



CITIZENS for REGIONAL TRANSIT NEWS

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Political Solutions

Politics, politics, politics.
We live in a democratic republic, where politics is on every page and TV screen, especially during 2008.

But amid the distractions of the presidential primaries and power plays, the art of politics requires attention to legislation. It is in crafting careful legislation that the politicians earn our respect and our votes.

At the Federal level, attention must shift to the next transportation bill, to succeed SAFETEA-LU, which expires in 2009. Will Congress continue to view transportation as simply an exercise in appropriations? or will they find the courage to formulate transportation policy that addresses congestion, air pollution, sprawl and land-use?

At the NYS level, budget negotiations are ongoing. The budget offers an arena for innovative solutions to the financial imbalance between transit and highway funding, especially in Upstate. Also timely is an effort to pass legislation which supports congestion pricing in New York City--a creative way to both ease congestion and air pollution in lower Manhattan.

The CRTC will keep our readers informed about these and related issues as they come to our attention.

Meanwhile, politics that offer solutions requires the active participation of the *polis* --energized citizens who vote!

Let's take the time to connect with politicians and political candidates, so that when they are elected we can hold them accountable for their actions.

Let's ensure that politics, politics, politics is not politics as usual, this year.

CRTC Monthly Meeting

**Friday, March 21
12:00 Noon**

"Transit issues in the 2008 NYS Legislature"

Come hear the various ways that the NYS Legislature may take action that impacts public transit in the 2008 legislative session. Discussion led by Gladys Gifford, League of Women Voters NYS transportation specialist.

Join us!

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.

Bush Budget Boo\$ts Regional Transit, cuts National Transit

by Michelle Ernst, 2-6-08, tstc.org

The Bush administration's 2009 federal budget released earlier this week includes significant new funding for New York City region transit. \$211 million is slated for the East Side Access project and \$277 million for the Second Avenue Subway. The administration also budgets \$54.1 million for the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail and \$14.7 million for further study on the ARC trans-Hudson tunnel project, which recently earned a "medium to high" priority rating from the Federal Transit Administration.

In the broader scheme, however, the Bush budget is bad news for transit. It proposes to shore up the Highway Account of the federal Highway Trust Fund (HTF) by "borrowing" \$3.2 billion from the HTF's Mass Transit Account. It would also cut national transit spending by more than \$200 million from previously proposed levels.

The Highway Account will fall into the red in 2009, with obligations expected to exceed gas tax receipts and other revenue. Policymakers have long-known about this impending crisis, and even established a commission to study federal transportation revenue with the passage of SAFETEA-LU in 2005.... Besides calling for an increase in the national gas tax, the commission recommended several immediate tweaks (such as dedicating transportation taxes to the Highway Trust Fund rather than to the General Fund) that could bring the Highway Account back into solvency. None of its recommendations included a shift in funds from the Mass Transit Account to the Highway Account.

Policy analysts believe that the Bush budget will be largely dismissed by the Democrat-controlled Congress. However, given the urgency to maintain highway spending levels, particularly in light of the Minnesota bridge collapse, many lawmakers may be tempted to support this provision. The Bush proposal "authorizes borrowing between the Highway Account and the Mass Transit Account within the Highway Trust Fund in fiscal year 2009 in the form of non-interest bearing repayable advances."

If the Bush proposal goes through, it will establish a dangerous precedent of raiding transit funds to build highways. More immediately, it will cut the balance in the Mass Transit Account to the point where, without new funding, the 2010 federal transit program could not be funded at current levels, let alone see an increase. Governor Spitzer strongly criticized the provision in a statement on the budget: "Recognizing that New Yorkers use mass transit more often than any other state, this federal action could negatively counteract our proposed record-setting state aid for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)."

