THE I-81 CHALLENGE

The I-81 Challenge May 2011 Public Workshops Summary Report

October 2011

Prepared for:

The Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SYNOPSIS

In fall 2009, the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) and the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) launched *The I-81 Challenge* – the official decision-making process for determining the future of I-81 in the greater Syracuse region. Recognizing the need and critical importance of public participation in the process, the SMTC and the NYSDOT hosted the first series of public workshops for *The I-81 Challenge* at the Oncenter in downtown Syracuse in early May 2011. This document summarizes the findings and input from those workshops.

Methodology and meeting format

The public workshops took place from 4 pm to 8 pm on Tuesday, May 3 and Wednesday, May 4 and from 9 am to 12 noon on Saturday, May 7. Each day featured identical format and content including board stations, interactive exercises, educational videos and breakout groups. The workshops were held in an open house format, and participants were invited to drop in at any time and stay for as long as they wished.

The primary goals of the public workshops were to:

- Educate the public about *The I-81 Challenge* and the process for reaching a decision
- Present the results of the existing physical conditions analysis
- Gather input on deficiencies and needs in the study area
- Refine the goals and objectives developed through previous public involvement efforts
- Gather input about future visions for I-81 through the Syracuse region

Publicity for the workshops was multi-faceted and included:

Advertisements at street kiosks were one of the many tools used to publicize the workshops.

- E-mail notification to the SMTC's general and project-specific stakeholder lists
- Promotion via the project's website, blog, and Facebook page
- Print and on-line advertising through the area's local newspaper
- Distribution of flyers to public and parochial schools in Syracuse, coffee shops, community centers/organizations, churches/religious institutions, grocery/convenience stores, libraries, neighborhood watch/neighborhood organizations, non-profit organizations and area shopping centers
- Postcards on Centro buses and mailed to interested parties
- Informational advertisements in street kiosks in downtown Syracuse and a local shopping center
- Variable message signs on I-81, I-690, and in the viaduct area
- Interviews with local print, radio, and television media

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

Additionally, in an effort to broaden opportunities for the public to participate, a simultaneous "virtual workshop" was launched on the project website (www.thei81challenge.org). This online option provided the same material and interactive opportunities as the in-person workshops and was available to the public seven days a week, 24 hours a day starting on May 3 and continuing for several weeks after the May 7 workshop.

The workshops were organized into a series of stations for sharing and gathering information. This document is a summary of the content of these stations, as well as the feedback from the public obtained through interactive exercises. Each station was staffed with project team members with relevant expertise. Attendees were provided introductory materials at the registration area to enhance their participation in the workshop including a map of the stations, Frequently Asked Questions, a study newsletter, and an informational brochure about the SMTC. Spanish and American Sign Language interpreters were available on site and on-call interpreters for other languages were available through a phone provided in the Oncenter atrium. No attendees used the available interpretation services.

Nearly 700 people participated in the workshops over the three days at the Oncenter, and over 200 people participated online. A complete account of all comments and input received can be found in the appendices of this summary.

Deficiencies and needs

The first major topic that the study team asked participants to respond to was the existing deficiencies and current and future needs for the corridor. The deficiencies and needs that attendees identified within the study area generally coincided with safety, congestion, and design problems already identified through NYSDOT's ongoing analysis of the roadway system. The map below shows the safety, congestion and design deficiencies presented at the workshops and an overlay of attendee input, noted with yellow dots. The size of the dot roughly corresponds to the frequency with which attendees identified the issue (larger dots indicate more comments).

Major deficiencies noted by the attendees were:

- The need for a connection from I-81 S to I-690 W and I-690 E to I-81 N
- Congestion and safety concerns through the current I-690/I-81 interchange
- Dangerous merges and ramps
- Traffic congestion on local streets and the viaduct
- Bike and pedestrian access and safety concerns under the viaduct
- Local access to downtown Syracuse from I-81

Safety, design, and congestion deficiencies with an overlay of needs identified at the public workshops

Desired outcomes

Participants were asked to describe their experiences with the highway and to present their desired outcomes for its future, to assist the project team in defining goals and objectives to guide the selection of the preferred alternative. Participants identified the highway as both a painful part of Syracuse's past and an important historical and personal landmark. Many positive comments about the highway's role in Syracuse centered on its functionality and enhancement of regional mobility – it provides access to key destinations and has allowed Syracuse to be a true "20-minute city". Many expressed concern that any future option that might remove the highway would have detrimental impacts on the transportation network, mobility, desirability and economic competitiveness of the Syracuse region. Participants also identified a long list of problems with the current highway, including geometric deficiencies that negatively impact safety, the physical and psychological barrier the highway creates, particularly the viaduct section, the promotion of a car-centric culture, and the lack of aesthetic and design appeal.

Through several stations at the workshops, participants presented a diverse array of ideas, concerns, and goals for the future of I-81. Participant ideas sometimes conflicted, and in many cases people

presented completely different solutions for the same problem. Despite the diversity of individual responses, the input gathered at the workshops does reveal a set of common desired outcomes. The list below is a synthesis of feedback provided by participants in response to the presented case studies of other cities as well as the draft study goals and objectives presented at the workshop. These desired outcomes are accompanied by supportive strategies also suggested by workshop participants. Where applicable, the desired outcomes articulated by workshop participants are phrased here in similar language to the draft goals and objectives also presented at the workshops.

Desired outcomes	Supportive strategies
Improve the visual built environment	• Integrate public art and murals into final project • Add visual amenities such as landscaping • Remove the "barrier" effect of the highway • Create a signature project for the city • Make the space near/under the highway lighter and more open • Repave local streets
Enhance Region-Wide Mobility	• Maintain the function of the Interstate highway • Maintain current travel times and access to key destinations • Minimize congestion and delay on regional highways • Ensure quick access to local hospitals • Keep traffic off of local streets • Enhance the connectivity of the local street network • Synchronize lights on local streets • Build a bypass around the western side of Syracuse • Keep transportation costs low
Improve Public Safety	• Fix geometric deficiencies • Install new and better lighting • Increase traffic enforcement • Enhance bicycle and pedestrian safety on local streets
Support Community Quality of Life	• Create livable, walkable communities • Incorporate complete streets concept, and public spaces into designs • Reconnect neighborhoods
Find Solutions that are "Outside the Box"	• Make a significant improvement over the existing condition
Maintain or Improve Economic Opportunities	• Promote local businesses and encourage new infill development • Encourage people to visit downtown • Encourage population growth/high density development in Syracuse
Enhance the Transportation Network	• Expand transit services and options • Enhance transit usage • Encourage more biking and walking • Provide amenities such as paths, trails, benches, green space, and improved lighting • Initiate a bike sharing program

	• Educate the public about transit • Provide driver training on bicycle and pedestrian awareness
Exercise Fiscal Responsibility	• Consider both current construction and future maintenance costs • Ensure any project is appropriately scaled for the Syracuse region • Look for smaller more cost effective changes first • Minimize the financial burden on current and future residents of the region
Ensure Proper Maintenance and Operation of the Transportation System	• Consider flooding and snow removal issues • Fix potholes • Reduce the use of salt in winter
Preserve Neighborhoods and Homes Throughout the Region	• Minimize disruptions to local communities – including the use eminent domain • Protect and enhance public housing • Ensure communities are involved in the entire planning process
Preserve or Enhance Environmental Health	• Lower gas consumption • Reduced noise and air pollution • Incorporation of green space • Pollution monitoring • Use "green" design technologies • Promote conservation • Discourage suburban sprawl
Ensure Quick Access to Area Hospitals	• Dedicated access routes

Visions for the future of I-81

Participants were asked to present their visions for the future of I-81 through words and drawings.

Participants were then asked to present their visions for the future of I-81 through words and drawings. Though the specifics varied significantly, the visions attendees developed for the future of the corridor generally fell into three major categories:

- **Rebuild the viaduct** while addressing some of the fundamental flaws in the current design. The primary goals of these visions were to keep commuting times low, minimize traffic congestion, and provide a cost-effective solution.
- **Remove the viaduct** and replace it with an urban boulevard or other thoroughfare integrated into the local street network. The primary goals here were to reintegrate downtown Syracuse with its surrounding neighborhoods, improve aesthetics, promote alternative modes of transportation, and lower long-term maintenance costs.

- **Replace the viaduct** with a below grade highway – either in a tunnel or open trench – which would serve to reconnect the city, improve aesthetics, and maintain the mobility and accessibility offered by the Interstate highway.

The common elements of these visions are provided below, as well as concerns identified by participants about these different approaches.

