

Technical Memorandum

To	Robert Gower and Rachel Maloney, NFTA	Page	1
cc	Michael Leydecker, Wendel and Carol Gould, FHI		
Subject	NFTA Metro Amherst Buffalo AA – Tier 2 Final Recommendations		
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1.0 Introduction

This memorandum was prepared as a follow-up to the feedback received at a series of Public Meetings and Committee Meetings that were held to communicate and seek comment on results of the Tier 2 Screening Process conducted for the Metro Amherst Buffalo Corridor Alternatives Analysis (AA). In light of feedback received, this memorandum revises the recommendations put forth by the AECOM team on the alternatives to carry forward into Tier 3 that was documented in the Tier 2 Screening Results “Draft Work In Progress” Technical Memorandum.

The alternatives development and evaluation process for the Metro Amherst Buffalo Corridor AA project consists of three distinct tiers of screening and evaluation. In each step, alternatives are examined and compared for their performance in terms of specific and progressively more detailed criteria along with increasingly more specific definition of alternatives. This process initially examines a large number of alternatives with the goal of reducing this “long list” of alternatives through screening and evaluation to only those that are reasonable (i.e., practical or feasible). In accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality’s (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), this process enables FTA and NFTA to screen the full range of alternatives and arrive at a subset of reasonable alternatives to undergo detailed study in the AA. Even though this AA study is not being performed in response to NEPA, it is the intent of the NFTA and FTA to link this planning process with NEPA so that the full range of alternatives is analyzed so that eventually at the end of Tier 3, a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) can be identified and the NEPA phase of FTA’s Project Development process initiated.

Briefly, the three tiers of screening and evaluation process consist of:

- **Tier 1:** Preliminary Screening of the Long List of Alternatives \implies Preliminary Alternatives – *Tier 1 is completed and was documented in the Tier 1 Evaluation: Long List of Alternatives Technical Memorandum.*
- **Tier 2:** Initial Screening of the Preliminary Alternatives \implies Final Build Alternatives – *the Tier 2 results are the subject of the Tier 2 Screening Results Technical Memorandum and this memorandum.*

- **Tier 3:** Final Screening and Evaluation of the Final Build Alternatives \iff Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) – *the Tier 3 analysis will be documented in the Final AA report.*

The long list of alternatives consisted of thirty-seven (37) alternatives. The Tier 1 Evaluation: Long List of Alternatives report documents the results of the Tier 1 screening process. At the end of the Tier 1 screening process on the long list of alternatives, fifteen (15) alternatives were retained to take into Tier 2 alternative definition and screening (seven LRT; six BRT; Enhanced Bus; Preferred Bus). Fifteen (15) alternatives were retained from Tier 1 to take into Tier 2 alternative definition and screening (seven LRT; six BRT; Enhanced Bus; Preferred Bus).

There are two major categories of Build Alternatives that were under consideration in Tier 2: 1) fixed-guideway alternatives, meaning either Light Rail Transit (LRT) or Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), and 2) non-fixed guideway alternatives, meaning the alternatives that are less capital investment intensive and represent more modest improvement to transit services and are the Enhanced Bus Alternative and the Preferred Bus Alternative. Both the Enhanced Bus Alternative and the Preferred Bus Alternative are focused on improvements that are more incremental in nature and represent modest capital investment primarily employing transportation system management strategies rather than the introduction of higher quality, fixed guideway transit. These non-fixed guideway alternatives were not subjected to the Tier 2 screening process. Because of their more modest investment level, they are automatically retained for the final Tier 3 evaluation of alternatives. This action allows these more modest investment alternatives to be rigorously evaluated and compared and contrasted with the fixed-guideway alternatives that are retained for Tier 3.

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide the final recommendations, in light of stakeholder interactions, on the set of alternatives to be carried forward into the more detailed definition and assessment of alternatives in Tier 3.

2.0 Initial Recommendation from the Tier 2 Screening Process

Regarding the alternatives considered in the Tier 2 screening, the AECOM consulting team provided its initial recommendations to NFTA on the alternatives to retain and carry forward into Tier 3. AECOM's recommendations on alternatives that would remain under study for detailed evaluation in Tier 3 took into consideration the quantified results of the Tier 2 screening matrix along with AECOM's considerations to the relative capital cost difference between LRT and BRT (the LRT alternatives are about 5 to 7 times the cost of the BRT alternatives) and to achieving a balance of geographic corridors. **Figure 1** displays the initial recommendations of the AECOM team on the alternatives to advance into Tier 3.

