

2023 American Planning Associated Upstate Chapter Fall Conference I-81 Viaduct: Getting there together



September 15, 2023

The I-81 Viaduct Project: Getting there together

- ❑ I-81 Viaduct Project Today
- ❑ NEPA and planning the I-81 Viaduct Project
- ❑ The Selected Alternative - The Community Grid
- ❑ The I-81 project Yesterday
- ❑ Community engagement on the I-81 Viaduct Project

- ❖ Betsy Parmley – I-81 Project Director
&
- ❖ TeNesha Murphy – I-81 Public Information Officer and Community Liaison



The I-81 Viaduct Project – Today

Project Area



The I-81 Viaduct Project – Today



The I-81 Viaduct Project – Today

Interstate 81 Engineering Issues

Infrastructure Deficiencies



Safety



Geometrics



Mobility



NEPA and Planning the I-81 Viaduct Project



The official decision-making process, *The I-81 Challenge*, is being led by two entities, the New York State Department of Transportation and the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC), the region's metropolitan planning organization (MPO). Together, these two entities are trying to engage a broad cross-section of community members in developing and evaluating options for the future of this vital corridor.

<http://www.thei81challenge.org>

NEPA and Planning the I-81 Viaduct Project

The I81 Challenge - timeline...

☐ 2010

- SMTC releases “Case Studies for Urban Freeways:
- I-81 Challenge website launched – www.thei81challenge.org
- WCNY hosts a 3-part series on the I-81 Challenge – “The History”, “The Plan”, “the People Speak”

☐ 2011

- Community Liaison Committee & Municipal Liaison Committees are formed
- NYSDOT issues first technical document “Physical Condition Analysis”
- Public workshops held – in person and virtual
- Newsletters released, Facebook page started, blog launched
- SMTC releases videos
- Community input is published by SMTC and NYSDOT

☐ 2012

- Public Meetings held (in-person & virtual)

☐ 2013

- Public Meeting held (in-person & virtual)
- NYSDOT publishes I-81 Corridor Study
- Technical Document #2 – Strategy Development and Evaluation Issued

The I-81 Corridor Study



Prepared by New York State Department of Transportation
In partnership with the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council and Federal Highway Administration
July 2013



Department of
Transportation

NEPA and Planning the I-81 Viaduct Project

Corridor Study- July 2013

Initial Strategies – vision from the public

- Rebuild the viaduct
- Remove the Viaduct
- Replace the Viaduct

Strategies Evaluated

- No Build Strategy
- Rehabilitation Strategy – restores bridges and pavement to “state of good repair” for 30+ years
- Reconstruction Strategy – new viaduct and interchanges to current highway standards
- Boulevard Strategy – removes the viaduct, changes to I81/I481 interchanges
- Tunnel Strategy – removes viaduct and lowers I81 to below grade
- Depressed Highway Strategy - removes viaduct and buries I81



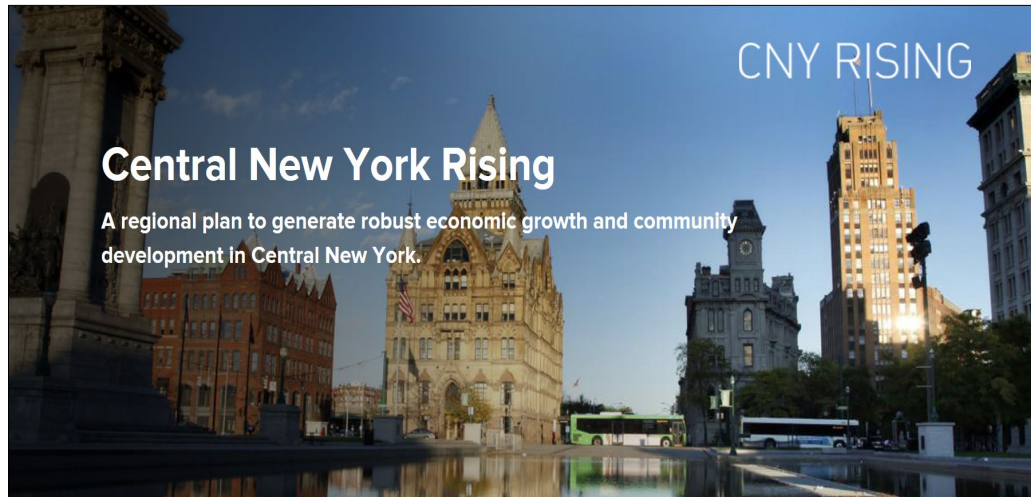
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Community Consensus

Jobs



Pedestrian/
Bicycle/
Transit



Economic Growth

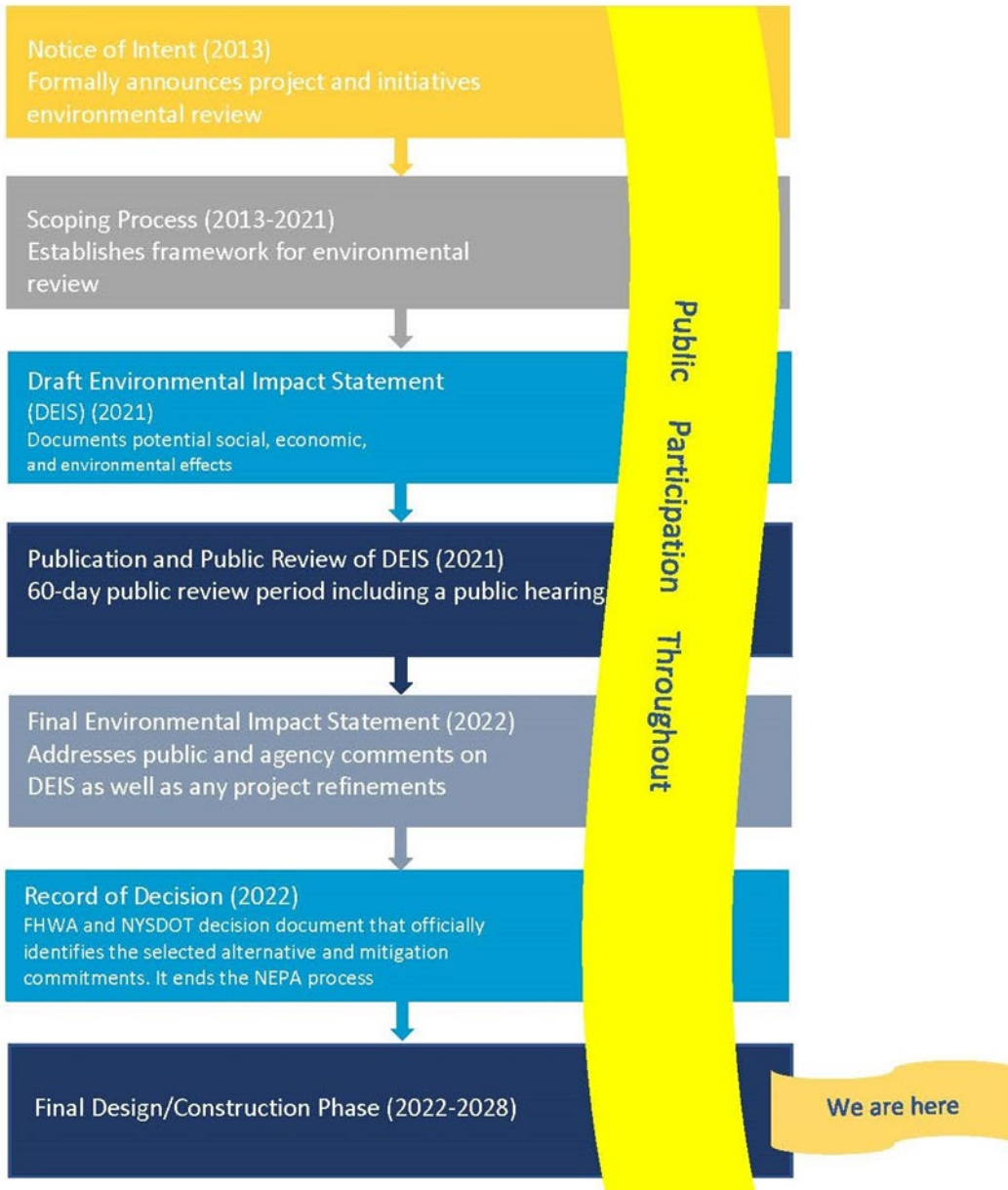


Sustainability/Livability



Department of
Transportation

NEPA and Planning the I-81 Viaduct Project



NEPA Process Timeline

August 2013 – FHWA issued NOI to prepare an EIS

November 2013 – FHWA & NYSDOT prepared Scoping Initiation Package

2013 & 2014 – FHWA and NYSDOT held public scoping meetings

June 2014 – FHWA & NYSDOT prepared Draft Scoping Report

April 2015 – FHWA & NYSDOT issued Final Scoping Report

July 2021 – FHWA & NYSDOT published DDR/DEIS → Public comment period of 90 days included both virtual & in-person meetings. More than 8,000 comments received.

April/May 2022 – FHWA & NYSDOT published FDR/FEIS, ROD

NEPA and Planning the I-81 Viaduct Project

Alternatives Considered



No Build



Viaduct



Community Grid



Tunnel

NEPA and Planning the I-81 Viaduct Project

EIS Sections

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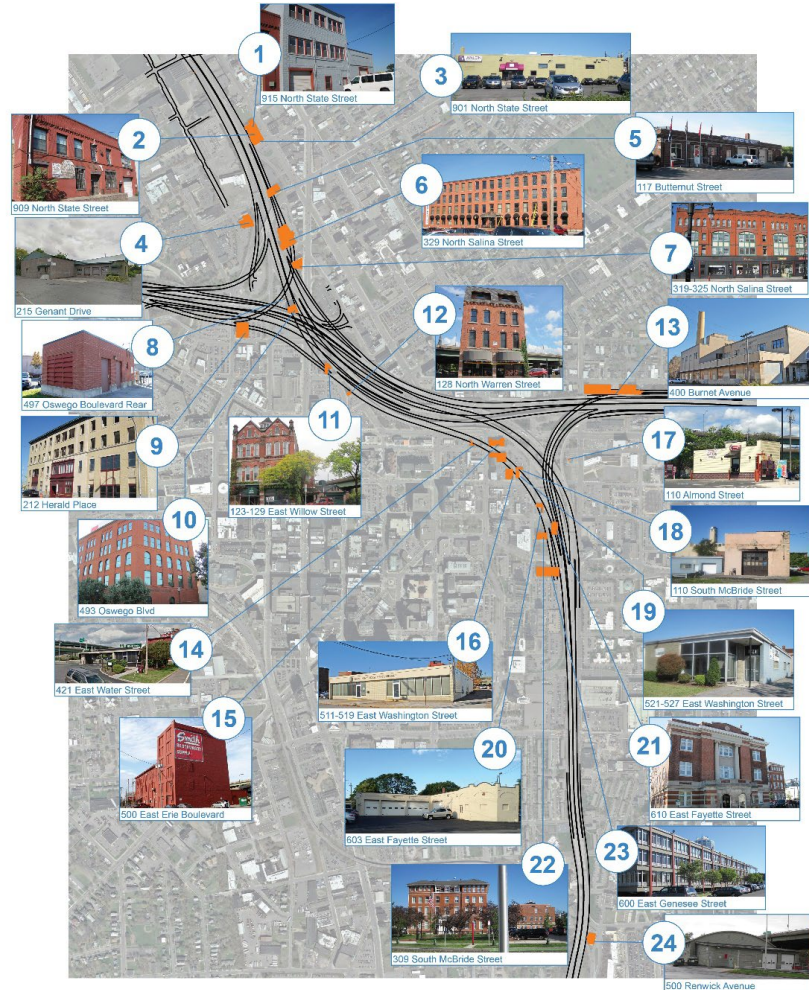
Summary of Build Alternatives

