

July 21, 2015

To all to whom it concerns:

Regarding the Draft Amendment to the 1996 Remsen-Lake Placid Travel Corridor Unit Management Plan

I would like to thank New York State for initiating this process regarding the future development and use of the Remsen-Lake Placid Travel Corridor. This is an asset that has been for too long left in a limbo for any of the interests of not only the Adirondack / North Country Region but the entire State and greater Northeast as it is not just a localized asset but regional and beyond with tremendous potential. Part of the problem in recent years has been the frustration to get any significant benefit out of this corridor. People are frustrated; the economy is tough in the Adirondack Region and for almost 20 years after the last hearings and studies there still has been no action or follow through. This resonates not only in the immediate region with residents and business owners, but with those who visit and vacation who have expected more diversified recreational opportunities and development that will continue to make New York an attractive vacation venue in which to spend money. The inaction of the State over the years has stagnated this development and it is time to stop studying this to death and commit to forward well thought out action with intelligent leadership. Certainly since studies began on this corridor in the early 1970's till today there is hardly a stone unturned, although there are mixed emotions, passions, concerns and visions.

Let's just simplify it and break it down logically. There are several thousand miles of trails already in the Adirondack Park and surrounding region. Some of these are into an over-use situation that is environmentally detrimental. There are thousands of miles of snowmobile trails. There is one railroad operating the length of the park boundary from near Woodgate to Lake Placid a little more than 100 miles away that traverses some of the most remote and beautiful scenery and ecosystems to be found anywhere in the United States. In winter the rail corridor hosts multitudes of snowmobiles making it an all season venue to best advantage. Snowmobiling is weather dependent and unpredictable. Arguments in favor of removing rail have a high risk value in that if it is a poor snow year, removing the rails will not in itself create snow or opportunities. Other trails may be rideable due to not having the steel rail impeding the trail but that is actually the solution to the "shoulder season". The alternative trails can be used in shoulder season. By removing the rails even in an extraordinary snow season will not extend the core season as most snowmobiling activity will naturally tail off by late March and April due to other factors and many folks being snowmobiled out. I've have lived in Old Forge and seen many great days late in the season with few snowmobilers. So the extended core season can be taken care of by

alternative trails in light snow times and indeed in heavy snow years can accommodate riders on the trail with rails intact. The core season will still be weather dependent, not trail without rail dependent. There will be a huge opportunity cost loss to removing the rails for a few extra days of snowmobiling that could still be accommodated elsewhere on other trails. What is the net gain ...? Nothing, there is a net loss. Trails are also seasonally dependent with few hikers out early in the season account of school year schedules, vacation schedules, rain, late season snow, mud and black flies. Mud season in the Adirondacks is generally pretty dead. Late season after Labor Day also dies back with a peak during leaf time then gets light as the weather turns colder and early season snow and rain begins. Hikers are not out "en masse" late in the season before winter. However, the logical way to boost the shoulder seasons is the train which can extend some of the short hikes or be an insurance policy for unpredictable weather. By integrating the train into the recreational opportunities multi-use options can not only be extended but developed encouraging hotel stays, camp rentals, outfitter retail sales, guide services, and other forms of retail trade that would not exist due to weather dependent only activities.

New York State has the opportunity to become cutting edge in recreational opportunities and enhancement. That involves vision and creativity and the integration of rail service, all the way through from Utica to Lake Placid with hiking, biking, mountain biking, kayaking, canoeing, camping, exploring and history. It can serve as a global model. There are people with vision and plans from all these recreational disciplines available to partner with to guide it to success. It is NOT about Rail vs. Trail, it is a far far bigger picture with many more advocacies some of whom do not yet even realize they are advocates. Tearing up 34 miles of rail, 10 of which is already rehabbed and provides job / employment and economic impact is not only short sighted, but backwards and potentially terribly expensive and time consuming and likely to open untold risks and costs due to historic preservation or legal entanglements. It will provoke further frustrations and inflame already contentious passions and emotions.

Since 1996, rail, although the chosen alternative (Option 6) has never been given a feasible chance. It has been a theoretical concept without even giving the current rail operator anything more than a 30 day revocable permit. 20+ years of this! Do you even need a study to figure out why it has not worked? Why not move forward with active leadership seeking and attaining the goals of a world class concept? Opponents to rail have stated the line is too long operating 141 miles to Lake Placid and does not fit the mold of a tourist railroad. Partially true ! And that is part of the point in making the statement this will be UNIQUE. There is almost nowhere in the entire United States that so much aligns itself for the multi-use rail integrated development that exists here. That is what makes it unique and that is what makes it cutting edge and world class. One exception to

long distance passenger and recreational integration is Alaska. There are several tour operators that do a profitable business and strongly enhance the Alaska Rail Belt economy. These operators do not do it as a charity but for profit. However, it took the State (originally the Federal government) to step up and be a committed partner. New York has more opportunity as the Adirondack corridor is more compact with many more diversified opportunities and is far closer to major population centers. The opportunities of a Utica – Lake Placid Rail Belt integrating multi-use recreation for all ages, handicaps and socio-economic levels is immense. But it cannot be looked at as a tourist railroad, or even a recreational trail, it has to be looked at as an Economic Recreational Tourism Project. It has to be newly defined and approached and managed and funded in a new way in order to succeed.

Is New York State (The Empire State) up to the challenge as we head into yet another “conclusion” to the future and fate of this corridor? Simply put there is much to gain with Rails with Trails (yes it can be done even up in the northern 34 miles) but it is more than Rails with Trails – it is Rails and Recreation. Trails are just a part of it or a linkage to the other activities (camping, canoeing, kayaking, mountain climbing, mountain biking, observing nature, swimming, exploring, general biking, hiking, fishing, nature interpretation and education and immersing oneself in the Adirondack atmosphere. The choice is before us, let us rise together to achieve it.

A quote by Franklin D. Roosevelt in a speech he wrote, but died before he could give it is appropriate here:

“The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today. Let us move forward with strong and active faith.” – Undelivered Jefferson Day Speech written by FDR April 1945

Please work towards the full, unique and world class cutting edge development of this historically significant asset for the benefit of all and end the frustration, stalemates, studies and inaction.

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