

December 29, 2003

Genesee Transportation Council
ATTN - LRTP: 2005-2025
50 West Main Street, Suite 8112
Rochester, New York 14614-1227

Dear GTC Staff Members:

As part of the Public Comment Period for the GTC's *Long-Range Transportation Planning* process, I'd like to amplify some of the challenges and opportunities that I believe can be addressed through transportation solutions—some of these I had introduced briefly at the Public Input Session held in the Town of Pittsford. These areas of opportunity include:

Economic Development

The Greater Rochester Area unfortunately has experienced a prolonged state of economic decline, characterized by corporate layoffs and downsizings, profound changes in the industries that comprise Rochester's employment base, and challenges for non-local business people to reach destinations in our community for meetings and other transactional activities.

Additionally, Greater Rochester has experienced a sustained outflow of talented, ambitious college graduates and grad-school graduates from our area. This continues to occur in part due to limited employment opportunities, but also due to the perception held by local students that there is little to do around Rochester, and few similar (single) people to meet. Contributing to this phenomenon is the lack of an attractive public transportation mode to bring students to the currently disconnected campuses of the U of R, RIT, Nazareth College, St. John Fisher College, SUNY Brockport, etc. These students also lack an attractive means, absent personal automobiles, to reach cultural or entertainment options in the core of Downtown Rochester. *The key opportunity exists to connect our area college students not only to each other, but also to downtown entertainment, sporting and cultural activities, doing so in an attractive and historically significant way.*

Tourism has long been an important component of our local economy, and will soon become an even greater contributor to the long-term health of our community. In the face of rising demands for tax revenues, the prospect of collecting taxes from more people is far preferable to collecting more taxes from the same people. Put differently, our ability to attract new people to this community and capture sales tax revenues (from tourists) and/or property tax revenues (from new residents) will be key to community growth.

Transportation has a key role to play in this regard, by expanding to provide the means to connect visitors and residents with the tourist destinations, activity centers, and population centers so as to facilitate movement throughout our community. *Additionally, the transportation system can come to be viewed as a destination in and of itself, a distinctive and defining feature of our community, rather than simply infrastructure.* An example of this phenomenon is the famous streetcar lines in New Orleans that double as public transit and recreational transport, or even San Francisco's famed cable car system.

The upcoming operation of Rochester's Fast Ferry provides a stimulus for additional tourism-based connections. Visitors from Toronto and beyond represent a great new opportunity to introduce our

community as the gem of Upstate New York, and as a new source of tourism (and sales tax) revenues. However, attractive public transportation means have not yet been developed to connect Fast Ferry passengers with our Downtown core or even other suburban and regional destinations and activity centers. *The opportunity exists to explore, identify and implement attractive transportation options to connect Rochester's Port and incoming visitors with Downtown and other Greater Rochester destinations.* Important to note is that Torontonians are intimately acquainted with both streetcars and an extensive subway system: permanent, rail-based public transportation systems.

Additionally, expansion of existing transportation systems, as well as developing new transportation modes, can bring economic benefits through local infrastructure investment, and creating both temporary construction jobs and permanent employment for operating and maintenance staff. *Expansion of the transportation system can also provide a needed stimulus for corridor renewal and redevelopment, creating new destinations and economic development districts that uplift our community and businesses located in these districts.* Providing more effective and attractive connections to the Greater Rochester International Airport can also provide improved ingress and egress to our community for business travelers and visitors alike.

Land Use

Increasingly, land is being consumed through sprawl, whether for housing tracts, suburban office parks, or retail expansion (malls). While this negatively impacts our community's remaining green space, much of these virgin lands are consumed and ultimately paved over to provide parking spaces for these destinations. The vast majority of these destinations, whether retail, employment center, or recreation center, are simply not served by transportation means other than roads and passenger automobiles.

Additionally, the increased suburban activity has placed a greater reliance on our existing roadways, especially in supporting single-occupant vehicles. The prospect of consuming additional land to expand roadways, whether in highly-populated or in low-density areas, represents a poor use of land. *Opportunities exist to maximize the effectiveness of the existing transportation footprint, including existing roads and highways, as well as existing but unused transportation corridors, such as former railroad rights-of-way.* Reusing these types of transportation corridors can help reduce the consumption of highly-valued land.

