

Closing the Gaps:

A Progress Report on the
Erie Canalway Trail 2014

PREPARED BY:

PARKS & TRAILS NEW YORK
IN COLLABORATION WITH
CANALWAY TRAILS ASSOCIATION NEW YORK



Executive Summary

Extending 360 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 14 counties where the trail is located. With 281 miles now open to the public, the Erie Canalway Trail is 78% complete and on its way to becoming the longest, continuous intrastate multi-use trail in the nation as well as a world-class destination for cyclists and other outdoor enthusiasts. However, the Canalway Trail can neither realize its full potential as an internationally known tourism destination nor offer maximum economic and quality of life benefits to the more than 200 communities along its length until it is finished from Buffalo to Albany as a continuous off-road trail.

Since the “Closing the Gaps” campaign was launched in 2010 by Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) and the Canalway Trails Association New York (CTANY) in conjunction with Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, interest in completing the Erie Canalway Trail among citizens, community leaders, and local, state, and federal government officials continues unabated. As a result, significant progress is now being made on closing the gaps in the Erie Canalway Trail. Under Governor Andrew Cuomo’s administration, more than 32 miles of trail have been rehabilitated, or constructed or are planned or under construction.

In 2014 alone:

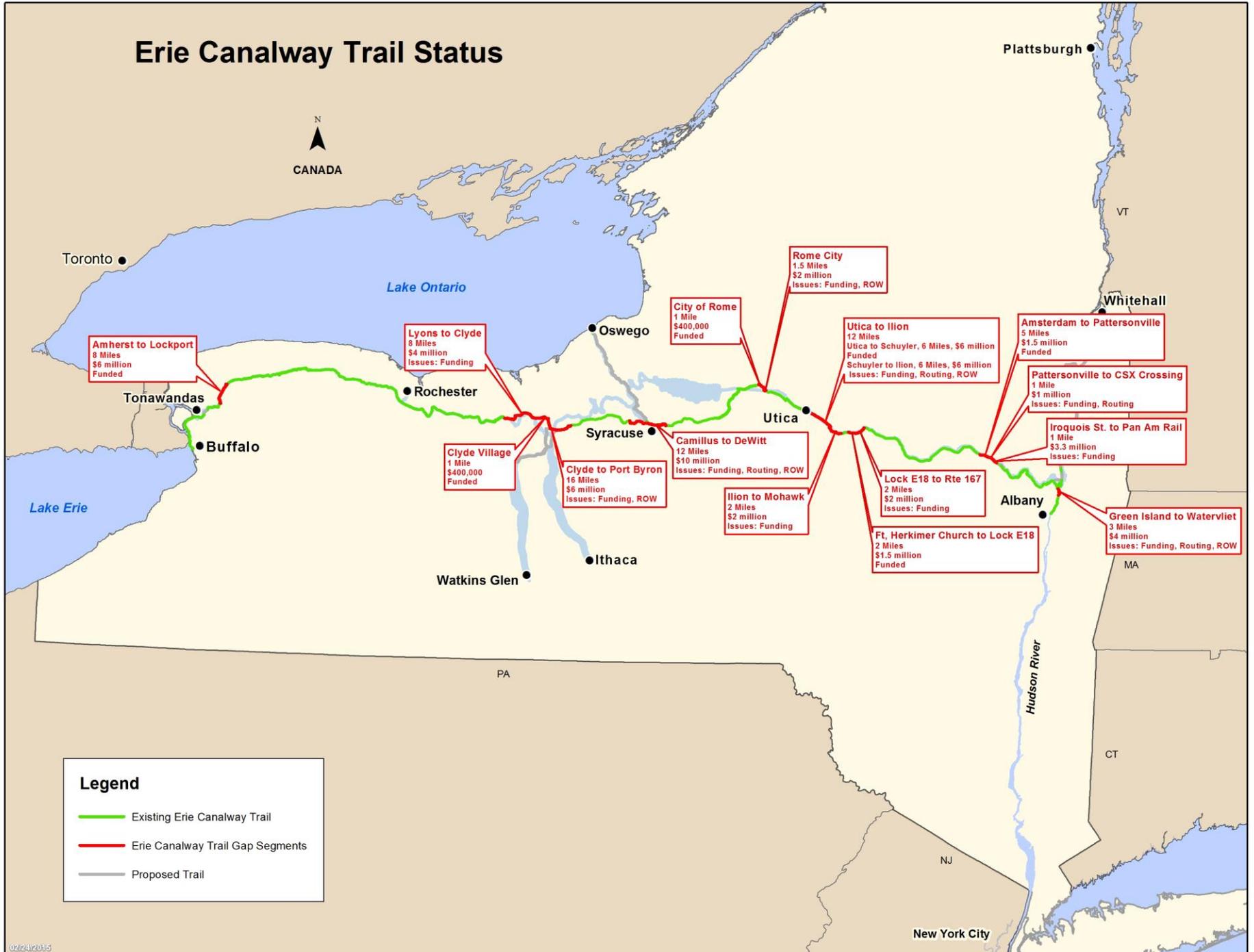
- **The NYS Canal Corporation completed three miles of new trail in the City of Rome in Oneida County.**
- **Work began on the eight-mile gap between Amherst and Lockport in western New York.** A contractor was selected by the NYS Canal Corporation and construction will begin in early 2015 on five miles of new trail to address most of the eight-mile gap between Amherst and Lockport. The remaining three miles of trail are under design. When the gap is complete, it will result in more than 130 miles of continuous off-road trail in western New York.

