

When a Highway Divides a City

Improving Decision Making in Syracuse, New York



ABSTRACT. Acting on the most vexing public problems requires more than just good social science and hard data. Acting on public problems requires creativity and innovation in how we build, maintain, and strengthen relationships while engaged in problem solving. This case study engages that challenge by working through the complex social and technical aspects of what to do about an aging interstate running through the heart of downtown Syracuse, NY. Stakeholders and citizens are polarized about what to do, and misinformation and mistrust is rampant. The case presents the issue in detail, before asking readers to develop a project proposal that will depolarize the situation and improve public and stakeholder engagement.



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INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Syracuse, New York, What To Do about Interstate 81?

Syracuse, New York, is in the midst of polarization concerning a critical transportation infrastructure question. Interstate 81 (I-81), running through the heart of downtown Syracuse, is rapidly deteriorating, and deciding what to do about the aging Interstate is a vexing problem that challenges lawmakers, planning officials, and citizens to make many decisions affecting their community. By 2017, a 15-mile stretch of the highway, which runs through and around Syracuse, will reach the end of its useful life, but most of the controversy has concerned a 1.4-mile elevated stretch of I-81 that runs through downtown Syracuse, a portion locals refer to as “the viaduct.” Four feasible options for resolving this issue focus largely on the 1.4-mile portion: (1) close the Interstate and convert it into a street-level boulevard, diverting highway traffic around the city to the Interstate 481 beltway; (2) rehabilitate the existing viaduct by removing and replacing the Interstate at current Federal Highway Administration standards; (3) remove and rebuild the Interstate below-grade, as a covered tunnel; (4) remove and rebuild the Interstate below-grade, as an uncovered tunnel. While these options have emerged as the most feasible, some city and county leaders have cautioned that other innovative options may still exist, but what those options might be is not very clear.

I-81 was built at the end of 1950s and early 1960s to service local commuters in the metropolitan area, but has long served as an important through route for regional and international trade. The elevated Interstate services local and incoming traffic to the University Hill area where Syracuse University, the State University of New York School of Environmental Science and Forestry, and an important hospital district are all located. The Interstate supports access to those institutions for suburban communities while easing work commutes and enabling shoppers to travel between the northern suburbs and downtown Syracuse. However, many point out that a dividing line exists in the city: on the east side of I-81 are prosperous institutions on the University Hill and a majority of the city’s population of white citizens, and on the west side, a concentration of poverty and a majority of the city’s population of black citizens (see Appendix A and B).

This demarcation of wealth makes the Interstate a path into prosperity for some and a wall barring others from it. Many have long identified the Interstate as a wall: “It was a city divided,” Syracuse Common Council President Van Robinson said, speaking about arriving in Syracuse decades ago. “In fact, I immediately, at that time ... called it the ‘Berlin Wall’” (Seward 2012). As of January 2014, Syracuse had a population of nearly 145,000 and a poverty level of 33.6%, more than twice that of the state of New York and one of the highest in the country for a city of its size (United States Census Bureau 2014). For an impoverished mid-sized city like Syracuse, a

major infrastructure project carries economic potential for the region, but also drives controversy.

When we look around the country, massive infrastructure projects, such as interstate construction, have always been highly controversial, with conflict revolving “around aesthetics, some around strategies preferred by commercial and industrial interests, some around transportation system efficiency, some around a nascent concern for environmental protection and historical and neighborhood preservation, and some around race” (DiMento 2009, 138). In Syracuse, all these issues are very much at play as decision makers and the public wrestle with how to reconcile and address these competing interests.

The Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC), New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), and the Federal Highway Administration (FHA), are the three main governmental bodies in charge of this project. They are important decision makers on this issue. The SMTC is designated by the state to plan and implement projects in the metropolitan area. The NYSDOT is the state body that technically owns the interstate, and the FHA sets federal standards and will inevitably pay for as much as 80 percent of the associated project costs. Despite these mandates, many in Syracuse are still frustrated by the scarcity of legitimacy among decision makers. Between 2009 and 2013 there’s been significant public participation; however, these efforts have primarily been informational, aimed at communicating project proposals and objectives to the public. While a variety of stakeholders from professional associations and geographic areas have been engaged in the process, there have been few attempts to convene citizens or stakeholders with differing views in the same meeting.

Decision makers are committed to public engagement but may simply lack the process expertise and are not viewed by the community as a neutral convener. Participation Works, a small nonprofit firm in Syracuse, has recognized the opportunity to submit a proposal to NYSDOT and SMTC that addresses this public engagement deficit. To help with this task, staff at Participation Works have collected information about the history of I-81 (Section One), compiled a technical analysis of the Interstate and mapped relevant stakeholders (Section Two), and assembled a collection of process proposals to help guide their proposal application moving forward (Section Three). Your job is to review these materials and write a two- to three-page proposal addressed to NYSDOT/SMTC. Further information about your task will be provided to you throughout the case.

SECTION ONE: UNDERSTANDING THE HISTORY OF INTERSTATE 81

Following World War II President Eisenhower bolstered a vision of a national highway system. This vision was eventually translated into policy when Congress passed the Federal Highway Act of 1956, which would use federal funds for 50 percent or more of the cost of national highway projects. This agreement was important to the national interest: federal funds would flow into American cities providing needed infrastructure improvements and funds for economic revitalization to help employ recently returned veterans. This strongly incentivized highway construction, an incentive that often trumped social and ethical concerns over the clearing of neighborhoods for construction.

Syracuse was a particularly important location to federal planners, since it falls along a natural path among Canada, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania—producers and consumers of a large portion of the nation’s commerce. But as Jim DiMento (2009, p. 135), a law professor at the University of California, points out, in Syracuse there was little “consideration of housing needs of those displaced, environmental and historical preservation, and broad-based citizen participation.” Public input processes, such as we expect them today, simply were not part of the legal or social fabric of the United States before the 1960s. In this era, decision making was largely left to experts and technocrats—while public views and perspectives were not deliberately ignored, public input was an afterthought, and the environmental impact assessments required today were still far off into the future (Aleshire 1972).

The Syracuse–Onondaga County Post-War Planning Council initially proposed an Interstate route through the city (I-81) and a beltway around it (I-481) in 1944 (Dimento 2009, p. 169). Syracuse had dramatically outgrown its infrastructure, and state planners had high goals set for a major highway through Syracuse that would decrease traffic problems and help move commerce. “There was little controversy about whether the urban freeway plans should go forward. All Syracuse mayors, planners with few exceptions, and most businesspeople were supportive” (DiMento 2013, p. 170). For the economic elite interested in growing commerce throughout the region, the highway was a promising injection of federal dollars with auspicious commercial gains to come.

The Legacy of Urban “Slum Clearance”

At the time, the 15th Ward, a historic community comprised of mostly African American and immigrant Jewish, Italian, and Irish residents, found itself right in the middle of the proposed I-81 route. This fits an unfortunate narrative associated with urban planning in the mid–20th century. Many developers saw highway projects as opportunities where “...blighted and slum areas could be redeemed through the proper location of expressways” (DiMento 2009, p. 173).

Indeed, the 15th Ward was largely populated with substandard housing, many lacking basic facilities like indoor plumbing. Congress for the New Urbanism listed I-81 as number ten in their 2010 “Freeways Without Futures” listing. They describe its legacy damningly: “construction of Interstate 81 (I-81) in Syracuse in 1957 destroyed a historic black community, ruined the economic activity within the area, and caused major barriers to development ever since” (Congress for the New Urbanism 2010). Even though there were relocation programs for displaced residents, this legacy drives cynicism toward public participation today, and some would say the community has been trying to piece itself together ever since.