Vision: Rebuild the viaduct

Intended outcome	Key concepts and ideas
Increase capacity and improve traffic flow	• Add new general use or HOV lanes • Improve highway signage • Improve curve radii through the I-690 Interchange
Improve regional accessibility	• Create a full interchange at I-81 and I-690 • Add new on-ramps and off-ramps on I-690 to serve downtown • Streamline complex interchanges • Create a western bypass around Syracuse • Keep the interstate through downtown
Improve safety	• Longer on-ramps/merges • Straighten sharp curves
Mitigate negative impacts	• Incorporate sound dampening materials • Add design elements such as public art to improve overall appearance • Improve the experience under the viaduct by making it lighter and more open and incorporating parks and public use spaces

Concerns about this vision:

- Does nothing to remove the barrier created by the highway
- Maintains a car-centric approach
- Misses an opportunity to do something new and unique in the city
- Negative impacts on neighborhoods and properties in order to fix geometric deficiencies

Vision: Remove the viaduct

Intended outcome	Key concepts and ideas
Eliminate the barrier created by the highway	• Remove the I-81 viaduct through downtown • Reroute I-81 along a different alignment • Replace I-81 with an urban boulevard
Maintain or improve regional accessibility	• Ensure access to key destinations such as the hospitals, Syracuse University, and downtown • Add exits on I-81 and I-690 for local access • Expand the I-81/I-690 interchange to a full interchange • Create a western bypass around Syracuse
Maintain or improve local accessibility	• Reconnect the street grid • Optimize traffic flow through downtown • Upgrade major streets to urban boulevards
Adaptive reuse of viaduct infrastructure	• Create a central elevated greenway • Reuse for recreational space, including bicycle and walking paths

Concerns about this vision:

- The ability of a boulevard to accommodate the traffic volume on I-81
- Increased traffic congestion and longer travel times
- Negative impacts on other highways in the region
- The impact on adjacent neighborhoods and properties
- Would still act as a barrier

Vision: Replace the viaduct

Intended outcome	Key concepts and ideas
Eliminate the barrier created by the highway	• Routing I-81 through a downtown tunnel • Put I-81 below grade in an open trench
Maintain or improve regional accessibility	• High speed express lanes on I-481 • Create a western bypass around Syracuse
Maintain or improve local accessibility	• Limited number of entrances and exits
Enhance the surrounding area	• Raising the level of the surrounding streets and sidewalks • Incorporating attractive landscaping • Building tree-lined walking paths over the highway

Concerns about this vision:

- Too expensive
- Complicated access to downtown
- Higher maintenance costs
- Flooding and snow removal

In addition to these three visions, many workshop attendees provided ideas and suggestions regarding alternative modes of transportation and land use changes that could potentially become part of any future option for I-81.

Transit, bicycle and pedestrian improvements

Common Elements	Concepts
Improve current transit service	• Covered bus shelters • Real-time bus information • Better ADA accessibility • Transit signal priority • Dedicated bus lanes • Shuttle buses along major routes • Provide convenient access to Amtrak • Educate people about public transportation • Develop a park-and-ride system
Implement new transit service	• Light rail service serving key downtown and suburban destinations • Bus rapid transit along major thoroughfares • Reinstate regional rail service
Improve bicycle and pedestrian accessibility	• Pedestrian overpasses over major thoroughfares • Improve sidewalks and add benches • Improve street lighting • Add bike lanes • Bike sharing program

Land use changes

Common Elements	Concepts
Promote redevelopment and infill development	• Redevelopment similar to Armory Square • Restoration of historic homes • Developing a “show piece” for the city
Promote sustainable development	• Incorporate green technologies and development practices • Promote commercial urban agriculture • Incorporate parks and other green space

Conclusion and meeting reactions

Through comment sheets and meeting evaluations, workshop participants expressed an overwhelmingly positive opinion of the workshops. Participants felt the event was well organized, informative, and productive, and called for continued focus on public involvement as the project moves forward. Attendees appreciated the magnitude of information presented, but also acknowledged that it was difficult to absorb everything at one time. Many were grateful that workshop resources were also available online, and stated that they planned to use the virtual workshop to review information and

share the experience with others. Several participants were concerned about how all of the public input would actually be used, and many identified strong follow-up as an important next step to the workshops. Overall, the evaluations and comments revealed that members of the public were grateful for the opportunity to learn, discuss, and voice their opinion.

Next steps

Input from the public workshops will be used to finalize *The I-81 Challenge* Goals and Objectives, confirm the deficiencies and needs identified in Technical Memorandum #1: Physical Conditions Analysis, and develop a set of preliminary options for the future of I-81. Through technical analysis and continued public involvement, the project team will refine and narrow these options to a select few that will progress into a formal environmental review process. The public involvement efforts for *The I-81 Challenge* will continue through additional questionnaires, newsletters, website updates, continued use of social media, and future public workshops and open houses

WORKSHOP SUMMARY

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- Promotion via the project's website, blog, and Facebook page
- Print and online advertising through the area's local newspaper
- Distribution of flyers to public and parochial schools in Syracuse, coffee shops, community centers/organizations, churches/religious institutions, grocery/convenience stores, libraries, neighborhood watch/neighborhood organizations, non-profit organizations, and area shopping centers
- Postcards on Centro buses and mailed to interested parties
- Informational advertisements in street kiosks in downtown Syracuse and a local shopping center
- Variable message signs on I-81, I-690, and in the viaduct area
- Interviews with local print, radio, and television media
- Press releases

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

Additionally, in an effort to broaden opportunities for the public to participate, a simultaneous "virtual workshop" was launched on the project website (www.thei81challenge.org). This online option provided the same material and interactive opportunities as the in-person workshops and was available

to the public seven days a week, 24 hours a day starting on May 3 and continuing for several weeks after the May 7 workshop.

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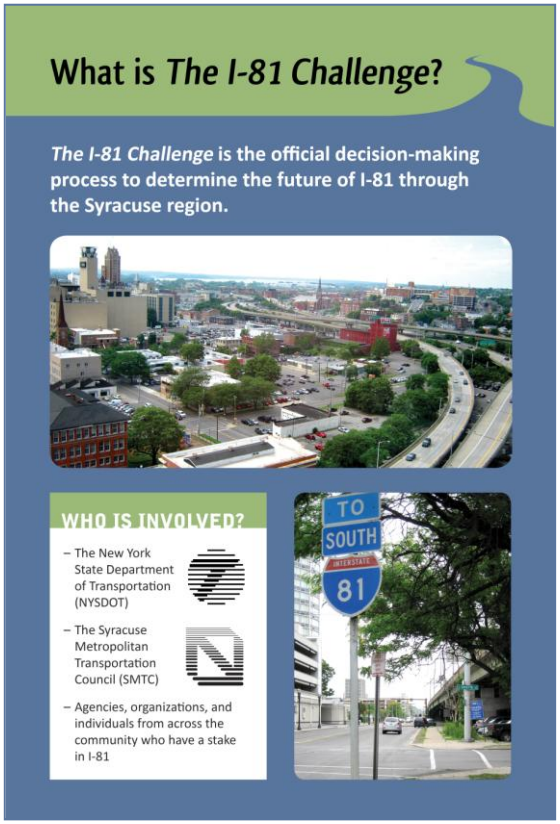
Station 1: *The I-81 Challenge*

The first station provided attendees with general information about *The I-81 Challenge*. Boards at this station first introduced the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) and the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) as the lead collaborating agencies for the project, and then explained why *The I-81 Challenge* is needed. Photos illustrating the aging infrastructure of the I-81 viaduct provided visual evidence that sections of highway are nearing the end of their lifespan.

Establishing a clear understanding of *The I-81 Challenge* decision-making process was a key element of this station. A large image of *The I-81 Challenge* Process Graphic (see Appendix C) provided a visual aid for understanding how The *I-81 Challenge* will lead to a decision. The final board in this station explained the role of various stakeholders in the decision-making process, including NYSDOT, SMTC, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the local transit agency (i.e., Centro), local municipalities, and the public. There was no interactive component to this station.



Boards from Station 1 provided general, introductory information.

Station 2: The history of I-81 and its impact

The second station focused on the history of I-81. The station included a short educational video created by the SMTC and titled "The Evolution of Transportation in the Syracuse Region," which traced the development of the modern transportation system from early horse trails through the construction of

the Erie Canal, railroads, and the interstate highway system. As a complement to the video, the boards in this station contained maps and historic photos to help participants visualize the development of the regional transportation system. Boards also contained information about early interstate highway planning, such as the factors that influenced highway routing during this era. Urban renewal was identified as one such factor which influenced the alignment of I-81 along Almond Street in Syracuse. Finally, the boards presented information and photographs about the construction of I-81, along with a few ideas about how I-81 has impacted residents of the region.

Attendees shared their stories about I-81 on the large story wall at Station 2.

At the end of this station, attendees were invited to share their stories about I-81 and add them to a large "Story Wall." Attendees' stories about I-81 touched on personal memories, current use of the highway, the "costs" the highway imposes on Syracuse, the value it brings, and concerns about the future plans for the highway.

Much of the input received from the public in this station supported the findings from other components of *The I-81 Challenge* outreach process. The highway is used for business and personal travel, it provides convenient access to different parts of the region, but it also acts as a barrier (physical, visual, and perceptual) that divides the City of Syracuse. I-81 touches the lives of almost all of the region's residents, for better and for worse, through driving on it, walking under it, living or working near it, seeing it, or remembering the impact of its construction. Everyone that provided feedback at this station indicated that I-81 had some impact on his or her life.

Memories

Attendees' memories focused on travel before and after the highway was built, the impact of its construction on neighborhoods and the city, and what the highway has meant for people. Some of these memories are included below:

- I was born and raised in a suburb of Buffalo, NY. I first encountered I-81 as I traveled back and forth to SUNY Delhi in the mid-1970s. To reach Syracuse meant we were half way home. Yet I was always drawn to the beauty of the hills south of this city. Eventually I chose to make Central New York my home.
- I remember the protests and court battles by people in the 15th Ward trying to save not only their neighborhood, but also the strong Italian culture that bonded them together. The city and the Governor succeeded in demolishing and dividing the [city] in half to make way for I-81. Your narrative points out that since the project was completed, there have been several important buildings added to that area. It fails to say that those buildings were not part of the original plans for the 15th Ward. Only the right-of-way for I-81 was the center of the construction plan. Those new buildings existed only in wishful drawings at City Hall. There was no funding available for any of those buildings in 1963-1966.
- When the plans for I-81 were proposed, we were told that this would be a "boon" to the city, because Syracuse would be the only city in the path of the road that would have exits allowing easy access to the Syracuse business district. No other city, Watertown, Binghamton etc. would have such an advantage. This was the "way of the future" for Syracuse; the end to all our problems.
- When I was 12 my family moved to Syracuse around 1964. My dad worked on I-81. He would drive us down to see the piles and piles of debris that used to be people's homes. At the time,

Salina Street and Warren Street had stores like K-mart, Grants, Woolworths, Dey Brothers and many more retail. After they opened I-81 the city of Syracuse became a virtual ghost town for retail.

