

5400 Butternut Drive  
East Syracuse, NY 13057-8509  
Phone: 315.446.3910  
Fax: 315.449.0620

**Town Board:**  
Joe Chiarenza  
Karen Docter  
Jack Dooling  
Kerry Mannion  
Kerin Rigney  
Sam Young

Edward M. Michalenko, Ph.D.  
Supervisor



October 14, 2021

Mark Frechette, P.E.  
Project Director  
NYS Department of Transportation, Region 3  
333 East Washington Street  
Syracuse, NY 13202

Rick Marquis  
Division Administrator  
Federal Highway Administration  
Leo W. O'Brien Federal Building  
11A Clinton Avenue, Suite 719  
Albany, NY 12207

**RE: Interstate 81**

Dear Mr. Frechette and Mr. Marquis:

Please find attached comments from the Town of DeWitt regarding the I-81 Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edward M. Michalenko".

Edward M. Michalenko, Ph.D.  
Supervisor

Attachments

**Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS):** The comment period was not long enough to provide adequate review of the voluminous documents and properly address the multitude of issues and concerns, nor provide specific comments on the document narrative.

**Overall Statement:** As an environmental scientist and Supervisor of the Town of DeWitt, I oppose the plan to eliminate the north-south connection of Route 81 through the City of Syracuse.

The conversion of Route 481 into Route 81 will be detrimental to DeWitt neighborhoods due to significantly increased traffic on Route 481 and on DeWitt's secondary County and Town roads, thereby resulting in significantly increased air and noise pollution.

The conversion of Route 81 into a business loop will be detrimental to Syracuse southside and northside neighborhoods due to separation, significantly increased traffic on neighborhood secondary streets, thereby resulting in significantly increased air and noise pollution. In addition, the selected option, community grid will have negative economic, social, and environmental impacts on a regional scale. The CNY community will suffer over the long term by disconnecting Route 81 through the City of Syracuse.

The proposed project(s) will have severe negative social, economic, and environmental impacts on DeWitt and CNY far into the future.

Please see a copy of the Town Board Resolutions dated June 10, 2013 and August 22, 2016 outlining our position at:

<https://cms8.revize.com/revize/dewittny/supervisor/Town%20Board%20Resolution.pdf>

<https://cms8.revize.com/revize/dewittny/1-81.2013%20resolution.pdf>

This position is supported by majority of the DeWitt Town Board; 19 of 19 Supervisors and 18 of 19 Town Boards in Onondaga County have formally opposed the community grid as a standalone option.

**Sustainability:** A sustainable solution to a complex problem requires a deep evaluation of the economic, social, and environmental factors involved at both a local and global scale. The community grid option is a sustainable option on a microscale with short and long-term benefits for a minority of stakeholders including Syracuse University, Upstate Medical Center, several local developers and businesses. The community grid option violates sustainability principles on a macro-scale. The community grid as a stand-alone project has long term negative implications to the vast majority of Central New Yorkers including adjacent and nearby city residents. I am not anti-community grid, in fact, I support the intended goals of the community grid, and yet the goals of the community grid can be met with other options such as a box tunnel, depressed, or combination highway or iconic bridge.

I fully support smart growth and sustainability principles. The proposed community grid works against sustainability principles on a regional scale:

- by disconnecting direct routes,
- isolating existing neighborhoods,
- causing the travelling public to drive greater distances,
- redirecting short distance travelers through at-grade city streets,
- lowering public safety,
- increasing wait times at greater number of intersections,
- consuming large amounts of personal time of the course of a career or lifetime,
- increasing fuel consumption,
- increasing transportation costs for gasoline and vehicle wear and tear,
- increasing air pollution, and thereby
- exacerbating climate change.

Each of these items can be dismissed by proponents of the grid on an individual basis and looking through a short-term lens. However, collectively and over the long-term, have a profound negative economic, social, and environmental impacts on CNY.

**Regional transportation study:** NYSDOT has spent over a decade promoting the removal of Route 81 through the City of Syracuse and the accompanied conversion of Route 481 into Route 81 without conducting a regional transportation study.

NYSDOT has fostered the public perception that extensive study has been performed; yet, by confining the study area to the one and one-half mile stretch of Route 81 elevated highway between approximately Kennedy Street and Route 690 and by constraining the scope of the analyses, NYSDOT limited the study findings. The outcome of a biased study can be predetermined by a flawed study design and inappropriate hypothesis testing. In this case, NYSDOT structured the wrong hypothesis as “What should be done with a short segment of elevated highway within the City of Syracuse?” Hence, NYSDOT failed to evaluate other problematic highway segments and additional highway needs throughout CNY. For instance, NYSDOT should have evaluated and addressed the need for connections between Route 690 and Route 81; NYSDOT should have attempted to establish connections for those traveling Route 690 West bound to Route 81 North and those traveling Route 81 South bound to Route 690 West.

A project of such magnitude, with regional economic, social, and environmental impacts warrants an in-depth study on a regional scale. Rather than focus on a single segment of elevated highway comprising one and one-half miles within the City of Syracuse, a regional evaluation of transportation needs for the future of CNY would have developed a multifaceted strategy addressing a variety of road and neighborhood improvements throughout CNY. Results and outcomes would likely be entirely different than the current community grid as a standalone project. A more comprehensive approach could have identified solutions to multiple problematic locations throughout the CNY highway system. A holistic strategic plan could have

laid out a series of road improvements that could be implemented in discrete units over an extended period of time. The long-term implementation of such a plan would benefit the large majority of stakeholders and citizens throughout CNY. The failure to conduct a regional transportation study has led to the current proposal which will severely and negatively impact the vast majority of citizens and stakeholders throughout CNY far into the future.

**Predetermined outcome:** I was invited as DeWitt Supervisor and attended a NYSDOT Stakeholder Meeting in Lafayette Town Hall on the evening of September 17, 2009, along with Mr. Kerry Mannion, Deputy Supervisor, Mr. Michael Lazar, Chair of DeWitt Planning Board, and Mr. Richard Robb, Director of Planning, Development and Operations in DeWitt. Representatives from the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) and NYSDOT were present. It was at this meeting that we were first introduced to the notion that Route 81 would be dropped to ground level through the center of Syracuse and Route 481 would become Route 81, CNY's only major north-south federal freeway. We were told by NYSDOT representatives that CNY's population "was too small to maintain two federal highways". Later, on the ride back to DeWitt, Mr. Lazar concluded "that it was a done deal". It was apparent then, and it is evident now, that the decision was made prior to conducting the process; perhaps by a higher office in state government than that of NYSDOT.

**Federal highway system:** The modern federal highway system is largely a result of the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956. Congress mandated a system of divided and controlled access roadways with no at-grade intersections for multiple purposes including:

1. accommodating an increasing number of automobiles,
2. providing greater efficiency and reduced time-of-travel,
3. improved safety,
4. public works measure,
5. economic expansion, and
6. national defense.

Because Route 81 is part of the federal highway system, it belongs to the citizens and business enterprise of the United States. It services the traveling public, including out-of-state citizens, in addition to serving national defense, international trade, interstate shipping, business and commerce. Each of these items is an important factor in establishing the federal highway system. Each of these areas warrants an in-depth evaluation of the local, regional, and national impacts of disconnecting Route 81 through Syracuse. Each of these topics and others should be part of the discussion, and should be addressed in the DEIS, and each should have been topics included in a comprehensive regional transportation study.

