

## **Introduction**

In the coming years, the Syracuse region has a very important decision to make about the future of I-81. Portions of I-81 are nearing the end of their lifespan. Just to continue operating as they always have, these parts of the road will require a significant investment of time, energy, and money. Given this reality, the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) is faced with a challenge: what should be done with I-81?

Government officials, local agencies, and the public have offered some suggestions: remove the elevated portions, place it underground, move it, rebuild it, or reclaim the underside for art space. NYSDOT realizes that the choice regarding the future of the corridor, whatever it is, must be acceptable to the public. Not only that, it must not harm the environment, the economy, or people's ability to access important places.

This is a once in a generation opportunity. Choices made about I-81 through the studies that are now starting have the potential to transform the City of Syracuse and the entire Syracuse region.

Today's decision about the future of the highway will offer many more opportunities for community input than the decision-making process that led to the construction of I-81 in the 1960s. The Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC), along with the NYSDOT and other partners in the region, is leading the effort to engage the community in this important decision over the next few years.

This purpose of this White Paper is to document the initial intent and framework for the public participation effort. The first section describes the challenge, and the goals and objectives against which we can monitor our progress going forward. The second section looks at the geographic context of this effort. Decisions about the future of I-81 will affect different parts of the Syracuse region in different ways; it is important that everyone understands the potential local and regional impacts of this decision. The third and final section is a preliminary discussion of the categories of potential stakeholders that have been identified at the start of this process. These categories will be used as an organizing framework for our initial outreach efforts in the summer and fall of 2009.

## Section 1: Challenge Statement, Goals, and Objectives

This section describes our challenge as we begin the public participation effort. It also provides goals and objectives against which we can monitor our progress going forward. Though it is not always easy to quantify the results of public outreach, metrics are described for each objective so that we can measure our success and determine if and when adjustments to our public participation process should be made.

**Challenge Statement:** The Syracuse region must consider the future of Interstate-81, one of the most important and historically controversial pieces of infrastructure in the region. Because of the highway's effect on a wide-range of Syracuse region stakeholders in the past, presently, and in the future, this effort necessitates a public engagement strategy that provides opportunity for reflection, input on, and influence by diverse regional stakeholders. Stakeholders include, but are not limited to, state and local government agencies, business owners, local institutions, commuters, and residents, inclusive of minority, low-income, and traditionally underserved populations.

**Goal:** To engage Syracuse region stakeholders in a process that builds their capacity to evaluate options and participate in planning for the future of I-81.

### **Principles:**

- Use **multiple means** of outreach to ensure effective two-way communication, learning opportunities, and information gathering appropriate to target audiences.
- Engage stakeholders in a **transparent** and **on-going manner**,
- Seek to provide **opportunities for public input** and **influence** throughout the planning and decision-making processes, from problem identification, to issues scoping, to alternatives development, to option evaluation, and so forth.

<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Metrics for Measuring Success</i>
<p><u>Objective 1:</u> To <b>engage diverse stakeholders</b>, from those most approximate physically to the highway to those in the greater region who may be affected by changes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Size of stakeholder database</li> <li>• Diversity of participation by race, ethnicity, age, income, geography, profession, etc.</li> <li>• Nature/kind of groups who attend one or more meetings</li> </ul>
<p><u>Objective 2:</u> To <b>utilize multiple means</b> of reaching out to, communicating with, educating, and receiving input from diverse stakeholders by means and methods that are most appropriate to them. This includes making relevant technical information understandable to the general public and decision-makers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of means</li> <li>• Diversity of participation, individuals and organizations</li> <li>• Number of stories and information that is disseminated via existing networks, newsletters, websites, etc</li> <li>• Number of written materials produced and disseminated</li> <li>• Number of stakeholders’ websites where information appears</li> </ul>
<p><u>Objective 3:</u> To <b>build a shared and enhanced understanding</b> about the history of the highway, ongoing efforts, available options, lessons learned from other communities, and current and future decision-making processes, including the roles and responsibilities of Tribal, federal, state, regional, and local governments, community organizations, and citizen stakeholders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in knowledge about the highway, options and ongoing processes (what do stakeholders, including agencies, know now v. what they know in 6, 12, 18 months)</li> <li>• Means to identify change will by a survey, keypad polling in key events, media coverage over time.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Objective 4:</u> To ensure a <b>cross-fertilization</b> of ideas, interests, and perspectives across geographies and interest groups. The process should ensure that stakeholders do not simply talk “to themselves” about the impacts and options for this regional issue, but engage one another across jurisdictions and interests to consider the issue from a region-wide perspective.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of events with diverse participation across interests and geographies.</li> <li>• Number of participants who say they learned from or met someone whose views they had not heard from or understood well previously.</li> </ul>

