Mission Statement
The Onondaga Citizens League fosters informed public discourse by identifying and studying critical community issues affecting Central New York, developing recommendations for action, and communicating study findings to interested and affected groups.

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William Pollard
Peter Salters
Indi Shelby
Debbie Stack
Jay Subedi

Heidi Holtz and Mary Kate Intaglietta, Co-Chairs
Renée K. Gadoua, Study Writer

Onondaga Citizens League
700 University Avenue, Room 406
Syracuse, NY 13244
Phone: (315) 443-4846
Fax: (315) 443-4410
Email: ocl@syr.edu
Website: onondagacitizensleague.org

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Walk, run, bike, drive, catch the bus. How do you move? From work to home and back again, to the ball fields and grocery stores, to entertainment and health clinics, we wondered how Central New Yorkers move throughout our community each day. We also wanted to know why our citizens made their transportation choices: time, money, convenience, necessity.

The very large, important and timely issue of transportation, studied in 2015-16 by the Onondaga Citizens League, links complex questions with potentially powerful solutions. “How CNY Moves” challenged countless community members to think big when it comes to transportation – to ask those vital questions that begin with “what if…?”

What if we had more bike lanes and everyone understood bike/auto safety?

What if our public transit system became a more sustainable, rapid and desirable option?

What if we became a more walkable community?

What if our entire Onondaga community, from city to towns to villages, committed to a “people” centered approach to development that encouraged a safe and intelligent blend of pedestrian, auto, bus and bicycle connectivity?

In order to explore these questions, we turned to the citizens of our community. We heard from young men and women as important to understand how barriers to safe and reliable transportation on an almost daily basis, we knew it was necessary to extend awareness of the important role they play in this arena. CENTRO officials have been gennus in sharing information and participating in honest dialogue about public transit in our community. Staff members from the Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency were active participants and provided data, stories, connections and expertise throughout. Local planning officials and elected leaders described innovative approaches to expanding the Erie Canalway and embracing the Complete Streets model for transportation.

Since virtually every person intersects with some mode of transportation on an almost daily basis, we knew it was important to understand how barriers to safe and reliable transportation affects our community well-being. We heard from human service agencies struggling to help their clients get to and from work and services. We heard from new grassroots efforts to supplement existing transportation systems in order to facilitate employment opportunities. We heard from newly communities and how they have successfully implemented ridesharing and bus rapid transit.

The study process was enhanced by the numerous participants who participated in scoping sessions, attended our twice monthly meetings, helped design and present in panels, and met with the study co-chairs and OCL staff. They brought forth ideas, challenged the status quo and all in all helped, if you forgive the pun, “drive” the outcomes.

This study also offers a new lexicon: sharrow, TOD, and Complete Streets are just a few of the terms that you will learn. We hope that you will also find this study provides just some of the answers to “How CNY Moves.” By understanding the past and by digging into current practices we can now imagine a future where every person moves efficiently, safely, healthily and productively forward.

Moving – whether on two feet, two wheels, by car or by bus – is how we connect as residents, as workers, as citizens, as humans. It is vital that we understand this complex web as demographic and technology changes loom. Innovation for down the road requires planning in the now. We hope this study will start that process.

Study Participants

We thank all those who gave their time, expertise, and viewpoints during the 2015-2016 study. We apologize for any missing names.

MUSTAFA ALLEN
DAVID ALIKON
MIKE ALEXANDER
ELIZABETH ALLEN
CHERYL ALLEN
ALIA ANTERAMA
KIM ARNAS
ARIKON BALZAR
LOURIE BLACK
VINN BIXE
NEIL BURKE
MELISSA CADDWELL
TIM CARLIN
BARBARA CARRANTI
MICHHEL CLARK
DEBORAH COLOSE
MARIO COLONE
DENNIS CONNORS
BIVANO COOK
LOISE CORSETTI
MEGAN COSTA

JAMES D’AGOSTINO
FERNANDO DEKRAEGER
JENNIFER DOTSON
BOB DOUGHERTY
ERIC ENnis
BRADLEY FETOS
MELISSA FINKEL
ADRIA FISCH
CHRIS FOWLER
SARAH FURDA
WILLIAM GRIE
TIMO GLAVES
CHRIS GODLEWSKI
SAM GORDON
CHRIS GORMAN
CONNIE GREYSON
LINDA HARTSCOTT
BRUCE HALFWAY
MELISSA HILDEK
ELIZABETH HIRASI
FRAN Hradil
DEBORAH HURSTLE
SALLY JOHNSTON
TAYANZA “MOTHER EARTH” JAMES
OWEN KORNEY
DANIEL KILLEY
PETER KING
DORIS KNAPP
KEN KRUDBER
STEVE KUEGEL
RAELE KRAMER
ANNETTE KINSKY
DANIELLE KROL
MICHAEL LAFAY
Morgan LEW
RICK LEW
BARRY LENTZ
STAN LISHNER
DON MACKAUGHER
SHAMAL MATTHEWS
JANICE MAYO

AARON McDOON
SARAH MCKHAN
DWAYE MEENOR
MELISSA MINOR
PAULA MOYSE
DOWE MIDDLE
COGGY MULLRIN
LAURA MILLER
ALLISON MITSURA
KATHY MOWE
CARO MONTI
JON MORGAN
LUIGENDO MUAYA
ISAAC OXON
MARK OXON
MAMBA OURS
TOM PERLO
MARK PETERS
MARTIN Pinksy
SLAPPY CHOW
LINDA CHOW
NANCY ZAACH
KIM ZHANG
LORETTA ZILOWECKI

ERIC RIGGS
SALLY SANTANGELO
PETER SAVOR
MIKE SOUTER
SUSAN SCHILLING
HEATHER SCHROEDER
GARY SINGH
NOSE SPALONE
JOANNE SPOLE DICKER
JAY SUBEDI
ERICA TAUZER
MARY THOMPSON
SCOTT VANDENPOOL
MEGHAN VITAL
LISA WARNER
MICHAEL WATNS
LINDA WRIGHT
NANCY WATSON
KIM ZHANG
LORETTA ZILOWECKI

How CNY Moves
“It’s not set up for students.” Teachers and employers aren’t documents and stuff to help your future, it’s hard,” he said. Riding Centro can be a challenge. “If you have portfolios and would then use the bike for his own errand – or to get him and another balanced on the handlebars. “People think Sometimes, three people would be on his bike, one behind him and another balanced on the handlebars. “People think we’re crazy, but we know where we have to be.” Sometimes he rode another person to an appointment, and the rider food and medicine for his father. Muya’s talk came during the year’s most emotionally riveting presentation. He and two other young Syracuse residents “I try to help them. Sometimes we will be driving and see someone. We offer them a ride. It doesn’t matter if you know them. I’ll see people walking by and think, ‘Hey! That used to be me,’ and I pick them up.” Muya does not take money for rides. “I get the feeling of a smile or I can tell myself I helped someone,” he said. “What’s in it for me? Ah, love. That’s what’s in it for me.” Transportation is crucial, he said. “Life is work,” he said. “As long as transportation is available, people will move around and be successful.” Muya’s talk came during the year’s most emotionally riveting presentation. He and two other young Syracuse residents talked about the importance of transportation in their lives and the transportation challenges they, their families, and friends face. 1 Their perspective provides a stark counterpoint to the experience of most Onondaga County residents, who typically can drive their own car any time of the day or night, to nearly anywhere in the county, in 20 minutes or less. These perspectives highlight the need for accessible, affordable, and reliable public transportation. They also illustrate the ingenuity of informal bike- and car-sharing programs operating in some communities. To set the stage for an examination of the many ways people travel and the barriers they face, picture downtown Syracuse during a typical weekday rush hour. The city of 145,000 people is home to 30 percent of Onondaga County’s 467,026 residents. 2 But more than 90,000, or 30 percent, of the region’s jobs are in the city. About 20,000 of the county’s jobs are in downtown Syracuse and another 18,000 are on University Hill, where three of the region’s 10 largest employers – Upstate University Health Center, Syracuse University, and Crouse Hospital – are located. 3 That means 15 percent of the region’s total employment is packed into a pair of districts totaling just over one square mile, 4 according to a 2015 report by the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC), which studies and makes recommendations about transportation and land use policies and services. At the end of a standard 9-to-5 weekday, nearly 20,000 workers make their way out of the city center, with a majority heading to the suburbs. Most of those cars begin their approximately 19-minute 5 commute to the most populous of Onondaga County’s 19 towns: Manlius and DeWitt to the east, and Clay, Salina, and Cicero to the north. About 8 percent of City of Syracuse commuters use public transportation to get to work; outside of the city, in the remainder of the region SMTC covers, only 1 percent of commuters use public transit. 6 In downtown Syracuse, riders can board one of the three dozen bus lines Centro originates at its Transit Hub at Salina and East Adams streets. The site, which opened in September 2012, is covered, and houses 22 bays for buses to pick up riders. The long-awaited transfer point is largely considered an improvement over the crowded outdoor site a few blocks north on Salina Street. Still, some riders remain frustrated when the scheduled routes don’t fit their needs. Other people working, shopping, or doing business downtown may head home on foot or by bicycle. Transportation on two feet or two wheels may be by choice or by circumstances and commuters using those means face a variety of conditions. Walking from a medical building on Genesee Street or Harrison Street to the Syracuse University neighborhood, for example, is a risky proposition, thanks to traffic congestion and limited walkways underneath I-81. Pedestrians must also take special care to cross West Street or Geddes Street, especially in the winter, when snow-filled, icy sidewalks force them into the roadway. Bike riders may be pleased with dedicated bike lanes downtown and along the Connective Corridor on East Genesee Street. But some motorists say they’re unclear where they can turn when there’s a bike lane. Other motorists, some bicycle advocates report, are hostile to bikers, honking and yelling as they pass. Motorists also report some on two wheels ignoring traffic rules and hogging the road. To use an appropriate metaphor, consider all of these elements – cars, public transit, bicyclists, pedestrians – as spokes of a wheel that make up our local transportation system. This was the starting point for the Onondaga Citizens League’s 2015 study, “How CNY Moves,” two recent studies, “Understanding the Employment Skills Gap” (2014) and “The World at Our Doorstep” (2012) noted the urgent need for reliable, safe, affordable public transportation for people seeking employment and for new Americans. Lack of