The federal highway system continues to expand to this day, especially in areas of population and economic expansion. For all six reasons cited above, the conversion of Route 81 to an at grade business loop is a step backwards. Those cities throughout the U.S. that currently possess a business loop are striving to increase connections and construct divided controlled access roadways. For the most part, the highways to boulevards movement has occurred on urban highway appendages that extend in and out of an urban center with an already existing terminus point at the urban center (Harbor Drive Expressway, Portland, OR; Clairborne Expressway, New Orleans, LA; Inner Loop, Rochester, NY; Park East Freeway, Milwaukee, WI; Central Artery [John F. Fitzgerald Expressway] Boston, MA; Terminal Island Freeway, Long Beach, CA); very few urban highways that extend across and through the urban center have or are being disconnected. What is being proposed for Syracuse is tantamount to removing a section of the Southern State Highway in Queens, NY because the neighborhood of Lynnwood was divided and separated from Howard Beach, or removing the Van Wyck Expressway which connects LaGuardia and Kennedy airports through Queens. The Van Wyck Expressway also divided dozens of neighborhoods. On a smaller scale, the removal of Route 81 through Syracuse would be analogous to the Village of Marathon, NY deciding to convert Route 81 to a Boulevard. In fact, Route 81 bisects the jurisdictional boundaries of Marathon such that neighborhoods have been divided and the downtown area is separated from important schools. Similar situations are pervasive throughout the federal highway system. Still these highways are part of the major federal highway system.

The number of vehicles continues to expand even in the absence of population growth due to greater numbers of drivers and greater numbers of vehicles per household, and the growing numbers of delivery and service vehicles resulting from rapidly expanding ecommerce and the gig-economy. Online shopping and the associate mobile job pool is expected to grow far into the future. The time of travel will increase significantly for those traversing the grid, and the number of accidents will rise as safety will be diminished for those who cross the City-highway travel route which will be eliminated and sent to ground level secondary streets.

**National defense:** President Dwight D. Eisenhower promoted Congress to enact and he signed the Federal Aid Highway Act on June 29, 1956, in part, because he knew the importance to national defense. The bill was popularly referred to as the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act. It was the largest public works project in American history at the time, it authorized \$25 billion for the construction of 41,000 miles (66,000 km) of the Interstate Highway System over a 10-year period. President Eisenhower recognized the ability to move armies, supplies, materials, and weapons via convoy across the federal highway system was critical to the nation's long-term interest. President Eisenhower served as Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe during World War II. As an opposing General, Eisenhower was impressed with the Reichsautobahn highway system, and Germany's ability to rapidly deploy troops and armaments.

The conversion of Route 81 to a business loop through the City of Syracuse will potentially weaken national defense, particularly amongst deployments in the northeast. Currently both Route 81 and Route 481 serve as conduits for military purposes. Should an enemy or terrorist

group disable one route the other can be utilized in its stead. The concept is similar to the internet with the movement and delivery of electronic messages. Both Routes 81 and Route 481 are important to Fort Drum in Watertown, NY and other military installations such as those at Hancock Air Force Base, Griffiths Air Force Base, and the Seneca Depot.

**Alternatives:** Several primary options have been looked at to date: a tunnel, depressed highway, elevated highway, and a community grid. Very few, if any, favor maintaining the status quo. The current elevated highway configuration is unacceptable for the future, and is counter to securing a walkable, more densely populated, and sustainable downtown. Clearly, the construction of the original viaduct in the 1960's destroyed the 15<sup>th</sup> ward neighborhood and caused irreparable damage to families and thriving businesses; accompanied deed records and the practice of redlining are further evidence of systemic racism.

**Hybrid Community Grid:** Still, opportunity exists to accomplish the goals of the community grid and also maintain the north-south Route 81 connection through the city of Syracuse via a "Hybrid Community Grid" approach. The Hybrid Community Grid alternative would integrate the north-south Route 81 connection through the city of Syracuse through a design that does not impact the Community Grid design. An innovatively designed Hybrid Community Grid could work with a depressed highway, an elevated highway, or even a tunnel.

**Tunnel:** Many assert the tunnel option is too expensive. Given the significant economic challenges our region faces, they cite additional tax dollars could be better spent on other needed infrastructure (See comments on federal funding). The tunnel option was dismissed by NYS DOT due to costs and geologic conditions. Several of the identified tunnel routes were agreed to be impractical. However, a localized box tunnel option was never included in the analysis. A box tunnel could be installed at relatively low cost and adequately address poor geologic substrates. Further a box tunnel or series of box tunnel sections could easily be incorporated into a depressed highway design. The box tunnel highway option has a distinct advantage of requiring that nearby underground public utilities such as gas and electric, and municipal infrastructure such as sewer and water would be rebuilt.

**Depressed highway:** The depressed highway option has distinct advantages such as allowing the secondary cross streets to maintain connections between both sides of the highway. A depressed highway as would a tunnel, require rebuilding Syracuse's underground public utilities and municipal infrastructure, which is sorely needed. A depressed highway could accommodate the community grid by incorporating "shelves," with street level traffic extending over the depressed highway like the Grand Central Parkway in Queens, NY. A depressed highway would work well in combination with a box tunnel or perhaps a series of box tunnels, particularly located at cross secondary streets.

**Elevated Highway:** The elevated highway option also presents advantages, an elevated highway doesn't have to look like our existing highway; it could take a different route through the city, be a different height, and could allow for the community grid and also new buildings and green space underneath. Architect Steve Buechner has put forth an excellent proposal (Moriarty 2019,

*Architect resurrects I-81 central park proposal, adds sailboat bridge*

<https://www.syracuse.com/news/2019/02/architect-resurrects-i-81-central-park-proposal-adds-sailboat-bridge.html> , Syracuse.com, Feb. 6).

An innovative elevated highway design could be architecturally unique, visually appealing, or even iconic. Combining infrastructure with public open space like the Presidio in San Francisco is not only aesthetically pleasing, it can become a tourist attraction and often supports increased real estate values.

**Iconic bridge:** While highways are unappealing and often look alike, bridges can be used to create identity, establish a sense of place. Bridges often “brand” a city. If we envision the 1.5 mile section through Syracuse as a bridge, that section of highway could be a unique landmark, even architecturally iconic and help define the city’s skyline, an added feature to the Dome, the Crouse Hospital Clock Tower, AXA twin towers, and the State Tower building.

**Footprint:** The supposition that a modern Route 81 requires more space and would require the removal of a large number of buildings is false. In fact, the footprint of the highway could actually be smaller than the existing footprint, and yet safe, and still conform to NYS highway standards and guidelines, by stacking both the north and south bound lanes over one another.

**Federal Funds:** Any project highway would be largely paid for with federal tax dollars. NYS has allocated 800 million dollars for the project; majority of the funds (80%) are federally sourced. One-fifth of the costs would be provided by NYS.

New York is seventh from the bottom amongst the state’s return on federal tax dollars. For every dollar paid, New York receives about 90 cents back. Yet, New York State ranks second in total taxes paid to the federal government. It is incumbent upon our federal representatives, Senator Charles E. Schumer, Senator Kirsten E. Gillibrand, and Congressman John M. Katko, to obtain the necessary federal funds to implement a project that serves the greatest number of citizens, stakeholders and interested parties. The community grid option alone supports a strong and powerful minority of institutions and entities at the expense of the majority.

**Mass transit:** Why sell CNY and the future short? Why not think big? Are we not worthy of the best option for the future? And why hasn’t there been any discussion of a regional mass transit system that would relieve pressure on our highways? Why not light rail transit?

A mass transit system would also support our very serious poverty issue, providing affordable transportation for low wage earners and helping the jobless get to available jobs outside of their local area. At a minimum, a regional rapid bus transit should be part of the long-term comprehensive plan and implemented across CNY. It would also support a reduction in our use of fossil fuels. The best long-term option for CNY should include mass transit. Perhaps a solar powered electric train system could be planned, designed, and constructed over the next generation. I want my grandchildren to view burning fossil fuels as we view riding horses. We have the technology, but lack the vision and political will.

