



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

Kennedy, Peoples-Stokes, Kearns Push for Commitment from NFTA to Review Recent Route Cuts and Fare Hikes as They Push State for Increased Funds

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY February 7, 2014

| ISSUE: **TRANSPORTATION**

State Delegation is Working to Help Secure Additional State Funding for NFTA; Lawmakers Want NFTA to Commit to Current Level of Service and Explore Reversing Previous Service Cuts and Fare Hikes.

NFTA Deserves Additional State Funding to Help Support Operations – Kennedy, Peoples-Stokes and Kearns Want Any Funds Secured to Go to Cutting Rates for Families in Need

Kennedy: If the State Does Its Part to Support the NFTA; NFTA Must Do Its Part to Support WNY.

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Today, Senator Tim Kennedy and Assemblymembers Crystal Peoples-Stokes and Michael Kearns are pushing for a commitment from the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority to protect reliable services and affordable fares for working families, if they successfully secure a significant increase in state aid. Specifically, the lawmakers are asking the NFTA to commit to maintaining current routes and preventing future fare hikes. In addition, the lawmakers are pushing the NFTA to explore restoring some of the previously cut routes and reducing some of the recently increased fares should additional state funding be secured. The lawmakers noted that if taxpayers step up and provide additional funding to the NFTA that those funds should go directly into services that Western New Yorkers depend on.

“Thousands of working families in Western New York rely on NFTA buses and trains for their daily commute to work or school. It is critical that New York State provide the NFTA with the resources they need to ensure our community has affordable, reliable access to transportation services,” said **Senator Tim Kennedy**. “We’re fighting to get the state to give Western New York its fair share by increasing funding for the NFTA, but we want to ensure any increase in state aid is driven directly back into the community through affordable fares and service restorations. The NFTA should immediately commit to not increasing fares or reducing services for the next two years, if we successfully secure additional state funding. If the state does its part to support the NFTA, then the NFTA must do its part to support Western New Yorkers.”

Crystal D. Peoples-Stokes, Assemblymember for the 141st District, said, “Federal Transportation and Aviation reports have commended the NFTA on their fiscal austerity but implore that the state adequately funds this WNY necessity. Historically, the NFTA has been significantly underfunded in comparison to its counterparts despite the fact that none of the other regions have a light rail system, two airports and the largest service area second only to the MTA. With airports being serious economic drivers, employers and tools for overall business recruitment, we should seek additional lines of funding and I pledge my support to correct this formulaic and funding inequity. I commend the NFTA on their fiscal discipline and ask for their assurance that funding will go where its ultimately needed – to assisting WNY transit riders by restoring reduced routes and services and maintaining their fleet.”

“New York State is using Smart Growth strategies to bring a greater return on taxpayer investment in funding transportation needs,” stated **Assemblymember Mickey Kearns**. “Additional state funding will provide people with more transportation choices and create economic opportunities for WNY.”

The Buffalo-area lawmakers say the NFTA is underfunded by about \$8 million, and they are fighting hard to get the state to agree to an increase in operating assistance for the NFTA. However, they want to ensure the NFTA improves services and lowers fares for transit riders when and if they secure necessary state resources to close their funding gap. The lawmakers want any state funding increase to directly benefit Western New Yorkers who use NFTA services to get to work or school.

In a letter to the NFTA, the lawmakers outline their request.

“Over the past few years, the NFTA has substantially increased fares for working families,” the lawmakers write to the NFTA. “With the 2012 fare increase, a single mother with two children would see the combined cost of their monthly NFTA passes increase by \$22 for a total cost of \$150. This is a substantial expense for families on tight budgets. We ask that the NFTA consider reversing fare hikes – specifically for children, seniors and individuals with disabilities – should the agency obtain additional state funding. Lastly, we ask that you conduct a review of all previously cut or reduced services and attempt to restore as many of those routes as possible.”

The lawmakers are calling for a significant and necessary increase in State Transit Operating Assistance (STOA) for the NFTA. They are also pushing, alongside NFTA officials, to secure funds, up to \$11 million in capital funding, to restore the NFTA’s aging bus fleet. Officials believe modernized and efficient buses will increase ridership, and increased ridership means additional revenues.

The Western New York Delegation has been making the case for a more fair share of state aid to be directed to the NFTA this year. 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. Kennedy

has called it a question of “basic fairness” – echoing recent statements from leaders within the NFTA. A continued lack of funding from the state could jeopardize transit services – which could mean fare hikes or route cuts – and delay or prevent capital improvements.

To demonstrate the regional equity issue, Kennedy has pointed to a comparison between the NFTA and its counterpart in Westchester County. While the NFTA has more riders and more vehicle-miles than the Westchester transit system, the NFTA is still receiving nearly \$7 million dollars less than the Westchester system.

A copy of the lawmakers' letter to the NFTA can be read below.

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FULL TEXT OF LETTER FROM LAWMAKERS TO NFTA:

February 6, 2014

Kimberley A. Minkel
Executive Director
Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority
181 Ellicott Street
Buffalo, New York 14203

Dear Ms. Minkel:

We write today on behalf of the thousands of Western New Yorkers who rely on the NFTA and the services it provides. We are proud to have joined you in advocating for additional STOA funds and capital funds to help support the NFTA's operations. We agree that these

funds are critical to the NFTA, and we are working to correct the inequity that exists in New York State transit funding. For too long, the NFTA has been underfunded by New York State. This year – as we have in previous years – we will continue to aggressively advocate for additional funding for the NFTA.

However, we believe that any increase in funding secured should be directed to support those services most important to the transit riders who depend on the NFTA. To our constituents, those services are efficient and stable routes, affordable fares for Western New York families in need, long-term investments in transit assets, and planning and policies that will prevent future fare hikes. We ask you and the Board of Commissioners to commit today to not increasing fares or reducing services for the next two years if we are successful in achieving an increase in state aid for the NFTA. The NFTA's commitment will make a big difference in our ability to get the job done.

Over the past few years, the NFTA has substantially increased fares for working families. With the 2012 fare increase, a single mother with two children would see the combined cost of monthly NFTA passes increase by \$22 for a total cost of \$150. This is a substantial expense for families on tight budgets. In addition to the commitment requested above, we ask that the NFTA consider reversing fare hikes – specifically for children, seniors, and individuals with disabilities – should the agency obtain additional state funding. Lastly, we also ask that you conduct a review of all previously cut or reduced services and attempt to restore as many of those services as possible.

We know that such promises cannot be made without the Board of Commissioners considering other economic realities. We would accept that such a promise would depend on drastic changes in federal funding, significant changes in ridership, dramatic increases in fuel costs, or other relevant but unforeseen circumstances. Nevertheless, we believe this commitment is not only critical to our efforts to secure additional state funds, but also

necessary to preserve the long-term stability of our public transit system.

All too often, funding can get swept up and spent on administrative costs, overhead and other areas. It is critical to us that we have your commitment that any additional funds you receive in this budget not be used for those purposes, but instead be used to support services that NFTA system users desperately need.

We will proudly advocate for the NFTA, and we are certain you will agree that if additional taxpayer funding is secured that those dollars should and will be driven directly back into the community through fare and route stability, and where possible, fare reductions and service restoration.

Sincerely,

Timothy M. Kennedy

State Senator, 63rd District

Crystal D. Peoples-Stokes

State Assembly Member, 141st District

Michael P. Kearns

State Assembly Member, 142nd District