

# GBNRTC

Newsletter for the GREATER *BUFFALO-NIAGARA* REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL  
Metropolitan Planning Organization For Erie and Niagara Counties

## State's transportation chief stresses need for change

"A new way of thinking" about transportation is needed for New York State to compete in an increasingly "smaller world" of global trade and "dramatically changing travel patterns."

That was the message from State Commissioner of Transportation Thomas J. Madison Jr. to the political and transportation leadership of Erie and Niagara Counties, as represented by the GBNRTC Policy Committee, of which he is the chairman.

He noted that the governor is seeking legislation that would allow the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), New York State Thruway Authority (NYSTA) and downstate's Metropolitan Transit Authority to "partner with the private sector to infuse some private equity capital into our infrastructure."

"This is a new way of thinking ... but it's done in other states around the country and it's been

done in other countries around the world for decades" and "it's another tool that we'll have at our



Commissioner Thomas J. Madison Jr.

disposal to fund projects. We will continue to talk about it and emphasize it as part of our master plan."

Madison took note of growing concerns about the future of transportation funding. He observed

that voter approval of a transportation bond issue plan last November would help to ease immediate concerns.

"We are on the threshold of the most robust capital construction program in history of New York State," he declared, over the next five years. "We're going to be spending \$38 billion ... an awesome figure.

"But our needs continue to outpace the available revenue streams ... When we look beyond the next five years !! ... We know that right now we have about \$70

### Second Quarter 2006

State's transportation chief stresses need for change

Seamless efficiency stressed in state's Master Plan

CSX commits to launching of "feeder port"

Brookings report warns of crisis in U.S. freight transportation

Latest roadway scores for Erie-Niagara region

A "transformation" in the Village of Lewiston

Creative gateway between Allentown and Medical Campus funded

Collaboration is the Name of the Game

billion in additional projects on the drawing board. We have tremendous needs, just in our core system. We have some of the most heavily punished, oldest infrastructure in the country.”

Madison stressed that future planning must also become “more customer oriented— focused on what our customers and our stakeholders need” and on ways of breaking down “institutional barriers among different transportation entities and operators,” becoming “more coordinated, federated, if you will, in our transportation.”

He added, “We need to be thinking beyond just highways and bridges” and ... “invest strategically and intelligently in all modes of transportation – passenger-freight rail and transit systems and aviation facilities ... and you’ll see that reflected in our capital construction plan and also in our master plan.”

Madison said that the state’s 13 Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), such as GBNRTC, would “play a vital role in helping us to find the ways we need to change.”

He said that Executive Director Hal Morse of the GBNRTC was one of four MPO executives whom he has named to an “MPO Implementation Team” headed by Ronald Hayes of NYSDOT. He added that Gary Gottlieb, planning and program manager for the regional office of NYSDOT and a member of GBNRTC’s Planning and Coordinating Committee, would also work with the team.

# ‘Seamless’ efficiency stressed in state’s Master Plan



**A** major goal of the New York State Transportation Strategies for a New Age is to “increase average occupancy of all passenger vehicles, including automobiles, buses, rail cars, etc.”

A draft of the Master Plan for 2030 describes this as a strategy that “can also be applied to goods movements by maximizing the amount of freight transported in each vehicle or rail car within allowable limits.”

The growth rate of automobile “travel on the highways ... is expected to grow more slowly in the future,” but ... “growth in goods movement on New York State transportation facilities is expected to grow substantially throughout the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”.

“While the amount of goods moved by rail and air is expected to increase, projections also indi-

cate that more goods will be moved by truck, resulting in a greater imbalance of truck use compared to other modes.”

The report finds a compelling need for a “seamless system,” with efficient management, innovation and advanced technology, because “one of the greatest challenges facing transportation policy makers” is “alleviating traffic congestion without adding capacity.”

The 94-page report, prepared by the New York State Department of Transportation, observes that “existing and future constraints on all levels of government will make it increasingly difficult to continue to finance infrastructure from traditional governmental sources.”

The plan “overtly recognizes that any commitment to rely solely upon the construction of new infrastructure to accommodate future demand is not feasible ... given the often enormous fi-

nancial, social, environmental and political constraints.”

Therefore, “new innovative methods will need to be found and implemented...” Any system expansions will have to be “carefully planned and selected” and “proceed only with the utmost in scrutiny.”

Expansion that “attains consensus support and funding will be advanced in ways to mitigate any negative impacts and always in conjunction with strategies that will better manage travel demand.”

The “constraints on potential capacity expansion” in the “more densely developed and populated” downstate region... “are greater than in the remainder of the state.”

Nevertheless, downstate has the most severe congestion problems while upstate “with few exceptions ... has adequate capacity to meet its transportation needs well into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” although “for those who cannot or do not drive, travel options are very limited, particularly in suburban and rural areas.”

Strategies for the upstate region include “priority attention” to “designated trade corridors and major connections.” Route 219, “connecting Buffalo to points

south,” will be among the priorities to “receive appropriate support and additional funding.” Also promoted is “better access between the developing Buffalo harbor and waterfront and the Southtowns area of Erie County...”

And replacement of the two Grand Island bridges is specifically included with the need for reconstruction of the Thruway system in the 2030 plan.

The plan forecasts that “upstate ports and the canal system will continue to pursue infrastructure modernization strategies to improve the efficiency of cargo loading and unloading.”

Also, “upstate public transportation systems will continue their efforts to pilot and implement reconfigurations and realignments” to meet travel demands that “are changing as the population and jobs shift away from cities.”

