Welcome to this meeting of the Stakeholders’ Committee, which will update members on the status of the project including recent developments. Tonight I’m going to show you some concepts for the southern and northern sections of I-81, and bring you up to date on some of the concepts we’ve developed to improve bicycle and pedestrian connectivity and enhance the Onondaga Creekwalk. I will also show you some graphics that provide additional information and clarification of some of the common features of the project alternatives we are now studying.

As you know, the project team is hard at work on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, which involves refining project alternatives and environmental analysis. As part of this effort, the project team has been meeting regularly with numerous stakeholders. We have been gathering not only their input but also information that we are using to assess the alternatives’ compliance with local plans and to develop the no build alternative. In the last few weeks, for example, we’ve had several one-on-one meetings with the various members of the University Hill Corporation—such as Crouse Hospital, the VA Hospital, Upstate Medical, ESF and others—Syracuse Housing Authority, Syracuse University, the City of Syracuse, and the New York, Susquehanna and Western Railway. All of these meetings have been very productive and have helped us advance the DEIS.
I’m going to start by telling you about a new concept that emerged as a result of one of these meetings.

As you know from reading the Scoping Report, the project alternatives have a few elements in common. Until recently, one of the features they had in common was a new partial interchange at Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. East (formerly known as Castle Street) in the Southside. This new interchange, with a northbound exit ramp and a southbound entrance ramp at MLK, would improve access to Southside and University Hill from the south, with direct access to the Hill via Renwick Avenue. This concept was developed to provide a new access point; for example, during Dome events, you would be able to use it to access I-81 south via Renwick. It also would alleviate congestion issues on Adams, Harrison, and Almond Streets and reduce the number of lanes needed on those streets. By removing vehicular traffic from those streets, we are also improving conditions for pedestrians.

The Viaduct Alternative would still build the partial interchange at MLK, as depicted on this slide. We do not anticipate that traffic volumes in the area—for example, on MLK East itself, Salina, State, and other routes—would grow in a substantial way.
This is what the new partial interchange could look like with the Viaduct Alternative. As you can see from this rendering, I-81 would go over the New York, Susquehanna and Western Railway. You can see the new southbound entrance ramp and northbound exit ramp in this illustration. The northbound exit ramp would end at MLK East, and traffic could continue on Renwick Avenue and proceed under the existing railroad bridge, which would not be affected by the alignment.
This is a view looking east along Martin Luther King, Jr. East showing the new southbound entrance ramp, which is adjacent to the Dr. King Elementary School, under the Viaduct Alternative.
This is a view looking east along Martin Luther King, Jr. East showing the new southbound entrance ramp, which is adjacent to the Dr. King Elementary School, under the Viaduct Alternative.
This spring, the Department met with Syracuse Housing Authority staff, along with AIA, and they asked that we consider an alternative to the partial interchange idea. As a result of this meeting, and in consideration of comments received during scoping, the project team developed a new concept, which works with the Community Grid Alternative and the potential tunnel alternatives.

Under this new concept, the State route—the former I-81—would shift eastward and go under—rather than over—the railroad. The railroad bridge would need to be reconstructed under this concept.

A couple of things do remain the same: 1) Under both the Community Grid and the Viaduct Alternatives, as well as the tunnel concepts, traffic coming from the south headed for the Hill would travel along what today is Renwick and then turn right at Van Buren. Van Buren would serve as the main entrance from the south to University Hill. 2) By creating this new access point to the Hill at the south, traffic at both Adams and Harrison—which are congested today—would be relieved.
As you can see from this rendering, the new route under the Community Grid Alternative and potential tunnel alternatives would go under the New York, Susquehanna and Western Railway bridge. There would be a traffic light at MLK East, as well as signalized intersections at Van Buren and Burt Street, which would be consistent with SHA’s master plan (these signals would also be in place with the Viaduct Alternative). We have been meeting with SHA, which has briefed us on their master plan, and this concept appears to be in keeping with their plan.

