

## **SYRACUSE METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL (SMTC)**

### **What is the SMTC?**

The Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) is the State-designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Onondaga County and portions of Oswego and Madison Counties. The SMTC is the region's forum for cooperative decision making when it comes to developing transportation plans, programs and recommendations. The SMTC is made up of officials representing local, state and federal governments or agencies with an interest in comprehensive transportation policies and services.

### **What area do you cover?**

The area that the SMTC covers is called its Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA). The MPA includes all of Onondaga County, the Town of Sullivan in Madison County and the Towns of Hastings, Schroepfel and West Monroe, plus a small area of the Town of Granby, in Oswego County.

### **How are you funded and where does that money come from?**

The SMTC's annual planning budget is approximately \$1.2 million. Funds are provided by both the Federal Highway and Federal Transit Administrations to the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT). NYSDOT allocates funding to the Metropolitan Planning Organizations throughout New York State on a formula basis. This funding is used strictly for metropolitan transportation planning activities and is not used for capital expenses.

## **SYRACUSE METROPOLITAN AREA REGIONAL TRANSIT STUDY PHASE 1 (SMART 1)**

### **What are the goals of the SMART 1 study?**

Consensus Building:

- Involve a large and diverse mix of community members through an unbiased, transparent and meaningful outreach program.
- Support the planning goals of SMTC, Centro, City of Syracuse, NYSDOT and other important stakeholders.
- Adopt a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) that is technically feasible, includes a sound financial plan, and has the broad support of the Centro, SMTC, City of Syracuse and other key stakeholders.
- Follow standard FTA procedures to facilitate the transition to the project development process and assure project competitiveness in the Small Starts program.

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### Transportation:

- Build on the analysis and conclusions of the Syracuse Transit System Analysis and confirm the selection of the preliminary corridors.
- Improve the utility of transit service for riders by reducing travel time, improving headways, expanding route coverage, and generally increasing travel options.
- Develop a plan for a high-intensity transit investment that is preferred for trips to and within downtown Syracuse because it has:
  - Frequent service
  - Convenient and accessible alignments and stops
  - Comfortable vehicles
  - Seamless connections to other regional transit services

### Development:

- Support revitalization of Syracuse and key neighborhoods along the selected corridors by encouraging transit oriented development and infill.
- Utilize transit to improve connectivity between key locations in Syracuse supporting economic, cultural, social, and health-related development opportunities.
- Plan to increase the effectiveness of transit in Syracuse, providing a vision for how it could contribute to a vibrant, inclusive, and prosperous city.

### **How is the SMART 1 study being funded?**

The SMART 1 planning study is being funded through the SMTC's annual planning budget mentioned earlier and in part through a similar statewide transportation planning allocation from NYSDOT known as SPR (Statewide Planning & Research). Funding is used strictly for metropolitan and/or statewide transportation planning activities and is not used for capital expenses. This study does not impact Centro's operating budget.

### **What area is being looked at?**

The SMART 1 planning study is focusing efforts along two corridors primarily in the City of Syracuse 1) the Regional Transportation Center – Syracuse University and 2) Eastwood – Onondaga Community College.

### **How were the two corridors selected?**

The SMART 1 study builds upon the analysis and findings of the 2014 STSA completed by NYSDOT as a component of *The I-81 Challenge*. The goal of the STSA was to develop a strategy to assist the Syracuse metropolitan area in achieving a balanced transportation system that supports economic growth, improves quality of life, and supports the vision of the communities it serves. The analysis identified six transit improvement corridors and evaluated three

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different types of improvements (Base Build, BRT or LRT) on each. Each corridor/mode combination was evaluated using numerous evaluation criteria in 5 categories: mobility improvements, economic development impacts, environmental benefits, cost effectiveness, and supportive land use. Six of the top 10 corridor/mode combinations listed in the STSA relate to two corridors: 1) James Street/South Avenue and 2) Destiny/RTC to University Hill. Given this, these two corridors were selected for further analysis in the SMART 1 study.

### **How is the SMART 1 study different from the I-81 Viaduct Project?**

The SMART 1 study will focus solely on the assessment of an enhanced transit system (BRT or LRT) operating along two corridors that may have the conditions necessary to sustain high ridership. The I-81 Viaduct Project is focused on a select area of the interstate that is nearing its lifespan. In addition to recommending pursuing higher-intensity transit services, the 2014 STSA also recommended a commuter express service for Interstate 81. Although interstate express bus service is not included in SMART 1, the planning study does not preclude Centro or NYSDOT from advancing the express bus concept. As plans for both I-81 and an enhanced transit system progress, SMTC, Centro, and NYSDOT will continue to communicate frequently. Both Centro and NYSDOT are members of the SMART 1 Study Advisory Committee, while SMTC and Centro are members of NYSDOT's I-81 Stakeholder Advisory Working Groups.

### **Who is on the Study Advisory Committee?**

A SMART 1 Study Advisory Committee (SAC) was established and will meet on a regularly scheduled basis. The SAC's role will be to advise the SMTC on the technical content of deliverables and to provide needed input and guidance throughout the study. The SAC is comprised of representatives from the following agencies:

- Central New York Regional Transportation Authority (Centro);
- City of Syracuse - Planning Division;
- Downtown Committee Inc. of Syracuse;
- New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC);
- New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT);
- Syracuse – Onondaga County Planning Agency (SOCPA); and
- University Hill Corporation.

