

The I-81 Challenge White Paper #3

August 2013

Prepared for:



The Syracuse Metropolitan
Transportation Council



The I-81 Challenge

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Prepared for: Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council
August 2013

in support of the New York State Department of Transportation's
I-81 Corridor Study

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Table of Contents

- Summary i**
- 1 - Introduction 1**
 - 1.1 Overview of *The I-81 Challenge* 1
 - 1.2 Purpose of this White Paper 2
- 2 - Public Outreach Efforts 2**
 - 2.1 Educational and Informational Materials 3
 - 2.1.1 Project Web site 3
 - 2.1.2 Social Media 4
 - 2.1.3 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs): Updates 6
 - 2.2 Study Committees 6
 - 2.2.1 Study Advisory Committee 6
 - 2.2.2 Community Liaison Committee and Municipal Liaison Committee 8
 - 2.3 Public Meetings 10
 - 2.3.1 Meeting Structure and Goals 10
 - 2.3.2 Outreach in Preparation of and During the Public Meetings 11
 - 2.3.3 Public Participation and Input 11
 - 2.3.4 Meeting Evaluation 12
 - 2.4 Limited English Proficiency Outreach and Environmental Justice 13
 - 2.4.1 Limited English Proficiency Outreach 13
 - 2.4.2 Environmental Justice 13
 - 2.5 Other Outreach 14
 - 2.5.1 Small Group Community Meetings 14
 - 2.5.2 Onondaga Nation 14
- 3 - Progress Towards Achieving Public Participation Objectives 15**
- 4 - Synthesis of Key Findings 21**
 - 4.1 Screening of initial strategies 21
 - 4.2 Public feedback on the five strategies to carry forward from May 2012 Public Meeting 22
 - 4.3 Goals and Objectives 25
 - 4.3.1 Evaluation Criteria 25
 - 4.4 Public response to strategies and assessments presented at 2013 Public Meeting 25

4.4.1 Municipal response..... 31

4.5 Feedback on transit system analysis..... 32

4.5.1 Our transit system: May 2012 Public Meeting 32

4.5.2 Our transit system: May 2013 Public Meeting 33

5 – Conclusion of *The I-81 Challenge* and next steps.....35

List of Figures

Figure 1: Project web site traffic (April 2011 – May 2013)4

Figure 2: Project blog traffic (April 2011 – May 2013).....5

Figure 3: Project Facebook page traffic (April 2011 – May 2013).....6

Figure 4: Total Participation by ZIP Code 16

List of Tables

Table 1: Meeting evaluation results: Questions 1 and 2 20

Table 2: Meeting evaluation results: Questions 4 21

Table 3: Public feedback on strategies recommended for Stage 1 screening 23

Table 4: Key Issue Categories 27

Table 5: Comparison of Feedback to Reconstruction and Boulevard Strategies 28

Table 6: Feedback to Reconstruction Strategy 29

Table 7: Feedback to Boulevard Strategy 30

Table 8: Resolutions Passed Regarding I-81 by Governing Entities in Syracuse Region 31

Table 9: Transit System Analysis: Prioritized Needs and Enhancements 33

Table 10: Support and Opposition for Public Transit System 34

Table 11: Support and Opposition for BRT and LRT..... 34

List of Appendices

- Appendix A: Emails to Contactus@thei81challenge.org and letters submitted by the public
- Appendix B: Resolutions passed by various governing bodies regarding the future of I-81

Summary

In 2008, the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) and the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) began a process to engage a broad cross section of community members for identifying, developing, and evaluating options for the future of the Interstate 81 (I-81) corridor in the Syracuse area. Over the past several years, this process, known as *The I-81 Challenge*, has advanced community discussions about the future of I-81, with specific focus on the Viaduct in downtown Syracuse. As part of this effort, the SMTC and the NYSDOT designed a comprehensive Public Participation Program to ensure that all interested persons, organizations, and agencies have an opportunity to be involved in *The I-81 Challenge*.

Throughout *The I-81 Challenge*, community input has helped guide the development of project goals and objectives as well as options for the future of I-81. Public input has played a role in reducing the broad range of possible options to a small number of feasible strategies. The SMTC and the NYSDOT have employed a wide range of community involvement techniques to facilitate public input in this important regional decision-making process.

This third White Paper describes and synthesizes findings from *The I-81 Challenge* Public Participation Program from the Fall of 2011 through its completion in the Fall of 2013. It documents the use of outreach products and publications, such as Frequently Asked Questions and web platforms, and draws conclusions from feedback gathered through:

- Meetings with the three committees involved in *The I-81 Challenge*
 - Study Advisory Committee
 - Community Liaison Committee
 - Municipal Liaison Committee
- 2012 and 2013 Public Meetings
- Outreach to populations with Limited English Proficiency
- Small group community meetings.

Two previous white papers have been published for *The I-81 Challenge*: White Paper #1¹ identified seven public participation objectives along with proposed metrics for each objective and White Paper #2² documented the use of various outreach and participation methods from the inception of *The I-81 Challenge* in 2008 through the first public meeting in 2011. Taken together, the three white papers present a complete summary of all public involvement efforts throughout the course of *The I-81 Challenge*.

¹ Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council. (May 2009) *The I-81 Challenge* White Paper #1.

² Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council. (December 2011) *The I-81 Challenge* White Paper #2.

Subsequent sections of this White Paper provide detailed descriptions of the progress made towards achieving the public participation objectives described in White Paper #1 through the work that has been completed for this phase of the project. Overall, feedback has suggested that the Public Participation Program has successfully utilized multiple means of outreach and communication to make relevant technical information both available and understandable to the general public. In addition, input from the public has indicated that *The I-81 Challenge* has effectively built a shared and enhanced understanding regarding the existing conditions and potential futures for the highway, and allowed for a cross-fertilization of ideas, interests, and perspectives within Syracuse's regional community.

The Public Participation Program has also allowed the SMTC and the NYSDOT to gather information about public opinion regarding issues/ impacts, values, goals, and alternatives related to the future of I-81, particularly through the first round of public workshops. Public workshop and meeting evaluations also suggest that public outreach efforts are contributing to transparency about and in the decision-making process.

The SMTC and the NYSDOT have completed many of the tasks outlined in the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) plan³ developed for this process and incorporated environmental justice concerns into all public outreach efforts. While the total number of contacts to date suggests that the Public Participation Program has reached a significant number of individuals, it is difficult to accurately judge progress in engaging diverse stakeholders because detailed demographic information has not been collected at outreach events. However, public comments submitted during the 2013 Public Meeting have indicated that continued efforts need to ensure that a diverse range of stakeholders contribute to the next phase of environmental review for I-81 in the Syracuse region, particularly minority, low-income, and traditionally underserved populations.

Public input, combined with technical studies, generated initial ideas and visions, from which five recommended strategies for the Stage 1 screening process were then developed and presented during the May 2012 Public Meeting. These strategies were as follows:

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

Although the feedback was highly varied in content and opinion, a few common themes transcended any specific strategy:

³ Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council. (December 2011) *The I-81 Challenge* White Paper #2, Appendix B.

- Safe, speedy access to key regional destinations is important. This includes the consideration of alternative modes of transportation, such as biking and walking.
- The physical impact of the Viaduct is a key issue – meeting attendees clearly expressed their desire for a more aesthetically pleasing and physically connected downtown environment.
- There is a strong desire for economic development and the revitalization in the downtown area.
- It is essential that any future solution for I-81 be financially responsible and feasible, and avoids negative impacts on the neighborhoods in the vicinity of the Viaduct.

During the 2012 Public Meeting, the public also contributed to the development of the evaluation criteria that were then used to determine the feasibility of strategies for the future of I-81 and how to progress from *The I-81 Challenge* into the next stage of planning, design, and environmental review.

Using these evaluation criteria, the key input from the public and stakeholders in combination with further review and refinement, the feasibility of each strategy was analyzed for the future of I-81. This led to the determination that Rehabilitation is a feasible strategy for the outer segments of I-81, but not for the viaduct priority. Therefore, four “build” strategies were explored for the viaduct priority area: Reconstruction, Tunnel, Depressed Highway, and Boulevard. The Reconstruction and Boulevard strategies were presented at the 2013 Public Meeting as the most feasible strategies for the viaduct priority area. The outer segments include 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 has been 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 results of the strategies’ feasibility assessments were presented during the 2013 Public Meeting and meeting attendees were asked to provide their feedback on both the strategies deemed feasible to move forward and the process by which their feasibility was determined. Over 500 comments were received in response to the strategies presented during the 2013 Public Meeting via the post-it note comments, the general comment forms provided at the meeting, mailed-in responses following the meeting, and the virtual meeting. While some attendees indicated that they did not understand or agree with the process to determine the strategies’ feasibility, very few attendees expressed disagreement with the determination that the Rehabilitation, Tunnel, and Depressed Highway strategies were not feasible for the viaduct priority area. The majority of the feedback received focused on the Reconstruction and Boulevard strategies, with many people viewing these two strategies in competition with one another. 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.

