



Welcome (Back) to *The I-81 Challenge!*

You have probably read or heard that portions of I-81, particularly the elevated sections of the highway in downtown Syracuse, are nearing the end of their lifespan. Over the coming decades, portions of the highway will need to be replaced, reconstructed, removed or otherwise changed.

The New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) and a Study Advisory Committee (SAC) have begun 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 next several years, this process, known as *The I-81 Challenge*, will advance community discussions about the future of I-81.

Using the community's input, along with information about the highway's existing conditions, a wide range of options for the future of I-81 and a set of goals and objectives will be generated. This broad range of options will be narrowed down to a small number of viable options through a combination of technical analysis and continued public involvement. The viable options will ultimately be refined and analyzed in further detail, and a formal environmental review process will begin. That process will lead to a decision, and to a project or projects that can be implemented. It takes time to make a decision of this importance, and we need the public to stay involved every step of the way. Visit www.theI81challenge.org to find out how you can stay informed of project updates.



Syracuse Metropolitan
Transportation Council



New York State Department
of Transportation

Pieces of *The I-81 Challenge*

The I-81 Challenge is made up of three separate but integrated efforts:

- **Public Participation Program** is the public involvement effort, led by the SMTC, to give the public opportunities to learn about I-81 and play an active part in planning for its future.
- **Corridor Study**, being led by NYSDOT, includes a review of the highway's existing physical conditions, a study of the existing land use, economic, and environmental context and an analysis of potential options (including those suggested by the public) for the corridor's future.
- **Travel Demand Modeling Effort** is a technical project in which the SMTC is using computer simulations to see how different future options for I-81 affect the transportation network.

Be Part of the The I-81 Challenge!

The I-81 Challenge presents our community with an exciting opportunity to rethink the role of this iconic highway in our lives. This is our community, our road and our future. Public input is an essential part of *The I-81 Challenge*.



Explore the Newly Re-designed
www.thei81challenge.org

Check out the website to:

- Learn about the past, present, and future of I-81.
- Complete a questionnaire, submit your feedback and learn about upcoming outreach events.
- Browse recent news and updates about *The I-81 Challenge*.
- Download reports, maps, fact sheets, meeting summaries and other important documents.



Fill out a Questionnaire

Visit www.thei81challenge.org/questionnaire and fill out our new online questionnaire to help us better understand:

- How you use and experience I-81 now.
- How you feel I-81 affects the Syracuse region.
- What you want for the future of I-81.



Visit our Blog:
www.thei81challengeblog.org

Browse project updates, background information, photos, videos and more.



Find us on Facebook

Go to www.facebook.com/thei81challenge to stay informed and updated.

WCNY Spotlight on I-81

The final decisions about I-81 are still years away, but discussions about our future are happening now!

This past fall, local PBS station WCNY aired a three-part *Central Issues* special called "Blueprint: The Rt. 81 Corridor" to explore the past, present and future of I-81. This series was part of Blueprint America - a national initiative designed to shed light on critical infrastructure issues throughout the country.

In the first part of the series, titled "The History," *Central Issues* explored the historical climate surrounding the construction of I-81 and the highway's impact on Syracuse's 15th Ward.

The next episode, "The Plan," looked at the safety and maintenance issues now arising as I-81 nears the end of its lifespan. Transportation planners from the SMTC explained how community members can play a part in shaping the future of I-81.

In the final installment of the program, "The People Speak," two community leaders spoke about their ideas for the future, from "living with the highway" to taking it down and replacing it with a pedestrian-friendly boulevard. The episode explored alternatives from other cities and elaborated on the solutions already being advocated by community groups in the region.



"The Plan" segment of the series addresses safety and maintenance issues on I-81.



"The History" part of the series covers I-81's impact on Syracuse's 15th Ward.

The final decisions about I-81 are still years away, but discussions about our future are happening now. "Blueprint: The Rt. 81 Corridor" is a must see for anyone in the Syracuse region. All three episodes of "Blueprint: The Rt. 81 Corridor" are available on

WCNY's website: www.wcny.org/content/view/282/403/.

Draft NYSDOT Report Highlights the Need for *The I-81 Challenge*

A new NYSDOT report from the I-81 Corridor Study offers an in-depth evaluation of the existing conditions in the 12-mile segment of I-81 from the southern I-481 interchange to the northern I-481 interchange along with the segment of I-690 from the West Street exit to the Teall Avenue exit.

