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Project Description

Contents

1	Project Description	1-1
1.1	INTRODUCTION	1-1
1.2	PURPOSE AND NEED	1-5
1.2.1	Serve Increased Travel Demand	1-6
1.2.2	Provide High-Quality Service to Key Activity Centers	1-7
1.2.3	Improve Service for Transit-Dependent Populations	1-8
1.2.4	Goals and Objectives	1-11
1.3	BACKGROUND	1-11
1.3.1	Alternatives Analysis	1-12
1.3.2	Transit-Oriented Development Study	1-13
1.3.3	Locally Preferred Alternative Refinement	1-14
1.3.4	No Action Condition	1-15
1.4	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	1-16
1.4.1	Alignment	1-16
1.4.2	Track and Catenary System	1-22
1.4.3	Stations and Park and Ride Facilities	1-22
1.4.4	Roadway Modifications	1-29
1.4.5	Light Maintenance/Storage Facility	1-30
1.4.6	Substations	1-30
1.4.7	Operating Characteristics	1-30
1.5	REQUIRED ACTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW	1-31
1.5.1	Environmental Setting	1-31
1.5.2	Environmental Review	1-32
1.5.3	Other Involved or Interested Agencies	1-33
1.5.4	Smart Growth Infrastructure Act	1-33

Figures

Figure 1-1.	Metro Rail Existing and Proposed Action Alignment	1-3
Figure 1-2.	Metro Rail Proposed Action	1-4
Figure 1-3.	Needs	1-6
Figure 1-4.	Transit Dependency Index	1-9
Figure 1-5.	Commute to Work	1-10
Figure 1-6.	Existing Typical Section, Niagara Falls Boulevard at Boulevard Mall Station	1-18
Figure 1-7.	Proposed Action Typical Section, Niagara Falls Boulevard at Boulevard Mall Station	1-18
Figure 1-8.	Existing Typical Section, Maple Road	1-19
Figure 1-9.	Proposed Action Typical Section, Maple Road	1-19
Figure 1-10.	Existing Typical Section, Sweet Home Road North of I-290 Overpass	1-20
Figure 1-11.	Proposed Action Typical Section, Sweet Home Road North of I-290 Overpass	1-20
Figure 1-12.	Existing Typical Section, John James Audubon Parkway Near Bryant Woods	1-21
Figure 1-13.	Proposed Action Typical Section, John James Audubon Parkway Near Bryant Woods	1-21
Figure 1-14.	Station Types	1-23
Figure 1-15.	Decatur Station	1-24
Figure 1-16.	Eggert Station	1-25
Figure 1-17.	Boulevard Mall Station	1-25
Figure 1-18.	Maple Station	1-26
Figure 1-19.	Sweet Home Station	1-26
Figure 1-20.	Flint Station	1-27
Figure 1-21.	Lee Station	1-27
Figure 1-22.	Ellicott Complex Station	1-28
Figure 1-23.	Audubon Station	1-28

Tables

Table 1-1.	Goals and Objectives	1-11
Table 1-2.	Locally Preferred Alternative Refinement Evaluation Criteria	1-15
Table 1-3.	Proposed Stations	1-23
Table 1-4.	Proposed Action: Traffic Capacity Change	1-29

Acronyms/Abbreviations

AA	Alternatives Analysis
BNMC	Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus
CCTV	closed circuit television cameras
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
DEIS	Draft Environmental Impact Statement
EA	Environmental Assessment
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
FEIS	Final Environmental Impact Statement
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
GBNRTC	Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council
LPA	Locally Preferred Alternative
LRT	light-rail transit
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NFTA	Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority
PA	Public Address System
PAT	Passenger Assistance Telephones
SEQRA	State Environmental Quality Review Act
SUNY	State University of New York
TDI	transit dependency index
TOD	transit-oriented development
TVM	ticket vending machine
UB	University at Buffalo
VMS	variable message signs

1 Project Description

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to the requirements of the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act, Article 8 of the Environmental Conservation Law and its implementing regulations 6 NYCRR 617 (“SEQRA”), this draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) analyzes a proposal by the Niagara Frontier Transit Metro System, Inc. (Metro), a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA), to extend Metro’s existing 6.4-mile light-rail transit (LRT) system in Buffalo, New York to Tonawanda and Amherst, New York. Metro is proposing to expand the LRT from its current terminus at University Station on the University at Buffalo (UB) South Campus, along Kenmore Avenue, Niagara Falls Boulevard, Maple Road, and Sweet Home Road, through the UB North Campus to John James Audubon Parkway and Interstate 990 (I-990). Ten stations are proposed as part of the 7-mile extension, two of which would contain a park & ride facility—and a light maintenance/storage facility is proposed at the end of the line. Figure 1-1 shows both the existing Metro Rail line and the Proposed Action alignment. Figure 1-2 presents the Proposed Action, including the underground (tunnel) and at-grade alignment, portal locations, ten stations, two park & ride facilities, and the light maintenance/storage facility. These proposed improvements collectively are referred to herein alternatively as the Metro Rail Expansion Project or the “Proposed Action”.

By letter dated December 21, 2018, Metro circulated among interest and involved agencies its notice of intent to serve as SEQRA lead agency¹ and classified the Proposed Action as a SEQRA Type I action, indicating that the project will be subject to coordinated review procedures under SEQRA. Subsequently, by resolution dated January 24, 2019, Metro issued a SEQRA Positive Declaration for the Proposed Action, reflecting Metro’s determination that the Proposed Action has the potential to result in one or more potentially significant adverse environmental impacts, thus warranting preparation of this environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Proposed Action.

The Proposed Action will be the subject of a future application by Metro for federal funds administered through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) or other federal sources to cover a portion of the Proposed Action’s capital costs. Therefore, this DEIS is intended to be compliant with the substantive environmental review requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) (42 U.S. Code § 4321 et seq.) and implementing regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality 40 CFR Parts 1500–1508), the Federal Highway Administration/Federal Transportation Authority (23 CFR Part 771), and applicable federal rules, regulations, and executive orders.

This chapter has been prepared to describe the Proposed Action and its purpose and need statement and to present the proposed regulatory and analytical framework for the DEIS analysis.

¹ The lead agency coordinates the SEQRA process and is responsible for making key SEQRA determinations during the review process.

The existing Metro Rail serves a diversity of activity centers and land uses, ranging from the waterfront to the urban center of downtown Buffalo and the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC), to the large and expanding UB campuses and other colleges, to older established residential neighborhoods and emerging commercial and employment centers.

