

Stephen M. Erman
P.O. Box 6
Ray Brook, New York 12977
(518) 891-5946
serman@roadrunner.com

July 6, 2015

Ms. Dawn Klemm
NYS Department of Transportation, Region 2
Utica State Office Building
207 Genesee Street, Utica, NY 13501

Mr. John Schmid
NYS Department of Environmental Conservation
625 Broadway
Albany, NY 12233-4254

Re: Remsen - Lake Placid Travel Corridor

Dear Ms. Klemm and Mr. Schmid:

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.

The proposed amendment is a clear effort by staff at the Departments of Transportation and Environmental Conservation to satisfy a range of competing interests in a manner that best serves communities along the Corridor and the people of the State of New York. Strong credits should, therefore, be given to all involved State officials since this is a difficult task indeed. Improvements, however, can and should be made.

While I applaud the decision to retain and improve the rails North to Tupper Lake and provide a recreational trail leading to Lake Placid, I believe the State's proposal should be adjusted to better serve the needs of a rail operator and communities along the route, as well as the needs of both rail riders and recreational users of the Corridor. Adjustments are needed in order for the proposal, once adopted and implemented, to have a "transformational impact" on both the local and regional economy and on the quality of recreational experiences in the Tri-Lakes area of the Adirondack Park.

My suggested adjustments:

1. Extend the rails beyond Tupper Lake to Saranac Lake. The "end of the line" destination for rail travelers should be Saranac Lake's Union Depot, an iconic, historic structure which can be used for the purpose for which it was originally intended. The Village of Saranac Lake is the center of the "Tri-Lakes" and the Adirondack Scenic Railroad has emphasized that its business plan has a greater chance of success if the railroad is allowed to reach Saranac Lake rather than ending in Tupper Lake, the Western edge of this three community tourist destination. A successful and sustainable rail operation to the heart of the Tri-Lakes is important to the economies of Tupper Lake, Saranac Lake, and Lake Placid.

Extending the rails to Saranac Lake (or more appropriately, retaining and improving the rails) will, in time, allow rail access through cross-platform connections with AMTRAK in Utica. This would be in addition to the use of the rails for scenic rail excursions. When this occurs,

Lake Placid, the region's internationally recognized destination, will be more easily accessed by shuttle or cab from Saranac Lake than from the more distant Tupper Lake.

Having rails between Tupper Lake and Saranac Lake also will allow train access for visitors, residents, and their paddle craft, to water bodies including those within the St. Regis Canoe Area. This will provide a special tourism development opportunity for the "Gateway Communities" of Tupper Lake and Saranac Lake which can both emerge as important destinations for paddling enthusiasts. The rails will also allow "flag stop" rail service for patrons of the State's popular campgrounds at Fish Creek and Rollins Pond.

Finally, retention and improvement of the rails between Tupper Lake and Saranac Lake will allow Saranac Lake to remain the starting venue for the "Rail Explorers Adirondacks" rail bike excursions which commenced operations from Saranac Lake on July 3, 2015. This, "first in North America" enterprise is meeting with early success and will be another way for Saranac Lake to strengthen its role as a tourism destination. The excursion will prove to be a popular attraction for visitors to the community including those staying in new and renovated hotel properties in which the State of New York is heavily invested.

2. Remove the rails between Saranac Lake and Lake Placid and create a trail with a hard, paved surface. For years, officials of the Olympic Regional Development Authority (ORDA) have sought a safe, long distance paved trail for the training needs of athletes (running, roller blading, roller skiing, etc.) A paved trail leading from Lake Placid would be ideal for this purpose. The paved trail would also be popular and safe hiking and road biking route for residents and tourists traveling between Saranac Lake and Lake Placid. It would also be a popular bicycle commuter route between the two villages and the State's Ray Brook employment hub.
3. Create a new "in and out of the Corridor" unpaved trail between Saranac Lake and Tupper Lake. This trail would be different in character from the trail proposed between Saranac Lake and Lake Placid. It would more closely follow the concept outlined in the State's 1996 Unit Management Plan where it was stated that trails could be built within the Corridor, beyond the Corridor in other State land planning units, and on private lands through easements. The creation of this trail would require Unit Management Plan revisions for Wild Forest Units adjoining the Travel Corridor to ensure proper trail location and design to best accommodate hikers, mountain bikers, and snowmobilers. It is important to note that the Trails and Rails Action Committee (TRAC) has already shared mapped information with both DEC and DOT which clearly shows how Tupper Lake to Saranac Lake trails could be developed by using and/or improving many of the State's existing trails in the vicinity of the Travel Corridor.

