

Closing the Gaps: A Progress Report on the Erie Canalway Trail 2012

Prepared by:

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



Executive Summary

Extending 361 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 277 miles now open to the public, the Erie Canalway Trail is more than 75% complete and on its way to becoming the longest, continuous intrastate multi-use trail in the nation and a premier tourist destination for cyclists and other outdoor enthusiasts.

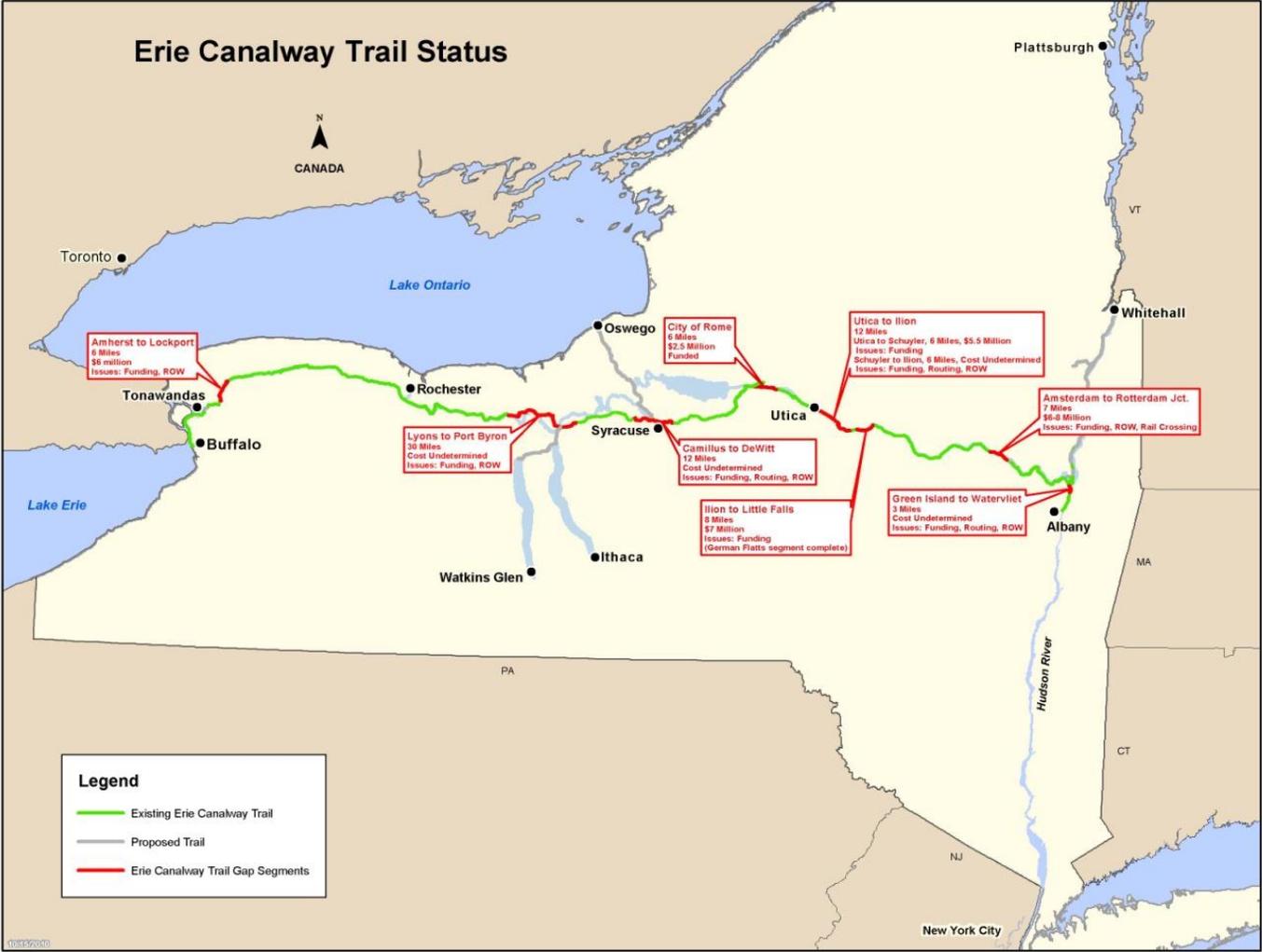
However, the Canalway Trail can neither realize its full potential as a world-class tourism destination nor offer maximum benefit to the more than 200 communities along its length until it is finished from Buffalo to Albany as a continuous off-road trail.

