Chapter 5

Metropolitan and Inter-City Travel

HIGHWAYS & STREETS

Introduction

Without question, the vast majority of travel within the Syracuse Metropolitan Area is by automobile over a network of interstate highways, major arterials and collectors, and local streets. Management responsibility of this network is divided among New York State, Onondaga County, the City of Syracuse, and to a lesser extent the neighboring towns within the County.

Street Network

Within the Central New York Region, Onondaga County is located at the crossroads of a number of interstate highways that form the backbone of both metropolitan and intercity travel in the State. Limited access facilities that link the Syracuse Metropolitan Area with other parts of the State and northeast include Interstate-90 (the New York State Thruway) and Interstate-81. Bypass or beltway facilities such as I-690 and I-481 supplement metropolitan and intercity travel by providing convenient alternative routes around the Syracuse central area. A number of major State roads (e.g., Route 31 and Route 20) augment the Interstate network by offering more scenic, rural routes for motorists to travel to and through the area. These facilities typically link towns and villages in Onondaga County to places outside the County as well as providing the necessary linkages to the limited access roadway network. Collectively, this highway network connects with similar highways in counties throughout the State (and similarly, across the country).

In addition to the interstate and major state roads, much of the travel in the SMTC’s planning area occurs on arterial, collector, and local roads. Map 5-1 shows the functional classification (based on use and access) of the facilities that make up the Onondaga County road network. Other than maintenance and rehabilitation, there have been only three changes to this network since the 2020 Long-Range Transportation Plan’s (LRTP) adoption. The changes are as follows:

- A 3500-foot length of road was constructed by the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) with funding from the state’s Industrial Access Program. Brundage
Road, as it is called, provides access to the Anheuser Busch Brewery and removes truck traffic from the Village of Baldwinsville. The road is owned and maintained by the Town of Lysander.

- P&C Parkway was constructed to interconnect P&C Stadium, the William F. Walsh Regional Transportation Center, and the Central New York Regional Market. The NYSDOT provided design and construction supervision. However, the road is owned and maintained by the City of Syracuse.

- Phase 1 of the Baldwinsville Bypass (NYS Route 631) that will link NYS Routes 370 and 31 east of the Village of Baldwinsville is currently under construction. The Bypass, which is being constructed by and will be owned and maintained by the NYSDOT, is intended to reduce truck traffic traveling through the Village of Baldwinsville.

**Vehicle Miles of Travel**

By far, the preferred mode of transportation for community to work is the automobile (see Figure 5-1), with most commuters driving alone. Figure 5-2 shows the County-wide data by individual town, as well as the City of Syracuse and the Onondaga Reservation.

The Highway Performance Monitoring System (HPMS) provided by the NYSDOT Planning and Strategy Group indicates that the 1999 Average Daily Vehicle Miles of Travel (ADVMT) in Onondaga County was 9,020,000. This represents a 29 percent increase over 1990 travel when the ADVMT was 6,990,000. The following graph (see Figure 5-3) shows actual HPMS ADVMT values for 1990 through 1999 and forecasted travel miles for the years 2000 through 2023. The forecasted ADVMT was prepared by The WEFA Group for the NYSDOT.
Functional Classification
Long Range Transportation Plan Update

Map 5-1

Lakes
Towns
Villages
Functional Classification
Principal Arterial
Minor Arterial
Collector
Rods
Urban Area

Basemap Copyrighted by NYSDOT
Data Source: NYSDOT, 1999
Prepared by SMTC, Jennifer Welnien
February 28, 2001, UPWP Number: 3700

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Figure 5-1: Mode of Transportation to Work
Onondaga County

- Drove Alone: 76%
- Carpool: 12%
- Bus: 4%
- Walked: 5%
- Other Means: 1%
- Worked at Home: 2%

Legend:
- Drove Alone
- Carpool
- Bus
- Walked
- Other Means
- Worked at Home
Figure 5-3

WEFA VMT Forecast for Onondaga County
1990-1999 Actual HPMS DVMT

Source: NYSDOT, Planning & Strategy Group
TRANSIT

Introduction

The Central New York Regional Transportation Authority (CNYRTA) is the operator of transit service in the Syracuse Metropolitan Area (see Map 5-2). In the period since the 2020 Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) was written, the CNYRTA has faced serious challenges. In 1995-1996, the transit operator faced significant financial problems. To address these problems, the CNYRTA implemented several major cost savings and revenue enhancement actions in 1995-1996, including a 17% reduction of service in Onondaga County and fare increases in Oswego and Cayuga Counties (20%) and on Call-a-Bus, the region’s complementary paratransit service (25%). These fare increases were implemented after a 33% base fare increase in Onondaga County in 1994-1995, which resulted in significant loss of ridership. The system-wide reduction of service (758,000 revenue vehicle miles) in 1995-1996 over 1994-1995, combined with fare increases in all operating subsidiaries, caused revenue passengers to drop 12.5% (1.4 million riders) in 1995-1996 (see Figure 5-4). On April 1, 1996, the CNYRTA cut an additional 5% of service in Onondaga County.

