

Canalway Trail Gap Segment
Assessment Report
Frankfort-Ilion-Mohawk-German Flats
Herkimer County, New York

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Report Prepared by:
Canalway Trail Partnership Project
New York Parks and Conservation Association
29 Elk Street
Albany, NY 12207
(518) 434-1583



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Introduction

This report is a product of the Canalway Trail Partnership Project which has been providing technical assistance to further the planning and development of this segment of the Canalway Trail. Under the Canalway Trail Partnership Project, New York Parks and Conservation Association (NYPCA), in partnership with the NYS Canal Corporation and the National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, is organizing and assisting Canal communities to plan and develop the Canalway Trail where critical gaps exist. When completed, the Canalway Trail will be a 524 mile continuous multi-use pathway along the New York State Canal System.

NYPCA is a statewide non-profit citizens' organization dedicated to protecting New York's parks and helping communities create innovative and popular forms of park lands such as greenways, rail and canal trails and heritage corridors. The trail segment in this assessment is a nine and one quarter mile route in central southern Herkimer County along the southern bank of the Mohawk River and Erie Canal. The canal in this segment is the Mohawk River and the terms "Canal" and "River" are used interchangeably.

Location

The area is situated approximately half way between the cities of Utica and Little Falls and includes parts of the Towns of Frankfort, Herkimer and German Flats and the Villages of Frankfort, Ilion and Mohawk. The Canalway Trail segment starts on the western side of the Village of Frankfort at the Frankfort Marina. The trail proceeds east through the Village of Frankfort on a still to be determined route, through a part of the Town of Herkimer on the south side of the river and through the villages of Ilion and Mohawk on village property close to the canal. From the Mohawk village line the trail goes east through the town of German Flats, along the River to the town line. (See figures 1-3)

