

# DIRECTIONS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SYRACUSE METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL  
Summer 2019



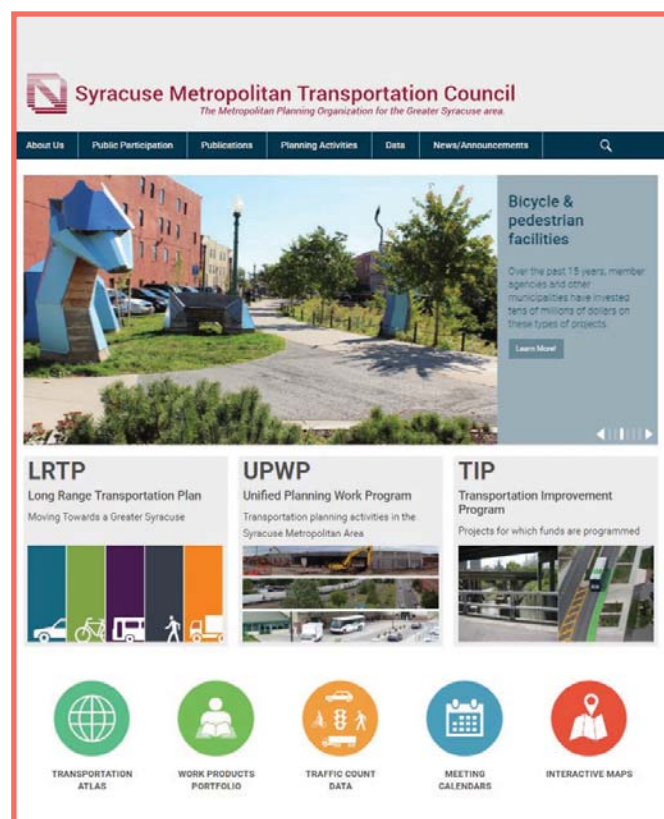
Armory Square, Syracuse



## SMTC Launches Updated Website

The Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) launched our redesigned website in June. Syracuse Design Group, a Syracuse-area web design and development firm, worked with staff to migrate and enhance the website.

The SMTC site has a new platform as well as a more modern aesthetic and feel. Visit [www.smtcmpo.org](http://www.smtcmpo.org) to find information on the SMTC and our member agencies, review a past study, browse a newsletter, use an interactive map to plan a bicycle ride or hike, read the latest SMTC news, or contact a staff member. Anyone curious to find the meaning of one of the many acronyms used in transportation planning is able to search the glossary to find the definitions. In the future, traffic count information will be available on the site. Check out the site today!





## SMTC Hosts NYSAMPO Conference

- Held July 15 - 18 at the Marriott Syracuse Downtown
- Three Plenary Sessions
- Twelve Technical Session Options with Two Training Sessions



*Opening remarks at the 2019 NYSAMPO Conference*

The SMTC served as the host of the New York State Association of Metropolitan Planning Organization's (NYSAMPO) 2019 Conference. The conference returned to the Marriott Syracuse Downtown, July 15-18. This year's conference welcomed 200 attendees from Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) across the state, as well as member agencies, federal partners, exhibitors, and out-of-state presenters.

The conference began by hosting working group meetings for MPO staffers. The highlight of Monday's

agenda was the Syracuse Bike Share Mobile Workshop. Participants were able to experience the City of Syracuse's recently launched Sync Bike Share System. Fitted with helmets, 20 cyclists enjoyed a late afternoon bike ride in downtown Syracuse.

Tuesday, July 16, began with welcoming remarks from Rick Marquis, Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) New York Division Administrator. Alain Kornhauser, PhD., from Princeton University, made his second appearance as a Plenary Speaker. Dr.



