

GBNRTC

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

Perspectives on funding crisis aired at Buffalo forum

New York State's "circulatory system," its transportation network, is "aging and under stress," and faces a funding crisis that poses a threat to the heart of the state economy.

That was the message from Stanley Gee, executive deputy commissioner of the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) at a public forum, attended by representatives of regional citizen and stakeholder groups, at the Erie County Historical Society in March. It was part of a series of public discussions of the crisis held across the state.

Gee's presentation echoed a report by NYSDOT's commissioner, Astrid Glynn, at an Albany budget hearing and a NYSDOT report, "Danger Ahead," that had been issued during the Pataki Administration.

Similar warnings have been sounded across the nation by transportation groups, including the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), American Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO) and American Road & Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA).

They were climaxed in January when a National Surface Transporta-

tion Policy and Revenue Study Commission, created by Congress, made a broad range of recommendations for dealing with an aging infrastructure and creating a "new beginning" in transportation strategy. At a recent meeting of GBNRTC's Policy Committee, Executive Director Hal Morse summarized some of the commission's recommendations as follows:

- A significant increase in public funding, including an increase in the federal fuel tax, "to keep America competitive."
- Innovative ways of funding our future system, including more tolling and additional private investment.
- A cultural shift across the nation to encourage greater use of transit and passenger rail.
- Shortening the time frame between conception and delivery of projects.

In his presentation to the forum at Buffalo, Gee emphasized that "the national crisis requires a federal solution." A new federal transportation act due in 2009, he said, would provide an "opportunity to redefine, revitalize and expand the federal role."

In this context, it should be noted that three members of the 12-member

national commission, including its chairman, Mary Peters, the U.S. secretary of transportation, issued a minority report calling for less federal financial involvement and more funding at the state and local levels to assure a higher degree of "accountability."

Some business groups, such as the National Federation of Independent Business, have opposed any increase in the fuel tax. But the National Association of Manufacturers and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce expressed "an openness" to all funding options because of the high cost of transportation bottlenecks to manufacturers.

A non-partisan political coalition, "Building America's Future," has also expressed support for increased federal transportation funding. Its co-chairmen are the Democratic governor of Pennsylvania, Edward Rendell, the Republican governor of California, Arnold

Third Quarter 2008

Perspectives on funding crisis aired at Buffalo forum

'Good Going' toward a green economy

Buffalo, Falls are vulnerable on road conditions

Bicyclist, motorists 'can work things out'

A boost for children who walk, bike to school

Schwarzenegger, and the Independent mayor of New York City, Michael Bloomberg.

Gee declared that current federal and state funding were “inadequate to reverse deterioration trends,” along with growing congestion and need for public transit, at both the state and national levels. He said that 1,450 bridges in the state would become deficient in the next five years and another 1,500 in the next six to ten years. Pavement was deteriorating and the percentage of aging transit buses was increasing, he said.

The crisis was exacerbated, he noted, by surging construction costs that reflect increases in the price of diesel fuel and such materials as steel and concrete.

In an interview, Gee also expressed concern over a Congressional trend to favor states that generate the most fuel tax, because of longer travel distances, over those that have the greatest needs, such as New York. It’s a trend that has been associated with a shift in Congressional political power to the South and West.

With much of the revenue coming from the fuel tax, he said, “the more gasoline you consume, the more dollars are returned to your state.” With soaring gasoline prices and the need to cut emissions associated with global warming, “maybe that’s not the right policy we want to renew,” he told the Buffalo News.

It has been noted that revenue from the federal fuel tax, at a flat rate per gallon, does not increase with higher cost per gallon at the fuel pump, and may diminish as consumers use less fuel or use alternative fuels.

Gee said the state’s 20-year transportation capital needs were estimated at \$175 billion, which included \$50 billion for “major projects,” such as the Peace

Bridge expansion and completion of the Route 219 corridor.

Indeed, the state’s 5-year capital plan includes \$9 million for its share of the Peace Bridge project and \$83 million for extension of the Route 219 freeway from Peters Road to Snake Run Road in Cattaraugus County. The 2009-2014 plan relies on some \$4.9 billion that has “yet to be identified” from state, federal or other sources. Some members of the state Legislature said the gap is “actually closer to \$10 billion.”

The Peace Bridge expansion is a priority project in the GBNRTC’s Long-Range Plan for Erie and Niagara Coun-

state levels.

Gary Hill, representing the Association of General Contractors and Union Concrete, emphasized the need to shorten the lapse between project conception and implementation during a time of rising construction costs, which he attributed in part to competition from China and India. He called for more expeditious handling of environmental issues.

Also, he declared, “Anybody who thinks that federal funding would replace Thruway tolls is absurd.”

