
NIAGARA FRONTIER TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY

Monthly Board Meeting

November 18, 2021

Transcript of Video Recording
of Proceedings held at NIAGARA FRONTIER TRANSPORTATION
AUTHORITY, 181 Ellicott Street, Buffalo, New York,
stenographically transcribed by VALERIE A. ROSATI, Notary
Public.

1 MEMBERS IN THE BOARDROOM:

2 Sister Denise Roche (Chair)
3 Commissioner Rev. Mark Blue
4 Commissioner Adam Perry
5 Commissioner Stephen Tucker
6 Kimberley Minkel (Executive Director)
7 David State (General Counsel)
8 John Cox (Chief Financial Officer)
9 Tom George (Director, Public Transit)
10 William Vanecek (Director, Aviation)
11 Helen Tederous (Director, Public Affairs)
12 John Schaefer (Director, Engineering)
13 Karen Novo (Director, Human Resources)
14 Darren Kempner (Manager, Government Affairs)
15 Christopher Ruminski (Manager, Financial
16 Planning & Analysis)
17 Lara Seniw (Assistant to Executive Director)

18 MEMBERS ON THE PHONE:

19 Commissioner LaVonne Ansari
20 Commissioner Joan Aul
21 Commissioner Margo Downey
22 Commissioner Jennifer Persico
23 Commissioner Philip Wilcox

CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: Good morning, everyone, and
thank you for being with us or being on this
call. This is an unusual meeting for us. We're
going to discuss a very important topic which is
the NFTA budget proposition that's being proposed
to us for 2022-23. And so I am going to turn it
over to Kim to take us through the meeting today.

1 MS. MINKEL: Great. Thank you, Sister, and thanks to
2 the board members. I know this is a little
3 different for us. Before we just called on the
4 phone. We're trying Teams to see how this works
5 in case we need to continue to meet like this
6 into next year.

7 So before I do ask for a roll call, just as
8 a reminder, if you could stay on mute, identify
9 yourself when you speak. We are recording this
10 meeting so that we can transcribe the meeting,
11 which will be posted on our website later. The
12 board should also know that we are streaming live
13 on our website and this video will be posted
14 later on our website for the public to view as
15 well.

16 With that, Dave, can you call the roll,
17 please?

18 MR. STATE: Yes. And I'll call the roll of everyone
19 I see just to make this a little shorter.

20 Commissioner Aul?

21 COMMISSIONER AUL: Here.

22 MR. STATE: Commissioner Blue?

23 COMMISSIONER BLUE: Here.

1 MR. STATE: Commissioner Perry?

2 COMMISSIONER PERRY: Present.

3 MR. STATE: Commissioner Persico?

4 COMMISSIONER PERSICO: Here.

5 MR. STATE: Commissioner Tucker?

6 COMMISSIONER TUCKER: Present.

7 MR. STATE: Sister Denise?

8 CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: Present.

9 MR. STATE: And Commissioner Wilcox?

10 COMMISSIONER WILCOX: Here.

11 MR. STATE: Any other commissioners that are on the
12 line either on Teams or have called in?

13 Thank you.

14 MS. MINKEL: Great. Thank you, Dave. I think
15 someone was just trying to dial in. Commissioner
16 Downey is joining us.

17 So before I turn this over to Chris Ruminski
18 to start us out, I just wanted to mention to the
19 board, this is a little bit different budget for
20 us. In the past we've, we've struggled quite a
21 bit in trying to present a balanced budget. For
22 the first time, we're presenting a budget that
23 really builds on the future, going beyond, you

1 know, just providing service, but being able to
2 provide really important, sound, safe, efficient,
3 reliable service over the next decade. This is a
4 budget that for ten straight years is not
5 increasing fares. Given the fact of inflation
6 out there, I don't think there are many things
7 that haven't gone up in the past ten years. So
8 that's something we are particularly proud of,
9 that for another year we are not increasing or
10 recommending increasing fares.

11 This budget does not include the
12 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. We will
13 talk about it as part of this discussion and we
14 will talk about the impact that this will have on
15 us going forward. While most of the
16 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is formula
17 based, as part of our preventative maintenance
18 funds, it does several things. It provides for
19 budget certainty on the federal side for the next
20 five years. So previously, you know, it became
21 challenging knowing how much we would receive.
22 This will allow for better planning. This
23 increased funding will help to address some of

1 the capital needs that have been deferred over
2 the past decade. And ultimately this will help
3 make our system faster, more reliable and greener
4 going forward.

5 So with that, I'll turn it over to Chris
6 Ruminski to start us off on the budget.

7 MR. RUMINSKI: Thank you, Kim. Thank you,
8 commissioners. Good morning. As Kim mentioned,
9 this is the fiscal year 2022-2023 budget,
10 building for the future. To give you an idea of
11 our process for doing this budget. To bring a
12 balanced budget to the board in November, our
13 budget process actually started before the 4th of
14 July of this year when we sent out next year's
15 personnel worksheets to all our business centers.
16 And then since then we've been working diligently
17 to -- in the following months to present this
18 balanced budget to you today. Next month the
19 commissioners will vote on the 2023 budget. And
20 if it is approved, it will be uploaded into
21 PARIS, which is the New York State Public
22 Authorities Reporting System, and that will be
23 done by December 31st.

1 In January of 2022, the governor will
2 deliver the executive budget to the legislature,
3 and we use this information as it pertains to New
4 York State Transit Operating Assistance to revise
5 the NFTA budget. Also, as more time has passed
6 and we get better information, we'll revise other
7 parts of the 2023 budget and present that to the
8 board in March of 2022. If that revised budget
9 is approved, it will be uploaded into PARIS by
10 March 31st, and then the New York State and NFTA
11 fiscal years will begin on April 1st, 2022.

12 We are presenting the details of the budget
13 again in these pie charts which we think are
14 helpful in visualizing the various parts of the
15 budget. First we'll start off with the NFTA.
16 And the NFTA of course is the Buffalo Niagara
17 International Airport, the Niagara Falls
18 International Airport, the property development
19 unit and the transportation centers. And we have
20 presented this in two pie charts, sources and
21 uses, or where does it come from, where does it
22 go.

23 On the where does it come from side,

1 operating revenue, which is mostly airport fees
2 and services, rental income and concessions and
3 commissions is about eighty-seven percent. And
4 operating assistance of where does it come from
5 is about thirteen percent. Historically, there
6 is minimal operating assistance on the NFTA. In
7 this budget, most of the operating assistance,
8 about ten point five million dollars, is federal
9 COVID relief funds which are used to pay part of
10 the BNIA debt service.

11 On the uses side, thirty-eight percent of
12 all expenditures are personnel costs, which
13 include wages and fringe benefits for airport
14 staff, transit police, operations and
15 administrative staff. And then operating capital
16 items make up twenty-seven percent of the
17 expenditures. And this is mostly BNIA debt
18 service payments and capital expenditures of the
19 BNIA and the MTC, this building right here.

20 Drilling down a little bit, operating
21 revenue is budgeted for fiscal '23 to be
22 seventy-seven point seven million dollars which
23 is up eleven percent or seven point nine million

1 dollars from the fiscal '22 forecast.

2 BNIA and NFIA concessions and commissions
3 revenue is budgeted to increase twenty-nine
4 percent from fiscal '22 forecasts due to higher
5 than expected enplanements. We are budgeting for
6 enplanements to be almost back to pre-COVID
7 levels in fiscal '23.

8 And BNIA airport fees and services and
9 rental income are up combined one point two
10 million dollars or three percent from fiscal '22
11 forecasts, and this is due to higher airline
12 compensatory billings which is reflective of an
13 increase in direct expenses due to more flight
14 activity and more enplanements.

15 Again, operating assistance is FAA COVID
16 relief for ten point five million dollars which
17 is being used for BNIA debt service payments.

18 On the where does it go, operating expenses
19 are up four point nine million -- excuse me.
20 Nine point four million dollars or sixteen point
21 four percent from the fiscal '22 forecasts.

