

Transportation and more livable Neighborhoods

Moderator: **Daniel Mackay**, State Policy Director, Preservation League of New York State;
Panel Members: **Julian Adams**, Technical Unit Supervisor, Field Services Bureau
of the New York State Historic Preservation Office;
Philip J. Clark, Director, Design Division, New York State Dept. of Transportation;
Jonathan Orcutt, Associate Director, Tri-State Transportation Campaign

“One of the hallmarks of the livable community is that residents become less dependent upon the automobile through the street layout and land use patterns it allows. Experts have reported that alternate transportation means, such as walkways and bicycle paths, are perceived to afford a higher quality of life in urban and adjacent areas.”

- *Quality Communities Task Force Report*



Moderator

Dan Mackay

State Policy Director,
Preservation League of New York State

According to Mr. Mackay, “As much as any other single policy area, state and federal transportation policy exerts a far reaching impact on the aesthetic quality, cultural heritage, social cohesiveness, and livability of New York state’s communities.” Given that, he felt the transportation section of the Quality Communities Task Force Report was “a very quiet and modest section.” He said, “I think that’s a shame because transportation policy is an extraordinarily key component of smart growth.” However, despite the lack of initiative on transportation in the report, Mr. Mackay pointed out that the New York State Department of Transportation (DOT) “has shown some real

initiative and some extraordinary capacity to start bringing pilot projects online... [and] is moving forward in a very progressive fashion.”

In framing the smart growth debate, Mr. Mackay pointed to an April 2001 Article in Planning, a publication of the American Planning Association, where author Anthony Downs depicted four distinct groups, these were: 1) anti, or slow growth, advocates and environmentalists, who are upset by the impacts of suburban and rural sprawl and want to slow outward expansion and cut automobile dependency; 2) pro-growth advocates, who are the home building/development groups and Chambers of Commerce seeking to accommodate future growth by fully expediting outward expansion; 3) inner city advocates, who are upset by the resource drain from traditional economic centers such as main streets, downtown business districts, and urban neighborhoods; and 4) better growth advocates, who advocate accommodation of reasonable growth through mitigation of negative impacts.

He further quoted from the article, “If you were to reduce transportation issues within the context of smart growth to one particular sentence, you might say that it’s all about reducing dependency on private automotive vehicles, especially one person cars.” There-

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fore, according to Mr. Mackay, the usual tactics advocated by the anti or slow growth advocates are clustering high density around transit stops, raising gas taxes, shifting money from road building to more transit, creating pedestrian friendly communities, and building light rail systems. While pro-growth advocates who also support added emphasis on public transit are in addition arguing that existing roads should be updated and new ones built.

However, because these tactics are not applicable to every region of a diverse state like New York, he said that it has been difficult to implement smart growth in transportation.

According to Mr. Mackay, increasingly the tools for local communities and for citizen activists are available to address smart growth issues. Further, he noted that as new processes are implemented at DOT there will be a challenge of educating not only the 11 administrative regions, but also the county and local municipal officials and planners. However, overall he is encouraged that a new mind-set at DOT has been set in motion and that it is being supported by the administration and top level officials at DOT. He welcomed the input of the panel members to assess the tools New York state has to address those issues, as well as to recommend the next steps in implementing the quality communities report and identifying new tools for the state to use.

To the right is an aerial view of the construction of the new Clinton Avenue Pedestrian Bridge over I-490 in the City of Rochester (Monroe County). The unusual geometry was selected in order to solve the security problem presented by the previous pathway across the expressway which routed pedestrians under structures and through dark areas that were less safe for users. Full compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act was achieved in designing a 5 percent maximum grade, while getting clearance over both the expressway and the double off-ramp. The NYS DOT worked with the City of Rochester, Monroe County and Rochester Police Department on this effort.



NYS Dept. of Transportation

Philip J. Clark
Director, Design Division,
New York State
Department of Transportation (DOT)

Mr. Clark gave an overview of DOT's environmental initiative, established three years ago, which reflects principles of context sensitive solutions and incorporates community planning and public outreach into projects undertaken by DOT.