- I remember driving down Pulaski to Little York for my family reunion where I was young, 12 or 13 years old. My aunt and uncle "oohed" and "aahed" about how much easier the trip became.
- I remember living in Syracuse before I-81 was built. It is so much easier to get through the city now.
- My earliest memories of I-81 were seeing the blinking lights of Syracuse as we crested the hill by the Onondaga Nation returning from some hockey game/tournament down south. It was a nice feeling, knowing we were just about home. A nice view.

Use of I-81

Many attendees also noted their primary use of I-81 which included:

- Daily commuting and work-related travel
- Access to key destinations such as the Carrier Dome, the airport, regional markets, hospitals, malls, and churches
- Long-distance travel
- Travel to school
- Visiting family and friends

Value of I-81

Some of the key benefits attendees felt I-81 brings to Syracuse were:

- Quick, direct, easy, and convenient access to key local and long-distance destinations. This was seen as benefiting both travelers and the economy of Syracuse
- Nice views of the city that help create a sense of identity
- Providing a convenient reference point/point of east-west demarcation in the city

"Costs" associated with I-81

In addition to the value the interstate brings to the city, attendees also noted its costs including:

- Acting as a barrier separating neighborhoods from downtown and preventing the expansion of downtown
- Detracting from the overall walkability and bikeability of the city
- Undermining the core of the city by destroying the city's cohesiveness, encouraging suburban sprawl, and encouraging the decline of downtown retail
- Detracting from the quality of life – from aesthetics to noise and air pollution.

Concerns about the future of I-81

Many attendees also expressed concerns they had about the future of the highway including:

- If the viaduct is removed:
    - Lack of a viable alternative for efficient north-south travel
    - Congestion and the ability of the local street network to absorb traffic
    - Access to medical facilities for emergency vehicles
    - Increased travel times and distances increasing fuel consumption and discouraging businesses and people from locating in Syracuse
    - Major improvements that would be needed to I-481 interchanges as well as additional new interchanges on I-81 north and south of the city
    - Fixing and cleaning up newly "opened" areas of the city
    - Impacts on senior housing on Almond and Burt Streets

- If I-81 is rerouted:
    - Impacts on other neighborhoods/communities
    - For any future option, balancing the needs of:
        - Residents
        - Commuters
        - Minorities
        - Younger generations

Station 3: Deficiencies and needs

Station 3 provided attendees with information about the current transportation system through informational boards and an interactive exercise. The boards presented traffic volumes, highway and bridge conditions, and traffic, safety, and design deficiencies in the corridor drawn from the NYSDOT's Technical Memorandum #1: Physical Conditions Analysis. Each informational board was followed by an interactive question board, challenging participants to test their knowledge of conditions in the corridor. Before leaving the station, attendees had the opportunity to share their own ideas about deficiencies on I-81 by writing down any issues they felt needed to be addressed and then placing their notes in the appropriate location on a large map of the I-81 corridor.

Safety, design, and congestion deficiencies with an overlay of needs identified at the public workshops

The deficiencies and needs that attendees identified within the study area generally coincided with safety, congestion, and design problems identified through technical analysis. The map at right shows the safety, congestion and design deficiencies presented at the workshops and an overlay of attendee input, noted with yellow dots. The size of the dot roughly corresponds to the frequency with which attendees identified the issue (larger dots indicate more comments).

The deficiencies and needs identified by attendees at this and other stations, including locations and specific issues, are summarized in the following chart.

Specific locations

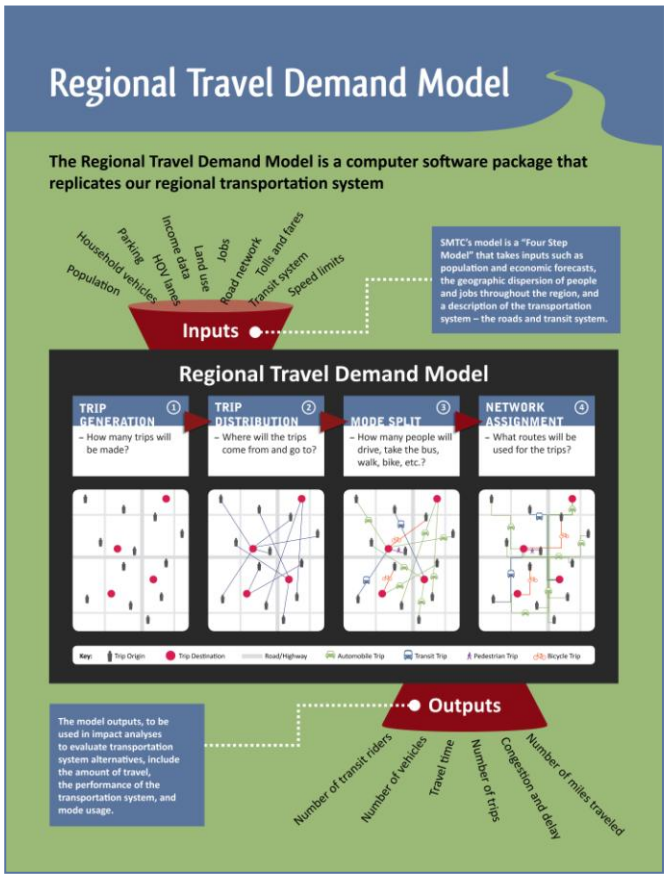
Locations	Comments
I-81 at Bear Street	• Substandard ramps • Difficult and dangerous merge
I-81 at Butternut Street	• Difficult merge • Dangerous near the on-ramps • Sharp curves between Butternut and I-690
I-81 Interchange with I-690	• Dangerous • Congested • Needs better signage • People do not yield when entering the freeway • I-690W to I-81S has a left-hand exit and entrance • Narrow/short merge lanes • Hard to understand and use • Need full interchange – connection from I-81S to I-690W and from I-690E to I-81N
I-81N at Harrison Street	• Weaving traffic • Dangerous • Congested
I-81 at Adams Street	• Need two-lane exit from I-81N • Ramp to I-81S is not clearly marked and dangerous
I-81N Interchange with I-481N	• Dangerous • Needs to be improved
I-81 at Bear Road	• Inefficient access to I-81 from Route 11: requires a merge first on to I-481
I-81 at Brighton Avenue	• Difficult access • Easy to get lost • I-81N on ramp area makes biking difficult between Dewitt/Lafayette and Syracuse
I-481 at E. Genesee Street	• Poorly designed • Unable to handle additional traffic
I-81 at Spencer Street	• Too narrow • Right up against retaining wall • Dip in the road gets icy in winter
Fayette Street and Townsend Street intersection	• Major accident area
Almond Street and Genesee Street intersection	• Dangerous traffic light often ignored by turning traffic (westbound to southbound)
Salina Street	• Difficult to access when there is an accident on I-81
Teall Ave. entrance to I-690W	• Need better signal timing
West Street	• Congested • Not a good option to access downtown
Pearl Street entrance to I-81	• Causes traffic problem in North Side when ramp is closed • Too many changed intersections and short lights

Non-specific locations and general issues

Issues	Comments
Additional exits on I-81	• Add an exit between Adams and Carousel Mall • Add an exit between Brighton and Adams • Lack of exits discourages people from entering downtown
Congestion on the viaduct	• Needs to be wider • Too much traffic • Poorly serves Hill traffic
Downtown	• Signal coordination needed
Bike/Ped issues under the viaduct	• Hazardous • Sidewalks need better maintenance in winter • Noisy/smelly • Need better crosswalks, sidewalks, lighting • Barrier for people with disabilities • Seely and Midler intersection – need pedestrian light • Erie Boulevard – need to incorporate bicycle/pedestrian accommodations
Southwest bypass	• Need western connection of I-481
Speed	• Police need to enforce speed limits • Excessive speed makes merging/lane changing difficult
Bike/Ped concerns	• Need to give bike riders a way to cross highways to commute to Syracuse • Connect the Connective corridor • Connect Cicero and Salina • Need pedestrian amenities such as benches, sidewalks, better lighting
Transit concerns	• Need to preserve rail system through the city and promote more passenger connections from Syracuse to other areas

Station 4: Understanding how traffic operates

This station provided basic information about traffic modeling and its role in transportation planning. An informational graphic helped participants understand how a regional travel demand model works to predict overall transportation demand throughout a system. The station also included information about microsimulation models, which allow planners and engineers to understand detailed operational aspects of a transportation system. Microsimulation models focus on the behavior and interaction of individual vehicles and demonstrate how traffic flows on a segment of highway, around a sharp curve, or through an intersection or interchange. These models help planners understand such things as how, why, and where congestion occurs as well as the operational impacts of specific changes to the transportation system. As an example of a microsimulation model, a looping video showed a six-minute VisSim model of the existing conditions during morning and evening peak travel time along the I-81 viaduct.



Boards in this station educated attendees about traffic modeling and its role in transportation planning.

The station was meant as a purely informational station with no interactive exercise for the participants. Observations of the number of people who stopped to watch the video and asked questions indicated that this station succeeded in giving participants a clearer understanding of how traffic moves along I-81. For many, this station was a first-time experience with the "bigger picture" of how traffic on I-81 operates within an entire highway network and how traffic movements on I-81 have impacts on other portions of the highway network and local street grid.

Station 5: The transportation – land use relationship

This station began with a video explaining the complex relationship between transportation investments and land use impacts. Informational boards explored the growth of American cities, the transportation/land use cycle, regional transportation and land use challenges, and opportunities for positive change in the future. Detailed information about population, employment, and current and future land use highlighted significant trends in the region. The boards also displayed maps of cultural resources, environmental resources, and noise and air quality sensitive receptors.

