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Citizens Regional Transit Corporation

Annual Report 2020

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Submitted by:

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2020 Annual Report

Executive Summary

This report summarizes the accomplishments, milestones and activities of Citizens for Regional Transit Corporation during 2020. Citizens Regional Transit Corporation is known as Citizens for Regional Transit (CRT). This shorter designation is used in this report.

During 2020 Citizens for Regional Transit was led by the following Board of Directors and Officers: Douglas Funke (President), Seth Triggs (Vice President), Rebecca Reilly (Secretary), and Jim Gordon (Treasurer). In addition the following persons served as members of the Board of Directors: Gladys Gifford, Elizabeth Giles, and Carl Skompinski. Also former long-time CRT Board Member and Joan Bozer was recognized as Emeritus Board Member. Collectively these Board Members logged 1,874 hours of service to the community valued at \$52,584 (using the NYS volunteer hourly rate of \$27.59).

At the end of 2020 CRT had 50 members, including carryovers from 2019. Going into 2021 we have 32 members including 2020 carryovers (1 year grace period) and those who have re-up'd so far. The CRT Secretary and Treasurer maintain the names and addresses of CRT members. CRT has 661 Facebook likes (down 5%) and 252 Twitter followers (up 2%). Our newsletter email list has 1,320 recipients (same as last year). Our media contacts list has 160 recipients (down 1%).

CRT continued to advocate for an integrated multimodal public transportation system that serves everyone fairly in WNY. We also continued to educate the public and leaders from both public and private sectors. We kept members and the public informed about transit issues and events via the CRT website and Facebook page, 4 published newsletters, and timely Twitter messages throughout the year. Seth Triggs managed the CRT website; Carl Skompinski managed our Facebook page. Rebecca Reilly was the CRT Newsletter Editor. CRT 2020 Committee Chairs were:

- Nominating Committee – Elizabeth (Betsy) Giles
- Communications and Public Relations Committee – Rebecca Reilly
- Legislative Committee – Gladys Gifford
- Membership Committee – (committee was not active)
- Grants Committee – (committee was not active)

CRT activities were significantly curtailed during 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Below are highlights of 2020 activities, many accomplished virtually:

- ***Saw new multimodal train station opened in Buffalo.*** In 2017, CRT joined with PPG to demand that the dilapidated Exchange Street Amtrak station be replaced. This year the new station opened for operations.
- ***Participated in a Buffalo-Niagara Proposed Public Mobility Concept Plan meeting*** led by Niagara River Greenway Commission (NRGC). The meeting focus was to explore ideas for expanding the Niagara Discovery shuttle to Buffalo and Lockport (Niagara Falls, 1/29/20).
- ***Attended NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) public meeting on the proposed 12-state Transportation and Climate Initiative (TCI)*** (Rochester, 2/12/20). TCI, if implemented, will put a price on carbon to generate sustainable funding for clean transportation, especially transit.
- ***Participated in the CNU Future of Mobility: Remaking Buffalo for the 21st Century workshop*** (Buffalo, 2/25 – 2/29/20). This 5-day workshop explored new age ideas for improving mobility in downtown Buffalo. Doug participated in this week-long represented transit in the discussions.



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- **Attended Transit Awareness Day to meet with NYS legislators** (Albany, 3/10/20). Met with 14 state legislators to promote financial support for transit operations and projects.
- **Reviewed NFTA draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Amherst light rail extension** project and offered comprehensive comments and recommendations (3/22/20).
- **Met with political and community leaders** (limited in number due to the pandemic).
- **CRT plank was selected for Partnership for the Public Good (PPG) agendas in 2020 and 2021.** Both planks call for passing the TCI and dedicating funds raised to transit. The 2020 plank also called for dedicating a larger share of county revenues to transit. The 2021 plank also calls for providing federal funds to support transit throughout the pandemic.
- **Joined and worked with NY for TCI** (<https://nyfortci.org>). NY for TCI is a coalition of organizations working to get NYS to join the 12-state TCI initiative. This work supported our work on the PPG plank (above).
- **We were successful in our proposal to host a Cornell ILR / PPG “High Roads Fellow”.** A paid student fellow from Cornell University will work with CRT in evaluating benefits of extending Metro Rail through Buffalo’s East Side and to the airport. Work will be during June and July, 2021.
- **Participated in Rail-Volution Buffalo delegation and attended the Rail-Volution annual conference** (virtual, 10/28 – 10/20/20). The Buffalo delegation is exploring the possibility of hosting a future Rail-Volution conference in Buffalo.
- **Provided community review and input to public agencies.** Served on transit-relevant committees and task forces and participated in public review of NFTA and GBNRTC documents.

