



CITIZENS for REGIONAL TRANSIT NEWS

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Volume #6 Issue #2

February, 2005

Metro Rail Ridership Rising

NFTA reports that Metro Rail ridership for 2004 is up slightly from 2003.

Think of it--

There is no hockey season this year--no crowds taking Metro Rail to the arena--but Metro Rail ridership is rising.

Canisius College, Bryant & Stratton, Buffalo State and Medaille College now provide student transit pass programs--and Metro Rail ridership is rising.

Buffalo Place and the NFTA offer a shuttle service to downtown--and Metro Rail ridership is rising.

The trend is encouraging, but should be no surprise. Nationwide, all forms of rail transit ridership has increased 11.2% since 1998, according to a January, 2005, study by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) www.gao.gov.

The difficulty comes when the rest of the story comes out: the capacity of the transportation system to accommodate its ridership is not keeping up with demand.

The GAO says (p. 76):
"According to DOT's 2002 Conditions and Performance report, capital investment by all levels of government remains well below DOT's estimate of the amount needed to maintain the condition of the highway and transit systems. As a result,... the overall performance of the system declined, thus increasing the number of highway and transit investments needed to address existing performance problems."

Let's hold our elected officials accountable. Let's insist that transit investments are the best investments.

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CRTC Monthly Meeting

**Tuesday, February 15
12:00 Noon**

A Conversation with

**Michael Ball,
Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus**

**"Transit-Oriented Development
Comes to Buffalo:"**

**How the Medical Campus Designers are including
access to Metro Rail
as an essential feature of their project."**

Michael Ball joined the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC) as a Project Manager in February 2004. He is responsible for managing the Healthy Communities Initiative grant project and overseeing the implementation of the BNMC Master Plan. Mike also acts as the BNMC liaison with various departments within the City of Buffalo, manages landscape architecture and beautification projects throughout the medical campus, and administers federal and state appropriations dollars obtained for infrastructure improvements.

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Citizens Regional Transit meets at:

3330 Main Street, corner NF Blvd., Buffalo

University Presbyterian Church education wing
Enter through the parking lot door, take elevator to "ML."

CRTC meetings are free and open to the public.

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NYC Shorted Essential Transit Funding for Metropolitan Transit Authority

...by Jon Orcott , *newsday.com* 1-25-05

Gov. George Pataki's \$19.2-billion proposal for repair and construction work on our [NYC's] huge mass transit system is billions of dollars less than what the Metropolitan Transportation Authority says it needs over the next five years.

Some may see it as necessary fiscal restraint. But low-balling mass transit is disinvestment in a system essential to the regional economy. Indeed, the governor's budget plan jeopardizes New York's future.

For 100 years, NYC's fortunes have been tied to mass transit. The subway provided the pattern for progress in the 20th century. The subway's descent into malfunction and crime was synonymous with New York City's crisis in the 1970s. The subway's recovery is one of the great urban renaissance stories. There simply is no way the New York of 2000 could have existed if it was trying to function with the mass transit system of 1980.

Since the early '80s, the MTA has organized infrastructure improvement into five-year programs. These plans brought the subway back from the brink and created better commuter railroads.

The MTA's 2000-2004 capital program has ended, and a new plan must be approved by Pataki, the State Legislature

Citizens Regional Transit Corp.

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174 Capen Blvd., Amherst, NY 14226

Pataki Flatlines NYSDOT Capital Projects

...www.tstc.org 1-31-05

and Mayor Michael Bloomberg...

Unfortunately, nearly all of the funding was borrowed, and the cost of that much debt will cause fare increases this year, and another MTA budget crisis in 2006. The new 2005-2009 plan not only needs to take the transit system into the 21st century; it must be paid for with real money.

Pataki's plan does bring new revenue to the authority in the forms of increased Department of Motor Vehicle fees and downstate mortgage-recording taxes. Unfortunately, these proposals are not enough to even cover the reduced five-year program. Budget documents explain that "additional resources" will be needed "to complete funding of the final two years of the plan."

State officials often talk of "additional federal funding" when asked about transportation budget holes, but Gov. Pataki will in fact forgo billions in federal money if he funds transit so weakly. Without local matching funds, the feds will not invest. In contrast, voters in a handful of other states approved \$40 billion in new transit-related taxes this past November. Those states are now poised to out-compete us for federal aid.

Our region will pay a price if the transit system does not grow. Since 1990, New York added more people (792,000) than any other U.S. city, and some think the population could be as high as 9 million by 2020. But such growth is not a given. If our basic urban systems cannot provide for it, it will go somewhere else. Can we add to the city's population and economy without increasing subway capacity? These are a few of the questions that need to be pondered in Albany before the governor's transit plan is set in stone.

Funding for NYSDOT capital projects in Governor Pataki's budget proposal is essentially flat....

Like the MTA [NYC] program proposal, revenue sources allocated to a planned DOT 2005-2009 program cannot complete the \$17 billion total. The final two years require additional resources. In the DOT case, the administration is considering "public-private partnerships" to bring in new money.

The part of the program that is funded relies in part on refinancing bonds that the DOT sells via the NYS Thruway Authority. Executive budget documents admit that the plan will further encumber the DOT with debt and that it is set up to push fiscal pain off into the future: "As a result of the restructuring, debt service costs will be lower in the early years of the Capital Plan, but the final-term of the existing debt will be extended by about 13 years resulting in higher levels of outstanding debt and future debt service costs."....

In testimony to the NYS Legislature over the budget proposal, NYSDOT Commissioner Joseph Boardman said it could make sense for the state to seek private involvement in infrastructure projects....Pataki's budget proposes legislation that would authorize state transportation agencies to enter into partnerships with private companies.

