



Citizens *for* Regional Transit

CRT News

A Quarterly Publication of Citizens for Regional Transit
Vol. 26, Issue 1, April 2024

Citizens for Regional Transit Next Public Meeting

St. Philip's Episcopal Church
[15 Fernhill Ave.](#) at Grider Street (Across from ECMC)
Buffalo, NY 14215

15 May 2024
6:00 – 8:00pm

You can also join remotely:
Microsoft Teams [Need help with Teams?](#)
[Click Here to Join the Meeting \(on May 15\)](#)
Meeting ID: 248 501 692 823
Passcode: 4pjejC



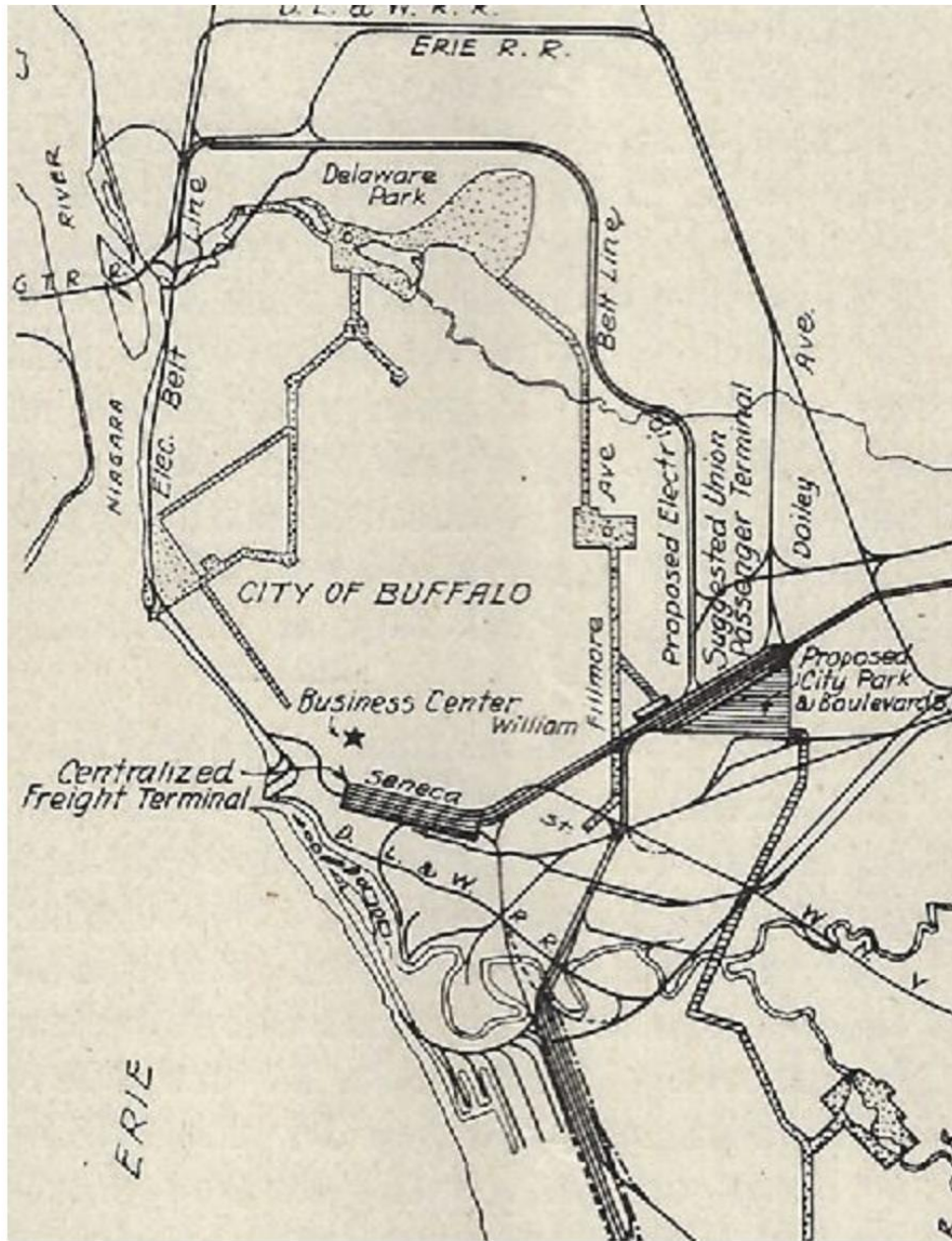
Topic:

