

TRAFFIC OPERATIONS

One of the premises of this Study was the basic understanding that while motor vehicle traffic is one of the main defining attributes of the corridor, the aim of the Study was not to identify remedies to traffic issues *per se*, but rather to identify actions which could be taken to reconcile traffic with the character and needs of the adjacent neighborhood. This aim was consistent with the findings from the first public meeting, at which it was interesting to note that not much was said about getting traffic *out of* McKownville. This acceptance of or resignation to the presence of significant volumes of traffic could be explained by pointing to two items:

- Tenure: According to the Fact Finders survey conducted for the Town Comprehensive Plan effort, the average homeowner respondent had lived in Guilderland for 21-22 years, while the average renter respondent had lived in the Town for 10-12 years. Thus, for many people, Western Avenue traffic has been a fact of life since they moved to the Town. For example, in 1979 the section of Western Avenue between the Northway and SUNY entrance carried 25,000 – 30,000 vehicles per day – levels generally comparable to current volumes.
- Major Local Trip Generators: While it is conceivable that there is some *slight* opportunity to redirect traffic away from the area, making greater use of Washington Avenue, the Northway and I-90, the fact is that with generators such as Crossgates, SUNY and the State Office Campus located in the area, with multiple points of ingress and egress, traffic has largely sorted itself out to its optimal paths in the area. “Wild cards” such as the potential redevelopment of the State Campus could change things somewhat by modestly affecting either travel patterns or peak work hours (the latter if any future changes to the use of the Campus result in its occupation by more “three shift” work such as high tech or “back office” private sector operations), but the basic influence of these sites on the surrounding transportation system would likely remain as it is now.

That said, the Study effort included a special meeting to discuss the corridor’s key traffic issues, so as to ensure that the Study Team proceeded in its investigations with a complete understanding of and sensitivity to the traffic realities of the area. Participants in this March 4, 2002 meeting were as follow:

Todd Gifford (Town Highway Superintendent)	Don Robertson (NYSDOT Region 1 Planning)
Mike Franchini (Albany County DPW)	Steve Terplak (NYSDOT Region 1 Traffic and Safety)
Dave Jukins (Capital District Transportation Committee)	Jan Weston (Town Planner)
James Murley (Chief, Town Police Department)	Steve Allocco (Creighton Manning Engineering)
Chris O’Neill (CDTC)	John Tozzi (Creighton Manning Engineering)

At this meeting, a number of issues and potential actions were identified; several of these issues and actions will be presented later in this Chapter.

Issues

Managing Interactions Between Modes

In the previous chapter, a note was presented regarding the importance of facilitating intermodal connections. Even more important to the enhancement of travel opportunities in the corridor for all modes of transportation is the *minimization of conflict between modes*. Speeding, right turns on red (“rolling” or otherwise), “boomerang U-turns” (which will be discussed below) and other behavior tend to occur at a cost to the comfort and safety of other modes, particularly human-powered travel and transit.

When one mode is accommodated by a given action, it is usually necessary to complement the action with actions affecting other modes in order to ensure safety and efficiency. As one example, the provision of a bike lane provides cyclists with an exclusive facility upon which to ride; installing SHARE THE ROAD signage would *compound* this benefit by reminding motorists to watch for cyclists and give them some room. Another example might be the combination of promoting transit use through improving pedestrian connections to transit stops with reducing speed limits or physical traffic calming steps to reduce motor vehicle speeds in the area.

Enhancing the Predictability of Traffic through Access Management

While on the one hand it is important to basic mobility and the local economic base to ensure the accessibility of land uses, it is indeed possible to have “too much” access resulting in unpredictable traffic. For example, a business with no curbing in front of its parking lot has a de facto full-width driveway. In addition to fostering uncertainty regarding where a vehicle accessing or leaving the property will drive, such full-width driveways allow motorists to turn off the street at higher rates of speed than do more explicitly delineated driveways. Also, single land uses with multiple full-access driveways (that is, to or from which left or right turns can be made) raise the potential for conflicting movements.

Access management – the reduction of driveway-related conflict points – can increase predictability and safety, with the added benefit of enhancing the efficiency of roadways in carrying traffic. While increasing the efficiency of the Study area roadways was not a stated goal of this project, nor is it on its face consistent with the idea of reconciling traffic with neighborhood setting, it does bring with it the benefit of reducing the amount of low-speed driving or idling. This in turn would also reduce emissions and noise in the area.

Traffic Calming

In its *Highway Design Manual*, NYSDOT uses the Institute of Transportation Engineers’ definition of traffic calming, which describes this tool as

“the combination of mainly physical measures that reduce the negative effects of motor vehicle use, alter driver behavior, and improve conditions for nonmotorized street users” (Institute of Transportation Engineers, as presented in NYSDOT *Highway Design Manual*, Page 25-2)

In the course of the Study, the Advisory Committee requested that Western Avenue, Fuller Road, and a number of the neighborhood streets off Western Avenue be examined for traffic calming opportunities. The recommendations set forth in this chapter will present the Study Team’s determinations on where from among these locations this tool is most feasible.

Down-Design

“Down-designing” is arguably a variant on traffic calming under which a facility is reconstructed to a lower *design speed* (the speed which the horizontal and vertical elements of a highway are designed to accommodate) after which the facility is not otherwise modified to further affect motor vehicle traffic speeds. This idea came up during the Study particularly with thoughts of application to Western Avenue and Fuller Road Alternate. A down-design concept for Fuller Road Alternate will be presented in the recommendations; what follows is some discussion of the idea for Western Avenue, for which the idea is *not* incorporated into any recommendations but for which future exploration is arguably warranted.

