

# GBNRTC

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



*A steering Committee tour of Bethlehem site includes representatives of both Erie and Niagara Counties and the Province of Ontario.*

## Bethlehem site proposed as part of a regional trade center

Establishment of a Buffalo-Niagara “intelligent logistics complex” that would include the former Bethlehem Steel site has been proposed as a way of galvanizing the region’s economic potential as a bi-national gateway.

The idea is presented in a Niagara Frontier Urban Area Freight Transportation Study carried out by WilburSmith Associates, a worldwide consultant, in a federally funded study for the GBNRTC. The proposed concept is to provide a platform to integrate the Buffalo-Niagara region’s logistics assets to increase the area’s participation in trade moving in the northeast U.S. and Canada. A heavy emphasis would be placed on using technology as a logistics tool

The proposed complex “would not replace public or private development initiatives, but rather, provide them with a complete package of the logistics services required by international companies planning to expand distribution in North America.” It would provide a basis for “integration and facilitation” of regional logistics services..

In addition, the complex would be a regional center for marketing, development and economic planning. It would be an “ideal single staging point” for Canadian and U.S. markets and provide “advanced electronic commerce technology” that would facilitate the physical distribution process.

The complex could support a staff and be led by a board of directors repre-

sentative of business, development and logistics interests of the “two-country region.”

As outlined in a draft version of Technical Memorandum No. 4 of the study, the Bethlehem Steel site, which would require an estimated \$25 million investment, would be an important ele-

### First Quarter 2009

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A search for energy to keep pace with mobility

Alternative transportation may be the thing to do

Walking and biking to school encouraged

Merlo is 2009 PCC chairman

ment of the regional complex, serving as a multimodal logistics center.

Eventually, it could house a neutral inter-modal rail center for container traffic complementing the recently developed CSX Seneca Intermodal Yard. It would also offer access to water transportation and connections to air-cargo service.

The study concludes that the Erie-Niagara region is favored by its being a principal NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) gateway, with a “nexus of several major railroads as well as smaller carriers, and major highway arterials” that is also “served by two airports and has maritime access.”

However, according to the analysis, “confirmed by discussions with transportation stakeholders,” the “development of logistics infrastructure that could attract economic development has not kept pace with other regions of the country.” Also, the region does have “gaps” and “choke points,” particularly with regard to cross-border and rail transportation.

A major objective of the complex would be to reap economic benefit from the large volume of “overhead” freight, particularly to and from Canada, that currently passes through the region en route to other destinations. The region’s strategic potential for warehousing and distribution centers, for example, could be promoted among domestic and foreign businesses whose goods pass through the region.

A shift in trade routes, with growing use of the Suez Canal and the Panama Canal, which is being widened to accommodate larger ships, is making East Coast ports increasingly popular, the study notes.

Besides providing a distribution point to the U.S. Midwest and Canada for goods moving through the Port of New York and New Jersey, the Buffalo-Niagara gateway offers a potential for more efficient shipments from the Port of Halifax, which presently have to be routed through Chicago for destinations in Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York State, according to WilburSmith analysts.

“The study found that well over 100,000 TEUS (freight containers of a certain size) move between consignees/shippers in Ontario and U.S. ports. Gen-

erally, these containers do not move by rail, rather the containers move through Buffalo by truck to their end destination. Given Buffalo’s strategic geographic position, the opportunity exists for an inter-modal freight terminal to serve outbound and inbound Canadian freight rail.”

The Bethlehem site is “directly served by the South Buffalo Railroad a short line carrier with a limited network” that could provide “a connection to the facility for each of the major carriers of the region.” It served “a similar role in the past when the steel mill was operational.”

In order to “fully capture the rail market potential for Canadian container traffic, access to the Bethlehem Steel site would have to be established by negotiating operating rights and improved rail connections for CN (Canadian National) and CP (Canadian Pacific) Rail to CSX’s Niagara Branch. CN currently has access to a lumber facility near the Bethlehem site via CSX’s Beltline, which has been described as longer and costlier because it loops around Buffalo to the east.