**Approaches:** NYSDOT has consistently reiterated the project is restricted to the elevated downtown highway between Kennedy Street and Route 690. NYSDOT has also recently spent years rebuilding, restoring, rehabilitating and reconditioning the approaches to the elevated highway designated for removal. Many of the bridges have been repaired and a number of adjacent road sections have been resurfaced. Consequently, the approaches to this stretch of highway will pretty much remain; there will be some re-engineering for the grid; however; road elevations are fixed and connections to a depressed highway, box tunnel, or iconic bridge will be difficult at best. Approaches would need to be re-designed in order to meet the proper grades and elevations if a viable alternative other than the community grid were to be implemented. The following summarizes NYSDOT's work approaching the elevated highway over the past several years:

1. **South:** NYSDOT has rebuilt Route 81 approaching the study area from the south. The road has been re-paved and the bridge at Colvin Street has been refurbished.
2. **North:** The Route 81 approach from the north has been repaved. The bridges at Butternut Street, Spencer Street, and the Court Street exits and south bound entrance have been refurbished. The exit to Court Street and the two entrances off Genant Street along with the extensive exchange between Hiawatha Boulevard and Park Street and Long Branch Park have been refurbished including the Route 81 southbound exits to Clinton Street and Salina Street.
3. **West:** Extensive work has been performed on Route 690 including the West Street Arterial and the bridges over Onondaga Creek. Work has been performed along Route 690 from downtown to and including exits at the NYS Fairgrounds.
4. **East:** The Route 690 bridge over Teall Avenue has been recently rebuilt. The craftsmanship and final appearance is excellent, especially in comparison to the Route 690 bridge at Bridge Street in DeWitt. A significant amount of work was recently performed at Bridge Street. The final bridge presentation is poor. The bridge deck was replaced, Bridge Street was widened, an additional lane was added, and the concrete wall forming the bridge abutment was scribed to appear as a block wall. The center median was left unattended, and the volunteer growth of weeds were left in place. Minimal cost and minimal design effort were spent on Bridge Street. An unequal level of resource and funds were dedicated compared with that afforded to the Teall Avenue Bridge. This is only one of many examples, but the attention to detail, the final design, and the work product delivered at Teall Avenue registers concern that DeWitt is not equal in value as the City of Syracuse to NYSDOT. This appears to be a theme, in NYS DOT's proposal for the community grid. From artwork to creek walk, the City is receiving premier treatment, while DeWitt receives band aids and minimus remedies.

**Approach Summary:** The previous recent work on the approaches to the area proposed for the community grid was a clear signal from NYSDOT that other alternatives or options were not to be selected because significant investment has been made in locations that now would be required to be removed and replaced should another alternative be selected. For instance, the approach to an iconic bridge would likely need to meet at higher elevations which would need greater distance to meet the desired elevation. Likewise, the option of a box tunnel, depressed highway



or some combination would need lower elevations on the approach, and would also need greater distance. Because the approach to these other options cannot be made in the distances allowed within the current infrastructure. The road elevations, heights, widths, and supports do not permit a re-engineering of the larger system on a scale necessary to accommodate a continued connection across the one and one-half mile elevated highway study area.

**Impact on City Neighborhoods:** The community grid option standalone has been accepted by many based on the assumption nearly all commuters are headed downtown. NYSDOT published in earlier documents that about 88% of the traffic on Route 81 heading towards Syracuse from either the northern or southern intersections with Route 481 did not exit at the opposite Route 481 intersection.

The implication is two-fold. The first based on a false and leading assumption that over three fourths of the travelers using Route 81 are heading downtown. The second false assumption is predicated on the first false assumption and that is only 12% of the Route 81 traffic is through traffic, and therefore, redirecting this miniscule through traffic to Route 481 would be minimal in its impact to Route 481 and DeWitt. Both assumptions and concomitant illogical conclusion are false. Further, the data are suspect and were collected for a short duration that excludes the seasonal migration of snowbirds to the south, and possibly more important, the summer recreational and vacation travel to the many lakes, waterways, and parks throughout central and northern NY.

Still, much of the traffic heading towards Syracuse may redirect at Route 690 or the NYS Thruway and never reach the opposite entry Route 481 intersection. Northbound traffic entering from the south and cutoff by the community grid will subsequently be added to Route 481. Some heading west will exit somewhere to the south and impact the western townships.

The largest groups to lose according to the proposed community grid option will be residents from the northside and southside neighborhoods of Syracuse. The grid will further isolate these residents and destroy rapid connections to each other. What's missing from the public discussion is everyone who crosses downtown in their daily travels, including city residents. Those who live south and work north, at places like Lockheed-Martin, Destiny, Salina Meadows, etc. and those who live north and work south, at places like Community Hospital, OCC, Loretto, etc. All will experience rush hour delays and downtown congestion at street level as they navigate city streets rather than safer and faster divided highway. Those likely affected that appear excluded from public discussion are those city residents who travel through and past downtown in their daily commute. Those that live in a northside neighborhood who travel south daily. Those who live in southside neighborhood and travel north beyond downtown daily. I do not possess a large sample size, but I do frequent neighborhoods adjacent to Onondaga Creek in Syracuse as it relates to my work with the Onondaga Environmental Institute. Whenever I have opportunity, I ask residents from surrounding neighborhoods opinion of the community grid. One southside resident informed me he gets on at Colvin Street and off at Brighton Avenue and works at Crouse-Hinds. His commute will be broken by the community grid. Most southsiders respond with a question. I am paraphrasing, but I commonly hear: "how am I to get to the mall?"

or “how am I to get to the airport?” The simple answer is they will navigate city streets at ground level. They will consume more time from their lives, spend greater amounts of money on gasoline, and increase their contribution of toxic gases to the atmosphere.

The farther away from center the starting point, the more likely the traveler will choose to travel roundabout using Route 481, Route 690, and/or the Thruway to complete their travel loop. In any case, there will be added time-of-travel, added fuel consumption, added costs, added noise, and added air pollutants (see comments regarding the same).

Another critical misconception is that everyone stays in the workplace for eight hours. That has never been less true. With the new “gig” economy, more and more workers are mobile throughout the day. The ability to travel quickly and efficiently is critical for postal carriers, package delivery, repair and medical services, students, IT and maintenance workers, vendors, and suppliers. Many scoff that the added 5 to 10 minutes per commute is nominal; but there are those whose work week will expand, costs will increase, due to hours of lost productivity. The collective effect will add to inflate prices and dampen an already weak local economy. The most vulnerable will be impacted the most. Further, the proliferation of internet purchasing necessitates the transportation of goods and services be dependable and rapid. Adopting a plan that works against the demands of e-commerce is a mistake, especially in trying to attract and recruit new business to the CNY region.

**Social Justice:** Many proponents of the community grid cite social justice as the rationale for supporting the grid. I ask, “Just how is the community grid going to help residents of the southside?” To the contrary, the community grid option alone will serve to disconnect Syracuse neighborhoods from the CNY highway transportation network, further isolate southside neighborhoods economically and socially contribute to the food desert phenomenon in areas away from downtown.

As a member of the Urban Jobs Task Force, I fully support racial inclusion in providing training and construction jobs to local companies and Syracuse City residents. Again, I support a hybrid option, hence, the community grid network of road improvements would be constructed along with a box tunnel, depressed highway, some combination, or iconic bridge. In addition, there is a need for road improvements to Route 481 irrespective of the outcome for Route 81. Those same jobs could be provided long-term as construction crews progress through a series of projects throughout CNY outlined in a long-term regional transportation plan.

The community grid option has been promoted as an environmental justice issue for southside neighborhoods, yet commuters coming from the south destined for the hospitals, university, or downtown will still be travelling the same Route 81 approach only now a business loop. Residents along and near South State Street, Garfield Avenue, Leon Street, South McBride Street, Oakwood Avenue and others will still be impacted by commuters heading to the hospitals, Syracuse University, downtown offices, government, businesses, and beyond. The community grid will not provide relief to existing neighborhoods. In fact, plans have already identified removal and displacement of the residents of Pioneer Homes. New housing along the grid, just

as that comprising the “downtown housing renaissance,” will likely gentrify the near downtown neighborhood at a price beyond that which would benefit the underserved communities of the Southside. Not long ago fourteen of the area’s most prominent developers penned an editorial in support of the community grid. We all support further economic benefits gained via the redevelopment of downtown. A strong Syracuse urban core is important to the overall health of CNY and developers will be quick to capitalize on downtown revitalization. Is their support of the community grid, self-interest, and profit, or is it altruism?

