

GBNRTC

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

UB Master Plan fits vision of mega-region



Buffalo-Niagara Bio-medical campus

There has been growing speculation that the Buffalo-Niagara area is part of a Great Lakes mega-region that has the potential to flourish in a global economy.

For example, that is a view expressed by Robert Shibley, director of the University at Buffalo's Urban Design Project, who is supervising UB's ambitious Master Plan for a 40 percent growth in students and faculty and academic enhancements that would transform it into "a model 21st Century University" by the year 2020.

Shibley and Elizabeth Cheteney, director of planning for the Urban Design Project, have initiated a collaboration with the GBNRTC for developing a transportation and land-use strategy that would support the university's goals, which could have a major impact on the economic future of the region.

The strategy will be produced by an Advisory Committee that includes GBNRTC's Executive Director Hal Morse and Transportation Analyst Amy Weymouth, as well as Shibley and Cheteney and representatives of the New York State Department of Transportation, Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority and the Town of Amherst and the City of Buffalo. A stakeholders group may also be named to work with the committee.

A "seamless inter-connectivity" between the North and South Cam-



UB North campus

puses and the Buffalo-Niagara Bio-medical Campus (BNMC) is among the goals for the UB Master Plan. The BNMC is frequently cited as a key symbol of regional progress in an era when economic competitiveness seems increasingly associated



UB South campus

with skilled training in the sciences, including the medical and computer fields.

An estimated 550 to 600 turned out in December for a forum on the Master Plan at the UB Downtown Gateway, adjacent to the BNMC in the former M. Wile Building on Goodell Street, to hear President John B. Simpson, Shibley and others outline the plan to make UB "one of the nation's truly outstanding research universities."

Shibley had been quoted in the

First Quarter 2008

- UB Master Plan fits vision of mega-region
- Does transportation go in cycles?
- Using transportation to improve the community
- Congestion in Buffalo-Niagara still relatively low
- Rand Corp. finds age a factor in driving risk

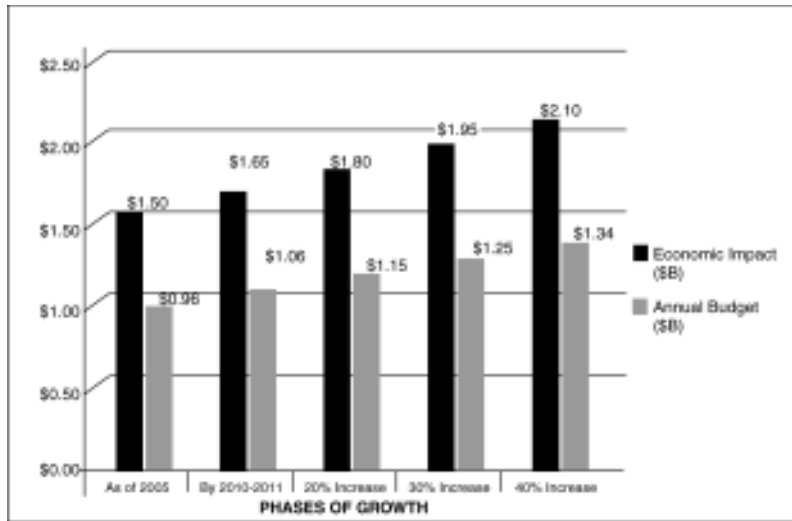
Toronto Star as emphasizing that the Great Lakes Basin, with less than a half percent of the world's population, was "within easy reach of a quarter of the planet's fresh water," a consideration that would have increasing significance as other regions are forced to deal with water shortages.

And a recent article in the Toronto Globe and Mail by Richard Florida, a former visiting professor at UB, described Toronto as a part of "one of the world's great mega-regions, a trans-border powerhouse that stretches from Buffalo to Quebec City." He added, "It's important to recognize this, because mega-regions have replaced the nation state as the economic drivers of the global economy."

Morse has proposed that the "Golden Horseshoe," a Canadian term for Southern Ontario, be amplified to include the Buffalo-Niagara and Rochester regions to reflect this emerging economic reality.



Florida, now a professor at the University of Toronto, declared that "border or no border and heightened post 9/11 security notwithstanding," Toronto and Buffalo are "effectively part of the same mega region – let's call it Tor-Buff-Chester (for Rochester) – with 22 million people and \$530 billion in economic activity,



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making it the 12th largest mega region in the world and fifth largest in North America."

Shibley, a senior adviser to Simpson, noted that the U.S. government has projected a national population increase of almost 50 percent by 2050, with much of the growth in the Southwest, which faces a growing water crisis that could not be solved by "sticking a straw in the Great Lakes."

