### MEETING SUMMARY

**Meeting Date:** Thursday, June 5, 2014  
**Location:** I-81 Opportunities Outreach Center at the Carnegie Building, Syracuse  
**Event:** Sustainability Stakeholders’ Advisory Working Group (SAWG) Meeting 3

#### Attendees:

**Project Team Members**  
Mark Frechette, NYSDOT  
Joseph Flint, NYSDOT  
Jon Adams, NYSDOT  
George Doucette, NYSDOT  
Kathryn Wolf, TWMLA  
Jonathan Peet, TWMLA  
Rita Campon, Parsons  
Carlos Lopez, Parsons  
Tom Heustis, Parsons  
Peter Liebowitz, AKRF  
Andrew Obernesser, EDR  
Aileen Maguire, C&S  
Steve George, C&S  

**SAWG Members**  
David Ashley  
Emanuel Carter  
Mario Colone  
Robert Haley  
Michael Kelleher  
Frank Kobliski  
Minch Lewis  
Rebecca Livengood  
David Mankiewicz  
Joe Sisko  
Andrew Schuster  
Mike Stanton

#### Discussion

Mark Frechette, NYSDOT’s I-81 Viaduct Project Director, welcomed the SAWG members to the meeting. He reminded the group of last week’s overviews of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process and the traffic study process and reiterated that those topics will continue to be discussed in more detail over the coming months.

Mr. Frechette stated that the *Draft Scoping Report* is nearing completion and will be released in the upcoming weeks. The report will be posted on the project website, and hard copies will be available for review at the project repositories (libraries and town halls throughout the area where project documents are available for review). NYSDOT and FHWA will hold a public scoping meeting to bring the public up to date on the project status; its purpose and need, as well as objectives; the EIS process; and the work done on the alternatives under consideration to date. NYSDOT also will recommend some alternatives to proceed for further study and others to be eliminated from consideration. The scoping public comment period will remain open until September 2, 2014. Mr. Frechette stated that a Stakeholders’ Committee meeting also will be held prior to the public scoping meeting.
Mr. Frechette introduced Tom Heustis and Kathryn Wolf, who jointly gave a presentation on the Depressed Highway and Street-level Alternatives.

Please note that additional information has been provided to clarify the responses given at the meeting.

Comments (C), Questions (Q), and Answers (A) included:

Q: The initial scoping comment period ended on January 17, 2014. Will those comments and responses be a part of the Draft Scoping Report?

A: No, the comments and responses will be included in an appendix to the Final Scoping Report, which we anticipate will be published later this year. Similar questions and comments will be aggregated and summarized together.

Q: Is the right-of-way (ROW) width consistent along the Almond Street corridor?

A: No, it varies. We are in the process of verifying all of the property lines and dimensions. It appears that the central portion of the Almond Street corridor is nearly 200 feet wide, but the southern end of the corridor, south of Harrison Street, is narrower.

Q: Are highway exits at Harrison and Adams Streets provided under the Depressed Highway Alternatives?

A: Yes, the ramps at Harrison and Adams under those alternatives would function similarly to the ramps there today, although they would be configured differently.

Q: Northbound Almond Street would go north from Adams Street. Southbound Almond Street is only one block long, from Harrison to Adams. Is that accurate?

A: Yes, the length of southbound Almond Street would be constrained under these alternatives. To accommodate the width of the depressed highway, plus the required surface streets, sidewalks, and minimal space for street trees, the entire Almond Street right-of-way would be necessary. Both sides of the highway trench would be cantilevered to provide room for street-level traffic lanes. The on- and off-ramps on the west side of the highway would limit the length of southbound Almond Street.

Q: Some of the existing buildings at Genesee and Almond Streets appear to be removed in this rendering. Are those buildings acquired under this alternative?

A: Yes, the width of the depressed highway and its ramps would likely necessitate those acquisitions.

Q: Has there been any consideration to turning Harrison and Adams Streets into two-way streets?

A: We would investigate such a possibility if the alternative were to advance into the EIS. Some
streets might work better as one-way or two-way streets, but we have not made those determinations at this early stage.

Q: Who owns and maintains the bridges over the highways?

A: NYSDOT typically owns the bridges over its highways.

Q: Would the Franklin Square area be impacted by the two new connector ramps (eastbound I-690 to northbound I-81, and southbound I-81 to westbound I-690)?

A: We don’t know the potential environmental impacts yet—and won’t know these until the Draft Environmental Impact Statement—but at this time we do not anticipate acquisition of buildings at Franklin Square. The new connectors would just south and east of the district.

Q: Has there been any thought to using the Bear Street route instead of the connectors?

A: We need to provide a fully directional interchange where two interstate highways meet, as mandated by FHWA.

