



2025

Empire State Trail Town Action Agenda



Cayuga County Trail Towns

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Table of Contents

Trail Town Program	3
Trail Town Framework	4
Program Process	5
2025 Trail Town Wins	6
Existing Conditions	7
About the Cayuga County Trail Towns	7
Empire State Trail Inventory	8
Trail User Counts	10
Plans & Upcoming Projects	11
Assessment	13
Trail-oriented services and amenities	14
Bicycle and pedestrian experience	17
Wayfinding signage and informational resources	19
Welcoming atmosphere and community character	21
Recommendations	23
Implementation	33



The Trail Town Program

Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) and the New York State Canal Corporation (NYSCC) developed the Empire State Trail Town program in 2022 to help upstate communities recognize and capture the economic impact of the Empire State Trail and create a culture in trailside communities that views the trail as an asset integral to what makes those places special. The 750-mile Empire State Trail was completed in 2020, forming the nation's longest single-state multi-use trail and one of the state's premier outdoor recreation destinations. The Empire State Trail Town program was designed to build capacity and guide communities through the process of identifying ways they can transform into trail-friendly destinations where visitors want to stay, explore, and spend.

In 2025, PTNY and the NYSCC selected three new communities for participation in the Empire State Trail Town program - the Village of Clyde, the Village of Canajoharie, and a consortium of two villages and three towns participating as the Cayuga County Canal Communities. Having been selected for their strong baseline of trail-based services and amenities and demonstrated commitment to improving the trail user experience, the selected communities worked with PTNY throughout the year to identify opportunities and develop the tools to more effectively harness visitation to the renowned long-distance trail in their backyard and enhance quality of life for their residents.

Over the course of nine months, the Villages of Weedsport and Port Byron and Towns of Montezuma, Mentz, and Brutus worked with PTNY to develop a network of local and regional partners committed to the Trail Town initiative, conduct research and assessment, and develop promotional resources and strategies. In this document, the work completed through the course of the program is summarized to guide the Cayuga County Canal Communities' advancement as Trail Towns.

Participation in the Trail Town program has and will continue to support local tourism by offering a platform for dialogue about the importance of creating a sense of place and safe places for both visitors and residents to recreate. Through the creation of a "trail culture," community members see the trail as part of their community's identity and see the success of the trail as part of their community's success. By setting a consistent baseline of expectations for visitors in terms of what services to expect and how to find them, by growing the trail culture and by promoting the services and amenities available, an increasing number of trail users will have a positive experience, boosting the reputation of the Cayuga County Canal Communities- and of the trail system as a whole- as an outdoor recreation destination.

Upon adoption of this Action Agenda, the Cayuga County Canal Communities will be recognized as an officially certified Empire State Trail Town.

Empire State Trail Town Goals

Make communities more trail-user friendly.

- Embrace the trail as a core asset around which future planning and investment should be oriented
- Increase the frequency with which residents and visitors walk or bike both on and off the trail.



Help communities realize economic benefits of the Canalway Trail.

- Increase the number of Canalway Trail users who spend money either at retail businesses or at a bar or restaurant as part of their trip
- Increase the number of Canalway Trail users who choose the community for an overnight stay



Empire State Trail Town Objectives

NETWORK: Form a network of individuals (including representatives of the municipality, engaged residents, volunteers, and members of the business community) dedicated to the Trail Town vision

RESEARCH: Conduct research and assessment to identify each Trail Town's strengths and areas for improvement, as well as understand current use of the trail

PROMOTION: Increase the visibility of the Trail Towns as destinations

ADVANCEMENT: Establish a plan and process to guide continued work toward Trail Town goals beyond the direct assistance provided by PTNY



Trail Town Framework

What makes a great Trail Town? Thriving vibrant Trail Towns are places where trail users can find the amenities and services they need, where they can safely travel by foot or by bike around the community (often their primary mode of transportation), where they can find information out about what's around them, whether ahead of time online or in the moment through wayfinding and welcome centers, and finally, probably the least tangible, is that the community is welcoming and has a unique sense of character. Thriving, vibrant Trail Towns are successful because they exhibit four key qualities and invest in these areas.



Trail-oriented services and amenities

Trail users can find exactly what they need, whether they're just passing through, spending a few hours exploring, or staying the night.

- Restrooms & drinking water
- Overnight accommodations - indoor lodging and camping
- Food and drink - especially local fare
- Attractions/destinations
- Information center
- Bike amenities



High-quality and safe bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure

Pedestrians and cyclists can safely travel around the community, both on the trail and off the trail to explore other parts of the community

- Trail conditions
- Connecting trails
- On-road connections to points of interest



Wayfinding and informational resources

Information is crucial for introducing potential visitors to the community or encouraging residents to get out and explore their own trails, be it ahead of time trip-planning resources or signage and welcome centers that help direct trail users in the moment.

- Pedestrian scale wayfinding signage
- Online & print promotional materials



Welcoming atmosphere and unique community character

Successful Trail Towns embrace and showcase what makes them unique, highlighting local history, culture, events and food. Visitors get to know what makes each town along the trail unique, and have more incentive to visit– and spread the word. Residents for their part get to share the best parts of their community and gain an enhanced sense of local pride.

- Festivals, events & programs
- Public art & history
- Volunteer presence

Program Process & Timeline

In March 2025, PTNY and the NYSCC selected the three participating communities, including the Cayuga County Canal Communities, for participation in the Trail Town program. Over the following months, Cayuga County's participation in the program proceeded along the following timeline:

- **April 7** - Virtual Orientation for all Trail Town communities
- **May 5** - ESTT Virtual Networking Event
- **May 15** - Trail Counter installed
- **June 1** - Self-Assessment submitted to PTNY by Trail Town steering committee
- **June 25-26** - Placemaking and Bike Around Workshops undertaken by PTNY staff and steering committee members in the Cayuga County Canal Communities
- **August 5** - Interim report sent to steering committee members
- **July 16** - The Cayuga County Canal Communities welcomed 600+ participants in annual Cycle the Erie Canal Bike Tour
- **Fall 2025/Winter 2026** - Landing Page Worksheet and Draft Priority Actions submitted to PTNY



2025 Trail Town Wins

The year 2025 marked the Bicentennial of the completion of the Erie Canal, meaning that while the Trail Towns were in planning mode through the Empire State Trail Town program, they were also busy implementing plans to celebrate the Erie Canal’s landmark year.

Montezuma

- The Town of Montezuma received a NYS Canal System Tourism Infrastructure & Amenities Grant for the High Street Trailhead Enhancement Project, which will strengthen public access, safety, and visitor experience at the primary entrance to Montezuma Heritage Park, with the installation of a new drinking fountain with a bottle-filling station, bike racks, trash receptacle, bench, and an ADA-accessible picnic table.

Port Byron/Mentz

- The Old Mentz Heritage Center sponsored the historic play drama, “Clinton’s Ditch: The Story of Building of the Erie Canal,” to honor this year’s 2025 Erie Canal Bicentennial. The play was performed five times over the summer at the Canal Society of New York State’s Samuel Center for Canal History in Port Byron.
- The Canal Society of New York State received a NYS Canal System Tourism Infrastructure & Amenities Grant to install two exterior weather-resistant interpretive signs alongside the full-scale replica canal boat, Lois McClure, at its new berth at the Erie Canal Heritage Park in Port Byron to provide background on its history and on the use on of the Erie Canal.

Weedsport/Brutus

- Village of Weedsport fourth graders developed a QR-code tour of the history of the Erie Canal, etched into wooden signs and installed on the Empire State Trail between Centerport Aqueduct and Centerport Road.
- The Town of Brutus received a NYS Canal System Events Grant for Brutus Erie Canal Festival, to take place on August 2, 2026. The event will feature a free, family-friendly festival to celebrate the traditions of an Erie Canal town with live music, a kids fun run along the canal, old fashioned pie eating contest, educational presentations, local vendors, food trucks, recreational activities, and more.

Collaborations

- The Montezuma Heritage Park and Old Erie Canal Heritage Park in Port Byron hosted both formal and informal rest stops, welcoming 700+ cyclists as part of the 27th annual Cycle the Erie Canal bike tour.
- A coalition of partners between Montezuma and Camillus was developed to celebrate the Erie Canal’s bicentennial, published a history-based guidebook titled “**Following the Flow**”, and started a Facebook page. The Facebook page, now rebranded post-Bicentennial to the **Cayuga County Trail Towns**, has over 500 followers.