Figure 5-4

Source: Annual Report on Public Transportation Assistance Programs in NYS. Note: 1999-2000 data is from the CNYRTA, and is subject to change due to utilization of new fare boxes.

Management and Service Improvements

In 1998, the CNYRTA opened the William F. Walsh Regional Transportation Center in Syracuse. Located adjacent to Interstate Route 81, the Central New York Regional Market, P & C Stadium, and Carousel Center, this intermodal facility brings together, for the first time in the Central New York community, all ground transportation services, including intercity rail, intercity bus, local and regional bus, and taxi service. The CNYRTA simultaneously restructured a number of its bus routes in order to maximize direct service to the Center from points throughout the region,
furthering the ease of intermodal passenger travel. Since the opening of the Center, all ground carriers have reported significant ridership increases.

The CNYRTA has also taken management actions to reduce costs and increase revenues, including coordination of services provided under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) in Oswego and Cayuga Counties with private, non-profit agencies.

There has been a growth in the sale of tokens to the Onondaga County Department of Social Services’ Jobs Plus Program. The program issues vouchers for its clients to use CENTRO buses for transportation to program training sites and job interviews. Also, the CNYRTA is currently providing rides to Medicaid clients in Onondaga County who do not state a preference for a type of transportation.

In terms of vehicle improvements, the CNYRTA has incorporated the use of alternative fueled vehicles in its fleet of city and suburban buses in Onondaga County. The CNYRTA has expanded its fleet of compressed natural gas (CNG) buses to 109, which is equal to 62% of the fleet operating in Onondaga County. They expect to replace the remaining urban transit and suburban buses within the next 3 years. The CNYRTA has also constructed a compressed natural gas fueling station, which, in addition to supporting its own fleet, makes CNG fuel available to vehicles owned by clients and the general public. These actions have had a direct benefit on the air quality of the region.

In response to the changing needs of its ridership, the CNYRTA has completed the Regional Mobility Action Plan (ReMAP) of the fixed-route transit and paratransit service delivery system. The study recommended a transit service plan for the Central New York Region to restructure local transportation services and ensure that the region enjoys an efficient, coordinated and integrated transit system. The ultimate goal of the plan is to provide decision-makers with data sufficient to make informed policy decisions on the provision of mobility options for the region. The CNYRTA began a phased implementation of the ReMAP Study in September 2000, with start-up of two new suburban routes. They have also aggressively pursued grants to implement a Mobility Management Center, which was also recommended in the ReMAP Study, and which began operation in February 2001. When fully implemented, this Center will function as a transportation coordinator for the region for participating human service agencies providing client transportation. The Mobility Management Center will initially concentrate on transportation needs of welfare recipients and the welfare-eligible population, in cooperation with Onondaga County.

The ReMAP program is founded on the premise that for transit services to operate effectively in the growing lower density suburban areas of Onondaga County, focal points, known as...
transit centers or hubs, are needed to facilitate transfers between services. The hubs will allow transit users to be gathered by collector transportation modes so that they can access higher frequency mass transportation modes. While the CNYRTA has an effective hub in Downtown Syracuse at the Common Center, additional hubs in outlying areas will reduce travel time and increase travel convenience for those whose destinations are outside Downtown Syracuse. Several transfer hubs have already been established at sites outside Downtown, with further development anticipated.
Transit Service in the SMTC Study Area
CNYRTA Bus Routes, Rideshare, and Park & Ride Locations

Long Range Transportation Plan Update

Map 5-2
BICYCLING and PEDESTRIAN TRAVEL

Introduction

In Onondaga County in 1990, approximately 21,555 persons (those who were employed and not working at home) walked, took the bus or rode a bicycle to work. Also in 1990, approximately 13% of Onondaga County’s households and about 15% of the City of Syracuse’s households did not own a car. It is important that the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) recognize the needs of those without personal motor vehicle transportation. In addition, there are various citizens’ groups that are interested in using non-motorized modes of transportation to travel to work.