The railroad bridge is shown in this illustration. As I mentioned earlier, this bridge would need to be rebuilt and re-aligned, and we have started meeting with Railway staff and are coordinating closely with them on this effort.
This is a closer, zoomed-in view of the previous slide which shows greater detail. It’s meant to show you where the route would go, and does not include potential aesthetic or design treatments to the wall or the bridge structure.

As you can see, the new State route would follow the path of Renwick Avenue and essentially replace Renwick with a much improved boulevard.
The concept would increase the distance between the Dr. King Elementary School and the highway. Here, the highway would be about 100 to 175 feet farther away from the school under the Community Grid/potential tunnel alternative concept than it would be under the Viaduct Alternative’s partial interchange and under the existing condition.
I want to point out some features of the under-the-railroad concept in the area shown on this slide. Under the original over-the-railroad concept for the Community Grid Alternative, the descent of the highway from a higher grade over the railroad to a lower grade at the street surface would have created a new visual barrier or obstruction between Taylor and Monroe Streets. Under the new under-the-railroad concept, the embankment between Taylor and Monroe would no longer exist.

The illustration shows the various intersections from Van Buren to Adams Street.

With this concept, we have the potential to maintain east-west pedestrian, bike, and driver connectivity for streets through Pioneer Homes and the south. We could continue the north-south multiuse path proposed for Almond Street.
At the MLK intersection, we have the potential to put in a traditional signalized intersection, as you see here....
...or we could investigate a roundabout, as shown in this slide, which could help to calm traffic here, keep vehicles moving, and create a welcoming and distinctive gateway to the City of Syracuse. We will look at these concepts at a later date—the best option has yet to be determined—but please let us know what you think of these ideas.
As you can see from this illustration, the shift of the State route eastward frees up about four to five acres of land, which is the parcel just west of the new alignment, as shown here. We don’t know the exact acreage yet, as we have not determined how much space we might need for the highway, sidewalk, path, and other transportation features.

This could also provide an opportunity to create a gateway to the University at Van Buren.

This illustration shows the alignment of the existing highway as well as the proposed new alignment of the State route.

I want to point out that Fineview Place would be closed between Raynor and Van Buren if we were to implement an under-the-railroad concept. There may be an opportunity to replace Fineview with a bicycle/pedestrian path, but there is insufficient space to allow it to remain open to vehicular traffic. Again, Renwick would be replaced by a new boulevard.
This is a cross-section of the new State route, which shows the route just north of MLK Jr. East, looking north. Here, the route has two lanes in each direction, as well as a bicycle/pedestrian path on the western side, a planted median, and a sidewalk on the eastern side. At the MLK Jr. East intersection, there would also be a slot for a northbound left turn.
Now I’m going to show you some developments in the northern part of the project.

As anyone who drives on this section of I-81 knows, it experiences chronic congestion during peak hours. This section is over capacity and is not up to today’s standards. For example, there are short acceleration lanes and the ramps are too close to one another.
To address the traffic issues on the northern I-81 segment, one new lane would be added in each direction.
Here’s a view of the I-81 interchange with I-690, showing the new connections that would be built under each project alternative. The new interchange would be conforming to the latest design standards. For example, ramps would be made safer with appropriately designed acceleration and deceleration lanes.
As part of this project, we are rebuilding several bridges that span the highway. In this area, we are rebuilding the bridges over Bear, Court, Spencer, and Butternut Streets. Here is a view of what the new Butternut Street Bridge might look like. The new bridge would include sidewalks on both sides for pedestrians. Butternut Street would become more of a typical city street, connecting neighborhoods, rather than a wide, busier street that serves ramps to and from I-81.
I’m now going to turn over the presentation to Kathryn Wolf, principal of TWMLA, landscape architects for the project team, and she will tell you about some of the plans to address bike/ped deficiencies and improve connectivity.

