

Citizens *for* Regional Transit Corporation

Annual Report 2024

Submitted by:

Douglas Funke
President, Citizens Regional Transit Corporation

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Citizens *for* Regional Transit Corporation 2024 Annual Report

Executive Summary

This report summarizes the accomplishments, milestones, and activities of Citizens for Regional Transit Corporation during 2024. Citizens Regional Transit Corporation is known as Citizens for Regional Transit (CRT). This shorter designation is used in this report.

The CRT Transit Prime Directive. Our Transit Prime Directive is:

“Make transit a competitive alternative to driving for everyone”

Until we achieve this directive transit will be the transportation choice of last resort for everyone who can drive **and** can afford a car. Everyone else will suffer inferior transportation options. The result will be the same as before – congestion, pollution, and parking lots filling large expanses of available land that could instead be used for useful enterprises.

Leadership. During 2024 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, Thomas DeSantis, Carl Skompinski, and Patrick Whalen. Collectively these Board Members logged over 2,800 hours of service valued at over \$100,000 (using the volunteer hourly rate of \$34.59 from the NonProfit Times, <https://www.thenonprofitimes.com/news/value-of-volunteer-hour-tops-28/>).

CRT 2024 Committee Chairs and Co-Chairs were:

- Nominating Committee – Carl Skompinski
- Communications and Public Relations Committee – Seth Triggs, Rebecca Reilly, and Jim Gordon
- Grants Committee – Jim Gordon

Membership and Social Following. We increased our membership slightly during 2024. As of December 31st 2024, CRT had 89 members (12% increase). The CRT Secretary and Treasurer maintain the names and addresses of CRT members. CRT social media statistics have been variable – for example, Facebook Post Reach ranged from 4,120 to 753 per month. Facebook Page Followers has steadily increased from 852 in January to 956 in December. X (Twitter) followers was flat averaging 310 per month. Our newsletter email list has over 1,500 recipients.

Advocacy and Outreach. 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 and leaders from both public and private sectors. We kept members and the public informed about transit issues and events via the CRT website, Facebook page, Instagram, and X (Twitter). We published 4 newsletters during the year. Seth Triggs managed the CRT



website; Carl Skompinski managed our Facebook and X accounts. Doug Funke was the CRT Newsletter Editor. Jim Gordon managed CRT's YouTube Channel.

Events and Actions. Conducted a many actions and activities during 2024 including the following:

- Supported NY Public Transit Association's (NYPTA) 2023 "Transit Advocacy Campaign" meeting with selected NYS legislators.
- Met with political and community leaders throughout the year to promote transit improvements.
- Monitored work of, and provided inputs to, the NFTA and Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC). As transit riders, provided reality-founded feedback on what needs to improve.
- Represented transit issues at public hearings, meetings, and community events throughout the year. Tabled at area festivals and community events.
- Served on transit-related committees and working groups including: the Erie County Community Climate Change Task Force, the GBNRTC Regional Rail Working Group, and the NFTA Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) for Public Transportation.
- Continued our petition work calling for transit improvements and investments. Our 2024 petition is reproduced in Appendix B.
- Continued work as a member organization of the East Side Parkways (ESP) Coalition.
- Joined lawsuits against NYS Department of Transportation's (NYSDOT) plans for spending \$1B to put a small portion (3/4 mile) of the Kensington Expressway in a tunnel. Obtained a court injunction stopping all work on the project while the legal issues are adjudicated.
- Held three Public Meetings featuring speakers on relevant transit issues. The January meeting included the CRT Annual Business Meeting.

CRT 2025 Board Nominees. The CRT Board is renominating the following returning Board Members for 2025: Douglas Funke (President), Seth Triggs (Vice President), Rebecca Reilly (Secretary), James Gordon (Treasurer), Bradley Bethel, Thomas DeSantis, and Carl Skompinski, We also are nominating two new board members: Anthony Carter, and Alan Oberst.

Pat Whalen will be leaving the CRT Board after several years of service. We are sad to see Pat leave and wish him the best of success in his future endeavors. We look forward to working with Pat when projects and interests cross paths.