In 1955, the city and state planners applied for funds to remove residents from the city’s 15th Ward and began Interstate construction the next year: “A total of 3,337 families, of which 812 are Negro [sic], are scheduled for displacement in Syracuse in the next three and a half years, from 1957 to 1960, because of government action” (DiMento 2009, p. 179, quoting from a *Post-Standard* article). As the project moved forward in 1957, families were uprooted from their community, but not without protest. In fact, the Central New York chapter of the New York Civil Liberties Union was founded in 1963 after more than 100 people were arrested for protesting: “police were harassing and arresting residents of the predominantly black 15th Ward, who were protesting the state’s seizure and destruction of their homes to build Interstate 81” (Gewanter 2014). Despite social protest, construction and relocation began in 1955 and continued for ten years.

SECTION TWO: SYRACUSE AND INTERSTATE 81 TODAY

Interstate 81: Facts and Technical Information

The New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) and Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) began studying the project in 2008. Through public and stakeholder participation and technical analysis, NYSDOT and SMTC have produced a great deal of information, much of which is summarized below. This section lays out important facts about I-81 and the dominant approaches to fixing the aging Interstate before mapping out the dominant stakeholders. Here are some useful facts:

- Average daily traffic spans between 44,000 and 99,000 cars, depending on the exit (I-81 Challenge Physical Conditions Analysis, p. 5).
- On certain portions running through Syracuse, the accident rate is three to five times the state average. This is because the interstate is narrow and curvy.
- Around 90% of traffic on I-81 is local (used by people in the metropolitan area).
- NYSDOT owns the road and makes the final decision; they vest authority in the SMTC to manage the road. The FHA is also a major steward; since they fund the project, they set the standards.
- If the highway is removed and rebuilt, it will have to be widened to meet updated highway standards, resulting in the further demolition of buildings along the viaduct portion of the Interstate.
- SMTC defines the viaduct technically as a 4,097-foot bridge with 124 bridge spans. While most controversy and attention has focused on this portion of the highway, the NYSDOT/SMTC is studying the entire 12-mile portion of the Interstate.
- Since it is an Interstate, the FHA and NYSDOT pay for maintenance, including the exit and entrance ramps, and the arterials coming off of them. If the state and city were to reclassify the highway into a boulevard, maintenance would become a local issue, and traffic would be rerouted around to Interstate 481.
- Syracuse does have an Interstate bypass, Interstate 481, which runs from the south to north side of the city along the eastern outskirts of the city, but there is no western side to the loop (Appendix A).

By 2017, a 12-mile portion of the highway will reach the end of its useful life but most analysis and conflict has occurred over a roughly 1.4 mile elevated span through Syracuse. The following six options have risen as the most feasible options for the viaduct portion of the Interstate:

1. No-build: this option looks at maintenance only. (It is essentially a baseline that is not feasible since the highway would have to be widened.)

2. Rehabilitation: This option lays out a long-term plan to rehabilitate the viaduct, but again, the Interstate would still have to be widened.
3. Above-grade reconstruction: This option will remove and replace the elevated viaduct (price tag = \$650-\$900 million).
4. At-grade surface construction: This option removes the Interstate and replaces it with a street level boulevard, rerouting traffic around Syracuse to I-481 (price tag = \$650-\$900 million).
5. Below-grade tunnel: This option removes the viaduct and builds an underground tunnel (price tag = \$1.3-\$1.8 billion).
6. Below-grade depressed Interstate: This option removes the Interstate and replaces it with an uncovered highway (price tag = \$1.3-\$1.8 billion).

According to an analysis from The I-81 Challenge White Paper #3, SMTC found that most citizens and stakeholders see the “at-grade surface construction” and the “above-grade reconstruction” as the two most feasible approaches. Project decision makers have also found these two options to be the most technically feasible for the viaduct portion of the highway, and found any kind of rehabilitation to be infeasible for that same portion. According to SMTC/NYS DOT’s analysis of public participation, participants also view these two options as competing with one another. Most public discourse and technical analysis has essentially concluded that the tunnel and below grade options would be too expensive to sell to state and federal officials. This has caused some locals to scoff that state and federal officials are simply looking for the least expensive option (Weaver July 9, 2013).

Mapping Important Stakeholders

While there are many groups and associations involved, here are a few of the most vocal stakeholders:

- The “Decision Makers”:
 - New York State Department of Transportation
 - Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council
 - Federal Highway Administration
- Syracuse University
- Syracuse Councilor Van Robinson
- The Save 81 Coalition and Onondaga County Legislature
- The Onondaga Citizens League
- The *Post-Standard*
- Onondaga County Executive Joanie Mahoney and Mayor Stephanie Miner

The “Decision Makers”

New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) Commissioner Joan McDonald acknowledged that the highway was built with “very, very little community input,” and James D’Agostino, Director of the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC), has recognized that “[Building I-81] impacted low-income communities more than other areas ... Whether it being a barrier is real or perceived, that’s something we’re going to look at” (Weaver 2013). Along with NYSDOT, the SMTC formed the I-81 Challenge, which is the official decision-making process, in 2009-2013. The I-81 Challenge has a dual focus to (1) conduct public participation and (2) conduct technical studies of proposed plans. The I-81 Challenge had well attended public events in May 2011, May 2012, and May 2013 that they describe on their website:

1. Nearly 500 to 700 participants at each of the three public meetings, with an additional 200 to 300 participants in each of the virtual online meetings.
2. About 400 unique users visited the study website per month, with much higher numbers around public meetings.
3. 352 Facebook followers.
4. 23 focus group meetings held throughout region.
5. Over 20 meetings held with community groups.
6. 4,300 individuals and businesses received meeting notices.
7. Over 1,200 email addresses received twenty-eight study messages.

In late 2013, the I-81 Challenge concluded and NYSDOT and SMTC began the I-81 Opportunities phase of the project. This new phase differs in that the state must officially conduct the federally and state mandated Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that assesses the social and environmental sustainability of any project. The study will look at proposals three through six in the EIS. They must do this to qualify for FHA funding, which is projected to be as much as 80% of the total cost of the infrastructure project. According to Syracuse reporter Teri Weaver, NYSDOT will likely contract the EIS with a private firm (July 9, 2013). NYSDOT projects the analysis will cost \$32 million. These “decision makers” sympathize with the legacy associated with this project, but they primarily view this conflict through the neutral eyes of the professional administrators.

Syracuse University

Under the leadership of Chancellor Nancy Cantor, Syracuse University (SU) (Chancellor from 2004-2013) has for years been worried about the effects on the community of I-81. This concern is rooted in diverse interests: for one, SU views the highway as land-locking this growing University, but the institution also has a historic commitment to diversity and social

justice. Reflecting this growth, SU purchased The Warehouse, a building just west of Interstate-81 that hosts University classes and functions, bringing many students, faculty, and staff across the dividing line. In a 2011 presentation Chancellor Cantor made both points clear, highlighting that the University was “only a 15-minute walk from downtown, but for years Interstate 81 has created and symbolized a divide” (p. 4-5). Recognizing this division the Chancellor pursued the Connective Corridor, a broad vision to connect the University, downtown, and Near West side (a neighborhood area west of I-81) together with a bus system (Appendix A). The University also spearheaded the formation of the Near Westside Initiative in 2006, which “leverages the resources of SU, the state, the city, private foundations, businesses, not-for-profit corporations, and neighborhood residents to achieve its goals” (Rethinking I-81 2009). In addition, professors and students affiliated with the Syracuse University School of Architecture launched Alt-81 in late 2013, a project to highlight the issue of connectivity (UPSTATE 2014). Their work has highlighted the potential of tearing down the Interstate and focusing on a traditional city grid system. Syracuse University has been a powerful and clear voice to tear down the Interstate and build an at-grade boulevard. They believe this would piece the city back together and begin to mend the broken ties that exist.

