

Citizens Regional Transit Corporation

Annual Report 2021

FINAL

Submitted by:

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4 February 2022



CITIZENS *for* REGIONAL TRANSIT

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Citizens Regional Transit Corporation 2021 Annual Report

Executive Summary

This report summarizes the accomplishments, milestones, and activities of Citizens for Regional Transit Corporation during 2021. Citizens Regional Transit Corporation is known as Citizens for Regional Transit (CRT). This shorter designation is used in this report.

During 2021 Citizens for Regional Transit was led by the following Board of Directors and Officers: Douglas Funke (President), Seth Triggs (Vice President), Rebecca Reilly (Secretary), and James Gordon (Treasurer). In addition the following persons served as members of the Board of Directors: Gladys Gifford, Elizabeth Giles, Maddie McCauley, and Carl Skompinski. Also, former long-time CRT Board Member Joan Bozer was recognized as Emeritus Board Member. Collectively these Board Members logged 2,703 hours of service valued at \$77,143 (using the volunteer hourly rate of \$28.54 from the NonProfitTimes, <https://www.thenonproffitimes.com/news/value-of-volunteer-hour-tops-28/>).

As of December of 2021 CRT had 50 members, including carryovers from 2020. Going into 2022 we have 52 members including 23 2021 carryovers (1 year grace period) and those who have renewed. The CRT Secretary and Treasurer maintain the names and addresses of CRT members. CRT has 642 Facebook likes (down 3%) and 261 Twitter followers (up 3%). Our newsletter email list has 1,294 recipients (down 2%). Our media contacts list has 134 recipients (down 16%).

CRT continued to advocate for an integrated multi-modal public transportation system that serves everyone fairly in WNY. We also continued to educate the public at large and leaders from both public and private sectors. We kept members and the public informed about transit issues and events via the CRT website and Facebook page, published 4 newsletters, and timely Twitter messages throughout the year. Seth Triggs managed the CRT website; Carl Skompinski managed our Facebook page. Rebecca Reilly was the CRT Newsletter Editor. CRT 2021 Committee Chairs were:

- Nominating Committee – Elizabeth Giles, Carl Skompinski
- Communications and Public Relations Committee – Rebecca Reilly
- Legislative Committee – Gladys Gifford
- Membership Committee – (committee was not active)
- Grants Committee – (committee was not active)

Conducted a wide range of projects and outreach activities including the following. We:

- Supported NY Public Transit Association (NYPTA) “Transit Moves the Economy” legislative outreach initiative and met with many NYS legislators.
- Met with political and community leaders throughout the year.
- We had our CRT plank proposal selected for Partnership for the Public Good’s (PPG) 2021 agenda. We worked with PPG for better transit service by seeking sustainable funding.
- Were awarded and led work of a paid Cornell / PPG High Road Fellowship. The work examined equitable transit oriented development (eTOD) potential of an East Side / airport extension of Buffalo Metro.



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- Provided inputs to the NFTA and Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC). Attended public hearings and meetings – provided verbal and written comments.
- Saw pedestrian safety advocacy work payoff with significant improvements at bus stops on Niagara Falls Boulevard.
- Served on Erie County Community Climate Change Task Force and Transportation Committee.
- Attended Rail-Volution conference (3 CRT board members attended virtually).

These projects are described in more detail in Appendix A.

CRT held three public meetings in 2021. These were held in January, May, and October. The January meeting included the CRT Annual business meeting. These meetings featured one or more guest speakers, were publicized, and open to the public. Table 1 gives a summary. All meetings were held virtually, via Zoom. We thank PPG’s Kristin (“Kricky”) Ksiazek for providing the Zoom support and for moderating the meetings.