Since Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) and the Canalway Trails Association New York (CTANY) launched their “Closing the Gaps Campaign” in 2010 in conjunction with U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, interest in completing the Erie Canalway Trail among citizens, community leaders, and local, state and federal government officials has reached an all-time high.

- Seven miles of trail are under construction and 14.3 miles of trail will be ready to go out to bid or under construction in 2013. The most significant result of these efforts will be completion of the eight-mile gap between Amherst and Lockport and, in Wayne County, extension of trail six miles further east to Lyons, resulting in more than 134 miles of continuous off-road trail in western New York.
- The Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council is actively working with the public to define a short and long-term route for the trail through the City of Syracuse. The immediate focus of their efforts is the creation of a short-term, on-road, signed route that would accommodate pedestrians and better serve touring cyclists.
- Members of Governor Cuomo’s cabinet and senior staff joined NYS Canal Corporation Director Brian Stratton and Canal Corporation officials as “Team New York,” participating with 500 persons from around the nation and the world in riding the Erie Canalway Trail from Buffalo to Albany as part of PTNY’s 14th annual eight-day *Cycling the Erie Canal* event.

CTANY and PTNY will continue to vigorously advocate to “Close the Gaps” in the Erie Canalway Trail so that the full quality of life, economic, and health and tourism benefits of the trail can be

realized. There still is much work to do: 84 miles of trail are still unfinished, federal transportation funding for trails has shrunk, budgets are tight at all levels of government, and, in several locations, right-of-way issues still present challenges to defining or developing a trail route.



Summary of Trail Gaps

Location	Length (mi.)	Issues/Status	Impact	Est. Cost	Timeline
Amherst to Lockport	8	Funding, ROW Final design report & advance detail plans complete	~134 miles of continuous trail from Buffalo to Lyons	\$4.6 million	2013 WORK TO BEGIN
Lyons to Port Byron	24	Funding, route, ROW	~180 miles of continuous trail from Buffalo to Camillus	\$6.2 million	
Camillus to DeWitt	14	Funding, route/corridor through the City of Syracuse STUDY UNDERWAY	Connects trail through Syracuse; removes route from streets	\$ 4.1 million	2014 STUDY COMPLETED
Rome	5	Design being finalized; 2005 Bond Act and Canal Greenway grant funding	50 miles of continuous trail between Dewitt and Utica	\$3 million	2013 WORK TO BEGIN
Utica to Little Falls	20	Funding, ROW, wetlands, cross CSX line	~50 miles of 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	2013 1 MILE IN LITTLE FALLS TO BE COMPLETED

Location	Length (mi.)	Issues/Status	Impact	Est. Cost	Timeline
Amsterdam to Rotterdam Junction	8	Funding, including bridge rehabs; ROW; cross Pan-American RR line; westernmost part only needs fundig	Connects completed sections on either side	\$7 million	AWAITING AVAILABLE FUNDING SOURCE
Cohoes-Green Island-Watervliet	5	Funding, route, ROW, local support	Connect Niskayuna/Colonie to Corning Preserve in Albany	Undetermined	
TOTAL	84			\$38 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 more than 75% complete as an off-road path primarily paralleling the current or historic route of the canal. When finished, it will not only bring important 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 also 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 remaining miles of trail, the Canalway Trails Association New York (CTANY), in collaboration with Parks & Trails New York (PTNY), has prepared this third annual report to update canal corridor communities on recent progress and the current trail status and underscore the need for the resources and political support necessary to ensure the Erie Canalway Trail is quickly finished.

