

Chapter 7:

Conclusion and Next Steps

7.1 SUMMARY OF ANTICIPATED FUTURE

7.1.1 DEVELOPMENT AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Over the next 30 years, the region's demographic and economic growth is expected to continue along the lines established in previous decades, although more population growth is expected in the City of Syracuse than in the recent past – particularly in Downtown, University Hill, and the Lakefront. With continued population growth in the northern suburbs, as well as in the Towns of Camillus, Manlius and Onondaga, and continued employment growth in the City of Syracuse and the Towns of DeWitt, Salina, and Clay, existing commuting trends – primarily utilizing single-occupant vehicles – are likely to continue. The extent to which recent COVID-19-related impacts to commuting patterns will manifest in more permanent trends has yet to be seen, but is something that planners will monitor carefully over the next few years.

The LRTP will influence commuting trends by supporting new transportation options, like bus rapid transit, transit oriented development (TOD), and making existing alternatives, such as ride-share services and commuting by bike, more attractive. However, transportation options must be supported by land use decisions. Developments such as apartments, businesses, and senior facilities should be sited to take advantage of these existing and future transportation options.

The region's median age will continue to rise over the next few decades, with the Baby Boom generation aging into its 80s, 90s, and beyond, and relying on increasingly specialized transportation solutions. At the same time, the Millennials will be transitioning into adulthood and middle age. By dint of its unusual size and its predilection (to date)

for living in urbanized areas and avoiding or delaying car ownership, this generation is in a position to have a significant influence on how the region develops over the next 30 years. Transportation investments that complement these tastes may pay larger dividends than ever before. These trends will continue to be monitored in subsequent updates to this plan.

Technology will also continue to influence how we get around in the future. In the past ten years, several transportation innovations with revolutionary possibilities have emerged, including transportation network companies (TNCs) like Uber and Lyft, drone technology, and driverless vehicles. Continued improvements in fuel efficiency, autonomous vehicles, connected vehicles and the like, may dramatically alter elements of our travel and land use patterns (see Section 5.5), but the fundamentals of the suburban-urban commute via a vehicle will remain, with the associated infrastructure needs, such as good pavement conditions and well-designed facilities.

7.1.2 SYSTEM CONDITIONS

Private vehicle. From the point of view of a resident of the region who relies on a car or truck to get around every day, the existing transportation system is working fairly well. Low levels of congestion, overall safety, and an abundance of accessible freeways make it easy to get from Hastings to Tully and from Geddes to DeWitt. From the point of view of overall system conditions, however, there has been a persistent erosion of pavement and bridge conditions regionally. As seen in the financial projections in Chapter 6, maintenance of the existing system will use a large portion of the region's federal funding for the foreseeable future.

Transit. Centro's transit service is extensive and has seen changes in recent years, such as the opening of the Transit Hub in Downtown Syracuse. The SMTC completed the Work Link study, which examined transportation options for low-income workers, as well as the Syracuse Metropolitan Area Regional Transit Study Phase 1 (SMART 1) Study, which identified the locally-preferred alternative for an enhanced transit system as Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in mixed traffic. Desired future improvements include frequency of service, adding more buses to Centro's routes during the non-commuting hours to connect people

to jobs, creating an express bus service with park and ride lots along I-81 north of Downtown Syracuse, and progressing the BRT system.

Bicyclists and pedestrians. The passage of New York State's Complete Streets law in 2012 made accommodating bicyclists and pedestrians an integral part of transportation planning and design. Just as the Americans with Disabilities Act has gradually transformed buildings and streets over the past two decades, the Complete Streets law will ensure that sidewalks, bicycle facilities, and trails are continuously built into the public right-of-way. In July 2019, the City launched a bike share system through Gotcha Bike, with 35 hubs that currently average 100 rentals per day. Through the Syracuse Bicycle Plan, the City has been working to upgrade its streets to continue to improve accommodations for bicyclists. Additionally, a municipal sidewalk snow removal program was piloted by the City of Syracuse in January 2019, and expanded during the most recent winter season. This LRTP includes performance measures to address both the quantity of facilities (e.g., sidewalk and bike infrastructure mileage) and the safety of cyclists and pedestrians. These items will be considered in the selection of future transportation projects.