Table 1. CRT Quarterly Meetings

Date	Speaker	Summary
Thursday, January 17, 2019	Douglas Funke, President, CRT Hal Morse, Executive Director, GBNRTC	Doug summarized the CRT annual report highlighting CRT successes and ongoing priorities. Hal discussed the 2021 funding expectations for transportation and transit.
Thursday, May, 13, 2021	Speaker: Douglas Funke, President, CRT Panelists: Thomas George, PE, Director of Public Transit, NFTA, and Hal Morse, PMP, Executive Director, GBNRTC	Doug presented the case for transit as an engine for equity, economic growth, and the planet, including an overview of CRT’s prioritized ideas for making transit more competitive with driving. Tom and Hal served as panelists and responded to our transit improvement ideas from planning and operational perspectives and answered audience questions.
Thursday, October 27, 2021	Speaker: Douglas Funke, President, CRT Discussant: Elizabeth Taber, 2021 Cornell / PPG High Road Fellow.	Doug summarized Elizabeth’s report on the potential for eTOD with the extension of Buffalo Metro through Buffalo’s East Side to the airport. “Lizzie” offered comments and answered questions.

The 2022 CRT Board will include the following returning board members: Douglas Funke (President), Seth Triggs (Vice President), Rebecca Reilly (Secretary), James Gordon (Treasurer), Carl Skompinski, Gladys Gifford, and Elizabeth Giles. Like last year, former CRT Board Member, Joan Bozer, will continue as an Emeritus Board Member. Maddie McCauley will be leaving the board after several years of service. We thank Maddie for many contributions over the years and wish her well as she moves on.

We have also nominated Bradley Bethel as a new member to the board. Bradley was born and raised in Buffalo. He brings an interest in transit and a passion for undoing the harm done by the Kensington that cuts through Buffalo’s East Side. He holds a Bachelor’s degree in Environmental Design from UB, and a Master’s in Visual Communications from the Rochester Institute of Technology. Bradley has worked at Locust Street Arts, Clean Air Coalition, the United Way of Buffalo & Erie County, the Restore Our Community Coalition and Preservation Buffalo Niagara. Bradley will be confirmed along with the returning board members virtually following his introduction at the annual meeting on January 19th.



Appendix A

Expanded Highlights

Project Details

- ***Supported NYPTA Transit Moves the Economy Conference.*** Doug, Jim and Carl attended the NYPTA Transit Moves the Economy Conference, held virtually starting on 17 February 2021, with legislator visits extending through April. We visited individually with WNY State Legislators and legislative staff to promote transit and support increased state budgets for transit statewide, including state support for planned Buffalo-Niagara projects (e.g., Buffalo Metro extensions). We visited the NYS Senator Sean Ryan and the following NYS Assembly Members: William Conrad, Bill Magnarelli (Assembly Transportation Committee Chair), Karen McMahon, Crystal Peoples-Stokes (Assembly Majority Leader), Jonathon Rivera, and Monica Wallace.
- ***Met with political and community leaders.*** Met with elected officials and community leaders to build support for improving transit services through light rail extension, improved transit operations and maintenance budgets, and programs that encourage transit use. In addition to the NYS legislators listed above, we met with US Senator Gillibrand's staff and met informally with Congressman Brian Higgins, NY State Senator and Transportation Committee Chairman Tim Kennedy and Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown.
- ***CRT Plank Proposal Was Selected for the 2021 PPG Agenda.*** Worked with PPG toward enabling better transit service by obtaining sufficient reliable funding. This work built from our 2020 and 2019 PPG planks to seek long term sustainable funding for transit operations and for obtaining the local share for Buffalo Metro extensions. Worked to get NYS to adopt the 12-State Transit Climate Initiative (TCI) that would put a price on carbon-based fuels to generate recurring funds that could be applied to transit operations as well as incentivize reduction in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and thereby reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) generation. Joined with a statewide coalition, NY for TCI (<https://nyfortci.org>) to work towards these goals. Also, encouraged the NYS Climate Action Council to prioritize public transit as a critical component for meeting the NYS Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) requirements for significantly reducing GHGs. We thank PPG for arranging and coordinating many of the Zoom meetings throughout the year. Note that the passing of TCI looks doubtful at this time so we will explore alternative active sources of funding such as vehicle miles traveled (VMT) taxes.
- ***Was awarded and led work of a paid Cornell / Partnership of the Public Good (PPG) High Road Fellowship.*** The CRT High Road Fellow, Elizabeth Taber, worked under the guidance of Carl Skompinski and Elizabeth Giles to explore the potential of equitable transit oriented development (eTOD) for improving economic and social conditions on Buffalo's East Side. The work involved reaching out to the East Side community and analyzing literature on the impact of eTOD implementation elsewhere. Elizabeth interviewed the following community leaders as part of the project: Dena Belzer, Paul Ciminelli, Brian Conley, Donna Edwards, Fred Frank, Leslie Honore, Robert Jones, Darren Kempner, Dan Leonard, Hal Morse, Paul Tronolone, and Howard Zemsky. A presentation summarizing the results of this work is on our website and YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ya8L8q5R-Qc>).