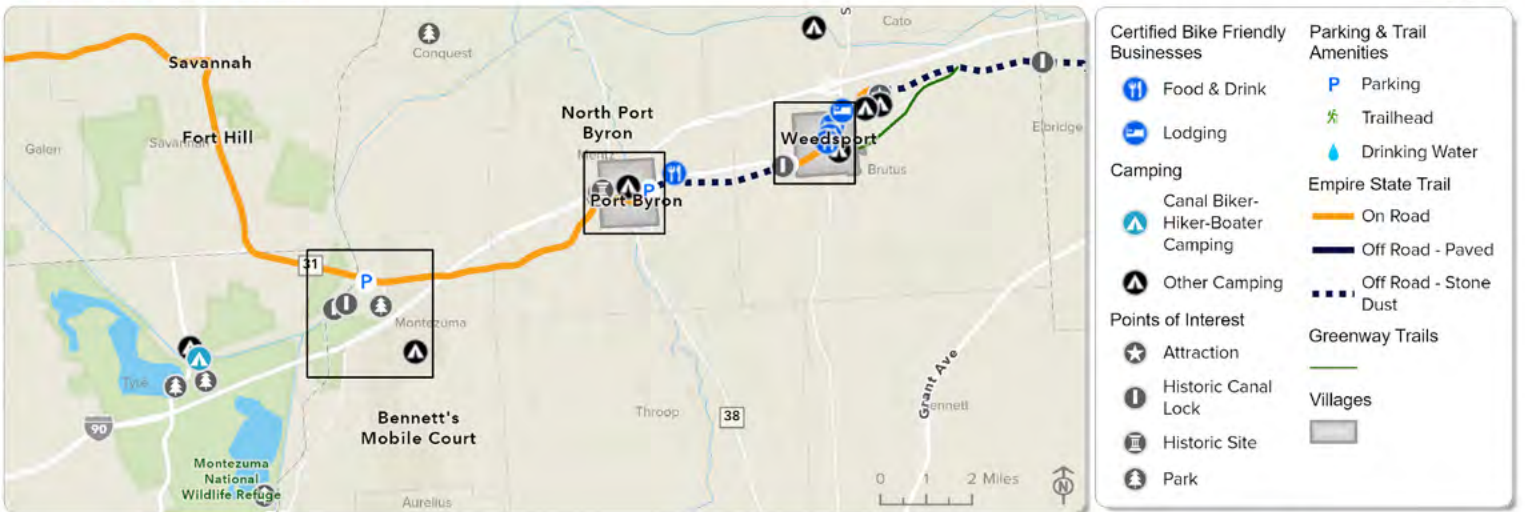
Existing Conditions

This section provides an overview of the community, an inventory of the Empire State Trail, and a summary of existing plans and upcoming projects.

About the Cayuga County Trail Towns

The Cayuga County Trail Towns - Montezuma, Port Byron, Mentz, Weedsport, and Brutus - form a connected 12-mile stretch of the Erie Canalway Trail, showcasing scenic views, historic canal features, and the charm of small-town life. The area offers convenient lodging options, dining, and everyday services that support both short visits and overnight stays. These communities provide a welcoming and well-equipped stop along the trail, blending natural beauty, history, and modern convenience.

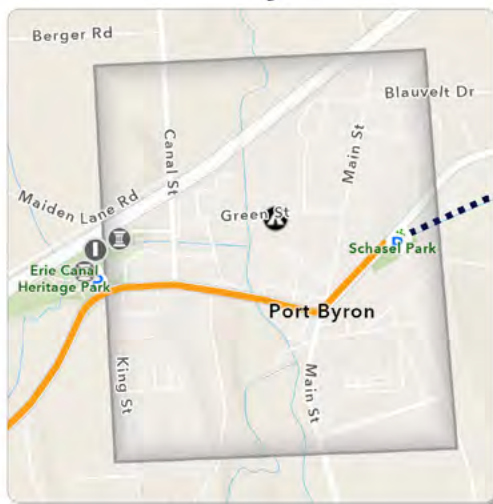
Cayuga County Canal Communities Empire State Trail Towns



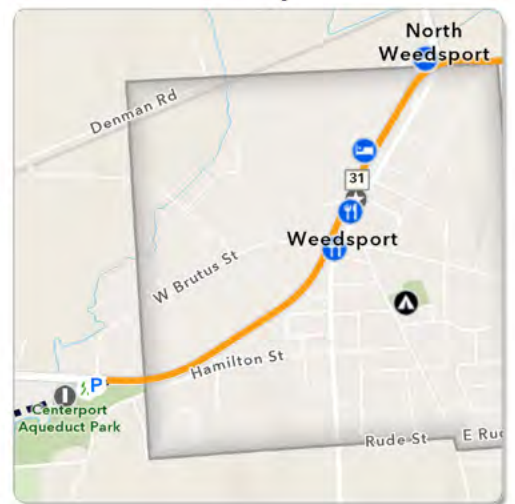
Montezuma



Port Byron



Weedsport

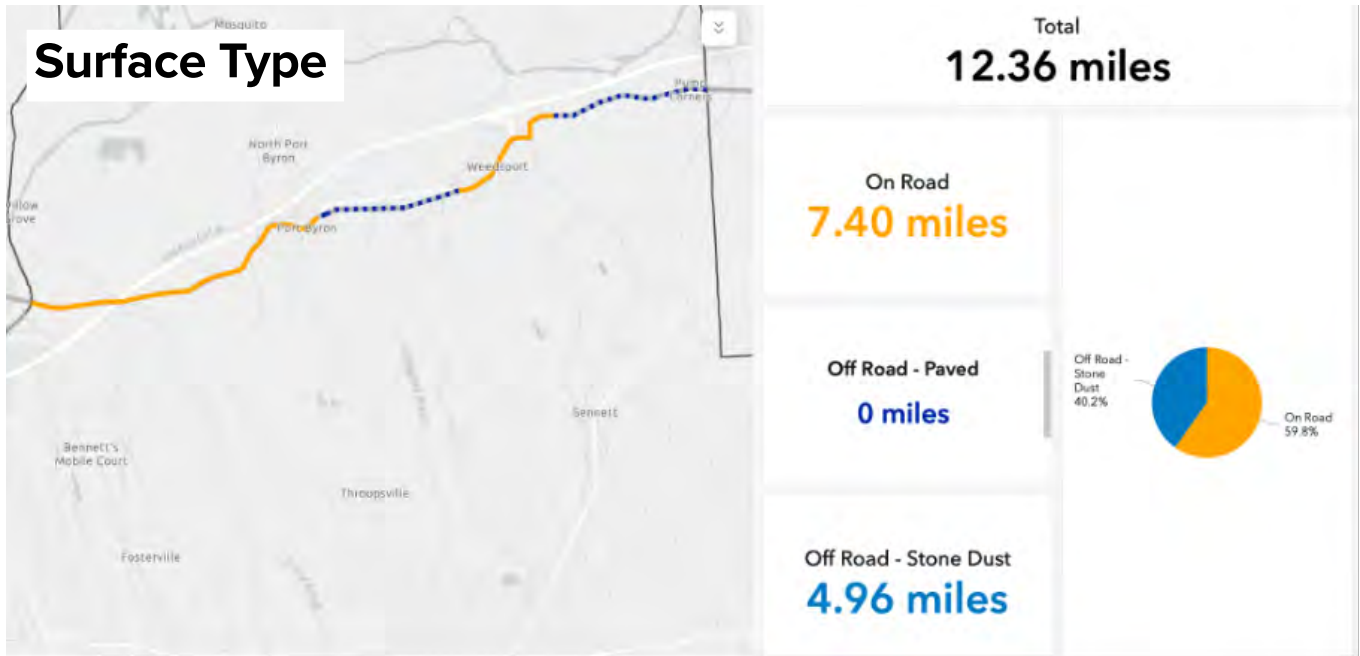


Empire State Trail Inventory

Surface Type, Ownership & Maintenance Responsibilities

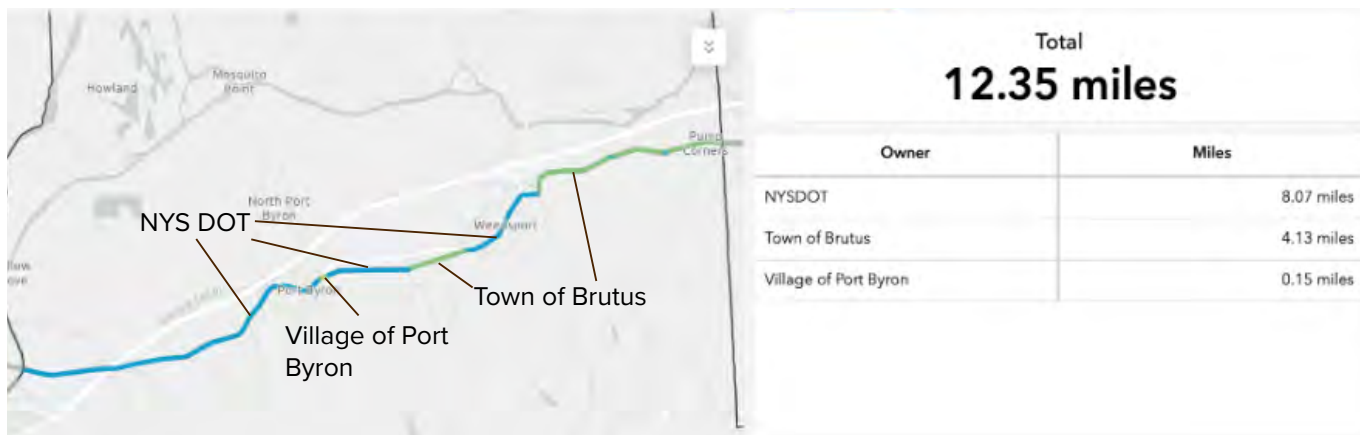
Cayuga County has about 12.36 miles of the Empire State Trail within its boundaries, with 7.4 miles as on-road route, mostly on NY Route 31, and two sections of off-road, stonedust trail, totaling 4.96 miles.