There was no formal interactive exercise at this station; however, a few attendees did offer the following comments:

- Eight lots per acre in rural areas does not make sense for the Syracuse region
- Any discussion of the future of I-81 must include consideration of regional commuting patterns in addition to commuting to the City of Syracuse
- Smart land use is constrained by "home rule" governance
    - People make decisions about development that are not well thought out
    - Results in sprawling suburbs and auto dependant populations
- Backroom real estate deals permeate Central New York
- A cohesive land use and development plan is needed to shape where people go and live
    - This is essential for consideration of where we build, rebuild, or tear down our freeways
- Carbon emissions data may be skewed by the location of the reader under the viaduct. This may make comparison with other locations difficult.

Since there were so few comments, it is not possible to draw any conclusions about future land use visions from this station.

Station 6: Case Studies of Urban Freeways

The sixth station examined case studies from cities that have faced challenges comparable to that of the Syracuse region and the I-81 corridor. The station included an educational video created by the SMTC and titled "Lessons Learned: Case Studies from Urban Freeways." Informational boards provided a summary of five case studies, all of which were highlighted in the video and presented in the SMTC's previous report, Case Studies of Urban Freeways for *The I-81 Challenge*. Each of the case studies presented at the station represented one of the five outcomes for urban highway projects found in the case studies report: reconstruct, bury, depress, relocate, and remove. Attendees were asked to write down what they liked and did not like about the case studies highlighted on the boards. The comments were written on post-it notes and placed in the space provided beside each case study board.

Attendees shared what they liked and did not like about the case studies highlighted on the boards.

Despite the fundamental differences between the outcomes of the case studies, several important themes emerged from attendees' comments that reflect overall values and desires for the future of the Syracuse region. Attendees indicated a desire to:

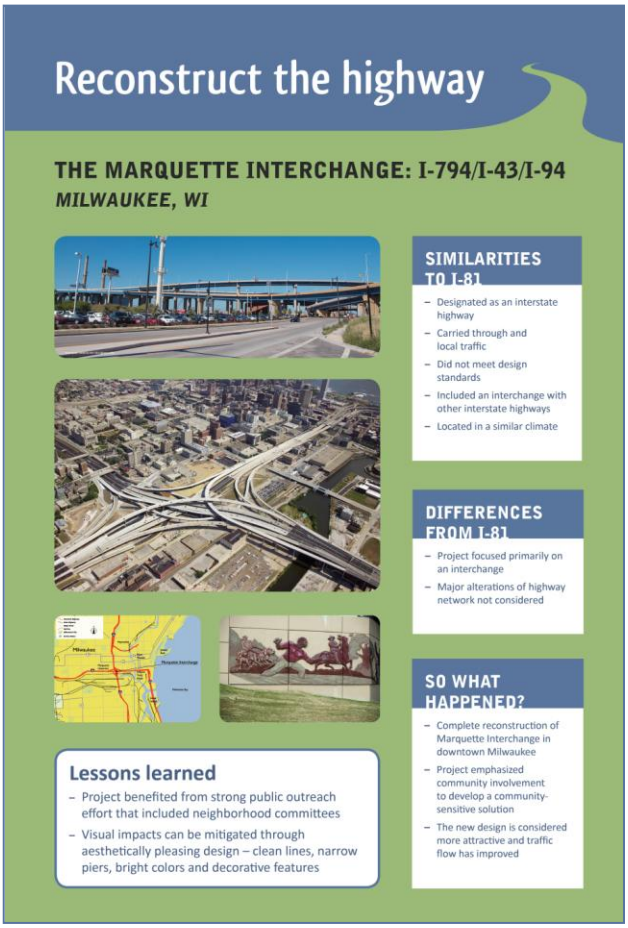
- Improve the aesthetics and design of both infrastructure and surrounding areas
- Maintain or enhance mobility, access, and connectivity
- Improve safety
- Improve the quality of life for the region's residents
- Find solutions that are "outside the box"
- Promote economic development at the neighborhood, city, and regional level
- Support alternative modes of transportation

- Make effective use of limited financial resources and minimize the fiscal burden on current and future residents
- Ensure proper maintenance and operation on the transportation system
- Preserve neighborhoods and homes throughout the region

An overview of each case study and the feedback received for each example are provided below.

Reconstruct the highway: The Marquette Interchange in Milwaukee, WI

This project in downtown Milwaukee involved the complete reconstruction of the Marquette Interchange at the junction I-94, I-794, and I-43. The project focused on redesigning the existing interchange to improve roadway conditions, make the interchange more visually appealing, and improve pedestrian safety at the ground level. The new design is considered more attractive, and traffic flow has improved.



Case Study boards highlighted specific projects and explored how they might apply to Syracuse and I-81.

Key aspects that attendees **liked** about this case study were:

- Aesthetics and design – Many felt the improvements to the Marquette Interchange made the highway look better and noted that the incorporation of public art and other visual amenities into I-81 would be an improvement for Syracuse. These visual changes would make I-81 less of a "barrier" and improve the space near and under the highway.
- Traffic operations – A key benefit many saw from this case study was that it maintained the function of the interstate. For Syracuse, attendees felt this option would maintain current travel times, help traffic flow, keep traffic off local streets, and provide quick access to the hospital and Syracuse University.
- Safety – Attendees also liked the safety aspect of this case study and felt that if applied to Syracuse, it would improve many of the unsafe conditions with the current highway configuration and improve safety for cyclists and pedestrians under the viaduct.
- Other "likes" about this case study included:
    - Cost-effectiveness
    - Less disruptive to local communities
    - Inclusion of significant public involvement
    - Positive impacts on fuel consumption

Key aspects that attendees **disliked** about this case study were:

- Maintenance of the status quo – Some felt this case study did not involve new ideas or major alterations to the existing highway and, if applied to Syracuse, would not address the major underlying problem of I-81 as a barrier. Additionally, it was seen as maintaining an overall emphasis on car travel at the expense of improvements for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Aesthetics and design – For some, the highway was still seen as unattractive and unappealing. For Syracuse, some attendees felt this would leave I-81 as a blight on downtown, as an intrusion into the Syracuse skyline, and fostering a poor urban environment. Others felt that reconstruction would also mean a larger structure to meet new design standards impacting neighborhoods through eminent domain and increasing overall traffic speed through the city.
- Quality of life – Some attendees felt the Milwaukee case study missed an opportunity to improve overall quality of life, particularly by not reducing air and noise pollution and not integrating green space.
- Lack of an economic development focus - Reconstruction was seen as taking up valuable real estate and shutting traffic off from downtown businesses.
- Costs – Some expressed concern about the cost of construction and the additional funds that would be needed for maintenance of similar type of structure.

Bury the highway: The 'Big Dig' in Boston, MA

The "Big Dig" involved an unprecedented effort to bury a major interstate highway—I-93—through the center of Boston. The project increased connectivity, improved traffic circulation, and stimulated economic development in the downtown area. However, it was also very expensive and cost overruns were significant.

The "Big Dig" involved burying I-93 through the center of Boston.

Key aspects that attendees **liked** about this case study were:

- City beautification – Many felt the Big Dig provided benefits to neighborhood residents and the city as a whole through the incorporation of parks and other public spaces. This was seen as improving the livability of surrounding neighborhoods.
- Aesthetics and design – Another key benefit of the Big Dig case study attendees noted was the removal of the highway and inclusion of a "signature project" to create a visually appealing space.
- Access and connectivity – Burying the highway was seen as successful at removing the elevated structure as a barrier, while at the same time maintaining or improving its function as an interstate highway. Many felt that in Syracuse this option had the potential to reconnect neighborhoods with downtown and provide better pedestrian access to downtown amenities.
- Alternate Modes – Workshop participants also liked that the Big Dig included significant investments in transit as well as bicycle and pedestrian improvements.
- Economic Development – Several attendees felt that burying the highway in Syracuse would create a more welcoming environment for businesses, and would encourage investment and

redevelopment of both downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods. In addition, it would open new land for economic use, promote neighborhood use of downtown businesses and services, and provide a boost for local tourism.

Key aspects that attendees **disliked** about this case study were:

- Cost - By far, the most commonly expressed "dislike" about the Big Dig was the cost associated with the project. As it relates to Syracuse, many felt that burying the highway would be too expensive and that current traffic volumes did not warrant the expense - the money could be better spent elsewhere. Additionally, attendees expressed concerns about cost overruns and the economic impact on businesses during construction.
- Not appropriate for Syracuse – The second major "dislike" of the Big Dig was that burying I-81 would not be appropriate for Syracuse because of drainage and flooding problems as well as long-term maintenance issues.
- Other dislikes about this case study included:
    - The time needed for construction
    - Continued emphasis on automobiles over transit
    - The quality of construction
    - Limited connectivity with other highways and local streets
    - Safety concerns (access to accidents, terrorism)

Depress the highway: Fort Washington Way in Cincinnati, OH

This project involved a comprehensive reconfiguration of a depressed highway – I-71 (Fort Washington Way) in downtown Cincinnati. Over 25 alternatives were considered. The final project simplified and improved traffic flow, opened up new public space at the waterfront, and improved safety for pedestrians at street crossings.

This project involved a comprehensive reconfiguration of a depressed highway – I-71 (Fort Washington Way) in downtown Cincinnati.

Key aspects that attendees **liked** about this case study were:

- Connectivity and access – The project was seen as having restored connectivity between both sides of the highway, helping to reintegrate the city and providing better bicycle and pedestrian access between downtown and the riverfront.
- Aesthetics and design – Many felt the final result improved the aesthetics of the immediate area and lessened the visual barrier of the highway.
- Quality of life – If applied to Syracuse, attendees noted many quality of life improvements that might be realized, including a reduction in noise pollution in the area near the highway, new open space for parks and public spaces, increased bike and pedestrian safety, and more "human-scaled" infrastructure.

