Welcome to the January 2016 SAWG meeting, which will focus on economic development and socioeconomic conditions.

This is the first meeting of several meetings that will focus on economic development.

Today we will provide an overview of what the Environmental Impact Statement will analyze from an economic perspective and present a preliminary review of socioeconomic data.
This is today’s agenda.

First, we will highlight some ways in which economic development considerations may affect or overlap with the planning and implementation of the I-81 Viaduct Project.

Second, we will describe the socioeconomic issues that will be addressed in the project’s Environmental Impact Statement.

Third, we will provide an overview of key regional and citywide plans that include economic development components of relevance to the I-81 Viaduct Project.

Fourth, we will present findings from the EIS “base studies” that have been completed to date, highlighting socioeconomic conditions and trends of particular relevance to the I-81 Viaduct Project.

Finally, we will discuss potential effects of the project on the region.
Economic considerations related to the I-81 Viaduct Project can be grouped into three general categories: EIS impact analyses, design and implementation, and planning for the future post project.

The EIS will consider the project’s potential to result in both beneficial and adverse socioeconomic impacts. The first category, EIS impact analyses, is about ensuring that critical issues are addressed in the EIS.

The second category, design and implementation, is about influencing project design to promote economic development. During a previous meeting, when the group talked about project design and its relationship to urban design goals for downtown, many participants noted the connection between urban design and economic development. Urban design can have a substantial effect on the business environment and the overall economic development potential of an area. A worthwhile goal for I-81 is to design the project in a way that supports local economic development.

Finally, the third category, planning for the future, is about laying the groundwork for post-project economic development, which also was discussed in previous meetings. For example, the City’s initiative to implement new zoning to support its comprehensive plan was discussed. While zoning and development planning are not
within the purview of NYSDOT or the transportation project itself, the EIS does examine each alternative for its consistency with existing public policy and plans. Some strategies may pertain to the locally affected corridor, and others pertain to the region as a whole.
This slide highlights some of the ways in which the I-81 Viaduct Project could affect the region. Any of the project alternatives under consideration by NYSDOT aims to improve the design/aesthetics of the roadway, improve neighborhood connectivity, and enhance the roadway’s safety and usability (through improved signage, ramps, etc.). These measures would make the study area corridor a more desirable place to live and do business and improve the motorist, bicyclist and pedestrian experience. Combined, these types of changes would contribute to an improved image for Syracuse. Over time, an enhanced image in the urban core would radiate outward, leading to increased visitation, visitor spending, and business growth throughout the region.

It's also important to note that the sheer size of the investment will bring a lot of economic activity to the region, supporting employment and secondary spending.
So what do we mean when we say “economic development”? Essentially, it is a broad term that can mean many things depending on the context in which it is used. Within the context of this project, we will be talking about “economic development” in terms of the following key questions: How can the I-81 project transportation investment relate to, and help support, new development opportunities in the corridor? How can the I-81 project help sustain the critical presence of key employers such as Upstate and SUNY? How can it foster the continued revitalization and organic growth of urban neighborhoods and suburban communities? Overall, the transportation investment needs to support the regional mobility that underpins the metropolitan economy.
The EIS will consider the project’s potential to result in both beneficial and adverse socioeconomic impacts. The EIS analysis isolates the impact of the project itself on socioeconomic conditions in the study area, comparing anticipated conditions in the future with and without the project.

Three main EIS components directly relate to economic development. While they will appear as distinct analyses in the EIS, the issues are to some extent intertwined. The three categories are socioeconomic conditions; land acquisition, displacement, and relocation; and environmental justice.
The project is likely to require acquisition or permanent easements of publicly or privately owned properties in the study area.

The EIS will consider all takings and easements and describe each affected parcel in terms of characteristics such as those shown in this sample table. Each property’s characteristics are likely to include its building size and property value, number and type of businesses and estimated number of employees, and number of residential units and estimated number of residents. This information will be compiled for each of the alternatives under consideration.
Transportation projects often have to deal with adjacent properties in terms of land acquisition or easements. Often, there is a stand-alone section in the EIS that specifically deals with acquisition, displacement, and relocation.

