

Executive Summary - Draft Purpose and Need Statement

This document provides a summary version of the full draft Purpose and Need statement for transportation investment in the Amherst-Buffalo Corridor study area for the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority's (NFTA) Metro Amherst – Buffalo Corridor Alternatives Analysis. The Purpose and Need Statement serves as a cornerstone for the development and evaluation of alternatives for improving transit in the corridor. The Purpose and Need Statement reflects transportation conditions that are observable and data-supported, as well as problems and needs articulated by the public and stakeholders.

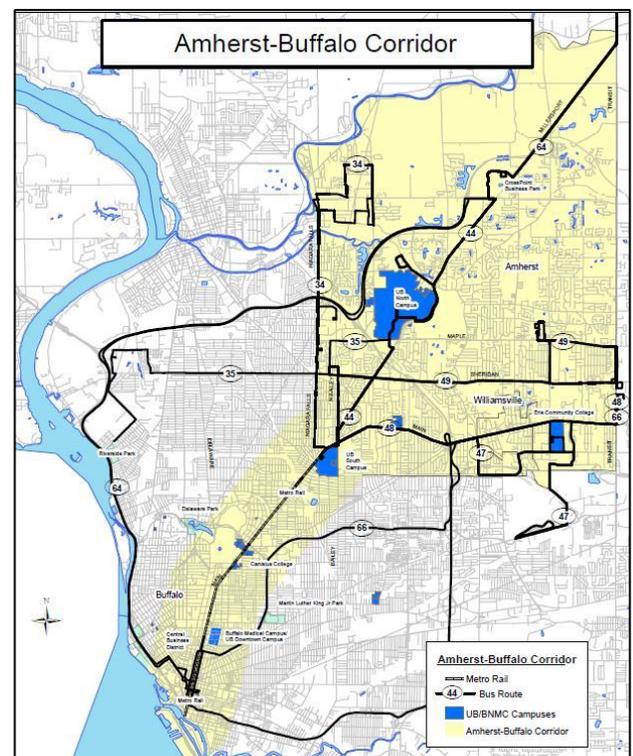
Project Purpose

The purpose of the proposed project is to provide a fast, reliable, safe, and convenient transit ride in the Amherst-Buffalo Corridor linking established and emerging activity centers along the existing Metro Rail Line in the City of Buffalo with existing and emerging activity centers in the Town of Amherst. The project is intended to serve increased travel demand, support redevelopment and other economic development opportunities, provide high-quality transit service to and from key activity centers in the Corridor, and better serve transit-dependent population segments

Corridor Setting

The Amherst-Buffalo Corridor includes an existing street network and transit service network. It is marked by high transit usage and contains a large number of residents who are transit dependent. The NFTA Metro Rail line provides fast and reliable rail transit service along a radial (north-south) route that serves part of the corridor to/from downtown Buffalo. By contrast, the NFTA Metro Bus service within the Amherst portion of the corridor is more limited. While service is available, frequency of the service is limited and it is often slower because it operates in traffic on a congested roadway network. Existing transit service often requires patrons to transfer among routes. This results in longer travel times for riders. UB also provides shuttle bus service between its campuses exclusively for the UB community. There are opportunities for coordinating transit services.

The transportation system in the corridor serves a diversity of land uses and activities ranging from the waterfront to the urban center of Downtown Buffalo and the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC), to the large and expanding University at Buffalo (UB) campuses and other colleges, to older established residential neighborhoods and emerging commercial and employment centers. The Buffalo metropolitan region is undergoing an economic transformation. Downtown Buffalo has over \$3 billion of projects recently completed, under construction, or planned, including projects at the Erie Canal Harbor and BNMC. Ongoing implementation of UB's 2020 Plan will have a significant economic impact. For the period of 2010-2035, population and employment projections for the region show growth throughout, including Buffalo and Amherst.



