



CITIZENS for REGIONAL TRANSIT NEWS

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

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The Ugly Silence

Thanksgiving and Christmas are holidays when we are on the move. Americans travel millions of miles in order to enjoy a few days of family togetherness. Will we travel in safety?

This is an appropriate time to confront our collusion in the ugly silence that surrounds American car crash victims. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 42,116 people were killed in traffic crashes on American highways during the year 2001. Of those victims, 1,548 died in New York State at a rate of eight people per 100,000 population.

The killing has been relentless. In the past decade, 1991-2001, over 465,000 people have died on our highways. A useful comparison can be made to the Viet Nam War, 1964-1973, when American casualties totalled 47,393 soldiers over a period of nine years.

Our outrage over those war deaths was vital and appropriate: public reaction to Viet Nam changed public policy.

Today there is no similar public outrage over the carnage which we tolerate every day on our highways.

Transportation Secretary Mineta sees the problem. He offers a bandaid solution: curbs on drunk driving, more safety-belt use, and enforced safety regulations on commercial vehicles. He sees no way to transform the system: to reduce the numbers of cars on the highways.

Let's break the silence, and speak up. The killing is intolerable; the system must change. Let's enhance and expand our mass transit system now so that our people are given a chance--to be safe, rather than sorry-- to arrive home, rather than not.

Why Highways are Hazardous to Your Health

by Gladys Gifford

Second in series on health impacts of transportation

Human health and safety is a mandate of the Federal government, cutting across many departments. The Environmental Protection Agency judges if environmental impacts are "protective of human health and safety." The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's mandate is to reduce "deaths, injuries and economic losses resulting from motor vehicle crashes." The US Department of Health and Human Services' slogan is "safer, healthier people." Clearly, the government wants to keep Americans safe.

Yet over 41,000 Americans die from car crashes every year. Why has our government failed so miserably in the area of car crash fatalities?

A recent study offered by Todd Litman of the Victoria Transport Policy Institute offers an insight as to why the efforts to improve traffic safety have failed to reduce the number of fatalities. Litman says that the problem is not in the good intentions of the government agencies, but in the methodology used. For example, the USDOT seeks to reduce the crashes per mile of vehicle driven, not the overall number miles driven. Therefore, transportation agencies can claim success over the past forty years, because the measurement they examine has shown improvement. Crashes per mile driven have been reduced by two-thirds.

However, in the same time period, *per capita* vehicle mileage has more than doubled. Everyone is spending more and more time in their cars, riding more and more miles: Americans are road-weary, and we are at risk. The result: the U.S. has one of the highest traffic fatality rates *per capita* in the world.

Clearly, the solution to our persistent level of crash fatalities is not better and safer cars. Technology has solved that problem. Rather, the solution is less traffic. Transportation agencies must learn tools which allow them to protect both human health and human safety.

For example, look at the Kensington Expressway. The Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC) did a good job of gathering information and analyzing the multiple safety issues of that traffic corridor. But the solutions suggested were consistent with the guidelines of the USDOT: better pavement, better signs, use Intelligent Systems Technology. No mention was made of traffic reduction.

The solution to the Kensington is to reduce the number of vehicles that use that route. Citizens Regional Transit suggests that the best way to reach that solution is to build the light rail extension to the airport and out to Transit Road. When the light rail is built, the traffic pressure on the Kensington will be significantly reduced.

How can we protect human health in the context of transportation policy? Litman suggests several mobility management tools, which when taken together will measurably reduce traffic, and thereby traffic fatalities:

- * offer more rapid transit
- * stop subsidizing parking
- * offer distance-based insurance
- * reform land-use planning to increase density
- * encourage ride-sharing, bicycling, walking

To see the full report, "If Health Matters: Integrating Public Health Objectives in Transportation Planning," visit www.vtpi.org.

Houston Voters Approve Light Rail in Spirited Referendum

...by Lucas Wall, 11-5-03 *Houston Chronicle*

Public Health Study Concludes: Suburbs are Unsafe

A study published in the American Journal of Public Health, 9-03, rigorously investigated the question: Is there a direct connection between urban sprawl and traffic fatalities? Authors Reid Ewing, Richard A. Schieber and Charles V. Zegeer created a sprawl index by applying principal components analysis to data for 448 US counties in the largest 101 metropolitan areas. They used regression analysis to determine relationships between the index and traffic fatalities.

They found that for every 1% increase in the index (i.e., more compact, less sprawl), all-mode traffic fatality rates fell by 1.49% and pedestrian fatality rates fell by 1.47%. They concluded that urban sprawl was directly related to traffic fatalities and pedestrian fatalities. They noted that traffic safety can be added to the other health risks associated with urban sprawl--namely, physical inactivity and air and water pollution.