Syracuse Common Council President Van Robinson

For at least a decade, Syracuse Common Council President Van Robinson, has led the charge to tear down I-81. In a July 24, 2012 story, Robinson likened I-81 to the Berlin Wall, with prosperous universities and hospitals on one side, and poorer neighborhoods on the other. This likening of I-81 to a “Berlin wall” is not confined to Robinson. Others, mostly limited to a West and South Side neighborhoods perspective, have adopted this vivid rhetoric. According to Bethany Bump, “Memories of I-81’s construction and stories told by parents and grandparents linger in the minds of South Side residents. The interstate is a barrier to the rest of the city — physically and symbolically — community members have said.” One Syracuse resident addressed current plans in a letter to the editor published at Syracuse.com:

To the Editor:

I'm not that concerned as to whether we tear down Interstate 81 through the city or not. I'm convinced that at the end of the 1950s, certain powers that be who wanted the 15th Ward for their personal properties connived with the federal government to declare eminent domain and erect I-81 in order to achieve their purpose.

We had a close-knit community, and along comes urban renewal -- or, as I call it, urban removal. It split us up, scattered us all over town. Now as I pass through that community, all I see are office buildings and parking lots. So it's a little late to care whether they keep it or tear it down.

Central A. Williams, Syracuse

In a reply to that post, “Mycuse” replied: “Rt 81 was the worst decision ever made for this city. It cut the city in 2 — and has been going downhill ever since. This city will never recover.” Half a century has passed, and still these feelings of injustice are pervasive among many residents. And indeed they have reason to be concerned. In 2010, Syracuse was identified as the ninth most segregated city in the U.S. between the city’s population of residents who are black and residents who are white (Knauss February 16, 2010; Appendix A). Council President Van Robinson leads the charge among a vocal but unorganized group of citizens to tear down I-81.

The Save 81 Coalition and Onondaga County Legislature

The Save 81 Coalition is the most prominent interest group involved. They launched in the summer of 2013 as a coalition of business, government, and prominent citizens who believe that rerouting traffic around Syracuse on Interstate 481 would harm the broader community. As they write, “Rerouting I-81 around the city could harm the region ... and might pose problems for public safety by creating more traffic in Syracuse which is known as the ‘20-minute city’” (savei81.org). Most Save 81 Coalition members are suburban, particularly in the northern suburbs, where elected leaders and business people fear that tearing down the highway would make commuting to downtown difficult, decrease access to the University Hill, and decrease business traffic to the north. Save 81 is backed in part by business interests of Destiny USA, one of the largest malls in the country, which is located in the northernmost part of Syracuse. The Interstate feeds traffic directly to the mall, and replacing I-81 with a boulevard, they argue, could make it more difficult for city residents to get there and potentially limit access from the Pennsylvania market to the south and the Canadian market to the north.

In November 2013, the Save 81 Coalition paid an outside interest group to conduct a telephone poll on the issue. The questions, however, have been controversial. Here’s an example: “The increased traffic the boulevard will create will force families to spend more in gas for their cars at a time when we can least afford it. Does this raise major doubts, minor doubts, or no real doubts about replacing parts of I-81 with a boulevard?” (Knauss November 10, 2013). This poll was conducted in advance of several public meetings held by SMTC in November 2013. The poll reported that 55 percent of respondents wanted to maintain I-81 and only 18 percent preferred the boulevard option. The poll surveyed about 400 people, but no information about how the sample was obtained is available. In addition, on May 7, 2013, the Onondaga County Legislature, dominated mostly by suburban representatives, unanimously adopted a resolution against the at-grade boulevard option. These two groups are powerful voices against the at-grade boulevard option, and advocate in favor of any option that maintains the Interstate.

The Onondaga Citizens League

The Onondaga Citizens League (OCL) was founded in 1978 as a nonprofit organization to support public participation and citizen engagement on important public policy issues. Each year they publish a report designed to stimulate public attention on a pressing public problem. In 2008 they began focusing on I-81, concluding that replacing the Interstate with an at-grade boulevard was desirable and would benefit communities in the area. Their report *Rethinking I-81* (2009) argued that “cities that removed elevated highways from downtown areas experienced improved connectivity between neighborhoods, stimulated economic growth, and created a more attractive, sustainable, and safe, urban environment” (p. 7). The OCL has supported the at-grade boulevard proposal and from 2008 to 2011 set up a dedicated blog (oclblog.wordpress.com) to promote this idea; however, their advocacy has trailed off since 2011.

Post-Standard

Syracuse’s daily newspaper, *The Post-Standard*, along with its online arm, *Syracuse.com*, have been an important source of information about public meetings. They fact check groups’ claims and provide other sources of insight into the issue. As evidenced from this analysis, they are one of the consistent groups involved, and their coverage dates back to the original construction of the Interstate. According to The Media Audit, a national media studies company, the print and online combination in Syracuse (owned by Advanced Publications) had the seventh highest market penetration in the nation as of 2012. In the metropolitan area, the paper-online duo reaches about 50 percent of adults, more than 250,000 people. The paper has served as an information conduit for stakeholders and elected officials, and as a critical point of entry for citizens into the conversation. The editorial board has not backed any option.

Onondaga County Executive Joanie Mahoney and Syracuse Mayor Stephanie Minor

Finally, the Onondaga County Executive and Syracuse Mayor are important voices. The two were critical in joining together with NYSDOT to open the I-81 Outreach Center in late 2013 in downtown Syracuse to keep residents informed as the project moves forward. Mayor Minor, with her staunch focus on the city of Syracuse, has yet to actively advocate for any particular option, but she released a letter to NYSDOT Commissioner McDonald arguing that the Syracuse community has been “provided with very limited information regarding a number of project elements including the decision-making process, project timelines and particularly specific design, community, economic development, environmental, traffic and other ramifications that may be associated with the major alternatives under considerations, as well as variations of these alternatives” (Weaver January 29, 2014). County Executive Mahoney has been more partial, however, voting with the Onondaga County Legislature on the resolution against the at-grade boulevard option. Her focus, and job, is clearly more with promoting a thriving business

climate countywide. However, sensing NYSDOT/SMTC was moving toward the two cheapest options (at-grade boulevard or above-grade reconstruction), she has argued that all options should still be on the table—tunnel, depressed highway, or another innovative approach (Coin 2013).

SECTION THREE: DEVELOPING A PROPOSAL TO MOVE FORWARD

As the I-81 Challenges process came to a close in late 2013 and gave way to the I-81 Opportunities phase, decision makers have realized they are faced with a dilemma. Despite what they thought was broad engagement on the issue, Syracuse is becoming more polarized and 2017 is rapidly approaching. NYSDOT has contracted with a private firm to do a technical study of the Interstate, and more data will be available in spring 2014 and on a continual basis for the next year or more. But that doesn't solve the problem: what to do about Interstate 81? Responding to this urgency, your firm, Participation Works, has decided to submit a proposal to SMTC to improve the decision-making process. Your firm has asked you to take the lead. The analysis that follows was conducted by Participation Works, and the five proposals at the end of the section were developed as process cheat-sheets, to guide you in developing a strategy.

