The Chancellor's Workgroup on I-81

Final Report

June 23, 2014

Michael Speaks (Chair)

Colleen Bench

Allan Breese

Chris Johnson

Burak Kazaz

Outline

MEMORANDUM

To: Michael Speaks (Chair); Colleen Bench; Allan Breese; Chris Johnson; Burak Kazaz

From: Kent Syverud, Chancellor and President

RE: Workgroup on I-81

Date: April 15, 2014

I am appointing each of you to a workgroup with the charge to recommend key objectives and considerations for the University pertaining to the future of I-81. New York State is conducting an environmental review that will eventually lead to a decision for replacing the existing structure. Syracuse University has an important stake in the final decision as a national/international university, a major regional employer, and one of the most popular destinations in the region. We are also a leading educator in architecture, urban design, civil engineering, and other related fields of study.

I am asking this workgroup to produce a report that will:

(1) Outline key considerations and impacts on the University's daily operations. This should include access to campus; attendance at athletics or other special events at the Carrier Dome; and, the logistics of moving employees, students, equipment, and supplies across campus and to destinations in the community. The report should examine the impacts in the short-term, given protracted construction that is expected, and long-term implications on daily academic and business operations.

(2) Outline long-term implications on campus planning including campus design and environment; real estate holdings; capital projects currently under development; and potential changes to the University's planned institutional districts.

(3) Describe the long-term implications on the community, including quality of life for living and working in the city; economic development; and regional planning.

(4) Recommend key design objectives and considerations that address the issues outlined above.

Each of you has particular expertise and experience to understand how changes to I-81 will impact our campus and our community. There has been much public discussion pertaining to specific design alternatives being studied by the State, or ideas that have been presented to the community by other interested parties. <u>The purpose of this workgroup is not to study those alternatives, nor advocate for a specific plan on behalf of the University</u>. Your charge is to help me better assess the major issues surrounding the I-81 replacement and therefore make decisions that are in the best interest of the University, both internally and externally.

I expect a report to be completed by Monday, June 16th. I ask that you consult with Eric Spina, Lou Marcoccia, Kevin Quinn, Daryl Gross, Chuck Merrihew, Rebecca Reed-Kantrowitz (and any of their relevant direct reports). Staff support will be provided by Eric Persons, Associate Vice President in the Office of Government and Community Relations.

CC: K. Quinn, D. Gross, E. Persons, C. Merrihew, R Reed-Kantrowitz, L. Marcoccia, E. Spina.

Executive Summary:

Over the course of two months, the Chancellor's Workgroup on I-81 conducted weekly meetings to gather information about the campus and surrounding community, daily campus operations, and future planning efforts that would be impacted by the decision to replace the current I-81 highway. The Workgroup interviewed University officials from Syracuse University Athletics, the Office of Parking and Transit Services, and the Office of Campus Planning, Design and Construction in order to review the transportation needs of the University community related to daily commuting, special events, capital projects, and future plans for development in and around campus. The Workgroup also interviewed transportation planners and officials from the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council and the New York State Department of Transportation in order to better understand the decision-making process in replacing I-81.

Whatever the ultimate configuration of I-81, the most important issue related to the I-81 decision is improving traffic circulation on the University Hill and on the University campus: both vehicular and pedestrian. The impact on traffic will be significant, no matter the alternative. This provides not just an opportunity to improve upon current conditions, but a requirement to plan strategically and mitigate the impact that construction will have on the area.

The most immediate impact will be on traffic leading to and from campus, and thus on vehicular and pedestrian traffic on the campus proper. There are two aspects to these two kinds of traffic and traffic circulation. One concerns efficiency: How do we most efficiently move people and goods to and from, and throughout, the University Hill and campus so that students, employees and visitors are able to conduct their daily business. The other concerns the campus experience: How do we most effectively script the movement of people and goods to and from and throughout the University Hill and campus so that students, employees and visitors have a coherent, unified, positive "Syracuse University Experience."

Among its several findings and conclusions, the Workgroup believes the following current conditions should be strongly considered in establishing the University's perspective on I-81:

- The University does not have enough space to accommodate parking demands on the main campus. The long-term, strategic approach to University parking and transit is thus to move parking away from main campus to locations on the periphery of the University Hill. This will reduce the overall daily traffic strain on the University Hill.

- Access to the University Hill area from the current configuration of I-81 is extremely limiting with only one direct exchange at Adams and Harrison streets; the consequence of having essentially a single access point creates a traffic bottleneck for daily commuters and visitors to downtown Syracuse and the University Hill institutions.

- The University lacks a signature gateway, or "front door" that aligns well with current traffic flows.

- In order to accommodate the short- and-long-term needs of access to the campus, the University must participate in the development of a multi-modal transportation system for the University Hill.

- The vast majority of vehicles using I-81 exit the highway to reach a local destination in the city and surrounding community. Only 6% stay on I-81 to drive through the city; another 5% use the I-690 exchange to access I-90.

- Traffic congestion along with decisions made 50 years ago during Urban Renewal have impeded economic development. The decision to replace I-81 presents an opportunity to create a long-term development plan that will enable the University, the city and the region to live up to its economic and life-quality potential.

- Regardless of the alternative selected, the I-81 decision will significantly impact the configuration of the SU Steam Plant, and future construction will disrupt the commuting schedules of faculty, staff and students accessing University locations downtown.

In moving forward, and to ensure that the University's interests are best represented in the decision-making process, the Workgroup recommends the following key objectives and considerations.

(1) Any campus strategic planning effort should take into account the extensive construction period that is expected to commence as early as 2017. Once construction commences on any of the I-81 alternatives, there will ensue a long and extremely disruptive period of at least 5 years that will require unprecedented planning and coordination with the city and the state.

(2) It is essential that a well-functioning, multi-modal transportation plan be in place before any I-81-related construction occurs in order to mitigate the disruptions in daily commuting. All commuters will be impacted, and operating a multi-modal transportation system with military-like precision will be required to create positive experiences for alternative transportation options.

(3) The campus should have multiple access points off the highway system, including at least one access point from each of I-481 and I-690 highways, and connecting into the city's street grid to improve the flow of vehicles to parking destinations. I-481 should become a major direct access point to the campus, when it currently is not, to further leverage existing park-and-ride operations from South Campus. Likewise, park-and-ride options off I-690 should be explored where opportunities currently do not exist.

(4) The University experience begins when you exit the highway. Therefore, any major exchanges must have an aesthetically pleasing view of the city and community in addition to traffic planning to make the most of this entryway to campus.

(5) The University has embarked on an ambitious plan to develop residential, commercial and academic infrastructure in the West Campus Planned Institutional District (PID). This area is presently boxed by the current highway configuration. Alternatives that open the Almond Street corridor to the city street grid would open the West Campus PID to the city and could provide an additional gateway to the University.

(6) There will be major consequences for the University properties located off the main campus. We should be advocating for solutions that minimally influence the University's plans and operations for the Syracuse University Steam Station, Nancy Cantor Warehouse, 900 E. Genesee St. block, Peck Hall and Syracuse Center of Excellence.

(7) Ultimately, there will be political obstacles, and the University should identify objectives shared by other institutions located at the University Hill and work collaboratively to achieve our common goals.

