

**“Closing the Gaps” in the Erie Canalway Trail” Roundtable  
Canajoharie, 9/16/2010**

presented by  
The Office of

**Senator Kirsten E. Gillibrand**

in partnership with

**New York State Canal Corporation and Parks & Trails New York**

Please see the accompanying agenda for the full content of the roundtable. The presentations of the Canal Corporation and Parks & Trails New York will be available online at [www.ptny.org](http://www.ptny.org). The following notes capture the questions, concerns and ideas expressed during the open discussion portion of the roundtable (“What’s next?”) and are organized by general topic.

Trails Surface: Current

1. Paved (asphalt) segments of the trail in the Utica to Albany corridor:
  - Pieces in Utica and German Flats
  - Amsterdam to Fort Hunter
  - Canajoharie to Fort Plain
  - Rotterdam Jct. to Albany (where off-road)
  
2. About stone dust as a trail surface:
  - It is considerably less expensive than asphalt
  - It provides an ADA-compliant surface
  - Runners generally prefer it
  - For bikers and walkers, it is a matter of personal preference
  - It lasts longer without needing major repairs
  - Most long-distance trails in US (e.g., Katy Trail) are not paved
  - Once stone dust matures, it provides a hard surface that can be used by road bikes and wheelchairs
  - It is not gravel but compacted limestone particles

Trail Surface: Future

1. Existing Canal Corporation plans for new segments assume stone dust will be used. Thinking is that it is best to get as much done as possible with funding that becomes available; can be paved later if desired.
2. Asphalt surface desired between Canajoharie and Fort Hunter.

## Trails Uses: Current & Future

1. Snowmobiles have not been allowed on Canal Corporation land in the past. A policy change to allow snowmobile use has been approved by its board and now is awaiting approval by the governor's counsel.
2. Current permits for snowmobile use are tests to see whether serious problems arise. Permits are with snowmobile groups only, not for individual snowmobilers. These groups maintain the trail and post signs as needed.
3. Concern expressed about impact of snowmobiles on trail and illegal motorized use; also speed.
4. Canal Corporation contacts state police and marine patrol about issues that arise, but these law enforcement agencies are stretched thin across the state. The Canal Corporation also advises local law enforcement agencies about reports of illegal use.
5. Village of Canajoharie has found snowmobilers are respectful of limits in village area.
6. Canal Corporation would like to discuss these concerns further outside of this meeting.
7. Also some concern about impact of horses on stone dust sections.

## Maintenance

1. Montgomery County is now negotiating a new long-term agreement with OPRHP for maintaining the trail and wants to find ways to lower maintenance costs; currently spends \$50,000/year on it. Closer cooperation might be part of a solution.
2. Need better trail signage in places.

## Status of Gaps

### Summary:

Utica – Schuyler: Six miles; Canal Corporation owns; no major problems; design report and advance detailed plan done. Estimate \$5.5 million.

Schuyler – Ilion: Six miles; design report done. Significant challenges, including ROW, wetlands, connection to marina. Have to cross CSX mainline at Lock 19. Need to look at other CSX projects across the country. NYSDOT not comfortable with placing trail on Rte. 5 even as a temporary approach; dangerous. Parallel to and off of Rte. 5 would be okay. Cost uncertain; probably more than \$5 million.

Ilion - Little Falls: Eight miles; German Flats part already done; very doable, but need for several bridges pushes up the cost to about \$7 million.

Amsterdam Rotterdam Junction: Seven miles; OPRHP just purchased abandoned rail corridor from CSX; some bridge rehabilitation needs to be done; in Rotterdam Junction, need to cross Guilford RR line.

- Amsterdam – Pattersonville – probably could be done for \$3-4 million
- Pattersonville to Rotterdam Junction - \$3-4 million. The Guilford RR bridge could be its own project; county is interested in that; will need help of NYSDOT.

1. Regional total cost thus is almost \$25 million; statewide estimate is \$50 million
2. Multiple ownerships are involved in the trail. About 3/4 is in state ownership (Canal Corporation and OPRHP); rest is divided among various municipalities and counties.
3. Question arose as to whether Canal Corporation applied higher standards in building earlier parts of the trail and now is using lower standards for the rest. Response was that standards have not changed and, if anything, may rise.

