

Chapter 1

Introduction

Contents

1	Introduction	1-1
1.1	PROJECT PURPOSE.....	1-4
1.2	PROJECT NEED	1-4
1.3	PROJECT PURPOSE, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES.....	1-5
1.4	SUMMARY OF DRAFT EIS ACTIVITIES	1-6
1.5	PROJECT ALTERNATIVES.....	1-7
1.5.1	No Build Alternative	1-7
1.5.2	LRT Build Alternative and Environmentally Preferred Alternative	1-8
1.5.3	BRT Build Alternative	1-8
1.6	ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK	1-8
1.7	FINAL EIS AND RECORD OF DECISION	1-9
1.8	STATE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY REVIEW ACT (SEQR) PROCESS	1-9

Figures

Figure 1-1.	Existing Metro Rail and Project Corridor	1-2
-------------	--	-----

Tables

Table 1-1.	Goals and Objectives	1-5
------------	----------------------------	-----

Appendices

Appendix A1 Alternatives: Purpose and Need

Acronyms and Abbreviations

BNMC	Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus
BRT.....	Bus Rapid Transit
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CFR.....	Code of Federal Regulations
DEIS	Draft Environmental Impact Statement
FEIS.....	Final Environmental Impact Statement
GBNRTC	Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council
LRT.....	Light Rail Transit
Metro.....	Niagara Frontier Transit Metro System, Inc.
Metro Rail.....	Metro Light Rail Transit System
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NFTA	Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority
NOI	Notice of Intent
Project	Buffalo-Amherst-Tonawanda Corridor Transit Expansion
ROD.....	Record of Decision
SEQR	State Environmental Quality Review Act
UB	University at Buffalo
USDOT.....	United States Department of Transportation

1 Introduction

This introduction of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) provides a description of the Purpose and Need for the Project, the goals and objectives associated with the Project, a summary of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) public hearings and comment period, a description of the Project Alternatives (i.e., the No Action Alternative, Light Rail Transit (LRT) Build Alternative and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Build Alternative, a framework for the analyses contained in the DEIS, a summary of the structure of the FEIS, and the federal National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) Record of Decision (ROD).