The urgent need for collaboration is a dominant theme throughout the report. More effective regional planning and “reliance upon the Metropolitan Planning Organizations,” such as the GBNRTC, are stressed to “address the transportation needs within each of the upstate metropolitan areas.”

These organizations “have the

capability to make the decisions and trade-offs necessary to achieve an optimum multi-modal transportation system” for their region. It is “especially critical that the MPOs work closely with adjacent rural communities in their regions in order to ensure appropriate coordination between land use, economic development and transportation.”

The report also takes note of “the adverse impacts of governmental and other institutional fragmentation,” including public authorities and the private sector while transportation customers increasingly place high priority upon “travel-time predictability” for both personal travel and the movement of goods.

“The commissioner of the New York State Department of Transportation, utilizing existing statutory and executive authority, will integrate transportation policy development among operators throughout the state to ensure greater policy coherence and consistency.”

An “unprecedented” level of public/private cooperation, planning and funding “will be required.” A strategy for future toll policies, including ways in which tolls can be used to influence travel behavior, “will be comprehensively reviewed by a committee comprised of the state’s toll



The growing role of “intermodalism” is shown in lineup of containers for rail=truck shipment near old Bethlehem Steel site at Lackawanna.

authorities under the direction of the commissioner of administration.”

And “it is anticipated that the commissioner’s transportation integrating role will be strengthened in order to achieve the policy objectives identified in this plan.”

The plan also outlines strategies for collaboration with federal authorities to improve security “without unreasonably sacrificing mobility and reliability.” It cites the need for expediting the use of new technology and initiatives for improving the flow of cross-border truck traffic.

A comprehensive safety program emphasizes a need for “altering the travel behaviors of vehicle operators posing the highest risk” and a system responsive to the elderly and handicapped “as the baby boom generation ages.”

The report forecasts “increased visibility and brightness of signs, wider pavement markings on freeways and expressways and longer walk intervals at traffic signals where appropriate.”

The state’s over age 65 population “is projected to grow from just under 2.5 million in 2000 to over 4 million in 2030.” The state’s population, as of the 2000 Census, was “just under 19 million, an increase of almost 1 million since 1990, but all of this growth occurred in the downstate area and is attributable almost exclusively to increased immigration.”

The movement of the state’s population from urban centers to suburbs “highlights the troubling and ongoing trend of population sprawl.” Suburbanites are “less likely to walk to work or school or

to the local store” and “job dispersal is likely to continue.”

Overall, the plan “projects that highway travel will continue to increase during the planning period, albeit, at a slower pace than during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.” The increase, even in areas with a stagnant population, is attributable in part to entry of more women into the work-force and a longer average commute.

New York State is the nation’s “heaviest user of public transportation,” but much of this is attributable to the fact that more than 50 percent of New York City residents regularly use public transportation.

“Of concern, upstate transit rider-ship has generally declined since the mid-1980s,” in part because of decline in city populations and the dispersal of jobs into the suburbs. “Encouragingly, since the mid 1990s, these declines seem to have been arrested and certain systems have even experienced modest increases in rider-ship. ...

“Metropolitan areas will require improved public transportation ... to satisfy customer travel requirements and help mitigate congestion from increased vehicular travel. A growing elderly population, much of it rural, will need these services as well.”

The state still has the highest figure nationally for those who “walk to work” but it has declined “over the decade from nearly 7 percent to only 5 percent.”

And the state has the third largest of bike work trips. Bicycling trips increased during the 1990s, to 500,000 daily, but “many are for recreation and fitness rather

than as an alternative for commuting or other travel needs.” Bicycling is expected to increase but will play “a minor role in addressing the core transportation needs...”

Intercity bus travel has increased downstate but declined upstate, especially “in most rural areas where service has been reduced.” Passenger rail service on the New York City-Albany-Buffalo



Bus terminal of Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority in Buffalo.

Empire Corridor, where 90 percent of inter-city rail rider-ship is concentrated, increased 26 percent but the future outlook is clouded by the uncertainties facing Amtrak. Development of combination rail-bus terminals will “continue to be explored.”

The plan stresses the need for “effective and affordable” strategies to cope with “dramatically increasing truck traffic” so that it will not “overwhelm the state’s transportation system.” Congestion and capacity issues “must be addressed to keep New York State freight terminals cost and service competitive with surrounding states.”

A national trend that “has only begun to scratch the surface in

New York State is the growth in intermodalism” — the movement of freight “from point of origin to destination via different modes, such as rail to trucks, ports to rail, air cargo to truck, etc., without intercession of the shipper.”

Nationally, 67 percent of commodities by weight are moved by truck, 16 percent by rail, 6 percent by pipeline and the remainder by water and multiple modes, according to a 2002 survey. In New York State, 90 percent of commodities by weight are moved by truck, only 3 percent by rail, 2.5 percent by pipeline and the remainder by water and multiple modes.

The report also found that emphasis on “just-in-time delivery” has resulted in an increase of “less-than-truckload deliveries,” leading to “further increases in the number of trucks on the highways.” (A 2002 survey of cross-border commercial traffic found that 23 percent of trucks from Canada to the U.S. and 31 percent of those moving from the U.S. to Canada were empty, “an apparently uneconomic phenomenon.”)

The state has 14 airports but about 92 per cent of the state’s air cargo is handled by John F. Kennedy Airport even though its capacity is limited “due to highway congestion” and other limitations in the New York metropolitan region.

The report outlines strategies for maintaining the state’s leadership on environmental and energy initiatives, including pilot projects for hydrogen fuel cells, with a goal of “ultimately” having hydrogen-fueling stations on the Thruway system.

