



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
Hon. Stephanie A. Miner, Mayor

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: September 2, 2014

CONTACT: Alexander Marion

Press Secretary (315) 448-8044

MINER SUBMITS PUBLIC COMMENT TO NYSDOT ABOUT FUTURE OF ROUTE 81

Miner Submits Letter to NYSDOT on Final Day of Public Comment Period, Urging NYSDOT to Focus on Livability and Directives from Syracuse Comprehensive Plan

Miner Also Supports Removing Stacked Viaduct, Tunnel, Depressed Highway, and Rehabilitation Options from Consideration

SYRACUSE, N.Y. – Mayor Stephanie A. Miner submitted a letter today to the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) as part of the environmental review process scoping comment period on Interstate 81 (I-81).

“Our downtown is in a state of rapid growth and the I-81 project is a chance to continue that trajectory,” said **Syracuse Mayor Stephanie A. Miner** “As we look for solutions to I-81, we need to do so with an eye towards opening up our community, providing opportunities for economic development, and further expanding connections between the University Hill and Downtown neighborhoods.”

In her letter, the Mayor endorsed the NYSDOT’s decision to eliminate a stacked viaduct, tunnel, depressed highway, and rehabilitation as alternatives from the planning process. The Mayor also encouraged the agency to take a holistic approach to the project, with attention paid to livability, alternative modes of transportation, and interconnectivity.

Mayor Miner thanked NYSDOT for their efforts to engage in community dialogue. The agency has held numerous public forums inviting community members to learn more and discuss potential alternatives to I-81. The Mayor, along with County Executive Joanie Mahoney and NYSDOT Commissioner Joan McDonald, have worked together engaging the community and promoting public dialogue on the issue, including co-hosting a series of lectures on the topic.

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A full copy of Miner's letter to NYSDOT can be found below:

September 2, 2014

ATTN: Commissioner Joan McDonald
NYSDOT Region 3
I-81 Viaduct Project
333 E. Washington Street
Syracuse, New York 13202

RE: Environmental Review Process (EIS), Scoping Comment Period (*I-81 Viaduct Project*)

Dear Commissioner McDonald:

I want to express my sincere gratitude for the opportunities my staff and I have had to interact, not only with you, but with your team during the last several months of the *I-81 Viaduct Project*. The partnership between the City of Syracuse and NYSDOT continues to grow. Under the direction of Mr. Mark Frechette, the level of transparency and public engagement has improved significantly since my letter of January 17, 2014. Mark and the project team have made efforts to reach out to the community to seek feedback from citizens, while providing more information about the process, project alternatives and the associated potential social, economic and environmental impacts of each. I thank you and the team for this enhanced public engagement and hope it continues.

The following are my comments relative to the Draft Scoping Report issued by NYSDOT in June of this year:

- Enhancing Livability and Economic Vitality Should be Primary Focus of the Process: I want to reinforce certain aspects of the "Purpose and Need" outlined in the Draft Scoping Report. While I understand NYSDOT's desire to address the transportation engineering-related concerns associated with, "Nonstandard and Nonconforming Design Features," I want to stress our community's interest in pursuing, "transportation solutions that enhance the livability, visual quality, sustainability, and economic vitality of Greater

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Syracuse.” I believe this stated goal should be the primary criterion by which we judge our options for this project.

- **Review Syracuse Comprehensive Plan’s Directives:** I urge NYSDOT to carefully review the formally adopted *City of Syracuse Comprehensive Plan: 2040* and its components, and plan this project accordingly. Goals of particular interest include:
 - Ensure that infrastructure for automobiles does not act as a barrier to other modes of travel.
 - Explore the feasibility of alternative sustainable modes of mass transit.
 - Enhance gateways and way-finding for visitors to the city.
 - Promote the development of trails and corridors that reflect local, regional, state, and national history.
- **Endorse NYSDOT’s Recommendation to Terminate Study of Certain Proposed Alternatives:** I endorse NYSDOT’s recommendation not to advance Rehabilitation, Stacked Viaduct, Tunnel, Depressed Highway, and Other alternatives to the draft EIS stage of this project. Based on the information presented by NYSDOT during the Scoping Phase of this project, it is clear these alternatives do not align with the stated goals of the City of Syracuse or the Purpose and Need articulated by NYSDOT. This fact has been reinforced by feedback I have received from citizens and community stakeholders. These alternatives do not advance Syracuse as a safer, better connected, and more beautiful, welcoming, economically vibrant, environmentally sensitive, socially just and livable place, and therefore should be discarded.

Additionally, as you move forward to the next phase of this project, I would like to reiterate certain interests of the City of Syracuse for your consideration:

- This project should explore and advance solutions that utilize and improve the transportation network beyond the viaduct corridor itself.
- Enhancing connectivity between the University Hill and Downtown areas, and throughout the urban core, should be a major goal of this project. The current highway configuration and condition acts as a barrier between two of the most structurally dense and economically vital areas of the Central New York Region. The West Street arterial

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also acts as a physical and psychological barrier. This project represents an opportunity for us to knit our urban fabric back together, and make the I-81 corridor, the West Street arterial and the entire Central New York Region safer, more livable and more convenient for the traveling public.

- This project must be sensitive to community impacts. The urban renewal era of the mid-Twentieth Century was one of communities ignored and opportunities missed. Moving forward, this process must be one of broad community inclusion. Analysis of alternatives should be mindful of neighborhood impacts, social justice issues, economic opportunity, environmental justice considerations and other associated concerns. Property takings and building demolitions that fracture neighborhoods and annihilate historic character and local heritage are unacceptable. This project must be about rebuilding communities and uniting neighborhoods.
- The next phase of the project should include a thorough examination of all modes of travel that are accommodating to all users. This process should be about people – not just about moving cars. New and enhanced transit options should also be contemplated as part of alternatives analysis.
- Short commute times should not be a prime indicator of success in alternatives analysis. Getting to and from the urban core in a timely fashion is but one of many measures of successful design. We should be mindful that design should influence demand, not just react to demand projections.
- Our downtown is in the midst of a major civic and economic renaissance. The *I-81 Viaduct* project is not just an opportunity for transportation solutions; it is an opportunity to build on our recent economic success. This project should focus on solutions that create development opportunities, promote urban planning best practices, and serve and connect the economic engines of our urban core neighborhoods.

I thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Draft Scoping Report portion of the *I-81 Viaduct Project* EIS. I want to reiterate my appreciation for your willingness to work together on this once-in-a-lifetime project, and I look forward to continued partnership with you and your team.

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Please feel free to contact me any time to discuss this issue further. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Stephanie A. Miner
Mayor

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