

OCL Rethinking I-81 Study
Steering Committee Meeting Minutes
University College
April 24, 2008

Present: Russ Andrews, Phil Bousquet, Dennis Calkins, Emmanuel Carter, Dennis Connors, Nell Donaldson, Carol Dwyer, Bill Egloff, Linda Henley, Steve Kearney, Rich Landerkin, Rebecca Livengood, Sarah McIlvain, Van Robinson, Donna O'Mahoney Rohde, Doug Sutherland, Sandra Barrett, Rachel Pollack

Discussion:

- Carol Dwyer's Public Affairs students' presentation of government modernization issue in 3 suburban high schools; possibility of inclusion of an I-81 module as part of a Fall 08 class. (When high school students at all points on the academic spectrum were asked about their opinions on I-81, their responses tended to mirror general public opinion).
- Marquette Interchange Project in Milwaukee, on one side freeway removal with the Park East Freeway, on the other freeway improvement with an updated interchange joining busy, still functioning freeways near Marquette University.
- Why should the region support the needs of the city in bringing I-81 to ground level? Because of the importance of a vital city to the health of the region overall, and the location of high growth institutions on the hill. This was a theme emerging from OCL's Government Consolidation and Downtown studies.
- Air monitoring/state and federal cutbacks in air monitoring/movement of counter from Almond and Adams intersection (the intersection's congestion a reason why area is on a watch list for CO.) High instance of respiratory illnesses around NYS/Air quality study.
- Centro will request a bus rapid transit study/light rail study in next round SMTC funding allocation.
- Federal dollars go to maintaining existing roadway infrastructure. If I-81 viaduct went away, would federal dollars now spent on viaduct maintenance flow to other transportation usage? How much has been spent on viaduct maintenance in past 5 – 10 years and how much is projected to be spent next 5- 10?
- Emmanuel Carter's student's design project might be informed by real estate developer know-how/both local and out-of-town developers might be sought out. Doug Sutherland will work with Emmanuel on bringing together people like Norm Swanson, Bob Doucette, others, to construct realistic projections of economic development potential.
- Important to talk to hospitals about how emergency vehicles are rerouted during bottlenecks. Van Robinson will work with Kevin McAuliffe on this issue; perhaps bring panel to study committee.
- Who will have influence with the decision makers when the time comes for action on I-81? And where do they stand? (For instance, towns and villages, MACNY, Chamber, Truck lobby, Destiny, Onondaga County government, city government, AAA, railroads, SU, ESF, Upstate Medical, Crouse, other Hill Institutions)

- Ultimately, the project will be funded as part of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), involving federal funds. Therefore, all of the agencies that serve on SMTC's Planning and Policy Committees, which operate on the basis of consensus, will have a direct say in the final decision on I-81. The committees include representatives from the CNY Regional Planning & Development Board, CNYRTA (aka Centro), City of Syracuse (administration, Community Development, DPW, Common Council, Planning Commission), Empire State Development Corporation, the MDA, the state (both DEC and DOT), the Thruway Authority, Onondaga County (Legislature, Office of the Executive, DOT, Planning Board), and SOCPA.

The committee listed issues to be addressed or at least acknowledged by the study. Points of View: Every one has an opinion, but not all opinions are grounded in fact. These are the reasons (many based on erroneous assumptions) people say they are for or against I-81.

Financial Concerns

+/- Expense - For: "Construction and maintenance costs will be less if we take it down." Against: "Taking it down will be too expensive."

+/- Land Acquisition - For: "Land made available from tear down will be a boon to developers, make city more desirable." Against: "Will land acquisition on 481 be necessary?"

- Against: Increase in cost of doing business if we reroute thru traffic on 481 (four extra miles adds time, gasoline costs to trip.)

Economic Development concerns

+/- Economic Development/Visibility of City to outsiders - For: "It will encourage economic development in the city and bring people in." Against: "It will prevent access to the city and hurt retail." For: Renaissance Hotel and CVB probably in favor. Against: Hotel Industry won't like it.

+/- Loss/Gain in City Residents - For: "A teardown might encourage beautification, economic development that will lead to new city dwellers." Against: "People won't want to live in the city/near I-81 during the construction phase of the teardown."

Travel/traffic concerns

+/- Inconvenience - For: "A teardown will be faster than a reconstruction, and there will be less delay." Against: "Traffic will be worsened by a teardown."

+/- Traffic Increase on City Streets - For: "Increased traffic on city streets means more business." Against: "More traffic will make the city environment worse."

+/- Emergency Vehicle Access - For: "There may be better, faster routes for emergency vehicles forced to sit in traffic during rush hour." Against: "How will emergency vehicles get to the hospitals without a highway?"

+/-Safety Concerns - For: "An elevated highway is dangerous." Against: "A four- to six-lane boulevard through a city poses danger from traffic."

- Against: Truck traffic taking short cuts on routes north and west

- Against: Buses, both tour and commuter, will be affected.

- Against: How do I get to work? How do I get to airport? How do I get to Carousel Center?

- Against: Changes will have to be made to 481.

Air quality concerns

+/- Relocation of Air Pollution - For: "There will be less air pollution in the city." Against: "There will be more air pollution in the suburbs.

-Against: Increase in air pollution if we reroute traffic on 481. (four extra miles means greater gasoline consumption, more pollution.)

How should the committee address these issues? Create a matrix and address by blocks or subsets. At the next meeting, we'll tackle this and look for volunteers to work on issues.

NEXT MEETING: May 1, 3:30 – 5 PM, 307 University College.