

## **BMTS Article Digest January – February 2022**

BMTS Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee Members:

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TRANSPORTATION

**PUBLIC SQUARE**  
A CNU Journal



Main Street in Seneca Falls, New York. Photo by Lynn Richards.



# Let Main Streets Be Main Streets

A community should determine what kind of community it wants to be, not unelected DOT engineers.

[ROBERT STEUTEVILLE](#) JAN. 4, 2022

Before moving to Ithaca, New York, more than 20 years ago, I lived on Main Street in the town of Emmaus, Pennsylvania. Cars would go by at 40 mph, sometimes 50 mph late at night. On-street parking buffered pedestrians from the fast-moving traffic, but crossing the street was uncomfortable. Few residents used their front yards or sat on porches or stoops.

On the other side of my apartment was a freight line, where the trains came through at 3 a.m. with loud whistles. I soon learned to sleep through that, it was the constant traffic noise on Main Street that wore on me (It wasn't the volume of traffic so much as the speed—above about 35 miles per hour automobiles get loud, and that's related to their kinetic energy).

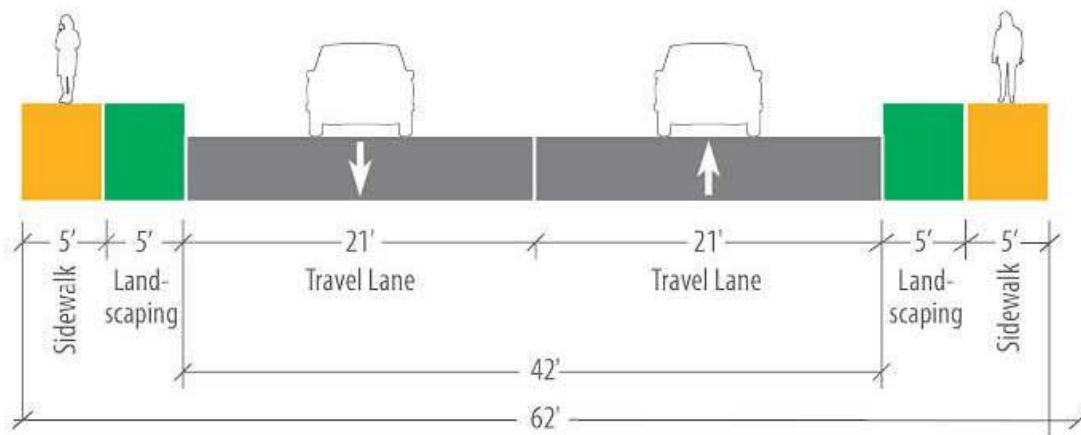
In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Main Street was designated a state route, widened, and trees were taken down so that traffic could move faster. Trees have grown up again, and the state has restriped the lanes to slow traffic a little (I checked on Google). Yet, the section of Main Street where I lived is still too wide for pedestrian comfort.

Similar damage has been done to countless American main streets, redesigned to enable fast automobile traffic at the expense of people outside of cars, who are the lifeblood of small city and town business and social activity.

Too few examples can be found where this damage has been undone in any meaningful way. One is Hamburg, New York, where US Route 62 goes through the heart of town. The state DOT has design jurisdiction over this road. About 20 years ago, this route had two 21-foot-wide lanes, one in either direction, allowing cars and 18 wheelers to speed through town. There was no on-street parking. When NYSDOT proposed adding a third lane to handle projected future congestion, the village fought back.

