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Micron's traffic plan: 2 new highway exits, a wider Route 31, and a unique path off I-81

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Micron Technology says the Route 31 and I-81 interchange, in Cicero, should be rebuilt as something called a diverging diamond interchange to move traffic faster as Micron gets ready to build a huge chipmaking complex at Route 31 and Caughdenoy Road. (N. Scott Trimble | strimble@syracuse.com) N. Scott Trimble | strimble@syracuse.com



By Glenn Coin | gcoin@syracuse.com

Syracuse, N.Y. – Micron Technology's proposed chipmaking complex in the town of Clay, and the growth that would spring up around it, would require significant changes to major state and federal roads in and around Clay.

Micron says that to avoid gridlock, new exits will be needed on Interstate 81 in Cicero and on Route 481 in Clay.

The company is also asking for the I-81/Route 31 exit in Cicero to be completely redesigned into something Central New Yorkers haven't seen before.

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And parts of Routes 31 and 11 in Clay and Cicero should be widened to as many as six lanes, Micron says in its environmental impact report recently submitted to the county and federal governments.

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Without those and other major upgrades, virtually every major intersection in Clay and Cicero would descend into “severe” traffic congestion, the worst traffic category used by highway officials.

Syracuse.com has obtained the bulk of Micron’s report, called a draft environmental impact statement. Onondaga County is reviewing the report and plans to release it in the first week of June for formal public comment.

Micron plans to build four vast fabrication plants, or fabs, at the corner of Route 31 and Caughdenoy Road that could eventually employ 9,000 people.

Building, and then staffing, those new fabs will mean thousands of more trucks and cars on the roads around Micron, especially on routes 481 and 31, and on Interstate 81.

The report, prepared by Micron and its consultants, argues that accommodating all the extra traffic would require new highway ramps, redesigned exits and wider roads.

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Micron wouldn’t pay for these changes. That would be up to the state and feds.

But to build up the business and to keep traffic flowing, Micron says the region will need two more exits off highways, and changes to two existing ones.

It also is asking for highway agencies to widen about eight miles of Route 31 that runs along the southern side of the Micron campus, and another five miles of Route 11 in Cicero.

“The recommended mitigation measures would require roadway configuration changes, potential acquisition of land for exits, ramps, roadways, and equipment upgrades to achieve the proposed operational conditions,” Micron wrote in the draft environmental impact statement it submitted to government agencies in March. “They would also achieve the best overall operational performance of the transportation network.”

Here’s the list of major road projects Micron recommends:

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Micron Technology is proposing that transportation agencies make major changes to highways in Clay and Cicero, including adding a new exit on I-81 in Cicero at Sneller Road. (N. Scott Trimble | strimble@syracuse.com) N. Scott Trimble | strimble@syracuse.com

- Build a new I-81 exit at Sneller Road, about 1.5 miles north of the busy Route 31 exit, in Cicero. The new exit would lead right to a Micron entrance off Route 11, according to the graphics Micron submitted to the federal and county governments.
- Convert the current Route 31 and I-81 exit into a novel traffic concept known as a diverging diamond interchange. The exit is meant to move traffic with fewer signals. There are only two of those in the state; one is on I-590 in Rochester. (See video of a diverging diamond interchange below.)

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Micron Technology is proposing that transportation agencies make major changes to highways in Clay and Cicero, including converting the current Interstate 81 and Route 31 interchange in Cicero to something called a diverging diamond intersection. Illustration by Christa Lemczak | clemczak@syracuse.com

- Widen Route 31 from two to four lanes between Route 11 and Morgan Road, and from two to six lanes between Morgan Road and Oswego Road.
- Widen Route 11 from two to four lanes from Sneller Road to Route 31.

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Micron Technology says roads in Clay and Cicero will need substantial improvements to accommodate its chipmaking plant, including building a new access ramp at Route 481 and Caughdenoy Road for southbound and westbound traffic. (N. Scott Trimble | strimble@syracuse.com) N. Scott Trimble | strimble@syracuse.com

- Add a new access ramp at Route 481 and Caughdenoy Road for southbound and westbound traffic, and a new roundabout at Caughdenoy and Maple roads.

