

How CNY MOVES



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Onondaga Citizens League

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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Preface and Acknowledgements

By Heidi Holtz and Mary Kate Intaglietta

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 they shared stories of ridesharing while asking for nothing in return, of using social media to coordinate rides and the importance of helping their neighbors get to and from work and school. We heard from a Near Westside resident who believes that walking gives her a greater appreciation for her community and stronger connection with her neighbors. We heard from CENTRO riders of different ages, economic status

and physical ability, and learned that while there are ample opportunities to improve our transit system, there are also substantial examples of people who use the bus by choice as much as necessity. We heard from passionate bike riders who, while delighted with the increased number of bike lanes created in the past several years, expressed the hope that bicycle safety and road sharing will become stronger elements of our community.

We also heard from experts, and developed a robust and collegial working relationship with the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council. The staff from SMTC were true partners in this endeavor, and presented their extensive and exhaustive findings on a regular basis. We appreciate not only their participation and enthusiasm, but the ability to extend awareness of the important role they play in this arena. CENTRO officials have been generous 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 nearby 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: sharrows, 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.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“Without my legs, I wouldn’t be here,” Lugendo Muya told the study committee in July 2015.

Muya, a native of Tanzania, came to the United States in 2004 after living with his father in a refugee camp in Kenya. Muya graduated from Nottingham High School in 2012 and Onondaga Community College in 2014. He is now studying health and physical education at Syracuse University. His legs – walking or bicycling – have kept him, his family, and friends safe and connected to services, jobs, and school.

When he was new to Central New York and still learning English, his bike was a lifeline. When his father was ill, the 12-year-old biked to Wegmans, where he was able to get food and medicine for his father.

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 would then use the bike for his own errand – or to get someone else to work on time.

Riding Centro can be a challenge. “If you have portfolios and documents and stuff to help your future, it’s hard,” he said. “It’s not set up for students.” Teachers and employers aren’t always sympathetic to public transportation’s limitations.

“You can’t tell the whole story,” he said. “He doesn’t care. You want to tell him and hope he has mercy.”

Now, Muya owns a car: “I’m lucky,” he said. But, “It’s crazier. Having a car is like driving a Centro bus.” Frequently, someone takes his car to help someone else.

“There are people who work and never have rides,” he said. “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 20,000⁵ workers make their way out of the city center, with a majority heading to the suburbs. Most of those cars begin their approximately 19-minute⁶ 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 covers⁷, only 1 percent of

¹ See July 15, 2015, study session notes.

² Transportation Atlas, Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council. June 2015. p. 11. Based on 2010 U.S. Census figures.

³ Ibid. P. 29

⁴ Ibid. P. 29

⁵ Ibid. P. 29.

⁶ Ibid. P. 66. 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

commuters use public transit⁸. 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

and small portions of Madison (Town of Sullivan) and Oswego (Town of Schroepel, Hastings and West Monroe) counties.

⁸ Ibid. P. 68.

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.⁹

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 does Centro serve the population, and what are other mass transit options? What will our population be like in 30 years, and what are the projected transportation needs? Other cities have Uber. Why not Syracuse, too? What are the transportation challenges as the economy shifts from a 9-to-5, Monday-Friday workweek to 24-7 service jobs?

9 “Creating a Community Where All Children Thrive by Five” (2013). P. 15.

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.”¹⁰ 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.”¹¹

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 Challenge¹² 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.”¹³

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

10 “Rethinking I-81, 2008.” P. 6. http://onondagacitizensleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/OCLRethinkingI81_9print.pdf

11 Ibid. P. 6.

12 “The I-81 Challenge” refers to the official decision-making process to develop and evaluate options for the future of the I-81 rebuild. It was led by the New York State Department of Transportation and the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council.

13 theI81Challenge.org website. Home page.



Streetcars first operated in Syracuse in 1860. By 1886, 16 lines ran from downtown Syracuse to places including Manlius and Cicero, making it easy for people to live in areas beyond the community’s business center. City street cars took their final runs in 1941. Photo credit: Onondaga Historical Association.

regional discussions to support Centro – the Central New York Regional Transportation Authority – and work together on a sustainable long-term plan.¹⁴ Consensus also advocates a regional land-use plan that provides for consistent and enforceable planning on a countywide basis.¹⁵

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.

14 Consensus Options Report and Preliminary Committee Recommendations. Consensus CNY. January 2016. P. 24

15 Ibid. P. 71.

A third broad finding focuses on the ways Syracuse’s concentrated poverty limits people’s transportation opportunities. Because so many people in the city’s most distressed neighborhoods must 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. 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”¹⁶ 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

16 See August 19, 2015, study notes.

all the people who need to get to medical services, said Aileen Balitz, 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 the run-up to the 2016-2017 state budget, Sen. John DeFrancisco led an effort of Upstate lawmakers to advocate for Upstate/Downstate funding parity. In the approved budget, Centro received \$32.6 million for operating assistance in the 2016-2017 New York state budget. This increase in operating assistance improved the level of parity between upstate transit agencies and those downstate.

On the national level, Congress in December 2015 passed the first long-term federal highway bill in a decade. Since 2009, Congress had passed 37 short-term federal highway bill extensions, limiting community ability to build or improve roads, bridges, and transit systems. While the highway bill assures funding for five years, the funding level offers only approximately a two percent per year increase, to keep pace with inflation.

"This year we made out fine and we appreciate the increased support from the governor and the legislature. But because the structure by which we are funded is based on a subjective determination each budget year, we still fight an annual battle for funding," said Rick Lee, who became Centro's chief executive officer in January 2016. Transportation funding is an important public policy question, he said: "Centro receives approximately three quarters of its revenue from federal, state, and local government. At a time when many are competing for limited governmental funds, the real question is: How much public transportation does the state and federal governments want to support?"

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 Radisson in the northern suburbs.¹⁷
- OCIDA in December 2015 approved tax breaks for COR Development Co.'s Inner Harbor project, including a \$2.91 million exemption from state mortgage recording tax.¹⁸
- The Syracuse Industrial Development Agency in February 2016 approved \$30,000 in mortgage recording tax

¹⁷ Moriarty, Rick. "Comptroller blasts \$5M tax break for luxury apartments." *The Post-Standard*. January 19, 2016.