1. See July 15, 2015, study session notes.
3. Ibid. P. 29
4. Ibid. P. 29
5. Ibid. P. 29
6. Ibid. P. 68. Nineteen minutes is the average commute from downtown Syracuse.
7. The Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council’s (SMTC) planning jurisdiction, called the Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA), covers Onondaga County

Chapter 1

Introduction

“Without my legs, I wouldn’t be here,” Lugendo Muya told the study committee in July 2015.
transportation, those prior studies found, is often a roadblock for people trying to find a way out of poverty through education and employment opportunities.

Similarly, “Creating a Community Where All Children Thrive by Five” (2013) noted the challenges parents face in transporting their children to Pre K. A Syracuse City School District survey found that lack of transportation prevented some parents from registering their children in a Pre K program. 11

Also driving the report’s focus was a growing awareness of the cultural, demographic, and economic trends that are spurring change in many car-centric communities. An emerging back-to-the city movement and a growing aging population are creating more interest in walkable, bikeable, and transit-served neighborhoods. Millennials are less likely to buy cars and houses and more likely to choose urban living than their elders. At the same time, new transit options and technological innovations are being studied. Our initial goal was to study the elements of our transportation system and the numerous studies and initiatives underway to develop a framework for considering a 21st century transportation strategy for Syracuse and Onondaga County.

An early finding, which fuels one of our overarching recommendations, was our recognition of the breadth and interconnectedness of transportation issues. In addition to the wheel outlined above to represent downtown rush-hour traffic, several other overlapping wheels exist. What, for example, are the circumstances and challenges of the downtown worker trying to get to her Eastwood home? What about the South Side student who needs to get to Onondaga Community College for an evening class? How do you get to the airport if you don’t have a car? How well do Ontonagon County’s transportation plans must improve transportation so that children can get to Pre K and to school, and people can get to jobs. Reliable, accessible, affordable transportation plays a significant role in providing pathways to services and opportunities that will help people move out of poverty. Transportation for schoolchildren is driven by state funding and policy, while access to jobs may be improved through local initiatives.

A lively session called “How CNY Moves Those in Need” illuminated the needs of low-income people and persons with disabilities in traveling to jobs, medical appointments, and other services, education, shopping (especially in light of “food deserts” in city neighborhoods), and to participate in civic and recreational activities. Although the session focused primarily on these two populations, similar concerns apply to elderly and refugee populations.

Speakers raised concerns about employees at St. Camillus and other health care facilities finding it difficult to get to work. Although St. Camillus has vans and buses to transport people, the agency does not have the capacity to transport

The OCL embarked on this study as major transportation initiatives were underway. Although the committee did not want to revisit its 2008 study, “Rethinking I-81,” any current discussion of Onondaga County’s transportation plans must include the short- and long-term implications of the future of the I-81 viaduct. That year’s study committee concluded that the decision offers “an opportunity to redefine our community for the 21st century.” 12 The report recommended “rerouting through traffic around the city and converting Almond Street to an attractive, pedestrian-friendly urban boulevard” because it “is a desirable concept that would benefit the region.” The reason for this recommendation, the report said, was “rooted not just in the experiences of other cities, but in the urgent needs in our own community for revitalization of our core and growth of the new economy.” 13

That forward-thinking conclusion mirrors our second broad finding: a strong belief that the impending change offers an opportunity to envision, proactively, how CNY will move during and after the redesign. It is, as the I-81 Challenge leaders put it, the perfect time “to think about the ways that we, both as individuals and as a community, interact with our surroundings and what we need from our transportation systems.” 14

In January 2016, the Commission on Local Government Modernization (Consensus) released its initial recommendations on how to make county governance more efficient. The group’s final recommendations, due in late 2016, have the potential to affect how Onondaga County funds projects and shapes the entities that will decide how we spend tax money on infrastructure and define policies that will shape future planning and development. Development plans must include transportation issues.

The January Consensus report includes at least two draft recommendations relevant to this study. One calls for

regional discussions to support Centro – the Central New York Regional Transportation Authority – and work together on a sustainable-long-term plan. 15 Consensus also advocates a regional land-use plan that provides for consistent and enforceable planning on a countywide basis. 16

Land-use planning that encourages “growth in a way that optimizes existing infrastructure and urbanized area” is consistent with efforts to enhance the efficiency of Centro’s public transit service to the community.

In contrast to sprawl, public transit ridership can expand in “densified” urbanized areas in the city and first-ring suburbs that use principles of urban design to do-in-fill development. Growth in public transit ridership reduces traffic congestion, improves air quality, and diminishes the need for valuable properties that are used as parking lots in the city.

We support proposed changes in the city’s zoning system that encourage transit-oriented development along the paths for the proposed bus rapid transit lines between University Hill and the Regional Transportation Center and between Eastwood and Onondaga Community College.

11 Ibid. P. 4
12 “The I-81 Challenge” refers to the official decision-making process to develop and evaluate options for the future of the I-81 viaduct. Issues led by the New York State Department of Transportation and the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council.
15 Ibid. P 11
16 See August 19, 2015, study notes.
all the people who need to get to medical services, said Aileen Baltz, St. Camillus CEO and president. “We need to look at the capacity as a community,” she added.

Linda Wright of the Salvation Army said the agency “does a lot of transportation even though we’re not a transportation provider.” Participation in senior activities fluctuates with people’s ability to pay for transportation on any day. “I’ve seen seniors ride their bikes in the winter to get meals because they don’t have bus money.”

It’s imperative that Centro be at the table early in discussions of new developments and countywide plans. It’s also imperative that the public transit organization stabilize its funding. In spring 2015, Centro survived yet another budget shortfall. Thanks to strong support and advocacy from Syracuse- and Utica-area state lawmakers, the 2015-2016 state budget included $25 million for upstate transit systems. Centro received an extra $4.5 million.

The state funding increase averted Centro’s plans to end some weekend and evening service and cut routes. But it exposed a broader problem: To meet Centro’s mission of providing public transit (41 percent of riders earn less than $15,000 a year), the state must create a consistent and equitable way to fund public transportation.

In fiscal year 2015-2016, 12 percent of Centro’s $66 million budget came from federal capital funds, which are converted to operating funds. Another 8 percent, about $5 million, came from mortgage recording tax (MRT). Since 1972, New York state law has required that one-quarter of 1 percent of commercial and residential mortgage transactions go to Centro. In fiscal year 2014-2015, Centro’s MRT funding was down $500,000 from the previous year. Centro consistently gets less MRT funding than its counterparts in the Buffalo and Albany areas. Albany, for example, receives about $11 million a year from MRT.