According to Mr. Clark, community planning is an outgrowth of the quality communities effort. He said that by working

"If the community has reached a consensus, then that helps us next identify the specific project needs that are going to be dealt with."

with communities and the people living adjacent to a given project, DOT can better understand their needs and know that the community has reached a consensus of what a project should be. This enables DOT to develop preliminary alternatives in conjunction with the community, to share those alternatives with the community, and to get their input on the specifics and the potential impacts of the project. According to Mr. Clark, by reaching a consensus, "then the remainder of the design process is fairly straightforward leading to the plans that are actually utilized for construction."

To implement the concepts behind context sensitive solutions, Mr. Clark said that DOT created a context sensitive solutions team to put together an implementation plan. The team includes members from both the main office of DOT, as well as liaisons from each of the eleven regional offices.

To help with this process, Mr. Clark said that they invited Tom Warren, the president of the American Association of State Highway

and Transportation Officials and Secretary of Transportation, Chief Executive Officer for the Utah Department of Transportation, for a two-day workshop on context sensitive design and solutions. A diverse group from DOT attended the workshop where problems associated with the implementation within the department as well as with other agencies that oversee their operations were identified.

In addition, according to Mr. Clark, DOT is conducting an extensive program of training for their engineers, which will include a training by the Kentucky Transportation Institute, a leader in context sensitive solutions. DOT has invited members of other state agencies and nonprofit organizations to participate in that training, which will also include an executive session to target the Bureau and Division Directors at DOT. Mr. Clark said, "This will give an excellent forum for people to better understand context sensitive solutions, what it means and how we can all work together to make it work, because what it's all about is [a] community participation process." He emphasized the importance of making the process work within DOT, so that early on in the planning process they can "truly design their projects to be as consistent [as possible] within the context of the community."





Julian Adams
Technical Unit Supervisor,
Field Services Bureau of the
New York State Historic Preservation
Office, New York State Office of Parks,
Recreation and Historic Preservation

Mr. Adams addressed the ways in which transportation and historic preservation mesh. According to Mr. Adams, “Any transportation project in the state of New York using federal or state funding, permits, or licenses has to take into account the effect of that undertaking on historic resources.” Mr. Adams’ department within NYS OPRHP will often be asked to determine what the historic resources are and how they will be impacted by a particular project.

According to Mr. Adams, historic resources not only include the “big obvious landmarks” such as mansions, churches, civic buildings, and city halls, but also historic housing, commercial downtowns, streetscapes, parks, historic transportation resources like bridges and highways, and archeological resources.

The types of impacts on historic resources that his department might consider are wide ranging. Mr. Adams said that if a project involves widening a road, replacing a bridge, or building a new transportation node, they will

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consider the impacts of demolition, potential changes to the character of the area, or a subtle change such as long term noise and vibration. In working with DOT on these assessments, according to Mr. Adams, their goal is to work together to try to accomplish a redesign, or a mitigation to the project to “avoid any adverse impacts,” while at the same time working to not stand in the way of progress and growth.

In doing so, Mr. Adams sees that smart growth and preservation are natural allies, because smart growth “is nothing more than looking back to the principles of traditional growth.” However, the rise of the car in the 20th Century greatly altered the traditional pattern of human settlements and the way humans lived, worked and shopped together. And smart growth, according to Mr. Adams, many times encourages the use of planning that is nothing more than what is already in place in historic areas.

According to Mr. Adams, the car created radical changes and “enabled people to drive great distances [making] proximity a secondary issue to where they lived and worked and shopped.” Therefore, he said, “transportation and preservation had a history in the mid 20th Century of an adversarial nature,” because downtown arterials drove wedges through historic neighborhoods having huge impacts on the lives of cities.

According to Mr. Adams, the outcome was federal and state legislation that set up NYS OPRHP's working relationship with federal and state agencies to address the losses to historic character and historic resources caused by transportation projects. In conclusion, Mr. Adams said that he is encouraged by new tools such as the use of context sensitive solutions by the New York State Department of Transportation (NYS DOT) and that in New York state, transportation policy is looking to include smart growth as part of their planning.

