

# Meeting, City of Buffalo Train Station Site Selection Committee

Public Discussion of Potential New Train Station Locations in the City of Buffalo

Thursday, January 19, 2017

Comment Submitted By  
Aaron Krolikowski, 947 Delaware Ave

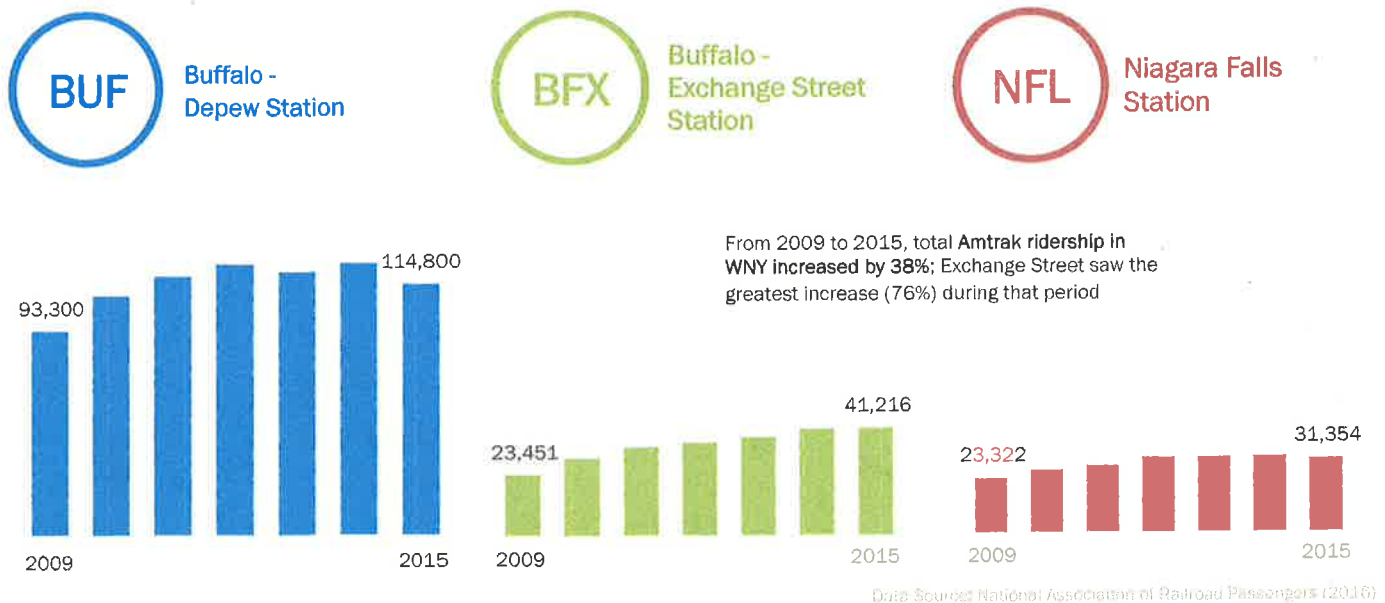
## OVERVIEW

New York State officials are pledging \$25 million to support the construction of a replacement for Buffalo's deteriorating Exchange Street Amtrak Station. Federal officials have indicated that there may be matching funds available, and it is likely that these funds can be collectively leveraged to obtain even more funding and support for the project.

Western New York (WNY) residents and policymakers should use this large pool of funds strategically, to make comprehensive and lasting improvements to inter-city rail in WNY.

This strategy includes three primary components:

- Maintain and improve a downtown rail station
- Move Depew Station to the Central Terminal
- Improve the frequency and reliability of rail service to Niagara Falls and Toronto



## INTER-CITY RAIL RIDERSHIP IN WNY

WNY is served by three inter-city rail stations: Buffalo-Depew, Buffalo-Exchange, and Niagara Falls. The region saw over 187,000 Amtrak riders in 2015, an increase of 38% over 2009, when there were 140,000 riders.

Ridership increased at all three stations during that period: 23% at Depew Station, 34% at Niagara Falls, and almost 76% at Exchange Street. Growing demand for inter-city rail services,

coupled with the ongoing revitalization of Buffalo and its surrounding areas, underscores the importance of this project.

Exchange Street Station is located in Downtown Buffalo, with Depew Station approximately 10 miles away on Dick Road near Walden Avenue. Niagara Falls Station is located on the Niagara River a short distance from Downtown Niagara Falls.