The CSX inter-modal terminal at the Seneca Yard “provides the region with a connection to the Port of New York and the railroad’s international inter-modal network as well as domestic operations,” the study notes. “The size of the site, however, limits its benefits as a logistics asset as there is no room for other logistics facilities such as warehouses or distribution centers.

“NS (Norfolk Southern) offers inter-modal and trans-loading service at its Bison Yard facility. It too is hindered by lack of space and being served by a single carrier.

“The Bethlehem Steel site ... has none of these barriers. The site, however, would require funding for a terminal.”

If connectivity can be improved or the number of inter-modal terminals and trans-load facilities expanded, rail competition in the region could be enhanced, competitive pressures would, in turn, reduce the cost of freight service, according to the study.

“Many railroads and shippers believe that a neutral railroad with the ability to move and handle cars anywhere in the Buffalo-Niagara terminal area would solve the competition problem and im-

prove operating efficiency.”

In addition, the report said that interviews with shippers indicated that the region’s rail potential was under utilized because of aging infrastructure, poor logistics with inefficient routing and delays that contributed to additional costs of delivery “in a global economy where shippers demand just-in-time delivery and better overall integration of services.”

Infrastructure issues included the following:

— The heavily congested CP Draw Bridge over the Buffalo River, for which a “restoration project has been deemed too costly and has not moved forward.” (Less costly alternatives for relieving the congestion were outlined.)

— The International Bridge over the Niagara River is more than 100 years old and “would be considered a key physical constraint should anything happen to restrict rail service across the border.”

— Portage Bridge, operated by Norfolk Southern over the Genesee River is 105 years old and has a 273,000 pound per railcar weight limit and a 10-mile per hour speed limit so that “many trains have to be diverted to other routes.” Its loss would “dramatically affect competitive access” to Buffalo from the east.

— Falls Road Bridge, operated by Genesee Valley Transportation over the Erie Canal at Lockport, is “nearly 100 years old and has numerous structural deficiencies including section loss and cracks in critical members and connections” that can “lead to sudden failures or even collapse.”

The report also gave consideration to restoration of the Lehigh Valley Yard and rehabilitation of the Whirlpool Bridge at Niagara Falls as options in improving cross-border access.

Regarding truck freight, the study observed that “the Buffalo metropolitan area benefits from being one of the lesser congested major metropolitan areas in the US, but also noted that the Interstate 90-290 connection “ranked seventh nationally in inter-city large truck delays in a study published by the FHWA (Federal Highways Administration) in 2005 based on year 2002 data.”

Highway freight stakeholders indicated that “the more significant problems

pertained to cross-border transportation” with bottlenecks at the bridges across the Niagara River and capacity and congestion problems throughout southern Ontario.

These would be eased through infrastructure improvements and new technology associated with security, the study found. But enhanced communication and integration among jurisdictions on both sides of the border “is required.” Providing truck drivers with advance information on processing times would also help, according to the report.

It also cited a need for coordination of restrictions for trucks in different states and provinces. “New York State, Quebec and Ontario must harmonize their weight and dimension guidelines. Other inconsistencies with weight limits exist between New York and other states. Pennsylvania and Ohio, for example, allow half as much weight as Ontario and New York.”

The study found that growth of the air-cargo market was constrained by competing airports in Ontario, New York City and adjacent states, and by an economic downturn that has wrought changes in the industry, although it conceded that a 2006 study on Niagara Falls International Airport, which has particularly long runways, had indicated that “the timing for an expansion into the air-cargo market has never been better.”

The WillburSmith report, suggested that local economic development initiatives should “focus on building the critical mass needed for air cargo growth and by attracting and retaining industries which utilize air-cargo services on a regular basis such as the medical device and automotive industries.”

In its report on the region’s marine operations, the study found that despite an “elaborate infrastructure,” with more than 20 terminals, and “a large labor

pool with a diversity of skill sets in the maritime sector,” the “Port of Buffalo handles a small volume of cargo, an amount that has been static for the past decade.”

Shippers were quoted as saying that the port lacks an export market and “a strong consumption market for products typically shipped on the Great Lakes.”