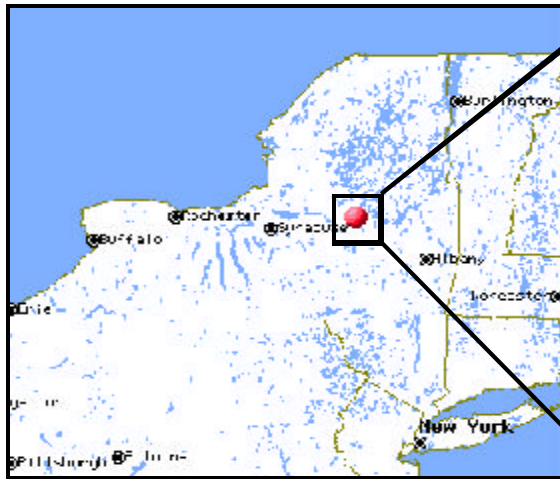


Fig. 1 Location of Segment in New York State

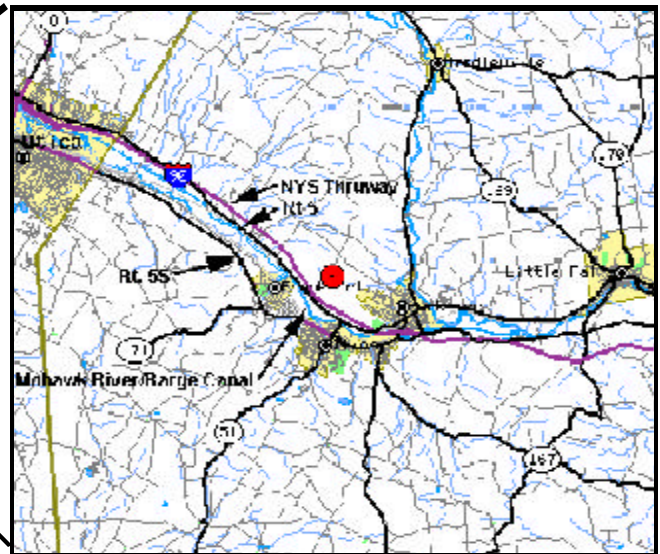


Fig. 2 Segment Area

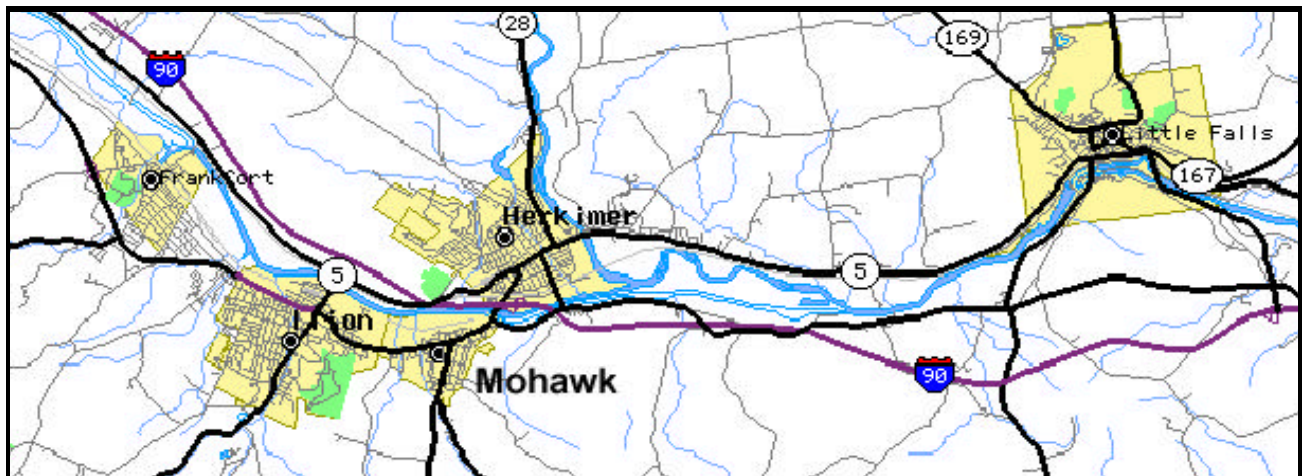


Fig. 3 Canalway Trail Segment Detail

Landscape Character

The character of this segment of the trail varies from open field and second growth forest through scrub vegetation, abandoned railroad right of way, and rural small town. Most of the length of the trail is on land close to the canal. The canal here is the canalized Mohawk River.

On the western end of the segment the trail comes east from the city of Utica along the canal's south shore. This area is overgrown with secondary growth forest and is quite wild feeling. As the trail crosses over to the Frankfort Marina it goes through the village on abandoned railroad track and has an urban feel. The village center of Frankfort is a short distance from the trail. The trail between Frankfort and Ilion varies but generally goes through fields, second growth forest, over streams and is rural in nature. For a portion the trail is proposed to go along a utility line and through the Ilion Marina. At that point the village center of Ilion is also a short distance away. Through the villages of Ilion and Mohawk and the Town of German Flats, the trail travels close to the southern bank of the canal, mostly through second growth forest and near wetlands typical of the Mohawk river. The trail passes close to a residential area in the western part of German Flats and onto abandoned railroad in eastern German Flats to the Herkimer Town Line.

The majority of the trail in this section will be close to the canal and will follow undeveloped land, some of which is low lying and will be along wetland areas characteristic of the Mohawk River valley. The views in this area are mostly of hillside farms, small villages and the canal and river. The villages are characteristic small rural population centers that are for the most part set away from the canal, leaving some distance of undeveloped land on the south side of the canal. This section is very mixed in land use but could generally be classified as rural.

From Canal Recreationway Plan

The Canal Recreationway Plan of 1995 identifies this section as composed of the following segments in exhibit 7-7 *Canal Trail Route Segments*:

1. ET-23; West Frankfort/West Schuyler to Ilion. 3.75 miles; ownership attributed NYS OPRHP along abandoned railroad ROW on the south side of the canal.
2. ET-24; Ilion to Herkimer. 5.5 miles; ownership attributed to Canal Corporation on the south side of the canal.

The trail condition in each of these segments is listed as “Right of Way assembled-Trail needs improvement.”¹

This characterization is no longer accurate because at the time the plan was written the recommendation was to site the trail this on abandoned rail line. The present situation is different in that the wishes of the municipalities are for a trail along the canal. This would push the trail condition to #3 in parts and #4 in parts. Please see the discussions on Routing, Ownership and Key Needs for further explanations of this matter. The trail route and design still need to be finalized.

The Recreationway Plan also identifies the Frankfort and Ilion Marinas as existing Canal Service Packages for this section of the trail. In Exhibit 7-8 *Proposed Canalway Trail Support Facilities, Hiking and Cycling* it defines the Frankfort Marina as a full service full day stop for hiking and the Ilion Terminal for a partial services package for a half-day bicycling stop. Presently the facilities at the Frankfort Marina are limited because of the lack of an operating entity. Canal Corporation is currently negotiating with possible operators. The Ilion Marina has an operating restaurant and marina as well as RV camping, showers and restrooms. Readers are directed to the Resources section for a further discussion of services in this area.

