Good evening. My name is Mark Frechette, and I’m the project director on the I-81 Viaduct Project. On behalf of the New York State Department of Transportation, I’d like to welcome you and thank you for coming to this open house on the latest developments in the project.

Our goal tonight is to bring you up to date on the project and to solicit your input. We will show you the latest versions of our project alternatives and present NYSDOT’s recommendations on those alternatives. We have large-scale maps of the alternatives, which illustrate them in detail, street by street, as well as boards and displays that depict how the alternatives are alike and unalike from one another. Traffic studies have progressed, and we will summarize these. We will also share our estimates of potential property impacts, based on the most recent engineering studies, although we want to stress that efforts to avoid and minimize property impacts continue.
As you know, NYSDOT, in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration, is preparing a Draft Environmental Impact Statement, or DEIS, for the I-81 Viaduct Project. We anticipate that this document will be published for public review early next year.
From the beginning of the project, we have studied several ideas to determine how the viaduct should be replaced. When we published our scoping report in April 2015, we dismissed a few of these concepts and advanced a No Build Alternative, which we are required to study; a replacement viaduct; and a community grid alternative for further study in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

Based on public input received during the scoping comment period, we also undertook additional engineering and further analysis to determine if there is a tunnel alternative that would address the project’s need and meet the project’s purpose and objectives, as well as the established screening criteria. We developed three new concepts, which I’ll speak about later.

Based on our studies to date, NYSDOT is now recommending that we dismiss some of the Viaduct, Community Grid, and Tunnel options we have looked at.
The No Build Alternative serves as a baseline against which the other project alternatives are evaluated. The No Build essentially represents what the future would look like without the project, although repairs and maintenance would continue to keep the viaduct safe for the traveling public.
The three Viaduct Alternative options--V-2, V-3, and V-4--would all replace the I-81 viaduct with a new viaduct that meets the latest engineering design standards. All three would involve a full reconstruction of I-81 between approximately Colvin Street and Spencer Street, as well as modifications to highway features north of Spencer Street to Hiawatha Boulevard and along I-690.

Options V-2, V-3, and V-4 differ in the tightness of the curves in the I-81/I-690 interchange area. All three would construct a new viaduct to today’s design standards, substantially improving safety and addressing the design issues present in the viaduct today—such as lack of shoulders and insufficient lengths for on- and off-ramps. Because Options V-3 and V-4 would be designed with slightly sharper curves than Option V-2, they would require fewer building acquisitions than Option V-2., which would occupy a greater footprint than would Options V-3 and V-4.
Based on the latest studies, Option V-2 would require the acquisition of 36 buildings, Option V-3 would result in acquisition of 29 buildings, and Option V-4 would result in acquisition of 24 buildings.

NYSDOT is recommending that Options V-2 and V-3 be dismissed from further consideration. This recommendation is based on V-2 and V-3’s adverse impacts to properties, which would result in the acquisition of historic buildings as well as substantial displacement of residences and businesses.
V-4, which would involve the reconstruction of all highway elements and would substantially meet current design standards, would eliminate the vast majority of problematic features in the project area and improve safety. Therefore, NYSDOT recommends retaining Option V-4 for further consideration in the Draft EIS.

The displays that you see at this open house labeled the Viaduct Alternative are based on Option V-4.
The Community Grid Alternative would involve demolition of the existing viaduct between the New York, Susquehanna and Western Railway bridge and the I-81/I-690 interchange.

There are two Community Grid Alternative options: Option CG-1, in which Almond Street would become a boulevard and the primary north-south thoroughfare through the city, and Option CG-2, which would disperse traffic onto Almond Street as well as other local streets.

The section of I-81 between the southern I-81/I-481 interchange and the I-81/I-690 interchange in Downtown Syracuse would be de-designated as an interstate, and we recommend that I-481 be re-designated as the new I-81.

