

Figure III-24: Aerial views of the corridor in Focus Area IV.

F. Focus Area IV

Vision: “A commercial activity center that maximizes the available land to intensify the level of development”

Focus Area IV is the southern most portion of the Transit Road study area, located south of Sheridan Drive to the NYS Thruway. Focus Area IV is intensely developed and has little to no vacant parcels available for development. Future development in the area will include redevelopment of existing parcels and structures or the creation of new out parcel developments. This portion of the corridor consists of four travel lanes, a median, right and left turning lanes at signalized intersections and a posted speed limit of 45 mph. It is the most heavily traveled section of Transit Road.

Issues:

In an area as intensely developed as Focus Area IV, a central goal must be improving efficiency and safety along the corridor. Two conflicting purposes come together in this area: commuting through traffic and stop and go consumer traffic. Consequently, the efficiency of the corridor is slowed by the large number of vehicles turning in and out of commercial properties. The high number of conflict points in this area must also be addressed in order to improve the safety of access in this area.

Although the use of land in this area is not going to change significantly in the near future, the approach to future development and redevelopment must be decided carefully to improve the function and overall appearance of the corridor. This is especially important since the Town of Clarence has indicated it desires an intensification of commercial development in this corridor segment.

Additionally, the need for safer pedestrian access was identified during the planning process. While this portion of the study area already has sidewalks, the area is designed at an auto-oriented scale. Pedestrian access is limited by the expansive parking lots, limited pedestrian accommodations between commercial and residential areas as well as the safety concerns associated with crossing the corridor in this focus area. The photographs shown in Figures III-24 and III-29 illustrate the existing conditions in the focus area.

Responses:

- Consolidate driveways;
- Develop parallel access roads;
- Develop a northern extension of Auto Place Drive through Eastern Hills Mall to Sheridan;
- Utilize parking areas as development sites; and



Figure III-25: These are images of Focus Area IV taken in 2002.



Figure III-26: The photo simulation shown in the bottom image illustrate the addition of out parcels with limited convenience parking located in front.

- Create pedestrian connections between residential and commercial areas (i.e., Lyndhurst Rd).

Actions:

A road reconstruction project was recently completed north of Main Street in this portion of the study area, which resulted in the construction of a raised median and the addition of turning and travel lanes. Additionally, a reconstruction project south of Main Street is currently in the planning stages. As a result, the recommended actions for this area do not include any suggestions regarding the reconfiguration of Transit Road. Instead, recommendations will focus on land use and design, improved pedestrian access and alternative access options.

Redevelopment—Same Uses, New Approach

The predominant land use along the corridor in this focus area is commercial. This is not expected to change drastically over the next few decades. Transit Road, especially in this area, will continue to serve as one of the area’s primary commercial centers. Its proximity to the NYS Thruway and the high volumes of traffic in this portion of the corridor make it a prime commercial and light industrial development area.

However, the towns should consider ways to change how the land is developed and redeveloped in the future in order to improve the access, safety and aesthetic appeal of the corridor. Although the role of

the corridor (commercial center) is not likely to change, the Towns can and should modify land use practices and design standards to ensure its performance and appearance maintain the highest standards.

One approach that would be effective in this area is the use of out-parcel development. The expansive parking areas located in many of the focus area's existing commercial parcels present significant opportunities for future development. Out-parcel development, in which new structures are built in front of existing commercial developments, would accomplish many of the towns goals for the area:

- Maximizes development space by utilizing excess parking areas;
- Improves pedestrian access by developing commercial businesses that are closer to the street and sidewalks;
- Improves the appearance of the corridor by encouraging well-designed, appropriately scaled development closer to the road; and
- Encourages the use of shared driveway and access roads.

The photo simulation shown in Figure III-26 illustrates what out-parcel development could look like in Focus Area IV. The top picture shows the entrance to Eastern Hills Mall. To the left of the entrance there is an abundance of unused parking that extends back to the front façade of the mall. The picture below it shows how infill development would utilize the available space, fill

