Section 4.3
Socioeconomic Conditions

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

BRT ..... Bus Rapid Transit
GBNRTC ..... Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council
LRT ..... Light Rail Transit
Metro ..... Niagara Frontier Transit Metro System, Inc.
MTP ..... Metropolitan Transportation Plan
NFTA ..... Niagara Frontier Transit Authority
O&M ..... Operations and Maintenance
Project ..... Buffalo-Amherst-Tonawanda Corridor Transit Expansion
TAZ ..... Traffic Analysis Zone
TOD ..... Transit-Oriented Development
UB ..... University at Buffalo

4. Environmental Consequences

4.3 SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS

This section evaluates potential socioeconomic impacts of the LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative and potential mitigation measures where necessary. Appendix D3, "Socioeconomic Conditions Supplemental Information" describes the existing socioeconomic conditions, including population, housing, employment, and economic conditions within the study area for the Project. Appendix D3 also describes the methodology used to evaluate socioeconomic conditions. Section 4.17, "Construction Effects," describes construction-related socioeconomic impacts of the LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative. Table 4.3-1 summarizes the socioeconomic conditions Project impact findings.

Table 4.3-1. Socioeconomic Impacts Summary

Permanent Impacts	Project Alternative		
	No Build Alternative	LRT Build Alternative	BRT Build Alternative
Population	No impact No change in existing trends.	No adverse impact Population would grow at a greater rate within the study area compared to the region	No adverse impact Population would grow at a greater rate within the study area compared to the region
Housing Supply	No impact No change in existing trends.	Housing supply would increase within the study area due to residential transit-oriented development	No adverse impact
Employment	No impact No change in existing trends.	No adverse impact Employment growth would be stronger within the study area compared to the region	No adverse impact Employment growth would be stronger within the study area compared to the region
Government	No impact No change in existing trends.	No impact No change in existing trends	No impact No change in existing trends
Student Population	No impact No change in existing trends.	No adverse impact Connects all three UB campuses without a need to transfer between transit services Supports UB student housing needs	No adverse impact Connects all three UB campuses Requires a transfer to Metro Rail at UB South Campus Supports UB student housing needs
Transit-Oriented Development	No impact No change in existing trends	No adverse impact Benefits: • Increase of $1.7 Billion (2016 dollars) in residential space as a result of the Project • Increase of 32% in property tax revenues and $10.3 million in sales tax revenues for Erie County (2016 dollars) as a result of the Project	No adverse impact Expected benefits: • Increase in residential space • Increase in property tax revenues • Increase in sales tax revenues

Source: Population and employment forecasts provided by GBNRTC, 2023
Source: Housing supply and government revenue provided by 2018 Comprehensive TOD Plan, GBNRTC, 2018

4.3.1 No Build Alternative

Key to the evaluation of the Project's socioeconomic impact on the study area is the comparison of future projections with and without the construction of the Project. This comparison evaluates the differences between the No Build Alternative (future without the Project) and the Project's proposed Build Alternatives. Socioeconomic characteristics related to race, housing tenure, income, age, and educational attainment are not included in the comparisons between the No Build and Build Alternatives. These characteristics are long-term and stable and likely to remain the basic demographic profile of the study area and region with the variability of overall growth projections.

The No Build Alternative will not change in existing trends and therefore will have no impact. In addition, the No Build Alternative does not assume opportunities for redevelopment and revitalization that is anticipated to be stimulated by the construction of the proposed Project.

4.3.2 Build Alternatives

The comprehensive transit-oriented development planning efforts conducted by Metro and GBNRTC included an analysis of the transit-oriented growth patterns of the existing Metro Rail corridor, the economic and fiscal benefits created by the construction of the Project and associated transit-oriented development, and benefits of job accessibility for households in the region. The analysis used the GBNRTC projections for the region's future population, households, and employment by sector for 2040, which were the latest available data at that time. The main findings of this analysis as reported in the *Comprehensive Transit-Oriented Development 2019 Final Report* are:

- The Metro Rail Corridor is projected to grow faster than the region. The existing and proposed Metro Rail corridor is forecasted to increase its population by 5.8% between 2015 and 2040, while the region's population increase during the same period is projected at 1.3%.
- The Metro Rail Corridor has smaller households than the rest of the region. Household size in the existing and proposed Metro Rail corridor is projected to decrease further between 2015 and 2040, and faster than the decrease projected for the region. This is consistent with typical transit-oriented growth scenarios.
- Employment growth is projected to be stronger, on average, in the existing and proposed Metro Rail corridor than in the total region. Employment in the existing and proposed Metro Rail corridor is expected to grow by 13.3% between 2015 and 2040, compared to a 12.5% for the region.

In 2023, GBNRTC updated demographic forecasts (population and households) for use in modeling year 2050 travel demand to support the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) update. Table 4.3-2 shows the estimated population, households, and total employment in 2050 for the TAZs within the study area, based on the updated forecasts. The GBNRTC regional travel demand model includes the Project in its 2050 forecasts, assuming 2040 as the opening

year for the Project. The primary difference between the Project's LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative is the transit type (i.e., LRT versus BRT). The alignment is consistent between both Build Alternatives. As such, the 2050 projections apply to the LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative.

The 2050 forecasts are consistent with the trends reported in the *Comprehensive Transit-Oriented Development 2019 Final Report*. Due to increased connectivity, mobility, and reductions in travel time that would result from the LRT Build Alternative, and the BRT Build Alternative, increased development would occur in the study area. Population, households, and employment would grow at a greater rate in the study area compared to the region.

