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To the Editor:

In response to a recent letter in this paper, the DeWitt Town Board's decision to join the lawsuit opposing the community grid is based on several factors. Key among them, from an economic and environmental perspective in the short-term – as well as significant long-term negative impacts both environmental and economic – the data clearly indicates the community grid option will not beneficially serve the public.

My opposition to the grid option – and that of the majority of the DeWitt Town Board – is based on this data, as well as the viewpoint of the majority of elected officials and residents, including those who will be directly impacted by the community grid plan.

Nineteen Town Supervisors and twelve Village Mayors signed letters voicing support for a hybrid solution to replace the aging elevated viaduct and for maintaining I-81's route through the city of Syracuse. Moreover, based on the results of six public opinion polls, 67 percent of local residents favored preserving I-81's current route through Syracuse rather than re-routing traffic onto Interstate 481.

For specific environmental and economic data, the link at the bottom of this letter takes you to a comprehensive 30-page document submitted to New York State in October of 2021; the document, compiled by recognized local experts and myself, outlines factual objections and provides in-depth analysis of the community grid option.

In addition to serving as Supervisor of DeWitt, I am also an environmental scientist by profession. In that capacity, I have served as President of *the Onondaga Environmental Institute* for 23 years, as former corporate sponsor to the *Onondaga Earth Corp.*, and also the *Partnership for Onondaga Creek*. As such, my opposition to the community grid is based not only on consideration for the needs, safety, and future well-being of the people of DeWitt, but also those who live within our most underserved communities; the data makes clear, the community grid is not the optimal solution for DeWitt, nor the broader community for myriad reasons.

Among them, advocates of the community grid make the mistaken assumption that all commuters are headed downtown. Absent from that assumption is everyone who crosses downtown in their daily travels, from city residents and workers who are mobile throughout the day - postal carriers, delivery, repair and medical services, students, IT and maintenance workers, vendors, and suppliers – to those who live south and work north at places like Crouse-Hinds, Destiny, Salina Meadows and the airport; also, those who live north and work south at places like Community Hospital, OCC, and Loretto.



Further, both the reality of the “gig economy,” and the proliferation of internet purchasing necessitates the transportation of people, goods, and services be dependable and rapid. Any plan that works against the demands – and tangible realities – of e-commerce would be a grievous error, especially with regard to attracting new business to the area.

The coming addition of businesses who will support and deliver goods to the Micron manufacturing plants make this need for rapid transit even more imperative.

As an environmentalist, I cannot support a community grid plan that increases distances and travel time, fossil fuel consumption, and added noise and air pollution for my community, nor the greater community.

For several years, I have advocated for a hybrid community grid, which would include the community grid, but would also maintain the Route 81 connection through the city of Syracuse. An innovatively designed hybrid community grid could work with a depressed highway, an elevated highway, or a box tunnel. A hybrid grid-box tunnel would afford the city of Syracuse a much-needed opportunity to rebuild its aging underground utilities and public infrastructure.

A depressed highway would accommodate the community grid by incorporating “shelves,” with street level traffic extending over the depressed highway like the Grand Central Parkway in Queens, NY. An elevated highway would allow for both buildings and green space beneath.

Further, an innovative elevated highway design could be architecturally unique, visually appealing, even iconic. If we envision the 1.5-mile section of the I-81 highway as a bridge, it could be created as a unique landmark that would further define the city’s skyline as does the JMA Wireless Dome, the Crouse Hospital Clock Tower, AXA, and the State Tower building.

Combining infrastructure with public open space, like the Presidio in San Francisco, is not only aesthetically pleasing, it can become a tourist attraction and often supports increased real estate values, which in turn supports the local economy.

As a steward of my community, I have openly and strongly opposed Interstate 481 becoming Route 81. Both my fellow Supervisors and Mayors, as well as the majority of the DeWitt Town Board – and the majority of the public – all agree. We employed data, experience, common sense, and our sincere and shared commitment to the greater community to reach an informed opinion. When none of the data – nor those many voices – was heard, joining the lawsuit became our only viable option.

Most sincerely,

Ed Michalenko, Ph.D., Town of DeWitt Supervisor

<https://cms8.revize.com/revize/dewittny/DeWitt%20I81%20DeWitt%20Comments%2010.14.21.pdf>

<https://www.syracuse.com/opinion/2022/11/why-dewitt-is-suing-to-stop-i-81-community-grid-guest-opinion-by-ed-michalenko.html>

