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The Buffalo Central Terminal and Economic Development

Abstract

BCT was completed in 1929 by New York Central Railroad, shortly before the stock market crash leading to the Great Depression. Between 1929 and 1933 the railroads' gross operating and net revenues fell; costs dramatically increased while passenger's disposable incomes decreased. The railroads were responsible for their own maintenance and capital improvements, while the Federal Government was actively subsidizing auto, bus and air travel. In addition, taxes paid by the railroads to federal, state and municipal governments were being used to pay for their competitors' infrastructure. The U.S.'s entry into World War II brought an increase in freight and passenger rail traffic because rails were an effective way to move war goods and there were gasoline rations as well as rubber and metal shortages. While the railroads were now increasing income like never before, they were stretched near to capacity in addition to the fact that resources were not available to maintain the trains (materials were being used to manufacture war goods). Once the war ended, the railroads' freight and passenger traffic once again declined.

Keywords

Buffalo, Data/Demographics/History, Historic Preservation, Fact Sheet, PPG, PDF

The Buffalo Central Terminal and Economic Development

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1. What is the history of Buffalo's Central Terminal (BCT)?

BCT was completed in 1929 by New York Central Railroad, shortly before the stock market crash leading to the Great Depression. Between 1929 and 1933 the railroads' gross operating and net revenues fell; costs dramatically increased while passenger's disposable incomes decreased. The railroads were responsible for their own maintenance and capital improvements, while the Federal Government was actively subsidizing auto, bus and air travel. In addition, taxes paid by the railroads to federal, state and municipal governments were being used to pay for their competitors' infrastructure.ⁱ

The U.S.'s entry into World War II brought an increase in freight and passenger rail traffic because rails were an effective way to move war goods and there were gasoline rations as well as rubber and metal shortages. While the railroads were now increasing income like never before, they were stretched near to capacity in addition to the fact that resources were not available to maintain the trains (materials were being used to manufacture war goods). Once the war ended, the railroads' freight and passenger traffic once again declined.ⁱⁱ

After WWII, BCT began to decline, first slowly and then rapidly. It was completely closed in 1979. Taxes as well as other high costs of maintaining the building led to the building's disrepair. In August 1997 the property was transferred to Central Terminal Restoration Corporation (CTRC), a non-profit organization run by volunteers. After almost 20 years of neglect and abuse, efforts began to preserve BCT.ⁱⁱⁱ

2. What are the Central Terminal Restoration Corporation's Goals for Buffalo Central Terminal?

"To facilitate the restoration of the Buffalo Central Terminal as a mixed-use facility, offering space for public events, light industry, cultural/educational space, office operations, condominiums, retail shopping and dining and access to passenger and light rail train services. Prerequisites to this goal are to protect public access to the main

concourse and to ensure that the terminal is redeveloped with a reasonable and acceptable level of historic integrity.”^{iv}

“To be a good neighbor. To coordinate and cooperate with others seeking to restore the neighborhood and city around the Central Terminal as well as its composite structures. To seek that our vision is in concert with that of those around us and to integrate our goals and objectives into larger plans whose scope may include us.”^v

The reported estimated cost of complete restoration is in the area of 56 million dollars.^{vi}

3. Is the Central Terminal Restoration Corporation involved in economic development in the community?

BCT is located on the east side of Buffalo in the Broadway-Fillmore District. The neighborhood was once a strong, thriving community, but is now experiencing extreme poverty and vacancy. CTRC thinks it is very important to work with the neighborhood.



They have worked with neighborhood groups including Broadway Fillmore Alive, the Broadway Market, Iron Island Preservation, area churches like Corpus Christi and St Stan’s, and groups like the Buffalo Federation of Womens Clubs. CTRC has also helped with tree and flower planting on BCT property as well as on Memorial and Fillmore streets, trying to beautify the area.

CTRC has tried to reach out to the people in the immediate area of the terminal with limited success; inviting

them to neighborhood open houses and trying to gain their input into what CTRC is doing and needs to do. Neighborhood reluctance to become involved in restoring BCT may stem more from the poverty and related issues that neighborhood residents are experiencing than from a lack of interest.

