THE I-81 CHALLENGE


# *The I-81 Challenge*
# May 2013 Public Meeting Summary Report

July 2013

Prepared for:

The Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council

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**Prepared for: Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council**
**July 2013**
in support of the NYSDOT's I-81 Corridor Study

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# *The I-81 Challenge*
# May 2013 Public Meeting Summary Report

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Spring 2013, the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) and the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) hosted the third public meeting for *The I-81 Challenge* – one of several steps to the official decision-making process for determining the future of the 12-mile I-81 corridor through the greater Syracuse region.

This May 2013 public meeting provided the opportunity to learn about the results of the I-81 Corridor Study before the state and federal environmental review phase begins. It built upon feedback received during the initial series of public workshops held in early May 2011 and the second public meeting in May 2012.

The primary goals of the May 2013 public meeting were to:

- Review materials and public feedback from the previous meetings
- View conceptual drawings of strategies
- Review initial traffic analysis and cost ranges for these strategies
- Learn which strategies will progress to the next phase of analysis and provide feedback
- Learn about the next steps and how the public will be involved going forward

The meeting took place at the Oncenter in downtown Syracuse on May 21, 2013, from 3:30 pm to 8 pm. Participants were invited to drop in at any time and stay for as long as they wished. Either free (validated) parking in the Oncenter garage or lot, or two single-use transit passes were available to meeting attendees. American Sign Language and Spanish interpreters were available on site, and on-call interpreters for other languages were available through a phone provided in the Oncenter atrium. Vietnamese translators were available with advance request. No attendees used the available interpretation services.

The meeting featured six stations with informational boards, interactive exercises, and educational videos. Each station was staffed by project team members with relevant expertise. Attendees were provided informational materials at the registration area to enhance their participation in the meeting, including Frequently Asked Questions and a guide to the public meeting.

Publicity for the meeting was multi-faceted and included:

- Meeting flyers distributed by various means, including within SMTC's agency newsletter, direct mailing to over 4,300 recipients, in local coffee shops and libraries, and through a variety of community organizations.
- Placards on Centro buses


*Above: Sample Meeting Flyer*

- Promotion via the project's web site, blog, and Facebook page and through multiple e-blasts
- Press releases
- Paid advertising on TV, radio, and in print
- Variable message signs on I-81 and I-690

Additionally, in an effort to broaden opportunities for the public to participate, a simultaneous "virtual meeting" was launched on the project web site (www.thei81challenge.org). This online option provided the same material and interactive opportunities as the in-person meeting and was available to the public seven days a week, 24 hours a day starting on May 21 and continuing through June 14, 2013.

Over 700 people participated at the in-person public meeting, and 334 people participated online. A complete account of all comments and input received can be found in the appendices of this summary.

## A. Meeting Content

The six meeting stations included numerous display boards, the content of which is described below. Some stations included interactive components, as noted in the descriptions.

Station 1, *The I-81 Challenge,* provided information on the background, purpose, and process of *The I-81 Challenge*.

Station 2, *The I-81 Challenge* to Date, described the work completed to date and some of the key findings. This station included an optional area to review the materials and videos presented at the previous (May 2011 and 2012) events.

*Above: Meeting attendees review information from previous meetings for The I-81 Challenge.*

Station 3, Your Visions, reviewed the nearly 150 "visions" received from the public at the May 2011 workshops and illustrated the process used to categorize these visions, pre-screen some visions, and arrive at the list of strategies recommended for further study.

Station 4, Possible Future Strategies, explored in more detail the strategies that were previously recommended to advance through the screening process, which were as follows:

1. No-build (as required by State/Federal environmental regulations)
2. Rehabilitation
3. Tunnel
4. Depressed highway
5. Reconstruction
6. Boulevard

The boards described key elements and analysis for each strategy, as well as some additional information for the Reconstruction and Boulevard strategies. Each strategy was evaluated considering the corridor needs and the

study goals and objectives developed in cooperation with the community and stakeholders. Each strategy evaluation was displayed in an assessment matrix, which addressed the transportation system as well as economic competiveness, social equity/quality of life, environmental stewardship, range of costs and determination of feasibility. A final strategy comparison matrix indicated that while the Rehabilitation strategy was determined to be feasible for the outer segments of the I-81 corridor, only the Reconstruction and Boulevard strategies were determined to be feasible for the viaduct priority area. Meeting attendees were provided with prompt questions and asked to provide their feedback to this material.

*Above: Meeting attendees review information from the previous public meetings and workshop.*

Station 5, Our Transit System, provided information about the area's existing transit system as well as a range of investment scenarios. These scenarios were created in response to public input at the previous public events. Examples of various levels of improvement were also presented for the medium and high investment scenarios, which include Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Light Rail Transit (LRT) respectively. Attendees were asked to provide their feedback at this station, which will be used to inform *The I-81 Challenge* transit system analysis.

Station 6, Transition to Environmental Review, described the environmental review process and outlined the next steps for *The I-81 Challenge* as the project transitions from the Corridor Study. Boards provided detailed explanation of the process outlined by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) as well as the public's continuing role during this process.

## B. Key Findings

### Process to determine feasible strategies and strategy concept designs

Over 500 comments were received in response to the strategies presented during the meeting via the post-it note comments on May 21, the general comment forms provided at the meeting, mailed-in responses following the meeting, and the virtual meeting. Attendees were asked to respond to a series of prompt questions, but they were not asked to respond to each specific strategy. Comments were organized according to their content and/ or viewpoints in order to determine the key findings presented below.

While the attendance at the public meeting and participation in the virtual meeting were clearly substantial – with over 700 in-person attendees and over 300 virtual participants – this represents a small sample of the region's residents. Also, not all meeting participants provided written comments. The interpretation of comments is subjective and should not be used to quantify public opinion; comments should not be misconstrued as "votes." The key findings presented below offer general impressions of the public sentiment that can inform how the I-81 decision-making process progresses in the future. The full text of all written comments is included in Appendix A.

i. Of the 500 comments received, many indicated that respondents did not understand or agree with the process that was used for the feasibility assessment matrix.

ii. Of the 500 comments received, many comments noted what was perceived to be a lack of consideration for disadvantaged groups in the process to determine the feasible strategies and in the content presented at the meeting.

iii. The issues referenced most frequently in the 500 comments received in response to the strategies station were (1) quality of life issues and (2) traffic flow and accessibility issues.

iv. A limited number of people responded to the Rehabilitation, Tunnel, and Depressed Highway strategies. Of those who did, the majority agreed with the determination, as presented during the meeting, that these strategies are not feasible for the viaduct priority area.

v. The majority of the 500 comments received focused on the Reconstruction and Boulevard strategies, with more overall feedback for the Boulevard, and many people viewed the two strategies in competition with one another.

vi. The majority of the nearly 180 comments that referenced the Reconstruction strategy expressed their support for the strategy.

*Above: Meeting attendees review the concept illustration presented for the Boulevard strategy.*

vii. Over 100 comments expressed support for the Reconstruction strategy, but many of these indicated that an important component of the strategy was the improvement to the aesthetics and design of the existing Viaduct.

viii. About two-thirds of the 300+ respondents who referenced the Boulevard strategy in their comments expressed support for the strategy.

ix. Based on the comments received, those in support of the Boulevard strategy were not in support of the potential capacity increases on West Street that were noted on the display board the meeting.

x. Based on the comments received, both respondents in support of and opposed to the Boulevard strategy frequently expressed dissatisfaction with the concept design presented at the meeting.

## Our transit system

Over 80 comments were received in response to the Transit Station during the meeting via the post-it note comments on May 21, the general comment forms provided at the meeting, mailed-in responses following the meeting, and the virtual meeting.