Trail ownership and maintenance boundaries can be viewed at [NYS Canal Corporation's trail ownership map](#), which has the most up-to-date conditions as of the map's creation in 2022.



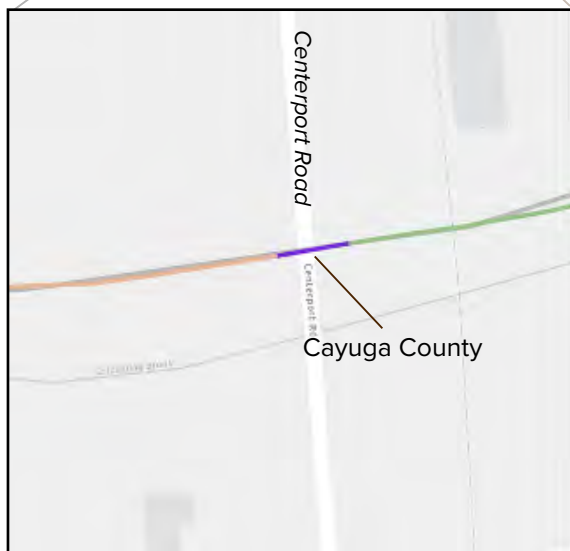
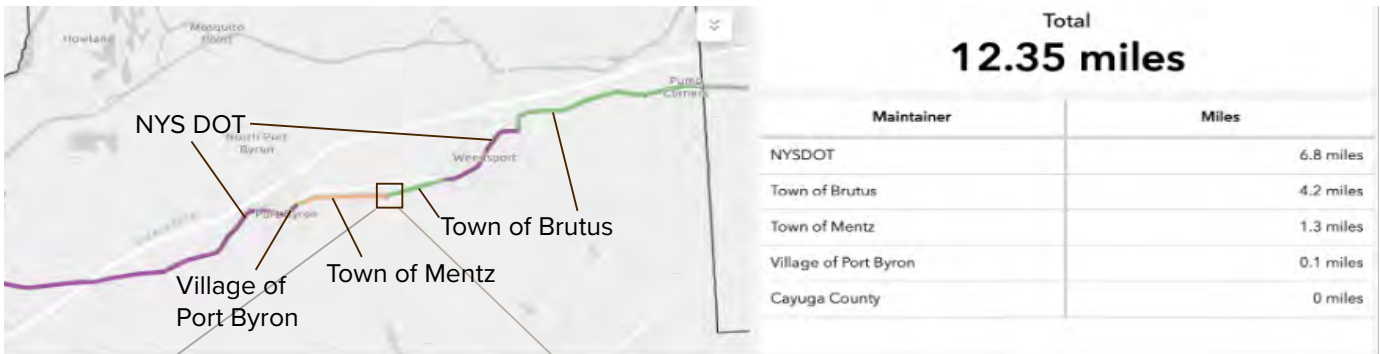
Ownership

NYS Department of Transportation owns the greatest proportion of trail through Cayuga County, including all portions of the route that follow NY Route 31, as well as a portion of the off-road trail between Port Byron's Schasel Park and Centerport Road. The Town of Brutus owns a significant portion of trail from the Weedsport Village line to the Brutus Town line at the eastern edge of Cayuga County.



Maintenance

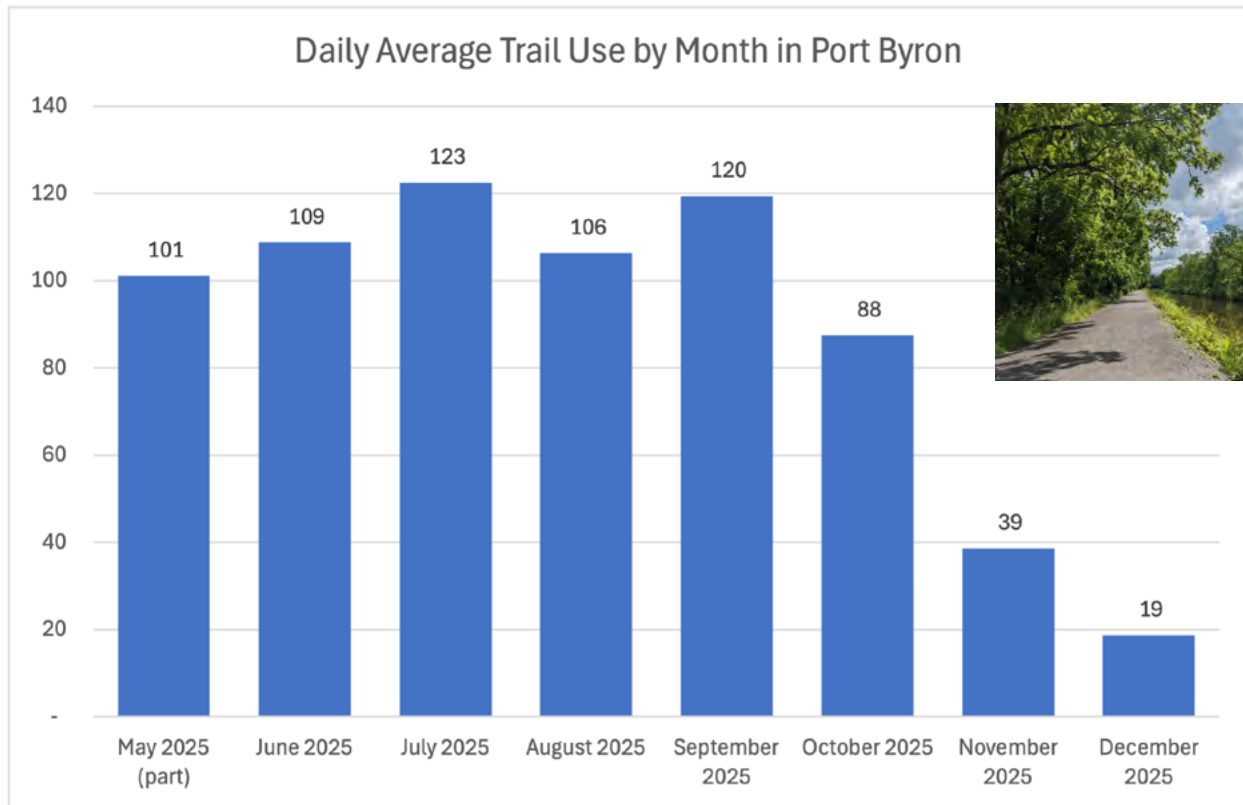
Maintenance of the trail varies slightly from ownership and is based on maintenance agreements. NYS DOT is responsible for maintaining the sections of route that run on NY Route 31. An area where maintenance varies from ownership is in the Town of Mentz, where the Town is responsible for maintaining the off-road section of Empire State Trail that is owned by NYS DOT between Port Byron’s Schasel Park and Centerport Road. The Town of Brutus is responsible for maintaining the off-road trail that they own.



Cayuga County is responsible for maintaining the crossing of Centerport Road, as it is a County Road. On the west side, the Town of Mentz is responsible, and on the east side, the Town of Brutus is responsible for maintenance.

Trail Use Counts & Analysis

Trail use data can help businesses and decision makers understand the potential market for trail user-oriented services and amenities, as well as when people are using the trail so that the community can best serve their needs. The following chart shows average trail use by month from May 15, 2025 to December 31, 2025. Further data analysis will be provided in PTNY's forthcoming Who's on the Trail: Canalway Trail 2025 report.



