Welcome. I’m Matthew Driscoll and I’m the Commissioner of New York State Department of Transportation.

We are here today to give you a brief status report on where the project is and how it’s progressing, and to provide you with the opportunity to give us your feedback on the project. In addition to this presentation, we have brought a few display boards with information about the project. After the presentation, we will be taking questions. Members of the project team are also on hand to answer questions and listen to any concerns you may have.

Public involvement is an integral part of the transportation planning process, and the New York State Department of Transportation has been and will continue to provide opportunities for open, collaborative, and meaningful public participation throughout the environmental review process for the I-81 project.
NYSDOT is looking at options to replace the I-81 viaduct through Syracuse, and we are in the midst of a comprehensive environmental review to determine how best to do that.

In April, we published the project’s *Scoping Report*. The report marks a significant milestone in moving the project forward—the start of the preparation of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) and a higher level of engineering studies, which will help us determine the future of I-81. An EIS is a comprehensive document that describes and analyzes a project’s potential impacts on the environment.
What is scoping? It’s part of the environmental review process that NYSDOT follows, which is guided by the National Environmental Policy Act—the federal law, enacted in 1970, that outlines policies to protect the environment—as well as New York State’s Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA). Scoping involves substantial public input to determine the scope—what will be studied—in the EIS.

Through this scoping process, and with substantial input from the public, FHWA and NYSDOT have identified the project’s purpose and need, developed its goals and objectives, investigated a range of potential alternatives, and determined the methodology that will be used to carry out the studies to assess the project. We’ve provided multiple opportunities for the public and our partner agencies to give us their ideas and comments to help shape the content of the Draft EIS.

Today I will summarize for you some of the results of this initial phase of the project.
NYSDOT’s goals for the project remain the same, and are shown on this slide.
In response to public comments, the project objectives, which will be used to evaluate the alternatives, have been modified.
The changes address the need for walkability and enhanced pedestrian connections and the need to provide access to Centro's bus services. Transit amenities that may be explored could include bus stops and shelters, bus turnouts, and layover and turnaround places.

I will give you more details on these modifications in later slides.
DOT is currently advancing four alternatives for further study: the No Build, Viaduct, Community Grid, and the Tunnel Alternative. The No Build is required by NEPA and serves as the benchmark against which the other alternatives are compared.

The project limits include approximately 3.75 miles of I-81 from Colvin Street to Hiawatha Blvd., and 2.5 miles of I-690 from approximately the West Street interchange to Lodi Street.
The Viaduct Alternative 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. The Viaduct Alternative has three options—Options V-2, V-3, and V-4—that differ in their design of seven curves within the I-81/I-690 interchange. These options have varying degrees of improvement of nonstandard features and a different range of property impacts and would cost approximately 1.4 billion.
We are also moving forward with the Community Grid Alternative, formerly known as the Street-level Alternatives.

