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## Proposed three-county rail trail gets planning aid

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Nov 27, 2009 (The Post-Star - McClatchy-Tribune Information Services via COMTEX) -- [ZZBPR | Quote | Chart | News | PowerRating](#) -- While Warren County supervisors wrestled over how to fix a section of railroad track in Riparius last summer after it was washed out, Curtis [Austin](#) dreamed up a plan to use 29 miles of rails from North Creek to Tahawus.

"It would be an awesome trail," he said. "This one goes into the heart of the Adirondacks."

Austin, a Chestertown resident and former manager and engineer for General Electric, formed the Friends of the Upper [Hudson](#) Rail Trail, and is working toward building a bike path where unused rail lines now sit.

Recently, the project was chosen to receive assistance from Parks and Trails [New York](#) in the form of planning, fundraising, grant writing and other activities.

"They'll be free consultants," Austin said. "It's an extremely valuable thing."

The D&H Rail Trail in Granville was also chosen,

and will get help with promoting the trail.

The Upper Hudson Rail Trail would wind through the Adirondack Mountains and along the Hudson River in three counties -- Warren, [Essex](#) and Hamilton -- from North Creek to Indian Lake and Tahawus, a hamlet in the town of Newcomb.

Austin said the line is full of history, as it was long used by mines in the area and is near the setting for a [hiking trip](#) by then-Vice President Theodore Roosevelt soon after he learned of President William McKinley's death.

Using the line for a bike trail is not in itself a new idea, but the Friends have committed themselves to making it happen, Austin said, and have set a target date of June 4, 2014, to open the path.

In the meantime, Austin said, he is working toward the two main steps to get the project in motion.

The first is gaining control of the railway.

"Rails are legally messy," Austin said.

In this case, Austin said National Lead Industries owns it, and are willing to part with it.

The next step is the actual construction of the trail, which Austin estimates would cost about \$7.25 million if it is paved.

"Step two is almost too far to look at," he said.

Somewhere in between, clearance must be gained from the Adirondack Park Agency.

The group has gained the support of Johnsburg Town Supervisor Sterling Goodspeed, who said the project is at an early stage, but there is much support for it.

"The timing couldn't be better," he said.

Goodspeed said county officials originally planned to join the rail with the Upper Hudson River [Railroad](#), which departs from North Creek. But with the economic troubles at the county level, any funding for that has dried up.

"You have this beautiful expanse of wilderness -- not developable as a railroad," he said. "That proposed use is not realistic anymore."

And having a bike trail begin where the [tourist](#) train ends will also be an economic boon to the town, Goodspeed said, granting not only an option for a bike trail, but access to high peaks camping.

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"I think it's another piece of the puzzle," he said. "There's unique opportunities there."

But Goodspeed said there are plenty of hurdles to overcome, including legal issues with purchasing the line and engineering complexities with the bridge that crosses over the Hudson.

But Austin said he just wants a bike path in the area.

The Friends have set up a Web site at [www.upperhudson.org](http://www.upperhudson.org), with [maps](#) and information on the trail.

"It's meant to be used by as many people as possible," Austin said. "This is the sort of trail people travel to come to."

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