The CRT Board continues its recognition of former longtime Board Members and CRT contributors, Lynn Magdol and Gladys Gifford as non-voting Emeritus Board Members.

The CRT 2024 budget is presented in Appendix A. Budget actuals for 2024 and the proposed budget for 2025 are presented and compared. The CRT 2024 petition is reproduced in Appendix B.

Expanded Highlights

CRT Public Meetings

Held three CRT Public Meetings. All the CRT public meetings were publicized, open to the public and accessible virtually. Table 1 summarizes the 2024 CRT Public Meetings.



Table 1. CRT Public Meetings

Date	Speakers / Panelists	Summary
Wednesday, January 24, 2023	Douglas Funke, President, CRT James Gordon, Treasurer, CRT	CRT Annual Meeting. Doug summarized the CRT annual report highlighting CRT successes and priorities. Jim updated the Amherst extension project from CRT’s perspective and progress with the ESP Coalition fighting against NYSDOT’s plans for the Kensington Expressway tunnel. The meeting was held at the Frank E. Merriweather Library and via Zoom.
Wednesday, May 15, 2024	UB Professor Bradley Wales and Architecture Department Small Works Program Students	CRT Public Meeting. A vision for resurrecting Buffalo’s “Belt Line” for light rail rapid transit along with removal of the Kensington Expressway to the airport was presented. The vision included actual rail station designs with community context. The meeting was held at St. Philips Episcopal Church and via Zoom.
Thursday, October 9, 2024	Jim Gordon filled in for NITTEC Executive Director, Athena Hutchins, PE, who had to cancel at the last minute.	CRT Public Meeting. The latest artificial intelligence-based traffic managements tools, especially MioVision traffic light coordination system was presented. The potential of these new tools coming online at the Niagara International Transportation Technology Coalition (NITTEC) for improving transit and traffic throughout the region was presented. The meeting was held at St. Philips Episcopal Church and via Zoom

Community and Public Agency Partnerships

Partnership with other organizations and coalitions is an important part of CRT’s work. Here are some key partners for 2024.

- **Erie County Community Climate Change Task Force and Transportation Committee.** Served on the Erie County task force working to meet 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.
- **East Side Parkway (ESP) Coalition.** We joined with the ESP Coalition to oppose the NYSDOT plan to spend over \$1B to put just ¾ mile of the Kensington Expressway into a tunnel. We argued 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 easily handled by Buffalo’s arterials stimulating business along these routes. An extended Buffalo Metro Rail through the East Side to the airport would also serve transportation needs in the long term with far less



pollution. Participated in many public demonstrations and press events to solicit public support for restoring Humboldt Parkway.

- ***WNY Regional Rail Working Group.*** Served as a member of this group headed by Greater Buffalo Niagara Region Transportation Council (GBNRTC), our regional metropolitan planning organization (MPO). In addition to CRT, members of the group included the Empire State Passengers Association and representatives from municipalities across Erie and Niagara Counties. Advocated for prioritizing regional rail investments in WNY as part of the NYS High Speed Rail (HSR) Program.
- ***Partnership for the Public Good (PPG).*** Supported an ESP proposal for inclusion on the PPG 2025 agenda. The ESP proposal was voted as the first-place selection. It advocates for removal of the Kensington Expressway and restoration of the Olmstead-designed Humboldt Parkway. It also calls for integration of the restored Humboldt with Region Central (i.e., the redesigned Scajaguada) and Delaware Park. We also submitted a separate CRT proposal that was not selected. Attended the PPG Good Community Agenda Rollout. 1/17/24.
- ***Buffalo Transit Riders Union (BTRU).*** BTRU is an organization under the Coalition for Economic Justice (CEJ) that represents transit riders and advocates for better public transit services. CRT works with BTRU to promote better transit and coordinate transit advocacy projects.
- ***University at Buffalo School of Architecture Small Built Works Class.*** CRT is continuing our consulting status for this upper level/graduate class at UB. We have adopted changes to our suggested alignments and maps as suggested by this class.

Public Meetings and Events

CRT attended and participated in several projects and events during 2024.