We are studying two options under the Community Grid Alternative: Option CG-1, or Boulevard; and Option CG-2, Almond and Other Local Streets. Under CG-1, the Boulevard option, Almond Street would serve as a primary thoroughfare; Option CG-2, the local streets option, would look to make better use of the existing local street network, in turn reducing the number of traffic lanes on Almond Street. The Community Grid Alternative would cost approximately 1 billion.
Under the Community Grid Alternative, a new route would be designated I-81. In addition to the option of re-designating existing I-481 as the new I-81, previously identified as part of the Street-level Alternatives, NYSDOT will consider a new sub-option based on public input received. Under this sub-option, DOT is working with our federal partners in considering a re-designation of I-81 north of downtown and a portion of I-690 east of Downtown to be changed to I-481.
NYSDOT developed four potential tunnel alternatives (Alternatives T-1, T-2, T-3, and T-4), which failed the alternatives screening and have been dismissed from further consideration. However, during the June 20, 2014 to September 2, 2014 scoping comment period, the public presented new tunnel concepts (for example, the Access Syracuse Plan, and 81’ Below Syracuse rev1, a revised Alternative T-4) and expressed interest in further tunnel development. In response, NYSDOT will conduct additional engineering and further analysis to determine if there is a tunnel alternative that addresses the project’s needs and meets the project purpose and objectives. DOT has been working with our Federal Partners to assist in the development, analysis, engineering and associated ROW impacts of a potential Tunnel solution for the I-81 project. Like previous tunnel alternatives, any new tunnel alternative(s) would potentially include surface street improvements, pedestrian and bicycle improvements, and context-sensitive design treatments.
All alternatives would reconstruct the I-690/I-81 interchange, providing all of the possible connections between the two interstates. With today’s I-690/I-81 interchange, it’s not possible to travel from eastbound I-690 to northbound I-81, nor from southbound I-81 to westbound I-690. These “missing connections” would be provided by all of the build alternatives. Both connections are illustrated by the yellow arrows on the slide.
The build alternatives would also include a new partial interchange at Martin Luther King East, formerly known as East Castle Street. With a northbound exit ramp and a southbound entrance ramp at MLK East, this new interchange would improve access to Southside and University Hill from the south. The interchange would provide direct access to the Southside and to University Hill via Renwick Avenue.
Also under all the build alternatives, a new bridge to carry Butternut over I-81 would be constructed. This new overpass would connect to Clinton and Franklin Streets, providing better access between the Northside and the Franklin Square neighborhoods.
NYSDOT would also make improvements in the northern section of I-81, from Interchange 20 to Interchange 23, based on needs identified from initial traffic data. From I-690 to Hiawatha Boulevard, we are proposing a new travel lane in each direction to improve operations on I-81. Several non-standard highway features—for example, narrow shoulders and tight curves—also would be corrected.

The Court Street interchange (Interchange 21) would be reconstructed, and possibly reconfigured, with longer entrance ramps and better merges. The Route 370 (Onondaga Lake Parkway) on-ramp and Old Liverpool Road on-ramp to southbound I-81 would be consolidated into a single ramp.
There is widespread agreement that everyone wants central New York to be more vibrant, and NYSDOT’s goals for the project state that it should be supportive of a revitalized community. Obviously, the creation of a vital downtown will be the responsibility of many persons and groups. This redevelopment would occur outside the NYSDOT right-of-way and outside of NYSDOT’s control. While we can’t control the redevelopment, we want to coordinate with those responsible for shaping the community’s future.

We are concerned with creating an environment that sets the stage for the type of development the City and County envision for the corridor. We seek to understand the city’s vision and how the project can support locally identified priorities.
Some modifications to the project objectives address the need for walkability and enhanced pedestrian connections. We will encourage walkability through the design of sidewalks and adjacent streets. For people to favor walking, the walk must be useful, safe, comfortable, and interesting.

Bicycles are an integral component of transportation and urban planning. Improving the connectivity and safety of bicycle infrastructure increases the viability of bicycling and reduces demand on the vehicular system. Syracuse has both local and regional bike facilities that provide connectivity to a range of destinations.

We also have a new objective addressing the need to maintain access to existing local bus service and enhance transit amenities within and adjacent to the I-81 project viaduct priority area. By transit amenities, we mean bus stops and shelters, bus turnouts, and layover and turnaround places for buses.
What’s coming next for the project? As you can see from the list on this slide, the Draft EIS is a comprehensive and thorough document that looks at a range of topics, and how they might be affected by the project. The public will have an opportunity to comment on this document at a public hearing, which will be held after it’s published, and during a formal comment period.
In the meantime, we will continue to hold meetings such as this one, continue to meet with stakeholders’ groups such as the Stakeholders’ Committee, our advisory groups, and others. We’ve had dozens and dozens of one-on-one meetings with a range of stakeholders—with individuals, elected officials, advocacy groups, business groups, the universities and hospitals, with SMTC, Centro, and others. We’ve held regular meetings with our cooperating agencies and with the City and County.

These efforts will continue throughout the environmental review process to ensure the public and agencies are afforded ample opportunities to participate in the project.
For more information and to read the *Scoping Report*, please visit our project website, www.i81opportunities.org, or drop by the project’s outreach center at the historic Carnegie building on 335 Montgomery Street, Tuesday and Thursday from 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM. You may also call the project hotline during business hours or email us. Thank you for your interest in this project, and we look forward to hearing from you.