22 Personnel services are increasing nine point
23 six percent or five point eight million dollars

1 due to contractual wage increases, increases in
2 fringe costs, anticipated fuller staffing at the
3 BNIA due to more flight activity and some new
4 positions in the BNIA and central administration.

5 Maintenance and repairs are increasing
6 thirty-two percent or three million dollars,
7 mostly due to higher costs at the BNIA relating
8 to the baggage maintenance system. Higher
9 activity as far as passengers goes increases the
10 maintenance requirements for the baggage
11 maintenance -- baggage system.

12 And general business/other is increasing
13 fifteen percent or two point two million dollars
14 from fiscal year '22 forecasts, and that's mostly
15 due to higher parking management fees at BNIA and
16 NFIA. As we receive more parking revenue, we
17 have to pay SP Plus a higher -- a more fee, and
18 that's where this resides, in general
19 business/other. And, also, we're increasing our,
20 our continued, excuse me, investment in our
21 information technology is in the general
22 business/other line.

23 Moving on to Metro, which includes the bus

1 and rail operations. Where does it come from,
2 where does it go. Well, where does it come?
3 Twelve percent of the funds come from passenger
4 fares and eighty-eight percent come from federal,
5 state and local operating assistance.

6 On the where does it go side, the uses,
7 sixty-eight percent of all expenditures are
8 personnel costs, which are wages and fringe
9 benefits of drivers, mechanics, transit police,
10 operations and administrative staff. And we know
11 that four percent of expenditures are for health
12 care costs, retired Metro employee.

13 Drilling down to more specifics on the
14 operating revenue. Twenty-three point nine
15 million dollars in operating revenue. And that's
16 mostly passenger fares. And we're projecting
17 passenger fares to increase fifteen percent or
18 three million dollars from the fiscal '22
19 forecast due to an anticipated increase in
20 ridership as we recover from the impact of COVID.
21 As Kim mentioned, this is the tenth consecutive
22 budget where the base fare has remained flat at
23 two dollars.

1 Operating assistance is a hundred and
2 seventy-five point one million dollars or up
3 twenty-one million from the fiscal '22 forecast.
4 We are budgeting an increase in STOA of ten
5 percent or five point five million dollars. Erie
6 County sales tax, we're budgeting an increase of
7 two percent or four hundred forty-three thousand
8 dollars based on the Erie County estimate.
9 Mortgage recording tax is increasing a hundred
10 twenty-five thousand dollars or one percent.
11 Federal preventative maintenance funds are
12 increasing a hundred and eight thousand dollars
13 or zero point five percent. That's based on
14 recent history. And, finally, included in
15 operating assistance are forty-six point two
16 million dollars of federal COVID-19 relief funds.

17 On the where does it go, operating expenses
18 are eighty-five percent of total expenditures,
19 and that totals a hundred and sixty-five point
20 nine million dollars, which is up eight point
21 three percent or twelve point six million dollars
22 from the fiscal '22 forecast.

23 Personnel costs are increasing eight point

1 seven million or eight point seven percent to a
2 hundred and eight million dollars. This is due
3 to contractual wage increases, increases in
4 fringe costs, and anticipated full staffing,
5 again, as we come out of the pandemic.

6 Maintenance and repairs are increasing six
7 point two percent or five hundred sixty-two
8 thousand dollars due to higher revenue vehicle
9 maintenance costs. Transit fuel power is
10 increasing twelve and a half percent or five
11 hundred and fifty-two thousand dollars as we are
12 anticipating higher electric, gasoline and diesel
13 costs in the next fiscal year.

14 General business/other is increasing seven
15 point five percent or one point four million
16 dollars due to higher outside service costs and
17 some new fees relating to the new fare collection
18 system.

19 And operating and capital expenditures are a
20 larger percentage of the pie than in prior years
21 due to additional capital projects in fiscal '23
22 funded by Metro dollars that were partially
23 caused by non-safety-sensitive projects being

1 deferred in fiscal '22 due to the pandemic.

2 This is -- discussion on where does it come
3 from and where does it go for the NFTA and the
4 Metro. Are there any questions on some of the
5 details of the budget?

6 COMMISSIONER BLUE: I have a question. Reverend
7 Blue. Do we have a comparison for the last three
8 to five years from the past to where we
9 anticipate going in the future? Is there any
10 type of a comparison chart like that?

11 MS. MINDEL: As we come through -- or, go through the
12 presentation, the next couple of slides, there is
13 a comparison in terms of expense and the
14 operating assistance, so that might help answer
15 your questions. If not, if you need more
16 details, we'll get you that information.

17 COMMISSIONER BLUE: Okay. Thank you.

18 COMMISSIONER PERRY: So you noted that twelve percent
19 is from passenger fares and eighty-eight percent
20 is from federal, state and local subsidies.

21 MR. RUMINSKI: Correct.

22 COMMISSIONER PERRY: How does that stack up with
23 other upstate transportation authorities and

1 then, more generally, in the U.S.?

2 MS. MINKEL: So do you want me to take this?

3 MR. RUMINSKI: Sure.

4 MS. MINKEL: Yeah. I don't know exactly across the
5 U.S., but I can speak to the state. We have done
6 a comparison, you know, just based on formula
7 funding as provided through the federal versus
8 how it compares on the state side. And on the
9 federal side, the formula funding is about
10 thirty-seven percent. I'm looking at Darren
11 because we just looked at these numbers
12 yesterday. On the state side, we're about
13 twenty-five percent compared to our state peers.
14 I'm sorry. Twenty-one percent. If we were to be
15 at the same formula funding matching on the
16 federal side, we would be up almost five percent
17 more.

18 So there seems to be a disconnect, probably
19 as it relates to the light rail recognition that
20 we are the only upstate agency that operates a
21 light rail system. So that's something we're
22 working with the delegation trying to address
23 going forward. I don't know if that answers your

1 question.

2 Across the U.S., you know, operating
3 assistance comes from various different sources.
4 Some may be a little bit heavier in local
5 support. You can see our local support is on the
6 lower side. States such as Texas, for example,
7 have a lot more funding in terms of operating
8 assistance. So it really varies from state to
9 state.

10 I don't know, Tom, if you want to weigh in
11 on your experience with the bus benchmarking
12 group.

13 MR. GEORGE: I think the only thing I would add, Kim,
14 is historically we have been at around
15 twenty-eight percent on fare box recovery, which
16 when we compare to our peers, larger agencies,
17 MTA, CTA, those, they have a much higher fare box
18 recovery. But when we compare ourselves to our
19 peers, we've always been a higher performer
20 relative to fare box recovery at the twenty-eight
21 percent. Now you're seeing us down at this point
22 closer to twelve percent, which is reflective of
23 the COVID and the reduction in ridership.

1 COMMISSIONER PERRY: Okay.

2 MR. GEORGE: So we've been doing very well. And
3 that's not just in New York State. That's
4 amongst our peers. You'll see agencies, like Kim
5 referenced, you know, DART as an example is five
6 hundred million dollars annually in sales tax
7 revenue. DART Dallas. So there's different
8 models all over the place. But, relative
9 straight to fare box recovery, we're one of the
10 better performers. You'll see some of the
11 smaller agencies down in single digits. Most of
12 the medium-sized agencies are in the fifteen to
13 thirty-percent range, and we've always been right
14 near the top of that.

15 COMMISSIONER PERRY: Okay.

16 COMMISSIONER TUCKER: I have a question too. I'm
17 sorry, Commissioner.

18 COMMISSIONER PERRY: I just wanted to say that so
19 this transportation thing is, generally speaking,
20 a heavily subsidized activity, right?

21 MS. MINKEL: Absolutely.

22 COMMISSIONER PERRY: So we're talking about fare box
23 recovery. That's not -- that's just a small

1 fraction of how things have to operate for a
2 subsidized activity.

3 MS. MINKEL: For any system, even a large system. No
4 one has a hundred percent fare box recovery.
5 Transit throughout the U.S. does require
6 subsidies. But, keep in mind, your automobile
7 gets subsidized. You know, the federal
8 government and state pays for roads and bridges.
9 That's a subsidy. So absolutely transit is
10 subsidized, but so is motor vehicle traffic.