Held two public meetings in 2020, held in January and October. The January meeting included the CRT Annual business meeting. These meetings featured one or more guest speakers, were publicized, and open to the public. Table 1 gives a summary. The January meeting was held at the central branch of the Buffalo and Erie County Library. The October meeting was held virtually. Our April meeting was cancelled due the pandemic.

Table 1. CRT Quarterly Meetings

Date	Speaker	Summary
Thursday, January 16, 2020	Doug Funke, President, CRT Kelly Dixon, Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC)	Doug summarized the CRT annual report highlighting CRT successes and ongoing priorities. Kelly provided a summary of progress and plans on the One Region Forward initiative.
Thursday, October 15, 2020	Nick Sifuentes, Executive Director, Tri-State Transportation Campaign Thomas George, PE, Director of Public Transit, NFTA	Nick and Tom summarized COVID-19 transit issues. Nick gave an overview of research and recommended transit practices during and after the pandemic. Tom summarized the NFTA’s experience operating under COVID-19 conditions and post pandemic plans.

CRT’s fiscal performance was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. We saw reduced income relative to planned budget and also reduced expenditures. The reduced income was due to our inability to solicit new members and fewer donations. We also saw less expenditures thus essentially breaking even with a deficit of \$49.56. Budget details are presented in Appendix B. We did not attend any festivals in 2020 and therefore did not solicit signatures on our petition calling for a transit revolution, which we hope to resume in 2021.

One new (returning) Board member has been nominated for 2021. We welcome Maddie McCauley back to the CRT Board to replace Aidan Ryan who is not continuing in 2021. The 2021 CRT Board will be Douglas Funke (President), Seth Triggs (Vice President), Rebecca Reilly (Secretary), Jim Gordon (Treasurer), Carl Skompinski, Gladys Gifford, Elizabeth Giles, and Maddie McCauley. Like last year, former CRT Board Member, Joan Bozer, will continue to be recognized as an Emeritus Board Member.



Appendix A

Expanded Activity Descriptions

Details of projects and outreach meetings listed in the Executive Summary are described here in more detail.

