

I have spent a number of hours educating myself with the facts regarding the Great Adirondack Train Debate. I call it the Great Train Debate because the TRAIN is what is at stake. Since 1892 this has been a rail bed. Today even under NYS law it is defined as a Transportation Corridor falling under the NYS DOT Rail Plan last published in 2009.

<https://www.dot.ny.gov/.../State%20Rail%20Plan%202009-02-10.pdf>

If the rails are removed, for whatever future intended purpose, train service is gone forever. It is this simple. Bah humbug to rail banking, the DEC and APA have said as much. Volumes have been written on both sides of Train Debate. Studies citing this and that are so common you could wallpaper the APA and the DEC buildings with them. That these studies come to different conclusions is a prima facie case they are based upon opinion not fact. Fact is irrefutable and unchanging. Fact is stated above. No matter what you do with the corridor post rail removal it will NOT be this train or any train using it. In the 1996 Unit Management Plan it was clearly stated that it was impossible to know what the economic impact of any use of the corridor might be with anything approaching a degree of certainty. After all the yelling, screaming, conjecture and misinformation what we are left with is this question: Should a public good, (defined as an economic term) of a unique and irreplaceable type that supports present economic activity, be destroyed and replaced with a proposal having an unknown economic impact? This is the question that the public and our elected leadership must answer.

If I had to make this decision I would base it on the following: 1) This is a public good owned by all the people of NYS and thus the needs of the entire State need to be considered. 2) Public goods serve a specific purpose and are intended to do what private enterprise cannot or will not do because the marginal economics do not allow it. 3) The potential economic benefit to both the State and the Region served must be properly measured and considered.

No compelling case can be made that the removal of the rail infrastructure on this corridor either in whole or in part can be made which will justify the destruction of this irreplaceable public good. Even the idea that the rail section from Saranac Lake to Lake Placid would be better used as a paved trail would leave Lake Placid, a world known tourist destination, cut off from the national rail network, and perhaps diminish the chances for another winter Olympics.

Trails are already abundant in the Northeast. The proposed rail trail would not be unique. Bordered by private land, environmentally sensitive lands, and NYS wilderness, the amenities that cyclists and hikers enjoy on long trails elsewhere (picnic areas, camping areas, retail services) cannot be constructed alongside this corridor. It would suffer from competition from other trails nationwide as a destination. No evidence has been shown that this trail would be an added attraction for tourists who would not otherwise plan to visit. The benefit to NYS residents in general would be negligible.

Snowmobile use in the winter is potentially an economic benefit that cannot be ignored. Here though we have to ask the same simple question which we did for the hiker/cyclist trail people. Will this add new economic value or simply be an augmentation to those trails already existing? Also what must be asked is who benefits? From what I have read and watched (video of local argument in favor of Snow Machines) it seems that along this line there are 4 or 5 distinct local Snowmobile Clubs from Lake Placid to Old Forge. These Clubs claim to do maintenance on the line and grooming in the winter. The corridor is used during the height of the season and as long as snow is sufficient. Snowmobile Clubs are reimbursed to groom this corridor and do. Snowmobile tourists plan their vacations at the height of the season (for obvious reasons). With these things said, no one can actually claim that any more economic impact than what currently exists. Given the predictions for climate change that would mean less snow and shorter winters in the Adirondacks, one wonders how much more snowmobilers will add to the area economy.

Ripping up this infrastructure so snowmobiles may use it more is certainly negative. No better use of this corridor yet exists. The rail line should stay along the entire corridor. The economic benefit to be derived from having this unique and irreplaceable public good needs to be better measured than has been done to date.

Vermont, a state about as large as the Adirondack Park and with the same highway challenges, has spend huge public moneys increasing Amtrak service and to good effect. Trains are efficient and environmentally sound. Given this, the best and really the only smart thing to do with the Remsen to Lake Placid Rail Line is to restore it FULLY and COMPLETELY to class 3 standards.

The kick against economic development in the Adirondacks has always been lack of accessibility. A fully operational rail infrastructure to the Tri-Lakes would support recreation and transportation options for residents and visitors, of all ages and abilities. The Adirondacks win and the citizens of NYS keep a valuable public good.

Signed