¹⁸ Moriarty, Rick. "County agency OKs tax deal for Inner Harbor project," *The Post-Standard*. December 16, 2015.

exemptions for a new Price Rite on South and Bellevue avenues.¹⁹

We are encouraged that Assemblyman 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.

¹⁹ Moriarty, Rick. "Desert food - Price Rite to open store in Syracuse neighborhood lacking a supermarket," *The Post-Standard*. February 2, 2016.

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 SMTC. 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 128 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 (I/I) 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."



SMTC, created in 1966, includes all of Onondaga County and small parts of Madison and Oswego counties. "It's not just about getting people and their cars places," said James D'Agostino, director. It also focuses on freight, transit, bicycling, and walking.

"The 2050 Long-Range Transportation Plan: Moving Towards a Greater Syracuse" (LRTP) is especially relevant, as it provides a broad view of transportation issues. LRTP is the first long-range plan since 1995, and it is intended as a guide for the next 35 years. It draws on several local reports: the Onondaga County Sustainable Development Plan, Vision CNY, Central New York Regional Economic Development Council Five-Year Strategic Plan as well as the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) and SMTC's I-81 Corridor Study.

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 trail system.

We found several organizations committed to removing the barriers lack of transportation creates for low-income people. Visions 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 Transportation Coalition, have agreed to take the lead on advocacy for public transit, including the financing.

Visit Syracuse and the Downtown Committee of Syracuse officials were receptive to further discussion about how they and other CenterState CEO leaders could facilitate a

system modeled on Ann Arbor's getDowntown Program.²⁰ The program, founded in 1999, provides commuting programs and services to employees and employers in downtown Ann Arbor. Its programs and services include the go!pass (an unlimited bus pass), the Commuter Challenge and Commuter Club, bike locker rentals, free commuting assistance to downtown employees and employers, commuting materials, and Zipcars.

The program is a partnership that includes the Ann Arbor Transportation Authority, the Ann Arbor Downtown Development Authority, and the City of Ann Arbor. Downtown employers can buy the go!pass for \$10 a year per employee. Employers that opt in must purchase one pass per full-time employee. The go!pass also provides discounts at many downtown businesses.

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.²¹ According to a 2013 survey by getDowntown, the three most cited reasons for changing commuting modes were that that a go!pass was available, parking cost too much, and convenience or comfort.²²

We also found enthusiastic groups committed to improving bike trails and advocating to include bicycling in planning discussions. SMTC, as well as the Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency (SOCPA), the County Office of the Environment, the Town of DeWitt, and an enthusiastic bicycling community are involved in these efforts. SMTC's planning area includes 4,244 roadway miles, but only 15.6 miles of on-road bicycle facilities. Existing bike-friendly projects include the Loop the Lake Trail, the Creekwalk, the Connective Corridor, and the South Salina

²⁰ See getDowntown website at <http://www.getdowntown.org/>.

²¹ Thibodeau, Ian. "1,688 Ann Arbor commuters ditch car rides for getDowntown's 2014 Commuter Challenge." Mlive.com. June 10, 2014. http://www.mlive.com/news/annarbor/index.ssf/2014/06/ann_arbor_commuters_ditch_cars.html

²² 2013 getDowntown Program Survey (Executive Summary). <http://www.getdowntown.org/Portals/0/Documents/Studies%20Reports/Executivesummary2013.pdf>

Street/Valley Plaza Corridor Improvements.

The Erie Canalway Trail (ECT) and Syracuse Connector Route project aims to complete the ECT through Syracuse. The project also aims to connect Camillus and DeWitt. The 14-mile gap "isn't the longest gap in the state, but it's arguably the most historic," said Sam Gordon, DeWitt town planner since 2014.

The Erie Canal project stands out for its complex web of ownership. New York State Parks, the New York State Canal, town of DeWitt, the state DOT, and the city of Syracuse are all owners. The project also stands as a rare example of the city, which has state funding for the project, working with a town. Further, Gordon coordinates the Old Erie Canal Working Group, which counts the Erie Canal Museum, the Heritage Trail, and Madison County among its stakeholders.

The report will outline SMTC data on commuter flow, transit analysis, and employment centers. We will also highlight other relevant SMTC studies, including the Syracuse Metro Area Regional Transportation Study Phase 1 (SMART). 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 ridesharing 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.

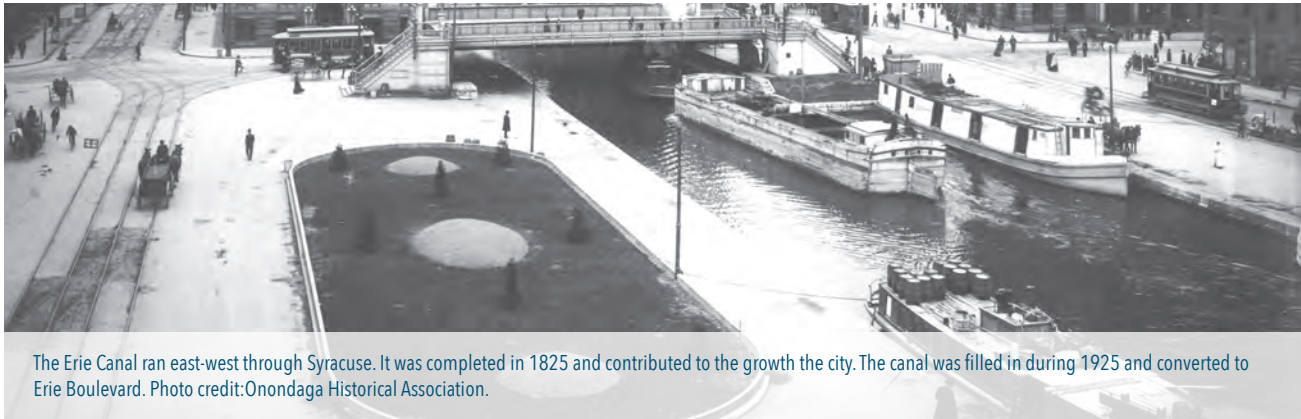
The study process

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 chairs, 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 (SMTC), Centro, the Onondaga County Office of the Environment, Town of DeWitt planner Sam Gordon; Bike CNY, the Moving People Transportation Coalition, St. Camillus, Providence Services, The Salvation Army, Upstate Medical University, and Syracuse University's Parking & Transit Department.