Some of the key findings include:

- 60% of bridges in the study area are “functionally obsolete” meaning that lane widths, load carrying capacity, clearance, or approach roadway alignments do not meet current bridge standards.
- By the year 2050 more than 80% of the bridges in the study corridor will have met or exceeded their expected service life.
- In the past few years there has been little if any growth in traffic volume on I-81, but certain areas along I-690 and I-81 in downtown Syracuse experience congestion during peak periods.
- Average annual daily traffic (AADT) ranges from 43,000 to 99,000 vehicles per day. About 45,000 vehicles per day use the Adams/Harrison exit.
- Accident rates in some sections of I-81 are five times the statewide average for similar roadways.

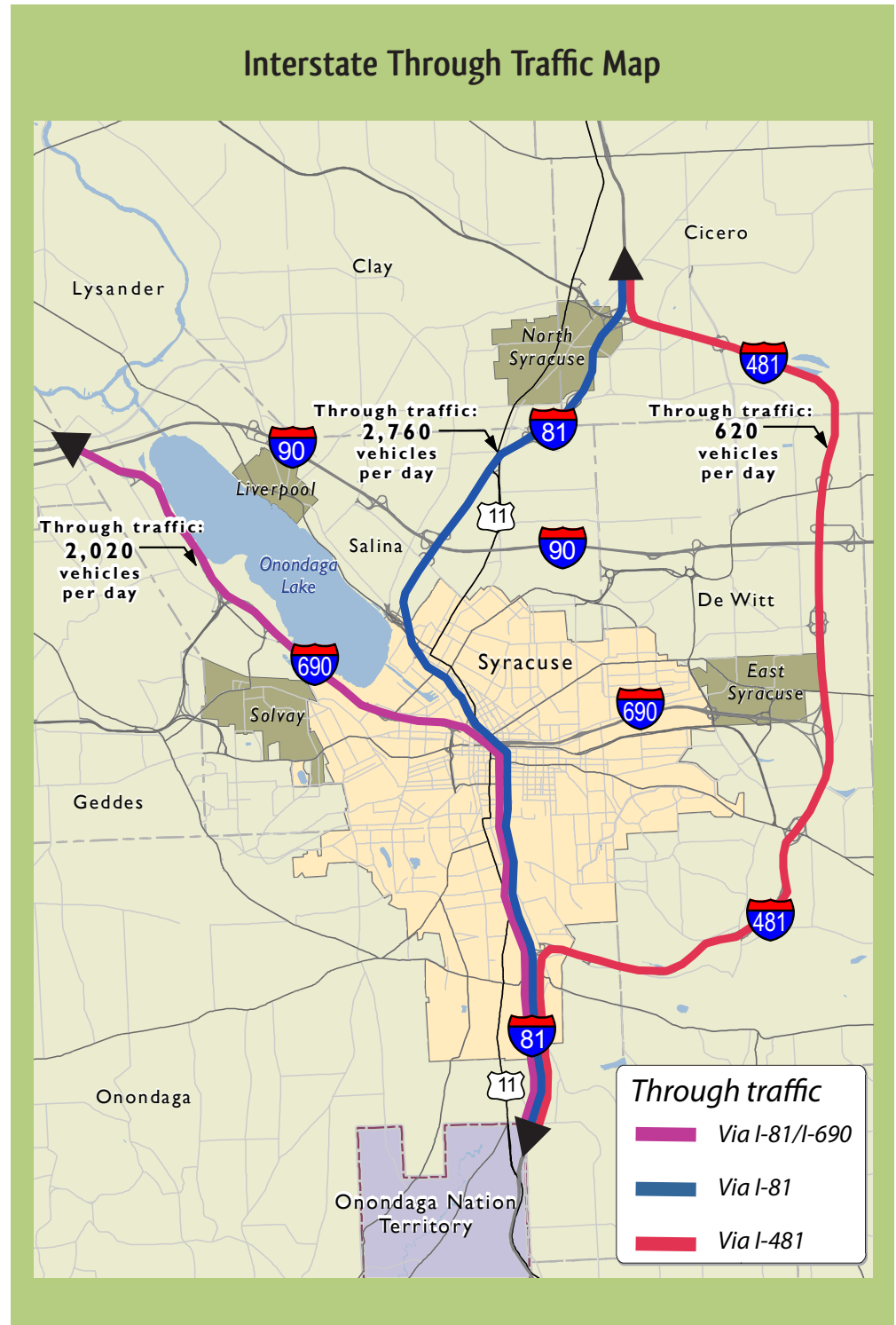
Also included in the report is a detailed analysis of regional interstate traffic highlighting how much of the traffic is passing through our region without stopping on three possible routes: I-81, I-81 to I-90 (Thruway) via I-690, and I-481 (see map to the right). The results of the analysis suggest that

diverting regional traffic to I-481 or other alternative interstate routes will have little impact on traffic volumes or operations on I-81 through downtown Syracuse.