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Kornhauser's presentation, SmartDrivingCars, built on his 2017 talk on autonomous vehicles. The afternoon Plenary Session, The Quest for Sustainable Urban Logistics in an Era of Rapid (and Unpredictable) Technological Change, featured Jose Holguin-Veras, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute/Volvo, and Peter Plumeau, EDR Group, an EBP Company. Professor Holguin-Veras discussed recent trends in freight trip generation and outlined an action plan to maximize the benefits of these new developments and mitigating the corresponding negative effects. Mr. Plumeau focused on New York State and illustrated how alternative economic futures can shift future regional economic development and trade, as well as relative demand for various airports, seaports, and highway corridors. James Bradbury from the Georgetown Climate Center, delivered Wednesday's Plenary address speaking to The Transportation Climate Initiative – Developing a Regional Policy for Low-Carbon Transportation. Mr. Bradbury focused on the work being done by a coalition of energy, environment, and transportation agencies from 12 northeast and mid-Atlantic states, as well as the District of Columbia.

Conference attendees were able to choose from twelve technical sessions, featuring 35 speakers, over two days. The topics included: Smart Transportation and Evolving

Technologies 1 and 2; Asset Management; Mobility as a Service 1 and 2; Practical Long Range Planning; Big Data and Analytics; Safety; Public Transportation; Funding and Finance; Public Engagement Concepts and Approaches; and Active Transportation and Public Health.

Thursday morning featured two training sessions: Improved and Emerging Techniques for Traffic Modeling presented by Caliper and Virtual Public Involvement Techniques presented by FHWA. Copies of the conference presentations are being made available under the Resources tab at [www.nysmpos.org](http://www.nysmpos.org).

Nine consultant firms, from New York, Maine, Maryland, and California, were on hand to network with those in attendance about the services they offer. Five additional consulting firms provided conference sponsorship.

The NYSAMPO would like to take the opportunity to thank all that participated in the conference. The SMTC looks forward to collaborating with NYSAMPO for future events.



*Networking opportunities during a conference break*



## A Look at the Armory Square Mobility Plan

- Requested by the City of Syracuse
- Looks at improved pedestrian mobility
- Focused on three parts of Armory Square

Armory Square is one of Central New York's greatest success stories: the conversion of a collection of underutilized warehouse and factory buildings into a thriving shopping and entertainment district. The Milton J. Rubenstein Museum of Science and Technology (the MOST) alone would be a major draw in any other Upstate city, but Armory Square also offers hotels, bars, shops, and nationally-recognized restaurants, all sitting next to the Landmark Theatre and RedHouse Arts Center. Over the past 40 years, it has cemented its role as the most popular destination in Downtown Syracuse. One of the best places to visit in Syracuse should be one of the easiest places to get to and in which to walk around. While some Armory Square blocks are models of walkable design, others have significant shortcomings in terms of accessibility.

In 2018, the City of Syracuse requested that the SMTC study options for improving pedestrian mobility in Armory Square, including identifying accessibility issues for people with disabilities and improving pedestrian safety. The resulting **Armory Square Mobility Plan** was presented to the SMTC's Policy Committee this past June. The full report is available at [www.smtcmpo.org](http://www.smtcmpo.org).

This plan is the product of dozens of conversations with business owners and community groups, including the Downtown TNT, the Clinton Plaza Apartments Tenants' Association, the Armory Square Association, and ARISE.