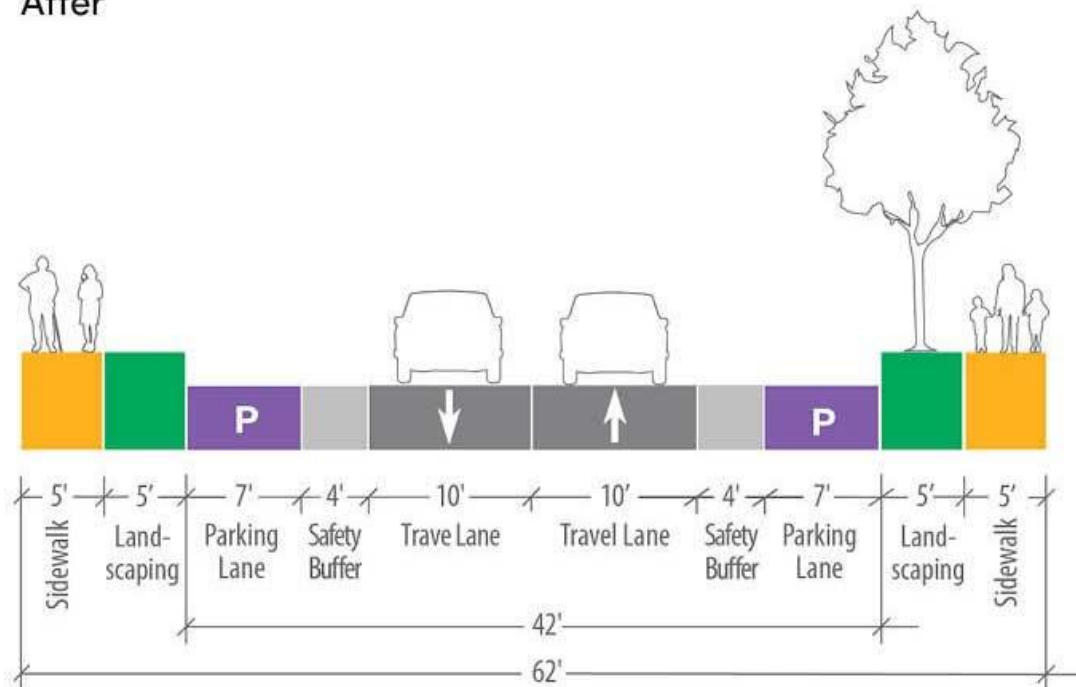
## Main Street, Hamburg NY between Buffalo and Center

Before Plan



## Main Street, Hamburg NY between Buffalo and Center

After



Cross-section by CNU

With the aid of new urban transportation consultants, the village came up with its [own design](#), which narrowed the lanes to 10 feet, and included roundabouts at key intersections to slow traffic. After holding a public referendum on the plans and rallying political support, the Village got New York State to build their preferred plan—which has been widely credited with catalyzing a revitalization of Hamburg's downtown. The expected increase in traffic never came (that [outcome](#)

[is common](#), according to Charles Marohn of *Strong Towns*), but the main street is thriving—with more pedestrians, bicyclists, businesses, and tax revenues.

Also in Upstate New York, the Village of Olean was able to pull off a [similar redesign](#) of State Route 16, the community's main street (named North Union Street). This project included five roundabouts, a tree-lined central median, narrowed lanes, crosswalks, improvements to sidewalks, and angled on-street parking. Accidents, especially those with injuries, have dropped dramatically. Olean saw many new businesses open within a few years of the redesign. The city also adopted a downtown form-based code. The street redesign was funded by a US DOT TIGER grant, with local and state support.



North Union Street before and after. By Chuck Banas.

Both of these examples involve roundabouts, which are a controversial solution among urbanists, because they keep traffic flowing at intersections. Roundabouts aren't necessary to calm a main street, but they work in some cases. Many other design tools are available—see Lancaster Boulevard in Lancaster, California, for a [good example](#). The roundabouts were probably



implemented in Hamburg and Olean because they are a favorite tool of the NYS Department of Transportation. Use whatever tool that gets the job done, and Hamburg and Olean are successful examples of reclaiming a main street for people and social life.

Small cities and towns everywhere should be thinking about what they can do to calm traffic and reclaim street life for people outside of cars. I don't recommend that they get rid of cars, because people still need to get to these destinations. But making the downtown pleasant for walking and biking, and hanging out, will help the community to thrive both economically and socially. In this era of climate change, we need more walkable places.



Downtown Olean, after street reconstruction. Photo courtesy of Bob Ring

Departments of Transportation, which have jurisdiction over thousands of main streets, have strenuously resisted design changes in most cases. This has led to a mentality among community leaders to that it's just too hard to make improvements. But this idea of reclaiming main streets for people has been around for a long time, and there is substantial empirical evidence that it works. It is time for a renewed effort to break down the opposition at state DOTs and implement more balanced mobility in the hearts of cities and towns across America. This is a project that has just barely begun and it badly needs to accelerate.

