



Strategic Workforce Development

I-81 Viaduct Project in Syracuse, N.Y.

After more than 50 years of heavy use—about 100,000 vehicles every day—and harsh winter weather, portions of Interstate 81 in Syracuse, N.Y., were deteriorating and experiencing high accident rates. This was especially true of a 1.4-mile elevated section, or “viaduct,” near downtown Syracuse. So, when the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) decided that upgrades to I-81 were essential, it decided to move forward with a local workforce.

Local Hiring Initiatives

Section 25019 of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, enacted in 2021 as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (P.L. 117-58), allows States to utilize local, geographic, and economic hiring preferences on their Federal-Aid Highway Program projects. For example, hiring preferences can be given to geographic boundaries such as State and county lines, geographic areas based on economic factors, and the economic conditions of workers.

With these targets in mind, NYSDOT set a goal of using qualifying local residents for 15 percent of the overall employment hours on the I-81 project.

Using Local Partnerships to Develop Local Workforces

An important step in achieving NYSDOT’s 15 percent goal involved partnerships with community groups.

The **Urban Jobs Task Force** developed strategies to support local hiring practices, including door-to-door canvassing and the development of the highway construction training. The Urban Jobs Task Force also partnered with the city of Syracuse to lead the I-81 Jobs Big Table, which held regular meetings with NYSDOT officials, trade union leaders, community workforce developers, community equity advocates, and political leaders to further the recruitment of local workers.



The **SUNY Syracuse Educational Opportunity Center** (EOC) offers several highway construction and apprenticeship opportunities:

- WorkSmart NY construction training is a 7-week classroom and workshop program that prepares students for various construction jobs.
- The Build Ready Construction Training Program involves 140 hours of hands-on training to prepare students for various construction/building maintenance apprentice positions.
- The no-cost SUNY Syracuse EOC Highway Worker Construction Program moves students through career pathways that could lead to employment on the I-81 project.

Syracuse Build's Pathways to Apprenticeship program connects Syracuse residents to pre-apprenticeship union training. The I-81 Viaduct Project used a project labor agreement to ensure that 75 percent of the workforce came from a local union.

The New York State Department of Labor (DOL) helps connect local jobseekers with training opportunities and potential job placements with the local unions and contractors working on I-81.

Trade unions were involved with several aspects of the I-81 project's workforce development, from facilitating training programs to helping with recruitment and job placement. The students received support from experienced instructors, while the unions saw opportunities to meet with the workforce's next generation.

A Playbook of Its Own

Modeled after the Highway Construction Workforce Partnership (HCWP) Playbook, NYSDOT's "Road Map for Heavy Highway Construction Workforce Development" details how the I-81 project's stakeholders worked together to provide job opportunities to trained local residents through collaborative discussions, identifying resources, and defining roles and responsibilities. NYSDOT's playbook describes the proactive efforts used to address all three steps in the workforce development process: identify, train, and place.



A key strength of the local hiring initiative for this project is the collaboration among all of the partnering agencies. There are monthly meetings, regular communication, and problem solving to achieve this important goal."

– Rick Marquis
FHWA NY Division
Administrator

Read NYSDOT's "Road Map for Heavy Highway Construction Workforce Development."

Scan:



Let's partner to build the highway construction workforce.

Reach out to discover how to build a highway construction workforce in your State.

Chrisy Currier | Program Manager
FHWA Office of Infrastructure, Construction Team
(202) 923-0986 | Christina.Currier@dot.gov