Edward Watts, president of Watts Architecture & Engineering, called for

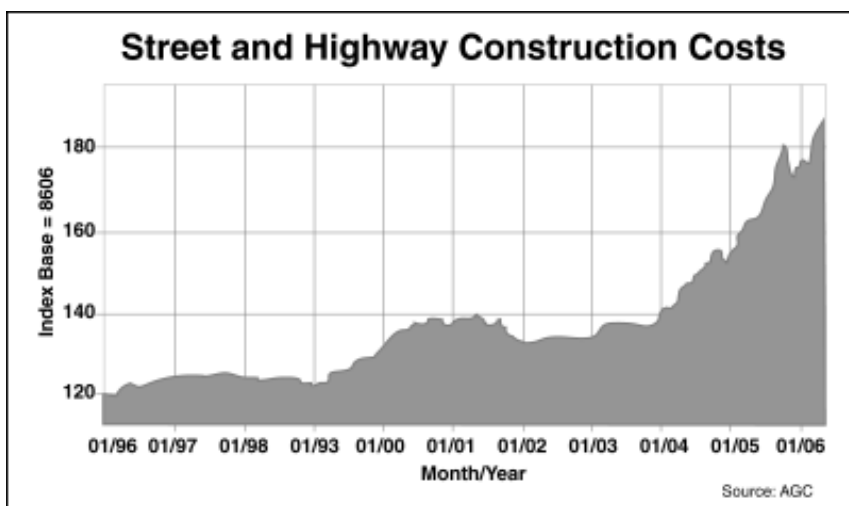
“a significant increase in federal funding” and added that it was “vital to regional economic and strategic interests” that funding be provided for such projects as the Peace Bridge expansion, “which has been delayed too long,” and the Route 219 freeway extension.

Thomas Frank, of Amherst, called for action on removal of the Williamsville Toll Barrier and construction of a Thruway exit to Youngs Road..

Others called for more focus on the safety needs of pedestrians and bicyclists and on carpooling and public transit. Andrew Graham, of Voice Buffalo, cited research that he said has shown that the traffic accident rate is significantly higher in suburbs than in cities because suburbs swarm with cars and traffic. “Public transit [in the cities] gets people out of cars,” he said.

Roy Tocha, representing the Niagara Frontier Bicycle Club, expressed concern that motorists should be aware that bicyclists do have rights on highways.

Traian Cainaru, of the New York Bicycling Coalition, declared that he could travel seven miles in 35 minutes on his bike, which he described as “a perfect tool for urban commuting” and “the perfect solution” to the high fuel and maintenance costs for motor ve-



ties. Route 219 is envisioned by some regional and Canadian business interests as part of a “Continental One” trade corridor that could ultimately extend south to Miami.

Morse, in his talk to the forum, stressed the role of the GBNRTC in “working together” with regional governments and agencies to promote efficient land use and transportation planning. Increasingly, this has included collaboration with Canadian authorities.

In another presentation, Ron Rienas, general manager of the Peace Bridge Authority, stressed the “importance of the strong population growth in Southern Ontario” and the “huge market on the Canadian side” to the regional economy.

Several speakers said the looming financial crisis called for dramatic changes in policy at the federal and

hicles. He called for more investment in bike paths and roads with bike ways, as well as a strong safety policy.

Gladys Gifford, representing Citizens Regional Transit Corporation, declared, “America doesn’t have a transportation policy — we have transportation appropriations.”

Robert Shibley, director of the University at Buffalo’s Urban Design Project, added, “A federal urban policy should drive transportation policy and appropriations. What we have now is what Gladys defined as appropriation rules that drive transportation policy ... that have us sprawling all over our landscape and defeating opportunities for clean, safe and environmentally friendly transit options.”

Connie Brown, president of Opportunities Unlimited for Niagara, which provides transportation for the disabled, was absent because of the flu, but asked to be recorded as emphasizing the need for collaboration, among transportation providers for the aged and the disabled in the face of growing financial challenges.

Bruce Becker, president of the Empire State Passengers Association, said that in the 1970s New York led the nation in support for the inter-city passenger rail system, but has since taken “a distinctly back seat.” It is time, he said, with rising energy costs and “congestion in the skies,” for the state “again to become a leader with a rational program of investment for incremental infrastructure improvements and a new fleet of equipment aimed at providing a safe, reliable, affordable and convenient alternative for travel.”

Wally Smith, a panelist representing the Buffalo-Niagara Partnership, declared that “a lot of political will and courage” would be required by “our elected officials” to come to grips with the financial issues.

In testimony at an Albany budget hearing, Glynn, the state commissioner of transportation, had declared, “New York State must either pay now for

prudent and effective infrastructure treatments or pay a much higher price later when delay has made matters much worse. ... The dilemma ... is not limited to New York State. It is being replicated across the country. This is a national issue and requires a strong federal role in the solution. ... A strong federal role in funding the nation’s bridges should continue as states across the country struggle with bridge deficiencies. Increased federal investment to maintain and expand transit services is needed to reduce growing traffic congestion. The federal government must also establish a



An example of bridge reconstruction on I-290.

stronger role in national rail policy”.

“As the nation faces the challenge of a growing energy crisis, federal leadership is needed to ensure that transportation systems are part of the solution and not part of the problem.”

She reported, “Our (state) transportation system is under stress, from age, heavy use and the lack of adequate investment. The system is safe, but the conditions of many parts of our infrastructure are worsening.”

The National Commission on Surface Transportation, in its January report, called for “a sea change in the way surface transportation is planned, funded and delivered.”

In conclusion, it declared: “It will require courageous decision making, financial innovation and unity of pur-

pose. Most importantly, it will require a return to national vision of a system that is integrated in its network varied in its modes and dedicated to providing safe, efficient and congestion-free movement of people and goods.”

It recommended “depoliticizing investment decisions and replacing more than 100 transportation programs with 10 programs focused on the national interest,” with money spent through “outcome based, performance-driven programs rather than political ‘earmarking.’” The report noted that “Congressional earmarking has increased from 10 projects in 1982 to more than 6,300 projects in SAFETEA-LU (2005).”