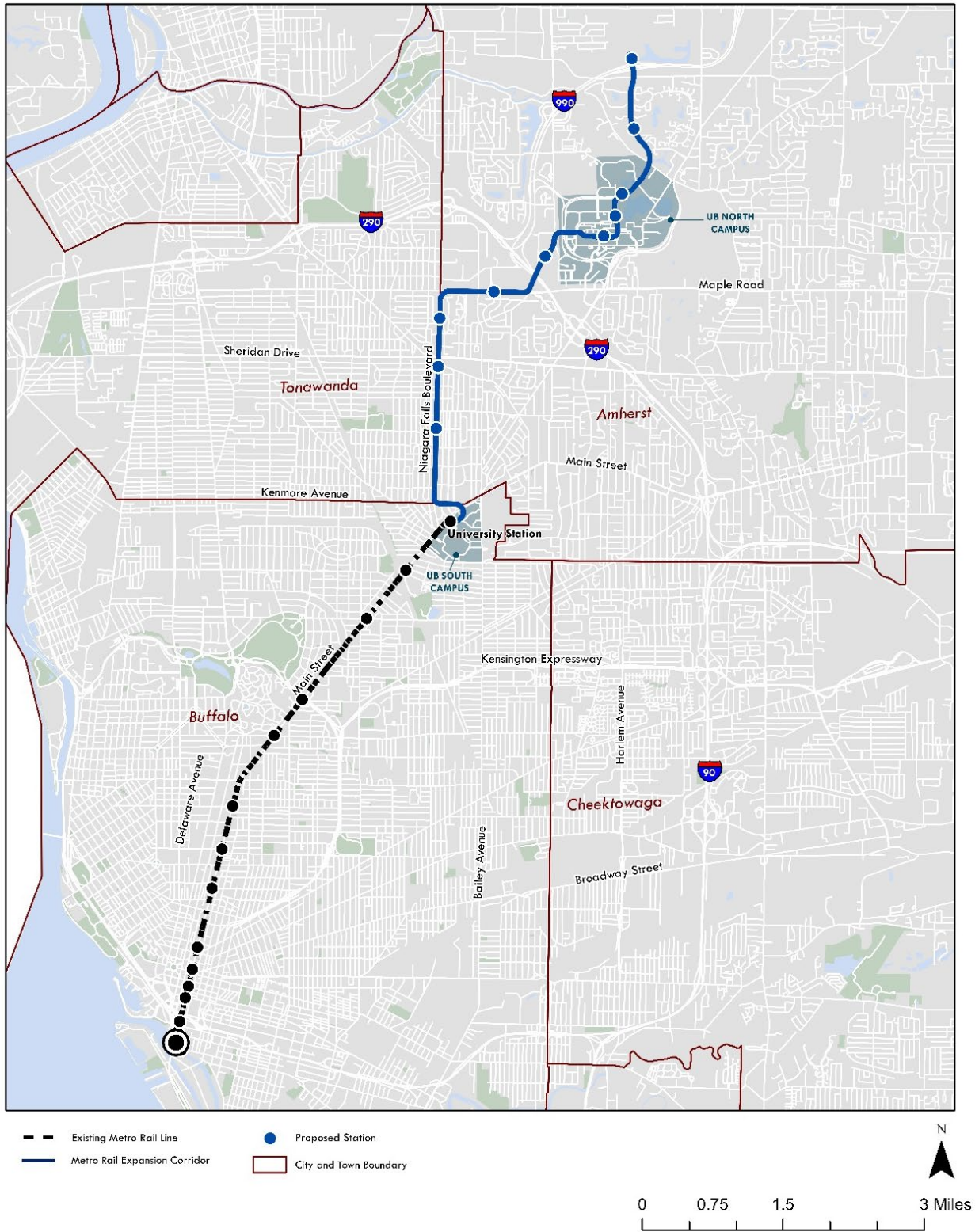


Downtown Buffalo



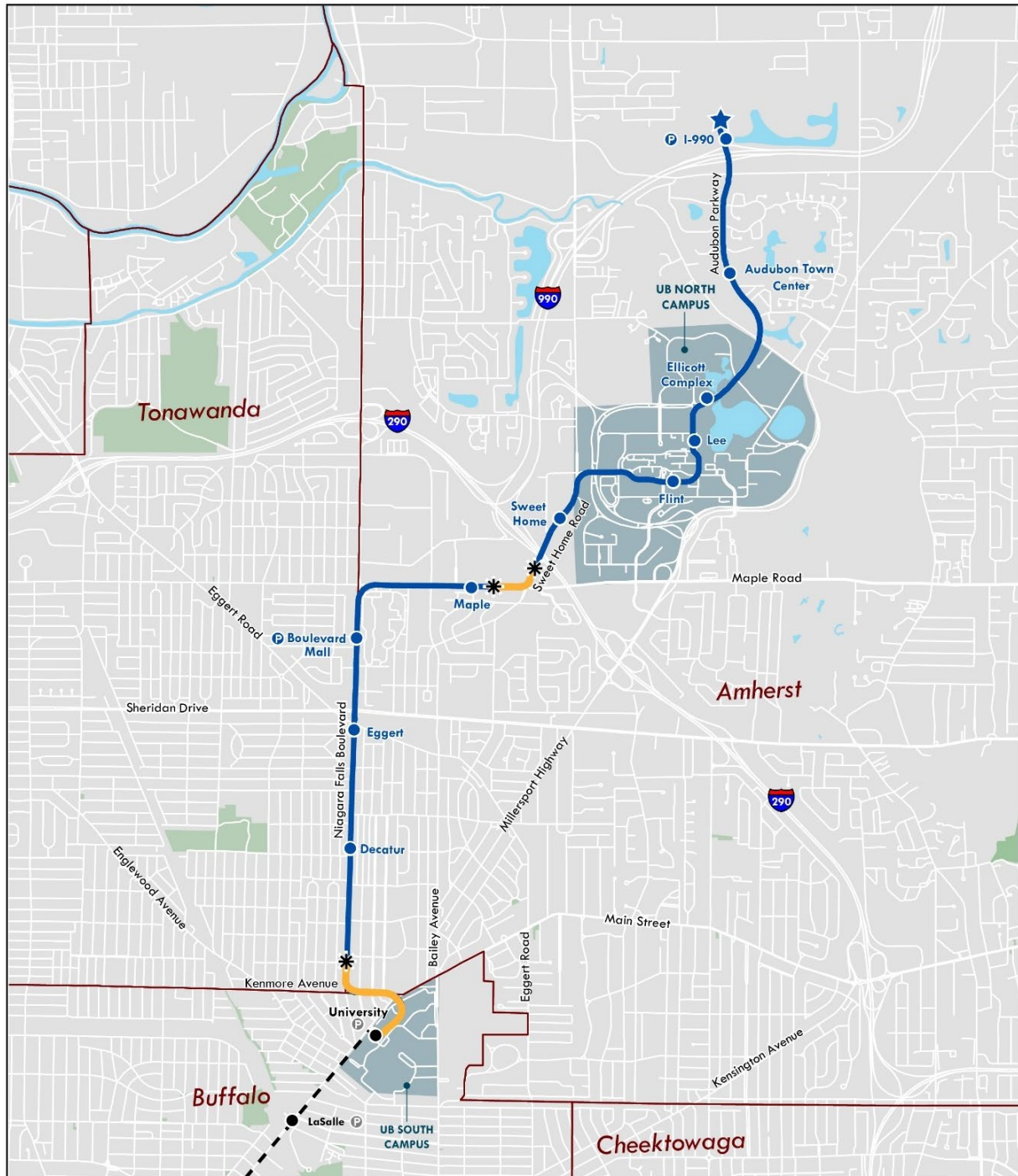
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Figure 1-1. Metro Rail Existing and Proposed Action Alignment



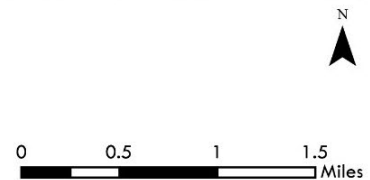
Source: Erie County, 2019

Figure 1-2. Metro Rail Proposed Action



Metro Rail Expansion

- At-grade
- Tunnel
- Proposed Station
- ★ Proposed Storage/Light Maintenance Facility
- Ⓟ Proposed Park & Ride
- Existing Station
- - - Existing Metro Rail Line
- City and Town Boundary
- Ⓟ Existing Park & Ride
- ✱ Portal



Source: Erie County, 2019

1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED

The **purpose** of the Proposed Action is to provide a fast, reliable, safe, and convenient transit ride in the Metro Rail Expansion corridor, linking established and emerging activity centers along the existing Metro Rail line in Buffalo with existing and emerging activity centers in Amherst and Tonawanda. The Proposed Action would better serve existing rail and bus riders, attract new transit patrons, improve connections to/from Buffalo, Amherst, and Tonawanda, and support redevelopment and other economic development opportunities. Additionally, the Proposed Action would improve livability by increasing mobility and accessibility in communities throughout the Proposed Action corridor. The Proposed Action would:

- Serve increased travel demand generated by new development in downtown Buffalo and Amherst.
- Provide high-quality transit service to and from key activity centers in the Proposed Action corridor by providing a time-efficient transit option connecting and serving key destinations in the corridor (i.e., UB campuses, BNMC, the Buffalo central business district, business parks, and the Buffalo waterfront, among others).
- Better serve transit-dependent populations and improve opportunities for participation of the workforce in the overall regional economy.
- Improve the system operating efficiency of the transit network.
- Support local and regional land use planning and Transit-Oriented Development (TOD).
- Provide social benefits from transit investment that support an array of economic and affordable housing development.
- Help meet the sustainability goals and measures as contained in the following state, regional, and local plans:
 - One Region Forward: A New Way to Plan for Buffalo Niagara
 - Moving Forward 2050: A Regional Transportation Plan for Buffalo Niagara
 - Framework for Regional Growth: Erie and Niagara Counties, New York
 - UB 2020 Plan
 - Western New York Regional Economic Development Strategic Plan
 - Queen City in the 21st Century: Buffalo’s Comprehensive Plan
 - Town of Amherst Bicentennial Comprehensive Plan
 - Town of Tonawanda 2014 Comprehensive Plan Update
- Help relieve parking constraints and capacity issues on the BNMC and surrounding downtown area to minimize traffic and parking-related impacts on neighborhoods.

The **need** for improved transit service has three main components (Figure 1-3): (1) to serve increased travel demand generated by recent, pending, and future development; (2) to provide high-quality transit service to key activity centers; and (3) to better serve transit-dependent population segments.

Figure 1-3. Needs



Serve increased travel demand



Provide high-quality service to key activity centers



Improve service for transit-dependent population

1.2.1 Serve Increased Travel Demand

The Buffalo metropolitan region is experiencing economic growth and transformation. Downtown Buffalo has over \$3 billion of projects that have been recently completed, are under construction, or are planned, including projects at the Erie Canal Harbor and the BNMC. Meanwhile, Amherst continues to grow, with opportunities for more commercial and mixed-use development, including infill of vacant and underutilized properties and parcels. Ongoing implementation of the *UB 2020 Plan* will also have a clear economic impact.

The Greater Buffalo-Niagara Region Transportation Committee (GBNRTC) has projected the region's population, households, and employment by sector for 2040. These projections are used for transportation demand modeling purposes, and serving the goal of helping the region plan for more sustainable, transit-oriented growth. Total population, household, and employment growth is projected at the regional level and then allocated to smaller geographies to understand travel demand at the local scale. These projections, and their allocation to smaller areas, rely on several assumptions. Among these, the projections assume that an enhanced transit project will be built in the region, and that the increased accessibility to more jobs and households that enhanced transit creates will in turn intensify development near transit stations. See Chapter 3, Socioeconomic Conditions, for more details on population and employment projections.

The GBNRTC, Buffalo, Amherst and Tonawanda, BNMC, and UB have plans in place or are developing new plans and land development ordinances to support and encourage sustainable development and redevelopment. The plans and ordinances are geared toward a dramatic transformation of the built environment, and public transit investment can help foster and leverage further reinvestment, redevelopment, and revitalization. New public transit improvements are consistent with these regional and local plans.

Such growth, however, will require supporting infrastructure and public facilities and services, particularly regarding transportation. Increasing development will increase the demand for work trips and non-work trips, including shopping, medical services, and entertainment. Expanded transportation options will be especially important for workers to have access to the increasing employment opportunities both in Buffalo and Amherst. As job and population growth occurs, transportation issues and challenges will need to be addressed, and improved public transit and increased transit usage will be an important part of the solutions.

The existing roadway network experiences traffic congestion, particularly during peak periods, and without mitigation, the anticipated level of new development will further increase congestion within

the Proposed Action corridor. Expanding roadway capacity is not viable because of constraints on available rights-of-way, potential environmental impacts, and concerns that highway investments are not a sustainable, long-term solution and that they do not encourage mixed-use, compact development—all goals of regional and local plans. Similarly, the parking supply is constrained, particularly in downtown Buffalo, and it is unlikely—as well as undesirable—that new parking will accommodate projected employment increases.

There is a need for new investments to provide a high-quality, increased transit services in the Proposed Action corridor to mitigate the growth of traffic and congestion, to enable and support more sustainable development patterns, and to preserve roadway capacity. As a prime example, BNMC, in planning for its major expansion, has developed an extensive Transportation Demand Management program, including working with NFTA to increase transit service opportunities and usage as well as multimodal transportation.