At the traffic issues meetings as well as throughout the study, the potential for reducing the speed limit along Western Avenue to 30 or 35 miles per hour (MPH) was discussed. The character of Western east of Fuller Road is generally comparable to that on the Albany side of the Albany/Guilderland line, where the City speed limit of 30 MPH applies.

The NYSDOT approach to setting speed limits is based on the 85th percentile speed of traffic traveling on a street. This is consistent with common traffic engineering across the country, and means that NYSDOT would not reduce the speed limit to 30 on a facility such as Western which sees 85th percentile speeds well over that figure. Discussions with NYSDOT *did* yield the point that NYSDOT *would* be willing to consider a speed limit change if speed along Western came down to a more conducive figure through other means, such as road design modifications. As noted earlier, the Town Police Chief has expressed a willingness to enforce a lower speed limit if it was posted. Traffic calming is certainly one tool for achieving this reduction; another tool which was discussed during the project would entail reducing Western Avenue’s cross section between the City line and Fuller Road from four lanes to two lanes plus a two-way left-turn lane. This concept was the subject of considerable discussion, a summary of which bears presentation here so as to provide some context for future readers of this document seeking insight on additional concepts for consideration beyond those explicitly recommended herein.

The Study team considered the potential of going from four lanes to a *two lanes plus two-way left-turn lane* (TWLTL) cross-section of the sort discussed by Dan Burden and Peter Lagerwey in their “Road Diets” paper (Walkable Communities, Incorporated, 1999). Burden and Lagerwey see promise in this concept because it would provide a benefit to *human-scale transportation* and, by extension, to

local quality of life -- crossing distances can be reduced and space freed up within the existing right of way for bike lanes, sidewalks and utility strips.

While a proper microsimulation analysis of the two-lane plus median/turn lanes (or roundabouts) or 2+TWLTL concepts for Western Avenue in McKownville was beyond the scope of this Study, the Study team used traffic and roadway capacity information, information on adjacent land use and overall transportation system configuration information to conduct something of a “fatal flaw” analysis of the potential of 2+TWLTL application in this corridor. The basic finding was that this section of Western Avenue appears to have too many local destinations, too much “entirely local” traffic, too much traffic *in total*, and insufficient spacing between signalized intersections to hold promise for successful 2+TWLTL application. The expectation would be that the intersections would dictate traffic flow through the corridor, with increased congestion resulting. While one of the cornerstones of this study was that it was *not* predicated on maintaining the quality of traffic operations above all else as an inflexible requirement, the quality of traffic operations is in fact part of what the *neighborhood* requires as a condition for quality of life – that is, for it can minimize the amount of exhaust in the air and noise related to pull-away acceleration. This concept is also currently being explored for Columbia Turnpike (U.S. Routes 9 and 20) in East Greenbush as part of another CDTC Linkage Program project. While ongoing explorations have yet to yield a clear insight on whether 2+TWLTL can be applied in that corridor, the reality is that as a starting point, Columbia Turnpike has fewer major destinations, for the most part lower traffic intensity commercial development, and a substantial amount of through traffic.

The team also took up the concept of 2+TWLTL for Western Avenue with Dan Burden; in fact, team Project Manager Steve Allocco had the benefit of Burden’s having been out in the field on this corridor some time ago when Steve and Don Robertson of NYSDOT Region 1 participated in the USDOT “Pedestrian Safety Road Show “train the trainer” sessions. Burden not only specifically observed that the volumes on Western Avenue exceeded what he had seen as most workable for 2+TWLTL – stating that numbers in the range of about 17,000 to 22,000 were “workable in most applications” – he also specifically suggested that the region not make Western Avenue the first location in the region at which 2+TWLTL be tried. Instead, Burden proposed concentrating on a mix of other streetscape, traffic calming and traffic regulation tools to achieve meaningful changes in operating conditions and livability. This response could be taken as “backing off too easily,” for the philosophy behind system management could arguably be more one of approaching the design of the road from the perspective that some degree of the quality of traffic operations can be sacrificed if a meaningful change in livability is the result and the sacrifice does not include defined undesirable side effects. In practice, this might for example mean that lower operating speeds through the corridor related to reduced capacity would be acceptable as long they enhanced local mobility (particularly human-scale transportation) and did not come with increased local vehicle emissions or vehicle stop/start cycles.

That said, the possibility that future conditions and circumstances will be substantially different from those of the present time is intriguing, for they could open up possibilities for actions that are presently beyond the realm of realistic consideration. While such conditions or

circumstances could be either more or less conducive to something like 2+TWLTL or two lanes plus medians and left turn lanes or roundabouts, the comment remains that NYSDOT and the Town should not limit their considerations of the possibilities for this street to what is possible right now. Accordingly, it is proposed that these concepts be considered to hold potential for implementation *if a number of preconditions were in place with regard to volumes, mix of traffic, adjacent land use, driveway access behavior, access management, intersection/traffic signal spacings, complementary treatments away from the corridor, NYSDOT policy and practice on management of capacity on its facilities* (i.e., “willingness to try something different”) and other factors. In other words, 2+TWLTL could become a more realistic possibility if for example a number of the other actions recommended in this report became a reality.