A more detailed explanation of the key findings below, along with the reasons for the respondents' support or opposition for the systems as described in the comments received, is provided in the appropriate section within this summary.

*Above: Many attendees expressed their support of the development of an improved public transit system.*

i. The majority of the comments received in the Transit Station supported the development of an improved public transit system because it would benefit the city and region.

ii. Based on the comments received, there were nearly identical levels of support for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Light Rail Transit (LRT), but over double the opposition to LRT in comparison to opposition to BRT.

## C. Meeting Evaluation and Participation

Through the meeting evaluations, participants expressed an overwhelmingly positive opinion of the public meeting. The evaluation forms revealed that attendees felt the meeting was well organized, accessible, and informative, and that it provided meaningful opportunities for input. Attendees appreciated the magnitude of information presented at the meeting, but noted that it was difficult to absorb everything at one time. Many attendees stated that the information was well presented and that the staff members at each station were friendly and knowledgeable.

While most attendees appreciated the ongoing opportunities to be involved in *The I-81 Challenge* decision-making process, several attendees also expressed concern about how the public input would be used moving forward, along with a degree of skepticism regarding the process and a perception that the future of I-81 had already been decided. This illustrates the importance of continued emphasis on transparency and public involvement in the next phase of the I-81 process.

*Above: Meeting attendees submit their feedback via post-it notes provided at the meeting.*

The meeting evaluation revealed that attendees heard about the meeting from multiple sources, with the highest number of attendees learning about the meeting through newspaper, TV, "other" outlets, and e-mail, in that order. Based on written comments, "other" outlets mainly referred to electronic variable message signs along I-81 and I-690 and mailed flyers.

Participation spanned across multiple towns in the vicinity of the city of Syracuse with a similar overall geographic distribution of participation in the May 2013 public meeting as compared to the May 2012 and May 2011 events. The 13202 ZIP code (downtown Syracuse) had the highest number of participants, followed by the 13210 ZIP code (Syracuse University-area and surrounding neighborhood). ZIP code information is based on what participants self-reported at sign-in/registration and may include either residence or place of employment.

## D. Next Steps

The May 2013 public meeting was the third and final large-scale public meeting held as part of a series of workshops and meetings since 2011 for *The I-81 Challenge* planning study. The significant amount of valuable input that was gathered as a result of the 2013 meeting will inform how to best move the I-81 process forward for the Syracuse region. Additionally, meeting attendees' feedback on the initial concept renderings will provide valuable insight for consideration as strategies are further refined and developed.

# II. MEETING SUMMARY

## A. Introduction

In spring 2013, the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) and the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) hosted the third public meeting for *The I-81 Challenge* – one of several steps to the official decision-making process for determining the future of the 12-mile I-81 corridor through the greater Syracuse region.

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The meeting took place at the Oncenter in downtown Syracuse on May 21, 2013, from 3:30 pm to 8 pm. Participants were invited to drop in at any time and stay for as long as they wished. Either free (validated) parking in the Oncenter garage or lot, or two single-use transit passes were available to attendees. American Sign Language and Spanish interpreters were available on site, and on-call interpreters for other languages were available through a phone provided in the Oncenter atrium. Vietnamese translators were available with advance request. No attendees used the available interpretation services.

The meeting featured six stations with informational boards, interactive exercises, and educational videos. Each station was staffed by project team members with relevant expertise. Attendees were provided informational materials at the registration area to enhance their participation in the meeting including Frequently Asked Questions and a guide to the public meeting.

Publicity for the meeting was multi-faceted and included:

- Meeting flyers distributed by various means, including within SMTC's agency newsletter, direct mailing to over 4,300 recipients, in local coffee shops and libraries, and through a variety of community organizations.
- Placards on Centro buses
- Promotion via the project's web site, blog, and Facebook page and through multiple e-blasts
- Press releases
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THE I-81 CHALLENGE

Stay involved in *The I-81 Challenge*!

Join us for the third public meeting for *The I-81 Challenge*

Drop in any time that is convenient for you:

Tuesday, May 21, 2013
from 3:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Location: Oncenter Ballroom (lower level)
800 South State Street
Syracuse, NY 13202

The New York State Department of Transportation and the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council invite you to participate in the third public meeting for *The I-81 Challenge*, before the environmental review phase begins. This meeting will provide the opportunity to learn about the results of the I-81 Corridor Study, a study of the 12 mile I-81 corridor through the Syracuse region. The public's input has been a critical element of this study and we want to ensure that you stay informed about our progress and the next steps in the process.

At this meeting, you will be able to:

- Review materials and public feedback from the previous public meetings
- View conceptual drawings of strategies
- Review initial traffic analysis and cost ranges for these strategies
- Learn which strategies will progress to the next phase of analysis and provide your thoughts
- Learn about the next steps and how the public will be involved going forward

**Need more information?**

For directions and additional information, visit **www.thei81challenge.org**. Meeting attendees will be offered either free (validated) parking in the Oncenter garage or lot, or two single-use transit passes at the meeting.

**Can't make the meeting in person?**

Participate online in our virtual meeting at **www.thei81challenge.org/virtual2013** starting May 21 through June 11, 2013.

**Need special accommodations?**

The meeting facility is accessible to people with disabilities. To request special accommodations, please contact the SMTC at 315-422-5716 or **contactus@thei81challenge.org**.

**Need language assistance?**

American Sign Language and Spanish interpreters will be available at the meeting. For other accommodations or for more information, please contact the SMTC at 315-422-5716 or **contactus@thei81challenge.org**.

**¿Habla usted español?**

Usted tendrá intérpretes disponibles en español en la reunión. Para más ayuda por favor llame al 315-944-2014 (debe marcar el código de área).

**Quý vị có nói tiếng Việt không?**

Thông dịch viên nói tiếng Việt sẽ sẵn sàng theo yêu cầu. Xin vui lòng gọi số (315) 944-2014 (quý vị phải quay số khu vực) và để lại lời nhắn yêu cầu xin thông dịch viên. Xin bao gồm cả tên và số điện thoại quý vị. Các yêu cầu xin thông dịch viên phải được nhận trước ngày 14 Tháng Năm, 2013.

*Above: Meeting Flyer*

Additionally, in an effort to broaden opportunities for the public to participate, a simultaneous "virtual meeting" was launched on the project web site (www.thei81challenge.org). This online option provided the same material and interactive opportunities as the in-person meeting and was available to the public seven days a week, 24 hours a day starting on May 21 through June 14, 2013.

Over 700 people participated at the in-person public meeting, and 334 people participated online. A complete account of all comments received through the in-person and virtual meetings can be found in Appendix A of this summary. Results of the meeting evaluations and comment forms can be found in Appendix D.

## B. Meeting Content and Key Findings

This section summarizes the content of the public meeting stations, as well as the public input obtained through various interactive exercises. In stations where interactive exercises were offered, public input is summarized in the "key findings" sections below. Regarding the key findings:

- Comments have been organized based on where they are most germane. (For example, any comment directly related to a possible future strategy was summarized within the Station 4 key findings section, regardless of where it was received.)
- While the key findings highlight the predominant issues and themes that were most frequently cited amongst the comments, they are not representative of all the comments received. All comments have been included in Appendix A of this document.
- Both the key findings and the comments in Appendix A have not been listed in order of magnitude.

Note that copies of the information boards from the public meeting can be found in Appendix B of this summary.

