

1 Introduction

The Champlain Canal Trail Concept Plan for Saratoga County proposes a walking and bicycling path the length of the county from Northumberland to Waterford. The trail is part of the New York State Canalway Trail system, which includes the Erie and Champlain Canals. **Saratoga County is the only county in the state which borders both canals**, and is in a unique position to capitalize on this significant economic, tourism and recreation opportunity. Where possible, the Concept Plan incorporates projects currently under development or proposed along the corridor, and emphasizes the use of existing public lands. The 26 -mile route from the Erie Canal to the Washington County line follows both the old and new Champlain Canals, and passes through areas steeped in Revolutionary War, War of 1812, railroad, Native American and early European settlement history. Along this historic path, the trail will parallel the Hudson River and connect the communities of Waterford, Mechanicville, Halfmoon, Stillwater, and Schuylerville.



NYS Canal Corporation map of the Erie and Champlain Canals in the Capital Region.

Support for this project is provided by The Canalway Trail Partnership and the New York Parks and Conservation Association. The project consultant is Jeff Olson, R.A.-*Trailblazer* of Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

2 Executive Summary

The Champlain Canal Trail is a significant opportunity for the residents, businesses and visitors of Saratoga County. More than half of the potential trail right-of way is currently in public ownership, and there is growing support within local communities along the route. Creating the Champlain Canal Trail would be the highest and best use of this unique, nationally significant resource. A trail for walking, bicycling, running, skating, horseback riding, canoeing, cross country skiing and other uses will be an asset for local communities. As with any project of this type, there are some significant issues regarding liability, maintenance and ownership which must be resolved. This Concept Plan represents a positive step towards creating a trail which will be a valuable asset to local communities, the state and the nation. A phased action plan, based on input from the public, non-profit and private sectors, is presented with the following priorities:

Phase 1 – “The Legacy of 225.” Since 2002 is the 225th anniversary of the Battles of Saratoga, it is appropriate to use this historic moment as the starting point for a new legacy along the Champlain Canal. Specific steps include:

- **Organize.** Establish a non-profit “Friends of the Champlain Canal Trail” group to advocate for the trail and establish the resources for its development.
- **Adopt this Plan.** The Saratoga County Board of Supervisors should pass a resolution adopting the concept of creating a trail along the Champlain Canal.
- **Preserve the Canal.** All publicly accessible land, easements and rights-of-way along the trail corridor should be maintained in public ownership.
- **Make Basic Road Repairs.** Saratoga County, New York State DOT and local communities should work cooperatively to enhance NY State Bike Route 9 as an on-road route and interim alignment for the Champlain Canal Trail.

Phase 2 – “50 % in 5 Years.” Within the next 5 years, a series of strategically focused projects can result in building more than half of the Champlain Canal Trail in Saratoga County:

- **Mechanicville – Waterford Trail.** Completion of this section will create a continuous 9-mile shared use path from Waterford to Mechanicville.
- **Schuylerville Trail.** The existing path should be upgraded to a stone dust surface from Lock 5 through the Village of Schuylerville to the Schuyler House. Funding for the Dix Bridge should be secured as part of the proposed Bi-County Park project.
- **Stillwater / Saratoga Battlefield Trail.** Priority should be given to the 3 miles of the old Canal adjacent to the Saratoga National Historical Park. The existing County-owned right-of-way should be developed into a trail and serve as a model for addressing drainage, liability and other issues raised by adjacent landowners.
- **Trail Master Plan.** A hydrologic and engineering study of the canal should be developed in order to determine the appropriate maintenance strategy for the waterway. A detailed property ownership inventory should also be conducted along

the entire corridor to identify alternatives for the ‘missing links’. These studies should be incorporated into a master plan for the entire 26-mile trail corridor.

Phase 3 – “Plan 250: Complete the Trail in 10 Years.” Within the next 10 years, an off-road Champlain Canal Trail could be completed in Saratoga County, and this corridor should continue to be enhanced and mature in time for the 250th anniversary of the Battles of Saratoga in 2027. The trail will serve as a symbol of the County’s patriotism and community spirit. Recommended actions include:

- **Right-of-way:** Develop opportunities to create publicly accessible rights-of way to complete the missing segments, including potential utility, abandoned rail, state highway and other lands.
- **Work with Willing Donors:** Establish easements, tax benefits and other opportunities for creating public access along the entire corridor, in cooperation with adjacent landowners, non-profits and local government.
- **Establish a “Made in Saratoga” Trail:** Incorporate local materials such as crushed stone, sod, dairy products and sculpture as an integrated element of design.
- **Implement Major Projects:** The Dix Bridge, completion of the ‘missing links,’ connections to Lakes to Locks Passage, new trailheads and a comprehensive interpretation and marketing program will be developed in this phase.

By the year 2027, similar projects will have developed along the entire New York State Canalway Trail system, creating a more than 500-mile network across the state. Saratoga County will be in the unique position of being the only county which has trails along both the Erie and Champlain Canals. The Lake George Bikeway, Glens Falls Feeder Canal, the Saratoga County Heritage Trail and the Mohawk-Hudson Bikeway will create an interconnected system of alternative transportation, recreation and heritage tourism. The Champlain Canal Trail will be a legacy that Saratoga County - and the entire nation – will celebrate.



The Old Champlain Canal Trail will be a year-round facility which benefits residents, visitors and businesses in Saratoga County, as shown in these renderings by local artist Lee Nichols.