

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Background and Purpose

Where high traffic volumes pass through residential areas, promoting neighborhood quality of life requires a broad mix of both on-the-road and policy actions. Such is the concern in the Town of Guilderland's McKownville neighborhood, through which Western Avenue carries 25,000 to 38,000 vehicles per day. Reconnecting the McKownville neighborhood to itself, in addition to promoting opportunities to travel to points outside the neighborhood through means other than personal motor vehicles, is a challenging task, with much at stake.

That said, reinforcing the primacy of neighborhood-scale activities in busy travel corridors has become easier in recent years with the development and successful use of both analytic tools and highway design techniques which emphasize walking, cycling, transit use, access management and other elements of the transportation system which go beyond the historical emphasis on "moving cars." In addition, considerable empirical evidence now exists to demonstrate that taking steps to make busy corridors more walkable and bikeable has an *economic* payoff – both retail and service sector businesses benefit from making these corridors more approachable to neighborhood residents and to people who work in the area. The McKownville neighborhood offers tremendous opportunity in this regard, given the large residential areas, offices and retail activities all located in a relatively compact area.

This report sets forth a feasible vision both for reinforcement of internal neighborhood travel routes and for the expansion of opportunities to travel beyond the neighborhood, particularly on foot or by bicycle. The underlying premise of the Study held that the potential exists to satisfy all involved parties with "people first" rather than "cars first" designs.

The Implementation Strategy contained within this draft report offers the Town and the residents of the McKownville neighborhood a unified strategy for promoting human scale activity in the area. This approach emphasizes *comprehensive* treatment of the range of circulation types in the study area and *complementary* treatment of the various transportation modes so as to harmonize interactions between modes and between the transportation system and the neighborhood's built environment. At the same time, it should be noted that McKownville interacts with other Town neighborhoods and other communities. Thus, improvements in McKownville will not resolve problems related to the "total trips" many people are taking. In addition, they will not change the overall climate of the area with regard to motorist behavior, for such behavior is a function of the motorist himself/herself as well as everything s/he encounters in the course of a journey. Thus, the improvements proposed in this report should be taken as important first steps in a continuous process of improvement needed to enhance the safety, comfort and convenience of travel in the region.

## Scope and Context: The McKownville Neighborhood

The well-established McKownville neighborhood at once presents numerous opportunities and challenges when working toward heightened degrees of walkability and bikeability and minimizing the adverse effects of motor vehicle travel through the area. In the area of opportunities, the neighborhood includes the following:

- fairly compact residential development
- a number of trip destinations (e.g., Stuyvesant Plaza, the University at Albany main campus, larger office buildings, restaurants) to which travel routes for the various modes can be rather easily traced
- several transit routes
- some degree of existing pedestrian infrastructure along Western Avenue, Fuller Road and a number of side streets from which a more complete system can emerge
- the designation of Western Avenue as part of State Bike Route 5, which gives this street some degree of stature related to NYSDOT's efforts to develop a statewide network of bicycle routes, particularly with regard to pavement cross section and accommodation of bicycles
- knowledgeable and involved residents who can share their experiences and ideas so as to better flesh out the range of known problems and possible actions for the area
- an essential vibrancy and vitality which gives the neighborhood a "good start" in promoting this type of human-scale transportation (that is, there are significant existing levels of walking and cycling to preserve and build upon, as opposed to cases in which the basic ideas of walking and cycling still need to be brought into existence)

The challenges in the neighborhood are by no means "fatal flaws;" in fact, they do present some silver linings. Some of the major examples are the following:

- recent land developments and redevelopments on either side of the Guilderland/Albany line have resulted in additional traffic pressures on the corridor (*silver linings: more local destinations for the neighborhood, and perhaps more walk-to-work opportunities*)
- the study area is near a regional transportation crossroads (the Thruway-Northway-"Freebie 90" area), a regional mall, a major university and a major State employment site, all of which either generate or otherwise handle substantial amounts of traffic (*silver linings: for some, the "local destinations" and "walk to work" opportunities noted previously; for others, the opportunity to zero in on a relatively small number of "gateway" locations at which the message needs to be conveyed to motorists that they are "entering a neighborhood"*)

- congestion in the area (particularly along Western Avenue) has prompted NYSDOT and CDTC to explore means of enhancing the ability of the area to process traffic (*silver lining: NYSDOT and Albany County DPW are well aware of the neighborhood's concerns regarding the character of the area, and the neighborhoods in turn appear to be prepared to continue to participate in the process of working toward solutions*)