Extensive regulations governing such actions are in place. Projects that are federally funded, for example, must comply with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970. In addition, state regulations under the Eminent Domain Procedures Law (EDPL) further codify the process of land acquisition. The laws are intended to ensure that individuals do not suffer disproportionate injuries as a result of a project’s design for the benefit of the public as a whole and to minimize the hardship of displacement.

The process is well established. The avoidance or minimization of property acquisition is an upfront concern in the development of concepts and alternatives. The Draft EIS identifies affected properties and includes a description of the process undertaken to arrive at a fair market value for a total or partial acquisition. In addition, the effects of the displacement of residents, business, employees are estimated. The fiscal effects of the elimination of private real estate can also be analyzed—for example, what would be the loss of future property tax revenues? —as shown in this example from the Tappan Zee Hudson River Crossing EIS.

As shown by this example, sometimes, as design development progresses, it may be possible to further minimize and reduce property takings. Any changes would be disclosed in the Final EIS.
A separate socioeconomic conditions section of the EIS will provide a comprehensive summary of the project area and its regional demographic and economic profile.

The EIS will evaluate the project’s potential effects on socioeconomic conditions, including population, housing, and primary business sectors, in the study area and region.

For example, how will the project alter existing travel patterns, and how will these changes affect existing businesses? Will there be business and residential displacements, and will these have a substantial effect on the socioeconomic profile of the area? How will the project affect the city’s tax base? Will the physical changes brought about by the highway have any positive or negative effect on the social and business dynamics of the surrounding communities? The EIS examines both permanent (post-project) and temporary (during construction) potential socioeconomic effects.
The environmental justice (EJ) issues associated with a large transportation project are also often presented in a stand-alone EIS section. EJ is a key socioeconomic consideration of the EIS.

Executive Order 12898, *Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations*, issued in 1994, established the requirement for an EJ assessment. With a 2011 Memorandum of Agreement, the US DOT, along with other federal agencies, confirmed and integrated environmental justice policies into their programs, policies, and project activities.

An EJ community is an area with a high proportion of minority and/or low income population (“EJ population”). An EJ analysis uses US Census Bureau data at the tract- and block group-level to identify communities with a higher proportion of “EJ population” than the region as a whole. The region is typically defined as the county in which the project impacts would occur – in this case, Onondaga County. Based on current census data for Onondaga County, localized areas that have a minority population greater than 20.8 percent and a low income population greater than 14.3 percent will be delineated in the I-81 Viaduct Project EIS.

Project impacts that disproportionately fall within these communities will be disclosed, and project alternatives and mitigation to minimize or avoid impacts would be specifically identified and analyzed in the EIS.
In summary, the EJ analysis will take a detailed look at income, race, and ethnicity characteristics of populations surrounding the viaduct to determine whether EJ communities exist within study area and whether the project would result in a disproportionately high and adverse impact on those communities. EJ maps for the project are currently being prepared.

