



CITIZENS for REGIONAL TRANSIT NEWS

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The True Costs of Oil

*...guest editorial, by CRTC member,
Rev. Joel Miller*

Oil fuels today's economy. It fuels our culture of cars and in turn shapes this culture structures: everything from how housing must be built to the tax subsidies our government spends to maintain and construct roads and freeways. A chronic shortage of oil would devastate our standard of living and the lifestyle chosen by the majority of Americans.

I enjoy driving my car. If my car becomes significantly more expensive to drive, I will have to make many hard choices. But I fear what oil costs us--not just the financial costs, but the profound social costs.

We now occupy a country to preserve our access to its natural resources. However the flow of oil cannot be sustained. It will eventually run out, perhaps in about sixty years. But the fundamental principles of American society need only one sustainable resource: our common life together.

What will we use to fuel our nation, a hundred years from now? The hard truth is that there isn't enough oil to sustain an automobile lifestyle even through the lifetime of a child born today.

Before the oil is gone, I believe we must return to the greatest engine of our way of life: the social compact our ancestors made for all Americans. Our ancestors struggled to create a nation based upon principles of openness, accountability, and authority as granted by the people. Many of them paid the ultimate price for us--but they believed these principles were very much worth such costs.

Our reliance on oil costs us too much.

Plans and Possibilities: a Mid-Year Report

by Gladys Gifford, CRTC Chair

In January, CRTC offered several local items worth watching during the year 2003. Following is a mid-year update on what we have done and what we have observed so far.

‡‡ Capital maintenance at the NFTA for light rail has concentrated this year on refurbishing the rail cars. On a recent ride, we noticed newly painted seats on the interior of cars. CRTC will continue to agitate for capital maintenance of the subway stations.

‡‡ Thanks to Congressman Jack Quinn, a flurry of meetings have occurred regarding the Canal Harbor and the Outer Harbor. Both of these projects rely on Federal transportation dollars to construct major improvements to waterfront infrastructure. The Canal Harbor project includes the proposed Intermodal Transportation Center, now slated for the Donovan Building site.

CRTC spoke at the public scoping session, held at the Historical Society, May 13. We urged that the current temporary events station on Metro Rail be rebuilt as a permanent station and be renamed the "Waterfront" station. Such a change could be done early in the process, would be inexpensive to do, and would provide the public with tangible proof that progress was happening.

‡‡ Planning for the 1.5-mile extension of Metro Rail past the HSBC Arena to serve parking lots near Mississippi Street is underway. Erie County, Buffalo Place and the NFTA are working together to iron out the details. Such a short extension would replace the shuttle buses that are currently being provided at a cost of \$550,000 per year by the city, Erie Co. and Buffalo Place.

The initial cost of installing the extra trackage would be paid back in three years of service. The economic and development benefits will be substantial.

‡‡ Discussions over the reauthorization of the Federal transportation bill have intensified. Former NYS Assemblyman John Faso, who serves currently as a spokesperson for Governor Pataki, spoke to the GBNRTC Policy meeting, May 30. He emphasized that struggle is clear: between "donor" and "donee" states. The risk is that the formula for funding which the late Senator Pat Moynihan so carefully constructed might be changed. The current Bush administration proposal, presented May 14 (see details, p. 3) would cut \$300 million per year from NYS.

Given Faso's report, CRTC urges all interested citizens and local governments to speak with one voice, to insist that our Congressional delegation fight on our behalf to retain the formula originated by Moynihan.

‡‡ NYSDOT held discussions of the Outer Harbor/Southtowns Connector on May 14-15. No direct action is possible on the Skyway, as suggested by NYS Assemblyman Higgins. Designs are being finalized to reconfigure Fuhmann Boulevard and associated streets. No direct study is planned for a light rail extension in that area, but NYSDOT has assured CRTC that the expected route for such an extension has been preserved.

‡‡ Better passenger connections between downtown Buffalo and downtown Niagara Falls are planned, via Amtrak. Designs are complete for the restored Customs House/station close to the river in Niagara Falls. Plans await funding.

‡‡ Responses to the identified problems at the Kensington Expressway are expected from the NYSDOT. Since the highway people will only work on improvements to the existing roadway, it will be up to the CRTC and others to address the underlying problem: too much traffic.

Rail Passengers Praise, Criticize SAFETEA Legislation

...narprail.org 5-14-03

The Bush Administration today [5-14-03] released its proposed highway/transit reauthorization bill, the "Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2003" (SAFETEA). The bill covers the six years, fiscal 2004-2009.