¹ The Recreationway Plan divides the status of trail right-of-ways into four groups as follows:

- 1 Improved Trail in use
- 2 Right-of-way assembled-Trail needs improvement
- 3 Trail sited, Right of way or easement to be acquired
- 4 Trail not sited.

Trail Partners

The Villages of Frankfort, Ilion and Mohawk and the Town of German Flats have all participated in the routing and planning for this trail segment. The Village of Ilion has taken the lead and formed a trail committee to aid with trail advocacy and development. This committee has worked diligently to site the trail through the village and to contact the neighboring municipalities. As of this writing the Town of German Flats has begun to form a trail committee and has agreed in principal with the Village of Ilion to work together on the project.

The Herkimer-Oneida Transportation Study is participating through the development of mapping and ownership studies and a representative attends the Village of Ilion trail committee meetings. The NYS DOT has had input into trail routing as has NYS Canal Corporation. NYPCA attends the meetings of all trail committees and has assisted with the routing, and other technical issues such as wetlands and permitting.

Ownership

The ownership of this section of the trail is quite varied. In the Village of Frankfort Canal Corporation owns the trail corridor in the Frankfort Marina area. As the preferred trail leaves the marina and heads east through the town along abandoned railroad ROW the ownership is private. There are several private owners along this section of the railroad. If an arrangement cannot be made with the owners an on-street option may be needed.

As the trail proceeds east there are sections of the railroad that were owned by NYS Office of Parks and Historic Preservation (OPRHP), now in private ownership and some land owned by Canal Corporation. Through the Village of Ilion there is some land along the preferred route that is owned by NIMO and some owned by Canal Corporation. Past the Ilion Marina the Village of Ilion owns the land to the village line. East of Ilion the trail will be almost entirely on Canal Corporation land. Some land in the section through German Flats is owned by the town and some is on abandoned railroad that is owned by OPRHP.

Acquisition needs

- Easements or acquisition will be needed where the proposed trail follows railroad ROW through private property in the Village and Town of Frankfort.
- Easements will also be needed where the trail is routed to be on Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation property.
- The Town of German Flats is preparing to acquire land around the Herkimer Church to build a town park that will accommodate the trail at that location.
- The NYS DOT has, in the past, suggested purchase of a piece of property in the western part of the Village of Ilion which includes a railroad bridge. This piece of property is not needed for the villages' preferred route.

Resources

The village centers in this segment are within easy walking and cycling distance from the trail and form the backbone of tourist services in this section. They all have services that would be of interest to persons travelling through the area. Super markets, drugstores, restaurants, and various other retail establishments are available. In addition, the Town of German Flats is planning a park to be connected to the historic Herkimer Church. This park would link this historic Church with the Canalway Trail and other historic sites.

This segment also lies between the historic General Herkimer Home State Historic Site in Little Falls and the Oriskany Flats Battlefield to the west. It is expected that hikers and bicyclists will travel between these two sites (20 miles) on day and multiple day trips to take advantage of the historic interpretation available.

The Remington Arms Museum at the Remington Arms factory in the Village of Ilion is a very popular tourist attraction. This facility is within easy walking distance from the Ilion Marina and the proposed Canalway Trail Route.

As has been mentioned above, the Canal Recreationway Plan of 1995 identifies the Terminals in both Frankfort and Ilion as major facilities for hiking and bicycling. Both the Frankfort and Ilion Marinas will provide food, camping, showers, and laundry. The Ilion Marina also provides RV camping and a tent camping area is planned at the Frankfort Marina. Tent camping is also a possibility at Lock E-19.

The scenic opportunities of the canal in the Town of German Flats should not be overlooked. There is a large bend just east of the town line with the Village of Mohawk that allows long views to the east and the west. This area would be a logical site for a developed promenade and accompanying retail development. The route 28 bridge that was recently built over the canal included pedestrian access and historic lighting. Similar amenities could be designed and built in this section of the trail.

Economic Opportunities

The Canalway Trail in this section can play a significant role in the tourism development of the area. Completion of this gap in the trail will bring people from Rome, Utica, the Fort Stanwix National Historic Site and Oriskany Flats Battlefield in the west and connect the sites to Little Falls and the General Herkimer home to the east. This will place Frankfort, Ilion, Mohawk and German Flats strategically between important historic resources in the heart of the historically significant Mohawk Valley.

