

Bicyclists Bring Business Roundtable



Final Report 2009

Prepared by Parks & Trails New York

for the

New York State Canal Corporation

Background

Each year, more and more cyclists are choosing to take vacations in Upstate New York, many of because of a desire to experience the Canalway Trail either for a trip of several days or a short ride of only a day or less. Studies consistently show that bicycle and other outdoor tourists come from high-income households, typically spend between \$100 and \$300 per day, and will travel significant distances to regions offering a good mix of cycling, attractions, and services. The Canalway Trail Corridor has all the right ingredients to become an international bicycle touring destination: a premier off-road trail, peaceful country roads with wide shoulders, picturesque villages, impressive historic sites and museums, charming B&B's and inns, ample campgrounds, and country stores and farm stands.

Program Goal

The goal of the program is to help local business people, local elected and tourism officials, and citizens discover what services and amenities make a difference to bicyclists when choosing a touring destination so that they can better attract and profit from the growing bicycle tourism market.

Roundtable Location

Parks & Trails New York and the New York State Canal Corporation presented a free roundtable entitled "Bicyclists Bring Business" on June 3, 2009 at the Crandall Memorial Library in the Capital Region city of Glens Falls. Glens Falls was chosen because a number of area trails - the Warren County Bikeway, Glens Falls Feeder Canal Trail, as well as Erie Canalway Trail - are already popular destinations for tourists. Because there is also widespread interest throughout the region in the development of the Champlain Canal Trail there are many trails to attract cyclists to the area who will be looking for places to stay and ways to eat and play.

The roundtable was held from 6-8 p.m. so business owners could attend on their way home from work. More than 50 persons participated in the event.

After light refreshments and introductions, the roundtable began with a power point presentation designed to review accomplishments and ongoing work along the Canalway Trail, including the Champlain Canal Trail. The power point was prepared by Canal Corporation Trails Director John Dimura.

Subsequently, Parks & Trails New York Executive Director Robin Dropkin presented multiple images of other bicycle friendly communities and cited statistics that substantiated the impact of bicycle tourism on local economies. Photos from her visits to the Le P'tit Train du Nord in Quebec and the Katy Trail in Missouri illustrated how trail-side communities have created programs and developed infrastructure to cater to the bicycling tourist. She noted that some places have developed a system for designating businesses as bicycle friendly if they agree to provide amenities such as bike racks, shuttle services, laundry facilities, and hearty breakfasts.

Following the power point presentations, participants were encouraged to ask questions and offer ideas on how their communities could take advantage of bicycle tourism. (See Appendix A for a summary of those comments). Participants were also encouraged to contact Parks & Trails New

York if they had further questions or needed additional assistance in encouraging bicycle tourism.

Roundtable Summaries

After the roundtable, participants were sent a summary of the comments from the discussion session. Participants who registered for a roundtable but did not attend also received a copy of the summaries. Summaries of comments from roundtables held in 2006, 2007, and 2008 were provided as handouts at the roundtable.

A summary of the 2009 roundtable comments was also posted on the Parks & Trails New York website. Notice of the availability of the summary was included in articles in the *Canalway Trail Times*, in the *Canal Alerts*, and in Parks & Trails New York's bi-monthly electronic newsletter, Parks & Trails E-News.

Publicity

Five to six weeks prior to the roundtable, an invitation letter and a flier were sent to legislators, local elected officials, tourist promotion agencies, the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor commissioners, Canals New York, Chambers of Commerce, bicycle clubs, bike shops, B&Bs and inns, member of the Champlain Canal Trail working group, Canalway Trails Association New York board members, and local media. The majority of persons were contacted by email but letters were sent to some elected officials and bike shops and lodging establishments without email addresses.

