

**OCL Study Session  
Transportation  
March 9, 2010**

**Presenters:** Mario Colone, Meghan Vitale, and Danielle Krol, Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council; Rich Landerkin, Centro; Chris Beck, Synapse Partners and Synapse Sustainability Trust (creator of 'Cuse Car); Chethan Sarabu of the sustainability study committee

Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Commission—federally mandated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) focusing on cooperative planning process for metropolitan area. Facilitates federal-state-local agencies to develop cooperative transportation plan. **They are facilitators—not in charge of implementation.**

Among SMTC responsibilities:

- Updating long-range transportation plan right now. Envisioning what want to see for area over 20-year cycle. Expect to have new plan approved next year. Surveying public on transportation/land-use and what they want transportation to do for them over next 20 years.
- Transportation Improvement Program—multi-year listing of federal highway and transit dollars that come to area for various areas—air quality, bikes, pedestrian, highway, rail, transit, etc. Federal monies go to regional DOT offices and then distributed to SMTC for disbursement. Towns, villages, municipalities, member agencies submit projects to the SMTC for TIP money. Municipalities that are acting as sponsors for the project are in charge of implementing.

One of big goals of transportation planning in this region—reducing vehicle miles traveled. Reducing VMT reduces emissions. Right now, estimated 21 vehicle miles per person in Onondaga/Oswego/Madison counties. Projected to go up to 25 vehicle miles by 2030.

55 percent of Americans would prefer to walk more. 68 percent favor additional funding for walking facilities. BUT not walking and biking more. Main concerns are distance, lack of facilities, weather, insecurity. How to decrease VMT and encourage use of transit or alternative modes of transportation:

- Plan for “pedestrian shed”—locate destination centers (jobs, businesses, services, schools) and surround with residential within ¼-mile walk. Zone for high-density and mixed-use around those destinations. Mid-density within ¼-mile. Decreased density beyond that.
- Design for transit: mixed-use development, retrofitting existing plazas—adding walkways, bus pull-offs, buildings close to road, etc. Need comfortable shelters, posted schedules, benches, etc. Sidewalks and safe crossings throughout pedestrian shed. Trees, benches, planters, etc.
- Develop on-road bike network—bike lanes, paved shoulders, etc.
- Shared-use paths (mini-roads) for walkers, cyclists, etc., connecting major destinations, along waterways, parks, etc. Supplement roads and more accessible for less experienced cyclists.
- Add convenient bike parking facilities through business districts and other developments. 1:10 bike-to-car parking. Some covered spaces.
- Safe crossings, lighting, on-street parking, etc.

SMTC completed a Bicycle-Pedestrian Plan a few years ago, with guidelines, recommendations. Also updating bicycle suitability map, rating various routes through city, etc. Developed bike network project for University Hill. Striped bike lanes, signage, etc.

For future—

- City-wide bike network
- Greenway trail system
- Improved pedestrian access
- Designing streets for all users
- Employer incentives for carpooling, walking, etc.
- Encourage higher density and mixed uses
- Design developments for transit and pedestrian access

**How to achieve sustainable transportation objectives—Comes down to zoning and municipalities themselves to implement. Need land-use patterns that support goals.** Trying to educate policymakers at municipal level to make smart land-use decisions. Taking advantage of pockets of density and existing vacant spaces within them, both in city and in suburbs, instead of continually sprawling into rural areas. Promote connectivity instead of isolated pockets of development.

Right now, we have steady population, fewer persons per household, more households, more vehicles, per household, fewer transit and walking trips ...equals more cars and expanded urbanized area.

Current transportation-land-use patterns create vicious cycle—congestion leads to widened roads, which increases accessibility and development, which causes more traffic, and even more widened roads... . People want development but don't want congestion. Need to see the consequences of their choices.

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**Centro**—Riding public transit saves individuals \$9,215 annually per rider, according to the AAA. Centro carries 1 million passengers/month and 12 million/year. Ridership skyrocketed in 2008 due to rising gas prices. Fall 2008 was record year (gasoline \$4/gallon).

**Good News—**

- New Syracuse transit hub opening in fall 2011 will strive for LEED certification.
- Are a compressed natural-gas fleet.
- Biodiesel mix on the diesel buses they run. Can't go much higher than 5 percent because of cold.
- Pursuing "Next Bus" technology, to be tested on Connective Corridor buses. Can go online to check where next bus is, ie. Buses themselves will have LED signage telling what the next bus stop is. Each bus will be traveling Wi-Fi hotspot.
- Free fare or reduced fares for SU, OCC, SUNY Upstate, Syracuse BOE, Cayuga Community College
- Employer fare deal program—Employers can offer monthly tax-free transit allowance for employees; subsidize employees' bus fare equal to subsidized parking spaces.

**Challenges—**

- Operating funds come from state aid and fares, both of which have declined in last two budget years. Last spring had to raise fares and cut service for first time since 1995. This spring, \$6 million funding shortfall. More service cuts planned for summer.
- Capital funding (from federal sources) needs to cover purchase of 106 buses in two years—at a cost of \$40 million or more.
- Sprawl. Migration to suburbs and exurban lifestyles make provision of efficient, effective public transportation difficult to impossible. Too many businesses/health facilities, ie., give no thought to impact on transit-dependent riders when they site their businesses.

- Growing numbers of aging baby boomers intensifies need for transit services at a time of declining resources.
- Cannot have strong transit systems with lax land-use controls we have here. Need policies that foster density, transit-friendly design.

'Cuse Car—Community nonprofit car-share program. In its second year now—formed right when gas prices went up. Initiative of Synapse Partners.

Five Prius vehicles available throughout community. Preparing to get 10 more of them.

Currently, the program is not citywide. Limiting access to ensure quality of service at this point.

More expensive than Zip Car because of using Prius vehicle.

In a related initiative of Synapse, got grant for installing 75 charging stations around Onondaga County—for use by any hybrid cars. Will put it in this summer.

How successful is 'Cuse Car? Overall, not yet as successful as it could be. **Disconnect between what people say they want and what they're willing to do.** Not willing to bus in and then rely on 'Cuse Car in case of emergency. May take time to catch on (Car-sharing program in San Francisco took 3.5 years to catch on). Behavioral issues—when \$4 gallon, people will take the bus; when it's \$2 they won't.

**Zip Car**—started out with two vehicles at SU. Now added three more. Phenomenal success. In any 24-hour period, each of the five vehicles is used at least 70 percent of the time.

Some general points about sustainability and transportation:

- Biking is most fuel-efficient form of transportation
- Benefits of alternative transportation include walking, community-building, social aspects
- Walking in downtown Syracuse shows signs of becoming growing trend

Syracuse has a number of assets to promote alternative transportation, including a strong walkable corridor and walkable downtown, and a system for light rail that can be revived. Number of colleges and universities in Central and Upstate New York makes city a good bet for developing regional transit network.

See also:

[Cuse Car](#)

Presentations:

CNYRTA & Sustainability report (Rich Landerkin)  
Sustainability in the Transportation Sector (SMTC)  
OCL Transportation (Chethan Sarubu)

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