C: You could use the Thruway to provide a functional connection between I-81 and I-690, albeit at a different geographic point.

Q: Pumps would need to drain the saline groundwater under Almond Street. Would the pumps need to be running all the time, and would their power consumption be included in the EIS?

A: We aren’t sure if pumps would need to be running all the time. Specific engineering details would be determined as design progresses, and energy will be a consideration in the EIS.

C: There is a huge, possibly abandoned, sanitary sewer under Erie Boulevard downtown, which could potentially complicate Erie Boulevard passing through the interchange area.

A: We’ll look into it. The bigger picture is that a depressed highway would have substantial impacts to utilities, and is partly why it would take so long to construct one. Utility lines would likely have to be consolidated and pushed to the bridge crossing decks. We would also need to look at installing pump stations for sanitary and storm sewers.

Q: How would snow removal be handled inside the depressed highway trench?

A: We would have to push the snow to the outside, beneath the cantilevers. In cases of substantial snow or snow build-up, we would have to use large snow blowers and haul out the snow in dump trucks.

Q: Would snow be pushed from Almond Street into the highway trench?

A: We would have to provide shoulders for snow storage and would likely have to add snow fence as well.
Q: Is there an ornamental version of a snow fence that is attractive?

A: We have painted snow fences a different color in previous instances and would look at other products that might be more attractive. It might be possible to minimize the snow fence by installing vertical concrete barriers at the edge of the highway trench.

**Street-level Alternatives**

C: The naming of the Street-level Alternatives may be confusing to the general public. You might consider changing the names to the Bypass Alternatives. People think that the Street-level Alternatives are intended to serve as I-81. Some might disregard these alternatives if they think the interstate goes away entirely. You should help people to understand that there is a piece of infrastructure to maintain the continuity of the highway.

A: We will present more detailed information about the Street-level Alternatives at the upcoming scoping meeting. Under the Street-level Alternatives, the former I-81 from I-481 to I-690 would be posted at 35 mph and remain a limited access high speed highway.

C: In Syracuse, people think of the boulevard as Erie Boulevard, which has a negative connotation for many people. Avoiding that word altogether and choosing a different name for SL-1, the Boulevard Alternative, might help people disassociate from Erie Boulevard.

Q: What would the former I-81 be called?

A: From the existing northern interchange between I-81 and I-481 south to I-690, the highway could still be an interstate highway—and could have a name such as I-581 or I-781—because it would connect to interstate highways on both ends. Downtown south to the existing southern interchange between I-81 to I-481, it could be a full-speed limited access state roadway or some other state, county, or local equivalent. Because the southern segment would connect only to the interstate system at one end, that section would not remain a part of the interstate system.

Q: Is there a potential cost savings if I-690 was used as the bypass instead of I-481?

A: There are many things that we would have to look at still to determine that, including the need for interchange modifications and potential lane additions.

Q: Are any lanes needed at Dewitt in the area of Route 5 under the Street-level Alternatives?

A: The operational problem there is the two-lane merge left, and not necessarily lane capacity. We would have to look at that more closely. There is also the problem of afternoon traffic exiting to Route 5 east backing up onto the mainline.

Q: Is the maintenance of a federal highway a federal expense?

A: Maintenance is a state responsibility, usually funded with federal dollars.
Q: Is the maintenance of the Almond Street corridor under SL-1 (Boulevard Alternative) a local expense?

A: Not necessarily. It may still be a state expense.

C: Separate and identify the long-term maintenance costs of the alternatives from the capital construction costs to improve public understanding.

C: The majority of maintenance cost is snow and ice removal. New highways and bridges are relatively cheap to maintain. Old pieces of infrastructure are expensive.

C: An anecdote from Toronto—the 50-year maintenance cost is three times the construction cost on that city’s recent viaduct-to-street-level conversion.

Q: Is there a reason that you avoided I-690 initially in favor of using the current I-481 alignment to connect back to I-81?

A: The reason we are focusing on the potential of I-481, as opposed to I-690, is that I-481 is the more direct route north to south. I-690 currently has a high volume of traffic on it, sometimes resulting in delays. We haven’t studied what might happen if the existing I-690 infrastructure starts to receive a higher volume of traffic under the scenario. For example, we may need to make improvements on I-690, including bridges, interchanges, lanes, etc. We would have a lot to study before we can really answer questions on the concept.

Q: Is the distance any shorter if I-690 is used as a bypass rather than I-481?

A: It looks like an I-690 loop would be longer.

Q: Can a single highway have two interstate designations?

A: No. We would likely just call it I-81, and I-690 would end at I-81.

Q: At the northern I-81/I-481 interchange, are new overpass loop ramps required?

A: Yes, under the Street-level Alternatives. The through movements would need to be 65 mph. There are different requirements for interstate-to-interstate connections and through-movements.