This is not a study area map for the EJ analysis, but it gives a sense of the number of neighborhoods in the vicinity of the project. These neighborhoods have distinct racial and economic compositions that will be analyzed as part of the EJ analysis.
The project’s consistency with local public policies, plans, and goals will be considered as part of the EIS. Several city and regional plans include economic development components.
The CNYREDC Strategic Plan is a key guiding document for the region. This slide presents an excerpt from the Plan’s Vision Statement. The Vision Statement emphasizes the need to strengthen urban cores and main streets throughout the region and to promote density in development.
The Plan identifies “Critical Issues” and “Critical Opportunities” for the region, several of which pertain directly to the I-81 Viaduct Project. For example, the Plan calls for investing in the region’s outdated infrastructure to support economic drivers and targeted industry concentrations. The I-81 viaduct is a prime example of such outdated infrastructure. In addition, as described in the Vision Statement, the Plan calls for densification and preservation of municipal centers, in part because these represent opportunities to connect the region’s workforce with employment and training opportunities. The I-81 viaduct Study Area has already been identify by the City as a higher density urban core area, consistent with CNYREDC’s goal for densification and enhancement of central areas.
Economic development goals are also outlined in the City's Comprehensive Plan. One of the “guiding policies” listed in this Plan is to “encourage, promote, and support a business-friendly environment that provides for sustainable urban economic growth and economic opportunities for Syracuse residents.” The Plan lists four economic development goals, shown on this slide. One goal that is of particular relevance to the I-81 Viaduct Project is Goal #4: “Reinforce University Hill and Downtown as the core of regional employment and business.” Strategies listed here include facilitating smooth flow of commuter traffic, working to enhance connectivity, public amenities, and attractiveness of these areas, and enhancing the urban aesthetics of the areas—all strategies that could be supported or augmented by the project.
The 50 Point Plan from the Syracuse Mayor’s Office also includes a section on economic development. This slide shows each of the economic development goals specified in the plan. Again, we see themes of championing downtown and revitalizing neighborhood commercial corridors. The 50 Point Plan lists economic development strategies in addition to goals. One of these calls for the use of tax incentives and public financing agreements to encourage private sector investment in targeted economic development strategy areas. This is not something that is directly related to implementation of the I-81 Viaduct Project. However, public financing and tax incentives are the types of tools that stakeholders may want to consider in maximizing the economic development potential of the enhanced I-81 corridor once the project is complete.
The University Hill Transportation Plan recognized that transportation solutions alone would not maximize the future economic value of University Hill’s many institutions, whose success is critical to the regional economy. Rather, it required a broader, more comprehensive approach than simply adding capacity to move and park cars. Maximizing opportunity also required solutions to mitigate transportation impacts and increase efficiency. Key initiatives called for integrating land use and transportation planning to allow for and encourage higher density, walkable mixed-use development, improving mass transit (including BRT), as well as removing physical barriers, including the possibility of creating an urban boulevard in lieu of the I-81 viaduct.
The CenterState Agenda for Economic Opportunity plan presents a collaborative, regional approach aimed at transforming existing strengths within the larger 12-county region into globally competitive assets. This slide highlights some of the economic development strategies specified in the plan. Similar to other plans, strategies include prioritizing growth in key industry segments, leveraging anchor institutions in higher education and healthcare to attract economic and community development, and transforming the business climate to be more entrepreneurial and welcoming. Directly related to this process, a key economic strategy called for prioritizing infrastructure investments and improvements, as the movement of people and goods within the region is critical to its economic success. Creating a transformative approach to renovating the I-81 viaduct in Syracuse is specifically identified in the plan to achieve this goal.
Next we will look at preliminary data that sets the project’s socioeconomic context.
The distribution of both population and economic activity has changed substantially since I-81 was built.

These maps show population density per square mile in 1950 (pre-highway) and in 2010 (post-highway). The maps show a significant decentralization of population, particularly to the north and northeast of the urban core. Outward growth from an urban core is not uncommon; however, in Syracuse, there has been little population growth over time. This has led to a true decentralization of an existing population base rather than a growing population that is accommodated by an increasingly broad geographic base. Today, Syracuse residents comprise about 31 percent of Onondaga County’s population and about 18 percent of the five-county Metro Area population.

The region’s population centers and economic bases have shaped themselves around the existing transportation network, including I-81 in its current configuration. Planning for the project must consider how changes to I-81 could affect existing population and employment patterns in Syracuse and throughout the Metro Area.
Business and employment have also begun to decentralize, as evidenced by recent development along I-481 north of I-690. It is important to note that one aspect of this business decentralization includes the “meds and eds” sector that is such an essential building block of downtown economic development.
Although there has been a trend toward decentralization, as shown on this map, employment in the Syracuse Metro Area remains largely concentrated in and around Syracuse, with additional areas of higher employment located in Oswego along the Lake Ontario shorefront (attributable in part to SUNY Oswego); around Morrisville and Hamilton (largely attributable to Morrisville State College and Colgate University, respectively); in Auburn (largely attributable to Auburn Memorial Hospital and the Auburn Correctional Facility); and in Cortland (attributable in part to SUNY Cortland and Cortland Regional Medical Center).