Public Participation Analysis

The New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) along with the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) have led the I-81 Challenge from 2009 to 2013 to develop technical analysis and conduct public participation. At the heart of this has been a complicated public participation process that has included focus groups, professional meetings, and large-scale public meetings. In May 2009, NYSDOT released its White Paper #1 detailing seven objectives for The I-81 Challenge, summarized here:

Objective 1: Engage diverse stakeholders.

Objective 2: Communicate, educate and receive input from those stakeholders.

Objective 3: Foster understanding among those stakeholders about the history and direction of the highway.

Objective 4: Support the sharing of ideas across interest groups and geographic areas.

Objective 5: Reach out to minority and underserved populations.

Objective 6: Engage public opinions, values and interests.

Objective 7: Build trust and ensure transparency about the process.

These objectives have informed the public participation process and will continue to do so moving forward. Three committees were formed by NYSDOT/SMTC and have been involved at various stages:

1. *The Study Advisory Committee (SAC)* established in March 2008 includes about 30 local and state groups, which are mostly elected officials or professional groups, such as, county and city transportation services, the city of Syracuse, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (a complete list appears in White Paper #3). These groups met nine times between March 2008 and May 2011 to advise the process and help recruit

participants to public meetings. They then met three additional times between May 2011 and May 2013.

2. *The Community Liaison Committee (CLC)* was established in 2011 after the initial public meetings to further communication channels and provide additional input into the planning process. While the SAC was established by invitation, the CLC was established through an open application and includes a mix of 38 groups representing diverse perspectives, such as the Sierra Club, Syracuse University, Onondaga Central Schools, New York Motor Truck Association, and others (a complete list appears in White Paper #3). The CLC met twice between forming in May 2011 and the conclusion of the I-81 Challenges phase. It's not clear why they met so infrequently.

3. *The Municipal Liaison Committee (MLC)* is meant to include the 42 municipalities within the SMTC planning area. However, only seven municipalities have participated. These members met twice between being formed in March 2011 and the conclusion of the I-81 Challenges phase.

The first series of open public participation meetings were held in downtown Syracuse on May 3, 4, and 7 in 2011. These four-hour meetings were designed to educate the public, gather input, and refine the objectives outlined above. Over the course of these meetings, more than 700 people participated in person, and about 200 people participated through an online system. The meeting was set up with eight stations. The first seven stations were designed as a combination of information booths, which included videos, charts, and text detailing options and feasibility studies. Some stations provided opportunities for feedback, mostly in the form of sticky notes posted in response to particular questions, or as a reaction to the objectives listed above. Station eight had facilitated breakout groups with a note-taker to record participant ideas. Participants were given the opportunity to talk together about their concerns, values, and goals for the I-81 project. These breakout groups were typically about 30 minutes long and were held every hour.

Two additional large-scale, day-long open public participation meetings were held, one in May 2012 and the other in May 2013. Similar to the May 2011 meeting, these meetings were set up in a station format designed to present the status of the planning process, educate about transportation and planning issues, and gather further feedback. At the 2012 meeting, approximately 500 people participated in person and 250 online. At the 2013 meeting, approximately 700 people participated in person and more than 300 online. See Appendix C for additional information about attendees and Appendix D for a breakdown of public comments received. Most meetings have engaged professionals and policy makers, and suburban populations are reported to comprise most of the citizens who have showed up to public meetings. Though an accurate reporting of this does not exist, the closest approximation has been tracking citizens who self-report their zip code (see Appendix C).

Proposals

Proposal One: Deliberative Polling

Summary: A deliberative poll conducts public engagement through random sampling. According to scholar John Gastil, “the deliberative poll seeks to track how a set of individual opinion statements change when survey respondents are hit by a wave of information” (2008, p. 204). The process is geared toward understanding what a random or stratified sample of the public believes given access to high-quality information and the opportunity to deliberate. Over the past few decades over 50 deliberative polls have been held, and studies have shown that participants experience both (1) *information gains*, where people show improved knowledge of an issue and ability to communicate that issue; and (2) *attitudinal changes*, in which people appear to refine their policy preferences (Gastil 2008, p. 201-204). Current Stanford professor James Fishkin of the Center for Deliberative Democracy pioneered this method in 1988. One of the strengths of this process is its large, random sampling of citizens, which makes these events difficult for media, and consequentially politicians, to ignore.

Process: A random or stratified sample of 250–450 people from some population for a one- to two-day event. Participants are paid a stipend to attend, and transportation, child-care, and food are all taken care of in order to attract a representative selection of citizens. This is considered by some to be a costly approach to engagement; a stipend of \$50 for a small event of 250 people would cost \$12,500. Participation Works would conduct telephone and internet surveys of participants prior to, during, and after the event to measure changes in opinion and knowledge. Typically the event itself will include issue briefs by experts and small-group facilitated discussions. Stakeholders and interest groups are not frequently invited, though their particular perspective will be included in briefing material prepared for participants. These events typically attempt to educate the public and afford them the opportunity to talk together about the issue. At the end of the summit, participants would likely vote on a project option, choosing among the four dominant approaches outlined in Section Two. But there also will be a report on the results behind why they made that decision. All this would be used by Participation Works to develop a report to present to NYSDOT/SMTC and other stakeholders.

Resources: For more information:

- Visit Participedia, a website that collects cases on participatory processes: <http://participedia.net/en/methods/deliberative-polling>
- Check out deliberative polling on the Center for Deliberative Democracy’s website: <http://cdd.stanford.edu/polls>
- Search “deliberative polling” on the NCDD website: <http://ncdd.org>

Proposal Two: Citizens Jury

Summary: A citizens jury convenes a random sample of 12-24 members of the public for four or five days. Participants are paid a stipend and reimbursed for the full cost of participating. The purpose of the jury is to “learn whether a mix of information and in-depth deliberation can bring diverse individuals to a broad consensus on a more narrow set of questions” (Gastil 2008, p. 204). The task for a citizens jury is typically more refined than a deliberative poll, and thus the number of people participating is small and the process lengthened. One of the strengths is that it typically uses a random sample of voter-registered citizens, so the process can help bring a sense of democratic legitimacy to bear on an issue and help improve representation (however, if decision makers don’t heed the advice of the citizens jury, the process can breed cynicism in the public). It is also a format familiar to many Americans that carries a sense of legitimacy—a jury process. The Jefferson Center in Saint Paul, Minnesota, pioneered this engagement method in 1974.

Process: A citizens jury would look more narrowly at the problem; for example, it might reduce the issue to looking at the at-grade boulevard option and the above-grade rebuild option. Participants might be asked pointedly, “Which option should be chosen?” In this case, partisan advocates of each approach and the jury members who are allowed to directly question the members over the course of the jury would call technical experts to “testimony.” Jurors are in full control of the hearings apart from Participation Works, which would schedule experts and advocates for testimony. At the end, the jurors can vote on a decision if they choose so but must produce a detailed statement of findings. This statement typically includes how they saw the pros and cons of each particular question. Participation Works would use this document to potentially lobby decision makers and the media on the citizens jury’s’ behalf.