- ***Saw new multimodal train station opened in Buffalo.*** In 2017, CRT joined with PPG to demand that the dilapidated Exchange Street Amtrak station be replaced. We were next invited to serve on Mayor Brown's train station siting committee. We argued for a low cost station to be built downtown and that Central terminal be designated as Buffalo's main station. This year the new downtown station opened for operations. We continue to argue for Central Terminal.
- ***Participated in a Buffalo-Niagara Proposed Public Mobility Concept Plan meeting.*** Doug represented CRT at this meeting, which was led by NRG (Niagara Falls, 1/29/20). The meeting brought together public, private, and community sector leaders from Niagara and Erie Counties to discuss ideas for connecting attractions along the Niagara River (Buffalo to Youngtown) and in Lockport. There was strong support for public transit to achieve this goal. We noted the need to regional tourism marketing as an element for program success.
- ***Attended NYS DEC public meeting on proposed 12-state TCI program.*** (Rochester, 2/12/20). Doug and Betsy attended this public meeting where NYS DEC staff who were leading the NYS exploration of TCI presented the outlines of the proposed TCI program, which if successful will bring together 12 states to put a price on carbon and fund clean transportation initiatives, especially transit.
- ***Participated in the CNU Future of Mobility: Remaking Buffalo for the 21st Century workshop*** (Buffalo, 2/25 – 2/29/20). Doug participated in this week-long workshop exploring mobility improvements for downtown Buffalo. Several CRT board members attended the public meetings associated with this workshop. Ideas generated ranged from deployment of automated vehicles to improvements in transit and bike infrastructure.
- ***Attended Transit Awareness Day Conference.*** Doug and Betsy attended the NY Public Transit Association (NYPTA) Transit Awareness Day in Albany (3/10/21). We visited with 14 WNY State Legislators and legislative staff to promote transit and support increased state budgets for transit statewide. We visited the following NYS Senators: Patrick Gallivan, Christopher Jacobs, Tim Kennedy (Senate Transportation Committee Chair), Robert Ortt, Michael Ranzenhofer,; and the following NYS Assembly Members: Patrick Burke, Bill Magnarelli (Assembly Transportation Committee Chair), Karen McMahon, Crystal Peoples-Stokes (Assembly Majority Leader), Sean Ryan, Robin Schimming, Michael Norris, Angelo Marinello, and Monica Wallace.
- ***Reviewed NFTA draft EIS on the Amherst light rail extension project and offered comments and recommendations.*** Several CRT board members attended the NFTA public meetings where the NFTA staff summarized the draft EIS. We provided verbal comments at the public meetings and several TV media outlets interviewed Doug and Jim. We also provided detailed written comments documenting CRT recommendations on a chapter-by-chapter basis (3/22/20). (Our comments is available on our website, www.citizenstransit.org.)
- ***Met with political and community leaders.*** The number of meetings was limited due to the pandemic. In addition to the NYS legislators noted above, we met with the following community leaders.



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- Ms. Lois New (NYS DEC) who is heading NYS's exploration of joining the 12-state TCI program. (Albany, 3/10/21). We emphasized the importance of transit for tackling climate change and therefore the importance of dedicating TCI funds to transit.
- Congressman Brian Higgin's staff member, Chris Fahey (virtual, 8/10/20). Discussed range of issues including transit / commuter rail connectivity between Buffalo and Niagara Falls, improved US-Canada border crossing needs, support for extending Buffalo's Metro Rail (Amherst, DL&W, East Side / airport, and eventually Southtowns), and the importance of transit improvements when the skyway comes down.
- ***CRT planks were selected for Partnership for the Public Good's (PPG) 2020 and 2021 agendas.***
 - The 2020 CRT plank built on progress during 2019 when CRT was also on the PPG agenda. We worked to encourage Governor Cuomo to join the 12-state TCI, which calls for putting a price on carbon to generate sustainable funding for clean forms of transportation, especially transit. We emphasized the key role of TCI for meeting the goals of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) already passed into law, and for fighting climate change generally. We wrote letters and met with state and local leaders, including Ms. Lois New the NYS TCI lead person (described above), to promote joining TCI.
 - We joined with NY for TCI (<https://nyfortci.org>), a coalition of NYS organizations working together to promote New York State's joining TCI.
 - Attended 12-State Climate and Transportation public meeting (virtual, 9/29/20)
 - During the 2021 CRT plank we will continue to promote Governor Cuomo's signing of the TCI and then will work with NYS legislators to make sure that TCI implementing legislation dedicates revenues to public transit improvements and operations. We will also work at the federal level to promote adequate financial support for transit throughout the pandemic.
- ***We were successful in our proposal for a Cornell ILR / PPG "High Roads Fellow".*** A paid student fellow from Cornell University will work with CRT in evaluating potential benefits of extending Metro Rail through Buffalo's East Side to the airport. The student fellow will work full time during June and July of 2021. Specific tasks may include benchmarking Buffalo's East Side with other light rail and bus rapid transit deployments to evaluate potential benefits, outreach to East Side community organizations to assess support for Metro Rail extension, review of prior NFTA studies to evaluate ridership and economic development estimates, review of relevant literature on the impact of light rail investments in poor neighborhoods, and other tasks that may emerge as important during the study.
- ***Participated in Rail-Volution Buffalo delegation and attended the Rail-Volution annual conference*** (virtual, 10/28 – 10/20/20). Several CRT board members attended the virtual conference; Elizabeth Giles did so representing CRT in the official Buffalo delegation organized by the NFTA, GBNRTC, and the UB Regional Institute, which entailed meeting with the Rail~Volution leadership and formally evaluating insights gleaned from the conference. The Buffalo delegation is now exploring the possibility of forming a diverse coalition of community stakeholders around the theme "Building Livable Communities with Transit" to equitably shape the future of mobility and transit-oriented development in the Buffalo Niagara Region. CRT hopes that this working relationship with Rail~Volution will lead to hosting a future Rail-Volution conference in Buffalo.
- ***Provided community review and input to public agencies.*** Served on transit-relevant committees and task forces and participated in public review of NFTA and GBNRTC documents.
 - Served on Erie County Community Climate Change Task Force. Erie County has formally committed to meeting the green house gas reduction (GHG) goals of the Paris Climate Agreement and the goals of the NYS CLCPA legislation. Doug continues to serve on the Erie County Community Climate Change Task Force. It is clear that public transportation will play a key role in meeting the Paris goals and the State's CLCPA goals.



