

Let's Think Boldly About The Future Of I-81

By Robert Antonacci

Throughout my time as Onondaga County comptroller, and now during my campaign for state comptroller, I have talked about the importance of infrastructure investment. Committing resources to improving our roadways, sewers and water lines can save communities money in the long run and is crucial for economic growth. We must keep these principles in mind as we consider the future of Interstate 81 in Central New York. Failure to spend money now on infrastructure will cost us more money in future lost opportunities.

As a lifelong area resident, I want my two children and their families to inherit a healthy and prosperous Central New York. The decision the state Department of Transportation makes regarding I-81 will play an important role in this vision for our region.

We cannot sell ourselves short in choosing an I-81 solution! We need to be bold and creative. If the best solution costs a bit more, then we need to find the financial resources necessary to make it happen.

Too often, our region has settled for less when it comes to our infrastructure needs. We cannot afford to do the same with I-81.

To best preserve Central New York's economic future, I believe we need a solution for I-81 that maintains its Interstate Highway designation and keeps the highway flowing along its present path. With so many businesses and jobs located along I-81, moving it around the city could have a devastating effect on our economy.

This doesn't mean that we should just rebuild the viaduct. While that may be a cheaper option, we need to think bigger, bolder and choose a solution that works for all of us.

The Access Syracuse option recently put forward by the Save81.org coalition could be the solution. This combination of a tunnel and boulevard has the potential to close the gap that has emerged during this debate by removing the viaduct and maintaining I-81 at the same time.

This may not be the least expensive option nor the easiest to construct, but the DOT owes it to our community to analyze Access Syracuse and provide accurate data on its costs and feasibility.

We can always find ways to make costs work. For example, the state taxpayers are expected to receive \$4 billion from fines and settlements. Let's use this money as an infrastructure investment fund with Syracuse being the perfect place to start.

Of course, we should not just throw money around. As state comptroller, I would conduct thorough infrastructure audits to ensure resources are being efficiently and appropriately deployed. I am committed to using all of the tools available to the comptroller's office to cut the waste, delays and cost overruns that too often plague major infrastructure projects.

But first, we need more information from the DOT about Access Syracuse and all of the options on the table. State officials have yet to give our community specific costs of detailed information on how much land would need to be acquired. Without this data, it is impossible for the community to give informed feedback. The speculation must come to an end.

Infrastructure investment is crucial to our region's future and economy. If we think boldly and commit the necessary resources in smart ways, we can build an I-81 that puts all of us on a path toward future prosperity. I encourage every Central New Yorker to get involved in this process by submitting your comments about I-81 to the DOT's [website](#) before September 2.

Robert Antonacci is a candidate for New York State Comptroller. Antonacci is currently serving his second term as the Onondaga County Comptroller.