Because of the amount of traffic traveling to, from and through the study area, there are issues with traffic congestion with several roadway segments with failing or near-failing conditions particularly during peak periods including I-290 (Youngman Expressway), Millersport Highway, Main Street, Bailey Avenue, Niagara Falls Boulevard, and Robinson Road. In addition, significant congestion problems occur along key arterials, particularly at intersections. When winter weather driving conditions are poor; accidents or incidents occur; or traffic is rerouted for other reasons, many other roads and intersections in the study area experience significant congestion problems.

Need for the Project

The need for improved transit service has three main components: (1) the need to serve increased travel demand generated by recent, pending, and future development; (2) the need for high-quality and efficient transit service to key activity centers in the study area; and (3) the need to better serve transit-dependent population segments.

(1) Need for Expanded Transit Service to Serve Increasing Development and Leverage Development Opportunities

As noted above, the Buffalo metropolitan region is experiencing substantial economic growth and redevelopment. The City of Buffalo has over \$3 billion of projects completed, or underway and current planning efforts suggest the potential for even more development at BNMC, along the Main Street Corridor, and in the Inner Harbor and Cobblestone areas. Meanwhile, Amherst continues to grow, with opportunities for more commercial and mixed-use development, including infill of vacant properties and parcels and expansion of the UB North Campus. The most recent MPO demographic projections call for increasing population and employment in the region and in the study area, as well by 2035. Such growth will require improved supporting transportation infrastructure.

The existing roadway network currently experiences traffic congestion, particularly during peak periods, and without mitigation, the anticipated level of new development will further increase congestion. There is limited ability to expand roadway capacity due to constraints on available right-of-way, environmental impact concerns, and concerns that highway investments are not a sustainable, long-term solution and that they do not encourage mixed-use, compact development—all goals of regional and local plans. Similarly, parking supply is constrained, particularly in downtown Buffalo at BNMC and on UB campuses. It is unlikely as well as undesirable that new parking will accommodate projected employment increases. Thus, there is a need for new investments to provide a high quality transit system in the Amherst-Buffalo Corridor to mitigate the growth of traffic and congestion, to enable and support more sustainable development patterns, and to preserve roadway capacity.

As the study area continues to grow, providing increased high quality and efficient transit service will help to shape the patterns of future development and redevelopment. Various regional plans, including the Framework for Regional Growth, call for center-based development forms, which transit will promote and complement. Expanding transit service along the Amherst-Buffalo Corridor will promote and support higher development densities and mixed-uses, as well as strengthen older residential neighborhood and commercial centers. Such development patterns will support more sustainable growth, leveraging additional economic development and employment opportunities while minimizing needs to expand roadway and parking capacity.

(2) Need for High Quality Service to Key Activity Centers

The only public transit service currently available for travel to and from activity centers in Amherst is Metro bus service. The frequency of service on these routes is limited and does not adequately serve several important activity centers and key corridors. UB provides Stampede shuttle bus service between its campuses exclusively for the UB community. This situation makes bus service a less attractive option, especially for riders that need to complete their trip by making transfers. Many Metro Rail riders currently have at least a two-seat transit trip incurring the

inconvenience of a “travel time penalty” affecting the desirability of the trip for riders. There is a need and opportunity for faster, more reliable and coordinated transit service and one that can offer a one-seat transit ride.

(3) [Need to Serve Better Transit-Dependent Population Segments](#)

The limited transit service to and from Amherst especially affects the mobility and access of transit-dependent population segments in the Buffalo metropolitan region. Transit-dependent population segments refer to people who cannot drive due to financial or physical reasons. Such segments include the elderly, disabled, low-income, and students. The corridor has many senior living complexes, facilities serving disabled persons, low-income housing complexes, apartment complexes, and student housing. The current Metro Rail and Metro Bus routes serve some but not all of these locations. For example, current bus routes provide some service to the UB North Campus and the Weinberg Campus, but for the most part, the residents of the many housing complexes in this area do not have transit options. The transit-dependent populations in the study area are adversely affected by limited connectivity, and the unreliability of the existing transit services. There is a need to extend the reach of a high quality transit service in order to increase the access for corridor residents to employment opportunities, health care, shopping, and entertainment throughout the corridor but particularly in Amherst.