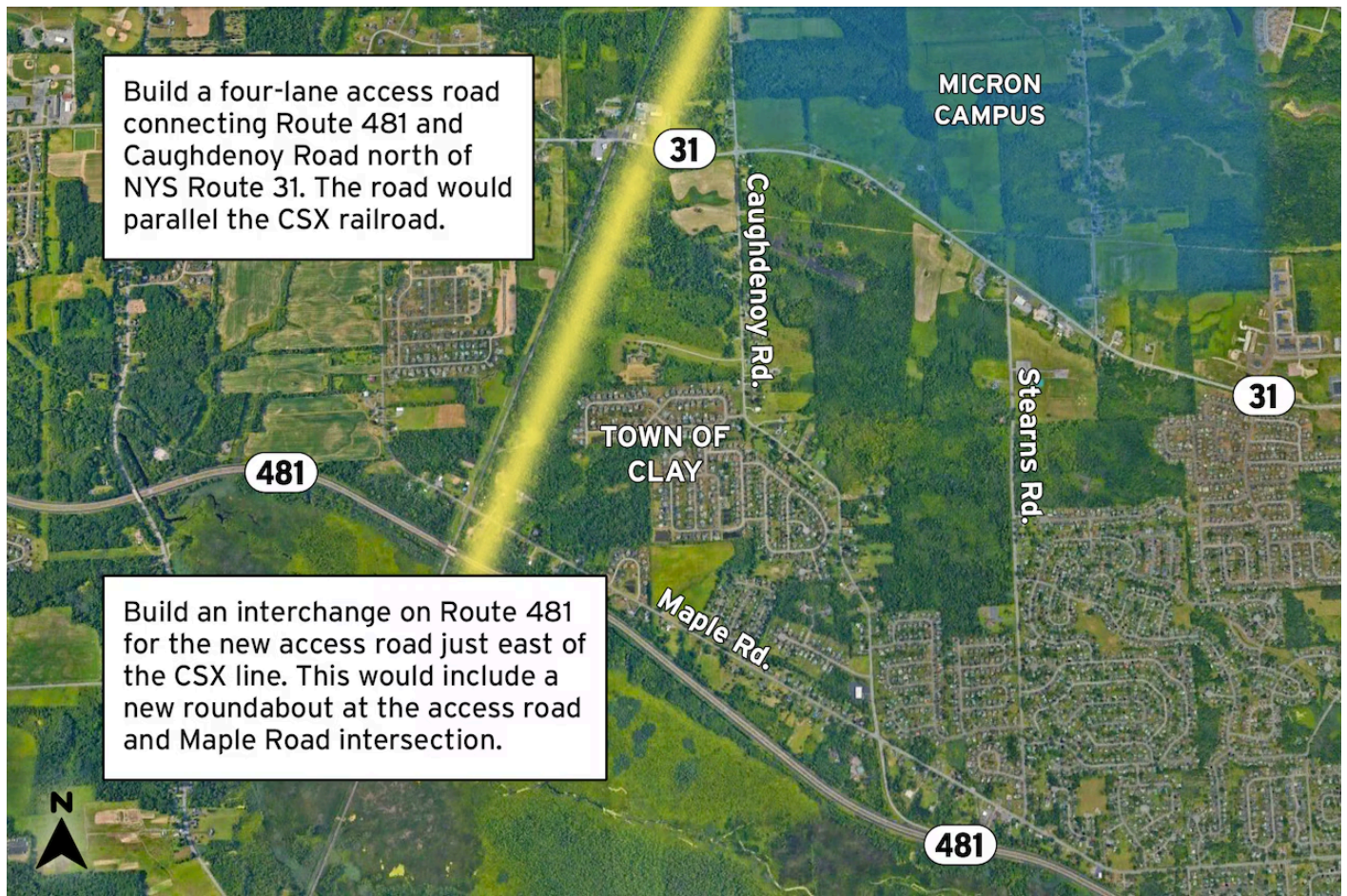
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Micron Technology is proposing that transportation agencies make major changes to highways in Clay and Cicero, including adding a new access ramp at state Route 481 and Caughdenoy Road. Illustration by Christa Lemczak | clemczak@syracuse.com

- Construct a new exit off Route 481 about two miles west of the Caughdenoy exit, according to the maps submitted by Micron.
- Build a four-lane access road from Route 481 to Caughdenoy Road north of State Route 31. The road would parallel the CSX railroad and have a roundabout at Maple Road. This would allow Micron traffic to drive directly from Route 481 to the campus, a distance of about 1.5 miles.

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Micron Technology is proposing that transportation agencies make major changes to highways in Clay and Cicero, including adding a new exit on Route 481 and running a four-lane access road from there to the Micron campus north of Route 31. Illustration by Christa Lemczak | clemczak@syracuse.com

These, Micron notes in its report, are just suggestions. The final decisions would be up to public transportation agencies and subject to approval by the state Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration and other agencies.

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New York state has already proposed building a new I-81 exit in Cicero near Micron at a cost of \$68 million. It would include on and off ramps in both directions, two roundabouts and a bridge over I-81 that would connect to Route 11.

Micron says that it would have 9,000 employees when the complex reaches full production in 2045. Thousands of other workers are expected at nearby supply chain companies, and the infusion of jobs is expected to lead to an influx of new residents, all of whom would use the same roads.

But with substantial improvements the report says traffic congestion would ease from “severe” to “light.”

For example, without major road alterations, drivers coming to work at 7 a.m. in 2041 would have to wait more than 90 seconds at the light at Routes 11 and 31. With the improvements Micron is suggesting, the wait would be cut to just 27 seconds, the report says.

Peak traffic around the Micron campus would come in 2041, the report says, when about 8,000 employees stream in daily to the three finished fabs while 4,000 construction crews wrap up the final fab.

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Micron would have two entrances from Route 11, including one very close to the proposed exit on I-81. The Micron campus would have a total of seven entrances.

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