"You're going to have 150 million people living in at least seven of the major regions that don't have water, don't have carrying capacity, can't feed themselves," he said. "It's

an ecological disaster waiting to happen. So there's good reason to think that people should come back to the Northeast, where we do have the carrying capacity and have the water.

"We're so focused on the cost of keeping large populations in the Southwest that we haven't considered anywhere near enough the cost

of leaving them out there long term. All of this is going to come home to roost, and as a society, we're going to have to figure out lower impact ways of delivering quality of life. We can do that right here, right now."

An October issue of Rolling Stone magazine suggested: "In the event of a mass exodus from New York City (possible with a significant sea-level rise), many Manhattanites may flee northward, past the expensive Connecticut suburbs and into the former Rust Belt cities – Buffalo, Rochester, Albany, Syracuse – of Upstate New York."

"Maybe it's time to think about what constitutes need and stop spending money to build carrying capacity in places that don't have it by nature and start investing in places that do," declared Shibley in The Toronto Star article.

Florida, in the Globe and Mail, suggested that the interest by the Buffalo Bills in playing two games in Toronto "makes sense," not only because "the market for American-style football in Toronto is huge," but because the Buffalo-Toronto corridor has evolved into "a single economic entity — a mega region, in other words."

Does transportation go in cycles?

The growing popularity of bicycling evokes memories of the area's history as a "hot bed" for the flourishing bicycle culture that characterized the nation's transportation in the late 19th Century.

"We don't have any hard facts but you can just go out there on any day and notice more bicyclists," said Justin Booth, founder of the expanding Blue Bicycle Program established by the Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo and WNY.

Despite the institute's limited financial resources, membership in the bicycle-lending program "has grown tremendously," according to Booth, "especially with the University at Buffalo (UB) coming on board by providing six Blue Bicycle racks at its North and South Campuses," supplementing "our conveniently located hubs across the city."

The Wellness Institute has spearheaded a move supported by the City of Buffalo, to relocate Orchard Park's Pedaling History Bicycle Museum, which has the nation's "largest collection of bicycling heritage," to the restored Erie Canal Harbor, historic site of the George N. Pierce Company, an early manufacturer of bicycles. An Erie Canal-Great Lakes Transportation Museum has also been proposed near the site. Consideration of it by the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation's Board of Directors is in its preliminary stages.

According to Carl Burgwardt, who, with his wife Clary is owner of the bicycle museum, Buffalo in the late 19th Century was a national "hotbed in bicycle manufacturing and racing" with more than 336 bicycle businesses, including 79 manufacturers and 136 dealers and repairers. Burgwardt is au-

thor of "Buffalo's Bicycles," a book on the city's "colossal and overlooked bicycle heritage."

Booth says that a relocation of the museum to the waterfront, with its convenient access to a Shoreline-Greenways system,

would enhance the historic resonance and tourism potential of the Erie Canal Harbor site.

"The bicycle was the first non-animal-powered 'vehicle' to need improved roads," says Burgwardt. And Buffalo and Western New York, because of their strong bicycle culture, became "renowned as having more paved roads than London and Paris combined, more than 500 miles of them," at a time when there was "no more than a handful of automobiles in America."

According to the Wellness Institute's application for a transportation enhancement grant to help fund relocation of the museum, "the knowledge of bicycles being the catalyst leading to all of man's personal transportation of today has often gone unnoticed...."

"Roads, road building, road signs, road maps and rules of the road were quickly required due to the bicycle's use...."

"In 1896 Susan B. Anthony said that 'the bicycle has done more for the emancipation of women than anything else in the world.'"

In his book, Burgwardt reports that a Buffalo Bicycle Club was organized in 1879 by the city's first four bicyclists. "A bicycle racing club bearing the same name still exists," he notes, "but unfortunately it has not been in continuous operation."