Comparison of Feedback to Reconstruction and Boulevard Strategies

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

The strategies determined to be feasible will be advanced to the project development, design, and environmental review phase, which will be led by the NYSDOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). As the strategies continue to be evaluated and refined, the public involvement process will continue to be an integral component.

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.

1 - Introduction

1.1 Overview of *The I-81 Challenge*

Portions of Interstate 81 (I-81), particularly the elevated sections of the highway in downtown Syracuse, known as the Viaduct, are nearing the end of their lifespan. Over the coming decades, segments of the highway will need to be replaced, reconstructed, removed, or otherwise changed.

In 2008, the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) and the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) began a process to engage a broad cross section of community members in identifying, developing and evaluating options for the future of this vital corridor. Over the last several years, this process, known as *The I-81 Challenge*, has successfully advanced community discussions about the future of I-81.

The I-81 Challenge is composed of four separate but integrated efforts focused on developing a clear understanding of the current conditions of I-81, the full complement of options for improving the corridor and the potential impacts of any course of action. The efforts include:

- **The I-81 Corridor Study** assesses and documents the highway's existing conditions and deficiencies, identifies multimodal transportation and community needs and priorities, analyzes potential strategies for the future of the corridor, evaluates such strategies, and recommends strategies for further study.
- **The I-81 Public Participation Program** develops, carries out, and documents the public outreach and involvement effort, and gives residents of the City of Syracuse, as well as Onondaga, Oswego, and Madison County, a mechanism to learn about I-81 and voice their ideas about the I-81 corridor.
- **The I-81 Travel Demand Modeling Effort** is a technical project using computer modeling to forecast and display how future options could affect the regional transportation network.
- **Syracuse Transit System Analysis** documents and evaluates the regional transit system operated by the Central New York Regional Transportation Authority (CENTRO) and identifies various transit strategies to address, enhance, and promote transit use throughout the region.

A set of goals and objectives were developed in accordance with input from the community as well as information about the highway's existing conditions and the region's transportation needs. This input and information was also used to develop a wide range of options for the future of I-81 that have since been further refined through a combination of technical analysis and continued public involvement.

The results led to the determination that Rehabilitation is a feasible strategy for the outer segments of I-81, but not for the viaduct priority. Therefore, four “build” strategies were explored for the viaduct priority area: Reconstruction, Tunnel, Depressed Highway, and Boulevard. The Reconstruction and Boulevard strategies were presented at the 2013 Public Meeting as the most feasible strategies for the viaduct priority area. The outer segments include 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 has been 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 next phase of the project will be the formal environmental review process, led by the NYSDOT, which will lead to a project or number of projects that can be implemented.

The SMTC and the NYSDOT designed a public participation program that has ensured all interested persons, organizations, and agencies an opportunity to be involved in *The I-81 Challenge*. The public participation program has included public workshops, public meetings, focus groups, an interactive web site, social media, questionnaires, educational and informational materials, and other events.

1.2 Purpose of this White Paper

This third White Paper describes and synthesizes findings from *The I-81 Challenge* Public Participation Program from the Fall of 2011 through the Fall of 2013. This White Paper follows White Papers #1 and #2, published respectively in May 2009 and Fall 2011.

The purpose of White Paper #1⁴ was to document the initial intent and framework for *The I-81 Challenge* public participation effort. It describes the challenge, an initial set of public participation objectives, the geographic context of the effort, and finally, discusses the preliminary stakeholder categories identified at the start of the public involvement process.

The purpose of White Paper #2⁵ was to document the Public Participation Program findings from the inception of *The I-81 Challenge* through the Fall of 2011. Its format is similar to this White Paper in that it details the public outreach that had occurred during that period of time, describes the progress made towards achieving the seven public participation objectives, described below, and synthesizes key findings that had been gathered from public input.

2 - Public Outreach Efforts

Throughout *The I-81 Challenge*, the SMTC and the NYSDOT have continued to employ a wide range of community involvement techniques to facilitate public involvement in this important

⁴ Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council. (May 2009) *The I-81 Challenge* White Paper #1.

⁵ Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council. (December 2011) *The I-81 Challenge* White Paper #2.

regional decision-making process. Community input has helped guide the development of project goals and objectives as well potential strategies for the future of I-81. Additionally, public involvement has played a role in reducing the broad range of *possible* strategies to a small number of *feasible* strategies, which can be refined and analyzed in further detail during the formal environmental process.

2.1 Educational and Informational Materials

One of the key challenges in this effort has been to ensure that the public receives accurate, timely, and sufficient information to engage in a productive dialogue and make informed opinions about the future of I-81. Much of this information is technical in nature and has required significant effort to transform it into visuals and a narrative that can be easily understood by the general public.

This material has been transmitted to the public through a variety of media, including the project web site⁶, a project blog⁷, *The I-81 Challenge* Facebook page⁸, and an updated set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). Additionally, any published material that resulted from efforts made prior to the Fall of 2011 has remained accessible to the public via the Resources section of *The I-81 Challenge* web site. This includes educational videos, newsletters, and fact sheets, all of which are described in detail in White Paper #2⁹.

2.1.1 Project Web site

The SMTC has maintained a project-specific web site (www.thei81challenge.org) since late 2008. In January of 2011, a revised and rebranded web site was launched that includes information on *The I-81 Challenge* process, project updates, public participation opportunities and project contact information. Additionally, all past and present project documents, including newsletters and fact sheets, study reports, maps, and video series, can be downloaded from the web site's "Resources" page¹⁰. The web site is updated on a regular basis and provides links to the project's Facebook page¹¹ and blog¹².

The web site's traffic has been monitored on a monthly basis through the use of Google Analytics, which is a service that generates detailed statistics about a web site's traffic and traffic sources. This data has provided the SMTC with the ability to measure quantifiable information, such as the number of people who have viewed the web site (absolute unique visitors), and the number of times the web site has been visited (visits). This information

⁶ <http://thei81challenge.org/>

⁷ <http://thei81challengeblog.org/>

⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/thei81challenge>

⁹ Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council. (December 2011) *The I-81 Challenge* White Paper #2.

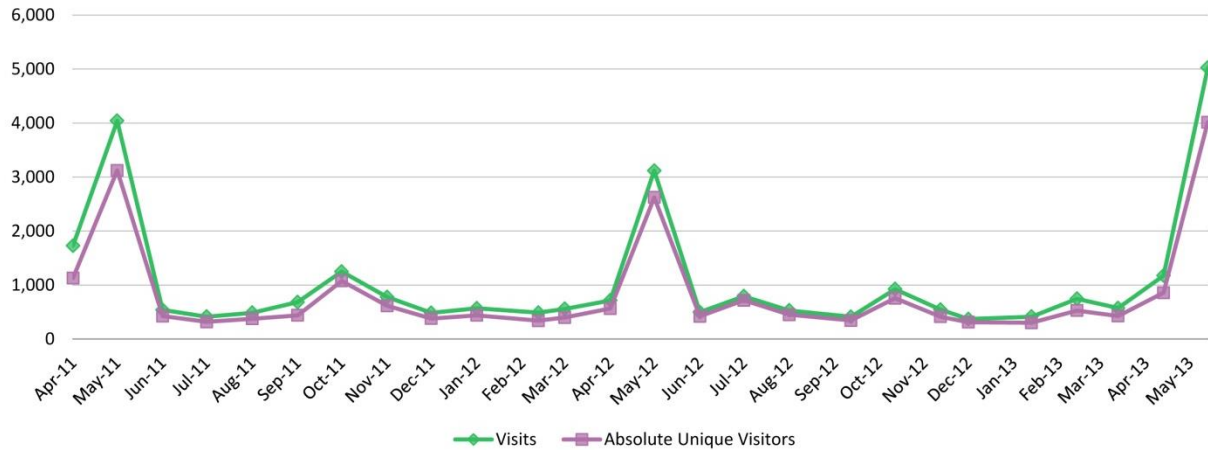
¹⁰ <http://thei81challenge.org/Home/MenuContent/Resources>

¹¹ <https://www.facebook.com/thei81challenge>

¹² <http://thei81challengeblog.org/>

illustrates the web site's effectiveness as a tool for both education and public participation, which is highlighted in the line graph below.

Figure 1: Project web site traffic (April 2011 – May 2013)



The graph shows that the web site has consistently attracted a steady level of traffic over the majority of the period of time since monitoring began in April of 2011. It is likely that most of this traffic were people seeking information about the project.

This steady flow is interrupted by peaks of extremely high volumes of traffic during the months surrounding the dates that large public events were held. A portion of those who visited the site during these high traffic periods were doing so in order to participate in a virtual version of the public events, which could be accessed via the project web site. The virtual meeting was an alternative for those who couldn't attend the in-person meeting or needed more time to review material and submit their comments. It is also clear from the line graph that the third public meeting in May 2013 resulted in the highest levels of traffic to the project site thus far.

2.1.2 Social Media

Overall, the primary purpose of *The I-81 Challenge* social media effort is to provide information, and to encourage and direct public participation into any one of the numerous official channels for public input. The effort utilized two main mediums: a project blog¹³ and a Facebook page¹⁴, which were launched in March and April of 2011, respectively.