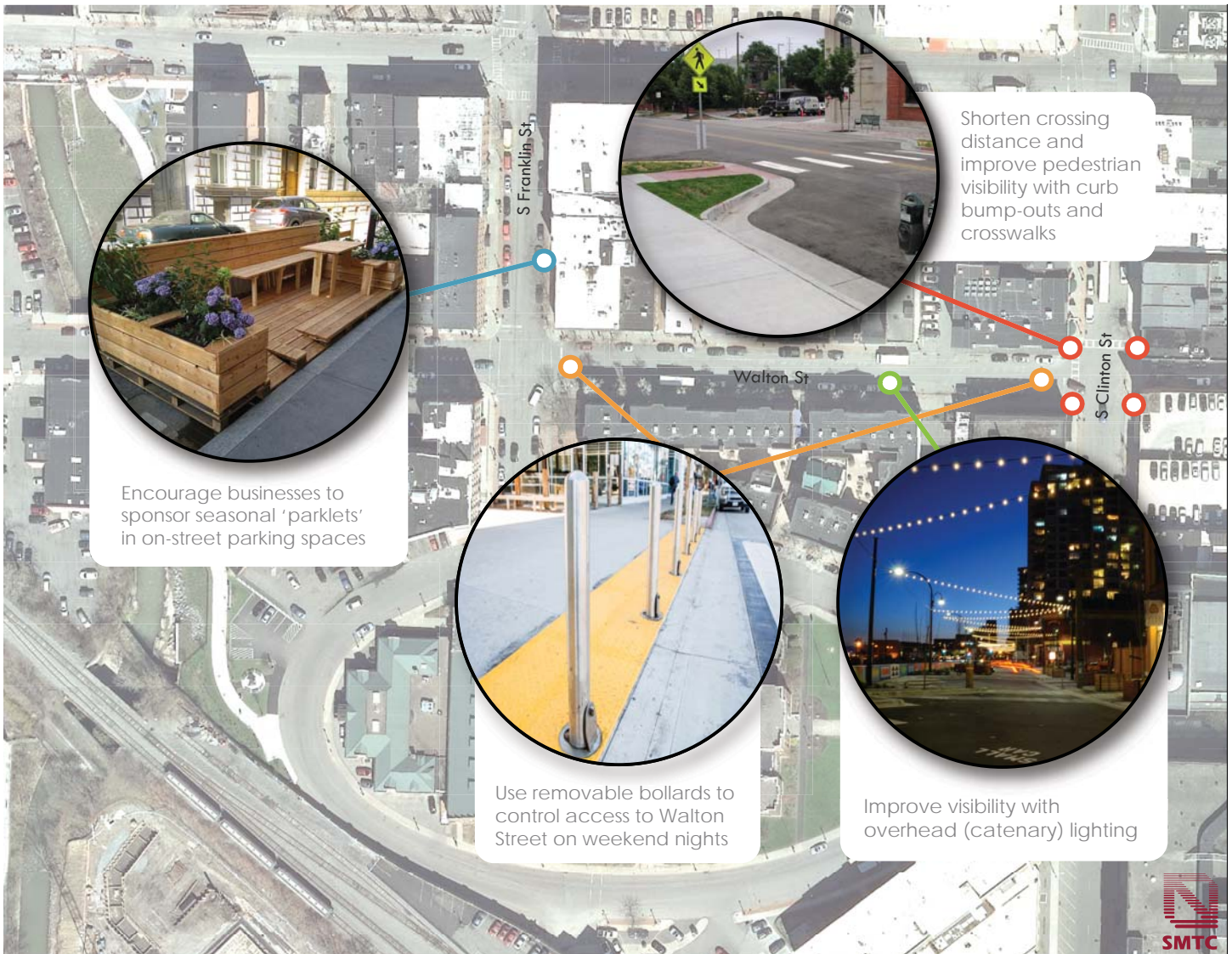
The plan focuses on three parts of Armory Square:

- "Armory Center", defined as Walton Street between South Franklin and South Clinton Streets, as well as the adjacent blocks of South Franklin and South Clinton Streets;
- The Jefferson Street Circle (around the MOST); and
- South Clinton Street between West Jefferson and West Onondaga Streets.

Armory Center is already a relatively pedestrian-friendly area, if only because the density of destinations here means that there are a lot of people walking around, that drivers are aware of pedestrians, and that most drivers are looking for parking so that they can become pedestrians. The Jefferson Street Circle shows more signs of this area's industrial past: sidewalks are narrow and not continuous, and the railroad viaduct on the circle's south side is an imposing concrete wall.

South Clinton Street south of West Jefferson Street is characterized by parking lots, a residential tower, and the large, blank rear wall of 400 South Salina Street. In terms of traffic operations, South Clinton Street has excess capacity: its three southbound lanes carry fewer than 5,000 vehicles a day. As a result, drivers tend to pick up speed in this block. To someone visiting Armory Square for the first time, South Clinton Street essentially ends at West Jefferson Street. But redevelopment is taking place on the south side of this block: the Allyn Foundation is turning a parking lot into a four-story building, with apartments, office space, and a food hall. Nearby, a long-vacant building is





*Possible streetscape improvements for Armory Square*

being redeveloped with retail space fronting on South Clinton Street. Streetscape improvements and a different approach to traffic operations could encourage further redevelopment on this block.

