



CRT News

**A Quarterly Publication of Citizens for Regional Transit
Vol. 28, Issue 2 April 2026
SPECIAL Passenger Rail Issue**

***Citizens for Regional Transit Next Public Meeting
14 April 2026***

***North Park Branch Library
975 Hertel Avenue
(Old K-Mart Parking Lot)
Buffalo, NY 14216
6:00 – 7:00 pm
Doors open at 5:30***

← ***Attend in Person***

Or

Online →



<https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/2532074113893?p=upEMYkeB7dsGc5nuni>

***Ideas for Making Passenger Rail More Competitive in New York State
Speaker: CRT Member John O'Brien
Moderator: Doug Funke***

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December 2025 – April 2026**

Special Issue Featured Article: Ideas for Making WNY Regional Rail More Competitive Today

**By John O'Brien
CRT Member**

How to Make Amtrak More Affordable; An Amtrak Pricing Proposal

Current Ridership Situation

In Western New York, Amtrak is primarily a conduit to transport riders to and from the New York City metro area. Based on 2022 data prepared by the Rail Passengers Association (RPA), roughly 55% of riders boarding or departing from Niagara Falls or Buffalo stations were traveling over 400 miles between WNY and the New York City metro area. After New York City, trips to the Capital region were a distant second for most common ridership pairs at approximately 15% of overall ridership. Amtrak trips between intermediate destinations within the Niagara Falls-Albany corridor constituted less than a quarter of rides beginning or ending in Western New York despite trips of this length typically constituting the bulk of ridership for stations in other corridors.

This weak demand can be attributed, in part, to fare pricing between cities within the Niagara Falls-Albany corridor not being competitive with transit alternatives. For example, at \$18 from Buffalo-Depew or \$21 from Buffalo-Exchange, a one-way ticket from Buffalo to Rochester is more expensive than the cost of gas and tolls along the New York State Thruway for a solo traveler who owns a vehicle. Resultantly, ridership along the corridor is relatively low, even for distances where rail travel could be expected to garner greater ridership. By adopting a modified pricing schedule along this corridor, Amtrak might be able to incentivize more riders to use this corridor for shorter distance train travel.

Cost-per-Mile Comparison

As a means of normalizing the comparison of trips between all city pairs, Table 2 contains a breakout of Amtrak ticket prices on a dollar per mile basis. These comparisons use a base estimate taken from looking at weekday tickets approximately two months out from the date of travel (shown in Table 1) divided by mileage estimates taken from the Ridership Statistics compiled by RPA. By comparing the cost per mile of trips between city pairs, we can normalize the value of a seat based on the distance traveled.

Table 1: Current Ticket Prices between City Pairs along the Niagara Falls - Albany Corridor

Origin	Destination										
		Albany	Schenectady	Amsterdam	Utica	Rome	Syracuse	Rochester	Buffalo-Depew	Buffalo - Exchange	Niagara Falls
Niagara Falls		50	50	50	50	40	30	23	13	13	
Buffalo - Exchange		47	47	47	39	38	29	21	12		13
Buffalo - Depew		43	43	43	34	34	25	18		12	13
Rochester		40	39	35	25	25	20		18	21	23
Syracuse		26	25	25	18	18		20	25	29	30
Rome		24	21	20	12		18	25	34	38	40
Utica		22	20	19		12	18	25	34	39	50
Amsterdam		18	13		19	20	25	35	43	47	50
Schenectady		12		13	20	21	25	39	43	47	50
Albany			12	18	22	24	26	40	43	47	50

Note: Train fares for this table were collected on 11/21/2025 for a one-way weekday ticket on 1/29/2026. Train fares are subject to change as the travel date approaches subject to availability.

Table 2: Current Cost-Per-Mile Averages between City Pairs along the Niagara Falls - Albany Corridor

Origin	Destination										
		Albany	Schenectady	Amsterdam	Utica	Rome	Syracuse	Rochester	Buffalo-Depew	Buffalo - Exchange	Niagara Falls
Niagara Falls		0.157	0.166	0.177	0.224	0.190	0.178	0.256	0.448	0.565	
Buffalo - Exchange		0.159	0.169	0.181	0.195	0.203	0.199	0.313	2.000		0.565
Buffalo - Depew		0.148	0.158	0.169	0.175	0.188	0.179	0.295		2.000	0.448
Rochester		0.175	0.185	0.181	0.188	0.208	0.253		0.295	0.313	0.256
Syracuse		0.173	0.189	0.219	0.333	0.439		0.253	0.179	0.199	0.178
Rome		0.220	0.231	0.274	0.923		0.439	0.208	0.188	0.203	0.190
Utica		0.229	0.256	0.317		0.923	0.333	0.188	0.175	0.195	0.224
Amsterdam		0.500	0.722		0.317	0.274	0.219	0.181	0.169	0.181	0.177
Schenectady		0.667		0.722	0.256	0.231	0.189	0.185	0.158	0.169	0.166
Albany			0.667	0.500	0.229	0.220	0.173	0.175	0.148	0.159	0.157