Belt Line Rail Stations
UB Architecture Students Create a Transit Vision for Buffalo's Future

Speakers:
UB Professor Bradley Wales
Small Built Works Program Students

Summary:

Buffalo once had a network of trolleys that connected the entire region. Part of that network was a trolley on a dedicated right-of-way (ROW) that encircled the city connecting downtown with Central Terminal, the West Side, Black Rock, and downtown (again). It was known as the "Belt Line." That Belt Line ROW is still there and used exclusively by CSX. When CSX was given ownership of the Belt Line ROW, it was with the provision that it also be used for passenger trolley service. It can once again be reimagined as a transit corridor sharing the ROW with CSX trains. UB's architecture students have analyzed this potential and offer a new vision of the future based on a glorious transit past including connections to the airport. Come see how.



Buffalo's Belt Line once encircled and connected the City of Buffalo

Source: <http://www.forgottenbuffalo.com/forgottenbufffeatures/buffalounionstation.html>

President's Column

Why Is the Kensington Expressway Project Not Included in the GBNRTC 2024 - 2026 Unified Planning Work Program?

By Douglas Funke, CRT President

As defined in the 2024-2026 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Report the UPWP is a:

“... biennial statement of work identifying the planning and work priorities and activities to be carried out within a Metropolitan Planning Organization” (MPO).

Our Metropolitan Planning Organization is the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Coalition (GBNRTC) covering Erie and Niagara Counties. The UPWP report identifies and describes major WNY transportation projects. For example, the 2024-2026 UPWP includes the Buffalo Metro Expansion Project along with many other projects in various stages of planning and development. Here's a link to the report. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56ccbffd3c44d8670dbd1d84/t/65dcf57d77c7566e091b994e/1708979583879/GBNRTC+UPWP+24-26+Final.pdf>

Shockingly, the Kensington Expressway Project is not included in the 2024 – 2026 UPWP. CRT reviewed the draft UPWP and submitted formal comments that asked why. Here's GBNRTC's response:

“Regarding the Kensington Expressway, NYSDOT is advancing its project through environmental review as of the time of the UPWP development. Any future planning for the Rt. 33 corridor, including connecting the Region Central concept, would be best suited to be undertaken after the conclusion of the environmental review for the current project. “

Really? Other projects that are in planning and environmental stages are included in the UPWP. For example, the Bailey Avenue Corridor Study, the I-90 Exit 50 Planning and Environmental Linkage Study and the Buffalo Metro Expansion are included. Why isn't the Kensington included in the UPWP?

This is disappointing because every project in the UPWP is analyzed with respect to the FHWA Planning Emphasis Areas (PEAs). According to the UPWP draft report:

“GBNRTC has incorporated FHWA Planning Emphasis Areas (PEAs) into all of its UPWP tasks.”

Since the Kensington Expressway Project is not included in the UPWP there is no accounting of whether and how the PEAs are incorporated. Here are the FHWA PEAs and our assessment of how well or whether the Kensington Project incorporates them.

