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Governor Hochul Announces Final Environmental Impact Statement for I-81 Project to be Published on April 15, 2022

Release of FEIS Triggers 30-Day Public Review Period and Keeps Project on Schedule for Fall 2022 Groundbreaking

Transformative Project Will Remove Aging Viaduct and Restore Community Grid to Improve Mobility and Reconnect Neighborhoods in Downtown Syracuse

I-81 Supported by Governor Hochul's \$32.8 Billion State Capital Plan Which Promotes Equity, Connectivity and Multi-Modal Transportation Opportunities for Communities

I-81 FEIS to be Available on Project [Website](#)

Governor Kathy Hochul today announced that the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Interstate 81 Viaduct Project will be published on April 15, 2022, a major milestone that keeps this transformative project on track to break ground in the fall of 2022. The historic project will remove the existing elevated structure dividing the City of Syracuse and replace it with a new business loop and an integrated Community Grid that will disperse traffic along local north-south and east-west streets, and reconnect the neighborhoods severed by the interstate. Release of the FEIS triggers a 30-day wait period for the public to continue to review the document. The Interstate 81 project is part of Governor Hochul's unprecedented commitment to modernize New York State's infrastructure and invest in projects that promote equity, connectivity and multi-modal transportation opportunities for communities all across the state. The recently adopted \$32.8 billion State Capital Plan helps fulfill the governor's vision for a modern transportation system that serves New Yorkers across the state.

"The Interstate 81 project represents a historic opportunity to correct the errors of the past and remove a relic of outdated and ill-conceived highway planning that has for generations negatively impacted residents, in particular communities of color, and never should have been constructed in downtown Syracuse," Governor Hochul said. "The release of the Final Environmental Impact Statement clears the way for us to move forward with this transformative project and bring new opportunities for growth and prosperity to all communities of Central New York."

The State Department of Transportation, working with the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration, prepared the FEIS for the I-81 project after conducting extensive outreach with the public and stakeholders throughout the Central New York region. The State Department of Transportation will continue to receive and consider comments on the document before a formal Record of Decision is issued.

Following the release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement in July of 2021, NYSDOT held two virtual public hearings, one in-person public hearing and nine subsequent meetings in neighborhoods

and communities in and around the City of Syracuse to discuss the project and elicit feedback. An on-line Virtual Public Outreach Center was also established to provide information on all aspects of the project and instruct users on how to submit comments. NYSDOT received approximately 8,000 comments from the community which were used to help develop the FEIS.

Based on the public feedback, a roundabout that was initially planned for Martin Luther King Junior East (MLK Jr. East) near the Dr. King Elementary School is no longer being proposed, and Business Loop 81 will no longer connect to MLK Jr. East. Instead, a roundabout is proposed at the intersection of Van Buren and Almond streets. The new location will increase the buffer of property between the elementary school and the proposed Business Loop 81 and will create an improved gateway to University Hill and the Community Grid corridor downtown.

The project also includes improvements to the sewer and stormwater management system that will reduce runoff and help prevent overflows during heavy rains that threaten the water quality of Onondaga Creek and Onondaga Lake. The construction of 18,000 linear feet of storm sewer trunk lines and other enhancements will increase the efficiency of the current stormwater management infrastructure by 20 percent and reduce the volume of runoff flowing to the combined sewer system by an average of 173 million gallons per year. Currently, stormwater from the downtown sections of Interstate 690 and I-81 flows into the local combined stormwater and sewer system, which is owned by the City of Syracuse and Onondaga County. Periods of heavy rain can cause stormwater overload, which results in untreated discharges into local tributaries, such as Onondaga Creek, which then flows into Onondaga Lake.

NYSDOT is also working with the City of Syracuse, the Urban Jobs Task Force, Legal Services of CNY and other community partners to ensure that local workers and contractors receive the maximum benefit from the project. Additionally, NYSDOT partnered with the State Labor Department to create Workforce Forward: Syracuse, an initiative to help train and recruit workers for the project.

The estimated \$2.25 billion project aims to reverse the ill-considered decision made in the 1950s to build the viaduct through the heart of the City and, through the construction of the Community Grid, provide new opportunities for inclusion and equity. The Community Grid will relieve existing traffic congestion issues in the city and improve access to and from the interstate highway network and key destinations, including the downtown business districts, area hospitals and Syracuse University. It will also provide safe and ADA accessible pedestrian and bicycle amenities throughout the project area.