Streetscaping and Motorist Behavior

At first glance, this may seem like an odd pairing of subjects, but as for traffic calming, the commonality lies in trying to modify the physical environment to enhance the feel of the corridor and affect motorist behavior in a positive way. What was striking to the Study team about discussions with area residents on this topic was that a substantial number of the actions the residents desired for the corridor for primarily aesthetic reasons could in fact be included in an effective approach to making motorists drive slower, less abruptly and (by extension) more predictably through the area. Among the tools and design preferences identified in exchanges with residents were the following:

- A *center median* with grass and plantings, but with turning points at intersections – in essence, interspersing a center turn lane but interspersed with green space.
- Attractive *street lighting*, perhaps using an old-fashioned or otherwise non-generic style.
- Improving the *appearance* of the rear of Stuyvesant Plaza near Fuller Road, or adding some kind of *visual screening*.
- Enhancing the look of the Fuller Road Alternate bridge over Western Avenue, perhaps through installation of a *false stone facing* for the sides of the bridge.
- Eliminating the *third westbound travel lane* (which extends to the Crossgates Mall entrance) between Fuller Road Alternate and Crossgates Mall.
- Installing *median refuges* for pedestrians on Western Avenue and Fuller Road, particularly at the intersection of Church Road and Western Avenue.
- More consistent *separation of sidewalks from roads* (with utility or maintenance strips).
- Planting more *street trees*, with the locations most often mentioned being the south (eastbound) side of Western from Fuller Road to McKown Road.

In addition to all of these considerations, neighborhood residents brought to the Study team’s attention a phenomenon termed *boomerang U-turns* which while not unique to this area appears to be a particular problem given the character of the streets just off the westbound side of Western Avenue, east of Fuller Road. As described by the residents (and subsequently observed by the team), under this maneuver people turn left into these dead-end streets, make U-turns (frequently using driveways), and then proceed west on Western Avenue. Two possible causes for these maneuvers are the following:

- Difficulties in turning left from unsignalized driveways (e.g., at hotels) onto Western Avenue, possibly rooted in the lack of a flush median which would enable motorists to get part of the way through their movements by first turning across the eastbound travel lanes.
- People (perhaps visiting UAlbany, the State Campus or area businesses from out of town) who are unfamiliar with the area and thus do not realize that they are turning into dead-end streets, because they are looking for a place to turn left and do not notice the DEAD END signs because they are concentrating on traffic.

Driveway consolidation favoring exiting through existing signalized driveways (e.g., at 1450 Western Avenue) would reduce this problem, as would the provision of clearer navigational signage for the benefit of visitors to the area. That said, the boomerang U-turn problem is likely to remain, as many people who *are* familiar with the area have apparently figured out that at times, they represent the easiest way to head west from properties on the south (eastbound) side of Western Avenue.

Flooding and Stormwater Management

Flooding is a critical issue for this study for two reasons: when it occurs, it creates major operational problems for all modes of travel in the area, and because the timings of a number of pedestrian, bicycle and transit-related actions will be functions of when needed improvements to the area's water, stormwater and sanitary sewer systems take place.

Steering Committee discussions of flooding in the Stuyvesant Plaza area raised an important note regarding the need for a “total solution” for the area: in the context of this Study, there is the need to enhance the pedestrian environment in particular; in addition, the flooding issue needs to be addressed such that people are assured of the availability of these facilities when wet weather occurs. (That is, people do still walk in the rain.) Toward this end, the Study Team worked closely with the Town Engineering Department to ensure that the prioritization of improvements identified as desirable in this study was consistent with the Town's plans with regard to both roadway and utility infrastructure.

Stormwater management is regulated to some extent by all levels of government, and is a logical concern for well-designed private and public projects and maintenance programs. To advance the practice of stormwater management, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) recently extended its Phase II Stormwater Management Compliance Regulations, as administered in New York by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC). The new regulations are intended to ensure that storm sewer improvements and other large construction projects in urbanized areas include appropriate controls on storm water discharge. These regulations apply to the Town, and will thus affect projects taking place in the study area.

The new regulations require that operators of smaller municipal separate storm sewer systems (generally, those serving populations of less than 100,000 people) and smaller construction sites (one to five acres in size) develop stormwater management plans and apply “best management practices” (examples of which are provided by USEPA on its stormwater program Web site,

<http://www.epa.gov/npdes/stormwater>) to minimize the adverse effects of stormwater discharges. Information on flooding, sediment and erosion control, which under the Phase II regulations may in some cases require NYSDEC permits, is available from NYSDEC's Division of Water at <http://www.dec.state.ny.us/website/dow>.



*Figure 4-1
Flooding at the Western Avenue/Fuller Road Intersection*

In addition to influencing the prioritization of projects within this effort and the Town's utility infrastructure planning, discussions of flooding issues raised ideas passed along to other agencies for consideration in their own efforts. For example, in the traffic issues meeting discussed earlier, Town Police Chief Murley suggested that in light of problems such as periodic flooding in the Stuyvesant Plaza area, it would be helpful to have variable message signs (VMSs) installed on the Fuller Road Alternate bridge over Western Avenue in both directions, so as to keep people from entering congested and potentially dangerous areas during flood conditions and major incidents. This is logical from the perspective of getting a message to travelers as they approach "decision points" where they can process the information provided and then decide whether to take alternate routes. The Study team passed this insight along to NYSDOT Region 1 Transportation Management Center (TMC) staff for consideration as TMC planners explore concepts for future additions to VMS coverage of the region.

