

Citizens Regional Transit Corporation

Annual Report 2023

Submitted by:

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24 January 2024



CITIZENS *for* REGIONAL TRANSIT

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Citizens Regional Transit Corporation

2023 Annual Report

Executive Summary

This report summarizes the accomplishments, milestones, and activities of Citizens for Regional Transit Corporation during 2023. Citizens Regional Transit Corporation is known as Citizens for Regional Transit (CRT). This shorter designation is used in this report.

During 2023 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: Bradley Bethel, Gladys Gifford, Carl Skompinski, and Patrick Whalen. Collectively these Board Members logged over 3,000 hours of service valued at over \$100,000 (using the volunteer hourly rate of \$34.59 from the NonProfitTimes, <https://www.thenonproffitimes.com/news/value-of-volunteer-hour-tops-28/>).

We significantly increased membership during 2023. As of December 31st of 2023, CRT had 79 members (52% increase), including carryovers from 2022 (1 year grace period) and those who have renewed. The CRT Secretary and Treasurer maintain the names and addresses of CRT members. CRT social media statistics has been variable – for example, Facebook Post Reach ranged from 6,454 to 526 per month (5,300 in December). Facebook Page Followers has been steadily increasing 784 in May to 834 in December. Twitter followers steadily increasing from 268 in January to 278 in December. Our newsletter email list has 1,588 recipients. Our media contacts list has 134 recipients.

CRT continued to advocate for an integrated multi-modal public transportation system that serves everyone fairly and reliably in WNY and is attractive and competitive with driving. 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 and X (Twitter) accounts. Rebecca Reilly was the CRT Newsletter Editor. Jim Gordon managed CRT’s YouTube Channel. CRT 2023 Committee Chairs and Co-Chairs were:

- Nominating Committee –Carl Skompinski
- Communications and Public Relations Committee – Seth Triggs, Rebecca Reilly, and Jim Gordon
- Membership Committee – (committee was not active)
- Grants Committee – Jim Gordon

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

- Supported NY Public Transit Association’s (NYPTA) 2023 “Transit Advocacy Campaign” Met with selected NYS legislators.
- Met with political and community leaders throughout the year.
- Finished work on a CRT co-sponsored plank on the Partnership for the Public Good’s (PPG) 2023 agenda calling for the City of Buffalo to clear snow from sidewalks and bus stops.



- Monitored work of, and provided inputs to, the NFTA and Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC).
- Attended public hearings, meetings, and community events throughout the year.
- Served on Erie County Community Climate Change Task Force and Transportation Committee.
- Served on GBNRTC Regional Rail Working Group advocating for regional rail investments in WNY.
- Tabled at area festivals and events.
- Continued our petition work calling for transit improvements and investments.
- Continued work as a member organization of the East Side Parkways (ESP) Coalition.

These projects and partnerships are described in more detail in Appendix A.

CRT held a Board Retreat on 26 August at Doug’s house. Discussed CRT working issues and made plans for improving CRT operations. Fine-tuned committee structure. Updated report generation, sharing, and version coordination procedures. Updated and fine-tuned CRT mission statement for inclusion on the CRT website and promotional material. It is: ***Make transit a competitive alternative to driving for everyone!***

CRT held two Public Meetings in 2023. These were held in January, and October. The January meeting included the CRT Annual Business Meeting. The January meeting was held virtually via Zoom. The October meeting was held at the Niagara Falls AMTRAK Station and focused on the role of transit for regional tourism.

The CRT Board is renominating the following returning Board Members for 2024: Douglas Funke (President), Seth Triggs (Vice President), Rebecca Reilly (Secretary), James Gordon (Treasurer), Bradley Bethel, Thomas DeSantis, Carl Skompinski, and Patrick Whalen.

Finally, the CRT Board is recognizing former longtime Board Members and CRT contributors, Lynn Magdol and Gladys Gifford as Emeritus Board Members.

The CRT 2024 budget is presented in Appendix B. Budget actuals for 2023 and the proposed budget for 2024 are presented and compared. The CRT 2023 petition is reproduced in Appendix C.