Two press releases were sent to local newspapers and television outlets. Articles announcing and summarizing the roundtables were included in *Canal Alerts* and Parks & Trails New York's bi-monthly electronic newsletter, Parks & Trails E-News. The *Free Press* and *Glens Falls Post-Star* included an article about the event in their on-line and print editions prior to the event. There was also a story in the on-line version of the Albany *Times-Union* announcing the event.

After the event, a story appeared in the *Glens Falls Post-Star*. Marlene Kennedy, Business Editor of the Albany *Times-Union* also wrote an excellent review titled, "Business Cycle with Profit Potential."

Next Steps

Parks & Trails New York will release its how-to guide to help communities take advantage of the tourism generated by the Canalway Trail at the end of 2009. The guide will be distributed at future roundtables, made available to individuals and businesses in communities along the Trail, and included as a downloadable pdf on the Parks & Trails New York website. Topics to be covered include understanding the demographics and needs of the trail tourist, making communities and businesses more pedestrian and bicycle friendly, and marketing to outdoor enthusiasts.

A roundtable is also planned for a new Canalway Trail location in 2010.

APPENDIX A -

Bicyclists Bring Business Roundtable Crandall Public Library Glens Falls, NY June 3, 2009

Participants presented the following ideas that could be implemented to further accommodate and build awareness of the importance of bicycle tourists.

Information

1. People generally not well informed about market potential of bicycle tourism
2. Tourism professionals need to inform themselves on which businesses in community are bike-friendly and just what that means
3. How do we educate business people about needs/desires of cyclists and potential value of meeting them? Funding needed to do this
4. How do all roundtable attendees communicate with one another? Many people are doing similar work; need to coordinate and know what is available elsewhere
5. Signage for finding trails is important and must be in a conspicuous location (e.g., not 15 feet up on a utility pole)
6. Want to connect Warren County Bikeway with Feeder Canal Trail; need clear signage, bike lanes or paths
7. How can we tap into 5-1-1 telephone information system? Apparently there is some info available now on bike trails

Services

1. Businesses that want to cater to bicyclists must be prepared to ship purchases
2. Convenient means to transport bikes on other modes of transportation is needed (on buses, taxis, etc.) Perhaps run biker-only trolleys less frequently? Much interest in ways to transport bikes conveniently & safely.
3. Amtrak should take bikes
4. BOCES students made bike racks for all businesses in one community
5. Convenient and easy-to-find parking for trail users is important

Promotion

1. Warren County has a guide and website with a section on bicycling
2. In one community, filming of bike trails is underway and finished product will be posted on website and made available on CD
3. Bike races draw lots of people
4. There is a need for greater visibility of biking opportunities
5. Need signs for bike trails on Interstate highways
6. One trail can help other nearby trails through connections and cross-promotion
7. How do we get people coming to a community for biking (or other reason) to stay longer? One possible solution: one-stop website that allows people to see all attractions/facilities, make reservations, etc. Adventure-Junction.com will do this
8. Should also work to get more local residents out using trails, not just focus on bringing people in from “away”
9. More local families have been seen on the trails during this economic downturn; it can be a good time for cycling businesses
10. Bicycle tourism adds 5 months to the business season
11. How do we reach people via Web 2.0 media? How do we inform people about web resources?

Issues

1. Trails in one area need to be connected to trails and systems in other nearby areas
2. Some existing designated bike routes (e.g., Bike Rt 9) are on undesirable roads in places
3. One bike shop owner’s experience is that road bikers want paved trails; stone dust can be hard on equipment
4. Cyclists in large numbers (e.g., for a race) sometimes seen as inconvenience on roads; have to educate community about economic value; information in this session needs to reach a broader audience

Suggestions

1. Could a CD of parts of the presentation be included with the trails marketing guide that Parks & Trails New York is developing?
2. Tapping into cycling tourism requires only modest investment at individual business level
3. Grant opportunity open now – “Blueprint Grants” – that could be used for bike racks
Information is available at <http://empire.state.ny.us/UpstateDownstateFund/default.asp>
4. **Send participant list to all those who signed in or registered!**