

Buffalo New Rail Station Site Selection Public Meeting

January 19, 2017

10:00 am

Buffalo City Hall, Common Council Chambers

Good morning. My name is Maria Lehman. I am the retired Acting Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer of the NYS Thruway Authority. I am a licensed professional engineer in several states and have been in the business for over 36 years, 10 in the public sector and the rest in the private sector. I have worked on hundreds of projects throughout the United States ranging from small local projects to the \$3.9 Billion New York Bridge, from preliminary planning and environmental assessment through the design, construction, operations and maintenance to final decommissioning of facilities. During my career I have worked on rail station projects in several states, and have traveled extensively using rail systems around the world. I am a lifelong Western New Yorker who is extremely proud of what is currently happening in Western New York and more specifically Buffalo – there are multiple cranes on the cityscape!

I would like to offer my perspective on the challenge at hand, and what I see as the answers when I ponder the questions related to a passenger rail station in Buffalo.

Buffalo's current passenger train station is not adequate as a multi-modal center at an international border. When you consider cross border traffic of people, goods and services, New York State and Canada are in the top 10 of trade between international trading partners. I repeat, New York and Canada. Everything we do that enhances the movement of people and goods is good for New York and specifically for Western New York.

Train stations across New York have been upgraded to encourage passenger rail as a green option to either air travel or single passenger automotive traffic. Improvements in both the stations and corridors result in higher usage which in turn, will further improve the experience. It will also require better agreements with the freight railroads that own the NYS corridors as well as streamlining the customs and immigration process, while maintaining high levels of security.

During my tenure as Commissioner of Public Works for Erie County, we participated in a commuter rail study to evaluate improvements needed to the connection of rail from Niagara Falls, NY to Buffalo, NY. The intent was to provide an alternative to the Thruway corridor, as the Grand Island bridges are a pinch point in travel flow, especially during peak commuter times as well as during the summer tourism months. It was to look at commuter connections as well as quick and efficient tourism connections between Buffalo and Niagara Falls, NY. We also considered the flow of international commuters. The Toronto GoTransit system includes a GoTrain commuter rail system that runs a commuter rail line to Hamilton (Lakeshore West) and runs a weekend summer month rail line to Niagara Falls, Ontario. Go Bus, another part of GoTransit, runs a daily commuter bus service to Niagara Falls, Canada. It is a commuter connection to Toronto.

The core question is to solve the issue of an inadequate rail station to provide a multimodal result. The primary driver for the station is not economic development. It is necessary to separate the nice to have from the necessary.

As someone who grew up on the east side of Buffalo, I would love to see the Central terminal re-developed. I fully support the redevelopment of the Central terminal and the neighborhood. But the focus of that project should be community redevelopment, and the restoration of that magnificent building.

We need to look at recent lessons learned to drive our decision making. Silver bullet, high ticket item projects, can not be delivered in today's environment of constrained resources. The key to success is to weave a tapestry of smaller, right-sized projects that when woven together can transform the landscape. And most importantly, we need to learn from our past mistakes and look to successful models elsewhere in the United States and the world. Projects need to work in a manner to leverage near-term, private sector development.

When you leave the United States it is VERY rare to have a train station that is not in the Central Business District of a City. There is good reason for that. The CBD is where the other modes converge: rapid transit, the intra city bus service and the intercity bus network. The CBD is also where the cluster of tourist activity is; whether it is attractions, or hotels and restaurants, to service the travelers. And it provides for the model that allows for walkable cities.

The only area currently considered that meets this requirement is Canalside. ESD is finalizing plans to build a commercial development which will require a basement. The existing train trackage is underground through Canalside, so the basement of the new development could serve as new train station. It puts the station in the middle of a bustling tourist area and transit service, and a short walk to intercity Bus service, hotels, attractions and restaurants. Canalside is a smart choice for the station in location, cost containment and expedited delivery.

Last year I was fortunate enough to travel to Poland and Krakow, a City that was established in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century. Krakow has a central train station, which was rebuilt in the middle of a mixed use development which including a shopping mall on the same downtown site. I took a train from the airport to the City and then walked to my hotel. When I left to go to Rzeszow, Buffalo's Sister City, I walked to the train station and took a train from there. It was efficient and it works.

I am interested in taking our current success stories and adding a chapter not writing a new book. We need to leverage the \$500 million in investment from both the public and private sectors at Canalside in the past 10 years, with the \$500 million on the books for the next 5 to 10 years. A centrally located, modern, intermodal facility at the epicenter of tourism in Buffalo is the place for the train station to be. Hockey fans, and youth hockey fans will use the intermodal station, as will general tourists. And there is always to potential for commuter rail as well.

Most importantly, by focusing on the problem at hand; the lack of a viable train station, you keep the costs of building that station at an affordable amount, leaving the bigger dollars to solve some of the corridor issues for both passenger and freight rail.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my thoughts on the subject. Good luck with your process.