



# CITIZENS for REGIONAL TRANSIT NEWS

published by Citizens Regional Transit Corporation  
P.O. Box 1186, Buffalo, NY 14231-1186  
contact: crtc@buffalo.com (716) 634-2412 <http://go.to/crtc>

Volume #4 Issue #8

October, 2003

## Uninformed Consent

Citizens Regional Transit Corp.(CRTC) is a non-partisan, not-for-profit group of volunteers whose purpose is to educate the public and its leaders about transit. Put another way, we don't get into politics. We will not take sides during a political campaign.

But we do try to provide politicians with accurate and reliable information when the issues they debate have a direct bearing on public transit in WNY.

Which brings us to the Giambra-Ward debate on October 2nd.

The League of Women Voters asked: would you support expansion of Metro Rail to the airport?

Neither candidate gave an informed reply. Daniel Ward, consistent with his views on local control, suggested that the line could be extended if the communities along the route wanted it. Joel Giambra nearly ignored the question in his drive to push regionalism, and then offered the same line that he gave during his first campaign four years ago: expand it or shut it down.

Soon after the debate, CRTC did contact the campaign headquarters of each candidate. We offered to give each candidate's staff a full briefing on the important role of light rail in WNY. Both responded, and we delivered the information, as well as we were able.

The lesson for CRTC is this: every candidate needs to know the importance of light rail, personally, and up front. The 90,000 current daily riders of Metro Bus and Rail are important constituents for any politician in WNY.

We ride, and we vote.

## Review: Three Tours, Two TV Stations and a Newspaper

*by the CRTC Executive Board*

After nearly three months of careful planning, the Citizens Regional Transit Corporation (CRTC) and staff of City Councilman Antoine M. Thompson put together a tour of the proposed downtown Buffalo to Airport and Transit Road extension. This invitation-only tour was offered on three afternoons in September, for the benefit of community leaders, interested businesses, and elected officials.

All the major media were informed of the tour, with press releases and phone calls. Television and radio responded, and the CRTC Chair was interviewed repeatedly. The result was the best media exposure that CRTC has ever had. Comments from the public were heard for days afterward.

The CRTC worked hard, in good faith, to make the tour a complete analysis of the possibilities and problems involved in building a Metro Rail extension. We knew in advance that high ridership and efficient operating costs make this route the most desirable of any extension. But an NFTA spokesman was quoted on a newscast as saying that the proposed Downtown/Airport/Transit Road corridor "would not be cost effective." Further, the NFTA was quoted in the News (9/17) with a double negative: the extension "is not economically feasible" and it "would not meet federal transportation guidelines" recommended for Federal funding.

These terms used by the NFTA spokesman to discourage discussion of light rail extension come from an official document, the Strategic Transit Assessment (STA), that the NFTA commissioned at a cost of \$200,000 from the nationally recognized firm of Parsons Brinckerhoff. The purpose of the STA, released in August, 2001, was to answer a simple question: What kind of transit system can and should the region support?

When the CRTC reviewed the STA, we discovered that the consultants' report differed significantly from the conclusions reached by the NFTA.

Parsons-Brinckerhoff examined the data made available to them by the NFTA. They concluded that the Airport corridor is the most "cost-effective" of the four potential light rail corridors examined, evaluated against Federal funding guidelines. Furthermore, the Airport corridor scored "well within the reasonable range when compared to individual projects in other cities (STA 4.9)." They suggested that the recent upgrade of the airport (STA 4.12) and other development in the area provided new justification for the corridor.

They noted that the cost effectiveness rating is only one tool used by the Federal government to evaluate transit projects. The consultants checked out six other factors used by the Federal government, and found that the Airport light rail corridor had a high potential to realize economic development, improve mobility and shift people from auto to transit. (STA 4.13)

The findings of the STA were clear to the tour participants. They saw heavy traffic on city and county streets, demonstrating a pressing need for the light rail extension. At Transit Road, they saw that the highway is already at capacity. They returned downtown on the Kensington Expressway, overused and dangerous, with no room to expand.

The NFTA Board passed two resolutions on April 13, 1992, which "deferred any further actions to advance rail extensions until a strong local commitment is in place (STA 1.4)." The time has come to show the NFTA strong local commitment for a complete and modern transit system.

## Light Rail Expands in Salt Lake City

...by Geoffrey Fattah 9-30-03 deseretnews.com

For University of Utah medical student Wesley Mortensen, the new TRAX line to the Utah Health Sciences Center could make him smarter and a better father. It might even make him a better husband.

