

OCL Study Session, June 2, 2015: How CNY Moves

Meeting held at [126 North Salina Street, 100 Clinton Square](#), Syracuse – downstairs conference room

Co-chairs: Heidi Holtz and Mary Kate Intaglietta

Attendees: David Aitken, Neil Burke, Tom Carlin, Bob Dougherty, Eric Ennis, Bruce Hathaway, Deborah Hundley, Addie Finch, Connie Gregory, Daniel Kelley, Peter King, Donna Knapp, Megan Lee, Barry Lentz, Stan Linhorst, Don MacLaughlin, Tom Magnarelli, Sarah McIlvain, Melissa Menon, Pascale Mevs, Laura Miller, Carlo Moneti, Carlo Moneti, Marilyn Pinsky, Phil Prehn, Eric Rogers, Peter Sarver, Scot Vanderpol, Lisa Warnecke, Michael Watrous

OCL: Sandra Barrett and Renée K. Gadoua

Speakers: Q&A session with **James D’Agostino**, director of the [Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council](#), **Mario Colone**, SMTC program manager and **Meghan Vitale**, SMTC principal transportation planner. SMTC, the metropolitan planning organization for Central New York, has just completed work on the latest Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) for the region.

Holtz and Intaglietta reported they conducted listening tour, including meeting with Sam Gordon, director of Town of DeWitt's Planning and Zoning Department; Megan Costa, Onondaga County planning services manager; SCSD Transportation Department.

Chairs also hosted two scoping sessions in May.

Recommended blogs relevant to study:

<http://usa.streetsblog.org/>

<http://www.citylab.com/>

<http://www.streetfilms.org/about/>

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**James D’Agostino** provided an overview of the SMTC. See website for details.

SMTC made up of officials representing local, state and federal governments or agencies having interest or responsibility in comprehensive transportation and land use policies and services. Committee structure that consists of a [Policy](#), [Planning](#) and [Executive](#) Committee.

Policy Committee’s (elected and appointed officials) primary responsibility is to establish policies for the overall conduct of the SMTC.

Planning Committee, which is established by the Policy Committee, is composed of the professional/technical representatives of both the Policy Committee members and public agencies having direct or indirect responsibility for transportation planning and/or

implementation. Their primary responsibility is to monitor all technical activities including the annual development of a draft UPWP and TIP for recommendation to the Policy Committee. They shall also direct and consider for recommendation to the Policy Committee all major studies and planning activities.

Executive Committee is made up of Planning Committee members and provides oversight of the day-to-day operation of the Central Staff for financial management, personnel and other administrative requirements.

SMTC is the [Metropolitan Planning Organization \(MPO\)](#) is the policy group designated by the state. Created in 1966 to carry out the continuous, comprehensive and cooperative transportation planning process for the Syracuse Metropolitan Area, which includes all of Onondaga County and small portions of Madison and Oswego Counties. (Region is one city, 23 towns, 18 villages and the Onondaga Nation.) Tries to get all entities to sit around same table and discuss transportation issues. Includes community input.

“Basically every road project that’s inconvenienced you in the last several years has been funded through this process,” D’Agostino said.

SMTC studies transportation issues in three categories.

- [Long Range Transportation Plan \(LRTP\)](#)
- [Unified Planning Work Program \(UPWP\)](#) (annual)
- [Transportation Improvement Program \(TIP\)](#)

Region has: Total population 504,672

Bridges: 554

Roadway mileage: 4,244

On-road bike trails: 13.14 miles

Transit riders: 10 million annually

Intermodal rail lines: 1 (CSX rail line)

“It’s not just about getting people and their cars places,” D’Agostino said. Also includes freight, transit, bicycling, walking. Includes getting people to the airport, but the airport has its own policies.

SMTC works on 12-20 studies at a time. Process determines which projects get federal funding.

Re funding: “There is not as much federal funding as there used to be, and projects cost more,” D’Agostino said. “We do a lot less. You may notice the condition of some bridges and roads are not as good as you’d like them to be. That’s because the money does not exist.”

Can’t do everything, so we prioritize.

See list of relevant SMTC studies.

SMTC will hold meetings this fall for 2050 LRTP, which must be completed in October.

**Mario Colone** outlined SMTC's transit activities.

For background, Colone shared responses from recent surveys:

A. 2010 joint [Community Planning & Transportation Resident Survey](#) (SMTC and Syracuse/Onondaga County Planning Agency (SOCPA) got 900+ responses. Survey asked: "Which do you think is best solution to reducing traffic congestion in Onondaga County?"

37%: Improve public transportation

32%: Create communities where people do not have to drive as much

16%: Build new roads

14%: Encourage carpooling

"I would use express train or bus from suburbs to Syracuse if the service had convenient stops and schedules": 82% agree or strongly agree

"I would continue to drive even if other types of travel were more convenient and accessible": 50% agree or strongly agree

B. [2011 I-81 questionnaire](#)

In the US, according to Census, less than 3% use public transit to get to work. In Onondaga County, 8% do.

C. [2014 Syracuse Transit System Analysis](#) (Component to I-81 Challenge)

Transit survey May 2012, public meeting of 174 non-riders and 271 riders. Highest priorities stated: increase frequency of routes and hours of operation.

