



CITIZENS for REGIONAL TRANSIT NEWS

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Energy Policy? Revive Trains!

As Congress returns to Washington this month, efforts will be made to craft legislation to deal with the energy crunch. Speeches will be offered in support of the Energy Reform Act of 2008, which includes:

- *an intensive effort to transition vehicles to non-petroleum based fuels;
- *a robust federal commitment to conservation and energy efficiency;
- *targeted, responsible domestic production of energy resources.

But, as the National Association of Rail Passengers (*see NARP.org*) asks:

Where are the trains?

Any effort to wean our economy off of the diminishing global supply of oil is commendable, but this Energy Reform Act fails to recognize the most obvious and successful route to energy conservation and energy efficiency-- a robust re-investment in America's neglected passenger rail system.

Americans are already taking the trains in record numbers, despite crowded cars and uncertain schedules. Rail travel is safe, comfortable, and relaxing. Train travel is cheap, saving passengers the cost of gasoline as well as offering reasonable ticket prices.

If more rail cars were in service, more Americans would choose train travel on existing routes. If more passenger rail routes were available, even more Americans would choose train travel. The net effect of all these choices would combine to achieve energy conservation and energy efficiency--just what this new Energy Reform Act proposes!

The simplest, most elegant answer is often the best.

You want energy reform?
Bring on the trains!

CRTC Monthly Meeting

Wednesday, September 17
12:00 Noon

"Candidates on Track?" or How Federal Campaigns deal with Public Transit

Meet with representatives of the campaigns for U.S. President and Congress (invited) to share with them our vision for public transit. Public transit should be a major item in candidates' platforms, because: Americans are demanding more an better transit service, and the new Congress and Administration will be shaping the new Federal Transportation Act, up for renewal in 2009.

Come help brief candidates on transit issues!

Join us!

NEW LOCATION NEW LOCATION
Citizens Regional Transit meets at:

617 Main Street, Market Arcade Bldg., Buffalo

Meeting room indicated by poster in lobby.

CRTC meetings are free and open to the public.

NEW LOCATION

CRTC Testimony at Nadler-Higgins Hearing

by Gladys Gifford, CRTC President

The CRTC was invited to testify at a hearing on transportation priorities, 8-11-08, at Medaille College, called by Congressmen Gerald Nadler and Brian Higgins. Here is the full text of testimony given by CRTC President, Gladys Gifford

Dear Congressmen Higgins and Nadler:

My name is Gladys Gifford. Today I represent two organizations: the Citizens Regional Transit Corporation (CRTC), and VOICE Buffalo. The CRTC is a non-profit organization 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. VOICE Buffalo is a faith-based community organizing project of urban and suburban congregations in Erie County.

I appreciate this opportunity to participate in discussions about transportation priorities for the next Federal Transportation Act, and thank you for organizing this event.

This conversation comes at a pivotal moment in the development of America's transportation system. The fiscal meltdown coming to the highway fund in 2009 plus a strong public desire to remedy global warming plus

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

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

continuing high prices for gasoline combine to allow effective action by you, members of Congress. As you prepare for the new transportation act in 2009, the timing could not be better to push for fundamental change in how you structure our transportation system.

Much of the problem we face arises from the fact that the United States does not have a comprehensive transportation policy. Instead, American transportation lives and dies by political appropriations, subject to Congressional horse-trading. In contrast, this current reauthorization of the Federal transportation bill offers an opportunity for you to listen to the public, who calls on you to reshape the dialogue along policy lines. Following are three suggestions 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 daily transportation. (We recommend the book, Out of Gas: the End of the Age of Oil, by David Goodstein, pub. W.W.Norton.) Therefore, Congress must increase the proportion of monies for transit throughout the country, 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 because of the high cost of gasoline. We need to encourage more people to make that switch. This change can only happen when transit is a reasonable option, providing mobility and access throughout urban areas.

2. Connect people first!

A recent issue of Consumer Reports shows that the cost to individual taxpayers of owning and operating a car to make use of those roads is now \$5,000-\$10,000 per year, depending on the vehicle. NYS is expected to spend \$2 billion per year of those taxpayers' money on repaving state roads, and local municipalities are expected to spend \$200 million per year repaving their local roads. This amounts to 13 times more spending on highways than on transit, according to a recent report by NYPIRG (A Better Way to Go, p. 37, pub. 3-08).

The alternative? Invest heavily in passenger rail on dedicated rights-of-way, such as commuter, light rail, streetcar. For example, Buffalo's light rail line could be expanded to the suburbs; Amtrak could upgrade its rails and offer high-speed travel from Buffalo to NYC. Such investment will allow car owners to choose to ride to destinations on efficient, green transportation without wasting time in traffic jams or spending hard-earned dollars on gasoline. Such investment will allow all transit riders to reach their destinations in a timely fashion without wasting hours making connections on routes that zigzag across town.

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, to UB Amherst, 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 is no need for new highways (such as the #219) or expansions of the Thruway.

...CRTC testimony calls for Parity

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/fees paid to offset use of public infrastructure.

Historically, the Federal government has subsidized privileged transportation heavily, while starving public transportation. This imbalance has a pernicious effect on the disabled, disadvantaged and disenfranchised--those who pay to use public transit and then pay again at tax time for the highways they cannot use.

