

Comments on the Potential New Train Station Locations in the City of Buffalo

Public Hearing
Thursday, December 15, 2016
10:00 AM – 2:00 PM
Buffalo Common Council Chamber
City Hall, 13th Floor

Hello. My name is Dr. Wende Mix. Currently, I am on the faculty at SUNY Buffalo State where I teach Transportation Planning and Sustainable Transportation courses. I also chair the college's Parking and Transportation Committee. My comments here reflect my own expert opinion, not that of the college's. I received a Ph.D. in transportation engineering from UB in 1987 while working at the NFTC (now the GBNRTC) on a study to integrate bus service with the new (and still under construction) light rail system and to reduce costs associated with bus services in the region. I was the Assistant Director of the Center for Transportation Research at Virginia Tech where I also taught transportation planning in the Civil and Environmental Engineering Department. I helped establish the federally funded Transportation Center at Utah State University in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, and held faculty status at Utah State, the University of Utah, as well as taught at the Utah Department of Transportation. One of my more memorable projects at the time was as a consultant on the Salt Lake Airport Planning Study and Light Rail extension that occurred shortly after Salt Lake City won the Olympic bid. I also worked at the USDOT Bureau of Transportation Statistics and as a federal contractor in the DC area on numerous transportation studies.

Although I understand the sentimental, historic and economic development reasons for restoring the Central Terminal, the downtown/canal side location would be more prudent in the short term. This area in downtown Buffalo is already surrounded by numerous hotels and entertainment venues within walking distance or a short, free light rail ride. Additionally, the Buffalo – Niagara medical campus is also a short light rail train ride away. It would be much more attractive to visitors from outside of the region to be delivered to such a centralized location. The Central Terminal requires a 15 plus minute taxi (or potentially uber or lyft) ride, or longer bus ride to the downtown area hotels, the convention center, theaters, casino, sports arenas, restaurants, etc..... The Central Terminal site would be more attractive after significant future economic development occurs, which its restoration is supposed to spur. In my opinion that may be too far down the road and is out of sync with the momentum associated with the current downtown revitalization. With a terminal downtown, locals could take the light rail and hop on Amtrak for a day in Toronto without the hassle and cost of driving, parking, etc. The

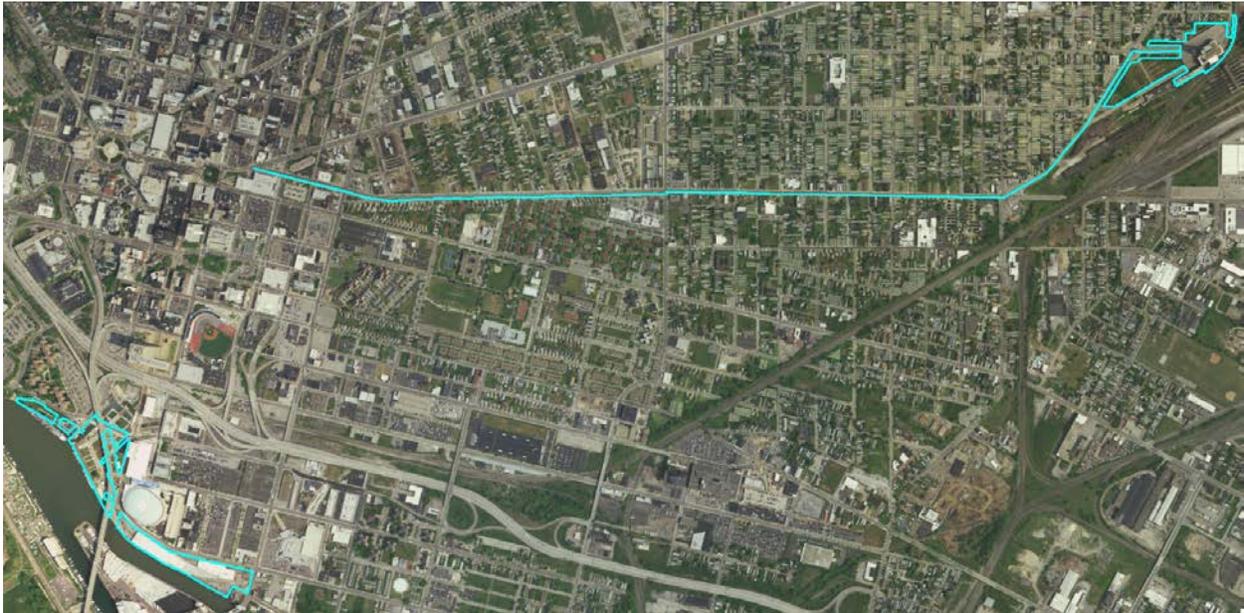
same would be true for Canadians/Torontonians who are coming to town for a hockey or baseball game or quick getaway (and possibly shopping when downtown retail picks up). If we ever develop more efficient regional rail travel between Buffalo and Toronto I can even imagine commuters using the system (like I did for many years on the MARC trains between Baltimore and Washington, DC.).