As Buffalo, Amherst, and Tonawanda continue to develop and redevelop, increasing transit service would help to shape and support the patterns of future development. Expanding and enhancing transit service along the Proposed Action corridor would promote and support higher development densities and mixed uses. Such development patterns would support more sustainable growth, possibly leveraging additional economic development and employment opportunities, while minimizing needs to expand roadway and parking capacity.

1.2.2 Provide High-Quality Service to Key Activity Centers

Bus service is the only public transit service available for travel to and from retail and commercial activity centers in Amherst. The Amherst portion of the Proposed Action corridor receives transit service from three NFTA Metro Bus routes (Route 34, Route 44, and Route 49), which connect with the Metro Rail University Station. The service frequency on these routes is limited, ranging from 30 outbound trips daily on Route 34 to only eight daily outbound trips on Route 49. Also, the length of the routes increases travel times, and riders are subject to the same delays as are motorists due to traffic congestion. Additionally, travel by bus is affected by the region's winter weather, in terms of frequent ice and snow conditions. These conditions can make bus travel during winter difficult and time consuming. Moreover, while these bus routes serve various retail centers, office parks, and multifamily residential complexes in Amherst, they do not serve several other major corridors including Main Street, Bailey Avenue, Maple Road, Sweet Home Road, and Audubon Parkway.

Limited service and delays make bus service a less attractive option, especially for riders who need to complete their trip by making transfers. Many Metro Rail riders transfer to or from bus service to reach destinations within Amherst and Tonawanda. This minimum two-seat transit ride affects the desirability of the trip for current and potential transit riders. There is a need for faster, more reliable transit service and one that can offer a one-seat transit ride. Providing high-quality transit and eliminating the need for transfers at University Station would improve travel times of current riders and attract additional transit riders. These additional riders could include persons who would otherwise drive to and park at University Station or who are dropped off there.

In sum, the existing bus service underserves the major commercial and retail activity centers and corridors in Amherst and does not provide a connection to Buffalo without requiring a transit mode transfer. Increased transit service along the Proposed Action corridor would improve access both for city residents traveling to suburban activity centers and suburban residents traveling to city activity

centers. A high-quality, high-capacity, and convenient public transit service would improve travel for current riders and attract new riders. Such a service would increase travel options for all travelers in this important corridor.

1.2.3 Improve Service for Transit-Dependent Populations

Transit-dependent population segments refer to people who cannot drive due to physical or financial reasons. Such segments include the elderly, disabled, and low-income households, and students. GBNRTC's recent Onboard Survey found that most transit riders using NFTA transit services are transit dependent: 84 percent of riders do not have access to a vehicle, 58 percent can be classified as low income, and 57 percent of riders in the region do not have a valid driver's license.²

The Proposed Action was evaluated for levels of transit dependency to better visualize transit needs. The study area for this analysis is defined as ¼ mile from the Proposed Action's alignment and ½ mile from proposed stations. The transit dependency index (TDI) was calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{TDI} = \text{Population Density} \times (\text{housing units without a vehicle} + \text{senior citizens} + \text{children ages 18 and under} + \text{individuals below poverty})$$

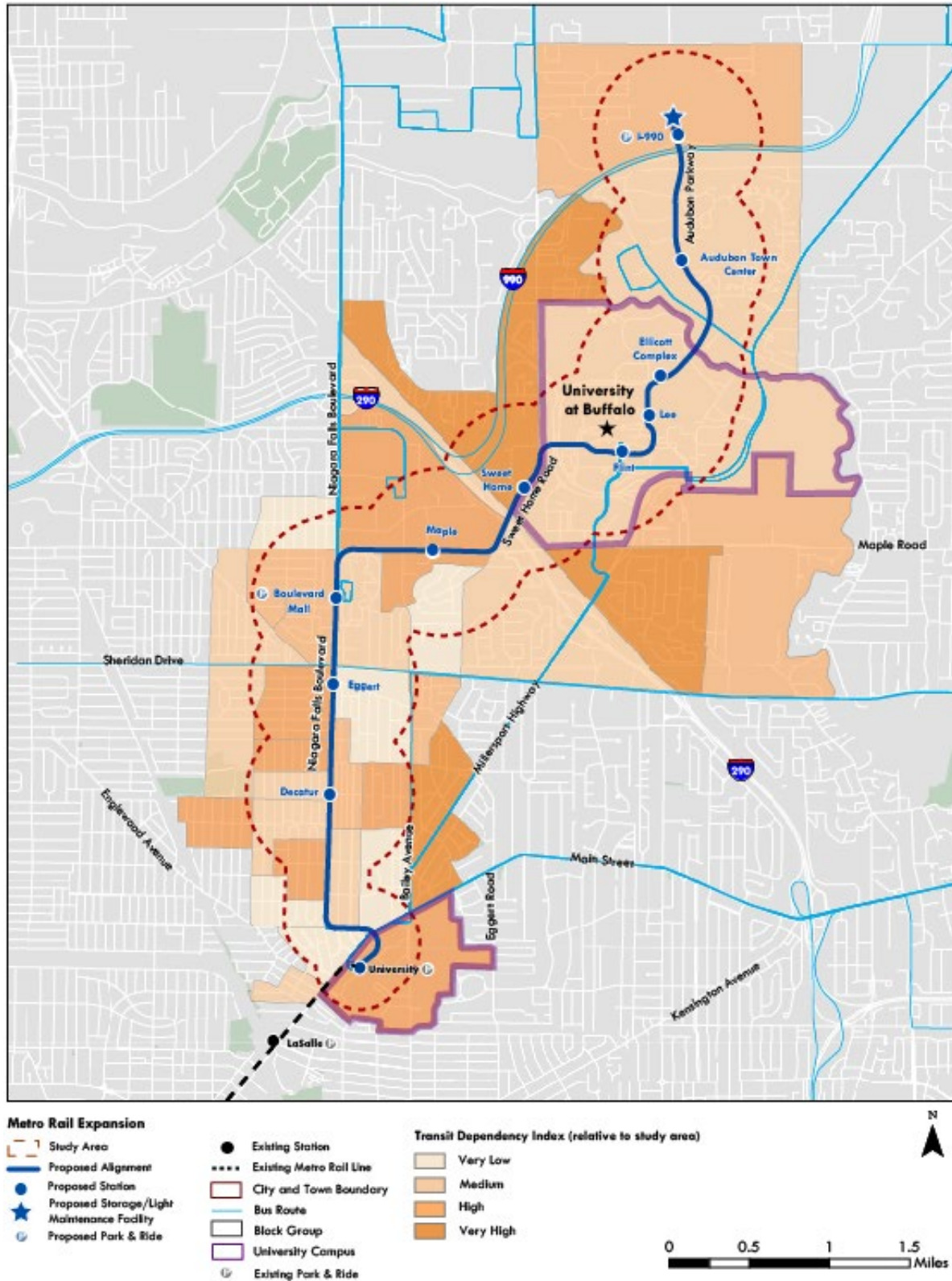
The results of the TDI relative to the study area were grouped into four categories: very low, medium, high, and very high (Figure 1-4). The populations with the highest dependency are in the northern and southern sections of the study area north of both UB campuses.

Figure 1-5 presents commute-to-work data for the study area. The study area was grouped into the same four categories: very low, medium, high, and very high. In comparing the areas with the highest percentage of residents who commute to work by transit to the areas that have the highest TDI, areas within the study area contain residents who are transit dependent but do not commute by transit. Presumably, the choice not to commute by transit is related to the limited transit options within the study area.

The lack of quality transit service in the corridor involves both residential origins and key trip destinations, including work and other trip purposes. The study area has many senior-living complexes, facilities serving disabled persons, low-income housing complexes, apartment complexes, and student housing. The current Metro Rail and Metro Bus routes serve some but not all of these locations. For example, current bus routes provide some service to the UB North Campus and the Weinberg Campus, but for the most part, the residents of the many housing complexes in this area do not have transit options.