Funding was awarded for nine miles of new trail in Wayne, Herkimer, and Montgomery Counties. Funding awards from the federal Transportation Enhancements and Transportation Alternatives Programs will be used to construct three new trail segments: one mile in the

Wayne County Village of Clyde, two miles in the Town of German Flatts in Herkimer County, and six miles between South Amsterdam and Pattersonville in Montgomery County.

There still is much work to do: 79 miles of Erie Canalway Trail are unfinished. For twenty-four of those miles there is an identified source of funding and work is programmed to start within the next three years. For an additional 55 miles of trail, an estimated \$40.3 million in funding is needed for corridor purchase and/or design and construction. However, by taking advantage of opportunities such as the state's Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) grants program and ensuring a strong commitment to closing the gaps among all levels of government, it may be possible to have the entire 79 miles of trail under construction or in design by the 2017 bicentennial of the start of construction of the original Erie Canal.

Erie Canalway Trail Status



Legend

- Existing Erie Canalway Trail
- Erie Canalway Trail Gap Segments
- Proposed Trail

Amherst to Lockport
 3 Miles
 \$6 million
 Funded

Lyons to Clyde
 8 Miles
 \$4 million
 Issues: Funding

Clyde Village
 1 Mile
 \$400,000
 Funded

Clyde to Port Byron
 16 Miles
 \$6 million
 Issues: Funding, ROW

City of Rome
 1 Mile
 \$400,000
 Funded

Camillus to DeWitt
 12 Miles
 \$10 million
 Issues: Funding, Routing, ROW

Ilion to Mohawk
 2 Miles
 \$2 million
 Issues: Funding

Rome City
 1.5 Miles
 \$2 million
 Issues: Funding, ROW

Utica to Ilion
 12 Miles
 Utica to Schuyler, 6 Miles, \$6 million
 Funded
 Schuyler to Ilion, 6 Miles, \$6 million
 Issues: Funding, Routing, ROW