11 COMMISSIONER PERRY: Thanks.

12 COMMISSIONER TUCKER: My question was, has ridership
13 returned back to pre-pandemic levels; and if not,
14 do we anticipate that it will?

15 MS. MINKEL: The short answer is no. At some point
16 they will. I think the big question is when is a
17 big uncertainty for all of us at the moment. I
18 think a lot is going to depend on when people
19 return back in person to work. We know that's
20 having an impact. And when people start to feel
21 comfortable again.

22 There have been other systems, larger
23 systems, who have felt the impact of ridership

1 much more severely than we have. I think that
2 speaks to the importance of transit here in
3 Western New York. So many of our riders are
4 transit dependent, they do not have alternatives,
5 so we really provide an absolutely critical
6 lifeline for so many people here in Western New
7 York.

8 Tom, I don't know if you want to add
9 anything.

10 MR. GEORGE: No. I think the demographic -- and it's
11 going to change. Right? Because what we've
12 traditionally seen is ridership -- as an example,
13 we see a lot of housing going in in the City of
14 Buffalo. We see zoning changes. We see transit-
15 oriented development which will change the
16 environment which will lead us to more ridership.
17 And then we see the telemarketing -- or, the
18 telecommuting, tele, tele, tele everything, which
19 will erode us. So it's going to be a changing
20 market. Our plan is currently we're looking at a
21 seventy-five to eighty-percent number in the
22 short-term. As Kim indicated, we're hopeful that
23 we can, we can provide products that will bring

1 everyone back. It may not be the same people,
2 but the ridership back.

3 COMMISSIONER TUCKER: And I can imagine the work from
4 home movement would probably impact the demand
5 for public transportation.

6 MS. MINKEL: Yeah. Absolutely. What I think we
7 might see a positive impact in terms of ridership
8 is the cost of car ownership is going up, putting
9 it out of reach for many people. Also, you know,
10 there is a movement, particularly among
11 millennials and younger generations, where they
12 like the freedom of not owning a car. As cars go
13 electric, the cost of that vehicle is going to go
14 up considerably. So, you know, how that's going
15 to impact ridership in the future is still
16 somewhat uncertain. It's something we wrestle
17 with every day and it's something that we will be
18 prepared to address. But all of these are very
19 good questions and some of which we struggle
20 with, and probably leads well into the next
21 section, John, that will help address some of the
22 questions you are looking for.

23 MR. COX: Yes. So here's a slide. And if you look

1 at the top red line, that's the operating
2 expenses of Metro's operations. And then all of
3 your solid colored areas are your operating
4 assistance and your state and local operating
5 assistance, along with your passenger fares. And
6 so as you see that curve of that expense, there's
7 that gap there which is the -- I guess I'll say
8 the shaded area, which is the -- it looks like
9 it's shaded in black. That had been a sixteen
10 million dollar per year gap that existed between
11 our operating expenses and what we got in our
12 operating assistance and passenger fares.

13 And so that is something that our dollars --
14 those preventative maintenance dollars and the
15 88c dollars, which are in that hash mark there --
16 or, that shaded area. Those were funds that we
17 typically the highest and best use is for
18 capital, but we've had to reallocate those to
19 continue to provide the level of service that we
20 have in the past.

21 What also is a result of that, we had to
22 defer non-safety-sensitive capital projects, and
23 the effects of that are that you have to delay

1 your state of good repair, which is your --
2 results in your reliability and resiliency of
3 your transportation system for the long haul.

4 Now, we'll move forward to the -- I guess
5 it's the crosshatched area. That is -- you see
6 the federal COVID relief coming in. So not only
7 do we have that gap, but we -- you see down below
8 in the green you have -- which is the passenger
9 fares dropping down, so that gap is increasing.
10 And we have the federal COVID relief coming in,
11 filling that gap which also has increased during
12 the last few years since COVID began in the end
13 of fiscal year 2020, and what that has allowed us
14 to do is to increase our planned projects for
15 state of good repair which will help with our
16 resiliency and reliability of the system.

17 And as we -- if we can switch to the next
18 slide, you can see --

19 MS. MINKEL: Actually, John, before we leave this
20 slide, just to point out to Reverend Blue's
21 question, you know, how does it compare year over
22 year. Each of those colors, I'll call them the
23 ribbons, shows the level of funding. Look at the

1 width of the ribbon. That really gives you
2 better indication how has that been over the
3 years. So you can see the green that represents
4 passenger fares has been steady over the years.
5 Obviously COVID dropped it down quite a bit. The
6 blue, the local assistance, was thinner
7 throughout the past decade. That has gotten a
8 little wider in recent years. A lot of that has
9 been driven by the mortgage recording tax and
10 sales tax. And then the yellow, that's our STOA,
11 our State Transit Operating Assistance, and you
12 can see, you know, around years '12 and '13 that
13 gets thinner, and in recent years it has slightly
14 expanded. But you can see even though our
15 expenses, we've really done a pretty good job of
16 holding those, we've had to because the operating
17 assistance really hasn't grown to meet the need
18 of the system. So hopefully that answers your
19 question.

20 COMMISSIONER TUCKER: Thank you.

21 MR. COX: And I can add to Kim's point. You know, as
22 she pointed out, we really have done a good job
23 controlling expenses. That red line -- and you

1 can -- if you were to smooth that curve -- or,
2 that red line and take out the dip because of
3 COVID, from the beginning in 2009 to this
4 proposed budget, that's really just approximately
5 a two-percent increase over that time period. So
6 that shows you that it is not a very steep curve.
7 It's very shallow. But year after year, you
8 know, it's going up steadily lockstep, you know,
9 in that average. You know, sometimes higher or
10 lower, but it's averaged about two percent.

11 Now, the -- as I mentioned before, the, you
12 know, the yellow, blue and the green which are
13 passenger fares and our state and local
14 assistance, that has averaged over that same
15 period about one point five percent. So you see
16 can see slowly over time that gap keeps opening
17 up as we go forward. And, luckily, the federal
18 government came in with the COVID relief which
19 has allowed us to close that gap, which, you
20 know, it has actually increased during COVID
21 as --

22 COMMISSIONER BLUE: Is there an anticipation of more
23 COVID relief in '24 and '25?

1 MR. COX: I do not know if that -- what will happen
2 in the future, but just currently, based on our
3 current COVID relief, we're looking at that COVID
4 relief lasting through approximately fiscal year
5 ending 2025-2026, depending on the (inaudible).

6 MS. MINKEL: Yeah. There was the anticipation with
7 the last round that it would last agencies over a
8 multiyear period, recognizing that it would take
9 some time for agencies to deal with the effects
10 of COVID.

11 MR. COX: Okay. Next slide. And as we saw in the
12 previous slide, there had been that gap. And
13 here is our 88c which is what we use for rail
14 operations. You can see the, the blue shaded
15 area, that's actually a -- shows the amount of
16 balance that we have in 88c. It's slowly working
17 its way down starting in '04 going forward. We
18 have the green area which is capital and the
19 purple area which is the dollars that are going
20 towards operating. Of course as previously
21 mentioned on the previous slide, we had to use
22 some of those funds to fill that gap.

23 So over time you see that, you know, more

1 and more dollars are coming out of the balance,
2 it's going down until we hit around fiscal year
3 ending '11, and then essentially at that point
4 we're just balancing along the bottom where it's
5 essentially just dollars in and dollars out of
6 that 88c which is part of our local assistance.
7 And over that time period, you know, you can see
8 the dollar amount that went towards operating
9 expenses versus capital.

10 So there was a significant amount more funds
11 during that time period going towards operating
12 versus capital, but starting in fiscal year '20
13 and -- well, actually, just after that, fiscal
14 year '21, you can see we've stopped -- the
15 federal COVID relief has allowed us to stop
16 allocating those capital dollars towards
17 operating expenses. We've just spent it on
18 capital and we've been able to increase the
19 balance that we have in our 88c fund which will
20 help with future -- not only current rail capital
21 projects, but also future capital rail projects,
22 because typically your capital projects tend to
23 be bumpy and you don't -- you know, you have a

1 certain amount you do every year, but then every
2 once in a while you have big projects to do. So
3 that will help address the state of good repair
4 items that we need to do at the rail.