	Community Grid	Viaduct	Tunnel
Cost	\$2.25 billion	\$2.4 billion	\$4.9 billion
Project Duration	6 Years	7 Years	11 years
Building Takings	4	24	22
Reconnects Community/ Facilitates Economic Development	High	Low	Medium
Enhances Safety	High	Medium	Medium
Supports Health Across All Policies	Yes	No	No
Annual Operating/ Maintenance Costs	Average	Average	High
			

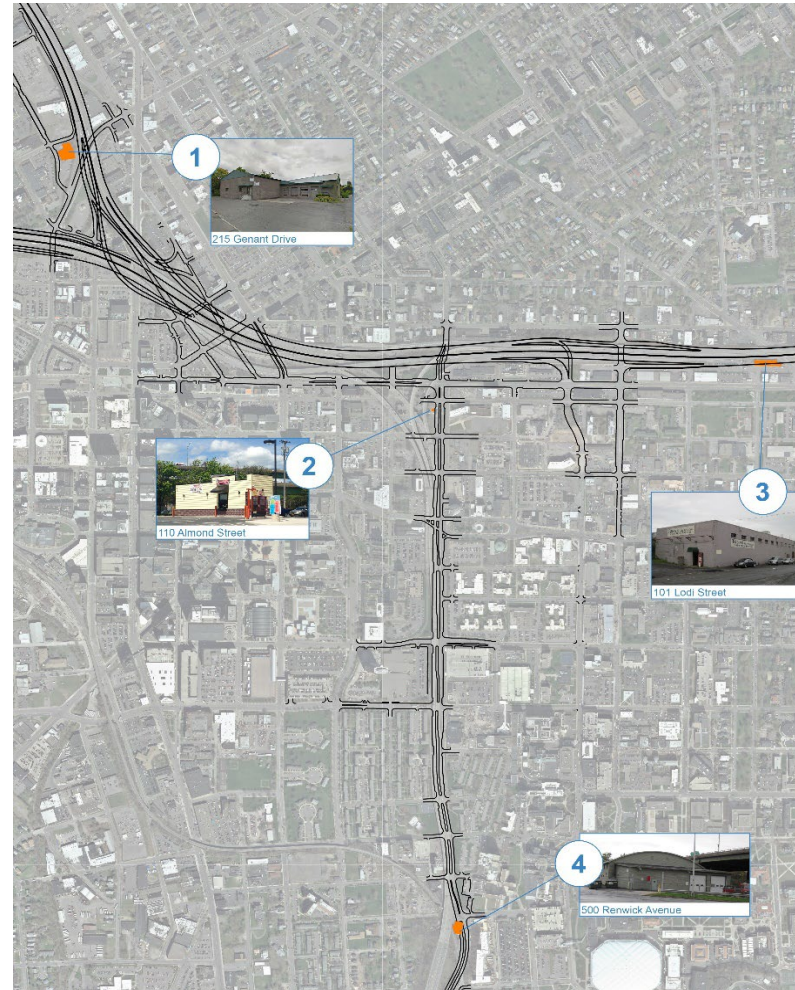
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Potential Building Acquisitions

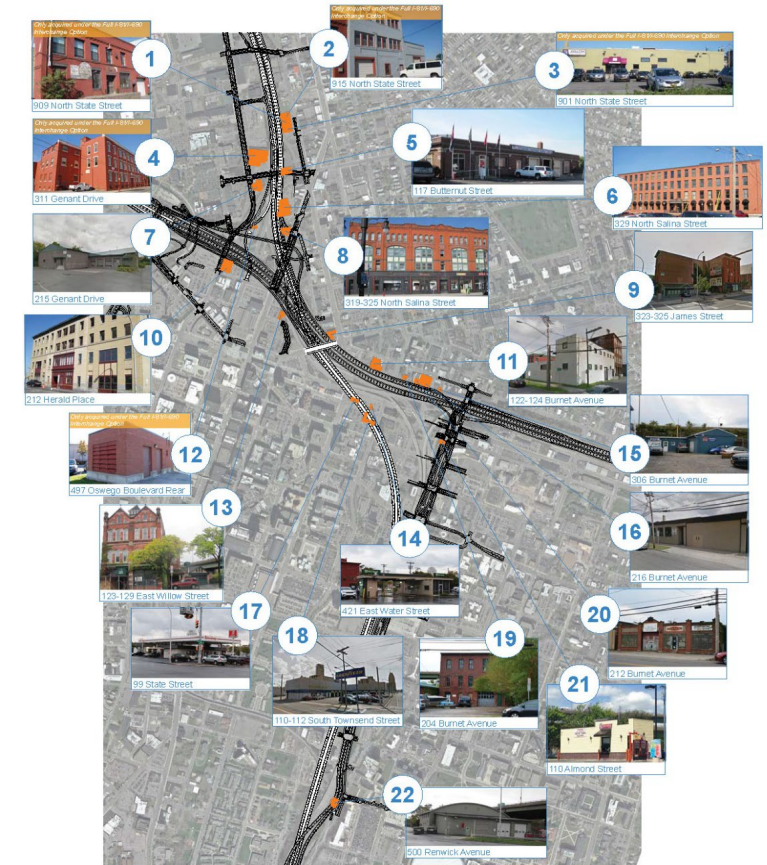
Viaduct Alternative



Community Grid Alternative

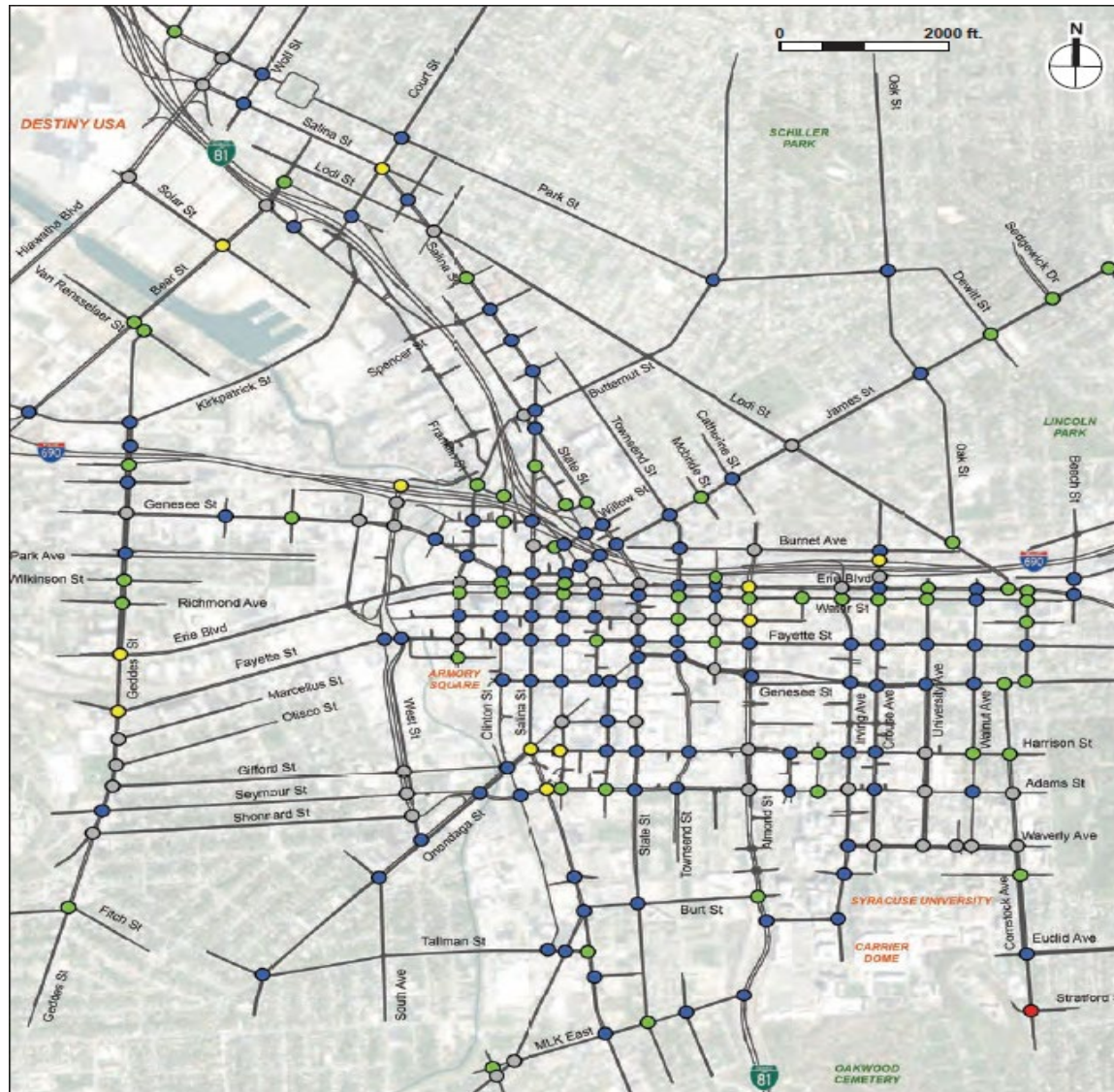


Orange Tunnel Concept



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Community Grid / Intersection Traffic Analysis



- Traffic functions well w/ good travel times. Traffic signals \neq traffic congestion.

Intersection LOS



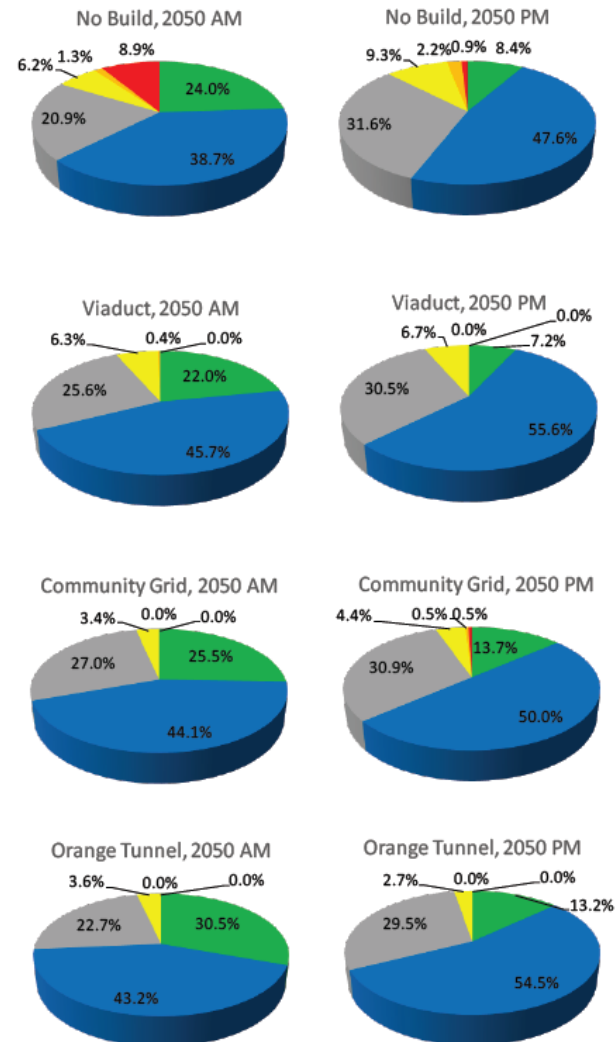
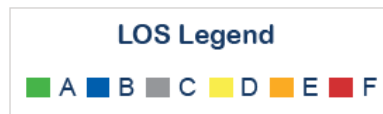
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All Alternatives – Freeway Traffic Analysis

Freeway Segment Level of Service

Level of Service (LOS) is an assessment of a road's operating conditions. It reflects the relative ease of traffic flow on a scale of A to F, with minimal delays rated as LOS A and congested conditions rated as LOS F.