Port Byron, NY (east of Schasel Park trailhead)
Data Period: May 15, 2025 - December 31, 2025

Number of days counted	Total traffic counted	Annual Trail Use Estimate	Daily Average	Peak Day	Peak Count
231	20,121	26,822	73	July 16, 2025	486

Monthly trail use trends indicate that trail use is strongest in the summer, but stays highwell through September, which was the second busiest month on the trail. The peak trail use day occurred on July 16, corresponding with when PTNY's annual Cycle the Erie Canal bike tour riders traveled through Cayuga County.

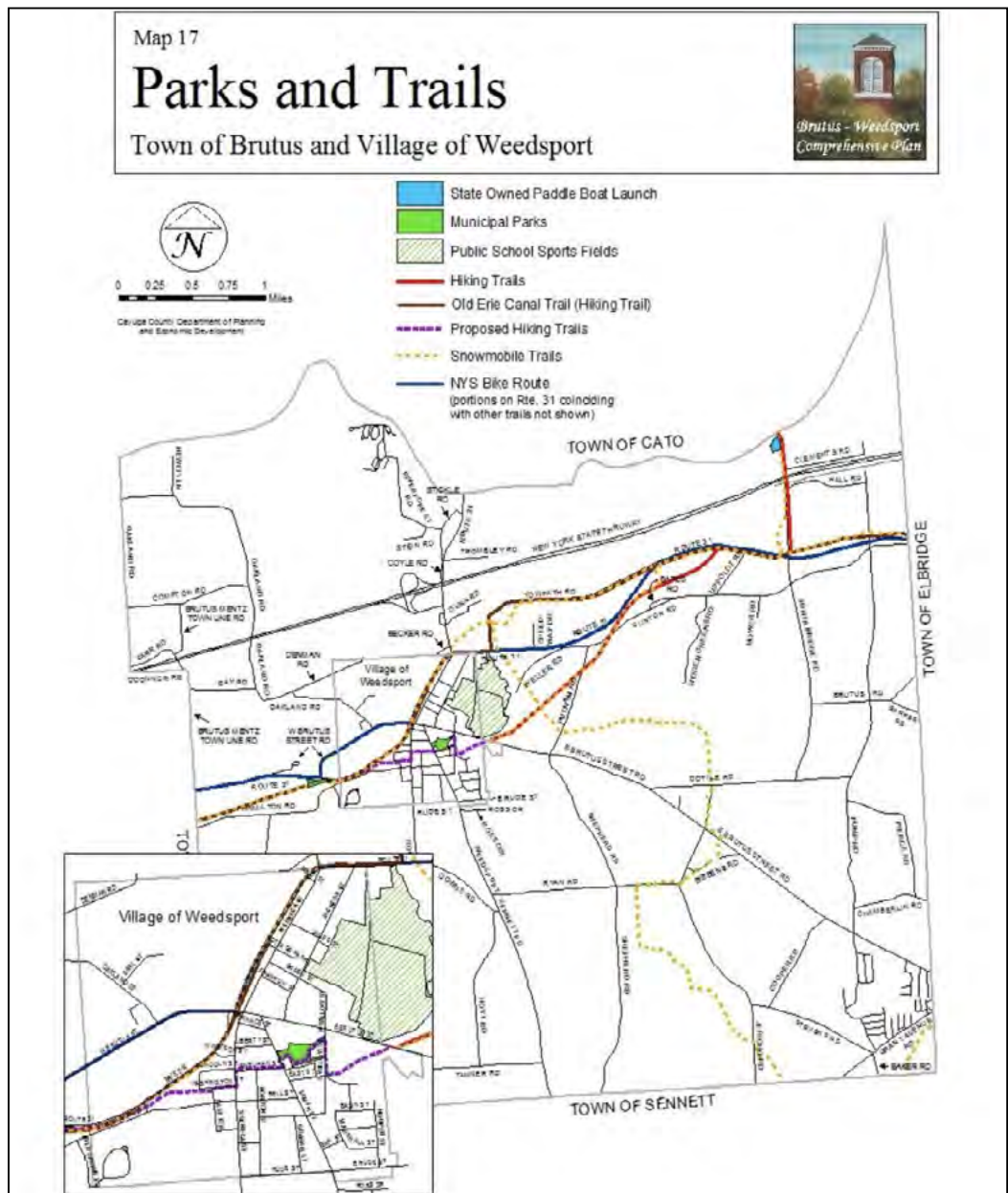
Plans & Upcoming Projects

Town of Brutus and Village of Weedsport Comprehensive Plan (2014)

The Town of Brutus and Village of Weedsport Comprehensive Plan supports the Erie Canalway Trail by improving access, connectivity, and amenities that enhance the trail experience. The plan proposes constructing a paved trail linking the Village Center to Aqueduct Park and improving connections from Aqueduct Park to the Old Erie Canal Trail through better signage, lighting, and trail infrastructure. These improvements would make it easier for cyclists, pedestrians, and other users to access the regional trail network and move safely between the trail and the village.

The plan also encourages recreational and tourism initiatives tied to the canal corridor, such as canoe and kayak launches, expanded trail routes, and businesses that serve trail users (e.g., bike or paddlecraft rentals). By enhancing recreational opportunities and promoting canal-related tourism, the plan seeks to attract visitors traveling along the canal corridor and strengthens the economic and cultural value of the trail system.

Map of existing and potential trail connections outlined in the 2014 Town of Brutus and Village of Weedsport Comprehensive Plan.



Mentz-Port Byron Joint Comprehensive Plan (2015)

The Town of Mentz & Village of Port Byron Comprehensive Plan adopted in 2015 recognizes that “efforts must be made to link the downtown business district with the park-like setting of the canal and trail so that trail users feel invited to visit the downtown.” Additionally, a recommendation was included to find ways to get tourists to “stop and stay”, even if just for an overnight stay.

Town of Montezuma Comprehensive Plan (2016)

The Town of Montezuma Comprehensive Plan supports the Trail Town goals by encouraging the development of an official trail connection between Port Byron and Lyons that would pass through the Town of Montezuma. The plan also recommends linking the trail to Montezuma Heritage Park, allowing visitors to access the park’s historic canal resources and existing trail system while strengthening recreation and tourism along the canal corridor.

Village of Weedsport Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) Application (2025)

The Village of Weedsport’s DRI Application’s vision includes using the village’s location on the Empire State Trail and historic Erie Canal route to attract tourists. One of the proposed projects would be to construct a new off-road trail to take the Empire State Trail almost entirely off-road through the Village of Weedsport and Town of Brutus, a project that is already underway but needs additional funding to complete. Another proposed project would be to develop a series of interpretive signs and kiosks to be built along the Empire State Trail and near other historically significant places throughout the village showcasing Weedsport’s history as a canal town, a rail hub, and as a local destination in the Central New York Region.

Description of a potential public project identified in the Village of Weedsport's 2025 Downtown Revitalization Initiative application.

18.) Connect Centreport Aqueduct to the School Multi-Purpose Trail



Developer: Town of Brutus
Address: Former West Shore Railroad Railbed
Possible funding sources: Town reserves, NYS DOT

Total project cost: \$720,000
DRI request: \$302,000
Match: \$418,000

The Town of Brutus will develop a new Trolley Connection Trail to connect the Erie Canal Trail to the Southwest Trail in the Village of Weedsport. The Southwest trail runs along the historic rail bed of the West Shore Railroad, and the new route would allow pedestrians traveling along the Empire State Trail & Erie Canal Trail the option to avoid crossing or traveling on a high traffic road with a large amount of heavy vehicle traffic (NYS Route 31). The new trail will provide locals and visitors with a cross-village pedestrian path connecting Trolley Park, Centreport Aqueduct Park, and the Weedsport public school complex. The Trolley Connection Trail will significantly improve pedestrian accessibility across the village.

Assessment

The Trail Town planning process assessed conditions in four areas:

- ✓ Trail-oriented services and amenities
- ✓ Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure
- ✓ Wayfinding and informational resources
- ✓ Atmosphere and community character

Within each area, each aspect was assessed and coded on a color-coded scale to determine how well the criteria is being fulfilled to help the community determine whether additional action is needed:

Red = No evidence. This criteria is not fulfilled or conditions are very poor.

Orange = Opportunity. This criteria may be partially met, but there is opportunity for improvement.

Yellow = Acceptable. This criteria is fulfilled and meets the needs of trail users, but there is still opportunity to make it excellent.