Creation of a National Surface Transportation Commission was recommended to serve as an overseer. New revenue strategies included phasing in an increase in the federal gas tax between 25-40 cents (5-8 cents per gallon, per year) in the near term “since it will continue to be a viable revenue source ... for the next 15 to 20 years.”

But alternatives “should be explored” as longer-term revenue sources. The “most promising alternative ... is a vehicle miles traveled fee, provided that substantial privacy and collection cost issues can be addressed.” Others include tolling, peak-hour ‘congestion pricing,’ a freight fee for freight projects and ticket taxes for passenger rail improvements.”

And “governments on all levels should encourage public-private partnerships ... provided that conditions are included to protect the public interest and the movement of interstate commerce.”

The commission also “believes that ... the rapidly eroding purchasing power of the dollar for transportation construction in recent years has called particular attention to the costs of what many experts consider to be the excessively long time it takes to bring a transportation project from concept to reality.”

'Good Going' toward a green economy

“It was ten minutes before I was scheduled to pick up my new carpool buddy and I was frantically stuffing garbage from my back seat into a plastic bag.”

In those words, journalist Tracey Drury opened an account in Buffalo's Business First of her first experience in sharing a ride to work with Deborah Gondek, the director of communications at Rich Products Corporation.

“I stressed a bit about what my new carpool buddy would think of me and my messy car. A sick child the day before meant that I didn't make it to the car wash,” Drury explained.

She and Gondek had registered as potential carpoolers on GBNRTC's Good Going web site (www.goodgoingwny.com), established by Ecology & Environment, Inc. (E&E), with global headquarters in Lancaster. Business First and Rich Products were among more than 300 businesses, organizations and schools in the region that signed up as participants in the Good Going Initiative for Earth Day.

The initiative was organized by E&E with the help of a Steering Committee that included Barbara Courtney of GBNRTC and representatives of groups ranging from the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) to the Buffalo Bisons, New Era Cap Co. Inc., UB (University at Buffalo) Green, Buffalo-Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau, and the Buffalo Niagara Partnership, among others.

The purpose of the initiative was to significantly increase participation in the Good Going program. The concept was that people

would be inclined to continue to carpool, use mass transit or use alternative transportation once they found out how easy it was to identify a ride match or transit route near them. A network-based advertising campaign in which committee members told peers who in turn told others was undertaken.

The approach proved very successful, as the number of registrants on the web site nearly tripled as a result of the Earth Day initiative. It neared a thousand and continues to grow.

Executive Director Hal Morse of GBNRTC reported that among commuters who participated in the Earth Day initiative 41 percent carpooled, 31 percent walked, 14 percent used public transit (10 percent bus, 4 percent train), 11 percent bicycled, 1 percent van pooled, 1 percent motorcycled, and 1 percent used other means (telecommuting, rollerblading, etc.)...

The web site has been periodically upgraded by E&E. A recent modification allows companies or other employers to register on the web site and personalize it so that carpool matching can be geared to people at the work location. It can assist the company tax and cost savings, reduced parking challenges, improved morale and public image, as well as recognition of clean-air and energy-saving programs.

Good Going's GIS (Geographic Information System) maps allow its

users to find other potential ride sharers in their neighborhood as well as public transit and bicycling options.

For example, Drury, of Business First, was unable to find a carpool buddy near her home in Niagara County's Sanborn community. “When I plugged in my start and end locations to the web site, I was a little disappointed not to find any matches,” she wrote. “Then I modified the information, listing the starting point at my daughter's North Tonawanda day care. Bingo, four matches popped up, including my carpool buddy, Gondek.”

Gondek said, “We leave a car at my house in North Tonawanda and take one vehicle into the city. My office is at West Ferry and Niagara Street in Buffalo and Tracey's is downtown on Washington Street. We rotate who drives and it's been working well since we started carpooling in March. Our crazy schedules don't allow us to carpool every day, but even one less vehicle on the road one day a week adds up. I think it's important for people to give alternate transportation a try, even if it's something you're not able to do every day of the week.”

Other car poolers at Rich Products include Kevin and Julie Sheldon of Amherst. Before Earth Day they had driven to work in separate cars because Kevin prefers to come in early and Julie prefers to work late. On Earth Day, they drove to work in the same car and have agreed to continue the practice because “it's good for the environment and saves money on gas.”

“We've had to learn to compromise with one another,” added Mrs.

Sheldon. "For example, we like different radio programs. Yesterday I listened to his program and today he listened to mine."

Another husband and wife team who have decided to carpool is Kim and Jeffrey Pagano at Daemen College, another participant in the Good Going initiative. She is director of orientation and he is director of financial aid. Sometimes they also give a ride to Richanne Mankey, vice president of student leadership

Students at Daemen are also encouraged to carpool or use other alternative transportation. Leah Zamoyski, for example, has been carpooling for three years with Jacob Triplet, and sometimes they also carpool with her twin sister Kelsey and Jacob Fischer, who attend the University at Buffalo.

"We usually use Leah's car since she gets more than 30 miles a gallon," said Jacob, whereas his gets only 15 to 20 miles a gallon.

"So he'll throw me a few bucks in when it's fill-up time," added Leah.