Resources: For more information:

- Visit Participedia: <http://participedia.net/en/methods/citizens-jury>
- Check out the Citizens Jury on the Jefferson Center’s website: <http://jefferson-center.org/what-we-do/components-of-a-citizens-jury/>
- Read about the Oregon Citizens’ Initiative Review, which essentially conducts a citizens jury for every ballot measure in Oregon: <http://healthydemocracy.org/>

Proposal Three: Twenty-First Century Town Meeting

Summary: The Twenty-First Century Town Meeting offers the ability to engage thousands of people in one room simultaneously. This kind of event requires significant expertise to organize and implement. Typically, participants are identified and recruited to attend, based on demographic and geographic representation. With potentially thousands of people involved, these events are most often brainstorming sessions and opportunities to gather ideas and evaluate options. It is very difficult to catalyze action in such a large summit. One of the

strengths of the Twenty-First Century Town Meeting is that a large event typically garners significant media attention. The small-group discussion format also enables participants to make connections among themselves. *AmericaSpeaks* pioneered this engagement method in 1995.

Process: The one-day event begins with elected leaders, experts, and advocates speaking about the issue. Participants are seated at round tables of 8-12 people. Each table has a facilitator who takes notes on a laptop. A station of trained experts analyzes all the tables' notes in real time and themes them, picking out trends that are projected on a larger screen for all to see. This process is typically centered on collecting ideas and identifying public priorities around a project. Throughout the process participants are polled using keypads on a variety of questions including demographic and values questions. Participation Works would use this information to evaluate the summit and report outcomes to NYSDOT/SMTC.

Resources: For more information:

- Visit Participedia: <http://participedia.net/en/methods/21st-century-town-meeting>
- Check out the *Americaspeaks.org* website and look at their Twenty-First Century Town Meeting: <http://americaspeaks.org/services/21st-century-town-meeting>

Proposal Four: A Public Hearing

Summary: The public hearing, often referred to simply as “the public meeting,” is a widely used and familiar engagement method in the United States. The method allows citizens, stakeholders, experts, and/or organized interests the opportunity for public comment. It is a strong method for disseminating information and collecting individual opinions. One of the strengths of a public hearing is it can be held several times over a short period of time in various locations and requires minimal resources. The public meeting can easily accommodate several thousand people in a large room or auditorium with little staff needed, and it is familiar to most public managers and elected officials. These events are typically covered by media since they can sometimes produce hostility among participants, and thus provide spectacle, if not substance.

Process: Typically the public hearing will have an agenda posted to the public. Key elected officials or experts might open the public meeting by presenting or reporting on the current state of affairs, before opening up a portion of the public comment section to any participants—citizens, elected officials, experts, etc. Participants are typically have from 30 seconds to 3 minutes to make comments that are recorded; however, officials are not required to respond to these comments. Typically Participation Works will also hand out surveys before and after to collect additional information. All this would be used by Participation Works to create a report that would be made public and delivered to NYSDOT/SMTC.

Resources: For more information:

- Visit Participedia: <http://participedia.net/en/methods/public-hearing>
- Search “public hearing” in any online search engine and browse through various cities and states. For example:
 - City of Denver:
<http://www.denvergov.org/citycouncil/DenverCityCouncil/News/PublicHearings/tabid/444409/Default.aspx>
 - Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington:
<http://www.mrsc.org/subjects/governance/hearings.aspx>

Proposal Five: Study Circles

Summary: Study Circles engage 10-15 participants in (1) strengthening the connections among each other, (2) defining the scope of the problem, and (3) brainstorming avenues for addressing the problem(s). Participants are selectively recruited and invited to attend. A Study Circles process works best over a long period of time, such as two to six months. This process works well with stakeholders and prominent citizens, such as interest group representatives, elected officials, and others. Therefore, one of the benefits of this process is its connection to decision-making authorities. Significant action can often come from a Study Circles process. However, it takes time to reap those benefits, and maintaining interest and commitment from participants can be difficult. Everyday Democracy, in East Hartford, Connecticut, pioneered the method in 1989 under its original name Study Circles Resource Center to deal with deep-seeded social problems such as racism.

Process: Study Circles typically convene 10-15 people to meet at a regular interval, such as once a week or every other week over a period of time, such as six weeks to six months. A facilitator and recorder work with the group to establish and strengthen relationships among participants and then transition into examining an issue. Typically there is some sort of discussion guide produced ahead of time that ensures all perspectives are included early on. Once transitioning to evaluating the issue at hand, participants will be able to share concerns and ideas about each aspect of the project. The process will end with the group brainstorming ideas for moving forward on the issue and a commitment to those ideas. Participation Works would be responsible for identifying and recruiting participants, developing discussion materials, and facilitating meetings. Participants can choose to produce a public document, but they are not required to do so.

Resources: For more information:

- Visit Participedia: <http://participedia.net/en/methods/study-circles>

- Check out the Dialogue to Change Program at Everyday-Democracy.org:
http://www.everyday-democracy.org/dialogue-to-change/about#.Uu_4X9Qo7cs
- Check out the Environmental Protection Agency's *Public Participation Guide*:
<http://www.epa.gov/international/public-participation-guide/Tools/Input/studycircle.html>

TEACHING NOTE

When a Highway Divides a City: Improving Decision Making in Syracuse, New York

Teaching This Case

This case study challenges participants to analyze a large-scale technical and political issue, map stakeholders, and evaluate proposals for moving forward before developing a project bid to support and improve the decision-making process on this issue. The case presents a lot of information, so students must choose what information to pay attention to and make critical decisions about what stakeholders to involve and for what reasons. The technical information is meant to help participants understand specifics about the issue; this added complexity will challenge students to interpret and determine which information is important for their particular proposal. One of the trends in this case study is that each phase has produced more and perhaps better information, but has not necessarily produced a more sound decision, greater public understanding, or consensus on the issue.

Each of the five proposals offered in Section Three provides background on innovative yet well-known methods for public engagement. Participants should be encouraged to independently research these methods in greater detail, and/or to look beyond them. One of the strengths in teaching this case is that participants can learn much about the field of engagement (which includes deliberative democracy, collaborative governance, and other streams of practice and theory). For additional resources about public and collaborative processes, see the suggested reading list below and the links after each project proposal.

Participant Instructions

Option One (Main Instructions)

You are a manager of Participation Works, a nonprofit in Syracuse, NY. This firm designs and facilitates meetings, including public participation, corporate brainstorming sessions, public dialogues, and other group and collaborative processes. Your job as a manager is to (1) examine the situation outlined in Sections One and Two, and the proposals outlined in Section Three, in order to (2) utilize that information and develop a proposal for improved public engagement to submit to NYSDOT/SMTC. You are challenged to write a concise two- to three-page memo laying out your case for a particular proposal.

The five proposals listed in Section Three are process cheat-sheets that Participation Works has developed over the years. Your recommendation should consider the resources necessary to

implement your proposal, the stakeholders implicated, and your take on the underlying problems your proposal addresses.

Option Two (Alternative Instructions)

You are a public manager with the SMTC. Your job is to (1) examine the situation outlined in Sections One and Two, and the proposals outlined in Section Three, in order to (2) make a recommendation to NYSDOT/SMTC for what public participation should look like moving forward. You can rely on the proposals included in Section Three and/or your own research and knowledge of public engagement. You must write a memo that recommends a particular course of action. You are writing a one- to two-page memo to your superior with rationale for why you chose this option.

Debriefing This Case in Class

This case challenges participants to think about important aspects of public participation. Discussion questions might include:

- Who should participate in further processes?
- What should the purpose of participation be?
- What are SMTC's and NYSDOT's expectations for satisfactory public engagement?
- Would a member of Participation Works have a different problem diagnosis and remedy than a manager with SMTC?
- How much authority should be vested in the participating body to make a decision? Does that look different depending on who is in the room (i.e., citizens, professionals, elected leaders, businesses leaders and stakeholders, etc.)?
- What kind of information should a participation process collect?
- Who should convene the meeting, and what should the meeting design look like?
- What role should experts have in public meetings, particularly in complex infrastructure projects like this one?
- How should/can a variety of stakeholder and community interests be met through public participation? Can they be?