It’s become typical for developers throughout the state to negotiate an exemption from MRT. Consider the MRT on several recent projects, as reported by local media:

- The Onondaga County Industrial Development Agency (OCIDA) in January 2016 approved $4.92 million in property, sales and mortgage recording tax exemptions for the construction of eight three-story, 26-unit apartment buildings at Center Pointe Apartments in Baldwinsville. The project included “green” and “grey” aspects, said Ken Knudsen, an engineer with Barton & Loguidice (I/I) and storm water flow issues. The project included repairs to pipes and manholes.
- OCIDA in December 2015 approved tax breaks for CDR Development Co.’s Inner Harbor project, including a $2.91 million exemption from state mortgage recording tax.
- The Syracuse Industrial Development Agency in February 2016 approved $30,000 in mortgage recording tax exemptions for a new Price Rite on South and Bellevue avenues.

We are encouraged that Assemblian William Magnarelli and Sen. DeFrancisco have introduced legislation (Assembly Bill A9490/Senate Bill S7442), which would no longer empower Industrial Development Agencies to exempt the portion of the MRT payments due the four regional upstate transportation authorities in Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse (Centro) and Albany.

11

Public transit plays a central role in economic development. We urge OCIDA and SIDA to end exemptions from mortgage recording taxes. Alternatively, deals should require developers to pay a transit fee.

We are pleased to see a great deal of local study, advocacy, and education taking place. New to many on the study committee, for example, were the many relevant studies of the SMSIC. The organization, with an office in the heart of downtown Syracuse, is made up of officials representing local, state, and federal governments or agencies with an interest or responsibility in comprehensive transportation and land use policies and services.

Brooklea Drive in Fayetteville

On a late spring afternoon, a few cars drove down Brooklea Drive in Fayetteville, slowed effortlessly at the street’s speed humps, then made their way to the town office building or the parking lot near the Little League field. A woman and a little girl peeked in the window of Chloe’s Closet, a boutique at 107 Brooklea Dr. Two women parked on Brooklea, just past the municipal building. They wanted iced coffee and debated whether they would try Pastificio, the new café at 210 Brooklea Drive, or head to Freedom of Espresso about a block away at 126 W Genesee St.

The two-block area in the village of Fayetteville stands as one of just a few examples of the county’s Complete Streets – streets designed to be accessible to cars, bicycles, and pedestrians. “People wanted to be able to walk everywhere they could,” Lorie Corsette, Fayetteville village clerk said at the October 21, 2015, study session.

The village helped finance the project with a $36,000 Suburban Green Infrastructure grant/Save the Rain grant. Improvements to the area included the village’s comprehensive plan to address inflow and infiltration (II) and storm water flow issues. The project included repairs to pipes and manholes.

The project included “green” and “grey” aspects, said Ken Knudsen, an engineer with Barton & Loguidice who worked with the village. Goals included making the neighborhood safe and attractive and improving water runoff to Limestone Creek. To accomplish that, the village promoted traffic calming through speed humps; added bump-outs; narrowed street width; added porous pavement to improve drainage; removed striping; and created rain gardens and snow storage strips.

Key to the village’s success was its creativity in seeking funding, Knudsen said. “The village took a chance,” he said. “It was new and innovative. We found it worked.”


18 How CNY Moves • 2015-2016 • Report No. 35

19 Onondaga Citizens League • 2015-2016 • Report No. 35
The overarching goals of the 2050 LRTP, adopted in September 2015, generally parallel the central concerns of this report. They seek to guide agencies in making transportation investment decisions over the next 35 years that:

- Support the planning goals of the region and local communities.
- Contribute to the achievement of transportation performance goals.
- Advance regionally significant public infrastructure projects: I-81 viaduct, enhanced transit, and an expanded regional rail system.

We found several organizations committed to removing the barriers lack of transportation creates for low-income people. Vision for Change, On Point for College, and Providence Services of Syracuse have created effective programs to address transportation barriers. As a result of concerns voiced at study sessions, two organizations, the Human Services Leadership Council (HSLC) and Moving People to Visions for Change, On Point for College, and Providence Services of Syracuse have created effective programs to address transportation barriers.

The programs have been successful in getting people who work in downtown Ann Arbor to use ways other than cars to get to work. In 2014, for example, employees at more than 200 organizations of getDowntown’s Commuter Challenge traveled to work by bus, bike, or two feet rather than driving a car. According to a 2013 survey by getDowntown, the latter is a two-year study begun in June 2015 to study the feasibility of bus rapid transit (BRT) and light rail transit (LRT) in the region.

The programs have been successful in getting people who work in downtown Ann Arbor to use ways other than cars to get to work. In 2014, for example, employees at more than 200 organizations of getDowntown’s Commuter Challenge traveled to work by bus, bike, or two feet rather than driving a car. According to a 2013 survey by getDowntown, the latter is a two-year study begun in June 2015 to study the feasibility of bus rapid transit (BRT) and light rail transit (LRT) in the region.

Study sessions also highlighted ride-sharing programs, parking, Complete Streets, and technology. The concepts are inter-related and reflect growing concerns about environmental stewardship, energy efficiency, and efforts to encourage healthier lifestyles. Subsequent chapters will describe local successes, challenges and opportunities, and best practices that we might emulate.

We hope that this report provides a broad overview of current transportation issues, and reinforces the need to view transportation as part of economic development, community character, and the health and welfare of our citizens.

The study process

In summer 2015, OCL held two scoping sessions in which we invited community members to identify potential questions and wishes for the community. These meetings helped shape the 11 discussion sessions convened in 2015 and early 2016. The report draft, committee members, and study writer also met individually with several other stakeholders. OCL members, representatives of local agencies, and experts in transportation, planning, and demographics met to discuss the topic. In addition to citizen representatives, stakeholders participating in panels or presentations included the Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency, the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMT), Centro, the Onondaga County Office of the Environment, the Town of DeWitt planner Sam Gordon; Bike CV, the Moving People Transportation Coalition, St. Camillus, Providence Services, The Salvation Army, Upstate Medical University, and Syracuse University’s Parking & Transit Department.

Early in the study process, four Syracuse University graduate students shared the results of their Maxwell School Capstone Project, “CNY Mobility: System Analysis and Recommendations for Improvement.” That project provided valuable background for topics the study would later address: Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), Complete Streets, car sharing, and alternative taxi services.

The final study session featured an overview of the region’s transportation issues, presented by Dennis Connors of the Onondaga Historical Association. Following an initial assessment of the material collected, the study writer and key members of the committee held follow-up meetings with some stakeholders.

Notes from all the study sessions are available at http://onondagacitizensleague.org/
Chapter 2

History and Data

A significant finding of the 2015 OCL study process is our recognition that transportation is not an isolated issue. Rather, transportation stands at the center of a wheel, intersecting with the economy and business; changing demographics and generational preferences; housing and business development. It also is increasingly connected to rapidly evolving technology and concerns about creating more health-conscious and safe communities. A look back reminds us that historic patterns are being repeated today, providing new challenges and opportunities.

Syracuse has long been at the center of the region’s economy. “At one time, the region’s natural resources provided the foundation for its economy, advanced in the early nineteenth century by the Erie Canal and growing demand for its products up and down the Eastern Seaboard,” notes the 2013 report “CenterState New York Agenda for Economic Opportunity.”

“The Syracuse area became a great manufacturing center, attracting major firms and large production plants,” the report adds.

The Erie Canal was completed in 1825. The 363-mile waterway, which ran through the center of what is now the Syracuse area, provided a historic overview of transportation at the November 18, 2015, study session.

New York the financial capital of the world, provided a critical supply line which helped the North win the Civil War, and precipitated a series of social and economic changes throughout a young America,” according to a state history.

By 1805, when Syracuse was still known as Salina, turnpikes connected places like Manlius and Mancelius to the economic center. Steam-powered railroads operated in Syracuse from 1828 to the early 1830s. By 1850, two years after Syracuse was incorporated as a city, streets were open to everyone,” Connors said. By 1920, personal autos were creating road congestion and conflicts with streetcars. “Pedestrians were warned to stay out of the way of vehicles,” Connors said.

As development spread out from Clinton Square, residential centers were farther from factories and people could not easily walk to downtown. Some business owners who bought land to develop housing also organized rapid transit companies. They sold housing by stressing that the area had transit to the economic center. That practice parallels one of the challenges this report highlights: For people without cars, the ability to live and work somewhere is very dependent on public transportation.

After Syracuse’s last street cars stopped running in 1941, street paving began to cover rail lines. The increase in personal cars from 1950 to 1960 led to a 58 percent decrease in bus ridership. As automobile use increased, so did the need for roads. The national highway system took off following the 1944 congressional report “Interregional Highways.” The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944 authorized “a limited 40,000-mile National System of Interstate Highways, to be selected by the state highway departments, to connect the major metropolitan areas and to serve the national defense.”

Where We Are

The 2015 study committee encountered a surfeit of data on transportation and related demographic trends. We relied heavily on local data provided by the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council and the Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency.