Major employers and employment centers in the Metro Area remain in and around Syracuse, including health and educational institutions such as Syracuse University, Crouse Hospital, and St. Joseph’s Hospital; utility firms such as Time Warner Cable and Verizon; retailers including the combined retailers at Destiny as well as Wegmans and Reymour & Flanigan; and design and manufacturing firms such as L.&J.G. Stickley, Inc. and Carrier Corporation, among others.
There are approximately 356,691 jobs in the Metro Area, of which nearly 30 percent are located in the City of Syracuse. Both the City and Metro Area employment base are heavily weighted toward meds and ed. In the Metro Area, about 29 percent of jobs are in the educational, health, and social services sector (104,122 jobs); within the City, about 40 percent of jobs are in meds and ed. As denoted by the green circle, the net change in total employment in Syracuse Metro Area was minimal between 2000 and 2010, less than one half of one percent, or just over 1,000 total jobs. However, there were significant changes in employment in many individual industry sectors over that time period. For example, the manufacturing sector lost 18,199 jobs (35 percent) while the educational, health, and social services sector gained 14,422 jobs (16 percent). Construction also experienced substantial gains.

Job growth in the City of Syracuse outpaced the larger region, up nearly 3.5 percent. This growth can be attributed to a few unique employment trends identified in the city. Construction employment grew considerably in the city, up 24 percent (over 900 jobs), double that of the Metro Area, and fueled in part by university and hospital projects. This construction activity is reflected in the “meds and eds” employment sectors, which added over 5,500 jobs over the timeframe. Conversely, retail employment in Syracuse was down nearly 10 percent, whereas it increased slightly (half of one percent) in the larger Metro Area. This points to the continued dispersal of retail to serve populations that have spread out in the region.
Additionally, some regional employment trends were more or less pronounced in the city. For example, although manufacturing employment declined in Syracuse – down 22 percent; the decrease was considerably lower than the 35 percent decline in the larger Metro Area. On the other hand, employment in finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing was down far more in the city – 13 percent compared to only 2 percent in the Metro Area. This is notable, particularly since these jobs have traditionally centered in downtown locations.
Based on data from ESRI, Inc. the Metro Area contains approximately 6,984 retail establishments. Nearly one third of these are food services and drinking establishments. Retail in the Metro Area is largely centered within and just outside of Syracuse. While Downtown Syracuse continues to offer retail options, it is not the regional shopping destination it once was. Current establishments are limited primarily to local or small format national retailers, concentrated in and around Armory Square, and along South Salina Street, the traditional downtown retail spine. The majority of retail in Onondaga County and the Metro Area is primarily located in regional malls and in concentrations of national chain stores situated along arterial roadways. These retail concentrations follow patterns of population shifts to the north and along historic east-west corridors from Route 5 through to the creation of I-690. DestiNY USA, the largest shopping mall in the Metro Area, and in all of New York, is located north of downtown and the I-81 I-690 interchange, and draws customers from throughout the region and beyond. Outside of Syracuse, retail concentrations in Onondaga County are found in DeWitt to the east, Camillus to the west, and in Clay to the north. These concentrations primarily comprise big box and national chain retailers in large shopping centers and/or malls. There are fewer shopping centers in the surrounding four counties; however, smaller concentrations were identified in Cortland to the south, Auburn to the west, Oswego to the north, and along the Seneca Turnpike to the east.
This map shows the location of hotels in the I-81, I-481, I-90, and I-690 corridors in and around Syracuse.