# CSX commits to launching of ‘feeder port’



**T**he CSX Corporation plans to start turning dirt “this construction season” to prepare its Seneca Yard in Lackawanna to serve as a “feeder port” for ocean-borne containers from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.”

“We are very excited about the great opportunity this offers for Buffalo and for the railroad,” said Maurice O’Connell, a resident vice president at the CSX state office in Selkirk. “We are definitely committed.”

O’Connell declined to set a date for start of construction. There had been reports of a start in early spring. CSX sources now predict it will be “sometime this summer.” O’Connell explained that arrangements had to be made to accommodate existing traffic through the yard while the transformation is underway.

The state has made \$4 million available for the project and that amount will be matched, “at

least,” by CSX, according to Steve Slavick, director of the Policy and Strategic Planning Bureau with the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT).

William Cronin, manager of shipper sales for the Port of New York and New Jersey, said, “When last I talked with CSX officials, they were hopeful, but not optimistic of completion this year and viewed the spring-summer of 2007 as more likely (for completion).

“Last year I made a visit to a number of importers, exporters, forwarders and brokers in the Greater Buffalo region to gauge interest in this project. Most wanted it up and running yesterday. Most likely I will make another visit in June of this year. We are very supportive of this.”

John Cappellino, business development director with the Erie County Industrial Development Agency (ECIDA), said that the feeder port concept “has been something the Port of New York has looked at as a mechanism to



The Seneca Yard in Lackawanna will be modified by CSX to handle container traffic from the Port of New York and New Jersey.

handle some of the congestion problems from the terrific growth of container traffic.”

He noted, “There just isn’t any room for them to expand. And it’s a problem not only for them, but for other ports on the East Coast and the West Coast as well.”

CSX, he said, has already improved its connections at the Port of New York and New Jersey to facilitate the transfer of containers from ocean-going ships to rail cars for shipment to the Seneca Yard, for distribution by truck or rail or water to population centers, with southern Ontario as one of the potential attractions.

“They’ve spent a lot of money down in New York to increase their ability to load onto rail cars directly from the port, so I think from that perspective they’ve kind of put their money where their mouth is.”

The improvements needed in the Seneca Yard, he said, would include longer tracks, offsetting paved areas for cranes and trucks, and an access road into the yard, probably near Lake Avenue in Blasdell.

He emphasized that the challenge for the region would be in marketing the facility to encourage the development of warehousing and distribution centers. “We are considering hiring a consultant, maybe with some public funding, to help us identify potential customers and market opportunities,” he said.

“There are several possibilities. The larger retailers look into gateway distribution, putting their products in a warehouse that acts as a distribution center.

“But there’s a growing trend also for dealers in international products to look for a place where final assembly and manufacturing work can be done. That’s where the big bucks are. I saw a survey that showed that some of these jobs pay almost as much as manufacturing. So this is a market we would definitely like to exploit.

“We have good transportation infrastructure here and available land and real estate is much less expensive here than in, say, Toronto.”

The Seneca Yard is not far from the Gateway Port of Buffalo,

which has experienced a steady increase in business recently that has been attributed in part to the increase in the price of fuel.

It’s also near a lumber reload facility operated by Canadian National (CN) Railroad at the former Bethlehem Steel. A CN spokesman said officials of the rail line have participated in talks on the feasibility of using the Buffalo area as a feeder port for the Port of Halifax but have rejected the idea “at least for now.”

“This feeder port concept has worked in a number of areas, particularly in Europe, but it is still somewhat of a trial balloon here, and it’s kind of a dance to get everybody together on it,” said Cappellino.

The Association of American Railroads recently announced that the nation’s Class 1 freight railroads, which include CSX, would spend more than \$8 billion in 2006 laying new track, buying new equipment and improving infrastructure — a 21 percent increase from last year.

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# Brookings report warns of crisis in U.S. freight transportation

**A** recent report by the Brookings Institute finds that the public, and even elected officials, are sometimes insensible to the fact that the U.S. freight system is a vital artery that keeps the nation's economic heart beating in a global market and offers "new employment opportunities, particularly near major points of entry to the country."

There has been a "vast increase in the amount of freight moving over longer distances, with even more cargo projected to move in the future," because of the increasingly "diverse locations of production and consumption," according to the Brookings report.

The trucking industry, freight railroads, domestic waterborne business "will see increased demand for their services." International air cargo movements "are also anticipated to grow" but will be affected "by the growing truck substitution for the service."

"The global economy is ... going through a period of change as intense as the Industrial Revolution," the report notes. The value of merchandise exported from the U.S. grew in value by 84 percent from 1990 to 2003. But the value of imported merchandise during the same period grew by 154 per-

cent. "The U.S. is now an 'import economy' – far more reliant on goods produced overseas."

Multinational firms are "likely to locate their headquarters in one country, their research and development in another and their production and distribution facilities in yet other locations" with all operations linked by telecommunications and data exchange along with improved transportation options.

"Goods are now sourced and largely produced at the lowest cost locations. Mexico, China, India and other countries have emerged as global production sites. China, in particular, has become a new world economic power."

"... Because the ability to compete and thrive in the emerging global economy now depends on the strengths of a nation's freight system, this dynamic situation generates one crucial question: Can U.S. infrastructure handle the volumes and adequately extract economic value from goods movement?"