Who Is This Case Useful For?

This case study will be useful for advanced undergraduates and graduates in a variety of disciplines. In Public Administration, Public Policy and Urban Planning, topics of New Public Management, governance, citizen participation and public participation are particularly relevant. For a list of suggested readings:

- Bingham, Lisa Blomgren, Tina Nabatchi, and Rosemary O'Leary. 2005. The New Governance: Practices and Processes for Stakeholder and Citizen Participation in the Work of Government. *Public Administration Review*, 65(5): 547-558.

- Kettl, Donald F. 2006. Managing Boundaries in American Administration: The Collaboration Imperative. *Public Administration Review*, 66(s1): 10-19.
- Leighninger, Matt. 2010. Teaching Democracy in Public Administration: Trends and Future Prospects. *Journal of Public Deliberation* 6(1), article 2. Available at: <http://www.publicdeliberation.net/jpd/vol6/iss1/art2>.
- Nabatchi, Tina. 2012. *A Manager's Guide to Evaluating Citizen Participation*. Washington, DC: IBM Center for the Business of Government. Available at: <http://www.businessofgovernment.org/report/manager%E2%80%99s-guide-evaluating-citizen-participation>.
- National League of Cities. 2004. *The Rise of Democratic Governance: How Local Leaders are Reshaping Politics for the 21st Century*. Washington, DC: NLC.

In Communication Studies and Political Science, themes of deliberative democracy, local/state/federal politics, group processes, and political communication are relevant. For a list of suggested readings:

- Gastil, John. 2008. *Political Communication and Deliberation*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Carcasson, Martín, Laura W. Black, and Elizabeth S. Sink. 2010. Communication Studies and Deliberative Democracy: Current Contributions and Future Possibilities. *Journal of Public Deliberation* 6(1), article 8. Available at: <http://www.publicdeliberation.net/jpd/vol6/iss1/art8>.
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- Coin, Glenn. "Joanie Mahoney: Don't Sell Us Short on I-81." *The Post-Standard*. N.p., 189 Sept. 2013. http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2013/09/joanie_mahoney_dont_sell_us_short_on_i-81.html.
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- DiMento, Joseph F.C. *Stent (or Dagger?) in the Heart of Town: Urban Freeways in Syracuse, 1944-1967*. *Journal of Planning History*, 2009.
- DiMento, Joseph F.C. and Cliff Ellis (2013). *Changing Lanes: Visions and Histories of Urban Freeways*. The MIT Press: Cambridge.
- "Freeways Without Futures 2010." *Congress for the New Urbanism*. Web. 10 Dec. 2013. <http://www.cnu.org/highways/freewayswithoutfutures2010>.
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- "Interstate 81." *I-81*. The Preservation Association of Central New York, 11 Dec. 2013. <http://syracusesthenandnow.org/Dwntwn/I-81/I-81.htm>.
- Knauss, Tim. "Interest Group's Poll Shows Support for Keeping I-81 in Syracuse." *The Post- Standard*. 10 November 2013. Web. 16 Feb. 2014. http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2013/11/post_932.html.
- Knauss, Tim. "Syracuse Metro Area Ranks 9th in Nation in Housing Segregation between Blacks, Whites." *The Post-Standard*. 20 Dec. 2010. Web. 16 Feb. 2014. http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2010/12/syracuse_metro_area_ranks_9th.html.
- Phillips, Kendall R. "The 15th Ward." *DigitaliCreation*. <http://www.digitalicreation.org/The-15th-Ward-Project/Home/About-Us>.

"Rethinking I-81." *SALT District of the Near Westside RSS*. Onondaga Citizens League, June 2009.
http://onondagacitizensleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/OCLRethinkingI81_9print.pdf.

Seward, Zack. "A City Faces Its 'Berlin Wall': An Interstate Highway." *NPR*. NPR, 24 July 2012.
<http://www.npr.org/2012/07/24/155917247/a-city-faces-its-berlin-wall-an-interstate-highway>.

"Syracuse (city) QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau." 7 Jan. 2014. Web. 20 Jan. 2014.
<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/36/3673000.html>.

"The I-81 Corridor Study" Prepared by New York State Department of Transportation in partnership with the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council and Federal Highway Administration. July 2013

The I-81 Challenge. "Highlights from Technical Memo #1: Physical Conditions Analysis" (March 2011).
http://www.thei81challenge.org/cm/ResourceFiles/resources/highlights_final_reduced.pdf.

"UPSTATE" *Rethink 81: To Reclaim the City and Reconnect Syracuse*. 16 Feb. 2014. Web
<http://upstate.syr.edu/uncategorized/rethink-81to-reclaim-the-city-and-reconnect-syracuse>.

Weaver, Teri. "NY DOT Commissioner Pulls Request for I-81 Study Funding until More Details Provided." *The Post-Standard*. 9 July 2013. Web
http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2013/07/ny_dot_commissioner_pulls_request_for_i-81_study_until_more_details_provided.html.

Weaver, Teri. NY Transportation Commissioner Says Cost Is Top Factor in Replacing Interstate 81 in Syracuse. *The Post-Standard*. Syracuse.com, 9 July 2013.

Weaver, Teri. Syracuse Mayor Miner Raises Concerns about I-81 Project as Gov. Cuomo Comes to Town. *Syracuse.com. The Post-Standard*, 29 Jan. 2014.
http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2014/01/syracuse_mayor_releases_questions_about_i-81_project_as_cuomo_comes_to_town.html.

