

“Closing the Gaps in the Erie Canalway Trail” Roundtable MVCC, Utica - May 17, 2011

Presented by
The Office of

U.S. Senator Kirsten E. Gillibrand

In collaboration with

**New York State Canal Corporation, Parks & Trails New York and Herkimer-Oneida Counties
Transportation Study**

NOTE: A follow-up meeting has been scheduled for 10:00am on June 14th at Herkimer County Community College. The purpose of this meeting will be to coordinate regional effort, identify ways to pool resources and work collaboratively to get the trail gaps closed. These meeting notes have been circulated to attendees of the May 17th meeting. Please feel free to forward the notes to other interested parties with an invitation to attend the next meeting.

Meeting Attendees (44):

Adam Hutchinson - Herkimer County HealthNet, Alan Vincent - ECNHC, PTNY, CTANY, Alison Swartz - HC HealthNet, Andy Dutcher - T/O German Flatts, Andy Zygmunt – Constituent, Brian Mandryck - Oneida County Leg., Brian Nosener - Oneida County, Celia A. Domser - Children's Museum, Danielle Miller - Assemblywoman Tenney, Diane Shoemaker - City of Rome, Donald Sterling - Ilion Marina & RV Park, Ferris J. Betrus Jr. - Clinton Chamber, Francis S. Coots - New York State Police, Gary Semft - Dick's Wheel Shop, George W. Cryer – Mohawk, Geraldine Ritter – Constituent, Helen Pannes - Town of Ilion, James Fike - Dick's Wheel Shop, Jayne Ritz - Canal Place Development Association, Jennifer Hartsig - Town of Forestport, Joseph I Lee - City of Little Falls, Joyce Polanowicz - The Village Crossing in Clinton, Liz Gustafson - OC Sheriff's Office, Lorraine Lewandrowski - Mohawk Valley Heritage Corridor, Matt Andrews - City of Rome, Michele Roberts - Nelson Associates, Peter Nelson - Nelson Associates, Richard M. Gloor - Dick's Wheel Shop, Robyn Safford - City of Little Falls, Sharon Heyboer - NYSDOT R-2, Teresa Lee - City of Little Falls, Thomas Stock - Herkimer County Community College

Oneida County Executive Anthony Picente spoke on the importance of projects such as the Canalway Trail.

Summary of Presentations

John DiMura, NYS Canal Corporation:

- Rome Bond Act Project will be completed in 2013.

- Rome Gap: 4 miles long, approximately 3 miles funded transportation bond act and under design 2013-14 construction, status – 1 mile not funded, current issues - funding
- Utica to Schuyler Gap: length – 4 miles, design report and advance detail plans complete, funding approximately 5 million dollars is needed.
- Schuyler to Ilion Gap: 6 miles, final design report complete, major issues: right of way
- German Flatts to Little Falls Gap: 8 miles, design report and final plans complete, major issues: funding and right of way approximately 7 million is needed in funding.
- Presentation available at www.ptny.org

Robin Dropkin, Parks & Trails New York:

- Why it is so great for communities
- Presentation available at www.ptny.org

Matthew VanSlyke, Herkimer-Oneida Counties Transportation Study:

- Erie Canalway Trail Connections
- Connecting Trail from the west resurfaced in 2010
- Possible new trail on City-owned property
- Berm carries buried storm water drainage pipe
- City DPW plans on grading and resurfacing to improve access and accommodate a trail
- Drainage areas meets Muck Road
- Trail would continue on Muck road which is an abandoned area.
- Crossing of Mud creek will require a bridge
- Existing to the west of Utica and east of Little Falls
- Closing the Utica-Little Falls gap would create 50 miles of continuous trail from Rome to St. Johnsville.
- Design report completed for trail from Utica to Ilion
- Proposed trail divided into two segments with a proposed on-road connection.
- Current design moves the route on-road at Lock 19 in Schuyler
- Crossing of the CSX rail line and the canal lock is needed to continue off-road, would require a structure to touch down outside the railroad ROW on both sides, which would be cost prohibitive.
- NY Route 5 is proposed as the route from Schuyler to Frankfort about 5 miles.
- NYSDOT preliminarily considered using the utility ROW to install a parallel off road trail separated from traffic.
- Similar trail exists parallel to River Road in Marcy, side road driveway crossing design (picture shown in presentation).
- Existing trail to west of Rome terminates near the Erie Canal Village. 2013 trail extension project will connect the existing trail at Stanwix with downtown Rome. City-proposed trail project would connect the Old Erie Canal State Park trail with downtown Rome. Closing the Rome gap alone would create 50 miles of continuous trail from Syracuse to Utica. Closing the Utica to Little Falls

gap would create an additional 20 miles of trail. ***Closing the gaps in the Erie Canalway Trail through Oneida and Herkimer Counties would create 80 + miles of continuous trail from Syracuse to St. Johnsville.***

- Presentation available at www.ptny.org

Please see the accompanying agenda for the full content of the roundtable. 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.