TEA-21

The importance of non-motorized travel was clearly recognized in the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA), gaining national attention on both the policy and funding fronts. Through ISTEA, MPOs were mandated to consider bicycling and walking as transportation plans were prepared. Financial resources to make improvements in the infrastructure were earmarked in this landmark legislation. The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), signed into law in June of 1998, continued to expand these requirements.

TEA-21 builds upon ISTEA's policy innovations and increases funding for the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) and Transportation Enhancement programs, which fund most bicycle and pedestrian projects. New provisions, such as eligibility for safety funds and development of design guidance, will help ensure that the needs of bicyclists and pedestrians are addressed.

Cities, counties and states continue to take a proactive role in developing and improving facilities for non-motorized travel. Since the adoption of the LRTP, the SMTC has taken steps toward including bicycle and pedestrian planning in all aspects of its work. Bicycle and pedestrian modes of travel are evaluated within each of the SMTC's Unified Planning Work Program's (UPWP) projects, including corridor studies, where sidewalks and roadways are rated for quality and safety and then given recommendations for future changes and improvements. In addition, bike racks have been installed on all CENTRO buses used in regular route operations, thus providing a connection between transit and traveling by bike.

1 Statistics are from the 1990 Census Transportation Planning Package (CTPP).
**Bikeway Plans**

Both Onondaga County and the City of Syracuse have bikeway plans. These plans address on-highway and off-highway bikeways, recommending and prioritizing bikeway locations. While the plans are somewhat dated, several facilities identified have been built, partially implemented, or have been proposed (see Map 5-3). Several examples are listed below.

- **Onondaga Lake Trail, also known as the “Loop the Lake Trail”** - The Onondaga County Department of Parks and Recreation hopes to complete the bicycle/pedestrian trail around Onondaga Lake within approximately five years. In May 2000, Onondaga County lawmakers approved a $480,000 plan to build a paved trail along the west shore of Onondaga Lake, creating a recreational “loop” for bicyclists, skaters, runners and walkers.\(^3\) Funding has also been earmarked in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) to complete other portions of the trail.

- **Onondaga Creekwalk** – The Franklin Square and Inner Harbor sections of the Onondaga Creekwalk have already been built. Once other sections are completed, the Creekwalk will provide an uninterrupted 2.3-mile pedestrian link between Onondaga Lake (and the Onondaga Lake Trail) and Armory Square, in Downtown Syracuse. Eventually, Creekwalk Plans call for extending the Creekwalk to Kirk Park on the south side of Syracuse. The entire Creekwalk trail will be integrated with the Onondaga Lake Trail and the New York State Canalway Trail.

- **New York State Canalway Trail** – Portions of this trail have been completed within Onondaga County that link to the end-to-end statewide Canalway Trail. In October 2000, the SMTC participated in the First Statewide Greenway and Community Trail Conference, held in Syracuse, New York, where SMTC staff members conducted a mobile workshop, “Routing the Canalway Trail through Syracuse.” The presentation discussed various aspects of the Syracuse portion of the Canalway Trail. The Syracuse segment of this trail is considered to be one of the most difficult gaps to complete, primarily due to the fact that the 15-mile segment that will connect Camillus in the west and DeWitt in the east traverses land that is the most urbanized along the entire state route. The proposed route also exhibits widely differing characteristics and features, as it passes over public streets, moderately maintained utility roads, seasonal access roads, multi-use trails, and a waste settling bed. Recently, the Town of DeWitt designated portions of roadway as a bicycle path, and marked the pavement as such. Once completed, the Canalway Trail will connect the DeWitt bike paths in eastern Onondaga County to the Canalway Trail in western Onondaga County, in the Town of Camillus.

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Beginning in 2001, the SMTC will be commencing a two-year city/county bicycle and pedestrian plan in order to re-visit, update and build upon the previously adopted Bikeway System Plan for Onondaga County (1976) and City of Syracuse Element of the Onondaga County Bikeway System Plan (1980). Through this process, the SMTC also plans to develop a city/county bike map.