"So for me it's a win-win situation. We've had some good discussions on life in general some mornings, just sitting in traffic. It's a good time and I think it really keeps people connected. I think everybody should try it."

Jacob said that when the schedules conflict then "one of us uses the time to study while the other is in class."

"It has helped my study habits," added Leah.

Cheryl Bird, executive director of Daemen's Center for Sustainable Communities, took a bicycle to work on Earth Day. "That was an experience in itself," she said. "It took about 40 minutes, compared with about 10 minutes to drive." Her husband, Brian Rotach, biked part of the way with her, but "he went on to the University Metro rail station, where he took his bike on board the Metro Rail to the downtown area, where he took his bike to work as a minister in the Seneca-Babcock area." She continues to bike to work "when I am able."

Another Daemen employee, Anna Ogorek, who is 85 and a secretary, has been walking to work for 32 years. "It's not a big deal. I live only a little over a mile away and it is a joyful experience, observing the beautiful gardens and skies and the change of seasons and it helps me to feel useful and needed,"

she said "Maybe more who don't live too far away will start walking..."

The regional record holder for an Earth Day walk may be Earl Aragona, an assistant to the president at E&E. He walked from the town hall in his hometown of Orchard Park to attend E&E's Good Going Earth Day ceremony at Niagara Square in Buffalo, a 17-mile trek that took nearly five hours through West Seneca and South Buffalo.

"It sounds cliché, but you miss a lot by riding in your car," he said. "I was delighted to hear so many different songs by birds as the morning sun started to rise. By walking, you really start to focus on the environment and the sights and sounds that provides."

Kevin Neumaier, a senior vice-president of E&E, gave the opening address at the ceremony, which was also attended by Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown and Erie County Executive Chris Collins. Neumaier declared, "What we are doing in Buffalo-Niagara is unique. Transportation accounts for a third of our carbon emissions and not much is being done world wide." The Good Going web site tracks carbon emissions prevented by its users.

"Gasoline and crude oil prices are at record highs," Neumaier noted. "It is time that we do something and we are doing something here – showing an example to the rest of the world."

Timothy Trabold, representing the GBNRTC, emphasized that the Good Going site not only "matches you with travelers going to the same locations" and points out park and ride lots where carpoolers could meet, but also assists bicyclists, even providing a "bicycling comfort rating for the streets along your route."

And "if you wish to take Metro Bus or Metro Rail, it transfers your trip specifics to the NFTA web site for personalized routing and time schedules."

Mayor Brown told the gathering, "Our goal in Buffalo and Western New York is to make every day an Earth Day, let's not just do this today," he said. "Every week let's think about some alternative transportation that we can take to protect the environment." Brown said he took Metro Rail that morning to get to work.

Collins said that "as a proud Boy Scouter for the last 50 years," he has been a dedicated hiker and camper and stressed that "while an Earth Day celebration is important, it is equally important that we do what we can every single day, 365 days of the year."





Park & Pool Lot at Route 20A and Route 219 Orchard Park.

Another speaker, Richard Geiger, president of the Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB), declared, “It makes good sense to be green and it also will deliver dollars and sense. Last year alone, the CVB was successful in booking three large sustainability conferences, the North American Association for Environmental Education, American Solar Energy Society and the National Trust for Historical Preservation.

“These three alone bring more than 5,000 people to the area and more than \$5 million in direct spending. Part of our 2008 marketing plan and our strategic long-term goal is to continue looking after more groups looking for green destinations.

“We have also begun work with our hospitality partners on environmental practices. Efforts are in the areas of operation management, energy-saving initiatives, food production and disposal, and water saving. More hotels are using environmentally safe cleaning products, safe paints and sound office practices.”

“We expect it will take obviously a number of years to ultimately reach our goal of having zero waste from the hospitality industry on Erie County. We are working on a

20 to 30 percent decrease (in waste produced) over the course of the next year and are confident we will be able to achieve that”. “The Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau views this Earth Day as an important launching point for building awareness in sustainable practices in our community...”

Mike Buczkowski, general manager of the Buffalo Bisons, said that “one of our partners for a long time is the NFTA Metro and it is particularly appropriate today to remind our fans of one of the great incentives you have when the coming to the Bison games – to use the Metro Rail line. In many cases, it will get you lot closer than the car lots do. And if you bring a Metro Rail pass to our box office you get two dollars off your ticket.”

Collins, Brown and Thomas Loughran, chairman of the Erie County Legislature’s Energy and Environment Committee, joined in honoring Kataie Pataky and Mindy McCabe of Orchard Park High School for the bison logo they designed to symbolize the Earth Day initiative.

They also presented a \$500 check to Adam Hovey, a teacher representing South Park High School, a winner of the “Sustainable Ideas” contest

sponsored by E&E for Earth Day. Hovey motivated his students to help with the “Resurrection of the Bailey Peninsula,” a natural habitat site administered by the county along the Buffalo River near their school.

Among other things, the students planted trees, painted wood for railings, repaired benches, worked to remove a Japanese knot weed that squeezes out native vegetation, according to Mary Rossi, of the county’s Department of Environment and Planning.

Eunice Lewin, of the NFTA’s Board of Commissioners, then presented Good Going Awards, donated by the NFTA, to six recipients, including Daemen College, as a large organization with the highest participation in the Earth Day Initiative (145 from the staff, faculty and student body), as well as Rich Products, which held a large Earth Day Fair at its headquarters.

