

CAPITAL REGION

# Closing canal trail gaps targeted by promoters

## Rotterdam Junction-Amsterdam link is a priority

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*Gazette Reporter*

An estimated \$50 million is needed to close six gaps along the Erie Canalway Trail, including seven miles between Amsterdam and Rotterdam Junction, according to advocacy groups in an end-of-year progress report.

The report, issued by Canalway Trails Association New York and Parks & Trails New York, said the New York State Canal Corporation needs to close six remaining gaps between Buffalo to Albany to make the 366-mile-long Canalway Trail a premiere tourism destination. The corporation administers the trail, which is about 75 percent complete.

"It is important to complete these gaps for the trail to fully realize its potential as an economic and recreational resource," said Fran Gotcsik, director of programs and policy for Parks & Trails New York. The groups estimate the trail can generate \$120 million in tourism revenue annually.

Closing the gap between Amsterdam and Rotterdam Junction requires funding, estimated at between \$5 million and \$6 million, bridge rehabilitation and a way to cross a railroad owned by Guilford Rail System in Rotterdam Junction. The trail would run along an abandoned CSX line.

Dan Keefe, a state Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

spokesman, said the state purchased five miles of the abandoned line in May for \$750,000, using money from the Environmental Protection Fund. Schenectady County owns the remaining two miles of the line on the eastern end.

"We are looking for federal grants or any kind of public and private partnerships to complete that section of the trail. No funding is earmarked for it, given the state's current financial condition," Keefe said. Gotcsik said the state plans to seek federal funds to finish the eastern segment of the trail.

Gotcsik said the groups plan to issue an annual progress report to raise visibility about completing the trail, "so that this is continually on the radar of communities and other stakeholders."

The report identifies factors preventing completion of the trail, including lack of funding, no identified route, the need to acquire rights-of-way, physical obstacles and lack of local support.

Gotcsik said a top priority for the groups in 2011 is to bring together private and public organizations to find ways to complete trail segments that are ready to be built but lack money.

"The trail is not fully off-road along its entire length. If you have a complete trail, the trail has all the ingredients that long-distance, multi-day cycling tourists seek," she said. Ingredients include historic sites like the Erie Canal, villages

within easy riding distance and access to inns, restaurants and other recreational facilities.

"There are many opportunities for communities along the 366-mile trail to profit from this additional tourism activity," Gotcsik said. She said multi-day cyclists spend between \$100 and \$300 per day on their trips.

The number of people who would use the trail annually could easily top 200,000, Gotcsik said. "We have done counts at various places along the trail and have gotten annual estimates of up to 250,000 users, which includes walkers, riders and runners. Overall, the number of users across the state is great," she said.

Other gaps in the state are:

- ◆ Amherst to Lockport, six miles. Estimated cost to close: \$6 million.

- ◆ Lyons to Port Byron, 30 miles. Estimated cost: undetermined.

- ◆ Camillus to DeWitt, 12 miles. Estimated cost: undetermined.

- ◆ Utica to Little Falls, 20 miles. Estimated cost: \$17.5 million.

- ◆ Cohoes to Green Island to Watervliet, five miles. Estimated cost: undetermined.

Gotcsik said the undetermined costs are estimated at about \$15 million.

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