5 And with that, we'll go to the next slide,
6 please. Now, here is our self-insurance. If you
7 look -- and it's a history of it back to '99.
8 The green line is the percent of our liabilities
9 that are funded. If you look back in '99, we had
10 a little over -- about -- between seventy and
11 eighty -- well, about seventy percent -- sixty to
12 seventy percent funded. You can see the blue bar
13 is the funding and the red is the total
14 liabilities. So we had a pretty good percentage,
15 but -- funded, and that was going on. But over
16 time, you know, of course as you settle
17 liabilities, you actually have to pay those out.
18 So over time we pay those out, our funding went
19 down.

20 And then what happened is starting in the
21 end of 2007, we actually had a Workers' Comp.
22 reform act. And so what that did is it drove up
23 the average cost of each of the claims. It did

1 do some things like shortening it to only ten
2 years instead of some of them had been going on
3 for fifteen or twenty. So it's helpful there,
4 but also the average payment on a weekly basis
5 increased. So that's why you see that -- kind of
6 that big ramp up or that big jump starting in
7 (inaudible). Then over time you can see it
8 worked its way down. We got down to twenty
9 percent. And then we were able to put some
10 additional funds back in in 2013. But as we went
11 on, it slowly crept up, our total liabilities.

12 And that hasn't -- you know, as far as our
13 actual cases, you know, we've done a great job as
14 we've talked about in insurance where the total
15 number of Workers' Comp. cases is going down, but
16 the cost associated with each one of them because
17 of this reform has gone up. So over time, you
18 know, it worked its way up. And to continue with
19 operations and keep moving forward, the amount
20 funded went down, where we eventually got to --
21 at the beginning -- or, the end of 2020, we were
22 at the point where we're approximately ten
23 percent funded. So we were only a few cases away

1 from having to actually -- that funding could
2 have gone away and we would be in a situation
3 where we would have to use either capital or
4 operating dollars to actually pay out those
5 liabilities because we no longer have any
6 funding.

7 So, again, here's where the COVID relief
8 came in and was very helpful. We re-funded a
9 significant portion, if you look at the
10 percentage funded, we went from, you know, in the
11 teens right back up to seventy or eighty percent.
12 And what that does is it allows us to pay those
13 claims as they come in and as they're settled.
14 And it also provides reliability and resiliency
15 to our operations because now we don't have to
16 worry about a big claim coming in that may be at
17 a time that we don't have funding and then we
18 have to look for those dollars. So, again, this
19 shows you how -- you know, we have been -- had a
20 lot of challenges, but just how important this
21 COVID relief was to help stabilize things for the
22 NFTA and Metro.

23 And unless there are any questions, I will

1 turn it over to Darren to touch base on the
2 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

3 MR. KEMPNER: Thanks, John. Good morning. I've got
4 four slides here to talk about the Infrastructure
5 Investment and Jobs Act, which is the formal
6 title of the bill that President Biden signed
7 into law on Monday. So I wanted to put this bill
8 in context of what it means to the NFTA and our
9 finances, but also the budget too since the
10 timing of this is all happening at the same time.

11 So this first slide, it's meant to explain
12 what this bill actually does from a funding
13 standpoint. The bill is primarily a
14 reauthorization of surface transportation
15 programs. What that means is Congress sets a
16 five-year standard for funding for certain
17 programs, creates the policies around those
18 programs, but it doesn't actually provide the
19 money to support those programs. That money
20 comes for these programs in the annual
21 appropriation bills that are typically approved
22 before the end of the fiscal year, but not
23 always, as is the case this year. We still don't

1 have a budget for the current federal fiscal year
2 that we're in.

3 But what I want to emphasize is that while
4 the bill authorizes -- reauthorizes the main
5 programs that federal transit uses to fund
6 NFTA-Metro operations and creates the new
7 programs for the airports, it doesn't actually
8 fund those programs. Those programs, we still
9 need a budget to do that.

10 So the programs that the bill does
11 reauthorize and create. It reauthorizes the same
12 three primary formula programs that fund
13 NFTA-Metro operations. The same rules apply.
14 The same terms and conditions apply for those
15 programs. Those programs are meant to support
16 capital assistance, capital projects for the
17 NFTA -- for NFTA-Metro. As John and Kim
18 mentioned, we've used that money in the past for
19 preventative maintenance which is an eligible
20 activity in the past from that funding. And then
21 importantly for airports this -- the bill creates
22 a new program for airports across the country.
23 And it's very similar to the PFC, passenger

1 facility charge, funds that you're familiar with
2 that we collect at the airport based on
3 enplanements. But, this funds that program with
4 general fund dollars at the federal level.

5 So if you can go to the next slide. So
6 here's the actual dollars authorized by the bill,
7 so -- and in the past. So the FAST Act, a much
8 catchier title than IIJA, over the last five
9 years was -- you know, it authorized -- the FAST
10 Act authorized and appropriated a hundred and
11 five million dollars over the past five years for
12 transit programs, those three main formula
13 programs.

14 This bill, the IIJA, authorizes a hundred
15 and fifty-six million for transit. So basically
16 what it does is it authorizes a thirty-percent
17 increase across the country for those three main
18 formula programs in the current federal fiscal
19 year. Doesn't appropriate, but authorizes. And
20 then slightly increases that amount by about two
21 percent authorized for the four years thereafter.
22 So that would result in, over five years, if
23 appropriated, about a fifteen million dollar

1 increase to -- estimated fifteen million dollar
2 increase to NFTA.

3 So I say estimated because those numbers are
4 formula driven programs based on our ridership
5 and vehicle revenue miles. And they're
6 calculated based on passengers and vehicle
7 revenue miles across the country. So there is
8 some uncertainty on that number because based on
9 what we do, what Albany does, what Dallas does,
10 that's how they'll distribute those authorized
11 and appropriated funds over that time period. So
12 there is some uncertainty around the actual
13 dollar amount. There's also uncertainty around
14 the actual appropriation. As I mentioned, these
15 are authorization amounts. And Congress does
16 typically follow that authorization level, but
17 there's a lot that -- you know, a lot can happen.

18 And the one key point that I want to make is
19 that sometime this month or next month the
20 transit (inaudible) which funds these programs at
21 the federal level will close to zero. It will be
22 bankrupt basically because it's funded by the gas
23 tax. And what Congress has said is that they

1 want to use general funds to continue these
2 programs, but those general funds face the same
3 pressures as all the funding that the federal
4 government does, rather than the gas tax
5 specifically for transit and highway programs.
6 So that's also a concern going forward until we
7 can figure out how to stabilize that fund.

8 And then as I mentioned on the airport side,
9 the bill creates a new program for airports for
10 passenger facility charge eligible, which is --
11 if you're familiar with the airport improvement
12 program, slightly broader eligibility. Think
13 terminal and other types of customer enhancement
14 projects. So great new programs funded at an
15 estimated amount for Buffalo/Niagara Falls of
16 about forty-five million dollars over five years.
17 So that, again, would have to be appropriated
18 annually to meet those authorization levels, but
19 that is new funding for the airports (inaudible)
20 an estimated amount.

21 And the remaining two slides -- I want to
22 talk for a minute about the capital investment
23 grant program which is one of the primary

1 discretionary programs that federal transit has
2 control over. So under the FAST Act, the CIG
3 program received about eleven and a half million
4 dollars over five years. The IIJA authorizes,
5 and actually in a strange way actually
6 appropriates, a portion of this program at a
7 level double what we saw over the last five
8 years. So it's a lot of money into this program,
9 doubling a very large program. Remember this
10 program funds new fixed guideway extensions, so
11 think light rail, bus rapid transit, across the
12 country. And the reason that Congress actually
13 appropriated some of this money in advance is
14 because these projects take a long time to get
15 going, so they wanted to kind of set the table,
16 say, you know, keep these projects moving.