- ***Provided inputs to the NFTA and GBNRTC throughout the year.***
 - Attended public hearings and meetings – provided verbal and written comments. Specifically, attended the NFTA Public Hearing on Transit Improvement Plans (8/25/21), NFTA Metro Expansion Plan (9/15/21) and the Annual NFTA Budget Hearing (11/29/21). Provided verbal summaries at the meetings and submitted formal written comments. Our comments emphasized that high speed, high capacity light rail extensions are a critical component for meeting the stated NFTA mission and goal statements and achieving an effective system that can attract “choice riders” – those who use transit over other modes – and address transportation equity issues challenging our society.
 - Served on the NFTA’s Community Advisory Committee (CAC) to provide ongoing advice on NFTA projects and operational decisions.
 - Reviewed GBNRTC planning documents and attended GBNRTC planning and public meetings, offering comment and recommendations.
- ***Saw Pedestrian safety advocacy work payoff with significant improvements at bus stops on Niagara Falls Boulevard.*** Every transit trip begins and ends as a pedestrian trip with transit riders often facing risks from heavy traffic near transit stops. CRT has been advocating for improved pedestrian safety around transit stops for years, including serving on a NYS DOT committee looking into these issues with a focus on Niagara Falls Boulevard (NFB). NFB was an especially dangerous road for transit riders with several pedestrians crossing NFB to catch a bus being killed in recent years. We are pleased to report that the most dangerous portion of NFB now has several critical improvements including special traffic controls that protect pedestrians from cars turning right, improved pedestrian crossing signals, reduced speed limits, and roadway realignments that reduce the pedestrian crossing distance. These are important improvements that will save lives and improve the transit pedestrian experience.
- ***Served on Erie County Community Climate Change Task Force (CCCTF) and Transportation Committee.*** Erie County has committed to meeting the goals of the Paris Climate Accord and the requirements of the NYS Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) signed into law by Governor Cuomo. The CCCTF has recognized the importance of improved public transit and reduced VMT for meeting these goals. You can find the work of this committee at this website (<https://www3.erie.gov/climateaction/>). CRT will continue to serve on the Erie County CCCTF as the county plan is developed. The draft plan will be made public in 2022.
- ***Attended the Rail-Volution conference.*** Betsy, Carl, and Jim attended the 3-day Rail-Volution Conference that was held virtually in October (https://railvoluton.org/the-conference/conference-information/sessions_and_speakers_rail-volution_2021/). Attended conference sessions, networked with transit leaders from across the US, and met with the WNY delegation to discuss local transit priorities. Brought back extensive amounts of information and resources that will be applied throughout 2022. Learned about the Federal Transit Administration and US DOT program called Justice40, which changes the focus of federally funded transportation projects to prioritize social equity. This could have a positive impact on the Buffalo Metro extension projects.
- ***Held Board retreat.*** Held Board retreat on 11/11 via Zoom. Discussed Board priorities and approaches for better success. Held Board holiday party on 12/18 at Gladys’ house. All were vaccinated and masked.
- ***Worked with various partners to promote transit priorities.***