<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Metrics for Measuring Success</i>
<p><u>Objective 5:</u> To place particular attention, emphasis, and resources on reaching out and communicating with <b>minority, low-income, and traditionally underserved populations</b>, including Native American and non-English speaking communities, by using multiple and varied opportunities for these to give input about the issues and concerns related to the future of I-81.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversity of participation by race, ethnicity, age, income, geography, profession, etc.</li> <li>• Number of participants in various face-to-face activities</li> <li>• Kinds of organizations engaged through meetings, workshops, and other means</li> </ul>
<p><u>Objective 6:</u> To <b>gather accurate information about public opinion</b> regarding issues/impacts, values, and alternatives related to the future of I-81.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey data</li> <li>• Number and kind of comments and engagement at public meetings and on documents produced for public review</li> <li>• Comments and views obtained and reviewed from all stakeholder groups identified in early stages of project during all key stages of the process.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Objective 7:</u> To <b>build trust</b> among stakeholders and <b>ensure transparency</b> about and in the decisionmaking process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kinds and diversity of information produced during all key stages of the process.</li> <li>• Direct engagement of project staff, key agencies, and stakeholders in diverse forums over the life of the project.</li> <li>• Evidence of stakeholder input in the decision-making process.</li> </ul>

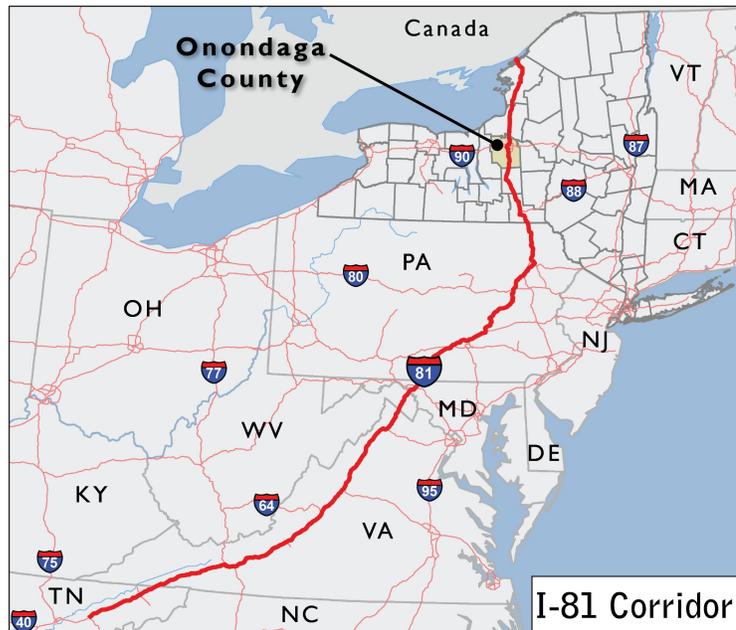
## Section 2: Study Focus Areas

This section discusses the geographic context of the I-81 Challenge. It is intended to help people understand that there are numerous perspectives from which to view a decision about the future of I-81. Any decision about this interstate highway will have local and regional implications not only for travel, but for the development and character of the community. The decision will impact different people in the region in different ways.

For the purposes of thinking about the potential impacts of any future change to I-81, it is helpful to think about this effort in terms of various focus areas. These focus areas do not have strictly defined boundaries, but are generally described as follows:

- **Viaduct Focus Area** – The viaduct focus area is concentrated around the elevated portion of I-81 that runs from approximately Salina Street in the north to Castle Street in the south and includes the Onondaga Interchange (where I-81 and I-690 intersect). It is the deteriorating condition of this 1.4 mile elevated section of the interstate that is the primary motivation for studying the future of I-81 at this time. The neighborhoods, businesses, and institutions immediately adjacent to the viaduct, including downtown Syracuse and University Hill, have been directly impacted by the presence of the highway, as they will be by any decision concerning the future of this significant piece of infrastructure. This area is shown in the map entitled *Viaduct Focus Area* on page 7.
- **Inner Ring Focus Area** – The inner ring focus area can be described as an area of influence that will be significantly impacted by changes to the I-81 corridor. This area includes the communities surrounding I-81 and the rest of the metropolitan interstate system, including I-481 and I-690. The economic vitality, character, livability, and travel patterns of this area will be influenced greatly by the decision regarding the future of I-81. The map entitled *City of Syracuse and Vicinity* on page 8 illustrates the extent of this focus area.
- **Metropolitan Planning Area** – The metropolitan planning area encompasses the entire Syracuse region, including all of Onondaga County and the small portions of Oswego and Madison Counties that are considered part of the SMTC's transportation planning purview. It is important to recognize that any decision about the future of I-81 will affect this entire region, not only in terms of travel patterns but in terms of regional growth patterns, economic vitality, and livability as well. The map entitled *regional Overview* on page 9 illustrates the metropolitan planning area.

