



# Citizens *for* Regional Transit

CRT News

A Quarterly Publication of Citizens for Regional Transit

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## *Next CRT Public Meeting*

**9 October 2024**

**6:00 – 8:00pm**

(doors open at 5:30)

***How New Traffic Moving Tools together with Highway Removal and Public Transportation Investments Can Help Mitigate Climate Change***

St. Philips Episcopal Church Parish Hall  
15 Fernhill Street across from ECMC

<Link to be provided>

### **Speakers:**

Athena Hutchins, P.E., Executive Director, Niagara International Transportation Technology Coalition (NITTEC)

James Gordon, Treasurer, Citizens for Regional Transit

## **Public Meeting Summary:**

The NYS Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), now NYS law, requires reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) production by 40% by 2030 and by 85% by 2050 to mitigate climate change. Transportation is the largest GHG producing sector with vehicles the biggest component. Reductions in vehicle miles travelled (VMT) and “road diets,” together with investments in less polluting transportation modes are needed. Across the U.S. cities are removing urban highways and investing in public transit. In NYS, Rochester and Syracuse are removing their urban highways. CRT is calling for removing the Kensington Expressway and restoring the treasured Olmsted Parkway in Buffalo.

So how to satisfy the transportation demand with fewer highways? This meeting will look at tools for meeting Buffalo’s transportation needs without the Kensington Expressway. NITTEC Executive Director, Athena Hutchins will introduce us to NITTEC and its latest traffic management and optimization tools coming online to move traffic and transit vehicles alike more efficiently. CRT’s Treasurer, James Gordon will introduce the national trend of highway removal and discuss the role of high-capacity public transit. He will specifically describe the potential role of Buffalo’s light rail rapid transit expansion for filling a key gap in moving people without the Kensington.

## **President’s Column**

### **Pedestrian Safety Is Key to Making Transit Work**

By Douglas Funke, CRT President

CRT’s April quarterly newsletter introduced progress on making pedestrian crossings on Niagara Falls Boulevard safer. Now, let me be more specific with pictures. As we said last quarter every transit trip starts as a pedestrian trip and involves crossing a street or road. When the road is a busy arterial like Niagara Falls Boulevard (NFB), the crossing can be intimidating and dangerous.

The NYS Department of Transportation together with the towns of Amherst and Tonawanda have already implemented several improvements.

- Speed limits were lowered.
- The number of lanes pedestrians must cross were reduced in places.
- Refuge islands were installed at selected locations to reduce crossing distance and allow crossing in two stages.
- Improved pedestrian crosswalk markings were added.
- Improved Roadway lighting was installed.
- Pedestrian signal heads and equipment were upgraded.
- “NO TURN ON RED” signs were installed at selected intersections.

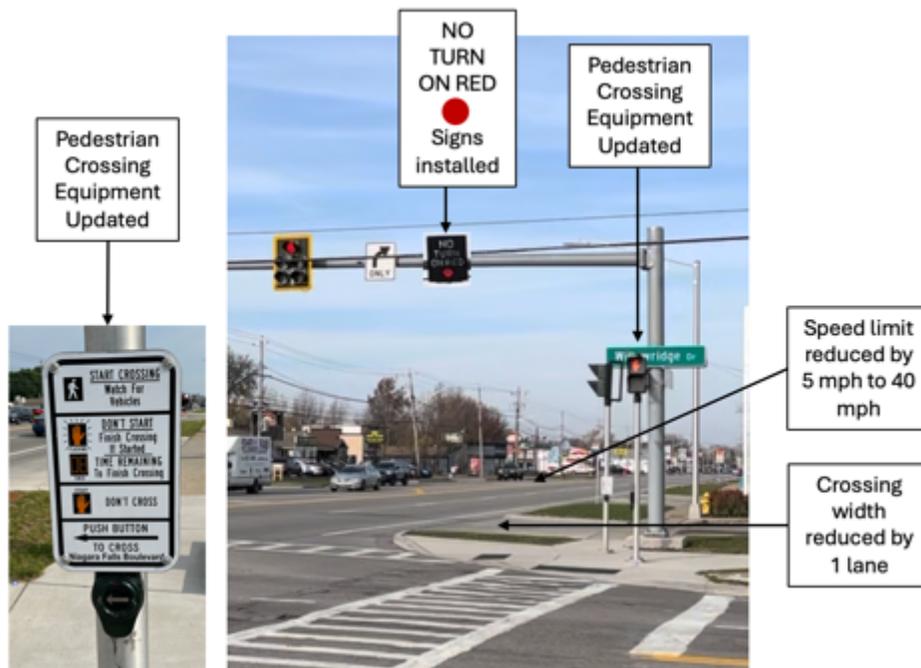


Figure 1. Improvements made at NFB and Willowridge Drive

We are recommending several more improvements They are drawn from the FHWA’s Pedestrian Safety Guide and Countermeasure Selection System (Reference 1) and the pedestrian signal section (Chapter 41) of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and highways (MUTCD) (Reference 2).

The most important of these is to implement a “leading pedestrian interval.” This gives pedestrians a head start before cars get a green light. As currently implemented, cars turning right from Willowridge Drive onto Niagara Falls Boulevard get the green light at exactly when pedestrians are told it’s OK to cross. *This is especially dangerous because right-turning drivers are looking left to see if any cars are running the light when pedestrians are told to cross.*



Figure 2. When pedestrian indicate the desire to cross NFB the OK to cross signal illuminates at the same time that the green light for cars turns on.

We are also recommending that the pedestrian crossing signal information be displayed at all times or at least when a pedestrian indicates the desire to cross. Currently pedestrians must wait until the next green cycle that could be up to 2 minutes even if the traffic light is already green.

Here is a link to the letter we sent to the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council, the NYSDOT, and town and community leaders.

