

Report cites progress in efforts to 'close gaps' in Canalway Trail

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ALBANY, N.Y. — The Erie Canalway Trail is 75 percent complete and is on its way to becoming a tourist destination other outdoor enthusiasts, according to a new report that cites the progress being made to close the five remaining 1/2 mile trail.

“Closing the Gaps: A Progress Report on the Erie Canalway Trail 2011” was released by the Canalway Trails Association in collaboration with Parks & Trails New York, and estimates that closing the remaining gaps will result in more than 500,000 bicycle and pedestrian trips across the Erie Canalway Trail, an increase of 500,000 trail users annually and will generate estimated additional \$5 million in annual mobility, health, recreation and reduced auto use benefits systemwide.

“We are convinced completing the Erie Canalway Trail will result in it becoming a world-class tourism destination. It goes back to New York’s early 19th century investment to build the Erie Canal and judge it successful from several perspectives: financial, transportation, nation building and more. We believe a relatively modest 21st century public investment in the Canalway Trail will be judged successful because of its positive impacts on tourism, community revitalization and economic development,” said Nelson Ronsvalle, Canalway Trails Association of New York president.

Interest in completing the Erie Canalway Trail among citizens, community leaders and elected officials at all levels of government was at an all-time high in 2011.

The campaign to “Close the Gaps,” initiated by U.S. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand in the fall of 2010 with a roundtable in Cortland and more than 200 persons to additional roundtables in 2011 in such places as Syracuse, Lockport, Utica and Clyde. Each spawned local follow up meetings and a number of working groups focused on discovering “out of the box” solutions associated with discrete segments within the larger gaps of the Erie Canalway Trail.

Locally, the effort to “Close the Gaps” is being spearheaded by District 3 Herkimer County Legislator Stephen Keblish and a group of people who are “giving of their time and talents, and are hoping to develop a plan of action and to secure funding for the trail.”

“You’ll be hearing more from this collection of talent and energy as we work to complete a project that will have a great quality of life in Herkimer County and beyond,” said Keblish as he addressed members of the Little Falls Common Council meeting earlier this year.

Additional information on the local campaign is available at keblish@nyassembly.gov.
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pedestrian projects and help resolve issues and attract support for completing the five major trail gaps. The organization continues to work with trail communities and all levels of government, including the regional economic development support their efforts to close the gaps and to emphasize the importance of the trail to tourism, local economies and the quality of life of Canalway Trail-community residents.

"The Erie Canal Corridor has all the right ingredients to become a bicycle touring destination — picturesque villages, historic sites and museums, charming bed and breakfasts and inns, ample campgrounds and country stores and farms. What it lacks is a trail that is fully complete. Finishing the Canalway Trail will create jobs while making a valuable investment in infrastructure of communities," said Parks & Trails New York Executive Director Robin Dropkin.

"Securing the funding to complete the gaps in the Erie Canalway Trail will be challenging in these difficult economic times. Canal Corporation Director Brian Stratton. "However, I believe it is more important than ever to do so to realize the impact the trail can bring."

"Closing the Gaps: A Progress Report on the Erie Canalway Trail 2011" is available online on the Parks & Trails New York website www.ptny.org.

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