



Citizens *for* Regional Transit

CRT News

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Citizens for Regional Transit Next Public Meeting

27 October 2021

5:30 – 7:00pm

Register in advance for this meeting:

<https://cornell.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJYqfuuhpj4jHN2pSyWiErKMjcCH7N7IAUnD>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

Topic

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

Speakers:

**Doug Funke, President, Citizens for Regional Transit
Lizzie Taber, Cornell / PPG High-Road Fellow**

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.

The Federal Transit Administration Has Agreed to Support The Metro Transit Expansion Project (good) But Plans to Re-Examine the Bus Rapid Transit Option (very bad)

By CRT President Douglas Funke and Elizabeth Giles

We appreciate the FTA's willingness to serve as sponsoring agency for the Metro Transit Expansion and welcome them to the project and to Buffalo. But we don't want to redo work already completed and reexamine alternatives already eliminated – and eliminated for good reason.



Picture Source: Cover of NFTA-Metro's "Metro Rail Expansion Project Locally Preferred Alternative Refinement Technical Report ". January 2019.

The FTA's requirement to restudy the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) option is unnecessary. As explained in more detail below, here's why: (1) The NFTA, its consultants, and the community have already spent years selecting, refining, and evaluating the alternatives for this project, a process that included comparison of Light Rail Transit (LRT) with BRT along many possible alignments, establishing LRT to be the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). (2) Restudying this question will delay the project needlessly, further postponing implementation of desperately needed high-capacity transit solutions; (3) The BRT alternative was rejected for many good reasons, outlined below; and (4) Selecting BRT fails to leverage the investment already made in building Buffalo's successful, functioning LRT.

1. We already spent many years evaluating project alternatives

The original plan for Buffalo's light rail network was developed in the 1960s and 1970s (Reference 1) revisited periodically over the years with major studies completed in 2001 and 2010 (References 2 and 3). Based on these foundational plans, the first in-depth transit expansion evaluation began in 2012. It progressed over the ensuing years and involved

extensive stakeholder input and public outreach, resulting in identification of a Locally Preferred Alternative and a detailed Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). (Reference 4.) The LPA was refined in 2018, resulting in a modified alignment based on further public input. (Reference 5.) The new alignment better addressed the needs and concerns of key stakeholders and reduced overall costs. The GBNRTC sponsored and led a parallel Transit Oriented Development (TOD) study that found significant economic benefits along the planned LRT deployment (Reference 6). It has now been 10 years developing this latest plan for the Buffalo Metro LRT extension. We don't need to go back and reconsider alternatives that have already been rejected and rejected for good reason!

2. Re-examining BRT will only add further delays

Re-examining BRT will prolong the project needlessly. Buffalo deserves support in moving forward with the LPA selected after years of analyses completed in accordance with state and federal requirements and with extensive public and stakeholder input. We ask the FTA to respect the work already completed and support moving forward with the locally selected solution without delay.

3. BRT Will Not Provide the Needed Capacity and Will Require a Mode Shift in the Middle of Key Transit Corridor

The selection of LRT for the Amherst extension is the only approach that will work effectively on this corridor for the following reasons:

Capacity. LRT can handle the UB student load because each train, with a top capacity of 700, can carry hundreds of passengers each trip. Buses can only carry 50 people (100 people with articulated buses, but these don't work well in snow and are not recommended for Buffalo). In order to carry the number of passengers demanding service between the UB campuses, selection of BRT featuring non-articulated (reduced capacity) buses would require bus departures less than every 10 minutes apart. This is not realistic, given the requirement for operation in mixed traffic on Main Street and Kenmore Avenue and high-traffic cross intersections to navigate – intersections like Sheridan Drive that will need many minutes to clear crossing traffic. The inadequacy of bus-based transit for UB is evident every day on the bus system that UB currently operates (“The Stampede”), which regularly experiences bunching and overloading, even on the shorter, more direct Millersport route the Stampede now takes.

Mode Shift Disruption. The selection of BRT will require a mode shift in the middle of a critical transit corridor. This will significantly lengthen the travel time from Amherst to downtown Buffalo and back. Passengers heading downtown would have to exit BRT buses at University Station, make their way into the station, take the long elevator or escalator to the LRT tunnel, and wait for the next train before completing the trip downtown. This will add 5 to 15 minutes (depending on how long they have to wait for the next train) to an already 50-minute long trip (10% to 30% increase). Also, in the Amherst direction, in addition to the mode shift, the potential for hundreds of passengers exiting the LRT and attempting to board 50-person BRT buses can overwhelm the bus system during peak periods. Commuters who have the choice to drive will not choose this inconvenient and

terribly time-consuming option. Having to get up, gather one's belongings, and go out into the weather mid-journey at University Station to wait for another mode negates the important advantage of the one-seat transit ride: being able to read or prepare for one's workday ("Metrotasking") during the commute.