And the issue is not limited to historic main streets. A few months ago, I was part of a call with four state DOT engineers about a two-lane highway near Ithaca, where the community wants to build a new village center at a key intersection. The current speed limit is 50 mph and there is already a traffic light. Traffic volumes are fairly light, well under 10,000 cars per day in any direction. The

community wants to lower the design speed for a short distance, just a quarter mile or so. This would slow down traffic, costing commuters less than a minute of time in either direction. The state engineers frowned on this idea, saying that this is a “non-standard approach,” and that the state DOT doesn’t usually take a non-standard approach.

For existing, historic main streets, the DOT allows lower speed limits, although usually still doesn’t promote good design. But the engineers simply can’t imagine creating a new main street on a state highway. This, mind you, is an area where both the town and county have designated as a node for *walkable*, mixed-use development. Landowners, residents, and elected officials are on board with this plan. And yet, how can a community create a walkable place with a 50 mph state highway through the middle?

Here’s a radical proposal: A community should determine what kind of community it wants to be, not unelected DOT engineers. If the local leaders want a mixed-use, walkable place, and developers want to build it, and people want to live there, the state DOT exists to support that political and economic will, not stand in the way.

In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, DOTs decided that the interest of automobile throughput overrode those of local municipalities, who needed main streets that serve as the social and economic heart of communities. It’s time we reclaimed those main streets as main streets and allowed new main streets to be built again, as determined by local needs.

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## Former Uber driver bikes to all 50 state capitals in 1 year

Bob Barnes tells Fox News Digital about his journey so far: ‘It’s like a big neighborhood’

By [Ann W. Schmidt | Fox News](#)

A former Uber driver is visiting all 50 U.S. state capitals – on a bicycle.

Bob Barnes, 52, [from Syracuse, New York](#), started his trip, which he’s calling the “Great American Triple Switchback,” on Aug. 1, 2021, and is hoping to finish the trip in one year, he told Fox News Digital.

As of Thursday afternoon, Barnes had cycled 7,900 miles and had visited 26 capitals and Washington, D.C.

“It’s awesome to be out here and just have all these experiences and every single little town, every state,” Barnes said.

Barnes said he decided to go on the trip for several reasons, including bringing awareness to blood donation and pushing himself to complete the personal challenge of cycling to all 50 state capitals.





**Bob Barnes, 52, from Syracuse, New York, is cycling to all 50 U.S. state capitals in one year. (Courtesy of Bob Barnes)**

He said he also wanted to see what the country is actually like.

"I call it 'real reality,'" he told Fox. "As opposed to what's on TV and the internet."

"I do consider myself an adventurer," he added. "I love to explore and I like to see things for myself."

He said he was also inspired by a similar trip he took several years ago when he cycled about 5,800 miles throughout the country.

"I was awestruck, it was so eye-opening," Barnes said. "I wanted to come back out here and do it again."

He said his first trip was more of a mental challenge, but now he's facing more physical obstacles.

"The [weather's](#) been challenging," he said. "The mountains have been challenging. Once I got to [Denver](#), all the way from Denver to [California](#) was windy and cold. But the experiences, it's absolutely amazing."

Though his journey is about cycling to all 50 state capitals, Barnes has made sure to pay it forward along the way.

He said on Saturday he plans to donate blood for the third time since his trip started. And on Thanksgiving and Christmas, he volunteered in the cities he was visiting.

**Barnes started his trip in August 2021 and so far, has cycled 7,900 miles and visited 26 capitals. (Courtesy of Bob Barnes)**

Barnes shares about his journey daily on his Facebook page, Bibbery Travels, where he posts pictures of every state capital and his other experiences along the way.

"I like to keep it very interactive," he told Fox. "I like to keep it lighthearted."





On his "Great American Triple Switchback" GoFundMe page – which helps him fund his journey – Barnes says his trip "is like a real reality show in real time."

"My obligation is to report to 'you the follower' 3 times a day promptly showing and talking about what 'we' have seen. It's a very lighthearted, fun and interactive experience," Barnes wrote.

"Basically 'we' are touring the entire United States on a field trip and I am the guide," he added.



**Barnes' trip is about pushing himself to complete the challenge while also bringing awareness to blood donation and to see the country as it really is. (Courtesy of Bob Barnes)**

Barnes told [FOX Television Stations](#) that he bikes 44 miles a day on average and camps in his tent overnight at truck stops and in parks.

Barnes explained to the outlet that he plans to bike to Juneau, [Alaska](#), after taking a ferry from [Canada](#). He'll bike to Honolulu, [Hawaii](#), after flying with his bike to the island, according to the outlet.