2012 Accomplishments

Trail construction

Great progress was made in 2012. Construction began on seven miles of trail and it was announced that bids will be let and/or construction begin on 14.3 additional miles of trail in 2013. The eight-mile Amherst to Lockport project will close one of the six key gaps in the trail and, when combined with the

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

work underway between Newark and Lyons in Wayne County, will create more than 134 continuous miles of trail between the City of Buffalo in Erie County and the Village of Lyons in Wayne County.

- **Amherst to Lockport - 8 miles**

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo announced in July that a new eight-mile segment of Erie Canalway Trail will go out to bid in 2013. Construction will begin in late 2013 and the trail will open to the public in the fall of 2014.

The project will include a 10-foot wide asphalt trail between the Amherst Museum and Prospect Street in Lockport, 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.

- **Newark to Lyons – 6 miles**

Construction is almost complete on five miles of trail between Newark and Lyons in Wayne County, funded primarily with federal Transportation Enhancement Program monies. The project is a joint effort of the NYS Canal Corporation, Village of Newark, and towns of Arcadia and Lyons. Formal opening of the trail should take place in the spring of 2013.

In 2012, construction also began on one additional mile of new 10-foot wide asphalt trail and an informational kiosk and directional signage in the Village of Lyons between Abbey Park and Erie Canal Lock 27. The project was funded by the NYS Canal Corporation in partnership with Wayne County and the Village of Lyons.

- **City of Rome – 5 miles**

The NYS Canal Corporation is finalizing the design for approximately three miles of trail in the Oneida County 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 bid in 2013 with completion to occur in 2014.

The City of Rome was awarded a 2011 \$50,000 Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) Canal Greenway grant to construct an additional two miles of on- and off-road trail between Old Erie Canal State Park and the Gryziec Field parking area. Completion of this trail section

in 2013, along with the three-mile section already under development within the City of Rome, will result in more than 50 miles of continuous trail between the Onondaga County town of Dewitt and the City of Utica.

- **City of Little Falls – 1 mile**

Construction began on a one-mile segment of new asphalt trail in the City of Little Falls in Herkimer County. When complete it will result in 40 miles of continuous trail from Little Falls to Amsterdam. The project, which also includes a small bridge and directional signage, is being undertaken with Canal Corporation funds in partnership with the state Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, Herkimer County, and the City of Little Falls.

- **City of Schenectady – 1.3 miles**

Schenectady County began to prepare for 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. Design will begin in 2013 with construction planned for 2014. When complete, almost all the trail will be safely off-road within the city limits. The project is funded in part by a \$140,000 2011 CFA Canal Greenway Grant.

Definition of a trail route

- **City of Syracuse**

As part of its 2011-2012 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) began the *Erie Canalway Trail - Syracuse Connector Routes* study. A working group of interested agencies was formed and a public meeting held to solicit input on where to locate the Erie Canalway Trail through the City of Syracuse.

Initial survey findings from those that attended the public meeting indicate that respondents felt the most important condition for an urban section of the Erie Canalway Trail was to follow the historic route of the Erie Canal through Syracuse. Next, was an off-road route (as much as is feasible, including portions of existing off-road routes), followed by a route with easy access to cultural sites, activities, food and services.

In November, the project working group reviewed the routes suggested at the July public meeting and focused on adjustments and outright changes to the existing on-road, unsigned route currently utilized by cyclists during the *Cycling the Erie Canal* bike tour. Once this short-term route is finalized, it will be signed using blazers provided by the NYS Canal Corporation.

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).³

➤ Lyons to Port Byron

The Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council identified extension of the Erie Canalway Trail between Lyons and Port Byron as another priority project consistent with its strategic goals that the council will, when appropriate, pursue and develop over the next five years.⁴

³ Mohawk Valley Regional Economic Development Council, Strategic Plan 2011, p. 77.

⁴ New York Open for Business, Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council, Accelerating Our Transformation Strategic Plan, November 14, 2011, p.46.