They also “contend that the port does not promote itself as it has no marketing entity” unlike “nearly every other port on the Great Lakes.” The study noted that the proposed “intelligent logistics complex” at the Bethlehem site would function as a marketing agency.



*Steering Committee members view ongoing coal operation at Bethlehem site.*

Maritime transportation would also provide “a low-cost alternative to truck to serve short-haul markets, such as the Greater Toronto Area.” Also, it could evolve as the transport hub for the region’s agricultural sector to meet a growing demand for fresh produce in other parts of the world, the study reported.

It could be developed into a “marine highway” for “containers or trailers that provide a low-cost alternative to the highways,” particularly if the Erie Canal is renewed as a transportation artery. In addition this route could be used for moving other biofuels and energy equipment. The maritime sector together with the intelligent logistics center could evolve as the transport hub for the region’s agricultural sector to meet a growing demand for fresh produce in other parts of the world, the study reported.

For example, “with substantial ethanol production planned for Buffalo, the product could move through the canal and down the Hudson River to New York City.”

The Bethlehem site, which “consists of over 1,100 acres,” became part of International Steel Group when Bethlehem Steel dissolved in 2003, but ArcelorMittal Steel is now the major owner, although it recently announced plans to close its plant on the Bethlehem site. The site is also used for a wind farm, known as “Steel Winds,” operated by BQ Energy, and a Port of Buffalo section is owned by Buffalo Crushed Stone .

An update on the overall study, which will conclude with an economic analysis and “a development plan,” was presented in December by Joseph Gurskis of Wilbur Smith and Robert Badger of Clough Harbour & Associates to a Steering Committee that includes representatives of Erie and Niagara Counties, the New York State Department of Transportation, World Trade

Center Buffalo Niagara, and the Province of Ontario. Its chairman is GBNRTC’s Richard Guarino, project manager for the study.

“Rarely in my 15 years of public service have I seen any planning study that can bring so many positives to the region,” said Guarino. “Upon successful implementation, these recommendations can create many good paying jobs, re-establish Western New York as an international freight and logistics center, reuse vacant Brownfield properties, re-establish our maritime ports and reduce the number of large trucks on the road. The recommendations of this study present a rare opportunity to truly improve the region’s economy and environment.”

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# A search for energy to keep pace with mobility

“The region’s strength has historically been linked to transportation,” GBNRTC Executive Director Hal Morse observed at a recent forum on “Mobility Across the Ages.”

The forum was held within the awesome walls, topped by windows of shattered glass, of the old New York Central Terminal that looms over Buffalo’s East Side, a symbol for many of a past when the region was at various times, “a Gateway to the West,” “Queen City of the Lakes,” “World’s Largest Flour Milling Center,” and “Nation’s Second Largest Railroad Center.”

The region still has the geographic advantages that made it a commercial gateway in the past, Morse said, but taking advantage of them required a “willingness to innovate and take risks.” Gov. DeWitt Clinton was sharply criticized by some for his decision to construct the Erie Canal, which launched the village of Buffalo on the road to prosperity.

By 1887, according to an article that year in the New York Times, there was in Buffalo an association known as “The Boomers” spreading the word that the area had “natural advantages” that made it “the center of the earth around which all other cities shall revolve like the flies on the rim of a wheel.” Boomers were expected, the article reported, to “tickle the auricle of some outsider with a tale of Buffalo’s greatness for at least one hour each day.”

Morse emphasized the need for collaboration among the region’s leadership in meeting the challenges posed by a changing world. “The future does not equal the past,” he said, and the “gateway” opportunities can change. He cited coordination with Canadian transportation officials and with strategists at the University at Buffalo (UB), and other regional groups, as examples of innovation in the approach to planning.

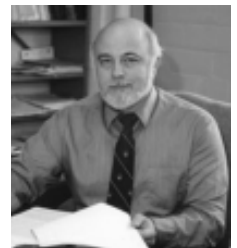
A Buffalo Comprehensive Plan adopted several years ago outlines a vision as follows: “In 2030 Buffalo will be the Queen City of the Great Lakes once more, growing again, renewed and rebuilt from its foundations, a model of smart growth and sustainability.”