Jonathan Orcutt Associate Director, Tri-State Transportation Campaign

According to Mr. Orcutt, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, which is a coalition of environmental, planning, and mass transit advocates and other public interest groups mostly in the downstate New York, New Jersey and southwestern Connecticut area interested in transportation policy reform, ask the question: "If our public investments continue to make it easier, or continue to encourage people to drive further and further, continue to emphasize trucks overwhelmingly in our goods movement, and crowd out people who are trying to get around by other means" can New York really achieve anything resembling smart growth?

Mr. Orcutt's answer is "no." He said, "If we want smart growth, we need smart transportation. We need public investment that really emphasizes access to important destinations. We need a mass transit system that really works for people in [a] different context. We need planning that will support walking and cycling and getting around by a variety of means. We need to think about our economic and industrial planning, so we can take more advantage of the pretty good rail freight system we have in

this country, but which we don't really have east of the Hudson."

For example, Mr. Orcutt held that in today's world, things like highway expansion are self-defeating, because it only creates space for more and longer car and truck trips and history has shown that it is not a solution to traffic congestion.

Mr. Orcutt provided an overview of New York state's transportation policy and the kinds of policies that can support smart growth. In general he felt that there were good things in the quality communities report in terms of transportation policy and spending, as well as happening within New York State DOT with Commissioner Boardman. He highlighted the following positive indicators for New York state:

- 1) More money is being spent downstate on mass transit than on highways, with the MTA capital plan a major factor in urban reinvestment and increasing mass transit ridership.



- 2) Downstate there is very little active road widening happening as the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the administration has taken highway widening off the table as a solution to traffic congestion due to public pressure.
- 3) New transportation planning processes are being pioneered in the Hudson Valley and were referenced in the Quality Communities Task Force Report as sustainable development studies. Mr. Orcutt cited Route 303 in Rockland County as an example of this process of public involvement, visioning, and scenario development, where DOT agreed to hire a consultant to facilitate the process and the town agreed to put zoning on the table so that everyone could take a fresh look at the project. According to Mr. Orcutt, this is also happening in several other projects, and it is exciting because it is starting to get to the core issue of connecting transportation and land use, which he felt has been difficult to do within a home rule context.

Mr. Orcutt sees this as a good start to bringing everybody back together, but emphasized that as none of these studies have been finished, it is unclear how they will be implemented. Mr. Orcutt advocated that it is nevertheless a model that should become the standard procedure in any corridor where there's conflict or where there are transportation capacity issues and reemphasized that the Quality Communities Task Force Report encouraged DOT to do more of these.

- 4) According to Mr. Orcutt, the Pataki Administration is pursuing some innovative and far reaching things to boost rail freight development, in particular by the private sector, to counter the negative affects that too much truck traffic is having on New York City neighborhoods and on traffic congestion in many highway corridors throughout New York state.

One of the opportunities Mr. Orcutt sees for New York state is better use of state aid to localities as incentives for communities to engage in smart growth transportation solutions. According to Mr. Orcutt, the Federal Highway and Transit Program is set up to persuade states to do certain things, and New York state should do the same by finding additional resources or dollars saved by concentrating more on road repairs and mass transit to create incentive programs. One example he gave of a current incentive program that the state could duplicate is a \$3 million grant program for Long Island communities to improve pedestrian safety through traffic calming measures. He also suggested New York pursue an incentive program to encourage local feeder services from neighborhoods close to commuter rail stations to avoid the need for more new parking and to reduce single occupant trips.

Mr. Orcutt proceeded to discuss some of the difficulties New York state is facing in terms of transportation, which are:

- 1) Mass transit is losing passenger travel market share north of the mid-Hudson Valley, despite current trends throughout the country, and especially in downstate New York, showing a real boom in the use of mass transit.
- 2) The continuation of what Mr. Orcutt called “old style, or dumb growth, road projects.” Tri-State Transportation Campaign recently spotlighted Brookhaven in Long Island, for potentially becoming “the road expansion capital of New York state.” According to Mr. Orcutt, they have asked DOT to consider whether or not more road capacity really made sense there and to consider doing a sustainable development study with public participation similar to the Hudson Valley studies he pointed to earlier.
- 3) The pursuit by DOT of the Long Island Transportation Plan 2000 as an omnibus

solution to traffic problems on Long Island. Mr. Orcutt points to what he termed its unfortunate “roadway emphasis,” adding that it has become known as the “Long Island Total Paving Project,” which also has the acronym LITP, by many planning and environmental types on Long Island. Here again he advocates for a sustainable development study approach.