- More than 190 segments were analyzed
- Under the Viaduct, Community Grid, and Orange Tunnel Concept, the vast majority of freeway segments would operate at LOS A, B, or C, which is very good
- Less than 7 percent of segments would operate at LOS D, well within acceptable design criteria
- No substantial differences between the Viaduct, Community Grid, and Orange Tunnel



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Interstate Travel Time Changes



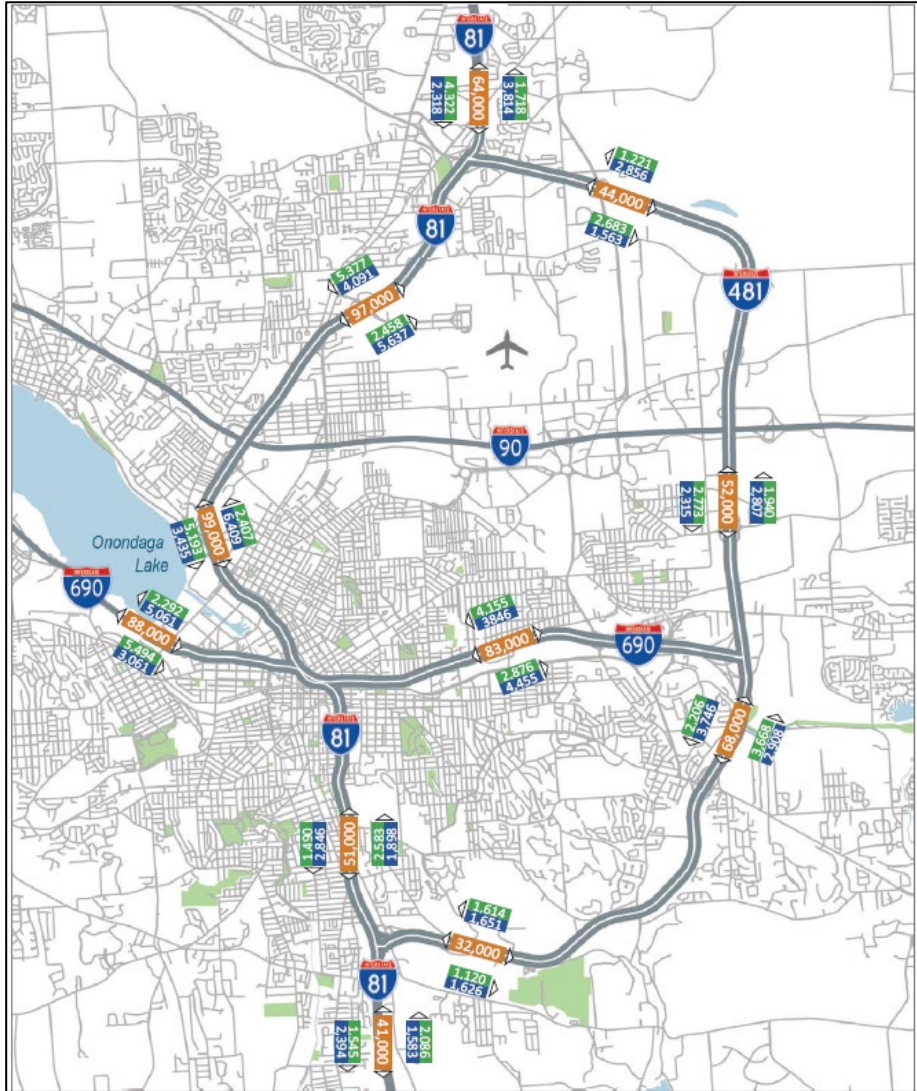
No Build



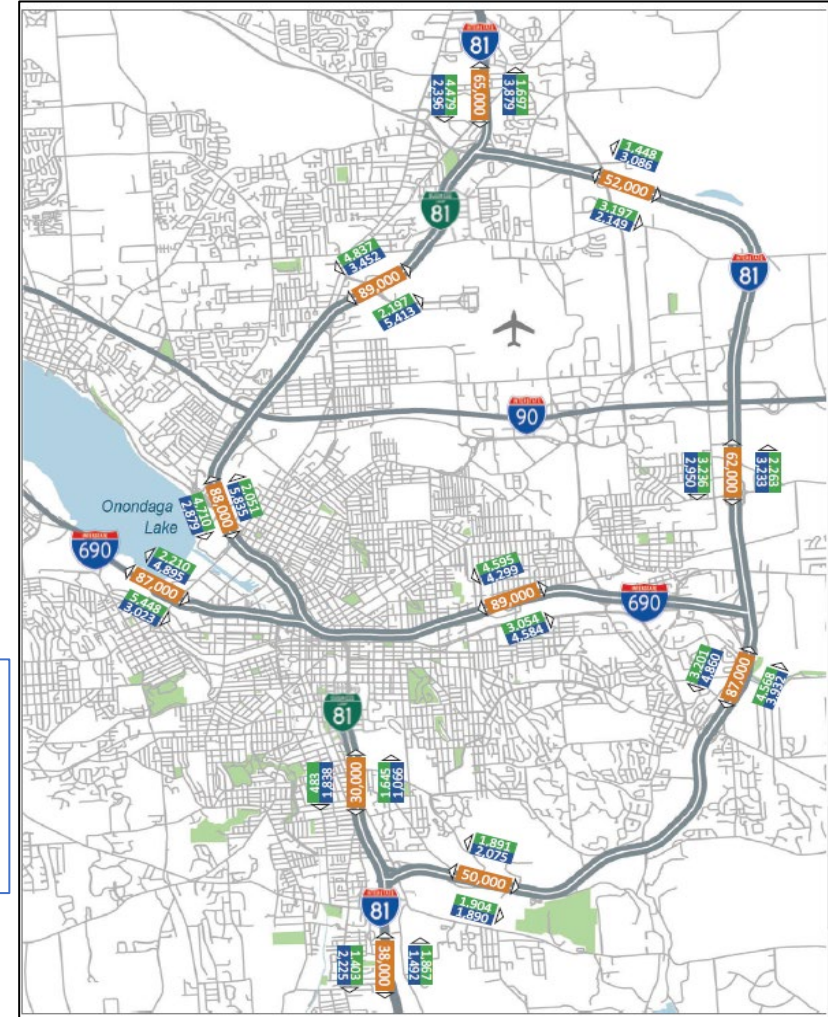
Community Grid

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Interstate Traffic Volume Changes