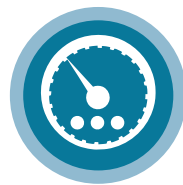
Early in the study process, four Syracuse University graduate students shared the results of their Maxwell School Capstone Project, "CNY Mobility: System Analysis and Recommendations for Improvement." That project provided valuable background for topics the study would later address: Bus Rapid Transit (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/>



The Erie Canal ran east-west through Syracuse. It was completed in 1825 and contributed to the growth the city. The canal was filled in during 1925 and converted to Erie Boulevard. Photo credit: Onondaga Historical Association.



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 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."¹

"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 downtown Syracuse, highlights the importance of transportation. It "established settlement patterns for most of the United States during the nineteenth century, made

¹ CenterState Metropolitan Business Plan. 2013. P. 3. http://www.centerstateopportunity.com/files/3413/8504/8856/CenterState_Strategic_Overview.pdf

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.² By 1805, when Syracuse was still known as Salina, turnpikes connected places like Manlius and Marcellus to the economic center. Steam-powered railroads operated in Syracuse by the late 1830s. By 1850, two years after Syracuse was incorporated as a city, coaches and omnibuses were transporting people.³

In 1860, Syracuse saw its first street railway line. By 1886, 16 stage lines ran from downtown to places including Manlius and Cicero. The line to Cicero ran until 1908. Electric cars provided local transit in Syracuse from 1888 to the early 1940s. The electric cars carried 6 million passengers annually

² <http://www.canals.ny.gov/history/history.html>

³ Dennis Connors, curator of history at the Onondaga Historic Association, provided a historic overview of transportation at the November 18, 2015, study session.

at a time when the city's population was about 90,000.

A significant change came in 1896, when the Rapid Transit Company extended tracks to less populated areas. This led to growth in the south part of the city and in the suburbs, said Dennis Connors, curator of history at the Onondaga Historical Association.

In 1900, electric rail replaced horse-drawn rail. The city's Golden Age of electric rail ran through 1932 and "expanded residential neighborhoods and enhanced the quality of life," according to Connors. Transportation, for example, led to the creation of resort locations, like Iron Pier and White City Resort.

Before personal automobiles became commonly used in the 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."⁴ 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."⁵

⁴ http://transportationfortomorrow.com/final_report/pdf/volume_3/historical_documents/05_interregional_highways_1944.pdf

⁵ Pfeiffer, David A. "Ike's Interstates at 50." Prologue magazine. Summer 2006, Vol. 38, No. 2. <http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2006/summer/interstates.html>

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 2005.⁶ Americans drive an average of 29.2 miles per day, making two trips with an average total duration of 46 minutes.⁷

⁶ Hirsch, Jerry. "253 million cars and trucks on U.S. roads; average age is 11.4 years." June 9, 2014. Los Angeles Times. <http://www.latimes.com/business/autos/la-fi-hy-ihs-automotive-average-age-car-20140609-story.html>

⁷ "New Study Reveals When, Where and How Much Motorists Drive." AAA Newsroom. April 16, 2015 <http://newsroom.aaa.com/2015/04/new-study-reveals-much-motorists-drive/>

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.⁸

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

⁸ "New Study Reveals When, Where and How Much Motorists Drive." AAA Newsroom. April 16, 2015. <http://newsroom.aaa.com/2015/04/new-study-reveals-much-motorists-drive/>

stable since then. But in the city of Syracuse, population declined from 220,000 in 1950 to 145,170 in 2010. Further, from 2000 to 2010, the county's highest growth generally occurred in towns north and northwest of the city.⁹

Despite growth in the suburbs, the region's single largest population concentration remains in the city. The most populous town is Clay, which at 58,206 people is only about 40 percent of the city's population.

As people moved out from the city, Onondaga County has added 7,000 housing units, 147 subdivisions, and 61 miles of new roads since 2000, SOCPA reports. Development is scattered and threatens the rural character of some areas, said Megan Costa, assistant director for county planning at Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency.

Houses and land parcels are getting bigger while households are getting smaller. The median age of householders is increasing, as is the number of heads of household over age 71. Large-family households, married

couple households, and two-parent households, on the other hand, are declining.

Of the 90,000 to 100,000 people who work in the city, 69 percent of workers who live outside the city drive to work alone. Among commuters who live in the city, about 67 percent drive alone to work.¹⁰ "We love our 20-minute commute, but as housing spreads out and jobs are decentralized, commute times increase," Costa said.

The county's 2011 Sustainable Development Plan, which the county legislature had not approved by spring 2016, notes the connection between land use and transportation. "Transportation infrastructure shapes development, influences property values and affects a neighborhood's character and quality of life," the report says. "Conversely, how communities develop can impact the type, size and location of the transportation infrastructure required to service that development."¹¹

¹⁰ SMTC Atlas. P. 68.
¹¹ <http://future.ongov.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Sustainable%20Development%20Plan%20Summary%20Report%20-%20draft%20June%202012.pdf> P. 14

⁹ SMTC Transportation Atlas. 2015. P. 13.

A Glimpse of the Future

Even as the county experiences sprawl and its consequences, preferences of both millennials and aging citizens challenge the direction of development and current transportation trends. A 2015 survey by the National Association of Realtors, "Community & Transportation Preferences", found that millennials (ages 18 to 34) prefer walking over driving by a substantially wider margin than any other generation. (On a related note, the 2013 National Association of Realtors study found that Americans prefer walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods and shorter commutes.)

The 2015 study, which parallels local research by SOCPA, found:

- 83% of millennials like walking, but only 71% like driving.
- 50% of millennials prefer living within an 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

¹ National Association of Realtors Community & Transportation Preference <http://www.realtor.org/reports/nar-2015-community-preference-survey>

- and baby boomers.
- Millennials use public transportation more than any other generation.

