

Chapter 1

Purpose and Need

Contents

1	Purpose and Need	1-1
1.1	PROJECT PURPOSE.....	1-3
1.2	PROJECT NEED	1-4
1.3	PROJECT PURPOSE, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES.....	1-4

Figures

Figure 1-1.	Existing Metro Rail and Project Corridor	1-2
-------------	------------------------------------------------	-----

Tables

Table 1-1.	Goals and Objectives	1-5
------------	----------------------------	-----

Appendices

Appendix A1 Alternatives: Purpose and Need

Acronyms and Abbreviations

BNMC	Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus
BRT	Bus Rapid Transit
DEIS	Draft Environmental Impact Statement
GBNRTC	Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council
LRT	Light Rail Transit
Metro	Niagara Frontier Transit Metro System, Inc.
Metro Rail	Metro Light Rail Transit System
NFTA	Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority
Project	Buffalo-Amherst-Tonawanda Corridor Transit Expansion
UB	University at Buffalo

1 Purpose and Need

The Niagara Frontier Transit Metro System, Inc. (Metro) operates a 6.4-mile light rail transit line called Metro Rail that provides service along Main Street in Buffalo, New York, from KeyBank Center in Downtown Buffalo to the State University of New York, University at Buffalo (UB) South Campus. Metro is proposing the Buffalo-Amherst-Tonawanda Corridor Transit Expansion (Project) to expand high-capacity transit service from the current terminus at Metro Rail University Station on the UB South Campus to Tonawanda and Amherst, New York, including connections to the UB North Campus. Figure 1-1 shows the Project Corridor alignment where the build alternatives—a Light Rail Transit (LRT) Alternative and a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Alternative—are being considered. The seven-mile corridor alignment with ten stations is proposed along Main Street, Kenmore Avenue, Niagara Falls Boulevard, Maple Road, and Sweet Home Road, through the UB North Campus to John James Audubon Parkway and I-990 (Project Corridor). This chapter describes the Project purpose and need, goals and objectives.

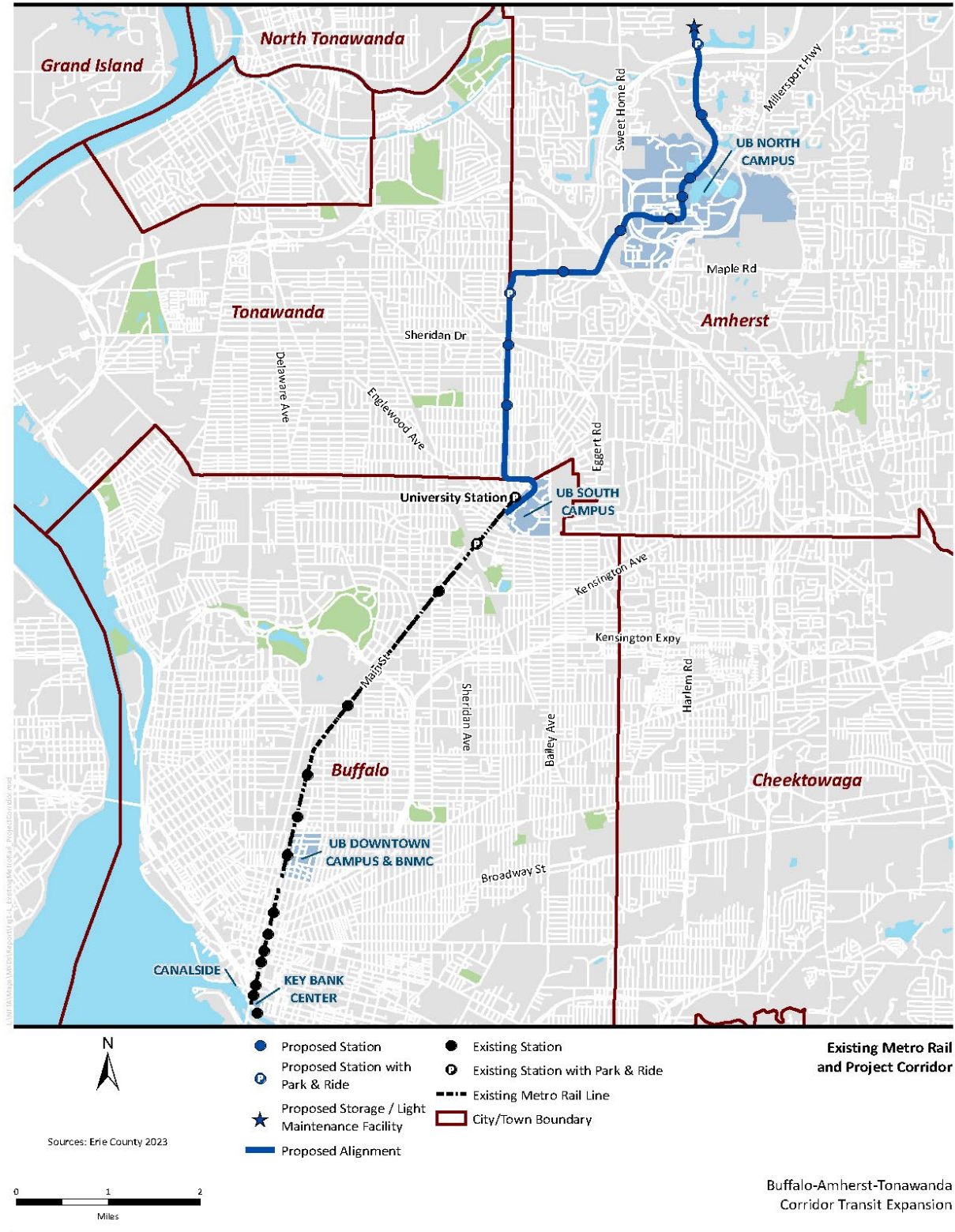
Improvements to transit service in the Greater Buffalo region have been considered for over 50 years. The concept for Metro Rail evolved in the 1960s and 1970s as one segment of a proposed 43-mile network of rapid-transit rail lines across the region. Plans were developed for a 14-mile rail line running between downtown Buffalo and north of the planned UB North Campus in Amherst. Due to funding constraints, the Metro Rail line that opened in 1985 is a 6.4-mile rail line terminating at the UB South Campus.

