



# CITIZENS for REGIONAL TRANSIT NEWS

published by Citizens Regional Transit Corporation  
617 Main Street, Buffalo, NY 14203  
contact: crtc@citizenstransit.org http://citizenstransit.org/

Volume #11 Issue #4

April, 2009

## Fast train? Plug in Metro Rail!!

What wonders does eight billion dollars bring!

Politicians and pundits alike are suddenly on board the fast train from Albany to Buffalo, now that the Feds are ready to provide the cash.

And well they should.

The last time the stars aligned this way, we were the beneficiaries of the new light rail system, Metro Rail--built by Federal and New York State monies.

On a recent trip to Washington, DC, visiting WNY legislators, the agreement was stunning. When asked, what is the WNY caucus' first priority for upstate New York? The answer: high speed rail.

Great. The stations in Albany and Utica and Syracuse are ready, well-able to handle more crowds. These stations feature connections to bus transit and ample parking for local commuters. Waiting rooms are clean and convenient to sandwich shops.

Not so great for Buffalo.

There are two Amtrak stations serving the Buffalo area, and neither one is convenient or clean or attractive. And just try to make a connection with bus or Metro Rail....

Wake up, Buffalo!

We have a couple of years to get ready.

Let's extend Metro Rail to the airport and revive Central Terminal as the premier Amtrak stop for the region!

Let's set up a downtown circulator (vintage streetcar?) that will bring Amtrak passengers into our Queen City!

Don't miss the train--plug in Metro Rail!

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## CRTC Monthly Meeting

*honoring the memory of Joseph Radder*

**Wednesday, April 15  
12:00-1:00 PM**

## Streetcars in the Cobblestone District? or Vintage Trolley, Anyone?

with  
**Special guest, James T. Sandoro**

**Jim Sandoro** is owner and operator of Buffalo Transportation/Pierce-Arrow Museum on Michigan Avenue. He is vitally interested in the concept of a streetcar system serving downtown, and participated in the 2007 tour conducted by CRTC of the proposed Cobblestone Loop.

Former chairman of CRTC, **Joe Radder**, long championed the concept of a Vintage Trolley for downtown Buffalo. Come see the 2002 video produced by CRTC to promote a Vintage Trolley. Could Joe's concept be revived?

**Join us!**

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**Citizens for Regional Transit meets at:**

**617 Main Street, Market Arcade Building, Buffalo**

Meeting space is available courtesy Preservation Buffalo-Niagara.

**CRTC meetings are free and open to the public.**

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# Congress gears up for Transportation Reauthorization

by Susan Berlin and John R.. Bell [www.apta.com/passenger\\_transport](http://www.apta.com/passenger_transport)

*Editor note: Passenger Transport is the weekly newsletter of the American Public Transportation Association (APTA)*

## Members of Congress Share Views on Sustainability, Economic Stimulus and Authorization

The two primary Congressional authors of the upcoming transportation authorization bill—Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-CT) and Rep. James Oberstar (D-MN)—were joined by three House Members who spoke about environmental sustainability, fiscal responsibility, and the role of public transportation in these efforts when they addressed separate sessions at **APTA’s Legislative Conference** last week in Washington.

Oberstar, chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, was the keynote speaker at the Opening General Session. “You must enjoy what you’re doing,” he told the transit professionals regarding the record 10.7 billion rides they provided last year. “You’re doing your job and laying the groundwork for even better things to come.”

[Oberstar] suggested that “OPEC did us a favor” by raising gasoline prices to more than \$4 a gallon during 2008.

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“People found options—such as transit,” he said, “but now that the prices have come down again, if people stop there and go back to driving, we won’t be serving the public well.”

The Congressman enthused over the \$8 billion for high-speed rail included in the ARRA legislation, offering examples of the “civilized” high-speed service in Europe. He also stressed the positive “rippling” effect of federal transit funds on the U.S. economy, where a transit agency in one state may order buses or railcars manufactured in another—boosting ridership in one place and creating jobs in another.