Table 4.3-2. Population, Households, and Employment for the Study Area and Buffalo-Niagara Region (2020, 2050)

Geography	Existing (2020)	Future Projections (2050)	Percent Difference (2020 to 2050)
Population			
Study Area	110,506	131,510	19.0%
Buffalo-Niagara Region	1,136,987	1,246,227	9.6%
Households			
Study Area	47,816	59,362	24.1%
Buffalo-Niagara Region	491,870	544,604	10.7%
Employment			
Study Area	133,964	161,307	20.4%
Buffalo-Niagara Region	696,286	791,271	13.6%
Average Household Size			
Study Area	2.07	2.01	-2.8%
Buffalo-Niagara Region	2.32	2.31	-0.6%

Source: GBNRTC, 2023

As with the No Build Alternative, socioeconomic characteristics related to race, housing tenure, income, age, and educational attainment are long-term and stable. These characteristics are likely to remain consistent with the basic demographic profile of the study area and region with the variability of overall growth projections.

4.3.2.1 Transit-Oriented Development and Increased Property Values

Metro and GBNRTC's comprehensive TOD planning efforts demonstrate that by promoting TOD, transit investment would enhance mobility options for the community and support broader social and economic goals. According to the *Comprehensive Transit-Oriented Development 2019 Final Report*, the LRT Build Alternative would facilitate future real estate development comprising approximately 8.4 million square feet of commercial (office and retail) and residential space throughout the existing and proposed Metro Rail corridor, worth a total assessed valuation of approximately $1.7 billion. Existing properties where the current buildings and uses are expected to remain should see their cumulative assessed value increase by more than $310 million because of their proximity to the corridor. As a result, Buffalo and Amherst would collect approximately $61.5 million in property tax revenues from properties in the existing and proposed Metro Rail Corridor, which would be 32 percent more than the No Build

Alternative. In addition, the potential retail development linked to the LRT Build Alternative would lead to approximately $8.7 million in annual sales tax revenues for the State of New York and $10.3 million in sales tax revenues for Erie County by 2040[1] (All financial figures are based on 2016 dollars).

Metro and GBNRTC's findings are supported by the American Public Transportation Association's conclusions that properties near public transportation experience higher rates of appreciation than properties not near public transportation.[2] The American Public Transportation Association study analyzed seven regions between 2012 and 2016, finding that residential and commercial median sales price increases for properties near public transportation stations were four percent to 42 percent higher than properties not near public transportation stations. The highest gains were in areas near rapid rail transit (LRT and Heavy Rail), BRT, and commuter rail. In addition, the average transportation cost savings per household near public transportation was between $2,500 and $4,400 per year.

The LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative would enhance regional mobility and are part of a larger regional investment strategy to leverage economic and community development opportunities associated with transit investment. Buffalo, Amherst, Tonawanda, and Erie County are committed to ensuring that development principles enhance the community and provide sustainable growth. For that effort, several regional plans and policies have been instituted to promote increased development, infill development, and redevelopment in established urban cores, and to limit development away from primary activity centers. Section 4.2, "Land Use," describes these plans and policies in detail. Therefore, in conjunction with associated land use policies, zoning, and plans, the LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative are expected to result in benefits to development and would contribute to the economy by encouraging and supporting high-density land uses, particularly around station locations.

As discussed in Section 4.17, "Construction Effects," the LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative would result in increased short-term employment and spending in the study area during construction, as well as long-term employment benefits resulting from the operations and maintenance (O&M) of the LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative.

The LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative would create jobs and additional earnings from O&M expenditures, including, but not limited to, the expenses associated with rail operators, vehicle maintenance, right-of-way maintenance, station maintenance, and safety and security, including additional NFTA police. It is assumed that O&M funding would be procured from local and Project-generated funds, and though these expenses would be generated at the

[1] Comprehensive Transit Oriented Development Plan. August 2018. GBNRTC.

[2] *The Real Estate Mantra: Locate Near Public Transportation.*, October 2019. American Public Transportation Association (APTA) and National Association of Realtors. October 2019. *https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/The-Real-Estate-Mantra-Locate-Near-Public-Transportation.pdf*

local level, O&M expenditures would not happen without the LRT Build Alternative or the BRT Build Alternative.

4.3.2.2 Tax Revenue

When a public entity acquires private property, the property is no longer subject to property taxes and is removed from the tax base. Section 4.1, "Property Acquisitions and Displacements," documents the properties that would be acquired for the LRT Build Alternative, and the BRT Build Alternative. However, the short-term tax revenue loss would be offset by the long-term increase in property values (and resulting taxes) that are expected from economic development that would occur because of the Project.

4.3.2.3 Summary of Potential Socioeconomic Impacts

As previously presented, Table 4.3-1 summarizes the environmental consequences of the No Build Alternative, LRT Build Alternative, and BRT Build Alternative and their impact on socioeconomic conditions.

The LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative would result in a positive increase in population, housing supply, and employment, particularly around the proposed stations. As these changes would be consistent with existing plans and policies, the proposed Project's Build Alternatives does not result in an adverse socioeconomic impact, therefore no mitigation is warranted. In addition, the LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative would facilitate future TOD, which is called for in existing local and regional plans.

Some tax revenue would be lost because of the LRT Build Alternative, and the BRT Build Alternative, due to private property acquisition (see Section 4.1, "Property Acquisitions and Displacements"). However, the overall loss of property would be small compared to the future socioeconomic projections and the additional municipal property tax revenue collected within the study area. Moreover, as the LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative would support future TOD, potentially resulting in millions of dollars in additional tax revenues, and does not result in an adverse socioeconomic impact, therefore no mitigation is warranted. In addition, the Town of Amherst has instituted plans and policies to promote increased development, infill development, and redevelopment. These efforts would create positive impacts on development and contributing economic benefits.