



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Robert G. Ortt

## Ortt Questions NFTA on Service Cuts as ADA Celebrates Anniversary

ROBERT G. ORTT July 25, 2015

| ISSUE: **TRANSPORTATION, DISABILITY**



*Senator Says Recent Cuts Threaten ADA Requirements for Paratransit Riders*

*Senator, Local Elected Officials, Advocates Call on NFTA to Reinstate Routes 57 and 55L*

**NORTH TONAWANDA** – Senator Rob Ortt (R,C,I – North Tonawanda) today stood alongside other elected officials and advocates on the steps of City Hall to call on the NFTA to reinstate the 57 Flex bus route and part of the 55L Route, and keep the Paratransit (PAL)

service - which will also be eliminated soon - on those routes. This push comes one day before the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). Cutting the Paratransit service on these routes is something Senator Ortt says threatens ADA requirements for those riders.

“I believe we have not only a moral, but a legal obligation to make sure individuals with disabilities have access to public transportation,” said **Senator Ortt**. “The alternative of forcing them into homes will have severe physical, emotional, and mental costs to those with disabilities, not to mention excessive costs for taxpayers. I want the NFTA to be a part of the solution, not the problem. And, I’m ready and willing to work with them on resolving this matter. Meanwhile, my constituents deserve accountability and I’m determined to get answers.”

Last month, the NFTA discontinued the 57 Flex bus route in North Tonawanda, and a portion of the 55L Route that traveled between Lockport and Niagara Falls. As of late June, the leg from Niagara County Community College to Lockport was eliminated.

The Paratransit service for these routes is slated to be cut in March of 2016. Registered Paratransit riders need to live within three quarters of a mile of an active route to use the PAL service. However, the ADA law requires Paratransit services by public entities that provide fixed route services, such as the NFTA. Senator Ortt says this is a deprivation of basic transportation rights of physically and developmentally disabled individuals.

“Unfortunately, when a fixed bus route is eliminated, the Paratransit system goes with it,” **said Ortt**. “The Paratransit service is a readily accessible and affordable option for an individual who has a physical or mental impairment, and I fear that once it’s gone, the quality of life for those in the disabled community who depend on the system will be gone too. Taking their means of transportation away from them negatively impacts their quality

of life, jeopardizes their independent living, and possibly infringes upon rights afforded to them through ADA requirements.”

**Assemblywoman Jane Corwin said,** “I am disappointed by the decision of the NFTA to discontinue bus Route 55L. It is critical for our community that a direct line of transportation be maintained between the east and west ends of Niagara County. As Lockport and Niagara Falls are the largest cities in Niagara County, our communities, especially including the needs of the disabled, deserve the attention, consideration and full service of the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority.”

**WNY Independent Living Director of Advocacy Todd Vaarwerk said,** “We’ve seen it before – services that were once offered through the NFTA for physically and developmentally disabled individuals, get cut and have adverse effects. Those people end up being isolated; they decline medically, and then end up in nursing homes. It’s a sad reality that needs to end.”

**North Tonawanda resident and Metro bus rider Lee Stevens said,** “Removing the 57 route is discriminatory against people who live in the suburbs. Anyone with a disability is forced to travel to the city to catch a bus. Moreover, these cuts effect us all one way or another. If citizens don't directly have a disability, they surely have a loved one or friend who does. This negatively effects their quality of life.”

**Paratransit rider Henry Oberjosh said,** “Once the PAL service stops next March, I’ll have to travel 1 – 1 ½ hours, three times a week on my powered wheelchair to get to my dialysis appointments. Taking our means of transportation away from us will negatively impact our quality of life, jeopardize our independent living, and infringe upon our basic rights.” `

Despite the \$6.4 million Senator Ortt fought to secure for the NFTA in the New York State Budget, routes 57 and 55L were still cut. Of that amount, \$2.5 million was aside to help the NFTA maintain current schedules for bus routes in jeopardy of termination.

Additionally, Senator Ortt sponsored a bill that passed in both houses of the state Legislature in June. The bill (S4523A) prevents NFTA funds from being diverted. It ensures that money allocated for the NFTA goes directly to the NFTA's general fund rather than being redirected to the state for governmental purposes.

Pictured from left to right: NFTA Metro Bus Rider Lee Stevens; Assemblywoman Corwin; North Tonawanda Common Council Member Cathy Schwandt; Lockport Mayor Anne McCaffrey; Senator Ortt; Wilson Town Supervisor Joe Jastrzemski; North Tonawanda Mayor Art Pappas; WNY Independent Living, Inc. Dir. Of Advocacy Todd Vaarwerk; North Tonawanda Common Council Pres. Russ Rizzo; North Tonawanda Common Council Member Donna Braun; and Paratransit Rider Henry Oberjosh.