Recommendations

General Note on Bulbouts

The Steering Committee saw significant potential benefit to reducing shoulder widths and otherwise “right-sizing” pavements at a number of Study area intersections, particularly with regard to reduced pedestrian crossing distances and a modest calming effect on traffic. While bulbouts are common tools for achieving this end, the Committee recognized that the standard bulbout design, which includes curbs extending to travel lane edges, could raise issues at certain locations, with these issues including difficulties in maintaining bike lane courses, snow removal difficulties and potential access problems where the bulbouts would be near driveways. It should thus be understood that while the project discussions which follow may convey images of *bulbouts*, the recommendations are in essence identifying locations at which the *types of benefits* common to bulbouts would be desirable. The Committee encourages the responsible agencies to consider other actions which would achieve comparable benefits, such as reduced shoulder widths, the use of concrete planter boxes (which could be removed from the right of way during the wintertime), flexible/removable bollards, and longer-than-standard tapers which would make the introduction of the narrowed areas less “abrupt.” In some cases, these would be interim measures; in others, they could be incorporated into roadway redesigns.

Intersections

IS-1: Western Avenue/UAlbany Intersection Improvements

- Description:
 - Reconstruct the west leg of the intersection to take out the westbound acceleration lane/bus bay and use this reclaimed area for greenspace and lighting.
 - Relocate the eastbound and westbound stop bars to accommodate crosswalks.
 - Reduce the radius of the northwest corner to lower speeds of right turns exiting UAlbany.
 - Install new high-visibility crosswalks.
 - Install new “countdown timer” pedestrian signal heads with ped buttons.
 - Install “Welcome to McKownville” monument sign on northwest corner.
- Estimated Cost: \$125,000
- Additional Notes: The recommended improvements are presented in Figure 4-2 on the following page. Aside from the signage and lighting improvements, this package could be implemented through CDTA’s Multi-Modal Program project.

Early Steering Committee discussions of this intersection raised the idea of reconstructing this intersection as a *roundabout* intersection, both for operational reasons and to create a gateway to McKownville. A roundabout is a form of intersection design accommodating one-directional traffic flow around a central island. Where roundabouts are retrofitted to existing conventional intersections, the one-way loop roadway is accessed by the current legs

***Please click on FIGURE 4-2 on the Web page
for the Western Avenue/UAlbany Intersection
Improvements visual***

of intersections via stop-controlled or yield-controlled approaches. An illustration of a roundabout is presented in Figure 4-3.

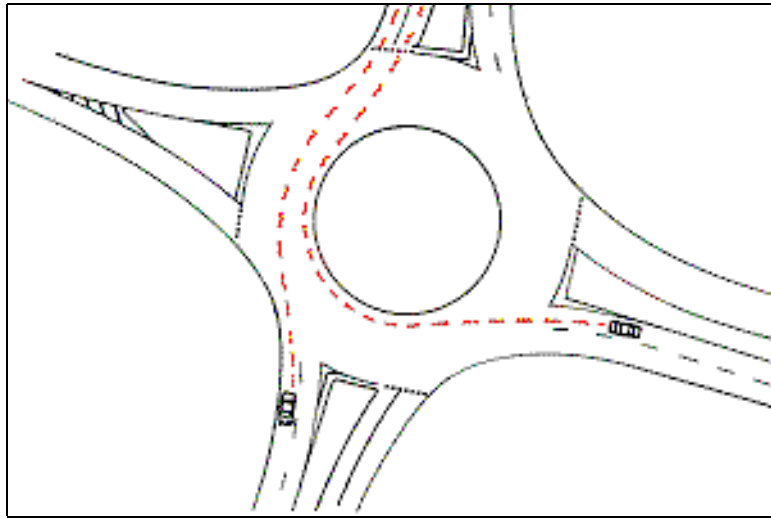


Figure 4-3

Sample Roundabout with Through Movement and Left-Turn Trajectories Illustrated

Roundabouts can open up overall traffic flow by eliminating the need to wait at traffic signals. The McKownville neighborhood's dominant traffic flows (particularly along Western Avenue) might be accommodated efficiently by this type of design. At the same time, there are considerations to be weighed regarding the effects of roundabouts on traffic flow and on pedestrian safety, including their being problematic for visually-impaired persons unless some type of traffic detector or protected crossing location is provided to take the place of the audible indication of stopped traffic which signalized intersections provide.

This noted, there are local examples of roundabout construction in progress, such as at the intersection of Routes 85A and 155 in Voorheesville; it would be prudent to look to that location in the future for insight on the effects of roundabouts on traffic flow and safety, so as to get a sense of the potential for roundabout development at this intersection.

IS-2: Western Avenue/McKown Road/Norwood Street Intersection Improvements

- Description:
 - Reduce shoulder widths and crossing distances on the eastbound and westbound Western Avenue approaches to the intersection.
 - Install pedestrian button-initiated “NO RIGHTS ON RED” signs and “countdown timer” pedestrian signal heads with ped buttons.
 - Curb off the southeast corner and consolidate driveway accesses.

- Prohibit left turns in and out of the driveway on the southeast corner of the intersection.
 - Install new high-visibility crosswalks.
 - Install a new sidewalk extending south from the intersection along the west side of McKown Road.
- Estimated Cost: \$125,000
 - Additional Notes: The recommended improvements are presented in Figure 4-5 on the following page. Like IS-1, aside from the signage improvements, this package could be implemented through CDTA's Multi-Modal Program project.