| FHWA Planning Emphasis Areas (PEAs) | The Kensington Expressway Project |
|---|--|
| <u>Tackling Climate Change</u> – Transition to a Clean Energy, Resilient Future. “... reducing single-occupancy vehicle trips and increasing access to public transportation, shift to lower emission modes ...” | <u>FAILS.</u> The expressway project is designed to maintain the same vehicle capacity and ignores potential East Side Metro Rail public transit options. |
| <u>Equity and Justice40 in Transportation Planning</u> – “... deliver 40 percent of the overall benefits of relevant federal investments to disadvantaged communities” ... “implement the goals of the Justice40 Initiative utilizing existing data sources and indices that are currently used by programs serving low income, vulnerable, and underserved communities ...” | <u>FAILS.</u> The benefits of the project go to suburban commuters while the pollution remains concentrated in a disadvantaged minority community. Only a portion of the road will be in a tunnel. Pollution will increase at portals with no improvement in uncovered portions of the expressway. |
| <u>Complete Streets</u> – “... promote Complete Streets principles in the region... provide an equitable and safe transportation network for travelers of all ages and abilities, including those from marginalized communities facing historic disinvestment. ...” | <u>FAILS.</u> This project is the opposite of a complete street. While there will be some green space on top of the tunnel the 6-lane expressway will continue to deliver 70,000 cars at highway speeds through the historically disadvantaged neighborhood. Only a portion of the expressway will be covered. |
| <u>Public Involvement</u> – “... early, effective, and continuous public involvement brings diverse viewpoints into the decision making...” | <u>FAILS.</u> Project planning was restricted to invited community groups only. <i>CRT was told we were not welcome</i> and were directed to the DOT office to register comments privately. Public Meetings were held after the project design was selected. Only one Public Hearing with public microphones was held after the Draft Design Report / Environmental Assessment was published. Most speakers were against the tunnel. |
| <u>Strategic Highway Network (STRAHNET)</u> – ... consider national security ramifications... | <u>Not Applicable.</u> The Kensington is not part of the STRAHNET. |
| <u>Federal Land Management Agency (FLMA) Coordination</u> – “... consider needs related to connecting to Federal lands ...” | <u>Not Applicable.</u> |
| <u>Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL)</u> – “... decision-making that considers environmental, community, and economic goals early in the transportation planning process, and uses the information, analysis, and products developed during planning to inform the environmental review process ...” | <u>FAILS.</u> A full Environmental Impact Statement was not conducted, let alone a PEL. CO ₂ pollution requirements of the Climate Leadership & Community Protection Act were ignored. Particulate pollution will increase by 6% at tunnel portals with increased pollution in uncovered parts of the expressway. Public health impacts were not evaluated. The NYS Constitution’s “Green Amendment” is being violated. |
| <u>Data in Transportation Planning</u> – “...incorporate data sharing and consideration into the transportation planning process ... allows for efficient use of resources and improved policy and decision-making. ...” | <u>FAILS.</u> The East Side Parkways Coalition had to FOIL NYS DOT to get arterial traffic impact data, which show that the arterials can handle the Kensington traffic. |

Is this why the Kensington Expressway Project was omitted from the 2024-2026 UPWP? It fails to address and does not meet any of the FHWA PEAs. Its omission from the UPWP hides this failure. We call on the DOT to slow down, evaluate compliance with the PEAs and make modifications needed. This should at least include a full EIS and a public health effects analysis. It should seek and integrate community inputs. CRT has joined many other community groups – including GOBike Buffalo, WNY Olmsted Conservancy, East Side Parkways Coalition – to oppose the tunnel approach and implement a community-driven process that considers all alternatives including full restoration of the Humboldt as a surface parkway. **Other NY cities are getting highway removal, why not Buffalo's East Side?**

Will you join us in signing an ESP e-letter to government and political leaders across local, state, and national levels? Please take a minute to add your name to this important e-letter. Here's a link:

<https://actionnetwork.org/letters/humboldt-parkway-restoration-project>



Today's Kensington Expressway cuts through Buffalo's East Side

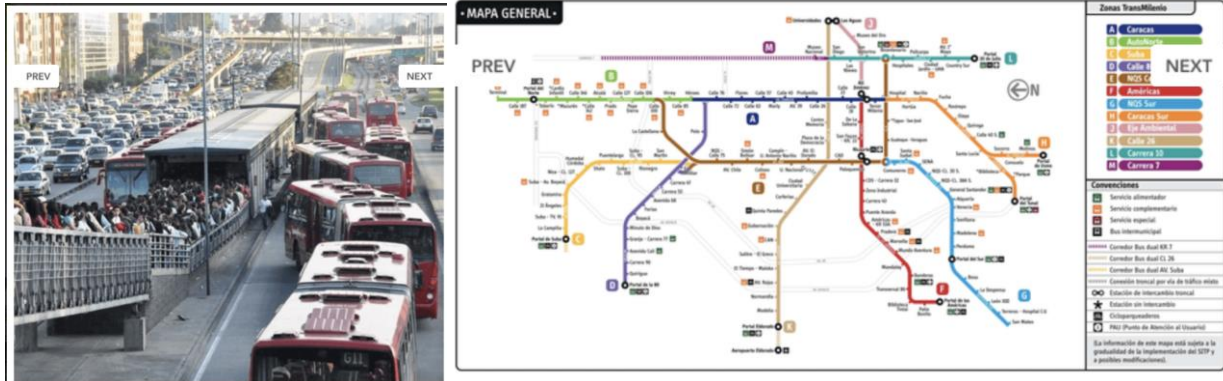
NYSDOT's tunnel proposal leaves vast sections of the Kensington unimproved! Particulate pollution will be increased and concentrated at tunnel portals in violation with NYS environmental laws and the NYS Constitution's "Green Amendment". (Picture Source: UB Small Built Works Program)

