TRANSPORTATION TOMORROW:2030

PLACEMAKING FOR PROSPERITY

FRONT STREET GATEWAY PLAN

BINGHAMTON METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION STUDY

February 2008

This study was funded by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Metropolitan Planning Program. The views expressed herein are solely those of the Binghamton Metropolitan Transportation Study, and do not represent an official position of the FHWA.

The Binghamton Metropolitan Transportation Study's current long range plan *TRANSPORTATION TOMORROW 2030 ~ PLACEMAKING FOR PROSPERITY* lists rebuilding Front Street as a high priority project and notes that this project should follow principles of placemaking and context sensitive solutions. This is reflective of the principle that transportation investment should support community development goals, and should move toward a common vision of the future of Greater Binghamton.

THE VISION:

IN 20 YEARS, FRONT STREET WILL HAVE TRANSFORMED INTO A MIDDLE-INCOME, RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD THAT INCLUDES HIGH-DENSITY HOUSING, ATTRACTIVE TO BROOME COMMUNITY COLLEGE, BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS OR SENIOR CITIZENS. IT WILL ALSO INCLUDE SOME OF THE HOMES THAT EXIST THERE NOW THAT HAVE BEEN REHABILITATED AND HAVE BECOME A REMINDER OF THE HISTORICAL CHARACTER OF THE AREA. SUCCESSFUL NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESSES WILL BE SCATTERED THROUGHOUT AND MANY PEOPLE WILL BE ATTRACTED TO THIS AREA BECAUSE OF THE AVAILABLE HOUSING AND PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE RIVER.

Context sensitive solutions (CSS) is a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders to develop a transportation facility that fits its physical setting and preserves scenic, aesthetic, historic and environmental resources, while maintaining safety and mobility. The challenge for transportation planners and engineers is to understand the context of their project, and to work with the community to develop the design. A state highway that runs through the center of a rural village, a suburban arterial that provides access to a regional shopping mall, and an urban Main Street each have a different context. The designer must pay attention to the competing needs of different users. This is where community input can be particularly valuable in helping establish priorities. It is also incumbent upon the transportation professional to educate the public about how much flexibility is reasonable, and where safety, for example, dictates a certain solution.

While CSS is all about transportation, placemaking is all about land use. It may be defined as using elements of urban design to create identifiable and positive places. Since streets are a key element in defining urban space, transportation design contributes a great deal to placemaking. Placemaking is also about context. A “great place” can be a bustling urban street lined with shops, cafés, residential loft space, and signature streetscape elements. It can also be a quiet waterfront park with walking and cycling trails and an amphitheater. A bus stop can be more than a place to stand, it can be a place to enjoy. Neighborhood streets can be places where parents can feel safe letting their children play, and commercial strips can be redeveloped into grand boulevards. The common element may be the creation of an environment where people want to be, where they feel safe and comfortable, a place of human scale. The challenge for the transportation planner and engineer in this case is to work with land use planners, urban designers, and landscape architects to figure out how transportation facilities can contribute rather than detract from the place that is being created.

The land uses found on a particular street, along with the street itself, have a great deal to do with the way motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists actually use it. Because the segment of Front Street from Prospect Street to Main Street provides a key entry point from the interstate highways into the City of Binghamton, the Front Street Gateway project, which is already programmed in the current Transportation Improvement Program, must balance mobility requirements with gateway design elements. Through public meetings and discussions with City officials many immediate-term projects and long term ideas have been identified in addition to the currently programmed gateway project scheduled for approximately 2010.

The basis of the long range plan is that transportation investment can influence land use and help communities achieve their overall development goals. The long range plan states that although the Front Street Gateway project is already programmed in the current Transportation Improvement Program, it will require additional funds to complete the project in a way that will make it an impressive gateway into downtown Binghamton

and the City's First Ward neighborhoods. This statement incorporates short-term and long-term investment necessary by the City of Binghamton to transform Front Street into a successful gateway into the City of Binghamton with compatible land uses along the street.

Because infrastructure projects make changes that have permanence, the upcoming Front Street Gateway project should be designed to facilitate the long-term vision chosen for Front Street and should be used as the catalyst for other private and public investment in the study area. The project should incorporate elements that would support the future vision of Front Street.

This *Front Street Gateway Plan* examines existing conditions within the project area and discusses future development options based on existing plans and future visions, including the City of Binghamton's Comprehensive Plan, the Visual Preference Study for Binghamton's Gateways, the Binghamton Metropolitan Greenway Study, and the City's Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan. The *Front Street Gateway Plan* also incorporates comments from meetings with City of Binghamton officials and the public.

The following is a summary of what each of the plans listed above recommends for the study area.

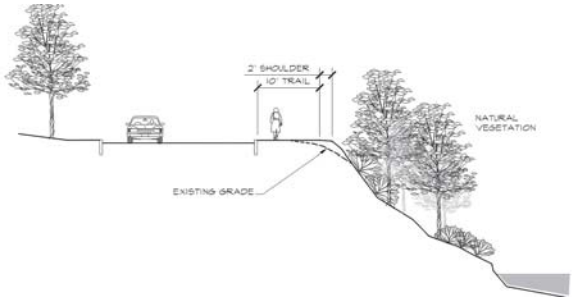
- **Comprehensive Plan (2003) - West Side Riverfront District**
    - Recognize the importance of this area as a gateway into downtown
    - Renew Front/Main Street intersection
        - Important focal point for travelers entering downtown Binghamton
        - Lighting and banners from Court Street bridge should be incorporated onto Front Street
        - Develop a Riverfront trail that connects to Roberson Museum
    - Strengthen & Maintain Integrity of Gateways – Front Street Gateway

