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December 9, 2014

Raymond D. Hessinger
Director, Freight and Passenger Bureau
NYS Department of Transportation
50 Wolf Road, POD 54
Albany, NY 12232

Dear Mr. Hessinger:

Parks & Trails New York strongly supports an amendment to the 1996 Remsen Lake Placid Travel Corridor (RLPTC) UMP to allow for the establishment of a multi-use trail (the Adirondack Recreational Trail) between Lake Placid and Tupper Lake and eventually, after further evaluation, between Tupper Lake and Old Forge.

Parks & Trails New York's mission is to expand, protect, and promote a network of parks, trails, and open spaces throughout the state for the use and enjoyment by all. For more than 25 years our focus has been on connecting New Yorkers at the local level to the outdoors through parks and trails because of the benefits they offer for improving individual mental and physical health, stimulating tourism and civic engagement, conserving natural resources and open space, bolstering the local economy, and enhancing quality of life.

Creation of a multi-use trail on the RLPTC would offer a unique opportunity not only for residents and visitors to safely travel off-road between Lake Placid, Saranac Lake, and Tupper Lake, but also for persons of all ages and abilities to fully experience the ever-changing beauty of the unique Adirondack landscape while gaining valuable year-round recreation and physical activity benefits. Because of its long history, the high degree of integrity that it retains, and the variety of places that it connects, this corridor is also the perfect means for telling the story of the activities and events that shaped this area of the Adirondacks.

The cycling experience alone will have great tourism appeal for both the short distance recreational and long-distance adventure cyclist. However far you cycle, hardly any other trail in the country can transport you to such a variety of mountain, lake, and forest environments.

Market trends substantiate that the appeal of the Adirondack Recreational Trail will be great.

- Bicycling is now the second most popular outdoor activity in America by frequency of participation.

- In 2013, Americans ages 6 and older went on 2.7 billion bicycling outings, averaging 58 outings per bicyclist.¹
- According to the U.S. Travel Association, half of all adults in the U.S. (98 million persons) participate in adventure vacations each year, and 27 million have taken a bicycling vacation in the past five years.
- A 2014 global bicycle tourism survey released by Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) found that more than half of adventure businesses offering cycling trips or activities said their profit outlook for 2014 was up from 2013.²
- Cycling vacations are popular with Europeans and New York State is the number one destination for Germans and the number two destination for the British.³

A cycling trip on this corridor would include all the elements needed to define an adventure trip: (1) interaction with nature (2) interaction with culture and (3) a physical activity. That is more good news for the economic impact that this trail can produce as the adventure travel category of the tourism industry is experiencing growth.⁴

And cycling tourists will really mean business. A recent study for the 34-mile Lake Placid to Tupper Lake section of the corridor projected that cycling tourists could pump \$63.86 to \$99.30 per day and conservatively add \$19.8 million in annual revenues to local economies.⁵ A survey of users of the Virginia Creeper Trail, which is of a length and environment similar to the Lake Placid to Tupper Lake section, found that nonlocal primary purpose overnight users spent \$119.85 within 25 miles of the trail, generating \$1.6 million of new economic activity and supporting almost 30 jobs for the two counties where the trail was located. And, the recent study of the economic impact of the Erie Canalway Trail commissioned by PTNY found that persons visiting the trail as part of a vacation spend, on average, \$939/person/trip and stay three nights or more.⁶

More difficult to quantify, but no less important, are the benefits that the Adirondack Recreational Trail will provide for enhancing quality of life, improving mental and physical health, and addressing rising health care costs for local residents and Essex, Franklin, Hamilton, and Herkimer county governments. New York ranks second highest among states for medical expenditures attributable to obesity. In 2009, spending on obesity-related diseases in New York State totaled \$11.1 billion, \$4 billion financed by Medicaid and \$2.7 billion paid by Medicare. These Medicare and Medicaid expenditures directly impact personal and property taxes and the services supplied by all levels of

¹ Outdoor Foundation, 2014 Outdoor Recreation Participation Report 2014, <http://www.outdoorfoundation.org/pdf/ResearchParticipation2014.pdf>.

² <http://www.adventuretravel.biz/store/2014-cycling-survey/> accessed 11/10/14

³ U.S. Travel Update, I Love NY, PowerPoint presentation.

⁴ Adventure Tourism Development Index Report 2011, http://www.adventureindex.travel/docs/atdi_2011_report.pdf

⁵ Rails to Trails Conservancy, The Adirondack Rail Trail Lake Placid to Old Forge Stage One: Lake Placid to Tupper Lake Trail Development Plan.

⁶ The Economic Impact of the Erie Canalway Trail: An Assessment and User Profile Of New York's Longest Multi-Use Trail, Parks & Trails New York, 2014.

government. A close-to-home multi-use trail serving as a safe, off-road alternative transportation corridor linking Lake Placid, Saranac Lake, and Tupper Lake can provide free or low cost opportunities for all residents of the region, irrespective of age or fitness level, to walk or bike, increase their daily physical activity, improve their health, and ultimately lead to lower health care costs and less of a burden on government budgets.

PTNY does not support amending the 1996 RLPTC UMP to allow for the restoration of rail service due to the lack of demand for freight service and the significant financial investment needed for infrastructure improvements. Development of the corridor as the Adirondack Recreational Trail – a multi-use trail extending between Lake Placid and Old Forge - represents the corridor’s highest and best use. Transforming this corridor as a multi-use trail will protect valuable open space; preserve natural and historic resources; provide safe off-road links to community resources; foster public-private partnerships and civic pride; stimulate community revitalization and tourism, create new business opportunities, and promote physical activity leading to a more vibrant Adirondack economy, healthier citizens, lower health care costs, and improved quality of life.

Because of the wide variety of long-term personal and community benefits it will generate, we strongly recommend amending the 1996 RLPTC UMP to allow for the conversion of the Tupper Lake to Lake Placid segment and eventually, after further evaluation, the Tupper Lake to Old Forge segment, to a recreational trail.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Robin Dropkin".

Robin Dropkin
Executive Director