When the Rome - Utica - Frankfort section is completed it will also link with the Erie Canal State Park trail and at that point only a short length of trail is required to link this section with Syracuse. Area business leaders should be aware that the completion of this segment will result in many bicyclists visiting from the populated areas of Rome, Utica and Syracuse. Hiking and bicycling tourism from the east and west will

find this area an interesting and convenient spot to stop for a meal, shopping, repairs, rest, and overnight. The facilities that exist will enjoy increased usage and new opportunities will appear. The potential for bicycle and hiking based tourism, including rentals and equipment repair and sales will increase. Canal-side restaurants and overnight boarding establishments would enhance the trail experience and encourage visitors and residents to take advantage of the recreation potential of the canal.

The concurrent development of trails linking the village centers to the canal and each other will bring many additional waterside and landside visitors and tourists to these communities.

The completion of this segment of the Canalway Trail will provide an important recreational facility for area residents and showcase the significant historic resources of the canal. This will measurably add to the quality of life and the view that this is a great place to live and work. The economic implications are significant. The perceived quality of life in a community is a major factor in many business's decisions either to stay in a community or to relocate there.

Proposed Routing/Condition of Trail

This description of the proposed routing proceeds from west to east. The preferred route is presented as well as an option (1) through the village and town of Frankfort and (2) through the town of German Flats. (See figure 4)

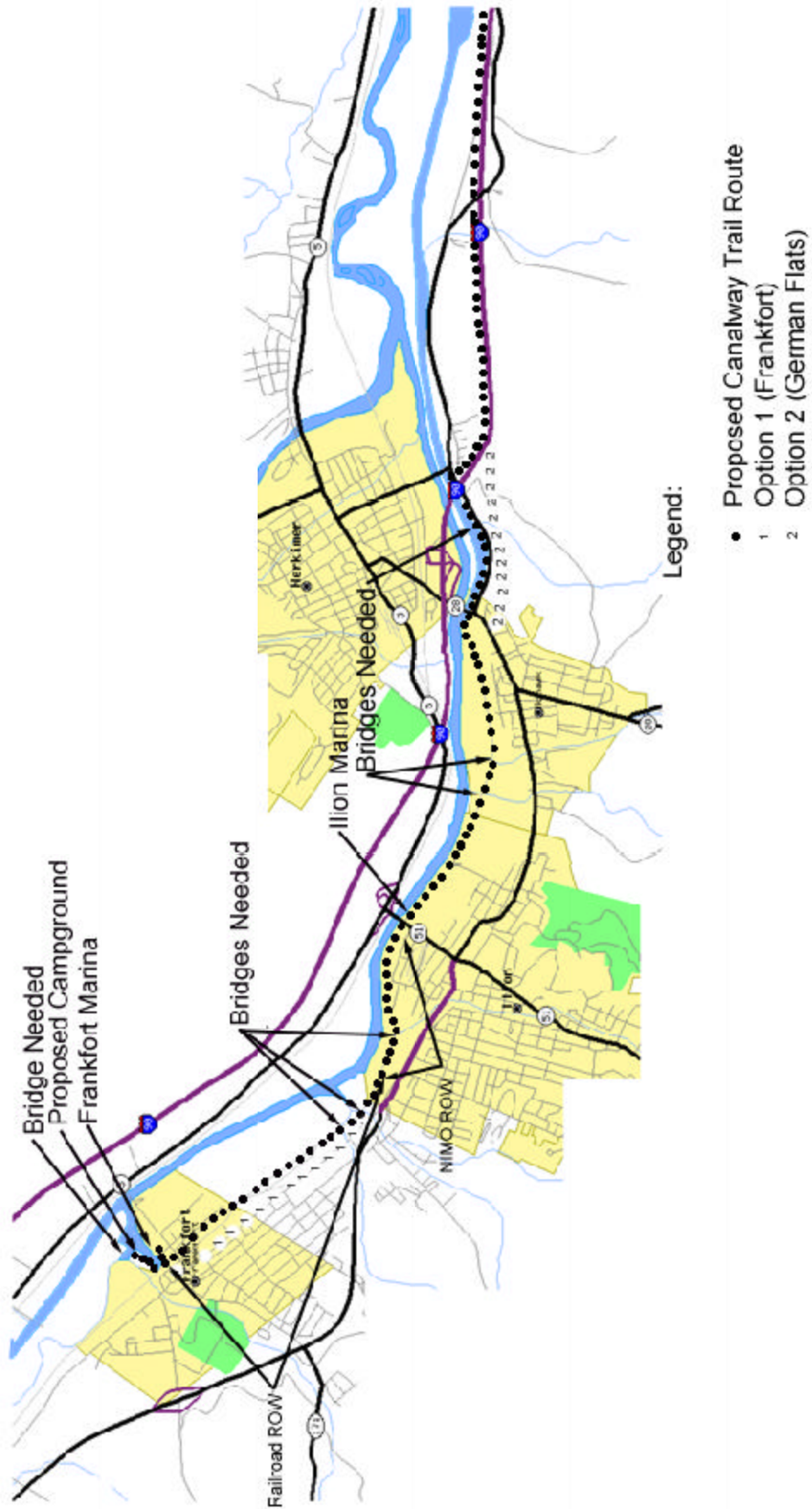
The routing descriptions given below are preliminary. The exact routing will be done considering site-specific conditions and may differ from these descriptions.

