

Closing the Gaps: A Progress Report on the Erie Canalway Trail 2011

Prepared by:

Canalway Trails Association New York
in collaboration with
Parks & Trails New York



Executive Summary

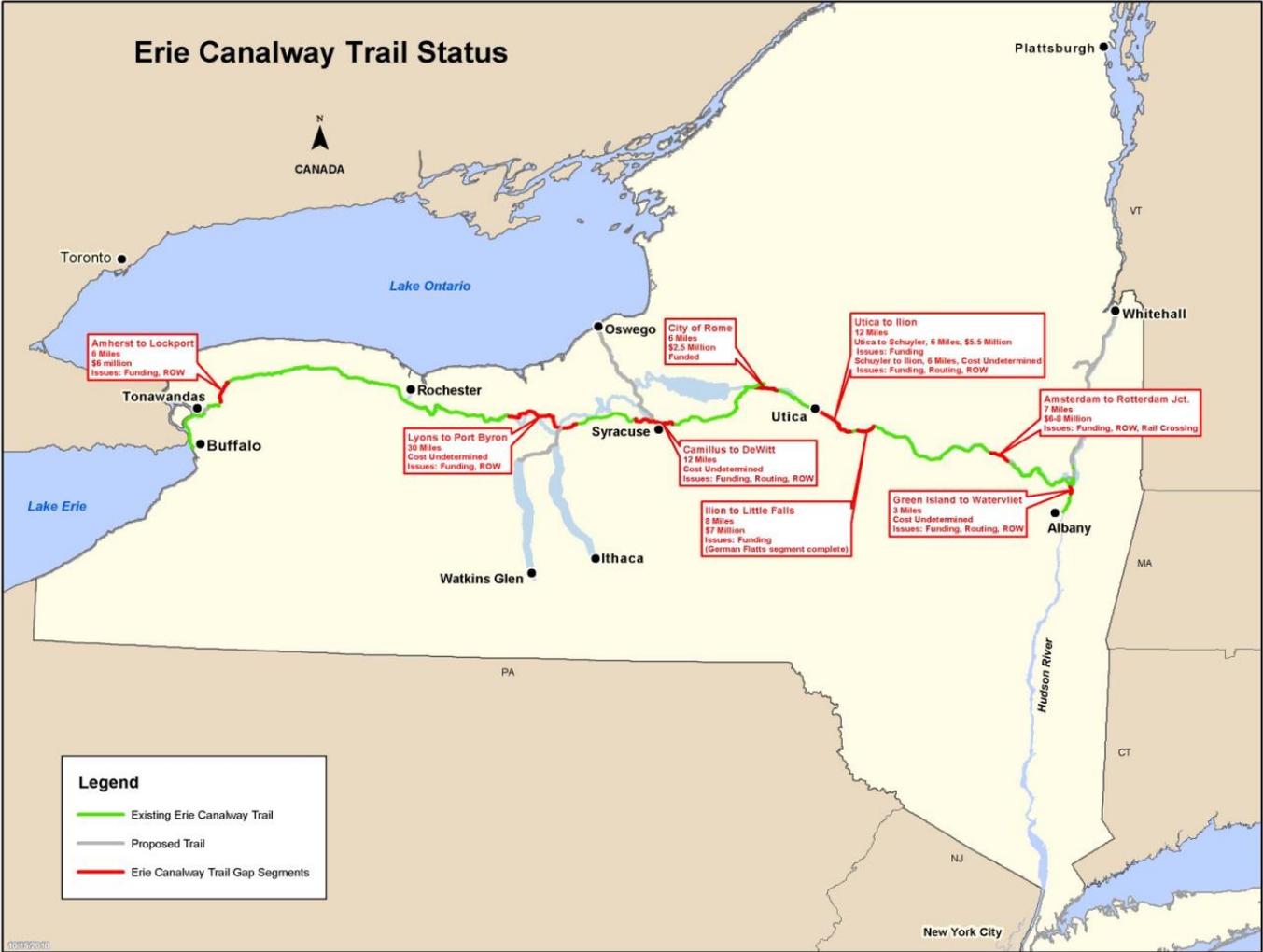
Extending 365 miles across New York, the Erie Canalway Trail brings important economic, public health, tourism, and quality of life benefits to more than 3.7 million New Yorkers living within the 15 counties where the trail is located. The Erie Canalway Trail is 75% complete and on its way to becoming a premiere tourist destination for cyclists and other outdoor enthusiasts as well as the longest, continuous intrastate multi-use trail in the nation.