4. What government economic development programs have been of assistance?

According to a member of the CTRC Board, they have yet pursued much help from economic development programs, mostly due to a lack of man power to research and pursue the programs/grants. The CTRC is currently working on forming a grants team to go after these sorts of opportunities. Government economic development programs that have been of assistance include:

- City of Buffalo – In 2004 the CTRC receives \$101,000 from the City of Buffalo for rehab of the building.^{vii} CTRC also receives a yearly block grant from the city [amounts?].
- Erie County - Invested \$1,000,000 in 2002-2003 towards the removal of 300 tons of debris, the repair of several flat roofs of the concourse and tower, and weather sealing 4,000 enclosures within the complex.^{viii}
- BOCES– The students of Erie 1 BOCES had the opportunity to work on a variety of projects at the train terminal such as restroom restoration, designing murals and additional projects utilizing building trade skills. This \$10,000 grant was contributed by Erie 1 BOCES in July 2007 through Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation (LCEF).^{ix}

In addition, BCT is located in an Empire Zone and is on the National Register of Historic Places. However, the CTRC has not yet found a way to make use of historic preservation funds or tax credits or Empire Zone benefits. In addition, BCT and was listed on NYS Preservation League's "Seven to Save" a few years ago. The Preservation League of New York State's Seven To Save program takes seven threatened places from across New York State and places them on an annual list of the most endangered properties within the state. With the listing as a Seven to Save site comes the League's pledge to support and bring statewide attention to the rehabilitation of the Central Terminal, while identifying new financial resources. The hope is that jobs will be created in the planning and rehabilitation phases.^x According to the CTRC board member, nothing has come of this listing yet



5. What government economic development programs may be used in the future?

Local Programs – CTRC may receive greater support from local and state development programs during the renovation phase.

- The Buffalo Economic Renaissance Corporation (BERC) offers grants and access to other economic development incentive programs including New York State Empire Zones and Federal Renewal Communities.^{xi}
- The Erie County, Department of Environment and Planning, Office of Economic Development (OED) offers technical assistance and financing tools for the redevelopment of brownfield sites in Erie County.^{xii} BCT has not been determined to be a brownfield yet, but CTRC has been told that any land that is adjacent to railroad tracks is contaminated and if tested would be recognized as a brownfield. CTRC has not done any development that required testing up to this point, so they do not currently know their brownfield status.

National Programs – In addition to local programs, CTRC should be looking to national development programs that focus on restoration of historic buildings. While applications have been made, CTRC or neighborhood groups like Broadway Fillmore Alive need to take advantage of BCT's listing on the National Register and seek funding.. Tapping into these national programs can help ensure funding during the renovation phase.

- Preserve America Communities - Preserve America grants are designed to support a variety of activities related to heritage tourism and innovative approaches to the use of historic properties as educational and economic assets. This matching grants program began October 1, 2005. These grants are intended to complement the bricks and mortar grants available under the Save America's Treasures program, and fund research and documentation, interpretation and education, planning, marketing, and training. A total of \$10 million has been requested for FY 2008.^{xiii} The Buffalo Fillmore Neighborhood petitioned to become a Preserve America Community in 2008.
- Save America's Treasure's program - Dedicated to identifying and rescuing the enduring symbols of American tradition that define us as a nation. The goals of this program include: fostering pride in American heritage; educating Americans on preservation problems facing the buildings, sites, monuments, objects and documents that represent America's diverse cultural legacy; raising concern for the urgent preservation needs of this country's historic and cultural treasures; and stimulating broad-scale involvement in *Save America's Treasures* including securing necessary resources and support, organization of grassroots preservation projects, participation in community preservation and educational initiatives. The National Trust for Historic Preservation works as *Save America's Treasures* principal private partner and plays an important role as an on-the-ground 'eyes and ears' for the federal program. To date, over \$320 million in public-private funds has been raised to save our nation's treasures.^{xiv}

6. How can the Central Terminal Restoration Corporation market Buffalo's Central Terminal?

In recent years, BCT has been used for various public and private events and functions. These events have allowed visitors to reminisce on what the BCT once was, experience BCT as it is now, and discuss its potential future uses. Because of its large size and historic architecture, BCT is a prime location to house mixed uses and may appeal to a wide variety of users.

