



Construction of Interstate 81 along Almond Street, looking south from downtown Syracuse, in the 1960s. Crouse Hospital's clock tower is in the distance. Clover Club, a jazz club, is one-story building at left. *Onondaga Historical Association*

Don't repeat history: Put local people first

William Sanford

Special to The Post-Standard

I have been silent until now regarding the Interstate 81 issue that has been debated and studied for several years. My experience relating to the issue may give a perspective that has not received much attention and may help the decisionmakers come to a final determination that is best for our Central New York community. My interest comes from studying the "expert" reports, listening to the debates and knowing that if our community is to prosper, the city of Syracuse must be healthy, as it is the heart of this body we call Central New York.

A very difficult decision was made over 50 years ago when it was decided that Interstate 81 would be an elevated highway that cut through the center of our city. It was deemed necessary, to insure our community's health and progress, to hook up with the national and state highway systems and become the "crossroads" of New York state. Unfortunately, with many difficult decisions of this type, there was a severe downside as the neighborhood called the 15th Ward was destroyed, people were uprooted, undesirable housing was created that led to poverty situations, and a barrier was established that separated our city. Many citizens of Syracuse, who were supposed to benefit from this bold and progressive decision, were the most negatively affected.

I am not mentioning this to be critical of the original decision, as I was involved with several tough decisions with pluses and minuses while serving as chairman of the Onondaga County Legislature that unfortunately had some negative impacts.

My purpose with this communication is to warn against

history repeating itself. As mentioned above, a large number of citizens who lived within the city were negatively impacted. We should not let that happen again as it would result in years of problems and actually cause a lack of progress for our community as it did more than 50 years ago.

When assessing the three options, the "Grid Plan" could result in the most negative, long-term impact on city dwellers and suburbanites who use the city for work and entertainment. Putting tens of thousands of additional vehicles daily onto four streets with 13 intersections, when there are two other less disruptive options on the table, makes no sense to me.

Other negative factors that can be added to the reasons why this would be the wrong choice would be environmental issues, public safety, economic impact of people avoiding a congested area, and more.

Let's not let history repeat itself. Let's put first, this time, the people who will be most impacted by this decision: the city residents, suburbanites who use the city as well as business owners and entertainment venues that are the drivers of our economy. The residents of our Central New York community deserve consideration regarding our quality of life (without congestion).

Let's build the tunnel as it solves the through traffic and congestion problems. My hope is that the decision makers will adhere to the old adage, "Do no harm."

William Sanford, a lifelong resident of Syracuse and Central New York, served 22 years in the Onondaga County Legislature, 14 as chairman, and one year in the New York state Assembly.