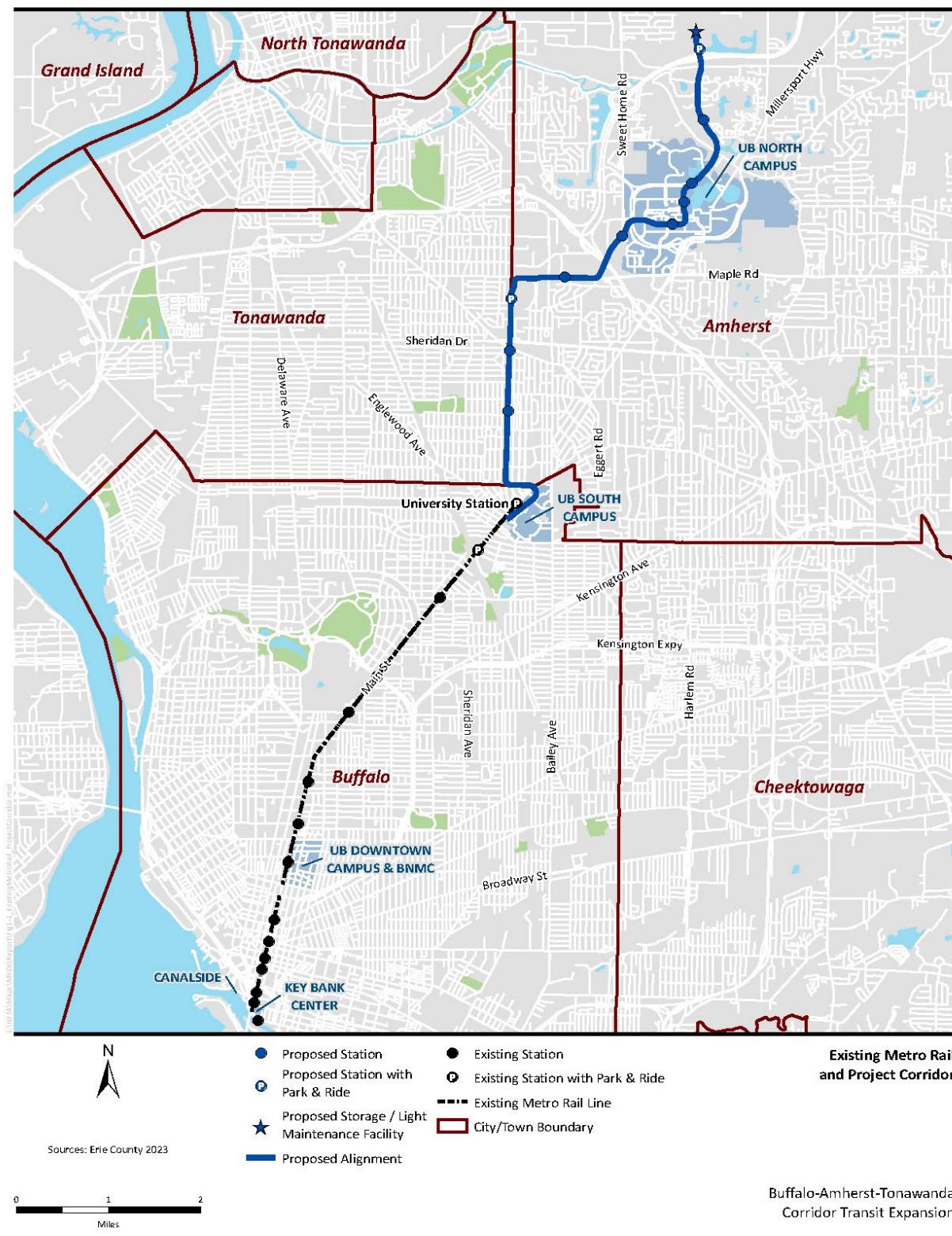
The Niagara Frontier Transit Metro System, Inc. (Metro) operates a 6.4-mile light rail transit line called Metro Rail with service along Main Street in Buffalo, New York, from KeyBank Center in Downtown Buffalo to the State University of New York, University at Buffalo (UB) South Campus. Metro is proposing the Buffalo-Amherst-Tonawanda Corridor Transit Expansion (Project) to expand high-capacity transit service from the current terminus at Metro Rail University Station on the UB South Campus to Tonawanda and Amherst, New York, including connections to the UB North Campus. **Figure 1-1** shows the Project alignment where the build alternatives are being considered. The approximately 7-mile corridor alignment with ten stations is proposed along Main Street, Kenmore Avenue, Niagara Falls Boulevard, Maple Road, and Sweet Home Road, through the UB North Campus to John James Audubon Parkway and I-990 (Project Corridor).

Improvements to transit service in the Greater Buffalo region have been considered for over 50 years. The concept for Metro Rail evolved in the 1960s and 1970s as one segment of a proposed 43-mile network of rapid-transit rail lines across the region. Plans were developed for a 14-mile rail line running between downtown Buffalo and north of the planned UB North Campus in Amherst. Due to funding constraints, the Metro Rail line that opened in the 1980s is a 6.4-mile rail line terminating at the UB South Campus.

The existing Metro Rail serves a diversity of activity centers and land uses. These activity centers and land uses range from recreation, family activities, and dining at the waterfront to the urban commercial center of downtown Buffalo, the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC), the UB campuses and other colleges, established residential neighborhoods, and emerging commercial and employment centers. College enrollment in the metropolitan area has grown over 300% from 1960 to 2022¹.

¹ U.S. Census of Population and Housing: 1960. Final Report PHC (1)-19.

Figure 1-1. Existing Metro Rail and Project Corridor



In 2010, Metro updated its Strategic Assessment, examining available rights-of-way and major arterial corridors as possible locations for major transit investments. The 2010 assessment revisited four existing corridors from the previous 2001 Strategic Assessment: Northwest to Tonawanda/Niagara Falls (Tonawanda Corridor), Northeast to Amherst/UB North Campus (Amherst Corridor), East to Airport area (Airport Corridor), and South to Southtowns (Southtown Corridor).

Also, six additional corridors (Bailey Avenue, Broadway, Delaware Avenue, Elmwood Avenue, Hertel-Fillmore, and Seneca Street) were identified for assessment. The 10 corridors were reviewed based on their market intensity, development potential, travel patterns, and existing ridership. The corridors were also compared to light rail transit and bus rapid transit peer systems across the United States to determine if corridor conditions were within similar ranges. Out of the 10 corridors, five scored well in all categories and were identified as good candidates for further study, including the Amherst Corridor (*i.e.*, the Project Corridor).² The Amherst Corridor is the proposed Project that is the subject of this FEIS.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA), serving as lead Federal agency, and Metro, the joint lead agency and Project Sponsor, prepared an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to evaluate potential impacts in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.), FTA's Environmental Impact and Related Procedures (23 CFR 7712), and the U.S. Department of Transportation's (U.S. DOT) Efficient Environmental Reviews for Decision Making (23 U.S.C. 139). The EIS also memorializes compliance with other applicable Federal environmental laws and regulations, including Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966, Section 106 and Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The EIS also addresses, as applicable, the guidelines and methodologies established under the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR).