No Build

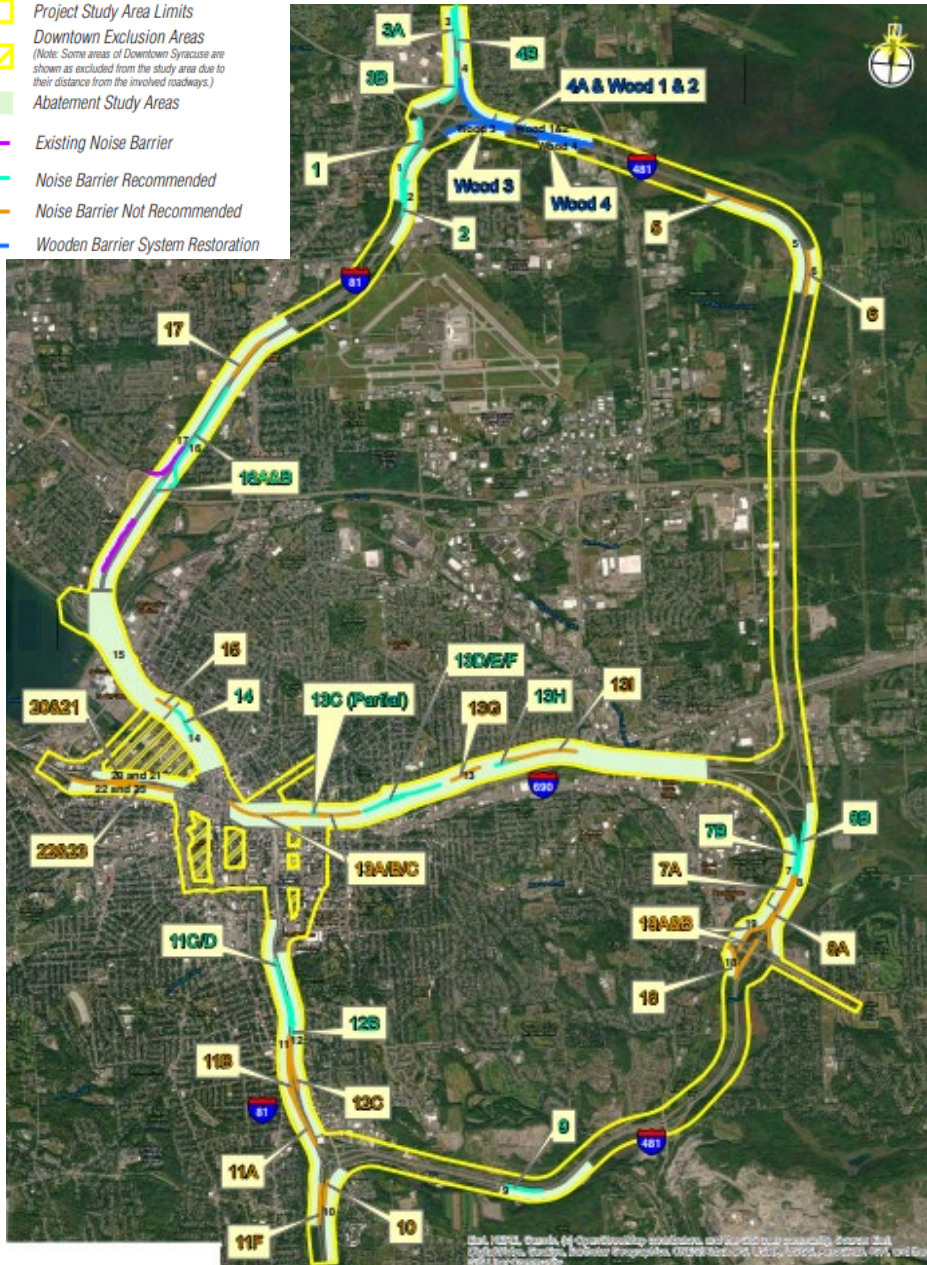


Community Grid

NEPA and Planning the I81 Viaduct Project

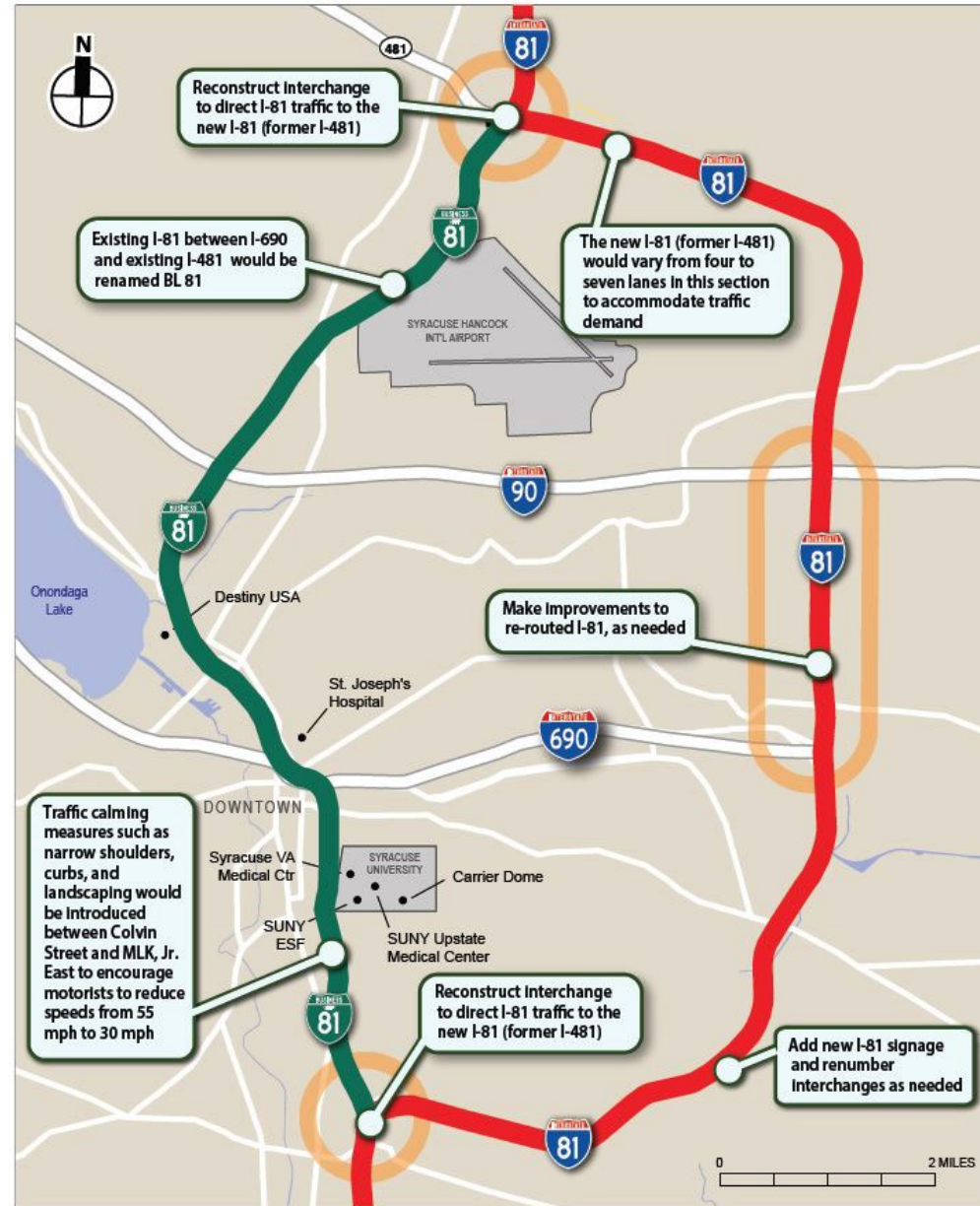
Noise Analysis

- Project Study Area Limits
- Downtown Exclusion Areas
(Note: Some areas of Downtown Syracuse are shown as excluded from the study area due to their distance from the involved roadways.)
- Abatement Study Areas
- Existing Noise Barrier
- Noise Barrier Recommended
- Noise Barrier Not Recommended
- Wooden Barrier System Restoration



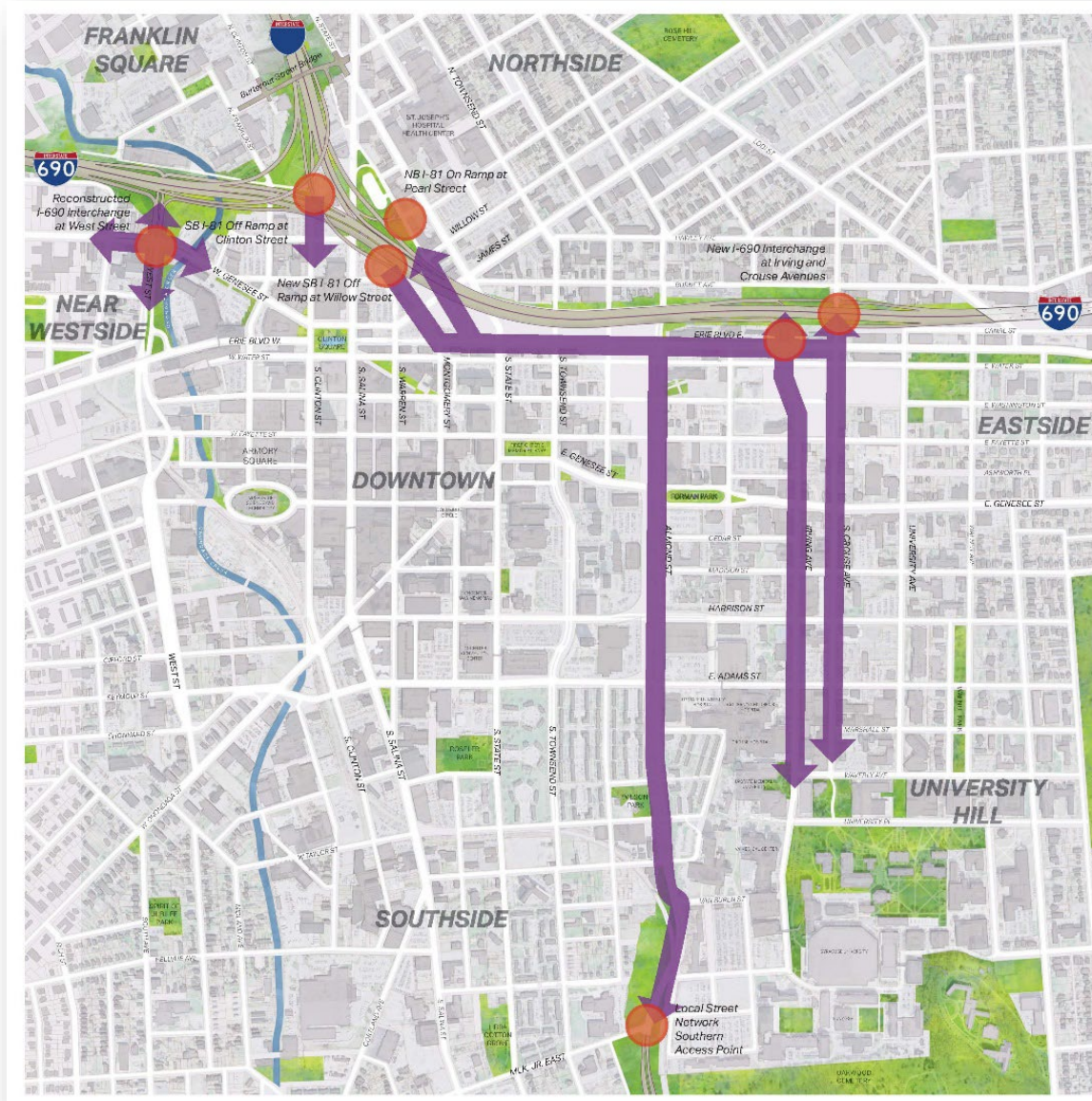
- In accordance with FHWA's "Highway Traffic Noise Analysis and Abatement Policy and Guidance," a noise level change of 3 dB(A) or less is barely perceptible to the human ear; therefore, a comparison was made to determine the number of receptors with changes of more than 3 dB(A) as compared to the No Build Alternative and existing conditions.
- Total number of impacts
- Total number of benefitted receptors
- Impacted receptors with >5 dB(A) Reduction
- Benefitted receptors with >7 dB(A) Reduction
- Sq Ft of Modeled Noise Barrier
- Sq Ft of wall per benefitted receptor
- Feasible
- Reasonable