These key objectives and considerations will need quick review as the decision-making process on I-81 will soon be at a pivotal point. By the end of June, NYS DOT is expected to finalize its scope of work to conduct a comprehensive environmental impact study of alternative proposals to replace the highway. As a first step in finalizing the scope of the work—which will range from studying the impacts on transportation to the issues associated with air quality, social equity and economic development—NYSDOT is expected by June 26 to reduce significantly the 16 alternative proposals that it has presented to the public. It will be important for the University to ensure that its key interests are examined in the environmental review. The final scope of work for the environmental assessment will have a significant role in determining the final alternative to I-81, and the University should advocate that the issues highlighted in this report are taken into account.

Section 1: I-81 and the Current Decision-Making Process

Residents of Central New York have heard for nearly a decade that I-81 is "nearing the end of its useful life"—particularly the highway's elevated sections running through downtown. Over the next decade, portions of the road will need to be replaced, reconstructed, removed or otherwise changed at a significant cost because the core structures are at the end of their useful life.

There has been a long public debate about the best approach to replacing the current I-81 structure. The future of I-8I has thus taken on great symbolic importance, especially considering how the city and region as a whole have evolved—economically, culturally and socially—since I-81 was first constructed. The decision will impact the livelihoods and lifeblood of those who live and work north of downtown. Without the highway, commuters fear long commute times and businesses fear their commercial interest will be negatively impacted. For others, the decision provides an opportunity to redress the economic, social and urban mistakes created by the original decision to build I-81. Proponents of dismantling the I-81 viaduct argue that the renewal of a structure that has its historical roots in the anti-urban policies from 80 years ago will continue to ignore the city's needs and aspirations today. They also argue that it is vital to spur the level of investment that other post-industrial cities have seen in their core urban centers over the past decade.

The formalized, governmental decision-making process began publicly in 2010. At that time, the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC)[1] and NYS Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) began a highly publicized outreach and visioning campaign, *The I-81 Challenge*, which was intended to educate the public and gather traffic data and community feedback to help develop concepts for replacing the viaduct. One important finding was the vast majority of users of the highway do not travel through the city, but rather exit the highway at various points leading into downtown. Only 6% of the vehicles drive all the way through the city on I-81, while another 5% use the I-81/I-690 exchange to access the New York State Thruway. These findings suggest that alternatives to the current I-81 structure need to take into account the large number of vehicles heading to destinations in the city and surrounding area, including the University.

In 2013, the *I-81 Challenge* concluded its public outreach by suggesting five conceptual options for I-81: replacing the old viaduct with a modern viaduct; a depressed highway; a tunnel; a boulevard; or, a rehabilitated structure.

The decision-making process has now entered a second phase, under the purview of NYS DOT and the Federal Highway Administration. The current process includes a federally mandated environmental impact study to more rigorously examine the possible impacts that each of the

[1] **SMTC** is the New York State-designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) responsible for the transportation planning process in Onondaga County and other parts of Central New York. As the regional MPO for Syracuse, all transportation projects must be accepted into SMTC's transportation improvement plan as a first step to receiving state and federal funding. SMTC develops its plans through committees composed of representatives from local, state and federal governments, elected officials, and other stakeholders. Syracuse University's Office of Parking and Transit Services and representatives of the University's senior leadership are often called upon to sit on SMTC's planning committees.

proposed alternatives may have on the community. A series of community meetings, public comment periods and detailed studies has been undertaken with two community stakeholder groups established to review NYSDOT's findings impacting sustainability and economic development.

This past winter, NYS DOT unveiled 16 variations in total on the themes of a boulevard, tunnel, depressed highway or a replacement viaduct. Any of these options will likely require adjacent property acquisition and the potential integration into the street grid in order to bring the interstate highway up to modern code. Public forums continue to be spirited and divisive, and NYS DOT has been routinely under public scrutiny from all sides over their methodologies. As a parallel effort, Onondaga County, the City of Syracuse and NYS DOT are sponsoring a public speaker series to bring in national experts to discuss the experiences of other communities that have faced similar decisions.

At the end of June 2014, NYS DOT is expected to release its recommendations to the public and is expected to significantly reduce the number of alternatives prior to conducting its environmental assessment. The NYS DOT's environmental impact study will include an examination of current transportation conditions; land use; required land acquisition, displacement and relocation; community character, including cultural resource and aesthetic considerations; air quality; energy and climate change; noise pollution; natural resources and environmental hazards; and the impact of construction. Following the study's conclusion, a final decision will be made and explained in a document released to the public. New York State Transportation Commissioner Joan McDonald has indicated a decision will be made in 2015.

NYS DOT maintains a website that describes its work, the options available to replace I-81, and all related documents and public presentations: https://www.dot.ny.gov/i81opportunities.

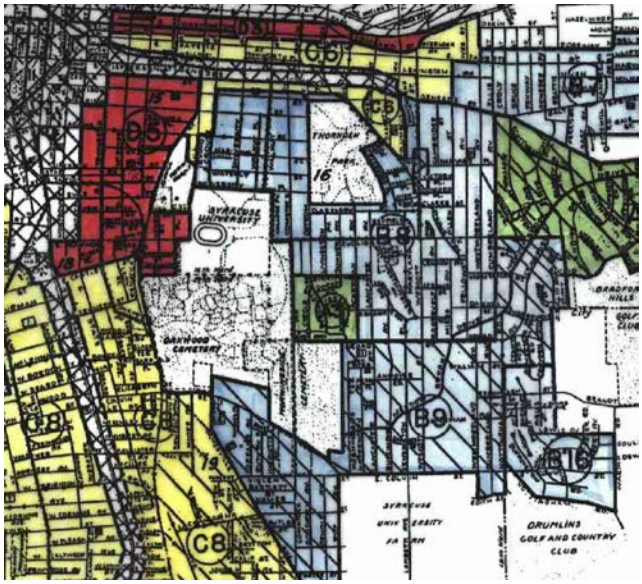
Section 2: The City and the University Hill

The 15th Ward

The development of Interstate 81 narrates a complicated history. The earliest plans for a north-south highway in the Syracuse area were first discussed in the late 1940s as the United States began a nationwide surge in infrastructure investment. The creation of the Interstate Highway System in the mid-1950s provided the framework for the decision to have I-81 pass through Syracuse. By 1958, the decision was made to build the elevated section between the University Hill and downtown Syracuse at its current location above Almond Street. Construction occurred in three stages over the course of a decade, with the final section being completed in 1969.

During this time, urban renewal, employing powers of eminent domain to seize private property, became the principal means of public land redevelopment. Like many cities with a strong industrial heritage, Syracuse embraced grand visions of modernizing its urban core as a way to reinvent itself. Urban renewal envisioned the elimination of older housing, decayed structures and other areas perceived to be in decline. In their place were proposed wider, open spaces more conducive to the automobile. Indeed, the automobile was the economic and cultural driver of what ultimately proved to be a model of redevelopment that favored commuting from suburban periphery into or through the city center. What was promised, but never delivered, was the rebuilding of the city fabric and the public amenities that are necessary to sustain mixed residential and commercial communities.

The area beneath the I-81 overpass through downtown Syracuse was once a vibrant neighborhood consisting of families, shops, schools, jazz clubs and other businesses. The area, known as the 15th Ward, underwent a remarkable transformation in the mid-20th century. It transitioned from being a largely Jewish neighborhood in the 1940s—all seven of the city's synagogues were located here—to becoming a largely African-American neighborhood by 1960. During this period, old and new mixed to form the complex social fabric of the 15th Ward.