The SMTC launched the project blog as another way to engage the community and share information about the project. The blog features project information, multi-media content, event announcements, and news items about similar projects from around the country, among other things.

¹³ <http://thei81challengeblog.org/>

¹⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/thei81challenge>

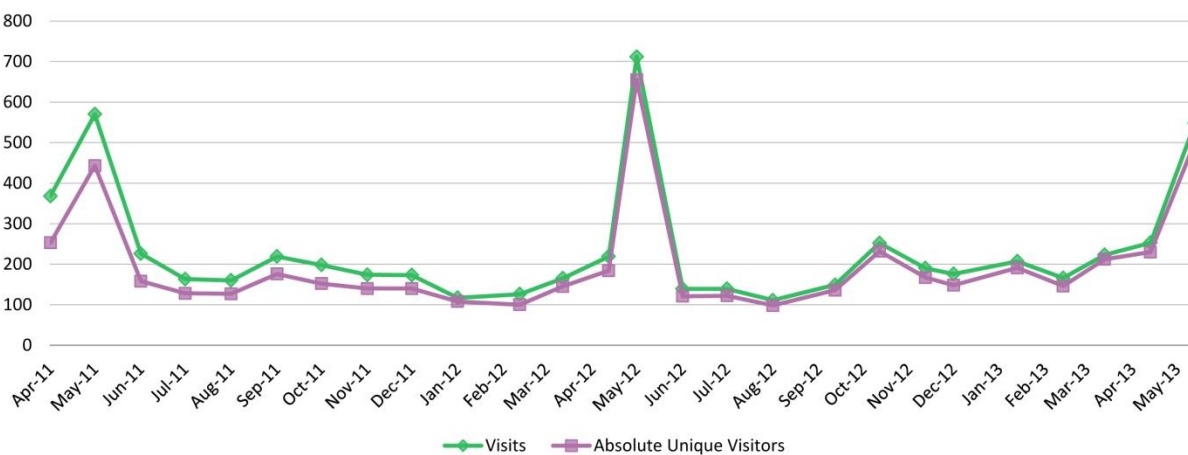
Shortly after the launch of the blog, the SMTC launched *The I-81 Challenge* Facebook page, which is used to advertise meetings, broadcast the release of documents, and provide project updates. The Facebook page utilizes “status updates” to communicate short messages that are sent to all Facebook members who have voluntarily identified themselves as “fans” of the project page. By mid-August, 2013, there were a total of 352 fans of *The I-81 Challenge* Facebook page. The page also features links to all blog posts as the SMTC has maintained an effort to mirror the content posted on both forms of social media to ensure the same information is conveyed through both methods of communication.

Any Facebook user can “like” or “comment” on any of the status updates on the project’s Facebook page, and their “like” or “comment” can be seen by all members of the Facebook community. A “like” is a button a Facebook user can press to indicate their approval or support of a particular post. A user can also “comment” on a post, which allows them to write a specific response, with the stipulation that any offensive language would be removed.

The SMTC has not actively promoted an online conversation through either of these social media efforts. Comments are encouraged through *The I-81 Challenge* web site and through the project’s Contact Us e-mail. Direct commenting on the blog posts is disabled and the project’s Facebook policy is to not respond to followers’ comments.

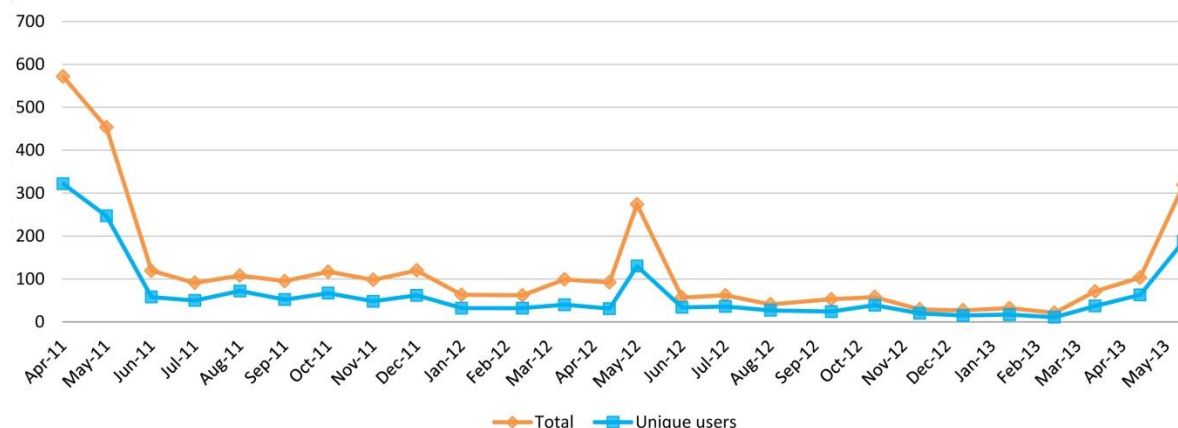
The traffic to the project blog and the Facebook page has also been monitored, either by Google Analytics or Facebook’s specific monitoring mechanisms. The traffic on both sites follows a similar pattern as the traffic to the project web site in that they receive fairly consistent levels of interaction with the exception of the periods of time surrounding the three major public events in May of 2011, 2012, and 2013 when volumes increased substantially.

Figure 2: Project blog traffic (April 2011 – May 2013)



It should be noted that Facebook users receive updates from all pages they are a “fan” of through their personal newsfeed. This reduces the need to go to each page that a user is a fan of on a regular basis, thereby resulting in lower levels of traffic to the Facebook page.

Figure 3: Project Facebook Page traffic (April 2011 – May 2013)



2.1.3 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs): Updates

As the project has progressed, the topics and issues that require the most focus have similarly shifted. As a result, the questions most frequently received by the SMTC and the NYSDOT have also changed and thus, the FAQs were updated accordingly in preparation for both the May 2012 and the May 2013 Public Meetings. The updated questions and answers were published on *The I-81 Challenge* web site’s “About” section and as a downloadable PDF in the “Resources” section prior to both meetings. The FAQs were also displayed on informational boards located at the refreshment areas of both public meetings and distributed within the folders that were handed to all meeting attendees upon their arrival.

2.2 Study Committees

There are three committees involved in *The I-81 Challenge*.

2.2.1 Study Advisory Committee

The Study Advisory Committee (SAC) was established in March 2008. The SAC has met regularly to advise the SMTC on all aspects of the project, including review of key products, identification of key stakeholders, review of presentations, and suggestions for public involvement. The SAC members have also been encouraged to actively participate in outreach events, such as the public meetings.

Three advisory committees were initially established, one each for the Public Participation, the Corridor Study, and the Travel Demand Modeling. However, a decision was quickly made to conduct meetings as one large SAC due to overlapping interests and membership on the three individual project committees.

The organizations represented on the SAC are:

- New York State
 - Transportation
 - Environmental Conservation
 - Empire State Development
- Onondaga County
 - Legislature
 - Physical Services
 - Transportation
- Center State Corporation for Economic Opportunity
- NYS Thruway Authority
- Onondaga Nation
- City of Syracuse
 - Mayor's office
 - Common Council
 - Neighborhood and Business Development
 - Engineering
 - Public Works
 - Planning and Sustainability
- Central NY Regional Planning & Development Board
- Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency
- Federal Highway Administration
- Central NY Regional Transportation Authority (Centro).

White Paper #2¹⁵ lists the SAC meetings held from the beginning of *The I-81 Challenge* up to the May 2011 public workshops. The SAC met three additional times between the May 2011 Public Workshops and the completion of *The I-81 Challenge*. These SAC meetings were held on: November 1, 2011; April 18, 2012; and March 15, 2013.

As of the last meeting in March 2013, there were a total of 34 SAC members. Much of the SAC have consistently shown an eagerness to participate throughout the duration of *The I-81 Challenge* and have provided valuable insight that has been utilized in the development of the project goals and objectives, the public participation program, the technical design, and more.

¹⁵ Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council. (December 2011) *The I-81 Challenge* White Paper #2.

2.2.2 Community Liaison Committee and Municipal Liaison Committee

Early in 2011, the SMTC and the NYSDOT formed two new committees to strengthen communication channels throughout the Syracuse region: the Community Liaison Committee (CLC) and the Municipal Liaison Committee (MLC). The CLC and MLC have played a critical role in *The I-81 Challenge* by:

- disseminating information about *The I-81 Challenge* to their constituents;
- providing input on community concerns;
- ensuring diverse points of view are represented; and
- commenting on materials and methods for public involvement.