This proposed routing is the product of many meetings and site visits by individuals representing various interest groups. Organizations that have participated in this process include NY Canal Corporation, trail committees in the villages of Frankfort, Ilion, Mohawk and the town of German Flats, Herkimer - Oneida Counties Transportation Study, New York State Department of Transportation and New York Parks and Conservation Association.

Proposed Route Description	Present Condition of Trail
Village of Frankfort	
<p>The trail starts on the south shore of an outlet of a stream into the Frankfort Basin. The trail continues through land currently proposed for a camping area by the Village of Frankfort. The trail then would proceed east on abandoned railroad ROW to the village line.</p>	<p>A bridge is needed at the crossing at the beginning of this trail segment. This would carry the trail across the stream outlet. The north side of the stream will have a section of the trail coming from Utica that will be developed by NYS Canal Corporation.</p> <p>The land proposed for the camping area is generally low but flat and easy to develop for trail. At this point the trail will connect with the existing Frankfort Marina where services are available to hikers and bicyclists.</p> <p>The abandoned railroad ROW is owned by several private owners. The condition of the ROW varies as well, some being overgrown and some in the village being quite clear. A moderate amount of clearing, grading and paving will be necessary to develop the ROW into trail assuming an agreement can be worked out with the owners.</p>
Town of Frankfort	
<p>The section through the Town of Frankfort will be entirely on abandoned railroad ROW.</p>	<p>Same as above.</p>

Village and Town of Frankfort Option 1	
This option would bring the trail to the village and town roads after going through the Frankfort Marina. A suitable west-east road can be found and signed and striped for on road trail use. The trail would continue east on road to a point as yet undetermined in the Village of Ilion where it could return to the railroad ROW or the NIMO ROW.	The condition of this option would depend on the road chosen. The road should be suitable for pedestrian and bicycle travel, with wide shoulders and few cross streets or driveway curb cuts.
Town of Herkimer	
A small section of the Town of Herkimer crosses over to the south side of the canal. The trail will go through this section on the railroad ROW.	The section here is generally overgrown and in old field condition. The ROW will need to be cleared and graded to make it suitable for trail development.
Village of Ilion	
The trail through the village starts at the western border with the Town of Herkimer. At this point the trail proceeds east on railroad ROW to a point where it meets with a Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation (NIMO) ROW. The trail follows this ROW east to Canal Corporation property to the west of the Route 51 bridge over the canal. The trail will go under the bridge, through the Ilion Marina and continue east on village property to the border with the Village of Mohawk.	<p>The NIMO ROW is easily developable for trail. Agreements with NIMO need to be reached for this arrangement to take place. There are several bridges over creeks that are needed east of the Route 51 bridge in order to avoid bringing trail users to the shoulder of Route 5S to make these crossings.</p> <p>Where the trail passes under the Route 51 bridge an engineered retaining wall will be needed to provide the width needed for the trail.</p> <p>The area east of the marina is very overgrown and will require clearing and grading. There is also a state wetland along the proposed route. This wetland needs to be delineated and it is possible that a permit will be required from NYS DEC and Army Corps of Engineers for trail development. Two bridges will be needed for this section between the Ilion Marina and the border with Mohawk.</p>