Bicycle and pedestrian improvements will continue to be made throughout the SMTC planning area. Improvements such as the addition of bicycle and pedestrian amenities (i.e. bike racks) at key locations, the upkeep of sidewalks and roads, the building of new bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and the continued inclusion of bicycle and pedestrian planning in all aspects of SMTC’s work will further promote the use of non-motorized transportation in Onondaga County and the City of Syracuse.
AIR PASSENGER SERVICE

Introduction

Hancock International Airport is the single provider of commercial air passenger service in the SMTC area as well as the four-county Syracuse Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). There are five Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)-designated general aviation reliever airports that support Hancock International, one of which is within the SMTC planning area (Michael Airfield), as shown on Map 5-4.

The marketing hinterland of Hancock International extends well beyond the MSA boundaries, with people traveling an hour or more from Watertown, Utica, Cortland and Ithaca for specific flight destinations. The airport is served by major and regional carriers, including but not limited to American, Continental, Delta, Northwest, United and US Airways.

Total enplaned and deplaned passengers have fluctuated over the past 30 years, as shown in Figure 5-5, and Table 5-1. The current passenger traffic levels are rebuilding toward earlier higher levels following the economic downturn of the early 1990s and the job losses experienced in Central New York. These losses amounted to 15,000 jobs between 1990 and 1995 in the SMTC study area, according to the Greater Syracuse Chamber of Commerce. While there has been a gradual strengthening of the area economy and a return to earlier air passenger traffic volumes, full utilization of Hancock International has been hampered by inordinately high airfares charged by airlines, which has caused passenger diversion to other airports and other modes of transportation. The City of Syracuse Common Council established the Air Service Task Force in January 2001, the purpose of which is to bring more airlines to Hancock International Airport in order to make the air fares more competitive.

Figure 5-5

Airport Passengers: 1996-2000

Source: City of Syracuse Department of Aviation – Passenger Traffic Reports
Table 5-1

Total Enplaned and Deplaned Passengers at Hancock International Airport

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1,138,800</td>
<td>1,381,700</td>
<td>1,663,200</td>
<td>2,638,803</td>
<td>2,106,328</td>
<td>2,205,521</td>
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</table>

Source: Central New York Regional Aviation System Plan and the City of Syracuse Department of Aviation, Aircraft Activity Reports.

**Airport Improvements**

The City of Syracuse has been proceeding for many years with airside and landside improvements at Hancock International in order to help support economic growth in the area by making the Central New York Region more economically competitive with other metropolitan regions. The new facilities make air travel safer and more attractive while at the same time positioning the airport and the community at large for future growth in the new century. Prominent among these new facilities are a new air traffic control tower, a modern and expanded terminal with extensive visitor attractions and facilities for use while at the terminal, improved and expanded parking and car rental facilities and additional runway surface and taxiways, among others.

Continuing with these improvements, the City of Syracuse is currently working on the environmental assessment for lengthening the existing main runway (10R-28L) for a 2000-foot extension, to 11,000 feet. The extension will reduce arrival and departure delays, provide for a longer runway surface to enhance safety under varied weather conditions and allow for the use of heavier aircraft for international air travel. At some point in the future, the City may also proceed with the design and construction of a new parallel Runway (10L-28R) to further enhance safety and capacity.

**Forecasts**

Air traffic forecasts for total operations (commercial service, general aviation and military) tend to vary depending on the source as well as the point in time when made. Early in this century, expectations are for 250,000 operations annually, compared with approximately 166,000 operations during 1999.  

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4 Estimates are intended for indicative purposes only and are derived from the Central New York Regional Aviation System Plan, using KPMG Peat Marwick indications.
Intermodal Aspects

From an intermodal perspective, Hancock International Airport is located approximately five miles north of the City of Syracuse and has excellent highway access from Interstate 81 and the New York State Thruway (Interstate Route 90). Recent improvements to highway intermodal connectivity include installation of numerous signs directing motorists to both the air passenger terminal and the South Side general aviation and military facilities. Additional rail and bus connectivity improvements have also been implemented with the opening of the William F. Walsh Regional Transportation Center.

General Aviation

From a general aviation perspective, Michael Airfield and other non-system public use airports (see Map 5-3) offer the potential for air transportation alternatives for privately owned business aircraft. The general aviation airports each have a variety of improvements planned for implementation over the next 20 years as funding from the FAA and/or other sources becomes available.
RAIL PASSENGER

Introduction

Rail passenger service in the SMTC area (see Map 5-3) is provided through two companies. The National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) provides intercity rail passenger service in the Central New York Region. The Ontrack shuttle trains operate over trackage owned by the Syracuse, Binghamton & New York Railway (a subsidiary of New York, Susquehanna & Western).