Millennials showed more preference than other generations for expanding public transportation, including trains and buses; providing convenient alternatives to driving such as walking, biking and public transportation; developing communities where more people do not have to drive long distance to work or shop; and building more sidewalks.

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, SMTC surveyed people about their interest in such policies. Findings include:

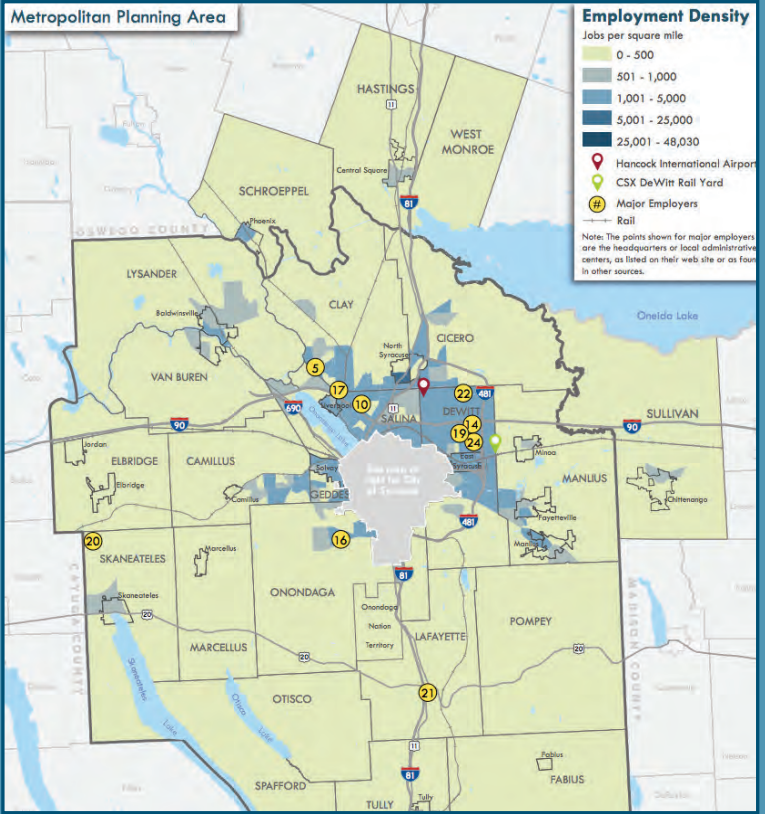
- 78% said development should occur in already developed communities with available buildings or unused land.
- 77% said future development should include housing and buildings closely spaced, with sidewalks leading to nearby shops and parks, even if it means having smaller homes and

- 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.

Employment

- Total regional employment is approximately 246,400, with 82 percent of that total located in the City of Syracuse and the five largest towns (DeWitt, Clay, Salina, Cicero, and Manlius).
- Three of the region's ten largest employers are located on University Hill.



Map Credit: Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council



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. It's so magical to me to use my legs and not worry about gas prices. Walking is a blessing. People who have a car find any reason to get in their car. They look at me and think, 'Oh, you're poor. You don't have a car.' No. I don't have a headache. I walk.

– Taywana “Mother Earth” James, Near Westside resident

Our community will be healthier – literally and figuratively – with a variety of transportation models that make it safe and simple for people to drive, ride, bike, and walk. A number of successful initiatives that encourage healthy living already operate here. One example is Central New York's enthusiastic bicycling community that advocates for bike lanes and educates riders and drivers on how to share the road. (Chapter 4 will address bike issues in depth.) Several organizations, including the Downtown Committee,

the American Heart Association, and SUNY Oswego Metro Center collaborate on Wednesday Walks. The biweekly walk is held in downtown Syracuse from June to October, and is supported by a grant from the Onondaga County Department of Economic Development.

The American Heart Association recommends people get 30 minutes of activity five days a week. That's why Allison Mitura, events coordinator for the Heart Association,



Photo credit: Onondaga Historical Association

participated in the 2015 Wednesday Walks. “I was telling people to get exercise, but I wasn't living it myself,” she said.¹ An added bonus: getting to know the city better. “Things are a lot closer than they seem,” she said. “Like a traveler, once you experience it, it becomes more familiar.”

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

Physical health is also a benefit of Complete Streets, which are “planned and designed to consider the safe, convenient access and mobility of all roadway users of all ages and abilities. This includes pedestrians, bicyclists, public transportation riders, and motorists; it includes children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.”³

The Complete Streets Act (Chapter 398, Laws of New York), signed into law in 2011, requires state, county and local agencies “to consider the convenience and mobility of all users when developing transportation projects that receive state and federal funding.”⁴ Complete Street roadway design features include 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. The state's Complete Streets law is in line with our broad recommendation that stakeholders, developers, and

planners need to be part of the discussion about how transportation decisions are made and how they will affect other programs, projects, and existing and new infrastructure. As the state puts it, the initiative “presents an opportunity to expand upon existing programs and collaborate with bicyclists, pedestrians, people with disabilities and others to identify best practices and designs for transportation facilities.”⁵

Kathy Mogle, program coordinator for Onondaga County Health Department's Creating Healthy Places Program, works with local municipalities to implement Complete Streets features in their communities. Complete Streets are safe, people-friendly, and support good health. They reduce accidents as well as improve visibility, air quality, and the street environment.⁶

She notes that Complete Streets make active living easy – a benefit both for people already physically active and those seeking to lose weight and increase cardiovascular activity. In Onondaga County, 28 percent of residents are obese, and the Centers for Disease Control reports that 21 percent of Americans say they participate in no regular physical activity. “Building roads that help support more walking and biking helps communities create opportunities for people to become more physically active,” Mogle said.⁷

Complete Streets have been shown to improve safety for all road users. They can reduce pedestrian injuries by as much as 28 percent, and on-road bike lanes have been shown to reduce crashes by 50 percent.⁸

The Onondaga County Health Department also cites these benefits of Complete Streets:

- Multiple, accessible transportation options allow everyone, including children, persons with disabilities, older adults, and people who cannot afford a car, the opportunity to stay connected to the community.
- A network of Complete Streets is safe and appealing to

¹ November 3, 2015, study session.