Depew Station hosts over 60% of the area's Amtrak riders, who typically must find transportation to and from Buffalo's eastern suburbs.

## INTER-CITY RAIL SERVICES

There are three Amtrak lines that run through WNY, accommodating eight trains each day. One train heads north to Toronto, three head west to Cleveland and Chicago, and four head east to Albany and New York City (NYC).

The Empire line runs between NYC and Niagara Falls, with two trains heading in each direction each day. In December 2016, Empire services departed Buffalo-Depew Station an average of 24 minutes late. The latest trains are those heading westward from NYC, as minor delays at each station tend to accumulate along the route.

Some Empire trains ran between a few minutes early and 2

hours and 37 minutes late in December. Just over 12% of Empire trains ran more than an hour late during that month.

The Maple Leaf line runs between NYC and Toronto, with one train heading in each direction each day. In December 2016, Maple Leaf services departed Buffalo-Depew Station an average of 43 minutes late. Similar to the Empire line, Maple Leaf trains heading westward from NYC tend to be the latest.

In that month, Maple Leaf trains ranged between 1 minute and 4 hours and 9 minutes late. Almost one out of every four Maple Leaf trains in December were at least 60 minutes late.

The Lake Shore line runs between NYC and Chicago, with one train heading in each direction each day. Lake Shore services departed Buffalo-Depew Station an average of 63 minutes late.



Niagara Falls  
Rochester  
Syracuse  
Albany  
NYC



Toronto  
Niagara Falls  
Rochester  
Syracuse  
Albany  
NYC



Chicago  
Cleveland  
Rochester  
Albany  
NYC  
Boston

Data Source: Amtrak's arrivals/departures, December 2016

Trains heading to Chicago typically experience the longest delays - an average of 1 hour and 20 minutes.

Throughout December 2016, Lake Shore trains ranged between 0 minutes and 5 hours and 19 minutes late. 35% of Lake Shore trains were at least 60 minutes late in December.

Trains are consistently late in WNY, with the largest fluctuations in December resulting from a winter snow storm and limited

freight services on Christmas day. However, most of the longer passenger rail delays in this part of the country are a consequence of competition with freight trains for what is left of America's limited rail infrastructure.

Passengers experiencing delays are often unable to find alternative activities during their wait, particularly at Depew Station, where there are no nearby amenities within walking distance.

## DESTINATIONS FROM WNY

From Buffalo and Niagara Falls, residents and visitors to WNY can use inter-city rail services to go to some of the largest cities in North America. To the north, riders can take a trip to Niagara Falls or Toronto, the largest city in Canada. Despite being just 60 miles away (as the crow flies), the journey to Toronto takes an average of four hours.