However, the Canalway Trail can neither realize its full potential as a world-class tourism destination nor offer maximum benefit to the more than 200 communities along its length until it is finished from Buffalo to Albany as a continuous off-road trail. The NYS Canal Corporation estimates that closing the five remaining major gaps will result in more than 1.5 million bicycle and pedestrian trips across the Erie Canalway Trail, an increase of 500,000 trail users annually and will generate an estimated \$5 million in annual mobility, health, recreation and reduced auto use benefits systemwide.

No new trail was constructed in 2011, but significant progress was made in efforts to close the remaining gaps. Interest in completing the Erie Canalway Trail among citizens, community leaders, and elected officials at all levels of local, state and federal government grew dramatically. The campaign to “Close the Gaps,” initiated by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand in Canajoharie in the fall of 2010, drew more than 200 persons to additional roundtables in Syracuse, Lockport, Utica, and Clyde. Each roundtable has spawned local follow up meetings and a number of working groups focused on discovering “out of the box” solutions to the unique challenges associated with discrete segments within the larger trail gaps. The NYS Canal Corporation’s application for \$35 million in federal TIGER III funds to effectively complete the remaining major trail gaps received letters of endorsement from Senators Charles Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand, Congressional Representatives Paul Tonko, Richard Hanna, and Kathy Hochul and 65 county, town village and city leaders, state agencies, Chambers of Commerce, Industrial Development agencies, citizens, and nonprofits.

Two Close the Gaps initiatives received NYS Canal Corporation Canalway grants. The City of Rome will use \$50,000 to complete two miles of on- and off-road trail east of Old Erie Canal State Park. When added to the two-miles of trail already under development within the City, it will result in more

than 50 miles of continuous trail from Dewitt to Utica. Schenectady County received a \$141,000 grant to help fund construction of 1.3 miles of trail along the Mohawk River. When complete, it will result in moving almost all the trail off the city's streets.



Summary of Trail Gaps

Location	Length (mi.)	Issues/Status	Impact	Est. Cost
Amherst to Lockport	6	Funding, ROW Final design report & advance detail plans complete	Create nearly 125 mi. continuous trail	\$4.6 million
Lyons to Port Byron	30	Funding, route, ROW	Create about 150 mi. continuous trail	\$6.2 million
Camillus to DeWitt	12	Funding, route/corridor through the City of Syracuse	Connect trail through Syracuse; remove route from streets	\$ 4.1 million
Utica to Little Falls	20	Funding, ROW, wetlands, cross CSX line	Create nearly 50 mi. continuous trail in Central NY	\$13.1million
• (Utica-Schuyler)	6	(Funding only; Final Design Report & advance detail Plans complete.)		\$5 million
• (Schuyler-Ilion)	6	(Funding, ROW, wetlands, cross CSX line)		\$2.7 million
• (Ilion-Little Falls)	8	(Funding, ROW, 2-mile German Flats section open; Final Design Report & Final Plans complete.)		\$5.4 million
Amsterdam to Rotterdam Jct.	7	Funding, incl. bridge rehab; ROW; cross Pan American RR line; westernmost part just needs funding	Connect completed sections on either side	\$7 million
Cohoes-Green Island- Watervliet	4.5 - 5	Funding, route, ROW, local support	Connect Niskayuna/Colonie to Corning Preserve in Albany	Undetermined
TOTAL	80			\$35 million

Purpose of this Report

The idea of constructing a multi-use trail along the length of the Erie Canal corridor has existed for nearly 40 years. Today the trail is about 75% complete as an off-road path primarily paralleling the current or historic route of the canal. When finished, it will bring important economic, public health, tourism, active transportation, and quality of life benefits to more than 3.7 million New Yorkers living within the 15 counties where the trail is located as well as become a premier international tourist destination for cyclists and other outdoor enthusiasts.

However, to achieve its full potential for visitors and residents, it is essential that the trail be complete. The NYS Canal Corporation estimates that closing the remaining major gaps will result in more than 1.5 million bicycle and pedestrian trips across the Erie Canalway Trail, an increase of 500,000 trail users annually.¹ Closing the gaps will also generate an estimated \$5 million in annual mobility, health, recreation and reduced auto use benefits systemwide.²

In order to focus attention on the need to complete the trail, the Canalway Trails Association New York (CTANY), with assistance from Parks & Trails New York (PTNY), has prepared this second annual report to update canal corridor communities on recent progress and the current trail status.