² November 3, 2015, study session.

³ <https://www.dot.ny.gov/programs/completestreets>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ October 21, 2015, study session.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

residents and visitors, which is attractive for retail and commercial development. Retail areas accessible only to cars, on the other hand, can restrict business.

- Planning that incorporates the needs of all forms of transportation can reduce automobile traffic and the costs of road repair and maintenance.

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 2014.⁹ 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.¹⁰

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.

⁹ Town of DeWitt Sustainability Plan. Draft July 24, 2014. <http://www.townofdewitt.com/documents/963.pdf>
¹⁰ October 21, 2015, study session.

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.”¹¹

In recognition of the interconnected nature of transportation decisions, the plan noted that Centro’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.¹²

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.¹³ 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

¹¹ Town of DeWitt Sustainability Plan. P. 29.
¹² Ibid.
¹³ “Onondaga County Sustainable Development Plan.” Powerpoint. http://www.ongov.net/planning/documents/plan_presentation.pdf

projected to be 65 and over. That’s compared with 13 percent in 2010 and 9.8 percent in 1970.¹⁴

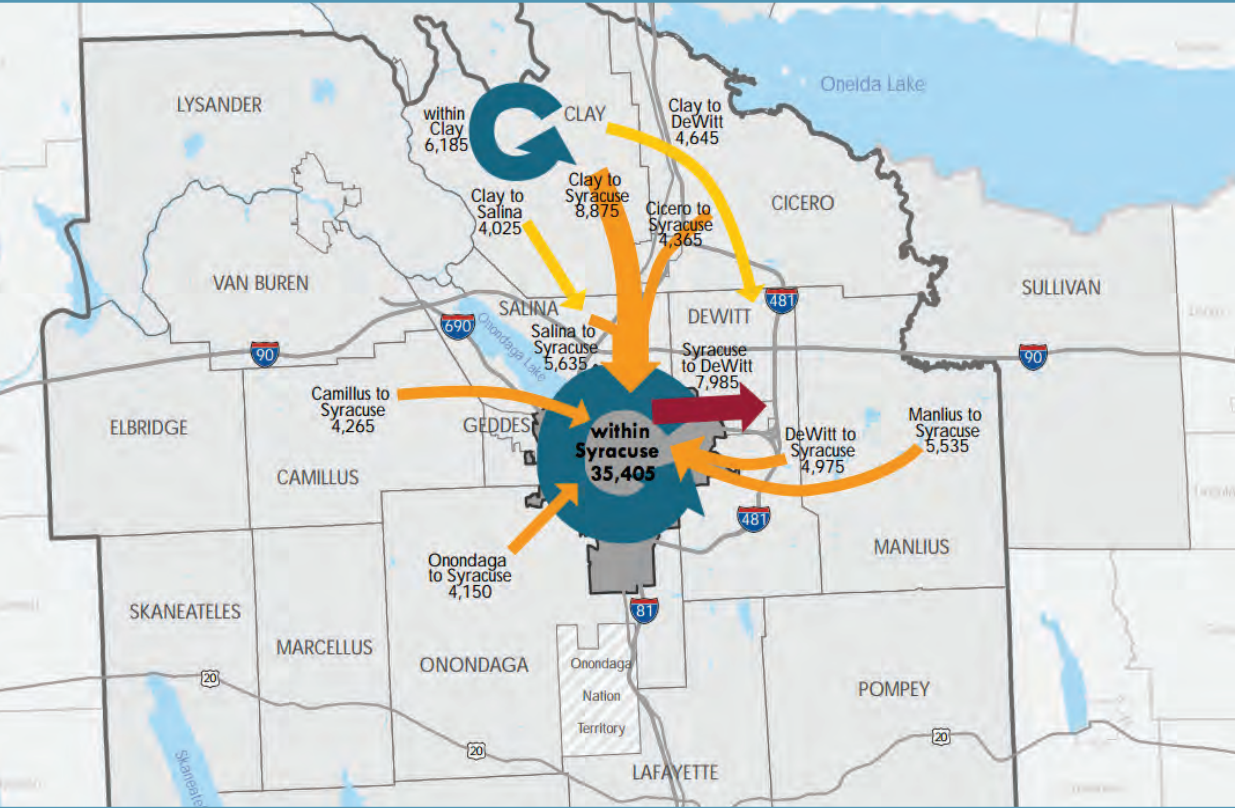
Low-wage employees without cars will face similar challenges to get to second- and third-shift jobs in companies far from the urban core. Organizations including Moving People, Providence Services, and Visions for Change

are addressing this issue. While some employers have changed shifts to accommodate bus schedules or supported carpooling or vans, 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.

¹⁴ Ortman, Jennifer M. and Victoria A. Ve. “An Aging Nation: The Older Population in the United States. Current Population Reports. U.S. Census. May 2014. <https://www.census.gov/prod/2014pubs/p25-1140.pdf>

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 19,000 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.



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.

¹ Ibid.
² Ibid.

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 rides; 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.

³ Centro website. <https://www.centro.org/TravelTraining.aspx>

Online Trip Planner and Centro Bus Tracker, a technology that uses GPS devices to report bus locations and shows in 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 (SMTCC) 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 SMTCC'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)

¹ "SMART 1 – Public Meeting #1." February 24, 2016. Powerpoint. http://smtccpo.org/SMART/docs/2016-02-24/SMART1_Public_Meeting_Presentation_2016-02-24.pdf
² Ibid. Syracuse Transit System Analysis (STSA) was part of the I-81 Challenge. The January 2014 report can be found here: <http://thei81challenge.org/cm/ResourceFiles/resources/Syracuse%20Transit%20System%20Analysis%202014%20Full.pdf>

to Syracuse University and James Street/South Avenue corridors. (See p. 28 for sidebar on characteristics of the two traffic corridors.)

SMART identified three transit enhancement strategies it will consider for the two corridors: existing service improvements, BRT, and Light Rail Transit (LRT). The goal is to provide faster service with fewer stops. BRT is also better for the environment and supports economic growth. Should BRT be chosen, possibilities include dedicated bus lanes, limited stops, curbs cuts, and other infrastructure changes that would allow faster transit.

