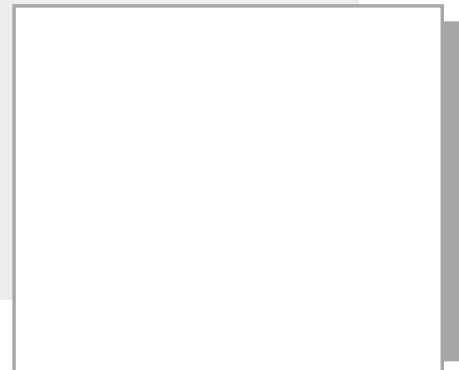


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Albany-Shaker Road Relocation



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Summary

The Albany Shaker Road
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The project is a major project of the Albany Shaker Road Relocation Project. *New Visions Regional Transportation Plan.*

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Overview

The Albany-Shaker Road is a county-owned National Highway System (NHS) arterial that serves Albany International Airport and nearby employment and retail centers in the Town of Colonie. It is the main access facility between Wolf Road, I-87 (the Northway) and the Airport. True to its name, the Albany-Shaker Road corridor is also the primary access route to a variety of natural, historic and community resources such as the Old Shaker Cemetery, the Shaker Museum and the Ann Lee Pond Preserve. Proposals for roadway improvements, therefore, needed to consider not only the roadway's strategic role in the transportation network but also preserving and enhancing historic and cultural sites.

The Albany-Shaker Road corridor had been studied in the past as part of other efforts including the Capital District Transportation Committee's (CDTC) New Visions long range transportation plan and the Albany County Airport Area Transportation Assessment.

The corridor was also included in the Albany County Airport General Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS). The GEIS, in particular, was undertaken in response to continuing growth at the airport and the impact changing land uses

along the corridor were having on the facility's ability to handle traffic volumes and accommodate transit, pedestrians and bicyclists. The Albany-Shaker Road relocation project evolved from recommendations in these studies; the project also built upon strategies identified in previous studies to become a success story in the efforts to develop context-sensitive solutions that are supportive of development, sustainable development and community values.

The Success Story

Albany-Shaker Road, a county-owned National Highway System (NHS) arterial, is the main access facility between Wolf Road, I-87 (the Northway) and the Albany International Airport. It is also the primary access route to a variety of natural, historic and community resources such as the Old Shaker Cemetery, the Shaker Museum and the Ann Lee Pond Preserve. The corridor was under scrutiny because it was experiencing poor pavement conditions, increasing traffic, decreasing levels of service and a lack of transit, pedestrian and bicycle access. In addition, regional planners recognized that the Albany-Shaker Road, together with the Albany International Airport, would be a focal point for considerable future growth.

In 1995, the Town of Colonie initiated a collaborative effort with Albany County and NYSDOT to plan, design and manage future roadway and corridor development. The challenge for project planners was to create a roadway improvement plan that could simultaneously:

- Improve the functionality of the existing roadway as a strategic arterial;
- Provide access along the corridor for transit, pedestrians and bicyclists;
- Preserve the future functionality of the roadway by guiding and shaping land uses and encouraging transit and non-motorized transportation; and
- Enhance and protect cultural and historic resources along the corridor.

Recognizing both the importance and the complexity of the project, the Town established a Steering Committee with diverse representation to guide the Study. The Town charged the Committee with crafting a broad-based set of goals and objectives that dealt with many issues, including traffic levels of service (LOS), safety, aesthetics and community-building. Among the Committee's highest

The Albany-Shaker road provides primary access to several natural, cultural, historic and commercial resources, including the Ann Lee Pond Preserve and the Road's namesake the Albany Shaker Museum. The Steering Committee ensured that the roadway design enhanced, rather than detracted from, these resources.

Albany-Shaker Road Relocation

priorities were pedestrian and bicycle facilities, including pedestrian access between facilities (the Shaker Site, the Airport and businesses) as well as environmental enhancements at the Ann Lee Pond Preserve. The Committee also recognized the importance of avoiding future conflicts between traffic and land uses. Of particular importance was preserving existing infrastructure resources and ensuring future growth would be properly managed and not outpace infrastructure capacity.