The original "redlined" maps showing areas near the SU campus.

In 1937, the 15th Ward was one of the first areas of the nation to be "redlined," a practice used by federal authorities to control mortgage lending. Redlining a neighborhood essentially meant that banks would not lend for mortgages in the area around which the "red line" was drawn. During this same period, the 15th Ward saw the development of one of the nation's first public housing projects, Pioneer Homes.

Reflecting nationwide migration trends, Syracuse experienced a major influx of new African-American residents fleeing Jim Crow and segregation in the American South during the 1950s and 1960s. As the older generation of residents in the 15th Ward—largely second-generation families of Eastern European immigrants—left the central city for life in the emerging suburbs, the 15th Ward become the landing point for many of the African-Americans coming to Syracuse.

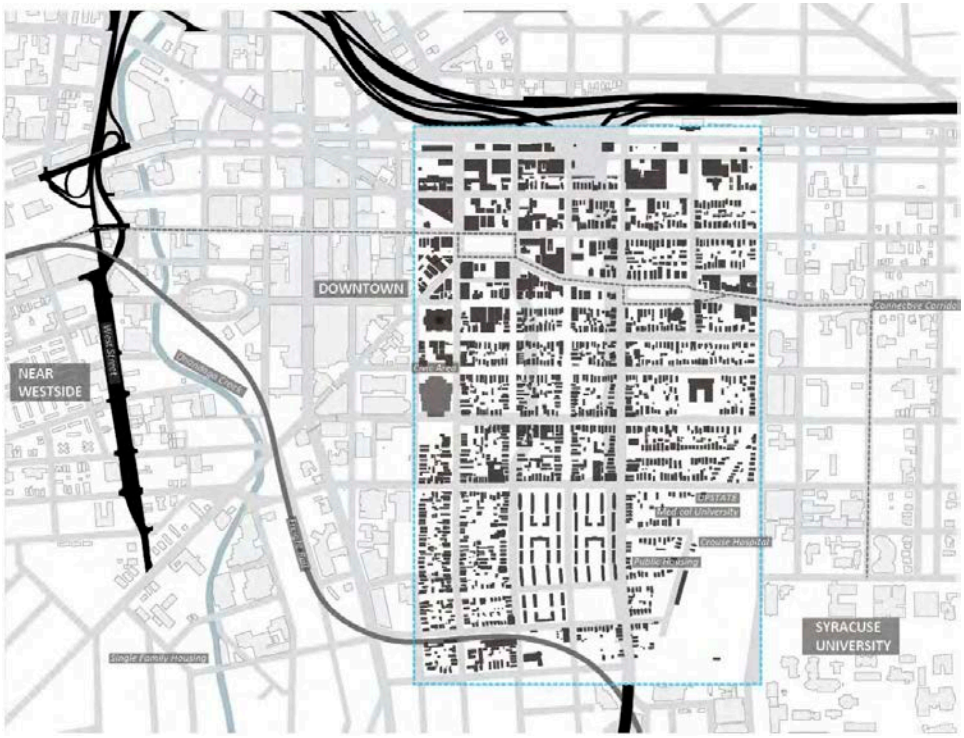
"Red lining" policies limited residents' ability to borrow money for mortgages or for upkeep, and thus began a period of decline that resulted in conditions that were reported by some newspapers as slum-like. By 1965, Syracuse officials, encouraged by urban renewal policies, made "slum clearance" a priority for this area.

Residents of the 15th Ward; photos courtesy of "The 15th Ward Project", led by Syracuse University professor Dr. Kendall Phillips.

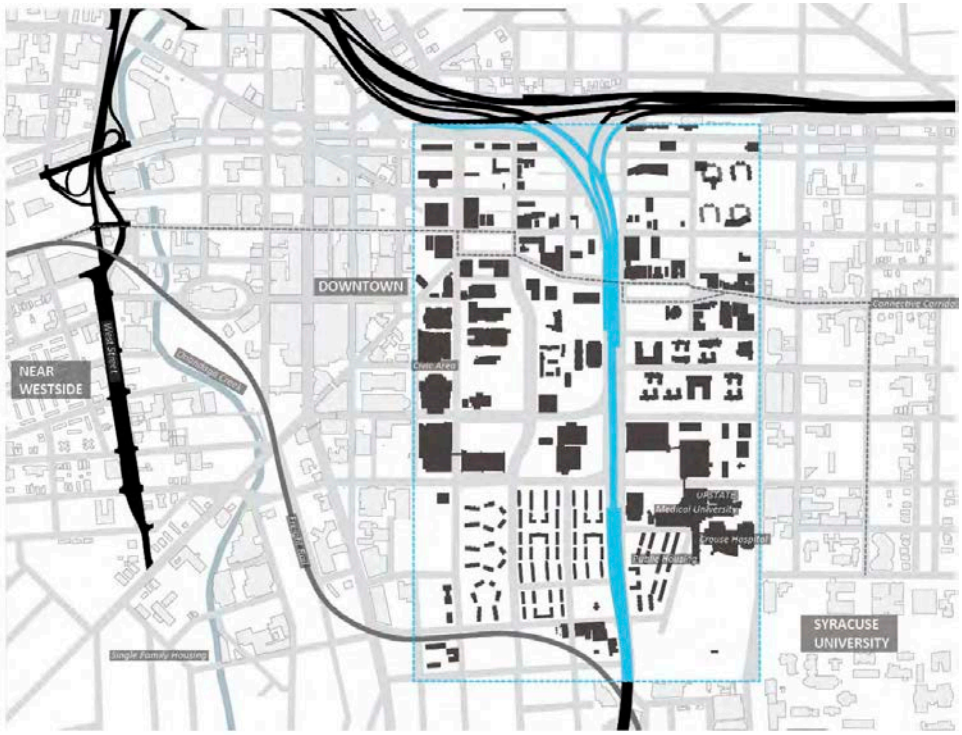
By 1965, much of the 15th Ward was almost entirely demolished; some 1,800 structures were torn down, destroying what was once one of Syracuse's more vibrant neighborhoods. At the time, there was little public opposition to the destruction of these "rundown" neighborhoods.

Over 50 years later, relatively few of the proposed redevelopment projects meant to replace the demolished homes, small businesses and community institutions have been built. One of the most long-lasting effects of urban renewal was the dramatic reduction of neighborhood density—now considered a positive measure of urban potential and progress. Those using I-81 to access the city and University Hill are today greeted by an unattractive city fabric marked by vacant lots, surface parking and the noticeable absence of pedestrian traffic. The effect is not only aesthetic, but is decidedly economic. Buildings scattered along the I-81 periphery remain unconnected to the kinds of pedestrian-centered public and commercial areas that all experts today agree are necessary ingredients for attractive live-and-work environments.

Syracuse Before I-81



Syracuse After I-81



From *Alt 81: Infrastucture's Role in the History and Future of Legacy City Design.* Marc Norman, Syracuse University School of Architecture, Upstate: A Center for Design, Research, and Real Estate.