Metro [Houston's Metropolitan Transit Authority] vowed Wednesday [11-5] to immediately begin implementing the \$7.5 billion transit-expansion plan voters narrowly endorsed Election Day, but cautioned it will take four years of planning, design and construction before the next trains are running.

The transit plan squeaked out a victory Tuesday with 51.7 percent of voters endorsing the plan, ending a vigorous \$6 million campaign on rail's future in Houston. The go-ahead from voters, however, was just the first step in a decades-long process needed to build the 73 miles of rail on the Metro blueprint. The gauntlet will require picking station locations to landing billions of dollars in federal funding.

"We are not losing any time," Metro President and CEO Shirley DeLibero said Wednesday. "We are going right into the process of completing these studies, completing the planning of all of it, and getting us in line to get into the federal funding process and then to eventually go into construction."

Voters approved the Metropolitan Transit Authority's request for \$640 million in bonds to accelerate construction of the next 22 rail miles.

The first extension will be along a north corridor from the University of Houston-Downtown to Northline Mall, scheduled to open in 2008. A line to the southeast comes next in 2009, followed by one to the East End in 2010. An inner southwest line through Greenway Plaza to the Galleria and Hillcroft Transit Center will open for passengers in 2012.

Texans for True Mobility, the prominent group fighting Metro's plan, conceded defeat Wednesday after all precincts had reported their results.

Chairman Michael Stevens said his organization will not obstruct the voters' desire but will encourage Metro to find opportunities to improve its plan as design work takes place. "The people have decided

they want this plan," Stevens told reporters assembled outside his Hunters Creek house Wednesday afternoon. "But it needs to be improved. I will work not to kill it but to improve it."

The next major step for the transit authority will be getting federal funds. Metro estimates the next 22 miles of rail will cost about \$1 billion and it's hoping to obtain half of that from the Federal Transit Administration.

"We have to have federal dollars in hand and our plan accepted before we can go into construction," DeLibero said.

Some local Republicans have ardently fought Metro's rail plans for years, arguing trains will not reduce Houston's traffic. But with voter approval, they pledged to drop their opposition.

House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Sugar Land, had blocked federal funding for MetroRail until voters approved the project. He will now work to get that money, spokesman Jonathan Grella said.

Voters in the Fort Bend County portion of Metro's service area, which DeLay represents, overwhelmingly approved rail expansion. Metro included an eight-mile commuter line to Missouri City in its plan; Fort Bend residents responded Tuesday with a 66 percent vote for the transit referendum.

The transit authority's staff will begin preparing an application for federal funding, which it plans to submit to the FTA next year. Obtaining FTA money requires four steps: identifying the best transit option, engineering and environmental review, preliminary engineering and final design. After that process, which often takes four years or more, an agency is eligible for money.

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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Election Day Returns Mixed Transit Results

...narprail.org 11-7-03

Several jurisdictions had ballot questions relating to rail transit on November 4:

Houston -- Voters approved (51%-49%) a referendum authorizing Houston Metro to issue \$640 million in revenue bonds to add 22 miles to its light-rail system, beyond the first 7.5 miles that will open in January, plus other bus and road improvements. That came despite a multi-million-dollar campaign opposing the issue. The Houston Chronicle quoted a lead opponent, Rep. John Culberson (R.-Tex.), saying that the close result "reflects deep flaws in Metro's plan," but also that "my job now is to move forward with this new instruction from the voters." The paper quoted one bus commuter pointing at gridlocked highways, saying, "I don't understand what the big issues are about not wanting to have trains. This [i.e., more highways] obviously hasn't worked."

San Francisco -- Voters approved (75%-25%) Proposition K, continuing a half-cent sales tax going to transportation projects, including transit. A two-thirds margin was required.

Tucson -- There were two propositions. Voters rejected (37%-63%) Proposition 200 to raise the city sales tax from 2.0% to 2.3% and a construction sales tax from 2.0% to 6.0%, for placement in a city transportation account. Voters rejected (36%-64%) Proposition 201 to use the account to improve transit, including a 13-mile light-rail line and express bus feeder network. Both propositions were heavily opposed by a coalition of area builders and real estate agents.

Kansas City -- There were two propositions. Voters approved (58%-42%) a proposition sponsored by the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority, raising the sales tax now used for transportation from 0.5% to 0.875% to benefit the local bus system. Voters rejected (33%-67%) Question 3 to add another 0.5% to the sales tax for light rail, streetcar, and bus "rapid transit" proposals.

Maine -- Voters approved (66%-34%) Question 6 to issue \$63.4 million in state bonds (making available over \$300 million, counting matching funds from other sources) for transportation, including \$3 million to extend passenger rail service from Portland to Brunswick.

Amtrak Revival!

Amtrak CEO David L. Gunn, speaking to the National Press Club, 9-30, said that ridership "will probably set a record...Revenues were weak at the beginning of the year, but in July they started to outpace last year and in August they were 4.8% ahead of last year."