The grant application states that the bicycle can even be related to the development of the windshield wiper at Buffalo:

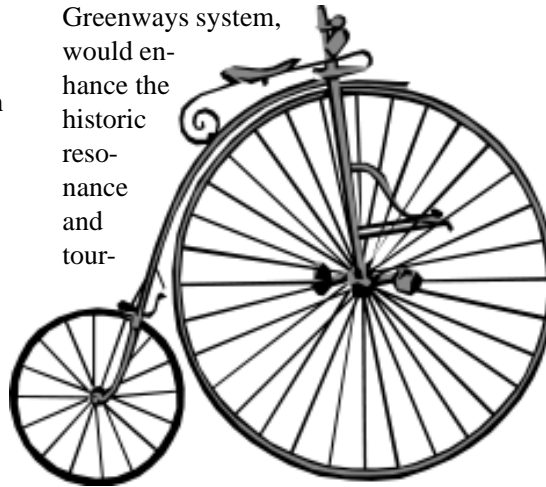
"Buffalo's Trico Corporation, maker of the original windshield wipers, would not have existed without a 1917 accident when a young theater owner named John Oshei, while driving an early Pierce Arrow automobile at night during a heavy rainstorm, hit a bicyclist because he was unable to see him. He was so shaken by the incident that it inspired him to immediately improve and perfect the windshield wiper."

Booth attributes a renewed interest in bicycling to a combination of factors, including the growing concern over obesity as well as traffic congestion and environmental issues.

"There is this obesity epidemic in adults and in the kids — kids as young as 12 are getting diabetes. One-mile trips by bicycle to school or work is being encouraged. There is the surgeon general's recommendation of 30 minutes of physical activity every day."

"And then there is Al Gore's warnings about the need to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions associated with global warming."

The "Bicycling at UB" program, which also includes the university's first bicycle registration system, and



bike racks on buses that operate between the North and South Campuses, is motivated by an increasing focus on environmental and health issues as well as a parking congestion.

James Simon of UB Green said the program is “a great step toward moving people away from single-occupancy vehicles and driving to campus.” He added that 31 percent of UB’s greenhouse-gas emissions comes from motor vehicles. An environmental group has also been instrumental in establishing a bicycling program at Buffalo State College.

Partly because of the region’s air-pollution issues, GBNRTC’s transportation plans in recent years have increasingly encouraged bicycling trails, and roadway accommodation. The New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) has a policy of providing roadway space for bicycling on new construction and uses signage that designates some corridors as “bicycle routes.”

Greg Szewczyk, NYSDOT’s bicycling and pedestrian coordinator, is chairman of a representative Bicycle/Pedestrian Subcommittee that helps the GBNRTC in the continuous updating of its Bicycle Master Plan for Erie and Niagara Counties. The GBNRTC free Bicycle Route Guide for the two counties has been widely circulated.

Since 2004, the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) has included bicycle racks for two bikes on all its new buses. Robert Gower, NFTA representative on the GBNRTC Planning and Coordinating Committee, said his agency will have information on its website, nfta.com, by next spring that will show how to use the racks, which are attached to the fronts of the buses.

Currently with only 25 per cent of NFTA’s fleet equipped with racks it is very difficult to insure which routes and trips will have a bus with a rack on any given day. NFTA is considering a pilot program for next summer, which would identify a few routes that would be assigned buses with racks. Bicyclists

can take their bikes on Metro Rail at any time, but should follow a list of rules and safety tips posted on NFTA’s website.

Booth acknowledged that despite the progress that has been made toward encouraging the bicycle culture “there are a lot of growing pains.” He noted that the Wellness Institute, as well as the NFTA, rely heavily on computer technology to relay information about their bicycle programs.

“The City of Buffalo has been identified as among the poorest large



UB buses equipped with bike rack.

cities in the country, with, I believe, a 26 percent poverty level,” he said. “And the Census data shows that almost 31 percent of households in the city do not have a motor vehicle. What is the probability that they will have a computer?”

“The need for more bicycling facilities is out there. We need to provide more options for these people to travel around, from walking to cycling to access to transit... All the studies have shown that access and convenience would drive the demand for bicycling and walking.”

“I was recently reading the GBNRTC Bicycle Master Plan and ... I found that the City of Buffalo had adopted in 1997 a Bicycle Route Network Master Plan. I’m not sure how far that has been developed. I’ve been trying to get a copy of it. But nobody seems to have one.”

The Blue Bicycle Program has not reached its full potential because of a

shortage of funding, he said. There are cities in Europe, for example, he said, that have achieved this potential with as many as 10,500 bicycles and 750 racks as part of their public transit system.

The Wellness Institute has applied for federal funding through the CMAQ (Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality) program to support Blue Bicycles.

Booth is also chairman of a Bicycle-Pedestrian Advisory Board to the Common Council that will “identify some of the issues and come up with some solutions and present them to the Council.

“And we’re also gotten a grant ... working with others ... to develop a bicycle-pedestrian transit access plan for downtown Buffalo.”

He said that “one of the most urgent needs” was for both bicyclists and motorists to become more mindful of safety issues and “the rules of the road.” For bicyclists this includes wearing a helmet and riding on the correct side of the street.

