



# CITIZENS for REGIONAL TRANSIT NEWS

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617 Main Street, Buffalo, NY 14203

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January, 2011

## New Year+ New Leaders = ??

Jim Wallis, the author of *God's Politics*, came to Buffalo several years ago and spoke with faith leaders in a downtown church. Among other points he made, was this illustration of a politician:

...the man wets his finger and holds it up in the air, to find out which way the wind is blowing. Then he leads the folks in that direction....

Then came the punch line: "we must learn how to change the wind."

Activists and advocates and yes, lobbyists work hard to change the public perception of what a politician can accomplish, i.e., to "change the wind." But public desire can only go so far. There does need to be true leadership on the part of those whom the public elects.

Western New York has elected three new faces at the state legislature--two seasoned politicians and one newcomer. The state has a new governor. The city of Buffalo has a new councilman.

Will these leaders work together?  
Will they exhibit personal discipline and professional skill on behalf of the public?  
Will they be trustworthy?

In the area of public transportation, all are on board to support the high speed rail project. The CRT plans to meet with the new elected officials soon, to share our vision for regional public transit. But our efforts alone cannot change the wind.

In this new year, our hope is that members of the public will get to know their elected representatives...

Write, call, show up at meetings!

Change the wind!

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## Citizens for Regional Transit Monthly Meeting

**Wednesday, January 19  
12:00-1:00 PM**

## CRT Annual Meeting

featuring-- 2010 Annual Report,  
election of officers for 2011,  
planning for 2011 and beyond

All are welcome!

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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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## Rail on the Move: More \$\$\$ for NYS High Speed Rail; Toronto Adds Light Rail Cars; Washington, DC, Commuters Change Habits

Gov. Cuomo hit the nail (spike?) on the head with his letter to Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood last November. The result? An additional \$7.3 million for NYS efforts to build **high speed rail**. As announced by Secretary LaHood on Dec. 9, 2010, the additional funds were distributed to fourteen states, after the newly-elected governors of Ohio and Wisconsin declined the funds ear-marked for high speed rail.

The \$1.195 billion was distributed as follows:

- California: \$624m;
- Florida: \$342.3m;
- Washington: \$161.5m;
- Illinois: \$42.3m;
- New York: \$7.3m;
- Maine: \$3.3m;
- Massachusetts: \$2.8m;
- Vermont: \$2.7m;
- Missouri: \$2.2m;
- Wisconsin: \$2m (for Chicago-Milwaukee improvements, which Gov.-elect Walker supports);
- Oregon: \$1.6m;
- North Carolina: \$1.5m;
- Iowa: \$309,080;
- Indiana: \$364,980.

For full text of LaHood's announcement, see: [fastlane.dot.gov/2010/12/dot-to-redirect-1195-billion-in-high-speed-rail-grants-rejected-by-wisconsin-ohio.html](http://fastlane.dot.gov/2010/12/dot-to-redirect-1195-billion-in-high-speed-rail-grants-rejected-by-wisconsin-ohio.html)

A recent article in the Washington Post (12-16-10) shows interesting changes in the commuter patterns in **Washington, DC**.

According to the article, recent census data shows that all forms of public transit increased ridership, 2005-2009. In the DC area, public transit share of commuter moved from 11% to 14%, while percentage of solo driver edged downward two points.

But the most interesting point made in the article was about the commuting habits of younger workers.

"Transportation experts said the gains in public transit were in part the result of higher gas prices but also reflected the influx of younger residents who refuse to spend long hours in the car. Many of those in their 20s and 30s have chosen to live in vibrant neighborhoods along bus, Metro and rail lines, even if it means sacrificing the suburban amenities of their childhoods."

The article goes on to quote experts who analyze commuter behavior regularly. All agree that change is happening, particularly among younger workers and also in response to rising gas prices.

Furthermore, when the younger generation returns to the workplace, their preference for transit will push demand even higher.

However, two out of three commuters still drive to work alone, depending on their housing and economic status.

For the complete article, see:

[www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/15/AR201012150](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/15/AR201012150)

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**Toronto** has moved forward on its plans for more and better light rail. A total of 182 cars were ordered from Bombardier, according to an announcement this past June. The additional rolling stock will ensure that the new light rail line currently under construction, Sheppard Transit City, will be operating in 2014.

These new cars will be operated under Metrolinx, and differ slightly from the rail cars used by the Toronto Transit Commission. These cars are slightly longer and wider, and operate on international standard gauge tracks. They are low-floor, and can be operated at either end of the vehicle. Each car can carry 280 passengers, and can be combined in multiple-car trains.

For more info, see: Toronto Transportation Society, [torontotransportationsociety.org](http://torontotransportationsociety.org)

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### 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

### Factoid:

In the last five years, transit use has increased faster than any other mode of transportation.

...[www.cfte.org/](http://www.cfte.org/)

# Opportunity in NYS, but Obstacle in US Congress ?

.....by Gladys Gifford, CRT President

Did you notice? **Gov. Cuomo**, in his State of the State message, **Jan. 5**, did mention transportation, as part of the “NY Cleaner, Greener Communities Program” announced late in his address. “These competitive grants would encourage communities across New York to develop regional sustainable growth strategies. Grants will be awarded to the best and most innovative comprehensive regional plans that coordinate sustainability efforts in housing, transportation, emissions control, energy efficiency and create jobs, while taking into account the cumulative impact of prior development.”