Lock E18 to Rte 167
 2 Miles
 \$2 million
 Issues: Funding

Ft. Herkimer Church to Lock E18
 2 Miles
 \$1.5 million
 Funded

Amsterdam to Pattersonville
 5 Miles
 \$1.5 million
 Funded

Pattersonville to CSX Crossing
 1 Mile
 \$1 million
 Issues: Funding, Routing

Iroquois St. to Pan Am Rail
 1 Mile
 \$3.3 million
 Issues: Funding

Green Island to Watervliet
 3 Miles
 \$4 million
 Issues: Funding, Routing, ROW

Trail Gaps with Identified Funding Source

LOCATION	LENGTH	ISSUES	STATUS	IMPACT	ESTIMATED COST	TIMELINE
Amherst to Lockport	8		Funding secure for five miles, construction to begin in 2015. Remaining three miles under design.	~130 miles of continuous trail from Buffalo to Lyons	\$6 million	5 miles – 2015 3 miles - 2016
Village of Clyde	1		2014- TAP funding for one mile of trail east of Route 414	Helps complete the trail gap in eastern Wayne County	\$400,000	2016
Rome	1		2011 - Canal grant funding	50 miles of continuous trail between Dewitt and Utica	\$400,000	Three miles complete 2014 One mile work to begin 2015
Utica-Schuyler	6		Final Design Report & Advance Detail Plans complete	Extends the trail in eastern Oneida County	\$6 million	2018
Fort Herkimer Church to Lock 18	2		2014 - TAP funding	Helps compete the gap between Little Falls and Mohawk	\$1.5 million	2016
Amsterdam to Pattersonville	6		2014- TEP funding	Extends the trail in eastern Montgomery County and helps complete the gap between Amsterdam and Rotterdam Junction	\$1.5 million	2016
TOTAL	24				\$15.8million	

Trail Gaps without a Funding Source

LOCATION	LENGTH	ISSUES	STATUS	IMPACT	EST. COST	TIMELINE
Lyons to Clyde	8	Funding	Final Design Report and Final Plans Complete	~140 miles of continuous trail from Buffalo to Clyde	\$4 million	Not Programmed
Clyde to Port Byron	16	Funding, Route, ROW	Concept Planning	180 miles of continuous trail from Buffalo to Camillus	\$6 million	Not Programmed
Camillus to DeWitt	14	Funding; Determining route/corridor through the City of Syracuse, Towns of Camillus, Geddes (Village of Solvay) and DeWitt that is off-road to the extent possible	Short-term on-road route study completed; City of Syracuse awarded 2014 Canal grant to install on-road trail direction signs 2014-Town of Dewitt LWRP grant to plan route	Connects trail through Syracuse; Will aim to remove route from streets as much as possible	~\$10 million (range of \$5 to \$20+ million)	Not Programmed Interim on-road route signage (hoping to be posted in 2015); Long-term Syracuse gap route study to be complete 2015
Rome	1	Funding, ROW	Concept Planning	Critical gap will link over 55 miles of continuous trail from Utica to Dewitt	\$2 million	Not Programmed
Schuyler-Ilion	6	Funding, Route, ROW, wetlands, cross CSX line	Final Design Report complete	Extends trail in Oneida and Herkimer Counties	\$6 million	Not Programmed
Ilion-Mohawk	2	Funding	Final Design Report & Final Plans complete	Extends the trail in Herkimer County	\$2 million	Not Programmed
Lock 18 to Little Falls Route 167	2	Funding	Final Design Report & Final Plans Complete	Critical gap will link over 50 miles of continuous trail in Montgomery and Herkimer Counties	\$2 million	Not Programmed
Pattersonville to CSX Rail crossing	1	ROW, Funding	Concept Planning	Helps complete gap in western Schenectady County	\$1 million	Not Programmed

LOCATION	LENGTH	ISSUES	STATUS	IMPACT	EST. COST	TIMELINE
Iroquois Street to Pan Am Rail	1	Funding	CFA funding \$150,000	Links trail in Capital District and Mohawk Valley	\$3.3 million	Not Programmed
Cohoes-Green Island-Watervliet	4	Funding, route, ROW, local support	Inactive	Connect Niskayuna/Colonie to Corning Preserve in Albany	\$4 million	Not Programmed
TOTAL	55				\$40.3 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 78% complete as an off-road path primarily paralleling the current or historic route of the canal. When finished, it will not only bring additional economic, public health, tourism, active transportation, and quality of life benefits to more than 3.7 million New Yorkers living within the 14 counties where the trail is located, but it will also become a premier international tourist destination for cyclists and other outdoor enthusiasts.

In 2014, PTNY released the first comprehensive study of the Erie Canalway Trail visitor, *The Economic Impact of the Erie Canalway Trail: An Assessment and User Profile of New York's Longest Multi-use Trail*. The study, which was funded in-part through grants from the New York State Canal Corporation and the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, demonstrated that presently the trail receives an annual trail traffic volume of more than 1.58 million visits per year, which generates an economic impact of approximately \$253 million and supports 3,440 jobs in the local economies within the trail corridor.



Cyclists rest along the Erie Canalway Trail in Camillus.