The individuals that will profit and capitalize on future development will bring projects that ultimately will lead to gentrification; those same individuals are citing the social justice argument. I question why the disenfranchised are being fronted to dissuade the argument for maintaining a Route 81 connection while no real project or plan to benefit Southside residents has been put forth to date.

**Waste:** We can all agree the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Forcing people to drive a round-about route through DeWitt leads to wasted time and money, lost productivity, added fuel consumption, noise and air pollution, and climate change exacerbation. A Hybrid Community Grid could address these issues wisely and innovatively.

**Time:** Proponents of the community grid cite an added 10 minutes per commute is nominal. Still, conservative calculations of the numbers show significant negative impact. The average workers commute will increase 10 miles by utilizing Route 481 and Route 690. With an average speed of 60 mph, the commute would increase by 10 minutes. The average worker with an additional 8 minutes per commute will lose 64 hours each year (assuming 2 trips per day, 5 days per week, 50 weeks per year) on top of their already existing commute. The same individual will lose nearly 11.5 weeks (1920 hours) added over a 30 year career. The collective lost time for 60,000 commuters is an individual equivalent of 438.36 years (3,840,000 hrs/yr) in a single year, and 13,150.7 years (115,200,000 hrs/30 yr) over the course of 30 years. Again, actual lost time could be more than 20% greater. Further, these numbers do not include added idling time to traffic navigating across the community grid. The impact to commerce and business is expected to be far worse. Time is money. For mail carriers, package deliveries, business suppliers, and other mobile enterprises, the work week will expand, costs will increase due to thousands of hours of lost productivity. The community grid will negatively impact the quality of life for thousands of individuals who will lose significant time. The collective loss of time will negatively impact the local economy and people’s lives socially.

**Fuel consumption:** The community grid will increase time and mileage for majority of commuters, in addition to added idling time to traffic diverted onto the grid, all of which greatly increases fuel consumption. Conservative calculations of the numbers show significant negative impact. The average worker with an added 10 mile commute will burn an additional 200 gallons of gasoline each year (assuming 25mpg, 2 trips per day, 5 days per week, 50 weeks per year) on top of their already existing gasoline consumption rate. The same individual will burn an additional 6000 gallons of gasoline over a 30 year career. The collective annual gasoline consumption for 60,000 commuters will be 12,000,000 gallons. The collective added gasoline

consumption over 30 years will be 360,000,000 gallons. Again, the actual amounts of increased fuel consumption are expected to be much greater. The estimates of added distance and daily vehicles are likely low. Further, these numbers do not reflect added idling time to traffic navigating across the community grid. Likewise, these numbers do not reflect commercial, business, fleet trucks, and tractor trailer trucks which are likely to consume diesel fuel at a much lower mileage efficiency.

**Fuel costs:** The community grid will increase time and mileage for majority of commuters, in addition to added idling time to traffic diverted onto the grid, all of which greatly increases fuel consumption. Increased fuel consumption translates to increased fuel costs. Conservative calculations of the numbers show significant negative impact. The average worker with an added 10 mile commute will pay an additional \$600 for gasoline each year (assuming \$3.00 per gallon for an added 200 gallons) on top of their already existing fuel bill. The same individual will spend an additional \$18,000 for gasoline over a 30 year career. The collective annual increase in cost for gasoline will be \$36,000,000. The collective added gasoline costs over 30 years will be \$1,080,000,000. Again, these are conservative estimates as no increase in the cost of gasoline was applied, and the actual amounts of increased fuel consumption are expected to be much greater. The estimates of added distance and daily vehicles are likely low. Further, these numbers do not reflect added idling time to traffic navigating across the community grid. Likewise, these numbers do not reflect commercial, business, fleet trucks, and tractor trailer trucks which are likely to consume diesel fuel at a much lower mileage efficiency and much higher cost per gallon. Therefore, added fuel costs will have a negative effect on families, especially those that can least afford it. Syracuse and Onondaga County lag NYS and the country economically; from 2016 to 2019, the median household income in the United States and New York State increased 7.05% and 7.59% respectively; the median household income in Onondaga County increased just 1.42%. While households in NYS gained \$5,087 and households across the U.S. gained \$4,329 during this same time period, households in Onondaga County gained only \$861. Moreover, approximately one-third of the residents in the City of Syracuse live in poverty; as do one in two children. In addition, added fuel costs will have a negative effect on the business community which will pass costs along to consumers through rising prices for goods and services. The community grid option alone will have a significant negative overall impact on the local economy.

**Environmental Impact:** The overall impact of the community grid to the environment will be negative as a result of increased vehicle use and increased noise and air pollution. Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from transportation account for about 29 percent of total U.S. GHG emissions, making transportation the largest contributor of U.S. GHG emissions. Between 1990 and 2019, GHG emissions in the transportation sector increased more in absolute terms than any other sector. The community grid option will contribute to this trend locally. Motor vehicles emit many types of pollutants including nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>), volatile organic compounds (VOCs), carbon monoxide (CO), carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), particulates, sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) and lead. Emissions vary by use and type of engine, fuel type and combustion temperature. Automotive air pollutants cause human health complications including cancer, asthma, eye irritation, poisoning, heart disease and birth defects. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

estimates motor vehicles emit almost 75% of the carbon monoxide pollution in the United States. The Environmental Defense Fund estimates that transportation releases nearly 27 percent of GHG emissions. Air pollution from motor vehicles contributes to climate change as GHG heat the planet and deplete the ozone layer. Average global temperatures are rising, leading to rising sea levels, an increase in natural disasters and local climactic effects such as increased intensity of storm events and greater frequencies and longer periods of drought. The community grid option will increase GHG emissions as demonstrated by the following calculations:

**Carbon dioxide pollution:** The community grid will increase time and mileage for majority of commuters, in addition to added idling time to traffic diverted onto the grid, all of which greatly increases fuel consumption, and therefore increases air pollution. Carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) is an important heat-trapping GHG released via human activities such as deforestation and the combustion of fossil fuels, as well as natural processes such as respiration and volcanic eruptions. Levels of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere have been increasing at an accelerating rate and CO<sub>2</sub> has become the scientific barometer for climate change.

Conservative calculations of the numbers for CO<sub>2</sub> show significant negative impact. On average a combusted gallon of gasoline yields about 20 lbs of CO<sub>2</sub>. The average worker with an added 10 mile commute will burn an additional 200 gallons of gasoline each year thereby producing an extra 4000 lbs of CO<sub>2</sub> annually over that already being generated. The same individual will emit an additional 120,000 lbs of CO<sub>2</sub> to the atmosphere over a 30 year period of time. The collective annual incremental CO<sub>2</sub> discharge for 60,000 commuters will be 240,000,000 lbs. The collective added incremental discharge over 30 years will be 7,200,000,000 lbs. Again, the actual amounts of increased CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are expected to be much greater. The estimates of added distance and daily vehicles are likely low. Further, these numbers do not reflect added idling time to traffic navigating across the community grid. Likewise, these numbers do not reflect commercial, business, fleet trucks, and tractor trailer trucks which are likely to consume diesel fuel at a much lower mileage efficiency, and over 10% greater CO<sub>2</sub> production per gallon. On average a combusted gallon of diesel fuel yields about 22.4 lbs of CO<sub>2</sub>. Hence, the overall effect to the environment of the community grid is negative.

