OCL *Rethinking I-81* Study
Steering Committee Meeting Minutes
University College
March 13, 2008

Present: Jason Allers, Russ Andrews, Joseph Ash, Emmanuel Carter, Chris Capella-Peters, Megan Costa, Jim D'Agostino, Nell Donaldson, Carol Dwyer, Bill Egloff, Linda Henley, Tony Ilaqua, Karen Kitney, Rich Landerkin, Kevin McAuliffe, Paul Mercurio, Van Robinson, Donna O'Mahoney Rohde, Steve Schroeder, Ben Sio, Doug Sutherland, Evan Weissman, Sandra Barrett, Rachel Pollack

University Hill Transportation Study presentation by Jim D'Agostino, SMTC (based on presentation by consultant from Jacobs, Edwards and Kelcey)

- 2000: Special Events transportation study by SMTC regarding traffic to and from Carrier Dome; during that study it was determined there was a parking problem on the hill.
- 2003-2004: Parking study grew into a major transportation study but a lack of focus led to temporary shelving of the study.
- 2005: Study restarted with new focus and consultant. The important step taken was to redefine the problem and approach. Ten-document study completed 2007; available on SMTC website.
- The attempt to define study: What is the problem? Does it revolve around vehicle ownership, vehicle use, vehicle occupancy, commuting or other factors?
- Study area: bounded by 690, I-81, Thornden Park and Southern boundary.
- As part of study, land use to 2025 was projected. Medical and Institutional land use on the hill expected to grow considerably. Vision for development on hill (created through confidential interviews with major players) includes anticipated new parking, residential units, retail units, commercial, medical units. Among projections: 2700 new parking spaces.
- What changes projected by 2025? Vehicle miles traveled would jump significantly. Transit ridership would decrease (2,900 down to 2,700). Bicycle and pedestrian trips will increase (29,000 up to 33,700). Large numbers of congested roadways and intersections at peak travel times.
- Analysis: Theoretical 33 minute commute from Van Buren/Lysander area to the Hill. Only three minutes/one-half mile of entire commute spent in traffic. Study conclusion that multi-million dollar effort to correct congestion problem would have minimal effect (small change in commute time.) The "add capacity/faster travel time" approach would not be a cost-effective solution.
- What's missing? People attempt to minimize walking as a transportation mode (walking needs to be incorporated into vision.)
- Cycle of growth: Institution requests more, adjacent parking. This allows for institution's growth, which increases congestion, requires additional capacity; fixing roads, widening intersections only leads to more traffic in area and increased need for parking. The parking problem on the hill cannot be fixed by adding more parking garages.
- Paradigm Shift: Instead of trying to just "move cars;" study needs to address "How do we move people?" Improve transit, biking and walking, offer connectivity, and good land use planning with a mix of land uses and integrate these concepts into more traditional solutions.

