Recent NYS DOT “SAWG’s” meetings

The NYS DOT held two more “Strategic Advisory Working Group” presentations in the last week of January 2016. These are the 2 groups of local “stakeholders” invited by the DOT at the start of the project in May 2013, to act as “working groups” to provide a “local, and informed” response to the DOT proposals being developed. The topic for the month is presented over two days, in similar 3-hour sessions, to Community representatives forming local “Economic Development” and “Sustainable Planning” experience.

The subject for the January meeting was the “Economic Analysis” of factors impacting the I-81 Project. This is intended to investigate possible economic advantages and disadvantages of the (4) remaining Alternatives identified in the Final Scoping Report (FSR) of April 2015. The initial background information was presented. We were told the “Economic Analysis” was just starting and would be developed further as we proceed. Unfortunately, the attendance of our community representatives at these DOT meetings was about a third of the participants invited.

The AIA Task Force has been working with the DOT for over 2-1/2 years now. The goals and concepts for healing the urban context of the city were accepted and have informed the current “Community Grid” option proposed by the DOT design team. However there are shortcomings in the current DOT planning which continue to need attention and development. The basic concept, for this smallish city, is to provide multiple access points to the University Hill area, to reduce the current funneling of all the suburban commuters to a single point of access. By providing more options of well sized, signaled and signed city streets for commuters, the current congestion, delays and resulting degradation of city properties will be eliminated. Fundamental to these ideas from 2+ years ago, the “at-grade” option needs to continue the “Community Grid” south, to a street level intersection at Colvin St. This option would investigate the option of elimination the highway above the RR neat the Syracuse Housing Authority, and running the street under the same RR line. These studies which the DOT said they would investigate, have not yet been done.
Concept Diagrams for Multiple Access Points to the University Hill area

These images are not DOT images, but do represent the possible access points requested by in the current most “I-81 Viaduct Project” stakeholders. The DOT has not yet fully addressed these options to alleviate current traffic congestion in the city center.
SYRACUSE is in the NATIONAL NEWS: News from the Federal DOT level: US Secretary of Transportation Andrew Foxx speaks about Syracuse

This article by US Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx appears in the most recent State of Black America. Here Foxx once again offers the I-81 viaduct through Syracuse as an example of how "...injustices of an earlier time are literally still part of the map."

Roads can be built to divide or they can be built to bring communities together... That's why we must learn from past mistakes so that we can build an infrastructure system that gives everyone a real shot at success.

Five decades ago, residents of the first public housing development in Syracuse, New York – the vast majority of whom were African American – saw their homes torn down and a massive highway constructed in their place. The highway was a 1.4-mile stretch of I-81 called “the viaduct,” but to some residents, it became known by a different name. They called it “The Berlin Wall.” For half a century, the I-81 has quite clearly separated the haves from the have-nots in Syracuse. It has turned the surrounding community into a “dead zone,” a neighborhood without even a grocery store in reach.

In too many places in this country, not just in Syracuse, the injustices of an earlier time are literally still part of the map. Two generations ago, when many of our rails, transit systems and roads were built, they were built like the I-81. Yes, they connected some Americans to better schools and better jobs. But they left other Americans – particularly African Americans – locked out of those opportunities.

Follow “Beyond Traffic” <https://www.transportation.gov/BeyondTraffic>

Beyond Traffic states: “many of our roads, bridges and transit systems… were built BY past generations, FOR past generations”……Technology Changes Everything……“in 30 years, how will you travel?”

www.transportation.gov/BeyondTraffic>
CNU Features Syracuse Planning as “Campaign City”

The Congress of New Urbanism (CNU) has listed the Syracuse I-81 Viaduct Project as one of its 14+ “Campaign Cities”. Campaigns represent places across the world where highway removal efforts in which CNU, CNU members, and our allies are actively engaged. Our CNY AIA Chapter was instrumental in facilitating the visit of the CNU “NY Regional Summit in Syracuse” symposium in October 2013. You can the “Campaign Cities” at:

<https://www.cnu.org/our-projects/highways-boulevards/campaign-cities>
An ongoing frustration for most of the Stakeholders Groups, is the lack of any real definitive progress on the questions asked of the DOT design team over the past year and a half. At this point, we still have no comparisons of the of (4) Options for: 1) construction cost, 2) 50-year life-cycle cost including annual maintenance cost (which varies substantially between the low-tech “Community Grid” option, and the high-tech “Tunnel” option), 3) construction schedule time-line projection, 4) nor a comparison of the economic impact to the community of the different construction schedules (varying minimally from 2+/- years to 6-7+/- years), and 5) a list of the comparative criteria for evaluating the (4) options.

Good News….The DOT is opening new dialogs with representatives of the neighborhoods adjacent to the highway planning. Both Syracuse University and the Syracuse Housing Authority are scheduled to release the results of their Master Plans currently underway.

What’s Needed?…..(editorial)…

"Planning & Design visualizations of “The Future We Want” for our CNY Towns & Villages

At this time only a few of the Towns & Villages in the CNY area have a visions plan for their future. The Town of DeWitt has integrated their wetlands and Exit 35 Hotel District into an exercise network of pathways. Other Towns could use this model for their future planning. The Town of Salina, with both suburban sprawl and a strong village center, needs to see visualizations and economic analysis of how their land values will increase, by applying the “Smart Growth” concepts of increased density and multi-use land planning. The Architectural community, especially the “new guard”, could make a significant contribution and take leadership in this process.

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 I-81 OUTREACH CENTER 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)