2.2.2.1 Community Liaison Committee

The Community Liaison Committee (CLC) was formed in 2011 through an open application process that is described in detail in White Paper #1¹⁶. The CLC initially consisted of 37 organizations. In 2012, Disabled in Action of Greater Syracuse, Inc. became the newest member of the CLC, bringing the total number of involved organizations up to 38. The final CLC membership list includes:

- American Institute of Architects Central New York Chapter (AIA)
- American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA)
- Citizens Campaign for the Environment
- CNY Chapter NY Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
- Concerned Citizens of Maple Drive and Genesee Street
- Disabled in Action of Greater Syracuse, Inc.
- DeWitt Community Club
- East Genesee Regents Association
- ESF Green Campus Initiative
- F.O.C.U.S. Greater Syracuse
- Greater Strathmore Neighborhood Association (GSNA)
- Greater Syracuse Hospitality & Tourism Association
- Greater Syracuse Tenants Network
- GreeningUSA
- Housing Visions Unlimited, Inc.
- Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance (IMA)
- Jubilee Homes of Syracuse, Inc.
- Le Moyne College
- Museum of Science & Technology (MOST)
- New York Motor Truck Association
- New York Upstate Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA)

¹⁶ Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council. (May 2009) *The I-81 Challenge* White Paper #1.

- Onondaga Central Schools
- Onondaga Citizens League
- Outer Comstock Neighborhood Association
- Preservation Association of Central New York (PACNY)
- SCORE
- Sierra Club, Iroquois Group
- Southeast University Neighborhood Association (SEUNA)
- Southside Community Coalition, Inc.
- Syracuse Alliance for a New Economy (SANE)
- Syracuse Housing Authority
- Syracuse University
- Syracuse CoE Center for Sustainable Community Solutions
- Temple Concord
- Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today, Area 7 (TNT 7)
- University Neighborhood Preservation Association, Inc. (UNPA)
- Urban Design Center of Syracuse
- Westcott East Neighborhood Association.

The CLC met twice between the May 2011 Public Workshops and the completion of *The I-81 Challenge* (in addition to the initial CLC meeting held in March 2011). These meetings occurred on November 1, 2011, and April 19, 2012.

2.2.2.2 Municipal Liaison Committee

The Municipal Liaison Committee (MLC) consists of representatives of municipalities within the SMTC planning area. All 42 municipalities (towns, villages, City of Syracuse and the Onondaga Nation) within the SMTC's metropolitan planning area were invited to participate; however, attendance was low at each of the MLC meetings held. Over the course of *The I-81 Challenge*, representatives from the following towns participated in one or more of the MLC meetings:

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| • Village of Fayetteville | • City of Syracuse |
| • Village of Liverpool | • Town of Sullivan |
| • Town of Van Buren | • Town of DeWitt |
| • Town of Skaneateles. | |

The MLC met twice over the course of *The I-81 Challenge*: an initial meeting in March 2011 and one additional meeting in April 2012.

2.3 Public Meetings

Three large-scale public events were held over the course of *The I-81 Challenge*. The first set of public workshops, held in May 2011, are described in White Paper #1¹⁷. Since the publication of that White Paper, the SMTC and the NYSDOT hosted the second public meeting on May 9, 2012, and the third and final public meeting on May 21, 2013. The 2012 Public Meeting built upon feedback received during the first series of workshops held in early May 2011, while the 2013 Public Meeting built upon feedback from those workshops as well as the previous year's meeting. Both meetings took place at the Oncenter in downtown Syracuse, with the 2012 Public Meeting from 2:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. and the 2013 Public Meeting from 3:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

2.3.1 Meeting Structure and Goals

While both the 2012 and 2013 Public Meetings differed from the workshops held in 2011 in that the meetings took place on a single day, they were similarly structured because it was held in the same open house format that allowed participants to stop by at any time and stay for as long as they wished. The primary goals of the May 2012 Public Meeting were to:

- Educate the public
- Review materials from the May 2011 Public Workshops
- Present the feedback received in May 2011 and demonstrate how this feedback was developed into initial strategies for I-81
- Present and gather input on the draft strategies for I-81 before the NYSDOT begins further analysis
- Present and gather input on the process for evaluating potential future strategies
- Present and gather input on long-term improvements to the regional transit system
- Explain next steps, including the environmental review process.

The primary goals of May 2013 Public Meeting were to:

- Review materials and public feedback from the previous meetings
- View conceptual renderings 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.

¹⁷ Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council. (May 2009) *The I-81 Challenge* White Paper #1.

2.3.2 Outreach in Preparation of and During the Public Meetings

Publicity for both the May 2012 and May 2013 Public Meetings was multi-faceted and included:

- Meeting flyers distributed by various means including: within SMTC's agency newsletter, direct mailing to over 3,800 recipients in 2012 and to over 4,300 recipients in 2013, in local coffee shops and libraries, and through a variety of community organizations
 - Flyers were also e-mailed to community groups and over 1,200 recipients in the I-81 stakeholder list for the both the 2012 and 2013 Public Meeting
- Placards on Centro buses
- Promotion via the project's web site, blog, and Facebook page
- Press releases
- Interviews with local print, radio, and television media (2012 only)
- Paid advertising on TV, radio, and in print
- Variable message signs on I-81, I-690, and in the Viaduct area.

To maximize promotion of, and outreach for the public meeting, much of the printed promotional material included pertinent information in both Spanish and Vietnamese.

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) for both public meetings. 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. It began on the days of each meeting (May 9, 2012 and May 21, 2013) and continued for several weeks after each of the meetings.

The meetings featured stations with informational boards, interactive exercises, and educational videos. Eight stations were showcased during the 2012 Public Meeting and six were displayed in 2013. Each station was staffed with 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, a study newsletter, and a guide to the public meeting. Spanish and American Sign Language interpreters were available on-site, while on-call interpreters for other languages were available. No attendees asked to use the available interpretation services.

2.3.3 Public Participation and Input

In 2012, over 480 people participated in the in-person public meeting, and over 250 people participated online. Meeting attendance and participation increased in 2013 with over 700 people at the in-person public meeting and 334 people online.

Public input was gathered at four stations (Station 3: Your visions, Station 4: Possible future strategies, Station 5: Our transit system, and Station 6: Evaluating future options) at the 2012 Public Meeting, and at Station 4: Possible future strategies and Station 5: Our transit system at the 2013 Public Meeting.

A synthesis of the key findings was compiled from each station's feedback for both public meetings. Each synthesis is summarized in 'Section 4 – Synthesis of Key Findings' of this White Paper, and a more detailed description can be found within the meetings' Summary Reports. These Summary Reports also provide an in-depth summary of the station content. A complete compilation of all the information boards and of the comments and input that were received can be found in the Summary Report appendices, which can also be downloaded off the project web site.

2.3.4 Meeting Evaluation

All of the public meetings included a meeting evaluation form at the final station. There were 184 evaluations submitted at the 2012 Public Meeting and 221 evaluations submitted at the 2013 Public Meeting. Similar to the 2011 Public Workshops, participants of both the 2012 and 2013 Public Meetings expressed an overwhelmingly positive opinion of the meetings through the meeting evaluation forms. The evaluation forms revealed that attendees felt both meetings were well-organized, accessible, and informative, and that they provided meaningful opportunities for input. Many attendees also stated that the staff members at each station were friendly and knowledgeable. Attendees appreciated the magnitude of information presented at the meeting, but noted that it was difficult to absorb everything at one time. For this reason, meeting attendees at the 2013 Public Meeting were especially grateful to learn about the Virtual Meeting.

While most of the 405 total evaluations submitted at the 2012 and 2013 Public Meetings expressed appreciation for the ongoing opportunities to be involved in *The I-81 Challenge* decision-making process, some stated dissatisfaction with various issues. At the 2012 Public Meeting, some attendees expressed frustration with the pace of the effort, stating that they would like to see the study progress more quickly and be given the opportunity to review and comment on more detailed information about the strategies.

Attendees of both the 2012 and 2013 Public Meetings reiterated a concern from the 2011 Public Workshops about how the public input would actually be used as the project continued to progress. Additionally, several meeting attendees in 2013 expressed a degree of skepticism regarding the process and a perception that the future of I-81 had already been decided. There will be a continued emphasis on transparency and public involvement in the next phase of the I-81 process.

2.4 Limited English Proficiency Outreach and Environmental Justice

2.4.1 Limited English Proficiency Outreach

The Limited English Proficiency (LEP) plan for *The I-81 Challenge* was developed based on guidance from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), FHWA and NYSDOT and was subsequently approved by the NYSDOT's Engineering Division and the Office of Civil Rights in December 2010. The LEP plan is included in the White Paper #2's Appendices¹⁸.

Throughout *The I-81 Challenge*, the SMTC maintained a voice mailbox with a basic greeting in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. SMTC staff members receive an email when a message is left in this mailbox. Staff can then alert the translation/interpretation contractor to the message for retrieval and response. One call was received on this line (prior to the May 2011 workshops), but the caller did not leave a message. No additional calls were received throughout the course of the study.

The following LEP tasks occurred in preparation for, during, and/or after both the May 2012 and May 2013 Public Meetings:

- Two Spanish and two American Sign Language interpreters were available at the public meetings (no attendees at either meeting utilized these services).
- Flyers advertising each of the public meetings included a note printed in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese about the availability of language assistance (with the phone number for the voice mailbox mentioned above).
- A language line was established at both public meetings and staffed by NYSDOT. A sign at the welcome table indicated that translation was available in a variety of languages. An attendee could point to their language and then use the available phone to call a translator, who could then provide instant translation between staff and the non-English speaking attendee. No attendees used this service.
- Numerous flyers were provided to the Spanish Action League prior to each public meeting.