This sentiment also can be applied in part to the expansion of our regional trail system. Repurposing dormant transportation corridors into multi-use trails is an economical way to add coverage and enhance the quality of life for local residents. However, maximum stewardship of these scarce, valuable resources would integrate multi-use recreational trails with safe, quiet, environmentally-friendly mechanized modes of public transportation. The existing rights-of-way generally connect population and activity centers in a roughly linear fashion, providing aesthetically pleasing alternatives to streets and roadways. *The opportunity exists to make maximum use of these linear transportation corridors through safe combinations of motorized and non-motorized transportation uses.*

The Environment

As mentioned above, the predominant form of transportation in our community is the single-occupant passenger vehicle, driven between home, work, shopping, and other recreational and/or family activities. This represents a difficult environmental challenge for our community, as well as an opportunity to reduce emissions from fossil-fuel-powered private vehicles. Put differently, *the opportunity exists to*

explore, identify, and implement attractive transportation alternatives that reduce our community's reliance on automobiles to transport us around the community.

Additionally, the existing public transportation service represents an opportunity for environmental improvements as well. The current model of diesel-powered buses contributes significantly to particulate (soot) emissions and undesirable noise across our community. *The opportunity exists to transition such road-based vehicles to alternative and/or renewable energy propulsion systems, including hydrogen, compressed natural gas (CNG), or even fuel cells. The opportunity also exists to explore, identify and implement rail-based, electric fixed-guideway transportation systems that would significantly reduce unwanted noise pollution, and would completely eliminate particulate and exhaust emissions at the point of consumption.*

Recreation

As mentioned above, our community's residents and visitors almost universally use passenger automobiles as the transportation means to reach their recreational destinations. This puts a significant demand on existing roadways, but also contributes to congestion on arteries serving those popular destinations, in addition to the significant parking requirements. Important recreational activity centers that currently (or soon will) experience these concerns include Rochester's Frontier Field, the coming PaeTec Park soccer stadium, the Blue Cross Arena, the coming Performing Arts Center, the High Falls District, the St. Paul Quarter, the East End, our local shopping malls, the Erie Canal Corridor, and the Finger Lakes region.

Additionally, existing public transportation options are not well suited to recreational uses, whether for residents or visitors. The current public transportation mode, diesel-powered transit buses, is not widely embraced as an attractive means of recreational transportation. The perception is that bus transport is appropriate for individuals who do not have access to alternative transportation means. On that basis, those engaged in recreational activities rarely even consider using buses to reach their destinations. *The opportunity exists to create attractive transportation options that serve population centers, activity centers, and recreational destinations using means that are perceptually and visually distinct from diesel-powered transit modes.*

In part, public transit buses are viewed only as very basic transportation. *The opportunity exists to explore, identify and implement public transportation options that provide an attractive, historically-significant, and environmentally sound complement to basic bus transportation.* One such possible approach is an electric, rail-based trolley / streetcar.

Historic Resources

Transportation itself can be a historic resource—examples of this, as mentioned above, include streetcars in New Orleans and cable cars in San Francisco. *Local transportation can become a means to maintain a meaningful connection to, and interpretation of, our community's history and growth patterns.* As well, local railroad rights-of-way are also historic resources that can both serve as historic corridors and transportation enhancements to our broader community. Related historic resources that merit preservation and/or reuse include the structures and infrastructure that supported past transportation systems and community destinations. Examples include vintage passenger railroad stations or even more symbolic standing structures such as the Hojack Swing Bridge in Charlotte. Such important historic resources can serve as a meaningful connection to the past, and a transportation connection to the future.

Fiscal Health

As mentioned above, our community's long-term economic vitality requires us to be able to capture more revenues than we consume in expenses providing services to our residents. A key component in this strategy is attracting visitors and residents who have very low requirements for public services, such as policing, healthcare, or other human services. Tourists represent a perfect source of these high-potential, low-cost revenues, and college graduates and young professionals and young families also represent new residents who also are limited consumers of human services. *The profound opportunity exists to connect and facilitate the movement of tourists and young people for the long-term benefit of our community, in an attractive, meaningful way.*

Potential Solution

As I have described previously, I believe that an electric rail-based trolley system can be an effective way to address many of the challenges and opportunities outlined above. Such a system can be used to connect otherwise disconnected destinations, college students, population and activity centers, in an attractive, historically-significant and regionally-distinctive way. Such electric vehicles can increase the system-wide capacity of our transportation infrastructure without necessitating expansion of the system footprint, and also are quiet, environmentally-friendly additions to our neighborhoods and community.

The trolleys could provide both a means of transportation for residents, and a memorable experience for visitors, guiding them to our community's assets. Electric rail vehicles and the supporting infrastructure also represent a durable, lasting investment, with life spans measured in decades rather than mere years. Additionally, local college students would be drawn to the panache of an electric trolley vehicle as the means to bring them around our community.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and proactive efforts to integrate the public's input on our community's transportation plans for the future. Should any of the points raised above invite any clarifications, please don't hesitate to contact me. In the meantime, I will look forward to the next round of public input in the spring.

Warmest regards,

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