Other awards went to:

- Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Gardens, which “turned the Earth Day initiative into a month-long exercise to try to include everybody on staff.”

- New Era Cap, credited with creative green policies and work on making the first baseball caps from completely recycled materials.

- Green Options Buffalo, which “combines the efforts of Buffalo Blue Bicycle, Recycle-a-Bicycle, and related biking and pedestrian advocacy efforts under one umbrella.”

- The Campus West Elementary School, in recognition of its goal of creating a “Recycled Book Store.” Under the guidance of their teacher, Carrie Munella, third and fourth graders aspire to recycle “everyday objects,” such as books, papers, crayons, blue jeans, fabric and ribbon, for the store.

Buffalo, Falls are vulnerable on road conditions

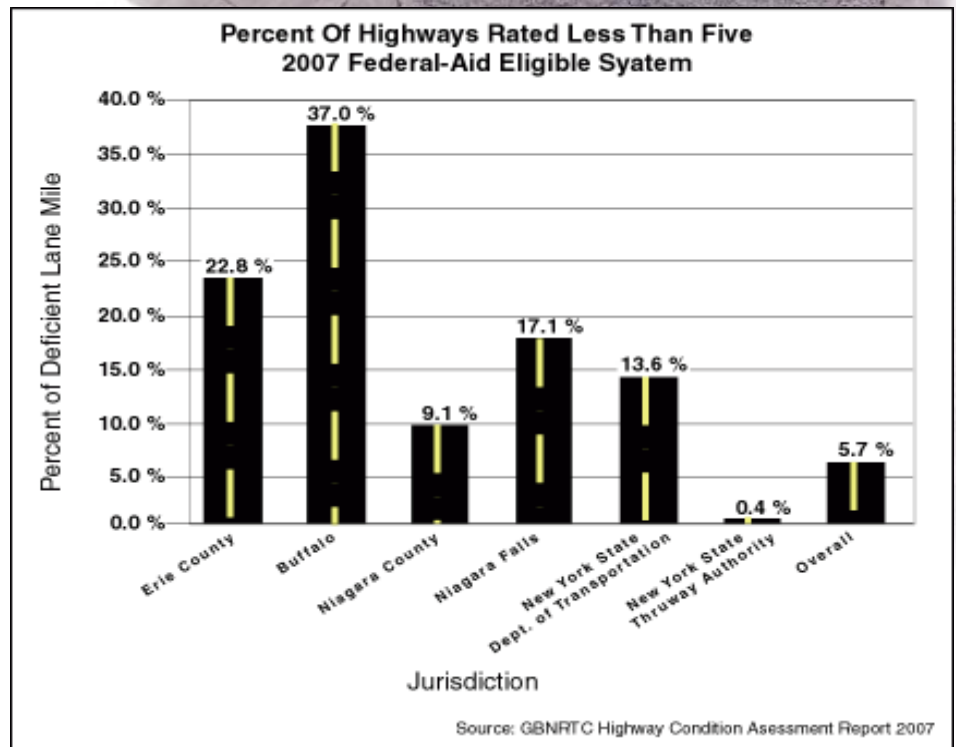
The City of Buffalo had the highest percentage of all the lane miles rated as poor in a 2007 survey of the pavement conditions on more than 5,000 lane miles of federal-aid routes in Erie and Niagara Counties.

The city had 37 percent of the region's "poor" lane miles, with a rating of five or under on a one-to-ten scale. Erie County roadways had the second highest proportion of the region's poor scores, at 22.8 percent. This included routes owned by municipalities, other than Buffalo, as well as those owned by the county. Niagara Falls was third, with 17.1 percent.

Despite Buffalo's high proportion of the region's poor road segments, the number of lane miles rated poor decreased in the city from about 40 percent in 2005 to 23 percent in 2007. In Niagara Falls, the number of poor lane miles slightly increased, from 50.8 percent to 51.7 percent.

Overall, the Thruway system had the highest score of any jurisdiction, averaging 7.69, on a scale of one to ten, compared with 7.13 in 2005. It displaced NYSDOT which had the top score in 2005 at 7.34. That declined to 7.11 in 2007, putting NYSDOT in second place.

In fact, only the NYSDOT system showed a lower average score in 2007 among the region's major jurisdictions. The entire federal-aid system for the region improved slightly to an average score of 6.83, compared to 6.71 in 2005.



Buffalo's average overall score improved from 5.98 in 2005 to 6.29 in the latest survey. Erie County's score went up from 6.85 to 6.99, Niagara County's from 6.68 to 7.11 and the City of Niagara Falls, 5.70 to 5.84, but still the "lowest among the local jurisdictions evaluated."

The report was compiled by GBNRTC's Kathryn Stilwell, assisted by Kim Smith. The survey, carried out during the summer of 2007, is held every two years using visual scoring procedures developed by NYSDOT, which surveyed the state routes. Other routes were surveyed by GBNRTC in collaboration with the respective jurisdictions.

"Of the approximately 5,000 total lane miles scored in 2007, almost 7 percent were rated in excellent condition, 68 percent in good condition, almost 19 percent in fair condition and slightly less than 6 percent in poor condition," according to the report by Stilwell. About 0.4 percent of roadways were under construction at the time of the survey.