- Coordinated with the Buffalo Transit Riders Union (BTRU), an organization within the Coalition for Economic Justice (CEJ), and with Our Outer Harbor (OOH) Coalition.
- Attended meetings of the Niagara River Greenway Commission and the Buffalo Place Board of Directors.
- Joined NYPTA-led Riders Coalition that brings together organizations from across the state. Meetings of this coalition will continue through 2022 to coordinate statewide transit advocacy efforts.
- Doug had meeting by phone with Steve Straus, Executive Director, Empire State Passengers Association (ESPA) (3/22/21)
- Met with Gail Wells of Coppertown Block Club on the East Side (8/2/21) and Marva Threat, President, Greater East Side Field of Dreams Block Club (9/2/21). Presented potential for an East Side extension of Buffalo Metro and discussed implications.

Community Education and Outreach

- ***Selected Correspondence***

- *Letter to Steve Ranalli, President of the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (1/6/21)* containing CRT comments on the “Buffalo Harbor Civic and Land Use Improvement Project General Project Plan”. Stated that public transportation needed to be added to the plan and emphasized our opposition to large venue infrastructure that would attract large numbers of cars. We noted the lack of public transportation to and from the outer harbor.
- *Letter to His Worship, Niagara Falls, Ontario Mayor Diodati (1/29/21)* commending him for commissioning the FedDev Tourist Area Connection and Transportation Study and encouraging him to include cross border considerations.
- *Letter to GBNRTC (2/6/21)* commenting on plans for purchasing more bus shelters emphasizing the desperate need throughout the NFTA system.
- *Letter to Erie County Legislator Jeanne Vinal (2/17/21)* introducing CRT and following up with literature on the importance of transit. Ms. Vinal is the transit point person for the Erie County Legislature.
- *Letter to Paul Lang, Central Terminal Restoration Corporation (4/26/21)* stating our position on the importance of having a light rail station at Central Terminal and offering to meet.
- *Letter to the NFTA (8/31/21)* documenting our comments at the NFTA Public Hearing on NFTA planned service changes. Stated our support for many elements of the plan but our opposition to the lack of opportunity for public input on the update of the NFTA-Metro “Service Design Guidelines & Delivery Standards – 2021 Update”.
- *Letter to Federal Transit Agency (FTA) (10/14/21)* thanking them for becoming the federal sponsoring agency for the Buffalo-Metro expansion project and stating our disagreement with their plans to re-examine the bus-rapid transit (BRT) alternative
- *Letter to Mark Poloncarz (11/30/21)* stating the importance of light rail as part of any public investment in a new Buffalo Bills stadium, wherever it is eventually built. Noted that transit serves all citizens, not just Bills fans and can be counted as part of the public share.
- *Letter to NFTA (12/2/21)* documenting our comments at the NFTA public hearing on the draft NFTA FY 2022-2023 budget.