- Cost – Many also felt that depressing the highway offered a nice compromise between eliminating the highway and the expense of a tunnel. In addition, this option was seen as reducing the high maintenance costs associated with an elevated roadway.
- Other "likes" about this case study included:
    - Development opportunities in reclaimed land around and over the highway
    - Maintaining the Interstate function of the highway

Key aspects that attendees **disliked** about this case study were:

- Drainage and maintenance issues – Several attendees questioned how a depressed highway would function in the Syracuse region, with particular concerns about flooding, snow removal, garbage removal and drainage.
- Minimal or no improvement over the existing condition – Some participants felt the Fort Washington Way project did little to improve noise pollution, air quality, connections across the highway, or transit. Many also felt the highway did not look significantly different after the project's completion and failed to beautify the area near the highway. When applied to Syracuse, some attendees thought this would keep most of the same problems as the elevated structure (just in a different form) and would not improve the human experience walking over or near the highway.
- Cost – Some expressed concern about the cost associated with depressing the highway and construction of new bridges for local streets to cross the highway.
- Impacts on economy, environment, and neighborhoods – In the context of Syracuse, attendees noted that depressing the highway would continue to depress the value of the corridor and would discourage investment and further degrade adjacent neighborhoods.
- Expansion and access – The Fort Washington Way case study was seen as having limited future expansion opportunities if implemented in Syracuse. In addition, some felt it would require the removal of existing structures along the right-of-way and require major changes to the on/off ramp system.
- Other "dislikes" associated with this case study included:
    - Not significantly improving safety problems
    - Not creating a pedestrian friendly environment

Relocate the highway: I-195 "I-Way" in Providence, RI

In Providence, the elevated I-195 highway was relocated from downtown to a nearby industrial corridor. The project opened up valuable land for new development. It included numerous pedestrian amenities, including walkways along the Providence River, and a new signature bridge. The project enjoyed solid support due in part to a focus on urban design. Because it was a relocation project, disruption to existing roads was minimal.

In Providence, the elevated I-195 highway was relocated from downtown to a nearby industrial corridor.

Key aspects that attendees **liked** about this case study were:

- Redevelopment and reintegration of downtown – The project was seen successful in reconnecting neighborhoods to downtown and opening up new space in downtown Providence that enabled an attractive redevelopment of the urban core.
- Removal of the highway from downtown – For many, the relocation of I-195 removed the barrier created by the highway and significantly improved the aesthetics in downtown Providence.
- Maintained function of the highway – By simply relocating the highway, the I-195 project kept the overall function of the Interstate, providing efficient travel that did not reduce travel speeds or travel times.
- Other "likes" noted about this case study included:
    - Improvements in the quality of life for local residents
    - The minimal disruption to residents and commuters during construction

Key aspects that attendees **disliked** about this case study were:

- Local impacts – Many felt that if this option was applied to Syracuse it would cause both economic and social disruption to neighborhoods and businesses (including eminent domain), would simply shift the problem to another neighborhood, and would likely create a new barrier to accessing other parts of Syracuse. Others simply felt there were no viable alternative routes for I-81 through the city.
- Cost – Some felt that relocation would be too costly a project for Syracuse to undertake
- Operations – A few attendees expressed concern that this option would negatively impact traffic congestion and travel times in Syracuse and be less convenient for those who rely on the current highway and its alignment.

Remove the highway: Central Freeway in San Francisco, CA

In this project, San Francisco's Central Freeway was replaced with an urban boulevard (Octavia Boulevard). The freeway was closed for a period of time after it sustained damage from an earthquake. Although it was eventually reopened, a proposal to replace the freeway with a boulevard ultimately gained significant support. The boulevard was opened in 2005, and it has succeeded in carrying high traffic volumes while also spurring development and creating a bicycle and pedestrian-friendly environment.

In this project, San Francisco's Central Freeway was replaced with an urban boulevard (Octavia Boulevard).

Key aspects that attendees **liked** about this case study were:

- Promotion of alternative modes of travel – Octavia Boulevard was seen as embracing a "Complete Streets" approach that made the city more "human-centered" by encouraging the use of public transit and promoting a bicycle and pedestrian friendly environment. Attendees also liked that this case study was not a "car-

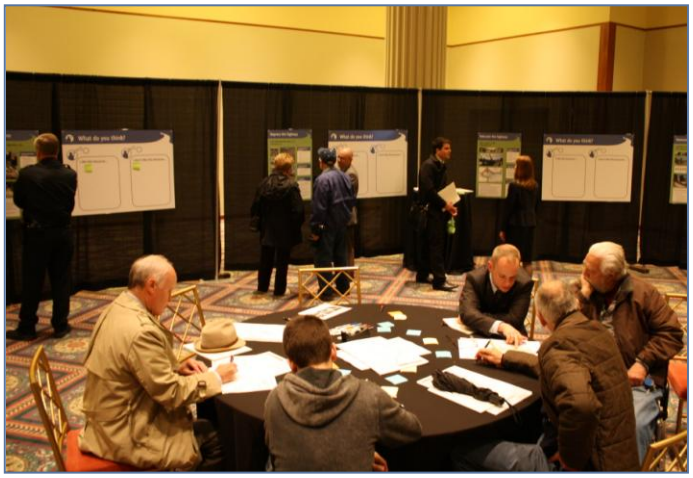
dominant" solution, but one which provided a better mix of transportation options and encouraged people to think about alternatives to auto travel.

- Aesthetics and design – Many thought this case study also created a more visually appealing urban environment that acted as an "aesthetic gateway" to the city with new trees, parks, plazas, and public art.
- Economic development and neighborhood reintegration – If applied to Syracuse, participants felt there would be an opportunity for significant redevelopment and revitalization of downtown. In addition, it could restore the urban fabric – reconnecting neighborhoods and communities and encouraging people to stop and support local businesses.
- Barrier removal – With the elimination of the elevated highway, many felt this would remove the barrier created by I-81, "open up" the city, and "scale" more closely to the size of Syracuse.
- Cost effective – Some attendees felt that this would be the most cost-effective solution in the long run as the maintenance costs for the road would be less expensive than those associated with a highway.

Key aspects that attendees **disliked** about this case study were:

- The impact on traffic operations – Many were concerned that a boulevard option in place of the current I-81 would increase travel times, cause significant congestion downtown, and shift the traffic burden to other highways and local streets.
- Economic and community impacts – Some felt that removing I-81 from downtown Syracuse would discourage people from going downtown and encourage people to leave the city – both having a "devastating" impact on the local economy. Some also were concerned that widening of the right-of-way to accommodate a new boulevard would require eminent domain to take many structures in adjacent neighborhoods.
- Safety issues – A few attendees felt that a boulevard would reduce walkability and provide a less safe environment for pedestrians.

Visions for the future of I-81



Participants were encouraged to write or draw their vision for I-81 on paper templates.

Information in the case study station emphasized that while the case studies offer some ideas, they are not the only solutions. After reading several examples of other ideas for the future of I-81, and using the background information on history, deficiencies and needs, and land use, participants were encouraged to write or draw their vision for I-81 on paper templates. Each paper had a space to draw, a space to write a description, and a space to explain how the idea benefitted the region. Three of the paper templates had a map in the drawing area – one contained a map of the region, one of the corridor, and one of the viaduct. The fourth template left a large blank space for ideas that did not fit the maps provided. Once participants were finished drawing or writing their vision, they posted the paper on the large "Visioning Wall."

Though attendees' visions differed significantly in details, most fell within one of three categories:

- **Rebuild the viaduct** while addressing some of the fundamental flaws in the current design. The primary goals of these visions were to keep commuting times low, minimize traffic congestion, and provide a cost-effective solution.
- **Remove the viaduct** and replace it with an urban boulevard or other thoroughfare integrated into the local street network. The primary goals here were to reintegrate downtown Syracuse with its surrounding neighborhoods, improve aesthetics, promote alternative modes of transportation, and lower long-term maintenance costs.
- **Replace the viaduct with a below grade highway** – either in a tunnel or open trench – which would serve to reconnect the city, improve aesthetics, and maintain the mobility and accessibility offered by the Interstate highway.

Additional details of the attendees' visions in each of these categories are summarized below.

Vision: Rebuild the viaduct

Many of the visions presented by attendees involved keeping the I-81 viaduct through downtown Syracuse. However, many expressed a desire to see more than just a simple reconstruction of the structure and viewed this as an opportunity to integrate other improvements to the local and regional transportation system.

Suggested elements of a rebuilt viaduct:

Improve traffic flow and increase capacity on I-81

- Double deck the viaduct and have four lanes in each direction
- Widen the viaduct to three lanes in each direction
- Expand the Adams St. exit to two lanes and/or move farther south
- Construct an exit near Castle Street for downtown traffic
- Add high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes
- Improve highway signage
- Improve curve radii through the I-690 Interchange

Improve regional accessibility

- Rebuild the I-81/I-690 interchange as a full interchange with wider turn radii to allow for higher speed limits
- Add an exit on I-690 at Crouse Avenue to service Syracuse University
- Open local street access at I-690/I-481 Interchange to allow access to Dewitt
- Eliminate extra loops at the I-90/I-81 Interchange
- Create a western bypass around Syracuse completing the I-481 loop

Mitigate negative impacts

- Add acoustic under decking tiles
- Install 5' high side panels
- Build a façade over structure to improve appearance
- Rebuild the viaduct much higher to "open" the space underneath
- Add parks and other public use spaces underneath the viaduct
- Add artwork from local artists

Some attendees felt the area under a rebuilt viaduct could be made more attractive and usable for local residents.

