Section 4.4
Neighborhoods and Communities

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

BRT ..... Bus Rapid Transit
EIS ..... Environmental Impact Statement
LRT ..... Light Rail Transit
Metro ..... Niagara Frontier Transit Metro System, Inc.
PAL ..... Metro Paratransit Access Line
Project ..... Buffalo-Amherst-Tonawanda Corridor Transit Expansion
NFTA ..... Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority
UB ..... University at Buffalo

4.4 NEIGHBORHOODS AND COMMUNITIES

This section identifies potential Project impacts on surrounding neighborhoods and key community resources. The analysis considered the surrounding community context and character, community mobility, and community facilities near the Project corridor, such as schools, libraries, daycare facilities, places of worship, emergency services, and healthcare facilities. The existing community context and character, mobility, and community facilities are described in Appendix D4, Neighborhoods and Communities Supplemental Information. Table 4.4-1 summarizes the impact findings related to neighborhoods and community resources.

Table 4.4-1. Neighborhoods and Community Resources – Impacts Summary

Alternative	Permanent Impacts		
	Community Character and Cohesion	Mobility and Access	Community Facilities
No Build Alternative	No impacts	No impacts No enhanced mobility benefits	No impacts
LRT Alternative	Community cohesion would be impacted by the impediment to pedestrians created by the construction of ballasted track along Niagara Falls Boulevard and Maple Road. Mitigation proposed in Chapter 3, "Transportation" includes embedded track to mitigate this impact. Impacts associated with noise will be addressed as described in Section 4.11, "Noise". No adverse impacts after mitigation	No adverse impacts Mobility benefits include: ▪ Reduced transit travel time between UB North and South campus ▪ Improved access to study area schools and educational institutions, public libraries, daycare facilities, Amherst government complex. ▪ Enhanced pedestrian and bicycle facilities. ▪ High-quality transit mobility along Audubon Parkway.	No adverse impacts
BRT Alternative	No adverse impacts	No adverse impacts Mobility benefits include: ▪ Reduced transit travel time between UB North and South campus. ▪ Improved access to study area schools and educational institutions, public libraries, daycare facilities, Amherst government complex ▪ Enhanced pedestrian and bicycle facilities. ▪ High-quality transit mobility along Audubon Parkway	No adverse impacts

4.4.1 No Build Alternative

Under the No Build Alternative, the Project would not be built, and there would be no changes to community character and cohesion. With the No Build Alternative, community facilities in the study area would not benefit from enhanced access to transit that would be associated with the implementation of the Project. An example of these unrealized benefits include:

- No additional mobility benefits to study area schools and educational institutions such as UB.
- No additional mobility benefits to study area public libraries, particularly those located in Amherst and on or near the UB campuses (e.g., Amherst Public Library – Audubon Branch, Health Sciences Library at UB South Campus, Libraries Annex – UB Facility, Lockwood Memorial Library and UB North Campus Libraries).
- No additional mobility benefits to study area daycare facilities, particularly those located on or near the UB campuses (e.g., UB North and South Child Care Centers).
- No additional mobility benefits to study area government facilities, particularly the Amherst government complex where the Amherst Court, Amherst Center for Senior Services, and Amherst Police Department are located.

4.4.2 Build Alternatives

The following analysis addresses community character and cohesion, mobility, and community facilities. Differences between the two Build Alternatives are noted.

4.4.2.1 Community Character and Cohesion

The LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative would operate at-grade within existing roadway rights-of-way on Niagara Falls Boulevard, Maple Road, adjacent to Sweet Home Road, and within the UB North Campus. Each Build Alternative would be constructed using the same proposed alignment and the same transportation cross-sections.

Both Build Alternatives propose the construction of stations at the same locations with the same configuration. The new transit stations would become focal points for the surrounding communities using context sensitive station designs that celebrate the existing community character. Proposed stations may also attract new commercial and residential activities that would result in the development of underutilized properties, new residential units, and new employment opportunities supporting the continued vibrancy of each community's character. Project investments in pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and the increased pedestrian activity around stations would improve safety and help bridge the gap between communities currently separated by higher volume roadways. Future development plans at the Boulevard Mall and the Project's associated station would serve as a community enhancement. There would not be any fencing on either side of the transit right-of-way that would prevent individuals from accessing crosswalks. The Project would not reduce the frequency of crosswalks along the alignment.