Beyond the Syracuse region, decisions reached about the future of I-81 will also impact national and international trade. As the map at right illustrates, I-81 runs from Canada to Tennessee. It is one of the most important north-south trade routes in the eastern part of North America. Any decision about the future of I-81 in Syracuse must consider this important role of the interstate highway in addition to all of the potential local and regional impacts described above.



As the I-81 Challenge progresses over the coming months and years, it will be important to remember the geographic context of this important decision. The difficult and complex decision-making process ahead will benefit from a shared understanding, on the part of residents and leaders throughout the region, of the full range of geographic perspectives about I-81.

**Viaduct Focus Area**

BACK

**Interstate Network Focus Area**

BACK

**Metropolitan Planning Area**

BACK

### Section 3: Stakeholder Development

One of the first steps in the public participation process is to begin to identify the tremendous number of potential stakeholders in the region and organize these stakeholders in a meaningful way. The potential categories of stakeholders described below are meant to capture diverse views by interest and geography. Geographic distinctions are not intended to encourage factionalization, but rather to acknowledge the geographic context of the I-81 Challenge as described in the previous section. In organizing actual meetings, we will often seek to encourage regional conversation by bringing together in one room individuals representing various geographic perspectives.

It is recognized and understood that many individual stakeholders could overlap two or more of these categories. At this stage, we are simply trying to create a logical framework in which to consider the great variety of stakeholders in “The I-81 Challenge”.

#### Categories of Potential Stakeholders

- **City of Syracuse - Abutters** – residents, neighborhoods, businesses, organizations and institutions adjacent to the highway (primarily the viaduct)

These stakeholders are concerned with the immediate impact of the viaduct and any future alternatives to the viaduct – includes residents, neighborhood organizations, perhaps specific businesses, organizations such as the housing authority, and institutions such as the hospitals and Syracuse University.

- **City of Syracuse – agencies and civic organizations**  
Concerned with the functions of the city and the future of the city
- **Regional – agencies and civic organizations with a regional outlook**  
Concerned with the functions of the county and region, and the future of the region
- **Regional – local governments**  
Includes the towns and villages in the Syracuse region – this category would probably be further broken out by geography (such as northern suburbs and southern suburbs). Later in the project, as alternatives emerge, certain geographic areas and their associated constituencies may be directly impacted by some of the proposed alternatives due to changes in transportation infrastructure. These impacted communities could become a subset of this category (for example, municipalities to the east if I-481 becomes an important part of a proposed solution).

- **Regional – commuters and other local users of the Corridor**  
This is a difficult category because these stakeholders are not organized in a discrete manner. They may be captured under several of the other categories – local governments, regional agencies and civic organizations, the business community, etc.
- **Business Community**  
Chambers of Commerce, major employers, representatives of smaller employers, unions, etc.
- **Socially Disadvantaged Populations**  
Social / community service agencies and organizations, affordable housing advocates, and others representing organizations that serve the needs of the disadvantaged (and typically under-represented) in Syracuse and the region
- **Arts, Cultural, Religious Communities**  
Representing other components of the human fabric of the metro region and which may also provide a venue or link to their respective constituencies to share information about the project.
- **Environmental and Sustainability Advocates**  
Representing organizations that are attuned to environmental issues in the Syracuse region – air quality, alternative transportation, livable cities, etc. These entities may also be likely to pay close attention to the NEPA process later in the project.
- **Sovereign Nations / Native American**  
The Onondaga Nation
- **National / International Trade**  
Truckers and others who have an interest in the role of the I-81 Corridor in national and international trade
- **Media**  
Those that play a role in informing the public about news and events

- **State / Federal Agencies**

Emphasis on reaching out to the agencies that will eventually have some role in signing off on whatever the eventual solution is.

- **Community-at-large**

Citizens of all interests – whether representing themselves as individuals and/or in association with any number of organizations - are stakeholders and their input will be broadly solicited through the media and other outreach avenues.