17 What I think this means for NFTA and our
18 projects which look to take advantage of this
19 program is it's really going to clear the deck
20 for us. We're not going to be ready necessarily
21 within the next five years to tap into this money
22 based on the timelines these programs -- these
23 projects take, but there are a number of

1 projects, none of them named in the bill, but all
2 part of the program, that will be funded by this
3 money. I think downstate Second Avenue subway,
4 gateway program, Hudson River tunnels and a few
5 other large projects that are already in full
6 engineering across the country.

7 So just a quick reminder of where we are at
8 based on this process for our Metro transit
9 expansion project. The CIG program has a very
10 defined process for these projects. We have not
11 yet entered into the first phase which is project
12 development. We hope to soon as we continue the
13 environmental review process. But, the first
14 phase would be project development then
15 engineering then a full funding grant agreement,
16 which is actually when you sign the contract to
17 receive the money. So those, those steps can
18 take some time, but we look forward to moving
19 down that path shortly.

20 One last thing before I hand it over to Kim
21 to clarify anything that I might have missed.
22 This is just one of the discretionary competitive
23 grant programs. There are many others. The

1 impact on the current year budget that you're
2 reviewing right now, I would say minimal to none,
3 as it will take time for the administrative
4 agencies to roll these programs out, apply,
5 receive awards, contracts, so I think March, '23
6 there will be very few, if any, competitive
7 programs that really get rolling (inaudible), but
8 we look forward to taking advantage of all of
9 those.

10 One of the most important ones I think is
11 over a billion dollars annually for low or no
12 emissions transit vehicles which is an incredible
13 increase over what this program used to fund. It
14 was about fifty-five million dollars annually in
15 the past. So definitely it's something that will
16 support our battery electric bus deployment in
17 the future.

18 Kim, did I miss anything?

19 MS. MINKEL: The only other thing I would mention is
20 the RAISE or formerly BUILD or formerly TIGER
21 grants, if you want to touch base on those,
22 Darren.

23 MR. KEMPNER: Yeah. Those are continued. TIGER,

1 BUILD, RAISE -- now called RAISE. Those are
2 large, twenty-five million dollar awards,
3 maximum, typically to fund significant regional
4 projects, transportation projects. That program
5 is continued and increased slightly in the
6 current -- in the IIJA.

7 COMMISSIONER BLUE: What projects do we have that
8 will fit that criteria?

9 MS. MINKEL: For the RAISE grant --

10 COMMISSIONER BLUE: Yes.

11 MS. MINKEL: -- or for the capital investment?

12 COMMISSIONER BLUE: Both actually.

13 MS. MINKEL: Both. Okay. Capital investment grant
14 program. That's our light rail extension
15 project. That's that tiny, little project with a
16 price tag of one and a half billion dollars that
17 would extend -- that would essentially double the
18 capacity of our system, take us all the way out
19 to UB North Campus.

20 The other project that would fall within the
21 capital investment grant program is a bus rapid
22 transit, BRT, on Bailey Avenue. And that has a
23 much smaller price tag of only eighty million

1 dollars.

2 Under the RAISE grant, there are a number of
3 different opportunities. Buses -- and it depends
4 year to year. We have to see specifically what
5 it is they're asking for. In the past we've put
6 in for DL and W.

7 Any other projects come to mind, Darren?

8 MR. KEMPNER: Well, those are the grants that have
9 funded the cars on Main Street in the City of
10 Buffalo. Right? Which we have received some
11 funding to support the track improvements
12 (inaudible).

13 But, yeah, but there are -- it could fund a
14 portion of the bus rapid transit or even the
15 light rail system, but it's, you know, not to the
16 scale necessarily of the CIG (inaudible).

17 MS. MINKEL: All right. Thanks a lot.

18 So that leads into our capital investment
19 discussion. So in the budget that we sent to the
20 board, we have a hundred and thirty-five million
21 this year in fiscal year ending '23 of capital
22 projects. The focus has really been on five main
23 areas, as we've looked to prioritize things.

1 The first focus is always on the safety and
2 reliability of our system. So we have just under
3 eighty-one million dedicated for that area.
4 Customer experience. We think it's important for
5 our customers so they have a great experience
6 whether at the airport or on the rail, and we
7 have twenty-one and a half million in that area
8 as well.

9 Sustainability, our green initiatives. A
10 lot -- most of it focused on electric buses and
11 converting our facilities to accommodate the
12 electric buses goes under the sustainability and
13 green initiative of just under twenty-three
14 million.

15 And then looking out towards the future, we
16 have thirteen and a half million that primarily
17 finishing up the environmental preliminary
18 engineering on the rail extension and our
19 DL and W project of just over eight million.

20 And wrapped around all of that is
21 technology. We think it's really important. It
22 really affects the reliability, the customer
23 experience, it helps with green initiatives and

1 building for the future. We have four and a half
2 million dedicated towards that.

3 We also -- to support these capital projects
4 and operating, we have a number of new positions
5 in this budget. The first being a chief
6 technology officer. You know, with the
7 investment in technology and MIS, it's a lot and
8 it's too much for just a CIO. And more and more
9 organizations are including chief technology
10 officers, so we think that's important to have
11 that focus.

12 Also, to help with accreditation and
13 succession, we have a position for a deputy chief
14 of police.

15 We also have a records officer to help with
16 new rules related to discovery, FOIL requests,
17 the ongoing impact in terms of transparency
18 initiatives that the state has has put greater
19 demands in our back office here.

20 We have a safety manager. We're required to
21 have a safety management system by the FTA, and
22 the needs for that are driving increased
23 documentation, so we have a safety manager

1 position.

2 We have an entry-level buyer position within
3 procurement. Particularly this past year during
4 the pandemic, our procurement office was highly
5 stressed.

6 In terms of customer service, we have four
7 assistant air terminal superintendents at the
8 Buffalo airport. It became very clear over the
9 past year that the baggage claim area, that some
10 of the airlines have been struggling in terms of
11 personnel and being able to deliver the bags
12 quickly. We think that's important for the
13 customer experience, so we want to be there. We
14 want to be that interface between the airlines
15 and the customers to help improve that. So we
16 have four positions there.

17 We have two positions for bus shelter
18 technicians. As Tom has mentioned in previous
19 meetings, we're looking to put more and more bus
20 shelters out there for the community.

21 We have a maintenance planner within our
22 Metro Rail to help deliver all these capital
23 programs.

1 And then additional custodial positions
2 within the airport. As we've expanded that
3 terminal, more restrooms, more space to address,
4 we've had to increase the custodial staff.

5 So those are the positions that are
6 supported in this budget to help with both
7 operating and delivering some of these strategic
8 investments.

9 Next slide, please. But looking out into
10 the future, transformational projects in the next
11 five to ten years. We have some significant
12 projects ahead. One of the main projects related
13 to reliability and safety of our system at the
14 Buffalo airport is the rehabilitation of the main
15 runway. That has a price tag of seventy-eight
16 million dollars. But, it's been a number of
17 years since we've addressed that main runway, so
18 that's important going forward.

19 And then we have bus replacement needs that
20 will be ongoing between big bus and paratransit
21 of sixty million dollars. And then an additional
22 apron and pavement work of twenty-four million.
23 So a total of a hundred and sixty-two million on

1 the reliability and safety of our system.

2 The customer experience, we have seventy-six
3 million looking out. That's improvements and
4 expansions of the Buffalo airport terminal and
5 the Niagara Falls terminal of eight million for
6 Niagara Falls. Over here on Division Street
7 where all of our bus shelters are located, where
8 the parking ramp is, there's an initiative to
9 make a large canopy to improve the customer
10 experience at a price tag of five million. And
11 improvements within our communication system.

12 Sustainability and green initiatives,
13 another ninety million, mostly on vehicles again,
14 but also on facility upgrades, making
15 improvements, incorporating a number of green
16 initiatives (inaudible) solar and window
17 replacements. The buildings are getting old.
18 That's for sure.