"The Interstate system in the two county-region is in good condition with the highest average surface score of 7.43 – with about 75 percent of lane miles rated in the good category. It also carries a significant amount of the region's VMT (vehicle miles traveled) at 4.6 million vehicle

miles per day.”

Other expressways in the region (such as Routes 400 and 219)) had an average score of 6.89 (good) and accounted for some 2.1 vehicle miles traveled per day.

“The principal arterial street system carries more vehicle miles traveled per day, at 5.4 million, than any other functional class and is rated in good condition, with an average score of 6.98.”

Minor arterials, with an average score of 6.75 (good), accounted for 4.4 million vehicle miles traveled per day; collectors, average a 6.68 score (good, but the lowest average score), with 1.5 million VMT, and rural routes, averaging 7.06, with 2.5 million VMT.

At the request of Erie and Niagara Counties, the GBNRTC also surveyed the condition of non-federal-aid routes. “The condition of the federal-aid highways in Erie County is generally better than the non federal-aid and the overall county system,” the GBNRTC report notes.

In contrast, the scores for federal-aid and non-federal aid are virtually the same in Niagara County, which has significantly fewer lane miles of roadway.

According to the report on the federal-aid system, “Best Street between Wohlrs Avenue and Fillmore Avenue could be considered the area’s ‘worst’ roadway segment,” based upon a poor road score of 4 and a traffic volume of 15,300 vehicles a day.

“Ridge Road from Lehigh Street to Route 62 South Park Avenue had a daily traffic volume of 13,000 vehicles per day in 2007 and also a poor road score of 4.

“The I-190 South Grand Island Bridges from River Road to the Grand Island Town Line has a high traffic volume per day of 75,800 and a poor road score of 5.” Eight of the 25 segments in the lowest category are scheduled for improvement as projects in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).



Bicyclist, motorists 'can work things out'

photo by Dan Burden

Bicyclists sometimes complain that some motorists don't respect their right to share the road. Motorists sometimes complain that some bicyclists don't respect the rules of the road.

There's some truth in both complaints, according to transportation analysts.

There are motorists who perceive bicyclists as a nuisance, even though state law gives bikers the same rights as motorists, except on Interstate systems, and other routes from which bikes are specifically excluded.

And significant numbers of bicyclists violate the rules of the road, for example, by riding on the wrong side, against traffic, rather than with it, or by ignoring traffic lights and stop signs.

A “Share the Road” initiative in Atlanta, Ga., expressed the problem in these words, addressed to motorists and bicyclists:

“You two have so much in common. You can work things out. Sure, you two don't always get along. Perhaps it's a failure to communicate or a simple misunderstanding. So let's start with the basics. A bicycle is legally a vehicle. Translation for the motorist — bikes belong on the roadways, not sidewalks. That other side of the road where the sidewalks are — that was made for walking, not vehicles. Trans-

lation for the bicyclist — the vehicular traffic law applies to you. So obey traffic lights. Stop at stop signs. Use turn signals when turning. It's pretty simple. And perhaps if you two find some common ground, you'll end up a nice, happy couple on the road of life...”

A recent guide issued by the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) for “reducing collisions involving bicycles” notes that bicycling in recent years has been getting increased attention as a transportation mode “for a variety of reasons,” including the higher cost of fuel and pollution issues.

But despite the fact that a national goal of reducing bicyclist injuries and fatalities was more than surpassed from 1993 to 2003 that progress “appears now to be eroding” and “increases in fatalities over the last two years dramatically reinforce the need for strategies to reduce collisions involving bicyclists.”

The NCHRP report concedes: “The safety interests of bicyclists are sometimes in conflict with the interests of motorists” because of “the substantially different characteristics of the two modes of transportation.

“Although bicycles can be ridden on most types of roads, the design interests of accommodating higher motor vehicle traffic volumes and speeds dur-

ing peak-hour congestion may create conditions that are less safe for bicyclists.

“Safety concerns can significantly influence a person’s decision to bicycle for transportation or recreation. Bicyclists inherently understand that they are vulnerable road users.

“However, understanding bicyclist safety issues has proven difficult for engineers, planners, and facility designers.”

Under “current federal policies and guidance and the resources now available” progress has been made, “but opportunities remain to improve facilities and programs for bicyclists.”

The guide outlines a wide variety of strategies for reducing bicyclist accidents and the risk of serious injury — including improved signage, pavement markings, traffic signals and roundabouts that accommodate bicyclists, enforcement of speed limits for motorists and of road rules for bicyclists.

Encouragement of the use of bicycle helmets and traffic-calming roadway designs were described as strategies that had proven to be particularly successful.

“Despite clear and convincing data regarding the effectiveness of bicycle helmets in reducing the risk of serious or fatal injury, few people across the United States are usually observed wearing bicycle helmets,” according to the guide.

However, “helmet use varies widely.” In New York State, helmet use is legally required by bicyclists under age 14.