The project objectives call for the project to “address vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle geometric and operational deficiencies in the I-81 viaduct priority area.” Our intent is to make sure that any plans we develop for new bike and pedestrian facilities under this project are consistent with City of Syracuse and SMTC plans, and support and advance these. We’ve reviewed the available bike planning studies and we are coordinating with the City of Syracuse on this issue. We are also aware of and are coordinating with other ongoing projects in the area.

NACTO is considered the state-of-the-art in bikeway design and we are using this as our design standard.
The Erie Canalway Trail is a statewide trail that runs from Buffalo to Albany along the Canal. In the City of Syracuse, the Canalway Trail is located on Water Street through the project area. The City of Syracuse, the Town of DeWitt, and the Erie Canal Museum recently sponsored an ideas competition that focused on the area just east of our project. A lot of exciting ideas came out of that effort and we are reviewing these entries. We are looking at opportunities to acknowledge the Canal within our project.
We’ve reviewed the City’s Bicycle Plan and the diagram here illustrates all of the existing and proposed bike facilities within and adjacent to the project area. The solid lines indicate facilities already in place, and the dashed lines are proposed facilities. We are examining this plan to identify opportunities for advancing the City’s Bicycle Plan as part of the I-81 project.
Just as a quick reminder, existing bike facilities in the area include the Erie Canalway Trail on Water Street, the Connective Corridor, the Onondaga Creekwalk, NYS bike Route 11, and existing bike lanes on West Street, East Onondaga Street, Cortland Avenue, Waverly Avenue, and Comstock Avenue.
In addition, several bike facilities are currently undergoing design and are anticipated to be constructed in the near future. These include the extension of the Creekwalk from Armory Square to Kirk Park and the construction of bike lanes on Salina Street. Comstock, Waverly, and Crouse Avenues are under design as a single combined project—there is discussion that a facility on Crouse may be dropped since the Connective Corridor on University Avenue largely provides this function.
I’d like to next address a number of opportunities that we believe could be addressed by the I-81 project. First, the City’s Bicycle Plan proposes a major new north-south bike facility along Townsend Street. We are suggesting that this facility could be shifted one block to the east and constructed as part of the I-81 project. We believe the right-of-way exists on Almond Street to accommodate this under all alternatives and that there is no apparent significant advantage of having it located on Townsend Street.
All of the dashed green lines represent proposed bike facilities in the City’s Bicycle Plan. One of the things that we want to ensure is that any new underpasses or bridges that are constructed as part of this project are built to accommodate bike facilities—where feasible—where the city has planned them. This diagram highlights bridges or underpasses under I-690 in the generally N-S direction. We are studying the provision of bicycle facilities on the new Butternut Street Bridge. Under I-690, underpasses would be constructed to either include bicycle facilities, or allow for their installation on local roads in the future. These locations include Salina Street, James Street, Almond Street, Crouse Avenue, and Lodi Street.
On the south end of the project, the City has identified Burt Street and MLK Street East as east-west connectors to University Hill. We are studying how to best incorporate connectivity along these streets under each of the alternatives but have not solidified any proposals to date.
A complete streets approach is envisioned for Almond Street and this is a sketch of what Almond Street could look like under the Community Grid Alternative. This is considered a state-of-the-art design for urban sidewalks where pedestrian activity is desired at the street level. This supports the city’s proposed land use and zoning for Almond Street, which calls for pedestrian oriented uses on the ground floor. On-street parking is envisioned, separated one-way cycle tracks would be located on both sides of the street, a landscape buffer that could include rain gardens, and a wide sidewalk that has the potential for outdoor café zones. A rain garden is a planted area that absorbs rainwater runoff from surrounding hard surfaces such as roofs and walkways and allows the water to percolate into the ground as opposed to piping the run-off to the storm water system. This relieves demand on an already overburdened stormwater system.