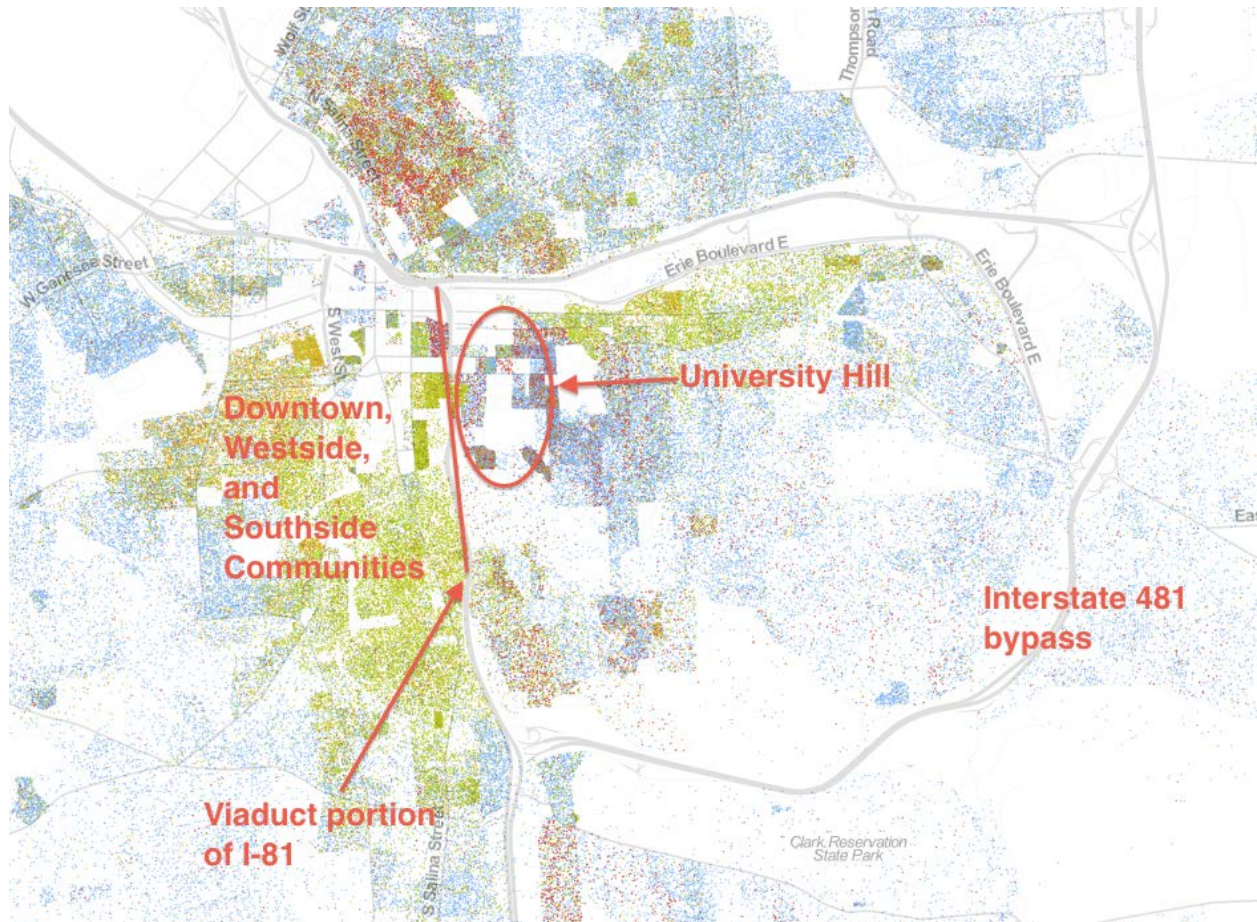
Williams, Central A. Letter to the Editor — Interstate 81 Debate Comes Too Late for the 15th Ward: Your Letters. *The Post-Standard*, 24 June 2013. Web. 23 Oct. 2013.
http://blog.syracuse.com/opinion/2013/06/interstate_81_debate_comes_too.html

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Map of Syracuse Metropolitan Area with Racial Breakdown

Adapted from: Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, University of Virginia.