The University Hill

University Hill was largely ignored during the development of I-81 in the 1950s and 1960s since the institutions on the Hill were largely seen as separate from the downtown area, with no pressing need to be connected. Chancellor William P. Tolley had talks in 1965 with the City of Syracuse about an east-west crosstown connector through Syracuse University that would go from I-81 to Euclid Avenue. While we have not been able to find a record of any statement by him or other University officials on the development of I-81, the historical changes in the infrastructure around the University Hill nonetheless had a lasting impact on the campus.

At present, the University lacks an acknowledged gateway, or "front door." Historically, the public face of the institution has been defined by the manner in which visitors first approach the University. In the early years, a cable car operated on University Avenue, connecting the University to the main train station on Erie Boulevard. University Avenue ran all the way to University Place, which operated as a city street. For those reaching the University by train or automobile, the grand plaza in front of the Hall of Languages served as the gateway to the campus.

With the opening of I-81 and I-690 and the re-location of the train station, the main entry point to campus shifted to the west. The Adams/Harrison Street exit on I-81 delivers north- and south-bound vehicles to the corner of Adams and Almond streets, where they pass through the medical campus on their way to the University. Eastbound travelers on I-690 are directed to I-81 south and get off at the same exit. Westbound travelers on I-690 get off at the Townsend Street exit, from which they make their way to Adams Street, eventually reaching the same intersection with Almond Street. On ascending the Adams Street hill, vehicles continue on to University Avenue, turn right and enter the University through the original gateway. Alternatively, they might turn right on Irving Avenue, left on Waverly Avenue, and enter the University via Crouse Avenue.

To further control the influx of traffic onto campus, the University negotiated an agreement with the City of Syracuse in the mid-1990s to shift ownership of College Place and University Place to Syracuse University, thus closing those streets to public automobile traffic. In addition, the block of University Avenue between Waverly Avenue and University Place was converted to a pedestrian mall. For drivers, the kiosks on Crouse Avenue and University Place serve as the principal gateways to the University. Those who park and walk to campus approach from a variety of paths, including the Carrier Dome stairs, Crouse Avenue, University Avenue, the passages adjacent to Bird Library, and University Place near Watson Hall.

As noted above, all current approaches to the University off I-81 are highly unaesthetic and have long been discussed as a deterrent to visitors, prospective students and their families. I-81funnels those visitors and everyday commuters into one congested area, marked by dark and rusting steel structures, a patchwork of concrete with water dripping overhead, and eight lanes of asphalt underneath the highway with no pedestrian accommodations or green spaces. This is the experience that thousands of people in their cars are greeted with each day prior to navigating the University Hill.

Proposed alternatives to the I-81 viaduct may result in diffusion of traffic to the University to an increasing number of approaches (the boulevard option), or continue to force University traffic through a single approach. In either case, careful consideration should be given to the way in which the University would like to welcome visitors who arrive by car.

Photo by Stephen D. Cannerelli, courtesy of Syracuse.com.

Adams/Harrison Streets Interchange

Most of the vehicle traffic to and from the University passes through the intersection of Adams/Harrison and Almond streets. Much of that comes from the Adams/Harrison streets exit on I-81, which collects vehicles traveling on both I-81 and I-690. This exit also serves as the primary point of access for the three medical centers and the criminal justice complex.

Backups around the exchange are commonplace during rush hour traffic. Under normal conditions, traffic to the University is not significantly hindered by hospital employee traffic because shift-changes at the hospitals occur between 7 a.m. and 8 a.m., then again between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. Most University employees arrive and depart from campus later than these shift changes, but nonetheless they intersect with visitors to the University Hill institutions and commuters into downtown Syracuse.

With such a heavy dependence on one interchange, major problems occur when traffic cannot be spread over time. During winter storms, the cancelling of afternoon classes in combination with afternoon shift changes at the hospitals creates gridlock at Almond Street. Major events at the Carrier Dome also have the potential to create problems at the Adams/Harrison streets exit. However, the use of Syracuse police for traffic control during Dome events significantly reduces this pressure.

A final concern regarding the current layout is the need to provide quick and efficient access for emergency vehicles. Currently, ambulances and police vehicles have to fight through traffic on Adams Street to get to the emergency entrances at Upstate and Crouse hospitals. The ability to disperse traffic effectively on the University Hill is an important consideration in the debate about the I-81 viaduct replacement.

Section 3: SU Campus Daily Operations

SMTC estimates that 45,000 vehicles use the Adams/Harrison exchange on I-81 at the base of University Hill, and a significant number of those vehicles find their way to the University campus. Moving people, supplies and equipment is a fundamental function of the University's daily operations. The University works closely with the City of Syracuse, CENTRO and other University Hill institutions to ensure that traffic congestion is mitigated, public transportation functions without delay, and parking is tightly controlled. Key facts and figures to consider in understanding what transportation-related issues impact the Syracuse University campus include:

I. Parking

- There are presently 5,436 commuters with parking permits; 3,634 faculty/staff and 1,802 students, respectively. The distribution of permits by source community is shown in the table below for the six largest originations.

Origination	**Faculty/Staff**	**Students**
Baldwinsville	128	54
Camillus	98	56
Fayetteville/Manlius	375	119
Jamesville	184	34
Liverpool	267	127
Syracuse	1640	752

- There are more parking permits issued than the 5,090 parking spaces available on the main campus. When including parking available on the periphery at locations on South Campus and Manley, the total available parking spaces jumps to 9,100. In total, there are 2,300 parking spaces in six parking structures and 6,800 in surface parking lots.

- There are approximately 2,000 temporary parking spaces at Skytop, which are largely used during Carrier Dome events. However, Parking Services is now issuing permits for everyday parking at Skytop, and it is likely that the number of commuter permits for Skytop will continue to rise.

- The University is required to maintain 1,480 parking spaces near the Carrier Dome.

II. Public Transportation

- The campus shuttle system operates approximately 41,500 hours per year, from 6:30 a.m. to 3:30 a.m. during the academic year.
- Sixteen separate campus routes carry 2.4 million passengers annually.
- The University pays for Centro riders who have a University identification on those routes that serve the campus; the free rides are limited to route locations around the University Hill, University East Neighborhood, to/from the Nancy Cantor Warehouse, and South Campus.
- The Centro City fare is $2 per ride. A $60 monthly unlimited pass or a $15 10-ride pass are available, and University employees can purchase them on a pre-tax basis. An average of 57 Centro bus passes are sold to faculty/staff on a weekly basis for commuting.
- During peak travel hours, there are 22 buses deployed to handle the traffic volume operating 255 scheduled hours. Approximately two-thirds of the passenger volume is between main campus and South Campus.
- Carrier Dome events can add up to 43 additional buses.

In addition to the conditions above, the University moves about 5,000 people off the main campus to various destinations across the city. Most of these are students studying at the Nancy Cantor Warehouse or the Falk College's downtown location at Peck Hall, or students involved in programs such as the Mary Ann Shaw Center for Public and Community Service.

Adding to the complications of moving people on a daily basis is the continuous work required to maintain utilities, construction and other activities that regularly interfere with road and pedestrian traffic on the University Hill. The standard construction period runs from the day following Commencement until one week prior to the start of the fall semester. Most major work on steam lines, chilled water lines, electric services, site work and parking areas must be coordinated and completed during this construction period. However, it is not unusual that unexpected maintenance and long-term capital construction projects occurring during the academic year present problems to both vehicular traffic and parking.