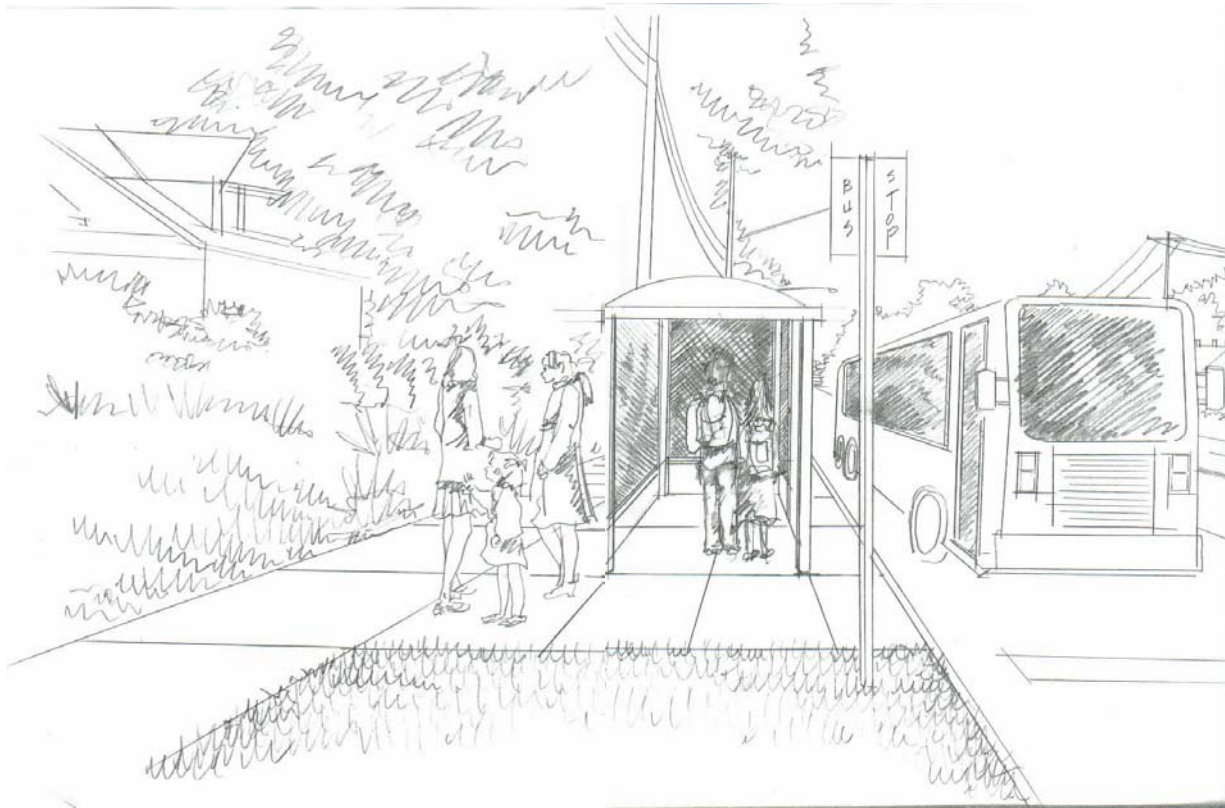


Figure 4-4
Rendering of Western/McKown/Norwood Intersection
with Recommended Improvements

IS-3: Western Avenue/Parkwood Street/1450 Western Intersection Improvements

- Description:
 - Install curb ramps and sidewalks along the eastbound (south) side of Western Avenue approaching the intersection. Reclaim some excess bike lane space to provide walks and utility strip.

***Please click on FIGURE 4-5 on the Web page
for the Western Avenue/McKown
Road/Norwood Street Intersection
Improvements visual***

- Install pedestrian button-initiated “NO RIGHTS ON RED” signs and “countdown timer” pedestrian signal heads with ped buttons.
- Install new high-visibility crosswalks.
- Along the westbound approach, provide an improved transit waiting area between the sidewalk and the shoulder/bike lane.



*Figure 4-6
Rendering of Western/Parkwood/1450 Western Intersection
with Recommended Improvements*

- Estimated Cost: \$150,000

IS-4: Western Avenue/Fuller Road Intersection Improvements

- Description:
 - Relocate westbound bike lane to align with lane on the other side of Fuller.
 - Modify signal controller settings to stop all conflicting movements when a pedestrian crossing is actuated. This could be either a “scramble” phase for all pedestrian movements (with all vehicle movements stopped) or a series of individual crossing-

specific phases which would stop all vehicle movements conflicting with the requested crossing but still allow other vehicle movements (right turn movements on the opposite side of the intersection, for example). In addition, install “countdown timer” pedestrian signal heads to inform pedestrians of the time remaining for them to complete their crossings.

- Develop signal phasing plans which will provide red arrow indications to left turn movements conflicting with crossing pedestrians when the appropriate pedestrian button is pushed.
 - Install new high-visibility crosswalk across Burger King driveway.
 - Reduce radius of northwest corner to reduce speeds of Fuller-to-Western right turns.
 - Prohibit left turns into/out of dentist office parking lot.
 - Negotiate shared access agreement to allow dentist office patient access to that lot via Burger King lot.
- Estimated Cost: \$85,000
 - Additional Notes: The recommended improvements are presented in Figure 4-7 on the following page. Like IS-1 and IS-2, this package could be implemented through CDTA’s Multi-Modal Program project. In addition, it should be noted that a dedicated left turn lane on Western Avenue into the Burger King *could* be used as an encouragement to Burger King to allow access to the dentist’s office and, ultimately, to allow a connection to a rear service road which would connect Highland Drive next to the Lutheran Church to the rear of the Holiday Inn Express parking lot. This would allow access by all users to the two signalized intersections at Fuller and Parkwood, if this is found to be manageable from the perspective of safe vehicle movement in the Burger King parking lot; if it would appear that the volumes in the lot would be too high to ensure safety, the rear access to Burger King from the other properties and Highland Drive would still serve to reduce short-length tripmaking on Western Avenue.