The Town and Steering Committee built on several ideas and strategies developed in previous regional and airport studies. Among the most influential of these was the Albany County Airport Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS), a study intended to identify and develop strategies to manage impacts associated with anticipated increases in Albany International Airport-related activity and land development. The GEIS was influential because, among other things, it provided a broad land use and development vision for the area around the Airport, including surface transportation access. By setting future land use goals, the Town and Steering Committee was able to commence the project with expectations regarding anticipated growth, development and land uses. The GEIS process also led to two important new tools designed to help local and regional governments ensure a sustainable future: mitigation cost sharing and concurrency.

Mitigation cost sharing (public-private partnerships) were an idea that evolved from the GEIS process. A Transportation Financing Task Force set up by the Town of Colonie explored alternative ways to fund the improvement

Albany Shaker Road improved both automobile and transit accessibility to the rapidly growing Albany International Airport.

Focusing on pedestrian safety and convenience was an important goal of the Steering Committee. Here, a crosswalk is well-defined with high visibility marking and countdown signals. Narrow vehicle lanes, reduced shoulder widths and the median refuge also enhance pedestrian safety.

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projects recommended in the GEIS. This Task Force also prepared recommendations to the Town of Colonie with regards to mitigation cost structure and mechanisms to collect and distribute the funds to specific infrastructure improvements, including more than a dozen different transportation improvements including an integrated mix of roadway, transit, travel demand, arterial and land

use management actions. A total of \$25 million is expected in private resources, roughly 30 percent of all improvement costs.

The second tool that evolved from the GEIS process was the integration of roadway, transit, travel demand, arterial, and land management actions as a critical strategy to extend the operating life of transportation infrastructure.

Recognizing the importance

of the inter-connectedness of these elements, the Town of Colonie and Albany County established a policy of "concurrency," an approach that directly links infrastructure capacity with development projects. In essence, concurrency requires that infrastructure improvements keep pace with anticipated levels of development, and at the same time, limits the pace of development to work within reasonable expectations for infrastructure improvements.

The Albany-Shaker Road Relocation project directly benefited from both initiatives. The Town of Colonie is using funds collected from mitigation cost-sharing to support all of the design and right-of-way acquisition as well as some of the construction costs. Further, the concurrency policy led project planners to closely integrate land use planning with infrastructure improvements and ensure development and roadway capacity would be mutually supportive. Concurrency also encouraged strategies that supported locally-oriented, context-sensitive solutions that maximized use of existing capacity.

Albany-Shaker Road provides important connections between the Interstate and the Airport as well as links to regional businesses and destinations. The roadway design ensured the safety, aesthetics and infrastructure needs of all travelers along this important corridor. The Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) shuttle-fly is an integral component of the Albany-Shaker Road project. Public transportation and roadway improvements are both financially supported by cost sharing.

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Albany-Shaker Road Relocation

Final recommendations for the Albany-Shaker Road Relocation project included a range of transportation and land use improvements that enhanced mobility across modes. For example, the final plan included a separated shared use path parallel to the corridor. The shared use pathway was designed to create not only a safe, walkable corridor but also a network of pedestrian routes that emphasized connections and access between neighborhoods, activity centers and destinations such as the Airport and the Ann Lee Pond Preserve. Pedestrian and bicycle improvements, in turn, enhanced transit effectiveness by improving the connections and safety between transit stops and destinations. Ultimately, by expanding the range of modal opportunities in the corridor, the Steering Committee's design retained capacity for future development and reduced future traffic impacts.

Collaboration and Coordination Among Local Partners

The locally-appointed and empowered Steering Committee was a key factor in the success of the Albany-Shaker Road Relocation project. While steering committees are frequently used to involve stakeholders and the public in a project's general direction and policy-level decision-making, the Steering Committee in this case had a proactive and "hands-on" role throughout the project, from planning to design to implementation. The Albany-Shaker Road Relocation project experience suggests there were two main factors in steering committee effectiveness — the diversity of participants and the legitimacy of committee responsibility.