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- Served on the NFTA Community Advisory Committee (CAC). Betsy continued to serve as a member on the NFTA's CAC providing feedback and recommendations on NFTA programs and operations.
- Provided inputs to NFTA and, GBNRTC.
 - Attended the NFTA FY 2022 budget hearing (11/3/20). Provided oral comments at the meeting and subsequently documented the comments in writing.
 - Reviewed GBNRTC planning documents and attended GBNRTC planning and public meetings, offering comment and recommendations.
 - Made comments on the draft 2020 – 2024 GBNRTC Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) and on proposed TIP amendments throughout the year (e.g., TIP amendments dealing with electric bus deployment, the NFTA transit oriented development (TOD) study, and NFTA's bus shelter replacement program).

Community Education and Outreach

- **Selected Correspondence**
 - Letter to the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC) stating our position that keeping the outer car-free and providing public transportation will be important for the success of outer harbor development. (1/6/20).
 - Letter to NYSDOT Region 5 commenting on plans for removing the skyway. The letter emphasized the importance of public transit improvements like extending Buffalo's Metro Rail to help handle the commuter demand after the skyway is removed. (1/28/20).
 - Letter to Governor Cuomo commending his action in signing the CLCPA and imploring him to also sign onto the 12-state TCI program. The letter detailed the importance of transit for meeting CLCPA and CTI TCI goals. (2/21/20)
 - Letter to NFTA commending fast action responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - Letter to Buffalo Common Council supporting Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Board recommendations calling for pedestrian and transit access improvements along Bailey Avenue. (11/27/20).
 - Numerous letters to GBNRTC commenting on proposed Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) changes including: Transit capital projects, infrastructure improvements, Metro Rail extension, and access mobility management.
- **Attended public and community events**
 - Buffalo Transit Riders Union (BTRU) membership meeting (Buffalo library – Gonzalez branch, 1/11/20))
 - Border crossing press event held by Senator Charles Schumer (Niagara Falls, 1/13/20)
 - Niagara River Greenway Commission board meeting (Marcy Casino, 1/14/20)
 - State of Transportation and Health Equity webinar (Smart Growth America) (1/23/20)
 - NYSDOT Skyway removal public meeting (Buffalo, 1/28/20)
 - East Side Corridor Update information meeting (Northland Development Center, 2/5/20)
 - Mayor Brown's State-of-the-City lunch and presentation (Convention Center) (2/20/20)
 - Informal meeting with WNY Youth Climate Council representatives (Casa Di Pizza, 2/13/20)
 - NFTA public meeting on the Amherst extension project (Sweethome Middle School) (2/25/20 and 2/26/20)
 - The Congestion Con webinar, Transportation for America (virtual, 3/17/20)
 - Think Transit First webinar, Reconnect Rochester (virtual, 3/18/20)
 - Southern bike trail public meeting (GoBike Buffalo, virtual, 5/13/20).
 - Transit and COVID webinar (Tri-State Transportation Campaign, 5/19/20)



