



***A letter from Town of DeWitt Supervisor Ed Michalenko, Ph.D.***

Though there have been a flurry of political viewpoints expressed recently about I-81 and the community grid option, the majority of the DeWitt Town Board, as well as elected representatives of the communities most impacted by changes to the configuration of I-81 – and the majority of the public polled – have made their opinion clear...they favor a hybrid community grid, rather than a community grid option alone.

Nineteen Town Supervisors and twelve Village Mayors recently signed letters voicing support for conserving I-81's current route through the city and also for a hybrid solution to replace the aging elevated viaduct. Based on the results of six public opinion polls, 67 percent of local residents polled favor preserving I-81's current route through Syracuse rather than re-routing traffic onto Interstate 481.

As Supervisor of the Town of DeWitt, it is my considered opinion based on the factors above - the well-being of DeWitt's residents and the broader community, the majority of the DeWitt Town Board, common sense transportation planning principles, and substantive economic realities - a community grid option alone is not only the least advisable option...but could in fact negatively impact the region's economic viability.

A hybrid community grid option however, is a wise, reasoned, economically smart solution; a compromise beyond simply replacing the aging viaduct.

For years I have personally advocated a hybrid community grid approach which would allow the community grid, but would also maintain the north-south Route 81 connection through the city of Syracuse. An innovatively designed hybrid community grid could work with a depressed highway, an elevated highway, or a tunnel.

Many assert the tunnel is too expensive. However, any hybrid solution will be more expensive than simply replacing the existing arterial. No one is advocating for maintaining the status quo, and any project would largely be paid for with federal tax dollars.

A hybrid grid-tunnel would afford the city of Syracuse the much needed opportunity to rebuild its aging underground utilities and public infrastructure...which serves the city, as well as the suburbs; what strengthens the city, supports the suburbs.

A depressed highway could accommodate the community grid by incorporating "shelves," with street level traffic extending over the depressed highway like the Grand Central Parkway in Queens, NY.

An elevated highway also presents several advantages, among them allowing for both buildings and green space beneath. Further, an innovative elevated highway design could be architecturally unique, visually appealing, or even iconic. If we envision that 1.5 mile section of highway as a bridge, it could be created as a unique landmark that would help define the city's skyline as does the Dome, the Crouse Hospital Clock Tower, AXA, and the State Tower building.

Combining infrastructure with public open space, like the Presidio in San Francisco, is not only aesthetically pleasing, it can become a tourist attraction and often supports increased real estate values.

Advocates of the community grid option alone make the mistaken assumption that all commuters are headed downtown; missing from that supposition is everyone who crosses downtown in their daily travels, from city residents and workers who are mobile throughout the day - postal carriers, delivery, repair and medical services, students, IT and maintenance workers, vendors, and suppliers - to those who live south and work north at places like Crouse-Hinds, Destiny, Salina Meadows and the airport, as well as those who live north and work south at places like Community Hospital, OCC, and Loretto.

Further, both the economic reality of the "gig economy" and the proliferation of internet purchasing necessitate the transportation of people, goods, and services be dependable and rapid. Any plan that works against the demands - and tangible realities - of e-commerce would be a grievous error, especially with regard to attracting and recruiting much needed new business to the CNY region.

As an environmentalist, I cannot support a plan that increases distances and travel time for commuters, fossil fuel consumption, and added noise and air pollution.

As a steward of this community, I continue to strongly oppose Interstate 481 becoming Route 81, and I favor a hybrid community grid option. Both my fellow Supervisors and Mayors, as well as the majority of the DeWitt Town Board and the public agree; we have spoken, let's hope DOT and our state government is listening.

**Most sincerely,**

*Ed Michalenko, Ph.D., Town of DeWitt Supervisor*