However, as demonstrated by a recent study conducted after completion of a long-standing gap in Durham, NC's American Tobacco Trail, for the Erie Canalway Trail to achieve its full potential for visitors and residents, it is essential that it be complete. In the case of the American Tobacco Trail, research conducted by the Institute for Transportation Research and Education found that after construction of a bridge joining the northern and southern segments of the 22-mile trail, annual trail usage increased by 133% and persons visiting the trail spent an additional \$3.7 million on goods and services per year, an increase of 154%.¹

¹ Cook, Thomas J., Sarah Worth O'Brien, Kristy N. Jackson, Sarah Searcy, Daniel J. Findley, *Behavioral Effects of Completing a Critical Link in the American Tobacco Trail: A Look at Impacts on Health, Transportation and the Economy*, Institute for Transportation Research and Education, Durham, NC, 2014. <http://www.itre.ncsu.edu/Public/bikeped.html>

In order to focus attention on the need to complete the remaining 79 miles of trail, 55 of which have right of way issues and/ or no identified source for the estimated \$40.3 million needed, Parks & Trails New York (PTNY), in collaboration with the Canalway Trails Association New York (CTANY), has prepared this fifth annual report. It is hoped that the report will update canal corridor communities and national, state, and local decision makers on recent progress and current trail status as well as underscore the need for the resources and political support to ensure the Erie Canalway Trail is quickly finished.

ERIE CANALWAY TRAIL CURRENT STATUS

2014 Accomplishments

Trail completion

- **City of Rome – 3 miles**

The NYS Canal Corporation completed approximately three miles of trail in the City of Rome in Oneida County between the Gryzniec Field parking area and the trailhead at Rome-Oriskany Road in Stanwix. The project was funded by the 2005 NYS Transportation Bond Act.



Newly-constructed Erie Canalway Trail segment in Rome.

Trail construction

- **Amherst to Lockport - 8 miles**

Bids were received and a contractor selected by the NYS Canal Corporation for construction of five miles of new trail within the eight-mile gap segment of Erie Canalway Trail between Amherst and Lockport in western New York. Construction will begin in 2015.

Design is ongoing for the remaining three miles of trail. Construction of this segment is anticipated to begin in 2016.

The project, which is being developed with NYS Canal Corporation funds, will include a 10-foot wide asphalt trail between the Amherst Museum in Erie County and Prospect Street in the Niagara County City of Lockport. It will also include a pedestrian bridge over Tonawanda Creek, trailhead parking, and information signs. Directional signage will be provided to establish an on-street link from Prospect Street to Erie Canal Locks 34 and 35.

When complete, this project will close one of the key gaps in the trail and create more than 130 continuous miles of trail between the City of Buffalo in Erie County and the Village of Lyons in Wayne County.

- **City of Rome – 1 mile**

Construction is ready to begin in 2015 on an additional mile of off-road trail between Old Erie Canal State Park and North Charles Street. The work, which will be funded by a 2011 \$50,000 CFA Canal grant, will involve rehabilitation of an existing section of Old Erie Canal towpath.

2014 Funding awards

- **NYS Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) Grants**

- The City of Syracuse received a \$45,000 Canal grant to install on-road trail directional signs for the Erie Canalway Trail. The effort is based on the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC)'s *Erie Canalway Trail - Syracuse Connector Route Project Part One* which developed a preferred route with suggested on-road bike treatments and pedestrian options based on extensive public input and examination of existing routes.
- The Town of DeWitt received \$124,000 in Department of State Local Waterfront Revitalization funds to plan for its waterfront along the NYS Canal System. Work will include planning for construction of a segment of the Erie Canalway Trail that would close a section of the trail gap between DeWitt and Camillus.
- The Town of Rotterdam was awarded a \$150,000 CFA Canal grant toward the \$3.3 million cost for a 105-foot trail tunnel under the CP Railway that will eliminate a critical gap in the Erie Canalway Trail. This project may also receive New York Rising funds as it will address other issues that have long contributed to flooding at this location.

- **Federal Transportation Enhancement and Transportation Alternatives Programs**

Federal Transportation Enhancements or Transportation Alternatives Program awards totaling \$2,245,072 will fund construction of three new trail segments: one mile in the Wayne County Village of Clyde; two miles in the Town of German Flatts in Herkimer County, six miles between South Amsterdam and Pattersonville in Montgomery County.