Given the growth of all the University Hill institutions, having enough space for employees, students and visitors to conveniently park their cars is a growing problem. The University's strategic approach in thinking long term about transportation is to move parking away from main campus and to locations on the periphery of the University Hill in order to reduce the traffic strain in accessing the University Hill on a daily basis. Having a convenient, reliable transit system to shuttle people to and from their cars is a necessity. The decision on I-81 can be an opportunity to implement that vision, as significant resources toward developing a park-and-ride system will inevitably be required to reduce vehicular traffic due to construction regardless of the alternative that is ultimate selected. "Temporary" measures often become permanent "solutions." It is, therefore, crucial that plans for traffic management, transit and parking during the construction

period be carefully made so as not to produce undesirable long-term outcomes that might stymie campus planning efforts.

Transportation Concerns with Carrier Dome Events

Adding to the daily transportation pressures on the University Hill that impact the I-81 decision are athletic and special events at the Carrier Dome. Basketball season can be especially difficult as the University can routinely expect a minimum of 20,000 additional people accessing the University Hill to go to a game during the middle of the workweek and oftentimes when the rush hour commute is occurring. The University currently has an agreement with the City of Syracuse to mitigate traffic disruptions caused by Carrier Dome events, in which police officers are deployed during ticketed events at the Carrier Dome. The number of officers deployed is pegged to expected attendance. University personnel work with the police to coordinate parking and direct traffic.

Although the University's collaboration with the police keeps vehicles moving relatively well during high-volume times, parking pressures continue to grow. The University is required to maintain 1,480 parking spaces at all times near the Carrier Dome, but that is clearly not enough to meet demand for Dome events that can top 50,000 in attendance. Weekday Dome events interfere with faculty and staff parking. Construction of Dineen Hall and future development work in the Campus West area (further described below under campus planning) has already eliminated 300 parking spaces near the Carrier Dome and forced Athletics to restructure its distribution of parking rights near the venue for longtime season ticket holders. As a result, the plan for parking for Carrier Dome events is to shift all parking away from the main campus and toward South Campus or areas below the University Hill. The University is already restricting all parking to South Campus and the periphery for non-season-ticketed events such as the popular monster truck show and has seen positive results in reducing traffic congestion around campus and on the University Hill.

The University's position on the I-81 viaduct replacement options should be informed by current efforts to evaluate and plan for the future of the Carrier Dome. Assuming the Carrier Dome remains on campus at its current location in the long term, current transportation management efforts will continue to shift parking to locations on South Campus and below the University Hill. The prospect of accessing campus via I-481 is an important consideration in order to fully utilize the South Campus park-and-ride program. Furthermore, shifting traffic away from the current I-81 configuration and to parking locations (future and current) accessible off of I-690 should be considered.

In order to shift parking away from its current configuration for Dome events, it is essential to have a strong, reliable public transportation system in place to quickly move large numbers of people in a short period of time. Currently, a typical football game requires 43 additional buses, operating 280 hours carrying 10,300 passengers. A typical men's basketball game requires 31 additional buses, operating 130 hours and carrying 6,000 passengers.

Section 4: Campus Planning and Real Estate Holdings

Campus West Planned Institutional District

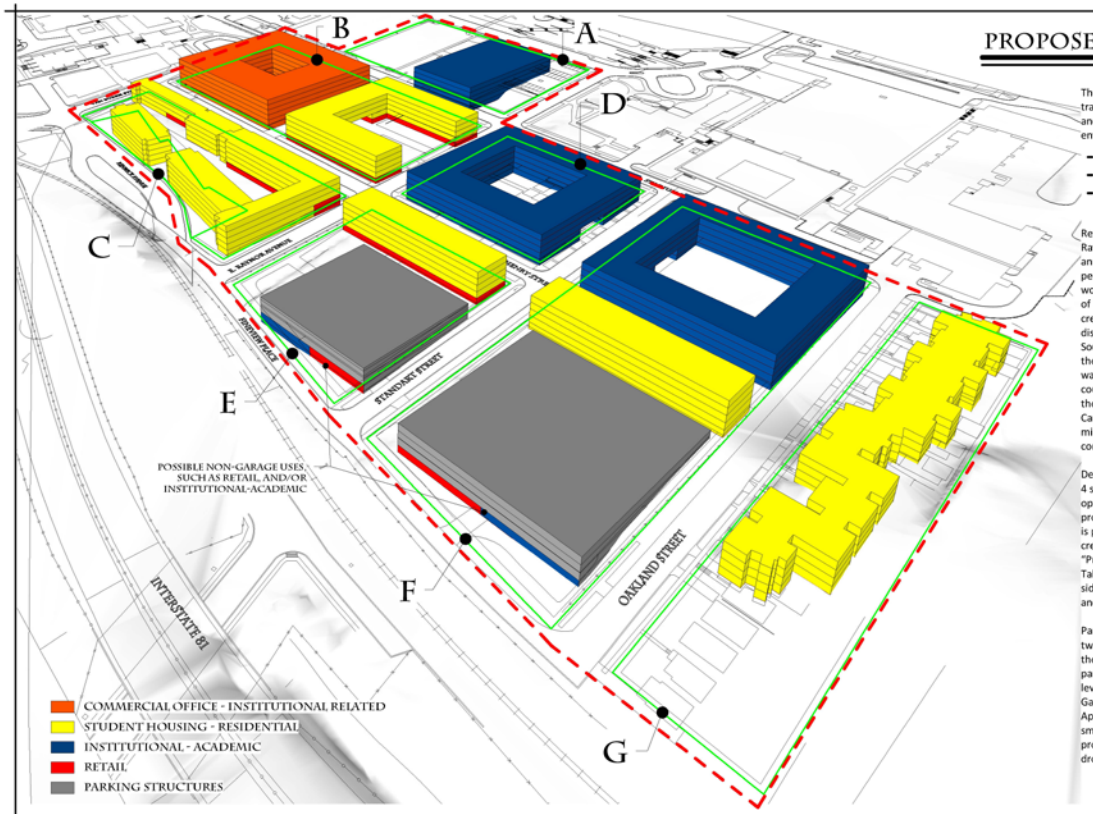
In 2011, the University and SUNY-ESF released a revised Planned Institutional District (PID) that reimagined the use for the Campus West area. The PID is a formal planning document that was approved by the City of Syracuse and serves as a master plan for a select area within the city.

Technically, Campus West is an 18-acre sub-district of the Main Campus PID filed with the city. The area is between Irving Avenue to the east, I-81 to the west, Van Buren Street to the north, and Oakland Street to the south.

In 2007, when planning work began to revise the Campus West PID, the area was nearly all composed of parking lots. When completed, it laid out a vision for 1.8 million square feet of mixed-use development, combining academic spaces with new student housing, retail, commercial/office spaces and parking. At least 20% of this space will be open to the public and include green spaces and streetscape enhancements for pedestrians and bicyclists. Buildings would be no more than six stories tall to preserve sight lines to and from the University Hill and surrounding areas.

Today, the early phases of Campus West development are being realized. The area is now home to Dineen Hall, ESF's Centennial Hall dormitory (which is currently expanding) and the Campus West Apartments. Future site development in the area is currently under consideration, with at least two projects being studied by the University and private investors.