First, the national picture: Americans love cars. The number of vehicles on the road in 2014 reached a record level of almost 253 million, an increase of more than 3.7 million, or 1.5 percent, over the previous year, IHS Automotive reported. That’s the highest level in the United States since 2005. “Americans drive an average of 29.2 miles per day, making two trips with an average total duration of 46 minutes.”

The rise of the automobile allowed Americans to move from cities, noted a March 18, 2016, Atlantic magazine article. “In 1940, 60 percent of Americans owned cars. In 1960, 80 percent did. Today, 95 percent of Americans own cars,” the magazine points out.

As noted in Chapter 1, 70 percent of Onondaga County’s population lives outside the city of Syracuse. The largest suburban populations live in the towns of Clay, Salina, Manlius, Cicero, DeWitt, and Camillus. The county’s population peaked in 1970 and has remained relatively
The 2015 study, which parallels local research by SOCPA, found: 9

- 83% of millennials like walking, but only 71% like driving.
- 50% of millennials prefer living within a easy walk of other places.
- 52% of millennials prefer living in attached housing where they can walk to shops and have a shorter commute.
- Millennials walk more for transportation than Gen Xers.

A local survey of 2,100 people found that transportation and accessibility are priorities for the aging community as well. The 2014 report “Shaping an Age-Friendly CNY” found:

- 54% of respondents said transportation is important in deciding where to live as they age.
- Boomers want transportation options.
- The majority use cars for day-to-day activities and fear having to give up their car.
- 20% over 65 do not drive.

A geriatric mental health survey of the 10-county region found that transportation is a major barrier to receiving mental health services in Central New York. Arranging and using available transportation options is difficult for seniors, especially those with cognitive and mental challenges, said Kim Armani, executive director of SUNY Oswego’s Active Aging and Community Engagement Center.

Like millennials, baby boomers increasingly prefer walkable communities and public transportation options. Boomers, Armani added, also want better coordinated bus routes, trains, street cars, and bicycle-friendly communities.

The preferences of millennials and baby boomers point to elements of Smart Growth. (See P. 30 for a discussion of Smart Growth.) Relevant principles include providing a variety of transportation choices; promoting mixed land uses; creating a range of housing opportunities and choices; and creating walkable neighborhoods.

In 2010, SMC surveyed people about their interest in such policies. Findings include:

- 78% said development should occur in already developed communities with available buildings or unused land.
- 77% said future development should include housing and buildings closely spaced, with sidewalks leading to nearby shops and parks, even if it means having smaller homes and less space for parking lots.
- Top priorities included protecting air and water quality; preserving natural areas; keeping the county’s scenic beauty; reducing our energy usage; and preserving farmland.
- 32% support creating communities where people do not have to drive as much.

This data, coupled with the need for a multi-modal transportation system to be in place before construction begins on the replacement for the I-81 viaduct, provides the context in which we will discuss specific ways CNY can change how it moves.
Chapter 3
Transportation for community strength and well-being

Walking for me is part of nature. We’re in these containers. We don’t use these containers enough. For health reasons, I like to walk. There was a time I would be happy to catch a ride. Then I got cancer and decided I’d walk. I challenged myself to walk two hours. I did it and I kept doing it. Now I look for reasons to walk.

There are two different worlds. When you’re driving, you’re going fast. When you’re walking, you time things better. I can take my time and talk to people. On the West Side, everything I need is within walking distance. There are two different worlds. When you’re driving, you’re going fast. When you’re walking, you time things better. I can take my time and talk to people. On the West Side, everything I need is within walking distance.

There’s another perspective on walking, though. For people who don’t own cars, walking is not a choice, but a necessity. People walking to and from work continually face safety challenges. They’re vulnerable to assault, car-pedestrian accidents, and weather extremes. As we pointed out in our 2014 report “Understanding the Employment Skills Gap,” lack of transportation is a common barrier to people seeking employment.

Ron Boxx, program manager at Visions for Change, noted that many businesses operate on Erie Boulevard and Carrier Circle, but neither roadway is pedestrian friendly. “You have folks doing everything they can to get to work, but they’re risking their lives,” he said.2

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DeWitt’s sustainability plan noted that Shoppingtown Mall could be “a central hub where housing units, shops, grocery stores, and offices could be located. The condensed nature of this type of development would make walking or using public transportation much easier, ultimately reducing the Town’s overall greenhouse gas emissions.”

In recognition of the interconnected nature of transportation decisions, the plan noted that DeWitt’s bus system needs to be much more efficient to increase use of public transportation. It also advocates for the implementation of BRT to make buses more efficient as well as reduce emissions, fuel costs, and reliance on foreign fossil fuels.

Gordon emphasized that mixed-use buildings near streets would make Erie Boulevard a place people will want to walk. “If that street was beautiful and had different uses, people would want to live there,” he said.

DeWitt’s emphasis on Complete Streets and transit-oriented development mirror many goals of the proposed Onondaga County Sustainable Development Plan. Onondaga County Executive Joanie Mahoney introduced the plan in 2011 to promote social, environmental, and economic sustainability of existing and future land development patterns. But the county legislature has so far failed to approve it. The strongest criticism has been opposition to the plan’s effort to limit expansion of public infrastructure, such as sewer lines, into new areas if there is no growth to support it.

Opposition to the plan indicates disdain for the transportation-related issues that result from urban sprawl. One issue is pollution from single-occupant vehicles. Less obvious are the challenges seniors living in housing developments will face if they rely on inadequate public transportation to go shopping, get to medical appointments, or socialize. The problem will only grow as our population ages; by 2030, more than 20 percent of U.S. residents are projected to be 65 and over. That’s compared with 13 percent in 2010 and 9.8 percent in 1970.

Low-wage employees without cars will face similar challenges to get to second- and third-shift jobs in companies far from the urban core. Organizations including Moving People, Providence Services, and Visions for Change are addressing this issue. While some employers have changed shifts to accommodate bus schedules or supported carpools, not enough programs exist to fill the need. Since access to well-paying jobs is crucial to our community’s well-being, transit-oriented development is a necessity.

DeWitt’s sustainability plan called for the development of an attractive, forward-thinking project is underway to redevelop Dewitt’s Erie Boulevard. In fall 2015, DeWitt and Syracuse launched a competition for new designs to make the four-mile, six-lane, commercial area friendly and attractive. The project is also studying the best way to connect the Erie Canalway Trail from DeWitt, where it ends at Butternut Drive, through the city of Syracuse to Camillus, where the trail continues.

The goal of Complete Streets, Mogle said, is to change the “roads are for cars” mentality. As of early 2016, three county municipalities have embraced Complete Streets: Syracuse (the Connective Corridor), Fayetteville (Brooklea Drive), and DeWitt. (See page 11 for a story about Brooklea Drive.)

The Town of DeWitt stands out as one of only two Onondaga County municipalities with a full-time planner. (The Town of Clay is the other.) DeWitt adopted a sustainable plan in 2014. Projects most relevant to this study are Dewitt’s town-wide bike and trail system, which will connect with bike lanes and trails in the city of Syracuse and surrounding towns. DeWitt is also working to close the gap in the trail system along the Erie Canal, to create a continuous connective link and preserve the historical canal.

In preparing the report, DeWitt analyzed land plans in town and identified corridors where the town should invest in enhanced transit opportunities. Sam Gordon, director of Planning and Zoning, said Dewitt’s pedestrian infrastructure is underdeveloped, with an incomplete sidewalk network, and considerable pedestrian obstacles. He also noted that the town’s existing bike infrastructure and network cover only 1 percent of the mileage of town streets.

An exciting, forward-thinking project is underway to redevelop Dewitt’s Erie Boulevard. In fall 2015, DeWitt and Syracuse launched a competition for new designs to make the four-mile, six-lane, commercial area friendly and attractive. The project is also studying the best way to connect the Erie Canalway Trail from DeWitt, where it ends at Butternut Drive, through the city of Syracuse to Camillus, where the trail continues.

Onondaga County has 10 municipalities and 10 cities. Syracuse is the largest city and DeWitt is the second largest concentration of commuters in the region. A total of nearly 10,000 people live in the towns of Clay, Cicero, and Salina and work in the city, making this the second largest condominium of commuters in the region.

Type of Commuter Flow

- The most substantial commuter flow within the region is within the City of Syracuse, with over 35,000 commuters who both live and work in the city.
- A total of nearly 10,000 people live in the towns of Clay, Cicero, and Salina and work in the city, making this the second largest concentration of commuters in the region.