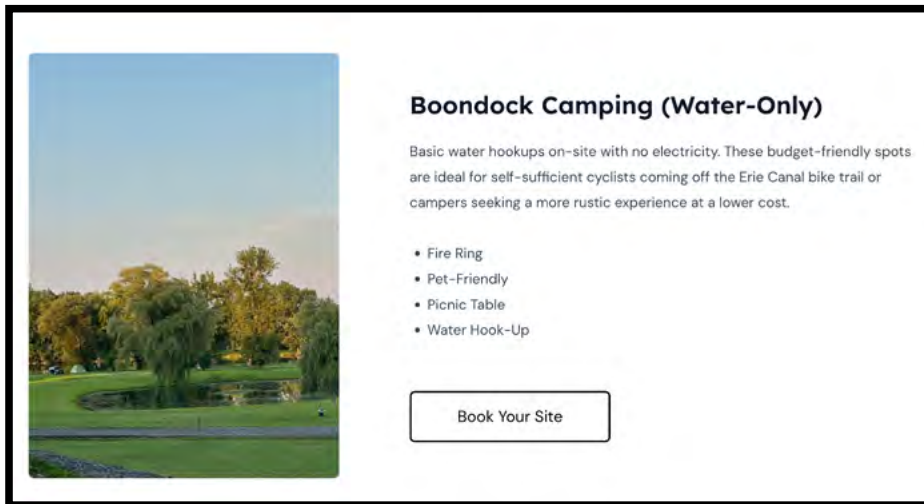
Green = Excellent. This criteria is completely fulfilled and goes above and beyond to meet the needs of trail users.



Trail-oriented Services and Amenities

Services & Amenities	Montezuma	Port Byron/Mentz	Weedsport/Brutus
Restrooms	There are two portable toilets at Montezuma Heritage Park — 1) in the Route 31 Parking lot just east of the Seneca River Bridge directly off the on-road portion of Empire State Trail. 2) at the High Street Trailhead next to the firehouse.	There are restrooms available at Port Byron Old Erie Canal Heritage Center during open hours. There is one portable toilet during the summer season at Schasel Park-Port Byron trailhead. The Pit Stop Convenience Store has restrooms and long hours.	The Weedsport Pit Stop Convenience Store is open 24 hours and has a restroom. There are portable toilets at the Fireman’s Field that are open 24 hours May 1-Nov 1, although the facility can be rented out which may limit use.
Drinking water	No outdoors hydration station as of 2025. The Town of Montezuma received a grant to install a hydration station at the High Street trailhead and procurement/ installation is underway. Signage from the main trail route will be key to letting trail users know it is there.	No outdoor hydration station. Drinking water is available at Ed & Jean’s Market and at the Port Byron Pit Stop Convenience Store, both of which have long hours. The Erie Canal Heritage Park is also installing a bottle filling station.	No outdoors hydration station. Drinking water is available at the Weedsport Pit Stop Convenience Store, which is open 24/7.
Bike amenities - Bike parking	Bike racks are located at Montezuma Heritage Park Route 31 parking lot. Bike racks are to be installed as part of the grant for amenities at the High Street Trailhead.	Bike racks are available at the Schasel Park trailhead and Old Erie Canal Heritage Park. There is insufficient bike parking in the downtown business district.	Bike racks are available at Lunkenheimer Craft Brewing and the White Rabbit Coffee Roastery. More bike parking is needed in the business district.
Bike amenities - Bike repair stations	No bike repair station.	Bike repair station in good condition with working air pump at Schasel Park.	Bike repair station in good condition at Lunkenheimer Craft Brewing.
Bike amenities - Bike shop/rentals	There is no bike shop or bike rentals between the three communities. The nearest bike repair shop is in Auburn (LB Lightning Cyclery), about 8-10 miles to the south of the Trail Towns. There are no bike rentals nearby.		
	No hardware store or store that could sell basic bike repair supplies.	True Value Hardware could offer basic bike repair supplies.	Ace Hardware could offer basic bike repair supplies.
Trailhead parking	- Montezuma Rt. 31: 15 parking spaces, restroom, picnic tables, kiosk, pavilion - Montezuma High Street: 10 parking spaces, restroom, , picnic tables, kiosk, boat replica, mule statue, mural displays.	Port Byron Schasel Park: 25 parking spaces, portable toilet, pavilion, kiosk, bike fix-it station	Weedsport Aqueduct Park: 18 parking spaces, kiosk

Accommodations - Indoor	No indoor lodging.	No indoor lodging.	The Rodeway Inn and Red Roof Inn are both certified Bike Friendly and offer bike storage overnight.
Accommodations - Camping	Hejamada Campground offers camping, south of Montezuma, although they offer no special accommodations or rates for cyclists.	There is a camping/ Warmshowers host that permits single night camping in the back yard for all cyclists / hikers who arrive by their own power and reach out in advance. There is no camping at village parks.	Riverforest Park Campground & Marina (highlights thru-cyclists on website) and Weedsport Speedway Campground (mostly for RVs) offer camping. Camping is allowed at the Trolley Park and Fireman's Field. Riders are asked to call ahead.
Food & Drink	No food or drink available for purchase.	Port Byron offers classic American fare (Potters Restaurant, Nino's Pizzeria, & Ed & Jean's Market/Pizza & Ice Cream Shoppe). Ed & Jean's also offers fresh produce at the market. Only Potters is certified Bike Friendly.	Weedsport offers a variety of food & beverage options. Highlights include ultra-bike friendly Lunkenheimer Craft Brewing and White Rabbit Coffee Roastery. Other types of offerings include ice cream, Chinese, diner fare, sandwiches, and pizza.



Boondock Camping (Water-Only)

Basic water hookups on-site with no electricity. These budget-friendly spots are ideal for self-sufficient cyclists coming off the Erie Canal bike trail or campers seeking a more rustic experience at a lower cost.

- Fire Ring
- Pet-Friendly
- Picnic Table
- Water Hook-Up

[Book Your Site](#)

Riverforest Park Campground specifically highlights their boondock camping as "ideal for self-sufficient cyclists coming off the Erie Canal bike trail"



Lunkenheimer Craft Brewing provides a spacious outdoor patio with bike parking, a bike repair station, and good vibes, right off the trail.

Destinations/attractions	Montezuma Heritage Park: A 160-acre park featuring scenic trails and the remains of the Richmond Aqueduct, one of the few places where visitors can see structures from all three eras of the Erie Canal and the Cayuga Seneca Canal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Port Byron Old Erie Canal Heritage Park: A restored canal lock and visitor center located directly off the NYS Thruway, offering a hands-on experience of canal life in the 1850s. - Old Mentz Heritage Center (97, Main St., Port Byron) The historical society for Mentz, Montezuma and Port Byron features collections that relate to the history of the region and the people who have lived and worked here. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Centerport Aqueduct in Weedsport: A historic stone aqueduct that once carried the Erie Canal over Cold Spring Brook, now a scenic and educational stop along the trail. - Old Brutus Historical Society (8943 N Seneca St, Weedsport) Preserving and promoting the region's historical heritage through educational programs, events, and the collection of historical information and artifacts related to the Town of Brutus.
Information/Welcome Center	There are kiosks for posting community information at the Montezuma Heritage Park trailheads. There is no staffed welcome center.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Port Byron Old Erie Canal Heritage Park functions as an information hub for trail users for the three communities. Open 7 days a week during the visitor season, May 1 to October 31. - The Village Hall is directly on the route of the Empire State Trail, but staff are generally not prepared to answer trail user questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is a kiosk at Centreport Aqueduct trailhead. - There is not a designated location for trail users to find information in Weedsport.
Boater amenities - Boat launch	none.	There is a kayak launch in the Town of Mentz on the Seneca River. on Rt 38 two miles north of the village	The Riverforest Park Campground, Marina & Restaurant in the Town of Brutus is a private marina and campground, with a restaurant on site. There is a low dock and concrete ramp, with ample parking about 500 feet away.
Boater amenities - Kayak rentals	none.	none.	none.



Port Byron Old Erie Canal Heritage Park serves as an informal trail welcome center for the entire county.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure

Bike/Pedestrian element	Montezuma	Port Byron/Mentz	Weedsport/Brutus
Empire State Trail - Trail Conditions	<p>The EST route is on-road on NY Rt 31 through the Town of Montezuma, generally with a wide shoulder separated by rumble strips. The speed limit is 45/55mph, and the road sees approximately 3,500 vehicles per day (10% of which are trucks). This is not a pleasant riding experience for inexperienced cyclists.</p>	<p>The EST route is on-road on the west side of Port Byron/Mentz on NY Rt 31. The speed limit decreases to 45 mph on the western approach to Port Byron, and decreases to 30 mph within the village of Port Byron. The average daily traffic on this stretch is 5,417 vehicles (9% of which are trucks). At Schasel Park on the east side of the village center, the trail goes off road with a stonedust surface and is in good condition. East of the village, the western approach to the intersection with Centerport Road is washed out and difficult to traverse. This section of trail is owned by NYS DOT and maintained by the Town of Mentz.</p>	<p>The EST is off-road from the Town line at Centerport Road to Centerport Aqueduct. The EST route returns to NY Rt 31 at this point, with a speed limit of 35 mph. Average daily traffic is about 4,000 vehicles (10% trucks). There is a designated, buffered bike lane between Brutus St and the intersection with Rt 34. The route returns to off-road at Towpath Road on the east side of Weedsport in the Town of Brutus. This section is stonedust surface and as of summer 2025, was washed out and in very bad condition in some locations.</p>

The images of the right represent some of the different trail route typologies in each community.