This FEIS complies with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act at 29 U.S.C. 794d, which requires federal agencies to ensure that individuals with disabilities seeking information from a Federal agency to have access to and use of information and data that is comparable to the access to and use of the information and data by such members of the public who are not individuals with disabilities. In substantial compliance with this rule, FTA has instructed Metro to post all FEIS materials on the Project website in a way that makes them accessible to individuals with disabilities. This information will be available at the following website for the life of the Project: (www.nftametrotransitexpansion.com).

² NFTA-Metro. June 2010. Metro Strategic Assessment.

1.1 PROJECT PURPOSE

Initiated August 30, 2021, Project scoping solicited input from agencies and the public to provide input on the Project's purpose and need, its objectives, and the potential alternatives under consideration. For more information refer to Appendix J1, "Public Outreach and Coordination Report." Derived from agency and public input, the purpose of the Project is to link established and emerging activity centers (e.g., UB campuses, BNMC, the Buffalo central business district, employment and retail centers, and the Buffalo waterfront) along the existing Metro Rail line in Buffalo with existing and emerging activity centers in Amherst and Tonawanda by providing fast, reliable, safe, and convenient transit. The Project would serve existing Metro riders; attract new transit patrons; improve regional connections between Buffalo, Amherst, and Tonawanda; and support transit-oriented development and affordable housing opportunities. In addition, the Project would:

- Improve mobility along the Project Corridor by increasing transportation options and accessibility in communities throughout the Greater Buffalo region.
- Better connect the three UB campuses by providing improved mobility options that include a "one-seat ride" between campuses without requiring a transfer.
- Improve the operating efficiency of the transit network by providing convenient and seamless connections for transit patrons between activity centers and competitive travel times.
- Support local and regional land use planning and transit-oriented development as outlined in the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC) and NFTA-Metro Comprehensive Transit-Oriented Development Plans, 2019³ and 2023.⁴
- Provide mobility options by serving transit-dependent populations, thereby improving opportunities for participation in the regional workforce and overall economy.
- Help relieve parking constraints and capacity issues on the BNMC, UB campuses, Project Corridor, and downtown Buffalo, and minimize traffic and parking-related impacts on neighborhoods.

1.2 PROJECT NEED

The Buffalo metropolitan region is experiencing economic growth and transformation, including over \$1 billion for projects that are recently completed or underway. These projects enhance revitalization; promote smart growth; incentivize innovation and entrepreneurship; develop the

³ GBNRTC and NFTA Metro. May 2019. "Comprehensive Transit-Oriented Development Plan, Final Report."

⁴ GBNRTC and NFTA Metro. September 2023. "Comprehensive Transit-Oriented Development Strategic Implementation Plan, Planning Program – Phase II, September 2023."

workforce; and advance manufacturing, tourism, and health and life sciences.⁵ As reported in the GBNRTC 2019 Comprehensive Transit-Oriented Development Plan, the existing and proposed Project Corridor is expected to experience faster population growth (an increase of 5.8 percent versus 1.3 percent for the region) and employment growth (an increase of 13.3 percent versus 12.5 percent for the region) than the balance of the region between 2015 and 2040.

This growth will increase the demand for work trips and non-work trips, including shopping, medical services, and entertainment. As jobs and population increase, transportation issues and challenges will need to be addressed. The Project seeks to serve these increased travel needs along the corridor, ensuring residents have mobility options and continued access to employment opportunities, in Buffalo, Amherst, and Tonawanda.

The need for increased mobility and transit service that the Project would serve has three main components: (1) serve existing and future travel demand generated by recent and future regional development; (2) provide high-quality regional transit service; and (3) improve service for transit-dependent populations. For more detailed information regarding the Project's need, refer to Appendix A1, "Project Purpose and Need."

1.3 PROJECT PURPOSE, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES

Table 1-1 presents the goals and objectives of the Project, which are directly linked to the Project purpose and need.