2.4.2 Environmental Justice

In compliance with federal policy, the SMTC completes an Environmental Justice Report on a regular basis. The SMTC also considers environmental justice issues in the development of its overarching Public Involvement Plan. These documents can be found on the SMTC's web site www.smtcmpo.org. Additionally, an environmental justice analysis was performed as part of the I-81 Corridor Study Technical Memorandum #1, completed by the NYSDOT.

¹⁸ Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council. (December 2011) *The I-81 Challenge* White Paper #2.

2.5 Other Outreach

2.5.1 Small Group Community Meetings

Throughout *The I-81 Challenge*, the SMTC has responded to over 20 requests for staff to attend small community group meetings. The SMTC initially conducted these community group meetings similar to the Focus Group meetings held at the beginning of the study, with a presentation by staff followed by a facilitated discussion. The community group meetings conducted between December 2009 and September 2011 are documented in White Paper #2¹⁹, along with the feedback received at these meetings.

Following this early effort to reach out through existing community groups, the SMTC staff continued to attend community meetings upon request through the course of *The I-81 Challenge*; however, the SMTC decided to scale-back the presentations and allow for general question and answer periods rather than facilitated discussion in order to devote staff resources to other tasks over the remainder of the study.

The community group meetings that SMTC staff attended between November 2011 and May 2013 are listed below:

- Central New York Engineering Expo (November 2011 and November 2012, Liverpool)
- New York State Association of Transportation Engineers (May 2012, Syracuse)
- Syracuse 20/20 Board (June 2012, Syracuse)
- Institute of Transportation Engineers – New York Upstate (October 2012, Syracuse)
- New York Upstate American Society of Landscape Architects (October 2012, Syracuse)
- Planning and Economic Development Committee of the Onondaga County Legislature (April 2013, Syracuse).

In addition to the meetings listed above, the SMTC and the NYSDOT staff also presented information about *The I-81 Challenge* at a public meeting in Liverpool on May 1, 2013. This meeting was hosted by the Town of Salina, Town of Cicero, and the Chairperson of the SMTC's Policy Committee and was attended by over 100 people.

2.5.2 Onondaga Nation

Throughout this study, the SMTC and the NYSDOT have reached out to the Onondaga Nation to encourage their participation. The initial SAC invitation was sent to both the Chief and a member of the Onondaga Nation. There was no response to this initial mailing. Subsequent SAC meeting announcements were mailed to the General Counsel and the Secretary of the Onondaga Nation. Additionally, in March 2010, the SMTC mailed a letter to the Chief of the

¹⁹ Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council. (December 2011) *The I-81 Challenge* White Paper #2.

Onondaga Nation asking for the Nation's involvement in the process and the SMTC included all study materials created to date. There was no response to any of this additional outreach.

3 - Progress Towards Achieving Public Participation Objectives

The first White Paper for *The I-81 Challenge* identified seven public participation objectives, along with proposed metrics for each goal. This section of White Paper #3 describes the progress made towards achieving these objectives through the work completed to date.

OBJECTIVE 1: *To engage diverse stakeholders, from those most approximate physically to the highway to those in the greater region who may be affected by changes.*

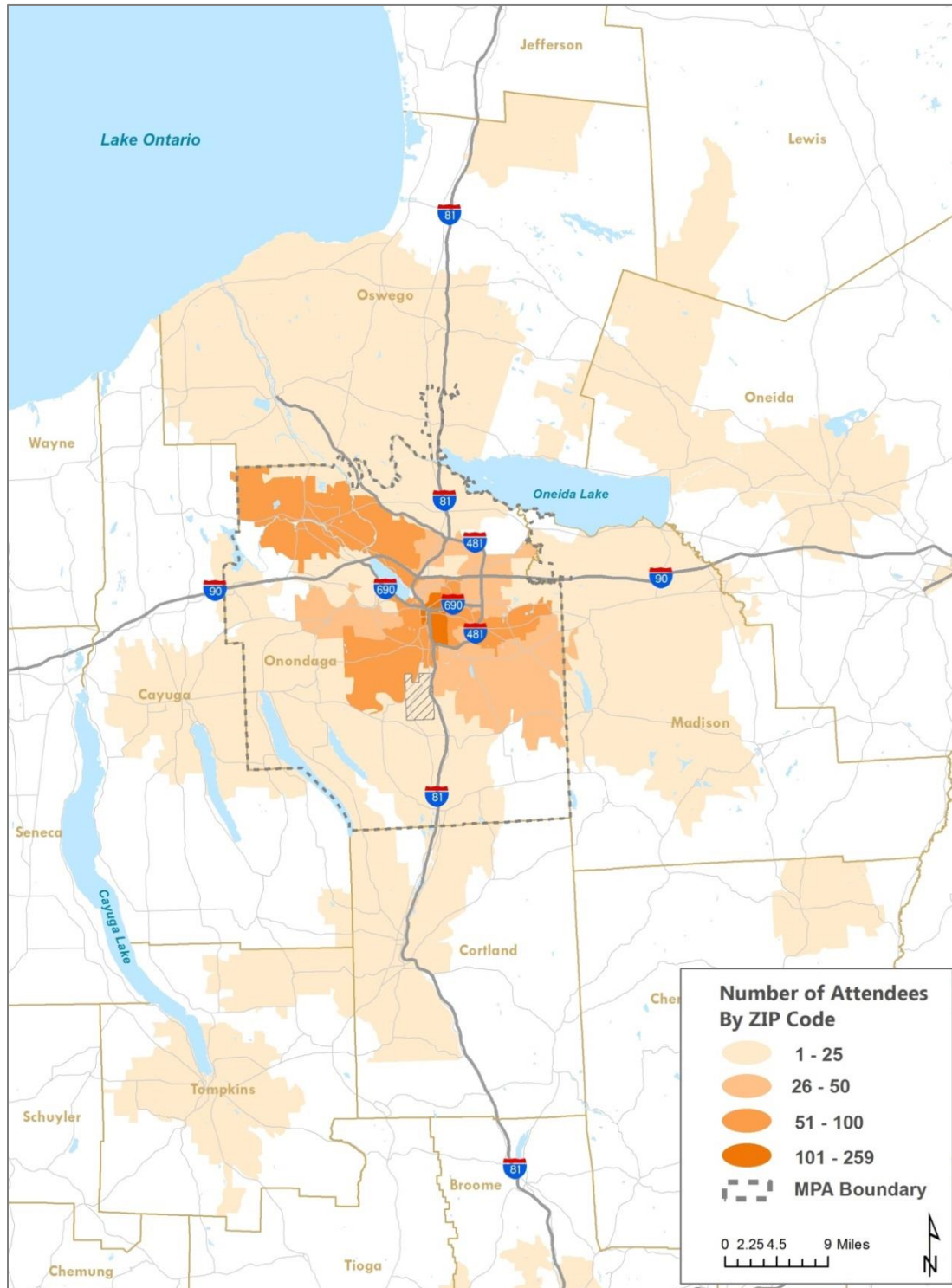
Information about an individual's race, ethnicity, age, income, geography, profession, etc., has not been collected at outreach events for this project. However, the total number of contacts at each of the events can be used as an indicator of diversity, albeit a vague one. To this end, the following statistics are noted:

- Over 2,500 individuals have had contact with *The I-81 Challenge* through correspondence from the SMTC (for example, a focus group invitation), small group meetings (based on sign-in sheets), or by emailing contactus@thei81challenge.org since 2008.
- As of July 2013, there were approximately 1,710 contacts in the distribution list for e-blasts and electronic newsletters.
- Over 480 people attended the May 2012 Public Meeting and over 250 people participated in the online Virtual Meeting.
- Over 700 people attended the May 2013 Public Meeting and 334 people participated in the online Virtual Meeting.

Both the May 2012 and the May 2013 Public Meetings were held at the Oncenter in downtown Syracuse, which is centrally located in the region and accessible via public transit. Additionally, either free (validated) parking in the Oncenter garage or lot, or two single-use transit passes were available at the meetings. The meeting rooms were also accessible to people with disabilities.

Some information about the geographic distribution of participants is available from workshop and meeting sign-in sheets. This information has been mapped and is included with the Public Meeting Summary Reports for both 2012 and 2013 and also in White Paper #2. Figure 4 shows participation across all outreach methods by ZIP code over the entire course of *The I-81 Challenge*.

Figure 4: Total Participation in The I-81 Challenge by ZIP code



Note: This map includes data from Focus Groups, small group community meetings, all three public meetings and virtual meetings, questionnaire, and via emails. 1,894 participants are included in this dataset. ZIP code data were available for another 108 participants, but these could not be mapped (18 out-of-state, 46 in state but outside map extent, 6 errors, 20 P.O. boxes, 14 Syracuse University addresses, and 4 addresses at the Federal Building). Approximately 500 additional participants did not provide a ZIP code.

OBJECTIVE 2: To **utilize multiple means** of reaching out to, communicating with, educating, and receiving input from diverse stakeholders by means and methods that are most appropriate to them. This includes **making relevant technical information understandable to the general public** and decision makers.