Overall, the pattern suggests that historical nodes of activity—Downtown, Carrier campus, the airport, and the Thruway—have been and continue to be the dominant market factors.
In addition to examining regional and citywide trends, the EIS will examine a study area that more immediately surrounds the I-81 viaduct. This map outlines Census tracts in the vicinity of the I-81 viaduct that make up the project Study Area. This includes neighborhoods to the east and west of the I-81 viaduct including the Downtown, Southside, and University neighborhoods.
This map depicts the range of land uses within the Study Area. University land uses are evident to the east of I-81. Patches of multifamily housing are located to the northeast of the university and hospital land and also directly west of I-81 in the Pioneer Homes complex, among other blocks. Downtown is home to a mixture of uses, including institutional, civic, office, and increasingly, residential, and retail uses. Concentrations of single family homes are evident in the southern portions of the study area.
This chart shows selected socioeconomic indicators for the I-81 viaduct Study Area and the context for each indicator. From both a residential and employment perspective, the study area is dominated by meds and eds. Approximately 40 percent of the residential population is living in the Census tract that includes Syracuse University, and 40 percent of the study area employment is in the educational, health, and social services industry.

Overall, population has decreased by nearly 20 percent in the Study Area since 1990; however, population within and in areas closest to downtown has increased in recent years, whereas declines continue in areas east of I-81 and in the south of the study area.

As of 2014, the study area had approximately 5,800 housing units, a decrease of 18 percent since 1990. However, since 2010, most areas have seen housing unit growth, especially downtown where numerous office buildings have been converted to residential. At $13,312, median income in the Study Area is extremely low, and has declined considerably since 1990 – down nearly 30 percent in constant 2015 dollars. However, household incomes downtown are on the rise. In 2010, they were among the lowest in the Study Area. As of 2014, they were the highest. Essentially, new housing units downtown are attracting higher income residents.
A preliminary retail “capture rate analysis” indicates that study area households are traveling outside of the Study Area for certain types of products such as groceries and furniture. These findings may represent an opportunity for the Study Area once the project is complete and new development takes place.

According to Census Transportation Planning Package data from 2000 and 2010, which is the most recent employment by industry data available by census tract, Study Area employment decreased by 13 percent between 2000 and 2010. According to the data, half of the jobs lost were in the educational, health, social services industry - which grew by 13 percent Citywide during that same time period. While this data reflects employment trends during the height of the recession, and losses may be partially attributable to industry trends such as the decentralization of certain medical services to improve access to healthcare services in the larger region, the data also may not accurately reflect employment in the study area. Employment is typically reported by payroll location. Thus, workers may be working in one place, but paid out of another location. This appears to be the case in this instance. The map on the following slide may help to clarify why this could be the case within the Study Area.
The map above, from the US Census’ online resource OnTheMap.com visualizes employment densities in 2013 for the “Educational Services” sector near the Study Area. In the lower right hand corner, a large concentration of “Educational Services” employment – several thousand jobs according to the legend – is located just outside of the Study Area. This area, which is located on the University’s South Campus and includes the Skytop Office Building, is home to the University’s Human Resources Department and its payroll. If this office moved to this location after 2000, the jobs associated with it would have “moved” as well and resulted in “lost” employment in the Study Area. This appears to be the case. As shown in the map to the upper right, which visualizes “Educational Services” employment in 2002, university jobs appear to be located on the main campus within the study area, whereas no employment is found near South Campus.

Thus, given the nuances of employment reporting, it is likely more effective to look citywide employment.
Syracuse, like many areas of Upstate New York, continues to struggle with slow or flat population and economic growth. This was further hindered by the 2008 recession.

