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Leilani C. Ulrich
Chairwoman
NYS Adirondack Park Agency
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Richard S. Booth
Chairman – State Lands Committee
NYS Adirondack Park Agency
P.O. Box 99
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Re: Remsen - Lake Placid Travel Corridor

Dear Ms. Ulrich and Mr. Booth:

I appreciate the opportunity to provide written comments on the State's proposed 2015 amendment to the Unit Management Plan (UMP) for the Remsen-Lake Placid Travel Corridor. My comments pertain to the proposal's non-conformity to the State Land Master Plan (SLMP), as well as what I believe are the broader responsibilities of the Agency in this matter.

The Adirondack Park Agency Act established the APA as the administrator of the State Land Master Plan (§814, APA Act) and gave the Agency "responsibility for developing long-range park policy in a forum reflecting statewide concern. This policy shall recognize the major state interest in the conservation, use and development of the park's resources" (§801, APA Act). Let me say at the outset, that I am greatly disappointed in the Agency for the narrowness of its current focus on the future of the Remsen to Lake Placid Travel Corridor. The Corridor is a listed property on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, and it is a significant economic asset for the Adirondack Park. In addition to determining whether the State's proposed amendment to the UMP conforms to the State Land Master Plan, the Agency should be focusing on the larger questions of the short and long-term economic and Park policy consequences of this wrong-headed DEC/DOT proposal. To do less, makes the Agency complicit in the proposed removal of historic and otherwise valuable economic infrastructure. If implemented, the proposal to remove these rails will: 1) set back efforts to strengthen the economic vitality of the Tri-Lakes; 2) diminish, by precedent, the protections afforded to other "listed" historic properties within the Park and Statewide; 3) undermine the viability of the Adirondack Scenic Railroad and any successor rail operation; and, 4) eliminate a new and already successful tourist-based enterprise, the Adirondack Rail Explorers.

The State's proposal is a matter of significant impact to communities in the Adirondack Park and it is disheartening that the Adirondack Park Agency has chosen to limit its discussion to the question of conformance with provisions of the State Land Master Plan. New York State government, including the APA, has emphasized the importance of private and State project proposals being consistent with a myriad of adopted State, regional and local plans. It therefore greatly surprises me that the DEC/DOT proposal has been allowed to proceed to this point. The proposal certainly undermines Governor Cuomo's important and forward thinking goals of strengthening the Adirondack Park tourism economy, encouraging new and innovative private sector enterprises, and creating a "cleaner and greener" New York. These important goals provide the foundation for the Governor's twice-yearly "Adirondack Challenge" tourism events, as well as the Governor's steady encouragement of all New Yorkers to choose transportation alternatives that reduce our dependence on fossil fuels.

The DEC/DOT proposal is also clearly inconsistent with the North Country Regional Economic Development Strategy produced by the North Country Regional Economic Development Council. That strategy calls for preservation and improvement of rail infrastructure in the seven counties of the North Country. The proposal also conflicts with the rail preservation and improvement recommendations of the North Country Regional Sustainability Plan, produced in May 2013 through the Cleaner Greener Communities Program of the NYS Energy Research and Development Authority. Finally, the proposal is an insult to the integrity of State and federal historic preservation statutes which were clearly not given due consideration in the State's analysis of a minimal set of poorly defined alternatives.

The current, largely unimplemented UMP for the Remsen-Lake Placid Travel Corridor (1996) wisely calls for the preservation and enhancement of the rails and the development of a network of integrated trails within the Corridor, beyond the Corridor in other State land units, and on private lands through easements. That UMP was prepared over a period of years with the active and ongoing involvement of an advisory board made up of representatives of a wide range of environmental, recreational, historic preservation and economic development organizations. In my view, the current, 1996 UMP serves as a landmark, consensus document, in stark contrast to the proposed amendment that is now before you. Sadly, it is only due to the State's failure to effectively implement the 1996 Unit Management Plan, in Republican and Democrat administrations, that we have been engaged in a wrenching controversy over the future of the Corridor for the past three years. Government should work better than this.

On the matter of conformity with the State Land Master Plan, I will focus on two points: 1) the DEC/DOT conclusion that the "Travel Corridor" State land classification can be maintained in spite of the removal of 34 miles or 26 percent of linear rail transportation infrastructure; and, 2) the inability of the State's goals for the UMP to be realized if the rails are removed between Tupper Lake and Lake Placid.