Amtrak

Syracuse rail passenger traffic on Amtrak is substantial, traditionally ranking third behind New York City (NYC) and Albany in ridership. This has changed over the last several years as the population in the Hudson Valley has increased and Amtrak service south of the Capital District to NYC has evolved into hourly frequencies. Syracuse ridership however, has seen significant growth with the opening of the William F. Walsh Regional Transportation Center in 1998. This facility provides greater interconnectivity between bus and rail transportation modes, as well as a greater presence for Amtrak in the Syracuse metropolitan area.

Ridership increases (see Figure 5-6) for 2000 over 1999 have been approximately 21 percent for the Maple Leaf line (New York City to Toronto via Syracuse) and 20 percent overall for the Empire Service corridor trains. In the Upstate segment of the corridor, Syracuse is the strongest station in ridership performance outside of Albany. During 2000 Amtrak Empire Service was merged into the new Acela Regional Service, which was created in anticipation of the launch of high speed Acela service in the Northeast Corridor.

Figure 5-6

Syracuse Amtrak Ridership 1980-2000

Source: Amtrak -- “State of New York Amtrak Facts”
Locally, as a result of Onondaga County’s efforts, a Task Force of County Legislative Chairs from across Upstate New York was formed in 1997 to address the issue of incremental implementation of High Speed Rail in New York State. This has directly resulted in the formation of an Advisory Council to the Governor to develop a State High Speed Rail Plan which, when fully implemented, will increase frequencies and reduce travel times in our region. As part of that plan, the State and Amtrak are rebuilding seven high-speed train sets with new energy efficient turbine powered engines. These are currently the only fossil-fueled engines capable of 125 mile-per-hour speeds.

**Ontrack**

The Syracuse, Binghamton & New York Railway began operation of Ontrack in 1994 with a recreational rail shuttle service. The service connects the hamlet of Jamesville to the Carousel Center with stops in between serving Syracuse University and Downtown locations. A future extension is planned that will provide an additional stop at the William F. Walsh Regional Transportation Center. This future stop will provide passenger service to the adjacent P&C Stadium and the Central New York Regional Market. Service is currently limited to eight trains in each direction, Wednesday through Sunday, on a seasonal basis.

**WATER TRANSPORTATION**

**Introduction**

The New York State Canal System (see Map 5-3) is undergoing a statewide revitalization program pursuant to seven regional canal plans and the New York State Canal Recreationway Plan. The SMTC area is included in the Central New York Canal Plan, which covers the entire Syracuse MSA of Cayuga, Madison, Onondaga and Oswego Counties. The Syracuse MSA accounts for approximately 19% of the entire State system, with all or parts of the Cayuga-Seneca Canal, Erie Canal and Oswego Canal.

**Canal System Revitalization**

Within the SMTC area, the State system has identified the Syracuse Canal Harbor as one of eight major canal harbors serving the entire state. In addition, the SMTC area includes four Canal Service Ports and Locks, out of 92 statewide. These four are located in the Village of Baldwinsville, Three Rivers in the Town of Clay, Lock E-23 State Canal Park in the Town of Clay.
and in the Hamlet of Brewerton in the Town of Cicero. All of these locations within the SMTC area are on the Erie Canal.

Data on the total passengers carried through the area is not currently available in a consistent manner since the data on number of crew and passengers is collected only at the first lock through which a cruise boat passes. In the case of the SMTC area, this would reflect only a small portion of total passengers. However, data does exist on the number of pleasure boats, as reflected in the table below. Lock E-23 is the busiest lock, and Lock E-24 the second busiest, on the entire NYS Canal System (see Table 5-2). There are no estimates available for future years.

**Table 5-2**

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<td>Lock E-23 State Canal Park, Town of Clay</td>
<td>7,598</td>
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<td>Lock E-24 Village of Baldwinsville</td>
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<td>Total NYS Canal System</td>
<td>67,795</td>
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**New Congressional Initiatives**

On December 21, 2000, the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor Act was signed into law and is anticipated to have a considerable beneficial impact on the Canal System. The legislation has three major goals: (1) preserve, promote and interpret the Erie Canalway; (2) Build partnerships among state and federal governments and the canal communities; and (3) provide federal financial aid and technical assistance to enhance the canal corridor. A 27 member commission, headed by the Secretary of the Interior, will be responsible for preparing and implementing plans that support public and private efforts to preserve cultural and natural resources, as well as encourage economic revitalization.