The National Association of Railroad Passengers commends the Administration for maintaining the general framework of TEA-21. We are pleased that Secretary Mineta, in his cover letter to Capitol Hill, cites "intermodal connectivity" as one area where our nation's transportation system "faces significant challenges," and that SAFETEA reserves certain highway funds for highway connections to intermodal freight facilities. Secretary Mineta also rightly emphasized the terrible costs of motor vehicle crashes -- "nearly 43,000" deaths "every year" and a "total annual economic impact of...\$230.6 billion."

NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon said, "As our population ages, and congestion increases, the need for alternatives to driving will grow. A federal policy which gives highways a continuing strong edge in the competition for project dollars will not meet that growing need. Such a policy likewise will not help reduce fatalities, injuries and economic costs associated with highway accidents."

We are disappointed that the bill would not allow states to spend Highway Trust Fund money on intercity passenger rail projects if they so desire, and that even for mass transit the bill falls seriously short on several counts. The bill continues Swift Act high speed rail planning programs, but at a reduced level of \$25 million a year. (It is high time for construction.)

The bill sets 50% as the top federal share for new rail starts. This limit sends an unfortunate message: for the indefinite future, state and local officials will get far bigger federal matches when they build more roads than when they invest in new rail transit.

Moreover, mass transit "guaranteed" funding -- that is, trust fund money not dependent on the annual appropriations process -- nominally rises just 3.3% (falling behind inflation), from \$36 billion under TEA-21 (fiscal 1998-2003) to \$37.2 billion under SAFETEA. [These numbers should not be confused with TOTAL transit funding, which would rise from \$36.2 billion to \$45.8 billion. But much of that increase may never be realized, as the non-guaranteed part is simply an authorization dependent on the dicey annual general fund appropriations process.]

Also, the trust-funded (guaranteed) portion of the "New Starts" program that is crucial for rail transit, drops from 80% to 18%, even as the definition of New Starts is watered down to include "Bus Rapid Transit" (BRT). [The May 12 Los Angeles Times has three strong letters under the heading, "A Busway Is No Way, Compared With Rail."]

Federal policy, of course, still provides no incentive for states to invest in intercity passenger rail. In April 30 testimony, Deputy Secretary Michael Jackson told the Senate Commerce Committee that the Administration hoped to have a more detailed proposal about intercity passenger rail within two months. While he proposed ultimately providing 50% capital grants to states, he made clear that the Administration favors phasing out federal operating grants, a euphemism for phasing out most existing intercity passenger rail service.

Rail Historical Tour, via Bus, Planned for June 21

The local chapter of the National Rail Historical Society is running a trip to the Rochester & Genesee Valley RR Museum and the NY Museum of Transportation at Industry, NY, on June 21.

Roundtrip motorcoach, museum admissions, a ride on the speeder cars between the museums, lunch & a light dinner are included in the cost.

Adults \$40
Seniors \$38

Call 716-864-4074 or www.nfcnrhs.com (click on excursions) by Friday, June 13, reservation required.

Buses leave promptly: N. Tonawanda, 111 Oliver Street (NHRS) at 10 AM & Exit 49 (Depew) park & ride lot Transit Road at 10:15 AM

Citizens Regional Transit Corp.

aims to improve and expand bus and rail transit for all of WNY through citizen involvement and education.

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If a coalition of southern and midwestern states has its way, New York and Connecticut could lose desperately needed transportation funding as part of the upcoming TEA-21 reauthorization. A recent study by NYU's Rudin Center for Transportation says this would mean a funding loss of \$300 million annually (or 18% of total highway funding) for New York's transportation system.

Currently, motorists pay into the Federal Highway Trust Fund primarily through the federal gas tax. The amount collected in each state is different, depending on a variety of factors, such as population size, percentage of rural or urban areas, infrastructure (roads vs. transit) and geography. In the end, as with all federal programs, motorists in some states send more in federal revenues than the state receives in return via federal transportation agencies. "States' Highway Alliance for Real Equity" (SHARE), a coalition of so-called "donor" states, mostly in the southern and Midwest, wants to rewrite the federal transportation formula so that they get more money, using "donor" status as their logic.

Presently, TEA-21 provides a minimum guarantee to states, so that they receive at least 90.5% of the federal gas tax revenues collected within their borders in the form of federal transportation aid. In the upcoming TEA-21 reauthorization, SHARE aims to increase the minimum guarantee to 95%.