Table 1-1. Goals and Objectives

Goals	Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a cost-effective, attractive, and high-quality transit service to serve the Buffalo-Amherst-Tonawanda corridor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide cost-effective transit service to transit-dependent populations. Provide a reliable and convenient transit service. Provide more convenient transit services for riders transferring to or from Metro Rail at University Station. Improve mobility. Reduce number of transfers for riders destined for the UB North Campus.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mitigate the growth of traffic congestion on study area roadways. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the share of trips using transit in study area.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the accessibility of transit in the study area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the number of transit options for travelers. Improve the connectivity of transit services. Improve livability by providing increased access to facilities such as affordable housing, jobs, education, medical services, food shopping, retail shopping, entertainment, etc. Provide access to populations that are traditionally underserved.

⁵ Western New York Regional Economic Development Council. January 2017. "Buffalo Billion Phase II – Buffalo Niagara's Strategic Plan for Prosperity."

Goals	Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase the effectiveness of the regional transit system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase system ridership. ▪ Increase system revenue. ▪ Build on investment/reinvestment of original Metro Rail.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support sustainable future economic growth in the study area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Serve new markets with high-quality transit services to support economic development. ▪ Provide transit-oriented development and design to enable the development/redevelopment of quality neighborhoods. ▪ Strengthen the regional economy.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Avoid or minimize adverse community and environmental impacts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Avoid or minimize impacts to sensitive environmental resources. ▪ Avoid or minimize negative impacts to neighborhoods. ▪ Avoid or minimize negative impacts to businesses.

1.4 SUMMARY OF DRAFT EIS ACTIVITIES

On August 30, 2021, the FTA, in coordination with Metro, issued a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS in accordance with NEPA, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, the New York SEQR, and Article 8 of the New York State Environmental Conservation Law and its implementing regulations. The NOI initiated public scoping for the NEPA EIS and provided information on the Project, including its purpose and need and the alternatives evaluated. The NOI also invited public comment on the environmental impacts that may be associated with the Project and the alternatives considered. The 45-day public comment period ended on October 14, 2021.

Metro hosted two public scoping meetings for the Project on Wednesday, September 15, 2021 (a daytime meeting from 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. and an evening meeting from 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.) using Zoom Webinar video conferencing. The scoping meetings were promoted using an email invite to the Project contact list, distributing information to media outlets, and posting to the Project website. The Project website (<https://www.nftametrotransitexpansion.com>) contains copies of promotional materials and links to the presentation and meeting recordings. Metro considered the comments received during the scoping period, incorporated them into the written record of the meeting, and addressed the comments in the Final Scoping Document. The Project website provides a summary of the scoping comments and responses.

On July 25, 2025, the Notice of Availability was published in the Federal Register and the DEIS was made available for public review and comment through the Federal Register and the Project website (www.nftametrotransitexpansion.com). The public was afforded the opportunity to comment for a period of 45 days, from July 25, 2025, through September 8, 2025. FTA and Metro provided the public numerous methods to comment on the DEIS, including submitting an email to transitexpansion@nfta.com, visiting the Project website and leaving a comment through the online comment form; sending a letter to the Metro or the FTA; and through live public testimony and comment cards at the public hearing held during the comment period. For more

information on public and agency comments received on the DEIS, refer to Appendix C, “Public and Agency Comments.”

1.5 PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

Chapter 2, “Alternatives Considered,” of the Draft EIS describes the alternatives considered – the LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative. In addition to the two Build Alternatives, the Draft EIS analyzed the No Build Alternative, which is a required element of a NEPA EIS and considers conditions in the future should Metro not undertake the Project. As described in the Draft EIS, the No Build Alternative would not satisfy the purpose and need for the Project.

Based on the information presented in the Draft EIS along with agency and public input received on the Draft EIS, and supplementary information included in this Final EIS, FTA has identified the LRT Build Alternative as the Environmentally Preferred Alternative (Section 1.5.2). The methodology used to compare the Build Alternatives is qualitative and is described as follows: (1) the alternative that best meets or demonstrates the highest comparative quantitative performance against the Project’s goals and objectives; (2) the alternative that meets the Project’s goals and objectives but exhibits comparatively lower quantitative performance; and (3) the alternative that satisfies some, but not all, of the Project’s goals and objectives.

While substantive comments received during the public comment period included points of information, clarification, or correction, the comments did not result in a change in the identification of the Environmentally Preferred Alternative.

1.5.1 No Build Alternative

The No Build Alternative is a required alternative as part of the NEPA environmental analysis and is used for comparison purposes to assess the relative benefits and impacts of implementing the proposed Project Build Alternatives.