The Bush administration also continues to call for the dismantling of Amtrak. The administration proposes a "shutdown" budget of just \$800 million for Amtrak, a 40 percent cut from current funding levels. The [Tri-State Transportation Campaign] doesn't expect this proposal to go anywhere (even the Republican-controlled Congress consistently gave Amtrak significantly more than Bush recommended), but it's worth keeping an eye on given the implications for NJ Transit, Shore Line East, and other regional rail services which use Amtrak's Northeast Corridor tracks.

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 \$150.00
- household 35.00
- individual 25.00
- student 5.00

send check to:

CITIZENS REGIONAL TRANSIT CORP.
c/o John K. Howell, treasurer
289 Ashford Avenue
Tonawanda, NY 14150-8563

Progress on the Cobblestone Loop Feasibility Study!

In 2008, the CRTC continues our fundraiser for the Cobblestone Loop feasibility study, to be prepared by Stone Consulting. Our goal is \$9,750. We have raised \$4,100 since mid-April, 2007. As soon as the money is in hand, the work will begin and is expected to be completed in about three months.

Help us reach our goal!

Send your donation to the CRTC treasurer, ASAP!

For more information, see the CRTC web page, citizenstransit.org.

Testimony to NYSDOT Commissioner Glynn

by Gladys Gifford, CRTC President, at March 4, 2008, hearing in Buffalo

Dear Commissioner Glynn:

My name is Gladys Gifford, and I represent the Citizens Regional Transit Corporation (CRTC), which seeks to educate the public, public officials, their authorities and agencies in the Buffalo-Niagara region about the benefits of a comprehensive transportation system including an expanded Metro Rail.

The CRTC appreciates this opportunity to participate in discussions with the NYSDOT about the future of transportation in our great state.

The "20-Year Multimodal Needs Analysis" recently completed by your department is a valuable document, showing us that NYS must improve our transportation system.

However, much of the problem we face arises from the fact that the United States does not have a comprehensive transportation policy. As quoted by James Simpson, FTA Administrator in a recent speech, writer Joseph Giglio said, in the book Driving Questions: "Government transportation agencies tend to regard the nation's standardized, publicly owned system of roads, bridges, and tunnels as a God-given oil field to be pumped dry with little concern for the future."

Currently, American transportation lives and dies by political appropriations.

Reauthorization of the Federal transportation bill offers an opportunity for the public to reshape the dialogue along policy lines. Following are three suggestions from the CRTC for such a new policy framework for investment in transportation.

1. Forget about oil!

In as little as 20 years, cheap oil will not be the major source of energy and will not be relied on for transportation. (We recommend the book, Out of Gas: the End of the Age of Oil, by David Goodstein, pub. W.W.Norton.) Therefore, NYS must increase the proportion of monies for transit throughout the state, in relation to highways.

Local areas could be encouraged to advocate for capital improvements to public transit, rather than building highways, to make it easy for people to switch from automobiles to transit.

Public transit could increase frequency of service. More people will follow the example of my friend who lives close to Metro Rail and now walks or takes the train since gasoline costs over three dollars a gallon and rising. We need to encourage more people to make that switch. This change can only happen when transit is a reasonable option.

2. Connect people first!

In your Capital Budget Presentation, a chart shows "Annual Passenger Hours of Delay per Person." Since this chart follows a discussion of highway repair, the message is clear: more and more auto passengers are delayed in traffic, at escalating rates. The previous charts show that NYS is expected to spend \$2 billion per year on repaving state roads and that local municipalities are expected to spend \$200 million per year repaving their local roads. Meanwhile, the latest issue of Consumer Reports shows that the cost of owning and operating a car to make use of those roads is now \$5,000-\$10,000 per year, depending on the vehicle.

The alternative? Invest heavily in passenger rail on dedicated rights-of-way, such as commuter, light rail, streetcar. Investment now will assure NYS that by 2020, passengers will ride to destinations on efficient, green transportation without wasting time in traffic jams.

However, if NYS continues to throw billions into road repair without offering our citizens a viable alternative, the result will continue to be the same: escalating delays for passengers. Should NYS put our tax dollars into effective public transit, the cost of road repair may moderate with the reduction of vehicle miles traveled--a win-win result for everyone.