“A new bill is coming,” Oberstar said of the next transportation authorization bill, which will follow the expiration of SAFETEA-LU on Sept. 30. “You just help us write it.” Together, he said: “We can make the 21st century the bright age of transit.”

The following morning, Sen. Dodd, who chairs the Senate Banking Committee, led off the General Session....Dodd has called for the bill to include a vision; funding; transit-oriented development; and a national infrastructure bank.

“Obviously, we meet at a very transformative moment in our nation’s history,” Dodd said, with “the very future of our planet” at stake with the new authorization. With the U.S. population expected to grow another 50 percent in the first half of this century, he noted that this will require millions of new homes and office space—and a dramatic increase in America’s carbon emissions unless bold measures are undertaken.

Dodd also emphasized public transportation’s significant economic benefits. He compared the current economic crisis not to the Great Depression, but to the nearly forgotten Great Panic of 1873 that continued for six years, and was initially caused by a transportation crisis: horse influenza caused the shutdown of horse-drawn street railways and stopped freight delivery.

Major investment is needed to prevent a similar situation now, he said, calling the current overall U.S. transportation system “inefficient, deteriorating, and responsible for a third of our carbon footprint.”

Dodd said he hopes public transit will be “the bedrock of climate change and energy efforts. “We shouldn’t confuse a down payment with a new policy,” he added, “and we shouldn’t confuse ‘shovel ready’ with ‘future ready.’ And we need future-ready projects.”

Also speaking were Reps. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), Peter DeFazio (D-OR), and John Mica (R-FL). Blumenauer cited his sponsorship of the Clean Low-Emissions Affordable New Transportation Equity Act (CLEAN-TEA). That bill calls for cap-and-trade (via auction) of greenhouse gas emissions, with 10 percent of the resulting revenues devoted to “greening” public transportation....

Mica, ranking member of the T&I, emphasized that the transportation authorization bill is “not just a highway bill, but a transportation bill for the United States,” and that it needs “strong components for public transit and for rail, both freight and passenger.” He continued: “I strongly advocate that, in the document we produce to replace SAFETEA-LU, that we have a strategic plan based on intermodal components and include all modes. It’s essential that we do that.”

He noted that he and Oberstar worked together in just 437 days to pass a proposal to replace the highway bridge in Minneapolis that collapsed in August 2007. “Normally that process takes seven or eight years,” he said, so “nothing should stop us from moving forward now with some of the transit projects we have.”

...editorial on April 6 gave a boost to plans for **Central Terminal** as major station for high-speed Amtrak, with first-ever public support for extending **Metro Rail**.

...report of reduced **highway deaths** (4-6) due to reduced vehicle miles traveled, attributed to slowing economy.

... report (4-6) on “job sprawl” study by the Brookings Institute which connected current business demand for large land footprints with impossible demands on public transportation. James J. Allen, **Amherst IDA**, admitted negative connection between suburban jobs and public transportation: “One of the first things people do when they get a good job is buy a car.”

...**Justin Booth, Green Options Buffalo** received recognition (3-31) for crafting the Healthy Infrastructure for Queen City Livability Project, a guide for the city to reconfigure the streets in order to improve mobility for pedestrians and cyclists while accommodating on-street parking.

...**Mayor Byron Brown and Council President David A. Franczyk** went on record (3-24) supporting reuse of **Central Terminal** as the Buffalo hub for proposed high-speed Amtrak.

...**CSX** discussed right-of-way issues with **Sen. Schumer** and **Rep. Slaughter** (3-26) for proposed high-speed rail line, from Albany to Buffalo.

...from National Association of Railroad Passengers, March 25, 2009--

Amtrak today released a complete list of projects it plans to complete with \$1.3 billion in funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Highlights include:

- \* Replacement of Niantic River movable bridge in Connecticut
- \* 21 Long Distance Cars and 60 Amfleet from wrecks and storage back into service
- \* ADA upgrades and improvements at nearly 200 stations
- \* Construction of an indoor maintenance facility in Seattle
- \* Investment in Chicago Union Station-area infrastructure to better handle winter weather.

Between the ARRA funds and regular capital appropriations, over the next two years, Amtrak plans to return to service nearly all its stored or wreck-damaged passenger train rolling stock.