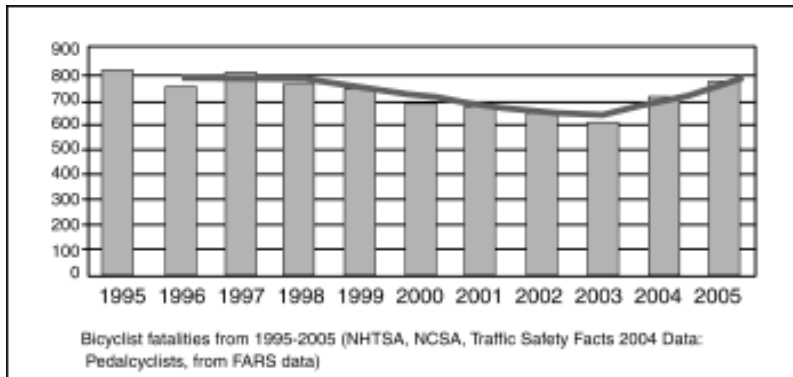
“Particular attention should be paid to education,” according to the guide. “Skill levels vary widely within the bicycling community. ... Effective and sustained education programs, often neglected by transportation agencies that focus on engineering solutions, can significantly improve safer riding behavior for all bicyclists.”

The federally financed Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program, recently inaugurated in Western New York, was cited as encouraging safe practices at an early age.

The guide notes that “child bicyclists are deemed to be solely at fault 70 to 80 percent of the time in crashes with motor vehicles, while only about 40 percent of adult bicyclists are deemed to be at fault.”

Both “bicyclist and motorist are identified as contributing to the crash in 5 to 20 percent of crashes over various bicyclist ages” and “motorists were deemed to be solely at fault in from 5 percent of crashes with the youngest aged cyclists to about 36 percent of crashes involving adults ages 50 to 59.”

Although declining in recent years, “the fatality rates among child riders,



in particular the 10-to-15 year age group, remain the highest per capita among any age group — about one fifth of the bicyclist traffic fatalities were between the ages of 5 and 15 in 2004.”

At the same time, “the number and the proportion of fatalities among adults ages 35 and up has been increasing, from 36 percent of all bicycle fatalities in 1994 to 59 percent in 2004.” In part, this was attributed to “changes in the bicycle riding population.”

Males of all ages account “for the largest proportion of injured and killed bicyclists – 76 percent and 87 percent in 2004, respectively.” Males also account for 70 to 80 percent of riders “in most locations.”

Alcohol “is a significant factor.” in bicycle crashes. “Alcohol use by either the motorist or the bicyclist was reported in more than one-third of the fatal bicyclist collisions” in recent years.”

Also, serious injury and fatal crashes were “disproportionately likely to occur during the late night and early morning hours” when “alcohol was more likely to be a factor.”

But in addition, according to a study of North Carolina crashes, many bicyclists involved in night-time crashes did not use the required lighting equipment.”

Another significant factor in crashes was a tendency among some bicyclists to “ride against the direction of traffic.” A study of bicycle crashes from six states in the early 1990s found that bicyclists were riding against the direction of traffic “in 32 percent of relevant cases...”

“This factor is particularly prevalent in crashes at intersections and other junctions where the motorist and bicyclist are on crossing paths. Bicyclists riding the wrong way are approaching from a direction where motorists do not expect them, and mo-

torists are typically looking for a gap to the left before pulling out.

“The right-turn-on-red vehicle movement” is another component to a number of these crashes. Additionally, bicyclists traveling the wrong way “may not be able to see traffic signs and signals.”

“Bicyclists on the sidewalk are also in a position where motorists do not expect them, particularly if also traveling the wrong way... The problem is further compounded since bicyclists are often traveling faster than pedestrians and may not have enough time to avoid a vehicle pulling across the sidewalk.”

The potential for crashes increases also “when driveways are frequent.”

Bicyclists are “particularly vulnerable to left-turning motorists who may not observe approaching bicyclists before making left turns into driveways or side streets.”

On-street parking poses another hazard. “Motorists exiting a parked vehicle without checking behind may open a door or step out in front of a bicyclist.” It was recommended that “adequate space” be provided between bike lanes and parked cars.

National data also “suggest that 31 percent of crashes were speed related” and that higher speeds contribute to higher fatality rates. More crashes with bicyclists occur in urban areas and at intersections, where speeds tend to be lower, but the severity of injuries and the fatality levels are higher in rural areas and at non-intersections.

The guide urges that more attention be given to bicyclist-related laws. “Although law-enforcement officers are trained to make motor-vehicle stops for speeding, red-light running and other dangerous behavior by motorists, they typically do not receive any special training with respect to bicycle-law enforcement.

“It is not surprising, then, that there is very little active enforcement of traffic laws affecting bicyclists in U.S. communities. . . . Law-enforcement officers sometimes find it difficult to ‘ticket’ bicyclists, or even to stop a young child.

“However, actions such as wrong-way riding, weaving in and out of traffic, ignoring ‘stop’ signs, and riding without proper lights at night are dangerous and these behaviors create ill will with motorists.

“Law enforcement officers can take advantage of the opportunity to stop and educate the offending bicyclist about the importance of obeying traffic laws.”

In 2005, the total bicyclist fatality rate across the nation was 2.64 per million population. New York State had a rate of 2.44 fatalities per million. The lowest rate was in South Dakota, with no fatalities, and the highest was in Florida, with a fatality rate of 6.97 per million population.

A boost for children who walk, bike to school

Representatives of the political and transportation leadership of the region have endorsed a prioritized listing of 10 candidates for a first-time federal funding of programs designed to encourage and safeguard children who walk or bicycle to school.

The listing endorsed by the GBNRTC’s Planning and Coordinating Committee (PCC) gives the top rank to projects submitted by the City of Buffalo, Town of Amherst, Town of Grand Island and the City of Tonawanda, in that order.