Barnes told Fox News Digital that his trip is basically just like cycling around a neighborhood.

"It's everything you think it would be if you get on a bike and start pedaling around the country, that's what it is," Barnes said. "It's just fascinating. It's like a big neighborhood. ... It's just the country is the neighborhood."

Barnes also said he hopes to inspire other people to follow their passions.

"I'd just like to point out to people to follow their dreams and follow their passion," he said. "No matter what it is, don't listen to other people. It's your passion. And if that's what's going to make you happy, find an excuse to do it."

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New "linear" park and public facilities proposed for Connecting the New 15th Ward. Source: UDA

## DESIGN

# Public housing transformation gets boost from freeway teardown

In Syracuse, New York, the relocation of I-81 creates opportunity for replacing public housing with a mixed-use, mixed-income neighborhood.

ROBERT STEUTEVILLE JAN. 26, 2022

One of the oldest public housing projects in the US is being redeveloped in concert with the tearing down of an elevated freeway in Syracuse, New York. The transformation of the late 1930s Pioneer Homes is designed to restore a mixed-use, mixed-income neighborhood adjacent to the current Interstate 81.

The plan for Pioneer Homes, other public housing, and the surrounding neighborhood raises the stakes and opportunities for the freeway transformation. This area in Southwest Syracuse is the site of the former 15<sup>th</sup> Ward, a largely African-American neighborhood that was torn down for "urban renewal" and highway construction. I-81 is planned to be routed around the city on the current I-481, and the elevated in-city section will be replaced by a surface street, connecting this neighborhood to Syracuse University and a medical district.



The neighborhood plan, Connecting the New 15th Ward, is to be developed by McCormack, Baron, Salazar, (MBS) an affordable housing and urban redevelopment firm. Urban Design Associates (UDA) of Pittsburgh is leading the urban design and public engagement—a process that began in the spring of 2021. The Syracuse Housing Authority has set up in-person meetings for residents, but the designers have worked remotely, due to the pandemic.



Choice Neighborhoods plan for Syracuse. Source: UDA.

The city has endorsed the plan, which is being submitted to US Housing and Urban Development as a \$50 million Choice Neighborhoods grant (deadline is February 15). Normally, the housing authority would take the lead on a project like this. Because the overall effort is so important to the future of Syracuse, the City itself is initiating the application. The housing authority is a partner in the plan.

The \$800 million project leverages local and state funding sources, and also includes wellness and education. The City is working with Purpose Built Communities of Atlanta, a nonprofit that promotes mixed-income housing, cradle-to-college education, and community wellness. Purpose Built Communities operates in 25 cities, and its model is combined with new urbanist design in Syracuse. The organization participated at CNU 27 in Louisville, and discussed with CNU how to combine their model with a stronger urban design focus. Purpose Built Communities set up a local nonprofit in Syracuse called [Blueprint 15](#). Urban Strategies, a national nonprofit, is also a partner in health, workforce development, economic stability, education, and overall wellbeing.

The first phase replaces nearly 300 units of public housing with 611 mixed-income living spaces, including one-to-one replacement of public housing. The next phase would take place after the highway is replaced by a boulevard. The total plan would provide over 1400 mixed-income units, including approximately 700 one-for-one replacement public housing units.

The plan calls for the public housing to be torn down, due to its design and condition. Even if the units were renovated, they are small and their layout is deficient according to current standards, notes to Megan O'Hara, principle-in-charge at UDA. The uniform townhouse buildings, which now look like public housing, are planned to be replaced with more diverse building types that look like what it is intended to be—a neighborhood. Buildings would include a mix of public, affordable, and market-rate housing, and a range of housing types and scales from triplexes to small walk-up apartment buildings to multi-family and mixed-use.



New streetscape proposed for Connecting the New 15th Ward. Source UDA.