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- GBNRTC Recertification meeting (virtual, 6/2/20)
- Restoring and Reimagining Transit Service in a Pandemic-Transformed World webinar (NYPTA, 6/4/20)
- Town Hall on Climate Leadership and Community Protection Action hosted by Senator Tim Kennedy and Assemblywoman People-Stokes (virtual, 7/17/20)
- Women's Safety on Transit: Alternative Models to Policing webinar (9/1/20)
- Effectiveness of Air Treatment in Transit Applications (NYPTA, virtual, 9/29/20)
- 12-State Climate and Transportation public meeting (9/29/20)
- Rail-Volution: Equity, Housing, Transit & the Next Federal Reauthorization webinar (10/8/20)
- WNY Youth Climate Council Community Meeting (virtual, 11/7/20)
- US-EPA Webinar – New Mobility Mindsets: On-Demand Transit (11/16/20)
- Central Terminal Public Engagement Meeting #2 (virtual, 12/9/20)
- ***Radio and Television interviews.***
 - Doug was interviewed on PPG's weekly radio show (virtual, WBFO, 6/12/20)
 - Doug and Jim were interviewed by several TV stations at the NFTA Amherst Metro Rail extension EIS public meeting.
- ***Published editorials.***
 - Doug Funke had an Another Voice article published in the Buffalo News (BN) (4/30/21). The article highlighted the importance of rail transit for slowing climate change and noted the dramatic public response to the COVID-19 pandemic as an indicator of what is possible.
 - CRT member, and recent Board Member Lynn Magdol had a letter to the editor in the BN (4/13/20) commending the NFTA's rapid and dramatic changes accomplished in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - Betsy Giles had BN Another Voice article published (7/15/20) asking our public leaders to go beyond just renaming a rail station after Buffalo architect, Robert Coles, and instead act on Robert Coles vision by extending Buffalo Metro Rail through the East Side.
- ***Published Quarterly Newsletter.*** Published the CRT News for the 21st year. Four issues of the newsletter were published during 2020.
- ***Website, Facebook and Twitter.*** Continued to maintain a CRT website (www.citizenstransit.org) and Facebook page. Also maintained a Twitter account where upcoming events are publicized and links to relevant information on transit are noted.
- ***Presentations to area community organizations:***
 - Unitarian Universalist Church of Amherst. Doug Presented talk on transit's role in achieving foals for a clean environment (1/28/20)
 - Torch Club. Doug presented the case for transit at a monthly speaker meeting (12/15/20)



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Appendix B

2021 CRT Budget

Budget Items	2020 Budget	2020 Actual	2021 Budget	Notes
2020 Balance Close			810.56	<- End of 2020
INCOME				
Donations	500.00	178.70	200.00	Includes Amazon Smile
Dues	1,500.00	609.00	600.00	We will resume corporate member solitations after pandemic
Grants	0.00	50.00	50.00	
Income Totals	2000.00	837.70	850.00	
EXPENSES				
Copy & Printing	200.00	20.74	50.00	Reduced, no need to print brochures
Office Supplies & Postage	150.00		50.00	
Festival Registration	100.00		100.00	
Conferences	1,065.00	611.52	350.00	Covers part of Rail-Volution and Transit Awareness Days registration.
Ads	150.00		0.00	
Memberships	135.00	90.00	135.00	NYPTA \$90 and Preservation Buffalo \$45
Miscellaneous	200.00		0.00	
Web hosting		165.00	165.00	
Expense Totals	1800.00	887.26	850.00	
Income minus expenses		(49.56)		
Proposed balanced 2021 budget			850.00	



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