11 October 21, 2015, study session.
12 Ibid.

Map Credit: Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council
Chapter 4
Strengthening and expanding options for transit

“Sometimes I would have to wait for the last bus and go to school late to take my art and keep it from breaking and not getting harassed. I had to explain it to my teachers sometimes: ‘This is why I’m late.’”

– Alia Annamaria, city resident who now provides rides to colleagues and family members

“I ride Euclid Avenue in rain, sleet and snow. … (There’s odd/even parking, so) it’s pretty safe on the way in every other day. … Good science shows bicyclists break rules to stay safe. We’re more likely to follow rules if the infrastructure is there to help us.”

– Melissa Fierke, Bike CNY

Centro

The 36 people at the July 7, 2015, study session were asked how often in the past five years they used regular Centro buses. A strong majority, 55 percent, said they rarely rode the bus; 32 percent said never, 9 percent said regularly, and 5 percent said fairly regularly. The largest reason given for riding Centro was to visit the New York State Fair. Only a few said they did so to be environmentally conscious or because they don’t have a car.

The responses reflect Centro’s own research: Most people don’t ride the bus unless they have to. In fact, 70 percent of riders depend on Centro for vital services. Among Centro riders in Onondaga County, 80 percent have no car, and 79 percent ride the bus to get to work.1

Public transit works best “in communities that have urban density, limited, costly parking; traffic congestion, and tourism,” said Rick Lee, who became Centro’s executive director in January.2 Syracuse, though, has what Lee calls “the scourge of public transit”: suburban sprawl. It also has, despite criticism to the contrary, abundant and affordable parking.

Centro officials have implemented changes in an effort to draw more “choice” riders (as opposed to those who rely on public transportation). Recent improvements include fare boxes that accept larger bills and give change in credit for future riders; stepped-up presence on social media; redesigned website ad schedules, and new system training. In 2013, Centro introduced a travel training program to work with people with disabilities, refugees, and new riders.3

“One of the big fears bus riders have is that isolated feeling of sitting at a bus stop and thinking, ‘Did I miss it?’” said Steve Koegel, Centro marketing and communications director.

Online Trip Planner and Centro Bus Tracker, a technology that uses GPS devices to report bus locations and shows real time where the buses are, is being tested in Syracuse. Centro officials expect a mobile app to be ready by the end of 2016.

In response to another rider concern, Centro in May launched a Day Pass in Syracuse. Centro plans to test for six months the option that allows customers to have unlimited rides over a 24-hour period for $5 for adults and $2.50 for people who qualify for reduced fare. Regular fare is $2. So a rider taking the bus to and from work, plus an extra trip to and from a location, would save $15 per week using the Day Pass.

In addition to the funding challenges outlined in Chapter 1, Centro officials are aware some riders and members of the public question the agency’s responsiveness to concerns on issues including bus shelters, Park ‘n Ride options, fare prices, schedules, and routes. Centro is constantly re-evaluating its routes, Lee said. “These are hard decisions,” he said. “The person in Tully is just as worthy of services as anyone else. City riders get better service because of density.”

Lee pointed out that funding and government regulations and mandates dictate some decisions. The Tully to Syracuse route, for example, appears ripe to be cut because of low ridership. But the route gets funding intended especially for rural transportation. He’s also sensitive to concerns about Call-A-Bus, a public, ride-sharing service Centro provides under the criteria of the Americans with Disabilities Act. If Centro cuts a route, it must also cut Call-A-Bus routes, limiting opportunities for people with disabilities.

Bus Rapid Transit

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is a bus-based mass transit system. The National BRT Institute calls it “an innovative, high-capacity, lower-cost public transit solution that can achieve the performance and benefits of more expensive rail modes.”1 BRT “can easily be customized to community needs and incorporate state-of-the-art, low-cost technologies that attract more passengers and ultimately help reduce overall traffic congestion.”2

The Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) began studying the feasibility of BRT in June 2015 with its two-year Syracuse Metro Area Regional Transportation (SMART) Study. The study follows the identification of enhanced transit as a community priority in SMTC’s 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan. It is also informed by Syracuse Transit System Analysis (STSA), which recommended “higher intensity transit services along the Destiny USA/Regional Transportation Center (RTC) corridor.”

2 ibid. Syracuse Transit System Analysis (STSA) was part of the I-81 Challenge. The January 2014 report can be found here: http://i81challenge.org/cms/2014/01/i81challenge%20report%20final%20v1.0.pdf
3 Centro website. https://www.centro.org/TravelTraining.aspx

1 Ibid.
2 Ibid.
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3 Centro website. https://www.centro.org/TravelTraining.aspx

1 Ibid.
2 Ibid.
3 Centro website. https://www.centro.org/TravelTraining.aspx
Transportation Authority (CDTA), provided a BRT case study in an October 29, 2015, Thursday Morning Roundtable presentation. A CDTA study determined BRT was the best solution for the Capital Region. The agency sought to improve transportation for people already dependent on public transit and encourage people to use public transit rather than cars.3

Albany’s BRT service, called BusPlus, began in April 2011, with the Red Line, which covers the NY 5 corridor, except for a three-mile gap. The second of three lines is scheduled for construction in 2017. The agency envisions 40 miles of BRT in the region.

Albany’s system features wifi, security cameras, transit signal priority, queue jumpers, and real-time bus information. The route crosses neighborhoods in need of revitalization.

“Advanced transit leads to development,” Farrell said. “That’s a pattern that goes back to Erie Canal days.”4

Officials hope to upgrade from basic BRT to full BRT, then to light rail, Farrell said. Since the rollout, BRT has seen 28 percent ridership growth and has decreased travel time by 20 minutes.

Other successful BRTs operate in Pittsburgh and Cleveland. The Pittsburgh BRT created the Downtown-Oakland Corridor, linking the two largest job centers in the region. The project was mostly privately financed, with some state and federal money, and experienced good collaboration in planning.5 Cleveland provides “quality light rail in a bus. It’s become the mindset of the city,” an official said in a YouTube video. “I’ve got to catch the train.”6

Syracuse Mayor Stephanie Miner joined the mayors of Albany, Rochester and Buffalo in calling for ride-sharing legislation.1 Their letter to Gov. Andrew Cuomo said:

“Our cities are in dire need of additional transportation options that will foster economic development by encouraging people to venture downtown for dinner or a night out with the peace of mind that they can get a ride home reliably and safely. Peer-to-peer ridesharing would offer an innovative, flexible, 21st-century solution to the transportation deserts many upstate municipalities face, while also providing an opportunity for the State to set standards that would ensure public safety and consumer protection.”2

We expect the Legislature will take up the issue again in 2017. Based on presentations at the October 6, 2015 study session many people are interested in car-sharing business models that will work in Central New York. Mario Colone, SMTC project manager noted that his agency investigated the concept a few years ago, but could not advance the project. Member agencies did not want to take on liability/licensing concerns, he said.


Ridesharing

The New York State Legislature ended its 2016 session in June without passing legislation that would allow Uber, Lyft, and other ride-sharing companies to operate outside of New York City. Uber and Lyft customers use apps to request a car. Customers can see who’s driving the car, track its location, pay without cash, and then rate the driver. A Syracuse.com editorial praised ridesharing as “convenient, cheap, cool and frictionless.”

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Commuting Times

The average commute time for Onondaga County residents is 19 minutes, below the national average of 25 minutes and well below the statewide average of 31 minutes.

• The Town of DeWitt has the shortest average commute time (by residence) in the region: 15.6 minutes.
• The Town of West Monroe has the longest average commute time (by residence) in the region: 33.1 minutes.


4 Ibid.

5 See Pittsburgh’s website on Bus Rapid Transit: http://gettherepgh.org/.


Zipcar, a service that allows customers to pay to drive cars by the hour or day, operates at both Syracuse University and Le Moyne College. SU has 16 Zipcars. Cost is $15 to sign up, and fees are $7.50 an hour or $64 a day. SU also offers Zimride, a private rideshare program that allows anyone with an su.edu email account to find rides or offer seats to other university community members. Drivers and riders negotiate prices, which are paid via PayPal. Last year, about 50 people used the service, according to Melissa Cadwell, of SU’s Sustainability Division.1

Bikes and dedicated bike lanes

Central New York, like other communities, is experiencing growing interest in both recreational and commuter biking. In an April 26, 2016, press release, Syracuse Mayor Stephanie Miner reflected that enthusiasm in announcing the city’s involvement in the 60th anniversary of National Bike Month. “Bike month is a great opportunity to involve our entire community in the fun, healthy, recreational activity of biking and I encourage everyone to participate,” she said. “As a cyclist myself, I know firsthand the benefits of biking. This is also why my administration has made investments into bike lanes and other bike infrastructure throughout the city.”2 Events included a workshop on bicycle commuting, Bike to Work Day, and the Downtown Living Tour Bike Share.