Incorporate transit, bicycle and pedestrian improvements

- Develop a rail transit system
    - Hub and spoke lines with inner and outer loops and satellite parking
    - Direct connection between downtown and the airport
    - Rail service on Water Street
- Reinstate passenger rail service to Binghamton
- Separate the northbound and southbound lanes of the viaduct and include walkways in the middle

Major benefits of rebuilding the viaduct

Some of the major benefits attendees identified for their visions for rebuilding the I-81 viaduct included:

- Keeping commute times low
- Allowing more direct travel
- Keeping traffic moving at a high speed
- Keeping congestion low
- Maintaining the function of the Interstate highway
- Offering a cost-effective solution
- Possibly increasing capacity

Vision: Remove the viaduct

Many of the visions presented by attendees involved removal of the I-81 viaduct through downtown Syracuse. Of those, some expressed a desire to replace the highway with an urban boulevard, while others preferred to disperse the traffic into the local street network.

Portion of the highway to remove

From the north, attendees suggested terminating the highway portion of the road at:

- I-481 Interchange (northern)
- I-90
- Route 370
- Webster's Landing
- Hiawatha Boulevard
- Butternut Street
- Spencer Street
- Willow Street
- Pearl Street
- Court Street
- Fayette Street
- Salina/Franklin/Clinton Streets
- I-690 Interchange

From the south, attendees suggested terminating the highway portion of the road at:

- I-481 Interchange (southern)
- Brighton Avenue
- Colvin Street
- Castle Street
- Former OnTrack tracks
- Kennedy Street
- Van Buren Street
- Burt Street
- Adams Street

Others also felt that portions of I-690 in downtown Syracuse should be removed as well.

Improve the highway network

- Changes to I-81
    - Reroute I-81 to the west of downtown along former OnTrack right-of-way
    - Maintain access to the Carrier Dome and medical facilities
    - Additional interchanges north and south of downtown to provide more options for local access
- Changes to I-481
    - Re-designate as I-81 between existing I-481 interchanges
    - Expand to accommodate increased traffic volumes
    - Additional interchanges to provide more options for local access
- Changes to I-690
    - Add new entrance/exit ramps at Erie Boulevard, Water Street, and State Street to connect with the local street network and/or new urban boulevard
    - Expand (or eliminate) the West Street exit
    - Build a full interchange with I-81 (if maintained as highway to I-690)
- Create a western bypass extending I-481 west of I-81

Improve the local street network

- General changes:
  - Reconnect the street grid
  - Rebuild major streets to "boulevard" standards with additional lanes and medians
  - Optimize traffic flow downtown through:
    - Coordinating traffic signals
    - Improving access from Townsend to I-690
    - Creating an "inner loop" from West Street to Adams Street to Townsend Street
    - Converting Adams and Townsend Streets to a one-way pair
    - Dispersing highway traffic into the city street grid
  - Create better connections with state roads to eliminate the need for I-81
- Specific changes:
  - A new boulevard connection between I-81 and I-690 from Court to West Streets
  - Conversion of West Street/Midland Ave. to a tree-lined boulevard
  - Reconnect Oakwood Ave. with Oakwood Cemetery and reopen the historic entrance to Oakwood Cemetery
  - Build a new arterial to connect Colvin Street to I-481 north
  - Place a traffic circle at I-81 and Van Buren Street
- Boulevard option changes
  - Build 4-way intersections at Adams, Harrison, Genesee, Erie, State and Butternut
    - Create bypass lanes alongside boulevard for local access
  - Incorporate green space and parks
  - Create "Eastside Drive" and "Westside Drive" with green space and parks in the middle
  - Implement a maximum speed limit of 40 mph to encourage use of I-481

Incorporate transit, bicycle and pedestrian improvements

- Implement light rail service along the current I-81 alignment, along the former OnTrack route, and/or along all major downtown streets. Key stops noted included Brighton Ave., Syracuse University, Adams Street, Armory Sq., Clinton Sq., Carousel Mall, the New York State Fairgrounds, the airport, and the Great Northern Mall. To support the new light rail, some felt park-and-ride lots were needed at the ends of each line.
- Bus rapid transit along major thoroughfares in dedicated busways that connect with Syracuse's inner suburbs. A 10-20 minute frequency for buses was desired.
- Bus system improvements included covered bus shelters, real-time bus information, HOV lanes, signal priority, better ADA accessibility, and a new downtown bus center

Adding bike lanes was one of many suggestions for improving alternative modes of transportation in our region.

- Shuttle buses along the I-81 corridor to reduce traffic at Adams/Harrison and along Almond Street
- Add pedestrian overpasses over major thoroughfares
- Improve sidewalks and adding benches
- Improve the Connective Corridor through Syracuse
- Add bike lanes
- Improve street lighting
- Incorporate new parks and other public spaces into the I-81 corridor

Suggested land use changes
Looking beyond transportation, many attendees included land use changes in their visions. Major elements included:

- Redevelopment and infill development along former viaduct route including:
    - 4-6 story buildings to promote urban context
    - Cafes and boutique shops
    - Redevelopment similar to Armory Square
    - Restoration of historic homes
    - Developing a "show piece" for the city
- Sustainable development
    - Incorporate green technologies and development practices
    - Promote commercial urban agriculture
    - Incorporate parks and other green space
- Expansion and growth
    - Expand Syracuse city limits to I-90 (north) and I-481 (east) to expand connectivity and areas for redevelopment
    - Set a target for regional growth of 50,000 people - 25k in Syracuse, 25k in the rest of the metro area

Reuse of the elevated highway structure
Though most who envisioned a future without the I-81 viaduct downtown thought the structure should be completely removed, a few suggested that it remain, but for a different use. Possible uses included:

- Create a central greenway consisting of an elevated park or "hanging gardens" similar to the High Line in New York City
- Reuse for recreational space, possibly incorporating the viaduct into the Connective Corridor, adding bicycle and walking paths for summer use and skiing/skating paths for winter use
- Create a new public space complete with amenities such as shops and food vendors to encourage public use
- Maintain part of the structure for dedicated access to medical facilities

Major benefits
Some of the major benefits attendees identified for their visions that involved removal of the I-81 viaduct included:

- Reconnecting the city by

  - Removing the viaduct as a barrier
  - Recreating the city's "urban fabric"
- Supporting economic development by
  - Opening land for commercial and residential development
  - Providing a boost for tourism
  - Promoting downtown
  - Making the city a destination
- Improving quality of life by
  - Improving aesthetics
  - Reducing noise and air pollution
- Encouraging sustainability by
  - Lowering GHG emissions
  - Incorporating green space and parks
  - Promoting the green image of the city
- Promoting alternative modes of travel by
  - Creating a bicycle and pedestrian friendly environment with adequate bike routes and sidewalks
  - Supporting transit use by providing more options
- Improving safety
- Lowering overall costs through
  - Lower maintenance costs
  - Making better use of existing infrastructure
- Maintaining mobility and access to key destinations

Vision: Replace the viaduct

Though smaller in number, there were a significant number of workshop participants whose visions for I-81 included replacing the I-81 viaduct with a buried (tunnel), depressed, or combination of both partially depressed and partially buried highway. In all cases, I-81 would be maintained as an Interstate highway through downtown Syracuse. Key elements of these visions are included below:

Alignment options

Attendees' visions differed on the alignment for the new highway and included:

- Following the current I-81 corridor
- Tunneling from Castle to Salina
- Straightened tunnel alignment from Castle to State with no downtown exits
- Tunnel from Adams to Salina (I-81) and from Crouse to Willow (I-690)
  - Depress I-81 from Castle to Adams and Butternut to Salina
  - Depress I-690 from University to Crouse and Clinton to Willow
- Tunnel from Colvin to I-90 (I-81) and from Teall to Geddes (I-690)

Configuration and capacity

There was no clear consensus on the configuration of a new depressed or buried highway. Options included:

- No downtown exits, forcing local traffic to exit before the tunnel portal
- Adding exits at major arterials
- Building two travel lanes in each direction
    - One for through traffic
    - One for local traffic

Local street changes

Changes to the local street network to support the buried or depressed highway visions included:

- Raising the level of the surrounding streets and sidewalks
- Incorporating "multi-level" landscaping
- Building tree-lined walking paths over the depressed highway

Highway network changes

To complement their visions, some attendees who wanted to replace the I-81 viaduct with a tunnel or depressed highway also noted improvements that would be needed to the regional highway system including:

- Adding express lanes to I-481 to allow 70 mph travel around the city
- Building a western bypass route around Syracuse. Alignment options included:
    - I-481 to I-690 across Onondaga Lake to I-81
    - Around Onondaga Lake to I-690/I-90 then to Great Northern Mall and back to I-481

Major benefits

Some of the major benefits attendees identified for their visions that involved burying or depressing I-81 included:

- Reconnecting the city by
    - Removing the viaduct as a barrier between downtown and neighborhoods
- Promoting economic development by
    - Promoting downtown redevelopment
    - Opening development space above the highway through the sale or leasing of air rights
    - Enticing people to visit downtown
- Improving safety by
    - Creating a bicycle and pedestrian friendly environment
    - Maintaining fast emergency vehicle access to hospitals
- Improving aesthetics by
    - Integrating the highway with the existing architecture and landscape in a way that creates a seamless aesthetic flow
    - Developing new parks and public spaces
- Maintaining mobility by
    - Retaining the function of the Interstate through downtown

Station 7: Goals and Objectives

Station 7 focused on the process of evaluating options for the future of I-81. An informational graphic illustrated this process, and the boards introduced a short list of draft study goals and objectives that had been developed based on previous public outreach. In a series of interactive exercises, participants were invited to help shape the goals for *The I-81 Challenge*.

The first exercise asked participants to provide examples of what the goals meant to them. Ideas were written on post-it notes and placed on a large board. Though attendees were asked to provide input on what the overall goal meant to them, their comments often referred to specific draft objectives under each goal and fell into three broad types of input: the meaning of the objective, how the objective could be met, and new objectives. This information is summarized in the table that follows.