The following describes impacts to Community Charter and Cohesion by segment.

- **Southern Segment**: Both Build Alternatives would be constructed at-grade within the median of Niagara Falls Boulevard. The design for the LRT Build Alternative considered ballasted track, which would act as a physical barrier for pedestrians traveling between neighborhoods on either side of Niagara Falls Boulevard. This LRT Build Alternative impact would be mitigated, as proposed in Chapter 3, "Transportation", through construction of embedded track which is flush with the roadway removing any physical barrier.

  The LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative would be constructed primarily within existing transportation right-of-way. However, portions of the LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative would be constructed in areas where there is insufficient right-of-way width or extending the limits of disturbance beyond the existing transportation right-of-way. As such, implementing the LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative would require acquiring property and, in some cases, could displace commercial and residential uses (see Section 4.1, "Property Acquisitions and Displacements"). These displacements are located immediately adjacent to the Project corridor and existing transportation uses. The Project would not result in permanent adverse impacts to community character.
- **Middle Segment**: Both Build Alternatives would be constructed at-grade within the median of Niagara Falls Boulevard and Maple Road. The LRT Build Alternative is proposed to use ballasted track which would act as a physical barrier for pedestrians travelling between neighborhoods on either side of Niagara Falls Boulevard and Maple Road. This LRT Build Alternative impact would be mitigated, as proposed in Chapter 3, "Transportation", through construction of embedded track which is flush with the roadway removing any physical barrier.
- **Northern Segment**: Both Build Alternatives would be constructed at-grade through the UB North Campus and along the vacated northbound travel lanes of Audubon Parkway. Both proposed Build Alternatives invest in public transit services within the existing transportation right-of-way and would not adversely impact community character or cohesion.

  Project noise, vibration impact analysis, and resultant findings are described in Sections 4.11 and 4.12, "Noise" and "Vibration", respectively. The Project design incorporates mitigation measures to reduce the noise impacts for the LRT Build Alternative.

4.4.2.2 Mobility

The LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative would not restrict mobility within the study area given their proposed median running alignment. Both Build Alternatives would result in benefits to mobility, as follows:

- Both Build Alternatives would invest in high-frequency public transit service which is currently not present within the study area today, providing enhanced mobility.
- Travel time between UB North and South campus would be reduced and study area neighborhoods would have direct transit services (without a transfer) to the community

facilities, housing, and employment opportunities present within the City of Buffalo and along the existing Metro Rail line.

- The LRT Build Alternative would include an investment in non-ballasted (embedded) track along Niagara Falls Boulevard and Maple Road to allow automobiles to transverse the track alignment at designated locations. The BRT Build Alternative also includes allowing left-turn movements at the same designated intersections. Intersections were selected based on their location to nearby signalized intersections and projected left-turn traffic demand. See Chapter 3, "Transportation" for more details and a list of intersections.
- Enhanced mobility benefits and access to study area schools and educational institutions such as UB will be provided. As a result of the Project, there is an opportunity to discontinue UB shuttle bus services as most users would directly benefit from the enhanced mobility provided by the Project. Enhanced mobility between the UB campuses is described in Chapter 3, "Transportation," and Appendix C2, "Travel Demand Forecasting."
- Enhanced mobility benefits and access to study area public libraries, particularly those located in Amherst and on or near the UB campuses (e.g., Amherst Public Library – Audubon Branch, Health Sciences Library at UB South Campus, Libraries Annex – UB Facility, Lockwood Memorial Library and UB North Campus Libraries).
- Enhanced mobility benefits and access to study area daycare facilities, particularly those located on or near the UB campuses with direct access to the Project (e.g., UB North and South Child Care Centers).
- Enhanced mobility benefits and access to the Amherst government complex where the Amherst Court, Amherst Center for Senior Services, and Amherst Police Department are located.
- Enhanced pedestrian and bicycle mobility benefits because of Project pedestrian infrastructure investments.