## **Back to the Future: U.S. Transit Use Hits 50-Year High in 2008**

...from Mobilizing the Region, 3-13-09

Newly released figures from the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) show transit ridership growing 4 percent nationwide in 2008 over 2007, with 10.7 billion trips taken on trains, light rail, buses and trolleys in 2008, the most since 1956.

The upward trend in ridership was spurred by high gasoline prices last spring and summer, but continued even as gas prices fell. The downward spiraling economy and mounting job losses slowed that growth somewhat in the fourth quarter of 2008, but ridership was still up by 1.7 percent over the same period in 2007, and December ridership grew by more than 4 percent.

The ridership growth contrasts starkly with a 3.6 percent drop in miles driven in 2008 and may signal a fundamental shift in the way that Americans travel. The dramatic drops in [the rate of] vehicle miles traveled that began in the spring of 2008 as Americans reeled from higher gas prices gave way in the fall and early winter to recession-induced declines.

It seems Americans have discovered that transit can offer an affordable alternative to driving and are now looking to transit to help balance their personal budgets. APTA reports that transit use can save the average family as much as \$8,000 a year over driving.

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### **ALERT-----ARRA Benefits Transit Riders-----ALERT**

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (a.k.a. the stimulus) provides a benefit that could save transit riders over \$1,000 a year. The federal bill signed into law last month raises the amount of pre-tax income an employee enrolled in a commuter benefits program can use to pay for mass transit or vanpool expenses, from \$120 to \$230. This also creates parity between the transit benefit and the commuter parking benefit, which was already \$230.

Sen. Chuck Schumer has pushed for increased transit commuter benefits for years and was instrumental in getting the benefit included in the stimulus.

## Transportation features of NYS Budget

*by Gladys Gifford, CRTC President*

Nobody is happy with the budget passed by the NYS Legislature, and the most recent alert (4-8) from the New York Public Transit Association (NYPTA) indicates that the agreement is already floundering. Revenues are simply not sufficient even to support this pared-down budget agreement.

Nevertheless, the official figures for transportation look like this:

	<u>Executive Budget</u>	<u>Enacted Budget</u>
DOT All Funds	\$6.7 billion	\$10.8 billion (includes \$3.7 billion from ARRA)
Transit-MTA	\$2.26 billion	(as in Executive)
Transit-other than MTA	\$0.416 billion	\$0.436 billion (Legislature restored \$20 million)

Also, the Legislature restored \$100 million to the Multi-Modal reappropriation.

Transit lobbyists and transit advocates worked tirelessly to persuade the Governor and Legislature to support public transit with adequate funding. Despite these vigorous efforts, the enacted budget slashed 2008-2009 funding levels by \$265 million, at a time when the population is turning to public transit for economic relief for their personal transportation needs.

This budget failed to recognize the great opportunity offered by the economic crisis: to raise public transit support on a par with highways. Instead, the above figures show that New York State allows public transit to struggle along at the rate of 1:3, transit to highways.

All observers predict that actual disbursements from the NYS coffers will vary significantly from the official budget, due to revenue shortfalls.

Stay tuned.

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### Citizens Regional Transit Corporation

617 Main Street  
Buffalo, NY 14203

*return service requested*

## CALENDAR

**April 15 12:00 noon**  
**CRTC Monthly Meeting**  
**617 Main Street, Buffalo**

May 6 9:30 AM PCC meeting,  
GBNRTC at City Hall, Buffalo

May 12-16 National Solar  
Conference, Buffalo  
Exhibit Hall at Convention Center  
open to public on May 16  
[www.ases.org/solar2009](http://www.ases.org/solar2009)

May 13 7 PM "Transit-Oriented  
Development" part of  
Reshaping Rochester series  
*Details at [www.rrcdc.org](http://www.rrcdc.org)*

**May 20 12:00 noon**  
**CRTC Monthly Meeting**  
**617 Main Street, Buffalo**

Oct. 30-Nov. 1, Boston, MA  
Rail-Volution  
[www.railvolution.com](http://www.railvolution.com)