Their projects were described as best meeting the federal criteria for the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program authorized under the current national transportation legislation, known as SAFETEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act—a Legacy for Users) and within the constraints of funding anticipated for the Erie-Niagara region.

The endorsed listing has been submitted to the Office of the State Commissioner of Transportation which will select the projects to be financed from the \$2.2 million allocated for projects in Erie and Niagara Counties as well as Cattaraugus and Chautauqua Counties. An announcement is expected by late August or early September.

The City of Buffalo application seeks \$549,999 for traffic-related enhancements for the Northland-Wohlers neighborhood around Hamlin Park School 47 and a program by the Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo to “educate families city-wide about the benefits of walking and biking to school.”

Mayor Byron Brown wrote that the funding would “leverage my administration’s \$1 million investment in this historic district as one of Buffalo’s Communities of Choice” and added that Hamlin Park would benefit from federal funding as a “designated Neighborhoods Revitalization Stabilization Area.”

Justin Booth of the Wellness Institute recently received a grant funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Bikes Belong Foundation for a project, focused also on the Hamlin Park School 47, to remove bar-



photo by Dan Burden

riers to walking and bicycling to school in a low-income area.

Related programs also include rehabilitation of a nearby pedestrian bridge over the Kensington Expressway and a “crime-prevention component” by city police. “Bicycles for police officers will be donated through the Recycle-A Bicycle program for use on patrols,” according to the application.

The Town of Amherst’s seeks \$546,978 for “walkability” projects with “walkways and walkway connections” at five elementary schools (County Parkway, Dodge, Heim, Maple East, Maple West) and a middle school (Heim) within the Williamsville Central School District.

The project would be carried out in collaboration with a University at Buffalo’s Education & Encouragement Program along with a district SRTS curriculum. Also, the Amherst Police Department would provide “more closely regulated speeds in school zones” implemented through purchase of “a new speed trail” that would “record the speed and time recorded for each vehicle passing through the zone.”..

Easing of traffic congestion, accident levels, and “childhood obesity concerns” were mentioned among the potential benefits.

The Town of Grand Island seeks \$57,000 to construct a 10-foot wide asphalt path and a 4-foot wide concrete sidewalk along Love Road and Park Avenue respectively near the Kaegebein School. According to the application, about 75 students are not eligible for bus transportation and must walk because they live within a mile of the school. “This number is some-

what higher during the warmer months as some students choose to ride their bikes rather than take the bus or be driven by parents.”

“The primary concern is that students are now forced into the street with oncoming traffic due to the poor condition or absence of pedestrian walkways to school.”

The City of Tonawanda has applied for \$400,000 to “replace and repair broken and dangerous sidewalks immediately adjacent to and surrounding the neighborhood schools,” to “improve safety for school children, individuals who access the city school buildings, and pedestrians and bicyclists who frequently utilize the city sidewalks along school routes.”

Other Erie-Niagara applicants on the list are as follows: Depew Union Free School District, a public bicycle path; Town of Evans, multi-use pathway in town park; Orchard Park Schools, sidewalk improvements; Town of Eden, replacement of sidewalks on Main Street (Route 62); Village of Gowanda, River View Path, Aldrich Street, pedestrian crossing improvements; Niagara Falls Central School District, parking/pedestrian improvement

The priority listing endorsed by the PCC was put together by Greg Szewczyk of NYDOT (New York State Department of Transportation) in collaboration with GBNRTC’s Holly Maietta. Public workshops were held at the Harlem Road Community Center in Amherst, the Lockport Town Hall, and Woodlawn Beach State Park Nature Center and in Downtown Buffalo to introduce the public to this new program.

According to Transportation Commissioner Astrid Glynn \$31.6 million is available for programs statewide with \$2.2 million for projects in Region 5, which comprises Erie and Niagara Counties as well as Cattaraugus and Chautauqua Counties.



photo by Justin Booth

Meeting Calendar

Planning and Coordinating Committee (PCC)

meetings begin at 9:30 A.M.

August 6 **Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority**
181 Elicott Street
Buffalo, New York

September 3 **Buffalo**
City Hall
Buffalo, New York

October 1 **New York State Thruway Authority**
Cayuga Street
Cheektowaga, New York

Policy Committee

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

"Higher gas prices getting to you? Check out:"



GOOD GOING
Smarter Transportation Choices for WNY

Carpool matching - Transit options
Park and Ride - Bicycling routes & maps

Erie and Niagara County's solution for alternative transportation

www.goodgoingwny.com

GBNRTC newsletter is published quarterly
Media Coordinator Robert Wagner
Layout and Graphics: Kenneth Field

Comments and requests to be added or deleted from the mailing list
are welcome and should be sent to:

GBNRTC Editor, 438 Main Street, Suite 503, Buffalo, NY 14202

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

Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council

Phone: 716-856-2026
Fax: 716-856-3203
www.gbnrtc.org

This newsletter was prepared with the financial assistance of the
U.S. Department of Transportation. However, the contents repre-
sent only the view of the authors and do not necessarily reflect
the review or approval of the U.S. Department of Transportation.



GREATER BUFFALO-NIAGARA
REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL

438 Main Street, Suite 503
Buffalo, New York 14202-3207

PRESORTED STANDARD
US POSTAGE PAID
BUFFALO, NY
PERMIT NO. 3803