What if you make the wrong choice on BRT?

By Jim Gordon, CRT Treasurer

When it comes to Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), it turns out Bogotá, Columbia and Buffalo, NY make an interesting comparison. In 1950, both cities were about the same size. From the late 1940's through the 1960's they faced the same pressures to replace rail-based trolleys with cars and buses. Both cities largely abandoned trolleys and went in big with cars and urban expressways. Bogota is now roughly 4x the population of Buffalo. Its populated area, unlike Buffalo, remains about the same as 1950.

Bogotá is the poster child for promoting BRT. BRT was deliberately chosen over light rail rapid transit (LRRT) to cut costs. Bogotá's BRT system is cited and heavily praised just about every time you search for examples BRT. But if you watched CRT's video on BRT, you'd wonder how things ultimately worked out in Bogotá. CRT's video predicts that in the long run, BRT is an economic bust.



Bogotá's BRT uses buses on dedicated ROWs

Source: <https://use.metropolis.org/case-studies/transmilenio-bus-rapid-transit-system>

I thought I might have to make a trip to Bogotá to find out, but on December 11, 2023, the New York Times came to the rescue. “Rapid Bus Lines Eased Bogota’s Gridlock, but Struggles Remain” was a front-page story. It turns out the CRT video was correct. I just didn’t realize how big a problem going with BRT is once you’ve gone down the rabbit hole until I read the NY Times article. You can find CRT’s BRT videos on our YouTube Page (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMxl5AvgSQys7fz_i_LFrYA).

The CRT on BRT YouTube video points out that buses wear out faster than light rail rapid transit (LRRT) carriages. Bogotá now needs to replace the BRT buses, which wipes out the savings they got when they went with BRT. On top of that, they are back to square one because now it is clear that they should have gone with LRRT for capacity that BRT can’t provide. Now Bogotá will have to pay for new buses while at the same time trying to figure out how to pay for and make LRRT work. They gave up potential LRRT rights-of-way to urban expressways making LRRT even more expensive today. That’s a terrible bind to be in.

Bogotá buses are worn out and there are fewer buses now which leads to overcrowding. Only the poor take the bus because they have no choice – something they have in common with Buffalo. The current administration is indecisive and hasn’t replaced the buses nor gone forward with LRRT.

Meanwhile, Bogotá is in a sort of contest to see which city is the most congested in the world? By some measures, it’s Bogotá and the drivers there seem to enjoy the attention the city gets for this.

Buffalo, on the other hand, never fully embraced cars as the be-all and end-all way to get around. Our leaders understood that LRRT needs to be an important component of our transportation system. Looking at a map, we can see that if Buffalo embraces the LRRT lines CRT has promoted over the years, Buffalo can grow and grow without the pain, pollution and cost of cars and gridlock. We’ve mostly preserved our LRRT rights-of-way. We should be thankful to the NFTA and past area leaders for their forward thinking. See our website for a map (<http://citizenstransit.org/index.php/corridors>).

Get your yard Extend Metro sign!



Donate and get a free yard sign!

<http://www.citizenstransit.org/YES.Extend>

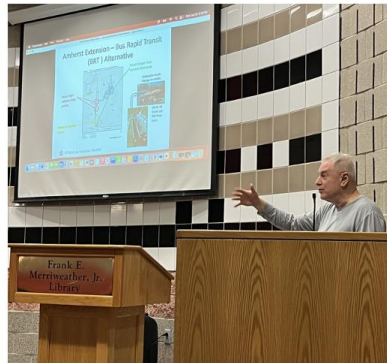
If you're near the Amherst corridor, we'll drop your sign(s) off. We can supply any quantity.