Carbon dioxide is just one of hundreds of hydrocarbons emitted by motor vehicles. Those hydrocarbons will increase in output due to the community grid just as that of CO<sub>2</sub>. All are air pollutants and harmful to human health, and all are GHG emissions and will contribute to climate change. The community grid option is an ill-fated environmental choice. It will negatively impact and perturb the environment downtown, in DeWitt, and across the CNY region.

**Toxic gases:** The community grid will increase time and mileage for majority of commuters, in addition to added idling time to traffic diverted onto the grid, all of which greatly increases fuel consumption, and therefore increases air pollution. Gasoline combustion produces many types of pollutants including nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>), volatile organic compounds (VOCs), carbon monoxide (CO), CO<sub>2</sub>, particulates, Sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) and lead. Many of these pollutants are

toxic and harmful to human health. The category for toxic gases includes a subset of byproducts; CO<sub>2</sub>, particulates, and metals are not included.

Conservative calculations of the numbers for toxic gases show significant negative impact. On average a combusted gallon of gasoline yields about 4.2 lbs of toxic gases. The average worker with an added 10 mile commute will burn an additional 200 gallons of gasoline each year thereby producing an extra 840 lbs of toxic gases annually over that already being generated. The same individual will emit an additional 25,200 lbs of toxic gases to the atmosphere over a 30 year period of time. The collective annual incremental discharge for 60,000 commuters will be 50,400,000 lbs of toxic gases. The collective added incremental discharge of toxic gases over 30 years will be 1,512,000,000 lbs. Again, actual amounts of increased toxic gases emissions are expected to be much greater. The estimates of added distance and daily vehicles are likely low. Further, these numbers do not reflect added idling time to traffic navigating across the community grid. Likewise, these numbers do not reflect commercial, business, fleet trucks, and tractor trailer trucks which are likely to consume diesel fuel. Calculations were not performed for diesel fuel, which will add to the overall impact.

The calculation of toxic gases output is representative of the impact of hundreds of hydrocarbons emitted by fossil fuel burning motor vehicles. All are air pollutants. Several have greater negative effects than CO<sub>2</sub>. The effects of air pollution include human health and environmental impacts.

**Human health effects:** There are a number of issues that will impact the residents of the City of Syracuse and the Town of DeWitt that are associated with the Community Grid option which has been selected to replace the elevated portion of Route 81 through the City of Syracuse. The primary cause of these impacts in DeWitt is associated with the increased traffic that will be created by the increased by-pass traffic which will be created on the Route 481 corridor. The two most important involve the impact on human health caused by the increase in traffic noise pollution and the further impairment in air quality which will be created by the increased by-pass traffic. Automobile air pollution is a major environmental risk factor in the incidence and progression of diseases such as asthma, lung cancer, ventricular hypertrophy, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases, psychological complications, autism, retinopathy, fetal growth, and low birth weight. Air pollution is also a leading cause of climate change, acid rain, freshwater eutrophication, ocean acidification, wildlife extinction, and ozone depletion.

**Benefactors:** Those that benefit from the community grid alone will be a select minority of stakeholders including Syracuse University, Upstate Medical Center, and a few developers. Future development along the community grid has been cited as a major benefit of the community grid, in particular, that along the newly constructed community grid boulevard along Almond Street. Many have touted tax revenue will increase significantly to the City of Syracuse from future development. However, much of land is owned by non-profits that do not pay property taxes or owners that receive tax relief through payments in lieu of taxes (PILOT) agreements made by either the Syracuse Industrial Development Agency or Onondaga County Industrial Development Agency.

Syracuse University<sup>1</sup>, Upstate Medical Center, associates of New York State Housing, Hutchinson Psychiatric Center, Human Performance Center, Center of Excellence, or an associate non-profit currently own a large number of parcels along and near Almond Street and collectively these institutions are looking to possibly develop and expand further into downtown. Upstate Medical Center currently owns or rents 500 Harrison Street, the Presidential Plaza including the Madison and Jefferson Towers, 550 and 600 East Genesee Street. The current elevated highway divides the campus setting as 500 Harrison St. and the Presidential Plaza are located on the westside of the highway and Almond Street. Route 81 serves as a barrier to both Syracuse University's and Upstate Medical Center's main campus. Neither institution nor associated not-for-profits pays property taxes. Added revenue from property taxes along the grid is not likely to greatly benefit the City of Syracuse and these institutions are likely to remove additional parcels from the tax roles as campus footprints expand in the future.

Property tax benefits from developers is not likely to be realized. As most large developments have been provided PILOT agreements by either the Syracuse Industrial Development Agency or Onondaga County Industrial Development Agency in recent years, a trend that is likely to continue. In fact, it was recently reported Syracuse granted downtown and university-area developers over 50 million dollars in property tax breaks over a twelve year period (Knaus 2018. *40 Syracuse properties that save 5.3 million a year from generous tax break* <https://www.syracuse.com/news/2019/12/syracuse-council-closes-tax-loophole-that-allowed-developers-to-save-millions.html>, Syracuse.com, May 30; Knaus 2019. *Three vending machines saved a builder \$3 million in property taxes* <https://www.syracuse.com/news/2018/05/3-vending-machines-saved-a-builder-3-million-in-property-taxes-a-ny-law-exploite.html#:~:text=SYRACUSE%2C%20N.Y.,%243%20million%20in%20property%20taxes;a%20NY%20law%20exploited>, Syracuse.com, May 30).

The Connective Corridor is a paradigm of Syracuse University's integration into downtown; a process that will likely continue. Likewise, Upstate Medical Center will likely continue to integrate into downtown. Pioneer homes and Mulberry Square will likely be displaced as current residents will be gentrified out of their homes. The irony is the social justice arguments used to justify the community grid will have a negative impact on minority and underserved populations closest to downtown. Residents will be pushed further into the Southside and Valley via downtown gentrification. Those dwelling in the Southside and Valley neighborhoods will still experience the negative impacts of commuter traffic to the hospitals, University and downtown offices as the current Route 81 arterial will serve as the business loop. Tens of thousands of commuters will still traverse the Route 81 business loop and as reported by NYSDOT will still travel past their neighborhoods at 65 mph.

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<sup>1</sup> Syracuse University may see its future as more of an urban campus (Syracuse University 2017. *Campus framework, full report: vision for excellence 2017–2037*). The University purportedly weighed the potential sale of south campus, establishing Manley Fieldhouse as its southernmost property, and migrating northward and westward into the City; however, this direction was subsequently abandoned (Simpson pers. Comm. 2016). Under a former Chancellor, the *Connected Corridor* was a potential pathway for future land acquisition and the further development of the urban campus, and some time ago, the former NYS Governor proposed to construct a Syracuse University indoor sports arena at Kennedy Square.

Syracuse University and Upstate Medical Center are both important institutions that have a tremendously beneficial role in CNY. Both are critical to the future. Both are major employers providing high paying jobs and exemplary citizens. Both contribute intelligentsia to the region, and enrich our body politic, arts, culture, and economy. Both further support the local economy via the dependency of supplemental service providers and secondary local business. Consequently, the position of both institutions in support of the community grid carries great weight and significance with decision makers. Yet with innovative design for a hybrid community grid with a maintained Route 81 connection, the goals of the community grid can be met, and the continued downtown integration of the Syracuse University-Upstate Medical Center complex could still occur.