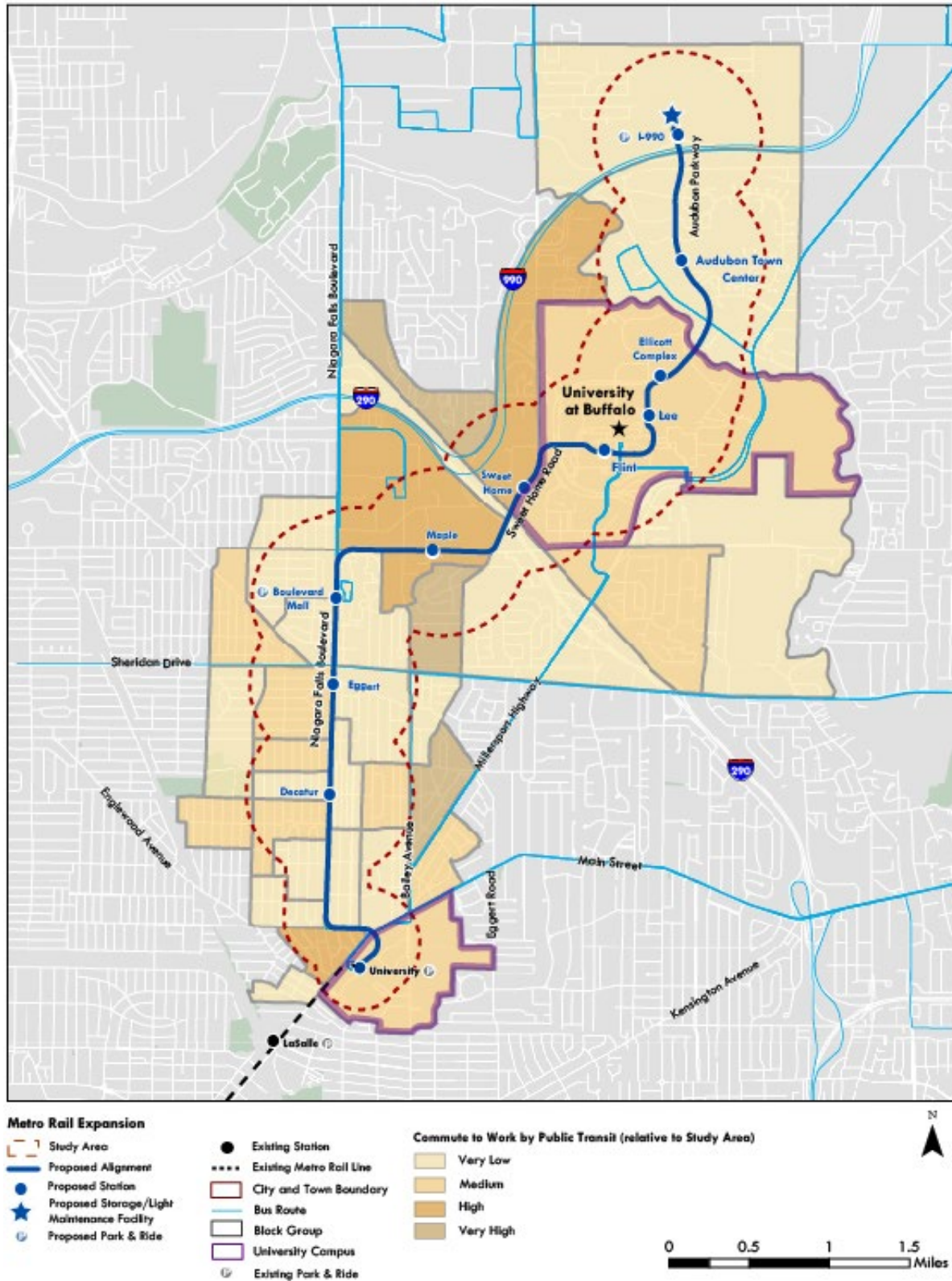
² Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council. 2017. "Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority Onboard Survey." <https://www.gbnrtc.org/surveys/>.

Figure 1-4. Transit Dependency Index within the Study Area



Source: Erie County and U.S. Census Bureau, 2019

Figure 1-5. Commute to Work within the Study Area



Source: Erie County and U.S. Census Bureau, 2019

Limited connectivity of the existing transit services affect the transit-dependent populations in the study area. Lack of transit options affects the ability of residents to access employment and other opportunities, and to travel to and from work or non-work purposes. The Proposed Action would increase the study area population’s access to high-quality transit and employment opportunities in Amherst and Buffalo. Moreover, with a growing aging population and with a rising number of students, increased transit service would help the region respond to the travel challenges faced by transit-dependent populations and to changing demographic trends.

1.2.4 Goals and Objectives

Table 1-1 presents goals and objectives that are directly linked to the purpose and need statement and that focus on related transportation, economic, and environmental issues.

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 Proposed Action corridor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide a reliable and convenient transit service. ▪ Improve mobility.
<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 (both bus and rail) 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. ▪ Provide more convenient transit services for riders transferring to or from Metro Rail at University Station. ▪ Improve the connectivity of transit services. ▪ Improve livability by providing increased access to facilities, such as, medical services, food shopping, retail shopping, entertainment, etc.
<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.
<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 the basis for 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 effects. 	<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.

1.3 BACKGROUND

High-quality transit service in the Greater-Buffalo region has been considered for nearly 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 Amherst to north of the planned UB North Campus. Due to concerns regarding cost effectiveness and consistency with local objectives, the rail line was scaled back to a 6.4-mile rail line terminating at the UB South Campus. This line opened in 1985 and continues to operate as the existing Metro Rail.

In 2010, NFTA updated its 2001 Strategic Assessment. The review examined available rights-of-way and major arterial corridors as possible locations for major transit investments. The study identified four corridors as candidates for future major investment. The Proposed Action corridor was recommended as a candidate for further study. The following describes other key reasons that supported the need to evaluate possible future transit improvements in the corridor:

- GBNRTC’s adopted metropolitan long-range transportation plan—*Moving Forward 2050: A Regional Transportation Plan for Buffalo Niagara*—includes a transit investment in this corridor.
- GBNRTC’s congestion management system shows congestion along several roadway segments in the study area.
- Multiple regional planning efforts have identified the Proposed Action corridor as a growth corridor.
- Buffalo, UB, Amherst, and Tonawanda have comprehensive plans that promote compact, mixed-use, center-based development complementary to transit service.
- UB has three campuses with the need to transport students, faculty, and staff between them in an efficient, safe, and scheduled manner.
- The Proposed Action is expected to receive favorable ratings by the FTA in its Capital Investment Grants Program.
- GBNRTC recently completed a TOD study along the current Metro Rail corridor and Proposed Action corridor that identified a strong potential for TOD growth and a commitment to revamping land use development patterns to support LRT.

1.3.1 Alternatives Analysis

NFTA and GBNRTC initiated the Amherst-Buffalo Alternatives Analysis (AA) in fall 2012. The overall goal of the Amherst-Buffalo AA was to evaluate a range of high-quality transit service alternatives to improve transit access between key activity centers in Buffalo and Amherst, provide enough information to support the recommendation of a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA), and enable GBNRTC to adopt the LPA as part of the fiscally constrained portion of the long-range transportation plan.

The Amherst-Buffalo AA involved a three-tiered approach that established screening methodology and selection criteria. A Project Steering Committee, Project Advisory Committee, and a robust public participation plan were established to help guide the study. Community stakeholders also provided input and feedback. During the study, four public information meetings were held as well as over 75 staff-level meetings and presentations to community organizations and stakeholders.

At the onset of the study, 36 alternatives were identified as part of a long list for Tier 1 analysis. The long list consisted of four modes (Light-Rail Transit, Bus Rapid Transit, Preferential Bus, and Enhanced Bus) along with three main alignments (Niagara Falls Boulevard, Bailey Avenue, and Millersport Highway). The 36 alternatives were screened based on criteria that considered those that could be reasonably built and would not have a substantial impact on the community or

environment. Tier 1 analysis resulted in 15 remaining alternatives to be refined and evaluated in more detail in Tier 2 analysis.

During Tier 2 analysis of the Amherst-Buffalo AA, conceptual level engineering was completed for the remaining alternatives. The alternatives were also subjected to quantitative assessment and compared across modes to determine the best performing. Tier 2 analysis resulted in seven alternatives to advance to Tier 3 analysis, the final evaluation tier.

Tier 3 analysis of the Amherst-Buffalo AA applied measurable categories of evaluation, including land use, mobility, and cost effectiveness to the remaining seven alternatives. Measurable criteria for each category included travel time, employment and population served, number of activity centers, operating and maintenance costs, capital cost, growth locations served, projected ridership (including UB boardings), and operating revenue. Construction costs were developed for the alignment options (in 2014 dollars) to assist in the selection of an LPA.

After reviewing the technical results of the Amherst-Buffalo AA and considering feedback from the Project Steering and Advisory Committees and the public, NFTA recommended the Niagara Falls Boulevard LRT Alternative as the strongest alternative to advance as the LPA. The LPA was generally defined as extending LRT from the existing Metro Rail terminus at University Station, extending underground along Bailey Avenue to a tunnel portal on Eggert Road, continuing at grade on Niagara Falls Boulevard to Maple Road to Sweet Home Road, onto and through UB North Campus to Audubon Parkway, and terminating near the I-990 interchange.

1.3.2 Transit-Oriented Development Study

The GBNRTC initiated a comprehensive TOD planning effort in fall 2016 to complement the Amherst-Buffalo AA study and to support the Proposed Action. This effort included developing TOD typologies for various station areas and using a Desirability & Readiness Assessment for identifying which Metro Rail station areas had the greatest potential for stimulating TOD. The TOD study further identified strategies for facilitating the build-out of TOD at key station areas. These strategies and tools included revised TOD-focused land use and zoning codes, capital projects to ready stations areas for TOD, policies and tools to encourage TOD (e.g., value capture and development financing), and an agreement that would create and focus a Regional TOD Committee.

Stakeholder and community workshops were held in 2017 (March, June, and October) for various stages of the planning effort about Smart Growth TOD along the Metro Rail line in Buffalo and the Proposed Action extension to Amherst and Tonawanda. The multi-day workshops included presentations by the Proposed Action team, followed by interactive discussions among stakeholders and members of the public. In addition to these workshops, the Proposed Action team attended meetings and shared information about the Proposed Action with multiple community and professional organizations. A final open house was held in August 2018 to present the TOD vision that the community and stakeholder members helped develop.



TOD stakeholder and community workshops

A second TOD planning grant was awarded to the NFTA in December 2018, followed by board resolution in October 2019 to begin the second round of the NFTA Comprehensive Transit Oriented Development Planning. The TOD planning will continue the 2016 effort and will improve opportunities for Metro Rail Expansion funding, enhancing TOD opportunities in the Metro Rail Expansion project corridor, and measuring progress made on these goals over time. Through community engagement, the project will also serve to actively engage champions, leaders, developers and other stakeholders in TOD planning and increase public support for Metro Rail Expansion and TOD.

1.3.3 Locally Preferred Alternative Refinement

Following the Amherst-Buffalo AA, the adoption of the original LPA in the fiscally constrained Transportation Improvement Program and the TOD study, NFTA agreed to a request from stakeholders to study the feasibility of exiting University Station directly to Niagara Falls Boulevard, via Kenmore Avenue, rather than running beneath Bailey Avenue. Under this option, the alignment would travel from University Station underground along Kenmore Avenue and onto Niagara Falls Boulevard where it would surface through a portal just north of Kenilworth Avenue and continue along Niagara Falls Boulevard to a common point at the intersection of Eggert Road and Niagara Falls Boulevard. From here, the alignment would follow the original LPA to the interchange of I-990 and Audubon Parkway. Figure 1-2 presents the refined LPA and Table 1-2 presents the evaluation criteria for the LPA refinement.