“Drivers,” he said, “tend to think of bicyclists as “second-class citizens – and there is also a belief that bicycles are for children or only for recreation, rather than for transportation. People need to know that bicyclists do have rights to the road and can ride abreast in traffic. We have to get past the myth that a bicyclist should be on the sidewalk, where he or she may put pedestrians in danger.”

Membership in the Blue Bicycle Program, at www.buffalobluebicycle.org, requires a donation of \$25 per season, or six hours of volunteer work fixing and maintaining bicycles.

Booth says he still bicycles to work at his office in City Hall “whenever I’m too lazy to walk” from his West Side home.

Using transportation to improve the community

There is a growing emphasis upon using transportation investment “as a way to improve the community rather than as a way to get through the community.”

That’s the theme of a report on integrated planning by the Association of New York State Metropolitan Planning Organizations (NYSMPOS), which comprises the state’s 13 MPOs, including the GBNRTC.

“Successfully developing community-based transportation projects can be challenging, in part because this approach deviates from traditional project-development processes ... this new approach requires more time and effort,” according to NYSMPOS.

“The strong sense of community created by well-designed development and transportation projects has become increasingly important in the competitive marketplace.”

The report cited ten “exemplary” cases in the state of integrated transportation and community vision, including the 1990s improvement of the Delaware Avenue sector along Delaware Park to provide “a safe and efficient transportation corridor while also accommodating community and historic goals.”

A key feature of the sector is its distinctive “S” curves, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux to produce a winding picturesque boulevard and to slow travelers. However, “because the road transitions from a state arterial to an avenue through the park, motorists frequently entered at speeds higher than those for which the road was designed.” Also, poor drainage often created wet or icy conditions. The result was “an unacceptably high rate of vehicle crashes.”

From an engineering perspective, the roadway design was outdated and unsafe. But from the perspective of such citizen groups as the Olmsted Park Conservancy the original design of the park had already been deeply compromised by such projects as the Scajaquada Expressway and they “strongly opposed further changes to any aspect of the park, including straightening or flattening portions of the ‘S’ curves” in ways that would intrude upon the park or the adjacent Forest Lawn Cemetery.

The City of Buffalo worked with the regional MPO, then known as the Niagara Frontier Transportation Committee (NFTC), to get the project on the region’s Transportation Im-



Delaware Avenue “S” curves designed by Olmsted.

provement Program (TIP) with the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) responsible for administration and design.

NYSDOT, “acknowledging the historic significance of the roadway and the importance of Delaware Park to the community,” enlisted a Study Steering Committee, including representatives of the city and key citizen groups, “as a partner in the process.”

In an elaborate balancing strategy, NYSDOT carried out a series of engineering and research analyzes while holding a widespread public outreach campaign. It was “one of the first times that NYSDOT made extensive use of visual and graphic materials, including aerial photography and visual simulations to ensure that design alternatives were clearly communicated to the public.”

In the end, NYSDOT “updated roadside and median strip landscape designs to retain as many of the original Olmsted features as possible. The avenue was also downsized from six to four lanes through the park “to make room for” pedestrian and bicycle facilities. “Roadway safety standards were addressed while minimizing impact to adjacent park lands and historic resources.”

More recently, the GBNRTC has collaborated with NYSDOT, the City of Buffalo and citizen groups on a plan to modify the Scajaquada Expressway into a boulevard that would harmonize with the adjacent Delaware Park and other cultural and educational settings.

“When a road passes through a town, village or city, it should be considered as a ‘community street,’ the NYSMPOS report declares. “Although automobile level of service and safety are important parts of the equation, they should not be prioritized above all else.”

The NYSMPOS is also providing grants for three case studies in the state on transit-supportive development, including one involving the University at Buffalo’s plan for “a shared future” with the region.

Congestion in Buffalo-Niagara still relatively low



Commuters in the Buffalo-Niagara metropolitan area experienced the least peak-hour traffic delay among the largest metro areas in the nation in 2005.

That's the finding in a 2007 Urban Mobility Report by the Texas Transportation Institute.

The average annual delay per traveler was 11 hours, lower than that for any other large (1 million to 3 million) metro area. It was also lower than the delays reported for the nation's very large (more than 3 million) metro areas. The longest delays were 72 hours for Los Angeles as a very large metro area and San Diego as a large one.

Total annual travel delay for the Buffalo-Niagara area was placed at 5,852 hours, compared with 169,278 hours for Los Angeles and 33,809 for San Diego.