"I've spent 1,100 hours on either TRAX or a bus," Wesley said Monday. "That's nearly 47 days . . . or 550 movies, or 220 18-hole rounds of golf." With a wife and kids in Sandy, Utah, Wesley said making good use of his time is important and time spent aboard TRAX is time well spent. Wesley said he can study his medical science or talk to his wife and little ones on his cell phone safely.

Wesley and a crowd of several hundred transit supporters gathered near Primary Children's Medical Center for the official opening of the new TRAX Medical Center line. The 1.5-mile, \$89.4 million line was completed 15 months ahead of schedule, giving Utah Transit Authority (UTA) officials special bragging rights. UTA estimates the new light-rail extension will service some 3,000 new riders right off the bat.

"I hope to see this kind of crowd at the station every day," UTA general manager John English said as he stood at the new Medical Center station.

### Citizens Regional Transit Corp.

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

Join us! Membership dues are fully tax-deductible:

corporate	\$100.00
household	35.00
individual	25.00
student	5.00

send check to:

**CITIZENS REGIONAL TRANSIT CORP.**  
c/o Alvin J. Schuster, treasurer  
174 Capen Blvd., Amherst, NY 14226

Salt Lake Mayor Rocky Anderson joined English in predicting a new "renaissance" of mass transit in Utah and across the nation. English predicted transit projects will sweep across U.S. cities in the next 50 years. "They're all looking at Salt Lake City," Anderson said.

At the turn of the last century, the mayor pointed out, Salt Lake City had some 156 miles of trolley track, which was ripped out after a "consortium of automobile and tire companies" bought and removed the transit system to make way for wider streets.

Yet transit projects are only possible with federal transit funding.

"We have a tough fight ahead of us" in Washington, said Rep. Jim Matheson, D-Utah, who criticized the current Bush administration for its efforts to limit federal funding for transit projects to a 50-percent match.

As students break in the new line, UTA officials are turning their eyes to future projects. "We have a lot on our mind right now," said UTA director of transit development Mike Allegra.

Within a year, Allegra said, written plans should be complete to extend TRAX from the Delta Center to the Salt Lake intermodal terminal near the Gateway. The terminal will not only cater to TRAX and UTA buses, but to Amtrak trains, local taxi cabs and Greyhound buses.

Allegra said the Davis County commuter rail system is planned for operation by 2007. No dates have been set for additional TRAX lines as funding has not come through, he said.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Tacoma, WA, Ridership Exceeds Expectations

..by Joseph Turner, Tacoma News Tribune, 9-26-03

The tiny streetcar line in Tacoma [WA] has earned transit sweet bragging rights.

The number of boardings on the 1.6-mile Link route between downtown and the Tacoma Dome has exceeded the agency's projected ridership for 2010 - one month into its existence and seven years ahead of schedule.

Consultants who put together ridership estimates for the Tacoma segment said weekday boardings on the downtown Tacoma segment would be 2,000 by 2010. The average for the first month of operation has been about 2,170 on weekdays.

There are several reasons for the apparent success:

- It's free. Riders don't have to pay the \$1.25 fare that they would have to pay to ride the bus.
- Parsons Brinckerhoff, the consultants who projected ridership for Sound Move, the three-county transit plan that voters approved in 1996, was deliberately on the conservative side.
- The Farmers Market in downtown Tacoma every Thursday has become quite a draw. Thursdays consistently are the highest ridership days, including 3,355 riders on Sept. 18.
- Parking at Pierce Transit's Tacoma Dome station, which has 2,400 stalls, also is free, and off-street parking in downtown Tacoma is getting pricey.

The City Council recently raised monthly parking at city-owned garages to \$125 a month.

## Congress Postpones Reauthorization of TEA-21

*Transfer 10-5-03 transact.org*

On the eve of its expiration date, President Bush signed a 5-month extension of the nation's surface transportation law or TEA-21.

With the President's signature September 30, the extension legislation (H.R. 3087), "Surface Transportation Extension Act of 2003" or P.L. 108-88, directs the distribution of funds to the states, transit providers and others for the five-month period ending February 29.

While the new law sets spending levels over the extension period, it does not take full effect until after October 31. For now, a one-month spending extension (i.e. continuing resolution) now governs expenditures for transportation spending (and most other federal activities) until either the Fiscal Year 2004 Transportation Appropriations bill is enacted or another continuing spending resolution is adopted allowing highway and transit spending through February 29. As such, states, transit providers and others are now operating on one-twelfth of their current spending levels.

P.L. 108-88 essentially extends current law programs for five months at somewhat higher funding levels for highways and allocates funding to transit at what TEA-21 provided for FY'03. The new law effectively postpones TEA-21's expiration date from September 30 until February 29, setting up another deadline aimed at forcing Congress to act on new transportation legislation.