On the right is a plan view at a typical intersection. The following sketches will illustrate this intersection treatment.
We’ve spoken to you tonight about vehicular safety, and we want to also emphasize that the project team is paying just as much attention to pedestrian and bicycle safety throughout the project. This series of slides illustrates some of the ways this would be done. This is a view of a typical intersection on Almond Street under the Community Grid Alternative.
Bicycle lanes are separated and delineated – this makes the cyclists more visible to drivers. Separating pedestrians and cyclists is safer for both pedestrians and cyclists.
In the same way, pedestrian crosswalks would be clearly delineated. Studies show that when crosswalks are highlighted in this way, pedestrians are more likely to stay within the designated crosswalk area, and they are more visible to motorists.
Curb bump-outs would be created at intersections. Bumping the curb out into the roadway makes the pedestrians more visible to motorists and shortens the distance the pedestrian needs to spend crossing the roadway. Islands in the center of the roadway would provide a safe refuge in the event a pedestrian is not able to cross in time for the light.
And here we see all of those elements in place. The combination of these elements would provide an environment that is more welcoming and safe to the pedestrian and cyclist.
This is an image of the Viaduct Alternative, illustrating the same suite of bike and pedestrian treatments to enhance safety. We are seeking to optimize pedestrian and bicycle safety under each alternative.
I will now show you some new graphics that I hope will help me explain another common feature of the project alternatives: the West Street improvements.

The orange lines represent the new alignment of West Street, and as you can see it is much narrower and has a smaller footprint than the existing West Street. The other thing to point out is that the roadway now goes under I-690, which is in red. West Street will now go under I-690.
Here are some photos of West Street today. On the left is a photo looking north at West Street as it passes over I-690. The wall that you see would be removed, and West Street would be brought down to grade. On the right is a view looking west on Genesee Street, with the West Street overpass overhead.
This is an aerial view of the same location, showing the elevated West Street as it is today....
...and a view of what it could look like after West Street is brought down to grade. I-690 is in the background.
This is a view looking east on Genesee Street toward Clinton Square, with the elevated infrastructure in place....
...and this is what it would look like when that infrastructure is removed. Genesee and West Street would become a normalized intersection, with traffic signals and pedestrian crossings, calming traffic and improving vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle connectivity. This would also create a more welcoming gateway to the city.
This is a street-level view of Genesee at West Street, with the existing highway in place.
This is view without the highway. As you can see, the physical barrier created by the highway would be removed, opening up views of the City that are now obstructed. The removal of this barrier would improve connectivity between the West Side and Downtown.
Finally, here is an aerial view looking south onto West Street, with the Franklin Square water tower and Onondaga Creek in the foreground. You can see West Street as it traverses beneath the elevated I-690.
These are photos of the existing Onondaga Creekwalk. The Creekwalk is currently located on the east side of the Creek until just north of Genesee Street, where it then leaves the Creek and uses City sidewalks.
The blue line illustrates the route of the Creekwalk today. Traveling from north to south, the Creekwalk follows the east side of the creek until just north of Genesee Street. At this point, the Creekwalk deviates from the alignment of the Creek and follows city sidewalks until it reaches Armory Square. As part of this project, we are exploring the potential to continue the Creekwalk along the creek itself, on the west side.

By removing the overhead highway infrastructure at West Street and Genesee Street, the highway footprint in this area would be reduced. Today, West Street is located very near the creek between Genesee and West Streets. In the future, West Street would have a much smaller footprint, the Herald Place Bridge would be removed, and the I-690 on-ramps would shift: all of this area would open up and allow for the potential expansion of the Creekwalk. A reduction in pavement along the banks of the creeks affords the opportunity for greater infiltration of stormwater before run-off reaches the creek. The toned green area indicates existing highway infrastructure that would become greenspace, allowing for the potential construction of the Creekwalk on the west side.

