

Onondaga Citizens League  
Downtown Study  
Study Session 7/13/06

**Speaker:** Mary Rowlands, director, Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council

Mary Rowlands presented a PowerPoint reviewing the role of the SMTC and current studies involving downtown and University Hill (see Resources link on OCL Current Study website page).

The SMTC focuses on transportation issues and their effect on downtown development. Through collaborative planning, it helps to decide the best use of federal monies and coordinates and facilitates interaction between the federal, state and local levels. It recently completed a “travel demand” software program that predicts what traffic patterns will do under various circumstances.

**Pedestrian experience.** Along with the Downtown Committee, the SMTC is completing a parking analysis and mapping project of downtown. The goal: to inventory downtown parking centers and major employment centers and to assess the quality of the pedestrian experience along those routes. Communities are often judged by the pedestrian experience of visitors.

**University Hill study.** This SMTC study is taking a comprehensive look at parking and transportation issues on the hill. Issues include interstate access, bus service to and from the hill, walking and biking (with linkage opportunities, including the connective corridor), and institutional parking.

Rowlands reported that 4.25 million square feet of new space is anticipated in the long term, including 790,000 medical related, 1.2-2.4 million university related, 780,000 residential (including Kennedy Square), and 240,000 square feet of commercial. They also anticipate 1,500 parking spaces added in the next five years.

Goals of the study include linking activity centers, promoting walkability through careful development, and coordinating land development. Transit is important because it extends walking distance and can spur development.

Rowlands said the study would provide a template of sorts for the larger city on ways of combining and centralizing parking, employment, retail and other multiuse facilities.

**Route 81.** The presence of the Route 81 viaduct is perceived as a major barrier between downtown and University Hill. The SMTC will be looking at possible courses of action to improve the feel, look and aesthetics of the viaducts should the highway remain as it currently is. The state will have to take some action on 81 within the next 10 years—either major improvements or conversion of the highway into a boulevard. Resurfacing is needed within the next eight years, “but that’s just a Band-aid. That’s not a long-term fix,” said Rowland.

A final decision on Interstate 81 most likely will be made at the state and federal levels after public meetings and other local input. Considerations would include traffic flow and air quality as well as economics.

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