IS-5: Western Avenue/Schoolhouse Road Intersection Improvements

- Provide high-visibility crosswalk markings across slip ramp from inner edge of ramp to corner refuge island.
 - Provide pedestrian button-activated alternating flashing lights with PEDESTRIANS CROSSING AHEAD sign alongside slip ramp upstream of crossing point.
 - Improve refuge island separating slip ramp from Western Avenue traffic to serve as pedestrian waiting area.
 - Install pedestrian button-initiated “NO RIGHTS ON RED” signs and “countdown timer” pedestrian signal heads with ped buttons for other crossings.
- Estimated Cost: \$75,000
 - Additional Notes: The recommended improvements are included in Figure 4-8 on Page 4-16. Also see Project SW-13 for additional elements related to the design and operation of this intersection.

*Please click on FIGURE 4-7 on the Web page
for the Western Avenue/Fuller Road
Intersection Improvements visual*

*Please click on FIGURE 4-8 on the Web page
for the visual showing improvements along
Western Avenue from Church Road to
Schoolhouse Road*

IS-6: Western Avenue/Church Road Intersection Improvements

- Description:
 - Modify signal controller settings to stop all conflicting movements when a pedestrian crossing is actuated. This could be either a “scramble” phase for all pedestrian movements (with all vehicle movements stopped) or a series of individual crossing-specific phases which would stop all vehicle movements conflicting with the requested crossing but still allow other vehicle movements (right turn movements on the opposite side of the intersection, for example). In addition, install “countdown timer” pedestrian signal heads to inform pedestrians of the time remaining for them to complete their crossings.
 - Install “countdown timer” pedestrian signal heads with pedestrian buttons on northwest corner of intersection (in front of United Methodist Church).
 - Reposition pedestrian buttons on southeast and southwest corners of Western/Church or add bicyclist-accessible buttons streetside.
 - Reposition eastbound bike lane to the left of the right turn lane from the beginning of the outermost lane west of Church Road.
 - Reduce radius of southeast corner to reduce speeds of right turns from Church to Western.
 - Install sidewalk along the northbound (east) side of Church Road.
 - Install new high-visibility crosswalk across the east leg of the intersection.
 - Install sidewalk along the eastbound (south) side of Western from the intersection to the bridge over the Thruway.
- Estimated Cost: \$100,000
- Additional Notes: The recommended improvements are presented in Figure 4-9 on the following page. Also see Project NCD-1 for additional elements affecting the potential design of this intersection.

IS-7: Western Avenue/Crossgates Mall Intersection Improvements

- Description:
 - After the westbound side of the street tapers inward (i.e., away from Crossgates), install a right turn lane on westbound Western Avenue to provide access to Crossgates.
 - Extend the islands at the Crossgates access further into the intersection to present a physical barrier to through traffic’s continuing westward from the right turn lane.
 - Install a new high-visibility crosswalk and pedestrian countdown timer heads in the middle of the English Couplet.
 - Install a sign to clarify pedestrians (particularly those walking along the westbound side of Western) that there is a sidewalk to Crossgates adjacent to the Crossgates exit direction road.

***Please click on FIGURE 4-9 on the Web page
for the Western Avenue/Church Road
Intersection Improvements visual***

- Estimated Cost: \$75,000
- Additional Notes: The recommended improvements are presented in Figure 4-10 on the following page. Also see Project NCD-1 for additional elements affecting the potential design of this intersection.

IS-8: Fuller Road/UAlbany South Driveway Intersection Improvements

- Description: Install high-visibility crosswalks across both streets.
- Estimated Cost: \$1,000

Neighborhood and Community Design

NCD-1: Reclamation of Western Avenue Pavement between Fuller Road Alternate and Crossgates Mall

- Description: Construct a boulevard on Western Avenue from Fuller Road Alternate to Crossgates Mall by shifting the westbound travel lanes outward at Fuller Road Alternate so as to go from Left/Through/Through/Through pavement use to a Boulevard/Left/Through/Through assignment. The boulevard would continue through the Church Road intersection between the eastbound left turn lane (to the Church) and the through lanes on west side of intersection, providing an opening for the turn lane and then continuing on to the Crossgates intersection, where it would taper inward as the two through lanes taper in and a right turn pocket to Crossgates is provided.
- Estimated Cost: \$1 million to \$1.5 million
- Additional Notes: See Figure 4-8 for the recommended improvements in this package.

NCD-2: Median on East Leg of Western Avenue/Fuller Road Intersection

- Description: Construct a median on the east leg of the intersection with a turn pocket provided for access to the Burger King parking lot (and, potentially, for access to the Dentist's office, if a shared use arrangement for the parking lot can be developed. (See Figure 4-7 for a visual representation of this concept.)