Challenges to Closing the Gaps

Since the NYS Canal Corporation assumed responsibility for the much of the trail corridor in 1995, it has directed construction of more than 150 miles of Erie Canalway Trail. However, several issues have contributed to a delay in closing the remaining gaps.

- **Lack of funding**

An estimated \$35 million in funding is needed for corridor purchase and/or design and construction to complete the 75 miles of trail contained in the five major gaps. For some gaps, construction funding is the *only* barrier to moving forward.

- **No defined route/corridor**

Over the years, parts of the canal have been relocated and the historic canal and towpath have been lost to other development. Utility corridors or abandoned rail lines may offer possible

¹ New York State Canal Corporation, TIGER III Discretionary Grant Application 2011, Table IV-e Total Annual Community Demand by Trail Segment. P. 19

² New York State Canal Corporation, TIGER III Discretionary Grant Application 2011, Table IV-c Annual and Life Cycle Economic Impact and Job-Year Creation, p.14

alternative off-road routes. Where no such alternatives exist, it will be necessary to acquire right-of-way or establish safe on-road routes.

- **Physical obstacles**

In some sections good corridor options exist but within these corridors there are specific obstacles (e.g., a need to cross an active rail line or a major highway) which must be overcome before trail planning and development can proceed.

- **Other local priorities**

At times there has been a lack of interest by elected leaders or no local advocate to continue to focus attention and garner support.

Progress in 2011

Trail Construction

No new trail was built in 2011, but two projects, moved closer to construction:

- **Newark to Lyons**

The design of four miles of trail between Newark and Lyons in Wayne County was completed and an intermunicipal agreement signed between the NYS Canal Corporation and the Village of Newark and towns of Arcadia and Lyons. Construction is slated to begin in 2012. The project is being constructed primarily with federal Transportation Enhancement funds.

- **City of Rome**

Design is underway by the Canal Corporation for approximately two miles of trail in the City of Rome between the Gryziec Field parking area and the trailhead at Rome-Oriskany Road in Stanwix. The project, funded by the 2005 NYS Transportation Bond Act, is expected to be completed by 2013.

- **Town of Glen**

The devastation wrought by Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee introduced two new additional trail gaps in the Town of Glen in Montgomery County. Fortunately, they are being repaired and the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) will help fund the cost of the work.

- The New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) closed the Route 5S Bridge over Schoharie Creek to vehicular traffic due to concerns about damage caused

by the storms. As a result Route 5S traffic has been re-routed over the abandoned railroad bridge that had carried the Erie Canalway Trail. Erie Canalway Trail traffic is in turn being moved onto the former Route 5S Bridge after repairs are made and the bridge is inspected. Rerouting trail traffic onto the Route 5S Bridge requires two at-grade crossings with Route 5S on the east and west sides of the bridge and connections between the existing and new trail alignments. Appropriate road crossing signs are also being installed.

- Almost 200 feet of trail was destroyed one-half mile southwest of Schoharie Creek near the Thruway bridge over Route 5S. Trail repair is being undertaken by Montgomery County and is expected to be complete by early 2012.

Ongoing Challenges

In 2011, significant progress was made in addressing the perennial problems that have prevented completion of the six remaining major trail gaps.

Funding

- Two local governments received NYS Canal Corporation Canalway grants to close small, but important trail gaps.
 - The City of Rome was awarded \$50,000 to construct an additional two miles of on- and off-road trail between Old Erie Canal State Park and the Gryzniec Field parking area. Completion of this trail section along with the two-mile section already under development within the City of Rome will result in more than 50 miles of continuous trail from Dewitt to Utica.
 - Schenectady County received \$140,000 toward construction of 1.3 miles of trail as part of a major private-public waterfront development at the site of the former American Locomotive Company in the City of Schenectady. When complete, almost all the trail within will be off-road within the city limits.
- To address the \$35 million needed to effectively complete the remaining 75 miles of Erie Canalway Trail, the New York State Canal Corporation requested \$21 Million in federal TIGER III funding and pledged \$14 million to the project, a match of 40 percent. Unfortunately, no funding was awarded for this project.

- The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) is prepared to apply for federal transportation enhancements program funds either to complete 1.6 miles of trail between Amsterdam and Lock 10 or almost five miles of trail from Amsterdam east to the Montgomery County line. The project limits will be determined based on the amount of funds available for the enhancements program and the estimated costs of construction. OPRHP's purchase price of the corridor and potential force account work from Montgomery County DPW may be able to ensure a highly desirable local match.