- Letter to NFTA Commissioners and executive managers (12/4/21) expressing our displeasure at the lack of opportunity for public comment on the updated NFTA-Metro Service Design Guidelines & Delivery Standards – 2021 Update. We requested that the NFTA reconsider and suggested some changes we would like considered.
- **Attended public and community events**
 - GoBike Southern Tier Trail Final Plan Public Meeting (1/6/21)
 - Transit Coffee with Senator Charles Schumer hosted by Riders Alliance and several other organizations (1/25/21)
 - NYS Transportation Advisory Panel Public Engagement Session hosted by NYSEDA (2/24/21)
 - Riverline Park Public Review (2/24/21)
 - T4America Webinar – Principles for Transportation Reform (2/25/21)
 - TCI Webinar (3/1/21)
 - NRC and Mass Transit Webinar on ballot initiatives (3/3/21)
 - Grant Street Redesign Workshop hosted by GoBike (3/9/21)
 - Bill Gates: How to Avoid a Climate Disaster webinar (3/10/21)
 - Empire State Passengers Association (ESPA) Annual Meeting (3/13/21)
 - Erie County public hearing on the Road Reserve Fund Surplus Transfer Tax, Doug and Betsy attended and spoke promoting transit funding (4/7/21)
 - Buffalo Central Terminal Public Forum (4/8/21)
 - Shoreline Trail Bike Path Options – Bethlehem Steel Site Public Meeting (4/13/21)
 - Outer Harbor Public Meeting, League of Woman Voters (4/21)
 - WNY Youth Climate Action Group Climate Justice Workshop (6/23/21)
 - Public meeting on the upcoming NYS Climate Action Plan. (11/3/21)
 - Webinar – Centering Equity in the Adoption of the Transportation and Climate Initiative (TCI) (11/4/21)
 - T4America Mini Conference on the Importance of Justice40 (11/6/21)
 - Erie County Budget Workshop (11/11/21)
 - USDOT Justice40 Public Meeting (11/16/21)
 - Bills Stadium Public Meeting (12/7/21). Doug spoke emphasizing the importance of light rail connection to a Bills stadium, wherever it is built.
 - Sierra Club – Buffalo-Niagara Seminar: Green the Grid & Electrify Everything (12/8/21)
- **Radio and Television Coverage.**
 - WBFO radio covered the CRT Quarterly public meetings including an interview with Doug after one of the meetings.
 - Doug and Jim were interviewed on PPG WUFO radio show on 9/28/21. The interview portion addressing the Amherst extension was picked up by national news and published in national rail publications.
(<https://www.facebook.com/PPGBuffalo/videos/4172441793002872>)
- **Published editorials.**
 - 6/19/21 Gladys Gifford, LTE, “Save Outer Harbor from destructive concerts.”
 - 7/2/21 Seth Triggs, LTE, “Mayor uses words long since out of style.”
 - 7/22/21 Gladys Gifford and Lori Robinson, Another Voice, “Outer Harbor needs to be protected as a state park.”



- 11/24/21 Seth Triggs. Another Voice, “Focus on up-front costs misses the point.”
- **Published Quarterly Newsletter.** Published the CRT News. Four issues of the newsletter were published during 2021.
- **Website, Facebook and Twitter.** Continued to maintain a CRT website (www.citizenstransit.org) and Facebook page. Also maintained a Twitter account where upcoming events are publicized and links to relevant information on transit are noted.
- **Presentations to Outside organizations:** Doug presented importance of the applying potential TCI funding to transit at the TCI Teach-in hosted by NY for TCI on 12/1/21. Doug’s slides are available here (<http://citizenstransit.org/sites/default/files/TCI%20Teach%20In%20-%20CRT.pdf>)



Appendix B

Citizens for Regional Transit 2022 Budget

Budget Items	2021 Budget	2021 Actual	2022 Budget
Previous Yr Closing Balance M&T Bank	810.52	1304.16	
Previous Yr Closing Balance PayPal		845.07	
Previous Yr Ending Balance Combined		2149.23	
INCOME			
Donations	200.00	322.15	300.00
Dues	600.00	448.46	500.00
Grants	50.00	0.00	0.00
Totals	850.00	770.61	800.00
EXPENSES			
Copy & Printing	50.00	0.00	0.00
Office Supplies & Postage	50.00	31.18	40.00
Event Registrations	100.00	0.00	0.00
Conferences, Tickets, Transportation	100.00	200.00	600.00
Ads	0.00	0.00	0.00
Memberships	200.00	135.00	135.00
Miscellaneous	0.00	0.00	100.00
Web Hosting	165.00	55.98	250.00
Total Proposed Budget	665.00	422.16	1125.00
Difference between income & expenses	185.00	348.45	-325.00



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