



CITIZENS for REGIONAL TRANSIT NEWS

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July/August, 2008

...it seems to me by Joseph Radder

Almost everything that's worth doing takes money...sometimes big money. And frequently things that should be done don't get done because the question "where's the money coming from?" cannot be answered.

That has been the case, at times in the past, when it comes to financing mass transit. But apparently many of our elected officials are beginning to see the light, probably as a result of the high gasoline prices.

Recently, the House of Representatives voted 322-98 to authorize \$1.7 billion over the next two years to expand public transit operations and reduce fares.

The measure (H.R. 6052) would provide federal aid to local mass transit for operating costs. However, the Senate has not taken corresponding action, and the Bush administration is opposed to the bill. Now is the time to contact your Senators and ask them to move the bill through committee and on to a vote.

Capital costs for building new transit lines are important, of course. But so are operating costs, and the Feds should help municipalities with both.

Mass transit takes automobiles off the road thereby reducing our dependence on foreign oil. And of course, reducing the number of cars on the road improves air quality.

But rising demand for transit puts heavy strains on current transit systems. Trains and busses need more operating dollars now, in order to respond effectively.

Our elected officials can move this bill to completion--if they know where you stand on this issue.

Tell them--move H.R. 6052 through Congress!

CRTC Monthly Meeting

**Friday, July 18
12:30 PM**

"Public Transit in the Partnership for the Public Good" by Sam Magavern

Sam Magavern teaches in the clinical program at the University at Buffalo Law School, specializing in affordable housing and community economic development. He also serves on the steering committee for the Partnership for the Public Good and is a volunteer lawyer for the City of Buffalo Living Wage Commission. A native of Buffalo, he attended college at Harvard University and law school at UCLA.

Join us!

NOTE: no CRTC meeting in August

NEXT CRTC monthly MEETING

**September 17 at Market Arcade, 12:00 noon-1:00 PM
617 Main Street, Buffalo**

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.

Grand Rapids, MI, considers Streetcar System

Results of a feasibility study indicate that a streetcar system in downtown [Grand Rapids] - just the first 1.6-mile segment of it - would spur some \$388 million in new development and create more than 700 new jobs in Kent County over nine years.

The Interurban Partnership Board accepted the feasibility study late last month and referred it back to the Strategic Planning Committee for further analysis....

The action should not be misconstrued as an irrevocable vote for a streetcar system, Chairman Don Lawless stressed. Mayor George Heartwell said it wasn't a vote for a streetcar, but a vote on "a vision for our community."

"We will continue to look at the project's feasibility, take a closer look at the opportunity, and test our ability to make this happen," Lawless noted.

Former Mayor John Logie attended the meeting and took a few minutes to pitch the streetcar concept before the board.

"This is an important moment for you as our board," Logie said. "I urge you to take that next step. It's a logical and necessary one."

...WZZM-TV News Mon, 7-7-08

(a model of how a feasibility study works)

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:

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289 Ashford Avenue
Tonawanda, NY 14150-8563

Report from NYSDOT Rail Plan Workshops

by Gladys Gifford, CRTC President

Responding to current interest in rail transportation, the New York State Department of Transportation is in the process of updating its **Rail Plan**. The previous Rail Plan was completed in 1986. Citizens Regional Transit Corp. had a voice in the previous Rail Plan, as the Citizens Rapid Transit Committee, and is an active participant in the current process to revise the Rail Plan.

Commissioner Astrid C. Glynn organized four public workshops by which many stakeholders and interested citizens offered input to the working draft of the **2008 New York State Rail Plan**. Afternoon sessions for the Buffalo-Niagara area were: June 18 at UB's North Campus and July 8 at ECC City Campus in downtown Buffalo. CRTC members were present at both sessions.

The motivation for updating the Rail Plan at this time is clear. Recent Federal legislation (HR 6003/S294) that authorizes funding for intercity passenger rail (Amtrak and commuter lines) requires states to have a current state-wide rail plan in order to qualify for Federal rail funds.

Unlike most public meetings that the CRTC monitors, this series of sessions were offered in a workshop format. Participants were invited to work together to critique the proposed vision, goals and strategies. Their comments were then gathered by DOT staff, to be collated and integrated into the drafting process. The workshop format did not allow for any participant to address any part of the draft Rail Plan in an open forum. Instead, participants were given a "comment form" to submit formal comments.

The draft Rail Plan consists of an analysis of the current state of all rail systems in the state, both freight and passenger--with the exception of local transit systems, i.e., light rail (Buffalo) and subway (NYC). The Plan evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the rail systems, and seeks a way to improve and position the systems for the demands of the future for rail transportation.

With this Rail Plan, the NYSDOT is clearly calling for significant investment in rail. Commissioner Glynn spoke at the July 8th session, promising that the time spent by stakeholders at these sessions "will not be wasted" and that the Rail Plan is "a robust plan" that will be implemented. She further commented that all of the state is suffering from neglect of the rail systems, but that the Western New York region "has great bones" upon which to build the rail systems of the future.