### **When will this project be completed?**

The SMART 1 planning project is expected to be completed in 2017 with the recommendation of a Locally Preferred Alternative. At the conclusion of the SMART 1 study, if desired, an additional environmental review and design phase of the Locally Preferred Alternative could be advanced by Centro, or another entity.

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### **What is a Locally Preferred Alternative?**

A Locally Preferred Alternative is the community members' and local officials' preferred option that emerges from the evaluation of modes and alignments for a particular corridor in the planning process. Once a Locally Preferred Alternative is identified, the area's Long Range Transportation Plan will be updated to include the enhanced transit service.

### **Why is the SMTC leading this project and not Centro?**

As the area's Metropolitan Planning Organization charged with carrying out the continuous, comprehensive and cooperative transportation planning process, the SMTC agreed to complete the SMART 1 planning study on behalf of Centro. Centro submitted the SMART 1 study application through the SMTC's annual work program known as the Unified Planning Work Program. There is no cost to Centro to have SMTC complete this study (see previous question: "How is the SMART 1 study being funded?").

### **How can I become involved in this project?**

To ensure that interested persons, organizations, and agencies have an opportunity to be involved in the study, the SMTC, with the assistance of the Study Advisory Committee, have designed an extensive public participation effort. Efforts will include open houses, focus groups, community/neighborhood meetings, surveys, and other events that have yet to be planned. Join our SMART 1 e-mail list (send an e-mail to [contactus@smtcmpo.org](mailto:contactus@smtcmpo.org)) and you will receive notices of upcoming meetings and other project-related events. Keep checking our website ([www.smtcmpo.org/SMART](http://www.smtcmpo.org/SMART)) for project status updates and notices of upcoming SMART 1 public meetings. All SMTC and SMART 1 meetings are open to the public.

### **Will the SMART 1 study result in improvements to the existing Centro service?**

Centro is one of the SMTC's member agencies and its Board of Members is responsible for approving any changes in service. The SMART 1 study may recommend improvements to the existing transit service provided by Centro, however, the SMTC as an agency has no role on Centro's Board of Members and, therefore, no direct influence on proposed service changes at Centro.

### **What about OnTrack?**

OnTrack was a unique rail service that operated in Syracuse from 1994 to 2007, with its final years of operation as a special events service during Syracuse University Carrier Dome events. Similar to the discussion on the interstate express bus service (see How is the SMART 1 study different from the I-81 Viaduct Project?), SMART 1 does not preclude the advancement of a special events rail service between Syracuse University and Destiny USA. However,

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the concept of commuter rail or special events rail service is not included in SMART 1 as the concept(s) ranked very low in the 2014 STSA.

### **BUS RAPID TRANSIT (BRT) and LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT (LRT)**

#### **What is BRT?**

BRT is an innovative, high capacity, lower cost public transit solution that can significantly improve urban mobility. This permanent, integrated system uses buses or specialized vehicles on roadways or dedicated lanes to quickly and efficiently transport passengers to their destinations, while offering the flexibility to meet transit demand. BRT systems can easily be customized to community needs and incorporate state-of-the-art, low-cost technologies that result in more passengers and less congestion.

#### **What is LRT?**

Light rail transit, often known simply as LRT, began as an evolutionary development of the streetcar to allow higher speeds and increased capacity. Light rail transit is characterized by its versatility of operation, as it can operate separated from other traffic below grade, at-grade, or on an elevated structure, or can operate together with motor vehicles on the surface. Service can be operated with single cars or multiple-car trains. Electric traction power is typically obtained from an overhead wire.

#### **Will there be a removal of existing bus stops on the two corridors to accommodate BRT or LRT?**

If a BRT or LRT system is constructed, there may be a removal of a few stops that will reduce the amount of time for passengers to travel to their destination. Riders will experience a much shorter wait time at stops. This improved level of service and convenience will be provided in exchange for fewer bus stops. However, stops may also remain for local non-BRT or LRT service.

#### **Will other routes be eliminated/consolidated in exchange for the BRT or LRT?**

Presently, all existing bus routes, stop locations and shelters along the two corridors will not change. If an enhanced transit service advances to construction some of the routes, stop locations and frequencies along the corridor will very likely change. These items will be taken under consideration in the SMART 1 planning study.

#### **Will the fares for BRT or LRT ridership be more than the existing bus fares on these routes?**

At this time it is unknown if fares would increase with the development of a BRT or LRT system. However, the existing fares in no way will be impacted by this planning study. Capital, operating and maintenance costs will be examined in the SMART 1 planning study.

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### **What other cities have implemented a successful BRT or LRT?**

There are several BRT systems operating nationwide, with 4 of these systems operating in mid-size cities like Albany, NY; Cleveland, OH; Hartford, CT and Eugene, OR.

Similarly, there are also various LRT systems in operation throughout the country, although larger in size, some of which are found in Newark, NJ; Phoenix, AZ; Portland, OR; Charlotte, NC; Salt Lake City, UT; and Los Angeles, CA.