The evaluation identified that this refined LPA could save approximately \$200 million (in 2014 dollars) in construction costs by reducing the tunnel length from 10,000 linear feet to only 3,400 linear feet. The refined LPA would also eliminate a costly underground station. Another evaluation factor was travel times, which would be just under 21 minutes from I-990 to University Station for the refined LPA and just under 22 minutes for the original LPA. Even though the travel times are comparable, the refined LPA would have fewer impacts to existing parcels. Further detail on the evaluation can be found on the Proposed Action website (<http://nftametrorailexpansion.com/>).

During outreach efforts and the scoping process, NFTA received feedback for an additional station along Niagara Falls Boulevard. NFTA conducted further analysis to locate a station at the intersection of Eggert Road and Niagara Falls Boulevard. The refined LPA now includes an additional station at Eggert Road, for a total of 10 proposed stations.

During meetings with the Technical Advisory Committee and Steering Advisory Committee, the consensus was to move forward with the environmental process utilizing the refined LPA and to eliminate the Bailey Avenue portion of the alignment. This was reviewed by the NFTA Board of Commissioners and with the general public during a meeting held on December 6, 2018.

Table 1-2. Locally Preferred Alternative Refinement Evaluation Criteria

Category	Evaluation Criteria
Order-of-Magnitude Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tunneling length ▪ Number of underground stations ▪ Cost of right-of-way ▪ Operations and maintenance costs
Overall Constructability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Availability of contractors ▪ Schedule/length of construction ▪ Impacts to traffic and business operations ▪ Utility conflicts ▪ Right-of-way impacts
Travel Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Length of time Metro Rail travels between UB North Campus stations and University Station
Community/Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transit-supportive elements in place or can be put in place (zoning, policy, community support, plans, etc.) ▪ Opportunity for transit-oriented development
Municipal Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local and regional stakeholder preference/acceptance
Ridership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maximizes ridership
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Impacts to adjacent property access ▪ Accessibility by transit-supportive populations
Traffic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Change to existing travel patterns ▪ Impacts to AM/PM peak-period volumes ▪ Impacts to level-of-service ▪ Impacts to intersection level-of-service
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Impact on natural and human environments ▪ Ability to reduce auto-dependency ▪ Noise sensitive land uses within proximity to alignment
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Passenger access to stations ▪ Light-rail transit/vehicular traffic intermixing
Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Connections with Metro Bus ▪ Multimodal opportunities ▪ Pedestrian and bicycle connectivity

1.3.4 No Action Condition

In the environmental review process, a No Action condition is used as a starting point to provide a comparison to the Proposed Action in terms of costs, benefits, and impacts. The No Action condition would consist of a future scenario with no changes to the Proposed Action corridor, beyond the projects that are already committed and planned by others. See Chapter 2, “Land Use, Zoning, and Community Character” for a list of No Action condition projects.

1.4 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Proposed Action would expand the existing Metro Rail from the terminus at University Station, for an additional 7 miles. The trackway would be configured with two tracks, one for northbound service and one for southbound service. The Proposed Action would generally exist within existing roadway right-of-way, as shown in the typical sections (Figure 1-6 through Figure 1-13). Some portions would be underground, under existing roads. The Proposed Action is described in more detail in the following sections. The conceptual plan is provided in Appendix A, “Conceptual Plan”.

1.4.1 Alignment

The Proposed Action alignment would begin at the existing Metro Rail terminus at University Station and travel along Kenmore Avenue, Niagara Falls Boulevard, Maple Road, and Sweet Home Road, through the UB North Campus to Audubon Parkway and I-990. The Proposed Action alignment is described in further detail below.

KENMORE AVENUE

The Proposed Action alignment would begin at the existing University Station. The Metro Rail service would continue underground eastbound, then loop westbound at the intersection of Main Street and Kenmore Avenue. The alignment would shift west and then make a quick turn north from Kenmore Avenue onto Niagara Falls Boulevard.

NIAGARA FALLS BOULEVARD

The Proposed Action alignment would continue underground on Niagara Falls Boulevard until emerging from a portal near the intersection of Kenilworth Avenue, where the alignment would be above ground along the median. The first station, Decatur Station, would be located in the median at Decatur Road. The second station, Eggert Station, would be located at the median at Eggert Road. The third station, Boulevard Mall Station, would be located at the median at Treadwell Road and the southern-most entrance of the Boulevard Mall. The alignment would continue along the median until making a crossover to the northbound shoulder of the road at the Boulevard Mall entrance. The Metro Rail would cross through the northwestern portion of the Boulevard Mall parking lot and onto the eastbound shoulder of Maple Road.

MAPLE ROAD

On Maple Road, the alignment would run along the westbound shoulder until crossing to the median at Alberta Drive. The fourth station, Maple Station, would be in the median of Maple Road between Bowmart Parkway and Hillcrest Drive. The alignment would remain in the median of Maple Road and transition underground in front of Sweet Home Middle School. The alignment would continue underground, through the intersection of Maple Road and Sweet Home Road and emerge from a portal on the west side of Sweet Home prior to the I-290 bridge.

SWEET HOME ROAD

The alignment would be on the northbound side of Sweet Home Road. The fifth station, Sweet Home Station, would be located on the west side of Sweet Home Road across from University Place Plaza. The alignment would continue along the northbound shoulder of Sweet Home Road until veering east, 500 feet south of Rensch Road, across Bizer Creek, onto the grassy area south of the eastbound portion of Rensch Road.

UB NORTH CAMPUS

The Proposed Action alignment would enter UB North Campus on the grassy area south of the eastbound portion of Rensch Road. The alignment would veer south at the Rensch Entrance loop and run east between Putnam Way and the Hochstetter lots. The sixth station, Flint Station, would be located on Putnam Way between Putnam Way and the Hochstetter lots. The alignment would continue east in the grassy areas between the Jacobs Parking Lots and Jacobs Management Center and Park Hall. The alignment would turn north and run along existing portion of Putnam Way, and onto Lee Road. The seventh station, Lee Station, would be located on the grassy area east of the northbound lane of Lee Road, adjacent to the University Book Store. The alignment would continue along the east side of Lee Road, then turn toward Audubon Parkway. The eighth station, Ellicott Complex Station, would be located on the grassy area east of the northbound lane of Audubon Parkway. The alignment would veer northeast, just south of Lee Circle, exiting the campus on the northbound portion of Audubon Parkway.

AUDUBON PARKWAY

The Proposed Action alignment would continue along the northbound portion of Audubon Parkway. The ninth station, Audubon Station, would be located on the northbound section of Audubon Parkway at the entrance of the Amherst Town Complex. The alignment would continue on the northbound portion of Audubon Parkway until terminating at the tenth station, I-990 Station, which would be located just north of I-990.

Figure 1-6. Existing Typical Section, Niagara Falls Boulevard at Boulevard Mall Station

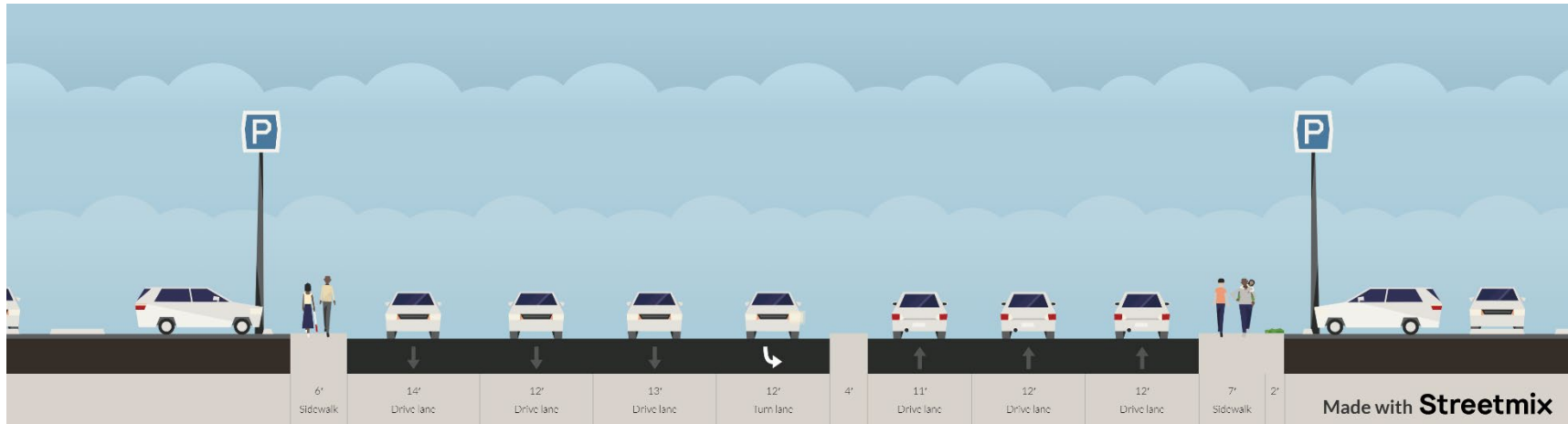


Figure 1-7. Proposed Action Typical Section, Niagara Falls Boulevard at Boulevard Mall Station

