April 6, 2015

Michael Franchini
Executive Director
Capital District Transportation Committee
One Park Place
Albany, New York 12205

Dear Mr. Franchini:

Over the past several years, CDTC has shown a true commitment to active transportation through its New Visions plans and programming. Parks & Trails New York, as the leading statewide advocate for trails and greenways, would like to commend this commitment and acknowledge the positive impact these projects have had on the residents of the Capital District. Based on the content of the White Paper Recommendations, it appears that much of this focus will remain in the New Visions 2040 update.

Parks & Trails New York is pleased to see the following recommendations included in the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee White Paper and we hope that they will also be included in the 2040 update.

1. **Develop a bicycle and pedestrian priority matrix to help prioritize projects that have the greatest potential impact on New Visions goals**. As demand for active transportation infrastructure increases and the amount of funding available for these projects decreases it will be important to have an objective way to measure the impact of specific projects. PTNY, along with our New Yorkers for Active Transportation (NY4AT) coalition partners, New York Bicycle Coalition (NYBC) and Tri-State Transportation Campaign (TSTC), has been advocating for dedicated funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects. This advocacy work stems from our organizations' commitment to increasing the bikeability and walkability of our communities, which can significantly reduce our auto-dependence, limit sprawl, and reduce health costs associated with obesity and diabetes.

2. **Measure the economic impacts of bicycling, walking, and transit infrastructure in the Capital District.** The economic impact of bicycling cannot be understated. Last fall, PTNY released the report, *The Economic Impact of the Erie Canalway Trail*, to demonstrate this fact. According to the study, more than 200,000 visits are made each year to the section of the Erie Canalway Trail (Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail) in Albany alone. The entire trail generates more than $253 million in sales, 3,440

jobs, $78 million in labor income, and $28.5 million in taxes for the Upstate economy each year. While our study may have only disclosed a specific trail's economic impact, many studies also show how bicycle infrastructure positively effects local economies.

3. Find local project champions, especially to help garner support to close gaps in regional bicycle and pedestrian networks, like trails. Since 2010, Parks & Trails New York, along with the Canalway Trails Association New York has been working on a "Closing the Gaps" campaign for the Erie Canalway Trail, a 360-mile trail extending from Albany to Buffalo. During this time, we have been able to successfully close more than 32 miles of gaps and now more than 281 miles, or 78%, of the Erie Canalway Trail is an off-road trail. The Capital District includes several gaps in the Erie Canalway Trail, including two miles in Rotterdam and three miles in Green Island and Watervliet. PTNY's track record in closing gaps similar to these demonstrates the value of working with project champions to enhance trail networks.

4. Research and establish a program managed by CDTC to leverage dollars by coordinating group purchases for amenities such as bike racks, signage, and materials for pavement markings for pedestrians and/or bicyclists. Provision of appropriate bicycling facilities, such as bike racks, signage, and pavement markings, encourages a broader range of people to bike more often, both for recreation and transportation purposes. These facilities create perceptions of safety and accessibility, and also contribute to more inviting streetscapes and public spaces. Bicycle infrastructure is a method of addressing "last mile" concerns, where potential bicyclists are discouraged from accessing transportation networks including public transportation because of a lack of local facilities. These measures can have a similarly positive impact on trail ridership, as users feel more comfortable accessing multi-use trails via the street network when cycling infrastructure is in place.

5. Research the feasibility of and potential fund source(s) of a regional revolving loan fund specifically for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure projects and
6. Recommend funds be carved out in the New York State Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) specifically for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and education projects. The percent of all traffic fatalities in New York State that are pedestrians and bicyclists is trending in the wrong direction – it has increased from 27% to 29% – yet we're only spending around 2% of our transportation dollars on the safety of these vulnerable users of our roads. As previously mentioned, PTNY advocates for dedicated state funds for bicycle and pedestrian projects. Increasing access to funding for Capital District projects through a revolving loan fund and/or including new funding in the CFA process would increase bicycle and pedestrian safety and accessibility in the region. Including funding in the CFA process would encourage Regional Economic Development Councils to revise their Economic Development plans so that healthy, safe, bike-ped projects that encourage increased physical activity are recognized as important to lowering health care costs, state and local taxes, and increasing worker productivity.

7. **Complete trail and greenway projects.** Trail and greenway projects, while they provide recreation and transportation opportunities for users, also provide substantial economic benefits to local communities. To see these benefits, look no further than the aforementioned study analyzing the economic impact of the Erie Canalway Trail on the more than 200 municipalities located along the trail. To maximize the full potential benefit these projects can provide, however, we need to ensure that safe and complete access to trails is available. For example, connecting the soon-to-be-completed Albany County Rail Trail to the Corning Preserve would not only provide safe access to Downtown Albany, but can extend access and the associated economic benefits of the Erie Canalway Trail in the Capital District.

While Parks & Trails New York applauds the preceding recommendations for the New Visions 2040 update, we feel it does fall short in one important respect. The Erie Canalway Trail, as you have already learned, is a proven economic generator for Upstate New York tourism. To fully realize how substantial the Trail's economic impact can be, we must close the remaining gaps. CDTC's jurisdiction contains two important gaps in the trail: three miles from Watervliet to Green Island and two miles in Rotterdam. The availability of funding is an issue for these gaps. **We strongly suggest that the New Visions 2040 update include a specific recommendation to close these gaps.** In addition to their recreational benefit, closing these gaps can also increase the transportation benefit of the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail and the Corning Preserve Trail sections of the Erie Canalway Trail.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the New Visions 2040 update.

Sincerely,

Robin Dropkin
Executive Director