



# Office of the Mayor

Matthew T. Ryan

## A Safer, Greener, More Cost-Effective Alternative Thoughts on the Court Street Gateway Project

Matthew T. Ryan, Mayor of the City of Binghamton

Last summer I went to Saratoga Springs for the New York Conference of Mayors' summer meeting, which included an awards ceremony honoring innovation in governance. Our City was receiving a first place award for our Blight Prevention Initiative, and at the event I shared a table with officials from Glen Falls who were receiving a Public Works award for their downtown roundabout. Their award led to us discussing the history of their project.

These gentlemen were willing to admit that many citizens fought against their roundabout at the outset. They established that about 70% opposed it, and that even some who were receiving the award were not in favor of the project initially. They also readily admitted that they now had completely changed their minds.

Their conclusion was confirmed by a Binghamton TV station. Several months ago, News Channel 34's Jim Ehmke went to Glen Falls to see what that community had to say about their roundabout, and he could not find a single resident or business owner who had anything bad to say about this once controversial project now that it was built and operational.

Now to answer questions about whether or not Binghamton's roundabout is a waste of money in these difficult times:

First, can't the money be used in some other way? The answer is no. This is a federal Department of Transportation project. These dollars are carefully allocated after vetting and approval by the Binghamton Metropolitan Transportation Study (BMTS) and all its community members. This decision-making process is consensus-based, and requires significant public input. It is not a unilateral decision by the Mayor's Office, and only after careful consideration of many factors did I support the roundabout option. As a result of this process, these funds have been dedicated to the Court Street Gateway Project, and must be used for that purpose and that proposal only.

How much will the project cost the City? The headline suggesting that the roundabout will cost City taxpayers an additional \$1.2 million was misleading, and for many reasons.

To begin, including the roundabout brings the Gateway Project to \$5.7 million, only \$728,000 more than the option without the roundabout, which checks out at roughly \$5 million. Even more important is that the City pays only 5% of the total cost, as the State picks the remaining 95%.



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In the end, the City pays \$251,050 without the roundabout, and \$287,450 with it included. The difference is only \$36,400, not \$1.2 million.

Even with this in mind, however, some have asked why we didn't choose the cheapest option possible, and I'm glad to offer background for our reasoning. In weighing our options, I looked at not only the short-term construction costs, but also the long term maintenance and operational costs. If we just reconstructed the existing intersections, we would have several intersections of new traffic signals to pay for; these are costs that would not be needed in the roundabout option. And the operational and maintenance costs of this option are large as well, much larger than one would expect. I took these additional costs into consideration before choosing the roundabout option.

I also hope that we all focus on how much we are getting for our \$287,450 investment, as this project is much more than just the roundabout. Court Street from Chapman Street on the East to the Court Street Bridge will all be newly paved and landscaped. Also, much needed water and sewer upgrades will be completed from Chapman to Chenango Street. We couldn't even pave this portion of Court Street for \$287,450. This project is a long awaited upgrade to our downtown corridor and we either use it or lose it.

Moreover, making these strategic improvements all along Court Street will help with both commercial and residential development.

This project was designed with the future in mind, and we took into account projected growth and increased traffic in the downtown corridor. The roundabout will allow for a calming of traffic but also a higher volume of free flowing traffic.

Will the roundabout be safe and accessible for visual impaired and other physically challenged people? There are design features that will make this project more user-friendly for the disabled, and all citizens. And as Ms. Cubic from AVRE stated recently, the current layout keeps many visually impaired people from going anywhere near that intersection in its current configuration. AVRE will be consulted during this project.

All across our country, roundabouts have become the preferred method to reconstruct strategic intersections. In fact, under current DOT guidelines, any deviation from the "preferred" method must include compelling reasons why a roundabout should not be installed. There are no compelling reasons why it should not be built here in Binghamton. In fact, it will be safer, greener, and more convenient, and more cost effective than what exists now, and at the end of the day if the Glen Falls' experience is any indication, our community will overwhelmingly embrace the change.