19 Supporting all this is fourteen million in
20 MIS technology improvements. And then a one
21 point seven billion dollar price tag as we look
22 for transit expansion to Amherst and Buffalo, the
23 development of DL and W station of eighty-eight

1 million, a project we're very excited about,
2 working with Savarino, and then the bus rapid
3 transit on Bailey Avenue at a price tag of eighty
4 million dollars.

5 COMMISSIONER TUCKER: I have a question real quick.
6 So those projects right there that you just
7 mentioned, DL and W and the expansion, they're
8 not ready to go to apply for funding or support
9 under the capital investment grants?

10 MS. MINKEL: That's right. That's right.

11 COMMISSIONER TUCKER: So we have some work to do
12 before they are ready?

13 MS. MINKEL: We have a lot of work to do, yes. Yes.
14 But, you know, we've been working on it for
15 years. We've been trying to position ourselves
16 so that when the money becomes available, we will
17 be able to tap into it, but --

18 COMMISSIONER TUCKER: Is there a time frame that you
19 think around, you know, when you will be ready?

20 MS. MINKEL: We -- in terms of that slide that Darren
21 had previously for project development, we hope
22 to have the environmental complete and the
23 sign-off by federal transit -- a lot is

1 determined based on their schedule -- by late
2 spring/early summer of next year. So that starts
3 the clock ticking. The engineering work and
4 doing the design work is --

5 MR. GEORGE: We're in final negotiation for the
6 thirty-percent design. We should bring it to the
7 board early in 2022 for that effort, which also
8 falls under that project development piece as
9 well.

10 MS. MINKEL: So that we would be submitting for the
11 grant application by --

12 MR. KEMPNER: Contingent upon (inaudible).

13 MS. MINKEL: Yeah. The big unknown is the
14 identification of the non-federal match. A lot
15 of that is going to dictate the schedule. The
16 sooner we get that commitment of the non-federal
17 portion, the earlier we can move the --

18 COMMISSIONER TUCKER: Do we have any prospects for
19 the non-federal match?

20 MS. MINKEL: Right now we're making a request to the
21 state, but certainly anyone else who wants to
22 provide assistance -- we'll be entertaining
23 anyone who wants to share in the project.

1 And I should say, you know, under the
2 previous CIG program, typically the federal
3 portion, the match was about fifty percent. The
4 new CIG program I believe is up to sixty percent,
5 so that's still a significant amount of funds
6 that are needed for the project locally, but it's
7 also significant new federal money that comes
8 into the region, that there is no other program
9 that I can think of that a region can tap into to
10 bring federal money to bring in transformational
11 projects to the area.

12 So the next slide. So beyond the numbers.
13 So we focused a lot on the budget, on the
14 operating and the capital projects, but, you
15 know, I just wanted to highlight the other things
16 that many of the staff, the employees do here for
17 the community. You know, particularly for
18 COVID-19, tremendous community support. There
19 was food distribution, there was vaccine
20 stand-ups that we did have, helping to bring
21 people to vaccination sites. Our paratransit in
22 particular was a lifeline for the paratransit
23 community so that they could get to doctors'

1 appointments, do their shopping. So life safety
2 is the addressed by our paratransit services.

3 Improving the environment. We've had a
4 number of solar projects, particularly with the
5 terminal enhancement project at the Buffalo
6 airport. We're improving indoor air quality and
7 water quality with the expansion of our wetland
8 treatment system for de-icing fluid at the
9 airport, and then certainly as we move to battery
10 electric buses. That's what they will look like
11 going forward and that will (inaudible) that we
12 hope to have delivered next year.

13 Next slide. Our operations have also been
14 the catalyst for sustainable community growth.
15 Just next-door to 181 there's the 201
16 development. That includes housing, a wonderful
17 small grocery store for the city. And
18 incorporated in all of this is a bus shelter so
19 that folks who live there have a way to move
20 around the city using our system.

21 We're very proud of the beautification and
22 engagement through public art initiative. We've
23 really been doing this over the past couple of

1 years. The Freedom Wall which is depicted in so
2 many things throughout Western New York we
3 completed at Cold Spring a couple of years ago.
4 There's additional improvements going forward in
5 terms of lighting, streetscaping to enhance that
6 area, but also on our DL and W panels there and
7 our Niagara Falls transportation center as well.

8 Next slide. And then the Buffalo airport
9 terminal expansion. You know, what this does for
10 the community is tremendous. DOT will be
11 releasing as part of their economic output their
12 DOT impact study. The Buffalo airport provides
13 one and a half billion, billion with a B,
14 annually in economic activity here in Western New
15 York, so making certain that we have the best
16 airport possible, one that has been recognized in
17 the past by J.D. Power, you know, so we can
18 attract that Canadian market and attract new
19 employers to the region is really very important
20 and very critical to our operations.

21 And then the last thing that I would say
22 beyond the numbers, everything that we've had in
23 our budget -- to give you an idea, just for this

1 calendar year 2021, we have spent over
2 sixty-three million in the State of New York in
3 terms of goods and service. So I talked about
4 the economic impact of the Buffalo airport, but
5 the Authority as a whole in terms of cash out the
6 door, sixty-three million stays here in the State
7 of New York.

8 So before I turn it over for questions.
9 Next steps. As we mentioned earlier, this will
10 come to the board for formal approval at the
11 December 9th meeting. In the meantime, if any
12 board member has any questions beyond today as
13 you're going through it, if you want to know more
14 information, feel free to reach out to me or John
15 or Chris to see if we can help answer any
16 questions that you have. This budget does get
17 modified again in March, so this is our best
18 guess at this time, you know, as identified. We
19 still don't know what the STOA, the state funds
20 will be. We'll have a better idea in January.
21 We'll then modify the numbers, you know, gas and
22 fuel is going up, we'll modify those numbers and
23 bring it back to the board at the March meeting.

1 And with that, I'll open it up for any
2 questions or discussions.

3 COMMISSIONER AUL: Hey, Kim? It's Joan. If you can
4 hear me.

5 MS. MINKEL: Yes, we can hear you, Joan.

6 COMMISSIONER AUL: Okay. Thank you. Just a couple
7 things. First of all, this presentation is
8 excellent. I mean, I know this is no small task
9 to put this together, so thank you. I mean, it's
10 thorough and it's extremely detailed, but, you
11 know, to the extent that it's helpful detail, so
12 it's wonderful. So thank you for that, first of
13 all, and your team.

14 Just a couple points. So on the first slide
15 it shows rental income projected at twenty-three
16 percent of our overall revenue base. And I know,
17 you know, at every board meeting we approve
18 renewals and extensions of leases. Is there
19 anything that can give us a feel just for a --
20 you know, not looking for a lot of work, but just
21 kind of a high-level view of how many properties
22 we control, just kind of a stratification of the
23 maturities of the leases and just so maybe we

1 have a better, you know, kind of high-level view
2 of our exposure there because it is really almost
3 a quarter percent of our overall revenue, in the
4 rental income side. So that's one question, and
5 I'll pause there.

6 MS. MINKEL: Yes. We can put that together and send
7 it out to the board so you can, you know, have
8 more information as it relates to that rental
9 income as it relates to the budget. But I think
10 you're asking an additional question beyond the
11 budget, you know, what are our holdings, what are
12 our -- how much space do we have leased and our
13 expenses on that side. Correct?

14 COMMISSIONER AUL: Correct. Yes. It would be nice
15 to put that into perspective of, you know, how
16 many properties we manage and, again, what our,
17 what our exposure level is there from rentals and
18 renewals and just the overall dynamic of real
19 estate and its impact on our overall financial
20 condition.

21 MS. MINKEL: Yep. I can get that and send it to the
22 board. I think Chris wants to --

23 MR. RUMINSKI: Yes. Commissioner, just to clarify,

1 that rental income is not just our outside
2 properties that we're renting. It is -- a big
3 chunk of it, or most of it, is the rental to
4 the -- at the Buffalo Niagara International
5 Airport. It's what the airlines pay for their
6 space at the airport.