NCD-3: Trailblazer Signage for Local Recreational Opportunities

- Description: Install trailblazer signage at Western Avenue intersections and along local streets directing people to Abele Park. Appropriate signs are of designs comparable to those of highway signs, but of smaller size so as to avoid conflicts such as motor vehicles traveling down McKown Road to get to Abele Park (accessible from McKown only by a trail).
- Estimated Cost: \$10,000

***Please click on FIGURE 4-10 on the Web page
for the Western Avenue/Crossgates Mall
Intersection Improvements visual***

- Estimated Cost: \$20,000

NCD-4: Streetscape Standards

- Description: Work toward implementing streetscape enhancements including pedestrian-scale/height lighting, preservation of existing trees and tree canopies, and planting of new trees, planter strips and other landscaping where appropriate. Increased lighting at pedestrian crosswalk areas, and colored, textured pavement for crosswalks increase pedestrian visibility and create a more attractive sense of place. Other features which can enhance the streetscape are benches, hanging flower baskets, attractive bus shelters and information kiosks.. The visualizations presented elsewhere in this report can provide illustrations of the value of streetscaping and the desired relationship between modes of transportation, lighting and trees in the Western Avenue corridor.
- Estimated Cost: Town staff time only.
- Additional Notes: With regard to plantings within the right-of-way, it is important to choose hardy species which will tolerate some amount of leaching of de-icing compounds into the ground. In addition, to minimize the potential for root spread to heave sidewalks, the use of open grates around the bases of trees rather than solid earth or pavement is encouraged, for this will provide trees with more immediate areas from which to draw water.

Operational Enhancements

OP-1: 30 MPH Goal for Western Avenue

- Description: Pursue a 30 MPH speed on Western Avenue between the City line and Fuller Road. To achieve this goal, act to reduce prevailing speeds through traffic calming, streetscaping, pedestrian-oriented design and other treatments.
- Estimated Cost: \$0
- Additional Notes: Pursuit of this goal can be reflected both in on-the-road projects and through administrative, regulatory and judicial decisions such as development reviews. That is, Town review and comment on future improvement proposals could include consideration of the question of whether the proposed improvement(s) would get the corridor closer to this goal.

OP-2: Strategic Width Reductions and Shoulder Right-Sizings

- Description: Reduce shoulder widths at a total of eight locations on Western Avenue between the City line and Fuller Road, in both directions. The reductions would be designed to “visually disrupt” the shoulder areas without intruding on the areas where bicycles would be traveling. This could most practically be achieved by constructing curb extensions which

do not extend all the way to the edges of travel lanes or by incorporating “cut-throughs” in the extensions which would continue 4’ – 5’ wide bike lanes through the extension areas.

- Estimated Cost: \$80,000 for eight locations (\$10,000 per location)
- Additional Notes: The aim is to provide repeated visual (and physical) cues to motorists that the bike lane/shoulder is not a travel lane. Particularly along longer blocks and when busy traffic blocks motorists’ downstream views, this will reduce the temptation to move over to the bike lane to reach an upcoming corner at which the motorist plans to turn right. In addition, a modest traffic calming benefit could be realized.

The “General Note on Bulbouts” presented earlier should be factored into consideration of this proposed strategy. Alternative treatments such as reducing shoulder widths and the strategic placement of planter boxes could achieve the same functional benefit as would be realized from bulbouts. The estimated cost figure presented above could thus be seen as a “placeholder” for the level of investment needed along the indicated section of Western Avenue.

OP-3: Access Management Treatments

- Description: Pursue access management treatments (driveway reductions, turn restrictions, driveway width restrictions and/or internal circulation changes) at the following sites:

<u>Top Priority Locations</u>	<u>Secondary Priority Locations</u>
Best Western/Capitalodge/Dunkin’ Donuts (driveway turn restrictions and internal circulation changes)	1450 Western (tie parking lots of office buildings next door to this one, to provide access to signal)
Vacant parcel across from Mangia’s (driveway access through or next to church lot)	Liberteks.com/Jade Fountain, 1648-1652 Western Avenue (reduce Liberteks driveway width, reorganize internal circulation)
Germano’s Auto Repair/Capital WinAir, corner Western/McKown (curb off to provide one standard width driveway access on either street)	Mobil station, Western opposite Alton (possibility of reducing two driveways to one or two full-access driveways to one in/one out)
Eastbound side Western at Alton Road (two full access driveways – reduce to one) – 2 full access eastbound side	Former gas station, Western at Chapman (three driveways – two on Western, one on Chapman – reduce to one per street)
Eastbound side Western at Church – gas station lots, Western at Fuller (reduce two Western Avenue driveways to one)	Burger King/Dentist’s office parking (close off Dentist’s Western Avenue access/provide access through BK?)

- Estimated Cost: \$2,000 per driveway for curb-offs; \$1,000 per location for turn prohibition signage; \$10,000 per location for right in/right out curbing.
- Additional Notes: Implementation is seen as a function of where opportunities arise in the course of other activities. For example, the above list of prioritized locations could be used as a reference as development, redevelopment or business expansion proposals come before the Town; that is, in such cases, access management treatments could be parts of the traffic mitigation or site design requirements for the proposals. Also, should larger improvement plans for Western Avenue arise (e.g., a NYSDOT reconstruction project for some part of the corridor), the opportunity could exist to incorporate driveway reduction, driveway narrowing or turn movement restrictions into the design of the roadway fronting individual parcels. Additionally, the Town might wish to pursue access management-related improvements using its own funds or funds available through CDTC and other sources.