In a series of interactive exercises, participants were invited to help shape the goals for The I-81 Challenge.

Draft goal: Improve public safety		
Draft objectives	*Participant Ideas about what the objective means*	*Participant ideas for achieving the objective*

Reduce accident occurrences to at or below the statewide average for similar facilities	No feedback was provided.	• Improve overall maintenance such as:
		  ○ Fixing potholes
		  ○ Reducing the use of salt in the winter
		• Improve geometric deficiencies including:
		  ○ Improving the I-690/I-81 Interchange
		  ○ Redesigning or reducing the number of on/off ramps
		• Installation of cameras to reduce DWIs

Improve the safety of alternative modes of transportation (pedestrian, bicycle, transit)	• Easier and safer access for individuals using non-vehicle modes of transport
	• Designing infrastructure with consideration given to pedestrian use
		• Adding amenities for bicyclists and walkers such as:
		  ○ Pedestrian bridges
		  ○ Street lights
		  ○ Better crosswalks
		  ○ Bike lanes
		• Operation changes:
		  ○ Lower speed limits
		• Public education:
		  ○ Driver training focused on awareness of pedestrians and cyclists
		  ○ Training of bicyclists in urban cycling
		  ○ Mechanisms to force landowners to clear sidewalks

NEW: Ensure fast access to medical facilities for emergency vehicles	• Protect speedy access for emergency vehicles (example: ambulance going to the hospital)	

Draft goal: Enhance the Transportation Network		
Draft objectives	*Participant Ideas about what the objective means*	*Participant ideas for achieving the objective*
Eliminate structural deficiencies	No feedback was provided.	No feedback was provided.
Improve existing geometric design	No feedback was provided.	No feedback was provided.

Identify alternative mode improvement in the vicinity of I-81	• A regional commuter transit system to get cars off the road and reduce gas consumption
	• Promoting walking and biking downtown
		• Providing more transit options
		• Improved bus service including:
		  ○ Routes that bypass downtown
		  ○ Restoring Centro service levels to that of the 1950s
		  ○ Public education about mass transit
		• New light rail system
		• Better connections between key destinations such as the airport, train station, university and medical facilities
		• A public rental program for bikes, scooters, and/or small cars

NEW: Improve the maintenance of existing highway infrastructure by	• Reducing the highway's susceptibility to flooding • Minimizing the impact of lake effect snow on safety and commuting time • Improving life-cycle maintenance	• Repairing pot holes quickly • Using less salt

Draft goal: Enhance Region-Wide Mobility		
Draft objectives	*Participant Ideas about what the objective means*	*Participant ideas for achieving the objective*
Improve peak period mobility and reduce delay on the highway system (primary, secondary and city streets)	No feedback was provided.	• Raising speed limits • Better traffic enforcement • Synchronizing traffic signals
Preserve regional mobility by maintaining travel times	• Keeping Syracuse a "20 minute city" • Minimizing travel times • Eliminating or minimizing "gridlock"	
Improve access to key destinations (e.g. the airport, hospitals, and downtown businesses)	• Emphasis on connectivity over speed • Easier navigation through Syracuse • Improved access from western areas of the metropolitan area	• Building a bypass around the west side of Syracuse • Ensuring access to medical facilities • Improving access to the Carrier Dome for sporting events
Improve connectivity of alternative modes of transportation (pedestrian, bicycle, transit)	• Providing an interconnected transit system • Enhancing the city street system and pedestrian environment	• Expansion of Centro to other counties • Allowing NYSDOT to fund bus systems to operate across county lines • Inter-urban and high-speed train service • Better intermodal connections

Draft goal: Maintain or Improve Economic Opportunities		
Draft objectives	*Participant Ideas about what the objective means*	*Participant ideas for achieving the objective*
Maintain or improve economic opportunities by addressing multi-modal access	No feedback was provided.	No feedback was provided.
Improve transportation system efficiency and reliability, and reduce travel costs	• Keeping transportation costs (user fees, tolls, etc.) as low as possible • Maintain reasonable travel speeds • Easy access to transportation to promote investment and economic development	No feedback was provided.
NEW: Promote overall	No feedback was provided.	• Using transportation to promote downtown

economic development and opportunities throughout the region		○ Small, medium, and "green" businesses ○ Increasing traffic on city streets to bring more customers to local businesses • Considering economic development possibilities that strengthen the city core and the region including: ○ Bringing back the suburban population ○ Considering the impact of any solution on businesses throughout the region ○ Using newly available land to promote economic development ○ Employing more minorities during construction

Draft goal: Preserve or Enhance Environmental Health		
Draft objectives	*Participant Ideas about what the objective means*	*Participant ideas for achieving the objective*
Support local, regional and state environmental initiatives	No feedback was provided.	• Require the planting of new trees for every car registered in Onondaga county
Maintain or improve air quality (overall emissions and odor)	• Enhance green space and air quality	No feedback was provided.
Minimize air quality and noise impacts on adjacent neighbors	No feedback was provided.	• Reducing noise pollution ○ Understanding the subconscious stress and related health impacts caused by noise pollution • Installing pollution monitors throughout city • Reducing impacts and incidence of asthma
Minimize impacts on designated community landmarks and historic resources	No feedback was provided.	No feedback was provided.
Minimize storm water impacts and improve water quality	No feedback was provided.	No feedback was provided.

NEW: Support and enhance overall environmental sustainability	No feedback was provided.	• Reducing the urban "heat island" effect by:
		  ○ Rethinking the urban canopy
		  ○ Incorporating green space
		• Incorporate "green" design, technologies and methods including:
		  ○ Green strategies for air and water filtering (e.g. green swales)
		  ○ "Showcase" the city by balancing green space and improving quality of life while maintaining traffic

Draft goal: Support Community Quality of Life		
Draft objectives	*Participant Ideas about what the objective means*	*Participant ideas for achieving the objective*
Encourage sustainable land use patterns within the city and county	No feedback was provided.	• Promoting energy and water conservation • Designing bicycle and pedestrian friendly communities • Using sustainable sources of energy • Encouraging urban agriculture • Providing more transit options • Promoting high density development in the urban core • Discouraging urban sprawl
Enhance local connectivity (such as linking University Hill with downtown)	No feedback was provided.	• Reducing or eliminating I-81 as a barrier • Improving connectivity within the city • Creating a better pedestrian environment
Encourage smart growth: sustainable regional land use patterns that minimize suburban sprawl, which increases demand for infrastructure and services	No feedback was provided.	• Promoting infill development downtown • Promoting urban villages with walkable communities and "people-oriented" spaces • Promoting walking, bicycling, and transit
Improve the visual built environment through context sensitive design that	No feedback was provided.	• Making the highway more attractive by adding an iconic component to the physical and mental image of our community

contributes to roadside/street ambiance, community character and public safety		• Using "out of the box" methods and designs
		• Beautifying the area under and around I-81 by:
		  ○ Repaving streets
		  ○ Creating parks and planting trees
		  ○ Installing new and better lighting

Promote other planning and development visions and initiatives (county, city, and region)	• Integrating I-81 and housing issues
	• Using *The I-81 Challenge* to positively impact city schools
	• Taking a holistic approach to long-term planning through:
	  ○ Coordinating plans for I-81 with other regional planning initiatives such as:
	  ▪ Sustainability plan
	  ▪ Local and regional development plans
	  ○ Planning for future infrastructure and transportation needs
		No feedback was provided.

Draft goal: Exercise Fiscal Responsibility		
Draft objectives	Participant Ideas about what the objective means	Participant ideas for achieving the objective
Minimize capital costs by ensuring that transportation system investments are cost effective	No feedback was provided.	• Using highly trained construction inspectors • Holding contractors accountable for cost overruns • Ensuring new infrastructure is needed and will be adequately used (Mattydale bridges were provided as an example) • Making smaller positive changes such as repairing streetlights, painting crosswalks, and enforcing traffic laws
Minimize long-term operation and maintenance costs	• Considering issues such as drainage, air quality, and trash removal • Identifying solutions with lower long-term maintenance	No feedback was provided.
NEW: Identify alternative methods for funding construction, operation, and maintenance	• Funding for the I-81 project(s) should not come from any additional taxpayer fees	• Implementing user fees (tolls) • Instituting a commuter tax on all who work in Syracuse

Draft goal: Share Burdens & Benefits		
Draft objectives	Participant Ideas about what the objective means	Participant ideas for achieving the objective

Share the burden of impacts during construction and long-term across stakeholders (e.g. suburbs, adjacent neighborhoods, low-income communities, Onondaga Nation)	• Connecting disadvantaged neighborhoods to the city and resources
	• Ensuring the negative impacts of the final decisions do not fall disproportionately on minority communities
	  ○ Ensuring inclusion in the entire process
	• Preserving local neighborhoods and communities
	  ○ Protecting and enhancing public housing
	  ○ Ensuring that surrounding communities do not deteriorate
	  ○ Avoiding another situation similar to the 15th Ward
	  ○ Considering the impact on local businesses
	• Considering the impact of solutions on other interstates in the regional highway system
		No feedback was provided.

Share the benefits across stakeholders (e.g. suburbs, adjacent neighborhoods, low income communities, Onondaga Nation)	• Weighing input and concerns in direct relationship to the stake at hand ○ Not all voices are equal in this scenario • Balancing the needs of urban residents and suburban commuters • Becoming a national model of how to do this "right"	• Making the final project or projects an asset to the community

For the second exercise of Station 7, participants were given three green dots and were asked to place the dots next to the three goals that were most important to them. The exercise revealed that attendees put significant weight on environmental considerations, enhancing the transportation network, and improving public safety.

