MEETING SUMMARY

**Meeting Date:** Tuesday, June 24, 2014  
**Location:** Everson Museum, Syracuse  
**Event:** Stakeholders’ Committee Meeting

Presentation

Mark Frechette, NYSDOT’s director of the I-81 Viaduct Project, opened the meeting by introducing himself and Joe Flint, the project manager. Mr. Frechette encouraged attendance at the Final Scoping Meeting on Thursday, June 26, 2014 and indicated that additional information would be presented at that meeting. Attendees will have an opportunity to view boards and talk to project staff and submit both written and oral comments. He also noted that the meeting materials would be available on the project website, www.i81opportunities.org, as well as the project’s outreach center at the Carnegie building, 335 Montgomery Street, by the day after the meeting.

After the presentation, Mr. Frechette opened the meeting to questions.

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 – There are no artistic renderings for ramps south of Adams—why? There should be more details on not just the number of properties impacted but also where they are located. What will be the impacts during construction, and will residents need to be relocated?

A – On Thursday, we will have a substantial number of graphics to share that will provide more details. At this time, however, the alternatives are not engineered in detail, and while we have an initial idea of the level of property impact—which we’ve developed for the purpose of screening the alternatives under consideration—specific impacts have yet to be identified. As the alternatives are advanced for further study, we will continue to investigate potential impacts to properties and strive to minimize those impacts. We will look at whether potentially affected buildings are historic, whether they are residential or commercial, etc.

Q – How long will it be until we know what will be constructed?

A – We are in the initial phase of design. At the end of this phase, when we have done all the environmental analysis, a record of decision (ROD) will be issued that will identify what alternative will go forward. The timeframe of the ROD hinges on many things that may add time to or reduce the schedule. For example, we currently have 17 alternatives. We expect this to change at the end of scoping. Within the
last month, we received a recommendation from one of the Stakeholders’ Advisory Working Groups members to look at I-690 as an alternative to I-481 for the re-designation of I-81 as part of the Street-level Alternatives. New alternatives could add time to the schedule. While we can’t provide a specific date when we know what will be constructed, a decision will be made over the next year or two.

Q – You are knocking off some alternatives based on cost. Do these costs include property acquisition costs? Are the property impacts more of a socioeconomic impact?

A – We have preliminary real estate costs and will continue to refine these over time. The real estate cost would be significantly less than the construction cost. As the alternatives are developed further, the property takings will be better defined. We also will assess social and economic impacts.

Q – It appears that Syracuse Housing Authority (SHA) residents will be impacted regardless of the alternative chosen even if it’s just maintaining the existing viaduct. Construction will have an environmental impact on residents. Have you considered relocating these residents?

A – Once we know what we will build, we will identify its potential impacts to the community. During construction we will strive to minimize those impacts.

Q – What is the cost of Alternative V-4?

A – $1.4B

C – Add street labels to the maps.

Q – Who are the recommendations going to and who has the final say on recommendations?

A – Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is NYSDOT’s partner on this project, and the two agencies will make the final decision. NYSDOT is the lead state agency, and FHWA is the lead federal agency. NYSDOT also is in regular contact with the County and City. The City has ownership and/or maintenance responsibility for most local roads that could be affected by this project.

Q – How much traffic is destined to the city, and how much is traveling through?

A – We estimate that about 10 to 12 percent of traffic is through traffic. Some origin-destination data will be shared at the scoping meeting on June 26.

Q – What is the rationale to provide a connection—such as a connection between I-81 and I-690—where there is not one today? What about expense and burden to community? Does the justification include some rationale that the streets that are currently used to make this connection can’t be used? Is it a speed or convenience factor and a determination that existing roads are insufficient?

A – Today southbound I-81 can’t go to westbound I-690 on the interstate; a motorist needs to travel on Bear Street or Hiawatha Boulevard to make that connection. A connection between eastbound I-690 and northbound I-81 also is missing and motorists need to travel local roads. Typically, FHWA and NYSDOT want to make all interstate-to-interstate movements, and these connections are included in all alternatives under consideration; it is desirable to keep interstate traffic on interstates.

Q – I am pleased to have the Draft Scoping Report and appreciate the work that has gone into that. It provides the rationale for the recommendations and, by and large, I agree with them. My concern is the
decision-making process in the next phase and that an evaluation matrix will have nothing regarding economic development. Especially with the build alternatives, the economic development factor will loom large. How will that be taken into account?

A – Livability, sustainability, and economic vitality are included in NYSDOT’s goals for this project. We still have work to do, and as alternatives are developed, and more information becomes available, we need to take those considerations into account.