The No Build Alternative represents the future conditions of transportation facilities and services in 2040 without the Project being built. Metro would continue to operate the existing Metro Rail system between University Station and Canalside Station, including the new DL&W Station. Metro will continue to operate Metro Bus service in the study area, and UB will continue operation of the Stampede bus service between the North and South Campuses.

The No Build Alternative would include projects that are already committed to and planned by other agencies and entities at the time of the DEIS assessment. For example, the GBNRTC Transportation Improvement Program includes a roadway improvement project within the study area along North Forest Road in Amherst between Route 263 (Millersport Highway) and Dodge Road. The project entails pavement resurfacing for a 1.67-mile stretch of North Forest Road. The Town of Amherst is considering converting John James Audubon Parkway to a two-lane

roadway utilizing the southbound lanes and abandoning the northbound lanes between the traffic circle at Lee Road and Dodge Road.

1.5.2 LRT Build Alternative and Environmentally Preferred Alternative

The LRT Build Alternative is an approximately 7-mile extension of Metro Rail, Metro's existing electric-powered LRT system. The LRT extension would be primarily at grade, except for two segments. One is a 0.8-mile underground segment from the existing Metro Rail University Station (which is currently underground) to Niagara Falls Boulevard where the LRT Build Alternative would exit the tunnel and operate at grade level. The other is a 0.3-mile underground segment at the intersection of Maple Road and Sweet Home Road. At this location, the LRT Build Alternative would operate under the Maple Road and Sweet Home Road intersection then continue adjacent to Sweet Home Road under the I-290 overpass. Ten stations are proposed (two with park-and-ride facilities) and an overnight storage and light maintenance facility located near the proposed I-990 Station.

Metro will continue to operate Metro Bus service in the study area, and UB would discontinue operation of the Stampede bus service between the North and South Campuses.

1.5.3 BRT Build Alternative

The BRT Build Alternative would provide electric-powered transit service north from the existing Metro Rail University Station for approximately seven miles along the same at-grade alignment as the LRT Build Alternative, except for the underground portions from University Station along Kenmore Avenue and onto Niagara Falls Boulevard and the segment at the intersection of Maple and Sweet Home Roads. At both locations, the BRT Build Alternative would operate in mixed traffic. The BRT Build Alternative would have the same number of stations in the same locations; however, a transfer would be required between the existing Metro Rail University Station to the BRT service. A new BRT vehicle storage and maintenance facility would also be required at the proposed I-990 Station and northern terminus or end of the line.

Metro will continue to operate Metro Bus service in the study area, and UB would discontinue operation of the Stampede bus service between the North and South Campuses.

1.6 ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

The DEIS included evaluations of the full range of technical areas needed to comply with NEPA. To comply with a 150-page limit for a NEPA EIS, consistent with 40 CFR Sections 1500-1508, certain chapters typical of a NEPA EIS were consolidated or placed entirely as an appendix to the DEIS.

1.7 FINAL EIS AND RECORD OF DECISION

Consistent with 23 U.S.C. 139(n)(2), FTA must prepare a combined FEIS and Record of Decision (ROD), to the maximum extent practicable, unless:

- (1) the FEIS makes substantial changes to the proposed action that are relevant to environmental or safety concerns; or
- (2) there has been significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns that bears on the proposed action or the impacts of the proposed action.

Consistent with 23 U.S.C. 139(n)(1), and as described in the FTA's Standard Operating Procedures (SOP No. 10), if changes to the DEIS are minor (*e.g.*, responses to comments involve factual corrections or an explanation that the comment does not warrant additional consideration), the CEQ regulations allow for an abbreviated FEIS through the use of errata sheets attached to a DEIS. This approach can be used with the combined FEIS/ROD or the traditional FEIS documents. This Project uses the combined FEIS/ROD approach.

Chapter 2, "Errata Table of DEIS Revisions," the FEIS contains relatively minor updates and corrections that were identified based on agency and public comments, as well as by Metro and FTA. Errata revisions are identified by DEIS Chapter or Appendix name, and the page number of the DEIS where the original text is located. The revised text is double-underlined, and a short explanation is provided as to why the revision was made. More substantial additions or revisions to the DEIS text are described in Chapter 3, "Supplementary Analyses" of the FEIS. Similarly, an explanation is provided as to why the revisions were made, and the supplementary analyses are accompanied by revised appendices, containing the relevant assessments presented in the DEIS, and revised text or additions are double-underlined.

