

What will Business Loop 81 look like as drivers approach Syracuse? See new drawing
[What will Business Loop 81 look like as drivers approach Syracuse? See new drawing - syracuse.com](#) (Original article source)

By [Michelle Breidenbach | mbreidenbach@syracuse.com](#)

There will be a new roundabout, a new railroad bridge, a new exit, new sidewalks and other features to slow traffic and bring vehicles into downtown just down the hill from the JMA Wireless Dome.

State transportation engineers and contractors have invited the public to an [open house](#) Wednesday evening to study new drawings and ask questions. The event is scheduled from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central, 258 East Adams St., in Syracuse.

One new rendering released early to syracuse.com shows a more detailed view of the new approach for drivers heading north into the city.

The picture below is the current Interstate 81.

BEFORE



Aerial view at Van Buren St looking south

This is the current Interstate 81 approach to the elevated bridge in downtown Syracuse. Provided

The drawing below shows plans for the new Business Loop 81.



Aerial view of proposed roundabout at Van Buren St looking south

The NYS Department of Transportation has released this drawing of the new approach to Syracuse from Interstate 81 south after the elevated highway is torn down. Michelle Breidenbach

The state plans to tear down the first seven spans of elevated highway, starting in 2027 and ending in 2028.

But first, they will build a new approach that stretches generally from from East Colvin Street to a new roundabout at Van Buren street.

Construction has already begun near Van Buren street, under the existing elevated highway bridge.

Here's how the new Business Loop 81 will work as drivers approach Syracuse from the south.

There will be a new exit at East Colvin Street for drivers headed north. That will offer a new route for drivers who want to get to neighborhoods or to the Syracuse University campus, including [remote parking](#) lots for football and basketball games.

Traffic will start to lower to ground level around the historic gate to Oakwood Cemetery.

Contractors have already dug up the stretch of the former Renwick Avenue that runs from Martin Luther King Boulevard to Van Buren street. Martin Luther King Boulevard is forever closed to through-traffic.

The highway will shift east and curve, as part of an effort to slow traffic down as drivers enter the city.

The state will have to build a new railroad bridge to take the Susquehanna and Western Railway tracks over the new highway. The railroad tracks currently run parallel to the highway and slip under the elevated highway near Van Buren Street.

That bridge will be designed to allow clearance of 16 feet to allow the tallest commercial vehicles to pass under, said TeNesha Murphy, spokeswoman for the state DOT.

Typical highway bridges are designed for 14.5 feet, she said. (The [Onondaga Lake Park railroad bridge](#) – the site of frequent crashes – is only 10 feet 9 inches tall.)

As drivers approach what is now the elevated highway, they will instead enter a new roundabout at street level. The roundabout is intended to slow traffic and navigate drivers to the university and hospitals or north through the city and back to what is now I-81 north.

The new roundabout has been designed with pedestrian walkways to cross from what is now Pioneer Homes public housing to the Syracuse University campus. Streets near Pioneer Homes are expected to be redesigned as part of a separate project to tear down aging public housing and build a new mixed-income neighborhood, called [East Adams](#).

Neighborhood residents see the roundabout as a victory. The state originally planned to build it about 2,000 feet south, close to Dr. King Elementary School. The DOT moved it to Van Buren street [after community protests](#).



Lanessa Owens-Chaplin, a civil rights lawyer for the NYCLU (left) and TeNesha Murphy, spokeswoman for the state DOT, talk about an air and noise monitor placed near the I-81 construction site. Michelle Breidenbach

Lanessa Owens-Chaplin, director of the Racial Justice Center for the New York Civil Liberties Union, visited the roundabout construction site Monday with Murphy, from the DOT.

“When we organized the march and protest about the roundabout and it was moved, it was a win,” she said. “It was like ‘Oh wait, we actually can make change. They are listening.’”

Owens-Chaplin said the NYCLU and other neighborhood advocates have been meeting with DOT officials every two weeks to discuss the project as construction moves closer to homes. She said neighbors appreciate plans for a new pedestrian walkway that will go along the road and under the railroad bridge.

She said she is happy with the DOT’s plans to monitor and [mitigate noise and air pollution](#).

On Monday, two trucks spread water over the dirt to keep dust from flying around the neighborhood. The DOT has placed nine monitors around the site to track vibrations and air

quality. Those sites will be identified at the open house. The DOT has already shared that information with people who live next to the highway.

“We’re at a really good place now in terms of feeling pretty confident that during construction, folks are going to be protected,” Owens-Chaplin said.

Kensington Expressway Project ‘starting fresh’ with new leadership, NYSDOT says

By: Katie Skoog

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) — The New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) announced on Wednesday new leadership and public engagement initiatives for transforming the Kensington Expressway.

Special Assistant to the DOT Richard Fontana said the department is conducting a nationwide search for a new project director following the former director’s retirement. He also called the new change — named Queen City Forward — an “open process” in which the community can voice different ideas for the expressway.

“We will be kicking off an outreach and listening tour beginning in October in areas across the region,” Fontana said. “We want to hear from as many people as possible before we formulate a new plan for the project along the 33.”

The \$1.2 billion Kensington Expressway Project originally sought to [reconnect neighborhoods](#) on Buffalo’s East Side, which were separated by the expressway, by capping a portion of the six-lane roadway and turning the top into parks and green space. It would have covered about three-quarters of a mile above Route 33.

New team members involved in the project include DOT Regional Director Eric Meka, DOT Regional Design Engineer Cameron Schulz and Community Outreach Specialist Tajé Jenkins-Jones.

Work on the project has [remained paused](#) since October 2024 after the East Side Parkways Coalition requested an environmental impact study. A judge then ruled in [February](#) that the project could not move forward without the study, a decision the NYSDOT [did not appeal](#).

“After we hear from the community, we will develop a scope for a new EIS [environmental impact study],” Fontana said. “The EIS will include a traffic study on a potential fill-in option. We intend to do an in-depth analysis of where those 75,000 cars a day would go if

we fill in the Kensington and what the air quality impacts will be if traffic is diverted to other parts of the city.”

After the community meetings, Fontana said multiple options will be considered and then an EIS will be conducted, which he said will take about two to three years. Construction would begin after that time period.