The State Land Master Plan has internal inconsistencies in reference to the Remsen-Lake Placid Travel Corridor. It is alternatively referred to as the "Remsen to Lake Placid Railroad right-of-way" (page 46), the "Remsen to Lake Placid Railroad line" (page 46 / page 116), and the "Remsen to Lake Placid Railroad" (page 49). References to the "right-of-way" appear to have allowed DEC/DOT to conclude that the "Travel Corridor" designation can be retained for the full Corridor, even with the absence of rail infrastructure, based on the underlying route/roadbed and the Corridor's continued management by the Department of Transportation. This conclusion ignores the statements in the SLMP showing clear intent for this Corridor to be committed to rail transportation uses.

All references in the SLMP state or imply that the Remsen-Lake Placid Travel Corridor is to be used for rail transportation, including the SLMP's definition of "Travel Corridor" on page 46. That definition is:

“. . . that strip of land constituting the roadbed and right-of-way for state and interstate highways in the Adirondack Park, the Remsen to Lake Placid railroad right-of-way, and those state lands immediately adjacent to and visible from these **facilities.**”

The use of the term “facilities,” meaning highways or rails and other railroad infrastructure, illuminates the clear intention for designated travel corridors to serve highway or rail transportation uses.

I see no reasonable justification in any of the materials submitted by DEC/DOT for saying that the 34 miles from Tupper Lake to Lake Placid should remain a Travel Corridor devoid of its rail infrastructure if it is to be used, not for rail transportation, but for recreational activities. The DEC/DOT proposal has a clear inconsistency with the Travel Corridor definition in the State Land Master Plan. If the State intends to remove the rails beyond Tupper Lake, the State Land Master Plan should be amended to re-classify the route between Tupper Lake and Lake Placid. The economic, transportation, and historic impact of the proposed rail removal is significant and the reclassification process for that section of the Travel Corridor should not be considered “minor” nor “ministerial.”

On my second point, it makes no sense, and it is against the public interest, for any Unit Management Plan to be adopted which is incapable of producing its' intended results. The Remsen-Lake Placid Travel Corridor is the only State land unit in the Adirondack Park where the ability to fully implement a Unit Management Plan relies on the success of a private business venture. The Adirondack Scenic Railroad, or any other rail operation selected by the State, must be able to attract an adequate pool of customers on the Northern end of the Travel Corridor to remain viable within the entire Travel Corridor.

Unfortunately, the DEC/DOT proposal was developed without close consultation with the Adirondack Scenic Railroad or any other potential rail operator. Had such business input been requested, the removal of the rails beyond Tupper Lake would not have been proposed with the expectation that a rail operation could succeed long before Tupper Lake is able to establish itself as a significant tourist destination.

The DEC/DOT proposal is at least fifteen years ahead of the market. No development has yet occurred at the Adirondack Club and Resort (ACR), which should, in time, become a premier regional attraction. The establishment of Tupper Lake as a tourist destination which is able to support the rail operation envisioned by the State of New York, will require the commencement and maturing of the ACR, and with it, a pool of rental units able to accommodate a steady flow of visitors on a three season basis. In my view, the successful rail operation envisioned by the State will not be possible between Remsen and Tupper Lake, for many years, unless the State of New York is itself willing to operate that railroad as a public venture. And this, I am sure, will not happen.

We have endured nearly twenty years with a Unit Management Plan for the Remsen-Lake Placid Travel Corridor which has never been fully implemented. This time, the Park and its people deserve a plan that can produce predictable transportation and recreational benefits within a realistic time-frame, is respectful of the historic designations of the Corridor, and builds on investments made by the State of New York within the Forest Preserve and in communities along the Travel Corridor. The rails should be recognized as important to the objective of delivering visitors to the Park and its “gateway

communities,” and transporting those visitors and their gear to Forest Preserve trail heads and launch points upon which community economic vitality so greatly depends.

If we are to find real meaning in Governor Cuomo’s statements of support for a more robust tourism economy, the State will need to “roll up its sleeves” and create the trail network that was proposed but not defined in the 1996 UMP. And, the rails will need to be preserved and used as an integrated economic asset long into the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Erman". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Stephen M. Erman

cc: Terry Martino, Executive Director
Kathy Regan, Deputy Director for Planning
Kathryn Dineen, Executive Chamber
Ron Thaniel, Executive Chamber
Commissioner Basil Seggos, Department of Environmental Conservation
Commissioner Matt Driscoll, Department of Transportation
Commissioner Howard Zensky, Empire State Development
Commissioner Rose Harvey, Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
Robert Davies, Esq., Department of Environmental Conservation
Raymond Hessinger, Department of Transportation