



Citizens *for* Regional Transit

CRT News

**A Quarterly Publication of Citizens for Regional Transit
Vol. 27, Issue 31 November 2025**

In This Issue:

**CRT President's Column
Meet Our New NFTA Transit Director!**

WNY Transit News

CRT August to October Work Highlights

Upcoming Events

Help us achieve the Transit Prime Directive:

Make Transit a competitive alternative to driving for everyone!

President's Column

Our New NFTA Transit Director

By Douglas Funke, CRT President

The NFTA has a new Director of Public Transit. Alan Oberst, Jim and I met with him, and I attended his introductory presentation at the October NFTA Board of Commissioners Meeting. We are looking forward to working with him and his NFTA Transit Team to make Buffalo transit the best in the country or at least meet CRT's goal to make transit a convenient and affordable alternative to driving for everyone.

First, I wish the NFTA's retiring Transit Director, James Morrell and NFTA Operations Vice President, Tom George, the very best in their retirements. Together under their combined leadership many important transit initiatives and successes have been accomplished. These include the Buffalo-Amherst light rail extension, the Bailey Avenue Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) initiative, the new light rail extension into the DL&W Terminal, which will create an indoor station connecting to the KeyBank Center. These projects are underway and will form the foundation for eventually achieving NFTA's original goal of a 40+ mile Light Rail Rapid Transit (LRRT) network. The Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) and Accessible Advisory Committee (AAC) are also important accomplishments started under Tom and James' leadership. Thanks to James and Tom for their many years of leadership at the NFTA as we welcome the new Transit Director!

The new Transit director is Mike Pal. He brings an impressive resume to the job. Like highly respected Navy "Mustangers" who served as enlisted personnel then transitioned to officer ranks, Mike started as a bus operator (driver) in NYC, moving to various management and executive management positions in Minneapolis and Phoenix. Both Minneapolis and Phoenix have added successful light rail systems to their transit networks. Mike brings this background and expertise to Buffalo as we expand our LRRT. Mike understands the value and importance of light rail. As he said in his introductory remarks: *"Where rail goes, investment follows!"*

Here's a link to his picture and bio. <https://www.nfta.com/node/235147>

Here are some highlights of the key objectives Mike wants to emphasize.

- Quality of customer experience (e.g., reduce headways on core routes, clean and environmentally friendly buses, safety for our customers and employees)
- Fostering innovation (e.g., bus rapid transit on Bailey, light rail expansion, hydrogen and hybrid light rail vehicles to modernize fleet, real time train information at all rail stations)
- Leveraging technology (e.g., best technology for staff, evaluate equipment and software needs, oversee new paratransit software, work with municipal partners to optimize bus operations.)
- Transparency (e.g., keeping Board-stakeholders-leadership-staff updated, own challenges and providing options for solutions, accurate performance data, new metrics for service delivery.)
- Safety (re-imagining our Transit Ambassador Program, utilize operator and customer feedback to best deploy collective resources, best practices to reduce accidents, participate in operational safety committee.)
- Engagement – Internal (e.g., hosting town halls and route reviews, effective employee feedback mechanisms, showcase best employees, partner with labor to implement apprenticeships.)
- Engagement – External (e.g., be visible in the field and service area, focus on transit-oriented development (TOD) for socio-economic opportunities and thriving communities, Chair Citizens

Advisory Committee (CAC), participate in Accessible Advisory Committee (AAC), host public engagement sessions in the field, LISTEN to the customer.)

- Fiscal responsibility (continue to lobby for capital operating funding, partner with NYPTA to advocate for more state funding, aggressively secure grants, streamline processes to achieve efficiencies, reorganize operations to adapt to current best practices.)

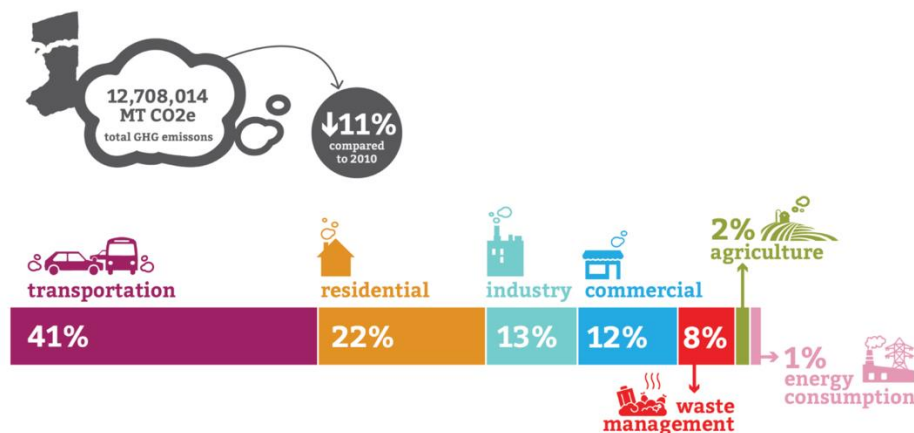
Mike says he plans to ride all NFTA routes to engage customers personally to find out what is working and where to improve. As transit riders ourselves, CRT understands the importance of on the ground experience in understanding what is working and what needs to be improved. We applaud Mike's plan to ride and engage riders and drivers and look forward to seeing him on the bus!

We look forward to working with Mike *to achieve the Transit Prime Directive of making transit a competitive alternative to driving for everyone.*

WNY Transit News

Amherst Extension Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was released in September for public review. There were over 750 responses to the NFTA with 87% in favor of extending the Buffalo Metro Light Rail.