The section of I-81 north of I-690 would remain a high-speed interstate.
The implementation of Option CG-1, Boulevard, would require construction of an overpass along Erie Boulevard from Townsend Street to Forman Street, potentially hindering access to businesses in that area, and would impact local street connectivity by severing McBride, Willow, and Water Streets.
Option CG-1 would require the acquisition of more property than Option CG-2, including two buildings listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The acquisitions also would result in greater socioeconomic impacts. And because Option CG-1 would concentrate traffic flow along one major thoroughfare, it would require more lanes on Almond Street and not optimize the use of the existing city street network compared with Option CG-2. Thus, it would provide a lesser benefit to pedestrians. Therefore, NYSDOT recommends that Option CG-1 be dismissed from further consideration and that CG-2, Almond and Other Local Streets, become the Community Grid Alternative. The boards you see at this open house labeled Community Grid Alternative are based on Option CG-2.
Option CG-2 would disperse traffic throughout the city grid by promoting broader use of the existing street network. North-south vehicular traffic would be channeled through Almond Street and along parallel corridors, such as Crouse Avenue, Irving Avenue, State Street, and Townsend Street. East-west traffic routes would include Erie Boulevard, Harrison Street, and Adams Street. By dispersing traffic to these other streets, the reconstructed Almond Street would maintain a narrow vehicular transportation footprint (typically two lanes, as well as turn bays when needed, in each direction).
The Community Grid Alternative provides direct connections to the key destinations in the city, including the two major employment centers, University Hill and Downtown. To provide a more direct connection to University Hill from I-690 and optimize the use of the city street grid, a full interchange would be constructed at Crouse and Irving Avenues. The new interchange would largely serve University Hill, one of the two major destinations for traffic in the viaduct priority area (the other major destination, Downtown, also would be served by direct connections to and from the interstate). It would provide a new access point to I-690 and to former I-81 (via I-690) to and from the north, east, and west; reduce reliance on Almond Street; and restore the missing street grid on Irving Avenue. Traffic headed Downtown would have direct connections from Oswego Boulevard and Clinton Streets.
We also developed three new tunnel concepts: T-5, T-6, and T-7.
T-5 would remove the viaduct and replace it with a shallow, approximately two-mile tunnel under Almond Street, from about East Kennedy Street to Butternut Street. The tunnel would provide two travel lanes in each direction, meet interstate standards, and would carry the I-81 designation.

T-5 is costly: $3.1 billion. Under T-5, community disruptions—including impacts to vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic—are likely as a result of cut-and-cover construction, which would be necessary to build this shallow tunnel. T-5 would require the underpinning of the viaduct, which is nearly 60 years old. This operation would add risk, difficulty, and duration to the construction. In addition, T-5 would temporarily disrupt 15 major road crossings and a railroad crossing. Finally, T-5 would require the acquisition of 35 properties, including historic ones, and displace approximately 714 employees and 175 residents.

For these reasons, NYSDOT recommends that T-5 no longer be considered.
T-6 would replace the viaduct with a deep tunnel west of Almond Street. The tunnel would be about two miles long, with two lanes in each direction and meet interstate design standards. The south tunnel portal would be located approximately 1,000 feet south of MLK, Jr. East, follow South Townsend Street, and make a westward turn near East Genesee Street. The tunnel would then continue in a northwestern direction to the north portal at Hickory Street, where it would join the existing I-81 highway.

T-6 is also costly, at $2.6 billion. It would require the closure of Townsend Street between Genesee Street and Harrison Street and the closure of James Street between Oswego Boulevard and State Street, substantially severing local street connectivity. T-6 would require the acquisition of 17 properties, some of which are historic, including the Verizon Building. Since all major fiber optic lines that are part of Verizon’s system go through the Verizon Building, with fiber entering and leaving in all directions, the acquisition of this building would be highly disruptive. T-6 also would result in impacts to Firefighter’s Memorial Park and displace approximately 746 employees and 46 residents.

For these reasons, NYSDOT recommends that T-5 should not be advanced for further study.
T-7 would also replace the viaduct with a deep tunnel, but instead of an interstate it would construct a high speed, non-interstate tunnel, with two lanes in each direction, through Downtown Syracuse from MLK, Jr. East to Hickory Street. In addition, this concept would include all elements of the Community Grid Alternative. It would convert I-481 to I-81, connect to I-690, and have the same interchange modifications.