<http://citizenstransit.org/node/230>

We hope these improvements can be made quickly.

#### References:

Reference 1. PEDSAFE, Pedestrian Safety Guide and Countermeasure Selection System. USDOT Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).  
[http://www.pedbikesafe.org/PEDSAFE/countermeasures\\_detail.cfm?CM\\_NUM=47](http://www.pedbikesafe.org/PEDSAFE/countermeasures_detail.cfm?CM_NUM=47)

Reference 2. Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition. Chapter 41. December 2023. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/pdfs/11th\_Edition/mutcd11thedition.pdf

## **Regional Rail Opportunities**

By CRT Board Member, Thomas DeSantis

The bipartisan infrastructure law offers a great opportunity for achieving the State's Rail Plan. (<https://www.dot.ny.gov/empire-corridor/feis> ). But this is being squandered by lack of action and focus at the State level.

This situation is not due to a lack of demand for more frequent, on time service, nor is it due to an inability to finance the necessary infrastructure improvements. These are just excuses. Those of us who have advocated for the benefits of better intercity rail services for decades know this all too well.

There is funding available and a plan in place! It is time to act. It is time to demand action. It is time to achieve what we have only dreamed of for so long and which can finally be within our reach if we act now. CRT calls on NYS to:

1. Progress NYS planning proposals to shovel-ready projects eligible for federal funding. Demonstrate that high speed rail (HSR) is a NYS priority.
2. Set a serious schedule with goals and milestones that will make HSR a reality in our lifetimes. The current 25+ year timeframe is way too long.
3. Balance the work schedule statewide. The current plan wrongly prioritizes improvements in Central Region and Downstate before any work is done in western NY.

These are low cost, high priority WNY projects that can be accomplished in five years! They should be prioritized and expedited:

1. The Niagara Falls Amtrak Maintenance Facility. This is a shovel-ready, but stalled, project that is critical for the success of the entire NYS HSR system. The land is already State-owned, and the cost is moderate.
2. Rail improvements to the Niagara Branch. This is a short rail line through Erie and Niagara Counties that needs low-cost upgrades. These improvements are integral to better connectivity with the fastest growing metro in Canada, Toronto, and to the entire Canadian passenger rail network.

These improvements also build a foundation for future Amtrak improvements like better Buffalo-Cleveland connectivity. A Buffalo/Cleveland Corridor as ripe for study now. This is the "right" travel distance connecting important travel markets. We remain hopeful that NYSDOT will see its potential (as we do in WNY) and work for its inclusion a federal study.

There is hope. The Empire Corridor EIS is now final. There is real potential for significant funding assistance from the federal Bi-partisan Infrastructure Bill. For everyone who wants to see progress made, call and write our elected representatives. WNY offers the best region for a refocused intercity rail initiative.

If not now, when?



Figure 3. Train leaving Buffalo's new Amtrak Station.

## Transit News

**Canalside Station.** The new Canalside Station is now complete and open.

**Single Tracking Continues.** Metro Rail trains will continue single tracking between Fountain Plaza and Canalside for system maintenance, into the fall. More information is on the NFTA website. <https://metro.nfta.com/schedules/route/145>. You can always call the NFTA Customer Care line to report problems (716-855-7211).

**Amherst Extension EIS Delayed Again.** The updated draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that was supposed to be released in early fall is delayed again. We are now told it will be released for public review in early 2025 or the end of 2025 at the latest. We are told that design work continues and the final implementation in 2030 will not slip.

## Get your yard Extend Metro 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.

## CRT Work Highlights

April - June 2024

### Community Outreach and Education.

- Tabled at Northland Beltline National Night Out (August 13<sup>th</sup>, Mt. Olive Baptist Church).
- Reinitiated support to UB's Small Built Works Program for fall that is designing potential Buffalo Metro stations along Buffalo's "Belt Line" and Buffalo Metro extensions to the airport.

### Continued Working with the East Side Parkways Coalition to advocate for restoration of Humboldt Parkway and to oppose NYSDOT's plans to partially tunnel the 6-lane expressway.

- Wrote comments to FHWA and FTA documenting GBNRTC's failure on the Kensington Project noting GBNRTC member NYSDOT's leading role. (July 10<sup>th</sup>.)
- Lawsuit with CEJ and others against NYS DOT continues. NYS Supreme Court hearings are planned for October

### Supported Buffalo Metro Amherst extension.

- Continued distributing "YES, EXTEND METRO" yard signs.
- If you would like a yard sign, contact us at our email: [crtc@citizenstransit.org](mailto:crtc@citizenstransit.org). We are requesting a \$10 donation so we can purchase more signs.

### Regional Rail Promotion

- Worked with the GBNRTC-led regional rail committee to draft a letter for GBNRTC to send to NYSDOT expressing local support for high speed rail implementation in WNY. Letter is still in draft form.

### Communication

- Sent letter to FHWA and FTC with our inputs on the GBNRTC recertification process. Gave GBNRTC high marks, generally, but criticized GBNRTC-member NYSDOT for poor performance on the Kensington Expressway Project.

**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).

### **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](mailto:CRTC@citizenstransit.org) if you want to help.

### **Calendar**

- 21 September 2024. Jim will speak at the Parkside Community Town Hall on transit capacity issues vs. highways.
- 28 September 2004. UUCA 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Living Green Festival. Unitarian Universalist Church of Amherst, 6320 Main Street, Williamsville, NY. 10am – 6pm
- 4 October 2024. Temporary restraining order press conference on the Kensington tunnel project.
- 9 October 2024. CRT Public Meeting on traffic moving tools and transit solutions for supporting highway removal.
- 25 October 2024. Court date for the lawsuit against NYS DOT on the Kensington tunnel project.