### Station 1: *The I-81 Challenge*

The first station provided attendees with general information about *The I-81 Challenge*. Boards at this station defined *The I-81 Challenge*, explained the SMTC and NYSDOT roles in the process, and reviewed why *The I-81 Challenge* is needed. Another board described what the public can expect to be accomplished as a result of *The I-81 Challenge*. A large image of *The I-81 Challenge* Process Graphic provided a visual aid for understanding how *The I-81 Challenge* will ultimately lead to a decision.

*Above: Meeting attendees review informational boards.*

One board in this station explained the role of various stakeholders in the decision-making process, including NYSDOT, SMTC, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the local transit agency (i.e., Centro), local municipalities, and the public. There was no interactive component to this station.

## Station 2: Getting up to date on *The I-81 Challenge*

The second station provided a review of key information about *The I-81 Challenge* to date, including:

- The Physical Conditions Analysis, as documented in Technical Memorandum #1
- The role of transportation modeling
- Public involvement efforts to date
- Initial key findings about I-81's role in the region, as well as deficiencies and needs in the I-81 corridor
- Results from the Spring 2011 Questionnaire, as summarized in the Questionnaire Summary report[1]

Display boards also reviewed background information from the 2011 and 2012 public meetings and workshops. Review material covered the history of I-81, regional land use trends, land use challenges and opportunities, and population, employment, and commuting patterns. The station included the short educational video created by the SMTC titled "The Evolution of Transportation in the Syracuse Region." This video traced the development of the modern transportation system from early horse trails through the construction of the Erie Canal, railroads, and the interstate highway system.

A second short educational video created by SMTC titled "Lessons Learned: Case Studies of Urban Freeways", was also shown at this station. This video, along with accompanying boards, reviewed the case studies presented during the May 2011 public workshops and highlighted public reaction to the case studies. The videos can be accessed via *The I-81 Challenge* website, and a limited number of DVD copies were available at the public meeting.

By reviewing essential information about *The I-81 Challenge*, this station set the stage for the information and interactive activities in subsequent stations. There was no interactive component to this station.

*Above: Meeting attendees reviewed material presented on the informational boards.*

## Station 3: Your visions

Station 3 illustrated how public input and visions from the May 2011 workshops were used to arrive at the five strategies recommended for further development. This station included large boards displaying the individual visions submitted by the public. An informational graphic illustrated how over 100 visions were grouped into six distinct categories – rehabilitation, reconstruction, tunnel/depressed highway, boulevard, western bypass, and relocate I-81. There was also a set of "common concepts" (such as improving bicycle and pedestrian connections and adding parks and open space) that could be included in any option.

A board then showed that the western bypass and relocate I-81 concepts were "pre-screened" and eliminated from further consideration due to concerns that these concepts may not meet the goals and objectives or purpose and need of the project (except for one western bypass option, which was retained at this point as

[1] Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council. (November 2011). "*The I-81 Challenge* Spring 2011 Questionnaire Summary."

possible mitigation for a boulevard strategy). Finally, the public was presented with the remaining categories and the required "No-Build" strategy that were recommended to progress to strategy development.

## Station 4: Possible future strategies

The fourth station provided details about the categories of strategies that were recommended to advance to strategy development. This station summarized the work that was completed since the previous (2012) public meeting. Upon entering the station area, attendees were reminded that while the depictions presented of these strategies are possible concepts for the future of I-81, they should not be interpreted as design level detail. The six strategies presented were:

1. No-build (as required by State/Federal environmental regulations)
2. Rehabilitation
3. Tunnel
4. Depressed highway
5. Reconstruction
6. Boulevard


*Above: Meeting attendees study results from SMTC's Regional Travel Demand Model.*

First, a series of boards described the SMTC's Regional Travel Demand Model that was used to initially model the traffic conditions and travel times to be expected by 2040 under each strategy. The initial modeling results were produced using forecasted regional growth in population and jobs, based on census trends and input from municipal officials. Also, it was assumed that no major changes to the highway network would occur aside from normal maintenance and planned smaller local projects.

For the No-build strategy, boards described the on-going routine maintenance efforts the strategy would include and the future issues that are anticipated under this scenario, including the modeling results.

The remaining five strategies were each evaluated according to a feasibility assessment matrix, which focused on the impact the strategy would have on both Syracuse and the region in terms of expected changes to (1) the transportation network, (2) economic competiveness, (3) social equity/ quality of life and (4) the environment. These four main categories were identified using the goals, objectives, and evaluation criteria outlined in the 2011 and 2012 meetings.

The next series of boards examined the Rehabilitation strategy's components and determined that while it was feasible for the outer segments of the corridor, it was not feasible for the viaduct priority area. The outer segments included the corridor from the northern I-481 interchange to Hiawatha Boulevard and from the southern end of the Viaduct (around Castle Street) to the southern I-481 interchange. The viaduct priority area was defined as, roughly, I-81 from Hiawatha Boulevard to Castle Street and I-690 from West Street to Beech Street (just west of Teall Avenue).

The remainder of the station explored the four "build" strategies (Reconstruction, Boulevard, Tunnel, and Depressed Highway) to determine their feasibility for the viaduct priority area. Boards displayed information on each strategy's elements, modeling results, and feasibility assessment matrix. Illustrative concepts were also included for the Reconstruction and Boulevard strategies. Two additional boards in the Boulevard strategy

section clarified the regional system modifications and the I-481 interchange modifications necessary under this scenario.

One of the final boards in this station displayed a comparison of all the strategies' feasibility assessment matrix scores that clearly identified the two strategies deemed feasible for the viaduct priority area: the Boulevard and Reconstruction.

The next board provided the following prompt questions to generate feedback:

- Do you understand the process that was used to develop and evaluate the strategies?
- What do you think about dismissing the Tunnel and Depressed Highway strategies and progressing the Reconstruction and Boulevard strategies to environmental review in the next phase?
- Do you have any comments on the concepts presented for the Reconstruction and Boulevard strategies?

Meeting attendees were then asked to provide their responses as well as general feedback about the strategies by writing comments on post-it notes and attaching these to two large, blank display boards.

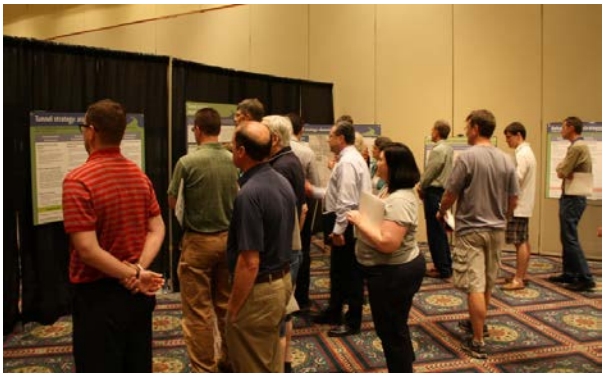
## *Key Findings: Strategies*

Over 500 comments were received in response to the strategies presented during the meeting via the post-it note comments on May 21, the general comment forms provided at the meeting, mailed-in responses following the meeting, and the virtual meeting. As previously stated, attendees were not asked to respond to each specific strategy, but they were provided with the prompt questions listed above. Comments were organized according to their content and/ or viewpoints in order to determine the key findings presented below.

While the attendance at the public meeting and participation in the virtual meeting were clearly substantial – with over 700 in-person attendees and over 300 virtual participants – this represents a small sample of the region's residents. Also, not all meeting participants provided written comments. The interpretation of comments is subjective and should not be used to quantify public opinion; comments should not be misconstrued as "votes." The key findings presented below offer general impressions of the public sentiment that can inform how the I-81 decision-making process progresses in the future. The full text of all written comments is included in Appendix A.

### i. Of the 500 comments received, many indicated that respondents did not understand or agree with the process that was used for the feasibility assessment matrix.