Local support

➤ Team New York ride

“Closing the Gaps” gained great visibility and support in the summer of 2012 when members of Governor Cuomo’s cabinet and senior staff joined NYS Canal Corporation Director Brian Stratton and Canal Corporation officials as “Team New York,” participating with 500 persons from around the nation and the world in riding the Erie Canalway Trail from Buffalo to Albany as part of PTNY’s 14th annual eight-day *Cycling the Erie Canal* event. For some it was their first opportunity to witness first-hand the beauty, history, culture and recreational appeal of the trail as well as experience the existing gaps. Along the way, “Team New York” stopped in Canal communities to announce trail construction, NY Works projects and other important economic development projects. The presence of “Team New York” was a significant morale booster that signaled to Canalway Trail communities that the Governor and the NYS Canal Corporation recognize the importance of the trail to local economies and quality of life. It also helped foster renewed interest among trail communities in marketing to Canalway Trail tourists.

➤ “Closing the Gaps” gains corridor-wide recognition

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

Ongoing Challenges to Closing the Gaps

Since the NYS Canal Corporation assumed responsibility for much of the trail corridor in 1995 it has directed construction of more than 150 miles of Erie Canalway Trail, resulting in 277 of the trail’s 361 miles now open to the public. However, several factors continue to contribute to a delay in closing the remaining gaps.

- **Limited funding**

An estimated \$38 million in funding is needed for corridor purchase and/or design and construction to complete the 84 miles of trail contained in the remaining major gaps. For some gaps, construction funding is the *only* barrier to moving forward.

Transportation Enhancement Program funds

NYS DOT's remaining funds from the federal Transportation Enhancements Program (TEP) have still not been available through a competitive grant process. These are monies that the NYS Canal Corporation, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (NYSOPRHP), and local governments could apply for to close some of the remaining gaps.

- OPRHP is prepared to apply for TEP 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 NYSOPRHP funds available for a match 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.
- Funding of \$5 million is the only element needed to complete the six-mile trail gap between the City of Utica in Oneida County and the Town of Schuyler in Herkimer County.

NYS DOT has indicated that the final round of TEP funds should be announced in the summer of 2013. However, given the time to review and select applications, it means that successful applicants will not be able to begin trail construction until at least 2014.

Reduced federal funding from MAP-21

Funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects was reduced by about 30 percent in the new federal transportation bill, MAP-21. Under the new legislation, both NYS DOT and local Metropolitan Planning Organizations serving areas above 200,000 persons will distribute funds for trails and bicycle and pedestrian projects through competitive grant programs. However, as the

legislation only took effect on October 1, 2012, it is unclear when local governments and state agencies will be able to access these funds.

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 small 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, most did not take advantage of the second round of CFA funds for Canalway Trail projects because of other budget priorities, especially in the wake of storms Lee and Irene, the need to provide a 50% match, and the fact that these are reimbursement programs.

- **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 the Village of Frankfort and the City of Ilion; between the City of Ilion and the City of Little Falls; and through Green Island. In these places it will be necessary to acquire right-of-way, utilize utility corridors, or establish safe on-road routes.

- **Physical obstacles**

In some sections, good corridor options exist but within these corridors there are specific obstacles which must be overcome before trail planning and development can proceed. One of the most critical obstacles is the need to cross an active rail line at Scrafford Lane in Rotterdam Junction. The trail is effectively closed at this location because of train cars parked across the trail but unfortunately trail users still attempt the crossing, creating a very dangerous situation.

Focus for 2013

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. 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 federal transportation funds and state municipal park and Canal Greenway grant funds 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 NYSDOT to more quickly make the remaining Transportation Enhancements funds and newly allocated Transportation Alternatives funds available to communities to support trail development projects.
7. Advocate for NYS to retain all its federal Transportation Alternatives funds to support trails and bicycling and walking infrastructure and not transfer any dollars to other programs.

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, 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 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.

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 *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.

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: