

GBNRTC

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

Niagara County leads the way on bridge maintenance

Niagara County has taken the initiative in implementing a GBNRTC strategy for preventive maintenance of bridges, in response to national and state concern over bridge deterioration, an issue dramatized last year by the tragic collapse of an Interstate bridge across the Mississippi River at Minneapolis.

This spring, 102 bridges were for the first time given a bath by the county in a collaboration with the City of Niagara Falls. Included were 22 city-owned bridges along with the 80 owned by the county. The work was done by experienced crews from Dandrow's Painting Inc. of Plattsburgh under a \$188,760 contract

Erie County and the City of Buffalo are expected to follow up with bridge washing in the spring of 2009.

The GBNRTC is believed to be the first of the 13 Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) in the state to implement a preventive strategy. It is modeled after a bridge maintenance system that has been used by the New York State Depart-



Crewman gives Niagara bridge a bath.

ment of Transportation (NYSDOT) for state-owned bridges. Funding issues had discouraged municipalities from implementing it.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has paved the way for municipalities to follow suit by amending its Highway Bridge Replacement and Replacement Program (HBRRP) to allow funding (80 percent federal matched with 20 percent local) for "preventive maintenance"

on qualified routes. Previously the funding had been limited to bridge replacement or major rehabilitation.

Kevin O'Brien, Niagara's commissioner of public works, said, "It would be very difficult for us to get funding to do this on our own. Now, with 80 cents of federal money in hand for every dollar, it's a lot easier to persuade the Legislature to find 20 cents to match it."

He said that washing the bridges cleans out the salt and grit that erode the structure and shorten its life. "The cars and trucks going over this stuff all the time acts like sandpaper.

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“Keep in mind that we’ve never before cleaned these bridges. A lot of municipalities are mixing grit or sand with their salts. We had all these years of buildup of grit and the plugging up of scuppers that drain water off the sides of the bridges. They had to get all of this off. Dandrow’s had five crews in the county to do it in less than a week. Next year when we do this, it’ll be a matter of washing down what has accumulated over one season.”

Other preventive maintenance, under the GBNRTC strategy, will include periodic lubrication of steel bearings, a sealing of concrete decks, and painting the bridges.

“If we can extend the bridge life from, say, 35 years to 45 or 50 years it means we get another 10 or 15 years for the bridge just through this washing and the other preventive maintenance,” said O’Brien. “And with the 80 to 90 bridges owned by the county that represents significant savings over reconstruction.”

Niagara has been particularly attentive to bridge issues under the leadership of O’Brien working with Richard Eakin, deputy commissioner for engineering, and Michael Tracy, deputy commissioner for highways. The county’s spans have the best overall rating for non-state owned bridges in NYSDOT’s Region Five, which includes Cattaraugus and Chautauqua as well as Erie and Niagara Counties.

Niagara County also has a relatively favorable score for the surface condition of its roads, particularly as compared with the City of Niagara Falls.

O’Brien said that “when I came to work as county engineer back in 2000-2001 our road system, based upon my predecessor’s efforts, were in pretty decent shape. But there were bridges in bad shape and it became evident that bridges had to be our emphasis.

“A lot of the bridges that were problematic seem to have been built in the same period during the war years, the 1940s, when steel was not of the best quality. A lot of them were timber bridges and by the time the 21st century started we were looking at bridges that were 60 years old. Their life expectancy was well up and all at the same time. We focused on getting the funding to having those taken care of.

“So with the help of our Legislature, and federal dollars, when they were available, we’ve gotten a foot up on our bridges. We’re doing a lot better. And now this preventive maintenance authorization is becoming a linchpin for the whole thing. Mike’s budget for bridge maintenance has always been very, very small and we’re trying to build that up. I’m not going to say we’re caught up. We’re not. We still have a good five or six year plan for bridges. But we are catching up.”

GBNRTC’s Executive Director Hal Morse noted, “There’s a recognition in New York State as well as in Erie and Niagara Counties that aging of our bridge infrastructure is an issue that’s both expensive and in need of urgent attention. One thing that we’re doing now is embarking on a comprehensive bridge maintenance program as part of our goal to work with state and local interests to build coordinated programs and apply federal funds to challenges in transportation.”