Some of the ideas that were presented to stakeholders and the general public included:

**Parklets:** Parklets turn two or three on-street parking spaces into public seating space. In cities around the country, businesses are sponsoring parklets as a way to draw foot traffic to their front doors. Stakeholders in Armory Square generally approve of this idea as an inexpensive way to liven up space that is otherwise underutilized.

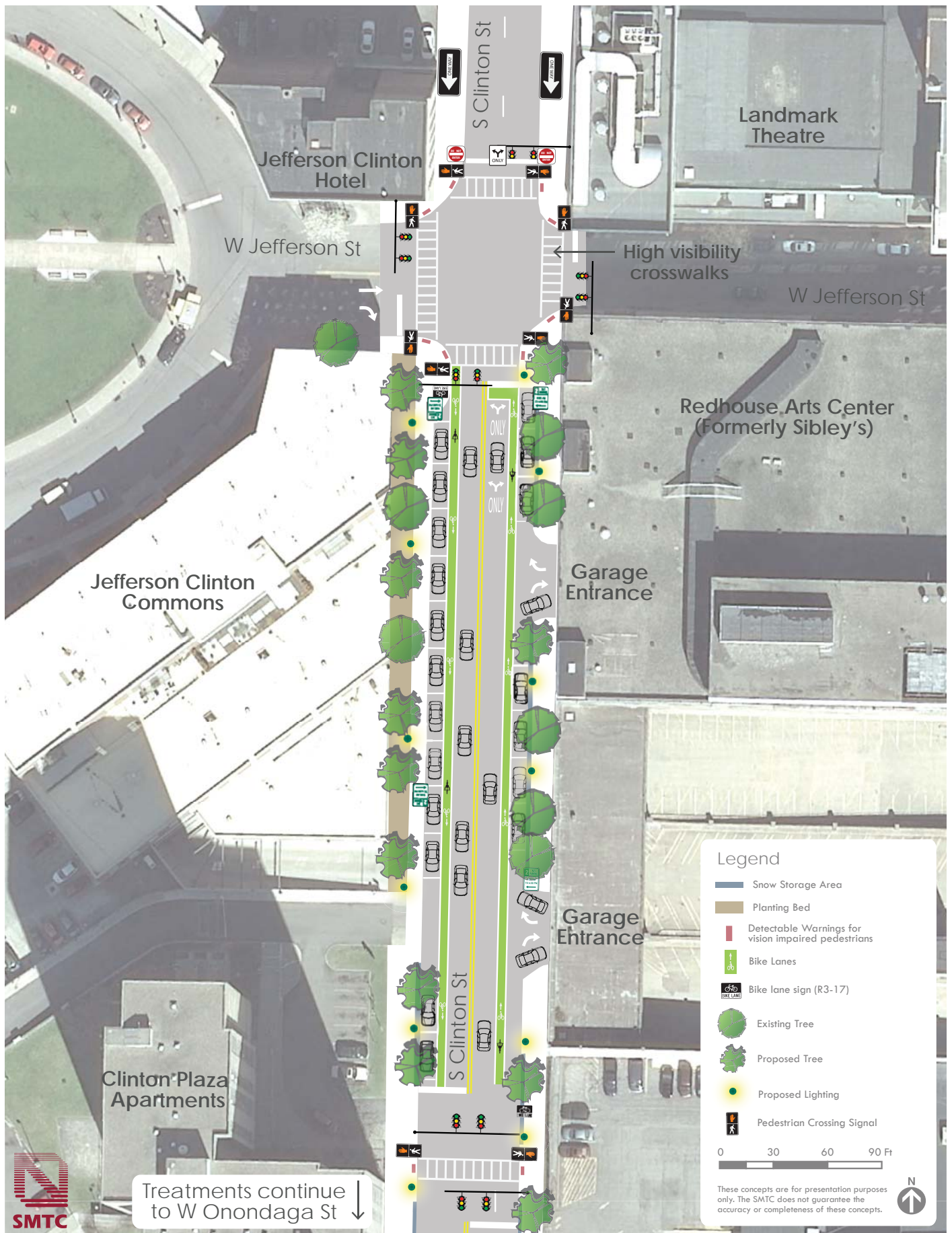
**Bump-outs:** Curb bump-outs shorten pedestrians' crossing distance to improve pedestrian safety at intersections. Several intersections, notably the South Clinton Street / Walton Street intersection, would benefit from this treatment.