Many comments included questions regarding the criteria that were used to determine the strategy's rankings for each of the four columns included in the feasibility assessment matrices. These comments noted perceived inconsistencies among the criteria used to rank the strategies. As a result, respondents often indicated disagreement with the concluding scores, with a particular amount of disagreement focused on the rankings for the Environmental column.



*Above: Meeting attendees review the feasibility assessment matrices for the strategies in Station 4.*

Additionally, comments indicated confusion regarding the scores themselves (i.e.: Poor to Very Poor, Poor, Fair to

Poor, etc.). Questions centered around the definition of these scores, the subjective nature of such words, and what groups were considered in the definitions since what is considered 'Poor' for some people may be considered 'Good' for others.

Many of the comments that expressed confusion or disagreement with the feasibility assessment matrix also expressed concern that the matrix had been designed to achieve a predetermined outcome. The concerns about the decision-making process for the feasibility of each strategy were tied to additional concerns about the decision-making process overall and how the public input will be incorporated into the final decision. Many comments cited trepidation that the local community and residents of Syracuse will not have a voice in the decision-making process or that a final decision had already been reached.

### ii. Of the 500 comments received, many comments noted what was perceived to be a lack of consideration for disadvantaged groups in the process to determine the feasible strategies and in the content presented at the meeting.

Based on the comments received, many respondents felt that disadvantaged groups were not involved enough during the process by which the strategies' feasibility was determined and that their needs were not taken into account during the development of the concept designs. Specific groups noted within the comments were people living in public housing near the Viaduct and people with physical disabilities.

### iii. The issues referenced most frequently in comments that assessed the strategies presented were (1) quality of life issues and (2) traffic flow and accessibility issues.

As the comments were reviewed, the same key issues were continually referenced by respondents, regardless of the comment's tone, viewpoint, or to what strategy it was in reference. These issues are organized into six main categories that are described in the table below, in order of the approximate frequency with which they were cited.

The below table provides an indication of the highest priority issues among respondents. While the methodology is simplistic, the results provide a general understanding of the underlying themes within the feedback. The results are not intended to be representative of the general population and are taken from a small sample of respondents. These categories have also been used to organize the feedback for the Reconstruction and Boulevard strategies.

| Category | Examples of issues cited by respondents: |
|---|---|
| **Quality of life** | Aesthetic appeal; attraction for tourists and residents; iconic structures or places; gateways; disadvantaged groups; "barrier effect"; community groups and neighborhoods; social equity; the national reputation of the city |
| **Traffic flow and accessibility** | Speed of traffic flow; congestion; trip or commute times; ease of access to key destinations; easy and quick access to medical care |
| **Multi-modal transportation** | Bike paths, sidewalks and walkways; pedestrian/ bicyclist accessibility and safety; walkability and bike-ability; car dependency; public transit system (LRT or BRT) |
| **Economic** | Cost of construction and continued maintenance; development potential; impacts on local businesses; regional economy |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Environment** | Park space; greenhouse gas emissions; pollution; flooding |
| **Safety** | Vehicle, pedestrian and cyclist accidents; pedestrian and cyclists crossings; modern highway design standards |

*Categories listed in order of frequency with which they were referenced within comments.*

### iv. A limited number of people responded to the Rehabilitation, Tunnel, and Depressed Highway strategies. Of those that did, the majority agreed with the determination, as presented during the meeting, that these strategies are not feasible.

Very few comments were received that referenced the Rehabilitation strategy. The few comments that were received expressed agreement with the determination presented in the feasibility assessment matrices that this strategy was feasible for the outer segments of I-81, but not the viaduct priority area.

While slightly more people responded to the Tunnel and Depressed Highway Strategies, the feedback was still very limited. Of those who did, there were almost equal levels of expressed agreement and expressed disagreement with the determination that these strategies were not feasible. The reasons respondents provided in their comments for their expressed agreement or disagreement are described in the table below:

| **Expressed agreement that Tunnel and Depressed Highway were not feasible** | **Expressed disagreement that Tunnel and Depressed Highway were not feasible** |
|---|---|
| <u>Economic</u><br>• Significant cost of construction<br><u>Quality of life</u><br>• Minimal community enhancements | <u>Traffic flow and accessibility</u><br>• Maintain the ease and speed of travel<br><u>Quality of life</u><br>• Elimination of the Viaduct barrier<br><u>Economic</u><br>• New opportunities for development<br>• Reduced maintenance costs during the winter<br>• Maintain vitality of existing businesses along I-81 |

Additionally, some comments described ideas to be considered for these strategies. For example, one comment suggested the construction of the Depressed Highway with walls that could absorb or eliminate much of the noise caused by the traffic. Other comments requested additional information regarding the determination of these strategies' feasibility, such as a soil analysis and how the total costs were deduced.

### v. The majority of the 500 comments received focused on the Reconstruction and Boulevard strategies (with more overall feedback for the Boulevard), and many people viewed the two strategies in competition with one another.

Overall, more comments spoke directly to the Boulevard strategy than to the Reconstruction strategy. The Boulevard strategy garnered more support as well as more than double the opposition and concern from meeting attendees as compared to the Reconstruction strategy, based on the comments provided.

The most frequently cited reason for support or opposition for both these strategies was quality of life issues. Those respondents who expressed support for the Reconstruction strategy and those who expressed opposition to the Boulevard strategy also frequently cited traffic flow and accessibility within their comments.

| | Reconstruction | Boulevard |
|---|---|---|
| **Support** | Traffic flow and accessibility; Quality of life | Quality of life |
| **Opposition** | Quality of life | Traffic flow and accessibility; Quality of life |

## vi. The majority of the nearly 180 comments that referenced the Reconstruction strategy expressed their support for the strategy.

Based on the comments received for the Reconstruction strategy, almost three-fourths of the responses expressed support for it. The main reasons respondents provided for this viewpoint, as well as the main reasons of those who were opposed to the strategy, were grouped according to the key issue categories. The categories, as well as paraphrased comments, are listed below according to the frequency with which those reasons were cited.

| Expressed Support for Reconstruction | Expressed Opposition for Reconstruction |
|---|---|
| Traffic flow & accessibility<br>• Maintain the ease and speed of travel through city, and to key destinations<br>• Maintain access to healthcare for all residents<br>Quality of life<br>• Could be redesigned as an iconic structure that will be an asset for the city<br>• Could include aesthetically pleasing elements and a community space under the Viaduct<br>Safety<br>• Address safety issues for drivers on highway<br>Economic<br>• Maintain vitality of existing businesses<br>Environmental<br>• Could include park space and landscaping<br>• Decrease pollution on local streets | Quality of Life<br>• Would not address the barrier effect or improve neighborhood connectivity<br>• Would not address noise concerns<br>Multi-modal<br>• Does not incorporate a public transportation plan<br>• Would not improve or promote other modes of transportation and would continue to encourage dependency on the car<br>Traffic flow & accessibility<br>• Would favor through traffic over local traffic<br>Economic<br>• Would not open up new land for development downtown<br>Environmental<br>• Another viaduct would result in the same amount or increased motor vehicular emissions |

Additionally, many comments included suggestions and ideas for consideration during the continuing development of the Reconstruction strategy. These suggestions have been paraphrased and organized into groups below:

Traffic flow and accessibility

- Move or add additional on- and off-ramps to alleviate congestion on Adams Street.

