



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

John A. DeFrancisco

## State Legislators Announce the Findings in a Report on the Community Grid Alternative for Replacing Route 81

JOHN A. DEFRANCISCO August 4, 2017

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State Senator John A. DeFrancisco (R-I-C, Syracuse), along with State Assembly Members William B. Magnarelli and Gary D. Finch, today held a press conference to announce the findings in a recent review of the Community Grid Alternative by Spectra Engineering, Architecture and Surveying, P.C. This report concludes that the Community Grid, standing alone, is not the right solution to a replacement of Route 81.

The report was prepared at the request of Save81.org, a diverse coalition of local elected officials, civic leaders, concerned citizens and business owners, with information obtained from the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), dated December 2016. Spectra's report finds that the Community Grid, if constructed, would result in approximately 80,000 vehicle trips per day through the City of Syracuse, placing an overwhelming burden on local streets. Further, the findings show that the Community Grid could have dire economic impacts on the City of Syracuse and the Central New York region as a whole as it would result in longer interstate trips, more traffic accidents and increased congestion on these local streets.

Senator John DeFrancisco (50<sup>th</sup> District) said, "Central New Yorkers will be living with a new I-81 configuration for many generations to come, which is why it is vitally important that all options are thoroughly studied before a final decision is made. We urge the NYSDOT to carefully consider the findings that are detailed in this report before moving forward."

The entire Central New York State Legislative Delegation has and continues to express consensus that the best solution for replacing Route 81 must be a regional one that will benefit the City of Syracuse, as well as all of the surrounding towns, villages and counties. Members of this delegation previously signed a letter to the NYSDOT in support of an alternative for replacing the current I-81 corridor that retains a north-south thoroughfare and the essential functions of Route 81.

Assemblyman William Magnarelli (129<sup>th</sup> District) said, "This study raises some eye opening findings on what the negative impact of the "Community Grid" option might be for the City of Syracuse and Central New York. It is important we fully understand the unintended consequences on our neighborhoods and daily commutes. I simply hope that the Department of Transportation will carefully review the findings of this study."

Assemblyman Gary Finch (126<sup>th</sup> District) stated, "At a time when protecting water quality is of paramount importance, I don't believe it would be prudent to embrace a transportation plan that would send more trucks carrying potentially hazardous chemicals, even garbage from New York City heading to Seneca Meadows, so close to the Finger Lakes. A spill could be disastrous. This plan will only continue to encourage increased truck traffic on secondary roads and after recent flooding events where many roads have been compromised or closed this additional traffic would not be feasible."

Senator David Valesky (53<sup>rd</sup> District) said, "It is vital we continue to work towards the absolute best solution for the 81 viaduct and not short change the residents of Central New York. The NYS Department of Transportation has continued to listen to the community about finding the best for us all and I hope they will use this new information to help in the decision making process."

Assemblyman William Barclay (120<sup>th</sup> District) said, "I-81 is a critical interstate which connects New York communities from the New York/Pennsylvania border all the way north to the St. Lawrence Seaway. Any alterations to I-81 will have lasting effects on commerce and highway safety, tourism and the regional economy. The infrastructure is aging and steps should be taken to address the deterioration but the thousands of cars and trucks that travel along I-81 should not be diverted to Syracuse city streets or other local highways with the proposed Community Grid Alternative. Rather, a compromise should be created to remove the viaduct and build a tunnel or depressed highway along the existing I-81 footprint to keep north and south traffic flowing smoothly."

Senator Patty Ritchie (48<sup>th</sup> District) said, "The reconfiguration of Interstate 81 isn't just important to the City of Syracuse, it's important to our entire Upstate region, including the countless people I represent who travel this stretch of roadway daily. We owe it to the taxpayers to make sure all options are considered before we move forward with this project."

I urge DOT to take into consideration the findings of this study, and the potential impact a Community Grid option could have on the economy, the safety of drivers and the strength of our infrastructure."

Senator James Seward (51<sup>st</sup> District) said, "This study reinforces the serious concerns I raised earlier this year in regard to the community grid alternative. Those I represent in Cortland and Cayuga counties should not be forced to contend with the increased traffic they will undoubtedly face when truck drivers and others look to avoid congested local streets in Syracuse. The long-term costs associated with this option, along with safety and quality of life issues, would be untenable. It is time we eliminate the community grid plan from further consideration and focus on other, more sensible, options to reconfigure Route 81."

Senator Pamela Helming (54<sup>th</sup> District) added, "This is a major infrastructure project with far reaching implications. Before moving forward, it is critical to address the issues and concerns identified in the Spectra report. We owe it to the taxpayers to make sure this project is done right and that includes fully understanding all of the potential impacts. All parties involved must continue to work towards a solution that will support the necessary upgrades to this vital transportation link, while also retaining the important I-81 function."

Senator Fred Akshar (52nd District) said, "Reliable, well-maintained infrastructure is essential to a thriving community for residents and businesses alike. This is exactly why we need to take a critical and thorough approach, while addressing all concerns found in the Spectra report, prior to making any final decisions."

Spectra Engineering, Architecture and Surveying was formed in 1993 and is headquartered in Latham, NY, with offices in Syracuse to provide comprehensive environmental, structural and civil engineering services to clients throughout the northeast. Spectra President John H. Shafer P.E., who detailed the report's findings, has over 40 years of experience in the

transportation and infrastructure fields. He was formerly Chief Engineer for the New York State Department of Transportation and Executive Director for the New York State Thruway Authority.

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