Goal	Attendee Weighting
Improve Public Safety	140
Enhance the Transportation Network	154
Enhance Region-Wide Mobility	107
Maintain or Improve Economic Opportunities	123
Preserve or Enhance Environmental Health	197
Support Community Quality of Life	116
Exercise Fiscal Responsibility	83
Share Burden and Benefits	42

Missing Goals

The final exercise provided a space for participants to add any goals they felt were missing from the list.

Much of the input received from the interactive exercise on "missing goals" related more closely to the draft objectives and is included in the summary above. However, there were three particular areas, though touched on in the draft objectives, that participants felt might be worthy of their own goals:

- Aesthetics of the ultimate project or projects that would serve to enhance the city and surrounding communities
- Ensuring emergency vehicle access to medical facilities downtown
- Developing and encouraging alternative modes of travel including:
  - Bicycle and pedestrian access to and through downtown
  - Viable bus transit
  - New or reactivated rail transit

Station 8: Breakout Groups

Immediately following the goals and objective station, participants at the in-person workshops had the opportunity to participate in breakout groups. These sessions were held approximately every hour and had anywhere from five to 30 participants. Each group had a facilitator and a note taker to encourage group discussion and document input.

The breakout group sessions provided participants with the opportunity to share their concerns, visions, goals, and objectives in a group discussion setting.

The breakout group sessions complemented the earlier activities by providing participants with the opportunity to share their concerns, visions, goals, and objectives in a group discussion setting. This format enabled participants to brainstorm and respond to one another's suggestions in a new way. While the discussion-focused format was unique, the issues that emerged from the breakout group sessions mirrored the input given throughout the

previous stations of the workshop. Included below are the major issues and points that were raised during the breakout groups in two primary focus areas – future options, and goals and objectives.

Future options for I-81

Urban Boulevard

Suggestions for implementing this option:

- Locate the boulevard on West Street
    - The boulevard should stretch to Adams Street and have no lights in this area
- Use Route 33 in Buffalo as an example
- Create pedestrian overpasses across busy intersections
- Route buses along alternate streets to alleviate boulevard traffic
- Use advanced signal timing
- Use Onondaga Lake Pkwy. to Liverpool as part of the boulevard

Concerns and counterpoints:

- Cannot accommodate the quantity of traffic on I-81
- Would create too much traffic downtown
- Requires too many traffic lights
- Would be difficult to access from side streets
- Will create more pollution
- Would put too much demand on other highways
- Could still divide the city
- May require seizure and destruction of more property
- Would have negative impacts for national defense

Leave I-81 as it is

Suggestions for implementing this option:

- Protect current levels of mobility
- Avoid drastic changes to the local transportation network
- Continue maintaining the viaduct on an as-needed basis
- Focus on preventative maintenance
- Address current noise and pollution issues
- Enhance the area under the viaduct
    - Add murals
    - Improve lighting

Rebuild the highway

Suggestions for implementing this option:

- Rebuild I-81 at the same location or slightly to the east or west
- Widen the highway
- Incorporate HOV lanes
- Rebuild the highway with two decks
- Rebuild the highway higher
- Include longer ramps
- Fill in the space under the viaduct with soil and stone, more permanent than concrete

Concerns and counterpoints:

- Wastes money
- Will be costly to maintain in the future
- Promotes car culture
- Limited space for reconstruction or relocation
- Filling in the space under the viaduct would create a new barrier in the city

Bury or depress the highway

Suggestions for implementing this option:

- Depress I-81 north after the cemetery and then route the highway below downtown
- Create separate routes for local and through traffic, using depressed roadways for high volume areas

Concerns and counterpoints:

- Too expensive
- Exits will be complicated
- Water damage will be a major concern in winter
- Will create a land grab in the downtown area

Re-route the highway using I-481

Suggestions for implementing this option:

- Make the viaduct "Business I-81" and use I-481 as the bypass for through traffic
- Make I-481 more appealing to freight and truck traffic
- Rerouting would benefit north side businesses
- Extend I-481 to create a loop around the city
    - Build the loop at least to I-690
    - Creating the loop would involve eminent domain

Concerns and counterpoints:

- Would increase the traffic and noise levels in neighborhoods around I-481
- Would require abatement walls in residential areas
- Could increase fuel costs and drive times
- Could lead to more pollution and higher transportation costs

<u>Other suggestions for improving transportation in the region</u>

Public Transportation

Suggestions:

- Consider the city's entire multi-modal transportation system
- Improve bus service
- Provide convenient access to Amtrak
- Educate people about public transportation options
- Create a comprehensive park and ride system with a network of parking lots and shuttles to key destinations
- Commuter rail
    - Reactivate OnTrack service
    - Add a regional train from the northern suburbs to downtown Syracuse
- Use Maglev or a monorail system
- Follow the example of Boston, D.C., or San Francisco

Improved bus service was one of many ideas participants discussed for improving transportation in the Syracuse region.

- Create a light rail system
    - Focus on points of density and common trip routes (such as Syracuse University to downtown, or the airport to downtown)
    - Use freight tracks when freight trains are not running

Concerns and counterpoints:

- Syracuse is not dense enough
- People want the convenience of a car

Non-motorized transportation

Suggestions:

- Launch a bike share program
- Build more protected bikeways
- Enhance pedestrian safety
    - Use reflective sidewalks
- Encourage walkability
    - Look at successful examples in other cities in the Northeast

Create more parks and/or green space

Suggestions:

- Use the High Line in New York City as an example
- Use European cities as examples

Concerns and counterpoints:

- Syracuse already has too many parks

Many wanted to see new or improved parks throughout the region to facilitate non-motorized travel.

Create a canal

Suggestions:

- Locate the canal on Erie Boulevard
- Locate the canal where I-81 is now from Oswego Boulevard to Onondaga Lake
- Would promote outdoor living
- Would enhance economic development
- Look at Oklahoma City as an example

Concerns and counterpoints:

- Not feasible

<u>Goals and objectives</u>

Participants identified the follow goals:

- Revitalize downtown
    - Create jobs and growth
    - Aim to create new sources of revenue for the city
    - Keep young people in the city
    - Make Syracuse a place people want to visit
    - Create a highway system that encourages people to stop and visit downtown
    - Beautify the city
    - Improve the shopping district
    - Add middle class housing

  - Focus on mixed use, in-fill development
  - Preserve cultural resources
  - Improve the quality of life for people who already live downtown
  - Revitalize the Salina Street Corridor
  - Improve the housing projects
- Improve safety for all users
  - Shorten ramps
  - Reduce the number of ramps in the downtown area
  - Widen shoulders
  - Improve visibility on ramps, particularly at the Harrison St. exit
  - Improve safety of merger areas from I-81 to other highways
  - Match speed limits to roadway conditions
  - Reduce fatalities and accident rates
  - Discourage drinking and driving
  - Fix the lights under the highway
  - Improve pedestrian safety around the viaduct
    - Erie Boulevard
    - Almond St.
- Reconnect the city
  - Integrate the university neighborhood with downtown
  - Undo the legacy of the urban renewal era
  - Reduce geographic isolation of low-income neighborhoods
- Support sustainability
  - "Go green" whenever possible
  - Use sustainable resources
- Maintain or improve mobility
  - Improve freight mobility
  - Minimize disruptions to mobility when the final project is constructed
  - Focus on maintaining access for commuters
  - Avoid one way streets
  - Improve mobility for automobiles
    - Address traffic problems at the Adams/Harris exit
    - Carousel Mall area is congested
    - I-481 south near Dewitt is congested during PM rush hour
    - Adams St. ramp is congested during rush hours
  - Balance mobility needs with improvements to quality of life
  - Create dedicated turn lanes at intersections on local roads
  - Maintain speedy access to hospitals
  - Preserve mobility of emergency vehicles
  - Consider the major traffic that results from Syracuse University events
  - Make steps to stagger demand for travel in the city
    - Support telecommuting
    - Support staggered work days
  - Consider the high volume of cars exiting the highway at East Adams St. to get to Syracuse University
    - Improve the Colvin St. exit

- Exercise financial responsibility
    - Consider the life cycle costs of any solution
    - Reduce maintenance costs
    - Implement a commuter tax
    - Make a meaningful investment in the city
    - Do not increase local taxes or the cost of living
    - Increase the tax base
    - Facilitate economic growth

Conclusion and meeting reactions

Through comment sheets and meeting evaluations, workshop participants expressed an overwhelmingly positive opinion of the workshops. Participants felt the event was well organized, informative, and productive, and called for continued focus on public involvement as the project moves forward. Attendees appreciated the magnitude of information presented, but also acknowledged that it was difficult to absorb everything at one time. Many were grateful that workshop resources were also available online, and stated that they planned to use the virtual workshop to review information and share the experience with others. Several participants were concerned about how all of the public input would actually be used, and many identified strong follow-up as an important next step to the workshops. Overall, the evaluations and comments revealed that members of the public were grateful for the opportunity to learn, discuss, and voice their opinion.

Next steps

Input from the public workshops will be used to finalize *The I-81 Challenge* Goals and Objectives, confirm the deficiencies and needs identified in Technical Memorandum #1: Physical Conditions Analysis, and develop a set of preliminary options for the future of I-81. Through technical analysis and continued public involvement, the project team will refine and narrow these options to a select few that will progress into a formal environmental review process. The public involvement efforts for *The I-81 Challenge* will continue through additional questionnaires, newsletters, website updates, continued use of social media, and future public workshops and open houses.

The public involvement efforts for The I-81 Challenge *will continue through additional questionnaires, newsletters, website updates, continued use of social media, and future public workshops and open houses. Stay tuned by signing up for the project mailing list at http://thei81challenge.org/.*

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Workshop participant comments

Appendix B: Attendee "visions" for the future of I-81

Appendix C: Workshop information boards

Appendix D: May Workshop publicity materials

Appendix E: Meeting evaluation results