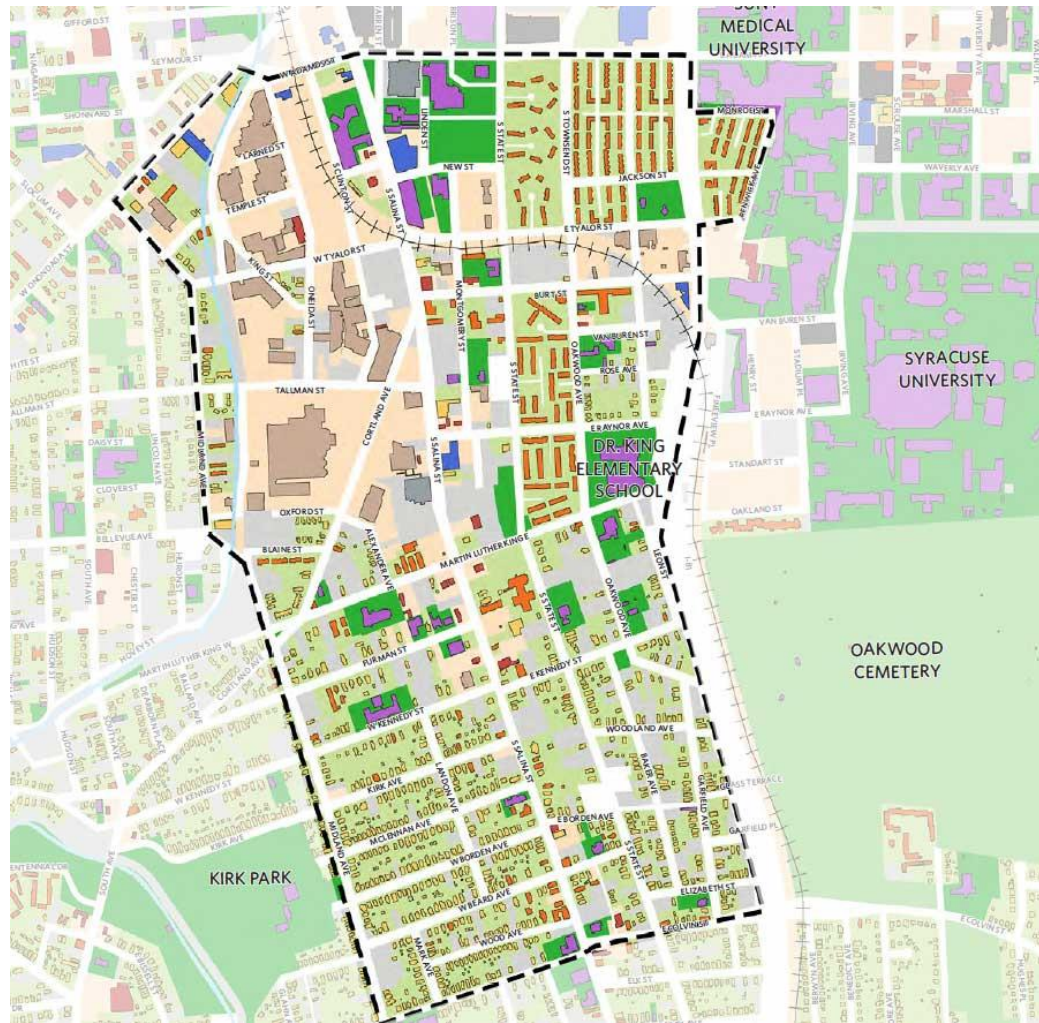
Removal of the existing housing facilitates a restored street grid similar to the historic 15<sup>th</sup> Ward. “What we are trying to do is break up all of these superblocks and replace them with streets that are walkable and safer,” Robert Mike, president of the Pioneer Homes Tenant Association, told Syracuse.com.

The plan has a strong focus on parks and public spaces. The existing Wilson Park will be impacted by the I-81 teardown, and the community hopes that the NYS Department of Transportation will enhance the park following the construction. A new “linear park” is proposed to include community gardens, play areas, and other recreational facilities (see rendering at top of article). Fronting the park is a proposed health and wellness center, programmed by YMCA, and an early childhood learning center.

One of the desires of residents is greater security, says Mike. That can be promoted through design that encourages “eyes on the street” and street life, but also a more economically diverse area. More than half of Choice Neighborhoods have seen crime rates decline at twice the rate of the city as a whole. The program also has a track record of increased employment and household income. Across the proposed boulevard (now I-81) is Syracuse University and a medical center, both large employers, offering educational and health facilities.



An expanded plan encompasses a larger area, including disinvested blocks of single-family housing and industrial areas. The city operates a program to renovate housing in this area.