Wasted fuel per year, as a result of peak-hour congestion, was placed at 7 gallons for the area commuter, compared with 38 gallons for his or her counterpart in Los Angeles and 25 gallons in San Diego. Annual figures were 3,685 gallons for the area and 120,127 gallons and 23,366 gallons for the California centers.

Among a sampling of 85 urban areas, including medium and small ones, the Buffalo-Niagara area ranked 77th in the nation for peak-hour traffic delay and 76th for wasted fuel.

The annual cost of congestion for the Buffalo-Niagara metro area peak-hour traveler was estimated at \$208. Total cost to the community was put at \$112 mil-

lion, compared with \$3.2 billion for LA and \$1.7 billion for San Diego. The figures were based upon a value of \$14.60 per hour of person travel and \$77.10 per hour of truck time as well as excess fuel consumption.

Despite the area's relatively favorable ranking for 2005, there has been a significant increase of 8 hours in peak-hour traffic delay since 1982, which was still third best among very large and large metro areas but behind both Pittsburgh and New Orleans, where delays increased respectively by 5 hours and 2 hours since 1982.

The report notes that on a national level congestion (based upon the 2005 figures) causes the average peak-period traveler to spend an extra 38 hours of travel time and consume an additional 26 gallons of fuel, amounting to a cost of \$710 per traveler. The report estimated the effect of congestion for all 437 U.S. urban areas with detailed information for 85 specific areas, including Buffalo-Niagara.

"The daily frustration of drivers on our roads is ample evidence that our current transportation model is broken and that bold thinking and leadership are needed," declared U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Mary Peters. "We're never going to solve congestion with higher federal gas taxes or additional earmarks. Instead we need fresh approaches like new technology, congestion pricing and greater private sector investment to get Americans moving again."

Rand Corp. finds age a factor in driving risk

“More public attention should be given to reducing the riskiness of younger drivers.”

That’s one of the conclusions of a recent RAND Corporation investigation into the risk posed by older drivers.

“Our most important finding is that older drivers,” 65 and older, are “not that much riskier than adult drivers,” age 26 to 64, and “far less risky” than drivers between the ages of 18 to 25, the authors declare in their summary.

“Older drivers are 16 percent likelier to cause a crash than adult drivers are. While that difference is significant, it is perhaps far smaller than the conventional wisdom, fueled by anecdote, would imply that it would be.

“And it is nowhere near the risk that younger drivers pose to the public... both because they are likelier to cause a crash and because they drive many more miles. The youngest drivers are 188 percent likelier than adult drivers to cause a crash.”

Older drivers, “who represent 15 percent of all licensed drivers, cause 7 percent of all two-car accidents (both fatal and non-fatal). Younger drivers, on the other hand, who represent 13 percent of all licensed drivers, cause 43 percent of all two-car accidents.”

However, the study finds that older drivers, because of increased frailty, are “considerably more likely to be killed” in an accident. “The main danger they pose on the road is not to others but to themselves.”

Older drivers go 38 percent fewer miles than adult drivers and the younger about 54 percent more miles.

“Why, one might ask, do older drivers not appear riskier, given medical evidence that establishes that their

driving skill declines with age? We propose that the answer is that older drivers change their driving habits to compensate for their diminished competence behind the wheel.”

The conclusion of the authors is that a significant number of “the most dangerous” older drivers stop driving because of pressure from relatives, social agencies, physicians, etc. And the evidence indicates that those who continue to operate motor vehicles drive less and tend to “avoid road conditions that put them at greater risk.”

The study finds that “the relative riskiness of older drivers changed little between the early 1970s and the last period of our data, 1998-2003, a time during which many states adopted stricter licensing requirements for older drivers.”

It estimates that, as the U.S. population ages, the number of traffic accidents per capita, could fall, because aging drivers drive less, although the seriousness of those accidents might increase because of their greater frailty.

“Our analysis shows that younger drivers pose a much greater threat to the public than do drivers of any other age group. Because they drive so much more frequently and they cause such a high proportion of all accidents, reducing their riskiness by even a modest fraction would have far greater effect in terms of lives saved and injuries avoided than reducing the riskiness of older drivers by such a fraction.”

The lead author of the report, entitled “Regulating Older Drivers: Are new Policies Needed?” was David Loughran, a RAND senior economist.

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Meeting Calendar

Planning and Coordinating Committee (PCC)

meetings begin at 9:30 A.M.

- February 6 Buffalo**
City Hall
Buffalo, New York
- March 5 Erie County**
95 Franklin Street
Buffalo, New York
- April 2 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.



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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

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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

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City of Niagara Falls
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Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council

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