The aim of the forum at the New York Central Terminal was described by its chief sponsor, the UB chapter of Engineers for a Sustainable World, as a collaborative event to bring together planners, policy makers, community members, academics, businessmen and visionaries “in a behemoth of Buffalo’s transportation past,” to initiate “a public dialogue about the region’s future in what is becoming an increasingly energy-driven society.”

Collaborators included the GBNRTC, the Central Terminal Restoration Corporation, the Flying Bison Brewery, and the University of Rochester (UR) Chapter of Engineers for a Sustainable World.

Ben W. Ebenhack, faculty adviser to the UR chapter, which is experimenting with using byproducts of the campus food service to help fuel the campus bus fleet, addressed the forum on the need to prepare over time for a transition away from the petroleum-based economy.

He projected that a peak in production of petroleum would probably not be reached before 2030 or 2040 but that shortages were likely to occur within five to 10 years because of growing demand that brings sharp increases in fuel prices. Temporary drops in price would only fuel greater increases over time, he said. And once production has peaked, he said, it would steadily decline and the petroleum that remained would be that which is most difficult to extract.



Ben W. Ebenhack

“The oil companies are going to try to meet the demand by producing from fields we never thought were economically viable before,” Ebenhack predicted. “But the reality is that shortages will come. Prices will go up dramatically. We’ll look back fondly on the days when gasoline was only four dollars a gallon and tell our children about those days.”

A part of the answer would be more efficient energy systems, he said. “Conservation is critically important.” There would also have to be a transition from petroleum to alternative sources of energy, but “it’s going to be a hard one because I don’t believe anything is ready to replace oil.”

He noted that more than an eighth of the world’s petroleum production goes to the American transportation. “There is no other single sector that stands to have such an impact on this global transition,” he said.

Adel Sadek of the UB Department of Civil, Structural and Environmental Engineering, emphasized the role of technological changes, such as those applied through Intelligent Transportation Systems, in achieving more efficient use of energy. Better fuel systems, improved management of roads and logistics and fleets and information systems, he said, were vital, along with “smart-growth” and better land use and greater use of public transit. A shorter work week and “more work at home” would help, he added.

Joseph Schwartz, from the Tonawanda plant of Praxair Inc., “the largest industrial gases company” in the Western Hemisphere, suggested that Western New York could play an important role if a “hydrogen economy” should prove to be feasible.

He declared that the largest source of renewable hydrogen in North America was at Niagara Falls, where Praxair has a liquid hy-



*Hal Morse addresses forum at terminal.*

drogen plant that energized the “Sequel,” a General Motors hydrogen fuel-celled vehicle developed at a plant in Monroe County. The car has been described by GM as “the world’s most technologically advanced automobile.”

Schwartz noted that there was already “a substantial hydrogen infrastructure, enough to fuel over 80 million cars,” and it could be distributed via pipelines, “just as gas is.” He acknowledged that “new and improved features” in the technology would be needed to “drive the growth of hydrogen use and infrastructure.”

Praxair was represented on the Steering Committee for development of a New York State Hydrogen Roadmap in 2005.

A state perspective was presented at the forum by Ron Hayes, representing the regional office of the New York State Department of Transportation. He said that NYSDOT has a broad program for encouraging more efficient transportation, ranging from a state rail plan for improvement of passenger and freight rail service to encouragement of bicycle and pedestrian facilities, roundabouts to replace traffic signals where appropriate, and promotion of public transit.

He cited NYSDOT’s improvements along the Buffalo waterfront as an example of its support for “smart growth.”

Robert Gower, of the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority, observed that there has been a significant increase in use of Metro buses and light rail. “We are starting to get capacity issues,” he said. “We need a lot more buses. We need about forty to fifty a year and have funding for about ten a year.” He expressed the hope that more federal funding would be forthcoming.

Seth Triggs of the Citizens Regional Transit Corporation, declared, “Public transit is one of the most critical elements for environmental conservation... We have developed our cities and suburbs to use as much fuel as possible.”