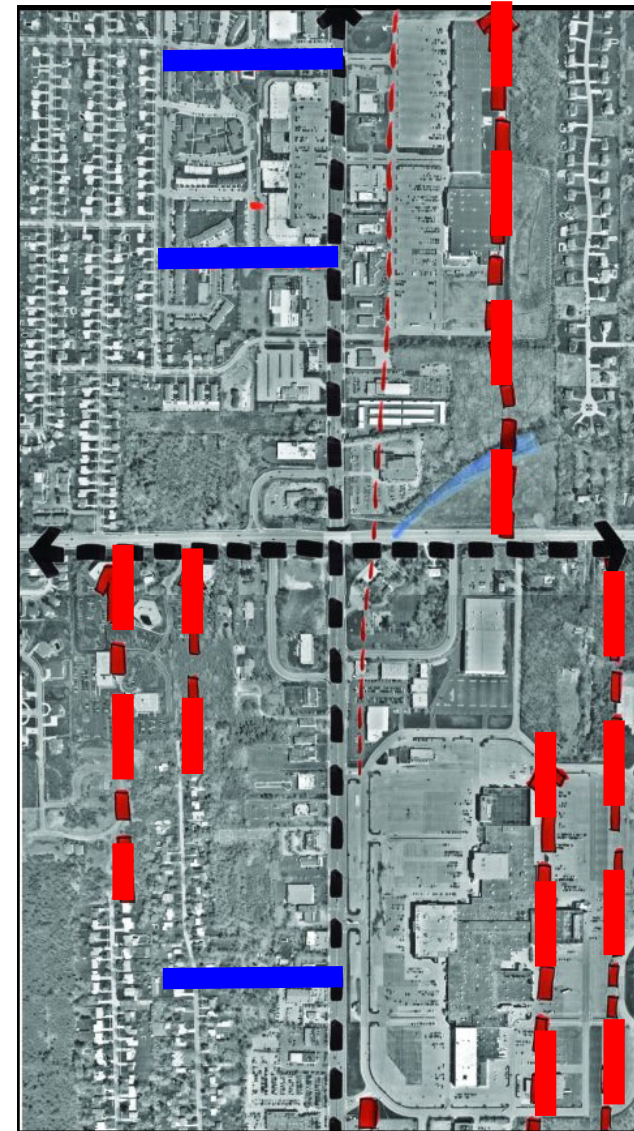


Figure III-27: Possible north-south roads and neighborhood connections identified during a planning workshop held with community members and stakeholders

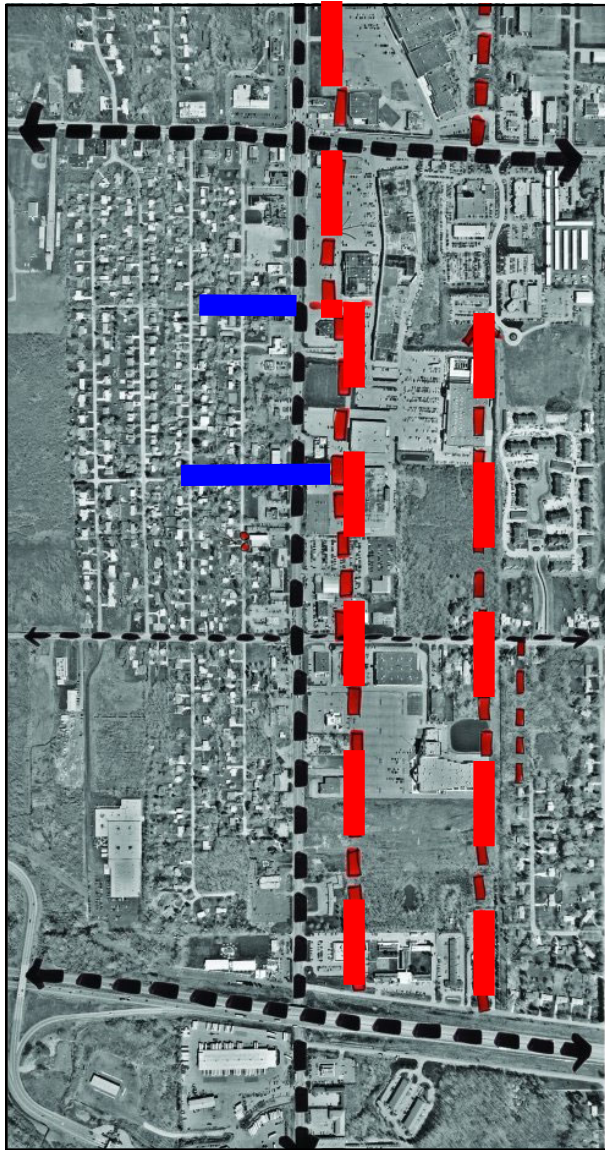


Figure III-28: Possible north-south roads and neighborhood connections identified during a planning workshop held with community members and stakeholders

in a visual gap along the corridor and allow shared access via the mall entrance. Intensifying the development density in this area maximizes the existing infrastructure of the area and helps to contain future development in the areas where the towns have deemed it more appropriate.

New Access Roads

Throughout the planning process, Technical Advisory Committee members and the public at large identified the need for alternative access in this portion of the study area, especially for local traffic. One way to achieve this is through the development of rear access roads that run parallel to Transit Road and provide easier access to the various commercial uses along the corridor. In addition to alleviating traffic congestion and allowing more efficient operation of the Transit Road, these new access roads would provide a direct connection to neighboring uses including residential areas.