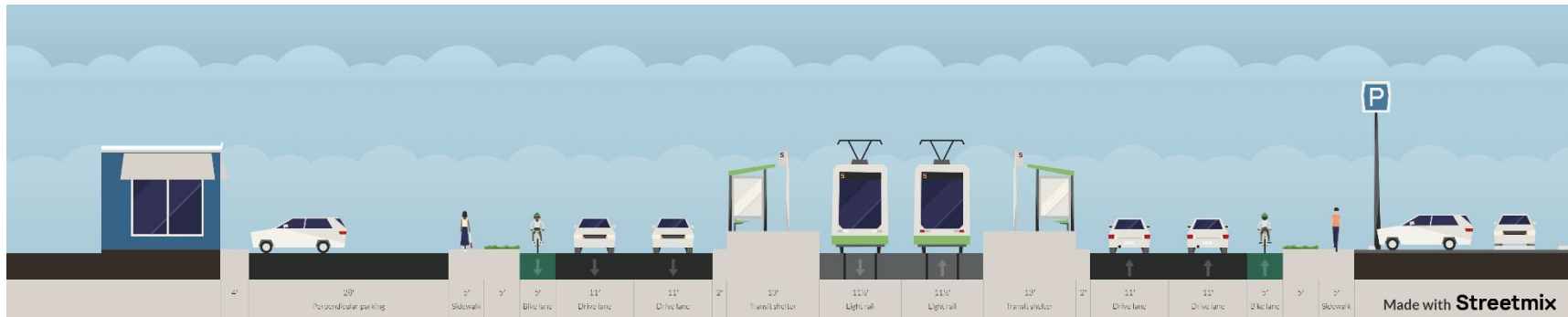


Figure 1-8. Existing Typical Section, Maple Road

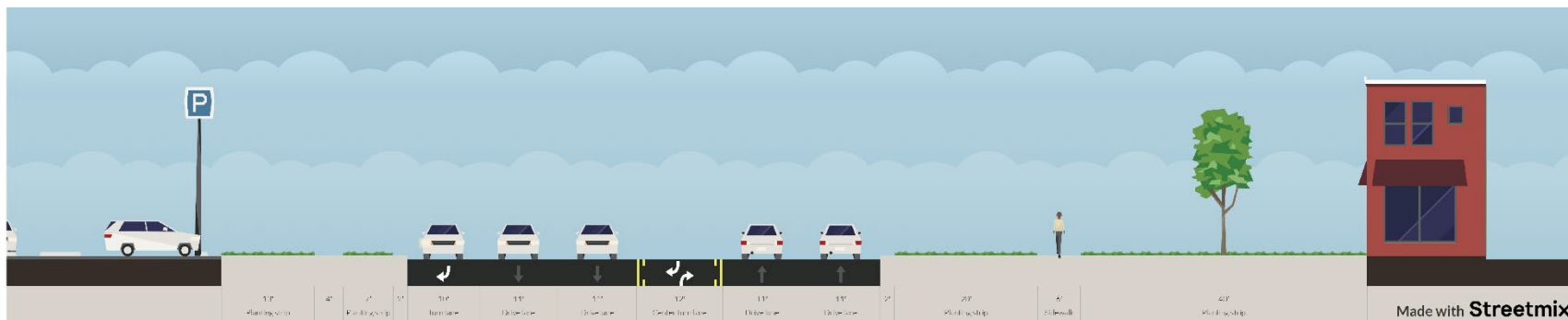


Figure 1-9. Proposed Action Typical Section, Maple Road



Figure 1-10. Existing Typical Section, Sweet Home Road North of I-290 Overpass

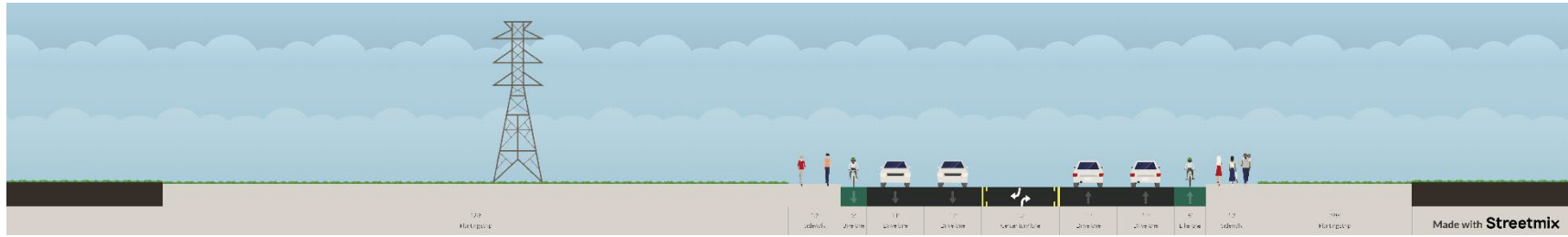


Figure 1-11. Proposed Action Typical Section, Sweet Home Road North of I-290 Overpass



Figure 1-12. Existing Typical Section, John James Audubon Parkway Near Bryant Woods

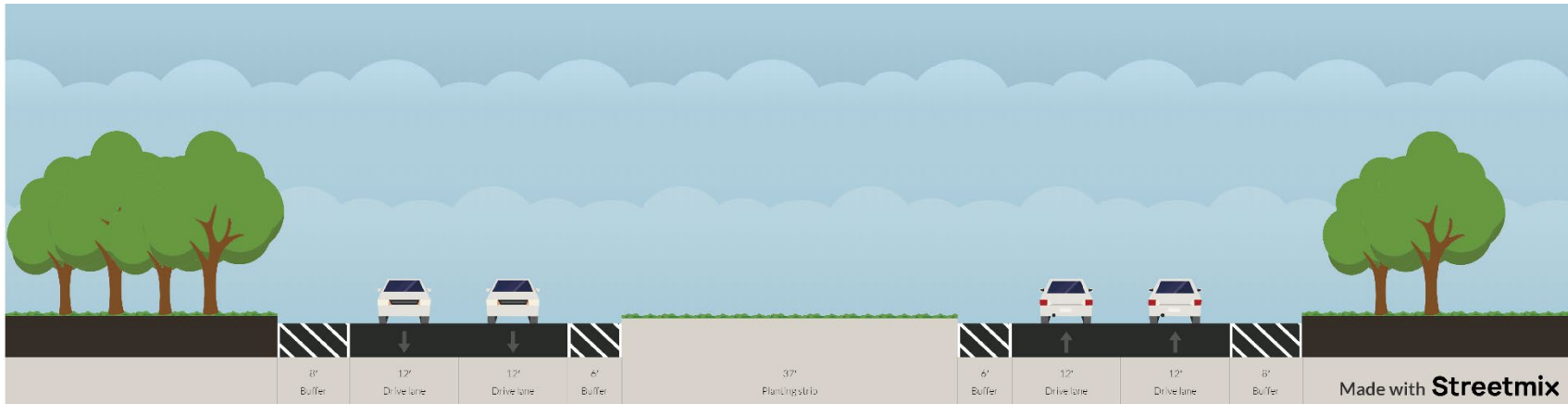
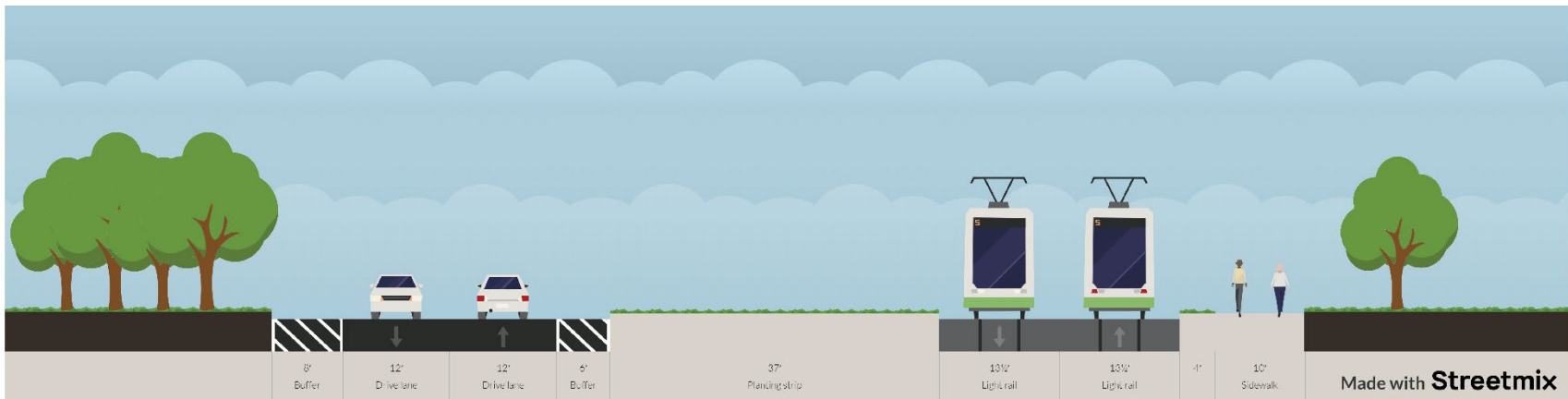


Figure 1-13. Proposed Action Typical Section, John James Audubon Parkway Near Bryant Woods



1.4.2 Track and Catenary System

Light-rail is a transit technology that operates on fixed steel rails and is typically powered by an overhead electrical system, although diesel-powered systems also exist. The Proposed Action vehicles would be electrically powered by an Overhead Catenary System (OCS) of wires supported by poles. The design of the light-rail OCS would utilize either a center pole configuration or side pole configuration along the corridor. For the Proposed Action, light-rail would operate in dedicated right-of-way; although autos would be able to cross the tracks at select intersections. Grade crossing gates and lights would be placed at these intersections for safety.

It is assumed that NFTA will have acquired a new vehicle fleet prior to operation of the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action would require the addition of two tracks also similar to the existing Metro Rail. Each vehicle would be fully compliant with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). The vehicles would also include racks to carry bicycles and Automatic Passenger Counters (APC).

1.4.3 Stations and Park and Ride Facilities

The Proposed Action would include ten stations to support the light-rail system. Passengers would board or alight the light-rail vehicles at stations. For each of the Proposed Action stations, three station types were evaluated to determine the best location and orientation to serve rail passengers. Figure 1-14 defines the station types that were evaluated: center platform, side platform, and split platform. Table 1-3 summarizes the basic characteristics of the proposed stations for the Proposed Action. Station renderings are included in Figure 1-15 through Figure 1-23.³

All stations would have level boarding to be ADA accessible. Platforms are planned to be approximately 300 feet long to accommodate the Metro Rail vehicles. All stations would include:

- Facilities for bicyclists, such as bike racks or bike lockers
- Shelters, garbage cans, and benches
- Lighting
- Self-serve ticket-vending machines (TVM)
- Closed circuit television cameras (CCTV)
- Passenger assistance telephones (PAT)
- Variable message signs (VMS)
- Public address system (PA)
- Blue light emergency phones
- Customer information, such as maps and schedules for the Metro Rail and connecting bus routes

³ A station rendering is not provided for the proposed I-990 station, since this station area is currently undeveloped and would be developed as part of the No Action condition.