**Overhead lights:** Ithaca Commons and other pedestrian-friendly entertainment districts around the world use lights on catenary wires over the street to add life to the public right-of-way.

**Bollards:** Bollards and signage, rather than police vehicles and personnel, can be used to close the 100 Block of Walton Street on weekend nights.

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Road treatment option for South Clinton Street

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The SMTC also developed alternative design scenarios for South Clinton Street, Armory Center, and the West Jefferson Street Circle.

**South Clinton Street:** Both ideas for this street include converting it from a one-way street to a two-way street, with one lane in each direction and on-street parking on both sides of the street. Two concepts were developed for this converted street, one that includes bike lanes and one that retains existing diagonal parking spaces on the west side of the street.

**Armory Center:** Three design scenarios were discussed for Armory Center (Walton Street east of Onondaga Creek and the 300 and 400 Blocks of South Franklin and South Clinton Streets):

- Use a curbless street design to calm traffic and increase pedestrian visibility and mobility;
- Implement raised intersections at the South Franklin Street / Walton Street, Walton Street / South Clinton Street, and South Franklin Street / West Jefferson Street intersections. Raised intersections slow vehicles down and increase pedestrian visibility.
- Create a permanent pedestrian mall in the 100 Block of Walton Street. Some stakeholders support the creation of a pedestrian mall, but others have pointed out that keeping this space active, interesting, and well-maintained would require a significant commitment of resources. Additionally, eliminating traffic may hurt some businesses that rely on easy access from the street. Cities around the country have been re-opening former pedestrian malls in recent decades; very few cities are developing new pedestrian malls.

Comments expressed at the public meeting supported raised intersections, but generally support was greatest for the curbless street concept, provided it is appropriately and safely designed and that the construction period is not significantly longer than that of other alternatives.

**West Jefferson Street Circle (west of South Clinton Street):** Two design scenarios were discussed:

**Two-way with raised intersection:**

- Add a continuous sidewalk between South Franklin Street and the Trolley Lot (this requires taking roughly five on-street parking spaces);
- Implement a raised intersection at the South Franklin Street / Walton Street intersection; and
- Convert the existing crosswalk between the Trolley Lot and the sidewalk on the inside of the Jefferson Street Circle to a raised crosswalk;

**One-way with pedestrian enhancements:**

- Make the Jefferson Street Circle a one-way street running counterclockwise;
- Widen sidewalks on the inside of the Jefferson Street Circle; and
- Add a continuous sidewalk between South Franklin Street and the Trolley Lot (this requires taking roughly five on-street parking spaces).

The one-way Jefferson Street Circle concept was favored by public meeting attendees, but other stakeholders have expressed concerns that out-of-town visitors might find it confusing. Others have pointed out that it may not function adequately during evening peak hours. Northbound Franklin Street traffic frequently queues on the Jefferson Street Circle due to congestion downstream.

Forty years ago, a Syracuse City Councilor described Armory Square as “a collective conglomeration of old warehouses with absolutely no historic charm”. Since then, its redevelopment has been continuous and the value of space in this district – including parking lots, sidewalk space, and curbside space – has skyrocketed. New plans to convert vacant Armory Square buildings into apartments and restaurants are announced every year, and underutilized lots are always being eyed for new construction. Streets and sidewalks should be improved to keep up with this redevelopment, to ensure that this district continues to be a place that people want to live in, work in, and visit.





