MEETING SUMMARY

Meeting Date: Thursday, October 29, 2015
Location: I-81 Viaduct Project Outreach Center, 335 Montgomery Street, Syracuse
Event: Community and Economic Development Stakeholders’ Advisory Working Group (SAWG) Meeting

Attendees

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Project Team Members</th>
<th>SAWG Members</th>
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<tr>
<td>Matthew Driscoll, NYSDOT</td>
<td>Barry Lentz</td>
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<td>Mark Frechette, NYSDOT</td>
<td>Peter Sarver</td>
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<td>Joseph Flint, NYSDOT</td>
<td>David Holder</td>
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<td>Jon Adams, NYSDOT</td>
<td>James Fayle</td>
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<td>Rita Campon, Parsons</td>
<td>Anthony Mangano</td>
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<td>Carlos Lopez, Parsons</td>
<td>Meghan Vitale</td>
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<td>Chris Calvert, AKRF</td>
<td>Bob Petrovich (for Brian Donnelly)</td>
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<td>Kathryn Wolf, TWMLA</td>
<td>David Paccone</td>
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<td>Jane Rice, EDR</td>
<td>Owen Kerney</td>
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<td>Andrew Obernesser, EDR</td>
<td>William Simmons</td>
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Discussion

Mark Frechette, NYSDOT’s I-81 Viaduct Project Director, welcomed the attendees to the Community and Economic Development Stakeholders’ Advisory Working Group (SAWG) meeting. In addition to work on the Scoping Report, which was published in April, the project team has been working on advancing engineering, environmental analysis, and public involvement activities. As NYSDOT moves into the next phase of the project, it will look to resume regular meetings of the SAWGs. NYSDOT again requests that SAWG members assist in relaying information to the public and in bringing public concerns back to NYSDOT. Mr. Frechette invited SAWG participants to expand the discussion to any other topics that they wished to discuss.

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

Will there be a regular schedule for SAWG meetings?
A: Members will receive notification of SAWG meetings about two weeks in advance of the meeting. The next meetings will be on December 1 and 2 to discuss transit. It is anticipated at this time that the January SAWG meetings will cover economic development.
NYSDOT and community leaders should begin planning for construction now rather than waiting until after the Record of Decision. For example, early opportunities for job training would be of benefit to supplying skilled labor from the local community.

Jobs are an important issue for the project. NYSDOT is committed to its policy of 30 percent participation by Minority and Woman-owned Businesses (M/WBE) as well as the use of skilled labor. There will be a lag after the Record of Decision before construction commences, but nevertheless, it is a good idea to explore early opportunities for job training.

The medical facilities are right next to I-81. There is also public housing along the viaduct, and there is a lot of student housing on University Hill. It is important to begin dialogue with the entities that run these facilities so they can be adequately prepared when construction begins. For example, the patients at the psychiatric hospital will be very susceptible to construction issues. In most cases, these institutions will need a long lead time to have plans in place.

There also needs to be consideration for business continuation during construction. There is much concern that customers will avoid the Downtown area if it is made more difficult to reach.

There will be a detailed consideration of construction impacts in the DEIS, and early coordination with key institutions in the area is a very good idea. NYSDOT also will work very hard to develop a Maintenance and Protection of Traffic Plan that avoids restricted access to local businesses, but construction activities will hinder some travel in the area.

Could NYSDOT begin the conversation by looking at what was done during construction of other large projects?

Publicly sponsored projects in New York City use specific performance commitments considered appropriate for an urban setting. These commitments were first developed for the Lower Manhattan recovery/redevelopment projects, including NYSDOT’s Route 9A project. We can look at these environmental performance commitments and examples from other urban areas. NYSDOT will also look to have conversations with the hospitals to address their specific concerns about construction activities.

How long will it take to commence construction following the Record of Decision?

A number of steps need to occur following the Record of Decision, including final design and procurement. Mr. Frechette estimated that it would take at least one year to commence construction following the Record of Decision.

The FHWA procurement process does not permit preference toward local labor in awarding construction contracts. There has been a pilot program for preference to local labor, but the I-81 project may not qualify. The use of local labor is very important to the Syracuse economy.

NYSDOT awards about $100 million in contracts each year, and many local firms carry out these awards. While NYSDOT cannot mandate that labor reside in Central New York, it is typical that most workers are from the area.
C: There should be an effort by local government agencies to develop job training programs so that there is ample skilled labor from Syracuse when construction begins.

A: The representative from Onondaga County Department of Planning mentioned job training efforts that were done for the amphitheater project, but he is not sure how this program would work if federal dollars had been used for project funding. Mr. Frechette stated that he would look into what programs NYSDOT can implement to encourage the hiring of local labor. Ms. Wolf mentioned experience with project sponsors that have helped connect contractors to local labor.