**Long-term economic shift:** NYSDOT is shifting the economic capital of CNY away from the City of Syracuse and into DeWitt. Should municipal borders and jurisdictions not change via consolidations or restructuring of local governments, DeWitt will be the economic capital of CNY in 30 to 50 years. DeWitt currently accounts for 45% of Onondaga County's industrial and commercial lands, two-thirds of the Syracuse Hancock International Airport is located within DeWitt, and the DeWitt Railyards and are situated in the Village of East Syracuse and the Towns of DeWitt and Manlius. Now DeWitt is about to become the crossroads of the major federal highway system in CNY. Route 81, Route 690, and the New York State Thruway (Route 90) will converge in DeWitt. State Route 173, Route 92, Route 5, Route 635, Route 290, and Route 298 all cross DeWitt and contact one of the major Federal highways. Economic activity based on trade dates back to the times of Marco Polo. With the connections between air shipping, rail freight, and highway transport, DeWitt will be the central locale for the movement of goods and services in and out of CNY. Hence, DeWitt will transition to the economic center of CNY over the next several decades due to access to transportation. Positioned as the transportation hub of CNY, DeWitt will attract new business and industry. I liken the economic shift as analogous to the historic migration of commerce from Salina to the City of Syracuse as result of construction of the Erie and Oswego Canals and ensuing railroads. Business and commerce tend co-locate with transportation centers. No better examples exist than those communities that either suffered versus those that rose economically in prominence along the federal highway system. The rapid economic and population growth of Denver, CO commenced and progressed with the onset and surge in air travel and shipping over the Rocky Mountains.

Despite the many negative impacts of converting Route 481 to Route 81 on residents, neighborhoods, and residential properties, the long-term economic impact on business and industry in DeWitt will be beneficial. Yet, these benefits are far outweighed by the overwhelmingly negative effects to DeWitt neighborhoods, the City of Syracuse and the CNY region.



## Required DeWitt Road Improvements

In addition to those concerns and issues expressed for the City of Syracuse and the CNY region, the Town of DeWitt's concerns are related to the effects that the potential rerouting of Route 81 to the Route 481 corridor would have on the character of the Town's neighborhoods and important open space systems. Yet, the following sections describe necessary road improvements required of NYSDOT irrespective of the translocation of Route 81 to Route 481.

**Greenspace:** The Butternut Creek corridor adjacent to Route 481 was identified by the Town as a conservation area by the Town of DeWitt Comprehensive Plan (2002) <https://cms8.revize.com/revize/dewittny/Planning%20and%20Zoning/Planning%20and%20Sustainability/Comprehensive%20Plan%202002.pdf> . At the same time, the Comprehensive Plan identifies the I-481 corridor as a significant barrier within the Town:

Excerpt from TOD Comp. Plan 2002 "Large areas of land in DeWitt are occupied by portions of the region's arterial highway system...it effectively segments the Town and creates significant visual and physical barriers."

**Pedestrian and bicycle accommodations:** Route 481 serves as a barrier at the interchange of East Genesee Street (NYS Rt 5) and Route 481, but problems exist at the Jamesville Road and Kirkville Road interchanges. The East Genesee Street interchange covers approximately 74 acres (larger than the prominent Shoppingtown Mall site) and presents difficulties for pedestrian and bicycle mobility due to the lack of adequate facilities, vehicular travel speeds, and the scale of the facility itself. The SMTC completed a "Bicycle Commuter Corridor Study" in 2013 that identifies NYS Route 5 as a "possible bike corridor" and recommended the consideration of a protected contraflow bike lane down the center lane from Wellington Road to Maple Drive. The Comprehensive Plan is supportive of the development of a Town-wide interconnected system of pedestrian and bike ways.

**The Town requests that NYSOT consider the redesign of the Route 481 and East Genesee Interchange to adequately and safely accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists (see Attachment 1). Accommodations for Pedestrian and bike paths should be designed at all town exit and entrances.**

**Sidewalk installation:** The Town is requesting sidewalk construction along major state routes throughout DeWitt in accordance with NYSDOT policy. The Town is willing to provide maintenance and snow removal via in-kind service and labor and is willing to enter into contract agreements with NYSDOT. Areas in further need of sidewalks include but are not limited to Erie

Boulevard (Route 5), Thompson Road (Route 635), Bridge Street, Route 92, Route 173, Route 290 and Route 298.

**Bicycle path installation:** The Town is requesting bicycle path construction along major state routes throughout DeWitt in accordance with NYSDOT policy. The Town is willing to provide maintenance and snow removal via in-kind service and labor and is willing to enter into contract agreements with NYSDOT. Areas in further need of bicycle paths include but are not limited to Erie Boulevard (Route 5), Thompson Road (Route 635), Bridge Street, Route 92, Route 173, Route 290 and Route 298.

**Sound Barriers:** Sound barriers are necessary to protect neighborhoods from increased noise levels. In particular, the Jonathan-Craig and Dewittshire neighborhoods are already exposed to extreme levels and constant highway noise on a daily basis. DeWitt neighborhoods should be afforded sound protection irrespective of moving Route 81 to Route 481.

DeWitt is located along the City of Syracuse entire eastern border. DeWitt is narrow geographically; only 3 miles wide at its greatest distance along its east-west orientation. DeWitt is approximately 9.25 miles long and entirely bisected by Route 481. Therefore, the entirety of DeWitt is currently impacted by sound and will be further impacted by the conversion of Route 481 into Route 81. Sound impacted neighborhoods include areas of Jamesville such as homes along and near Rockcut Road, Rt. 173, Doubletree, Apple Cross Woods, Boulder and Steinway Heights, and the Nottingham. Sound impacted neighborhoods in Central DeWitt include Orvilton and the homes along and proximate to Woodchuck Hill Road, Maple Drive, Jamesville Road, and Butternut Drive. Sound impacted neighborhoods in East Syracuse and the Northtown include Dunrovin and Collamer.

NYSDOT performed sound modelling for the DEIS. Model results are inaccurate, inadequate, and are questionable. For instance, the DEIS calls for sound attenuation on the eastside of Route 481 in front of Town Hall, but not on the western side directly across from Town Hall where the Jonathan-Craig neighborhood exists. The eastern “sound-protected” side at Town Hall is absent of homes and residents, whereas the western side has hundreds of occupants residing in the Jonathan-Craig neighborhood. A comprehensive sound measurement study should be conducted to obtain concrete data. Still, sound attenuation is warranted throughout DeWitt. Natural berms with plantings in open greenspace would be the preferred treatment. Sound barrier walls such as those along Route 81 in Binghamton with translucent panels that allow light and vision would be preferable in locations unable to accommodate a natural berm with plantings.

The following outlines potential mitigation options to lessen impacts of transportation generated noise pollution. A number of noise abatement measures can be utilized to lessen adverse noise impacts. These include:

- Solid obstructions or barriers
- Planting vegetation and trees

- Creating buffer zones

Noise barriers or walls can reduce noise levels by 5 to 10 decibels which cut the traffic noise in half and are built of wood, stucco, concrete masonry, metal and other materials meeting State specifications. The noise barriers function by deflecting the noise but can have an adverse visual effect and tend to draw graffiti. Alternatively, vegetation or trees coupled with earthen berms can be very effective in deflecting and absorbing sound. Large-leaf deciduous species of trees can be more effective in reducing noise during spring and summer, but evergreens provide better results year-round. Where trees are densely planted, noise can be reduced by 6 decibels over a distance of 30 meters and can reduce noise levels by 50%.