## I-81 Project Overview Given to SMTC Committee Members

- Information Session held for member agencies
- NYSDOT Presentation
- Review of the Preliminary DDR / DEIS



*Interstate 81 at Interstate 690, Syracuse*

On April 22, 2019, the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) released the Preliminary Draft Design Report (DDR) / Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Interstate 81 Viaduct Project. The Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) hosted an I-81 Project information session for member agencies on June 26, at the SUNY Oswego Metro Center in Syracuse. Mark Frechette, NYSDOT's

I-81 Project Director, gave an overview of the DDR / DEIS and fielded questions from those in attendance.

Information on the NYSDOT's Preliminary Draft Design Report / Draft Environmental Impact Statement is available at <https://www.dot.ny.gov/i81opportunities/environmental>.





## Bridge and Pavement Report Completed

- Roadway bridges and FAE roads in the MPA reviewed annually
- Data collected in 2017 and 2018
- Report helps justify TIP funding allocations for the area

The SMTC's annual **Bridge and Pavement Condition Management System** (BPCMS) report was recently completed and is available online in the "Publications" section of our website, [www.smtcmpo.org](http://www.smtcmpo.org). The BPCMS report contains information on all roadway bridges and federal-aid eligible (FAE) roads in the SMTC's Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA). All data in the report were collected in 2017 and 2018.

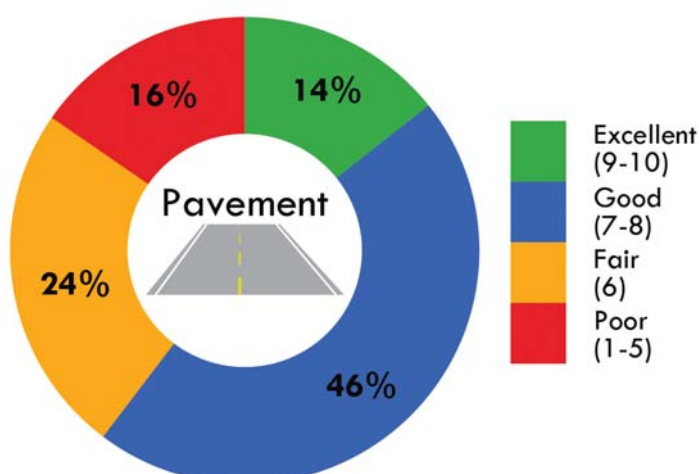
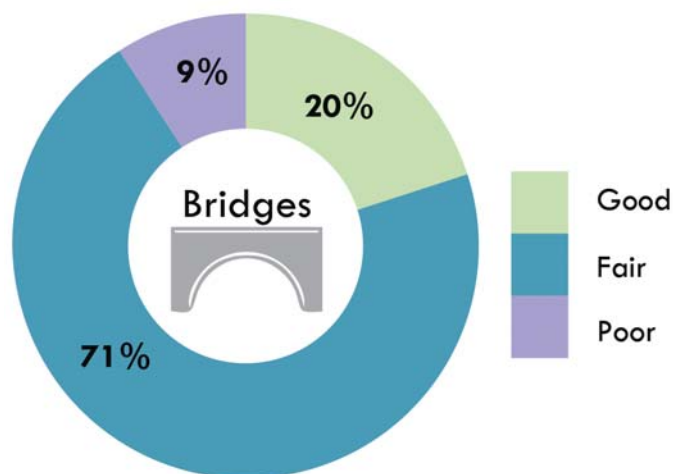
Bridge conditions are rated using a scale of Good-Fair-Poor, a classification which is derived from four element ratings contained in the National Bridge Inventory: deck, superstructure, substructure, and culvert. A rating of "Poor" does not indicate that a bridge is unsafe, but that additional maintenance is needed to improve its condition.

Pavement is scored on the New York State Department of Transportation's (NYSDOT) scale of 1-10, based on the frequency and severity of surface cracking. Each number on this scale correlates with a rating of either

Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor. Since 2015, all federal-aid eligible roads in our MPA have been rated by either NYSDOT or SMTC staff. Fieldwork to collect this year's road ratings is currently underway. The charts below show percentages of bridge ratings (by deck area) and pavement ratings (by centerline mile) in our MPA.