This misalignment of resources merely perpetuates past failed policies. America must find a way to go back to the future--to rebuild the robust public transit system we enjoyed before World War II, when Americans of all economic status enjoyed a reliable passenger rail system, both for cross-country travel and for local access by way of streetcars.

The current convergence of high gasoline prices and uncertain economic times has already pushed many Americans to use public transit. Here in Buffalo, the NFTA sees a constant rise in ridership, with our light rail system carrying 23,000+ riders daily. But since the Congress has not invested enough money in public transit, our transit systems are straining to provide the service demanded. They need more rolling stock and more capital investment to meet the demand.

We seek your help, to urge Congress to invest heavily in public, not privileged, transportation. Let the next transportation bill do something new: establish parity between highway construction and rail construction. Support a mechanism that gives priority to the operations and maintenance needs of public transit--especially the passenger rail system.

Did you see the opinion piece by Thomas Friedman, in the NY Times yesterday? (8-10-08)

He recounts his personal experience at the 6 PM rush hour in Copenhagen, Denmark--"you knew it was rush hour because 50 percent of the traffic in every intersection was bicycles." He goes on to comment that Denmark responded to the 1970s oil crisis by imposing high gasoline taxes and other measures, such that today the country is energy independent.

Like Denmark, the USA is capable of becoming energy independent. The crisis of 2009 presents an historic opportunity for Congress. We challenge you: take the first step toward energy independence, and have the courage to reshape America's transportation system through a policy that eliminates reliance on oil and puts people first, through sustained and consistent investment in public transportation.

We appreciate your careful attention to our concerns.

Sincerely,

Gladys Gifford, CRTC President

On Track, Here and There....

...Check out the new **NYS DOT** website

www.nysdot.gov/smartplanning

announced in June by Commissioner Astrid C. Glynn. The site includes a simple checklist for local planners to "coordinate infrastructure investments to create connections," Glynn said. "That is, provide for access to transit that is easy to navigate, whether on foot, bicycle or car. In short, to develop an area in a way that maximizes the potential and use of transit."

Download the checklist, and use it as a basis for candidate questions on transportation.

...New **NFTA** fall schedule adds significant service to several routes. The new service on Metro Bus, Route 210 Airport-Niagara Falls Express, will now operate indefinitely. Connecting Niagara Falls with the Buffalo Niagara International Airport, the route was originally intended for tourists and scheduled to run seasonally, but its popularity with both tourists and Niagara County residents persuaded Metro Bus to continue offering the service.

Metro Rail will add an extra weekday round trip in early morning;

Metro Bus increases service on several routes in metro Buffalo plus changes to routes in Niagara Falls, Lockport, Gowanda.

See *nfta.com* for updates.

...**Cincinnati** [OH] officials are assembling financing for a \$132 million [streetcar] system that would connect the city's riverfront stadiums, downtown business district and Uptown neighborhoods, which include six hospitals and the University of Cincinnati, in a six- to eight-mile loop. Depending on the final financing package, fares may be free, 50 cents or \$1.

The city plans to pay for the system with existing tax revenue and \$30 million in private investment. The plan requires the approval of Mayor Mark Mallory, a proponent, and the City Council. *New York Times*, 8-14-08

Mobility Across the Ages
September 20, 2008 3PM – 11pm
Buffalo Central Terminal

Step into Western New York's transportation history, and discover its future, as Buffalo's Central Terminal, a behemoth of Buffalo's transportation past, comes alive with music, art, brews, and a sustainable future for all.

Mobility Across the Ages

3 PM Displays open: view the historical context and the current reality of transportation and energy in our region.

3:30 PM Forum of planners, policy makers, community members, academics, businessmen and visionaries to develop an efficient sustainable transportation system.

5:30 PM Dinners available

Musical entertainment throughout the event, to complement the theme.

Mobility Across the Ages is being put on by student chapters of Engineers for a Sustainable World from the University At Buffalo and the University of Rochester, in cooperation with the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council, the Central Terminal Restoration Corporation and Flying Bison Brewery.

Educational resources and transit plans and will be presented by The New York State Department of Transportation, the NFTA, Citizens for Regional Transit Corp., Empire State Passengers Assn., the Toronto Party Transportation Committee, the Office of Sam Hoyt and the Buffalo Museum of Science.

Tickets: \$5 presale at brownpapertickets.com or \$8 at the door.

...November's presidential election could be pivotal.
Democratic Sen. Barack Obama says he would fight for Amtrak funding while seeking reforms. His Republican rival, Sen. John McCain, has in the past sought to block subsidies for Amtrak.
msnbc.msn.com Wed., Aug. 27, 2008

Citizens Regional Transit Corporation
617 Main Street
Buffalo, NY 14203

return service requested

CALENDAR

Sept. 17 12:00 noon
CRTC Monthly Meeting
617 Main Street, Buffalo

Sept. 20 3-11 PM
Mobility Across the Ages (p. 4)

Sept. 24 6-9 PM
Blue-Green Alliance
Buffalo Historical Society

Sept. 27 9:00 AM-12:30 PM
Environmental Summit
Daemon College Info: 839-8524

Oct. 1 PCC meeting of GBNRTC
NYS Thruway, 455 Cayuga Rd.

Nov. 19 UB public forum to refine
2020 Plan