**Air Pollution mitigation:** The transportation generated air pollutants that will contribute to the further degradation of the air quality in the Town of DeWitt include carbon monoxide, CO<sub>2</sub>, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic carbon compounds and particulate matter. A study conducted by researchers from the International Council on Clean Transportation at Washington University and the University of Colorado estimated that vehicle tailpipe emissions of ozone and PM<sub>2.5</sub> were linked to 385,000 premature deaths in 2015. Recent evidence indicates that the public health response to PM<sub>2.5</sub> pollution may actually be greater. We have also identified air toxics derived from the transportation sector that include benzene and formaldehyde. Efforts must be taken to reduce these impacts on air quality associated with this project and the transportation sector as a whole. The USEPA is working the issue and pressing to government, industry and business to move to electric vehicles. Coupled with alternate energy production at the source, electric vehicles could make a large difference. In the interim, the urban and suburban forestry resources should be enhanced along the Route 481 corridor as part of this transportation project. It has been demonstrated that urban forests can improve air quality by reducing atmospheric carbon dioxide levels and absorbing a wide range of air pollutants. Ottosen and Kumar 2019 have reported on the first long time-series of multiple pollutants to assess the mitigation of traffic generated air pollution when trees are planted along the road side. The results show concentration reductions as follows:

- -52% for PM<sub>1.5</sub>
- -44% for PM<sub>2.5</sub>
- -35% for PM<sub>10</sub>

Air pollutants can be directly removed from the air as contaminants deposited or absorbed on the surfaces of leaves. The citizens of the Town of DeWitt deserve the inclusion of these mitigation strategies in the overall Community Grid Option. The use of Urban or Suburban forestry practices to help mitigate serious air pollution and noise impacts associated with the transportation project will represent an extraordinary investment in helping to preserve the quality of life.

**Exit 3 at East Genesee St:** NYSDOT's proposal to remove the westbound cloverleaf exit and add additional lanes and a traffic light intersection with two lanes heading east and two lanes heading west is woefully inadequate. This remedy again demonstrates neglect and lack of

attention to the residents of DeWitt and beyond. The proposed exit ramp modification is of minimal effort and cost for NYSDOT, and is an interim remediation at best because eventually a more comprehensive modification of the entrance and exit ramps at East Genesee Street will be required. The Town of DeWitt requests a diverging diamond interchange.

There needs to be consideration of the increase in bypass traffic projected along Route 81. Some of the greatest industrial/commercial growth has been in the eastern towns and in particular the Town of DeWitt. The City of Syracuse has not observed similar commercial growth; the commercial growth in the eastern towns must be supported by improvements to the Route 481 corridor.

The upgrade of signage along Route 481 is also required. The Town of DeWitt would be in a position to help support this effort. Signage could be developed ranging from the initial "Welcome to the Town of DeWitt," to additional signage regarding available services. The AAA suggests mile markers, exit signs, state highway signs and the signature identification of the communities through which they pass.

**Exit at Kirkville Road:** NYSDOT recently invested a 20 million dollar grant award to CSX Railroad for infrastructure improvements at the CSX Railyards in DeWitt. In particular, the monies were used to install box lifts that transfer trailers from train to tractor trailer trucks. Truck traffic is projected to increase from 250-300 trucks per day to 750-800 trucks per day in the near future and to 1000-1200 in years to come. A direct connection from Route 481 into the CSX Inland Port railyards is imperative. Reconfiguration of the Kirkville Road exit ramps with traffic lights is required for safe access to a service road for trucks only entering and exiting the railyards. Perhaps a diverging diamond interchange would work at this location. This is best accomplished in close proximity to the current highway footprint due to wetland and floodplain issues. Route 481 has a stone and concrete base of construction materials, i.e. runner crush that support the existing elevated highway over the railyards. There is adequate room alongside or under the elevated highway to put a direct connection for a truck traffic in and out of the railyard. This would eliminate hundreds of tractor-trailer trucks exiting and entering the highway on local secondary roads travelling to and from the DeWitt Railyards. Trucks currently use Kirkville Road and Fremont Roads; thereby traversing the entrances of an East Syracuse-Minoa Elementary School, Middle School, and High School. The ESM District Bus Garage is proximate to the railyards. The co-mingling of hundreds of tractor trailer trucks and multiple dozens of school buses can and should be avoided. One young male student on a bicycle was killed by accident with a tractor trailer truck. One life lost is too many. Therefore, the railyards in DeWitt should have direct access to the highway irrespective of the Route 81 conversion, and most certainly should be included in any list of improvements to Route 481 as a consequence of Route 81 conversion. See Attachment 2, Mitigating Truck Traffic.

**Additional entrance ramp:** The Town of DeWitt currently has a right of way to Route 481 off of Towpath Rd. The installation of a southbound entrance ramp just south of Kinne Rd would

alleviate rush hour traffic and aid in removing out-bound traffic from Glacier Creek Park, Widewaters Office Park, BlueCross Blue Shield, Shoppingtown Mall future development, Marshall's Plaza and other multiple nearby office parks and shopping centers.

**Route 690 extension:** Currently East Genesee Street to Lyndon Corners and Routes 5 and 92 serve as the Route 690 extension. East Genesee Street has up to 10 lanes of traffic along this corridor. Hundreds of thousands of cars traverse through DeWitt on a daily basis. DeWitt would like road reduction and a traffic diet through our Town. This is not an unreasonable request it follows the same logic as taking Route 81 down through the City of Syracuse. If the City of Syracuse does not have to allow traffic on a major interstate highway to run north south through its jurisdiction, then why should DeWitt accommodate commuter traffic between the City of Syracuse and the eastern most suburbs.

DeWitt is requesting Route 690 be extended eastward through the Town of Manlius and as far east as Chittenango. Route 690 was originally designed to extend into the eastern suburbs and the interchange between Route 690 and Route 481 is still in place. At a minimum, NYSDOT could utilize the existing interchange between Route 690 and Route 481 to provide entrance and exit to and from the two highways from Butternut Drive. Further, an at-grade road similar to Northern Boulevard should be extended eastward at a minimum to Burdick Avenue in the Town in Manlius. This would help to relieve traffic on both Route 290 and East Genesee Street.

**Additional amenities:** New York State DOT is proposing amenities to the Onondaga Creek walk within the City of Syracuse. We concur that alternative transportation paths such as bike lanes and walkable trails are important. The Town of DeWitt would like equal treatment as the City of Syracuse, especially because NYSDOT is shifting the major federal interstate highway system for CNY through DeWitt. The Route 481 corridor parallels the Butternut Creek floodplain of which the Town has made numerous investments in green space, parklands, bike paths and trails. Several of these projects have been completed, initiated, or have commenced planning or are conceptual and have been included in our comprehensive plan, parks and recreation master plan, climate action plan, and/or are contained in DeWitt's Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan (LWRP).

**Widewaters Pond:** The Town of DeWitt is working to establish a pocket Park along the National Heritage Erie Canal Trail at the intersection of Bridge Street and Erie Boulevard. The Town is requesting to acquire Widewaters Pond from NYSDOT similar to the process being conducted with NYSDOT for property acquisition for the Town's Butternut Creek Park. I thank NYSDOT for its continued good faith effort in working through this process with DeWitt.

DeWitt also requests NYSDOT dredge the Widewaters Pond. The Widewaters Park would include water fountains, colored decorative lighting, a boardwalk, benches, and other amenities. (See LWRP projects in Attachment 3).



The concept is similar to a municipal duck and/or trout pond. The site is situated along the Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor.





The property is 35 Acres in size, and the pond is about 1500 ft long. Properly managed the site could be a local and tourist attraction including water fountains and colored lighting.



The trail would encircle the pond totaling nearly 5000 ft in length, and connect to the NYS Heritage trail along Towpath Drive at 3-4 locations, and at Erie Blvd at two locations and from its Eastern side at multiple locations from the Best Buy Plaza and Marshalls Plaza. Park amenities would include gezebo, benches, public art, monuments, historic markers, small ampitheather, benches, picnic tables, drinking fountains, LED solar lighting, safety railing, signage, and trail connections including contour earth moving, filter fabric, crushed limestone (crusher run/runner crush), and stone dust for about 5250 linear feet of trail (including connections).





The Town of DeWitt needs to acquire ownership from NYSDOT. The pond requires dredging and water quality improvements. Sediments and surface water need to be monitored for contaminants. Fountain aeration will provide oxygen for fish survival in addition to aesthetics. Fish populations and pond life would be managed. Small craft/paddle boat rentals along with canoe and kayak launch site and ice skating in winter months could be provided.