Robert Grosholz, manager of CSX facilities in the Buffalo and Syracuse areas, discussed the economic incentives for using the upgraded Seneca Yard in Lackawanna to ship freight and Creighton Randall and Adam Blair explained the economic and environmental benefits of their Buffalo CarShare program, initially aimed at Allentown, the Elmwood Village and Lower West Side in Buffalo.

UB’s Patrick Braun, who introduced the speakers, said the university’s Engineers for a Sustainable Future planned “to help community organizations with some of the design work to build on their momentum” in efforts to “restore the terminal as a community center.” He acknowledged there was “a long way to go before “transit can be restored to the terminal.”

# Alternative transportation may be the thing to do

Using alternative transportation is becoming an increasingly cool thing to do. In the not-so-distant past, taking public transit or carpooling, or biking, or walking to work were not the chic thing to do in some social circles.

The volatile price of gasoline, along with environmental and obesity concerns, are credited with making these mobility modes increasingly popular and even trendy.

The GBNRTC has updated its Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan in ways that emphasize, according to Holly Maietta, a transportation analyst, that transportation “must accommodate everybody, not just cars.” A new federal program offers grants to encourage walking and biking to schools.

Buffalo is the first city in the state to adopt a “Complete Streets Policy” that calls for streets and roads that routinely accommodate all travelers – drivers, transit users, pedestrians, bicyclists, older individuals, children and people with disabilities. It includes installation of bicycle racks in commercial districts.

Also, there has been a steady increase in commuters using the GBNRTC web site, at GoodGoing WNY, for alternative transportation, including carpooling, public transit and bicycling.

According to Barbara Courtney, a senior transportation analyst, an increasing number of employers have also signed up, including the University at Buffalo, M&T Bank, Blue.Cross/Blue Shield, the City of Buffalo, HSBC Mortgage Corporation, Ingram Micro, Mercy Hospital, Praxair, Sodexo. Others interested include Buffalo-Niagara Medical Campus, Daemen College, Hilbert College.

The most dramatic change has been in the ridership on the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority’s Metro Rail system, which increased by 45.9 percent in the second quarter of the year, the highest jump in the national average of a 12.3 percent increase. Bus ridership was up by 5.24 percent for the NFTA during the same quarter, compared with a national average of 5.1 percent.

And for the month of July alone, both national and regional public transit ridership was up by about 11 percent, with the NFTA reporting another 9.5 percent increase in August.

But bicycling is also increasingly popular. GBNRTC’s Executive Director Hal Morse is not only a patron of the Metro bus system but is an avid bicyclist. (He has even been known to run the eight miles from his office in downtown Buffalo to his home in West Seneca.)

The Bikes Belong Coalition, an industry organization, took a survey of summer sales in 2008 by 150 bicycle retailers in 40 states and reported that 73 percent said they were selling more bikes, 84 percent were selling more accessories and 88 percent

more service. And 95 percent of the retailers attributed the increase to volatile higher gas prices. “Areas where commuting is perceived as most difficult (such as Atlanta or Houston) are seeing less of a sales boom,” according to the survey.

The International Herald Tribune reported that bicycle sales had increased over the past five years by about 9 percent in the United States, compared with an increase of 14.6 percent among European nations, which “buy 70 percent of the bikes worldwide.” (China leads the world in the “number of bikes produced per year with about 73 million units of a total 100 million annually.”)

In Buffalo, Ethan Johnson of Campus Wheelworks on Elmwood Avenue, reported a 20 percent increase in sale of bikes in 2008 over 2007, “which was also a record year.” He said that some firms have “trouble keeping up with the demand for parts” for repairs. Another dealer reported about the same volume of business as in 2007.

When the Complete Streets Policy was announced in May, three members of the Common Council – Michael Kearns, Michael LoCurto and David Rivera, rode bicycles to work at City Hall. Kearns, the president pro tempore, frequently bikes to work from his home in the South District. Justin Booth of the Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo & WNY, who drafted the policy, routinely walks or bikes to work at City Hall from his West Side home.

Mayor Byron Brown, in collaboration with the Common Council and the Wellness Institute, announced the installation of 35 new bike racks last fall in business sectors, including those in Elmwood Village, Hertel and, Jefferson Avenues, and Allen and Seneca Streets.