- ***New York Public Transit Association (NYPTA) Transit Advocacy Initiative.*** CRT is a member of NYPTA and participates in their annual legislative advocacy event. This year Doug, Jim and Carl participated. We held virtual meetings with legislative staff of NYS Senator Sean Ryan and NYS Assembly Member Karen McMahon. Meetings were in March 2024.
- ***US State Department 's Sustainable Cities, International Visitor Leadership Program.*** Jim represented CRT in this invitation-only program sharing transit experiences and ideas with international visitors. Objectives were to explore best practices in environmentally sound urban planning and design of urban areas and considered methods of collaboration. 4/15/24.
- ***Scajaguada Full Circle Meeting Series.*** Doug, Jim, and Carl attended this meeting series that discussed the Scajaguada Creek corridor from historical, present, and future perspectives with focus on environmental and economic development aspects. The Meeting series was held at the Birchfield Penny Auditorium during September and October.
- ***US EPA and NYS DEC Listening Session.*** Doug and Carl attended this listening session. Doug delivered a paper called Actions vs. Promises that highlighted the glaring disconnect between the many new government environmental laws and guidelines (e.g., the CLCPA, the FHWA Planning Emphasis Areas) and government actions and projects that violate them (e.g., NYSDOT Kensington Tunnel Project). Here's our paper. <http://citizenstransit.org/node/228>. 4/15/24.



- **Passenger Rail Summit.** Jim and Tom attended this workshop in Erie, PA. Rail executives from AMTRAK, Northeast Ohio Coordinating Agency, Virginians for High Speed Rail and others spoke and participated. An update on HSR progress and opportunities were summarized. 6/13/24.
- **EPA-sponsored Climate Action Symposium.** Doug and Jim attended this day-long, invitation-only symposium on climate initiatives held at UB's Center for Tomorrow. The symposium covered many local projects and priorities focused on fighting climate change. 10/4/24.
- **New York Public Transit Association (NYPTA) Annual Meeting.** Doug and Jim attended NYPTA's 2024 Annual Meeting that was held in Buffalo. We were able to setup a table and engage transit agencies from across the state and met with many transit supply vendors. 10/16/24.
- **Reconnect Rochester Presentation.** CRT Board members attended Reconnect Rochester presentation of a Not Just Bike's video and saw the results of highway removal in Rochester.

Transit Agency Support and Monitoring

- **Provided inputs to the NFTA throughout the year.**
 - Attended NFTA Transportation Committee / Board of Commissioners Meetings.
 - Reviewed the draft NFTA 2025 - 2026 budget and provided comments. Doug testified at the NFTA Budget Hearing on 12/5/24. Here's a link to the comments Doug read and submitted. <http://citizenstransit.org/node/233>.
 - Served on the NFTA's Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). Provided ongoing inputs on NFTA projects and operational decisions.
 - Attended NFTA Metro Transit Expansion Listening Session, provided verbal comments. 1/29/24.
- **Provided inputs to the GBNRTC throughout the year.**
 - Reviewed GBNRTC transit-related planning documents and attended GBNRTC planning and public meetings, offering comments and recommendations.
 - Reviewed the GBNRTC Unified Program Work Plan (UPWP), attended the UPWP Public Meeting and delivered written public comments. Criticized the UPWP for omitting the Kensington Tunnel Project and therefore not addressing the Federal Highway Association (FHWA) Planning Emphasis Areas that call for meeting environmental justice and climate change mitigation guidelines. <http://citizenstransit.org/node/228> 1/18/24.
 - Attended GBNRTC Recertification Public Hearing. Provided verbal and written comments. Here's a link to CRT's written comments. <http://citizenstransit.org/node/235>
 - Served on the GBNRTC Regional Rail Advisory Working Group advocating for regional rail investments in WNY.

Tabled at Area Events and Festivals

- **East Side Forward Clean Mobility Expo.** Doug and Carl attended this event. Shared table with Buffalo Transit Riders United (BTRU) at their invitation. Distributed CRT literature and engaged attendees on transit issues. 3/16/24.