- Reconstruct the entrance and exit ramps farther north of Harrison and south of Adams.
- Take into consideration the high-density areas and build more on- and off-ramps.
- Build an exit from I-81 S to Downtown after the I-690/I-81 interchange.
- Add exits along the Viaduct to distribute traffic to city streets; e.g. add an exit at Colvin Street for SU.
- Remove the streets under and adjacent to I-81 and build up a roadway similar to I-690.
- Place a large open underpass at Adams, Genesee, and perhaps Fayette Street and relocate the traffic presently under the roadway to other parallel streets.
- Eliminate vehicle traffic directly underneath the roadway.
- Convert some streets to one-way (ex: Washington and Fayette) to ease the Harrison/ Adams bottleneck.
- Reconstruct with two tiers. The top tier could be for through traffic while the lower tier could be used for traffic entering and exiting the city and include dedicated transit or bike lanes.

Pedestrian and bicyclist enhancements

- Create attractive, safe and accessible pedestrian bridges under the new 81 at the Adams Street area and at the Park Street (Regional Market, Regional Transportation Center) area to connect sections of the city and encourage foot traffic.
- Include a bike lane underneath the Viaduct.

### vii. Over 100 comments expressed support for the Reconstruction strategy, but many of these indicated that an essential component of the strategy was the improvement to the aesthetics and design of the existing Viaduct.

Based on the comments received, respondents in support of the Reconstruction strategy acknowledged that although the existing Viaduct was not aesthetically pleasing, a reconstructed Viaduct could be designed to be an iconic structure that defines and elevates the city. Listed below are paraphrased suggestions that respondents included in their comments:

- Include a guaranteed maintenance plan and funding to improve the aesthetics of a redesigned Viaduct.
- Increase the height of the Viaduct to prevent the barrier effect and allow more light underneath.
- Utilize the space underneath the Viaduct for parking, public art, park space, community space, etc.

*Above: Meeting attendees provide their feedback after reviewing the new information presented.*

### viii. About two-thirds of the 300+ respondents who referenced the Boulevard strategy in their comments expressed support for the strategy.

Over 300 participants referenced this strategy in their comments, with about two-thirds expressing support for the strategy and one-third expressing opposition to it. The dispersion of these comments across the key issues they referenced and the viewpoints they expressed are shown in the table below.

Based on the comments received, the majority of those in support of the Boulevard expressed an opinion that the strategy would significantly progress the city toward what was described as a 'visionary and sustainable 21st-century city.' Comments that expressed opposition to the Boulevard strategy often also expressed support for the Reconstruction strategy, citing traffic flow and accessibility as reasons for both viewpoints.

| Expressed support for Boulevard | Expressed Opposition for Boulevard |
|---|---|
| Quality of life<br>• Revitalize and transform Downtown<br>• Improve aesthetics of the local area and create a key attraction/ destination.<br>• Create an inviting gateway into the city<br>• Eliminate the Viaduct barrier, and restore unity and connectivity within the city<br>• Reduce noise levels in the surrounding areas<br>Economic<br>• Attract residents and improve the city's tax base<br>• Increase Downtown accessibility, encourage Downtown visits, and promote local economy<br>• Open up valuable land for development<br>• Minimize construction and maintenance costs<br>Multi-modal<br>• Reduce auto dependency<br>• Promote development of a public transit system<br>• Foster a more pedestrian and bicyclist-friendly environment<br>Traffic flow & accessibility<br>• Does not impede traffic flow because existing city streets will absorb car traffic entering Downtown/ University area<br>• Connect to street grid to provide more options for motorists in heavy traffic<br>Environmental<br>• Improve air quality in the surrounding areas<br>• Create numerous opportunities for the use of green infrastructure and landscaping features | Traffic flow & accessibility<br>• Increased travel times, congestion, gridlock, and delays<br>• Increased traffic on I-481<br>• Inhibit convenient and quick travel to key destinations<br>Quality of life<br>• Create a new barrier that would divide the city<br>• Create difficulties for people with disabilities<br>Safety<br>• Impede accessibility to hospitals for emergency vehicles<br>• Six lane pedestrian crossings would lead to increased accidents<br>Economic<br>• Discourage people from visiting Downtown and hurt the local economy<br>• Cut off the suburbs and businesses in the north, thereby negatively affecting the local economy<br>Environmental<br>• Reduce the fuel efficiency for cars passing through the city because of stop-and-go traffic<br>• Cause continuous pollution along the boulevard and on surrounding surface streets due to stop-and-go traffic<br>Multi-modal<br>• Six lanes create an unfriendly pedestrian environment |

Additionally, many comments included suggestions and ideas for consideration during the continuing development of the Boulevard strategy. These suggestions have been paraphrased and organized into groups below:

Traffic flow and access

- Limit traffic on the Boulevard to passenger vehicles and local truck delivery; restrict commercial and truck traffic to I-481 and I-690.
    - Limit access to the Boulevard to E-ZPass vehicles if tolls are used as a funding scheme.
- Include a connection to West Street.
- Coordinate signals and give priority to boulevard traffic.
- Collect and analyze detailed traffic data from each entry and exit point throughout the city in order to further develop design options.
- Consider that not every street needs to intersect with the Boulevard.
- Consider the inclusion of a roundabout at Erie Boulevard.
- The northern end of the proposed Almond Boulevard should better connect to the Northside neighborhood street grid.

Quality of life

- Consideration should be given to what will happen to low-income communities if property values are raised significantly along the proposed boulevard.
- Avoid any similarities to Erie Boulevard, which is unsafe, unsightly, and inefficient.

Multi-modal transit

- Add a dedicated bus route to the Boulevard; promote the development of a public transit system.
- Include improved bicyclist accessibility and dedicated bike lanes.

Economy

- Combine the development potential of the right of way portion not needed for Boulevard construction with some limited acquisition of surface level parking lots adjacent to the right of way.
- Identify existing or design new routes that can provide efficient alternative access to businesses located north and south of the city center.
- Include prominent and clear signage on the north, east, south, and west limits of Downtown to direct people to alternative routes to Destiny USA.

## ix. Based on the comments received, those in support of the Boulevard strategy were not in support of potential capacity increases on West Street that were noted on the display board at the meeting.

Numerous comments that expressed support for the Boulevard strategy in general also adamantly opposed the potential use of West Street to accommodate increased traffic, as was noted on a display board at the meeting. Respondents noted within their comments that any capacity increases on West Street should be completely avoided because they would have a significantly negative impact on the Near Westside neighborhood.

**x. Based on the comments received, both respondents in support of and opposed to the Boulevard strategy frequently expressed dissatisfaction with the concept rendering presented at the meeting.**

The concept rendering for the Boulevard strategy generated a substantial amount of negative feedback with a particular focus on the inclusion of six lanes of traffic. Based on the comments received, those in support of the Boulevard considered six lanes to be unnecessary and stated concerns that the amount of traffic caused by six lanes would significantly impede many of the Boulevard's potential benefits. Some respondents expressed within the comments that their support was conditional on the reduction of the number of traffic lanes.

Comments that expressed opposition to the Boulevard often referenced the number of traffic lanes as a reason for their opposition. Based on the comments received, many respondents believe a six-lane boulevard would create a whole new barrier effect, and that it would be dangerous and intimidating for pedestrians and cyclists.

Many comments included suggestions on other ways to utilize the right of way with only four traffic lanes, such as a dedicated bus lane or separated bike lanes. Other comments included suggestions on how to improve pedestrian safety if six lanes of traffic were necessary, such as overhead bridges at intersections or a pedestrian tunnel as alternatives for pedestrian crossings.

## Station 5: Our transit system

Station 5 focused on the area's transit system. The boards provided information about the existing system, explained the role of the transit system analysis in *The I-81 Challenge*, and presented information about urban and suburban ridership levels in the region. Specific corridors identified for possible transit improvements were displayed. Another board illustrated what a low investment scenario would look like in Syracuse, which would enhance the existing system.