No defined corridor or route

City of Syracuse

As part of its 2011-2012 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) has agreed to complete the *Erie Canalway Trail - Syracuse Connector Route* project at the request of the City of Syracuse. The intent of the \$30,000 project is to re-establish a working group of interested agencies to continue discussions on how and where to locate the Erie Canalway Trail through the City of Syracuse.

The effort will identify barriers, propose solutions, and develop a documented plan for how to implement a trail through the City of Syracuse with connections to the Town of Camillus on the west and the Town of DeWitt on the east. Study products will consist of a signed short-term on-road route within the city as well as a permanent Erie Canalway Trail route that would be off-road to the greatest extent possible.

Work for the long-term off-road route will be organized into three sections: West/Middle/East (to represent the Camillus connection in the west, the City of Syracuse gap in the "middle" and the Town of DeWitt connection in the east) so that the appropriate entities and agencies can participate in detailed discussions per "piece" of the Canalway Trail gap segment. Preliminary cost estimates and physical improvements needed to advance both the short-term and permanent route will be included in the final report which should take about 24 months to complete.

Physical obstacles

The Offices of Senator Gillibrand and Congressman Tonko are working with Norfolk Southern and Pan Am Railroads to examine options for improving and re-opening the trail crossing at Scrafford Lane in Rotterdam Junction. Presently, the trail is effectively closed at this location because of train cars parked across the trail.

Other local priorities

Local support for completing the Canalway Trail grew exponentially during the last year as the Close the Gaps roundtables, other regional and local initiatives, and media attention helped more and more people recognize the importance of the Canalway Trail to the state's economy, tourism appeal, and quality of life.

- **Close the Gaps roundtables**

- **Across the state**

The campaign to “Close the Gaps,” was initiated by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand in conjunction with the New York State Canal Corporation and Parks & Trails New York with a roundtable in Canajoharie in the fall of 2010. Four additional “Close the Gaps” roundtables were held in Syracuse, Lockport, Utica, and Clyde in 2011. Attendance ranged between 45 and 75 persons at each event. Participants included elected officials and other representatives of town, village, county and state government and nonprofits; civic and business leaders; and interested citizens.

- **Rome to Little Falls**

Subsequent to the “Close the Gaps” roundtable held in Utica in May, four subcommittees were established as part of a larger working group. Each subcommittee is actively focusing on the unique challenges within four discrete gaps: City of Rome, Utica to Schuyler; Schuyler to Mohawk, and Mohawk to Little Falls.

The Erie Canalway Trail from Rome to Amsterdam has also been specifically identified in the Mohawk Valley Regional Economic Development Council's Implementation Agenda. The Council wishes to establish a regional source of funds to address waterfront development and connectivity and the Canalway Trail is an element of this effort.

- **Rotterdam to Amsterdam**

Town, county, and state agency officials, planners, and engineers, along with aides to Congressman Tonko and Senator Gillibrand, met several times to identify and propose solutions to the unique set of issues associated with separate segments of the seven-mile gap between Amsterdam and Rotterdam Junction.

- **Amherst to Lockport**

Efforts have focused on resolving right of way issues at three locations:

- City of Lockport ROW in vicinity of Summit Street Bridge – Efforts are underway to transfer the ROW from the City to the NYS Canal Corporation.
- National Grid ROW in Pendleton
- Amherst Museum Trailhead/Tonawanda Creek Bank

- **TIGER III application support**

The NYS Canal Corporation’s application for federal TIGER III funding received overwhelming support from Senators Charles Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand, Congressional Representatives Paul Tonko, Richard Hanna, and Kathy Hochul and 65 county, town village and city leaders, state agencies, Chambers of Commerce, Industrial Development agencies, citizens, and nonprofits.

- **Inclusion in state and regional studies**

- **Mighty Waters Task Force**

The Erie Canal and Canalway Trail were recognized by Congressman Paul Tonko as one of the Capital region’s biggest assets at his second Mighty Waters conference held in June and attended by about 250 government officials, community planners, and local business owners. Congressman Tonko’s goal is to transform the Mighty Waters Task Force into an institution that will promote the region and secure funding for natural resource conservation, revitalization, recreation, and business development.

- **Mohawk-Erie Multimodal Transportation Corridor Study**

PTNY participates on the Corridor-wide Project Advisory Committee for a multimodal transportation analysis of the Mohawk-Erie corridor undertaken by the New York State

Department of Transportation, the New York State Thruway Authority and the New York State Canal Corporation. Bicycle and pedestrian trails, especially completion and promotion of the Canalway Trail, are recognized by the committee as contributing to the corridor's economic competitiveness and quality of life and as a factor in determining the types of modal investments in the region.