Mr. Flint provided an overview of the scoping process. For this project, scoping was quite complex. The public was heavily involved in scoping, including developing goals and objectives, development and evaluation of alternatives, and in identifying and applying screening criteria. Using all of this information provided, NYSDOT was able to whittle down from 17 build alternatives to 6 alternatives (3 viaduct alternative options and 6 street-level alternatives) in the Draft Scoping Report. Subsequent to the Draft Scoping Report, the three Street-level Alternatives (Alternatives SL-1, SL-2, and SL-3) were combined into one alternative, known as the Community Grid Alternative, with two options that differ in their use of the local street network. Alternatives SL-2 and SL-3 were combined into a single option called CG-2. Given the similarities of the three Viaduct Alternatives (Alternatives V-2, V-3, and V-4), they were combined into a single alternative (the “Viaduct Alternative”). The Viaduct Alternative has three options (V-2, V-3, and V-4) that differ in the design of seven curves within the I-81 and I-690 interchange. Finally, NYSDOT will conduct additional engineering and further analysis to determine if there is a tunnel alternative that addresses the project’s need and meets the project purpose and objectives, as well as the established screening criteria. If a tunnel alternative is determined to be reasonable based on these factors, it may be considered for further evaluation and analysis.

Mr. Flint opened the floor to questions about the Scoping Report.

Q: Will the development and evaluation of the tunnel alternative slow down the rest of the analysis?
A: No. NYSDOT will continue work on other alternatives at the same time, so major delays are not anticipated at this time. If a tunnel is advanced to the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), the analysis will require additional time.

Q: Who decides whether a tunnel goes forward?
A: NYSDOT and FHWA will first determine if any reasonable tunnel options were not reviewed in scoping. NYSDOT and FHWA will then take a hard look at any options that may arise and determine whether they meet project purpose and objectives, as well as the screening criteria, and should advance.

Q: In evaluating new tunnel options, will you use the same eight screening criteria that were in the Scoping Report? Or will there be more or different criteria?
NYSDOT will use the same criteria identified in the Scoping Report to determine if any new tunnel concept is reasonable. If carried forward to the DEIS, many additional factors will be used to define the benefits and impacts of the alternative.

Will the stakeholders get to see the information that is being used to screen the alternatives before the Draft EIS (DEIS) is published?

Yes, the DEIS will present the impacts of each alternative. The DEIS will not recommend a Preferred Alternative. Instead, the Final EIS (FEIS) will recommend the Preferred Alternative. Stakeholders and the public will have an opportunity to review and submit comments on the DEIS.

There is limited information about how the Community Grid Alternative will transition from a freeway section at Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. East (“MLK East,” formerly Castle Street) to the at-grade section at Adams Street. Could you consider moving the MLK East ramp farther south (for example, to Kennedy Street) to provide more room for a transition from the freeway section to the at-grade section?

Project engineering continues to advance, and landscape and urban design are key considerations as the project moves forward. At this time, NYSDOT has investigated options that pass over the railroad, and it is likely that retaining walls are needed for the descent of the ramp to Almond Street. Design treatments will be considered to buffer the adjacent areas from the ramps. NYSDOT would not install an at-grade railroad crossing. NYSDOT also is investigating options that would place the route under, rather than over, the railroad.

How are aesthetics considered in the design?

NYSDOT is exploring a number of aesthetic schemes and features as part of its current efforts. Aesthetic considerations will be much more refined as part of final design.

NYSDOT could consider an alternative that uses I-690 to route vehicles to University Hill.

Improving access between I-690 and University Hill is under consideration.

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Commissioner Driscoll entered and greeted the group. Attendees offered introductions to the commissioner, and then the group continued to ask questions of NYSDOT.

For the street-level option, does the road have to be as wide as shown in the Scoping Report?

Two options are being considered under the Community Grid Alternative. Option CG-1 would replace Almond Street with a boulevard that would function as the primary thoroughfare, handling most vehicular traffic from the former I-81. Option CG-2 would disperse traffic over a combination of local streets, including a reconstructed Almond Street. A brief explanation of both options was given. The exact width of the road has yet to be determined. It was noted that all options under consideration will improve pedestrian crossings and safety at Almond Street.
C: Changing the terminology from the Street-level Alternatives to the Community Grid Alternative is brilliant; it is very helpful in communicating the purpose of this alternative to the public. However, the term boulevard carries a negative connotation in Syracuse.

Q: Is there a timeline for publishing the DEIS?
A: It is premature to commit to a publication date at this time.