Commissioner Glynn clearly enjoys the herculean task before her--to reverse decades of dis-investment in the rail systems of the state. All stakeholders are encouraged to take part in this process, thereby supporting her effort.

Public comments will be received through July 18, and may be submitted to:

StateRailPlan@dot.state.ny.us

or by mail to:

**Draft 2008 Rail Plan
NYSDOT
50 Wolf Road
Albany, NY 12232
attn: Bonnie Kring POD-64**

The draft 2008 Rail Plan may be downloaded at

<http://www.nysdot.gov/2008drafrailplan>

Regional Advisory Group (RAG) Arrives at GBNRTC

On July 17, 1-3 PM, during the Policy Committee meeting of the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC), a new group will be announced.

Representatives of the Regional Advisory Group (RAG) will introduce their new organization, whose purpose is to advise the GBNRTC on its planning process in order to meet transportation needs of the community.

At this meeting, the RAG will present their guiding principles and offer their "2008 Regional Advisory Group Agenda" to the GBNRTC.

The RAG currently includes: Citizen Action of NYS, Citizens Regional Transit Corporation, Coalition for Economic Justice, Homeless Alliance of WNY, New Millenium Group, Partners for a Livable WNY, Wellness Institute/GO Buffalo, and VOICE Buffalo.

- Key long-range objectives of the RAG include:
- * support the Framework for Regional Growth, especially its fourth principle: improved access and mobility (as well as similar language in the GBNRTC's Long-range Transportation Plan);
 - * advocate for adequate transportation service for people with limited income and/or personal mobility;
 - * offer a community voice to balance the strong voice of business interests at the GBNRTC.

- Short-term items on the RAG 2008 Agenda include:
- * monitor the Cars on Main Street project, to ensure no reduction in Metro Rail service or accessibility;
 - * publicize efforts to reshape the Federal Transportation Act, due for reauthorization in 2009, to reflect shift in priorities from highways to public transit.

Members and associates of the organizations that comprise the RAG are encouraged to attend this important meeting!

Be there!

July 17, 1-3 PM

GBNRTC Policy Committee meeting

Adams Mark Hotel, Buffalo

Stand up and be heard!

Congress acts to Support Transit, Amtrak

On **June 26**, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the "Saving Energy Through Public Transportation Act of 2008" (**H.R. 6052**) by a vote of 322-98. Representatives James L. Oberstar (D-MN), Chairman of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, John L. Mica (R-FL), Ranking Member of the Committee, and Peter M. DeFazio (D-OR), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit, are the bill's original cosponsors.

The legislation authorizes \$850 million for both Fiscal Year (FY) 2008 and 2009 to help transit systems cope with rising fuel costs and to promote public transportation ridership as a means to reduce domestic fuel consumption.

(Update: on June 27, the bill was referred to the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs. Senator Schumer serves on that committee.)

On **June 11**, the House of Representatives approved **H.R. 6003**, the "Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008" by a vote of 311-104. The measure authorizes \$14.4 billion in support of **Amtrak** and passenger rail over a five-year period. In addition to substantial funding increases for Amtrak operating and capital expenses, the legislation includes a number of provisions... to promote the development of passenger rail.

The bill authorizes \$2.5 billion for grants to states to pay for capital costs of facilities and equipment necessary to provide new or improved intercity passenger rail. It also authorizes \$1.75 billion for grants to states and/or Amtrak to finance the construction of new high-speed rail corridors.

(Caution--this is an authorization, not an appropriation bill. Congress has not yet appropriated these funds.)

#####

Aug. 22, 2008
time TBA
Albright-Knox Art Gallery

Gusto at the Gallery
features

“Re-Use of Central Terminal”

*This iconic building stirs memories and emotions.
The efforts of the Central Terminal Restoration Corporation
are beginning to pay off.
Now is the time to share your vision for this historic building.*

*What would you like to see happen with the Central Terminal?
Could the building serve as a train station, once again?
All ideas welcome--both wise and wonderful.*

**Check the Art Gallery website: www.albrightknox.org
for specific time on August 22nd.**

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 \$4,300 since mid-April, 2007.

Help us reach our goal!

Send your donation to the CRTC treasurer, ASAP!

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

Citizens Regional Transit Corporation

617 Main Street
Buffalo, NY 14203

return service requested

CALENDAR

July 17 1-3 PM
GBNRTC Policy meeting
Adams Mark Hotel, Buffalo (p. 3)

July 17th 5:30 to 7:30 PM
Buffalo Museum of Science
“Business Gets Green”

July 18 12:30 PM
CRTC Monthly Meeting
3330 Main Street, Buffalo
Sam Magavern on PPG

Aug. 22 Gusto at the Gallery
“Re-Use of Central Terminal”
Albright-Knox Art Gallery

Aug. 23-24 Green Options
Buffalo at Elmwood Art Festival

Sept 6-7 Train Show
Central Terminal

Sept. 20 Central Terminal
“Mobility across the Ages”
regional transportation event