

OCL *Rethinking I-81* Study
Steering Committee Meeting Minutes
University College
March 27, 2008

Present: Phil Bousquet, Chris Capella-Peters, Emmanuel Carter, Dennis Connors, James D'Agostino, Nell Donaldson, Carol Dwyer, Bill Egloff, Linda Henley, Tony Ilaqua, Karen Kitney, Rich Landerkin, Rebecca Livengood, Paul Mercurio, Sarah McIlvain, Donna O'Mahoney Rohde, Van Robinson, Steve Schroeder, Doug Sutherland, Sandra Barrett, Rachel Pollack

Presentation by Doug Sutherland: Milwaukee Case Study

Why is Milwaukee a key study for Syracuse decision-makers to examine? It provides more parallels to Syracuse than many of the other case studies.

The history

- 1950s: A planned Milwaukee beltway approved by the electorate. The western (North/South) portion and southern (East-West) portion of the beltway are eventually built but the northern and eastern boundaries are never started.
- 1970s: Activist group awoke public to the fact that the Eastern roadway would have cut through a major park, marring it. This helped stop freeway building in the eastern area. (location of East Pointe)
- East Pointe, the area which had been held back from development while slated to become part of the transportation corridor, was parceled out to developers. The mixed-use development that resulted has won numerous awards and includes supermarket with pedestrian-friendly entrance, housing targeted toward empty nesters looking to move into into a livable, walkable urban neighborhood.

Park East Freeway: This elevated viaduct required reconstruction/replacement and was considered for removal. It was seen to be a barrier between downtown and surrounding areas. It carried only 35,000 vehicles per day and the land around it had been severely devalued by the roadway.

- The reconstruction cost would have been \$100 million while the cost for demolition and reweaving the grid was \$25 million.
- It took one year (2002-2003) to bring down the highway; rebuilding would have taken 3-5 years.
- The freeway had generated congestion by concentrating traffic on just a few local streets.
- No roadway/boulevard was built to replace the freeway (only thing built was a new bridge.) The restored grid dispersed traffic on many streets.

Redevelopment occurred concurrently with plans to bring down the freeway and continued after its demolition.

- The redevelopment area created by the teardown was 26 acres, and it quickly increased in value. Before teardown, much of the land adjacent to the highway was surface parking. It was used to create three new neighborhoods
- Long "car-friendly" blocks were reduced to shorter "pedestrian-friendly" blocks.
- Since, 2003, \$300 million worth of development has occurred.

How is Milwaukee like Syracuse?

- Two rust-belt cities transitioning to new economies.
- Bringing down the Park East Freeway did not open up the city to its waterfront but did open it up to urban development. (Many of the major freeway takedown projects do or promise to connect downtowns with their waterfronts).
- Viaducts similar in length; both concentrating traffic on a few city streets and devaluing land around them.

What made Milwaukee's take-down project more easily doable:

- John Norquist, a former community organizer who had opposed construction of the beltway was mayor of the city during the take-down phase. He was strongly in favor of the takedown. He is currently president of the Congress for New Urbanism.
- The highway carried 35,000 vehicles per day, a lower total volume than I-81, but close to amount of local traffic carried by 81; the Park East Freeway did not carry through traffic.
- State divested themselves from freeway project. It was handled by city planning department.

Discussion:

- Emergency vehicle access in cases of highway removal.
- Yonkers: Example of urban area drawing suburbanites, largely due to waterfront development and new accesses to NYC.
- Need to make the university hill/arts culture a draw for empty nesters by creating the right conditions for living in city.
- Maxwell School capstone project already has the required projects for the year. The land use plan survey assessment cannot be done via that route.
- Emmanuel Carter's project with grad students will begin this summer with a research phase.
- Upgrading of water system and necessity of authority/oversight over water system (related to lack of oversight should OCWA and the Metropolitan Water Board merge.)
- Rethinking and rewording of mission statement (will be reviewed at next meeting).

Next Meeting: April 3, 3:30 – 5 PM, 307 University College.