An "in and out" trail between Tupper Lake and Saranac Lake would provide visitors to the State's Fish Creek and Rollins Pond campgrounds with an excellent hiking and biking amenity while preserving their opportunity to access trains for travel to Tupper Lake, Saranac Lake and points in between including Lake Clear/the Junction and Floodwood.

It is my hope that these suggested adjustments to what has already been proposed will be seriously considered by the Departments. Their effect would be to greatly increase options for tourism development and marketing in the Tri-Lakes area over what was proposed in June 2015. Imagine, if you will, the myriad of opportunities available to visitors to Saranac Lake if the UMP were approved and implemented with the suggested adjustments. First, travelers could have rail access to the center of the Tri-Lakes, with its improved lodging base, without the need for shuttle or cab service, or the use of personal automobiles. Hiking and biking alternatives within and along the Corridor would then be

available to accommodate a visitor's specific recreational interests. They could hike or road bike East along a paved trail to Lake Placid or have a very different trail experience by hiking or mountain biking West and South to Lake Clear and Tupper Lake. Along the route to Lake Placid, they could witness, first hand, active training by our athletes, and thereby gain a stronger understanding of the role of both the U.S. Olympic Training Center and NYS/ORDA in building the next generation of Olympians.

Visitors could access the new "Rail Explorers Adirondacks" attraction from Union Depot to Lake Clear and/or visit Saranac Lake's growing number of graphic art and performance venues which are easily accessible from trails in the Village within and along the Travel Corridor. The adjustments to the proposed UMP amendment would for the first time, present local tourism promoters, including the business community, with a strongly competitive package of recreational attractions through which to better market the Saranac Lake community and the Tri-Lakes as a whole.

With rail improvements to allow Class II passenger operations (top speed 45 mph), and cross-platform linkages to AMTRAK in Utica, the rails could provide relatively easy access to the Tri-Lakes, as well as other communities along the Corridor. However, removing the rails between Tupper Lake and Saranac Lake would, in my judgment, undermine the financial viability of the Adirondack Scenic Railroad or any successor operation chosen by the State to serve the full line. It makes no sense from the standpoint of growing the region's economy for the State of New York to take any action that would undermine both the viability of active rail operations and the local development strategies of communities in which the State has made substantial investments.

A final but important comment relates to the current listing of the Travel Corridor and all of the rails and related infrastructure on the State and Federal Registers of Historic Places. The historic preservation issue appears to have been given minimal consideration, to date, in the UMP revision process. The adjustments proposed herein would reduce by 2/3rds the amount of rail to be removed and would establish the final rail destination as the iconic 19th century Union Depot, the largest station on the line. Retention of the rails to Saranac Lake and the development of trails as proposed herein would allow the State-owned Union Depot to be the unifying point for a broad set of transportation and recreation activities, helping to improve the economy of Saranac Lake and the broader Tri-Lakes area. It would appear that extending the rails a short distance beyond the Union Depot would present a strong opportunity for interpretation of the listed property, including the rails to be removed, thereby allowing the State of New York to be persuasive in countering arguments that historic preservation issues were not adequately considered in the UMP amendment process.

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

Sincerely,



Stephen M. Erman

cc: Deputy Secretary Ron Thaniel
Deputy Secretary Basil Seggos
Commissioner Matt Driscoll (DOT)
Commissioner Joseph Martens (DEC)
Commissioner Howard Zensky (ESD)
Raymond Hessinger (DOT)
Robert Davies, Esq. (DEC)