3. BRT Fails to Leverage Prior Investments. Buffalo has already invested in one of the most successful LRT systems in the country, ranked 4th in passengers per mile (pre-recession) and carrying 18% of all NFTA-Metro riders – this on a 6.4 mile LRT compared to over 1,000 miles of NFTA-Metro bus service! This past investment is worth billions in today's dollars that can be cost-effectively expanded to provide a seamless transit connection between Buffalo and Amherst – our largest and most populous suburb – along a corridor containing a large percentage of the current and future jobs, and in the process connecting all 3 UB campuses. Failing to leverage this prior investment would be a huge wasted opportunity and a colossal mistake.

We ask the FTA to please respect Buffalo's LPA selection based on 10 years of work, decades of planning, and extensive stakeholder and public input. Please help us expedite moving forward on this project and leveraging the investments already made to build upon Buffalo's existing light rail.

References:

1. *Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority. Preliminary Design Report. Buffalo-Amherst Metro Line. Prepared by Bechtel Associates. June 1974.*
2. *Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority. Strategic Assessment: working Paper. Prepared by Parsons Brinkerhoff. August 2001*
3. *NFTA-Metro. Erie County Transit Service Restructuring and Fare Study – Strategic Assessment. Final Report. August 2010.*
4. *NFTA-Metro. Metro Rail Expansion Project. Locally Preferred Alternative Refinement Technical Report. January 2019.*
(https://www.nftametrotransitexpansion.com/pdfs/LPA_refinement_technical_report_012019.pdf)
5. *NFTA-Metro. Metro Transit Expansion transit Project. Draft Environmental Impact Statement.. January 2020.*
(https://www.nftametrotransitexpansion.com/document_library/deis)
GBNRTC / WSP. Comprehensive Transit-Oriented Development Plan. Final Report. August. 2018.
(https://www.nftametrotransitexpansion.com/pdfs/buffalo_tod_book_export_20180919.pdf)

**NFTA-Metro Updated their Transit Service Guidelines Without Any Public Review.
This Was Wrong and Led to a Missed Opportunity!**

By CRT President Douglas Funke

The NFTA-Metro “*Service Design Guidelines & Delivery Standards – 2021 Revision*” (Reference 1) was updated earlier this year. We agree that this document needed to be revisited (as it was last updated in 2012) but we were very disappointed that the NFTA Board of Commissioners adopted the updated version without allowing public comments. Citizens for Regional Transit had just started reviewing the draft that was posted without announcement when it was quickly approved by the NFTA Commissioners and then announced as final at the next Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) meeting. The CAC is where community organizations and representative transit riders meet for the purpose of providing inputs on transit projects, programs, and decisions. These are foundational NFTA transit service guidelines, so there should have been a chance for stakeholders to provide input as called for in the “*NFTA-Metro’s Public Participation Plan – 2018 Update*”. (Reference 2.)

We had many suggestions for improving the service guidelines. Most importantly, the updated guidelines and service delivery standards should have been tied to the NFTA-Metro stated mission and vision and not just benchmarked to other budget-limited transit systems. They should have included aspirational guidelines that would satisfy the stated NFTA-Metro goals, while also acknowledging current budget-limited service levels. Guidelines for meeting the most essential transit needs within current budgets should be distinguished from service guidelines meeting the “highest level of safe, clean, affordable, responsive, and reliable public transportation...” called for in the NFTA-Metro mission statement, and for the NFTA “to be seen as the best transit provider in the US” as called for in the NFTA vision statement. Meeting these goals would attract new riders and address equity issues plaguing our society, but at least pledging to meet them when funding permits would give those in charge of the purse strings a reason to devote more resources to transit.

The following tables give CRT recommendations for service levels that meet the NFTA mission and vision.

Table 1. CRT Recommended Service Frequency Improvements

| Parameter* | Current NFTA-Metro Budget-Limited Service Guidelines** | | CRT Recommended Service Goals that Meet the NFTA-Metro Mission*** | |
|-------------------|--|-----------|---|-----------|
| | Peak | Off-Peak | Peak | Off-Peak |
| Metro Rail | 10-12 min | 15-20 min | 8-10 min | 12-15 min |
| Bus Rapid Transit | 10-12 min | 15-20 min | 8-10 min | 12-15 min |
| Frequent | 10-15 min | 20-30 min | 10-12 min | 15-30 min |
| Standard | 30 min | 60 min | 15-20 min | 20-30 min |

* The parameter names used here are those in the NFTA document. We believe they should be reevaluated. For example, “Standard” implies that they meet NFTA goals or an unidentified trade standard. Perhaps “Standard” should be called “Basic” or “Basic-Local” as used in the NFTA-Metro 2016 Service Plan (Reference 3).