The Brookings report stressed the need for public awareness of the economic potential in the new trade patterns. For example, despite the "loss of traditional manufacturing jobs overseas," warehouses and distribution centers are being "constructed throughout the U.S." that can employ



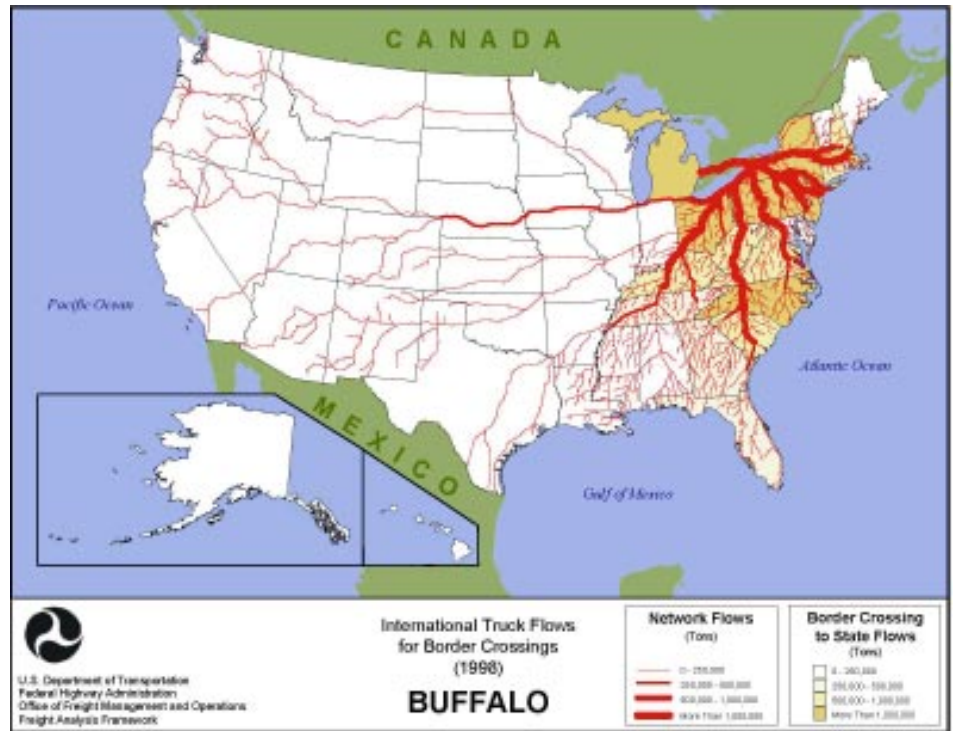
“900 to 1,000 workers with a range of skills.” Goods are produced “at the least cost location,” but “the final assembly and shelf-readiness is increasingly occurring near the point of consumption.”

A recent example was a British manufacturer of swimwear that chose the City of Tonawanda as a warehouse site because of its logistical value — near the Canadian border and Toronto and to the Buffalo Marketing Group that built the firm’s U.S. web site. Buffalo Niagara Enterprise, a non-profit private business and development group, helped with legal and logistical details, according to a report in the Buffalo News.

“The growing importance of these facilities” sometimes escapes the attention of public agencies, but some state economic development agencies have “recently begun to recognize the value of these facilities and are beginning to target them for their areas.” Pennsylvania has “attracted distribution centers through its Keystone Opportunity Zone initiative.”

In New Jersey, the Portway Extensions Concepts Study “identified much of the cargo moving through the port as headed for local warehouses and distribution centers – supporting thousands of jobs, where value added activities turned the imported goods into shelf-ready products that were then distributed throughout North America.”

Another initiative is the Integrated Logistics Centers (ILCs), “large manufacturing and distribution parks built around major rail yards and other modes, offering efficient transport connectivity.”



Goods are “brought in by rail, value is added at buildings in the distribution park, and then goods are transported to end users in the market area.” CenterPoint in Joliet, Illinois, is cited as an example.

In facing the challenges of global change, “the U.S. is not alone – all major areas of the world are finding their freight systems straining under the new loads placed on them.” However, the “congestion and delays” in the U.S. freight system in 2004 “would indicate that U.S. freight infrastructure is in crisis despite massive investment in certain elements.”

Erik Autor, vice president for the National Retail Federation, was quoted as saying, “The (freight) system is really starting to crumble and it’s eventually going to find a way into consumer prices.” Jeffrey Shane, undersecretary for policy at the U.S. Department of Transporta-

tion, declared, “Maritime congestion is masking congestion on the rails and roads.”

The Brookings report warns that “communication to the general public about the value of the goods movement system and the changes it is undergoing has not been adequate.” It stressed the need for elected officials and the general public to be “comfortable and supportive of public investments in the system.”

Although Americans are “utterly dependent on the freight system and its carriers,” says the report, “there is little understanding of the system’s impact on our daily personal and business lives ...” Unless the public is “made aware of the global trading system, its economic importance to a region and their daily lives,” it will lack the background to understand “the goods movement trends that have developed and the new operating practices, policies and projects that are needed.”

The report also warned that federal agencies are still “largely organized along modal lines, with separate agencies for trucking, rail, maritime and air movements,” a structure “that has not kept pace with the widely adopted multimodal business practices in today’s freight movement business.”

Multiple agencies “may contact private sector companies separately and set up different meetings, which can become a large time burden for private organizations.” It “still remains common to see public agencies in the same region undertaking parallel initiatives with minimal coordination.”