Note: Train fares for this table were collected on 11/21/2025 for a one-way weekday ticket on 1/29/2026. Train fares are subject to change as the travel date approaches subject to availability.

Although cost-per-mile averages generally fall over longer distances, those ratios do not move with a clear relationship to the distance traveled. While tickets from Niagara Falls or Buffalo to Albany are below \$0.16 per mile, the ratio jumps to \$0.175 per mile at Rochester, a 13% increase in per mile costs after travelling 61 miles. The ratio declines slightly to \$0.173 per mile after travelling 79 miles to Syracuse before jumping another 27% starting in Rome, 41 miles away from Syracuse and closer to Albany. For trips beginning or ending in Buffalo, costs per mile are lowest at Buffalo-Depew but spike nearly 10% on average for trips traveling the additional six miles between Buffalo-Exchange. When a route extends to include Niagara Falls,

per mile costs may fall towards the ratio established at Buffalo-Depew but remain higher for stations between Rome and Albany.

Load Factor

The current ticket prices are particularly expensive when considering that the trains regularly have unsold seats. Load factor, a calculation based on the number of passenger miles for which seats were occupied divided by the total number of seat miles available on a given route, can be used to compare used ridership capacity between Amtrak routes. Statistics for the Niagara Falls-Albany corridor are not generally published as such, rather ridership volumes are attributed either to the Lake Shore Limited or the Maple Leaf, the latter of which combines both services ending at Niagara Falls as well as trains continuing to Toronto. Because the Lake Shore Limited data covers a broader geography and includes riders whose trips neither begin nor end on the Niagara Falls-Albany corridor, I rely on the Maple Leaf data here to illustrate the likely capacity on most trains along the corridor.

According to data for the full FY25 fiscal year, which ran from 10/2024 to 9/2025, the Maple Leaf route recorded a load factor of 37.6%. This rate is lower than Amtrak’s overall average of 53.4%, the 66.4% average along the New York City-Albany portion of the Empire Service, and the 67.5% average of Regional and Acela services within the Northeast Corridor. Given that New York City is by far the most common origin or destination for travelers along this corridor, we can infer that these trains are at their fullest in Albany. As the trains move closer to Niagara Falls, more seats remain unoccupied, driving down the route’s load factor and creating greater capacity for ridership between cities within the corridor.

The trains along the Niagara Falls-Albany corridor have room for additional riders for short-distance trips. Decreasing the price for these trips would not draw from the largest existing sources of revenue (i.e., trips to destinations along the Hudson River) while offering more competitive prices and using capacity more efficiently.

Cost-per-Mile Price Ratios Along Other Corridors

Moreover, lower cost-per-mile averages are already offered along other corridors across the country. Particularly for tickets on the company’s longer national routes (e.g., Lake Shore Limited, Empire Builder, Texas Eagle), fares for short-distance trips at intermediate destinations can be significantly cheaper on a per mile basis. Examples of the prices and ratios for select city pairs are shown in Table 3. In each instance, the cost ratio is at least 25% lower than the lowest possible city pair ratio along the Niagara Falls-Albany corridor.

Table 3: Examples of Pricing for Coach Fares along Amtrak’s Long-Haul National Routes				
Origin	Destination	Cost	Miles	Cost-per-Mile
Albany, NY	Boston, MA	\$14	199	\$0.070
Chicago, IL	St. Louis, MO	\$25	284	\$0.088
Seattle, WA	Spokane, WA	\$30	326	\$0.092
Cleveland, OH	Toledo, OH	\$11	107	\$0.103
San Antonio, TX	Austin, TX	\$10	93	\$0.108

Note: Train fares for this table were collected on 11/21/2025 for a one-way weekday ticket on 1/29/2026. Train fares are subject to change as the travel date approaches subject to availability.