Definition of a trail route

City of Syracuse

The Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) continued work on Part Two of the *Erie Canalway Trail - Syracuse Connector Route Project* on behalf of the City of Syracuse in order to gather feedback on possible long-term, primarily off-road routes for the trail through the city.

Identification in regional economic development plans

- **Mohawk Valley**

Completion of the Erie Canalway Trail from Rome to Amsterdam was identified in the Mohawk Valley Regional Economic Development Council's 2011 Strategic Plan as a key regional initiative that would unify and establish a new identity for the region, build an innovation economy, and make its waterfront areas attractive gathering points. The Council's desire to establish a regional source of funds to address waterfront development, connectivity and the Canalway Trail are elements of this effort.

The plan proposes an investment of \$25.5 million, to be funded as a State project through NYSDOT or through other financing measures (e.g., fractional increase in statewide bed tax, or proceeds from gaming receipts to support key investments to boost the state's tourism attractions).²

- **Lyons to Port Byron**

The Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council identified extension of the Erie Canalway Trail between Lyons and Port Byron as a priority project consistent with the strategic goals that the council will, when appropriate, pursue and develop over the next five years.³

² Mohawk Valley Regional Economic Development Council, Strategic Plan 2011, p. 77.

³ New York Open for Business, Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council, Accelerating Our Transformation Strategic Plan, November 14, 2011, p.46.

Local support

- **“Closing the Gaps” continues to garner corridor-wide recognition and support**

A growing number of elected officials, businesses owners, and Canalway Trail community residents are using the term “Closing the Gaps” while noting that completion of the trail is vital to their economic interests. Continued media attention has helped more people appreciate how completing the Canalway Trail can improve the state’s economy, tourism appeal, and quality of life.

- **Canalway Trail communities awarded state grants to further community revitalization and tourism promotion**

The 2014 Regional Economic Development Council grants demonstrate that Erie Canalway Trail villages and towns are keenly interested in enhancing the Erie Canalway Trail visitor experience and seeking funds to achieve that result. A number of this year’s awards will fund creation of new facilities for Canalway Trail visitors, develop connecting trails, rehabilitate buildings, and revitalize many of the corridor’s historic downtowns. Tourism promotion agencies were also awarded funds for additional efforts to attract additional visitors to the region.

Ongoing Challenges to Closing the Gaps

Since the NYS Canal Corporation assumed responsibility for much of the trail corridor in 1995 and began implementing the Canal Recreationway Plan, more than 200 miles of Erie Canalway Trail have been built, resulting in 281 of the trail's 360 miles now open to the public. However, several factors continue to contribute to a delay in closing the remaining gaps.

Funding

An estimated \$40.3 million in funding is needed for corridor purchase and/or design and construction to complete the 55 miles of trail contained in the remaining unfunded gaps. For some gaps, such as the 105-foot trail tunnel needed under the CP Railway at Scrafford Lane in the Town of Rotterdam, the two miles of trail between Lock 18 and Route 167 in Little Falls, and the two miles of trail between Illion and Mohawk, construction funding is the *only* barrier to moving forward. There are two major issues affecting funding.

- **Uncertain federal funding for bicycle and pedestrian programs**

Funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects was reduced by about 30 percent in the most recent federal transportation bill, MAP-21. New federal transportation legislation must be passed in spring 2015 but it is unclear whether it will contain funding for bicycle and pedestrian programs.

- **Limited recognition in economic development plans**

Only the Mohawk Valley and Finger Lakes regions include completion of the Canalway Trail as a priority in their economic development plans, making it harder for local governments and nonprofits in other regions to be competitive when applying for projects that could enhance the trail or close minor gaps. While local governments recognize the importance of completing the trail and enhancing its appeal to tourists, they can take fuller advantage of funds from the CFA grant program for Canalway Trail projects.

Trail Gaps without a Funding Source

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Right of way

- **No defined corridor or route**

Over the years, parts of the canal have been relocated and the historic canal and towpath have been lost to other development. Publicly-owned abandoned rail lines offer the best possible alternative off-road routes. However, in several locations no such alternatives exist: between Schuyler and the Village of Frankfort and through Green Island. In these places it will be necessary to acquire right-of-way, utilize utility or highway corridors, or establish safe on-road routes.