4) The lack of mass transit dollars being spent in Staten Island, the fastest growing county in New York state. Mr. Orcutt sees the need here to address the issue of whether Staten Island should be developed into a new truck route in to New York City, or whether the transportation dollars being invested in New York should rather be used to look at ways to promote a mass transit system, such as bus-ways, that has never existed in Staten Island. Again, Mr. Orcutt encourages a sustainable development study approach to encourage participation by the public and local officials.

5) The need for a clearer infrastructure reinvestment policy in New York state. Mr. Orcutt used New Jersey as a positive example explaining that, like New York, “New Jersey gets about half the money it spends on mass transit and highways from the federal government and it raises the other half through the state gas tax and some other revenues like transit fares.” Last year when New Jersey was to reauthorize its capital spending, there was a real debate over what they should be spending its transit money on, with the assumption already there that they would raise the gas tax to increase the amount of money available. According to Mr. Orcutt, this debate led to a statewide consensus that

“Overall, we need to collectively come up with a better sort of tool box to address suburban congestion and suburb travel...[and] we need more mass transit funding.”

New Jersey should be emphasizing highway repairs and mass transit. They won the support of the road building industry by convincing them that this did not mean less dollars spent, but rather more dollars spent in different, more popular ways, which would also mean easier approvals. Mr. Orcutt advocated that New York state needed a similar debate about transportation spending, to create a clearer policy on what exactly New York is raising more transportation money for.

6) Finally, Mr. Orcutt suggested that “overall we need to collectively come up with a better sort of tool box to address suburban congestion and suburb travel.” He said that the possibilities here needed to come

through local planning and perhaps state incentives could “help push municipalities in those directions and encourage the sort of smart transportation that can underlie smart growth.”

In conclusion, Mr. Orcutt emphasized that the most important thing needed in New York state is mass transit funding. Increasing demand, crowding on New York City’s buses and subways, Nassau County buses and the commuter rails, as well as increasing numbers of worthy projects throughout New York state are all reasons why increased revenue streams will be necessary. In addition, he said that increased capital funding would be needed to do the kinds of rail freight and transit connections that everybody is talking about.

Tom Marois, CDTA

The new Rail Station at Rensselaer-Albany is right in line with recommendation #31: Continue to construct or rehabilitate new or existing intermodal transportation centers to address passenger needs and anticipated future growth.



Tom Marois, CDTA



CDTA Liberty Park Bus Shelter

As stated in the Task Force Report, "New York now has one of the nation's most comprehensive systems of transportation infrastructure, consisting of over 112,000 miles of highways, nearly 17,500 bridges, 3,700 miles of railroad track, 524 miles of canals, nearly 4,500 miles of pipelines, 92 public-use airports, 12 major ports, hundreds of miles of bicycle paths and thousands of miles of sidewalks and trails. This system is a critical asset that must be preserved and strengthened to meet present and future travel needs. Within this vast system, there are opportunities to more effectively manage the necessary basic improvements."

Improvements along waterways across the state include the Tonawandas Gateway Harbor Center in the City of Tonawanda, Erie County and the City of North Tonawanda, Niagara County. Establishment of a harbor center to provide a concentration of services and facilities for users of the State Canal System, as well as to stimulate the local economy. The harbor center is one of eight being developed across the Canal System to revitalize the system as a major recreation way. Completion of the harbor improvements has had a very positive impact on the economy and quality of life of the adjacent cities

NYS DOS



NYS Dept. of Transportation



The New York State Department of Transportation works with local communities to rehabilitate public spaces and roadways. To the left shows the improvements made to Detective Joseph Mayrose Park as part of the reconstruction of the Prospect Expressway in the Park Slope section of Brooklyn (Kings County). To the right shows highway improvements, pedestrian amenities, utility upgrades and period lighting that were part of the reconstruction of South Broadway (Route 9) in the City of Saratoga Springs (Saratoga County).