Q: Jackson Street functions as an internal street for Pioneer Homes. It doesn’t pass through the I-81 corridor currently and it is lightly used. How would that change under this alternative?

A: Jackson Street would be a dead-end street at Almond Street.

Q: Is there a reason that the highway would have to go under or over the railroad? Could the railroad be moved?
A: Moving the railroad hasn’t been an option for us so far. For every foot of vertical change, the railroad needs a horizontal mile to accommodate the grade. Technically we could go under the railroad; we would have impacts to other cross streets in the area.

Q: Under SL-1 (Boulevard Alternative), would the boulevard continue from Adams Street south to Burt Street?

A: Yes, the boulevard would continue south, past Adams Street. The last traffic signal would be at Adams Street, with a section of city streets (posted at a 30 mph speed limit) for a few blocks; the speeds would increase farther south as the boulevard becomes a highway.

Q: Could there be a pedestrian crossing in the Pioneer Homes public housing area?

A: Pedestrian crossings would likely occur at Adams Street and at a location farther south.

C. The loss of pedestrian connectivity in this area sounds like a major impact.

Q: Is the existing ROW wide enough to avoid building impacts?

A: We are still verifying the actual ROW widths throughout the project area, but we don’t anticipate building acquisitions in the southern area at this time.

Q: What is the design speed in the area just south of Adams Street?

A: 30 mph.

Q: Has there been a look at compressing the wide median to use the ROW on the west side adjacent to the dense residential areas? Could the extra ROW be used by the community or commercial development? It’s currently full of parking lots.

A: That is a possibility. If this alternative moves forward into the EIS, we would consider ways to go beyond the basic transportation needs, like providing on-street parking. We need to investigate, and then vet, those potential program elements. This conversation would likely occur over the next several years.

C: We should be able to review a narrowed option to examine what could happen in the excess ROW, especially south of Adams Street. We need to see what could happen south of Monroe Street also.

Q: What happens at I-690 at the north end of this area?

A: The interstate would need to be reconstructed because I-81 and I-690 are integral pieces of infrastructure in this area. We’re also thinking about potential impacts to the areas east and west of the interchange area along the I-690 corridor, such as Thompson Road and Teall Avenue.
Q: Under the Street-level Alternatives, the portion of I-81 south of I-690 is not a “shielded route,” so does it need to directly connect to the interstate? Does Almond Street need to connect?

A: By federal guidelines, no. But in this instance it makes sense because that’s where the traffic is.

C: The available developable land is a great issue for the city and our region’s largest employers. The city stands to gain a great deal if we can turn development back to facing the street.

A: These sections suggest the possibility of potential future development, including a pedestrian zone at the front of the building—suggested here [in a graphic] by the tables and chairs or outdoor café space.

Q: Would Alternative SL-2 (One-way Traffic on Almond Street and Other Local Street[s]) result in fewer lanes on Almond Street than would Alternative SL-1 (Boulevard)?

A: Yes, our initial traffic estimates, pending further study, suggest that under Alternative SL-2, Almond Street would carry northbound traffic in three one-way lanes. Alternative SL-1 assumes three lanes in each direction, for a total of six lanes. We’ll have many possible concepts and scenarios for how to use the additional space freed up by Alternative SL-2.

C: We want to see the minimum width possible dedicated to the roadway and imagine the next fifty years of growth in the city for the balance of the ROW.

Q: Would there be any changes to Townsend Street under these alternatives? That street currently has a very suburban feel that is not necessarily conducive to urban development.

A: We would look closely at any corridor we work in, including Townsend Street.

Q: Would it be correct to say that under SL-1 (Boulevard Alternative), Almond Street would have six lanes; three lanes under SL-2 (One-way Traffic on Almond Street and Other Local Street[s]); and between three and six lanes under SL-3 (Two-way Traffic on Almond Street and Other Local Street[s])?

A: Yes, that is our assumption at this point, based on initial traffic data, but we do need to investigate further with more in-depth study before we can confirm.

C: We want to see the street grid being studied as thoroughly as you’re analyzing the highway itself. We want to see street-level plans and the associated development potentials early so we get the best alternatives.

Q: To what standards are you designing the new roadways at the interchange areas under the Street-level Alternatives?

A: We would look to minimize impacts and balance all of the factors while meeting the fundamental needs and safety standards.
C: I have concerns about the disturbance of construction impacts at the interchanges. We should not rebuild them if we don’t have to.

Q: Could it be within the scope of this project to look at the potential of including light rail infrastructure for the long-term planning of the region?

A: That is outside the scope of this project. Centro is studying the region’s future transit needs.

Q: On this graphic, why does the bike path jog across the street at Adams Street?

