February 17, 2023

To the Editor,

As a municipal participant in the Renew 81 for All lawsuit, we are very pleased with Judge Neri’s decision requiring the New York State Department of Transportation Department complete further environmental reviews before tearing down the I-81 viaduct through Syracuse; I have personally advocated that action for 14 years now. The judge astutely recognized that by limiting the study area for the past decade to the 1.5 mile stretch of elevated highway within the city, NYS DOT failed to identify the many impacts to DeWitt residents and businesses in converting Route 481 into Route 81 and rerouting traffic through our community.

NYSDOT never performed a regional transportation study, which is almost always the case with a project of this size and cost. As such, the current Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) does not properly address the impacts of an increase in traffic of up to 60,000 – potentially in the hundreds of thousands – of cars and other vehicles travelling through DeWitt on a daily basis, should Route I-81 be eliminated. As a result, the highway, secondary roads, neighborhoods and commercial corridors in DeWitt will experience increased delays, lost time – therefore decreased productivity – increased costs via greater gasoline and diesel fuel consumption, noise pollution, carbon dioxide generation, and toxic gas emissions.

Outlining, quantifying, and understanding these impacts in a supplemental EIS is a critical first step towards developing the strategies – and implementing the mitigation measures – that will minimize the overall effects to the citizens of DeWitt. As an environmental professional for the past 40 years, I can attest to the fact that the existing NYSDOT plans for Route 481 are woefully inadequate. A comprehensive 30-page document detailing the critical impacts outlined above is available on our Town website.

This is not to mention the myriad of other communities and neighborhoods throughout Central New York who will be negatively impacted economically and socially by the Community grid only plan. I would respectfully remind the public the majority of elected officials in Onondaga County, as well as the majority of residents polled, did not favor the elimination of Route I-81 through the city of Syracuse.

Those of us who oppose the Community Grid only plan base our opposition on data, common sense, and detailed and comprehensive analysis of the economic, environmental and social impacts of the plan. Sadly, the discourse has become exceedingly negative and divisive. As Scotland’s First Minister Nicola Sturgeon summarized well in her resignation announcement this past week regarding the brutality of politics, “Statements and decisions that should not be controversial at all, quickly become so. Issues that are controversial, end up almost irrationally so.”

Nonetheless, in anticipation of the Community Grid only plan coming to fruition, the Town of Dewitt will continue – as we have been for the last 18 months – to press for the mitigation measures critical to secure the quality of life of our community. These include, but are not limited to: an additional traffic lane throughout DeWitt, re-configuration of the entrance/exits ramps at Kirkville Road and East Genesee Street, direct truck access into and out of the CSX railyards from the highway, sound and air pollution attenuation for our neighborhoods, and also alternate trails and greenspace enhancement including berms, trees, and storm water controls.

As the Supervisor of DeWitt – as the steward of my community, and as an environmental professional – it is my duty to object to a plan executed in the city that will so negatively impact the quality of life of the people and businesses of the Town DeWitt.

Sincerely,

Ed Michalenko, Ph.D.

Supervisor, Town of DeWitt

https://www.townofdewitt.com/news\_detail\_T10\_R34.php