The Community Grid



The Community Grid

Community Grid Alternative: Activating the Street Grid



The Community Grid

I-690/Crouse, Irving & Lodi



The Community Grid

BL 81 Southern Section



MLK Elementary School



Van Buren Street Roundabout

The Community Grid

I-690 at West Street



Existing West & Genesee Street

Community Grid, West & Genesee Street

The Community Grid

Rebuild I-690

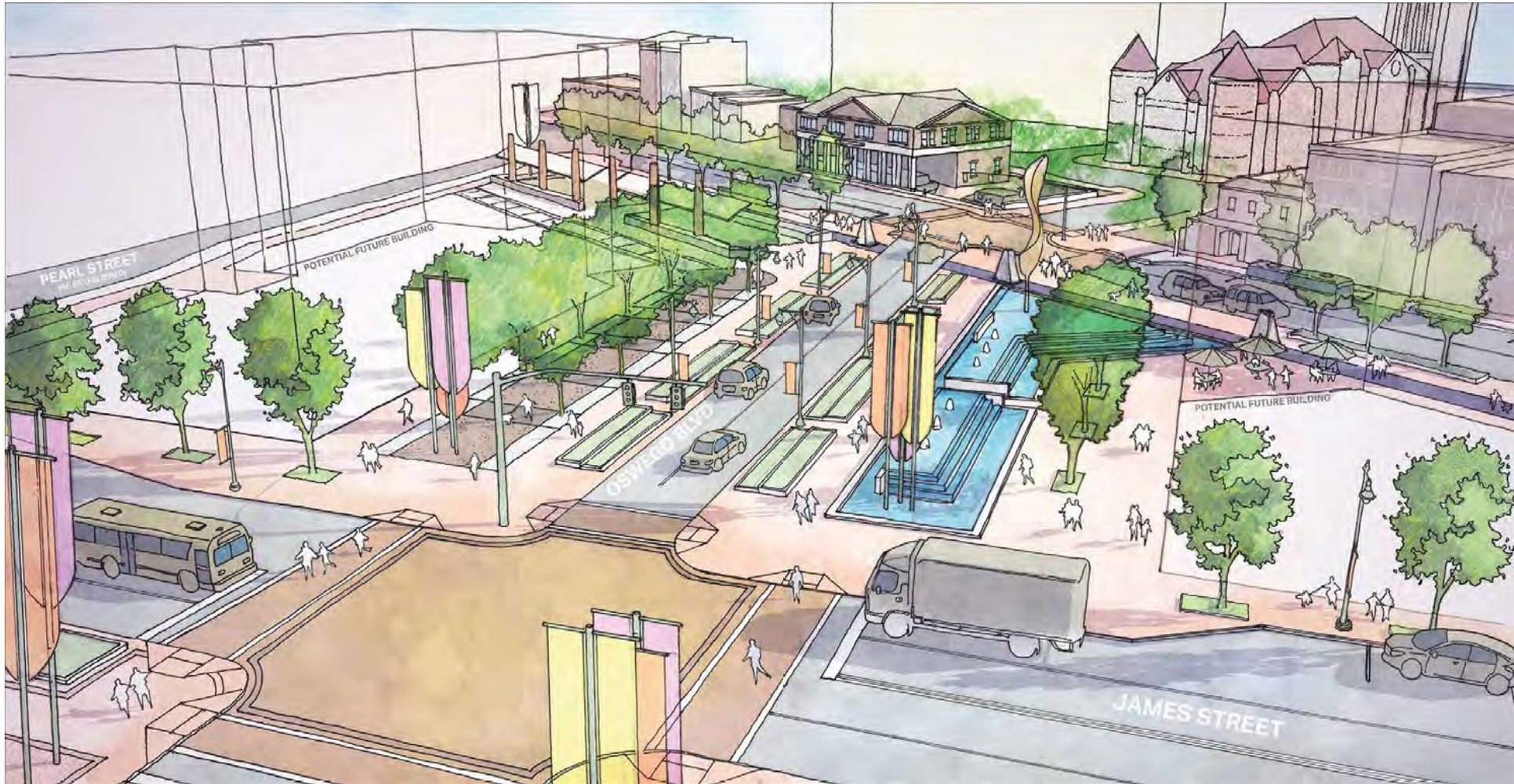


Creekwalk Enhancements



The Community Grid

Northern Business Loop 81



Oswego Boulevard & James Street

The Community Grid

Business Loop 81 Southern Section



Existing Pioneer Homes



Community Grid BL 81 Pioneer Homes

The Community Grid

Business Loop 81 Southern Section



Existing Almond & Adams Street



Community Grid BL 81 & Adams Street

The Community Grid

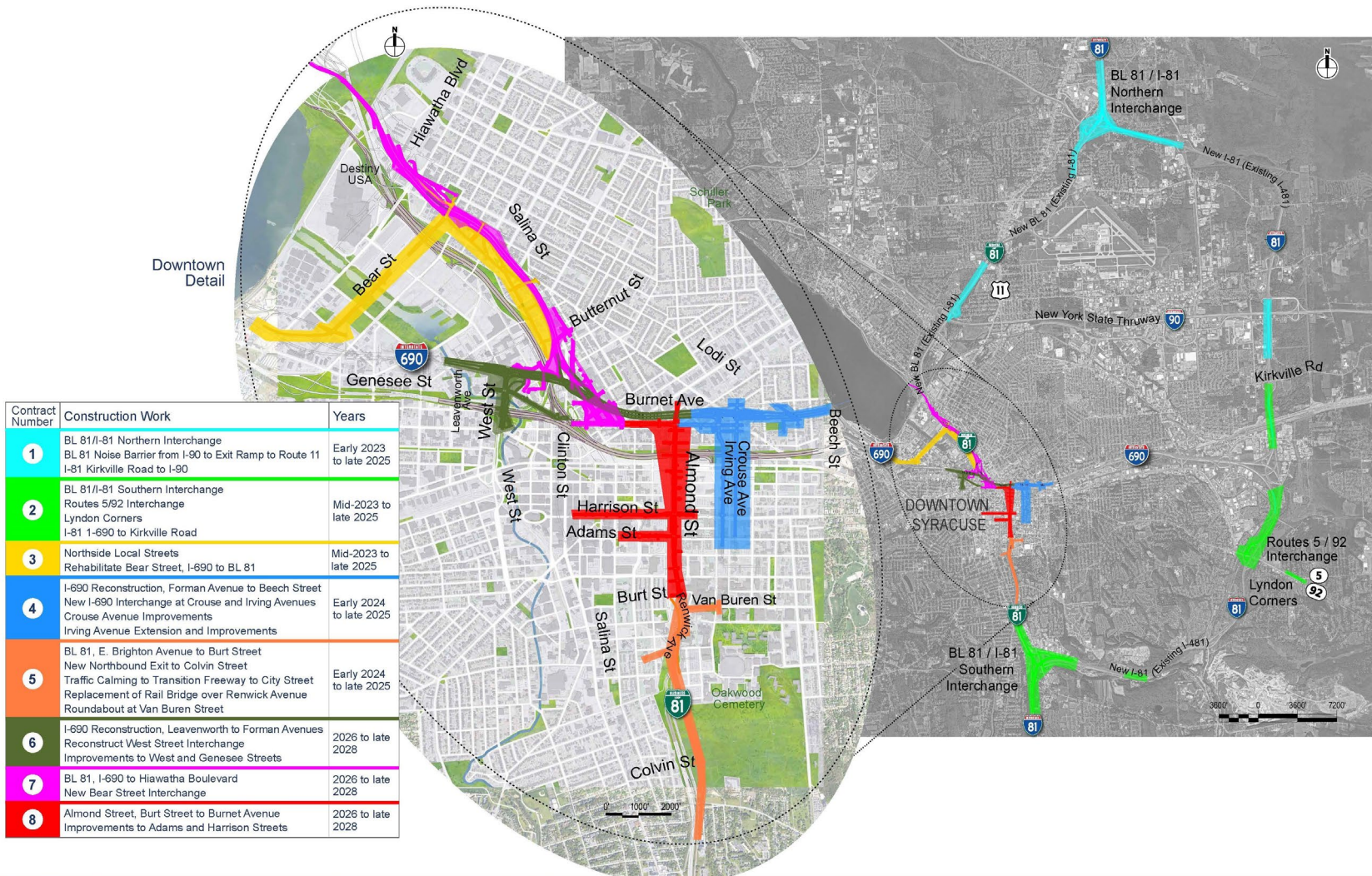
Business Loop 81 Southern Section



Community Grid BL 81 & Harrison Street

The Community Grid

Construction Phasing



The Community Grid



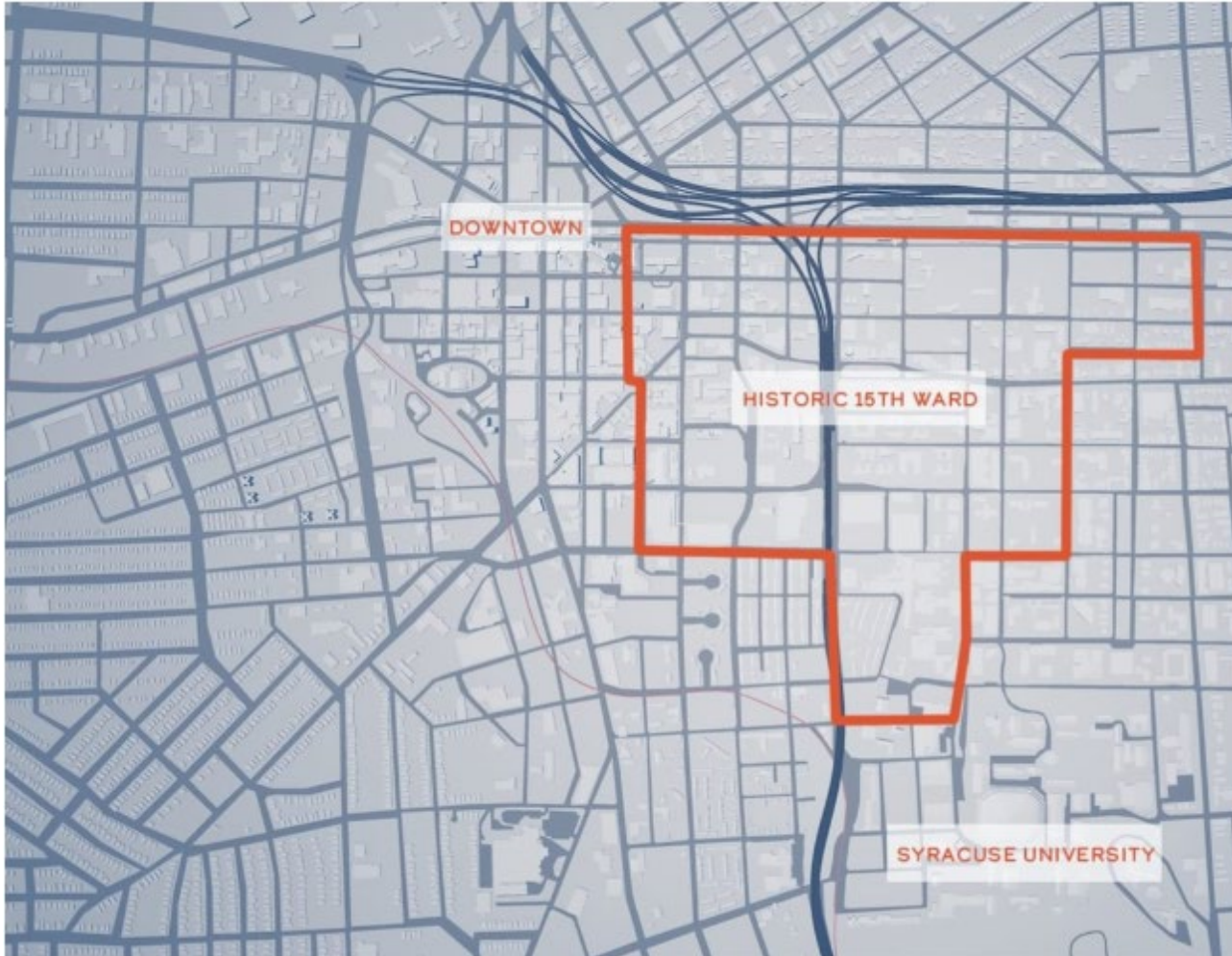
- Community Benefits
 - Promotes a livable/walkable/transit friendly community
 - Removes the physical barrier
 - Reconnects University Hill with Downtown
- Federal expansion of local hire & work force development pilot programs
- Creates potential new opportunities for residential, recreational and/or commercial development
- Most economical build alternative
- Incorporates input from the local community, including Environmental Justice communities
- Avoids removal and demolition of historic properties

I-81 Viaduct Project

- **What do you say to people who think social justice has no place in transportation infrastructure projects?**
- **“When you know better you do better.”**
Dr. Maya Angelou



The I-81 Viaduct Project – Yesterday



- Half-square-mile area where the city's Black and Jewish Americans built a thriving community
- Placed here after racially focused housing policies implemented – “redlining”

The I-81 Viaduct Project – Yesterday



- By 1950 – eight of every nine black residents in Syracuse lived in the 15th Ward
- Close knit community with thriving businesses such as restaurants, taverns, hotels, beauty parlors, barber shops, night clubs.

The I-81 Viaduct Project – Yesterday

- ❑ The Federal Highway Act of 1944
- ❑ The Federal-Aid Highway Acts of 1954 & 1956
- ❑ I-81 Original Construction in Syracuse, NY
 - 1958- decision made to locate a proposed interstate highway on an elevated structure along Almond Street
 - I-81 was constructed in 3 stages, opening between 1959 & 1969



The I-81 Viaduct Project – Yesterday



- During urban renewal efforts – many parts of the 15th ward demolished for expanded central business district
- In 1964 city began to bulldoze neighborhoods to make way for I-81
 - “twin in justices” – forced to live there, then forced to leave
- 400-500 businesses torn down from I-81 and urban renewal

The I-81 Viaduct Project – Yesterday

Historical Impacts



I-81 Syracuse NY 1967

Looking South



Community Engagement

Planning Process & Alternatives

Public involvement for The I-81 Challenge

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Input directly from the public has also been critical for the progress of *The I-81 Challenge*. More than 2,000 people have directly participated through the various public participation activities. To date, our work has included:



PUBLIC WORKSHOPS

- In May 2011, the SMTC and NYSDOT hosted the first series of public workshops
- More than 700 people participated in person, and more than 250 participated in the "virtual" workshop on the project website
- The workshop summary is available on the project website: <http://www.thei81challenge.org/>

FOCUS GROUPS

- The SMTC and the NYSDOT convened 23 focus groups throughout our region
- A total of 176 stakeholders participated



COMMUNITY EVENTS

- The SMTC and the NYSDOT have presented or distributed project information at community events throughout the region

SMALL GROUPS, COMMUNITY MEETINGS

- 21 organizations accepted the SMTC's offer to discuss *The I-81 Challenge* at community meetings

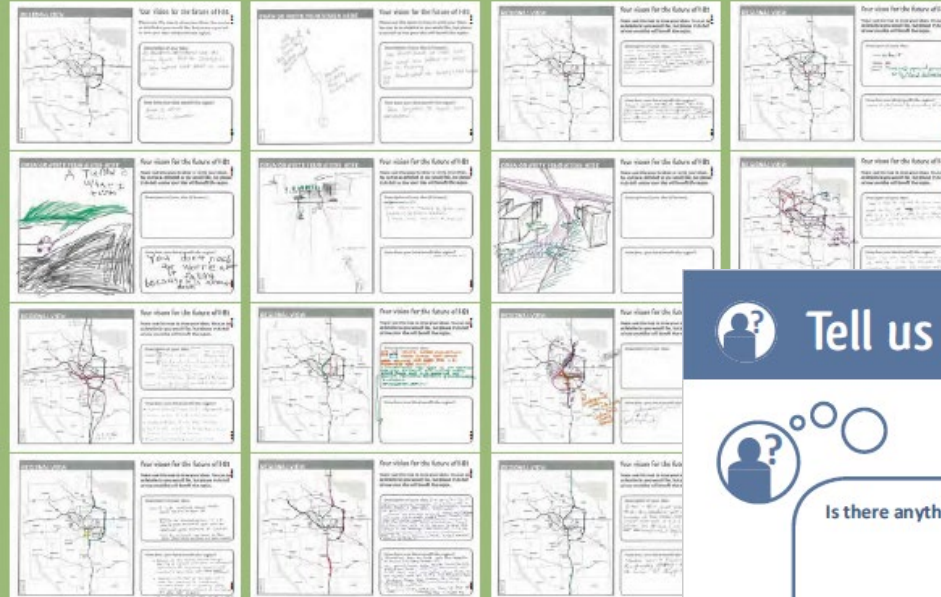


QUESTIONNAIRES

- Two questionnaires allowed more than 1,000 people to answer questions about numerous topics, including their use of I-81 and desired goals for the future of the highway
- The questionnaire summary is available on the project website: <http://www.thei81challenge.org/>

Your visions for I-81

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Tell us what you think

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Is there anything missing from this strategy?