*Above: At Station 5, meeting attendees were able to learn about and provide input on the transit system.*

Medium and high investment scenarios, which would include Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Light Rail Transit (LRT) respectively, were also displayed on boards following a board that described the advantages and disadvantages of each. These boards were created in response to previous input from the public on the locations where transit enhancements are most needed. A series of boards also provided examples of low, medium, and high intensity improvements for both BRT and LRT. A large interactive board then invited the public to provide feedback to this information as well as input about current and other potential enhancements to the transit system.

As noted previously, public feedback about the transit system is intended to inform *The I-81 Challenge* transit system analysis by helping to identify transit system needs, as well as factors that would enhance or encourage future transit use.

## *Key Findings: Transit*

Over 80 comments were received in response to the Transit Station during the meeting via the post-it note comments on May 21, the general comment forms provided at the meeting, mailed-in responses following the meeting, and the virtual meeting.

Attendees were not provided with any prompts when asked to submit feedback for this station. While the paraphrased comments below have been used to highlight the key findings, a full list of all comments can be found in Appendix A.

### i. The majority of the comments received in the Transit Station supported the development of an improved public transit system because it would benefit the city and region.

The main reasons respondents provided for their support or opposition of an improved public transit system have been paraphrased and listed below.

| Supported public transit system because: | Opposed public transit system because: |
|---|---|
| • Would transform Downtown, the city, and the region<br>• Would reduce traffic along I-81 or a Boulevard | • Population density is too low to support a significant public transit system<br>• The city and region is too auto dependent and ridership levels would remain low<br>• Could result in steep rise in fares |

Additionally, many comments included suggestions and ideas for consideration if the development of an improved public transit system is pursued. These suggestions have been paraphrased and organized into groups below:

- A publicity campaign and significant signage will ensure people are aware of a public transit alternative.
- There should be improved nighttime public transportation options, in quantity and quality.
- Transportation to the airport should be included in the public transit system.
- The revitalization of the OnTrack system should be considered.
- Incentives should encourage large employers to subsidize public transit fares for their employees.
- A park-and-ride system with a transit connection to and around Downtown would relieve parking and congestion issues.

### ii. Based on the comments received, there were nearly identical levels of support for BRT and LRT, but over double the opposition to LRT in comparison to opposition to BRT.

The main reasons respondents provided for their support or opposition to a BRT system have been paraphrased and listed below.

| Supported BRT because: | Opposed BRT because: |
|---|---|
| • Would be a cost effective solution to implement and to update in the future<br>• Benefit a large area<br>• Create a more livable urban community<br>• Improve traffic flow, reduce congestion, and reduce pollution | • The Connective Corridor bus system is a failure and wastes resources |

Additionally, many comments included suggestions and ideas for consideration if a BRT system is pursued. These suggestions have been paraphrased and organized into groups below:

- Add the following bus routes:
    - To the airport.
    - That connect outlying neighborhoods and/or suburbs to each other.
    - Between Onondaga Hill and University Hill.
    - That is specific to Syracuse University's campus.
- Add smaller, jitney buses with more frequent arrival times within Downtown.
- Bus stops should:
    - Be spaced at alternate blocks with attractive shelters to boost ridership.
    - Provide better signage, including posted route maps and estimated arrival time notifications.
- Focus resources for bus routes on the areas where residents cannot afford other transit alternatives.
- Buses should travel at higher speeds and provide shortened trip times than existing service.
- Allow the use of a prepaid transit card that can be refilled at vending stations.

The main reasons respondents provided for their support or opposition to a LRT system have been paraphrased and listed below.

| Supported LRT because: | Opposed LRT because: |
|---|---|
| • Create easy access to key city points, including late night service<br>• Increases safety through the prevention of late night driving<br>• Create a more livable urban community | • Expensive and difficult to implement and to update over time due to necessary infrastructure and limited right of ways<br>• The population is too small and too auto dependent to support the system<br>• Historically unsuccessful<br>• Does not benefit many areas, such as the northern suburbs |

Additionally, many comments included suggestions and ideas for consideration if a LRT system is pursued. These suggestions have been paraphrased and organized into groups below:

- Add LRT corridors to/ from the airport, suburbs, and the Dome, including a Brewerton-Tully corridor and a Camillus-Fayetteville corridor.
- Ensure LRT connects easily to major Downtown employers.

### Station 6: Transition to Environmental Review

*Above: Meeting attendees learned about the NEPA process from boards and staff at Station 6.*

This station presented information on the environmental review process and outlined the next steps for *The I-81 Challenge* as the project transitions from the Corridor Study.

Boards provided detailed explanations of the relevant legislation, including the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR). A series of boards then described the three different routes by which projects proceed through the NEPA process and provided a comprehensive overview of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which will be prepared for this project. This information was presented in both a traditional text format and diagrammatically.

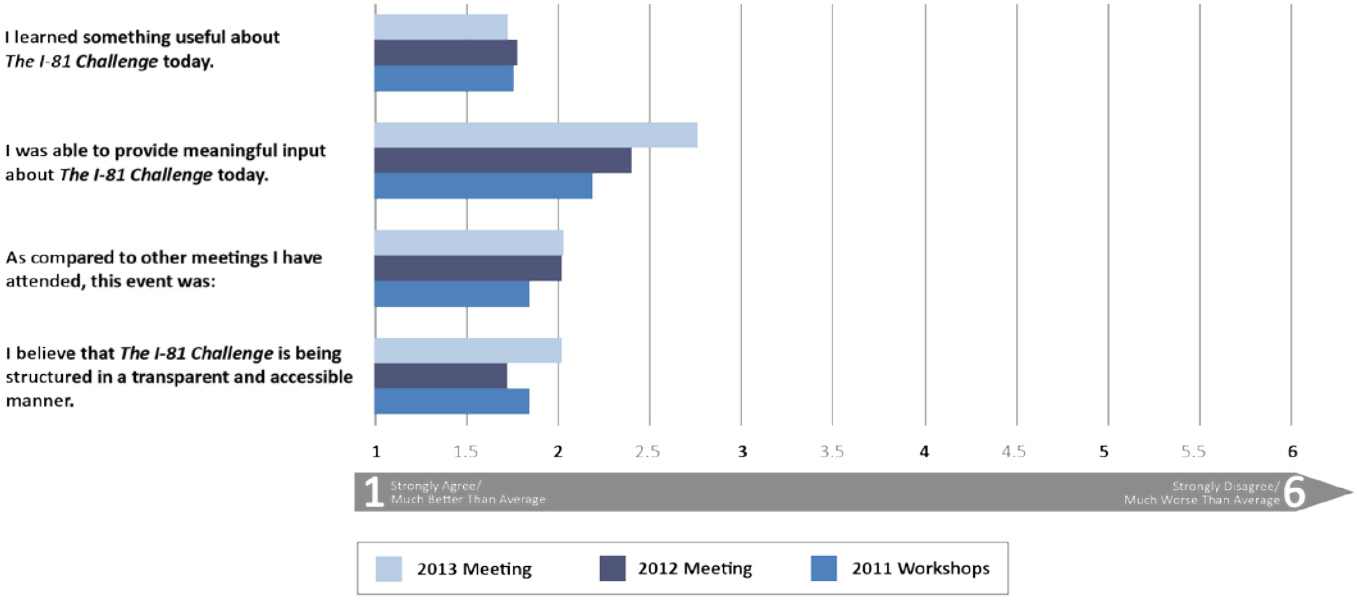
This station also described how public input has been used thus far and the importance of the public's role in the identification of the study area problems and issues, transportation needs, and possible strategies that will lead to alternatives in the NEPA process. The public's continuing role during the NEPA process was described in the key components of the EIS and illustrated in a diagrammatic representation of how the I-81 Corridor Study will lead to a decision. There was no interactive component to this station.