Plans call for the removal of the aging and now-obsolete I-81 Viaduct between the New York, Susquehanna and Western Railway and the I-81 / I-690 interchange, reconnecting neighborhoods that have been separated since the viaduct's construction in the 1960s. The project would also upgrade a portion of Interstate 481, which would be re-designated as I-81; and construct the new "Business Loop 81" along Almond Street to improve connections to downtown and other business districts.

Additional project features include:

- Reconstruction of Almond Street to include two travel lanes in each direction, nearly 13 miles of new or reconstructed sidewalks, two miles of new or reconstructed shared-use paths for bicycles and pedestrians, a 1-mile cycle track, and nearly two miles of new or reconstructed shared vehicle and bicycle lanes.

- A new full interchange on I-690 at Crouse and Irving Avenues to provide more direct connections to hospitals, employment centers and educational facilities on University Hill.
- A reconfigured I-690 West Street exit.
- A new northbound off-ramp from Business Loop 81 to Colvin Street
- Bear Street improvements
- A new third lane on I-481 between the NYS Thruway (Interstate 90) and I-690; and a greatly improved Exit 3

Preliminary plans call for Phase 1 to include work on the northern and southern sections of Business Loop 81, work on I-690 over Crouse and Irving Avenues, and the conversion of I-481 to I-81 including a number of road and bridge improvements along the corridor.

State Department of Transportation Commissioner Marie Therese Dominguez said, "From the very beginning of this project, the Department of Transportation has been committed to engaging with the community and listening to their concerns. The Final Environmental Impact Statement is a product of those efforts and brings us a major step closer to fulfilling our goal of getting this project started and creating a modern transportation network that enhances safety, improves mobility and strengthens - not divides - communities."

Senator Charles E. Schumer said, "This Final EIS will get us closer to hundreds of good paying construction jobs working on the transformation of I-81 as soon as this summer. Last month when I spoke to Secretary Buttigieg I made it clear that it is essential that the EIS move quickly, be full, comprehensive and address all the community's concerns to ensure the success of this project. Today we have the Final EIS, this summer the ROD, and then lots of J-O-B's."

State Senator John W. Mannion said, "Rebuilding I-81 and reimagining traffic flow in and around the City of Syracuse to create healthier and more vibrant communities is a once in a generation opportunity. The publication of the FEIS is a significant milestone in moving from the planning stage to a groundbreaking this Fall. Governor Hochul has continued to make infrastructure in Central New York a priority and I'm grateful for her strong partnership in the budget process that delivered record road and bridge funding for projects in Cayuga and Onondaga Counties, including \$1.1B for I-81."

State Senator Rachel May said, "The future of I-81 has been thoroughly discussed for more than the last decade here in Syracuse. I am deeply excited to see progress on moving forwards with the future, and am focused on building the best city and region possible. I thank the NY DOT for their work and responsiveness so far in this process, and pledge to continue to work to ensure that all residents impacted by this process have their concerns addressed."

Assemblymember Pam Hunter said, "With the final environmental impact statement set to be published and new funding secured in the state's budget, I-81 will soon be transformed from infrastructure that divides communities to a system that brings them together. As the project is set to commence, I encourage those who will be affected by it to review the document and comment with any concerns or feedback."

Assemblymember Al Stirpe said, "We look forward to the Governor's Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Interstate 81 Viaduct Project enabling this project to stay on track for the Fall of 2022. Once the statement has been released, the project will enter a public comment period for 30 days and welcomes community input. We are excited this lengthy process is finally ending and we can move forward responsibly for the environment and this community."

Onondaga County Executive McMahan said, "The I-81 project will be the most transformational infrastructure project our community has seen in decades. Regardless of whether you are one of our neighbors that lives in the city, suburbs or in our rural communities, this project affects everyone. That is why I encourage everyone to share their opinion but just as important, I will continue to advocate for comprehensive investments in communities that currently flourish with the existing infrastructure. Ultimately, we are one community and we must work in unison because we are stronger together."

City of Syracuse Mayor Ben Walsh said, "By working together at the federal, state and local level, all of the pieces for the Interstate 81 viaduct project are coming together. In releasing the Final Environmental Impact Statement, New York State Department of Transportation has achieved another major milestone. I thank Governor Hochul, Commissioner Dominguez and the Legislature for continuing to advance the project. We look forward to the next steps and to ensuring that the Community Grid achieves its full potential for improved transportation, healthier neighborhoods, economic growth and more jobs and opportunity for city residents."