Outreach and education

The I-81 Challenge has employed numerous means of outreach. This White Paper details all of these methods, summarized in the list below:

- Documents published (Fall 2011-Fall 2013)
 - *The I-81 Challenge* Spring 2011 Questionnaire Summary (November 2011)
 - Travel Demand Model Documentation (April 2012)
 - May 2012 Public Meeting Summary Report (August 2012)
 - Syracuse Transit System Analysis: Public Survey Results (November 2012)
 - Updated set of FAQs (May 2013)
 - Transit System Analysis Executive Summary (May 2013)
 - I-81 Corridor Study Report (July 2013)
 - Draft Technical Memorandum #2: Strategy Development and Evaluation (July 2013)
 - Draft Technical Memorandum #1: Supplemental Information (July 2013)
 - May 2013 Public Meeting Summary Report (August 2013).
- Events
 - Community meetings
 - SAC Meetings
 - CLC Meetings
 - MLC meetings
 - Public meetings.
- On-going communication
 - Web site, blog, Facebook
 - E-mail blasts.
- Public Relations
 - Media appearances
 - WCNY's "Insight with Jim Aroune" (October, 2012)
 - National Public Radio's "NPR Cities" series (July 2012)
 - News coverage of both the May 2012 and May 2013 Public Meetings throughout the end of April and the majority of May by local print, radio, and online media.

- A variety of advertising methods leading up to May 2012 and 2013 Public Meetings, which are listed in *Section 2.3: Public Meetings*.

All products and publications have been made available for download on the project web site. The FAQs and the previously-published Fact Sheet and Physical Conditions Highlights²⁰ documents were also distributed to attendees at the majority of public outreach events, where copies of additional products and publications were also usually available.

Receiving input

A number of avenues for gathering input have been provided, in addition to the public outreach events previously discussed:

- Phone numbers and addresses for the NYSDOT and the SMTC are included on the fact sheets and other project materials, as well as the web site.
- A project-specific email address (contactus@thei81challenge.org) has been established. This e-mail address forwards to an SMTC staff member.
- Attendees of the May 2012 and May 2013 Public Meetings had the opportunity to review material and submit their comments electronically via the Virtual Meetings.
- As previously discussed in this White Paper, members of the Facebook community can comment on the information posted on the project Facebook site.

Making technical information understandable to the general public

The Corridor Study and the travel demand modeling portions of *The I-81 Challenge* are highly technical and information produced through these two efforts must be made accessible to the general public.

The Corridor Study report was prepared by the NYSDOT as a user-friendly document and was made available to the public on the study web site in 2013.²¹ In addition to this document, the NYSDOT also published Technical Memorandum #2²² in 2013 (the first technical memorandum was published in 2011 and is described in White Paper #2).

The SMTC's Regional Travel Demand Model was used to determine the expected traffic conditions and travel times in 2040 under each strategy. The SMTC recognized the importance of continually educating the public about the use of the travel demand models throughout the process since the results have been one of the main factors in determining each strategy's feasibility. Therefore, both the May 2012 and May 2013 Public Meetings included boards that

²⁰ SMTC and NYSDOT. (March 2011) Highlights from Technical Memorandum #1: Physical Conditions Analysis.

²¹ NYSDOT. (July 2013) The I-81 Corridor Study.

²² NYSDOT. (July 2013). Draft Technical Memorandum #2: Strategy Development and Evaluation.

described the travel demand modeling process and showed some outputs from the current conditions model using graphics and, to the extent possible, non-technical language.

The modeling results were then presented to the public for the first time during the 2013 Public Meeting and the SMTC made a similar effort to ensure the information was presented in as clear a manner as possible. Each strategy's modeling results were grouped together on one board so as to clearly present an indication of the expected traffic conditions and travel times under that strategy. Each board contained a list of the assumptions that were made under that strategy along with a series of maps that clearly illustrated the modeling results. Each board was set up in the same format to allow for easy comparison among the strategies.

OBJECTIVE 3: *To build a shared and enhanced understanding about the history of the highway, ongoing efforts, available options, lessons learned from other communities, and current and future decision-making processes, including the roles and responsibilities of Tribal, federal, state, regional and local governments, community organizations and citizen stakeholders.*

OBJECTIVE 4: *To ensure a cross-fertilization of ideas, interests, and perspectives across geographies and interest groups. The process should ensure that stakeholders do not simply talk "to themselves" about the impacts and options for this regional issue, but engage one another across jurisdictions and interests to consider the issue from a region-wide perspective.*

The SMTC has produced a variety of materials that address the items listed in Objective 3, including the continued availability of the Educational Videos ("The Evolution of Transportation in Syracuse Region" and "Lessons Learned: Case Studies of Urban Freeways") and the Case Study Report, as well as an updated process graphic that is included in documents and presentations.

With regards to both Objectives 3 and 4, the SMTC has distributed information about similar ongoing projects across the nation through the project blog, which were announced via the project Facebook page at the time of publication. This information served to both educate the public about varying phases of the decision-making process and spark conversations about such projects within the Syracuse community.

Additionally, the SMTC has transcribed and published all the public comments that have been received under the Resources section of the project web site. Attendees at the May 2012 and May 2013 Public Meetings had the option to write their feedback on post-it notes that were then posted on display boards during the remainder of the meetings. This allowed the other attendees to build off of or respond to others' comments so they could engage one another about the future of I-81 as well as the SMTC and the NYSDOT.

Attendees of the in-person 2011 Workshops and the 2012 and 2013 Public Meetings were asked to complete a meeting evaluation at the final station. . A total of 178 evaluations were received in 2011, 184 evaluations were received in 2012, and 221 evaluations were received in 2013. Attendees' responses to these evaluations can be used to gauge the progress towards

achieving the shared understanding and cross-fertilization of ideas described in Objectives 3 and 4. Thus, the averaged results of the first two questions over the past three years' public events are shown below.

Table 1: Meeting evaluation results: Questions 1 and 2

	May 2011 Public Workshops	May 2012 Public Meeting	May 2013 Public Meeting
1. I learned something useful about <i>The I-81 Challenge</i> today.	1.76	1.78	1.7
2. I was able to provide meaningful input about <i>The I-81 Challenge</i> today.	2.19	2.4	2.72

1 = Strongly Agree, 6 = Strongly Disagree

OBJECTIVE 5: *To place particular attention, emphasis, and resources on reaching out and communicating with **minority, low-income, and traditionally underserved populations**, including Native American and non-English speaking communities, by using multiple and varied opportunities for these to give input about the issues and concerns related to the future of I-81.*

This objective is addressed through the LEP plan for *The I-81 Challenge*, which is described in Section 2.4: *Limited English Proficiency Outreach and Environmental Justice*.

While the SMTC and the NYSDOT made significant efforts to reach out to the populations described in Objective 5 (for example, meetings with the Syracuse Housing Authority Board, advertising in *The Stand*, free transit passes at public meetings, and translation of key information on public meeting flyers), some attendees of the May 2013 Public Meeting stated within written comments that the outreach efforts were insufficient and more should have been done to reach out specifically to minority and low-income populations. These comments also expressed concern that the concept designs that were presented for the strategies did not take the needs of disadvantaged populations into consideration.

OBJECTIVE 6: *To **gather accurate information about public opinion** regarding issues/impacts, values and alternatives related to the future of I-81.*

As discussed under Objective 2, the SMTC has provided, and continues to provide, multiple avenues for the public to provide input into *The I-81 Challenge* process.

The public has also been specifically asked to provide feedback at both the May 2012 and May 2013 Public Meetings on all the items listed in Objective 6. Furthermore, the content that was presented at both of these meetings was built upon the input that was received at the previous public event.

Attendees at the May 2012 Public Meeting were also asked to fill out a Transit Ridership Survey. The survey results and the overall feedback that was received are discussed in Section 4: Synthesis of Key Findings.

OBJECTIVE 7: To **build trust** among stakeholders and **ensure transparency** about and in the decision-making process.

The SMTC and the NYSDOT have continually published and presented project material about both the potential strategies and the decision-making process as soon as possible and in as clear a manner as possible. Additionally, both the SMTC and the NYSDOT have presented project material at a multitude of community events, as described in Section 2.6.1 of this White Paper, in order to keep the public up to date and to further establish a sense of trust and transparency.

The degree to which this objective has been achieved can be tracked through Question 4 of the Meeting Evaluations answered by attendees of the public events in May of 2011, 2012, and 2013. As previously noted, approximately 200 meeting evaluations were submitted at each event. The results of this question are illustrated in the table below:

Table 2: Meeting evaluation results: Questions 4

	May 2011 Public Workshops	May 2012 Public Meeting	May 2013 Public Meeting
4. I believe that <i>The I-81 Challenge</i> is being structured in a transparent & accessible manner.	1.83	1.71	2.17

1 = Strongly Agree, 6 = Strongly Disagree

It should be noted that the process to progress to a final decision for the future of I-81 will be moving forward. Thus, the decision-making process has received increasingly more attention by both the media and the public, and continues to cause concern among some community members as to how the public input will be considered during the process.