Q: Can you please clarify whether or not the DEIS will identify the Preferred Alternative?
A: The DEIS will not identify the Preferred Alternative; the identification will occur in the FEIS.

Mr. Calvert and Ms. Campon provided an overview of the scoping process including public scoping meetings, the timeframes and methods for providing comments, and the process used to organize comments and provide responses. NYSDOT organized the public submissions into 353 unique comments, representing the input of 714 individuals and organizations. Comments were provided by letter, e-mail, electronic comment form, paper comment form, and orally at scoping meetings. The comments and responses are organized by the major topic areas in the Scoping Report, and all comments and responses are shown in Section 6 of the Scoping Report. Mr. Calvert and Ms. Campon also reviewed some of the public comments and how these comments are integrated into the DEIS studies. Comments reflected both support for and opposition to alternatives, with most comments relating to the viaduct and street-level alternatives. There also was public interest in tunnel alternatives, which NYSDOT is now further investigating. In addition to a Re-think I-81 concept, which was raised by members of the public, another concept emerged during scoping that would designate the former section of I-690 and the former section of I-81 as I-481 and then route I-81 around the east side of Syracuse. There were comments on inclusion of transit in the project. NYSDOT has been closely coordinating with Centro, and an objective was added to address access to transit. The topic of the next Stakeholders’ Advisory Working Group meetings will be a discussion of transit.

There were comments regarding the justification for the missing connections between I-81 and I-690, and NYSDOT provided greater detail in the purpose and need section of the April 2015 Scoping Report. Similarly, there were a number of requests to consider specific local plans, and all of these plans were reviewed and cited in the April 2015 Scoping Report. NYSDOT also heard that Goal #2 needed more consideration through objectives, and there were a number of comments on quality of life, livability, and walkability.

There were comments that access to the Dome is important. While the project is not being designed to ensure free-flow conditions during Dome events, the alternatives will improve access to the Dome in general. Commenters also stated that NYSDOT needs to consider the loss of parking under the viaduct, which is being examined. There were also numerous comments about potential construction impacts, and these comments are being considered as the detailed construction analysis framework is being developed.

NYSDOT received many suggestions for new alternatives or variants of the alternatives presented. Each suggestion was considered, including its engineering, traffic, and environmental considerations. The Access Syracuse Plan is one example of a plan that was reviewed in detail and
not found to be reasonable. There was also interest in roundabouts, which NYSDOT is examining as part of its standard practice.

Q: Was the Re-think I-81 concept dropped?
A: The concept, along with other designation concepts, will be visited again as part of the interstate re-designation report that will be developed as part of the Community Grid Alternative.

Q: Did you consider re-designating I-481 as a state route?
A: That option will not be considered.

Q: Have you considered modifying tolls on I-90 to reduce congestion on I-690 and other roads through the city?
A: SMTC conducted a study of options to attract more east-west traffic to I-90 a few years ago. NYSDOT is not investigating any changes in I-90’s operation as part of this project.

Q: When the viaduct is removed, how will traffic be handled through Downtown? How long will diversions be in place?
A: NYSDOT is investigating construction sequencing, which will examine traffic diversions. These plans will be described in the DEIS.

C: There will be a period of time when I-81 will not operate as an interstate during construction.
A: NYSDOT will examine all opportunities to maintain adequate traffic flow through Downtown during construction.

Q: Will any elements of the Access Syracuse Plan be considered when developing future tunnel options?
A: Yes.

Mr. Adams presented a broad overview of the EIS. Given the project’s setting, the EIS will have a heavy focus on the built environment, but all impact categories will be considered. NYSDOT is also advancing preliminary design and beginning work on environmental baseline conditions.

Mr. Flint opened the floor to any final questions or thoughts from SAWG members.

Q: Is the Teall Avenue improvements project a separate project? Will there be a scoping process for it?
A: The project is separate and independent from the I-81 project. A scoping process is not required for the Teall Avenue project because an EIS is not anticipated. However, NYSDOT will hold a public information meeting for the project.

Q: Who is preparing the economic study, and when will the economic study be completed?
A: The economic study will be completed as part of the DEIS. Peter Liebowitz will be making a presentation at the January SAWG meetings regarding the economic analysis that is being prepared for the DEIS.

Q: When will the results of the origin and destination study be available?
A: Data regarding the origins and destinations of vehicle trips will be used to understand traffic patterns in the I-81 viaduct priority area. FHWA and NYSDOT will assemble the origin-destination (O-D) trip data from the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council’s (SMTC’s) regional travel demand model. The SMTC recently updated the model using new O-D data. Additional O-D information will be provided in the Draft EIS.

The meeting ended at 6:00 PM.