



Department of
Transportation

TRANSPORTATION NEWS

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Governor Hochul and Senator Schumer Announce Major Milestone for \$2.25 Billion I-81 Viaduct Project in Syracuse

After More than a Decade of Planning and Community Input, Federal and State Concurrence on Community Grid Alternative Represents the Final Step in the Environmental Review Process Allowing for Construction to Begin this Fall

Aging Viaduct that Has Divided Downtown Syracuse for Decades and Disproportionately Impacted the City's Communities of Color to be Removed

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

Renderings of the Project and Other Information Available [Here](#)

Governor Kathy Hochul and U.S. Senate Majority Leader Charles E. Schumer today announced the signing of the formal Record of Decision for the Interstate 81 Viaduct Project in Syracuse, which will allow the Community Grid Alternative to proceed with construction beginning this fall. As part of the \$2.25 billion project, the existing elevated structure that has divided the City of Syracuse for decades and disproportionately impacted residents of color will be replaced by a new Business Loop 81 with an integrated Community Grid that will disperse traffic along local north-south and east-west streets. Portions of Interstates 481 and 690 will also be reconstructed to accommodate high speed traffic going around and through the city.

"This is a new day for the City of Syracuse, one that's been decades in the making and one that will change the trajectory of Central New York for generations," Governor Hochul said. "The I-81 Viaduct Project gives us an historic opportunity to correct an enduring injustice, and we are boldly embracing this opportunity so we can reconnect neighborhoods and revitalize Central New York communities. With full concurrence secured on the Record of Decision, we are ready to move forward with shovels in the ground this fall and deliver on the infrastructure and opportunities that residents of Central New York deserve. I thank the Biden Administration and my colleagues in government for working collaboratively on this transformative project, and for their continued commitment to advancing infrastructure that will help lift up New York's urban communities."

Senator Chuck Schumer said, "Syracuse lace up your work boots because the feds have just given the final greenlight for construction to begin on the transformation of I-81. This decision now clears the way to unify divided neighborhoods and to breathe \$2.25 billion in new life to revitalize this area. We will build a better future here in Syracuse that shows what enlightened and equitable transportation infrastructure can look like."

The transformative I-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 project will be funded with a mix of federal and state resources.

The Record of Decision has been signed following the federally required 30-day review period on the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), which was [issued](#) in April. 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 years of extensive outreach with the public and stakeholders throughout the Central New York region.

NYS DOT received approximately 8,000 comments from the community on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, which were used to help develop and inform the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). An additional 1,000 comments were received during the 30-day review period on the FEIS and substantive new comments were addressed in the Record of Decision. 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 will now be constructed 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.

NYS DOT is also working with the City of Syracuse, the Urban Jobs Task Force, Syracuse Build, Legal Services of CNY and other community partners through the recently formed WorkSmartNY Syracuse Build Collaborative to ensure that local workers and contractors receive the maximum benefit from the project. Additionally, NYS DOT is partnering 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.

The removal of the aging and now-obsolete I-81 Viaduct, presently located between the New York, Susquehanna and Western Railway and the I-81 / I-690 interchange, will reconnect neighborhoods that have been separated since the viaduct's construction in the 1960s. The project will 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.

Phase 1 of the project will 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.

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.

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

State Department of Transportation Commissioner Marie Therese Dominguez said, "Say goodbye to the I-81 viaduct and say hello to a reimagined City of Syracuse, one that is transformed by a community grid that benefits all users of the road and connects the community in new and exciting ways. The City of Syracuse and the Central New York region are filled with wonderful people and the I-81 Viaduct Project will be a launchpad for new jobs and generational opportunities for all residents. This latest milestone is a result of tireless planning and years of robust community engagement, spearheaded by dozens of dedicated staff here at DOT. This is a labor of love for our DOT team and I thank them for their tireless efforts to advance this project to this stage in the process - now, let's really get going!"

State Senator John Mannion said, "Replacing I-81 with a Community Grid is a once-in-a-generation multi-billion dollar investment in the City of Syracuse and the Central New York region. Central New York will soon be home to one of the largest and most impactful infrastructure projects in the nation. It will provide a region known for its connectivity with a state-of-art highway system in and around the city while using the Community Grid to reunite minority neighborhoods to make the city healthier and more vibrant. As construction moves forward, this project will continue to require partnership from across all levels of government and I am grateful for the leadership of Governor Kathy Hochul and Senator Chuck Schumer."

State Senator Rachel May said, "I am thrilled to see the Community Grid option finalized and the I-81 replacement construction set to begin this fall after over a decade of discussion. I hope my constituents

continue communicating with the Department of Transportation and my office on construction impacts and fine tuning the details."

Assemblymember Pam Hunter said, "Today's decision is the right decision for Syracuse. The removal of the I-81 viaduct will bring communities together and is a first step towards providing environmental justice to those who have been disproportionately impacted by this segregating infrastructure for decades. I look forward to this project commencing and the many benefits the Community Grid will bring to our residents."

Assemblymember Al Stirpe: "I'm thrilled to see there's been a formal decision on the more than decade long planning process for the aging I-81 Viaduct. As one of the first and longtime supporters of the Integrated Community Grid Alternative project, this new path is expected to bolster the vibrancy of Syracuse and the greater Onondaga County community and promote greater equity and connectivity amongst disenfranchised neighborhoods in Syracuse. Beyond the much-needed renewal of the city center, it will revitalize multi-modal transportation in Syracuse and enhance public safety as first responders will no longer be confined to the Viaduct during emergency response. Thank you to Governor Hochul for your continued invaluable support of this transformative project."

Mayor Ben Walsh said, "The Community Grid alternative is imminent with the signing of the formal Record of Decision for the Interstate 81 viaduct project. After years of planning, thorough review and extensive public input, we can be confident that the removal of the viaduct is the right choice for Syracuse and Central New York. At long last, we will remove the structure and begin to heal the scar it created across the heart of the city at the same time that we improve transportation for our city and region. I thank Governor Hochul for embracing the Community Grid and keeping this project moving forward. I am also grateful to Majority Leader Schumer for his consistent support of the Grid and for delivering the resources to complete this project. Through continued partnership at the local, state and federal level, we will strengthen communities and people's lives."