1.8 STATE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY REVIEW ACT (SEQR) PROCESS

The Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA), a public benefit corporation and public authority, and its wholly-owned subsidiary, Metro, a public benefit corporation, are required to comply with the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR) (Article 8 of the New York Conservation Law) and its implementing regulations (6 NYCRR 617) in connection with all discretionary decisions to approve, fund, or undertake projects that may impact the environment and are subject to review under SEQR.

In January 2019, Metro, in its capacity as Project sponsor, was authorized by the NFTA Board of Commissioners to act as Lead Agency pursuant to 6 NYCRR 617.6 for the Project. Metro, pursuant to 6 NYCRR 617.7, subsequently determined that the Project may have significant adverse environmental impacts. As a result, Metro published a Positive Declaration and a Draft

Scope was developed for an Environmental Impact Statement for the Project. A scoping meeting was held on February 12, 2019, at Sweet Home Middle School in the Town of Amherst.

In early 2020, Metro completed, published, and received public and agency comments on the SEQR DEIS for the Project. The public comment period for the DEIS was open from January 24, 2020 through March 24, 2020, and included two public hearings held in the Town of Amherst on February 25, 2020, at Sweet Home Middle School and on February 26, 2020 at The Screening Room at the Boulevard Mall. In response to the SEQR DEIS, the FTA submitted a letter to the NFTA stating that in anticipation of the NFTA seeking Federal funding for the Project, FTA would support development of the Project under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and that it would now serve as the lead Federal agency for this review, with Metro serving as local Project sponsor and joint Lead Agency.

On August 30, 2021, the FTA, as lead Federal agency, and Metro, as local Project sponsor and joint Lead Agency, issued a NOI in the Federal Register to prepare an EIS for the Project in accordance with NEPA, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act), and pursuant to 6 NYCRR 617.15 of SEQR. Pursuant to 6 NYCRR 617.15, if an action has been the subject of a DEIS and Final EIS (FEIS) under NEPA, State agencies have no obligation to prepare a separate EIS under SEQR, provided the Federal EIS provides adequate information for State and local agencies to make SEQR findings.

Issuance of the NOI initiated a 45-day public scoping period from August 31, 2021, to October 14, 2021, which included two virtual scoping meetings on September 15, 2021, to offer the public and other Federal, State, and local agencies the opportunity to provide input on the Project's purpose and need, alternatives to be evaluated, and potential environmental impacts. At the conclusion of the scoping process, comments received, as well as responses to them, were incorporated into the final NEPA Scoping Information Packet and made available for public review.

Between Fall 2021 and Summer 2025, the DEIS was prepared and on June 26, 2025, Metro determined that the DEIS was complete pursuant to 6 NYCRR 617.9(a)(2). On July 25, 2025, FTA, in coordination with Metro, published the Notice of Availability (NOA) of the DEIS and Draft Section 4(f) Evaluation for the Project in the Federal Register. On July 30, 2025, Metro filed and posted a Notice of Completion of the DEIS in the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) Environmental Notice Bulletin (ENB) pursuant to 6 NYCRR 617.9(a)(3) and 617.12. These actions commenced a 45-day public comment period from July 25, 2025 to September 8, 2025 to offer the public and other Federal, State, and local agencies an opportunity to provide comments on the Project's potential impacts and proposed mitigation measures as documented in the DEIS. This included a formal public hearing held on August 19, 2025, at Sweet Home Middle School located in the Town of Amherst. Notice of the public hearing was provided pursuant to 6 NYCRR 617.12 between July 30, 2025 and August 7,

2025 in the following publications: NYSDEC ENB, Buffalo News, Buffalo Criterion, Niagara Gazette, Ken-Ton Bee, Amherst Bee, via Rider Alerts on all Metro buses and light-rail vehicles, and on the Project website (www.nftametrotransitexpansion.com).

During the DEIS public comment period, FTA and the NFTA received over 700 comment submissions on a variety of topics, including but not limited to the Project's potential environmental impacts and proposed mitigation measures as documented in the DEIS. All substantive public comments received during the public comment period have been added to the administrative record for the Project and responded to within the FEIS pursuant to 6 NYCRR 617.9(b)(8).

Following FTA's publication of the NOA of a combined FEIS/Record of Decision (ROD) and Section 4(f) Evaluation for the Project in the Federal Register, Metro will file the FEIS and publish a Notice of Completion in the NYSDEC ENB pursuant to 6 NYCRR 617.9(a)(6) and 617.12. Metro will subsequently prepare a written Findings Statement and Decision on whether to proceed with the action pursuant to 6 NYCRR 617.11.