<http://demographics.coopercenter.org/DotMap/index.html>



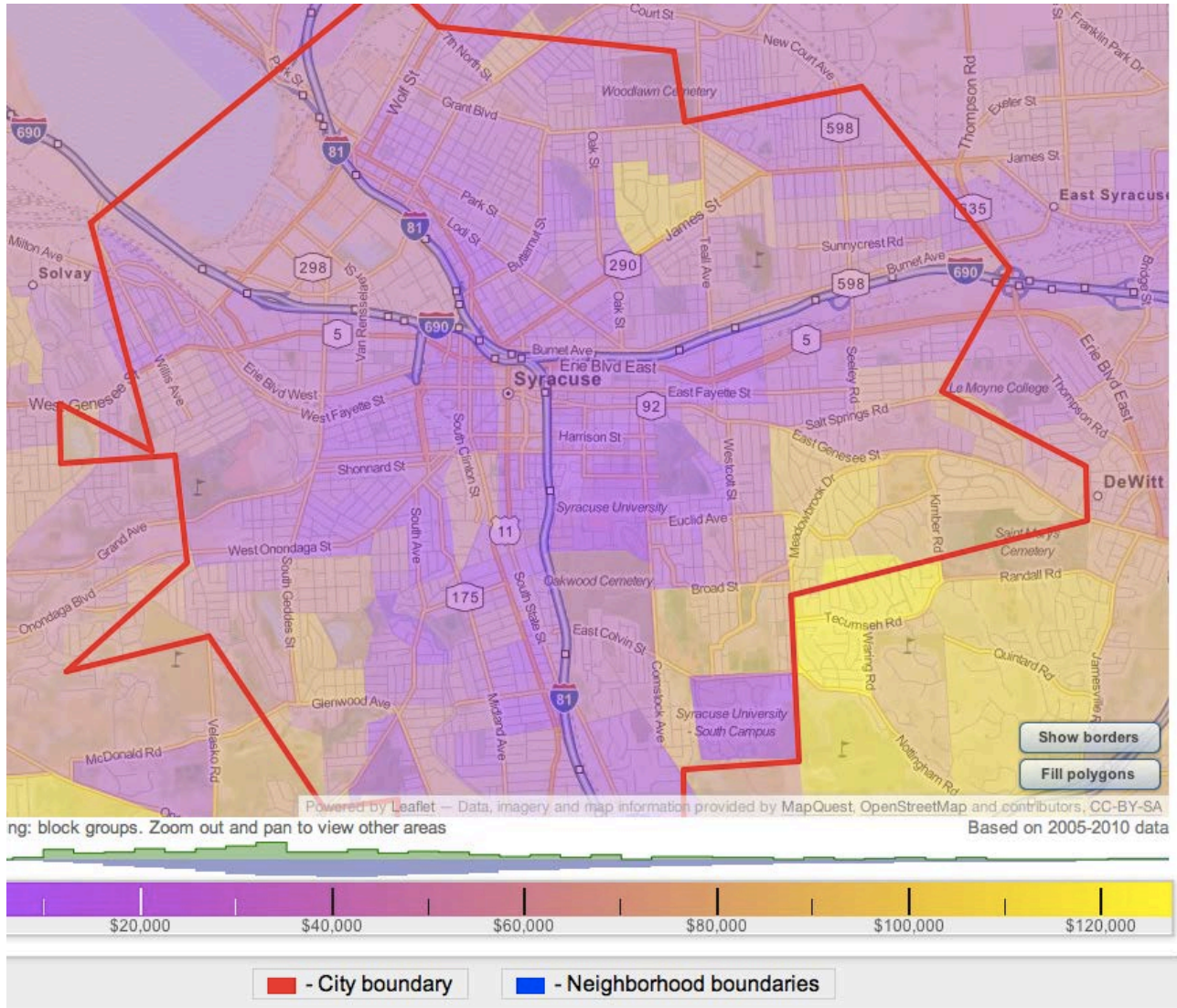
2010 Census Block Data

1 Dot = 1 Person

- White
- Black
- Asian
- Hispanic
- Other Race / Native American / Multi-racial

APPENDIX B: Map of the City of Syracuse by Median Household Income

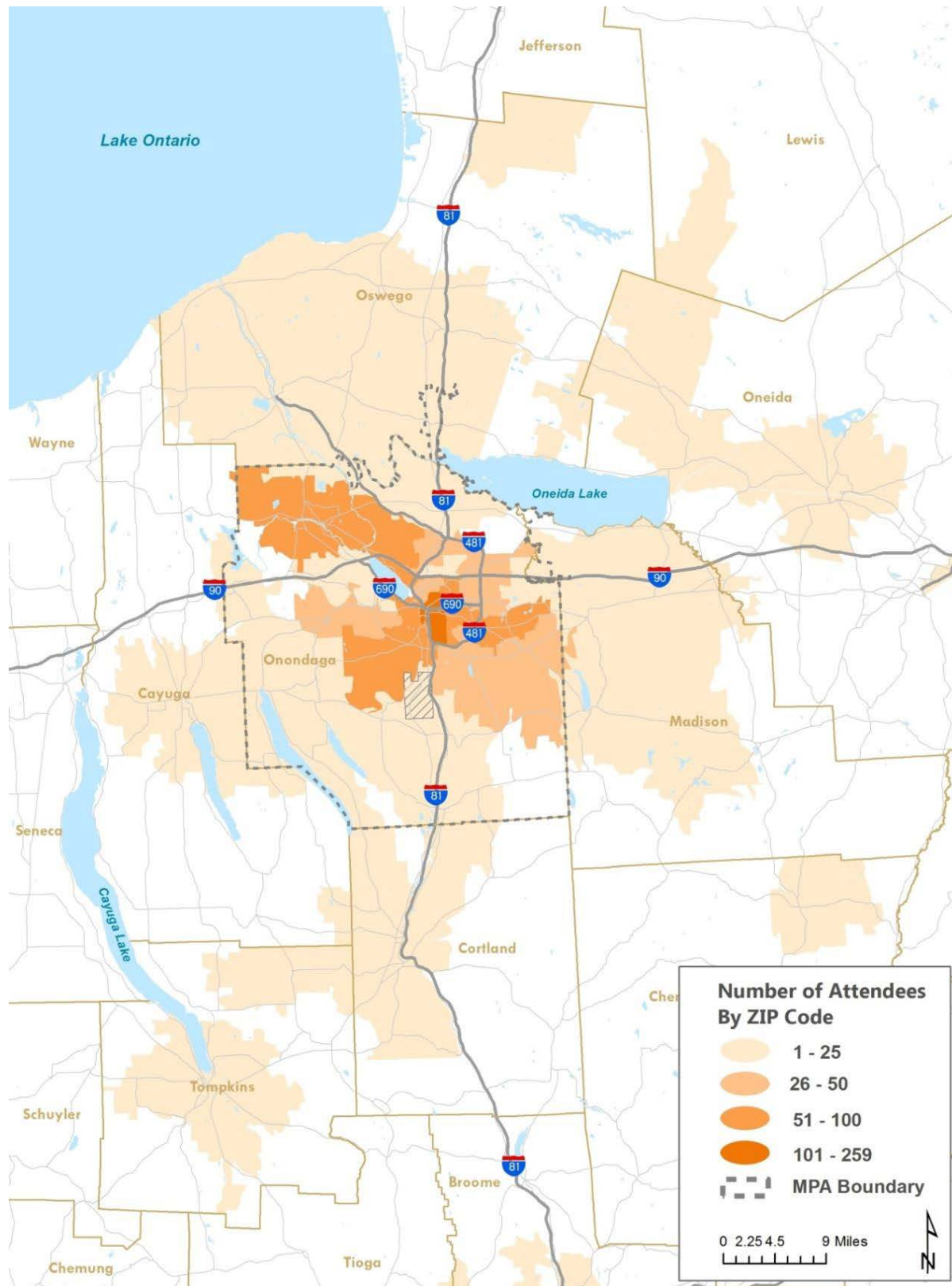
Source: City-Data.com <http://www.city-data.com/nbmaps/neigh-Syracuse-New-York.html>



APPENDIX C: May 2013 Attendees by Zip Code

Source: White Paper #3 page 18.

http://thei81challenge.org/cm/ResourceFiles/resources/WhitePaper3_FINAL_082713.pdf



APPENDIX D: Analysis of Public Comments Received at the May 2013 Meeting

Source: White Paper #3, pages 22-24.

http://thei81challenge.org/cm/ResourceFiles/resources/WhitePaper3_FINAL_082713.pdf

4.2 Public feedback on the five strategies to carry forward from May 2012 Public Meeting

Attendees at the May 2012 Public Meeting were presented with details about the five categories of strategies that were recommended to advance through the screening process, described in the previous section of this White Paper. The five categories of strategies were as follows: No-build (as required by State/Federal environmental regulations), Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, Tunnel/Depressed Highway, and Boulevard. For the No-build strategy, a board detailed the future issues that are anticipated under this scenario. For the remaining strategies, boards in the station provided a definition and explored common concepts which could be incorporated into any strategy. Meeting attendees provided extensive feedback on the five strategies recommended for Stage 1 screening, with over 400 comments submitted in this part of the public meeting. Although the feedback was highly varied in content and opinion, a few common themes transcended any specific strategy:

- Safe, speedy access to key regional destinations is important. This includes the consideration of alternative modes of transportation, such as biking and walking.
- The physical impact of the Viaduct is a key issue – meeting attendees clearly expressed their desire for a more aesthetically pleasing and physically connected downtown environment.
- There is a strong desire for economic development and the revitalization in the downtown area.
- It is essential that any future solution for I-81 be financially responsible and feasible, and avoid negative impacts on the neighborhoods in the vicinity of the Viaduct.

The table below summarizes the primary likes and concerns about each of the strategies recommended for Stage 1 screening. It should be noted that the individual bullets listed represent a relatively small number of actual comments (typically between five and 20 individual comments) and cannot be interpreted as a majority opinion.

Table 3: Public feedback on strategies recommended for Stage 1 screening; May 2012 Public Meeting

| Rehabilitation Strategy | |
|---|--|
| <i>Primary Likes</i> | <i>Primary Concerns</i> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains ease/speed of travel through Syracuse | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money could be better spent on reconstruction of I-81 • Does not address existing quality of life and environmental issues • Limited space to make significant modifications to the design of the highway may result in impacts to neighboring properties • Does not improve bicycle/pedestrian flow or safety under the Viaduct |
| Reconstruction Strategy | |
| <i>Primary Likes</i> | <i>Primary Concerns</i> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could incorporate a more aesthetically pleasing design and improve the appearance of the local area • Could resolve critical safety issues for cars on the highway and for cars and pedestrians below it • Will maintain short travel times and quick access to key destinations while preventing traffic jams on local streets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not address key complaints about the current Viaduct • Potential for significant impacts on adjacent neighborhoods due to widening right-of-way • May result in another structure that will eventually deteriorate and become obsolete • Does not encourage people to stay/visit downtown, which will continue to hurt the local economy |
| Tunnel/Depressed Highway Strategy | |
| <i>Primary Likes</i> | <i>Primary Concerns</i> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminates or reduces the "barrier" effect of the current highway and reconnects downtown neighborhoods • Maintains Interstate highway and traffic flow through Syracuse • Improves the aesthetics of the local area through the removal of the Viaduct and integration of green space • Could improve and promote walkability in downtown | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tunnel would be prohibitively expensive • Depressed highway would create a new barrier that would be more difficult for cars and pedestrians to cross and create accessibility problems for people with disabilities • Significant impacts from the construction of a tunnel/depressed highway • Maintenance issues related to snow removal, flooding/pumping and ventilation • Loss of key access points to downtown if built with few interchanges • A depressed highway would not improve the aesthetics of the local area |
| Boulevard Strategy | |
| <i>Primary Likes</i> | <i>Primary Concerns</i> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimizes both construction and future maintenance costs • Supports economic development, downtown revitalization and quality of life • Improves aesthetics, creates a gateway to the city • Eliminates the barrier created by the Viaduct and restores connectivity between downtown neighborhoods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A boulevard wide enough to handle existing traffic will decrease safety for pedestrians and bicyclists while creating a more significant barrier between downtown and University Hill than the current Viaduct • Could not handle the necessary traffic resulting in undesirable outcomes for mobility • May have a negative impact on economic development by discouraging people to visit downtown and limiting access to major destinations in Syracuse • May be similar to the current Erie Boulevard which is unsafe and unsightly • May require a larger right-of-way resulting in the use of eminent domain • Negative quality of life impacts |