OP-4: Fuller Road Alternate Traffic Calming/Gateway Treatments

- Description: Enhancements to Fuller Road Alternate (commonly considered to be the southern end of the Northway) and the Fuller Road Alternate/Western Avenue intersection to reduce vehicle speeds south of the Crossgates flyover and establish a transition to the McKownville neighborhood. Elements would include:
 - Installation of a grass refuge island with a sidewalk through it at end of Fuller Road Alternate, with rollover curbs used to avoid introducing what might be regarded as a fixed barrier.
 - The installation of pedestrian buttons activating “PEDESTRIAN CROSSING AHEAD” signs along the southbound side of Fuller Road Alternate, including buttons in the refuge island.
 - The installation of a pedestrian button-activated “NO RIGHTS ON RED” sign along the southbound side of Fuller Road Alternate.
 - The installation of medium-height plantings (bushes and flowers) outside the roadway edges.
- Estimated Cost: \$200,000 to \$300,000

OP-5: Fuller Road Alternate Down-Design

- Description: Down-design Fuller Road Alternate (commonly considered to be the southern end of the Northway) to reduce vehicle speeds south of the Crossgates flyover, in anticipation of entering the McKownville neighborhood. Elements would include redesign of the southbound facility to a 50 MPH design speed, with plantings closer in (have row of trees taper in on either side, getting closer to the shoulder).
- Estimated Cost: \$2.75 to \$5 million.

- *Additional Note:* This improvement would most appropriately be considered in the context of a larger-scale project such as a complete reconstruction of Fuller Road Alternate or the development of a direct Northway-Thruway connection (to be discussed in the “Miscellany” section of this chapter).

OP-6: Elmwood Street Traffic Calming Measures

NOTE: This project is presented strictly as a discussion concept. It is important that the Town enter discussions with the residents of Elmwood Street to get a sense of their sentiments regarding these ideas prior to their pursuit, as the treatment at Western Avenue would result in a reduction in ease of access by precluding turns from Western to Elmwood. Still, given the relatively modest additional distance to be traveled by car from Western/Elmwood to Fuller/Elmwood, it is possible that many residents would be willing to accept this tradeoff in exchange for reduced through traffic.

- *Description:* Modify the intersection of Western Avenue and Elmwood Street to keep Elmwood one way at the intersection but not permit traffic to access it from Western at the intersection. To do this, install a raised island across what had been the side of Elmwood which vehicles currently can travel from Western to Elmwood. Install appropriate signage to make clear the prohibitions on turns onto Elmwood. The Buckingham Drive/Bender Street intersection in Albany (shown in Figure 4-11 below) illustrates the concept.



*Figure 4-11
“One Way at the Intersection” Treatment at Buckingham and Bender, Albany*

In addition, to reduce the speeds at which vehicles turn between Fuller and Elmwood, extend the sidewalk/utility strip area at the northeastern corner of the intersection to force these turns to make squared-off rather than “slant off” turns between the two streets.

- *Estimated Cost:* \$50,000
- *Additional Note:* The initial step in exploring this concept would be outreach to Elmwood Street residents to get their views of this concept.

Miscellany

In addition to the specific recommendations raised in this report, a number of additional concepts, points to bear in mind or future considerations were articulated during the Study effort. A few of the key such concepts follow.

- *Stormwater Management Efforts:* Improvements to stormwater management in the neighborhood go hand in hand with improvements to pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, for reducing the risks of flooding in certain parts of the neighborhood will both (1)enhance the predictability of availability of facilities for all modes of travel (that is, they will be usable whether it is rainy or dry) *and* (2)provide opportunities to advance some trail and recreational projects (the Krum Kill West Branch and McKownville Reservoir projects, as examples).
- *Centerline Stripes on Side Streets:* It was suggested in one meeting during the Study that installing short lengths of standard yellow centerline striping (perhaps 100' or less) on side streets starting at their intersections with either Western Avenue or Fuller Road would provide something of a budget traffic calming benefit in keeping motorists (particularly through traffic) from making left turns onto residential streets and starting to proceed on the wrong side of the road; in addition, these stripes would visually “box in” the pavement, which could also reduce speeds somewhat.
- *Aesthetic Treatments:* It was suggested for a number of the existing or proposed structures in the study area (such as the Fuller Road Alternate flyover over Western Avenue) that it would be beneficial to install some sort of stone facing or other visual improvement to make the structure look more in keeping with a residential neighborhood. Again, this has some potential to provide a traffic calming benefit, in this case by conveying the sense that an area is not completely “about” moving traffic.
- *Pedestrian Separation from Traffic on Bridge over Thruway:* In a similar vein to the previous point, but also for the purpose of enhancing safety, it was suggested that consideration be given to installing some sort of more visually interesting way to separate people from traffic on the westbound side of this bridge, with examples including either some sort of ornamental ironwork.
- *Potential Thruway-Northway E-ZPass Connection:* A current New York State Thruway Authority study is examining a number of possible means of enhancing traffic operations in the area, concentrating on the Northway-Thruway connection. One of the ideas being considered which has gained a bit of currency would involve a dedicated connection between the two facilities for E-ZPass-equipped vehicles. In turn, one variant on this concept would have the connection only serve trucks. The significance of this study to the McKownville area is twofold:

- should such a connection ever become reality, it is possible that it might involve some sort of elevated structure which would have more of an impact on the appearance of the area than the current Fuller Road Alternate flyover does, and
- it would present the Thruway Authority (and, perhaps, NYSDOT) with the opportunity to enhance the pedestrian connections under the current Fuller Road Alternate flyover. As a project of this magnitude would invite a revisiting of the issue of traffic flow patterns and the layout of the roadway system in this entire area, some neighborhood residents on the Study Steering Committee and/or who are members of the McKownville Improvement Association have contacted the involved agencies to request that this study be conducted not only with the requisite sensitivity not only to local traffic impacts but also with an eye toward enhancing local travel opportunities, particularly for walking trips.