The full report provides a wealth of detailed information, including a

detailed analysis of I-81’s physical conditions, traffic volumes, congestion and accident history. Copies of the full report and an abridged “highlights” document can be downloaded from our website at www.thei81challenge.org/existing.

Interstate Through Traffic Map



New Committees Speak for Community Interests and Needs

Early this year we formed two new committees to strengthen communication channels with communities throughout the Syracuse region.

Our **Community Liaison Committee (CLC)**, organized through an application process, is made up of representatives from local community and religious organizations whose missions cover a wide range of issues including the environment, social justice, local neighborhoods, education, civic engagement, urban design, economic development and housing. The **Municipal Liaison Committee (MLC)** consists of representatives of municipalities within the SMTC planning area. While not decision-making bodies, both the CLC and MLC will play 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.
- Commenting on materials and methods for public involvement.

Visit www.theI81challenge.org to download a full list of CLC participants.

Focus Groups Highlight Emerging Community Principles

Between the fall of 2009 and the spring of 2010, the SMTC and NYSDOT held 23 focus group meetings with more than 175 community stakeholders.

The focus groups were designed as a starting point for *The I-81 Challenge* and included a sample of representatives from existing agencies and organizations throughout the Syracuse region. The meetings yielded valuable information about emerging community principles and values that will be considered as we develop future options for I-81. Focus group participants told us that any future option for I-81 should:

- Enhance economic opportunity for downtown, the city and the region.
- Enhance public safety.
- Ensure region-wide mobility.
- Fit within a regional vision for land use and economic development.
- Preserve or enhance environmental health.
- Preserve or enhance social fabric and community vitality.
- Share burdens and benefits.

What do you think of these emerging community principles? Is anything missing? Help us refine this list by participating in ***The I-81 Challenge Public Workshops on May 3, 4, & 7, 2011.*** See page 5 for more details.



Focus group meetings were held between Fall 2009 - Spring 2010.



The focus group meetings yielded valuable information about emerging community principles and values.

Join us for the first public workshops of *The I-81 Challenge* Open house format. Drop in any time on any day:

Day 1: Tuesday, May 3 from 4 pm - 8 pm

Day 2: Wednesday, May 4 from 4 pm - 8 pm

Day 3: Saturday, May 7 from 9 am - 12 pm

Location:

Oncenter Ballroom (lower level)
800 South State St.
Syracuse, NY

Drop in any time that is convenient for you.
All workshops will feature the same material.

The SMTC will be hosting the first set of public workshops for *The I-81 Challenge* on May 3, 4 and 7 at the Oncenter in downtown Syracuse. The same information will be presented each day, so drop in anytime and stay as long as you like between 4pm and 8pm on May 3 and May 4 or between 9am and 12pm on May 7.

We'll have interactive stations for you to explore the history of I-81 and the state of the highway today, share your thoughts and vision for the future, and be part of the process for determining how we decide what options make sense for our region.

Free parking will be provided.

More Information

Do you need language assistance?

Sign language and Spanish interpreters will be available at each workshop. Other interpreters will be available upon request. Please call *The I-81 Challenge* at **315-944-2014** (you must dial the area code) to request an interpreter. Include your name, phone number, and meeting you plan on attending. Requests must be received by April 15, 2011.

¿Habla usted español?

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

Quý vị có nói tiếng Việt không?

Sẽ có thông dịch viên người Việt theo yêu cầu. Xin gọi số **315-944-2014** (quý vị phải quay số khu vực) và để lại lời nhắn yêu cầu thông dịch viên. Xin bao gồm luôn cả tên, số điện thoại và ngày tham gia chương trình hội thảo của quý vị mà quý vị định tham gia. Các yêu cầu xin thông dịch viên phải được nhận trước ngày 15 tháng Tư, 2011.

Take the bus!

The Oncenter is accessible by transit. Most of CENTRO's bus routes pass within a short walk of the meeting location. Contact CENTRO at **315-442-3400** or www.centro.org for more information.

Participate online

If you can't attend our meetings in person, you can still participate. Visit www.thei81challenge.org/virtual to participate in our virtual workshop - available 24/7 starting May 3.



Discover the History of I-81 and Highway Projects in Other Cities

SMTC is producing a two-part video series about I-81.

One of the best ways to prepare for a meaningful dialogue about the future of I-81 is to inform yourself about the issues surrounding this project. To help on this front, SMTC is producing a two-part video series about I-81.

The History of I-81

The first video explores the historical context for the region's transportation infrastructure. The transportation system we know today was influenced by the location of the canals and railways of the past. Like many American cities, Syracuse's infrastructure development was also impacted by national legislation and highway building trends. This presentation helps you understand the past so that we can set the groundwork for a future that fits our needs.