If the institutions continue to grow on Campus West, and its vision is fully developed, the transportation pressures on the area will mount and only add to the strain that exists throughout the rest of the University Hill. There are currently 1,959 parking spaces—both surface and structured—after the reduction of 300 parking spaces due to the construction of Dineen Hall and the Campus West Apartments. The plan would require an additional 1,900 parking spaces in order to accommodate housing, new employees and retail activity. Yet access to the area is essentially limited to the existing I-81 configuration that funnels traffic to the already-congested Adams/Harrison exchange. Van Buren Street provides an alternative corridor to downtown Syracuse, but I-81 continues to limit that access point because it funnels traffic along Almond Street below the elevated highway. Complete access to the city's street grid to and from the area will be needed in order to more effectively move people to and from the area.



PROPOSED LAND USES & MASSING

The PID zoning will allow the West Campus to develop with traditional university academic buildings and student housing, and with varying types of commercial uses. Commercial uses envisioned include the following:

- Office buildings related to the SU and ESF academic missions.
- Retail Commercial, such as stores, restaurants, and theater.
- Community-supporting commercial, such as a childcare center, a grocery market, banks, dry-cleaners, etc.

Retail activity at the ground floor along the Henry Street and Raynor Avenue corridors creates major spines of activities. If an operation similar to the former OnTrack resumes, a major pedestrian connection at Fineview Place and E. Raynor Avenue would develop as well. The level of density, relatively low-scale of development, and classic grid street pattern combine to create an active, safe, and walkable neighborhood. The district's commercial services could readily be utilized by the South Side Gateway and the University neighborhoods, therefore knitting together various areas of the city. As a walkable, vibrant area akin to Armory Square, West Campus could become a retail or entertainment destination for those in the city and larger environs. This concept for the new West Campus PID sub-district would ultimate deliver about 1.9 million gross SF, utilizing lot coverages and floor area ratios common to the existing SU campus PID.

Development will not exceed 5-6 stories, and most will be at 3-4 stories. The district will contain a considerable amount of open space and meets the PID requirement for 20% of the property being public open space. Although ample open space is provided, buildings are still located close to the street to create an urban, pedestrian-friendly streetscape. (See "Proposed Block Layout & Building Setbacks" section, page 6.) Taller buildings are generally planned for the east and north sides of the district, taking advantage of the view to the south and west.

Parking on the site will remain, but it will be concentrated in two structures at the southwestern portion of the site, which is the most suitable topographically for their placement. The parking garages will be designed to accommodate future grade level retail and service uses which address the South Side Gateway neighborhood, pending the transformation of I-81. Approximately 225 parking spaces will be on-street and/or in small, surface, interior parking lots throughout the district to provide for persons with disabilities, short-term parking, visitor drop-off, etc.

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Real Estate Holdings

There are 41 Syracuse University properties that are potentially affected by the I-81 viaduct replacement project, including the parcels of property included in the Campus West PID. Of these properties, 31 are owned by the University and 10 are leased. About half of the properties are parking lots. Of particular interest due to their locations, which will be directly impacted by any changes to traffic due to the construction of I-81 (regardless of the alternative selected), are the Syracuse University Steam Station; Brewster, Bowland and Brockway halls; the Nancy Cantor Warehouse; the 900 block of East Genesee Street; the Syracuse Center of Excellence; Syracuse Stage; and Peck Hall (601 E. Genesee St.). Students and faculty will also be impacted in their daily commutes to the Tech Garden, home of the Student Sandbox, in downtown Syracuse.

The Syracuse University Steam Station provides steam for heating and chilled water for cooling to the University and the medical complex. Owned by the University, the Steam Station is funded jointly by the University and the hospitals. There are two major concerns regarding the Steam Station. Replacement of the I-81 viaduct with another raised viaduct will require substantial widening of the structure. There are scenarios in which the widening of the south-bound lanes would require the demolition of the existing chiller plant and construction of a new plant elsewhere on the parcel. The second concern has to do with the operation of the station, which is strategically located to assist in the flow of water and steam. The steam produced by the plant naturally rises up the University Hill, while condensate naturally returns to the station by gravity,

with no assistance needed by pumps or added pressure. The replacement of the viaduct by a recessed highway or a cut-and-cover tunnel would require the pipes to be lowered below the roadway, jeopardizing the ability to operate the system by gravity alone. Installing and operating pumps would increase the cost of the steam and chilled water.

Syracuse Stage and the properties along the 900 block of East Genesee Street (which currently house Phoebe's restaurant and academic spaces) lie in an area that sees high volumes of traffic that cross underneath I-81. The University can expect that traffic reconfiguration—either temporary for construction or long term to accommodate a selected alternative—could create additional congestion along Irving Avenue and East Genesee Street, unless mitigated by a robust public transportation system to better serve the Hill. Some of the viaduct replacement alternatives call for increasing the size of Irving and Townsend avenues to accommodate local traffic. Since the University's buildings on the 900 block of East Genesee Street have no setback from the sidewalk, expansion of Irving Avenue could potentially require their demolition.

Peck Hall is home to the Falk College's Department of Marriage and Family Therapy and the new McMahon-Ryan Child Advocacy Center. The building sits adjacent to the existing viaduct and could be affected by the widening required for a replacement viaduct. Peck Hall is also potentially impacted by new ramps to and from I-690 that will be required under some of the design alternatives. The existing (and proposed) I-81 viaduct is at approximately the same elevation as I-690, whereas the boulevard, recessed highway and tunnel would all lie well below I-690. The rise required to connect these structures to I-690 will result in longer ramps than the existing structure.

The Syracuse Center of Excellence (CoE) building, which sits just to the southeast of the intersection of I-81 and I-690, is also potentially affected by the longer ramps that may be required for the new structure. Its location on Almond Street also places it in jeopardy should Almond Street be widened that far north.

More than 500 faculty and staff travel to the Nancy Cantor Warehouse each day. Although the building is clear from any consideration of demolition due to the I-81 project, transporting people to and from campus will be impacted by any construction plan. The Nancy Cantor Warehouse lies at the western end of the Connective Corridor and houses academic programs in the College of Visual and Performing Arts. Smooth operation of the Connective Corridor transit route and other

campus-supported bus routes during the construction phase of the I-81 project will be crucial to the continued viability of the Warehouse as an academic venue.

The Nancy Cantor Warehouse also sits along West Street, officially designated as a state-owned highway. As such, West Street is potentially an alternative route for redirecting traffic from I-81, temporarily or as a permanent solution. The University has led efforts to calm traffic along West Street based on its current traffic volume and design, and has previously supported efforts by the City of the Syracuse and other community leaders to explore ways to reduce the number of lanes and slow the speed of traffic in order to enhance pedestrian safety and access to and from the downtown and Near Westside neighborhoods. The NYS DOT has been a willing partner to work with the city and the University to further improve this important pedestrian links in the area.

Section 5: Economic Development and Community Planning

Economic Development Opportunities and Challenges

One of the stated goals for the I-81 viaduct replacement project is to "enhance…the economic vitality of greater Syracuse." As a major employer in the region, a regional center of research and innovation, and host of events that bring thousands of visitors to the city, the University plays a key role in that municipal vitality. The University understands that its well-being is tied to the health of the city and the region, and has several ongoing partnerships aimed at building bridges between campus and community. In considering alternatives for the replacement of the I-81 viaduct, it is important to assess the degree to which the various replacement options might affect the University's relationship with the surrounding community. Likewise, downtown Syracuse provides a natural entry onto the University Hill and eventually to the Syracuse University campus. As travelers and commuters exit the highway, the urban environment that welcomes them will inevitably have a psychological impact on their perceptions for the area as they work their way to campus.

