AIACNY I-81 Task Force : January 2016 update

Over the decades, our CNY Chapter of the American Institute of Architects has served both social and professional agenda. And each of these has significant benefits to each of its members. The professional agenda offers regular continuing education and learning events in the technical and legal areas, while the highlight of the many social events culminates in the public recognition of “Design Excellence”, an annual announcement to our clients and our community of the benefits of good design, and how Architecture can enhance the quality of the community we live in. This is a wonderful balance for a professional organization, and we are lucky to be able to exercise the skills and knowledge we continually develop in our everyday endeavors.

The role of our chapter’s “I-81 Task Force”, a focused subcommittee of the long standing Urban Design Committee, is evolving in response to the current EIS phase of the NYS DOT “I-81 Viaduct Project”. For the past 2-1/2 years, since the summer of 2013, the Task Force has been in a “research & discovery” mode, and providing its findings to the NYS DOT design team. As the DOT process continues, the Task Force sees its role moving into an “advocacy & education” role in 2016.

The DOT works in a linear path, checking off their prescribed tasks one by one. Count the cars, check the bridges, deliver public presentations, write summary reports, and then start the next phase. It is not like the creative design process typical to the Architectural design we are used to. The DOT tends to do their design options first, show them to the public, and then asking for their response. Then the DOT makes small changes to their first ideas. It tends to be all about rebuilding what was built before.

The Chapter Task Force continues to ask the DOT to: - create a balanced evaluation criteria appropriate to the Syracuse urban context; - provide multiple access and egress connections between the highway and the street grid below; - plan to utilize the unused capacity of the city streets to move traffic more efficiently; - improve traffic choices for daily commuters; - keep traffic moving by including “roundabout” standards in the planning options; - provide multiple access points to the University Hill area, including new dedicated connections from the “north” & “south”, and two access points from the “west”; - compare the long term economic development potential of the land below the different options; - plan to redistribute current highway congestion points; - reduce FHWA requires highway speeds within city limits; - reverse the negative environmental impact of the I-81 viaduct on the quality of the residential, hospital and business surroundings; - inform commuters how their commutes can be more efficient; -

MORE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

At the same time Governor Cuomo announced that former mayor Matt Driscoll would be the new Commissioner of the DOT, he also appointed Ron Thaniel as NYS Deputy Secretary for Transportation. Featured by Governing Magazine as “The Man Behind U.S. Transportation’s Future,” Mr. Thaniel has served on executive committees of numerous national transportation organizations, and is a member of the Washington, D.C. transportation think tank Eno Center for Transportation Policy.

The recent Upstate Revitalization Initiative (URI) $500M award to the CNY region deserves congratulations to the planning teams involved. As the schematic planning develops for the “Inland Port” project of the URI, the new transportation impact on the regional I-81 & I-481 will need to factored into the I-81 planning. This is a new programming issue, potentially adding
400-700 trucks daily to the regional Interstate system. Preliminary discussions have been initiated between the DOT and the “Inland Port” project team. The impact on the I-81 planning could be significant.

**Roundabouts**

State & Federal standards for “roundabouts” are proven to keep traffic moving while reducing potential for pedestrian & vehicle conflict points.
The City of Dallas is looking to redevelop a section of the city currently occupied by I-345, with issues similar to our “DOT I-81 Viaduct Project”.

Their website

“A New Dallas” is subtitled:

“Highway 345 is falling apart. We think it should be turned down. Here’s why.”

“The Vision” shows potential redevelopment of the land under the current I-345 through the center of Dallas

Check out the full website:

http://www.anewdallas.com/index.html

You can **FOLLOW THE PROGRESS** and view all the DOT presentations to the “Stakeholders Working Advisory Groups” on the DOT project website at www.dot.ny.gov/i81opportunities

You can **EXPRESS YOUR VIEWS**: “Please visit the DOT design team at the I-81 Opportunities Outreach Center in the historic Carnegie building at the corner of Montgomery Street and East Jefferson Street. The office is open on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM.

For the “I-81 Task Force” of the AIACNY; Your support is welcome. Please check our website http://aiacny.org/ for upcoming meeting times and more information on the I-81 project which will set the character of our city for decades. (Bob Haley, for the Task Force)