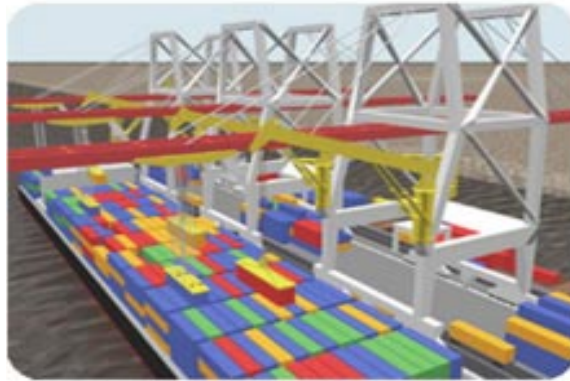
Because “customers will not wait, companies are not waiting for the governmental agencies to solve these problems.” Many companies are “beginning to reorient their supply chains to minimize the potential impacts of disruptions,” sometimes in ways that, “from a public sector standpoint, may not be optimal...”

For example, when there are disruptions on the rail system, “goods may be trucked for long distances, increasing congestion on roadways.” Innovations include increasing capacity to gain economies of scale ... “such as longer truck trailers, double-stack container trains ... a new generation of vessels capable of carrying as many as 10,000 containers between countries.”

For “more than 20 years,” companies have worked to make supply chains leaner by “reducing the amount of goods kept in inventory.” Goods are “moved just-

in-time (JIT) for use in production lines or in response to ‘real-time demand by consumers based on analyses of purchasing patterns.’”

Shippers and receivers “generally do not focus on the modes used — they often hire third party freight providers and task them with getting the job done on time for the least cost... The facilities that providers employ are a mix of public and private infrastructure.... Projects that facilitate intermodal activity that involve more than one jurisdiction or agency have a greater tendency to not receive public investment priority by regional decision makers.”



Ports are challenged by container shipments.

The Brookings study found that the national rail freight system “in some areas does not have the capacity or control of strategic right-of-way to carry the amount of freight that businesses and the public sector would like,” has “severe labor and skill shortages that may take several years to fully resolve, “ and “a business mindset that needs to be challenged to maximize fully the use of rail freight as the public sector envisions it.”

And the trucking industry is

“facing a driver shortage that can be measured in the tens of thousands of positions that need to be filled” and “shows no signs of abating.”

The federal government “estimates that the number of truck drivers will rise by nearly 20 percent between 2002 and 2012, but a BB&T Capital Research report predicts that “the demand for drivers will be three times as high as the available supply for the next few years, constraining growth and raising trucking rates.”

But the “potential Achilles heel of the our ‘import economy’ may be intermodal connectors, which have often been called the ‘orphans’ of the freight transportation system.” A report to Congress by the Federal Highway Administration found that National Highway System connectors with freight terminals have “significant mileage and pavement deficiencies” and that there is “a general lack of awareness and coordination for freight projects...”

The report concludes that steps are being taken in the right direction by some public agencies, “but much needs to be done.” The 21<sup>st</sup> Century “requires a multimodal national freight system” with agreements among agencies and the private sector that can keep the U.S. “economically competitive and responsive to security needs.”

The findings of the Brookings report are reflected in the New York State Master Plan for 2030 with its emphasis upon trade corridors, intermodalism and coordination among public agencies and with the private sector.



# Latest roadway scores for Erie-Niagara region

A view of Ohio Street looking North towards Buffalo.

**T**he average pavement condition of federal-aid eligible roadways in Erie and Niagara Counties has improved slightly in the latest survey.

The average regional road score, based upon a 1-to-10 range, was 6.71, compared with 6.44 in 2003, 6.45 in 2001, 6.6 in 1999 and 5.81 in 1997. The survey was carried out from May through October in 2005 by the GBNRTC in collaboration with the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT).

Under the rating system, 9 and 10 are “excellent,” 7 and 8 are “good,” while 6 is “fair,” and 1 to 5 are “poor.” The rating reflects the amount of scaling, cracking, patching, raveling and faulting.

The City of Buffalo had 31.6 percent of the federal-aid routes with “poor” scores, although its average 5.98 score was a 7.7 percent improvement upon the 5.5 recorded in 2003. The City of Niagara Falls had 19.3 percent of the “poor” ratings but its overall average of 5.7, compared with 5.03 in 2003, repre-

sented a 13.3 percent change for the better.

Overall, the highest average score of 7.34 was recorded for roads under the jurisdiction of NYSDOT. It was a 3.2 percent improvement over 7.11 in 2003.

Erie County registered a 2005 average score of 6.85, a 5.7 percent improvement on 6.48 in 2003, while Niagara County’s 2005 rating of 6.68 was down by 1.6 percent from 6.79 in 2003.

Overall, for the two-county region, the federal-aid lane mileage had increased to 5,007.77 from 4,781.95 in 2003 and the vehicle miles traveled by drivers increased to 20,274,561 compared with 19,428,147 in 2003.

The report was compiled by GBNRTC’s Kathryn Stilwell, assisted by Kim Smith. Ms. Stilwell cautioned that exact year-to-year comparisons may be complicated by changes in classification of some roadways.

“Poor” sectors with significant traffic counts scheduled for improvement in the Transportation

Improvement Program include the following:

South Grand Island Bridge; Lasalle Expressway from Niagara Falls City Line to Williams Road; New York State Thruway, Erie County line to Eden/Angola Exit; North French Road in Amherst, from Dodge Road to Transit Road, and Sweet Home Road to Interstate 990; Sweet Home Road from Rensch Road to Chestnut Ridge Road; Harlem Road, in Cheektowaga, from Genesee Street to Cleveland Drive; Kenmore Avenue, from Delaware Avenue to Starin Avenue; Wehrle Drive, from Youngs Road to Aero Drive; East Main Street in Hamburg.