The Connective Corridor initiative is an effort to break down the psychological barriers between the University and downtown Syracuse. This initiative has brought together investments by the University, the city and the county, and the New York State and federal governments to improve infrastructure, beautify the streets that comprise the corridor, and develop arts, entrepreneurial and commercial activities that will stimulate closer ties between campus and community. The Connective Corridor passes under I-81 along Genesee Street. None of the I-81 viaduct replacement options would eliminate this crossing, but the construction phase of the project may slow or halt the momentum of the initiative by making it more difficult to travel between campus and downtown.

The potential effect of the I-81 viaduct replacement project on the Syracuse city tax base is also a concern for the city and, indirectly, for the University. Widening of the Almond Street corridor and the potential expansion of connecting ramps to I-690 will require the acquisition of taxable properties, removing them from the tax rolls. An additional concern is the effect of the project on property valuations. Predicting how property values will change under different replacement alternatives is very difficult, as there will be winners and losers in any shift of commercial and residential activity. Nevertheless, it would be in the best interest of the University for property values in our neighborhood to increase and see that the city's commercial and residential tax base grow.

The University Hill Transportation Study

Due to increasing pressures on moving people around the University Hill, and on land use and real estate development on the Hill, SMTC initiated a comprehensive study to provide guidance for future planning efforts for the University Hill. The University Hill Transportation Study was also the first formal effort by a public agency to envision the possibility of no longer having I-81 run through the center of Syracuse.

The study emphasized that any solution to the transportation needs on the University Hill must be made along with the land-use planning decisions. It also argued that any transportation improvements cannot focus on improving access to the automobile, simply because an increase in capacity for automobile access on the University Hill was impossible. Overall, the report placed emphasis on the need to focus on moving people and goods, rather than cars, and acknowledged that governments and the institutions on the University Hill need to be strategic in addressing the cultural barriers that still favor single-occupant automobile traffic.

The study contained six key recommendations. None of the recommendations were at a level of analysis in which projects could quickly develop. Rather, the scope of the University Hill Transportation Study was to create a master plan with the intent that future decisions in transportation and land use—such as I-81—would consider these recommendations as goals to be closely studied in any future efforts. The recommendations include:

(1) Implement a mixed-use development program: The best way to get people out of cars, and thus control traffic, is to create the urban amenities within easy walking and public transit distances. Recommendations included the development of grocery stores, retail, entertainment venues, childcare and restaurants to be integrated within any new capital projects being planned by the University Hill's major institutions.

(2) Implement an Integrated Parking Strategy: Greater efficiencies could be achieved if local government and the University Hill's institutions could work closely together to create an integrated parking system. Parking on the University Hill remains a patchwork of unsightly surface parking lots and costly parking garages managed individually by each institution. Recommendations included wrapping parking garages with other uses; creating a common park-and-ride system; and developing a common parking management system. The University Hill Transportation Study also encouraged pushing parking away from the University Hill toward remote areas that have easy access, provided that reliable transit service could be established.

(3) Create a Prioritized Public Transit Network: An attractive, reliable public transit network is needed to better connect downtown with the University Hill and transport commuters from park-and-ride facilities. Specific recommendations included developing a streetcar service, a bus rapid transit system on highly congested roadways and/or a multi-modal hub.

(4) Develop a Bike Boulevard Network: A bicycle network could increase visibility of alternative means of transportation; fuel the alternative transportation demands of students and those returning to live in the city; and improve the overall appearance of the city's livable environment.

(5) Restore city streets to two-way streets: Long a complaint of those navigating the city and the University Hill, the University Hill Transportation Study argued for much greater coherence in navigating city streets by making all streets two-way.

(6) Reconfiguration of the Almond Street Corridor: The University Hill Transportation Study was the first to envision removing the I-81 highway through the city by developing a boulevard system in its place. The study provided design concepts for adding contemporary roundabouts to replace traffic lights in order to keep traffic moving. It also recommended an overall narrowing on the Almond Street footprint to calm traffic, increase safety and accommodate streetscape improvements and urban design features.

Central New York Regional Economic Development Council (CNY REDC)

Although the CNY REDC has not taken a position on I-81, it has emphasized that the decision will have an important impact on the future of the City of Syracuse and the region. Since the release of its *Five-Year Strategic Plan* in 2011, the CNY REDC has placed great emphasis on reinvesting in the region's urban and municipal centers by, in part, rebuilding the infrastructure that serves our communities' main streets and neighborhoods. The Council has backed its objectives by awarding funding to projects that invest in housing in downtown Syracuse, streetscape improvements, walking trails in urban areas, and other capital improvement projects to help build the living and work conditions that can help a city's urban core to grow.

A rendering of one of the NY DOT schemes: a surface level thoroughfare with four driving lanes, a cycle track and on-street parking. Under our scenario, reclaimed land is at times large enough for new buildings and where not as wide could provide opportunities for public amenities and an enhanced pedestrian environment. A planted median could increase foliage and also create a mid-block pedestrian refuge to enhance safety.

Section 6: Quality of Life in the City and on the Hill

The I-81 outcome will ultimately have long-term implications on the quality of life for those living and working in the City of Syracuse. Some of those implications will directly affect the city and some will affect the city as a consequence of how I-81 impacts the University. Syracuse University faculty, staff and students live in the city, frequent its businesses and contribute to the social, commercial and civic life of the city. In addition, the University enhances the identification of the City of Syracuse as a cultural destination by hosting regional and national sporting events at the Carrier Dome, cultural events at the Setnor School of Music and Syracuse Stage, and lectures within the various nationally renowned schools and colleges. Easy access to the Syracuse University campus and the ability of patrons to easily park and attend these events will be crucial to the economic development of the city. Nearby hotels, restaurants and businesses flourish when events are held on campus.

The City of Syracuse has a reciprocal impact on the University. As noted earlier in this report, the deleterious effects of the original construction of I-81 on the City of Syracuse, and especially on the 15th Ward, have created physical and psychological divisions between the city and the University, divisions that projects like the Connective Corridor have sought to redress by focusing on two-way vehicular traffic and on bicycle paths and pedestrian traffic. Such attempts to stitch the city and the University fabric together are important and have focused on the experiential qualities of traveling from the University campus to downtown Syracuse. The Connective Corridor is a traffic path, but it is also an "urban experience" enriched by local businesses, pedestrian and bicycle paths, landscaping and an overall attention to landscape and urban design. Similar attention needs to be paid to the traffic paths that lead from where one exits the I-81 or any of the various alternatives to the University. Indeed, the experience of the University begins precisely at that exit point. This is an important consideration for the University as prospective students, visitors, faculty, staff, athletic recruits, trustees and community partners all visit the campus on a daily basis. The "gateway to our campus" has been discussed in other sections of this report; it is important because it helps to identify and distinguish the University experience. Aesthetically, it is important that ample green space be built around these "gateway" exits and that the signage is easy to read and easy to locate. Equally important are the streets and neighborhoods in and around the I-81 off ramps closest to our campus: They must be well lit, well-kept and safe. All of these attributes will affect the first impression that our campus makes to visitors. Indeed, if we think of the University experience beginning at the exits and ending at their destination on campus, the "gateway to the University" is defined by no single, fixed point, but by that entire experience from the freeway or boulevard exit to the parking location and beyond as the pedestrian makes his/her way to the individual's final destination on campus.