The Steering Committee was comprised of a broad array of local and regional representatives. Among the entities represented were the Town of Colonie, NYSDOT, Albany County, the Airport Authority, and the Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC). Other stakeholders including neighborhood groups, the Shaker Heritage

A multi-use path was constructed throughout the project corridor. Parts of the path are adjacent to the roadway with other parts on a parallel alignment through the woods. In addition to connection with the airports, businesses, and historic area, the path provides links to region trail and sidewalk systems including the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail.

Society, Sheriff's Department, and bicycle advocates, were invited to participate during the course of the design process.

The committee's diverse composition led to the Committee's consideration and discussion of a wide range of impacts. Prioritization of project elements also reflected the Committee's diversity. For example, discussions on safety were expanded beyond just crash rate reductions to include benefits associated with lower design speeds and pedestrian comfort and convenience. Similarly, the Committee prioritized environmental enhancements to the Ann Lee Pond Preserve, traffic calming measures on Albany-Shaker

Road, and maintenance of pedestrian access.

The Steering Committee was further strengthened by the extended involvement of the CDTC in final design and project development. CDTC is the Albany area's metropolitan planning organization (MPO), with overall responsibility for long-range transportation planning, setting regional transportation priorities and identifying projects for near-term implementation. Typically, after the project planning stage is completed, participation from planners and planning organizations is limited. For the Albany-Shaker Road Relocation project, however, CDTC remained actively engaged throughout final design and project development, and ensured that the project's established goals and objectives remained in the forefront during implementation. CDTC's involvement was especially effective and important because the project required coordinating multimodal improvements, ensuring connections to

The Steering Committee and project team considered existing and planning land uses adjacent to the corridor when designing the roadway. As a result, where Albany-Shaker Road passes through predominately historic or institutional areas, the character and infrastructure is reflected appropriately. Where it provides access to the airport, the roadway follows a parkway style design that includes traffic calming features like narrow lanes and shoulders, landscaping and textured materials. These features have helped moderate speeds through the corridor.

Albany-Shaker Road Relocation

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wider networks and integrating transportation improvements with land uses.

The Town of Colonie also delegated considerable responsibility to the Steering Committee, including oversight of technical work, development of alternatives, decisions on recommendations and monitoring of project implementation.

This sense of ownership created an atmosphere of accountability that helped members stay engaged throughout the process and encouraged Committee members to consider solutions that may not have developed otherwise. For example, the Steering Committee recommended closing a portion of the roadway near the Ann Lee Pond Preserve as a strategy to help retain the integrity and character of the Preserve's environment.

The Committee's use of performance measures represents another example of project innovation. The Steering Committee prepared a set of performance measures that reflected consensus on project priorities, goals and objectives. These measures, which tracked project elements such as the use of pedestrian and bike paths, vehicular speeds, and transit effectiveness, were used as a management tool to evaluate alternatives and guide recommendations. The Committee used the same performance measures during project implementation; several of these measures are being used today as tools to track development impacts and mitigation effectiveness. Projects were selected and

Rather than merely minimizing impacts, the project capitalized on the opportunity to improve the environment and historic property. As part of the relocation, for example, roads serving the Ann Lee Pond Preserve and the Shaker Museum were closed to vehicular traffic, improving the surroundings for visitors as well as the natural environment.

designed, therefore, using the same goal-driven criteria identified during the planning process. This approach had the benefit of maintaining project priorities across all development phases, sustaining public consensus and facilitating decision-maker accountability.

Results

The Albany-Shaker Road Relocation project illustrates how municipalities can manage existing infrastructure to both allow and guide growth and development. In the case of Albany-Shaker Road, this involved using multimodal strategies to effectively increase roadway capacity. The roadway design achieved its goals by creating a safe and convenient transportation facility for transit users, pedestrians and cyclists, preserving access to key recreational and historical areas and maintaining community character. The improvements also enhanced overall transportation system reliability, particularly for transit services, and preserved roadway capacity for future development.