**Erie Canal restoration:** The Town owns a remanent of the former Erie Canal between Widewaters Pond and Route 481 along Towpath Road and the newly constructed National Heritage Erie Canal Trail. The Town is looking to restore this section of the old Erie Canal. DeWitt requests NYSDOT dredge the former canal along towpath Drive along with Widewaters Pond, thereby restoring the Erie Canal as a waterway from nearby Kinne Road to Erie Blvd. NYSDOT should also install a barrier wall separating the canal and the Erie Canal Heritage Trail from neighborhood backyards. The Town would work with property owners and NYSDOT to establish easements and install vegetative plantings to buffer homeowner’s backyards along the entire barrier wall. Working together with NYSDOT, the Town would:

- Hold public hearing with Jonathan Craig neighborhood (in particular Westminster Rd).

- Establish easement (may require purchase [compensation to property owners]) and buffer along back property line for properties along Westminster Rd (includes privacy wall, fence and/or tree plantings).
- Remove trees and dredge canal.
- Reconstruct/repair canal walls.
- Re-establish/design hydrology for permanent water containment and flow through former canal (may require clay lining).
- Relocate access for 6724 Towpath Drive (may require easement/purchase of access through 5794 Widewaters Parkway parking lot from the West). Requires construction of road/driveway around house.

**East Genesee Street Box Tunnel Path:** Butternut Creek flows through a set of three box tunnels underneath East Genesee St in DeWitt and the east bound Fayetteville off-ramp and northbound on-ramp at the intersection with Route 481.



The project proposes to construct a pedestrian/bike path under East Genesee Street and the northbound on-ramp to Route 481. The proposed path would provide crosswalk connections between east-west sidewalks along Genesee Street and the existing Butternut Creek trail and two future trails proposed in a north-south orientation on both sides of Route 481 connecting all neighborhoods and businesses between East Genesee Street southward to the hamlet of Jamesville.



Permits would be required from NYSDOT, NYSDEC, and USACoE. Construction would include the placement of large stones under the highways at the creek's edge along the eastern most wall of the two box tunnels and placing a concrete slab on top forming the trail. Amenities would include LED solar lighting, safety railing, signage, and trail connections including contour earth moving, filter fabric, crushed limestone (crusher run/runner crush), and stone dust for about 800 linear feet of trail.

### Trailways

**East Genesee Street to Kinne Road:** The proposed trail would run from East Genesee Street to Kinne Road approximately 4250 ft along the Orville Feeder Canal on the west side of Route 481. The trail would run in a north-south orientation and provide connections for adjacent neighborhoods, nearby business including Excellus and Shoppingtown. Access points to the trail would be at bridges located at E. Genesee St, Drovers Lane, and below Kinne Rd. Amenities would include LED solar lighting, safety railing, signage, and trail connections including contour earth

moving, filter fabric, crushed limestone (crusher run/runner crush), and stone dust for about 4500 linear feet of trail (including connections).



**Jamesville Rd to East Genesee Street:** The proposed trail would run from Jamesville Road to East Genesee Street along the Orville Feeder Canal on the west side of Route 481. The trail would run in a north-south orientation and provide connections for adjacent neighborhoods, nearby public greenspace including the Manlius Pebble Hill School, Community Library of DeWitt and Jamesville, and the First Tee Golf Course and Driving Range. Additional access points to the trail would be located at Jamesville Rd, Andrews Rd, and E. Genesee St. Amenities would include LED solar lighting, safety railing, signage, and trail connections including contour earth moving, filter fabric, crushed limestone (crusher run/runner crush), and stone dust trail (including connections).

**Woodchuck Hill Rd at Jamesville Rd to East Genesee Street:** The proposed trail would run from Woodchuck Hill at Jamesville Road to East Genesee Street along the currently Paul Fowler owned right-of-way (agreed to donate to Town, but never followed up) on the west side of Route 481. The trail would run in a north-south orientation and provide connections for adjacent neighborhoods, nearby public greenspace including town-owned property and St David's Episcopal Church. Additional access points to the trail would be located at Jamesville Rd, Flametree Drive, Gleason Pl, Thistlewood Ln, Miles Ave, and E. Genesee St. Amenties would include LED solar lighting, safety railing, signage, and trail connections including contour earth moving, filter fabric, crushed limestone (crusher run/runner crush), and stone dust f trail (including connections).

**Rt 173 to Jamesville Rd:** Through Fiddlers Green and would require donation from Hansen Quarry along the east side of Butternut Creek from Solvay Road to pump house. Two paths:

1. along Jamesville Road to Woodchuck Hill Road
2. box tunnel underneath Jamesville Road along creek to DEC fishing access

**Amphitheater:** Construct public amphitheater at eastern side of landfill.

- Stage
- Sound
- Lighting
- Restrooms
- Concessions
- Water fountains/colored lights in adjacent Erie Canal.

Parking located under National Grid right-of-way; entrance/exits at Butternut Drive, Rt 290, and Fisher Rd. Additional parking at Town Hall and Cedar Bay Park.

**Beautification:** The Town of DeWitt requests a number of aesthetic improvements to state owned routes with DeWitt of which the Town is willing to partner via monetary contributions and/or in-kind labor services.

**State Routes, 5, 20 and 635:** On numerous occasions over the past two decades the Town of Dewitt has requested NYSDOT remove the asphalt and vegetate the islands on Erie Boulevard, East Genesee Street, and Thompson Road. The Town will install water supply lines and provide long-term maintenance to vegetation, should NYSDOT plant fine-leaf trees and flowering plants. Fine-leaf material will not clog storm drains nor create slippery road surfaces during wet weather conditions.

**Daffodils at East Genesee Street:** The Town and the Syracuse Garden Society planted daffodils within the four cloverleaves at Exit 3 on East Genesee Street nearly 15 years ago. Just after the installation of the daffodils, NYSDOT and contractors began using the site for staging vehicles,

construction materials, and debris. NYSDOT also stages debris just north to the Jamesville Road entrance ramp in the center median. Both eyesores are unnecessary as the NYSDOT highway garage is less than a mile north at the intersection of Route 690. In addition to poor aesthetics, NYSDOT's activities have damaged or destroyed the daffodil plots. The Town of DeWitt herein requests NYSDOT vegetate the entire Route 481 median through DeWitt with a crown-vetch or clover plant. This would save considerable labor time and money in mowing costs over the long-term, be visually appealing to the traveling public, and provide nutrients to the soil as these plants are nitrogen fixing legumes, thereby enhancing or improving surrounding soils.

**Maintenance and drainage issues:** The Town is requesting cooperation with NYSDOT on a host of road maintenance and drainage issues on state roads and easements throughout the town. The Town is willing to contribute in-kind service and labor in exchange for permission and/or contract agreements to aid NYSDOT in weed control and water runoff. Areas include, but are not limited to Erie Boulevard, Thompson Road, Bridge Street, Route 173, Route 290 and Route 298. See Attachment 4 for comments from the DeWitt Highway Superintendent and Town Engineer.

**Summary:** DeWitt residents in the nearby neighborhoods will be exposed to greater amounts of noise and air pollution. DeWitt secondary roads will have greater traffic. NYSDOT has proposed a minimus approach and failed to identify or remedy the traffic problems in DeWitt. For numerous reasons the community grid is antithetical to sustainable principals on a regional scale. The community grid alone will have a number of negative social, economic and environmental impacts. Social justice arguments have been fronted with no real benefit to the past and subsequent generation of victims of past racist policies. For all these reasons and more, and as an environmental scientist, steward of my community, and an elected representative, I continue to strongly oppose Route 481 becoming Route 81. A Hybrid Community Grid could address all these issues wisely and innovatively.

**Most sincerely,**

*Ed Michalenko, DeWitt Supervisor*

*With the support of:*

*Kerry Mannion, Deputy Supervisor*

*Jack Dooling, Town Councilor*

*Joe Chiarenza, Town Councilor*

*Karen Docter, Town Councilor*