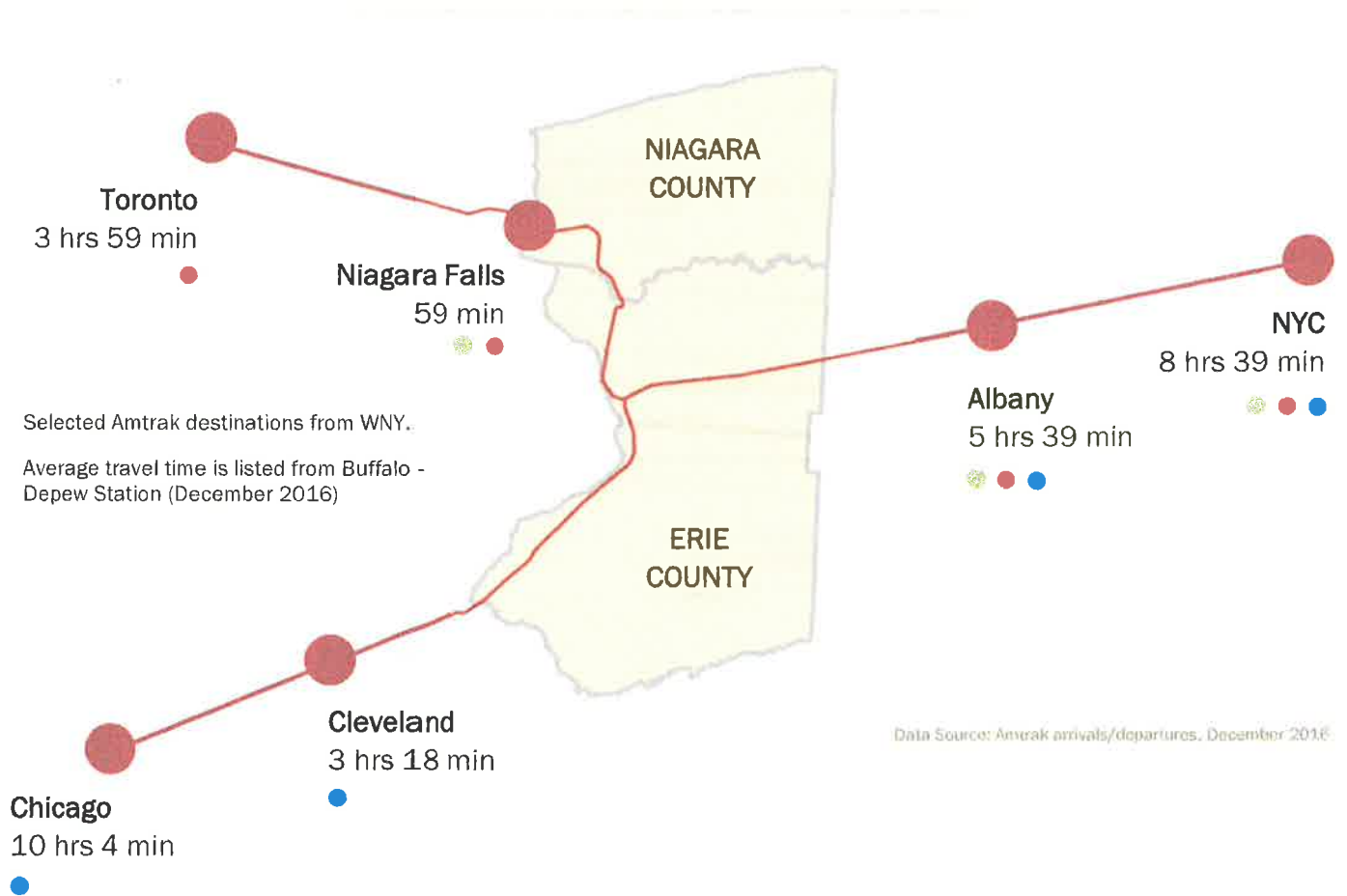
To the west, Cleveland and Chicago are the top destinations, and from Chicago riders can access the rest of the Midwest and Western United States. The time of the trip to Cleveland is comparable to automobile travel, with both taking approximately three hours.

To the east, riders can access the state capital in Albany and

NYC, the largest city in New York and the United States. It takes almost 6 hours to get to Albany and just under nine hours to arrive in NYC.

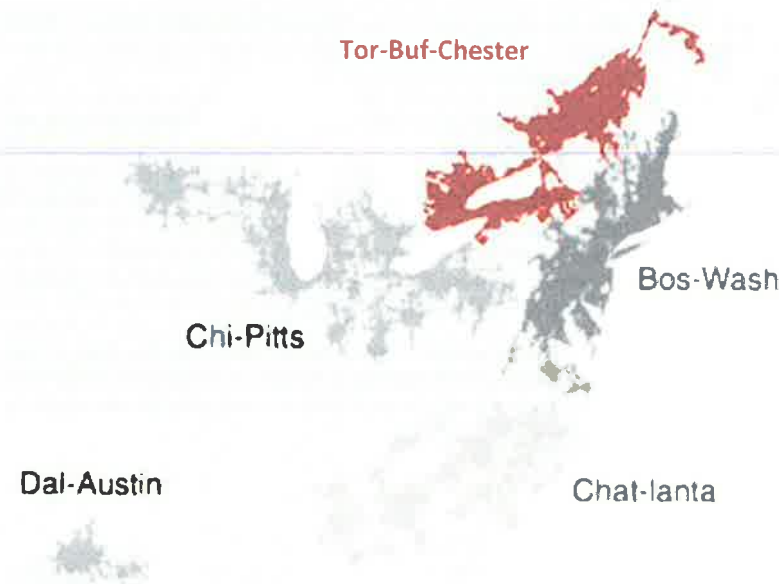
In each of these destinations, riders arrive at train stations that are either located in the center of a city or within walking distance of it. Union Station in Toronto, Union Station in Chicago, and Penn Station in NYC are just a few examples of this. Ensuring that a new or updated train station is sited near existing amenities in a downtown area is critical if Buffalo intends to capture any type of spillover benefits or multiplier effects from this public investment.