The Public Speaks: The NFTA Responds: "It can't be Done"

by Gladys Gifford, CRTC President

This past fall, the Buffalo Common Council and the CRTC demonstrated clear public support for expanding Metro Rail from downtown Buffalo to the airport and out to Transit Road. The Council passed a supporting resolution November 3. The CRTC completed a petition drive on November 1, collecting over 10,000 signatures. The CRTC took those petitions to the NFTA as part of a rally on November 18, and presented an analysis of the petition process to the NFTA Board on November 22. Business First confirmed public support with statistics from an independent poll conducted at the same time.

Chairman Kahl of the NFTA's Board of Commissioners responded to these efforts with a letter to the Council, November 23, and later copied to the CRTC, in which he outlined several reasons why expanding Metro Rail cannot be done.

Why not, Buffalo?

Mr. Kahl based his conclusions on the Executive Summary issued by the NFTA of a very important document, the Strategic Transit Assessment (STA). The STA was an analysis of the light rail system done by Parsons Brinckerhoff consultants for the NFTA and released in August, 2001.

When the STA was released, CRTC ran an analysis to compare the Executive Summary with the document it was supposed to summarize. Many discrepancies were uncovered, but the CRTC chose to accent the positive in CRTC newsletters in order to promote cooperative action for the future of the region.

One glaring discrepancy was in the analysis of the guidelines by which the Federal government approves grants to build light rail extensions. In conducting the STA, the consultants were limited to the actual studies done by the NFTA in preparation for the Federal guidelines. They found that they could not do a complete

analysis because several of the necessary studies had not been conducted by their client, the NFTA. They had no hard data from the NFTA to evaluate Federal New Starts criteria such as: travel time savings, operating costs per mile, zoning regulations near stations and local financial commitment.

But, both the Executive Summary and Mr. Kahl's recent letter insist that the region did not qualify for FTA funding.

Why not, Buffalo?

Mr. Kahl concludes his letter by expressing appreciation for the hard work done by the CRTC to collect the petition signatures. He promises that the NFTA Board of Commissioners will "explore the possibility of expanding the light rail transit system in the future."

In accordance with the recommendations of the STA, the CRTC will continue in its mission, to build positive public consensus around the critical need to expand Metro Rail.

Metro Rail was opened in 1985, a pioneer in the field of light rail systems. Since that time, many cities in North America have built light rail lines, and then expanded them. Buffalo has been left at the starting gate, with an overbuilt short line and wonderful plans for extensions that sit on the shelf.

Why not, Buffalo?

Many members of the public told the CRTC that they were skeptical of the NFTA, even while they hopefully signed the CRTC's petition. Another study to "explore possibilities" will not convince these taxpayers. Only public commitment by the NFTA to apply to the Feds for building the extension will satisfy them. The CRTC will continue to work on their behalf.

Changes coming to Citizens *for* Regional Transit News!

To make better use of our membership dues and donations, the Citizens *for* Regional Transit News will be published in electronic format (.pdf)

beginning with the March, 2005, issue, available at www.citizenstransit.org

Dues-paying CRTC members may continue to receive CRT News via US Mail as a membership benefit.

Help support CRTC! Join us! To become a CRTC member, see page 2.

Congressional timetable

...excerpted from "Washington Report" 1-31-05, apta.com

- January 4 Congress sworn in. Committees have been organized.
- February 2 State of the Union address delivered.
- February 7 President sends annual budget proposal to Congress. It is expected to recommend fiscal restraint on domestic discretionary spending (of which the federal transit and highway programs are a part), and propose reductions in some areas, in an effort to reduce the federal deficit. The budget will also include the latest Highway Trust Fund (HTF) revenue projections from the U.S. Treasury Department. These revenue projections, and related ones by the Congressional Budget Office, will play a role in the debate over transit and highway funding levels in the appropriations process and TEA 21 reauthorization.
- February 7 All earmarks for the new authorization bill due.
- April 15 Congress debates the Budget Resolution, due April 15. Congress never did agree on a Budget Resolution for FY 2005, and appropriators [i.e., lawmakers] based FY 2005 appropriations on the FY 2004 Budget Resolution and elements of the FY 2005 Budget Resolution approved by each house.
- May 31 TEA-21 extension expires. The formal part of the process to pass a new transportation bill will likely begin in March with markups in authorizing Committees.
- September 30 Budget for FY 2006 due. Congress often is unable to finish the appropriations process before the deadline and passes a series of "Continuing Resolutions" to fund programs at current levels until the process is completed. The last two years a number of unfinished appropriations bills, including the transportation bill that provides funding for highway and transit programs, have been combined into one large omnibus bill.

Congressman Brian Higgins has been appointed to the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

Congratulations, Brian!

Citizens Regional Transit Corporation

P.O. Box 1186
Buffalo, NY 14231-1186

return service requested

CALENDAR

Feb. 9 9:30 AM
GBNRTC -PCC meeting
Rm 1417, City Hall, Buffalo

Feb. 11 9:00 AM
GBNRTC Policy meeting
Quality Inn, Niagara Falls

Feb. 15 12:00 noon
CRTC Monthly Meeting
3330 Main St., Buffalo
Michael Ball, BNMC
"TOD comes to Buffalo"

Mar. 8 6:00 PM
Partners for a Livable WNY
EPIC Building, 1000 Main St., Bflo.
contact: 883-5070

Mar. 9 9:30 AM
GBNRTC -PCC meeting
Erie Co. Public Works Dept., Bflo.

Mar. 15 12:00 noon
CRTC Monthly Meeting
Michael Schmand, Buffalo
Place, "Queen City Hub"