4 - Synthesis of Key Findings

4.1 Screening of initial strategies

During the May 2011 Public Workshops, meeting attendees submitted over a hundred visions for the future of I-81. The process by which these visions were analyzed in order to arrive at five recommended strategies for the Stage 1 screening process was then described in detail at the May 2012 Public Meeting.

The numerous visions were first grouped into six distinct categories – Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, Tunnel/Depressed Highway, Boulevard, Western Bypass, and Relocate I-81 – along with a set of “common concepts” that could be included in any option. Some examples of common concepts included improvement of bicycle and pedestrian connections, and the addition of parks and open space.

Two of these categories, the Western Bypass and Relocate I-81, were “pre-screened” due to concerns that these concepts would not meet the goals and objectives defined for the project. The remaining categories, plus the required “No-build” strategy, were recommended to progress to Stage 1 screening.

Feedback was requested from meeting attendees on the process used for the pre-screening of initial strategies, but only about a dozen comments were received that specifically addressed this. The few comments received were split between those who supported the pre-screening of the Western Bypass and the Relocation options and those that did not. Other comments focused on the optional inclusion of the West Street/railroad arterial component within the Boulevard strategy. These comments were also split between attendees who supported this strategy, while others felt it would have negative impacts on quality of life in Syracuse. A complete compilation of this feedback can be found in the Appendix of the May 2012 Public Meeting Summary Report²³.

4.2 Public feedback on the five strategies to carry forward from May 2012 Public Meeting

Attendees at the May 2012 Public Meeting were presented with details about the five categories of strategies that were recommended to advance through the screening process, described in the previous section of this White Paper. The five categories of strategies were as follows: No-build (as required by State/Federal environmental regulations), Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, Tunnel/Depressed Highway, and Boulevard.

For the No-build strategy, a board detailed the future issues that are anticipated under this scenario. For the remaining strategies, boards in the station provided a definition and explored key characteristics and considerations. The last board in the station presented a series of common concepts which could be incorporated into any strategy.

Meeting attendees provided extensive feedback on the five strategies recommended for Stage 1 screening, with over 400 comments submitted in this part of the public meeting. Although the feedback was highly varied in content and opinion, a few common themes transcended any specific strategy:

²³Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council. (August 2012) *The I-81 Challenge* May 2012 Public Meeting Summary Report.

- Safe, speedy access to key regional destinations is important. This includes the consideration of alternative modes of transportation, such as biking and walking.
- The physical impact of the Viaduct is a key issue – meeting attendees clearly expressed their desire for a more aesthetically pleasing and physically connected downtown environment.
- There is a strong desire for economic development and the revitalization in the downtown area.
- It is essential that any future solution for I-81 be financially responsible and feasible, and avoid negative impacts on the neighborhoods in the vicinity of the Viaduct.

The table below summarizes the primary likes and concerns about each of the strategies recommended for Stage 1 screening. It should be noted that the individual bullets listed represent a relatively small number of actual comments (typically between five and 20 individual comments) and cannot be interpreted as a majority opinion.

Table 3: Public feedback on strategies recommended for Stage 1 screening; May 2012 Public Meeting

<i>Rehabilitation Strategy</i>	
<i>Primary Likes</i>	<i>Primary Concerns</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains ease/speed of travel through Syracuse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money could be better spent on reconstruction of I-81 • Does not address existing quality of life and environmental issues • Limited space to make significant modifications to the design of the highway may result in impacts to neighboring properties • Does not improve bicycle/pedestrian flow or safety under the Viaduct
<i>Reconstruction Strategy</i>	
<i>Primary Likes</i>	<i>Primary Concerns</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could incorporate a more aesthetically pleasing design and improve the appearance of the local area • Could resolve critical safety issues for cars on the highway and for cars and pedestrians below it • Will maintain short travel times and quick access to key destinations while preventing traffic jams on local streets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not address key complaints about the current Viaduct • Potential for significant impacts on adjacent neighborhoods due to widening right-of-way • May result in another structure that will eventually deteriorate and become obsolete • Does not encourage people to stay/visit downtown, which will continue to hurt the local economy

Tunnel/Depressed Highway Strategy	
<i>Primary Likes</i>	<i>Primary Concerns</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminates or reduces the “barrier” effect of the current highway and reconnects downtown neighborhoods • Maintains Interstate highway and traffic flow through Syracuse • Improves the aesthetics of the local area through the removal of the Viaduct and integration of green space • Could improve and promote walkability in downtown 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tunnel would be prohibitively expensive • Depressed highway would create a new barrier that would be more difficult for cars and pedestrians to cross and create accessibility problems for people with disabilities • Significant impacts from the construction of a tunnel/depressed highway • Maintenance issues related to snow removal, flooding/pumping and ventilation • Loss of key access points to downtown if built with few interchanges • A depressed highway would not improve the aesthetics of the local area
Boulevard Strategy	
<i>Primary Likes</i>	<i>Primary Concerns</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimizes both construction and future maintenance costs • Supports economic development, downtown revitalization and quality of life • Improves aesthetics, creates a gateway to the city • Eliminates the barrier created by the Viaduct and restores connectivity between downtown neighborhoods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A boulevard wide enough to handle existing traffic will decrease safety for pedestrians and bicyclists while creating a more significant barrier between downtown and University Hill than the current Viaduct • Could not handle the necessary traffic resulting in undesirable outcomes for mobility • May have a negative impact on economic development by discouraging people to visit downtown and limiting access to major destinations in Syracuse • May be similar to the current Erie Boulevard which is unsafe and unsightly • May require a larger right-of-way resulting in the use of eminent domain • Negative quality of life impacts

Within the approximately 400 comments submitted in this portion of the public meeting, attendees also provided a number of ideas to be considered in the development of alternatives. Although many of these ideas were specific to one strategy, the following themes emerged that apply to all strategies:

- Improvements in access to downtown and the University Hill area
- Safety improvements
- Enhancements in the viaduct area such as better lighting and more pedestrian amenities
- Changes to the I-81/I-690 interchange to improve safety and connectivity
- New access to I-81 within the city south of downtown.

The full report includes a more in-depth synthesis of these findings along with a transcription of all the received comments. This report, the May 2012 Public Meeting Summary Report²⁴, can be downloaded from the Resources sections on *The I-81 Challenge* web site.

4.3 Goals and Objectives

4.3.1 Evaluation Criteria

Following the May 2011 Public Workshops, a set of draft goals and objectives were developed based on what were identified as the emerging community principles during the project's initial stages. The SMTC and the NYSDOT then reconciled the draft goals and objectives with the additional public input gathered through the workshops to develop draft evaluation criteria.

During the May 2012 Public Meeting, the draft evaluation criteria were presented to the public, who were asked to provide their feedback. A relatively low number of comments, just 21, were received on the evaluation criteria. Of the comments received, public input suggests it is important to consider the following when developing future alternatives:

- Bike and pedestrian improvements
- Economic impacts to businesses located near the I-81/I-90 interchange and Exit 25 (7th North Street)
- Quality of life for current and future residents adjacent to I-81, as opposed to the needs of commuters
- Construction time frame for each alternative
- Seasonal traffic variations (suggestion to use summer traffic counts in the analysis, to include recreational traffic)
- The appropriate method to measure how each option might enhance the connectivity between University Hill and downtown
- The value of easy access from the suburbs to University Hill.

The evaluation criteria were then used to help determine the strategies that were presented during the May 2013 Public Meeting and that will progress from *The I-81 Challenge* into the next stage of planning, design, and environmental review.

4.4 Public response to strategies and assessments presented at 2013 Public Meeting

Attendees of the May 2013 Public Meeting were presented with details about the six strategies that had advanced to strategy development, which were as follows:

²⁴ Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council. (August 2012) *The I-81 Challenge* May 2012 Public Meeting Summary Report.

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

The information that was presented about each strategy illustrated the analysis and consideration that led to the determination as to whether a strategy was feasible. It was determined that the Rehabilitation strategy was more feasible for the outer segments of the corridor, and the Reconstruction and Boulevard strategies were feasible strategies for the viaduct priority area. An in-depth description of the content that was presented can be found in the May 2013 Public Meeting Summary Report²⁵ and more detailed material can be found in The I-81 Corridor Study²⁶ and accompanying technical documents.

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.

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 strategies’ rankings for each of the four columns included in the feasibility assessment matrices, where were as follows: Transportation Assessment, Economic Competitiveness, Social Equity/ Quality of Life, and Environmental Stewardship. 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.

²⁵ Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council. (July 2013) *The I-81 Challenge* May 2013 Public Meeting Summary Report.

²⁶ NYSDOT. (July 2013) *The I-81 Corridor Study*.

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 matrices 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 the 500 comments received in response to the strategies station 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, and provide an indication of the highest priority issues among respondents. The results are not intended to be representative of the general population and are taken from a small sample of respondents.

Table 4: Key Issue Categories

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 who did, the majority agreed with the determination, as presented during the meeting, that these strategies are not feasible for the viaduct priority area.

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.

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 received.

