

Statements for TRAC supporters to use in the UMP scoping sessions

1. About Trails with Rails

The Trails with Rails Action Committee, composed of people with backgrounds in land use, railroads, trail planning, historic preservation and tourism, is continuing the work with State staff and others designing a system for both rails and trail. Considerable time and money can be saved by the State with a 'fast track' process with all parties cooperating as we move ahead. As planned with both rails and trail, the corridor will provide recreational diversity, help revitalize local economies and provide access for all residents and visitors.

2. Overall Project and Approach

Some citizens may not know that New York State's current unit management plan (UMP) for the Remsen-to-Lake Placid railroad corridor calls for the tracks to remain in place with a system of trails winding inside and outside the corridor. The authors of the plan concluded that this would provide the greatest benefits to residents and visitors.

Given the recent interest in the development of trails, an ad-hoc group of volunteers gathered to help plan a trail system to combine with the rails. The Trails and Rails Action Committee (TRAC) participants have broad experience in recreation, tourism, railways, and natural and historic preservation and represent the broad interests embodied in the UMP.

TRAC members used information from the state and other sources, made field observations and have planned a trail system envisioned by the current UMP. They are drawing on existing multi-use trails and standards for inspiration and ideas, to provide trails suitable for traditional and recumbent bikes, walkers, wheelchairs and snowmobiles.

This is not the rail to trail conversion proposed by the Adirondack Recreational Trail Advocates, which will now involve a long process: formal management plan review, a plan decision, and then, if a trail-only option is chosen, railroad abandonment hearing procedures and final decision, followed by dismantling and disposing of thousands of tons of rails and ties and part of the rail bed, along with specification of new trail elements to expand to fit over the narrow rail bed. These are mostly sequential decisions and actions, so only near the end of this process would construction of a rail-trail likely begin. For the Tupper Lake to Lake Placid segment, this process is likely to require 10 to 12 years to completion, given the cost and complexity involved. Removing the tracks for a rail-trail would result in a continuously flat trail. In contrast, a trail system winding in and out of the corridor would have more variety and enjoyment and offer opportunities on nearby private land for commercial uses (such as repair shops and food and beverage vendors), while connecting with communities and other trails.

The entire railroad corridor is listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, including the rails, rail bed, and structures identified as 'contributing features' protected by regulation. This is critical, as there is an increasing trend of using historic districts as living cultural resources for educational experiences and integrating them with new economic development. The Remsen-Lake Placid line can provide a real historic perspective for each community along the way.

The rail system is an organizing element in completing the trail with rails system, maintaining it, and providing access to Adirondack natural resources and communities.

One of the most important reasons for the rails and trails to co-exist is the opportunity for further development of train excursions that would drop off hikers, bicyclists, campers, boaters, birders, photographers and other outdoor enthusiasts at various points along the corridor. In the middle segment of the corridor, the train is a crucial organizing element in accessing more natural areas in a managed way to avoid overuse.

Taking into account the long but required processes involved in environmental assessment and review, railroad abandonment, special disposal regulations, and the need for new roads and other ways to construct a trail bed in remote areas if the rails are removed, the cost of building an adjacent trail is competitive with the rail to trail conversion, but perhaps more important, results in a better product for all New Yorkers. The system will be used sooner, by more people in more ways with the rail line retained and a trail added or supplemented where needed. Continuing to build on the assets in the Remsen-Lake Placid corridor provides more choices for residents and visitors, creating a dynamic and unique resource that has few peers elsewhere in the nation.

3. Winter Use for Cross Country Skiers as Well as Snowmobiles

We're also providing a multi-use trail in the winter, not just a rail bed for snowmobilers. On the trail we're designing for xc skiing, there are wonderful opportunities to visit neighbors and restaurants across town, go to other trail heads, natural areas and even commute to work, without competing with our snowmobiling friends. We can do this by turning this plan review into a fast-track cooperative effort to work together to provide the best for all New Yorkers.

4. Uniqueness of our Corridor for the Future

The uniqueness of the Park basically points toward NOT doing what the rest of the country may be doing. We have very little infrastructure, already a lot of trails and no major populations on the trail at either end or the middle. So, save the rail line for the 50-100 year future, as an in-place energy corridor (light rail, information, solar) and use it as a support system for an adjacent and nearby recreation trail inventory that already exists to a great extent. So the idea of DOT 'banking' existing ROW's and infrastructure should be maintained, especially in the Adirondacks.

5. Three Main Reasons for Trails with Rails

The State UMP plan review must compare the multi-use recreational trail by itself with the multi-use recreational rail combined with rail, as originally planned and as being designed now. Having both systems is important for the present and the future, in 3 basic ways:

- 1) the rail system will help in construction and maintaining the adjoining trail, some of which already exists in rudimentary form.
- 2) the combined trail with rail system affords access by all age and capacity groups who would otherwise be denied access to natural areas.
- 3) the rail system is an economic stimulus and cultural enrichment which will be lost if the rails are removed.