Urban Freeway Case Studies

The second video presents case studies from other cities that have tackled similar infrastructure challenges. You can learn about the following outcomes from other cities:

- Reconstructing a highway in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
- Burying a highway in Boston, Massachusetts.
- Depressing a highway in Cincinnati, Ohio.
- Relocating a highway in Providence, Rhode Island.
- Removing a highway in San Francisco, California.

Learning about these projects can inform you about *The I-81 Challenge* and help us explore the costs and benefits of various future options together.

We hope you'll enjoy learning more about *The I-81 Challenge*. You can view the presentations at www.thei81challenge.org/edseries.



Watch the I-81 video series to learn how the canals and railways of the past impacted our modern transportation system.



The case study video series covers several projects including Boston's "Big Dig."



The case study series also features a highway depression project in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Things You Should Know?

Is the viaduct safe?

The viaduct is safe. The NYSDOT inspects and maintains the 124 bridge spans that make up the viaduct on a regular basis. However, all of these bridges are nearly 50 years old. The time and cost associated with maintaining them in safe condition is growing. A more comprehensive solution for dealing with the aging viaduct must be found.

Has a decision about I-81 already been made?

Although many people have ideas about the future of the highway, no decision has been made about I-81. All options for the future of the highway are currently on the table. *The I-81 Challenge*, is designed to inform the public about the highway and the I-81 planning effort, as well as to gather public input. This public input will be used to help identify the range of options that will eventually be analyzed. Options will be narrowed down during later stages of the project development process.

Why are you planning for I-81 now?

I-81 was built in Onondaga County in the 1950s and 1960s. This means that portions of I-81 are nearing the end of their intended lifespan. In particular, it is the deteriorating condition of the 1.4-mile elevated section of the interstate in the City of Syracuse (the viaduct) that is the primary motivation for studying the future of I-81 at this time. It will take years to reach a decision about the future of the highway so it is important to start the process now.



The bridges in the aging I-81 viaduct are nearly 50 years old.

How will my input really be used?

As a community member, you can impact this process in several important ways. First, you can educate yourself about the highway and the process by regularly visiting www.theI81challenge.org, signing up for our mailing list, and participating in public involvement opportunities as they arise. (See “Be Part of *The I-81 Challenge*” on page 2.) Your input will help guide the development of options for the future of the highway. Just as importantly, your input will help inform the criteria that will be used to narrow down potential options for the future of the highway.



Public participation is key in determining the future of I-81.

Is there funding for the I-81 solution?

The only funding available for I-81 right now is for planning (see “The Pieces of *The I-81 Challenge* on page 1). There is no funding for the design, removal, construction or reconstruction of I-81 at this time. Securing adequate capital funding requires a preferred option (or a short list of preferred options) and the development of a financial plan, which are several years away.

How much is the eventual I-81 project going to cost and who is going to pay for it?

Currently, there is no identified solution, or set of solutions, for addressing the long-term future of I-81. Therefore, no valid cost projections can be made nor can we determine through what mechanisms the project will be financed. In addition, we do not know now what specific funding programs will be available by the time a decision is made. Usually, transportation projects of this size are paid for with some combination of federal and state funding. Under current highway funding programs, the federal government typically pays 80% of project costs, and state or local entities are responsible for the remaining share.

See a full list of FAQs on the web at:
www.theI81challenge.org/faqs.

This is an exciting time for our region.

Together, we are taking the first steps toward developing a vision for I-81 through the Syracuse region. Although many people have ideas about the future of the highway, no decision has been made. All options for the future of the highway are currently on the table. In the coming months we want to hear from you – how do you use I-81, how does it impact your life, what do you think about its future?

We, the citizens of the Syracuse region, have an unprecedented opportunity: a chance to reevaluate the needs and desires of those who use I-81 and live or work in the area, to formulate a vision and a plan that will best serve our goals for the future. Thus, we are posing a challenge – *The I-81 Challenge* – which is a challenge to you and a challenge to ourselves, a challenge to think big and think outside the box; a challenge to think about the ways that we, both as individuals and as a community, interact with our surroundings and what we need from our transportation system.

The challenge is big and the solutions are neither simple nor readily evident. This process is about and for you, so let us know

what you think. Take our challenge and get involved now when we are in the early stages of this process. Help us identify the range of options that will be evaluated over the course of this effort by talking with us at our public events, engaging with us through our blog or Facebook page, participating in our questionnaires and surveys and learning the facts through our newsletters, educational videos and website.

We look forward to hearing from you in the coming months!



Public participation is an integral part of The I-81 Challenge.

Sincerely,

James D'Agostino

*Director,
Syracuse Metropolitan
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Carl F. Ford, P.E.

*Regional Director,
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THE METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION



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