The existing Metro Rail serves a diversity of activity centers and land uses. These activity centers and land uses range from recreation, family activities, and dining at the waterfront to the urban commercial center of downtown Buffalo, the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC), the UB campuses and other colleges, to established residential neighborhoods, and emerging commercial and employment centers in Amherst. College enrollment in the metropolitan area has grown over 300% from 1960 to 2022¹.

In 2010, Metro updated its Strategic Assessment, examining available rights-of-way and major arterial corridors as possible locations for major transit investments. The 2010 assessment revisited four existing corridors from the previous 2001 Strategic Assessment: Northwest to Tonawanda/Niagara Falls (Tonawanda Corridor), Northeast to Amherst/UB North Campus (Amherst Corridor), East to Airport area (Airport Corridor), and South to Southtowns (Southtown Corridor).

¹ U.S. Census of Population and Housing: 1960. Final Report PHIC (1)-19.

Figure 1-1. Existing Metro Rail and Project Corridor



Also, six additional corridors (Bailey Avenue, Broadway, Delaware Avenue, Elmwood Avenue, Hertel-Fillmore, and Seneca Street) were identified for assessment. The 10 corridors were reviewed based on their market intensity, development potential, travel patterns, and existing ridership. The corridors were also compared to modern light rail transit and bus rapid transit peer systems across the United States to determine if corridor conditions were within similar ranges. Out of the 10 corridors, five scored well in all categories and were identified as good candidates for further study, including the Amherst Corridor (*i.e.*, the Project Corridor).² The Amherst Corridor is the proposed Project that is the subject of this Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

1.1 PROJECT PURPOSE

Initiated on August 30, 2021, Project scoping solicited input from agencies and the public to provide input on the Project's purpose and need, its objectives, and the potential alternatives under consideration. For more information refer to Appendix J1, "Public Outreach and Coordination Report." Derived from agency the public input, the purpose of the Project is to link established and emerging activity centers (e.g., UB campuses, BNMC, the Buffalo central business district, employment and retail centers, and the Buffalo waterfront) along the existing Metro Rail line in Buffalo with existing and emerging activity centers in Amherst and Tonawanda by providing fast, reliable, safe, and convenient transit. The Project would serve existing Metro riders; attract new transit patrons; improve regional connections between Buffalo, Amherst, and Tonawanda; and support transit-oriented development and affordable housing opportunities. In addition, the Project would:

- Improve mobility along the Project Corridor by increasing transportation options and accessibility in communities throughout the Greater Buffalo region.
- Better connect the three UB campuses by providing improved mobility options that include a "one-seat ride" between campuses without requiring a transfer.
- Improve the operating efficiency of the transit network by providing convenient and seamless connections for transit patrons between activity centers and competitive travel times.
- Support local and regional land use planning and transit-oriented development as outlined in the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC) and NFTA Metro Comprehensive Transit-Oriented Development Plans, 2019³ and 2023.⁴

² NFTA-Metro. June 2010. Metro Strategic Assessment.

³ GBNRTC and NFTA Metro. May 2019. "Comprehensive Transit-Oriented Development Plan, Final Report."

⁴ GBNRTC and NFTA Metro. September 2023. "Comprehensive Transit-Oriented Development Strategic Implementation Plan, Planning Program – Phase II, September 2023."

- Provide mobility options by serving transit-dependent populations, thereby improving opportunities for participation in the regional workforce and overall economy.
- Help relieve parking constraints and capacity issues on the BNMC, UB campuses, Project Corridor, and downtown Buffalo, and minimize traffic and parking-related impacts on neighborhoods.

1.2 PROJECT NEED

The Buffalo metropolitan region is experiencing economic growth and transformation, including over \$1 billion for projects that are recently completed or underway. These projects enhance revitalization; promote smart growth; incentivize innovation and entrepreneurship; develop the workforce; and advance manufacturing, tourism, and health and life sciences.⁵ As reported in the GBNRTC 2019 Comprehensive Transit-Oriented Development Plan, the existing and proposed Project Corridor is expected to experience faster population growth (an increase of 5.8 percent versus 1.3 percent for the region) and employment growth (an increase of 13.3 percent versus 12.5 percent for the region) than the balance of the region between 2015 and 2040.

This growth will increase the demand for work trips and non-work trips, including shopping, medical services, and entertainment. As jobs and population increase, transportation issues and challenges will need to be addressed. The Project seeks to serve these increased travel needs along the corridor, ensuring residents have mobility options and continued access to employment opportunities, in Buffalo, Amherst, and Tonawanda.

The need for increased mobility and transit service that the Project would serve has three main components: (1) serve existing and future travel demand generated by recent and future regional development; (2) provide high-quality regional transit service; and (3) improve service for transit-dependent populations. For more detailed information regarding the Project's need, refer to Appendix A1, "Project Purpose and Need."

1.3 PROJECT PURPOSE, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES

Table 1-1 presents the goals and objectives of the Project, which are directly linked to the Project purpose and need.

⁵ Western New York Regional Economic Development Council. January 2017. "Buffalo Billion Phase II — Buffalo Niagara's Strategic Plan for Prosperity."

Table 1-1. Goals and Objectives

Goals	Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a cost-effective, attractive, and high-quality transit service to serve the Buffalo-Amherst-Tonawanda corridor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide cost-effective transit service to transit-dependent populations. Provide a reliable and convenient transit service. Provide more convenient transit services for riders transferring to or from Metro Rail at University Station. Improve mobility. Reduce number of transfers for riders destined for the UB North Campus.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mitigate the growth of traffic congestion on study area roadways. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the share of trips using transit in study area.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the accessibility of transit in the study area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the number of transit options for travelers. Improve the connectivity of transit services. Improve livability by providing increased access to facilities such as affordable housing, jobs, education, medical services, food shopping, retail shopping, entertainment, etc. Provide access to populations that are traditionally underserved.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the effectiveness of the regional transit system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase system ridership. Increase system revenue. Build on investment/reinvestment of original Metro Rail.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support sustainable future economic growth in the study area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serve new markets with high-quality transit services to support economic development. Provide transit-oriented development and design to enable the development/redevelopment of quality neighborhoods. Strengthen the regional economy.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid or minimize adverse community and environmental impacts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid or minimize impacts to sensitive environmental resources. Avoid or minimize negative impacts to neighborhoods. Avoid or minimize negative impacts to businesses.