## Outreach Activities

While there had been considerable public dialogue in the course of several efforts leading up to this Study, the range of technical issues and the specificity of some of the concerns to be addressed in the Corridor Study required that it also include a substantial public participation component. Thus, in addition to regular Steering Committee meetings, Public Meetings were held in March and July of 2002, with each of these events drawing 40 to 50 people. In addition, the Guilderland Chamber of Commerce sponsored a briefing on the Study for members of the local business community, providing additional opportunity for interested parties to provide their input to the effort.

## Study Team

The Implementation Strategy was prepared through a combination of Steering Committee discussions, public outreach efforts and technical examinations. The Consultant Team was led by Creighton Manning Engineering, LLP (CME), with support from the LA Group, PC and the Hudson Group, LLC. The effort proceeded under the guidance of a Steering Committee consisting of the following residents and other interested parties:

Lindsay Childs, Guilderland Pathways Committee  
 Stephen Feeney, Town of Guilderland Planning Board  
 David Jukins, Capital District Transportation Committee  
 Bill Meehan, McKownville Improvement Association  
 Christopher O'Neill, Town Resident/Capital District Transportation Committee  
 David Reid, McKownville Improvement Association  
 Don Robertson, New York State Department of Transportation - Region 1  
 Bert Schou, Guilderland Pathways Committee/Capital District Transportation Authority  
 Kathy Tabora, Holiday Inn Express/Guilderland Chamber of Commerce  
 Jan Weston, Town of Guilderland Planning Department (Town Project Manager)

The effort also benefited from a considerable amount of fieldwork, survey research and community outreach conducted by the McKownville Improvement Association. Officers and Directors of this organization were as follow:

### *Officers*

Don Reeb, President  
Bill Meehan, Vice President  
Kathy LeRoux, Secretary  
Steve Berg, Treasurer

### *Board of Directors*

Sue Brown  
Marty Gnacik  
Paul Haldeman

Martha Haraus  
David Knight  
Doug Smith

Alice Torda  
Joe Trapasso  
Jim White

## **Key Issues and Recommended Strategies**

### *Pedestrian and Bicycle*

#### *Need*

- Enhancement of walking/cycling-based travel routes about the area.

#### *Key Recommendations*

- long-term plan for sidewalk improvements (replacements and new construction)
- development of a system of off-road trails/paths
- bike route designations
- intersection improvements
- ordinance provisions for bike parking, pedestrian/bike-friendly street and site design

### *Trails and Recreational Areas*

#### *Needs*

- Enhanced pedestrian/bicycle access
- Additional recreational opportunities

#### *Key Recommendations*

- Improvements to pedestrian and bicycle routes accessing recreational opportunities
- Trailblazer signage and on-the-way cautionary signage raising awareness of destinations, potential pedestrians and cyclists
- Redevelopment of McKownville Reservoir as recreational destination

## *Transit Service and Facilities*

### *Needs*

- Enhanced traveler comfort
- Improved traveler information
- Expanded local transit travel opportunities

### *Key Recommendations*

- Shelter installations
- Installation of electronic signboards providing transit route/vehicle information
- Pilot effort targeting UAlbany students promoting use of transit as an alternative to driving

## *Intermodal Facilitation*

### *Needs*

- Enhanced pedestrian, bicycle access to transit stops
- Assurance of year-round accessibility of transit stops and comfort/security while waiting

### *Key Recommendations*

- Prioritization of sidewalk, shoulder, bike lane improvements based on transit route access
- Improvement of sidewalk maintenance practices, snow removal law to ensure availability of facilities in wintertime
- Integration of stormwater management treatments into transportation projects where possible to advance the pace at which flooding issues are addressed

## *Traffic Operations*

### *Traffic Operations, Part 1: Managing Interactions Between Modes*

### *Needs*

- Enhance motorist awareness of pedestrians and bicyclists in the area
- Complement awareness with physical treatments and traffic control
- Establish a more reasonable balance between motor vehicle, pedestrian and cyclist mobility in the neighborhood

### *Key Recommendations*

- Install pedestrian button–initiated “NO RIGHTS ON RED” signs at Western/Fuller and Western/McKown/Norwood
- Prohibit right turns on red from Church Road at Western/Church
- To alert motorists to the potential for encountering pedestrians and cyclists, install cautionary signage along main streets and routes to recreational, shopping, other destinations