Village of Mohawk	
<p>The trail will proceed east from the border with Ilion on Village of Mohawk land towards the canal where it will join with Canal Corporation property. The trail continues east on Canal Corporation Property next to the canal and under the Route 5S Bridge. The trail proceeds east on the shoulder of Route 5S until it can connect with Canal Corporation property on the south side of the Canal and continue to the village border.</p>	<p>The trail ROW in this section ranges from open to recently overgrown. A modest amount of clearing and grading will be necessary in the extreme western portion of the village. The land under the Route 5S bridge is already graded for the trail and connects with an abandoned road on the south side of the canal which brings the trail to the shoulder of Route 5S.</p> <p>This shoulder and associated right of way, is wide enough for trail development and will require signage, grading and paving.</p> <p>The Canal Corporation property lies between residences and the canal. This land will require clearing and grading and paving.</p>
Town of German Flats	
<p>The trail continues from the western town border along the south side of the canal to a planned town park surrounding the historic church on Route 5S. The trail will then proceed south from the canal, cross the road and along the edge of the NYS Thruway ROW to an existing Railroad ROW. At this point the trail will proceed east on the ROW to the border with the Town of Herkimer. This is the route preferred by the Town of German Flats.</p>	<p>The land on the south side of the canal will require extensive grading and clearing for trail development. Additionally, because the proposed would pass close to residences in some sections of the trail it may be necessary to plant buffer zones.</p> <p>The land for the Town Park by the Historic Church is as yet undeveloped. This park will become an important feature of the trail in this area and will require extensive development by the town to make it viable. The section along the railroad ROW will need grading and clearing and paving.</p>
Town of German Flats Option 2	
<p>A route that must be considered as an option is a route that was defined by the region DOT office. This route would follow an abandoned railroad ROW east of the Village of Mohawk. The route between the trail on the Canal Corporation land and this route is as yet undetermined. The trail would stay on the ROW through the Town of German Flats to the border with the Town of Herkimer.</p>	<p>The condition of the ROW in this section is very conducive to trail development. A minimal amount of grading and no clearing would be needed. However, the trail does not relate to the canal in any way and this route would bring the trail far from the scenic resources of the canal and the historic resources of the park and church in the Town of German Flats.</p>



Constraints

Bridges

Five bridges are needed to complete this section of the trail. The alternative would be to bring the trail to the shoulder of a nearby road (usually route 5S), cross the creek on the shoulder and return to the trail alignment. This option is not possible in all five creek crossings due to ownership issues. Additionally, the local trail committee in Ilion has determined that this would not be a safe alternative due to the nature of route 5S.

These bridges will significantly increase the cost of the trail in this section. Immediate action is necessary in order to apply for funding under the first round (1999) of the TEA-21. Inquiries should be made to the regional DOT as to the availability of bridges that have been removed in other parts of the region or state.

Prefabricated pedestrian bridges will probably be the most cost-effective solution to these creek crossings. Past experience with these types of installations indicate that the required specifications should be obtained from the Department of Transportation before obtaining cost estimates.

Wetlands

The section of the trail between the Ilion Marina and the border with the Village of Mohawk passes in the vicinity of two wetlands defined as state wetlands. These wetlands need to be delineated in order to determine whether the trail passes through them, within the buffer zone or does not affect them at all. At the time of this writing the regional Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) office has provided an application for a request that they delineate the wetland. After this is accomplished and the proximity of the proposed trail route to the wetland is determined the appropriate action will be taken. If the trail goes through the wetland or within the buffer zone a permit for this construction will be necessary. It may also be necessary to apply for an Army Corps of Engineers permit. The presence of other, non-state regulated wetlands will determine this.

NYP&A has initiated discussions with the DEC at the state level to make it possible that a state-wide wetlands permit be issued for the Canalway Trail as a whole. These discussions are at very preliminary as of the date of this report, but it may be possible that a permit for all wetland crossings in the entire route to be issued by Spring of 1999. This would eliminate the need for many individual permits being applied for and administered. Similar discussions with ACOE have not taken place, however ACOE is considering administering all canal related permits out of one office for NYS rather than the present situation in which ACOE administers canal permits out of both NYS offices. This change of administration would help consolidate and coordinate ACOE permitting.

Cost Estimates

The standard cost estimates being used by NYS Canal Corporation for the Canalway Trail at this date are \$70,000 - \$80,000 per mile for stone dust surfacing and \$110,000-\$125,000 for asphalt surfacing. Either surface would be appropriate in this area. The stone dust surface encourages slightly slower bicycling than the asphalt surface and requires more maintenance after installation. The maintenance costs should be considered if there is no volunteer group in the area to help with these tasks.