The extension law provides \$14.4 billion for five months of spending to the states for highway programs, a level that assumes an annualized level for FY'04 of \$33.8 billion, well above last year's level (FY'03) of \$31.6 billion and substantially above the TEA-21 set level of \$27.6 for FY'03. Transit spending, however, is set at \$3.04 billion for an annualized level of about \$7.3 billion for FY'04, which is slightly above last year's spending level and about identical to what TEA-21 set for FY'03.

Among the issues that surrounded adoption of P.L. 108-88 was the inclusion of additional flexibility provisions allowing state transportation departments broader authority over the use of any funding provided under the legislation (a similar provision was included in 1997 when the ISTEA law expired).

The final version of the extension law as well as the Congressional intent that was expressed during debate on the legislation should help ensure that states use this authority on a project-by-project basis. In addition, reconciliation of spending shifts among program categories is to be made once a new law is enacted after February 29, whether it is a new multi-year authorization or another extension bill. Local elected officials, metropolitan planning organizations and others raised concerns about the need for these flexibility provisions, requesting acknowledgements that these provisions not undermine ongoing program commitments to clean air, transportation enhancements and metropolitan transportation investments. Federal Highway Administration officials are expected to develop procedures to ensure that funds are tracked and that states use this authority where needed.

## Public Transportation offers Tangible Benefits

*Transfer 10-5-03 transact.org*

At an event held in the hearing room of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, the Texas Transportation Institute released its annual Urban Mobility Study. Joining with TTI's Tim Lomax for the release were Representatives Tom Petri (R-WI) and Jim Oberstar (D-MN) and representatives of the American Road & Transportation Builders Association and the American Public Transportation Association.

The new study found that congestion continues to worsen across the U.S., in urban areas of every size. In addition, it reported that Americans are spending more hours stuck in traffic, more roads are congested, and congestion continues to grow.

New to the report is an analysis of the benefits of public transportation and operational improvements. These improvements were made in response to criticism from STPP and other public transportation supporters, as well as some state DOTs.

TTI's analysis shows that public transportation saves commuters more than one billion hours and almost \$21 billion in congestion costs annually, an amount that is nearly three times the annual federal investment in public transportation. According to the Urban Mobility Study, addressing congestion will require a "diverse set of options," including public transportation.

\*\*\*\*\*  
**Quotable Quotes:**

"A safe, efficient and reliable public transportation system is an engine for economic growth. It connects people to jobs, customers to businesses, and communities to one another."

...US Department of Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta, 10-9-03, at announcement of \$21.6 million grant to New Orleans, LA, to help put historic streetcars into service on Canal Street in November.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Tour was a Grand Success!!

CRTC Executive Board, assisted by the office of City Councilman Antoine M. Thompson, conducted three tours of the proposed Downtown/Airport/Transit Road corridor, on September 12, 16 & 17.

A total of 69 leaders representing 35 organizations attended. They saw that safe, clean, rapid transit along existing rail rights-of-way would also serve existing and new neighborhoods, the Central Terminal, Walden Galleria, and future development adjacent to the Lancaster/Depew Thruway exit. They were moved by the vision presented for rejuvenating and connecting downtown with the east side of Buffalo and with its eastern suburbs.

The CRTC Board will work with these friends of light rail, to move the vision forward. Stay tuned for further developments.

\*\*\*\*\*

## "Shuttle Off to Buffalo: Getting Around in the 21st Century"

A forum on transportation, sponsored by the Central Library

### Saturday, October 18, 1:00 PM

The forum will feature a panel discussion on transportation issues moderated by local civic leader Kevin P. Gaughan.

Panel participants will include:

Hal Morse, executive director of the Greater Niagara Regional Transportation Council;  
Michael Cerrone of Partners for a Liveable WNY; and  
Daniel Hess of the University at Buffalo's Department of Urban and Regional Planning.

The event is free and open to the public.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Citizens Regional Transit Corporation

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

*return service requested*

## CALENDAR

**Oct. 13 6:00 PM**  
Partners for a Livable WNY  
United Way Bldg., Buffalo  
Rick A. Baran, "The Buffalo Fix"

**Oct 18 1:00 PM**  
Forum on Transportation in 21st Century  
Central Library, Buffalo

**Oct. 21 7:30 PM**  
CRTC monthly evening meeting  
3330 Main Street, Buffalo

**Nov. 4** Election Day

**Nov. 10 6:00 PM**  
Partners for a Livable WNY  
United Way Bldg., Buffalo

**Nov. 12 9:30 AM**  
GBNRTC PCC meeting  
NYS Thruway, Cheektowaga