



# A NEW FUTURE FOR TRANSIT IN ROCHESTER: RECONNECT ROCHESTER'S MAYORAL POLICY STATEMENT



Reconnect Rochester is a group of transportation advocates calling for the creation of a fully integrated multi-modal transportation network for our region. We believe the next Mayor has the opportunity to champion a dramatic shift in our transportation infrastructure. The transit system this city and region needs will require dedication of time, staff and resources.

We urge all candidates to pledge their commitment to this vision as part of their platform for candidacy. What follows is our reasoning and recommendations for the future Mayor to incorporate into his or her platform.

An improved transit system must be an integral component in the planning of Rochester's future.

#### **Enhanced transit will:**

- Drive dense, walkable, pedestrian-oriented development
- Improve Rochester's economic viability and competitiveness among other progressive U.S. cities
- Reduce our carbon footprint and expand our environmental sustainability
- Increase equity of access to mobility for all citizens

At one time Rochester had an outstanding, diverse transportation system with streetcars, a trolley subway, inter-urban passenger railroads, bicycles, and provisions for pedestrians. This was a key factor in establishing the city's economic and cultural vitality. But with road-oriented development and the subsequent sprawl of the region's population, our transportation options have been reduced to: bus and car.

As we plan for our future transportation requirements, we must not allow the automobile to continue to be our top priority. Our transit system, beginning with buses and in the near future, rail, can provide a high level of mobility. Walking and bicycling can also increase accessibility within transit-connected neighborhoods.

#### **Our new Mayor must lead us in planning a more viable, sustainable transportation system that supports urban development.**

We all know there are many benefits of a true regional inter-modal transportation system. Conversely, there are many serious risks to not planning a more modern system—and these dangers become more damaging to our economy and environment—and more unjust to our citizens—every day we ignore them.

Which is why it is imperative our next Mayor pursue the following strategies to foster the development of a broader multi-modal transportation network right away—beginning with his or her platform for candidacy.



# Pedestrians

Safe conditions for pedestrians (young, old, able, or disabled) are crucial for a city to work and function effectively. Cities at their best are oriented to the scale and function of pedestrians—and their accessibility remains a fundamental priority.

## The next Mayor of Rochester should:

- Consider pedestrian access and safety first in transportation and development plans.
- Encourage developments that are oriented toward the street/sidewalk rather than toward parking lots.
- Improve public safety in our neighborhoods to enable safe pedestrian travel.
- Create zones that enhance the pedestrian environment—including quality sidewalk design, benches, and public art—especially in historic, shopping, and cultural districts.
- Utilize traffic-calming methods where the design of streets and driveways promotes safe speeds and interaction with pedestrians.
- Improve snow removal strategies and enforcement of sidewalk shoveling to facilitate year-round pedestrian travel.
- Enforce fines for illegal parking across sidewalks and other obstructions to pedestrians.
- Ensure new pedestrian trails do not endanger the preservation of key rights of way for rail transit.



# Bicyclists

Increasing the use of bicycles is one of the most affordable and practical ways to promote accessibility for local and even longer-distance trips.

## The next Mayor of Rochester should:

- Implement the recommendations made in the City's Bicycle Master Plan, build on the goals set forth by that document, and ensure bicycle trails don't endanger the preservation of rights of way for rail transit.
- Utilize traffic-calming methods where the design of streets promotes safe speeds and interaction with cyclists.
- Develop bikeways and bicycle lanes that are connected to regional bikeways and public transit modes.
- Provide adequate secure parking facilities for cyclists at public buildings and facilities where there is currently free automobile parking.
- Continue positive and effective outreach with the Rochester Cycling Alliance and other members of the bicycling community
- Establish free community bicycle fleets or contribute funding to the implementation of a bike-sharing system.



# Public Transportation

An over-reliance on auto travel is a growing source of greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution—and a major cause of the decline of our cities. Suburban jobs are often inaccessible to inner city residents, which contributes to mounting social disparities. And parking issues limit the development potential of downtown and major activity centers.

Cities throughout the country have found rail transit—light rail, streetcars, and regional rail—provides major advantages over an all-bus transit system.

## **Rail transit:**

- **Attracts more riders**
- **Costs less to operate**
- **Delivers riders to their destination quickly**
- **Results in more development**

Electric light rail/streetcars are smooth, quiet, have zero emissions on the street, and are very compatible with city streets. We believe rail transit is the most strategic transportation investment our region can make to revitalize our city.

# The next Mayor of Rochester should:

## **Leverage existing programs and funding**

- Coordinate with RGRTA to ensure the preservation of the current level of service and frequency of bus routes within the City of Rochester.
- Ensure the final design of the RTS Transfer Center meets the riding public's needs and concerns expressed through public involvement prior to final approval and construction.

