

NYS MPO

Integrated Transportation Planning &
Community Design Processes

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Route 5 Corridor Land Use and Transportation Plan

“Great streets do not just happen . . . They are streets for both pedestrians and drivers. They have definition, a sense of enclosure with their buildings; distinct ends and beginnings, usually with trees . . . great streets are where pedestrians and drivers get along together.”

Allan B. Jacobs



NEW YORK STATE

Albany



Significant Achievements

- ◆ Three regional authorities, five municipalities, two counties and the NYS Department of Transportation collaboratively prepared and adopted a final corridor plan through a Study Advisory Committee.
- ◆ The Study Advisory Committee developed and refined improvement alternatives via an extensive, innovative and multi-faceted public outreach campaign.
- ◆ The Study Advisory Committee developed extensive visualization tools and renderings that illustrated three conceptual development alternatives in a way that was understandable and meaningful to all corridor stakeholders.
- ◆ The public “voted” for a “preferred future” for the corridor through a survey administered via newsletters and the internet. Survey results were integrated with the technical evaluation to determine the preferred alternative for corridor development.
- ◆ The Route 5 Corridor Plan created a dynamic, far-reaching corridor concept consistent and coordinated with other regional planning and development goals.

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Overview

The New York Route 5 corridor between Albany and Schenectady is an important component of the Capital District’s transportation system. Despite erosion of its vitality over time, the corridor continues to be a significant component of the regional transportation and land use system. With the region’s two largest urban centers at either end of the corridor and the largest suburban complex between them, the corridor carries the highest arterial traffic volumes and greatest number of transit riders in the region.

The Route 5 Corridor Land Use and Transportation Study built from earlier efforts undertaken in the region to develop the “New Visions” Plan, the Capital District Transportation Committee’s long-range transportation plan, which called for higher levels of transit service and urban reinvestment in the corridor. The Route 5 Corridor Study was unique because it looked to land use, economic and social solutions to address the corridor’s transportation issues as well as more typical transportation system improvements and policies.

Previous page: The *Route 5 Transportation and Land Use Plan* calls for balancing all modes of transportation through the corridor. Neighborhoods along State Street and Central Avenue will receive “context sensitive” street improvements to better facilitate the flow of traffic, while improving transit access and pedestrian safety.



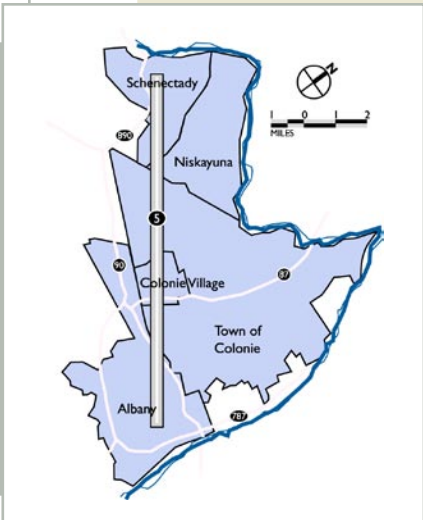
Project Development

The portion of New York Route 5¹ is a 16.5 mile corridor connecting the Cities of Albany and Schenectady and linking the region's largest employment and residential centers. Historically, the corridor served the region as the primary connector; it also was the Capital District's main street. Much of the corridor's vitality, however, has been eroded over time. Changes in land use and transportation, combined with social and market shifts, undermined the role of the corridor as a main street. As greater numbers of people, jobs and businesses dispersed across the region, Route 5 increasingly attracted automobile-oriented strip development, a land use pattern that undermined the corridor's effectiveness as a transportation facility as well as a center of economic activity.



Despite these problems, the Route 5 corridor between Albany and Schenectady continues to be a significant component of the Capital District's transportation and land use system. The corridor is central to the region's land use and transportation infrastructure. According to the Route 5 Corridor Study 15 percent of households and 30 percent of jobs in the Capital District are located within a half-mile of the Route 5. The corridor, therefore, was designated as one of the first facilities to be studied and improved in the region's long-range transportation plan, known as "New Visions".

Despite being the central corridor for the region, some sections of Route 5 lost transportation functionality as well as local character. As shown in this photo, traffic flow is slowed, access management is challenging and conditions for pedestrians are uninviting.