** Budget limited values are those now in the updated guidelines and standards document.

*** CRT Recommended goals are defined to meet the NFTA-Metro mission and vision.

Table 2. NFTA-Metro Span of Service Guidelines – Current Budget-Limited

| Parameter | Budget-Limited* | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| | Weekday | Saturday | Sunday |
| Metro Rail | 5:30am-1:00am | 7:00am-1:00am | 8:00am-12:00am |
| Bus Rapid Transit | 5:30am-1:00am | 7:00am-1:00am | 8:00am-12:00am |
| Frequent | 5:30am-1:00am | 6:30am-12:00am | 7:00am-10:00pm |
| Standard | 5:30am-12:00am | 6:30am-12:00am | 7:00am-10:00pm |
| Limited Stop | 6:00am-10:00pm | None | None |
| Suburban Express | 6:30am-9:00am 4:00am-6:30pm | None | None |
| Local Express | 6:30am-9:00am 4:00am-6:30pm | None | None |
| On-Demand Microtransit | 5:30am-12:00am | TBD | TBD |
| Trolley (seasonal) | TBD | TBD | TBD |

* Basic limited are those now in the NFTA-Metro service standards & guidelines document.

Table 2. CRT Suggested Span of Service Guidelines to Meet NFTA-Metro Mission Goals*

| Parameter | NFTA Mission-Based Goals * | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| | Weekday | Saturday | Sunday |
| Metro Rail | 24 hours/day | 24 hours/day | 24 hours/day |
| Bus Rapid Transit | 24 hours/day | 24 hours/day | 24 hours/day |
| Frequent | 24 hours/day | 24 hours/day | 24 hours/day |
| Standard | 24 hours/day | 24 hours/day | 24 hours/day |
| Limited Stop | 5:00am-1:00am | 5:00am-1:00am | 5:00am-1:00am |
| Suburban Express | 5:00am-1:00am | 5:00am-1:00am | 5:00am-1:00am |
| Local Express | 5:00am-1:00am | 5:00am-1:00am | 5:00am-1:00am |
| On-Demand Microtransit | 5:00am-1:00am | 5:00am-1:00am | 5:00am-1:00am |
| Trolley (seasonal) | TBD | TBD | TBD |

* CRT recommended service guidelines are selected to meet the NFTA mission and vision.

The inclusion of service guidelines that satisfy the NFTA mission and vision statements in addition to budget-limited service levels would give meaning and substance to the NFTA’s mission and vision statements. Their absence leaves the NFTA-Metro vision statements as vague, empty platitudes. Also by establishing service delivery standards only based on currently available budgets diminishes the long-term value of this document.

We hope the NFTA will reconsider this document and look for public inputs. It would be an excellent topic for CAC discussion.

References:

1. *NFTA-Metro. Service Design Guidelines & Delivery Standards – 2021 Revision.* (https://www.nfta.com/media/k2yhjha4/metro_service_guidelines.pdf)
2. *NFTA-Metro. Public Participation Plan. 2018 Revision.* (<https://metro.nfta.com/media/2978/ppp.pdf>)
3. *NFTA-Metro. Erie and Niagara County Service Plan. Prepared by TMD. July 2016.*

CRT Work Highlights:

July - September 2021

Transit Advocacy. Attended FTA/NFTA's Public Hearing on the Amherst Transit Expansion Project. Stated our disagreement that we should re-evaluate BRT as a potential mode. Submitted a letter to the NFTA summarizing our main points. Started working on a more extensive letter to the FTA (deadline October 14th) that will make the points in the above article.

Doug's Road Show – Doug presented arguments for accomplishing the East Side Buffalo-Metro extension to Marva Threat, East Side Field of Dreams.

Cornell Cooperative Extension / PPG High-Road Fellow. This program, sponsored by PPG / Cornell Cooperative Extension ran from June and through July. Our Fellow, Lizzie Taber, examined and documented the benefits for extending Metro Rail to the East Side and airport. The effort focused on equity and Transit Oriented Develop (eTOD) potential that can be achieved with this extension. Betsy and Carl worked 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). Worked with statewide organization, NY for TCI to promote adopting TCI. Working on a letter to the new NYS Governor, Kathy Hochul

Keep CRT On Track

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

Calendar

October 27, 5:30 – 7:00. CRT Quarterly Public Meeting (via Zoom)