

Summary of 10/12/23 STM Informational Meeting

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 pm. Father Ward of St Bartholomew's Church was thanked for allowing STM to use the church facilities. Fr. Ward gave welcoming remarks.

Synopsis of Project Proposal Details

The Metro Rail project details were given as they relate specifically to the Marvin Gardens (Tonawanda) area. These included timing for completion of the project once construction was started (4-5 years), reduced traffic lanes on N.F. Blvd, limited ability to make left turns due to raised roadbed built to accommodate the train, congested side streets from traffic diversion during and after construction, noise and vibration during and after construction (train horns), closure of businesses. A map covering the traffic patterns of N.F. Blvd and the route the extension would take was presented.

It was pointed out that the Erie County mortgage tax currently subsidizes the Metro Rail, which is, in essence, a subsidization by taxpayers of a service that benefits few people. The NFTA representation of ridership on the train is exaggerated.

It also was pointed out that STM does not stand in the way of progress but instead envisions a more efficient alternative to the train through a rapid bus system that would be less disruptive to the neighborhoods and more flexible.

Rick Henry, a volunteer fire fighter, addressed the probable effect the project would have on emergency response times given the reduction of traffic lanes, the raised roadbed affecting the ability to make left turns and new traffic patterns. He stated the project was "the worst plan ever" and that it will cost lives in the long run.

Current Status of FTA (Federal Funding)

Note was made of the fact that the expansion will not go forward without funding from the FTA and that the FTA will not provide funding if there is little community support for the project.

Currently, the submission of the environmental impact study by the NFTA has been pushed back to 2024 which will be followed by public meetings. It was noted the expansion is not on the FTA's Capital Investment Grant program ledger for 2023-2024 which means that the NFTA has not yet submitted an application for funds. Once the application is submitted, probably for 2024-2025 fiscal year, a huge media event will occur. NFTA admits that it has much work to do before reaching this point.

NFTA "Smoke and Mirrors"

Examples of NFTA disingenuousness were given. A video of NFTA representative Kim Minkel was played in which she stated the community was excited by the expansion and was wholly behind it. In reality, the community knew nothing about the project. NFTA hired KCI Technologies to perform surveying in support of the environmental impact statement but did not inform town supervisors. NFTA held an on-line hearing in 2021 thereby preventing comments from non-tech savvy persons. There has been no official confirmation that the Stampede buses will be discontinued or that the rail will add to any conveniences. The NFTA is claiming, without evidence, that the extension will reduce traffic in the area.

It also was noted that the NFTA and CRT (an organization that supports the expansion) have "fudged" statistics related to the Metro Rail, including a claim that ridership growth is up 400%, that there are 20,000 daily riders on the UB buses, when ridership is actually 14,000 at peak times (180 days per year) and that the cost of the expansion is 1.2 billion dollars with FTA funding 80% when the cost is actually 2 billion dollars with the FTA splitting the cost 50/50 with local sources.

Julia Partsch, a licensed real estate broker, addressed CRT's claim that property values will increase after the expansion is completed. Based on her research related to proximity of property to the expansion and the reduction of frontage due to eminent domain or otherwise, it is her opinion that property values will decrease. Specifically, properties within 5,000 feet of the Metro Rail would sustain a property value decrease of 8%; within 900 feet, a decrease of 11%. For those who

would lose 6 ft of land to the expansion, a decrease in value between 10% and 80% dependent on noise levels, and level of road encroachment.

Steps Taken By STM To Date

STM has held 4 community meetings, distributed road signs, obtained 1500+ signatures on the petition, obtained media exposure, attended local town meetings in order to question politicians about the expansion, organized support of businesses and suggested alternative routes for the expansion.

Comments by Politicians and Another Activist

County Legislator John Bargnesi stated that the NFTA has yet to approach the County about the expansion. He also provided some historical facts including that any expansion was meant to be for the benefit of UB students and eliminate the Stampede buses. In order to garner support of the Legislature, the NFTA would have to show that the train would be more efficient than the buses. It was Mr. Bargnesi's opinion that the current project didn't seem the right project but noted that never stopped a project from going forward in the past

Tonawanda Councilman Carl Szarek stated that with the joint effort of the County and the Town of Tonawanda the concerns of its citizens can be addressed.

Town of Tonawanda Supervisor Joseph Emminger provided background regarding the preferred sites of the expansion and his opinion 6 years ago that the Niagara Falls Blvd option would not work for Tonawanda. The expansion along that route did not benefit Tonawanda, only Amherst which has UB and the then-thriving Boulevard Mall. He believes that more media attention can be garnered by having the local politicians actively involved and in that regard, he has set up a meeting with the Town of Amherst supervisor, Brian Kulpa, to discuss the impacts that the expansion will have on the towns. Mr. Emminger believes Mr. Kulpa is not "overly excited" by the expansion down N.F. Blvd and that this represents a change in opinion on Mr. Kulpa's part.

Joseph Lane, president of the Audubon Homeowner's Association, who has been active in opposing the Metro Rail in his neighborhood, provided historical background re: the original purpose of the expansion of the Metro Rail into the Northtowns. The idea was to provide public transportation to what was touted as a huge residential and commercial development around the I-990. However, the development is only 1/10 of what was originally planned making any extension of Metro Rail obsolete.

Comments by Attendees

A homeowner on N. F. Blvd expressed her concerns as a disabled person about access to her home in case of a medical emergency, about health issues in relation to proposed blasting, about the potential loss of power due to construction and its effect on her medical equipment as well as the designation of N.F. Blvd as an evacuation route.

A homeowner on Kenmore Avenue addressed concerns about the construction interfering with his ability to leave his home to obtain medical treatment as he is wheelchair bound and requires extensive care due to a serious accident. He presented a letter his doctor wrote to the NFTA in support of these concerns.

One attendee mentioned the release of rats into the community due to underground construction.

Another attendee addressed the problems with snow removal during and after construction especially given the proposed raised roadbed for the train.

Two attendees suggested respectively starting a lawsuit and holding a referendum regarding the expansion.

To close the meeting, a historical statement from former Town of Amherst council member William Kindel was read.

The meeting was ended with a prayer by Fr. Ward at 8:45 pm.