The plan is backed in Washington by Rep. Tom Delay, Ohio Senator George Voinovich and others.

Because New York relies so heavily on mass transit, the amount it sends to Washington from U.S. gas taxes is relatively low per capita. Therefore, SHARE's plan to hike the minimum guarantee would greatly reduce transportation funding for New York, along with other "donee" states, such as Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Washington, Massachusetts and Maine. For example, according to the Rudin Center report, if the 95% guarantee was enacted for FY 2002, Connecticut would have lost \$163 million, or 33% of its total highway budget. New Jersey, on the other hand, because it is so densely paved and serves as an East Coast corridor between major metro areas, would have seen an increase of \$57 million (or a 7% increase) in highways funds. (Apparently, New Jersey has recently signed on to the SHARE plan, though it could reduce federal transit funding for the state).

The SHARE alliance has even gone as far as to say that the recent \$4.5 billion given to Lower Manhattan for transportation improvements after 9/11 is more evidence that New York receives more transportation funding than it deserves, even though those funds are from the general fund for emergency response, not from FHWA or Federal Transit Administration programs.

There are many ways to look at the fairness of federal funding. The "donor" states approach is sophistry. It equates funding needs with federal gas tax revenues collected within a certain jurisdiction — a random measure by anybody's logic. The Rudin Center took several different perspectives:

- The federal funding formula, because it accounts for lane miles and other factors besides population, greatly benefits sparsely-settled states. For example, Wyoming got four times the national average in federal transportation aid per capita from 1996-2000.
- The MTA and NYC DOT receive the smallest amount in federal funding per passenger mile of the top 20 largest mass transit agencies in country.
- Nationally, the federal government paid an average of 18% for states' transportation projects, with states and localities making up the rest. However, New York and Minnesota paid a much highest proportion themselves, with only 11% and 12%, respectively, coming from the federal government.

The late Senator Moynihan used to publish an annual report showing how much more NY State residents and businesses paid in federal taxes each year than the state received back from federal programs. Transportation is one of a tiny handful of areas where NY was in the black regarding federal aid.

Senators Schumer and Clinton ought to revive the annual report, and make a practice of introducing minimum guarantee provisions into federal farm bills and other legislation regarding federal formula programs until SHARE state representatives get the message and agree to lay off our transit funding.

For the entire Rudin Center report, see www.nyu.edu/wagner/transportation/

... by the numbers:

miles of rail in NFTA system	6	expected 2004 fare-box revenue	\$3.4 million*
miles of bus routes in NFTA system	1,305	expected 2004 fare-box revenue	\$18.4 million*

Therefore, in 2003-2004, one mile of highway used by Metro Bus is expected to earn \$14,143 for the year, while one mile of rail used by Metro Rail earns \$571,333 for the year.

**figures reported in the 2003-2004 NFTA Budget*

Come to the CRTC Monthly Meeting, June 17....

“Light Rail Transit: A Proven Alternative”

Plan to attend CRTC's June meeting and see a 15-minute video featuring light rail systems in Buffalo, Calgary, Alberta, Sacramento, San Diego and Portland

See and hear how light rail brings benefits in 3 areas:

Transportation, Economic Development and the Environment.

Come to the CRTC Monthly Meeting, July 15....

“Central Terminal: Past, Present, Future”

Hear Russell Pawlak, from the Central Terminal Restoration Corp. discuss their work to restore the Central Terminal, a major stop on the proposed light rail extension to the airport.

Citizens *for* Regional Transit meets monthly in the education wing of University Presbyterian Church, corner of Main Street and Niagara Falls Blvd., Buffalo.

Enter via the parking lot door, and take the elevator to “ML.”

Meetings are free and open to the public. Brown bag lunches are welcome.

CALENDAR

June 10 5:30 PM
“Improving Streetscapes and Calming Traffic”
Burchfield-Penney Art Center

June 10 7:00 PM
“A Buffalo Conversation”
Canisius College Athletic Center

June 17 12 noon-1:30 PM
CRTC monthly meeting
3330 Main St., Buffalo

June 21 10:00 AM
NHRS bus tour of rail museums
(see info, p. 2)

June 24 7:00 PM
“Smart Growth and Choices for Change”
Burchfield-Penney Art Center

July 15 7:30 PM
CRTC quarterly evening meeting
speaker: Russell Pawlak, Central Terminal
Restoration Corp.
3330 Main St., Buffalo

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return service requested