The GBNRTC’s updated Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan envisions a region where “residents and visitors alike will be able to walk and ride a bicycle with confidence, safety and security in every local community.”

An inventory of the region’s sidewalk system is suggested to document the condition of existing locations and “disconnections and/or disruptions” that point up the need for more sidewalks..

“Intersections should have appropriate lane widths, pavement markings, adequate signal time, pedestrian signals” and “where appropriate, bike lanes and/or new demand-actuated signals that detect bicycles.”

Maietta said that maintenance of bike lanes is important, along with the use of bicycle-safe sewer grates, because impediments that motor-vehicle drivers don’t notice “can be hard on bicyclists.”

Bike parking, including indoor facilities, is recommended not only for municipal buildings but is encouraged for all public institutions, such as universities and hospitals, and for retail and shopping and apartment locations. “It would be nice for Bills fans to have a place to park their bicycles inside the stadium,” Maietta said.

The plan proposes “a seamless and convenient interface” with public transit for pedestrians, especially the disabled and elderly, and bicyclists, including bike parking at park-and-ride facilities. Fifty percent of NFTA’s buses, and all the new ones, currently are equipped with bike racks.

Educating motorists and pedestrians and bicyclists to understand and obey the law and “share the road” is another objective of the plan. This could be done with publicity and presentations, through organizations, web sites, schools, police departments, etc.

A recent example is the action of the Buffalo Police Athletic League in giving more than 260 bicycle safety helmets to pupils in the 79<sup>th</sup> Street Elementary School at Niagara Falls. Donors included BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York, State Farm Insurance and Upstate New York Transplant Services.

“I think there is certainly a greater recognition now that taking public transit or walking or bicycling are more acceptable,” said Morse. “Working downtown now it seems I see more people every day riding bicycles to work, looking for places to park them, so it certainly has picked up quite a bit.

“A lot of people feel challenged by the volatile price of gasoline but feel they can’t do much about it. My point is that you can start out modestly by taking public transit or riding a bike or walking to work maybe once a week. That will save money on your gas bill and it may mean that you can save time by not having to go to the gym that day.”

# Walking and biking to school encouraged

“Research indicates that overweight children may do more poorly in school,” according to Buffalo’s superintendent of public schools, James Williams. “Studies show almost 50 percent of Buffalo school-children are overweight or obese,” he added.

He joined Mayor Brown in emphasizing the city’s plan, in collaboration with the Green Options Buffalo, to use a federal grant of \$550,000 for a ground-breaking Safe Routes to School Program (SRTS) to encourage physical activity among pupils. Additional funding from the city and various organizations, provide a total of some \$1.6 million for the project.

The Town of Amherst also received a \$550,000 SRTS grant for a project in the Williamsville Central School District and another \$57,000 went to a school project in the Town of Grand Island. Greg Szewczyk, a planner with the regional office of the New York State Transportation Department, is the area coordinator.

Assunta Ventresca, director of health-related services for Buffalo schools, declared, “Students who walk/bike are ready to learn. Research shows there is a connection between exercise and brain performance. Studies show that even moderate exercise will supercharge mental circuits to sharpen thinking and enhance memory.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported that “physical inactivity and childhood obesity are at crisis proportions in America” with more than 33 percent of children and adolescents now overweight or obese.

A report by the National Safe Routes to School Task Force warned that “the prevalence of obesity is so great that, due to compounding health effects, today’s generation of children may be the first in over

200 years to live less healthy and have a shorter lifespan than their parents.”

The American Heart Association recommends that children and adolescents participate in at least 420 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per week. “In comparison, the number of minutes per week that the average child watches television is 1,680.” Research has been cited as indicating that television, in contrast to reading, tends to tune out the part of the brain that processes information logically and analytically.

Another factor has been the cost of school bus transportation. According to the School Transportation News, an increase of only 5 percent in the percentage of kids walking and bicycling to school in New York State would save more than \$57 million a year. Total cost of school bussing in the state was put at \$1.1 billion annually or \$441.87 per pupil.