Ross Farrell, director of planning for the Capital District

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

3 “BusPlus – Creating a Bus Rapid Transit Line in Upstate New York.” October 29, 2015, Thursday Morning Roundtable presentation.

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.”¹

Syracuse Mayor Stephanie Miner joined the mayors of Albany, Rochester and Buffalo in calling for ride-sharing legislation. 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

1 “Change NY law to allow Uber, Lyft to operate Upstate.” June 7, 2016. http://www.syracuse.com/opinion/index.ssf/2016/06/uber_lyft_ny_legislature_allow_ride-hailing_platforms_to_operate_upstate_editor.html

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

4 Ibid.
5 See Pittsburgh’s website on Bus Rapid Transit: <http://gettherepgh.org/>.
6 Stories that Matter: Transforming Cleveland through Bus Rapid Transit.” YouTube. January 8, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Caa7KjkmI>

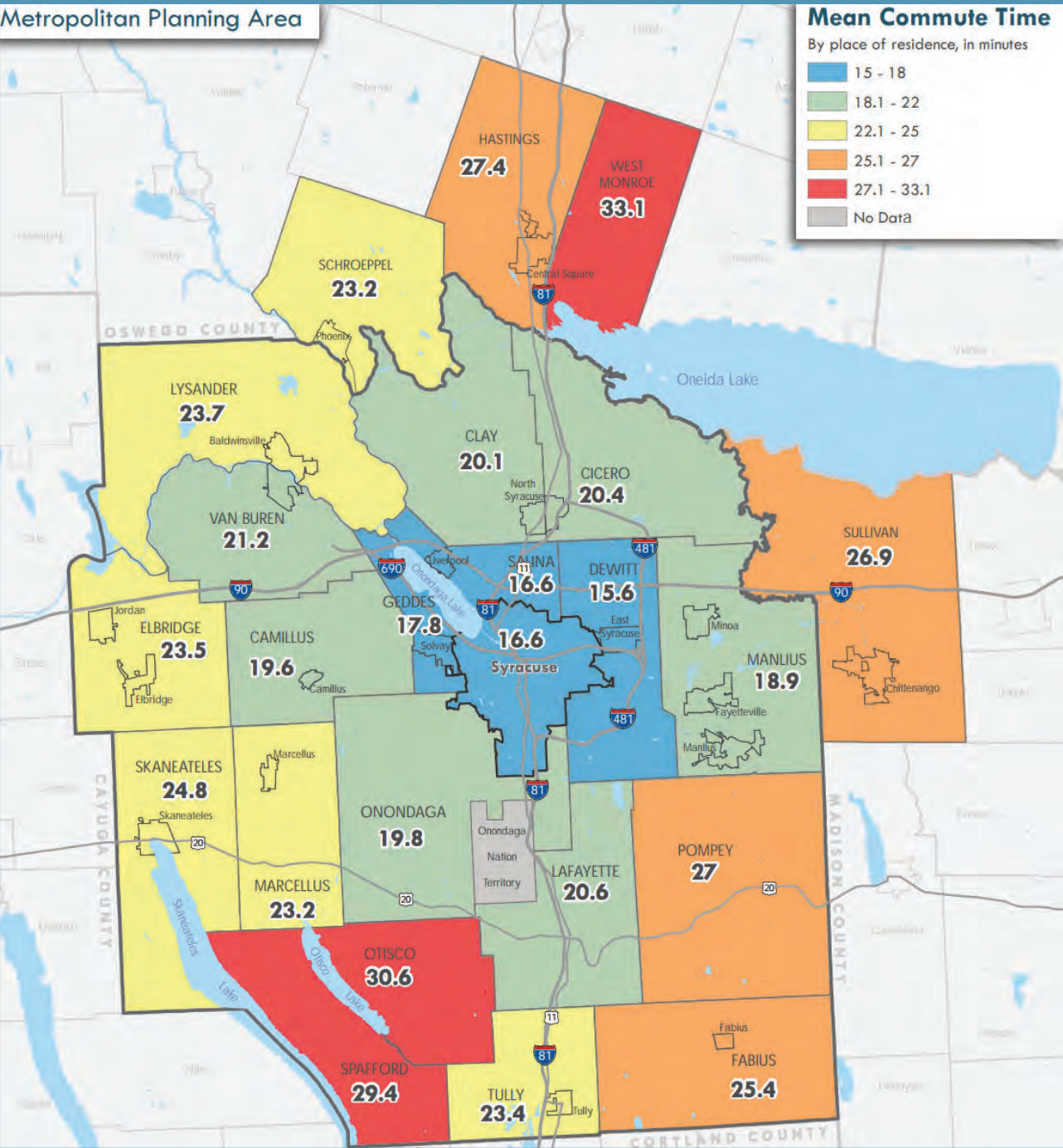
standards that would ensure public safety and consumer protection.”²

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.

2 “Four Upstate NY Mayors Calling for Ride-Sharing Legislation in Open Letter to Gov. Cuomo.” April 15, 2016. <http://www.twcnews.com/nys/central-ny/news/2016/04/15/upstate-ny-mayors-call-for-ride-sharing-legislation-.html>

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.



Map Credit: Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council

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 syr.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.³

3 September 16, 2016, study session notes.

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

4 October 6, 2016, study session notes.

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."¹ 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 Onondaga Creekwalk is one success story. The 2.6-mile bicycle/pedestrian pathway connects Armory Square in downtown Syracuse to the southern shore of Onondaga Lake. The route "celebrates the creek, which is a long neglected resource," said Owen Kerney of the Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency³. Construction for Creekwalk Phase 2, which will connect downtown/Armory Square to Colvin Street, is scheduled to begin in 2018. Phase 3 of the project, which is only a concept at this time, would extend the Creekwalk to the southern border of Syracuse at Dorwin Avenue.⁴

1 "Syracuse Bike Plan." 2012. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B2Xo82GXTbPdS3RMUXpKRzY1ZVvk/view>
2 Ibid. p. 6.
3 September 1, 2015, study session.
4 "Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan." September 2015. P 104.

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.