Central Avenue is the region's primary corridor, connecting the Cities of Albany and Schenectady and linking the region's largest employment and residential centers.

¹ Known as Central Avenue in Albany County and State Street in Schenectady County.

Route 5 Corridor Land Use and Transportation Plan

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The “New Visions” Plan, developed by the Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC), the metropolitan planning organization (MPO), called for higher levels of transit service and urban reinvestment in the Route 5 corridor as part of a wider strategy designed to preserve existing transportation facilities, integrate transportation and land use planning and stimulate local economies in the urban service area. The goal of Route 5 Corridor Study was to understand community aspirations in terms of transportation, community character, and economic development and to translate these goals into strategies that would guide the corridor’s future development. At the same time, however, strategies to enhance the orientation of the corridor locally needed to be balanced to ensure the functionality of the facility as a regional transportation route.

A total of eleven agencies and jurisdictions joined together to conduct the Route 5 Corridor Land Use and Transportation Study — the CDTC, the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA), the Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC), the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), the counties of Albany and Schenectady, and five local jurisdictions (the Cities of Albany and Schenectady, the Towns of Colonie and Niskayuna and the Village of Colonie). They administered the study via a Study Advisory Committee, comprised of corridor stakeholders representing local government, the private sector, engineers, planners, residents, and safety and environmental advocates.



These three photos, using artists’ renderings, show how infill development can be used to restore pedestrian accessibility and improve circulation to existing malls.

In the initial stages of the project, the Study Advisory Committee focused on existing land use and transportation patterns. Committee members examined economic development, market forces and real estate trends. This information, combined with input from individual corridor communities, led the Committee to evaluate existing conditions and gauge future potential. This process was innovative because the Committee's approach evidenced an appreciation for the contribution of social and market forces on land use patterns and recognized the combined effect of these trends on transportation. Likewise, the Committee understood that sustainable transportation could best be achieved by promoting land use patterns that support economic activity, neighborhood development and multi-modal transportation. The challenge for the Study Advisory Committee, therefore, was to develop a transportation-oriented corridor plan that could be integrated with and supportive of strategies to guide land use, generate economic activity and enhance all modes.

The Study Advisory Committee used its analyses to develop three preliminary development alternatives based on different assumptions regarding land use, economic activity and transportation investment:

- The *Base Alternative* assumed existing conditions and growth forecasts for the region and corridor.
- The *Intermediate Alternative* represented the same growth projections, but with a greater portion of regional growth shifted to the corridor, reflecting new land use policies to encourage investment and development to the corridor. More development in the corridor would be supported by future investment in the corridor transportation system.

Though Route 5 may be one continuous stretch of roadway, land use and community character along the corridor are diverse. The corridor was divided into segments to receive different types of improvements based on traffic patterns, building use and patterns, and parking needs.



State St.—Schenectady

DOWN TOWN



New MVP Headquarters

URBAN CORE



State St. and McClellan Ave.

URBAN STRIP



Central Ave. and Wolf Rd.

SUBURBAN STRIP



Central Ave. and Colvin Ave.

URBAN STRIP



Central Ave. and Quail St.

URBAN CORE



Washington Ave. Armory

DOWN TOWN



State St. and Eagle St.—Albany

Route 5 Corridor Land Use and Transportation Plan

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The character along the corridor is varied. As shown in this photo, sections of the route pass through well established neighborhoods. A part of the study's success included being able to identify different sections and plan improvements accordingly.



The *Stimulated Alternative* assumed overall higher regional growth rates and offered a future that coupled these increased growth rates with strong land use policies to create more intensive development in portions of the corridor. Land use and economic improvements would be further supported by increased investment in the corridor's transportation system, potentially including a bus system with dedicated lanes (BRT) or a light rail service.

To supplement the Preliminary Alternative Futures, the Study Advisory Committee prepared a set of documents that illustrated how the corridor would appear visually with the changes proposed under each alternative. The Committee hosted a five-day design and policy charette as its primary vehicle to introduce the alternatives to corridor stakeholders and the public, using study documents, illustrations and renderings to explain concepts.