Identified potential transit enhancement corridors:

James Street: Eastwood to Downtown

Syracuse University/University Hill

South Avenue (OCC to Downtown)

W. Genesee St. (NY 5): Camillus to Downtown

Erie Boulevard (NY 5/E Genesee St. (NY 92): DeWitt to Downtown

US 11/I-81 (Including Midland Avenue): North Salina to South Salina

Possible actions: Implement corridor branding (rather than route numbers), base build, BRT, LRT

D. Syracuse Metro Area Regional Transportation Study Phase 1 (SMART) (Two-year study started in June 2015)

Follow-up to Syracuse Transit System Analysis. Will look at the feasibility and components of BRT and LRT. Looking where to connect, place stations, feasibility of bus-only lane, signal pre-emption technology

There will be significant public input.

**Meghan Vitale** outlined the 2050 Long-Range Transportation Plan. (See website for slides of plan.)

SMTC held four public meetings on the plan in April.

It is the first long-range plan since 1995; meant to be a guide for the next 35 years.

Goals of LRTP:

1. Support community planning goals (including [Onondaga County Sustainable Development Plan](#), [Vision CNY](#))
2. Transportation system performance
3. Three significant projects in the region:
  - I-81 viaduct
  - Enhanced transit
  - Expanded regional trail

Public feedback came from December 2014/January 2015 survey. 380 people responded.

“We feel like we had good goals and objectives that had been vetted by the community,” Vitale said.

Transportation goals have to be reasonable over time.

Where we live: highest density on the north side; growth along northern edge of Onondaga County.

Where we work: 57% jobs in the city are outside downtown and SU hill. Upstate is by far the largest employer. 12% of city residents walk or bike to work.

Commuter flow maps show “largest single flow in the region is by those who live and work downtown. The biggest concentration of people moving around are in the city.”

Roads and bridges: “We have a lot of roads and pavements here in poor or fair condition,” she said.

Most accidents are between motor vehicles.

Transit ridership: 2,400 people on average weekday. Busiest routes are James Street, South Salina, South Avenue.

LRTP is “not a pie in the sky wish list. We have to show we can reasonably expect funding in the future.” Based on current funding sources and allocation levels by 2030.

Most costs are for maintenance. “A very small amount is going to service enhancements,” she said. “That maintenance need is huge in the region.”

Long-range plan will be presented at public meeting this summer.

D'Agostino: "The plan does not include how to pay for I-81 and enhanced transit. Our money is already spent and we have two big projects the community wants to get done?"

SMTC started study June 2 on enhanced transit corridors. Must be "mode neutral," relevant for both light rail and BRT.

Question: How does I-81 grid fit into that plan?

D'Agostino: We acknowledge I-81, but we're moving ahead even though decision not made. It will work very well with street-level option.

Question: Who is responsible for infrastructure?

D'Agostino: When the federal government was flush, a lot of local projects were done with federal money. Now more are done with local money.

Centore explained BRT: It's not like the Centro express from Tully downtown. We're trying to make travel time more comparable to traveling by car. Possibilities are putting buses in their own lane or using signal-priority technology, which would extend green lights for buses. There would be fewer stops and specific stations.

It's unclear if current streets are wide enough for express lanes.

Question: Is there changing trend on commuter map?

Answer: After 2005, more people are working outside the city, per population changes.

D'Agostino: "Everyone thinks transit ideas are better for everyone else: 'Everyone should ride the bus, but not me.'"

D'Agostino: "We have an abundance of parking and affordable parking in the urban center. That's one of the reasons you cannot get people out of their cars."

If we want to make the middle class walk to work, we have to make parking more expensive: "We have to change that expectation that when you go to the city, it's not going to be the same experience as in the suburbs."

Efforts continue on Erie Canalway Trail between Camillus and DeWitt.

Canal Corp is getting signage.

Some pieces of temporary route may open soon. Parts of temporary route may become permanent.

Water Street envisioned as permanent part of trail because of historic relevance and lack of traffic.

Could Erie Boulevard include shared lane/bike path down the middle?

Syracuse area's Canalway plan last in the state to be completed. "We don't own the streets," D'Agostino said. "We need a champion for the project."

It could be commuter and recreational.

The last federal transportation bill ended May 31, 2015. Congress extended it for 60 days.

D'Agostino: "You cannot do transportation plans that take six years by extending it 60 days."

Question: Is there an effort to make sure poor in the city have access to jobs outside the city?

D'Agostino: SMTC previously used Ladders of Opportunity program to make sure transportation is not a barrier for people. "It is a very hard problem to crack," he said. There were programs and money in the 1990s, but funding has evaporated.

Also noted: James Street, South Ave. transportation corridors do run through economically challenged neighborhoods.

One way to save money is to close redundant bridges, a solution D'Agostino notes is unlikely/

Re: ride-sharing/carpooling: SMTC studied it a few years back, but no entity wanted to host service. D'Agostino said programs exist that could work here.

About 700 SU employees share rides. About half are students with one-time rides.

RE: Sidewalk clearing: SOCPA asked SMTC to inventory sidewalks and conditions. Snow removal issue hard to solve. "You need policies," D'Agostino said.

### **Upcoming study sessions:**

**Wednesday, June 17, 12-1:30 p.m.** in the **SUNY Oswego Metro Center at 100 South Salina Street** (the Atrium office building on Clinton Square) in **Room 129**. Coffee, tea & water, sweets will be provided. Feel free to bring a brown bag lunch. Session will include review of Maxwell School students' **MPA Capstone project** exploring some best practices and model programs in transportation systems. **Megan Costa**, assistant director of Onondaga County Planning, will also present.

Meeting schedule will follow this pattern:

- First Tuesday of each month, 4:30-6 p.m. – Locations TBA
- Third Wednesday of each month, 12-1:30 p.m. – SUNY Oswego Metro Center.

Submitted by Renée K. Gadoua, study writer