By keeping track of conditions, the SMTC hopes to underscore the importance of ongoing support for infrastructure maintenance efforts. The deterioration of bridges and pavement is a constant process, and conditions need to be both monitored and maintained or improved. The report also serves to justify the large portion of Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) funds allocated to highway and bridge projects, and recommends that these funds are invested appropriately.

For additional information on the report, please contact Andrew Frasier, [afrasier@smtcmpo.org](mailto:afrasier@smtcmpo.org) or 315.422.5716.



MPA Percentage ratings



## New Multi-Year TIP Adopted

- Begins October 1, 2019
- 107 Projects totaling \$387.707M
- Consists of bike/ped, bridge, pavement, transit, and safety projects

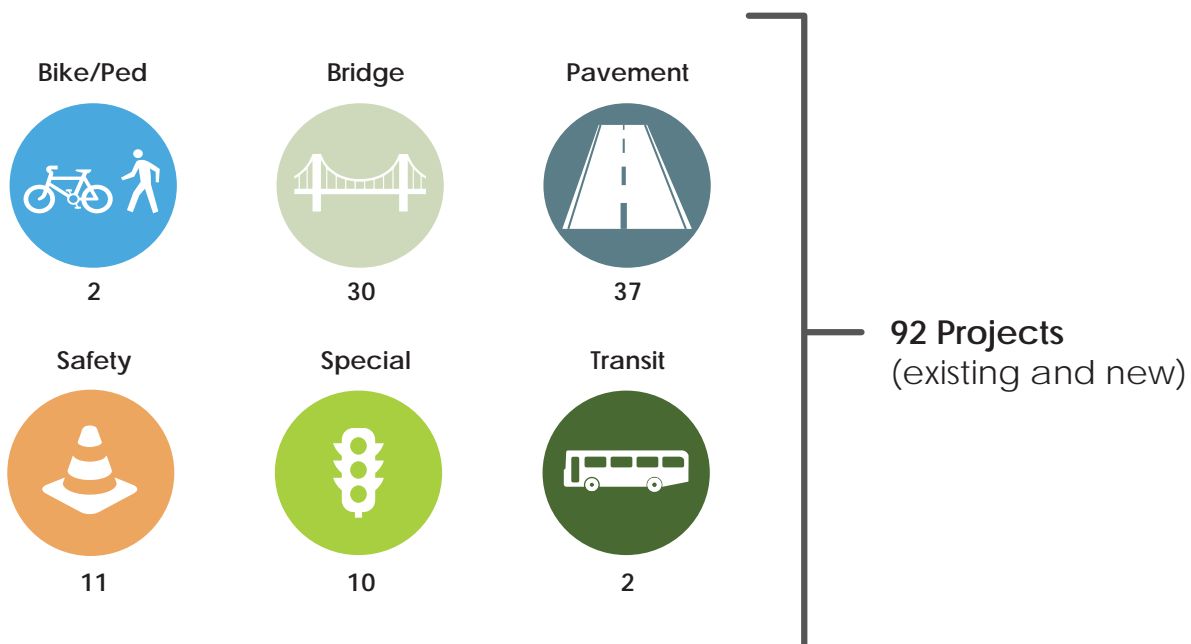
On June 19, 2019, the SMTC Policy Committee adopted the new **2020-2024 Transportation Improvement Program** (TIP). The new TIP for the SMTC area, totaling \$387.707M (\$278.714M federal + \$108.993M non-federal match) for 107 projects, is a multi-year program of transportation capital projects together with a five-year estimate of transit capital and operations. According to federal transportation policy, a TIP should include a minimum of four fiscal years for all States and Metropolitan Planning Organizations. The SMTC's TIP contains an additional fifth year of federal transportation funding anticipated to be available for programming in our area.

Working in collaboration with the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), the Central New York Regional Transportation Authority (CNYRTA), and other SMTC member agencies, the projects in the

new TIP are aimed at increasing efficiency, improving the condition of, and/or safety of the existing transportation system rather than construction of new roads and bridges. The various project types in the TIP consist of bicycle/pedestrian, bridges, paving, safety, special (such as Intelligent Transportation Systems, guide rails, signs, traffic signals), and transit.

