



The Relatives of Harriet Tubman

August 24, 2021

Honorable Joe Biden, President
United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington DC 20500
Re: Interstate 81 - Reconnecting Communities

Dear President Biden

After surviving 2020, the Covid Pandemic, and what can be deemed a biological and psychological war, where we have seen 201 million people affected, 4.2 million deaths, global, national and local economies destroyed, the world, America, Central New York and Syracuse, are once again facing uncertainty and fear as we anticipate dealing with the new Covid Delta Variant.

As you are aware, Central New York is looking at the largest construction and development projects most of us will see in our lifetime. The future of Interstate 81 in Syracuse's urban core is critically important as it has been historically inhabited by African-Americans and low-income individuals and families, reminiscent of the urban renewal policies of the 1960's and the destruction the old Syracuse 15th Ward and a once thriving community.

Right now, to replace the portion of I-81 that runs through Pioneer Homes, Central Village and McKinney Manor, the option being proposed by the New York State Department of Transportation ("NYSDOT"), is what is being called "The Grid", which is simply, "A Road" that is based on an outdated 2008 report that we feel does not apply in today's social, political and economic climate of hopelessness, fear and uncertainty and definitely does not address the need for hope and inspiration, that the community and Central New York needs right now.

We, the family of Harriet Tubman, feel that the symbol of pride, hope and inspiration the people of Central New York and Syracuse need and deserve can be found in supplementing "The Grid" with the Harriet Tubman Memorial Freedom Bridge ("HTMFB"). We strongly endorse it. We feel it will be a symbol of hope and inspiration for the world to see: a symbol that reconciles our past, present and future; a testament to our ancestor and American icon, Harriet Tubman -- the renowned abolitionist and political activist, who lived and died in Central New York and exemplified our American values of courage, freedom and perseverance.

The Harriet Tubman Memorial Freedom Bridge will be a marvelous structure and symbol of pride for the people of Central New York and Syracuse; a work of art and beacon of hope and inspiration for the world to see, stretching up to the North Star, brilliantly lighting the way to our neighbor and at one time, a destination for freedom, Canada. This is what the people of Central New York and Syracuse need now, in this time: a symbol of hope and inspiration, not just a "Grid", a testimony to our community's strength, courage and perseverance.

With your help and support, we will achieve everyone's goal of both reconnecting and redevelopment of Syracuse's urban core; while having a living tribute to an American icon. We see a comprehensive project that can be a real draw and connection for national and international visitors and welcomed tourism to the Harriet Tubman House and Complex in Cayuga County. The Harriet Tubman Memorial Bridge will be a true gateway initiating from a refurbished African American neighborhood to the social justice trail through the Finger Lakes. The Southside of Syracuse could have its own welcoming events around Juneteenth. The HTMB will enhance a tourism site that is growing in Auburn.

Now is the time to do this correctly. We appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

The Relatives of Harriet Tubman

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Pauline Copes Johnson - Family Matriarch

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Cc: Secretary Pete Buttigieg, US Department of Transportation
Senator Charles Schumer
Senator Kirsten Gillibrand
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Charles Small, Deputy Assistant Secretary Intergovernmental Affairs, USDOT
Commissioner Marie Therese Dominguez, NYSDOT
Assemblyman William Magnarelli, Chair of Transportation Committee

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