Figures III-27 and III-28 illustrate potential locations for future access roads and pedestrian linkages that were identified at the public workshop. These are intended to illustrate the level of connectivity that could be attained in this area as well as provide general location of future linkages. New roads could be developed behind existing commercial development to provide another point of access between adjacent commercial uses. For example, the development of a new access road is currently being considered behind Eastern Hills



Figure III-29: These pictures illustrate the existing cross sections within Focus Area IV. The typical cross section is sidewalk, planting strip, right turn lane, three through travel lanes in each direction with a raised, landscaped median.

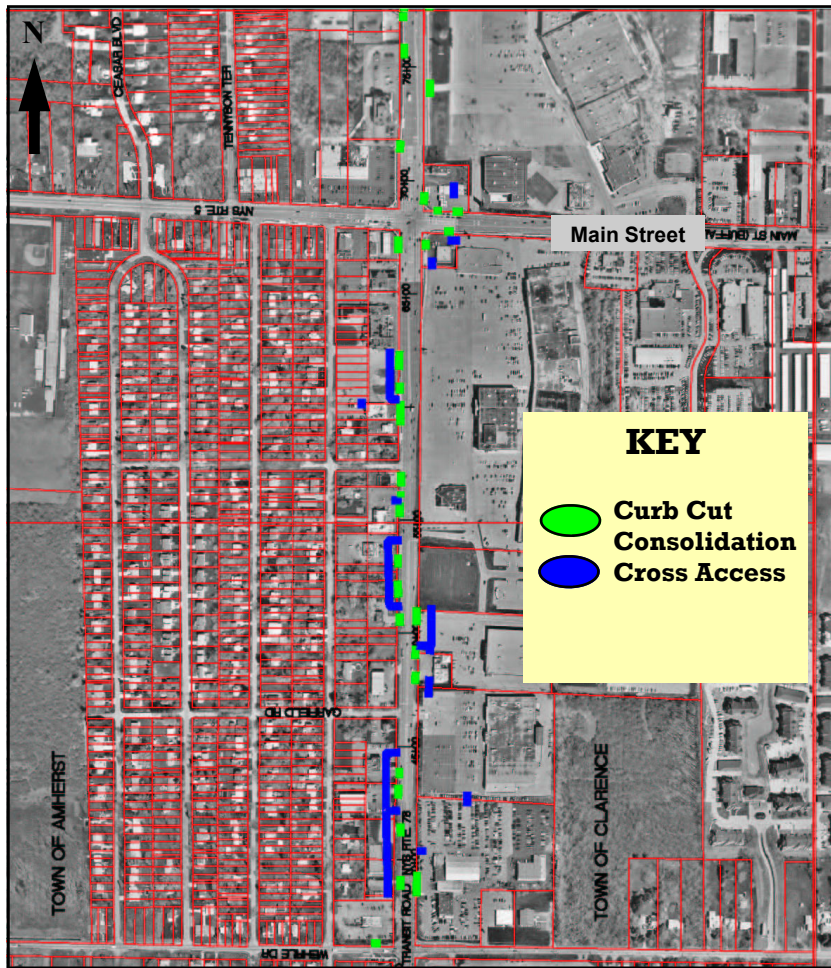


Figure III-30: Provides an illustrative example of the potential for cross access and curb-cut consolidation in the southern portion of Focus Area IV. See the Figures section of this report for a complete set.

Mall which would connect Main Street and Sheridan Drive via an extension of Bryant and Stratton Way. The proposed road is included as part of the Eastern Hills Corridor Study that is currently being conducted.

Developing rear access roads and pedestrian connections in Focus Area IV would also provide neighboring residential areas with easier access to the commercial uses along Transit Road. And if designed correctly, these new access roads would also encourage increased pedestrian movement among adjacent commercial developments as well as residential areas.

The creation of an access road in front of current development should also be considered. Given existing conditions, this type of access road could only be considered for the east side of Transit Road. The access road (in front of existing uses) would provide local access to the commercial uses and allow motorists to enter and exit various establishments along this portion of the corridor without ever traveling on Transit Road. Road-front access roads have been utilized on other major commercial routes across the state (e.g. Route 24 in Nassau County) and have been applied in residential areas in the Buffalo area.

Consolidating Driveways to Improve Traffic Flow

Figures III-30 and III-31 illustrate the current driveway entrances (curb cuts) in the study area. As redevelopment and development occurs, opportunities for shared access should be capitalized upon to limit the number of access points along the corridor. The

reduction in the number of turning movements and conflict points will produce a safer corridor that operates more efficiently. As mentioned earlier, the decision to consolidate driveways must consider several factors: compatibility of adjacent land uses; benefit of consolidation; feasibility of construction; density of spacing; and impact to property owners.