### FHWA

Over the five-year cycle, \$241.350M federal funds from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is programmed to a number of sponsors. Approximately 70% is programmed to NYSDOT, 14% to the City of Syracuse, 13% to Onondaga County, 1% to CNYRTA, 1% to the Village of Solway and less than 1% to the Village of Skaneateles.



*TIP project type summary*



Regarding funding percentages by project type, bridge and paving projects make up 75% of the FHWA funded projects - 27% bridges and 48% paving. This is consistent with previous capital programs and the goals, objectives, and performance measures identified for the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and the TIP whereby funding is distributed to projects to maintain the existing aging infrastructure. Onondaga County and the other five counties that comprise the Region 3 office of the NYSDOT have historically been identified as having one of the higher percentages of bridges and federal-aid pavements in need of repair throughout the state. Due to the regional conditions for this 2020-2024 funding cycle, a significant amount of funding has been programmed to assist in improving structural deficiencies and pavement conditions primarily on the National Highway System.

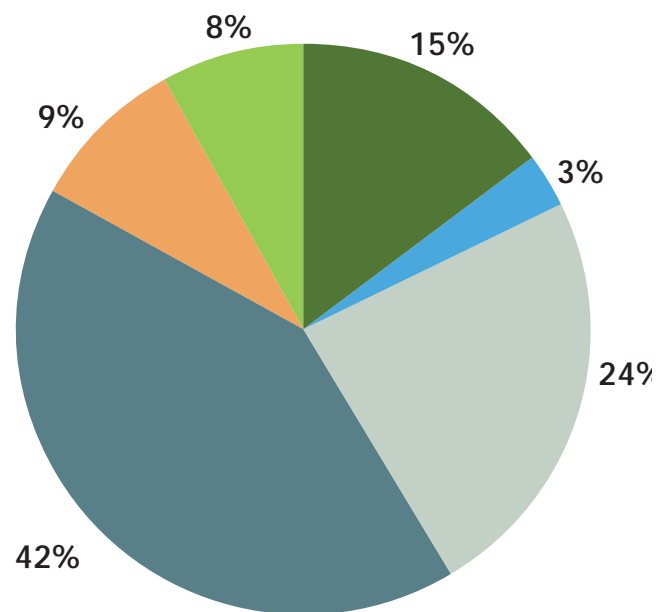
#### FTA

In addition to funding sources specific to the FHWA, the TIP also lists funding from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Within the SMTC area, the CNYRTA is the primary operator for public transportation services. The 2020-2024 TIP programs \$37.364M federal FTA funds to the CNYRTA where the majority of federal dollars are assigned to the authority's preventative maintenance to offset operating costs.

As required by federal transportation policy, the 2020-2024 TIP is a balanced, fiscally constrained program over the life of the multi-year program cycle and one that supports the goals, objectives, performance measures, and financial outlay of the SMTC's 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan. The proactive cooperation of the SMTC member agencies and the

SMTC Central Staff will continue to contribute to better transportation infrastructure investments and mobility in the Syracuse metropolitan area. With the initiation and/or completion of projects contained in the fiscally constrained TIP, the metropolitan area can look forward to better connectivity between modes, improved infrastructure conditions of the federal-aid highway and public transportation systems, and efficient movement of people and goods.

The new program is available on the Publications and TIP pages of the SMTC website, [www.smtcmpo.org](http://www.smtcmpo.org). For more details on the TIP process, please contact Mario Colone at 315.422.5716 or [mcolone@smtcmpo.org](mailto:mcolone@smtcmpo.org).



Percentage of funding by project type  
(see graphic on Page 10 for project type)

Directions is a publication of the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC). Formed in 1966 as a result of the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1962, and the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964, the SMTC serves as the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the Syracuse metropolitan area, and provides a forum for cooperative decision making in developing transportation plans and programs. Its committees are comprised of elected and appointed officials, representing local, state, and federal governments or agencies (member agencies) having an interest in or responsibility for transportation planning and programming.

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