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Eastside-Airport Metro Rail Extension

Citizens for Regional Transit

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Eastside-Airport Metro Rail Extension

Abstract

"This policy brief provides information regarding the expansion of NFTA metro-rail services in east-side Buffalo to the Buffalo Niagara International Airport.

This extension would connect Buffalo's highest-demand destinations (including Larkinville, Central Terminal, the Walden Galleria, and the airport) while simultaneously serving Buffalo's neediest populations with rapid mobility and opportunities for community redevelopment. This Eastside-Airport extension was part of the original LRRT plan and was recommended for study by the NFTA as recently as 2010. The NFTA 2010 study rated the Eastside-Airport extension as highest in the category of potential development (now known as Transit Oriented Development or TOD) and high in categories of market intensity and ridership per line mile. Funds should be found for studying the Eastside-Airport extension while the Amherst extension is designed and completed, so that it can progress towards shovel-ready status as funds become available. As this extension would run above ground, mostly on disused rail rights-of-way (ROWs), trains could transport passengers at high speed without the high costs associated with tunneling. Public ownership of these ROWs also makes this investment especially cost-effective, while the fact that this alignment is separate and away from streets, also minimizes disruption to traffic and businesses during construction.

The world is changing in ways that demand a bold new vision for mobility based on clean, reliable public transportation. The largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Erie County is not electrical energy generation or industry, but rather transportation (at 40%, primarily from cars). If we expect people to drive less, alternatives must be provided.

This is also a matter of equal access to jobs, food, healthcare, education, recreation, and cultural amenities. Thirty percent of Buffalo households do not own cars. This includes seniors, the disabled, and those who cannot afford cars. The annual cost of car ownership ($10,000) and road maintenance ($25,000 per lane mile) puts a strain on family and municipal budgets alike. Millennials with the option to drive are increasingly choosing not to – and are attracted to cities that provide other mobility options. For all of the above reasons, a solid commitment to expanded, efficient public transportation must undergird our plans for a just, successful, and sustainable future."

Keywords

economic development, high road, environment, land use, transit, civil rights, neighborhoods, poverty, income inequality

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EASTSIDE – AIRPORT METRO RAIL EXTENSION

With proposed stations; not to scale

LEGEND

- Park & Ride for reducing congestion
- Connecting bus routes

Diagram by Seth Triggs, Citizens for Regional Transit
Version 1.1: 16 June 2019

Estimated Construction Costs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance (miles)</th>
<th>Canalside to Larkinville</th>
<th>Larkinville to Central Terminal</th>
<th>Central Terminal to Galleria</th>
<th>Galleria to Airport</th>
<th>Airport to Transit Road</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Segment Cost</td>
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<td>Cumulative Cost</td>
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<td>$200M</td>
<td>$450M</td>
<td>$550M</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Light rail construction costs range from $20M per mile to $60M per mile ($50M/Mile used here)
THE EASTSIDE – AIRPORT METRO RAIL EXTENSION

Why is Eastside - Airport a priority?

- Provides a fast, one-seat ride between downtown Buffalo and the Buffalo Niagara International Airport, aboveground on disused railway we already own.
- Links WNY’s highest demand destinations (per One Region Forward public outreach\(^1\)) including Larkinville, Central Terminal, Walden Galleria, and the airport.
- Extends from the southern end of the existing Main Street line, connecting all the new destinations above with Canalside, sports venues, Central Business District, Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, Theater District (including Chippewa Street), Canisius College, and all UB campuses.
- Highest development potential corridor per NFTA 2010 study\(^2\); builds on $726 million in Eastside investments\(^3\)
- Efficiently serves visitors, city and suburban commuters, cyclists, and those without cars – a valuable green amenity for everyone. Also satisfies tourism and convention business demands.
- Provides intermodal connectivity between the airport and Amtrak (Exchange Street Station) with potential to connect to a future Amtrak / transportation hub at Central Terminal.
- Park-and-Rides collect commuters from Clarence, Cheektowaga, Depew, Lancaster, and others arriving by the I-90, relieving parking pressures downtown and on city neighborhood streets.

Why Rail and not just more buses?

- Runs on clean, renewable hydroelectricity from Niagara Falls. Brakes recover electricity, “recycling” power to propel trains.
- Builds on Buffalo’s existing light rail investment (now valued at $2 billion) while adaptively re-using our legacy railroad assets for 21st century needs.
- Offers shortest travel time between destinations, carrying more people with less energy and emissions than any other mode.

Each train (4-cars) carries 560 people\(^4\)  

Capacity of 8 buses\(^5\)

Can replace anywhere from 140 to 560 cars every 10 minutes (270 shown here)

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\(^2\) NFTA Erie County Transit Service Restructuring and Fare Study – Strategic Assessment. August, 2010.

\(^3\) Article, Business First, Fall 2018 Build WNY magazine

\(^4\) RAILFAN GUIDES of the U.S. > Todd’s Railfan Guide to the Buffalo, NY NFTA Light Rail System (http://www.railfanguides.us/ny/buffalo/lightrail/index.htm)


Version 1.1: 16 June 2019