The larger planning area.  
Source: UDA

While some are skeptical that middle class households will choose to live in the area, Mike explains that “the housing authority took the philosophy that we wanted to invest in the neighborhood and invite people in.” The plan also calls for commercial spaces to allow residents to walk to purchase daily needs. Mixed-use commercial development is

slated on East Adams Street, which is the boundary between the public housing and the downtown to the north.

The project has momentum from the state’s decision to tear down the highway and build a boulevard. The city has a good shot at the Choice Neighborhood grant, but the plan is to proceed (albeit more slowly), even if the grant is not approved by HUD.

Blueprint 15 has three goals:

- **High-quality housing.** High-quality, mixed-income housing that’s both safe and affordable — the foundation of a vibrant neighborhood.
- **Health and wellness.** Access to fresh, affordable, nutritious food and safe public places for recreation, like parks and community centers.
- **Amazing education.** Cradle-to-college education pipeline that sets young people up for any kind of future they can imagine.

The overarching goal is to rebuild social capital and restore the urban patterns that were disrupted through the highway and mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century planning.

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#### CELEBRITY NEWS

## Simon Cowell 'doing well,' 'healing at home' with broken arm following e-bike crash: source

The 'America's Got Talent' judge suffered a broken back in August after a similar fall from his bike in Malibu

By [Julius Young](#) | Fox News

Simon Cowell is at home recovering after he was hospitalized following a crash on his electric bicycle last week, Fox News Digital has confirmed.

The accident occurred last Thursday near his home in West London as the "America's Got Talent" judge, 62, was riding his bike when he "crashed to the ground" and "broke his arm."

A source told Fox News Digital that Cowell is "doing well and is healing at home."



Simon Cowell goes for a morning bike ride in London on Jan. 26, the day before his accident. (Mega Agency)

Per [TMZ](#), citing sources, the accident occurred when Cowell "turned a sharp corner" on a road that was wet. The tires reportedly "went out from under him, and he crashed to the ground."

Meanwhile, a report from [The Sun](#) indicated that the music and TV executive is "lucky to be alive" since he was thrown from the bike after riding around 20 mph without a helmet. "He was pedaling along, with his electric motor on, when the wheels suddenly went from under him after hitting a wet patch," an insider told The Sun on Monday night.

"He slipped and went flying over the handlebars into the middle of the road," the source maintained, adding that Cowell was bleeding profusely from his face and likened the bloody mess to "something from Phantom of the Opera." The outlet reported that in addition to suffering a broken arm, Cowell was rushed to the hospital with a "suspected concussion."



Simon Cowell is at home recovering after he was hospitalized following a crash on his electric bicycle last week, Fox News Digital has confirmed. (AP, File)

Cowell's biking accident is the second in recent months.



In August, he sustained numerous injuries to his back while riding his \$20,000 bike near his home in Malibu, California, and underwent a six-hour operation to repair fractures in his spine, according to [Page Six](#).

Doctors reportedly implanted a metal rod in his back to stabilize the injuries.

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## Chenango St. detour was expected to last 3 months: Why work on 81/17 interchange persists

**Neal Simon**

Binghamton Press & Sun-Bulletin  
February 9, 2022

The \$3.5 million project to strengthen the Interstate 81 bridge in Binghamton is taking longer to complete than the original three-month estimate, extending the Chenango Street underpass detours well into the new year.

In June 2021, the New York State Department of Transportation announced engineers detected an "uncharacteristic settlement" in the roadway above the Chenango Street arch.

Engineers said the bridge is completely safe for travel.

Nevertheless, out of an abundance of caution and to preserve the structure's 75-year design life, DOT engineers developed a plan to fix the problem, the agency said.

## Chenango Street detours still in place



The project began shortly before the end of summer. Construction workers set up on the underside of 81. That minimized traffic snarls but necessitated a pair of detours on the stretch of Chenango Street running beneath the overpass.

"We are going from the underside to strengthen it, because that is less intrusive to daily traffic than if we did it from above and would have had to (impact) traffic on 81," said Scott Cook, DOT Region 9 public information specialist.

Since Sept. 11 motor vehicle traffic has been diverted at Frederick Street on the south end of the arch and at Bevier Street on the north side.





The road under the arch remains accessible to pedestrians and bicyclists, while local motorized traffic retains access to destinations between the diversions and the overpass on Chenango Street.

“From both detour points, you can still go all the way to the bridge to get to whatever businesses, homes or side streets you want to go to,” Cook said.

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