Community Engagement

All Alternatives -Travel Time Differences

ALTERNATIVE		Year 2050							
		Morning Peak				Evening Peak			
		NOBULD	VIADUCT	COMMUNITY GRID	TUNNEL	NOBULD	VIADUCT	COMMUNITY GRID	TUNNEL
From Fayetteville/Manlius to:	Baldwinville	25	27	27	26	30	30	30	30
	Cicero	15	16	16	16	15	16	16	16
	Destiny USA	14	13	13	13	14	13	13	13
	Downtown	15	15	15	15	14	15	16	15
	Fairmount	21	20	20	20	22	22	22	22
	LaFayette	15	15	15	15	19	19	19	19
	Liverpool	15	17	17	17	18	18	18	18
	St. Joseph's Hospital	14	13	14	14	13	13	14	13
From LaFayette to:	University Hill	15	15	16	16	15	16	15	15
	Baldwinville	31	30	37	31	32	31	36	32
	Cicero	25	24	26	24	25	24	26	24
	Destiny USA	17	15	22	15	16	15	20	15
	Downtown	15	16	19	17	15	16	16	17
	Fairmount	24	22	29	23	24	23	28	24
	Fayetteville/Manlius	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
	Liverpool	21	19	26	20	20	19	24	20
From Liverpool to:	St. Joseph's Hospital	19	17	20	18	16	17	17	17
	University Hill	17	14	16	15	14	14	14	15
	Baldwinville	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
	Cicero	13	13	13	13	14	14	14	14
	Destiny USA	6	7	7	7	6	8	7	7
	Downtown	10	8	8	8	9	8	8	8
	Fairmount	15	15	16	15	17	17	19	17
	Fayetteville/Manlius	20	18	18	18	20	19	19	19
From St. Joseph's Hospital to:	LaFayette	21	20	24	20	20	20	25	20
	St. Joseph's Hospital	10	8	8	8	8	9	7	9
	University Hill	14	13	12	13	12	11	11	11
	Baldwinville	20	20	21	21	22	23	23	23
	Cicero	12	12	12	12	12	12	13	12
	Destiny USA	3	3	3	3	4	3	4	3
	Downtown	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4
	Fairmount	13	13	13	14	14	15	16	15
From University Hill to:	Fayetteville/Manlius	14	14	16	15	15	16	17	16
	LaFayette	15	17	19	18	18	18	20	19
	Liverpool	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	8
	St. Joseph's Hospital	7	7	8	9	7	8	7	8
	Baldwinville	21	20	21	22	24	23	23	25
	Cicero	15	14	15	16	15	15	16	17
	Destiny USA	7	6	7	7	7	6	7	8
	Downtown	6	5	6	6	6	6	6	6
From University Hill to:	Fairmount	14	13	14	15	15	15	15	17
	Fayetteville/Manlius	15	15	14	16	17	17	16	17
	LaFayette	15	14	16	16	15	15	15	17
	Liverpool	10	10	11	11	12	11	12	13
	St. Joseph's Hospital	6	6	7	6	6	6	7	7

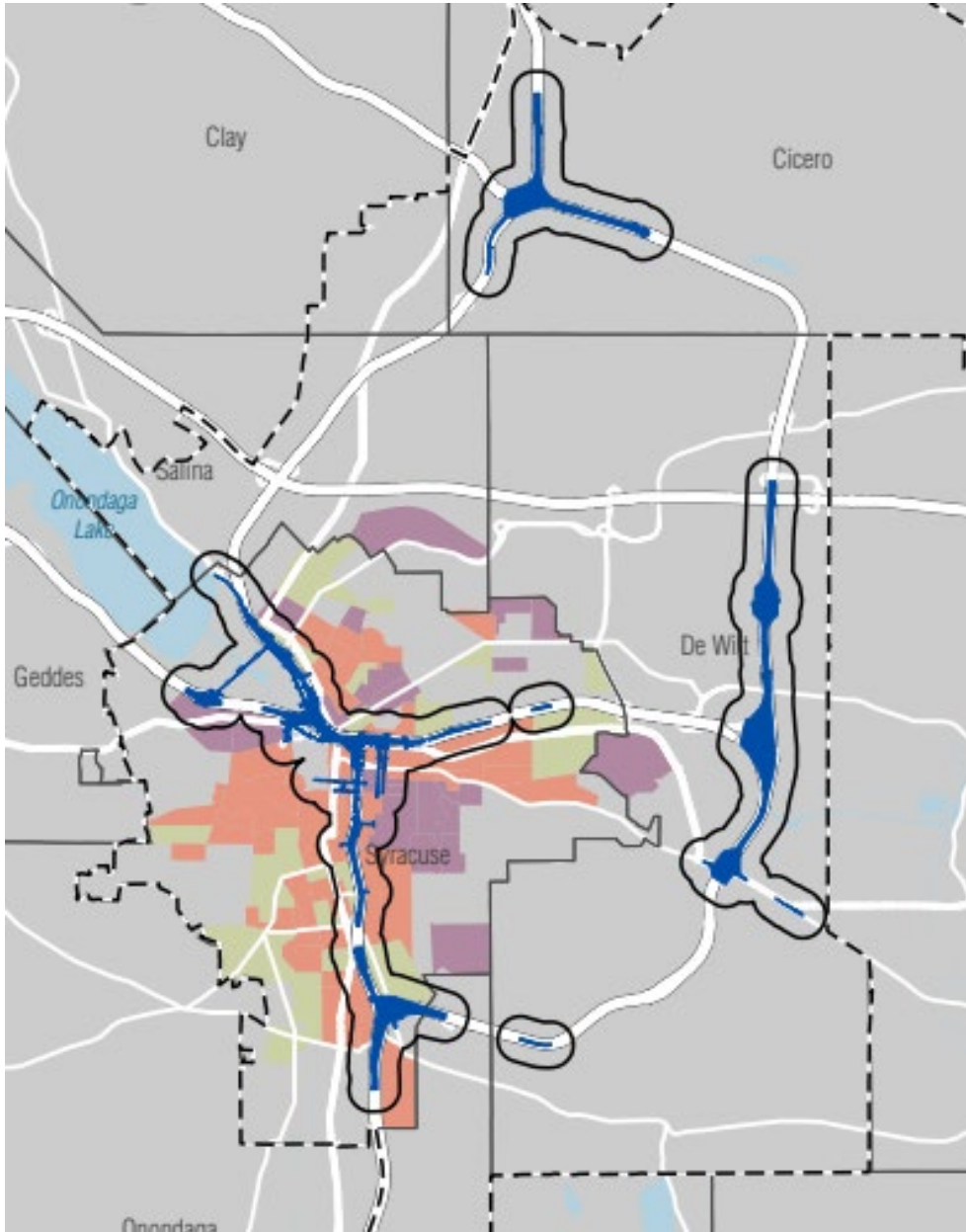


Community Engagement

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations (February 11, 1994), directs federal agencies to take the appropriate and necessary steps to identify and address disproportionately high and adverse effects of federal projects on the health or environment of minority populations and low-income populations to the maximum extent practicable and permitted by law.

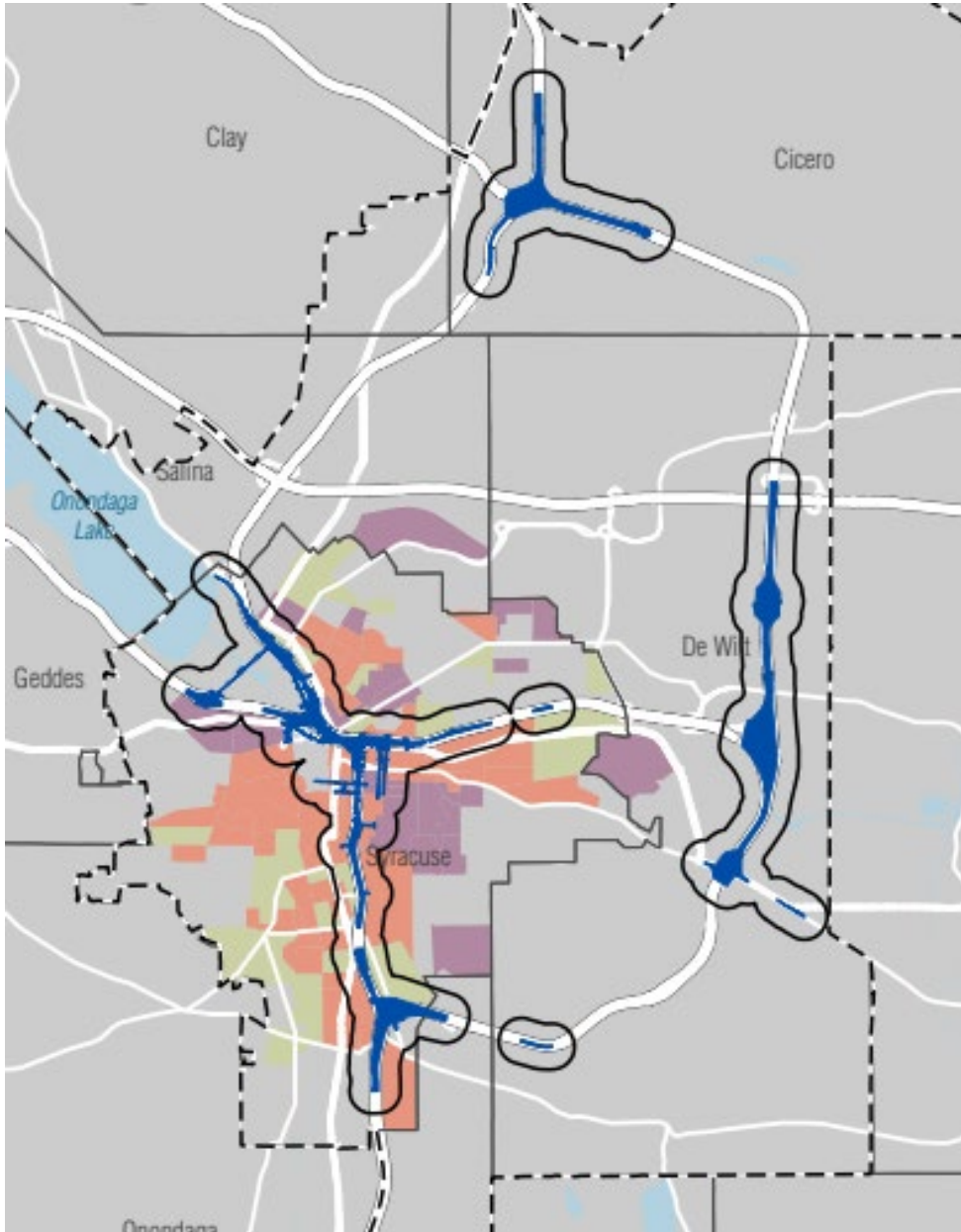
The construction of the existing I-81 viaduct was completed by the end of the 1960s, prior to the implementation of NEPA, and resulted in the **taking** of residential and commercial properties as well as **displacement** residents and businesses within its alignment through the center of Syracuse. Since then, I-81 has been a prominent feature in the Central Study Area and has **created harmful** social and economic conditions.



ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

STEP 1: IDENTIFY EXISTING MINORITY AND LOW-INCOME (ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE) POPULATIONS WITHIN THE STUDY AREA

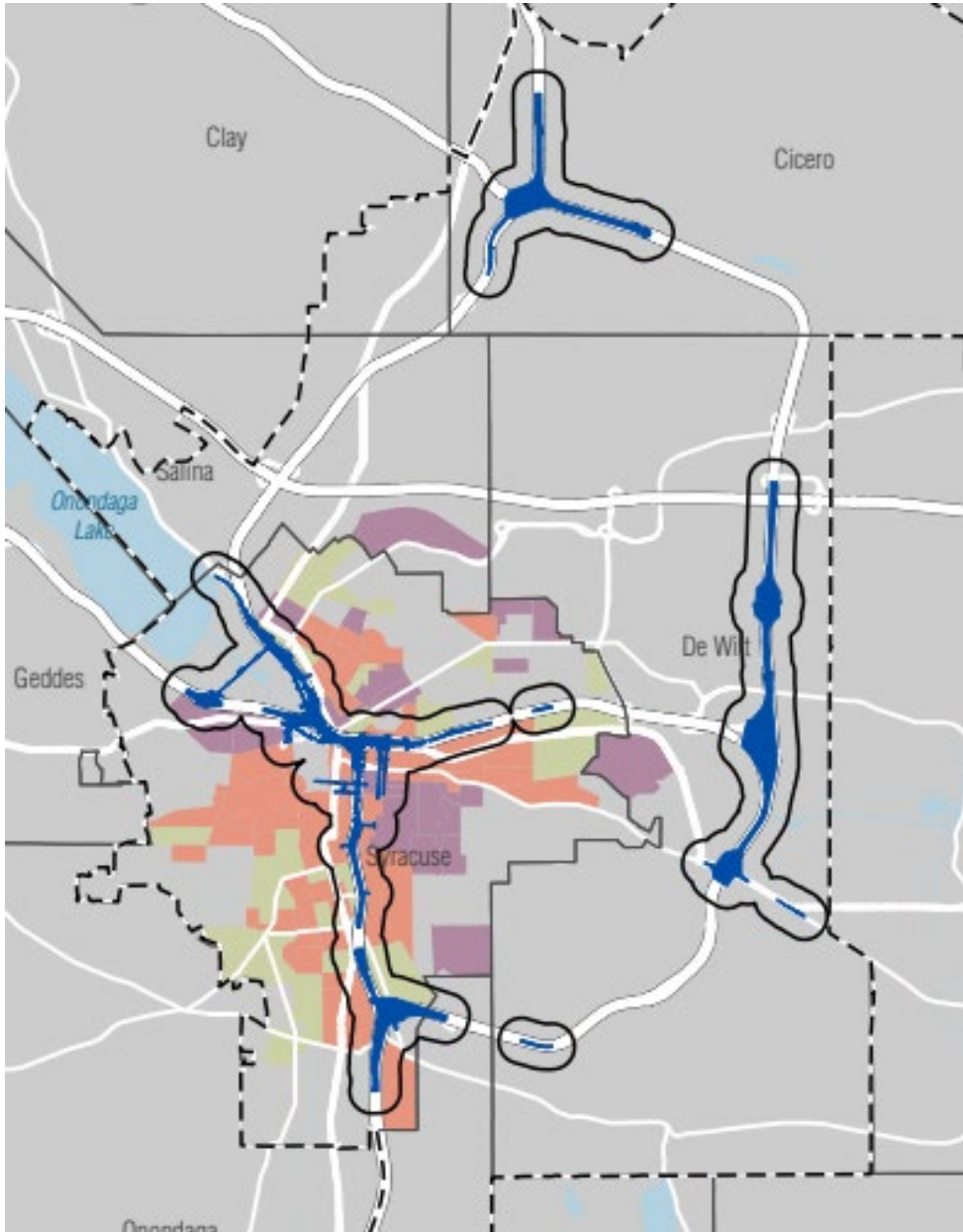
- Project Limits
- Study Area (1/4-Mile Boundary)
- Environmental Justice Study Area
- Minority Community
- Low-Income Communities
- Minority and Low-Income Community



ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

STEP 2: DETERMINE WHETHER THE PROJECT WOULD RESULT IN ADVERSE EFFECTS ON THE IDENTIFIED ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE POPULATIONS

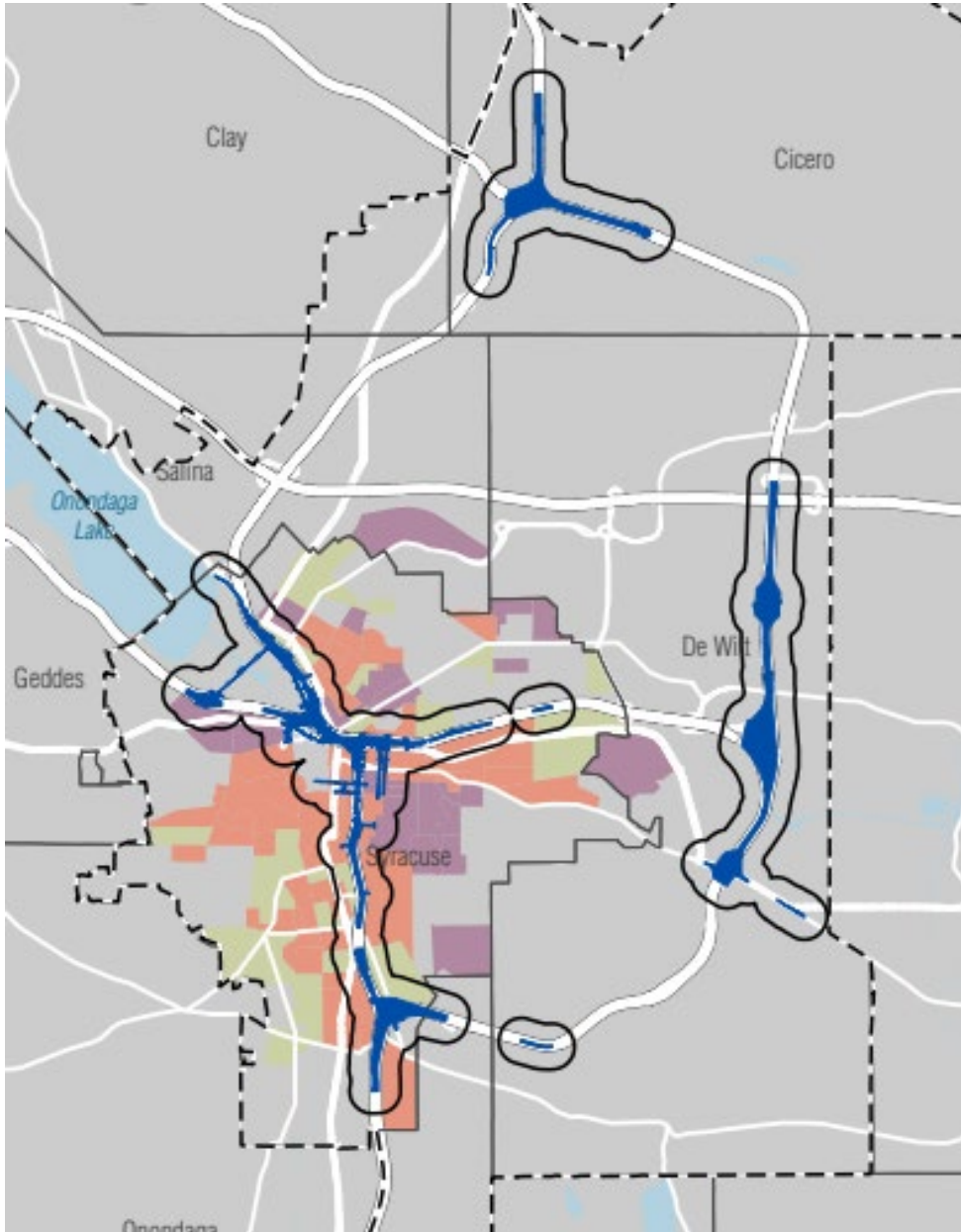
- Neighborhood Character
 - Land Use
 - Community Cohesion
- Transportation
- Land Acquisition and Displacement
- Parks and Recreation Resources
- Visual and Aesthetic Considerations
- Air Quality
- Traffic Noise
- Construction Effects



ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

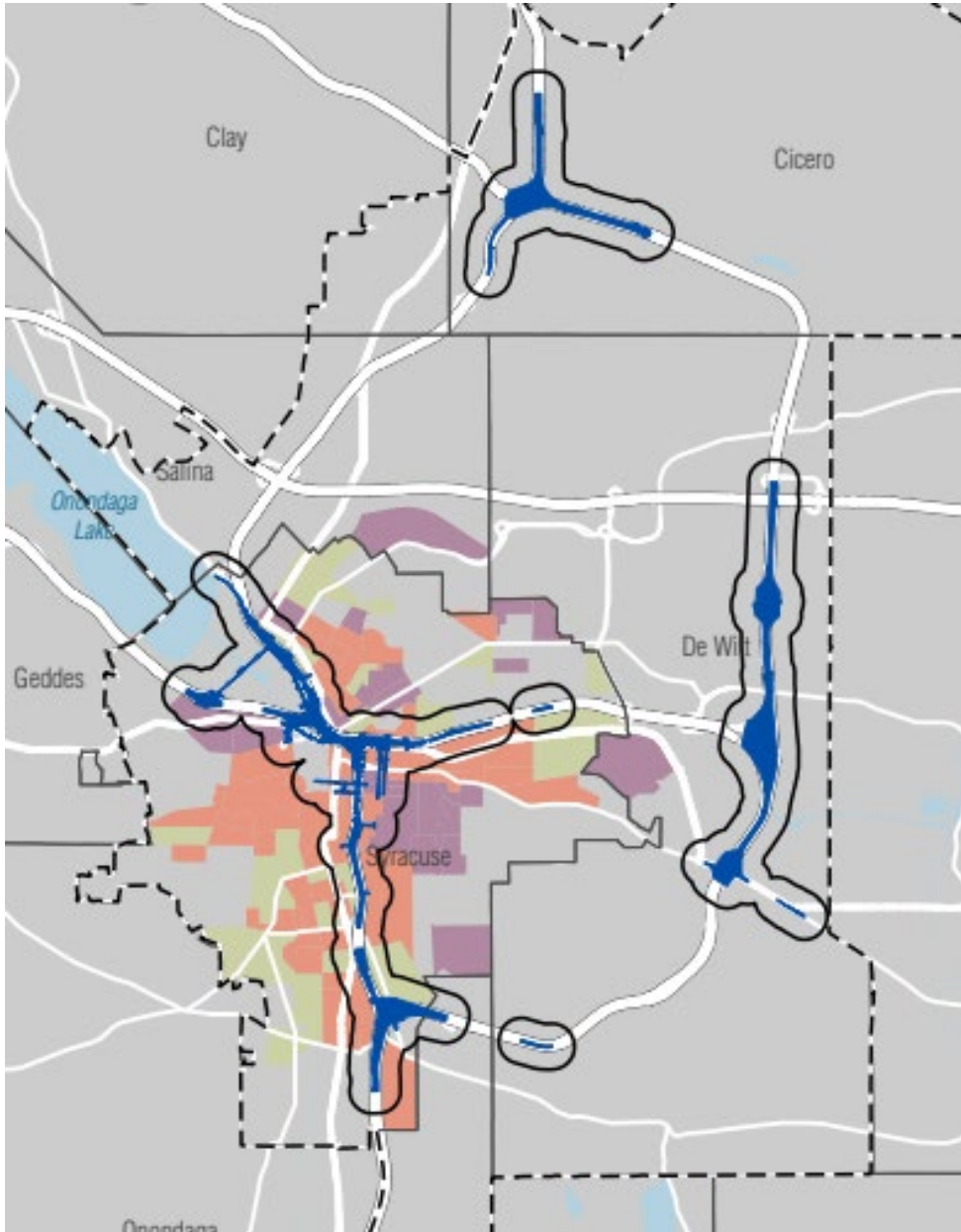
STEP 3: CONSIDER MITIGATION FOR ANY ADVERSE EFFECTS