Tickets along the Northeast Corridor also typically feature at least one option with a significantly lower cost-per-mile ratio for various city pairs. While these Night Owl tickets are only available for travel during the early morning hours, they provide a price floor for intercity transit options and are, theoretically, priced to incentivize efficient use of the route. Table 4 shows the cost-per-mile average on city pair combinations available on at least one train per day.

Origin	Destination	Cost	Miles	Cost-per-Mile
Baltimore, MD	Philadelphia, PA	\$5	95	\$0.053
Philadelphia, PA	Washington, DC	\$10	135	\$0.074
Boston, MA	New York, NY	\$25	231	\$0.108
Philadelphia, PA	New York, NY	\$10	91	\$0.110
New York, NY	New Haven, CT	\$10	75	\$0.133

Note: Train fares for this table were collected on 11/21/2025 for a one-way weekday ticket on 1/29/2026. Train fares are subject to change as the travel date approaches subject to availability.

These examples show that the broader proposal herein is not without precedent. Even along the heavily used Northeast Corridor, Amtrak provides intercity rail service well below the existing per mile prices charged along every combination of stations within the Niagara Falls-Albany corridor.

A Proposed Fix

In the interest of expanding Amtrak usage along the Niagara Falls-Albany corridor, New York State elected officials should work with Amtrak to adopt a standard pricing model of \$0.1825 for the first 60 miles of travel and \$0.1425 for each additional mile of travel (rounded down to the nearest dollar) with a minimum trip price of \$7 for all Empire Service trains within the Niagara Falls-Albany corridor. Pricing such as this would generally preserve the existing long-distance travel pricing that constitutes the bulk of Amtrak’s ticket revenue along the corridor while making short-distance intercity fares price competitive with transit alternatives.

Table 5: Ticket Prices between City Pairs along the Niagara Falls-Albany Corridor based on Proposed Calculation

Origin	Destination										
		Albany	Schenectady	Amsterdam	Utica	Rome	Syracuse	Rochester	Buffalo-Depew	Buffalo - Exchange	Niagara Falls
Niagara Falls		47	45	42	34	32	26	15	7	7	
Buffalo - Exchange		44	42	39	30	29	23	11	7		7
Buffalo - Depew		43	41	38	30	28	22	11		7	7
Rochester		35	32	29	21	19	13		11	11	15
Syracuse		23	21	18	9	7		13	22	23	26
Rome		17	15	12	7		7	19	28	29	32
Utica		16	13	10		7	9	21	30	30	34
Amsterdam		7	7		10	12	18	29	38	39	42
Schenectady		7		7	13	15	21	32	41	42	45
Albany			7	7	16	17	23	35	43	44	47

Note: Train fares for this table were collected on 11/21/2025 for a one-way weekday ticket on 1/29/2026. Train fares are subject to change as the travel date approaches subject to availability.

Table 6: Cost Per Mile Ratios between City Pairs along the Niagara Falls-Albany Corridor based on Proposed Calculation

Origin	Destination										
		Albany	Schenectady	Amsterdam	Utica	Rome	Syracuse	Rochester	Buffalo-Depew	Buffalo - Exchange	Niagara Falls
Niagara Falls		0.147	0.150	0.148	0.152	0.152	0.154	0.167	0.241	0.304	
Buffalo - Exchange		0.149	0.151	0.150	0.150	0.155	0.158	0.164	1.167		0.304
Buffalo - Depew		0.148	0.151	0.150	0.155	0.155	0.157	0.180		1.167	0.241
Rochester		0.153	0.152	0.150	0.158	0.158	0.165		0.180	0.164	0.167
Syracuse		0.153	0.159	0.158	0.167	0.171		0.165	0.157	0.158	0.154
Rome		0.156	0.165	0.164	0.538		0.171	0.158	0.155	0.155	0.152
Utica		0.167	0.167	0.167		0.538	0.167	0.158	0.155	0.150	0.152
Amsterdam		0.194	0.389		0.167	0.164	0.158	0.150	0.150	0.150	0.148
Schenectady		0.389		0.389	0.167	0.165	0.159	0.152	0.151	0.151	0.150
Albany			0.389	0.194	0.167	0.156	0.153	0.153	0.148	0.149	0.147

Note: Train fares for this table were collected on 11/21/2025 for a one-way weekday ticket on 1/29/2026. Train fares are subject to change as the travel date approaches subject to availability.

President's Column

By Doug Funke

This column expands on the ideas presented in John O'Brien's article above, especially as related to the Niagara Falls – Buffalo region. Figure 1 compares and summarizes the current and proposed Amtrak prices proposed by John with the addition of NFTA transit prices.