Other “poor” sectors with traffic counts of at least 11,500 vehicles per day include:

In Buffalo — Genesee Street, between Walden and Bailey; (East) Delavan Avenue, from Grider to Bailey; Best Street, Wohlers to Fillmore; Seneca Street, Bailey to Keating.

In Amherst — Maple Road, from Millersport Highway to North Forest Road; Youngs Road, from Aero Drive to Wehrle Drive; Eggert Road, from Buffalo City line to Main Street.

In Cheektowaga – Cayuga Road, Cleveland Drive to Genesee Street; Aero Drive, from Youngs Road to Holtz Road; Galleria Drive, from Union Road to Galleria Mall entrance near Interstate 90; Borden Road, from Losson Road to Como Park Boulevard.

In Lancaster — Central Avenue, from Walden Avenue to Pleasant View Drive.

In West Seneca – Slade Avenue, from Ridge Road to West Seneca Mall entrance.

In North Tonawanda – Payne Avenue, from Walck Drive to Meadow Drive.

# A 'transformation' in the Village of Lewiston

**W**hen Mayor Richard Soluri goes for one of his walks in the business district of his Village of Lewiston, he may pause to pick up a piece of paper littering the pavement. And he's been known to take time to caution an aggressive driver on the rights of pedestrians.

He is proud of the orderliness and walk-ability that are part of the vision he has helped to realize for the village's commercial district, an eight-tenth-mile sector on Center Street that has become a model of activity and prosperity for other communities in the region, even though the village, with a population of about 3,000, is among the smallest in the region.

The mayor and the Village Board of Trustees, in collaboration with the Lower River Region Chamber of Commerce, Historic Association of Lewiston, Lewiston Council on the Arts and an activist community, have worked their historic legacy and geographic advantages into an economic tonic.

The village is adjacent to Artpark and the Niagara River, about seven miles from the Niagara Cataract, which, as the villagers like to boast, was born during the last Ice Age at Lewiston, before carving a gorge through the escarpment for seven miles up-

river to its present site.

The Historic Association of Lewiston boasts that the village also is:

"Where early French explorers traded with Indians and pioneered commerce on the Great Lakes.

"Where the United States invaded Canada only to be pushed back to see the area destroyed.

"Where the 'cocktail' was invented and the power brokers on



Mayor Richard Soluri.

the Frontier hobnobbed.

"Where escaping slaves made their last stop on their long, treacherous journey on the Underground Railroad to freedom."

The original settlement was burned by the British during the War of 1812 but was soon rebuilt. "There are 17 19<sup>th</sup> Century historic structures along Center Street and a majority of them have retained

their original use as restaurants, specialty shops, real estate and law offices," according to Mark Mistretta, of Wendel Duchsherer Architects & Engineers.

The Wendel Duchsherer firm designed a year-and-a-half long streetscaping of the business district that was launched in 1999 and became a defining moment in its renewal. The project was funded primarily by a federal Transportation Enhancement Grant. Village officials submitted their application through the GBNRTC and were awarded the grant, on a statewide competitive basis, by the New York State Department of Transportation. Federal and state funding was about \$2.5 million and the cost to the village about \$130,000.

The objective, as described by Mistretta, was to "create a beautiful, clean, safe and accessible corridor that attracts and encourages community residents and tourists to spend their time in the village at shops, restaurants, etc., and enjoy the historic, scenic and local recreation opportunities of the village."

Village officials identified a theme of "Frontier Colonial, circa 1812 (commonly called 'Yankee')" and emphasis was placed on "key project components" that would "support this theme." The



State Historic Preservation Office acted as overseer on historic accuracy.

In the end, compromises were made. For example, historic photos showed only “one photo of a bench ... at a train station,” because back then “nobody wanted to sit along a muddy or dirty street.” Also, “there were no McDonald wrappers to throw out, so there was little need for waste receptacles” and “bicycles were not that common either.”

All wood benches and waste receptacles were used in historic settings along with some bicycle racks that mimicked the old horse tie-up posts.

More green space, better pedestrian accommodations and traffic calming were introduced. Center Street was reduced from four to three lanes, which allowed for a “14-foot wide shared travel lane with bicyclists” as well as “a generous parking lane” and a center turning lane.

And most of the community supported this measure. However, there were “nay-sayers” who thought this would cause unnecessary congestion or may have been reluctant to give up the freedom to pass. But the traffic count has continued to support the lane reduction

Indigenous stone mined from the Niagara Escarpment was used to replace deteriorating stone

walls and for pillars designed in combination with white picket fences. A new lighting system — about 100 historic looking lanterns on 12-foot poles — “unifies the streetscape from one end to the other.”

Mayor Soluri said, “It’s the old story – ‘if you build it they will come’ (from the movie ‘Field of Dreams’). Our occupancy rate in the business district is almost always 100 percent. When there’s a vacancy, somebody’s there almost immediately. We have almost all the major banks within the village and when the banks want to come that’s a sign that our economy is strong.

“We have created a real nice atmosphere and there is a lot of enthusiasm from the residents and organizations in our village. It’s a combination of having a good community, a strong chamber, arts council and historical society, garden club, beautification commission, and strong service clubs, like Kiwanis and Rotary,

“And all of these people pull together. I brought all the organizations together in what we call SOULS, Service Organizations of Lewiston, and we meet quarterly and exchange ideas, including the Boy Scouts (who help with periodical cleanups).”