Figure 1: Initial Recommendations of Alternatives to Advance into Tier 3

Mode	Alternative	Screening Assessment - BRT	Review for Geographic Balance	Screening Assessment - LRT	Consistency with BRT Alternatives	Alternatives to Advance to Tier 3
BUS RAPID TRANSIT	Niagara Falls Blvd 1			N/A		Niagara Falls Blvd 1
	Niagara Falls Blvd 2		Eliminated	N/A		
	Bailey Ave 1			N/A		Bailey Ave 1
	Bailey Ave 2		Eliminated	N/A		
	Millersport Hwy 1			N/A		Millersport Hwy 1
LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT	Niagara Falls Blvd 1					Niagara Falls Blvd 1
	Niagara Falls Blvd 2				Eliminated	
	Niagara Falls Blvd 7				Eliminated	
	Bailey Ave 1				Eliminated	
	Bailey Ave 2				Eliminated	
	Millersport Hwy 1				Eliminated	

3.0 Common Themes Received as Feedback from Public and Committees

A public open house meeting was held on Thursday June 11th and also on Tuesday, June 23rd at two separate locations. Participants had the opportunity to speak with study team members and complete comment forms to provide input about the four recommended alternatives that are proposed to advance to Tier 3 analysis.

Common themes received as feedback include the following:

- LRT was clearly the preferred mode over BRT with roughly 85% of those who commented favoring LRT.
- Most favor the light rail alternative via Niagara Falls Boulevard as it was perceived to have the most available right of way and was perceived that it would have less direct impacts on properties along the alignment.
- LRT was seen as the best mode for lessening impacts on the environment, for speed of travel, for the potential for offering a one-seat ride (meaning requiring fewer transfers), for

serving disadvantaged and transit-dependent populations, and for providing convenient connections among destinations as well as to other modes of travel.

- BRT was generally perceived as too slow, requiring many transfers and less easy to use and as a sample the following comment was made: *“All the Bus “Rapid Transit alternatives are anything but rapid. Buses stuck in mixed traffic and 35MPH on Millersport, Bailey or Niagara Falls Blvd doesn’t attract ridership.”*
- Strong support for making any new transit investment bicycle-friendly and LRT was seen as better option for bicyclists bringing a bike on-board transit than BRT.

The above common themes were also echoed by NFTA’s advisory committees established for the study. The committees suggested that there appeared to be a lack of LRT alternatives being recommended as moving forward into Tier 3 with only one LRT alternative being considered for advancement into Tier 3. The committees stated that as a result if these recommendations hold, the focus in Tier 3 will be too centered on BRT alternatives and that this suggests that NFTA had already identified a preferred mode and that it was BRT. The committees strongly favored advancing a more equitable balance in modes for the alternatives moving forward in Tier 3. Additionally, the committees recognized that BRT could be developed in a corridor as a precursor, high-quality transit service that then lends to eventual construction and transit service by LRT and as a result, the committees indicated that both LRT and BRT alternatives should be examined in the same corridor in Tier 3. The committees also recognized the existing constrained environment (only 2 travel lanes; limited setbacks from the existing roadway of residential properties; probable high impacts to private property in implementing BRT) on Bailey Avenue and that BRT on Bailey would need to operate in mixed traffic, thus, would not offer any speed differential or improved reliability and suggested that the BRT Alternative on Bailey does not merit further consideration in Tier 3 and should be dropped.

From a technical view, the Bailey BRT alternative as a precursor to eventually upgrading the corridor to LRT was not a reasonable alternative to continue to pursue in Tier 3. Prior work completed in Tier 2, identified that the Baily LRT alternatives were inferior from an engineering perspective to either of the LRT alternatives on Niagara Falls Boulevard or Millersport Highway due to the significant increase in the length of underground construction including underground stations and the greater level of impacts than either of the LRT alternatives in the other corridors under consideration. Equally important was that the location of the Bailey LRT alignments was essentially duplicating the ridership capture area provided by the Niagara Falls Boulevard LRT and BRT alignments with fewer impacts.

The addition of the Millersport Highway LRT alternative into the set of recommended alternatives to be carried forward into Tier 3 is consistent with the public and committee desires to consider the potential that if BRT alternatives are selected that they provide the opportunity to build transit ridership for future consideration of LRT. The Millersport Highway LRT alignment provides that opportunity for potential upgrading of the alignment if warranted from BRT service to LRT service at some future date.