## **Preserve irreplaceable assets**

- Maintain right of ways for potential future rail transit use including several former railroad rights of way, the Broad Street tunnel, and the Erie-Lackawanna Bridge near University of Rochester.
- Help secure adequate space for additional RTS Satellite Transfer Centers within future redevelopment projects.

## **Collaborate with regional transportation agencies**

- Use seat on the Genesee Transportation Council to advocate for policies that strengthen the city of Rochester, minimize sprawl, and reduce pollution including greenhouse gases.
- Advocate that the GTC's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) reflect urban- and environment-friendly policies.
- Use the city's positions on RGRTA's board to advocate for RGRTA policy that incorporates the city's transit policies.

## **Plan for the improvements**

- Study light rail/streetcar routes, leverage off of prior studies that concluded rail transit would be viable in Rochester. Identify the corridors that have the greatest ridership potential and impact on connecting key activity centers. Use available Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funding, including section 5307, to finance the study.
- Work with GTC to adopt a centers-focused approach for its upcoming Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) that prioritize the future funding for projects that emphasize in-fill growth and redevelopment through transit and alternative transportation investment.

- Incorporate land use impacts in all City of Rochester transportation planning and funding decisions.
- Develop standards for minimum levels of transit service, such as frequency of service on core routes and on secondary routes and maximum walking distances to routes.
- Incorporate transit facilities and amenities—including improved transit stops and dedicated transit lanes—in street reconstruction and enhancement projects.

### **Implement improvements**

- Ensure that GTC establishes set-asides of future Surface Transportation Program (STP) and other discretionary program funding to support the LRTP centers-based concept.
- Increase bus service frequencies.
- Work with GTC to fund the proposed downtown circulator service and/or provide reduced/free RTS fare passes.
- Advocate for the early adoption of at least one starter light rail/ streetcar project using available funding sources such as Section 5309 New Starts/ Small Start, flexible Surface Transportation Program (STP), Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ).
- Restructure our transit system with light rail/streetcars forming the core of an integrated bus-rail transit system. Redeploy current radial bus routes replaced by light rail/streetcars to form new cross-town routes.
- Establish satellite transit centers to enable transfers in city neighborhoods and suburbs. The combination of satellite transit centers and rail transit trunk lines will allow us to transition from a radial system to a hybrid (radial and grid) system with multiple transfer points.



# Intercity Transportation

Leverage Rochester's proximity to regional and international metropolitan areas by developing high-speed rail, increased inter-city bus service and a high quality inter-modal facility that promotes a positive image of Rochester and provides accessible transit options throughout the city and region.

## The next Mayor of Rochester should:

- Take a leadership role in planning and developing an inter-city inter-modal transportation center at the Central Avenue Amtrak station. A new facility should offer improved amenities for passengers, act as an attractive gateway to our city, facilitate transfers between modes, and encourage greater usage of intercity bus and rail.
- Ensure the coordination of multiple transit connections to the intermodal center (both buses and future rail) and the improvement of bicycle and pedestrian connections between the intermodal center and downtown.
- Champion improvements to the Empire Corridor at the local, state, and federal levels to promote the prioritization of high-speed rail funding from Albany to Niagara Falls and Toronto.
- Study a regional passenger rail service that connects surrounding communities along the Empire Corridor from Lyons to Batavia through Rochester. This service would leverage infrastructure planned for high speed rail improvements.



# Automobiles

By adopting strategies that lessen the need for car ownership and discourage unnecessary auto use, we can increase public transit ridership, reduce our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and enjoy a cleaner, safer and more livable urban environment.

**The next Mayor of Rochester should:**

## **Leverage Road Financing**

- Champion the use of federal and state funding to provide for a maximum share of transit capital and operations rather than roadway projects.
- Work with GTC to shift more funding from road capacity projects to road maintenance and rehabilitation.

## **Re-evaluate Parking**

- Discourage unnecessary auto use by reducing subsidies to parking in non-residential areas well served by mass transit, and establish preferential parking rates for High-Occupancy Vehicles (HOV).
- Eliminate minimum parking requirements for all new development.
- Establish maximum parking allowance for all new development within the Center City and areas adjacent to the primary transit corridors.
- Increase impervious cover limits to minimize storm water runoff from road and parking surfaces into watersheds.

## Promote Car-Sharing

- Provide free and designated parking for Zip Car and future car-sharing services.
- Contract with car-sharing services to reduce the City's need for fleet vehicles and increase the number of shared vehicles on public streets.

## Transition to Alternative Fuel Vehicles

- Adopt policies to facilitate the transition to hybrid and electric vehicles.
- Install electric charging stations for electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles in City-owned parking facilities and other locations. Provide power to those vehicles using renewable energy sources.



**Reconnect Rochester invites all candidates and their staff to share thoughts and opinions on this document with its membership. Contact us at [info@reconnectrochester.org](mailto:info@reconnectrochester.org).**

phone: 1.585.354.6232 | [www.ReconnectRochester.org](http://www.ReconnectRochester.org)