Q – Has any consideration been given to Bob Doucette’s idea of designating I-690 as I-81 or to other ideas such as Senator DeFrancisco’s tunnel concept?

A – We are in the early design or scoping phase of the project and many ideas about alternatives have been generated. We will consider comments that have been submitted, including Mr. Doucette’s comment. We will also consider the Senator’s concept. The scoping comment period will remain open through September 2, 2014, and we encourage comments. We will respond to comments in the Final Scoping Report.

Q – Will you collect new air quality data? Will you consider collecting urban heat island data?

A – We will look at how alternatives affect air quality. The most recent air quality data for the project area will be obtained from the nearest New York State Department of Environmental Conservation air monitoring station. Computer modeling will be used to predict air quality with the project alternatives. The project is a roadway construction project within an existing highway alignment and would not be expected to result in a land use change that is of a nature or scale that would be discernible and warrant collection of urban heat island data. For the air quality dispersion modeling, we will use meteorological data from the nearby representative National Weather Service stations. Any urban heat island effect will be reflected in these meteorological data and, in turn, will be accounted for in the predicted pollutant concentrations.

Q – Will the scoping meeting provide information on whether the alternatives would provide better access to hospitals and to University Hill?

A – Yes, there will be information on proposed improvements to the Teall Avenue interchange, which would be a common feature of all alternatives recommended to move forward for further study.

Q – What percentage of the decision making has to do with pollution over downtown?

A – It’s not possible to give an exact percentage. Air quality is one of numerous environmental categories that will be investigated. The next phase of the project, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, will identify potential impacts and measures necessary to mitigate adverse impacts.

C – I wish that $1.5 B could be available to make the City a better place to live so we don’t need a highway to access.

Q – Recently, we have had a lot of private investment in the Hawley Greene neighborhood. I am concerned that some alternatives, particularly the boulevard concept, will close streets that go into our neighborhood. Are there alternative that won’t close our roads? My concern is that the north will be closed off from downtown.

A – Going forward, impacts will be reviewed and there may be an opportunity to lessen those impacts.
Q – Under Alternatives V2, V3, and V4, what is the design standard for the curves?

A – You typically design an interstate for 70 mph and post it for 60 mph. In some alternatives, we would design to 60 mph and post it at 55 mph. In other alternatives, we would tighten curves to be sharper but believe we could keep the highway posted at 55 mph.

Q – The EIS process seems to be missing urban design criteria as well as the economic value of land freed up and returned to the City from taking down the viaduct (though Commissioner McDonald has spoken about urban design). It is not just about construction costs; it’s also about duration and phasing of construction and the future maintenance costs (i.e., roadways have less maintenance and take less time for construction). Tackling the complexity of this project is needed even at this early stage.

A – NYSDOT understands the importance of urban design and economic development opportunities, and both are key components of the project. It has established a project consulting team with this expertise and experience and will also consider these issues via the public outreach and the EIS. The construction costs and duration are among the factors that were evaluated and described in the Draft Scoping Report. The EIS will further refine and disclose the relative construction costs, phasing, duration, and maintenance costs of the alternatives, and these will all be factors in the selection of a preferred alternative.

Q – Milwaukee had a similar project ten-plus years ago. One deciding factor was that the boulevard cost one quarter the amount of the replacement. I am surprised that the cost of the Boulevard Alternative is not much different from the cost of the others. Is that due to the connection to I-690? I would like to see a cost breakdown and whether an individual cost is going into something desirable but not necessary.

A – The Street-level Alternatives require us to rebuild some of the local ramps and local street grid. Costs associated with the interchange and I-481 improvements are also factored in.

Q – How do we keep our city beautiful? What factors for aesthetics have been included, such as decorative walls, park areas, or incorporation of artwork?

A – Aesthetics are important especially in an urban area like ours, and will continue to be an important component of the project as it moves forward.

C – There should be a way to connect and talk about mass transit. Only 3 percent of the community is using mass transit. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if this project was a trigger for change? In the past, Upstate had folks at a shuttle lot at Alliance Stadium while a garage was being constructed. Folks had changed their travel to bus and wanted to continue the service after the garage opened.

Q – Is there any consideration to make light rail part of the project?

A – The feasibility of light rail has been discussed with the transit provider. They indicate there is insufficient density to justify its use or the expenditure.

Conclusion

At 7:35 PM, Mark Frechette closed the meeting and again encouraged attendance at the Final Scoping Meeting on Thursday.