4.0 Final Recommendation of Alternatives to Advance to Tier 3

Reflecting public and committee feedback that demonstrates a preference for LRT over BRT as a mode, the concerns offered by the public and committees that it would benefit the study to advancing more LRT alternatives into Tier 3, and the recognition by the committees that BRT could be implemented as a precursor transit service to LRT in a corridor and that Bailey represents a constrained corridor for BRT, the AECOM team recommends to NFTA that the following alternatives are advanced into Tier 3:

LRT Alternatives

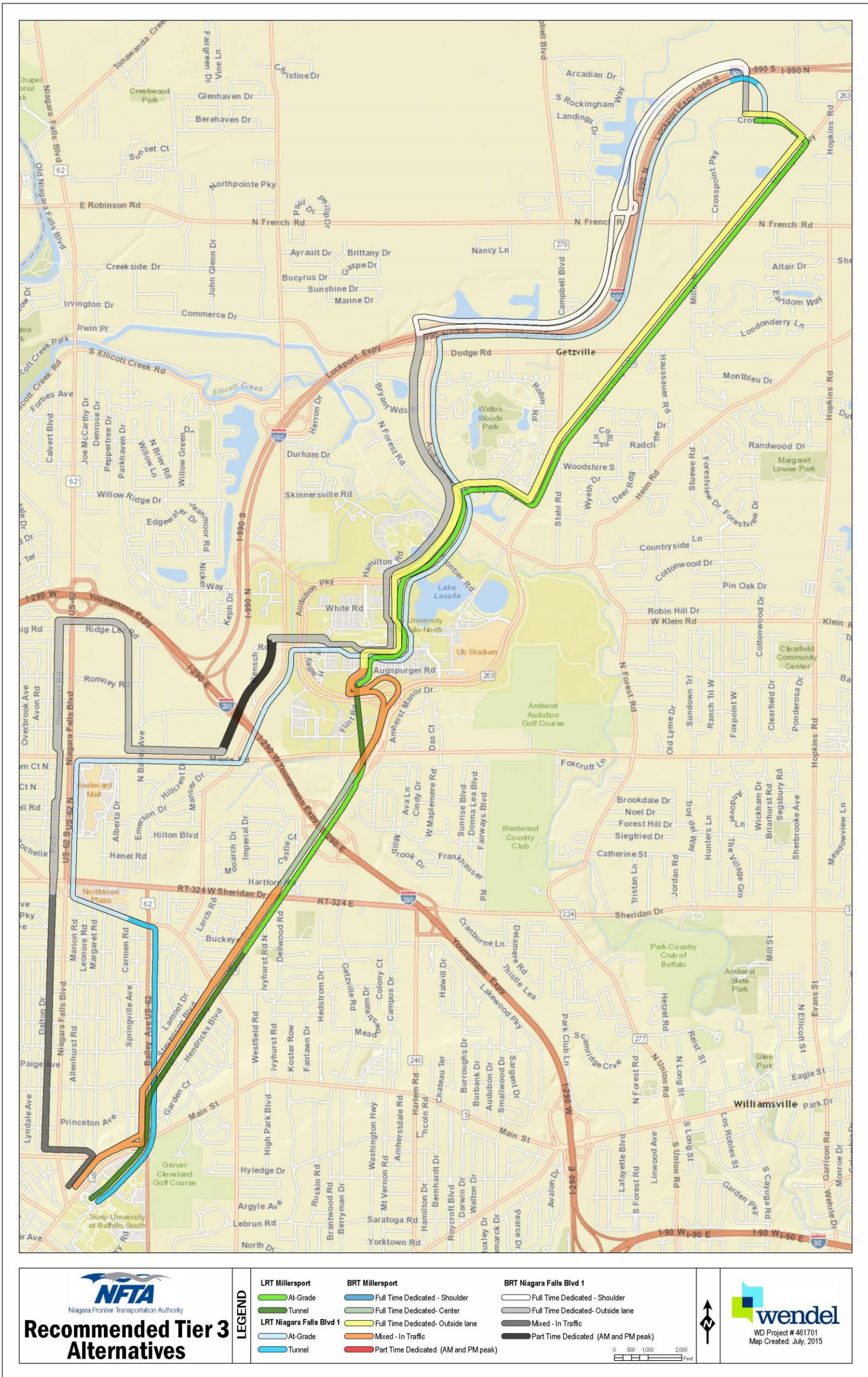
- Niagara Falls Boulevard 1
- Millersport Highway 1

BRT Alternatives

- Niagara Falls Boulevard 1
- Millersport Highway 1

Figure 2 provides a map of the final recommendations of the AECOM team on the alternatives to advance into Tier 3.

Figure 2: Map of Final Recommended Alternatives to Advance into Tier 3



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