-Amherst Alternatives Analysis Project Advisory Committee (PAC).**

Secretary Lynn Magdol **attended a national conference, Transit Initiatives and Communities,** sponsored by the Center for Transportation Excellence. She returned with many good ideas for coalition building and getting the message out.

### Appreciations and Remembrances



We are sorry to see Jack and Betty Howell leaving the CRT Board. Both have served on the Board for many years, most recently as Treasurer and Secretary, respectively. While Jack and Betty are leaving the Board, they plan to stay involved in CRT and will be available to help with special events when needed. We extend a hearty thank you to Jack and Betty for their many years of dedicated service and wish them well.

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We are sad to report the passing of Dick Olday. Dick was a longtime CRT Board Member and past Vice President. He was an enthusiastic and unflappable promoter of light rail extensions and had deep knowledge of the history of rail-transit throughout Buffalo-Niagara. He frequently shared his historical knowledge illustrated with pictures from his collection that we have included on our website and FaceBook pages. He was always ready with an idea or thought provoking perspective during Board Meetings and was a good friend. He will be missed.

Citizens for Regional Transit seeks to educate the public, public officials, their authorities and agencies in the Buffalo–Niagara region about the benefits of a comprehensive transportation system including an expanded Metro Rail.

[www.citizenstransit.org](http://www.citizenstransit.org)

Facebook: Citizens for Regional Transit

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Please support our efforts with your dues and donations. Send your payment by [Paypal](#), or mail to CRTC, 617 Main St., Buffalo, NY 14203

*Calendar*

September – NFTA public hearings – Fare Policy. Details TBA.

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Citizens Regional Transit Corporation  
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Buffalo, NY 14203

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