There is an enthusiastic bicycling community here. Syracuse common councilors in March 2014 approved Syracuse Bicycle Plan 2040.1 That plan notes that bicycling provides economic, health, equity, and safety benefits.2

The Connective Corridor, which links two economic powerhouses – Syracuse University and downtown – serves as a model for Complete Streets as well as offering lessons in collaboration and funding. It features bike lanes along East Genesee Street and the university area. Onondaga County is working on Loop the Lake, which will extend the Onondaga Lake Park trail system to the Creekwalk behind Destiny USA. Syracuse and the town of DeWitt are working together on the Erie Canalway Trail project, a 4-mile gap in the statewide trail.

Jennifer Dotson, executive director of Ithaca Carshare said the nonprofit company struggled for two years to find an insurance provider that would write the insurance plan they needed. Ithaca Carshare was launched in 2008 and owns 25 cars.4

Over this 5-year period, 455 bicycle accidents occurred in the City of Syracuse and 283 in the remainder of the MPA. In the same timeframe, 795 pedestrian accidents occurred in the City of Syracuse and 402 in the remainder of the MPA. Although bicycle and pedestrian accidents represent a small percentage of total accidents, they are disproportionately more likely to result in serious injuries or fatalities. Between 2009 and 2013, there were approximately 7 bicyclist fatalities and 24 pedestrian fatalities in the entire MPA.5

“We’ve got to do something about that,” Fierke said. “As someone really passionate about bicycling, I want to make it safer for everyone.”6

Bicyclists express frustration at motorists who travel too close or harass them. Fierke said the frustration cuts both ways. “We have to listen to people who don’t like bicyclists,” she said. “It helps if we play by the rules and are a little bit friendlier.”7

Bike advocates are pleased with recent attention to their concerns. But they call for further initiatives to improve bicycling. They include: connecting bike lanes, particularly through downtown; creating a design for Euclid Avenue bike lanes; embracing a “Ride to the Right”8 effort similar to Philadelphia’s; supporting a bike-share program in Syracuse; and including the minority/income community in bike planning/advocacy.

Photo credit: Syracuse University
Enhanced transportation corridors

Before focusing on the Destiny USA/Regional Transportation Corridor (RTC) to Syracuse University and James Street/South Avenue corridors, the Syracuse Transit System Analysis (STSA) reviewed the entire Centro system. The report identified six corridors that would be likely to support increased transit ridership by analyzing existing transit ridership and modes share; population and employment density; households with access to one or no vehicles; potential for commuter trips; commute times; household income; and existing plans.

Here are details about the Destiny USA and James Street corridors:

- Centro operates 42 bus routes within the RTC-SU corridor.
- Centro operates 41 bus routes within the Eastwood-OCC corridor.
- Average weekday ridership (2013):
  - James Street: 2,005
  - South Salina/Nedrow: 1,619
  - South Avenue/Kelley Drive: 1,386
  - Drumlins/Neib Hill: 1,296
- 39,000 people live within RTC-SU corridor, with the majority residing in close proximity to Syracuse University.
- 45,000 residents live within the Eastwood-OCC corridor, with the majority residing in neighborhoods adjacent to James Street and South Avenue.
- RTC-SU corridor is more commercial in character
  - Commercial: 35% (5.3 square miles) of total land area
  - Institutional: 17% of total land area
  - Residential: 18% of total land area
- Eastwood-OCC corridor is more residential
  - Residential: 40% (6.2 square miles) of total land area
  - Commercial: 19% of total land area
  - Institutional: 17% of total land area
- The two corridors will work together to cover a large proportion of the origins and destinations in Syracuse.
- 44% of households within the RTC-SU corridor live below the poverty line.
- 34% of households within the Eastwood-OCC corridor live below the poverty line.
- 24% of households in the city of Syracuse have no vehicle.
- High density of residents under age 25 near Syracuse University and in the Eastwood-OCC corridor.
- Senior population is heavily concentrated along James Street and toward the southern end of Eastwood-OCC corridor near the Van Duyn Center for Rehabilitation.

Source: SMART1

Chapter 5

Community-wide planning and shared space principles

Nearly every study session included calls for transportation to be part of ongoing community planning discussions. The “Comprehensive Plan 2040” (unanimously adopted by the Syracuse Common Council on March 17, 2014) provides one example of how transportation fits into the planning process. The report includes chapters on bicycle infrastructure, land use and development, and sustainability – issues this report sees as priorities related to transportation.

The city report on bicycle infrastructure, for example, uses data to determine the best routes for future bicycle infrastructure, identifies likely users, and proposes possible designs to act as a starting point for community discussions as the bicycle network expands.1 The city plan also encourages private developers to accommodate bicycle parking on-site and develop and adopt pedestrian infrastructure components.

The report cites the need to overhaul Syracuse’s zoning ordinance as part of the city’s land use and development policy, which includes “environmentally sustainable land use patterns, transportation options, and site plans.”2

In May 2016, city officials unveiled ReZone Syracuse, a plan to update its zoning code, which dates to the early twentieth century. The goal is to “transition the City from the current ‘single use’ zoning philosophy to an updated ordinance that incorporates principles of form-based codes, Smart Growth, Traditional Neighborhood Development, and Transit Oriented Development, among other current best practices.”3 ReZone Syracuse is a promising effort with the potential to spur development and increase density along transportation corridors.

As noted in the introduction, Onondaga County’s Sustainable Development Plan includes similar goals promoting sustainability through land development policies. In her 2016 State of the County address, County Executive Joanie Mahoney again called on the Onondaga County Legislature to take action on the county’s land use planning report.4

“I implore you to consider it,” Mahoney said in her speech. “Ask questions, make suggestions, even vote it down if you must. … but come up with your own plan if you (disagree) because what we are doing now is clearly not working for all of us and it is an abdication of our responsibility to the people we serve to just avoid talking about it.”

The county plan notes that development in the county’s suburbs continues to increase while the population has stayed the same or declined. The plan would limit residential development to areas that are already served by public infrastructure like roads and sewer and water lines. As development moves out to the suburbs, people commute more, requiring upkeep of county roads and causing pollution. More roads out of population centers means less traffic congestion; it also means less population density and less public transportation.

Both the city and county plans promote Smart Growth and

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2 Ibid. P. 10.
3 Ibid. P. 24.
4 City of Syracuse press release, May 9, 2016.
Complete Streets – concepts opponents criticize as not-so-veiled attempts to dictate how municipalities operate. The intention, though, is a broad view of how development and planning decisions affect the entire community now and in the future. The Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Encyclopedia defines Smart Growth as policies that integrate transportation and land use decisions, for example, by encouraging more compact, mixed-use development within existing urban areas, and discouraging dispersed, automobile-dependent development of the urban fringe. Smart Growth can help create more accessible land use patterns, improve transport options, create more livable communities, reduce public service costs and achieve other land use objectives. Smart Growth is an alternative to urban sprawl.6

Communities with sprawl are characterized by “automobile-oriented transportation and land use patterns, poorly suited for walking, cycling and transit.” Communities that embrace Smart Growth, on the other hand, encourage “multi-modal transportation and land use patterns that support walking, cycling and public transit.”7

In terms of planning, communities with sprawl have “streets designed to maximize motor vehicle traffic volume and speed.” Communities developed with Smart Growth principles, though, have “streets designed to accommodate a variety of activities” and are “traffic calming.”8

Smart Growth America, a national organization that advocates Smart Growth policies, says the concept is in line with the American dream: “the simple hope that each of us can choose to live in a neighborhood that is beautiful, safe, affordable and easy to get around.”9

The organization defines one concept of Smart Growth, Complete Streets, as “streets for everyone.” They are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users. Pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and public transportation users of all ages and abilities are able to safely move along and across a complete street. Complete Streets make it easy to cross the street, walk to shops, and bicycle to work. They allow buses to run on time and make it safe for people to walk to and from train stations.10

The city is committed to providing “Complete Streets that meet the needs of all people regardless of age, income or ability,” and ensure “that the right-of-way can safely and efficiently accommodate this movement by a range of transit modes.”11

Both Complete Streets and Smart Growth are enshrined in New York state law. The New York State Smart Growth Public Infrastructure Policy Act (SGIPPA) was signed into law in August 2010 as an amendment to Environmental Conservation Law. The law “is intended to minimize the unnecessary cost of sprawl development.”12 State infrastructure agencies, including the state DOT, must use eleven Smart Growth characteristics the law outlines.13

Since August 2011, when Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo signed the Complete Streets Act,14 state, county and local agencies must “consider the convenience and mobility of all users when developing transportation projects that receive state and federal funding.”15

Complete Streets feature sidewalks, lane striping, bicycle lanes, paved shoulders suitable for use by bicyclists, signage, crosswalks, pedestrian control signals, bus pull-outs, curb cuts, raised crosswalks, ramps, and traffic-calming measures. Definitions of many of those terms are in the glossary.

