



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

Senator Kennedy Enlists Senate Democratic Leader Stewart-Cousins in Push for Increased State Support for NFTA

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY April 12, 2014

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State Budget Increased Aid for NFTA and Set Aside Funding for Upstate Transit Projects; Kennedy Wants to Ensure NFTA Receives Fair Share of Upstate Capital Funding.

Senate Democratic Leader Stewart-Cousins Visits Buffalo to See First-Hand Unique Challenges and Opportunities Facing WNY.

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BUFFALO, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy, D-Buffalo, visited the Allen-Medical Campus Metro Rail Station with Senate Democratic Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins today to show her first-hand the unique challenges facing the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA). Throughout this year’s budget process, it became clear that there is a lack of statewide awareness of the specific needs of the NFTA. Senator Kennedy is enlisting the help of Leader Stewart-Cousins, who has been a long-time advocate for public transit across the state, to help build statewide support for potential solutions to address the challenges facing Western New York’s transit system.

Leader Stewart-Cousins is visiting Buffalo this weekend to directly observe specific issues affecting Western New York. During her visit, Senator Kennedy highlighted the exciting progress happening throughout the area, especially along the waterfront and at the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, and he detailed the obstacles that remain ahead. One of those issues is ensuring the NFTA receives increased support from the state, so that region’s resurgence is not slowed down by a struggling transit system.

“The NFTA will play a critical role in the economic revival of Buffalo and Western New York, but first we must secure increased state support to meet its most urgent needs,” said **Senator Tim Kennedy**. “Leader Stewart-Cousins was eager to see first-hand the challenges facing the NFTA, and with her support, we will help spur new investment in Western New York transit. Every \$1 invested in public transportation generates at least \$4 in economic returns. Investing today will pay dividends long into the future, and it will foster sustained job growth and economic development along the NFTA’s light-rail corridor. Working alongside Leader Stewart-Cousins, we have been able to ensure that Albany always pays attention to the unique needs of Buffalo and Western New York. She has been an important ally in our fight for Western New York’s fair share.”

“There has been no stronger advocate and ally for increased funding to the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) in the State Senate than Senator Tim Kennedy,” **Senate Democratic Conference Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins** said. “Senator Kennedy fought to ensure that more funds were allocated to NFTA in the 2014-2015 State Budget, and he is continuing the fight to ensure this critical transit authority has the funds it needs to excel in its core mission. I thank Senator Kennedy for his leadership on this issue and for his efforts to explain these concerns to his colleagues, and I look forward to working with him to ensure NFTA, and the greater Western New York region, receive the state aid they require to grow and prosper.”

In previous years, the NFTA has not received its fair share of funding from the state. The NFTA receives less state aid per passenger-trip and per revenue-mile than the other major upstate transit agencies, despite being the state’s second largest transit provider and the only upstate system with light-rail service. In 2011, Metro Rail saw nearly 6.5 million riders, but none of these light-rail users – nor the light-rail system itself – are factored into the NFTA’s transit operating assistance. These millions of riders, who are invisible to this formula, put a financial strain on the NFTA that no other upstate transit authority has to deal with.

“While we just approved this year’s budget, we are not resting in our efforts to raise statewide awareness to the need to reform upstate transit’s funding mechanisms,” Kennedy said. “The state should update its funding formulas to ensure they provide the NFTA with the resources we need to meet existing and future needs for public transportation in Western New York.”

The NFTA remains in need of significant capital improvements to replace its aging bus fleet and update its light-rail services. This year, there will be a total of about \$30 million in state funding available for upstate-transit capital projects. Of that \$30 million, about \$10 million is new upstate capital funding that was included in the 2014-15 budget, and the remaining \$20

million was appropriated in previous budgets but never released to local transit agencies.

Senator Kennedy is pushing to ensure that the NFTA receives an enhanced share of those funds to meet the urgent capital needs facing the agency. Kennedy outlined several of the most critical capital projects for NFTA's light-rail service over the next five years. They include:

- Upgrades to light-rail infrastructure, such as overhead power, underground and above-ground track improvements, which is estimated at \$15.5 million.
- Escalator rebuild, which will cost approximately \$9.6 million.
- Completing light-rail car rebuild efforts at \$9.2 million.
- A new fare collection system with gates for the underground portion of system, which has an estimated cost of \$9.1 million.
- Overall rail station repair at about \$3.1 million.

These capital projects are critical to the future strength of Buffalo's economy, and they demonstrate the need to direct a substantial portion of capital funding to the NFTA. The NFTA's light-rail corridor is home to Western New York's largest concentration of employment, population and university enrollment, and development along the corridor has been rapid in recent years.

While touring the NFTA's Allen Street rail station, Kennedy shared with Leader Stewart-Cousins the details of high-profile development projects bordering the rail line, including:

- The UB 2020 legislation set in motion efforts to construct a new UB School of Medicine, which will be integrated with the NFTA's new Allen-Medical Campus Light Rail Rapid Transit station.

- Expansion at the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus continues, with job growth leading to over 17,000 daily commuters.
- The ongoing development at Canalside and the construction of the HarborCenter complex is boosting the need for reliable transit to Buffalo's waterfront.
- Re-opening Main Street in the downtown area to vehicle traffic is ensuring Metro Rail is better integrated with our city center to help revitalize this important business strip.

“With increased support from the state, we can fulfill the critical needs facing the NFTA – which will help speed the revitalization of our city and strengthen our economy,” Kennedy said.

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Senator Timothy M. Kennedy represents the New York State Senate's 63rd District, which is comprised of the town of Cheektowaga, the city of Lackawanna and nearly all of the city of Buffalo. More information is available at <http://kennedy.nysenate.gov>.