As indicated by recent data, while the recovery is under way, the area is still under-performing (compared to national averages) in some real estate market segments. For example, recent real estate reports from Integra Realty Resources, a national market data provider, show that the office market in the Syracuse Central Business District, or CBD, had a vacancy rate of 14.4 percent (Class A and B) compared to 12.6 percent in other CBDs. Although higher than other areas nationally, this is considerably lower than in recent years, when vacancy in the CBD exceeded 20 percent. However, while this decrease is primarily the result of lower Class B vacancy, as noted by Pyramid Brokerage Company and Cushman & Wakefield, which similarly report declining vacancy in the CBD, it is due in part to conversions of older Class B spaces into residential units, and not from significant leasing activity, although leasing activity is up.

Meanwhile, the suburban Syracuse office market continues to perform better than the CBD, with a Class A and B office vacancy rate of 9.5 percent, which is lower than national average. However, vacancy is up slightly, due primarily to “right-sizing” by existing companies, resulting in need for less space, not a loss of employment in the suburban submarket.

Retail vacancy rates were 6.1 percentage points higher in the Syracuse market area, and average asking rents were approximately 30 percent lower compared to all market areas. The outlier is regional mall vacancy and rents, which are higher. This is due in large part to the consumer draw of DestiNY USA.

The strongest market segment is industrial. The industrial vacancy rate for both Class A and Flex Industrial space was 4 percent in the Syracuse market, compared to 7.1 percent and 11 percent, respectively, in other areas of the country. Further, average annual net absorption for Flex space in the Syracuse Metro area was nearly triple the rate of other areas, and this trend is projected to continue.

In addition to the modestly positive trends outlined above, real estate firms do note signs of continued improvement in the Syracuse market. In 2015, Cushman & Wakefield and Pyramid Brokerage Company noted that overall, office leasing volumes in the Syracuse market remain positive and are expected to continue with recently opened downtown redevelopment projects showing strong absorption for office (and residential). Further, rents for industrial spaces are projected to increase, and should the tight supply continue, speculative industrial development may occur.

These trends are important to note, as strengthening of the urban core is both a regional and city economic development goal. Based on the data, the urban core is rebounding somewhat, attracting both residents and companies, after decades of decline. Simultaneously, the suburban markets are steady.
It is a common notion in urban and regional planning that a strong urban core makes for a stronger region, and this notion is at the heart of many of the plans completed in the region. A 2012 study published by the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland explores this idea, comparing demographic changes (1980-2010) within growing cities to those within declining cities and examining the relationship between population density near the CBD and metropolitan statistical area (MSA)-level income growth.

The charts on this slide show that between 1980 and 2010, population growth per square mile in cities that are growing was generally highest within or closest to the urban core. In cities that were shrinking, the inverse was true, i.e., population loss per square mile was highest within or closest to the urban core. This indicates that population loss at the MSA level tends to be associated with a drop in population growth at the urban core. While the study authors indicate that more research is necessary, their initial findings underscore the importance of a strong urban core to the broader region.

In addition, the study found that changes in population density near the urban core were positively associated with MSA-level income growth, a finding that points to a connection between MSA-level productivity growth and changes in population density near the urban core.
While not currently in the “growing cities” category, market trends discussed earlier indicate some growth (primarily residential) is occurring in the core after decades of decline. Further, recent development data by parcel show increased investment near the core as well. This map and the following one highlight residential, commercial, and university development within the City of Syracuse, broken out into two periods: 2003 through 2007, and 2007 through 2012 (the most recent year for which this data is available). As shown here by highlighted parcels, new development was fairly distributed within the City between 2003 and 2007.
However, compared to the more distributed development observed on the previous slide, more recent development between 2008 and 2012 was more pronounced in areas adjacent to the core, particularly in the West Side, Prospect Hill, and Westcott. In some ways, this resembles the Federal Reserve of Cleveland’s 1990s diagram of growing cities, where the highest growth was within five miles of the core.
Finally, on this map, which includes at all development that occurred between 2003 and 2012, the trend towards residential development near the core is more evident. Meanwhile, commercial development continued to follow the highway system, as highlighted by concentrations at the eastern edge of the city, along I-690, and near DestiNY USA adjacent to I-81.