## C. Meeting Evaluation

After the in-person meeting participants reviewed the final station, they were invited to provide additional feedback through comment sheets and a meeting evaluation forms.

Through the meeting evaluations, participants expressed an overwhelmingly positive opinion of the public meeting. The evaluation forms revealed that attendees felt the meeting was well organized, accessible, and informative, and that it provided meaningful opportunities for input. The graph below illustrates that the average numerical ratings for each of the four questions were similar to the 2012 and 2011 public events.

**Figure 1: Meeting Evaluation Result Comparison**




Attendees appreciated the magnitude of information presented at the meeting, but noted that it was difficult to absorb everything at one time. Many attendees stated that the information was well presented and that the staff were friendly and knowledgeable. Other things people liked about the meeting included:

- Convenient hours
- Free parking
- Inclusive tone and interactive format
- Personal attention and knowledgeable staff members at each station
- Online availability of information through the virtual meeting

Attendees also made suggestions about how the meeting could be improved. Suggestions included:

- Holding the meeting over two days to thin the crowds
- Altering the layout of the room to improve traffic flow
- Holding more than one meeting
- Providing a succinct overview at the beginning
- Better communication of availability of online materials

While most attendees appreciated the ongoing opportunities to be involved in *The I-81 Challenge* decision-making process, several attendees also expressed concern about how the public input would be used moving forward, along with a degree of skepticism regarding the process and a perception that the future of I-81 had already been decided. This illustrates the importance of continued emphasis on transparency and public involvement in the next phase of the I-81 process.

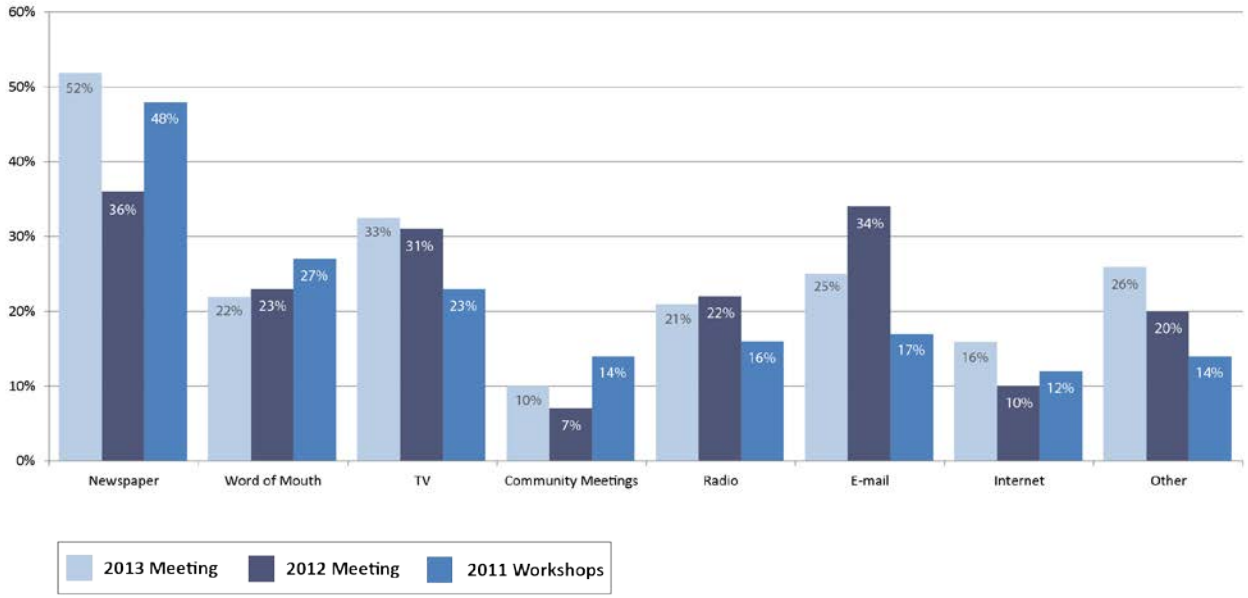
## D. Meeting Participation

As noted earlier, over 700 people participated in the in-person public meeting, and 334 people participated online. Attendees at the in-person meeting were asked to indicate on the sign-in sheets whether or not they had attended the 2011 Public Workshops or 2012 Public Meeting. Approximately 262 people reported that they

had attended one of the previous meetings, 353 people reported that they had not attended the May 2011 or 2012 meetings, and nearly 105 people did not provide a response to this question. Based on a review of the names provided at the meeting sign-in and the virtual meeting registration, 33 people participated in both the in-person and virtual events.

The meeting evaluation revealed that attendees heard about the meeting from multiple sources, with the highest number of attendees learning about the meeting through newspaper, TV, "other" outlets, and e-mail, in that order. Based on written comments, "other" outlets mainly referred to electronic billboards along I-81 and I-690 and mailed flyers. The chart below shows the effectiveness of outreach approaches for the May 2013 public meeting as compared to the previous public workshops and meeting.

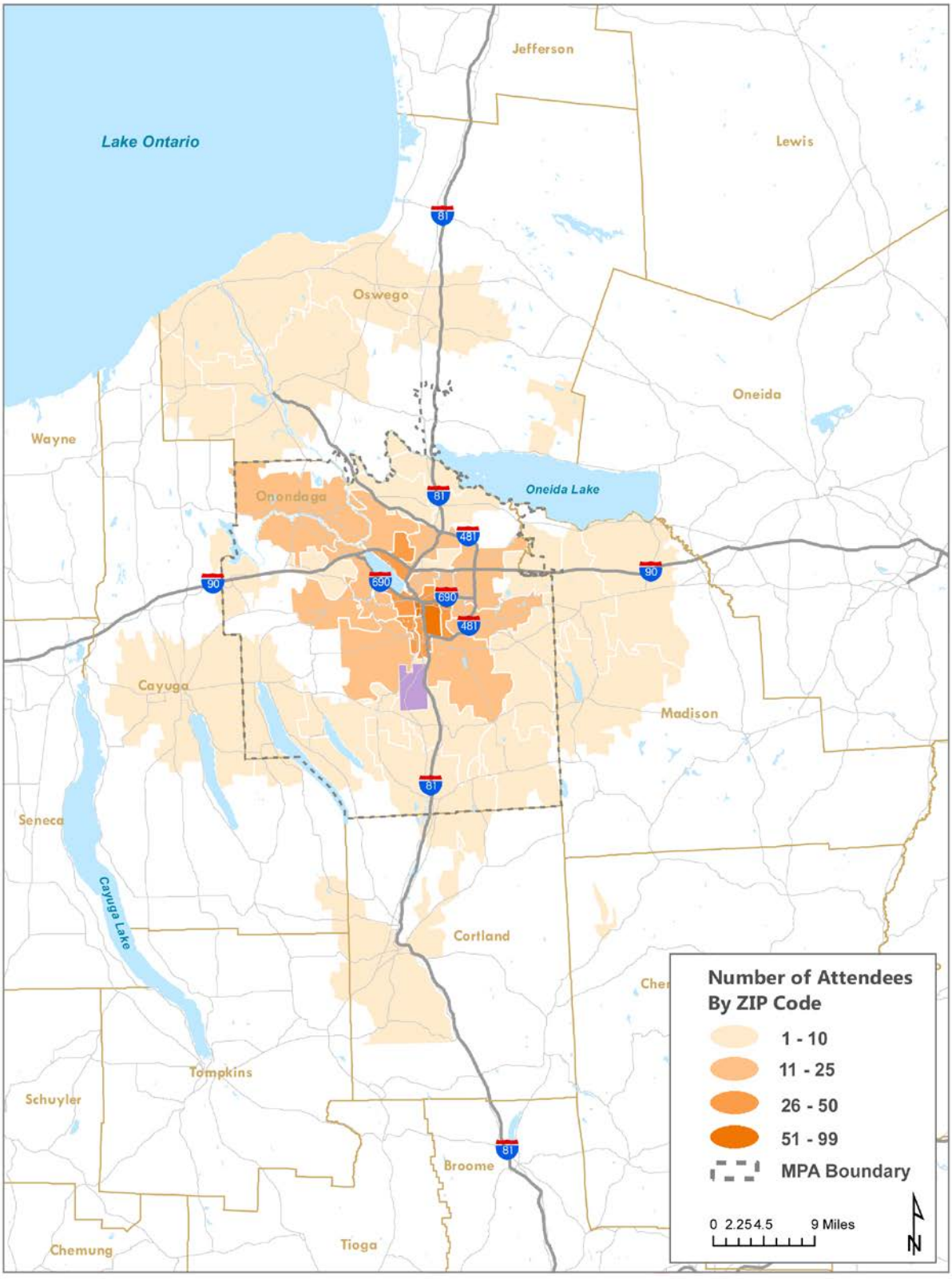
**Figure 2: How did you hear about this meeting?**