Melissa Fierke, a member of the group Bike CNY and a SUNY ESF professor who lives in the university area, started a bike safety committee at ESF. She's passionate about promoting biking for health and as a transportation option, but she worries about accidents. Between 2009 and 2013, 1.43 percent of accidents in the SMTC Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) involved pedestrians, and 0.88 percent involved bicyclists.⁵

5 Transportation Atlas, Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council. June 2015. p. 77. Based on Accident Location Information System data, January 2009 through December 2013.

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.⁶

"We've got to do something about that," Fierke said. "As someone really passionate about bicycling, I want to make it safer for everyone."⁷

Bicyclists express frustration at motorists who travel too close or harass them. Fierke said the frustration cuts both

6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.

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."

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/low income community in bike planning/advocacy.

8 See MOTU, Philadelphia Mayor's Office of Transportation & Utilities: <https://phillymotu.wordpress.com/category/other/walk-right-ride-right-drive-right/>



Photo credit: Syracuse University

Enhanced transportation corridors

Before focusing on the Destiny USA/Regional Transportation Center (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 mode 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/Valley Drive: 1,386
 - Drumlins/Nob 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: 22% 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.
- 26% 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"¹ (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 expand.² 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."³

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."⁴ 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.⁵

"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

¹ "City of Syracuse Comprehensive Plan 2040." <http://www.syracuse.ny.us/uploadedFiles/Comp%20Plan%20amended%202013-08-14.pdf>

² Ibid. P. 10.

³ Ibid. P. 28.

⁴ City of Syracuse press release, May 9, 2016.

⁵ State of the County Address, March 1, 2016. <http://www.ongov.net/executive/documents/SOTC%20as%20prepared%20for%20delivery.pdf>

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 at 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

6 TDM Encyclopedia definition of Smart Growth. <http://www.vtpi.org/tdm/tdm38.htm>
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Smart Growth America website. <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/what-is-smart-growth>

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 (SGPIPA) 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.

10 Smart Growth America website. <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets/complete-streets-fundamentals/complete-streets-faq>
11 “City of Syracuse Comprehensive Plan 2040.” P. 31.
12 New York State Department of Transportation website. <https://www.dot.ny.gov/programs/smart-planning/smartgrowth-law>
13 <http://on.ny.gov/2d8igqG>
14 <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2011/s5411/amendment/a>
15 <https://www.dot.ny.gov/programs/completestreets>

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 (gloves, windbreaker, balaclava) and head out in the cold.

Toward the end of my working life, I commuted by bike almost daily, between my house on Allen Street, near Westcott, and the newspaper office on Clinton Square. Rainy days posed a challenge, but I put on my slicker suit – pants and jacket – and arrived in good shape. The route to work was a breeze – half of it was downhill. Coming home was ... good exercise.

Since I left the paper in 2013, I use my bike whenever I can. Actually, bike-riding is nearly my only exercise, so I try to ride everywhere – to the grocery store, the pharmacy, the bank, the post office, downtown, to visit friends. You can carry quite a bit in pannier bags draped over the back of a sturdy commuter bike.

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.

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.

– Fred Fiske, former longtime Post-Standard editorial writer and Syracuse University neighborhood resident



Photo credit: The Post-Standard/Nicholas Lisi



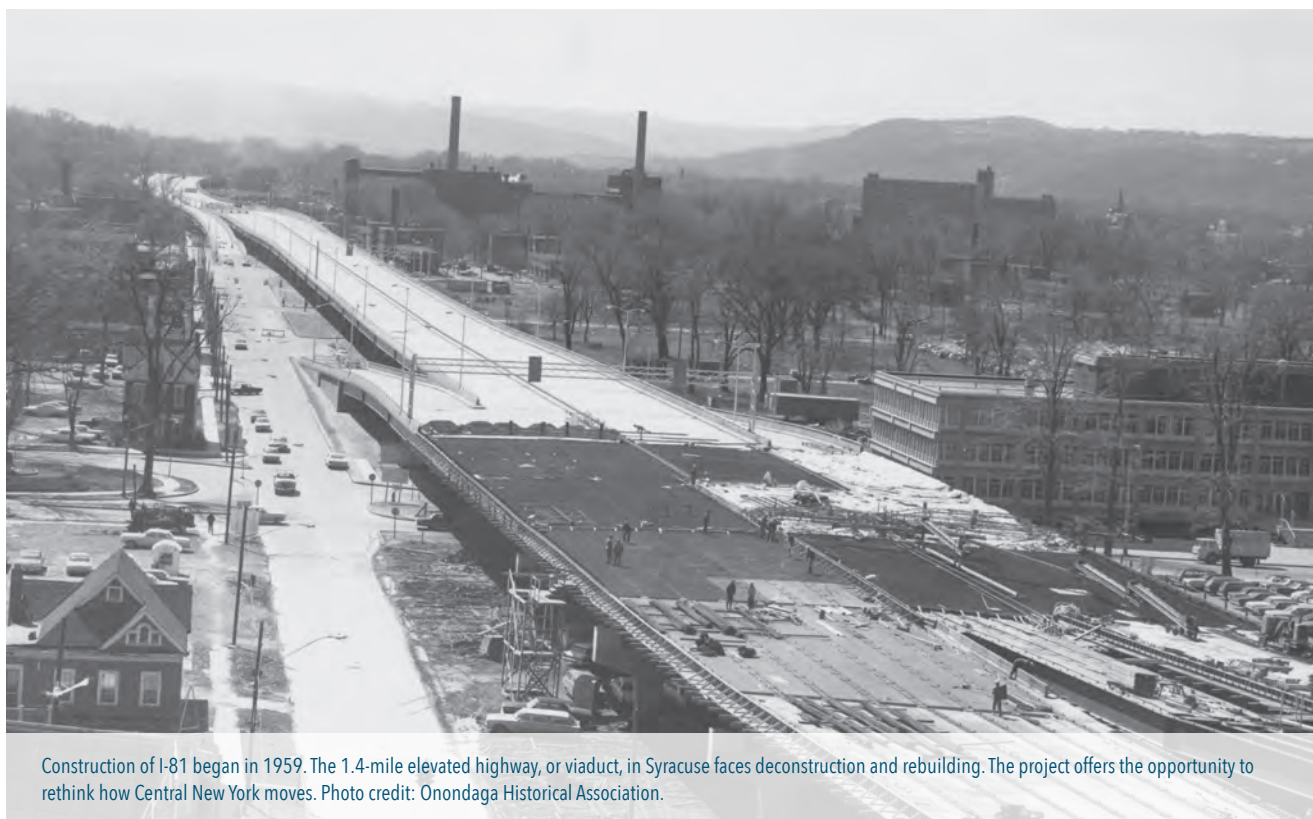
Chapter 6

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



Construction of I-81 began in 1959. The 1.4-mile elevated highway, or viaduct, in Syracuse faces deconstruction and rebuilding. The project offers the opportunity to rethink how Central New York moves. Photo credit: Onondaga Historical Association.