Further, although parcel data was not available, the 2010-2014 ACS reported an increase in housing units in the downtown core, the result of recent conversions of office spaces downtown into residential. Thus, although the region has not seen significant population or job growth, development and housing trends appear to be shifting back to the core to some extent.
As previously mentioned, the EIS will consider potential positive and negative effects of the project on economic development in both the local study area and the region as a whole.

Developing a thorough understanding of where recent development has occurred and what type of development is prominent will be essential to that effort. As this point, given what we’ve just presented, we ask the group to help identify notable development activity, business relocation or growth, hospital and university campus expansions, and other types of growth that have occurred over the past ten to fifteen years within the broader Metro Area.
One of the issues to be addressed by the EIS is the project’s effect on the local tax base. This map shows 2014 property taxes per square foot of land area in the I-81 project Study Area. Taxes per square foot (psf) of land area are generally highest in Downtown (CT 32) where there is a higher concentration of commercial uses located in mid- to high-rise buildings, and lowest in the Southside portion of Study Area (CT 53) where property values are lower and vacant lots are scattered among developed lots. Large areas of land in the center of Study Area do not pay ad valorem property taxes (shown in gray on the map). These properties are generally community facilities, municipal uses, or public housing. Large areas of tax exempt properties are not unusual for the City of Syracuse. As of 2012, approximately 71 percent of all parcels in the City of Syracuse were partially or wholly exempt from paying property taxes (as compared with 58 percent in Madison County and Oswego County and 62 percent statewide).
Where is the most valuable real estate on an assessed value basis, even if it is not a tax paying parcel?

This map uses a vertical scale to show comparative assessed value. It is not a representation of physical height or bulk of buildings.

This map highlights some key points:

• The most valuable land in the City is clearly aligned with I-81 and I-690: from Destiny, St. Josephs, and south to Upstate and SU
• The most valuable land in the City remains largely tax exempt or subject to a negotiated payment often referred to as a PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes)
• Higher value residential and commercial real estate (darker red with or without vertical extrusion) also reflects the adjacency to transportation as well as the historic urban Central Business District (CBD) and important corridors such as James Street
This map was generated for a project in Newark, New Jersey. While not set at the exact scale of the Syracuse maps above, it does reflect a more traditional cluster of highest values in the CBD.
Given the routing of I-81 through downtown Syracuse and its function as an interstate highway, it is possible that the I-81 Viaduct Project could have transportation, economic, and land use implications that extend beyond the immediate study area. Regional effects will depend to some extent on the project alternative that is selected.
Stepping back, it is important to remember that the urban core and surrounding suburbs are inextricably linked and should be viewed as collaborators rather than competitors. It is increasingly common for urban planners and economic development practitioners to describe this as “a fading distinction” between city and suburb, with strong urban cores supporting strong suburbs, and strong suburbs important to the vitality of the region. This slide presents excerpts from recent articles that describe this notion of blurred city/suburb lines. The articles speak about the changing face of many suburban communities that are adopting a more urban/walkable character, as well as the economic and fiscal interdependence of cities and suburbs.
Given the importance of the urban core to the success of the larger region and vice versa, and given that I-81 is the primary north-south connection for the larger Syracuse Metro Area, it is essential that the project address regional needs for the entire Metro Area. For example, although the Federal Reserve Back of Cleveland showed that population densities in growing cities increased most closest to the core, population densities continued to increase throughout the region, just at lower levels the farther you traveled from the core. Essentially, where cities were growing, the entire regions were growing. Conversely, in shrinking cities, population densities over the last decade decreased throughout the region.