Figure 1-14. Station Types

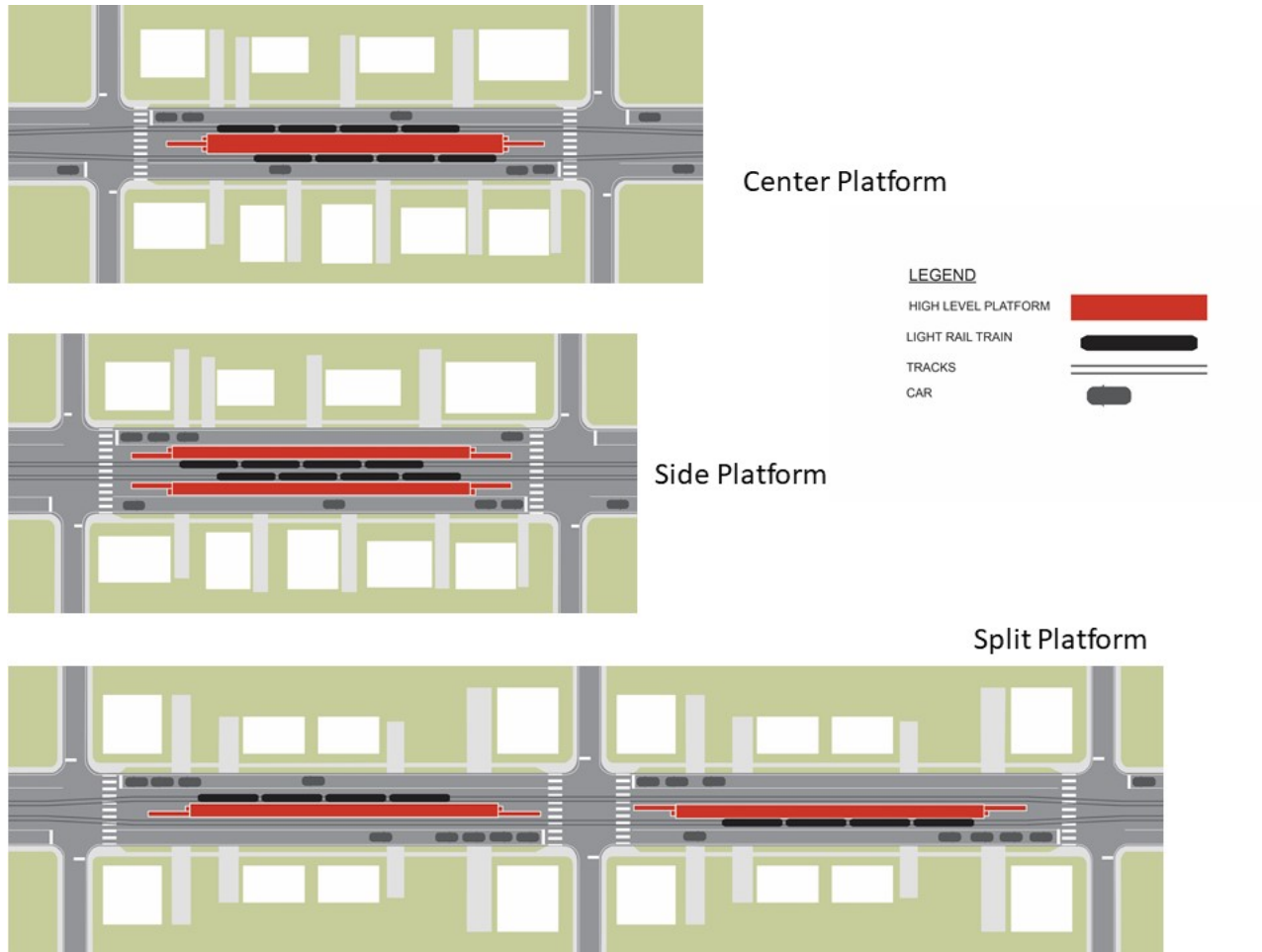


Table 1-3. Proposed Station Platform Types

Proposed Station	Platform Type
Decatur	Side
Eggert	Side
Boulevard Mall	Side
Maple	Side
Sweet Home	Center
Flint	Side
Lee	Side
Ellicott Complex	Side
Audubon Town Center	Center
I-990	Center

Access to stations would primarily consist of pedestrians, bicyclists, or passengers transferring from bus services; otherwise known as “walk-up” customers. Walk-up stations are more conducive to urban environments where higher land densities exist. Automobile parking would not be provided at walk-up stations; therefore, less land acquisition would be required for walk-up stations. On-street bus transfers would take place in proximity to the station locations to facilitate mobility between bus service and the light-rail.

Two of the proposed stations – Boulevard Mall and I-990 – would include park & ride facilities with Americans with Disabilities (ADA) accessible parking. The park-and-ride facilities would vary in size based on projected ridership and available land. Park-and-ride facilities have been designed to accommodate access by bus, automobile, bicyclists and pedestrians. Additionally, bus bays and bus stops, would be accommodated at select stations based on available land and projected demand.

Figure 1-15. Decatur Station



Source: Sowinski Sullivan Architects

Figure 1-16. Eggert Station



Source: Sowinski Sullivan Architects

Figure 1-17. Boulevard Mall Station



Source: Sowinski Sullivan Architects

Figure 1-18. Maple Station



Source: Sowinski Sullivan Architects

Figure 1-19. Sweet Home Station



Source: Sowinski Sullivan Architects

Figure 1-20. Flint Station



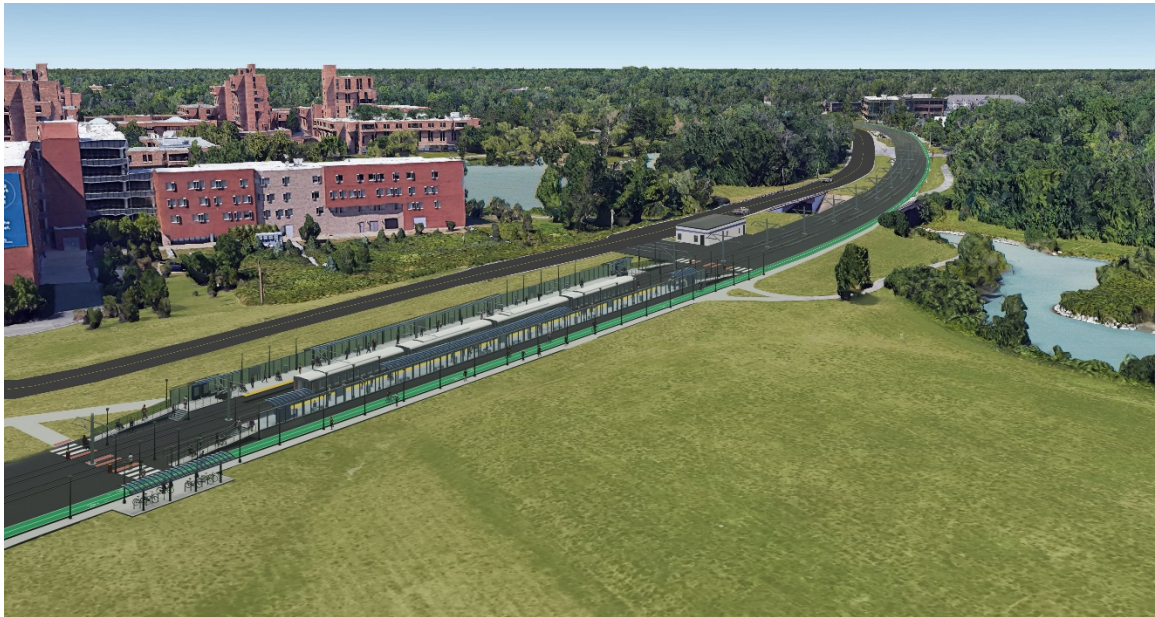
Source: Sowinski Sullivan Architects

Figure 1-21. Lee Station



Source: Sowinski Sullivan Architects

Figure 1-22. Ellicott Complex Station



Source: Sowinski Sullivan Architects

Figure 1-23. Audubon Station



Source: Sowinski Sullivan Architects

1.4.4 Roadway Modifications

The inclusion of the Proposed Action within the constraints of the existing right-of-way would require modifications to the existing roadway infrastructure. These modifications are listed in Table 1-4 and presented in Chapter 13, “Transportation”.