7 COMMISSIONER AUL: Got it. Okay.

8 MR. RUMINSKI: So total --

9 COMMISSIONER AUL: Okay, Chris. Thanks.

10 MR. RUMINSKI: Sure.

11 COMMISSIONER AUL: And then -- I don't want to
12 monopolize. Two other quick things. So,
13 Chris -- or, I'm sorry. Kim, the positions that
14 you ran through that are pretty critical
15 positions that you are looking to fill, can we
16 get a list of those again? I know you ran
17 through them verbally, and I don't, I don't know
18 that they were necessarily in what we were
19 looking at, unless I kind of wasn't looking at it
20 in the right context as you were going through
21 the positions.

22 MS. MINDEL: No. You're correct, Joan. They are not
23 identified by position in the budget, so that's

1 why I wanted to make mention of them
2 specifically. But, yes, I will send out an
3 e-mail to the board identifying all those
4 positions I went over.

5 COMMISSIONER AUL: Okay. Okay. Thank you. And
6 then, lastly, just a comment. I think, you know,
7 as we look at the human capital piece of our
8 budget and the vulnerability that we have there,
9 especially in drivers and maintenance people and
10 mechanics, we talk about it every board meeting.
11 I think, you know, it may be time to get a little
12 bit more strategic. And you probably -- you and
13 Karen have already I'm sure done this, but I
14 think we as a board should also start looking at
15 how the human capital piece factors into our
16 strategic investments. And, you know, if we
17 don't have the mechanics to service or we don't
18 have the drivers to drive these vehicles and
19 handle our system, I think it will be, you know,
20 a huge -- and it already is a huge area of
21 vulnerability for us. So I don't know how we
22 interweave that in, but I think it's an area that
23 down the road and now and more so in the future

1 will be, you know, just a very critical concern
2 for us. So just my two cents on that piece.

3 MS. MINKEL: Yes. Thank you, Joan. And we share
4 those concerns. So we can set up a future
5 discussion, you know, maybe as part of the HR
6 committee -- Commissioner Perry stepped out of
7 the room. But, maybe have it at an HR committee
8 meeting (inaudible).

9 COMMISSIONER AUL: Yeah. No answers unfortunately,
10 but I just think it's -- you know, it should be
11 part of our strategic planning, probably more so
12 than it's ever been. So thank you. That's the
13 end of my comments and questions. But great job
14 and a great meeting. Thank you all.

15 MS. MINKEL: Yeah. Thank you, Joan. Any other
16 questions?

17 COMMISSIONER ANSARI: Kim? This is LaVonne. I'm
18 driving. I think maybe we can look at some of
19 the training pieces or some of the strategies
20 that we might have from the HR perspective and
21 see if that can be part of the budgeting or some
22 of the collaborations we might have to help us
23 with a pipeline of hiring.

1 MS. MINKEL: Yes. That's a good point. We will make
2 certain that when we bring the HR committee to
3 the board, I think you're right, talking about
4 training and that pipeline in is really critical
5 as we talk about human capital going forward.

6 CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: Kim, I have one. As you look
7 ahead, do you see anything needing fewer
8 resources? Any programs, any positions that
9 aren't as necessary as they used to be?

10 MS. MINKEL: So that's a good point, Sister. You
11 know, as we invest in technology, one of the
12 reasons why you invest in technology is for
13 efficiencies in the operations. So where we can
14 make improvements and allocate staff differently
15 is something that we are absolutely looking at.
16 But even with improvements in technology, you
17 can't replace a driver. You can't replace the
18 mechanic. So those are two key vulnerable areas
19 that we have. And as Dr. Ansari mentioned, that
20 pipeline into the organization is so important.
21 Working with Commissioner Tucker and Northland
22 Corridor has been helpful, reaching out to
23 various schools and so many different areas has

1 been helpful, but we're not there yet. And we
2 are all competing in a market of very limited
3 resources. You know, I mentioned the staff. My
4 previous budget challenges have always been
5 financial capital. And this one, the challenge
6 is different. It's on the human capital side.
7 They've both been scary, but in different ways.

8 COMMISSIONER BLUE: I have a question. I don't know
9 if -- it's kind of related to the budget. But it
10 is related to the changing of our scheduling for
11 our buses and the rerouting. So my question
12 is -- we did surveys. We did surveys to the
13 riders, but did we ever do surveys to the
14 drivers?

15 MR. MINKEL: Yeah. Absolutely.

16 COMMISSIONER BLUE: The drivers were surveyed?

17 MR. GEORGE: Yeah. We did extensive outreach in all
18 three of our garages. Our planning staff went
19 out and we surveyed those operators. We got
20 their input on that. We also have a unique
21 program we call route of the month where we go
22 out and we go into a garage and we pick a
23 specific route. And first we survey the

1 customers who ride that route and then we go in,
2 we create all the data, and then we sit in front
3 of all the operators that operate that route. We
4 talk about everything on that route from their
5 bathroom to the stops to their customer needs to
6 their needs to the safety issues. And then
7 every -- all the information we get, we go
8 through and we go through it and then we go back
9 out and we post that in the garages with all the
10 answers to their questions they provided.

11 So there's a number of different things we
12 do to try to engage the operators, but there was
13 an extensive designated outreach program relative
14 to the routing. And as a matter of fact, when we
15 went out for the route of the month on the
16 fifty-five, which is in Niagara Falls, we had all
17 kinds of questions about the new scheduled
18 service that we went through and addressed those
19 as well. So it's an ongoing thing, but, yeah,
20 our planning staff is really focused on not just
21 the customer, but also the operator.

22 COMMISSIONER BLUE: Did we receive that?

23 MS. MINKEL: The results of that?

1 COMMISSIONER BLUE: Yes.

2 MR. GEORGE. So that wasn't a specific designated
3 survey. That was an interaction that happened
4 between the operators and the planning staff, and
5 they went out and had more of a roundtable
6 discussion. We can certainly provide you with
7 the input that we have on all the routes of the
8 month that we went through. We have that. We
9 can give the board a summary of that piece, but
10 that's usually done one route per month and we go
11 to a different station every three months.

12 COMMISSIONER BLUE: But one of the things -- we're
13 looking at all of the routes, so did we do all of
14 the routes, not just one route per month?

15 Because our ridership covers all of the routes.

16 MR. GEORGE: Right.

17 COMMISSIONER BLUE: So that's the question. And the
18 reason I ask that is because whenever we make
19 decisions as the board, sometimes it's a top down
20 versus a bottom up, and getting that perspective
21 can help us. Well, it helps me really to make a
22 more -- a sound decision because of all of the
23 riders are out there. We've seen the input from

1 the riders, but we've never seen the input from
2 the drivers.

3 MR. GEORGE: So what we do have is we have all of our
4 notes that we created from that operator
5 interaction. We can certainly provide you with
6 that.

7 COMMISSIONER BLUE: Great. Did we do it the same way
8 we did with the riders? That's the question. We
9 got that input, we brought that back, we put it
10 through the apparatus that we used to look at how
11 it could change, but was that same initiative
12 taken with all of the drivers? Not just some of
13 the drivers, not just some of the (inaudible),
14 but getting a broad perspective of all the
15 drivers. And I've done this with total quality
16 management with the Air Force when I was teaching
17 their course. Because sometimes to make a better
18 widget is not from the bosses, you know. So it's
19 from the broad perspective of everyone. So
20 that's why I brought that up.

21 MR. GEORGE: That's the challenge. When you say all
22 of the operators, no, because those operators --
23 some of them do not like to engage and don't

1 engage. Those who wanted to and were willing to
2 engage, the forum was created for them to come
3 in.

4 COMMISSIONER BLUE: Okay.

5 MR. GEORGE: And it was relative to all of the routes
6 that were run out of that specific garage. So
7 when we talked to the Babcock garage, we talked
8 to them about the routes that come out of the
9 Babcock garage, the ones that they operate.
10 Frontier and Cold Spring were the same type of
11 environment. We talked to them about those
12 routes that they have familiarity with. But it
13 wasn't done in a formal survey process where we
14 sent surveys out and asked them for input. It
15 was more of a roundtable, here's what we're
16 presenting, here's what we're doing, give us your
17 thoughts. And then we did document those
18 thoughts. We can certainly provide that to you.