Section 7: Key Considerations and Recommendations

Ultimately, the I-81 decision provides the opportunity to better manage the circulation of traffic on the University Hill, but the decision should not be thought exclusively about getting people from Point A to Point B. The movement of people throughout our community will have a lasting impact on current developments and the future aspirations of our campus as we enter a major master planning exercise. Likewise, improving the daily experiences that commuters and visitors have as they exit the highway and navigate city streets can allow for the City of Syracuse to realize its vision for offering a vibrant urban environment for all who live, work and visit the city.

In the near term, the University must look at what impacts the I-81 decision will have in simply getting people to their work, class or special event on campus when faced with a significant construction project over multiple years, no matter which alternative to replace I-81 is selected. In the long term, the University and its neighboring institutions on the University Hill have an opportunity to advance long-discussed ideas to develop a robust transit system to serve all the varying needs of employees, residents and visitors to the area. At the very least, the I-81 decision will be transformational. The University will need to be prepared to consider the following key issues and interests to ensure that such change results in positive impacts to both our campus and surrounding community:

1. **Any campus strategic planning effort should take into account the extensive construction period that is expected to commence as early as 2017. Once construction commences on any of the I-81 alternatives, there will ensue a long and extremely disruptive period of at least five years that will require unprecedented planning and coordination with the city and the state.**

   To reinforce a positive outlook on the I-81 decision, the NYSDOT project website is titled *I-81 Opportunities* as a suggestion that the final path chosen to replace the current highway can transform our city and region for the better. Indeed, the decision does provide a long-term opportunity for the community to improve upon the physical and psychological barriers that the current highway has created over the past several decades. However, no matter which alternative is selected, tackling the challenges of moving people and goods across the University Hill will be a short-term requirement once construction begins. Given the expected duration of work, the amount of resources that will be expended during that time to mitigate for traffic problems and the natural resistance of everyday commuters to change their habits, the University and its public partners should think strategically in creating a short-term plan that also accomplishes our long-term objectives to improve traffic circulation across the University Hill and city.

2. **Any alternative to the current I-81 highway needs to have a multi-modal transportation plan already in place before construction. Managing a system of public transportation, with military-like precision and convenience will influence the long-term success of the selected alternative.**

   A public transit plan that accepts the reality that people will remain in their cars to get to the University Hill should be completed and implemented prior to any construction of an alternative. The University Hill Transportation Study released in 2007 outlined the need for car, bus and rail transportation (albeit less on train), as well as an alternative parking system to access campus and other destinations on the University Hill. A better transportation system than what exists now will be needed to mitigate complications that will be inevitable due to construction in the short term. In the long term, the I-81 decision provides the opportunity to fully realize the University's strategic direction in pushing parking off the main campus and to the periphery.

   a. The University is already shifting parking to South Campus where it can accommodate bus service on a daily basis and for special events. Traffic planning should accommodate parking at other locations that are convenient for commuters across the University Hill area but remain undeveloped or underdeveloped.

   b. The University Hill Transportation Study suggested the introduction of streetcar service on the University Hill as a way to overcome many of the barriers that people have in utilizing public transpiration. Streetcars offer a convenient, reliable and unique mode of transportation that should be further studied and would be a reflection of Syracuse's history when streetcars regularly serviced the University Hill in the early 20th century.

   c. The On-Track rail service offered great potential for easing the daily commute to campus, as well as helping move people during Carrier Dome events from 1994-2008. However, poor planning and implementation that limited scheduling and never fully accessed parking locations and other important community destinations (such as the train station and airport) doomed this commuting line to failure. Understanding that legitimate logistical and market barriers may remain, any multi-modal system should at least reexamine the potential for utilizing this existing infrastructure.

   d. Needed steps to improve parking and transit in the short term to mitigate construction will be an enormous expense, regardless of which alternative is chosen. To use this opportunity to develop a long-term, multi-modal solution would be an effective use of resources.

3. **The University should advocate for a new major exit and entrance from I-481 and an improved access from I-690.**

   The campus should have multiple access points off the highway system, including I-690 and I-481, to further leverage locations conducive to a park-and-ride system. The current transportation route is heavily based on Adams and Harrison streets without a contingency plan to reroute the heavy traffic. Therefore, multiple access points should be given to commuters and visitors, with a higher number of exits enabling them to access the University Hill in times of high traffic volumes, such as during Carrier Dome events. Having multiple access points already in place prior to the construction of I-81 is essential for the short-term and long-term planning to ease traffic complication.

4. **Any major exit and entrance to the highway must have an aesthetically pleasing experience in addition to better traffic planning in order make the most of this entryway to campus, the University Hill and the city.**

   The University experience begins when a driver exits the highway, yet what currently greets commuters and visitors is dark, gray concrete; water or snow-melt running off from the highway above; noise and air pollution; and perhaps the worse safety conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists in the region. This has a lasting impact on first-time visitors to the campus, despite efforts by the University to maintain a beautiful campus on top of the University Hill.

5. **Alternatives that open the Almond Street corridor to the city street grid would open up opportunities to further develop plans for Campus West.**

   Syracuse University and SUNY-ESF have embarked on an ambitious plan to develop residential, commercial and academic infrastructure in the Campus West Planned Institutional District (PID). This area is presently boxed in by the University and SUNY-ESF campuses to

the south and east, the hospitals to the north, and the I-81 viaduct to the west. As a result, Campus West is psychologically isolated and difficult to reach by automobile. Any future development under current transportation conditions will only exacerbate the congestion already experienced at the Adams/Harrison streets exchange. Alternatives that open the Almond Street corridor to the city street grid would open the West Campus PID to the city and could provide an additional gateway to the University.

6. **The I-81 decision will negatively impact the University's properties located outside the main campus. The University needs to be positioned to advocate that the long-term costs are kept to a minimum.**

   Portions of the Syracuse University Steam Station might be considered for demolition or some form of acquisition by New York State. Similarly, Peck Hall, which the University rents for the Falk College, lies in the immediate path for construction. Additionally, popular campus destinations off the main campus, such as the Nancy Cantor Warehouse, will see major disruptions in offering daily transportation service. The University should advocate for solutions that least influence these properties and best preserve the services that these properties provide to the campus community.

7. **Ultimately, there will be political obstacles, and the University should identify objectives shared by other institutions located at the University Hill and work collaboratively to achieve our common goals.**

   Issues such as having a robust park-and-ride transit system, aesthetic concerns for the design of the selected alternative to I-81, and having transportation solutions in place for our daily commuters before construction are all common concerns shared by the University Hill community. Furthermore, it should be expected that any chosen alternative will have some impact on the city's tax base, which is an issue that all institutions should be watching closely given existing pressures already placed on the city. Collective action with our neighboring institutions will help advocate for common issues and lead to outcomes that will benefit the University Hill community as a whole.

About the Authors

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