- **Utility reluctance to enter into long-term agreements.**

Federal funding cannot be obtained to develop trail unless the land is secured with at least a twenty-five year lease or easement. There are former rail corridors, now owned by utilities, that could be used to close some of the remaining gaps, but they are essentially unavailable because of the utility's reluctance to grant leases of that term length. Legislation should be considered that would extend liability protection for recreational use to landowners of railroad and utility corridors as in other states such as Massachusetts.

Focus for 2015

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, PTNY, in collaboration with CTANY, will continue to vigorously advocate for “Closing the Gaps” through the following means:

1. Rally local government and citizen support for “Closing the Gaps” and its ability to attract more tourists, grow local economies and positively impact the health of the region’s residents.
2. Continue to 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.
3. Advocate for local governments and coalitions of communities to submit applications for federal transportation funds and, through the CFA process, state municipal park and Canal and Waterfront Revitalization grant funds in order to build new trail segments in those places where funding is the only barrier to construction.
4. Supply support letters for funding applications that promote completion of gap segments.
5. Foster communications and meetings between the appropriate parties to resolve issues and remove barriers to trail development.
6. Advocate for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure projects to receive \$20 million in state funding in the FY 2015-2016 budget to address the loss in federal transportation funding.

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 multi-use trails reaching into all parts of the state.

As early as the 1960s, some canal communities that had lost most of their commercial canal traffic were seeking new ways to benefit from the canal and 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 NYS Office of Parks and Recreation, today the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP), and the NYS Department of Transportation entered into a formal agreement to jointly develop the 524-mile canal system, encompassing the Erie, Cayuga- Seneca, Oswego, and Champlain Canals, for recreational purposes. Many sections of the Canalway Trail were constructed during the next two decades.

In 1992, the NYS Legislature transferred responsibility for the Canal System to the NYS Thruway Authority and its subsidiary the NYS Canal Corporation and created the NYS Canal Recreationway Commission to advise the Thruway and NYS Canal Corporation on canal-related activities. In 1995 and 1996, respectively, the NYS Canal Corporation adopted the Canal Recreationway Plan and the NYS Canal Revitalization Plan to guide development of the Canal into a recreation system. Among the major recommendations made in the NYS Canal Recreationway Plan was the completion of an end-to-end Canalway Trail along the canal system.

In 2000, the U.S. Congress recognized the national significance of New York's canal system by establishing the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor which includes the Erie, as well as the Cayuga-Seneca, Oswego, and Champlain Canals and their historic alignments. In 2014, the Erie Canal was listed on the National and State Registers of Historic Places.

Since 1995, when the Canal Corporation assumed responsibility for the Canalway Trail and began implementing the Canal Recreationway Plan, more than 200 miles of Erie Canalway Trail have been built. Ownership, maintenance and management of the Erie Canalway Trail are split with the NYS

Canal Corporation, NYS OPRHP, and counties and local municipalities each owning about one-third of the trail corridor.

Erie Canalway Trail Partners

Canalway Trails Association New York (CTANY) is an all-volunteer organization that works both statewide and locally with citizens, state agencies and municipalities to develop the Canalway Trail System 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. www.ptny.org/canalway/ctany.shtml

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 *Cycle the Erie Canal* bike tour, the annual Canal Clean Sweep, and *Bicyclists Bring Business* community roundtables and publications such as *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

New York State Canal Corporation Created by the New York State Legislature in 1992, the New York State Canal Corporation operates, maintains and promotes the 524-mile New York State Canal System, comprised of the Erie, Champlain, Cayuga-Seneca, and Oswego Canals. A world class recreationway and resurgent commercial waterway, the iconic Canal System has been enlarged twice and has been in continuous operation for 190 years. Today, though still used for commercial transportation, New York's Canals are primarily seen as a world-class destination for tourism and recreation, and the Canal System remains vital to many communities, businesses, industries and farming operations for its abundant, reliable and inexpensive supply of water. The Canal Corporation also oversees the development and promotion of the statewide Canalway Trail System and has directed the construction of more than 200 miles of Canalway Trail since 1995. 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.

Local governments play an important role in completing and maintaining the trail in the more than 200 municipalities and 14 counties through which the Erie Canalway Trail passes. About one-third of the Canalway Trail is owned by local governments.