19 COMMISSIONER BLUE: Because sometimes, just like a
20 bartender, they'll talk to the bartenders to help
21 solve their issues, some of the riders, versus
22 putting it down on paper.

23 MR. GEORGE: Oh, yeah.

1 COMMISSIONER BLUE: So that's the other part of it
2 that I was just -- you know, didn't resonate with
3 me, if there was something that we were missing
4 and we didn't have that component.

5 MS. MINDEL: And it's an important component and it
6 is something we will have anytime we do any route
7 changes. Because as Tom mentioned, you know,
8 hearing from the community, their focus is
9 getting to where they need to go on time, is it
10 easy, is it -- you know, that's their focus. The
11 driver's focus -- you know, obviously they're
12 concerned about the public, but they're also
13 concerned about their safety, they're concerned
14 about bathroom rest stops, because it's critical
15 to their operations. But they also provide the
16 critical information that the customer can't
17 provide. And it's the timing on the route.
18 Like, yes, you have me being at point A and point
19 B in this amount of time, but let me tell you,
20 it doesn't work like that because there's
21 potholes here, there's road barriers here. And
22 so that information absolutely is brought to our
23 planning group. The other thing I will say about

1 our planning group -- and I don't think we
2 promote this enough. Our planning group are
3 riders. They are transit dependent. So while
4 they're bringing recommendations that we bring to
5 the board, you know, they know firsthand because
6 they're out there in the system and they get to
7 know the drivers. But Tom's right, some are good
8 at engaging, some not so, but they are an
9 important piece for sure.

10 COMMISSIONER BLUE: Growing up I've ridden the bus to
11 go to school. I didn't have transportation. I
12 was an avid rider. And I don't know if anybody
13 else has ridden the bus, but in the wintertime,
14 when it's raining out, the time between buses,
15 the intervals, are very crucial to your health,
16 because when you get out there and you just miss
17 a bus -- I'm not going to tell you what I said.
18 But, when you just miss a bus, I mean, then
19 you've got to wait for the next bus, it's, you
20 know, it's something that happens. And sometimes
21 drivers, they know individuals who take their
22 particular bus, and they're there to even help
23 ensure that they catch that bus. Again, that

1 data is very crucial because we can sit here and
2 look at charts and get computer programs and say
3 this is going to work, that's not going to work,
4 but that driver is the key component into the
5 ridership piece.

6 COMMISSIONER TUCKER: Well, couldn't we consider
7 surveying the drivers the same way we do the
8 riders? And I think that may eliminate that
9 hesitancy of not wanting to engage. I mean, if
10 it's just a survey that they are encouraged to
11 complete on their own time then we could
12 (inaudible).

13 MS. MINKEL: We can look at how we interact with our
14 drivers to make certain that we're getting that
15 important information. You know, maybe one on
16 one isn't the best way. Maybe there's -- you
17 know, the other thing to keep in mind, our
18 drivers move. They have what's called picks. So
19 they get to pick their route. So some are
20 creatures of habit, they'll stay on the same
21 routes, and some like to move around. As you can
22 imagine, some are more desirable because less
23 weekends or evening services. So we have that

1 rotation. That rotation actually is good for us
2 so we have many different eyes on a particular
3 route. But absolutely we can look at those
4 driver interactions.

5 COMMISSIONER BLUE: And the other reason is I want to
6 make the decision once and right and not have
7 it -- well, it's impossible to have a perfect
8 decision, but to be as accurate as we can for the
9 organization because it's going to fall back on
10 us. You'll get community that will say, well,
11 they cut my route, they didn't care about me.
12 You can't solve all the issues and you can't
13 solve all the problems, I know, but -- trust me,
14 I know. But, we can try to make the decisions,
15 the right decisions to make sure that the
16 majority of our ridership and our operators and
17 we are all on the same page because we receive
18 dollars, public dollars, and we have that
19 responsibility. And I want to commend all of you
20 who are here, who work for the NFTA. We're just
21 commissioners, but you guys are doing an
22 excellent job, and I want to make sure that the
23 job that is being done is seen in the most

1 positive light of the community.

2 MS. MINKEL: Well, thank you for that. Just one
3 other point to your comments. This is ever
4 evolving. We make decisions on where and how we
5 post the service today, but we also have to be
6 nimble because the community that we serve is
7 constantly changing.

8 COMMISSIONER BLUE: Absolutely.

9 MS. MINKEL: For example, Northland Corridor didn't
10 exist a couple years ago. So sometimes we have
11 to adjust and move. So it's not one and done.
12 We will keep moving and adjusting, you know, as
13 new information becomes available, as new housing
14 centers are located, because that's really
15 important. We couldn't agree with you more. We
16 have to be the best we can.

17 Any other questions or comments?

18 CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: I want to say that you tell us
19 frequently that the cost of riding the bus has
20 not gone up, and at least to the people who ride,
21 but I think that's phenomenal. And, you know, we
22 don't hear it, so we don't remark on it. But of
23 all the things that we can give the passengers, I

1 think the fact that they can depend on being able
2 to afford to ride a bus is a wonderful one. And
3 I commend you all for being able to do it for ten
4 years. It's amazing.

5 MS. MINKEL: Thank you, Sister.

6 CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: Absolutely amazing.

7 MS. MINKEL: But as a reminder, we can only do that
8 as long as the public assistance (inaudible). So
9 we'll do what we can to control expenses, but a
10 lot of that is driven by --

11 CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: That's what people see. How
12 much do I have -- how much (inaudible).

13 MR. GEORGE: Absolutely. Absolutely.

14 MR. VANECEK: Kim, a little late-breaking news if you
15 don't mind. You'll like it.

16 MS. MINKEL: I always get scared.

17 MR. VANECEK: No. No. You're all going to love
18 this. Trust me. So Pike went above and beyond,
19 and we are going to be taking down the walls
20 around carousel three and four tomorrow morning.
21 And it's anticipated that they'll be in schedule
22 by three, three-thirty, it may slip a little bit.
23 But we wanted to do that ahead of the

1 Thanksgiving rush that we're going to see, and it
2 typically starts on this weekend. So big kudos
3 to Pike Company and Jacobs. They did well above
4 and beyond for us to do that to get that open.
5 So they will be open tomorrow morning, so you'll
6 have a much grander scale to look at when you
7 come to our airport and something that functions
8 a lot better than it's doing now.

9 MS. MINKEL: That's wonderful news. Thank you.

10 COMMISSIONER TUCKER: Since the border has opened,
11 have we seen more -- an increase?

12 MR. VANECEK: We're not seeing much yet.

13 COMMISSIONER TUCKER: I've seen a few Canadians, but
14 because of the requirements to test when they go
15 home, they still --

16 MR. VANECEK: Yeah. If you have a family of four and
17 you're paying a hundred and fifty dollars, that's
18 six hundred dollars (inaudible). I think it
19 will -- I think that will go away. I read in the
20 paper today that I don't think they're going to
21 require the Canadians to have -- as long as
22 they're vaccinated, they don't have to show a
23 test. I saw that the other day. However, U.S.

1 individuals still have to have a test to get into
2 Canada. I know that Brian Higgins is working
3 hard to see if he can (inaudible). But, yeah, so
4 we should start seeing at some point, probably
5 the spring -- it's a little slow when you get
6 into early December, January. But when you start
7 getting into the mid February, March, that's when
8 it will really tell us if we're back.

9 MS. MINKEL: Any other questions?

10 If not, do you need a motion to adjourn?

11 COMMISSIONER BLUE: So moved.

12 COMMISSIONER TUCKER: Second.

13 CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: Thank you both. I imagine
14 everyone is in favor of adjournment. And thank
15 you very much to those who presented today.

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SS:

COUNTY OF NIAGARA)

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