T-7 would cost $2.5 billion. It has many of the same benefits as the Community Grid Alternative, but since it also would include construction of a tunnel, T-7 would involve additional property acquisitions, additional construction (and therefore greater community disruption), and a higher cost than the Community Grid Alternative.

NYSDOT recommends that T-7 also be dismissed from further consideration.
To summarize, NYSDOT recommends that options V-2, V-3, CG-1 and the three new tunnel concepts—T-5, -6, and -7, be dismissed from further consideration.

Again, V-4 would be known as the Viaduct Alternative, and CG-2 would be known as the Community Grid Alternative, and this is how we refer to them in the open house displays. These two alternatives, along with the No Build Alternative, would be studied further in the DEIS.

We would like to solicit your input on these recommendations. Together FHWA and NYSDOT will make the decision on these recommendations in the DEIS.
Now I’d like to tell you more about the Viaduct and Community Grid Alternatives.

The Viaduct Alternative would build a new viaduct with four 12-foot travel lanes (a minimum of two in each direction), as well as inside shoulders (a minimum of four feet in each direction) and outside shoulders (a minimum of 10 feet in each direction).

The new viaduct would be approximately 10 to 15 feet higher than the existing viaduct.
South of Harrison Street, the new viaduct generally would be approximately 10 to 20 feet wider, depending on the section, than the 66-foot-wide existing viaduct.
Between Harrison and Genesee Streets, the viaduct would begin to split into separate bridges, with connecting ramps. As a result of these connections, the separate bridges, wider shoulders, and other improvements, the footprint of the new viaduct would be substantially wider than the existing viaduct footprint.
The Community Grid Alternative would reactivate the city’s street grid and create new travel patterns. I’m going to show you some of the travel paths that would be possible, though these are not all.
These are possible pathways to western Downtown...
To eastern Downtown...
...to the Hill...
...access to the hospitals on the Hill (Upstate, Children’s, and Crouse)
...and access to St. Joe’s...
Although they are different solutions, the Viaduct and Community Grid Alternatives have some features in common, and we have boards at the open house showing these features. For example, West Street would be lowered to meet Genesee Street under both alternatives.
Under both the Viaduct and Community Grid Alternatives, I-690 would be reconstructed: from Leavenworth Avenue to Lodi Street under the Viaduct Alternative, and from Leavenworth Avenue to Beech Street under the Community Grid Alternative. Under both alternatives, the existing ramps between the two interstates would be demolished and rebuilt.
Almond Street would be reconstructed differently under each alternative, and you can see these proposed improvements in detail at this open house.
The Viaduct Alternative would require 24 building acquisitions, and the Community Grid Alternative would require five.
The Viaduct Alternative would cost $1.7 billion, and the Community Grid Alternative would cost $1.3 billion.

There also would be costs associated with the No Build Alternative in each year that repairs are undertaken. As the facility continues to deteriorate, the level of effort and associated costs would increase.
Traffic studies have progressed, and you will see computer simulations of traffic in 2020, under the Viaduct and Community Alternatives, during the morning and afternoon period periods. We also have information on projected travel times and level of service for each alternative in 2020 and 2050.

Traffic operates well under both alternatives.
We are preparing the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and anticipate that it will be published early next year.
Recognizing that projects of the magnitude of I-81 can create local jobs, NYSDOT is developing a comprehensive approach to local hiring. The focus is to create a local hiring preference for the project. NYSDOT’s goal is to create a unique, meaningful program that would lead to opportunities for long-term employment. This approach would help address unemployment and poverty.

NYSDOT is working with local job advocacy/training organizations to identify the jobs, skill sets needed, and potential employees. Jobs would be not only in construction but also in other fields needed to support the project.
We encourage you to stay involved in the project. Please fill out comment sheets and let us know your opinion and concerns. Public meetings will continue. We are planning meetings in the various neighborhoods in the next couple of months, and a public hearing once the DEIS is published.