Biking as an Everyday Commuting Option

I have been using a bicycle regularly as transportation for 15 years or so. For the past two years, I have not even stowed my bike during the relatively mild winter. When it’s not icy, I bundle up (jumps, windbreaker, balaclava) and head out in the cold.

Asst. Managing Editor Fred Friske, former longtime Post-Standard editorial writer and Syracuse University neighborhood resident.

For me, it’s important to be able to ride my bike somewhere. But it’s about more than just transportation. The other day, on a sunny afternoon, as I rounded the corner of Fellows and Genesee and glided into the designated bike path, a warm gust of fresh air blew through the sparkling trees. It was a moment to savor. I felt free, refreshed, vitally connected.

The Connective Corridor provides a specially painted and surfaced path along Genesee Street and University Avenue. It seems more bike lanes appear every year. For recreational biking, the Onondaga Creekwalk trail is an urban delight, and the Onondaga Lake loop trail is shaping up as a real winner, on top of the ever-popular Onondaga Lake Park trails.

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https://www.dot.ny.gov/programs/completestreets
http://on.ny.gov/2d8igqG
https://www.dot.ny.gov/programs/smartplanning/smartgrowthlaw
http://on.ny.gov/2bqSjyY
http://on.ny.gov/2bqB6o4
https://www.dot.ny.gov/programs/smartplanning/smartgrowthlaw
Opportunities, challenges, and recommendations

The study committee was encouraged by the abundance of good projects underway on this topic. To return to our metaphor of the wheel, lots of wheels are spinning — but not necessarily in the same direction. While groups don’t appear to be at odds with each other, there is some re-inventing the wheel as they consider issues other groups have researched.

Numerous data-rich studies exist, including the broad projects of the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Agency, the Syracuse Onondaga County Planning Agency, and other Onondaga County and Syracuse agencies. Likewise, grassroots groups including the Moving People Transportation Coalition, Providence Services of Syracuse, and Bike CNY show initiative and commitment to addressing transportation concerns.

Because this report comes as the community is at an important turning point, we encourage the many stakeholders whose operations touch on transportation issues to find ways to join forces, share resources, and work together to advance progress on this important issue. Many of the groups working on transportation issues participated in our study sessions. It is clear that a lot of information already exists and groups will benefit from sharing. We do not advocate creating a new group or coalition. But we do suggest some format or organization that will provide regular interaction and updates among interested parties. Possibilities include a common website, a list-serve modeled after the popular Preservation Association of Central New York’s online discussion group, and quarterly meetups.

Citizen engagement is key as transportation planning evolves. As the special-interest groups cited attest, the process requires special emphasis on the needs of low-income and rural communities and the needs of disabled people. Both the Consensus process and the I-81 discussion have invited citizen participation. Citizen engagement surely can make a difference. Note, for example, that in May 2016, days after South Side residents voiced concern at a community forum, state Department of Transportation officials said they would not create new I-81 on- and off-ramps at Martin Luther King Boulevard (East Castle Street) because of neighbors’ concerns about increased traffic.1

We said at the outset of this study process that “How CNY Moves” is not about I-81. We don’t, in fact, seek to influence the decision about the form of the I-81 rebuild. But with the announcement about the state’s decision on the future of the new I-81 viaduct in Syracuse expected by the end of 2016, we must be proactive. The impending disruption of traffic patterns is an opportunity to envision how a multi-modal transportation system can best serve the community.

This year’s study process only scratched the surface of the many aspects of transportation. While we do offer actionable recommendations, our most prominent finding is an appreciation for the central role transportation — the center of the wheel, if you will — plays in the health and welfare of all of our citizens as well as in the economic success of the region. Transportation must not be an afterthought, but must be front and center in planning, repair, and design decisions. Further, planning discussions must include public transit at early stages.

Transportation must be central in a countywide plan that favors design decisions. Decisions must take into consideration both present and future demographics and maintenance costs. As they approach repairs or new projects, municipal planners and private developers must consider how vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians can share roads in ways that are safe, efficient, and environmentally responsible.

While acknowledging numerous avenues the study could not adequately address (we did not tackle how the region moves goods, for example), we sought to prioritize transportation issues most relevant to this moment. In a community proud of its 20-minute commute a variety of challenges emerge. Can we improve transportation systems so that more people can get more places quickly, safely, inexpensively? How can we best use technology while caring for the environment? How do we encourage walking and biking among a population more focused on speed and efficiency than health and appreciation for our surroundings? How do we build a community that embraces people who walk, bike, drive, ride the bus, and use wheelchairs? How do we make infrastructure and development decisions that best serve Onondaga County’s current and future populations? Big challenges remain. Short-term and long-term funding for both the I-81 renaissance and the result of the SMART study on what option is best for Syracuse’s two transit corridors will call for patience, creativity, and collaboration. Community decisions on land use and application of home rule remain significant questions for transportation innovation.

One thing is for certain: Transportation developments are constantly evolving. Although ride-sharing legislation did not pass in 2016, we anticipate rigorous lobbying to bring the service to Upstate New York. As we were finalizing this report, we learned that Detroit voters will consider in November a 20-year, $4.6 billion property tax to expand regional transit service, including bus rapid transit. The project would cost the average homeowner about $95 per year, the Detroit Free Press reported.2

1. McAndrew, Mike. “DOT’s I-81 project director: We don’t know what we are going to build yet.” Syracuse.com. May 20, 2016. http://www.syracuse.com/data/index. shtml/2016/05/20/i-81_project_director_we_dont_know_what_we_are_going_to_build_yet.html
Where Syracuse Workers Live

Thirty-five percent of the people who work in the City also live in the City. The remaining workers commute from suburban towns, with the towns north and east of the City contributing the greatest number of workers.

“Public transit – or lack thereof – ranks among the metro area’s most pernicious problems,” the Detroit Free Press wrote in an editorial. “From job stagnation to economic segregation, trace any of our regional deficits back far enough, and you’ll find our troubled transit system at or near the root.” The project is important, the editorial adds, “not just for the folks who depend on buses to get around, but for the employers that rely on workers’ mobility, for the local governments that rely on a robust economy, with workers who are connected to jobs.”


We challenge the community to be open to different travel plans that are in the best interest of our citizens and support community health and well-being. The wheels are turning quickly. Jump aboard, hold on tightly, and be part of the conversations.

Findings and Recommendations

Our community is at an important crossroads to expand and improve its transportation options.

Although Onondaga County is largely a suburban community, cultural shifts offer the opportunity to reconsider how our auto-centric practices can shift to ones that embrace a multi-modal transportation system. Nationally, and increasingly here in Central New York, people are showing a heightened commitment to health and well-being both for individuals and the community as a whole, and an imperative to reduce our carbon footprint. An interactive, multi-modal transportation system will serve a broader set of social needs and enhance our sustainability. Because of their interconnected nature, emerging development and infrastructure decisions must include transportation concerns as central. The impending disruption caused by the deconstruction of the I-81 viaduct makes it essential that the community is open to short- and long-term transportation policies that allow a dynamic mix of cars, buses, bikes, and pedestrians to safely interact on our roadways. Regardless of which rebuild option is chosen, the community will need to adapt transportation habits and modes for years.

We are also increasingly aware of the ways in which Syracuse’s concentrated poverty limits people’s transportation opportunities. Reliable, accessible, affordable transportation plays a significant role in allowing access to the services and opportunities that will help people move out of poverty. Because so many people in the city’s most distressed neighborhoods rely on public transit, we must improve transportation so that children can get to Pre-K and to school, and people can get to jobs.

As the study evolved, we began to understand that transportation is not an isolated issue. That’s why we chose the metaphor of a wheel to demonstrate the broad, and interconnected spokes of this complex issue. Transportation plays a role in development, the economy, and access to services, jobs, and schools. Funding streams and jurisdictional issues overlap and influence development and transportation plans. Transportation systems also rely on infrastructure, planning, and budget issues. Because of the many ways transportation affects all of our citizens, it must be a priority in discussions about development and infrastructure proposals for the region.