Let me illustrate, for Western New York:

By 2020, the transportation system of WNY should look like this: the light rail has expanded to the airport and to UB Amherst, with planning underway for extensions to the Tonawandas and to the Southtowns. The NFTA's buses run on routes that feed riders into the light rail system, and the whole system operates on a headway that provides public transit every 15 minutes or less, whether bus or rail. The Erie Canal Harbor has a functioning cruise ship dock, such that cruise ships are arriving and departing from Buffalo regularly. There are no new highways and no more expansions of the Thruway or of NYS 219.

3. Support public transportation with public monies!

Finally, the proper use of public monies is the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Transportation funding falls roughly into three categories: private, privileged, and public.

Only public transportation is available to all sectors of the public equally--anyone can ride for the price of the fare, and the cost of vehicle and road/right-of-way is borne by taxpayers. Privileged transportation, i.e., automobiles and airplanes, is only available to those who can afford to own a car or buy an airplane ticket, and the cost of road and airport is subsidized by taxpayers. Private transportation costs are borne by the customer, with taxes paid to offset use of public infrastructure.

In the proposed 20-year Transportation Capital Needs prepared by your department, capital spending on public transit totals \$6.5 billion, compared to \$96.1 billion for highway and bridge needs. This misalignment of resources merely perpetuates past failed policies. One stated goal of your department's analysis is: "efficient movement of people and goods." The best way to reach that goal is to invest heavily in public, not privileged, transportation.

We appreciate your careful attention to our concerns.

Go Green on Earth Day!

Kevin Neumaier, P.E., at Ecology and Environment, Inc., has announced the Buffalo-Niagara Earth Day 2008 Initiative. This action seeks to lower the carbon footprint of the region by urging residents to walk, bike, ride-share or take public transit on Earth Day, April 22, 2008.

Kevin noted that the City of Good Neighbors has signed a commitment with over 700 other cities in the United States to take action against global warming. "In honor of Earth Day this April 22, 2008, we will take the next step in promoting this positive image by employing a large-scale, concerted use of carpooling and alternative transportation," he said.

Earth Day 2008 Initiative promotes the use of alternative methods of transport that have minimal to no impact on our earth, in hopes to take the reins as the least-congested city in the U.S.

CRTC has signed on as a participating organization with Earth Day 2008 Initiative.

**We encourage all community groups, block clubs,
businesses, municipalities to sign on.**

**Let's show the world that Buffalo-Niagara
works together to care for the Earth!**

Ecology and Environment, Inc., is one of the world's leading organizations in pioneering innovative methods of ridesharing/alternative transportation. Partners who helped shape this initiative are: the Buffalo Niagara Partnership, Buffalo Niagara Enterprise, Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council, NFTA, Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau, and the Buffalo Niagara Human Resource Association. For more information visit www.goodgoingwny.com or call 716/684-8060, or via e-mail at kneumaier@ene.com or Bob Gibson at 716/684-8060 or via e-mail at rgibson@ene.com.

CALENDAR

Mar. 21 12:00 noon
CRTC Monthly Meeting
3330 Main Street, Buffalo

April 2 9:30 AM
PCC meeting of GBNRTC
NYSDOT

April 22 Go Green
Earth Day Initiative, led by
Ecology & Environment (p. 4)

April 26 8 AM-5 PM
The Landmark Society of WNY
22nd Annual Regional Preservation
Conference - *Maintaining
Hometown Character in the 21st
Century*, First Congregational
Church and Ontario County
Historical Society, N. Main Street,
Canandaigua, NY. Details at:
www.landmarksociety.org

Jun 17: BuffaloFirst 6:00-7:30 PM
Market Arcade Bldg, 617 Main St
"Green Transportation"
Screening of "The End of
Suburbia:" Discussion to follow.
Guest speaker: Justin Booth,
Buffalo Blue Bicycles, others TBA.

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return service requested