Excellent words, but lots of “wriggle room.”  
How does this competitive grants idea fit with the Smart Growth bill recently passed by the NYS Legislature?

The more immediate test will come in the first Cuomo budget, due out in early February. Will transit funding be protected from the budget axe?

On the legislative side, WNY now has three new **NYS Senators**, each with vital committee assignments. Plus, Senators Maziarz (Niagara) and Young (Cattaraugus) have seats on the Senate Transportation Committee. The CRT urges all WNY legislators to work together and promote equitable funding for public transportation in our region.

Meanwhile, back at the **Congress of the United States...**

SAFETEA-LU, the transportation act passed in 2004, has been extended once again. The Act expired in 2009. The current extension continues funding authorization through September 30, 2011. Congress has not taken significant action on its replacement, despite the valiant work of several advocacy groups and the leadership of Rep. Jim Oberstar (D-MN), a veteran Congressman who lost his 18-term seat in the 2010 election.. Advocates are already working with Rep. John Mica (R-FL), new chair of the House committee on transportation, to sustain the momentum for a new bill.

But a wrench has been thrown in the works...  
Action by the **House of Representatives** on January 5 changed the rules by which Federal transportation funds are distributed. No longer are states assured that the funding levels required by the Transportation Act will be distributed for transportation.

Under previous rules, the House is prevented from taking up any legislation that would result in lower funding levels for transportation than those guaranteed in the authorization law (i.e., SAFETEA-LU). The new rules package for the 112th Congress eliminated that firewall, thereby putting transportation projects at risk of losing funding as part of budget-cutting.

Will saner heads in the House prevail?

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## Highways Fail to Pay for Themselves ...*uspig.org (1-4-11)*

A new study just released by U.S. Public Interest Research Group (U.S. PIRG) disproves the common misperception that road-building is paid for by user fees, showing that gas taxes cover barely half the costs of building and maintaining roads, a fraction which is likely to fall steadily.

“America needs to make difficult choices about how to fund our troubled transportation system. The first task is to discard common myths about how roads are paid for,” said **U.S. PIRG Transportation Associate Dan Smith**.

This year, Congress will again address funding for the nation’s Highway Trust Fund, which has been bailed out four times with \$35 billion from general funds since 2008. Federal gas taxes have not increased since 1993 and revenues are expected to remain flat as Americans continue to drive less and use more fuel-efficient cars. “Highway advocates often wrongly portray highway spending as financially conservative by falsely labeling gas taxes as ‘user fees’ that pay for roads,” said Smith. “Funding programs based on myths instead of what is most needed is wasteful and unproductive.”

**Letter-Writing Campaign**  
**led by**  
**Transportation Equity Network** ([transportationequity.org](http://transportationequity.org))

President Obama and his team are drafting their proposed 2012 budget. Send the White House your personal stories to show them how vital it is to invest in transit access and transportation equity in order to get America moving again.

With transit budgets being slashed across the country, this is a crucial opportunity to support the transportation investments our communities need to access jobs, opportunity, education, and health care.

**Write a personal letter to President Obama, before February 4.**

Letters to the White House should be as personal as possible.

- 1) Introduce yourself briefly.
- 2) Tell the President how transit issues affect you and those close to you. Do you or a loved one rely on public transportation to reach a job, school, or health care provider? Have service cuts or rising transportation costs affected you or your family? Is high-speed rail or another major transit project on the line in your state or community? Consider the following prompts...

- Transportation matters for me and my community because...
- Public transportation is important to me...
- I believe transportation needs to be a national priority...
- Equitable transportation investments are part of creating healthy communities, for example...
  - Why robust investments in our transportation and infrastructure are crucial...
  - What is at stake for me / my family / community...

Handwritten letters are the most effective.

Please fax your letter to: 202-456-2461

ATTN: The Honorable President Obama

c/o Melody Barnes, Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council

**Send a copy to CRT, please!**

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**Citizens Regional Transit Corporation**

617 Main Street

Buffalo, NY 14203

*return service requested*

**CALENDAR**

**Jan. 19 12:00 noon**  
**CRTC Annual Meeting**  
**617 Main Street, Buffalo**

January 26 7 p.m.  
Monroe Community College  
Brighton Campus Theatre,  
1000 E. Henrietta Road, Rochester  
**“The New American Dream” by**  
**Christopher Leinberger, Visiting**  
**Fellow, The Brookings Institution**  
and Professor and Director of the  
Graduate Real Estate Program at the  
University of Michigan.

Fee: \$15/advance (at any Wegmans store), \$20/door. For more information go to [www.rrcdc.org](http://www.rrcdc.org).

Feb. 2 9:30 am  
GBNRTC PCC meeting  
Buffalo City Hall

March 7, Albany, NY  
Transit Awareness Day  
sponsored by New York Public  
Transit Association

June 1-3, Hyatt Regency  
Buffalo, NY  
New York Public Transit  
Association conference