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 with this report 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.

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/state/index.ssf/2016/05/dots_i-81_project_director_we_dont_know_what_we_are_going_to_build_yet.html

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

² Lawrence, Eric D. "\$4.6B transit plan would connect Detroit, 4 counties." Detroit Free Press. May 31, 2016. <http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2016/05/31/detroit-rta-public-transportation/85089668>

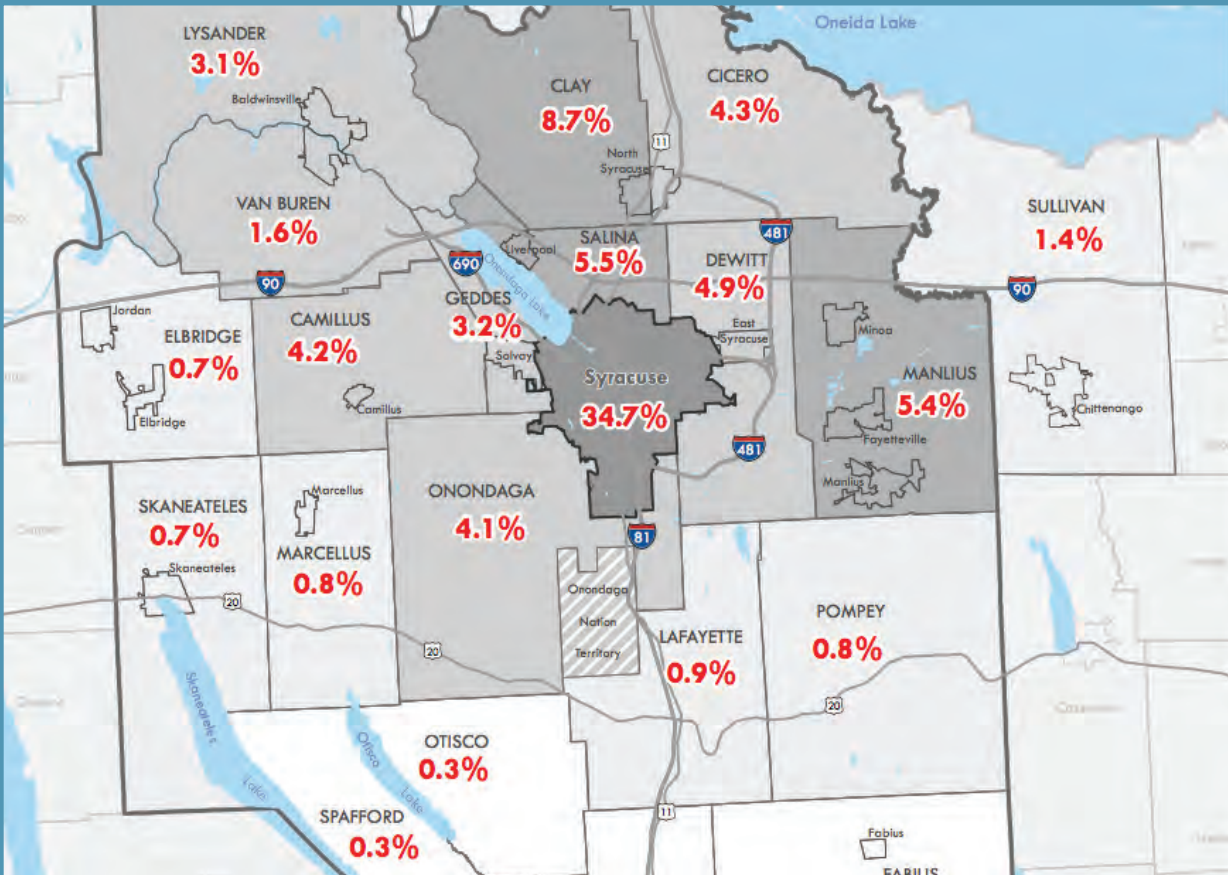
“Public transit – or lack thereof – ranks among the metro area’s most pernicious problems,” the Detroit Free Press wrote in an editorial. “From job stagnation to economic segregation, trace any of our regional deficits back far enough, and you’ll find our troubled transit system at or near the root.” 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.”³

3 “It’s time to get metro Detroit’s broken transit system right.” Detroit Free Press. May 31, 2016. <http://www.freep.com/story/opinion/editorials/2016/05/31/rta-millage-transit/84982194/>

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.

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.



Map Credit: Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council



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.



Transportation is not an isolated issue, but a broad, interrelated one.



The impending change of the I-81 viaduct offers an opportunity to envision, proactively, how CNY will move during and after the change.



Syracuse’s concentrated poverty limits people’s transportation opportunities.

In response to these three major findings, the OCL makes the following recommendations:

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 SOCPA.
- 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.

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.

Glossary

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 iconic 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 law (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 SMTC covers: Onondaga County, the Town of Sullivan in Madison County, and the Towns of Hastings, Schroepfel, 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 support 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.



Photo credit: Syracuse University

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.acts-syracuse.org/#!/moving-people-transportation/cg42

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. SMTC's Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) includes Onondaga County, the Town of Sullivan in Madison County, and the Towns of Hastings, Schroepfel, West Monroe and a small portion of Granby in Oswego County. www.smtcmpo.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

Sources: Institute for Transportation and Development Policy New York State, Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations, National Association of City Transportation Officials, Smart Growth America

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