BCT will host the 2011 National Trust of Historic Preservation National Preservation Conference. BCT was chosen due to Buffalo's rich architecture and its ability to showcase history.^{xv} This national conference is a great opportunity for BCT to be featured country-wide and attract attendees who may be able to positively affect its future.



One interesting suggestion is that BCT be used as a technology center to export knowledge regarding the magnetic technology used in high-speed trains in places such as Germany. Buffalo could take advantage of its transportation history, and BCT could attract firms engaged in such technology to Buffalo. A local college or university could develop a department dedicated to magnetic technology. Institutions dedicating themselves to this technology have been proposed around the world, but have not yet been developed.^{xvi}

ⁱ Buffalo Central Terminal and the Railroad Passenger. Retrieved on November 6, 2008 from <http://centralterminalrailfan.net/history.html>

ⁱⁱ Buffalo Central Terminal and the Railroad Passenger. Retrieved on November 6, 2008 from <http://centralterminalrailfan.net/history.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Central Terminal Restoration Corporation Timeline. Buffalo Central Terminal. Retrieved on November 6, 2008 from <http://buffalocentralterminal.org/about/central-terminal-restoration-corporation-timeline/>

^{iv} Mission Statement. Buffalo Central Terminal. Retrieved on November 6, 2008 from <http://buffalocentralterminal.org/about/mission-statement/>

^v Mission Statement. Buffalo Central Terminal. Retrieved on November 6, 2008 from <http://buffalocentralterminal.org/about/mission-statement/>

^{vi} Frequently Asked Questions. Buffalo Central Terminal Retrieved on November 6, 2008 from <http://buffalocentralterminal.org/about-the-terminal/faqs/>

^{vii} Central Terminal Restoration Corporation Timeline. Buffalo Central Terminal. Retrieved on November 6, 2008 from <http://buffalocentralterminal.org/about/central-terminal-restoration-corporation-timeline/>

^{viii} Central Terminal Listed as Seven to Save Site Fall Winter 2003. Buffalo Central Terminal. Retrieved on November 6, 2008 from <http://buffalocentralterminal.org/about-the-terminal/news-archive/2003/central-terminal-listed-as-seven-to-save-site-fall-winter-2003/>

^{ix} BOCES awarded grant for Central Train Terminal – buffalo.yourhub.com 7.24.07. Buffalo Central Terminal Retrieved on November 6, 2008 from <http://buffalocentralterminal.org/about-the-terminal/news-archive/2007/boces-awarded-grant-for-central-train-terminal-buffaloyourhubcom-72407/>

^x Central Terminal listed as seven to save site fall winter 2003. Buffalo Central Terminal. <http://buffalocentralterminal.org/about-the-terminal/news-archive/2003/central-terminal-listed-as-seven-to-save-site-fall-winter-2003/>

^{xi} For more information see BERC's website: <http://www.berc.org/incentiveprograms.php>.

^{xii} For more information see OED's website:

http://www.erie.gov/environment/planning_ecdev/economic_development.asp#brownfield.

^{xiii} For more information see the Preserve America Communities website:

<http://www.preserveamerica.gov/federalsupport.html>

^{xiv} For more information see Save America's Treasure's website at

<http://www.saveamericastreasures.org/>

^{xv} Cutler, P.K. (2007, October). Buffalo NY will host 2011 National Preservation Conference. City of Buffalo. Retrieved on November 6, 2008 from

http://www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/Mayor/Archive_Press_Releases/Leadership/2007Archives/October2007/Buffalo_NY_Will_Host_2011_National_Preservation_C

^{xvi} Miller, E. Central terminal for the future. Retrieved on November 6, 2008 from

<http://www.buffalohistoryworks.com/terminal/essays/eric-miller2.htm>.