Funding

- Where will funding come from? Currently funding primarily from federal Transportation Enhancements Program (TEP). Future funding depends on passage of new transportation bill (currently operating under extensions). A new round of transportation funding may be announced in mid-June. Mayors and Supervisors should be encouraged to apply for TEP funds.
- How much money is needed to complete it? \$15 to \$20 million including the Rome portion. (ballpark)
- Has a cheaper alternative been brainstormed? Is there a way to “make do” as we are now? Local communities want to have trail. It is expensive due to the need for bridges on portions of the trails. The Transportation Enhancement Funds are received regionally, are reviewed and then distributed regionally.
- Is there a way to eliminate the overpasses and decrease costs? Rail line crossings or river bridges must be built to federal standards. On-road from Schuyler east could possibly avoid a crossing. There is no rail line crossing included for Schuyler. The NYSDOT preliminarily identified that the Right-of-way on the south side of Route 5 may be wide enough to accommodate a trail parallel to, and separated from, the roadway.
- What about private funding and/or tolls? I think it is an option, because of the amounts it has not happened yet. In Syracuse, Mass Mutual has said that they would like to sponsor a portion of the trail within Old Erie Canal State Park. Also, a member of the Rotary has offered assistance as well. In regards to charging tolls, enforcement would be required.
- Is there an identified cost once this is built of the maintenance cost? We would have to get back to you about this. There are counties that maintain sections, so it really varies. In different parts of the State there is also an adopt-a-trail program. German Flatts Highway Superintendent indicated the cost for the town was not that great, and added that the trail is very heavily used and a priority for the town. He noted that their biggest

maintenance issue comes from maintaining the integrity of the canal bank possibly due to speed of boats.

- Several years ago funding was identified and it was told that the trail was going to be built what happened? The money was reallocated. A person attended that meeting and what may have been lacking was that there were not one or two volunteers to keep the momentum going, facilitate the meetings, and keep the focus.
-

Specific Concerns/Questions

- Why is there no speed limit on the canal in some areas? It needs armor and large stone, Rob Dressing is the NYS Thruway representative in attendance.
- Village of Mohawk and the connection of the gap to the Frankfort side, the only time we know anything is when we read it in the Observer Dispatch, why is that and could someone communicate with us about the plans? Village wants to build and maintain a bike area and park as economically as possible but wants to know what the Canal Corp plans are before they begin. The plans were shared with Village officials but we can always get them to you. Matthew VanSlyke of Herkimer-Oneida Counties Transportation Study (HOCTS) has a copy of the plans with him and will share them. Contact him at 315-798-5710 or mvanslyke@ocgov.net.
- Are all of the completed sections of the trails paved? Paved with asphalt or stone dust which is an acceptable surface and much cheaper to install and maintain.

Need for Coordinated Action

- Isn't it time that we band together and work together for this funding and be called the Eastern portion, let's put all the plans together and work together for the funding instead of applying for it separately. It will increase competitiveness.
- There is a compelling need for residents and communities in the Mohawk Valley to come together and articulate what we need, want and deserve, we seem to sit and wait for others to hand us "crumbs off of the table" I advocate a more unified, vocal and participative voice on our own behalf. (group agrees)
- Regional visions are competitive for funding.
- Is there an existing organizational structure? Who would be the coordinating entity to bring stakeholders together when funds are available? HOCTS could assist but could not serve as the sponsor of a funding application.
- Has anyone thought of working with SUNY ESF to have a design done, get grants and tie education into this? There is a professor at ESF that is working on a trail plan, more of a nature trail within the Utica marsh, but it will connect to the Canalway Trail. We should bring him into this group when we meet again.
- Can you help the little guy? There is always someone in the State that is saying no can you all give us support? NYSDEC was invited but did not attend this meeting. Coordination of meetings will help for everyone to have a discussion. Portions of the

trail can be accomplished with a modest amount of manpower but it needs to be made easier to get approvals. In-kind services are very helpful as a funding match. In the Town of Webb the TOBIE trail (which includes the Towns of Webb and Inlet in Herkimer and Hamilton Counties) had a very strong funding application because they thought more regionally and were able to do some creative things with their match funds. The Town of Webb was the sponsor for the application.

Other Efforts

- How has the roundtable that was in Canajoharie progressed? A subcommittee is looking at ways to complete that gap between Amsterdam and Rotterdam Junction, State Parks is proposing to submit a TEP application, Town of Rotterdam has a Brownfield project and there is a representative from Congressman Tonko that is active in the group and has written a letter along with Senator Gillibrand about the railroad crossing, currently it's about keeping the energy focused. Although there isn't money now there may be money down the road and you want to be prepared when something breaks you can move.

Next Steps:

- What was the model in your mind on how there would be next steps? How have they been functioning? We have met to keep the momentum going so that the elected officials are aware so if funding comes down the road then everyone is aware and it could be applied for immediately because it has already been discussed and worked on.
- Proposal to have subcommittees work on gaps at the local level and come back to the larger group for advocacy.
- Regional coordination is needed: a not-for-profit or something similar to be the lead and point of contact. This group could continue to meet and be that body. Meet at least 4 times a year. HOCTS can get the initial meeting together and has a meeting room available.
- Going further Herkimer-Oneida Counties Transportation Study will facilitate the initial follow up meeting. We need a good plan put together and we need to start it now and we need champions to start that plan to implement it. People are needed to speak up and advocate for the plans.
- Send a summary via email as well announcements for the next meeting. Also an invitation to the follow-up meeting will be sent with the notes. Include someone from the City of Utica in these communications.
- Mohawk Valley Heritage Corridor has an email network of supervisors and is willing to share information.
- Send an email of the facts of how much funding is needed to complete the trail and the economic gains if the trail is completed. (The speakers will send their presentations + Bicyclists Bring Business publication)

- Mayor of Mohawk will speak to Mohawk Valley Economic Development as it could be a possible project for them. They have a staff
- The Governor is forming regional economic councils and will be announcing them sometime soon. Once it is formed this region will have some form of representation. We would like to be included in the region. The State should be called and the Governor's office. Contact the Governor's regional representative.
- Advocate a model where we plan and execute at the State level and use that as an organizational foundation for moving forward. For the Town of Herkimer we can identify where we are coming up short when we meet again.
- Herkimer County Legislator would like to lead efforts for Herkimer County and contribute as well and there are other players in the room that would like to work with him to get that done.