A: That is just one of numerous potential concepts for placement of the bike path. Once an alternative moves forward for further study, we’ll take a much closer look and develop more specific layout of the bike facilities.

Q: How about locating a spur of the bike path through Oakwood Cemetery to the back of University Hill?

A: We are reviewing bike plans in the area and will aim to be consistent and in harmony with these plans.

Q: Could you consider on- and off-ramps to provide access at the south end of University Hill?

A: Yes, we are currently studying ways to provide access at the southern end of the project. We hope to present more information at the scoping meeting and in the future as concepts are developed.

Q: The use of Clinton Street under Alternatives SL-2 and SL-3 concerns me. This street passes Clinton Square and Armory Square, which are big pedestrian areas and some of the most significant districts of downtown. Wouldn’t there be a conflict between increased vehicular traffic and pedestrians?

A: These ideas are still developing and need further work, but we would be mindful of safety and the need to avoid pedestrian/vehicular conflicts in any design. One idea is for the traffic signals to vary in their timing. For example, during the morning commute the signal timing could favor motorists, and later in the day or during the afternoon commute, pedestrian signal time would favor crossing pedestrians.

Q: I am still concerned about harming Armory Square. Can you look at using Salina Street as an alternative to Clinton Street?

A: We have yet to determine which streets would be used under these alternatives. We began by looking at Clinton Street since it already has an exit ramp from I-81, but we will be looking at the use of other streets as well, and one of these could be Salina Street.

Q: Could parallel parking be removed during peak commute times to accommodate additional traffic volumes?
A: We don’t know that yet, but it’s something that could be considered at a later stage, when we look at the alternatives in greater detail.

Q. Who would maintain the trees, bike paths, sidewalks, or anything else beyond the highway if these alternatives are built?

A: Maintenance responsibilities have yet to be determined. Typically NYSDOT builds amenities, and municipalities maintain them. The state doesn’t typically maintain the amenities.

C. We need a firm financial understanding, and a mechanism like a BID (business improvement district), to hold accountability for future maintenance. There needs to be some creative thought into a financial solution. The responsibility for maintenance needs to be made very clear.

Q: Are on- and off-ramps really needed at I-690 and Almond Street?

A: The interchange north of I-690/I-81 would need to be reconstructed. We need to provide access to the highway from the streets.

Q: Do we need the southbound I-81 to westbound I-690 ramp?

A: Yes, interstate-to-interstate connections fall under our project’s federal requirements.

C: It is misleading to lump the cost of Alternative V-1 (Rehabilitation), which is $800 M, with the cost of the new viaduct alternatives (V-2, V-3, V-4), which are over $1 B.

Q: Do the costs include property takings?

A: Not at this time.

C: Add another line to act as a placeholder for acquisitions so people know more is coming.

Q: What is the decision-making process for the three Street-level Alternatives?

A: These alternatives, along with others under consideration, will be evaluated and undergo a screening to determine which ones will be advanced for further study and which ones will not be studied further. Alternatives that advance to the EIS will be studied comprehensively. The environmental review will determine the preferred alternative.

Q: In the cost matrix, can you include other columns with information on life cycle costs, construction duration, maintenance costs for a 50-year projection, land acquisitions, and so on? It would be valuable to enhance the cost matrix and answer many questions all at once.

A: Those things haven’t been included because we don’t have all of that information at this point. However, the Draft Scoping Report will provide some additional information.
Q: Can you elaborate on Alternative V-1 (Rehabilitation)? Is that a real option that solves the problem?

A: Rehabilitation would address some problems, for example, repair of the deck. We would also need to add shoulders for emergency services, but Rehabilitation would not do that. We wouldn’t be able to improve the speed or reconstruct the steel structure. A simple Rehabilitation could be a solution for 10 or 15 years and would address some, but not all, of the viaduct’s non-standard features; it is not a long-term solution.

Q: Can you show lifespans for each alternative?

A: We’re using 50 years as a basis of design for any potential construction.

Q: How do you approach maintenance and life cycle costs?

A: We need to look at that in the upcoming EIS for the alternatives moving forward. Because we’re currently in the scoping process, we aren’t looking at those particular items in great detail.

Q: There is a great difference in maintenance required for different types of facilities. It needs to be understood and communicated across the 50-year projection.

A: Life cycle costs and the cost benefits are things we look at. There is a great deal of expense in maintenance. For example, bridges need deck overlays every 25 years, and highway roads need resurfacing after 16 to 20 years.

Q: One thing we haven’t seen yet are sustainability factors. We should have comparisons between alternatives. Can you calculate carbon footprints for all of them?

A: We will have several opportunities to explore green practices, including steel recycling, concrete and asphalt re-use, and storm water practices. We’ll get into that during future steps of the project.

Mark Frechette closed the meeting.