The towns should examine the possibility of providing shared access drives to existing commercial uses during development/redevelopment review. In addition, the towns should consider instituting a requirement that all new development and redevelopment in this section of the corridor incorporate shared access designs in their site plans. This approach may be more appropriate for the west side of the corridor.

Pedestrian Activity—Linkages and Safe Access

Focus Area IV is geared toward vehicular movement. Although this area will never be a quaint, walkable “village-like” atmosphere, the Towns of Amherst and Clarence want to ensure the area is safe and accessible for pedestrians and bicyclists. The presence of sidewalks and a median provides necessary pedestrian accommodations. However, the following will help improve pedestrian access in the area:

- additional connections between sidewalks to existing and new development along the corridor
- pedestrian access between residential and commercial areas;

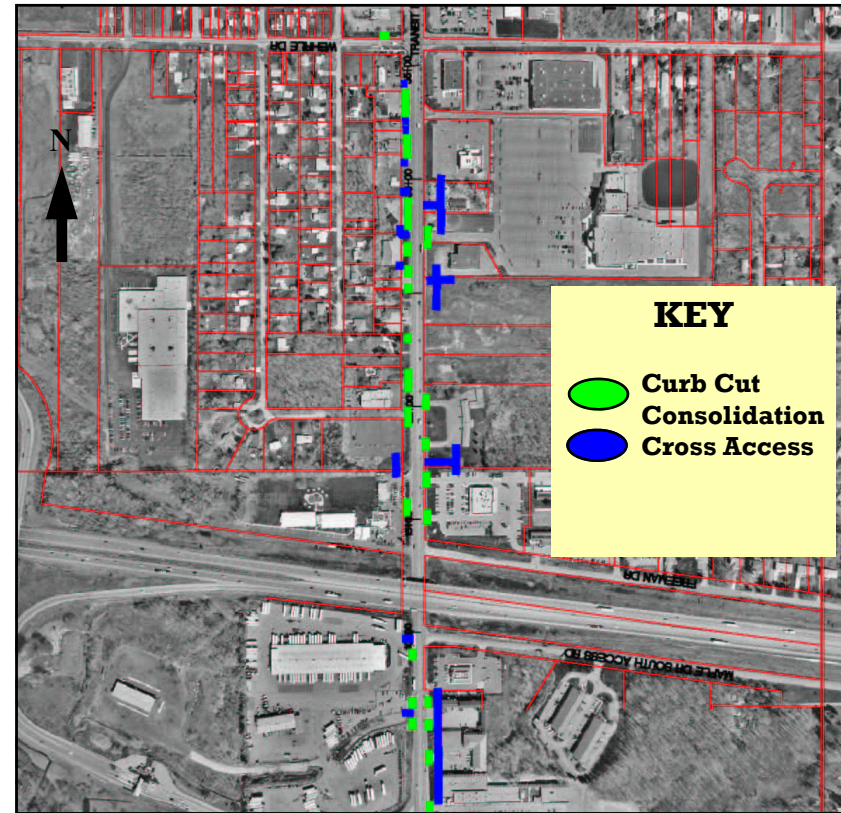


Figure III-31: See the Figures section of this report for a complete set.

- installation of street trees along Transit Road;
- pedestrian accommodations through large parking areas (example shown in Figure III-23 on page 38).

Transitioning Between Uses

As the density and scale of commercial development increases, transitions between neighboring uses becomes critical. Using multi-family or office development between single-family residential areas and corridor commercial development provides a gradual transition in the design and scale of structures as well as the intensity of generated traffic. Examples of this land use strategy can be found in Amherst's existing zoning map and development pattern.

In places where it is not feasible to create buffers using transitions in land use, the towns should require physical buffering to minimize the potential for nuisances. This is especially important in areas where commercial and residential uses are directly adjacent to one another.

One option is to require generous landscaping buffers on commercial properties that directly border single-family residential areas. The greenery would provide a visual separation for residents and improve the aesthetic appeal of both the commercial and residential areas. In addition, landscaping can serve as a noise and light barrier.

However, there are instances where generous landscaping buffers are not feasible due to limited parcel size or proximity of conflicting uses. In these areas, man-made buffers should be utilized. For example, the use of decorative fencing or pre-cast living wall systems would reduce potential conflicts.

Living wall systems incorporate pre-cast concrete and live evergreen plantings that eventually cover the entire wall system. The end result is a landscaped wall that provides a significant light and noise barrier in a manner that is aesthetically appealing.

The towns should also consider modifying regulations pertaining to lighting and hours of operation in commercial areas that directly border residential development. For example, the towns could include provisions to control the type, style and strength of lighting located along the back of commercial lots in an effort to minimize the impacts to nearby residents.