Hector Boggio and Timothy Trabold of the GBNRTC consulted with Kevin Marracino, regional bridge-maintenance engineer with NYSDOT, in putting together a strategy for the Erie-Niagara region that is modeled after the NYSDOT program that has been in effect for the



102 bridges were watered down.

past two decades for state-owned bridges. All county and municipally owned motor-vehicle bridges are subject to state inspection every two years

After the fatal collapse of the bridge at Minneapolis last summer an inspection of 49 similar bridges was ordered in New York State. No major problems were reported but the Route 219 bridge over Cattaraugus Creek was among five found to be in need of further investigation because of its weight limit. It reportedly has a deck truss design similar to the Minneapolis bridge.

The Minneapolis disaster is reminiscent for some of the Thruway bridge that collapsed into Schoharie Creek near Amsterdam in New York State in 1987. The toll included the death of 10 motorists. Gov. Mario Cuomo took a helicopter to the scene and ordered every bridge in the state inspected. The disaster led to passage of a state Transportation Bond Act to finance more maintenance and led to a more meticulous system of bridge inspections.

In 1938, the Honeymoon Bridge, at Niagara Falls, had collapsed, but with no fatalities, as the result of an ice jam. It was replaced by the Rainbow Bridge.

Canada may hold key for regional freight rail gateway

The high cost of fuel, congestion in truck traffic and the trend toward container shipments have generated widespread interest in the possibility of resurrecting the Buffalo-Niagara region as a gateway for railroad freight.

Back in the days when Buffalo was the eighth largest city in the nation, it was also a major railroad hub, second only to Chicago. The empty tower of New York Central Terminal that looms over the city is a symbol of that railroad legacy.

The decline of the area as a railroad and industrial center is often associated with the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1959, which allowed shipping and trade to bypass the Buffalo-Niagara region.

But there is growing speculation that changing trade and economic patterns offer an opportunity to harness that rail framework toward reviving the regional economy. The area has spacious rail yards, including inter-modal (rail/truck) facilities for container traffic by CSX Transportation Inc. and Northfolk Southern Corporation.

"Buffalo Niagara's potential as a railroad hub, inter-modal distribution site and center of global commerce is vast," said Andrew J. Rudnick, president and chief executive officer of the Buffalo Niagara Partnership.



"Our region lies within a 10-hour drive of almost 40 percent of the continental United States. It has the potential to offer shipping opportunities across the Great Lakes and beyond and provides the prospect of a rail foreign trade zone, which could help decrease both traffic congestion and fuel emissions at the U.S./Canadian border."

A preliminary report on a study by the World Trade Center Buffalo Niagara on the region's potential as an inter-modal freight terminal has suggested that a lack of marketing and coordination of existing services is the reason the possibilities have not been realized.

It proposed the designation and funding of an organization for marketing and coordination that would function as "a port authority" for Erie and Niagara Counties but with links "to nearby Ontario," which offers "75 percent of the opportunity."

Also proposed was a "Niagara Bi-National Logistics Center at a "unique location for distribution to

both U.S. and Canada." It would include not only inter-modal rail but warehousing and distribution services, U.S. and Canadian government services, and "ancillary services."

There was no reference, in this context, to either the 40-acre Norfolk Southern inter-modal facility at the Bison Yard off Harlem Road, or to

the CSX Seneca Yard in Lackawanna, which had been upgraded last year to replace a smaller facility at the Frontier Yard near William Street.

The Seneca Yard upgrade was financed through a state grant. It was reported that the yard would serve as a "feeder port" for rail container traffic from the Port of New York and New Jersey. Rudnick noted that the downstate port complex, "the largest ... on the East Coast," is at capacity for overseas container shipments.

At the Seneca Yard, rail shipments from the Port of New York and New Jersey could be transferred to trucks for shipment to the Midwest and Southern Ontario. And regional and Ontario firms could use it in the reverse direction for overseas shipments.

A spokesman for CSX, Robert Sullivan, issued the following report on the railroad's regional role:

"CSX and its predecessors have served the Greater Buffalo area for more than a century. We take great pride in our role in the region's economy and we believe that, to-

gether, we can continue to build the transportation infrastructure and network so important for continued growth.

“CSX’s operations have long been anchored by Frontier Yard, where the materials used and created by the region’s industries and businesses are sorted for shipment to and from destinations across the country.

“The growth of inter-modal transportation and the opportunity to create an inland port facility with the Port of New York and New Jersey, led CSX to develop, with support from New York State, a new inter-modal facility at the former Seneca Yard. This facility positions CSX and the region to grow as a distribution hub as additional infrastructure changes occur at the port. These planned changes will enable containers to be moved directly between the train and ship without an intermediate truck haul, or dray.

“The port’s size, business volume and location make it an ideal partner for the Seneca facility and the Greater Buffalo region. As changes occur at the port, CSX remains committed to working with local business leaders to build additional business which will help continue the growth of the area economy.”

At a September briefing held in Buffalo by the Port of New York and New Jersey, port and CSX officials indicated that service to and from Buffalo would be improved when construction of “support tracks” is completed in September of 2009 between the CSX yard at Port Kearney, New Jersey, and the port terminal at Elizabeth, New Jersey. Presently, cargo is transported by truck between the two and that raises costs and is affected by roadway weight limits.

Also, they noted that travel time between the port and the Seneca Yard would be improved if the volume of cargo becomes sufficient enough to allow for through traffic that would

avoid the present time-consuming lay-overs at Syracuse. Peter Zantel, assistant director of port commerce, addressing businessmen attending the briefing, declared, “All we need is your business, your support to put your cargo on the rail.

“We’ve been coming up to Buffalo from probably 2000 or 2001 working with the region, the city, working with CSX, working with the state ... trying to develop this rail project. And everybody came up with ‘yeah, yeah, that’s what we need up here in Buffalo, an inter-modal yard, and we’re going to use it.’ But I’m telling you, you aren’t using it. It’s there, but you aren’t using it.”

One of the positive signs has been the construction by the Cheektowaga based Sonwil Distribution Center of a \$13.2 million regional distribution center on a 54-acre site in Buffalo’s Lakeside Commerce Park, which is served by CSX and is adjacent to the Seneca Yard. The Sonwil project is the largest to date in the commercial park. A second “sister building” is planned by the firm.

Sonwil, with headquarters near the Buffalo Niagara International Airport, is described as a family-owned national independent developer, public warehouse provider and transportation broker with operations throughout the United States, Canada and abroad. An incentive package to help finance the Lakeside project was received from the Erie County Industrial Development Agency. Negotiations reportedly are underway for use of the 300,000 square foot building by current and potential clients.

However, doubts about the Seneca Yard were expressed at a recent public forum at Medaille College on



Mayor Byron Brown and Sonwil’s Peter Wilson at Lakeside site.
Photo courtesy of Buffalo Rising website

transportation issues. Bob Skerker, chairman of Robinson Home Products of Buffalo, which deals in household tools and utensils, and imports from Asia, declared:

“Empire State Development’s investment last year of \$6 million in Buffalo inter-modal rail yard improvements for CSX has not produced any tangible benefits for Western New York. The service is underutilized and barely marketed.... A combination of congestion, lack of interest, and port pricing is impeding this program.”

The 40-acre Norfolk Southern inter-modal facility, by the Bison Yard, was described by the railroad’s director of public relations, Rudy Husband, as “one of the smaller inter-modal terminals on our 22-state network in terms of volume.”

He said it had a capacity to hold 600 trailers and containers with two loading, unloading tracks as well as four support tracks. He said, “Traffic through there has been steady over the past number of years – no trends up or down.”

Skerker said that railroads “have been reluctant to invest in infrastructure in New York due to the high real-estate taxes – the highest of any state – and the generally unfavorable regulatory environment which makes doing business in New York more difficult for

railroads than in other states.”

However, he added that the region’s low land costs, labor availability, large brownfield sites adjacent to rail and bridge connections to Canada were among the factors that make it “well positioned to take advantage of the economies rail can offer.” He also declared that “rail is about 30 times as energy efficient as a truck and has the added benefit of removing traffic from congested highways and bridges”

Skerker said that his company imports a large volume of container shipments from China to Vancouver, then by non-stop rail to Toronto and by trucks from Toronto to Buffalo. “Eliminating the truck portion and bringing containers via rail the additional 100 miles from Toronto would result in a 15-20 percent saving in total transit costs per container,” he said.

“A route via Seattle and two U.S. railroads is under test now as well. Chicago congestion has been a critical issue in our decision to move freight via Canada.”

Neither the Canadian National (CN) nor the Canadian Pacific (CP) Railways provide container service into the Buffalo-Niagara region. Skerker noted that both “have trackage rights that allow relatively free access into the region.” There are also three railroad bridges across the Niagara River, although only the International Bridge between Buffalo and Fort Erie is currently used for freight rail.

Mark Hallman, communications director for CN, said, “While Buffalo remains an important gateway for general CN merchandise railway traffic between Canada and the United States, CN at this time does not see a business case for inter-modal-service to the city from points on its North American network. CN can quickly and efficiently ship containers over the road to the Buffalo region from its Brampton Inter-modal Terminal in the Greater Toronto Area.”

The study by World Trade Center Buffalo Niagara envisions “an inter-modal freight terminal that makes area businesses more competitive globally while making better use of our heritage rail infrastructure and contributing to job growth, quality of life and environmental sustainability.”

It could generate, according to the report, 1,900 warehouse jobs, 900 office, administrative, packaging, insurance, banking, legal, government, maintenance and construction jobs.

Cited as a model was a Kansas City Logistics Park that “will create an estimated 13,000 jobs” and “is projected to contribute \$1.7 billion over 20 years to the Kansas economy.”

Several possible sites for an “independent” inter-modal yard for U.S. and Canadian rail lines have been mentioned in the Buffalo area, as well as a state-run yard in the Niagara Falls area that could accommodate cargo at the Niagara Falls International Airport.

Federal financing system described as ‘broken’

The nation’s system for financing transportation projects is “fundamentally broken,” according to the representative of a national commission that has called upon Congress to produce bold changes in the system.

Frank McArdle a member of the National Surface and Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission, told a biennial meeting of GBNRTC’s Policy Committee that the nation’s Highway Trust Fund is “so basically eroded” that it would require significant yearly increases in the federal fuel tax “just to keep the buying power of what you have now alive.”

The commission has recommended that the federal fuel tax of 18.4 cents per gallon be increased from 5 to 8 cents per gallon per year over the next five years, “after which it should be indexed to inflation.”

This would be a preliminary phase in a plan to meet financial and political challenges. It also recommended a

federal ticket tax on transit and passenger-rail trips, a federal freight fee, increases in state fuel taxes, and new flexibility for tolling and congestion pricing and public-private partnerships. The commission also suggested that a fee



Frank McArdle

based upon Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) could be the preferred long-term alternative to the fuel tax.

McArdle said that an increase of 3 cents a gallon in the federal fuel tax would be needed merely to keep the Federal Trust Fund in fiscal year 2009 at its 2008 level.

“Our analysis,” he said, “suggests that we should be spending not the \$80 billion a year now going to transportation but somewhere in the range of \$240 billion” to meet the challenges of soaring costs along with economic needs posed by a projected population growth of 150 million over the next 50 years.

In addition, the commission has recommended a “major restructuring” of the federal surface transportation program to avoid costly delays and to require “performance-based planning. It has also recommended a re-structuring of programs “around functional lines rather than individual modes,”

more flexibility, for example, on whether funding is used for highways or mass transit. The commission proposed that the name of the Highway Trust Fund be changed to the Surface Transportation Trust Fund.

McArdle explained, “There must be national performance standards that we use to measure success or failure across the country and to guide future development. Right now the money that’s handed out goes on formulas that do not at any point require a state or locality to achieve anything other than to spend the money.”

He emphasized that the standards should be based upon consultation and collaboration with state and local officials and generated “from the bottom up, not just imposed from the top down.” He said, “You have to decide what works in your community” in land use and for highways or public transit in ways that make optimal use of funding to meet the national standards.

He said the present system facilitated the kind of “earmarking” by members of Congress for such projects as “the bridge that goes to nowhere” or a “chairman’s insertion of an interchange in Florida at the behest of a contributor.” The commission report declared that “Congressional earmarking has increased from 10 projects in 1982 to more than 6,300 projects in SAFETEA-LU (2005).”

“To assure the maximum effectiveness of federal capital investment support, states, local governments, and other entities accepting federal capital support, must develop, fund, and implement a program of asset

maintenance and support over the useful life of the asset that conforms to nationally accepted standards and that is independently audited,” the report declared.

Because political considerations may make it difficult for Congress to confront the financial and bureaucratic issues, McArdle noted, the commission has proposed that Congress create a 12-member commission (“not us”) that would be responsible for bringing about the necessary changes. McArdle said it would function much the same as the former Interstate Commerce Commission and other regulatory bodies.

The commission report compared the role of the proposed National Surface Transportation Commission (NASTRAC) to the Base Closure and Realignment Commission (BRAC) and the Postal Regulatory Commission, both of which were “created by Congress to depoliticize difficult policy actions – closing military bases and raising postal rates.”

A “related state model is the public utility commission, which is typically empowered to regulate rates for electricity, heating, and telephone service independent of direct legislative action.”

The commission, McArdle said, would be responsible for adopting the national performance standards as well as “setting the rate for the user fees to raise the capital that’s needed.” The revenue recommendations would be sent to Congress but become law within 60 days unless vetoed by a two-thirds vote of both houses.

“The first thing to understand,” McArdle said, “is that we have consistently under invested in our transportation over the last 50 years,” but the effect of this was mitigated for a time by the “application of computer power to supply-chain management and logistics,” which made possible just-in-time scheduling and more efficient use of trucks and rail.

“Now we have reached the point where capacity is almost fully utilized by everybody and logistics costs are going up for the first time in years and we have congestion choking many major urban areas that is particularly costly for freight movement.”

“A few years ago you could not have had a member of my commission able to wrap their mind around the notion of \$100-a-barrel oil or a decline in the driving patterns of Americans,” he said. “That has changed fundamentally...”

Frank McArdle

The value of the Highway Trust Fund, he said, is eroded by at least 10 percent a year, driven in part by energy costs but also by the soaring costs of raw materials, “particularly iron ore and the things that go into making steel,” as a result of growing demand from China and India.

“A few years ago you could not have had members of my commission able to wrap their mind around the notion of \$100-a-barrel oil or a decline in the driving patterns of Americans,” he said. “That has changed fundamentally...”

He noted that the rapidly eroding purchasing power of the dollar has focused attention on the costs imposed by the delays imposed by federal regulations to bring a project from concept to reality. “If you wish to use federal dollars, you have to plan that the project time to the start of construction will add four years, raising its cost by at least 40 percent,” he said.

In its report, the commission noted that “for some major projects, the time needed to complete planning, environmental and construction activities can be 14 years or longer,” resulting in sharp cost increases that undermine financial plans.

“We are willing to recognize that the federal process itself is a costly impediment,” McArdle said “But nine of us, five Republicans and four Democrats, believe in a strong federal program.” He noted that three other members, including the chairperson, Mary Peters, who is also the U.S. secretary of transportation, had issued a minority report “in favor of devolution,” of shifting transportation authority and financing from the federal to the state and local levels.

A part of the reasoning behind this minority position was that local and state authorities would be more sensitive to “supply and demand” pressures and more willing to experiment with “direct-user charges” and private investment as alternatives to the fuel tax, which was criticized as inconsistent with national energy policy.

“Given current technologies and international experiences, we believe that within a decade, the vast majority of metropolitan areas in the U.S. could finance their transportation systems through direct user charges, instead of indirect taxes,” the minority report concluded.

The federal government would focus on “preservation and improvement of the Interstate Highway system, interstate freight movement, national safety programs, and research supportive of national goals.

McArdle noted that a newly organized national group, Transportation Transformation or T2, is making the argument that if Congress fails to act in time “there is little rationale in sending the fuel-tax money to Wash-

ington to get it.” “Donor” states that generate more fuel tax than they receive in federal transportation funding, he suggested, may be more responsive to devolution than “donee” states in the Northeast.

Devolution, he said, would mean either “that growth will not take place, or even worse, that it will only take places in states that decide to make those investments and that is one thing the majority of us were concerned about. We did not want a system that is not a national system. We thought that question had been answered back in Alexander Hamilton’s time and we’re not going back.”

At the meeting, the Policy Committee also amended the GBNRTC’s Long-Range Transportation Plan to allow for the possibility of federal funding toward a new “border crossing” between Buffalo and Fort Erie.

During public comment on the issue, James B. Kane, regional director of the Ambassador Niagara Signature Bridge Group, spoke in support of a proposal by the Detroit Bridge Company, owner of the Ambassador Bridge in Michigan, to construct a trucks only crossing near the International Railroad Bridge, about a mile downstream from the Peace Bridge. He said his group had spent millions on an environmental assessment and no fundamental flaws had been found in its plan.

A former city councilman, Alfred Coppola, said the Ambassador plan would avoid “all this destruction” posed by the Peace Bridge expansion plan.

Kathy Mecca, president of the Niagara Gateway Columbus Park Association, provided a detailed account of the residential destruction and the health hazards she said the Peace Bridge plan posed for her “historical community.”

Executive Director Hal Morse of the GBNRTC emphasized that the Long-Range Plan amendment did not specify design, location or configuration of the project. However, it was amended, at the suggestion of Niagara Falls Mayor Paul Dyster, to avoid specific reference to the Peace Bridge.

Also at the meeting, members of the Policy Committee were introduced to a newly formed “Regional Advisory Group,” a “partnership of community groups” that is seeking formal recognition by the GBNRTC. Its mission was described as “urging transportation officials to bring balance to predominately automobile-focused regional planning through an increased focus on alternative modes of transportation.” It was represented by Gladys Gifford, of Citizens Regional Transportation Corporation, Michael Gent, of Voice Buffalo, and Chuck Banas of the New Millennium of WNY.

New source of revenue needed, senior congressman says



Congressman Jerold Nadler.

U.S. Rep. Jerrold Nadler, senior Democrat from the Northeast on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, has told regional leaders that “we’re going to have to find another source of revenue” for the nation’s transportation system.

Nadler addressed a regional forum on transportation priorities in August at Medaille College. The forum, one of several held across the state to address the financial crisis, was organized in collaboration with Congressman Brian Higgins, who is a member of the same committee.

Nadler presided at the forum which was attended by a cross-section of political and transportation leaders, including the state’s commissioner of transportation, Astrid Glynn, as well as representatives of interested civic organizations.

Buffalo’s mayor, Byron Brown, greeted the participants by calling for “creativity and boldness” in meeting regional needs. Higgins, who represents most of Erie County

as well as Chautauqua County, followed up by declaring:

“It’s very important that we determine our priorities in the start of negotiations for the next six-year federal highway authorization bill. We want to make sure that Western New York and New York State get their fair share of transportation dollars but use it wisely toward the goal of promoting new-industry investment and job growth.”

He also emphasized the need for “streamlining the process,” to shorten the time frame between project conception and completion, a holdup that has received growing attention because of inflation pressures.

Nadler, who represents parts of New York City and Long Island, said, “We have to figure out something” to counter the growing inflation rate and diminished revenue from the federal fuel tax. The tax is a flat 18.4 cents per gallon, which means that it not only does not increase with the price of fuel but has declined because of less driving.

A national commission “has recommended we increase the gasoline tax but that may not be politically viable,” Nadler said. “A greater role for private investment could be part of the solution but I doubt that it’s the whole solution.” (In September, President Bush signed legislation to transfer \$8 billion into the Highway Trust Fund from the General Fund to offset a shortfall for the federal fiscal year that ended Oct. 1 to delay immediate effects of the crisis.)

Nadler defended “earmarking” as “very valuable” because it “allows a congressman to tailor the legislation to particular local needs” but suggested that it might be possible to “synergize” those needs in the legislation. “That’s why we hold these hearings.”

The congressman also noted that the state faces growing competition for federal funding from “donor” states that provide proportionately more federal fuel tax than they receive in transportation funding. “New York State gets more than we

pay in terms of the gasoline tax because we're energy efficient," Nadler declared. "We invest billions in mass transit, especially downstate, and mass transit uses less gasoline per capita. And for that we must be punished? That doesn't make any sense. In addition, if you look at the entire federal budget, we send a lot more money (in revenue) than we get back."

He stressed the importance of the transportation bill for the state. "It is said that the transportation bill is for New York State what the farm bill is for Iowa," he declared.

Commissioner Glynn said that "overall, the state's transportation infrastructure is ok, but it's not getting any better and the prospects are not getting any better." She added, "Our infrastructure is aging. We have some of the oldest infrastructure in the country and we're struggling to keep up with inflation." She declared that there was "a great need to diversify our funding sources."

Glynn also stressed the need to meet the growing demands for public transit as the price of gas increases. "There is a need to align

our federal transportation policy with our environmental and energy security policy," she said, "instead of being penalized for being energy efficient."

She also declared that "nearly one third of state bridges are deficient, and nearly 40 percent of local bridges are deficient."

Bridges were the central theme in a presentation by Erie County Executive Chris Collins. "We have perhaps more infrastructure needs than any county in the state," he said. He noted that the county has 300 bridges (more than 20 feet long) and 500 culverts (less than 20 feet long). "We've had bridges closed in our country for the last 20 years. Of our 300 bridges, 25 percent, or 75 of those bridges, are rated poor or less. The average repair on bridges costs \$1.5 million. For 75 bridges that's \$100 million dollars and right now the dollars aren't there to help our county."

GBNRTC's executive director, Hal Morse, stressed his agency's focus on bringing community groups together so that the region can achieve maximum consensus on land use and economic goals

that give priority to transportation projects with the most bang for the buck.

He cited collaboration with southern Ontario on a Bi-National Transportation Strategy and with the University at Buffalo on projects related to regional development as examples of the growing sense of the need for coordination.

Larry Meckler of the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority said the NFTA had multiple needs but he emphasized the need for "buses, buses, buses." He declared that nearly half of the agency's 332 buses were "life expired."

State Assemblyman Sam Hoyt regional priorities included extension of the Metro light-rail system to the University at Buffalo North Campus in Amherst "as originally planned, providing 25,000 additional students and faculty and more with an easy access to the inner city and downtown; an international high-speed rail corridor "connecting the three greatest cities in North America — New York City, Toronto and, of course, Buffalo."

He also called for a "truly inter-



Speakers included, from left, Hoyt, Meckler, Morse, Collins, Nadler, Higgins, Glynn and Brown.

modal, multi-modal transportation facility” associated with Niagara Falls International Airport, even though it’s “not in my district,” but represents “the number one economic opportunity in this region.” And he called for ultimate removal of the Niagara section of the Thruway and the Skyway with diversion of traffic elsewhere because “our greatest natural asset is our water and we’ve destroyed access to it.” He reiterated his call for one authority, instead of two, for the four bridges that cross to Canada; ultimate removal of the Niagara Section of the Thruway and the Skyway with diversion of traffic elsewhere because “our greatest natural asset is our water and we’ve destroyed access to it.”

Hoyt called for an international high-speed rail corridor “connecting the three greatest cities in North America — New York City, Toronto and of course Buffalo.” He said that key airports at Toronto and New York were at capacity, “gas prices are skyrocketing and this is the most sound environmental transportation policy.”

Thomas DeSantis, senior planner for Niagara Falls, also supported more focus on rail infrastructure, including a high-speed passenger network, which would link “our airports to our railroads to our downtowns.” He declared that the city had “a lot of transportation needs but the “over-arching priorities” were the international, inter-modal rail terminal at a historic setting near the Whirlpool Bridge and

removal of the remains of the Robert Moses Parkway in the northern sector of the city.

“The city is looking for a system and network that emphasizes accessibility over mobility,” he declared. “These are fundamental policies that seem to work well in Europe and I don’t understand why more of the plannings for economic



competitiveness doesn’t take them into more consideration in the allotment of scarce resources.”

A Niagara County legislator, Renae Kimble, supported the inter-modal rail center at the Whirlpool Bridge as a project that would integrate new U.S. Customs and border inspection and protection inspection facilities and other security measures sought by the Department of Homeland Security. “As a small county, we want to make sure that our needs are not overlooked,” he said.

Bruce Becker, representing the Empire State Passengers Association, called for a national policy that “addressed the needs of all modes of transportation, including a “flexible long-term spending plan for Amtrak.” He supported plans

for an inter-modal Amtrak station at Niagara Falls and also called for a “new Amtrak station in downtown Buffalo.”

Kathy Hochul, Erie County clerk, emphasized that she was speaking for “the little guy, the drivers,” in demanding relocation of the Lackawanna and Williamsville toll barriers, which “impede growth.” She also suggested that the “Toronto system on tolls” that “sends a bill,” instead of using barriers, was superior to the Thruway’s. This appeared to be a reference to the sophisticated electronics used on the privately operated Route 407 near Toronto.

An Erie County legislator, Robert Reynolds, stressed the need for more park and ride facilities to facilitate public transit in

rural sections of the county. He also called for priority funding to complete a 12-mile multi-purpose trail along the lakeshore from the Town of Evans.

Wally Smith, vice president of the AAA for Western and Central New York, cautioned against putting too much reliance upon “public-private partnerships” in any new federal approaches to transportation. He also said that policy makers should give more consideration to “senior-friendly signs” and needs of the growing numbers of elderly drivers.

Kelley Dixon, representing the Center for Transportation Excellence, called for more flexibility in funding to address the needs of CTE and similar groups that

are confronted with rising costs in meeting the growing transportation needs of seniors, the disabled, low-income workers, etc., a challenge that will grow with “our aging demographics.”

“The rising cost of fuel and insurance premiums coupled with static reimbursement rates in is forcing many private operators out of business,” she said. “According to a 2003 Brookings Institution study, nationally, the Buffalo metropolitan region has the eighth highest percentage of the population of adults 65 and over living in the suburbs that are poorly served by traditional fixed-route public transportation service.

“The added challenge for Buffalo is that in addition to being the second poorest mid-sized city in the United States, with a population that has declined by half since 1950, the metropolitan footprint continues to grow.”

Percy Williamson, representing the Developmental Disabilities Alliance of Western New York (DDAWNY) and Aspire of Western New York, declared that DDAWNY and Aspire, which serves more than 2,600 disabled with a fleet of more than 200 vehicles, greatly support all planning that involves collaboration of businesses, agencies and communities on federal funding “to maintain this area’s transportation infrastructure.”

Gladys Gifford, speaking for Citizens Regional Transit Corporation and Voice Buffalo, declared, “The time could not be better for comprehensive change.” She said that “thirteen times more is spent on roads than on public transit” and her vision for the year 2020 was to have highways and public transit “a least on a parity.”

Leonard DePrima, chairman

of FAIR (Fair Apportionment of Infrastructure Revenue) called for focusing the priorities on maintaining highways and bridge infrastructure in good condition. Economic development, he said, was dependent upon transportation infrastructure. He also stressed the need for new sources of revenue “more effort to shorten the time frame,” and “better collaboration among federal agencies.”

George Lee, a professor of civil engineering at the University at Buffalo, emphasized the importance of financial support for research and development in designing “optimal structural systems” for bridges, for example, that would have the effect of extending service life.

“The commitment to such research and development carries a price tag, but this cost is far less than the cost to replace a collapsed bridge,” he said.

Maria Lehman, director of the Transportation Systems Business Sector for Bergmann Associates, and former Erie County public works commissioner, declared that “a crumbling infrastructure cannot support a healthy economy.”

She noted that China invested an estimated 2.5 percent of its gross domestic product in highway construction in 2001, compared with 1.5 percent by the U.S. in 2004. Her “prescription for health” to compete in the global economy, included expanding infrastructure investment, maximizing its quality, enhancing its delivery, and building for future expansion and inter-modality.

Comments from a Reader

In the third quarter 2008 GBNRTC Newsletter, I read the same old comments about drivers and bicyclists perceptions and the realities of both roadway users “not respecting each other and the rules of the road.” Not surprisingly, the lack of enforcement of those rules is the culprit for the most part. It takes a lot of police effort to keep on top of drunk driving, speeding, running red lights.

For the NCHRP report writer to conclude or concede that “the safety interests of bicyclists sometimes conflict with the interests of motorists” because of “the substantially different characteristics of the two modes of transportation,” says nothing new to cyclists who have spent our lives attempting to survive on the roads in this country.

Comparing our experience to cyclists in Europe, China and other countries where the bicycle has been a substantial part of the culture of the transportation mix, it seems to me that the solution to crashes involving all modes of transportation in the USA needs to begin with a study of the cultural, psychological and anthropological makeup of the citizens of this country. Otherwise we will continue to compile the same statistics with little change or improvement. A complete overhaul of the system is called for.

Suzanne Toomey Spinks,

bicycle/pedestrian advocate in long standing

Meeting Calendar

Planning and Coordinating Committee (PCC)

meetings begin at 9:30 A.M.

November 5 Erie County

Rath Building
Buffalo, New York

December 3 New York State Dept. of Transportation

100 Seneca Street
Buffalo, New York

January 7 Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority

181 Ellicott Street
Buffalo, New York

Policy Committee

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

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Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council Policy Committee

County of Erie

Niagara County Legislature

City of Buffalo

City of Niagara Falls

New York State Department of Transportation

Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority

New York State Thruway Authority

Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council Planning and Coordinating Committee

Erie County Department of Public works

Niagara County Department of Public Works

City of Buffalo Department of Public Works

City of Niagara Falls

New York State Department of Transportation

Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority

New York State Thruway Authority

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