The village has a wealth of special events and festivals including: Christmas Walk on Center Street, Spirits of the Seaway Trail, Taste of Lewiston, Blue Monday,

Jazz Wednesday, Annual Outdoor Fine Arts Festival, WNY Chalkwalk Competition, Toast and Jam, Haunted History Ghost Walk, Smelt Festival, Historic Jazz Festival, Peach Festival, Harvest Festival, and Scarecrow Festival.

The village has teamed up with George Grasser, president of Partners for a Livable Western New York, for a 23-home “New Urbanism” project, where, according to the mayor, “garages are in the back, yards are smaller, and you can walk to the grocery store, just as my wife and I go four blocks to the grocery on Center Street.”

Soluri added, “We’ve had a lot of young people who have moved from other places to come home because of our improvements.

They see progress and hope and that makes them feel good.”

He acknowledged, “Every now and then you get into a battle and we do have historic -preservation issues. Somebody wants to tear a building down or there’s a battle over aluminum siding, compared with replacing the wood siding... and if

someone can provide a hardship and if the aluminum siding looks good, we let them proceed with that.”

Another issue involves the Robert Moses Parkway. Environmentalists with the Niagara Heri-



tage Partnership believe that “the Robert Moses Parkway must go.” The mayor and Village Board of Trustees see the parkway as a vital conduit for business and tourism.

Niagara Falls officials have succeeded in eliminating or reconfiguring sections of the parkway through their city after complaining that it acted as an economic barrier by separating the city from its world famous waterfront.

One of the reasons for the different perspectives may be that the parkway circumvents the Village of Lewiston without adversely affecting waterfront access.

Soluri said he did “not have a problem” with “reconfiguring parts of it in the City of Niagara Falls – our difficulty is with some of the environmental groups that want to tear it out between Niagara Falls and Lewiston.”

Robert Borgatti, of Lewiston, described the parkway, on a Niagara Heritage web site, as “a barrier to our beautiful gorge ... (and) to our potential for an unprecedented regional renaissance.”

But he also commended “Mr. Soluri and the board ... for the marvelous transformation of Center Street,” which has “helped to restore the beauty and re-invigorate the community pride of this historic town.” He added, “I would like to see the City of Niagara Falls experience some of Lewiston’s good fortune and prosper once again.”

In fact, Niagara Falls officials have adopted a Master Plan for their business district that embodies many of the concepts applied in Lewiston.

# Creative gateway between Allentown and Medical Campus funded



A view of Allen Street intersection with Main Street at Metro Station.

**P**lans for a creatively landscaped gateway between Allentown and the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC) are under way as a result of \$6 million in federal funding to be matched with \$1.5 million by the state and the city.

It marks a start toward implementing the Transit Oriented Development (TOD) that is a part of the BNMC master plan. The earmarked funds, from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), will launch a plan to extend Allen Street into the medical campus for two blocks, from Main Street to Ellicott Street, bisecting the Allen/Medical Campus Metro Rail Station.

“Our vision is to literally extend the street through the station,” explained Michael Ball, the BNMC project manager responsible for planning. “So now you will have a real physical connection between the medical campus and the Allentown community.”

“There are more than 8,000 employees at the BNMC and they are not taking full advantage of what’s available in the neighborhoods around them. We want to enhance access to those amenities, to stimulate investment in the surrounding neighborhoods, and create a more integrated relationship.”

He emphasized that the “Allen Street extension project” includes landscaping and streetscape improvements along Main Street, which is the BNMC western border. It may include a green median, “anything to create an environment that improves both pedestrian and vehicular circulation, and results in a really nice gateway for the medical campus, Allentown and downtown.”

Carl Paladino, a private developer, has announced plans to revive four dormant properties along the Main Street sector for business and housing that would harmonize with the BNMC program. And First Amherst Development Group has a \$5 million project under way at Main and Vir-



Business and housing and streetscape improvements are scheduled in Main and Virginia area.

ginia, scheduled for completion this summer. It includes 28 rental units and 4,600 square feet of commercial space.

The Allen Street extension project is expected to be included in GBNRTC’s Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) in May after completion of the air-quality modeling required by the FHWA. Congress earmarked another \$3 million for streetscape and infrastructure improvements on streets throughout the medical campus for which air-quality modeling is not required.

Last year, the medical campus was allocated \$2 million for streetscape and infrastructure improvements of Ellicott and Virginia Streets, which are scheduled to break ground this fall.

“We envision some really innovative and creative details,” said Ball. “We are developing a public art plan to symbolize a world-class medical campus. It could be in the form of sculpture or even taking simple streetscape elements, like a trashcan or a bench or sidewalk, and giving them an artistic flare.

“We want to cultivate an environment conducive to walking and biking, one that promotes physical activity for both our employees and our neighbors.”

The Transit-Oriented Development study was made possible through federal dollars obtained by former Congressman Jack Quinn. The study was commissioned by the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority and developed by Chan Krieger & Associates, of Cambridge Massachusetts, in collaboration with the University at Buffalo Center for

Urban Studies and Watts Engineers. The concept received an “Outstanding Planning Award” from the Western New York American Planning Association last fall.

Ball noted that the light-rail connection to UB’s South Campus, “which is where the UB Medical School is,” becomes increasingly important with the increased presence of UB at the medical campus, specifically related to the opening of the New York State Center of Excellence in Bioinformatics & Life Sciences.



A view of Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus at Washington and Virginia intersection.

# Collaboration Is the Name of the Game

Getting the multiple interests in Erie and Niagara Counties on the same road to progress is vital to the success of GBNRTC's Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRP) 2030.

With that in mind, Executive Director Hal Morse launched preparation of the plan, scheduled for completion in the summer of 2007, with a Regional Summit that was held in April at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in downtown Buffalo.