[GBNRTC Climate Action Committee Green House Gas \(GHG\) Inventory published.](#) We have made some solid improvements in Erie County, except in transportation. Transportation is still the largest component of GHG pollution (41%) with cars contributing the most. GHG is down slightly due to more efficient cars, but vehicle miles traveled (VMT) is up. When the pollution from tires is considered, this is a disappointing result. More progress in moving to transit is needed. Improvements in transit services, like extending LRRT, is needed.



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 desired.

CRT Work Highlights

August - October 2025

Community Outreach and Education.

- CRT presented on the Future of Public Transit in the Niagara Frontier Region at the Niagara County Fair. Doug introduced CRT. Jim presented the NFTA's plans the Buffalo-Amherst Extension and Anthony gave a preview of his gondola concept for connecting tourist sites in Niagara Falls.



CRT Board Member Anthony Carter's Niagara Falls Gondola Concept

- CRT provided feedback on the NFTA draft EIS.
 - Submitted extensive comments on the NFTA Draft EIS document. [Here's a link.](#)
 - Presented oral comments at the EIS Public Hearing. <https://citizenstransit.org/node/243>

- CRT held several public meetings on the project to inform the public in the benefits of extending Buffalo's light rail rapid transit, most recently at UB's Capen Hall on September 4th to inform UB students of the opportunity and potential that LRRT offers.
- CRT tabled at area festivals and events (supporting both CRT and East Side Parkways Coalition) including:
 - Calvary Baptist Annual Community Outreach Sunday, July 27th.
 - National Night Out at Mt. Olive Baptist Church on August 5th.
 - Central Terminal Fall Festival on October 11th at Central Terminal.



- Restarted support to UB's Small Built Works Program that is designing potential Buffalo Metro stations along Buffalo's "Belt Line" and airport extensions. The fall semester has started, and a new class of UB architecture students are building on the work completed last year. Jim, Tom, Carl, and Tom are supporting
- Served on Scajaquada Community Coalition advocating for optimal Region Central implementation
- Continued to support the East Side Parkways Coalition
 - Attended Restore Humboldt Parkway Fruit Belt Information Session on August 1st.
 - Attended ROCC Community Meeting on August 21st at Mt. Olive Baptist Church.
 - Met with Sam Radford of ROCC on September 8th to understand and document areas of agreement and difference between ROCC and ESP
- Attended the Buffalo Bills Transit Hub proposal meeting. Both Doug and Jim spoke. The Bills / NFTA plan is for a covered transit hub that can hold 10 buses. This is an improvement over the current bus facility as a first step toward a high-capacity, high speed light rail facility. We pointed out that 10-buses can carry 400 people, a tiny fraction of the 60,000 fans who will need to get to the stadium. Most will still have to drive (and find parking like today.) We call for the Bills and NFTA to eventually implement light rail as identified in the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA)?



Buffalo Bills / NFTA proposed Highmark Stadium bus hub will have room for 10 buses
 No one wears Bills gear to the game?

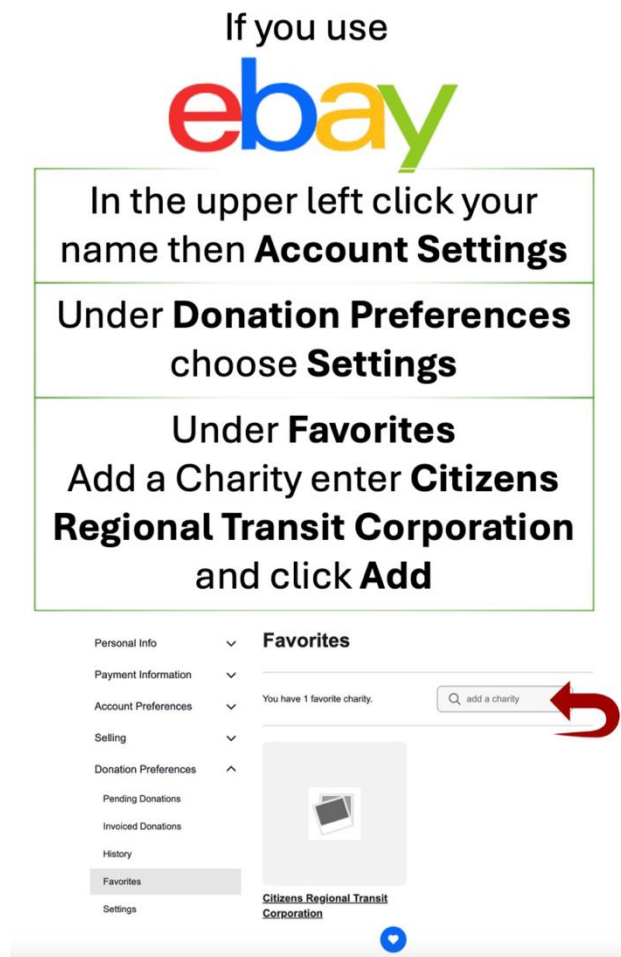
- Various ongoing Activities and Meetings. Continued to attend meetings of local public organizations, including the NFTA, GBNRTC, and Buffalo Place. Also served on the Erie County Climate Change Task Force (ECCTF) representing transit issues and on NFTA's Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). Also, served on Scajaquada Corridor Coalition (SCC) committee advocating Region Central next steps

Opportunities and Upcoming Events

Keep CRT On Track. To join as a new member, renew your membership, or make a donation please click on: <http://citizenstransit.org/join>. 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@citizenstransit.org if you want to help.

Sign up for CRT on EBAY.



Upcoming Events

21 January 2026. Annual meeting. Time and location to be determined.