The following describes impacts to mobility by segment.

- **Southern and Middle Segments**: Modifications to Metro Bus service within the study area as provided by Route 34 along Niagara Falls Boulevard and Route 35 along Maple Road are anticipated. These modifications would be designed to complement the service provided by either Build Alternative and would not impact mobility.

- **Northern Segment**: As of September 1, 2024, Metro extended the Metro Bus Route 34 (Niagara Falls Boulevard) from Commerce Drive. This new service travels east on Commerce Drive and Dodge Road and then travels south on Audubon Parkway with a connection to the Amherst Town Center. Metro does not currently provide public transit services between UB North Campus and the Amherst Town Center within the study area along Audubon Parkway. Both Build Alternatives would invest in new high-quality transit service, providing a Project benefit to mobility. In doing so, PAL service would also be provided by Metro, in association with both Build Alternatives, which also constitutes a benefit to mobility.

4.4.2.3 Community Facilities

The LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative would not directly displace community facilities within the study area, such as schools, libraries, day care services, places of worship, and healthcare facilities. The LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative would remain largely within the existing transportation right-of-way and would generally operate at-grade within the roadway median, separated from immediately adjacent community facilities. At-grade median running operations would minimally impact access (turning movements) to these immediately adjacent properties and community facilities.

The LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative would not have an adverse impact on Emergency Service facilities. Modifications to Niagara Falls Boulevard resulting in the repurposing of one lane of traffic for use by both Build Alternatives would not have an adverse impact on emergency response times. LRT and BRT Build Alternative's investments in traffic signals would include technology that allows emergency vehicles to take advantage of signal preemption or priority designed for LRT or BRT vehicles. Through coordination meetings with the NFTA, emergency service providers have indicated the potential to reroute emergency access plans, if needed, and have also indicated that the LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative would not impact emergency services. Coordination efforts with emergency service providers would continue throughout Project design and construction.

With the LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative; community facilities would experience benefits from increased access to transit and transportation options. The LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative would provide increased access to community facilities such as places of worship, emergency services, healthcare facilities, and government offices; therefore, increased usage of facilities could occur Chapter 3, "Transportation," describes the impacts of the LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative on traffic operations.

4.4.3 Potential Mitigation Strategies

The LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative conceptual designs have incorporated measures to avoid and minimize adverse impacts on community character and cohesion. These mitigations measures are summarized by the segment below.

- **Southern Segment**: The LRT Build Alternative is proposed to use ballasted track which would act as a physical barrier for pedestrians traveling between neighborhoods on either side of Niagara Falls Boulevard. This LRT Build Alternative impact would be mitigated, as proposed in Chapter 3, "Transportation", through construction of embedded track which is flush with the roadway removing any physical barrier.
- **Middle Segment**: The LRT Build Alternative is proposed to use ballasted track which would act as a physical barrier for pedestrians travelling between neighborhoods on either side of Niagara Falls Boulevard and Maple Road. This LRT Build Alternative impact would be

mitigated, as proposed in Chapter 3, "Transportation", through construction of embedded track which is flush with the roadway removing any physical barrier.

- **Northern Segment**: Adverse impacts related to noise in the Northern Segment will be addressed during final design, as described in Section 4.11, "Noise".

Metro would continue to conduct extensive public information activities to inform residents and provide the opportunity for participation when implementing either the LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative. Information may include details related to station locations, environmental concerns, and other items of public interest. Public presentations have been offered to the public at-large, community groups, public officials, institutional officials, and local, State, and Federal agencies during the planning phases of the Project and would continue throughout the environmental review process. Appendix J1, "Public Outreach and Coordination Report," and Appendix J2, "Listening Sessions and Survey," summarizes these activities and meetings. Public involvement would also continue throughout design and construction, with continued solicitation of comments and concerns from Project stakeholders.