Freight movement. The Syracuse region sees relatively little congestion on its primary freight corridor system and this is not expected to significantly change over the next 30 years. The presence of an international airport, the CSX DeWitt Rail Yard, and the I-81/I-90 interchange will continue to give the region a competitive advantage in terms of freight movement. The recent New York State investment in the CSX DeWitt Rail Yard will expand capacity and reduce costs for shipping, making the Central New York region more globally competitive. The region's relatively low congestion and easy access to rail and Interstate highway systems make it attractive to warehousing and distribution businesses, as evidenced by the two recent Amazon warehouse developments. It is likely that additional, related development proposals will follow.

Equity and accessibility. The SMTC's most recent (2018) Environmental Justice Analysis analyzed TIP spending in Priority Target Areas (geographic areas with higher than average proportions

The LRTP identified four regional priorities: the I-81 viaduct, an enhanced transit system, an expanded regional trail network, and an inland port facility.

of low income and/or non-White residents) and concluded that the SMTC's planning activities have been distributed throughout the region, in both Priority Target Areas and non-target areas. The SMTC has also examined pavement conditions in Priority Target Areas compared to the remainder of the MPA and found that overall condition ratings are very similar. Sidewalk compliance ratings in the city are also very similar between Priority Target Areas and the city overall. Both the City of Syracuse and the NYSDOT have adopted ADA Transition Plans for their pedestrian facilities.

SMTC's 2017 Work Link study focused on transportation options for low-income workers, and transit's effectiveness in getting workers to jobs. The study found that most suburban employment centers have good transit coverage in the morning commute period, but service drops off substantially in the off-peak periods and second- and third-shift jobs are often inaccessible for workers without a car. The Work Link study looked at a variety of options to address this situation including vanpools and rideshare subsidies. Also, the BRT system identified in the SMART 1 study would connect a number of city neighborhoods to jobs and educational institutions, with higher-frequency and more reliable transit service. This BRT system would increase accessibility for many of the region's low-income residents and households without vehicles, encourage more people to choose transit, and create economic development potential around BRT stations.

7.1.3 REGIONAL PRIORITY PROJECTS

Four projects remain regional priorities: the I-81 Viaduct Project, an enhanced transit system, an expanded regional trail network, and an inland port facility. As noted earlier, the first three projects have been the subject of substantial community discussion and there is broad public support for advancing these projects, and the state recently made a substantial investment in the CSX DeWitt Rail Yard.

Many of the public comments received during the original 2050 LRTP development process in 2015 focused on the need to make a decision about the I-81 viaduct in downtown Syracuse. Since that time, the NYSDOT has continued to progress this project, completing the Project Scoping Report and Preliminary Draft Design Report/Draft

Environmental Impact Statement, in 2015 and 2019, respectively. Once a decision is made, the SMTC will update this LRTP to reflect the chosen option for the future of I-81. Securing funding for the I-81 Viaduct Project – as well as many local projects that may be associated with whatever option is finally selected – will remain a top priority for the region.

The region’s transit system may be revolutionized by implementing the BRT system identified as the locally-preferred alternative in the SMART 1 study. Securing a sustainable source of operating funds for a BRT system will be a challenge, and will require a focused effort among regional stakeholders. Continued public involvement and support, as well as land use policies that support transit oriented development, will be crucial to the future success of this project.

Compared to the I-81 Viaduct Project and development of an enhanced transit system, expanding our regional trail network is the “low-hanging fruit” – the easiest to accomplish, while improving the quality of life for those that live in the region by offering non-motorized commuting options as well as recreational opportunity. The cost of bicycle, pedestrian, and trail amenities is relatively small (especially compared to the two projects above), but the potential benefits to the region are great. Progress has been made on the Onondaga Lake Trail, the Onondaga Creekwalk, and the Erie Canalway Trail (now part of the state’s larger Empire State Trail). Each of these trails has been expanded in the last two years, and are in the process of being connected (See inset “Current status of regional trail projects”).