Simply put, to ensure the overall success of the region, it’s critical to identify the economic assets throughout the region, and how they relate and complement one another, and work as a system, so as to strengthen the competitive position and value of the larger region.
In particular, it is important to look at major interchanges and how land uses could be affected by potential changes in regional traffic patterns and economic activity depending on the alternative. This includes I-90 at I-81, I-481 at I-690, as well as I-481 and I-690. Areas surrounding Onondaga Lake near the existing I-81 and I-690 interchange should also be a focus, as areas near the Project Area would be affected by changes in travel patterns as well.
For example, the project needs to look at business concentrations surrounding key interchanges in the region. The map on the left shows land use patterns in a half-mile area surrounding the I-81 and I-90 interchange south of Syracuse Hancock International Airport. To the west of the interchange is a cluster of hotels and eating establishments catering primarily to airport and Thruway traffic (red color). To the east of I-81, south of I-90, there is a cluster of transportation/warehousing businesses including a number of auto repair shops (purple color). To a large degree much of the commercial pattern appears to be historically based on the development along Route 11 and along the alignment of the NYS Thruway. Thus, these patterns may be less likely to be substantially altered.

Similarly, and farther north along I-81, there is a concentration of local retail along Route 11, the Northern Lights Shopping Center, and a post office complex. Given the nature of the retail, the primary customer base for Northern Lights Shopping Center and other retail in this area is likely to come from the adjacent residential communities. The hotels in the area are there to appeal to airport travelers. Therefore, these stores and hotels are unlikely to be substantially affected by any potential changes in through traffic patterns.

However, farther north, at the current I-81 and I-481 interchange, land uses could be affected particularly if I-481 was to be made I-81 and the primary north-south route. The same is true for the I-481 and I-690 interchange in DeWitt, given potential increased volumes depending on the selected alternative. The post office is strategically located adjacent to the airport and would not depend on through traffic.

There are a number of hotels west of I-81, along I-90. We will discuss effects of potential traffic changes on hotels in a few minutes. In addition, the Lockheed Martin complex is located along I-90.
This slide shows land uses within a half mile of I-81 and I-690 within the City of Syracuse, north of the viaduct.

As the map highlights, these corridors contain a mix of land uses, generally including industrial, institutional, and commercial uses most immediately adjacent to the interstates, with residential radiating outward. The largest commercial (red) block is DestiNY, and the gray areas to the south of DestiNY are surface parking and vacant land, which are likely to experience change with the advent of the harbor project and long-term implementation of development plans for the area.

With the exception of the DestiNY Mall, which is mega-regional in nature, and will continue to have strong highway access no matter the selected alternative, much of the retail in this area is either local retail serving the surrounding residential base or concentrations of similar stores, for example, car dealerships along Route 5 (West Genesee Street) one block south of I-690. For the most part, the land use pattern does not indicate that the commercial concentrations grew from I-81 but, rather, from demand from local residential and employee populations and from Route 5.
Given all that has been presented, we felt it appropriate to bring back a slide from earlier in the presentation. Given current socioeconomic conditions in the Syracuse Metro Area, in particular its stagnant, decentralized population, minimal job growth, and lowering incomes, it is essential that the region work together to ensure the I-81 project, whichever alternative is selected, supports economic growth and prosperity for the entire Metro Area. Therefore, the project must not only improve the I-81 experience through design/aesthetics of the roadway, enhanced safety and usability, and improve neighborhood connectivity, it must do so in a manner that makes the study area and I-81 corridor a more desirable place to live and do business, thus enhancing the image of Syracuse and the Metro Area in a way that increases visitation, visitor spending, and business growth that would benefit the entire region.
In summary, and in the context of much of the information presented today, from the overall economic considerations, the existing socioeconomic profile of the region, to the economic development goals of the City and Region, the I-81 Viaduct Project is an important component to help create a stronger regional economy.

This slide is a reminder that a stronger urban core is not a City/Suburban divide, nor is it a sun belt versus snow belt equation. It is interesting to note that cities can and should be looking for new and collaborative ways to create an environment that incubates growth.

Toronto is a location in the historic “Golden Horseshoe” (Rochester - Buffalo – Hamilton – Toronto) that has really succeeded in growing and transitioning its economy, and the whole Toronto metro area is benefiting. This assessment comes from the Twin Cities and it seems to have relevance for the planning that lies ahead here in Syracuse.