Respectfully Submitted,

Douglas Funke

President, Citizens for Regional Transit



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Appendix A

Expanded Highlights

CRT Public Meetings

Held two CRT Public Meetings. All the CRT public meetings were publicized, and open to the public and accessible virtually. Table 1 summarizes the 2023 CRT Public Meetings.

Table 1. CRT Quarterly Meetings

Date	Speakers / Panelists	Summary
Wednesday, January 18, 2023	Douglas Funke, President, CRT James Gordon, Treasurer, CRT	Doug summarized the CRT annual report highlighting CRT successes and ongoing priorities. Jim provided an update on the Amherst extension from CRT’s perspective.
Thursday, October 27, 2022	Keynote Speaker: Sara Capen, Executive Director, Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Panelists: Patrick Kaler, President and CEO, Visit Buffalo Niagara Andrea Czopp, Chief Operations Officer, Destination Niagara USA Thomas George, PE, Vice President, Operations NFTA	The meeting was hosted by the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area and held at the Niagara Falls AMTRAK station. Speakers discussed the role of transit for regional tourism.

Community Education and Outreach

- ***NYPTA Transit Advocacy Initiative.*** Doug, Jim and Carl participated in the 2023 NYPTA Transit Advocacy engagements. Held virtual meetings with state legislators / legislative staff during March. Meetings included NYS Senators Sean Ryan and Tim Kennedy, and NYS Assembly Member Karen McMahan.
- ***Political and Community Leader Meetings.*** Met with elected officials and community leaders. In addition to the NYS legislators listed above. We met with GBNRTC Executive Director Michael Finn, PE, NFTA Board of Commissioners Chairperson Michael Hughes, Amherst Planner Daniel Howard. and Tonawanda Commissioner Joe Emminger. Also met with several NFTA managers.
- ***Provided inputs to the NFTA and GBNRTC throughout the year.***
 - Attended NFTA Transportation Committee / Board of Commissioners Meetings. Some meetings were attended virtually and some in person.



- Reviewed the draft NFTA 2025 / 2026 budget and provided comments. Attended the NFTA Budget Hearing on 12/7/22. Here's a link to the comments we submitted. http://citizenstransit.org/sites/default/files/12.7%20CRT%20Comments%20on%20NFTA%20Draft%202024_2025%20Budget.pdf.
 - Served on the NFTA's Community Advisory Committee (CAC). Provided ongoing inputs on NFTA projects and operational decisions.
 - Reviewed GBNRTC planning documents and attended GBNRTC planning and public meetings, offering comments and recommendations.
- ***Attended Public Meetings and Community Events***
 - GBNRTC's Region Central Project (RCP) Public Meeting at Canisius College where the results of the RCP to reimagine the Scajaquda Expressway were presented. 1/17/23.
 - Buffalo Urban Development Corporation (BUDC) Downtown Smart Streets & Waterfront Accessibility Public Meeting and workshop series. 3/1/23, 8/9/23, 12/5/23.
 - Reshaping Rochester Public Meeting featuring Dr. Norman Garrick, the sustainable transportation and urban planning guru. The success in filling-in Rochester's Kensington-like Inner Loop was highlighted. 3/9/23
 - Erie County Climate Action Task Force Climate Action Showcase. D'Youville College. 3/18/23.
 - GBNRTC 2050 Plan Public Meeting. 4/25/23.
 - Erie County Climate Action virtual event. 5/24/23.
 - Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Public Meeting summarizing the Buffalo Metro Transit Oriented Development study. 6/22/23.
 - NYSDOT Public Meeting on the Kensington Expressway Project. Doug and Jim attended and provided feedback to NYSDOT staff in attendance. 6/20/23.
 - NYSDOT Public Hearing on the Kensington Expressway Project. Doug gave CRT's spoken summary comments. Jim and Carl presented their personal comments. Followed up with formal comprehensive written comments. 9/27/23. <http://citizenstransit.org/sites/default/files/111023%20Humboldt%20Pkwy%20Public%20Comments%20Citizens%20for%20Regional%20Transit.pdf>
 - City of Buffalo / NFTA. Public meeting on LaSalle ETOD Community Meeting. Gloria Parks Community Center. 10/25/23.
 - NFTA Draft 2024/26 budget Hearing. Doug attended and read CRT comments. (See link above. 11/7/23.
 - East Side Parkway (ESP) Coalition Press Event. Delavan-Grider Community Center (DGCC) 11/18/23.
 - ESP Speaker Program. Speakers highlighted similar urban highway removal projects in Rochester and Syracuse. Speakers were Jason Heremsa, AICP, Rochester; and Lenessa Owens-Chapin, NYCLU Syracuse. DGCC. 12/6/23.
 - UB Small Works Project Presentations. Sponsored by ESP. DGCC. 12/15/23.
 - We Are Women Warriors Public Meeting on Kensington Expressway Project sponsored by Betty Jean Grant and ESP. Merriweather Library. 12/21/23.
 - ***Tabled at area Events and Festivals.*** Tabled at area community events. Solicited signatures on our petition and sought advocacy for improving transit. Distributed transit information and our CRT brochure. Tabled at the following events:



- Erie County Climate Action Showcase, D'Youville College. 3/17/23.
 - Juneteenth Festival. 6/17.22 – 6/18/22.
 - Food Truck Tuesdays at Larkinville. 8/22/23.
 - Unitarian Universalist Church of Amherst Living Green Festival. 9/23/23.
- ***Finished Work on the 2023 PPG Snow Removal Plank.*** Worked with Buffalo Transit Riders Union (BTRU and GOBike to advocate that the City of Buffalo take responsibility for clearing snow on sidewalks and at bus stops. Submitted proposal to Common Council, spoke in support at a Common Council Meeting where the issue was discussed. While we were not successful in obtaining funding for a pilot in the 2024 budget, we are pleased that it received some support in the Common Council. While no longer a PPG plank, we agreed with our partners to continue this advocacy in 2024.
 - ***Served on Erie County Community Climate Change Task Force and Transportation Committee.*** Erie County has committed to meeting the requirements of the NYS Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) signed into law by Governor Cuomo. The Task Force has recognized the importance of improved public transit and reduced vehicle miles traveled (VMT) for meeting these goals. You can find the work of this task force at their website (<https://www3.erie.gov/climateaction/>). CRT will continue to serve on the Task Force as the county plan is implemented.
 - ***Served as a Member of the East Side Parkway (ESP) Coalition.*** We joined with ESP to oppose the NYSDOT plan to spend over \$1B to make 0.8 miles of the Kensington Expressway into a tunnel arguing instead that the Humboldt Parkway should be restored as a slow speed Olmsted parkway on the surface for a fraction of the cost. Current Kensington traffic would be redirected to Buffalo's arterials in the short term. An extended Buffalo Metro through the East Side and airport would serve transportation needs in the long term.
 - ***Served as member of WNY Regional Rail Working Group.*** This group was headed by GBNRTC with membership of Empire State Passengers Association. Submitted letter to NYSDOT asking their support for regional rail investments to be made in WNY. Met with Erie County to educate and solicit support.
 - ***Continued advocating for Expansion of Buffalo Metro.*** Continued to advocate for extension of Buffalo Metro, first to Amherst, then through the East Side to the airport, and finally to the Southtowns and Bills Stadium. Argued that studies of the East Side and Southtowns extensions should be initiated immediately, simultaneously with the Amherst extension construction. This was the focus of our petition (Appendix C) and messaging at tabling events.
 - ***Continued advocating for Transit Connectivity Between Niagara Falls and Buffalo.*** Continued to advocate for transit improvements between Niagara Falls and Buffalo establishing WNY as a regional tourist destination. This work also advocated for transit connections between Buffalo, Niagara Falls and Southern Ontario. Our fall public meeting focused on this goal.

Communication

- ***Selected Correspondence***
 - Letter to GBNRTC. Comments on proposed Transportation Improvement Plan Amendments to purchase electric buses, charging infrastructure, and DL&W station improvements. 2/3/23.