The project relied on locally-led efforts encompassing goal-setting, regulatory authority, public involvement and performance monitoring to create an environment for more effectively using transportation corridor planning as a tool to ensure sustainable regional growth and development and protect important community and historic resources.

The Albany Shaker relocation project illustrates how roadways can function as key vehicular facilities and provide access to the full range of users, even in cases where the roadway provides access to critical, high volume destinations such as airports and the interstate system.



Lessons Learned

- **Creating and empowering a diverse steering committee brings a broad range of interests and perspectives to the table, encouraging innovative and dynamic thinking.**

When organized thoughtfully and empowered with appropriate authority, a steering committee can be a significant project asset. It is able to provide leadership, form partnerships, facilitate public involvement, build consensus and lend validity to project decisions. Prospects for a steering committee's success are enhanced by establishing the committee's role early in the process, empowering it with tangible project responsibilities and ensuring it adequately represents the full spectrum of relevant community interests.

- **A steering committee can enhance the transparency of the planning and decision-making process when it acts as a conduit for community involvement.**

The Town of Colonie formed the Steering Committee to ensure that affected communities viewed decision-making on project planning and design as transparent. This transparency was achieved because the Committee provided a forum for the community to participate in the project decision making process. For example, the community's input and concerns were reflected in several ideas the Steering Committee proposed, including closing a portion of the roadway near the Ann Lee Pond, that enhanced the community and local environment and that would not likely have been considered without input from such a broad-based constituency. In this way, the Steering Committee functioned as an

Proximity of the Albany-Shaker Road to the Albany International Airport runway was a critical issue in the final roadway design. By moving the roadway further from the end of the runway, the project enhanced safety and travel conditions for both surface and air travelers.

important resource in the development of context sensitive solutions that flowed from the broad cross-section of the community represented on the Committee.

- **Integrate transportation and land use as a sustainable development strategy.**

The Albany-Shaker Road Relocation project focused on creating a multimodal transportation corridor with goals of improving traffic conditions and enabling additional development. Inherent in the final design was a willingness to work within existing land use plans and an understanding that traffic and development must be balanced. This means pursuing transportation and land use strategies that effectively encourage alternative modes, maintain roadway capacity and preserve future development opportunities. By creating a tangible link between transportation and land use, planners and developers were encouraged to consider impacts. The result was a well-balanced, accessible and functional roadway.

- **Mitigation cost sharing is an effective sustainable development tool and infrastructure finance tool.**

Suggestions for establishing mitigation cost sharing evolved from recommendations put forward in the Albany Airport GEIS process.

The Town of Colonie, together with a Transportation Financing Task Force and the CDTC, created a mitigation cost sharing mechanism that directly linked a development's consumption of infrastructure capacity to its cost assessment, thereby encouraging developers to more carefully manage development impacts. The process provides local and regional planners with a consistent method to track their infrastructure capacity and also raises revenues to finance new projects. In the case of the Albany-Shaker Road Relocation project, mitigation costs paid for all of the design work as well as right-of-way land acquisition.

Albany-Shaker Road Relocation

In addition to connecting the airport, businesses and historic areas, the path is designed to connect the local and regional bike paths and sidewalk systems. As a result, the facility has evolved into a key recreational resource for the community.

• Performance measures can be an effective tool for tying planning goals to project implementation as well as a means for monitoring future outcomes.

The Steering Committee overseeing the Albany-Shaker Road Relocation project developed a series of performance measures during initial project planning to reflect community and stakeholder goals and priorities. It used the performance measures initially as a tool to evaluate project alternatives. As the project progressed, the Committee continued with the same set of performance measures to monitor implementation; several measures are currently being used by CDTC to track project effectiveness. By retaining consistent measures and benchmarks, the Steering Committee as well as project planners and designers were able to track and stay focused on their original goals.

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