There are also important historic resources along the creek that are currently inaccessible for viewing by the public due to their proximity to the West Street on-ramp. We are exploring the potential of consolidating the on- and off-ramps to West Street at Erie Boulevard into a single ramp. The yellow circle shows the location of an important historical resource as Onondaga Creek passes under Erie Boulevard.
This is a historic aqueduct that carried the Erie Canal over Onondaga Creek. Currently, there is no way to safely view this historic structure, because it is located immediately adjacent to an on-ramp to West Street.

A triple stone arch bridge was constructed beneath Erie Boulevard as a culvert to carry the Erie Canal over the creek. The structure was completed in 1838 as part of the initial efforts at enlarging the Erie Canal. This is one of the largest surviving structures of its type from the 1835-1862 enlargement of the canal. This structure is also associated with what was one of the most notable engineering disasters that occurred in the history of the Erie Canal. The third arch was destroyed in this disaster and not rebuilt.
This is a view looking east down the Erie Canal from the Onondaga Creek. In 1907, an explosion in one of the buildings adjacent to the Canal resulted in a traffic jam of boats that broke through the floor of the canal, draining the canal into Onondaga Creek. Even so, much of the historic 1838 structure still remains.
Here you can see in the photo on the left, the canal appears to be dry. This project could afford an opportunity to make the aqueduct visible and tell this story.
These photos provide additional views of the aqueduct.
The reduction of the highway footprint and consolidation of the West Street ramps will allow for a west side Creekwalk. We are exploring extending the west side Creekwalk under I-690 and connecting to Evans Street.

By bringing the West Street and Genesee Street intersection to grade, we can now construct a sidewalk on the east side of West Street, where none currently exists. This improvement would strengthen pedestrian connectivity between the West Side, Downtown, and the Creekwalk.
This view shows the potential expanded Creekwalk on the west bank of the Creek. The west bank section could potentially be built at a higher elevation than the east side, which is closed during high water; this would create an alternative section that could remain open during flooding. The west bank Creekwalk alignment would make the Creekwalk accessible to West Side neighbors and create new views of the historic aqueduct, an important canal era resource, which are not possible today.
We have just formed an Urban Design Technical Advisory Panel, which consists of professionals in the design field, as well as representation from the City. This will be a small group to ensure effective and productive work sessions. They will be looking at some of our ideas for gateway treatments and providing their advice to us. For example, we will ask them to work with us on the concepts we’ve just shown you related to the Onondaga Creekwalk.
We’ve also brought on a new consultant to the project team, Design Trust for Public Space, an organization that works with agencies and communities to unlock the potential of public spaces. This group undertook a study called Under the Elevated, working with New York City Department of Transportation. They developed design and policy recommendations to transform the neglected public space under the city’s elevated bridges, highways, subway and rail lines, into valuable community assets. The partnership continues today with the launch of several pilot programs. Under the Elevated: Phase I spelled out sustainable and versatile ways to redesign and maintain the multi-jurisdictional public spaces beneath and adjacent to the “elevateds” in a comprehensive study.

Because of this extensive experience, we are bringing them onto the project team to specifically research and present creative yet reasonable strategies for the space beneath the viaduct, should it be rebuilt under the Viaduct Alternative, and spaces under other elevated infrastructure, which would remain under all project alternatives. They will be assessing the viability of varying uses beneath viaducts under both alternatives, identifying key locations for potential uses, describing conditions and prerequisites recommended for a reasonable likelihood that those uses be successful, based on precedents, studies and empirical evidence. The goal would be to identify the parameters that would facilitate the creation of successful under-viaduct spaces. The Design Trust will be producing a report and presentation that will be shared with stakeholders.
We are continuing work on the DEIS and anticipate an open house later this year where we will share details of the project alternatives. We will provide you with more information about the Viaduct, Community Grid, and potential tunnel alternatives. Prior to that, we will likely have another meeting of this Committee and continue our other public participation efforts such as one-on-one meetings and meetings with our advisory groups.

We have project team members here tonight to speak with you and answer any questions you might have. The presentation will also be on the project website, www.i81opportunities.org.

We have comment sheets here as well—please let us know what you think of these concepts.

Good night.