## Funding

### Transportation Enhancements Program

1. A major source for trail construction funds is the Transportation Enhancement Program (TEP), part of the federal surface transportation program; must be reauthorized every five years. Current version (known as SAFETEA-LU) expired this year. State Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) and Recreational Trails Program (RTP) are other options.
2. When can we expect next federal transportation bill to be passed? Probably not this year. Most likely there will be an extension of current law, SAFETEA-LU, which will continue funding availability. EPF funding was significantly reduced by the legislature this year.
3. Next TEP grant round expected in the spring with a cap of \$2 million per project. Many communities along the existing parts of the trail have received TEP funds for trail development. NYSDOT granted \$91 million in TEP and stimulus funds in last round.
4. A number of years ago, the Canal Corporation received about \$35 million from NYS' share of Transportation Enhancement funds. That is now gone. As overall funding declined, CC has had to focus on structures where there were safety concerns. More recently, as Thruway toll revenue has declined, the CC only gets funding for 1 or 2 capital projects per year.
5. Real property guidelines for federal TEP grants are now stricter (FHWA/USDOT); for example, in the past a 20 -25 year lease, permit or agreement would be adequate, but now a longer term (99 years) or permanent easement is required for a trail on land not owned by the applicant.

### Recreational Trails Program

6. New funding round is OPEN RIGHT NOW. Maximum \$200,000 per project. Application deadline November 5. Regional workshops being held in October. Minimum match of 20% or project cost required; can be in-kind. Canalway Trail projects would score high. Info at <http://nysparks.state.ny.us/grants/recreational-trails/default.aspx>.

TIGER grants (Transportation Infrastructure Generating Economic Recovery).

7. This could be a funding option if there is an additional round of grants. The Canal Corporation applied in first round, but was unsuccessful. Second round required a higher funding match, which was not available.

#### EPF

8. EPF funding was significantly reduced by the legislature this year. The future is unclear.
9. Canal Corporation reviews EPF (and LWRP) grant applications that involve the canal/trail, so John DiMura is an important contact when considering applying.

#### Miscellaneous

10. Is Empire State Development Corporation funding a possibility? Need to push legislators to bring the trail into economic development priorities; perhaps create an ESDC line item to finish all or some of major gaps. Identify what we all should get behind as a united effort.
11. Canal Corporation would like to see counties take a role in closing the gaps.
12. Private funds have not been applied to constructing the trail because it is difficult to use private funds for work on Canal Corporation land. Could be used for promotion.

#### Moving Forward

1. The regional total amount needed is not large compared to many other capital and highway projects such as rehabilitating the Batchellerville Bridge and replacing the Champlain Bridge that have been funded despite budgetary constraints.
2. The state can easily find such funds when it wants to promote economic development. What is the "upstate solution?" This is it!
3. OPRHP is planning to apply for a TEP grant for the Amsterdam to Lock 10 section, which it owns.
4. We should focus on seeking funding for gaps where work is ready to go. This group might consider setting up subcommittees for each gap to look at options for moving forward. We also need to have design work progressing on other projects (like the Guilford RR project) so that when funding is available we are ready to go.
5. Consider developing a consortium of multiple partners in the region to apply jointly for grants, particularly a Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant (HUD) in the next round (rather than separate municipalities each applying individually).
6. Schenectady County will soon help with opening of a new signage and refurbished trail segment in the city of Schenectady that was a significant problem. Good example of cooperative effort.
7. In Ilion Remington has decided to stay there and has made a big commitment to the village; want to expand marina and seeking guidance on how to close the gap.
8. Application for Alternative Transportation funding through the National Park Service and Federal Transit Administration submitted for the Utica to Schuyler and Ilion to Little Falls segments.
9. Could Army Corps of Engineers be helpful in the Schuyler to Ilion gap?

#### Marketing of Trail

1. Besides finishing the trail, we must also market it so that people come and the potential economic benefits are realized.
2. The trail IS economic development. It should be part of the upstate NY brand. Schenectady County has made completing the trail its top economic development priority.

### **Possible Action Items**

1. Form subcommittees for gaps
2. Consider DOS funding for multi-modal Erie-Mohawk corridor planning. SWCD received funding for watershed plan; kick-off is 9/20
3. Concentrate on more doable, ready-to-go segments first
4. Use a two-pronged approach:
  - a. Look for big \$\$ for the whole corridor
  - b. Look for smaller grants for specific gaps or projects like Guilford RR bridge (committees work on this), including line items from members of legislature & Congress

### **Other actions items distilled from the comments above:**

1. Meet with legislators about local projects, their importance to upstate economic development, and possibility of ESDC funding.
2. Establish a regional priority project list that all can rally behind.
3. Contact Army Corps of Engineers regarding possible role.
4. Develop a means to communicate with attendees and others about funding opportunities and overall progress.
5. Publicize this meeting and the enthusiasm of this group.