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716-691-8528 crtc@citizenstransit.org

- **Juneteenth.** Tabled at the Juneteenth Festival. Promoted opposition to the Kensington Tunnel Project and distributed CRT literature. Obtained signatures on the 2024 CRT petition and the East Side Parkway Coalition petition. 6/15/24 – 6/16/24.
- **Northland Beltline Taxpayers Association (NBTA) National Night Out.** Tabled at the NBTA National night out community event. Obtained petition signatures. 8/6/24.
- **Unitarian Universalist (UUCA) Green Festival.** Tabled at the 3rd annual green festival promoting innovative environmental solutions. Distributed CRT literature, “Yes to Metro” yard signs, and obtained petition signatures. 9/28/24.

Legal Actions

- **Initiated Legal Action Against NYS Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) to stop the Kensington Tunnel Project.**
 - Joined with ESP, WNY Youth Council and 68 plaintiffs living near the Kensington to initiate several lawsuits against NYSDOT to: (1) stop work on the Kensington Tunnel Project; (2) require full environmental analysis; (3) require compliance with the CLCPA environmental requirements; and (4) follow the mandates of the NYS Constitution’s “Green Amendment”. Here’s a link to more information.
http://citizenstransit.org/sites/default/files/808662_2024_Western_New_York_Youth_v_Western_New_York_Youth_MEMORANDUM_OF_LAW_I_44.pdf
 - Received injunction from the judge overseeing the case making NYSDOT stop construction work on the project while the legal actions are in process.
 - Waiting for judge’s decision on the lawsuits.

Communication

- **Selected Correspondence.** Here is a list and a links to selected CRT correspondence during 2024. Most of these are available on our website. <http://citizenstransit.org/>
 - Letter to Governor Hochul and NYSDOT Commissioner Dominquez. Included comments on the proposed Kensington Tunnel Project. Comments noted failure to follow NYS environmental laws and NYS Constitution’s “Green Amendment.”
<http://citizenstransit.org/node/235> 1/2/24.
 - Comments on the draft GBNRTC Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). Comments criticized omission of the Kensington Tunnel Project from the UPWP and therefore lack of assessment of satisfaction of the FHWA Planning Emphasis Areas. See link above. 2/5/24.
 - Comments to GBNRTC on Bailey Avenue BRT. Comments supported the BRT project plans. 6/14/24.
 - Letter to USDOT re. GBNRTC Recertification. Letter expressed support for GBNRTC’s work generally but noted the failure to include Kensington Project in the UPWP and therefore NYSDOT’s failure to follow the FHWA Planning Emphasis Areas. See link above.
 - Letter to Mike Finn, GBNRTC Executive Director, commending pedestrian safety improvements on Niagara Falls Blvd. while recommending additional improvements that are still needed. 8/18/24. <http://citizenstransit.org/node/230>



- Letter to GBNRTC commenting on proposed alignment changes on Main Street. These proposed alignment changes did not consider the potential for removing the Kensington Expressway that would change traffic patterns. These changes could result from the lawsuits in progress. The City of Buffalo revised the project based on CRT feedback. 10/27/24.
 - Letter to Mr. John Cox, NFTA CFO with comments on the NFTA draft 2025-2026 budget. See link above. 12/5/24.
- ***Presentations***
 - Parkside Community Town Hall – Highway Removal Workshop. Jim served as a presenter at this event representing public transit issues. 9/21/24.
 - Black Rock Block Club. Jim provided an overview of the Kensington Expressway project including alternative capacities from Buffalo Metro and Buffalo arterials. 10/7/24.
 - UUCA Green Festival presentation series. Doug and Jim presented an overview of transit priorities and preliminary plans for the Amherst metro Extension. 11/12/24.
 - ***Media Interviews and Published editorials.***
 - Did several media interviews (print and TV) throughout the year.
 - 3/2/24. Douglas Funke had an Another Voice article published in the Buffalo News stating that it is not too late to change Kensington Expressway Project’s approach. https://buffalonews.com/edition/page-a8/page_c6a90a2f-4369-5a04-b588-1183435184a4.html
 - 12/23/24. Submitted letter to the editor stating the new Bills’ stadium in Orchard Park, now proposed as a “destination” stadium, needs high speed, high-capacity transit connectivity using the available public rights-of-way.
 - ***Published Quarterly Newsletter.*** Published CRT Newsletters. Four issues of the newsletter were published during 2024.
 - ***Website, Facebook, X (Twitter) Instagram, and BlueSky.*** Continued to maintain a CRT website (<http://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. We’re also active on Instagram and BlueSky.
 - ***YouTube Channel.*** Maintained YouTube channel where many CRT videos are posted. (https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLtusFbyu1yOTjyeAlTRb0uKAOVIR_hnwU) Posted 11 new original content videos including a 7-part series titled Vision 2024 where we presented the breakthrough suggestions provided by the UB Small Built Works program. A two-part series describes why Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) fails for the Amherst high-capacity transit extension.