Linking suburban communities and city neighborhoods to our regional trail network will expand options for cycling and strengthen the overall network. The SMTC’s 2013 Bike Commuter Corridor study identified preferred corridors for investments in bicycle lanes and other infrastructure for cyclists, in addition to existing accommodations (wide shoulders) on many roads throughout the region. The City of Syracuse has continued to expand its network of bicycle facilities over the past few years, as recommended in the Syracuse Bike Plan 2040 (a component of the City of Syracuse Comprehensive Plan 2040), which proposes bike infrastructure for over 65 miles of roads throughout

city neighborhoods, including 4.2 miles of priority areas in downtown. Additionally, the SMTC, CNYRPDB, and SOCPA are working together on the Onondaga County Empire State Trail Local Economic Opportunities Plan which is examining trail connections (both on- and off-road) from the EST to local municipalities.

7.1.4 OTHER ANTICIPATED FUTURE PROJECTS

The SMTC's member agencies identified projects that they are likely to complete through the mid-term years of this plan (through

Current status of regional trail projects

As of this writing, the Southwest Extension of the Onondaga Lake Trail is under construction and will add nearly three-miles of trail to connect the West Shore Trail to the Syracuse Creekwalk/ Inner Harbor. The trail extension includes fishing access points, lighting, and connectivity to a NYSDEC boat launch, as well as an expansive pedestrian bridge over the rail lines on the south shore of Onondaga Lake. This segment will serve as a key portion of the New York State Empire State Trail system, and is expected to be complete by December 2020. The design of the southeast segments of the Onondaga Lake Trail (Lake Lounge and Murphy's Island) have begun where the canal meets Onondaga Lake, with construction anticipated to begin this year. This trail segment will feature access to wildlife viewing and connects directly to the Onondaga Creekwalk.

Phase Two of the Onondaga Creekwalk, connecting Armory Square to Kirk Park, opened in summer 2020, adding 2.2 miles of paved trail in the City of Syracuse. Cyclists and pedestrians can now travel from the Onondaga Lake Trail to Kirk Park by way of the Onondaga Creekwalk. Phase Three of the project, which is only a concept at this time, would extend the Creekwalk to the southern border of the City at Dorwin Avenue.

In his January 2017 State of the State addresses, Governor Cuomo announced plans for completing the Erie Canalway Trail and the Hudson River Valley Greenway by 2020, to create the Empire State Trail. As a result, one of the largest gaps in the Erie

Canalway Trail, the local segment between Camillus and DeWitt, will be completed by December 2020. Locally, the NYSDOT has taken the lead on completing the Empire State Trail. As of summer 2020, the pedestrian crossing at Warners Road, on-road improvements to Water Street including bike lanes and improved crosswalks, and the Towpath Road connection (from the Bridge Street/Erie Boulevard intersection to Butternut Drive) have been built. The new pedestrian/bicycle bridge over I-481 and shared-use path along the median of Erie Boulevard East from Beech Street to Bridge Street are currently under construction. Honeywell Corporation is also contributing to the Empire State Trail by extending a trail from Reed Webster Park in Camillus to the connection at I-695, and adding a trail segment along the old canal that parallels Gere Lock Road. Honeywell anticipates these pieces of the Empire State Trail to be open to the public by fall 2020.

As mentioned in Section 3.2.3, the CNYRPDB's Central New York Regional Recreation & Heritage Plan outlines a regional bicycle touring corridor network for Central New York with 29 potential recreation and bicycle touring corridors. This network will connect to the Onondaga Lake Trail, Onondaga Creekwalk, and local Empire State Trail segments, further solidifying and emphasizing trails and non-motorized transportation options within (and connections beyond) the MPA.

2034), which totaled over \$1.38 billion. For the long-term years (2034-2050), an additional \$1.89 billion in projects - primarily maintenance - is anticipated, for a total of over \$3.27 billion in project costs over the life of this plan. However, the projects listed in Chapters 5 and 6 of this document will still have to compete for capital funds through the SMTC TIP process and be judged against other projects proposed in the individual TIP cycle for their ability to meet the LRTP goals and objectives and to ensure progress on our performance measures. Also, as costs for I-81 become more clear and additional local projects associated with the I-81 construction are identified, some of the projects included in this LRTP may be pushed to later years or reprioritized.