In attendance was a broad sampling of regional leadership, representing everything from the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) and the Thruway Authority (NYSTA) to Voice Buffalo, Daeman College and the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

The LRP, required by federal law, must harmonize also with the latest federal transportation act, SAFETEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Act – a Legacy for Users), the state's Master Plan for 2030, the Regional Framework that's evolving for Erie and Niagara Counties, and the Bi-National Strategy for cross-border traffic.

A precedent was set with attendance at the Regional Summit by two representatives of the Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO), Frank Williams and Patrick Griepsma, who offered a unique perspective based upon Ontario's sometimes divergent transportation experience. The MTO and GBNRTC are among the participants in a Niagara Bi-National Transportation Coordinating Group recently organized to implement a 40-point Bi-National Strategy.

In general, participants in the Regional Summit, agreed upon the following:

- Priorities need to be specified in terms of economic and employment requirements with a focus on preserving existing infrastructure and redevelopment with application of "smart -growth" principles.
- Widening of roadways should not be the only option considered for relieving congestion. Car pooling and use of public transit should be encouraged.



At Regional Summit, above are Paul Leuchner, of Niagara Greenway Commission, at left, and Hal Morse of GBNRTC. Robert Gower, of NFTA is in photo at left, with Dan Howard, of Amherst.



- More attention to freight movement, rail and truck intermodal systems and improvement of Brownfields.

- Transit investments aimed at tourism, other "key economic development sectors."

- Improvements to the Buffalo waterfront and Niagara Falls International Airport to support cargo movement at the latter.

- Improved implementation and coordination of municipal master plans toward developing a consensus for a regional agenda.

There was also significant support for bicycle and pedestrian issues and promotion

of alternative fuels and energy sources. Privatization and "innovated bonding" were discussed among a variety of options for meeting funding challenges.

Douglas Struckle, a principal transportation analyst is supervising preparation of the plan with the help of Amy Weymouth, an assistant planner. Barbara Courtney, senior transportation analyst, has coordinated demographic studies that project modest regional increases in population and employment that will be factored into it.

Numerous related planning initiatives being undertaken by the GBNRTC include efforts to improve coordination of the region's traffic signal systems, which are controlled by multiple jurisdictions, and to establish a computerized ride-sharing system.

Public meetings are scheduled to be held in the two-county region this fall to consider alternative approaches to the plan, and again in 2007 on a final version. Meanwhile, other meetings will be held with government officials, business, community, civic, and college and university groups.

# Binational Trails Day

The Second Annual Binational Trails Day will be celebrated with a symbolic crossing by Americans and Canadians at the Peace Bridge on June 4, according to Bruce Harris of the Binational Tourism Alliance.

Harris said that construction work on the Peace Bridge would prevent walking across the span but not bicycling, although bikers will not have an exclusive lane as they did last year. He said alternative ways of transporting hikers across the span to trailways on both sides of the border were being explored.

The staging areas for participants will open at 8 a.m. with pancake breakfasts at the Peace Bridge Park (corner of Busti Avenue and Vermont Street) in Buffalo and Veteran's Way (Garrison Road and Central Avenue) in Fort Erie, Harris said. Displays, booths and events were planned by clubs and organizations at both sites, he added.

Participating organizations were identified as the Buffalo/Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority, the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council, New York State Department of Transportation, the Regional Municipality of Niagara, the Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo & Western New York, the University at Buffalo, the Ontario Trails Counsel, Fort Erie Friendship Trail, Peninsula Paddlers, the Niagara Freewheelers Bicycling Touring Group, the Ontario Cycling Alliance and the Niagara Frontier Bicycle Club.

Participants were asked to be aware of the following:

- Photo ID is required for crossing.
- Do not carry large backpacks or cycle bags as they will delay customs inspection.
- Helmets are mandatory for cyclists.

For further information and updates please contact Bruce Harris at 1-888-333-1987 (toll free) or visit the web site at [www.binationaltrailsday.com](http://www.binationaltrailsday.com)

## Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council

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GREATER BUFFALO-NIAGARA  
REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL

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## Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council

### POLICY COMMITTEE

**Joel A. Giambra** - County of Erie  
**William Ross** - Niagara County Legislature  
**Hon. Byron W. Brown** - City of Buffalo  
**Hon. Vincenzo V. Anello** - City of Niagara Falls  
**Thomas J. Madison Jr.** - New York State Department of Transportation  
**Gregory Stamm** - Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority  
**Michael R. Fleischer** - New York State Thruway Authority

### PLANNING and COORDINATING COMMITTEE

**John Loffredo** - Erie County Department of Public works  
**Kevin P. O'Brien** - Niagara County Department of Public Works  
**Daniel E. Kreuz** - City of Buffalo Department of Public Works  
**Robert Curtis** - City of Niagara Falls  
**Gary V. Gottlieb** - New York State Department of Transportation  
**Walter D. Zmuda** - Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority  
**Thomas A. Pericak** - New York State Thruway Authority

## Meeting Calendar

### Planning and Coordinating Committee (PCC)

*meetings begin at 9:30 A.M.*

- May 3**      **Niagara Falls**  
Carnegie Building  
1022 Main Street, Niagara Falls, New York
- June 7**      **New York State Thruway Authority**  
455 Cayuga Rd.  
Cheektowaga, New York
- July 12**      **Niagara County**  
Public Safety Building  
5526 Niagara Street Extension  
Lockport, New York

### Policy Committee

*Meeting dates and times are subject to change:  
please call (716) 856-2026 for confirmation.*

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