Empire State Trail - Trail Crossings	n/a	There is a complicated intersection in Port Byron's village center that is particularly difficult to navigate coming from the east.	The intersection of the Empire State Trail where it is on-road on NY Rt 31 with NY Rt 34 is very dangerous for vulnerable road users and is difficult to navigate with no dedicated cycling infrastructure.
Connecting trails	Montezuma Heritage Park has many lovely hiking trails. Most are grass or natural surface and are not easily traversed by road or touring bicycles.	There is a trail through the Port Byron Old Erie Canal Heritage Park, however it can only be accessed through the main entrance to the Park.	Weedsport has a short, paved trail through Trolley Park. The Town of Brutus has two natural surface trails, primarily used for walking and snowmobiling that are not easily traversed by bicycle. One is a 0.3-mile segment along the Old Erie Canal behind Arby's with a recently upgraded bridge. The other is a 1.7-mile grass-surface trail that starts behind the High School. The trails are not well marked.
On-road connections to points of interest	The amenities and services at the Montezuma Heritage Park can be easily accessed via High Street.	Most of Port Byron's amenities and services are within view of the route of the EST through the village. The Port Byron library is not directly on the route, but is easily accessed via local roads. Potters Farm to Fork is not on the trail, and many trail users may miss it.	Many of Weedsport's businesses are very easily accessible right off NY Rt 31. NY Rt 31 however is not the main street, and feels more like the back of many of these businesses.



A unique trail at Port Byron's Old Erie Canal Heritage Park takes cyclists through a lock.

Signage & Information

Signage/ Information Element	Montezuma	Port Byron/Mentz	Weedsport/Brutus
ECT/EST identifier blazes	There are sufficient EST blazes to follow the route, however there are cases where trail travelers have gone off-route following google maps. There are no ECT blazes.	EST trail blazes for westbound riders in Port Byron at triangle intersection with Main St is hard to follow. Otherwise, EST identifier blazes are sufficient. There are no ECT blazes.	There are sufficient EST blazes to follow the route. There are no ECT blazes.
Trailhead signage	There is good signage for the Montezuma Heritage Park trailhead directly on NY Rt 31 (the bike art is a great touch!). There may be a need for more signage to the High St trailhead once more amenities like drinking water are installed.	Port Byron's Schasel Park has good signage for the trailhead.	Weedsport's Aqueduct Park has good signage for the trailhead.
Kiosks	Montezuma Heritage Park has good kiosks. Very nice to have trailhead check-in data to share.	Port Byron's Schasel Park has a kiosk with a regional map and historical information. No place for flyers or community information.	Weedsport's Aqueduct Park has a kiosk with a regional map and historical information. No place for flyers or community information.



Westbound view of the intersection of Main St and Rt 31 in Port Byron where it is difficult to tell which direction the trail route continues.



Welcoming kiosk at Montezuma Heritage Park.

Gateway/Welcome Signage	The bicycle art on the Montezuma Heritage Park signage serves as a great welcome/gateway moment.	From west: Port Byron has a roadway sign telling trail users they are entering the village. The Port Byron Old Erie Canal Heritage Park also serves as a gateway, though the entrance can be difficult to see. From east: Port Byron’s Schasel Park acts as a gateway, but does not have anything specific welcoming trail users to Port Byron.	From west: Weedsport’s Aqueduct Park serves as a gateway, but there is little information about entering Weedsport. The side of the large metal historical marker facing the trail entrance is blank. From east: Trail users are met immediately with the confusing, busy intersection with NY Rt 34. The first welcoming sign is the mural on the Old Brutus Historical Society building.
Wayfinding within the community	Good wayfinding signage to points of interest.	No pedestrian-scale signage to points of interest. Difficult to notice entrance to Port Byron Old Erie Canal Heritage Park when coming from west.	No pedestrian-scale signage to points of interest. Difficult to see names of businesses and entrances to businesses from NY Rt 31/EST.
Print resources	The printed book publication “Following the Flow,” published in 2025 for the Erie Canal’s bicentennial, may be purchased at several business and historical sites from Montezuma to Camillus, NY. No printed map of the region with points of interest.		
Online materials	Cayuga County Tourism has supported the corridor significantly. Tour Cayuga has a specific webpage for the Erie Canal and the Bicentennial. They also put together a Erie Canal bicentennial travel guide that could continue to be updated. The Cayuga County Bicentennial itinerary could also live on. There is also an Erie Canal STQRY app that has been developed.		
	Map of Montezuma Heritage Park.	Village of Port Byron website is clean and welcoming, but has no information about the Empire State Trail or other information for visitors.	Old Brutus Historical Society
Municipal webpage	Town of Montezuma website offers quite a bit of information on local parks and history.	Village of Port Byron website is clean and welcoming, but has no information about the Empire State Trail or other information for visitors.	Village of Weedsport website is pretty good, but has no information about the Empire State Trail or other information for visitors.
Social media	Through the Bicentennial and the Trail Town process, there is now a Cayuga County Trail Towns Facebook page with over 500 followers.		



This sign on Rt 31 directs trail users to the Montezuma Heritage Park with directional arrows and a bike as a piece of art to welcome cyclists.

Welcoming Atmosphere & Community Character

Atmosphere & Character Element	Montezuma	Port Byron/Mentz	Weedsport/Brutus
Festivals, Events & Programs	Montezuma Heritage Park hosts a big welcome for 700+ cyclists on PTNY's Cycle the Erie Canal each year. The Park also hosts trail walks and activities, in partnership with Wayne County Trailworks.	The Port Byron Farmer's Market – Schasel Park, Wednesday nights, June to October. PTNY's Cycle the Erie Canal holds a rest stop at Port Byron Old Erie Canal Heritage Park for 700+ cyclists each year. No community events focused on the trail.	The Weedsport Fireman's Field Days, First weekend in June. In 2025, the Erie Canal Museum partnered with Lunkenheimer Craft Brewing for a Beers, Bikes, and Barges bike ride.
Public Art & Historic interpretation.	Montezuma provides large public mural scenes, replica canal boat structure and mule statuary that depict how the hamlet looked in the era of Erie Canal.	The Village of Port Byron and Town of Mentz have public mural scenes depicting the Erie Canal. The mural on the side of the Historical Society is particularly impactful. The Port Byron Old Erie Canal Heritage Park, the Samuel Center, and the historical society all contribute to promoting the region's Canal history.	The Village of Weedsport and Town of Brutus have public mural scenes depicting the Erie Canal and other topics. The Brutus Historical Society also contributes to the region's historical identity.



Mural and boat in Montezuma Heritage Park.



Canal mural in Port Byron.

Volunteer Presence & Community Organizations	There is a lot of overlap in volunteers across the communities, especially when it comes to canal heritage, leading to potential burnout. Members and volunteers of the Old Mentz Heritage Center's Friends of the Park Committee help support the Town of Montezuma to maintain the Montezuma Heritage Park.		
Window Displays & Facades	There are no visitor-facing businesses in Montezuma.	Downtown Port Byron has vacant storefronts and some facades are in poor condition.	The Village of Weedsport has vacant storefronts, and many of the backs of businesses face the route of the trail. Lunkeheimer Craft Brewing is very welcoming.
Community Brand	Montezuma has embraced its Canal history and celebrates it. It has the potential to lean even more into its identity as a place for outdoor recreation.	Port Byron has strong ties to the region's canal history, with multiple entities celebrating this heritage. This is not so visible in any outward "brand" of the village.	Weedsport celebrates its canal heritage with Aqueduct Park and murals, but there isn't a strong municipal "brand."

The view of the White Rabbit from the trail/Rt 31 in Weedsport.



Recommendations

The following recommendations have been developed by PTNY and the Trail Town committee, and include information about a realistic timespan these strategies should be pursued within. Short timespan projects can be pursued immediately and completed within 12 months. Medium timespan may be 1-2 years, while long term projects may take 3-5 years.

Note that when planning for projects on land owned by the NYS Canal Corporation (NYSCC), all necessary permits and approvals will be required. All signage on land owned by the Canal Corporation must conform to the NYS Canal Corporation Design Guidelines.