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- Letter to Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz (2/12/23). Appeal to dedicate all Erie County bed tax to tourism with focus on supporting transit services for tourists.
 - Letter to Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz and NFTA's Tom George (2/12/23). Thank you for including transit hub and potential for rail station as part of the Bills Stadium Community Benefit Agreement. 4/13/23.
 - Letter to GBNRTC. Comments on proposed Transportation Improvement Plan Amendments to purchase paratransit buses and bus wash equipment. 10/4/23.
 - Letter to Mr. John Cox, NFTA Chief Financial Officer with CRT comments on the draft FY2025/2026 NFTA Budget. 12/7/23.
 - Comments to Kensington Expressway Project Team. Comments on the NYSDOT Draft Detailed Design Document / Environmental Assessment (DDR/EA). 11/10/23. Cc'd to: Governor Hochul and NYSDOT Commissioner, US Senators Schumer and Gillibrand, Congressman Higgins with cc's to Pete Buttigieg, U.S. Secretary of Transportation; NY State Senators: Patrick Gallivan, Sean Ryan, Robert Ott, Tim Kennedy; Assembly members: William Conrad, Crystal Peoples-Stokes, Pat Burke, Monica Wallace, Michael Norris, Karen McMahon, David DiPietro, Jonathan Rivera; County Executive Mark Poloncarz; County Legislators: Howard Johnson, April Baskin, Michael Kooshoian, John Bargnesi, Jeanne Vinal, Christopher Greene, Timothy Meyers, Frank Todaro, John Gilmore, James Malczewski, John Mills; Mayor Byron Brown; City Council Members: Darrius Pridgen, David Rivera, Christopher Scanlon, Joel Feroletto, Byron Bollman, Mitch Nowakowski, Joseph Golombek, Ulysees Wing, Rasheed Wyatt. (See link above.)
- ***Radio and Television Coverage.***
 - Doug was interviewed by Channel 2 's Nate Benson on 4/13/23.
 - Doug and Jim were interviewed on the Murray Holman Show at the Apollo Theater at 1435 Jefferson Ave. 6/29/23.
 - Jim was interviewed on WBFO. 7/31/23.
 - Doug was interviewed on WBEN on the Kensington Expressway Project. 11/14/23.
- ***Published editorials.***
 - 3/22/23. Douglas Funke. Replace NYSDOT as the lead agency on the Kensington Project. Buffalo Rising. <https://www.buffalorising.com/2023/03/replace-nysdot-as-the-lead-agency-on-the-kensington-expressway-project/>
 - 4/24/23. Gladys Gifford. Transportation is critical for East Buffalo Progress. Buffalo News Everybody's column. https://buffalonews.com/edition/page-a07/page_770826f1-c336-58e8-b98d-047efbd1c46c.html
 - 8/22/23. Douglas Funke. Restore Humboldt Parkway more like its original design. Buffalo News, Everybody's Column. https://niagara-gazette-cnhi.newsmemory.com/?token=8f0ce2a91345485806b790bf926d7081_65a7fed1_6e6



- 10/27/23. Thomas DeSantis. Getting rail service back on track. Niagara Falls Gazette. https://www.niagara-gazette.com/opinion/guest-view-getting-rail-service-back-on-track/article_9d5a0a80-73a1-11ee-83ae-97ef52e22bd7.html
- **Published Quarterly Newsletter.** Published the CRT News. Four issues of the newsletter were published during 2023.
- **Website, Facebook and X (Twitter).** Continued to maintain a CRT website (www.citizenstransit.org) and Facebook page. Also maintained a X (Twitter) account where upcoming events are publicized and links to relevant information on transit are noted.
- **YouTube Channel.** Maintained YouTube channel where many CRT videos are posted. (https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLtusFbyu1yOTjyeA1TRb0uKAOVIR_hnwU)