- Visual and Aesthetic Considerations
 - Landscape Plans
 - Aesthetic treatments on infrastructure
- Traffic Noise
 - Noise Barriers
- Construction Effects
 - Time-of-day restrictions for noisy activities
 - Temporary barriers to shield noise
 - Requirements for vehicles and equipment to reduce noise
 - Restrictions on impact and drilling equipment where reasonable
 - Designated truck routes
 - Noise, air quality and vibration monitoring program
 - Communication and outreach plan



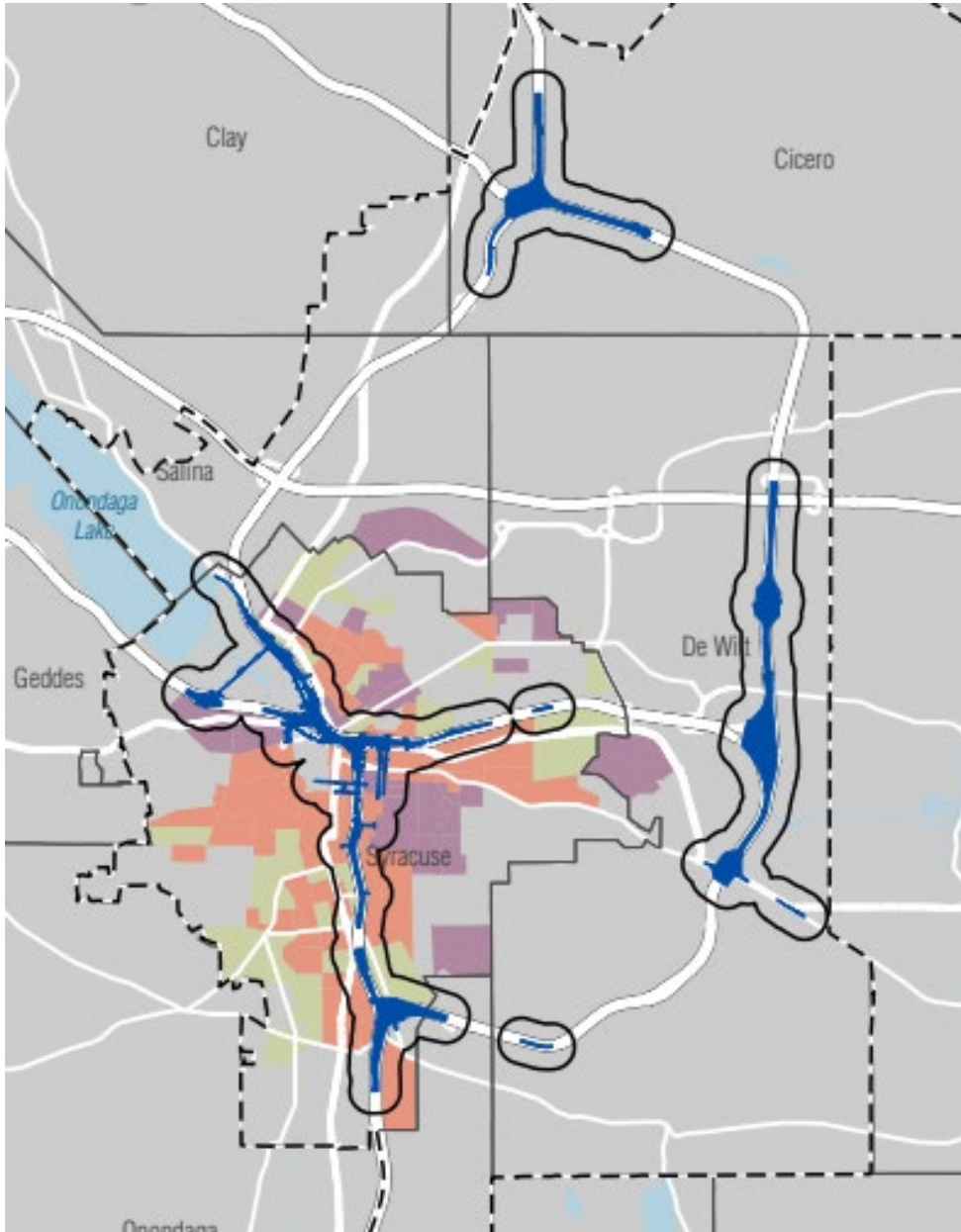
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

STEP 4: IF EFFECTS WOULD REMAIN ADVERSE AFTER MITIGATION IS CONSIDERED, IDENTIFY WHETHER THOSE EFFECTS WOULD BE PREDOMINATELY BORNE BY THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE POPULATIONS OR ARE APPRECIABLY MORE SEVERE OR GREATER IN MAGNITUDE ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE POPULATIONS THAN THE ADVERSE EFFECT SUFFERED BY THE NON-MINORITY OR NON-LOW-INCOME POPULATIONS (E.G., DISPROPORTIONATELY HIGH AND ADVERSE EFFECTS).



ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

STEP 5: IF DISPROPORTIONATELY HIGH AND ADVERSE EFFECTS ON ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE POPULATIONS ARE ANTICIPATED, EVALUATE WHETHER THERE IS A FURTHER PRACTICABLE MITIGATION MEASURE OR PRACTICABLE ALTERNATIVE THAT WOULD AVOID OR REDUCE THE DISPROPORTIONATELY HIGH AND ADVERSE EFFECTS.



ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

PUBLIC OUTREACH TO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE POPULATIONS

- Large Public Meetings
- Open houses
- Advertisements in various media
- Spanish language interpreters
- Local festivals

Community Engagement

Community Engagement feedback during NEPA included:

- Construction effects on the Southside and other environmental justice areas
- Displacement and relocation of minority and low-income residents
- Local hiring of contractors and construction workers
- The long-term effects of highway infrastructure on the local community, including social, economic, and health effects
- Concerns regarding the indirect displacement of low-income or minority populations because of development spurred by the Community Grid Alternative
- The location of a roundabout near Dr. King Elementary School as proposed in the DDR/DEIS

Community Engagement

Community Engagement Commitments

- A land use working group to identify opportunities for surplus right-of-way
- Stakeholder and community meetings during the final design and construction phases
- Establishment of a centrally located, on-site project office that would accommodate drop-in visitors with any questions, comments, or concerns that they may have about ongoing and upcoming construction activities
- Establishment of a telephone number that would be used to call and ask any questions about ongoing and upcoming construction activities, to submit input, or discuss a concern
- Development and maintenance of a website to advise stakeholders and the general public of construction activities. - Development of a specific communication schedule and procedures for providing construction status updates and other construction-related information to the general public.

Community Engagement

Example of results from Community Engagement - MLK Roundabout



DDR/DEIS



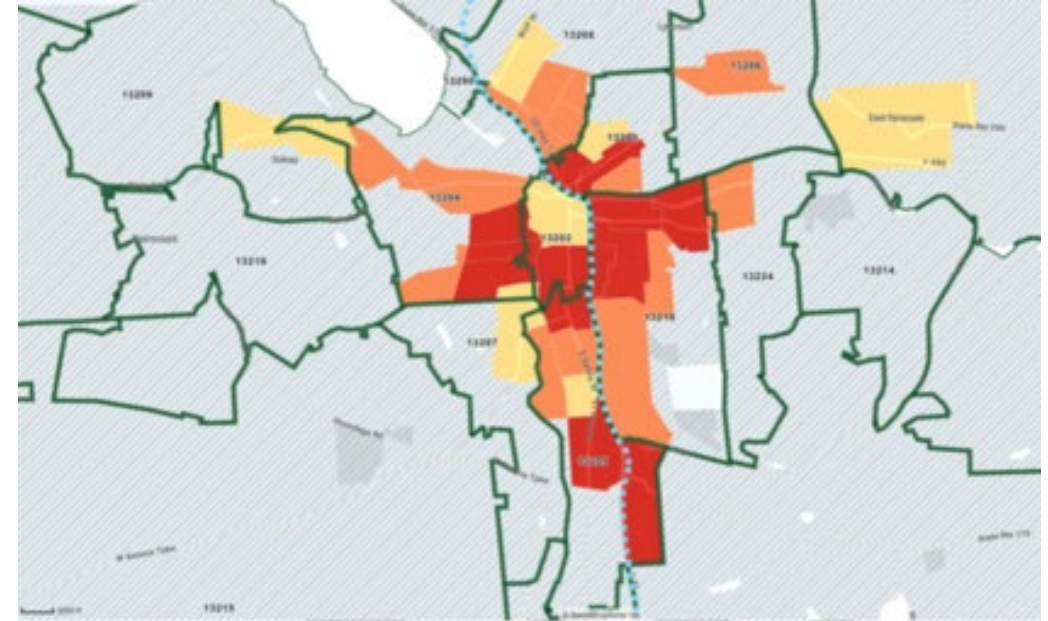
FDR/FEIS

Community Engagement

Local Hiring Preference

WorkSmartNY Syracuse Build Collaborative

- Syracuse Build
- SUNY EOC
- CenterState CEO
- Association General Contractors
- Northern and Central Building Trades
- Urban Jobs Task Force
- CNY Works
- Department of Labor
- City of Syracuse
- Onondaga County
- FHWA
- Onondaga Nation



- Participation Goal – 15%
- Targeted Areas
- Minimum Qualifications
 - Tier 1 & Tier 2
- Incentive Payment Rate
 - Tier 1 - \$20/hour
 - Tier 2 - \$30/hour

Community Engagement

Community Engagement Today

➤ Meetings:

- Elected Officials
- Stakeholders
- Community Groups

➤ Outreach Centers:

- Two locations

➤ Open Houses:

- Cicero
- Southern Interchange



Community Engagement

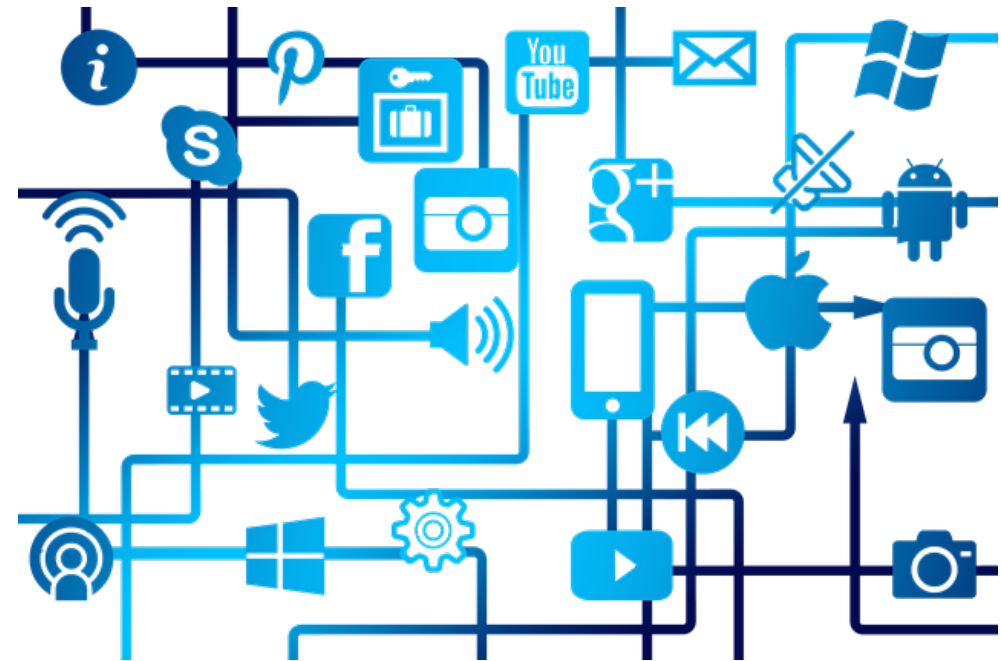
Community Engagement Today and in the future

➤ Current Public Outreach Tools:

- Website, Email, Hotline
- Press Releases & Travel Advisories
- Festivals
- Social Media Accounts

➤ Coming Soon:

- Monthly Digital Newsletter
- Mobile App
- YouTube Videos
- Podcast



The I-81 Viaduct Project: Getting there together



I81.dot.ny.gov