This is a potentially large market, *and huge benefit for tourists who want to explore the attractions in Buffalo in addition to in Niagara County*. Niagara Falls draws over 8 million visitors every year. NFTA transit buses are running twice an hour in each direction between Buffalo and Niagara Falls. But they are not promoted to tourists. In fact, it's hard for visitors to find out where to get an NFTA bus to Buffalo. Amtrak trains also travel between Niagara Falls and Buffalo and can provide transportation between the two cities. Tourists can be offered an opportunity to “Shuffle off to Buffalo” on the train. Who wouldn't want to for affordable price?

NFTA buses run every 30 minutes in each direction, so can carry 640 people in an 8-hour period. Amtrak trains run 3 times a day in each direction (including the Toronto trains) and can carry over 300 people or 921 per day. Between the two, given current bus/trolley/train frequencies, that's 1,562 people a day (in each direction).

In addition to the NFTA buses and Amtrak, the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area runs the “Niagara Discovery” shuttle buses to Niagara County attractions. Both Sara Capen the Executive Director of the Niagara Falls Heritage Area and Pat Kaler Director of Visit Buffalo, say they support expanding the Niagara Discovery shuttle to Buffalo. The Heritage Trolley runs every 30 minutes with a capacity of over 30 people or 480 over an 8-hour period.

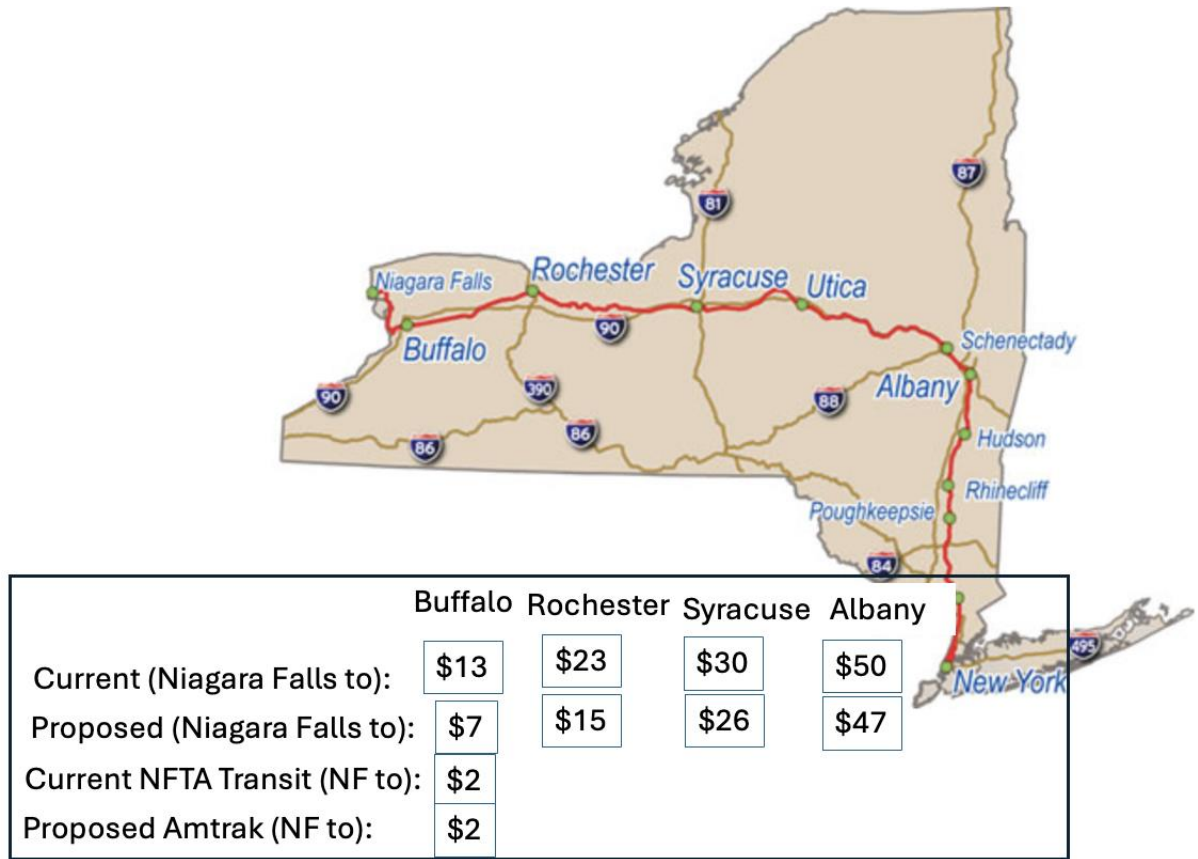


Figure 1. Current and Proposed Amtrak, shuttle and Transit Fares.