- A dozen recommendations emerged from the study. The six main recommendations were: Mixed use development; a prioritized transit system; integrated parking strategies; improvements to the Almond Street corridor that can be made today (such as changing streets from one way to two way, a bicycle boulevard network).
- Poor land use on the hill (surface parking) should be turned toward mixed-use development. (Goal to bring activity/interactions out to street front.)
- Suggestion: Centralized campus book store could provide good focal point for development. (Would draw student, visitor and employee population.)
- Mixed-use development should contain: additional retail, housing, daycare, cinema, office space, parking. (Illustration of re-imagined Adams Street complex.)
- Key recommendation: Prioritized Transit Network with a bus rapid transit item. A bus system that could have a dedicated lane, next bus technology on bus stops. Constraints involve curb parking which allows little room for a dedicated lane; street needs to be chosen carefully.
- Goal: How do we create an environment that keeps the spending power of those who pass through University Hill every day on the Hill? Use existing infill areas (surface parking) for that mixed use development. Create pedestrian environment that allows for residential development. Good pedestrian environments require short city blocks. Long blocks were designed for cars.
- Additional transit opportunity studied: Streetcar option connecting hill and downtown, tends to be more attractive to people than bus; 10 to 20 percent of people more likely to utilize this form of transit (and less expensive than light rail). Projection of $33 million for system, compare cost with parking garage at $25,000 per parking space.
- Mobility Hubs: Central nodes in key locations throughout the city with parking opportunities, car sharing, zip cars, rental cars, bike sharing, taxi sharing, links to bus or streetcar system. They produce activity and have multiple services provided.
- Study finding: There is an adequate amount of parking on hill, but it isn't where people want it to be and isn't available when they want it.
- Need for integrated parking strategy: Shared parking.(For instance, turn day use parking into 24-hour parking.) First part of parking solution: Use parking available more efficiently; second part of solution, add some parking capacity (amount required will be reduced by efficient usage.)
- A central parking authority required to oversee this.
- Need for better planning of parking structures. They should be brought up to the curbside and wrapped with retail as part of mixed-use development.
- No major, successful urban center has free and unlimited parking. Necessary to create a "pedestrian mindset" where people feel comfortable not parking next door to office. Large number of infill sights (open lots) create poor pedestrian environment most places on hill except for in the University area. Necessary to create a better pedestrian environment in other high traffic areas (e.g. hospitals.)
- Recommendation: Create pedestrian promenades on Hill.
- Almond Street corridor improvements necessary. This is the gateway to the city, what most people see when they first come through Syracuse. It is unsafe and unpleasant to pedestrians, confusing to motorists. Solutions: Viaduct treatment, reduce number of lanes on Almond street (there is an excess), create roundabouts at intersections with Harrison and Adams (they slow fast-moving traffic) to make pedestrian movement under I-81 easier.
- Removing I-81 and replacing with a boulevard: Is it possible? Traffic models showed *not* impossible but finer level of analysis necessary to determine if workable. Model showed streets could potentially hold traffic but traffic would be substantially increased,

particularly to the West.

- Goal: Selection of best streets for bicycle friendly boulevard.
- Streetcar system could provide a remote parking lot for people to get off the expressway and then take a transit ride into the hill area. Employers could provide incentives for employees to utilize the system.

Comments: Discussion of difficulties related to employing mass transit: Workers not arriving and leaving at same time (149 different shifts at Upstate); origin and destination key to a successful transit system, for every transfer 20 percent of the market lost; light rail system in Buffalo hasn't picked up ridership as hoped.

Presentation by Nell Donaldson, SMTC/ summarized in SMTC Final Scope of Work handout

- Two projects related to I-81 at SMTC; one is travel demand modeling and the other is the public participation project.
- Purpose of public participation project (on behalf of NYSDOT); first public outreach on history, role, functions, condition of I-81, also create awareness of the process undertaken; a public involvement process to gather input on issues/concerns related to I-81 and its environs; next a second stage of public involvement, to engage community in decision-making process related to future of I-81.
- 10-20 person study advisory committee will be formed.
- Ongoing coordination with NYSDOT consultant.
- Study Boundary Limits, impact to primary, secondary and tertiary areas around I-81 corridor will be considered; North/South: Southern boundary of Onondaga County to 2 1/2 miles north of Central Square.)
- Identification of Key Stakeholders
- Public outreach (as listed above) will also encompass case studies of other cities. Facets of project include public meetings/workshops; stakeholder meetings/focus groups; flyers brochures, newsletters, project web site.
- Public Involvement (as listed above) to be handled through public meetings; stakeholder meetings; web site; statistically valid telephone survey; online paper questionnaire.
- Synthesis of input from stakeholders and community groups
- Presentation of modeling results at open houses
- Consultant will document complete project process and put it into a format that can be made widely accessible.

Comments: Stakeholders are defined as those who put themselves forth as stakeholders; (advisory committee will also offer advice on key stakeholders). The area covered by telephone survey is not yet defined but will encompass much of tertiary area of study. The Scope of Services is approved; consultant RFP process next; the first outreach project due in 2010. A single feasibility study related to one-way to two-way streets, roundabouts, and narrowing of Almond Street corridor will be done in 2008 (all one way streets are being studied). Currently underway: feasibility study of parking facility shared by multiple institutions and serviced by shuttle, and bike boulevard study. Discussion of Park and Rides at shopping centers and Centro's investigation of possible Park and Ride ownership; possibility of using Carousel Mall outer lots as Park and Ride; discussion of incentives/disincentives to using Park and Rides. City Parking Authority under discussion already exists but has never been used. Discussion of roundabouts in contrast with traffic circles – see DOT website https://www.nysdot.gov/portal/page/portal/main/roundabouts