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.

Table 5: Comparison of Feedback to Reconstruction and Boulevard Strategies

	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 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.

Table 6: Feedback to Reconstruction Strategy

Expressed Support for Reconstruction	Expressed Opposition for Reconstruction
<p><u>Traffic flow & accessibility</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain the ease and speed of travel through city, and to key destinations • Maintain access to healthcare for all residents <p><u>Quality of life</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be redesigned as an iconic structure that will be an asset for the city • Could include aesthetically pleasing elements and a community space under the Viaduct <p><u>Safety</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address safety issues for drivers on highway <p><u>Economic</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain vitality of existing businesses <p><u>Environmental</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could include park space and landscaping • Decrease pollution on local streets 	<p><u>Quality of Life</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would not address the barrier effect or improve neighborhood connectivity • Would not address noise concerns <p><u>Multi-modal</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not incorporate a public transportation plan • Would not improve or promote other modes of transportation and would continue to encourage dependency on the car <p><u>Traffic flow & accessibility</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would favor through traffic over local traffic <p><u>Economic</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would not open up new land for development downtown <p><u>Environmental</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Another Viaduct would result in the same amount or increased motor vehicular emissions

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.

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.

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.

Table 7: Feedback to Boulevard Strategy

Expressed support for Boulevard	Expressed Opposition for Boulevard
<p><u>Quality of life</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revitalize and transform Downtown • Improve aesthetics of the local area and create a key attraction/destination. • Create an inviting gateway into the city • Eliminate the Viaduct barrier, and restore unity and connectivity within the city • Reduce noise levels in the surrounding areas <p><u>Economic</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attract residents and improve the city's tax base • Increase Downtown accessibility, encourage Downtown visits, and promote local economy • Open up valuable land for development • Minimize construction and maintenance costs <p><u>Multi-modal</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce auto dependency • Promote development of a public transit system • Foster a more pedestrian and bicyclist-friendly environment <p><u>Traffic flow & accessibility</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not impede traffic flow because existing city streets will absorb car traffic entering Downtown/ University area • Connect to street grid to provide more options for motorists in heavy traffic <p><u>Environmental</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve air quality in the surrounding areas • Create numerous opportunities for the use of green infrastructure and landscaping features 	<p><u>Traffic flow & accessibility</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased travel times, congestion, gridlock, and delays • Increased traffic on I-481 • Inhibit convenient and quick travel to key destinations <p><u>Quality of life</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a new barrier that would divide the city • Create difficulties for people with disabilities <p><u>Safety</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impede accessibility to hospitals for emergency vehicles • Six lane pedestrian crossings would lead to increased accidents <p><u>Economic</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discourage people from visiting Downtown and hurt the local economy • Cut off the suburbs and businesses in the north, thereby negatively affecting the local economy <p><u>Environmental</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the fuel efficiency for cars passing through the city because of stop-and-go traffic • Cause continuous pollution along the boulevard and on surrounding surface streets due to stop-and-go traffic <p><u>Multi-modal</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six lanes create an unfriendly pedestrian environment

- 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.**

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 design 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.

4.4.1 Municipal Response

In May and June of 2013, a number of municipalities in Central New York passed resolutions stating their position on the future of I-81. Although *The I-81 Challenge* has no involvement or opinion on such action, it is another way by which community members are expressing input regarding the potential futures for I-81. Therefore, a list of the county legislatures and town and villages boards that have passed resolutions that state their official position on the future of I-81 in the city of Syracuse is included below. It should be noted that as of August 12, 2013, all resolutions that have been passed by municipalities regarding this issue have requested to maintain the existing alignment of I-81 through Syracuse.

Table 8: Resolutions Passed Regarding I-81 by Governing Entities in Syracuse Region

Governing Entity	Date Passed	Primary Concern
Owasco Town Board	May 9, 2013	Would alter the flow of heavy commercial traffic and increase truck traffic flow through these areas and on the local roads, thereby causing safety and quality of life issues.
Skaneateles Town Board	May 16, 2013	
Sennett Town Board	May 31, 2013	
Fleming Town Board	June 10, 2013	
Board of Trustees of the Village of Aurora	June 18, 2013	
Cayuga County Legislature	June 6, 2013	

Onondaga County Legislature	May 7, 2013	Will compromise the most significant advantages of living in the area (such as the convenience of 20 minute access to key destinations and medical facilities) and inhibit businesses along the corridor, thereby damaging the city and regional economy overall.
Salina Town Board	June 10, 2013	
DeWitt Town Board	June 10, 2013	Will compromise the most significant advantages of living in the area (such as the convenience of 20 minute access to key destinations and medical facilities) and inhibit businesses along the corridor, thereby damaging the city and regional economy overall. Additionally, will increase traffic along Route 481, thereby increasing noise, dust, toxic emission, and atmospheric depositions of pollutions in DeWitt and causing harm to its residents' social welfare and the environment.

4.5 Feedback on transit system analysis

Both the May 2012 and May 2013 Public Meetings included informational boards that explained the role of the transit system analysis in *The I-81 Challenge* and provided information about the existing transit system. Information was then presented on the progress of the transit system analysis before attendees were asked to submit their input and feedback. This feedback 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.

4.5.1 Our transit system: May 2012 Public Meeting and Rider Survey

During the May 2012 Public Meeting, the public was invited to provide input about current needs and potential enhancements to the transit system, and which transit needs were most important. Meeting attendees could comment on information that was presented about the transit system analysis through the use of post-it notes on comment boards or by completing a transit survey that was distributed to all meeting attendees as they left the transit station. Separate rider and non-rider/former rider surveys were distributed. Due to the low number of rider surveys completed at the public meeting, additional surveys were distributed at the CENTRO transit hub on October 11, 2012. In total, 500 surveys were completed, including 174 non-rider/former rider surveys and 326 rider surveys.

The results of the comment boards and survey provided valuable insight into how the public perceives the transit system and what enhancements/improvements may increase transit use. Based on the results of the comment boards and survey, a prioritized list of needs/enhancements that will be carried into the transit system analysis was developed, and is

shown in the table below. A more complete description of the comment board and survey results is available in the Syracuse Transit System Analysis Public Survey Results report.²⁷

Table 9: Transit system analysis: prioritized needs/ enhancements

Priority	Need/Enhancement
1	Reduce transit travel time to be more comparable with vehicles
2	Increase frequency and hours of operation
3	Provide more real-time system information (online, by phone, at bus stops)
4	Provide direct connections between major regional destinations
5	Improve safety and public perception of the transit system
6	Provide more suburban commuter options
7	Improve on-time performance
8	Maintain an affordable fare

Additionally, comments indicated that the majority of respondents were in favor of transit enhancements, such as increased frequency, reduced travel time, and real-time information. While respondents favored Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) (for its flexibility and ease of implementation), and Light Rail Transit (LRT) (for its aesthetic and economic benefits), both were seen as expensive.

Some respondents also expressed concern regarding the feasibility and practicality of large-scale transit enhancements in the Syracuse metropolitan area. In particular, people expressed concern that current land use patterns, suburbanization, convenience of a car, and public perception of the transit system may make it difficult to justify larger scale improvements.

Overall, respondents appeared to be looking for a balanced and practical approach to enhancing the transit system. Additional information about desired service enhancements and amenities, transit needs and concerns, and input about BRT and LRT enhancements from the 2012 Public Meeting can be found in the meeting summary report.²⁸

4.5.2 Our transit system: May 2013 Public Meeting

Over 80 comments were received in response to the Transit Station during the 2013 meeting via the post-it note comments, the general comment forms provided at the meeting, mailed-in responses following the meeting, and the Virtual Meeting.

²⁷ Stantec. (November 2012). Syracuse Transit System Analysis Public Survey Results.

²⁸ Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council. (August 2012) *The I-81 Challenge* May 2012 Public Meeting Summary Report.

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 May 2013 Public Meeting Summary Report²⁹.

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.

Table 10: Support and Opposition for Public Transit System

Supported public transit system because:	Opposed public transit system because:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would transform Downtown, the city, and the region • Would reduce traffic along I-81 or a Boulevard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population density is too low to support a significant public transit system • The city and region is too auto dependent and ridership levels would remain low • Could result in steep rise in fares

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.

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

Table 11: Support and Opposition for BRT and LRT

Supported BRT because:	Opposed BRT because:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would be a cost effective solution to implement and to update in the future • Benefit a large area • Create a more livable urban community • Improve traffic flow, reduce congestion, and reduce pollution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Connective Corridor bus system is a failure and wastes resources
Supported LRT because:	Opposed LRT because:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create easy access to key city points, including late night service • Increases safety through the prevention of late night driving • Create a more livable urban community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expensive and difficult to implement and to update over time due to necessary infrastructure and limited right of ways • The population is too small and too auto dependent to support the system • Historically unsuccessful • Does not benefit many areas, such as the northern suburbs

²⁹ Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council. (July 2013) *The I-81 Challenge* May 2013 Public Meeting Summary Report.

5 – Conclusion of *The I-81 Challenge* and 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 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 will see additional opportunities for public participation and input in the future.