- 1. Continue to strengthen trail-oriented business support & prepare local businesses to welcome cyclists.**
- 2. Make investments to the Empire State Trail to ensure it is safe for trail users of all ages and abilities.**
- 3. Enhance amenities and wayfinding signage along the route of the Empire State Trail.**
- 4. Advocate and plan for an expanded regional trail network branching off the Empire State Trail.**
- 5. Develop a brand and share informational resources for the Cayuga County Trail Towns.**
- 6. Activate the community to fully take advantage of the recreational opportunities that Cayuga County has to offer.**

Strategy 1: Strengthen the route and character of the Erie Canalway/Empire State Trail.

	Timespan	Partners	Additional Resources/Notes	Potential Funding
1.1 Collaborate with Trail Towns and partners to develop a Cayuga County Trail Town bike rack design and install at local businesses.	Short/ Medium	Trail Town Committee, Cayuga County, local BOCES or other group that could manufacture racks; Libraries; Cayuga County Health Department	Example: Montgomery County’s custom racks (see image on next page) Bike Parking Tips - U racks or post and ring are recommended	NYS Canal System Tourism Infrastructure Grant; Cayuga County
1.2 Encourage local businesses and other establishments to become certified “bike friendly”	Ongoing	Trail Town Committee; Cayuga County; local businesses	ptny.org/bikefriendly ; Bicyclists Bring Business handbook ; Forthcoming EST Economic Impact Study (to be released June 2026) Example: Lunkenheimer Craft Brewing	
1.3 Produce a business directory and map brochure (both stationary and takeaway) for the Trail Towns to locate at informational kiosks and stock at points of interest and businesses. The map brochure can include information about the trail and other recreational opportunities, leveraging content developed for the Trail Town landing page and Tour Cayuga’s Bicentennial Explorers Guide.	Short / Updated Annually	Trail Town Committee; Cayuga County Planning & GIS; Cayuga County Tourism	Ex: The Village of Clyde is taking on a mapping project as part of a grant to Lauraville Landing, and intends to use the maps in other locations. A QR code could help the committee track use and might help demonstrate value to local business owners. Signage guidance (not binding but could be used for inspiration): NYS Canal Corporation Signage Guidance Empire State Trail Design Guidelines Tour Cayuga’s Erie Canal bicentennial travel guide	NYS Canal System Tourism Infrastructure Grant (can be used for design and installation of physical signage but not for printing brochures)

<p>1.4 Develop and place branded wayfinding yard signs indicating upcoming businesses and other attractions. Use the branding and a template developed in strategy 5.1 so all signs follow the same format. Begin a pilot program with the Old Erie Canal Heritage Park entrance to test if signs can help increase visitation.</p>	<p>Short/ Medium</p>	<p>Trail Town Committee; Local businesses and attractions</p>	<p>Examples: Village of Clyde & Town of Savannah Lawn Signs</p>	<p>It would be up to the local businesses to purchase and maintain their own signs.</p>
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Bike rack designed and installed by Montgomery County in Canajoharie Trail Town.



Example of a lawn sign for Westside (not installed) that shows cyclists they are welcome.



Strategy 2: Make investments to the Empire State Trail to ensure it is safe for trail users of all ages and abilities.

	Timespan	Partners	Additional Resources	Potential Funding
2.1 Address trail washout on the western side of Centreport Rd.	Short	Town of Mentz (maintenance entity); NYS DOT (owner of trail)	NYS DOT Region 3	Recreational Trails Program (NYS OPRHP); Annual Municipal Budget; NYS Canal Corporation Canalway Grant Program
2.2 Resurface washed out trail to the east of the Village of Weedsport in the Town of Brutus.	Short	Town of Brutus		Recreational Trails Program (NYS OPRHP); Annual Municipal Budget; NYS Canal Corporation Canalway Grant Program
2.3 Coordinate with NYSDOT to ensure that bike lane/shoulder markings and crosswalks are visible prior to each tourism season.	Annually	Trail Town Committee; NYS DOT	NYS DOT Region 3	
2.4 Collaborate with nearby communities to close the 14-mile gap in the off-road trail between the Town of Savannah and Village of Port Byron.	Medium/Long	Cayuga County Trail Towns; Village of Clyde; Town of Savannah, Town of Montezuma, Village of Port Byron, NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation; NYS DOT; Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge; Wayne County; Cayuga County; PTNY		Transportation Alternatives Program (NYSDOT); Recreational Trails Program (NYS OPRHP)

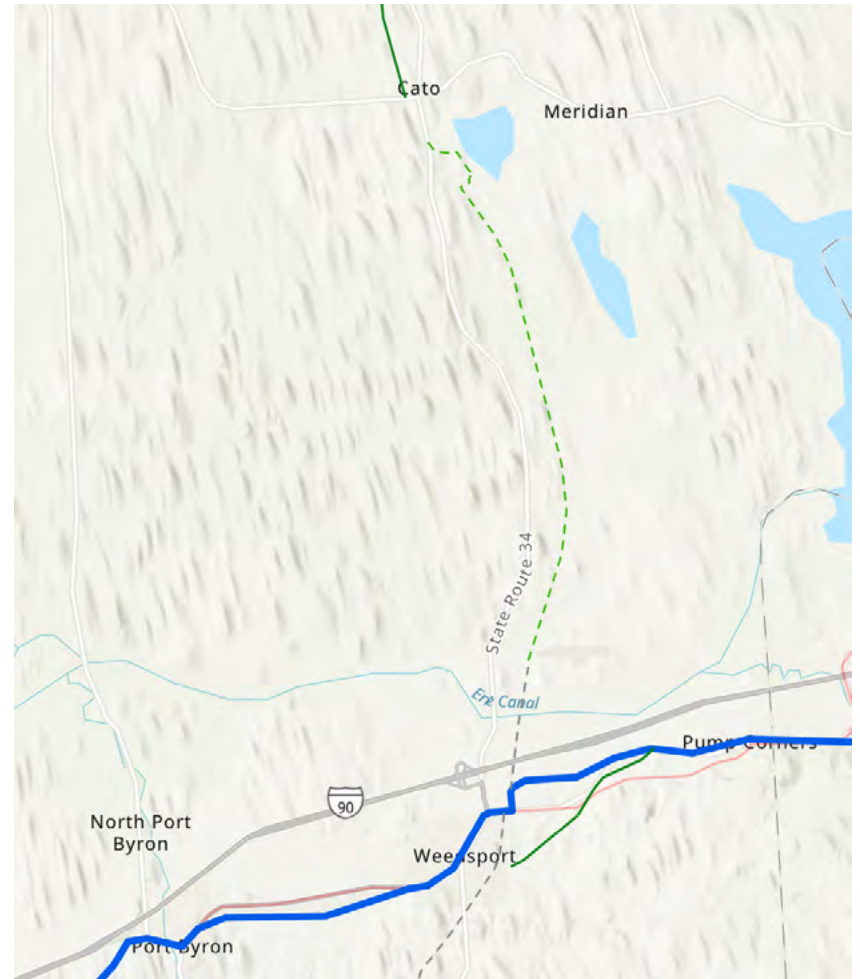
<p>2.5 Work with and support the Town of Brutus and Village of Weedsport to implement the off-road trail connection through the Town and Village envisioned in the Town of Brutus and Village of Weedsport Comprehensive Plan (2014). Elements include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete the project underway to build an off-road section of trail between Centreport Aqueduct Park and the Village of Weedsport roadway system (Town of Brutus) - Improve the trail through Weedsport's Trolley Park to serve as a trail connection (Village of Weedsport) - Resurface the West Shore Rail Trail from natural grass surface to stonedust (Town of Brutus) 	<p>Medium/ Long</p>	<p>Village of Weedsport; Town of Brutus; Cayuga County</p>	<p>Empire State Trail Design Guidelines; Town of Brutus and Village of Weedsport Comprehensive Plan</p>	<p>NYS DRI/NY Forward; NYS Canal Corporation Canalway Grant; Transportation Alternatives Program (NYSDOT); Recreational Trails Program (NYS OPRHP)</p>
<p>2.6 As new sections of the trail are completed, work with state-level stakeholders to determine next steps for designating the new route as the official route of the EST and acquiring new signage.</p>	<p>Short/ Medium/ Long</p>	<p>Village of Weedsport; Town of Brutus; NYS OPRHP; NYS Canal Corporation; PTNY</p>	<p>PTNY can provide connections to stakeholders and provide guidance.</p>	

Strategy 3: Advocate and plan for an expanded regional trail network branching off the Empire State Trail.

