

OCL *Rethinking I-81* Study  
Steering Committee Meeting Minutes  
University College  
Feb. 14, 2008

Present: Russ Andrews, Joseph Ash, Phil Bousquet, Emmanuel Carter, Dennis Connors, Megan Costa, James D'Agostino, Carol Dwyer, Bill Egloff, Linda Henley, Steve Kearney, Karen Kitney, Rich Landerkin, Rebecca Livengood, Joe Mareane, Lora McCooey, Sarah McIlvain, Paul Mercurio, Eric Persons, Van Robinson, Benjamin Sio, Doug Sutherland, Sandra Barrett, Rachel Pollack

Sandra Barrett welcomed the committee and the members introduced themselves. Barrett discussed the relationship of the topic to the 2006-07 OCL study of downtown and the timeliness of the study that will coincide and overlap a two-year NYS Department of Transportation/Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) study. Barrett enumerated the role of the study committee: to refine and define the mission statement (see handout 2008 OCL Study: *Rethinking I-81*); to frame the questions; to determine what research is needed and methodology; to conduct fact-finding and research (see handout OCL 2008 Study Research I-81 Comparison Case Studies, beginning of research underway by students of Carol Dwyer, Maxwell School); and ultimately to draw conclusions and develop recommendations. Barrett emphasized the importance of making those outside the committee aware of the study process through citizen participation, public sessions and media outlets. Barrett mentioned an ideal study timetable of one year.

Study Co-chair Rebecca Livengood brought up overlap of NYS DOT/SMTC study and OCL study and how each will have a different focus, with the OCL study honing in on how the fate of I-81 will affect downtown Syracuse. Livengood expanded on handout 2008 OCL Study: *Rethinking I-81*, a framework for thinking about OCL's study. 1) Best Practices, how what other communities have done about their elevated urban highways can inform the public debate here 2) Alternatives 3) Connectivity 4) Community Discussions. She explained that the preplanning group felt having case studies was crucial, and that in open sessions it might be possible to invite those from other cities to present their alternatives. Livengood concluded with the thought that the role of the study should be to raise all the issues involved, but not necessarily to address each of those issues.

James D'Agostino of the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council explained the study his agency was asked by NYS DOT to conduct, including the geographical scope of the project, (SMTC area north to Central Square and south to the Onondaga county border, east and west covering the entire metropolitan area). The study, he said will provide public education and then solicit input. He also discussed that study's methodology, which involves soliciting broad public input through outreach to community groups and public meetings throughout the stated area. Other components of the study will include a consultant team, websites, brochures, and travel demand modeling.

Bill Egloff of NYS DOT outlined scope of NYS DOT/SMTC study as threefold, I-81 between the southern and northern interchanges of 481, from county line to county line, on statewide and regional bases.

Points brought up during discussion:

- Gaining public input by establishing a "Rethinking I-81" blog, regularly supplemented by materials from committee's public presentations
- Changes to I-81 will bring about a new traffic flow in downtown; mass transit will need to be a part of that equation.
- Importance of including input as to nature of traffic flow to expanded Carousel Mall (suggested

study session/presentation).

- Committee must identify the stakeholders (perhaps systematically) in order to know which constituencies should have input into the process (difficult to do because so many will be impacted by changes).
- Rebuilding I-81 as an elevated highway does not mean likely mean rebuilding "as is" because modern engineering standards would by necessity change structure; possibility of grandfathering to keep structure "as is" also raised; (Egloff) originally built not as an interstate but as an arterial, only section in a distance of 120 miles that is 45 miles per hour. By 2017, the deck will have to be replaced, as will widespread highway system infrastructure.
- Allocation of Federal monies to interstate rebuilding may be impacted by population and hence congressional delegation loss locally, population growth in other states.

Resources:

- *SMTC's University Hill Transportation Study* and its importance to understanding traffic flow within the university area, including access parking and land use. A conclusion was reached that a key presentation given on that report should be reformulated and scheduled for presentation to the 2008 OCL study committee
- "Syracuse Gateways," a study with graphics done in the mid-90s that looked at entry points into the city and included an examination of what would happen if I-81 became Almond Blvd in the downtown area
- Summary document for the Post WW II plan (based on assumptions formed before WW II), traffic plan from 1947 shows divided Boulevard with landscaping, first visual image of city divided by roadway

Scheduled and possible Presentations

- Presentation by Syracuse native Tom Brennan, a transportation planner working with the city of Seattle and Washington State DOT to develop an alternative to rebuilding Route 99.
- Suggested presentation by Connors and Carter on interstate's history and relationship to overall need for planning
- Suggested presentation by Bill Egloff on current structure
- Suggested presentation to be assembled from "I-81 alternatives" student project of SU architecture professor Liz Kammel (in Florence Spring semester 2008)
- Traffic flow to and around expanded Carousel mall by representatives from Pyramid/Destiny Project
- Presentation by Jim D'Agostino summarizing information provided by Brian McMann during SMTC's University Hill Transportation Study.

Quotes:

"It seems important to define all the issues that need to be addressed, not that we have all the answers..." --Rebecca Livengood

" (We asked) Is it even technically feasible to take this on to another level of analysis? And what we found was it's worth taking a much more detailed numerical analysis, computer model analysis. It didn't blow the system away, which is one of the questions we didn't know, can the vehicles even manage to get by without 81? It can, but we did learn that there are going to be

some dramatic changes in the transportation system....the downtown streets will dramatically increase the quantity of traffic on them." --James D'Agostino

"In talking about the history of how I-81 came to be....it was not simply a technological decision... we were in a long process of dismantling our concept of city, systematically and unconsciously....we're still in an era of suburbanization....and if we fundamentally don't like our cities, it doesn't matter much what happens to 81."--Emmanuel Carter

"One of the other things that has fascinated me when I have looked at the history of I-81, is the parallels....to the problem that Syracuse had with railroad trains running down the street, and even, as well, the Erie Canal. Everybody today says 'Why didn't they leave the Erie Canal?'....And the people in Syracuse when the barge canal was finished, they could not wait to get rid of the Erie Canal....because it divided the city too much and it created barriers and it created problems, so Syracuse really had these issues to deal with before." -- Dennis Connors

Next meeting:

February 20, 3:00, Presentation by Syracuse native Tom Brennan, a transportation planner currently working with the City of Seattle and Washington State DOT to develop an alternative to rebuilding Washington State Route 99.

Scheduled meetings 3:30 Thursdays, from February 28th through March 27th.