One of the problems, according to the National Task Force, is that “those who do still walk or bicycle to school often face traffic safety hazards that can overshadow any perceived benefits of the activity.”

The focus of the SRTS grant for Buffalo, and of city funding, will be on infrastructure improvements adjacent to the Hamlin Park School No. 74 to provide pupils with “quality conditions for walking and riding their bicycles to school.”

These include marked crosswalks with enhanced treatments, traffic signal replacements with pedestrian countdown timers, new signage, curb ramps and extensions and pedestrian scaled lighting. The Police Department is committed to enforce traffic rules.

But the program also includes a city-wide social marketing campaign, efforts at other schools, support for the Recycle-A-Bicycle effort and a Walking School Buys/Bicycle Train program that involves parent participation.

“Hamlin Park could be a role model for other schools,” said Ventresca, “transforming it to a community school with more than 800 potential students living in a one-mile radius.”

According to the city’s grant application, drafted by Green Options Buffalo’s Justin Booth, who is also the State Network Organizer for the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, “the impact of the program will extend well beyond the

(Hamlin Park) school population.” Two other schools, not yet identified, will be early targets, according to the application.

Hamlin Park, “an historic preservation district,” has been designated by the city as “a neighborhood of choice” with “homes of exceptional quality,” low vacancy and crime rates compared to the rest of the city, and connections to Metro rail and bus routes “as well as successful business districts.”

Some 100 volunteers recently planted 273 trees, of 10 different species, in the neighborhood in a partnership between Re-Tree Western New York and the Hamlin Park Taxpayers Association.

Another factor in its selection for the SRTS grant is that “more than 30 percent of the (School 74) students currently are not bussed to school.”

The Amherst grant will be used for infrastructure projects affecting four schools in the Williamsville Central School District and SRTS education by the school district that will include a general assembly, posters, handouts and an interactive program with the University at Buffalo. In addition the Amherst Police Department will provide a trailer that displays driver speeds in school zones and the Town of Amherst will administer an evaluation of the projects.

Infrastructure projects at the Williamsville schools are as follows:

Country Parkway Elementary School – Sidewalks within a half mile of school grounds on Country Parkway, Hollywood Drive, Fifth Avenue and Bauman Road.

Dodge Elementary School – An 8-foot wide “connector path” between the end of Lillyridge Drive and the school.

Heim Elementary and Middle Schools – Sidewalks along sections of Heim Road, Swanson Terrace and Cottonwood Drive.

Maple East and Maple West Elementary Schools – Installation of ADA (Americans With Disabilities Act) compliant curb ramps along Maple Road.

The Grand Island grant will finance installation of new sidewalk segments on local streets surrounding Kaegebein Elementary School and to reconstruct a portion of the Love Road Pathway.



Peter Merlo, at right, with Thomas DeSantis.

## Merlo is 2009 PCC chairman

Buffalo City Engineer Peter Merlo has been unanimously elected to succeed Niagara Falls Senior Planner Thomas DeSantis as chairman of the Planning and Coordinating Committee of the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council.

The chairmanship of the committee is rotated annually among the committee members, who also include representatives of Erie and Niagara County governments, the NFTA, the Thruway Authority and the State Department of Transportation.

Merlo stressed the need for cooperation among the government agencies of Erie and Niagara Counties during a period of financial challenge in meeting transportation needs.

He told the committee: “I have been very impressed with the level of cooperation while working with DeSantis and that needs to be maintained, and even improved if possible, now that we are facing even tougher economic challenges and the dollars are getting tighter.”

Mayor Byron Brown appointed Merlo in May of 2007. A licensed New York State professional engineer, Merlo worked at R&D Engineering, P.C. from 1995 through March 2001, before joining the city’s Division of water as an associate engineer and becoming principal engineer in 2005.

# Meeting Calendar

## Planning and Coordinating Committee (PCC)

meetings begin at 9:30 A.M.

- February 4 Buffalo**  
City Hall, Niagara Square  
Buffalo, New York
- March 4 Erie County**  
Rath Building  
Buffalo, New York
- April 1 New York State Department of Transportation**  
100 Seneca Street  
Buffalo, 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:"**



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

## Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council

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