The Buffalo-Niagara Falls market is unique for several reasons.

1. The area is served by public transit, Amtrak, and the Niagara Discovery Shuttle.
2. Both Niagara and Erie Counties are served by the same transit system operated by the NFTA. For the price of a transit ticket (\$2 per ride capped at \$5 for a day) passengers can travel between all major cities in the region including Niagara Falls, Buffalo, and Lockport.
3. Because Niagara Falls attracts large numbers of visitors – over 8 million per year, there are opportunities and need for transit options to and from Niagara Falls.
4. Buffalo has many attractions of its own for visitors (e.g., museums, theater, historic naval park and architecture) but few visitors to Niagara Falls hear about them and take the trip.

Public transit between Buffalo and Niagara Falls is not promoted to tourists and is mostly used by locals even though buses run every half hour. Amtrak between the cities is also not used by tourists since it costs \$13 each way. They have a capacity of over 300 people but run mostly empty.

There is also a free tourist shuttle in Niagara County, but it doesn't go to Buffalo. Both Erie and Niagara County tourism leaders (Pat Kaler of Visit Buffalo and Sara Capan of the Niagara Falls Heritage Area) have publicly expressed support for extending the Niagara Falls Discovery Shuttle to Buffalo but this hasn't happened yet. This is a missed opportunity.

Making the Amtrak fare between Niagara Falls and Buffalo the same as transit would provide a high-capacity travel option between the two cities at \$2 each way. That could bring in \$1,400 for each train. These trains are already in service but are running empty - a wasted resource and missed opportunity.

Of course, a major advantage is we would make Buffalo-Niagara a regional tourist destination. Visitors would stay longer, spending money in hotels, restaurants, etc.

CRT Work Highlights

January – March 2026

Continued Working with the East Side Parkways Coalition to advocate for full restoration of Humboldt Parkway and to oppose NYSDOT’s original plan to partially tunnel the 6-lane expressway.

- Attended NYSDOT Listening Sessions to express CRT’s position on the Queen City Forward Kensington Expressway Project.
- Made ESP arguments to NYS Appeals Court on our lawsuit appeal to require DOT to follow CLCPA law and NYS Constitution’s “Green Amendment.”
- Attended ESP Town Hall on February 18th.
- Attended ESP planning meetings twice a month

Continued supporting Scajaquada Corridor Coalition (SCC) in planning for implementation of the Region Central Plan that:

- Plans call for disconnecting the Scajaquada Expressway from the I-190 and NY33 and integrating a slow speed parkway with Buffalo street network more consistent with Olmsted’s original vision.

Continued supporting Buffalo Metro extensions

- Attended NFTA DL&W Station Grand Opening on December 8th.
- Continued distributing “YES, EXTEND METRO” yard signs for the Amherst extension.
- 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.

Community involvement.

- Attended The Partnership for the Public Good’s Community Agenda Rollout on January 16th.
- Attended Scajaquada Coalition Meeting on March 21st. Heard update on Region Central Project from Senator Sean Ryan and the coalition.

Held CRT Annual Public meeting. The meeting was held January 22.

- Doug reviewed 2025 accomplishments.
- Seth was our featured speaker. His talk answered the question; did Buffalo Metro Rail kill downtown. His full paper was included in the January Newsletter.

Reviewed Transportation Reports and provided written comments.

- Unified GBNRTC’s Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP).
- NFTA Sustainability Plan.

Supported UB Small Built Works Studio. This UB class is designing potential Buffalo Metro Rail stations along Buffalo’s “Belt Line” and Buffalo Metro Rail extensions to the airport again this year.

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).

Communication.

- Doug was interviewed by Channel 2 on Queen City Forward Project.
- Submitted Another Voice article on the Queen City Forward (Kensington) Project.
- Praised Mayor Ryan’s call for taking over the Scajaquada Expressway project to provide community focus rather than DOT’s regional traffic focus.

Get your Extend Metro yard 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.

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@citizenstransit.org if you want to help.

Sign up for us on EBAY. Go to [eBay > My eBay > Account > Donation Preferences > Favorites](#). Then make Citizens Regional Transit Corporation (our legal name) your favorite charity.