Map Credit: Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council
Community Planning

- Approach the anticipated disruption caused by the I-81 reincarnation with open minds and as a step toward creating long-term policies and habits that will contribute to the health and well-being of the community and individuals. Seize the impending deconstruction of the I-81 viaduct as an opportunity to consider alternate means of transportation and transitioning away from single-occupant vehicles.
- Look to Ann Arbor’s Get Downtown initiative as a model for creating easy access to hubs of activity. We urge Syracuse, Centro, and CenterState CEO to explore how this collaborative model might work here.
- Embrace a strong county land-use plan that addresses long-term issues including sprawl, mixed-use development, and environmental stewardship. We echo County Executive Joanie Mahoney’s call for the county legislature to adopt the sustainable development plan.
- Highlight successful Complete Streets projects and encourage adoption of the Complete Street strategy for community projects wherever they will promote health and safety benefits.
- Look to the Connective Corridor’s experience in creating a Complete Streets project for examples of challenges and successes in the areas of funding, collaboration, and policy implementation.
- Ensure a commitment to “transit-oriented development” by engaging the ReZone Syracuse Project and by filling the position of a transportation planner for the city to work with SCODA.
- Expand the number of qualified municipal planners available for the county, city, towns, and villages and offer more opportunities for the training of zoning and planning lay leaders.
- Support the recommendation of the Consensus Report calling for expanded regional discussions as to how to support Centro and secure a plan to improve its long-term viability.

Public Transit

- Promote accessible and safe public transit. We urge the Human Services Leadership Council and the Moving People Transportation Coalition to continue their leadership efforts in advocating for public transit policies including long-term, stable financing.
- Align public transit to employment centers, daycare sites and schools through continued cooperation between Centro and employers and others.
- Challenge the public to be more open to riding the bus, thereby increasing the level of choice riders and helping reduce the community’s use of fossil fuels.
- Embrace, as a community, transportation innovation, including Bus Rapid Transit routes being studied as part of the SMART 1 Study of the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council.
- Pressure public officials to remove mortgage-reporting tax exemptions from PILOT agreements to increase funding to Centro.
- Advocate to state and federal officials to commit to long-term state and federal funding mechanisms for public transit and to address Upstate/Downstate parity in state transit funding, as supported by state Sen. John DeFrancisco.
- Expand the number of qualified municipal planners available for the county, city, towns, and villages and offer more opportunities for the training of zoning and planning lay leaders.
- Support the recommendation of the Consensus Report calling for expanded regional discussions as to how to support Centro and secure a plan to improve its long-term viability.

Biking and Walking

- Encourage the stakeholders behind the Elevating Erie design competition to move from dreaming to implementing a plan that will make the area attractive, safe, and beneficial for all.
- Encourage the public to approach Elevating Erie with optimism at the possibility for a significant change in the perceptions and the reality of this vital area in our community.
- Encourage the completion of the statewide Erie Canal Trail by closing the missing link in Onondaga County.
- Encourage completion of Loop the Lake Trail and the Onondaga Creekwalk.
- Encourage the city to fully implement the Syracuse Bike Plan, which will provide connections within and between Syracuse neighborhoods as well as to our local and regional trail system (Erie Canalway Trail, Loop the Lake Trail, and the Onondaga Creekwalk).
- Promote bike-commuting for work and finds ways to highlight its multiple benefits, including better health and less need for parking.
- Find ways to improve bike access and safety in corridors such as Euclid Avenue to/from Syracuse University.
- Explore successful bike-sharing programs, such as the one operated in Toronto.
- Emphasize that walking, while a necessity for some, offers health and recreational benefits to all.
- Urge the city to improve sidewalks to make them safe and accessible.

Innovation and Access

- Get beyond the barriers to new and innovative ridesharing approaches and join Upstate mayors, including Syracuse’s Stephanie Miner, in their support of state legislation to open the way for Uber, Lyft, and other peer-to-peer ridesharing across New York.
- Encourage community stakeholders to see SMTC’s work on numerous transportation-related studies as valuable, relevant data for regional planning.
- Support funding to transport city children to school, including Pre-K.
- Support the efforts of local agencies and other stakeholders to pilot and establish job-related transportation options such as increased use of shuttles.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

- Applaud Centro’s renewed level of engagement and commitment to understanding community needs and encourage continued engagement with stakeholders.
- Encourage the public to take advantage of new user-friendly services, such as Centro’s app, which provides accurate and updated bus arrival times.
- In recognition that transportation issues are always evolving, we recommend that the Moving People Transportation Coalition convene a quarterly meeting of the many citizens and stakeholders, already working on related initiatives to discuss developments and exchange information.
Bike lane: A portion of the roadway that has been designated by striping, signage, and pavement markings for the preferential or exclusive use of bicyclists.

Bumpouts: Created by visually and physically narrowing the roadway, creating safer and shorter crossings for pedestrians while increasing space for street furniture, benches, plantings, and street trees. Also known as curb extensions.

Bus bulbs: Curb extensions that align the bus stop with the parking lane, allowing buses to stop and board passengers without leaving the travel lane. Bus bulbs help buses move faster and more reliably by decreasing the amount of time lost when merging in and out of traffic.

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT): A high-quality bus-based transit system that delivers fast, comfortable, and cost-effective services at metro-level capacities. It typically includes dedicated lanes, with busways and on-street stations typically aligned to the center of the road, off-board fare collection, and fast and frequent operations.

Complete Streets: Streets designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Complete Streets Act. New York state statute (S05411A/A08366) went into effect February 15, 2012. It states that “the department or agency with jurisdiction over such projects shall consider the convenient access and mobility on the road network by all users of all ages, including motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transportation users through the use of complete street design features in the planning, design, construction, reconstruction and rehabilitation, but not including resurfacing, maintenance, or pavement recycling of such projects.”

Curb cuts: A dip in the sidewalk that enables a vehicle (like a bus) to drive to a spot for loading passengers.

Home rule: The right of a municipality to make and follow its own laws.

Light rail: A transportation system involving trolleys or other vehicle on rails on surface streets.

Mixed-use development: Development that combines residential buildings with commercial, cultural, institutional, or industrial uses.

Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO): A federally required transportation planning body comprised of elected and appointed officials representing local, state and federal governments or agencies having interest or responsibility in transportation planning and programming. The Syracuse Metro Transportation Council is an MPO.

Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA): The geographic area SMTA covers: Onondaga County, the town of Sullivan in Madison County, and the Towns of Hastings, Schroeppel, West Monroe and a small portion of Granby in Oswego County.

Road diet: A design that creates narrower travel lanes to slow vehicles and free space for other uses in the right of way. It may convert a four lane street to two through lanes, a center two-way left turn lane, and space for bicycle lanes.

Sharrow: Pavement marking that indicates motorists and cyclists share a lane. It consists of a bicycle and chevrons pointing in the direction of travel.

Smart Growth: A planning and transportation concept that encourages growth in compact, walkable areas to supports local economies, protect the environment, and avoid sprawl.

Speed humps: Vertical traffic calming devices intended to slow traffic speeds on low volume, low speed roads. They are typically 3-4 inches high and 12-14 feet wide. They reduce speeds to 15-20 mph.

Transit-oriented development (TOD): Mixed-use residential and commercial area designed to maximize access to public transit.

Relevant partners

The Central New York Regional Transportation Authority (Centro): The public transportation provider for Onondaga, Oswego, Cayuga, and Oneida counties, which includes the cities of Syracuse, Oswego, Fulton, Auburn, Rome and Utica. www.centro.org

Moving People Transportation Coalition (MPTC): Network of some 20 community organizations working together on transportation issues with the goal of a sustainable regional transportation system that focuses on moving people, not cars. www.movingpeopletransportation.org

Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency (SOCPA): An agency that provides and promotes effective planning by Onondaga County, Syracuse, and the county’s towns and villages. www.ongov.net/planning/

Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC): The local Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), or federally required transportation planning body responsible for transportation planning and programming. SMTA’s Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) includes Onondaga County, the Town of Sullivan in Madison County, and the Towns of Hastings, Schroeppel, West Monroe and a small portion of Granby in Oswego County. www.smtcmap.org

Syracuse Industrial Development Agency (SIDA): Agency whose mission is to enhance the City of Syracuse’s economic development. SIDA will achieve this mission by providing financial incentives to projects, including exemptions from property, sales, use and mortgage recording taxes, grants, and bond financing. SIDA is made up of five people, appointed by the mayor of Syracuse. www.syracuse.ny.us/syracuse_industrial_development_agency.aspx

Onondaga County Industrial Development Agency (OCIDA): County agency tasked with stimulating economic development through the use of incentives including sales, mortgage, and real property tax exemptions. A seven-member board appointed by the Onondaga County Legislature governs the agency. www.syracusecentral.com/IDA.aspx