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Appendix B

Citizens for Regional Transit 2024 Budget

Budget Items	2023 Budget	2023 Actual	2024 Budget
Previous Yr Closing Balance M&T Bank		2,759.33	
Previous Yr Closing Balance PayPal		1,008.11	
Previous Yr Ending Balance Combined		3,767.44	
Budget			
INCOME			
Donations & Dues	700.00	1,151.63	1,175.00
Dues	700.00	0.00	
Grants	50.00	25.00	50.00
Totals	1,450.00	1,176.63	1,225.00
EXPENSES			
Copy & Printing	50.00	299.43	200.00
Equipment (Projector, computer, tables, etc.)		189.98	200.00
Office Supplies & Postage	50.00	0.00	25.00
Event Registrations	350.00	0.00	200.00
Conferences, Tickets, Transportation	200.00	0.00	0
Ads	0.00	0.00	200.00
Memberships (NYPTA, B-Preservation)	150.00	150.00	150.00
Miscellaneous	150.00	0.00	85.00
Web Hosting / Domain Listing	500.00	165.00	165.00
Total Proposed Budget	1,450.00	804.41	1,225.00
Difference between income & expenses	-0.00	372.00	0.00



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Appendix C

Let the Transit Revolution Continue!

A 2023 Petition for Investment in Sustainable Public Transit

Whereas; political leaders from across Buffalo Niagara (including mayors, city/town/village councils and the Erie County Executive) have signed the CRT petition calling for a Transit Revolution!

Whereas; over 50 community organizations (including Coalition for Economic Justice, GoBike Buffalo, Housing Opportunities Made Equal, League of Women Voters, Network of Religious Communities, Partners of a Livable WNY, Partnership for the Public Good, PUSH Buffalo, Sierra Club, VOICE Buffalo) and a growing list of business leaders (including Carmina Woods Morris, Ciminelli Real Estate, Douglas Development Corp.) signed an earlier CRT petition for a Transit Revolution.

Whereas; transportation is the largest source (40%) of greenhouse gas emissions in WNY, meeting Erie County's commitment to the Paris Climate Accord and CLCPA goals will require moving from car-centered transportation to public transit, bicycles, eBikes, scooters, hoverboards, golf carts, walking and other forms of transportation.

Whereas; every \$1 invested in public transportation generates \$4 in economic returns and over 70% of public funding in public transportation flows to the private sector creating and supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Whereas; public transportation for businesses and schools also aids those unable to travel by automobile (low-income, older, and disabled citizens) and other riders.

Whereas; hotels in cities with direct access to airports raise 11% more revenue per room than hotels in cities without direct transit access.

Whereas; Buffalo's has publicly owned rights-of-way (ROW) making extensions to Metro Rail among the most affordable in the country for transporting large numbers of people. Further, since the Eastside / Airport ROW is not on public roads; disruptions to businesses during construction will be minimal.

Whereas; The federal government has passed a sweeping, but time-limited, infrastructure bill that provides funding for transit projects.

Whereas; Public transportation is critical for closing the mobility equity gap that requires the 30% of Buffalo households that do not own cars to spend twice as long for commuting than those with cars.

Therefore, we call on the NFTA with the Governor and state, county, and municipal legislators to:



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1. Make transit a competitive alternative to driving *for everyone*.
 - a. **Extend Buffalo Metro** along heavily travelled corridors to provide fast, high-capacity network connecting major destinations (especially UB campuses, downtown, the airport, Highmark Stadium, Sahlen Field, Keybank Arena, Exchange Street Amtrak Station).
 - b. **Provide high frequency bus service** (e.g., 10-minute frequencies on core routes and 20-minute frequencies on secondary routes) and integrate buses with Buffalo Metro. This should include high-frequency weekend service!
 - c. **Increase service hours** on all major routes and Buffalo Metro.
2. Coordinate *road diets with transit improvements*, including:
 - a. **Restore the Humboldt Parkway in parallel with light rail extension** to the East Side and airport.
 - b. **Coordinate Scajaguada corridor improvements with high-frequency transit alternatives** connecting the many attractions along the corridor (e.g., museums, zoo, Darwin Martin House, Wegmans/Tops, Elmwood Village, Buffalo State College.) These should be integrated with Buffalo Metro.
3. Initiate formal study and planning for transit *connectivity between Buffalo, Niagara Falls, and Southern Ontario*, especially for tourism.
4. *Integrate transit with regional planning initiatives*.
 - a. IDA's should **mandate transit access when evaluating project incentive applications**, and incentive siting on Metro Rail using e-TOD principles.
 - b. Highway projects should **first consider transit alternatives**.
5. *Fix the transit funding problems*.
 - a. Fix the public transit and highway funding gaps.