Table 1-4. Proposed Action: Traffic Capacity Change

Corridor Location	Direction	Modification
Niagara Falls Boulevard	Northbound and Southbound	Eliminate one travel lane in each direction along Niagara Falls Boulevard from Kenilworth Boulevard to Maple Road, and along Maple Road from Niagara Falls Boulevard to Sweet Home Road
Niagara Falls Boulevard	Southbound	Add additional southbound left-turn lane on Niagara Falls Boulevard at Eggert Road
Niagara Falls Boulevard	Southbound	Add a 200-foot southbound lane receiving lane on Niagara Falls Boulevard south of the Eggert Road intersection
Niagara Falls Boulevard	Westbound	Add westbound dual left-turn lanes on Niagara Falls Boulevard at Maple Road
Bailey Avenue	Southbound	Add southbound dual left-turn lanes on Bailey Avenue at Maple Road
Brighton Road	Eastbound	Add additional eastbound through-lane on Brighton Road at Niagara Falls Boulevard (eastbound Brighton approach (through and through/right lanes would be extended west for more storage)
Boulevard Mall	Northbound	Metro Rail alignment would be shifted from median running to side running at northern Boulevard Mall entrance (to east side), through mall property and transition into median of Maple Road at Alberta Drive
Maple Road	Eastbound	Add eastbound left-turn lane on Maple Road at Hillcrest Drive
Maple Road	Northbound	Convert northbound right-turn lane to a shared through/right lane at Maple Road at Sweet Home Road
Sweet Home Road	Northbound	Eliminate one of the northbound travel lanes along Sweet Home Road from Maple Road to Rensch Road
Sweet Home Road	Southbound	Add additional southbound through- lane on Sweet Home Road at Maple Road
Sweet Home Road	Southbound	Add additional receiving lane southbound on Sweet Home Road south of Maple Road
Sweet Home Road	Eastbound	Shift Metro Rail alignment to east side, running along Sweet Home Road from Maple Road to Rensch Road
Rensch Road		Create a separate Metro Rail track bridge over Bizer Creek to avoid affecting operations of Rensch Road at Sweet Home Road intersection
Audubon Parkway	Both	Convert Audubon Parkway from a 4-lane divided facility to a two-lane facility utilizing the existing 2-lane southbound facility; the LRT would then operate on the 2-lane northbound travel lanes from Lee Road to I-990

1.4.5 Light Maintenance/Storage Facility

The Proposed Action would include a storage facility to store LRT vehicles overnight and perform light maintenance and cleaning at the end of line, north of the I-990 and Audubon Parkway interchange. The site is an undeveloped parcel; however, the property is being planned for student housing (see Chapter 2, Land Use, for a description of the No Action condition projects within the study area). NFTA has been coordinating with the developer of the property to incorporate a storage facility, as well as a station and park & ride facility. The storage facility would be fully enclosed with staff facilities to account for offices, restrooms, and lockers.

1.4.6 Substations

Substations are essential in providing the necessary power to operate LRT. Substations are typically located every 5,000 feet, depending on power source connections and available sites. Locations of substations were identified during conceptual engineering for the purposes of this DEIS, and are shown in Appendix A, “Conceptual Plan”. During preliminary and final design, the location of substations could change. Substations could be located and designed within a station platform area to minimize impacts. Similarly, substations could be incorporated into existing or new development and designed to blend with surroundings. Chapter 7, “Visual Resources” considers how substations could change the visual environment and includes photos of typical substations.

1.4.7 Operating Characteristics

The operations plan for the Proposed Action includes light-rail service. Since the Proposed Action would be an extension of the existing Metro Rail, service frequency for the Metro Rail would be the same as that for the existing Metro Rail.

Light-rail service would operate between the downtown Buffalo's Erie Canal Harbor Station at the southern terminus of the existing Metro Rail and the proposed I-990 Station. Trains would operate in 1, 2 or 3-car sets, seven days a week from 5:00 a.m. to 1:00 a.m. On occasion, for special events, 4 car trains would be used. The service would generally operate on the following frequencies:

- Weekday peak-period service (i.e. 6:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.) would be every 10 minutes.
- Weekday off-peak service would be 12 minutes during the mid-day and early evening periods (i.e. 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.) and 15 minutes during the early morning and evening/night period (i.e. 5:00 a.m. to 6:30 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m.).
- Saturday service would be every 15 minutes from 7:00 a.m. to 1:00 a.m.
- Sunday service would be every 20 minutes from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 a.m.

Fare collection for the Proposed Action would be the same as the existing Metro Rail. Light-rail patrons would buy tickets and passes from the self-serve ticket vending machines (TVMs) located in all Metro Rail stations, Metropolitan Transportation Center, Portage Road Transportation Center and Niagara Falls Transportation Center, or otherwise in advance at an authorized NFTA outlet or through the NFTA website. The TVMs located at the stations would have the capability to dispense

one-way, round-trip, weekly and day pass tickets, reduced-fare tickets for qualified persons (seniors, handicapped, etc.) and print receipts for credit/debit transactions. The fare media would be paper-based, magnetically encoded, and compatible with the existing bus magnetic ticketing system. In addition, the NFTA is in the process of upgrading the fare collection system for Metro Rail and Bus system. The new system will include TVMs, as well as a variety of cashless payment options including smart cards and mobile ticketing using smart phone technology.

1.5 REQUIRED ACTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The Proposed Action is subject to environmental review under SEQRA based on the discretionary actions associated with the Proposed Action's implementation by Metro and other involved agencies. SEQRA was enacted by the New York State legislature in 1975 and requires New York governmental agencies to identify potential environmental effects that would result from their discretionary actions, to evaluate reasonable alternatives to avoid or minimize impacts, and—to the extent that adverse impacts are identified—avoid or otherwise mitigate those impacts to the maximum extent practicable, consistent with social, economic, environmental, and other considerations. State and local governments and agencies must review their discretionary actions in accordance with SEQRA, unless such actions fall within certain statutory or regulatory exemptions, before undertaking, funding, or approving the actions.

As noted above, the Proposed Action will be the subject of a future application by Metro for federal funds administered through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) or other federal sources to cover a portion of the Proposed Action's capital costs. Therefore, this DEIS is intended to be compliant with the substantive environmental review requirements the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) (42 U.S. Code § 4321 et seq.) and implementing regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality 40 CFR Parts 1500–1508), the Federal Highway Administration/Federal Transportation Authority (23 CFR Part 771), and of other applicable federal rules, regulations, and executive orders. While the Proposed Action does not include a federal action at this time, Metro could seek federal funding and enter the FTA's Capital Investment Grant program. As such, the SEQRA environmental findings could be used to prepare and make a NEPA-level environmental determination. FTA serves on an advisory committee and has reviewed the environmental documents, along with other involved and interested agencies, per SEQRA.

1.5.1 Environmental Setting

SEQRA requires that an EIS include a concise description of the environmental setting of the areas to be affected, sufficient to understand the impacts of a proposed action and alternatives. This DEIS includes a discussion of existing conditions as well as conditions expected in the future with and without the Proposed Action. Construction of the Proposed Action is expected to occur in multiple phases, with completion of the full build-out of all project components in 2030.

An analysis year of 2040 was used, which includes the anticipated year of completion (2030) and a reasonable planning horizon to evaluate long-term environmental consequences. In accordance with SEQRA, this DEIS considers the Proposed Action's potential impacts on the environmental setting, considering planned and in-construction development as well as major infrastructure projects in the

area that are anticipated to be completed by 2040. This DEIS also includes analysis of the Proposed Action's potential for temporary effects during the construction period.

In the environmental review process, the future without the Proposed Action (No Action condition) is used as a starting point to provide a comparison of the Proposed Action in terms of costs, benefits, and impacts.

1.5.2 Environmental Review

The environmental review process allows decision-makers to systematically consider potential environmental impacts of the Proposed Action, to evaluate reasonable alternatives, and to identify mitigation of environmental impacts to the extent practicable. The SEQRA process provides the opportunity for public comment on the Draft Scope and DEIS.

As lead agency, Metro's first charge is to determine whether the Proposed Action may have a significant adverse impact on the environment. Metro, as lead agency, prepared an Environmental Assessment Form and determined that the Proposed Action may result in one or more significant adverse environmental impacts. On January 24, 2019, Metro issued a Combined Notice indicating its intent to act as lead agency, and that it had issued a Positive Declaration—thereby requiring the preparation of this DEIS—and a public scoping meeting notice, along with the Draft Scope for the DEIS.

A public scoping meeting was held under the direction of Metro on February 12, 2019, at Sweet Home Middle School at 4150 Maple Rd, Amherst, NY 14226. The scoping meeting was attended by over 80 members of the public. Attendees left nine comments on the rollout map, 21 completed comment cards, and three comments with the stenographer. In addition to public comments received orally and in writing at the February 12, 2019, scoping meeting, written comments on the Draft Scope were accepted through March 10, 2019, at which point the public comment period for the Draft Scope closed.

All comments received prior to the close of the comment period were considered by Metro and the changes, as appropriate, were included in the Final Scope that was prepared and distributed on May 29, 2019.

Publication of the DEIS and issuance of the Notice of Completion signal the beginning of the public review period. During this time, which must extend for a minimum of 30 days for SEQRA and 45 days for NEPA, the public may review and comment on the DEIS, either in writing or at a public hearing convened for the purpose of receiving such comments. All substantive comments received on the DEIS, at the hearing or during the comment period, become part of the SEQRA record and will be summarized and responded to in the final environmental impact statement (FEIS).

Once the public comment period for the DEIS has closed, the lead agency prepares the FEIS. This document will include a summary of, and response to, each substantive comment made about the DEIS. Once Metro determines that the FEIS is complete, it will issue a Notice of Completion and circulate the FEIS. The completed FEIS will be available to agencies and the public for a minimum of ten days before Metro will make its SEQRA findings.

1.5.3 Other Involved or Interested Agencies

In addition to Metro, several other involved or interested public agencies or authorities have been identified as being required to implement the Proposed Action, as follows:

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – federal wetland permit
- NYS Department of Transportation: highway work permits for curb cut access and review of traffic mitigation measures
- NYS Department of Environmental Conservation: State Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit/approval of Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) and state wetland permit
- NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation: historic resources determination
- National Grid: proposed substation, underground distribution feeders and transmission lines, and electrical connection
- Erie County Department of Public Works: highway work permit for work on county roads; sewer permit/stormwater management requirements; review and implementation of transportation mitigation measures
- Town of Amherst
- Town of Tonawanda

1.5.4 Smart Growth Infrastructure Act

The State Smart Growth Public Infrastructure Policy Act requires state infrastructure agencies to determine that a public infrastructure project is, to the extent practicable, consistent with the relevant criteria specified in the act prior to approving, undertaking, supporting, or financing a public infrastructure project. This includes providing grants, awards, loans, or assistance programs in furtherance of a project. A Smart Growth Impact Statement Assessment Form was completed for the Metro Rail Expansion Project and is included in the DEIS as Appendix B, “Smart Growth Screening Tool”.