The five bridges that are needed will add significant cost to this segment of the trail. Final cost estimating on these structures can only be made after design. A preliminary cost estimate, based on similar structures elsewhere in New York State would put the cost at approximately \$175,000 each. The engineering costs would be an additional \$30,000-\$35,000 assuming that the bridges are almost identical and the prefabricated bridges are used.

If Option 1 is taken along the streets in the Village and Town of Frankfort some cost is saved. This is because only striping and signage would be needed rather than grading, clearing and paving.

Option 2 through the Town of German Flats would also be less expensive than the proposed trail route because preparation of the trail bed on the railroad ROW is simpler. This cost is not estimated below but approximately 10% could be saved for every mile on the ROW in this option.

The cost of developing more intricate landscaped areas along the canal in the Town of German Flats is not estimated here because any cost estimate of this sort of project can only come after preliminary designs had been made.

The following tables incorporate the above estimates and add in costs of surveys, signage and contingencies. The totals have been rounded up to reflect these additions.

Route As Proposed				
Item	Cost	Unit	Amount	Sub Total
Asphalt Surfaced Trail	\$125,000.00	mile	9.25	\$1,156,250.00
Stone Dust Surfaced Trail	\$80,000.00	mile	9.25	\$740,000.00
Five Bridges (including design)	\$210,000.00	each	5	\$1,050,000.00
Signage	\$7,000.00	mile	9.25	\$64,750.00
Striping Streets for Bike Lane	\$5,000.00	mile	0.75	\$3,750.00
Total for Asphalt Trail	Corrected to include contingencies and rounded up to the nearest 1/4 million			\$2,500,000.00
Total for Stonedust Trail				\$2,000,000.00
Option 1 (On streets in the Village and Town of Frankfort)				
Item	Cost	Unit	Amount	Sub Total
Asphalt Surfaced Trail	\$125,000.00	mile	8	\$1,000,000.00
Stone Dust Surfaced Trail	\$80,000.00	mile	8	\$640,000.00
Five Bridges (including design)	\$210,000.00	each	5	\$1,050,000.00
Signage	\$7,000.00	mile	9.25	\$64,750.00
Striping Streets for Bike Lane	\$5,000.00	mile	1.25	\$6,250.00
Total for Asphalt Trail	Corrected to include contingencies and rounded up to the nearest 1/4 million			\$2,250,000.00
Total for Stonedust Trail				\$2,000,000.00

Key Needs and Opportunities

The priorities and steps listed below should be followed so that the trail can be designed and built as quickly as possible. Because of the constraints involved it is most important that these tasks be dealt with in a chronologically logical manner so that information they will provide will promote trail development.

Wetland Delineation

The wetlands (both DEC and ACOE regulated) should be delineated and surveyed as soon as possible. The DEC wetlands will be delineated by DEC in the field but it will still be the responsibility of the land owners or municipalities to survey the delineation. The ACOE should be contacted as soon as possible to determine the method for delineating those wetlands under ACOE regulation.

Property Line Survey

The Canal Corporation and all municipalities involved should provide surveys of their property lines and mark these lines in the field. These surveys can be combined with the topographic survey and is also essential to insure that the trail is routed solely on Canal Corporation Property.

Volunteer Organization

One of the first needs in this area would be to expand the existing village trail committees to one regional committee that will help support trail development along the entire trail section rather than in any one municipal division. It is important to maintain each village and town's control over its own property and at the same time construct a vision for the section as a whole. This group would be made of a mix of representatives from the businesses, municipal and county officials, and community residents. Participants for this group should be actively recruited and meetings should start as soon as possible. The Ilion Canalway Trail Committee has begun to reach a wider constituency by agreeing to work with the Town of German Flats and a local snowmobiling club.

During routing and development the committee could participate in trail clearing and construction activities. The committee could recruit volunteers and businesses willing to donate time, money and materials to the development of the trail. The committee could also be active in encouraging trail development and helping to overcome impediments.

This group could also be active after the trail is constructed by becoming part of a statewide "Friends of the Canalway Trail" organization. This involvement would mean participating in maintenance of the local trail under the auspices of the statewide organization as well as organizing and administering local trail events and initiatives, which would enhance the economic benefits of the trail.