



# CITIZENS for REGIONAL TRANSIT NEWS

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November, 2009

## Who Acts for Transit Riders?

“Cars Sharing Main Street,” has just passed another hurdle. The Federal Transit Administration issued its finding on October 2, 2009. The FTA states that this project will have no significant impact on the environment. This ruling, or Finding Of No Significant Impact (FONSI), means that there is no need for an Environmental Impact Statement, and that construction may start as early as next spring.

Construction (or demolition) will remove the Theater Station entirely and tear down the remaining stations in order to replace them with new ones.

The project is expected to take three years and will be built one block at a time.

Once completed, vehicles will be allowed on the railbed of Metro Rail, including the area under the HSBC skyscraper.

This project is the brainchild of Buffalo Place, Inc., aided by the City of Buffalo and the NFTA.

The public has been struggling with this flawed project since 2002. The FONSI dealt with 34 comments from the public received April 27, 2009. Of these, only a handful were supportive: most of the public presented objections.

Each comment received a response from the FTA--but these responses were simply paraphrases of the project, as submitted by Buffalo Place.

This project is guaranteed to disrupt Metro Rail--the most successful route in the whole NFTA system.

The NFTA was powerless to stop it. The City of Buffalo sat on its hands.

Who advocates for transit riders in Buffalo?

Who can stop this train wreck?

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## CRTC Monthly Meeting

### Wednesday, November 18 12:00-1:00 PM

## High-Speed Rail in NYS: Alignment, Advocacy, Legislation

with

**Hon. Sam Hoyt, NYS Assemblyman, District 144**  
**Bruce Becker, President of Empire State Passengers Association**

Assemblyman Hoyt will update the legislative history of the project. He has been a consistent advocate for high-speed rail throughout his career in the NYS Legislature.

Bruce Becker will present the details of the proposed project, including costs and alignment. He will also outline the advocacy efforts of the NYS high-speed rail coalition. The Empire State Passengers Association is a state-wide citizen-advocacy organization focused on improving intercity public transportation resources with a modern, high-speed passenger rail system as the foundation.

Discussion will follow, to focus on high speed rail funding process, alignment details and advocacy efforts.

### 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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# CRTC's Gifford testimony at NYS Senate Transportation Committee, 10-30-09 excerpted--full text at CRTC website

I currently serve as President of Citizens Regional Transit Corporation, a 501c3 non-profit group that advocates for expansion of the light rail system in metro Buffalo. I also serve the League of Women Voters of NYS as their transportation specialist. These groups have joined together in Buffalo with other non-profits to form a transportation advisory group for our local MPO.

However, my remarks today are drawn from my personal experience for the past fifteen years as an advocate for public transportation, and are not endorsed officially by any group.

The document we are charged to examine today is set up to plan for the next five years. I submit to you that we must have a much longer time-frame in mind. We should follow the example of the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), who insists that we must have a vision for the next fifty years in order to properly make near-term plans. Let us only allow near-term plans for transportation construction that support the long-term vision.

As expressed by Senator Dilan, New York State is in a bind. The usual ways of doing transportation appropriations have failed to keep up with the needs of the system...This crisis demands new thinking among policy-makers in NYS.

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I suggest three changes, or reforms.

**First**, concerning current NYS revenues, the practice of stealing from Peter to pay Paul must stop. Gas tax revenues must be dedicated to support only transportation needs. These revenues must be protected by law, so that no gas tax revenue and other transportation-generated revenue may be siphoned off for the general fund by a future legislature.

**Second**, the Capital Plan priorities of the NYS Department of Transportation must shift, from roads to transit, as a matter of justice. Highway-based transportation policy is regressive, placing a disproportionate financial burden on those least able to pay. Taxpayers only pay for the highways; the vehicles required to use those highways must be provided by citizens out of their own private funds.

Recent studies show that household costs of owning and maintaining an automobile are \$7,000-\$12,000 per year, regardless of household income. For low-income households, automobile-based transportation is the second highest expense in the budget after housing. For all households, automobile-based transportation is a drain on their budget--an unfair entry fee for participation in the economy.

New York State already has a model for public transit-based transportation policy: New York City. Statistics cited by the NYSDOT (A Transportation Profile of New York State, May, 2004, p. 25) showed that 70% of commuters in the city used public transit in 2004. Furthermore, NYC has been cited as a "green" city due to its density and extensive public transit system. Consequently, households in New York City are not burdened with the expenses of automobile-based transportation. Other urbanized areas in the state could benefit likewise from expanded public transit, such as streetcars, light rail, heavy rail and buses....

Why continue to throw limited tax dollars at all highways, which can only be used by those among us who can afford to provide our own cars and trucks?

Why starve public transit, which is available to all citizens in the areas where it operates?

**Third**, there are hidden costs of the current highway-based transportation system that must be recognized and publicized. A recent project in Western New York illustrates this problem. NYS Route 78, called Transit Road, serves a growing suburb on the east side of Buffalo. Sections have been widened to accommodate traffic congestion, to the extent of 10 lanes in some areas. Meanwhile, little has been done to set up a parallel street grid which would allow multiple access points for commercial strips that attract traffic. The result is more traffic, not less, despite millions of dollars spent....