Riders can also visit many smaller cities via the Maple Leaf, Empire, and Lake Shore lines. Syracuse, Rochester, Utica, Erie, Toledo are also options from WNY's three inter-city rail stations.



One of the biggest barriers to improved service in the WNY region is a lack of available railroads themselves, as most were removed during the 20th Century. This has created conflicts between freight carriers and passenger rail, conflicts that are often visible at a national scale.

There are approximately 28 miles of rail bed between the Central Terminal and Niagara Falls Station. Allocating some funds to incentivize the construction of new track between these two cities can generate new regional revenues from ridership, tourism, and stronger macro-economic connections with Southern Ontario.



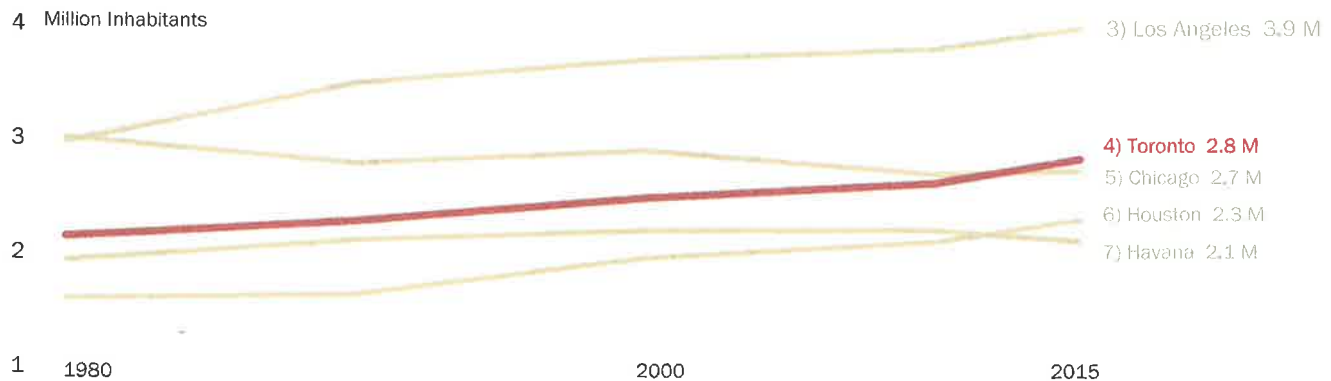
### WNY'S ECONOMIC POTENTIAL

Given its proximity to the border with Canada, WNY is well-positioned to take advantage of its location within a massive economic region.

Anchored by Toronto, this region stretches along the St. Lawrence Seaway to Ottawa and Montreal in the north, and around Lake Ontario to Buffalo and Rochester to the south. With over 16 million people generating \$600 billion in annual economic output, it ranks among the world's 25 largest economies. Improving connectivity with Southern Ontario will help WNY capitalize on its position within this globally-connected megaregion.

Map Source: Martin Prosperity Institute (2007)

In 2015, Toronto surpassed Chicago to become the 4th-largest city in North America. Only Mexico City (8.9 M), NYC (8.6 M), and LA (3.9 M) are larger



Data Source: Multiple Sources

### EXPANDING THE SCOPE OF THE BUFFALO RAIL STUDY

WNY is presented with a considerable opportunity to improve the overall functioning of its inter-city rail services and expand our potential for economic development. Strategically using pledged and potential funding to expand the presence of rail in Downtown Buffalo, moving the Depew Station to the Central Terminal, and improving the frequency and reliability of rail services in WNY will take political will and public support. It is a smart investment.

**The Buffalo Rail Committee should consider expanding the scope of the proposed study to include a cost-benefit analysis of increasing the frequency and reliability of rail services between Buffalo and Niagara Falls.**

Potential solutions are varied, but may include anything from laying new track within existing rail beds to establishing a purpose-built Amtrak line between the two cities. Whatever our future might bring, we should be able to take a train to get there.

For more information on the datasets used for this analysis, please contact:

Aaron Krolikowski, PhD  
 aaron.krolikowski@gmail.com  
 716-579-0922