### *Traffic Operations, Part 2: Access Management*

#### *Needs*

- Enhance the predictability of traffic to pedestrians and cyclists
- Preserve the carrying capacity of the road
- Enhance overall traffic safety

#### *Key Recommendations*

- Driveway turn restrictions and internal circulation changes at Best Western/Capitalodge/Dunkin’ Donuts
- Reduce Western Avenue driveway accesses for corner parcels
- Promote shared driveway use/rear accesses from side streets
- Tie parking lots together where one lot has signalized driveway access

### *Traffic Operations, Part 3: Traffic Calming*

#### *Needs*

- Reduce traffic speeds
- Reclaim right-of-way for pedestrians and cyclists
- Enhance transit vehicle safety
- Increase motorists’ abilities to see pedestrians and cyclists
- Reduce illegal motor vehicle travel along shoulders, bike lanes

#### *Key Recommendations*

- Install bulbouts at intersections near CDTA bus stops
- Reduce pavement width by reclaiming some wide shoulder space
- Use pavement markings and signage to provide visual “sanctions” for pedestrians and cyclists in roadways

## *Traffic Operations, Part 4: Streetscaping and Motorist Behavior*

### *Needs*

- Establish a “sense of neighborhood” readily evident to motorists
- Enhance the comfort of pedestrians and people in their homes
- Harmonize Western Avenue’s traffic-carrying function with its setting in a residential neighborhood

### *Key Recommendations*

- Introduce street trees closer to the right-of-way
- Replace taller “cobra head”-style street lights with shorter, more ornamental neighborhood-style lighting
- Promote uniform cross-section to rights-of-way providing for a greater mix of activities, more greenspace
- Use medians and roadway narrowings to reduce expanses of pavement and “wide open” perception of streets

### *Gateways*

#### *Need*

- Clarify the distinctions between higher-speed/design roads accessing the area (e.g., Northway, I-90, State Campus ring roads) and area streets

#### *Key Recommendations*

- Install planted median islands at intersections where area character changes
- Where median islands are not possible, use plantings and other treatments outside the curb lines to establish a visual point of distinction for approaching motorists
- Install “Welcome to McKownville” signage to establish definition for the neighborhood

### *Regulatory and Procedural Steps*

#### *Issue*

Not everything that needs to happen will happen on the road. In many cases, what is needed are modifications to processes and requirements that yield both softer treatments such as bike racks at commercial sites and design of internal and new subdivision roadways and off-road internal circulation systems with an eye toward providing a supplemental buffer for pedestrians and cyclists, or enhanced ease of internal mobility for transit.

### *Key Recommendations*

- Bike parking ordinance
- Transit-friendly design standards for internal roads (paying special attention to corner radii, potential stop locations and other elements)
- Enforcement of laws concerning keeping public rights-of-way/alleys clear for through travel
- Site design guidelines promoting development closer to roads, with parking areas behind buildings (to reduce walking distances and enhance the safety of pedestrian approaches)

### **The Implementation Strategy**

In addition to a listing of desirable products with cost estimates, this document provides two critical mechanisms for ensuring that it becomes a tool for action rather than a shelved reference document:

- Individual projects are presented with indications of *priority*, both relative to other projects and in a time frame context (the latter e.g., short/medium/long term). This should provide the agencies responsible for implementation of these concepts with a framework and logic for getting the process of improvement underway.
- The Implementation Strategy outlines a plan for getting the projects implemented based on available funding opportunities, existing programs and agency budgets, and other considerations. The aim in developing this part of the document was to ensure that this package of proposals, which likely provides the Town with at least fifty (50) years' worth of action items for McKownville (given both needs in other neighborhoods and other programmatic priorities), is both ambitious and grounded in an understanding of the fiscal context in which it needs to be considered.

Reflecting an emphasis on developing or enhancing *systems* for the various transportation modes present in the area, the remainder of this report is organized by transportation mode or topic, rather than by sub-neighborhoods or some other geographic basis. The last chapter of the report presents an *implementation strategy* consisting of both a strategic plan for pursuit of the various projects discussed and an overview of the funding landscape within which the Town, Albany County, NYSDOT, CDTA and other parties will be operating as they work to progress these projects.