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Appendix A

Citizens for Regional Transit 2025 Budget

Budget Items	2024 Budget (corrected)	2024 Actual (closing balances)	2025 Budget
Previous Yr Closing Balance M&T Bank		3833.32	
Previous Yr Closing Balance PayPal		1814.78	
Previous Yr Ending Balance Combined		5648.10	
Budget			
INCOME			
Donations & Dues	1,175.00	1,119.91	1200.00
Grants	50.00	505.00	500.00
Totals	1,225.00	1,624.91	1,700.00
EXPENSES			
Copy & Printing	200.00		300.00
Equipment (Projector, computer, webcam, etc.)	200.00	85.00	200.00
Office Supplies & Postage	25.00	65.92	50.00
Event Registrations	200.00		200.00
Conferences, Tickets, Transportation (includes cost of CRT public meetings space)	200.00	\$200.00	400.00
Ads	200.00		200.00
Memberships (NYPTA, B-Preservation)	150.00	135.00	150.00
Miscellaneous	85.00	65.00	350.00
Web Hosting / Domain Listing	165.00		250.00
Total Proposed Budget	1,225.00	550.92	1,225.00
Difference between income & expenses	-0.00	1,073.99	0.00



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Appendix B

Let the Transit Revolution Continue!

A 2024 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) and thousands of citizens have signed earlier CRT petitions 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 single 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 all 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; Our region 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.



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716-691-8528

crtc@citizenstransit.org

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

Whereas; NYS is spending \$1B to put part of the Kensington Expressway in a tunnel to maintain current traffic levels in violation of the CLCPA law and NYS Constitution's Green Amendment and whereas that same \$1B could extend Buffalo Metro Rail to the airport in support of the CLCPA.

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

1. Make transit a competitive alternative to driving *for everyone*.
 - a. **Extend Buffalo Metro Rail Rapid Transit** 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). Increase frequency on holidays and weekends, as well.
 - 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 Scajaquada corridor improvements with high-frequency bus 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 Rail Rapid Transit.
 - c. **Remove the 6-lane Kensington Expressway** and instead restore the Humboldt Parkway on the surface and refurbish Buffalo's many arterials for carrying a portion of the traffic now clogging the Kensington.
3. Make regional and long-range rail a viable reality in WNY:
 - a. Initiate formal study and planning for transit *connectivity between Buffalo, Niagara Falls, and Southern Ontario*, especially for tourism.



- b. Take advantage of Amtrak expansion programs to *implement NYS High Speed Rail (HSR)* giving WNY equal priority with downstate. *Improve westbound service with more trains* and *build the long planned Amtrak maintenance in Niagara Falls*.
- 4. *Integrate transit with regional planning initiatives.*
 - a. IDA's should mandate transit access when evaluating project incentive applications and incentivize siting on Metro Rail Rapid Transit and existing Metro Bus routes using e-TOD principles.
 - b. Highway projects should first consider transit alternatives.
- 5. *Fix the transit funding and staffing problems.* Fix the public transit and highway funding gaps and find a way to hire enough bus and train operators to satisfy needed increased service frequency.

Please sign our petition:

<http://citizenstransit.org/form/individual-petition>