	Timespan	Partners	Additional Resources	Potential Funding
3.1 Advocate for a trail connection between the Erie Canalway Trail and the Fair Haven-Cato Trail to expand regional riding options and enhance trail network connectivity.	Long	Cayuga County; Snowmobile community; Town of Cato; Town of Brutus	Greenway Trails Plan Map; Greenway Trail Development Guide	Transportation Alternatives Program (NYSDOT); Recreational Trails Program (NYS OPRHP)
3.2 Work with Cayuga County to undertake a countywide trails plan.	Medium/ Long	Cayuga County	Examples: Allegany Countywide Trail Master Plan (2026) Cattaraugus County Countywide Trail System Plan (2017) Tompkins County Priority Trails Strategy (2023)	Northern Border Regional Commission Catalyst Grants
3.3 Plan loops and spurs of routes that could direct cyclists off the Empire State Trail to businesses and other destinations, planning for signage and other traffic calming elements. This will be important once more of the trail is taken off Rt 31.	Medium	Trail Town Committee; Village of Weedsport; Town of Brutus	Example: McKeesport/Boston loop trail off of the Great Allegheny Passage in PA	NYS Canal System Tourism Infrastructure Grant



A sign in McKeesport, Pennsylvania along the Great Allegheny Passage, highlighting a loop trail off the main trail route.




Screenscapture of the Statewide Greenway Trails Plan interactive trail inventory highlighting the possible connection (dashed green line) between the Empire State Trail and the Cato-Fairhaven Trail.

Strategy 4: Enhance amenities and wayfinding signage along the route of the Empire State Trail.

	Timespan	Partners	Additional Resources	Potential Funding
4.1 Evaluate EST blaze signage, document needs and work with state agency partners at NYS OPRHP and NYSDOT to move or add additional signage to improve trail route wayfinding.	Short	NYS OPRHP Trails Manager; NYSDOT Region 3	Priority signage location: Port Byron intersection of NY-Rt 31 and Main Street. Consider consolidating existing trail blazes and signage for the Erie Canalway Trail, New York Bike Route, and Empire State Trail, onto shared signposts for consistent and clear wayfinding.	
4.2 Pursue additional signage at Montezuma Heritage Park to enhance visibility of the trailhead and available amenities (including new hydration station at High Street trailhead)	Short	NYS OPRHP Trails Manager; Town of Montezuma; NYSDOT Region 3	NYS OPRHP Trails Manager may be able to provide an EST Trailhead Parking sign.	
4.3 Install a drinking fountain hydration station that has 24/7 access at at least one of the trailhead parks. Options include Port Byron Old Erie Canal Heritage Park (there is a water fountain inside), Port Byron Schasel Park or Weedsport Aqueduct Park.	Medium	Village of Port Byron; Village of Weedsport; Cayuga County; Old Erie Canal Heritage Park	Empire State Trail Design Guidelines (p. 3-17 for recommended drinking fountain and bottle filling station product)	NYS Canal System Tourism Infrastructure Grant
4.4 Encourage local businesses like hardware stores, pharmacies, or breweries to offer basic bike repair supplies, including patch kits, bike tubes, and multi-tools. Businesses could also offer other resources like guidebooks, branded Trail Town stickers or other souvenirs.	Medium	Trail Town Committee; Local businesses	The Village of Clyde is piloting this at one of their businesses.	

Strategy 5: Develop a brand and share informational resources for the Cayuga County Trail Towns

	Timespan	Partners	Additional Resources	Potential Funding
5.1 Design a Cayuga County Trail Towns logo that can be used for branding. This logo would be used on signage and stickers to aid in promoting our Trail Town identity and increase community visibility.	Short/underway	Cayuga County Tourism; Trail Town Committee	Example: Rome Waterways and Trails Advocacy Group. 	
5.2 Work with Tour Cayuga (Cayuga County Tourism) to develop a Trail Town webpage that will be hosted on their site. This site will serve as the “go-to” page so each Town/Village can link to it and avoid competing pages.	Short/underway	Cayuga County Tourism; Trail Town Committee	This page can build on Tour Cayuga’s Bicentennial page , and reframe the content to focus on Trail Towns. Can use Cayuga County’s analytics to track views and find out what visitors want to know.	
5.3 Continue to maintain an active social media presence by posting on the Cayuga County Trail Towns Facebook Page	Ongoing	Trail Town Committee	Example: Clyde Welcome Center profiles of visiting riders.	
5.4 Monitor active websites and social media that have information about the Erie Canalway Trail and Empire State Trail.	Ongoing	Trail Town Committee	Websites and pages to monitor include but are not limited to: Cycling the Erie Canal Facebook Page www.CanalwayTrail.com Empire State Trail Website Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor	

Strategy 6: Activate the community to fully take advantage of the recreational opportunities that Cayuga County has to offer.

	Timespan	Partners	Additional Resources	Potential Funding
6.1 Host a social bike ride or run club on the trail between Port Byron and Weedsport.	Short/Medium	Trail Town Committee; Lunkenheimer Brewing	Examples: Clyde Saturday morning social rides Lockport Slow Spokes	
6.2 Engage with PTNY’s annual stewardship and cycling events, like Canal Clean Sweep in April and Cycle the Erie Canal the second week of July.	Annual	Trail Town Committee; Town Historical Societies; PTNY	Montezuma and Port Byron consistently host and engage with events, from whom Weedsport could take inspiration.	
6.3 Host On the Canals excursions, partnering with an outdoor recreation service provider to lead hikes, bike rides, snowshoe walks, historical or bird walks, or other events on the trail that leverage existing assets.	Medium	Trail Town Committee; NYS Canal Corporation	On the Canals website Sample 2026 bid information	NYS Canal Corporation pays the vendor to make the activities free for the public.
6.4 Explore opportunities to start a Trail Ambassador program.	Short/Medium	Trail Town Committee	Examples: Lyons Canal Greeters Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor's Canalway Challenge Ambassadors	

Implementation

In order for the Cayuga County Canal Communities to fully capture the benefits of being Empire State Trail Towns, the recommendations on the preceding pages should be implemented. Taking the following steps will help the community reach its goals.

» **Adopt this Action Agenda with a Municipal Resolution**

Cayuga County should recognize the progress the Trail Town committee has made and make a commitment to advancing the recommendations outlined in this document by passing a resolution. Each of the municipalities should also consider making a resolution adopting this Action Agenda.

Resource: Download a [Sample Municipal Resolution](#)

» **Establish a Group to Implement this Action Agenda**

The Trail Town Steering Committee should continue to meet in order to carry out the recommendations identified in this Action Agenda. The Trail Town Committee shall continue to have representation from the Town of Montezuma, Town of Mentz, Village of Port Byron, Town of Brutus, Village of Weedsport, and Cayuga County.

» **Celebrate Certification as an Empire State Trail Town**

Once the new Action Agenda has been adopted and the implementing group formed, the Trail Town committee will coordinate with local partners, PTNY, and the NYS Canal Corporation to celebrate the Village's official designation as an Empire State Trail Town. Examples may include a social media announcement, press release, or event.

» **Maintain Empire State Trail Town designation**

- Continue to meet Trail Town criteria as set forth in the Empire State Trail Town handbook.
- Prior to each tourism season (April of each year), the Trail Town steering committee shall verify with PTNY that the information on the Trail Town landing page is accurate.
- Each year, PTNY will host a virtual meeting for all Trail Towns to provide updates about the Empire State Trail and Trail Town initiative and allow Trail Towns to share progress on their action agendas. The Trail Town committee shall send at least one representative and will submit a brief written update prior to the meeting on progress and challenges.

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About Parks & Trails New York

Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) is New York’s leading statewide advocate for parks and trails, dedicated since 1985 to improving our health, economy, and quality of life through the use and enjoyment of green space. PTNY works to expand, protect, and promote a network of parks, trails, and open spaces throughout our state for use and enjoyment by all. For more information, visit www.ptny.org.



About the New York State Canal Corporation

The New York State Canal Corporation runs the New York State Canal System, which includes the Erie, Champlain, Oswego and Cayuga-Seneca canals. Spanning 524 miles, the waterway links the Hudson River with the Great Lakes, the Finger Lakes and Lake Champlain. In 2017, the Canal Corporation celebrated the 200th anniversary of the groundbreaking for the Erie Canal, which occurred in the city of Rome on July 4, 1817. The Canal System includes the Canalway Trails, a network of approximately 420 miles of multiple-use trails across upstate New York. The Canalway Trails follows the towpaths of both active and historic sections of the New York State Canal System as well as adjacent abandoned rail corridors. Together, the canals and trails create a world-class recreationway that is a vibrant, scenic, and unique New York resource. To learn more about the New York State Canal and Canalway Trail System or to obtain a free map, please call 1-800-4CANAL4 or visit the Canal Corporation’s website at www.canals.ny.gov.