The footprint of the Central Terminal site is quite large and can accommodate on-site parking and bus service which would be necessary for passengers going to and from that site. However, a terminal location downtown should not attempt to compete with this site advantage of the Central Terminal. One thing that might detract from a downtown train station is an overwhelming presence of buses. Design is very important so that the station doesn't look and feel like a bus terminal. Bus connections are needed but should be discretely incorporated into the design. The second priority mode should be walking and light rail. The design should also incorporate secure bike parking and bikeshare. Shuttle buses to sites with remote parking, city bus connections, and rental cars could be one approach to solving this lot size issue. Ideally, the design should also attempt to make the station a destination for shopping (small retail) and dining, like Union Station in DC.

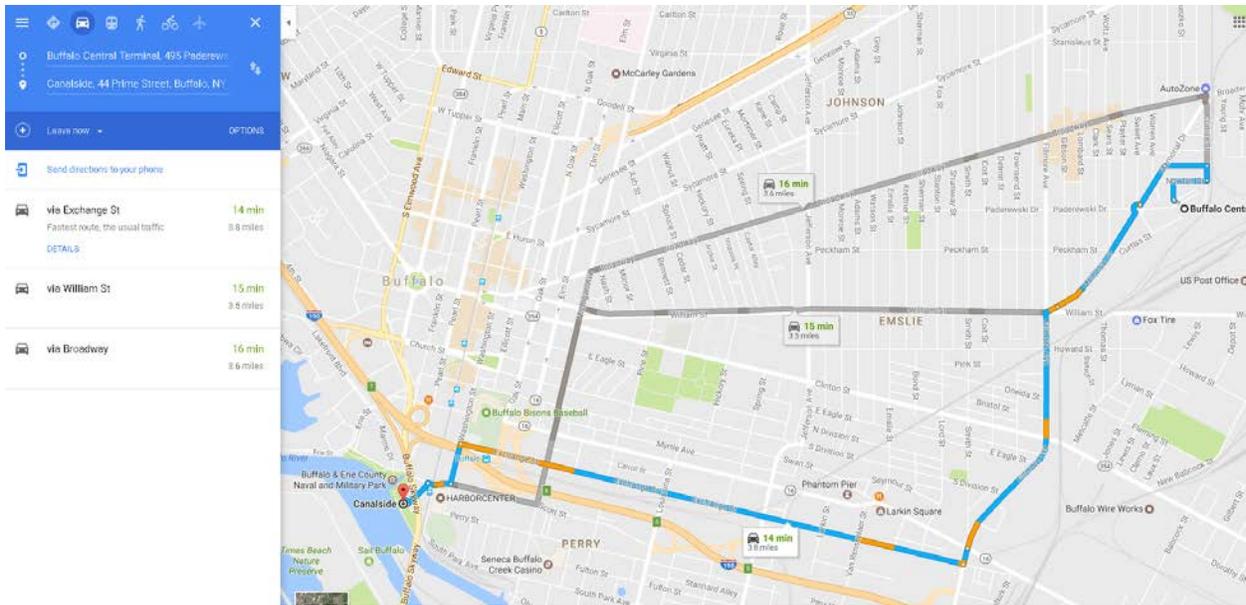
I have included some maps below that visually tell the story of my remarks. Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you regarding siting of the new train station.



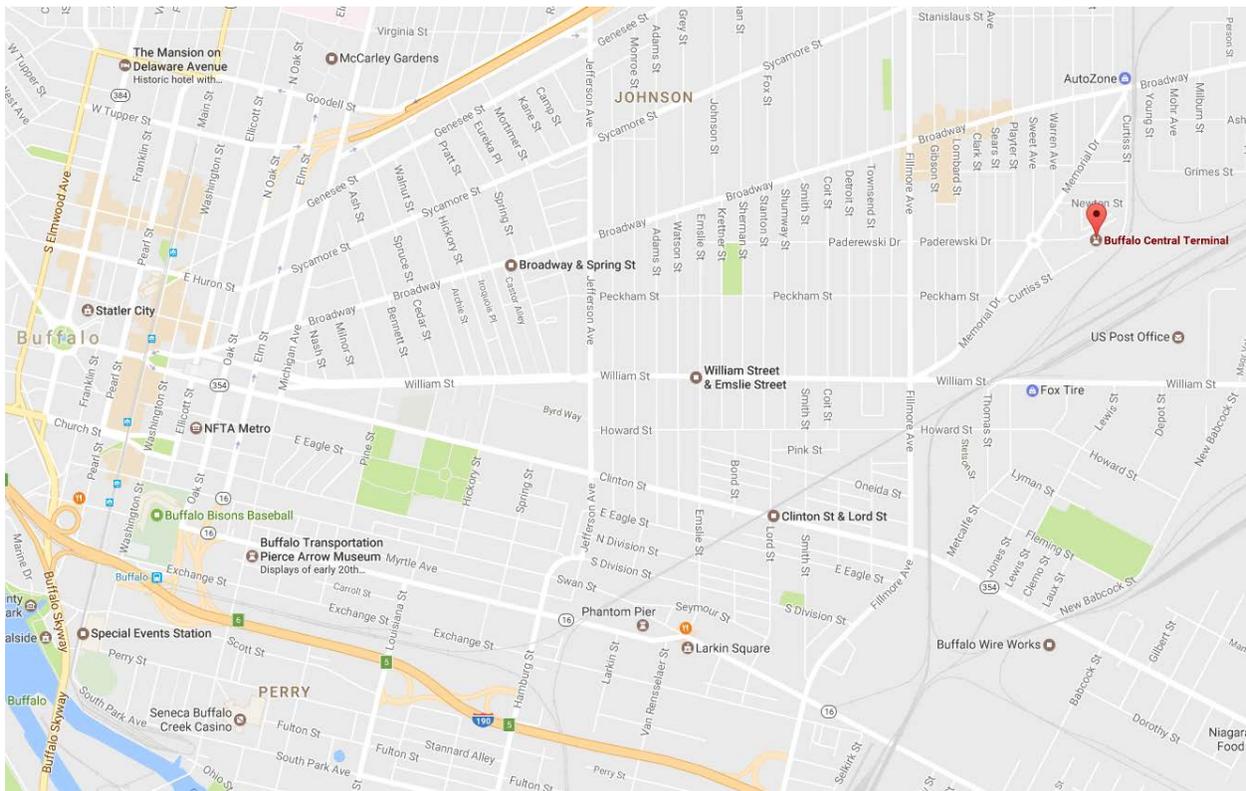
Central Terminal footprint and surrounding neighborhood (with significant vacant residential parcels).



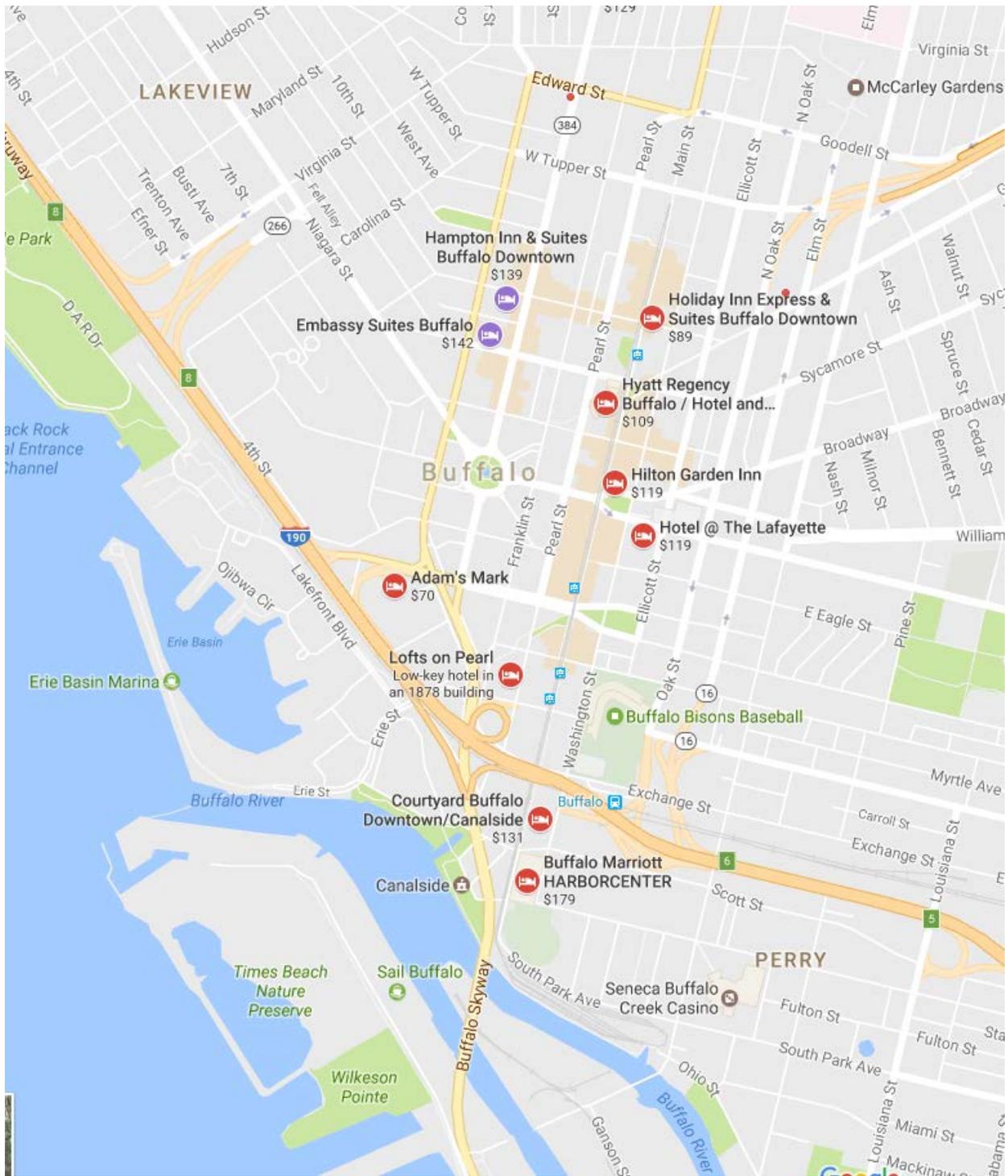
Shortest path to downtown (boundary) from Central Terminal. Canal side parcels highlighted in southwest corner.



Google estimated travel time by auto from the Central Terminal to Canalside (for dinner and a game!)



What the world sees when searching on the Central Terminal in Buffalo.



What the world sees when searching on canalside in downtown Buffalo with Google maps.