CRT Work Highlights

January - March 2024



March Opposing Kensington Tunnel



CRT Annual Meeting



Clean Mobility Workshop

Continued Working with the East Side Parkways Coalition to advocate for restoration of Humboldt Parkway and to oppose NYSDOT's plans to partially tunnel the 6-lane expressway.

- Marched from Jefferson to Humboldt Parkway along East Utica with “We Are Women Warriors” on January 6th to demonstrate opposition to NYSDOT’s tunnel plan. Doug spoke at the event emphasizing transit considerations.
- Attended NYSDOT – NAACP Public Meeting on January 8th.
- Attended ESP Town Hall meeting on February 9th.
- Continued e-letter campaign calling for a more complete environmental impact analysis. Received over 1,000 signatures so far.

Supported Buffalo Metro Amherst extension.

- Attended NFTA listening session providing feedback. Held informal discussions with attendees.
- Continued distributing “YES, EXTEND METRO” yard signs.
- If you would like a yard sign, contact us at our email: crtc@citizenstransit.org. We are requesting a \$10 donation so we can purchase more signs.

Supported NYPTA transit advocacy initiative.

- Met with staff of NYS Senator Sean Ryan and Assembly Member Karen McMahon. Also spoke with both legislators personally at the “meet the legislators’ event” at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Amherst.
- Promoted adherence to CLCPA and NYS Constitution’s “Green Amendment’s” that call for investing in public transit instead of more roads. Stated our opposition the Kensington tunnel plan in favor of a surface Humboldt Parkway.

Community involvement.

- Attended PPG’s Community Agenda Rollout on January 12th.
- **Attended East Side Clean Mobility Workshop** on March 16th. Shared BTRU’s table to distribute CRT literature and meet with public attendees. We thank BTRU for sharing their table.
- Attended and spoke at USEPA / NYSDEC Environmental Justice Listening Session in Niagara Falls on April 15th.
- Attended Scajaquada Coalition Meeting on March 21st. Heard update on Region Central Project from Senator Sean Ryan and the coalition.

Public sector involvement

- Reviewed GBNRTC’s Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and provided written comments. Asked why the Kensington Expressway Project was omitted. See President’s article for details.
- Met with WNY Rail Advocacy Group to promote implementation of high-speed rail (HSR) and regional rail improvements in WNY soon.

Held CRT Annual Public meeting. The meeting was held on January 24th. Doug and Jim reviewed 2023 accomplishments and led a discussion on 2024 priorities.

Small Built Works Program. Supported UB’s Small Built Works Program that is designing potential Buffalo Metro stations along Buffalo’s “Belt Line” and Buffalo Metro extensions to the airport.

Ongoing Activities and Meetings. Continued to attend meetings of local public organizations, including the NFTA, GBNRTC and Buffalo Place. Also served on the Erie County Climate Change Task Force (ECCTF) representing transit issues and on NFTA’s Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC).

Communication.

- Doug was interviewed Channel 2 on February 16 on Kensington Project.
- Published Another Voice article on the Kensington Project.
https://buffalonews.com/edition/page-a8/page_c6a90a2f-4369-5a04-b588-1183435184a4.html
- Posted the Jim’s latest video discussing the Amherst Extension alignment on the CRT’s YouTube Channel. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMx15AvgSQys7fz_i_LFrYA

Keep CRT On Track

To join as a new member, renew your membership, or make a donation please click here. Thanks.

Can You Help Us?

We are looking for volunteers to help us be more effective. Can you help us plan and staff tabling events? Can you help us update and prepare outreach material? Can you help us with data entry tasks (e.g., maintaining our email lists)? Can you help us write grant applications? Please contact us at CRTC@citizenstrnsit.org if you want to help.

Calendar

15 May 2024. CRT Public Meeting Presentation of three new LRRT Lines in Buffalo by the Small Built Works Program 6-8pm at [15 Fernhill Ave. Buffalo, NY 14215](https://www.buffalony.gov/15-Fernhill-Ave-14215).