*Note: Because attendees were able to select more than one method, total percentages do not add to 100%. The percentages are based on the total number of evaluation forms received at the public meeting.*

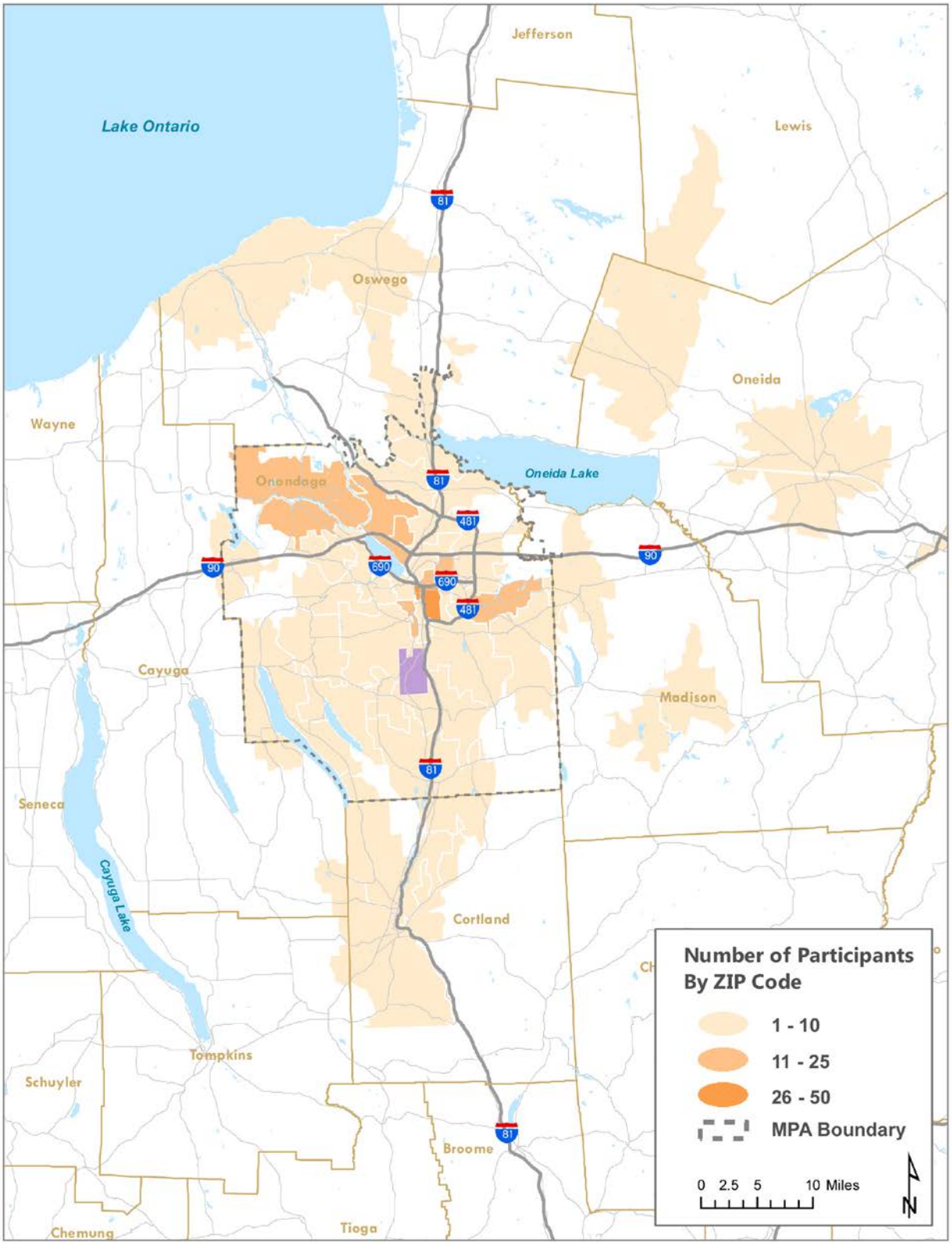
The overall geographic distribution of participation in the May 2013 public meeting was similar to that of the May 2012 and 2011 public events, although there were an increased number of attendees in some of the surrounding ZIP codes in 2013. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the distribution of 2013 in-person and virtual meeting participation based on the ZIP codes participants provided at sign-in or registration. The ZIP code information may include either residence or place of employment. The overall extent and distribution of participation were very similar for the in-person and virtual meetings. The 13202 ZIP code (downtown Syracuse) had the highest number of participants, followed by the 13210 ZIP code (Syracuse University-area and surrounding neighborhood). While the maps certainly show concentrated participation in a few areas, in general, participation spanned across multiple towns in the vicinity of the city of Syracuse.

**Figure 3: Attendance (in-person) at May 2013 public meeting by ZIP code**




Note: This map shows 676 of the total 720 in-person attendees. Besides 21 attendees who did not provide ZIP codes, those not shown include: 13 outside map limits, 1 P.O. box, 6 Syracuse University addresses, 1 Federal Building address, 1 could not be found, and 1 business.

**Figure 4: Participation in May 2013 virtual public meeting by ZIP code**




Note: This map shows 294 of the total 334 virtual meeting participants. Those not shown include: 25 outside map limits, 4 P.O. boxes, and 4 Syracuse University addresses, and 7 ZIP codes that could not be found or resulted in errors.

## E. Conclusions & next steps

The May 2013 public meeting was the third public meeting and the last in a series of workshops and meetings that have occurred since 2011 for *The I-81 Challenge* planning study. The significant amount of input that was gathered as a result of the 2013 meeting will inform how to best move the I-81 process forward for the Syracuse region. Additionally, meeting attendees' feedback on the initial concept renderings will provide substantial insight for consideration as those strategies determined to be feasible are further refined and developed.

While *The I-81 Challenge* is expected to conclude in Fall 2013 with a transition from the planning stage to the official environmental review process, all the comments received will carry forward to the next phase. Public involvement will continue to be an essential part of the project both during and after this transition and the Central New York community can expect to see additional opportunities for public participation and input in the future.

# APPENDICES

Appendix A: Participant comments

Appendix B: Informational boards

Appendix C: Publicity materials

Appendix D: Meeting evaluation results