The proposed 2010-2015 Capital Plan supports "strategic expansion of capacity to support economic development." .... The NYSDOT should not be in the business of enabling sprawl that is cloaked in the mantra of "economic development." Rather, as in the proposed high speed rail project and other passenger rail projects, let taxpayer dollars be invested in public transportation infrastructure that supports in-fill development and revitalization of urban areas. In the urban context, expansion of public transportation infrastructure will be a boon to economic development, both for short-term construction impact and for long-term sustainability....

I urge the New York State Senate to advocate for a comprehensive change in transportation policy for all of our citizens. Please insist that the NYS Department of Transportation become a partner in our communities, to create transportation systems that support sustainable and connected communities with multi-modal infrastructure that will carry us forward for the next fifty years--not just the next five years!

# 72 % of Transportation Measures Approved on November 3 Voters Choose Pro-Rail Candidates; Vote Down Anti-Tax Measures

...from *cfte.org*

On November 3, 2009, voters across the country approved 72% of transportation ballot measures. In a rough economy and an off-year for elections, these results indicate that voters feel strongly about supporting transportation despite major economic challenges. This is a continuation of what we saw last fall when 77% of transportation measures were approved, even though many voters were already feeling the effects of a weakening economy. The results from the past two years are in line with what has been happening throughout the past decade. Since 2000, approximately 70% of all transportation measures have been approved, a rate double that of ballot measures generally.

This November, measures were on the ballot in five states--Colorado, Indiana, Maine, Michigan and Ohio. Of the seven measures, five were finance, one sought to establish a Regional Transportation District, and one to amend a city charter to require voter approval of all public transportation projects. Voters in Cincinnati, Ohio rejected the city charter amendment, which was designed to delay and obstruct public transportation projects. Voters also approved four out of five finance measures, generating over \$74 million for transportation.

Earlier in the year, three elections were held with transportation measures on the ballot. Of those three elections, a sales tax increase in Island County, Washington and a property tax increase in Kalamazoo County, Michigan, were both approved. Voters in Grand Rapids, Michigan came close to approving a property tax increase for a high-speed bus line, but in the end it did not achieve the necessary support.

There is one more measure scheduled in 2009--voters in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma will be asked to approve a sales tax on December 8 to support a variety of projects, including a new rail-based streetcar system, potential commuter lines and a transit hub.

Even beyond the traditional ballot measures, November 3 was a good day for public transportation. The defeat of several local anti-rail candidates and anti-tax measures that could have limited funding can be seen as boons for transportation advocates. In mayoral races in Cincinnati and Charlotte, the pro-rail candidate won. Newly re-elected Mayor Mark Mallory strongly supports the 7.9 mile streetcar plan for Cincinnati. In Charlotte, voters elected City Council member Anthony

Foxx, a strong supporter of the Charlotte Area Transit System and finding new funding options for transportation. In both cases, the defeated candidate was less supportive of transportation issues. This was also a key issue in city council races in Boise, ID, and at the ballot, the candidates with the stronger transportation agenda were elected.

On two statewide ballots this November, voters were faced with initiatives known as TABOR measures. In both Washington and Maine, these measures sought to impose spending limits on state and local budgets and require voter approval of any increases. In the past, places that have approved such measures have seen dramatic decreases in state and local budgets, requiring intense cuts to services like public transportation. Maine and Washington voters roundly defeated the measures, ensuring that needed services and infrastructure will not be neglected because of artificial limits on spending.

The Center for Transportation Excellence anticipates that 2010 will be an even more robust year for transportation elections. Both state legislatures and communities around the country began considering a variety of potential measures in 2009, but held off as a result of the economic downturn.

After the November elections, American Public Transportation Association President William Millar made the observation that "at a time when unemployment is high and economic uncertainty is foremost in peoples' minds, you might not expect people to tax themselves for better public transit services." He continued on to identify the key lesson from these recent elections that "these votes for public transportation speak loud and clear: the public wants more public transportation service and is willing to pay for it."

Already, there are fifteen likely measures for ballots in 2010 and additional measures are expected to be announced in the coming months.

A complete list of 2009 ballot initiatives, as well as potential measures in 2010, is available at *cfte.org*.

The Center for Transportation Excellence is a non-partisan research group based in Washington, D.C. See *cfte.org*

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## ***Clean transportation in Senate climate bill!***

The bill, S.1733, authored by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, includes a higher, guaranteed level of funding for clean transportation options, such as public transportation...(Sen. Gillibrand serves on the EPW committee.)

---*www. t4america.org*

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Tuesday, November 17,  
4 PM to 5:30 PM

237 Main Street,  
Downtown Buffalo

Second Floor Conference Room

**CALENDAR**

Nov. 4 9:30 AM  
GBNRTC PCC meeting  
Erie County  
95 Franklin St., Buffalo

Nov. 17 2009 4 to 5:30 PM  
Cornell ILR, 237 Main Street-Suite  
1200, Buffalo, Partnership for the  
Public Good forum  
"Investing in Public Transit."  
[www.ppgbuffalo.org](http://www.ppgbuffalo.org)

**Nov. 18 12:00 noon**  
**"High-Speed Rail in NYS"**  
**CRTC Monthly Meeting**  
**617 Main Street, Buffalo**

Dec. 2 9:30 AM  
GBNRTC PCC meeting  
NYS DOT  
100 Seneca St., Buffalo

**Dec. 16 12:00 noon**  
**"Rail-Volution in Boston"**  
**CRTC Monthly Meeting**  
**617 Main Street, Buffalo**

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**Citizens Regional Transit Corporation**

617 Main Street  
Buffalo, NY 14203

*return service requested*