Focus for 2012

Additional progress in closing the gaps will result from the efforts of multiple individuals and communities continually working to address specific needs in discrete segments of the trail. In the year ahead, CTANY, with assistance from PTNY, will undertake the following activities:

1. Continue to communicate to the public that "Closing the Gaps" will attract more tourists, grow local economies and positively impact the health of the region's residents.
2. Work with Senator Gillibrand's office to ensure continued support for resolving issues associated with the five major trail gaps.
3. Meet with local and state legislators, Congressional representatives, and the regional economic development councils to emphasize that completion of the Canalway Trail is a priority project that will make a significant contribution to quality of life attributes needed to attract and retain jobs and improve the economy of more than 200 communities upstate.
4. Ensure that applications for transportation enhancements, municipal park, and Canal Greenway grant funding are submitted by coalitions of communities to build new trail segments in those places where funding is the only barrier to construction.
5. Supply support letters for funding applications that promote completion of gap segments.
6. Where gaps have other issues to be resolved in addition to funding, continue to foster communications and meetings between the appropriate parties to resolve these issues and remove barriers to trail development.
7. Advocate for the continuation of Transportation Enhancements in the next federal transportation bill.

Trail Background

The Erie Canalway Trail, stretching across the state between Buffalo and Albany, is the central element of an envisioned Canalway Trail System that also will include the Champlain, Cayuga-Seneca and Oswego Canalway Trails and total more than 500 miles. It also will serve as the backbone of an emerging network of similar trails reaching into all parts of the state.

As early as the 1960s, some canal communities, seeking new ways to benefit from the canal that had lost most of its commercial traffic, began building local trails on remnants of the old towpath. The first public expression of the Canalway Trail concept came with the release of the NYS Canal Recreation Development Plan in the early 1970s. Soon thereafter, the Office of Parks and Recreation (today the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation) and the NYS Department of Transportation entered into a formal agreement for joint development of the 524-mile long canal system for recreational purposes. Many sections of the Canalway Trail were constructed over the next two decades. Since the NYS Canal Corporation assumed responsibility for the trail in 1995, more than 150 miles have been built.

About the Canalway Trails Association New York (CTANY)

CTANY is an all-volunteer organization that works both statewide and locally with citizens, state agencies and municipalities to develop the Erie Canalway Trail as a world-class multi-use recreational trail and international bicycle tourism destination. In partnership with the NYS Canal Corporation and others, it encourages the proper maintenance of the trail by coordinating the Adopt-a-Trail Program. For more information visit www.ptny.org/canalway/ctany.shtml or call 518-434-1583.

Erie Canalway Trail Partners

Local governments The more than 200 municipalities and thirteen counties through which the Canalway Trail passes play an important role in completing and maintaining the trail, as do the following statewide organizations and agencies:

Parks & Trails New York works statewide to expand, protect and promote a network of parks, trails and open space for the use and enjoyment of all. It advocates for completion of the Canalway Trail System and promotes the trail through events such as its annual Cycling the Erie Canal bike tour and *Bicyclists Bring Business* community roundtables and its publications, *Canalway Trail Times*, *Cycling the Erie Canal: A guide to 400 miles of adventure and history along the Erie Canalway Trail*, and *Bicyclists Bring Business: A Guide for Attracting Bicyclists to New York's Canal Communities*. In addition, it supports the Canalway Trails Association New York in managing the Adopt-a-Trail Program. www.ptny.org

The **New York State Canal Corporation** operates, maintains and promotes the NYS Canal System and owns and manages approximately one-third of the Erie Canalway Trail. The Canal Corporation is a subsidiary of the NYS Thruway Authority. www.canals.ny.gov

The **Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor** collaborates with communities and organizations to preserve and interpret the nationally significant heritage of New York's canal system, invite visitors to explore what makes the Corridor unique, and ensure a vibrant future for the 3.7 million people who call the Corridor home. The National Heritage Corridor extends across the expanse of upstate New York and includes the present day canal system along with its historic alignments.

www.eriecanalway.org

The **New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation** manages and protects the state's system of state parks and historic sites and also is charged with coordinating and developing a statewide trails plan. OPRHP owns approximately one-third of the Erie Canalway Trail corridor, including Old Erie Canal State Park, in the central portion of the route. In some cases, the agency contracts with counties to maintain the trail.