He added, "We have rebuilt over 20 wrecked cars...By the middle of October, we will have completely rebuilt three Heritage dining cars. [By 9/30,] we will have converted approximately 37 miles of track from wood ties to concrete ties."

He concluded, "the more we can demonstrate that we run a tight ship, that we are wise stewards of public funds and that we get good bang for the buck in the capital program, I think we have a good chance of getting adequate funding."

...narprail.org 11-03

NJ Celebrates Light Rail Success

...Ridership on the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail line [about 8 miles], has been steadily rising since it opened in 2000, according to **NJ Transit**. Ridership increased markedly after the major disruption to the PATH system beginning on Sept. 11, 2001 and when the line was extended from its initial northern terminus in Jersey City to Hoboken. Currently the line carries 16,000 daily riders.

Recent news reports have said NJ Transit expects daily ridership to increase to 28,000 after the 6-mile link between Weehawken and North Bergen is completed in five years. The Journal News reported that 31% of the light rail's riders had previously driven, indicating the line has been successful in getting traffic off of northern NJ's congested roadways.

...sttc.org 10-03

The Hudson-Bergen Light Rail operates between 16 stations from West Side Avenue, Jersey City and East 34th Street, Bayonne to Hoboken. The service provides easy access to the Hudson River Waterfront, Newport Centre Mall, Liberty State Park, Liberty Science Center, and many shopping areas, medical facilities and schools. In addition, there are four Park-Ride Lots located at East 34th Street Station, East 45th Street Station, West Side Avenue Station or Liberty State Park Station. In the future, service will expand to East 22nd Street as well as north into Bergen County.

Connections may also be made to PATH trains and NY Waterway ferries at Exchange Place/Newport and to NJ TRANSIT and private bus routes all along the route.

...njtransit.com

Capitol Hill Update:

With the 5-month extension of TEA-21 in place, Congress is negotiating the particulars of the new transportation bill. WNY's delegation has a significant role to play: in committees whose work directly impacts the transportation bill, we have Sen. Clinton on Banking, Sen. Schumer on Public Works and Rep. Quinn on Transportation.

Contact your member of Congress now, to support greater funding for mass transit to benefit all Americans.

USDOT Releases Strategic Five-Year Plan

The US Dept. of Transportation released their strategic plan for 2003-2008 in September, 2003. Following are excerpts from the vision statement:

“The need to improve safety on our highways is clear. In 2002, over 42 thousand people were killed in traffic accidents. While alcohol remains the single, largest contributing factor to fatal crashes, claiming over 17,000 lives, about 25 percent of Americans (or about 70 million people) still do not use safety belts when driving or riding in motor vehicles. Finally, 11 percent of people killed in motor vehicle incidents are involved in crashes with large trucks. Our central strategies for reducing transportation fatalities and injuries on our highways are to reduce alcohol-impaired driving, to increase safety belt use and to ensure that commercial vehicles meet the highest possible safety standards.

...An integral aspect of mobility is accessibility. To be inclusive, transportation must be accessible to all, including those with low incomes, the elderly and persons with disabilities. Transportation connects each of us to vitally important aspects of our lives: work, education, family, friends, recreation, health, and commerce. Many of the 37 million Americans who live below the poverty line rely on transit as their only means of transportation. As former recipients of Federal aid move from welfare to work, transit will offer the critical link that makes employment possible and the American workforce stronger. Accessible public transportation is critical to nearly 50 million Americans with disabilities and the increasing elderly population who can no longer drive. It is our obligation to ensure that transportation is not only safe and efficient, but that it is also accessible to all. Where barriers to accessibility exist, we will seek to eliminate them. When planning for the future, accessibility will be part of our vision. We will strive to give more freedom and choice to travelers and shippers. Mobility is the right of every American.”

View the plan at: http://www.dot.gov/stratplan2008/strategic_plan.htm

CALENDAR

Nov. 12 9:30 AM
GBNRTC PCC meeting
NYS Thruway, 455 Cayuga Rd., Cheektowaga

Nov. 15 9:00 AM- 12:00 noon
“Working Better Together” Civic Fair
WNED Studios, Horizons Plaza, Buffalo

Nov. 18 12:00 noon
CRTC monthly meeting
3330 Main St at Niagara Falls Blvd.

Nov. 21 9:00 AM
GBNRTC Policy Committee meeting

Dec. 8 6:00 PM
Partners for a Livable WNY
United Way Bldg., Buffalo

Dec. 10 9:30 AM
GBNRTC PCC meeting
NYSDOT, Waterfront Village Cntr., Buffalo

Dec. 16 12:00 noon
CRTC monthly meeting
3330 Main St at Niagara Falls Blvd.

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

return service requested