Additionally, we know that the condition of our roads, bridges, and transit system has been declining faster than we can fix them even though we currently spend a substantial portion of our funds on maintenance activities. Public feedback during the LRTP's development reiterated the need for increased maintenance work on the existing system. Working with our member agencies, the SMTC estimated that around \$2 billion in additional funding would be necessary to bring a substantial portion of our system into good condition by 2030. Given the maintenance/replacement in-kind needs of the existing system, limited financial resources, and the fact that our existing road system generally operates very well, we do not anticipate spending significant funds to expand the capacity of the existing transportation system.

7.1.5 FISCAL OUTLOOK

Uncertainty about future funding levels remains, especially given that the FAST Act expires in September 2020, and the nation is still learning how to react and operate amid the COVID-19 pandemic. We are hopeful that the next transportation law will have a longer (6+ year) timeframe. This will enable transportation planners and departments of transportation to make longer-term plans for the transportation system, which may include completing more projects with local funds. Whatever the source of funds, unless funding levels are increased substantially, our maintenance need will continue to grow and the system will continue to deteriorate.

The LRTP does not anticipate significant expansion of the capacity of our existing transportation system. Maintenance/replacement in-kind on the existing system will continue to be a funding priority.

7.2 IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

7.2.1 LINKAGE WITH CAPITAL PROGRAMMING

Projects selected to receive capital funds through the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) must be aligned with the goals and objectives of the LRTP. Projects funded with TIP money should also help the region make progress towards performance targets. This LRTP update includes Federally-required performance measure reporting for freight reliability, safety, Interstate and National Highway System reliability, pavement and bridge conditions, and transit asset management.

7.2.2 SCHEDULE FOR UPDATING THE PLAN

The SMTC is required to update our LRTP at least every 5 years. However, a decision about I-81 will prompt an update of the LRTP significantly sooner.

Although there is uncertainty about the next transportation bill, we anticipate that performance-based planning will continue to part of the LRTP. Our system performance report will be updated to determine if the region is making progress towards our goals and objectives. The next update will also consider the continuing evolution of transportation technology, such as mobility as a service, connected and autonomous vehicles, and UAVs (drones), along with changes in commuting patterns.

7.3 VISION FOR OUR FUTURE

The 2050 LRTP articulates goals, objectives, and performance measures that, taken together, form a vision for the transportation system in our community over the next 30 years.

Transportation infrastructure investment decisions have a profound effect on how communities develop socially and economically. Canals and railroads supported the very early development of our city and villages, and eventually the highway systems of the mid-twentieth century enabled the redistribution of population and jobs throughout suburban towns in our region. Now, as we consider our future, we must address the challenges presented by our extensive and aging roads,

highways, railroads, and bridges, which were originally designed to accommodate the needs of a bygone manufacturing era. At the same time, we must consider the changing needs and preferences of our society and ensure that our transportation system provides access to opportunities for all members of our community.

As the crossroads of New York State, our strategic location will contribute to increases in intermodal freight activity in our region. This will place new demands on our railways, interstate highways, and state roadways. As our transportation system is improved to keep up with these demands, it should be designed to move freight safely and efficiently, while protecting and enhancing the character of our community and maximizing local economic benefits.

Looking to the future, we will support infrastructure investments that contribute to safe and walkable urban centers. Reinvesting in our aging streets and roads will mean opportunities to add green infrastructure and other design elements that will enhance our community. Local plans and initiatives envision a region of robust villages and town centers anchored by a revitalized and growing City of Syracuse, connected by roads, trails, bike lanes, and an enhanced transit system. We anticipate that our region will continue to add residents and jobs at a moderate rate, and recent trends suggest that employers and homeowners will seek out locations in established communities, where they will find that previous generations' investments in parks, streets, and sidewalks continue to pay dividends.

By investing in transportation projects that support the objectives of this LRTP, the Greater Syracuse region of the future should offer residents additional means to travel within and beyond their neighborhoods by embracing options to walk, bike, ride, and drive. Our infrastructure investment decisions will further strengthen our existing communities: our villages, suburban town centers, city neighborhoods, and the heart of our region, downtown Syracuse. Transportation infrastructure enhancements for all modes of travel will have a positive impact on our quality of life and the character of our communities.

This is our vision for moving towards a Greater Syracuse region.