        - Gateway should continue with a primary orientation toward auto-traffic, a bit more prominent welcoming to the City should be established
        - Land use should be addressed
    - Continue developing an integrated waterfront trail

- **Binghamton Gateway Study (2003) – Visual Preference Survey**
    - Landscape all entrance streets with street trees in close proximity
    - Where possible redesign the street to include a narrow center island for tree planting
    - Incorporate on-street parking
    - Add recognizable gateway features: gates, arches, towers, monuments, banner poles
    - Add highly visible pedestrian crosswalks
    - Classic street lighting
    - Remove and replace or revitalize deteriorated buildings
    - Add benches, trash receptacles, planters (design should be consistent throughout the City – Court Street Gateway)
    - Identify areas for future parks and green space

- **Binghamton Metropolitan Greenway Study - Chenango River West Bank Trail**
    - Create a terraced riverbank walkway network from Riverside Drive to the Clinton Street Bridge (cost estimates were very high)
    - Increased popularity of Otsiningo Park and its trail network has created an important destination of the west bank for bicyclists and pedestrians
    - A trail on the west bank could dramatically improve bicycle and pedestrian travel between Roberson Museum and Otsiningo park

- **City of Binghamton's LWRP (2005)**
    - Signature gateways are needed within the City to identify entry into the downtown core and to waterfront developments. Potential gateway locations have been determined in the Binghamton Metropolitan Transportation Study, however, the specific design for these gateways should be determined in future planning initiatives involving the City and City residents.
    - Along the western banks of the Chenango River, north of Main Street, steep slopes prevent a trail from being constructed along the riverbank and there are no man-made flood protection features, with only natural vegetation existing between the River and roadways. At this location the trail should be developed along either side of the existing roadway to maximize the potentials of the site.



<u>Current Conditions</u>

Current land use along Front Street is a mixture of businesses and residences with a two-way Annual Average Daily Traffic count of 11,310 from Prospect Street to Clinton Street and 10,520 from Clinton Street to Main Street. From Main Street north to McDonald Avenue the predominant land use is commercial, with a few scattered residences and home occupations. From McDonald Avenue north to Gaines Street, Front Street is strictly residential, with the exception of the Broome County Health Department, and a storage mall. Only approximately 25% of the residences along this section of Front Street are owner occupied. Over time some of these homes have become dilapidated and

are in need of renovations, repairs, or, some have been vacant for an extended period of time and are so rundown that demolition may be an option.

Dilapidated homes located on Front Street between McDonald Ave and Gaines Street

"New Dwightsville" is an exception along this segment of Front Street. In 2001, First Ward Action Council completed its "New Dwightsville" renovation project that transformed eight large deteriorated Victorian-style homes into 22 apartments for low and moderate-income families, preserving the history and character of the neighborhood. In 2007, First Ward Action Council was awarded $400,000 for the renovation of four more homes along this section of Front Street.

"New Dwightsville" renovation project

Business owners and residents felt that trees were a great addition to the landscape of the street and should be included as part of the gateway project. The City should ensure that a landscape architect or urban forester is consulted to determine which trees would be best suited for Front Street.

Directional signage was mentioned as an important improvement to Front Street. Currently there is no signage to direct people downtown from Front Street. Way-finding signage is also necessary to show where businesses are located on and around Front Street.

Bike lanes should be incorporated on the east and west sides of Front Street within the study area. Details and feasibility will be determined during the project development and preliminary design.

There are four bus stops on the east side of Front Street heading north and six bus stops on the west side of the street heading south in the study area. This route is one of the busier routes since farther north on Front Street is Broome Community College. Bus shelters at these stops would help to comfort BC Transit passengers during inclement weather and make waiting for the bus more pleasurable.

Immediate Improvements (0-3 months):

Through public meetings, BMTS has identified some immediate improvements that the City of Binghamton should consider along Front Street.

- Repair of sidewalks that are in poor condition
    - East side of street from North Street to Gerard Avenue
    - West side of the street just north of the Bridgewater Center for Rehabilitation and Nursing to Gerard Avenue

Deteriorated sidewalk north of the Bridgewater Center for Rehabilitation and Nursing to Gerard Avenue

- Trim overgrown foliage, especially on the east side of Front Street, from North Street to Gerard Avenue (privately owned property)
- Investigate the possibility of a donation of the privately owned land on the east side of Front Street from North Street to Gerard Avenue, as part of creating a more walkable street with better views of the river.
- Ensure that the clearance height under the railroad bridges is correctly measured and identified on the signage located there
- Intensely target any code violations along Front Street

  "All exterior surfaces, including chimneys and accessory buildings, shall be repaired, painted, coated, treated, sealed, pointed, sandblasted, or chemically cleaned or sealed when the surfaces require the above-stated maintenance to prevent or retard deterioration or weathering, to avoid health or safety hazards, or ***to promote an attractive appearance and prevent a substantial depreciation to the integrity of the neighborhood.****"*
- The location of the bus stop at Front Street and North Street was repeatedly brought up as a source of crowding and litter problems. Poor access and limited standing room along the sidewalk contribute to the problem. BC Transit might look into the feasibility of relocating the stop. Also, to accommodate bus patrons in inclement weather, a bus shelters were suggested.

Existing bus stop – Intersection of Front Street and North Street

Many people come to downtown Binghamton every day using this gateway. It is an important gateway to the City and should be improved over time so that it becomes a welcoming and inviting entryway into the City. Land use along Front Street can be influenced by transportation investment. This investment should be used to accommodate and facilitate the chosen long-term vision for Front Street.