Attendees were encouraged to learn as much as they could about the corridor study and to participate in evaluation of the preliminary alternatives. Charette participants also helped the Committee identify concepts for encouraging urban revitalization and promoting neighborhood development. Ultimately, the Committee used these discussions to refine the alternatives into the Alternative Future Scenarios, three concepts it could take to the wider public for comment and input.

The Study Advisory Committee initiated a large-scale public outreach campaign to introduce the refined alternatives to the wider public. The Committee prepared an "Alternatives Evaluation Working Paper"



Engaging residents, business community and public officials was key to the study's success. A five-day design and policy charette, attended by more than 100 people, was held to give stakeholders an opportunity to collaborate on the corridor's future.

that fully described the three future scenarios and, at the same time, published summarized information in a newsletter and on a more detailed web site. The newsletter and web site included a short questionnaire to query residents, business owners, employees and land owners for their reaction to improvements proposed under the Stimulated Alternative, the most comprehensive of the Alternative Futures. To encourage participation, the Study Advisory Committee developed a set of visualization tools, including (among others) detailed photosimulations highlighting “before and after” images of improvements and illustrations of potential traffic calming and street design strategies. The visuals were available to the public on the web site.

The Study Advisory Committee also used the newsletter to introduce new concepts to the public and gauge interest in new ideas, such as a high quality Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system. For example, one question asked whether the respondent would be willing to trade off retaining current levels of roadway service (which in some segments translated to congested conditions) for improvements to the pedestrian and transit environment, while information in the newsletter showed how increased transit ridership and pedestrian activity can potentially generate secondary benefits such as neighborhood vitality.

The survey was administered via newsletters and the web; nearly 700 people responded. Survey results showed considerable enthusiasm for planning and design strategies that supported multi-modal accessibility within the corridor communities. People who participated in the survey also supported mixed-used developments, “high end” transit systems, land use controls and site



Advanced traffic engineering technology can improve transit system performance and maximize convenience for passengers.



Notable examples of current improvement activities include:

- ◆ the corridor-wide Bus Rapid Transit Conceptual Design Study that will identify, locate and estimate costs for BRT stations and feasible and desirable transit priority treatments.
- ◆ State Street reconstruction in the City of Schenectady incorporates streetscaping and traffic calming of Route 5 along two sections, one in the urban core and one in the urban strip.
- ◆ Central Avenue rehabilitation in the urban strip section of the City of Albany integrating BRT needs with this road improvement project.
- ◆ Village of Colonie linkage planning study to produce streetscape guidelines and architectural design standards.
- ◆ redevelopment of old Mohawk Mall into Mohawk Commons representing incremental infill of parcels and integration of pedestrian accommodations.
- ◆ Bow Tie Cinemas, a New York City-based movie theatre operator, will open a six-screen movie theatre on State Street. The theatre will be part of a \$10 million movie theatre/Class A office building complex. The City's plan and vision helped attract the developer to Schenectady.

design review as strategies that could improve the quality of life along the corridor.

The Study Advisory Committee tallied survey results and used them in conjunction with an extensive technical evaluation of the development alternatives to identify a preferred option. The preferred future — the Stimulated Alternative



Citizens and stakeholders “voted” for a preferred plan that called for vastly improved pedestrian infrastructure, including street trees and furniture as well as safety enhancements such as bulb-outs and clearly marked sidewalks.

— recommended mixing, and in some cases intensifying, land uses along the corridor utilizing well designed sites as a catalyst for economic revitalization of corridor communities and to support continued reinvestment in the corridor’s transportation system. For developed land, this meant ensuring that parcels were being used efficiently and were generating wealth for the local economy. Strong transportation services integrated with surrounding land uses, including high end transit (BRT), pedestrian networks, and context sensitive, community enhancing infrastructure improvements were all identified as important strategies.

The Committee continued to work on the corridor plan after the preferred alternative was identified, both internally and with the public. The Committee developed a series of coordinated implementation steps, budgeting requirements and a detailed action plan. It also continued to generate opportunities to involve and communicate study progress to the community. The preferred alternative, for example, was posted on the study web site with a description that included visualization techniques; the web site offered visitors a “tour” of the preferred alternative. The Committee also posted a series of actions that interested and concerned members of the community could do to support the proposed improvements.

Results

The Route 5 Corridor Land Use and Transportation Study created a multi-modal corridor plan that addressed social, economic, land use and transportation concerns facing communities along the corridor. The Study was innovative in several ways:



At the heart of the Route 5 Corridor Plan is coordinating land use and transportation planning to improve access and mobility. As shown in this existing photo and artists rendering of “after” conditions, steps to enhance road conditions include burying utility lines, breaking up large parking lots, clarifying pedestrian circulation and creating a safe pedestrian environment.



One of the more exciting changes that has happened in the corridor is the redevelopment of Mohawk Mall. The site was transformed into a vibrant community commercial center with new buildings, fresh landscaping, a redesigned parking lot and site circulation. This project also provided support for additional downtown investment, including NYS DOT Region 1 office and corporate headquarters for MVP Health Plan. The building was successfully integrated into the site by incorporating State's street curve into the building design.

- Study goals were broad, encompassing socio-economic, land use and transportation considerations;
- The public involvement process was extensive, with members of the community consulted from the development of the study scope and findings through to creation of the recommended implementation actions; and
- The Study Advisory Committee employed a variety of tools and formats to reach out to the public, including visualization and rendering techniques, surveys, design charettes, public work sessions and newsletters.

These innovations resulted in an integrated vision for the corridor that included strategies to revitalize and stimulate local economies, enhance neighborhood quality of life, maximize land use, and improve access for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit, and automobiles.

Lessons Learned

- **Visualization techniques are powerful tools for illustrating new concepts and designs in a compelling manner**

Among the most innovative aspects of the Route 5 Corridor Plan was the use of visualization and rendering techniques to communicate development alternatives to corridor stakeholders and members of the public. The Study Advisory Committee used these tools to solicit feedback and participation in selection of the preferred alternative. Visualization techniques were also incorporated into a wider education and surveying process whereby corridor stakeholders

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Infrastructure and landscaping support go a long way to supporting a multimodal environment. Segregated sidewalks create a safe and comfortable environment, while a segregated bus shelter offers transit users a covered, level boarding area to access vehicles. Specially designed noise barriers on the train bridge minimize local impacts from passing trains.



and members of the public “voted” on their preferences. By encouraging people to participate in the selection process, the Study Advisory Committee built consensus and generated enthusiasm for the plan.

• **Using a variety of techniques can stimulate community involvement.**

The Study Advisory Committee encouraged community involvement through a variety of means. The Committee itself is an example of community involvement and was the primary platform whereby representatives from the regional and local jurisdictions interacted with other corridor stakeholders, including members of the public. In addition, the Route 5 Corridor Study offered numerous opportunities for the public to get involved, by holding public work sessions and design charettes, publishing newsletters and a web sites and issuing a surveys.



Today, the streetscape is unsafe for motorists, transit riders, pedestrians and bicyclists alike.

The simulation shows an alternative future that illustrates how street design can effect positive change. The boulevard shown reduces conflicts caused by curb cuts, and improves safety for cyclists and pedestrians by separating through traffic from local traffic. This configuration allows for a dedicated transit lane for regular or BRT service.



Route 5 Corridor Land Use and Transportation Plan

- **Involving and educating the community enhances participation in the process and sense of ownership for project success.**



The policy and design charrettes engaged participants by using extensive visualization and mapping tools.

These visuals depicted potential solutions by corridor segment as well as for the whole route, enabling participants to evaluate neighborhood-specific and corridor-wide improvement alternatives.

The Study Advisory Committee developed innovative techniques to communicate ideas to the public and invited public participation through a variety of formats. The combination of these efforts resulted in “local ownership” of the Study process and results. First, as corridor stakeholders and members of the public were engaged in study process, they developed a greater appreciation for the study goals and a greater sense of responsibility for its success.

- **Transportation projects can effectively address social, land use and economic goals through planning and design.**

Among the most innovative aspects of the Route 5 Corridor study was recognition of the combination of social, economic and land use forces that have changed the Route 5 corridor. By understanding the multiple causes of transportation and land use problems, the Study

Advisory Committee was able to include similar factors in the plan for the future of the corridor. The Study, therefore, resulted in a plan that addressed land use, neighborhood planning and regional economic planning to identify appropriate transportation investments and to ensure the corridor would address local and regional transportation needs.

Project Details

New York 5: Central Avenue and State Street Land Use and Transportation Study
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